

[My prime of youth is but a frost of cares]

By Chidiock Tichborne

My prime of youth is but a frost of cares,
My feast of joy is but a dish of pain,
My crop of corn is but a field of tares,
And all my good is but vain hope of gain.
The day is gone and yet I saw no sun,
And now I live, and now my life is done.

The spring is past, and yet it hath not sprung,
The fruit is dead, and yet the leaves are green,
My youth is gone, and yet I am but young,
I saw the world, and yet I was not seen,
My thread is cut, and yet it was not spun,
And now I live, and now my life is done.

I sought my death and found it in my womb,
I lookt for life and saw it was a shade,
I trode the earth and knew it was my tomb,
And now I die, and now I am but made.
The glass is full, and now the glass is run,
And now I live, and now my life is done.



Chidiock Tichborne was born in Southampton, England, to Roman Catholic parents. Though Catholicism was tolerated in England during Tichborne's early years, when Queen Elizabeth I was excommunicated by the pope in 1570, she reinstated a series of anti-Catholic measures in retaliation. In 1586 he joined the Babington conspirators who were plotting to kill the queen. He was apprehended and held in the Tower of London, where he composed a letter to his wife with the stanzas—known as "Tichborne's Elegy"—concerning his impending death.