Cowley, Abraham, 1618-1667: On the Death of Mrs Katherine Philips. [from Philips, Katherine, 1631-1664: Poems (1667)]

[1.]

1 Cruel Disease! Ah could it not suffice
2 Thy old and constant spight to exercise
3 Against the gentlest and the fairest sex,
4 Which still thy Depredations most do vex?
5 Where still thy malice most of all
6 (Thy malice or thy lust) does on the fairest fall?
7 And in them most assault the fairest place,
8 The Throne of Empress Beauty, even the Face?
9 There was enough of that here to asswage
10 (One would have thought) either thy Lust or Rage:
11 Wast not enough, when thou, Profane Disease,
Didst on this glorious Temple seize,
Wast not enough, like a wild zealot there,
All the rich outward ornaments to tear,
Deface the Innocent Pride of beauteous Images?
Wast not enough thus rudely to defile,
But thou must quite destroy the goodly Pile?
And thy unbounded Sacrilege commit
On the inward Holyest Holy of her Wit?
Cruel Disease! there thou mistook'st thy Power;
No Mine of Death can that Devour;
On her Embalmed Name it will abide
An Everlasting Pyramide,
As high as Heaven the Top, as Earth the Basis wide.

2.

All Ages past, Record; all Countrys now
In various kinds such equal Beauties show,
That even Judge Paris would not know
On whom the Golden Apple to bestow.
Though Goddesses to his sentence did submit,
Women and Lovers would appeal from it;
Nor durst he say, of all the female race
This is the sovereign Face.
And some (though these be of a kind that's Rare,
That's much, oh much less frequent then the Fair)
So equally renown'd for virtue are,
That it the Mother of the Gods might pose,
When the best Woman for her guide she chose,

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But if Apollo should design
A Woman Laureat to make,
Without dispute he would Orinda take,
Though Sappho and the famous Nine
Stood by, and did repine.
To be a Princess or a Queen
Is Great, but 'tis a Greatness always seen,
The World did never but two Women know
Who, one by fraud, the other by wit did rise
To the two tops of Spiritual dignities;
One Female Pope of old, one Female Poet now.

3.
Of Female Poets who had names of old,
Nothing is shewn, but onely told,
And all we hear of them, perhaps may be
Male Flattery onely, and Male Poetry;
Few minutes did their Beauties Lightning wast,
The Thunder of their voice did longer last,
But that too soon was paste
The certain proofs of our Orinda's Wit
In her own lasting characters are writ,
And they will long my praise of them survive,
Though long perhaps too that may live.
The trade of Glory managed by the pen
Though great it be, and every where is found,
Does bring in but small profit to us men;
'Tis by the number of the sharers drown'd,
Orinda in the female Coasts of fame
Engrosses all the Goods of a Poetique name,
She does no Partner with her see;
Does all the Business there Alone which we
Are forced to carry on by a whole company.

But Wit's like a Luxuriant Vine,
Unless to Virtues prop it join,
Firm and erect towards Heaven bound,
Though it with beauteous leaves and pleasant fruit be crown'd
It lies deform'd, and rotting on the ground.

Now shame and blushes on us all
Who our own Sex superiour call;
Orinda does our boasting Sex out-do,
Not in wit only, but in virtue too:
She does above our best examples rise,
In hate of vice, and scorn of vanities.
Never did spirit of the manly make,
And dipt all o're in Learnings sacred Lake,
A temper more invulnerable take;
No violent passion could an entrance find
Into the tender goodness of her mind:
Through walls of stone those furious bullets may
Force their impetuous way;
When her soft breast they hit, damped and dead they lay.
The fame of friendship, which so long had told
Of three or four illustrious Names of old,
Till hoarse and weary of the tale she grew,
Rejoyces now to have got a new,
A new, and more surprising story
Of fair Lucasta and Orinda's glory.
As when a prudent man does once perceive
That in some foreign Country he must live,
The Language and the Manners he does strive
To understand and practise here,
That he may come no stranger there;
So well Orinda did her self prepare,
In this much different Clime for her remove,
To the glad world of Poetry and Love;
There all the blest do but one body grow,
And are made one too with their glorious Head,
Whom there triumphantly they wed,
After the secret Contract past below;
There Love into Identity does go,
'Tis the first unities Monarchique Throne,
The Centre that knits all, where the great Three's but One.

Abraham Cowley.