The Yellow Book

of Max

The Visitation of the Max

You won't believe this, Oscar, but:
  I'm in your dream! I can't explain
  How. Welcome, Max. Your ancient brain — *Beerbohm, that is.*
Amuses me. I like the cut—

So slender—of your style. Fine fellow!
  Cosmetics cosmic in their periods
  Your prose wears: *ennui* toned in myriads
Of masking shades, dominant yellow.

True, en l'an vingtièsme de mon
  Maquillage I was wizened as
  The Sphinx that hath seen all things pass.—
Les temps jadis s'en vont, s'en vont…

You are as old as sand—the sand
  Of a resplendent sea-side castle,
  Complete with flags of jaunty tassel.
What brings you, though, to Oscar Land?

Hermes has sent me on a message,
  Oscar. He wants me to remind you
  That you are dead. How droll I find you,
Astral-wing'd, bearing such grim presage!

This 'death' of mine: tell me about it.
  You're sure you want to know? You died
  In a hotel room. At your side
Were Reggie and Robbie. Who could doubt it?

Such splendid fellows! *An old ear*
  Infection abscesses, with fever
  In the meninges. Well, I never!
How clinical it sounds, my dear!

I fear you make an awful mess.
  And yet you do not die in sin.
  So I explode, like a myth? *In*
A ghastly way, you effloresce.

A most unpleasant way to die! — *Max disappears.*
  This dream is rather harrowing.
  So long since I ate anything…
I feel so flushed…faint…where am I?

Trial by Caricature
The Sphere of Satire

Max makes me fatter than I am.
The scene is Cat-Call Music Hall.
[Dante]: *Mind your Ledge!*

1.
Is that you, Max? What brings you here?
  Not dead, I hope? *Oh, no. At least*
  I hope not. I feel like a creased
Page in some ancient book. Oh, dear,

It must be, yes, I think that I'm
  Dreaming—if old men still can dream.
  Well, welcome to the side, the 'team'.
You're on a plane, you see, where time

And space are, well, peculiar.
  I have been drawing you. Ah, clever
  Max! *Hard as I try, I can never*
Draw you quite as fat as you are.

I think I'm going to draw you fatter
  Than anyone was ever drawn.
  Fatter than Aubrey did me?
I think I'll think you as pure matter;

Then, Oscar, I propose to blow you
  Up like a helium balloon.
  Max, don't be tedious. *As soon*
As I draw you as so-and-so, you

Are what I make you seem. Look! quicker
  Than V can scribble 'i.o.u',
  The blank your Self reduces to
Reforms itself, but as a thicker

And grosser Self, and, yes, a fatter.
  Into an abstract state you fall
  And simultaneously all-
Too-amply incarnate as matter!

Beerbohm, that is. He sees
that I have gained back the
weight I lost in previous tomes.

(Yawn.)

I sigh as I begin to expand in smirking
Beerbohm-space, self-caricturing.
caricature. Ah, well, no small parts…
On with the Show, then.

(Something by G&S might be nice here.)
—[Mr V]

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2.
The grave of Self's annihilation
  Gapes thrice as wide for you as for
  The rest.—A fact which I deplore,
But losing weight's a tribulation

I am unable to endure,
  So I must lug the avoirdupois
  And pursy bulk of portly *moi*
Like a disease without a cure.

You've taken on a plump rotundity
  Incredible in its immensity,
  All-but Teutonic in the density
Of its corporeal profundity;

Outsized Falstaffian profanity
  Gives you such ludicrous pomposity
  Of oleaceous adiposity,
More than a man, you are a manatee.

I am become a Schoolman's quiddity,
  Crassitas, with a bent for battening
  On, of all language, the most fattening,
Larded encomiast's pinguidity:

I lay upon you, like fantastical
  Chintz drapery on an old chair,
  The most outrageous flatteries: there!
Upholstered rhetoric, bombastical

Hyperbole and gross exaggeration,
  Unctuous, fulsome praise and oily
  Compliments greasy as a doily
Soiled to the point of sweaty saturation:

'Dearest, handsomest Max, ah! you are
  The youngest youth I've ever seen!'
  Now you are merely being mean.
'You are so dapper, so demure!'

3.
To be so fat suggests depravity,
  It's true; yet here you are, bereft
  Of all but your material heft,
By now a major source of gravity:

In a word, overweight—in fact
  You have become so nearly spherical
  It is a harlequinade miracle,
Of flesh you are an estate, a tract.

Am I the Mikado?

Orchestral tutti. Applause.

♫

The greatest elephant in the world, except himself.

And yet: 'All the fat is the LORD'S'.
Leviticus 3:16

Not one of Dante's bolge *holds you.*
You are outgrowing the entire
Depression, rising higher and higher;
Like a flesh-flag the wind unfolds you,

Or like a sail to the utmost swelling,
Like a cloud, like a cloud formation
You shadow the globe's vast curvation
And where it ends, there is no telling!

So soft, so far-from adamantine,
So Tweedledee-and-Tweedledumpy,
So Humpty-Dumpty-plump and clumpy—
You're a Gargantuan-elephantine

Heavyset, stout, absurdly dense
Man who, spectacularly globular,
(His thoughts half-nebulous, half-blobular)
Lost in his porcine corpulence,

Must drag his pudgy, paunchy bulk
Along the ground as Sisyphus
Uphill his rock, and ponderous
The wheezing pace, and a great sulk

Exists among your folds of face—
Distended, jowly, erythematous,
With wattles of which no known limit is;
You are a weighty thing that weighs

As much as, and in form and feature
Is *very like a whale whose blubber's*
So vast, it seems to mere landlubbers
Who've never seen quite such a creature

Less like a creature than a land.
A thing that thinks, 'Alas, were I a thin
Fellow again…!' No: you are Leviathan.
And thus resigned; fat makes you bland.

You grow through all the change of weather
Till you become (to my dismay!) an
Amalgamation Himalayan
Of many Oscars heaped together.

I am become Johnsonian,
Almost. (For a Circumferential
Humanity was the essential
Ingredient of that massive man.)

The Tragic Dandy

A Dandy, should he live so late,
Becomes, not a svelte skeleton,
But Falstaff, charm weighed by the ton.
How fat was poor Beau Brummel's fate!
—[Cancelled stanza]

Another Cancelled Stanza:
How Many Tweedles* Are *There?

I contain Tweedles Dee and Dum,
And several more you've never heard of.
(Writing in margins is absurd, of
Course, a vice I should abstain from.)

Think of me as the Continent.
  The Incontinent, you surely mean?
  There is so much you haven't seen.
Take the Grand Tour, become a *gent*,

See the Great World of me. Go on,
  Round off your education, polish
  Your manners, and perhaps demolish
Some *borné* notions, too, my son.

Ah, it would be a tour de farce
  Of no small magnitude, if I
  Could bring it off. Well, why not try?
It might make you a bit less *sparse*.

3.1
Steatopygic, narcissistic,
  Multiple-chinned and jowly, fish-
  Lipped, huge hands moist as you could wish,
More than gigantic, GIGANTISTIC,

So swollen, meaty, over-present
  In overbearing too-much-of-him,
  Far too much stuff appears to stuff him.
If not bovine, then bovinescent

He seems to me in lard and lolling,
  And, sirs, as far as one can tell he, well, he
  Has no plans to reduce his jelly-belly,
And lately he is prone to rolling,

This pound-amassing ball of butter,
  Nor are there signs he'll ever cease
  Becoming ever-more obese
And so fat-lipped he can but sputter

And thickly slobber forth his muttering
  Through those reverberant, rubbery slabs
  Till who knows what *it is he blabs*
Through all that noise of spittle sputtering?

Not worldly merely: planetary,
  A gaseous Jupiter whose tactic
  Is to inflate past the galactic
Till 'mid the supernumerary

Another Cancelled
Brummelian Stanza

Beau Brummel, when his slimness fails,
Meets an unfashionable end
At fences it's too late mend
With his fat friend, the Prince of Whales.

Vastnesses, with huge creaks and strains
He eats the universe entire;
Then will his weight and mass be higher
Than everything that he contains

(And all is now in him contained)
Of substance and of time and space.
(What Grösse *in that fatted face!)*
Not one more scruple to be gained.

What keeps me with a man so sick,
So fatuous and outright batty?
Love of the Fat Man, Amor Fatty
Keeps me with him through thick and—thick.

A pun, somewhat grossier, *on Nietzschean* amor fati.—[Mr V]

Too big I've grown for my own trousers.
I must find means to pay the tailor
And to 'buy off' a new blackmailer
(The cut of whose trousers arouses).

3.14 (*Enter the Oscar*)

The stage is set: a dull soirée:
The tepid waltz, the gossiping pairs
Of matrons… Past their frosty stares
I make my slow and shambling way.

My left leg is an epic poem,
My right, a learnèd commentary.
The wit of those whose words I parry
Is pint-sized; mine's a jeroboam.

Frank Harris, shameless Bardolater, ready to sacrifice his manhood on the altar of Shakespeare's Uranian lust.

My arms are sturdy cylinders
Of gesturing flesh. My lips? Obscenely
Large, said one lady, rather meanly.
I move; my trousers swish; I purse

My monstrous fishy lips, then say
Such wondrous things, as lost in thought,
That soon the miracle is wrought
And all are hooked: I win the day.

Your lips grew ever fatter, true,
And fatter grew your fingers and
Your thighs, but your head, vast and grand!
Became the fattest part of you.

3.141

All things want to be round, or rounded,
  The Cherokee say: should you sound
  My roundness I think 'twould be found
Praise for Earth's roundness is unfounded.

I am the heavy and the light
  Combined: a massive Zeppelin
  Part helium and part stretched skin.
That's why I'm almost always right

'…gigantic, smooth-shaven and rosy, like a great priest of the moon in the time of Heliogabalus.
—Stuart Merrill

About, say, Art, Space, Time, and Weather.
  I split the difference between
  Extremes, attaining, not a mean—
A different difference altogether.

And thus I, with profound resoundings,
  A wheel-turned-sphere, blessed by its rondure,
  Move smoothly into a Beyondure
Where I'm the 'round' in your surroundings,

Modality there is no fleeing;
  More, therefore, than a simple ball,
  I am the pantheistic All
In which you move and have your being.

Your scheme has failed, Max: though you planned
  To make me little by expansion,
  (And here I *do* exceed the bounds of scansion)
You've made me positively *grand*!

Survival of the fattest?

You'd make me much more wide than tall,
   But I've accomplished in my stoutness
   A *ne plus ultra* roundabout-ness
There is no getting round at all.

En gros, you've merely multiplied me,
  Not fattened me, by infinite orders
  Of magnitude, or greatness. Borders
I've none, and nothing stands beside me:

I am God. And you? You are not there:
  There simply is no room for you
  Save in *me*, as a thought I have too
Long entertained, like an old air.

Well, as a thought, do I, therefore,
Occupy space? If I am 'there'
Inside you, am I 'in the air'?
A figure of speech, dear, nothing more.

In fact, I have invented you
As Will invented Enoch Soames.
You are apocryphal as the tomes
You never wrote. You are not true.

Will Rothenstein.

3.1415…
Whilst I am, well, bloviating, hugely, thus, Max has taken from his pocket a small, laqueured box, of Chinese make, it appears. He opens the box, the interior of which is lined with silk, and carefully lifts therefrom, or rather tweezes, a fine silver needle. Remember that I am roughly co-extensive with the Universe at this point—and yet I can somehow make out that the needle is incised with exquisite carvings, made with an even tinier implement, by some very, very small, and I imagine, very thin, presumably Oriental, man. These carvings depict an entire scene: to wit, Angkor Wat, complete with temples, canals, lotus flowers, and monks in saffron-coloured robes with begging bowls. And now I am beginning to worry a bit, for he has casually positioned the needle between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, and the hand is approaching me very steadily and purposefully, but for what purpose, exactly? I fear the worst: Cosmic Deflation! Whilst all of this is going on, Max's face wears a look of inscrutable, almost Buddha-like, and at the same time distinctly blasé, detachment. I attempt to dodge the needle, but—there is no room outside me to maneouvre!

A small pin-prick can cause a vast
Implosion. No, Max! Not that! NO!

I (the Universe) deflate catastrophically. An apocalypse of inconceivable proportions, galaxies imploding, planets colliding to form molten lumps, cataclysmic storms and earthquakes and the extinction of life on this planet, of course… Meanwhile Max, who appears remarkably unconcerned as the end of time is taking place deafeningly all around him, appreciatively scrutinises his exquisite needle, occasionally sipping a glass of brandy. Once all the cosmic dust has settled…

There! You're as thin as long ago
You were—in youth! Your trial is passed.

Why, thank you, Max. It *was* a burden,
Being the Being of all beings,
With all the I-ings and the me-ings…
A villanelle shall be your guerdon.

Max looks somewhat alarmed.

Oscar, you are wilful, you are whimsical—
But I am tired, quite tired. I'm waking up.
Your image, dear, *has* begun breaking up.
Well, long may you avoid the grim sickle!

He vanishes, or pretends to.