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Excerpt
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SPECIMENS
OF
ENGLISH DRAMATIC POETS.

THE MAID'S TRAGEDY. BY FRANCIS BEAUMONT,
AND JOHN FLETCHER.

*Amintor, a noble Gentleman, promises marriage to Aspatia, and
forsakes her by the King's command to wed Evadne.—The
grief of Aspatia at being forsaken, described.*

This lady
Walks discontented, with her watry eyes
Bent on the earth : the unfrequented woods
Are her delight ; and when she sees a bank
Stuck full of flowers, she with a sigh will tell
Her servants what a pretty place it were
To bury lovers in ; and make her maids
Pluck 'em, and strew her over like a corse.
She carries with her an infectious grief
That strikes all her beholders, she will sing
The mournfull'st things that ever ear have heard,
And sigh, and sing again ; and when the rest

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MAID'S TRAGEDY.

Of our young ladies in their wanton blood,
 Tell mirthful tales in course that fill the room
 With laughter, she will with so sad a look
 Bring forth a story of the silent death
 Of some forsaken virgin, which her grief
 Will put in such a phrase, that, ere she end,
 She'll send them weeping one by one away.

The marriage-night of Amintor and Evadne.

EVADNE. ASPATIA. DULA, and other Ladies.

Evad. Would thou could'st instill (To Dula.)
 Some of thy mirth into Aspatia.

Asp. It were a timeless smile should prove my
 cheek ;

It were a fitter hour for me to laugh,
 When at the altar the religious priest
 Were pacifying the offended powers
 With sacrifice, than now. This should have been
 My night, and all your hands have been employ'd
 In giving me a spotless offering
 To young Amintor's bed, as we are now
 For you : pardon, Evadne, would my worth
 Were great as your's, or that the King, or he,
 Or both thought so ; perhaps he found me worthless,
 But till he did so, in these ears of mine
 (These credulous ears) he pour'd the sweetest words
 That art or love could frame.

Evad. Nay, leave this sad talk, madam.

Asp. Would I could, then should I leave the cause.
Lay a garland on my hearse of the dismal yew.

Evad. That's one of your sad songs, madam.

Asp. Believe me, 'tis a very pretty one.

Evad. How is it, madam ?

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MAID'S TRAGEDY.

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Asp. Lay a garland on my hearse of the dismal yew ;
 Maidens, willow branches bear ; say I died true :
 My love was false, but I was firm from my hour of
 birth ;

Upon my buried body lay lightly gentle earth.
 Madam, good night ;—may no discontent
 Grow 'twixt your love and you ; but if there do,
 Enquire of me, and I will guide your moan,
 Teach you an artificial way to grieve,
 To keep your sorrow waking. Love your lord
 No worse than I ; but if you love so well,
 Alas, you may displease him, so did I.
 This is the last time you shall look on me :
 Ladies farewell ; as soon as I am dead,
 Come all and watch one night about my hearse ;
 Bring each a mournful story and a tear
 To offer at it when I go to earth :
 With flattering ivy clasp my coffin round,
 Write on my brow my fortune, let my bier
 Be borne by virgins that shall sing by course
 The truth of maids and perjuries of men.

Evad. Alas, I pity thee. (*Amintor enters.*)

Asp. Go and be happy in your lady's love ;
 (*To Amintor.*)

May all the wrongs that you have done to me,
 Be utterly forgotten in my death.
 I'll trouble you no more, yet I will take
 A parting kiss, and will not be denied.
 You'll come, my lord, and see the virgins weep
 When I am laid in earth, though you yourself
 Can know no pity : thus I wind myself
 Into this willow garland, and am prouder,
 That I was once your love (though now refus'd)
 Than to have had another true to me. ———

B 2

Aspatia wills her Maidens to be sorrowful, because she is so.

ASPATIA. ANTIPHILA. OLYMPIAS.

Asp. Come, let's be sad my girls ;
 That down-csat of thine eye, Olympias,
 Shews a fine sorrow ; mark, Antiphila,
 Just such another was the nymph Oenone,
 When Paris brought home Helen : now a tear,
 And then thou art a piece expressing fully
 The Carthage Queen, when from a cold sea rock,
 Full with her sorrow, she tied fast her eyes
 To the fair Trojan ships, and having lost them,
 Just as thine eyes do, down stole a tear, Antiphila.
 What would this wench do, if she were Aspatia ?
 Here she would stand, till some more pitying god
 Turn'd her to marble : 'tis enough, my wench ;
 Shew me the piece of needle-work you wrought.

Ant. Of Ariadne, madam ?

Asp. Yes that piece.

This should be Theseus, h'as a cousening face ;
 You meant him for a man ?

Ant. He was so, madam.

Asp. Why then 'tis well enough. Never look back,
 You have a full wind, and a false heart, Theseus.
 Does not the story say, his keel was split,
 Or his masts spent, or some kind rock or other
 Met with his vessel ?

Ant. Not as I remember.

Asp. It should ha' been so : could the gods know this,
 And not of all their number raise a storm ?
 But they are all as ill. This false smile was well exprest
 Just such another caught me ; you shall not go so,
 Antiphila,

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MAID'S TRAGEDY.

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In this place work a quicksand,
 And over it a shallow smiling water,
 And his ship ploughing it, and then a fear.
 Do that fear to the life wench.

Ant. 'Twill wrong the story.

Asp. 'Twill make the story, wrong'd by wanton poets,
 Live long and be believ'd; but where's the lady?

Ant. There, Madam.

Asp. Fie, you have miss'd it here, Antiphila.
 You are much mistaken, wench;
 These colours are not dull and pale enough,
 To shew a soul so full of misery
 As this sad lady's was; do it by me,
 Do it again by me the lost Aspatia,
 And you shall find all true but the wild island.
 I stand upon the sea beach now, and think
 Mine arms thus, and mine hair blown with the wind,
 Wild as that desert, and let all about me
 Tell that I am forsaken, do my face
 (If thou hadst ever feeling of a sorrow)
 Thus, thus, Antiphila, strive to make me look
 Like Sorrow's monument; and the trees about me
 Let them be dry and leaveless; let the rocks
 Groan with continual surges, and behind me
 Make all a desolation; look, look, wenches,
 A miserable life of this poor picture.

Olym. Dear madam!

Asp. I have done, sit down, and let us
 Upon that point fix all our eyes, that point there;
 Make a dull silence, till you feel a sudden sadness
 Give us new souls*.

* One characteristic of the excellent old poets is their being able to bestow grace upon subjects which naturally do not seem susceptible of any. I will mention two instances: Zelmane in the Arcadia of Sidney,

Evadne implores forgiveness of Aminor for marrying him while she was the King's Mistress.

Evad. O my lord.

Amin. How now!

Evad. My much abused lord! (Kneels.)

Amin. This cannot be.

Evad. I do not kneel to live, I dare not hope it;
 The wrongs I did are greater; look upon me,
 Though I appear with all my faults.

Amin. Stand up.

This is no new way to beget more sorrow:

and Helena in the All's Well that Ends Well of Shakspeare. What can be more unpromising at first sight than the idea of a young man disguising himself in woman's attire, and passing himself off for a woman among women? and that too for a long space of time? yet Sir Philip has preserved such a matchless decorum, that neither does Pyracl'es' manhood suffer any stain for the effeminaey of Zelmane, nor is the respect due to the princesses at all diminished when the deception comes to be known. In the sweetly constituted mind of Sir Philip Sidney it seems as if no ugly thought nor unhandsome meditation could find a harbour. He turned all that he touched into images of honour and virtue. Helena, in Shakspeare, is a young woman seeking a man in marriage. The ordinary laws of courtship are reversed; the habitual feelings are violated. Yet with such exquisite address this dangerous subject is handled, that Helena's forwardness loses her no honour; delicacy dispenses with her laws in her favour, and Nature in her single case seems content to suffer a sweet violation.

Aspatia in this tragedy, is a character equally difficult with Helena of being managed with grace. She too is a slighted woman, refused by the man who had once engaged to marry her. Yet it is artfully contrived that while we pity her, we respect her, and she descends without degradation. So much true poetry and passion can do to confer dignity upon subjects which do not seem capable of it. But Aspatia must not be compared at all points with Helena; she does not so absolutely predominate over her situation but she suffers some diminution, some abatement of the full lustre of the female character; which Helena never does: her character has many degrees of sweetness, some of delicacy, but it has weakness which if we do not despise, we are sorry for. After all, Beaumont and Fletcher were but an inferior sort of Shakspeares and Sidneys.

MAID'S TRAGEDY.

7

Heaven knows I have too many ; do not mock me ;
 Though I am tame and bred up with my wrongs,
 Which are my foster-brothers, I may leap
 Like a hand-wolf into my natural wilderness,
 And do an outrage : pray thee do not mock me.

Evad. My whole life is so leprous, it infects
 All my repentance : I would buy your pardon
 Though at the highest set, even with my life.
 That slight contrition, that's no sacrifice
 For what I have committed.

Amin. Sure I dazzle :
 There cannot be a faith in that foul woman,
 That knows no god more mighty than her mischiefs.
 Thou dost still worse, still number on thy faults,
 To press my poor heart thus. Can I believe
 There's any seed of virtue in that woman
 Left to shoot up, that dares go on in sin
 Known, and so known as thine is? O Evadne !
 Would there were any safety in thy sex,
 That I might put a thousand sorrows off,
 And credit thy repentance : but I must not ;
 Thou hast brought me to the dull calamity,
 To that strange misbelief of all the world,
 And all things that are in it, that I fear
 I shall fall like a tree, and find my grave,
 Only rememb'ring that I grieve.

Evad. My lord,
 Give me your griefs : you are an innocent,
 A soul as white as heaven ; let not my sins
 Perish your noble youth : I do not fall here
 To shadow by dissembling with my tears,
 As all say women can, or to make less
 What my hot will hath done, which heaven and you
 Knows to be tougher than the hand of time
 Can cut from man's remembrance ; no I do not ;

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MAID'S TRAGEDY.

I do appear the same, the same Evadne,
 Drest in the shames I liv'd in, the same monster.
 But these are names of honour, to what I am ;
 I do present myself the foulest creature,
 Most poisonous, dangerous, and despis'd of men,
 Lerna e'er bred, or Nilus ; I am hell,
 Till you, my dear lord, shoot your light into me,
 The beams of your forgiveness : I am soul-sick,
 And wither with the fear of one condemn'd,
 Till I have got your pardon.

Amin. Rise, Evadne.

Those heavenly powers that put this good into thee,
 Grant a continuance of it : I forgive thee ;
 Make thyself worthy of it, and take heed,
 Take heed, Evadne, this be serious ;
 Mock not the powers above, that can and dare
 Give thee a great example of their justice
 To all ensuing eyes, if thou play'st
 With thy repentance, the best sacrifice.

Evad. I have done nothing good to win belief,
 My life hath been so faithless ; all the creatures
 Made for heaven's honours have their ends, and good ones,
 All but the cousening Crocodiles, false women ;
 They reign here like those plagues, those killing sores,
 Men pray against ; and when they die, like tales
 Ill told, and unbeliev'd, they pass away
 And go to dust forgotten : but, my lord,
 Those short days I shall number to my rest,
 (As many must not see me) shall, though too late,
 Though in my evening, yet perceive a will,
 Since I can do no good because a woman,
 Reach constantly at something that is near it ;
 I will redeem one minute of my age,
 Or like another Niobe I'll weep
 Till I am water.

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PHILASTER.

9

Amin. I am now dissolved :
 My frozen soul melts : may each sin thou hast,
 Find a new mercy : rise, I am at peace :
 Had'st thou been thus, thus excellently good,
 Before that devil king tempted thy frailty,
 Sure thou had'st made a star : give me thy hand ;
 From this time I will know thee, and as far
 As honour gives me leave, be thy Amintor :
 When we meet next, I will salute thee fairly,
 And pray the gods to give thee happy days :
 My charity shall go along with thee,
 Though my embraces must be far from thee. —

Men's Natures more hard and subtil than Women's.

How stubbornly this fellow answer'd me !
 There is a vile dishonest trick in man,
 More than in women : all the men I meet
 Appear thus to me, are harsh and rude,
 And have a subtilty in every thing,
 Which love could never know ; but we fond women
 Harbour the easiest and smoothest thoughts,
 And think all shall go so ; it is unjust
 That men and women should be matcht together.

PHILASTER; OR, LOVE LIES A BLEEDING. A TRAGI-
 COMEDY. BY FRANCIS BEAUMONT AND JOHN
 FLETCHER.

*Philaster tells the Princess Arethusa how he first found the boy
 Bellario.*

I have a boy sent by the gods,
 Not yet seen in the court ; hunting the buck,
 I found him sitting by a fountain side,
 Of which he borrow'd some to quench his thirst,

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PHILASTER.

And paid the nymph again as much in tears ;
 A garland lay him by, made by himself,
 Of many several flowers, bred in the bay,
 Stuck in that mystic order, that the rareness
 Delighted me : but ever when he turn'd
 His tender eyes upon them, he would weep,
 As if he meant to make them grow again.
 Seeing such pretty helpless innocence
 Dwell in his face, I ask'd him all his story ;
 He told me that his parents gentle died,
 Leaving him to the mercy of the fields,
 Which gave him roots ; and of the crystal springs,
 Which did not stop their courses ; and the sun,
 Which still, he thank'd him, yielded him his light.
 Then took he up his garland and did shew,
 What every flower, as country people hold,
 Did signify ; and how all order'd thus,
 Express his grief : and to my thoughts did read
 The prettiest lecture of his country art
 That could be wish'd, so that, methought, I could
 Have studied it. I gladly entertain'd him,
 Who was as glad to follow ; and have got
 The trustiest, loving'st, and the gentlest boy,
 That ever master kept : him will I send
 To wait on you, and bear our hidden love.

Philaster prefers Bellario to the Service of the Princess Arethusa.

Phi. And thou shalt find her honourable, boy,
 Full of regard unto thy tender youth,
 For thine own modesty ; and for my sake,
 Apter to give, than thou wilt be to ask, aye, or deserve.

Bell. Sir, you did take me up when I was nothing,
 And only yet am something by being yours ;
 You trusted me unknown ; and that which you are apt
 To construe a simple innocence in me,