

Chorus Sacerdotum

By Baron Brooke Fulke Greville

from Mustapha

O wearisome condition of humanity!
Born under one law, to another bound;
Vainly begot and yet forbidden vanity;
Created sick, commanded to be sound.
What meaneth nature by these diverse laws?
Passion and reason, self-division cause.
Is it the mark or majesty of power
To make offenses that it may forgive?
Nature herself doth her own self deflower
To hate those errors she herself doth give.
For how should man think that he may not do,
If nature did not fail and punish, too?
Tyrant to others, to herself unjust,
Only commands things difficult and hard,
Forbids us all things which it knows is lust,
Makes easy pains, impossible reward.
If nature did not take delight in blood,
She would have made more easy ways to good.
We that are bound by vows and by promotion,
With pomp of holy sacrifice and rites,
To teach belief in good and still devotion,
To preach of heaven's wonders and delights;
Yet when each of us in his own heart looks
He finds the God there, far unlike his books.

Notes:

The epigraph of this poem was originally omitted in the changeover to the new website. Because of this, reciting the epigraph is optional for the 2019-2020 Poetry Out Loud season.



Fulke Greville, Baron Brooke was better known in his day as a statesman than as an author: he served four terms in England's Parliament and held important posts under both Elizabeth I and James I. But the publication of his poems and other writings five years after his death revealed another facet of this versatile man, and established his reputation as a distinctive minor literary

figure. In 1609 *The Tragedy of Mustapha* was printed without Greville's authorization; it contains the famous "Chorus Sacerdotum," or "Priest's Chorus," but was meant to be read rather than performed.