



Fret Knot

Special Holiday Edition: 2012



Table of Contents

From the Chronicler	Page 2
From Their Excellencies	Page 2
Great and Excellent Cakes by THL Johnae Ilyn Lewis	Page 3
Rumballs by Elric Thurstonsen of Dragonskeep	Page 6
Go day, go day, My lord Syre Christemasse, go day! By Ian Brown	Page 6
Yule by THL Johnae Ilyn Lewis	Page 7
Pastime With Good Company By Henry VIII	Page 9
Christmas Log by Elric Thurstonsen of Dragonskeep	Page 10
Wassail and Wassailing by THL Johnae Ilyn Lewis	Page 11
Snowflake Ottova Rima by THL Secca of Kent	Page 14
Copyright Information	Page 15

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From the Chronicler

Welcome to a special holiday edition of the Fret Knot! As Chronicler, I wanted to wish the Barony a very happy Holiday (whatever holiday you celebrate) and may your new year bring you great joy!

~ Baroness Asakura Mashime

From Their Excellencies

Holiday Greetings from your Baron and Baroness,

Greetings Altavia! It has been another wonderful year in the Barony, and we just wanted to thank you all for being so fabulous! You make our job simple!

Here's hoping this holiday season brings you all the joy you can imagine -- and twice the happiness!

~ Love, Secca and Meliora

This is the Special Holiday Edition 2012, issue of the **Fret Knot**, a publication of the Barony of Altavia of the Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc. (SCA, Inc.). The **Fret Knot** is available from Mercy Neumark (Baroness Asakura Mashime) at chronicler@sca-altavia.org. It is not a corporate publication of SCA, Inc., and does not delineate SCA, Inc. policies.

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Great and Excellent Cakes

Contributed by THL Johnnae Ilyn Lewis, CE

Thou for whose feast dayes greatcakes ordained...
The Countesse of Pembrokes Yuychurch. 1591

S 151 TO MAKE A GREAT CAKE

Take a peck of flower & put to it 10 eggs beaten; take out 3 of ye whites. Put in nutmeg, cinnamond, cloves, & mace, of each a quarter of an ounce; A full quart of Ale barme, & mingle with ye flower two pound of fresh butter. When it allmoste kneaded, put in 6 spoonfulls of hot water to it, & 10 pounds of currans, & halfe a pound of sugar beaten. Let it ly by ye fire to rise, & then bake it.

Martha Washington's Booke of Cookery. pp.315

TO MAKE AN EXCELLENT CAKE

To a peck of fine flour take six pounds of fresh butter, which must be tenderly melted, ten pounds of currants, of cloves and mace, half an ounce of each, an ounce of cinnamon, half an ounce of nutmegs, four ounces of sugar, one pint of sack mixed with a quart at least of thick barm of ale (as soon as it is settled to have the thick fall to the bottom, which will be when it is about two days old), half a pint of Rose-water; half a quarter of an ounce of saffron. Then make your paste, strewing the spices, finely beaten, upon the flower: Then put the melted butter (but even just melted) to it; then the barm, and other liquours: and put it into the oven well heated presently. For the better baking of it, put it in a hoop, and let it stand in the oven one hour and a half. You ice the cake with the whites of two eggs, a small quantity of Rose-water, and some sugar.

Kenelme Digbie. *The Closet of Sir Kenelm Digby, Opened*, p.136

Ingredients—

Karen Hess who edited the manuscripts that belonged to Martha Washington provided some suggestions as to the amounts required for a quarter version of the S 151 recipe.

8 cups flour, 3 eggs, minus 1 white, 3/4 teaspoons each of the spices, 1 cup barm made from 1 cup imported ale and 1 ounce yeast, 1 cup sweet butter, 2 tablespoons hot water, and 2 1/2 pounds currants, 1/4 cup sugar, 1 teaspoon salt.
Bake at 350 degrees F for an hour.

When one examines the proportions given in the suggested amounts of the flour to the currants in these original recipes, one often comes up with a one to one ratio of flour to currants. Hess holds to the rule as 8 cups of flour at 3 1/3 cups of flour per pound equals approximately 2 and 1/2 pounds, which is the amount of currants Hess suggests using.



Although it calls for an additional two pounds of currants, I thought 1/2 pound of currants would be adequate for my cake. So when I have made the cake over the years, I have cut back on the amount of currants; to compensate for losing part of the sweetness of the currants, I then increased the sugar to 1 cup. I also used Sam Adams' Summer Ale, an American product for the Ale. Since I used a whole 12 ounce bottle, I did not add the called for 2 Tablespoons hot water. Sam Adams' uses Grains of Paradise and lemon zest in its summer ale.

Ingredients used for my version:

8 cups all purpose flour,
3 eggs, minus 1 white,
1 teaspoon each of the spices: nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, & mace,
ale barm made from 1 bottle of Sam Adams' Summer Ale and 1 tablespoon yeast,
1 cup butter,
1/2 pound currants,
1 cup sugar,
1 teaspoon salt.

Method

I do not have a fire to let the cake rise by, so I used my kitchen's modern equivalent. I combined all the ingredients, except for the currants in my bread machine and let the dough mix and rise on the machine's dough cycle. I then added the currants to the dough just prior to placing the dough into the chosen baking pan. This kept the currants whole and prevented the bread machine blade from knocking them about into bits and pieces.

[Be sure that your bread machine can handle a dough of 8 cups of flour before doing the cake in your machine. Otherwise one should make the recipe up and handle it as one does any rich, yeasted dough. Mix, knead and let rise and then place in a cake pan of one's choice.]

Bake in a preheated oven at 350 degrees F for approximately an hour.

Check to make sure that the cake doesn't burn or brown too much on the top. Currants are subject to over browning. Cover with foil, if needed. Turn out and cool on a rack. Ice or serve plain. You may have to adjust the baking time to accommodate the cake pan that you are using. Heavy bundt type pans may call for a 325 degree oven. I baked my great cakes in a reproduction [albeit non-stick] late 17th – early 18th century reproduction cake pan, which is the earliest documented cake tin reproduction that I own. A 12 cup pan is best for this amount of dough. Hess thinks the cakes in *A Booke of Sweetmeats*' may have been baked in hoops or possibly even baked without a hoop. Digby of course calls for a hoop for his cake. I've thought the cakes have worked well in the pan I own.

Notes on Recipes and Sources

The first recipe is one of four recipes for an ale barm or yeast leavened cake as found in '*A Booke of Sweetmeats*', which is the second manuscript of the two that make up *Martha Washington's Booke of Cookery*. Despite the title the manuscripts are Tudor-Jacobean and are dated 1580-1620, making them suitable for late Elizabethan cookery and exploration. (They are named after the First Lady because she inherited the manuscripts through her first marriage.)

Sir Kenelme Digby or Digby and his *The Closet of Sir Kenelm Digby, Opened* dates from later in the 17th century. The collection of recipes was first published in 1669 after the author's death. It is thought Digby collected the majority of the recipes during the 1640's and 1650's.

Other cakes of the same type include the currant cakes that form the basis of Gervase Markham's Banbury Cake, the banbury cake as found in Hannah Woolley's *The queen-like closet* from 1670 and the same from *The Accomplish'd lady's delight in preserving, physick, beautifying, and cookery* from 1675. There is one entitled "To Make a Good Cake" from *The Gentlewoman's Cabinet Unlocked*. Rebecca Price in her culinary manuscript included recipes for "rich" and "not rich" cakes, "good" and "very good" cakes, and lastly a recipe for "A very good, and a Rich Cake, often made by me." Elizabeth David remarks that

over the centuries every village and town in the British Isles would develop its own special yeast bread or cake. The recipes mentioned here form the background of those cakes or breads.

Icing –

My survey article on the recipes, history and uses of the words “icing”, “glazing”, and “frosting”, appear in the file: Sugar-Icing-art - 11/10/01 "Sugar Icing" by Johnnae Ilyn Lewis. Described as: “Some notes on sugar icing in late period...” with appropriate dated recipes. It is located in Stefan’s Florilegium at <http://www.florilegium.org/>

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[Recipe from *The Gentlewoman’s Cabinet Unlocked* may be found in Bridget Henisch’s *Cakes and Characters*. Prospect Books, 1984.]

See also:

Pepys At Table. Edited by Christopher Driver and Michelle Berriedale-Johnson. Bell & Hyman, 1984.

David, Elizabeth. *English Bread and Yeast Cookery.* 1977. American edition with notes by Karen Hess. Viking Press, 1980. Numerous other editions. [See especially her chapter on moulds and tins and regional cakes.]

Holloway, Johnna. “Twelfth Night or Day Cakes.” [feature article] *Tournaments Illuminated.* #168; fourth quarter 2008, pages 15- 16, 24. Looks into the evidence behind the hiding of beans or token into 12th Night Cakes.

Rum Balls

Recipe submitted by Elric Thurstonsen of Dragonskeep

1 cup powdered sugar	1 Tbs. Corn syrup
1 cup finely crushed Vanilla Wafers	1 Tbs. Molasses
1 cup finely chopped pecans	
2 Tbs. Powdered Chocolate	1/2 cup Bacardi 151 rum

Mix dry ingredients together. Add corn syrup, molasses and rum. Mix until all the ingredients until moist. Coat hands with butter or Crisco and roll batter in to balls. Roll balls in granulated sugar to coat. Store in cover container until ready to eat.

Go day, go day, My lord Syre Christemasse, go day!

By Ian Brown

Good day, Syre Christemas, our kyng,
 For every man, both olde & yinge,
 Ys glad & blithe of your comynge;
 Go day!
 Go day, go day, My lord Syre Christemasse, go day!

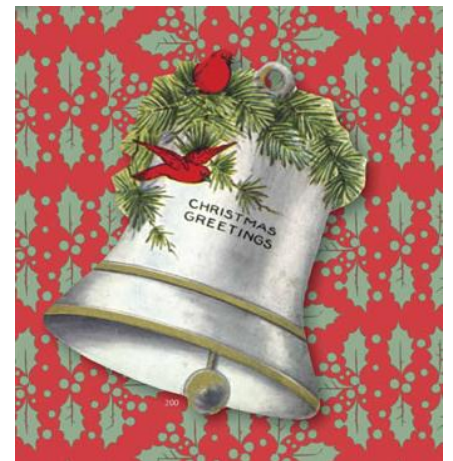
Godys sone so moche of myght
 Ffram heven to erthe down is lyght
 And borne ys of a mayde so bryght;
 Good day!
 Go day, go day, My lord Syre Christemasse, go day!

Heven & erthe & also helle,
 And alle that ever in hem dwelle,
 Of your comynge they beth ful snelle;
 Good day!
 Go day, go day, My lord Syre Christemasse, go day!

Of your comynge this clerkys fynde:
 Ye come to save al mankynde
 And of her balys hem unbynde;
 Good day!
 Go day, go day, My lord Syre Christemasse, go day!

Alle maner of merthes we wole make
 And solas to oure hertys take,
 My semely lorde, for your sake;
 Good day!

Go day, go day, My lord Syre
 Christemasse, go day!



Yule

Contributed by THL Johnnae Ilyn Lewis, CE

What should we speak of
When we are old as you? When we shall hear
The rain and wind beat dark December, how,
In this our pinching cave, shall we discourse
The freezing hours away?
Shakespeare. **Cymbeline**. Act 3 sc iii lines: 35-39

The Elizabethan author John Stowe in his **Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles**, wrote "December hath xxxi daies. The daye is .vi. houres, the nyght .xviii." Prior to the Norman Conquest of England this period was Midwinter, a span of days that was sometimes referred to as Yule. The Venerable Bede in the eighth century mentioned both an Early Yule and Later Yule, meaning the months of December and January. Reduced into a period of days and not months, Yule gradually merged into and became part of the English Christmas in the 12th century and eventually became just part of Christmas Day.



Another Elizabethan author, Raphael Holinshed wrote about the "twelve day in Christmas, otherwise called Yule" but only in the North of England did Yule still hold sway with any force in the later Elizabethan period. One observance in York was known as the Riding of Yule and his Wife. Yule in this case was actually personified as a person with a wife. The origins of the festival remain unclear. It may trace back to pagan culture or it may originally have been part of the Scandinavian culture of 9th and 10th century York. The Elizabethans reckoned it dated back to the Conquest.

By the 16th century, the "notable and antient spectacle" of the Riding of Yule and his Wife had settled into a frivolous, possibly licentious, and rude celebration. The man representing Yule carried a shoulder of lamb and a large cake of fine bread; his 'wife' carried her distaff. Both wore sheepskins, and thus disguised, they roamed the streets and passed out nuts and cakes. There was music and dancing and the children of York tagged along creating much noise and "misrule." According to Alexandra Johnston, by 1570, a broadside had appeared in support of the tradition, asserting the custom was "Christian" in origin and focus. "Yule, Yule," wrote the anonymous author, "a Babe is borne." The sheepskins were symbols of the "lambe of God." The children who followed the couple might be seen as angels. The nuts that were given out were symbols not only of the "Imaculate Virgin" and the Conception, but they were also symbols of the Trinity.

The broadside did not save the fun. In 1572 Edmond Grindal, the Archbishop of York and members of his Ecclesiastical Commission, ordered the Mayor and Aldermen to suppress the annual parade because it drew 'great concourses of people' away from church-going on St. Thomas Day (December 21st). Yule and his Wife were also "very undecently and uncomely" clad in the Riding. It also involved "disguising" which was disapproved of by the more Puritanical of the Anglicans. The Council agreed and no longer did Yule and his Wife Ride. The last civic display related to the Catholic religion in York was abolished. The custom continued in only a minor way. Almost a century later, In 1661 T, Blount in the second

edition of *Glossographia* wrote "at Ule, In Yorkshire and our other Northern parts, they have an old Custom, after Sermon or Service on Christmas day, the people will, even in the Churches cry Vle, Vle, and the common people run about the streets singing Ule, Ule, Ule, Three Puddings in a Pule, Crack nuts and cry Ule."

In recent years the celebration of Yule in York has been taken up in part by a musical group called the York Waits. In commemoration of the ancient customs of Yule, the Waits have been performing ancient Christmas-tide music in the streets of modern York in December. The costumed band uses a variety and "extensive array of period instruments ranging from harp, lute and fiddle to hurdy-gurdy, shawms, curtal and bagpipes, not to mention crumhorn, sackbut and recorders of many different sizes." (Their CD featuring *Yule Riding Music for the Twelve days of Christmas* can be downloaded from iTunes.)

Today when Yule is just an adjective attached to items of modern merchandise as Yule logs, Yule candies, Yule candles, Yule boughs, Yule greenery, or just part of slogans such as "Yule save a Bundle," it's nice to remember that once there were such things as Yule and his Wife and that groups such as the York Waits are working to bring some festive traditions back.



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Pastime With Good Company

By Henry VIII

[British Library Additional Ms. 31922, ff.14v-15]

Pastime with good company
I love and shall unto I die;
Grudge who list, but none deny,
So God be pleased thus live will I.

For my pastance
Hunt, song, and dance.

My heart is set:
All goodly sport
For my comfort,
Who shall me let?

Youth must have some dalliance,
Of good or illé some pastance;
Company methinks then best
All thoughts and fancies to dejest:

For idleness
Is chief mistress
Of vices all.

Then who can say
But mirth and play
Is best of all?

Company with honesty
Is virtue vices to flee:
Company is good and ill
But every man hath his free will.

The best ensue,
The worst eschew,
My mind shall be:
Virtue to use,
Vice to refuse,
Shall I use me.



Source:

English Literature: An Illustrated Record. Vol I.

Richard Garnet and Edmund Gosse, Eds.

London: William Heinemann, 1903. 357.

<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/pastime.htm>

Christmas Log

Recipe submitted by Elric Thurstonsen of Dragonskeep

Meringue Mushrooms, (See Below)

1 cup all-purpose flour
Pinch of salt
1/4 cup butter
3 whole eggs
2 egg yolks
2/3 cup sugar

Sugar Syrup, (See Below)

3 oz. Semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
Butter Cream opposete, made with 4 egg yolks
1 to 2 tbs. Grand Marnier

Meringue Mushrooms:

3 egg whites
3/4 cup sugar
1/2 tsp. Vanilla extract
Additional sugar
Grated chocolate or cocoa powder

Sugar Syrup:

1/2 cup sugar
1/3 cup water

Prepare Meringue Mushrooms. Preheat oven to 425°F (220°C). Grease a backing sheet and line with waxed paper. Butter and flour waxed paper. Sift flour with salt. Melt butter; cool. Beat whole eggs, egg yolks and sugar in large bowl until combined. Beat at high speed 8 to 10 minutes until light and thick enough to leave a ribbon trail. Shift flour over batter a third at a time, folding in each third as lightly as possible. Just after last addition, add melted butter and fold in both together. Spread batter evenly on prepared backing sheet to a 15" X 10" rectangle. Bake 8 to 10 minutes until edges are browned. Do not over bake or cake will crack when rolled. Slide cake off backing sheet onto a rack by gently pulling paper with cake on top. Invert cake onto a cloth towel; remove paper. Roll up hot cake with towel and let cool. Prepare Syrup. Melt chocolate over a pan of boiling water. Cool slightly. Divide Butter cream in 2 equal parts. Add melted chocolate to one part and Grand Marnier to the other. Unroll cooled cake. Brush with Syrup. Spread Grand Marnier Butter Cream on cake. Trim edges with a sharp knife. Roll cake trimmings into tight spirals to be attached later to log as knots. Roll up cake, removing towel as you roll. With a little butter cream, attach cake spirals to log. Use a pastry bag fitted with a medium star tube to pipe Chocolate Butter Cream on cake from end to end to resemble bark. If you don't have a pastry bag, spread Butter Cream on log with a spatula and mark it with a fork to resemble bark. Arrange Meringue Mushrooms on and around log. Refrigerate until ready to serve. *Christmas Log can be covered and refrigerated 1 to 2 days.* Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Meringue Mushrooms:

Preheat oven to 250°F (120°C). Butter and flour a backing sheet. In a medium bowl, whip egg whites until stiff. Add 1 tbs. Sugar and beat 30 seconds to make a light meringue. Fold in remaining sugar and vanilla. Spoon Meringue into a pastry bag fitted with a 1/4-inch plain tube. Pipe mounds for mushroom caps and strips for stems. Sprinkle with sugar. Sprinkle caps with grated chocolate or cocoa powder. Bake 15 minutes then insert stems in to caps. Bake 15 to 30 minutes longer until dry and crisp. If mushrooms begin to brown, reduce heat.

Sugar Syrup:

Bring sugar and water to a boil in a small saucepan. Boil 1 to 2 minutes or until clear. Cool.

For a snow-covered log, sprinkle with a little powdered sugar just before serving.

Wassail and Wassailing

by THL Johnnae Ilyn Lewis

What would it have meant when one mentioned wassail or to wassail in medieval and Tudor England? The subject comes up annually hereabouts as our local barony celebrates the holidays with an event known as "Wassail!" What would it have meant in period, one wonders? As to the meanings of wassail and wassailing, in a very long entry, the **Oxford English Dictionary [OED]** notes that in neither Old English or in Old Norwegian, has any trace been found of the use of *wassail* as a drinking formula, or of the phrases represented by "wassail and drinkhail." This follows for the other Teutonic languages as well. **OED** postulates that the use of wassail and drinkhail "arose among the Danish-speaking inhabitants of England" becoming common sometime before the 12th centuries. The Normans saw its use as "markedly characteristic of Englishmen." It was later recorded the English on the night before Hastings spent their time in "weissel" and "drincheheil." According to the **MED**, Geoffrey of Monmouth in circa 1140 would mention "lingua Saxonica ait 'Washail, [vrr. Washeil, Weshail, Waesseil, wassheil], Lauert King.'"

The custom of taking the Wassail cup or bowl, crying "Wassail", drinking from it, and passing it to the answering cry of "Drinkhail" are recorded in a mid-fourteenth century text by Robert Mannyng and Peter de Langtoft or Peter (of Langtoft). This same legendary tale regarding the origins of "wassaille" is recorded again in a very early English book, printed by William Caxton. In 1480 Caxton traces the history of wassail to an encounter between the beautiful maiden Ronewen and King Vortiger.

And whan nyght come that the kyng Vortiger shold gone in to his chambre for to take ther his nyghtes reste Ronewen that was Engistes doughter come with a coupe of gold in hir honde and kneled before the kyng and said to hym **wassaille** and the kyng wist not what it was to mene ne what he sholde ansuere for as moch as hym selfe ne none of his Britons yit coude none Englissh speken ne vnderstond it but speken tho the same langage that Britons yit done

Nothelees a latorymer tolde the kyng the full vnderstondyng ther of **wassaille** and that othir sholde an suere drynke haille

And that was the fyrst tyme that **was saille** and drynkhaile come vp in this land and from that tyme vn to this tyme it is will used in this lande.

This story regarding the Saxon Ronewen or Ronwena and the hospitality of offering wassail in fifth century must have been quite popular. The tale is repeated in other late fifteenth century incunabula, including the **Cronycles of the londe of Englo[n]d** which is dated 1493 and in the later sixteenth chronicles written by Holinshead and John Speed. Speed also records a less hospitable moment. He writes that in the time of King Edward II, the English troops "in his Campe, **Wassaile**, and Drinkehaile were thundered extraordinarily" before battle with the Scots.

By the second year of the reign of King Henry VIII, Edward Hall wrote that the Christmas festivities at Richmond, ended with "and then was the **wassail** or banket brought in, and so brake vp Christmas." By this time the custom of wassail is firmly part of the Christmas, Twelfth Night or other festive holiday traditions. Ronald Hutton provides this text of wassailing song from circa 1550 or just shortly after the time of Henry VIII.

"Wassail, wassail, out of the milk pail, Wassail, wassail, as white as my nail,

Wassail, wassail, in snow, frost and hail, Wassail, wassail, that much doth avail,
Wassail, wassail, that never will fail."

In 1658, Edward Phillips in his dictionary would define the term as:

"Wassail, (Sax. Waesheal, i. be in health) an ancient Ceremonious custome, still used upon twelf day at night, of going about with a great bowl of Ale, drinking of healths, taken from Rowena, the daughter of Hengistus, her Ceremony to King Vortilger, to whom at a banquet she delivered with her own hands a Golden Cup full of wine." A generation later, In 1677 Elisha Coles in his **An English dictionary** defined "Wassail, (sa. Was-heal) be in health" and "Wassail-bowl, of Spiced Ale, on Nevv-years Eve."

For our purposes, and based upon entries in **Middle English** and **Oxford Dictionaries**, the term wassail in England might have meant: "A salutation used when presenting a cup of wine to a guest, or drinking the health of a person, the reply being drink-hail." There's also the association with the rather strong liquor (spiced ales or the spiced wines), which were drunk at Twelfth-nights and Christmas-eve celebrations. From that custom of drinking, there then came to mean the "custom formerly observed on Twelfth-night and New-Year's eve of drinking healths from the wassail-bowl." And of course "the person invited to drink from the wassail-bowl" might be termed a Wassail. This leads into the meaning where a wassail just became "a carousal; riotous festivity, reveling." By the early 17th century, wassail also developed into "a carol or song sung by wassailers, thus becoming a wassailing or health-drinking song." As a verb, "To `keep wassail' came to mean carousing and health-drinking."

In summary, we have *Wassail* then meaning the ale or mulled wine that is drunk from a decorated or special cup, the toasts or salutations of the season, the songs being sung, the actual festivities with much carousing, and lastly the drinkers or the drinking carousers. And here we end our brief examination of Wassail with the words of Robert Herrick.

Thou shalt have Possets, Wassails fine,
Not made of Ale, but spiced Wine;
To make thy Maids and selfe free mirth,
All sitting neer the glitt'ring Hearth.

Thou sha't have Ribbands, Roses, Rings,
Gloves, Garters, Stockings, Shooes, and Strings
Of winning Colours, that shall move
Others to Lust, but me to Love.
These (nay) and more, thine own shall be,
If thou wilt love, and live with me.

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Here comes a big
hearty wish for a
Merry Christmas.

Snowflake

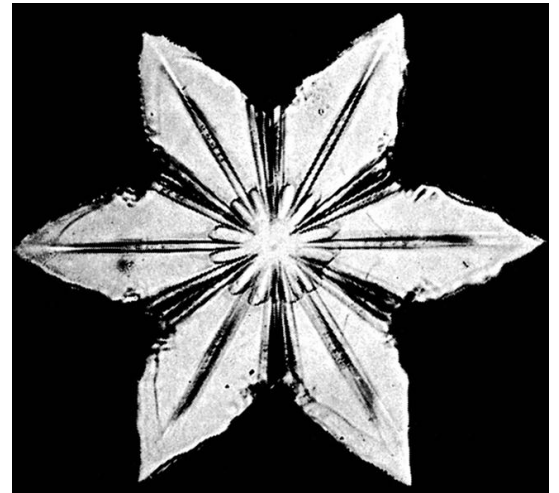
Ottova Rima

Written for their Excellencies
Baron Laertes Blackavar McBride & Baroness
Bridget Lucia Mackenzie
on the occasion of Altavia's Yule, Anno
Societatus XL



So softly downward falling through the night,
The Snowflake gently settles on a sleeve;
Mysteriously lolling from such height,
It takes one several moments to conceive
The full elaborate crawling of its flight,
And makes its being harder to believe:
This evanescent miracle of air,
This gift of beauty; simple, fine, and rare.

Yet beauty pended to itself wilt gain;
Each particle partaking doth incite
suspended Flakes' melodious refrain,
A Snowfall ~ making harmonies in white!
Tys ended, yet the music doth remain ~
O'er covered world aching at the sight.
One Snowflake grows when added to the
rest,
Beauty compounded ~ is beauty doubly blest.



So too, in troth, when working for a cause;
Tys not enough to serve oneself alone,
A Punchinello jerking for applause ~
all bluff and nonsense, soon this farce is known;
To toil for self is shirking Caid's laws,
Aye, truer stuff the snowflake has us shown;
Give fair Altavia all she deserves,
True service comes from knowing whom one serves.

~~ Secca

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