***Marsyas:***  ***Un Paradis artificiel***

1.

Dante, you prayed to Phoebus, in

 The moment of your Spirit’s flight,

 In posture of Marsyas, that he might *See* Paradiso, *i.*—[Mr V]

Unsheathe you from your earthly skin.

Phoebus, how kind of you to skin *me*.

 (Who would dress up must be dressed down.)

 *Bring me my pearls, my satin gown*…

I have immoral longings in me.

Fate’s Jacquard loom, by Clotho plied,

 Has fashioned me a stylish look

 From the Platonic Pattern Book,

![C:\Users\Aphori\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\X0NB3R66\MC900438726[1].jpg]()![C:\Users\Aphori\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\X0NB3R66\MC900438726[1].jpg]()With threads a tragic purple dyed;

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Has made me just the clothes that suit

 A shining breath, a breathing light.

 No, not for me the robe of white.

I cannot play the harp or lute.

Then let me don my swallow-tails.

 (*O quando uti chelidon!*)

 The mystic force that leads me on

Will see my safely through the gales.

Top hat and cane as well, and gloves:

 These I bring with me, for the sake

 Of wrongs suffered and done. Clothes make

The man; make, too, the soul that loves

To strike a transcendental pose.

 Style is the timeless thing, my Friends.

 What confidence the right look lends

When rising to the Mystic Rose!

(Isn’t it curious, Dears, how, seen

 From here, that roseate destination

 Somewhat resembles a carnation,

Its colour a subtle shade of green?)

*Ecce*, my Dears, behold, look on as

 Oscar performs a happy ending,

 Complete with hymns and angels tending,

And hallelujahs and hosannas!

2.

Gauche splendour of youth, my old great coat—

 Fur-lined, *de trop*, absurdly grand—

 Hangs on me now; that angel band

I promised joins me as I float

Ever-so-lightly up; and so

 I pass the moon’s inconstant sphere,

*See* Paradiso, ii *.*

—[Mr V]

 And for an instant, shed a tear

As I look back and down below:

Bosie, poor Dives, what a fall!

 There in a row house rented for you

 While your contemporaries ignore you.

You loomed so large, you are so small.

Yet I would gladly lift you up,

 Oh I would love you in the flower

 Of youth for an eternal hour!

With Christ the Poet you would sup.

You’re having a bad dream, poor thing.

 You simply can’t *imagine* where

 I’m going… How could you *be* there,

In the Heaven of Blithe Imagining?

Ah, Bosie, Bosie, you are old!

 Ruined by gambling, drink, and rage,

 A relic of a bygone age,

You shiver in your bed with cold

As in that fitful sleep you lie.

 Down to your body I let float,

 To warm your dreams, my old great coat.

Thou hast more need of it than I.

3. *A Brief ‘Retroscension’*

That wingèd youth, *quel* *amuse-bouche*!—

 Will the Lord strike me with his levin

 For chasing cherubs into Heaven?

The Saints will find me somewhat *louche*,

I’m sure; they’ll turn away from me

 And ask of God, with a pained face,

 That He request I leave the place,

Like some old haughty maître-d’.

Down-at-heels Mephistopheles,

 Turn back! The moon’s where you belong,

 Or listening to Casella’s song

*See* Purgatorio*,* *ii*:

*to a poem by Dante.*

 —[Mr V]

At Purgatory’s foot, at peace

With all your selves… How threadbare seem

 My splendid clothes now, shameful rags…

 My gloves, pricked from sewing mail bags…

Is this another prison dream?

Penance lacks charm. At least to be

 Belacqua, Dante’s idle friend,

 Would give me leisure-space to mend

My ways a bit more casually,



Not keen to make that arduous climb

 To the Earthly Paradise. A breeze

 Would fan me, head between my knees,

(For surely I have served my time!)

Sitting in shade—no, not to brood:

 To daydream, perhaps gently jeering

 My old friend’s strenuous mountaineering,

His fetish for sheer Altitude.

For what *I* crave is *Latitude*.—

 Still, why not play along? The ride’s

 Easy, the view, glorious. Besides,

I would not have them think me rude.

4.

How warm is the sky’s Giotto blue!

 The angels, purest Raphael;

 Music by Mozart—chosen well:

Wagnerian bombast would not do.

So let the Saints and Martyrs stare!

 At least (if fervent prayer has found

 Favour) shelves lined with vellum-bound

Volumes are waiting for me there.

Perhaps I will encounter Pater

 Browsing among the blessèd aisles,

 And we will meet with tears and smiles,

The Actor and the Contemplator.

Tennyson I shall surely see,

 And Arthur with him, as of old,

 On a cloud flushed with pink and gold,

Together in the Mystery.

Ah, may his weary head he lay

 On Arthur’s bosom, may the balm

 Of sweet words all his terror calm

That ever again he’ll go away!

Is Dante Alighieri now

 The mystic Dante Gabriel?

 Is that his Blessèd Damozel

Beside him, Lizzie, all aglow?

Ah, *vita nuova!* Young once more,

 And standing in a well of light,

 Do they look round with second sight

As if they knew it all of yore?

Is poor, dear Ruskin young again,

 And with his Rosa Mystica

 At one in spirit and in, ah!

The blissful flesh, amen, amen?

Chaucer and I are pledged to go

 Bunburying. And oh, Shakespeare!

 He is the very atmosphere:

It is the robe of Prospero,

The air we breathe, art’s Holy Ghost.

 I’ll look around, and see my wife,

 And Mother, she who gave me life,

And Father: all my heart’s own host!

And my poor Cyril, dear, brave boy!

 My reckless hero of the war!

 To think that I shall hold, once more,

The child of our first nuptial joy!

And shall I see *my* Beatrice,

 Isola, my dear little sister?

 How many years since last I kissed her!

Do I deserve such perfect bliss?

Look! In a rosy, cloudy bower

 Sit the First Pair with Cain and Abel.

 (Here Murder’s but a wicked fable.)

Stay ever ripe, thou drowsy Hour!

5.

The Artist Christ: does He receive

 Me with a smile? Am I forgiven?

 Can one be citizen of a Heaven

In which one does not quite believe?

Prepare yourself, vagabond soul,

 To add—but ah! then must you settle

 At last?—one queer, flamboyant petal

To the Eternal Buttonhole.

In a playhouse not made with hands 2 Cor. 5:1.

 I join a divine comedy

 Of manners, for eternity:

For such the Lord’s good taste demands.

The lightness of a witty farce

 Is wedded to the great Sublime

 In Heaven’s Play—a perfect rhyme.

And I shall be among the stars.



♫