

Representative extract from *Women's Works*, vol. 4 (pp. 160-1)

Sir William Davenant (1606-1668) – poet, playwright, and stage manager; godson of William Shakespeare; and a favorite of Queen Henriette Marie – was named poet laureate of England in 1638, following the death of Ben Jonson. That same year, Davenant lost his nose to syphilis, a mishap that made him the butt of many witticisms, including a satirical poem by Hester Pulter:

**To Sir W. D. upon the Unspeakable Loss  
of the Most Conspicuous and  
Chief Ornament of his Frontispiece**

Sir:

Extremely, I deplore your loss!  
You're like Cheapside, without a Cross! 1  
Or like a dial and no gnomon.  
In pity, trust me, I think no man  
But would his leg or arm expose  
To cut you out another nose.  
Nor of the female sex there's none  
But 'ld be one flesh (though not one bone):  
I (though unknown) would slight the pain  
That you might have so great a gain. 2  
Nay, any foot (did he know it)  
Would give his nose, to have yo' wit.  
And I myself would do the same 3  
Did I not fear 'twould blur my fame.  
("I," as once said a gallant dame,  
"My nose would venture, not my fame.")  
For who but that bright Eye above 4  
Would know 'twere *charity*, not *love*?  
Then, sir, your pardon I must beg— 5  
Excuse my nose: accept my leg!  
But yet, be sure, both night and day,  
For me as for yourself you pray.  
For if I first should chance to go  
To visit those sad shades below,  
As my frail flesh there putrifies,  
Your nose, no doubt, will sympathize. 6  
But this, I fear – lest that blind boy 7  
(Which Fate defend!° – yet such a toy 8  
May take the chit) should shoot *again*.  
Then the next loss will be your brain.  
Some coy young lass you might adore

[25]

<sup>1</sup> *gnomon* ] the angled plate on a sundial that indicates the time of day by casting its shadow

<sup>2</sup> *foot* ] footservant (with pun)

<sup>3</sup> *blur my fame* ] i.e., as a syphilitic woman

<sup>4</sup> *charity, not love* ] i.e., Who but God would know that I lost my nose as a charitable gift (to Sir William Davenant) and not (as he lost his) from making love to the wrong person?

<sup>5</sup> *accept my leg* ] 1. accept my curtesy; 2. take my leg but let me keep my nose

<sup>6</sup> *blind boy* ] Cupid (Eros), the god of love; *such a toy* ] the god's bow, gold-tipped arrow, and quiver of desire

<sup>7</sup> *Fate defend* ] may Fate forbid

<sup>8</sup> *chit* ] young cub or whelp; here, Cupid, son of Venus

Which would prefer some base Medore 9  
 And all your wit and titles slight,  
 T'embrace a page before a knight.  
 Then should some noble-minded friend,  
 Astolpho-like, to Heaven ascend; 10  
 (And, having searchèd near and far  
 And found your most capacious jar), 11  
 Then being with joy returned again  
 You could not then snuff up your brain,  
 Though all your strength you should expose—  
 You want the organ called "a nose."  
 Prodigious the *knight* remains, 12  
 Without or nose, or fame, or brains. 13  
 Then a bold ordnance struck the title off! 14  
 Thus the proud Parcae sit and at us scoff. 15  
 What now remains – the *man*, at least?  
 No, surely: nothing left, but *beast*.  
 Then royal favor glued it on again, 16  
 And now the knight is bow-dyed and in grain. 17  
 Then trample not that honor in the dust  
 In being a slave to those are slaves to lust. (1643)

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William Davenant, in wig, with his nose artfully restored by the engraver (pub. 1672)

<sup>9</sup> *Medore* ] In *Orlando Furioso*, Angelica falls in love and in bed with Medore, squire to Sir Cloridano

<sup>10</sup> *Astolpho-like* ] In *Orlando Furioso*, Astolpho travels to the Moon, to cure Orlando of his madness by returning with his lost wits, in a vial.

<sup>11</sup> *jar* ] i.e., a jar, not of your lost wits, but full of snuff, pulverized tobacco leaves inhaled through the nose

<sup>12</sup> *Prodigious* ] like a talented genius (*OED* 2); like a monstrous freak (*OED* 3)

<sup>13</sup> *or ... or ... or* ] either ... or ... or

<sup>14</sup> *ordnance* ] missile (with innuendo) which when fired destroys the knight's nose, reputation, sanity, and knighthood

<sup>15</sup> *Parcae* ] the Fates

<sup>16</sup> *royal favor* ] Davenant was knighted by the king in 1643

<sup>17</sup> *bow-dyed and in grain* ] dyed scarlet, indelibly red; in royal colors; blushing