

THE HUSBANDMAN AND DEATH

By Johannes von Tepl, c. 1401

Translated by Michael Haldane



THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter One.

Ferocious effacer of every being, terrible outlaw of all creation, hideous butcher of every human, Death, you take my curse! God, your Creator, detest you, increasing disaster reside with you, misfortune violently visit you: be wholly dishonoured for ever! Fretting affliction and misery never leave you, wherever you wander; grief, distress and sorrow accompany you all over; fatiguing enmity, disgraceful aversion, shameful disdain beset you with vengeance at every step; sky, earth, sun, moon, stars, river, mountain, field, valley, mead, the abyss of Hell and all that has life and breath be rancorous and resentful towards you and curse you until the end of Time! Founder in malice, vanish in calamitous woe, and continue in the severe, irrevocable proscription of God, of all mankind, and the whole of Creation for all future days! Shameless villain, your evil remembrance live and persist without end; fear and terror never part from you, live wherever you will! I and all humanity wring our hands and scream the hue and cry after you!

DEATH. Chapter Two.

Hark, hark, hark at the latest marvel! We are challenged by appalling and incredible complaints. Whence they have come is, in truth, unknown to Us. But threats, curses, screams of hue and cry, hand-wringing, and every kind of attack have never yet done Us any harm. However, son, whoever you are, announce yourself, and make known what grief has befallen you through Us to lead you to treat Us so unbecomingly, as We are quite unaccustomed to, although We have sent many knowledgeable, noble, beautiful, mighty and strong-standing people to graze over the edge – a cause of sufficient grief to widows and orphans and lands of the living!

You act like a man in earnest, as if oppressed by grave affliction. Your plaint lacks rhyme, from which we conclude that you will not unvail from your meaning for its sake. But if you are raging, ranting, misty-minded or otherwise apart from your senses, then calm down, refrain, do not be so hasty to utter such terrible curses, so you be not burdened with future remorse. Do not imagine that you could ever weaken Our immense and magnificent power. But name yourself, and do not withhold those matters in which We have met you with such dreadful violence. We wish to be right and just before you; right and just are Our proceedings. We do not know what crime you are, so wantonly, laying to Our name.

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Three.

I am a Husbandman by name, my plough is of bird's-clothing,¹ and I live in the land of Bohemia. I will always be spiteful, inimical, adversarial to you: for horribly you have torn my 12th letter, my hoard of joys, out of my alphabet;² deplorably you have weeded the bright summer flower of

¹ “von vogelwat is mein pflug”: that is, he is a ‘ploughman of the pen’ – a clerk.

² The twelfth letter is ‘M’ for Margaretha, ‘J’ not being counted as a separate letter in the Latin alphabet.

my delights from the meadow of my heart; maliciously you have sundered me from the prop of my happiness, my chosen turtle-dove: you have committed irretrievable robbery on me!

Consider for yourself, if I rage, storm and cast charges at you with justice: through you I am robbed of a joyous existence, disinherited from the days of a good life, and divested of all bliss-bringing gain. I used to be bright and merry at every hour; all my days and nights were short and joyful, the one as full of delight, as full of bliss, as the other; my every year was a year of grace. Now I am told: Croak! Remain with dismal thoughts on a withered bough, in darkness and wilting, and howl incessantly! The wind drives me so, I am swimming the surge of the wild sea, the waves have won the upper hand, my anchor holds fast nowhere. Therefore I shall scream without ending: Death, you take my curse!

DEATH. Chapter Four.

We are seized with wonder at such an outrageous challenge, the like of which We have never encountered. If you are a Husbandman, living in the land of Bohemia, then it seems to Us that you do Us a heavy injustice, for We have done no conclusive work in that land for a long time – recently, only in a solid, handsome town, securely situated on a mountain; four letters of the alphabet – the 18th, the 1st, the 3rd and the 23rd – weave its name. We performed our act of grace on a respectable, blessed young lady there; her letter was the twelfth. She was virtuous and free from blemish; for We were present at her birth. At that time, Lady Honour sent her a gusseted mantle and garland, in the hands of Lady Fortune. She took the mantle and garland with her, whole, untorn, and untarnished, to the grave. Our witness, and hers, is He who knows all hearts. She was pure of conscience, assiduous, faithful, honest, and supremely gracious to

one and all. –Verily, so gentle and constant a nature has seldom come into Our hands. Perhaps this is the one you mean; We know of no other.

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Five.

Yes, sir, I was her loving spouse, and she my sweetheart. You took her away, the joy-filled feast for my eyes: she is gone, my peaceful shield from hardship; my soothsaying, divining rod is away. She is gone, gone! Here I stand, poor Husbandman, alone: the shining star has disappeared from my sky; the sun of my weal is descended to rest: never again will she rise! My radiant morning star will never rise again, her light has faded away, I have no sorrow-banisher more: black night is everywhere before my eyes. I do not believe ought exists that could ever bring me back to true happiness, for the proud banner of my joys has sunk, to my sorrow, to the dust.

Murder! To arms! be yelled from the depths of the heart, for the blanched year, for the disastrous day, and for the onerous hour when my constant, solid diamond was shattered, when my loding staff was mercilessly ripped out my hands, when the road to my weal-renewing fountain of youth was barred me. Dole without ending, woe without respite, miserable sinking, felled plunging, eternal fall be given to you, Death, to you and yours! Die besmirched with vice, greedy with disgrace and gnashing your teeth, and perish in the stink of Hell! God deprive you of your power and reduce you to dust! Lead a diabolical existence for ever!

DEATH. Chapter Six.

A fox struck a sleeping lion on the cheek, wherefore his hide was torn to shreds; a hare pinched a wolf, wherefore he has, to this day, no tail; a cat clawed a dog who was wanting to sleep, and so she must bear his enmity

everlastingly. In this way will you chafe yourself against Us. For we believe: the servant shall serve, the Master shall rule. We will prove that We weigh justly, judge justly, and act justly in the world: We spare none for the title, take no heed of great knowledge, pay no regard to any form of beauty, and do not blink at the sight of talent, love, sorrow, age, youth or other qualities. We do as the sun, who shines over good and evil: We take good and evil into Our power. All those masters who can compel spirits must commit and relinquish their spirit to Us; the necromancers and magicians cannot withstand Us, and their riding on sticks, their riding on goats, helps them nought. The doctors who lengthen the lives of men must come to our shared shore: roots, herbs, ointments, and manifold apothecatical powders cannot help them. If we made account to even the butterflies and the grasshoppers for their species, they would not be satisfied. And if we let people live for the sake of friendship or enmity, of love or sorrow, the whole world would now stretch as Our Empire; every King would have placed his crown on Our head and presented his sceptre to Our hand; the Papal See and the three-crowned mitre would now be in Our power. Leave be with your curses; do not bring new tales from the prattling-rock; do not hew above you, or shavings will rain into your eyes!

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Seven.

Could I curse, could I rail, could I revile you to cause you the worst of evils, then that would be no more than you have despicably deserved of me. For bitter complaints must follow bitter grief: it would be inhuman of me not to weep for so virtuous a gift from God, which none but God alone can give. Truly, I shall mourn for ever: my honourable falcon has flown away, my virtuous wife. I am justified in my complaints, for she was of noble birth, rich in honours, beautiful, sprightly, and of a figure that towered

over her boon companions; truthful and modest in words, chaste of body, good and cheerful in company – I am silent, for I am too weak to tell of all her honour and virtue, which God Himself granted her: Master Death, you know this yourself. I am right to arraign you for such intense heartache. Truly, were there any good in you, you yourself would feel pity. I will turn away from you, speak no good of you, I will oppose you for ever with all my power: all God's Creation shall assist me in my strivings against you; all that is in Heaven, on Earth and in Hell, hate you and feud with you!

DEATH. Chapter Eight.

God has given Heaven's Throne to the good spirits, the Abyss of Hell to the evil, and the terrestrial lands to Our portion. In Heaven, peace and reward for virtue; in Hell, torment and punishment for sin; this sphere of Earth with its flowing rivers and all they contain was commended Us by the mighty Duke of all Worlds, with the order that We uproot and weed out all superfluity. If you imagine, foolish man, if you consider, and chisel into your reason with a burin, then you will find: if We had not eradicated, since the time when the first man was worked from clay, the growth and increase of humans on Earth, of beasts and worms in the barren wastes and wild woods, of scale-bearing, slippery fishes in the waters – then no one would now exist for gnats, no one would venture out for wolves, each man would guzzle another, each beast another, each living creature another, for they would lack food, and the Earth would be too narrow for them. He is foolish who weeps for mortals. Desist! The living to the living, the dead to the dead, as hitherto. Consider your cause more deeply, you fool, before you begin to complain!

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Nine.

I have irretrievably lost my highest treasure – should I not mourn? I must linger in misery to my final days, robbed of every delight. Gentle God, the mighty Lord, avenge me on you, wicked sorrowbringer! You have dispossessed me of every joy, deprived my life of pleasant days, disaccustomed me from great honour. Great honour was mine when the good, the pure, the sublime angel played with her children, born in a pure nest. The hen is dead who brought up such chicks. Oh God, mighty Lord, with what pride did I look before me when she walked with such modest steps, mindful of decorum, that people gave her loving looks, and said: “May the gentle soul be praised, honoured and thanked; God grant her and her nestlings a world of good!” If I knew how to properly thank God for this, in truth, I would do as was meet. What other poor man had he endowed so richly, so soon? Let others say what they will: when God gifts a man a pure, chaste and beautiful wife, this is a real gift, one that is higher than every earthly, material gift. Oh mightiest Lord of Heaven, what a boon you have conferred on the man you have wedded to a pure and spotless spouse! Delight, honest man, in a pure wife; delight, pure woman, in an honest husband: God give joy to you both! What does the fool know of this, who has never drunk from this fountain of youth? And crushing heartache may have befallen me, yet I thank God sincerely, for that I have known the flawless lady. You, evil Death, enemy of all mankind, be eternally hateful to God!

DEATH. Chapter Ten.

You have not drunk from the fountain of wisdom; I mark that from your words. You have not seen the working of nature; you have not peered into the mixture of worldly events; you have not beheld the transformation of flesh: you are an ignorant whelp. Mark how the

delightful roses, the strong-scented lilies in the garden, how the virtuous herbs and the joy-giving flowers in the meadows, how the firm-standing stones and the high-grown trees in the rugged fields, how the puissant bears and the strength-wielding lions in the eerie wilderness, how the strong, tall-grown warriors, how the nimble, exceptional, erudite and omniproficient people, and how all earthly creatures, however intelligent, and charming, and strong they may be, however long they preserve themselves, however long they continue – one and all must come to nought. Now, when all human generations who have been or are yet to be must pass from being to non-being, how may the Extolled One you mourn enjoy the advantage that she not be done to as all others, and all others not be done to as she? You yourself will not escape Us, although this may be far from your thoughts at present. “Everyone to follow!” each one of you must say. Your plaint is invalid; it helps you nought; it proceeds from a torpid mind.

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Eleven.

I have every faith in God, who has power over me and you, that He will shield me from you, and take severe revenge on you for the aforesaid outrage you have done me. You declaim like a trickster; you mix truth with falsehoods, intending to beat my enormous soul-sorrow, my mind-grief and heartache, out of sight, out of mind, out of senses. You will not succeed, for I am pained by my weighty, agonising loss, the which I can never replace. My curative medicine for all woe and hardship, God’s servant, the nurse of my will, my body’s attendant, the guardian of my honour and hers all day and all night, she was indefatigable. Whatever was entrusted to her was returned entire, intact and pure, often with increase. Honour, propriety, chastity, generosity, fidelity, moderation, care and modesty always inhabited her house; shamefacedness always

bore the mirror of honour before her eyes; God was her gracious protector. He was also gracious and merciful to me for her sake; health, happiness and fortune were mine. This pure domestic bliss she had earned and deserved of God. Give her her reward and wages of grace, lenient meed-giver, expender to all faithful souls, richest of lords! Show her more grace than I could wish for her! Oh, oh, oh! brazen murderer, Master Death, vicious brat! the torturer be your judge and tie you with the words “Forgive me!” to the rack!³

DEATH. Chapter Twelve.

Could you measure, weigh, count and judge correctly, you would not discharge such words from a hollow head. You curse and demand vengeance without understanding and without need. What use is such asininity? We have already said: all that is rich in thought, noble, honourable, upright, and everything living, must perish by Our hand. Yet you yap and say that all your felicity lies in your pure, honest wife. If you take the view that felicity lies in wives, then We shall advise you to remain in felicity. But take heed that it turn not to disaster!

Tell Us: when you took your laudable wife, did you find her, or did you make her, virtuous? If you found her in virtue, then seek sensibly: you will find many more virtuous, pure women on Earth, one of whom may become your spouse; if, however, you made her virtuous, then rejoice: you are the living master, who can create and educate a wife in virtue.

But I shall tell you something else: the more love that fell your way, the more sorrow will befall you; if you had abstained from love, you would now be relieved of sorrow; the greater the love you enjoy, the greater the sorrow of life without love. Wife, child, wealth and all earthly

³ In many places it was the custom for the torturer to ask forgiveness of the tortured.

goods must bring some measure of joy at first, and a greater of sorrow at last; all earthly love must turn to sorrow; sorrow is love's end, the end of joy is grief, sadness must follow pleasure, the enjoyment of one's will must end in disaffection – to such an end all living things must run. Learn a little more, if you wish to cackle with wisdom!

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Thirteen.

After injury comes insult; those in distress feel this all too well. And in this wise am I, an injured man, served by you. You have unbedded me from love and wedded me to sorrow; so long as God wills, must I suffer this at your hands. However dull-witted I may be, however little wisdom I may have acquired from sagacious masters, I am still well aware that you are the robber of my honour, the thief of my joys, the stealer of my good days, the devastator of my delights, and the destroyer of all that procured and guaranteed me a blissful life. Wherefore shall I now rejoice? Where shall I seek solace? Where shall I have refuge? Where shall I find a place of healing? Where shall I take good counsel? Gone is gone! All my delight is gone! She has disappeared from me before her time; she has flown away from me too soon; you have torn her from me all too hastily, the faithful one rich in love, thus making without mercy a widower of me and orphans of my children. Miserable, alone, overwhelmed by grief, I remain without your compensation; you have not yet been able to make me amends for your great misdemeanour. What of you, Master Death, universal marriage-breaker? No one may gain any good from you; you will give no one satisfaction for criminal deeds; you will make no one amends for evil. I see it: compassion does not live with you; curses are your daily fare; you are merciless in all places. Such benefaction as you confer on man, such favour as man receives from you, such reward as you give man, such an end as you bring man, may He who

has power over life and death send you! Prince of the Heavenly Host, make good to me my tremendous loss, my great affliction, my wretched sorrow and pitiful call to arms! So avenge me on the arch-roguer, on Death, God, avenger of atrocity!

DEATH. Chapter Fourteen.

Idle words; as much said as silence. For foolish words must lead to discord, discord to enmity, enmity to conflict, conflict to injury, injury to sorrow, and sorrow to repentance, for every confused man. You announce discord to Us. You complain that We have caused your sorrow through your so very dear wife. Yet she has been served with kindness and mercy: We have taken her into Our grace in joyful youth, with a proud body, in the best days of her life, with the highest esteem, at the best time, with honour inviolate. The prophets extolled this, they craved this, when they said: “It is best to die when it is best to live.” He did not die well who desired death; he has lived too long who calls on Us for death; woe and hardship to him who is overloaded with the burden of age: in the midst of wealth he is poor!

In the year of the Ascension, on the Feast Day of Heaven’s Gatekeeper’s Chains, when 6,599 years were counted since the beginning of the World,⁴ at the birth of a child, We bid the blessed martyress leave this short spell of shining misery, with the intention that she come full of grace, after good services, to the eternal joy, everlasting life, and unending peace, of God’s inheritance. However spiteful you may be towards Us, We shall wish without grudges that your soul abide with hers in the celestial dwelling up there, and your body with hers in the terrestrial vault down here. We would stand surety to you that you will enjoy her beneficence. Be silent, cease! As little as you can deprive the

⁴ The Feast Day of St. Peter’s Chains is August 1. The year referred to is 1400.

sun of its light, the moon of its coldness, fire of its heat, and water of its wetness, so little can you rob Us of Our power.

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Fifteen.

A guilty man needs to colour his words. As you are doing. It is your custom to show yourself sweet and sour, gentle and harsh, kind and severe, to those you intend to deceive: so much is clear from my experience. However much gloss you give yourself, I know that I must live grief-stricken without the woman of nobility and grace for the sake of your vehement disfavour. I also know that no one has command of such power except you and God. But I am not tormented so by God: for if I had trespassed against God, which has, alas, oftentimes happened, He would have taken revenge on me, or the flawless lady would have atoned for me.

The malefactor is you. And so I would like to know who you are, what you are, where you are, whence you are, and what good you do, for you to possess so much power and to have challenged me so evilly without warning, desolated my bliss-covered meadow, undermined and brought down my tower of strength.

Ah God, Consoler of all afflicted hearts, console and compensate me, this poor, grieving, miserable, lone-sitting man! Send, Lord, plagues; undertake retaliation; shackle and eradicate abominable Death, Your enemy, and enemy to all! Truly, Lord, there is nothing in Your creation more heinous, nothing more hideous, nothing more cruel, nothing more unjust, than Death! He distresses and destroys Your entire earthly realm; he takes the upright away before the dishonest; the harmful, the old, the infirm, the useless, he often leaves here; the good and the useful, he carries them off every one. Pass judgement, Lord, just judgement on the false judge!

DEATH. Chapter Sixteen.

Senseless people name evil good, call good evil. As you are doing. You accuse Us of passing false judgement: you do Us injustice. We shall prove this to you. You ask who We are: We are God's handle, Master Death, a truly effective reaper. Our scythe works its way. It cuts down white, black, red, brown, green, blue, grey, yellow, and all kinds of lustrous flowers in its path, irrespective of their splendour, their strength, their virtue. And the violet's beautiful colour, rich perfume, and palatable sap, avail it nought. See: that is justice. Our justification was acknowledged by the Romans and the poets, for they knew Us better than you do.

You ask what We are: We are nothing, and yet something. Nothing, because We have neither life, nor being, nor form, and We are no spirit, not visible, not tangible; something, because We are the end of life, the end of existence, the beginning of nullity, a cross between the two. We are a happening that fells all people. Huge giants must fall before Us; all living beings must be transformed by Us.

You ask where We are: We are not ascertainable. But Our form was found in a temple in Rome,⁵ painted on a wall, as a hoodwinked man sitting on an ox; this man wielded a hatchet in his right hand and a shovel in his left hand, with which he was beating the ox. A great crowd of all kinds of people was hitting him, fighting him, and making casts at him, each one with the tools of his trade: even the nun with her psalter was there. They struck and made casts at the man on the ox, he who signified Us; yet Death contested and buried them all. Pythagoras likens Us to a man's form with the eyes of a basilisk: they wandered to the ends of the Earth, and every living creature had to die at their glance.

⁵ The reference to the illustration in the Roman temple has not been traced.

You ask where We are: We are from the Earthly Paradise. God created Us there and gave Us Our true name, when he said: “The day that ye bite of this fruit, ye shall die the death.” And for that reason We call ourself: “We, Death, mighty ruler and master on Earth, in the air, and in the rivers of the sea.”

You ask what good We do: you have already heard that We bring the world more advantage than harm. Now cease, rest content, and thank Us for the kindness we have done you!

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Seventeen.

Old men can tell new tales; learned men unknown tales; far-travelled men, whom no one dares contradict, may freely venture to tell fictitious tales, for they speak of unknown matters and are thus exempt from punishment. Now, if you are one of those old men, you may well be fabricating. Although you fell into the worldly paradise as a reaper who strives after justice, your scythe hews unevenly: it uproots the flowers with violence, and leaves thistles standing; the weeds remain, the good herbs must perish. You claim that your scythe cuts straight ahead. How is it, then, that it leaves unscathed more thistles than flowers, more caraway than camomile, more evil people than good? Tell me, show me with your finger: where are the upright, worthy people of past days? I maintain: you have taken them away. My beloved is away with you; only the ashes remain. Where have they gone, they who lived on Earth and talked with God, who won grace and favour and mercy from His hands? Where have they gone, they who had their seat on Earth, who walked beneath the stars and determined the planets? Where have they gone, the profound, the masterly, the righteous, the sprightly men, about whom the chronicles have so much to say? All of them, and my gentle one, you have murdered; the base people are still here. Who bears the guilt for that? If

you dared admit the truth, Master Death, you would name yourself. You insist that you judge fairly, spare no one, and the strokes of your scythe fell them one after the other. I stood there and saw with my own eyes two immense hosts – each numbering over three thousand men – fighting one another on a green heath; they were wading up to the ankles in blood. And among them there was you, buzzing and whirring with great diligence all around. You killed quite a few of the army; you left quite a few standing. I saw more lords than servants lying dead. You would pick one from the rest like so many soft pears. Is that how to reap justly? Is that how to judge justly? Is that your scythe cutting straight ahead? Come here, dear children, come here! Let us ride towards, let us sing the praises of, let us offer honour to Death, who judges so justly! God's judgement is hardly so just.



DEATH. Chapter Eighteen.

Who understands nothing of the matter, he can say nothing of the matter. And this has happened to Us. We did not know that you were so splendid a man. We have known you for a long time; but We had forgotten you.

We were there when the Sibyll informed you with wisdom; when Solomon, on his death-bed, bequeathed his wisdom to you; when God granted you all the power He had conferred on Moses in the land of Egypt; when you grabbed a lion by the legs and beat it against the wall.⁶ We saw you count the stars, calculate the number of grains of sand, and of fishes in the sea, and measure raindrops. In Babylon, We saw you proffering food and drink with great honour and dignity to the Sultan. When you carried the banner before King Alexander under which he defeated Darius, We watched you and willingly allowed you the honour. When, in Academia⁷ and in Athens, you debated with distinguished, knowledgeable masters, who spoke so expertly about divinity, yet you so wisely prevailed over them, then We were especially delighted. When you instructed Nero to exercise righteousness and be patient, We heard you with a willing ear.⁸ We were surprised when you bore the Emperor Julius over the raging sea in a ship of reeds,⁹ defying the stormy gales. We saw you in your workshop, weaving a noble garment out of rainbows; angels, birds, animals, and all kinds of fish were fashioned in it; and the Owl and the Ape were woven in the woof. We laughed especially hard and extolled you when, in Paris,¹⁰ you sat on the Wheel of Fortune,

⁶ The Lion-slayer may be Samson.

⁷ Tepl misconstrues Plato's Academy as a town.

⁸ The philosopher who taught Nero was the Stoic, Seneca.

⁹ Another misunderstanding is the "ship of reeds": the boatman in question lived in a reed hut.

¹⁰ Paris was the most famous university in mediaeval Europe.

danced on an ox's hide,¹¹ worked in the Black Arts and exorcised the Devil into a peculiar glass. When God called you to His council, to speak about the Fall of Lady Eve, then, for the first time, We became cognisant of your great wisdom.

If We had realised who you were, We would have done as you command; We would have allowed your wife and all mankind to live for ever. And We would have done this to honour you alone: for you are, in truth, an intelligent ass!

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Nineteen.

Men must often endure mockery and ill-treatment for the sake of the truth. And this is happening to me. You extol me for impossible things, for effecting unheard-of works. You exercise far too much force; you have treated me wickedly; and I am sorely grieved. Yet when I speak of this, you are spiteful to me and full of rage. Whoever commits evil and will not submit to accept punishment and suffer, but arrogantly resists, let him keep a close watch that he be not met with enmity!

Take me as an example! Whether you have proceeded too peremptorily, or too irremediably, unkindly or unjustly with me, I show tolerance and do not take vengeance, as I should by rights. And today I shall go further: if my manner towards you has been unreasonable or unseemly in any way, then tell me: I shall gladly and willingly make this good. But if this be not the case, then recompense me for my loss or instruct me what compensation I can draw for my great heartache. Truly, never before did such a reduction befall man. In spite of everything, you shall witness my moderation. Either you redress the malicious wrong you have committed against my sorrow-avertter, against me and my children, or you come with me to God, who is the righteous judge of me, and you,

¹¹ It was believed that sitting on an ox-skin would give insights into the future.

and all the world. You may well request that I leave the matter in your hands; I trusted you to see your unjustness for yourself and afterwards give me satisfaction for your grievous undeed. Follow your reason! Otherwise the hammer must strike the anvil, force against force, come what may!

DEATH. Chapter Twenty.

People are pacified by good words, reason holds people to moderation, patience brings people to honour, and an angry man cannot decide what is truth. Had you spoken amicably to Us earlier, We would have amicably instructed you that you may not, in all propriety, lament and weep for the death of your wife. Do you know nothing of the sage who wished to die in the bath, have you not read in his books that no one should lament a mortal's death? If you know it not, then know it now: as soon as a human is born, so soon does he drink to clinch the deal of death. The end is brother to the beginning. He who is sent out is obliged to return. No one may resist what must come to pass. No individual may gainsay that which all humans must suffer. A man shall return what he has borrowed. All humans are strangers on this Earth. They must pass from something to nothing. Every man's life runs along on fast feet: this moment, living; in the turning of a hand, dead.

To briefly conclude: every human owes the debt of death and has inherited death. If you weep for your wife's youth, you are wrong to do so; as soon as a human has life, so soon is he old enough to die. Perhaps you think that age is a precious treasure? No, it is infirm, laborious, misshapen, cold, and ill-pleasing to all people; it avails nought and is suited to nothing: early apples fall gladly into manure; over-ripe pears fall gladly into a puddle.

If you lament her beauty, then that is childish of you: every single human's beauty must be destroyed by either age or death. All rosy little mouths must ashen; all red little cheeks must pale; all shining little eyes must darken. Have you not read where Hermes, the sage, teaches that a man should beware of beautiful women, saying: "What is beautiful is difficult to keep, even with daily care, for it is coveted by all; what is ugly is easy to keep, for it is displeasing to all." Let go! Do not lament a loss you cannot retrieve.

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Twenty-One.

"Accept good punishment with good grace: that is the act of a wise man!" I hear sage voices proclaim. Your punishment is also bearable. Now, if a good punisher is supposed to be a good instructor, then advise me, teach me how I am to excavate, eradicate and expel such unspeakable sorrow, such deplorable grief, such sadness beyond measure from my heart, from my mind and from my senses. By God, it was unspeakable heartache that befell me when my chaste, true and constant household honour was so hastily torn away from me – she is dead, I am a widower, and my children are become orphans.

Oh Master Death, all the world complains of you, and so do I. But since there was never a man so evil that he was not good for something: advise me, help me, show me how I may cast such heavy sorrow from my heart, and how so pure a mother may be replaced for my children! Otherwise I must be disgruntled, and she sad, always. And you should not take this ill of me; for I see that, among the unreasoning beasts, an inner compulsion drives one spouse to mourn the other's death.

You owe me help, advice, and compensation; you did me the harm. If this does not happen, then even if God in His omnipotence had no

vengeance, it would still have to be avenged, should shovel and hoe be exerted once more.

DEATH. Chapter Twenty-Two.

Gack, gack, gack, gabbles the goose; howl, howl, says the wolf; one may preach whatever one wishes. And such is the yarn that you spin. We have already explained to you that Death shall be beyond the impeachment of mortals. The reason being that We are a tax-collector, to whom humankind must declare and pay the toll of their lives. So why do you resist? Truly: he who will deceive Us deceives himself.

Now listen, and make sure that this sinks in: life is created for the sake of Death. If life were not, We would not be, and Our business were nought; nor would the world order exist. Either you are filled too deeply with sorrow, or unreason is housing inside you. If you are from your reason, then beseech God to grant you rationality! If you are filled with sorrow, however, then stop, let go, and take this on board: man's life on Earth is but a breath of wind!

You ask for advice on how to put the grief from your heart. Aristotle once taught you that joy, sorrow, hope, and fear, these four emotions, encumber all the world, especially those who cannot guard themselves against them. Joy and fear shorten, hope and sorrow lengthen, the duration of time. Whoever does not banish these four from his mind must live with anxiety at all times. After joy sorrow, after love grief: such is the way of this Earth. Joy and grief must always be bound together. The end of one is where the other begins. Grief and joy are nothing other than a man grasping a thought and refusing to release it; likewise, the undemanding are never poor, and the demanding never know wealth: for sufficiency and insufficiency are not relative to possessions, or to external things, but only to the mind. Whoever will not

drive all love from his heart must bear the presence of grief at all times. Drive the remembrance of love from your heart, from your senses, from your mind, and at once you will be relieved from sorrow! The moment you have lost something you cannot regain, make as if it had never been yours! And your sorrow will instantly leave.

If you will not do this, then further grief awaits you. For heartache will beset you after the death of each child, and heartache to all of them after your death; to you and to them, when the time comes to part from one another. You want their mother to be replaced. If you can bring back past years, spoken words and lost maidenhood, then bring your children their mother. I have counselled you enough. Can you understand, blunt-wit?

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Twenty-Three.

Time brings man to an awareness of this truth: the more learned, the more able. Your pronouncements are sweet and lively, as I am now beginning to perceive. But if joy, love, delight and diversion should be banished from the world, then the world would be in a bad way. Let us consider the Romans. They taught their children to follow their example and hold joy in honour, to tourney, joust, race, leap, and pursue all kinds of virtuous courtly arts in their leisure-time, to the intent that this would keep them out of the reach of evil. For the thoughts of man's mind cannot be idle: it must be working good or evil at all times; not even in sleep may it rest. If good thoughts were taken from the mind, evil ones would enter. Good out, evil in; evil out, good in; and this exchange must endure until the end of the world. Ever since joy, breeding, modesty, and other courtly virtues have been expelled from the world, have malice, disgrace, faithlessness, mockery and betrayal filled it to overflowing; as you may see everyday.

Now, if I were to beat the memory of my dearly beloved from my mind, an evil memory would return to my head: all the more reason for keeping my dearly beloved in constant remembrance. When great, heartfelt love is transformed into great, heartfelt sorrow, who can forget this so soon? That is what evil people do. Good friends think always of one another; distant roads, long years, do not part dear friends. She may be dead to me in body; she is ever living in my mind. Sir Death, you must advise more truly, if your counsel is to bring benefit; or else you must, Sir Bat, even more than the sparrowhawk, bear the enmity of birds!

DEATH. Chapter Twenty-Four.

No joy too great, no sorrow too deep, should affect the wise man during profit or loss. It affects you. He who asks for advice then will not follow the counsel given is not to be advised. Our wise words are lost on you. Now whether you like it or loathe it, We shall bring you the truth to light: listen who will.

Your short understanding, your clipped mind, your hollow heart, will make more of mankind than it has the power to become. Make of a man what you will, yet he cannot be more than this I say to you, with the leave of all pure women: a human is conceived in sin, nourished with impure, unspeakable feculence in the maternal body, born naked and smeared like a beehive; a mass of refuse, a churn of filth, a dish for worms, a stinkhouse, a repulsive washtub, a rancid carcass, a mildewed crate, a bottomless sack, a perforated pocket, a bellows, a rapacious maw, a reeking flagon of urine, a malodorous pail, a deceptive marionette-show, a loamy robber's den, an insatiably slaking trough, a painted delusion. Let recognise who will: every human created to completion has nine holes in his body; out of all these there flows such repellent filth that nothing could be more impure. You would never see human beauty, if

you had the eyes of a lynx, and your gaze could penetrate to the innards; you would shudder at the sight. Strip the dressmaker's colouring from the loveliest of ladies, and you will see a shameful puppet, a hastily withering flower, a sparkle of little duration and a soon decomposing clod of earth! Show me a handful of beauty of all the belles who lived a hundred years ago, excluding those painted on the wall, and you shall have the Kaiser's crown! Let love flow away, let grief flow away! Let the Rhine run its course like other waters, you wise lad from Assville!

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Twenty-Five.

Pah to you, you evil sack of shame! How you destroy, maltreat, and dishonour noble mankind, God's dearest creation, thereby reviling divinity! Now, for the first time, I see that you are mendacious and not created in Paradise as you claimed. Had you been in Paradise, you would know that God created man and all things, and created them wonderfully well; He set man above them all, conferred on him dominion over them all, and made them subservient to his feet, so that man should rule over the beasts of the earth, the birds of the air, the fish in the sea, and all fruits of the soil; and man does. Now if man were as despicable, evil and impure as you say, then truly, God would have worked an unclean and futile act. Had God's omnipotent Hand created so impure and ordurous a work of man as you say, He were a shameful Creator. And it would not be true that God had created all things, and man over them all, wonderfully well.

Sir Death, cease your pointless yapping! You sully God's most splendid creation. Angels, devils, imps, and birds of death, all these are spirits under the government of God; man is the most noble, the most skilled, and the most free of all God's works. God formed him in His image, as He Himself proclaimed at the Creation of the World.

Where has a workman ever effected so skilled and rich, so masterly and small, a sphere as the human head? Inside it there are artful, wondrous powers, incomprehensible to all spirits. In the eyeball there is the face, the most reliable of witnesses, masterfully worked in the way of a mirror; it reaches the clarity of the heavens. In the ears is the far-reaching sense of hearing, perfectly grated with a thin membrane for the perception and differentiation of a host of sweet sounds. In the nose is the sense of smell, entering and leaving through two holes, purposefully carpentered for the ease and convenience of all sweet and delightful scents. In the mouth are teeth, which grind the body's nourishment every day; also the tongue's thin leaf to pass thoughts between humans; and it holds the pleasurable sense of gustation for every kind of food. And then, in the head, there are thoughts coming from the depths of the heart, with which mankind rapidly reaches as far as he wills; with his thoughts, man clambers towards, and even above, the divine. Only man is in possession of reason, the noble treasure. He alone is the delightful form, whose like none but God is able to shape, and in which all skilled works, all art and mastery, are woven with wisdom. Let go, Sir Death! you are the enemy of man: that is why you speak him ill.

DEATH. Chapter Twenty-Six.

Rebukes, curses, and wishes, no matter how many, can fill no sack, no matter how small. Furthermore: there is no contending with words against garrulous people. Now let Us accept your opinion that man has been endowed with every knowledge, beauty and dignity: he must, notwithstanding, fall into Our net; he must be drawn into Our snare. Grammar, the foundation of all eloquent speech, will not help him with her precise and finely-turned locutions. Rhetoric, the blossoming ground of honeyed words, will not help him with her ornate and richly-coloured

expressions. Logic, the insightful demarcator of truth and untruth will not help him with her sly concealment, with the crooked ways that mislead truth. Geometry, the ascertainer, assessor, and measurer of the Earth, will not help him with her unerring measurement, or with her accurate weighing. Arithmetic, skilled marshal of numbers, will not help him with counting and calculations, or with her dexterous digits. Astronomy, Master of the Heavenly Bodies, will not help him with her astral power, the influence of the planets. Music, the organising handmaid of song, will not help him with her sweet melodies, with her harmonious voices. Philosophy, field of wisdom, tilled and sown, and grown to perfection, in knowledge of Nature and God and in the production of ethical living; Physic, with her draughts that help many; Geomancy, skilful respondent to all kinds of questions posed on Earth; Hydromancy, unveiler of the future by dint of the workings of water; Astrology, interpreter of sublunar events through the course of the Heavens; Chiromancy, smart soothsayer from the hand and the lines of the palm; Necromancy, mighty compeller of spirits through the sacrifice of dead men's fingers and secret signs; the musical art, with her select prayers and her strong incantations; the augur, versed in the language of birds and so the true prophet of future events; the haruspex, indicating the future in the smoke of the altar-victim; Paedomancy, conjuror with children's intestines, and ornithomancy, with grouse's guts; the jurist, the Christian without conscience: will not help him by twisting right and wrong and passing crooked judgements. These arts, and all those related, avail nought: every man must be felled by Us, scoured in Our fulling-tub and cleaned in Our rolling-press. Take my word, you riotous ploughhand!

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Twenty-Seven.

One should not meet evil with evil; man should practise patience, and have the teachings of virtue at his command. I shall tread this path; perhaps this will exhaust your impatience.

I gather from your speech: you believe that you have advised me truly. Now if trueness dwells in you, advise me in good faith, as though after a sworn oath: what direction shall my life take now? Previously I lived in dear and happy wedlock; where should I turn to now? To the secular or the spiritual state? Both stand open to me. My mind formed images of man's many existences, then scrupulously weighed and appraised them: I found them all to be lacking, fragile and in sin. I am uncertain whither I should turn: every human station is tainted with affliction. Sir Death, advise! Advice is of the essence! In my thoughts I find, imagine and believe, in truth, that a home and being so pure, so pleasing to God, will never return. Upon my soul I say: if I knew that I would thrive in marriage as I have formerly done, I would live in that state for as long as my life continued. Blissful, joyful, merry and cheerful is the man with a worthy wife, wherever he may wander. It is a pleasure for such a man to strain for food and strive after honour. It is also a pleasure for him to meet honour with honour, fidelity with fidelity, and good with good. He does not need to watch her; a chaste wife is her own best guard. He who cannot believe and trust his wife must live in perpetual anxiety.

Lord of the Upper Regions, Prince of the Manifold Blessings, happy the man you endow with so spotless a bed-companion! He should look to Heaven and thank you with upraised hands every day.

Do what is best, Sir Death, multipotent Lord!

DEATH. Chapter Twenty-Eight.

To praise without end, to revile without purpose, at all times and places, is the custom of many. Praise and abuse should be meet and measured, that they be ready at hand when the need for one arises.

You praise married life beyond moderation. But We shall instruct you in the conjugal state, all pure women notwithstanding: as soon as men take a wife, so soon do they enter Our prison, two by two. From that moment on a man has an obligation, a dependent, a hand-drawn sledge, a yoke, a horse-collar, a burden, a pressing load, a devil from Purgatory, a daily grating rust-file, which he cannot rightly rid himself of until We grant him Our grace. A wedded man has thunder and hailstorms, foxes and snakes, in his house every day. A wife strives all her days to become the man; if he pulls up, she pulls down; if he wants this, she wants that; if he wants to go here, she wants to go there – he shall have his fill of such sports and defeat every day. She can deceive, outwit, flatter, concoct, caress, grouch, laugh and weep in the blink of an eye; she was born that way. Sick for work, but healthy for lust; and tame or wild, as suits her purpose. She needs no advisor to find an argument. All the time she strains not to do that which she is bidden, and to do what is forbidden. This is too sweet for her, and that is too sour; this is too much, and that is too little; now it is too early, now it is too late – everything is met with a reproach. If she ever praises anything, her words are turned to shame on a lathe; the praise is thickly mixed with mockery. No means can help a man living in wedlock: if he is too kind, if he is too harsh, he is punished; being kind and severe, half and half, is also no way: it will always incur harm or punishment. Every day new presumption or bickering; every week alienating noncompliance or sulking; every month new atrocities or terrors; every year new clothes or daily squabbling: such is the lot of a wedded man, let him behave however he will. We shall keep silence over

the aggravations of night, for shame for Our age. If We did not wish to spare the virtuous women, we could sing and say much more about the ones lacking in virtue. So recognise what you are praising: you cannot tell gold from lead!

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Twenty-Nine.

“Those who dishonour women dishonour themselves” say the masters of truth. What is happening to you now, Sir Death? Your irrational vituperation against women, although it is made with their leave, is truly disgraceful for you and ignominious for them. In the writings of many wise masters one finds that, without a woman at the helm, no man may be steered to happiness; having a wife and child is not the slightest part of earthly joy. With such truth did Philosophy, the wise Mistress, bring peace to the mind of Boethius, the Roman rich in consolation. Every exceptional and thoughtful man is my witness: no man can keep his discipline if there be not a woman to take him in hand. Let anyone say who wishes: a modest, beautiful, chaste wife of untouched honour is above all earthly delights. I never yet saw a man, no matter how manly and spirited, who was not guided by a woman’s words. Where nobility gathers, one sees every day: in all places, at every court, at every tournament, with every army on the march, women bring out what is best. Whoever is in a lady’s service must abstain from misdemeanour. Women hold the power of terrestrial delight; they effect that all courtly deeds and pastimes on Earth be performed to their honour. A pure lady’s warning finger punishes and disciplines a valiant man more than any weapon. Without glosing, and in few words: noble ladies are the support, the fortification, and the increase of the whole world.

Now, there must be lead among gold, corncockles among wheat, counterfeits among coins, and she-devils among women: but do not make the good pay for the bad. Mark my words, Captain of Mountains!¹²

DEATH. Chapter Thirty.

A fool takes a cob for a gold nugget, a piece of horn for topaz, a pebble for a ruby; the idiot calls a barn a mountain, the Danube the Sea, a buzzard a falcon. And so do you praise what feasts the eyes; you pay no thought to causes. For you do not know that everything of this world is either desire of the flesh, or desire of the eyes, or pride in life. Desire of the flesh aims at lust; desire of the eyes at possessions or estate; and pride in life at honour. Possessions bring greed, lust causes lewdness and lechery, and honour brings arrogance and boastfulness. Possessions will lead to desire and fear, lust to malice and sin, and honour to vanity. Could you comprehend this, you would find vanity walking the whole of the world; and if joy or sorrow then befell you, you would endure it in patience and leave Us unreproached.

As well as an ass plucks the lyre, with such skill do you grasp the truth. That is why We are so sorely concerned for you. When We parted the youth Pyramus from the maiden Thisbe, who were one heart and one soul; when we dispossessed King Alexander of world dominion; when we annihilated Trojan Paris and Greek Helen: we were not upbraided so severely as we are now by you. We did not meet with such vexation for Kaiser Karl, Markgrave Willehalm, Dietrich von Bern, Boppe the Strong of Arm, or horn-skinned Siegfried.¹³ Many still lament Aristotle and

¹² “hauptman vom berge”. Sometimes translated into modern German as ‘Maulheld’ (‘loudmouth’, ‘blusterer’: *lit.* ‘gob-hero’).

¹³ Kaiser Karl is Charlemagne. The Markgrave is that Willehalm who is the hero of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Willehalm* (ca.1215-18). Dietrich von Bern, based on misty reminiscences of the Ostrogothic King of Italy Theodoric the Great (reigned

Avicenna; yet We remained unimpeached. When David, the mighty King, and Solomon, the Shrine of Wisdom, died, We were given more thanks than curses. Those who were in days of yore have all gone; you and everyone, who is now or is yet to be, must follow. For We, Death, remain Master here!

THE HUSBANDMAN. Chapter Thirty-One.

A man is often condemned by his own words, especially one who speaks now this, now that. You said earlier that you were something and yet nothing, not even a spirit, but you were the end of life and all of Earth's people were commended to your cure. Now you say that we must all hence and you, Sir Death, remain Master here. Two contradictory statements cannot both be true. If we all depart this life, and all earthly beings have an end, and you are, as you say, life's ending, then I reason: where life is not, there can never be dying and death – So where are you, Sir Death? Heaven is no home for you: it is given only to good spirits, and you are, after your own words, no spirit. Now when you have nothing more to manage on Earth, and Earth is gone for ever, then you must straight to Hell; where you must groan without end. Then shall both the living and the dead be avenged on you. No one can set a course by your changing words.

Are all sublunary beings really so evil, wretched and vicious in creation and form? That would be to speak against God, an accusation never levelled against the eternal Creator since the dawn of the world. Hitherto, God has loved virtue, hated evil, and overlooked or punished sin.

493-526), is the hero of the first cycle of poems in *Das Heldenbuch*, a collection of metrical romances of the 13th century. Boppe the strong is an often named but elusive hero. Horn-skinned Siegfried is 'Der gehörnte Siegfried', the hero of an ultimately disappointing *Volksbuch* and, originally, of an ancient poem, 'Das Lied vom Hürnen Seyfrid' ('The Lay of Horn-skinned Siegfried'), which presents a more positive image of the hero Siegfried than is found in the *Nibelungenlied*.

And I believe that, henceforth, He will do exactly the same. Ever since my youth, I have heard, read and learnt that God created all earthly things. You say that all earthly life and being must have an end. Yet Plato and other messengers of wisdom say that: all events involve the decay of one and the birth of another; recurrence is the universal foundation; and everything in the revolving earth and heavens is an effect eternally transforming between the two. With your swaying words on which no one may build, you intend to deter me from my complaint. So I refer myself and you to God, my Saviour. Sir Death, my undoer, God give you a dire Amen!

DEATH. Chapter Thirty-Two.

Often a man, having launched into speech, cannot cease, unless he is interrupted. And you are stamped with this mark. We have said and We say – and this by way of conclusion –: the Earth, and all it contains, is founded on temporality. In this age, she is become prone to change, for all things are reversed: back has moved to front, and front is back; depths have shifted to mountains, and heights to valleys; evil is made justice, and justice evil: all through the agency of the mass of mankind. I have thrust the whole human race into fire's steady flame. The chance of finding a good, true, constant friend is almost as great on this Earth as that of grasping a light-beam. All humans are inclined more to evil than good. When someone does do good nowadays, he is acting from fear of Us. All people, and all their activity, are full of vanity. Your body, your wife, your children, your honour, your belongings, and all you possess, all flees away; it disappears in a moment; it drifts away in the wind, neither shine nor shadow can remain. Look, see, observe and note, the intentions of souls on this Earth: how they burrow through hill and vale, wood and field, Alps and deserts, the depths of the sea, the bowels of the

Earth, for the sake of earthly goods; how they drive shafts, tunnels and mines down into the earth, boring through Earth's veins, to seek glittering stones, which they love before all things on account of their rarity; how they fell trees, paste together walls, barns and houses like swallows, plant and graft orchards, till the fields, lay down vineyards, build mills, raise the rent, practise fishery, hunting and gaming, drive large herds of cattle together, own numerous serving-lads and maids, ride high on horse, have chests and houses full of gold, silver, precious stones, costly garments and other wares, foster pleasure and lust, which they pursue and strive after night and day – what is the sum of this? All is vanity, a sickness of the soul, as transitory as the day that passed yestereve. They gain this through war and rapine; the greater the possessions, the greater the robbery. They bequeath it to discord and conflict. Oh, mortal man is always in fear, in affliction, in sorrow, in care, in dread, in terror, in days of pain, in days of sickness, in sadness, in mourning, in misery, in grief and in multitude of irritations; and the more worldly wealth a man has, the more annoyances he encounters. And this is the greatest of all, that a human cannot know when, where and how We shall suddenly overfall him and drive him the way of all flesh. This burden must be shouldered by master and servant, husband and wife, rich and poor, good and evil, young and old. O mournful prospect, and so little regarded by the witless! When it is too late, they would all be virtuous. All this is vanity over vanity and sinking of the soul.

So leave your complaining! Enter whichever rank you wish, you will step into affliction and vanity! Now depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and hold on to it with constancy;¹⁴ love a pure and clean

¹⁴ “kere von dem bosen vnd tue das gute; suche den fride vnd tue in stete.” Cf. Luther's Bible, Psalm 34:15: “Laß ab vom Bösen und tu Gutes; suche Frieden und jage him nach!” In the Authorised Version, this is line 14: ‘Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it’.

conscience above all earthly things! And as we have advised you correctly, We shall accompany you to God, the Great, the Mighty, the Eternal.

THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD. Chapter Thirty-Three.

Springtide, summer, autumn and winter, the four invigorators and upholders of the year, fell into disaccord and fiery dispute. Every one of them boasted of their beneficence in rain, winds, thunder, showers, and in all kinds of storms; and every one would be the best in his working.

Spring said that he revives all fruit into lush profusion. Summer said that he ripens and readies all fruit for harvest. Autumn said that he brings all fruit to collection in barns, cellars and houses. Winter said that he consumes and expends all fruit and expels all poisonous vermin. They boasted and quarrelled violently. But they had forgotten that they were boasting of powers granted them by God.

As you both are now doing. The plaintiff laments his loss, as though it were his estate; he does not pause to reflect that it was loaned by Us. Death boasts of his mighty powers, which he only received in fief from Us. This one laments what is not his; that one boasts of a power that is not immanent. However, the quarrel is not entirely unfounded. You have both contested well: the one is forced by his sorrow to lament, the other by the plaintiff's attack to tell the truth. So plaintiff, yours is the honour! And Death, yours is the victory! Every man is obliged to give his life to Death, his body to the earth, and his soul to Us.

Chapter Thirty-Four. THE HUSBANDMAN'S PRAYER FOR THE SOUL OF HIS WIFE.

Ever-vigilant Watcher over all the world, God of gods, wonder-working Lord above all lords, almighty Spirit of spirits, Prince of all Princedoms, fountainhead of the flow of goodness, Holy of Holies, Crowner and Crown, Rewarder and Reward, Elector in whose curacy lies the cure of all souls: fortune has befallen the man who has entered Thy service! Joy and delight of angels, Moulder of the highest forms, Greyhead and Fresh-Faced Youth: hearken to me!

O Light, that receives none other light; Light, that outshines and darkens all outward light; Radiance, by which all other radiance is occulted; Radiance, in the face of which all lights are darkness, in which every shadow shines bright; Light, which spake in the Beginning: "Let there be light!"; Fire forever burning, that knows no extinguishment; Beginning and End: hearken to me!

Grace and Salvation over all salvation; Path without pitfalls to life everlasting; Superior with no superior; Life, in which all is living; Truth of all truths; Wisdom circumflowing all wisdom; Holder of all strength; Guard over just and unjust hands; Healer of affliction and error; Plenisher of the needy, Refresher of the sick; Seal of the highest Majesty; Preserver of the harmony of Heaven; sole Perceiver of all human thoughts, Creator rich in invention of all human countenances; powerful Planet of planets; omnifacient Influence over all heavenly bodies; mighty and blissful Steward of the Celestial Court; Law, through which all heavenly rules may never unhinge from their eternal fixing; resplendent Sun: hearken to me!

Eternal Lamp, eternal Permalight; right-faring Sailor, whose cog never sinks; Standard-bearer, beneath whose banner no one walks without victory; Founder of Hell, Architect of Earth; Dammer of the surging sea,

Compounder of the inconstant breezes; Strength of fire's heat; Creator of all elements; Sole Herdmaster of thunder, lightning, mist, shower, snow, rain, rainbow, dew, wind, frost, and all their effects; mighty Duke of the entire celestial army; irrefusable Kaiser; mildest, strongest, most merciful Creator: take pity and hearken to me!

Treasure, from which all treasures issue forth; Source, from which all pure springs flow; Guide, who leads none astray; Saviour for every ailment, to whom all things hive and hold, like bees to their queen; Cause of all things: hearken to me!

Cure-bringing Doctor for all epidemics; Master of Masters; unique Father of Creation; ever-present Beholder of all roads and ways; self-empowered Guide from the mother's womb into the Earth's vault; Creator of every form; fast Foundation of all good works; Lover of purity, Hater of crudity, Rewarder of all good deeds; only just Judge; the One, whose Beginning all things never escape in eternity: hearken to me!

Saviour in anxiety; tight Knot, which none can loosen; perfect Being, in command of all perfection; true Perceiver of all secret, universally unbeknown matters; Afforder of eternal joys, Destroyer of earthly delights; Host, Servant, and Household Member of all good people; Hunter, to whom no spoor remains hidden; choice Decanter of all senses; right and centering Medium of all spheres; grace-conferring Auditor to all who cry to You: hearken to me!

Close support to the needy; Sorrow-averter for all who hope in You; Plenisher of the hungry; sole Effector with the power to make something from nothing and nothing from something; omnipotent Invigorator, Preserver and Annihilator of all ephemerae, time-dependants, and eternal, whose Being, that which You are in Yourself, no one can grasp, gather, depict or convey; highest Good of goods; worthy Lord Jesus: receive unto grace the spirit, receive in mercy the soul of my

beloved wife! Give her eternal repose, bathe her with the dew of Your favour, preserve her in the shadow of Your wings! Take her, Lord, into complete sufficiency, where the slightest find the fulfillment of the greatest! Let her, Lord whence she is come, live in Your kingdom with the eternally blessed!

I ache for Margaretha, my chosen wife. Grant her, Lord rich in grace, that she see, behold, and take delight in herself in the mirror of Your Almighty, Eternal Divinity, the Light of all angelic choirs!

All that has its home beneath the Eternal Standard-Bearer's banner, whatever creature it be, help me in saying with blissful intensity, from the depths of my heart: Amen!

