

# AN "IMITATION" AND TWO TRANSLATIONS

*Gerald Guinness*

## SONNET WRITTEN TO ORDER

Amanda wants a sonnet -- what a bore.  
No, never have I found a task less fun.  
They tell me fourteen verses must be done,  
Already as a joke I've scribbled four.

The problem was (they said) to find the rhyme  
But rhymes abound and here I am half-way;  
A few more hobbling iambs and I'll pray  
I find the clinching rhyme-word just in time.

Well, that was painless -- but what's this I see?  
A pesky tercet's trapped me in its noose;  
Squeeze out I Must, or it will "squeeze out" me!

The second tercet's worse. It's just no use --  
I *must* give up -- I'll *never* wriggle loose --  
(Cliff-hanging end). Here are fourteen lines... I'm free!

## *BALLAD OF THE LOVE MASS*

The morning of St. John,  
A morning clear and bright,  
Fair ladies and young men  
Flock out to hear High Mass.  
My lady leads the throng  
Most lovely of them all --  
Her petticoats in layers,  
Her veils of shining silk,  
Her blouse with gold and pearls  
Embroidered at the neck,  
Upon her lovely lips  
A brilliant splash of red,  
Upon her snowy cheeks  
A touch or two of rouge,  
And on her sparkling eyes  
A tiny spot of kohl.  
So enters she the church,  
Refulgent like the sun.  
The ladies die of spite,  
The young men swoon with love;  
The deacon in the choir  
Forgets his creed half-way;  
The priest who says the Mass  
Shipwrecks in the response;  
The acolytes entranced  
Forget to sing the psalms  
And when they should chant, "Lord."  
Can only stammer, "Love."

While still white lilies and the crimson rose  
show in the changing colours of your face,  
and hidden ardours in your modest gaze  
inflame the heart, but yet restraints impose;

and while still playful breezes fan your hair  
drawn from some vein of gold, and make it float  
across the marble whiteness of your throat,  
each silken strand dispersing through the air;

make haste and pluck the fruit of your gay spring  
before the snows of time with cruel blows  
cover the lofty crest of your young head.

For icy winds do wither every rose;  
and lightly moving age will changes bring  
rather than move from its habitual tread.