

# Lament XIX



JAN KOCHANOWSKI

LAMENTS

## *Lament XIX*

THE DREAM

TEUM. DOROTHEA PRALL

Long through the night hours sorrow was my guest  
And would not let my fainting body rest,  
Till just ere dawn from out its slow dominions  
Flew sleep to wrap me in its dear dusk pinions.  
And then it was my mother did appear  
Before mine eyes in vision doubly dear;  
For in her arms she held my darling one,  
My Ursula, just as she used to run  
To me at dawn to say her morning prayer,  
In her white nightgown, with her curling hair  
Framing her rosy face, her eyes about  
To laugh, like flowers only halfway out.

«Art thou still sorrowing, my son?» Thus spoke  
My mother. Sighing bitterly, I woke,  
Or seemed to wake, and heard her say once more:

«It is thy weeping brings me to this shore:  
Thy lamentations, long uncomforted,  
Have reached the hidden chambers of the dead,  
Till I have come to grant thee some small grace  
And let thee gaze upon thy daughter's face,  
That it may calm thy heart in some degree  
And check the grief that imperceptibly  
Doth gnaw away thy health and leave thee sick,  
Like fire that turns to ashes a dry wick.  
Dost thou believe the dead have perished quite,  
Their sun gone down in an eternal night?  
Ah no, we have a being far more splendid  
Now that our bodies' coarser claims are ended.  
Though dust returns to dust, the spirit, given  
A life eternal, must go back to heaven,  
And little Ursula hath not gone out  
Forever like a torch. Nay, cease thy doubt,  
For I have brought her hither in the guise  
She used to wear before thy mortal eyes,  
Though mid the deathless angels, brighter far  
She shineth as the lovely morning star;  
And still she offers up her prayers for you  
As here on earth, when yet no words she knew.  
If herefrom Springs thy sorrow, that her years  
Were broken off before all that endears  
A life on earth to mortals she might prove —

Yet think how empty the delights that move  
The minds of men, delights that must give place  
At last to sorrow, as in thine own case.  
Did then thy little girl such joy confer  
That all the comfort thou didst find in her  
Could parallel thine anguish of today?  
Thou canst not answer otherwise than nay.  
Then fret not that so early death has come  
To what was dearest thee in Christendom.  
She did not leave a land of much delight,  
But one of toil and grief and evil blight  
So plenteous, that all which men can hold  
Of their so transitory blessings, gold,  
Must lose its value through this base alloy,  
This knowledge of the grief that follows joy.

«Why do we weep, great God? That with her dower  
She bought herself no lord, that she might cower  
Before upbraidings from her husband's kin?  
That she knew not the pangs that usher in  
The newborn child? And that she could not know,  
Like her poor mother, if more racking woe  
It were to bear or bury them? Ah, meet  
Are such delights to make the world more sweet!  
But heaven hath purer, surer happiness,  
Free from all intermingling of distress.  
Care rules not here and here we know not toil,  
Misfortune and disaster do not spoil.  
Here sickness can not enter nor old age,  
And death, tear-nourished, hath no pasturage.  
We live a life of endless joy that brings  
Good thoughts; we know the causes of all things.  
The sun shines on forever here, its light  
Unconquered by impenetrable night;  
And the Creator in his majesty  
Invisible to mortals, we may see.  
Then turn thy meditations hither, towards  
This changeless gladness and these rich rewards.  
Thou know'st the world, what love of it can do:  
Found thou thine efforts on a base more true.  
Thy little girl hath chosen well her part,  
Thou may'st believe, as one about to start  
For the first time upon the stormy sea,  
Beholding there great flux and jeopardy,  
Returneth to the shore; while those that raise  
Their sails, the wind or some blind crag betrays,  
And this one dies from hunger, that from cold:  
Scarce one escapes the perils manifold.  
So she, who, though her years should have surpassed  
That ancient Sybil, must have died at last,  
Preferred that ending to anticipate  
Before she knew the ills of man's estate.  
For some are left without their parents' care,  
To know how sore an orphan's lot to bear;  
One girl must marry headlong, and then rue  
Her dower given up to God knows who;  
Some maids are seized by their own countrymen,  
Others, made captive by the Tatar clan

And held thus in a pagan, shameful thrall,  
Must drink their tears till death comes ending all.

«But this thy little child need fear no more,  
Who, taken early up to heaven's door,  
Could walk all glad and shining-pure within,  
Her soul still innocent of earthly sin.  
Doubt not, my son, that all is well with her,  
And let not sorrow be thy conqueror.  
Reason and self-command are precious still  
And yielding all to blighted hope is ill.  
Be in this matter thine own lord, although  
Thy longed-for happiness thou must forego.  
For man is born exposed to circumstance,  
To be the target of all evil chance,  
And if we like it or we like it not  
We still can not escape our destined lot.  
Nor hath misfortune singled thee, my son;  
It lays its burdens upon every one.  
Thy little child was mortal as thou art,  
She ran her given course and did depart;  
And if that course was brief, yet who can say  
That she would have been happier to stay?  
The ways of God are past our finding out,  
Yet what He holds as good shall we misdoubt?  
And when the spirit leaves us, it is vain  
To weep so long; it will not come again.  
And herein man is hardly just to fate,  
To bear in mind what is unfortunate  
In life and to forget all that transpires  
In full accordance with his own desires.  
And such is Fortune's power, dearest son,  
That we should not lament when she hath done  
A bitter turn, but thank her in that she  
Hath held her hand from greater injury.  
So, yielding to the common order, bar  
Thy heart to more disasters than now are;  
Gaze at the happiness thou dost retain:  
What is not loss, that must be rated gain.  
«And finally, what profits the expense  
Of thy long labor and the years gone hence,  
While thou didst spend thyself upon thy books  
And knewest scarce how lightsome pleasure looks?  
Now from thy grafting pluck the fruit and save  
Something of value from frail nature's grave.  
To other men in sorrow thou hast shown  
The comfort left them: hast none for thine own?  
Now, master, heal thyself: time is the cure  
For all; but he whose wisdom doth abjure  
The common ways, he should anticipate  
The healing for which other men must wait.  
What is time's cunning? That it drives away  
Our former haps with newer ones, more gay,  
Or like the old. So man by taking thought  
Perceives them ere their accidents are wrought,  
And by such thinking banishes the past  
And views the future, quiet and steadfast.  
Then bear man's portion like a man, my son,

The Lord of grief and comfort is but one.»  
Then I awoke, and know not if to deem  
This truth itself, or but a passing dream.

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Tekst opracowany na podstawie: Jan Kochanowski, *Laments*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1920

Wydawca: Fundacja Nowoczesna Polska

Publikacja zrealizowana w ramach projektu Wolne Lektury (<http://wolnelektury.pl>). Reprodukacja cyfrowa wykonana przez Bibliotekę Narodową z egzemplarza pochodzącego ze zbiorów BN. Dofinansowano ze środków Ministra Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego.

Opracowanie redakcyjne i przypisy: Justyna Lech, Marta Niedziałkowska, Paweł Koziół.

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