



1890

PANTHEA

by Oscar Wilde

PANTHEA

Nay, let us walk from fire unto fire,  
From passionate pain to deadlier delight,-  
I am too young to live without desire,  
Too young art thou to waste this summer night  
Asking those idle questions which of old  
Man sought of seer and oracle, and no reply was told.

For sweet, to feel is better than to know,  
And wisdom is a childless heritage,  
One pulse of passion-youth's first fiery glow,-  
Are worth the hoarded proverbs of the sage:  
Vex not thy soul with dead philosophy,  
Have we not lips to kiss with, hearts to love, and eyes  
to see!

Dost thou not hear the murmuring nightingale  
Like water bubbling from a silver jar,  
So soft she sings the envious moon is pale,  
That high in heaven she hung so far  
She cannot hear that love-enraptured tune,-  
Mark how she wreathes each horn with mist, yon late  
and laboring moon.

White lilies, in whose cups the gold bees dream,  
The fallen snow of petals where the breeze  
Scatters the chestnut blossom, or the gleam  
Of all our endless sins, our vain endeavour  
Enough for thee, dost thou desire more?  
Alas! the Gods will give naught else from their  
eternal store.

For our high Gods have sick and wearied grown  
Of boyish limbs in water,- are not these  
For wasted days of youth to make atone  
By pain or prayer or priest, and never, never,  
Hearken they now to either good or ill,  
But send their rain upon the just and the unjust at will.

They sit at ease, our Gods they sit at ease,  
Strewing with leaves of rose their scented wine,  
They sleep, they sleep, beneath the rocking trees  
Where asphodel and yellow lotus twine,  
Mourning the old glad days before they knew  
What evil things the heart of man could dream, and  
dreaming do.

And far beneath the brazen floor, they see  
Like swarming flies the crowd of little men,  
The bustle of small lives, then wearily  
Back to their lotus-haunts they turn again  
Kissing each other's mouths, and mix more deep  
The poppy-seeded draught which brings soft

purple-lidded sleep.

There all day long the golden-vestured sun,  
Their torch-bearer, stands with his torch a-blaze,  
And when the gaudy web of noon is spun  
By its twelve maidens through the crimson haze  
Fresh from Endymion's arms comes forth the moon,  
And the immortal Gods in toils of mortal passions swoon.

There walks Queen Juno through some dewy mead,  
Her grand white feet flecked with the saffron dust  
Of wind-stirred lilies, while young Ganymede  
Leaps in the hot and amber-foaming must,  
His curls all tossed, as when the eagle bare  
The frightened boy from Ida through the blue Ionian air.

There in the green heart of some garden close  
Queen Venus with the shepherd at her side,  
Her warm soft body like the brier rose  
Which would be white yet blushes at its pride,  
Laughs low for love, till jealous Salmacis  
Peers through the myrtle-leaves and sighs for pain of  
lonely bliss.

There never does that dreary northwind blow  
Which leaves our English forests bleak and bare,  
Nor ever falls the swift white-feathered snow,  
Nor doth the red-toothed lightning ever dare  
To wake them in the silver-fretted night  
When we lie weeping for some sweet sad sin, some dead  
delight.

Alas! they know the far Lethaeon spring,  
The violet-hidden waters well they know,  
Where one whose feet with tired wandering  
Are faint and broken may take heart and go,  
And from those dark depths cool and crystalline  
Drink, and draw balm, and sleep for sleepless souls,  
and anodyne.

But we oppress our natures, God or Fate  
Is our enemy, we starve and feed  
On vain repentance- O we are born too late!  
What balm for us in bruised poppy seed  
Who crowd into one finite pulse of time  
The joy of infinite love and the fierce pain of  
infinite crime.

O we are wearied of this sense of guilt,  
Wearied of pleasures paramour despair,  
Wearied of every temple we have built,  
Wearied of every right, unanswered prayer,  
For man is weak; God sleeps: and heaven is high:  
One fiery-colored moment: one great love: and lo!  
we die.

Ah! but no ferry-man with laboring pole  
Nears his black shallop to the flowerless strand,  
No little coin of bronze can bring the soul  
Over Death's river to the sunless land,

Victim and wine and vow are all in vain,  
The tomb is sealed; the soldiers watch; the dead  
rise not again.

We are resolved into the supreme air,  
We are made one with what we touch and see,  
With our heart's blood each crimson sun is fair,  
With our young lives each spring-impassioned tree  
Flames into green, the wildest beasts that range  
The moor our kinsmen are, all life is one, and all  
is change.

With beat of systole and of diastole  
One grand great light throbs through earth's giant heart,  
And mighty waves of single Being roll  
From nerve-less germ to man, for we are part  
Of every rock and bird and beast and hill,  
One with the things that prey on us, and one with what we kill.

From lower cells of waking life we pass  
To full perfection; thus the world grows old:  
We who are godlike now were once a mass  
Of quivering purple flecked with bars of gold,  
Unsentient or of joy or misery,  
And tossed in terrible tangles of some wild and  
wind-swept sea.

This hot hard flame with which our bodies burn  
Will make some meadow blaze with daffodil,  
Ay! and those argent breasts of thine will turn  
To water-lilies; the brown fields men till  
Will be more fruitful for our love to-night,  
Nothing is lost in nature, all things live in  
Death's despite.

The boy's first kiss, the hyacinth's first bell,  
The man's last passion, and the last red spear  
That from the lily leaps, the asphodel  
Which will not let its blossoms blow for fear  
Of too much beauty, and the timid shame  
Of the young bridegroom at his lover's eyes,- these  
with the same

One sacrament are consecrate, the earth  
Not we alone hath passions hymeneal,  
The yellow buttercups that shake for mirth  
At daybreak know a pleasure not less real  
Than we do, when in some fresh-blossoming wood  
We draw the spring into our hearts, and feel that  
life is good.

So when men bury us beneath the yew  
Thy crimson-stained mouth a rose will be,  
And thy soft eyes lush bluebells dimmed with dew,  
And when the white narcissus wantonly  
Kisses the wind its playment, some faint joy  
Will thrill our dust, and we will be again fond  
maid and boy.

And thus without life's conscious torturing pain

In some sweet flower we will feel the sun,  
And from the linnet's throat will sing again,  
And as two gorgeous-mailed snakes will run  
Over our graves, or as two tigers creep  
Through the hot jungle where the yellow-eyed huge  
lions sleep

And give them battle! How my heart leaps up  
To think of that grand living after death  
In beast and bird and flower, when this cup,  
Being filled too full of spirit, bursts for breath,  
And with the pale leaves of some autumn day  
The soul earth's earliest conqueror becomes earth's  
last great prey.

O think of it! We shall inform ourselves  
Into all sensuous life, the goat-foot Faun,  
The Centaur, or the merry bright-eyed Elves  
That leave their dancing rings to spite the dawn  
Upon the meadows, shall not be more near  
Than you and I to nature's mysteries, for we shall hear

The thrush's heart beat, and the daisies grow,  
And the wan snowdrop sighing for the sun  
On sunless days in winter, we shall know  
By whom the silver gossamer is spun,  
Who paints the diapered fritillaries,  
On what wide wings from shivering pine  
to pine the eagle flies.

Ay! had we never loved at all, who knows  
If yonder daffodil had lured the bee  
Into its gilded womb, or any rose  
Had hung with crimson lamps its little tree!  
Methinks no leaf would ever bud in spring,  
But for the lovers' lips that kiss, the poet's  
lips that sing.

Is the light vanished from our golden sun,  
Or is this daedal-fashioned earth less fair,  
That we are nature's heritors, and one  
With every pulse of life that beats the air?  
Rather new suns across the sky shall pass,  
New splendour come unto the flower, new glory  
to the grass.

And we two lovers shall not sit afar,  
Critics of nature, but the joyous sea  
Shall be our raiment, and the bearded star  
Shoot arrows at our pleasure! We shall be  
Part of the mighty universal whole,  
And through all aeons mix and mingle with  
the Kosmic Soul!

We shall be notes in that great Symphony  
Whose cadence circles through the rhythmic spheres,  
And all the live World's throbbing heart shall be  
One with our heart, the stealthy creeping years  
Have lost their terrors now, we shall not die,  
The Universe itself shall be our Immortality!

THE END