

INTO THY HANDS

Jonathan Holmes

ANN: Well. (*To audience.*) I am not used to speak to you and, no doubt, you were expecting my husband. He does tend to monopolise you, but I too have a voice. (*Indicates the remnants of the masque stage.*) Such folly. The opposite of truth, of love. (*Begins to undress, but then stops.*) Nakedness is the greatest costume of all, don't you think?

What I dream happens as surely as that which I see, for it happens to me. The makings of the mind are as real as those of the hand; if they were not, it would not please our Majesties to place us in the gaol and upon the rack until they be public. Our actions are but the fleshly echoes of our thoughts, which themselves are the constellations of an inner universe more vast than anything Galileo can perceive through his tube. Man is not a little world, he is the greater - yes, and woman too. If truth is what we seek, we should look not abroad but inward; all else is but a mirror on a stage.

He did eventually take orders, as you know. It took some persuasion, but everyone has their price. For John it was death. For every year he delayed, our poverty killed two of our children. And the king did not relent. We lost four, before he accepted. Conscience, or pride? Only you truly know. When he finally did give in, he was able to wipe the slate clean. All sins forgiven. Heaven rejoiceth, and we were invited to all the best banquets.

I never know if you hear. No response. No matter. I suppose that if you know everything anyway, then all this prattle is rather embarrassing. And if you do, then this vast inner world of my mind, this galaxy, is nothing more than a reflection of what is already in yours. And as this reflection, too, must be there imagined, our time upon this stage is but a reflection of a mirror of your mind. A kind of triple echo, searching for the voice that shapes us. How paltry we become when you are countenanced; yet how majestic when you are disavowed.

I often wonder about you as John and I make love. Do you watch? I suppose you must. Do you condemn the pleasure, as Andrewes and the others argue? I cannot believe that. Without the pleasure there would be no propagation. If you approve, and if you are within us and without us as is commonly thought, then I am fucking you, am I not? And as you are in John, too, then you are fucking yourself. No, you can't dislike the pleasure.

And if all this is true, then every time a child of mine dies, you die too. Every time John is wracked with illness, you suffer too. Either you feel everything, or you feel nothing. And if you feel everything, why do you not stop the pain, as a good God

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would? No response. But if you feel nothing, you are either indifferent or it is as if you do not exist. Which comes to the same thing. So those are the alternatives: a cruel god or a non-existent god. Which is it? Whose hands am I placed in? What choice must I make?

Your answer came soon enough. As I went into labour there was, this time, too much pain, too much blood, and I saw in John's eyes as he looked at me that the child had died. And as I continued to look his eyes went dead and there was such agony, such torment, and I saw the truth mirrored in his despair; I knew that I was dying too.

Forgive me, John, for leaving you. You are my world.