**\* *Strange Gods* \***



***Theologies of Oscar Wilde***

The *prisca theologia*,

The *philosophia perennis*…

Many have never been to Venice,

But all are in one Gondola.

***Table of Contents***

A Roundabout Cosmology 3

Christ the Artist 5

From Père Lachaise:

A Theatre Critic in Purgatory 7

Resurrection in the Flesh: The Theology of Eros 14

Psalms of the Heresiarch:

The Gnostic Dandies 17

The Gnostic Christ 20

The Miracle of the Stigmata 22

The Theology of Being Earnest:

The Importance of 24

The Selfish Giant 26

The Critic as Artist as Theologian:

A Commentary on ‘The Selfish Giant’ 28

*Strange Gods*

1. Ye Shall Have Other Gods Before You 30

2. The God Who Was Bored 32

3. Heliogabalus 34

Julian the Apostate 36

Singular Truths 37

From Père Lachaise:

The Prophets 39

The Golem 36

The Tetragrammaton 41

A Credo of Sorts 42

Our Lady of Sorrows 44

Marsyas 46

***A Roundabout Cosmology***

1.

And then the pivot of a comma

Spins me around, and I return

To *C.3.3.* (Book One) and burn

In tinsel fires of melodrama,

I am in Hell, nor am I ever

Quite out of it, by the same token

By which Eternity’s stained, broken,

And pieced again (as by a clever

Craftsman) in what the eye sees as

White swans against a sky of blue,

When a warm wind blows gently through

The meadow, ruffling the green grass,

I am in Purgatory, am always

In Purgatory, by the same token

As who shall heal a promise broken

I walk the long, memorious hallways,

I am in Heaven perpetual

By the same (is it the same?) token,

Awakened now, and my fast broken,

I find it hardly bearable,

At times, this sorry Paradise,

For the sad secret of salvation

If you look hard, is resignation,

Writ in ice-crystals in its eyes,

Despair is only hope fulfilled,

So with its selves my soul debates,

Lingering by Saint Peter’s Gates,

So the same soul of mine that willed

Its way up from the lower realms

Is not the same that sees the good

Points even in the savage wood,

Rebellion gathers, overwhelms

A soul that doubts this is the best,

And the redundancy of stasis

Becomes the Luciferian basis

Of renewed longing and unrest,

As if there *had* to be a fall

From grace, as if there were a Schedule,

And now Hell is a burning red jewel

And a sidhe-cry and Siren call

That slices through the sound of harps

And psalteries and cold, hymning voices

Like mad despair, sick of its choices,

Chromatic accidentals, sharps

And keen augmented fifths arouse

In me, a critic always, even

In Heaven (especially in Heaven)

A lust to join in Hell’s carouse,

To be there, or to have been there,

So I have always been in Hell

When the past drowns me in a swell

Of guilt that comes from everywhere,

But it recedes, the whelming sea

Of grief, the salt regret, again

I am, and will, I think, remain,

Upon the Mount of Purgatory,

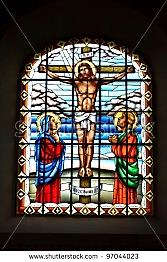
For in real Hell or abstract Heaven

I am someone else, here only I

Am what I am, eternally,

It seems, when it is half-past seven,

***Christ the Artist***

****

*For Francis Thompson, who saw*

*‘the many-splendoured thing’.*

1.

*Unsearchable love of the Light!*

*Fire burning bitter in the bone!*

*I dwell inside the thickest stone.*

*I cast the shadow that is night.*

*‘And lo, Christ walking on the water,*

*I cast the lights upon the Thames. Not of Genesareth, but Thames!’*

*Late in the evening, to and fro*

*I pace along the Docks, as Bow*

*Bells ring for the forgotten names.*

*Through the Whitechapel slums, among*

*The thieves and murderers who stalk*

*The ladies of the night I walk,*

*And where the vaudeville tunes are sung.*

*I know this city. Many a time*

*Have I wept at the penny gaffs*

*In Marylebone, where misery laughs.*

*At misery in pantomime.*

*The City of Encounters, say*

*Some; ‘tis the City of Resurrections*

*To me, seeking in all directions*

*Darkness to raise back into Day.*

*I walk in bitter Realism’s*

*Fog past the tenements and hovels*

*Where lunatics are writing novels.*

*How shall I heal their souls’ deep schisms?*

*Poised above Piccadilly Circus,*

*Atop the fountain, stands the statue The work of Alfred Gilbert, dedicated*

*Of Christian Charity, aiming at you in 1893. Intended to represent Anteros,*

*With bow and arrow. Strange his work is, but popularly identified with Eros.*

*And wondrous, for this angel is Eros,*

* Whose love the Fathers named a vice.*

*He blesses lovers with his eyes.*

*He is Saint Francis’ god, and Nero’s.*

*He is corrupt, he is immortal.*

*You know it when the shaft runs through you.*

*He knows you and he always knew you,*

*This Shady Boy by Heaven’s portal.*

*My eyes in Soho catch the wink*

*Of renters in their favourite haunts,*

*The music halls and restaurants.*

*I pass the Knightsbridge Skating Rink,*

*I heave how many a weary sigh*

*Outside the brilliant Pavilion,*

*Exchanging glances with the million-*

*Eyed, eternal Passerby.*

*At the Old Bailey I have seen*

*The crooked sword of Justice deal*

*Death to the poor that Love could heal,*

*To keep Hate’s memory ever-green.*

*And on the Empire’s promenade*

*Where courtesans and dandies strut,*

*At the Savoy, and in the smut*

*Of shadowy brothels, I am God.*

*Upon a platform I have waited*

*Somewhere in the damp Underground,*

* With crowds of people milling round*

*Like prisoners whose lot is fated.*

*I long to take them out of here,*

*To save them from the Limbo of*

*A life that has no hope or love.*

*A grinding, howling thing draws near,*

*Till from the tunnel there comes screeching*

*A Juggernaut with eyes of glass*

*Whence glazed eyes stare out, as they pass,*

*With a look silently beseeching,*

*Like victims bound for immolation.*

*And on the metal dragon speeds, The express train to Charing Cross.*

*Stuffed full of captives; my heart bleeds, (‘…and on thy so sore loss*

*For of what Cross is it a Station, Shall shine the traffic of Jacob’s Ladder*

*Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross’.)*

*This day-by-day self-sacrifice?*

*And I, the Harrower of Hell,*

*Am harrowed more than I can tell*

*By the death in those glassy eyes.*

*I cannot save them, anymore*

*Than Dante could his virtuous heathen,*

*From the poisonous fogs they breathe in.*

*But then, what is a saviour for?*

***From Père Lachaise***

***A Theatre Critic in Purgatory***

1.

Returning to my favourite

Subject, myself: how is it I

Can speak to you? Did I not die?  
I’m hard-pressed to account for it.

Somehow into your minds I weave,

Thread upon thread of this dilating

Poem I’m writing, or dictating,

The form in which I laugh and grieve.

No, not dictating: say, ‘scriptating’.

It isn’t quite my voice I’m using,

But Mr V’s good hand (*ab*using

It, I’m afraid). This *is* frustrating,

I must say, for in life I put

My genius into my voice.

Into my writing, my Dear Boys,

I only put my talent. (What

Writing I did, whether of dramas

Or lyric poems, was a performance.

Ah, was the applause worth all the torments

Of adding and deleting commas?)

2. *A fashionably-dressed and beautiful young*

*But Mr Wilde, is there no way woman insists on more details; I cannot resist*

*You can describe the place a little, the importunities of such a charming Sphinx.*

*To shed some light upon the Riddle?*

If you insist, I can but say

What I once said to Gide, when he

Reached me by séance years ago.

I told him (for he longed to know)

That the Hereafter seems to be

A chaos, at times quite alarming,

Of fluid nebulosities,

A *cloaque* brimming with the lees

Of living matter. A less charming

Setting for a lost soul’s purgation

Could hardly be imagined, Dears.

If not for curious sight-seers

Like you, and the odd communication

*Sir William Barrett, physicist*

With those who are psychically inclined,  *and member of the Society*

Like Mr V, with his good hand, *for Psychical Research.*

And the strange power to roam from land

To land at will, free as the wind,

And see the world through others’ eyes,

And read what they are reading—well,

I really *would* think this is Hell.

I dwell among great Mysteries,

Beyond my ken, but if there *is*

A God, a grand *Metteur en Scène*

(And that’s unclear), then if and when

We meet in that great Heaven of His,

I may just venture a suggestion

Or two, in helpful, sympathetic

Fashion, regarding His ‘aesthetic,’

As it were. I may even question

His basic premise as too vague.

At least the plotting lacks precision,

The script cries out for some revision…

I’d try his patience with such *blague*,

No doubt, for He is the *Auteur*,

I but a creature and a critic.

His response would be quite acidic,

Given with the Most High *hauteur.*

3.

Yet it *does* sometimes seem to me

God made Creation more to show

What could be done *ex nihilo*,

What sort of cosmic *jeu d’esprit*

An artist of his scale and stature

Could fashion from unlikely clay

Than for some serious purpose, say,

To edify Man’s fallen nature.

Why *not* create a universe?

No one had thought of it before,

And formless voids are such a bore.

So, there it is. One could do worse.

To say the least, it shows a certain

Originality, Creation.

The audience thrill with expectation.

The fanfare, please! Up goes the curtain.

Yes, all for show, my Dears! For show

The Divine Wit or *Saint-Esprit*

Rings changes on the verb ‘to be’.

In the beginning was the *mot*,

And in the end? *Just wait*, says God.

Meanwhile, *Encore!* we cry, and dawn

With practiced fingers on the lawn

Plays us a charming new aubade.

**

4. *The Lord as Lord Henry*

A landscape artist of renown,

He shaped us, for our domicile,

A Garden in the English style,

One our own Capability Brown

Could not have bettered for its touches

Of studied wildness. And among

These bosky groves He placed the young

And lovely nudes, with profiles such as

Few artists’ models of our day

Could hope to rival. What they lacked,

Though, was experience—a fact

The Lord addressed, in His own way,

By leading them into temptation.

This took the form of a fruit tree

Called Knowledge, clearly meant to be

A lively source of complication,

To fructify a sense of sin

In souls else shut off from impressions

Imparted only through transgressions

Of laws that He had trapped them in.

He *wanted* them to sin. To ensure

They’d eat the fruit that he had brought to

Their notice, the Lord told them not to.

To lend sin such perverse allure:

Was this not, in itself, perverse?

Almost Lord Henry-like, in its

Own way, to mold their childish wits

To seek a blessing through a curse.

Is Eden not a Gnostic College?

Of course, when God tells the pair, *No!*

It reads to their young ears like, *Know!*

For is not it the Tree of Knowledge?

On homophones is the exam.

(Two words, the same when said aloud,

Mean different things.) They have been ‘ploughed’,

Sent down, nay, rusticated! Damn

The snake, that renegade professor

Of Gnosis! On the pair how just

The ban that falls, as fall it must

On every naive transgressor!



Oh for the days when Adam walked

His Eden Gardens, dropping names

On bird and bush: what pun and games!

But sweetly, too, the serpent talked,

And sweet to Eve the apple’s taste.

Now drops the boom, the bomb, the curtain.

Down on your knees, O Fallen! Blurt an

*Amen* on your way through the Waste!

God willed the Fall. His tragic sense

Of Beauty poisons fleecy white

With scarlet sunsets. For the light

Is richest in its decadence.

5. *Murder and Civilisation*

Now the experiment with Cain,

The scandal of a murderous brother.

(Murder, Civilisation’s Mother.

The arts are born of Abel slain.)

And Cain miraculously finds

A bride among the thorns, and founds

A city. The entrancing sounds

Of Jubal’s harp refine our minds.

(And to this day the great Musicians

Choreograph our inner strife,

Redeem this nasty, brutish life

With variations and divisions

Almost divine, but all-too-short.

Bliss Schopenhaueresque and Buddhist

Is interrupted by the rudest,

Loudest artillery retort.

The mind well-read in truth and law

Acknowledges Will’s lawless power.

Though Art wields Beauty for an hour,

Life is, well, red in tooth and claw.)

Now, there were giants in the earth

In those days, sons of God came in

To mortal women—‘twas no sin:

To monstrous heroes they gave birth.

And foremost were the Nephelim.

Of chthonian genius, walking towers

Of strength, with superhuman powers:

They were God’s opium-pagan dream.

Like Nero with the Christians He

Toyed with extermination of

The masses He had ceased to love.

We bored the Lord. *Tiens! C’est la vie.*

Noah, sophisticated man,

Skims o’er the Flood in a fine yacht.

The *louche* charms of the polyglot

Are Babel’s curse. For what else can

A tower do but fall? Two nights

Lot’s daughters make him drunk: their way

They have with him, so that there may

Be Ammonites and Moabites.

*Let there be colour*, said the Lord.

Sin is the colour element.

Brimstone burns green and yellow, sent

Down on Uranians abhorred.

Even Whistler, master of design,

Of exquisite taste, did not give more

Fastidious specifications for

The Peacock Room than the Divine

Lord of Hosts gave to holy Moses

For Ark and Tabernacle and Tent

Of Tabernacle, details meant

To grace the priests’ Levitic poses

With the appurtenances thereto—

Rich curtains, cherubs, robe, ephod,

And breastplate—thus to make of God

A Symphony in Gold and Blue.

*All this for Beauty*, saith Jehovah.

The Aaronite toilette, the good

Smell of incense, acacia wood

And the burnt offerings wafting over

The Tabernacle, these shall be

The envy of pre-Raphaelites *Who was William Morris*

And Pater will observe the rites *compared with Monsieur Bezalel?*

And prose upon them subtly.

The Ten Commandments plagiarise

The Hammurabi code. Jehovah?

Derivative pastiche, warmed over,

Of various older deities.

God loves His Moses: that is why

He tries to kill him. Each God kills

The ones He loves, until He wills

Repentance. (Then His Son must die.)

\*

The Scriptures dwell on the descent

Of Man from the first bitten fruit

Because this Truth is absolute,

That we are all born decadent.

*Coda*

Onward and onward rolls the Torah.

But of Old Testament history

The glory and grandeur die for me

With tragic Sodom and Gomorrah.

**

***Resurrection in the Flesh***

***The Theology of Eros***

*Come la carne glorïosa e santa When the flesh, glorious and sanctified,*

*fia rivestita, la nostra persona shall be clothed on us again, our persons*

*Più grata fia per esser tutta quanta… will be more acceptable for being complete…*

*\**

*onde la vision crescer convene so that our vision needs must increase,*

*crescer l’ardor che di quella s’accende, our ardor increase which by that is kindled,*

*crescer lo raggio che da esso vene. and our radiance increase which comes from this.*

—Saint Thomas, *Paradiso* XIV, 43-51

1.

Ah, resurrection in the flesh!

Soul without body cannot be

Perfect: it lacks entelechy.

Body and soul must fully mesh,

And so they do in Heaven; so

In this way is increased l’ardor

Aquinas notes: not less, but more

Intensely does the body glow



In the perfection of its nature.

Thus Aristotle and Saint Paul

Join hands, and body-soul knows all

The consummations of the creature.

Allow me some extrapolation.

For instance, are there lavatories

In Heaven, among its other glories?

Or will there be a sublimation

Of flesh? Will our digestive tracts,

Like Marx’s State, wither away,

Leaving for free erotic play

The once-utilitarian facts,

Our crudest anatomical features?

For if I understand Paul’s text,

If we have bodies, they are sexed;

If sexed, they will be sensual creatures.

Those heavenly bodies of ours will

Have intercourse of every kind,

Body with body, not just mind

With mind, and thus will soul fulfil

As real its mere potentiality,

And have an excellent good time

In doing so, in the Sublime

Of earthly, human sexuality.

Why should man’s ivory shaft and tower,

And woman’s fertile field and cave

Of making ‘twixt the thighs, not have

Their fullness there, and deathless flower?

On second thought, though, it would be

A shame to eliminate the pleasure

Of good food eaten at one’s leisure

With wine, and genial revelry.

Delicious was unfallen meat, See Paradise Lost, V.—[Mr V]

To taste which Raphael was not nice;

With keen dispatch in Paradise

He dined, and with concoctive heat.

Where height and broadness intersect

A man may feel the stress inside,

On paradox be crucified,

Crushed in a crux. *I am the Elect!*

*I am the Damned!* cries poor Verlaine.

The Pagan and the Christian, in

A duel of dualisms, sin

Against each other, and the pain

Of being stretched and pierced by demon

Eros even as one flies to Heaven

Blasphemes by uttering, with the Seven

Last Words, ejaculate of semen!

So shall we dine in Heaven, with friends

Convivial. So pure, up there,

Is the divine, ambrosial fare

That all will be absorbed, and hence

There will be nothing left to be

Eliminated, leaving us

Free to explore the erogenous

Organs, which shall be gladsomely

Creative (but not procreative!)

Joy-giving and -receiving zones.

Orgasms, with their cries and moans,

Will be Heaven’s chorus and its native

Language, and alleluia and

Amen will be replaced by an ah!

And oh! will do for a hosanna:

Now doesn’t that sound rather grand?

The erotic will grow infinitely

So, pleasure as enduring as

Intense: all this will come to pass

Just as it ought to, and quite fitly,

According to the Keatsian Truth

Scripture enjoins us give hospitality—including food—to strangers; after all, they might be Angels, and Angels eat human food when visiting the Earth. (Genesis 18:8, Hebrews 13:12)

In Heaven the Angels seem to prefer a manna-based diet, which to mortals is angel’s-food-cake, indeed: ‘Yet He had commanded the clouds above, and opened the doors of heaven, had rained down manna on them to eat, and given them of the bread of heaven. Men ate angels' food; He sent them food to the full’. (Psalm 78:23-25)

Since Angels are immortal, they do not eat

to survive, but purely for enjoyment: they

are holy hedonists and blessèd epicures.

That what is Beautiful will in

The end prevail—the death of sin

Gives birth to an eternal Youth.

All will be yielded-to Temptation.

When Body and Soul together swell

One wine-dark wave, how can we tell

The Revel from the Revelation?

***There is no hell but* this, *a***

***body without a soul*, *or* *a* *soul without a body.***

Letter to Robbie Ross

***The Gnostic Dandies***

***Psalms of the Heresiarch***

1. *Chorus of Ophites, or Gnostic Libertines*

From underneath Egyptian sands

We, the true Sons of Christ, arise.

Believe with us, and lift your eyes

From those false stories in your hands!

We are the Keepers of the Spark,

Worshippers of the Sacred Snake,

Christ’s secret emblem… For His sake

We brave life’s utmost sins and dark

Temptations; for His sake we suck

The marrow of experience

To draw our Godhead from the dense

Shell of the body’s solid muck.

How else but through the furious thresh

Of pain and pleasure can one free

The spark of immortality

Imprisoned in the tortured flesh?

Haunting the haunts of worldliness,

Baptised in rites of carnal pleasure,

We Gnostic Dandies walk at leisure

Through the secular wilderness

Like *flaneurs* on an evening stroll.

Sophisticated pilgrim: quaff

Sin’s heady, poisonous wine, and laugh!

Redeem, by martyring, your soul!

What is forbidden to the Saved?

Let fools and cowards stand in awe

Of worldly authority and law

And keep their inner God enslaved.

Into our hearts the Saviour burned

The secret words His Gospel spells;

By these we live and die. Who else

But we Elected Ones have learned

The joy of feeling overfull

Of raw Divinity, licentious

God-lust that thrills the nerves and clenches

The muscles of an animal?

Is the Flesh evil? Then defile

The Flesh and make of it your whore

Until Lust knows it to the core,

How loathsome a thing it is, and vile!

Perfect, tranquil Eternity

Is entered through the tempest’s gate.

Into our deaths we penetrate.

We are stabbed into Divinity.

2. *Simon Magus*

Let the man couple with the woman!

Let the girl couple with the boy!

In fiery, terrifying joy

They shall become the Superhuman.

O Word made flesh and flesh made Word!

When Kingsley shall with Newman merge,

Power and Knowledge shall converge

And the soul be both sheath and sword.

Let man be woman, woman man!

Let each tranvest the other, freeing

Themselves to be that perfect Being

Who was before the world began.

God is the deathless Androgyne.

For man is Power, woman Thought;

When these are one—O bliss long-sought!—

Humanity becomes divine.

3. *Saint Judas Iscariot*

For *Thee* did I consent to cover

Myself with deathless shame! ‘Betray’?

Ah, what a false and ugly way

To say what *Thou* said’st: *Hand me over*.

4. *Chorus of Cainites*

Hosanna to the martyred Firstborn,

He who discovered sin to save

Us from it. Bless the curse God gave

Him, curse that God, the only Cursed-Born.

Blessèd be Sodom, scapegoat city,

Sister Gomorrah, too, we mourn,

And all the evils they have borne

Over the centuries we pity.

The plural effusion of the one

Pleroma is exhaled, it breathes us

And from our earthly shell unsheathes us

Into the Light. Adam Kadmon

Awakens in us from his sleep.

That cruel tyrant named Jehovah

Trembles, because His reign is over.

Let Him sink back into the Deep!

5. *To Summarise:*

Abel is Cain. Judas is evil

To save the Christ who saves the soul.

To take upon Him all that’s foul

In Man, Christ makes Himself the Devil.

***The Gnostic Christ***

*Christ did not die to save people, but*

*to teach them how to save each other.*

—Letter to Robbie Ross

1.

*I am not your father, but your brother.*

*My miracle: I walk on sod.*

*I have known pain and sorrow. God*

*And Man bleed into one another.*

*Am I the only begotten Son?*

*The Crucifix is every place*

*Where Self meets Other face-to-face:*

*Estrangement tears them into One.*

*Deny me. Then I shall return*

*To you. For I am not your teacher.*

*Be not a beggar and beseecher.*

You *are the Truth for which you yearn.*

2. *The Thirteenth Station*

*And of the Tree of Life the fruit*

*Am I, and bruised, to be made ripe,*

*Of higher Man the suffering type.*

*Unbind me, soldiers, hand and foot—*

*The spear has done its work, I am*

*As dead as God can ever be—*

*Lest like the medlar on the tree  
I rot; let go the bleeding Lamb.*

*Release me from this fictive cross*

*And free me to become a myth,*

*A spear to fright the Nations with,*

*An empty tomb to gather moss,*

*That in my sweet, redeeming Name*

*A thousand crimes may be committed,*

*And shepherds feed on the sheep-witted,*

*And those of strong limb be made lame,*

*The healthy sick, the sighted blind,*

*The living killed to feed the dead,*

*Till one day I am rightly read*

*And all God’s tombs are left behind.*

*Now I shall strip, that I may don See* The Secret Book of James [Mr V].

*The robe of my Ascension. Light*

*Is my ascent into the Light*

*Where waits my dear Apostle John.*

3.

Lord Christ, do not come back! No: Those

Who pose as Christians would but try you

Once more, and once more crucify you

And once more cast dice for your clothes!

***The Miracle of the Stigmata***

***As Told by the Retired***

***Magus, Jesus of Nazareth***

*This is turning into a Spenserian*

*pageant of Christs, my Dears!*

1.

*I am that Jesus who, alone*

*Among His converts, in the Christ*

*Does not believe. How over-priced*

*My Promises have somehow grown,*

*Gold standard Truth, the Word of God!*

*It seems now a whole world of souls*

*Trades in this currency, and tolls*

*Its bells in honour of a fraud.*

2.

*Good Joseph bid the soldiers ply me Of Arimathea.*

*With a sponge secretly made magic*

*With sleeping potion, and tricked the tragic*

*Muse whose script bid them crucify me.*

*Martha and Mary Magdalen*

*Awoke me in my tomb of stone.*

*I went into the world alone,*

*With a changed name walked among men.*

*I dwell now at a far remove*

*From stiff-necked, proud Jerusalem.*

*I know the people, and live with them*

*In sin and joy, and weep and love.*

3.

*I have returned to my first trade,*

*And, learning from my gains and losses,*

*Am an old hand at cribs and crosses.*

*I live in the new world I made,*

*Nonplussed by the fuss made of* me*.*

*I hear my name invoked by strangers*

*At the town well, they speak of Changes,*

*Miracles wrought or soon to be,*

*And I, a simple carpenter*

*With a Talmudic bent, and given*

*To parables about a Heaven*

*Whose God learns He’s but a* poseur*,*

*Half-hear, bemused. They stand and blab, I*

*Pass on. Could they see up my sleeve*

*They might think twice ere they believe*

*Another charming, clever Rabbi.*

4.

*And when I die, and they lay bare*

*The punctured hands I covered with*

*My robe—there is no end to Myth,*

*To Clown-God jests!—‘twill not end there:*

*(Ah, how ingeniously quaint,*

*Their simple faith!) The irony*

*That crowns the cosmic Comedy*

*Is that I shall be made a saint.*

***The Theology of* *Being Earnest***

***The Importance of***

1.

So many golden bees have hived

In that important bonnet! Clarion

Clangings announce in tones Wagnerian

That Lady Bracknell has arrived.

Fall to your knees now, say you have lost your

Belief, pray that she exercise her

Mercy, and she will answer, *Rise, sir,*

*From this semi-recumbent posture!*

2.

For the God in my Trinity

Is Lady Bracknell. And the Son?

Her earnest? Jack (not Algernon).

The Holy Ghost? One *Bunbury*,

A naughty ghost, half-fantasy,

Half-Ernest, a peculiar Dove,

Cupidinous, though of strange love,

And dubious, theologically:

His buried bones are but a lie.

He’s *all* a lie, which Heaven believes.

Jack dons the black and deeply grieves

The passing of an alibi.

Jack *is* the Ernest he pretends

To be, but always will pretend

To be the Ernest that, in the end,

He is. Of course it makes no sense.

There he is, reaching up to pluck

That volume from the top-most shelf,

The place where his name finds itself,

The aerie of his Romance luck.

3. *The Unholy Ghost*

Who can say what it is? A flame

Of green and yellow, buoyantly

Flamboyant, now detached and free,

Now crimsoning with lust or shame

When red lips hotly blow upon it.

Sometimes it is a poem’s begetter,

As when a certain scarlet letter

Ignites into a purple sonnet.

Or it will lose the world, and be

Content to lose it, too, just as

One might give all one had and was

To live a line of poetry.

Believe His fabulous lies, they even

Trump the Great Lady’s interdiction.

Victorian eyes believe the fiction

And Decadence rules Dissenter Heaven,

If only for a moment, for

The several-hours’ traffick of

The play, a momentary love

Of all *you* envy and abhor!

**

*****The Selfish Giant***

*Cyril and Vyvyan. They are still in C.3.3. Vyvyan*

*asks Cyril to tell him again the story of the Selfish*

*Giant. Vyvyan periodically and perversely interrupts.*

There was a Selfish Giant once,

*Named God*. He had a beautiful

Garden, always in bloom, and full

Of birds, and fish swimming in ponds,

And in the middle of it all

Stood an apple tree. As I said,

He was selfish, and he hoarded

The apples, and he built a wall

Around the garden, and he told

The children whom he found one day

Running around in it at play

That all that world of green and gold

Was *his*, not theirs, and chased them all

Away. He made a sign that read:

NO TRESPASSING. *It was, he said,*

*Because of a thing called the Fall.*

The children, being children, did

Not understand. They had to play

In the road. Now on that same day

Winter came. It was cold. Clouds hid

The sun, and snow lay on the grass.

The Giant wondered if the spring

Would ever come again. Nothing

Would grow, and no birds sang, alas.

But then, one morning, lying awake,

He heard the singing of a linnet

In a tree. All of spring was in it;

In the garden, too, for the sake

Of those same children, who had stolen

Back in through a hole in the wall.

They were in every tree, and all

Were laughing. They had put the soul in

The garden again. But one small boy

Couldn’t reach to the bough, and when

*God* saw this, his heart melted. Then

He placed him there, with tears of joy,

And what did he do next? He tore

Down the wall! *‘I’m guilty of sin’,*

*Said God*, and let the children in.

‘Here let them play for evermore’.

And so beneath a springtime sun

He let them frolic, and eat freely

Of the sweet fruit. For he was really

Very sorry for what he’d done.

The boy he’d helped into the tree

Did not come back, though, and oh, how

He missed him! Years went by, and now

The Giant had begun to be

Quite old, and thought he’d never see

Him ever again, the little boy.

But then, one day, to his great joy,

There, underneath a golden tree,

Near the edge of the garden, stood

The lad. *God* looked, and he could see

Wounds on his hands. ‘Who hath hurt thee?’

He cried. ‘I’ll slay him!’ ‘These are good

Wounds, for Love gave them me,’ said he,

The boy. ‘Now you shall come away

With me to *my* Garden’. Next day

*They found God dead beneath the tree.*

***The Artist as Critic as Theologian***

***A Commentary on ‘The Selfish Giant’***

*Cyril and Vyvyan.*

1.

Come, Vyvyan, that’s not how the story

Goes! Why must you keep interrupting?

*But, Cyril*… It is most disrupting.

This fairy tale’s a *Christian* glory.

The Selfish Giant isn’t God,

Just a selfish giant, in fact.

You read it as an atheist tract.

*Which it is, in a subtle, odd*

*Sort of way, don’t you think? Yet not*

*Atheist so much as a Gnostic*

*Gospel, a salutary caustic.*

*I find in it a Blakean thought,*

*Beneath the surface (where one ventures*

*At one’s own peril). ‘Tis a Song*

*Of Innocence sung by the strong*

*Devil the pale, weak Angel censures.*

*This God is Urizen, who bounds*

*And rules and measures and confines.*

*The children overstep the lines*

*In wiry leaps and bounds, with sounds*

*Of joy that they are Los, the youth*

*And excess of Imagination*

*That overcomes all limitation*

*Of ratio and rigid truth.*

*A God of Wrath dies into Man.*

*Blake’s anti-myth is so explosive,*

*Science is hardly more corrosive.*

*That giant antediluvian*

*Creator Darwin makes extinct*

*Becomes the God we are becoming*

*Through progress—though at present ‘slumming’*

*A bit, true: for are we not linked*

*By chains of iron and gold to toil*

*And commerce and Old Testament*

*Strictures and attitudes? Ascent*

*Is tortuous, still clings the soil*

*Of Calvinist sanctimony*

*To the bright raiment of the soul.*

God gave His Son to make us whole,

Vyvyan. That’s Christianity.

*The orthodox Christ appears, but a veil covers*

*O sealed-for-death within the womb, his face, and the voice is Cardinal Newman’s:*

*Beyond the grave lives deathless bliss!*

* For He who walks among you is*

*Known by the Cross and empty tomb.* *Now it is Cyril again..*

*The Word is full of contradiction,*

*Which Art refashions in its fashion.*

*The Passion Play and play of passion*

*Intersect in a Crucifiction.*

That is not even blasphemy,

It is so precious and so stiff,

Though God might be offended, if

He were to take you seriously*.*

*I am a jester, Cyril—no,*

*The gesture of a jester, merely.*

*You know I never speak sincerely.*

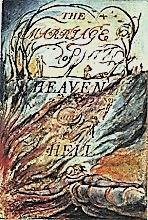
How tiresome Cretan Liars grow!

*Come, Cyril, don’t be so…*procedural*.*

*You are my soul, remember. Love*

*That moves the stars set them above*

*The mire as well as the cathedral.*

**

***Strange Gods***

1. *Ye Shall Have Other Gods Before Me*

My god is not a jealous sort.

He knows the soul, how it will lust

For other, stranger gods. It must

Have its affairs, however short,

With those exotic Ones, queer fish

Of theological fantasia,

Goat-shaped, or blue, from pagan Asia,

Adonis-like as one could wish.

And when my god is introduced

To the most recent, does he thunder?

No, with sophisticated wonder

He looks them over, quite amused

By their pretensions, their inhuman

Frailties (so eager to believe

Their own myths, full of such naive

Faith in themselves). *What a crude numen*

*You’ve picked up this time! Where did you*

*Find* this *one, on a sacred mountain,*

*In an old temple, by a fountain?*

He knows that none of them are true.

Your day has come and gone, Dagon.

Your oracles were hard to swallow

Even when the Sybil spoke, Apollo.

And Bacchus left me, for the dawn

Was grey, he found… It ends in boredom,

Like any too-extended tryst,

To be remembered, but not missed.

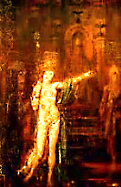
It fades, each flaming scarlet whoredom,

Into the ashes of such fire

As after sunset fadeth in

The west. Ah, the original sin

Is unoriginal desire,

The worship of a store-bought idol!

I tell him new apostasies

I have committed on my knees:

He only yawns at the recital.

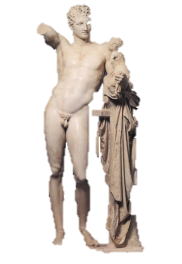
He’s heard it all before, you see.

*Do something harder to forgive.*

*Your treacheries grow repetitive.*

*You might as well believe in me.*

**

2. *The God Who Was Bored*

There is so little to amuse me

I am my own Scheherazade.

I dream up a nice, bored young god

Who tells his faithful, *You confuse me*

*With your pedantic rituals*

*And laws. Do some extravagant thing,*

*Murder, love self-disfiguring,*

*Or your belief in me is false*

*And none will walk the clouds with me.*

And then a trembling man came forth

Thousands of captives from the North

Leading in chains: *All these for thee!*

He cried. *For thee I have betrayed*

*My people into slavery.*

*So much thou signifiest to me,*

*Great Lord!* A maiden kneeled and made

Two rich red lines appear across

Her forearms with a silvery knife.

*Thou knowst how much I loved my life.*

*The more mayst thou enjoy its loss,*

*This life sacred to thee, great Lord!*

And a man turned lead into gold,

And willed it to the god, and sold

Himself for meat—the god was bored.

Salomé cried, before she had

Herself beheaded, *Thou hast tasked me*

*For calling for John’s head, and asked me*

*For mine. In this thou mak’st me glad.*

*Would it were thou who held the sword!*

*The mystery of cruelty*

*Is greater than the mystery*

*Of love, even mine for thee, great Lord!*

The sword struck, the head dropped. How greatly

She died, proud in her passionate madness!

But there was not a trace of sadness

In the god’s eyes, so desperately

Sated with stale self-sacrifices,

Those formulaic martyrdoms

Done to the thumping beat of drums

Borrowed from that *gauche* cult of Isis.

And then there rode by in a hansom

A well-dressed man, holding a cup.

The Dandy drawled, *I give it up,*

*Lime tea, for one whole day, as ransom*

*For any languour, so to speak,*

*You’ve noted in my zeal for ‘thee’.*

*So many engagements, don’t you see.*

*I’ll drop a card on you next week.*

*Oh yes: great Lord*. The god was thrilled

At such extraordinary cheek

And had him feted for a week,

The Dandy. Then he had him killed.

.

**

3. *Heliogabalus*

*Assassinated at eighteen years of age.*

A beast to Dio Cassius,

A monstrous mockery of Man

To Gibbon and Herodian:

Tremendous Heliogabalus!

For feasts Rome had not seen his fellow.

Out of the palette of his moods

He chose the colour-schemes of foods.

Blue feasts gave way to green and yellow.

He launched his scandalous reign and life

Outraging Roman piety,

Flouting Vestal virginity

By taking a priestess to wife.

He is, when not yet seventeen,

Already married to a man,

A charioteer far handsomer than

His rivals. The Emperor is keen

As any debutante to dance

The High Priest’s Dance for Senators

Playing audience under threat of force:

He sways in a narcotic trance.

He wears fine silks, that all may view

His beauty and sigh, *How womanly!*

In his coy veils how winsomely

The mincing Emperor’s peeping through

The doorway, much as the sun peeks

Over the shoulder of a mountain

Or eyes the glass beads in a fountain,

Fetchingly! though the pilgrim seeks

In vain to bridge the distance to

The fiery coquette with sighs

Of love. Gold is for gold the price:

Which paid, what joys will be his due!

By far the goddess-god of all

The harlots in the palace is he,

The Emperor. Success makes him dizzy:

He vaunts his takings, likes to call

The other ‘temple prostitutes’

And courtesans mere common whores.

Heliogabalus is, of course,

Ishtar, when sluttishly it suits

His Syrian soul, which corruscates

With exquisite corruptions of

Sacred hermaphroditic love.

He even haunts the Janus gates

For pity, lavishing that love

On gruff Centurions passing by,

Most skilled his pliant lips to ply.

He dares to set himself above

The mortal run, even deprecate

The powers of Venus next to his.

On Hubris follows Nemesis.

O Sacred Beast, you know the fate

Of those in your…*especial* line:

The head from shoulders rudely rent

And down a river’s current sent,

Orphic Antinoüs divine!

***Julian the Apostate***

*God save me from the Christians!* cried

Julian, much-put-upon Apostate.

Priapus long had left his prostate

Prostrate. But to the One who died

Upon the Cross he bore no ill

Will, none at all; ‘twas the disciples

Who beat him senseless with their Bibles

And ah, that great heart beating still

Above the staggering girl or boy,

It beat no more, the indifferent beak

Had let drop even the will to speak

Convincingly of pagan joy.

Zeus had left Ganymede and Leda,

And that great temple at Olympus,

And his believer’s grey loins, limp as

A dead fish, quite bereft. A reader

And pale mythographer is he,

The Emperor, merely, like the rest

Of us, belated, and at best

A scholar of Antiquity,

Hardly its avatar, its poet.

Unless the nymphs and satyrs thrive

In meadows thoroughly alive

They are mere ghosts that do not know it.

Pedantic old Bacchante, Julian,

No prayer can stave off the prim process

By which the attar of the rose is

Translated into digits Boolean.



***Faith and Despair***

1.

The dervish whirls, the rabbi davens,

The monk rings matins from the tower;

Canonical is every hour;

Providence rules in every province.



The God we patch from all these gods

Accepts—this cunning composite—

Each Faith and seals the Truth of it

Against all reasonable odds.

Tailored to every sensibility

And custom, with but that faint, distant

Discord of dogmas inconsistent

To spice His robust credibility,



Some sort of God is in some sort

Of Heaven: then what’s wrong with the world?

‘When the world waxed old, it waxed war old’,

Quoth Spenser in his serious sport

With words, and words are worlds, no doubt,

And worlds are made of them: so must

They, when those worlds die, be their dust.

We’re hedged by rubble all about,

And love among these ruins makes

Its home, its hovel, its haunt, its palace.

The Rock, the Book and the lost Chalice

Are relics that the mind forsakes,

Though my soul, at war with my self,

Digs lycanthropic in the ground

And howls at the dark treasure found,

For Lord Christ is its bleeding pelf.

The Holy Wars leave in their wake

How many a subjugated nation,

While trampling their own inspiration

With every violent step they take!

2.

I dreamed I saw the very air’s

Religion: it was Ruskin’s dream,

Athena. From her eyes the gleam

Had faded. In her stock the shares

Had fallen, the imagination,

Fallen, would put no stock in her.

Her owl coughed up a ball of fur.

The industrial cloud, a foul stagnation,

Had made the air a dark religion,

And day a dim, gas-lighted night.

The Dove descended from its height

Till it became a Hyde Park pigeon.

Bread-particles, random, atomic,

Were all its diet, and the beak’s

Work led to naught but little streaks

On statues. Scents Hindoo-Islamic-

Christian-Judaic laced the air

Polluted by the very mind

That reared their shrines against the wind.

What was once Faith was our despair.

******

***From Père Lachaise***

***The Prophets***

Elijah in the desert, fed

Cucumber sandwiches by crows:

Splendid! But what do you suppose

Would make a prophet run ahead

Of the king’s chariot like that? (*Run*!)

Madness, of course. It’s far too strenuous.

But these old prophets are ingenuous.

They have no sense of what is done

And what is not, they are perfect strangers

To the proprieties. They do

As the Lord bids them do, these True

Believers: eat dung, sleep in mangers,

Walk the streets in the nude… Whatever

You do, don’t mock them, or a bear

 Will eat you up, right then and there!

And what they say they say for ever.

Scorched to the bone is Jeremiah,

Mourning his people and their city

And helpless in his rage and pity,

Whom burning still in righteous fire

The Lord of Hosts to Eire will send

To wed the daughter of the King

And stow the Ark, that golden thing *And bring David’s harp, as well, which*

We call the pot at rainbow’s end. *becomes the national symbol of Ireland.*

*You don’t believe me, do you, Dears?*

A rum trade, Prophecy. Who knows where *You believe it is a* crack*pot theory,*

He’ll tell you to reside? The belly *correct? Well, so do I, a little.*

Of a great whale, perhaps (quite smelly)—

And, it transpires, God doesn’t care.

*****The Golem***

*Will Rothenstein tells the story.*

Emet *is truth, reality,*

*As scrawled across the Golem’s forehead:*

*It is the Word, it says this poor red*

*Lump is alive, it makes him* be*.*

*That ancient Adam-clay fails not,*

*Though fall’n, as atom-stuff of new*

*Creations. Such the Word can do,*

*Being real:* Im Anfang war die Tat*.*

Dhavar *can be both word and thing.*

*Whilst* shem *but names the thing,* dhavar

*Can thing the name: Lo! all things are.*

*The Lord created everything*

**Yesh me'ayin*, from Nothing’s root.*

'Yehi or!’ *He said: Let there be light!*

*And there was light. And in His might,*

*In His* tselem *and His* demut

*He made us, in His image and*

*His likeness shaped He us a life,*

*Sharpened us with His sculptor’s knife.*

*God’s dream was Adam, and dreams grand*

*Enough, by dint of that, are true.*

*Believe the Golem could destroy*

*The Emperor, the pompous goy!*

*So Arrogance does well to sue*

*With* Demut *and humility Demut: German for ‘humility’.*

*For mercy on his human clay.*

*And so the Rabbi wipes away*

*The Golem’s power: for the ‘e’,*

*The first-last letter of* emet

*(Our People’s script and scripture being*

*Mirror-wise to your way of seeing),*

*Erased, dead is the Golem:* met*.*

***The Tetragrammaton***

The name of love we dare not speak

Becomes, by its own secrecy,

Almost a sublime Mystery,

*Tremendum* on a cloudy peak

Moses alone can look upon

(Or the Elders whom God condescends

To lunch with, as admiring friends)— *Making Mt. Sinai a sort of Old*

Becomes the Tetragrammaton, *Testament Kettner’s on high.*

In brief—in *very* brief: just four

Letters, and no sign of a vowel

In sight! So the Love takes a cowl

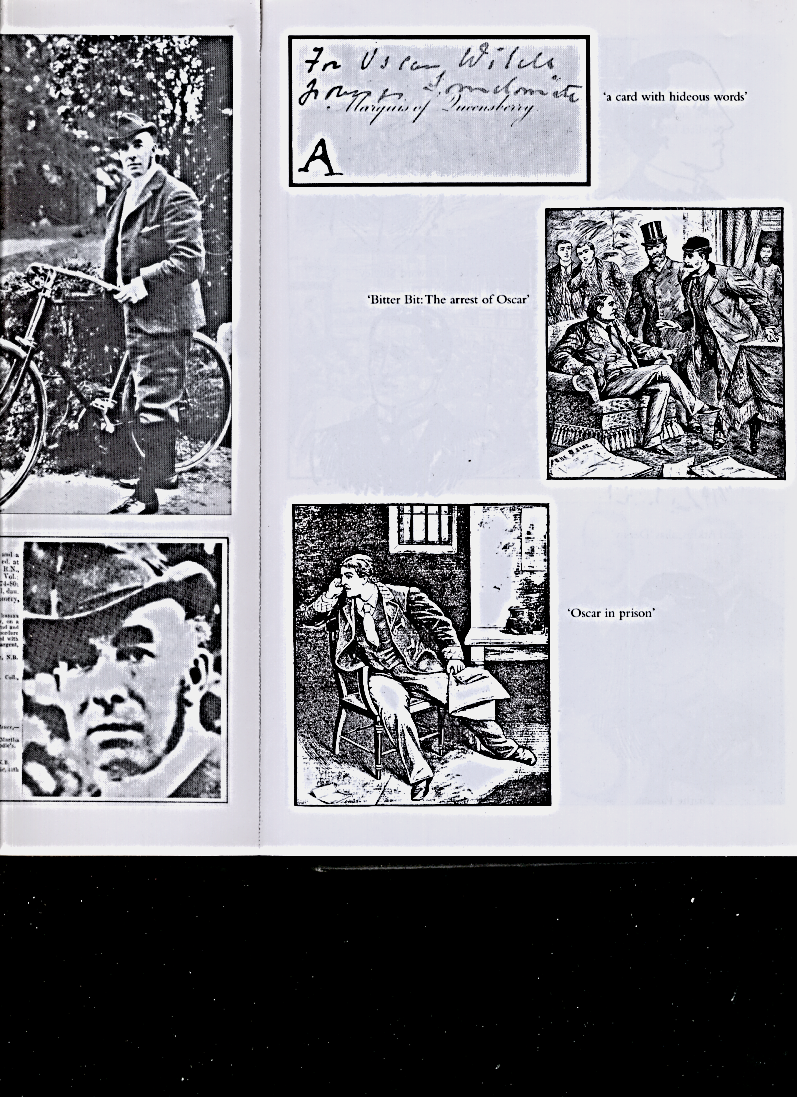
And vow of silence evermore.

The Law spells out the offense, to stun you,

Flushes vowels from the consonants

That keep the secret sense: advance

The shambling constables upon you.



***A Credo of Sorts***

1.

With Origen, the Neoplatonist,

I hold that Hell’s a makeshift, a

Prison camp, that will go away.

Satan will cease to play the Satanist,

A pose he will discard, a dated

Ensemble, out of season, when

He rises in what Origen

Claims is the natural and fated

Return of all souls into God,

Their Origin, a universal

Redemption for which the rehearsal

Is all our incarnations, odd

Evening out with even, the even

Modified by its infinitely

Repeating decimals, and fitly

Will all resolve into First Heaven.

If you would have a word for this, *Locus classicus: the vision of Er,*

You’ll have to fish language’s vasty *left for dead on the battlefield,*

Deep, till you come up with that nasty *in* The Republic, Book X.

Great word, *apocastastasis*.

Sense: Universal Restoration.

It doesn’t make one want to try it,

The word; it needs to be more quiet,

A more mellifluous appellation,

To give the thought a human face.

*De facto*, it was Goethe’s creed,

Who would see blossom every seed:

Even Mephisto may find Grace.

Our Karma up or down compels us.

In the beginning, then, was *not*

The Word: *Im Anfang war die Tat*,

As theologian Goethe tells us:

In the beginning was the Deed.

And then the Mortgage—don’t forget!

In *our* beginning was the Debt.

Where there’s no credit, there is Creed.

Apocatastrophe is when

***Goethe and* Faust II**

*H****is mind was Europe’s, his soul Brahma’s.***

*H****e knew the calm Olympian bliss.***

***As for his* Faust, Part II*, it is***

***The Everest of closet dramas.***

Regression happens: things go wrong

And fallen souls think they *belong*

In flesh, and spurn the regimen

That leads them to a re-promotion

Among the blessèd sparks of God.

They much prefer to tread the sod,

The funk smell and the heady potion



Taste, and the fury and the mire

Of feeling *feel*, and fall in love

Not with Creator God above

But with his creatures of frail fire

And false desire. A counterfeit *To Proclus and the Gnostics,* anti-

Is matter, the material, mimenon pneuma*, counterfeit spirit.*

*This* life not seen against the All,

Of which among its infinite

Broad spectra spread out the chaotic

Up-stage traffickings egos noise

In their brief hours of pose and poise

Seem moments slightly idiotic:

They take themselves far, far too seriously.

The hook advances stealthily

From the wing, and it comes for *thee*,

There, over-acting-so-deliriously!

Sly is the hook. Many the Acts.

Let’s move things right along, then, shall we?

Strike up the band! ‘Tis but a small, wee

Vertex among the tesseracts.



***Our Lady of Sorrows***

*Sarausa, or Syracuse, Easter Sunday, 1900.*

*A procession, and a miracle which I, through*

*the spectacles of the Green Lady, witnessed.*

In brocade cope, a painted doll

Hewn by a peasant piety

To feed its starved idolatry

Is swaying stiff, unearthly, tall

Above the figures ranged along

The pavement, or behind the wagon

While swigging from a plump wine-flagon

Following with a prayerful song

Upon their lips, and all the garish

Colours of rude festivity

Solemn, grotesque, and strange to me

As music in a slow, nightmarish

Interlude from a Pantomime—

When suddenly a stillness falls

Upon the crowd, the wagon stalls,

And some god halts the tread of time.

Now, here, amid the living people

Rigid as puppets, the dead doll,

Kissed by a sunbeam, by the toll

Of a great bell that shakes the steeple

Shocked to red motion through her veins

And honeyed music in her voice,

Opens her eyes, and smiles, and joys

In freedom from enchantment’s chains.

She doffs her jewels, crown and cope

And in her naked beauty she,

The goddess, strides up from the sea

Till, picking flowers, up the slope

Of Aetna to the glens she climbs

Where, high above mere mortal sight,

Nymphs dance around a fire-light

And satyrs pipe, and mincing mimes,

The gods’ own painted darlings, bring

The Myths to life, and wine and song

 Flow richly all the evening long.

Ah, Venus, how she loves to sing!

Apollo harps, and Mercury

Flutes a mysterious tune to match,

And Vulcan booms of Beauty’s hatch

From a shell on the foaming sea.

How Venus dances with the rest!

Till on the pinions of his joy

Lights by her side her little boy,

The dear bright thing, by all loved best

Who worship at the shrine of pleasure

And die like moths for their desire.

And now she greets the sweetest Liar

With tears and kisses, and *My treasure,*

*My best-beloved!* coos like a dove

Into his ear.—Where have you been?

He cries. *I’ll tell you all I’ve seen*

*And all I’ve learned* *of patient love*

*Another time. Be happy now,*

*My darling boy, my sweetest child!*

And on they dance, and on the wild

Flute trills, till in the pallid glow

Of morning bleed away the shadows,

And once, twice, thrice the cock crows. Now

Sorrow comes o’er face, her brow

Darkens, and *Ah, these lovely meadows*,

*My fellow gods, the wine and song*,

She sighs, *and you most terribly*

*I must forsake*. But me, cries he,

What about me? You’d do me wrong

Again, and once more make me grieve?

*Beloved, a memory calls to me*

*Out of that mournful reveille.*

*Back to the sea I go, and leave*

*Behind the sweets of taste and touch.*

*I’d stay, but, child—I feel a Loss.*

*I have another son, across*

*The waves, and he has suffered much.*

***Marsyas***



*Easter Sunday, 1939.*

1.

Dante, you prayed to Phoebus, in

The moment of your Spirit’s flight,

In posture of Marsyas, that he might *See* Paradiso, i.

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.

Is it *outré*? Each of your flails,

Dread Lord, ends in a fashion tip!

The proper attire for a trip

To Heaven? What else but coat and tails?

Fate’s Jacquard loom, by Clotho plied,

Has fashioned me a stylish look

From the Platonic Pattern Book,

With threads a tragic purple dyed;

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.

(What flower, what lightning-flower composed

Of thoughts about a lightning-flower

Blossoms from my lapel? Great Power,

The circle of my Book is closed!)

Amazing, how the spark leaps out

Of darkness quicker than a thought!

A dream, you say? But ah, are not

Some things beyond belief and doubt?

(Who knows? *Is* this the promised end,

 Or image of that error? Charming,

At least, that in a form past harming

I can make jokes as I ascend.)

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

Oscar performs a happy ending,

Complete with hymns and angels tending, *(Hermes has lost rank: he’s but one*

And hallelujahs and hosannas! *Angel among a multitude;*

*Such pale gods are but dimly viewed*

Should *you*, Dears, feel the urge to rise, *In the white dazzle of the sun.*

Along with me I bid you come

To what is, I confess, a some-

What artificial Paradise.

2.

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?)

I’m tempted, but I will not lay it on

As thick as the old Prophets do,

Or John of Patmos; there is too

Much spectacle in Ezekiel’s Phaëton,

That quadriceps monstrosity

On high. I’ll spare the trumpets: no

Giant Angel will crassly blow

Apocalyptic reveille.

‘Twill not seem *too* contrived, one hopes—

And yet I know how Antony

Must feel when somewhat awkwardly

Ascending by those creaky ropes.

But I am in my own best play,

In *Earnest*, and yet-lighter keys.

I see the high road to Release;

It is delightful, I must say.

I trust you’re keeping up, dear V?

Your face has gone quite blue! You must

Be turning into Krishna, just

The perfect deity to be

Up here; that cyanotic hue

Matches your thoughts, which line on line,

Have so far imped themselves on mine

That you are me, and I am you.

*Even mute swans sing in this blue air,*

*And with a glad vociferation.*

Their flight is itsown vindication:

*Heaven is in the Getting There.* *We speak this line in unison,*

*like Jack and Algernon.*

(Could Heaven be the City of Willows

On an isle in the Country of

Blue China? Where dove mates with dove

For ever upon cloudy pillows.)

3.

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-spryly up; and so

I pass the moon’s inconstant sphere, *See* Paradiso, ii.

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.

4. *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’.

Ah, is there Grace enough to wipe

My sins away? Is not my type

One of a far-too curious stripe,

Ascending ere the time is ripe?

Down-at-heels Mephistopheles,

Turn back! The moon’s where you belong,

Or listening to Casella’s song *See* Purgatorio*,* *ii*:

At Purgatory’s foot, at peace *to a poem by Dante.*

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, *See* Purgatorio*, iv.*

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.

(For surely it *is* a bit presumptuous

To criticise one’s own Ascension?

It would be graceless not to mention

The many lovely effects: how sumptuous

Yet chaste is the sky’s Giotto blue;

The angels, purest Raphael;

Music by Mozart—chosen well: Ave Verum Corpus*, perhaps? No,*

Wagnerian bombast will not do. *the chorus of lovely cherubim, those*

*angelic boys, in* Die Zauberflöte.

For through the psalms and scent of roses,

The smiling chords divinely blent,

Should run a thread of pure lament

To complicate Apotheosis.)

5.

Well, 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.

At his celestial Kelmscott Press

Morris will set their type and bind

Them lovingly. Here all are kind.

Heaven is the Happy Consciousness,

And here the Word, the Word Sublime,

Is spoken in finely illustrated

Editions, copies signed and dated

By the Creator for all time.

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?

(A little tipsy at the bar

He seems. And why should he *not* be

In the intoxicating, free

Abode where the Eternal are?)

Is poor, dear Ruskin young again,

And with his Rosa Mystica

At one in spirit and in, ah!

The blissful flesh, amen, amen?

And Baudelaire, Prince of Cloud Nine,

Thirteen, a Sulfur-Cloud, and other

Assorted vapours, double and brother,

Desires to take me out to dine,

To meet Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert…

Will Lelian be there to greet me?

(Molière, it seems, desires to meet me.)

*Ah, mes semblables et mes chers!*

And in his garden on a cloud

A naked Blake hymns the great myth

Of Vision’s fiery blacksmith,

The Song of Los he singeth loud.

Chaucer and I are pledged to go

Bunburying. And Ned Shakesvere *The Bard and I have agreed to designate him*

Will be the very atmosphere, *henceforth by a kind of portmanteau name,*

As ‘twere the robe of Prospero. *a compromise we hope will please both the*

*Shakespeareans and the Oxfordians. (An*

(Hamlet and Lear are gay, of course— *acceptable alternative is* ‘Nelliam de Vere’.)

Yeats saw to that. The roguish laugh

Cannot be heard of soused Falstaff,

For he in Arthur’s bosom snores.)

I think I can glimpse Dodgson, lost

Nervously in the crowd; my wife, *With* her *Arthur, Oscar?* [Mr V]

And Mother, she who gave me life, *Yes, and I’m happy for them both.*

And Father: all my heart’s own Host!

And Cyril, oh my poor brave boy!

My reckless hero of the war!

To think that I shall hold, once more,

The child of our first nuptial joy!

And do I see *my* Beatrice,

Isola, my dear little sister?

How many years since last I kissed her!

Do I deserve such perfect bliss?

Sebastian Keats I see, and tear

On tear I shed. There’s Chatterton,

And there’s Marcel! I could go on, *Marcel Proust.*

But let’s just say, *They are all here.* —[Mr V]

6.

All Contraries at this genial Garden

Party mingle, upon a terraced

Lawn, where Nietzsche, a bit embarrassed,

Jostles Saint Paul, and both say, *Pardon!*

My soul is lighter than a feather,

*Far* lighter than a sunflower petal.

No more the Sisters’ thumping treadle.

Spring shall for ever be the weather.

The lawn’s a carpet all alive

With beetle, bird, and butterfly,

A casual anthology

Of the best Nature’s art can give,

Yet of Art’s nature they partake,

And Wordsworth here is glad to see *O potent flower of the sun!*

The twain together amiably

Thrive, and one spousal Union make,

Wherein with intricacies of

A Dürer etching is combined

The light touch of Watteau, and Mind

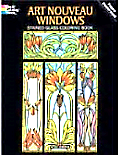
And Matter are hopelessly in love,

Sublime, unlikely love, for Mind

Is all that matters here, but Matter

Minds hardly at all: the Jacob’s Ladder

Electric it has climbed. A wind



Comes to us from the fields of sleep,

Token intimate as a breath

That everything here, even death,

Is a dream bottomlessly deep.

The very leaf that, sere, crispated,

Drifts to the ground and falls asleep,

Falls happy into the same deep

Dream wherein all are consecrated.

And on those leaves does dear old Walt

Recline, those living *Leaves of Grass*,

In naked splendour, young now as

The world once was. And bread and salt

And wine make rich the vocal air

Of a sunflower’s bold Avowal

That sheds for ay the wintry cowl

And all are young as the First Pair:

They in a rosy, cloudy bower

Sit with their two sons Cain and Abel.

(Here Murder’s but a wicked fable.)

Stay ever ripe, thou drowsy Hour!

For o’er the pearly portal they

Have written the divine word *Whim*, *Yes, Emerson is here, too, as are many other*

You see—and all your praise for Him *philosophers or weighty philosophical gadflies*

Should be to teach Him how to play. *from Heraclitus to Menippus to Lucian to* *Nietzsche. Plato I do not see; or is he—God?*

7.

The Artist Christ: will He receive

Me with a smile? Am I forgiven,

Soon-to-be citizen of a Heaven

In which I do not quite believe?

Resign yourself, then, vagrant soul,

To adding—ah, but must you settle

At last?—one queer, flamboyant petal

To the Eternal Buttonhole:

A house with many a mansion (‘stanza’,

If you prefer, or gay Café

Empyreal): how fine to play

One’s rôle in the Extravaganza!

Or in the Garden one may stand

‘Mongst other bright, eternal guests

With whom one trades *bon* *mots* and jests,

A glass of nectar in one’s hand.

Exhilarating as good farce

Seen by the light of burning lime,

This Show. I should have space and time

To be among its brighter stars.

**\***

\*\*

**\***