

An Elegy on the Lady Markham

By Francis Beaumont

As unthrifths groan in straw for their pawn'd beds,
As women weep for their last maidenheads,
When both are without hope or remedy,
Such an untimely grief I have for thee.
I never saw thy face, nor did my heart
Urge forth mine eyes unto it whilst thou wert;
But being lifted hence, that, which to thee
Was death's sad dart, proved Cupid's shaft to me.
Whoever thinks me foolish that the force
Of a report can make me love a corpse,
Know he that when with this I do compare
The love I do a living woman bear,
I find myself most happy: now I know
Where I can find my mistress, and can go
Unto her trimm'd bed, and can lift away
Her grass-green mantle, and her sheet display;
And touch her naked: and though th' envious mold
In which she lies uncover'd, moist, and cold,
Strive to corrupt her, she will not abide
With any art her blemishes to hide,
As many living do, and know their need;
Yet cannot they in sweetness her exceed,
But make a stink with all their art and skill,
Which their physicians warrant with a bill;
Nor at her door doth heaps of coaches stay,
Footmen and midwives to bar up my way;
Nor needs she any maid or page to keep,
To knock me early from my golden sleep,
With letters that her honour all is gone,
If I not right her cause on such a one.
Her heart is not so hard to make me pay
For every kiss a supper and a play;
Nor will she ever open her pure lips
To utter oaths, enough to drown our ships,
To bring a plague, a famine, or the sword,
Upon the land, though she should keep her word;
Yet, ere an hour be past, in some new vein
Break them, and swear them double o'er again.
Pardon me, that with thy blest memory
I mingle mine own former misery:

Yet dare I not excuse the fate that brought
These crosses on me, for then every thought
That tended to thy love was black and foul,
Now all as pure as a new-baptiz'd soul:
For I protest, for all that I can see,
I would not lie one night in bed with thee;
Nor am I jealous, but could well abide
My foe to lie in quiet by thy side.
You worms, my rivals, whilst she was alive,
How many thousands were there that did strive
To have your freedom? for their sake forbear
Unseemly holes in her soft skin to wear;
But if you must (as what worms can abstain
To taste her tender body?) yet refrain
With your disordered eatings to deface her,
But feed yourselves so as you most may grace her.
First, through her ear-tips see you make a pair
Of holes, which, as the moist inclosed air
Turns into water, may the clean drops take,
And in her ears a pair of jewels make.
Have ye not yet enough of that white skin,
The touch whereof, in times past, would have been
Enough to have ransom'd many a thousand soul
Captive to love? If not, then upward roll
Your little bodies, where I would you have
This Epitaph upon her forehead grave:
"Living, she was young, fair, and full of wit;
Dead, all her faults are in her forehead writ."