

*A Pindaric on the Death of Our Late Sovereign:
With an Ancient Prophecy on His Present Majesty*

I

Sad was the morn, the sadder week began,
And heavily the god of day came on:
From ominous dreams my wondering soul looked out,
And saw a dire confusion round about.
My bed like some sad monument appeared,
Round which the mournful statues wring their hands
[and weep;
Distracted objects all, with mighty grief prepared
To rouse me from my painful sleep.
Not the sad bards that wailed Jerusalem's woes,
(With wild neglect throughout the peopled street,
With a prophetic rage affrighting all they meet)
Had mightier pangs of sorrow, mightier throes;
'Ah! Wretch, undone,' they cry, 'awake forlorn,
The King! The King is dead! Rise! Rise and mourn.'

II

Again I bid 'em tell their sorrow's theme,
Again they cry, 'The King! The King is dead!
Extended, cold and pale, upon the royal bed.'
Again I heard, and yet I thought it dream.
'Impossible!' I raving cry,
'That such a monarch! Such a God should die!
And no dire warning to the world be given:
No hurricanes on earth! No blazing fires in Heaven!
The sun and tide their constant courses keep:
That cheers the world with its life-giving reign,
This hastes with equal motion to the deep;
And in its usual turns revives the banks again,

And in its soft and easy way,
Brings up no storms or monsters from the sea,
No showers of blood, no temple's veil is rent,
But all is calm, and all is innocent.
When nature in convulsions should be hurled,
And fate should shake the fabric of the world;
Impossible! Impossible! I cry.
'So great a King! So much a God! So silently should die!

III

True, I divined, when lo a voice arrived,
Welcome as that which did the crowd surprise
When the dead Lazarus from the tomb revived,
And saw a pitying God attend his rise.
'Our sovereign lives!' it cried. 'Rise and adore!
Our sovereign lives! Heaven adds one wonder more
To the miraculous history of his numerous store.'
Sudden as thought or winged lightning flies,
This chased the gloomy terrors from our eyes,
And all from sorrows, fall to sacrifice.
Whole hecatombs* of vows the altars crown,
To clear our sins that brought this vengeance down;
So the great saviour of the world did fall,
A bleeding victim to atone for all!
Nor were the blessed apostles more revived
When in the resurrection they beheld
Their faith established, and their Lord survived,
And all the holy prophecies fulfilled.
Their mighty love, by mighty joy they showed!
And if from feebler faith before,
They did the deity and man adore:
What must they pay, when he confirmed the God?
Who having finished all his wonders here,
And full instructions given,
To make his bright divinity more clear,
Transfigured all to glory, mounts to Heaven!

IV

So fell our earthly God! So loved, so mourned,
So like a God again returned.
For of his message, yet a part was unperformed,
But oh, our prayers and vows were made too late,
The sacred dictates were already passed:
And open laid the mighty book of fate,
Where the great monarch read his life's short date;
And for eternity prepared in haste.
He saw in th'ever lasting chains
Of long passed time and numerous things,
The fates, vicissitudes, and pains,
Of mighty monarchies, and mighty kings;
And blessed his stars that in an age so vain,
Where zealous mischiefs, frauds, rebellions, reign,
Like Moses, he had lead the murm'ring crowd,
Beneath the peaceful rule of his almighty wand;
Pulled down the golden calf to which they bowed,
And left 'em safe, entering the promised land;
And to good Joshua,* now resigns his sway,
Joshua, by Heaven and nature pointed out to lead the way.

V

Full of wisdom and the power of God,
The royal prophet now before him stood:
On whom his hands the dying monarch laid,
And wept with tender joy, and blessed and said:
'To thee, kind aid in all my fates and powers,
Dear partner of my sad and softest hours,
Thy parting King and brother recommends
His frightened nations, and his mourning friends,
Take to thy pious care my faithful flock.
And though the sheltering cedar fade,
Regard,' said he, 'regard my tender stock;
The noble stems may shoot and grow
To grace the spacious plains, and bow
Their spreading branches round thee a defensive shade.'

The royal successor to all he hears
 With sighs assented, and confirming tears.
 Much more he spoke, much more he had expressed,
 But that the charming accents of his tongue
 Flew upwards, to compose a Heavenly song,
 And left his speaking eyes to bless and tell the rest,
 His eyes so much adored! Whose less'ning light
 Like setting suns that hasten on the night;
 (Lending their glories to another sphere)
 Those sacred lights are fading here,
 Whilst every beam above informs a star,

VI

Which shall a nobler business know,
 And influence his best loved friends below.
 But, oh!
 No human thought can paint the grief and love,
 With which the parting heroes strove.
 Sad was the scene, soft looks the voice supplies,
 Anguish their hearts, and languishment their eyes;
 Not God-like Jonathan* with greater pain,
 Sigh'd his last farewell to the royal swain;
 While awful silence filled the gloomy place,
 And death and midnight hung on ev'ry face.
 And now the fatal hour came on,
 And all the blessed pow'rs above
 In haste to make him all their own,
 Around the royal bed in shining order move.
 Once more he longs to see the breaking day,
 The last his mortal eyes shall e'er behold,
 And oft he asked if no kind ray,
 Its near approach foretold.
 And when he found 'twas dawning in,
 (With the cold tide of death that flowed all o'er)
 'Draw, draw,' said he, 'this cloud that hangs between,
 And let me take my last adieu;
 Oh let me take my last last view,
 For I shall never, never see it more.'
 And now——

Official angels catch his dying sighs,
 And bear 'em up in triumph to the skies,
 Each forms a soul! Of the divinest dress!
 For new-born kings and heroes to possess.
 The last, that from the sacred fabric flew,
 Made Charles a God! And James a monarch too!

To His Sacred Majesty, King James the Second

All hail great Prince, whom ev'ry miracle
 Preserved for universal rule;
 When time your wondrous story shall unfold,
 Your glorious deeds in arms, when yet but young;
 Your strange escapes, and danger shall be told,
 Your battles fought, your gilded laurels won,
 When yet the elder generals (not in fame)

Your perils dar'st not share,
 Alone the raging torrent you would stem,
 And bear before you the fierce tide of war.

How Spain* records your glorious name;
 And how when danger called, for Britain's good,
 You paid the lavish ransom of your blood.

When the ingrates shall blushing read,
 How far great souls the vulgar can exceed
 In patience, suffering, and humility,
 Your condescension, and your banishment,*

Then let the obstinate (convinced) agree;
 You only were preserved, and fit for sacred government.

Come listen all whom needless fears* possess,
 And hear how Heav'n confirms your happiness:

Behold the sacred promised prince,
 Whom wondrous prophets* ages since
 Told, when the mystic figures of the year,
 To such a number should amount,
 (As fill this lucky year's account)

O'er England there should reign a star
 Of that divine and gracious influence,
 Should make proud neighbouring nations fear,
 And mightier Britain's happy genius prove,

251 A PINDARIC ON THE DEATH OF OUR LATE SOVEREIGN: text from the 1685 publication (O'Donnell A19.1), checked against the reissue in the same year. For Pindaric poetry, see notes on Cowley and Sprat, above.

Charles II collapsed on the morning of 2 February 1685 and died four days later, having been received into the Catholic church on the last night of his life. As Behn's poem notes, the public were given false hope by an optimistic medical bulletin on the morning of his death, quickly emended as his worsening state became apparent. Greer notes 78 elegies on Charles's death. For a detailed account, see Antonia Fraser, *Charles II* (London, 1979).

- 252 *hecatombs*: large public sacrifice (originally a hundred oxen).
- 253 *Joshua*: i.e. Charles's brother, James, who will succeed Charles as Joshua succeeded Moses.
- 254 *Jonathan*: friend in youth of David, King of Israel.
- 255 *Spain*: James was indeed a highly successful soldier and leader. He had notable successes fighting with the Spanish in the Interregnum, and was offered the command of the Spanish army in 1660. See Jock Haswell, *James II: Soldier and Sailor* (London, 1972).

banishment: under pressure during the exclusion crisis, Charles 'banished' James in 1679; he went first to Brussels, then to Scotland, and did not return until 1682.

needless fears: i.e. fears about James as a Catholic monarch, which had been fuelled by the Popish Plot and its aftermath.

prophets: prophecy was popular in the seventeenth century, for royal and all other events. An example connected with James is *Prince-Protecting Providences* (1682). See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971), who notes a great increase in prophecies during the Civil War.