

The Victorians

To Marguerite: Matthew Arnold

Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live *alone*.
The islands feel the enclasping flow,
And then their endless bounds they know.

But when the moon their hollows lights,
And they are swept by balms of spring,
And in their glens, on starry nights,
The nightingales divinely sing;
And lovely notes, from shore to shore,
Across the sounds and channels pour –

Oh! then a longing like despair
Is to their farthest caverns sent;
For surely once, they feel, we were
Parts of a single continent!
Now round us spreads the watery plain –
Oh might our marges meet again!

Who order'd that their longing's fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cool'd?
Who renders vain their deep desire? –
A God, a God their severance ruled!
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea.

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The Lost Mistress: Robert Browning

All's over, then: does truth sound bitter
As one at first believes?
Hark, 'tis the sparrows' good-night twitter
About your cottage eaves!

And the leaf-buds on the vine are woolly,
I noticed that, today;
One day more bursts them open fully
– You know the red turns grey.

Tomorrow we meet the same then, dearest?
May I take your hand in mine?
Mere friends are we, – well, friends the merest
Keep much that I resign:

For each glance of the eye so bright and black,
Though I keep with heart's endeavour, –
Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops back,
Though it stay in my soul for ever! –

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer!

Far From the Madding Crowd: Thomas Hardy

He pointed to about a yard in front of him.
Bathsheba's adventurous spirit was beginning to find
some grains of relish in these highly novel proceedings.
She took up her position as directed, facing Troy.

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5 'Now just to learn whether you have pluck enough to
let me do what I wish, I'll give you a preliminary test.'

10 He flourished the sword by way of introduction number
two, and the next thing of which she was conscious was
that the point and blade of the sword were darting with
15 a gleam towards her left side, just above her hip; then of
their reappearance on her right side, emerging as it were
from between her ribs, having apparently passed through
her body. The third item of consciousness was that of
seeing the same sword, perfectly clean and free from
blood held vertically in Troy's hand (in the position
15 technically called 'recover swords'). All was as quick as
electricity.

20 'Oh!' she cried out in affright, pressing her hand to
her side. 'Have you run me through? — no, you have not!
Whatever have you done!'

25 'I have not touched you,' said Troy, quietly. 'It was
mere sleight of hand. The sword passed behind you.
Now you are not afraid, are you? Because if you are I
can't perform. I give my word that I will not only not
hurt you, but not once touch you.'

'I don't think I am afraid. You are quite sure you will
not hurt me?'

'Quite sure.'

'Is the sword very sharp?'

30 'O no — only stand as still as a statue. Now!'

In an instant the atmosphere was transformed to
Bathsheba's eyes. Beams of light caught from the low
sun's rays, above, around, in front of her, well-nigh shut
out earth and heaven — all emitted in the marvellous
evolutions of Troy's reflecting blade, which seemed
everywhere at once, and yet nowhere specially. These
circling gleams were accompanied by a keen rush that
was almost a whistling — also springing from all sides of

her at once. In short, she was enclosed in a firmament
of light, and of sharp hisses, resembling a sky-full of
meteors close at hand.

45 Never since the broadsword became the national
weapon had there been more dexterity shown in its
management than by the hands of Sergeant Troy, and
never had he been in such splendid temper for the
performance as now in the evening sunshine among
the ferns with Bathsheba. It may safely be asserted with
respect to the closeness of his cuts, that had it been
possible for the edge of the sword to leave in the air a
permanent substance wherever it flew past, the space
left untouched would have been almost a mould of
Bathsheba's figure.

50 Behind the luminous streams of this *aurora militaris*,
she could see the hue of Troy's sword arm, spread in
a scarlet haze over the space covered by its motions,
55 like a twanged harpstring, and behind all Troy himself,
mostly facing her; sometimes, to show the rear cuts,
half turned away, his eye nevertheless always keenly
measuring her breadth and outline, and his lips tightly
closed in sustained effort. Next, his movements lapsed
60 slower, and she could see them individually. The hissing
of the sword ceased, and he stopped entirely.

'That outer loose lock of hair wants tidying,' he said,
before she had moved or spoken. 'Wait: I'll do it for
you.'

65 An arc of silver shone on her right side: the sword had
descended. The lock dropped to the ground.

'Bravely borne!' said Troy. 'You didn't flinch a shade's
thickness. Wonderful in a woman!'

70 'It was because I didn't expect it. O, you have spoilt
my hair!'

'Only once more.'

'No - no! I am afraid of you - indeed I am!' she cried.
 'I won't touch you at all - not even your hair. I
 am only going to kill that caterpillar settling on you.
 Now: still!'

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It appeared that a caterpillar had come from the
 fern and chosen the front of her bodice as his resting
 place. She saw the point glisten towards her bosom, and
 seemingly enter it. Bathsheba closed her eyes in the full
 persuasion that she was killed at last. However, feeling
 just as usual, she opened them again.

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'There it is, look,' said the sergeant, holding his sword
 before her eyes.

The caterpillar was spitted upon its point.

'Why, it is magic!' said Bathsheba, amazed.

'O no - dexterity. I merely gave point to your bosom
 where the caterpillar was, and instead of running you
 through checked the extension a thousandth of an inch
 short of your surface.'

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'But how could you chop off a curl of my hair with a
 sword that has no edge?'

'No edge! This sword will shave like a razor. Look
 here.'

He touched the palm of his hand with the blade, and
 then lifting it, showed her a thin shaving of scarf-skin
 dangling therefrom.

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'But you said before beginning that it was blunt and
 couldn't cut me!'

'That was to get you to stand still, and so make sure
 of your safety. The risk of injuring you through your
 moving was too great not to force me to tell you a fib to
 escape it.'

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She shuddered. 'I have been within an inch of my life,
 and didn't know it!'

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'More precisely speaking, you have been within half

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an inch of being pared alive two hundred and ninety-five
 times.'

'Cruel, cruel, 'tis of you!'

'You have been perfectly safe, nevertheless. My

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sword never errs.' And Troy returned the weapon to the
 scabbard.

Bathsheba, overcome by a hundred tumultuous
 feelings resulting from the scene, abstractedly sat down
 on a tuft of heather.

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'I must leave you now,' said Troy softly. 'And I'll
 venture to take and keep this in remembrance of you.'

She saw him stoop to the grass, pick up the winding
 lock which he had severed from her manifold tresses,
 twist it round his fingers, unfasten a button in the breast
 of his coat, and carefully put it inside. She felt powerless
 to withstand or deny him. He was altogether too much
 for her, and Bathsheba seemed as one who, facing a
 reviving wind, finds it blow so strongly that it stops the
 breath.

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He drew near and said, 'I must be leaving you.' He
 drew nearer still. A minute later and she saw his scarlet
 form disappear amid the ferny thicket, almost in a flash,
 like a brand swiftly waved.

That minute's interval had brought the blood beating
 into her face, set her stinging as if aflame to the very
 hollows of her feet, and enlarged emotion to a compass
 which quite swamped thought. It had brought upon her
 a stroke resulting, as did that of Moses in Horeb, in a
 liquid stream - here a stream of tears. She felt like one
 who has sinned a great sin.

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The circumstance had been the gentle dip of Troy's
 mouth downwards upon her own. He had kissed her.

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Early twentieth century

A Room with a View: E.M. Forster

At the end of five minutes Lucy departed in search of Mr Beebe and Mr Eager[...]

She addressed herself to the drivers, who were sprawling in the carriages, perfuming the cushions with cigars. The miscreant, a bony young man scorched black by the sun, rose to greet her with the courtesy of a host and the assurance of a relative.

'Dove?' said Lucy, after much anxious thought.

His face lit up. Of course he knew where. Not so far either. His arm swept three-fourths of the horizon. He should just think he did know where. He pressed his finger-tips to his forehead and then pushed them towards her, as if oozing with visible extract of knowledge.

More seemed necessary. What was the Italian for 'clergymen'?

'Dove buoni uomini?' said she at last.

Good? Scarcely the adjective for those noble beings! He showed her his cigar.

'U'no - piu - piccolo,' was her next remark, implying 'Has the cigar been given to you by Mr Beebe, the smaller of the two good men?'

She was correct as usual. He tied the horse to a tree, kicked it to make it stay quiet, dusted the carriage, arranged his hair, remoulded his hat, encouraged his moustache, and in rather less than a quarter of a minute was ready to conduct her. Italians are born knowing the way. It would seem that the whole earth lay before them, not as a map, but as a chess-board, whereon they continually behold

the changing pieces as well as the squares. Anyone can find places, but the finding of people is a gift from God.

He only stopped once, to pick her some great blue violets. She thanked him with real pleasure. In the company of this common man the world was beautiful and direct. For the first time she felt the influence of spring. His arm swept the horizon gracefully; violets, like other things, existed in great profusion there; would she like to see them?

'Ma buoni uomini.' He bowed. Certainly. Good men first, violets afterwards. They proceeded briskly through the undergrowth, which became thicker and thicker. They were nearing the edge of the promontory, and the view was stealing round them, but the brown network of the bushes shattered it into countless pieces. He was occupied in his cigar, and in holding back the pliant boughs. She was rejoicing in her escape from dullness. Not a step, not a twig, was unimportant to her.

'What is that?'

There was a voice in the wood, in the distance behind them. The voice of Mr Eager? He shrugged his shoulders. An Italian's ignorance is sometimes more remarkable than his knowledge. She could not make him understand that perhaps they had missed the clergymen. The view was forming at last; she could discern the river, the golden plain, other hills.

'Eccolo!' he exclaimed.

At the same moment the ground gave way, and with a cry she fell out of the wood. Light and beauty enveloped her. She had fallen onto a little open terrace, which was covered with violets from end to end.

'Courage!' cried her companion, now standing some six feet above. 'Courage and love.'

She did not answer. From her feet the ground sloped sharply into the view, and violets ran down in rivulets and streams and cataracts, irrigating the hillside with blue, eddying round the tree stems, collecting into pools in the hollows, covering the grass with spots of azure foam. But never again were they in such profusion; this terrace was the well-head, the primal source whence beauty gushed out to water the earth.

Standing at its brink, like a swimmer who prepares, was the good man. But he was not the good man that she had expected, and he was alone.

George had turned at the sound of her arrival. For a moment he contemplated her, as one who had fallen out of heaven. He saw radiant joy in her face, he saw the flowers beat against her dress in blue waves. The bushes above them closed. He stepped quickly forward and kissed her.

Before she could speak, almost before she could feel, a voice called, 'Lucy! Lucy! Lucy!' The silence of life had been broken by Miss Bartlett, who stood brown against the view.

The Going: Thomas Hardy

Why did you give no hint that night
That quickly after the morrow's dawn,
And calmly, as if indifferent quite,
You would close your term here, up and be gone

Where I could not follow
With wing of swallow

To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!

Never to bid good-bye,
Or lip me the softest call,
Or utter a wish for a word, while I
Saw morning harden upon the wall,
Unmoved, unknowing
That your great going
Had place that moment, and altered all.

Why do you make me leave the house
And think for a breath it is you I see
At the end of the alley of bending boughs
Where so often at dusk you used to be;
Till in darkening dankness
The yawning blankness
Of the perspective sickens me!

You were she who abode
By those red-veined rocks far West,
You were the swan-necked one who rode
Along the beetling Beeny Crest,
And, reining nigh me,
Would muse and eye me,
While Life unrolled us its very best.

Why, then, latterly did we not speak,
Did we not think of those days long dead,
And ere your vanishing strive to seek
That time's renewal? We might have said,
'In this bright spring weather
We'll visit together
Those places that once we visited.'

Well, well! All's past amend,
Unchangeable. It must go.

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