***Bardolatries***

***[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/praetorius.mp3)***

***The Bard and I***

♫

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***From Père Lachaise***

***The Question of Reincarnation***

***With a Note on the Oxfordian Theory***

*A visitor asks a question.*

*Do you plan to reincarnate?*

Ah, only as myself, my Dear.

Or as the ring in Shakespeare’s ear,

Perhaps, privy to all 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 flaws, its magnanimity.

And yet, Dears, speaking as Shakespeare’s

Reincarnation, as I used

To insist I was, I am amused

At how far from the truth it ‘veres’,

This theory, and I applaud

The fanciful in any form.

The Bard sent me here to perform

Himself as me—for he is God.

*You’d like to return as the Bard’s*

*Earring, you said. Reincarnation*

*Works backwards*? Why not? On occasion

One may turn up the oddest cards.

The Aion Child-Divinity

Has moods… *Item:* can emit time

Backwards, permit a rhyme of ‘time’

With ‘time’: a mighty mite is he.

**

*****Meeting the Bard Backstage***

***At the Globe Theatre***

*[He rises to greet me as I enter the tiring house. He*

*has just exited the stage after saying his last lines*

*as Hamlet’s father’s ghost: his face is half-young, half- The Great Globe itself.*

*old (the half with old-man make-up not yet removed.]*

1. *In my excitements I blurt this out:*

You nouned new verbs and verbed new nouns

To leap thought’s farthest gaps! You tore

Lightning-fork neuron pathways for

The mind to grow beyond its bounds!

‘Twas only you who found a way to

Make of the scripts that feed a player

Scripture and Book of Common Prayer

For those who know no God to pray to.

You let us live in Hamlet’s mind,

Yes, at the growing-point of that

Complex and vibrant crystal, at

The edge experienced-tried, refined *We are all ‘Shakesperienced’?—*[Mr V]

*I wish you found puns more…*resistible, *Mr V!*

By suffering, jagged with the hard

Lessons that do not come too late

To ready him to meet his fate,

Perpetually avant-garde.

O you who fathomed all you saw

In this sad world, and made it seem

The thing it is, a passionate dream…

Your plays, Will, your plays! With what awe

Since childhood in my heart I’ve kept them,

Like vestal flames! I’ve written about

Your Romances: two poems, no doubt

The flimsiest things, but please accept them.

***The Winter’s Tale*** *.*

*‘It is required you do awake your faith’.*—Paulina.

A gallery, under the direction

Of one Paulina, Love’s strict purist;

She leads Leontes (gawking tourist)  *Art and Religion in wavering equipoise.*

To see the jewel of her collection.

The stage is set—she draws a curtain:

Brightly, yet shadowed by its irony,

Stands forth the statue of Hermione.

He feasts his eyes—but is uncertain:



This faithful likeness of the wife

He thinks he murdered long ago

(Now guilt and penance walk a slow

Procession through his empty life):

What made the artist think to trace

Upon its brow those lines of care?

The weight of sixteen years is there,

And ah! such sadness in that face!

Awake your faith, Leontes, rouse

It like a child you’re taking on

A journey that begins at dawn:

He stumbles weeping from the house.

Have faith, repentant king: the stone

Will breathe, and there’s an end to grief.

(And we’ll believe in your belief,

Strengthen your credence with our own.)

Perhaps we’re merely mocked with Art?

Music, awake her! Strike! Descend.

It’s time. Now let those cold limbs bend

And leave their plinth. All those depart

Who scoff at wonders, or fear magic.

Childlike credulity’s required.—

Then it takes place, the most-desired:

An exorcism of the tragic.

See! Like a fatal wound that mends,

She comes alive. Husband and wife

Embrace. Desire, done to the life,

Is its own earnest. The tale ends.

\*

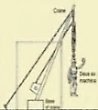
*Curtain. Epilogue.*

Doubt lingers. Curious, how these sleights

Of hand serve Christian piety,

True to the solemn mummery

Of ancient sacraments and rites.



Love’s own High Priestess dares to preach

Faith by deceiving minds and eyes

When back to life she whitely lies

Love long thought lost beyond all reach.

Paulina—new Apostle, with

The gall to be a *feminine*

St. Paul: this Romance heroine

Gently demystifies the Myth

To end all myths, and Paul’s campaign

Ends in a disappearing act,

A trick consisting of the fact

That all the tricks are made so plain:

The coffin’s trap door is laid bare;

Here’s the technique that makes the Dove

Spring from the hat and wheel above

The witnesses in breathless air!

The miracle of theatre

And Christian Theatre of Miracle

Pivot where Art draws from the empirical

Fresh revelations secular.

Our disbelief hung there, suspended.

We wept, we gasped, put fleeting stock in a

Quaint, jerry-rigged *deus ex machina*,

Then marveled how the thing…*transcended*,

On prayer’s tough guy wires. In a jangling

Sheet of thunder, an eyebrow pencil,

In a halo of shining tinsel,

A powder-faced god’s awkward dangling,

In this sublime, momentous hoopla  
 Imagination found its Heaven,

And even the angels could believe in

Poetry’s gaudy trompe-l’oeil cupola.

\*

***The Tempest***

A crazed old man howls *Fire!* and *Flood!*

The eyes go blind, the mouth grows fangs.

Kindness is killed, the poor fool hangs,

And all is darkness, filth and blood.

There is another ending, where

Magic restored what evil banished.

The trick once done, the magic vanished

Into air, into thin air.

Free with the crows and frogs to croak

Ranges the Beast, and free as well

The Angel pines no more. My spell

Dissolves the mirror and the smoke.

No harm, no harm. Thou hast nor youth

Nor age, when all this fierce to-do

That scares the foreground, fades into

The vanishing perspective truth.



**2.

*Well done, my lad! A eulogy*

*Most excellent, i’ faith.* How bold

You were to leave so much untold!

You kept your Creed a mystery.

*What I was not allowed to say*

*I did not have to say, and could*

*Imply what had not done me good*

*To do in all but trifling play.*

*This Freedom Negative I call*

*The boon of Capability*

*Not-Quite-Denied, when mastery*

*Of gambits metaphorical*

*And innuendo twice as subtle*

*As any Jesuit can be,*

*In feigning lies, the truth sets free*

*Sans fear of torturous rebuttal.*

*I flirt with Chaos, but don’t marry her.*

*She is a dangerous goddess-wench*

*Who holds the Cosmos in a clench. ‘Clench’ in Elizabethan*

*You bury darkness when you bury her, English can mean ‘pun’*.—[Mr V]

*But light, as well. I am resolute*

*To keep faith with complexity*

*And complication; the whole tree,*

*The limb, the leaf, the squirming root.*

Then where is God in thy Creation?

Though in disguise of Pagan robe,

Thy King Lear is the Christian Job

Decrying a New Dispensation

More outworn than the Old, corrupt

As the office of the Anglican

And as the jaded Vatican.

For when the livid clouds erupt

In fire and downpour, where is He?

And when the wicked prosper, where?

When ill blooms in the brain, who’s there?

Where is thy God? Knoweth He thee?

*Since ‘twas forbid to represent*

The poet is the Cretan Liar

Who captures in a contradiction

The truth that Life is but a fiction

Stage-managed by the sorcerer, Maya.

*Biblical scenes on stage, I was*

*Freed, by the same stroke, from the clause*

*That binds to doctrinal assent;*

*Freed to explore the world’s Book, put*

*In question, glancingly, aside,*

*All abstract truths. Doubt loves to hide*

*In motley—dress betrothed to what*

*Is real, not merely true—for one*

*Can always say, ‘It is the part*

*That calls for it, the mummer’s art’.*

*And all one asks is a Well Done.*

*Prospero’s Book? Why, he commends it*

*To the grey mercy of the wave.*

*And is the sky th’inverted grave*

*Of prayer, the emptiness where ends it?*

*Nay, ‘tis a fine and skyey tomb*

*Of azure, clear-eyed as Apollo*

*Which all our smoke and sweat doth swallow*

*With the hopes of a widowed womb!*

*Or does the Empyrean indeed*

*Lie close behind the vast blue mask?*

*Does Heaven free of toil and task*

*Await the few who hold the Creed?*

*Then let it be a human place.*

*Love is the feeling of the thought,*

*‘Do what you feel, not what you ought’*

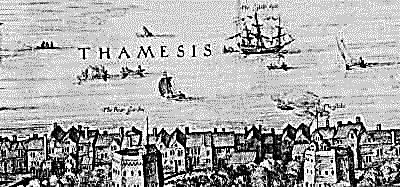
*The only ‘ought’ amid the Grace.*

*[He excuses himself. He must stage-manage the rest*

*of the play, and curb the pitiful ambition of the extempor-*

*isers. So convincing is his impersonation that he seems is he that to vanish into air, into thin air, rather than merely exit--*

*like the ghost that he plays and, admittedly, is.*]

******

*****William and I***

***Riding on a Qua-Train***

*I take him on a trip by train to Brighton.* *‘Shakespeare’ and I take a trip by (qua)tr to nowhere in particular, that is, Brighton.*

*We are smoking hashish in a small clay pipe.*

1.

And Marlowe, how, exactly, did

You know him? Biblically, as in

The Sodom-and-Gomorrah sin?

*I will not raise that coffin lid.*

*Leave the dead shepherd to his Faustus,*

*His Helen and his woeful Dido.*

Ah, Doctor Faustus! Where to hide, oh

Where, when the devils come to roust us?

*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.*



Yes, in a sturdy, swift qua-train

I am riding with the Avonian Swan.

The window keeps a glass eye on

Blurred vistas of hill, field, or plain.

From town to village to great city

We speed, in conversation so

Engrossed at times we hardly know

Quite where we are. (The Bard’s so witty!)

And as we tactfully talk ‘round

The question of his good friend Marlowe,

A garish light invades the car: low-

Bowing, and who knows whither bound,

A gentleman dressed in a daily

Newspaper enters, takes a seat.

*Who is he?* asks Will (a discreet

Aside). Looks a bit like Disraeli.

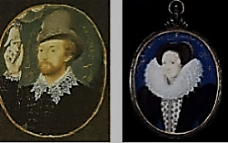
2. *Who Is Shakespeare?*

*Thinkst thou I* *am not what I am,*

*And, in a dream that time will shatter,*

*A king, but, waking no such matter?*

*Bring buds of staining marjoram,*

*That would have stol’n Ophelia’s hair,*

*And lay them at my grave, and laugh*

*As if it were the cenotaph*

*Of one whose bones do lie elsewhere.*

*What boots it these bone-buryings?*

*The Phoenix leaveth none behind.*

*Let them pick cinders from the wind*

*Who have not seen her living wings.*

3. *The Dark Lady*

***The False Ganymede***

***Uncover the false Ganymede***

***Whom Phoebe loves distractedly***

***And he is she, but she is he***

***Who is a Ganymede indeed.***

*Ah, the dark lady of my dreams,*

*Where is she now, I wonder, where?*

*I know not, Oscar, no, nor care.*

*It seems (and well she knows that ‘seems’)*

*She’s taken up with my boy-player,*

*And they may whistle down the wind*

*For aught it recks me. Just or kind*

*She hardly was, but, darkly fair!*

*And not true, neither, and black wires*

*Grew on her head, and on the ground*

*She trod, and a more pleasing sound*

*Hath music than her voice. Desires*

*Chase out desires. Strange boy, that Cupid.*

*Not to the damask’d rose he flies,*

*But for the blood-red poppy sighs*

*Till in a haze he wandereth, stupid.*

*In black ink did my love shine bright.*

*At reason clever folly mocks.*

*This was, and is, a paradox,*

*That she was comely in my sight.*

*She made me jealous, passing jealous,*

*So languid, she, to grant my suit,*

*Of vows so careless, in pursuit*

*Of her self-joys how keen, how zealous!*

*I had her by the Avon, aye,*

*My make, and my unmaking, she,*

*A perfect piece of deviltry,*

*She comes to mind, I know not why.*

*Hard by the Avon did I have her,*

*A wanton nymph beside a stream.*

*And Anne? She lived in sin’s own dream*

*And the sun of my brothers’ favour.*

*A scene eyed through a windowpane*

*Tells more than ears may hear in passing.*

*I, as a medal-and-scar-amassing*

*Veteran of many a campaign*

*In Cupid’s wars, tell you I won her*

*The length she took to swear an oath,*

*To touch my heart, and break them both.*

*Yet would I lie again upon her!*

4. [*Song*] *Sung by a Pierrot dressed in motley,*

*though with Ariel’s delicate features.*

*Music, for that he waketh joy*

*In the sensory motor cortex,*

*In jig and reel reels in a vortex*

*The girl that danceth with the boy.*

*Music, for that he causeth joy*

*To leap synaptic in the brain,*

*Seasons his meat with salt of pain,*

*And round and round go girl and boy.*

*If music be the food of love*

*The ear’s the mouth that hungers for it,*

*And love’s annoy, though we deplore it,*

*What is it but the spice thereof?*

*No song but has its dissonance,*

*No storm but leaveth a rainbow*

*Behind him as a memento,*

*And for that gift the rain will dance!*

*If music at the close be sweet*

*‘Tis for the storms that love hath passed.*

*Nor rainbow nor the storm shall last,*

*And love sails in a winding sheet,*

*He in the end takes to his bed*

*Not pleasure’s toy, but his own self.*

*And strange as in a dream an elf*

*Seems the dead love rememberèd.*

*A curtain front stage left is lifted*

*to reveal Desdemona’s ghost, still*

*lying on her bed. She wakes and sings.*

**5. *Desdemona: an Encore*

*What is’t o’clock? All men do kill*

*The thing they love, willow O willow.*

*Some use a sword, some use a pillow.*

*And some are cold and treat her ill*

*Till of that ill the lady die.*

*And some in jealous madness slay*

*Whilst others with a kiss betray.*

*Weep, O my willow, weep and sigh!*

*Must love come at so steep a cost?*

*He killed me, but he loved me after,*

*In the teeth of the Devil’s laughter.*

*Weep, O my willow, all is lost!*

**

6. [*Gratuitous Clown:*]

*Doth music tire of keeping pace*

*With hearts whose roving’s never over?*

*Nay, Bacchus’ pard can change her lover*

*But not her spots, nor I my case.*

*Thus Love and Music on a brass*

*Trumpet did bid me spread their fame,*

*Two things in differing the same.*

*A lad is born to sing, Alas!*

7. *Enter the Dark Lady*  *She runs to Shakespeare and throws her arms*

*around his neck. His back is turned, and she*

*My love, forgive me, that I stole gives me an interested look over his shoulder. towards me, and she casts an interested*

*Your Willie, he is just so like*  *glance at me over his unsuspecting shoulder.*

*A lily. Cupid’s dart did strike*

*Me willy-nilly to the soul.*

*We are all pinned, and made a wreath*

*Of butterflies to crown his head!*

*Your boy I’ve ta’en into my bed,*

*My love, but as I hope to breathe*

*Again in Heaven, I simply could*

*Not help myself. ‘Twas sin, but Willie*

*Is just so very like a lily.*

*I want so badly to be good.*

The Bard:

*Ah, well, those tears are pearl, which thy*

*Love sheds, and they are rich, and ransom…*

*You know the rest*.—‘*Come thou, my handsome!*

*Let’s stroll the city, you and I,*

*‘And note the various qualities*

*Of people!’*—*Curious, aren’t they, people?*

*‘Or make love up in the church steeple!’*

*Then with a kiss let’s seal the peace.*

*Scene change: back inside the train.*

\*

Bravo! The greatness of life is

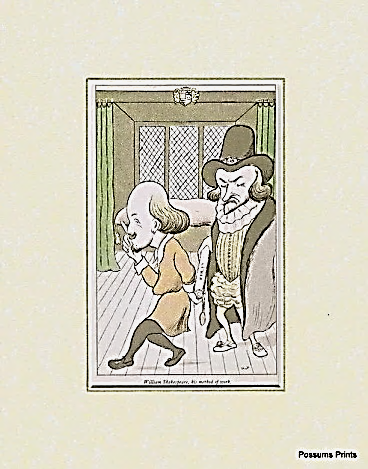
To do thus. What’s thus? There’s the rub.

I think I’ve lost my ticket stub.

Our stop’s the next one after this.

*[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/verdi.mp3)*

♫

*****Lectura Dantis Avoniensis Olorisque***

***Jottings from the Reading Notebook***

1.

For all the floors in Dante’s house,

Finally there is but the one story,

A many-leveled Allegory,

One human story thou wouldst rouse

Us all to take to heart, with thine

Example as our Everyman

Pilgrimming from the Fall’s first Ban

Through Sin’s purge back to the Divine;

Whereas inShakespeare there is no

One Story, only a rainbow

Assortment thereof. High to low

The axis, up or down we go

In Dante on that Jacob’s Ladder

Which rests its base in the Infernal

While reaching up to Life Eternal,

Blushing and rouged with fine rose madder.

The axis of the Bard: the wide

Variety of Renascence Land’s

*Copia* and far-flung Romance

Of dreams mediaeval, side by side.

2. *Hotspur and Falstaff*

*The Henriad:* a cast a thousand

Strong through three plays at sprawling strife!

And thou, Falstaff, fatter than life,

Who lead the vitalist carouse and

Fall scapegoat to the Prince at last:

He kills your heart from virtue, true?

Or from a Machiavell’s *virtù*?

You fade into the canvas vast

**Of politics and warring states,

Whose kings with real men as their knights

And pawns play chess, as history fights

Against and through itself, and fates

Are sealed in larger fates. We see

Them fall, the wayside casualties:

Brash Hotspur feeds the worms. They seize

Bardolph and hang him from a tree.

Babblin’ o’ green fields, Jack, you wait

In bed for death: ‘tis for the best.

In Arthur’s bosom you shall rest

Ere long—if it can bear the weight.

3. *Dante’s Infernal Pride*

In the midst of your harrowing tour

You manage to find space and time

For the egotistical Sublime

To brand Hell with its signature.

The pure bravado of your stance,

Lording it over Ovid with

Your gift for metamorphic myth:

Agnello and Fucci, how they dance

Circles around the Procnes and

The Philomels! who, having changed,

Remain as they are rearranged,

Or like treed Daphne, simply stand.

\*

Unique in genius, pride and rage,

The nonesuch who plays Everyman

As well as any nonesuch can,

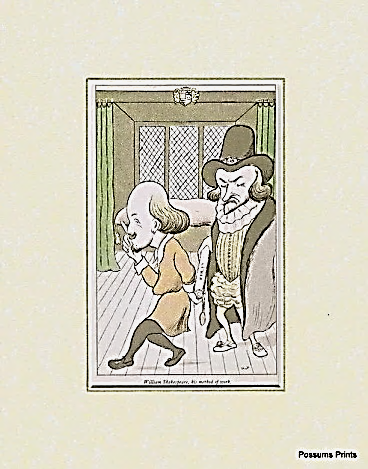
You take us on a pilgrimage

That leads at last to Beatrice,

And God Himself yields to the pull

Of that which is as personal

As Proust’s quest for his childhood bliss.

*[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/respighi_appia1.mp3)****Dante and the Bard***

***Talks in Lieu of War***

♫

Bard:

*‘Twas you who opened this Pandora’s*

*Box, in despite of (and with prescience)*

*The cloistered, institutional nescience*

*Of the Church, and the Gothic horrors*

*With which it threatened those who dared*

*To read and reason for themselves.*

*‘Twas you who scoured the study shelves*

*And would not let yourself be scared*

*Away by blind Authority*

*From the great quest to understand*

*The world, the work of God’s own hand,*

*And the Word, from Antiquity*

*To the summation of St Thomas,*

*Meant by all people to be read,*

*Not kept a Secret, dark and dread,*

*By a cold mummy Priesthood from us.*

Dante:

*But the Word points in* one *direction,*

*Not all directions, willy-nilly.*

*(Should I say rather, nilly-Willy?)*

*We can’t choose* this *piece, scorn* that *section,*

*Picking and choosing what best favours*

*A momentary use or mood:*

*That is the very Savage Wood*

*From which the Word alone can save us.*

[B:] *When all is said and done, to say*

*‘I do not know’ is not a sin.*

[D:] *Where knowledge ends, must faith begin.*

[B]: *Indeed it must. But my faith may*

*Well be another’s heresy,*

*Should I look through that other’s eyes.*

*How many must we sacrifice*

*To nurse our greed for certainty?*

*Life wants to be considered curiously.*

*Let us ask, with Montaigne: ‘Que sais-je?’*

*Those who judge Truth by too-stern measure*

*See not, because they look too furiously.*

Dante:

*You find a thousand ways to say*

*You do not know, when what is asked*

*Is that you do believe. Unmasked*

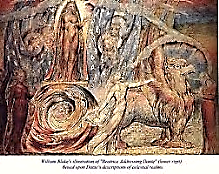
*Will all you revellers be, one day!*

*Dante storms from the room followed*

*by his advisors. The next day spokesmen*

*for both sides characterise the talks as*

* ‘cordial, wide-ranging and fruitful’.*

*****The Latest Pageant***

*Marcel Proust 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 Vinteul 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*



*Regard, mon cher!* It comes. ‘Tis nigh!

The Pageant! It seems barely a moment

Ago that we were passing comment

On the last Pageant that went by.

*The Chariot comes to a halt.*

[Dante Narrates:]

*The monstrous Boor of Germany,*

*That cowled and costive, choleric*

*Old Antichrist and Heretic,*

*Attacks the wagon 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,

Dishevelled now, no longer nimble,

Her features vague, scumbled by Symbol,

Disoriented, weak and hoary.

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.*

**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,**

[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/liszt_totentanz.mp3)

**AS THE CLASS DUNCE SITS THERE REPEATING**

**HIS LESSON IN A CONICAL HAT,**

**BY SCHOOLMATES TAUNTED AND MOCKED AT,**

**STILL SMARTING FROM THE MASTER’S BEATING.**

(So testy is he, of his art!)

Why, my dear Alighieri, so

Put out by a tall man you know

Is but a foolish child at heart?

Accept what lesser says to Greater:

*‘Scusi, senor, la colpa mia,*

*Uomo della diritta via!*

*Sono smarrito, gran’ poeta!’*

O Highest Meaning of it All,

Which in the eyes of, *is* the bliss

It is to *be* a Beatrice!

But all of this begins to pall.

I thought by now you were my friend!

*Last night, yes. But today I am*

*Your Judge again, to praise or damn.*

For Heaven’s sake! This show must end.

***Dante and the Bard***

***at Psychomachia***

[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/holst_mars.mp3)

♫

***The Battle for my Soul***

[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/rachmaninoff_prelude2.mp3)***The Array of Battle***

♫

*Dante has insulted me again!* *At a loss how to stop this abuse from*

*a more powerful soul (and at times such a bully!), I turn to my good Will,*

*or Ned, or Nelliam. (My uncertainty as to his true identity personified.)*

[Prelude:

O Will, O will you help me? Will

 You wear my garter on the field

Of honour? *Certes, he shall yield*

*Or die!* My prayers your sail shall fill!]

As I looked over Dante’s forces

My heart sank. For both Evil and Good

He had marshalled for his cause: there stood

In serried ranks, with many on coursers,



Bristling with spear and lance, an host,

Battalions of devils ranged

In dense ranks, angels, faces changed

To fearsome masks, Michael foremost

Leading the Four grim Horseman, fell

Beyond all telling in the glint

Of his eye, death by many a dint

Portending, yet I must it tell.

Attila’s vast and fearsome horde,

Rattling the sword and spear and bow

And arrow, rushed up from below,

Dante their general now, and lord.

And likewise rushed up Alexander,

Blood-red from head to toe, in train

His army that left millions slain;

But Dante now was their commander.

And what of Shakesvere’s force? A rag-

Tag army and a motley crew,

With squads of madmen, one or two

Soothsayers, a Weird Sister hag…

The Moor has his quietus made

With a bare bodkin. Hamlet broods

In his tent, in one of his moods.

Timon is gibbering a tirade

Whilst Lear is castigating wind,

And a platoon of Fools, how wise

Soever, cannot organise

For combat, with but half a mind.

Mad Tom’s no good at following orders.

Macbeth is certainly ambitious,

Richard III, brilliant and vicious…

But meanwhile mass along the borders

The Tuscan’s picked troops, helmets gleaming:

No sodomitical Theban band

These, no Chaeronia at hand,

But victory expecting—dreaming



Of spoil and booty and much riot

In the defenceless towns and farms

Of Shakesvere won by force of arms.

And over all reigns a tense quiet,

When from the hill drive down hell-bent

A countless horde upon the plain:

The army of great Tamberlaine,

By Shakesvere’s friend Kit Marlowe sent.

(The Stagirite, astute supplier,

Lends the Bard the *Poetics*, and

Dante th’*Ethics*, with even hand.

He is a theorist for hire.)

More nearly equal now in forces

Appear the foes, drawn up in ranks

Against each other. Armour clanks,

Rattle the swords and snort the horses.



***The Battle Commences***

*Dante and the Bard clash in Homeric*

*hero-to-hero fashion, each cheered*

1. *on by his respective army.*

And so upon the field of battle

At Psychomachia they meet

In clanging mail and emulous heat,

And each his flaming sword doth rattle.

The earth as by two twinned Poseidons

Trembles as each a steely wave

On th’other crashes, madly brave,

And with a shock yields to subsidence:



The Swan Avonian, a fierce eagle,

And the proud lion Florentine.

They, aquiline and leonine,

Together form one Griffon regal

Whose aspects war with one another,

One more-than-mythic beast self-riven;

As two they rule the Earth and Heaven

Divided, brother against brother.

(And so I play them off against

Each other, stalling, I suppose,

For time. It’s good that neither knows.

I think they’d both be quite incensed!)

I am returned (I who have seen them)

To tell you, of their *geste*, the gist.

(One thinks they both can co-exist,

Whilst one demands you choose between them.)

Great Homer! who of doings martial,

The clash of arms, the burning tower,

Sang with such massive epic power,

Who, blind, compassionate, impartial,

Mourned for Patroclus *and* for Hector,

Troy tricked into its doom, the great

Trickster’s own intricate, strange fate:

A drop of your divinest nectar

[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/vader.mp3)Let fall upon my parchèd tongue

That I may with both strength and grace

The combat of this mighty brace

Of Titans frame in fitting song!

2. ***The Battle Royal***

♫

First Dante in wrath blinding hot

Hurls Shakespeare headlong flaming down

Into a Circle of his own,

A Globe that is a chamber pot.

Here on a stage thrust out obscene

As a protruding, cankered tongue

The Bard must sing of Beauty among

A crowd of hoggish groundlings mean

As dirt, reeking of urine and beer;

The Bard must sing in filthy motley

The youth pursued by Venus hotly

And move those boars to shed a tear!

The groundlings with one base accord

And fearsome snorting storm the stage,

With a wild beast’s bewildered rage

They leave the Poet stabbed and gored.

He in his strength not conquered quite

Bleeding breaks forth extempore

Into a vast soliloquy

In which Adonis and the night,

And Love and Death, and blood and roses

And other metaphors are mixed

In such significance unfixed

Of joint-stools, kerchiefs, bodkins, posies



And what-not, all as in a dream,

The groundlings scatter, Dante scratches

His head and frowning hardly catches

The sense, perplexed in the extreme:

For *he* must suffer now the slings

And arrows of a catachresis,

And watch as into rainbow pieces

His White Light shatters. A shard stings

His heart with poignant reminiscence

Like aspects of young Beatrice’s

Eyes, and a splinter barely misses

His own stained-glass eye as he listens

Bound helpless in determination

As great Ulysses at the mast

To hear in all its strains the vast

Sweet, deadly Sirens’ Incantation.

For the strong Tuscan ‘tis a strange

Ecstasy, crucified to be

By sensuous, earthly melody:

He is tempted to become each change

And see change as a holy fire

And Heraclitus as its Prophet—

But *that* way lie the fires of Tophet.

He shuns that bodily-stained desire

And his great Gothic pile again

Constructs out of Thomistic blocks.

With his wild figures the Bard rocks

The broad Foundations: Shatters then,

Into a scattering of star-

Sparklings structured like the sky,

The hard mosaic Trinity.—

In such ways do these Giants spar

And write and wrong each other. (Lust is

At strife with Love, but the altercation

Is like the seasons’ reparation

To each other for the same injustice.)



3. *The Book*

Now Dante, more than ever grim

And fell in his intent to harm

One who seems blessed by faerie charm,

Decides to throw The Book at him!

And lo! The Book becomes an **Ark**

Aflame as through the air it flies,

Flashing with dangerous mysteries,

A fiery missile in the dark.

Magnetic bolts of father-wrath

Shoot from its side, whence Uzzah’s carcass

Hangs trophy, and a light as stark as

The sun’s burns through the eyes a path

To the bedazzled brain o’ th’ Bard.

In the **\*** The Book\*S fabric atoms boil

Of scripture and scroll, they bursting roil

With hermeneutics deep and hard,

Cruxes and credos fire-crackling

As from celestial ordinance factories

 Of size to fit into phylacteries

Within *tefellin*. Hear the cackling

And squealing of a million devils

As tiny tongues of seraphim

Sing subatomic hymns to Him!

And Prophets chant of tiny evils

Apocalyptic and nightmarish

Forthcoming to be visited

Upon the poet’s doubting head!

But crashing with explosions garish

Of scarlet, violet, and vermillion

The **Book** lands loud, and the Bard side-

Steps nimbly, else he sure had died!

As the ploughshare strikes spark from sillion

When through earth grinding sharp and gashing,

 The **Book** carves a deep, fiery furrow

Into the soil, and seems to burrow

Until it comes to rest, still flashing

A sullen ruby glow, pulsating

And glowering like a meteorite

Plummeted from the sky at night,

Like an ill omen consternating.

And Dante cries this malediction:

*May your indulgence in pure fiction*

*Be to your conscience like sand’s friction*

*To the oyster! (Sleepless, his affliction.)*

But sneering at his rival’s rhymes

The Briton, wearing Welsh Glendower’s

Wizard composure, only glowers

Defiance, and the tension climbs

To an unbearable suspense

Of disbelief in restless balance

Striving, so matched their mighty talents,

Deathless their written testaments.

For Heaven Dante claims; the Bard,

Olympus. Equals, Bard and Tuscan,

In the cothurnus or the buskin,

Though Dante’s jests are dark and hard,

Pitch-black his harlequins with *Schwarz*-

*Humour*—and yet Belaqua’s wit

Holds its own ‘gainst the infinite

High-seriousness that like a quartz

Threatens benignly to encrystal

All individualities

As we approach the Comedy’s

Apex, where in Aquinas’ fist all

Particularities, conducted

By theo-allegorical

Electrodes super-celestial,

Into the White Light are inducted.

4.

Shakesvere, although he find it hard

At times to say it, spite of doubt

He sayeth, *Yes*. To cancel out

Accounts, the level-headed Bard

Suspends his judgment to a height

The Tuscan cannot reach, for all

His high way with the Vertical,

And he lets drop upon, and smite

His foe, the crude, robust claymore

Of comedy. The picaresque

Rogue children of his writing desk

Descend upon him by the score,

Foremost the great Sir John Falstaff.

(The sort of rascal he most loathes.)

Into a hamper of dirty clothes

He drops him as his fellows laugh,

Provoking to his highest dudgeon

With this unruly interruption

The great denouncer of corruption

Who sputters like a sour curmudgeon.

*Come hither!* Rosalind snidely sighs

And Pistol fires bombastic bullets

And Mistress Quickly plucks her pullets

And blows the feathers in his eyes

Until beside himself the Tuscan

Rages, trapped in a festive play,

Seeing himself recoil as they

Pull over his head a sweaty buskin.

But as the sun sinks in the west

And hoot-owl goes a-hunting (soon a

Pale bulb will be the face of Luna)

Each to his camp withdraws, to rest.

Comes Hypnos now with poppies crowned

And in their eyes throws fool’s-gold dust.

The heroes yawn, for sleep they must,

And still falls all the battleground.



***Interlude II: The Bard’s Tent***

Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle’s compass come;

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out, even to the edge of doom.

If this be error and upon me proved,

I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

--Sonnet 116

***I Never Writ***

1. *Is Shakespeare an Oxfordian?*

*A poet sets down much he blots*

*In the fair copy. Through the foul*

*Papers of my ‘prophetic soul’*

*I rummage, old abandoned plots*

*I take from memory’s cobwebbed attic*

*And noise a bitter battle scene*

*With shadow-puppets on a screen.*

*Fingers no longer acrobatic*



*Hamlet-and-Lear it by lamp-light,*

*Shadowing forth their infinite*

*Sub-plots; but there’s no pith in it*

*And the soliloquies lack bite*

*And I beshrew me for a hack*

*To have set down this phrase, I scratch*

*That skald old rhymester’s ballad snatch*

*And drain another glass of sack.*

*My dearest, think that poetry*

*Is a species of gallantry*

*That oft ends on a gallows-tree.*

*For it is of its own country.*

We see the world through your eyes, say

It in your speech. You are a prince

Indeed of life, which is, e’er since

You wrote, lost in a Shakespeare play.

*I am labouring on a new edition,*

*In which I take to task the previous:*

*It used bad quartos, based on devious*

*Textual assumptions (the omission*

*Of references, and some misread*

*Words, too, I mention); I opine*

*Only* my *version’s genuine.*

*I am my soul’s department head,*

*And so are my pronunciamentos*

*Canonical, authoritative.*

*My woodnotes sound a bit less native,*

*These days, ‘tis true, sometimes mere centos*

*Of passages from old anthologies.*

*Adam Kadmon, if he should live*

*Too long, might grow derivative,*

*Revise himself, and make apologies,*

*Nay, argue himself logically*

*Out of existence, save in theory.*

*How wearying ‘tis at times, how dreary,*

*Such an ambiguous thing to be.*

*That such a never-author has*

*So many ever-readers is*

*A fame* someone *should claim as his,*

*But who is he, am I, alas?*

3.

*Why do I question ‘who’ and ‘why’*

*And doubt I am the thing I am?*

*My Lady’s love proved such a sham*

*It gave all certainties the lie.*

*My error was upon me proved*

*So many times, I reckon it*

*Proof positive I never writ,*

*And sure no* woman *ever loved.*

*And so, withal, I question whether*

*I am the author of those plays.*

*They were so long ago, those days.*

*Perhaps I do not altogether*

*Remember who it was who wrote them.*

*I had a certain turn of phrase.*

*Some works of mine, I hear, amaze*

*The ages! I’m not sure I could quote them.*

***Interlude II: Dante’s Tent***

**Meanwhile, in his tent, the much-**

**battle-wearied Tuscan broods o’er Shakesvere’s muscular metaphors,**

**his agile grasp of the truth of opposites—**

***The opposite of the Truth!* cries Dante,**

**rising from his crouch before an image**

**of the *Santo Volto* of Lucca, whose posterior has been sighted in the Grafters’ Pool of Pitch in Canto XXI of the *Inferno*. This *objet* has gone the rounds, my Dears!**

***A Prayer***

**

*A timely truce that trumpet sounded…*

*How his tropes twist me from myself!*

*This* thing *I thought a puckish elf*

*Antaeus is. He is so* grounded*!*

**

*To strip him from his horse and beat him*

*Into the earth but feeds his power.*

*This is his Gaia-Mother’s dower.*

*Thine arm lend, Father, to defeat him!*

*My strongest tactic: If I hold him*

*Up high and long enough to exhaust*

*His force, his evil Cause is lost!*

*Let the worms chew, and seasons mould him!*

\*

**

*Thou, Mother Mary, full of Grace:*

*Strike dead the Titan-whelping bitch!*

*Gaia! What is she but a witch?*

*IN NOMINE PATRIS… Smash her face!*



[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/bruckner.mp3)5. ***The Battle Continues***

♫

But Dante now—fierce in the fray—

Slams the Bard ‘gainst the iron walls

Of Dis: which Will pronounces false,

A myth, and melts the walls away.

‘Shakesvere’ shrinks to King Oberon,

Of magic vast. The devils there

He banishes into the air

And casts a fairy-charm upon



The Tuscan, who beneath that spell

Feels Force and Faith dissolve, the while

You, potent Bard enraged, exile

Your rival to a leafy dell:

There, in the moonlight, face to face

He comes with whom but Puck? who sneers

That Midas, too, had asses’ ears.

He feels his ears with sore amaze

**And brays when he attempts to scream,

Nor can pry loose his asses’ head

Till he admits what Bottom said

Is true, that it is Bottom’s Dream

Because it hath no Bottom. This

*Il Tosco* having once confessed,

His face restored at Will’s behest,

Thus vaunts his doubty Nemesis:

‘Shakespeare’:

*Eye hath not seen, nor ear hath heard,*

*Nor tongue of man can say what thing*

*Is Bottom’s Dream, but this I sing,*

*As it is written in the Word.*

Dante:

*Blasphemy so to twist the words*

*Of the Apostle! You won’t blab*

*So glibly ‘neath a burning slab*

*Of stone whited by Harpy t\*rds!*

6. ***A Truce Broken***

Wrath smoulders in the Bard’s great heart,

As in his foe’s; but Dante’s eye

Still smarting, though he will not cry,

And the Bard put beside his part

With weariness, they call a truce.

‘Tis night: the Florentine thinks best

To sulk upon Our Lady’s breast,

Whilst of Queen Mab in robe of puce

Arrayed the Bard dreams in his sleep,

And of a heart empurpled and

Pierced by an arrow from the hand

Of Cupid-Puck. Bottomless-deep

Is Bottom’s absence from his dream—

Which Dante enters, and the story

Substantiates as an Allegory,

As Will dreams like a cat of cream

Only to wake up in a tar pit

Where Malacoda looming o’er him

With prongs of guilt makes threat to gore him.

Here Mercury on a magic carpet

Speedily lounging through the gloom

Plucks from the seething, grumous pitch

His darling, who seems strangely rich,

Charged by the bath in Dante’s doom.

Next Geryon, the wingèd worm,

Sent as vehicle of God’s ire,

The Bard sends spinning in a gyre

With *God’s a literary term.*

(Thus do they battle, the two Titans,

Deep in my roiling, undecided

Soul, now this-sided, now that-sided,

And somehow all of this enlightens

This groping mole, this soul of mine.

The Rainbow Bard, White Dante, both

Compound me, lustful pain, Greek-Goth;

Pagan and Christian powers I mine.)

[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/holst_neptune.mp3)7. ***May You Burn in Heaven!***

♫

Now Dante on his evil plan

Acts, lifting Will to his great Heaven,

Saints, angels, thrones and powers, even

The Mystic Rose, whose sense and span

Is not for mind of Man to parse,

He shows him, even the very face

Of God, whose Love propels through space

The sun and all the other stars!



Beatrice last of all he shows

In fullness of her luminous glory.

The rightness of her allegory

Brings to his knees the Bard. He bows

His head, he prays, he pledges due

Devotion to the Mother Church.

But like an eagle from his perch

Sudden he springs into the blue

And, circling in widening rings,

Looks down upon the sun, the Rose,

The Lady, and all that Dante shows

As a stage-set, complete with wings.

*From here it looks like Purgatory,*

*And Purgatory is a lie;*

*Yet is the truest poetry*

*Most feigning, and the strangest story*

*In Ovid, or the most outrageous*

*Metaphysical simile*

*In Donne, is fit our fane to be,*

*To walk through, as we turn the pages.*

*Horizontal and vertical!*

*They intersect, two sturdy sticks,*

*To form a sort of crucifix*

*Where hangs the poet-god of all*

*That strife of dissonant dimensions,*

*Contest of singular and plural,*

*As if it found a kind of cure-all*

*In bringing to a head these tensions.*

8.

As epic poets may, beyond

The thing they would illuminate,

Their similes elaborate,

Much as a mother over-fond

Of the sweet issue of her womb

Grants it the liberty to crawl

About her person, upset all

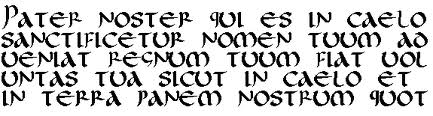
Her needful labour at the loom

And to itself her whole attention,

Like a plump, fleshy magnet, draw,

And of its least whim make a law,

A tyrant to her least dissension:

So Dante in the bristling pride

Of his imaginative fecundity

Draws Will into a dark profundity

And maze of similes inside

Similes within figures hidden

In tropes and types and allegories,

Where every least side-metaphor is

A doorway through which rush, unbidden,

Unwonted and unwanted, Willy-

Nilly, mental associations

That twirl the Bard at orientations

Disorienting, gilded lily-

Gilding, uncial, manuscript-

Illuminating-intricate

And living-letter elaborate,

Till he feels like a mastiff whipped,

A strolling clown, a painted shell.

For at his foe the Tuscan flings

Hours that are heavenly stairs with wings,

And saints’ souls that are letters spell

*LOVE JUSTICE, YE WHO JUDGE THE WORLD*,

And the last letter forms an eagle

That speaks to Will in measures regal

Till like a child the Bard weeps, curled

Into the foetus of his doubt

And fear, and like a question mark

Hunched o’er his terror in the dark

He looks, but can find no way out.

Dante stands poised for fresh assault

But the issue must stay unresolved:

The field in shadow is involved

And no stars pierce night’s curtained vault.

*[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/orff_carmina.mp33)*

♫

***Interlude III: The Bard’s Tent***

1.

The Bard collapses in a chair.

Despondency hangs in the air

That bodes an outcome far from fair

And in his eyes sits dark despair.

But here I rush to Shakesvere’s aid.

The hero’s hero must I be

To rescue him who rescues me.

‘Think of the sublime things you said!

‘Can any other poet boast

So much that’s bound to live for ever?

Like *Never, never, never, never’*.

*You left out the last ‘never’, the most*

*Important of the five.* I’m glad

To see your sense of humour’s coming

Back. I shall help you. I’ll try strumming

A lute and singing something sad—

No, a tune witty and risqué…

I know, a ditty on the medlar!

I’ll be Autolycus, the Pedlar.

Coraggio, Maestro, *toujours gai*!

******

***Medlars***

***A Medley***

*I enter as Autolycus in a fur-lined great-coat patched*

*with stripe-and-arrow-patterned convict-symbols.*

*But am I not, rather, mercurial, Marlovian Mercutio?*

I.

That pied, pieced, patched-which-way apparel,

The glozing voice, are mine, the pedlar’s.

What wares sell I? Medlars, and medlars.

Not one good apple spoils the barrel.

The difference between ripeness and

Decay is surely a matter of taste.

What one calls spoilage, a shame’s waste,

Last, best gift of the golden land

Another calls, and both have reason.

A snapper-up of trifles, ere

He exits, pursued by a bear—

Alas!—likes things rare, out-of-season:

The anemone, the shady bloomer,

The rath primrose, that dies forsaken.

Are all who like their Shakespeare shaken

Not stirred by the quirk, the freak humour?

Medlars unripened on the boughs,

Hardened to waiting, spoil to be

Softened and yet, still saucily

Sure of their power to arouse

Appetite for the fruit hard-got,

Decline to ripen otherwise

Than in an artificial guise,

Else none doth ripen ere it rot.

Ask of the Reeve how *that* must feel; *Of the* Canterbury Tales*, of course.*

I’d rather not live that much longer.

Or ask *this* man, obscure spell-monger *Pointing to the Bard.*

And secular magus of the real.

II.

Ah, *Mespilus germanica*!

Think not that I misspell Mespil

Nor the plant’s power, for good or ill,

Dispel, that works from Africa

To India to the Levantine

Ambiguously its, some (too pure

Of heart) call, *decadent* allure.

Rosalind thinks the fruit divine,

She’ll graft it on Orlando with

The bark of a love-lettered tree,

‘The earliest fruit in the country’, *See* As You Like It, *III, ii.—*[Mr V]

He’ll be, like it, both fact and myth.



‘For you’ll be rotten ere you be

Half ripe’. That is the medlar’s virtue.

The tongue’s a *meretrix* can hurt you,

Dears. She’s a whore, indecently

Open to a suggestive play

On words and shapely images.

How tart in time the medlar is,

How sweet to Romeos of a day!

*Enter Mercutio mocking Romeo.*

Mercutio: *(See* Romeo and Juliet *II, i*.—[Mr V]

*Now underneath a medlar tree*

*He’ll wish his mistress such a sort*

*As maids amongst themselves in sport*

*Call open-\*rse, with ‘tee-hee-hee!’ Excuse his indecency… Blame*

*the Bard if you must, but forget not*

Autolycus: *that he is both spirit and bawdy.*

Not like the music at the Proms,

** This plangent noise of a Concerto

Romantico for Culaperto

And Orchestra of screeching Toms!

II. Autolycus:

In time a Timon *I* become,

For to all things there is a season,

And I have insufficient reason

For turning down the medlar some *See* Timon of Athens*, IV iii*.—[Mr V]

Friend offers, chiding me for want

Of moderation (he’s a pun

On ‘meddler’), venting thus upon

My loss a moral, like a vaunt.

Ah, to a medlar then let me *See* Measure for Measure *IV, iii.*

Be wedded, to the rotten fruit, —[Mr V] *Thinking of Lucio in* Measure for

For time in yielding to my suit Measure. [See IV, iii, 171.—Mr V.]

Brings me the bitterest dowry. *Now it is I who am in a brown*

*study. The Bard, meanwhile, has*

*regained his high spirits, and offers*

2. *His Gallantry* *me encouragement and support.*

This medlar of a Book I bear

May rot before its ripening.

Alas, this posthumous Miltoning

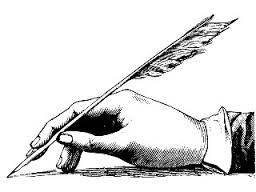
Is such a foolish feat to dare!

*The grapes of wrath may mellow. Grapes*

*May rot, then deepen and mature*

*And time’s vicissitudes endure*

*Till into delicate crystal shapes*

***[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/campion.mp3)***

*Decanted, on the palate fine,*

*Like the full meaning of things past*

*Speaking in tongues, they burst. (To outlast*

*Their deaths they sued the god of wine*

*To be his wild, renewing gift,*

*Refreshment for the revellers,*

*Potent to stir the noblest verse*

*And into madness souls uplift.)*

*When from the deep-delved earth they rise,*

*Hell’s gift, rain-bathed and sweetened in*

*The sun, they turn the blood-red, sin-*

*Redeeming colour of Sacrifice.*

*Dear, write your Thousand and One Nights*

*In Purgatory, or what-not.*

*May my exploits advance the plot*

*Of the Book that sets all to rights!*

♫

***Interlude III: Dante’s Tent***

***A Dramatic Monologue***

***and a Sestina in the Making***

*up his quill. He bids a mystic writing-*

*tablet be brought to him. He ponders.*

More strength, strong Pilgrim, reach for more!

You have been mean; you must be meaner.

Yes: put him in a cruel sestina

With ‘toadstool’ and ‘close-stool’ and ‘whore’!

But that is one too many ‘stools’.

Something more, shall we say, *feline?*

Why, ‘Aphroditus’! In th’sixth line.

Three more make up this Feast for Fools:

‘Dark’, as in Dark Lady. (Ties in

With ‘whore’.) A verb: hmm. ‘*Bugge*r’! Can

Be noun, too. Why, I’ll fit him! ‘Man’

Is last—last thing *this* ‘Paladin’

E’er was, or ‘Will’ be. Grr! Ha! Ha!

I have him there, the mincing rogue!

What wrath shall on him disembogue

From this my vial, *Anathema*!

Pasquino’s lampoons I shall better.

This tailor posted satires on

Public statues. Won’t ‘Will’ look wan,

Reading his shame done to the letter!

\* *Even in the solitude of his tent, Dante’s thoughts*

*are infiltrated by* Richard III*—a premonition?*

But Dante in his heart can find

No love for Dante—only hate.

For what? For wrath, for pride—for hate!

Self-sickened is this poisoned mind.

I fell asleep, I must wake up!

I dreamed I heard the trumpets blaring.

Already comes Aurora bearing

New battle in her crimson cup!

♫

[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/scarbo.mp3)9. ***The Conclusion of the Battle***

Now stupid luck, not Cupid-Puck,

Takes the advantage here to make

The Bard a tragic pratfall take

Into the deep-most central muck

Where the thrice-foulmouthed fallen Star

Of Lucifer stands socketed:

But the feet once examinèd

In his doubt ghostly-muscular

The Bard dismisses as a fable

Cloven, and as Touchstone the Wise

Chaffs the stiff Tuscan, *The truth lies.*

This daedal Cretan Liar, able

All Idiot Questioners to amaze

With his solutions to their puzzles,

Shapes, ‘spite of God’s constraining muscles,

A Poem that puts Him in his plays.

What fury boils in your great soul,

Strong Tuscan, like the pitch that seals

From water the tall ships whose keels

Slice through the waves. Your mouth a coal

Contains, and lo! it burneth blinding

Bright in its whiteness: this you hurl

Soul-furious at the foe—a swirl

Of curses is it and a binding.

But Shakespeare doffs the fiery buskin

Dante would have him wear, unhurt

Tears off guilt’s poisoned Nessus shirt

And shoots round oaths back at the Tuscan:

*Thou beaky liver-eating bloody*

*Old vulture of Jove’s Spleen, Hyaena*

*Loosed from the kennel of Caïna,*

*Of thine own vomit make a study!*

The Bard’s head now becomes the head

Of Henry the Fifth, conqueror

Of France at Agincourt; as for

His body, it, laid down outspread,

Particulates into that band

Of trusty followers who on

Saint Crispian’s Day the battle won,

Those lucky few. They make their stand.



The Tuscan’s head must now become

The Dauphin’s, and his chivalry—

Whom vast superiority

Of numbers could not rescue from

The sharpened stake and the longbow

But down their stallions came crashing

And they in mud and bloody thrashing

Suffered disastrous overthrow—

That swarm of knights *his* body must

Dissolve into. His Dolphin-head

Must count once more the countless dead

And Henry’s cry of wild bloodlust

And pride at a whole kingdom taken

Hear once again. From vaunted-over

Dauphin he scarcely can recover

His Tuscan self, shakespeared and shaken,

And back into his former shape

The Bard as well unhenries. Pride

Fills Dante with a homicide

Madness that reddens the landscape.

He opens up his Hell-Mouth now:

A halitosis he exhales

Of devils. The Bard’s courage fails

Almost, to see how *teeming*, how

****Limitless is the Tuscan’s ire.

The hordes advance like a storm cloud

That darkens all beneath, and loud

Their thunderous tread. Though streams of fire

Pour from the Bard’s high battlements

(He as a castle now stands fixed),

They climb his walls, with knives betwixt

Their teeth, a seething swarm as dense

As a Scholastic treatise by

Aquinas. Now they storm the keep

In which the Bard’s soul seems to sleep

And have bad dreams, his Hamlet eye

Turned inward on a thousand doubts:

[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/superman.mp3) But from those dreams, in a strange glow

Emerges wizard Prospero:

♫

He with a charm those devils routs.

*No harm, no harm*, the sorcerer

Intones, and his spell binds the devils

And turns aside their purposed evils

Till back to their Lord Lucifer

They flee; back down the Tuscan’s throat

They pour, and almost choking he

Must gulp them down. How furiously

He burns to see his foeman gloat!

And now the Titans fall to beating

Each other senseless in the air,

O’er seas, on mountains, everywhere,

Neither the other quite unseating.

Great Ares! How much longer must

These Heroes twain themselves outwear

In vainest strife? An end declare

Ere both together eat the dust!



10. ***The Judgment***

And so the final judgment falls

To me, perplexed as a young Paris,

Much loath to anger or embarrass

A deity. But duty calls.

‘The poetry of Sir “Shakespeare”

Is so…good-looking—such a stunner!

(He’s free, too. You are such a *dunner*.)

The palm must go to him, I fear.

‘Though to the Mantuan my mind

Belongs, my senses are seduced

By Ovid’. *Him I only loosed*

*In Hell, where he belongs. O blind*

*Voluptuary! Your form shall be*

*For ever restless and unstable*

*As Fucci’s. You have set the table*

*For Circe and her sorcery!*

Shakespeare:

*Sore losers are twice-losers, friend.*

*We moderns are to restless change*

*Committed, and the boundless range*

*Of possibilities. We mend*

*Our ways as best we can: the sleeve*

*Of care grows ever looped and ragged.*

*The troughs are deep, the crests are jagged,*

*And all we love we all must leave.*

*For to the puzzling scheme of things*

*What is the Plot? We live sub-plots,*

*Wherein to choose is to draw lots.—*

*Then Heaven help your reckonings,*

*Or you will choose yourself a Hell.—*

*To be or not to be was ever*

*A riddle hardest to the clever.*

*Means guess their ends. May all end well!*

**

*Shakesveare arrayed in chivalrous glory*

*kisses my hand and rides off on his steed.*

*****O Bard O Bard O***

*In bed with Will, Ned, Nelliam, all of them…*

Hyperion, you will not forget me,

Will you? (Have I become a bore?)

Please stay awhile. There’s so much more

That I could do, if you would let me!

When you stand up, like Mercury

Poised on a Heaven-kissing hill

You seem, my wayward, skyward Will.

And I would kiss *your* hill. Let me.

Ah, Nelliam, you also played

With fire… *It’s true, dear: sodomy*

*Could earn you the death penalty*

*In my day*. Progress has been made.

Now only a ten-year sentence waits *For felony acts of sodomy.*

For men who do *that* to each other.

*She should have let you leave, your mother, That is, leave England rather*

*Not joined the chorus of the Fates. than face conviction and prison.*

Stay, ‘Will’ my love! *I must not dawdle in*

*Your arms so late. Be a good girl.*

*(Who knows? Perhaps I am the Earl.) Weeping, I attempt to embrace him.*

And *I* am Oxford! *Child, you are maudlin.*

*He motions me gently away.*

*Touché*, Ned! Does not Magdalen take

Its name from one who told the lie *So writes Renan in his* Vie de Jésus.

That founded Christianity? *See also my Miltonic sonnet, ‘On the*

Thus saith Renan. For pure love’s sake *Massacre of Christians in Bulgaria’.*

She perpetrates this epic fraud.

Hallucination hath remade

A failed schismatic renegade

Into the resurrected God!

*Thou art a story-teller deep*

*And versed, my dear. Adieu, adieu— Kisses two fingers and places*

*A dew which may you melt into them gently on my lips, so.*

*Of dreams on the black rose of sleep.*

*Exit the Bard, pursued by a bare, dark lady.*

******

[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/midsummer.mp3)***Queen Mab in the Garden of Eden***

♫

Somehow I have stumbled on the Garden

Of the Earthly Paradise, aloft.

I hear the strains of music soft

And strange, as from the woods of Arden

Wafted upon a weightless breeze.—

Or is it music to a vision

Of some mercurial magician?

What pageant-staging shapes are these,

As fine as dandelion spores,

Attending, not a chariot,

But, hollowed from a hazelnut,

A coach, that in its stately course

Is drawn by a grey-coated gnat?

And in the coach there rides a Queen.

This figure’s hardly to be seen

By naked eye, but, squinted at,

Proves a right royal She indeed.

Of cricket-bone she plies a whip;

An eyelash sprouting from the tip

Goads the puce-coloured insect-steed.

What business has this elfin band

On these austere, salvific heights?

In God’s red carpet, are they mites?

And in the hollow of His hand

Are *we* the little nits of light,

The *lucciole*, and our show,

The world, a little firefly-glow

That warms His hands on a cold night?

The glow between His fingers bleeds

A subtle luminosity

The soul can see, and even see

By, in the wood where Danger breeds—

As some see in a gnat a horse

That pulls a coach of hazelnut

As real as Dante’s chariot:

Two different dreams; a single Source.

*Musical Program*

**Page 1, Title Page**

Praetorius, *La Bourée*, from *Terpsichore*. Westra Aros Pipers.

**Page 15, *William and I***

Verdi, *Otello*, Act IV: *Ave Maria*. Maria Callas, soprano. Orchestre de la Société

des Concerts du Conservatoire, Nicola Rescigno, conductor.

DESDEMONA DESDEMONA

Ave Maria, piena di grazia, eletta Hail Mary, full of grace, chosen

Fra le spose e le vergini sei tu, among wives and maidens art thou,

Sia benedetto il frutto, o benedetta, blessed be the fruit, o blessed one,

Di tue materne viscere, Gesù. of thy womb, Jesus.

Prega per chi adorando a te si prostra, Pray for the one who kneels in prayer before you,

Prega nel peccator, per l'innocente, pray for the sinner, for the one who is innocent,

E pel debole oppresso e pel possente, and for the weak and oppressed, and for the mighty,

Misero anch'esso, tua pietà dimostra. also wretched, show thy mercy.

Prega per chi sotto l'oltraggio piega Pray for the one who bows his head

La fronte e sotto la malvagia sorte; under injustice and under misfortune;

Per noi, per noi tu prega, prega for us, pray thou for us, pray

Sempre e nell'ora della morte nostra, ever and in the hour of our death,

Prega per noi, prega per noi, prega. pray for us, pray for us, pray.

Ave Maria . . . Hail Mary . . .

Nell'ora della morte. in the hour of our death.

Ave!. . .Amen! Hail! . . . Amen!

*The original Latin prayer, and translation:*

Ave Maria, gratia plena: Hail Mary, full of grace;

Dominus tecum: the Lord is with thee;

benedicta tu in mulieribus, blessed art thou among women,

et benedictus fructus ventris tui Iesus. and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Sancta Maria mater Dei, Holy Mary, mother of God,

ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc, pray for us sinners, now,

et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen. and in the hour of our death. Amen.

Trans. Rebecca Burstein

**Page 18, *Dante and the Bard: Talks in Lieu of War***

Respighi, *Pines of Rome*. IV: *Pines of the Appian Way* (excerpt)*.* Berlin Philharmonic, Herbert von Karajan, conductor.

**Page 22**

Lizst, *Totentanz* (excerpt). Krystian Zimerman, piano. Boston Symphony Orchestra, Seiji Ozawa, conductor.

**Page 23, *Dante and the Bard at Psychomachia***

Holst, *The Planets*, Op. 32. I: *Mars, Bringer of War* (excerpt). Berlin Philharmonic, Herbert von Karajan, conductor.

**Page 24, *The Array of Battle***

Rachmaninoff, *Prelude in g minor* (excerpt), Op. 23, No. 5. Boris Berezovsky, piano.

**Page 27, *Dante and the Bard at Psychomachia***

Williams, *Imperial March* *(Darth Vader’s Theme).* Excerpt. From *Star Wars.* London Symphony Orchestra, John Williams, conductor.

**Page 35, *Dante and the Bard at Psychomachia***

Bruckner, *Symphony No. 9 in d minor*. II: Scherzo (excerpt). Vienna Philharmonic, Herbert von Karajan, conductor.

**Page 37, *Dante and the Bard at Psychomachia***

Holst, *The Planets*, Op. 32. VII: *Neptune, the Mystic* (excerpt). Chicago Symphony Orchestra, James Levine, conductor.

**Page 39, *Dante and the Bard at Psychomachia***

Orff, *Carmina Burana.* I: *O Fortuna* (excerpt)*.* Chicago Symphony Orchestra, James Levine, conductor.

**Page 43, *Dante and the Bard at Psychomachia (Medlars*)**

Campion, *I Care Not for These Ladies*. Alfred Deller, counter-tenor.

**Page 44, *Dante and the Bard at Psychomachia (Dante’s Tent*)**

Ravel, *Gaspard de la Nuit*. III: *Scarbo* (excerpt). Martha Argerich, piano.

**Page 47, *Dante and the Bard at Psychomachia***

John Williams, *Superman Theme* (excerpt). NY Pops, John Williams, conductor.

**Page 50, *Queen Mab in the Garden of Eden***

Mendelssohn, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: Scherzo (excerpt)*.* Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, Valery Gergiev, conductor.