

Aphra Behn, “On a Juniper-Tree, cut down to make Busks”

Description

APHRA BEHN

“On a Juniper-Tree, cut down to make Busks.”

Whilst happy I Triumphant stood,
The Pride and Glory of the Wood;
My Aromatick Boughs and Fruit,
Did with all other Trees dispute.
Had right by Nature to excel, ^ 5
In pleasing both the tast and smell:
But to the touch I must confess,
Bore an Ungrateful Sullenness.
My Wealth, like bashful Virgins, I
Yielded with some Reluctancy; ^ 10
For which my vallue should be more,
Not giving easily my store.
My verdant Branches all the year
Did an Eternal Beauty wear;
Did ever young and gay appear. ^ 15
Nor needed any tribute pay,
For bounties from the God of Day:
Nor do I hold Supremacy,
(In all the Wood) o’er every Tree.
But even those too of my own Race, ^ 20
That grow not in this happy place.
But that in which I glory most,
And do my self with Reason boast,
Beneath my shade the other day,
Young *Philocles* and *Cloris* lay, ^ 25
Upon my Root she lean’d her head,
And where I grew, he made their Bed:
Whilst I the Canopy more largely spread.
Their trembling Limbs did gently press,
The kind supporting yielding Grass: ^ 30
Ne’er half so blest as now, to bear
A Swain so Young, a Nimph so fair:
My Grateful Shade I kindly lent,
And every aiding Bough I bent.
So low, as sometimes had the blisse, ^ 35
To rob the Shepherd of a kiss,
Whilst he in Pleasures far above

The Sence of that degree of Love:

Permitted every stealth I made,

Unjealous of his Rival Shade. 40

I saw â€em kindle to desire,

Whilst with soft sighs they blew the fire:

Saw the approaches of their joy,

He growing more fierce, and she less Coy,

Saw how they mingled melting Rays, 45

Exchanging Love a thousand ways.

Kind was the force on every side,

Her new desire she could not hide:

Nor wouâ€™d the Shepherd be denyâ€™d.

Impatient he waits no consent 50

But what she gave by Languishment,

The blessed Minute he persuâ€™d;

And now transported in his Arms,

Yeilds to the Conqueror all her Charmes,

His panting Breast, to hers now joinâ€™d, 55

They feast on Raptures unconfinâ€™d;

Vast and Luxuriant, such as prove

The Immortality of Love.

For who but a Divinitie,

Could mingle Souls to that Degree; 60

And melt â€em into Extasie.

Now like the *Phenix*, both Expire,

While from the Ashes of their fire,

Sprung up a new, and soft desire.

Like Charmers, thrice they did invoke, 65

The God! and thrice new vigor took.

Nor had the Mysterie ended there,

But *Cloris* reassumâ€™d her fear,

And chid the Swain, for having prest,

What she alas wouâ€™d not resist: 70

Whilst he in whom Loves sacred flame,

Before and after was the same,

Fondly implorâ€™d she wouâ€™d forget

A fault, which he wouâ€™d yet repeat.

From Active Joyes with some they hast, 75

To a Reflexion on the past;

A thousand times my Covert bless,

That did secure their Happiness:

Their Gratitude to every Tree

They pay, but most to happy me; 80

The Shepherdess my Bark carest,

Whilst he my Root, Loveâ€™s Pillow, kist;

And did with sighs, their Fate deplore,

Since I must shelter them no more;

And if before my Joyes were such, Â 85

In having heard, and seen too much,
My Grief must be as great and high,
When all abandonâ€™d I shall be,
Doomâ€™d to a silent Destinie.

No more the Charming strife to hear, Â 90

The Shepherds Vows, the Virgins fear:
No more a joyful looker on,
Whilst Loves soft Battelâ€™s lost and won.

With grief I bowâ€™d my murmuring Head,
And all my Christal Dew I shed. Â 95

Which did in *Cloris* Pity move,
(*Cloris* whose Soul is made of Love;)

She cut me down, and did translate,
My being to a happier state.

No Martyr for Religion diâ€™d Â 100

With half that Unconsidering Pride;
My top was on that Altar laid,

Where Love his softest Offerings paid:
And was as fragrant Incense burnâ€™d,

My body into Busks was turnâ€™d: Â 105

Where I still guard the Sacred Store,
And of Loves Temple keep the Door.

NOTES:

3 *Boughs* â€œAn arm or large shoot of a tree, bigger than a branch, yet not always distinguished from itâ€• (Johnson).

6 *tast* Variant for â€œtaste.â€•

13 *verdant* Green.

17 *God of Day* Helios, Greek god of the sun.

44 *Coy* Modest.

56 *Raptures* â€œEcstasy; transport; violence of any pleasing passion; enthusiasm; uncommon heat of imaginationâ€• (Johnson).

62 *Phenix* Phoenix. An ancient mythological bird associated with the worship of the sun. â€œAs its end approached, the phoenix fashioned a nest of aromatic boughs and spices, set it on fire, and was consumed in the flamesâ€•*Britannica*).

105 *Busks* Popular in womenâ€™s fashion as an undergarment during the 16th to early 20th century. â€œA strip of wood, whalebone, steel, or other rigid material attached vertically to the front section of a corset so as to stiffen and support it. Hence occasionally: the corset itselfâ€•*QED*).

SOURCE: *Poems Upon Several Occasions: with a Voyage to the Island of Love* (London, 1684), pp. 19-24.
[Google Books]

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