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Though I thy Mithridates were
 Framed to defy the poisondart,
Yet must thou fold me unaware
 To know the rapture of thy heart
And I but render and confess
The malice of thy tenderness.

For elegant and antique phrase,
 Dearest, my lips wax all too wise;
Nor have I known a love whose praise
 Our piping poets solemnise,
Neither a love where may not be
Ever so little falsity.

*

Notes

This was No. 27 in the 1907 edition.

Mithridates VI – King of Pontus and Armenia Minor (120-63 BC) who reputedly built up an immunity to various poisons. The English poet A.E. Housman incorporated references to him into a poem ('Terence, This is Stupid Stuff') included in his cycle *A Shropshire Lad* (1896).

The conjoining of 'malice' with 'tenderness' is instructive.

The 'poisoned dart' is a direct lift from John Dowland's 'Say, Love If Ever Thou Didst Find', from his *Last Book of Songs or Ayres* (1603).

The reference to 'piping poets' is freighted with much critical and moral baggage; is Joyce aiming at his Irish contemporaries? Some meaning hides amid the tortuous syntax; what remains is an impression of irony and enmity.