

William Strobe

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Selected Poems

of

William Strode

**Selected & edited by
Tony Frazer**

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Introduction

The casual reader's first response on seeing a volume of William Strode's poems is more than likely to be: "Who's that?", for William Strode is an almost forgotten figure, except with those readers who pay careful attention to compendious anthologies of Jacobean and Caroline verse, where Strode is often represented by a poem or two. Anyone who had been interested by those few anthologised gems would have drawn a blank when looking for more of the poet's work, because there has only ever been a single volume of his work, edited and published by the indefatigable Bertram Dobell, in London in 1907. I found a copy of this through the antiquarian book trade and it was instructive that the copy—at that point 99 years old—still had uncut pages. Having read the book, I came to the conclusion that Strode little deserved his oblivion. He is not a major poet, but nor should he be ignored. At a time when England was blessed with a large number of first-rank poets, a secondary figure such as Strode is easily forgotten, obscured by the shade cast by mightier figures. For readers in the West Country, in particular, Strode, a native of Devon, should be part of their heritage—although it must be admitted that his work has more to do with Oxford and London than it has with Devon, with the exception of the dialect poem, 'A Devonshire Song'.

Strode did not go quite unpublished, however: his play, *The Floating Island*, was printed in London in 1655, but seems to have had little impact. The play itself, written for the visit of Charles II to Oxford, also appears to have had minimal impact in performance—although some recorded comments from its single performance suggest that it was not regarded as an *exciting* occasion. Strode's poems, however, turned up frequently in commonplace books of the era and in printed miscellanies—indications that his work was held in some esteem by his contemporaries.

William Strode was born in the county of Devon in either 1600 or 1601, in the parish of Plympton St. Mary—then a separate

township, but today subsumed within the boundaries of Plympton, itself now a township on the very edge of greater Plymouth. His father was one Philip Strode, and William appears to have been the only son, although the address of one of his poems indicates that he had at least one sister. A successful and diligent scholar, Strode went up to Christ Church College, Oxford from Westminster School, probably in 1617, and there took his first degree in 1621. He became Master of Arts in 1624, after which he entered the Church, becoming a preacher with the University. In 1629 he was awarded the post of Proctor and also Public Orator, the latter no doubt a tribute to his verbal powers. In 1631, he was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Divinity. It seems he was to stay in Oxford for the rest of his days. From 1628 to 1635 he also served as Chaplain to the Bishop of Oxford, a post which would have brought him additional income, and in 1633 he became Rector of East Bradenham in Norfolk, although it would appear that he did not leave Oxford—he no doubt appointed a Chaplain to manage the living. From 1639 to 1642 he was Vicar of Badley, Northants, no doubt in a similar manner. Strode was married and had one daughter, but was to die in 1645 in Oxford, and was buried in Christ Church Cathedral.

Such are the bare bones of Strode's life, and precious little more is to be had. We do have his poems, however. I have selected almost all of his lyric poems (leaving out only the minor 'Posies'), as well as a large number of his elegies, although I elected against a more thorough survey of the latter, given the somewhat repetitive nature of these tribute poems. No selection has been made from *The Floating Island*, which seems to belong in another kind of book entirely.

Tony Frazer
Exeter, 2009

SONG

When Orpheus sweetly did complayne
Upon his lute with heavy strayne
How his Eurydice was slayne,
 The trees to heare
 Obtayn'd an eare,
And after left it off againe.

At every stroake and every stay
The boughs kept time, and nodding lay,
And listened bending all one way:
 The aspen tree
 As well as hee
Began to shake and learn'd to play.

If wood could speak, a tree might heare,
If wood could sound true greife so neare
A tree might dropp an amber teare:
 If wood so well
 Could ring a knell
The Cipres might condole the beare.

The standing nobles of the grove
Hearing dead wood so speak and move
The fatall axe beganne to love:
 They envyde death
 That gave such breath
As men alive doe saints above.

SONG: IN COMMENDATION OF MUSICK

When whispering straynes doe softly steale
With creeping passion through the hart,
And when at every touch wee feele
Our pulses beate and beare a part;
 When thredds can make
 A hartstring shake
 Philosophie
 Can scarce deny
The soule consists of harmony.

When unto heavenly joy wee feyne
Whatere the soule affecteth most,
Which onely thus wee can explayne
By musick of the winged host,
 Whose layes wee think
 Make starres to winke,
 Philosophie
 Can scarce deny
Our soules consist of harmony.

O lull mee, lull mee, charming ayre,
My senses rock with wonder sweete;
Like snowe on wooll thy fallings are,
Soft, like a spiritts, are thy feete:
 Greife who need feare
 That hath an eare?
 Down lett him lye
 And slumbring dye,
And change his soule for harmony.

SONG

Keepe on your maske, and hide your eye,
For with beholding you I dye:
Your fatall beauty, Gorgon-like,
Dead with astonishment will strike;
Your piercing eyes if them I see
Are worse than basilisks to mee.

Shutt from mine eyes those hills of snowe,
Their melting valleys doe not showe;
Their azure paths lead to dispaire,
O vex me not, forbear, forbear;
For while I thus in torments dwell
The sight of heaven is worse than hell.

Your dayntie voice and warbling breath
Sound like a sentence pass'd for death;
Your dangling tresses are become
Like instruments of finall doome.
O if an Angell torture so,
When life is done where shall I goe?

ANOTHER VERSION, TO HIS MISTRESSE

Keepe on your mask and hide your eye
For in beholding you I dye.
Your fatall beauty Gorgon-like
Dead with astonishment doth strike.
Your piercing eyes that now I see
Are worse than Basilisks to me.
Shut from mine eyes those hills of snow,
Their melting vally do not shew:
Those azure paths lead to despaire,
O vex me not, forbear, forbear;
For while I thus in torments dwell
The sight of Heaven is worse than Hell.
In those faire cheeks two pits doe lye
To bury those slaine by your eye:
So this at length doth comfort me
That fairely buried I shall be:
My grave with Roses, Lillies, spread,
Methinks tis life for to be dead:
Come then and kill me with your eye,
For if you let me live I dye.

When I perceive your lips againe
Recover those your eyes have slaine,
With kisses that (like balsome pure)
Deep wounds as soon as made doe cure,
Methinks tis sicknesse to be sound,
And there's no health to such a wound.
When in your bosome I behold
Two hills of snow yet never cold,
Which lovers, whom your beauty kills,
Revive by climing those your hills,
Methinks there's life in such a death
That gives a hope of sweeter breath:
Then since one death prevails not where

So many antidotes are nere,
And your bright eyes doe but in vain
Kill those who live as fast as slaine;
That I no more such death survive
Your way's to bury me alive
In place unknown, and so that I
Being dead may live and living dye.

SONG

O when will Cupid shew such arte
To strike two lovers with one darte?
I'm ice to him or hee to mee;
Two hearts alike there seldome bee.

If thrice ten thousand meete together
How scarce one face is like another!
If scarce two faces can agree
Two hearts alike there seldome bee.

SONG: ON A SIGH

O tell mee, tell, thou god of wynde,
In all thy cavernes canst thou finde
A vapour, fume, a gale or blast
Like to a sigh which love doth cast?
Can any whirlwynde in thy vault
Plough upp earth's breast with like assault?
Goe wynde and blow thou where thou please,
Yea breathles leave mee to my ease.

If thou be wynde, O then refrayne
From wracking whiles I thus complayne:
If thou be wynde then light thou art,
Yet O! how heavy is my hart!
If thou be wynde then purge thy way,
Lett cares that clogge thy force obey.
Goe wynde and blowe thou where thou please,
Yea breathles leave mee to my ease.

Those blasts of sighing raised are
By influence of my bright starre;
Their Æolus from whom they came
Is love that straynes to blow his flame,
The powerfull sway of whose behest
Makes hearth and bellowes of my breast.
Goe wynde and blow then where thou please,
Yea breathles leave mee to my ease.

Know 'tis a wynde that longs to blowe
Upon my Saint wherere shee go,
And stealing through her fanne it beares
Soft errands to her lippes and eares,
And then perhapps a passage makes
Downe to her heart when breath shee takes.

Goe wynde and blowe then where thou please,
Yea breathles leave mee to my ease.

Yes, gentle gale, trye that againe,
O doe not passe from mee in vayne,
Goe mingle with her soul divine
Ingendring spiritts like to mine:
Yea take my soule along with thee
To worke a stronger sympathie:
Go wynde and blowe thou where thou please,
Yea breathles leave mee to my ease.

My soule, before my grosser part,
Thus to her heaven should departe,
And where the body cannott lye
On wings of wynde my soule shall flye:
If not one soul our bodies joyne,
One body shall our soules confine,
Go wynde and blow thou where thou please,
Yea breathles leave mee to my ease.

SONG: ON THE BATHS

What Angel stirs this happy Well,
Some Muse from thence come shew't me,
One of those naked Graces tell
That Angels are for beauty:
The Lame themselves that enter here
Come Angels out againe,
And Bodies turne to Soules all cleere,
All made for joy, noe payne.

Heate never was so sweetely mett
With moist as in this shower:
Old men are borne anew by swett
Of its restoring pow'r:
When crippl'd joynts we suppl'd see,
And second lives new come,
Who can deny this Font to be
The Bodies Christendome?

One Bath so fiery is you'l thinke
The Water is all Spirit,
Whose quick'ning streames are like the drink
Whereby we Life inherit:
The second Poole of middle straine
Can wive Virginity,
Tempting the blood to such a vayne
One sexe is He and She.

The third where horses plunge may bring
A Pegasus to reare us,
And call for pens from Bladud's wing
For legging those that beare us.
Why should Physitians thither fly
Where Waters med'cines be,

Physitians come to cure thereby,
And are more cured than we