A Thousand Martyrs

By Aphra Behn

A thousand martyrs I have made,
   All sacrificed to my desire;
A thousand beauties have betrayed,
   That languish in resistless fire.
The untamed heart to hand I brought,
And fixed the wild and wandering thought.

I never vowed nor sighed in vain
   But both, though false, were well received.
The fair are pleased to give us pain,
   And what they wish is soon believed.
And though I talked of wounds and smart,
Love's pleasures only touched my heart.

 Alone the glory and the spoil
   I always laughing bore away;
The triumphs, without pain or toil,
   Without the hell, the heav'n of joy.
And while I thus at random rove
Despise the fools that whine for love.

Aphra Behn was the first English woman to earn her living as a writer. Her fiction — including a work critical of slavery — is often political and her plays are frequently bawdy. She sometimes scandalized her audience, but her work broke new literary ground and sold well.

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