

Fraszki

I.37 To Barbara

I see thee late in dancing drag:
Rein in a little, good my Ba--rbara dear, I pray.
The deuce hath made thy partner rage,
He seemeth not to mind thy ailing steps.
His prancing gives him foolish fame,
Doth he not know thee for grand – dainty – frail?
Be not thou fooled by any man,
Keep clear of strangers with thy fanciful dreams.
In monks take care not to confide,
And never let them come in sight of thy treasure.
Away keep priests who come and pry;
At night see that alone thou litanies sing.
And if my counsel's to be had,
Good Barbara, don't be malcontent.
Be always ready for the truth:
Instead let them all dance who've you now blessed.
'Tis time to doff this fancy wear,
And settle down to pious pre-occupations.
For all that glistens is not gold:
In bed is ugly all that's old-fashioned.
Thy conduct know before all folk,
Unless wouldst be their common jovial friend.
All villains they who but take stock
To flatter, whilst in private – mortal enemies.
The end thou canst thyself discover:
To grown children art thou much needed.

I.53 On a Mathematician

He's measured the earth and fathomed the depths;
He knows whence the sun rises and whither it sets;
The wind's nature kens, and futures foretells;
He just can't see there's a whore in the house where he dwells.

I.55 On a Lady

A lady was once begged with pleas most express
For what bounty – I'll leave your own wits to guess.
But being a woman kind, constant, and honest,
Wasting no word to deny, nor rashly to promise,

She showed her suppliant in with her husband to bathe,
To decide the petition while both guest and host laved.
They entered the bathroom where the husband parades
As Adam in Eden with his joys all displayed.
And rightly so, for the pizzle he had
No breeches could have bounded, harboured, or clad.
The guest just stood dumbfound, staring dismayed and precautioned
At finding his gentleman's virtues not matched in apportion.
He hastened his washing, he left even faster:
Few can play fiddle to Bekwark, lutemaster.

I.60 On a Surveyor

Since your statistics you're swift to compile,
Knowing exactly the wheel-turns per mile,
Tell me, o, tell me, have you surveyed
How many times Maude shudders each time she is laid?

I.61 The Serving Lad

The master for a lady sent
With whom he private business meant.
The boy was out a goodly while,
In which he could have rid a mile.
The lord through window looks at last
To see the boy his task surpass:
"Thou serv'st the lady well, anon,
"I said, 'ride *with* her, not *upon*.'" "

I.77 On the Graves of Sokal

Here we fought in battle brave,
Here for country found our grave.
Stranger, mourning us is wasted breath:
You, too, might know the soldier's death.

I.79 The Spanish Doctor

Our good friend the Doctor is off to his bed,
Not caring for supper and scared of bad 'ead.
"Let him go, let him go: let's give him his snooze,
"Stop wasting your time and get back to the booze."
"Supper is over, let's go find the Spaniard!"

“Right you are, but remember to bring a full tankard!”
“Up! Doctor, up! And let’s in, good friend!”
The Doctor’d not open, but the door did – in the end.
“One won’t hurt you! Here’s to you!” they cried.
“If ‘twere one only,” the poor Doctor replied.
And so from the one they all went to nine,
The Doctor’s poor brain started swimming in wine.
“Alas! Good my comrade – my will ye have shrunk,
“I went to bed sober – ye’ll see me up drunk!”

I.81 Epitaph on a Child

Father dear, weep not, mourn not for me,
Heaven’s the prize for my simplicity.
Would that so many bless’d years thee assuage
As Death hath robbed me of deservèd age.

I.90 On a Banquet

The privy costs a penny; the supper’s scant and scragged,
My fart’s worth more than my food – ‘tis not a healthy habit.

II.3 On Divorce

A man who wanted divorce arrived once at court,
The bishop asked of him wherein ‘twas his wife was at fault.
“I found her, M’lud, not a pure virgin,” the quarreller quoth.
“O, fool!” retorted the bishop, “O, drunkard, O, oaf!”
“To many a king it happens, and to many a peer,
“But never would they such gossip at this court have appear.
“Then thou, man, if virgin thou cravest, if woman thou rue,
“To Cologne thou shouldst go, there’s maids there some few!”

II.5 Epitaph on Sobiech

All who knew you, Sobiech, live
So admired the wealth which let you thrive.
But I learned the truth, in your want I knew:
‘Twas not you kept your money – it kept you.

II.6 On the Linden Tree

Stranger, come sit under my boughs and rest;
Relief I promise those by heat oppressed.
For though the sun dispatch his zenith-blades,
My leaves will smooth them into scattered shades.
Here soothing winds from breezy fields do vent,
Here nightingale and starling sing lament.
Here in my blossoms bustles a brisk but tiny beast,
Culling the honey to grace the grandest feast.
Whispering soft, I rustle leaves to sweep
The wearied traveller into sweetest sleep.
I bear no golden apples, yet I charm and please
As much as any arbor of Hesperides.

II.37 To Sleep

Sleep, a glimpse of death your somnials mime,
And a foretaste of the future time;
Wrap in fleeting dream this mortal flesh,
Free the soul from out its pond'rous mesh.
Let it forth to where the dawn wakes bright,
Or to where the dusk fades into night;
Whither snow and glacier reign supreme,
Or to where the sun swills pool and stream.
Let it upwards, through the stars to stray,
Through the orbits unknown, unsurveyed.
Let the spheres in mutual passage charm
My soul with music rare and calm.
Let it wander, wafted where it please –
Bring my body tranquil, temporal ease;
Never let it rue the soul's release;
Let it but glimpse its final, far-off peace.

II.40 To Wojtek

Indeed, dear Wojtek, hasten to unite:
Alone you waste, she wilts in wretched plight.
'Tis good that all that's in you to delight
You seek to share and with your friend's requite.
So hasten now, dear Wojtek, 'tis already night:
This sharing and uniting, I guess, will last till light.

II.42 The Old Man

The Priapic complaint caused the old man to suffer,
But the young wife made light of the pain to her duffer,
For the frequent hot spurts of his natural geyser
Used to pacify less in *him* than they would please *her*.
But at last the wise doctors came up with a cure:
The poor wife will lament: “ ‘Tis my downfall, for sure!
“Before, he was ill, but I was healthy and quick,
“Now is he whole, and it’s my turn to be sick!”

II.45 To Bartosz

Bartosz, bald and with a Spanish beard,
His comeliness should thus be cheered.
But the ladies turn away afeared:
He smells, they say, he’s mouldy-eared.
Which, if it be true, deplore the jeered,
His futile baldness and his precious beard.

II.63 On Bekwark

If only the lute had the power of speech,
This, I venture, is what she would say:
“Leave off me, ye rabble, the pipe’s for your screech,
“I am only for Bekwark to play.”

II.75 Epitaph on Adrian the Doctor

Death, you jest not, even medicos you snatch,
So what hope have patients to escape your catch?
Adrian, farewell then, physick won’t avail
When the ship of death awaits and bids thee sail.

II.82 On the *Fraszki*

How vain to keep these nugae their nine-full,
For so many years of lit’rary scribble!
To mould them so learned is only to niggle:
The *fraszka* remains, for all that, a trifle.

II.95 On Rome

Once all the peoples served the Roman arms,
As long as Rome held luck within her palms;
But when adversity struck Rome's career
From all sides danger then appeared.
More fortunate her tongue, for still today it charms:
The fruit of wit's more lasting than of arms.

(19th September 1999)

II.106 On the Bridge at Warsaw

Relentless Vistula, in vain you rage,
In vain you break your banks and roads engage.
The King will have you harnessed and subdued,
And all your wanton pranks must now conclude.
Save boat and oar your uncurbed neck must bear
This bridge as dry and public thoroughfare.

III 1. To His Native Hills and Forests

Ye hills, both high and forest-clad, what joy
To see you and recall how, as a boy,
I lived out here my blithe and easeful years,
When youth for neither rank nor honour cares.
Since then where've I not been? What sights not spied?
Across the deepest seas my boat has plied.
I've known the German, French, and Latin lands;
Far south I've roamed where Sybil's dungeon stands;
Now quiet scholar, now a questant knight
With sword-girt side; and now a merry courtier
In rich lord's hall; tomorrow to the cloistered
Chapter-house as humble clerk; and yet
I might 'mid grey-cowled monks be set
As abbot pledged to ward monastic plight.
I'm like a Proteus-form that's flicked and flexed
From snake to cloud; I cry: what next?
Within this head twist thousand silver strands:
With that which first grips firm I'll squarely stand.

III. 6 On the Linden Tree

My learned guest! If sitting in my shade
Thou may'st the heat of summer's day evade,
If lute on lap and ice-cooled wine
Within this freshness stowed seems more sublime,
Then pour me neither olive-oil nor wine:
Full-foliage trees best feed on rain divine.
But rather give me sip of graceful verse;
With envy green my barren friends imbuse.
Likewise the leaf-burdened. Say not, "What cares
"The lime for rhyme?" For forest sways when Orpheus plays.

III.7 On the Linden Tree

See, my good guest, how quick my green leaves have all withered,
Bared to my boughs, my skeleton shaking a-shivered;
And what be the cause of this sudden misventure, d'ye think?
'Tis not from the cold winter frost, nor from bitterest wind;
'Tis only a bad poet's bad verses that've drifted and dinned
Against my poor crest, and my branches are bald for the stink.

III.52 Epitaph on a Cat

As long as, Master Cat, thou'd stop at mice,
And hunting with the hawks thee ne'er enticed,
So long the general favourite thou, and stroked thy fur,
Whilst thou with stiff proud tail wouldst walking purr.
But when, thy heart on sundry sweetmeats set,
Thou didst to dove-cote steal, for fowl to get –
Alas! Poor wretch, for this thy neck's the price,
And round thy gallows dance both doves and mice.

III.53 Epitaph on Jost Glac

Here lies Jost Glac, the steward loyal
To his lord, the Northern Conqueror Royal.
This steward's summoned now before a King
To who the guiltless e'en owe reckoning.
Lord, may Thy mercy spare our evil ways,
For in Thy justice end we now our days.

III.54 On Good Health

O, noble health,
Thou – all our wealth!
None thy taste cost,
Till thou art lost.
'Tis only then
Thy worth we ken.
Then can we swear
Naught be so dear:
Neither estate,
Nor jewels ornate,
Nor fresh youth's face,
Nor beauty's grace.
Not e'en high place,
Nor rule's embrace.
These precious all
When health is whole.
When health is weak,
The whole world's bleak.
Most precious health,
Humble I dwell.
But welcome be:
Come, 'bide with me.

III.59 Epitaph on Rozyna

Sate of old age, here lieth Rosine,
Of age she is sate, but not of the wine,
She asks not for mass, nor candle and knell,
Rather she'd have her green pitcher of ale.

III.59 On Marek

Marek weeps not that he must from hence,
Marek weeps for the knell-ringer's pence.
To make the same sum cover more, for economy's sake,
He bade his son hurry and die quick in his wake.

III.68 On the Wine Goblet

I waited on the lords of Cracow long ago,
My sparkling beauty made their tables glow.
The time's now that by Głoskowski I am owned,
A nobler lord, in truth, I never could have known.

III.70 The Goat

The wisdom-lovers often stress
That brutes no reason can possess.
But Billy Goat a trick hath shown,
And to the world his wit made known.
Of late a loach he swallowed live;
The wily fish his guts survived
And out did slip. Once more Bill pounced:
Like Theseus on his thread out bounced
Again the fish. O, Goat! Too swift
Is thy digestion! If thou shift
A third time round this hapless loach,
He'll know the road, thy rump's approach.
Perpend the goat, the fourth time wise,
Conceit most learned to devise:
He gulps, but rump to wall doth press,
His courier traps, though thrice transgressed.

III. 72 A Prayer for Rain

Bestower of all good things, eternal Lord,
To You the earth aflame from sun-swept sword,
The fainting flowers and the log-stalked grain,
Promise of harvest, stoop and pray for rain.

Repose upon the clouds Your sacred hand,
And let them water woods and parched land;
Listen, You who out the dry rock-face
Did once draw springs, and show Your grace.

For You are He who sends the dew and fills
With living waters riverheads unstilled;
Ravines and raging seas You hold withdrawn;
You feed the flashing stars and fiery dawn;
At Your hest this world's in deluge lost,
Or like leaf in tempest-fire is tossed.

