

Beauty and Love in Poetry

Coventry Patmore (1823-1896)

The Revelation

An idle poet, here and there,
Looks around him; but, for all the rest,
The world, unfathomably fair,
Is duller than a witling's jest.
Love wakes men, once a lifetime each;
They lift their heavy lids, and look;
And, lo, what one sweet page can teach,
They read with joy, then shut the book.
And some give thanks, and some blaspheme
And most forget; but, either way,
That and the Child's unheeded dream
Is all the light of all their day.

Philip Sidney (1554-1586)

Loving in Truth

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my
pain:
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her
know,
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain:
Oft turning others' leaves to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sun-burn'd
brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay,
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows,
And others' feet still seem'd but strangers in my way.
Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my
throes,
Biting my trewand pen, beating myself for spite,
Fool, said my Muse to me, look in thy heart and write.

William Shakespeare

(1564-1616)

Sonnet CXVI: Let me not to marriage of true minds admit impediments

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove:
 O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wandering bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come:
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

(1770-1850)

Sonnets from the Portuguese, XIII

And wilt thou have me fashion into speech
 The love I bear thee, finding words enough,
 And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,
 Between our faces, to cast light on each ?--
 I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach
 My hand to hold my spirit so far off
 From myself--me--that I should bring thee proof
 In words, of love hid in me out of reach.
 Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
 Commend my woman-love to thy belief,--
 Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,
 And rend the garment of my life, in brief,
 By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
 Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief.

Sonnets from the Portuguese, XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
 Except for love's sake only. Do not say
 'I love her for her smile--her look--her way
 Of speaking gently,--for a trick of thought
 That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
 A sense of pleasant ease on such a day'--
 For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
 Be changed, or change for thee,--and love, so wrought,
 May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
 Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry,--

A creature might forget to weep, who bore
 Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby !
 But love me for love's sake, that evermore
 Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

William Wordsworth

(1770-1850)

The world is too much with us; late and soon

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
 Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
 Little we see in Nature that is ours;
 We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
 The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
 The winds that will be howling at all hours,
 And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
 For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
 It moves us not.--Great God! I'd rather be
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

Henry Reed

(b. 1914)

Naming of Parts

To-day we have naming of parts. Yesterday,
 We had daily cleaning. And to-morrow morning,
 We shall have what to do after firing. But to-day,
 To-day we have naming of parts. Japonica
 Glistens like coral in all of the neighboring gardens,
 And to-day we have naming of parts.

This is the lower sling swivel. And this
 Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see,
 When you are given your slings. And this is the piling
 swivel,
 Which in your case you have not got. The branches
 Hold in the garden their silent, eloquent gestures,
 Which in our case we have not got.

This is the safety-catch, which is always released
 With an easy flick of the thumb. And please do not let
 me
 See anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easy
 If you have any strength in your thumb. The blossoms
 Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see
 Any of them using their finger.

And this you can see is the bolt. The purpose of this
 Is to open the breech, as you can see. We can slide it
 Rapidly backwards and forwards: we call this
 Easing the spring. And rapidly backwards and forwards
 The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers:

They call it easing the Spring.

They call it easing the Spring: it is perfectly easy
 If you have any strength in your thumb: like the bolt,
 And the breech, and the cocking-piece, and the point of
 balance,
 Which in our case we have not got; and the almond-
 blossom
 Silent in all of the gardens and the bees going
 backwards and forwards,
 For to-day we have naming of parts.

Philip Larkin

(b. 1922)

Next, Please

Always too eager for the future, we
 Pick up bad habits of expectancy.
 Something is always approaching; every day
Till then we say,

Watching from a bluff the tiny, clear,
 Sparking armada of promises draw near.
 How slow they are! And how much time they waste,
 Refusing to make haste!

Yet still they leave us holding wretched stalks
 Of disappointment, for, though nothing balks
 Each big approach, leaning with brasswork sprinkled,
 Each rope distinct,

Flagged, and the figurehead with golden tits
 Arching our way, it never anchors; it's
 No sooner present than it turns to past.
 Right to the last

We think each one will heave to and unload
 All good into our lives, all we are owed
 For waiting so devoutly and so long.
 But we are wrong:

Only one ship is seeking us, a black-
 Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back
 A huge and birdless silence. In her wake
 No waters breed or break.

Walt Whitman

(1819-1892)

O Me! O Life!

O ME! O life!... of the questions of these recurring;
 Of the endless trains of the faithless--of cities fill'd with
 the foolish;
 Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more
 foolish than I, and who more faithless?)
 Of eyes that vainly crave the light--of the objects mean--
 of the struggle ever renew'd;
 Of the poor results of all--of the plodding and sordid
 crowds I see around me;

Of the empty and useless years of the rest--with the rest
 me intertwined;
 The question, O me! so sad, recurring--What good amid
 these, O me, O life?
 Answer.
 That you are here--that life exists, and identity;
 That the powerful play goes on, and you will contribute
 a verse.

Theodore Roethke

(1908-1963)

I knew a woman

I knew a woman, lovely in her bones,
 When small birds sighed, she would sigh back at them;
 Ah, when she moved, she moved more ways than one:
 The shapes a bright container can contain!
 Of her choice virtues only gods could speak,
 Or English poets who grew up on Greek
 (I'd have them sing in chorus, cheek to cheek).

How well her wishes went! She stroked my chin,
 She taught me Turn, and Counter-turn, and Stand,
 She taught me Touch, that undulant white skin;
 I nibbled meekly from her proffered hand;
 She was the sickle; I, poor I, the rake,
 Coming behind her for her pretty sake
 (But what prodigious mowing we did make).

Love likes a gander, and adores a goose:
 Her full lips pursed, the errant note to seize;
 She played it quick, she played it light and loose;
 My eyes, they dazzled at her flowing knees;
 Her several parts could keep a pure repose,
 Or one hip quiver with a mobile nose
 (She moved in circles, and those circles moved).

Let seed be grass, and grass turn into hay;
 I'm martyr to a motion not my own;
 What's freedom for? To know eternity.
 I swear she cast a shadow white as stone.
 But who would count eternity in days?
 These old bones live to learn her wanton ways:
 (I measure time by how a body sways).

Lord Byron

(1788-1824)

She walks in beauty

She walks in beauty, like the night
 Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
 And all that's best of dark and bright
 Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
 Thus mellow'd to that tender light
 Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,
 Had half impair'd the nameless grace
 Which waves in every raven tress,

Or softly lightens o'er her face;
 Where thoughts serenely sweet express
 How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
 So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
 The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
 But tell of days in goodness spent,
 A mind at peace with all below,
 A heart whose love is innocent!

When We Two Parted

When we two parted
 In silence and tears,
 Half broken-hearted
 To sever for years,
 Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
 Colder thy kiss;
 Truly that hour foretold
 Sorrow to this.

The dew of the morning
 Sunk chill on my brow--
 It felt like the warning
 Of what I feel now.
 Thy vows are all broken,
 And light is thy fame;
 I hear thy name spoken,
 And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,
 A knell to mine ear;
 A shudder comes o'er me--
 Why wert thou so dear?
 They know not I knew thee,
 Who knew thee too well!--
 Long, long shall I rue thee,
 Too deeply to tell.

In secret we met--
 In silence I grieve
 That thy heart could forget,
 Thy spirit deceive.
 If I should meet thee
 After long years,
 How should I greet thee?--
 With silence and tears.

Michelangelo Buonarroti

(1475-1564)

The Doom of Beauty

Choice soul, in whom, as in a glass, we see,
 Mirrored in thy pure form and delicate,
 What beauties heaven and nature can create,
 The paragon of all their works to be!

Fair soul, in whom love, pity, piety,
 Have found a home, as from thy outward state
 We clearly read, and are so rare and great
 That they adorn none other like to thee!
 Love takes me captive; beauty binds my soul;
 Pity and mercy with their gentle eyes
 Wake in my heart a hope that cannot cheat.
 What law, what destiny, what fell control,
 What cruelty, or late or soon, denies
 That death should spare perfection so complete?

Francesco Petrarch

(1304-1374)

Lover's Inconsistency


I find no peace, and all my war is done;
 I fear and hope, I burn and freeze likewise;
 I fly above the wind, yet cannot rise;
 And nought i have, yet all the world I seize on;

That looseth, nor locketh, holdeth me in prison,
 And holds me not, yet can I 'scape no wise;
 Nor lets me live, nor die, at my devise,
 And yet of death it giveth none occasion.

Without eyes I see, and without tongue I plain;
 I wish to perish, yet I ask for health;
 I love another, and yet I hate myself;

I feed in sorrow, and laugh in all my pain;
 Lo, thus displeaseth me both death and life,
 And my delight is causer of my grief.

Back  **Next** 

Email  **Home** 

