1881

CHARMIDES

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Charmides (1881) - Charmides, a Grecian boy, hides in the temple of Athena and lavishes his passion on a statue of the goddess.
Opening line: He was a Grecian lad, who coming home ...  I He was a Grecian lad, who coming home With pulpy figs and wine from Sicily Stood at his galley's prow, and let the foam Blow through his crisp brown curls unconsciously, And holding wind and wave in boy's despite Peered from his dripping seat across the wet and stormy night.

Till with the dawn he saw a burnished spear Like a thin thread of gold against the sky, And hoisted sail, and strained the creaking gear, And bade the pilot head her lustily Against the nor-west gale, and all day long Held on his way, and marked the rowers' time with measured song.

And when the faint Corinthian hills were red Dropped anchor in a little sandy bay, And with fresh boughs of olive crowned his head, And brushed from cheek and throat the hoary spray, And washed his limbs with oil, and from the hold Brought out his linen tunic and his sandals brazen-soled.

And a rich robe stained with the fishes' juice Which of some swarthy trader he had bought Upon the sunny quay at Syracuse, And was with Tyrian broideries inwrought, And by the questioning merchants made his way Up through the soft and silver woods, and when the laboring day Had spun its tangled web of crimson cloud, Clomb the high hill, and with swift silent feet Crept to the fane unnoticed by the crowd Of busy priests, and from some dark retreat Watched the young swains his frolic playmates bring The firstling of their little flock, and the shy shepherd fling The crackling salt upon the flame, or hang His studded crook against the temple wall To Her who keeps away the ravenous fang Of the base wolf from homestead and from stall; And then the clear-voiced maidens 'gan to sing, And to the altar each man brought some goodly offering, A beechen cup brimming with milky foam, A fair cloth wrought with cunning imagery Of hounds in chase, a waxen honeycomb Dripping with oozy gold which scarce the bee Had ceased from building, a black skin of oil Meet for the wrestlers, a great boar the fierce and white-tusked spoil Stolen from Artemis that jealous maid To please Athena, and the dappled hide Of a tall stag who in some mountain glade Had met the shaft; and then the herald cried, And from the pillared precinct one by one Went the glad Greeks well pleased that they their simple vows had done.

And the old priest put out the waning fires Save that one lamp whose restless ruby glowed For ever in the cell, and the shrill lyres
Came fainter on the wind, as down the road In joyous dance these country folk did pass, And with stout hands the warder closed the gates of polished brass.

Long time he lay and hardly dared to breathe, And heard the cadenced drip of spilt-out wine, And the rose-petals falling from the wreath As the night breezes wandered through the shrine, And seemed to be in some entranced swoon Till through the open roof above the full and brimming moon Flooded with sheeny waves the marble floor, When from his nook upleapt the venturous lad, And flinging wide the cedar-carven door Beheld an awful image saffron-clad And armed for battle! the gaunt Griffin glared From the huge helm, and the long lance of wreck and ruin flared Like a red rod of flame, stony and steeled The Gorgon’s head its leaden eyeballs rolled, And writhed its snaky horrors through the shield, And gaped aghast with bloodless lips and cold In passion impotent, while with blind gaze The blinking owl between the feet hooted in shrill amaze.

The lonely fisher as he trimmed his lamp Far out at sea off Sunium, or cast The net for tunnies, heard a brazen tramp Of horses smite the waves, and a wild blast Divide the folded curtains of the night, And knelt upon the little poop, and prayed in holy fright.

And guilty lovers in their venery Forgat a little while their stolen sweets, Deeming they heard dread Dian’s bitter cry; And the grim watchmen on their lofty seats Ran to their shields in haste precipitate, Or strained black-bearded throats across the dusky parapet.

For round the temple rolled the clang of arms, And the twelve Gods leapt up in marble fear, And the air quaked with dissonant alarums Till huge Poseidon shook his mighty spear, And on the frieze the prancing horses neighed, And the low tread of hurrying feet rang from the cavalcade.

Ready for death with parted lips he stood, And well content at such a price to see That calm wide brow, that terrible maidenhood.

The marvel of that pitiless chastity, Ah! well content indeed, for never wight Since Troy’s young shepherd prince had seen so wonderful a sight.

Ready for death he stood, but lo! the air Grew silent, and the horses ceased to neigh, And off his brow he tossed the clustering hair, And from his limbs he threw the cloak away, For whom would not such love make desperate, And nigher came, and touched her throat, and with hands violate Undid the cuirass, and the crocus
gown, And bared the breasts of polished ivory, Till from the waist
the peplos falling down Left visible the secret mystery Which no
lover will Athena show, The grand cool flanks, the crescent thighs,
the bossy hills of snow.

Those who have never known a lover’s sin Let them not read my
ditty, it will be To their dull ears so musicless and thin That they
will have no joy of it, but ye To whose wan cheeks now creeps the
lingering smile, Ye who have learned who Eros is.- O listen yet a-
while.

A little space he let his greedy eyes Rest on the burnished image,
till mere sight Half swooned for surfeit of such luxuries, And then
his lips in hungering delight Fed on her lips, and round the
towered neck He flung his arms, nor cared at all his passion’s will
to check.

Never I ween did lover hold such tryst, For all night long he
murmured honeyed word, And saw her sweet unravished limbs,
and kissed Her pale and argent body undisturbed, And paddled
with the polished throat, and pressed His hot and beating heart
upon her chill and icy breast.

It was as if Numidian javelins Pierced through and through his
wild and whirling brain, And his nerves thrilled like throbbing
violins In exquisite pulsation, and the pain Was such sweet
anguish that he never drew His lips from hers till overhead the
lark of warning flew.

They who have never seen the daylight peer Into a darkened room,
and drawn the curtain, And with dull eyes and wearied from some
dear And worshipped body risen, they for certain Will never know
of what I try to sing, How long the last kiss was, how fond and late
his lingering.

The moon was girdled with a crystal rim, The sign which shipmen
say is ominous Of wrath in heaven, the wan stars were dim And
the low lightening cast was tremulous With the faint fluttering
wings of flying dawn, Ere from the silent sombre shrine this lover
had withdrawn.

Down the steep rock with hurried feet and fast Clomb the brave
lad, and reached the cave of Pan, And heard the goat-foot snoring
as he passed, And leapt upon a grassy knoll and ran Like a young
fawn unto an olive wood Which in a shady valley by the well-built
city stood.
And sought a little stream, which well he knew, For oftentimes with boyish careless shout The green and crested grebe he would pursue, Or snare in woven net the silver trout, And down amid the startled reeds he lay Panting in breathless sweet affright, and waited for the day.

On the green bank he lay, and let one hand Dip in the cool dark eddies listlessly, And soon the breath of morning came and fanned His hot flushed cheeks, or lifted wantonly The tangled curls from off his forehead, while He on the running water gazed with strange and secret smile.

And soon the shepherd in rough woollen cloak With his long crook undid the wattled cotes, And from the stack a thin blue wreath of smoke Curled through the air across the ripening oats, And on the hill the yellow house-dog bayed As through the crisp and rustling fern the heavy cattle strayed.

And when the light-foot mower went a-field Across the meadows laced with threaded dew, And the sheep bleated on the misty weald, And from its nest the wakening corn-crake flew, Some woodmen saw him lying by the stream And marvelled much that any lad so beautiful could seem, Nor deemed him born of mortals, and one said, “It is young Hylas, that false runaway Who with a Naiad now would make his bed Forgetting Herakles,” but others, “Nay, It is Narcissus, his own paramour, Those are the fond and crimson lips no woman can allure.”

And when they nearer cane a third one cried, “It is young Dionysos who has hid His spear and fawnskin by the river side Weary of hunting with the Bassarid, And wise indeed were we away to fly, They live not long who on the gods immortal come to spy.”

So turned they back, and feared to look behind, And told the timid swain how they had seen Amid the reeds some woodland God reclined, And no man dared to cross the open green, And on that day no olive-tree was slain, Nor rushes cut, but all deserted was the fair domain.

Save when the neat-herd’s lad, his empty pail Well slung upon his back, with leap and bound Raced on the other side, and stopped to hail Hoping that he some comrade new had found, And gat no answer, and then half afraid Passed on his simple way, or down the still and silent glade.A little girl ran laughing from the farm Not thinking of love’s secret mysteries, And when she saw the white and gleaming arm And all his manlihood, with longing eyes
Whose passion mocked her sweet virginity Watched him a-while, and then stole back sadly and wearily.

Far off he heard the city’s hum and noise, And now and then the shriller laughter where The passionate purity of brown-limbed boys Wrestled or raced in the clear healthful air, And now and then a little tinkling bell As the shorn wether led the sheep down to the mossy well.

Through the gray willows danced the fretful gnat, The grasshopper chirped idly from the tree, In sleek and oily coat the water-rat Breasting the little ripples manfully Made for the wild-duck’s nest, from bough to bough Hopped the shy finch, and the huge tortoise crept across the slough.

On the faint wind floated the silky seeds, As the bright scythe swept through the waving grass, The ousel-cock splashed circles in the reeds And flecked with silver whorls the forest’s glass, Which scarce had caught again its imagery Ere from its bed the dusky tench leapt at the dragon-fly.

But little care had he for anything Though up and down the beech the squirrel played, And from the copse the linnet ‘gan to sing To her brown mate her sweetest serenade, Ah! little care indeed, for he had seen The breasts of Pallas and the naked wonder of the Queen.

But when the herdsman called his straggling goats With whistling pipe across the rocky road, And the shard-beetle with its trumpet-notes Boomed through the darkening woods, and seemed to bode Of coming storm, and the belated crane Passed homeward like a shadow, and the dull big drops of rain Fell on the pattering fig-leaves, up he rose, And from the gloomy forest went his way Past sombre homestead and wet orchard-close, And came at last unto a little quay, And called his mates a-board, and took his seat On the high poop, and pushed from land, and loosed the dripping sheet, And steered across the bay, and when nine suns Passed down the long and laddered way of gold, And nine pale moons had breathed their orisons To the chaste stars their confessors, or told Their dearest secret to the downy moth That will not fly at noonday, through the foam and surging froth Came a great owl with yellow sulphurous eyes And lit upon the ship, whose timbers creaked As though the lading of three argosies Were in the hold, and flopped its wings, and shrieked, And darkness straightway stole across the deep, Sheathed was Orion’s sword, dread Mars himself fled down the steep, And the moon hid behind a tawny mask Of drifting cloud, and from the ocean’s marge Rose the red
plume, the huge and horned casque, The seven cubit spear, the brazen targe!

And clad in bright and burnished panoply Athena strode across the stretch of sick and shivering sea!

To the dull sailors' sight her loosened locks Seemed like the jagged storm-rack, and her feet Only the spume that floats on hidden rocks, And marking how the rising waters beat Against the rolling ship, the pilot cried To the young helmsman at the stern to luff to windward side.

But he, the over-bold adulterer, A dear profaner of great mysteries, An ardent amorous idolater, When he beheld those grand relentless eyes Laughed loud for joy, and crying out “I come” Leapt from the lofty poop into the chill and churning foam.

Then fell from the high heaven one bright star, One dancer left the circling galaxy, And back to Athens on her clattering car In all the pride of venged divinity Pale Pallas swept with shrill and steely clank, And a few gurgling bubbles rose where her boy lover sank.

And the mast shuddered as the gaunt owl flew, With mocking hoots after the wrathful Queen, And the old pilot bade the trembling crew Hoist the big sail, and told how he had seen Close to the stern a dim and giant form, And like a dripping swallow the stout ship dashed through the storm.

And no man dared to speak of Charmides Deeming that he some evil thing had wrought, And when they reached the strait Symplegades They beached their galley on the shore, and sought The toll-gate of the city hastily, And in the market showed their brown and pictured pottery.

II But some good Triton-god had ruth, and bare The boy's drowned body back to Grecian land, And mermaids combed his dank and dripping hair And smoothed his brow, and loosed his clinching hand, Some brought sweet spices from far Araby, And others made the halcyon sing her softest lullaby.

And when he neared his old Athenian home, A mighty billow rose up suddenly Upon whose oily back the clotted foam Lay diapered in some strange fantasy, And clasping him unto its glassy breast, Swept landward, like a white-maned Steed upon a venturous quest!

Now where Colonos leans unto the sea There lies a long and level stretch of lawn, The rabbit knows it, and the mountain bee For it
deserts Hymettus, and the Faun Is not afraid, for never through the day Comes a cry ruder than the shout of shepherd lads at play.

But often from the thorny labyrinth And tangled branches of the circling wood The stealthy hunter sees young Hyacinth Hurling the polished disk, and draws his hood Over his guilty gaze, and creeps away, Nor dares to wind his horn, or else at the first break of day The Dryads come and throw the leathern ball Along the reedy shore, and circumvent Some goat-eared Pan to be their seneschal For fear of bold Poseidon’s ravishment, And loose their girdles, with shy timorous eyes, Lest from the surf his azure arms and purple beard should rise.

On this side and on that a rocky cave, Hung with yellow-bell’d laburnum, stands, Smooth is the beach, save where some ebbing wave Leaves its faint outline etched upon the sands, As though it feared to be too soon forgot By the green rush, its playfellow,- and yet, it is a spot So small, that the inconstant butterfly Could steal the hoarded honey from each flower Ere it was noon, and still not satisfy Its over-greedy love,- within an hour A sailor boy, were he but rude enow To land and pluck a garland for his galley’s painted prow, Would almost leave the little meadow bare, For it knows nothing of great pageantry, Only a few narcissi here and there Stand separate in sweet austerity, Dotting the unmown grass with silver stars, And here aid there a daffodil waves tiny scimitars.

Hither the billow brought him, and was glad Of such dear servitude, and where the land Was virgin of all waters laid the lad Upon the golden margent of the strand, And like a lingering lover oft returned To kiss those pallid limbs which once with intense fire burned, Ere the wet seas had quenched that holocaust, That self-fed flame, that passionate lustihead, Ere grisly death with chill and nipping frost Had withered up those lilies white and red Which, while the boy would through the forest range, Answered each other in a sweet antiphonal counter-change.

And when at dawn the wood-nymphs, hand-in-hand, Threaded the bosky dell, their satyr spied The boy’s pale body stretched upon the sand, And feared Poseidon’s treachery, and cried, And like bright sunbeams flitting through a glade, Each startled Dryad sought some safe and leafy ambuscade.

Save one white girl, who deemed it would not be So dread a thing to feel a sea-god’s arms Crushing her breasts in amorous tyranny, And longed to listen to those subtle charms Insidious lovers weave when they would win Some fenced fortress, and stole back again, nor thought it sin To yield her treasure unto one so fair, And lay
beside him, thirsty with love's drouth, Called him soft names, played with his tangled hair, And with hot lips made havoc of his mouth Afraid he might not wake, and then afraid Lest he might wake too soon, fled back, and then, fond renegade, Returned to fresh assault, and all day long Sat at his side, and laughed at her new toy, And held his hand, and sang her sweetest song, Then frowned to see how froward was the boy Who would not with her maidenhood entwine, Nor knew that three days since his eyes had looked on Proserpine, Nor knew what sacrilege his lips had done, But said, “He will awake, I know him well, He will awake at evening when the sun Hangs his red shield on Corinth's citadel, This sleep is but a cruel treachery To make me love him more, and in some cavern of the sea “Deeper than ever falls the fisher’s line Already a huge Triton blows his horn, And weaves a garland from the crystalline And drifting ocean-tendrils to adorn The emerald pillars of our bridal bed, For sphered in foaming silver, and with coral-crowned head. "We two will sit upon a throne of pearl, And a blue wave will be our canopy, And at our feet the water-snakes will curl In all their amethystine panoply Of diamonded man, and we will mark The mullets swimming by the mast of some storm-foundered bark, “Vermilion-finned with eyes of bossy gold Like flakes of crimson light, and the great deep His glassy-portaled chamber will unfold, And we will see the painted dolphins sleep Cradled by murmuring halcyons on the rocks Where Proteus in quaint suit of green pastures his monstrous flocks. "And tremulous opal hued anemones Will wave their purple fringes where we tread Upon the mirrored floor, and argosies Of fishes flecked with tawny scales will thread The drifting cordage of the shattered wreck, And honey-colored amber beads our twining limbs will deck.” But when that baffled Lord of War the Sun With gaudy pennon flying passed away Into his brazen House, and one by one The little yellow stars began to stray Across the field of heaven, ah! then indeed She feared his lips upon her lips would never care to feed, And cried, “Awake, already the pale moon Washes the trees with silver, and the wave Creeps gray and chilly up this sandy dune, The croaking frogs are out, and from the cave The night-jar shrieks, the fluttering bats repass, And the brown stoat with hollow flanks creeps through the dusky grass. "Nay, though thou art a God, be not so coy, For in yon stream there is a little reed That often whispers how a lovely boy Lay with her
once upon a grassy mead, Who when his cruel pleasure he had done Spread wings of rustling gold and soared aloft into the sun.

“Be not so coy, the laurel trembles still With great Apollo’s kisses, and the fir Whose clustering sisters fringe the sea-ward hill Hath many a tale of that bold ravisher Whom men call Boreas, and I have seen The mocking eyes of Hermes through the poplar’s silvery sheen.

“Even the jealous Naiads call me fair, And every morn a young and ruddy swain Wooes me with apples and with locks of hair, And seeks to soothe my virginal disdain By all the gifts the gentle wood-nymphs love; But yesterday he brought to me an iris-plumaged dove “With little crimson feet, which with its store Of seven spotted eggs the cruel lad Had stolen from the lofty sycamore At daybreak when her amorous comrade had Flown off in search of berried juniper Which most they love; the fretful wasp, that earliest vintager “Of the blue grapes, hath not persistency So constant as this simple shepherd-boy For my poor lips, his joyous purity And laughing sunny eyes might well decoy A Dryad from her oath to Artemis; For very beautiful is he, his mouth was made to kiss.

“His argent forehead, like a rising moon Over the dusky hills of meeting brows, Is crescent shaped, the hot and Tyrian noon Leads from the myrtle-grove no goodlier spouse For Cytheraea, the first silky down Fringes his blushing cheeks, and his young limbs are strong and brown: “And he is rich, and fat and fleecy herds Of bleating sheep upon his meadows lie, And many an earthen bowl of yellow curds Is in his homestead for the thievish fly To swim and drown in, the pink clover mead Keeps its sweet store for him, and he can pipe on oaten reed.

“And yet I love him not, it was for thee I kept my love, I knew that thou would’st come To rid me of this pallid chastity; Thou fairest flower of the flowerless foam Of all the wide Aegean, brightest star Of ocean’s azure heavens where the mirrored planets are!

“I knew that thou would’st come, for when at first The dry wood burgeoned, and the sap of Spring Swelled in my green and tender bark or burst To myriad multitudinous blossoming Which mocked the midnight with its mimic moons That did not dread the dawn, and first the thrushes’ rapturous tunes “Startled the squirrel from its granary, And cuckoo flowers fringed the narrow lane, Through my young leaves a sensuous ecstasy Crept like new wine, and every mossy vein Throbbed with the fitful pulse of amorous blood, And the wild winds of passion shook my slim stem’s maidenhood.
“The trooping fawns at evening came and laid Their cool black noses on my lowest boughs And on my topmost branch the blackbird made A little nest of grasses for his spouse, And now and then a twittering wren would light On a thin twig which hardly bare the weight of such delight.

“I was the Attic shepherd’s trysting place, Beneath my shadow Amaryllis lay, And round my trunk would laughing Daphnis chase The timorous girl, till tired out with play She felt his hot breath stir her tangled hair, And turned, and looked, and fled no more from such delightful snare.

“Then come away unto my ambuscade Where clustering woodbine weaves a canopy For amorous pleasance, and the rustling shade Of Paphian myrtles seems to sanctify The dearest rites of love, there in the cool And green recesses of its furthest depth there is a pool, “The ouzel’s haunt, the wild bee’s pasturage; For round its rim great creamy lilies float Through their flat leaves in verdant anchorage, Each cup a white-sailed golden-laden boat Steered by a dragon-fly,- be not afraid To leave this wan and wave-kissed shore, surely the place were made “For lovers such as we, the Cyprian Queen, One arm around her boyish paramour, Strays often there at eve, and I have seen The moon strip off her misty vestiture For young Endymion’s eyes, be not afraid, The panther feet of Dian never tread that secret glade.

“Nay, if thou wilt, back to the beating brine, Back to the boisterous billow let us go, And all day beneath the hyaline Huge vault of Neptune’s watery portico, And watch the purple monsters of the deep Sport in ungainly play, and from his lair keen Xiphias leap.

“For if my mistress find me lying here She will not ruth or gentle pity show, But lay her boar-spear down, and with austere Relentless fingers string the cornel bow, And draw the feathered notch against her breast, And loose the arched cord, ay, even now upon the quest “I hear her hurrying feet,- awake, awake, Thou laggard in love’s battle! once at least Let me drink deep of passion’s wine, and slake My parched being with the nectarous feast Which even Gods affect! O come Love come, Still we have time to reach the cavern of thine azure home.”

Scarce had she spoken when the shuddering trees Shook, and the leaves divided, and the air Grew conscious of a God, and the gray seas Crawled backward, and a long and dismal blare Blew from some tasseled horn, a sleuth-hound bayed And like a flame a barbed reed flew whizzing down the glade.
And where the little flowers of her breast Just brake in to their milky blossoming, This murderous paramour, this unbidden guest, Pierced and struck deep in horrid chambering, And plowed a bloody furrow with its dart, And dug a long red road, and cleft with winged death her heart.

Sobbing her life out with a bitter cry On the boy's body fell the Dryad maid, Sobbing for incomplete virginity, And raptures unenjoyed, and pleasures dead, And all the pain of things unsatisfied, And the bright drops of crimson youth crept down her throbbing side.

Ah! pitiful it was to hear her moan, And very pitiful to see her die Ere she had yielded up her sweets, or known The joy of passion, that dread mystery Which not to know is not to live at all, And yet to know is to be held in death's most deadly thrall.

But as it hapt the Queen of Cythere, Who with Adonis all night long had lain Within some shepherd's hut in Arcady, On team of silver doves and gilded wane Was journeying Paphos-ward, high up afar From mortal ken between the mountains and the morning star, And when low down she spied the hapless pair, And heard the Oread's faint despairing cry, Whose cadence seemed to play upon the air As though it were a viol, hastily She bade her pigeons fold each straining plume, And dropt to earth, and reached the strand, and saw their dolorous doom.

For as a gardener turning back his head To catch the last notes of the linnet, mows With careless scythe too near some flower bed, And cuts the thorny pillar of the rose, And with the flower's loosened loveliness Strews the brown mold, or as some shepherd lad in wantonness Driving his little flock along the mead Treads down two daffodils which side by side Have lured the lady-bird with yellow brede And made the gaudy moth forget its pride, Treads down their brimming golden chalices Under light feet which were not made for such rude ravages, Or as a schoolboy tired of his book Flings himself down upon the reedy grass And plucks two water-lilies from the brook, And for a time forgets the hour glass, Then wearies of their sweets, and goes his way, And lets the hot sun kill them, even so these lovers lay, And Venus cried, "It is dread Artemis Whose bitter hand hath wrought this cruelty, Or else that mightier mayde whose care it is To guard her strong and stainless majesty Upon the hill Athenian,- alas!

That they who loved so well unloved into Death's house should pass."
So with soft hands she laid the boy and girl in the great golden waggon tenderly, Her white throat whiter than a moony pearl just threaded with a blue vein’s tapestry Had not yet ceased to throb, and still her breast Swaysed like a wind-stirred lily in ambiguous unrest.

And then each pigeon spread its milky van, The bright car soared into the dawning sky And like a cloud the aerial caravan Passed over the Aegean silently, Till the faint air was troubled with the song From the wan mouths that call on bleeding Thammuz all night long.

But when the doves had reached their wonted goal Where the wide stair of orbed marble dips Its snows into the sea, her fluttering soul Just shook the trembling petals of her lips And passed into the void, and Venus knew That one fair maid the less would walk amid her retinue, And bade her servants carve a cedar chest With all the wonder of this history, Within whose scented womb their limbs should rest Where olive-trees make tender the blue sky On the low hills of Paphos, and the fawn Pipes in the noonday, and the nightingale sings on till dawn.

Nor failed they to obey her hest, and ere The morning bee had stung the daffodil With tiny fretful spear, or from its lair The waking stag had leapt across the rill And roused the ousel, or the lizard crept Athwart the sunny rock, beneath the grass their bodies slept.

And when day brake, within that silver shrine Fed by the flames of cressets tremulous, Queen Venus knelt and prayed to Proserpine That she whose beauty made Death amorous Should beg a guerdon from her pallid Lord, And let desire pass across dread Charon’s icy ford.

III In melancholy moonless Acheron, Far from the goodly earth and joyous day, Where no spring ever buds, nor ripening sun Weighs down the apple trees, nor flowery May Checkers with chestnut blooms the grassy floor, Where thrushes never sing, and piping linnets mate no more, There by a dim and dark Lethaean well, Young Charmides was lying wearily He plucked the blossoms from the asphodel, And with its little rifled treasury Strewed the dull waters of the dusky stream, And watched the white stars founder, and the land was like a dream.

When as he gazed into the watery glass And through his brown hair’s curly tangles scanned His own wan face, a shadow seemed to pass Across the mirror, and a little hand Stole into his, and
warm lips timidly Brushed his pale cheeks, and breathed their secret forth into a sigh.

Then turned he around his weary eyes and saw, And ever nigher still their faces came, And nigher ever did their young mouths draw Until they seemed one perfect rose of flame, And longing arms around her neck he cast, And felt her throbbing bosom, and his breath came hot and fast, And all his hoarded sweets were hers to kiss, And all her maidenhood was his to slay, And limb to limb in long and rapturous bliss Their passion waxed and waned,- O why essay To pipe again of love too venturous reed!

Enough, enough that Eros laughed upon that flowerless mead, Too venturous poesy O why essay To pipe again of passion! fold thy wings O'er daring Icarus and bid thy lay Sleep hidden in the lyre's silent strings, Till thou hast found the old Castilian rill, Or from the Lesbian waters plucked drowned Sappho's golden quill!

Enough, enough that he whose life had been A fiery pulse of sin, a splendid shame, Could in the loveless land of Hades glean One scorching harvest from those fields of flame Where passion walks with naked unshod feet And is not wounded,- ah! enough that once their lips could meet In that wild throb when all existences Seem narrowed to one single ecstasy Which dies through its own sweetness and the stress Of too much pleasure, ere Persephone Had made them serve her by the ebon throne Of the pale God who in the fields of Enna loosed her zone.

THE END
1881

WIND FLOWERS

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Wind Flowers (1881) - A collection of Wilde’s shorter poems which includes Impression du Matin, Magdalen Walks, Athanasia, Serenade- For Music, Endymion, La Bella Donna Della Mia Mente, and Chanson.
**IMPRESSION DU MATIN**

The Thames nocturne of blue and gold Changed to a Harmony in gray: A barge with ochre-colored hay Dropt from the wharf: and chill and cold The yellow fog came creeping down The bridges, till the houses' walls Seemed changed to shadows, and St. Paul's Loomed like a bubble o'er the town.

Then suddenly arose the clang Of waking life; the streets were stirred With country waggons: and a bird Flew to the glistening roofs and sang.

But one pale woman all alone, The daylight kissing her wan hair, Loitered beneath the gas lamp's flare, With lips of flame and heart of stone.

**MAGDALEN WALKS**

The little white clouds are racing over the sky, And the fields are strewn with the gold of the flower of March The daffodil breaks underfoot, and the tasselled larch Sways and swings as the thrush goes hurrying by.

A delicate odor is borne on the wings of the morning breeze, The odor of leaves, and of grass, and of newly upturned earth, The birds are singing for joy of the Spring's glad birth, Hopping from branch to branch on the rocking trees, And all the woods are alive with the murmur and sound of Spring, And the rosebud breaks into pink on the climbing brier, And the crocus-bed is a quivering moon of fire Girdled round with the belt of an amethyst ring.

And the plane to the pine-tree is whispering some tale of love Till it rustles with laughter and tosses its mantle of green And the gloom of the wych-elm's hollow is lit with the iris sheen Of the burnished rainbow throat and the silver breast of a dove.

See! the lark starts up from his bed in the meadow there, Breaking the gossamer threads and the nets of dew, And flashing a-down the river, a flame of blue!

The kingfisher flies like an arrow, and wounds the air.

**ATHANASIA**

To that gaunt House of Art which lacks for naught Of all the great things men have saved from Time, The withered body of a girl was brought Dead ere the world's glad youth had touched its prime,
And seen by lonely Arabs lying hid In the dim wound of some black pyramid.

But when they had unloosed the linen band Which swathed the Egyptian’s body, lo! was found Closed in the wasted hollow of her hand A little seed, which sown in English ground Did wondrous snow of starry blossoms bear, And spread rich odors through our springtide air.

With such strange arts this flower did allure That all forgotten was the asphodel, And the brown bee, the lily’s paramour, Forsook the cup where he was wont to dwell, For not a thing of earth it seemed to be, But stolen from some heavenly Arcady.

In vain the sad narcissus, wan and white At its own beauty, hung across the stream, The purple dragon-fly had no delight With its gold-dust to make his wings a-gleam, Ah! no delight the jasmine-bloom to kiss, Or brush the rain-pearls from the eucharis.

For love of it the passionate nightingaleForgot the hills of Thrace, the cruel king, And the pale dove no longer cared to sail Through the wet woods at time of blossoming, But round this flower of Egypt sought to float, With silvered wing and amethystine throat.

While the hot sun blazed in his tower of blue A cooling wind crept from the land of snows, And the warm south with tender tears of dew Drenched its white leaves when Hesperos uprose Amid those sea-green meadows of the sky On which the scarlet bars of sunset lie.

But when o’er wastes of lily-haunted field The tired birds had stayed their amorous tune, And broad and glittering like an argent shield High in the sapphire heavens hung the moon, Did no strange dream or evil memory make Each tremulous petal of its blossoms shake?

Ah no! to this bright flower a thousand years Seemed but the lingering of a summer’s day, It never knew the tide of cankering fears Which turn a boy’s gold hair to withered gray, The dread desire of death it never knew, Or how all folk that they were born must rue.

For we to death with pipe and dancing go, Nor would we pass the ivory gate again, As some sad river wearied of its flow Through the dull plains, the haunts of common men, Leaps lover-like into the terrible sea!

And counts it gain to die so gloriously.
We mar our lordly strength in barren strife
With the world’s legions led by clamorous care,
It never feels decay but gathers life
From the pure sunlight and the supreme air,
We live beneath Time’s wasting sovereignty,
It is the child of all eternity.

SERENADE For Music
The western wind is blowing fair
Across the dark Aegean sea,
And at the secret marble stair
My Tyrian galley waits for thee.
Come down! the purple sail is spread,
The watchman sleeps within the town.

O leave thy lily-flowered bed,
O lady mine come down, come down!
She will not come, I know her well,
Of lover’s vows she hath no care,
And little good a man can tell
Of one so cruel and so fair.
True love is but a woman’s toy,
They never know the lover’s pain,
And I who loved as loves a boy.
Must love in vain, must love in vain.

O noble pilot tell me true
Is that the sheen of golden hair? Or is it but
the tangled dew
That binds the passion-flowers there?
Good sailor come and tell me now
Is that my lady’s lily hand? Or is it but
the gleaming prow,
Or is it but the silver sand?
No! no! ‘tis not the tangled dew,
‘Tis not the silver-fretted sand,
It is my own dear Lady true
With golden hair and lily hand!

O noble pilot steer for Troy,
Good sailor ply the laboring oar,
This is the Queen of life and joy
Whom we must bear from Grecian shore!

The waning sky grows faint and blue,
It wants an hour still of day,
Aboard! aboard! my gallant crew,
O Lady mine away! away!

O noble pilot steer for Troy,
Good sailor ply the laboring oar,
O loved as only loves a boy!
O loved for ever evermore!

ENDYMION For Music
The apple trees are hung with gold,
And birds are loud in Arcady,
The sheep lie bleating in the fold,
The wild goat runs across the wold,
But yesterday his love he told,
I know he will come back to me.
O rising moon! O Lady moon!
Be you my lover’s sentinel, You cannot choose but know him well,
For he is shod with purple shoon, You cannot choose but know my
love, For he a shepherd’s crook doth bear, And he is soft as any
dove, And brown and curly is his hair.

The turtle now has ceased to call Upon her crimson-footed groom,
The gray wolf prowls about the stall, The lily’s singing seneschal
Sleeps in the lily-bell, and all The violet hills are lost in gloom.

O risen moon! O holy moon!
Stand on the top of Helice, And if my own true love you see, Ah! if
you see the purple shoon, The hazel crook, the lad’s brown hair,
The goat-skin wrapped about his arm, Tell him that I am waiting
where The rushlight glimmers in the Farm.

The falling dew is cold and chill, And no bird sings in Arcady, The
little fauns have left the hill, Even the tired daffodil Has closed its
gilded doors, and still My lover comes not back to me.

False moon! False moon! O waning moon!
Where is my own true lover gone, Where are the lips vermilion,
The shepherd’s crook, the purple shoon? Why spread that silver
pavilion, Why wear that veil of drifting mist? Ah! thou hast young
Endymion, Thou hast the lips that should be kissed!

LA BELLA DONNA DEL MIA MENTE
My limbs are wasted with a flame, My feet are sore with travelling,
For calling on my Lady’s name My lips have now forgot to sing.

O Linnet in the wild-rose brake Strain for my Love thy melody, O
Lark sing louder for love’s sake My gentle Lady passeth by.

She is too fair for any man To see or hold his heart’s delight, Fairer
than Queen or courtezan Or moon-lit water in the night.

Her hair is bound with myrtle leaves, (Green leaves upon her
golden hair!) Green grasses through the yellow sheaves Of autumn
corn are not more fair.

Her little lips, more made to kiss Than to cry bitterly for pain, Are
tremulous as brook-water is, Or roses after evening rain.

Her neck is like white melilote Flushing for pleasure of the sun,
The throbbing of the linnet’s throat Is not so sweet to look upon.
As a pomegranate, cut in twain, White-seeded, is her crimson mouth, Her cheeks are as the fading stain Where the peach reddens to the south.

O twining hands! O delicate White body made for love and pain! O House of Love! O desolate Pale flower beaten by the rain!

CHANSON
A ring of gold and a milk-white dove Are goodly gifts for thee, And a hempen rope for your own love To hang upon a tree.

For you a House of Ivory (Roses are white in the rose-bower)! A narrow bed for me to lie (White, O white is the hemlock flower)! Myrtle and jessamine for you (O the red rose is fair to see)! For me the cypress and the rue (Fairest of all is rosemary)! For you three lovers of your hand (Green grass where a man lies dead)! For me three paces on the sand (Plant lilies at my head)!

THE END
1894

THE SPHINX

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Sphinx (Wilde) (1894) - Modelled somewhat after Poe’s “The Raven,” this poem tells of the Sphinx’s thousand weary centuries of history. It is one of the earliest incidences of Wilde alluding to his secret sexual life.
THE SPHINX

In a dim corner of my room For longer than my fancy thinks, A beautiful and silent Sphinx Has watched me through the shifting gloom.

Inviolate and immobile She does not rise, she does not stir For silver moons are nought to her, And nought to her the suns that reel.

Red follows grey across the air The waves of moonlight ebb and flow But with the dawn she does not go And in the night-time she is there.

Dawn follows Dawn, and Nights grow old And all the while this curious cat Lies crouching on the Chinese mat With eyes of satin rimmed with gold.

Upon the mat she lies and leers, And on the tawny throat of her Flutters the soft and fur Or ripples to her pointed ears.

Come forth my lovely seneschal, So somnolent, so statuesque, Come forth you exquisite grotesque, Half woman and half animal, Come forth my lovely languorous Sphinx, And put your head upon my knee And let me stroke your throat and see Your body spotted like the Lynx, And let me touch those curving claws Of yellow ivory, and grasp The tail that like a monstrous Asp Coils round your heavy velvet paws.

A thousand weary centuries Are thine, while I have hardly seen Some twenty summers cast their green For Autumn’s gaudy liveries, But you can read the Hieroglyphs On the great sandstone obelisks, And you have talked with Basilisks And you have looked on Hippogriffs O tell me, were you standing by When Isis to Osiris knelt, And did you watch the Egyptian melt Her union for Anthony, And drink the jewel-drunken wine, And bend her head in mimic awe To see the huge pro-consul draw The salted tunny from the brine?

And did you mark the Cyprian kiss With Adon on his catafalque, And did you follow Amanalk The god of Heliopolis?

And did you talk with Thoth, and did You hear the moon-horned Io weep And know the painted kings who sleep Beneath the wedge-shaped Pyramid?

Lift up your large black satin eyes Which are like cushions where one sinks, Fawn at my feet, fantastic Sphinx, And sing me all your memories.
Sing to me of the Jewish maid Who wandered with the Holy Child, And how you led them through the wild, And how they slept beneath your shade.

Sing to me of that odorous Green eve when crouching by the marge You heard from Adrian’s gilded barge The laughter of Antinous, And lapped the stream, and fed your drouth, And watched with hot and hungry stare The ivory body of that rare Young slave with his pomegranate mouth.

Sing to me of the Labyrinth In which the two-formed bull was stalled, Sing to me of the night you crawled Across the temple’s granite plinth When through the purple corridors The screaming scarlet Ibis flew In terror, and a horrid dew Dripped from the moaning Mandragores, And the great torpid crocodile Within the great shed slimy tears, And tore the jewels from his ears And staggered back into the Nile, And the Priests cursed you with shrill psalms As in your claws you seized their snake And crept away with it to slake Your passion by the shuddering palms.

Who were your lovers, who were they Who wrestled for you in the dust? Which was the vessel of your Lust, What Leman had you every day?

Did giant lizards come and crouch Before you on the reedy banks? Did Gryphons with great metal flanks Leap on you in your trampled couch, Did monstrous hippopotami Come sidling to you in the mist Did gilt-scaled dragons write and twist With passion as you passed them by?

And from that brick-built Lycian tomb What horrible Chimaera came With fearful heads and fearful flame To breed new wonders from your womb?

Or had you shameful secret guests And did you harry to your home Some Nereid coiled in amber foam With curious rock-crystal breasts; Or did you, treading through the froth, Call to the brown Sidonian For tidings of Leviathan, Leviathan of Behemoth?

Or did you when the sun was set, Climb up the cactus-covered slope To meet your swarthy Ethiop Whose body was of polished jet?

Or did you while the earthen skiffs Dropt down the gray Nilotic flats At twilight, and the flickering bats Flew round the temple’s triple glyphs Steal to the border of the bar And swim across the silent lake And slink into the vault and make The Pyramid your lupanar, Till from each black sarcophagus Rose up the painted,
swathed dead, Or did you lure unto your bed The ivory-horned Trageophos?

Or did you love the God of flies Who plagued the Hebrews and was splashed With wine unto the waist, or Pasht Who had green beryls for her eyes?

Or that young God, the Tyrian, Who was more amorous than the dove Of Ashtaroth, or did you love The God of the Assyrian, Whose wings that like transparent talc Rose high above his hawk-faced head Painted with silver and with red And ribbed with rods of Oreichalch?

Or did huge Apis from his car Leap down and lay before your feet Big blossoms of the honey-sweet, And honey-coloured nenuphar?

How subtle secret is your smile; Did you love none then? Nay I know Great Ammon was your bedfellow, He lay with you beside the Nile.

The river-horses in the slime Trumpeted when they saw him come Odorous with Syrian galbanum And smeared with spikenard and with thyme.

He came along the river bank Like some tall galley argent-sailed He strode across the waters, mailed In beauty and the waters sank. He strode across the desert sand, He reached the valley where you lay, He waited till the dawn of day, Then touched your black breasts with his hand.

You kissed his mouth with mouth of flame, You made the horned-god your own, You stood behind him on his throne; You called him by his secret name, You whispered monstrous oracles Into the caverns of his ears, With blood of goats and blood of steers You taught him monstrous miracles, While Ammon was your bedfellow Your chamber was the steaming Nile And with your curved Archaic smile You watched his passion come and go.

With Syrian oils his brows were bright And wide-spread as a tent at noon His marble limbs made pale the moon And lent the day a larger light, His long hair was nine cubits span And coloured like that yellow gem Which hidden in their garments’ hem, The merchants bring from Kurdistan.

His face was as the must that lies Upon a vat of new-made wine, The seas could not insapphirine The perfect azure of his eyes.
His thick, soft throat was white as milk And threaded with thin veins of blue And curious pearls like frozen dew Were brodered on his flowing silk.

On pearl and porphyry pedestalled He was too bright to look upon For on his ivory breast there shone The wondrous ocean-emerald,- That mystic, moonlight jewel which Some diver of the Colchian caves Had found beneath the blackening waves And carried to the Colchian witch.

Before his gilded galiot Ran naked vine-wreathed corybants And lines of swaying elephants Knet down to draw his chariot, And lines of swarthy Nubians Bore up his litter as he rode Down the great granite-paven road, Between the nodding peacock fans.

The merchants brought him steatite From Sidon in their painted ships; The meanest cup that touched his lips Was fashioned from a chrysolite.

The merchants brought him cedar chests Of rich apparel, bound with cords; His train was borne by Memphian lords; Young kings were glad to be his guests.

Ten hundred shaven priests did bow To Ammon’s altar day and night, Ten hundred lamps did wave their light Through Ammon’s carven house,- and now Foul snake and speckled adder with Their young ones crawl from stone to stone For ruined is the house, and prone The great rose-marble monolith; Wild ass or strolling jackal comes And crouches in the mouldering gates, Wild satyrs call unto their mates Across the fallen fluted drums.

And on the summit of the pile, The blue-faced ape of Horus sits And gibbers while the fig-tree splits The pillars of the peristyle.

The God is scattered here and there; Deep hidden in the windy sand I saw his giant granite hand Still clenched in impotent despair.

And many a wandering caravan Of stately negroes, silken-shawled, Crossing the desert, halts appalled Before the neck that none can span.

And many a bearded Bedouin Draws back his yellow-striped burnous To gaze upon the Titan thews Of him who was thy paladin.

Go seek his fragments on the moor, And wash them in the evening dew, And from their pieces make anew Thy mutilated paramour.
Go seek them where they lie alone And from their broken pieces make Thy bruised bedfellow! And wake Mad passions in the senseless stone!

Charm his dull ear with Syrian hymns; He loved your body; oh be kind!
Pour spikenard on his hair and wind Soft rolls of linen round his limbs; Wind round his head the figured coins, Stain with red fruits the pallid lips; Weave purple for his shrunken hips And purple for his barren loins!

Away to Egypt! Have no fear; Only one God has ever died, Only one God has let His side Be wounded by a soldier’s spear.

But these, thy lovers, are not dead; Still by the hundred-cubit gate Dog-faced Anubis sits in state With lotus lilies for thy head.
Still from his chair of porphyry Giant Memnon strains his lidless eyes Across the empty land and cries Each yellow morning unto thee.

And Nilus with his broken horn Lies in his black and oozy bed And till thy coming will not spread His waters on the withering corn.

Your lovers are not dead, I know, And will rise up and hear thy voice And clash their symbols and rejoice And run to kiss your mouth,- and so Set wings upon your argosies! Set horses to your ebon car!
Back to your Nile! Or if you are Grown sick of dead divinities; Follow some roving lion’s spoor Across the copper-coloured plain, Reach out and hale him by the mane And bid him to be your paramour!
Crouch by his side upon the grass And set your white teeth in his throat, And when you hear his dying note, Lash your long flanks of polished brass And take a tiger for your mate, Whose amber sides are flecked with black, And ride upon his gilded back In triumph through the Theban gate, And toy with him in amorous jests, And when he turns and snarls and gnaws, Oh smite him with your jasper claws And bruise him with your agate breasts!

Why are you tarrying? Get hence! I weary of your sullen ways.
I weary of your steadfast gaze, Your somnolent magnificence.
Your horrible and heavy breath Makes the light flicker in the lamp, And on my brow I feel the damp And dreadful dews of night and
death, Your eyes are like fantastic moons That shiver in some stagnant lake, Your tongue is like a scarlet snake That dances to fantastic tunes.

Your pulse makes poisonous melodies, And your black throat is like the hole Left by some torch or burning coal On Saracenic tapestries.

Away! the sulphur-coloured stars Are hurrying through the Western gate!
Away! Or it may be too late To climb their silent silver cars!

See, the dawn shivers round the gray, Gilt-dialled towers, and the rain Streams down each diamonded pane And blurs with tears the wannish day.

What snake-tressed fury, fresh from Hell, With uncouth gestures and unclean, Stole from the poppy-drowsy queen And led you to a student’s cell?

What songless, tongueless ghost of sin Crept through the curtains of the night And saw my taper burning bright, And knocked and bade you enter in?

Are there not others more accursed, Whiter with lepersies than I? Are Abana and Pharpar dry, That you come here to slake your thirst?

False Sphinx! False Sphinx! By reedy Styx, Old Charon, leaning on his oar, Waits for my coin. Go thou before And leave me to my crucifix, Whose pallid burden, sick with pain, Watches the world with wearied eyes.

And weeps for every soul that dies, And weep for every soul in vain!!.

THE END
1888

THE SELFISH GIANT

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. The Selfish Giant (1888) - A fairy tale about a giant who comes home after a seven-year visit with an ogre, to find children playing in his garden. He puts up a wall and posts a sign that says, “trespassers will be prosecuted.”
THE SELFISH GIANT

Every afternoon, as they were coming from school, the children used to go and play in the Giant’s garden.

It was a large, lovely garden, with soft green grass. Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach-trees that in the spring-time broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. “How happy we are here!” they cried to each other.

One day the Giant came back. He had been to visit his friend the Cornish ogre, and had stayed with him for seven years. After the seven years were over he had said all that he had to say, for his conversation was limited, and he determined to return to his own castle. When he arrived he saw the children playing in the garden.

“What are you doing there?” he cried in a very gruff voice, and the children ran away.

“My own garden is my own garden,” said the Giant; “any one can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself.” So he built a high wall all around it, and put up a notice-board.

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED He was a very selfish Giant.

The poor children had now nowhere to play. They tried to play on the road, but the road was very dusty and full of hard stones, and they did not like it. They used to wander round the high wall when their lessons were over, and talk about the beautiful garden inside. “How happy we were there,” they said to each other.

Then the Spring came, and all over the country there were little blossoms and little birds. Only in the garden of the Selfish Giant it was still winter. The birds did not care to sing in it as there were no children, and the trees forgot to blossom. Once a beautiful flower put its head out from the grass, but when it saw the notice-board it was so sorry for the children that it slipped back into the ground again, and went off to sleep. The only people who were pleased were the Snow and the Frost. “Spring has forgotten this garden,” they cried, “so we will live here all the year round.” The Snow covered up the grass with her great white cloak, and the Frost painted all the trees silver. Then they invited the North Wind to
stay with them, and he came. He was wrapped in furs, and he roared all day about the garden, and blew the chimney-pots down. “This is a delightful spot,” he said, “we must ask the Hail on a visit.” So the Hail came. Every day for three hours he rattled on the roof of the castle till he broke most of the slates, and then he ran round and round the garden as fast as he could go. He was dressed in grey, and his breath was like ice.

“I cannot understand why the Spring is so late in coming,” said the Selfish Giant, as he sat at the window and looked out at his cold white garden. “I hope there will be a change in the weather.” But the Spring never came, nor the Summer. The Autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the Giant’s garden she gave none. “He is too selfish,” she said. So it was always Winter there, and the North Wind, and the Hail, and the Frost, and the Snow danced about through the trees.

One morning the Giant was lying awake in bed when he heard some lovely music. It sounded so sweet to his ears that he thought it must be the King’s musicians passing by. It was really only a little linnet singing outside his window, but it was so long since he had heard a bird sing in his garden that it seemed to him to be the most beautiful music in the world. Then the Hail stopped dancing over his head, and the North Wind ceased roaring, and a delicious perfume came to him through the open casement. “I believe the Spring has come at last,” said the Giant; and he jumped out of bed and looked out.

What did he see? He saw a most wonderful sight. Through a little hole in the wall the children had crept in, and they were sitting in the branches of the trees. In every tree that he could see there was a little child. And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they had covered themselves with blossoms, and were waving their arms gently above the children’s heads. The birds were flying about and twittering with delight, and the flowers were looking up through the green grass and laughing. It was a lovely scene, only in one corner it was still winter. It was the farthest corner of the garden, and in it was standing a little boy. He was so small that he could not reach up to the branches of the tree, and he was wandering all round it, crying bitterly. The poor tree was still quite covered with frost and snow, and the North Wind was blowing and roaring above it. “Climb up! little boy,” said the Tree, and it bent its branches down as low as it could; but the boy was too tiny.
And the Giant’s heart melted as he looked out. “How selfish I have been!” he said; “now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put the poor little boy on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children’s playground for ever and ever.” He was really very sorry for what he had done.

So he crept downstairs and opened the front door quite softly, and went out into the garden. But when the children saw him they were so frightened that they all ran away, and the garden became winter again. Only the little boy did not run, for his eyes were so full of tears that he did not see the Giant coming. And the Giant stole up behind him and took him gently in his hand, and put him up into the tree. And the tree broke at once into blossom, and the birds came and sang on it, and the little boy stretched out his two arms and flung them around the Giant’s neck, and kissed him. And the other children, when they saw that the Giant was not wicked any longer, came running back, and with them came the Spring. “It is your garden now, little children,” said the Giant, and he took a great axe and knocked down the wall. And when the people were going to market at twelve o’clock they found the Giant playing with the children in the most beautiful garden they had ever seen.

All day long they played, and in the evening they came to the Giant to bid him good-bye.

“But where is your little companion?” he said: “the boy I put into the tree.” The Giant loved him the best because he had kissed him.

“We don’t know,” answered the children; “he has gone away.” “You must tell him to be sure and come here to-morrow,” said the Giant. But the children said that they did not know where he lived, and had never seen him before; and the Giant felt very sad.

Every afternoon, when school was over, the children came and played with the Giant. But the little boy whom the Giant loved was never seen again. The Giant was very kind to all the children, yet he longed for his first little friend, and often spoke of him. “How I would like to see him!” he used to say.

Years went over, and the Giant grew very old and feeble. He could not play about any more, so he sat in a huge armchair, and watched the children at their games, and admired his garden. “I have many beautiful flowers,” he said; “but the children are the most beautiful flowers of all.” One winter morning he looked out of his window as he was dressing. He did not hate the Winter now,
for he knew that it was merely the Spring asleep, and that the flowers were resting.

Suddenly he rubbed his eyes in wonder, and looked and looked. It certainly, was a marvellous sight. In the farthest corner of the garden was a tree quite covered with lovely white blossoms. Its branches were all golden, and silver fruit hung down from them, and underneath it stood the little boy he had loved.

Downstairs ran the Giant in great joy, and out into the garden. He hastened across the grass, and came near to the child. And when he came quite close his face grew red with anger, and he said, “Who hath dared to wound thee?” For on the palms of the child’s hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.

“Who hath dared to wound thee?” cried the Giant; “tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him.” “Nay!” answered the child; “but these are the wounds of Love.” “Who art thou?” said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child.

And the child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, “You let me play once in your garden, to-day you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise.”

And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms.

THE END
1888

THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. The Nightingale and the Rose (1888) - A fairy tale about a nightingale who presses her breast against a thorn until a rose is born.
THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE

“She said that she would dance with me if I brought her red roses,” cried the young Student; “but in all my garden there is no red rose.” From her nest in the holm-oak tree the Nightingale heard him, and she looked out through the leaves, and wondered.

“No red rose in all my garden!” he cried, and his beautiful eyes filled with tears. “Ah, on what little things does happiness depend! I have read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy are mine, yet for want of a red rose is my life made wretched.” “Here at last is a true lover,” said the Nightingale. “Night after night have I sung of him, though I knew him not; night after night have I told his story to the stars, and now I see him. His hair is dark as the hyacinth-blossom, and his lips are red as the rose of his desire; but passion has made his face like pale ivory, and sorrow has set her seal upon his brow.” “The Prince gives a ball to-morrow night,” murmured the young Student, “and my love will be of the company. If I bring her a red rose she will dance with me till dawn. If I bring her a red rose, I shall hold her in my arms, and she will lean her head upon my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine. But there is no red rose in my garden, so I shall sit lonely, and she will pass me by. She will have no heed of me, and my heart will break.”

“Here indeed is the true lover,” said the Nightingale. “What I sing of, he suffers: what is joy to me, to him is pain. Surely Love is a wonderful thing. It is more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the market-place. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance for gold.” “The musicians will sit in their gallery,” said the young Student, “and play upon their stringed instruments, and my love will dance to the sound of the harp and the violin. She will dance so lightly that her feet will not touch the floor, and the courtiers in their gay dresses will throng around her. But with me she will not dance, for I have no red rose to give her”; and he flung himself down on the grass, and buried his face in his hands, and wept.

“Why is he weeping?” asked a little Green Lizard, as he ran past him with his tail in the air.

“Why, indeed?” said a Butterfly, who was fluttering about after a sunbeam.
“Why, indeed?” whispered a Daisy to his neighbour, in a soft, low voice.

“He is weeping for a red rose,” said the Nightingale.

“For a red rose!” they cried; “how very ridiculous!” and the little Lizard, who was something of a cynic, laughed outright.

But the Nightingale understood the secret of the Student’s sorrow, and she sat silent in the oak-tree, and thought about the mystery of Love.

Suddenly she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She passed through the grove like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed across the garden.

In the centre of the grass-plot was standing a beautiful Rose-tree, and when she saw it, she flew over to it, and lit upon a spray.

“Give me a red rose,” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.” But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are white,” it answered; “as white as the foam of the sea, and whiter than the snow upon the mountain. But go to my brother who grows round the old sun-dial, and perhaps he will give you what you want.” So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing round the old sun-dial.

“Give me a red rose,” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.” But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are yellow,” it answered; “as yellow as the hair of the mermaiden who sits upon an amber throne, and yellower than the daffodil that blooms in the meadow before the mower comes with his scythe. But go to my brother who grows beneath the Student’s window, and perhaps he will give you what you want.”

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing beneath the Student’s window.

“Give me a red rose,” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.” But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are red,” it answered; “as red as the feet of the dove, and redder than the great fans of coral that wave and wave in the ocean cavern. But the winter has chilled my veins, and the frost has nipped my buds, and the storm has broken my branches, and I shall have no roses at all this year.”

“One red rose is all I want,” cried the Nightingale. “Only one red rose! Is there any way by which I can get it?” “There is a way,” answered the Tree; “but it is so terrible that I dare not tell it to you.” “Tell it to me,” said the
Nightingale, “I am not afraid.” “If you want a red rose,” said the Tree, “you must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart’s-blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine.” “Death is a great price to pay for a red rose,” cried the Nightingale, “and Life is very dear to all. It is pleasant to sit in the green wood, and to watch the Sun in his chariot of gold, and the Moon in her chariot of pearl. Sweet is the scent of the hawthorn, and sweet are the bluebells that hide in the valley, and the heather that blows on the hill. Yet Love is better than Life, and what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?” So she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She swept over the garden like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed through the grove.

The young Student was still lying on the grass, where she had left him, and the tears were not yet dry on his beautiful eyes.

“Be happy,” cried the Nightingale, “be happy; you shall have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with my own heart’s-blood.

All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover, for Love is wiser than Philosophy, though she is wise, and mightier than Power, though he is mighty. Flame-coloured are his wings, and coloured like flame is his body. His lips are sweet as honey, and his breath is like frankincense.” The Student looked up from the grass, and listened, but he could not understand what the Nightingale was saying to him, for he only knew the things that are written down in books.

But the Oak-tree understood, and felt sad, for he was very fond of the little nightingale who had built her nest in his branches.

“Sing me one last song,” he whispered; “I shall feel very lonely when you are gone.”

So the Nightingale sang to the Oak-tree, and her voice was like water bubbling from a silver jar.

When she had finished her song the Student got up, and pulled a note-book and a lead-pencil out of his pocket.

“She has form,” he said to himself, as he walked away through the grove, “that cannot be denied her; but has she got feeling? I am afraid not. In fact, she is like most artists; she is all style, without any sincerity. She would not sacrifice herself for others. She thinks
merely of music, and everybody knows that the arts are selfish. Still, it must be admitted that she has some beautiful notes in her voice. What a pity it is that they do not mean anything, or do any practical good.” And he went into his room, and lay down on his little pallet-bed, and began to think of his love; and, after a time, he fell asleep.

And when the Moon shone in the heavens the Nightingale flew to the Rosetree, and set her breast against the thorn. All night long she sang with her breast against the thorn, and the cold, crystal Moon leaned down and listened. All night long she sang, and the thorn went deeper and deeper into her breast, and her lifeblood ebbed away from her.

She sang first of the birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl. And on the topmost spray of the Rose-tree there blossomed a marvellous rose, petal followed petal, as song followed song. Pale was it, as first, as the mist that hangs over the river- pale as the feet of the morning, and silver as the wings of the dawn. As the shadow of a rose in a mirror of silver, as the shadow of a rose in a water-pool, so was the rose that blossomed on the topmost spray of the Tree.

But the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. “Press closer, little Nightingale,” cried the Tree, “or the Day will come before the rose is finished.” So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and louder and louder grew her song, for she sang of the birth of passion in the soul of a man and a maid.

And a delicate flush of pink came into the leaves of the rose, like the flush in the face of the bridegroom when he kisses the lips of the bride. But the thorn had not yet reached her heart, so the rose’s heart remained white, for only a Nightingale’s heart’s-blood can crimson the heart of a rose.

And the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. “Press closer, little Nightingale,” cried the Tree, “or the Day will come before the rose is finished.” So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and the thorn touched her heart, and a fierce pang of pain shot through her. Bitter, bitter was the pain, and wilder and wilder grew her song, for she sang of the Love that is perfected by Death, of the Love that dies not in the tomb.

And the marvellous rose became crimson, like the rose of the eastern sky.

Crimson was the girdle of petals, and crimson as a ruby was the heart.
But the Nightingale’s voice grew fainter, and her little wings began to beat, and a film came over her eyes. Fainter and fainter grew her song, and she felt something choking her in her throat.

Then she gave one last burst of music. The White Moon heard it, and she forgot the dawn, and lingered on in the sky. The red rose heard it and it trembled all over with ecstasy, and opened its petals to the cold morning air. Echo bore it to her purple cavern in the hills, and woke the sleeping shepherds from their dreams. It floated through the reeds of the river, and they carried its message to the sea.

“Look, look!” cried the Tree, “the rose is finished now”; but the Nightingale made no answer, for she was lying dead in the long grass, with the thorn in her heart.

And at noon the Student opened his window and looked out.

“Why, what a wonderful piece of luck!” he cried; “here is a red rose! I have never seen any rose like it in all my life. It is so beautiful that I am sure it has a long Latin name”; and he leaned down and plucked it.

Then he put on his hat, and ran up to the Professor’s house with the rose in his hand.

The daughter of the Professor was sitting in the doorway winding blue silk on a reel, and her little dog was lying at her feet.

“You said that you would dance with me if I brought you a red rose,” cried the Student. “Here is the reddest rose in all the world. You will wear it to-night next your heart, and as we dance together it will tell you how I love you.” But the girl frowned.

“I am afraid it will not go with my dress,” she answered; “and, besides, the Chamberlain’s nephew has sent me some real jewels, and everybody knows that jewels cost far more than flowers.”

“Well, upon my word, you are very ungrateful,” said the Student, angrily; and he threw the rose into the street, where it fell into the gutter, and a cartwheel went over it.

“Ungrateful!” said the girl. “I tell you what, you are very rude; and, after all, who are you? Only a Student. Why, I don’t believe you have even got silver buckles to your shoes as the Chamberlain’s nephew has”; and she got up from her chair and went into the house.

“What a silly thing Love is,” said the Student as he walked away. “It is not half as useful as Logic, for it does not prove anything, and it is always telling one of things that are not going to happen, and
making one believe things that are not true. In fact, it is quite unpractical, and, as in this age to be practical is everything, I shall go back to Philosophy and study Metaphysics.”

So he returned to his room and pulled out a great dusty book, and began to read.

THE END
1888

THE HAPPY PRINCE

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. The Happy Prince (1888) - A fairy tale about a swallow who falls out of love with a reed then lands on and falls in love with the stature of the Happy Prince.
THE HAPPY PRINCE

High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince.

He was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold; for eyes he had two bright sapphires, and a large red ruby glowed on his sword-hilt.

He was very much admired indeed. “He is as beautiful as a weathercock,” remarked one of the Town Councillors who wished to gain a reputation for having artistic tastes; “only not quite so useful,” he added, fearing lest people should think him unpractical, which he really was not.

“Why can’t you be like the Happy Prince?” asked a sensible mother of her little boy who was crying for the moon. “The Happy Prince never dreams of crying for anything.” “I am glad there is some one in the world who is quite happy,” muttered a disappointed man as he gazed at the wonderful statue.

“He looks just like an angel,” said the Charity Children as they came out of the cathedral in their bright scarlet cloaks, and their clean white pinafores.

“How do you know?” said the Mathematical Master, “you have never seen one.”

“Ah! but we have, in our dreams,” answered the children; and the Mathematical Master frowned and looked very severe, for he did not approve of children dreaming.

One night there flew over the city a little Swallow. His friends had gone away to Egypt six weeks before, but he had stayed behind, for he was in love with the most beautiful Reed. He had met her early in the spring as he was flying down the river after a big yellow moth, and had been so attracted by her slender waist that he had stopped to talk to her.

“Shall I love you?” said the Swallow, who liked to come to the point at once, and the Reed made him a low bow. So he flew round and round her, touching the water with his wings, and making silver ripples. This was his courtship, and it lasted all through the summer.

“It is a ridiculous attachment,” twittered the other Swallows, “she has no money, and far too many relations”; and indeed the river was quite full of Reeds.
Then, when the autumn came, they all flew away.

After they had gone he felt lonely, and began to tire of his lady-love. "She has no conversation," he said, "and I am afraid that she is a coquette, for she is always flirting with the wind." And certainly, whenever the wind blew, the Reed made the most graceful curtsies. "I admit that she is domestic," he continued, "but I love travelling, and my wife, consequently, should love travelling also."

"Will you come away with me?" he said finally to her; but the Reed shook her head, she was so attached to her home.

"You have been trifling with me," he cried. "I am off to the Pyramids. Goodbye!" and he flew away.

All day long he flew, and at night-time he arrived at the city. "Where shall I put up?" he said; "I hope the town has made preparations." Then he saw the statue on the tall column. "I will put up there," he cried; "it is a fine position with plenty of fresh air." So he alighted just between the feet of the Happy Prince.

"I have a golden bedroom he said softly to himself as he looked round, and he prepared to go to sleep; but just as he was putting his head under his wing a large drop of water fell on him. "What a curious thing!" he cried. "there is not a single cloud in the sky, the stars are quite clear and bright, and yet it is raining. The climate in the north of Europe is really dreadful. The Reed used to like the rain, but that was merely her selfishness." Then another drop fell.

"What is the use of a statue if it cannot keep the rain off?" he said; "I must look for a good chimney-pot," and he determined to fly away.

But before he had opened his wings, a third drop fell, and he looked up, and saw- Ah! what did he see?

The eyes of the Happy Prince were filled with tears, and tears were running down his golden cheeks. His face was so beautiful in the moonlight that the little Swallow was filled with pity.

"Who are you?" he said.

"I am the Happy Prince." "Why are you weeping then?" asked the Swallow; "you have quite drenched me." "When I was alive and had a human heart," answered the statue, "I did not know what tears were, for I lived in the Palace of Sans Souci, where sorrow is not allowed to enter. In the day time I played with my companions in the garden, and in the evening I led the dance in the Great Hall. Round the garden ran a very lofty wall, but I never cared to ask
what lay beyond it, everything about me was so beautiful. My courtiers called me the Happy Prince, and happy indeed I was, if pleasure be happiness. So I lived, and so I died. And now that I am dead they have set me up here so high that I can see all the ugliness and all the misery of my city, and though my heart is made of lead yet I cannot choose but weep.” “What, is he not solid gold?” said the Swallow to himself. He was too polite to make any personal remarks out loud.

“Far away,” continued the statue in a low musical voice, “far away in a little street there is a poor house. One of the windows is open, and through it I can see a woman seated at a table. Her face is thin and worn, and she has coarse red hands, all pricked by the needle, for she is a seamstress. She is embroidering passion-flowers on a satin gown for the loveliest of the Queen’s maids-of-honour to wear at the next Court-ball. In a bed in the corner of the room her little boy is lying ill. He has a fever, and is asking for oranges. His mother has nothing to give him but river water, so he is crying. Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow, will you not bring her the ruby out of my sword-hilt? My feet are fastened to this pedestal and I cannot move.” “I am waited for in Egypt,” said the Swallow. “My friends are flying up and down the Nile, and talking to the large lotus-flowers. Soon they will be going to sleep in the tomb of the great King. The King is there himself in his painted coffin. He is wrapped in yellow linen, and embalmed with spices. Round his neck is a chain of pale green jade, and his hands are like withered leaves.” “Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “will you not stay with me for one night, and be my messenger? The boy is so thirsty, and the mother so sad.” “I don’t think I like boys,” answered the Swallow. “Last summer, when I was staying on the river, there were two rude boys, the miller’s sons, who were always throwing stones at me. They never hit me, of course; we swallows fly far too well for that, and besides, I come of a family famous for its agility; but still, it was a mark of disrespect.”

But the Happy Prince looked so sad that the little Swallow was sorry. “It is very cold here,” he said; “but I will stay with you for one night, and be your messenger.” “Thank you, little Swallow,” said the Prince.

So the Swallow picked out the great ruby from the Prince’s sword, and flew away with it in his beak over the roofs of the town.

He passed by the cathedral tower, where the white marble angels were sculptured. He passed by the palace and heard the sound of dancing. A beautiful girl came out on the balcony with her lover.
“How wonderful the stars are,” he said to her, “and how wonderful is the power of love!” “I hope my dress will be ready in time for the State-ball,” she answered; “I have ordered passion-flowers to be embroidered on it; but the seamstresses are so lazy.” He passed over the river, and saw the lanterns hanging to the masts of the ships. He passed over the Ghetto, and saw the old Jews bargaining with each other, and weighing out money in copper scales. At last he came to the poor house and looked in. The boy was tossing feverishly on his bed, and the mother had fallen asleep, she was so tired. In he hopped, and laid the great ruby on the table beside the woman’s thimble. Then he flew gently round the bed, fanning the boy’s forehead with his wings. “How cool I feel,” said the boy, “I must be getting better”; and he sank into a delicious slumber.

Then the Swallow flew back to the Happy Prince, and told him what he had done. “It is curious,” he remarked, “but I feel quite warm now, although it is so cold.” “That is because you have done a good action,” said the Prince. And the little Swallow began to think, and then he fell asleep. Thinking always made him sleepy.

When day broke he flew down to the river and had a bath. “What a remarkable phenomenon,” said the Professor of Ornithology as he was passing over the bridge. “A swallow in winter!” And he wrote a long letter about it to the local newspaper. Every one quoted it, it was full of so many words that they could not understand.

“To-night I go to Egypt,” said the Swallow, and he was in high spirits at the prospect. He visited all the public monuments, and sat a long time on top of the church steeple. Wherever he went the Sparrows chirruped, and said to each other, “What a distinguished stranger!” so he enjoyed himself very much.

When the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince. “Have you any commissions for Egypt?” he cried. “I am just starting.” “Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “will you not stay with me one night longer?” “I am waited for in Egypt,” answered the Swallow. “To-morrow my friends will fly up to the Second Cataract. The river-horse couches there among the bulrushes, and on a great granite throne sits the God Memnon. All night long he watches the stars, and when the morning star shines he utters one cry of joy, and then he is silent. At noon the yellow lions come down to the water’s edge to drink. They have eyes like green beryls, and their roar is louder than the roar of the cataract.” “Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “far away across the city I see a young man in a garret. He is leaning over a
desk covered with papers, and in a tumbler by his side there is a bunch of withered violets. His hair is brown and crisp, and his lips are red as a pomegranate, and he has large and dreamy eyes. He is trying to finish a play for the Director of the Theatre, but he is too cold to write any more. There is no fire in the grate, and hunger has made him faint. “I will wait with you one night longer,” said the Swallow, who really had a good heart. “Shall I take him another ruby?” “Alas! I have no ruby now,” said the Prince; “my eyes are all that I have left.

They are made of rare sapphires, which were brought out of India a thousand years ago. Pluck out one of them and take it to him. He will sell it to the jeweller, and buy food and firewood, and finish his play.” “Dear Prince,” said the Swallow, “I cannot do that”; and he began to weep.

“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “do as I command you.” So the Swallow plucked out the Prince’s eye, and flew away to the student’s garret. It was easy enough to get in, as there was a hole in the roof. Through this he darted, and came into the room. The young man had his head buried in his hands, so he did not hear the flutter of the bird’s wings, and when he looked up he found the beautiful sapphire lying on the withered violets.

“I am beginning to be appreciated,” he cried; “this is from some great admirer. Now I can finish my play,” and he looked quite happy.

The next day the Swallow flew down to the harbour. He sat on the mast of a large vessel and watched the sailors hauling big chests out of the hold with ropes.

“Hear a-hoy!” they shouted as each chest came up. “I am going to Egypt!” cried the Swallow, but nobody minded, and when the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince.

“I am come to bid you good-bye,” he cried.

“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “will you not stay with me one night longer?” “It is winter,” answered the Swallow, “and the chill snow will soon be here. In Egypt the sun is warm on the green palm-trees, and the crocodiles lie in the mud and look lazily about them. My companions are building a nest in the Temple of Baalbec, and the pink and white doves are watching them, and cooing to each other. Dear Prince, I must leave you, but I will never forget you, and next spring I will bring you back beautiful jewels in place of those you have given away. The ruby
shall be redder than a red rose, and the sapphire shall be as blue as the great sea.”

“In the square below,” said the Happy Prince, “there stands a little match-girl.

She has let her matches fall in the gutter, and they are all spoiled. Her father will beat her if she does not bring home some money, and she is crying. She has no shoes or stockings, and her little head is bare. Pluck out my other eye, and give it to her, and her father will not beat her.” “I will stay with you one night longer,” said the Swallow, “but I cannot pluck out your eye. You would be quite blind then.” “Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “do as I command you.” So he plucked out the Prince’s other eye, and darted down with it. He swooped past the match-girl, and slipped the jewel into the palm of her hand.

“What a lovely bit of glass,” cried the little girl; and she ran home, laughing.

Then the Swallow came back to the Prince. “You are blind now,” he said, “so I will stay with you always.” “No, little Swallow,” said the poor Prince, “you must go away to Egypt.” “I will stay with you always,” said the Swallow, and he slept at the Prince’s feet.

All the next day he sat on the Prince’s shoulder, and told him stories of what he had seen in strange lands. He told him of the red ibises, who stand in long rows on the banks of the Nile, and catch gold fish in their beaks; of the Sphinx, who is as old as the world itself, and lives in the desert, and knows everything; of the merchants, who walk slowly by the side of their camels, and carry amber beads in their hands; of the King of the Mountains of the Moon, who is as black as ebony, and worships a large crystal; of the great green snake that sleeps in a palm-tree, and has twenty priests to feed it with honey-cakes; and of the pygmies who sail over a big lake on large flat leaves, and are always at war with the butterflies.

“Dear little Swallow,” said the Prince, “you tell me of marvellous things, but more marvellous than anything is the suffering of men and of women. There is no Mystery so great as Misery. Fly over my city, little Swallow, and tell me what you see there.” So the Swallow flew over the great city, and saw the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates. He flew into dark lanes, and saw the white faces of starving children looking out listlessly at the black streets. Under the archway of a bridge two little boys were lying in one another’s
arms to try and keep themselves warm. “How hungry we are!” they said. “You must not lie here,” shouted the Watchman, and they wandered out into the rain.

Then he flew back and told the Prince what he had seen.

“I am covered with fine gold,” said the Prince, “you must take it off, leaf by leaf, and give it to my poor; the living always think that gold can make them happy.”

Leaf after leaf of the fine gold the Swallow picked off, till the Happy Prince looked quite dull and grey. Leaf after leaf of the fine gold he brought to the poor, and the children’s faces grew rosier, and they laughed and played games in the street. “We have bread now!” they cried.

Then the snow came, and after the snow came the frost. The streets looked as if they were made of silver, they were so bright and glistening; long icicles like crystal daggers hung down from the eaves of the houses, everybody went about in furs, and the little boys wore scarlet caps and skated on the ice.

The poor little Swallow grew colder and colder, but he would not leave the Prince, he loved him too well. He picked up crumbs outside the baker’s door when the baker was not looking, and tried to keep himself warm by flapping his wings.

But at last he knew that he was going to die. He had just strength to fly up to the Prince’s shoulder once more. “Good-bye, dear Prince!” he murmured, “will you let me kiss your hand?” “I am glad that you are going to Egypt at last, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “you have stayed too long here; but you must kiss me on the lips, for I love you.” “It is not to Egypt that I am going,” said the Swallow. “I am going to the House of Death. Death is the brother of Sleep, is he not?” And he kissed the Happy Prince on the lips, and fell down dead at his feet.

At that moment a curious crack sounded inside the statue, as if something had broken. The fact is that the leaden heart had snapped right in two. It certainly was a dreadfully hard frost.

Early the next morning the Mayor was walking in the square below in company with the Town Councillors. As they passed the column he looked up at the statue: “Dear me! how shabby the Happy Prince looks!” he said.

“How shabby indeed!” cried the Town Councillors, who always agreed with the Mayor, and they went up to look at it.
"The ruby has fallen out of his sword, his eyes are gone, and he is golden no longer," said the Mayor. "in fact, he is little better than a beggar!" "Little better than a beggar," said the Town Councillors. "And here is actually a dead bird at his feet!" continued the Mayor. "We must really issue a proclamation that birds are not to be allowed to die here." And the town Clerk made a note of the suggestion.

So they pulled down the statue of the Happy Prince. "As he is no longer beautiful he is no longer useful," said the Art Professor at the University.

Then they melted the statue in a furnace, and the Mayor held a meeting of the Corporation to decide what was to be done with the metal. "We must have another statue, of course," he said, "and it shall be a statue of myself." "Of myself," said each of the Town Councillors, and they quarrelled. When I last heard of them they were quarrelling still.

"What a strange thing," said the overseer of the workmen at the foundry.

"This broken lead heart will not melt in the furnace. We must throw it away." So they threw it on a dust heap where the dead Swallow was also lying.

"Bring me the two most precious things in the city," said God to one of His Angels; and the Angel brought Him the leaden heart and the dead bird.

"You have rightly chosen," said God, "for in my garden of Paradise this little bird shall sing for evermore, and in my city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise me."

THE END
1881

THE GARDEN OF EROS

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Garden of Eros (1881) - One of Wilde's long poems, it deals with Venus and Adonis and is an example of Wilde's early attraction to artificial pastoral settings. Opening line: It is full summer now, the heart of June, ...
THE GARDEN OF EROS

It is full summer now, the heart of June, Not yet the sun-burnt reapers are a-stir Upon the upland meadow where too soon Rich autumn time, the season’s usurer, Will lend his hoarded gold to all the trees, And see his treasure scattered by the wild and spendthrift breeze.

Too soon indeed! yet here the daffodil, That love-child of the Spring, has lingered on To vex the rose with jealousy, and still The harebell spreads her azure pavilion, And like a strayed and wandering reveller Abandoned of its brothers, whom long since June’s messenger The missel-thrush has frighted from the glade, One pale narcissus loiters fearfully Close to a shadowy nook, where half afraid Of their own loveliness some violets lie That will not look the gold sun in the face For fear of too much splendour,- ah! methinks it is a place Which should be trodden by Persephone When wearied of the flowerless fields of Dis!

Or danced on by the lads of Arcady!
The hidden secret of eternal bliss Known to the Grecian here a man might find, Ah! you and I may find it now if Love and Sleep be kind.

There are the flowers which mourning Herakles Strewed on the tomb of Hylas, columbine, Its white doves all a-flutter where the breeze Kissed them too harshly, the small celandine, That yellow-kirtled chorister of eve, And lilac lady’s-smock,- but let them bloom alone and leave Yon spired holly-hock red-crocketed To sway its silent chimes, else must the bee, Its little bell-ringer, go seek instead Some other pleasance; the anemone That weeps at daybreak, like a silly girl Before her love, and hardly lets the butterflies unfurl Their painted wings beside it,- bid it pine In pale virginity; the winter snow Will suit it better than those lips of thine Whose fires would but scorch it, rather go And pluck that amorous flower which blooms alone, Fed by the pander wind with dust of kisses not its own.

The trumpet-months of red convolvulus So dear to maidens, creamery meadow-sweet Whiter than Juno’s throat and odorous As all Arabia, hyacinths the feet Of Huntress Dian would be loath to mar For any dappled fawn,- pluck these, and those fond flowers which are Fairer than what Queen Venus trod upon Beneath the pines of Ida, eucharis, That morning star which does not dread the
sun, And budding marjoram which but to kiss Would sweeten
Cytheraea's lips and make Adonis jealous,- these for thy head,- and
for thy girdle take Yon curving spray of purple dematis Whose
gorgeous dye outflames the Tyrian King, And fox-gloves with their
nodding chalices, But that one narciss which the startled Spring Let
from her kirtle fall when first she heard In her own woods the wild
tempestuous song of summer's bird, Ah! leave it for a subtle
memory Of those sweet tremulous days of rain and sun, When
April laughed between her tears to see The early primrose with shy
footsteps run From the gnarled oak-tree roots till all the wold, Spite
of its brown and trampled leaves, grew bright with shimmering
gold.

Nay, pluck it too, it is not half so sweet As thou thyself, my soul's
idolatry!
And when thou art a-wearied at thy feet Shall oxlips weave their
brightest tapestry, For thee the woodbine shall forget its pride And
veil its tangled whorls, and thou shalt walk on daisies pied.

And I will cut a reed by yonder spring And make the wood-gods
jealous, and old Pan Wonder what young intruder dares to sing In
these still haunts, where never foot of man Should tread at evening,
lest he chance to spy The marble limbs of Artemis and all her
company.

And I will tell you why the jacinth wears Such dread embroidery
of dolorous moan, And why the hapless nightingale forbears To
sing her song at noon, but weeps alone When the fleet swallow
sleeps, and rich men feast, And why the laurel trembles when she
sees the lightening east.

And I will sing how sad Proserpina Unto a grave and gloomy Lord
was wed, And lure the silver-breasted Helena Back from the lotus
meadows of the dead, So shalt thou see that awful loveliness For
which two mighty Hosts met fearfully in war's abyss!

And then I'll pipe to thee that Grecian tale How Cynthia loves the
lad Endymion, And hidden in a gray and misty veil Hies to the
cliffs of Latmos, once the Sun Leaps from his ocean bed, in fruitless
chase Of those pale flying feet which fade away in his embrace.

And if my flute can breathe sweet melody, We may behold Her
face who long ago Dwelt among men by the Aegean sea, And
whose sad house with pillaged portico And friezeless wall and
columns toppled down Looms o'er the ruins of that fair and violet-
cinctured town.
Spirit of Beauty! tarry still a-while, They are not dead, thine ancient votaries, Some few there are to whom thy radiant smile Is better than a thousand victories, Though all the nobly slain of Waterloo Rise up in wrath against them! tarry still, there are a few, Who for thy sake would give their manlihood And consecrate their being, I at least Have done so, made thy lips my daily food, And in thy temples found a goodlier feast Than this starved age can give me, spite of all its new-found creeds so skeptical and so dogmatical.

Here not Cephissos, not Ilissos flows, The woods of white Colonos are not here, On our bleak hills the olive never blows, No simple priest conducts his lowing steer Up the steep marble way, nor through the town Do laughing maidens bear to thee the crocus-flowered gown.

Yet tarry! for the boy who loved thee best, Whose very name should be a memory To make thee linger, sleeps in silent rest Beneath the Roman walls, and melody Still mourns her sweetest lyre, none can play The lute of Adonais, with his lips Song passed away.

Nay, when Keats died the Muses still had left One silver voice to sing his threnody, But ah! too soon of it we were bereft When on that riven night and stormy sea Panthea claimed her singer as her own, And slew the mouth that praised her; since which time we walk alone, Save for that fiery heart, that morning star Of re-arisen England, whose clear eye Saw from our tottering throne and waste of war The grand Greek limbs of young Democracy Rise mightily like Hesperus and bring The great Republic! him at least thy love hath taught to sing, And he hath been thee at Thessaly, And seen white Atalanta fleet of foot In passionless and fierce virginity Hunting the tusked boar, his honeyed lute Hath pierced the cavern of the hollow hill, And Venus laughs to the one knee will bow before her still.

And he hath kissed the one of Proserpine, And sung the Galilaean’s requiem, That wounded forehead dashed with blood and wine He hath discrowned, the Ancient Gods in him Have found their last, most ardent worshipper, And the Sign grows gray and dim before its conqueror Spirit of Beauty! tarry with us still, It is not quenched the torch of poesy, The star that shook above the Eastern hill Holds unassailed its argent armory From all the gathering gloom and fretful fight O tarry with us still! for through the long and common night, Morris, our sweet and simple Chaucer’s child, dear heritor of Spenser’s tuneful reed, With soft and sylvan pipe has oft beguiled The weary soul of man in
troubulous need, And from the far and flowerless fields of ice Has brought fair flowers meet to make an earthly paradise.

We know them all, Gudrun the strong man’s bride, Aslaug and Olafson we know them all, How giant Grettir fought and Sigurd died, And what enchantment held the king in thrall When lonely Brynhild wrestled with the powers That war against all passion, ah! how oft through summer hours, Long listless summer hours when the noon Being enamored of a damask rose Forgets to journey westward, till the moon The pale usurper of its tribute grows From a thin sickle to a silver shield And chides its loitering car- how oft, in some cool grassy field Far from the cricket-ground and noisy eight At Bagley, where the rustling bluebells come Almost before the blackbird finds a mate And overstay the swallow, and the hum Of many murmuring bees flits through the leaves, Have I lain poring on the dreamy tales his fancy weaves, And through their unreal woes and mimic pain Wept for myself, and so was purified, And in their simple mirth grew glad again; For as I sailed upon that pictured tide The strength and splendour of the storm was mine Without the storm’s red ruin, for the singer is divine.

The little laugh of water falling down Is not so musical, the clammy gold Close hoarded in the tiny waxen town Has less of sweetness in it, and the old Half-withered reeds that waved in Arcady Touched by his lips break forth again to fresher harmony.

Spirit of Beauty tarry yet a-while! Although the cheating merchants of the mart With iron roads profane our lovely isle, And break on whirring wheels the limbs of Art, Ay! though the crowded factories beget The blind-worm Ignorance that slays the soul, O tarry yet!

For One at least there is,- He bears his name From Dante and the seraph Gabriel,Whose double laurels burn with deathless flame To light thine altar; He too loves thee well Who saw old Merlin lured in Vivien’s snare, And the white feet of angels coming down the golden stair, Loves thee so well, that all the world for him A gorgeous-colored vestiture must wear, And Sorrow take a purple diadem, Or else be no more Sorrow, and Despair Gild its own thorns, and Pain, like Adon, be Even in anguish beautiful;- such is the empery Which painters hold, and such the heritage This gentle, solemn Spirit doth possess, Being a better mirror of his age In all his pity, love, and weariness, Than those who can but copy
common things, And leave the soul unpainted with its mighty questionings.

But they are few, and all romance has flown, And men can prophesy about the sun, And lecture on his arrows- how, alone, Through a waste void the soulless atoms run, How from each tree its weeping nymph has fled, And that no more ‘mid English reeds a Naiad shows her head.

Methinks these new actaeons boast too soon That they have spied on beauty; what if we Have analysed the rainbow, robbed the moon Of her most ancient, chastest mystery, Shall I, the last Endymion, lose all hope Because rude eyes peer at my mistress through a telescope!

What profit if this scientific age Burst through our gates with all its retinue Of modern miracles! Can it assuage One lover’s breaking heart? what can it do To make one life more beautiful, one day More god-like in its period? but now the Age of Clay Returns in horrid cycle, and the earth Hath borne again a noisy progeny Of ignorant Titans, whose ungodly birth Hurls them against the august hierarchy Which sat upon Olympus, to the Dust They have appealed, and to that barren arbiter they must Repair for judgment, let them, if they can, From Natural Warfare and insensate Chance, Create the new ideal rule for man!

Methinks that was not my inheritance; For I was nurtured otherwise, my soul Passes from higher heights of life to a more supreme goal.

Lo! while we spake the earth did turn away Her visage from the God, and Hecate’s boat Rose silver-laden, till the jealous day Blew all its torches out: I did not note The waning hours, to young Endymions Time’s palsied fingers count in vain his rosary of suns!

Mark how the yellow iris wearily Leans back its throat, as though it would be kissed By its false chamberer, the dragon-fly, Who, like a blue vein on a girl’s white wrist, Sleeps on that snowy primrose of the night, Which ‘gins to flush with crimson shame, and die beneath the light.

Come let us go, against the pallid shield Of the wan sky the almond blossoms gleam, The corn-crake nested in the unmown field Answers its mate, across the misty stream On fitful wing the startled curlews fly, And in his sedgy bed the lark, for joy that Day is nigh, Scatters the pearled dew from off the grass, In tremulous ecstasy to greet the sun, Who soon in gilded panoply will pass Forth from yon orange-curtained pavilion Hung in the burning
east, see, the red rim O’ertops the expectant hills! it is the God! for
love of him Already the shrill lark is out of sight, Flooding with
waves of song this silent dell, Ah! there is something more in that
bird’s flight Than could be tested in a crucible! But the air freshens,
let us go,- why soon The woodmen will be here; how we have
lived this night of June!

THE END
1881

THE FOURTH MOVEMENT

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Fourth Movement (1881) - A collection of Wilde’s shorter poems which includes At Verona, Apologia, Quia Multum Amavi, Silentum Amoris, Her Voice, my Voice, and Taedium Vitae.
IMPRESSION Le Reveillon

The sky is laced with fitful red, The circling mists and shadows flee, The dawn is rising from the sea, Like a white lady from her bed.

And jagged brazen arrows fall Athwart the feathers of the night, And a long wave of yellow light Breaks silently on tower and hall, And spreading wide across the wold Wakes into flight some fluttering bird, And all the chestnut tops are stirred, And all the branches streaked with gold.

AT VERONA

How steep the stairs within Kings’ houses are For exile-wearied feet as mine to tread, And O how salt and bitter is the bread Which falls from this Hound’s table,- better far That I had died in the red ways of war, Or that the gate of Florence bare my head, Than to live thus, by all things comraded Which seek the essence of my soul to mar.

“Curse God and die: what better hope than this? He hath forgotten thee in all the bliss Of his gold city, and eternal day” Nay peace: behind my prison’s blinded bars I do possess what none can take away, My love, and all the glory of the stars.

APOLOGIA

Is it thy will that I should wax and wane, Barter my cloth of gold for hodden gray, And at thy pleasure weave that web of pain Whose brightest threads are each a wasted day?

Is it thy will- Love that I love so well That my Soul’s House should be a tortured spot Wherein, like evil paramours, must dwell The quenchless flame, the worm that dieth not?

Nay, if it be thy will I shall endure, And sell ambition at the common mart, And let dull failure be my vestiture, And sorrow dig its grave within my heart.

Perchance it may be better so- at least I have not made my heart a heart of stone, Nor starved my boyhood of its goodly feast, Nor walked where Beauty is a thing unknown.

Many a man hath done so; sought to fence In straitened bonds the soul that should be free, Trodden the dusty road of common sense, While all the forest sang of liberty, Not marking how the spotted
hawk in flight Passed on wide pinion through the lofty air, To where the steep untrodden mountain height Caught the last tresses of the Sun God’s hair.

Or how the little flower he trod upon, The daisy, that white-feathered shield of gold, Followed with wistful eyes the wandering sun Content if once its leaves were aureoled.

But surely it is something to have been The best beloved for a little while, To have walked hand in hand with Love, and seen His purple wings flit once across thy smile.

Ay! though the gorged asp of passion feed On my boy’s heart, yet have I burst the bars, Stood face to face with Beauty, known indeed The Love which moves the Sun and all the stars!

QUIA MULTUM AMAVI
Dear heart I think the young impassioned priest When first he takes from out the hidden shrine His God imprisoned in the Eucharist, And eats the Bread, and drinks the Dreadful Wine, Feels not such awful wonder as I felt When first my smitten eyes beat full on thee, And all night long before thy feet I knelt Till thou wert wearied of Idolatry.

Ah! had’st thou liked me less and loved me more, Through all those summer days of joy and rain, I had not now been sorrow’s heir, Or stood a lackey in the House of Pain.

Yet, though remorse, youth’s white-faced seneschal Tread on my heels with all his retinue, I am most glad I loved thee—think of all The sums that go to make one speedwell blue!

SILENTIUM AMORIS
As oftentimes the too resplendent sun Hurries the pallid and reluctant moon Back to her sombre cave, ere she hath won A single ballad from the nightingale, So doth thy Beauty make my lips to fail, And all my sweetest singing out of tune.

And as at dawn across the level mead On wings impetuous some wind will come, And with its too harsh kisses break the reed Which was its only instrument of song, So my too stormy passions work me wrong, And for excess of Love my Love is dumb.

But surely unto thee mine eyes did show Why I am silent, and my lute unstrung; Else it were better we should part, and go, Thou to some lips of sweeter melody, And I to nurse the barren memory Of unkissed kisses, and songs never sung.
HER VOICE
The wild bee reels from bough to bough With his furry coat and his gauzy wing.

Now in a lily-cup, and now Setting a jacinth bell a-swing, In his wandering; Sit closer love: it was here I trow I made that vow, Swore that two lives should be like one As long as the sea-gull loved the sea, As long as the sunflower sought the sun It shall be, I said, for eternity 'Twixt you and me!

Dear friend, those times are over and done, Love's web is spun.

Look upward where the poplar trees Sway and sway in the summer air, Here in the valley never a breeze Scatters the thistledowns, but there Great winds blow fair From the mighty murmuring mystical seas, And the wave-lashed leas.

Look upward where the white gull screams What does it see that we do not see? Is that a star? or the lamp that gleams On some outward voyaging argosy, Ah! can it be We have lived our lives in land of dreams!

How sad it seems.

Sweet, there is nothing left to say But this, that love is never lost.

Keen winter stabs the breasts of May Whose crimson roses burst his frost, Ships tempest-tossed Will find a harbour in some bay, And so we may.

And there is nothing left to do But to kiss once again, and part, Nay, there is nothing we should rue, I have my beauty,- you your Art.

Nay, do not start, One world was not enough for two Like me and you.

MY VOICE
Within this restless, hurried, modern world We took our heart's full pleasure: You and I, And now the white sails of our ship are furled, And spent the lading of our argosy.

Wherefore my cheeks before their time are wan, For very weeping is my gladness fled Sorrow hath paled my lip's vermilion, And Ruin draws the curtains of my bed.

But all this crowded life has been to thee No more than lyre, or lute, or subtle spell Of viols, or the music of the sea That sleeps, a mimic echo, in the shell.
TAEDIUM VITAE
To stab my youth with desperate knife, to wear This paltry age’s gaudy livery, To let each base hand filch my treasury, To mesh my soul within a woman’s hair, And be mere Fortune’s lackeyed groom,- I swear, I love it not! these things are less to me Than the thin foam that frets upon the sea, Less than the thistle-down of summer air Which hath no seed: better to stand aloof Far from these slanderous fools who mock my life Knowing me not, better the lowliest roof Fit for the meanest hind to sojourn in, Than to go back to that hoarse cave of strife Where my white soul first kissed the mouth of sin.

THE END
THE BURDEN OF ITYS

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Burden of Itys (1881) - This poem, Wilde’s favorite, expresses his melancholy at having no pagan world of deities in which to believe. Opening line: This English Thames is holier far than Rome, ...
THE BURDEN OF ITYS

This English Thames is holier far than Rome, Those harebells like a sudden flush of sea Breaking across the woodland, with the foam Of meadow-sweet and white anemone To fleck their blue waves,- God is likelier there, Than hidden in that crystal-hearted star the pale monks bear!

Those violet-gleaming butterflies that take Yon creamy lily for their pavilion Are monsignores, and where the rushes shake A lazy pike lies basking in the sun His eyes half-shut,- He is some mitred old Bishop in partibus! look at those gaudy scales all green and gold!

The wind the restless prisoner of the trees Does well for Palaestina, one would say The mighty master's hands were on the keys Of the Maria organ, which they play When early on some sapphire Easter morn In a high litter red as blood or sin the Pope is borne From his dark house out to the balcony Above the bronze gates and the crowded square, Whose very fountains seem for ecstasy To toss their silver lances in the air, And stretching out weak hands to East and West In vain sends peace to peaceless lands, to restless nations rest.

Is not yon lingering orange afterglow That stays to vex moon more fair than all Rome's lordliest pageants! strange, a year ago I knelt before some crimson Cardinal Who bare the Host across the Esquiline, And now- those common poppies in the wheat seem twice as fine.

The blue-green beanfields yonder, tremulous With the last shower, sweeter perfume bring Through this cool evening than the odorous Flame-jewelled censers the young deacons swing, When the gray priest unlocks the curtained shrine, And makes God's body from the common fruit of corn and vine.

Poor Fra Giovanni bawling at the mass Were out of tune now, for a small brown bird Sings overhead, and through the long cool grass I see that throbbing throat which once I heard On starlit hills of flower-starred Arcady, Once where the white and crescent sand of Salamis meets the sea.

Sweet is the swallow twittering on the eaves At daybreak, when the mower whets his scythe, And stock-doves murmur, and the milkmaid leaves Her little lonely bed, and carols blithe To see the heavy-lowering cattle wait Stretching their huge and dripping mouths across the farmyard gate.
And sweet the hops upon the Kentish leas, And sweet the wind
that lifts the new-mown hay, And sweet the fretful swarms of
grumbling bees That round and round the linden blossoms play;
And sweet the heifer breathing in the stall, And the green bursting
figs that hang upon the red-brick wall.

And sweet to hear the cuckoo mock the spring While the last violet
loiterers by the well, And sweet to hear the shepherd Daphnis sing
The song of Linus through a sunny dell Of warm Arcadia where
the corn is gold And the slight lithe-limbed reapers dance about
the wattled fold And sweet with young Lycoris to recline In some
Illyrian valley far away, Where canopied on herbs amaracine We
too might waste the summer-tranced day Matching our reeds in
sportive rivalry, While far beneath us frets the troubled purple of
the sea.

But sweeter far if silver-sandalled foot Of some long-hidden God
should ever tread The Nuneham meadows, if with reeded flute
Pressed to his lips some Faun might raise his head By the green
water-flags, ah! sweet indeed To see the heavenly herdsman call
his white-fleeced flock to feed.

Then sing to me thou tuneful chorister, Though what thou sing’st
be thine own requiem!

Tell me thy tale thou hapless chronicler Of thine own tragedies! do
not contemn These unfamiliar haunts, this English field, For many
a lovely coronal our northern isle can yield, Which Grecian
meadows know not, many a rose, Which all day long in vales
Aeolian A lad might seek in vain for, overgrows Our hedges like a
wanton courtesan Unthrifty of her beauty, lilies too Ilissus never
mirrored star our streams, and cockles blue Dot the green wheat
which, though they are the signs For swallows going south, would
never spread Their azure tints between the Attic vines; Even that
little weed of ragged red, Which bids the robin pipe, in Arcady
Would be a trespasser, and many an unsung elegy.

Sleeps in the reeds that fringe our winding Thames Which to
awake were sweeter ravishment Than ever Syrinx wept for,
diadems Of brown be-studded orchids which were meant For
Cytheraea’s brows are hidden here Unknown to Cytheraea, and by
yonder pasturing steer There is a tiny yellow daffodil, The
butterfly can see it from afar, Although one summer evening’s dew
could fill Its little cup twice over ere the star Had called the lazy
shepherd to his fold And be no prodigal, each leaf is flecked with
spotted gold As if Jove’s gorgeous leman Danae Hot from his
gilded arms had stooped to kiss The trembling petals, or young
Mercury Low-flying to the dusky ford of Dis Had with one feather of his pinions Just brushed them! the slight stem which bears the burdens of its suns Is hardly thicker than the gossamer, Or poor Arachne's silver tapestry. Men say it bloomed upon the sepulchre Of One I sometime worshipped, but to me It seems to bring diviner memories Of faun-loved Heliconian glades and blue nymph-haunted seas, Of an untrodden vale at Tempe where On the clear river's marge Narcissus lies, The tangle of the forest in his hair, The silence of the woodland in his eyes, Wooing that drifting imagery which is No sooner kissed than broken, memories of Salmacis.

Who is not boy or girl and yet is both, Fed by two fires and unsatisfied Through their excess, each passion being loath For love's own sake to leave the other's side, Yet killing love by staying, memories Of Oreads peeping through the leaves of silent moonlit trees.

Of lonely Ariadne on the wharf At Naxos, when she saw the treacherous crew Far out at sea, and waved her crimson scarf And called the false Theseus back again nor knew That Dionysos on an amber pard Was close behind her: memories of what Maeonia's bard With sightless eyes beheld, the wall of Troy, Queen Helen lying in the carven room, And at her side an amorous red-lipped boy Trimming with dainty hand his helmet's plume, And far away the moil, the shout, the groan, As Hector shielded off the spear and Ajax hurled the stone; Of winged Perseus with his flawless sword Cleaving the snaky tresses of the witch, And all those tales imperishably stored In little Grecian urns, freightage more rich Than any gaudy galleon of Spain Bare from the Indies ever! these at least bring back again, For well I know they are not dead at all, The ancient Gods of Grecian poesy, They are asleep, and when they hear thee call Will wake and think 'tis very Thessaly, This Thames the Daulian waters, this cool glade The yellow-irised mead where once young Itys laughed and played.

If it was thou dear jasmine-cradled bird Who from the leafy stillness of thy throne Sang to the wondrous boy, until he heard The horn of Atalanta faintly blown Across the Cumnor hills, and wandering Through Bagley wood at evening found the Attic poet's spring, Ah! tiny sober-suited advocate That pleadiest for the moon against the day!

If thou didst make the shepherd seek his mate On that sweet questing, when Proserpina Forgot it was not Sicily and leant Across the mossy Sandford stile in ravished wonderment, Light-winged and bright-eyed miracle of the wood!
If ever thou didst soothe with melody One of that little clan, that brotherhood Which loved the morning-star of Tuscany More than the perfect sun of Raphael, And is immortal, sing to me! for I too love thee well, Sing on! sing on! let the dull world grow young, Let elemental things take form again, And the old shapes of Beauty walk among The simple garths and open crofts, as when The son of Leto bare the willow rod, And the soft sheep and shaggy goats followed the boyish God.

Sing on! sing on! and Bacchus will be here Astride upon his gorgeous Indian throne, And over whimpering tigers shake the spear With yellow ivy crowned and gummy cone, While at his side the wanton Bassarid Will throw the lion by the mane and catch the mountain kid!

Sing on! and I will wear the leopard skin, And steal the mooned wings of Ashtaroth, Upon whose icy chariot we could win Cithaeron in an hour e'er the froth Has overbrimmed the wine-vat or the Faun Ceased from the treading! ay, before the flickering lamp of dawn Has scared the hooting owlet to its nest, And warned the bat to close its filmy vans, Some Maenad girl with vine-leaves on her breast Will filch their beechnuts from the sleeping Pans So softly that the little nested thrush Will never wake, and then with shrilly laugh and leap will rush Down the green valley where the fallen dew Lies thick beneath the elm and count her store, Till the brown Satyrs in a jolly crew Trample the loosestrife down along the shore, And where their horned master sits in state Bring strawberries and bloomy plums upon a wicker crate!

Sing on! and soon with passion-wearied face Through the cool leaves Apollo's lad will come, The Tyrian prince his bristled boar will chase Adown the chestnut copses all a-bloom, And ivory-limbed, gray-eyed, with look of pride, After yon velvet-coated deer the virgin maid will ride.

Sing on! and I the dying boy will, see Stain with his purple blood the waxen bell That overweighs the jacinth, and to me The wretched Cyprian her woe will tell, And I will kiss her mouth and streaming eyes, And lead her to the myrtle-hidden grove where Adon lies!

Cry out aloud on Itys! memory That foster-brother of remorse and pain Drops poison in mine ear- O to be free, To burn one's old ships! and to launch again Into the white-plumed battle of the waves And fight old Proteus for the spoil of coral-flowered caves? O for Medea with her poppied spell!
O for the secret of the Colchian shrine!
O for one leaf of that pale asphodel
Which binds the tired brows of Proserpine, And sheds such wondrous dews at eve that she
Dreams of the fields of Enna, by the far Sicilian sea, Where oft the golden-girdled bee she chased
From lily to lily on the level mead,
Ere yet her sombre Lord had bid her taste
The deadly fruit of that pomegranate seed, Ere the black steeds had harried her away
Down to the faint and flowerless land, the sick and sunless day.

O for one midnight and as paramour
The Venus of the little Melian farm!
O that some antique statue for one hour
Might wake to passion,
and that I could charm
The Dawn at Florence from its dumb despair,
Mix with those mighty limbs and make that giant breast my lair!

Sing on! sing on! I would be drunk with life, Drunk with the trampled vintage of my youth,
I would forget the wearying wasted strife,
The riven vale, the Gorgon eyes of Truth, The prayerless vigil and the cry for prayer,
The barren gifts, the lifted arms, the dull insensate air!

Sing on! sing on! O feathered Niobe, Thou canst make sorrow beautiful, and steal
From joy its sweetest music, not as we Who by dead voiceless silence strive to heal
Our too untented wounds, and do but keep Pain barricaded in our hearts, and murder pillowed sleep.

Sing louder yet, why must I still behold
The wan white face of that deserted Christ,
Whose smitten lips my lips so oft have kissed, And now in mute and marble misery
Sirs in His lone dishonored House and weeps, perchance for me.

O memory cast down thy wreathed shell!
Break thy hoarse lute O sad Melpomene!
O sorrow, sorrow keep thy cloistered cell
Nor dim with tears this limpid Castaly!
Cease, cease, sad bird, thou dost the forest wrong
To vex its sylvan quiet with such wild impassioned song!

Cease, cease, or if ‘tis anguish to be dumb
Take from the pastoral thrush her simpler air, Whose jocund carelessness doth more become
This English woodland than thy keen despair, Ah! cease
And let the north wind bear thy lay Back to the rocky hills of Thrace, the stormy Daulian bay.
A moment more, the startled leaves had stirred, Endymion would have passed across the mead Moonstruck with love, and this still Thames had heard Pan splash and paddle groping for some reed To lure from her blue cave that Naiad maid Who for such piping listens half in joy and half afraid.

A moment more, the waking dove had cooed, The silver daughter of the silver sea With the fond gyves of clinging hands had wooed Her wanton from the chase, the Dryope Had thrust aside the branches of her oak To see the he lusty gold-haired lad rein in his snorting yoke.

A moment more, the trees had stooped to kiss Pale Daphne just awakening from the swoon Of tremulous laurels, lonely Salmacis Had bared his barren beauty to the moon, And through the vale with sad voluptuous smile Antinous had wandered, the red lotus of the Nile.

Down leaning the from his black and clustering hair To shade those slumberous eyelids’ caverned bliss, Or else on yonder grassy slope with bare High-tuniced limbs unravished Artemis Had bade her hounds give tongue, and roused the deer From his green ambushcade with shrill hallo and pricking spear.

Lie still, lie still, O passionate heart, lie still! O Melancholy, fold thy raven wing! O sobbing Dryad, from thy hollow hill Come not with such desponded answering! No more thou winged Marsyas complain, Apollo loveth not to hear such troubled songs of pain!

It was a dream, the glade is tenantless, No soft Ionian laughter moves the air, The Thames creeps on in sluggish leadenness, And from the copse left desolate and bare Fled is young Bacchus with his revelry, Yet still from Nuneham wood there comes that thrilling melody So sad, that one might think a human heart Brake in each separate note, a quality Which music sometimes has, being the Art Which is most nigh to tears and memory, Poor mourning Philomel, what dost thou fear? Thy sister doth not haunt these fields, Pandion is not here, Here is no cruel Lord with murderous blade, No woven web of bloody heraldries, But mossy dells for roving comrades made, Warm valleys where the tired student lies With half-shut book, and many a winding walk Where rustic lovers stray at eve in happy simple talk.

The harmless rabbit gambols with its young Across the trampled towing-path, where late A troop of laughing boys in jostling throng Cheered with their noisy cries the racing eight; The gossamer, with
ravelled silver threads, Works at its little loom, and from the dusky red-caved sheds Of the lone Farm a flickering light shines out Where the swinked shepherd drives his bleating flock, Back to their wattled sheep-cotes, a faint shout Comes from some Oxford boat at Sandford lock, And starts the moor-hen from the sedgy rill, And the dim lengthening shadows flit like swallows up the hill.

The heron passes homeward to the mere, The blue mist creeps among the shivering trees, Gold world by world the silent stars appear, And like a blossom blown before the breeze, A white moon drifts across the shimmering sky, Mute arbitress of all thy sad, thy rapturous threnody.

She does not heed thee, wherefore should she heed, She knows Endymion is not far away, ‘Tis I, ‘tis I, whose soul is as the reed Which has no message of its own to play, So pipes another’s bidding, it is I, Drifting with every wind on the wide sea of misery.

Ah! the brown bird has ceased: one exquisite trill About the sombre woodland seems to cling, Dying in music, else the air is still, So still that one might hear the bat’s small wing Wander and wheel above the pines, or tell Each tiny dewdrop dripping from the bluebell’s brimming cell.

And far across the lengthening wold, Across the willowy flats and thicket brown, Magdalen’s tall tower tipped with tremulous gold Marks the long High Street of the little town, And warns me to return; I must not wait, Hark! ‘tis the curfew booming from the bell of Christ Church Gate.

THE END
1898

THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Ballad of Reading Gaol (1898) - One of Wilde's best-known poems, it is drawn from his experiences in prison. Opening lines: He did not wear his scarlet coat, / For blood and wine are red, ...
He did not wear his scarlet coat, For blood and wine are red, And
blood and wine were on his hands When they found him with the
dead, The poor dead woman whom he loved, And murdered in
her bed.

He walked amongst the Trial Men In a suit of shabby gray; A
 cricket cap was on his head, And his step seemed light and gay;
But I never saw a man who looked So wistfully at the day.

I never saw a man who looked With such a wistful eye Upon that
little tent of blue Which prisoners call the sky, And at every
drifting cloud that went With sails of silver by.

I walked, with other souls in pain, Within another ring, And was
wondering if the man had done A great or little thing, When a
voice behind me whispered low, “That fellow’s got to swing.”

Dear Christ! the very prison walls Suddenly seemed to reel, And
the sky above my head became Like a casque of scorching steel;
And, though I was a soul in pain, My pain I could not feel.
I only knew what haunted thought Quickened his step, and why
He looked upon the garish day With such a wistful eye; The man
had killed the thing he loved, And so he had to die.

Yet each man kills the thing he loves, By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look, Some with a flattering word, The
coward does it with a kiss, The brave man with a sword!

Some kill their love when they are young, And some when they are
old; Some strangle with the hands of Lust, Some with the hands of
Gold: The kindest use a knife, because The dead so soon grow cold.

Some love too little, some too long, Some sell, and others buy;
Some do the deed with many tears, And some without a sigh: For
each man kills the thing he loves, Yet each man does not die.

He does not die a death of shame On a day of dark disgrace, Nor
have a noose about his neck, Nor a cloth upon his face, Nor drop
feet foremost through the floor Into an empty space.

He does not sit with silent men Who watch him night and day;
Who watch him when he tries to weep, And when he tries to pray;
Who watch him lest himself should rob The prison of its prey.

He does not wake at dawn to see Dread figures throng his room,
The shivering Chaplain robed in white, The Sheriff stern with
gloom, And the Governor all in shiny black, With the yellow face
of Doom.
He does not rise in piteous haste To put on convict-clothes, While some coarse-mouthed Doctor gloats, and notes Each new and nerve-twitched pose, Fingering a watch whose little ticks Are like horrible hammer-blows.

He does not feel that sickening thirst That sands one's throat, before The hangman with his gardener’s gloves Comes through the padded door, And binds one with three leathern thongs, That the throat may thirst no more.

He does not bend his head to hear The Burial Office read, Nor, while the anguish of his soul Tells him he is not dead, Cross his own coffin, as he moves Into the hideous shed.

He does not stare upon the air Through a little roof of glass: He does not pray with lips of clay For his agony to pass; Nor feel upon his shuddering cheek The kiss of Caiaphas.

II Six weeks the guardsman walked the yard, In the suit of shabby gray: His cricket cap was on his head, And his step was light and gay, But I never saw a man who looked So wistfully at the day.

I never saw a man who looked With such a wistful eye Upon that little tent of blue Which prisoners call the sky, And at every wandering cloud that trailed Its ravelled fleeces by.

He did not wring his hands, as do Those witless men who dare To try to rear the changeling Hope In the cave of black Despair: He only looked upon the sun, And drank the morning air.

He did not wring his hands nor weep, Nor did he peek or pine, But he drank the air as though it held Some healthful anodyne; With open mouth he drank the sun As though it had been wine!

And I and all the souls in pain, Who tramped the other ring, Forgot if we ourselves had done A great or little thing, And watched with gaze of dull amaze The man who had to swing.

For strange it was to see him pass With a step so light and gay, And strange it was to see him look So wistfully at the day, And strange it was to think that he Had such a debt to pay.

The oak and elm have pleasant leaves That in the spring-time shoot: But grim to see is the gallows-tree, With its alder-bitten root, And, green or dry, a man must die Before it bears its fruit!

The loftiest place is the seat of grace For which all worldlings try: But who would stand in hempen band Upon a scaffold high, And through a murder'ee's collar take His last look at the sky?
It is sweet to dance to violins When Love and Life are fair: To
dance to flutes, to dance to lutes Is delicate and rare: But it is not
sweet with nimble feet To dance upon the air!
So with curious eyes and sick surmise We watched him day by
day, And wondered if each one of us Would end the self-same
way, For none can tell to what red Hell His sightless soul may
stray.
At last the dead man walked no more Amongst the Trial Men, And
I knew that he was standing up In the black dock’s dreadful pen,
And that never would I see his face For weal or woe again.
Like two doomed ships that pass in storm We had crossed each
other’s way: But we made no sign, we said no word, We had no
word to say; For we did not meet in the holy night, But in the
shameful day.
A prison wall was round us both, Two outcast men we were: The
world had thrust us from its heart, And God from out His care:
And the iron gin that waits for Sin Had caught us in its snare.
III In Debtors’ Yard the stones are hard, And the dripping wall is
high, So it was there he took the air Beneath the leaden sky, And
by each side a warder walked, For fear the man might die.
Or else he sat with those who watched His anguish night and day;
Who watched him when he rose to weep, And when he crouched
to pray; Who watched him lest himself should rob Their scaffold of
its prey.
The Governor was strong upon The Regulations Act: The Doctor
said that Death was but A scientific fact: And twice a day the
Chaplain called, And left a little tract.
And twice a day he smoked his pipe, And drank his quart of beer:
His soul was resolute, and held No hiding-place for fear; He often
said that he was glad The hangman’s day was near.
But why he said so strange a thing No warder dared to ask: For he
to whom a watcher’s doom Is given as his task, Must set a lock
upon his lips, And make his face a mask.
Or else he might be moved, and try To comfort or console: And
what should Human Pity do Pent up in Murderers’ Hole? What
word of grace in such a place Could help a brother’s soul?
With slouch and swing around the ring We trod the Fools' Parade!
We did not care: we knew we were The Devils' Own Brigade: And shaven head and feet of lead Make a merry masquerade.
We tore the tarry rope to shreds With blunt and bleeding nails; We rubbed the doors, and scrubbed the floors, And cleaned the shining rails: And, rank by rank, we soaped the plank, And clattered with the pails.
We sewed the sacks, we broke the stones, We turned the dusty drill: We banged the tins, and bawled the hymns, And sweated on the mill: But in the heart of every man Terror was lying still.
So still it lay that every day Crawled like a weed-clogged wave: And we forgot the bitter lot That waits for fool and knave, Till once, as we tramped in from work, We passed an open grave.
With yawning mouth the horrid hole Gaped for a living thing; The very mud cried out for blood To the thirsty asphalte ring: And we knew that ere one dawn grew fair The fellow had to swing.
Right in we went, with soul intent On Death and Dread and Doom: The hangman, with his little bag, Went shuffling through the gloom: And I trembled as I groped my way Into my numbered tomb.
That night the empty corridors Were full of forms of Fear, And up and down the iron town Stole feet we could not hear, And through the bars that hide the stars White faces seemed to peer.
He lay as one who lies and dreams In a pleasant meadow-land, The watchers watched him as he slept, And could not understand How one could sleep so sweet a sleep With a hangman close at hand.
But there is no sleep when men must weep Who never yet have wept: So we- the fool, the fraud, the knave That endless vigil kept, And through each brain on hands of pain Another's terror crept.

Alas! it is a fearful thing To feel another's guilt!
For, right within, the sword of Sin Pierced to its poisoned hilt, And as molten lead were the tears we shed For the blood we had not spilt.
The warders with their shoes of felt Crept by each padlocked door, And peeped and saw, with eyes of awe, Gray figures on the floor, And wondered why men knelt to pray Who never prayed before.
All through the night we knelt and prayed, Mad mourners of a corse!
The troubled plumes of midnight shook
Like the plumes upon a hearse:
And as bitter wine upon a sponge
Was the savour of Remorse.
The gray cock crew, the red cock crew,
But never came the day:
And crooked shapes of Terror crouched,
In the corners where we lay:
And each evil sprite that walks by night
Before us seemed to play.
They glided past, the glided fast,
Like travellers through a mist:
They mocked the moon in a rigadoon
Of delicate turn and twist,
And with formal pace and loathsome grace
The phantoms kept their tryst.

With mop and mow, we saw them go,
Slim shadows hand in hand:
About, about, in ghostly rout
They trod a saraband:
And the damned grotesques made arabesques,
Like the wind upon the sand!
With the pirouettes of marionettes,
They tripped on pointed tread:
But with flutes of Fear they filled the ear,
As their grisly masque they led,
And loud they sang, and long they sang,
For they sang to wake the dead.

“Oho!” they cried, “the world is wide,
But fettered limbs go lame!
And once, or twice, to throw the dice
Is a gentlemanly game,
But he does not win who plays with Sin
In the secret House of Shame.”
No things of air these antics were,
That frolicked with such glee:
To men whose lives were held in gyves,
And whose feet might not go free,
Ah! wounds of Christ! they were living things,
Most terrible to see.
Around, around, they waltzed and wound;
Some wheeled in smirking pairs;
With the mincing step of a demirep
Some sidled up the stairs:
And with subtle sneer, and fawning leer,
Each helped us at our prayers.
The morning wind began to moan,
But still the night went on:
Through its giant loom the web of gloom
Crept till each thread was spun:
And, as we prayed, we grew afraid
Of the Justice of the Sun.
The moaning wind went wandering round The weeping prison wall: Till like a wheel of turning steel We felt the minutes crawl: O moaning wind! what had we done To have such a seneschal?

At last I saw the shadowed bars, Like a lattice wrought in lead, Move right across the whitewashed wall That faced my three-plank bed, And I knew that somewhere in the world God’s dreadful dawn was red.

At six o’clock we cleaned our cells, At seven all was still, But the sough and swing of a mighty wing The prison seemed to fill, For the Lord of Death with icy breath Had entered in to kill.

He did not pass in purple pomp, Nor ride a moon-white steed.

Three yards of cord and a sliding board Are all the gallows’ need: So with rope of shame the Herald came To do the secret deed.

We were as men who through a fen Of filthy darkness grope: We did not dare to breathe a prayer, Or to give our anguish scope: Something was dead in each of us, And what was dead was Hope.

For Man’s grim Justice goes its way And will not swerve aside: It slays the weak, it slays the strong, It has a deadly stride: With iron heel it slays the strong The monstrous parricide!

We waited for the stroke of eight: Each tongue was thick with thirst: For the stroke of eight is the stroke of Fate That makes a man accursed, And Fate will use a running noose For the best man and the worst.

We had no other thing to do, Save to wait for the sign to come: So, like things of stone in a valley lone, Quiet we sat and dumb: But each man’s heart beat thick and quick, Like a madman on a drum!

With sudden shock the prison-clock Smote on the shivering air, And from all the gaol rose up a wail Of impotent despair, Like the sound the frightened marshes hear From some leper in his lair.

And as one sees most fearful things In the crystal of a dream, We saw the greasy hempen rope Hooked to the blackened beam, And heard the prayer the hangman’s snare Strangled into a scream.

And all the woe that moved him so That he gave that bitter cry, And the wild regrets, and the bloody sweats, None knew so well as I: For he who lives more lives than one More deaths that one must die.
IV There is no chapel on the day On which they hang a man: The Chaplain’s heart is far too sick, Or his face is far too wan, Or there is that written in his eyes Which none should look upon.

So they kept us close till nigh on noon, And then they rang the bell, And the warders with their jingling keys Opened each listening cell, And down the iron stair we tramped, Each from his separate Hell.

Out into God’s sweet air we went, But not in wonted way, For this man’s face was white with fear, And that man’s face was gray, And I never saw sad men who looked So wistfully at the day.

I never saw sad men who looked With such a wistful eye Upon that little tent of blue We prisoners called the sky, And at every happy cloud that passed In such strange freedom by.

But there were those amongst us all Who walked with downcast head, And knew that, had each got his due, They should have died instead: He had but killed a thing that lived, Whilst they had killed the dead.

For he who sins a second time Wakes a dead soul to pain, And draws it from its spotted shroud And makes it bleed again, And makes it bleed great gouts of blood, And makes it bleed in vain!

Like ape or clown, in monstrous garb With crooked arrows starred, Silently we went round and round The slippery asphalte yard; Silently we went round and round, And no man spoke a word.

Silently we went round and round, And through each hollow mind The Memory of dreadful things Rushed like a dreadful wind, And Horror stalked before each man, And Terror crept behind.

The warders strutted up and down, And watched their herd of brutes, Their uniforms were spick and span, And they wore their Sunday suits, But we knew the work they had been at, By the quicklime on their boots.

For where a grave had opened wide, There was no grave at all: Only a stretch of mud and sand By the hideous prison-wall, And a little heap of burning lime, That the man should have his pall.

For he has a pall, this wretched man, Such as few men can claim: Deep down below a prison-yard, Naked, for greater shame, He lies, with fetters on each foot, Wrapt in a sheet of flame!

And all the while the burning lime Eats flesh and bone away, It eats the brittle bones by night, And the soft flesh by day, It eats the flesh and bone by turns, But it eats the heart alway.
For three long years they will not sow Or root or seedling there:
For three long years the unblessed spot Will sterile be and bare,
And look upon the wondering sky With unreproachful stare.

They think a murderer's heart would taint Each simple seed they sow.

It is not true! God's kindly earth Is kindlier than men know, And
the red rose would but glow more red, The white rose whiter blow.

Out of his mouth a red, red rose!
Out of his heart a white!
For who can say by what strange way, Christ brings His will to light, Since the barren staff the pilgrim bore Bloomed in the great Pope's sight?

But neither milk-white rose nor red May bloom in prison air; The shard, the pebble, and the flint, Are what they give us there: For flowers have been known to heal A common man's despair.

So never will wine-red rose or white, Petal by petal, fall On that stretch of mud and sand that lies By the hideous prison-wall, To tell the men who tramp the yard That God's Son died for all.

Yet though the hideous prison-wall Still hems him round and round, And a spirit may not walk by night That is with fetters bound, And a spirit may but weep that lies In such unholy ground, He is at peace- this wretched man At peace, or will be soon: There is no thing to make him mad, Nor does Terror walk at noon, For the lampless Earth in which he lies Has neither Sun nor Moon.

They hanged him as a beast is hanged: They did not even toll A requiem that might have brought Rest to his startled soul, But hurriedly they took him out, And hid him in a hole.

The warders stripped him of his clothes, And gave him to the flies: They mocked the swollen purple throat, And the stark and staring eyes: And with laughter loud they heaped the shroud In which the convict lies.

The Chaplain would not kneel to pray By his dishonoured grave: Nor mark it with that blessed Cross That Christ for sinners gave, Because the man was one of those Whom Christ came down to save.

Yet all is well; he has but passed To Life's appointed bourne: And alien tears will fill for him Pity's long-broken urn, For his mourners be outcast men, And outcasts always mourn.
V I know not whether Laws be right, Or whether Laws be wrong; All that we know who lie in gaol Is that the wall is strong; And that each day is like a year, A year whose days are long.

But this I know, that every Law That men have made for Man, Since first Man took His brother’s life, And the sad world began, But straws the wheat and saves the chaff With a most evil fan.

This too I know- and wise it were If each could know the same That every prison that men build Is built with bricks of shame, And bound with bars lest Christ should see How men their brothers maim.

With bars they blur the gracious moon, And blind the goodly sun: And the do well to hide their Hell, For in it things are done That Son of things nor son of Man Ever should look upon!

The vilest deeds like poison weeds Bloom well in prison-air: It is only what is good in Man That wastes and withers there: Pale Anguish keeps the heavy gate, And the warder is Despair.

For they starve the little frightened child Till it weeps both night and day: And they scourge the weak, and flog the fool, And gibe the old and gray, And some grow mad, and all grow bad, And none a word may say.

Each narrow cell in which we dwell Is a foul and dark latrine, And the fetid breath of living Death Chokes up each grated screen, And all, but Lust, is turned to dust In Humanity’s machine.

The brackish water that we drink Creeps with a loathsome slime, And the bitter bread they weigh in scales Is full of chalk and lime, And Sleep will not lie down, but walks Wild-eyed, and cries to Time.

But though lean Hunger and green Thirst Like asp with adder fight, We have little care of prison fare, For what chills and kills outright Is that every stone one lifts by day Becomes one’s heart by night.

With midnight always in one’s heart, And twilight in one’s cell, We turn the crank, or tear the rope, Each in his separate Hell, And the silence is more awful far Than the sound of a brazen bell.

And never a human voice comes near To speak a gentle word: And the eye that watches through the door Is pitiless and hard: And by all forgot, we rot and rot, With soul and body marred.
And thus we rust Life’s iron chain Degraded and alone: And some men curse, and some men weep, And some men make no moan: But God’s eternal Laws are kind And break the heart of stone.

And every human heart that breaks, In prison-cell or yard, Is as that broken box that gave Its treasure to the Lord, And filled the unclean leper’s house With the scent of costliest nard.

Ah! happy they whose hearts can break And peace of pardon win!

How else may man make straight his plan And cleanse his soul from Sin? How else but through a broken heart May Lord Christ enter in?

And he of the swollen purple throat, And the stark and staring eyes, Waits for the holy hands that took The Thief to Paradise; And a broken and a contrite heart The Lord will not despise.

The man in red who reads the Law Gave him three weeks of life, Three little weeks in which to heal His soul of his soul’s strife, And cleanse from every blot of blood The hand that held the knife.

And with tears of blood he cleansed the hand, The hand that held the steel: For only blood can wipe out blood, And only tears can heal: And the crimson stain that was of Cain Became Christ’s snow-white seal.

VI In Reading gaol by Reading town There is a pit of shame, And in it lies a wretched man Eaten by teeth of flame, In a burning winding-sheet he lies, And his grave has got no name.

And there, till Christ call forth the dead, In silence let him lie: No need to waste the foolish tear, Or heave the windy sigh: The man had killed the thing he loved, And so he had to die.

And all men kill the thing they love, By all let this be heard, Some do it with a bitter look, Some with a flattering word, The coward does it with a kiss, The brave man with a sword!

C. 3. 3.

THE END
1881

ROSA MYSTICA

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Rosa Mystica (1881) - A collection of Wilde's shorter poems which includes Helas, Requiescat, Salve Saturnia Tellus, San Miniato, Ave Maria, Plena Gratia, Italia, Rome Unvisited, and more.
HELAS

To drift with every passion till my soul Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play, Is it for this that I have given away Mine ancient wisdom, and austere control? Methinks my life is a twice-written scroll Scrawled over on some boyish holiday With idle songs for pipe and virelay Which do but mar the secret of the whole.

Surely that was a time I might have trod The sunlit heights, and from life's dissonance Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God; is that time dead? Io! with a little rod I did but touch the honey of romance And must I lose a soul's inheritance?

REQUIESCAT

Tread lightly, she is near Under the snow, Speak gently, she can hear The daisies grow.
All her bright golden hair Tarnished with rust, She that was young and fair Fallen to dust.
Lily-like, white as snow, She hardly knew She was a woman, so Sweetly she grew.
Coffin-board, heavy stone, Lie on her breast, I vex my heart alone She is at rest.
Peace, Peace, she cannot hear Lyre or sonnet, All my life's buried here, Heap earth upon it.

Avignon

SALVE SATURNIA TELLUS

I reached the Alps: the soul within me burned Italia, my Italia, at thy name: And when from out the mountain's heart I came And saw the land for which my life had yearned, I laughed as one who some great prize had earned: And musing on the story of thy fame I watched the day, till marked with wounds of flame The turquoise sky to burnished gold was turned The pine-trees waved as waves a woman's hair, And in the orchards every twining spray Was breaking into flakes of blossoming foam: But when I knew that far away at Rome In evil bonds a second Peter lay, I wept to see the land so very fair.

Turin

SAN MINIATO
See, I have climbed the mountain side Up to this holy house of God, Where once that Angel-Painter trod Who say the heavens opened wide, And throned upon the crescent moon The Virginal white Queen of Grace, Mary! could I but see thy face Death could not come at all too soon.

O crowned by God with thorns and pain! Mother of Christ! O mystic wife! My heart is weary of this life And over-sad to sing again. O crowned by, God with love and flame! O crowned by Christ the Holy One! O listen ere the searching sun Show to the world my sin and shame.

**AVE MARIA PLENA GRATIA**

Was this his coming! I had hoped to see A scene wondrous glory, as was told Of some great God who a rain of gold Broke open bars and fell on Danae: Or a dread vision as when Semele Sickening for love and unappeased desire Prayed to see God’s clear body, and the fire Caught her white limbs and slew her utterly: With such glad dreams I sought this holy place, And now with wondering eyes and heart I stand Before this supreme mystery of Love: A kneeling girl with passionless pale face, An angel with a lily in his hand, And over both with outstretched wings the Dove.

Florence

**ITALIA**

Italia! thou art fallen, though with sheen Of battle-spears thy clamorous armies stride From the North Alps to the Sicilian tide!

Ay! fallen, though the nations hail thee Queen Because rich gold in every town is seen, An on thy sapphire lake, in tossing pride Of wind-filled vans thy myriad galleys ride Beneath one flag of red and white and green.

O Fair and Strong! O Strong and Fair in vain!

Look southward where Rome’s desecrated town Lies mourning for her God-anointed King? Look heavenward! shall God allow this thing? Nay! but some flame-girt Raphael shall come down, And smite the Spoiler with the sword of pain.

Venice

**SONNET**
I wandered in Scoglietto’s green retreat, The oranges on each o’erhanging spray Burned as bright lamps of gold to shame the day Some startled bird with fluttering wings and fleet Made snow of all the blossoms, at my feet Like silver moons the pale narcissi lay: And the curved waves that streaked the sapphire bay Laughed i’ the sun, and life seemed very sweet.

Outside the young boy-priest passed singing clear, “Jesus the Son of Mary has been slain, O come and fill his sepulchre with flowers.” Ah, God! Ah, God! those dear Hellenic hours Had drowned all memory of thy bitter pain, The Cross, the Crown, the Soldiers, and the Spear.

Genoa, Holy Week

ROME UNVISITED

I The corn has turned from gray to red, Since first my spirit wandered forth From the drear cities of the north, And to Italia’s mountains fled.

And here I set my face toward home, For all my pilgrimage is done, Although, methinks, yon blood-red sun Marshals the way to Holy Rome.

O Blessed Lady, who dost hold Upon the seven hills thy reign!
O Mother without blot or stain, Crowned with bright crowns of triple gold!

O Roma, Roma, at thy feet I lay this barren gift of song!

For, ah! the way is steep and long That leads unto thy sacred street.

II And yet what joy it were for me To turn my feet unto the south, And journeying toward the Tiber mouth To kneel again at Fiesole!

And wandering through the tangled pines That break the gold of Arno’s stream, To see the purple mist and gleam Of morning on the Apennines.

By many a vineyard-hidden home, Orchard, and olive-garden gray, Till from the drear Campagna’s way The seven hills bear up the dome!

III A pilgrim from the northern seasWhat joy for me to seek alone The wondrous Temple, and the throne Of Him who holds the awful keys!
When, bright with purple and with gold, Come priest and holy Cardinal, And borne above the heads of all The gentle Shepherd of the Fold.

O joy to see before I die The only God-anointed King, And hear the silver trumpets ring A triumph as He passes by.

Or at the altar of the shrine Holds high the mystic sacrifice, And shows a God to human eyes Beneath the veil of bread and wine.

IV For lo, what changes time can bring!
The cycles of revolving years May free my heart from all its fears, And teach my lips a song to sing.

Before yon field of trembling gold Is garnered into dusty sheaves, Or ere the autumn’s scarlet leaves Flutter as birds adown the wold, I may have run the glorious race And caught the torch while yet aflame, And called upon the holy name Of Him who now doth hide His face.

Aruna

URBS SACRA AETERTNA
Rome! What a scroll of History thine has been!
In the first days thy sword republican Ruled the whole world for many an age’s span: Then of thy peoples thou wert crowned Queen, Till in thy streets the bearded Goth was seen; And now upon thy walls the breezes fan (Ah, city crowned by God, discrowned by man!) The hated flag of red and white and green.

When was thy glory! when in search for power Thine eagles flew to greet the double sun, And all the nations trembled at thy rod? Nay, but thy glory tarried for this hour, When pilgrims kneel before the Holy One, The prisoned shepherd of the Church of God.

SONNET
On Hearing the Dies Irae Sung in the Sistine Chapel Nay, Lord, not thus! white lilies in the spring, Sad olive-groves, or sliver-breasted dove, Teach me more clearly of Thy life and love Than terrors of red flame and thundering.

The empurpled vines dear memories of Thee bring: A bird at evening flying to its nest, Tells me of One who had no place of rest: I think it is of Thee the sparrows sing.

Come rather on some autumn afternoon, When red and brown are burnished on the leaves, And the fields echo to the gleaner’s song,
Come when the splendid fulness of the moon Looks down upon the rows of golden sheaves, And reap Thy harvest: we have waited long.

EASTER DAY
The silver trumpets rang across the Dome: The people knelt upon the ground with awe: And borne upon the necks of men I saw, Like some great God, the Holy Lord of Rome.

Priest-like, he wore a robe more white than foam, And, king-like, swathed himself in royal red, Three crowns of gold rose high upon his head: In splendor and in light the Pope passed home.

My heart stole back across wide wastes of years To One who wandered by a lonely sea, And sought in vain for any place of rest: “Foxes have holes, and every bird its nest, I, only I, must wander wearily, And bruise My feet, and drink wine salt with tears.”

E TENEBRIS
Come down, O Christ, and help me! reach thy hand, For I am drowning in a stormier sea Than Simon on Thy lake of Galilee: The wine of life is spilt upon the sand, My heart is as some famine-murdered land, Whence all good things have perished utterly, And well I know my soul in Hell must lie If I this night before God’s throne should stand.

“He sleeps perchance, or rideth to the chase, Like Baal, when his prophets howled that name From morn to noon on Carmel’s smitten height.” Nay, peace, I shall behold before the night, The feet of brass, the robe more white than flame, The wounded hands, the weary human face.

VITA NUOVA
I stood by the unvintageable sea Till the wet waves drenched face and hair with spray, The long red fires of the dying day Burned in the west; the wind piped drearily; And to the land the clamorous gulls did flee: “Alas! I cried, “my life is full of pain, And who can garner fruit or golden grain, From these waste fields which travail ceaselessly!” My nets gaped wide with many a break and flaw Nathless I threw them as my final cast Into the sea, and waited for the end.

When lo! a sudden glory! and I saw The argent splendor of white limbs ascend, And in that joy forgot my tortured past.
MADONNA MIA
A lily girl, not made for this world's pain, With brown, soft hair close braided by her ears, And longing eyes half veiled by slumbrous tears Like bluest water seen through mists of rain; Pale cheeks whereon no love hath left its stain, Red underlip drawn in for fear of love, And white throat, whiter than the silvered dove, Through whose wan marble creeps one purple vein.
Yet, though my lips shall praise her without cease, Even to kiss her feet I am not bold, Being o'ershadowed by the wings of awe. Like Dante, when he stood with Beatrice Beneath the flaming Lion's breast and saw The seventh Crystal, and the Stair of Gold.

THE NEW HELEN
Where hast thou been since round the walls of Troy The sons of God fought in that great emprise? Why dost thou walk our common earth again? Hast thou forgotten that impassioned boy, His purple galley, and his Tyrian men, And treacherous Aphrodite's mocking eyes? For surely it was thou, who, like a star Hung in the silver silence of the night, Didst lure the Old World chivalry and might Into the clamorous crimson waves of war!
Or didst thou rule the fire-laden moon? In amorous Sidon was thy temple built Over the light and laughter of the sea? Where, behind lattice scarlet-wrought and gilt, Some brown-limbed girl did weave thee tapestry, All through the waste and wearied hours of noon; Till her wan cheek with flame of passion burned, And she rose up the sea-washed lips to kiss Of some glad Cyprian sailor, safe returned From Calpe and the cliffs of Herakles! No! thou art Helen, and none other one!
It was for thee that young Sarpedon died, And Memnon's manhood was untimely spent; It was for thee gold-crested Hector tried With Thetis' child that evil race to run, In the last year of thy beleaguerment; Ay! even now the glory of thy fame Burns in those fields of trampled asphodel, Where the high lords whom Ilion knew so well Clash ghostly shields, and call upon thy name.
Where hast thou been? in that enchanted land Whose slumbering vales forlorn Calypso knew, Where never mower rose to greet the day But all unswathed the trammeling grasses grew, And the sad shepherd saw the tall corn stand Till summer's red had changed to withered gray? Didst thou lie there by some Lethaean stream Deep brooding on thine ancient memory, The crash of broken spears, the fiery gleam From shivered helm, the Grecian battle-cry? Nay, thou
were hidden in that hollow hill With one who is forgotten utterly, That discrowned Queen men call the Erycine; Hidden away that never might’st thou see The face of her, before whose mouldering shrine To-day at Rome the silent nations kneel; Who gat from joy no joyous gladdening, But only Love’s intolerable pain, Only a sword to pierce her heart in twain, Only the bitterness of child-bearing.

The lotos-leaves which heal the wounds of Death Lie in thy hand; O, be thou kind to me, While yet I know the summer of my days; For hardly can my tremulous lips draw breath To fill the silver trumpet with thy praise, So bowed am I before thy mystery; So bowed and broken on Love’s terrible wheel, That I have lost all hope and heart to sing, Yet care I not what ruin time may bring If in thy temple thou wilt let me kneel.

Alas, alas, thou wilt not tarry here, But, like that bird, the servant of the sun, Who flies before the north wind and the home.

So wilt thou fly our evil land and drear, Back to the tower of thine old delight, And the red lips of young Euphorion; Nor shall I ever see thy face again, But in this poisonous garden must I stay, Crowning my brows with the thorn-crown of pain, Till all my loveless life shall pass away.

O Helen! Helen! Helen! Yet awhile, Yet for a little while, O tarry here, Till the dawn cometh and the shadows flee!

For in the gladsome sunlight of thy smile Of heaven or hell I have no thought or fear, Seeing I know no other god but thee: No other god save him, before whose feet In nets of gold the tired planets move, The incarnate spirit of spiritual love Who in thy body holds his joyous seat.

Thou wert not born as common women are! But, girt with silver splendor of the foam, Didst from the depths of sapphire seas arise!

And at thy coming some immortal star, Bearded with flame, blazed in the Eastern skies; And waked the shepherds on thine island home.

Thou shalt not die! no asps of Egypt creep Close at thy heels to taint the delicate air; No sullen-blooming poppies stain thy hair, Those scarlet heralds of eternal sleep.

Lily of love, pure and inviolate! Tower of ivory! red rose of fire!
Thou hast come down our darkness to illume: For we, close-caught in the wide nets of Fate, Wearied with waiting for the World’s Desire, Aimlessly wandered in the house of gloom.

Aimlessly sought some slumberous anodyne For wasted lives, for lingering wretchedness, Till we beheld thy re-arisen shrine, And the white glory of thy loveliness.

THE END
RAVENNA

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Ravenna (1878) - One of Wilde’s earliest long poems, it won the coveted Oxford Newdigate Prize. It describes his responses to the ancient Italian city, Ravenna. Opening line: A year ago I breathed the Italian air, ...
RAVENNA

I A year ago I breathed the Italian air, And yet, methinks this northern Spring is fair, These fields made golden with the flower of March, The throstle singing on the fathered larch, The cawing rooks, the wood-doves fluttering by, The little clouds that race across the sky; And fair the violet’s gentle drooping head, The primrose, pale for love uncomforted, The rose that burgeons on the climbing briar, The crocus-bed, (that seems a moon of fire Round-girdled with a purple marriage-ring); And all the flowers of our English Spring, Fond snow-drops, and the bright-starred daffodil.

Up starts the lark beside the murmuring mill, And breaks the gossamer-threads of early dew; And down the river, like a flame of blue, Keene as an arrow flies the water-king, While the brown linnets in the greenwood sing.

A year ago!- it seems a little time Since last I saw that lordly southern clime, Where flower and fruit to purple radiance blow, And like bright lamps the fabled apples grow.

Full Spring it was- and by rich flowing vines, Dark olive-groves and noble forest-pines, I rode at will; the moist glad air was sweet, The white road rang beneath my horse’s feet, And musing on Ravenna’s ancient name, I watched the day till, marked with wounds of flame, The turquoise sky to burnished gold was turned.

O how my heart with boyish passion burned, When far away across the sedge and mere I saw that Holy City rising clear, Crowned with her crown of towers!- On and on I galloped, racing with the setting sun, And ere the crimson after-glow was passed, I stood within Ravenna’s walls at last!

II How strangely still! no sound of life or joy Startles the air! no laughing shepherd-boy Pipes on his reed, nor ever through the day Comes the glad sound of children at their play: O sad, and sweet, and silent! surely here A man might dwell apart from troublous fear, Watching the tide of seasons as they flow From amorous Spring to Winter’s rain and snow, And have no thought of sorrow; here, indeed, Are Lethe’s waters, and that fatal weed Which makes a man forget his fatherland.

Ay! amid lotus-meadows dost thou stand, Like Proserpine, with poppy-laden head, Guarding the holy ashes of the dead.
For though thy brood of warrior sons hath ceased, Thy noble dead are with thee:- they at least Are faithful to thine honour:- guard them well, O childless city! for a mighty spell, To wake men’s hearts to dream of things sublime, Are the lone tombs where rest the Great of Time.

III Yon lonely pillar, rising on the plain, Marks where the bravest knight of France was slain, The Prince of chivalry, the Lord of war, Gaston de Foix: for some untimely star Led him against thy city, and he fell, As falls some forest-lion fighting well.

Taken from life while life and love were new, He lies beneath God’s seamless veil of blue; Tall lance-like reeds wave sadly o’er his head, And oleanders bloom to deeper red, Where his bright youth flowed crimson on the ground.

Look farther north unto that broken mound, There, prisoned now within a lordly tomb Raised by a daughter’s hand, in lonely gloom, Huge-limbed Theodoric, the Gothic king, Sleeps after all his weary conquering.

Time hath not spared his ruin,- wind and rain Have broken down his stronghold; and again We see that Death is mighty lord of all, And king and clown to ashen dust must fall.

Mighty indeed their glory! yet to me Barbaric king, or knight of chivalry, Or the great queen herself, were poor and vain Beside the grave where Dante rests from pain.

His gilded shrine lies open to the air; And cunning sculptor’s hands have carven there The calm white brow, as calm as earliest morn, The eyes that flashed with passionate love and scorn, The lips that sang of Heaven and of Hell, The almond-face which Giotto drew so well, The weary face of Dante:- to this day, Here in his place of resting, far away From Arno’s yellow waters, rushing down Through the wide bridges of that fairy town, Where the tall tower of Giotto seems to rise A marble lily under sapphire skies!

Alas! my Dante! thou hast known the pain Of meaner lives,- the exile’s- galling chain, How steep the stairs within king’s houses are, And all the petty miseries which mar Man’s nobler nature with the sense of wrong.

Yet this dull world is grateful for thy song; Our nations do thee homage,- even she, That cruel queen of vine-clad Tuscany, Who bound with crown of thorns thy living brow, Hath decked thine empty tomb with laurels now, And begs in vain the ashes of her son.
O mightiest exile! all thy grief is done: Thy soul walks now beside thy Beatrice; Ravenna guards thine ashes: sleep in peace.

IV How lone this palace is; how grey the walls!
No minstrel now wakes echoes in these halls.
The broken chain lies rusting on the door, And noisome weeds have split the marble floor: Here lurks the snake, and here the lizards run By the stone lions blinking in the sun.

Byron dwelt here in love and revelry For two long years- a second Anthony, Who of world another Actium made! Yet suffered not his royal soul to fade, Or lyre to break, or lance to grow less keen, ‘Neath any wiles of an Egyptian queen.

For from the East there came a mighty cry, And Greece stood up to fight for Liberty, And called him from Ravenna: never knight Rode forth more nobly to wild scenes of fight!

None fell more bravely on ensanguined field, Borne like a Spartan back upon his shield!

O Hellas! Hellas! in thine hour of pride, Thy day of might, remember him who died To wrest from off thy limbs the trammelling chain: O Salamis! O lone Plataean plain!
O tossing waves of wild Euboean sea!
O wind-swept heights of lone Thermopylae!
He loved you well- ay, not alone in word, Who freely gave to thee his lyre and sword Like Aeschylus at well-fought Marathon: And England, too, shall glory in her son, Her warrior-poet, first in song and fight.

No longer now, shall Slander’s venomed spite Crawl like a snake across his perfect name, Or mar the lordly scutcheon of his fame.

For as the olive-garland of the race Which lights with joy each eager runner’s face, As the red cross which saveth men in war, As a flame-bearded beacon seen from far By mariners upon a storm-tossed sea,Such was his love for Greece and Liberty!

Byron, thy crowns are ever fresh and green: Red leaves of rose from Sapphic Mitylene Shall bind thy brows; the myrtle blooms for thee, In hidden glades by lonely Castaly; The laurels wait thy coming: all are thine, And round thy head one perfect wreath will twine.

V The pine-tops rocked before the evening breeze With the hoarse murmur of the wintry seas, And the tall stems were streaked with amber bright; I wandered through the wood in wild delight, Some startled bird, with fluttering wings and fleet, Made snow of all the
blossoms: at my feet, Like silver crowns, the pale narcissi lay, And small birds sang on every twining spray.

O waving trees, O forest liberty!
Within your haunts at least a man is free, And half forgets the weary world of strife: The blood flows hotter, and a sense of life Wakes i' the quickening veins, while once again The woods are filled with gods we fancied slain.

Long time I watched, and surely hoped to see Some goat-foot Pan make merry minstrelsy Amid the reed! some startled Dryad-maid In girlish flight! or lurking in the glade, The soft brown limbs, the wanton treacherous face Of woodland god! Queen Dian in the chase, White-limbed and terrible, with look of pride, And leash of boar-hounds leaping at her side!
Or Hylas mirrored in the perfect stream.
O idle heart! O fond Hellenic dream!
Ere long, with melancholy rise and swell, The evening chimes, the convent's vesper-bell Struck on mine ears amid the amorous flowers.

Alas! alas! these sweet and honied hours Had 'whelmed my heart like some encroaching sea, And drowned all thoughts of black Gethsemane.

VI O lone Ravenna! many a tale is told Of thy great glories in the days of old: Two thousand years have passed since thou didst see Caesar ride forth in royal victory.

Mighty thy name when Rome's lean eagles flew From Britain's isles to far Euphrates blue; And of the peoples thou wast noble queen, Till in thy streets the Goth and Hun were seen.

Discrowned by man, deserted by the sea, Thou sleepest, rocked in lonely misery!
No longer now upon thy swelling tide, Pine-forest like, thy myriad galleys ride!
For where the brass-beaked ships were wont to float, The weary shepherd pipes his mourning note; And the white sheep are free to come and go Where Adria's purple waters used to flow.

O fair! O sad! O Queen uncomforted!
In ruined loveliness thou liest dead, Alone of all thy sisters; for at last Italia's royal warrior hath passed Rome's lordliest entrance, and hath worn his crown In the high temples of the Eternal Town!
The Palatine hath welcomed back her king, And with his name the seven mountains ring!

And Naples hath outlived her dream of pain, And mocks her tyrant! Venice lives again, New risen from the waters! and the cry Of Light and Truth, of Love and Liberty, Is heard in lordly Genoa, and where The marble spires of Milan wound the air, Rings from the Alps to the Sicilian shore, And Dante's dream is now a dream no more.

But thou, Ravenna, better loved than all, Thy ruined palaces are but a pall That hides thy fallen greatness! and thy name Burns like a grey and flickering candle-flame, Beneath the noon-day splendour of the sun Of new Italia! for the night is done, The night of dark oppression, and the day Hath dawned in passionate splendour: far away The Austrian hounds are hunted from the land, Beyond those ice-crowned citadels which stand Girdling the plain of royal Lombardy, From the far West unto the Eastern sea.

I know, indeed, that sons of thine have died In Lissa's waters, by the mountain-side Of Aspromonte, on Novara's plain, Nor have thy children died for thee in vain: And yet, methinks, thou hast not drunk this wine From grapes new-crushed of Liberty divine, Thou hast not followed that immortal Star Which leads the people forth to deeds of war.

Weary of life, thou liest in silent sleep, As one who marks the lengthening shadows creep, Careless of all the hurrying hours that run, Mourning some day of glory, for the sun Of freedom hath not shown to thee his face, And thou hast caught no flambeau in the race.

Yet wake not from thy slumbers,- rest thee well, Amidst thy fields of amber asphodel, Thy lily-sprinkled meadows,- rest thee there, To mock all human greatness: who would dare To vent the paltry sorrows of his life Before thy ruins, or to praise the strife Of kings' ambition, and the barren pride Of warrior nations! wert not thou the Bride Of the wild Lord of Adria's stormy sea!

The Queen of double Empires! and to thee Were not the nations given as thy prey!

And now- thy gates lie open night and day, The grass grows green on every tower and hall, The ghastly fig hath cleft thy bastioned wall; And where thy mailed warriors stood at rest The midnight owl hath made her secret nest.
O fallen! fallen! from thy high estate, O city trammelled in the toils of Fate, Doth nought remain of all thy glorious days, But a dull shield, a crown of withered bays!

Yet who beneath this night of wars and fears, From tranquil tower can watch the coming years; Who can fortell what joys the day shall bring, Or why before the dawn the linnets sing? Thou, even thou, mayst wake, as wakes the rose To crimson splendour from its grave of snows; As the rich corn-fields rise to red and gold From these brown lands, now stiff with Winter’s cold As from the storm-rack comes a perfect star!

O much-loved city! I have wandered far From the wave-circled islands of my home, Have seen the gloomy mystery of the Dome Rise slowly from the drear Campagna’s way, Clothed in the royal purple of the day I from the city of the violet crown Have watched the sun by Corinth’s hill go down, And marked the “myriad laughter” From the hills of flower-starred Arkady; Yet back to thee returns my perfect love, As to its forest-nest the evening dove.

O poet’s city! one who scarce has seen Some twenty summers cast their doublets green, For Autumn’s livery, would seek in vain To wake his lyre to sing a louder strain, Or tell thy days of glory: poor indeed Is the low murmur of the shepherd’s reed, Where the loud clarion’s blast should shake the sky, And flame across the heavens! and to try Such lofty themes were folly: yet I know That never felt my heart yet nobler glow That when felt my the silence of thy street With clamorous trampling of my horse’s feet, And saw the city which now I try to sing, After long days of weary travelling.

VII Adieu, Ravenna! but a year ago, I stood and watched the crimson sunset glow From the lone chapel on thy marshy plain: The sky was as a shield that caught the stain Of blood and battle from the dying sun, And in the west the circling clouds had spun A royal robe, which some great God might wear, While into ocean-seas of purple air Sank the gold galley of the Lord of Light.

Yet here the gentle stillness of the night Brings back the swelling tide of memory, And wakes again my passionate love for thee: Now is the Spring of Love, yet soon will come On meadow and tree the Summer’s lordly bloom: And soon the grass with brighter flowers will blow, And send up lilies for some boy to mow.

Then before long the Summer’s conqueror, Rich Autumn-time, the season’s usurer, Will lend his hoarded gold to all the trees, And see
it scattered by the spend-thrift breeze; And after that the Winter
cold and drear.

So runs the perfect cycle of the year.

And so from youth to manhood do we go, And fall to weary days
and locks of snow.

Love only knows no winter; never dies: Nor cares for frowning
storms or leaden skies.

And mine for thee shall never pass away, Though my weak lips
may falter in my lay.

Adieu! Adieu! yon silent evening star, The night's ambassador,
doth gleam afar, And bid the shepherd bring his flocks to fold.

Perchance before our inland seas of gold Are garnered by, the
reapers into sheaves, Perchance before I see the Autumn leaves, I
may behold thy city; and lay down Low at thy feet the poet's laurel
crown.

Adieu! Adieu! yon silver lamp, the moon, Which turns our
midnight into perfect noon, Doth surely light thy towers, guarding
well Where Dante sleeps, where Byron loved to dwell.

THE END
1881

PANTHEA

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Panthea (1881) - One of Wilde’s long poems. Part of this work represents the poet’s attempts to come to terms with Darwinian evolutionary thought. Opening line: Nay, let us walk from fire unto fire, ...
Nay, let us walk from fire unto fire, From passionate pain to
deadlier delight, I am too young to live without desire, Too young
art thou to waste this summer night Asking those idle questions
which of old Man sought of seer and oracle, and no reply was told.

For sweet, to feel is better than to know, And wisdom is a childless
heritage, One pulse of passion-youth’s first fiery glow, Are worth
the hoarded proverbs of the sage: Vex not thy soul with dead
philosophy, Have we not lips to kiss with, hearts to love, and eyes
to see!

Dost thou not hear the murmuring nightingale Like water bubbling
from a silver jar, So soft she sings the envious moon is pale, That
high in heaven she hung so far She cannot hear that love-
enraptured tune, Mark how she wreathes each horn with mist, yon
late and laboring moon.

White lilies, in whose cups the gold bees dream, The fallen snow of
petals where the breeze Scatters the chestnut blossom, or the gleam
Of all our endless sins, our vain endeavour Enough for thee, dost
thou desire more? Alas! the Gods will give naught else from their
eternal store.

For our high Gods have sick and wearied grown Of boyish limbs
in water,- are not these For wasted days of youth to make atone By
pain or prayer or priest, and never, never, Hearken they now to
either good or ill, But send their rain upon the just and the unjust at
will.

They sit at ease, our Gods they sit at ease, Strewing with leaves of
rose their scented wine, They sleep, they sleep, beneath the rocking
trees Where asphodel and yellow lotus twine, Mourning the old
glad days before they knew What evil things the heart of man
could dream, and dreaming do.

And far beneath the brazen floor, they see Like swarming flies the
crowd of little men, The bustle of small lives, then wearily Back to
their lotus-haunts they turn again Kissing each other’s mouths, and
mix more deep The poppy-seeded draught which brings soft
purple-lidded sleep.

There all day long the golden-vestured sun, Their torch-bearer,
stands with his torch a-blaze, And when the gaudy web of noon is
spun By its twelve maidens through the crimson haze Fresh from
Endymion’s arms comes forth the moon, And the immortal Gods in toils of mortal passions swoon.

There walks Queen Juno through some dewy mead, Her grand white feet flecked with the saffron dust Of wind-stirred lilies, while young Ganymede Leaps in the hot and amber-foaming must, His curls all tossed, as when the eagle bare The frightened boy from Ida through the blue Ionian air.

There in the green heart of some garden close Queen Venus with the shepherd at her side, Her warm soft body like the brier rose Which would be white yet blushes at its pride, Laughs low for love, till jealous Salmacis Peers through the myrtle-leaves and sighs for pain of lonely bliss.

There never does that dreary northwind blow Which leaves our English forests bleak and bare, Nor ever falls the swift white-feathered snow, Nor doth the red-toothed lightning ever dare To wake them in the silver-fretted night When we lie weeping for some sweet sad sin, some dead delight.

Alas! they know the far Lethaean spring, The violet-hidden waters well they know, Where one whose feet with tired wandering Are faint and broken may take heart and go, And from those dark depths cool and crystalline Drink, and draw balm, and sleep for sleepless souls, and anodyne.

But we oppress our natures, God or Fate Is our enemy, we starve and feed On vain repentance- O we are born too late! What balm for us in bruised poppy seed Who crowd into one finite pulse of time The joy of infinite love and the fierce pain of infinite crime.

O we are wearied of this sense of guilt, Wearied of pleasures paramour despair, Wearied of every temple we have built, Wearied of every right, unanswered prayer, For man is weak; God sleeps: and heaven is high: One fiery-colored moment: one great love: and lo! we die. Ah! but no ferry-man with laboring pole Nears his black shallop to the flowerless strand, No little coin of bronze can bring the soul Over Death’s river to the sunless land, Victim and wine and vow are all in vain, The tomb is sealed; the soldiers watch; the dead rise not again.

We are resolved into the supreme air, We are made one with what we touch and see, With our heart’s blood each crimson sun is fair,
With our young lives each spring-impassioned tree
Flames into green, the wildest beasts that range
The moor our kinsmen are, all life is one, and all is change.

With beat of systole and of diastole
One grand great light throbs through earth’s giant heart,
And mighty waves of single Being roll
From nerve-less germ to man, for we are part
Of every rock and bird and beast and hill, One with the things that prey on us, and
one with what we kill.

From lower cells of waking life we pass
To full perfection; thus the world grows old:
We who are godlike now were once a mass
Of quivering purple flecked with bars of gold,
Unsentient or of joy or misery, And tossed in terrible tangles of some wild and wind-swept sea.

This hot hard flame with which our bodies burn
Will make some meadow blaze with daffodil, Ay! and those argent breasts of thine will turn
To water-lilies; the brown fields men till
Will be more fruitful for our love to-night, Nothing is lost in nature, all things live in Death’s despite.

The boy’s first kiss, the hyacinth’s first bell,
The man’s last passion, and the last red spear
That from the lily leaps, the asphodel
Which will not let its blossoms blow for fear Of too much beauty, and the timid shame
Of the young bridegroom at his lover’s eyes,- these with the same
One sacrament are consecrate, the earth Not we alone hath passions hymeneal,
The yellow buttercups that shake for mirth At daybreak know a pleasure not less real Than we do, when in some fresh-blossoming wood We draw the spring into our hearts, and feel that life is good.

So when men bury us beneath the yew
Thy crimson-stained mouth a rose will be,
And thy soft eyes lush bluebells dimmed with dew,
And when the white narcissus wantonly
Kisses the wind its playment, some faint joy
Will thrill our dust, and we will be again
Fond maid and boy.

And thus without life’s conscious torturing pain
In some sweet flower we will feel the sun,
And from the linnet’s throat will sing again,
And as two gorgeous-mailed snakes will run
Over our graves, or as two tigers creep
Through the hot jungle where the yellow-eyed huge lions sleep
And give them battle! How my heart leaps up
To think of that grand living after death In beast and bird and flower, when this cup,
Being filled too full of spirit, bursts for breath, And with the pale leaves of some autumn day The soul earth’s earliest conqueror becomes earth’s last great prey.
O think of it! We shall inform ourselves Into all sensuous life, the
goat-foot Faun, The Centaur, or the merry bright-eyed Elves That
leave their dancing rings to spite the dawn Upon the meadows,
shall not be more near Than you and I to nature’s mysteries, for we
shall hear The thrush’s heart beat, and the daisies grow, And the
wan snowdrop sighing for the sun On sunless days in winter, we
shall know By whom the silver gossamer is spun, Who paints the
diapered fritillaries, On what wide wings from shivering pine to
pine the eagle flies.

Ay! had we never loved at all, who knows If yonder daffodil had
lured the bee Into its gilded womb, or any rose Had hung with
crimson lamps its little tree!

Methinks no leaf would ever bud in spring, But for the lovers’ lips
that kiss, the poet’s lips that sing.

Is the light vanished from our golden sun, Or is this daedal-
fashioned earth less fair, That we are nature’s heritors, and one
With every pulse of life that beats the air? Rather new suns across
the sky shall pass, New splendour come unto the flower, new glory
to the grass.

And we two lovers shall not sit afar, Critics of nature, but the
joyous sea Shall be our raiment, and the bearded star Shoot arrows
at our pleasure! We shall be Part of the mighty universal whole,
And through all aeons mix and mingle with the Kosmic Soul!

We shall be notes in that great Symphony Whose cadence circles
through the rhythmic spheres, And all the live World’s throbbing
heart shall be One with our heart, the stealthy creeping years Have
lost their terrors now, we shall not die, The Universe itself shall be
our Immortality!

THE END
1881

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Miscellaneous Poems (1881) - A collection of Wilde’s shorter poems which includes The True knowledge, A Lament, Wasted Days, Lotus Leaves, Impressions Le Jardin, Impressions La Mer, and more.
THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE

Thou knowest all- I seek in vain What lands to till or sow with seed. The land is black with briar and weed, Nor cares for falling tears or rain.

Thou knowest all- I sit and wait With blinded eyes and hands that fail, Till the last lifting of the veil, And the first opening of the gate.

Thou knowest all- I cannot see.

I trust I shall not live in vain, I know that we shall meet again, In some divine eternity.

A LAMENT

O well for him who lives at ease With garnered gold in wide domain, Nor heeds the splashing of the rain, The crashing down of forest trees.

O well for him who ne’er hath known The travail of the hungry years, A father grey with grief and tears, A mother weeping all alone.

But well for him whose feet hath trod The weary road of toil and strife, Yet from the sorrows of his life Builds ladders to be nearer God.

WASTED DAYS

A fair slim boy not made for this world’s pain.

With hair of gold thick clustering round his ears, And longing eyes half veiled by foolish tears Like bluest water seen through mists of rain: Pale cheeks whereon no kiss hath left its stain, Red under lip drawn for fear of Love, And white throat whiter than the breast of dove.

Alas! alas! if all should be in vain.

Behind, wide fields, and reapers all a-row In heat and labour toiling wearily, To no sweet sound of laughter or of lute.

The sun is shooting wide its crimson glow, Still the boy dreams: nor knows that night is nigh, And in the night-time no man gathers fruit.
LOTUS LEAVES

I There is no peace beneath the moon, Ah! in those meadows is there peace Where, girdled with a silver fleece, As a bright shepherd, strays the moon?

Queen of the gardens of the sky, Where stars like lilies, white and fair, Shine through the mists of frosty air, Oh, tarry, for the dawn is nigh!

Oh, tarry, for the envious day Stretches long hands to catch thy feet.

Alas! but thou art overfleet, Alas! I know thou wilt not stay.

II Eastward the dawn has broken red, The circling mists and shadows flee; Aurora rises from the sea, And leaves the crocus-flowered bed.

Eastward the silver arrows fall, Splintering the veil of holy night: And a long wave of yellow light Breaks silently on tower and hall.

And speeding wide across the wold Wakes into flight some fluttering bird; And all the chestnut tops are stirred, And all the branches streaked with gold.

III To outer senses there is peace, A dream-like peace on either hand, Deep silence in the shadowy land, Deep silence where the shadows cease, Save for a cry that echoes shrill From some lone bird disconsolate; A curlew calling to its mate; The answer from the distant hill.

And, herald of my love to Him Who, waiting for the dawn, doth lie, The orbed maiden leaves the sky, And the white firs grow more dim.

IV Up sprang the sun to run his race, The breeze blew fair on meadow and lea, But in the west I seemed to see The likeness of a human face.

A linnet on the hawthorn spray Sang of the glories of the spring, And made the flow'ring copses ring With gladness for the new-born day.

A lark from out the grass I trod Flew wildly, and was lost to view In the great seamless veil of blue That hangs before the face of God.

The willow whispered overhead That death is but a newer life And that with idle words of strife We bring dishonour on the dead.
I took a branch from off the tree, And hawthorn branches drenched with dew, I bound them with a sprig of yew, And made a garland fair to see.

I laid the flowers where He lies (Warm leaves and flowers on the stones): What joy I had to sit alone Till evening broke on tired eyes: Till all the shifting clouds had spun A robe of gold for God to wear And into seas of purple air Sank the bright galley of the sun.

V Shall I be gladdened for the day, And let my inner heart be stirred By murmuring tree or song of bird, And sorrow at the wild winds’ play?

Not so, such idle dreams belong To souls of lesser depth than mine; I feel that I am half divine; I that I am great and strong.

I know that every forest tree By labour rises from the root I know that none shall gather fruit By sailing on the barren sea.

IMPRESSIONS
I Le Jardin The lily’s withered chalice falls Around its rod of dusty gold, And from the beeoh trees on the wold The last wood-pigeon coos and calls.

The gaudy leonine sunflower Hangs black and barren on its stalk, And down the windy garden walk The dead leaves scatter,- hour by hour.

Pale privet-petals white as milk Are blown into a snowy mass; The roses lie upon the grass, Like little shreds of crimson silk.

II La Mer A white mist drifts across the shrouds, A wild moon in this wintry sky Gleams like an angry lion’s eye Out of a mane of tawny clouds.

The muffled steersman at the wheel Is but a shadow in the gloom;And in the throbbing engine room Leap the long rods of polished steel.

The shattered storm has left its trace Upon this huge and heaving dome, For the thin threads of yellow foam Float on the waves like ravelled lace.

UNDER THE BALCONY
O beautiful star with the crimson mouth! O moon with the brows of gold! Rise up, rise up, from the odorous south!
And light for my love her way, Lest her feet should stray On the windy hill and the wold!
O beautiful star with the crimson mouth!
O moon with the brows of gold!
O ship that shakes on the desolate sea!
O ship with the wet, white sail!
Put in, put in, to the port to me!
For my love and I would go To the land where the daffodils blow
In the heart of a violet dale!
O ship that shakes on the desolate sea!
O ship with the wet, white sail!
O rapturous bird with the low, sweet note!
O bird that sits on the spray!
Sing on, sing on, from your soft brown throat!
And my love in her little bed Will listen, and lift her head From the pillow, and come my way!
O rapturous bird with the low, sweet note!
O bird that sits on the spray!
O blossom that hangs in the tremulous air!
O blossom with lips of snow!
Come down, Come down, for my love to wear!
You will die in her head in a crown, You will die in a fold of her gown, To her little light heart you will go!
O blossom that hangs in the tremulous air!
O blossom with lips of snow!

A FRAGMENT
Beautiful star with the crimson lips And flagrant daffodil hair, Come back, come back, in the shaking ships O’er the much-overrated sea, To the hearts that are sick for thee With a woe worse than mal de mer O beautiful stars with the crimson lips And the flagrant daffodil hair.

O ship that shakes on the desolate sea, Neath the flag of the wan White Star, Thou bringest a brighter star with thee From the land of the Philistine, Where Niagara’s reckoned fine And Tupper is popular O ship that shakes on the desolate sea, Neath the flag of the wan White Star.

LE JARDIN DES TUILERIES
This winter air is keen and cold, And keen and cold this winter sun, But round my chair the children run Like little things of dancing gold.
Sometimes about the painted kiosk The mimic soldiers strut and stride, Sometimes the blue-eyed brigands hide In the bleak tangles of the bosk.

And sometimes, while the old nurse cons Her book, they steal across the square And launch their paper navies where Huge Triton writhes in greenish bronze.

And now in mimic flight they flee, And now they rush, a boisterous bandAnd, tiny hand on tiny hand, Climb up the black and leafless tree.

Ah! cruel tree! if I were you, And children climbed me, for their sake Though it be winter I would break Into spring blossoms white and blue!

SONNET On the Sale by Auction of Keats' Love Letters

These are the letters which Endymion wrote To one he loved in secret and apart, And now the brawlers of the auction-mart Bargain and bid for each tear-blotted note, Aye! for each separate pulse of passion quote The merchant's price! I think they love not art Who break the crystal of a poet's heart, That small and sickly eyes may glare or gloat.

Is it not said, that many years ago, In a far Eastern town some soldiers ran With torches through the midnight, and began To wrangle for mean raiment, and to throw Dice for the garments of a wretched Man, Not knowing the God's wonder, or His woe?

THE NEW REMORSE

The sin was mine; I did not understand.

So now is music imprisoned in her cave, Save where some ebbing desultory wave Frets with its restless whirls this meagre strand.

And in the withered hollow of this land Hath Summer dug herself so deep a grave, That hardly can the leaden willow crave One silver blossom from keen Winter's hand.

But who is this that cometh by the shore? (Nay, love, look up and wonder!) Who is this Who cometh in dyed garments from the South? It is thy new-found Lord, and he shall kiss The yet unravished roses of thy mouth, And I shall weep and worship, as before.
AN INSCRIPTION
Go, little book, To him who, on a lute with horns of pearl, Sang of the white feet of the Golden Girl: And bid him look Into thy pages: it may hap that he May find that golden maidens dance through thee.

THE HARLOT’S HOUSE
We caught the tread of dancing feet, We loitered down the moonlit street, And stopped beneath the Harlot’s House.

Inside, above the din and fray, We heard the loud musicians play The “Treues Liebes,” of Strauss.

Like strange mechanical grotesques, Making fantastic arabesques, The shadows raced across the blind.

We watched the ghostly dancers spin, To sound of horn and violin, Like black leaves wheeling in the wind.

Like wire-pulled Automatons, Slim silhouetted skeletons Went sidling through the slow quadrille, Then took each other by the hand, And danced a stately saraband; Their laughter echoed thin and shrill.

Sometimes a clock-work puppet pressed A phantom lover to her breast, Sometimes they seemed to try and sing.

Sometimes a horrible Marionette Came out, and smoked its cigarette Upon the steps like a live thing.

Then turning to my love I said, “The dead are dancing with the dead, The dust is whirling with the dust.” But she, she heard the violin, And left my side and entered in: Love passed into the House of Lust.

Then suddenly the tune went false, The dancers wearied of the waltz, The shadows ceased to wheel and whirl, And down the long and silent street, The dawn with silver-sandalled feet, Crept like a frightened girl.

THE END
1890

IMPRESSIONS DE THEATRE

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art's sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Impressions de Theatre (1890) - A collection of Wilde's shorter poems meant as tributes to the theatrical personalities of his day including Fabien Dei Frenchi, Phedre, Portia, Queen Henrietta Maria, and Camma.
FABIEN DEI FRANCHI To My Friend Henry Irving

The silent room, the heavy creeping shade, The dead that travel fast, the opening door, The murdered brother rising through the floor, The ghost’s white fingers on thy shoulders laid, And then the lonely duel in the glade, The broken swords, the stifled scream, the gore, Thy grand revengeful eyes when all is o’er, These things are well enough,- but thou wert made For more august creation!

PHEDRE To Sarah Bernhardt

How vain and dull this common world must seem To such a One as thou, who should’st have talked At Florence with Mirandola, or walked Through the cool olives of the Academe: Thou should’st have gathered reeds from a green stream For goat-foot Pan’s shrill piping, and have played With the white girls in that Phaeacian glade Where grave Odysseus wakened from his dream.

Ah! surely once some urn of Attic clay Held thy wan dust, and thou hast come again Back to this common world so dull and vain, For thou wert weary of the sunless day, The heavy fields of scentless asphodel, The loveless lips with which men kiss in Hell.

I. PORTIA To Ellen Terry

I marvel not Bassanio was so bold To peril all he had upon the lead, Or that proud Aragon bent low his head, Or that Morocco’s fiery heart grew cold: For in that gorgeous dress of beaten gold Which is more golden than the golden sun, No woman Veronese looked upon Was half so fair as thou whom I behold.

Yet fairer when with wisdom as your shield The sober-suited lawyer’s gown you donned And would not let the laws of Venice yield Antonio’s heart to that accursed Jew O Portia! take my heart; it is thy due: I think I will not quarrel with bond.

Written at the Lyceum Theatre

II. QUEEN HENRIETTA MARIA To Ellen Terry
In the lone tent, waiting for victory, She stands with eyes marred by the mists of pain, Like some wan lily overdrenched with rain; The clamorous clang of arms, the ensanguined sky, War’s ruin, and the wreck of chivalry, To her proud soul no common fear can bring: Bravely she tarrieth for her Lord the King, Her soul a-flame with passionate ecstasy.

O Hair of Gold! O crimson lips! O Face Made for the luring and the love of man!

With thee I do forget the toil and stress.

The loveless road that knows no resting place, Time’s straitened pulse, the soul’s dread weariness, My freedom and my life republican!

Written at the Lyceum Theatre

III. CAMMA To Ellen Terry

As one who poring on a Grecian urn Scans the fair shapes some Attic hand hath made, God with slim goddess, goodly man with maid, And for their beauty’s sake is loath to turn And face the obvious day, must I not yearn For many a secret moon of indolent bliss, When is the midmost shrine of Artemis I see thee standing, antique-limbed, and stern?

And yet- methinks I’d rather see thee play That serpent of old Nile, whose witchery Made Emperors drunken,- come, great Egypt, shake Our stage with all thy mimic pageants! Nay, I am growing sick of unreal passions, make The world thine Actium, me thine Anthony!

Written at the Lyceum Theatre

THE END
1881

HUMANITAD

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Humanidad (1881) - One of Wilde’s long poems — a good example of his early philosophical poetry. Opening lines: It is full winter now: the trees are bare, / Save where the cattle huddle from the cold ...
It is full winter now: the trees are bare, Save where the cattle huddle from the cold Beneath the pine, for it doth never wear The Autumn's gaudy livery whose gold Her jealous brother pilfers, but is true To the green doublet; bitter is the wind, as though it blew From Saturn's cave; a few thin wisps of hay Lie on the sharp black hedges, where the wain Dragged the sweet pillage of a summer's day From the low meadows up the narrow lane; Upon the half-thawed snow the bleating sheep Press close against the hurdles, and the shivering housedogs creep From the shut stable to the frozen stream And back again disconsolate, and miss The bawling shepherds and the noisy team; And overhead in circling listlessness The cawing rooks whirl round the frosted stack, Or crowd the dripping boughs; and in the fen the ice-pools crack Where the gaunt bittern stalks among the reeds And flaps his wings, and stretches back his neck, And hoots to see the moon; across the meads Limp's the poor frightened hare, a little speck; And a stray seamew with its fretful cry Flits like a sudden drift of snow against the dull gray sky.

Full winter: and a lusty goodman brings His load of faggots from the chilly byre, And stamps his feet upon the hearth, and flings The sappy billets on the waning fire, And laughs to see the sudden lightning scare His children at their play; and yet,- the Spring is in the air, Already the slim crocus stirs the snow, And soon yon blanched fields will bloom again With nodding cowslips for some lad to mow. For with the first warm kisses of the rain The winter's icy, sorrow breaks to tears, And the brown thrushes mate, and with bright eyes the rabbit peers From the dark warren where the fir-cones lie, And treads one snowdrop under foot and runs Over the mossy knoll, and blackbirds fly Across our path at evening, and the suns Stay longer with us; ah! how good to see Grass-girdled Spring in all her joy of laughing greenery Dance through the hedges till the early rose, (That sweet repentance of the thorny briar!) Burst from its sheathed emerald and disclose The little quivering disk of golden fire Which the bees know so well, for with it come Pale boy's love, sops-in-wine, and daffodillies all in bloom.

Then up and down the field the sower goes, While close behind the laughing younker scares, With shrilly whoop the black and thievish crows.
And then the chestnut-tree its glory wears, And on the grass the creamy blossom falls In odorous excess, and faint half-whispered madrigals Steal from the bluebells' nodding carillons Each breezy morn, and then white jessamine, That star of its own heaven, snap-dragons With lolling crimson tongues, and eglantine In dusty velvets clad usurp the bed And woodland empery, and when the lingering rose hath shed Red leaf by leaf its folded panoply, And pansies closed their purple-lidded eyes, Chrysanthemums from gilded argosy Unload their gaudy scentless merchandise And violets getting overbold withdraw From their shy nooks, and scarlet berries dot the leafless haw.

O happy field! and O thrice happy tree!
Soon will your queen in daisy-flowered smock, And crown of flower-de-luce trip down the lea, Soon will the lazy shepherds drive their flock Back to the pasture by the pool, and soon Through the green leaves will float the hum of murmuring bees at noon.

Soon will the glade be bright with bellamour, The flower which wantsons love, and those sweet nuns Vale-lilies in their snowy vestiture Will tell their bearded pearls, and carnations With mitred dusky leaves will scent the wind, And straggling traveller’s joy each hedge with yellow stars will bind.

Dear Bride of Nature and most bounteous Spring!
That can’st give increase to the sweet-breath’d kine, And to the kid its little horns, and bring The soft and silky blossoms to the vine, Where is that old nepenthe which of yore Man got from poppy root and glossy-berried mandragore!

There was a time when any common bird Could make me sing in unison, a time When all the strings of boyish life were stirred To quick response or more melodious rhyme By every forest idyll;- do I change? Or rather doth some evil thing through thy fair pleasance range?

Nay, nay, thou art the same: ‘tis I who seek To vex with sighs thy simple solitude, And because fruitless tears bedew my cheek Would have thee weep with me in brotherhood; Fool! shall each wronged and restless spirit dare To taint such wine with the salt poison of his own despair!

Thou art the same: ‘tis I whose wretched soul Takes discontent to be its paramour, And gives its kingdom to the rude control Of what should be its servitor,- for sure Wisdom is somewhere,
though the stormy sea Contain it not, and the huge deep answer

“’Tis not in me.”

To burn with one clear flame, to stand erect In natural honor, not to bend the knee In profitless prostrations whose effect Is by, itself condemned, what alchemy Can teach me this? what herb Medea brewed Will bring the unexultant peace of essence not subdued?

The minor chord which ends the harmony, And for its answering brother waits in vain, Sobbing for incompleted melody Dies a swan’s death; but I the heir of pain A silent Memnon with blank lidless eyes Wait for the light and music of those suns which never rise.

The quanched-out torch, the lonely cypress-gloom, The little dust stored in the narrow urn, The gentle XAIPE of the Attic tomb, Were not these better far than to return To my old fitful restless malady, Or spend my days within the voiceless cave of misery?

ay! for perchance that poppy-crowned God Is like the watcher by a sick man’s bed Who talks of sleep but gives it not; his rod Hath lost its virtue, and, when all is said, Death is too rude, too obvious a key To solve one single secret in a life’s philosophy.

And love! that noble madness, whose august And inextinguishable might can slay The soul with honeyed drugs,- alas! I must From such sweet ruin play the runaway, Although too constant memory never can Forget the arched splendor of those brows Olympian

Which for a little season made my youth So soft a swoon of exquisite indolence That all the chiding of more prudent Truth Seemed the thin voice of jealousy,- O Hence Thou huntress deadlier than Artemis!

Go seek some other quarry! for of thy too perilous bliss My lips have drunk enough,- no more, no more, Though Love himself should turn his gilded prow Back to the troubled waters of this shore Where I am wrecked and stranded, even now The chariot wheels of passion sweep too near, Hence! Hence! I pass unto a life more barren, more austere.

More barren- ay, those arms will never lean Down through the trellised vines and draw my soul In sweet reluctance through the tangled green; Some other head must wear that aureole, For I am Hers who loves not any man Whose white and stainless bosom bears the sign Gorgonian.

Let Venus go and chuck her dainty page, And kiss his mouth, and toss his curly hair, With net and spear and hunting equipage Let
young Adonis to his tryst repair, But me her fond and subtle-
fashioned spell Delights no more, though I could win her dearest
citadel.

Ay, though I were that laughing shepherd boy Who from Mount
Ida saw the little cloud Pass over Tenedos and lofty Troy And
knew the coming of the Queen, and bowed In wonder at her feet, not for the sake Of a new Helen would I bid her hand the apple take.

Then rise supreme Athena argent-limbed!
And, if my lips be musicless, inspire At least my life: was not thy
glory hymned By one who gave to thee his sword and lyre Like
Aeschylus at well-fought Marathon, And died to show that
Milton’s England still could bear a son!

And yet I cannot tread the portico And live without desire, fear
and pain, Or nurture that wise calm which long ago The grave
Athenian master taught to men, Self-poised, self-centered, and self-
comforted, To watch the world’s vain phantasies go by with
unbowed head.

Alas! that serene brow, those eloquent lips, Those eyes that
mirrored all eternity, Rest in their own Colonos, an eclipse Hath
come on Wisdom, and Mnemosyne Is childless; in the night which
she had made For lofty secure flight Athena’s owl itself hath
strayed.

Nor much with Science do I care to climb, Although by strange and
subtle witchery She draw the moon from heaven: the Muse of Time
Unrolls her gorgeous-colored tapestry To no less eager eyes; often
indeed In the great epic of Polymnia’s scroll I love to read How
Asia sent her myriad hosts to war Against a little town, and
panoplied In gilded mail with jewelled scimitar, White-shielded,
purple-crested, rode the Mede Between the waving poplars and the
sea Which men call Artemisium, till he saw Thermopylae Its steep
ravine spanned by a narrow wall, And on the nearer side a little
brood Of careless lions holding festival!

And stood amazed at such hardihood, And pitched his tent upon
the reedy shore, And stayed two days to wonder, and then crept at
midnight o’er Some unfrequented height, and coming down The
autumn forests treacherously slew What Sparta held most dear and
was the crown Of far Eurotas, and passed on, nor knew How God
had staked an evil net for him In the small bay of Salamis,- and yet,
the page grows dim.
Its cadenced Greek delights me not, I feel With such a goodly time too out of tune To love it much: for like the Dial’s wheel That from its blinded darkness strikes the noon Yet never sees the sun, so do my eyes Restlessly follow that which from my cheated vision flies.

O for one grand unselfish simple life To teach us what is Wisdom! speak ye hills Of lone Helvellyn, for this note of strife Shunned your untroubled crags and crystal rills, Where is that Spirit which living blamelessly Yet dared to kiss the smitten mouth of his own century!

Speak ye Ridalian laurels! where is He Whose gentle head ye sheltered, that pure soul Whose gracious days of uncrowned majesty Through lowliest conduct touched the lofty goal Where Love and Duty mingle! Him at least The most high Laws were glad of, he had sat at Wisdom’s feast, But we are Learning’s changelings, known by rote The clarion watchword of each Grecian school And follow none, the flawless sword which smote The pagan Hydra is an effete tool Which we ourselves have blunted, what man now Shall scale the august ancient heights and to old Reverence bow?

One such indeed I saw, but, Ichabod! Gone is that last dear son of Italy, Who being man died for the sake of God, And whose unrisen bones sleep peacefully.

O guard him, guard him well, my Giotto’s tower, Thou marble lily of the lily town! let not the lower Of the rude tempest vex his slumber, or The Arno with its tawny troubled gold O’erleap its marge, no mightier conqueror Clomb the high Capitol in the days of old When Rome was indeed Rome, for Liberty Walked like a Bride beside him, at which sight pale Mystery Fled shrieking to her furthest somberest cell With an old man who grabbed rusty keys, Fled shuddering for that immemorial knell With which oblivion buries dynasties Swept like a wounded eagle on the blast, As to the holy heart of Rome the great triumvir passed.

He knew the holiest heart and heights of Rome, He drave the base wolf from the lion’s lair, And now lies dead by that empyreal dome Which overtops Valdarno hung in air By Brunelleschi- O Melpomene Breathe through thy melancholy pipe thy sweetest threnody!

Breathe through the tragic stops such melodies That Joy’s self may grow jealous, and the Nine Forget a-while their discreet emperies, Mourning for him who on Rome’s lordliest shrine Lit for men’s
lives the light of Marathon, And bare to sun-forgotten fields the fire of the sun!

O guard him, guard him well, my Giotto's tower, Let some young Florentine each eventide Bring coronals of that enchanted flower Which the dim woods of Vallombrosa hide, And deck the marble tomb wherein he lies Whose soul is as some mighty orb unseen of mortal eyes.

Some mighty orb whose cycled wanderings, Being tempest-driven to the furthest rim Where Chaos meets Creation and the wings Of the eternal chanting Cherubim Are pavilioned on Nothing, passed away Into a moonless void- and yet, though he is dust and clay, He is not dead, the immemorial Fates Forbid it, and the closing shears refrain, Lift up your heads ye everlasting gates!

Ye argent clarions sound a loftier strain!
For the vile thing he hated lurks within Its sombre house, alone with God and memories of sin.

Still what avails it that she sought her cave That murderous mother of red harlotries? At Munich on the marble architrave The Grecian boys die smiling, but the seas Which wash Aegina fret in loneliness Not mirroring their beauty, so our lives grow colourless For lack of our ideals, if one star Flame torch-like in the heavens the unjust Swift daylight kills it, and no trump of war Can wake to passionate voice the silent dust Which was Mazzini once! rich Niobe For all her stony sorrows hath her sons, but Italy!

What Easter Day shall make her children rise, Who were not Gods yet suffered, what sure feet Shall find their graveclothes folded? what clear eyes Shall see them bodily? O it were meet To roll the stone from off the sepulchre And kiss the bleeding roses of their wounds, in love of Her Our Italy! our mother visible!

Most blessed among nations and most sad, For whose dear sake the young Calabrian fell That day at Aspromonte and was glad That in an age when God was bought and sold One man could die for Liberty! but we, burnt out and cold, See Honour smitten on the cheek and gyves Bind the sweet feet of Mercy: Poverty Creeps through our sunless lanes and with sharp knives Cuts the warm throats of children stealthily, And no word said:- O we are wretched men Unworthy of our great inheritance! where is the pen Of austere Milton? where the mighty sword Which slew its master righteously? the years Have lost their ancient leader, and no word Breaks from the voiceless tripod on our ears; While as a ruined
mother in some spasm Bears a base child and loathes it, so our best enthusiasm Genders unlawful children, Anarchy Freedom's own Judas, the vile prodigal License who steals the gold of Liberty And yet nothing, Ignorance the real One Fratricide since Cain, Envy the asp That stings itself to anguish, Avarice whose palsied grasp Is in its extent stiffened, moneyed Greed For whose dull appetite men waste away Amid the whirr of wheels and are the seed Of things which slay their sower, these each day Sees rife in England, and the gentle feet Of Beauty tread no more the stones of each unlovely street.

What even Cromwell spared is desecrated By weed and worm, left to the stormy play Of wind and beating snow, or renovated By more destructful hands: Time's worst decay Will wreath its ruins with some loveliness, But these new Vandals can but make a rainproof barrenness.

Where is that Art which bade the Angels sing Through Lincoln's lofty choir, till the air Seems from such marble harmonies to ring With sweeter song than common lips can dare To draw from actual reed? ah! where is now The cunning hand which made the flowering hawthorn branches bow For Southwell's arch, and carved the House of One Who loved the lilies of the field with all Our dearest English flowers? the same sun Rises for us: the season's natural Weave the same tapestry of green and gray: The unchanged hills are with us: but that Spirit hath passed away.

And yet perchance it may be better so, For Tyranny is an incestuous Queen, Murder her brother is her bedfellow, And the Plague chambers with her: in obscene And bloody paths her treacherous feet are set; Better the empty desert and a soul inviolate!

For gentle brotherhood, the harmony Of living in the healthful air, the swift Clean beauty of strong limbs when men are free And women chaste, these are the things which lift Our souls up more than even Agnolo's Gaunt blinded Sibyl poring o'er the scroll of human woes, Or Titian's little maiden on the stair White as her own sweet lily and as tall, Or Mona Lisa smiling through her hair, Ah! somehow life is bigger after all Than any painted angel could we see The God that is within us! The old Greek serenity Which curbs the passion of that level line Of marble youths, who with untroubled eyes And chastened limbs ride round Athena's shrine And mirror her divine economies, And balanced symmetry of what in man Would else wage ceaseless warfare,- this at least within the span Between our mother's kisses and the grave Might
so inform our lives, that we could win Such mighty empires that from her cave Temptation would grow hoarse, and pallid Sin Would walk ashamed of his adulteries, And Passion creep from out the House of Lust with startled eyes.

To make the Body and the Spirit one With all right things, till no thing live in vain From morn to noon, but in sweet unison With every pulse of flesh and throb of pain The Soul in flawless essence high enthroned, Against all outer vain attack invincibly bastioned, Mark with serene impartiality The strife of things, and yet be comforted, Knowing that by the chain causality All separate existences are wed Into one supreme whole, whose utterance Is joy, or holier praise! ah! surely this were governance Of life in most august omnipresence, Through which the rational intellect would find In passion its expression, and mere sense Ignoble else, lend fire to the mind, And being joined with it in harmony More mystical than that which binds the stars planetary Strike from their several tones one octave chord Whose cadence being measureless Would fly Through all the circling spheres, then to its Lord Return refreshed with its new empery And more exultant power;- this indeed Could we but reach it were to find the last, the perfect creed.

Ah! it was easy when the world was young To keep one's life free and inviolate, From our sad lips another song is rung, By our own hands our heads are desecrate, Wanderers in drear exile and dispossessed Of what should be our own, we can but feed on wild unrest.

Somehow the grace, the bloom of things has flown, And of all men we are most wretched who Must live each other's lives and not our own For very pity's sake and then undo All that we live for- it was otherwise When soul and body seemed to blend in mystic symphonies.

But we have left those gentle haunts to pass With weary feet to the new Calvary, Where we behold, as one who in a glass Sees his own face, self-slain Humanity, And in the dumb reproach of that sad gaze Learn what an awful phantom the red hand of man can raise.

O smitten mouth! O forehead crowned with thorn! O chalice of all common miseries! Thou for our sakes that loved thee not hast borne An agony of endless centuries, And we were vain and ignorant nor knew That when we stabbed thy heart it was our own real hearts we slew.
Being ourselves the sowers and the seeds, The night that covers and the lights that fade, The spear that pierces and the side that bleeds, The lips betraying and the life betrayed; The deep hath calm: the moon hath rest: but we Lords of the natural world are yet our own dread enemy.

Is this the end of all that primal force Which, in its changes being still the same, From eyeless Chaos cleft its upward course, Through ravenous seas and whirling rocks and flame, Till the suns met in heaven and began Their cycles, and the morning stars sang, and the Word was Man!

Nay, nay, we are but crucified, and though The bloody sweat falls from our brows like rain, Loosen the nails- we shall come down I know, Stanch the red wounds- we shall be whole again, No need have we of hyssop-laden rod, That which is purely human that is Godlike that is God.

THE END
1881

ELEUTHERIA

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated “art for art’s sake” and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Eleutheria (1881) - A collection of Wilde's shorter poems which includes Sonnet to Liberty, Ave Imperatrix, To Milton, Louis Napoleon, Quantum Mutata, Libertatis Sacra Fames, and more.
SONNET TO LIBERTY

Not that I love thy children, whose dull eyes See nothing save their own unlovely woe, Whose minds know nothing, nothing care to know, But that the roar of thy Democracies, Thy reigns of Terror, thy great Anarchies, Mirror my wildest passions like the sea, And give my rage a brother—! Liberty!

For his sake only do thy dissonant cries Delight my discreet soul, else might all kings By bloody knout or treacherous cannonades Rob nations of their rights inviolate And I remain unmoved— and yet, and yet, These Christs that die upon the barricades, God knows it I am with them, in some things.
AVE IMPERATRIX

Set in this stormy Northern sea, Queen of these restless fields of tide, England! what shall men say of thee, Before whose feet the worlds divide?

The earth, a brittle globe of glass, Lies in the hollow of thy hand, And through its heart of crystal pass, Like shadows through a twilight land, The spears of crimson-suited war, The long white-crested waves of fight, And all the deadly fires which are The torches of the lords of Night.

The yellow leopards, strained and lean, The treacherous Russian knows so well, With gaping blackened jaws are seen Leap through the hail of screaming shell.

The strong sea-lion of England’s wars Hath left his sapphire cave of sea, To battle with the storm that mars The star of England’s chivalry.

The brazen-throated clarion blows Across the Pathan’s reedy fen, And the high steeps of Indian snows Shake to the tread of armed men.

And many an Afghan chief, who lies Beneath his cool pomegranate-trees, Clutches his sword in fierce surmise When on the mountain-side he sees The fleet-foot Marri scout, who comes To tell how he hath heard afar The measured roll of English drums Beat at the gates of Kandahar.

For southern wind and east wind meet Where, girt and crowned by sword and fire, England with bare and bloody feet Climbs the steep road of wide empire.

O lonely Himalayan height, Gray pillar of the Indian sky, Where saw’st thou last in clanging fight, Our winged dogs of Victory?

The almond groves of Samarcand, Bokhara, where red lilies blow, And Oxus, by whose yellow sand The grave white-turbaned merchants go: And on from thence to Ispahan, The gilded garden of the sun, Whence the long dusty caravan Brings cedar and vermilion; And that dread city of Cabool Set at the mountain’s scarped feet, Whose marble tanks are ever full With water for the noon-day heat: Where through the narrow straight Bazaar A little maid Circassian Is led, a present from the Czar Unto some old and bearded khan, Here have our wild war-eagles flown, And flapped
wide wings in fiery fight; But the sad dove, that sits alone In England- she hath no delight.

In vain the laughing girl will lean To greet her love with love-lit eyes: Down in some treacherous black ravine, Clutching his flag, the dead boy lies.

And many a moon and sun will see The lingering wistful children wait To climb upon their father’s knee; And in each house made desolate Pale women who have lost their lord Will kiss the relics of the slain Some tarnished epaulet- some sword Poor toys to soothe such anguished pain.

For not in quiet English fields Are these, our brothers, laid to rest. Where we might deck their broken shields With all the flowers the dead love best.

For some are by the Delhi walls, And many in the Afghan land, And many where the Ganges falls Through seven mouths of shifting sand.

And some in Russian waters lie, And others in the seas which are The portals to the East, or by The wind-swept heights of Trafalgar.

O wandering graves! O restless sleep! O silence of the sunless day! O still ravine! O stormy deep! Give up your prey! Give up your prey! And thou whose wounds are never healed, Whose weary race is never won, O Cromwell’s England! must thou yield For every inch of ground a son?

Go! crown with thorns thy gold-crowned head, Change thy glad song to song of pain; Wind and wild wave have got thy dead, And will not yield them back again.

Wave and wild wind and foreign shore Possess the flower of English land Lips that thy lips shall kiss no more, Hands that shall never clasp thy hand.

What profit now that we have bound The whole round world with net of gold, If hidden in our heart is found The care that groweth never old?

What profit that our galleys ride, Pine-forest-like, on every main? Ruin and wreck are at our side, Grim warders of the House of pain.
Where are the brave, the strong, the fleet Where is our English chivalry? Wild grasses are their burial-sheet, And sobbing waves their threnody.

O loved ones lying far away, What word of love can dead lips send!
O wasted dust! O senseless clay!
Is this the end! is this the end!
Peace, peace! we wrong the noble dead To vex their solemn slumber so: Though childless, and with thorn-crowned head, Up the steep road must England go, Yet when this fiery web is spun, Her watchmen shall decry from far The young Republic like a sun Rise from these crimson seas of war.
TO MILTON

Milton! I think thy spirit hath passed away From these white cliffs, 
and high embattled-towers; This gorgeous fiery-colored world of 
ours Seems fallen into ashes dull and gray, And the age changed 
unto a mimic play, Wherein we waste our else too-crowded hours: 
For all our pomp and pageantry and powers We are but fit to delve 
the common clay, Seeing this little isle on which we stand, This 
England, this sea-lion of the sea, By ignorant demagogues is held 
in fee, Who love her not: Dear God! is this the land Which bare a 
triple empire in her hand When Cromwell spake the word 
Democracy!

LOUIS NAPOLEON

Eagle of Austerlitz! where were thy wings When far away upon a 
barbarous strand, In fight unequal, by an obscure hand, Fell the 
last scion of thy brood of Kings!

Poor boy! thou wilt not flaunt thy cloak of red, Nor ride in state 
through Paris in the van Of thy returning legions, but instead Thy 
mother France, free and republican, Shall on thy dead and 
crownless forehead place The better laurels of a soldier’s crown, 
That not dishonored should thy soul go down To tell the mighty 
Sire of thy race That France hath kissed the mouth of Liberty, And 
found it sweeter than his honeyed bees, And that the giant wave 
Democracy Breaks on the shores where Kings lay couched at ease.

SONNET On the Massacre of the Christians in Bulgaria.

Christ, dost Thou live indeed? or are Thy bones Still straightened 
in their rock-hewn sepulchre? And was Thy Rising only dreamed 
by her Whose love of Thee for all her sin atones? For here the air is 
horrid with men’s groans, The priests who call upon Thy name are 
slain, Dost Thou not hear the bitter wail of pain From those whose 
children lie upon the stones? Come down, O Son of God! 
incestuous gloom Curtains the land, and through the starless night 
Over Thy Cross the Crescent moon I see!

If Thou in very truth didst burst the tomb Come down, O Son of 
Man! and show Thy might Lest Mahomet be crowned instead of 
Thee!
QUANTUM MUTATA
There was a time in Europe long ago, When no man died for freedom anywhere, But England's lion leaping from its lair Laid hands on the oppressor! it was so While England could a great Republic show.

Witness the men of Piedmont, chiefest care Of Cromwell, when with impotent despair The Pontiff in his painted portico Trembled before our stern embassadors.

How comes it then that from such high estate We have thus fallen, save that Luxury With barren merchandise piles up the gate Where nobler thoughts and deeds should enter by: Else might we still be Milton's heritors.

LIBERTATIS SACRA FAMES
Albeit nurtured in democracy, And liking best that state republican Where every man is Kinglike and no man Is crowned above his fellows, yet I see Spite of this modern fret for Liberty, Better the rule of One, whom all obey, Than to let clamorous demagogues betray Our freedom with the kiss of anarchy.

Wherefore I love them not whose hands profane Plant the red flag upon the piled-up street For no right cause, beneath whose ignorant reign Arts, Culture, Reverence, Honor, all things fade, Save Treason and the dagger of her trade, And Murder with his silent bloody feet.

THEORETIKOS
This mighty empire hath but feet of clay; Of all its ancient chivalry and might Our little island is forsaken quite: Some enemy hath stolen its crown of bay, And from its hills that voice hath passed away Which spake of Freedom: O come out of it, Come out of it, my Soul, thou art not fit For this vile traffic-house, where day by day Wisdom and reverence are sold at mart, And the rude people rage with ignorant cries Against an heritage of centuries.

It mars my calm: wherefore in dreams of Art And loftiest culture I would stand apart, Neither for God, nor for His enemies.

THE END