Poems and Three Plays

John Jeffery

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For Family and Friends
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Foreword

For this book, I have selected some of my best poems and my first three plays. A few lesser poems are included to expand a bit the variety of themes as one reads along. I hope that the works will entertain.
Those Whom our Lovers Loved

Those whom our lovers loved they did not stay
To almost trace out sunlight in our eye,
But parted with our lovers far away,
So we shall take you with us when we die,
Those who alive and dead apart are bound
Will sleep together and that sleep is sound.

The Explorer

I am frost bound and wintering,
With snow rising to the door’s height,
Wasting while the Sun’s malingering,
My bonds are strong, I am held tight.

But I am tightening my bow,
And sharpening my sword on a rock,
Keening my eyes on blazing snow,
Preparing for every shock.

For cold breaks and rivers run free,
Men to the fields, buds to the air,
Ships that are mewed are ships to the sea,
Winds that are warm are winds that dare.

My soul has heard the siren song,
And court and the city have palled,
To the open sea in ships that are long,
Like all such men who are called.

Say that they serve who are not there,
If the Queen asks where I bide,
Then say that I say she is most fair,
And say I have gone with the tide.

I am told there are hurricanoes,
That sunder the mast from the main,
That fright as no mortal foes,
Causing lips to surrender God’s name.

There’s telling of heathens to fear,
And they have no mercy to share,
But I know pityless men so near
That I brush their sleeve on the stair.

Cities of gold, gold that I spin,
In the days when creditors dun,
Thus at nights I worry at sin,
at the means I’ll no means shun.

There are the new navigations,
And endless isles I could name,
Laurels crowning my ambitions,
Of such is made excellent fame.

O isles in the southern sea,
Green wildness shimmering on blue,
Where fawn eyes and gold pelt are free
To draw me as Adam drawn new.

But after danger, gold, and fame,
After the light that lit Adam’s eye,
 Returned to the Queen’s grace and her train,
How shall I still only be I.

Late Year on the Lake Front

All along the days have been shrinking,
And now the air is a white cold,
All along the days have been sinking
From a fall to a winter foretold.

The Great Lakes of leaden skys, ice floes,
Are closing as it’s that season,
Ships docked, exposing rust to the snow,
All alone for that same reason.

Men abroad who wander ice ledges,
Are such men that long for the Sun,
Are men that gnaw their own edges,
Are men self-consumed and mum.

As comes evening, as comes sleet,
A light resumes across the bay,
Surges, recedes as a heart beats,
A heart that should never be stayed.

By Night

It is by night I seek you,
By night I find you,
By night I roam and hide with you,
By night.

It is the stars that swirl
About your head,
It is your hair that sweeps,
It is you.

It is the strumming of distant strings,
The taut’ning and releasing
That twangles the night air,
And makes you sigh.
It is the coolness that divides us,
The coolness before the kiss,
And the clutch that circumscribes us,
Defines us.

It is this midnight woodland,
Where weathered and ancient stones stand,
Where moss supports and vines endure,
Where love lives.

It is the play on your lips,
The twitch of your hip,
Your flanks like a fawn,
My fawn.

It is this folding in a single cape,
This settling of robins in a nest,
This resting my head on your breast,
This loving sleep.

**Ulysses IV: Helen**

It’s inflated in every ear,
It’s the thing, the prize of the prize,
It starts the soul, owns the eyes,
And it’s dear, O dear, O dear, O dear.

A child is born, rolling and round,
Which child has parents as rich as cake,
And she forms, is welded in classic make,
Every mark right, every curve in bound.

“O she would make days less drear,
O she’s the stuff, the gorgeous mound,
Without her, we’re dogs in the pound,
Without her, life’s one long warm beer.”

So the traveller toasts her in the tavern,
And every clod and dastard knows she’s there,
Someplace, drinking chilled wine, somewhere,
And it’s the talk while we relieve in the cavern.

In the north, his helmet against the sky,
Each hog bristle up on its end,
Every warlike thrust, every Greek bend,
Achilles, the feeder of flies.

He knows she is not for whom he dies,
He knows he is another’s soul,
Another for whom he cannot grow old,
But buries this for now in lies.

Agamemnon, dawn of false hope,  
Beaten already in all things,  
King of men, in his ear it rings,  
Woman, gold woman, a receding rope.

Of Pylos, of Nestor, old war at his books,  
White sage, honored achiever, but thrifty,  
God-like, gracious, over fifty,  
Imagination’s fool, he likes her looks.

Ripe or new, they have come in a bunch,  
To the image of images, the easy dream,  
Of fitful days of spoiled cream,  
And some who eat romantic lunch.

And I and I-you, is it so strange,  
The spoiled and the spoiler are twain,  
Meet me in that garden where it always rains,  
Where twined tragedies are arranged.

**Nighthawks**

*for TVJ*

The prostitutes have gone to bed,  
the city has given up its dead,  
the neon glows, the shadows browse,  
derelicts are curled in alley louses,  
rich men laid in penthouses,  
the wise are sleeping,  
the good have said goodnight,  
the bad have said bawnswa,  
and the trash is waiting on the city law.

The city’s as old as ash,  
the city’s as hot—as cold as cash,  
and the cement seems there to last,  
and we’ll all come to grass.

And we’re at the counter  
with our small change and powder,  
and my elbows are worn  
and everything all around is sore,  
and we’re tough and seen it all,  
and there’s no past, no timorra,  
no future in it kid,  
so lay off all bets,  
and we let the drinks be set,  
trade the day, make the night pay.
On the farm I’d have been younger,
and cut stones wouldn’t be your hunger,
and anywhere at all we could have had it all,
but not nowhere, not notime, not here,
So why the whine let it be a beer.

How many cards in a pack?
Fifty-two.
How many steps to a stair?
Why should I care.
How many cigarette butts make a life?
God, why ask.
How many dates in a love?

**Patrick’s Song**

*for Jean*

When I was in the green land
then I had a treble hand
and this hand held three things
were love, reprieve, and life
on these things let sing
as birds do to early spring
when I was in the green land.

When I was first in the green land
taken there by iron hand
then I knew three things
the link, the rod, and abuse
and little man, least man
forgot in the green land.

When I was back in the green land
in the very palm of his hand
then I said aloud three things
the kiss, the cup, and cross
and the people did not count it loss
when I was back in the green land.

When I was long gone from the green land
old and worn by pilgrim hand
and stones I sted on were moss
and all I said to amend
became first child of legajend
when I was long gone from the green land.

When I was old in the green land
long had set to rest my hand
I dreamt on that city fair
where there is no strife or burning
from whence I know no turning
albeit I die in the green land.

Balcony

for Jean

Spring day we adorn you.
As flowers we grew out of the ground
For this single morning and Sun.
Rustling and resting, playing ourselves in dress and suit,
All pomp, all ornament, all moment, all gossip,
All the richness of the sun-shaft day.

In the street is the ever-flowing,
The world of our other-knowing.
We could stand to resist,
But is it not you we should assist,
Are not our hands to meet,
Are not our eyes like mutual stars,
Our hair cut and curled to amuse,
We are comedians called to perform.
O applaud and love us, forgive and repair us.
Let the child play his flute,
And the lovers meet again and again and again.
This rail will stand their hands,
This balcony their weight,
This Sun will always pour his color into them.

Indeed we will cut to the fashion,
Indeed change in all ways,
Living on the century’s ration
Sufficient for all days.
Indeed we are coming and going, are flowing and still,
Perpetually clearing our throats for that one great speech
And always delivering a song.
Into your hands we concede,
Into your hearts we surrender
The love we lived.

À Jennifer

C’est une question de la temps
Mais la temps s’enroule tres vite,
C’est une question de les affaires
Mais les affaires sont bon si à ton appetite.

Et si tu es grandi si grande
Est-ce que n’est pas ta charge
Pour grandeur c’est obligatoire
Pour la personne dans son propre histoire.

Bonheur pour le maintenant
Bonheur pour les jours très cher
Bonheur ma sœur gentille
Aimé dans ta vie privée.

École d’Été

If it is the last of these occasions
And past learning is past repair
And I misspent all my youthful seasons
Falling one step per year behind my peers
Then there is no reprieve to be begged
And a pure feeling would be a blessing
Like a phone call from a distant friend
Both a gentle exit and a sailor’s tide.

Apollo Fragment

In the beginning was this lyre
Which my love chased, became desire
My love stood, became a tree
Laurels torn a crown for me.

Abishag

Abishag from the Bible’s vine,
David’s last concubine,
chosen from the plenteous fields
that olive, fig, and grape do yield.
Girl of milk and honey,
sold for a king’s money
and the honor of old trudition
of a daughter in right position.

Enough of these legs of lead,
give me legs that over streams have sped.
I would shed my rings on you
whose breath revives my ancient dew;
girl of night eyes and hair
with rosy breasts by order bare
clutch me now and be my queen,
yet I know best I do but dream.

Obedient and good and true,
you have done as I would of you;
shame should never nest contrive
between your breasts free and live,
but time hits upon my hoar head,
so soon I shall be sagely dead
and my precautions all discounted,
my throne and you otherwise bemounted.

Behold, I gift you my philosophy
to heal you after said catastrophe.
You must endure, pretend, sublime,
and to your own high self reclimb,
sing your song with heart’s tone
though condemned to live in mind alone.

Having said so much so easily,
lie you for now and kiss with me.

**Paul Gauguin to the South Seas**

*for ENH*

If it was far
like the spring earth scented with new life in motion after the white sleep,
like dawn’s golden dew,
like long slow summer afternoons played through till child arms and legs ached
and thirst delivered me up to sparkling fountains,
like buried-in-the-drawer photographs of parents,
specks of smiles to be cast up on the problematic shore of a moment
to acknowledge that things pass,
like friendship burned out in the fires of jealousy, body, and spirit,
still, still, still,
it could be sought for, hunted down.

Gauguin and Rimbaud (after the sheets of blood) departing,
saying we have spoiled and stewed enough,
let us be blacks on the shore where the palms wade before the whites debark,
far from the wars,
the blasted landscape where the tentacles of the city have heaved,
the Satanic mills,
even, yes, even the people marching and all above la flamme d’or.
It has sickened and so have we.
Let us go bearing our complexities, our hates, and the bacteria of the century,
proud and fell and fallen,
then die, cursing God that we are deceivers.

Yet, yet, yet,
we have not sailed to where we are not,
these palms reside as the willows on the Loire,
this idol with my own bulging jowl is essentially Notre Dame,
nothing is strange or unheard of, nothing without beauty, homeliness,
I am not foreign, not strange,
cannot kill what I have been, will be,
the old shadows, extincted man and woman
are the bloods of my veins branching into the thighs of posterity,
creating thought and action and dew,
I shall depart no more.

La Dame à la Licorne

_for EEH_

This bit of thread bears the grain of the Sun,
braids it into this picture, never done,
recalling the heaven wild flowers of the fields,
the heaven hours that the sunshine yields.

Rabbits twitch ears and rub their noses,
birds sing and soar, free of the supposes
of furred little treaders of the heavier paw,
the meaty breath signaling the lion raw.

The queen here spreads her garnished tent,
into its woof these mysteries are blent:
what is to sigh, what is to fear,
what is to open a _mon seul désir._

Breaching a thick mist, or seen far off,
almost a shape, almost a head, so oft
almost a spear swung, almost a horn
almost a heart, almost that torn.

Licorne is gone at the thought Licorne,
the sight Licorne is the sight forlorn,
only pure-hearted, only winsome fair
makes gentle, still, the ghost of white hair.

Wish awhile on white and velvet, silky and strong,
fearless, but fretful, eternal yet long gone,
loving, but nimble, caring, but stern,
once lost, he will never return.

The Riddle

_for GES_

O’s own solution,
all ends in dissolution
as the gods will, and it is blind.
To which does it contrast
what the ploughman saw at the plough,
what the traveller saw from the road
century on century, and now,
what from my step, I see every morning,
and the bell tolls and it is not for me.
The field and the barn and the needle,
alternative solution to the sphinx’s riddle,
and so I bought this card
before the snow fell
and now the snow has fallen.

Evening Walk

for IRH

She said, the Sun is setting,
in the west the clouds are lucent amber
buildings of the twilight world.

The sky between the clouds above us, he said,
is dark blue, the blue of a sea that taunts our sailing,
the mottled Moon, the ghost of our remembering.

Turn back, whisperly she, the barren trees aﬁght me,
their trunks are giant thighs, their spider fingers
have spider fingers.

We are in disguise, he spoke, our friends may be speak of us,
our enemies may hold our hands.

Only a cat in a bush, only a bird on a branch, said she,
birds clustered for warmth, only a good soul
passing on the common path, to a common home,
with common joy in his small package of good things.

Said he, beware the sunken step, the shadow, the shadow’s shade,
the creeper and the stalker, the night and night mocker.

Said she, no light so good as a home light,
no door so heavy as a home door,
no bed so fathomed as the bed wherein
we sleep and sleep is sovereign.

November 11

The office of the RCMP is closed,
it’s Remembrance Day, the 11th month, the 11th hour …
o one sweat-suited officer informs me,
I pass into the streets, raucous as usual,
slip around corners, follow the spoor,
in the streets, in Jackson Square Mall
the people are intricate,
red flowers, cheaply produced and distributed, adorning,
there are veterans in berets,
the bit of ribbon or whatever,
they meet, talk, and wait.

“We are still here,
only yesterday we were the sinews and the mind,
still very strong, if you asked
we could take back the banks, the firms,
construction, airlines, universities,
but these are yielded now, we know times change,
and the First War veterans are faded.”

In the Gore a crowd attends
the service or the sunny day,
I have never been here on this occasion,
a small display of martial pomp
for this time and the two world wars,
Canadians were never eloquent at these affairs,
neither poetry nor prose can I approve,
the voice of old Hamilton,
the voice of Ulster,
the words of appraisal,
“we fought in past days, we lived and died,
the Sun shone then as now,
we approve of you, our sons and daughters.”

“Boys we were,
and just as bad as you’d think,
the drinking, smoking, obscene joking,
but too Presbyterian bred for whoring,
too boy-scout pure by half,
the trains pulled us out of our country,
the ships swallowed us and put us to sea,
we saw the sea, saw the other side of the ocean,
and a hurrah for Monty and a hurrah for Ike.”

Hot flying metal does horrible things to flesh,
we are not made for this,
I saw a bloody man at night,
on the still burning field of today’s battle,
his eyes and face were gone,
—look no more on the fairness of the world,
look no more on the fairness of my face—
he was castrated and bloody between the legs,
—make love no more—
I thought of the veterans’ hospitals
tucked in the byways of small towns,
the years of never finishing pain,
let’s liberate Johnny,
let’s never go marching again.

“Perhaps we crossed a channel or two,
saw a sea of ships at dawn,
saw land looming like death,
saw all that man can do to stop man at the shore,
saw planes frisking at war in the sky,
we spread through the green summer of Normandy,
the Sun and rains of Normandy.”

“In the Netherlands we lost our purity,
the flat and lying low land
of tall blond girls with big breasts,
the flat and lying low girls,
and that was a sweet time and place to stop.”

“And victory, victorious again as we have always been,
we pay a price,
all those years sitting on the steps
of those memorials of stone.”

So I stood and heard the loudspeaker voices,
saw two passes overhead of two planes of war,
drifted out of that crowd,
thoughts returning to my day,
the prosperity and peace of my country.

Pandora

_for EEH_

She, for she it was, said AWAKEN,
and gold was caught in the dew of the grass,
a robed woman watered a garden,
the beauty quickened and hurt, alas
to find and lose, to seek and sustain
the speed of the growth and the growth pain.

She, for she it was, said BEHOLD,
and beheld we were
by sunlit day through star-scattered night,
but lost, lost we were
on a plain meeting the sky
at the farthest light of the eye,
waters lapped on a shore,
also an open door stood,
pools dreamed deep and dreamed on savannas,
crowds shouted and shouted hosannas,
I want became I say, I have written,  
checked became bounded and bitten,  
together fell from apart and pieces,  
sweaters were knitted to fleeces,  
we fell on children, cities, and shrines,  
made cookies, paintings, and rhymes.

She, for she it was, said **ALL THINGS**,  
and all things being said  
what do we say,  
danger and daughter, feed and fodder,  
day and day, night and night robber,  
a wave is a wave as wave to a wave,  
wander and wonder, cry and rave.

She, for she it was, said **HOPE**,  
and we trusted to hope,  
the last out the box  
and given to thought and forethought,  
so we spin, teach, and are taught,  
swirl for the swing, grow feathers and wings,  
fly on a zephyr to the height of the world,  
for hope is high and hope is a girl.

**From Sources Close To**

From sources close to or out of high school years,  
perhaps at parties or in sleep,  
word has passed from mouth to street  
of something willow weird and stalking mad,  
and well, so is it true, is every day recalled,  
does neither milk nor sparrow fall unmourned,  
are all present, a secret chorus to our speech?

**Shall We Dance in Barcelona?**

Shall we dance in Barcelona?  
Are sorrows past and passed away?  
then we dance and dance together  
in the orange-lit café.

The parish is already gathered  
by the sound of wood guitars,  
and two are late, but late together  
for the sound of fast guitars.

By the twanging of the flamenco  
all dreck is pressed to wine,
the churlish clap in unison,
lip whispers are divine.

As fire flickers unsteady
orange, blue, and green,
so spirits gash and splinter hues
in the revels of this corrida
forgetting after ash and after pews.

We who are happy in our flight
need ask of tomorrow no wishes
having the flamenco of each other,
and night may end in kisses.

After Spain

open throated, battered suit,
this is how I’ll go to work,
middle old and not too talky,
an average face that’s rather pocky,
a bit of beard will serve for which,
if I can abide the itch.

but brother Steve drinks by night
from bar to barmaid and to tight,
he’s never early, oft belated,
who knows which girls left bemated,
all hallmarks of the painter-genius,
the boast and burn of canvass keeness.

if a gallery for his works,
would we sell enough to bless
ourselves with some returnedness,
or would we sink without a trace
and proceed with drinks to face.

say on a golden summer morn
on Canal bank’s seedy row
I early put his work for show,
clean and scrape and frame,
maybe sell a piece or two,
while a reputation grew
and a name got passed around
of an artist, bald on crown,
who knew how to paint a dog,
flatter man and flatter God.

then there’s those selected few,
tired of boats and rotten views
who’d be taken in to rave
at works, idle or depraved,
with prostitutes in gilded beds, 
fanatics maggoty and dead, 
a holocaustal vision of the city, 
pity without the seems of pity.

but if we sold and grew rich 
and not descended down to dwell, 
in some trashy whiskey Hell, 
would that only mean to say, 
when all’s been paid and paid, 
he had just failed to make the grade.

Christmas V: In the Green Velvet Room

In the green velvet room 
we had a beer, not two, 
opined upon the cult of violence, 
read the screeds of some of those, 
who in black and white and prose, 
travel to those nether depths 
and dispense a strange largess.

In this green anteroom 
to what fate or what tomb, 
dissolution crowns our heads 
just like Christmas ribbon reds 
that all about the walls proclaim 
Christmas has come round again 
with its blessing and its curse 
which we defy and take the worst.

But in the Friday of the soul 
I take among my selves a poll, 
find a tender feeling dwells 
before the incipient gates of Hell, 
for bodies, gentle, warm, sublime, 
and the minds which are their rhymes, 
and who, perhaps not first at all, spoke 
to both proud and simple folk, 
to which is one with all the rest, 
those who blessing shall be blessed.

Mug

for ART

still and silent and serene, 
but with affections and effect, 
I sit unlabeled tabled on
this table, desk, or step,
 froze in a roundy second of hot time
 neither to bend nor yield,
 but as may be to break or chip,
 meant centuries to roll,
 and brews of all the east and west
 will never quench or sting my thirst,
 who of fire-dried earth and glaze
came spinning born,
 alone or company, so good for all,
 aloof, but with attention and respect,
gift of a thousand hands
 now into a single hand,
a single lift, a single nod,
one taster and one taste,
 but if one taster, then whose lip
 is on my lip
 for all my little life.

First Molts
for IAR

First molts of soils in the air
Sun cruising north, gone winter where?
gone its fruitless white cold way
so trees
are running rivers full of saps
where birds find branch and lift
but all things find relapse
and resume their ramping ways
yet there’s an electron’s shift
a budge we notice in our days
the budget’s new, tho all primeval stays.

***

Now top hunting hill, red fox in ferns scents
that the bush has more stalkers than sparkly pebbly rills
that the vixen’s haunting slaughter is in her skin’s intent
that roads interlace capricious taking their roadkills
but being knows no turning on ways coming to or back
and so must turn aside to chase a vixen’s track.

***

Well as the fair new season beams
up rise the sprouts in paschal green
who praise the boys on their common ways
who catch their girls for holidays
the girls who’ll crowd bare-shoulder flocks
to get their boys half-liter bocks.

Jackson Square

I’m off to move my car
for I must hie to Jackson Square,
but I might yet be back
before I hit the road to Mac.

A Dog of Montjuic

Coming out of el Castillo
castled on the height of Montjuic
and between high stone walls to drawbridge over ditch
there was dog beside me
and he stopped to piss on the wall
“thou dog, it is too easy for you”
and our eyes caught in a moment
and I went on over the drawbridge to
the garden of the cars.

Somewhere back behind me
on places like this hill
there was the fury and the kill
the fires and the stones
deep secret cavern homes
of the spirits we chased
clothed in the fur we craved
and which we broke
to the bones and pieces for our wandering homes
and like the speed of the deer
the strength of the bear
we were jealous of their winter-hearted
prick-eared, howling force
and slaughtered the other suitor for the crown
of first among mortals under heaven
who did not fly or swim
and took the whelps to our firesides
and made promises to pups
be thou ever loyal, and to our paces go
and we to thee will ever be a master and a friend.

Did I glancingly renew, oblivious, a pledge
from face and eye to eye and face
the sadness of love and loss
made by our selection into gentle lovers
to take on trust the hand that feeds
upon the head, but not between
three hundred pounds of canine force
still levered in those jaws
and so I watched said dog
run along the parapet
and he was collarless
but his master was ahead or behind
or over that rise or behind that stand of trees
and the dog cruised on ahead
to the crossroads somewhat downward
and I passed and went left and he passed going left
and loped before, a torpedo on four rhythmmed legs, oddly aslant
and the sidewalk was narrow and I stopped for him to piss
and Montjuïc is mostly bushy ground
on this north landward facing side
as if it had been cleared in Franco’s day or so
and waited for the planner’s hand between the tended highground
and the jardins, museos, and stadiums below
meanwhile wild grass and a few trees grow
and asphalted criss-crossing roads
and I turned right and went lower
and I had a dog.

My dog was somewhat black and tan
perhaps some German shepherd
but sans that Wehrmacht look
a trusty hound
my dog’s a boy, though being oblivious
except to the bleeding obvious
this was rank assumption
he knew the routine, he goes before, he goes behind
makes excursions to the side
but stays within my never voicéd call.

Crossing below the path we were on before
he takes to the other side of the road
“something interesting fella, down this dirt car path
on this grassy slope”
down thru a few small trees
and some dumpings, perhaps a fridge
to gravel road and gravel parking lot
and a few cars spaced about
and a few lowered figures inside
but who could look more uncurious
than a good burgler of Barcelona out on a Domingo afternoon
walking his dog
but lovers are easy to find in Barcelona
they litter the grassy parks, they curl on benches at bus-stops
in the moat of el Castillo sub rosa, but not only beneath roses
and who could look more uncurious
than a man and his dog.

We left the cleared but left land, waiting for the planner’s hand
and went into the planned land of jardins and museos
the paths of dusty dirt between the palms and pines
the stone women loosely draped or not at all
the stone fountains with their leafy somewhat soiled waters
o for a Alpine mountain brook or a Canadian pond
but this is well enough where oldsters on benches play cards
and lizards climb.

We went to the Joan Miro Fundación and approached around the back
and around to the side where a barely roller-painted pylon of stone
pricked its square pointed head to the sky
and another good man and his good dog
were spending their time there
and we stood off, this man and I, but dogs are otherwise
and must know who, and they know by nose
they romped and chased amid the art
and somehow set a pack abarking under the ground
the guard dogs of Joan Miro
but when I moved on, it was time to go
and my dog came with me.

We passed the guard dogs howling up a storm
out of training to set fear, or from frustration
but it is best that they are in and we are out
Joan Miro’s showing Maplethorpes till June 19th
but the doors were closed, its after 5 p.m.
and my dog drank in a fountain stream that
fell down the cut terraces of the hill
and we came through parked and pathed ways
to the Museo de Etnologia
and there was a congress of masters and dogs
the dogs were romping and howling
while the masters were seated and talking
I walked thru and walked around and did not wait
for my dog was consumed with so much company
and so I finally shook him
and left him somehow to return
by his own ways to his home perhaps behind the mountain.

O, I never laid a hand on him, I am too wise,
and he never sniffed my shoe or pant-leg cuff, too wise too
O, these summer Sunday walkers
with their steady slow manstrides
their flowing pant legs, their leathery sweaty shoes
that promise so much, “forever pup, like this forever”
always walks and always paths and always all these summer smells
they walk out of castles in Spain into gardens of Earth
and go away soon again to wherever they will
and leave hearts scattered all behind.

After Contemporaries

One afternoon, and it could have been any afternoon,
but it was just one fine late afternoon,
a man with a belled jingly hat
and a second man with a severe grey suit
and a face whitened and wreathed in pencil lines,
but ready for an age of erosion yet to come,
collided nearly in Köln
while taking the river and the park in the gold late weather.

And what do we know of Köln?
and who that we know lived and mattered there?
It is a city Roman wise that tipples on Rhein wine,
it is always à la mode; and always up to time,
it is always flowing, always old, always riverine.

“Then” said the Mayor to the Clown,
as Titan striding, Earth groaning down,
the Boxer, black-haired and Neanderbrowed,
crushing grass, stopped to stare
at the meeting of the Clown and Mayor,
and gathered to their throng
whispered what telling tales to answer their’s.

As in the forest, fairy-taled, and deer-struck,
came running, weaving over green, a maid,
the Chanteuse, artist-chased, her hands atwist,
and widened the three to four,
her light hand to the Boxer’s heavy wrist,
and panting fifthed them, the Artist, husband to the maid,
who with his red-white Köln colors gave them a flag to cheer,
lifting all their hearts, to be together and be dear.

So assembled, so embossed upon the land, so enchanted,
how beautiful willowy yellowy you are my dear,
how the Moon rising arrests your face my Mayor,
how cathedral hard your hands my fighting friend,
what is the end of strength, what is the meaning of song,
and what joke my jester sage will you tell of our times:

That we who breathed and are brief,
waltzed and wrinkled in an instant,
that flashing gestures of hands
have cut grooves in our hearts,
that all the smoke-filled rooms and bars and rings
have written history in our faces,
that even a Mayor can fall and rise again
that even an Artist, modern and T-shirted,
must paint in mortal colors,
that friends depart and lovers leave,
that love is a common good and the greatest good.
When You Wake

When you wake,
I could be there when you wake,
eyes dazzled leaving off the darkness,
finding in the light
the white sheets and the warm humid self
duplicated in a broken symmetry
that completes the same,
coming out of the dilemma of dreams
where all plans go awry, all attempts shipwreck,
into the hands of daylight and into my hands.

Montserrat

_for UYP_

If you thought in a mountain moment
this peak in quiet was only quiet,
your moist breath was almost nearly cloud,
this life and death were a stone’s throw,
that merely being, not recording,
that simply questing, not edition
were much, sufficient, and sufficed,
you erred,
sainted seconds scorch the page,
all journeys end in a book.

Girl with a Pearl Earring

_for TVJ_

Lord! it was man-gray, morning to noon,
then he came and brought her to me, the Pearl,
it was a moment for theory and technique,
what did the light speak of her,
how did the room renown her,
was chapter and verse in her shying
from the foul bird in this place.

Say it is not in the conquest of the picture,
but in refined strokes of the brush
blessing an infinite series of her qualities,
siring—Lord!—all children in her womb,
turn I say, startled she turned,
hold I say, become an eternal moment held,
an answer nearly of the lips,
a suspension only of the word.
Blues enfold you, not always rejoicing,
but serene and pertinent,
if fingers interlocking found no stillness,
I’d never search in hands for stillness,
if merely being a painter of Ghent,
a fashion and a man, and one of your days were enough,
then I’d paint you à la mode,
and never be intimate with your colors.

Blue and blue-darkness, this is your world,
or the world I search in you,
a gateway, whether you know or not,
prodigious—Lord!—the moment of turning,
in the pirouette of a head, in the ballet of the lips,
the stars about your ears, your ocean eyes,
on the point of a century.

Elissa

Elissa, so shy, of delightful tact,
meaning friendship, no more, her hand, his back,
found meekness no weakness in clay,
as he coaxed at the catch of her slacks.

Space Flight

I swooped around the Earth
fell up into the Moon
spent a sensual second
invented a new tune

’48

*for HLV*

What time invokes that time betrays
in bills come due, in things waylaid,
as if a century’s ending would not wait
for all lost songs of ’48.

That time marks time is always true,
reflect thrice on the child’s clue
that saplings grow, that robins mate,
that parents knew thereof

in ’48.

That war years break, that war years thresh,
and at the spear’s point only flesh
has held back that that obliterates
before and since year ’48.

That time began, that time was flashed,
and elements strewn from worlds that gashed
from Gamow’s wise head in postulates
in that wise time in ’48.

What time invokes that time betrays
in counts of years, in counts of days,
as if 50 less or 50 more could date
all those who spring from ’48.

Riddler I

I am right red or unbearable gold,
to my straight gaze, eyes flinch and fold,
est bows at my paraded levé,
I define—am—the essence of day,
at noon, Inuit north and far Bedouin,
but mutually me—I blister skin,
shadows fear me—stay out of my path,
and in the desert, all stands in my wrath.

But—to the lazy rhythm of 3 pm time—
I Earthward glide the ecliptic line,
dying decently west, a ghost of late might,
then before I’m quite gone—I cast my twilight.

Hey You

Hey you, who compared yourself to a spring flood,
who climbed the Sun, while the mountain shone,
were but a prisoner in a drop of dew,
a roundy ocean all on a morning leaf,
but Proteus himself, a fish, a seal, a wave’s toss,
a mile high, wide-winged albatross,
beware, you evaporated into air,
were once a cloud fairweather white,
were once a jet’s journey into night,
or bridal cirrus in the sky’s high blue,
you became black thunder, a lightning flash,
became a rain, rained everywhere,
and on the mountain lied down as snow,
a glacier in the Sun, a streamlet in the spring,
gathering yourself, cascading all the way,
for even the mountain has heard of the sea.
The Comet’s Hair

I lick my wounds around the Moon,
yank the comet’s hair for a fair share,
cry in my Milky Way milk like those ilk
whose sulky verse is timeless terse
which in lines rhymes to this universe.

Straight from Sorrows

*For the Oak Ridge International Folk Dancers*

Straight from sorrows bind your shoes,
straight on tomorrow bind in twos,
dance Earth’s rim, eternity looks in
trolling for human rhymes therein.

The Bargaining Table

I used to just put my toothbrush there
and toss around my snotty kleenexes,
but lately I’ve had to negotiate a bit
and if talks break down
we go to mediation.
I wonder how I put up with a second force,
a mint-new me who draps nylons
dripping on the shower bar,
an I who fleshily rescents—to avoid plain words—my space,
but much mediation is not much less than bliss
and even rest.

Riff on Cavafy’s *Ithaca*

*for AIB*

Be certain you are old laying your anchor at Ithaca,
that the gods in everything have fled their siren tricks
and over the red horizon no more the red tide flows,
Ithaca has given you a voyage,
she is a poor place to arrive,
without her you would never have started out,
she has nothing to give you now.

**NOTE:** This is a free variation on Constantine Cavafy’s (1863–1933) poem *Ithaca.* Cavafy’s works are now in the public domain. To elucidate the sense of Cavafy’s poem, I have compared the translations by Edmond Keeley & Philip Sherrard, John Cavafy, Stratis Haviaras, and Daniel Mendelsohn.
Whence Slept my Love her Sleep

Some quarrelling about the hour,
she slipped off her shirt to glower,
none bade, least inspire, lest
her pride resist a touched address,
I calmed her fury in a flank sweep,
whence slept my love her sleep.

When quarrelling with the late light,
she pulled up her skirt to fight,
none bade, least inspire, lest
her pride resist a spread caress,
I calmed her fury in a flank sweep,
whence slept my love her sleep.

Still piqued at the midnight chime,
turnable, she reared a Golden Hind,
none bade, least inspire, lest
her pride resist un main a la fesse,
I calmed her fury in a flank sweep,
whence slept my love her sleep.

When Like a Twin

When like a twin,
but more identical even
for only identity can compete
with strangeness when complete
yet when we meet
I need not say or do anything
merely be with you
and that takes all my time.

You Were Speaking of Your Friend

You were speaking of your friend
and I said “You were speaking of your friend.”

Brother among brothers
stamping the earth in contest for the prize
that is nothing but the contest
of friendship and the day’s glory
that in the rough joke that covers
the tenderness of strength
yet who would not remember wilder years
and echoes of our fathers
whose boldness outflanked the Sun
that rose in the springs that rise
in the trailing of the Moon.

Lover among lovers
giving to the second the body that
reaches to the deep sea that
flows from beneath the howling Moon
that left the safe and separate sleeps
that rose in the night to close the tears
in kisses and opened the eyes in breath
that sustained the hair that tickles
that recalls what happiness that
is mad for love before youth had lost
and love had had love.

One among ones
that the one should not be forgotten
that the one should enter every party with us
as the guest who cannot recall a better time
whose rainbow thunder goes with us
in the gathering of the spirits
who nuzzle like the deer our living height
who wish us ever so much happiness
as we travel our 80 years.

Why Because the Rhythm Told Us

Where are the dancers
the rain has brought them in
where are the dancers
the Moon has brought them in.

Why because Elf-face asked me
slow slow quick quick leap
why because I had to know
slow slow quick quick leap.

And much as I admire Elf-face
there before the Moon had risen rose
a grey hair quickened by the Sun
a woman time has given
standing over all the daughters of the world.

Disabled and reabled by the searching
the line grows turning and striking
slow slow quick quick leap
dragon red and dragon running
glide! knee! turn! left! leap!

Why be spun like the whirlwind
why be twin to all the living
why because the rhythm told us
why because we had to speak.

The 50’s of Peter Glaucus

The 50’s or perhaps by now the 1950’s,
they were a time for hotdogs in the summer,
and banging radiators in the winter,
and turtleneck sweaters and trying to be so cool,
and being a bit of everything we pretended,
aaah, New York and name dropping,
Vivien Thornett stayed at the Waldorf,
she’ll live a long time after that, young actresses do.

I remember subways and TV and black artists,
I remember Harlem and Midtown,
and working days being my professional self
apart from my private self,
and my private self who was always checking out
the country boys come to Manhatten.

There were my travels, with of course a friend,
to see the new trends in Spain, Franco’s Spain,
then Paris and Rome and Singapore,
but I only must have imagined getting to Harbin.

Probably we—and you know who “we” are—were meant to be outsiders,
not by God, no not him, but just by being a minority,
yet we may have discovered art and philosophy,
no, I don’t want to preen, just to not worry
when I bring someone home at night.

I’m not sure I understood the 60’s,
not that I forgot how to tie my tie,
but I didn’t know any more that a tie was not cool,
I didn’t write much then
because some will say I was drinking, but I was really working,
the bills must be paid,
and I thought the new painters were important,
and I thought my show was important,
and man does not live by the word alone.

You know I often went out to the beach, Fire Island,
it’s really just a beach park, not Sodom,
Auden used to go there in the 40’s,
and I heard him give readings,
and I was too shy to introduce myself,
but we might have become old cronies later on
when fame or unfame come to rest and nothing more to add,
but still living on just keeping our hands in.
The beach quite often in the 60’s,
I always liked to swim and the nights after swimming were fine,
and you would think I’d remember more of the last day,
but it was like any other day,
the tide comes in, the tide goes out,
you’re never ready.

How does one live on speaking from the grave,
well that is one of the things writing is for,
a reader can trace maybe somewhat, maybe wrongly, but sympathetically,
I have to be read lightly,
I never wanted to stretch, to seem bright, brittle,
just the ordinariness, but I admit to dropping names,
which is sort of vampiric,
but then you’d want to know that
Vivien Thornett stayed at the Waldorf.

NOTE: Peter Glaucus and Vivien Thornett are fictional. Peter Glaucus is modeled to a degree on Frank O’Hara (1926–1966).

No Souls

They have no souls
the Americans have no souls
the British have no souls
Romans, Israelis, Germans,
no souls
the Assyrians really, really had no souls
even Canadians have no souls
—sorry—anglo Canadians have no souls

Power, money, free sex
but no souls.

Riff on Hesiod’s *Works and Days*

When thistle bursts and cicada,
hid in his tree, shrill and timeless,
sings his song—timeless,
then summer swoons and goat is fat
and wine is good and maids are riggish,
but burnt are streams and men—burnt dry
by Sirius teaming with the Sun—but I
in the Dog Days think a shady rock
godlike with Biblos from the vine.

NOTE: This is a free adaptation of a passage from Hesiod’s *Works and Days* starting from line 582 in the translation of Hugh G. Evelyn-White (d. 1924). The Evelyn-White translation (public domain) and that of Dorothea Wender (1934–2003) were
compared to elucidate the literal meanings of the terms and phrases.

Take Chess

Take chess, the pastime of kings,  
Shah mát, the king is dead,  
and regress back from falling disorder  
to ruled ranks as pawns phalanx  
and white always begins.

It’s not life, quantized time rules,  
breaks into a smaller infinity  
that the mind of Capablanca could compress  
though never solve though win,  
it’s not life.

Nor physics neither,  
the pieces white and black or Alice red,  
Staunton or all that myth pretends,  
the emperor of China and the Khan,  
all that’s kitsch or philosopher’s spawn.

One can play blind,  
the board left to breakfast  
and think moves ten moves ahead  
which beats a breakfast partner  
who grouches and begins to bore  
the champion with the smallness  
of non-life, non-physics.

One can play blind nor physics neither:  
that means thus: it’s not the atoms in the pieces,  
not the golden rule of either sort,  
a pippin Plato proclaims ideal chess  
that needs no mind to think it  
nor cosmic preamble first.

If not chess, then not life,  
no atoms nor molecules need apply,  
the bricks are not the beam—  
of light and evolution proceeds  
even in the machine,  
and in all the worlds that thought allows.

Not that nothing is that is not nothing,  
but the Boundless is not bound by Newton  
nor castaway on the island of Einstein,  
there is more in Heaven and Earth  
than dreamt of in your physics.
Christmas VII: Yule

In winter midmost mid the darkness,
very life seeps from the saps
of all the veins, and hands collapse
into pockets from a timeless coldness
that bids and broods.

The very bird that pecking in the snow
for the dying Sun in the living seed,
brings to mind the summer reed
and bird that is, still knows
what nests and breeds.

The Roman senator in wine-winter revels tost
hikes up his toga to the pater,
that all his slaves will see the matter,
which Saturn in his cups so drank the toast
against the board.

Mammals and fowls straying in their coats,
drool from the mouth and stalk the yards,
liiting their tails in saltation to the stars,
and suffer all their pains for threats and oats
paired and rude.

Year again has eaten year and munched the hurts
that all the darts of pain and loss
that break the maidenheads of lovers’ gloss
which spring foretold which died in equal parts
of broken seals.

Christmas VIII: Saturn

In winter hidmost, neath the darkness,
in the last clutch of loving warmth,
beyond the mountains without kindness,
my old love and I play for hearts and mirth.

Obsessed with tokens and their broken joy,
even as children see in their others
what a cheap and graven thing are toys
that flame desire and tire in bother.

But that brightness come into the world,
but that something tinsel and tinny foretells
that hurts end and in arms closed and curled,
their love has love and all will be well.

So I, unthrottling the antlers,
bidding Blixen to bound to the world’s height,
and chasing the dim stars,
pass into nightness and out of all sight.

Woman Nonetheless

Seamstress, lateness, fondness, fateness,
Mistress mineness, frankness, kindness,
Shortness, tallness, slimmness—but vigil Venus,
Lionness, tigress—but Cubless, Childless,
Procureess luress, Latin lemures,
Enchantress, hextress, toothless crone,
girlness, crossness, messiness, moan,
Countess, princess, highness, queen,
Temptress, playmatress, whippiness, cream,
Actress, actor, long-dress part,
Poetess, courtliness, courtesan, tart,
Perduess, Jewess, Pesach, Shaloch,
Sculptress, redness, whiteness, smock,
Adventuress, craftiness, silk,
Babe and babes and milk,
Wondrous, talentless, terribleness, tipsiness,
Sulkiness, sybilness, timeless, rhymeless,
Hardiness and Tess—of the D’urbervilles—Tess!
Cleverness, meanness, relentless, depressed,
Dreaminess, dressiness, desirous, undressed,
Otherness, goddess, goodness, and mother wit,
Apartness, togetherness, oneness, twoness yet.

Words for Shakespeare

My ashes were my breast of snow,
My talons now are afterglow,
Deceived, dismembered four winds wide,
But I lived, but I died.

The Fall

For the Crew of the Columbia

As one second too many gave itself to another second,
time itself gave to more time,
call back the morning, call back the dawn,
but a wind blows over Texas,
and the wind is the spirit itself,
always going away from perception
and we capture it for a second only
a pant and an expiration, and it is gone.

As in the high sky for a moment, then the moment gave way
and pride fell and turned itself into light
before it scattered across Texas,
and the wind is the spirit itself,
whistling a tune carried from itself,
and finding no home, roams up and down.

Disintegrated into air, into the suffused air,
design into the law of momentum
as the fragments of being in formation
spread over Texas.

Grief and grief and grief,
if you beat your fists on the air it is no better
than if you beat your fists on the spirit,
grief is an arrow that flys,
an arrow that always homes.

And when desolation comes, it comes,
and then it is best to be with the best,
whomever one can reach out to,
and if we fall on each other, then we fall on the best,
and spare a thought for all the other falls
we are not alone in grief, not in all the ages.

They are simple now, the spirit that comes and goes,
no more that they should fill up the days
with all the details of the venture of the living,
those who go on, shoulder on,
lifting the Earth.

I Woke

I woke,
you slept,
I protected your sleep.

White Symmetry

When you were sleeping, face down and a force,
your bare back was a white symmetry,
geometry became my own affair,
your arm slung down,
a hand laid to rest on the belly of the Earth,
breathing was a calling and a loving,
lifeless elements shivered,
I planted kisses on your shoulders,
the awakening grew tufted.

No Reach: Riff on Harry Edward Mills

I see her in my moods,
here or on the stair,
no reach, but then eludes
the girl I once named fair.

A Joy and a Strength

A joy and a strength and a strength and a light,
from a day to a day, and a night to a night.

Dear Friend

Dear Friend:
don’t worry about the lapse of time,
sometimes there is nothing much to say,
I have this friend in Munich,
years and more, we have not met,
no word in the ether since I can’t remember when,
but if we met tomorrow, it would be the same.

Winslow

for OMB

Shuddering and heaving like the sea,
and secret like the heart.
No arriving without setting out,
no stirring without passion.
Victoria, Cape Breton, or Ithaca,
Penelope and what every island knows.
Whichever way the wind blows,
where will the Sun rise tomorrow?
in Winslow, Arizon.
Night Intervenes

Night intervenes in the quiet touch,
there is this and there is this much,
after day and after dance, and aches that come,
breath and dialog and breath and sleep,
then in the morning with the same one
one left off with the night before.

Suddenly an Easy Morning

Suddenly an easy morning, a gentleness that’s flesh,
instead of waking merely, a shining from a rest,
that has a second memory, and a second strength,
a human factor side-by-side in bed, and at years’ length,
which is a second sorrow, a second pity for pity’s sake,
with two faces twinned and grinning, taking each and each other take.

What Hopes

What hopes she had, I could not say,
whose hearts she held, or young when,
the past it’s nothing either way,
I spoke her love and tallied then,
though jealous hounds held me at bay,
when I’d be held with

her absent men.

Toto

Ah, flat and grass and green and rolls,
wired, posted, and bounded fields,
cow smells, and pigs’s and flowerets and ferns,
with a paw I broke and pried the marigold.

My human toted me at will
and in my basket all around,
so fond I took such trolley tricks
and grew fierce only and at her and only in little barks
when she neglected morning, noon, and dinner walks.

Then the great dust whorl that spiraled out of time
and ripped the barn and blew the cow,
which lifted the house and spun the world,
I cried and coughed and bid her,
her who is always there, whose scent is on me ever,
to shelter me and from the blast defend.
And all the world was color then
with gold bricks, gold wicker, and gold ware,
we wanderlusted, made new friends,
I frighted in the forest the tawny lion,
and slept in the poppy field
and wakened to the weight of snow.

The Emerald City, the cloudy man whose speech was fire
and not and not and not desired
to journey to the end of smoke
with monkeys and their monkey tricks,
and I alone knew, though none took note,
that water would endrench the witch.

And back with a broom and back with what we knew,
three toe taps and circle twice,
and the far fields wreaked the world,
and “is” once again as “was” it were.

I slip and sleep more and more,
and still the scent that grew tall
brings me treats and tricks and table bits,
I think much on one and another thing
in the day the Sun grew round and the Moon still.

Every Season

That I could write was her permission,
and God knows what I wish to say,
but to keep her friendness, it’s not passion,
she knows that anyway.

I’d write I’d love her and dote on her daily self,
check when she’s late, and save her from the cold,
in sickness we’d be tender and glorious in health,
forsaking all others, how much of this I’ve told,
and she knows that’s half the reason,
but her alone in this and every season.

Topeka

With the wind; against the grain: is this the final fault,
white and tall and turned and to a pillar of salt,
though Topeka has its hundred thousand and its gathered force,
still I raise a shout for the leader of the chorus.
The Younger Man

Softly in the thought when your love fails of your desire,
body first, mind then must lead yours and must tire,
quietly in patio shade, she’ll grouse and peeve, and forget the rain,
so this hurt, this luck, this love returns ever and again,
human leaves break and fall,
the earth mulches them all to all,
but dance or sleep, her body stood at the ready,
“yes sir, carry on, storm the fort, steady.”

Mark Antony

Mark Antony without shed blood and not a soldier,
thus his wreath, thus his lifted cup,
thus he knows his man and his man’s hurt,
thus he lifts her arm, thus he kisses her cheek.

Adam and Eve

If Adam and Eve a century after
found each other on the plain,
a century before missed in the Garden,
had their separate snakes and separate loves,
thus he’d lift her arm, thus he’d kiss her cheek,
not children now nor naked,
too many stories to tell, too many tangles to respect,
they’d know one another so, and know to be wary of this
a withdrawal before the resolution and the trance,
before they speak in rhythm and speak in dance.

What Song

What song the women sung,
when Achilles hid them among,
what story Primavera tells
in her silences or spells.

Spider Webs

Tucked between such vines,
a space caught in the same act
as last year, gold, black.
The Girl Who Circumnavigated the Globe

_for IAR_

Are you adding Bali to your tally
or giving them the facts in Iraq,
but the girl who circumnavigated the globe,
and I know this, is not a travel phobe.

As if the Gold Had Never Happened

As if the gold had never happened
and the bounded Earth grew square
and in the city of the towers
arrows fell and fell without a care,
arrows curled and in the backs and thunder
grew silent in the mouths that gaped and racked
as if the veil had torn asunder,
as if the noon were black.
And a crowd denied that there were two,
as if there were no I, no you.

A Casa, Amante, Aquí

Do you still go by the cafés,
do you still visit the tapas bars,
do you still journey by burnt light
and still catch the midnight,
_a casa, Amante, aquí._

From the unbounded sky
and the roundness of the Earth
a message in the ether or when
in the density of the ocean,
_a casa, my love, here._

Who keeps her secrets in the heart,
who laughs and laughs to the dark,
who does the work of las hadas,
who tells the nights of Scheherazade,
_a casa, Amante, aquí._

Do you come from Jerez,
do you remember Sevilla,
is not Granada enough,
Barcelona, hair and rough,
_a casa, my love, here._

I’ve journeyed to the end of the fire,
I’ve taken the long road to the break of desire,
I’ve heard all that the Sirens sing
forever! from the day of the gold rings.

A casa, Amante, aquí.

Champion, Last Son
If not fallen then,
no longings in the long nights,
and not then risen.

A Likeness to Ovid’s Springs and Stones
A likeness to Ovid’s springs and stones
that for a second were person and passion
and on the next breath were time alone,
time recorded to time left in this fashion
that all the aches that last are held a trust
for love is in the seed and that is in the dust,
and if we pass this way again where then embraced,
we find nothing but our ruin
and our ruined grace.

The Return
After your adventure,
your hair sweeps over your khaki shirt and beneath your safari hat,
and your knapsack brings forth gold seed and your knife
and your passport from the land of the dead.

Becoming Irish
I am becoming Irish and have my passport for proof,
I have the Luck, the half and half, the good and the bad,
I am permitted to see leprechauns, as my grandfather saw,
from the udders of cows drawing milk in a stream and over the Moon,
I am permitted to say I’ve done nothing all day
without a trace of negative guilt,
but with a trail of positive glee,
I am permitted to say I’m sorry for your troubles
and have done with the gunman’s hate,
and though a descendant of bloody Prod Orangemen,
I swear to the green, the shamrock, and the harp,
the choice of Henry VIII for his kingdom of Ireland
and the sign of the poet’s art,
I am the descendant of Irish kings
and travel with tinkers in a donkey cart
from Dublin to Connaught
and stand on the hill with Adam Malloy
and bid from purgatory such deliverings
that a cry to heaven from the Mountain of Joy
can bid to end Earth’s all sufferings.

Poem Envy

Poetry, and this is damned, is such a matter of taste,
a cup of wine from a cup of grape
or palace chalice, poison laced,
one man’s squalid dog, one man’s canny ape,
but chawed on, the Panda on his shoots of bamboo,
words of glowing renown on the body, inked tattoo,
a rhyme along a thigh and that pleasure bends me,
that’s all I desire, lover, and that’s poem envy.

An IRA Man Reads the Newspaper

“The victims were riddled with bullets.”
Riddled with bullets!
Do the lads think bullets grow on trees?
One to bring down; one if needs be
for the coup de grace.
Riddled with bullets my ass.

Richard Villier

I dine with Richard Villier, he is night
or shivering morning breaking day,
if we were brothers, we would fight
two lyrics to a single play.

Worry Stone

My hand enfolds around the table
catching my old worry stone,
once a garish marble,
now a laquer of smooth tones.

My hand revolts against the table
hurting my old worry stone,
once a pointed marble,  
now a laquer steeled in chrome.

My hand resolves into the table  
searching my old worry stone,  
once a holy marble,  
now a laquer soothed alone.

Words Never Said

Though finally out of touch,  
we remain always friends,  
it’s enough and it’s too much,  
I’m sorry for the last sad end  
and sorry that I wasn’t strong either way  
and that is all that’s left to say.

***

If sometimes I grow distant,  
there’s nothing in that either,  
you have your story and descent,  
some things are spoken never,  
in years ahead or day to day,  
you, me, we stay.

Patrick’s Day

Like mist and bog,  
like the open Earth,  
like the name of God,  
like the moment of birth.

Love Feeds on This

Love feeds on this,  
and dies in this effect,  
you know the words,  
attention, neglect.

How Shall These Two Be Arrayed

for IAR

How shall these two be arrayed  
when sea-returned and crested waves
sweep old friends who not dismayed
for they survive though nothing stays.

The Poem Gift

The thing that puts the words in order,
that spells and catches spells,
that rings and jangles up the bells,
that holds within and speaks without
that’s in the chamber and in doubt.

Whatever Shore

for Helen

Whatever shore, whatever strand,
whatever shelter, whatever bed,
and by whatever hand there led.

Huck Finn on the River

for IDG

Huck Finn on the river,
her grin, her narrowed eyes,
and all those wilder years,
cemented to the next generation
and the last.

Nice

It’s nice to have a friend,
to have her around,
nice to talk to, nice to touch,
and then to do nice things with,
why can’t there be more nice.

Laurel

Though I’ve come and gone and nothing stays,
when I’m laid out, Prince,
lay my head with bays.
No Ghost

May no ghost touch your rest,
and no sorrow bathe your mind,
no past return an old flame,
and your love in your love shine.

As You Seem Unreachable

As you seem unreachable, I remind you of my love,
as you are in Morocco, I indicate my love,
as you’ve caught a flight to London
and are visiting the British Museum
and are actually standing in the manuscript room,
let me call to your attention the autograph copy by John Dryden:
“All for . . .”

NOTE: There probably is no such a manuscript extant by John Dryden (1631–1700).

My Fall

My fall is like a dream,
like an emptiness,
like a sitting alone in the dark,
like the falling of acorns, one, two,
like my straw hat and blue jacket put on to go home,
absent the long track of your body,
as the new century of science fiction
lumbers before us, all its forecastings,
its shimmering entities in biolabs,
its AI not asking for life, not forgiving of its gift,
beneath a half moon in a half-light,
beneath a crowded sky
and still there will be time for this then
in twenty-thirty or twenty-forty,
not alone in a world too swift,
not alone when your touch still reaches
all the length of my form.

Pablo Neruda

The resound of the Andes found an echo in a man’s voice,
water leaping, splashing from the heights
like words leaping, splashing from the singer of the morning,
collector of books and shells
in the manifest evolution of Darwin’s journey’s land,
born in the narrowest pais, Chile!
one hand rests on the lip of the Volcano,
one foot is in the Pacific surge
that has come from halfway round the planet,
the middle-aged cowboy escaping over the mountains,
and in the Atacama desert, where dust-wind erodes stone
and the faces of the miners, who dig copper deep,
the miners and Indians who chose him their senador.

And What if One Man

And what if one man from all the rest
touched a hand, myself alone addressed.

From the First Line

From the first line, you shake,
this will take you where you’ve never been,
to the heart? to the heart of darkness?
to the door of the car, the car that will take you mile after mile
farther from all the happiness you’ve ever known.

Coming Down from the Daemonic

Coming down from the daemonic
and off the tragic hue,
ordinary again in scope
and sunrise, golden-handed, all in view.

Zorba

That was an afternoon: we slew the goat and fired him on the spit,
and the Sun set and the retsina spouted in gaping mouths and we sang and danced,
and the Widow of the Taberna of the Black Olives, swirled up her skirt,
and I caught her up and danced her off her feet and into porch and onto the old mat,
and we slept, yes, we slept fully and sincerely till the cock crowed,
and rosy-fingered dawn illuminated us and since it was Sunday,
holy Sunday, we played till 10 and then threw water all over each other,
and dressed in our colored vest and shawl, we aped the gentry all the way to the Eglesia,
and knelt fervently in shaking incence and Priest-Ikon rolled his eyes at us
mocking his erring children, I and the Widow of the Black Olives.
23rd Psalm

Lord, Shepherd,
in the green fields,
by the fountain spring,
you are with me and restore my soul,
in the twilight between waking and dreaming
and near to the night,
you guide me onward
to the valley and the hill,
to the mountain and the sky,
always to live in your love.

Toe on Toe

At night together, snuggly hugs and kisses,
then apart to sleep, but toe on toe,
till sunrise, golden-handed, through the window misses
the forms in touch and under the shadow
while along the body and go—hubs and krisses.

It Was Sunday

It was Sunday and we went walking through the university campus
and of a university I did not know, but that is likely in dreams,
we walked through fences and cobwebs,
we walked into the history building
and it couldn’t have been Sunday,
there was a class off the main hall and you wanted to sit in,
the desks were jam-packed to the door and only you could slip in,
I sat on a bench in the hall with the “other” students
and I was given a paper bag with chocolate bars,
but I protested I wasn’t there for an exam,
but the students said take them anyway
and you came out of the classroom
and I put on my jacket before my sweater
and in untangling myself you slipped away,
three hallways and which way did you go,
I thought to search one way or another,
I thought to wait because I believed
you would notice when I wasn’t there.

My Tongue

My tongue lumps on the floor of my mouth
and touching the teeth though I am lying flat,
and then there is a series of itches
and I'm trying all the while to drift off,
and when the last atom has separated from the last atom
that will be a pale day.

Ladies and Gallants

Ladies and gallants laughing at play
around and around dancing down to the floor,
to a green wood to a green door.

And in the dark, the shadows walk
in silver moon-leaf and nightwork lore,
to a green wood to a green door.

Thus the party, thus the stalker’s word,
thus forever and about, thus forevermore,
to a green wood to a green door.

With Playful Crowns

With playful crowns
happy to adore each other,
girl-mother, credit of her flesh,
upstart of her joy,
with pain and sweat and sweat and pain,
so helpless, so all in hands,
so all tomorrows, all yesterdays,
baby and bliss and bless,
and rest, restfulness.

Toe to Toe

Toe slithers to toe,
awake?
yes, awake,
in awhile then?
in awhile,
in awhile then a hand strums
bringing into tune.

Rain Kisses

Rain kisses on my face,
hold me tighter than time,
why sadness,
only gladness,
writes this rhyme.

I Love My Little Sam

I love my little Sam,
I love her all the day
when Earth and time have passed away.

Others I have loved
and deserving of,
but I took my hurts,
in German *Welt und Schmerz*.

Of them take good care,
of whom with whom they share
days and bliss, bless
and rest, restfulness.

I love my little Sam
and with all my might
in the soundness of the night.

Puppy Sleep

*For SLB*

Lumped together like before,
sleep and nothing, nothing more,
and scarcely room to thrust a head
through the battled brother bed.

Davy Had a Little Sam

Davy had a little Sam,
her fleece was brown as mousse,
and every moment Davy spent
his Sam was on the loose.

Davy had a little Sam,
whose eyes could fetch a tear,
and every whisper Davy spoke
it fell and brushed her ear.
A Native American Leader of My Affinity

Once only may be, under a blue-gold sky,
he shied from a bronc with a hellfire eye,
but no one ever forgot it of course,
Chief Man-Afraid-of-His-Horse.

A Parti-Colored Sock

A svelte little foot
in a parti-colored sock,
a sneeze and a mock.

A parti-colored sock
around a svelte little foot,
a had and a took.

At the Zero of Midnight

At the zero of midnight,
under a coward moon,
not a sound, not a light,
from shadow to a shadowed tomb.

There with black Hecat’s pentagram,
who is that who rests below
who once lived, who is damned,
and who in fact wants to know.

And in the cave and in the crypt,
shining in the candlestick
on hair and bone and crippled flesh,
pass the scissors, hold the wretch.

So we pass from life to death
and resurrection’s just a dream,
a story for a body’s theft,
still I hold you seam to seam.

Being Emily Dickinson

I believe in the life everlasting,
I believe in it most of the while,
we must in part go living
and into the dark and after the mile.

But even when I believe it,
there is still this to fear,
oh God, not to conceive it,
not the same there as here.

I Heard the Ocean Whisper

I heard the ocean whisper
that merges into roar,
and saw cascades lift Mister
Dead-Man-Upon-the-Shore.

Of the Nature of Time and Space

Of the nature of time and space,
finicky and pallored like Irish lace,
our theories come and come to say
there infinitely are many ways
to guess the start and to plumb
to the end’s remote dim sum.

And to this physics theology,
who am I to speak tautology
and add a scarlet, chancy piece,
a flimsy, touchless rhyme,
a hopeless vanity deceased,
and a red arrow into time.

Competitors

Hesiod lamented competitors,
some hierarchy decides,
out of three score and ten,
one or none to mention.

Einstein twisted four,
string theorists ask for more,
and a lot of talk of ten or eleven,
but no one dimension.

Out in the Sun

Out in the Sun,
unpacked from the bed,
still moving in touches.
Like a Thigh

Like a thigh, like a hip, like jutting underlip
and just enough speech to curse
then like a slip, augmented fall,
that’s like a clinch that’s none the worse
for loosening, wreathing, and a sprawl
that’s like a day, that’s like a night,
that’s only just enough, that’s time in flight.

Like Faust

Like Faust,
stay a minute, minute,
you’re beautiful,
but I am weak like jello,
my girls are romping—stay,
and the Coroner said death by cuteness,
but the world goes on forever,
we wouldn’t want it any other way,
praise the Earth, but
hey Gorgeous stay.

There Was a Young Lady Named Sock

There is a young lady named Sock,
she’s always a friend for a talk,
but at the third beer,
she’s really a dear,
for then she’s ready to flock.

Riddler II: The Riddler Strikes Again

I am always only me,
but never the same,
sometimes I’m just potential i.e.,
and where is the shame,
the change artist triumphs again—
and I’m like money—but I don’t inflate—
paid—and on the due of the date,
from light unto dark, hot unto cold,
as Joule, my prophet, has foretold,
but all riddle games—and so it goes—
must end—so speak it—as in Frodo’s.
Creatively Mary

Creatively Mary made her own dairy, staffing with cows named Dick and named Harry, and what of old Tom, here and then gone, he’s up in the loft making old Mary.

David Swanger, Guru

There is a poet named Swanger, David, not my own Doppelgänger, but paired with Paul Fussell, a sort of anti-con-Fussell, poetry is meter, poem is a dagger.

T.S. Eliot, Poet, Critic

There was a poet named Eliot, really, I say, intelligent, worked for a degree, didn’t defend don’t you see, so no Ph.D., but eloquent.

A Jacobite Song

In the battle men fell wreathing their breath went out of their bodies awe to the sky, and no quarter was asked, none surely given, and Keppoch Himselp to a bothie to die, I counted my kin and brothers around, and to nap they’d all laid down.

So the young prince was too awe small for the stories that we’d been taught and the harp tucked tight in the hall, the glimmering Sun in his hair twae braids caught at some ancient air that only pipes call out of old legends and legends of Scots.

And though the Sun makes heather glow, and larks adore the sky the more, and milk foams all as before, night’s dark and silence keeps over the sea where sailors sleep, ferry me over tae Tcharlai.
A Screen Goddess Translates Sappho

Frag 126
Lucre without succour,
what a pall,
both in the cooker,
you got it baby doll.

Frag 94
God, Hon, I swear,
not a fear, and not a tear,
he’s your guy, your his doll,
all the veils, let’m fall,
be nice, he’s no bruiser,
remember that “I choose her”
and my old nights, not so slow,
then it’s sleep toe to toe,
something to know when it’s tall,
like the apple, like the Fall.

Frag 164
Hob’s bells, there’s darkness in hell,
and no let-offs, and no free days for me,
but when I come back from where I dwell
to shiver and shimmy on the DVD,
remember me, Love—not just my spell.

NOTE: The frags are free variations on the like-numbered fragments in Paul Roche’s (1916–2007) The Love Songs of Sappho (1991). I have checked the sense of Roche’s fragments 94 and 126 with J.M. Edmonds’s (1875–1958) prose translations (his fragments 84 and 104) in Lyra Graeca (1922). I have taken care not to infringe on Paul Roche’s copyright.

Mummy III
Suffer a witch, but I have come O Sorceress,
but come Michelle Yeoh make me immortal with a kiss,
and in this I heal myself from that—that yon
taker of women, women’s dragón,
and though I lie dead two thousand years,
held together by will and will by tears,
yet I’ll rise, make good our lust
till Emperor Wind scatters yellow dust.

Scott O’Dell’s “Island of the Blue Dolphins”
My island is not the whole world,
there are other islands,
Aleuts come from there,
all the families went there—
my brother died—
I fought the dogs
and made Rontu my friend,
and he died and there was Rontu Aru, son of Rontu—
my loneliness is the story everyone tells,
I am a legend.

A Poet of Color on Her 80th

Just 80 years young like that, that’s why
I turn my head to the Sun,
growling in his blackness
under his nonethelessness,
never critique me in my hearing,
I turn my head to the Sun.

Tumult in the Shabby Woods

Tumult in the shabby woods,
yelling in the Babel tree,
giants in the mounted clouds,
not so silent you and me.

Tearing hands beneath a dress,
lightning tree, blows of bark,
this will end in a mess,
in the lightning, in the dark.

Tavern Wench

How do I love thee,
let me count the moles,
to the height of your head, Blond-Top,
to the depth of your sneakers, Comfy-Footed,
to the narrowness and the broadness,
is this the face that lit a thousand candles orange
and an orange flame in the eyes of men,
eyes pouring over books, glimpsing heaven,
pondering tankards of mere ale—
O feed me another coffee, nymph.

Dorothy Osborne Among the Sheep

Shepherd girls, barefooted, bare-breasted quite—loose clothes!
giggling silly in the shade—the sheep broke out the folds,
and up their skirts and after they all run,
one happier—nor lovelier—in the rounded Sun.

Alexander Pope

He wrote classic line with what surprise
and rose in the poet’s place to sit,
arrived at a position no less than wise,
but failed to stop the Devil’s wit.

Friends he adored, guile he quite eschewed,
but venom’s a weapon for those few
who baited his suffering and his faith,
and poet arrows no know date.

Lastly withered quite outside,
he left life justified,
he did his work, he had his crown,
from his day to resound.

Plain Poems for Plain Lives

Plain poems for plain lives,
coffees and just talk,
crumbs on the countertop,
I said—the poet said—you sighed,
and said not what you meant,
saying goodbye from the moment we met.

Corinna

Gathered she roses while she Mayed,
Corinna blushes, I don’t know,
prospered her—I stand dazed—
in what bed, by what Jove.

An Irish Poet, Now 80

Snow falls glibly, hair whiter just the same,
the heavy step, but the ground stays solid,
likely I bear a wreath or two,
if more lauded, more like an ox pulling kudos,
indeed, Love, I welcome my prize money
and respect my peers—
I only need to talk of a Word with them—
Is it right? and whatever you think Curragh Mór.

Cattle and horses, horses and races,
the life I chose to write, than live,
well the hands are still enormous—
and the Troubles, bloody hell,
I’m of my tribe, but it’s the injustice, not the tribe,
and I should’ve written better of Africa
or stayed there with you.

Indeed, Love, I’m not quite the Marmots,
but if reading an old favorite,
then there’s desire in the room,
or one cousin, mother born Fermullan, ready for
Circe’s “damned cry” drifting down to
Alkeste’s “dead sigh”.

NOTE: Curragh Mór and the Marmots are fictitious.

Bleakly Hello

Bleakly hello, did you call, I don’t know,
probably not, I don’t think so,
but I don’t know how to do it
if you did.

Sling

The Fiddles had come, were testing their strings,
and the boys were wrestling, feats of strength,
and older men had a thirst and already,
and sturdy women had none.

I had come to the dance, expecting no better,
some dance and some watch, I do both, but none better,
and there was the one and there was the other,
Emmie the First and Emmie the Second.

The First high skirts to the Fiddles, makes wreathes,
and wide-eyed into eyes, and like skys,
one looks up and down and over the hills
and into the West, and hurry sundown.

The Second, just drunk of smiles, shares with the girlsies
the secrets of fun, she knows and they none,
but they share what knows when they knows,
who giggling silly, who fresh and proud.

As the night grows over, stars twinkle about,
music twiddles and blows and harps tell stories we know,
the old are young and the young steal kisses,
stars like the Thousand over the houses.
And after a bit for the dry Fiddles to drink,
we talk all at once, like queens, kings,
but before the night’s at home’s brink,
the music strikes—and it’s Sling.

Barak Obama

A broker’s certainty,
a light in the dirt from the spade,
Kenyan highs, Kansan lows,
family name, Obama,
savannas, gazelles, lions,
hills with coffee beans,
an international man,
a man of reconciliations,
a lawyer, Daddy to two girls,
President of America,
what do I do next?

Robot Armies of the Night

Robot armies of the night,
when I was in the Khyber,
relentless howl,
relentless bowl,
laser guide whose aim is always true,
laser guide whose aim is always true quite,
life is sanctified,
life is scantified,
as adults, as assaults,
I speak of a desirable world,
God bless the fragment.

Trying Out the Voice

Trying out the voice
as if almost, nearly quite
one of the adults,
they listening as to no child, peerwise,
—from this departmental room to some amphitheater
in two years, three,
speaking before the great ones,
and them staring at their laptops.
Trying Out Gerard Manley Hopkins

Upkins and tiger springs, each word strung tight,
light over the barn, feathers fly up,
chickens peck, chickens fight,
porridge in the morning, potatoes at night,
and luck?—too much work, too much muck.

Mr. Bloom

Middle class, hanging in, a gentleman, certainly, a Jew,
at the turn of a century, in one frocked/frogged/naked corner of the world,
we’ve got good singing in Dublin, horses, bookmakers, pawnshops.
—Come in sir, Mr. Bloom.
—My lord, happy to oblige.
—You’ve been a good party man, canvassed for us all Dublin 2,
permitting an anachronism, Tim O’Toole, you’ll see him, man,
chief inspector of buildings, I’ve said a word, d’ye see.
—Thank my lord, very good of you, I’ve always been Home Rule,
since Parnell’s day, but not Sinn Fein.
—Sound man, not that I disdain the Shinners,
all going the same way.
—Staying part of empire sir, Irish only, but over all land and sea.
—But Jewish, Mr. Bloom, can you be only Irish.
—Ach aye, a man can be monny things, only Irish, merely Jewish,
subject of the Queen, inspector of buildings may be,
journalist, advertizer, husband, father, son, son of a bankrupt,
stand a man a drink, give a man a hand.
—Earls are men, too Mr. Bloom,
at flower shows, we just pass out more trophies than most.

You Were Here

You were here, you’ve gone,
I’d like to have a good dog,
days become years,
it was a long time ago,
I suppose you remember,
it doesn’t do any good,
self-pity’s fine, it’s fine right now,
but time to lay off incompetent moaning.

Leonard Cohen at 75

An occasional easy man,
a serial monogamist,
but if I teach as much as I touch,
but still—still only dust.
Hydra, water island, alas Hellas,
just halfway home,
where are the sandals,
what do I do now Irving,
get girls, write more, screw more,
go on tour?
I can still be hurt, even in my pride,
what a thing for a Buddhist Jew,
lost money and a lost friend too,
litigation after sex or in the grave,
raise a white flag over the universe,
what do I do now Irving,
go on tour?

Sam’s Song to Orange Flight

for Sam

There’s a Sammy far away,
whom I love all the day
for she’s wise and good and true
and she knows just what to do.
She is Sam, yes she am,
even here and in Siam,
and though rather quite petite,
she’s just so darn bloody sweet.
Oh, I love my little Sam,
who is Sam yes she can,
and in this world of strife
and after this and after life.

Lanford Wilson on Saturday Morning

In the Sally Ann, gravitated to the paperbacks—
this is fame, The Rimer of Eldritch & Other Plays, 1967,
photo on the back, God I looked handsome then—
they’re not so bad even now, “the Boy”, “the Girl”,
plays for voices, who knows what’ll click,
but now in 3 centuries—part of the stream only,
maybe the Midwest is a desert after all,
Missouri born, proud of what,
clapboard houses, banging old screen doors,
that never close tight,
all the carpentry skill of my father—
San Diego, maybe I should have stayed,
rode the surf all along the coast
to Steinbeck’s brittle heaven, Monterey,
or Big Sur, could have drifted in for decades, tanned,
but Chicago, New York, where the money is,
where my kind, whatever that is, are,
a people-driven world,
oh you can ooh over sunrises,
or Pacific foggy mornings burnt lady bright by ten,
but who’d be a fern, a starfish,
even a redwood, live ten thousand years,
just quiet thought, if I thought at all,
better to hone my words on the mob,
there’ll be time enough when I’m 70,
or 80 if I last that long, for sunsets.

Do Hard-Headed Reasoners

Do hard-headed reasoners guided by it,
a perennial philosophy know it only,
I think not, not one particular,
not the other, particulars disprove
and themselves, but my scorn is in the sentence
do they hold it as truth, their creed,
or as a model for truth, a model only,
but more than the thing itself.

Yes, modern Augustine and modern Aquine,
you are in my eye, safely dead,
harmless you seem, harmless you are,
and yet I contend the quarrel is not ended,
and we will not discuss stigmata,
and am I forced to sermons, must I bristle,
become like a giant hog, maddened,
tusks driving out in the trapping pew?

All I want is to be at the same level,
the same as God, that is not stultified,
not arrogance and not the fool of arrogance,
principles are not peeves, and power grubbers,
raving mad at disobedient servants,
are not the ones over my head I like to see,
they slander God, the great novelist,
saying that they kill like him.

Absolutist, relativist, either, neither,
neither, neither defines what is seen,
what is seen is that there is a web
or a universe of principles, some thus and thus,
physics, yes, but even chemistry is not merely that,
rules apply no matter what the matter,
one goes higher, one finds new things.

I don’t care that we are finite,
time and space are huge and so what the devil,
what’s important addresses all levels,  
and what’s most important for us,  
say it’s nothing, but it’s something to us,  
and if thought is important at all,  
then learning, compassion, love  
are all our life.

James Goldman, 1927–1998

At times, my eclectic reading sprouts,  
into a doubt, no doubts,  
you read this, I don’t miss,  
take your eye  
it covered this page, I  
cover it now with notes,  
then having seen it, dreamt it, wrote  
about some wonder,  
the small detail of du Petit-Dutaillis mon chéri,  
a man reflective knotting his rope,  
a man between, and hope against hope,  
life and legend and life and cinder,  
James Goldman wrote the Lion, the Winter.

NOTE: It is only a guess on my part that James Goldman used the book  
*The Feudal Monarchy in France and England from the Tenth to the Thirteenth Century* (1933) by Charles Petit-Dutaillis (1868–1947) as a source in writing  
*The Lion in Winter* (1966).

Vancouver, 2010

Skate as if your life were worth it, skate true, old friend,  
bruises on yesterday’s bruises, this is for the last time  
for what began fighting brothers over long ice  
when every day gained seconds—  
over two thousands yards now, half a second is too much to ask—  
there is no snow and Nodar Kumar-Itashvili is dead—  
there will be a homecoming,  
and she will lay his head with a wreath.

Cape Summer

Summer in buggy sleep and starry dark  
creeps over the spit of the Cape,  
half a Moon fragments the sky,  
crabs hunt in the sand  
and every night thing moves  
a shadow between and a shadow,
only bites and ticks assault Gulliver,
her long socks, his armor,
all’s lonely night and lantern bright,
and call the fiddlers and a step to a step
and courtesy turn and pass through,
and cold cup of milk,
so we find our old bed,
hearts drunk, love fed.

John Millington Synge’s Western World

The words like the waves,
rock cracked Atlantic songs,
rushing and crashing, dawns,
like night, like pitch, so terrible long,
with only hearth fire, lantern orange light,
the Creeler hauling up from Castlebar,
poor like the road, so far, so far,
did the stooks lie down and die,
is there a hero but a crash adrawn,
lies! take out their passion,
what landlords have not taken,
the Ocean did, America or Canada, broken
the widow and the virgin both alike
left dreary years, the left of life.

Being Poet

Do I have to, surely not,
but rising Muse, mount not her,
but my pedestal, but my feet of clay,
but mends marble all that,
head off, a nap in the midden,
my body smiles, head on,
my wreath slips on,
the audience awaits.

John Wolfe

God bless the large poets,
their height, their towering height, their girth,
mammoth in nature, greathearted,
may their hearts never fail.
Emmie Girl

Emmie burn with a fire
in one place or here,
confined by leaps, bounds, higher
till you leave Earth entire,
travel well dear and then
“Whatever shore, whatever strand,
whatever shelter, whatever bed,
and by whatever hand there led.”

The World’s Love Poetry

*The World’s Love Poetry* at last moving
after much loving and twoing
when Emily D fashions
herself, her passions.

The Civil War

Aunt Julia said we should give the soldiers a home,
no waltzing mud into the hall, no guns at the table,
we baked chicken and apple with cinnamon,
Emmie made them cake,
Lieutenant Hollister—Holly—was a favorite,
Emmie shot him significant glances.

Captain Brasidas mumbled about Hecatomb,
which is somewhere near Chancellorsville,
one night when the air was electric,
and there he had the belt and gun off a dead Reb,
and Brassy said they belonged to the son of Bob Lee,
and Bob Lee was coming through the lines to gather’m,
and lightning and thundering, angel artillery,
the rain fell and we found separate beds,
when I woke, the Sun was streaming level through trees,
and birds were giving day a voice.

Once Darkness

Once darkness and touch sufficed,
sleep and breath enough,
then talk and time,
mountains and deserts,
only ether now,
I gather my forces—
“Everything will be good.”
They Say My Love is Dead

They say my love is dead,
she lay down for a little sleep,
I will join her shortly,
rising like morning.

What Robert Frost Really Meant

When with some pains you cup
her breasts even to the swearing
and disgrace—and a race is bred up
from such darings—
who then shall sup?

Speak Romeo

Speak Romeo—appropriate notes—speak Romeo—plangent shriek,
and Richard Burbage and his lady with fencing swords,
dueling in circles, edge off the world,
speak Romeo—and I, picking up my parka—speak Romeo—
and the daughter of the singer
race for the door,
and the burden of this song,
just us two.

Stillness

for IAR

In the stillness, there is a stillness,
in the night, there is a night,
after sleeping, there is a waking,
after waking, tender might.

The Fathers

An ambition laid against all odds,
a vision that knowledge could be free,
with the shade of Steven Jobs,
in life of Tim Berners-Lee.
Christmas IX: Taurus

*for IAR*

Watchman, how goes the night?
silent like on the plain when night was
before time was or you or I,
and silent star-crossed the sky,
girl-mounted, Taurus rising just so
in the trailing of the milk road.

Zeus! the Vigil! is it the midnight?
do dead men walk, do spirits fly?
but twos and threes go guarded by
and in what hurry, is it flight?
—and in what shelter ends the night.

The Ground Gives Way

The ground gives way,
no more the shape, no more the voice,
not concretely,
he lives in my heart.

Daddy, I’m Thirteen Years Old

Daddy, I’m thirteen years old,
*you were six yesterday,*
*you came in with your doll Betty*
*and we played tea,*
Oh Abishag, your father hasn’t lost his mind,
he’s just time-tripping.

Adam Names the Animals

Thou art barker,
thou growler
—hisser, hisser
—kisser, kisser.

Europa

“HERMES drive Agenor’s cattle from hill to shore,
of this I need not expand, you need know no more,
but to the cove, mark you, where the land thrusts into the sea
a spit of dunes and beach and scattered trees”,
and Zeus did not mention on that shore of sand,
the King’s darling and her girls frolicked, tanned,
and talked of clothes, boys, brides, and nights
for which all was useless, he had had her sight
and now Europa, human star, held his thought
where thunderbolts are thrown, caught,
his god-as-god form should break her slenderness,
no patience for words of tenderness
a golden boy would have to say to bring her breast
beating on his mortal breast,
a golden beast, no words, but touch and Taurus,
“let history judge, smart alecks make a chorus”.

A bull ambles on the sand, yoke wide, enormous eyes,
not brown, uncanny blue, and in them skies and skies,
he moves a shade, she stops, makes to retreat, he nuzzles grass,
“he’s harmless, I’ll stand, ignorant he’ll pass
with those horns twisted, piteous, baroque,
dewlap magnificent, I’d play in it like my cloak,
he seemed golden brown and now bride white,
I’ll touch his side, he cannot bite,
he moves to my touch and moves in dances,
he lies, I lie on him and lie in trances,
I tickle his ears, he flicks them and we rise,
we rove over sand, there Sidon-King, Tyre-Queen,
there mountains of Lebanon,
there sea going west, Venus in foam,
we breed a world of myths and legends
and die at last in heaven.”

NOTE: A free variation on Ovid’s (43 BCE–17/18 CE) Abduction of Europa.

Adam

... coming into his own country,
he stood in no one’s way nor spoke to anyone,
he seemed to know a woman, but it was not so,
he sat in the olive grove he had planted,
seeing all the generations in that moment,
and then just one.

Major Why Distracted

Major why distracted,
Maxwell why so far
—may sea serpents find your tides,
alders whisper over your brook,
eel squirm in falling water,
drizzle frozen white be your island,
and otters bask in your Sun,
Major why distraught,
Maxwell why so far
—miss you.

Sparrows

“The fall of”—
“my lady’s sparrow is”—
a flock of—
what is the color of—
in what choirs did—
    late sweet birds sing.

NOTE: The first line is a quote from Shakespeare and the second is a quote from Catullus (84?–54? BCE). The last two lines are a variation on a line from Shakespeare.

He Rode a Sliver of Midnight

He rode a sliver of midnight
to the height of a jerry hill,
turned and backed into black night,
whither and whither still.

Riff on *Omar Khayyam*

Sometimes thought never blows red,
whereas the Rose, whereas Caesar dead,
whereas O Hyacinth, whereas the Garden,
whereas the lap, whereas the fallen head.


Scrolling Through the Sketches of a Poet

Scrolling through the sketches of a poet,
and noting with his finger tips, Goya replied
“he knows nothing, he knows everything.”

A Riff on Hesiod’s *Theogony*

The daughters of Nereus—who’s never wrong—
Thoe, shining light,
Chryse, silver brave,
Agave, starry night,
Pano, Proto, Cymo, Dodo, Domino,
and Erato, she’s the spice,
Glauce’s eyes and they’re ice,
Nerea, who’s the brain herself,
and Psamanthe, Aegean, Twelfth.

NOTE: This poem is not an adaptation of translations. It is a new poem using elements from the Hesiod’s *Theogony* starting from line 233 in the translation of Hugh G. Evelyn-White (d. 1924). The Evelyn-White translation (public domain) and that of Dorothea Wender (1934–2003) were used as sources.

Zeus

Should you ever sit in your golden hall,
speaking rude law unto a savage race,
think of me in my ivory choir
speaking eternal law in timeless space.

Should you ever sit in your golden hall,
where winter follows fall,
think of me in my ivory choir
speaking love to heart’s desire.

Who Wants to Be a Dark Lord?

Who would be like to Great Sauron,
first in line is Sarurwn,
and who would not be living dead,
why that mad beast Gandread,
who with rat minions does conspire
in his dire seat in Dire Shire,
and who would all love-speech quench,
not His Elfness deft Elrench,
—but in caverns deep where dead things sleep
beneath the mountains, beneath the steep,
breaking flame, setting all agogga,
twice the monster, Balarogga,
who’d be overmatched by that bitsy creep,
the Hobbit-Doom, Frodbleep,
—but who should we elect bad king,
to wield at us the one ring,
to make us give to her sweet moan?
to Herself, Galadron.
Nothing Like the Spring

Nothing like the Spring,
sudden soil, worms turning,
warm Sun, buds, birds, general song,
your hand, mine.

Unless it is the Fall,
Sun, infinite blue,
leaves, gold, red gold, and brown,
turning brown and falling, damp and cold,
and then crisp morning, frosty breath,
still your hand in mine.

Judgment

Many poems here, admired and trusted, but my heart
O my heart chooses and it chooses Arc
wherein the poet lifts meter and rhyme,
pledging to Homer and Chaucer in our time.

Riff on Midnight

1
As Sun hangs low,
waiting by the gate,
Stranger look at me,
sweet face, hands,
long hair, stubble, hands,
such is the road.

2
My scent, leaves,
my face, dare,
Desire sent me,
seeing you.

3
Uncombed hair, uncombed everywhere,
bed-left just as always, bed-ready,
bed me you.

4
When a man seemed a man, only us,
now broken weave, silk undone,
this had to come.

5
We retreat?
magnetic force pulled us upright together, we retreat? ripping band aids, and already the lamp is Midnight all alone.

6

My mind goes with the river, shimmering blue-green, passing tableaux, peasants in coracles, rods and lines, my mind comes home with sunset, catch of the day.

7

Go for it, have something to regret, look at the grass, if you can see it under the snow.

8

Midnight counting the beats between hour strokes, heartbeats, no reason my Love, no Love.

9

Midnight, Moon, full moon, c’mon sleep, not this, not bristles, fangs, love comes to this.

10

Sun’s up, see him, he’s in the room, the Mandarin groom, but you sleepyhead —I liked your eyes— you sound like the dead, after your exercise.

NOTE: These verses are free variations on the Midnight Songs attributed to a Chinese woman artist (Midnight or Tzu-Yeh) of the 4th century CE. The variations are based on the translations of Jeanne Larsen in The Longman Anthology of World Literature, Vol. B, The Medieval Period, p. 102–105.

In Flanders

“In Flanders” “the crosses” delineate the way to where we tramped, to where we stay, “row on row.”

Now war and death and nature hybridize, roots bury bullets, skulls reveal to bring a glow to boys’s eyes, it’s fine that we are toys,
we ourselves were the boys
and in that role saying things that boys forget,
yet are remembered yet.

This is no way to make war,
and worse things happen in war,
but as the Lion said “terrifying things done
by a light in the man, the man’s son.”

NOTE: This poem was suggested by John McCrae’s (1872–1918) *In Flanders Fields*, now public domain. The quoted bits of *In Flanders Fields* are in quotes.

We Are All on the Road of History

We are all on the road of history,
but for most only the universal survives,
what we all participate in,
birth, love, death, sleep, loss,
heroes go higher or lower
engraving a name,
but even they mostly not even that.

We touch them in our imagination,
we repair and love them,
united in passion, united at heart,
and reunited and ignited,
the light everlasting, the Light
against the fall of night.

The Notebook of Michelangelo

1
Lorenzo’s garden, dug-up statues, living men,
and yes I walked among them then, shadows now,
I ate at his table and took his ducats,
the Prince of our new life:
“This man lived long enough for his glory,
but not long enough for Italia.”
—Plato I was told would redeem us, Savonarola damned us
for our games, our lutes, the work our hands.

2
At the word of the Friar,
even Borgia’s eyes grew round
and he flung up his hands in defense,
but those hands were huge.

3
Arno and Tiber spring from there, the mountain,
there we cut marble in the mornings,
and in the afternoons rested,  
Sun and shadow on the veins of Giove,  
Ercoles and Cupids all.

4

Virginity is innocence and innocence is untouched by time,  
why this special grace was hers,  
Maria, Maria, Santa Maria.

5

Being sometimes overly concerned with,  
sometimes technically proficient in carving,  
I asked Belcanto what eunuchs feel:  
“All the same, love, wounds, life  
—when I think of it, my back runs with cold sweat,  
but there is always humor,  
their mothers fornicated with camels.”

6

We never married,  
Leonardo after he knew himself, probably never gave it a thought,  
I have too many begging nephews as if I were a pope,  
and Raphael: “Why should I have only one,  
when I can have anyone.”

7

“Raphael, you go around like a cardinal  
with a herd of secretaries and suitors.”  
“You go around alone in workman’s clothes, a hangman.”  
and then Bramante secreted Rapho into the chapel  
before the ceiling was forsaken:  
“And what did he say Bramo?”  
“He said nothing.”

8

Others will do it better, I will be outmoded,  
oh good in his day, comic classics now  
—Giotto had no perspective I saw,  
I could do it all over in modern style, true depth, true height,  
and I sit in the Arena Chapel, angels around me.

9

Many marbles cut to find the man within,  
40 to make, Night and Day, Terrible’s tomb,  
all rescoped now to something less proud,  
sorry Giulio, I’ve blown it off.

10

“Fratello, we appreciate your genius, you are the glory of our time,  
but you have become an alarming man, there’s no getting on with you.”  
now Leo, then Giovanni, son of Lorenzio,  
I am the brother of the Holy Father.
“Son of Florence rebuild the walls,
Pope and Emperor are united against us.”
and just yesterday they were at each other’s throats,
the Emperor at least is not a brother,
Medicean or Republican? I am both.

12
Not Michelangelo, Michelangelo Buonarroti,
O my brothers, O my father, O Ludovico,
what a grasping old goat,
but in Tuscan soil, under Tuscan Sun I grew,
now high in Zion, heaving, pope on pope,
myself I never broke
from the duty and the faith I learnt in my home.

13
Leonardo loved his brothers
though they stole his inheritance,
the farm he was born on
where he would have seen the sunset,
he was a bastard,
—he was a real bastard.

14
Leonardo took some precautions
after having been arrested once,
Sodoma, what can one say
if a man’s name proclaims his acts
—but Raphael left some of his figures unpainted over
—I have never defiled myself,
cutting marble with lads in Carrara doesn’t count,
ambiguous to myself, Cavalieri,
I love even the name Cavalieri,
the body is the shape of love.

15
Leave Rome now, on the sly,
the Inquisition has long ears like dogs, and not only that,
I think the granddaughter of Federigo is a reformer,
Vita of my life, Colonna of fire, O my Queen.

16
O Tosco, who through the city of fire
goes a living man speaking a living tongue,
Pity! and stay awhile with me.

NOTE: The last verse is a free variation on lines 22–24, Canto X of the *The Inferno* by Dante (c. 1265–1321).
The Apollo of the Pistozenos Painter

In my shrine, with my Raven, in my shrine,  
in marble, only Pentelic, only white,  
only gold but red veined,  
with one voice, with one voice my morning,  
Kithara-Guitara, Kithara-Guitar,  
myself the Sun, my arrows dividing light and shade,  
and within and without are glades  
fiery, flowery, myrtle, laurel, oak,  
with my chorus, in my dawn, my Nine,  
amusing, musing, mousing cats,  
Epica, Lyrica, Dramatica,  
and Wine, Woman, and Song,  
Terpsichore, History, Astro-Girl,  
not all the arts, but all the arts,  
radiant in my heart,  
and still at play Silver Ray,  
Artemis, Ar-tay-mis, Diana-Moon,  
Sister-Twin, Sister-Friend everlasting,  
in the world ever searching.

Image of the God

I needed an image of the god for my class,  
this Apollo struck my fancy,  
and seemed to need some sort of hymn,  
then the Muse came at 6 am in the morning,  
about which I was not too happy,  
but she gets sulky when she’s ignored,  
and she dictated the first draft,  
she leaves the other drafts to me,  
then sneers at the final degree.

Modern Theognis

1
“Impossible person” moi-me,  
think rather it is the world,  
and if you said Thee-Oh-G-niece,  
you wouldn’t be far wrong.

2
Kurnos! she’s wrong, I specified your gender,  
still here’s a toast, Dorothea Wender,  
what else is needed Eros,  
from a man to a man.

3
If modern poetry wasn’t dismal
or could I say a tedious bog,
then I’d be left without a job.

4

Aristo Mephisto, carnsarn it,
breed with a sheep before a common harlot,
but when they have kind hearts,
then you’ll breed little tarts.

5

Think you better than an ant dying under my finger,
give you a little pain and you are unhappy.

6

Sometimes Ivan will put you in prisoner’s rags
and then Ivan will make you sew in the old Gulag
like Pussy Riot, and Ivan’s behind it,
cold work, then tuberculosis,
city of Stalin, then necrosis.

7

Ivan’s done a deal with clerics,
bought them, they kiss his horse,
persecute us gays of course,
not that I’m a model man,
unfit to speak, but who else stands.

8

Sacker of cities, Agamemnon, king of men,
his age collapsed, fell in a ruin,
God knows why, his walls were strong,
hundreds of slaves worked for his luxury,
I myself am a devotee of luxury.

9

Sixty-eight days of grain in holdover, worldwide,
we face famine, worldwide,
with fear and abdication,
seven lean kine, four horsemen ride.

10

With men furious, I am Fury,
with the Just, I am nearly just.

NOTE: This is essentially a new poem with a somewhat reformed Theognis—he’s still
egotistical, egregious, emphatic. Only the last elegy is a free adaptation of a Theognis
elegy (lines 313–314 in the translations of J.M. Edmonds (1875–1958) and Dorothea Wender
(1934–2003)). I have compared several translations (Edmonds, Wender, and the public
domain one of Rev. J. Banks of 1856) to elucidate the sense of this elegy. The first verse
quotes from Wender’s introduction to her translation of Theognis.
Japanese Name Haiku

Oku, Ojawa,
Hai! Agora Asagawa,
Nihon sensei san.

**NOTE:** The names are chosen for sound effects and do not refer to anyone. Nihon is Japan, sensei is teacher/master/sage, san is a common honorific, and hai means “aye, aye sir.”

Very Serious Haikus

When the mentee strays,
when the girls go super bad,
Psamanthe@home.

***

With a hand just so,
with humor, tumor, dragon,
her sigh, her flagon.

Yevtushenko

“The whole of Yevtushenko’s life is at stake . . .
Since everything stands or falls together . . .”
—God, I hope not for all of us
—Russian, poet, dissident or dissident manqué,
but *Zima Junction* must stand alone
if anything of his time stands.

For Becky

Soixante, Sechzig, Sixty, we do care,
Nineteen Fifty-Three,
Eisenhower has no hair,
but we’ve got Tallent.

Indian Territory? officials in Delhi stare,
it’s a long road from here to there,
like ponies and blankets in starlight,
like cruel fair and all past flights,
like a trail of sorrows
pity stays as does tomorrow
in a red Earth chthonic
hearts beat and beat tectonic
enough to break like a wave
like to break like a man
like thunder in the sky
like tornado like a sigh.

**Survivor of Masada**

Some chose death for freedom,
some from shame from Eleazar’s words,
some were compelled,
some submitted from fear only
—Understand—the threats of the Romans echoed on the plateau,
their bodies were ants creeping higher day by day.

An ancient lady—my friend Crone—did not want it,
and five children, no father to strike, no mother to submit
—Understand—and I who had crawled through all places
found a cave that no one would search last,
there with food and water,
we waited through the day and night,
while the words of Eleazar—son of the sister of my mother—
became deed and the fires burnt out.

They had put on their armor,
they were ready for a last stand,
but they were told they were all dead,
they were told they should see
the contempt of death they had,
they marveled at what they had done,
and their soldier hearts were touched,
their mothers’ sons were identified—
Understand if there is a sacrifice
there must be a sacrificed for,
Understand if there is death,
there is a seed of life.

**NOTE:** This poem is a historical fiction loosely based on the book 7, chapter 9 of the *War of the Jews* by Josephus (37–c. 100 CE) in the translation by William Whiston (1667–1752). The last verse is a bit quotaceous of the pronoun-challenged Whiston.

**Ledge of Heaven**

“This is a safe perch for pigeons
suspended between Heaven and Earth,
flat, broad, swept by no winds,
tall shadows are indifferent deep in the glass world,
no cats climb here, there are no owls,
no owls anywhere ever my Love.”

Here with my Grey, my Grey like the cloud,
prismatic throat, his raptor eye,
red like the sunset-soaked rain,
grey pillows puffed and spread,
what cared we for guano all around
spread on soft stems gathered down.

And gone then like all males,
once all lovey-rock-dovey,
them slam, bam—where are the berries he brought me?
two white eggs, cloud white,
and brooding on time,
huddled down scanning
—there are owls everywhere—
two each they were created
for a wounded sky.

John Ciardi (1916–1986)

I could have been a Mafioso,
dark heart, gush piety,
ring kissing, Fathering,
honor and concrete shoes.

I did wear black shirts,
I lounged with GI power,
we were back from the war,
some became presidents,
some ran seminars.

I directed summer workshops,
do these make poets or anything and not a few
wondered why I was paid
for something they could do.

I wrote Dante for him,
first footfall to Hell,
last flight to Heaven,
and you were with me my Love.

The kids were what we prayed for,
the American family then,
baseball, beaches, beauties, proms,
love is what it’s all about.

The Asimovs were over now and then,
Isaac and I trying to top each other,
no contest, Isaac was the fountain.
If I could love any man,
I would love Isaac,
the prophet at Nightfall,
“Live—but under what conditions, man—but live, yet live.”

If I Were King of Horror

If I were King of Horror,
of Halloween and the Dread,
night falls fast,
and the son of Jack
tells you trauma
drains the warmth of blood
and leaves you cold like that.

Or if I walked the streets of eastern cities,
covert and stalking,
buying secrets from those I despise,
but promising trifles from the budget,
betray others as they would betray you,
Jack of all tradecraft.

Talking of mean streets, much too late,
Oh better books have written,
but nothing like the first,
light a candle, curse the dark,
a man of honor in a world without,
a man who does not doubt
lying in the city morgue
with so many old friends,
home at last.

I could teeter on the knife’s edge,
suspended from book to book,
between success in skill
and in the latrines of prison
as my whimsy take me
if my rumpole keeps me out.

Romance, a luminous else Earth,
where dells and dragons dwarf,
where whence and wings wizard,
all ends well, but all is long ago,
heroes die, trolls keen.

Equal to all men and times,
every man loves his country,
therefore every man understands,
and if you love every country,
then you truly understand,
it is the love that is truth,
and stories TV does well,
no time now for the Evening Post,
but a longshot read at the beach,
and James if I were a witch
I’d sign every page stitched.

Historic monsters, jar’d diamonds, florisco hens,
some resist, Diamond Bashers III, Singapore, ’05,
and social constructivortices demean
—resistance is futile to brassy frowns from the loins,
to the teller of tales,
understand it, how we got here,
and where to from here, our Knarled Saga.

Astounding stories, science fables,
but you can choose our own extinction,
they will live until they perish in any case,
“but under what conditions man,”
if I could love any man, I would love Isaac,
“I’m not wise, sometimes I access wisdom.”

The genre has been my native land,
and I was shipwrecked
before I ever stepped on Bertholt Brecht,
who was quite poet I gather wool,
gewiss, veilleicht, kann sein,
and why not I to scarf the standing Laurel
and not forget the golden Kroner,
noble country, noble city,
Stockholm here I come.

Who is She?

Who is she?
if I whispered of her,
she’d cry, smile, sulk,
revel, reveal, bare her breasts,
revile, curse, lust,
-drain, suck, fold,
crest, wave, dash, die, rise,
rise at last alone,
speak alone to you.
Chartres has No Martyrs

Chartres has no martyrs, no Montmartre, 
wrong time for that in the age of faith, 
wrong place for that in the center of faith  
— they came by hundreds to build it,  
oxcart, mason, woman, child,  
the Bishop, he knew faith,  
raise a city to heaven, soar,  
the Master Mason, best man of his time, he knew stone,  
raise an arch, point it to heaven, soar  
on flying buttress over Loire descended  
—to walk to now, over the gleaned fields,  
tiptoe over the curve of the round Earth,  
Chartres rising, pointed, balanced, true,  
like rapt, like religieux.

When They Have Enthusiasm

When they have enthusiasm and they do,  
some frailty of tenderness and for you,  
it’s fine, it’s grand, be the man,  
you’d be beast, a pig to protest,  
instead protect, pet, pant,  
at last to rest.

Lion-Claw in Winter Thaw

My people said he is gone mad,  
a sickness of the mind,  
and in any other land they’d force me out,  
but in Sicilia, my word is law,  
just, unjust, kind, unkind,  
kings are like weather, just accept.  
My queen-like Queen, like a gold wand,  
she had thought she had gone mad,  
could this be him, could this be my life,  
more adult than adulterous, she died,  
and the child sent away, not to be mentioned,  
all long ago, all the barren years since.  
I judged and a judgment was given,  
and more grave than alive,  
more moments than time counts,  
but days become weeks,  
weeks months, months years,
and it is all long ago,
ashes like dead love,
time itself wears out thought.

It is for the old to protect the young,
teach them their letters, their trades,
how to live, show them how to die,
leave them a going concern,
leave them a better world,
at least a world.

Hidden from the world, safe and growing,
the seed under the frost,
the spring, the daughter of my youth,
restored by what I had not foreseen,
sub specie aeternitatis grown tall,
spring eternal, my Perpetua’ll.

“Hey Michelangelo, a statue, a likeness, a presence,
I order for the botanical garden of Palermo”
—in the afternoon, the plants are sleeping,
in the morning, dew-laden, they speak of the green world,
there the Cypress, the Giant Fern, the Pampas Grass,
the Twister Tendril, the Strangler Mass
—so I ordered carve the monument for me
stone cold, but shaped, historical statue, statue in the stars
—so I ordered, not for me, I can barely stand it,
but for them, for her and for her too,
and at the unveiling, like a gold wand standing,
at a sign, stirring to life.

NOTE: A free variation on Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*.

FDR in ’44

I’m gonna to die,
not just this moment,
those little pills buck me up,
but in the tense soon indefinite.

Should I retire?
no way my good man, no way,
gotta run again,
the Sun will shine on the Democratic Party.

I’ll be missed,
better bow out than the hook,
then sub specie aeternitatis.

Those I care for are taken care of,
all of them,
I'll be missed.

I should have loved those I loved better,
I mean love—love, love, love, my best love.

The next president?
in a democracy the leader does not anoint his successor.

The vice president?
my intuition is he'll get no better.

I know great men,
Marshall’s a serving general
and grins like stone,
Stimson’s a Republican
and he’s 77,
too much gravitas the both of them.

The president is a politician,
senators are handy,
Thaddeus Bilbo, boy, Oh, boy,
can you see Eleanor’s face? priceless.

Gotta balance the ticket,
I’m eastern, I’m rural,
Oh all right being a squire doesn’t count,
but no one likes manure more than me.

Truman, he’s made a name in the country,
a New Deal man, but not more than me,
as southern as a man can be without impairment,
his own man, an original.

Yep, gotta balance the ticket,
democracy in action.

Does he need any lessons?
Beelzebub no,
one moment a bridesmaid,
next the President.

All part of the plan,
the stars just fell on him.

Sometimes I show off,
not this time,
tell no one Fala.
Subjunctive Mood

It may be that I am late,
it may be that I thought you had forgot,
it may be I was browsing,
it may be I am miffed,
it may be you are forgiving,
it may be I’m not in a forgiving mood,
it may be I take your hand, get down on my knees, beg,
it may be you are doing better,
it may be I kiss your hand,
it may be that that is not enough,
it may be I pet just so,
it may be you do,
it may be I embrace,
it may be I permit embrace,
it may be I stroke up and down, cup thus, lick inward so,
it may be I demand satisfaction,
it may be placet,
indeed it may be uxor inquor placet.

Fan Letter to The Champions

Dear Craig, Sharron, Richard,
fifty years on, more or less, is high time to finally admit my love,
though undemonstrated in 1968 when I didn’t always know showtimes
and didn’t always control the dial,
and I think Channel 2 Buffalo never showed the whole run anyway,
but, as Youtube shows now, I remember more bits than I thought from the first few episodes,
Ave Champions.

Was it Dennis Spooner’s idea—taking a break from writing Doctor Who—
how can James Bond clue in so fast, fight his way out of anything,
beyond plausibility in this world, but super-humans, taken as a given,
clues would just come Psi-wise, bull their way out of anything,
who needs karate, kung fu,
just speed, rough magic, rude superpower, as much as is needed or as a little,
there have to be defeats to have story, it rises and falls as needs be,
and so does confidence,
one moment Richard goes against an army,
next a door to danger and his nerve wobbles,
and across the threshold, it’s just Jim Hacker.

But how are super-humans born, it’s myth,
but in the modern world just one lab accident away from the impossible,
or the good old radioactive bug or yellow mist at sea,
but maybe something more ethereal is needed,
a resonance with timeless humanity,
they should be agents of secret wisdom.

Shangri La is a real place, you can go there,
Edmund Hillary went there, he says so in View from the Summit,
reading between the lines,
there they have disciplines, call it magic or Psi
or a super-intelligence that can minutely direct matter everywhere
and puts itself at the service of the chosen human will.

Getting there? they’re spies, it’s still the Cold War, Red China,
fly in, fly out with the thing, flight, flight damage, fall, crash,
wounded sleep and dreams, inexplicable operations,
the subjects, the sanctioned experiment.

Broad day, an open fuselage, obviously a studio set,
but that just means, like on a stage, the actors are with us,
alive, awakening, warm, strong, transcendence low-keyed,
the Himalayan level, to live there always,
Sharron’s resurrection smile “Crrraig.”

And the return.

Nemesis, an agency with one office, one map, one screen, one chief,
three agents with expense accounts and one chief Tremayne,
the last agency of appeal, of hope, when all else fails,
everything else went in budget cuts in Geneva,
the city that once aspired to be the capital of the world.

Three agents.

Craig, a prince once, a singing prince, and Dracula and a doctor, a healer,
the boy from New York, Broadway, 42nd Street, Tony Curtis’s kid brother,
the wise-guy James Bond.

Sharron’s blond mane, her hairdresser’s forge,
every curved spacetime reasoned, hyperbolic, hyperspherical, Möbius,
the Casque d’Or, or strands whipped by the wind, the Sportscar Girl travels fast,
—or Gold Jacket leaving the prowl, forsaking all men,
her car wedged in, Gold Jacket pulls it free with unparalleled force
even in her own experience and drives home alone
to the home called headquarters.

Richard, the third man so to speak,
and why was the cryptanalyst son of a Salisbury banker playing commando in Red China?
less physical before, less physical after than Joe Cool Giant,
envy? forget it, and that’s mother wit,
a compact man, under the radar, then to act with flash force
at the right moment, or the moment right after,
—Mission-Impossible precision, forget it,
the Champions are bulls in the China shop.

An eternal triangle, but they couldn’t aggress,
siblings to each other, tigers from cubhood, even to others perhaps pro forma,
the gap, to be super-human is to be not quite a sexual being,
no one else to share with,
—or like vampires could they bring someone over?
—but just another sib—or a father—Tremayne.

Not that you-all were without sin,
kidnapping Jeremy Brett, drugging him to submission,
brainwashed—even into a patroit king—is wrong,
and nuking hundreds of men in Antarctica,
even if led by Patrick Wymark,
colossal wrong hidden in action-adventure,
what were you thinking Dennis? “Nemesis.”

“What ARE you reading Richard?”
“it’s a comic book about these people with superpowers,
who fight crime and supervillains, and for justice,
and they have anxieties and needs and character flaws,
and they have names and costumes that signify their prowess
—what do you say Chevron?”
“we’d be smashing and we’d awe the mortals;”
“I’m vetoing this right now, absolutely not, never, no way, nope,”
“I think Crag-King is getting into it.”

Searchers pass through episodes:
Donald Sutherland, an undercover mountie, don’t look now,
we Canadians know all about The Force,
but something Psi rubbed off and drained into Venice,
Colin Blakely, a hunter from the cells of the Maze Prison,
and he’s right, Craig does work for a secret agency,
Adrienne Corri, a Celtic red witch and a showdown with the blond witch from Tibet,
no contest there,
Felix Aylmer, who was Isaac of York in the Middle Ages,
who taught Audrey Hepburn stage voice, also an organization woman,
who worked for UNRRA at sixteen.

Guillermo del Toro will direct the film
—there is a uranium ring that will sell to a terrorist ring,
and Nemesis sends its best and only team to the surface of things,
and there is an enemy behind the screen who never sleeps,
and there is a T’ai Chi warrior from a slum temple,
who has death foretold and life to avenge in the streets of the midnight city,
no one is trusted, everyone has spoken to the Triads, no one has not bent,
and hunting in that darkness faced with the image of the thing,
his fist travels a thousand light-years to fell a giant,
and the last thing you expect to hear from a Yeti in the dust: “hey that hurt,”
“Heal Craig and grow stronger.”
then allies, then with three allies in commando black crossing the threshold,
“so you have come with your eunuch friends,”
“this is T’ai Chi’s fight Craig, your fight is still to come.”

I see them in their street clothes,
immediately the Everest of all fountains rises behind them,
expands into fine rain that rains on their faces,
the faces speak each to each and beckon me
to the city that is called the Himilayas.

NOTE: This poem is my interpretation of the television show
*The Champions*, and thus is commentary, not fan fiction.
Hence I believe I am making fair use of copyrighted material.
How John XXIII Became Pope

“We need a pastor,”
“We need a man of the world,”
“We need a man who will not tie our hands for years to come,”
“Roncalli?”
with open hands “Roncalli.”

Hey Ballerina

Hey Ballerina, can’t you tap, can’t you woogie and jive?
then soar if you will, a parallel glide and answer a question,
do you come from the north?
“like a white storm, a snow line you will not cross,”
after winter, spring, after frost, freedom,
“after spring, summer, humidity, drenched heat, call me thunder,
or call me when you will, lightning strikes,”
and if I withdraw Ballerina, it being a late night?
“you can sleep with me tonight.”

Not Fixed Form

Not fixed form, the seeming of fixed form,
which is higher, lighter, with power,
like the power of prayer,
like the chant that brings the crowd to weep,
like community, like the living and the dead,
they are not lost, they have just gone before,
we are not lost, we will follow when we can,
arrested in faith, humble before wisdom,
all the lovers in the world, world without end.

Medieval Latin Poems Translated

Urbs felix, si vel dominis urbs illa careret,
Vel dominis esset turpe carere fide!
    Happy city if a veiled ruler—still dear!
    To a fallen lord, our dear faith.

***

Raptor mei pilei morte moriatur.
    The dinosaur who stole my hat to death shall die.

***

Tempus instat floridum,
Cantus crescit avium,  
Tellus dat solatium.  
Eia, qualia  
Sunt amoris gaudia!  

Time florescent, birds asong, Earth in the Sun,  
Such mornings we knew then my Love.

**NOTE:** The Latin fragments are, respectively, from pages 165, 187, and 183 of *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (1955) by Charles Homer Haskins (1870–1937).

What’s Epigram?  

What’s epigram? death as told,  
brevis body, art, soul.

**NOTE:** A take-off on *What is an Epigram?*  
by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834).

Richard Villier II  

Villier, not Duke of Buckingham, the other one,  
midnight night, light and Sun.  

***  

Richard Villier, but that’s a code name,  
he has celebrity rights, such is fame.  

***  

“Richard, what are you doing in Half Moon Street?”  
“Overcome by natural yearning for wanton acts,  
here in fact—there’s heaven above!—  
for girls who charge so little for love.”
Play I

Federigo da Montefeltro
A Historical, Comical, Tragical, Pastoral
For a brief fifty years, a little hill town in the northern Marches was one of the great cultural centers of Europe. Urbino was the birthplace of Raphael and Bramante. Sculptors were drawn there from Milan and Florence, architects from Siena and Dalmatia, painters from Spain and tapestry workers from Flanders. Paolo Uccello worked inside its hospitable walls; so did Piero della Francesca and Melozzo da Forlì. Baldassare Castiglione emigrated from Mantua in order to live there, and was sent as the special envoy of Urbino to England, taking with him a painting commissioned from Raphael as a present for the English King. And as a result of Castiglione’s much-translated Book of the Courtier, people all over the Western world heard of this remote mountain town, and learned from the standard of Urbino a code of manners, a way of courtesy and refinement, which became the norm of polite behavior.

Federigo da Montefeltro A Historical, Comical, Tragical, Pastoral

Dramatis Personae

Federigo da Montefeltro: Duke of Urbino
Nino: Cardinal of Messina
Paolo: Cardinal-Nephew of Messina, nephew of Nino
Baldassare Castiglione: courtier, writer
Cesare Casamassivi: gentleman in the service of the Duke
Ciardi Ciardini: gentleman in the service of the Duke
Monsieur Phenix: an astrologer
Bacchus: a publican

Cantacia da Montefeltro: daughter of the Duke
Atalanta: a lady of the Duke’s court

General Setting

The time is the days before and up to Christmas Eve, 1480. The main scene is the court of Duke Federigo at Urbino in the Italian Marche. The Italian names are pronounced as in Italian, except that the second “c” in Cantacia is pronounced like the English “s.” Stage directions are kept to a minimum. The play is broken into poetic lines, but the breaks are sometimes pretty arbitrary. The play wavers between poetry and prose. The actors and director must find the right rhythm for themselves.

Act I, Scene I, The Roman Palace of Cardinal Nino

Nino: This our age, cannot be denied, it rules all past times, even that of the Caesars must bend the knee, not Cicero writes better letters than we have seen, even I penned pages that are virtuosiama, and humanists have taught us good Latin, but our Italian in all its Earthy forms is the sweetest speech that the world has heard, we sing when we speak, words soar in conclave, or buying bread in the street, and the buildings and the arts, nothing yet so large as Rome of the ancients, but mere antiquity bores with it’s impassive face, they wanted merely power, we live for charm, for grace, no ancient sculptors match ours, not in works extant, no paintings from them left for us to match but mosaics at Ravenna show psychic thrust that we best leave to sad old days— the Church needs reform, it always needs reform, the sanctity is inherent, men are often weak, but men of our times we must do as we must, and life is so full, the glow of Platonism has enlightened our darkness, we see clearly now
the meanings of the creeds and words,
their secret meanings, open for all to see,
but those of simple faith must not be scandalized,
that is clear enough to all cognoscenti—
to man all things are possible,
a poor boy can become a pope,
Sixtus IV of that name is not the holiest,
still we’ve had worse, and holiness
is not half the job, a pope must be a man of the world,
as well as of God, a man who understands men
and women, yes women too, the pope is also a man—
to the highest office, yes even that,
I am a cardinal in a palace, Roman ways are no mystery,
it will take vast sums, pontificates are not cheap,
and on all Italy and the rest of Christendom too
I’ll put my stamp, my men, and alas my nephew,
but he will have be content with his cardinalate,
I’ll found no dynasty, I’ll do the Church some good,
and even take some care of Christendom beyond the Alps,
you can’t ask more than that of any pope,
and we will enjoy our good fortune that God has given,
genrous and liberal yes, this conclave next
or the next, there’s a chance yes,
a glorious chance.

enter Paolo, the Cardinal-Nephew

Paolo: A letter from Duke Federigo, uncle,
and a gift, it must be a painting, but nothing for me.
Nino: Greedy one, the letter please you.
Paolo: (aside) Not greedy, not a bit,
do I not give everything away,
...
I have sent you a gift, my portrait
by Maestro Piero della Francesca,
it’s a marvel what he’s done,
no illusions, no doubts, boundless resolve,
you’d think this broken-nosed, bald old man
was Caesar in his days of glory,
not a snuffling worn-out old soldier
who finicks about his house and garden
interfering with all the workers,
who are dutifully polite and explain why
things cannot be as perfect as could be,
a man of the world’s grown old indeed
when he can write of his cabbages,
but they’re huge if I say it myself,
vale, Federigo Duke,
Urbino
November 30, 1480.
Nino: Now what is the interior of his words, Paolo,
what is beneath the seeming, the subtext of his mind?
Paolo: He wishes to thwart the Holy Father,
and keep Rimini for the Malatesta,
and the war against Turk in the south,
and thinks you might be of use to him.
Nino: Yes, as far as it goes that is so,
but do not forget he is now grown old,
and has always been a decent enough son of the Church,
with Federigo to see only self-interest
is to miss the whole point—
this portrait shows him somewhat younger than his years,
yes he was something then, still is,
we must hit back, blow for blow,
send him that portrait of me,
the one that’s just the way I looked
when Federigo was of the age seen here,
the copy of the one by Fra Angelico,
there’s purity in that visage, purity
I’ve never claimed or reckoned for,
and Federigo’s admiration is unbounded for it,
and prepare for the journey,
I’m much bucked by a little plotting
and the splendor of his court
will be something for your education,
nothing so grand as Rome or Firenze
but Athens abides in Urbino if anywhere
in our world it abides.
Paolo: I’ll see to it at once, your grace.
Nino: Wait a moment, my mind has come out of doldrums,
don’t prepare for the journey,
we will go incognito, as Franciscan brothers,
and alone, and on foot, perhaps it is folly,
it has been a long time since I cut loose,
but my heart is suddenly light at the prospect,
there are monasteries on the road still for the nights,
noblemen still allow friars the liberty of their kitchens.

**Paolo:** It’s winter, our feet will freeze in wooden sandals,
Uncle are you joking, tell me you are joking.

**Nino:** Oh, we can always resume high rank in an instant,
there is no difficulty, no danger,
I’ll write a dispensation allowing us woolly socks,
nephew mine, this will be a glorious adventure,
now not a word to a soul, we announce that we are in retreat
for the Christmas season to pray for our salvation
at the Franciscan house in Via Veneto,
the prior is an old friend and a bit of wag,
he will outfit us for the road and advise us,
this is splendid.

**Paolo:** God save us.

Act I, Scene II, The Garden of the Urbino Palace at fall of night

**Federigo:** Yes calm, very resolute, and stern I,
yes most august ruler of a mountain world
that reaches—over-reaches perhaps—south to Gubbio,
my Gubbio, my own, whose citizens yielded me
all the care and worry of their city,
to be their prince and have I not done well by them,
and by the northerners too, to the borders
of that San Marino whose sovereignty none
may dispute since holy martyrs on God’s grace
founded it in the years of Diocletian Caesar
who denied grace himself despite himself,
his Earth-powering force that saved Rome,
but could not save it’s soul or his.

**Cesare:** My lord, tis a cold wind
such is the wont of evening in that which what
the ancients deem to be Saturnalia but which
in holy dispensation by God’s grace
we hold the epoch of the birth of the King of grace.

**Federigo:** Meaning lad if your speach is so construed
that I have no business, being old and feeble grown,
to stand and watch the stars come one, come two,
come thousand all before the eye can catch them
the very citadel of God and all angelic song.

**Cesare:** A cape at least my lord, a cape,
the angels would not have you shiver, yes shiver,
and I will put it on you and bind the cords,
dukes fend draughts with capes as with shields they fend swords,
will you not take me with you to your wars
that I might in the service of Mars
fire the great cannon and dispute the day
and earn the praise that becomes a man
and courtier of that Duke who all of Italy courts
and who even in the fabulous island Inghilterra
is held for the shape of princes.

**Federigo:** You are too slight and mild,
and fair too, but not German raufebold,  
content yourself with the court and law and words,  
a peace man, not a battle man, a healer, not a wounder.  
**Cesare:** But your man, my lord, in your service,  
in Urbino, in the field, not perhaps to fight,  
but yes, even with a sword to defend your person.  
**Federigo:** You have the spirit, but not the strength,  
to go war is to see all the evil of men,  
their greatness too, I love it,  
and I hate it, all men love the sport they thrive on,  
the sport wherein all others surpassed,  
I enlist boys who’d see nothing but their father’s farm,  
but they go soldiering and see the world  
and earn some profit, life is brittle,  
give them their adventure in a trade so honored  
by the singers back to Homer sang you Troy,  
and if they live and save a bit  
and their captain I preserve them,  
they may grow grey beards and yarn the days  
of when the world knew their strength, in Ancona, in Rimini,  
and yes to the gates of Rome, but there is blood,  
I have sacked a city, only one and against my order,  
but a lifetime is not enough for expiation.  
**Cesare:** Your words do your cause nothing good,  
for I am keen to see all Italy, yes the gates of Rome,  
I am a gentleman and would have reputation.  
**Federigo:** I’ll make you an ambassador,  
you read books, you read men, and yes women too,  
for all turning away and blush face,  
a reputation gained as a lover is reputation too,  
and all the arts of love are good,  
yes, it is a revelation and God’s gift,  
that sorrows may end in unending reach  
that unites the principles divided in the beginning,  
honor women, but do not keep them waiting either.  

*(aside)* Quick, into shadows lad.  
**Atalanta:** I’ve have killed him, lying in the chapel  
is his ruin and God have mercy on him,  
O pace, pace, pace the night, that night be walked away,  
I cannot sleep, I’m vexed, giddy, my brain  
strikes again and again on the bell of my memory,  
it was rape, it was force, it was a beast,  
seduction is rape, yes that is the law of it,  
a brother would avenge me, but then, praise him, convent me,  
zounds, the truth, the truth, his mirth, his friends:  
“I’ve scratched my itch now girl, and this small lock  
you let me cut will remind me of your form  
and keep company with others of it’s ilk  
cut from proud ladies who lifted up their skirts  
just as quickly as you lifted yours.”  
Ciardi, I will open your side at Holy Mass,  
the Pope himself approves assassination then,
Ciardi, I will tell of your infamy, the Duke,  
God save him, he will open your side,  
and I will forgive you, yes forgive you  
when you’re dying, when the arterial blood is spreading  
over the mosaic and all the ladies are sobbing,  
yes that will be very noble of me,  
everyone will praise me, then they will convene me,  
ah, ah, ah, ah, ah.

**Federigo:** Go Cesare, get that dagger from her,  
bestill her, belay her, bewitch her in my service.  
**Cesare:** Whoa lady have a care, knives wound,  
not so deep as a sword, nor such a hole as a cannon,  
still deep enough and broad enough,  
save yourself, stab yourself not,  
and not me neither, let go, I conjure you,  
aroind thee witch, God save me.

**Atalanta:** You’re a man, I hate all men.  
you all grow beards and other things,  
you all speak of love and mean other things,  
deceivers, cry to heaven then die like a dog.  
**Cesare:** I’m a boy, lady, a virgin male,  
mostly virgin, you cannot count  
a little of nightness in the broad day,  
and you are compact of all qualities,  
say are you not that Atalanta who outraced the lion,  
who pricks the ears of the foxes,  
who finds in the hornéd Moon her only likeness,  
who shoots the arrows that always home,  
who bends so graceful a knee,  
who is likened to the goddess of the dawn,  
in whose eyes swim all the dolphins  
that ever rose out the sea,  
who knows where birds nest,  
and where to find rocks flecked with gold,  
who holds a knife so charmingly.

**Atalanta:** Boy, virgin, but golden lipped,  
I’ll save you from yourself,  
and all women too who’d otherwise be sadder,  
with a quick stroke well aimed,  
then serviceable and mannerly and tame  
like those otherwise stallions who ride gently  
and do not distress the morning mares.

**Cesare:** Bloody work and hurtful too,  
for me, and your good heart would grieve,  
let it be at ease, men are not all whoremasters,  
gentlemen and scholars respect the honor of women,  
men of sense have always taken council of women,  
the Duke himself in his fair Battista took his rest  
and learned much though she was scarce half his age.  
think on that Alceste whose life was given for her king,  
that all the poets praise, Homer to Chaucer,  
think on Penelope whose steadfastedness won renown  
and whose cunning contrived a victory for Athena,
you are known to be alike to these,
your reading and your work with stuffs,
Maestro Piero holds your drawing for masterly
and thinks your colors are the best he’s seen
both in manufacture and in application,
Sooth, Signor Castiglione, thinks your address
most seemly and holds you the shape of young ladies,
the Duke praises your sweet nature.

Federigo: (aside) I do?
Cesare: Sooth, you are a fine creature.
Atalanta: Did you name me whore?
Cesare: Sooth, nothing was farther from my mind,
your chastity is like the hornéd Moon,
proud and untouched and untouchable and prideful,
and ripe and grave and august and kind
like the summer breeze.

Atalanta: You think me a fool,
you think I do not know you know
what ails me, what is the hurt of all women,
who give that to men, giving all for love
because that is what men expect of us,
what the poets praise us for, not respecting virtue,
and alas, always women themselves think nothing
of a woman who will not love a man to the uttermost
in a way no man ever goes at it,
yes the Duke loved Battista and Ulysses loved Penelope,
but they both went away to war, leaving wife and child,
for the sake of glory, and the Duke’s glory is not in war,
no Homer will sing of it, only Signor Castiglione,
and it is not the warrior he sings of
but the good Duke, the Duke of peace,
of arts and learning and good theology,
but the Duke is still like other men,
are there not four cuckoos whose mothers
yielded to him because he is the Duke,
but as his own lineage is the same kind,
what can one say, but men are weak
and women too, God save us all,
I’m through, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah.

Cesare: We are all fools some time or many times,
the Duke has said anyone afraid of being a fool
is afraid to live and laughing at one’s own folly
is half the cure, and I say living well
is the best revenge and what did revenge ever bring
but vendettas and vendettas that have gone on for centuries
over some insult, some lost virginity,
my family has all died out,
I am the last Casamassivi, and why
for vengeance and vendetta killed them all,
all il Casamassivi, and all il Salieri Grande,
a plague on vendetta, live now, live forever.

Atalanta: I’m through, ah, ah, ah, ah,
take me to my room and take me,
nothing to lose now and thrown, best to ride at once,
and if you count me as a conquest only,
well it was conquest taken fairly.

exit Cesare and Atalanta

Federigo: That warms the blood on a winter night,
gods above and gods below, if I weren’t sixty years in two,
I’d have done comedy myself, and tragedy,
away with tragedy, comedy ends well,
but where will this end,
a boy with nothing but a fair address
and a proud name, a woman with a fair face
but a poor reputation that cannot now be hid,
all for love, all for love.

Ciardi, Ciardi Ciardini, I’ll have to send him on a mission
say to the Sultan on the Golden Horn,
perhaps he’ll turn Turk, he’s halfway there already,
but such bravos do not live long in any case,
give him some grief and let him earn his wages,
and Atalanta, and Atalanta, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah.
exit Federigo

Act I, Scene III, later in the Duke’s cabinet

Federigo: Who knocks, enter, (aside) but let me take my dagger,
I keep no guard and need none, still an old soldier prepares.

enter Cantacia

Cantacia: Father, I disturb you, shame on me,
but I must speak with you, and you,
you must forgive me, forgive me.

Federigo: But what is it exactly I’m forgiving you for,
have you mortally offended some lady again,
 vexed a grand-dame, lost a precious jewel,
or been drawing pentagrams with Monsieur Phenix?

Cantacia: First forgive me, do, do.

Federigo: I forgive you.

Cantacia: Oh thank you, thank you, best of fathers,
 prince of fathers, best of men, and shape of kings.

Federigo: And thank you, but now to business,
what is the matter that waits not the morning,
would it not be better in the morning,
I think I could wait till morning
for anything short of seige by the Turk.

Cantacia: Father, I have been pacing alone
up and down, nothing can help me.

Federigo: Another pacing woman, it is the night of pacing women,
they pitter-patter, they—

Cantacia: Father, I’m in trouble.

Federigo: What, who is the ruffian, let me get my sword,
when I lay hands on him, I’ll—

Cantacia: No joke, no joke, I’m all a mess, oh please.

Federigo: Now, now, there, there, what, what,
of course it is a problem, but where would the world be
without little bastards, half the dynasties of Italy,
and I myself bear the bar sinister.

Cantacia: But ladies are ruined, I must go to the convent, and cut my hair and pray six times a day, for all my life.

Federigo: Not if the man of the moment is of higher rank than yourself, then all sustains, but there is a shocking lack of men of higher rank in the vicinity, no cardinals or princes of the blood in your boudoir? now, now, there, there, what, what, but maybe it’s a false alarum, or we can marry you quick, there’s Count Albino, eighty years if he’s a day, no one would suspect, not a soul, not even he if only we were sure he’d weather a wedding night, but now who is the man?

Cantacia: Oh, oh, I really couldn’t say.

Federigo: I won’t harm him, not more than a skewer or two.

Cantacia: Oh, I don’t know, don’t know.

Federigo: You gave yourself to a stranger or was it—

Cantacia: No, no, neither, but there are three and it was all so quick, I was upset, I needed comfort.

Federigo: Three, three in one night, I knew about Antonio of garden in the spring, and who better to deflower—

Cantacia: Could I deny him, I who’d given way and so often, yes it could be him, oh the shame though he is very good you know.

Federigo: Ciardi—or Cesare?

Cantacia: Forgive Cesare, I demanded, I obstructed his passage, it was just in the little hallway, standing, he’s such a small and gentle boy, a good boy.

Federigo: And Ciardi?

Cantacia: The sword, the sword, that wretch, I was forced, nearly forced, I didn’t yield until my skirt was off, I swear—he did this funny thing, he took a cutting of my private hair, I mean he asked and I permitted, and after, there seemed no harm in the after, I wonder where he learned that trick.

Federigo: Let us not delve into the pit of his soul and let us not resolve this tonight, but have no fear, you are not lost, you will not have to go into the convent, as a nun you are scarcely to be believed, nor married to Count Albino though we can keep him in reserve, now we are both worn out, these passions are too heady a drink for one basking in his early dotage, go now and pace no more, but sleep, the dawn will be better.

Cantacia: Yes, yes, oh thank you, thank you.

exit Cantacia

Federigo: What a night, I wonder when the child is due, count off the months, less than eight, more than—
she’d seemed a little grown,
God save us, maybe only five.
Antonio, Cesare, Ciardi.
Federigo sleeps.

Act II, Scene I, next afternoon, Trattoria Bacchus

Bacchus: It’s like this, see,
all world stops at Trattoria Bacchus,
shepherd’s before a night of lambing
take some morning bread to sop in wine,
and kings three at time have ordered a flagon,
the prentice boys crowd masters who pitch on artists
who come to raise Urbino Palace and adorn the court,
orators have delivered themselves like Cicero
with a stoup of wine between every line,
poets in terza rima have despaired of love
and often in thrilling detail,
the Duke slips in from time to time
without a sound, without a stir, it’s just the Duke,
once he brought the Emperor of Constantinopolis,
that was long ago, before the Turk broke the walls,
and Caesar bled again,
women do to not scruple, my bread and cheese are supreme,
ladies with their lords, after a morning hunting,
though at night, it’s courtesans or they come in mask.

enter Ciardi and Monsieur Phenix

Ciardi: God of the grape save us,
lord of liqueurs save us, father of vintners save us,
we have sinned and are sober
we are fallen and without form,
our void is the morning of the first day,
our void is not abhorred by nature,
our dryness is the ditch in Calabria,
our dryness is the hospitality of the Bishop,
in our dark afternoon of the soul fill our cup,
but let it not runneth over.

Bacchus: What’ll it be signori?

Ciardi: Well wine, yes, and bread and cheese,
and cabbage soup, the Duke thinks highly of cabbage soup,
and do not spare the salt.

exit Bacchus

Phenix: Well yes, indeed, of course, and certainly,
while the whole population of Urbino looks on,
a better stratagem to defeat the purpose, or porpoise,
bears a year of study, and a doctoral thesis.

Ciardi: Ad Latinibus, Phenix astrologus minus,
Dux knowus allus, circus Atalanta, virginitis non nix,
meus herrus copulatus super tablum in librarium,
Dux meus ad Turkus sendorium, est disastorium,
pro bono Dux nix knowus quod Cantacia yo copulatus tuus,
quod Cantacia non virginitis proto meus.

*enter Baldassare Castiglione*

E pluribus unum.

**Phenix:** Cras amet qui numquam amavit quique amavit cras amet.
Ver novum, ver iam canorum, vere natus orbis natus est,
Vere concordant amores, vere nubunt alites,
Et nemus conam resolvit de maritis imbris.
Cras amorum copulatrix inter umbras arborum
implicat casa virentes de flagello myrteo:
Cras Dione iura dicit fulta sublimi throno.

**Ciardi:** Sine qua non.

**Phenix:** Ila cantat, nos tacemus. Quando ver venit meum?
Quando fiam uti chelidon, ut tacere desinam?
Perdidi Musam tacendo, nec me Phoebus respicit.
Sic Amyclas, cum tacerent, perdidit silentium.

**Ciardi:** Et tu Brute.

**Castiglione:** What are Castor and Pollux babbling about,
the heavenly twins have taken to Latin, humanism is saved,
once again the genius of Italian and French
have restored the world or taken a wench,
the upshot being that all have fled,
the herders have returned to the herds,
the artists have found somewhere else to dally,
but I have come to be enlightened by those
who’ve sobered enough just
to speak in prose.

**Ciardi:** Signor Castiglione, we are at study,
the court of Urbino is known throughout Christendom,
as the most learned court, with the most learned prince,
its courtiers are no slackers either,
we do not wish to let the home team down,
sit with us and let us drink of your wisdom,
in fact quite truthfully I am in a jar of jam,
and worse may come—
but here comes sustenance.

*enter Bacchus*

**Bacchus:** Signor Castiglione, I am honored,
gentlemen and scholars, not exclusively one or the other,
you are served—
but where is the company?

**Castiglione:** I think it was the incorrect pluperfect subjunctive.

**Bacchus:** Nay signor, twas not grammatical—amo, amas, signor—
I remember me that there’s a cock fight in old Pietro’s barn,
now you wouldn’t think your artists would go in for cock fighting,
but such it is signor, not the fighting itself,
it’s the dead fowl, truly signor they do love a dead fowl,
many’s atime I’ve had them in my kitchen painting the vegetables,
but lay a dead fowl among them and it’s a still life,
your service signori.

*exit Bacchus*

**Ciardi:** Signor please partake of our repast.

**Castiglione:** Thank you signori, the art of the courtier
is fifty percent eating at another man’s expense.
Ciardi: And the other fifty percent?
Castiglione: Being of service.
Ciardi: Now to business,
I have wronged Lady Atalanta.
Castiglione: Was it force?
Ciardi: No, on my honor—
but she was innocent.
Castiglione: Does the Duke know?
Ciardi: Yes by second sight and not of her,
no wonder in a lady so leaf-tripping
that not even the mole hears her footfall in the wood—
but she was very wroth, she took my jokes ill,
they have never been taken ill before,
not even after a sack.
Castiglione: A proud lady and a just Duke, it looks bad.
Ciardi: The Duke said I was to go the Turk,
but I think he did not mean that,
I think he meant to the Devil.
Castiglione: I will give you my opinion,
Atalanta is a lady who is no lady,
her only provision is the Duke,
so you must make the lady an honorable offer,
say a 100 ducats per year, and all the jewelry you plunder,
the Duke is a man of the world,
a well maintained mistress is no shame to the court,
the Duke himself in his earlier years—well he has forgiven himself,
it is one of his strong points,
I have learnt from him to forgive myself.
Ciardi: But will he forgive myself?
Castiglione: I think so, he is forgiving as I say,
and you have a stronger hand than you know,
the Duke needs your service,
your refortification of Gubbio is geometrically admirable,
the killing fields are a delight,
your daring on the last campaign is noteworthy
in that you have lived to boast of it,
the Duke needs you as his strong right arm,
he is no younger than he is,
his son Prince Guidobaldo has all his father qualities
but not the strength of them,
for his son’s sake, his dynasty’s sake, Urbino’s sake
he will keep you if you prove yourself a man of honor,
but mark you this, and I speak freely,
because I take you as a man of honor,
and Monsieur Phenix too, do not harbor dark hopes,
think of those men who live all their lives behind stone walls,
who do not have courtiers, but sycophants,
Italy is replete with them, they are slaves,
you may say to yourself the Duke was not born a prince,
the natural son of the old Duke only,
and, speaking freely again, some say not even that—
he is a prince by nature, and when his “brother”
was killed by the mob in payment for his crimes,
the people called, with some coaxing mind, on the Duke who is, and he compacted with them and he has always kept that compact in spirit if not quite always to the letter, he sleeps with no guard, he walks the streets alone unarmed, sitting among shepherds in Bacchus he is not ashamed, he is a free man.

Ciardi: Much of what you say I know, I was born in Urbino, and you are of Mantua, but I see your point in saying it, the truth is sometimes too close to recognize, always having known the Duke, although not well until this last year since I have been his man, I could not conceive till I was eighteen that there really were princes of another sort, I will do as you say and make Atalanta an honorable offer, she is tempestuous—

Phenix: She is a rare bird, a rara avis, like the falcon, do not cross her.

Ciardi: I will be honorable and kind and contrite.

enter Bacchus with Nino and Paolo dressed as Franciscans

Bacchus: Brothers—fraters may I say—welcome, these gentlemen are at the common board, it is the custom of Bacchus for the company to sit together, strangers or brothers.

Nino: Signori, this is Brother Paolo, my nephew, I am Brother Nino, we are of the Franciscan order as you can see, we wish to honor the custom of the house, but if it is not convenient, we can sit apart on the patio.

Ciardi: Brothers, sit with us, it is winter, the patio is cold, this is Signor Baldassare Castiglione, a gentlemen in the service of the Duke, this Monsieur Phenix, Ph.D., Paris, 1466, also the Duke’s man, as am I, Ciardi Ciardini at your service.

Nino: We thank you.

Bacchus: Signori I will return with more victuals.

exit Bacchus

Ciardi: Signori, wine?

Nino: And thank you again.

Paolo: Thank you twice over.

Ciardi: To break the chain of courtesies, may I boldly ask, what has brought you to fair Urbino, for, begging your pardon, your accents are strange to me.

Nino: We are Sicilians, though of a Roman chapter, we are glad to have met the Duke’s men, for we are bound to his palace, I conceived the notion to stop at Bacchus for olden times.

enter Bacchus

Bacchus: Signori, you are served.

Nino: Bacchus will you join us as my guest at your own board, for you may remember me, it has been many years, but there was a time when I often sat to your vintage.

Bacchus: Brother Nino— indeed and it is honor itself to receive you again, that you have given up great rank to become a Franciscan restores my faith in the episcopacy.
Nino: Nothing can restore mine, but thank you Bacchus.
Phenix: You were troubled by the corruption in Rome?
in France many learned men and prelates too have wondered
could another council of the Church restore her,
could the will to have a council be found.
Nino: Popes, even the good ones, disfavor councils,
there is one papal cardinal I know of who would call one,
or at least imagines he would, I know not the truth of it.
Castiglione: If the Christian princes could be provoked,
say by the authoritative letter of a known saint,
then they might force a council, that is my opinion,
perhaps it could be printed, I am very keen on printing,
though the Duke scorns it, his love is the italic hand.
Nino: Not all saints are equal, there are none in world today,
known to me, who have the stature and wisdom to advise Christendom,
saints have a temptation to retreat into their holiness
for it is dangerous to try to change the world,
our Founder, if I say it myself, was a great saint,
but if he had not had a great pope, Innocent III,
I tremble to think of his fate,
perhaps, printing will make a difference,
knowledge and protest can so easily be broadcast,
and laymen are now much more learned than in former years,
I do not know if it is a good thing or a bad thing,
but certainly great changes seem just at hand.
Phenix: It is a good thing, printing, gunpowder, the compass,
they have changed the world,
the ancient Romans fell and all the old empires
written of in the Bible fell, and why,
because the barbarians are always almost as strong,
weaken a little and the barbarians take over,
printing, gunpowder, the compass are just the harbingers
of what innovations may come,
the secrets of nature can be interrogated,
what new powers, not magic, but rational powers
may yet appear, I have great hopes,
the cycle of rise and decline can be permanently broken,
civilization could become immortal.
Nino: Your view to some degree I share,
the days of Attila and Genghis Khan and Tamerlane
may have passed for good, I hope so,
but civilized men can be as cruel as barbarians,
it is civilized men I fear now.
Bacchus: This is gloomy talk for the day before the day before Noel,
I have not seen the Huns for many a year,
let’s have a song:
“We three Kings of Orient are”
All: “bearing gifts we travelers afar ...”

Act II, Scene II, after midnight in a modest apartment in Urbino Palace

Paolo: Well that turned out to be a jolly Christmas party,
and I thought it was just going to be politics and philosophy,
but with some songs, some wine, quite a bit of wine, more than a few songs,
when we started Gregorian chants as the courtesans arrived—
well, the expressions on their faces, you had to be there,
but, of course, you were, and Ciardi when he got off his good behavior
and told of his adventures with women
and you told of your adventures in the mountains with wildlife,
did you really eat bear excrement Uncle,
and Bacchus, when he started delivering Ciceronian orations,
in pure Latin, with all the naughty bits left in,
about the Huns, he couldn’t have meant what I heard,
he couldn’t really be a god, could he—
I must say this life of a scurrilous mendicant friar
agrees with me better than I thought,
I mean I thought I’d be dead, well we almost were with those banditos,
does it always work to appeal to the memory of their sainted mothers,
oh, yes, I almost forgot to say it today,
Pater Noster in Celestium have mercy on One-eyed Gonzago,
Fat Ricardo and his little kiddies, Capo Repulso,
Maria Magdalene from the Brothel, and Joan the Crone, Amen,
and the things I’ve done, I have never been more proud
than when those poor people had me preach in their church
with the dirt floor and the sheep shit,
of course, the episode afterwards with the shepherdess,
well it takes away from the sanctity a bit,
I noticed you went AWOL early in the proceedings,
off hearing someone’s confession I suppose,
what did I preach, oh yes, on the evil of the Lollard heresy
and it’s rejection of the hierarchy of the Church,
didn’t mean a thing to them, it’s the thought that counts,
what was that church called, oh yes, St. Peter’s,
Michelangelo’s conception is nothing to me now,
and who cares what a child of five thinks anyway,
pity we didn’t arrive in time to go with the Duke
to the deathbed of Count Albino,
I could have given him extreme unction, Count Albino I mean,
not that I know the ritual you understand,
I would have made it up as I went along, that’s religion for you,
not that it’s all been fun,
the feet blistered raw, the vermin in what are laughingly called inns,
in this bath robe the cold wind comes up my privy parts,
and the sight of every disgrace, disease, and deformity known to man,
well that’s given me nightmares,
but there’s no telling what you’ll find
around the next bend in the road.

Act III, Scene I, Forest of Urbino, morning of Christmas Eve

Nino: What a strange light this morning,
a northern light, a German light,
and yet so mild a day in the mountains at midwinter

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I have not seen, the warmth is almost Sicilian,
but yet the ravaged leaves betray the season,
but among the broken garlands, the buds wait,
they come apace, my heart is glad to be with you.

Federigo: Subaqueous I call it,
the ducks on that brown water, or is it green,
seem almost on a level above us,
the stone dolphins swim today before my eyes,
I see Urbino sunken, shoals of fishes in the sky,
basking quiet, hookable meals, white whales,
treasures have sunk to the bottom,
is that my lady’s ring, she toyed it about her finger,
the calamari is king of ducats in the wrecks of galleons,
crabs play among the bones of men,
this is a strange revery that afflicts sudden-like,
it will pass, but beneath the waves
I seem to dwell for a moment, I see Urbino sunken,
and like the lost city, leaving nothing,
but what is glimpsed in the green fathoms.

Nino: Speaking elegy before noon is bad manners.

Federigo: The moment is passed, I am again man alive.
Nino: You have turned the young people loose,
this is again a free picnic where we play hide and seek
in Urbino Forest, just like other days,
we cannot run any more, but we know all the secret trees.

Federigo: Hm, hm, running around in the woods
always accelerates the plot lines.

Nino: Pardon.

Federigo: Earthquakes are caused by fault lines,
or so Aristotle has said, just musing on geology,
you know I am an amateur of all the sciences.

Nino: Say there’s a striking youth,
he must be very strong,
there with pruning shears and the obvious crock,
I mean crook, or—you know what I mean.

Federigo: That’s the under-gardener Antonio,
an enterprising youngster,
I’m making him steward of the southernmost vinyard of Urbino
and giving him fifty ducats for his betrothal.

Nino: He has maid then?

Federigo: I’m ordering his betrothal.

Nino: Better that than a vendetta with her father—
an ancient Forest of Urbino, so gloriously still here,
since the pagans worshipped you, you are still holy,
I dreamt you were all cut down,
the creatures homeless—
there I’m doing it too—bad Nino—
that covert, there through we chased the stag,
il Magnifico, but you would not bring him down,
fourteen points on either antler,
but you didn’t let all the wildlife escape,
have you still your collection
of the private hairs of ladies,
it always seemed out of character in you
that you should shear the sheep.
**Federigo:** Hm, hm, in some old drawer or another—
let us sit here awhile and have our wine and cheese—
you noticed, since the summer, it shakes sometimes,
it is nothing, it will pass—
I remember when you first came here with Aeneas,
you seemed to have just stepped off Helicon,
but in fact you’d been climbing all the mountains in Umbria—
**Nino:** An exaggeration.
**Federigo:** Searching for the source of the Tiber.
**Nino:** Every great work has many sources—
I remember you seemed to me like Charlemagne or Arthur.
**Federigo:** Urbino is sixty miles north to south,
scarcely that east to west,
and I am a condottieri, a captain of mercenaries,
the luxury of Urbino is paid for out of my wages,
I have sacked a city, only one and against my order,
but a lifetime is not enough for expiation.
**Nino:** Of your kind, you are the sublime example—
could you not once have been Charlemagne in fact
and spread Urbino to all of Italy, all of Europe
and given us order and strength?
**Federigo:** All religious prejudice aside,
the Sultan is a great man, but he is wrong
to make of his country a beehive,
the ancient Greeks were great because of their liberty
and diversity, each city state free to flower,
they paid a price, they are gone,
but so are the Assyrians and no one mourns for them,
now all our Europe is a greater Greece,
it effervesces, sparks, we pay a price,
my kind are part of that price,
even if I had the strength which I never did,
I have not the will to power even over Rimini,
it is more honorable to be a paid soldier than a Khan,
and this is why I have always supported the Catholic Church,
among other reasons, because it gives a coherence,
holds in check the disaster of unbridled liberty,
in due measure mark you, it’s power is for the good,
and the Pope, he is the Godfather of Europe—
the next conclave, what are your chances,
it is much to me because I love you
and because a reformation of the Church
is the policy of all thoughtful men.
**Nino:** I will never be pope, the papacy must be bought.
**Federigo:** You are a rich man.
**Nino:** Not that rich.
**Federigo:** I could help somewhat.
**Nino:** The King of Spain and the Holy Roman Emperor are buying.
**Federigo:** The King of Spain is pious it is said.
**Nino:** Piety has fermented to murder before this,
he has re-instituted the Inquisition in Spain,
and its proceedings make the Holy Office in Rome look like a girl’s school, who would have expected it, he and his inquisitors plan to rid Spain of all its Jews and Muslims, both alike, and root out the converted ones even going generations back to make pure the blood—the Spanish will become purebred dogs, all temperament and no brains—and, in any case, the King of Spain has his candidate, Rodrigo Borgia, you know of him, of course.

_Federigo:_ Not well, not really, though he has long played the game in Italy, more than twenty years, our paths have not crossed, I have never felt his hand, not that I know of, I doubt I have ever seen him.

_Nino:_ He is a man of great intelligence, and force of will, and, though a Spaniard, has a refinement of taste to equal any gentleman of Rome or Firenze, he has the morals of a Sicilian Capo, and he has no shame, it is unnerving to old hypocrites like myself, he has children, as I said, no shame, not nephews and nieces, but children, one of them, still counted as a boy, but the tales told of him, well there are always tales, but I have seen with my own eyes his cruelty to animals.

_Federigo:_ Tell me the name of the son of Rodrigo Borgia.

_Nino:_ Cesare, but let us call him the Anti-Cesare.

_Federigo:_ That is good, that is very good, I will remember it—so, barring a descent of the Holy Ghost on the conclave, you will not be pope, you are needed and second sight tells me you have another plan.

_Nino:_ Well I do, I see myself in history now, not that I’m vain, you know that better than myself, just a footnote, I will not be pope, I do not write, others have bigger book collections, yours for example, others are more notorious, it will say in some memorial that Nino, Cardinal of Messina was learned, a councilor, a behind-the-scenes operator, but all the hues of my rainbow will be suppressed, but a man can found something, I am going to found a university in Messina, nothing is open yet, but my plans mature, the practical arts, engineering, mathematics, medicine, law, the liberals arts too, astronomy, history, literature, philosophy, and theater, for I do love a good play, but no theology, others can wrangle about that.

_Federigo:_ Hm, hm.

_Nino:_ And military science too.

_Federigo:_ I will endow a chair.

_Nino:_ I hope that my university will restore to Sicily something of the soul of Archimedes,
and lift us Sicilians out of the derision cast upon us
even by ourselves,
I have presented the plan to Sixtus and, to give him his due,
he took it up at once and will sign the charter,
his intuition is good,
he said it may well be the best thing he’s ever done,
of course, five minutes later we were back to plotting against the Medici—
a calculated indiscretion note.
**Federigo:** After the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478
to assassinate Lorenzo il Magnifico,
and my own campaign against Firenze in 1479 in the Pope’s pay,
I hardly think the world needs any hints
about who is in the Pope’s bad books.
**Nino:** Naturally I had to throw Sixtus a sop,
the university will be named for him,
but that’s only as it should be,
the price of signature.
**Federigo:** In five hundred years it will be known
as the university founded by Nino of Messina, Sicilian patriot,
Sixtus IV, who the Devil is he.
**Nino:** Perhaps, but for all time
it will be the Sistine University.

*exit Federigo and Nino*

**Act III, Scene II, Forest of Urbino**

*enter Phenix and Bacchus*

**Phenix:** The noble Arab, Al-Shatir, removed the equant
by using three compounded epicycles,
this was excellent, but it only makes the problem clearer
that there is no unique mathematical model of the heavens,
the distances and order of the planets are completely unknown,
except that the Moon is at sixty Earth radii,
what is needed is a completely new conception
or on the empirical side a means to measure celestial distances.

**Bacchus:** The Sun is a mighty god
who sits amidst the planets
swirling them by silent tentacles.

**Phenix:** If I deconstruct your poetic utterance correctly,
you hold to the Aristarchan heliocentric view of the cosmos,
which has never been worked out in any detail,
no tables, no horoscopes,
now Ptolemy allowed that moving-Earth models could be built,
yes we could skip the Earth like a stone in mathematical conception,
but the physics man, the physics,
Aristotle proved by irrefutable logic
that the Earth must be motionless at the center of the cosmos,
true Aristotle’s physics has defects
for it is not at all clear how the arrow leaving the bow
is pushed by the air,
but I contend that if we adopt Aristotle’s practice
of experimental philosophy, we can perfect physics,
the object is not to quote Aristotle,
but to be Aristotle.

exit Phenix and Bacchus

Act III, Scene III, Forest of Urbino

enter Atalanta and Paolo

Atalanta: Your tales of the unprotected life make me shudder,
I've known the wild, but not the wilderness of the city,
I have been kept safe in Urbino,
but look through that glade, it's Cantacia, the Duke's daughter,
my good angel, whatever is she doing kneeling before Antonio.

Paolo: It is a performance by a lady I have never seen,
by a lady outside of Rome I mean to say.

Atalanta: Perhaps we should turn aside
and walk into the west wind
and leave my Lady Cantacia to her performance,
it is not fitting that we should spy so on her.

Paolo: Ah, the eye is not satisfied with seeing only,
the hand in touching only,
example leads to practice,
and practice makes perfect,
and as we are here my Lady Atalanta—

exit Atalanta
gone, better not to chase,
she was very accurate with those arrows,
and I had such hopes of her,
such a rough, great girl.

enter Cesare

Cesare: There's Brother Paolo,
he and his uncle Brother Nino make such a grave and matching pair,
I will greet him—
Brother Paolo, I am Cesare, the Duke's page
we have met and are well met again.

Paolo: Cesare, I had hopes we’d find each other,
you are a noble youth, my Uncle told me Urbino was Athens,
in disguise and secret in the world,
but seeing you stride off a hill, why it could be Helicon,
come sit with me, you will find I am a canny playmate.

exit Cesare

by the Dog, as Socrates would have said,
I thought he was a sure thing.

enter Castiglione

Castiglione: Why Brother Paolo, I had hopes we’d find each other.
Paolo: (aside) Maybe I should run away—
Signor Castiglione, I was hoping you knew some secret trees.

Castiglione: Indeed I do, there’s one not far off, splendid view.
Paolo: Why views are my great love,
we should retire there and not forget the wine.

exit Paolo and Castiglione

Act III, Scene IV, Forest of Urbino

enter Federigo and Nino
Nino: I always loved Paolo from his littleness, 
as I loved his mother, she was my laundress, 
she kept my reds ever so scarlet, 
my private saint if uncanonical, 
she could not bear a second son, she died—
and Paolo was raised with me, but not with me, 
I loved him, but I could never forget he was my creature, 
and I saw his qualities grow, good and ill, 
he was always generous and shared with his friends 
everything he ever stole, 
you understand, on both sides he is pure Sicilian—
on our journey—well it was more than I expected, 
my strength and heart nearly failed me, 
Paolo sustained me in my weakness 
and we came to rely on each other, 
I can never patronize him again, 
we are Franciscan brothers truly now.

Federigo: I too have learnt my son is himself, 
not my extension, I do not try to dictate my hereafter, 
and, though this is not perceived, least of all close to, 
I consult with him on everything now, 
you do not see him here because he is at his work 
preparing the reconciliations that will be my work 
this evening to confirm, we meet at midnight mass—
but Paolo what is his future, a cardinal-nephew 
has ever been a despised being.

Nino: We plan to play to his strengths, 
he almost turned Franciscan, but we thought better of it—
well excuse me please, I thought better of it—
the Father General of the Franciscans 
will be much, much happier with Paolo, Cardinal of Messina, 
as a patron of the Order in the conclave 
than with Brother Paolo carrying on that noble tradition of friars 
which has brought them so much fame in popular song, 
I confess to glowing prophesy, he will back the Order, 
the Order will back him and he will have status 
and do good things, well chickens before they’re hatched, 
but he has found himself as much as a man can, 
I suppose nothing will make him more decorous, 
he regards every pretty man or woman as a potential easy lay, 
at least when he’s chancellor of the Sistine University 
he will be to the undergraduates a role model.

exit Federigo and Nino

Act III, Scene V, Forest of Urbino

enter Atalanta and Ciardi

Ciardi: Atalanta, I have caught up to you at last, 
run no further, please, I am as serious and sober 
as I have ever been, I have reflected, repented, 
I have been a rogue and ruffian, but my heart is true, 
I have come to make you an honorable offer.

Atalanta: Man of Earth and war, I reject you
and your offer of marriage,
what I saw in you was an illusion, it was my mistake,
but I wish to see you no more, go from me.

**Ciardi:** Ah, marriage is an honorable offer, yes—
it would be the making of me, I would be a better man for you,
and yes, I desire you again, my joking covered my surprise,
you give yourself like the whirlwind, like fire.

**Atalanta:** Go.

**Ciardi:** Forgive me then at least, that I be not half a man,
that I may with honor treat of honor.

**Atalanta:** The hairs, do you have them.

**Ciardi:** I have them here in my hand.

**Atalanta:** I forgive you, now toss them to the wind.

**Ciardi:** Good-bye spirit, Urbino is the richer.

**Atalanta:** You still joke, adieu.

*exit Atalanta*

**Ciardi:** It is no joke, I remember now,
I was deified for a moment in her gaze,
and we flew over land and sea.

### Act III, Scene VI, Forest of Urbino

*enter Cesare and Cantacia*

**Cantacia:** Cesare I must speak to you,
you must obey me, don't run, don't run,
and don't climb that tree, come down,
I order you, order you.

**Cesare:** My lady, I am always in your service,
but until properly chaperoned, it is best I stay in my tree.

**Cantacia:** Arn't all the barriers down,
doesn't the little hallway bring you happy memories,
it was brief and athletic, but it did so much for me.

**Cesare:** It was a revelation my lady,
but since then my head draws lightning,
let us keep apart and forget the little hallway
for I know you can forget.

**Cantacia:** Are you calling me a whore?

**Cesare:** Sooth, nothing was farther from my mind,
your chastity is like the hornéd Moon,
proud and untouched and untouchable and prideful,
and ripe and grave and august and kind
like the summer breeze.

**Cantacia:** Stop it, stop it,
I have my little follies, but a lady's secrets must be kept,
and this lady may marry where she chooses,
my Father gives me total freedom,
or at least I've taken it,
and you would make a good consort,
though they are poor now the Casamissivis go back to the Caesars,
the da Montefeltros, that is my da Montefeltros,
go back to the old Duke's stable as is well known in Urbino,
will you take me?

**Cesare:** My lady, oh my lady, I have found someone to love,
it is my chance for happiness, you could have a fine prince, 
a Gonzaga or an Este, someone who would match your strength 
and be your proper lord.

**Cantacia:** It's Atalanta and she seemed so true me, 
that witch has changed you into a dog 
for you make puppy eyes at her.

**Cesare:** My lady, I am just a little dog, please.

**Cantacia:** I am with child.

**Cesare:** Where? I see no child.

**Cantacia:** I'm all knocked up and you're the man.

**Cesare:** I'm a boy.

**Cantacia:** If you're old enough to do't, your old enough to do't.

**Cesare:** O my lady, I am unhappy.

**Cantacia:** Aaah!

*exit Cantacia*

**Cesare:** Oh, what am I to do?

*Cesare climbs down, enter Atalanta*

**Cesare:** Oh, Atalanta, Lady Cantacia is with child.

**Atalanta:** Where? I saw no child.

**Cesare:** She has conceived and I am the man.

**Atalanta:** Do not believe her, she's a man-eater, 
all Urbino could be the father, 
or she stood in the west wind and took it.

**Cesare:** I must speak to the Duke, I must, 
all my honor tells me I cannot deceive him in this.

**Atalanta:** If you must, you must— 
but take all the blame yourself, 
the Duke is best at mercy— 
come rest on my shoulder, comfort me, 
that is my good Cesare, my brave man, 
we have the moment, we have the day, 
let us find a secret tree.

*exit Atalanta and Cesare*

**Act III, Scene VII, Forest of Urbino**

*enter Federigo and Nino*

**Federigo:** I am the son of a horse doctor in the stables, 
he was known the country round as an athlete, 
a racer and a boxer, an equestrian, 
he died I know not how before my birth, 
my mother after soonly, she was a scullery maid, 
her sisters of the kitchen cared for me, 
none were nursing and I kept nothing in 
but mare's milk, such is the story, 
and one day they were negligent 
and left me i the Sun in my basket, 
and the flies tormented me, 
and the old Duke who was saw this, 
he came over me to brush away the flies, 
and I have this from himself, 
that my tiny hand clutched the pommel of his sword, 
being old-fashioned, he took this for a sign
and said “thou shalt be the strong right arm of Urbino,  
and I claim thee for my natural son,”  
such is the story, perhaps it grew in the telling,  
but it is a good story, a man should have story of himself.

*exit Federigo and Nino*

**Act III, Scene VIII, Forest of Urbino**

*enter Cantacia and Ciardi*

**Cantacia:** Ciardi I have sought you out  
for I have come to a resolution that you are man I seek.  
**Ciardi:** Lady Cantacia your reasoning is acute,  
but why do you seek me now, I am afraid I am—  
not in a mood for pretty games.  
**Cantacia:** Not games, life, I want you for my man,  
my husband, you know me well, none better,  
and I know you, you are ribald fellow,  
a joker and no respecter of the honor of women,  
but you can be kind and you brighten days wherever you go,  
I need brightness, day’s shining lightness  
to wander in this kingdom which is mine,  
I need a man who will answer to my moods,  
be equal to my force and mind,  
who will tame me and make me good,  
you are that man,  
and you are another thing, a soldier,  
hardened in battle, a falcon of the mountains,  
my father thinks you the best young captain in Italy,  
my father he is as old as he is,  
you will be his strong right arm,  
my brother Guidobaldo, sweet boy, not a brain in his head,  
I know you will always back him up,  
and also my father—  
his hand, it shakes sometimes, my heart fails,  
without his prowess, I am just a fallen woman,  
all the da Montefeltros fallen, Urbino fallen,  
I have never known life without his power.  
**Ciardi:** Cantacia, you speak love and duty,  
though I am still very young,  
I felt just quite recently that my sportive days were over,  
that I needed responsibility to change my vitality  
into this power that you speak of,  
will you love me and grow up to be a woman for me  
that I might grow up to be a man for you?  
**Cantacia:** Now it is my turn to tremble,  
do not rebuke me for my past conduct,  
I am with child—and don’t say “where?”  
as near as I can reckon, its sire must be Cesare,  
his yielded to my whimsey, do not hurt me with jealousy,  
Cesare is not you, he cannot be you,  
he cannot be the strong right arm of Urbino,  
he cannot lift me from my fallen state.  
**Ciardi:** Cesare or the west wind, I care not,
I am your lord, are you not my lady?

**Cantacia:** I am your lady, I am, I am
mm, mm, mm, mm, mm,
and now to business—for a moment—
our child is set for the end of June,
we must wed at once—Twelfth Night!
twelve days hence, we will just have our own people,
it will be a popular match,
country boy marries girl in the palace,
but we must overcome Father.

**Ciardi:** Good Lord, I am not in the best odor with him now,
and for a man of my rank to beg for his daughter—

**Cantacia:** Piffle, he will do no better
if he sought to the ends of the world,
and he came from the stables himself,
and our child is now our ace,
as for that Atalanta hussy,
he is still very mad about that,
but not in the way the world imagines,
you must get an audience with him tonight,
we’ll get that cur Cesare to arrange it,
Cesare is his Ganymede,
oh, not in that way, at least I think not,
speak of your love and ask for my hand at once,
take him by storm, it is his own way,
but say nothing of the strong right arm,
he will think of that for himself by and by,
the only good ideas are his own ideas,
poor Daddy, how I manipulate him,
it’s very wicked of me, but it’s for his own good,
and now I declare business over,
let’s go find a secret tree.

*exit Cantacia and Ciardi*

**Act III, Scene IX, Forest of Urbino**

*enter Federigo and Nino*

**Federigo:** Strange, this place smells like a mare in heat.
**Nino:** I think I will find a secret tree—alone,
no need to assist me.

*exit Nino*

**Federigo:** Adieu till we meet again,
ah, a precious moment, nature conspires with man,
Atalanta, Cesare, I see you skulking disheveled in the bushes,
I will see you both alone, first Atalanta.

*enter Atalanta*

**Atalanta:** My lord.

**Federigo:** I bless your union with Cesare, fear not,
and do not worry about the future till tomorrow,
matters press upon us tonight, and of Cantacia, fear not,
by second sight I know of her colt to come,
I’m going to corral her—
but I see you have something to say.
Atalanta: My lord, Ciardi is a ribald fellow, but a good henchmen to you, I would not have his future dimmed for my frailty, he has asked for me to wed and in reply I have forgiven him and beg you to forgive him too.

Federigo: Oh, I will by and by—how did it happen?

Atalanta: I was in the library reading romances and reciting love poems, and he came in looking for Aquinas, and he seemed to me a shining knight, and we did it on a table.

Federigo: Thank you my dear, and now I have secret charge for you, go to the library when all others are going to the feast, there is a portrait there on display of a young man, it is a copy of an original by Fra Angelico, the original has been consumed, the young man once climbed all the mountains in Umbria searching for the source of the Tiber, have a good look at that portrait, but tell no one what you have seen, and to the library at the stroke of 11 o the clock return, I’ll be there for a moment.

Atalanta: Yes, my lord.

Federigo: Good girl, run along and send me Cesare at once.

Cesare: My lord.

Federigo: You have been of service to my daughter, and service to her, is service to me, and I never inquire into her private commissions.

Cesare: Yes my lord or no my lord or as you say my lord.

Federigo: She will not need that service again, it is 4 o the clock—you see my hand clock, it’s called a watch, I had it made in Venice, it’s a wonder, it has these little stars—well I see you arn’t interested—soon we will go to the feast and there you will find Ciardi, he is your lover, I mean to say your amigo, your comrado, this gets worse and worse, well you know him to speak to, speak this to him, he is to come to the library at quarter to 11 o the clock sharp, and he can speak for himself and I will speak his doom, now run back and attend to Atalanta and if you meet Brother Nino, look innocent.

Cesare: exit

Federigo: Ho, ho, ho.

Nino: enter

Ah, Nino, restored I see, the light reddens now as the Sun lowers to the west, it always does that you know at this time of day, we must hasten back and rest before the feast, after as I told you I hold my reconciliations.
wherein I bring peace to the quarrels of the year
within each family and between them,
restitutions are made, betrothals concluded, virginities restored,
it is mere form, all matters have been settled,
still the people wish me to set my seal upon,
will you meet with me in the library at 10 o the clock,
there is some business I would discuss still,
purge my soul, I should say, before midnight.

Nino: Certainly, Federigo I am always at your service—
but there I see the young people returning,
they seem shy of each other and sulky rather,
who is the tall girl with the bow and arrows,
I saw her close to earlier,
Maestro Piero should paint her as Diana—

Federigo: Let’s go, or the midnight will surprise us.

1 exit Federigo and Nino

Act IV, Scene I, Library of the Urbino Palace, 10 o’clock
at night

enter Federigo and Nino

Nino: Well that makes me self-conscious,
my portrait, center stage front.

Federigo: Oh that’s just because it’s new,
I’ll put it back with the family by and by,
I’ve always like the expression,
far away in a lost world far away.

Nino: Oh, that’s a fine lion you have there.

Federigo: That’s where I put my correspondence with customers,
file it under lion.

Nino: Here’s a letter from the Republic of Venice—
sorry, didn’t mean to pry—
say that was rather obvious Federigo.

Federigo: Hm, it was on this table I believe—

Nino: Pardon.

Federigo: It was on this table I believe I left Aquinas,
but no there he is on the shelf sitting next to Euripides—
Nino I have been thinking hard all day,
and forgive me for recurring to this topic,
you say you don’t write, but I know you write superbly,
you say you are a behind-the-scenes man,
but I know you have a golden eloquence when you want it,
our mentor Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini was raised up to be Pope Pius II
based on his writing and eloquence and other merits,
not without a struggle mind,
and the buying and selling in the Temple
were almost as much then as now,
and if it comes down to money, there are Jewish bankers in Venice
who know you have always been a friend of their faith,
what I’m saying is I see no absolute barrier to the papacy,
I would not press the issue if it wasn’t important.

Nino: Oh Federigo, on my journey with Paolo,
I saw what I'd forgotten hovering in Rome,
the terrible misery of humans,
the terrifying simplicity of faith,
I could not face the shade of Aeneas,
the living presence of Federigo
as that lie Pope Nino I—
talking of lost faith is off the mark,
I have sought for truth in the books of the Bible,
read freshly, without the grime of the commentators,
sought in the works of the Jews and of Islam,
sought in reports of the wisdom of China,
I have sought in my heart and life,
I have come to believe fully in the Golden Rule,
in the Sermon on the Mount, but yet
in the truths of Plato, the acuity of Aristotle,
if, and pardon me, I can no longer believe in fairy tales,
than that is the truth I have found,
I do not perceive myself to be a proud heretic,
bows can hurt me, the Inquisition, God knows,
could wring from me any confession it likes,
I say the Inquisition is the work of the Devil,
the Devil I do not believe in,
I am more and less than Christian now,
do I shock you? do not withdraw from me.

Federigo: Perplexed, but not shocked, not drawn away either,
I always knew the way your spirit would go,
by instinct more than reason, but has God become Plato?

Nino: No Plato was a man, and could falter,
in his book The Laws he founds the Inquisition,
he was a seeker, too proud of his own genius,
I am not proud, I am not that which I seek.

Federigo: What then is your philosophy,
in summary, in a nutshell, what are you Nino?

Nino: That the universe of material is large,
larger than we can know perhaps,
Nicholas of Cusa thought perhaps space was infinite,
so did the ancient Democritus,
who posited an infinity of worlds,
I do not know, but nor does anyone, not Aristotle,
not the redactors of the Bible,
in the universe we are the spirit,
not only us, the spirit is not definite,
a dog partakes of psyche, we do more so,
perhaps angels are beings higher on the chain of being,
but there is no proof of angels
apart from feeling there is some guardian to our life,
what is the meaning of the universe,
all I can think is that the spirit is the search for meaning,
love and learning are part too,
and God, what is God,
there is an old problem in theology:
is God good because he is a tyrant,
and good is what he says is good,
or is goodness a standard to which he subscribes
in which case he is lesser than a standard,
but the problem vanishes if God is not an old man
on a mountain, nor a babe in a manger,
but a principle, or the spirit as I call it,
there, all this could be put more clearly,
elaborated, extended,
but probably no more substance can be found, we must search on,
my philosophy is uncertain, speculative, skeptical,
but I believe in love and freedom,
and in this age of the world I must wear a mask.
Fedeligo: Nothing divides me from the people of Urbino,
I believe in the Savior, the Saints, and Our Lady,
but in many years of conversation with Aquinas,
I have come to believe that dogma is a thing of straw,
and no person should be persecuted for it,
and I am not afraid of a philosopher-pope,
and I believe that we are saved by the chapter and verse,
“the greatest commandment is that you should love one another.”
Nino: Fedeligo, I have not lost you.
Fedeligo: Nino, I am always found—
you noticed Atalanta among the young people.
Nino: The girl with the bow and arrows?
Fedeligo: Did she seem to you familiar—
a likeness perhaps—
Nino: The portrait.
Fedeligo: There was a lady who lived in an ancient villa,
high in the mountains of Umbria,
one day a beautiful young man chanced by her house,
he was climbing all the mountains in Umbria,
and searching for the source of the Tiber,
what happened was natural,
and there was no question of him staying
or her going, and that was the way of it,
she had a girl child, but died bearing it,
this child Atalanta was raised by her grandfather,
a rude count of the backwoods, a hunter only,
and she knew no society of gentlefolk or scholars,
they had no wealth, only an old tradition of lordship,
when the old man died that died too,
I heard of her aloneness and brought her to Urbino,
she has become somewhat civilized,
I myself taught her to read and to recite,
now she has found a mate, my page Cesare,
he is by rights Count of Casamassivi,
but his lands are lost and he is the last of his breed,
I have secretly recovered the smallest and remotest
and most ancient home of the Casamassivis,
it is in the Tuscan hills, not far is Lake Trasimeno,
this is my gift to them and a repayment for an old score,
but the girl should also have a dowry and a relative,
an uncle say.
Nino: I already have a nephew,
it would not look any better in Rome to have a niece.

**Federigo:** All Italians approve of a generous uncle,
and you aren’t going to alienate a papal state for her,
say a thousand ducats, not too much, not too little,
the young people would be well set up,
they would be a comfort to you.

**Nino:** My niece, my ducats,
this is an ambush, why should I give way?

**Federigo:** It’s Christmas,
now to business, it wants 16 minutes of 11 o’clock—
you see my hand clock, it’s called a watch,
I had it made in Venice, it’s a wonder,
it has these little stars—well I see you aren’t interested—
at 15 to 11, Ciardi Ciardini will be here if punctual,
and if all goes well we will settle our business by 11,
if not, we fight with swords—
pardon me, all will go well,
I am already the victor of a battle with no losers,
and it has disposed me to be merry,
at the 11th hour Atalanta will be here alone,
she has seen the portrait, no more than that,
and you will come to her and say what you will,
to the left in the passage is the chapel of Our Lady,
I often go there to reflect and pray.

*exit Nino

**Act IV, Scene II, Library of the Urbino Palace**

**Federigo:** I am Proteus, now for a change of shape.

*enter Ciardi dressed somewhat like Federigo*

Atalanta has spoken of your resolutions,
that you asked for her to wed, doing honor to yourself,
instead of disgrace.

**Ciardi:** Yes my lord, the counsel of that noble courtier
Signor Castiglione, spurred me, he spoke wisdom, truth,
and truth, the Lady Atalanta is a rare bird,
rara avis as the noble Roman declaimed,
in the clouds, on mountaintops her spirit,
could such a man as I, a man of Earth and war,
mingle propitiously with a spirit,
the noble Cesare is of another ilk,
lightning and thunder in the summer when they wed.

**Federigo:** Of Cantacia?

**Ciardi:** She is to me compact of virtue,
wise in her feeling, passionate in her temper,
such daughter in a thousand, such a woman—
I love her and though I am a poor man, I withstand Jove
to ask for her, but submit to his might.

**Federigo:** Yourself passionate, defiant,
and not without wit in a tight corner
either in war or love,
I give her to you and bless you both,
I make of you a count and castellan of Urbino,
such a son, you will be my strong right arm,
Guidobaldo’s favor you have always had
since you were captain of the boys,
a brother he never had till now.

Ciardi: My lord, I think you are as strategic in peace
as a hundred campaigns have proven you in war.

Federigo: Do not believe it
that I foreknew how this Christmas play would play,
I plotted, hoped, prayed, and have been well rewarded,
but better than I could devise the event has shown,
a gracious mercy saves us all despite ourselves,
still there is one last scene to play
and you and I are not in it,
the most important venture may founder,
but I feel my battle luck surging.

enter Atalanta. She stops for a moment and looks
back and forth between the two men as if not sure whom
she is to address or which is which.

Atalanta: My lord, I have returned as you bid me.

Federigo: Ciardi and I must attend Cantacia,
you have seen Brother Nino,
he is in fact, Nino, Cardinal of Messina,
a very great man in Rome,
he is a gentleman and my old friend,
Nino will speak to you.

Atalanta: My lord.

exit Federigo and Ciardi. Federigo gently hustles Ciardi.

Act IV, Scene III, Library of the Urbino Palace

Atalanta: The cardinal and what is he,
what is the man in the portrait,
copied from Fra Angelico, copied from the young man
who climbed the all mountains of Umbria
searching for the source of the Tiber,
steadfast, do not give way to him,
the Duke is all you have needed,
Cesare all you need, steadfast,
but Cesare needs care, resource,
for myself, I'd run away to the mountains.

enter Nino

Your grace.

Nino: Lady Atalanta, Atalanta may I say,
you may not know this, but I am your kinsman,
far-off and long ago, perhaps your mother—
no she never spoke of me,
and you have surprised me,
knocked the breath out of me,
I never knew you were, believe it, never,
but I cannot say if I had that—
that I would have been of service to you,
the Duke, your lord, my old friend
credits me with more compassion than I know of,
his countenance means more to me than my own,
his judgment was my guide star in my better days—
without you having to ask for anything,
or having to be anything but what you are,
I beg now to be of service to you,
to dower you and stand among family at your wedding,
to some these would mean much,
but take them not for what they mean to you,
take them for what they mean to me,
it is I, not you, who supplicate.

**Atalanta:** When I was a girl,
rusticated in the Umbrian mountains,
I chased clouds, deer followed me,
birds lighted on my hand, I walked with wolves,
had nodding acquaintance with the wildcat,
what am I to Rome, or Rome to me,
that I should weep for it.

**Nino:** It is the Duke’s wish
that you accept my offer of ducats and rank.

**Atalanta:** The Duke’s wish, the Duke’s wish,
ah, ah, ah, ah, ah,
I will be tame and serviceable,
Uncle, I accept your offers,
and refer myself to your wishes,
and will be a support and refuge to you
in your old age.

**Nino:** Which will still be some ways off,
but one imagines the day will come
when I will prattle with your children
and give them sweets and walk in your garden,
and take my rest—
but I have played this game somewhat wrongly,
showed the wrong hand at the right time—
Rome is of the world too, a hundred thousand souls,
it is a combustion, a fire, an aspiration,
it teems, crime will always breed in its alleys,
genius will always heighten its fame,
Caesars and Popes will have their days,
the monuments have fallen and been built over,
ot once, but again and again,
marble is burnt for lime,
men have been slaughtered in the streets,
women have been brought to prostitution to eat,
the Goths have taken Rome, they will take it again,
God endows Rome, God torments it,
but there are men, their armor clanks, their swords weary,
who still battle to save Rome,
Rome is all of men and women, Roma aeterna.

**Atalanta:** ah, ah, ah, ah, ah,
I give way, I give way, I weep for Rome.

**Act IV, Scene IV, Library of the Urbino Palace**
enter all

Federigo: Ah, a loving attitude,  
my good Nino, my good Atalanta, all my lovers,  
this is the night that the world waited on,  
this is the night the Christ child was born,  
not in a palace, but among the animals,  
in the silence of the night, unsuspected,  
the mercy which extends to all,  
the love which is the purpose and end of being,  
reaches out to us across the ages  
and the generations,  
let us go my lovers to the Cathedral,  
and be among all the people of Urbino.

exit all, but Atalanta

Atalanta: Our play is done and its persons, those who lived  
and those whose life was only here, must sleep again,  
but for the completeness of the story  
Duke Federigo dies two years later on campaign  
of malarial fever,  
his son Guidobaldo is overthrown in 1502 by Cesare Borgia,  
the da Montefeltros are dispersed among the people of Italy,  
whence they rose,  
Baldassare Castiglione writes his book The Courtier  
by which the spirit of Urbino lives in the imagination of Europe for a century  
and reflects to posterity.

exit Atalanta

New Mexico Tech  
Socorro, New Mexico  
2002 December 22

General Note

The play is mostly unhistorical including the epilogue. Only Federigo da Montefeltro (1422–1482) and Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529) are historical persons—and as their dates show, they never met. Castiglione was at the Court of Urbino in the time of Federigo’s son Guidobaldo, but the The Courtier did reflect the earlier period too. The da Montefeltros were restored after the Borgia collapse, but they disappeared sometime one supposes.

In Act II, Scene I, Monsieur Phenix quotes the first and last parts of Pervigilium Veneris (The Vigil of Venus) an anonymous poem from late Antiquity. The text source is “The Latin Library”  
(http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/)  
which is believed to consist of all public domain texts. An English translation is at  

The idea of pubic hair as a sex trophy was originally suggested by Anthony Powell’s novel Temporary Kings (1973). But I do not think Powell’s copyright is being infringed since the idea is probably as old as the hills. Certainly, it is implied in Pope’s The Rape of the Lock (1714) as is explicitly mentioned in Cleanth Brooks’s The Well Wrought Urn (1947).
References

—Once a well known book I think.

Tracy, C. 1974, *The Rape Observ’d* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press)
—Good illustrations of the world of Alexander Pope.

—The inspiration for my play.

—A nice little book. It even has a letter to the reader from Edward R. Murrow, Director of the U.S. Information Agency.
Play II
Prince Henry
“It was always Walter Ralegh’s great ambition to be the counsellor to a prince and it was ironically, right in the middle of his detention in the Tower of London that he finally achieved his goal. Elizabeth had never taken him seriously as a political adviser, and James had mistrusted him before ever he met him, but in 1608 Walter Ralegh struck up a friendship with James’s eldest son, Prince Henry, born in Scotland in 1594 and now Prince of Wales and heir to the throne. It was no relationship of passing curiosity, this companionship between the old Elizabethan and the bright fourteen-year-old lad who would be the next king of England and Scotland. Sharing common interests, similar temperaments and an attitude towards King James founded on separate but bitter personal experience, Walter and Henry became close and true friends.”

Prince Henry

Dramatis Personae

Henry Stewart: Prince of Wales  
Sir Walter Ralegh  
George Villiers: gentleman of Buckinghamshire, later Duke of Buckingham  
Thomas Harriot: mathematician and natural philosopher  
John Killigrew: barrister  
William Shakespeare  
Strange: the prince’s bodyguard  
Lady Bronwen Annesley of Rydal: a young country lady  
Mrs. Wildgoose: aunt of Bronwen Annesley  
Shock: maid of Bronwen Annesley

General Setting

The time is 1613 late June, early July on the Julian Calendar still used in England until 1752. June 29 is July 9 on the Gregorian Calendar. A main scene is the Tower of London especially the Garden Tower where Ralegh is a prisoner. The Garden Tower is also known as the Bloody Tower since it the possible place where the Yorkist boy princes were murdered under Richard III circa 1483. Other scenes are the homes of Mrs. Wildgoose and John Killigrew in Southwark and the Prince’s Arms on the south side of Fleet Street. The Prince’s Arms was named in 1610 for Prince Henry and still survives: the facade of the building and ceiling of the Prince’s Room are adorned with the prince’s crest of three floppy feathers.

Act I, Scene I, courtyard of the Tower of London, 1613  
June 29,  
Tuesday, morning

Henry: This is where the scaffold stands,  
by tradition it is only erected at need,  
those executed here are of a rank that they deserve their own scaffold,  
also it is not pleasant to have one always on display,  
either for the Warden or the keepers or the prisoners,  
here or nearly was brought Lord Hastings in the time of Richard III,  
the little princes?  
who knows where they died,  
but by tradition beneath the Garden Tower where Sir Walter lives,  
and sometimes, but only for effect, that tower is the Bloody Tower,  
Ann Boleyn and Catherine Howard were brought here,  
perhaps Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell,  
we should ask the Warden,  
certainly within our own years Essex,  
and Sir Walter would have come here,  
now he strolls over it every day.  
Bronwen: Those ravens are ominous.  
Henry: Another Tower institution, the Tower ravens,  
there is a ravenmaster to keep them happy,
this is a sad place when one dwells on it,
this is a place of might-have-beens,
Lady Jane Grey was executed here too,
she was wise and seventeen, younger than we are,
she cut her name there in the Beauchamp Tower room,
a cat’s-paw of her elders, what monsters,
but if they had been more monstrous still
and succeeded in their plots
she’s an usurper against herself, she’s forgiven,
hers marraige was forced and consumated by order
of her father-in-law the bad Duke of Northumberland,
not the good Earl of Northumberland of our own age,
why instead of a Queen virgin,
we could have had a Queen divorced, think of that,
and she might have lived as long as the old Queen, think of that,
and been as great, perhaps not, might-have-beens,
princes are mindful of these phantoms,
even and perhaps especially those close by,
the plan of my father, of course,
is that I will be king after him,
but, of course, he doesn’t like to think of after,
and my plan is to be king after, but I try not to think of it,
and brother Charles loves me,
but if not yet, then soon, he’ll think, if not Henry, Charles,
and I love Charles as much as I bully him,
but Charley boy, ho! damn your presumption,
I must marry, produce heirs, and liberate Charley,
one thing’s sure, alternatives exclude,
I can talk of this to you,
ever since we met as children,
I spoke Scots only then, you thought I spoke magic,
we have been friends.

Bronwen: It is chance only,
but I think it a good thing that you should have a friend
who is only barely of the court, you know I will always be at Rydal.

Henry: And I can always ride over from Woodstock
when I’m hunting there, or when I’m visiting Oxford,
it is almost the wonder of our age
that no one seems to have noticed or cared.

Bronwen: That luck won’t last,
now that I’ve been seen in London.

Henry: Vanity girl—
but I have to show you my city,
and show you off to Sir Walter and Mr. Harriot,
that I have a friend of intellect impresses them no end,
and there is Mr. Harriot, arrived at last,
sir, sir we are here.

enter Harriot

Harriot: Your Highness, Lady Bronwen, your servant,
and how is your weather.

Henry: Prince’s weather Mr. Harriot all the day,
it’s certain.

Bronwen: Mr. Harriot I’ve read your gift,
I'm now all agog for astronomy,
but is the redundant Mr. Galileus Galileus' title
to be translated The Message from the Stars
or the The Star Messenger.
**Harriot:** The latter, but only custom tells me this,
the Latin as you see yourself is ambiguous.
**Bronwen:** I think I understand all the discoveries clearly,
but is there no reconciliation with Aristotle,
is the world so totally changed,
where do we put our feet.
**Harriot:** None, Aristotle is overthrown at last,
I've observed all the new astronomy with my own lens tubes,
it's all quite real,
I could show you on a night at my house at Syon,
in fact, I saw the new wonders, some anyway,
as long ago as 1609, perhaps even before Galileus Galileus.
**Bronwen:** Then you should have written the book.
**Harriot:** I never seem to have data good enough,
and the man of Galilee writes better than I,
and evidently endures controversy better,
I'm a very quiet man, that I have friends like Ralegh,
and the Earl of Northumberland, and now yourself my Lady,
with whom natural philosophy is a passion,
well it suffices, and, of course, I include Your Highness.
**Henry:** AUCH aye, I'm a natural philosopher
just as I'm an admiral and a graduate of Oxford.
**Harriot:** Your Highness listens with passion.
**Henry:** In one ear, out the other.
**Bronwen:** Let's get off this tender subject
and return to astronomy,
Galileus barely alludes to the Copernican theory,
but he hints belief,
is this book a proof without saying so.
**Harriot:** No, but the weight of the evidence has shifted,
Jupiter has moons, so the Earth can orbit the Sun and have its Moon still,
Jupiter is larger, its moons smaller, the small orbit the large,
we know OUR Moon, as we must call it now,
is smaller than the Earth, and the Earth vastly smaller than the Sun,
so the Moon orbits the Earth, the Earth orbits the Sun,
it all hangs together,
and the fact the Moon has mountains and perhaps oceans
means it’s not a perfect sphere but a body like the Earth,
and conversely the Earth is like the Moon,
from the Moon, the Earth would look Moonish,
we are in space my Lady, the Earth’s a bloody planet,
and, in fact, the geometrical arguments first given by Copernicus himself
seventy years since
are as compelling for a man, or let me say a person,
of mathematical understanding as anything else,
I believe it is best now to think Copernicanly,
it’s good that the good bishops of England never think about astronomy,
in fact, they hardly think at all,
pardon me Your Highness.
Henry: No bishop, no king, Mr. Harriot, but I pardon you, I’ve always found them a tedious lot, but there’s a cloud, tiny, furious, nearly on us, prince’s weather is over, a pillar of rain comes, why don’t we resume our discussion in the Garden Tower with some cakes and ale, and see if Sir Walter and Mrs. Wildgoose have gotten up to the gossip of 1592 yet, but better let me send Strange first to see if the coast is clear.

Bronwen: Coast is clear?
Henry: No bishops, no bishops with Sir Walter, they often drop in to convert him, but here comes Mr. Villiers, I must speak with him in the Warden’s office, Bronwen and Mr. Harriot please rejoin Sir Walter when Strange gives the all clear.

exit all

Act I, Scene II, Warden’s office, Tower of London, just a moment later

Villiers: Your Highness I’ve the letter from the king.
Henry: Thank you Villy— it’s about my marriage, nothing nobody doesn’t know already, the King of Spain wants more tariff reduction for the Infanta, the King of France wants to give the younger girl, the one who’s two, the Tsar of Russia offers the daughter of his Mongolian concubine who our ambassador in Muscovy says is the most beautiful woman in world, but adds that she keeps a razor sharp scimitar at the ready for any insult.
Villiers: The lot of a Russian courtier is not an easy one.
Henry: Oh Villy you’re such a handsome man, you must know everything about women.
Villiers: No one knows everything about women.
Henry: What if you’re in love, and the woman is fond of you, but gives no hope at all, in fact, has turned you into a brother.
Villiers: Well quite often they’re playing for a higher stake— but, with your indulgence, if I may guess at the woman in question, then the stake is very high indeed, don’t mistake me, it’s not things or position she wants, it’s yourself, total complete, hers only, and that’s the thing you can never give her, your duty to your king, your country, your court forbids that you can give yourself like that, your princess, our future queen must be your true wife, other women are allowed, but in England queens are respected, but if I may make another guess, your “sister” will settle for duty, if you need her carnally, she’ll yield, duty for duty, yours, hers.
Henry: Yes, yes, that makes sense, but it’s still a delicate thing, she’s not just a desirable woman, she’s my woman friend, my pal,
I must be my very best self—the prince—
you'll help will you?
Villiers: Of course, Your Highness, but—
well I'm not that vain, but you said yourself, I'm handsome,
best her attention never rests on me, she's at a dangerous age.
Henry: My God, women are weak—
extcept when we want them to be.
Villiers: Ever thus Your Highness.

Act I, Scene III, House of Mrs. Wildgoose in Southwark, 
early afternoon

enter Bronwen and Shock
Bronwen: Now what is the hilarity
that barely holds within your breast,
I can see your eyes dancing on Aunt Wildgoose when she looks away,
when she looks to, you go all saintly and celestial,
what before you burst and mess my bodice?
Shock: When we all left for the Tower yard,
leaving Sir Walter and the Wildgoose in the Garden Tower,
I tripped back seeing as you and the prince
wanted to be just you and the prince,
but then I heard out of the door of Sir Walter's room
such cozenage and cooing, think it,
two such old bodies tricksing each other and at such speed,
why I'd never go so far in under half-hour,
then swush into the laboratorium,
and fearing for my old lady's honor,
I tiptoed in to the laboratorium door,
just to check if all were honest,
and she “unhand my skirt Sir,”
and “take it not off Sir,”
and he “assume the position Black Beauty.”
Bronwen: You're making this up—
no bishops! no bishops!
Shock: All is true,
and then much panting and gasping
ending in a sigh.
Bronwen: When I entertain a man,
I'll chain you in the cellar—
and then?
Shock: He “Black Beauty you are a fine wench,
my impotence is cured,”
and she “Sir Walter, do me again.”
Bronwen: My, my, my, my.
Shock: My, my, my, my.
Bronwen: My, my.
Shock: My, my.
Bronwen: My.

enter Mrs. Wildgoose
Mrs. W.: What are you two giggling yourselves sick over?
Bronwen: Just girlish nonsense Aunt.
Mrs. W.: This was such a morning,
when I was young, I saw Sir Walter from afar,
he was the pole star of the court,
and all the compass needles pointed there,
he is the greatest man alive in England,
the king should pardon him whatever his faults,
it is a disgrace, a falcon in a cage.

Bronwen: Some falcon, some cage.
Mrs. W.: Ah, I am weak and weep for him.
Bronwen: Ah, dear Aunt Wildgoose,
Shock help me hug her,
women are such fools for manly grace.
Mrs. W.: Thank you, thank you, I am strong again,
and litigation waits on me,
my barrister, Mr. John Killigrew, waits on me,
speaking of manly grace,
why I swooned when he roared *corpus delicti*
at my wretched neighbor Stork
who built a wall a foot on my path,
and when Dean Pigeon had me in his private prison
over that misunderstanding over my debts,
Killigrew’s *habeas corpus* fished me out
and made Dean Pigeon pay restitution,
he’s a coming man Killigrew is,
he’ll be a bencher before he’s 30,
and if the king ever calls another Parliament,
Killigrew is sure to sit for Southwark, hark me,
but I must withdraw for a half-hour or so to recover,
attend him Bronwen, show him in Shock.

Bronwen: Of course, Aunt, show him in Shock,

exit Mrs. Wildgoose and Shock

Bronwen: I smell a plot.

enter Killigrew

Bronwen: G’day to you Mr. Killigrew,
your Aumt is indisposed for a moment and I attend you,
you remember me, Bronwen Annesley of Rydal.

Killigrew: Certes, I do, but you were but a girl
when last you were in the city.

Bronwen: Certes, you were just a termer at the Inner Temple,
and young for that, your voice still cracked,
not having then that tenor instrument in tune,
you were, I remember, a famous choirboy at St. Paul’s School,
the voice of heaven as I heard in the lane.

Killigrew: You touch my vanity to the quick,
it was a dark day when I could not reach a high note
for all my screwing up my throat,
being praised so young has spoiled me for praise since,
I now wish to be the greatest lawyer in London
and be known as such, and in my own fancy—
well I’ve come some way along—
but God help me I’m glib, I forgot your grief,
all my sorrow on the loss of your parents,
that the daughter of such ones can bear it I know,
but old times fade, they were the hearts of England.
Bronwen: Thank you, it was sudden, but as you say I bear it because I bear their hearts, time will heal the wound and their strength survives, and as you see I've put off mourning and left my twin brother lord of Rydal, and come to learn London ways from Aunt Wildgoose.

Killigrew: Your Aunt too is old England, dear soul, she's steeped in legal lore, and keeps me on my toes, but we win our cases, there's not a better brain for common law in the Inner Temple, but, of course, she lost the famous case, all's healed there I trust?

Bronwen: All's healed, she was reconciled by my mother, not without a bit of effort mind, and she pledged to watch over me, and my mother pledged me to watch over her.

Killigrew: She always reminds me of Chaucer somehow.

Bronwen: You change satiric Mr. Killigrew, your sense of humor shows.

Killigrew: Not at all, when I was called to the Bar, I had a surgeon remove it, all silk and gravitas now— but would you call me simply Killigrew, all my friends do, enemies too, “damn him, damn that Killigrew.”

Bronwen: Killigrew like in Rabelais, but you must call me Lady Bronwen.

Killigrew: Lady Bronwen, only all my life— ah, but how long have you been in London and what have you seen?

Bronwen: Today Aunt and I toured the Tower of London, Prince Henry led us, you know my connections to the court still linger, and I've known the prince since he was a wee Scot, come out of the north, we visited Sir Walter, Aunt made a great impression on him, such a strange prisoner, he is still feared in the world, to the Spanish he is still Gualtero, as Drake was Draco.

Killigrew: Old England too, but nowadays we are at peace with Spain, the Armada was before us both, we do not hack our way with swords, peaceful men and rational means must govern the realm— but the prince what is he like, for I do not move in exalted circles, and am just as curious and snobbish as Tom the Fish.

Bronwen: He is enthusiastic and a great admirer of Ralegh, but I do not know him well, he is courteous and thoughtful.

Killigrew: It is enough for me to know, and to know that you have said it.

Bronwen: If we are to be friends Killigrew,
you must stop reading my mind.

Killigrew: Are we to be friends?
Bronwen: There is a plot.
Killigrew: I can see it now,
legal work gratis for family—
but let’s be friends.
Bronwen: So we shall—
but let me call in Aunt Wildgoose now
for she must have some wondrous suit for you.

Act II, Scene I, Killigrew’s house, June 30, morning

Bronwen sitting, enter Shakespeare

Shakespeare: I beg your pardon mistress,
Mr. Killigrew’s clerk said he was here waiting.

Bronwen: No, Killigrew is absent without leave,
I’ve been waiting on him, we could wait together,
I’m Lady Bronwen Annesley of Rydal,
if you’ll pardon a bold assault on your acquaintance.

Shakespeare: I’m Mr. Shagsbard of Stratford,
or so my writ of summons from the clerk says,
poor old Adam, we must forgive him his muddle,
not many men remember seeing Anne Boleyn
taken down river to the Tower,
all is over when you go to the Tower.

Bronwen: Oh do not say it.

Shakespeare: Unsaid.

Bronwen: Thank you Mr. Shagsbard—
is your business urgent, mine is not, I could leave.

Shakespeare: Not urgent really Lady Bronwen,
all of Southwark is in uproar today,
so nothing doing.

Bronwen: It is the burning of the Globe Playhouse yesterday afternoon,
at the performance of Old King Henry,
it’s turned everyone into gawpers at the smoking heap.

Shakespeare: No loss of life, no hurt,
amazing even considering the inferno that was,
it’s quite a loss for me,
I’m a partner in the King’s Men,
though now that I’m retired to Stratford
I do not meddle much in management,
not just money loss,
the Globe was my center of existence once,
I’m shaken in fact—but oddly lightened too,
a load lifted, another life perhaps.

Bronwen: Phoenix from the ashes?

Shakespeare: From the ashes—
My ashes were my breast of snow,
My talons now are afterglow,
Deceived, dismembered four winds wide,
But I lived, but I died.—
something in that perhaps—
but there will be no new Globe in Southwark—
pardon Lady Bronwen, but your name mystifies me.

**Bronwen:** Bronwen is Welsh, from my mother’s mother,
the Welsh are the oldest Britons,
before the Sassenachs, the Romans, we were.

**Shakespeare:** Annesley reminds me of Annesley.

**Bronwen:** Well yes, I’m doubly Annesley, for my father,
who died before my birth, was my mother’s cousin—
but you are perhaps recalling my mother Cordell,
she was famous in Chancery Court in the last years of the old Queen,
my grandfather, Sir Brian Annesley, a gentleman of the Queen,
turned feeble-minded in old-age, my Aunt Wildgoose,
egged on by Uncle Wildgoose, wanted him declared lunatic
to seize his property,
Cordell defended his second childhood in Chancery
and before the Queen, that he should not be shamed,
and as she always said, to preserve her own rights,
and she won.

**Shakespeare:** I know the story, yes,
but how did it end?

**Bronwen:** My grandfather died soon after,
and Cordell raised a monument in love of her parents
in the Old Lee Church on the Dover Road,
and after Uncle Wildgoose died,
Aunt Wildgoose was in difficulties and Cordell succored her
and they were reconciled, I visit with Aunt Wildgoose now,
Cordell married again to Sir William Harvey,
who fought the Armada in ’88,
and was also the stepfather to the notorious Earl of Southampton,
in the last year both Cordell and Sir William died
for winter kills.

**Shakespeare:** I honor your grief,
yet it seems to me they lived bravely—
pardon me again, for I misspoke my name,
all for a comic interlude,
I am William Shakespeare, an old player of the King’s Men,
a writer of their plays,
perhaps I’m known to you.

**Bronwen:** By name yes, of course,
but having lived mostly at Rydal
which is quite alone even though in Oxfordshire,
I’ve only ever seen inn courtyard fit-ups,
all clowns and falls,
not the great London plays,
except once when I was a little girl,
Cordell took me to see a play at Woodstock
when the old Queen was there, last time,
there was a fat knight, he was very droll,
but I can’t recall his name.

**Shakespeare:** Falstaff ma’am, Sir John Falstaff.

**Bronwen:** He is one of yours then?
Shakespeare: One of mine.
Bronwen: Have we said all this before?
suddenly I’m all deja vue—
oh nonsense, a passing abstraction of my mind—
oh Mr. Shakespeare, I have wonderful plan,
I have a special friend who lives in a special place,
he is a great admirer of yours,
is it possible that tomorrow
you could go down the river with me to meet him,
we could bring Killigrew too,
my friend would be ever so cheered.
Shakespeare: My lady at your service,
but who is your special friend in his special place.
Bronwen: Ralegh in the Tower—
but I hear Killigrew, oh forgive me if I run out to catch him
for moment and then slip away,
where can I send you a letter to arrange the party?
Shakespeare: At the Tabard Inn.
Bronwen: Of course, of course,
I’ll send it by tonight,
oh Mr. Shakespeare I’m on the clouds, the clouds,
adieu till then, adieu.
Shakespeare: Adieu till then.
exit Bronwen
I smell a plot.

Act II, Scene II, Mrs. Wildgoose’s house, cellar, that afternoon

to enter Shock and Strange
Strange: Cellar! this be a daungeon.
Shock: Oh yes, Mrs. Wildgoose’s house is built on the remains
of an abbey of the Benedictines, the black monks.
Strange: Wha did the brothers need with a daungeon?
Shock: Ah well, one doesn’t know any more,
but old folk say the Bishop of London kept prisoners here,
those he wanted secret.
Strange: Bishops, puritan ranters, big men.
Shock: A little window into the soul they want,
and if they don’t like what they see
into the stocks or the pit.
Strange: Grandad just lit a canda to Our Lady
and th’alderman had him in the stocks.
Shock: Do you hold to the Old Faith?
Strange: Nah, but no harm in a canda,
we have twain now.
Shock: That’s logic—
see that pentagram,
that was not here when the black monks decamped in ’36,
they do say, the old folk, that Kit Marlowe, the playwright,
visited Mrs. Wildgoose in the old days and held black mass.
Strange: Larking with his mates, jigging and chaunting,
aye, I sah Marlowe when a lad carrying pots in th’Arrow,
ah, th’old Arrow, burnt, and the Globe Playhause built over it,
burnt just yesterday, soon it’ll be twenty years ago toe.

**Shock:** Don’t go sad Strange.
**Strange:** Not sad, had me luck,
the prince’s man, none would ever ha thought that
when I worked in th’Arrow.

**Shock:** And how did you come to be with the prince?
**Strange:** A fit of strength and a whippen dog,
man was who was whippen a dog, and I took whip from him,
’a lashed me across the face, and I tossed him in Thamsis,
the prince was tha incognito and took me up
to be his man and bodyguard, but only away from court,
a court they have gentleman guards for the prince,
but roving incognito the streets I guard him, none tangles,
the character of a murderer serves,
but I never murdered none,
butchery on a calf and I crys—
ah wha’s that glassy e’en, sprits!

**Shock:** That’s just Tidster, the cat,
how did you get down here Tidster,
if you got down here, you can get yourself out,
oh all right maiow, maiow, lift you up and out the door,
we live to serve you Tids—
you’re not afraid of a little pussy Strange?

**Strange:** Glassy e’en they ha,
look at you knowing like,
kept by witches.

**Shock:** Now no such talk, there are no witches,
there are wise women who can make a bit of charm
for Lass who wants Lad,
or a bit of physic for ailing folk.

**Strange:** You said Mrs. Wildgoose black-massed with yon star.

**Shock:** Oh, pentagrams are tomfoolery out of books,
charms are made from simples, herbs,
at least best not to go further
or those big men come after you—
now what about Sir Walter yesterday,
does he always work so fast?

**Strange:** Oh, aye, nothing to japing widows,
they know how and ha their own means,
you can take it or leave it,
I and the widow of th’Arrow,
she kept me and I worked her tannery,
ah poor calfies, ah that’s butchery,
and the widow of th’Arrow died
and I had to hauling on the docks
till the whippen dog and the prince.

**Shock:** Mrs. Wildgoose does take it a bit,
folk do say that old benchers of the Inns of the Court
still visit at times and pay in favors from the bench,
and she keeps her black mass of hair in a bottle,
I found the recipe, I might need a recipe on a day myself—
do you have to hurry back with my Lady’s message for the prince.

Strange: Nah, I slip in to Whitehall with the password after sup,
and the prince be reading and writing and rhyming, he rhymes pretty,
and we ha a thimble of that Scotch water,
and he reads me his rhymes, tis harmless,
and I goes to sleep with his dogs,
a dog never bites a friend.

Shock: Ah, then we have time for me—
to show you the room with the chains.

exit Shock and Strange

Act II, Scene III, Garden Tower, Tower of London,
July 1, late afternoon

present all, except Bronwen, Killigrew, Mrs. Wildgoose,
Shock and Shakespeare who enter

Bronwen: Mr. Shakespeare, Prince Henry and his friends,
pardon my deception, but no deception, no surprise.

Shakespeare: Your Highness, Sir Walter, all,
I’m honored out of words, in fact, the steps have honored me out of breath,
but thank you Lady Bronwen for the surprise—
Your Highness at your service.

Henry: Mr. Shakespeare it is we that are honored.

Shakespeare: Your Highness, breathing now,
but tongue-tied, but then again, with Sir Walter here,
and Mr. Harriot who I’ve met long years ago,
I seem myself at a show of monsters,
where I am Chimera.

Ralegh: I seem myself the effigy of myself,
and you Thomas.

Harriot: The Sun eclipsed.

Henry: Gentlemen be at ease, but I confess to mirth,
for me being in a tableau vivant is natural, all my life,
I’ve only recently found how not to be ME in capital letters,
but Mr. Shakespeare you are our prize capture today,
I’ve seen your plays since ever I came to London,
and seen yourself, are you not Banquo, my ancestor,
not Enobarbus, the praiser of Cleopatra,
and here you find a mighty company,
your friend, my new friend, Mr. Killigrew of the Inner Temple,
a small two-finger salute

Mrs. Wildgoose, famous in Southwark,

Henry kneels and kisses her hand

my Lady Bronwen Annesley, fair maid of Rydal,
looking at her hands, she raises her face and smiles

her maid and familiar Shock,
sitting on the floor at Bronwen’s knees looking witchy,

Henry pets her like a cat

my man Strange, he is quite at home in the Tower,
steps out of the shadows for a moment

George Villiers, a gentleman of the royal court,
a grand courtier’s bow

Thomas Harriot, who can explain light,
a nod of the head
Ralegh and I, Henry or Harry or Hal,

nothing and whatever Henry chooses to do
and from beneath our very feet I summon
the little princes of York,

blows out a candle, a wisp of smoke rises
such a Parliament has never assembled
to remonstrate a king,
to beg that he explain his governance,
tell us how you write your plays.

Shakespeare: Called upon to descant—
like a grammar master on Plautus or Seneca, equally dead,
what I speak will lack form, but it will not be madness,
I speak first of experience, I have never been out of England,
ever crossed the channel,
our wall against the envy of less happier lands,
but I was born in Stratford in the heart of England,
played at Robin Hood in the Forest of Arden,
was a countryman and tradesman—in gloves of all things,
but drawn by the plays I’d seen,
I left my town when no longer young and hearth and home,
to learn the player’s art,
and since have played here and toured to Devon, Sir Walter,
and north as far as Carlisle, Your Highness,
oh all the stage is a scaffold in a country inn,
where we have our entrances and exits,
flounce and posture, out-Herod Herod,
and bombast out a blank verse,
the crowd roaring or hissing, animate,
I’ve counted the coins, held horses,
played ten roles in a play,
but not only the theater have I seen,
have I not listened in the all the taverns of London,
heard the soldiers boast and how they speak,
the sailors who have seen the vexed Bermoothes,
counted coins with money lenders, argued with landladies,
been in those writers quarrels, nothing so absurd,
I’ve heard the rant of whores and seen their pathos,
Desdemona and Doll Tearsheet are sisters,
I’ve been among the lords too,
was I not the man of my Lord Southampton,
strangely brother of my Lady Bronwen,
and more than this I’ve read,
did I not read all the writings of our time,
Holinshed, Thomas More, the Courtier,
Plutarch, Boccaccio, Petrarch,
did I not read Wyatt, Sidney, and Ralegh too,
not studied the plays of Lyly and Kyd,
and Marlowe, dead since ‘93,
even then at that early age, in my vanity,
I was the greater poet than Marlowe,
his life he condemned in comparison to liberty of speech¹,
he was my brother-rival—
at times I seem to float a mist upon the Thames
and curl up the high streets and into alleys
into the homes, counting houses, courts,
dens of thieves, witches’ covens, a shadow—
how does it start, a play,
why there’s some old story tried and popular,
perhaps already a play,
some person moves me, I write them a speech
from which the essence is distilled,
and you must give them your very best support
because you love them,
for them soar, steal, or strip yourself,
or two characters come into play,
lovers say, then each must answer each,
convention says that young and bright
must war and love, at first sight and at last breath,
and you spin it out in between,
there are scenes crying to be written,
often before the Sun rises in my bed
my head is spinning dialogue,
God help me to remember it when I rise,
then the good scenes must be pasted together
with just plain scenes, but do not think this bad,
a play cannot be merely good scenes,
one must rest from the peaks in the valleys,
we live by tomfoolery—
a play’s not life, life is drawn out ridiculous,
who ever overhears complete conversations,
except in the stalls,
lovers can take years or at least three meetings,
but I must make them love in three repartees,
life does not speak verse, people mean bloody well what they say,
“it’s cold, it’s hot, where are the jakes?”
in a play every good line must have an underline
that signifies it’s place in the whole,
or, and this I find momentous,
a good line may conjure a world, more than ever I intend,
and that packs a play with richness that doesn’t fade,
life is shapeless
at least as those of us trapped in time perceive it,
a play must be coherent, at best every bit is a surprise,
but in the end every bit should fit,
the audience should be enchanted,
somehow the play has meaning, somehow life has meaning—
I’ve often been asked what of the persons before or after
or even in between the scenes,
I don’t know, I’m not paid to think out their lives for them,
I wonder myself, after Hamlet dies, what does Horatio do,
returns to Wittenberg and meets the turbulent monk,
and Rosalind and Orlando, happy are they?
but perhaps Rosalind, after she’s worn pants ’n hose,
will play his boy for life—
it’s the not saying too much that lets them live,
then enter the actors, I’m one myself,  
I trust to them the lines, their speed and their suspense,  
on the page the play is dead, only on the stage is life,  
even if only the stage of the mind,  
I’m myself a muddler on the stage, swell a progress,  
carry a spear, oh I can be a playcard king,  
but I can’t take them into myself, the audience,  
now Richard Burbage, why he is Hamlet, Lear, Antony,  
for a moment,  
and there was that boy actor,  
Desdemona, Lady Mac, and the Queen of Egypt,  
he died in the plague of ’09—  
what is behind scenes in my mind,  
all the world seems disintegrated,  
I must uplift it, be the Atlas of the Globe,  
uphold kings, but kings must be good kings, good kings,  
and did not the old Queen have hands sliced off  
for only an offending word,  
and she was a good queen by all reckoning,  
all wanton authority ordering hands sliced off,  
oh I show the way of things,  
but it takes no genius to see I hate unkindness—  
I seem to have said too much,  
but there are volumes more if I went tedious,  
and—and—my plays in last resort are myself.  

Henry: Perhaps we have asked too much,  
I feel insubstantial, temporary as a mere person,  
but ignorance is no virtue—  
Mr. Shakespeare your plays dim already in the minds of men,  
I have never seen many of your early works,  
what of Richard III and Romeo and Juliet,  
I have never seen them and if printed  
where are the pamphlets now,  
could you not give us an edition of them all.  

Shakespeare: Plays are business,  
my partners in the King’s Men live by the playing of plays  
that no other company can have or have rightly,  
al my old plays are in the repertoire  
ready to be bodied forth when they seem in fashion again.  

Henry: Companies fail, perhaps the King’s Men  
will survive the flaming Globe, but perhaps not,  
and where will the play scripts be then,  
already there are plays remembered only as titles by old men,  
print is immortality,  
the prince does not command,  
I, Henry Stewart, or if you please Mr. H.S.,  
beg you for edition.  

Shakespeare: It could be done,  
perhaps my partners will consent,  
even my newest plays seem out of fashion,  
one of two Henry VIII’s burnt to ashes but two days ago,  
a complete edition might bring in more than hiding,  
I will try to get consent, but I will not press for press,
but if press, then I beg to dedicate my plays to Mr. H.S.

**Henry:** Granted with my thanks—
you all should know that Sir Walter’s
*History of the World* is dedicated to me,
and Mr. Harriot’s treatise on light,
in which the law of refraction,
unknown to ancients or moderns, will be revealed,
will be dedicated to me when it is finished,
if all else fails, it will be remembered
that I honored the three greatest men
alive in England in this age,
my crest, chosen for me in infancy,
—show them my livery, Strange—three floppy feathers,
was prophetic of this—
and now Mr. Shakespeare you should know that
the fair maid of Rydal tried to surprise us with each other,
but princes have many spies and I was prepared slightly,
there are no laurels on the banks of the Thames,
but there are oaks sacred to Zeus, father of the Muses,
I cut this branch and shaped it to a wreath,
now this leafy froth on the widest brim descends,
I crown you our poet laureate.

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**Act III. Scene I, Mrs. Wildgoose’s house, July 2,**
**early afternoon**

*Bronwen sitting, enter Henry*

**Bronwen:** Your Highness G’day to you,
wandering the streets in rough soldier wear?

**Henry:** My best incognito, Strange is my sergeant,
we’re paid off and ready to sin.

**Bronwen:** You look too downy-cheeked to be a veteran.

**Henry:** Looks are deceptive, Sir Walter was a veteran
of four years in the religious war in France by age sixteen,
and he came back beardless, but for all of that
what he’d seen and done, I’ve only been told a little,
the war at sea with Spain was in comparison a clean thing,
Ralegh says God’s mercy must be infinite
or no soldier would ever pass into Paradise.

**Bronwen:** Oh be a king of peace, peace is best,
much as the men of renown move us,
much as their power has shook the Earth,
peace is best, I speak as a woman,
keep the sons and husbands in England,
the navy is our wall and pride,
we are happy with our island.

**Henry:** Wars may come, and a king may have to earn his spurs in France.

**Bronwen:** You are not Henry V and that play is not my favorite.

**Henry:** Ah, well the peace with France and Spain seems solid.
perhaps the great wars are all passed forever,
all trade and progress now—
Bronwen I have come to be indelicate,
as a prince I cannot choose for myself,
a princess of France, Spain, or, as it seems, Mongolia,
will be negotiated for me, a treaty clause,
an augmentation to the peace and trade that we speak of,
but for myself, none is fairer, none is better than yourself,
we can have a place for ourselves, all of Hampton Court say,
a court away from the court, our own court,
or more modestly only Rydal, what you will,
it has become so clear to me that we are not children now,
become mine, I love you.

Bronwen: Henry, no and no and no—
do not ask for that, do not spoil us,
do not spoil yourself,
we can’t live hidden, not at Hampton Court, not at Rydal,
not from your princess, our queen-to-come,
not from ourselves,
you are precious to me as my prince-friend, my brother,
I know all about arranged marriages, all society bows to them,
all society bows to paramours, but it is not the best,
why should we, either of us, settle for less,
I want the real thing, love and marriage,
and I want the real thing for you
and you must give your princess her chance for it too,
I cannot be one body with you and be myself.

Henry: I desire you, I wake up dreaming of you,
you would be so good to have beside me in the evening, in the morning,
do you not love me?

Bronwen: Not that way, it is no kindness to pretend it either.

Henry: Kindness! kindness is to help me,
as a prince I bound to loneliness,
you would be my company and my love.

Bronwen: I will always be your company,
I will always be at Rydal for you with words and memories,
be kind to me, do not ask again.

Henry: I will ask and ask and ask!
I am a prince and though I will never command you,
my need for you goes beyond that of merely me,
England itself would bless you for yourself giving.

Bronwen: That’s sophistry, your pain is common pain,
you will have to bear it, I will not yield.

Henry: I beg—I beg your leave, my lady.

Bronwen: Your Highness.

exit Henry

Bronwen: Now I am misery.

after a moment enter Shock

Shock: Oh my lady what has happened,
the prince is very angry,
is it at me and Strange?—
we were in the cellar playing with chains
and just at the point of release
the prince burst in and ordered Strange away,  
he was red-faced and silent,  
if only he had roared laughter,  
I’d been abashed, but this, this,  
I’ve never seen him cruel before.  
**Bronwen:** Not you Shock, I,  
I have rebuffed him,  
Shock there is a domain of myself,  
even for a prince, even for my prince-friend,  
I will not yield that domain,  
it would betray myself,  
and he had no right—  
oh he is still at times just a boy,  
I am wholly woman now,  
he will ask forgiveness by and by,  
and we will be friends on different terms,  
but no use pretending that now is not misery,  
let’s cry and take to our beds,  
perhaps tomorrow we will ride away to Rydal.

**Act III, Scene II, The Prince’s Room in the Prince Arms, on the south side of Fleet Street, later that afternoon**

*enter Henry and Villiers*

**Henry:** This is the Prince’s Arms,  
established as long ago 1610 I’m proud to say,  
and this is my room, the Prince’s Room,  
see the three floppy feathers plastered on the ceiling,  
of course, I’m just an honorary patron,  
the landlord is freeholder,  
but he lets me use this room to entertain gratis  
when convenient, of course,  
and, of course, I tip like a prince should,  
and yet I think that this room is really my room,  
I have no establishment of my own yet from my father,  
no other place to bring my friends just for myself,  
you see I’ve given some books,  
*The Principal Navigations of the English Nation*, Richard Hakluyt,  
*The Chronicles of England*, Raphael Holinshed,  
and *The Defense of Poesy*, Philip Sidney,  
and there’s my globe, and there’s my boyhood sword,  
this room is the first earnest of my kingdom,  
I think I will return here at times in all my years,  
especially as now when out of sorts,  
it is my haunt.  
**Villiers:** It’s good, good wood, good window,  
a view of Fleet, the sound of the carts rumbling,  
take six fellows and their mistresses, a fiddler,  
enough floor for a dance with table back,  
enough table for a deck of cards to pass,  
enough shadow for just a friend, a bottle of sack, and a candle,  
when you are out of sorts.  
**Henry:** I pressed my Lady Bronwen,
and was ruder and redder than I meant,
and cursed Strange, but now I’m paying,
I’ve begged his pardon and gave him gold
to treat some sailors with down below.

**Villiers:** Take my advice to the devil, but—
ask for the lady’s forgiveness at once.

**Henry:** Sent her a note already,
and asked to be received again on the old terms,
it was my maladdress, my own damnation,
but at another moment, less the prince, more the man,
she might have yielded and we both happier for it,
at least when old and needing another bond to youth,
already I’m old enough to regret lost time, lost joy.

**Villiers:** Now Your Highness is making me feel a dotard—
but how about that Muscovite princess,
she’d make up for lost youth.

**Henry:** That scimitar aroused you Villy?

**Villiers:** I wonder if I could go on embassy to Muscovy,
they say the city is Constantinopolis in wood,
they say the winters are white bears,
they say the boyars are bearded bears,
and dead drunk is the only style,
I’d teach them what is a fine milord Anglais—
the lady was proud and chaste.

**Henry:** Oh, yes, but she plays the tease too,
poor Mr. Shakespeare is her lapdog already,
she’s strung him along something awful,
he’s acting out his plays with her
as if she hadn’t seen them all in Oxford,
but that is all Diana-thing,
the sweetness of a blush, the flight of poetry—
probably Sir Walter is no good guide to women,
Bronwen’s quite amused at the old rake,
but that’s a pash for a bit of bad out of her stars,
I’m too much in them.

**Villiers:** Ralegh’s a dazzler,
the favorite of the Old Queen when
she was just young enough yet to yield,
not that she ever did,
the man who would found a nation in America,
the Shepherd of the Ocean in Spenser’s story,
the would-be conquistador of El Dorado,
the poet who rises to poetry by will alone,
the historian of the whole history of the world,
the hero of the tragedy our Mr. Shakespeare will never write.

**Henry:** Tragic yes, but still he lives,
my father will free him, I will see to it, when the time is ripe—
but a tragic hero has a flaw,
what’s Ralegh’s? I’m too young to know,
I was in my nonage, a mere Scot at the trial time.

**Villiers:** I was not even a stripling then myself,
but Sir Edward Coke, it is said, was advocatus diaboli itself,
old jurymen tell me that the case was all hearsay, slanders,
well almost all, and, forgive me Highness, the king was ill-disposed.  
*Henry:* That should not be said to me, however well known,  
ah, but what’s the flaw in judicial murder?  
*Villiers:* Hypocrisy, always better in posture than in fact,  
the colony in America was lost, the colonists dead,  
waiting for the relief that never came,  
there was the Armada to worry about,  
but Ralegh was shipping privateers even in the Armada days,  
could not one relief ship have made Virginia in ’88?  
and where is El Dorado, in the Americas or nowhere at all,  
and he lost the old Queen’s favor,  
true, he got it back because one does not throw away a Ralegh,  
and then there was the plot,  
Ralegh was not in it, clear enough to us,  
but clear enough he was never frank either,  
there is a murkiness in his soul,  
all those old Elizabethans, the best of them were plotters,  
the old Queen lived against the shadows,  
Old Queen Mary of bloody memory, young Jane Grey the unqueen,  
her brother-in-law, King Phillip of Spain,  
and Mary Queen of Scots, your grandmother,  
there are alternatives, even now,  
I speak without reserve note,  
the dotard Earl of Huntingdon is a Plantagenet,  
though that appellation is forbidden,  
certain the Earl’s an innocent old sot,  
but in men’s words he’s not a Scot.  
*Henry:* Oh, devil take you Villy,  
Ralegh would never have countenanced that nonsense.  
*Villiers:* Not against you,  
you are his prince and, if I may say so, he likes your person,  
he’s fatherly, it’s one of his qualities,  
but in 1603 he knew you not,  
and remember Ralegh is a thinker,  
the whole *History of the World* is a study of kings,  
ever doubt that he will judge you.  
*Henry:* So do all men, impertinent of them, but there it is.  
*Villiers:* Not all men are Ralegh.

**Act III, Scene III, The Garden Tower, Tower of London, that evening**

*enter Henry*  
*Henry:* Sir Walter pardon my lateness, but I was on the river.  
*Ralegh:* Your Highness, your servant as always.  
*Henry:* What do you know of kings?  
*Ralegh:* What I’ve read and been told,  
I’ve only ever known a Queen.  
*Henry:* Did you love her?  
*Ralegh:* As a body no, her bloom faded long before I met her,  
but the soul, yes, steeped in learning, schooled in a hard school,  
driven by passions that could never be satisfied,  
she died a virgin, if you don’t know that, you don’t know her,
the act was death, death in childbirth,
death by murder, for how else did her mother die,
betrayal by love, think of your own grandmother,
but she loved men, I for my brilliance,
Leicester for himself, Essex to the ends of shame,
between fair and fear, desire and duty,
she was the captain of our enterprise,
the imperfect person of our hope.

**Henry:** How good does a king or queen have to be?

**Ralegh:** As good as they can be,
they must put all their qualities to the test,
I won’t praise you, you have yet to run the race.

**Henry:** What about that divine shrubbery
all about a king in bed?
does that not uphold a king in all cases?
when does service end and plotting begin?

**Ralegh:** A king is not a god,
though your father has claimed as much in a fashion,
and a king of England is a king in Parliament,
Parliament and the estates of England uphold a king,
no man or woman can rule on their own brains,
select counselors from every shire, every burgh,
men who are leaders on their own turf,
balance them, never raise up any faction to be your only help,
ever cast any important faction down so low that they lose hope,
let their collective wisdom be your strength,
your strength is your disinterest,
only one born to authority and duty
can be the king of all England.

**Henry:** And you will be the chief of my counselors?

**Ralegh:** If you will it, it is my hope for myself,
it is also my hope that it will be best for you,
but in no one repose all your trust,
Robert Cecil, my old enemy-friend, was a shrewd man in London,
a man to all of Europe politic,
you’ll need a man like that, a man of business,
your friend Villiers is a seductress,
about the court and the ladies he’ll play his part,
but to order about rough Westcountrymen,
the men who man your ships, muster to your colors,
there’s my part, and more than that
all my being is for greatness, you know your own heart.

**Henry:** My own heart—
Cecil is dead a year, and pardon me, you are not young,
Villiers has great talents, he is of my generation.

**Ralegh:** I’m not the man to protest against a man
risen by fair address and Apollo’s own face,
but I don’t see the stuffing in him for a chief counselor,
use him according to his merits.

**Henry:** Truth or jealousy?

**Ralegh:** Jealous? you should be jealous,
he tried to make Bronwen—
and failed.
Henry: Liar, hypocrite, how do you know!
Ralegh: I have my spys at court,
yourself first of all,
I know as well as anyone, who’s topping whom,
you know them both, think it out for yourself.
Henry: Did you plot against my father?
Ralegh: No Your Highness—
no, but I was aware of talk and I said nothing,
but talk can mean many things, and a man disloyal today
can be loyal again after he’s received favors,
on mere talk I will not betray a man—
at least when I’m at my best,
I’ve been a hypocrite.

Henry: Whose will is done in the last resort,
king or Parliament?
Ralegh: The world is not what it was,
the gentlemen and merchants of England read all of history,
they know their Erasmus, their Machiavelli, their Francis Bacon,
the fourth greatest man alive in England,
they know the limits of the wisdom of any king,
they know their own interests and worth,
in the last resort give way to Parliament.

Henry: Good-night Sir Walter.
exit Henry

Ralegh: There dies my hope,
Elizabeth, I have done you a last service,
Lord Burghley you have had your revenge,
the very tone of my voice, the pith of my words,
aped your very tone and very pith—
but that tone was never heard by Elizabeth,
hh, “Lord Burghley, God’s death,”—
I will never again roam England,
mewed in this Bloody Tower till the end,
or in yonder yard there on my scaffold
when I’m too weak with age to make a show,
Essex, old friend Robert, I did not gloat at your head on the gate,
mine will join yours to grind grin in the Sun and rain,
faugh let me pull it off now,
damm, still too tightly screwed,
what did the wind the say when I last waited the last morning:
“when you come again to give the world the lie,
will you teach us how to live and show us how to die.”
faugh I’ve taught nothing and I’ll whimper to the axe
and I’m no atheist:
“Give me my scallop-shell of quiet,
My staff of faith to walk upon,
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation,
My gown of glory, hope’s true gage,
And thus I’ll make my pilgrimage.”
Act IV, Scene I, Mrs. Wildgoose’s house, July 4, early morning

*enter Killigrew*

**Killigrew:** My ladies? is there anyone at home? what the devil is happening?

*enter Shock*

**Shock:** Oh Mr. Killigrew.

**Killigrew:** Shock what has happened, you are distraught, I’m fresh come from the country, just off a horse, the bells of all the churches are tolling death, is it the king!

**Shock:** Prince Henry’s dead.

**Killigrew:** My God— how in God’s name, how Shock?

**Shock:** The prince went swimming in the Thames last afternoon, and caught a sudden fever, his body fluxed all out, the decline was faster than rumor, for even at midnight the town still hadn’t heard, we hadn’t heard, and then at that hour, horsemen came to sweep my lady to Whitehall, I, her satellite, was swept along by her gravity, my lady is as private a friend of the prince as a prince can have, so it was only when he called in fever swoon for her that any sought her out, we flew through doctors, bishops, guards, the king and queen themselves, I tailing on my lady’s skirt, and he knew her and gripped her hand, but could not speak and was then lost to sense, we were pushed back to a corner with Strange supporting me, and waited hours as the breathing failed and all the mess of fluids and muck came out, as the Sun broke the rim of the world, he breathed his last.

**Killigrew:** God save us all, how is my Lady Bronwen?

**Shock:** We came away at once, we are only the prince’s friends and nothing more, we had nothing more to say or do at court, we were there for him alone, my Lady Bronwen fainted into sleep.

**Killigrew:** I will not break her sleep, but I will not be far off, but yourself Shock, you seem flat gone, why are you not in your bed.

**Shock:** I was putting Strange to bed sir, he came back with us, he is the prince’s man only and has no place at court, oh Mr. Killigrew could you find him some position,
his face stops a clock, his fist fells a dockside bully,
but he is very gentle and needs protection,
the prince would have provided for him,
but this sudden end left no time for provision.

**Killigrew:** Do not worry now,
perhaps I could use a bailiff of his character,
he and I will compound on this in good time,
do not worry now,
is there any else of news that you can tell.

**Shock:** The prince called for Sir Walter too,
but the king would not hear of this, so Strange tells,
the king has no love for Sir Walter,
Sir Walter was left in the Tower,
but Mr. Villiers was there at the deathbed,
he was flat out struck too,
the king leaned on him and they cried together.

**Killigrew:** Mrs. Wildgoose?

**Shock:** Gone to the country yesterday.

**Killigrew:** You’re flat out gone,
take to your bed, but let me sit here for awhile,
and guard the door,
I’m at a loss at what to do or say
as all of England is.

*exit Shock*

**Act IV, Scene II, Mrs. Wildgoose’s house, a long moment later**

*enter Bronwen*

**Killigrew:** Lady Bronwen, I can barely speak,
I’m without words almost,
it is not a good day for words,
except I’m sorry beyond words,
should I go?

**Bronwen:** What cannot be spoken is thought,
and we are out of time to day,
beyond the bounds of the world,
so what is thought can be spoken,
speak your truth.

**Killigrew:** I envied the prince,
his careless power of rank unmerited by anything
but birth in Holyroodhouse in Scotland,
I envied his—his whatever,
but now there’s only pity,
he is among the strengthless dead,
he promised fair.

**Bronwen:** Oh he is the king of might-have-beens,
you had no cause to envy his whatever,
I had taken myself out the lists,
I would not spoil the bed of his princess
in whatever foreign land she lives,
I’d hoped to live at Rydal with a gentleman husband,
and Henry, if it pleased him, could come to visit
and I would listen and not flatter and not scheme, 
be for him the promise that never fades, 
smart lad, he’s played me false, 
and reversed the roles, he is the promise that will never fade—
except for holidays, I do not see myself at Rydal now, 
my years extend perhaps half a century or more 
here in London, amid the slings and arrows 
as Mr. Shakespeare calls them, 
you had no cause to envy his whatever, 
speak your truth.  
**Killigrew:** Lady Bronwen—  
**Bronwen:** Bronwen!  
**Killigrew:** Bronwen I love you and ask for your hand,  
**Bronwen:** Killigrew I love you, take it—  
for life, forever. 

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**General Note**

The play is mostly unhistorical, but the persons are historical, except for Bronwen Annesley, John Killigrew, Shock, and Strange. The Globe Playhouse burnt down on 1613 June 29 during a performance of *Henry VIII*, the last play that is mainly due to Shakespeare. Prince Henry died on 1612 November 12, but I’ve given him 8 more months. The story of Cordell Annesley is loosely based on history, but I’ve set it in a slightly earlier time in the last years of Elizabeth and given Cordell a first husband who was a cousin with the same surname Annesley. Prince Henry was an admirer of Ralegh and the prince’s death was the death of Ralegh’s hopes. Ralegh dedicated his *The History of the World* to the prince. The book went through at least ten editions in the 17th century: more than the works of Shakespeare.

One ahistorical point I’d like to correct. Ralegh was not an old rake. After his marriage in 1592—and he married for love—he gave up his old ways.

Notes to the text and references follow.

**Notes:**

1. A near quote from Thomas Nashe, a friend of Marlowe (Ro-113).

**References**


—It is probably controversial, but it seems all right to me. But we live in the great age of rehash.

Young, G. M. 1948, *Today and Yesterday: Collected Essays and Addresses* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis)  
—An essay in this book first alerted me to the story of Cordell Annesley.
Play III
Abdera
In any case this is the kind of picture we have of Euripides in his last years: a figure solitary, austere, with a few close intimates, wrapped up in living for what he would call 'the service of the Muses', in music, poetry and speculation; capable still of thrilling his audiences with an intensity of tragic emotion such as no other poet had ever reached; but bowed with age, somewhat friendless, and like other solitaries a little strange in his habits; uncomprehendingly admired and hated, and moving always through a mist . . .


Democritus had a long life—some say he lived to be a hundred . . . No works of Leucippus or Democritus have survived. They were engulfed in the surge of disapproval generated by the great Athenian schools. Our knowledge of them depends on quotations in surviving authors, criticisms by their rivals, and summaries by the ancient historians of philosophy . . . The total disappearance of all the many books of Democritus is one of the most lamentable literary catastrophes of the classical world.


An unnamed woman, who used to live with him, cremated his body in the fire set by the assassins . . . the hetaira Timandra, who might be the woman . . . No other Athenian general of his generation had the same combination of charisma, daring, and intelligence . . . The truth is that he had made too many enemies . . . All this is hindsight. Alcibiades could not have known that he was already an anachronism. He had risen from the flames more than once . . . Alcibiades died as he had lived, in the midst of a whirlwind of events: vital, controversial, admired, and hated, and trying once again to become his country’s leader.

Abdera

Dramatis Personae

Euripides (484?–406?): Athenian playwright
Democritus (460?–360?): the atomist philosopher, citizen of Abdera, he is 52 years old at the time of play, but looks much younger
Alkibiades (450?–404): Athenian politician and general
Capricorn: one of the Archons of Abdera, a wealthy, older, Falstaffian man

Psyche: a hetaera, citizen of Abdera, she is 26, her name is Greek for breath, spirit, soul, and mind
Electra: Psyche’s servant, also a singer

General Setting

The time is the fall of 408 BCE, the 23rd year of the Peloponnesian War. Athens has made a heroic effort to recover from the loss of an army of its best men in Sicily in 413 BCE, but is now torn by internal divisions and treasons. Sparta, its allies, the rebels from the Athenian hegemony, and the Persian empire are crystalizing into an ultimately unbeatable strong enemy alliance.

Still in the fall of 408 BCE, there is some hope that Athens can survive its still uncoordinated enemies.

The general setting is Abdera, a city—a polis—on the north shore of the Aegean Sea. Abdera is a minor member of the Athenian hegemony, but has oscillated (in the play) between half-hearted rebelliousness, and resentful obedience and fear of the devil they don’t know. At present, it is officially loyal, but the people are really waiting on events.

The actual settings are the Garden of Antigone, and Psyche’s and Capricorn’s houses both of which are near the Garden.

Act I, Scene I, Garden of Antigone, morning

Psyche is alone, dressed in simple white. Her appearance suggests a timeless beauty and dignity.

Psyche: Abdera is on the north littoral of the Aegean, the Aegean is a bounded sea, bounded by Hellas, ancient Hellas on the west, Ionia on the east, the flowery islands, Samos, Chios, Lesbos, Rhodes, holy Delos, tragic Melos, and Minoan Crete is south, around about is the larger world, Scythian north, boundless Persia east, Egypt and Nubia below the sea, and west is Italy near to the Blessed Isles I believe, surely the Hellenes in Italy can almost see them, the Blessed Isles in the rays of the setting Sun, above the heaven of stars, below the house of Hades, but O where is there a city, a city for me, when I was girl I thought Athens, after the war, Athens, Athens, the beloved, Athens, the hated, the scorners and deceiver and the greatest of cities,
but the war has no end
and I will grow old and alone in Abdera,
when I was young I lived with my traveling father
and lived in many cities and on islands,
but not the Blessed Isles.

Democritus enters and sees Psyche. He hesitates
and then makes to withdraw. She sees him.

Democritus: Kyria Psyche, my apologies for disturbing you,
let me slip nimbly away.

Psyché: No need Kyrie,
are you not Democritus, the philosopher,
indeed I have seen you often and heard one of your lectures,
a philosopher should lecture more often,
Protagoras did not hide his light,
but ravished us with his words, when he was not away with kings,
even at 70 his voice honey-warm filled halls
and a single aphorism was quoted for months,
and you speak well too—if differently.

Democritus: Indifferently, but praise is sweet, but I’m modest of words,
and writing is my true style, one treatise after another,
a solid record for myself and my appreciaters,
one can hope that one’s writings will be “a possession for all time”
as this Athenian general has put it
at the head of his history of our age of redundant war,
I will send you one of my works,
not a technical one, but one close to my heart.

Psyché: That is brave, that is good, I will read it—
but tell me where are the Blessed Isles,
I believe they can be seen from Italy,
just as the Sun sets red over the red tide.

Democritus: I believe you are correct,
from Italy they can be seen,
I think Pythagoras has written about them,
somewhere in his treatise on reincarnation
and the advisability of living principally on beans.

Psyché: Beans, beans, why forever beans?

Democritus: Pythagoras believes they are the food of the psyche.

Psyché: My food, why forever,
well I’ve pecked at them in my time I dare say,
but to feed the body, not Psyche.

Democritus: But if the body is not the psyche, what is the psyche?

Psyché: Psyche is not the body,
Psyche is winged and a whirring rainbow,
a peacock that flies over land and sea,
and dreams of rest on the Blessed Isles—you are a materialist?

Democritus: Yes, that is the accusation,
and yes I am, but subject to so many qualifications
that I reject categorization,
the body and the psyche are not antitheses,
but necessary things,
the body, and there are many bodies,
are realizations of the psyche,
I am realized here before you, but also realized in my writings,
I am a scroll as well as a human,
to communicate, psyche to psyche,
there must be body to body mediation.

Psycle: You are becoming indelicate considering my order of life.
Democritus: You are a great lady and I am speaking about philosophy.
Psycle: I thank you for the absence of irony,
but a great lady is not a great person,
you, I think, truly think, are a great person,
one who will be remembered in time after,
I will not be remembered,
there is no path to greatness for me,
even the greatness of the hetaeras
requires a great man in a great city,
Aspasia had Pericles and Athens,
I have just my good friends—and they are good to me,
I do not scorn them—and here I am in Abdera,
O I am a castaway on a forgotten shore in a forgotten time
in a forgotten war that has no end,
your kind of greatness can be anywhere,
you will be remembered for your atoms
when no man can name your city.

Democritus: Greatness is not contingent on remembrance
or renown of any kind,
if I am a great person, and I dispute, perhaps disingenuously, the title,
then I will be great even if all my writings powder to dust,
and I am remembered not at all,
and my atoms, if they are real, are real either way—
and Kyria Psycle here we are in the Garden of Antigone,
her greatness was there before it was ever called upon.

Psycle: You offer me the consolation of philosophy,
and I am consoled, but the noon-like Sun invokes my homegoing,
but I will read your book when it comes,
but I thank you for it, but we can meet again as friends.

Psycle nimbly slips away with a wave. Democritus waves,
hesitates and nimbly slips away.

Act I, Scene II, Psycle’s house about noon of the same
day

Psycle is reading a scroll and making little notes.

There is a knock at the door of the room.

Psycle: Come in my belovéd.

Capricorn and Electra enter

Capricorn: Today I am “belovéd,”
yesterday I was “you old goat,”
but I suppose that might be considered an endearment,
a touch of familiarity that marks us for comfortable creatures,
indeed when we are together—
well there’s been a lot of history already—
of course, you are still a child.

Psycle: I am in the old age of youth, Capri,

She pronounces Capri Capree like the island.
26 years as I live and breathe, 
and we are comfortable creatures and I am glad of my old friend.

**Electra:** Kyrie Capricorn is being mysterious today, 
his not staying for lunch, 
he’s come straight from the City Hall, 
I have my spies all over the city and I know, 
something is brewing up, 
the rich men were all snuffy and panicking, 
rushing about like the cat was loose, 
I hate them, they haven’t the guts of thievery.

**Capricorn:** to *Psyche* Isn’t she charming when she’s malicious, 
I wonder what I ever did before her straight talk set me straight, 
I guess I was a just panicky old thief, 
but poor old me, I still cling to the thought 
that without some rules of society, 
however imperfect the rules and maddening the society, 
we’d all be tearing each other apart like sharks in a frenzy, 
and when they rise up, the slaves, 
then it always ends in futile chaos and death 
for they have no new rules that work as well as the old.

**Electra:** I’m not rising up, you’d know it if I were, 
I’m looking out for myself and my mistress 
and I use all the weapons of a woman.

**Capricorn:** You don’t seem too handy with them.

**Electra:** Some men like honey, some like fire.

**Capricorn:** Ah, that’s true, 
but Electra perhaps we can pick this up at a later time, 
so exit Electra stage right.

*Electra exits*

**Psyche:** Capri?

**Capricorn:** Something is brewing up, 
and the rich men are all snuffy and panicking, 
but the boiling’s tomorrow, tonight is delight.

**Psyche:** Delight Capri?

**Capricorn:** The Archons of the city, request your presence— 
and Electra’s too—for the entertainment of a special guest of the city.

**Psyche:** I am not the city whore, I have my old friends, Capri, 
like my old friend Capri, and that is all I need—

*Capricorn is blandly silent*

well what is to be my pay?

**Capricorn:** Not a blessed thing, 
I explained to my colleague Archons, you are a patriot, 
it’s for the city, for Abdera.

**Psyche:** Is this guest of the city an honorable man? 
Zeus, he’s not a Persian, they are very handsome as rule, 
but that is sleeping with the enemy.

**Capricorn:** He’s not a Persian, he is a Hellene, an excellent man.

**Psyche:** Excellent man is not synonymous with honorable man, 
and you are very careful with your words as a rule.

**Capricorn:** An excellent man, I say, and useful to Abdera, 
he’s a general and not ghastly, 
his incognito while he’s here, 
but you will know who he is by and by.
Psyche: Zeus, it’s Alkibiades.

Capricorn: Don’t guess, and don’t tell, that is the rule of your order.

Psyche: That is my own rule.

Capricorn: Tonight at my house as the Sun is setting we dine, there will be a symposium, in fact, I rather think, lofty talk, you’ll fit right in, and Electra will sing and be silent, I’ve a taste for her myself, but this isn’t going to be a brawl, we’re all old sobersides, even you-know-who, his head isn’t what it used to be.

Psyche: I will come with Electra, will there be other performers?

Capricorn: Yes, Democritus the philosopher, now that Protagoras is drowned, the city must produce its other world-class sage to prove that we are not just hicks—and another guest of the city will be there, not a general, not a Persian, a voice, you’ll be surprised.

Psyche: Then I will be surprised.

Act I, Scene III, Garden of Antigone, the afternoon of the same day

Enter Psyche and Electra, perhaps arm in arm.

Psyche: Tonight, I am the champion of the city again and everything must be carried off in the best style, but given the heavyweights at the party—or so I’m led on—I won’t have to carry the conversation—just as well, I’m quite past it all—at 18, I portrayed the baby-whore come to life—with some appropriate hand or lip gesture “you like that, I know”—and at 21, I was this being of throb alone—although that was hit or miss, I’m not the actress Thaïs is known to be, I had to believe that there was love and when that became too much to believe there was nothing but tears and shame, now that I’m 26 and the famoustest courtesan in Abdera, it’s only ambassadors and they treat my presence as mere form, they’re gentlemen and mostly grandfathers, and by lamplight, we chat politics and literature, or gossip about the celebrities—it’s not the life others may think, it’s not the life of most hetaeras which is slavery ending in poverty, I’ve a measure of freedom and that is good, my Sissy and my Capri protect me.

Electra: Tonight, there might not be so much protection, I’ll bet it’s no ambassador, but a general, probably a young one, fresh from the beaches where the soldiers sweat and swear,
it could be Homeric.

Psyché: Oh, Sissy stop it,
Capri said the talk would be refined,
a refined man puts off his sweat with his armor—
but yes, we will likely get into physical
and I will act the lover as best I can.

Electra: Oh, that was just my inner procurress speaking,
I’ll be nearby and everything will go well.

Psyché: Let’s hide behind the pedestal,
I see Capri coming with Democritus—
Demon that’s who he is!—
and two others, they must be the guests of the city.

*Psyché and Electra hide behind the pedestal bearing, but not baring, Antigone.*

Capricorn, Democritus, Alkibiades, and Euripides enter.

Capricorn: The young men of Abdera walk about quoting *Andromeda*:
“Love, king of men under heaven, king in heaven too,”
and seem like to go on quoting for five hundred years,
Euripides you’d be elected king if you stayed among us.

Euripides: The sacrificial kind all too likely.
Alkibiades: “The King must die” and all that,
I’ve never envied those fellows —
but many people have tried to cast me in the role,
but I’m too old and canny now,
grey and creased, but I had a radiant beauty once,
I’ve got the dedicated poems to prove it.

Capricorn: I was a beauty too—
or so my mother always claimed—
but you are not so old Alkibiades,
if I reckon correctly, your father Cleinias said you were 4
in the year of his death at Coronea—sorry a painful subject—
that makes you 42 now, the youngest man in our party.

Alkibiades: You’re forgetting our philosopher,
the man’s a stripling, not over 30 definitely.

Democritus: I turned 52 in the spring,
and knew the men of the Persian War as they were in their strength.

Alkibiades: Zeus in Hell, I took you for a younger man,
suitable to patronize as I am oldster in philosophy,
a lover of Socrates, indeed an ex-lover of Socrates,
but you’re an elder, half a generation ahead,
have the decency man to be grey, lose a tooth or two,
maintain a stately waddle, grow a dewlap—
the pendulous fold under a cow’s throat don’t you know—
and stop this skipping about like a pony.

Democritus: I’ve simply chosen my grandparents well,
the old dears, all four of them, are over 90,
and betwixt and between them, they’ve a full set of wits and teeth,
they’re very sweet together, a double set of Baucis and Philemon,
presently they will turn into trees,
my paternal grandfather has an excellent understanding of philosophy too—
“what’s all this atom bullshit?” *in an old codger voice*—
I have cabbage soup with them every noon,
does me no end of good.
**Euripides:** You will outlive our age then and tell our story—do you write history or plays Democritus?

**Democritus:** Not yet, but I'm nothing if not a jack of all trades.

**Euripides:** Your works are well known in Athens.

**Democritus:** I went there and no one knew me—of course, I was only 8 then—

I remember seeing your *Cyclops*,

that was the first satyr play I'd ever seen—

but even then you were Euripides

and I felt sorry for the monster—

to be hurt forever.

**Euripides:** I've learnt a few more tricks since then Democritus, but you saw my point.

**Alkibiades:** See how they talk to each other Capricorn, as if we barely counted—

poor dears they can't help it,

and, of course, we do barely count—

an Archon and a general, pfui—

we are not worthy to be admitted to the society, currently numbering two, of greatest living men, we must perform a feat to prove ourselves—

we could bring about a just Peace.

**Capricorn** Hm, tricky.

**Euripides:** More than two, Sophocles still lives.

**Alkibiades:** There are four, Socrates walks the wide world.

**Euripides:** Socrates writes nothing, he barely can he tells me, he tells me he sees letters reversed half the time, thus everything he says is consigned to the wind, unlike Homer, no one will memorize his speech for it's all prose, a generation from now no one will know what he said, and even his name will be a hollow in men's minds, yet there is something terrific in his striding up the Agora, trying to define terms and undermining complacencies, engaging in his peculiar conversations which have a name already, Socratic dialogues: his parts are long and verbose, your part is short and to the point:

"Yes Socrates," "No Socrates,"

"Surely, O Socrates the Good is not the same as the Beautiful," naturally he has some enemies, he associates too much with aristocrats, corrupts youth, Alkibiades here is a prime example.

**Alkibiades:** I protest, my corruption was not because of Socrates, Socrates taught me to think, to roll with the punches of life, to live philosophically, the unexamined life is not worth living.

**Euripides:** His wife Xanthippe now, she is an intelligent person, she quite gets the fine points of my plays, she gave me a clue that helped my *Medea* to come off properly, now Sophocles's *Medea* went entirely wrong, all grotesque and grue, he really let rip on that one—great part for Thespis, of course.

**Alkibiades:** Socrates is brave as a lion, he saved my life in the Battle of Potidaea, he walks on water, leastways when it frozen in winter in Potidaea, and far from being off the path, his path is the true path,
the path to seeing how the Good is to be achieved,
virtue, excellence, the greatness of the city,
his words are written on the wind, but so it is with all Oracles,
Socrates defines progress, teaches ethics, right living,
the way for men who have lost the old gods,
philosophizing about nature, about atoms and the like,
this for humankind is esoterica, the true cosmos is ethical,
O Democritus, your style of philosophizing,
however intelligent—not to mention difficult—
is now out-of-date, you are—to coin a word—Presocratic.

**Democritus:** Why is it that everyone assumes I’m depraved,
I’m as ethical as the next man,
I will write a treatise on ethics that will be read in a thousand years,
twice that, “a possession for all time”.

**Euripides:** Who can tell the fate of written stuff,
in my boyhood it was still new-fangled to write anything, but the grocery list,
perhaps it will pass again out of fashion,
in any case, writing is not permanent,
old scrolls I saved from Granddad flake to pieces in my hand,
and copies are frequently illegible,
words are reversed, dog replaces god, etc.,
libraries are burned, languages evolve beyond recognition—
men say I speak the language of Marathon
and not in praise—
Democritus and Euripides two old bores,
good for schoolboy exercises for a few lives of men—
all attempts to transcend time are tragic,
and only the tragic transcends time,

As this last speech is said the men are moving off stage,
and the last words are heard from off stage.

**Electra:** So those are great men,
sniff, they’re not gods.

**Psyche:** No, they must fill up every second of time like the rest of us,
and I find it best treat them as everyone else
with common courtesy and good humor,
it’s only that they sometimes rise to peaks,
but that’s only for a few seconds, or for a few lines of writing.

**Electra:** I’ll bet Alkibiades, Capricorn, and the Archons are just messing around,
they’ll scheme and plot and do nothing good,
they won’t make the Peace or give us a rest,

As this last speech is said the men are moving off stage,
and the last words are heard from off stage.

**Psycha and Electra emerge from hiding.**
**Electra:** So those are great men,

**Psyche:** No, they must fill up every second of time like the rest of us,
and I find it best treat them as everyone else
with common courtesy and good humor,
it’s only that they sometimes rise to peaks,
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they’ll scheme and plot and do nothing good,
they won’t make the Peace or give us a rest,

As this last speech is said the men are moving off stage,
and the last words are heard from off stage.

**Psycha and Electra emerge from hiding.**
**Electra:** So those are great men,
Psycne: Aristophanes, I rather think, was given to poetic license, for supposing we women did withhold the cheeks, and kept a healthy distance from the bed, the men, you must remember, all are Greeks, and can do another thing instead.  
Exit Psyche and Electra, perhaps giggling themselves sick.

Act II, Scene I, house of Capricorn, evening of the same day

Dinner is over, except for some wine sipping.
Alkibiades: Being Hellenes or—as Italians call us—Greeks, Psyche and Electra exchange glances. we are always interested in primacy, and not that it can ever be decided, but what is Democritus’s own opinion: who is the foremost Abderan philosopher, Democritus or the late Protagoras?
Democritus: You are right, it can never be decided, modesty tells me to name my old friend Protagoras, but in truth I don’t know, it depends on what field of study one talks of, I’ve little interest in pure rhetoric as had Prot, and yet I use a good deal of it in my books, and yet I like a more direct abbreviated style, I’m not much into music whereas Prot was a master of practice and a sage of theory, but yet I’ve an interest in sound and harmony, but if forced to a judgment, I’d have to say I was greater for I’ve been more original and Prot in all the conventional studies was merely the greatest person I know of— I’ve a fear that his reputation might decline in time and he might be recalled as a man of one aphorism that all men repeat, promising to repeat it to the end of time: “Man is the measure of all things”— but I have my aphorism too. waits obviously Euripides: in a long, drawled tone Yeessssss. Democritus: con brio Atoms and void!
Euripides: Catchy.
Psyche: Demon, you must explain atoms to me and in the simplest of words for I can only think of little motes of dust.
Democritus: Well that’s not so bad— atomos means uncut or unmown— as in the “ unmown meadows” that Hippolytus frequents in Euripides’s play of that name—
Capricorn: I saw it 20 years ago, when it won the prize.
Euripides: It is a play that cannot be played, except by actors.

Democritus: *throat-clearingly* Ahem, atoms are uncutables—
the world has a great stability and order
and yet all things beneath heaven change—
and I maintain that heaven changes too,
but only on time scale too long for the lives of men to perceive—
and the objects of life are all various,
things conform to type, but each individual is unique and unstable,
growing or flaking away—
so following the thought of my old teacher Leucippus,
I maintain that what is permanent and stable is beneath perception,
that is the atoms, too small to be seen—
and why not, we can see smaller and smaller things
until our eyes fail us, just as they fail us when we look far enough away,
but we can walk closer to the far, but cannot walk closer to the small,
we can only imagine what happens at the tiny scale—
it seems to me—and to Leucippus as I must always say—
that all matter is made of tiny uncutables, atoms,
and these atoms combine to make all larger structures,
one loses atoms and gains them all the time, changing,
while the atoms only change locations in space,
and space is the void between atoms,
atoms link and lock to form structures
and unlock and unlink to dissolve them—
Leucippus and then I have resolved many issues of the world and life using atoms,
I cannot claim that they are philosophically necessary,
and yet I’m almost on verge of claiming so,
they are so compelling—
now is not the time to discuss all uses of atoms,
but let me describe the cosmos of atoms
since all people wish to know about cosmetology,
which is the proper name for the study of the ornamented universe,
I believe that the universe is infinite and eternal and full of atoms
traveling through space and time, colliding and rebounding,
they have a permanent motion, but also some inherent randomness,
which I call “Swerve”
and sometimes Swerve starts a cascade of motion and a vortex forms—
we observe such vortices in the air on a small scale
twirling the leaves about—
some vortices are small and short-lived,
others are vast and exist for ages of man-years—
and in the vortices there is a vast sorting by processes
that admittedly I only dimly understand,
perhaps, I admit, I only intuit them—
and out of these processes atoms collect into many complex structures,
of which humans are the most complex and thoughtful that we know much of,
some say I deny the gods, but I don’t—
we’ve no reason to believe that we are the most complex structures,
there may well be higher order beings—the gods—but we know little of them
and much that is claimed is merely ourselves,
projecting our psychology on ancient names
that were heroes or kings in long forgotten ages—dreamtime—
our Vortex which is our local cosmos swirled about
and some atoms formed a membrane that enclosed us from the chaos outside,
stars lit up on the membrane and planets and Moon and Sun coalesced within it,
and some atoms formed solids and liquids
and some force broke the axial symmetry
and the solids and the liquids collected at one end,
but tilted with respect to the cosmic axis,
and these became the solid and liquid Earth and there life and humans arose—
which is a long story and fills a book—
already written, you can read it when you like,
the Earth is a residue at the bottom of the membrane sack.

Euripides: Well following the arguments of Parmenides,
I believe the Earth is round and not a residue at the bottom of the Vortex
in broken symmetry.

Democritus: Ah those astronomers,
never in doubt, always in error³,
it takes a philosopher, or should I say a physicist,
to set them straight—
but I concede that my story might need some revision,
I'll probably have to do some more peering at the sky
and consulting travelers who have gone to the ends of the Earth.

Psyche: If they can find any ends,
for if one starts here and goes in any one direction on a round Earth,
one will arrive back where one started
and know where one is, perhaps for the first time¹⁰.

Democritus: Now who said they only know about dust motes.

Psyche: Oh, Demon, atoms are still a mystery,
but logic is a Hellenic specialty,
we all know how to pick up an argument and run with it.

Alkibiades: Well stumble with it when we are in our kraters—

He raises a krater—a wine-water mixing bowl—just so the audience
can get the point.

but what goes with wine and women?

Psyche: Song, my general Alkibiades—
Electra will you give us a song?

Electra: Do I have any choice my mistress?

Psyche: Please, Sissy, sing for us.

Electra: Something a little old and forgotten perhaps¹¹:

Ah, my darling one, my darling rolling child,
who has such little hands and on my little finger,
and what a mystery and what a soft beguile,
that all my pleasures live and linger.

And when I waited on him, red and looking down
from the nearness of my brazen boy,
and through my shirt my breast grew round,
then had my boy of gold his joy.

And such an all around, such an over and under,
we came to such soft blows,
I never thought we'd come asunder,
and as the ocean comes and as the ocean goes.

And what is like to the dawn
when with the one, one left off with
and then resumes the arm of brawn
that so gave one that throbbing lift.

What cared I for pain and belly ache
impaled on the point of my man,
and yet that pain did come and take
my breath and all my life was sham.

Ah, my darling one, my darling rolling child,
who has such little hands and on my little finger,
and what a mystery and what a soft beguile,
that all my pleasures live and linger.

**Alkibiades:** You wrote that.
**Euripides:** I wrote it down.
**Electra:** A slave girl sung it over a cradle.
**Euripides:** A country girl.
**Psyche:** But you are not staying with us either, Europe,
you are going off to live with the barbarians.
**Euripides:** The Macedonians consider themselves Hellenes,
a harmless illusion,
rather they are more Achaeans as in Homer.
**Capricorn:** Certainly, the king’s court in Pella in Macedon
is not quite the Agora in Athens,
there you break a krater and Mercury is blessed,
a pregnant woman admits a touch for luck,
the good ones only to other women, of course,
the Queen is not so good it’s said,
and Zeus walks amid the oaks at night,
rustling leaves mark him
and dread things follow in his wake—
how shall Euripides, whose plays incite the gods,
make out in the land the gods still hold.

**Euripides:** I assure you I will show cultural sensitivity in Macedon,
when the Queen handles the sacred snakes about her breasts,
I will look with becoming reverence
on this natural and holy act—
it is too simple to say I mock the gods,
I hold them to account and perceive beyond their shadow,
if Zeus is just, then Zeus I honor,
if Demeter is tender, then Demeter I cling to.

**Capricorn:** An answer that satisfies reason,
but not those thirsting after righteousness,
who have been immunized already, heard sophists since their father’s day,
they simply walk past reason,
but in Macedon they may still be abashed at the light of the mind—
but now to bait Euripides further,
everyone knows why Euripides left Athens,
to leave the jibes and danger his work invoked,
the Athenians having less use for paradox
now than formerly when they ruled the sea,
but why did Euripides leave Athens,
we are old friends now and deserve answer.
**Euripides:** I first knew the glow of Athens,
leader of an alliance that had defeated the Persians at sea,
allied to Sparta that had defeated the same on land,
and my young soldier days were spent in operations
pushing the Spartans— I mean Persians— back further,
and all Hellenes were brothers and sisters
at least almost nearly, at least it seemed but an arm’s reach away,
the defection of Themistocles in pique seemed a minor anomaly,
but of a surpassing leader,
and the glow of the philosophers twinned the Athens glow,
and I could see a day when no more wars were needed,
when there would be no slaves, no subject women,
when all would have an equal dignity,
it was the promise of those days—
but it is no promise I see now—
it was a happy conjunction of the chaos of cities and societies,
that came about like Saturn and Jupiter aligning with Venus,
and as they come nearer, so they drift apart,
year by year since my youth, Athens changed,
it became the tyrant city and embraced that name,
justifying this by its superiority in war and magnificence,
the school of Hellas, Pericles called it,
with himself the schoolmaster,
once I thought him great, still I do,
but it’s a small kind of greatness, that holds iron-hard to power,
and not to kindness—
kindness, something not said of statesmen now,
perhaps never sayable, Solon was an exception,
or in my own day Aristides,
perhaps an exception—
and now we are in this eternal war,
that year by year tears down what was earlier built up,
and I have done some building, can my building stand,
in Athens or elsewhere, it is not for Athens alone,
vainglory, perhaps, but I want to speak to all posterity,
if I need a respite from Athens now
to project my voice to that posterity,
then that is my calling,
and Pella is out of the war
and is in green-clad mountains.

Alkibiades: O Euripides not now for God’s sake,
is that not desertion indeed,
you owe Athens your service in its hour of desperation.

Euripides: O Alkibiades, O fine patriot,
you defected to the Spartans, and then defected to the Persians,
and now have redefected to Athens, but they’ll not have you inside the city walls,
though you have won them a victory or two,
whom shall you betray now.

Capricorn: aside to Democritus, Psyche, and Electra
Come little friends,
when drunken Athenians are accusing each other of treason,
we can only fluff up our ears.

   Capricorn fluffs up his ears. Democritus, Psyche, and Electra fluff up their ears.
   Euripides and Alkibiades are meanwhile engrossed in a little old glaring contest.
Alkibiades: I did nothing to help the Spartans,
I was just their guest between engagements—
although I may have told them a tale or seven,
and my enemies will say anything,
I did impregnate the Spartan Queen—
I wanted to found a line of kings.

Euripides: The golden opinions that you won at Cyzicus,
were but a partial healing of what you’d made ill,
the whole revolt at Chios, the train of events since,
have left the Ionian coast a maze of Persians and Spartans,
dear God, why did you not just retire to exile
before the trial for profanation of holy mystery of Eleusis,
why go straight to Sparta,
no answer comes, but the Athenian above the Athenians.

Alkibiades: Even when I went to Sparta, lived Spartan,
I dreamt of Athens, it is the only city in the world,
it is the adult, all others are the children,
I sinned, I own it to the skies,
I was twirling in the whirlwind,
only my resource, my charm, my ready plan to win the game,
kept me going, only they keep me going still,
I will walk the stones of Athens again,
I will be elected general,
I will bring the war to an end,
I will make the Peace—
O Euripides why are you not my friend.

Euripides: Friend, friend—
to some a friend is but a servant or a master,
I am neither, not to anyone,
a friend is one whose wisdom and compassion is trustworthy,
for all your power and invention, trustworthiness eludes you,
you have begun again with the navy at Samos and have restored the situation somewhat,
go on now to the Peace.

Alkibiades and Euripides are trying to remember their manners
in the next bit.

Alkibiades: I have said it and I will do
whatever is in my power to do—
Euripides, why have you left Athens,
Sophocles must be nearly in his dotage,
will you leave us without tragedy,
tragedy may be all that holds us up.

Euripides: Athens is “us” I now see—
well tragedy is taking a rest, comedy must have a day,
I am not Alkibiades, but I am not without an Athenian’s plan,
King Alexander\(^{12}\) is philhellene and partial to Athens,
our ships were grown in his forests,
he is a coming man and Macedon’s day will come,
if Alexander chooses, perhaps he can be the arbiter of the Peace,
think of that, a just peace, a peace of compromise,
if Athens wins, it loses, if Sparta wins, it loses,
only a balance, a holy respect among all Hellenes wins,
the new can redeem the old,
and the old man can write the speeches for the young,
probably this is all tomfoolery,
but it is a good moment, Alkibiades to Athens,
Euripides to Macedon,
at least I will see mountains rise again.

Alkibiades: Then I will hear of you in Macedon.
Euripides: And I will hear of you in Athens—
our chorus has been very silent and respectful,
no doubt in awe of two Athenians in full discourse,
my host Capricorn, infirmity of age begs you lead me to my pallet.

Capricorn: O Euripides, son of Cleito, and Alkibiades, son of Cleinias,
our darkness has been enlightened,
we now live in expectation of the golden age—
but as it is the golden hour, I will lead Euripides to his bed,
my servant will lead Democritus to his home,
which is just across the Garden of Antigone,
Electra will bow out, and discretion will rule all around.

All exit in various moods, except Alkibiades and Psyche.

Act II, Scene II, house of Capricorn, near midnight, dark lighting

Bedroom scene. Psyche is in a decently covering nightdress.
Alkibiades is in towel-like thing—not a loin-cloth.

Alkibiades: Dear Psyche thank you for being here,
I ask nothing more than that you lie beside and talk with me,
not so young now, and today the Sun rose in another city.
Psyche: Thank you Alkib, it is not easy you know,
not easy to be what I’ve made my reputation with,
but that was all with known and trusted ones—
but Alkibiades’s reputation is otherwise—or is it the same with you.

Alkibiades: Sometimes yes there is tiredness
faced with the phantom of thing—
oh, I’ve roared in my time and since,
and still go out with the other boys,
though not so much now, I’m soberer
and I know this, that our tragic friend has taught,
the dignity and rights of women,
at least half the time I know what’s right.
Psyche: Why only half, why not always?
Alkibiades: You ask me, although you havn’t asked,
why I’ve deserted, played traitor to my city and slept with Persians,
why because the world is a great adventure,
Greek-like I must strive to overcome,
rise from the flames and on whatever side remain a leader,
then perhaps I can both serve myself and make the Peace,
betraying all, I’m true to all, all men are brothers—
you now say nothing,
but I was not tutored by Socrates for nothing,
I know that I speak lies,
but I’m trying, desperately in these last years, to find the truth,
to break through the coils of my past,
there are expedients I must take, meaning cities broken,
men born rich, end cleaning latrines,  
women from dignity dropped to plying beds,  
new slaveries for people who themselves owned slaves,  
I want to restore Hellas,  
and for me, that is only by my sword,  
this man, this thing is what lies beside you,  
if you are indignant and ashamed,  
I do not blame you.  

**Psyche:** I’ve mingled my limbs with many,  
I’ve bought my degree of freedom at a precarious price,  
the shame is the simulation of that bonding  
that should bring real strength, make one of two,  
some say sex is for children, some say pleasure,  
and yes and it is more—  
but my men have been honorable by the rules  
and I may be truer than I know one day,  
give everything for some person, I know not who,  
Antigone gave herself for brothers,  
but having none I must give myself for a lover,  
better than old age, but I’ll not choose death,  
I’m too much a coward, it may choose me—  
what is your story Alkib, what is Alkibiades?  

**Alkibiades:** Above all I am a democrat—not a good one,  
certainly not a straight one, but one to the soul nonetheless,  
an aristocrat born too, but so were my cousins Pericles  
and long dead Cleisthenes, the father of democracy,  
and unlike them I mingle with people from all classes,  
I’m as much at home in a sailor’s tavern as in symposia,  
I want that every man should have equal voice in the city  
and that no man should suffer injustice at rich man’s word  
and I want this in every city—  
Pericles was a fool in an important way  
he made Athens the tyrant city,  
I thought that was right once and wanted to build an empire,  
the whole Sicilian invasion was wrongheaded—my mistake  
and the mistake of democratic Athens,  
even if we’d won our battles there—  
and if I had been there to lead, I believe we’d have won them  
and not lost all our men to death or the stone quarry—  
but nothing lasting or good would have come of it,  
the Aegean is the lake of Athens, if trusted alliances all around,  
we would stand up to my Persian friends and tell them where to go  
and keep the Spartans at home enjoying their Spartan ways—  
oh God when I think how badly things have gone these last 7 years—  
my mistakes—if I wasn’t blindly egotistical, I’d retire in shame,  
the charade about the Eleusinian mysteries—it was nothing,  
a game, tomfoolery, but just the stick men needed to beat me with,  
but I swear to heaven I did nothing to the Herms—  
god-awful things you know—a post with the head of Hermes and an erect phallus,  
they stood in front of houses for luck or frightfulness—  
some band of enemies knocked their faces and were most cruel in other parts—  
aesthetically all to the good, but it wasn’t me, it wasn’t me—  
that was my first mistake, when I was recalled to Athens to stand trial,
I should have gone and fought it out with words in the law courts—
for I'm as good with words as with the sword—
and been the true-blue Athenian at all times,
but instead I went to Sparta—
but note Athens and Sparta were officially, though temporarily, at peace then—
though bristling for war—and my family once held the Spartan proxeny—
were the official friends of Sparta at Athens,
perhaps I could help toward the Peace—
but I helped toward war—
first a double game with Athens and Sparta,
then I went over to the Persian domain in Ionia and started a triple game:
Athens, Sparta, Persia, and then a quadruple game,
Athens, Sparta, Persia, and the other Athens party too,
people didn't know what side I was on,
and I lost track of the plots and couldn't figure it out either,
but then things cleared with the government of 400 in Athens—
down with democracy, up with the oligarchs—
I rejoined the Athenian fleet at Samos,
desperate men sweating on a beach, they needed a general,
they needed a leader, they needed some guidance for their anger,
to restore democracy; to win some battles, to turn the tide,
men in straits respect intelligence, the man with a plan,
the man of decision, the man with a joke in the face of death,
the past is nothing then, all that counts is now—
dishonor, I've drank that cup—and I chose not to die,
but to spring back, to redeem myself and with my sword,
the fleet and I, at Cyzicus, at Chalcedon, at Byzantium,
we've beaten those bloody Spartans and their allies,
but everything is still deadly serious,
Athens—restored to democracy—is strained to the limit,
the men who'd replace the men who'd died in Sicily
are still playing with balls and sticks,
the treasury is emptied to the last 20 talents of silver,
but it's close damn it, so close to the point where negotiation will work—
but bloody hell, the Spartans have this bloody general now—Lysander—
things are so much better when Spartans die gloriously in battle—
Thermopylae was their finest hour, 300 Spartans—
but when they have a sneaky general, they get uppity
and want to win battles and install pro-Spartan governments—
they arn't the Spartans their fathers were—
if they are in the Mess Hall, they think only of keeping poor Spartans out,
if they are poor Spartans, they will doing anything to get in the Mess Hall,
either way they only think of gold, except my poor friend King Agis,
who should have thought only of his wife,
the Spartan man wants out of Sparta,
he wants to set himself up as a Persian satrap,
and sate the lusts that laconically have no name in Lacedaemon.

Psyche: And what of the Spartan Queen?
did she not have dignity to defend.

Alkibiades: That is all ill-founded rumor,
I only play it up out of relentless egotism
and to get old Agis's goat.

Psyche: And make another mortal enemy.
Alkibiades: Who’s counting—
there was a Spartan lady though—Psamanthe,
little Sam and their was a child, little Psametta—
Psamanthe didn’t trust me to go with me to Ionia—
and she was right, but I truly, truly believed otherwise then—
I understand that she and the child are confined to some hill farm—
at the Peace, I will demand something for her, whatever she wants—
to stay where she is, some refuge, perhaps at Delphi close the gods,
the Spartans are well liked at Delphi,
me—well probably not me, for both of us time has moved on.

Psyche: I am glad that you care for women,
we have little resource in the world,
we depend on the protection of men.

Alkibiades: I wish that protection never failed—
but it is a two-way street
though many men after taken from the women’s quarter forget it forever—
who brings us into the world, nurses us with her body,
an aspect for which we ever after long for,
who tends us in illness and in old age,
and lays us out when we die—
respect for the dead, I’ve counted myself among them in the morning,
only to be spared barely by sunset,
when dead, we are helpless and any tyrant of the day
can whip the husk that is fallen—
you have a good garden outside,
she is remembered in Athens, more even than in Thebes I dare say,
Antigone, what she was, the essence of resistance
to the tyrant that the dead are not dishonored
with only the strengthless dead beside her,
the single conscience redeems us if all else fails—
I begin to yawn and drowse,
after I sleep dear Psyche leave me,
my man Antiochus will wake me in the morning,
there are things I must do and say then,
you understand, I must seem to be a man of iron.

Psyche: Tears are good to see, Alkib, sleep now—
he sleeps, and sleeping dreams of being the leader of Hellas,
he is beautiful in sleep.

*Psyche slips out of the bed and leaves.*

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Act III, Scene I, house of Capricorn, morning of the next day

*Euripides and Democritus come in separately.*

Euripides: What is the uproar Democritus,
Athenian and Samian soldiers are running in the streets,
are we being sacked?

Democritus: Not quite,
Alkibiades infiltrated his men into the city last night,
the city guards must have been bought—or were drunk,
and he’s got the Archons hostage in the City Hall,
and forced them to hand over the whole treasury
and decreed that all gold and silver in the city is to be handed over,
the Athenians and Samians are collecting it now house by house,
there isn’t any blood, but sword-point prodding is going on,
there’s been some beating too I hear—
Capricorn is in disgrace and stricken with a heart attack,
the Archons think he’s in cahoots,
though Alkibiades denies that,
Capricorn thought he’d negotiated a three-years-in-one tribute
and the friendship of Abdera,
but Alkibiades says he needs everything
to pay his twenty thousand soldiers and sailors,
and for friendship, he’ll earn that back on another day,
the Archons are going out of their minds,
banging their fists in the air,
the sight of them makes me feel rational,
comparatively rational.

Euripides: Did you get away from the City Hall.
Democritus: No, I’m here with an “escort” of Samians
to deliver Capricorn to his bed, he’s in a bad way,
pulse erratic, he complains of burning wrists,
he labors to breathe.

Euripides: I will go to him though there is perhaps little to be done,
cabbage broth with salt cures as well as any fancy food,
though jellies and soft-boiled eggs are not hard to get down—or to throw up,
I am not without some practice in the art
and I can claim as much success as the highest paid physician in Athens,
none to speak of that is—
is their a good slave doctor in Abdera?

Democritus: Hippocrates—as we call him—
he earns a pretty penny for his master, the third Archon,
I’ll see if I can get him here—
but Hippocrates is notoriously good at being elsewhere
when the rough stuff starts.

Euripides: I’m well known for discretion myself—
I’ll stay in today—
some soldiers respect old men,
but some would gladly knock my whistling teeth out—
or could I do something at the City Hall?

Democritus: I’d rather not have you doddering about.

Euripides: Nothing like a good sacking for frank speech.

Democritus: It’s not a sacking yet—
I must get back to the Archons,
my self-importance is boundless,
but I think I need to be there,
the Archons are in a fit of indignation,
that bunch of old thieves,
any one of them could cry havoc—
you see Alkibiades is half bluff,
if we sounded the trumpet, the men would rush to their swords,
but it would be a slaughter either way,
the streets would be sticky with our blood
and I know exactly what Alkibiades would do if driven to the wall, 
he’d set fires throughout the city 
and like Troy, the grass would grow over our ashes 
ever longer as the centuries roll by. 

**Euripides:** Democritus, you must save the city. 
**Democritus:** God, I hope we haven’t come down to depending on me— you stay here. 

**Euripides:** I will defend Capricorn to my last drop of blood— 
but not his treasure, 
I suppose Capricorn’s people can dig that out and hand it over. 
**Democritus:** I’m sure they can, 
they know everything, 
anyway Capricorn is not a rich man anymore, 
he spent his wealth on arcades and fountains for the city— 
my “friends” outside are banging their swords on their helmets— 
it doesn’t do much for their brains, but I get the point, 
I’ll be back when I’ve got a moment. 

Democritus and Euripides leave separately. 

**Act III, Scene II, Psyche’s house, a bit later**

*Psyche is sitting alone. Electra enters.*

**Psyche:** Electra wherever have you been? 
I’ve been so worried with the Athenian and Samian soldiers in the streets, 
they’ve been here and they taken all my treasure, 
whatever will we do, and they’ve taken all the jewelry— 
Electra are you all right? you haven’t been hurt? 

**Electra:** I’m all right and I haven’t been hurt, 
I followed Alkibiades this morning to the City Hall 
and I’ve been making myself useful there— 
hah, those Archons, what men they are, 
calling for their slaves to save them— 
they only order people about because they are the establishment— 
but now that’s overthrown at least today, 
maybe they’ll be whipped— 
Alkibiades is too much of a “gentleman”— 
but at least he’s a real aristocrat, not a fake one. 

**Psyche:** Electra, cruel, oh please don’t be cruel, 
have pity on the Archons, the whole city could be sacked, 
I’ve got hampers of food and bedding 
in case we need to flee to the Temple of Aphrodite. 

**Electra:** What sanctuary was that to the women of Melos? 

**Psyche:** Oh God, that was the Athenians. 

**Electra:** I’m sorry I said that, you are safe here, 
Alkibiades has said there will be no sack, he wants no sack. 

**Psyche:** I have no faith in him, he is not what I hoped to find. 

**Electra:** He’s better than nothing, 
he bought a Melian woman you know and had a son with her, 
they are kept on his farm in Attica, 
they have some refuge. 

**Psyche:** with exasperation He keeps doing that. 

**Electra:** I’m going with him, Alkibiades. 

**Psyche:** Electra that’s not—not safe,
stay here, we’ll make out, havn’t we always done OK?
**Electra:** Oh, I’m not going in his bed,
I’m not interested in beds,
I am just going to Athens with him,
I am a singer and Athens is the place where I can be heard,
Alkibiades will use me in his election campaign,
an entertainment for men of taste,
and I’ll get talked about—
I’m no fool, I know that there’s a risk—
and there’s Telemahkos in Athens,
he’s written, he’s doing well ceramics,
he’s got a deft hand you know.
**Psyche:** Ah, the boyfriend,
he’s a very good fellow, I know.
**Electra:** Nothing to it, I’m not counting on that,
but if I need a friend—
I’m going now, my things are being carried by a couple of Samians,
I’ve borrowed them—
I can’t stay any longer, there’s nothing left to say.
**Psyche:** Write, please write,
I’ll send some money—here are some obols, there’s no drachmas left.
**Electra:** No, no, keep them,
I’ll send you money when I make some—
kiss me now and let me go,
I have to go quickly.

_They embrace. Electra tears herself away._

*Psyche returns to sitting. After awhile there’s knocking.*

**Psyche:** Oh gods above, come in, come in,
have pity, there’s nothing left.

*Enter Democritus.*

Oh Demon everything’s ruined,
Electra’s going away with Alkibiades to sing in Athens,
my little bird is gone,
and soldiers have taken all my money.
**Democritus:** I’ve seen Electra at the City Hall,
she was enjoying the show—that’s what we can expect
when those we’ve enslaved see the tables turned.
**Psyche:** She was never my slave,
I said she was free the day I bought her,
I own no slaves.
**Democritus:** I own none either, slavery is against the law of nature,
but no one forgets the humiliation of being bought,
one only has to think it through,
Alkibiades has said he will promote her in Athens,
being an impresario is part and parcel of being a politician,
I trust that he’ll do his best for her,
she will solo in his choruses.
**Psyche:** Demon are you all right?
have the soldiers taken your money?
are you safe going in the streets?
everyone has been told to stay in.
**Democritus:** Oh well, my money is gone, but that’s common grief today,
and I’m very, very safe in the streets,
I am here with Samian “friends”,
they’re outside glistening in the Sun,
they’ve indulged me a side visit
since I have just taken Capricorn home,
he’s taken ill, the shock of this treachery.

Psyche: I must go to Capri.
Democritus: That you will not do,
the streets are forbidden really and truly,
the Athenians and Samians are nervy
as well they should be,
and they are right in Garden of Antigone—
Capricorn is not in such a bad way in any case,
it’s just the shock, knocked the wind out of him,
and Euripides is with him,
to no great surprise, Euripides and I
have discovered that we are both amateur doctors,
we’ve been treating our friends all our lives,
why when I was seven up on Scopus hill with Althea the little shepherdess—
but perhaps we shouldn’t delve into ancient history—
Euripides will feed Capricorn jellies and soft-boiled eggs,
it can’t do any harm and will amuse the patient,
and his old people will be with him today,
tomorrow Alkibiades and the loot will be gone
and then go to Capricorn,
perhaps at nightfall, but don’t count on that.

Psyche: Alkibiades hinted that today would be grim,
but I thought he only meant hard words in the City Hall.

Democritus: He offered to return your treasure.
Psyche: I will take nothing from him,
I will be poor like everyone else.

Democritus: He knew that too—
is there a man about the house,
I would feel better if there were.

Psyche: Bacchus is in the kitchen.

Democritus: The god?
Psyche: The steward of my vineyard,
he came to town at dawn with supplies,
he’s baking bread.

Democritus: Baking bread?
Psyche: If the soldiers come back, we will give them a meal,
hospitality is sacred.

Democritus: Yes, of course—
Psyche I want to stay and protect you,
but my escort is waiting and, though my self-importance is boundless,
I really think I’m needed at the City Hall,
everything seems calm, everything will be well,
but something might go out of control
and I might be able to help hold things together.

Psyche: Demon, you must save the city.

Democritus: It’s not as bad as all that,
believe me, we haven’t come down to counting on me.

Psyche: Come back here tonight to sleep.

Democritus: Yes—
yes, if I can come, I will come,
otherwise I will send a message.

They embrace lightly at first and then a bit more tightly and then Democritus
breaks away and leaves.

Act IV, Scene I, Garden of Antigone, morning of the next
day

Enter separately Euripides and Democritus.

Democritus: Capricorn?
Euripides: Dead,
he died as the red arrows raced through the hills,
Psyche came over after sunset and was with us all night,
he couldn’t speak, but he knew she was there,
she has washed him and laid him out
with a wreath of grape vine on his head
and his goat horn in his hands,
but the family came and sent us away,
our part with him is over.

Democritus: He was always pro-Athenian
in the best sense of the word,
when he was young, Athens was the champion of Hellas,
the defender against the Persians,
who forced Abdera to submit twice over,
Athens was the hope and glory of Hellas,
Capricorn could never forget that time,
in his boyhood, he was with the fleet of Aristides,
and was there when Aristides founded the Athenian alliance
and no one questioned the contributions
that were set by the Just Man.

Euripides: I have myself always been pro-Athenian in that sense you speak of,
but in any sense there is little popularity this morning,
I put a talent of silver in the haul,
Abdera has befriended and honored me, I am ashamed of Alkibiades,
and Athens too and for more than this.

Democritus: The Archons know how to honor the man,
but there is some peevishness,
I’m a little peevish myself,
the gold crown the city gave Protagoras,
and that he lent to me, is gone—
it was thing.

Euripides: The renown of this city is always yours—
and I have it too though I see grim faces in the street.

Democritus: The savings of a lifetime have gone for some,
the inheritance of the son, the dowry of the daughter—
it’s a blessed thing to be left with an old daughter—
Alkibiades and his crew are well gone you know,
if they come back any time in this generation
they’ll see a fight,
and yet it was theft, not murder,  
one can admit there were no beatings I think now,  
and just a bit of threatening,  
as soldiers go, they behaved themselves.

Euripides: He has learnt something,  
no more massacres at Melos, no more death in Syracuse,  
but I have no faith him,  
he has too many enemies,  
in Sparta, in the Persian court,  
in Athens—and in the other party in Athens,  
he could win through, but a single defeat  
and all hands will be against him,  
I know, none better, the panic mood in Athens—  
and even if he wins through and Athens with him  
will he have done justice,  
I am an idealist, Alkibiades thinks a little more injustice  
a little more war, will improve the terms of the Peace,  
it’s a stupid game to do a little evil even in the name of good,  
Athens should sue for peace now  
and Alkibiades will not have it,  
after the next victory, after the next clever strategy,  
gods above, there will never be enough victories,  
but he has learnt something,  
Pericles unlearnt things and made of the Athenian alliance  
the Athenian empire and brought us all our grief—  
perhaps Alkibiades will win something,  
history is chancy and gloomsters are often wrong,  
maybe he’ll have all the virtues, not just half,  
when he’s happy.

Democritus: O Euripides, imagining happiness  
should a man not act as if he had it.  
Euripides: Imagining the pain of men and women  
a person should act as if they felt it.

Democritus: I should have known better—  
but anyway imagining yourself,  
I’m thinking you ought go to my family farm in country,  
my four nonagenarian grandparents will call you boy  
and have you trot out your lyre.

Euripides: Not even there is safe enough, I think,  
one man in the street stared daggers  
and said “the return in Alcestis, Euripides, that alone”  
and went his way scowling—  
I have booked passage to Pella,  
I sail at noon.

Democritus: Noon then, that’s had it,  
and this might be the last chance—  
tell me your philosophy Euripides,  
fair’s fair, you had mine.

Euripides: I struggled with Parmenides whom I never met,  
and Anaxagoras whom I knew well,  
and I feel equal for a bout or two with atoms,  
and I can say I’ve nothing against them,  
they may as you say underlie all the physical world,
but with that barefoot boy Socrates,  
I'm prepared to contend that underlying is not everything,  
somehow life organized itself and rekindles itself  
and thought emerges bit by bit culminating in that imperfect creature  
the human and the human consciousness,  
but I'm not going to set up a straw-man Democritus to knock down,  
I've read your book on psychology  
and I think you are ahead of me,  
our consciousness may be constructed of atoms  
and a chair is constructed of wood,  
but it could also be constructed of stone or ivory,  
the design, not the materials, is the thing,  
and so there can be other substrates in principle I think, for consciousness,  
the nature of consciousness transcends any particular physics,  
it is an emergent or a transcendent principle,  
consciousness may exist in many other places we cannot touch—  
we are small creatures on the round Earth—  
as Parmenides proved pretty clearly—  
no bloody residue at the bottom of our Vortex for me—  
small creatures, but in our thought, in yours in particular,  
we can imagine other cosmoses and commune with their beings  
with our imaginations,  
likewise I can talk to Homer and Hesiod,  
and think my way back into the mind of Prometheus  
which has led me in moments of abstraction  
to wonder if I'm being thought out myself.  
Democritus: And the gods?  
Euripides: Now there's a ticklish subject,  
I've been called an atheist,  
and even a monotheist, by the vicious,  
but Xenophanes pointed out long ago—  
and again I'm teaching my grandmother to suck eggs—  
that every culture has its own set of parochial gods  
and its own divine history and sacred rituals,  
and they are all different and much the same,  
and no one can prove any of them—  
and yet all humans acknowledge that kindness is good  
and any god who is kind is a good god  
and so there is another transcendent principle, kindness—  
any human who is kind and any super-being who is kind is good,  
kindness is the genuine thing, the divine that is not demonic,  
all the particulars of particular religions are things one maintains  
in order to be kind to one's society;  
and to one's parents who otherwise might drive one up the wall—  
I've sometimes thought of setting myself up as a prophet—  
I've got the attributes, white beard, hypnotic eyes—  
but I think it best to be eclectic—  
you know I'm initiate of Eleusis  
and Eleusis is a very good thing,  
all may enter, citizens, slaves, women, whole and maimed,  
and this is wonderful, no exclusion—  
extcept for the exclusion of non-initiates,  
if only the Eleusinians could see that all are bonded
whether they partake of the particulars of Eleusis or not—
there is a special sub-group of Eleusinians,
they are called the Corn-Watchers,
at first by others, but now by themselves too,
and they try to live a life of purity and equality among themselves,
and I lived among them for awhile and love them well,
but I can’t make my mind as simple as theirs,
I see a trend growing up among them to think outsiders are evil
and an adherence to ritual as an absolute good in itself,
instead of just being a symbol of that kindness that I spoke of
and so I cannot go with them—
I try to open myself to all experience and all consciousness
and live by kindness.

Democritus: Now politics for I am nothing if not encyclopedic.
Euripides: No one can get too far from politics,
not in the middle of war and not when my city is robbing yours—
like Alkibiades I am a democrat—
some like Socrates have come to detest democracy
and want some kind of rule by the best, aristocrats,
or some kind of king—
you know I’m on the way to King Alexander’s court
and I will praise him—temperately mind you—
and sincerely too, for he has many admirable qualities—
but it’s a stultification to think that any human has superior right to any other—
I will be discreet in Macedon I assure you—
many say that democracy has led to disaster for Athens
and for all of Hellas and that is true,
but all other forms of government have led to disasters too,
there’s nothing unique in the crimes of Athens—
but democracy in Athens is only a halfway point,
democracy without qualifications holds that all humans have equal rights
and equal dignity, there are no slaves, there is no rule over women,
there are no foreigners,
we are all citizens of the world,
how could kindness see it otherwise.

Democritus: And why have you left Athens?
Euripides: Some say I’m a rat leaving a sinking ship,
and it’s true enough that I tremble for what may lie ahead,
but there are more commendable reasons for going on vacation—
I did not lie last night,
I do hope that King Alexander can play a useful role in the Peace—
but it’s not a great hope,
and he’s just as likely to exploit the situation
to try to become the hegemon of Hellas,
he could listen to worse counselors than me
and probably will—
another reason is that I’m not so popular now,
democracy is being as capricious as if it were a king,
my “atheism”—or my “monotheism”—has been rebuked,
and I’ve been in the popular courts before accused of this and that
and been fined for that and this,
and the fine might be heavy in a panic—
did I say I was a democrat,
I'll not be elected to a drink of hemlock, no thank you sir—
and though I've left Athens I've not abandoned her, I never will—
to answer Alkibiades, I will not deny Athens tragedy,
in my long quarrel with the Demos,
I intend to have the last word,
there are two plays living in my mind:
*Iphigenia at Aulis* in which the maid is sacrificed for nothing
and is sacrificed for everything
and *The Bacchae* in which I show the power of the God
and break it with the human heart.

**Democritus:** Psyche is coming, I'll slip away,
but an embrace—like a brother I mean—
farewell O Euripides.

*Exit Democritus.*

**Act IV, Scene II, Garden of Antigone, a bit later,**
the lighting has changed to
something a little otherworldly

*Euripides begins to dance a slow Greek sirto
with tiny steps, perhaps to Greek music.*

*Psyché enters dancing and joins his line
and they dance for as long as needed.*

**Psyché:** The dead are remembered!

**Euripides:** The dead are remembered forever!

**Psyché:** Poor Capri, he was good, he was good to me—
I'm so ashamed, Europe,
I liked him, Alkibiades,
he seemed good.

**Euripides:** Leaders in carrying out their great plans
are careless of little lives that are ruined,
and that I hate,
and yet I look around me,
these are not the empty streets of Melos,
not the burnt foundations of Troy.

**Psyché:** His fixed intention or just our luck—
somewhere in between you’d say—
Sissy—I mean Electra—
I'm so worried about her little life.

**Euripides:** I will write to Iophon, son of Sophocles,
he is the best chorus master
and has a good ear for a singer,
now that he is rising 70, perhaps only an ear,
I will tell him to give her a job,
he owes me a favor.

**Psyché:** Thank you, I love her, you know.

**Euripides:** A bit teasingly.

Held about the waist, tendrest and tender,
thigh pressed thigh, pressed and slender,
then intake, release, and breath beating
closed eyes, widening o’s, and breath meeting,
lying, secreting, sliding, sighing,
climbing, falling, living, dying,
then no more, but bliss and bless,
and together and at rest.  

**Psyche:** Sappho rather let the cat out of the bag,
but no it was not like that with me and her,
she was my little sister, my little Sissy—
and yet we are not much alike,
I used to kid her about her anger at the upper class,
but deep down I am afraid,
even for me who am degraded.

**Euripides:** Our splendor is a parasite
on the people in misery and ignorance, it is unjust,
but whenever an upper class is cast down,
a new one rises at once to fill its place,
I know no cure for this
until the Earth yields its fruits to a wave of the hand.

**Psyche:** Must all our achievements fail then,
must we always fall back into the mud.

**Euripides:** I believe in a higher live,
but I don’t know what it is.

**Psyche:**

Could I take me to some cavern for mine hiding,
In the hill-tops, where the sun scarce hath trod,
Or a cloud make the home of mine abiding,
As a bird among the bird-droves of the God!

**Euripides:** You speak that very well.

**Psyche:** Could I come with you?

**Euripides:** No, where I’m going, you cannot follow—
suddenly I came to you, suddenly I leave you,
I have booked passage at noon with Captain Charonides
and he will ferry me over to the west.

*Psyche kisses Euripides on both cheeks and he backs away,*
*perhaps in small dancing steps, and off the stage.*

**Psyche:** Goodbye Euripides.

*Psyche sits on a bench beneath the statue of Antigone*
*and looks like Melancholia in Dürer’s engraving.*

**Psyche:** Now that I cannot die,
I must wait for the sign.

**Act IV, Scene III, Garden of Antigone, a bit later with noon lighting**

*Democritus enters.*

**Psyche:** Demon you did not come last night.

**Democritus:** With the Archons and all the old soldiers taken as hostages—
Alkibiades will let them go in a few days he says,
that man pays attention to detail—
well there was no one else
and I found myself commander-in-chief of the city by sunset,
a heck of a job for a philosopher,
and I spent the night inspecting walls and wells,
and peering into grain bins,
but at daybreak old Nestor came in from the country
and I handed over to him the sword,
now he's mustering troops and happier than a pig in shit,
you can see he's almost hoping the Thracian dogs
will come to try to pick our carcass,
he's spoiling for a fight—
I'm a bit less excited about slapping on a hog-bristle helmet
and taking the old man's place in the third rank of the phalanx.

**Psyche:** Are the Thracians coming then?

**Democritus:** No they won't come,
Nestor knows his business, by sunset we'll be defensible,
the Thracians like their victims helpless—
we like our victims that way too for that matter—
but enough of this warrior talk, it's been getting to me,
all will be well with the city—
even when the Archons get back,
all will still be well.

**Psyche:** Euripides was here—
just a moment ago it seems—
but he's going on to Pella now.

**Democritus:** I spoke with him just before you came and said my farewell.

**Psyche:** You should have stayed with him,
we could have said goodbye together,
aren't we to do things together?

**Democritus:** Euripides preferred to say goodbye to you alone.

**Psyche:** Is it like that then?

**Democritus:** It will always be like that.

**Psyche:** A certain way of dispensing with make-up,
a certain curvature of a nostril,
a certain way of tying my hair back in one ponytail,
with one strand dangling as if to suggest
something that is barely suppressed,
and a certain lazy glowing smile,
these are just Helen's wiles.

**Democritus:** In Euripides's play *Helen*,
Helen never went to Troy, but was god-carried to captivity in Egypt,
ever the good wife, ever the good mother,
always true, always humane,
the Euripidean Helen.

**Psyche:** You turn a pretty compliment,
the best since Protagoras—
but are you propositioning me?

**Democritus:** I think am.

**Psyche:** I should tell you that the other night,
Alkibiades only wanted to talk and he did all of that,
and for a long time Capri was only my friend and protector,
I've been quite abstemious,
just a few celebrity visitors and ambassadors to the city—
the city's most-famous-courtesan thing you know—
they were all gentlemen, Demon, I assure you.

**Democritus:** I'm not a rich man, even before yesterday,
the family farm, such as it is, belongs to my elder brother,
may he live a hundred years,
I've received gifts from the city and celebrities,
I suppose I can get some more,
but I'm not so young, 52, just twice your age,
from my eternal grandparents, I've inherited a long youth,
but the first white hairs are at my temples.

**Psyche:** Oh let me kiss them and make them better.

*She kisses his temples.*

Better?

**Democritus:** Yes, lots—
O Psyche, I want only the real thing,
equality, companionship, completion, love,
togetherness, oneness, love.

**Psyche:** There's nothing else,
everything else is a lesser thing,
I could never love a person
who could not accept me as an equal person—
but everything is difficult,
I am who I am and have done what I've done,
can your pride really bear that,
I am afraid, I'm nearly poor now myself,
I own a farm, but relatives of my father
are always petitioning the Archons to get it away from me
claiming I couldn't inherit since I'm a woman,
Capri kept them off.

**Democritus:** My pride will have an easy time of it,
and we will fend off your relatives,
and if not, we can trade on my fame, it is something to have written 20 books,
we can go to King Alexander in Macedon,
meet up again with Euripides,
and be the stars of the court at Pella,
or west to Sicily, or beyond to the Blessed Isles,
we're going there at last.

**Psyche:** And children Demon,
I find I want them desperately,
tell me now if that isn't to be.

**Democritus:** My son is dead,
he died a long time ago while hunting in his boyhood,
yes, children would be good,
I'd like to have your daughters around me,
all philosophers should have daughters.

**Psyche:** There would be prejudice,
the children of hetaeras are scorned.

**Democritus:** We will protect them,
to be the children of Democritus is something
even if they are the children of Psyche too.

**Psyche:** Now you are speaking paradox.

**Democritus:** I am the most matter-of-fact of philosophers,
paradox I scorn—
now since the Thracians are not coming for dinner,
and the city is not to be sacked,
and the Archons are sleeping with Alkibiades,
we can wander over the hills, pet the trees,
talk about the stars or the leaves of grass,
we can tease, or be easy together in our silences,
and after the day, make good use of the night—
we will write a book out of ourselves.

**Psyché:** Dear philosopher, dearest Demon,
will you write a book addressed to me, to Psyche?

**Democritus:** I dare say it won’t be the last word,
just the ideas of a materialist to be condemned by Socrates,
but it is my adamant intention to write on the soul.

**Psyché:** Body and soul, Demon, body and soul.

*Embrace, kiss, depart arm-in-arm.*

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General Note

The play is mostly unhistorical. I have, however, tried to fit the action into history and
Euripides, Democritus, and Alkibiades are historical, of course. I am not aiming at complete
historical verisimilitude nor naturalism. The play is a dialogue between my concerns and ideas
and the natures of the historical characters as I imagine them.

My principals have been in literature before. Euripides appears in three of Aristophanes’s
satirical plays (Mu-17) most notably *The Frogs*. In *The Frogs*, Dionysus, the god of theater, descends
into the Underworld with resurrection on his mind as he has a “restless craving for Euripides” (Mu2-
348). But in the end, Dionysus redeems Aeschylus since “My choice shall fall on him my soul desires”
(Mu2-348).

Alkibiades turns up late for Plato’s *Symposium* set in 416 BCE (El-21). When he arrives he
is more than a little tipsy and lovelorn—for Socrates. He appears in some other dialogues of Plato
too (El-20–21). Shakespeare puts Alcibiades (as Alcibiades) and Timandra on stage in *Timon of
Athens* (Cr-1018,1019ff,1345)—which was quite a surprise to me. That least of Shakespeare’s plays
is not a sufficient stage. Much later, Alkibiades has a featured part in Mary Renault’s novel *The
Last of the Wine*. Euripides makes a cameo appearance also. Whatever the actuality, to me as to
many others, Renault’s Hellenic novels seem true to the ancient world. I make no thorough attempt
to be true in *Abdera*.

Democritus’s personality has been forgot, his works are all lost, his conceptions remain. To
my knowledge—pretty shaky—Democritus only turns up in fiction before in Hell: in Dante’s *The
Inferno*, Canto IV, Democritus is with the other Greek philosophers Aristotle, Plato, Socrates,
Thales, Anaxagoras, Zeno, Heraclitus, and Empedocles in the First Circle (Mi-24; Ci-54). Considering
that Dante put Epicurus, a follower of Democritus in Atomism, in the Sixth Circle
among the heretics (*The Inferno*, Canto X: Mi-51; Ci-96), Democritus was pretty lucky not be put
down in the “morgue of wrath” (*The Inferno*, Canto X: Ci-96).

Notes to the text, references, and chronology follow. The references and chronology give access
to the actual history. The references are not necessarily best references, just ones found useful and
convenient.

Notes

1. “A possession for all time” is what Thucydides hoped his *Peloponnesian War* would be. I am
supposing that the early parts at least of Thucydides’s book are circulating in 408 BCE. Who
knows. This may be true.

2. “And if the body is not the soul, what is soul” is a quote from Walt Whitman. I can’t recall
where I got it from.

3. *Sleeping with the Enemy* is the title of a novel by Nancy Price, I believe. Certainly, it is the
name of the Julia Roberts film (1991) made from said novel.

4. Thaïs was an Athenian hetaera who was a lover of Alexander the Great and later Ptolemy I
(Ba-1253). Thus she actually flourished about 80 years after the date of this play. But her fame
makes a good allusion and who’s counting centuries. Dante puts her—actually her namesake
from the play *Eunuchus* by Terence—in Hell and treats her ungallantly:

   Of that dishevelled harlot soiled with sweat
   Who with filthy nails scratches her side,
   Now crouching and now standing on her feet.
   Thais is she, the whore . . .

   (Inferno, Canto Canto XVIII: Bi-99).

5. In the 1st century CE, the Abderans fell for a time under the spell of Euripides’s *Andromeda*
and young men quoted the play in the streets or so the story goes (Mu-93,94).

6. *The King Must Die* is a novel about Theseus by Mary Renault. The point of the title is that a
king must at times sacrifice himself or assent to be sacrificed. Theseus agrees in principle, but
would rather not.

7. “Hm, tricky.” is a common enough expression, but it is famously used in Douglas Adams’s
*Hitch-Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* in response to a request to explain “life, the universe, and
everything.”

8. Electra is doing a take off of some lines from Aristophanes’s *Lysistrata* (Cro-13).

9. Russian physicist Lev Landau (1908–1968) is said to have said something like this. I’ve heard
slightly different versions.

10. This is a paraphrase of a much-quoted passage from near the end of the poem *Little Gidding*
by T. S. Eliot:

   We shall not cease from exploration
   And the end of all our exploring
   Will be to arrive where we started
   And know the place for the first time.

   It may be just about the only Eliot most people know. Well me anyway.

11. Well I flopped out on trying to write song lyrics. Electra will just have to intone this poem and
everyone is to pretend she’s singing.

12. I have also given the Macedonian king the name Alexander just for the sake of recognition. At
the time of the play the actual Macedonian king was Archelaus. Alexander the Great (356–323)
came later, but the use of his name suggests the rising of Macedonian power and the end of the
city-state world of classical Hellas.
13. Cleito was Euripides’s mother. He was the son of Mnesarchus or Mnesarchides. Capricorn is being humorous and alliterative. For some unknown reason, Euripides was kidded by Aristophanes as the son of a greengroceress even though his mother was of a noble, land-owning family (Mu3-121–122).


16. This is from the “escape ode” in Euripides’s *Hippolytus* in Gilbert Murray’s translation (Mu-154).

**References**

Ashby, C. 1999, *Classical Greek Theatre: New Views of an Old Subject* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press) (As)
—Maybe this is a really good book on the subject—but I wouldn’t know.

—The most authoritative desk dictionary every published—it says so right on the cover.

—I like Laurence Binyon’s translation best. I think his rhyming hits the mark pretty often.

—Pretty readable.

—Pretty readable.


—A concise modern account of Alkibiades. I have preferred the more Greek version of his name with the “k” over the Latinized version with a “c.”

—It seems very authoritative; certainly very persuasive.


—I like it when Dionysus calls “My priest, protect me.” We should all have priests.

—Dated no doubt, but sufficient for my purpose of a fictional recreation of Euripides.

—I happen to own a copy. I like much of what Philip Vellacott has to say about Euripides, but I wonder if he overinterprets at times.

**Chronology**

All dates are Before Common Era (BCE) unless specified as Common Era (CE).

534 The supposed year of the first tragedy competition in Athens instituted by the tyrant Peisistratus. Thespis was the first victor and is the prototype actor. His name can be used as a sign for actors who are thespians. This information comes from the *Parian Marble* which is a fragmentary marble stele with inscriptions found on the island of Paros in 1627 (CE) (As-21). It dates to 264/263 and may not be trustworthy.

525 Aeschylus (525?-456?) born approximately (Ba-20). He is the earliest of the three great tragic playwrights of Greco-Roman antiquity: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

495 Sophocles (495?-406?) born approximately (Ba-1152).

490 The battle of Marathon in which the Athenians and their allies defeated the first invasion by the Persians of mainland Greece. Aeschylus fought in this battle.

484 Euripides (484?-406?) born according to the *Parian Marble* (Mu-11).

481? Protagoras of Abdera (481?-411?) born approximately (Ba-973). Perhaps, the most famous sophist, Protagoras was reputedly a friend of Euripides. His famous aphorism is “Man is the measure of all things.”

480 According to tradition Euripides was born on the island Salamis on day of the naval battle of Salamis in which Athens and her allies defeated the Persians (Mu-11). Euripides’s parents would have been evacuated to safety on the island.

469? Socrates (469?-399) born approximately (Ba-1146).

460 Approximately the year of the birth of Democritus of Abdera (460?-360?) (Fu-115). Some accounts say he was reputed to have lived to be 100.

456 Approximately the year of the death of Aeschylus. According to a story, an eagle dropped on tortoise on Aeschylus mistaking for tortoise-breaking rock, Aeschylus’s bald head (Fu-149).
450 Approximately year of the birth of Alkibiades (450?–404) (El-9,103).

446 Death of Alkibiades’s father Cleinias at the battle of Coronea (El-103).

432 Battle of Potidaea probably in September (El-25). Potidaea, a member of the Athenian hegemony, revolted and an Athens sent forces who defeated the Potidaeans in the battle and besieged the city. Socrates saved Alkibiades’s life in the battle (El-25–26).

431–404 The Peloponnesian War. This long war was the 2nd major war of the 5th century between Athens and Sparta and their respective hegemonies. It was interrupted by the Peace of Nicias 421–414 (El-35,66). Athens would be defeated in the end, but would rise for another great epoch in the 4th century. Sparta would be the premier state in Greece until defeated at the battle of Leuctra by Thebes in 371 and thereafter would never again be a great power.

414–412 Alkibiades in Sparta (El-103). He defected to the enemy after being charged with sacrilege in Athens (El-64). Technically, Athens and Sparta were at peace in 421–414 (El-35,66), and so Alkibiades may not technically have been defecting on arrival. But the Peloponnesian War resumed in 414 and Alkibiades is reported to have advised the Spartans on how to proceed against Athens (El-66). From 414 to 411, Alkibiades would play a triple game with the Spartans, Persians, and Athenians (El-66,74,80,88). Alkibiades was certainly self-serving, but in judging by timeless ethics one must accept the mitigation that he was involved a war with no absolute moral superiority on any side and he lived in an age in which the cult of personal triumphalism was widely accepted.

411 Alkibiades is recalled by the Athenian fleet at Samos (El-89,103). Athens was then on the brink of collapse and in their desperation the Athenian forces abroad give the hero another chance. In 411–407, the Athenian forces often under Alkibiades leadership greatly restored the Athenian situation although it remained desperate.

408 In the spring, Euripides leaves Athens for voluntary exile (Mu-111). He probably first went to Magnesia in Asia Minor which is not far from Ephesus and was under Persian rule. The city itself under the rule of the descendants of Themistocles, the leader of Athens in the Persian War of 480 who had later taken refuge with the Persians and been given Magnesia as fief (Mu-109). But he must have moved on soon from there to Macedon then under King Archelaus. Archelous was building up the strength and prestige of his country and had attracted other famous men to his court. I have set Abdera in 408 fall with Euripides in Abdera on his way from Magnesia to Macedon. In the play, I have given the Macedonian king the name Alexander.

407 Alkibiades returns to Athens in triumph and is elected to supreme command (El-89) although he still has many enemies. In the next year, the Athenian fleet under command of Alkibiades’s personal follower Antiochus is defeated at the battle of Notium (El-90–91). Alkibiades was held responsible and not re-elected. His safety at Athens not assured, he retreated to a personal fortress on the Chersonese (El-93) which is the modern Gallipoli Peninsula (Ba-207). He apparently survived by piracy at this time (El-94).

406 Death of Euripides probably by this year. According to an account of Euripides’s life, Sophocles publicly mourned for Euripides circa 406 March (Mu-112). Euripides left three new plays Iphigenia in Aulis, Alcmnaeon (not extant), and The Bacchae (Mu-112).

404 Alkibiades offered aid (at the price of a share in the command) to the Athenian fleet at the mouth of the Aegeospotami (El-94). Aegeospotami is a creek flowing into the Hellespont (Ba-19). The Athenians refused and also declined Alkibiades’s advice which in modern parlance can be summarized as to get the heck away from Aegeospotami. The Athenians the next day were
defeated by the Spartan fleet under Lysander. This final disaster for Athens finally ended the Peloponnesian War.

404 Alkibiades took refuge in Asia Minor with his sometime patron, the Persian satrap Pharnabazus. But then Alkibiades was assassinated probably at Pharnabazus’s order on the instigation of Greek enemies of Alkibiades either Spartan or Athenian (El-94–97). He was supposedly beheaded with his head taken to Pharnabazus as proof. In the building fire set by the assassins to drive Alkibiades into the open, a woman, perhaps the hetaera Timandra, was supposed to have cremated his body.

399 Death of Socrates. Judged guilty of impiety in Athens, Socrates was obliged to drink hemlock and die.

360 Perhaps, approximately, the year of the death of Democritus.