***From Père Lachaise***

 ***The Empire at Home and Abroad***

*A group of German university*

*students gather round my elegant tomb****.***

1.

Good evening! Kind of you to trot

By on your way to, where, a nice

Café? The Opéra? How wise

You all seem! You’re an owlish lot.

Students, you say? Ah, so was I,

Once. Intellectuals? This visit

Is about edification, is it?

Well, if you must be scholarly,

I wager you would like to hear me

Talk about England in the old

Days, about politics and cold

Economy. Alas, dear me!

This has potential to be boring.

*You knew so much, though, Oscar, saw*

*And lived so much. We hold in awe,*

*Critical awe, that age, exploring,*

*Exploiting, brutal and scientific*

*And decadent, expansionist*

*And insular*…—I get the gist,

My Dear. You’d have me be specific.

Very well, I will set the scenes

And act them out, and bring you up

To date, briefly. Then you will sup

And revel. (Ah! You are in your teens!)

2. *The Pre-Raphaelite Years and their Passing*

Society still sought its tone,

As there continued, almost daily,

The exchange of Gladstone for Disraeli

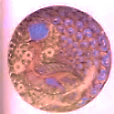
And of Disraeli for Gladstone.

Pilgrims to Arthur Liberty’s

Regent Street store, and other art warehouses,

The bourgeois thronged to buy for their houses

The flower-patterned tapestries

Of peacock-blue, the finely wrought

Stained-glass things, thin as a whisper,

The vine-and-tendril wallpaper

With which pre-Raphaelites sought

To save the harried modern soul

From the brute, levelling onslaught

Of the great factory juggernaut.

But those who paid the steepest toll

To the barons of industry

Could least afford these lovely things,

And they fell to the scavengings

Of the bower-bird bourgeoisie.



The middle class could not decide

Whether to help the hungry poor

Or punish them. But these grew more

And more, and an advancing tide

Of Socialists and Fabians

And Communists and Anarchists

Brandishing pamphlets or their fists,

At times, broke in on the romance

And idyll of the wealthier classes.

(This I was sure of: Socialism

Fails without Individualism,

Detaching oneself from the masses.

How many young souls have I seen

Who should be individuals

Ground down like rows of decimals

In Babbage’s Difference Machine!)

3.

One Anarchist’s bomb would reveal

The Tower Bridge’s quaint façade

(That mediaeval face says ‘God’)

Is built on heartless modern steel.

The scions of the Saboteurs,

Lyonnaise or Silesian weavers,

And Sans Culottes, are true believers

In violent gods, as they rehearse

The Communist Apocalypse

When horsemen storm the Winter Palace

And vent an ancient pent-up malice

Against the boyars’ knouts and whips.

Glorious October! Who can stifle

The bullet, barricade and bomb?

Liberty’s still, though *très grande dame*

By now, a crack shot with a rifle.

The Marx-intoxicated Masses

And the great Spectre of Revolution

Come alive, horribly: blood-ablution

Of the sins of the Upper Classes,

Its musical accompaniment

The cracking of aristocratic

 Skulls and the stutter of automatic

Weapons, and tycoons shot or sent

To labour camps with reprobate

Theoreticians of Class Struggle

Whilst cowardly apparatchiks snuggle

Against the ogre of the State.

4.

And Capitalism? The great fact is

How powers-that-be manipulate

And merge beneath *its* modern State

Religion and sharp business practice,

The latter of which, based upon their

Utilitarian theories (with

Doses of fallen-Adam Smith),

Is quite amoral, laissez-faire

Barbarity in a frock coat.

*Thou shalt not kill, but make a killing.*

*Torture the pence into the shilling.*

*Worship the stock, and buy the vote.*

The indistinguishable herd

Of Nonconformists, clean of face

And conscience briskly-scrubbed, that race

So serious and so absurd,

Dissenters, once beneath a ban,

Who helped abolish the slave trade,

Are now Consenters to be made

Slave-drivers of the working man.

*Govern the unwilling. Lest, like vermin,*

*The angry poor should run amok,*

*Toss them a crumb, for Christian luck.*

*Give them a lecture, preach a sermon.*

5. *Trade Winds: The Colonial Adventure*

‘Twas to intrepid Commodore

Perry’s gunboat diplomacy

That we owed Japonaiserie.

(What stuff comes through that Open Door!)

And what is Japonaiserie?

The iceberg’s tip. The world, once vast,

Was growing smaller, and was fast

Becoming one society

Riven by violence, and rent

By revolution everywhere.

(The greed of wealth that will not share

Ensures continual dissent.)

Along with foreign goods, ships brought

To our shores strains of speech, exotic

New words that spiced the old demotic

With the tang of the polyglot.

Suttee, Seppuku and Kow-Tow,

Mahatma, Dharma, Hunky-Dory, *‘Hunky-Dory’, from a red-light district*

Kiwi, Banana and Satori, *in Yokohama, Japan, haunt of sailors.*

Pantoum, Kris, Bwana… In they blow

On one great capitalist trade wind.

The growl of Rikki-Tikki-Tavi *Sir Charles Napier in the 1840’s conquered*

Mingles with Napier’s ‘Peccavi’, *this east Indian province. His despatch*

Meaning, *I have sinned. I have Sindh. consisted of this single punning word.* [Oscar] Mr V: W*rong, Oscar. But let us continue below.\**

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*\*This is a popular misconception. The author of the pun was a girl*

*named Catherine Winkworth, who submitted it to* Punch, *which*

*then printed it as a factual report. She went on, by the way, to win*

*fame as a composer of hymns.—*Oscar:Very well. But let us leave

the cramped basement of this footnote! It is rather *clammy*.

(He exceeds his authority

In a way that secretly pleases the

Foreign Office, for he increases the

Size of our holdings measurably.

Of course, the East India Company

Can see the possibilities.

The public chuckles: *At least he’s*

*A noble rascal, isn’t he!*)

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/chinese_dance2.mp3)

6.*The Opium Wars; the Boxer Rebellion*

We cook the Dragon’s goose, fill full

Our bellies at the feast, our host

Lord Palmerston, who serves as toast-

Master to delicate John Bull,



*Lord Palmerston (1857) showing the*

*Chinese what’s what. (*Punch *cartoon.)*

Drug trafficker extraordinaire

To the Chinese, willing to force

Smoke down their throats, to fight two wars

And spread addiction everywhere

To adjust the balance of Free Trade.

We bring them interesting times,

We foreign devils, and our crimes

Are schools in how Empire is made.

To them affliction is a thing

Eternally passing, the one dream

Into the other, what things seem

And are, equally vanishing.

But comes the Boxer, acrobat

Martial and magical in air;

And Chiness Muslims gobble rare *Clemens von Ketteler, German Pleni-*

The black heart of a diplomat. *potentiary to Peking, gratuitously shot a*

*Chinese boy. In revenge, Kansu Braves*

*made a meal of the man’s heart (1900).*The peasants fear the officials; the

 Officials fear John Bull; Bull fears

The peasants: such harsh, clanking gears

Drive the commercial colony.

7. *Pius Aeneas*

Ah, the colonial adventure

Makes each man pious Aeneas, in

His own mind—a *good* killer. Sin

On epic scales escapes the censure

Of Conscience by appealing to

The old ideals. (Modernity

Adds sweetening Tartufferie.)

And what can the poor natives do?

What gross enormity can one

Commit but it bears fruit, or tends

To useful ends, and finally blends

Beneath a never-setting sun

Into the glorious old story,

That is, the great reality,

That is, a fact of history

So vast that the details, cruel, gory,

Shameful, atrocious as they are,

Fade, in the sunlight of successes,

To ghosts that trail, as it progresses,

Caesar’s immense triumphal Car?



*Disraeli offering Queen Victoria an even*

*more prestigious title: Empress of*

*India! Her daughter had become German*

*Empress: that simply would not do!*

(His slave, an economical

Philosopher, seizes the hour

To whisper in the ear of Power:

*You are immortal, after all.*)

What have they done, the English? Made

A little history, that’s all.

Is that so evil? Yes. The Fall

Rendered us so. For since Eve bade

Her husband eat, and he and she

Sinned in their disobedience,

We are all half-devils. Innocence

Is a Tahitian luxury

Gauguin made sure to cure them of—

He was a sort of missionary

Of Decadence: he taught how very

Risky and dangerous is love,

All sicklied o’er with the pale cast

Of death, or at the very least,

Shameful disease. (And yet the East,

I think, will be avenged at last.)

Real missionaries, ever-officious,

Cried, *Save the heathen!* But did not

Many a Christian in his pot

Curse God, who made him so delicious?

A mere foretaste of what the world

At England’s feet, licking its chop-

Sticks, has in store when conquests stop

And the frayed Union Jack is furled

And packed, and sent back to the roost

 To which the chickens, too, will come,

The Foreign Ones, and call it home.

When once the reins of Power are loosed,

As loosed they must be, finally (Rome’s

*Imperium* ate the dust), the past is

Not what it used to be… As fast as

It drove, the chariot caroms

From off the rebound of its force

And veers from the triumphal path

To muddle through the aftermath

Of altering human history’s course,

Its own course altered. For the *arma*

*V*i*rumque* that made others change

Those changes shall in turn estrange:

So saith Fate, or Wyrd, or Karma.

8. *A Charming Coda*

I broach a somewhat different topic

For your refreshment and surprise:

For in a fit of wild surmise

I have discovered a new Tropic

And fashioned for the clime a novel

Pith helmet and white suit of clothes

To uphold the Mad Dog English pose

So that whilst coolies in their hovel

That barely from the rains gives cover

Poke grains of rice with little sticks

From bowls, I may my sixty-six

Thousand-pound income savour over



A cold, spiced drink of whisky or rum

And summon up those souvenirs

Of G & S that still wring tears,

And hum the Moon Song of Yum-Yum.

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/three_little_maids2.mp3)

My eyes are glistening, myopic—

But listen! Something is amiss:

Beelzebub is Lord in this

Mosquito-buzz-bedevilled Tropic!

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