

MINOR PIECES.*

MAHMOUD.¹

I have just read a most amazing thing,
A true and noble story of a king:²
And to show all men, by these presents, how
Good kings can please a Liberal,³ even now
I'll vent the warmth it gave me in a verse:
But recollect—these kings and emperors
Are very scarce; and when they do appear,
Had better not have graced that drunken sphere,⁴
Which hurts the few whose brains can bear it best,
And turns the unhappy heads of all the rest.
This prince was worthy to have ruled a state
Plain as his heart, and by its freedom great:
But stripped of their guilt stuff, at what would t'others rate?

There came a man,⁵ making his hasty moan,
Before the Sultan Mahmoud on his throne,
And crying out—"My sorrow is my right,
And I *will* see the Sultan, and to-night."
"Sorrow," said Mahmoud, "is a reverend thing:
I recognize its right, as king with king;
Speak on." "A fiend has got into my house,"
Exclaimed the staring man, "and tortures us:
One of thine officers—he comes, the abhorr'd,
And takes possession of my house, my board,

* Author: Various authors / Transcribed by Alessandra Crotti; Annotated
by Alessandra Crotti and Andrea Peghinelli.

My bed:—I have two daughters and a wife,
And the wild villain comes and makes me mad with life.”
“Is he there now?” said Mahmoud:—“No;—he left
The house when I did, of my wits bereft;
And laugh’d me down the street, because I vowed
I’d bring the prince himself to lay him in his shroud.
I’m mad with want—I’m mad with misery
And, oh thou Sultan Mahmoud, God cries out for thee!”

The Sultan comforted the man, and said,
“Go home, and I will send thee wine and bread,”
(For he was poor) “and other comforts. Go;
And, should the wretch return, let Sultan Mahmoud know.”

In three days’ time, with haggard eyes and beard,
And shaken voice, the suitor re-appeared,
And said “He’s come.”—Mahmoud said not a word,
But rose and took four slaves, each with a sword,
And went with the vexed man. They reach the place,
And hear a voice, and see a female face,
That to the window fluttered in affright:
“Go in,” said Mahmoud, “and put out the light;⁶
But tell the females first to leave the room;
And, when the drunkard follows them, we come.”

The man went in. There was a cry, and hark!
A table falls, the window is struck dark:
Forth rush the breathless women; and behind
With curses comes the fiend in desperate mind.
In vain: the sabres soon cut short the strife,
And chop the shrieking wretch, and drink his bloody life.

“Now *light* the light,” the Sultan cried aloud.

'Twas done, he took it in his hand, and bowed
Over the corpse, and looked upon the face;
Then turned and knelt beside it in the place,
And said a prayer, and from his lips there crept
Some gentle words of pleasure, and he wept.
In reverend silence the spectators wait,
Then bring him at his call both wine and meat;
And when he had refreshed his noble heart,
He bade his host be blest, and rose up to depart.

The man amazed, all mildness now, and tears,
Fell at the Sultan's feet, with many prayers,
And begged him to vouchsafe to tell his slave,
The reason first of that command he gave
About the light; then, when he saw the face,
Why he knelt down; and lastly, how it was,
That fare so poor as his detained him in the place.

The Sultan said, with much humanity,
"Since first I saw thee come, and heard thy cry,
I could not get it from my head, that one
By whom such daring villanies were done,
Must be some lord of mine, perhaps a lawless son.
Whoe'er he was, I knew my task, but feared
A father's heart, in case the worst appeared:
For this I had the light put out; but when
I saw the face, and found a stranger slain,
I knelt and thanked the sovereign arbiter,
Whose work I had performed through pain and fear;
And then I rose, and was refreshed with food,
The first time since thou cam'st, and marr'dst my solitude.

THE VENETIAN FISHERMAN.⁸

[*The burden, "With your gallant going vessel," is repeated at the end of every two lines.*]

Oh, fisher of the waters, Fidelin,
 Come fish for me, I pray,
 With your gallant going vessel,
 With your gallant pull away.
 La ra lo, la ra lay.

And what am I to fish for?
 Oh, a ring I've lost to day;
 A hundred crowns I'll give thee,
 And a purse both rich and gay.

Oh, a hundred crowns I'll have not,
 Nor a purse both rich and gay;
 Lady, I'll have a kiss of love,
 And that shall be my pay.

O pescator dell'onda, Fidelin,
 Vieni pescar in quà
 Colla bella sua barca,
 Colla bella se ne va,
 Fidelin, lin, la.

Che cosa vuoi ch'io peschi?
 L'anel che m'è casca;
 Ti darò cento scudi,
 Sta borsa ricamà.

Non voglio cento scudi,
 Nè borsa ricamà;
 Voglio un bazin d'amore,
 Con quel mi pagherà, &c.

DIALOGUE FROM ALFIERI;⁹

BETWEEN A CHAIR IN ITALY AND A GENTLEMAN FROM
ENGLAND.

CHAIR.

What is the reason, Sir, that every day
You load me thus for nothing, hours and hours?
Is this the manner, pray,
Of making love in that cold clime of yours?
You may be heavy for a century,
And get no further with the lovely she.

GENTLEMAN.

And hast thou too conspired against me, chair?
I love, tis true—too true—and dare not say it:
But surely my whole air,
My looks, my very silence, all display it:
Every one, doubtless, must perceive the fire,
That gnaws and eats me up with fierce desire.

CHAIR.

For God's sake, speak then, or you'll never do:
What you do now by the fair lady's side,
I boast of doing too:—
It makes her mad to find you thus tongue-tied,
To see you sit and stare, like a stuck pig:
You make me speak myself, who am but fig.

SEGGIOLA.

Signor, perchè¹⁰ del tuo disutil peso
Ogni giorno mi vuoi gravar tant'ore?
Si fa così all' amore
Tra i gelati Britanni?
Me premerai mill' anni,
E mai non ti avverrà d'essere inteso.

IL SEDUTO.

Sedia e tu pur congiuri a danno mio?
Amo pur troppo è vero, e dir non l'oso:
Ma l'amor sì nascoso
Non ho, che nel mio, sguardo
Non legga ognun, ch'io ardo,
Che mi consuma e rode un fier desio.

SEGGIOLA.

Non di parlar, bensì d'an dartene osa:
Ciò che tu fai della Sandrina accanto
Di farlo anch'io mi vento.
A lei l'anima e il senso
Toglie il tuo starti intenso:
Me fai parlare inanimata cosa.

DIALOGUE

BETWEEN ALFIERI AND HIS FLORENTINE LAUNDRESS,
NERA COLOMBOLI.*¹¹

- A. Why, Mistress Nera, what the devil's here?
To bring my stockings home at last undone?
N. Undone! ah! God knows if I've sewn and sewn;
But they so *spider-web*, it's a despair.
- A. So *spider-web*, school-mistress! Why, that's queer.
N. How? Any thing that we put off and on,
And wear and wear, till all the stuff is gone,
Does'nt it *spider-web*? I think it's clear.
- A. *Spider-web*? I don't take it: what d'ye mean?
N. Lord bless me, Sir, break me a spider's web,
And see if I can sew it up again.
A. Ah! It is I that am the unlick'd cub.
I grow grey writing Tuscan, but in vain:
A sorry graft, fit only for the grub.

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- A. Che diavol fate voi, Madonna Nera?
Darmi per sin co'buchi le calzette?
N. Co'buchi, eh? Dio 'l sa, s'i'l'ho rassette;
Ma elle ragnano sì, ch'è una dispéra.
A. *Ragnar*, cos'è, Monna vocaboliera?—

*Alfieri, a Piedmontese, writes this sonnet (which is doubtless a true recital) to shew the difficulty he found in acquiring the niceties of the Tuscan tongue, and how well they are felt and understood by the common people.

N. Oh! la roba, che l'uom mette e rimette,
 Che vien via per tropp'uso a fette a fette,
 Nun ragna ella e mattina e giorno e sera?

A. *Ragnar?* non l'ho più udito, e non l'intendo.
 N. Pur gli è chiaro: la rompa un ragnatélo;
 Poi vedrem, se con l'ago i'lo rammendo.
 A. Ah! son pur io la bestia! imbianco il pelo
 Questa lingua scrivendo, e non sapendo:
 Tosco innesto son io su immondo stelo.

A BLESSED SPOT.

FROM AN EPIGRAM OF ABULFADHEL AHMED, SURNAMED
 AL HAMADANI, RECORDED IN D'HERBELOT.¹²

HAMADAN¹³ is my native place;
 And I must say, in praise of it,
 It merits, for its ugly face,
 What every body says of it.

It's children equal it's old men
 In vices and avidity;
 And they reflect the babes again
 In exquisite stupidity.

MOUTH VERSUS EYES.

FROM THE FRENCH OF LA FONTAINE.¹⁴

CYPRUS¹⁵ to wit: Sweet Mouth *versus* Fine Eyes,
 Before the Chamber of Precedencies.
 The case was opened by Sweet Mouth, who said,
 "I summon Hearts. Let their reports be read.
 Let them decide, my Lords, which of us two
 Has most to say, to charm with, and to do.
 Do, did I say? I'm ready to take oath,
 I've more than I can do, though nothing loth:
 Only it seems, I've not the happy art,
 Of shedding tears, like Eyes! With all my heart:
 My glory centers not in sight alone:
 I satisfy three senses, they but one.
 Odours and sounds to my sweet state belong,
 And to delightful words I join a charming song.
 My very sighs exhale a world of sweets,
 Like zephyrs in the time of violets:
 I have such ways to make a lover blest,
 Such heaps—your Lordships will excuse the list:
 And then, if Fine Eyes lay a wager with us,
 To see who first can strike some heart beneath us,
 Lord! how Fine Eyes go toiling round and round,
 While, speak we but a word—the man's on ground:
 We want no tricks, not we, to give the rosy wound.
 Let Fine Eyes shut, they're no such wonder, they:
 Sweet Mouth has always treasures to display:
 Coral without, and precious pearl within;
 Who, when I deign to play, can hope to win?

Let presents fall in oriental showers,
The favours I bestow beat all their dowers.
Thirty-two pearls I wear about me here,
Of which the least in beauty and least clear,
Surpasses all with which the East is lit;
As many millions should not purchase it."

Thus spoke Sweet Mouth; on which was seen to rise
A lover, who was counsel for Fine Eyes.
He said, as you may guess, that for their part,
Love, without them, could never find the heart:
That as to tears, he felt, he must own, shocked,
To hear their very tenderness rebuked.
What could sighs do, he should be glad to know,
Unless their warrants stood prepared to flow?
The fact was, both were good, and Sweet Mouth there
Wronged her own cause, and hurt her character.
There are delicious tears; and there are sighs,
On t'other hand, not over good or wise;
And Mouth had better, as she says she can,
Have gained the cause by silence than this plan.
"What are the silent charms, the godlike powers,
To shew for her cause, when compared with our's?
We charm an hundred and a thousand ways,
By sweetness, by a stealth, by sparkling rays,
And by what Sweet Mouth blames—but is the part
We glory in the most—the gentle art
Of melting with a tear the manliest heart.
Where Sweet Mouth gains a single conquest, we
Roll in a round of ceaseless victory:
And for one song in which she bears the prize,
A hundred thousand sparkle with Fine Eyes.
In courts, and cities, in the poet's groves,

What is there heard of but our darts and loves?
 Such sudden strokes we deal, such deeds we vaunt,
 That those do well, who say that we enchant:
 We come, and all surrender up their arms:
 Though often in the whirl of those alarms,
 Fine Mouth comes following in, and then pretends her charms.
 Heaven grant the people ask not who she is,
 Or she may speak, and "thank the Gods amiss."¹⁶
 'Tis true, she has two words of magic touch,
 "I love;" but cannot Fine Eyes say as much?
 We have a tongue that with no words at all
 Can ask, and hint, and tell a tale, and call,
 And ravish more than all the pearls and songs,
 Which Sweet Mouth musters round her tongue of tongues."

The Counsel started here, and took occasion
 To make a very happy peroration.
 He caught a lady's eye, just coming in,
 With an approach the sweetest ever seen:
 He changed his tone, and with a gravity,
 Seconded well by a reposing eye,
 Said—"I've been taking up your Lordship's time
 With trifling matters fitter for a rhyme;
 Look there: my Lords, I think 'twould be absurd,
 After that sight, to add another word.
 Pray give the sentence:—we are quite secure:
 My client would not tire the court, I'm sure."

The lady, with a pretty shame, looked round
 With speaking eyes, which dealt so wide a wound,
 That all hands dropt their papers for surprise,
 And not a heart but gave it for Fine Eyes.
 Sweet Mouth at this, seeing how matters went,

And forced to raise some new astonishment,
 Resumed, and said—"To what has just been dropt,
 (Which, by the way, is shockingly corrupt)
 There is one word alone I wish to say:
 My Lords, Fine Eyes do little but by day:
 The silent tongue of theirs, when in the dark
 Makes but a sorry sort of frigid spark:
 What I can do, needs surely no remark."

This reason settled the dispute *instantaner*:
 Fine Eyes were much, but Sweet Mouth the Enchanter.
 Fine Eyes, however, took it in good part,
 And Sweet Mouth gave the Judge a kiss with all her heart.

Belle Bouche et Beaux Yeux plaidaient pour les honneurs,
 Devant le juge d'Amathonte.¹⁷
 Belle Bouche disait—"Je m'en rapporte aux cœurs,
 Et leur demande d'ils font compte
 Des Beaux Yeux ainsi que de moi.
 Qu'on examine notre emploi,
 Nos traits, nos beautés, et nos charmes.
 Que dis-je, notre emploi? J'ai bien plus d'un métier,¹⁸
 Mais j'ignore celui de répandre¹⁹ des larmes:
 De bon cœur, je le laisse aux Beaux Yeux tout entier.
 Je satisfais trois sens, eux seulement la vue.
 Ma gloire a bien plus d'étendue.
 Louie²⁰ et l'odorat ont part à mes plaisirs,
 Outre qu'aux doux propos je joins les chansonnettes.²¹
 Belle Bouche fait des soupirs,
 Tels à peu près que les zéphirs²²
 Dans la saison des violettes.

Je sais par cent moyens rendre heureux un amant—
 Vous me dispenserez de vous dire, comment.
 S'il s'agit entre nous d'une conquête à faire,
 On voit Beaux Yeux se tourmenter;
 Belle Bouche n'a qu'à parler:
 Sans artifice elle sait plaire.
 Quand Beaux Yeux sont fermés, ce n'est pas grande affaire—
 Belle Bouche à toute heure étale ses trésors;²³
 Le nacre est en dedans, le corail en dehors.
 Quand je daigne m'ouvrir, il n'est richesse égale:²⁴
 Les présents que nous fait la rive orientale
 N'approchent pas les dons que je prétends²⁵ avoir.
 Trente-deux perles se font voir,
 Dont la moins belle et la moins claire
 Passe celle que l'Inde a dans ses régions;²⁶
 Pour plus de trente-deux millions,
 Je ne m'en voudrais pas defaire.²⁷

 Belle Bouche ainsi harangua.
 Un amant pour Beaux Yeux parla;
 Et, comme on peut penser, ne manqua pas de dire,
 Que c'est par eux qu'amour s'introduit dans les cœurs.
 Pourquoi les reprocher les pleurs?
 Il ne faut donc pas qu'on soupire?
 Mais tous les deux sont bons; Belle Bouche a grand tort.
 Il est des larmes de transport,
 Il est des soupirs, au contraire,
 Qui fort souvent ne disent rien.
 Belle Bouche n'entend pas bien
 Pour cette fois-là son affaire.
 Qu'elle se taise, au nom des dieux!
 Des appas qui lui sont répartis²⁸ par les cieux,
 Qu'a t'-elle sur ce point qui nous soit comparable?

Nous savons plaire en cent façons,
 Par l'éclat, la douceur, et cet art admirable
 De tendre aux cœurs des hameçons.
 Belle Bouche le blâme, et nous en faisons gloire:
 Si l'on tient d'elle une victoire,
 On en tient cent de nous; et pour un chanson,
 Ou Belle Bouche est en renom,
 Beaux Yeux le sont en plus de mille.
 La cour, le parnasse, et la ville,
 Ne retentissent tout le jour
 Que du mot de Beaux Yeux et de celui d'Amour.
 Dès que nous paraissions, chacun nous rend les armes.
 Quiconque nous appellerait
 Enchanteurs, il ne mentirait,
 Tant est prompt l'effèt²⁹ de nos charmes.
 Sous une masque trompeur leur éclat fait si bien,
 Que maint objet tel quel, en plus d'une rencontre,
 Par ce moyen passe à la montre:
 On demande qui c'est, et souvent ce n'est rien.
 Cependant Beaux Yeux sont la cause
 Qu'on prend ce rien pour quelque chose.
 Belle Bouche dit "J'aime," et le disons nous pas?
 Sans autre bruit notre langage,³⁰
 Muet qu'il est, plaît davantage
 Que ces perles, ces chants, et ces autres appas
 Avec quoi Belle Bouche engage."

L'avocat de Beaux Yeux fit sa péroration
 Des regards d'un intervenante.
 Cette belle approcha d'un façon charmante;
 Puis il dit, en changeant le ton,
 "J'amuse ici la cour par des discours frivoles:
 Ai-je besoin d'autres paroles
 Que les yeux de Phillis?³¹ Juge—regardez les;

Puis prononcez votre sentence:
Nous gagnerons notre procès.”

Phillis³² eut quelque honte; et puis sur l'assistance
Repandit³³ des regards si remplis d'éloquence,
Que les papiers tombaient des mains.
Frappé de ses charmes soudains,
L'auditoire inclinait pour Beaux Yeux dans son âme.
Belle Bouche, en faveur des regards de la dame
Voyant que les esprits s'allaient préoccupant,
Prit la parole, et dit—“A votre rhétorique,
Dont Beaux Yeux vont ainsi les juges corrompant,
Je ne veux opposer qu'un seul mot en réplique.³⁴
La nuit mon emploi dure encore—
Beaux Yeux sont lors de peu d'usage.
On les laisse en repos, et leur muet langage
Fait un assez froid personnage.”³⁵

Chacun en demeura d'accord.
Cette raison regla³⁶ la chose:
On préféra Belle Bouche à Beaux Yeux;
En quelques chefs pourtant ils eurent gain de cause.
Belle Bouche baisa le juge de son mieux.

EDITORIAL NOTES

¹ Mahmoud the Gaznevide or Mahmoud of Ghazni (971–1030), Sultan of the Ghaznavid Empire, is celebrated in Persian and Arabic sources and later depicted in Europe as both a conqueror and a model of magnanimity.

² The tale of Sultan Mahmoud appears in the tenth volume of Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789). Gibbon acknowledges his debt for this character and story to Barthélemy d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697), which also served as a source for Leigh Hunt. From the same work, Hunt selected eight verses, translated them, and published them as a separate poem entitled "A Blessed Spot".

³ Allusion to Hunt's own radical political identity.

⁴ Image of the corrupt and irrational human world, echoing both classical Stoic and Romantic moral cosmology (see, for instance, William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* V.i.72.)

⁵ Episode found in Barthélemy d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale*, entry "Mahmoud." D'Herbelot's version tells how the Sultan personally avenged a poor man whose house had been invaded by a soldier. Hunt closely follows this outline but expands the emotional and psychological dimension.

⁶ William Shakespeare, *Othello* V.ii.7.

⁷ Incorrect page number.

⁸ Traditional Italian folk song, associated with the Veneto region.

⁹ Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803), Italian dramatist and poet, often regarded as the founder of Italian tragedy. "Dialogo fra una seggiola e chi vi sta su" is one of the epigrams Alfieri composed in Pisa in June 1766.

¹⁰ Misprint for *perché*.

¹¹ Alfieri's sonnet CLXXXV "Difficoltà dell'apprendere il parlar toscano," composed on 28 March 1796; the two interlocutors are Alfieri and Nera Comboli, his Florentine maid.

¹² Barthélemy d'Herbelot de Molainville (1625-95), French Orientalist. In his *Bibliothèque orientale* (1697), d'Herbelot mentions an Arab doctor called Abulfahdi Ahmed Hadamani, author of a book entitled *Mecamât* ("Commonplaces") and of several poems collected in d'Herbelot's work.

¹³ City in western Iran.

¹⁴ Jean de La Fontaine (1621-95), French fabulist and poet best known for his *Fables* (1668-94). The poem "Le différent. De beaux yeux et de belle bouche" was published in *Contes, troisième partie* (1671).

¹⁵ Cyprus is an island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

¹⁶ See John Milton, *The Measure* 177.

¹⁷ Amathus, one of the ancient royal cities of Cyprus.

¹⁸ Misprint for *métier*.

¹⁹ Misprint for *répandre*.

²⁰ Misprint for *ouïe*.

²¹ Misprint for *chansonnettes*.

²² Misprint for *zéphyrs*.

²³ Misprint for *trésors*.

²⁴ Misprint for *égale*.

²⁵ Misprint for *prétends*.

²⁶ Misprint for *régions*.

²⁷ Misprint for *défaire*.

²⁸ Misprint for *départis*.

²⁹ Misprint for *effet*.

³⁰ Misprint for *langage*.

³¹ Misprint for *Phyllis*. A minor figure of Greek mythology, Phyllis falls in love with the hero Demophon, but after he leaves her, she dies of grief and the gods transform her into an almond tree.

³² Misprint for *Phyllis*.

³³ Misprint for *répandit*.

³⁴ Misprint for *réplique*.

³⁵ Misprint for *personnage*.

³⁶ Misprint for *régla*.