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978-1-107-64187-7 - Ben Jonson: The Sad Shepherd or a Tale of Robin Hood

Excerpt

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THE SAD SHEPHERD
OR
A TALE OF ROBIN HOOD

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THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Robin Hood. The chief Woodman, Master of the Feast.

Marian. His Lady, the Mistress.

Their Family

Friar Tuck. The Chaplain and Steward.

Little John. Bow-bearer.

Scarlet. } Two Brothers, Huntsmen.
Scathlock. }

George-a-Greene. Usher of the Bower.

Much. *Robin Hood's* Bailiff or Acater.

The Guests invited

<i>Clarion.</i>	The Rich	} Shepherds.
<i>Lionel.</i>	The Courteous	
<i>Alken.</i>	The Sage	
<i>Aeglamour.</i>	The Sad	
<i>Karolin</i> (also called <i>Karol</i>).	The Kind	

<i>Mellifleur.</i>	The Sweet	} Shepherdesses.
<i>Amie.</i>	The Gentle	
<i>Earine.</i>	The Beautiful	

The Troubles unexpected

Maudlin. The Envious: the Witch of Papplewick.

Douce. The Proud: her Daughter.

Lorell. The Rude: a Swineherd, the Witch's Son.

Puck Hairy, Or *Robin Goodfellow*: their Hind.

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THE SAD SHEPHERD

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[*The Reconciler*

Reuben. A devout Hermit.]

Woodmen, Servants, &c.

The Scene is *Sherwood*,

consisting of a landscape of forest, hills, valleys, cottages, a castle, a river, pastures, herds, flocks, all full of country simplicity; Robin Hood's bower, his well, the witch's dimble, the swineherd's oak, the hermit's cell.

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THE PROLOGUE

He that hath feasted you these forty years,
And fitted fables for your finer ears,
(Although at first he scarce could hit the bore,
Yet you, with patience hearkening more and more,
At length have grown up to him, and made known
The working of his pen is now your own);
He prays you would vouchsafe for your own sake
To hear him this once more, but sit awake.
And, though he now present you with such wool
As from mere English flocks his muse can pull,
He hopes, when it is made up into cloth
Not the most curious head here will be loth
To wear a hood of it, it being a fleece
To match or those of Sicily or Greece.
His scene is Sherwood, and his play a tale
Of Robin Hood's inviting from the vale
Of Belvoir all the shepherds to a feast,
Where by the casual absence of one guest
The mirth is troubled much, and in one man
As much of sadness shown as passion can:
The sad young shepherd, whom we here present,
 [The sad shepherd passeth silently over the stage.]
Like his woe's figure, dark and discontent
For his lost love, who in the Trent is said
To have miscarried: 'las! what knows the head
Of a calm river whom the feet have drown'd?
Hear what his sorrows are, and if they wound
Your gentle breasts, so that the end crown all
Which in the scope of one day's chance may fall,

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THE SAD SHEPHERD

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Old Trent will send you more such tales as these,
And shall grow young again as one doth please.

*[Here the Prologue, thinking to end, returns upon a
new purpose, and speaks on.]*

But here's an heresy of late let fall,
That mirth by no means fits a pastoral!
Such say so who can make none, he presumes;
Else there's no scene more properly assumes
The sock. For whence can sport in kind arise
But from the rural routs and families?
Safe on this ground, then, we not fear to-day
To tempt your laughter by our rustic play;
Wherein if we distaste or be cry'd down,
We think we therefore shall not leave the town,
Nor that the fore-wits that would draw the rest
Unto their liking always like the best.
The wise and knowing critic will not say
This worst or better is, before he weigh
Whether every piece be perfect in the kind;
And then, though in themselves he difference find,
Yet, if the place require it where they stood,
The equal fitting makes them equal good.
You shall have love and hate and jealousy,
As well as mirth and rage and melancholy,
Or whatsoever else may either move,
Or stir affections and your likings prove.
But that no style for pastoral should go
Current but what is stamp'd with Ah and Oh,
Who judgeth so may singularly err;
As if all poesy had one character,
In which what were not written were not right;
Or that the man who made such one poor flight

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BEN JONSON

In his whole life had with his winged skill
Advanc'd him upmost on the Muses' hill,
When he like poet yet remains as those
Are painters who can only make a rose.
From such your wits redeem you or your chance,
Lest to a greater height you do advance
Of folly, to condemn those that are known
Artificers, and trust such as are none!

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ACT I

SCENE I

Aeglamour

Here she was wont to go! and here! and here!
Just where those daisies, pinks, and violets grow.
The world may find the spring by following her;
For other print her airy steps ne'er left;
Her treading would not bend a blade of grass,
Or shake the downy blow-ball from his stalk,
But like the soft west wind she shot along,
And where she went the flowers took thickest root,
As she had sow'd them with her odorous foot.

[*exit.*

SCENE II

*Marian, Tuck, John, George-a-Greene, Much,
Woodmen, &c.*

Mar. Know you or can you guess, my merry men,
What 'tis that keeps your master, Robin Hood,
So long both from his Marian and the wood?

Tuc. Forsooth, madam, he will be here by noon,
And prays it of your bounty as a boon
That you by then have kill'd him venison some,
To feast his jolly friends who hither come
In threaves, to frolick with him and make cheer.
Here's Little John hath harbour'd you a deer,
I see by his tackling.

John. And a hart of ten
I trow he be, madam, or blame your men;
For by his slot, his entries, and his port,
His frayings, fumets, he doth promise sport

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BEN JONSON

And standing 'fore the dogs; he bears a head
Large and well beam'd, with all rights summ'd and
spread.

Mar. Let's rouse him quickly, and lay on the
hounds.

John. Scathlock is ready with them on the grounds,
So is his brother Scarlet; now they've found
His lair, they have him sure within the pound.

Mar. Away, then! when my Robin bids a feast,
'Twere sin in Marian to defraud a guest.

[exeunt Marian, John, and Woodmen.]

SCENE III

Tuck, George-a-Greene, Much, &c.

Tuc. And I, the chaplain, here am left to be
Steward to-day, and charge you all in fee
To don your liveries, see the bower dress'd,
And fit the fine devices for the feast.

[exeunt all except Tuck, George, and Much.]

You, George, must care to make the baldric trim,
And garland that must crown or her or him
Whose flock this year hath brought the earliest lamb.

Geo. Good Father Tuck, at your commands I am
To cut the table out of the greensward,
Or any other service for my lord;
To carve the guests large seats, and these laid in
With turf as soft and smooth as the mole's skin,
And hang the bulled nosegays 'bove their heads;
The piper's bank, whereon to sit and play;
And a fair dial to mete out the day.
Our master's feast shall want no just delights;
His entertainments must have all the rites.

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Muc. Ay, and all choice that plenty can send in:
Bread, wine, acates, fowl, feather, fish or fin
For which my father's nets have swept the Trent.
[Aeglamour falls in with them.]

Aeg. And have you found her?

Muc. Whom?

Aeg. My drowned love,
Earine, the sweet Earine,
The bright and beautiful Earine.
Have you not heard of my Earine?
Just by your father's mills—I think I'm right;
Are not you Much, the miller's son?

Muc. I am.

Aeg. And bailiff to brave Robin Hood?

Muc. The same.

Aeg. Close by your father's mills, Earine,
Earine was drown'd (O my Earine!);
Old Maudlin tells me so, and Douce her daughter.
Ha' you swept the river, say you, and not found her?

Muc. For fowl and fish we have.

Aeg. Oh, not for her?
You're goodly friends, right charitable men!
Nay, keep your way and leave me; make your toys,
Your tales, your poesies that you talk'd of, all
Your entertainments; you not injure me,
Only if I may enjoy my cypress wreath,
And you will let me weep ('tis all I ask),
Till I be turn'd to water as was she.

And, troth, what less suit can you grant a man?

Tuc. His fantasy is hurt; let us now leave him:
The wound is yet too fresh to admit searching.

Aeg. Searching? where should I search, or on what
track?

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BEN JONSON

Can my slow drop of tears or this dark shade

About my brows enough describe her loss?

Earine, oh, my Earine's loss!

No, no, no, no! this heart will break first.

Geo. How will this sad disaster strike the ears

Of bounteous Robin Hood, our gentle master!

Muc. How will it mar his mirth, abate his feast,

And strike a horror into every guest!

[exeunt Tuck, George, and Much.]

Aeg. If I could knit whole clouds about my
brows,

And weep like Swithin, or those wat'ry signs,

The Kids, that rise then, and drown all the flocks

Of those rich shepherds dwelling in this vale,

Those careless shepherds that did let her drown,

Then I did something; or could make old Trent,

Drunk with my sorrow, to start out in breaches,

To drown their herds, their cattle, and their corn,

Break down their mills, their dams, o'erturn their weirs,

And see their houses and whole livelihood

Wrought into water with her, all were good;

I'd kiss the torrent and those whirls of Trent

That suck'd her in, my sweet Earine.

When they have cast her body on the shore,

And it comes up, as tainted as themselves,

All pale and bloodless, I will love it still

For all that they can do, and make them mad

To see how I will hug it in mine arms,

And hang upon the looks, dwell on her eyes,

Feed round about her lips, and eat her kisses,

Suck off her drowned flesh; and where's their malice?

Not all their envious sousing can change that.

But I will study some revenge past this: