

Further Revelations of Oscar Wilde



Tome I

Dialogues of the Dead

(The Late-Repentant)

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Foreword
A Recently Discovered Transcript of a Séance
with the Spirit of Oscar Wilde in Purgatory
Conducted by Unnamed Members of the Psychical Research Society

How do you find the regimen in Purgatory, Mr Wilde?

Very tedious. For the most part it is a dull round of penitential exercises. It is true, however—let me be fair—that Heaven’s Home Office have instituted various humane reforms in the Purgatorial regimen that have somewhat alleviated the harshness of working conditions here. For example, the work week has been shortened to five days, and the work day to eight hours. The tasks we are required to perform on the various Terraces remain, as I say, quite tedious, but our evenings and weekends are generally free. We are at liberty at such times to engage in conversation and recreational activities of a harmless sort. (No gambling, ‘whoring’, or fox-hunting is allowed, for example.) We are free to assemble on our respective Terraces for discreet little ‘soirees’. (Whereas some of the less imaginative types seem to enjoy attending lectures and holding prayer meetings.) One is also free to read, and due to various donations, prayers, and intercessions, the library here has amassed considerable holdings. Among my interlocutors are many literary luminaries, some of whom can boast of a lengthy tenure on these austere salvific heights.

You previously indicated that overcrowding in Purgatory has necessitated a consolidation of work assignments and a shortening of the penitential term. I also understand that the termination date is set by the Authorities and is compulsory. Sinners are no longer permitted to choose the time of their ascension into Paradise; they are simply whisked up at the appointed hour. How are these policy changes actually implemented, on a day-to-day basis?

In my case it is quite simple. I repent Monday and Tuesday on the Terrace of Pride, and Wednesday and Thursday on the Terrace of Lust, whilst Friday is split into two four-hour shifts, the first devoted to lamenting my Sloth, the second to bemoaning my Gluttony. The length of the exercise, as you may infer, is proportional to the gravity of the sin.

I found the Pride regimen extremely onerous at first. Lugging a giant rock around a narrow ledge for eight consecutive hours—well, I have neglected to mention the fifteen-minute ‘breaks’ we are allowed every hour—this is literally back-breaking work; or would be if we had physical and not spiritual bodies. I petitioned the Heavenly Home Office for special consideration on the grounds of my frail health and my periodic dizzy spells—and in any case, I am a writer by trade, not a stevedore. ‘It is not that I am too *proud* to stoop and crawl about on all fours through the dust beneath a large, ungainly slab of stone’, I wrote in my petition. ‘It is simply that I am *infirm*’. I also reminded them of the two years of purely physical hard labour I had already endured in the English penal system. With surprising alacrity a representative from the Purgatory Commission came round to speak with me

personally about the matter. After some discussion it was decided that I should be lent the services of an angel to assist me in my oppressive task. This angel (a strapping, radiantly handsome youth named Guido), being immortal and of supernatural strength, periodically relieves me of my burden by carrying the stone himself. In fact, we have become such good friends of late—I think my lavish compliments may have predisposed him in my favour—that he now does most, if not all, the carrying, while I walk beside him companionably, entertaining him with improbable stories and dispensing a paradoxical epigram or two, to keep him, as it were, on his toes. So that the arrangement is really quite satisfactory for both of us.

Still, all that walking is a sore trial for one's feet, and a severe test of one's patience. But I bear it all with meekness and equanimity.

The Lust regimen I found exceedingly uncomfortable in the first few years. One is, I need hardly remind you as readers of Dante, burning in purifying *fire*. The flames, are, by definition, *hot*. So I again respectfully petitioned the Authorities—they are really very forward-looking and progressive in their mode of approach to reforming this ancient and in many ways somewhat barbarous institution—and again they responded in the most helpful manner. It was decided, after some consultation among the Committee members, that the lust-purging fires had, after all, always been meant to be understood *allegorically*; that as such they signified not a physical incineration but a spiritual 'cauterisation' as it were, of a vicious inclination through 'zealous' (from the Greek for 'burning') repentance; and that therefore, it was perfectly reasonable to substitute for this allegorical phlogiston-like substance an excessively warm and humid allegorical *climate*—humid enough to be quite uncomfortable, thereby providing the necessary spur and reminder to the Sinner—in this case, myself—that the heat of sexual desire really produces only a great deal of sweat and an unpleasant sensation of clamminess, and in its wake may come a change of heart and most certainly a change of sheets. So you will not be too surprised to learn that, after eight hours of enduring really very *enervating* temperatures, I am full of zeal to immerse my spiritual body in the cooling waters of the cast-iron bath-tub provided to sinners for purposes of hygiene and refreshment.

As for Friday's four-hour Sloth 'marathon': the exertion required to sprint around the Terrace forty times during that period put far too much strain on my depleted reserves of stamina. I pleaded an asthmatic condition to the Authorities, and they were kind enough take my weakened state of health into consideration. Making allowances for my sedentary life as a gentleman and man of letters, they thoughtfully lent me the use of a motor vehicle—no ostentatious Rolls Royce, but a purely utilitarian old Daimler. (Virgil would be indignant if he learned of this; Dante would be blind with rage.) And as I am a hopelessly incompetent driver—in all things mechanical I freely admit to being helpless—they took the further, and as far as I know, unprecedented step of providing me with a seraphic chauffeur. Since that time the Sloth exercise has gone rather smoothly—though again, the iterative nature of the circular itinerary, and the unchanging scenery, consisting merely of featureless rock-face to one side and the boundless ocean to the other, make it a very dull pastime, and there is the additional nuisance of those vociferous herds of strenuous

runners, who are always getting in the way of the vehicle and obliging the chauffeur to slow down or even come to a stop, and occasionally he must even resort to the vulgar expedient of 'honking' the klaxon—though the loud noise *does* get their attention, and, they tend to move aside, like cattle, and let us through.

This leaves only four hours to be accounted for on Friday, and these, as I have said, are devoted to repenting Gluttony—and oh what horrible hours! One is put on the most abstemious diet

imaginable: *one* cucumber sandwich at noon, and a stick of celery two hours later! When five o'clock comes round and the 'factory' whistle blows—yes, they have installed one—imagine the gusto with which I attack the meal that awaits me in my quarters!

Would you describe it as an extravagant meal?

It is hardly a Lucullan feast of the sort on offer at Kettner's, but it is substantial, reasonably well-prepared fare, better, on average, than one is likely to encounter in any respectable middle-class restaurant in Putney.

But, really, all this is rather dull stuff. The mere mechanical business of repentance merits no further description. What is of interest is the company one keeps during leisure hours, for here one encounters many distinguished and provocative personalities. I have met, and talked, with all the names in literary history—or so it seems. For example, I have had lively exchanges with Lord Byron—who, unlike Don Juan, is not in Hell, despite Mrs Grundy's fervent prayers, no doubt. I have become reacquainted with Marcel Proust, whom I knew very briefly in Paris during my years on earth. Tennyson is also here, as is—this may surprise you—his Eminence Cardinal Newman. And there are numerous others, as you shall see. Through the good offices of Mr V these conversations have been recorded, and for dramatic purposes many have been given stage sets, props, and other trappings of the theatre. (For example, my talk with Rossetti is set in his house in Cheyne Walk, and as an exotic novelty a llama and a toucan are introduced.) Perhaps all this is merely hallucinatory nonsense, by which a lonely man entertains himself—doing the poets in different voices.

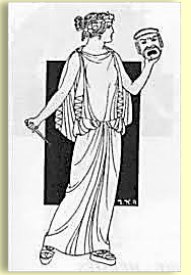
At any rate, it is these entertainments and encounters of my leisure hours, real or imagined, that I would like to share with you. Accordingly, I invite you to speak with Mr V, who is present among you. He will provide you with copies of a beautifully illustrated transcript—really a work of art in itself—of some of these conversations (together with some introductory material I later added), and they will teach you more of what the Purgatorial experience is like than any detailed enumeration of the mere rote exercises with which we fill the time between our hours of leisure. It is in these conversations, in fact, for all their appearance of the casual and haphazard, that the real 'work' of spiritual self-examination takes place—or so I learned over time, to my surprise and chagrin. Such talks, which at first seemed mere frivolous diversions from the boredom of Purgatorial labour, eventually proved to be the *real* Purgatory—especially as my interlocutors tended to

become increasingly severe with me as time went on. I had initially resolved to sing of my sorrows in a major key, as it were, like Schubert in 'The Brook's Lullaby' elegy with which he ends his great song cycle, *Die Schöne Müllerin*. It was when Rossetti and I, for a lark, decided to experiment with contacting the living through the medium of the Ouija Board ('on the sly', of course, since the Authorities consider such activities pagan superstition)—it was in the course of this experiment, I say, that the seriousness of Purgatory most powerfully, indeed, *devastatingly* came home to me. Sorrow now found that it must, after all, sing in a sorrowful key.

But Heaven forbid I should give away the 'plot', like so many authors who in their forewords tell you so much about the book you are about to read that they relieve you of the need to read it. I invite you to peruse Mr V's transcript, and to enjoy the many illustrations that provide commentary and counterpoint to the text. (I ask only that you keep its existence a secret amongst yourselves—the time is not yet ripe for publication.) *Look*, then, as well as read—and listen! For if you are mystically inclined, you may even hear the Music of the Spheres.

The Epic of Literature

Wherein elegy becomes epic.



1.
Beyond what I foresaw or willed,
Melpomene feels bound to make
An epic poem or mistake,
I'm still not quite sure which. To build

Or not to build: that is the question.
For in constructing a foundation
One grows pedestrian; explanation
Replaces lyrical suggestion

And what of my poor readers, who,
Groping about for home-truths, feel
Nothing but cold Scholastic steel
Behind the words, not even true,

Much less *real*, in a human sense,
To human souls clothed in the senses?
Against the Muse what worse offense is
There than pedantic compliments?



2. Melpomene in a Trousers Rôle

My weeping goddess has brought in,
For consultation, stern Calliope.
(Poor, dear Melpomene's the Niobe
Of Muses.) *Where does one begin,*

*Precisely which part is in medias res,
Where to put off the lachrymose
And strike a clanking martial pose?
What a sword-rattlingly tedious race,*

*These lumbering Homeric heroes,
Those peregrinating Red-Cross Knights!
And who could parse the wrongs and rights
Of Dante's casuistry? (Here Eros*

*With kisses soothes the Muse's blues.)
Between her sobbing fits she goes
On criticising what she knows
To be beyond her green purlieus*

The 'work assignments' of the various Muses are fluid throughout Classical history. Melpomene is often placed in charge of Tragedy, but Tennyson in his In Memoriam presents her as the Muse of Elegy and the poetry of earthly grief (or 'pastoral elegy'), as opposed to Urania, who in Tennyson's poem (following Milton in Paradise Lost) is the Muse of Religion – things 'Heavenly', as her name suggests – whereas in Classical times she was most often associated with the science of astronomy.

— [Mr V]

Of pastoral intimacy, where
The archetypal Poet wept
In melody, and vigil kept,
Through his short life, with grief and care

Over the Beautiful One, lost
For ever at a nervous glance
Back at the source of all Romance —
And at how terrible a cost!

Buck up, and take up buckler, too!
Barks brisk Captain Calliope.
But stiffly armoured cap-a-pie,
Howe'er becoming 'tis to you,

Sister, on me it looks a fright!
Cries 'Mel'. — Thomistic engineers
Have laid the plans. I clutch my ears
Against the hammering day and night

As this enormous edifice, grave,
Austere, and cosmological,
Rears up capacious from the small
Green spot that is Eurydice's grave.

3.
The deed is done; my name is signed.
May this vast posthumous swan song
Wry-seriously thrill the throng
Spoudogeloyously inclined!

The play's the thing, my Dears, the play!
(One *always* had to be a soldier.)
From Heaven to the lowest *bolgia*
And back again, I make my way.

What was a cell, a little field,
At most, became a world. Welcome
To Oscar's planet. Feel at home.
Mi casa es su casa. Yield

To the temptation to lay down
Your silk hat on this Persian rug,
The Earth. The love-seats are quite snug,
The pillows rich with eiderdown.



In reading the five-volume 'sequel' to In Memoriam C.3.3. that begins with the present volume, readers are following one direction in what Borges has recently pictured for us as a 'garden of forking paths'. They have chosen to follow Oscar's further adventures in Purgatory (extending in two directions from 'Sweet Wormwood', or IMC33 II) rather than go directly to 'Demi-Heaven'. They could just as well skip this 'sequel' and go directly to D-H, the conclusion of IMC33. The implications of this labyrinthine diversity of sequences in which one may choose to read Oscar's total Book will become clearer in later volumes of the 'sequel'. [Note by Mr V, dated December, 1941.]



The Lightness of the Light

*Am I in Heaven, or Magdalen? With my lovers and disciples (or call them students)
I stroll down the bird-haunted walks of what is actually the Oxford of a dream.
I have been paying more attention to the pre-Socratics in my reading, In their
aphorisms I find my life written and my fate foretold. ('Character is destiny'.)
I discourse upon them. It is a fine summer day, the Cherwell is our Illisos; we recline
on a shady bank. I am asked to describe the experience of death and the afterlife:
I respond not with a true description so much as an impromptu pre-Socratic fable.*



1.
Lightness, once hidden in the bone,
Expands and permeates the flesh.
The body, a thin, loosening mesh,
First feels, then joins, the senseless moan

Of astral breezes as they scatter
The stubborn selfhood like a cloud;
These tatter like an ancient shroud
The boundaries of solid matter

And all that makes it matter: mind
And memory and love and lust.
Soul, bursting into pollen-dust,
Adds bitter fineness to the wind.

It carries *weight*, this lightness: care
And sorrow, forlorn hope and fear
It holds englobed, a single tear
Evaporating in blue air.

2.
Like atoms of Democritus
We shall disperse and coalesce;
The Whole is neither more nor less
For all that may become of us.

Think that the Heraclitean Flame
Receives us, burning ever-wild
In time's free play; that time's a Child,
And we? The pieces in his game.

3.

Earth learns its own unearthliness:
Like an old Gipsy's crystal ball
It grows transparent to the fall
Of starlight through the emptiness —

Poor Earth, askew, a giddy top
The Aion Child twirled into space
To be the tragic toy he plays
With till he tires, and lets it drop!

Poor Earth, Misfortune's dizzy wheel,
A sad dream in the mind of God
Who wakes at last and thinks, *How odd!*
I could have sworn the thing was real!

Fear not, my Dears, the encroaching night.
It signals turning and returning.
All that's heavy is burning, burning
Into the lightness of the light.

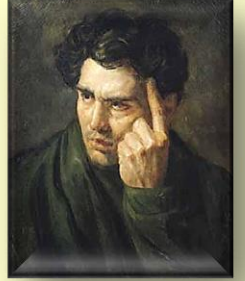


Dialogues of the Dead



The Vampire Vyron

*When I first encounter him, he takes on the sinister features of the vampire
Polidori portrayed him as. I am seeing him through his former friend's vengeful eyes.*



1.
A boding and malarial air
Hangs o'er the castle in my dream.
I glimpse a silhouette, and scream.
There is a Vampire on the stair!

Handsome, and fairly tall, but oh!
An Oedipus-Hephaistos, with
His club-foot, limping through his myth
His dashing, devilish gusto.

Could it be Lord George Gordon Noel
Byron? Back through the dismal Portal
You pass, O ghastly-dead immortal,
From the Hell only you know so well,

As Manfred, in the wanderings
Of Harold... From your mountainous soul
You look down on the poisoned bowl
Where valley-dwellers chase small things

They call the joys of life, herd-creatures
With whom you've not one thing in common,
You scorn them all, save one loved woman
You killed: her gentle, radiant features

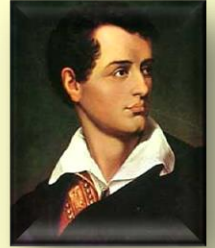
Haunt you up to the highest cliff,
To its extremest craggy brink!
How sweet to fall, or swooning sink
Into the abyss, become a stiff

And cold thing 'mid things stiff and cold,
O'er-shaded by firs whispering,
And overhead the circling
Lammergeier... Why, Manfred, so bold

In hopeless knowledge as you are,
Still cling to life at death's wide gate
Of void, which all must enter, late
Or soon? Oblivion leaves no scar. —

Useless to plunge! You cannot die.
You have forgotten how to sleep
At night. Back to your coffin creep
Ere the dawn burns you with its eye!

*His fiendish mien changes and
gives way to a frank, downright
expression. He has shaken off
his vampiric visage or image.*



2.
You don't believe that tired old story?
I'm really not at all vampiric.
He was a quack, a mere empirick,
An envious hack, that Polidori.

*I apologise for Lord Byron, Gabriel.
I know the doctor was your uncle.*

[Now I put on Goethe glasses, and before me leaps and bounds the Euphorion of Faust II, mercurial, reckless and doomed. His leaps and bounds up hills and rocky slopes begin to weary me; merely watching him makes me dizzy. He jumps two hundred feet into the air and falls, with a surprising lack of alacrity, to a reasonably soft landing and without pausing walks up to me, looking a bit irritated at having been put through these somewhat gruelling paces, short of breath and sweating profusely. On the other hand, he could certainly use the exercise. Another swim across the Hellespont might also help.]



Here's some advice that you should be
Grateful for, though of course you won't be –
Not interested? Well, then, don't be.
'Tis naught to me, what weird ye dree.

*He speaks as the author of the
sublime Vision of Judgment.*

The grey non-entity that wrote
The Junius Letters, less than one
And far too many, and Chatterton,
Macpherson, and more I could quote

If I knew whose work I was quoting,
Forgers of literature's uneasy
Conscience, though they make Peter queasy,
Are seen among the Blessed floating.

The Judgment is perpetual
Forgiveness, but to be forgiven
Is also (so, at least, in Heaven)
To be despaired of, fulfil all

One's destiny as what one can
Be, and no more, with no potential
Remaining, thus, inconsequential.
Why expect more of such a man

As this? I plead his little crimes
In his defence. He could no more
Do other than a thief or whore
Could do when fallen on hard times.

*If that is what you are, and you
Demand forgiveness, very well.
You're not much in demand in Hell.
Come in, then. What else can God do?*

*If mad King George is sly enow
To scuttle into Paradise,
Oscar, perhaps even you are wise
Enough to slip in there, somehow.*

3.
*Enough of Manfred, Giaour, and Childe
Who heralds nothing but self-pity
Grandiose, picturesque or pretty.
I am as witty as you are, Wilde.*

*I'm known for slipping in ironic rhymes
From time to time, a cynical joke, a
Jape and a jibe. I'm known to smoke a
Bowl of hashish when the Byronic rhymes*

*Won't come... – You've learned to dance the line
Between the slapdash and the dashing –
From whom? From me! – not bull-like smashing,
Nor shop-keep-worshipping the fine*

*Blue china of poetic form.
Congratulations, you strange rogue!
Why don't you break out in a brogue?
That is a trick I won't perform.*

4. *The Nobility of Cain*

*Abel, first murder victim, can
Attest what power's coiled in the fist
Of Cain, that violent pacifist
And bloody vegetarian.*

*For in your tortured *Mystery*
An unfortunate 'altar-cation'
Leads to poor Abel's expiration,
And leaves Cain with the misery*

Cain: A Mystery.



Of living with a mother's curse.
Into the wilderness he goes
To found a history, God knows,
That has been but one long reverse.

Strangely is destiny unfurled.
In struggling on behalf of life
Thinking he'd found the source of strife
This man loosed murder on the world.

*England! you were my mother, I
The Cain you cursed. My vengeance was
My wit, and the quixotic cause
For which I found a way to die.*

5.
*My hand is reaching for the Rhenish,
I know not how. You honour me, sir,
By knowing me a fallen Caesar-
Hater who hankered to replenish,*

*In freedom's drought, its parchèd spring.
Greece first, but the Armenians,
The Kurds, the Slavs! To win back Man's
Right to the world the poets sing*

*I gave my life in action's fever.
At Missolonghi I learned rest.
It is a lesson one learns best
Forgetting everything for ever.*

You, Shelley, Keats, such promise giving....!
Funny, almost, how doctors bled you
To death with kindness. Even dead you
Are more full-blooded than most living.

*



*Byron shaking the dust
of England from his shoes.
(Caricature by Beerbohm.)*

5. His Ode to Shelley

*Oh down to earth the gods once sent
A poet at his most concrete
When writing of the clouds. His feet
Had palms. His body underwent*

*Two deaths, by water and by fire:
Drowned out at sea, burned on the sand
Save for the heart a faithful hand
Reached down and plucked up from the pyre.*

*Guardians of Heaven, do your duty,
Hail him, ye Powers, as ye march
Through a rainbow's triumphal arch,
Angels of Intellectual Beauty!*

6. His Elegy for Keats

*And Keats, killed by an article?
I have since modified my stand
On Keats; yes, he is of the Band
Of the Elect, and I was full*

*Of snobbery. 'What, a Cockney
Shakespeare? We'll see', I drily thought.
In this opinion I forgot
My own Byronic irony.*

*Keats, my fine sleeping boy, inside
The earth, beneath that coffin lid
What greatness lies for ever hid?
All died a little, when you died.*

*Sweet Keats, the Fates, so cold of heart
To keep you in this world alive
For scarcely twenty years and five,
Spoil not the ageless Youth of Art.*

*A broken lyre adorns your stone,
And yet the name that you thought writ
In water shines in the Infinite,
Star of a brightness all its own!*



*'Tis strange the mind, that very fiery
particle,
Should let itself be snuffed out by an article.
— Don Juan*

*'Byrony', perhaps? — [Mr V]
Mr V, are you a ghost-writer's
ghost-writer? Pray focus your
mind on what I am dictating.*

*The ghost of Keats floats into view — or
rather, his head floats by on its death-pillow.*

7. Keats



Think how it feels to leave Apollo
Half-changed into the deity
His beauty destines him to be!
And no more golden notes will follow.

Though he stood poised in potent song
Where'er he ventured with the lyre
His spark of fructifying fire
To scatter 'mongst the listening throng,

He bows his head now, and surrenders
To the impossibility
Of that which he was meant to be,
With all the fairer hopes and tenders.

In stars of inky black you die
Mid-sentence: moult in your dark fire,
Apollo! Phoenix of Desire,
From ashes may you one day * *
* * * * *

What but a delicate china urn
Could hold the lovely soul of you?
Bordered with flowers of every hue
That soul to honour and to mourn.

8.

In Greece, Albania, Italy,
Streets, neighbourhoods proclaim you Byron
(Though modern Greeks pronounce you 'Vyron');
Your statue still declaims, in the

*He's an incurable 'necromantic'! [Mr V]
That's quite enough. Mind the script! Pay
attention! You are encroaching on the
body of the text! Just now you caused me
to enjamb very clumsily, on the word 'the'.*

Borghese Gardens, its great ode
Out of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*
To that 'fair Italy' whose rage
For freedom you did much to goad.

I envy you, I really do,
A little, George. And you are quite handsome.
The Book this ghost throws o'er Life's transom
Is partly an *hommage* to you.

You fashioned, when the time was ripe,
By your great, wayward way with rhyme,
A serio-comical sublime
Unique, and yet an archetype

Beppo, The Vision of
Judgment, Don Juan.

Of what we call the Modern, half
In lamentation, thinking on
What choices had to be foregone,
And half — *at least* half — with a laugh.

What Nietzsche says would likely suit your
Ironical sensibility:
'Laughter,' he writes somewhere, 'may be
The only thing that has a future'.

No vengeful old Commendatore
Will from the dead rise, and Don Juan seize
And drag to Hell for amorous trancies,
Not in *your* version of the story.

A Klezmer music of the mind,
The soul's Levantine melodies,
You sing — the 'blues' in smiling keys
That love leaves so much grief behind.

9.
I much enjoyed this talk with you,
Lord Byron — George, if you don't mind.
Likewise, Oscar. You are quite kind
In your keen way. Adieu. Adieu.

You know, Oscar, when England grew
A rumoured couch of damnèd incest,
I sought, yes, with a certain...sin-zest,
Exotic climes. The boys I knew...!

You may let go my hand, Lord Byron.
I said, Let go my hand! — What's this?
I'll give thy throat a cobra's kiss.
Fiend! Loose me from thy grip of iron!

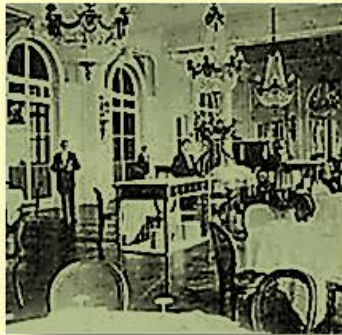


We drink a final toast.

He lingers, his brow darkens, a lurid fire
burns in his eyes... It is the thirst for blood!



L'Enfant est le père de l'homme



** Marcel and I **

Reading Proust in Hell

1. *Café Inferno*

There *is* a restaurant in Hell,
But surly are the waiters there,
And dear the mediocre fare.
Much too well-done to be done well

Is the *bifteak*; the wine is sour.
The strolling fiddler plays off-key,
And speaking to the *maître-d'*
Will gain you nothing but a glower.

For who is he but Malacoda?
He smears the patrons with his evil
Gossip – a very devil's devil –
And spits into your hock-and-soda.

No use to make a reservation:
He will not recognise you when
You and your party arrive. But then,
Why be surprised? This *is* Damnation.

Abandon all hope whatsoever
Of decent service. They're so rude
They'll keep you waiting for your food
(So it may seem to you) for ever!

The *tête de Jean* that the *garçon*
Brings, red froth at the lips, turned blue...
His eyes, though glazed, look up at you
Intelligently – *quel frisson!* –

Or *would* look, if they'd ever bring
The meal we have been waiting for
Since Eve bit the apple to its core!
Their tip will be as vanishing

As they are the instant you make vain
Gestures in their direction. Well,
What's the use? One can hardly tell,
My Dears, to whom one should complain.

The foreknowledge of the Damned allows
me to read *À la recherche du temps perdu*
in its posthumous, complete edition.



*Garçon, you have kept the lady waiting for
nearly half an hour. You can be sure that she
will take up the matter with the management*

2.

Though on my person all the rage
Of Malacoda's gang were loosed,
I would continue reading Proust.
Prodded with prongs, I'd turn the page

(For the damned have foreknowledge, though
They do not read the newspapers),
Piqued by the Baron's quest perverse
To know the lowest of the low.

And what more torturing rebuke
Could God deliver, what worse Hell
Than that bad business with Morel,
When ancient privilege's peruke

Is snatched away by a blue-stocking?
For Madame Verdurin has turned
The youth against you, pride has earned
You, sir, a cruel and a mocking

Humiliation. One's heart melts.
Were you so easy to outplay
On the chessboard of that soirée?
From there a short step to the welts

Upon the back, the paid-off lout,
The queenly progress through the Stations
Of long and lingering flirtations
With brothel-boys on the way out.

Charlus, stout, sadic old Narcissus,
Ah, how affectedly you talk
And oh, how gingerly you walk,
Nursing those angry, crimson kisses!

3.

Poor Palamède! What so obscene as
The spectacle of talent wasted
On pleasures stale as soon as tasted?
Old lion sporting with hyaenas,

What transformation have we here?
Charlus! Your shock of hoary hair
Is such, one cannot but compare
You with the grizzled, mad King Lear.



What *très grande dame* whose painted face
Seems not at times somewhat macabre
In the light of a candelabra,
A death-mask shrunk and glued in place?

Down, down, brightness falls from the air
And, with it, rightness, fitness, thought
Of any but the wrong thing sought:
Plague take us, but we did not care!

*I think I was at least in part the model for
this lovingly sculpted Decadent, though most
insist it was the Baron de Montesquiou.*



Meeting in the Afterlife

1.

As nervous as a fluttered dove
He flew to me from his death-bed
Tonight. I'm cradling his head.
I think that I may be in love.

Cannot a spirit put its mouth
To the mouth of a breathless ghost
And breathe a kiss into the lost
Soul till he wakes and is a youth?

2.

*Oh my poor stomach! What am I
Going to do? It's killing me.
Ah, that is a fait accompli.
But you cease dying once you die.*

*Did you say 'die'? What, am I dead,
Then, Oscar? You are Oscar Wilde,
Aren't you? I recognise those mild
And dreamy eyes. I'm still in bed,*

*Aren't I? Where is Françoise? I'll ring
For her. She will not come, Marcel.
It's useless now to ring the bell.
You'll only tire yourself, poor thing.*

*The last three volumes, Oscar, oh!
They're still unfinished, incomplete!
To come so far, and meet defeat!
Your brother's making sure that no*

*Such thing will happen to your Book.
My dear, have faith. He'll see the last
Three volumes through the press. A vast
Fame will reward those pains you took.*

*It's true! Outside of time we dwell
Free in the present-future-past!
You are not as I saw you last,
Though. You did not behave so well,*

*18 November, 1922. At this point I had already
fore-read the complete version of Proust's great Book.*



*He has shed the beard, the terrible beard
that grew upon him on his deathbed.*



*Oscar, beating that brusque retreat
At the sight of my parents there! —
I do apologise, mon cher.
I was ungracious in defeat.*



*I had designs upon your person,
Ah, most particularly, dear.
The advance was blocked at the frontier,
The lie of things could only worsen —*

*Say nothing more; I understand.
But you know, I am no forgetter.
Beside you sits, I hope, a better
Oscar, holding your dear young hand.*



3.
*I think of your great Book, Marcel,
That *rêve de bonheur* made a fact
Through mercies of an artefact.
Again unto myself I tell*

*The tale of how dear Monsieur Proust
Learned how to write his story, now
Our story, as he lived it; how
He coaxed the Phoenix home to roost.*

*The Book ends at the point where you
Are finally ready to begin
The writing of that Book, and in
The Book, make a child's dream come true.*

4.
*A mind should line its hearing's walls
With cork, and dive into the spell
Of reverie where the phantoms dwell,
And write no word whose note is false,*

*But, through the brakes of clause on clause,
As long and tortuous a way
As one must take to clear the fray,
Should struggle towards that hill-top pause*

*From which we see, in vast refrain,
The distance we have covered, hear
The church bells, and, resolved now, clear
And broad, the sentence becomes plain.*

*To spend much time with friends, to share
Their routine trivialities,
Is a sort of mental disease,
Almost like talking to a chair.*

*In each of us there is a flower,
A seed. Time is, will be, and was
Prenatal, present, posthumous.
I wove into my Book the power*

*Of Time to wither and make whole.
Stretched taut across the fourth dimension,
Every moment feels the tension,
Every detail. Time has a soul.*

*There are mementos that it keeps.
While clock-time marches like a guard
Before a tomb, and wears a hard,
Precise expression, soul-time leaps*

*Nijinsky-like, stage-right or -left.
Time heals, much as the sea heals, over
The wreck it makes of friend and lover,
And leaves us all richly bereft.*

*Though vast and complex in its form
My Book is really but a dress
That I have pinned together, less
Structure than garment, made to warm.*

6.
*You wrote of life. I, an escapist,
Imagined things as otherwise,
Not as they were. I, in your eyes,
Must seem a high-aesthetic Papist.*

*Oscar, you were a child of mood.
Avidity and appetite
Starved in you half your power to write.
What have you learned? What understood?*

*You cut me to the quick, Marcel,
And why I never undertook,
Like you, the writing of that Book
Your questions show me all too well.*



*You built your personality
On a Narcissus pond (unstable
Foundation!) like Charlus, unable
To comprehend the enmity*

*His arrogant intelligence
Inspired, says Marcel, his hand smoothing
My brow, which I find very soothing.
My dear, you make transcendent sense!*

*You are a giant mayfly. Of
What moment? Everything you touch
You make less real. Lie on this couch.
You look tired. Jealousy and love...*

*Come, dear Marcel, you'll catch a cold!
Here, let me wrap my coat around you.
I am so lucky to have found you.
Never again shall we grow old.*



All my Albertines

1.

I look back on my life, and see
The afterglow of a mirage,
A senseless bit of *bricolage*
With but the eternal mystery

Of failure to commend it, like
A tarnished badge. *Your* memory
Was a *triumphant* Mystery!
Out of the dark, rare moments strike

*A match that shows them as bright rooms
In which one moves about, assesses
The furniture, admires the dresses...
Like Scarbo when he shrinks or looms*

*To play Nightmare above your bed,
Time shifts our shapes: as Albertine-
Balbec, Gomorrah's libertine,
Becomes the Captive, then the Dead.*

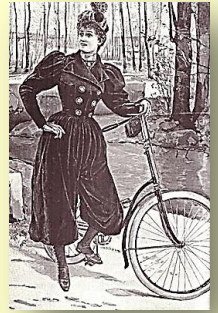
Anatomised, young Albertine
Your merciless jealousy exposes
Modeling in unconscious poses
Certain *laws*... All that fill your scene

Are cajoled sitters for a portrait
Self-caricatured by passing time,
Their features twisting as a rhyme
From an unwilling word is tortured,

As wisdom comes from jealousy
Inflicted by, let's say, Odette,
Swann's Venus whore — though Swann's flaws set
The stage for that man's tragedy.

But time is on *your* side, though bribed
There by that self-consuming fire,
The poet's visionary desire.
Some antidote you had imbibed

Kept you young, and let you fill pages
With poetry within and poison
Without; you kept your marvelous poise on
A sturdy style built for the ages.



What Swann lacked, richly you possessed:
Power to change from socialite
To high-aesthetic Stylite.
For literature you saved your best.

*All of my Albertines stood here
Beside me, crowding my mind's eye.
'Ah, I should like, before I die',
I thought, 'to make them all appear*

*'Before my readers' eyes for ever.
In doing so I shall discover
Myself compounded, of the lover,
Of the betrayed, in jealous fever,*

*Of the small boy and writer dying.
They form the spectrum of the eternal
Human in me, and the diurnal.
Surely it is a thing worth trying,*

*Regaining our lost time in art!
We chart time to the millisecond
But there's a kind we leave unreckoned:
The clockless dream-time of the heart.*

2.

The last, perhaps the greatest of
Romantic masterpieces, yours,
With Pater and Ruskin one joined force,
And somewhere, dove-like, far above

These two, cloud-throned in the Oversoul
Itself, floats our good Emerson.
And you are also Wordsworth's son,
Who recollect in words the whole

Tumult and outcry of emotions
In reverie and tranquility –
But unlike Wordsworth, wholly free
Of self-conceited moral notions.

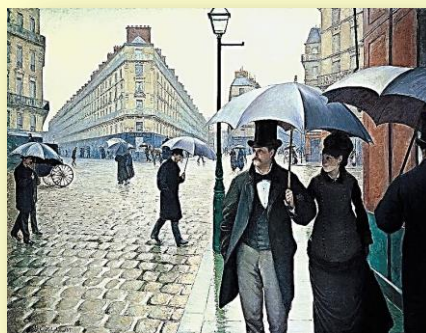
You are a man of wit and charm.
Laughing, you strum the tennis racket,
Look natural in a dinner jacket,
And take your reader by the arm.



In dreams and the gratuity
Of the *mémoire involuntaire*
You knew, because you *felt* the share
Of joy and healing sympathy

Building its music all around
The body and deep into the soul
In life's worst sufferings, how the whole
Self is the Giant from the ground

Built up who rises into spire-
Pierced, wide blue reaches beyond size.
What has time written in his eyes?
Elegy for a Child's Desire.





Marcel Takes Me to Combray



1.
*My friend, you need a change of weather!
What if I took you to Combray,
For a walk on the Guermantes' Way?
We shall be children there together.*

*For this Combray is located
Dans le département de mon
Enfance. The place itself is gone,
The church bombed, all the people dead,*

*But Combray time exists: it is
A place deep in my memory,
Dream-dyed, part of the sensory
Motor of my desire, my bliss.*

*Then shall we go by motor car?
Make sure the driver is discreet.
One never knows whom one may meet.
Marcel, how singular you are!*

*Then let us go there, you and I,
To Combray, in a motor car,
I said. — And so we travelled far
Afield, 'neath a memorious sky,*

*To Guermantes' Way... Sweet were our walks
Past lily-pads afloat upon
The waters of the slim Vivonne.
How long and searching were the talks!*

2.
*This river is the Lethe of
Remembrance. All the time lost, and
Things past, here take us by the hand.
And everything is what we love.*

*We walk like deer, with quiet splash
On grass, amid such plenty hushed,
Snuffing the scent of thyme, hoof-crushed,
And musts so heady they abash.*

*Did I not say the only true
Paradise is the paradise
That we have lost? Regained? A wise
Child knows to leave behind a clue*

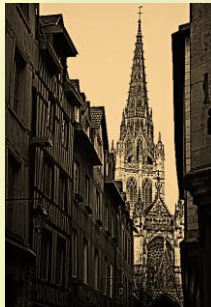
*To lead him back, a trail of crumbs.
From all the places whence he came
The magic resonance of a name
Shines him a path, and home he comes.*

3.
Out of a melody, a flower,
A garden, houses and a town
Spring forth and give, before they drown,
The taste and fragrance of the hour

Spent with long-dead, beloved people,
Whom we shall never meet again.
With tea-soaked crumbs of madeleine
And pointing finger of a steeple

You build a shelter made of sky
For all the life that died beneath it,
For the blue breadth, which, as we breathe it,
Is counting down to nullity.

But as the days go winding down
A Book raised up amid the swell
Cherishes what is perishable
As a church steeple guards a town.





I Take Marcel to London

Marcel, my dearest, come with me
To the magnificent capital
Of my spectacular rise and fall!
Avec plaisir, mon cher ami.

Then here is London, grim and grand:
Circle and Square and Bridge and Abbey,
Glorious, curious, or shabby,
And much of it was made by hand!

We'll stare like peasants, all agog,
At the great Gog known as Big Ben;
A giant in a smoky fen
He'll seem in the industrial fog.

We'll take the bracing, sulfurous air
At Gardens Kew and Kensington.
We'll look up at Lord Nelson on
His high perch in Trafalgar Square.

Old St. Paul's, with its 'dizzy top,'
Its Whispering Gallery, where sound,
Leaving the lips, runs circling round
And at the ears comes to a stop;

The hotel whose unwilling guest
So many a Personage has been,
The Tower, of course: *these* will be seen.
And so much more, my dear! The West

End's signs shine gaudy, luminous
Over the Theatre's broad scene
Whilst down the streets of Golders Green
Go motor car and omnibus...

('Depend upon it, sir, when once one
Is tired of London, one is tired
Of life.' How *he* would have admired
Ellen Terry, my great good Johnson,



Her style of acting and her figure.
'But it will never do,' he'd sigh.
'Gone are those halcyon days when I
Could ply Love's sword with proper rigour.'

And on into the Whistler fog,
Dimly a-glimmer, let us plunge,
From which a tall armed man might lunge
At you and, snarling like a dog,

Demand your life, or—favours... Fancy,
Dear, how enchanted and enchained
Charlus would feel, whilst a thug strained
At the barbed whip and called him 'Nancy'

And spat upon in him in that room
Across from us, on the third floor
Of that brick house! Upon the door,
Then, shall we knock? No, let the gloom

Swallow that *louche* establishment.
I have another house to show you.
I'm sure they will be charmed to know you,
My wife and sons. Ere I was sent

To prison by society,
I lived there. It is in Tite Street,
Chelsea. They would all love to meet
You, if you care to come to tea.

*Oscar, I won't do unto you
As you unto me! My exceeding
Good taste and my superior breeding
Remain intact; they bid me do*

*As you desire, and get to know
Your family, whom I'm interested
In, anyway. Ah, she is dead,
Marcel, and Cyril is laid low*

Upon the field of battle, slain.
*But, Oscar, they can live again,
Can come within your memory's ken
And stand before you without strain*



*Or ceremony or formality.
How Constance bites her lip! Her eyes
Are swollen. Vyvyan is nice.
See them, Oscar, in their reality.*

*Is it alive, the sound, the feel
Of the creak in the hallway floor
As you creep in through the front door,
The twinge of guilt: does that seem real?*

*The Hermes there beside your desk
Bearing the infant god of wine:
Is he your Muse? Hermes, divine
Surrogate mother? How grotesque*

*You make it sound! Where is the charm?
You see no hint of parturition?
Should a mere herald on a mission
Dandle so fondly on his arm*

*The god of madness before Zeus?
I'd call his smile maternal, very
Protective and proprietary.
Well, botany is rather loose.*

*There are self-pollinating flowers.
Male-and-female created He
Them in themselves. Phylogeny
Repeats androgyny. Ah, towers*

*The sunflower over all green glory!
(Constance attempts a smile. The boys
Are full of laughter, such sweet noise!)
'Father, tell us another story!'*

*Cries Cyril. Such a handsome boy!
Exclaims Marcel. But Vyvyan,
Cyril and Constance have turned wan,
They fade, and with them, all my joy.*





Poor Palamède!

A Vignette for Marcel

Le Baron de Charlus.



The house, which is so proud to wear,
In its Saint-Germain cul-de-sac,
A faded old memorial plaque
To some illustrious forebear,

Lives only on the Nights of Nights.
Drawn curtains block the prying view
And freely all within pursue
Their private, intimate delights.

The evening, at this time alone,
Is endless: never yawns the dawn.
'Neath lanterns on the high-walled lawn
There is much converse, one with one.

You burned intensely once among
Your circling satellites, dark star.
Now, how superfluous you are,
A stinging man who has been stung!

Morel to Madame Verdurin
Has consecrated his attentions.
Yours is the name that no one mentions.
You hear a passage from Chopin

The selfish young Charles has arranged
For violin. How he can play!
While you, a wilted old nosegay,
Furtively eye the youth, estranged

By stratagem, from outside in
The garden, where the fountain drowns
A tippler, and a dowager drowns.
Your smile has never looked so thin.

You are in Hell, poor old Mémé.
It is in you. The Night is endless.
You stand by the acacia, friendless
And fading gradually away.



Tragedia dell'Arte

A Puppet Show for Marcel

We are in his bedroom in his Combray house.



1. Introduction

You open for me that collage
Of photographs you have filed away.
They reassemble to display
Great Duchesses *d'un certain âge*

Who with their poses make a Masque
Wherein beneath the chandeliers
Come Questions to their eyes (with tears)
It only pains their hearts to ask.

The Question what is nobler in
The mind when Beauty, *déclassé*,
Falls to the ranks of yesterday;
The Question how it might have been

If she had followed her desire
When on the terrace, 'neath the moon
She gasped, and fell into a swoon
To see in his dark eyes such fire.

Come, step into the Masquerade!
The part of ladies in old age
In ways so redolent of the stage
By comic actresses is played

That one is tempted both to smile
And weep, and certainly to say,
Encore! in one's most genial way
To players of such practiced style.



2. The Performance

Sciatic old Lord HARLEQUIN

Attempts a dashing cartwheel for
His entrance, teeters, hits the floor,
And hides his pain with a forced grin.

None of the troupe at this *soirée*

Makes sport of him: too tired, too tired.
Though COLUMBINE, who once admired
The stumbling tumbler, and still may,

Comes to his aid. His words are fierce

To the coquette, now *très grande dame*;
Down her white cheeks, with strange aplomb,
Doodle the black mascara tears.

Her with a hairy hand he thrusts

Aside, and through his monocle
Casts ogles at the beautiful
Young courtesan for whom he lusts.

(Her glance, in turn, seems to appraise

Him as a rich though paunchy goat.)
PIERROT, he of the wrinkled throat,
Gives Columbine a pitying gaze,

But has no heart to play the game

He used to play. The mandolin?
He gave it up. But he *is* in
The midst of writing, for his fame,

A lengthy novel, a *roman*

À clef, of sorts, and a memoir,
Luminous, with a tinge of *noir*,
Of a considerable élan,

Exposing for all time what Time

Has done to *them*, with all the paces
Still to be gone through, though with faces
Weathered, yet, in a way, sublime

Against the sunset fade-away

Of vices they must still pursue.
(And ah, what else ought one to do
At the anti-climax of a play?)



3.

IL CAPITANO's eye for *très*
Jeunes filles has grown myopic, dull.
Too weak to wax thrasonical,
He is thin, taciturn, and grey.

DOTTORE, garrulous as Brichot,
No longer writes his weekly column.
His laugh is empty, his eyes solemn;
His lucid moments come and go.

But *he* remembers, old Pierrot,
A *père Goriot* (oh yes, he married,
Is widowed and a father harried),
How he decried the long-ago

Gomorrhan love-play and carouse
Of Columbine and ZERBINETTA,
How he, *toujours jaloux*, once set a
Trap to expose them in a house

Of ill repute, but they escaped
And robbed the voyeur of his pleasing
Anguish. How it amused her, teasing
The swain whose hapless heart she scraped

Distractedly as with a heel
She scraped the floor in the champagne
Waltzes of yesteryear! The pain
She caused, but would not feel,

Returns now, as he gazes at her,
Shaped into unsaid sentences
He'll write down on that desk of his
Tonight. Ah, what engrossing matter

Her lightness gave him, frivolously,
For contemplation, serious Letters!
Yes, she is one of the Forgetters.
But *he* remembers. So will we.

We will remember Columbine
Looking so queenly through her tears
At beauty stolen by the years;
What can one do but drink more wine?



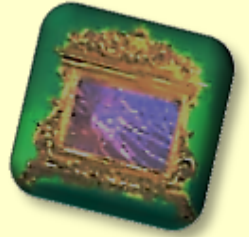
4.

Then break the mirror, and burn all
Those *billets doux* the Spirit killeth,
Madonna of the morning, Lilith
By daylight, Eve at evenfall!

The shadows that grow round you are
The umbrage of a shelter for
A face close-up inspection, pore
By pore, would find as secular

As the yew bending over tombs,
And grimaced like a tragic mask
In the full horror of the task
Of dying in these crowded rooms

Where, in the last sciamachy,
The magic lantern shoots its rays
As flames along a paned bookcase
Flickering into obscurity.





Farewell for Now

Your soul is lighter than my own.
Why? *Happiness, fulfilled endeavour.*
Then will we see each other, ever?
You rise beyond me. I am alone.

You are not fulfilled. The Book... It's true.
Ascend the Purgatorial hill.
When you have reached the top, I will
Be waiting there to welcome you.

Adieu, then, dear – but have you no
Time for one last, small glass of sherry?
It calls to you, your Sanctuary?
Good-bye, then. It is better so.

Go, go, it's better that you go!
Your tie is crooked. Let me set
It straight. There. Now we must forget
Each other. Listen, soft and low,

Maman is from the Garden calling.
She has been waiting for you all
These years. Can you not hear her call?
Go, go, these partings are appalling!



** Authors and Arthurs **



Tennyson and I

In Memoriam A.H.H.

Somersby Manor.



1.
Read with kind eyes, dear Tennyson,
This Grieving Song. Grudge not to lend
The form in which you mourned your friend
To one who asks your benison.

I add a fin-de-siècle clarity
As muttering winds, bleak, Hyperborean,
Fan the ashes of our Victorian
Bonfire of Empire and austerity.

So loftily vulgar and virtue-*bent*,
This so-progressive century,
Now burying both itself and me,
Deserves a stranger testament.

Tastefully grand, your Hall of Woe—
And yet (I trust you'll take me lightly)
I thought I might refurbish slightly,
Adding a touch more Art Nouveau?



My sorrow takes a different path
Than yours. My style of grief demands a
Boudoir, an intimate sort of stanza,
Where (prelude, tryst, and aftermath)

Love lives its brief ABBAs;
Where eyes, then hands, then lips may meet
Blissfully, till reluctant feet
Bear them upon their separate ways.

2.
Your stanza is a coach and four:
The pace is slow and funerary;
Inside the coach, a solitary
Passenger sits head bowed, heart-sore.

Solemnly onward the wheels roll,
Bearing you and your weary load
Of grief down the high royal road
Into the vexed Victorian soul,

That shrinks from science's cold facts,
Not knowing what her fate shall be,
Survival or blank nullity,
Whilst space's vast and empty tracts,

When at the sky she dares to look,
Stretch out before her on all sides,
And in her nameless fear she hides
Her fragile faith inside a Book.

For what does science leave us with,
That gives the soul no food, no scope?
'Immortal soul....' A desperate hope
In the survival of a myth.

Your elegiac coach was half
An ambulance. Even the Queen
Upon your sturdy words would lean
In her long grief, as on a staff.

This carriage I dare requisition
For curious jaunts far from the highways,
Down shady lanes and crooked byways,
Pursuing quite another vision.

Your vehicle, wheels by tears greased,
Determined to end cheerfully,
With a gallop's forced gaiety
Crashes into a wedding feast.

I choose to name it *l'Hirondelle*,
My borrowed, begged or stolen coach,
And warn all those who would approach
The black, vibrating vehicle

That what is going on inside
Is a thing sordid and illicit:
For though I will not be explicit,
I'll say that the poor soul who died

Drooling black liquids from her lips
Is in the throes of *petit mort*
Foreshadowing what will, before
Long, be the Great One. And the whip's



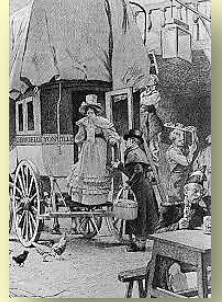
*'Next to the Bible, In Memoriam
is my comfort', she said, referring
to her grief over Prince Albert's death.*

'The Swallow'.

Emma Bovary, of course.

Reverberation as it cracks,
With creak of wheels and clatter of hooves
And driver cursing as it moves,
This coach, uneasily, leaving tracks

Down mud-bespattered Paris streets,
Is the fore-echo of her doom.
She writhes inside a rattling tomb.
The rain shakes down its winding sheets.



3.
*Rein in your silly Pegasus,
Oscar. Your flights of fancy pall.
I ask, what right have you at all
To use my unique stanza thus,*

*Actually, the form had been used before,
by Lord Cherbury, among others.*

*Presume upon my poem's title,
And light your small match at my bonfire?
Compared with which, yours is a wan fire.
All that you say is a recital,*

*A repetition or a theft.
You are no seer, merely a sayer,
A charlatan, a strolling player.
And look at you, you've nothing left!*

A work of art's no destination,
It is a starting point for new
Departures. What is one to do
But meet Creation with Creation?

Admittedly, my Lord, I was
Nothing if not *jusque'au-boutiste*
By taste and temperament, nor least
In the experimental Cause

I pressed in poetry and prose.
Extremes meet, in ways mystical,
For drinks, at the Café Royal.
And where the night may lead, who knows?

*If you're inviting me, thank you
No, though your offer's very gracious.
Sarcasm in a soul as spacious
As yours, sir, seems somewhat *voulu*.*

4.

You know I place you far above
That singer with the honeyed lips,
He of the cognac and the whips,
So orotund when he drinks of

*Discomfited by his angry attitude,
I attempt to flatter him by saying
terrible things about his contemporaries,
opinions I do not in fact hold.*

The ocean of alliteration:
How harmlessly the fires of sin burn
In the adolescent Hell of Swinburne!
Enfant terrible of the nation

Once, spreading anarchy like rabies,
He goes to seed, a dry, deaf reed, in
His suburban Garden of Eden,
Watts-Duntonised, and kissing babies.



Arnold? The failing that defeats
His strengths strengthens his weaknesses.
The man is self-deceived: he is
A Keatsian poet who scorns Keats.

Look what a frigid elegy
He writes for his friend Arthur Clough!
Fine diction, images enough,
But a tone that says, *Look at me!*



I got it right. You went astray.
No note of genuine mourning pierces
The self-complacency of 'Thyrsis'.
It is a cold and donnish lay.

Through Mystery and Mystification
Rossetti leads us towards the Yonder,
But is at times inclined to wander
In mists of Personification.



Browning's a genius, true, but wrong
Notes mar his measure. No, he lacks
Finesse. You, whilst he sometimes hacks
Through language, coax it into song.

His prosody I cannot brook.
He writes novels in rough blank verse;
Fiction's blessing is poetry's curse.
How fat a thing is *Th' Ring and th' Book!*



Inspired he often is — though one
Could wish it a more careful rapture.
And yet how deftly does he capture
Soul-states, he knows them to the bone!

Alfred is not mollified.

5.

*As for your poetry, 'tis all
Rank plagiarism — though that tinge
Of gaucherie that makes one cringe
Is, in its way, original.*



A thing is public property
Once published; it is common food
For thought. *Your stolen lines are good.*
The rest is mediocrity,

Inflated rhetoric, pastiche!
What reader of sound judgment thinks
Well of that stilted thing, 'The Sphinx'?
Your Muse, sir, should be on a leash.



And how portentously you weary us
In Salomé, as hierophant
Of Symbolism! Ah, you can't
Believe that you wrote something serious?

That flowery rant of Jokanaan...
'The satyr and nymph have fled'? Has he
Been reading Monsieur Pierre Louÿs?
Oh how they all go on and on!

(It is my soul! Ruskin is John,
Pater is Salomé, who slays
The thing she loves — and ah, she pays
For that, as pay she must, anon!)



6.

Lord Alfred, let this rancour cease!
I didn't mean to pain you when
I spoke so frankly. Once again
Have I burned through your masterpiece.

Pity me in my misery!
The light is dim, and I must strain
To parse your words. Alas, my brain
Is clouded. Keep me company.

*You found friendship a mystery,
With acolytes and lovers only
For company. Did you feel lonely,
At times, without quite knowing why?*

*Well, Oscar, let's put by our quarrel
And talk about my poetry.
This time I promise to pass by
The question whether it was moral*

*Or otherwise, your fatal love
For that vain youth. Let us discuss
What in my poem touches us
As all-too-human creatures of*

*Religious longing. Endless Life
Is what we crave. Do we not need,
In this confounding world, a Creed
To guide us through the smoke and strife?*

7.
Your nobly unpersuasive faith
Persuades us as a passionate doubt
We cannot help but care about
More deeply than we mourn the wraith

Of that young friend whose passing you
Immortalised in song. Oh how
You beg the seasons to avow
Their faith in what we humans do!

*I cried to Nature, all unanswered,
To speak the holy name of God.
I could not bear to face this broad
Bewilderment unblessed, unsponsored.*

Your soul speaks ever in 'Two Voices,'
Of faith and doubt, hope and despair.
Which is the truer of the pair?
It's clear: although your conscious choice is

To affirm and to believe, within
Your soul prevails that sad, that lonely
Voice, singing of its losses. Only
This sorrowing voice is genuine.



Nothing in art, or life, or science
Brings back the one you used to meet
At 67, Wimpole Street.
Religion fails the old reliance.

Lyell has changed all. Did Christ say,
Suffer the little dinosaurs
To come unto me? Who taught coarse
Darwinian ape-man how to pray?

Some things will thrive, the rest will fail.
From variations infinite
Evolves this Law austere, as it
Is written in the Book of Shale.



8.
Once, Oscar, on a mystic even
Out on this lawn, I felt a Soul
Breathe on my own, and make it whole.
(*Two souls that touch touch also Heaven.*)

The vision faded by and by,
But brought this hope, which eased my dread:
That Death itself had freed my dead
Dear friend to Life that cannot die;

That we in Heaven, hand in hand,
Might walk together, two as one,
Repeating in a finer tone
Words once exchanged on street and strand.

On quads of Art, and banks of Higher
Criticism, conversing by
A river, under a golden sky,
Amid the glittering dome and spire!

This would be very Heaven, surely:
A leisured University town,
Where Peter, dressed in cap and gown,
Directs a choir that sings demurely,

And, with a grave and owlish face,
Greets freshmen angels with a few
Kindly remarks, then points them to
Their rooms, their tutors, and valets.



How gladly I would join you there!
What leisure to enjoy, what talks
Strolling along tree-shaded walks
In the umbrageous evening air!

We'd speak in measured, flowing feet
That through the listening conduits glide
Like graceful swans that breast the tide.
For Poetry is God's helpmeet

Here on the lawns beyond the Wars,
And chiefly of Hallam now she sings,
Bright, haloed Hallam: how his wings
Are light, and woven of the stars;

How in the radiance of your friend
Was shadowed forth a finer life
Destined to rise above the strife
And crown with Peace the latter end.

Look! Punting down the river's wending
Come Graces, Splendours, Spirits, Glories,
Recounting all of History's stories
And how they reached this happy ending!

Ah, gentle reconciliation
Of Nature's ravening tooth and claw
With the Creator's sacred Law
Through Evolution's mediation!

*Hallam was hallowed by the earth
We shared, knitted as family members.
These halls rang out with laughter; embers
Winked kindly from the homely hearth.*

*The snide esprit of the cafés
Could not breach such a citadel. —
Your grief was landed, settled well
Into the turf of gentry days.*

Still, I recount but half the story:
How oft you wing, from west to east,
On clean, fresh lyric gusts, to feast
On an authentic morning glory!



But sometimes, too, there is a taste of
Cold mutton in your funeral baked
Meats, some leftover grief that's ached
Too long, and thrift has made a waste of.



9.
*How without malice you deflate!
A most infuriating gift!
Even as you debase you lift.
Might this explain the special hate*

*You stirred up with those genial stings?
It was the honey in your gall
That pained your victims most of all;
They envied you your generous wings.*

*We cannot hold your jests against
You: this, of course, is what we hold
Against you. You are so calmly bold,
You leave us even more incensed.*

*My levity was tactical,
A dangerous art of levitation.
Ah, with what vengeful gravitation
Things ponderous land when back they fall!*

*But my dear friend! I am bespoken.
My little children call for me
To help them trim the glittering tree.
And yet, to leave you here, heartbroken...*

*I bid you stay with us. Take part
In our festivities this Christmas.
There's room, then, for a ragged Dismas
At the rich table of your heart?*

*If you speak from mere charity,
Dear Alfred, ah, I can't stay here!
Agâpe, Oscar. But I fear
That ends in 'pay'. Christ's love is free.*

*Think not of losses now, nor grieve.
'Mid glowing lights, and eyes that shine,
Savour the cakes, the goodly wine!
For gaily falls this Christmas-eve.*

*We have something else in common::
we both found the Alps disappointing.
Elizabeth Browning took you to task for
lack of cringing awe before the Sublime.*

(Said with a smile.)



The Arthur Cycle



Tennyson and I

The Arthur Cycle

*Tennyson and I again,
haunting Somersby Manor.*



1.
Must *every* male child be named Arthur?
In tribute to that grand Ideal
Whose own wife doubted he was real...
One must not take this any farther!

*

Alfred, my excellent good friend,
Sing me a song of Camelot,
Won't you? *Oh, dear! I'd rather not,*
But since you ask: attend, attend!

2. King Arthur

O spotless fool, royal cuckold:
The torch, the torch will not be passed!
Why must the lilies fade so fast,
So fast the roses? I am old.

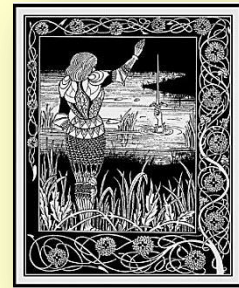
Your knights were many, and true and bold!
Your ladies, they had golden hair.
All that is beautiful and fair
Is as unthreaded cloth of gold.

Thrice must Sir Bedivere be told,
'Give back the brand Excalibur!'
Ere he relinquish it to her
Who gave it you to have and hold,

The Lady of the Lake, to fold
Into the waters whence it came,
That shining sword of golden flame.
But now 'tis done, as was foretold.

(Strictly his lot to each is doled.)
Now on a dim and dusky barge
Three queens shall take you in their charge
Wailing and weeping unconsolated

Over your body pale and cold,
And take it to Avilion
Whose other name's Oblivion.
And the Round Table will be sold



*At auction, the silk gown will mould,
A death-moth-eaten souvenir
Of what was once Queen Guinevere.
I weep, but tell what must be told,*

*The story of this king of old,
King Arthur, and his soul so vast!
And how the torch that was not passed,
On misty evenings, on the wold*

*That like a tapestry unrolled
Spreads out its endless waste of green,
That fatuous fire by fools is seen,
Sometimes, a Grail of fine fool's gold,*

*And how they chase across that wold
A phantom (and to phantoms turn)
That warms them not, although it burn,
And leaves the 'nighted world quite cold.*

3. The Wicker Man

*You brought upon yourself a fate
That you would not have wished upon
Your worst of enemies. It's done,
Enough! It's done! It's far too late*

*To change what happened. Why tear off
The bandage and the scab beneath
And pull the dagger from the sheath
And stab my heart and make me cough*

*Up blood again and let out cries
And seep again the morbid fluids?
What, is my soul some sort of Druid's
Plaything, a hapless sacrifice*

*In cage of wicker set ablaze
And destroyed so flamboyantly
Pity and terror to ecstasy
Are driven? Through an acrid haze*

*To see it writhe, that blackening speck,
A small fire lost in a great fire,
The gods of savage men desire,
But spare me, pray, arrah! vos prec.*



4. *The Green Man*

You chop him into bits and serve
Him as an archetype-ragout
Or hearty, seething mythic stew,
And in your every vein and nerve

He'll magically reanimate
And your own inner viridescence
Invigourate. You'll feel his presence
Within you as an altered gait,

A lighter step, a suppler wrist,
A languid new vitality
With just a *soupçon* of ennui
To scandalise the moralist.

Two or three inches of transcendence,
That's all he asks for, from the ground,
That, and a band of angels round
His head to clown, and dance attendance.

Look at his skull! Out of the eye
Sockets, the nostrils, and the mouth
Spring green carnations and the youth
Eternal of regeneracy!

5. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

He also comes in an edition
De luxe: a Knight, in skin of calf,
Whose head, swung by his hand, will laugh
At you, Sir Gawain, with derision

Quite supernatural, for you
Have severed it with an axe blow.
It says, as it sways to and fro,
That you've a debt will soon fall due:

Soon you must offer him *your* head
In what of course is a *Green Chapel*.
But first Eve offers you an apple.
Move back a step. You are half-dead



From questing for the giant's lair
When in a castle you are offered
Harbourage – and much more is proffered:
One Bertilak de Hautdesert

A lovely wife hath; to your bed
She comes, night after night. Her plan?
Seduction! But you, virtuous man,
Preserve your chivalrous maidenhead,

It remains unviolated,
Although not so your sacred vow
To give back the wife's girdle, now
The talisman that saves your head.

For on the point of hewing you
The Green Knight pauses at the sight
Of it and laughs: 'twas all a light-
Hearted bit of fun, much ado!

Morgan Le Fay's behind this jest,
That sometimes devious, sinister
Or merely mischievous half-sister
Of Arthur: it was all a test

Of Gawain's vaunted chastity,
And of the ideals of the Court,
And withal a malicious sport
Queen Guinevere to terrify.

*

And as the Green Knight doffs his head
To Sir Gawain, for courtoisie,
I take my hat off to *you*, Dee-ah,
Who don't believe a word I've said.

6. *Merlin and Vivien*

*The charm you should have kept, that charm
You gave her: ah, she understands!
The woven steps, the waving hands!
The power she has to do you harm*



*You put into those hands that doom
You to a hollow oak for ever.
You, whom we thought so very clever,
You made the Tree of Life your tomb!*

*Poor wizard, wizened but not wise,
Who made from music Camelot's gate
And knew before it came your fate,
And still believed her lying eyes!*

*You, the wand-waver, a mere tool
In the hands of one so profoundly
Unworthy! I denounce you roundly,
Hapless magician, gifted fool!*

7. Princess Ida and The Lady of Shalott

*Your Princess, though: what, from sheer chivalry
She must renounce her independence
And submit to the man's transcendence,
Foregoing gifts and mental rivalry,*

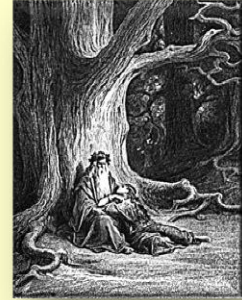
*Eunuch self-castrated to flatter
The vanity of the poor male,
The victim, lest his manhood fail?
Must treat her mind as a small matter*

*Compared with her predestined rôle
As selfless servant wife and doting
Mother – and how *he* must be gloating,
Your husband who has killed your soul!*

*Decked out in hollow-clanging blank
Verse and Arthurian trumpery,
Poems of such complacency
Have but Philistia's Muse to thank.*

*But Oh! the Lady of Shalott
Whose mirror cracked when she forgot
She must not look on Lancelot,
She drifts down dead to Camelot,*

*The Lady of Shalott, Elaine!
Her web flown hopeless, floating wide,
What she must do she did, and died:
If love brings death, death ends love's pain.*



*O, ay, it is but twenty pages long;
But every page having an ample marge,
And every marge enclosing in the midst
A square of text no larger than the limbs of fleas;
And every square of text an awful charm,
Writ in a language that has long gone by,
* * *
And every margin scribbled, crost, and cramm'd
With comment, densest condensation, hard
For mind and eye; but the long sleepless nights
Of my long life have made it easy to me.
And none can read the text, not even I;
And none can read the comment but myself;
And in the comment did I find the charm.
– Idylls of the King, 'Merlin and Vivien'*



8.

*And shall I speak of Galahad
Who perserveres o'er sea and land
Till he alone of all that band
Beholds the Grail, and yet is sad?*

*For nothing now can be the same.
Ah, back into the world he goes,
And all he knew no longer knows,
And 'home' sounds like a foreign name!*

*All things look skeletal and old
As branches when November winds
Strip their bright leaves away like sins
And leave them purified and cold.*

*His heart is pure, and so is snow
Unsmutched, a virgin sheet of white.
He prays upon a winter's night
In his stone chapel, head bowed low.*

*Infinite Love will ruin Love
Of earthly kind, so dear a waste!
And kisses leave a bitter taste
When human love's not love enough.*

*He only wants to die a death
Of his own choosing: he would be
Of flesh entirely, wholly free
And rise toward Heaven like a breath.*

9. *The Fairie Queene and the Labyrinth of Allegory*

*Complexities, in the end, defeat
Design. The maze grows only denser.
Think of those episodes in Spenser
Where plain knights weave in dark conceit*

*'Mongst nymphs and wizards and what-not,
Until the allegory spins
So many myths of origins
That Virgil's oak is overwrought*



With Ovid's ivy. 'Hard begin',
 What is your end? You have too many
 Of these to be said to have any,
 And fewer the ways out than in.

So highly charged with gorgeous Eros,
 Infected will unwilling serves
 Erected wit, and sensory nerves
 Are insolent squires to his knight-heroes.

A knight may 'gainst his interest act,
 His better judgment; what he fears he
 Is overtaken by: his Circe
 Turns hoggish mind to bodily fact.

The thread tatters to threads, to broken
 Endings leading. But these are new
 Beginnings, each a chance to do
 It all again, new vows are spoken

In a tempestuous wedding of
 The pagan and the mediaeval,
 Protestant God and Catholic Devil.
 It is the straying that we love.

*

Spenser, you hated us, it's true.
 Hysteria mars your fantasy.
 But though you fear to set him free,
 Eros exuberates from you.

You wrestle to the ground but can't
 Pin down the daemon. He will rise
 Again. What spell could exorcise
 The Protean from the Protestant?

10. *Childe Harold*

Childe Harold sings his anxious song
 Of influences that make him pine
 To go a quest that will, in fine,
 At a dark tower, and a throng

The Faerie Queene, III, iii, 21.



Prince Arthur and the Fairy Queen (Fuseli).



Hated the Irish, that is.

Of palely loitering phantoms, end —
Though first he through a plashed and muddy
Waste, as through a dead scholar's study
Littered with scribbled leaves, must wend



With steadfast and obdurate will
Set against Time and its *It Was*.
But why so hard a quest? Because
Opposed, irreconcilable

Are power and will, good, and the means
Of good? Because triumphant life
Achieved through such a ghastly strife
Might just as well be death? The scenes

Of misty squalour through the which
He struggles are composed of naught
But splendid failures, all they wrought
A poverty that makes them rich,

A wealth that leaves them poor indeed.
Who steals my purse, steals trash: how true!
Accumulations vast accrue
Until they bloom into a weed.



11. *Arcturus Redux?*

*Oh once in a blue Cambrian moon,
Perhaps, stray knights will constellate
Into a court, can we but wait!
A king will strike a fork, and tune*

*Their disparate notes into a Song
Of Solomon uniting God
And Aphrodite. On a broad
Heraldic field that noble throng*

*Will clash the shield and break the lance,
Before a gateway by a clever
Sorcerer built to last for ever,
Since made of Music and Romance.*

*A supernatural resource
Endangered, rare, exhaustible
Are the real, loyal, true, frail, spell-
Bound, binding few. But does their force*

*Diminish over time, will jackals
Inherit the high halls, the Round
Table? Merlin's already bound
Inside an oak, in wooden shackles.*

*Who shall be judge of Lancelot?
Or so high-minded and severe
As to condemn poor Guinevere?
Yet with their passion comes the rot.*

*Fear Arthur's justice! Look and see:
His trusty friend, ah, such a charmer!
Lies dead and crumpled in his armour.
The Queen has joined a nunnery.*

*

*Some say that he will come again.
Some wounds take centuries to heal,
And many times the earth will reel
And we as blind as drunken men*

*Will trail a slick of blood behind us
As down the hall of time we stumble,
And many a tower will rise and crumble
Till by the full moon he will find us*

*Feasting like wolves with small red eyes
And bloody mouths upon each other,
Friend upon friend, brother on brother,
Lips stained with gore and smeared with lies,*

*And he will have his hands full then,
Assembling once more the knights
He'll need to set it all to rights:
Why should he ever come again?*



***Farewell
At Somersby?***



Still in the Vast, the Vague, we linger,
On the Astral Plane, in Purgatory,
Or...Where are we? At Somersby?
In a space thinner than this finger,

*Oscar. We are in the in-between
And are the in-between. For we
Are neither here nor there, you see.*
Alfred, please tell me, have you seen

Your Arthur? Was yours a true dream?
Do our most-feigning lies become
Realities? Or did doubt numb
The sense that felt the life of him?

*I have not seen him, have not even
Left this old place. No, I remain
Upon the Purgatorial Plane,
Ambiguous between earth and Heaven.*

Unfinished business keeps *me* here.
But you, Alfred, what makes you stay?
Do you not long to see him? Say
What makes you haunt *yourself* so? — *Fear!*

*Fear that I will not see him there,
Or will not recognise him. (He
May be much changed.) Ah, will he be
The one who once breathed English air?*

*And will he wish to see me? Will
He even recognise the face
Of one he loved in bygone days?
Are fleshly memories with him still?*

*Or what if mere oblivion
Awaits me, and my soul shall die,
Extinguished like a firefly
Within the furnace of the sun?*

No, all the Arthurs we have known
Or dreamed: my Goring, Windermere,
Saville, Balfour, Clifton, your dear
Hallam, and he who from a stone

Drew forth a sword, and by that sword
Preserved the Christianity
Of Britain when barbarity
Descended in a ravenous horde:

We'll see them all, we'll revel in
A cornucopia of Authors
And Arthurs, like old friends or brothers
They'll join us in a genial din!

No stern arthuritarian Father
Will we cognise, but pure Arthurity,
Time-mellowed, quick with all futurity,
All excellences Mind can gather.

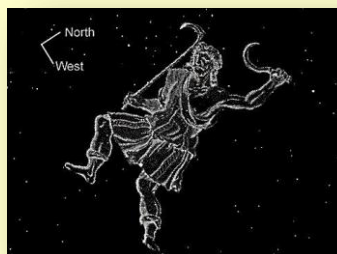
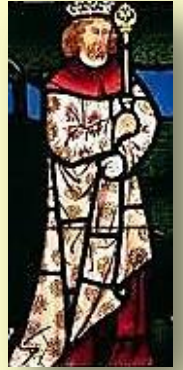
All will take on one royal Roman
Name, *Rex Arcturus*, Guardian
Of Ursa Major, a Star Man.
Oscar, Oscar! You're such a showman!

*One Arthur only, and one Author
I long to see. But be at ease,
Enjoy your superfluities.
Arthur's your Brother, I your Other.*

Tennyson vanishes.

*

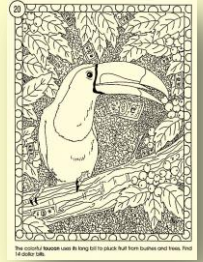
Already I miss his company.
I need more chatter to distract
Me from the Purgatorial fact.
Still major fights with minor key.





Rossetti and I *A Moment's Monument*

*Dinner at his house, 16 Cheyne Walk,
Chelsea. A toucan wearing a tiny cowboy
hat is riding a llama around the table.*



1.
Ah, Dante Gabriel Rossetti!
What an array of sumptuous dishes!
Everything here looks so delicious...
Anticlerical strozzapreti!

Your cook can do miraculous things.
A true Artusi, dear, a paragon!
Parsley, sage, rosemary and – tarragon!
I'm a man for all seasonings.

2.
'A moment's monument': a moment
Enlarged a little by addition
Of letters? Poetry's saving vision:
Does it reduce to a smart comment

On language? Say a monument
Composed of letters holds, contains
The moment: still, is what remains
More than *remains*, the life-breath spent?

Ah, we would make the moment new
Again, reborn in naked flesh,
The infant of the instant, fresh
As on the grass the morning dew,

Quivering, beaded, rainbow-coloured,
Cooled by a breeze upon the lawn,
Basks in the keen, sweet smell of dawn!
When time has grown a doting dullard,

And all its tarnished coinage faded,
Can a new currency be minted,
And all things shine that merely glinted
And quicken senses numb and jaded

To eager peaks of ecstasy
And still-more eager expectation?
How to sustain a soul's elation
In all its natal poetry,

*Lit., 'priest-strangler', a pasta
of unusually large size. – [Mr V]*

*The meal finished, we linger over wine. The talk
turns to poetry, how and whether it can preserve
the moment or win it back once gone. He reads the
prefatory sonnet to The House of Life. I respond.*

*Moment becomes mo(nu)ment,
which becomes 'new' again.*



Rossetti and Watts-Dunton.

A Wordsworthian problem, poetry's problem.

How to perpetuate the minute
In its minutiae, the timbre
Of her low voice, the mellow amber
Of the sunlight, moats floating in it,

As it sifts down upon her hair
And mingles with the red the gold?
Why must light fade and youth grow old?
Why must the leafy trees grow bare?

Ah, *monochronos hêdonê*!
A god can press immortal flowers
Into the yellowing Book of Hours
And timelessness into a day,

And we as well could do the trick,
Though *brotoi*, dying ones, had we
Time enough for eternity.
But clocks will tock, and tocks will tick.

3.
*Why must the keen sense in the gaze
She gives you as her fingers stroke
Your cheek become a thing of smoke
Viewed through a dim, abstracted haze?*

*Why must the meaning in a look
That summed up all the Heaven in
The world for you, become as thin
As propositions in a book*

*Of obsolete theology?
And Beauty, fresh and rose-leaf-lipped,
Illuminate a manuscript
Whose theme is Beauty's Brevity?*

*If you could dig it up again,
Love's body, and amid such bleak
Corruption rescue words that speak
Of Resurrection's joy, amen!*

*If joy in flesh proved to be made
Of more than flesh, and Lizzy Siddal
Opened her eyes, and solved the riddle,
Then letter might for spirit trade,*

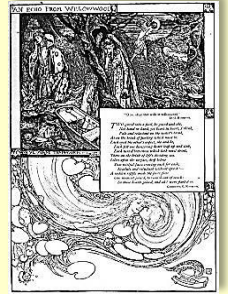


I snub out my cigarette and light another.

*The grandfather clock ticks in the corner; its
hands, interestingly, are moving backwards.*

Rossetti speaks in italics.

*If Willowwood were Willow Is
And Love could make, in the cool mirror
Of Dream Well, a dream-face draw nearer
And greet me with a bubbling kiss!*



4.
*The inviting smiles the stranger beams
Across the room, the glasses clinking,
The promise in a blue eye's winking,
Are as a lighted house that gleams*

*Upon a dim, receding shore.
Absences crowd the cenotaph
Of memory. A Cheshire-laugh
Dies down an empty corridor.*

*The llama stops circling the table. The toucan
flies to a cabinet in the corner. He perches
there, in his cowboy hat, looking depressed.*

5.
*The moment is a thievish thing.
It pockets all its proffered pelf —
But ah! is not desire itself
Invested in its vanishing,*

*That one brief pleasure may give way
To others, and variety
Nourish the hunger of the eye?
Sufficient, then, unto the day*

*The laughter and the lust thereof.
When night comes, and Minerva's owl
Flits bat-like, time then for the howl
Of Sorrow keening for lost Love.*



Ruskin and Rossetti at Oxford.

*I ventured to take Sorrow's bronze
And carve therein, for-evermore,
The Pleasure that Abideth for
A Moment — and awoke in bonds.*

*In bonds I wake, and having found
That Sorrow can in iron shape
Its image, and in chains can scrape
And clank along the frozen ground,*

I swivel my tired eyes, I peer
Around at blank and barren walls
Of space, and like a curtain falls
The light, because the drop is sheer.

Sunbeams are rods of bronze in air.
That blinding mirror of my sorrow:
Who will lift it to the sky to-morrow?
Who will hang that heavy pendant there?

What mighty crane will hoist that ball
Of metal aloft? The sky is steep.
The sun would rather fall asleep
And let the shadows cover all.

That burning clock, that tells the same
Old tale from dawn to dusk to dawn
Again, would with a gaping yawn
Sink into darkness, salve its flame

In waters of oblivion,
Scatter in seas and lakes and ponds.
Then who shall tell the tale that once
Upon a time there was a sun?

*He who demands of life a true love
Kisses illusion, clasps a ghost,
And weeps to hear time's heartless toast:
'Ring out the old, ring in the new love'.*

6. *The Swan of Tuonela*

Quite a splendid menagerie!
But why not add a swan to your
Collection? They are going for
A swan song these days. *That would be*

The mute swan, then, Cygnus olor?
Is that the one you have in mind?
The Agamemnon's where we find
The first use of the metaphor

Of the swan song, in that scene where
Cassandra, drawing her last breath,
Is likened to the swan whose death
Draws out both soul into the air



*'New love', 'newlove'... Oh yes, Henry
Newlove, one of the 'perverted telegraph boys'.
Memory still serves. The toucan squawks.*



And sad lament. Chaucer writes of
*'The Ialous swan, ayens his deth
 That syngeth'. Deep, oh deep beneath
 The earth, far from the songs of love,*

*The shouts of hate, circles a swan
 Around the Isle Tuonela, Land
 Of Death. Mysterious, pale and grand
 Amid the gloom she glides upon*

*The water. Deathless is her song
 As death is endless, and releasing.
 Voice of an oboe sadly pleasing,*

She pauses, sings again. Along

*The shores the shades are listening, listening,
 Startled alive in hearing's nerve.
 As graceful as her neck the curve
 Of melody, and pale and glistening*

*In the mist is the sombre vision.
 The music is a dying fall,
 And sweetest at the close of all.
 Orphic immortal, death's musician!*

* * *

*Schubert's publisher called his last
 Songs Schwanengesang. How could Fate
 Rob us so early of so great
 A man, of promise still more vast?*

*His is the Spirit of Water in motion,
 Rippling, bubbling, eddying,
 But ever a downward-flowing thing
 Returning home, to Mother Ocean.*

7.

*A mute swan is a paradox:
 For doesn't 'swan' mean 'sound'? Her breath
 Shapes only hisses, until death
 Inspires her: Ah, then she unlocks*

*Her throat, and pours forth melody!
 For when death's tonic note resolves
 Our dissonances, life dissolves
 Into the essential poetry*

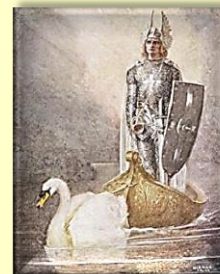


If Rossetti is referring to Sibelius'

*The Swan of Tuonela, this should
 be an English horn, Oscar. — [Mr V]
 A Finnish swan with the voice of an
 English horn! Really, Mr V, consider
 the exigencies of both sound and sense!*



*His eyes moisten, as do mine. I try to
 modulate the discussion to a lighter key.*



It was. The swan, symbol of faith
In love and God, Lohengrin's ferry,
Does not invariably marry
For life. Divorce happens (so saith



The ornithologist, and shoots
Down one more beautiful old myth,
A heedless Parsifal armed with
Binoculars, in Wellington boots.)

Sheer Beauty cast in pantomime
Upon the mirror of a stream,
Like the white shadow of a dream
The swan is with herself a rhyme.

Juvenal calls the virtuous woman
A rara avis, rare as a
Black swan. But in Australia,
I hear, black swans are not uncommon.



Great Zeus preferred to play the swan
In courting Leda. Urgency
Takes on wings, grasping bill, and see!
'Tis over – ah, much further on

The sequel... Fate can bide its time,
But action in the present moment
Sometimes proceeds too fast for comment.
Back to the sky we watch him climb

On broad but somewhat hurried wings.
Let politics and history wend
Their slow ways to one tragic end.
Zeus has moved on to other things.



The Trojans' hecatombs pique not
His nostrils. With his Ganymede
To play with, why should he pay heed?
Let Troy in its charred ruin rot.

(Still, he's a sentimentalist:
He takes stray stars and makes them spell, in
The sky, a Swan, when born is Helen,
The fateful issue of his tryst.)

No, it's a myth, the mute swan's silence;
It simply has no trumpet call,
No 'theme song' for its flight, saves all
For that Grand Tour round mythic islands.

*Your Aengus found his love among
The swans, and with her flew away,
A swan himself. Indeed, they say
There was enchantment in their song.*

*Let's not forget the albatross!
Here's to the floppy, flappy, bloody
Old albatross! Well, in your study
Of Baudelaire you've come across,*

No doubt, his version of the myth?
Where sailors capture the great bird
And watch him flap about, absurd
And clumsy; mock his limp, and with

A clay pipe tease his beak? *Of course.*
*Algernon's mad about it. Pass
The wine this way, could you? Alas,*
I feel its force. I feel its force.

*'The poet is this Prince of Clouds
Who, stranded among earthly things,
Encumbered by his giant wings,
Must limp among the jeering crowds'.*

Not bad, my friend, for an impromptu.
Of Baudelidge and Coleraire
Now sing a medley. Fuse the pair.
The toucan or the swan will prompt you.

*I am too deeply in my cups.
I am not up to it. You do it,
Oscar, my dreamy Irish poet.*
Ah, no. *I'll prompt you with hiccups.*

8.
*I have forgotten how to paint,
And, oh, I was an amateur.
Chasing the tarts: how that hurt her!
Care for some chloral? (I feel faint.)*

*Caer Ibormeith, beautiful daughter of
Prince Ethal Anbuail of Sid Uamuin.*



*Ah, Coleridge's admirable
nightmare-ballad, with quaint
annotations somewhat like mine.*

*I believe it should be
the other way around,
Oscar! — [Mr V]*



*But I am silent, lost in
some wistful thought.*

No thank you, for I am in thrall
To the opium-tainted cigarette.
By the last puff one can forget
Everything and imagine all.

*I miss her still, that's what hurts most.
Do you miss Bosie, ever? Always.
On dim side streets. In hotel hallways.
He is, and always was, a ghost.*

Better, therefore, to say I'm haunted.
One can't be disillusioned when
Illusion's all there is. Amen.
It was the dream *qua* dream I wanted.

9.
*Another glass? Good Lord, is that
A naked Algy sliding down
The staircase banister? The clown!
He'd look good in a cowboy hat.*

*He keeps babbling about BY-RON
And incest. So he f*cked his sister!
Who cares just where or when he kissed her,
Which breast he lay a hot hand on?*

*Does Algy want his drinky-tinky,
His boozy-woozy? Ask nice, Algy.
MY EPILEPTICO-NEURALGY!
Now don't go trying something stinky.*

*Algy, put your clothes back on! Show a
Bit of restraint! Put on your clothes!
More than a drunk Noah, one loathes
A drunk buck f*cking naked Noah!*



Suddenly I am very sad.



10.

*The thrush out in the garden! Can
You hear him? As plain as can be
That little b*stard's mocking me.
I'd punch him, if he were a man!*

*He says I that I am a brain-sick
Murderer and a chloral-fiend.
You must feel very much demeaned.
My neighbours taught him this neat trick.*

Come, Gabriel: I doubt the bird's
Remarks have anything to do
With you. *Now he's insulting you!*
I think you misconstrue his words.

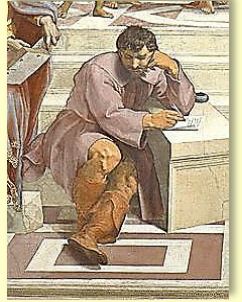
I'd hate to see you come to blows,
You two. Why not simply agree
To disagree? Let be, let be.
Ah, well: my nerves are raw, God knows.

Recite that poem you're working on.
Ignore that thrush, the impertinent bird!
I will hang on your every word,
Fitting aubade, for look: the dawn!



Putting Myself to School With Heraclitus

I have been reading Heraclitus, moving beyond Platonism to a more anarchic aesthetics of the fragmentary and the metamorphic, inspired by the aphorisms of the great Ephesian sage. As I read, he comes alive before me.



But, Heraclitus, teacher, say
How, in a world of flux and fire,
You can at all assert a higher
Principle, Logos or Arché?

*(You look quite cold. Come, sit beside
This oven; let the small fire warm
You with the thought that in this form,
Too, gods are present, and abide.)*

*Since Fire is the arch-element,
To grasp the Logos, understand
That nothing in the world can stand
Still: for the Fire is an event.*

You are the Arché's anarchist.
Logos is a paralogism.
Each word in every aphorism
You give precisely the right twist.

*We are in the kitchen of
Heraclitus' house in Ephesus.*

*Truth can only be expressed
as a Cretan Lie, perhaps?*

*

*On temple steps I'd often play
At draughts with children: for theirs is
The Kingdom, theirs the eternal bliss
And freshness of a dawning day.*

*A mere child's riddle made a fool
Of Homer: 'What we do not see,
That we take with us'. ('Lice' is the
Solution.) Thus life is a school*

*In which the lesson's always just
Beginning. In perpetual
Inception stands the mind. We all
Choose whether we shall burn or rust.*

Reading Nietzsche in the Afterlife

Seldom are advocates *artist*
Enough to turn the beautiful horror
Of, say, the murder of a whore, or
A lover, poisoned with a twist

Of lemon, irony and fate,
To the advantage of their clients.
For our Newtonian moral science
Is heavy-handed, overweight,

It cannot keep up with life's nimble
Complexities and gravity-
Defying, cosmic flippancy,
Of which the criminal is symbol.

You'd think he had been reading, 'Pen,
Pencil, and Poison' and was thinking
Of Wainwright! Psychic interlinking
Exists between like spirits, then?

*

Didn't I, too, like Hallam, though
Otherwise a far different type,
Appear before the time was ripe?
You pay a price if you outgrow

Your own contemporaries. Fate
In the mask of society
Punishes prematurity.
Too early we are born, too late

Appreciated for our good.
Some of us are born posthumously,
Herr Wilde. Our 'type' is doomed to be
Heard loudly and faintly understood,

Because we are not types at all,
But the exceptions to the rules,
Including those of any 'Schools.'
We stand for the Atypical.

In us all 'types' come to an end.
A population that consists
Purely of individualists:
Of this we are the omens, friend –

As Gide recommended ... I am struck by
an aphorism in Beyond Good and Evil.



Enter Nietzsche.



A world of artists who fulfill
Themselves at every moment! With
Each thought and deed they make the myth
Of themselves. *Only such can will*

Their own return eternally.
The Will is powerless not to will.
The Nihilist, willing Nothing, still
Is willing, willing not to be.

*

What is God? Nothing real or firm.
A name for namelessness. A place-
Holder, an X. As Arnold says,
'God is a literary term' —

An inconceivability
Impersonating a concept
That in its ghostly grasp has kept
The mind from setting itself free.

Reports of God's demise are highly
Exaggerated. He may slink
Into your conscience, and ghost-think
Your thoughts, even now. These ghosts are wily.

The hand releasing must be steady.
The Buddha's shadow lingered on
The wall long after he was gone.
It will not leave till it is ready.

The Lion in the desert roars
I WILL. The Dragon says, THOU SHALT.
Here even Lion spirits halt.
The Child is the renewing force.

We are born old, we Moderns, sinning
Against LIFE. This was my demand:
'Grow young again!' Let 'the Child' stand
For innocence always beginning.

(But what if childhood's taken from
The Child, with its carefree delight
(By, say, a father)? What he might
Have been he never will become!)



Is he plagiarising Lichtenberg?

A Bit of By-Play. A Reproof.

'There are no facts', you once asserted,
'Only interpretations'. Well,
Is that a fact! You 'over-sell'.
That was not stated, sir, but blurted.

Sometimes I used a rapier,
Sometimes a sabre. True, the slash
May leave a crude and ugly gash.
But it is an awakener!



His Grace and I
A Conversation with Cardinal Newman



1.
I kept your portrait, and the Pope's,
In my rooms in the University.
Was it a gesture of perversity?
A diptych of my fears and hopes.

Reading your books again reminds
Me why I was afraid to meet
With you: the great charm would defeat
Me of a man born to mold minds.

Oh, I have dallied with the Lady
From time to time, your Grace, but faltered
At the Altar. You would say I've paltered
With God. My character is shady.

But many a time I have been half
In love with her, the Scarlet Woman.
How like a Siren did she summon
Me in those days! My friends would laugh

To see how earnestly I talked
With priests, and nattered about Rome
As being my spiritual home.
At the church door I stood, but balked.

My own half-heartedness dispirited me.
Worse than religious, a financial
Crisis! Penalties were substantial:
My father would have disinherited me

If I had left the Fold. As 'twas,
My uncle nearly cut me from
His will for making eyes at Rome
Merely! The flesh is weak, *hélas!*

And the intellect is sceptical.
Each finds a questionable nutrition,
Whether in money or ambition,
Two gods that rule after the Fall.

2.

It was so tenderly dogmatic,
Your 'look' in the sartorial
Splendour of gravely beautiful
Vestments, say, a stiff flowered dalmatic.

And ah, the comely altar boys
Sweetly composed in solemn rite,
The incense-rich, subdued delight
Of hymns sung in a clear high voice!

You consecrate the Eucharist
With just a *soupçon* of ennui —
Te deum vitae (pardon me!) —
As with a somewhat languid wrist

You sway the censer. Incense smoke
Drowns communicants like bees,
Drugged by sublimest Mysteries.
You speak the words the Saviour spoke,

You magically consecrate,
With *hoc est corpus*, daily bread
Into the flesh of One who bled
To heal our wounds, Word increate

And boundlessly creative Holy
Ghost of the blessed Trinity. —
But what can all this do for me,
A moral leper, one whose *Noli*

Me Tangere is Lazarus' warning,
Confession of uncleanness, foul
Contagion? My unsightly soul
Wears the veil of a sinner's mourning.

3.

*The primitive, true Revelation
Lives on in Rome, and the tradition's
Seemingly novel definitions
Are clothing only, and illustration*

*Of ageless Truth in time unfurled.
The Church's mission is to fight
A giant evil, and shed light
Upon the darkness of the world.*



What is this 'giant evil', then?
Does it include, say, paederasty
Among the priests? *You have a nasty
Imagination. Priests are men,*

*And men are prey to lust and greed.
In every human institution
Is found some ethical pollution.
We are the flower of Adam's seed.*



4.
*There are some who say I should be made
A saint. They do not know, you see,
That I remain in Purgatory.*
Because you countenanced the slave trade?

*I felt it wrong, but thought it right
That, being fallen, Man's condition
Should be so harsh, whilst abolition
Defied God's plan. I see the light.*

I'm glad you see it, Cardinal Newman.
Our social evils cannot all
Be solved by finding texts in Paul!
The righteous can be so inhuman.

*One also finds in Paul the text
On resurrection in the flesh.
I trust yours will be cleanly, fresh,
And unambiguously sexed.*

You had a boon 'companion',
Your Grace, a man who lived with you
Some thirty years – is this not true?
One could elaborate upon

The implications of this fact...
That ex-Dominican who denounced
The Pope: how angrily you pounced
On *him*, how fiercely you attacked

His morals! With such animus
Did you impugn his character,
You triggered such a public stir,
A jury found it libelous.

5.

*But what bad conscience you betray
With your scurrilous imputations.
Your aesthete pose would try Job's patience.
Yet even a drunken man, one day,*

*By miracle or luck, may lurch
His way home. At the door I see
You stand. Ah, may you find the key
To the Apostolical, one true Church!*

Will the Lord own me as his son?
Surely, I have been prodigal,
Have eaten of the fruit of all
Life's tempting trees, and battened on

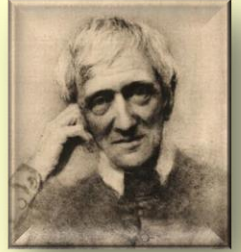
The husks of my humiliation!
Suffering is kindest when most cruel...
Then shall I don the brilliant, jewel-
Encrusted robe of my salvation?

*I trust that is a metaphor.
Say rather the garb of humility.
Yes, certainly of great utility,
But one might want to make a more*

Dazzling entrance unto God.
The aesthetics of a summer's day,
Pure *monochronos hêdonê*,
Give the tang to the angels' Laud.



His Grace and I
More Chats
with Cardinal Newman



1.

[Thus far we two have had a very
Pleasant discussion touching on
Substantiation, trans- and con-,
And over a fine glass of sherry

Compared notes on the Real Presence
In the Eucharist, the wafer-thin
Line 'twixt obedience and sin,
The bitter sweetness of His Essence.]

2.

Substance is, like a pure Idea,
Known only through its accidents.
These only we experience.
The Lord's ungraspable οὐσία

Makes itself actual for us
In accidents of bread and wine.
This daily miracle we define
As Transubstantiation. Thus

Divine Grace is embodied in
A sensuous form. The nourishment
Of this essential Sacrament
Renews us, cleanses us of sin.

But sin is, as it was, also
A mode of self-discovery.
A vice may save our lives to be
The good souls that to Heaven go.

At Lesbos, Aristotle says,
The mason's rule is made of lead,
Adjustable to help him read
The stones' uneven surfaces.

One bends the rule for the exception,
As everyone is, or should be.
But fallen is Humanity,
That crooked timber. The deception

*Built into language by its own
Bias and ambiguity
Distributes its perversity
Between the measurer and the stone.*

*Reason, the universal caustic,
Devours itself. God's rule is straight.
And He does not discriminate
Between atheist and agnostic.*

*Like you, I sought the Idea in
The Image. But, being pagan, you
Worshipped the image, not the true
Substance, οὐσία. That is sin.*

*You loved the thing created more
Than its Creator, you pursued
Idol and fetish, which illude
The soul. Then is my soul a whore?*

*Each of us worshipped Mystery
Almost for its own sake, and saw,
Appalled, how mystery and awe
Were being murdered rationally.*

*But Art was my religion, my
Mystery, a Mystery we should deepen,
Nor let the grubs of mere Fact creep in.
It was, it's true, idolatry.*

*But you, too, had an aesthete's eye
For images. These Rome could give
In plenty, here your eye could thrive
On icons of authority.*

3. The Biography of a Conscience

*In England ruled the great god Mammon,
Whom Liberalism served a feast.
In Ireland, meanwhile, raged the beast
An Gorta Mór, the Great Famine.*

*But it was consecrated bread
You hungered for. Anglican fare
Seemed made with insufficient care
And left you feeling underfed.*



The soul of the High Church was in
Sore disrepair. Crucial improvements
Were needed, and your Oxford Movement's
Goal was to save it from the sin



Of worldliness ('economy')
And schism. Evangelicism
Was one threat; worse, though, Liberalism
Was a great thriving blasphemy

Against the eternal principles
Of the true Faith: its sublime Vision,
Its rituals and its saving mission
Were ciphers to the Liberals.

Then, in the mirror of your soul,
You saw, one day, to your great terror,
An image of doctrinal error
So twisted out of shape, so foul,



Littlemore.

It looked as hideous a fright,
In its own intellectual way,
As the picture of Dorian Gray.
For you saw...a *Monophysite*!

What Gothic horror was this!

But when, at Littlemore, you came
To dinner in grey trousers (stood
Modeling a Change of Attitude
You were too subtle a man to name),

The old heresiarch was gone,
Your gesture said. Henceforth your stance
No longer was an Anglican's,
But the profession of the one

True Apostolical universal
Catholic Church, with comprecation
Of Saints, Purgatory, veneration
Of Mary: yes, this Great Reversal

You mimed in inter-sacerdotal
Mufti – a *coup de théâtre*, as 'twere.
And through the angry public stir
Your new faith stayed entire and total,

Your soul unerring in devotion.
The stations of your crossing home
From Low to Broad to High to Rome
Lead through grave doubts, and much commotion

You have to pass on lands and seas
Polemical and introspective
(For human logic is defective),
Until at last, your soul finds peace.

Behold! At length the stage is set
For Rome to take John Henry Newman,
A most distinguished catechumen,
Into Saint Peter's waiting net.

A Passionist baptises you.
Old Adam is at last a new man
And, gainsay all they say, a true man,
Who by his lights, although they grew

Dim sometimes in a gathering doubt,
Ne'er did but what he thought was right
And found his version of the Light
By honest ways, though roundabout.

4.
*I was, some made bold to suspect,
A dandy with accoutrement
Of halo, perfumed with the scent
Of sanctity. I and my 'sect'*

*Were even accused of 'foppery',
And seemed suspiciously 'refined'
To Christians of the muscular kind.
That 'die-away effeminacy'*

*Kingsley ascribed to me was nothing
Compared with the dishonesty
He charged me with, implicitly.
For all my modesty and loathing*

*Of self-advertisement, I had
To answer such an accusation.
This challenge, then, was the occasion
Of the Apologia. From young lad*



*To ageing man I traced the curious
Autobiography of my
Opinions, trudging, with a sigh,
Through old pamphlets. — Reliving furious*

*Controversies that to some seem
Much erudite ado, and little
More? — Pondering the ancient riddle
Of Antiquity made me dream*

*Of a Truth pristine, primitive,
Enshrined in doctrine, ritual, and
Tradition, passed from hand to hand
Down the millennia, still alive*

*In Rome — alas, somewhat corrupt,
But living. What was Protestantism?
A theory, a bookish 'ism'.
But he who with Christ Jesus supped,*

*The fisherman Apostle, passed
By firm succession, Pope to Pope,
Power and universal scope
Over the One Church. Thick and fast*

*Heresies come and have their day.
But Scripture proves that only Rome
Is the Tradition's lasting home.
The English Church will pass away.*

*She lured your soul, the sweet, demure
Holy Mother, across the Channel.
'Twas Milton's pipes now sounded 'scrannel'.
She lured you, and you yielded to her.*

*For, as I've said, the only way
To rid oneself of a temptation
Is to yield to it. To the Nation
A traitor, some presumed to say,*

*(They cursed the Popish harlotry
Of images you venerated
Of martyr and saint, they execrated
Your shameless Mariolatry)*

*To your own wayward yet steadfast,
Tentative, cautious and yet pure
Nature you kept faith, were most sure
When unsure that your faith would last.*



By what a curious, tortuous way
You reached your spiritual home in
The only Catholic church, the Roman!
But there you stayed, and there you stay.

5.

*I never saw the Holy Ghost,
The Spirit who descends to save us.
I never saw that rara avis,
The hovering dove of Pentecost.*

*What other prophylactic moly,
Of symbol and higher Mystery
Compounded, could have kept you free
From the Circèan spell unholy*

*Of panther feasts on offer in
The private rooms of your desire,
The marketplace and barnyard mire
Of heedless hedonistic sin?*

*Ah, not the herb that Hermes gave you
(Itself a spell)! Only the love
Of the invisible Power above.
But what you don't believe can't save you.*

6.

At last, at least, *your* changing soul
Came out in an authoritative
Edition, and fulfilled its native
Urge to submit to God's control.

From sacrament to sacrament
In the incense of the Illative
You found a way to think and live
An unconditional Assent.

Your story has an austere glamour
Consonant with your mind's precision,
Though your abstract, scholastic vision
Repels me with its frigid grammar.

Where the child Blake saw angels perched
In trees, your mind received 'impressions
Of dogma' at fifteen, a prescience
Of all the Tracts to come, researched



From my Notebook

*Kingsley, muscular Christian, can
Weight-lift two hundred pounds of sin.
Wrestle the Devil, and who can win?
Good Works' top athlete, Christ's he-man!*

With minute and exhaustive reading
In the Church Fathers, building thesis
On thesis, founded on *φρονησις*,
To justify Faith's special pleading.

The cause for which you fought was doomed
To fail, the tide of Liberalism
Could not be stemmed; Rationalism
Made all the assumptions once assumed,

Including the Assumption, either
Questionable or wholly moot.
The tree was severed at the root.
How could you glue it back together?

'Twas doomed to fail, your Restoration.
How could a Tory renegade,
Perversely, grandly retrograde,
Undo the history of the Nation?

For history has leached the colour
Element from the English Church.
Good deeds and scholarly research
Can't keep it from becoming duller

And duller as the years advance.
No purple dyes of tender awe
Can make us see what Peter saw,
The living Radiance in the glance

Of God made Man and Holy Ghost.
The once-fresh Apostolic Creed,
A mystic rose that's gone to seed,
Mixed with the general compost

Of Western myth, cannot be prayed
Back from the dead, except in art,
The temple of the modern heart.
The Institutional must fade.



The Athanasian Creed

*Anathematical, schematic,
The Athanasian Creed turns sword-
Point Trinitarianism toward
Arius, the dangerous schismatic.*

7. *The Idea of a University*

But let my portrait be well-rounded.
You *did* defend the Catholics,
The poor of Ireland; candle-wicks
You lighted for them when you founded

The Catholic University,
(A place that served to incubate
The intellect of the first great
Catholic Irish writer, he

Who boldly cried, *Non serviam*,
And fled the fold of Church and Nation
But never lost his admiration
For your prose style. Would you still damn

James Joyce to Hell as reprobate?
He is your truest 'fan': these days
There aren't that many left, your Grace.
Might you shed some on him? A great

Phronesis would it be, and prudence.
The herd of independent minds
Read Marx, of late. One can't pick *kinds*,
One has to welcome any students.

*

O radical who found no root,
You are history. The *Via Media*'s
A relic of the encyclopaedias,
And you begged questions long since moot.



Now University College Dublin.



Ulysses Revisited

1.

I have read through *Ulysses* once
Again: I am even more impressed.
You and Marcel are much the best
Of Flaubert's wayward modern sons.

*Begob, my dream is a nightmare
From which I am trying to awake.
You'll put me back to sleep! I take
It you're abashed by such a rare*

Compliment? But you write resplendent
Prose! A cracked looking glass you place
Before the Bard's own gibbering face.
A prank so cheekily transcendent,

Getting the English language drunk!
Linguistic Saturnalia
Striking blows for Hibernia!
Yet, from behind it all, a monk

Peers out, ascetic young aesthete.
'A god, paring his fingernails'.
(That comes from *me*.) The prim Muse pales
At the soiled wonders of the street,

But down that street your novel guides
Her, sights that would have sickened Zola
You show her, as you give the soul a
Tour of its animal outsides.

2.

That June day glared, and challenged you
To render it, down to the most squalid
Details, as a Carlylean solid.
But is not Bloom, the Wandering Jew

Reading at stool his *Titbits* tale,
A sort of icon to remind us
How soon such things will be behind us,
Mixed with the dung and gilded stale?

*Another conversation with the dreaming
Joyce. He is hard at work on his Work
in Progress, even as he sleeps.*



'Narrative is linear, Action is solid'.

– Carlyle

And yet 'tis a canonic Scene,
Recorded for eternity.
It resists ideality
In vain, the smear of what is mean.

It is swept up into the vast
Sun-saturated canvas of
A day in Dublin's life, whose tough
Presence is flooded by the past

As by a Liffey of the soul
That carries all that is inside us
Of prayers and curses, that detritus,
To the ocean of the cleansing Whole;

The Akashic record of that single
Sixteenth of June, 1904,
Silver-and-dross of Dublin ore,
Where the inner and the outer mingle

In one half-chance, complex vibration
Somehow imprinted on the ether
Of vital oddnesses together
Forming the song of their occasion

Intricately attuned to which,
With vastly listening ear, one sings
The motley anthem of these things
Whose very poverty is rich

With scents his intuition noses.
Lives of the living and the dead
He lives and dies, for he has read
The scripts of our metempsychoses.

(A schizophrenic, Carl Jung thinks,
But diving conscious into water
Wherein Lucia, your poor daughter,
In helpless madness merely sinks.)

3.
Realism, pushed far enough —
Too far, that is — yields to the pull
Of the Phantasmagorical.
Among strange diamonds in the rough



When you and Nora first 'stepped out'.

*'You' becomes 'one' becomes 'he' becomes 'we'.
A polyphonic ear hears collective Rabelaisian speech.*



He should have said, 'scherzophrenic'.

We enter what is truly real:
The mind, half-dreaming what it sees
In haphazard epiphanies,
The taste and touch and smell and feel

Of existence as a lived process,
Moment-by-moment. This atomic
Viewpoint is mapped, in ways both comic
And grand (as in 'met him pikehoses'),

Onto the overarching myth
Of the *Odyssey*. The past, the Great
Tradition, shadows forth a fate,
An archetypal monolith

To which this day's experience
Adds its impromptu gargoyles. Mind
Passes through Overmind. Refined
And gross, intricate and immense,

Eccentric, yet of massive poise,
This solid dream, this sight-seeing vision
You render with such mad precision
Gives madness reason to rejoice.

You consecrate life's daily mess
As artist's bread, down to the least
Particulars and bubbling yeast
Of language-making-consciousness.

Ulysses is a smear of gold
We find God-like details enough in
To fill cathedrals. (One must roughen
The texture or the truth won't hold,

The truth, I mean, of mental realms.)
Your ear, ah, supernatural!
Catches murmurs innumerable
Of bees in immemorial elms,

When that's the note you wish to sound.
In 'The Oxen of the Sun' your style
Runs from the Latin to Carlyle.
Indeed, what echo is not found



Of literary ancestors,
Most from an alien, conquering race?
For you, pastiche is at once grace
And vengeance on those who by force

Stole from us our good Gaelic tongue,
But in whose language we must speak
And write, or else, resigned to weak
Provincial status, dwell among

The marginal, behind green doors
Weave cottage marginalia,
Languishing in Hibernia,
All our subversive metaphors

Hidden, like Blake, but in the dense
Brogue of an ancient wizard speech
We would, like good Saint Francis, preach
To ears that catch nor style nor sense.

With syntax to inordinate
Degrees you play, of which the meaning
Often resembles more a keening
Than a (to logic or dictate

Of fact with reference which one
Can easily grasp) significance.
Nothing in style escapes your glance,
With life it rings in unison.

4.
Imagination can possess
The streaky bacon of a life;
Through the texture, as with a knife,
Cut to the grain of consciousness.

Mid-day traffic. Businessmen feeding.
The potted meat. The scrotum-tightening
Sea, the wind-driven breakers whitening.
Bloom in his silks, or Stephen reading:

We know them by their style of thinking.
How the sun dapples with its light
The schoolmaster, the anti-Semite.
The rumor of sedition, winking.



'I am hid', writes Blake writes in an annotation. To be 'apocryphal' in both Graeco-Roman and Hebraic traditions means to be 'hidden' or 'hid'. —[Mr V]

The Cyclopean Citizen
Hurling his tin. Gerty, who raises
Lewdly her skirt, the lame girl. Blazes
Boylan. Gogarty-Mulligan.

You get inside our heads... What is
Home without Plumtree's Potted Meat?
We know the answer: Incomplete.
And with it? An abode of bliss.

(Your Stuart Gilbert certainly
Wrote you a fine advertisement,
A book of which, do you repent?
I do, I do, most bitterly.)

It ends — to anticipate — with Yes.
As well him as another, call
Him lover or husband, Yes to all
This, melon-buttocked Molly says.

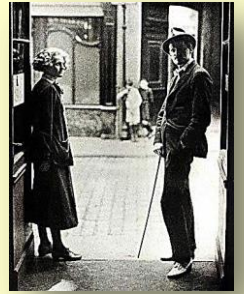
5.
*Yer deepraised voice is greatful to me,
For all of yer profundust snobbing.
It pains me, thinking of you sobbing
There, in your prisonce, gland and gloomy.*

*But I owe you no reverence,
O Moon-Queen of a Beardsley drawing.
I find you less than overawing.
I make of you whatever sense*

*I knead, to bake my WIP, a ball
Of doughy smear-sinification,
Accusative of accusation.
I make you anyone at all.*

(Ah, here comes everybody! I'm
Aware of it: quite Shandean.
The plot, though, as far as I can
Make out, is: Once. A pun. A time.)

To appropriate is exquisite,
To be appropriated, more
Exquisite still. Come, dear: have your
Way with me. I don't mind a bit.



*'Work in Progress'.
The finished work:
Finnegans Wake.
— [Mr V]*

Far from a solemn archetype,
I am a posture, a position,
A trend, a manner, a transition —
A Tyger, in short, of any stripe

One of *your* stripe may postulate.
Primal infinitive of a sign
That signifies its own decline
Into declension and cognate...

Yes, mighty conscience-forging smithy,
Go forth, our Hero Daedalus!
(Though in your *WIP*, dear, some of us
Might wish you a wee bit more pithy.)

All you wild geese of Irish letters:
With Joyce on point you fly to where
I foundered. Pierce the cold blue air
In glory, free of English fetters!



Master of the Revelations ***Dante's Latest Pageant***

*I dream Marcel and I are on the summit of Mount Purgatory,
walking in awe through the Garden of the Earthly Paradise.*



1.

How verdant is this Paradise!

*To see this place, who would not die?
It has, mon cher, look! its own sky,
A bruised white rose flushed pink at rise*

*Of day, blood-red at evenfall.
You'd think it was the Tuileries.
Everywhere, roses, peonies,
Azaleas, daffodils, and all*

*So fragrant! Listen: that sublime
Passage in the Vinteuil Septet!
To recall we must first forget.
This is the ambiguous gift of time.*

*Even for Dante, Paradise
Is the regaining of the past:
Fully remembered, cosmic, vast,
It lives in Beatrice's eyes.*



2. The Pageant

*So, when does the next chariot come
Along? As if the two of us
Were waiting for an omnibus?
I'm sure that it will strike us dumb*

*With wonder. — Look, Marcel, behold
That candelabra, seven-branched
And moving! We are bleached and blanched
And blinded by its brilliant gold-*

*Blue rainbow-stranded peacock tail!
Look, the Apostles and the Saints!
So virtuous, one nearly faints
With awe. Yet they all look so pale...*

*{The Chariot comes to a halt. Dante narrates an
allegorical representation of the Protestant heresy.*

*The monstrous Boor of Germany,
That cowed and costive, cholerick
Old Antichrist and Heretic,
Attacks the chariot and tears free*

*The rear half, and with a strong push
Rolls it into a savage wood
Where muskets bark and men of blood
Lurk behind every tree and bush...*



3. A Snide Aside

And next comes antique Allegory.
Arthritic now, no longer nimble,
Her features vague, scumbled by Symbol,
She sits lamenting her lost glory.

In her right hand she holds a sword,
In her left is an hourglass.
She is a melancholy lass.
She gazes down at a chessboard

On which great birds of prey, the black
And white, are tactically deployed.
She looks down at the sword, annoyed
And puzzled: She thinks back, thinks back

But cannot quite remember where
She got it, what it is, or why
'Tis in her hand. A tapestry,
Cobwebbed, is floating in the air.

On it are pictures dim and grey,
Images of things dreadfully
Important, one takes them to be,
But what they are one can't quite say,

They are so dim. But on a table
An astrolabe allays one's doubt,
It seems so definitely *about*
Something definite, one's unable

To say exactly what that is,
But one likes how exact it looks.
And there are pentagrams and books,
Flowers, and skulls, and compasses...



Can someone help her, please? Relieve
Her of those objects in her hands,
Whose meaning no one understands,
Or knows too well to well-believe.



*Dante's voice breaks out
like thunder overhead.*

4.

**WHAT, OSCAR, DO YOU THINK ME DEAF?
I HEAR YOUR JESTS. I'VE HALF AN URGE
TO SEND YOU BACK TO SING YOUR DIRGE
DEEP IN THE PITCHY PIT'S BASS CLEF.**

Accept what lesser says to Greater:

*'Scusi, senor, la colpa mia,
Uomo della diritta via!
Sono smarrito, gran' poeta!'*

Maestro, you are my ancestor
Upon my mother's side, or so
She told me: my great-great-great-oh-
How-great grandfather. In my heart's core

You live, you burn at times within
The features of *my* face, I sense
Your presence in presentiments.
You are my sickness and my sin.

Something in us, despite our lateness,
Still relishes Ruggieri's head,
Your bloodlust for the damnèd dread,
Your gruesome and atrocious greatness...

*So Goethe characterised it: 'Wider-
wärtige, oft abscheuliche Grossheit.'*

*Now in golf tweeds, he threatens me with a huge putting iron.
A reminder of my mendacity in claiming to be on golf outings to
deceive Constance as to my whereabouts and sodomitical doings?*

But what apocalyptic round

Of golf is this, sir? Would you putt me
Into a pocket, Eagle, shut me
In a hole in unholy ground?

**YOU ARE A MIDAS IN REVERSE,
DEBASING EVERYTHING YOU TOUCH.
FOUL SODOMITE, GET IN THIS POUCH!
THE JOSTLE OF CLUBS SHALL BE YOUR CURSE.**

Really now, Dante, that is quite
Enough! It is uncouth, this show
Of violence every time you grow
Annoyed. You gave me quite a fright!

*The scene changes to the Terrace of the Proud.
Now wearing a stone on his back, he manages
to heave at me the two tablets of the Ten
Commandments. I step aside in the nick of time.*

The Ten Commandments? All agog
Am I to read them through again.
Thank you. One *does* need, now and then,
A hefty dose of Decalogue.

I note that *you* are stooping under
A heavy stone, gasping and groaning.
Why not in wrathful smoke atoning?
Not yet for you the heavenly thunder.

For after all, my fitful guide,
You dwell in Purgatory, too,
In trials of smoke and stone. *It's true.*
For wrath, for wrath! And ah, for pride!

5. Surprised by Dante

*A great bitch-goddess, Lady Bracknell,
An old grotesque raised out of time
By shrewdly marrying the Sublime,
Muffling the funeral bells' black knell.*

*You should be punished, not seeing how
Much better is The Importance of
Being Earnest than the one you love,
An Ideal Husband, which is now,*

*Well, something of a period piece,
Despite its wit, yes, in a way
A middling sort of well-made play,
Whence Ernest is divine Release.*



*Announcing a soul's ascension from
Purgatory into Heaven. – [Mr V]*

*Another transformation scene. We are
seated in the library of my Tite Street
home. Brandy is served. Attired in a
smoking jacket, Dante is languidly leafing
through The Importance of Being Earnest.*

*How flattering, and unexpected:
he has read my play, and likes it!*

(The Tuscan as a theatre critic,
Exhorting me, for reasons purely
Aesthetic, to judge more maturely
My own work? He is so acidic,

Yet not unkindly, his advice.)
Perhaps you're right. *Its lightness is*
A decorously zany bliss.
An irresponsible Paradise!

Perhaps you'd care to have a look
At the engravings of Doré?
They do add something, I must say.
It is a very handsome book.



*I take down a beautiful edition
de luxe of the Divine Comedy,*



*I am pleased to report that, since the events
related here, Dante has finally achieved
ascension from Purgatory into Heaven,
where he is indeed reunited (he writes to
me on a postcard) with his Beatrice. They
are expecting a blessed event in the spring.
I will be sure to drop a card on them,
if I am ever in the vicinity.*

*From Père Lachaise
The Question of Reincarnation
With a Note on the Oxfordian Theory*



A visitor asks a question.

*Do you plan to reincarnate?
Say rather, incarnate again
As Shakespeare, with his teeming brain.
Ah, to enjoy once more the great*

*Gossip, the Mermaid Tavern jokes,
Shop-talk concerning plays and staging,
And drunken Richard Burbage raging
As Pistol whilst Ben Jonson smokes*

*His meerschaum pipe, and interjects
A caustic comment now and then!
Those plays came from another pen,
Some say. Ah, disputatious sects,*

*Bardolatrous and bardoclastic!
Some claim that it was Ned De Vere,
The Earl of Oxford. So I hear.
I like such claims. They are fantastic.*

*If he was not the Bard, he should
Have been, and therefore was. Shakespeare's
Life was quite colourless; De Vere's
Was full of romance, and at good*

*Queen Bess's court, he was a figure
Of no mean stature, what with marrying
Old Burleigh's daughter, and with carrying
On that feud with Sidney: a bigger*

*And grander and more poetic soul
Than Shakespeare's, a more likely sort,
What with his knowledge of the Court,
To have been the author and the sole*

*Begetter of those utterly
Life-like depictions none surpass
Of the aristocratic class,
Its sins, its magnanimity.*

And yet, Dears, since I *am* Shakespeare's
Reincarnation (though quite used
To scepticism), I am amused
At how far from the truth it 'veres',

This theory, and I admire
The fanciful in any form.
The Bard became me to perform
Himself as...martyr to desire.

You'd like to return as the Bard
You were, you say. Reincarnation
Works backwards? Why not? On occasion
One may turn up the oddest card.

The Aion Child-Divinity
Has powers... *Item*: can emit time
Backwards, permit a rhyme of 'time'
With 'time': a mighty mite is he.



The Master of the Revels *An Idle Show*



1.

*I've often dreamed of such a kind
Of man as thou. I am Falstaff,
You mean, good only for a laugh,
A comic butt? Is not my mind,*

*My wit, at least, the cause that wit is
In others? Yet there is a blot
Upon thy name. I love thee not
For honour's sake, my dear, but pity's.*

*Of course, one wants to be fair, kind
And true. It is good to be good.
But there are differences. How could
Thy love to Constance be confined,*

*In a domestic idyll all
Thy love's idolatry be spent,
When love a stranger turned, and went
Astray from homely hearth and hall?*

*Fair, kind and true it was to one
Nor true nor kind, though fair. What scope
Was there for faith, or love, or hope?
I am alone. I am alone.*

2.

*But Marlowe, how, exactly, did
You know him? Biblically, as in
The Sodom-and-Gomorrhah sin?
I will not raise that coffin lid.*

*The sun declineth in the west
And droops now the Hesperian star low
O'er the sea, mourning for Kit Marlowe.
Leave the dead shepherd to his rest.*

*Uncover the false Ganymede
Whom Phoebe loves distractedly
And he is she, but she is he
Who is a Ganymede indeed!*



I mean, of course, your Willie Hughes...

*Of hues so various, I still rage
At him whose love, mimed on a stage,
So rankly did my love abuse.*

So, William, you also played
With fire...*In my day, sodomy
Could earn you the death penalty.
Who made love thus might be unmade.*

Here is a catch ('tis but a toy):
*'Hey-no, high-low, say dost thou know
The Angel with the Brown Halo,
Hey-nonny-no, oh the Brown Boy?*

*'Hey-no, high-low, his brown hair turneth
The tawniest gold in certain lights,
Uncertain lights, on curtained nights,
Hey-nonny-no, as the lamp burneth.'*

*Thine eyes are full of moons and stars;
Thy mouth hath tasted of the gutter.
Thy life indeed was too, too utter,
A tragico-historic farce.*

*But sorrow's wound hath made thee deep.
Rest now, my dear. Adieu, adieu –
A dew which may you melt into
Of dreams, on the black rose of sleep.*



*He singeth.
He quoteth from Teleny.
He hinteth, with great negative
capability, at his scion Keats.*

*Kisses two fingers and places
them gently on my lips, so.*



A Letter from the Sphinx



*Ada Leverson recounts
an interesting evening
with friends.*

*Ada (Sphinx) communicates with me
through the mediumship of Mr V.
She entertains me with a decadent bit
of gossip. Of course she is making
all this up, and I believe her implicitly.*

(I) *Beardsley and the Brownings*



1.

Oscar, I dined last night with Browning
And Beardsley! Friend, I had a fine
Time of it. We drank so much wine!
What with arch Beardsley, and Browning frowning,

And dear Elizabeth *née* Barrett
Present to goad them on and play
Them off against each other, they
Were *quite* the experience: I shall share it.

2.

Aubrey's a gifted young musician,
'Mongst many other wicked things.
Robert, a musicolater, sings
Along when Aubrey plays magician



At the keys, and plucks teardrops of
Chopin, or strums a scandalous tango.
Elizabeth holds out a mango,
A blushing prize, to him whose love

Most sweetly tunes itself to smooth
And voluble discourse of tongue
On matters musical: for young
She's grown, and vigorous and, in truth,

Quite dangerous in her sorcerous beauty.
Robert, the Evangelically
Inclined, takes on most manfully
The challenge, thinking it his duty



To do the honours due to Beauty
And Beauty's blazon in her eyes.
Aubrey, ah, wicked Aubrey! sighs.
He is ironical and snooty,

And yields his rival choice of theme.
I have one. (Aubrey, do not mock!)
I shall describe the City of Bach.
The architecture of a dream?

Robert speaks in italics.

Asks Aubrey, silver-hatchet-faced,
His black hair parted in the middle,
His attitude an angle, a riddle,
His promise, ah, so soon erased,



A second Keats, he, too, died at 25, and of the same disease. I almost wish I had not invented him, for such an end. — [Oscar]

So cruelly curtailed, dark-glowing
In all its tragic anger in this
Hollow-cheeked, acute face of his,
Those eyes so full of deathly knowing.

2. The City of Bach

Fugueberg-of-a-thousand-streets
'Tis called. On this I shall dilate.
Where is it, then? In a 'fugue state'?
The blueprint lays out on white sheets,

(Aubrey, behave!)

On grids of voice in four-part writing,
Intersection, circle, and square.
And through this place the travellers fare
Fleeing each other, or at times fighting,



And generally going their
Own ways down diverse avenues.
But all this counterpoint of views
Forms somehow a melodious air

Of a clean richness so precisely
Beautiful that one weeps for joy
To hear the jostling and annoy
Of voices drawing harmony

From clash of passing dissonance,
As textured layers of voice one voice
Make of complex assent that joys
In God as in a Sacred Dance.

Aubrey:
The Book of Numerology!
Who knew the cold Masonic God he
Adored was so adorned and gaudy?
He sings Bel Cantor thrillingly.

4. The Aleph

*Into the darkness light shall enter!
Dark was the Void, without a sun.
All things lay in oblivion.
Circumference was there none, no centre.*

*Silence was King, things slept a slumber.
The Cantor trained a starry choir;
They knew no measure of desire
And so He said, 'Let there be Number'.*

*And like the fundamental tone
Of things, before things were, There is.
'Let it be Aleph' – Lo! 'tis this.
'Be it infinity-plus-one'*

*And so I am. I ALEPH am.
What are you? What am I? 'I' is
Another, is all others. Bias
Is built into your Panogram*

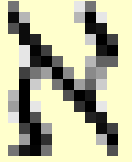
*Towards a certain solipsism
Belied by the Pleroma's loud
Downbeat into a riotous crowd
Of syncopated anarchism.*

*I am the Aleph. I am what
I am. Fool! All that is, at all,
Endures for ever, past recall.
Life, saith Shakespeare, is a slut*

*Whose pox God wills our flesh to want,
A pampered punk, a Trojan strumpet,
Apocalypse that lips the trumpet
Of the end of all, this Aleph-Ant*

*Of More in Less and Less in More.
She is the sultry cigarette girl
In Space's Cabaret, she'll whirl
You for a waltz out on the floor*

*And lead you to a curtained garden,
One soft and flowery bed. She'll turn
The gramophone crank, you will yearn
For her, and soften, and then harden...*



*'Both tiny and huge: the Aleph-ant',
whispers Aubrey to Elizabeth, snickering.*

Aubrey interjects a question.

Saith Rabbi ben Ezra.

Says Aubrey.

Sleeper awake! The sweet thief's gone,
And you an elephant of wrinkled
Memory on sheets, think how it twinkled,
Your wedding ring she soon will pawn.

*E.B.B. looks on amused as the
two rivals glare at one another.
Robert resumes, dactylically rhapsodic.*

5. Tetra-Anagrammaton

*Bach: A brook flowing down from the mountain.
Bellows: The lungs of the organ aloft,
Booming like thunder, now distant and soft.
Bach: Flows to the sea and returns as a fountain.*

*Anna his sweet Magdalena, the singer.
Allemande: dancer, and German by birth,
Andante it moves, lightly touching the earth.
Appoggiatura, the discord-bringer.*

*Clavichord thirds embellish the cello.
Circle of fifths its own tail devours.
Clef unto clef calls, and it showers
Chords misted with a chromatic halo.*

*H: Pronounced 'asch', a German 'B'.
Harmony's honey is bittersweet:
Hear how in One all the bird-songs meet,
Harps, how they're coaxed of their melody!*



6.
*High on the senses' crest, the ear
Is hungry and deep, a shadowy hollow
Harmony-hallowed. Troubles follow:
Cursing and tears are all we hear.*

*Evil visits us in our dreams.
When the Physician comes, we are too sick
To drink the potion of His music.
When shall we enter a house whose beams*

*Are stronger than the winds of time?
How low they lie among the stones,
The scattered staves of human bones!
They would in stepwise sureness climb*

*To the high registers of Heaven
And descant sweetly on the Word
Melismas round the tonic chord
With every dissonance forgiven.*

7.

*Each part is made of many parts:
A single heart, faithful and true.
Two hearts in love. One, broken in two.
Each heart is made of many hearts.*

*The heart of pride, sickly and cold,
The Queen of Hearts, upon her throne,
Who wears a crown, but sits alone,
For love cannot be bought or sold.*

*The heart of hate, baffled and wild.
And that miraculous red bird
That beats in the hand of the Word
Of God is the heart of a child.*

8.

*Follow one street through all the towns,
Cross the one town by myriad streets:
Such the complexity that meets
The ear with wiles to thread these sounds.*

*Every listening reveals
A unique city; say, therefore,
Infinite cities to explore,
And ne'er the same one twice unreels*

*Itself before the venturing ears.
As often as they listen, these
Will always hear a different piece,
No road is royal, each path veers*

*Off on its own course, no twin brother
It has among the ways to get
From end to end of town, and yet
Each path's as good as any other.*

*Such is the infinitely complex
Bach fugue: complex yet clear, and thus
Infinitely perspicuous
As the eye of the regorum Rex.*

*So every work of Bach's contains
More music than the ear can hear,
Though asymptotically we near
The whole towards which our hearing strains.*



*His music is pure in excelsis
Deo gloria, the Infinite
Dwells in the ringing shrine of it
More than in anybody else's.*

9. Cantata and Mass

*Cantata, a pew filled with voices
Diversely joined in one devotion
Spending itself in sound like ocean
Waves on the altar. Grief rejoices.*

*But dissonance comes like a sword
Amongst the tones, with ills and evils
The tonic major heals – but, Devil's
Interval, you baffle the chord!*

*The hearts' tritones prevaricate.
Sweet distant voices fall and rise.
We hear the tunes of Paradise
But swordsman Michael guards the gate.*

*The heart's a furtive, darkling coast,
Tough muscle, Lord, perversely soft,
Made whole when the priest holds aloft
The consubstantiated Host.*

10. A Prince and a Subject

*He is the Prince, a man of pallid
Visage, and pride unlimited
Inside a small and narrow head.
I am the subject of the ballad.*

*As vast as a great fugue it was,
This Prince's grandiosity.
Once, as his coach-and-six rolled by,
What every loyal subject does*

*I failed to do: I would not raise
My cap, when duty bid me show
The Christian virtue of a low
Obsequiousness. In those days*



*Robert knocks back a glass of wine
and turns storytelling balladeer.*

*High Worldliness decreed that even
Our music should wear livery,
Though only true Divinity
It ought to serve, and highest Heaven.*



*Fetters and a floor strewn with straw
Would be the fugitive's if caught –
Though freedom in this place meant naught
But wearing lighter chains. I saw*

*My chance, and leaping on my horse,
Broke through the guards' ranks and attained
The open road. How my horse strained
To outstrip the advancing force!*

*She plunges on in a dust cloud,
Presto, and her hooves on the ground
In demisemiquavers pound,
Whilst gaining hooves beat fast and loud.*

*I turn at a remote byway
And somehow narrowly escape.
I try to modulate my shape.
(Such are the games subjects must play.)*

*I change the angle of my figure,
And backwards, even upside-down
I walk at times, from town to town,
Now seeming smaller and now bigger,*

*Disguise myself, almost become
Another subject altogether,
Darting hither in stealth and thither,
Hotly pursued. My nightly home*

*I make in taverns, wayside inns.
The crashing entry of his men
Awakens me, again, again,
Come in the name of the great Prince.*

*Only an open window gapes
At them when they burst through the door.
Another night: we play once more
This stretto of entries and escapes.*

*It ends with capture, but a finer
End than the gallows waits for me.
My crime was thinking I was free.
My life concludes in sad B minor.*

*'Im finstern Tal, fürchte ich kein
Unglück'. I pray here, in my prison,
Waiting to die. For He is risen,
His tomb empty; so shall be mine.*

*From the Lutheran Bible, Psalm 23
(‘Yea, though I walk through the
Valley of Death, I shall fear no evil’).*



11.
*We go about our business, friend
To enemy and enemy
To friend. The town hall clock strikes three.
Around the clock stiff figures wend*

*The circle of fallen Man and end
Where they began, as in a prison
Exercise yard. Soul's prayer-gears (listen!)
Chime: 'Bury your clocks and ascend'.*

12.
*Out in the yard, bread, cheese, and beer.
Anna my wife, the gifted singer,
At our wild children wags a finger,
Smiling in daylight soft and clear.*

*They scramble over bench and board.
Smoking my Meerschaum pipe, I am lost
In thought. The beer tastes stale. The cost
To fix the roof I can't afford!*

*A sort of fugue, those scampering cats...
That post in Leipzig... I review
My awkward speech: the interview,
The sacred, stupid bureaucrats!*

*Can rules be followed so far that
You break them? Do you then become
The leader? Leading where? God, home?
Meanwhile, cat runs away from cat.*



Thomasskirche, Leipzig.



13. *The Passion According to St. Matthew*

*O Christ our Lord and living Word,
This music is your beating pulse.
As through these dissonant intervals
Lines journey towards the tonic chord,*

*And as the chosen tribe of Moses
Walked forty years o'er desert sand
Until they reached the Promised Land,
Rose made of thorns composed of roses,*

*So up a path of flails and curses
You strove, to crown our exaltation
From the tower of humiliation,
As it is writ in Matthew's verses.*

*And in this Passion, in this pity
Let sound the tolling bell, for dun
Will grow the day ere long: the sun
Is setting on the human city.*

14. Aubrey's Palinode

Two subjects scraping, now and then,
Against each other, blade on blade
In spark and clash, then retrograde
Going their separate ways again:

Yes, that's what counterpoint is all
About. Bach is its master – and
Its slave. The structure is quite grand
But such formality may pall.

I prefer madness in my music.
Thor-hammering Wagner. Poetry,
Too, Schubert's sweet melancholy.
Or the dark side of Mozart, too sick

To finish his last masterpiece,
Coughing up genius in a garret.
(Sometimes I simply cannot bear it,
This dying. Where shall I find peace?)

[Aubrey recovers his arch composure and improvises mockingly
on some favourite themes and anathemas of the Evangelically-
minded Robert, including his hated Calibanesque natural theology.]



By Walter Sickert.



The Requiem.

15.

Galuppi, give us a toccata
On themes as wild as the Galapagos,
Or Guinean shores, where anthropophagus
Natives are chanting a cantata

In praise of Nature (God, or Book
Of Darwin, Devil's script?) They praise
The Vulcan-spark that in a blaze
Makes oily missionaries cook.

They dance around the fire and shout
Hosannas to a tikki god,
This animistic cult of fraud-
Shamans and tribal odd-men-out.

Mutations on the theme of apes
Ever-evolving into angels
As an idea in the brain gels
They sing, and praise all protean shapes.

16. *Another Venetian Toccata*

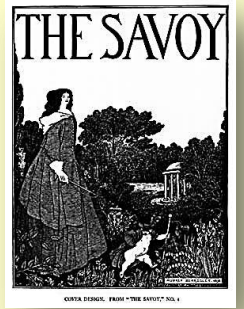
Galapagan Galuppi sings
The faded charm of every feather
That on a belle, in heady weather
Of Carnival, composed the wings

Of gold, the Cupid guise in which
She revelled in the Doge's Palace,
Quaffing the moment in its chalice
At the masked ball where all the rich

And haughty nobles of Poseidon's
Cherished old harlot City go
To see and be seen, 'mid the flow
Of wine and song, and the smile widens

On Lady Cupid's face, the fire
Of all her prostituted splendour
Glowes in her eyes as they attend her,
Her beaux, the Knights of her Desire,

*And she becomes, in all her glory,
A vision of Venus, clam-shell borne,
Stroking the tumid Unicorn
In Aubrey's filthy little story.*



Robert interjects.

*'Under the Hill', detailing the erotic
adventures of Venus and Tannhäuser.*

And your Porphyria? Her hair
You twined into a strangling cord.
You killed the one that you adored.
Porphyria, at least the rare

Variety you suffer from,
Brings seizures and delusions, brings
Depression, anxious thoughts, and things,
Bump-in-the-night things, oh! they come.

17.

Now let her walk her along the Lido
Alone and lovelorn, for of all
The beaux the one she chose to fall
In love with is the faithless Guido!

And let the sands she walks be changed
To shores Galapagan, or better,
Of Easter Island: yes, there set her
Down in a barren and estranged

Marooning, let my lady pace
Among the cold and brooding heads
Of gone gods underneath the reds
And purples of her dusky days,

Her Knights of Stone, and every breath
She takes their breathless faces mock.
And let them join, as flesh and rock,
The stone death and the living death.

18. *A Hand of Tarot Cards*

Now they are playing with the cards,
The Twin Arcana of the Tarot
Goddess, a Gipsy nomad, narrow-
Eyed and sly, who picks crystal shards

Of questionable epiphany
From the seamed rock-face of the random.
She has a partner: they in tandem
Can read your fate, for a small fee.

The power of suggestion! Robert's skin turns purple, blisters appear, he feels stomach pains, becomes depressed, and begins to sweat profusely as Aubrey looks on gloatingly... But with a great effort of will he shakes off the curse. Aubrey, having made his point, resumes the singing match.



Twilight of the Idols?

A sort-of run-off election or elimination round, as narrated by my dear Sphinx. The loser must gradually disappear, like the Cheshire-cat, but without the residual grin.

Beardsley's cards are read. Browning wears a look of S4chadenfreude. Beardsley, like the tower, looks stricken.

*Alas, the lightning-shattered Tower,
From which two men fall to their death!
Ah, numbered is your every breath.
How soon it comes, your Hour, your Hour.*

*

R: Today we shall be married, Ba!
The world lies all before us, dear!
E: But, darling, let me shed a tear
For poor Papa, oh poor Papa!

Transformation scene: It is the 12th of September, 1846. Robert and Elizabeth have stolen away from her house in Wimpole Street and are on their way to be married, in secret, at St. Marleybone Parish Church. Imagine their joy! And yet...

[Things get confusing here, Oscar, so let me summarise the Pantomime costume- and scene- changes that ensue, the detailed chronicling of which will have to wait till the next post, or if you prefer, chapter: Elizabeth Browning becomes Lizzie Siddal with a strong dose of Lilith. Robert Browning becomes Gabriel Rossetti, Beardsley withers away, and much else besides takes place, all of it deliciously decadent. Be patient, friend, the sequel followeth anon!]

I must go now: we are invited
To the Asquiths for a late supper.
My next has things that Martin Tupper
Would cough at; *you* will be delighted.

Sphinx



(II) *Gabriel and les Femmes Damnées*

1.

Yes, as I told you in my last,
Our beardless Beardsley's dead. Poor Aubrey's
A blasted flower. Ah, no more strawberries
For Aubrey! Eternity is vast.

Now as for Robert, he's turned dark
As he Rossettifies – no great
Stretch for one so Italianate.
And she is having quite the lark,

E.B.B., as divine Lizzie,
A lady noble as Godiva,
Yet who in Death is so alive a
Creature, who is as fresh as she?

What's most intriguing, though, is this:
She has turned tribade recently:
A fascinating thing to be,
As we both think. What he thought his,

Poor husband – the sweet, pulpy mango
Of Passionate Ecstasy Divine –
Is, rather startlingly, mine:
She asks me if I'd like to tango!

That is to say (how? There's the riddle!)
Elizabeth's transformed to Lizzie.
(The metaphysics make one dizzy:
She is herself *and* Lizzie Siddal.)

*If dreams were true, this would be Heaven,
She says. But love is seldom true.
From red to blue he changes hue.
On earth, love, true love is not given.*

He, too, must improvise his part,
I mean her husband, who grows old
And sees and hears, and feels the gold
And strangling hair about his heart.

Her soul of late is concentrated
On sin, our Lizzie-Beth is Lilith:
Flesh giveth life, but Spirit killeth,
Saith Lady Henrietta, sated



*Not, thank God, 'Tupperossettifies',
as Max – cheeky lad! – portmanteau-
cises in his fine 'No. 5 the Pines'.*

Trousered like George Sand; a pagan.

Gabriel, that is, yet residually Robert.

Gabriel is brooding in an arm-chair in a shadowy corner: this is his dark soirée of the soul. He looks on helplessly and yet eagerly, recognising the cosmic justice or 'Karma' of what is unfolding before his reddened, tortured and excited eyes: a scene of Hell-cat Sapphos in writhing attitudes of wanton and lascivious ecstasy! As clearly carved into his psyche as the Tables of sin done and atoned for placed on Pride's Cornice on Mount Purgatory as Rein and Spur for pilgrims as they slowly ascend to the Earthly Paradise. To Swinburne, it is all a 'blue movie', and he acts accordingly. Meanwhile Marcel Proust arrives...

With food of love, though in a mood
To bite blue stars into my bosom
And feel my faded flowers blossom.
Ah, how her evil does me good!

The modest remnants of my modesty
Bid me omit details and skip
To languid sequel: I, with lip
Bruised, serving a reclining goddess tea.

2. Gabriel to Lizzie

*The palmy days shall come no more,
My love. You only I saw, ah, you,
Bellissima, so gifted, too,
And so alive in every pore*

*With the Imagination's life.
Like coppery hair that overflows
The coffin of dead Love's repose
When one retrieves from a dead wife*

*The volume pored through by a worm
Was the profusion of my grief
And the despair of my belief
That in the elegance of form*

*And stanzas radiant with pain
I might revive the moment still
In the fane on the wooded hill,
The wedding white, still free of stain.*

*The thousands-in-itself containing
Pastel I made of you in words,
The tonic pulse through all the chords
Of Memory at its task, unstaining*

*What faithless Heart had fouled, and Time
Had put in storage, was the guilt
From which my House of Life was built,
Each joist a penitential rhyme.*

*But the long cloud that veils the moon
And the long wood that leads to light
Shed double darkness on the Night
Of the Soul, and the end comes soon.*

Swinburne is busy playing with
Himself off in a corner, singing
In intense anapestics, and flinging
Ejaculates to swell the myth

Of Onan to heroical
Proportions, though the jerky movement
Of leptic limbs could use improvement,
And he is generally hysterical.

*I, too, have loved Gomorrah's daughters.
I am a jealous dog, Marcel
Says to the nonplussed Gabriel,
In whose eyes tremble troubled waters.*

Never more moving is a moving
Picture than when the impassioned mover
Is than the moved, beloved lover
More movèd still, such pleasures proving,

And thus is on our pulses proved,
When Love's high revels wax frenetic,
How brief is she, and how kinetic,
No sooner than no longer loved,

But back into her negatives
Wound up, and stored in those warehouses
Of memory lime tea arouses
Less and less frequently, she lives

In glamorous glow upon the screen
No more, but in the dim archives
Of memory gives, or dreams she gives,
Performances everywhere seen

And encored in life's theatre.
But no one sees, and no one cares
How gracefully she climbs the stairs.
For who has even heard of her?

*At a table, in a dark room
I called to you, and you replied
That you were not the one who died.
Who spoke to me, then, through the gloom?*



3. Lizzie to Gabriel

*You were with her the night I died,
Weren't you, my Guggums, my Don Juan?
The woods are dark, dark is the Ruin
Whose crumbling is a suicide.*

*The clearing where we two once stood,
Remember? held a secret fane
And there we made ourselves a vain
Religion, and we called it good.*

*Memories of when we stood beneath
The clinging trees in that dark wood
Are your soul's ghostly Tantalus food,
And my death is the air you breathe.*

*I haunt you as you haunted me.
When you first saw me, sweet, I was
In a tub, freezing for the cause
Of Art, and for Millais: to be*

*The true Ophelia, feel as she
Felt as she slid downstream to Death,
Singing, till water stopped her breath,
Snatches of lauds and balladry,*

*I drowned my health, and bathed my aches
In the green waters of a drug.
Like Poems of Resurrection dug
Out of the grave that Despair makes*

*For Hope are these, my words to you,
My fallen angel, Gabriel,
And the lines do not scan so well
As once they did, when they were new.*

*Here is what makes me so perverse
And charms you with such evil charm:
You cannot do me any harm:
I do not love you, dear, and, worse,*

*Lizzie speaks to Gabriel from the divan
where she lies with her head in my lap.
—[Ada Leverson's note.]*

Fanny Cornforth, perhaps.



*I do not need you. I am a scandal
Of beauty, and am wholly free.
All you can do is mirror me,
And tie the latchet of my sandal,*

*If I elect you to the honour.
I am a wild thing, and uncanny.
Alexa Wilding, say, or Fanny
Cornforth, ah, the outrageous stunner!*

*And she you called the Elephant
Is but the mourning of my Eve,
Guggums. It is for me you grieve,
Who for so many does did pant,*

*And, like the hart that fouls the fount
Of Immortality for which
He thirsts, consigned me to a ditch
Who should have been your Eden Mount.*

*And stillborn as a hopeless dream
Was the issue of my lonely hours.
Ophelia wept in herbs and flowers
And sank into a laudanum stream.*

*How sour at times, and out of key
Thy sweet bells seem to jangle now!
Old Adam, sweat pours from thy brow,
And, dear, those sweet bells toll for thee.*

5.

*And back to mad frottage and other
Heavenly Purgatories of Hell
Do we return... Poor Gabriel!
The penalty is the sin's brother,*

*And recompense is injury's
Sister, and ah, how sweet a fiddle
To stroke is vengeance! (Lizzie Siddal,
My beauteous dear! We mustn't tease.)*

*



*They replaced me as your models and lovers.
Like a Lilith's Lilith they supplanted me.*



I trust all's well with your age-old
Latest *hoc opus*, it all sounds
Quite laboured! When you go your rounds,
Dear, bundle up, or you'll catch cold.

Yours affectionately,



Sphinx

6. *Reply by Telepathogram:*

Dear Sphinx, I savour this tableau.
Too soon you choose to draw the curtain!
In a mad world — this much is certain —
The curtain falls on every show.

In church, in temple or in mosque, her
Face, and the lust it sparked, would be
The same religion. Think of me,
My dear Sphinx. — Your affectionate

Oscar



The Gay Science *Time's Pastimes*

*I imagine myself as Tutor of Magdalen College,
Oxford, in my old rooms, Kitchen Staircase,
1 Pair Left, overlooking the Cherwell. My pupil:
a comely youth, my friend Harry Marillier.*



That Time slows as we near the speed
Of lightness (call it inspiration):
The notion merits some dilation.
A sort of Athanasian Creed?

Speaking relatively, of course.
*Does 'athanasia' signify
A state of immortality?*
It almost does. So through sheer force

*Of effortlessness we attain
A temporary permanence
That wit indefinitely extends...?*
To put it that way doesn't strain

The meaning. Paradoxically,
As Time speeds up, it seems — to us,
At any rate — to slow down. *Thus*
It isn't Time that flies when we

Are having fun, it's we who fly?
Indeed: we reach the frivolous threshold
Where stale begins to grow fresh, old
Young, what is stale and brittle, spry.

And Time — so mindful of our sins
(You know, that sour Grim Reaper fellow)
At other times — even *he* grows mellow.
A transient regret begins

To form inside his stringent brain
For what he tramples with his feet:
Apple and golden hair, the sweet,
Small infant smell of ripening grain...

He thinks of Eden days, so rife
With leisure — and so far upstream!
When Time was young, he loved to dream
Beneath the exuberant Tree of Life.

The other Tree is virgin-green,
Time hasn't learned the sense of time,
Confounds it with *the scent of thyme* —
Spelt badly, though his nose is keen.

'Tis these nostalgias that slow
Him down until he almost stands
Still. In the stream of wit his hands
Spread wide, his fingers feel the flow

Of what he is, he grows memorious,
Pleasantly sad. As our eyes twinkle
He starts to yawn like Rip van Winkle —
Then there's a knock: *Conscience*, censorious,

Stands in the doorway: *Clocks will tick*
And clocks will tock. Time starts to notice
That we have spiked his drink with lotus —
And now we answer for the trick.



Lord Byron Takes Offence



[He has recently read the following passage in my *De Profundis*:
'Byron was a symbolic figure, but his relations were to the passion
of his age and its weariness of passion. Mine were to something
more noble, more permanent, of more vital issue, of larger scope.']

*You say I was the symbol of
Passion alone, whereas you stood
For something nobler! Oh, that's good!
What stood you for? Furtive boy-love.*

*(Stood in the dock for it, alas!)
It's true, I had a taste for boys,
For male and female sexual joys,
But never did I try to pass*

*For anything but what I was.
I scorned the good opinion
Of England as freely as one
Would scorn the braying of an ass.*

*I went abroad with spirits high
And did not care a fig that fools
At home who worshipped senseless rules
Were hanging me in effigy.*

*You feared exile, didn't you?
One cannot be a rebel and
Not pay a price. I left the land.
You stayed, and let the yahoos do*

*Their worst, and drive you to your grave.
You were attached to High Society
So fondly that you could not pry
Yourself away, even to save*

*Yourself. To what were you a martyr?
Love of respectability,
Not Uranus. You were never free,
Because you stooped to ask for quarter*

*From tyrants, cowards, and the Crown!
You gave snobbery a bad name
Splattering it with the mud of shame.
To let that midget bring you down!*

*You sacrificed your freedom for
The sake of pleasure. I gave my life
For freedom, in the smoke and strife.
I asked for nothing more.*

*Success leads to satiety.
It killed my soul. It is one-sided.
Failure is easily derided,
But it is life's great mystery.*

*Dem me, I give it up! I know
Not what to do with you. You are
Beyond the pale of truth so far
Your every breath's a lie. A show*

*Put on is every tear you shed.
You even pose as a poseur!
Enough. A certain person, sir,
Is waiting for me in my bed.*



Pater Noster

*I speak with the ghost of my
Oxford mentor, Walter Pater.*



1.
Pater noster, which art in Heaven
Do you profess, to fresh-faced angels?
At what vampiric charms, what strange ills
Do you hint, sweetly, as you scriven?

Wandering among the blessed aisles
I see you, blowing gold dust off
Old tomes of Beauty with a cough
So tactful, even St. Peter smiles.

You read out loud (no, not out loud,
Out *soft*, so that we strain to hear)
Life's Secret, which, though doubtless clear,
A certain reticence would shroud.



You eye your comely young assistant
Cherub, as he ascends the ladder,
With looks a scruple seems to scatter
Like cirrus clouds. Yet they're persistent,

For all their vagary, such looks,
And they return (it seems their place
Still knows them) to your anxious face,
Which – as the youth withdraws the books

Requested from the highest shelf
(Close to the ceiling, slightly sooty,
Boasting a splendour of pudgy putti) –
Seems to ask questions of itself

Not altogether focused on
Concern for the adventurous cherub's
Safety, but folding, like the Arab's
Mobile and lithe pavilion,

Into a fugitive, nocturnal
Luggage the nomad steals away with,
Leaving, for desert winds to play with
(In a dry jest that seems eternal),

Only the ashes of a fire
Whose momentary wasting flame
Was neither gem-like, nor quite game
Enough to burst into desire. –

The precious books, though, what about
The books? A fall from such a height
Might break their spines — O piteous sight!
It is one's duty to reach out,

To shore, to brace, to keep from tumbling
In ruinous precipitation
Arks of such frail illumination —
But then you hear the thunder rumbling:

Fear not, it is no greater threat
Than borborygmic mutiny (given
That the ambrosial fare in Heaven
Does not agree with you as yet).

2.
Dear Pater! You would not forgive
Such archness in an angel, let
Alone a man on whom they have set
The mark of Cain. Yet I dared *live*

What you discreetly preached. You picture
My life as vulgar — yet I braved them,
Love's risky gifts; you merely craved them.
That's craven. Those who cannot, lecture.

For though you taught us all to be
Artists of ourselves, my dear Pater,
You chose to be a mere spectator
Of life, in 'passionate celibacy'.

Burn in these moments as they pass,
You told us. Like the Fauré Gloria
Your prose-style hymns our frail sensoria:
Your works compose a Requiem Mass

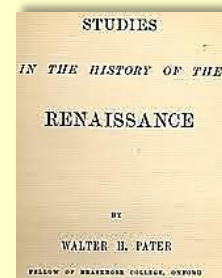
For Epicureans. But small headway
You yourself made into the strife
Of *living* your creed, even in life
A phantom of a texture midway

'Twixt life and books. (*Again you plunder
Another's words: Wordsworth's this time.*
You spoil my woodcock springe, all lime-
Bespred! *I steal your stolen thunder.*)



*'Poor, dear Pater has lived to dis-
prove everything he has written.'*

Was he ever alive?



*Ah, but what am I, Dears? What am I?
(It's true; from The Prelude, Bk. 3.)*

Your Denis l' Auxerrois was rote
Mythology; I *lived* the rôle,
The Liberator of the soul
Whose fate is to be the Scapegoat.



Still, what strange influence, my friend,
Did your 'Conclusion' have on me!
It was, or rather proved to be
Both my beginning and my end.

To Studies in the Renaissance (orig. vers.)

Then was that clarion in the grey light
Coda or prelude, that your pages
First trumpeted? Perhaps the age is
Near when the torch is quenched in daylight.

I'll have you brought to me at slow,
Amber hours, on a golden platter.
You shall be read to me. A patter
Of raindrops on a drift of snow

Will syncopate a melting dream
Of crystal, flushed with pinks that double
The sky's, as bubbling bass-notes trouble
The frozen music of a stream.

3.
*Oscar, you tended to mistake
Vulgarity for cleverness,
And you were ruined by success.
You killed yourself for pleasure's sake.*

But wasn't I a 'martyr of style',
As well? Extended to the life.
*And martyrs, too, you made of wife
And sons. Was not that somewhat...vile?*

Pater's description of Flaubert.

*In Eden, why look for a snake?
A sensualist should have more sense.
You gave the name 'experience'
To far too many a mistake.*

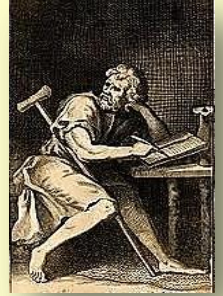
*There's something of the excellent talker
About the way you've written me.
I won't be written easily,
However: the Moirai mock the mocker.*

Classical Desire

An Exchange with Epictetus and Epicurus

(With an Unsolicited Contribution from Aristippus)

I look again, and Pater has transformed himself into Epicurus. With him is his sterner brother in soul-economy, Epictetus. (My headache has suddenly grown more intense.) Bad Conscience visits me in the form of two Hellenistic philosophers – or vice-versa, I am not sure which.



Epictetus:

*You read the Greek philosophers,
Yet missed the passages about
Σοφροσυνη, that thing without
Which Eros is a fatal curse?*

Sophrosyne, 'moderation'.

*Play with a fire out of control
And you are certain to be burned.
How little, in the end, you learned
From us, damaging your own soul!*

Epicurus:

*Yes, the soul is a pleasure garden –
But you uncultivated yours,
Made it a wilderness. Of course
Pleasure is good, but let it harden*

*Into compulsion, seek excess,
Transgress the mean, and it becomes
Disease. 'We do not make our homes
In hotels,' as my good friend says.*

*I died in one, fighting a losing
Battle with ugly wallpaper. –
Souls can be even uglier.
And all this was of your own choosing?*

*Better to husband than to lose.
The βίος απολαυστικός
Turns caustic, and the pleasure gnaws
Itself away in overdose.*

Bios apolaustikos, 'Life of pleasure'.

Epictetus:

*You showed a certain stylish verve
In praising lies, masks, and illusion:
Where did they lead but to confusion?
What healthy purpose could they serve*

*When what was needed was a true
Description of reality?
The calling card of Queensberry
Spelled out your destiny for you:*

*An exile's fate, sooner or later.
As soon as you had read that card
You could have left. Life might be hard
At times, abroad, but spirits greater*

*Than yours had followed where the cart
Led them, preferring that to being
Dragged. There is dignity in fleeing
To save one's spirit and one's art.*

*Alas, you never learned the art
Of managing desire. You fed it
Till it became a monster, and let it
Devour your reason and your heart.*

[Aristippus, founder of the Cyrenaic School, appears and interrupts the conversation – Aristippus, the crude Hedonist depicted by Diogenes Laertius, one-time disciple of Socrates who scandalised his mentor by accepting fees for his teaching. Dressed in a purple robe, he seems somewhat winded, as if fresh from dancing before Dionysius the Tyrant of Syracuse.]

*Aristippus:
I can instruct you how to lord it
Over the wildest lusts with my
Foolproof pleasure-philosophy.
The question is, can you afford it?*

*A Free Sample of his Wares:
Know what you have, and where you put it.
To each excess apply a limit.
If the light burns too brightly, dim it.
But if thine eye offend thee, shut it.*

*Epictetus:
From Socrates' philosophy
You managed to subtract both 'love'
And 'wisdom,' thinking it enough
To concentrate upon the 'fee'.*

*Epicurus:
You are, in general, quite appalling.
Your counsel's worthless; we don't need it;
We'll neither pay for it nor heed it.
Go. Dionysius is calling.*

Exit Aristippus hurriedly.



Epicurus:

*Only if pleasure is cultivated
Intelligently, can it thrive.
Do you expect a rose to live,
Let alone grow, when saturated*

*With water to the point of drowning?
Drink is a good, says Aristotle.
Then must one empty every bottle?
Must revelry mean vulgar clowning?*

*You don't distinguish pain from pleasure:
All's mere intensified sensation.
Health you conceive as deprivation,
But morbid 'sins': ah, these you treasure.*

*Stop! Thou hast cleft my heart in twain.
Is this your famous literary
'Ham' acting? Hamlet acting. Very
Clever. (True, I've too glib a brain.*

*Brilliance is a disease, perhaps.
I'd like to meet this Grand Guignol
Stage-manager inside my soul
Who built me all these little traps,*

*These oubliettes, invisible
Beneath my Palace of Desire,
My House of Lust, so that the higher
I climbed, the farther I might fall...*

*What caillloch's curse, what Irish hex
Left me here hanging upside-down,
The Tarot's Fool, a tragic clown
Upon his crucifix of sex?*

*I lost the action, and the name
Of action, in the same mad passion.
Yes, I *am* Hamlet, in my fashion,
Shifting pieces in an end-game.*

*Why is it I am so immune
To introspection, and the High-
Serious? I know the words, but I
Cannot quite carry such a tune.*



When my urbane court-jester's brain
Attempts to make that arduous climb
To the high peaks of the Sublime,
My prose turns purple with the strain.

(I have a *dream* of introspection:
'Tis night. I seek my soul. The mirror
I gaze in shows me but a mirror.
Clearly it calls for some reflection.))

Epicurus:
*My friend, you did a grave disservice
To hedonists in every quarter.
The Cause requires no tawdry martyr.
And your Uranian friends: how nervous*

*You made them! Hundreds fled the land
When scurrilous press and cowardly Crown
Cornered their prey, and all the town
Seemed bent against your little band.*

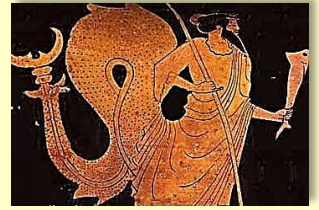
The bitterest of consolations
You bring me, my dear Epicurus.
Were you so *scelerisque purus*,
Growing well-heeled on the donations

Of faithful followers? Is this
The way of a philosopher,
Or of a Simon Magus? Sir,
How much cash subsidised your bliss?

My yielding to Temptation was
A method to get rid of it,
By sheer indulgence to outwit,
Out-Proteus the Proteus.

You compare Eros to a fire
That one can quench or light at will –
Just so, no lack, no overfill.
But in those ancient times, Desire

Was so much simpler, wasn't it?
It's good to make one's soul one's own,
But lately, alas, the beast has grown
So tiresomely infinite!



Am I a vampire?

Think of the great Homeric topos,
Odysseus throttling Proteus
To solve his destiny. Mine was
That travelled mind, the *polytropos*,

The mind of many turns... *Excuse me,*
But surely you mean Menelaus?
Facts, dreadful facts... How they betray us,
Even in art-matters! You amuse me,

Epicurus, with your naïve
Empiricism. What I mean,
Of course, is that it *should* have been
Odysseus... I tried to cleave

To the poetic, that is, *higher*
Truth, that the polytropic meets
The polymorphous and defeats,
Or tames, a myriad-faced desire.

And what good is a verity
That lacks verisimilitude?
What's any given fact? The crude
First draft of an infinity

Of possibilities! *If facts*
Get in the way, so much the worse
For facts, says Hegel. What *occurs*,
The grist of our mere daily acts,

Is of no interest to art,
Save as the roughest raw material
Translated into realms aethereal
Where the quotidian plays no part —

Epicturus:
Brilliantly self-deceiving elf
Of a man, wittily outwitted
Sphinx of a man, hopelessly pitted
Against the riddle of himself!



*The two philosophers fuse into
one, with a portmanteau name.*



Le bon Michel
Montaigne and I



1.
How sceptical a wonderer
You were, Michel (if you don't mind),
And with the genius of a kind
Nature. A little outside you were

At all times. From that curious angle
You sifted through Philosophy,
Religion and Morality,
Teasing, from all that specious tangle

Of words, what is from what is not,
Never quite sure that you were right.
Doubt made you question even the white
Man's precedence, his gains ill-got



Exploiting New World 'savages'.
Your mother's mother's anguish was
Expulsion from her Spain, because
She was a Jew. How hard it is,

The lot of those out on the borders
Of the Community, the Power.
They can be undone in an hour
By some king's mercenary orders,

One's family ties, one's history,
Places familiar and dear,
Wealth, rank, and reputation clear...
If all this can be instantly

Expunged, what in this world is real
Or solid? What can we assume?
What do we know? Those who presume
To tell us what to think and feel,

The zealots, *they* make our brief time
On Earth a Hell in Heaven's name.
Such certainty, that feels no shame,
Is the *real* sin, and worse, a crime.

*Montaigne lived through a time that
saw France torn by the Wars of Religion,
with much persecution of Protestants.*

– [Mr V]

2.

*One ought to feel compassion for
Our common plight, not come to blows
Over a 'truth' that no one knows.
Why should a theory lead to war?*

*The dogmatist, a tyrant in
The world of spirit, never feels
The self-doubt that alone reveals.
To cast a stone is the worst sin.*

*One ought to be bemused and tender,
Make of what is one's level best,
And seize the day! which, gone,*

Nox est perpetua una dormienda.

*My father sent me, when I was
A boy of tender years, to live
Awhile with peasants. And I give
Thanks everyday for this, because*

*It taught me that the human lot
Is common to the high and low,
Which nobles little care to know.
But every day I gave a thought*

*To those whose suffering and strength
Was all they had of earthly good:
To milk the cows, to gather wood,
To huddle through a winter's length.*

*You, whom your wealth and fame made hard,
Saw the poor as commodities –
Like those young renters you would squeeze
Your pleasures from, and then discard.*

*Such attitudes as these condemn
The poor to added bitterness,
Being paid for their worthlessness.
And yet you died as one of them!*

Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt.



Ferdinand and Isabella.

Late Repentance

To Mr V

Time: The Great War.

1.

It seems, like everything else
We dream, Cosmology has evolved.
New problems must be newly solved.
There are new Heavens, better Hells.

2. *Hell*

Work has been done on Hell's landscape,
Resulting in crude, terraced trenches
That a perpetual drizzle drenches.
All's the same muddy shapeless shape.

Sinners are simply shot or blown
To pieces with artillery.
Punishment's mass-industrially
Administered. The social tone

Is a tight-lipped barbarity
In the dark boiler rooms of God;
Black farce is the aesthetic, broad
As the Eastern Front. No subtlety

Is to be found, one can discern no
Moral gradations in the levels,
For Malacoda and his devils
Have taken charge of the Inferno.

Like warders in a vast cell block
They march, with small red eyes, platoons
Of them. Swaggering trolls and goons
Patrol the *bolge* round the clock.

3. *Heaven*

Heaven I know about by rumour
Only, but hear it looks even more
Suburban than it did before,
And lacks, as ever, a sense of humour.

*'Delightful residences rose on our right, and
at a tall gate, which suggested rather than
disclosed one of them, Wilde paused and said,
"That is what I like, just to stand and peep
through the bars. It would be better than
being in Paradise to stand like this, catch a
glimpse as now, and want to go in. Reality
would be sure to be disappointing.'"*

— Wilfred Chesson,
'A Reminiscence of 1898'

4. *Purgatory*

Penance is the most tedious part
Of Purgatory. It is a bore.
I am still the man I was before
I reached this place, alas. My heart

Is naturally perverse, which is
To say unnatural, in some sense.
I am not, in the art of penitence,
The quickest study. I've been remiss.

Now, only, I feel sympathy
For Constance and her suffering,
Neglected by me in my 'fling'
With decadence, debauchery,

And mania as I pursued
My pleasures. And my children, oh!
What price they paid for my shallow
And selfish worship of mere mood!

Such things I *do* spend hours ruing.
Consider my so-late, *deathbed*
Conversion: I had lost my head,
I hardly knew what I was doing...

My irresponsibility,
My living of a life so feckless,
Made Cyril dutiful, more, *reckless*
In his resolve to prove that he

Was the reverse of what I was —
And proved how much he was like me!
He risked his life so carelessly
In battle, and lost it there. The cause?

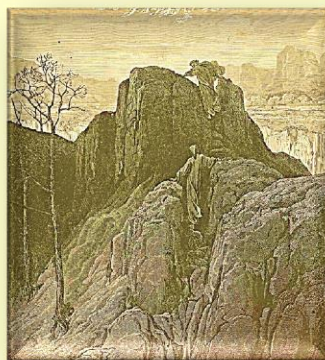
It was my bad example (or
Traits that, as people say, run in
The blood?) There was my love of 'sin',
Which I so foolishly took more

Seriously than I pretended...
I posed as frivolous, you see,
And took *that* pose too seriously.
Ah, those dear lives I left upended!



Mount Purgatory, dear, is made
Of consequences. Even here
I spend too much time seeking cheer
In company. My memories fade,

I talk my Afterlife away.
And yet, my time runs out, I know,
And there will come a *serious* blow
I can't eternally delay.



Willow-Ware Cup and Ouija Board *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and a Visitant*

Now that I am fully conscious of being deceased, I look about for something to do. As spirits somewhat adrift in Purgatory, bored in the Afterlife, full of tedium mortis in what Tibetan Buddhists call the 'Bardo' state, Gabriel and I decide, like the famous ape, to try conclusions – conduct an experiment, that is: attempt to communicate with the elusive Living.

Scene: An astral version of Gabriel's house. Our act of biomancy is performed within a magic circle: a Great Wall of Blue China – many a vase. Time: 6 July, 1930.



1.

To live up to the Blue Things, one
Must sometimes play the genteel shaman,
Gabriel, wielding with aplomb an
Arcane device. That's how it's done.

A piece of china we shall use,
And blue it shall be. We'll turn up-
Side-down this willow-ware tea cup;
Its divinations will amuse

Us, I am sure, with their divine
Presumption, like an immature
But charming wine, brash and cock-sure
As those who, furthering their design

To trump up business with romance,
Invented Chinese legends, tales
For English designs, puffing sales
On the Free Market Sea. Let's glance

Back at these fictions. As you know,
One of them is a sad love story,
The other a vision of calm glory.
Let's see. How does the first one go?

2. First Version: The Persecuted Lovers

A Mandarin's daughter falls in love
With his accountant, who, alas,
Is of the lowly servant class.
The father hardly would approve

The marriage, nor would ancient law.
 This strict man builds a fence around
 His daughter's quarters. Ways are found
 Around one they still hold in awe,

For love twice-dear is love forbidden.
 So the young, loving couple dare
 Elopement, to an island fair.
 For years they live there safely hidden.

But by her father she, Koong-See,
 Has been pledged to a Duke; he, spurned,
 Vengeful, their whereabouts once learned
 To the island sends his soldiery

Where in their house they trap the pair.
 Their two melodious songs are muted,
 By fire the lovers executed.
 The gods who made them young and fair

Transform them into turtledoves
 Flying above the willow tree,
 Beside the temple, can you see?
 And note the bridge that for their love's

Sake they traverse into as fair
 A Paradise as ever was
 Doomed to be lost at length, alas,
 A splendid lie to sell a ware

In eighteenth-century England, dear!
 China? There's no such thing, and there are
 Certainly no such people. (Where are
 Paper and pen? We'll need them here.)

3. Second Vision: The Persecution of the Monks

My Irish soul weeps as I tell
 Of Shaolin Monastery, rased
 By the Manchurians, who, amazed,
 See monk souls pass out of that Hell

Of smoke and flame and in a boat
 Fare to a lovely Blessèd Isle.
 There, on a bridge, with tranquil smile,
 Three Buddhas greet them as they float



Milton filtered through Thomas Minton?

*So I deny the existence of a second Far
 Eastern nation of some importance. Languid
 Conqueror, your Empire is expanding!*

To safety's shore: the Buddha Past,
Buddha to Be, Buddha Who Is.
Behold the City of Willows. Bliss!
All shall drink tea, with a repast

Of little rice-cakes; all shall steep
Therein the airy delicacies
And dream a thousand histories
There in Nirvana's endless keep.

*

Thus there has been, more recently,
Stamped on bald porcelain the myth
That the motifs so monkeyed with
Revived a style which destiny

And clever monks had from perdition
Preserved. Of course, those soaring birds
Are the monks' souls. No human words
Convey the beauty of this vision.

Though by a magic lantern cast
Upon a bedroom wall, the limelight
Wherein we dip our souls is time-light,
Sublimely present-future-past.

Golo goes riding o'er the brass
Door-knob, and there floats Genevieve
In the window, and two doves grieve
Upon a polished looking glass.

The legend of a legend, twice
Removed from real, concocted late,
Their never-love they celebrate
For ever on a floe of ice.

4.
Come, Gabriel, we shall attempt
To commune with the living through
The Ouija Board, that Manitou
Whose punctuation's so unkempt.

We shall start by contacting my
Long-suffering scribe, good Arthvr V,
Who has persuaded Arthur C
To take part in the Mystery.



*Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, member
of the Society for Psychical Research.*

But though we are brave, and have the will, oh where
 Is that we seek, which way is true
 North, which is the right path thereto?
 We've map and compass. We've a willow-ware

Cup that the surface over-flies
 Like the Dove called the Holy Ghost.
 From Cadmus' teeth hath grown an host
 Of silent-speaking shapes. There lies

In front of us, to be less vague, a
 Fine smörgasbord assortment of
 Letters, ox- \aleph to marked τ ,
 A to Zed, A to Ω .

And just in case one day we need them,
 The Chinese characters... A storm
 Of hieroglyphs, cuneiform
 Wedges – if only we could read them!

Spirits dwell in them, as in crypts.
 You surely know an Orientalist –
 Some Eastern-mystic transcendentalist –
 Who can translate the obscurer scripts?

5. Gabriel

*Just write them down as best you can,
 Oscar. The spirits are urbane
 Enough not to befuddle a brain
 With words a philologist*

*Alone could disentangle of
 Their sense. Take notes, and use them later
 When you become the explicator
 Of what comes from beyond, above,*

*Or who the Hell knows bloody whence?
 Even the Sibyl had to edit
 Her Leaves, when, to maintain her credit
 Amid the swift flow of events,*

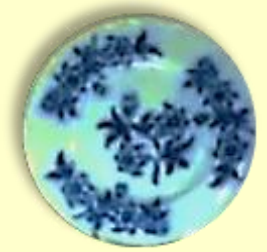
*She made adjustments, day to day,
 Small retroactive emendations...
 To make precise prognostications,
 The clairvoyant must be *au fait*.*



Pronounced 'aleph' and 'tav'.
 'Alpha' to 'omega', of course.



And when it comes to what's to come,
She is the queen of having it
Both ways, whom years have taught to split
The difference 'twixt Yes, No, and dumb.



When a great general asked her whether
He ought to wage a war abroad,
DOMINESTES was what the Bawd
Of Wisdom answered. Yes together

With No, according to the grammar:
Domine stes means, Master, stay.
Domine stes means, Go away.
She is a clever hussy, damn her!

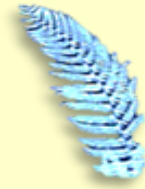
My alternatives during the Trials...

6. Mr V 'Comes Through'

How do the dead communicate with the living?

Sir Arthur will be with us soon.
He said he would be late... No doubt
With Holmes he is out and about
Sleuthing by the light of the moon.

You have convinced me that the dead
Are able to invoke the living.
But how and why? All this is giving
Some trouble to my muddled head.



It was Josiah Wedgwood's son,
Thomas, who gave us the sun-print,
Light stamped on silver nitrate. (Hint
Of photographs to come.) Thus on

In the 1770's.

The psychically sensitive plate
Of the mind ghostly light may stamp
A sort of moon-print. That pale lamp
Is the ghost of the sun. The weight

Of moonlight is a feather's touch.
It is the light ghosts see by, since
Their day's our night. Thus like the prints
Of ghost-light, like the indelible smutch

Of a dead thumb, my words impress
Themselves in silver on your mind,
A firefly-phosphor, yet a kind
Of radiance, nevertheless,

And like the stamp of willow ware
Are they, the pattern of a myth,
Sad legend one may conjure with
Of what's no longer 'really' there.

*Ah there he is! Sir Arthur's here,
And says he quite looks forward to
Conversing once again with you.
Well, Gabriel, coraggio! 'Steer'*

The magic cup. Whilst my left hand
Rests upon yours my right will set
Down what you spell. So we shall get
Intelligence of Terra Land.



7. *The Letters Assemble: Sir Arthur Speaking*

I AM SO PLEASED TO TALK WITH YOU
AGAIN OSCAR OH HOW YOU CHARMED
AND DAZZLED WHEN WE MET DISARMED
ENTIRELY WHAT COULD I DO

BUT LET YOU DO THE TALKING AND
TO LISTEN AS ONE LISTENS TO
MOZARTIAN MUSIC IN A NEW
TONALITY I'D SHAKE YOUR HAND

IF HANDS COULD REACH ACROSS THE ETHER
OR WHATSOEVER ELEMENT
ACTS AS STUBBORN IMPEDIMENT
TO THE TWO WORLDS' COMING TOGETHER

I HAVE MET MANY BRILLIANT MEN
AND WOMEN NONE BUT YOU WAS QUITE
SO MUCH A GENIUS AND HOW BRIGHT
IS OUR GOOD MR V! AND THEN

THERE IS THE GENIUS BESIDE
YOU THE GREAT PAINTER-POET WELL
MET MY DEAR DANTE GABRIEL
I'M TEMPTED TO GO RUN AND HIDE

MY HERO IS AN AMATEUR
AND HARDLY AU COURANT IN MATTERS
SO RECONDITE AS YOU MAD HATTERS
ARE TRIFLING WITH WITH SUCH HAUTEUR



AND GENIALITY AND SENSE
OF FUN THAT THE AFTERLIFE SO SOMBRE
AT TIMES YOU SOMEHOW DISENCUMBER
OF ITS OLD BURDENS BUT OLD FRIENDS



MOTHER AND GALLANT SON ALL GONE
NO ART RECUPERATES THESE LOSSES
NO MATTER HOW HIGH THE SOUL CROSSES
OVER THE FATHER GRIEVES ALONE

MY HOLMES IS BUT A REASONER
WHO SOLVES SMALL PUZZLES WITH PANACHE
HE'S EARNED ME QUITE A BIT OF CASH
I'M HERE TO BE A LISTENER

It takes a genius to create
A genius. This much you have surely
Done. Tut, tut, you speak too demurely
Of what in its own way is great!

Now Holmes's keen, mercurial mind,
Its quick, athletic causal leaps
(Hare busy whilst the tortoise sleeps)
Bears strong resemblance, of a kind,

To mine, although empirical
In cast, and reasoning with facts.
None but the rare and strange attracts
His art, he sees the Beautiful

In its aspect of sinister
Disguise, grotesque yet commonplace
Detail, the evil-boding face
Wherein the heroic Reasoner

Reads danger, and divines solutions
To one of myriad mysteries London
Teems with, ills done and somewhat undone
When given elegant solutions

In a detective tale's sharp focus.
(An Irishman in all but birth,
You are a man of sterling worth.)
Yes, with his sober hocus-pocus

Holmes is an artist, as an actor
Only by Irene Adler bested
In cunning and disguise, invested
In proletarian guise, as factor,

Navvy, old beggar on the docks...
And yet he takes cocaine and smokes,
And all the scales fall as he strokes
His violin, and truth unlocks.



8.
MY HOLMES *DID* FEEL THE INFLUENCE OF
YOUR DANDYISM ISN'T THERE
A HINT OF DORIAN GRAY SOMEWHERE
IN THE HOLMES SAGA NOT ENOUGH

'GRAY' MATTER TO RECALL IN WHICH
STORY IT WAS I THOUGHT YOU ILL
IT WAS BEYOND YOUR POWER OF WILL
THE SICKNESS EVEN MADE YOU RICH

And poor. AH BUT THAT MRS SMITH
DIDN'T SHE HIT YOU OFF OLD BOY
IT WAS AUTHENTIC WHAT A JOY
TO READ YOUR LIVING WORDS A myth!

*Hester Travers Smith in her book
Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde.
--[Mr V]*

A lie! Self-propaganda! Sorry,
Dear Arthur, that was an uncalled-
For outburst. You must be appalled!
When will you write another story?

Late in the night, when all alone, and oil
Burns in the bedside lamp, ah, there's
No cure for common, carking cares
Like settling in with cozy Conan Doyle!

I HAVE A BIGGER FISH TO FRY
IT IS THE URGENT QUESTION OF
THE AFTERLIFE OF THOSE WE LOVE
WHAT HAPPENS TO US WHEN WE DIE



9. *But Sir Arthur Remembers More Details*

YES HOLMES GREW MORE EPIGRAMMATIC
AND YES NOW I REMEMBER YOU
ARE THADDEUS SHOLTO THE TOO-TOO
AND WHAT'S MORE SINISTER AND DRAMATIC

HOLMES TAKES A PAGE FROM DORIAN
USING A DOUBLE OF HIMSELF
OF WAX TO FOIL THE EVIL ELF
FROM IRELAND, THE OUTCAST MAN,

MORAN I THINK HIS NAME WAS YES
SEBASTIAN MORAN 'THE WILD BEAST'
So you have gone and made a feast
Of my dishonoured corpse? Confess!

WELL I DO GIVE YOU CREDIT AS
THE ARTISTE WHO SCULPTED THE MADAME
TRUSSAUD-HOLMES OSCAR 'S HIS FIRST NAME
HIS LAST? I FORGET WHAT IT WAS

OLD BOY MEMORY SO FREQUENTLY
FAILS ME OF LATE IT IS THE DEAD
I CAN RECALL ONLY THE DEAD
AND I AWAIT ETERNITY

Well, Gabriel, what do you think
Of all this? *What? I did not see*
Lizzie. Where is she? Where is she?
You'll see her, rub your eyes, and blink.

10.
HOUDINI'S FALLEN OFF HAS DROWNED
IN THE STEEL CHEST OF A CLOSED MIND
NO CLAIRVOYANCE COMES TO EYES BLIND
AS SAMSON'S SCEPTICISM-BOUND

I HAVE EXAMINED WITH THESE EYES
THE FAIRIES IN THE PHOTOGRAPH
LIGHT DOES NOT LIE THE SCEPTICS LAUGH
BUT YOU ARE PROOF THAT NO ONE DIES



The Sign of Four (1890).
—[Mr V]

*'The Adventure in the
Empty House' (1903).*
—[Mr V]

*Alas, his eyes, dim with chloral,
see nothing. They well up with tears.*



*The Cottingley Fairies, larking
about in this 1917 photograph.*

11. *The Great War and the 'Occult'*

After so many shameless years
Of carving up the world like an
Enormous piece of marzipan
(One made of blood, sweat, gold, and tears)

It had to come, the time when they
Would fall to carving up each other,
Brother eat Continental brother,
And the great beast of Empire prey

Upon itself, wolf universal.
For this apocalyptic farce
The previous European wars
Have been but tentative rehearsal.

CATASTROPHE THE GREAT POWERS FELL
INTO LIKE SLEEPWALKERS WITH NO
MORE REASONING THAN THAT OF SLOW
FESTERING BOILS THAT SWELL AND SWELL

TILL THEY AT LAST EXPLODE IN BLOOD
THROUGH THEIR OWN INNER TENSION BOILS
OF GREED FOR THOSE COLONIAL SPOILS
THAT DRAGGED ALL EUROPE THROUGH THE MUD

THE LADS WERE REALLY ALL SUCH SPLENDID
FELLOWS INDEED IT NEVER SHOULD
HAVE HAPPENED FOR WHAT EARTHLY GOOD
IN THE AFTERLIFE THIS *MUST* BE MENDED

12. *A Spirit Appears*

THE ARMIES OF OUR GRIEF AND LOSS
ARE LIGHTING ASTRAL SWITCHBOARDS UP
THE APOCRYPHAL-YET-REAL TEACUP
IS MOVING FRETFULLY ACROSS

THE LETTERS GARBLED TELEGRAMS
DEAD LETTERS DESTINED TO BE LOST
LIKE THE LIVES OF OUR SONS WHO CROSSED
THE CHANNEL SACRIFICIAL LAMBS



Sir Arthur did not live to tell the world of this psychical encounter. He died of a heart attack the very next day (7 July 1930). I trust he is with his son, Kingsley, who was killed in the Great War, and with other loved ones long lost.



TO FEED THE CONTINENTAL MADNESS
OH NEVER IN THE HISTORY OF
THE WORLD HAVE THERE BEEN GRIEF AND LOVE
ON SUCH A SCALE SUCH WIDESPREAD SADNESS

Aching, bewildered desperation!

*Papa its Cyril sorry to
break in like this Cyril, it's you?
those years and years the separation*

*I miss you better late than never
we meet again are you upset
you cant speak better to forget
good-bye papa you were so clever*

*His appearance alternates between that
of the child I loved and the grown man,
in a blood-soaked uniform, hiding his
face – and I know why! I know why!*



Mr V and I

Astral Travel

1.

*Your absence haunts me. It sounds queer,
I know, but I feel quite chagrined.
You are intangible as the wind!
How strange to switch from there to here*

*And then to now so quickly in space
And time! Death has its privileges.
We ghosts can move with startling ease
From age to age and place to place.*

*We fly, as 'twere, on conscious wings —
Or drift, or float, if minded to.
Still, hawk-like, I return to you.
You must have seen some wondrous things.*

2. My Travels

*Ah, let me tell you! I have seen
The tawny Ceylonese sunrise
Through a tea-planting girl's sloe eyes;
Have watched the Nile, swift, emerald-green,*

*Surge past the ruins of the sacred
City that Akhenaten built,
Muscling a wealth of fertile silt
Down to the shores where the waves break red*

*And purple beneath dying suns.
At Alexandria, deep under
The harbour waves, I've seen the plunder
Of time, the great stone blocks that once*

*Composed the wonder of the Pharos.
On high Mount Ida I have stood
Where Troy's doom burned in the hot blood
And fateful judgment of young Paris,*

*And watched a Geisha girl in Kyoto
With exquisite composure pour
Tea for her warrior paramour
And pluck sad music from a koto.*



*(In a pavilion on the way
Down from Mount Fuji I have seen girls
Make love to girls. This part unfurls
As a print by Hiroshige.)*



*With the Aborigines I trace
Song-lines, I join them as they sing
Into existence Everything
That IS, and gather it into place.*



*I have seen the Dogon dance delirious
To honour the completed spin
Of its mysterious hidden twin
Around the raging Dog Star, Sirius.*



*I've watched (as strange as this may seem)
From the moon, with these ghostly eyes,
A pearl of calmest blue arise
From darkness like a solid dream,*

*And only slowly recognised
It as our planet, lone and small
In the void vastness of it all,
A fragile thing ah, to be prized!*

*As fragile as blue china, and
As rare – which how shall we live up to,
Who drain the tea, and break the cup, too?
Leaving our stain on sea and land.*

*And sometimes Ruskin joins me there.
Tears fill his eyes, and the earth-light
Trembles in them. The rest is night
And silence, stars, and breathless air.*





Musical Program

Page 9, *The Epic of Literature*

Hymn to the Muse. Text (and music?) by Mesomedes of Crete (2nd century, A.D.).
Sung by Daphne Panourgia. Arrangement by Petros Tabouris.

Ἀειδε Μούσά μοι φίλη,
μολπῆς δ' ἐμῆς κατάρχου,
αὐρῇ δε σὼν ἀπ' ἄλσεων
ἐμὰς φρένας δονεῖτω.

Καλλιόπεια σοφά,
Μουσῶν προκαθαγέτι τερπνῶν,
καὶ σοφὴ Μυστοδότα,
Λατοῦς γόνε, Δῆλιε, Παιάν,
εὐμενεῖς πάρεστέ μοι.

Sing, dearest Muse,
and help me start my song.
Let the breeze coming
through your forests
make my soul vibrate!

Oh, wise Calliope,
you the leader
of the gracious Muses,
and You wise Initiator
of the Mysteries,
Latona's son, Delian,
Paean, offer your help,
be favorable to me!

Page 12, *Dialogues of the Dead* (Full-page illustration)

Satie, *Socrate*. (Symphonic Drama in Three Parts Based on the Dialogues of Plato).
II: *By the Illisos*. Socrate: Andrea Guiot. Orchèstre de Paris, Pierre Dervaux,
conductor. (Illustration: Watercolour by Turner, *Composition of Tivoli*, inspired by
Claude.)

Socrate:

Par Junon, le charmant lieu de repos! Comme ce platane est large et élevé! Et cet agnus castus avec ses rameaux élancés et son bel ombrage, ne dirait-on pas qu'il est tout en fleur, pour embaumer l'air? Quoi de plus gracieux, je te prie, que cette source qui coule sous ce platane, et dont nos pieds attestent la fraîcheur? Ce lieu pourrait bien être consacré à quelque nymphe et au fleuve Achéloüs à en juger par ces figures et ces statues. Goûte un peu l'air qu'on y respire: est-il rien de plus suave et de si délicieux? Le chant des cigales a quelque chose d'animé et qui sent l'été. J'aime surtout cette herbe touffue qui nous permet de nous étendre et de reposer mollement notre tête sur ce terrain légèrement incliné. Mon cher Phèdre, tu ne pouvais mieux me conduire.

French translation from the Greek by Victor Cousins

Socrates:

By Hera, a fair resting-place, full of summer sounds and scents. Here is this lofty and spreading plane-tree, and the agnus castus high and clustering, in the fullest blossom and the greatest fragrance; and the stream which flows beneath the plane-tree is deliciously cold to the feet. Judging from the ornaments and images, this must be a spot sacred to Achelous and the Nymphs. How delightful is the breeze: so very sweet; and there is a sound in the air shrill and summerlike which makes answer to the chorus of the cicadae. But the greatest charm of all is the grass, like a pillow gently sloping to the head. My dear Phaedrus, you have been an admirable guide.

English translation from the Greek by Benjamin Jowett

Page 17, *The Vampire Vyron*

Beethoven, *String Quartet in A minor*, Op. 132. II: Allegro ma non tanto. Melos Quartet.

Page 18, *The Vampire Vyron*

Schubert, *String Quintet in C Major*, D. 956. II: Adagio. Melos Quartet, Mstislav Rostropovich, cello.

Page 20, *L'Enfant est le père de l'homme* (title page)

Saint-Saens, *Violin Sonata No. 1 in D Major*, Op. 75. I: Allegro agitato. Frank Peter Zimmermann, violin, Enrico Pace, piano.

This may or (possibly) may not be the famous "petite phrase" from the violin sonata by the fictitious composer Vinteuil in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Several other real-life candidates have been suggested, including Fauré's first

violin sonata and Franck's (only) violin sonata, as well as works by his friend and lover, Reynaldo Hahn. (Debussy may have been a general model for Vinteuil, but his the violin sonata appeared five years after the publication of *Du côté de chez Swann*.) From Susan Scheid's *Prufrock's Dilemma* blog:

The year before, at an evening party, he had heard a piece of music played on the piano and violin. At first he had appreciated only the material quality of the sounds which those instruments secreted. . . . But then at a certain moment, without being able to distinguish any clear outline, or to give a name to what was pleasing him, suddenly enraptured, he had tried to grasp the phrase or harmony—he did not know which—that had just been played and that had opened and expanded his soul, as the fragrance of certain roses, wafted upon the moist air of evening, has the power of dilating one's nostrils. . . . This time he had distinguished quite clearly a phrase which emerged for a few moments above the waves of sound.

—Marcel Proust, from *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol.1: *Du côté de chez Swann*

Many origins of the petite phrase have been put forward, including Franck's Violin Sonata in A Major (1886) and Fauré's Ballade, for piano and orchestra, Op. 19 (1881). However, Proust was unequivocal about the origin of the petite phrase: as he wrote to Jacques de Lacretelle, "the 'little phrase' of the Sonata—and I have never said this to anyone—is . . . the charming but mediocre phrase of a violin sonata by Saint-Saëns, a musician I do not care for."

Why would scholars keep searching for a source for this musical phrase if Proust identified it himself? And why would he, in the same breath, seem to cast aspersions on the composer of an idea that would have such profound ramifications for him? A possible source for both areas of confusion is a bit of autobiographical revisionism on Proust's part. The cyclic theme that pervades Saint-Saëns's Violin Sonata No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 75 (1885)—the very one that provided the inspiration for Vinteuil's petite phrase—had earlier symbolized for Proust his passionate love for Reynaldo Hahn. . . . the memory of Saint-Saëns's passionate sonata may have brought up a painfully acute remembrance of things past. (Byron Adams)

From Alex Ross's blog, *The Rest is Noise*:

What does Vinteuil's Septet sound like? Scholars have suggested various sources: one passage or another might echo the music of late Beethoven, César Franck, Debussy, or Proust's onetime lover Reynaldo Hahn. The chamber works of Gabriel Fauré may resemble most closely the cultivated, compressed music that Proust describes—in particular, the "violet mist" that Vinteuil summons with certain of his textures, "so that, even when he introduced a dance measure, it remained captive in the heart of an opal." As for the Vinteuil Sonata, the description of the "little phrase" was originally pegged to Saint-Saëns's First Violin Sonata, the character of Vinteuil having been a late addition to the inaugural volume. Wagner also lurks behind the scenes. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, in his book *Proust as Musician*, notes that the narrator was originally supposed to undergo a series of epiphanies while listening to Wagner operas, but Proust then decided that Marcel should "experience his revelation through an *imaginary* work of art, for according to the logic of the novel a real work always disappoints: attainment of the absolute could only be

suggested by a work that was unrealized, unreal, and ideal.” Thus, a passage that in an early draft was intended to describe the Good Friday Spell in *Parsifal*—“like an iridescent bubble that had not yet burst, like a rainbow that had faded for a moment only to begin shining again with a livelier brilliance”—was reassigned to Vinteuil. This blend of French refinement and German grandeur is, as Nattiez says, a blueprint for *In Search of Lost Time*

Page 21, Reading Proust in Hell

Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp*. III. Finale: Allegro moderato ma risoluto. Chamber Music Society of the Lincoln Center.

Page 24, Meeting in the Afterlife

Fauré, *Dolly Suite*, Op. 56. I: *Berceuse*. Alfred Cortot, piano.

Page 27, Meeting in the Afterlife

Reynaldo Hahn, *Offrande*. Text by Verlaine, originally entitled *Green*, from *Romances sans paroles*. (Hahn, a musician and composer best known for his songs.) The composer sings and accompanies himself on the piano.

Voici des fruits, des fleurs, des feuilles et des branches
Et puis voici mon cœur qui ne bat que pour vous.
Ne le déchirez pas avec vos deux mains blanches
Et qu'à vos yeux si beaux l'humble présent soit doux.

J'arrive tout couvert encore de rosée
Que le vent du matin vient glacer à mon front.
Souffrez que ma fatigue, à vos pieds reposée,
Rêve des chers instants qui la délasseront.

Sur votre jeune sein laissez rouler ma tête
Toute sonore encore de vos derniers baisers ;
Laissez-la s'apaiser de la bonne tempête,
Et que je dorme un peu puisque vous reposez.

Here are the fruits, the flowers, the leaves, the branches,
Here my heart that beats only for your sighs.
Shatter them not with your snow-white hands,
Let my poor gifts be pleasing to your eyes.

I come to you, still covered with dew, you see,
Dew that the dawn wind froze here on my face.
Let my weariness lie down at your feet,
And dream of the dear moments that shed grace.

Let my head loll here on your young breast
Still ringing with your last kisses blessed,
Allow this departure of the great tempest,
And let me sleep now, a little, while you rest.

Trans. A. S. Kline (with alterations)

Page 28, *All my Albertines*

Franck, *Violin Sonata in A Major*. IV: Allegretto poco mosso. Kaja Danczowska,
violin, Krystian Zimerman, piano.

Page 30, *All my Albertines*

Fauré, *Chanson d'amour* ("Song of Love"), Op. 27, No. 1. Text by Armand Silvestre.
Barbara Bonney, soprano, Warren Jones, piano.

J'aime tes yeux, j'aime ton front,
Ô ma rebelle, ô ma farouche,
J'aime tes yeux, j'aime ta bouche
Où mes baisers s'épuiseront.

J'aime ta voix, j'aime l'étrange
Grâce de tout ce que tu dis,
Ô ma rebelle, ô mon cher ange,
Mon enfer et mon paradis!

J'aime tout ce qui te fait belle,
De tes pieds jusqu'à tes cheveux,
Ô toi vers qui montent mes vœux,
Ô ma farouche, ô ma rebelle!

I love your eyes, I love your forehead,
oh my rebellious and fierce one.
I love your eyes, I love your mouth
on which my kisses will tire themselves out.

I love your voice, I love the strange
gracefulness of everything you say,
oh my rebellious one, my dear angel,
my hell and my paradise!

I love all that makes you beautiful,
from your feet to your hair,
you to whom my hopeful pleas ascend,
oh my fierce and rebellious one!

Trans. Peter Low

Page 31 (Monet, *Water Lilies*)

Debussy, *Estampes*. III: *Jardins sous la pluie* (“Gardens in the Rain”). Walter Giesecking, piano.

Page 32, *Marcel Takes Me to Combray*

Debussy, *Dances (danse sacrée et danse profane)* for harp and strings. Ann Mason Stockton, harp. Concert Arts String Ensemble, Felix Slatkin, conductor.

Page 33, *Marcel Takes Me to Combray*

Fauré, *Requiem*, Op. 48. II. Sanctus. Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Robert Shaw, conductor. (Illustration on next page: Monet, *Rouen Cathedral at Sunset*.)

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth,
Pleni sunt coeli et terra
Gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Holy, holy, holy
Lord God of Sabaoth,
Filled are heavens and earth
with your glory.
Hosannah in the highest.

Trans. Nick Jones

Page 35, *I Take Marcel to London*

Fauré, *Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor*, Op. 15. III: Adagio. Emanuel Ax, piano, Isaac Stern, violin, Jaime Laredo, viola, Yo-Yo Ma, cello.

Page 36, *I Take Marcel to London*

Ibid.

Page 37, *I Take Marcel to London*

Ibid.

Page 38 (*Cézanne, Bay of Marseilles, View from L'Estaque*)

Fauré, *Pavane*, Op. 50. Text by Robert de Montesquiou. Chorus of l'Orchestre de Paris, Stephen Betteridge, director. Orchestre de Paris, Paavo Järvi, conductor.

C'est Lindor! c'est Tircis ! et c'est tous nos vainqueurs !
C'est Myrtil! c'est Lydé ! Les reines de nos coeurs !
Comme ils sont provocants! Comme ils sont fiers toujours !
Comme on ose régner sur nos sorts et nos jours!
Faites attention! Observez la mesure !
Ô la mortelle injure!
La cadence est moins lente! Et la chute plus sûre !
Nous rabattons bien leur caquets!
Nous serons bientôt leurs laquais!
Qu'ils sont laids! Chers minois !
Qu'ils sont fols! Airs coquets !
Et c'est toujours de même, et c'est ainsi toujours!
On s'adore! on se hait ! On maudit ses amours !
Adieu Myrtil! Eglé ! Chloé ! démons moqueurs!
Adieu donc et bons jours aux tyrans de nos coeurs!
Et bons jours!

It's Lindor! It's Tircis! and all our vanquishers!
It's Myrtil! It's Lydia! The queens of our hearts!
How they provoke us! How they are always so proud!
How they dare to control our destinies and our days!
Pay attention! Observe the beat!
O the mortal injury!
The cadence is slower! The fall more certain!
We shall beat back their cackles!
We will soon be their stooges!
They are so ugly! Such darling little faces!
They are so foolish! Such coquettish airs!
And it's always the same, and so it shall always be!
We love them! We hate them! We speak ill of their loves!
Farewell, Myrtil! Egle! Chloe! mocking demons!
So it is farewell and good day to the tyrants of our hearts!
And good day!

Trans. Ahmed E. Ismail

Page 39, *Poor Palamède!*

Chopin, *Nocturne in C-sharp minor*, op. posth. (arr. for violin). Midori, violin.

Page 40, *Tragedia dell'Arte*

Debussy, *Fantoches*. From *Fêtes galantes*, by Verlaine. Véronique Gens, soprano, Jeff Cohen, piano.

Scaramouche et Pulcinella,
Qu'un mauvais dessein rassembla,
Gesticulent noirs sous la lune,

Cependant l'excellent docteur
Bologna cueille avec lenteur
Des simples parmi l'herbe brune.

Lors sa fille, piquant minois,
Sous la charmille, en tapinois,
Se glisse demi-nue, en quête

De son beau pirate espagnol,
Dont un langoureux rossignol
Clame la détresse à tue-tête.

Puppets

Scaramouche and Pulcinella,
brought together by some evil scheme
gesticulate, black beneath the moon.

Meanwhile, the learned doctor
from Bologna slowly gathers
medicinal herbs in the brown grass.

Then his sassy-faced daughter
sneaks underneath the arbor
half-naked, in quest

Of her handsome Spanish pirate,
whose distress a languorous nightingale
deafeningly proclaims.

Trans. Clara Claycomb

Page 41, *Tragedia dell'Arte*

Stravinsky, *Suite No. 2 for Small Orchestra*. "Harlequin." CBCSO, Stravinsky, conductor.

Stravinsky, *Suite No. 2 for Small Orchestra*. "Columbine." CBCSO, Stravinsky, conductor.

Stravinsky, *Suite No. 1 for Small Orchestra*. "Pierrot." CBCSO, Stravinsky, conductor.

Page 43, *Tragedia dell'Arte*

Debussy, *Clair de lune*. From *Fêtes galantes*. Text by Verlaine. Véronique Gens, soprano, Roger Vignoles, piano. (Illustration, next page: Collin Campbell Cooper: *A Garden in Granada in the Moonlight*.)

Votre âme est un paysage choisi
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques,
Jouant du luth et dansant, et quasi
Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques!

Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur
L'amour vainqueur et la vie opportune.
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur,
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,

Au calme clair de lune triste et beau,
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres,
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,
Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.

Moonlight

Your soul is an exquisite landscape
charmed by masquers and revellers
playing the lute and dancing and almost
sad beneath their fanciful disguises!

Even while singing, in a minor key,
of victorious love and the good life,
they do not seem to believe in their happiness,
and their song mingles with the moonlight,

the calm moonlight, sad and beautiful,
which sets the birds to dreaming in the trees,
and makes the fountains sob with ecstasy,
the tall slender fountains among the statues.

Trans. Peter Low (with alterations)

Page 45, *Farewell for Now*

Fauré, *Berceuse*, Op. 16. Renaud Capuçon, violin, Michel Dalberto, piano.

Page 53, *Tennyson and I: In Memoriam A.H.H.*

Holst, *The Planets*, Op. 32. VII: *Neptune, the Mystic*. Chicago Symphony Orchestra, James Levine, conductor.

Page 55, *Tennyson and I: In Memoriam A.H.H.*

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen (trad.). Sung by Annie Lennox.

Page 56, *The Arthur Cycle* (title page)

Chausson, *La légende du roi Arthur avec chœur*. La Société Philharmonique de Mirande, conducted by Max Fougà.

Page 59, *The Arthur Cycle*

Guillaume de Machaut, *Puis qu'en oubli* (rondeau). Rogers Covey-Crump, Mark Padmore and Paul Hillier.

Puis qu'en oubli sui de vous, dous amis,
Vie amoureuse et joie à Dieu commant.

Mar vi le jour que m'amour en vous mis,
Puis qu'en oubli sui de vous, dous amis.

Mais ce tenray que je vous ay promis,
C'est que jamais n'aray nul autre amant.

Puis qu'en oubli sui de vous, dous amis,
Vie amoureuse et joie à Dieu commant.

Since I am forgotten by you, sweet friend,
I bid farewell to a life of love and joy.

Unlucky was the day I placed my love in you;
Since I am forgotten by you, sweet friend.

But what was promised you I will sustain:
That I shall never have any other love.
Since I am forgotten by you, sweet friend,
I bid farewell to a life of love and joy.

Page 61, *The Arthur Cycle*

Chausson, *Viviane*, Op. 5. Orchestre Symphonique de Nancy, Jérôme Kaltenbach, conductor.

Page 62, Illustration: *The Lady of Shalott*, John William Waterhouse

Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*. Act III: *Mild und leise*. Isolde's *Liebestod*. (Instrumental version.) Berlin Philharmonic, Herbert von Karajan, conductor.

Page 63, *The Arthur Cycle*

Peter Warlock, *Corpus Christi*. Text: Anon. carol, ca. 1500. Blossom Street, Hilary Campbell, conductor.

Lulley, lully, lulley, lully,
The faucon hath born my mak away.

He bare hym up, he bare hym down,
He bare hym into an orchard brown.

In that orchard ther was an hall,
That was hanged with purpill and pall.

And in that hall ther was a bede,
Hit was hangid with gold so rede.

And yn that bede ther lythe a knyght,
His wowndes bledyng day and nyght.

By that bedes side ther kneleth a may,
And she wepeth both nyght and day.

And by that bedes side ther stondith a ston,
Corpus Christi wretyn thereon.

“One theory about the meaning of the carol is that it is concerned with the legend of the Holy Grail. In Arthurian traditions of the Grail story, the Fisher King is the knight who is the Grail's protector, and whose legs are perpetually wounded. When he is wounded his kingdom suffers and becomes a wasteland. This would explain the reference to ‘an orchard brown.’

“The text may be an allegory in which the crucifixion is described as a wounded knight. The bleeding knight could be Christ who bleeds for the sins of humanity endlessly. Christ is most probably represented as a knight as he is battling sin and evil by his continual pain. The "orchard brown" to which the knight was conveyed becomes, in this reading, the "orchard" of wooden crosses that covered the hill of Golgotha/Calvary where Christ – along with many others – was Crucified, while the "hall... hanged with purpill and pall" could be a representation of the tomb in which Christ was placed after Crucifixion. This allegorical interpretation would tie in with the seven stanzas possibly representing the Seven Deadly Sins. The maiden who is by the knight's side could be Mary. There is religious symbolism throughout the carol. The falcon may have several possible meanings. It may be that, as a bird of prey, it represents those who killed Christ and sent him to heaven. It may also represent a new beginning and freedom, which Christ gained on his death. The colours in the carol are also significant. The purple and gold are signs of wealth, although these were also colours that referred to the Church due to its wealth. The pall (black velvet) probably refers to death. An interpretation of the inscription on the stone may also be that it marks the location of the grail itself, still guarded by the Fisher King.”—From *Corpus Christi Carol* (Wikipedia), based on an article in *The Independent* currently inaccessible on the Web.

Page 64, *The Arthur Cycle*

Mendelssohn, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Scherzo. Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, Valery Gergiev, conductor.

Page 65, *The Arthur Cycle*

Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*. Act III: Prelude. ORTF Orchestra, Karl Böhm, conductor.

Page 66, *The Arthur Cycle*

Purcell, *King Arthur*, Act V, Scene II: *Fairest isle, all isles excelling*. Libretto by John Dryden. Barbara Bonney, soprano. Concentus Musicus, Nikolai Harnancourt, conductor.

Venus:

Fairest isle, all isles excelling,
Seat of pleasure and of love;
Venus here will choose her dwelling,
And forsake her Cyprian grove.
Cupid from his fav'rite nation,
Care and envy will remove;
Jealousy that poisons passion,
And despair that dies for love.
Gentle murmurs, sweet complaining,
Sighs that blow the fire of love;
Soft repulses, kind disdaining,
Shall be all the pains you prove.
Ev'ry swain shall pay his duty,
Grateful ev'ry nymph shall prove;
And as these excel in beauty,
Those shall be renown'd for love.

Page 69, Full-page illustration: Portrait of Arthur Henry Hallam

Schubert, *Piano Sonata in B Flat Major*, D. 960. II: Andante Sostenuto.
Sviatoslav Richter, piano.

Page 74, *Rossetti and I*

Sibelius, *The Swan of Tuonela* (from *Four Legends*, Op. 22). Oslo Philharmonic, Mariss Jansons, conductor.

Schubert, *Liebesbotschaft*, from *Schwanengesang*. Text by Ludwig Rellstab.
Wolfgang Holzmair, tenor, Imogen Cooper, piano.

Rauschendes Bächlein,
So silbern und hell,
Eilst zur Geliebten
So munter und schnell?

Ach, trautes Bächlein,
Mein Bote sei du;
Bringe die Grüße
Des Fernen ihr zu.

All ihre Blumen,
Im Garten gepflegt,
Die sie so lieblich
Am Busen trägt,

Und ihre Rosen
In purpurner Glut,
Bächlein, erquicke
Mit kühlender Flut.

Wenn sie am Ufer,
In Träume versenkt,
Meiner gedenkend
Das Köpfchen hängt,

Tröste die Süße
Mit freundlichem Blick,
Denn der Geliebte
Kehrt bald zurück.

Neigt sich die Sonne
Mit rötlichem Schein,
Wiege das Liebchen
In Schlummer ein.

Rausche sie murmelnd
In süße Ruh,
Flüstere ihr Träume
Der Liebe zu.

Love's Message

Murmuring brooklet,
So silvery bright,
Hurry to my beloved
So fast and light,

Oh friendly brooklet,
Be my messenger fair,
Bring my distant greetings
to her. All the flowers
She tends in her garden,
Which she sweetly
Bears on her bosom,
And her roses
In a purple glow,
Brooklet, refresh them
With cooling flow.

When on the bank,
Immersed in dreams,
Remembering me,
She hangs her head,
Comfort my sweetheart
With a friendly glance,
For her beloved
Will soon come back.

When the sun sets
With reddening glow,
Rock my loved one
To slumber,
Murmur for her
Sweet sleep,
And whisper dreams
Of Love to her.

Trans. Richard Morris

Wagner, *Lohengrin*, Act I: Prelude. Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Bernard Haitink, conductor.

Page 78, Rossetti and I

Ravel, *Alborado del Gracioso* (*Morning Song of the Jester*), from *Miroirs*. Alicia de Larrocha, piano.

Page 80, Reading Nietzsche in the Afterlife

Richard Strauss, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein, conductor.

Page 82, His Grace and I: A Conversation with Cardinal Newman

Britten, *Ceremony of Carols*. I: Procession. Boys' choir unnamed.

Hodie Christus natus est:	Today Christ is born:
hodie Salvator apparuit:	today the Saviour appears:
hodie in terra canunt angeli:	today on earth the angels sing:
laetantur archangeli:	the archangels announce:
hodie exultant justi dicentes:	today be exultant and say together:
Gloria in excelsis Deo.	Glory to God in the highest.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!	Halleluia! Halleluia! Halleluia!

Page 85, His Grace and I: A Conversation with Cardinal Newman

Palestrina, *Missa Brevis*. II: Gloria. The Tallis Scholars, directed by Peter Phillips.

Gloria in excelsis Deo
Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus Te, benedicimus Te, adoramus Te, glorificamus Te,
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam,
Domine Deus, Rex coelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine Fili Unigenite, Jesu Christe,
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris:
Qui tollis peccata mundi miserere nobis;
Qui tollis peccata mundi suscipe deprecationem nostram,
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris miserere nobis.
Quoniam Tu solus Sanctus, Tu solus Dominus,
Tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe,
Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris. Amen

Glory in the highest to God. And on earth peace
to men of good will. We praise thee. We bless thee.
We worship thee. We glorify thee. Thanks we give to thee
because of great glory thy. Lord God, King of heaven,
God Father almighty. Lord Son only begotten, Jesus Christ.
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of Father.
Who take away sins of world, have mercy on us.

Who take away sins of world, receive supplication our.
Who sit at right hand of Father, have mercy on us.
For thou alone holy. Thou alone Lord.
Thou alone most high, Jesus Christ.
With Holy Spirit in glory of God Father. Amen.

Trans. Aaron Green

Page 88, *His Grace and I: More Chats with Cardinal Newman*

Hildegard von Bingen, *Kyrie*. Oxford Camerata, Jeremy Summerly, director.

Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.
Christe eleison.	Christ, have mercy.
Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.

Page 93, *His Grace and I: More Chats with Cardinal Newman*

Debussy, *Preludes*, Book I, No. 10: *La cathédrale engloutie*. Nelson Freire, piano.

This piece is based on an ancient Breton myth in which a cathedral, submerged underwater, rises up from the sea on clear mornings when the water is transparent. Sounds can be heard of priests chanting, bells chiming, and the organ playing, from across the sea. By the end of the piece, the cathedral sinks back down into the ocean and the organ is heard once more, but from underwater, with a murky, muffled sound. Finally, the cathedral is gone from sight, and only the bells are heard, at a distant *pianissimo*.

Page 99, *Ulysses Revisited*

Harry B. Norris, *Those Lovely Seaside Girls*. Kevin McDermott, tenor, Ralph Richey, piano.

Page 102, *Master of the Revelations: Dante's Latest Pageant*

Liszt, *Totentanz*. (Arr. for piano solo.) Valentina Lisitsa, piano.

Page 111, *A Letter from the Sphinx I: Beardsley and the Brownings*

Bach, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I: *Fugue No. 3 in C-Sharp Major*.
Friedrich Gulda, piano.

Page 112, A Letter from the Sphinx I: Beardsley and the Brownings

Bach, *Crab Canon*, from *The Musical Offering*, BWV 1079. Video by Jos Leys.

Page 113, A Letter from the Sphinx I: Beardsley and the Brownings

Bach, *French Suite No. 5 in G Major*, BWV 816. I: Allemande. Piotr Anderszewski, piano.

Page 114, A Letter from the Sphinx I: Beardsley and the Brownings

Bach, *The Passion of Our Lord according to St. Matthew*, BWV 244. No. 1 Double Chorus: "Kommt, ihr Töchter." New York Philharmonic, Collegiate Chorus, Leonard Bernstein, conductor.

(Töchter Zion und Gläubige Seelen)

Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen,
Sehet! - Wen? - den Bräutigam!
Seht ihn! - Wie? - als wie ein Lamm.
Sehet! - Was? - seht die Geduld,
Seht! - Wohin? - auf unsre Schuld.
Sehet ihn aus Lieb und Huld
Holz zum Kreuze selber tragen.

(Daughters of Zion and Faithful Souls)

Come, daughters, help me lament,
behold! - Whom? - the Bridegroom!
Behold Him! - How? - As a Lamb.
Behold! - What? - behold the patience,
Look! - Where? - at our guilt.
See Him, out of love and graciousness
bear the wood for the Cross Himself.

Trans. Pamela Dellal

Page 117, A Letter from the Sphinx I: Beardsley and the Brownings

Bach, *The Passion of Our Lord according to St. Matthew*, BWV 244. No. 68, Double Chorus: "Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder." New York Philharmonic, Collegiate Chorus, Leonard Bernstein, conductor.

Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder
Und rufen dir im Grabe zu:
Ruhe sanfte, sanfte ruh!
Ruht, ihr ausgesognen Glieder!
- Ruhet sanfte, ruhet wohl. –
Euer Grab und Leichenstein
Soll den ängstlichen Gewissen
Ein bequemes Ruhekissen
Und der Seelen Ruhstatt sein.
- Ruhet sanfte, sanfte ruht! –
Höchst vergnügt
Schlummern da die Augen ein.

We sit down with tears
and call to You in the grave:
rest gently, gently rest!
Rest, you exhausted limbs!
- Rest gently, rest well.
Your grave and headstone
shall, for the anxious conscience,
be a comfortable pillow
and the resting place for the soul.
- Rest gently, gently rest! –
Highly contented,
there the eyes fall asleep.

Trans. Pamela Dellal

Page 118, *A Letter from the Sphinx I: Beardsley and the Brownings*

Wagner, *Das Rheingold*. Act I: "Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla." Cleveland Orchestra, George Szell, conductor.

Page 119, *A Letter from the Sphinx I: Beardsley and the Brownings*

Galuppi, *Sonata in D minor*. Fabio Bonizzoni, cembalo.

Page 121, *A Letter from the Sphinx I: Beardsley and the Brownings*

Mozart, *Requiem Mass in D minor*, K. 626. III. Sequentia, 6: Lacrimosa. Collegium Vocale, Philippe Herreweghe, conductor.

Lacrimosa dies illa,
qua resurget ex favilla
judicandus homo reus.
Huic ergo parce, Deus,
pie Jesu Domine,
dona eis requiem. Amen.

That day of tears and mourning,
when from the ashes shall arise,
all humanity to be judged.
Spare us by your mercy, Lord,
gentle Lord Jesus,
grant them eternal rest. Amen.

Page 127, Full-Page Illustration: *Ophelia*, by John Everett Millais

Schubert, *Des Baches Wiegenlied*, from *Die Schöne Müllerin*. Text by Wilhelm Müller. Fritz Wunderlich, tenor, Hubert Giesen, piano.

Gute Ruh, gute Ruh!
Tu die Augen zu!
Wandrer, du müder, du bist zu Haus.
Die Treu' ist hier,
Sollst liegen bei mir,
Bis das Meer will trinken die Bächlein aus.

[The remaining stanzas are omitted.]

The Brook's Lullaby

Good rest, good rest,
Close your eyes!
Wanderer, tired one, you are home.
Fidelity is here,
You shall lie by me,
Until the sea drinks the brooklet dry.

Trans. Emily Ezust

Page 145, Willow-Ware Cup and Ouija Board

Guzheng: Autumn Moon Over the Calm Lake. (Performer unknown.)

Page 148, Willow-Ware Cup and Ouija Board

Collins and Leigh, *Now You've Got Yer Khaki On*. Sung by Marie Lloyd.

Page 155, *Willow-Ware Cup and Ouija Board*

Howard Blake, *I'm Walking in the Air*. Sung by Peter Auty.

Page 157, *Mr V and I: Astral Travel*

Bach, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I, No. 22: *Prelude in B flat minor*.
Glenn Gould, piano.