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# **Zophiel A Poem**

Maria Gowen Brooks

# Imprint

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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, to wit:  
District Clerk's Office.

Be it remembered, that on the twelfth day of August, A. D. 1825, in the fiftieth year of the Independence of the United States of America, *Richardson & Lord*, of the said District, have deposited in this office the Title of a Book, the right whereof they claim as Proprietors, in the words following, *to wit*:

Zophiel, a Poem, by Mrs. Brooks.  
— — — — — *Forse la sorte*  
*E stanca di me tormentar. — Metastasio.*

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JOHN W. DAVIS,  
Clerk of the District of Massachusetts.

## PREFACE.

Wishing to make a continued effort, in an art which, though almost in secret, has been adored and assiduously cultivated from earliest infancy, it was my intention to have chosen some incident from Pagan history, as the foundation of my contemplated poem. But, looking over the Jewish annals, I was induced to select for my purpose, one of their well-known stories which besides its extreme beauty, seemed to open an extensive field for the imagination which might therein avail itself not only of important and elevated truths but pleasing and popular superstitions.

Having finished one Canto I left the United States for the West Indies in the hope of being able to sail thence for Great Britain, where I might submit what I had done to the candour of some able writer; publish it, if thought expedient; and obtain advice and materials for the improvement and prosecution of my work. But as events have transpired to frustrate that intention I have endeavored to make it as perfect, as with the means I have access to, is possible.

It is, now, far beneath what might have been done, under the influence of more decided hopes and more auspicious circumstances. Yet, as it is, I am induced to place it before the public, with that anxiety which naturally attends the doubtful accomplishment of any favourite object, on the principle that no artist can make the same improvement, or labour with so much pleasure to himself, in private, as when comparing his efforts with those of others, and listening to the opinions of critics and the remarks of connoisseurs. The beauty, though she may view herself, in her mirror, from the ringlets of her hair to the sole of her slipper, and appear most lovely to her own gaze, can never be certain of her power to please until the suffrage of society confirm the opinion formed in seclusion; and "Qu'est ce que la beaute s'elle ne touche pas?"

Literary employments are necessary to the happiness and almost to the vitality of those who pursue them with much ardour; and though the votaries of the muses are, too often, debased by faults, yet, abstractedly considered, a taste for any art, if well directed,

must seem a preservative not only against melancholy, but even against misery and vice.

Genius, whatever its bent, supposes a refined and delicate moral sense and though sometimes perverted by sophistry or circumstance, and sometimes failing through weakness; can always, at least, comprehend and feel, the grandeur of honour and the beauty of virtue.

As to the faults of those to whom the world allows the possession of genius, there are, perhaps, good grounds for the belief that they have actually fewer than those employed about ordinary affairs; but the last are easily concealed and the first carefully dragged to light.

The miseries too, sometimes attendant to persons of distinguished literary attainments, are often held forth as a subject of "warn and scare" but Cervantes and Camoens would both have been cast into prison even though unable to read or write, and Savage, though a mechanic or scrivener, would probably have possessed the same failings and consequently have fallen into the same, or a greater degree of poverty and suffering. Alas! how many, in the flower of youth and strength, perish in the loathsome dungeons of this island, and, when dead, are refused a decent grave; who, in many instances, were their histories traced by an able pen would be wept by half the civilized world.

Although I can boast nothing but an extreme and unquenchable love for the art to which my humble aspirations are confined, my lyre has been a solace when every thing else has failed; soothing when agitated, and when at peace furnishing that exercise and excitement without which the mind becomes sick, and all her faculties retrograde when they ought to be advancing. Men, when they feel that nature has kindled in their bosoms a flame which must incessantly be fed, can cultivate eloquence and exert it, in aid of the unfortunate before the judgment seats of their country; or endeavour to "lure to the skies" such as enter the temples of their god; but woman, alike subject to trials and vicissitudes and endowed with the same wishes, (for the observation, "there is no sex to soul," is certainly not untrue,) condemned, perhaps, to a succession of arduous though minute duties in which, oftentimes, there is nothing to charm and little to distract, unless she be allowed the exercise of her

pen must fall into melancholy and despair, and perish, (to use the language of Mad. de Stael,) "consumed by her own energies."

Thus do we endeavour to excuse any inordinate or extreme attachment by labouring to show in their highest colours the merits of its object.

Zophiel may or may not be called entirely a creature of imagination, as comports with the faith of the reader; he is not, however, endowed with a single miraculous attribute; for which the general belief of ages, even among christians, may not be produced as authority.

The stanza in which his story is told though less complicate and beautiful than the Spencerian, is equally ancient; and favorable to a pensive melody, is also susceptible of much variety.

The marginal notes will be useless to such as have read much.

*San Patricio, Island of Cuba, March 30, 1825.*

## INVOCATION.

Thou with the dark blue eye upturned to heaven,  
And cheek now pale, now warm with radiant glow,  
    Daughter of God, — most dear, —  
    Come with thy quivering tear,  
And tresses wild, and robes of loosened flow, —  
To thy lone votaress let one look be given!

Come Poesy! nor like some just-formed maid,  
With heart as yet unswoln by bliss or woe; —  
    But of such age be seen  
    As Egypt's glowing queen,  
When her brave Roman learned to love her so  
That death and loss of fame, were, by a smile, repaid.

Or as thy Sappho, when too fierce assailed  
By stern ingratitude her tender breast: —  
    Her love by scorn repaid  
    Her friendship true betrayed,  
Sick of the guileful earth, she sank for rest  
In the cold waves embrace; while Grecian muse bewailed.

Be to my mortal eye, like some fair dame —  
Ripe, but untouched by time; whose frequent blush  
    Plays o'er her cheek of truth  
    As soft as earliest youth;  
While thoughts exalted to her mild eye rush —  
And the expanded soul, tells 'twas from heaven it came.

Daughter of life's first cause; who, when he saw  
The ills that unborn innocents must bear,

When doomed to come to earth —  
Bethought — and gave thee birth  
To charm the poison from affliction there;  
And from his source eternal, bade thee draw.

He gave thee power, inferior to his own  
But in control o'er matter. 'Mid the crash  
Of earthquake, war, and storm,  
Is seen thy radiant form  
Thou com'st at midnight on the lightning's flash,  
And ope'st to those thou lov'st new scenes and worlds unknown.

And still, as wild barbarians fiercely break  
The graceful column and the marble dome —  
Where arts too long have lain  
Debased at pleasure's fain,  
And bleeding justice called on wrath to come,  
'Mid ruins heaped around, thou bidst thy votarists wake.

Methinks I see thee on the broken shrine  
Of some fall'n temple — where the grass waves high  
With many a flowret wild;  
While some lone, pensive, child  
Looks on the sculpture with a wondering eye  
Whose kindling fires betray that he is chosen thine. [FN#1]

[FN#1] Genius, perhaps, has often, nay generally, been awakened  
and the whole future bent of the mind thus strongly operated upon,  
determined, by some circumstance trivial as this.

Or on some beetling cliff — where the mad waves  
Rush echoing thro' the high-arched caves below,  
I view some love-reft fair  
Whose sighing warms the air,  
Gaze anxious on the ocean as it raves

And call on thee-alone, of power to sooth her woe.

Friend of the wretched; smoother of the couch  
Of pining hope; thy pitying form I know!  
    Where thro' the wakeful night,  
    By a dim taper's light,  
Lies a pale youth, upon his pallet low,  
Whose wan and woe-worn charms rekindle at thy touch.

Friendless – oppressed by fate – the restless fires  
Of his thrall'd soul prey on his beauteous frame –  
    Till, strengthened by thine aid,  
    He shapes some kindred maid,  
Pours forth in song the life consuming flame,  
And for awhile forgets his sufferings and desires.

Scorner of thoughtless grandeur, thou hast chose  
Thy *best-beloved* from ruddy Nature's breast:  
    The grotto dark and rude –  
    The forest solitude –  
The craggy mount by blushing clouds carest –  
Have altars where thy light ethereal glows. [FN#2]

[FN#2] Every nation, however rude, has, as it has been justly observed, a taste for poetry. This art after all that has and can be said for and against it, is the language of nature, and among the relics of the most polished and learned nations little has survived except such as simply depicts those natural feelings and images which have ever existed and ever must continue. Most of the great poets have been individuals of humble condition rising from the mass of the people by that natural principle which causes the most ethereal particles to rise and the denser to sink to the earth. But, as Byron exquisitely says, in one of the most wonderfully beautiful pages he ever composed,

"Many are poets who have never penned  
Their inspirations, and, perchance, the best;  
They felt, they loved, and died; but would not lend  
Their thoughts to meaner beings; they compest  
The god within them, and rejoined the stars  
Unlaurel'd upon earth."

In the place where I now write amid several hundred Africans of different ages, and nations, the most debased of any on the face of the earth, I have been enabled to observe, even in this, last link of the chain of humanity, the strong natural love for music and poetry.

Any little incident which occurs on the estate where they toil, and which the greater part of them are never suffered to leave, is immediately made the subject of a rude song which they, in their broken Spanish, sing to their companions; and thereby relieve a little the monotony of their lives.

I have observed these poor creatures, under various circumstances, and though, generally, extremely brutal, have, in some instances, heard touches of sentiment from them, when under the influence of grief, equal to any which have flowed from the pen of Rousseau.

Thy sovereign priest by earth's vile sons was driven  
To make the cold unconscious earth his bed: [FN#3]  
    The damp cave mocked his sighs —  
    But from his sightless eyes,  
Wrung forth by wrongs, the anguished drops he shed,  
Fell each as an appeal to summon thee from heaven.

Thou sought'st him in his desolation; placed  
On thy warm bosom his unpillowed head;  
    Bade him for visions live  
    More bright than worlds can give;  
O'er his pale lips thy soul infusive shed  
That left his dust adored where kings decay untraced.

[FN#3] "On the banks of the Meles was shown the spot where Critheis, the mother of Homer, brought him into the world, and the cavern to which he retired to compose his immortal verses. A monument erected to his memory and inscribed with his name stood in the middle of the city – it was adorned with spacious porticos under which the citizens assembled."

Source of deep feeling – of surpassing love –  
Creative power, – 'tis thou hast peopled heaven  
    Since man from dust arose  
    His birth the cherub owes [FN#4]  
To thee – by thee his rapturous harp was given  
And white wings tipp'd with gold that cool the domes above.

[FN#4] The Indians (says M. de Voltaire) from whom every species of theology is derived, invented the angels and represented them in their ancient book the "Shasta," as immortal creatures, participating in the divinity of their creator; against whom a great number revolted in heaven, "Les Parsis ignicoles, qui subsistent encore ont communique a l'auteur de la religion des anciens Perses les noms des anges que les premiers Perses reconnaissaient. On en trouve cent-dix-neuf, parmi desquels ne sont ni Raphael ni Gabriel que les Perses n'adoptèrent que long-tems apres. Ces mots sont Chaldeens; ils ne furent connus des Juifs que dans leur captivite."

Husher of secret sighs – from childhood's hour  
The slave of Fate, I've knelt before thy throne;  
    To thy loved courts have sped  
    Whene'er my heart has bled,  
And every ray of bliss that heart has known  
Has reached it thro' thy grief-dispelling power.

Fain thro' my native solitudes I'd roam  
Bathe my rude harp in my bright native streams  
    Twine it with flowers that bloom

But for the deserts gloom,  
Or, for the long and jetty hair that gleams  
O'er the dark-bosomed maid that makes the wild her home. [FN#5]

[FN#5] This invocation when composed was intended to precede a series of poems entitled Occidental Eclogues; which work the writer has never found opportunity to finish.

I sing not for the crowd, or low or high—  
A pensive wanderer on life's thorny heath  
    Earth's pageants for my view  
    Have nought: I love but few,  
And few who chance to hear thy trembling breath,  
My lyre, for her who wakes thee, have a sigh. [FN#6]

[FN#6] It may not be improper to observe that these stanzas were composed during a period of misfortune and dejection.

Forsake me not! none ever loved thee more!  
Fair queen, I'll meet woe's fearfulest frown—and smile;  
    If mid the scene severe  
    Thou'lt drop on me one tear,  
And let thy flitting form sometimes beguile  
The present of its ills—I'll scorn them and adore.

Then warm the form relentless fate would chill—  
Dark lours my night—Oh! give me one embrace!  
    If every pain I bear  
    Befit me for thy care,  
Come sorrow—scorn—desertion—I can chase  
Despair, fell watching for her victim still.

## ZOPHIEL.

### CANTO I.

#### I.

The time has been — this holiest records say —  
In punishment for crimes of mortal birth,  
When spirits banished from the realms of day  
Wandered malignant o'er the nighted earth.(1)

And from the cold and marble lips declared,  
Of some blind-worshipped — earth-created god,  
Their deep deceits; which trusting monarchs snared  
Filling the air with moans, with gore the sod. [FN#7]

Yet angels doffed their robes in radiance dyed,  
And for a while the joys of heaven delayed,  
To watch benign by some just mortal's side —  
Or meet th' aspiring love of some high gifted maid. [FN#8]

Blest were those days! — can these dull ages boast  
Aught to compare? tho' now no more beguile —  
Chain'd in their darkling depths th' infernal host —  
Who would not brave a fiend to share an angel's smile?

[FN#7] The god who conducted the Hebrews sent a malignant spirit to speak from the mouth of the prophets, in order to deceive king Achab.

[FN#8] It is useless to note this stanza, as two well-known poems have lately been founded on the same passage of the Pentateuch to which it alludes.

## II.

'Twas then there lived a captive Hebrew pair;  
In woe th' embraces of their youth had past,  
And blest their paler years one daughter – fair  
She flourished, like a lonely rose, the last

And loveliest of her line. The tear of joy –  
The early love of song – the sigh that broke  
From her young lip – the best-beloved employ –  
What womanhood disclosed in infancy bespoke.

A child of passion – tenderest and best  
Of all that heart has inly loved and felt;  
Adorned the fair enclosure of her breast –  
Where passion is not found, no virtue ever dwelt.

Yet not, perverted, would my words imply  
The impulse given by Heaven's great Artizan  
Alike to man and worm – mere spring, whereby  
The distant wheels of life, while time endures, roll on –

But the collective ministry that fill  
About the soul, their all-important place –  
That feed her fires – empower her fainting will –  
And write the god on feeble mortals face.

## III.

Yet anger, or revenge, envy or hate  
The damsel knew not: when her bosom burned  
And injury darkened the decrees of fate,

She had more pitious wept to see that pain returned.

Or if, perchance, tho' formed most just and pure,  
Amid their virtue's wild luxuriance hid,  
Such germ all mortal bosoms must immure  
Which sometimes show their poisonous heads unbid —

If haply such the lovely Hebrew finds,  
Self knowledge wept th' abasing truth to know,  
And *innate pride*, that *queen of noble minds*,  
Crushed them indignant ere a bud could grow.

#### IV.

And such — ev'n now, in earliest youth are seen —  
But would they live, with armour more deform,  
Their love — o'erflowing breasts must learn to screen:  
"The bird that sweetest sings can least endure the storm."

#### V.

And yet, despite of all the gushing tear —  
The melting tone — the darting heart-stream — proved,  
The soul that in them spoke, could spurn at fear  
Of death or danger; and had those she loved

Required it at their need, she could have stood,  
Unmoved, as some fair-sculptured statue, while  
The dome that guards it, earth's convulsions, rude  
Are shivering — meeting ruin with a smile.

#### VI.

And this, at intervals in language bright  
Told her blue eyes; tho' oft the tender lid

Like lilly drooping languidly; and white  
And trembling — all save love and lustre hid.

Then, as young christian bard had sung, they seemed  
Like some Madonna in his soul — so sainted;  
But opening in their energy — they beamed  
As tasteful pagans their Minerva painted;

While o'er her graceful shoulders' milky swell,  
Like those full oft on little children seen  
Almost to earth her silken ringlets fell  
Nor owned Pactolus' sands more golden sheen.

## VII.

And now, full near, the hour unwished for drew  
When fond, Sephora hoped to see her wed;  
And, for 'twould else expire, impatient grew  
To renovate her race from beauteous Egla's bed.

## VIII.

None of their kindred lived to claim her hand  
But stranger-youths had asked her of her sire  
With gifts and promise fair; he could withstand  
All save her tears; and harkening her desire

Still left her free; but soon her mother drew  
From her a vow, that when the twentieth year  
Its full, fair finish o'er her beauty threw,  
If what her fancy fed on, came not near,

She would entreat no more but to the voice  
Of her light-giver hearken; and her life  
And love — all yielding to that kindly choice

Would hush each idle wish and learn to be a wife.

## IX.

Now oft it happ'd when morning task was done  
And for the virgins of her household made  
And lotted each her toil; while yet the sun  
Was young, fair Egla to a woody shade,

Loved to retreat; there, in the fainting hour  
Of sultry noon the burning sunbeam fell  
Like a warm twilight; so bereft of power,  
It gained an entrance thro' the leafy bower;  
That scarcely shrank the tender lilly bell

Tranquil and lone in such a light to be,  
How sweet to sense and soul! – the form recline  
Forgets it ere felt pain; and reverie,  
Sweet mother of the muses, heart and soul are thine. [FN#9]

[FN#9] Every one talks and reads of groves, but it is impossible for those who never felt it, to conceive the effect of such a situation in a warm climate. In this island the woods which are naturally so interwoven with vines as to be impervious to a human being, are in some places, cleared and converted into nurseries for the young coffee-trees which remain sheltered from the sun and wind till sufficiently grown to transplant. To enter one of these "semilleros," as they are here called, at noon day, produces an effect like that anciently ascribed to the waters of Lethe. After sitting down upon the trunk of a fallen cedar or palm-tree, and breathing for a moment, the freshness of the air and the odour of the passion flower, which is one of the most abundant, and certainly the most beautiful of the climate; the noise of the trees, which are continually kept in motion by the trade winds; the fluttering and various notes, though not musical, of the birds; the loftiness of the green canopy, for the

trunks of the trees are bare to a great height, and seem like pillars supporting the thick mass of leaves above; and the rich mellow light which the intense rays of the sun, thus impeded, produce; have altogether such an effect that one involuntarily forgets every thing but the present, and it requires a strong effort to rise and leave the place.