

**80. 'Chi è fermato di menar sua vita' (Sestina)**

He who is set on living out his life  
on the treacherous sea and near the rocks,  
saved from death by a little vessel,  
cannot be far from his own end:  
unless he knows how to return to port  
while the tiller still directs the sails.

The gentle breeze to which my tiller and sails  
were entrusted, entering beloved life  
and hoping to reach a better port,  
carried me then among a thousand rocks:  
and the causes of my sorrowful end  
were not just outside but inside the vessel.

Trapped for a long time in this blind vessel  
I wandered, not lifting my eyes to the sails  
carrying me, before my time, to my end:  
then it pleased Him who brought me into life  
to call me back, far enough from the rocks  
that some way off I could see the port.

As a light at night, burning in port,  
is seen on the high seas by any vessel  
if it's not hidden by a storm or rocks,  
so, from above my swelling sails,  
I saw the emblem of that other life,  
and then I sighed towards my end.

Not that I am yet certain of my end:  
who wishes while day remains, to reach port  
make's a long voyage in so short a life:  
I'm afraid, sailing so frail a vessel,  
mostly I wish the wind not to fill my sails  
that wind that drove me on the rocks.

If I escape alive from dangerous rocks,  
and my exile comes to a good end,  
I'd be content to furl my sails,  
and cast anchor in any port!  
If only I don't blaze, a burning vessel:  
it's so hard for me to leave the old life.

Lord of my end, and of my life,  
before my vessel shatters on the rocks,  
drive me to port, with storm-tossed sails.

**94. 'Quando giugne per gli occhi al cor profondo'**

When through my eyes the image of my lady  
enters my heart's depths, she banishes all others,  
and the power my spirit radiates  
leaves my limbs, leaves them inert weights.

And often a second miracle is born  
from the first: what was driven away,  
fleeing from itself, arrives in a place  
where it takes vengeance and delights in exile.

So a deathly pallor appears in two faces,  
since the vigour that showed them as living,  
is no longer where it used to be in either.

And I recalled this on the day I saw  
two lovers undergo that transformation,  
and look as pale as I used to look.

*Note: 'in a place': in her heart.*

**161. 'O passi sparsi, o pensier' vaghi et pronti,'**

O wandering steps, O swift and errant thoughts,  
O fixed memory, O wild ardour,  
O powerful desire, O weakened heart,  
O eyes of mine, not eyes now, but fountains!

From *The Canzoniere* – Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374)

O leaves, that honour famous brows,  
O one sole emblem of double worth!  
O weary life, O sweet error,  
that makes me go searching plains and hills!

O lovely face where Love has set together  
the reins and spurs that make me twist and turn,  
at pleasure: and no use to kick against them!

O gentle loving spirits, if there are  
any in this world, and you, naked dust and shadows,  
pause and see the nature of my ills.

**169. 'Pien d'un vago penser che me desvia'**

Full of a wandering thought that separates me  
from all other men, and makes me go lonely through the world,  
hour after hour I am tempted from myself  
searching for her, whom I should fly from:

and I see her go by so sweet and deadly  
that my soul trembles to rise in flight,  
she leads such a troop of armed sighs with her,  
this beautiful enemy of Love, and of me.

Truly if I am not wrong I see a ray of pity  
shine from that high clouded brow,  
that partly brightens my grieving heart:

then I recall my soul, and when I start  
to reveal my ill-conceived thoughts to her,  
I have so much to say to her, I dare not begin.

**176. 'Per mezz'i boschi inhospiti et selvaggi'**

Through the midst of inhospitable, wild woods,  
where men at arms go at great risk,

I go safely, since nothing can frighten me  
except that sun whose rays are alive with love:

and I go singing (oh, my unwise thoughts!)  
of her whom heaven cannot set distant from me,  
whom I have in my vision, and seem to see  
women and girls with her, and they are beech and fir.

I seem to hear her, hearing the branches and breeze,  
and the leaves, and the birds lamenting, and the water  
murmuring, running through the green grass.

Rarely did silence, and solitary awesomeness  
of shadowy woodland ever please me so:  
if only too much of my sunlight were not lost.

**306. 'Quel sol che mi mostrava il camin destro'**

That sun that showed me the right road  
to climb to heaven with glorious steps,  
turning to the highest Sun, has shut my light  
and her terrestrial prison beneath a little stone:

so I have become a wild creature, lonely  
and weary, with wandering feet,  
carrying a heavy heart and wet downcast eyes  
through the world, a mountainous desert to me.

So I go searching again for every place  
I saw her: and only you, who afflict me,  
Love, come with me, and show me the way.

I do not find her: yet I always see  
her sacred footsteps on the heavenly path,  
far from Lake Avernus and the Styx.



1. W. Tischbein: Goethe in the Campagna, detail.

<sup>Johann Wolfgang von</sup>  
J. W. GOETHE  
ITALIAN JOURNEY  
〈1786–1788〉

PANTHEON BOOKS

ORIGINAL TITLE  
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Translation by  
W. H. AUDEN  
and  
ELIZABETH MAYER

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# ITALIAN JOURNEY

*ET IN ARCADIA EGO*

\* The asterisks in the text refer to  
the notes on pp. 499-502.

"Go thou to Rome!" From *ADONAI'S* (An Elegy for Keats) - Percy Bysshe Shelley

49. Go thou to Rome,—at once the paradise,  
The grave, the city, and the wilderness;  
And where its wrecks like shattered mountains rise,  
And flowering weeds and fragrant copses dress  
The bones of Desolation's nakedness,                    5  
Pass, till the Spirit of the spot shall lead  
Thy footsteps to a slope of green access,  
Where, like an infant's smile, over the dead  
A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread.

50. And grey walls moulder round, on which dull Time  
Feeds, like slow fire upon a hoary brand;  
And one keen pyramid with wedge sublime,  
Pavilioning the dust of him who planned  
This refuge for his memory, doth stand                    5  
Like flame transformed to marble; and beneath  
A field is spread, on which a newer band  
Have pitched in heaven's smile their camp of death,  
Welcoming him we lose with scarce extinguished breath.

51. Here pause. These graves are all too young as yet  
To have outgrown the sorrow which consigned  
Its charge to each; and, if the seal is set  
Here on one fountain of a mourning mind,  
Break it not thou! too surely shalt thou find                    5  
Thine own well full, if thou returnest home,  
Of tears and gall. From the world's bitter wind  
Seek shelter in the shadow of the tomb.  
What Adonais is why fear we to become?

52. The One remains, the many change and pass;  
Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows fly;  
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of eternity,  
Until Death tramples it to fragments.—Die,                    5  
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!

Follow where all is fled!—Rome's azure sky,  
Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak  
The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

53. Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my heart?  
Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here  
They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!  
A light is past from the revolving year,  
And man and woman; and what still is dear                    5  
Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.  
The soft sky smiles, the low wind whispers near:  
'Tis Adonais calls! Oh hasten thither!  
No more let life divide what death can join together.

54. That light whose smile kindles the universe,  
That beauty in which all things work and move,  
That benediction which the eclipsing curse  
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love  
Which, through the web of being blindly wove                    5  
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,  
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of  
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,  
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

55. The breath whose might I have invoked in song  
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven  
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng  
Whose sails were never to the tempest given.  
The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven!                    5  
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar!  
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of heaven,  
The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation* - Percy Bysshe Shelley (1818-1819)

PREFACE.

The meadows with fresh streams, the bees with thyme,  
The goats with the green leaves of budding Spring,  
Are saturated not--nor Love with tears.--VIRGIL'S "Gallus".

Count Maddalo is a Venetian nobleman of ancient family and of great fortune, who, without mixing much in the society of his countrymen, resides chiefly at his magnificent palace in that city. He is a person of the most consummate genius, and capable, if he would direct his energies to such an end, of becoming the redeemer of his degraded country. But it is his weakness to be proud: he derives, from a comparison of his own extraordinary mind with the dwarfish intellects that surround him, an intense apprehension of the nothingness of human life. His passions and his powers are incomparably greater than those of other men; and, instead of the latter having been employed in curbing the former, they have mutually lent each other strength. His ambition preys upon itself, for want of objects which it can consider worthy of exertion. I say that Maddalo is proud, because I can find no other word to express the concentrated and impatient feelings which consume him; but it is on his own hopes and affections only that he seems to trample, for in social life no human being can be more gentle, patient and unassuming than Maddalo. He is cheerful, frank and witty. His more serious conversation is a sort of intoxication; men are held by it as by a spell. He has travelled much; and there is an inexpressible charm in his relation of his adventures in different countries.

Julian is an Englishman of good family, passionately attached to those philosophical notions which assert the power of man over his own mind, and the immense improvements of which, by the extinction of certain moral superstitions, human society may be yet susceptible. Without concealing the evil in the world he is for ever speculating how good may be made superior. He is a complete infidel, and a scoffer at all things reputed holy; and Maddalo takes a wicked pleasure in drawing out his taunts against religion. What Maddalo thinks on these matters is not exactly known. Julian, in spite of his heterodox opinions, is conjectured by his friends to possess some good qualities. How far this is possible the pious reader will determine. Julian is rather serious.

Of the Maniac I can give no information. He seems, by his own account, to have been disappointed in love. He was evidently a very cultivated and amiable person when in his right senses. His story, told at length, might be like many other stories of the same kind: the unconnected exclamations of his agony will perhaps be found a sufficient comment for the text of every heart.

*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation* - Percy Bysshe Shelley

A CONVERSATION

I rode one evening with Count Maddalo  
Upon the bank of land which breaks the flow  
Of Adria towards Venice: a bare strand  
Of hillocks, heaped from ever-shifting sand,  
Matted with thistles and amphibious weeds,  
Such as from earth's embrace the salt ooze breeds,  
Is this; an uninhabited sea-side,  
Which the lone fisher, when his nets are dried,  
Abandons; and no other object breaks  
The waste, but one dwarf tree and some few stakes  
Broken and unrepaired, and the tide makes  
A narrow space of level sand thereon,  
Where 'twas our wont to ride while day went down.  
This ride was my delight. I love all waste  
And solitary places; where we taste  
The pleasure of believing what we see  
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be:  
And such was this wide ocean, and this shore  
More barren than its billows; and yet more  
Than all, with a remembered friend I love  
To ride as then I rode; -- for the winds drove  
The living spray along the sunny air  
Into our faces; the blue heavens were bare,  
Stripped to their depths by the awakening north;  
And, from the waves, sound like delight broke forth  
Harmonising with solitude, and sent  
Into our hearts æreal merriment.  
So, as we rode, we talked; and the swift thought.  
Winging itself with laughter, lingered not,  
But flew from brain to brain, -- such glee was ours.  
Charged with light memories of remembered hours.  
None slow enough for sadness: till we came

Homeward, which always makes the spirit tame.  
This day had been cheerful but cold, and now  
The sun was sinking, and the wind also.  
Our talk grew somewhat serious, as may be  
Talk interrupted with such raillery  
As mocks itself, because it cannot scorn  
The thoughts it would extinguish: -- 'twas forlorn,  
Yet pleasing, such as once, so poets tell,  
The devils held within the dales of Hell  
Concerning God, freewill and destiny:  
Of all that earth has been or yet may be,  
All that vain men imagine or believe,  
Or hope can paint or suffering may achieve,  
We descanted, and I (for ever still  
Is it not wise to make the best of ill?)  
Argued against despondency, but pride  
Made my companion take the darker side.  
The sense that he was greater than his kind  
Had struck, methinks, his eagle spirit blind  
By gazing on its own exceeding light.  
Meanwhile the sun paused ere it should alight,  
Over the horizon of the mountains; -- Oh,  
How beautiful is sunset, when the glow  
Of Heaven descends upon a land like thee,  
Thou Paradise of exiles, Italy!  
Thy mountains, seas, and vineyards, and the towers  
Of cities they encircle! -- it was ours  
To stand on thee, beholding it: and then,  
Just where we had dismounted, the Count's men  
Were waiting for us with the gondola. --  
As those who pause on some delightful way  
Though bent on pleasant pilgrimage, we stood  
Looking upon the evening, and the flood  
Which lay between the city and the shore.



*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation* - Percy Bysshe Shelley

Paved with the image of the sky ... the hoar  
And æry Alps towards the North appeared  
Through mist, an heaven-sustaining bulwark reared  
Between the East and West; and half the sky  
Was roofed with clouds of rich emblazonry  
Dark purple at the zenith, which still grew  
Down the steep West into a wondrous hue  
Brighter than burning gold, even to the rent  
Where the swift sun yet paused in his descent  
Among the many-folded hills: they were  
These famous Euganean hills, which bear,  
As seen from Lido thro' the harbour piles,  
The likeness of a clump of peaked isles --  
And then -- as if the Earth and Sea had been  
Dissolved into one lake of fire, were seen  
Those mountains towering as from waves of flame  
Around the vaporous sun, from which there came  
The inmost purple spirit of light, and made  
Their very peaks transparent. "Ere it fade,"  
Said my companion, "I will show you soon  
A better station" -- so, o'er the lagune  
We glided; and from that funereal bark  
I leaned, and saw the city, and could mark  
How from their many isles, in evening's gleam,  
Its temples and its palaces did seem  
Like fabrics of enchantment piled to Heaven.  
I was about to speak, when -- "We are even  
Now at the point I meant," said Maddalo,  
And bade the gondolieri cease to row.  
"Look, Julian, on the west, and listen well  
If you hear not a deep and heavy bell."  
I looked, and saw between us and the sun  
A building on an island; such a one  
As age to age might add, for uses vile,

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A windowless, deformed and dreary pile;  
And on the top an open tower, where hung  
A bell, which in the radiance swayed and swung;  
We could just hear its hoarse and iron tongue:  
The broad sun sunk behind it, and it tolled  
In strong and black relief. -- "What we behold  
Shall be the madhouse and its belfry tower,"  
Said Maddalo, "and ever at this hour  
Those who may cross the water, hear that bell  
Which calls the maniacs, each one from his cell,  
To vespers." -- "As much skill as need to pray  
In thanks or hope for their dark lot have they  
To their stern maker," I replied. "O ho!  
You talk as in years past," said Maddalo.  
"Tis strange men change not. You were ever still  
Among Christ's flock a perilous infidel,  
A wolf for the meek lambs -- if you can't swim  
Beware of Providence." I looked on him,  
But the gay smile had faded in his eye.  
"And such," -- he cried, "is our mortality.  
And this must be the emblem and the sign  
Of what should be eternal and divine! --  
And like that black and dreary bell, the soul,  
Hung in a heaven-illuminated tower, must toll  
Our thoughts and our desires to meet below  
Round the rent heart and pray -- as madmen do  
For what? they know not, -- till the night of death  
As sunset that strange vision, severeth  
Our memory from itself, and us from all  
We sought and yet were baffled.' I recall  
The sense of what he said, although I mar  
The force of his expressions. The broad star  
Of day meanwhile had sunk behind the hill,  
And the black bell became invisible,

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*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation* - Percy Bysshe Shelley

And the red tower looked gray, and all between  
The churches, ships and palaces were seen  
Huddled in gloom; -- into the purple sea  
The orange hues of heaven sunk silently.  
We hardly spoke, and soon the gondola  
Conveyed me to my lodging by the way. 140

The following morn was rainy, cold and dim:  
Ere Maddalo arose, I called on him,  
And whilst I waited with his child I played;  
A lovelier toy sweet Nature never made,  
A serious, subtle, wild, yet gentle being,  
Graceful without design and unforeseeing,  
With eyes -- Oh speak not of her eyes! -- which seem  
Twin mirrors of Italian Heaven, yet gleam  
With such deep meaning, as we never see 150  
But in the human countenance: with me  
She was a special favourite: I had nursed  
Her fine and feeble limbs when she came first  
To this bleak world; and she yet seemed to know  
On second sight her ancient playfellow,  
Less changed than she was by six months or so;  
For after her first shyness was worn out  
We sate there, rolling billiard balls about,  
When the Count entered. Salutations past --  
"The word you spoke last night might well have cast 160  
A darkness on my spirit -- if man be  
The passive thing you say, I should not see  
Much harm in the religions and old saws  
(Tho' I may never own such leaden laws)  
Which break a teachless nature to the yoke:  
Mine is another faith" -- thus much I spoke  
And noting he replied not, added: "See  
This lovely child, blithe, innocent and free;

She spends a happy time with little care,  
While we to such sick thoughts subjected are  
As came on you last night -- it is our will 170  
That thus enchains us to permitted ill --  
We might be otherwise -- we might be all  
We dream of happy, high, majestic.  
Where is the love, beauty, and truth we seek  
But in our mind? and if we were not weak  
Should we be less in deed than in desire?"  
"Ay, if we were not weak -- and we aspire  
How vainly to be strong!" said Maddalo:  
"You talk Utopia." "It remains to know,"  
I then rejoined, "and those who try may find 180  
How strong the chains are which our spirit bind;  
Brittle perchance as straw ... We are assured  
Much may be conquered, much may be endured,  
Of what degrades and crushes us. We know  
That we have power over ourselves to do  
And suffer -- what, we know not till we try;  
But something nobler than to live and die --  
So taught those kings of old philosophy  
Who reigned, before Religion made men blind;  
And those who suffer with their suffering kind 190  
Yet feel their faith, religion." "My dear friend,"  
Said Maddalo, "my judgement will not bend  
To your opinion, though I think you might  
Make such a system refutation-tight  
As far as words go. I knew one like you  
Who to this city came some months ago,  
With whom I argued in this sort, and he  
Is now gone mad, -- and so he answered me, --  
Poor fellow! but if you would like to go  
We'll visit him, and his wild talk will show 200  
How vain are such aspiring theories."

*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation* - Percy Bysshe Shelley

"I hope to prove the induction otherwise,  
And that a want of that true theory, still,  
Which seeks a 'soul of goodness' in things ill  
Or in himself or others, has thus bowed  
His being -- there are some by nature proud,  
Who patient in all else demand but this --  
To love and be beloved with gentleness;  
And being scorned, what wonder if they die  
Some living death? this is not destiny  
But man's own wilful ill.' As thus I spoke  
Servants announced the gondola, and we  
Through the fast-falling rain and high-wrought sea  
Sailed to the island where the madhouse stands.  
We disembarked. The clap of tortured hands,  
Fierce yells and howlings and lamentings keen,  
And laughter where complaint had merrier been,  
Moans, shrieks, and curses, and blaspheming prayers  
Accosted us. We climbed the oozy stairs  
Into an old courtyard. I heard on high,  
Then, fragments of most touching melody,  
But looking up saw not the singer there --  
Through the black bars in the tempestuous air  
I saw, like weeds on a wrecked palace growing,  
Long tangled locks flung wildly forth, and flowing,  
Of those who on a sudden were beguiled  
Into strange silence, and looked forth and smiled  
Hearing sweet sounds. -- Then I: "Methinks there were  
A cure of these with patience and kind care,  
If music can thus move ... but what is he  
Whom we seek here?" "Of his sad history  
I know but this," said Maddalo: "he came  
To Venice a dejected man, and fame  
Said he was wealthy, or he had been so;  
Some thought the loss of fortune wrought him woe;

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But he was ever talking in such sort  
As you do -- far more sadly -- he seemed hurt,  
Even as a man with his peculiar wrong,  
To hear but of the oppression of the strong,  
Or those absurd deceits (I think with you  
In some respects, you know) which carry through  
The excellent impostors of this earth  
When they outface detection -- he had worth,  
Poor fellow! but a humourist in his way" --  
"Alas, what drove him mad?" "I cannot say:  
A lady came with him from France, and when  
She left him and returned, he wandered then  
About yon lonely isles of desert sand  
Till he grew wild -- he had no cash or land  
Remaining, -- the police had brought him here --  
Some fancy took him and he would not bear  
Removal; so I fitted up for him  
Those rooms beside the sea, to please his whim,  
And sent him busts and books and urns for flowers,  
Which had adorned his life in happier hours,  
And instruments of music -- you may guess  
A stranger could do little more or less  
For one so gentle and unfortunate:  
And those are his sweet strains which charm the weight  
From madmen's chains, and make this Hell appear  
A heaven of sacred silence, hushed to hear." --  
"Nay, this was kind of you -- he had no claim,  
As the world says" -- "None -- but the very same  
Which I on all mankind were I as he  
Fallen to such deep reverse; -- his melody  
Is interrupted -- now we hear the din  
Of madmen, shriek on shriek, again begin;  
Let us now visit him; after this strain  
He ever communes with himself again,

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*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation* - Percy Bysshe Shelley

And sees nor hears not any." Having said  
These words we called the keeper, and he led  
To an apartment opening on the sea --  
There the poor wretch was sitting mournfully  
Near a piano, his pale fingers twined  
One with the other, and the ooze and wind  
Rushed through an open casement, and did sway  
His hair, and starred it with the brackish spray;  
His head was leaning on a music book,  
And he was muttering, and his lean limbs shook;  
His lips were pressed against a folded leaf  
In hue too beautiful for health, and grief  
Smiled in their motions as they lay apart --  
As one who wrought from his own fervid heart  
The eloquence of passion, soon he raised  
His sad meek face and eyes lustrous and glazed  
And spoke -- sometimes as one who wrote, and thought  
His words might move some heart that heeded not,  
If sent to distant lands: and then as one  
Reproaching deeds never to be undone  
With wondering self-compassion; then his speech  
Was lost in grief, and then his words came each  
Unmodulated, cold, expressionless, --  
But that from one jarred accent you might guess  
It was despair made them so uniform:  
And all the while the loud and gusty storm  
Hissed through the window, and we stood behind  
Stealing his accents from the envious wind  
Unseen. I yet remember what he said  
Distinctly: such impression his words made.

"Month after month," he cried, "to bear this load  
And as a jade urged by the whip and goad  
To drag life on, which like a heavy chain

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Lengthens behind with many a link of pain! --  
And not to speak my grief -- O, not to dare  
To give a human voice to my despair,  
But live and move, and, wretched thing! smile on  
As if I never went aside to groan,  
And wear this mask of falsehood even to those  
Who are most dear -- not for my own repose --  
Alas! no scorn or pain or hate could be  
So heavy as that falsehood is to me --  
But that I cannot bear more altered faces  
Than needs must be, more changed and cold embraces,  
More misery, disappointment, and mistrust  
To own me for their father ... Would the dust  
Were covered in upon my body now!  
That the life ceased to toil within my brow!  
And then these thoughts would at the least be fled;  
Let us not fear such pain can vex the dead.

"What Power delights to torture us? I know  
That to myself I do not wholly owe  
What now I suffer, though in part I may.  
Alas! none strewed sweet flowers upon the way  
Where wandering heedlessly, I met pale Pain  
My shadow, which will leave me not again --  
If I have erred, there was no joy in error,  
But pain and insult and unrest and terror;  
I have not as some do, bought penitence  
With pleasure, and a dark yet sweet offence,  
For then, -- if love and tenderness and truth  
Had overlived hope's momentary youth,  
My creed should have redeemed me from repenting;  
But loathèd scorn and outrage unrelenting  
Met love excited by far other seeming  
Until the end was gained ... as one from dreaming

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*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation* - Percy Bysshe Shelley

Of sweetest peace, I woke, and found my state  
Such as it is. --

"O Thou, my spirit's mate  
Who, for thou art compassionate and wise,  
Wouldst pity me from thy most gentle eyes  
If this sad writing thou shouldst ever see --  
My secret groans must be unheard by thee,  
Thou wouldst weep tears bitter as blood to know  
Thy lost friend's incommunicable woe.

"Ye few by whom my nature has been weighed  
In friendship, let me not that name degrade  
By placing on your hearts the secret load  
Which crushes mine to dust. There is one road  
To peace and that is truth, which follow ye!  
Love sometimes leads astray to misery.  
Yet think not though subdued -- and I may well  
Say that I am subdued -- that the full Hell  
Within me would infect the untainted breast  
Of sacred nature with its own unrest;  
As some perverted beings think to find  
In scorn or hate a medicine for the mind  
Which scorn or hate have wounded -- O how vain!  
The dagger heals not but may rend again ...  
Believe that I am ever still the same  
In creed as in resolve, and what may tame  
My heart, must leave the understanding free,  
Or all would sink in this keen agony --  
Nor dream that I will join the vulgar cry;  
Or with my silence sanction tyranny;  
Or seek a moment's shelter from my pain  
In any madness which the world calls gain,  
Ambition or revenge or thoughts as stern

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As those which make me what I am; or turn  
To avarice or misanthropy or lust ...  
Heap on me soon, O grave, thy welcome dust!  
Till then the dungeon may demand its prey,  
And Poverty and Shame may meet and say --  
Halting beside me on the public way --  
'That love-devoted youth is ours -- let's sit  
Beside him -- he may live some six months yet.'  
Or the red scaffold, as our country bends,  
May ask some willing victim, or ye friends  
May fall under some sorrow which this heart  
Or hand may share or vanquish or avert;  
I am prepared -- in truth with no proud joy --  
To do or suffer aught, as when a boy  
I did devote to justice and to love  
My nature, worthless now! ...

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"I must remove  
A veil from my pent mind. 'Tis torn aside!  
O, pallid as Death's dedicated bride,  
Thou mockery which art sitting by my side,  
Am I not wan like thee? at the grave's call  
I haste, invited to thy wedding-ball  
To greet the ghastly paramour, for whom  
Thou hast deserted me ... and made the tomb  
Thy bridal bed ... But I beside your feet  
Will lie and watch ye from my winding sheet --  
Thus ... wide awake tho' dead ... yet stay, O stay!  
Go not so soon -- I know not what I say --  
Hear but my reasons ... I am mad, I fear,  
My fancy is o'erwrought ... thou art not here...  
Pale art thou, 'tis most true ... but thou art gone,  
Thy work is finished ... I am left alone! --

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*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation* - Percy Bysshe Shelley

"Nay, was it I who wooed thee to this breast  
Which, like a serpent, thou envenomest  
As in repayment of the warmth it lent?  
Didst thou not seek me for thine own content?  
Did not thy love awaken mine? I thought  
That thou wert she who said, 'You kiss me not  
Ever, I fear you do not love me now' --  
In truth I loved even to my overthrow  
Her, who would fain forget these words: but they  
Cling to her mind, and cannot pass away.

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"You say that I am proud -- that when I speak  
My lip is tortured with the wrongs which break  
The spirit it expresses ... Never one  
Humbled himself before, as I have done!  
Even the instinctive worm on which we tread  
Turns, though it wound not -- then with prostrate head  
Sinks in the dusk and writhes like me -- and dies?  
No: wears a living death of agonies!  
As the slow shadows of the pointed grass  
Mark the eternal periods, his pangs pass  
Slow, ever-moving, -- making moments be  
As mine seem -- each an immortality!

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"That you had never seen me -- never heard  
My voice, and more than all had ne'er endured  
The deep pollution of my loathed embrace --  
That your eyes ne'er had lied love in my face --  
That, like some maniac monk, I had torn out  
The nerves of manhood by their bleeding root  
With mine own quivering fingers, so that ne'er  
Our hearts had for a moment mingled there  
To disunite in horror -- these were not  
With thee, like some suppressed and hideous thought

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Which flits athwart our musings, but can find  
No rest within a pure and gentle mind ...  
Thou sealedst them with many a bare broad word,  
And searedst my memory o'er them, -- for I heard  
And can forget not ... they were ministered  
One after one, those curses. Mix them up  
Like self-destroying poisons in one cup,  
And they will make one blessing which thou ne'er  
Didst imprecate for, on me, -- death.

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"It were  
A cruel punishment for one most cruel,  
If such can love, to make that love the fuel  
Of the mind's hell; hate, scorn, remorse, despair:  
But me -- whose heart a stranger's tear might wear  
As water-drops the sandy fountain-stone,  
Who loved and pitied all things, and could moan  
For woes which others hear not, and could see  
The absent with the glance of phantasy,  
And with the poor and trampled sit and weep,  
Following the captive to his dungeon deep;  
Me -- who am as a nerve o'er which do creep  
The else unfelt oppressions of this earth,  
And was to thee the flame upon thy hearth,  
When all beside was cold -- that thou on me  
Shouldst rain these plagues of blistering agony --  
Such curses are from lips once eloquent  
With love's too partial praise -- let none relent  
Who intend deeds too dreadful for a name  
Henceforth, if an example for the same  
They seek ... for thou on me lookedst so, and so --  
And didst speak thus ... and thus ... I live to show  
How much men bear and die not!

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*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation* - Percy Bysshe Shelley

"Thou wilt tell,  
With the grimace of hate, how horrible  
It was to meet my love when thine grew less;  
Thou wilt admire how I could e'er address  
Such features to love's work ... this taunt, though true,  
(For indeed Nature nor in form nor hue  
Bestowed on me her choicest workmanship)  
Shall not be thy defence ... for since thy lip  
Met mine first, years long past, since thine eye kindled  
With soft fire under mine, I have not dwindled  
Nor changed in mind or body, or in aught  
But as love changes what it loveth not  
After long years and many trials.

"How vain  
Are words! I thought never to speak again,  
Not even in secret, -- not to my own heart --  
But from my lips the unwilling accents start,  
And from my pen the words flow as I write,  
Dazzling my eyes with scalding tears ... my sight  
Is dim to see that character'd in vain  
On this unfeeling leaf which burns the brain  
And eats into it ... blotting all things fair  
And wise and good which time had written there.

"Those who inflict must suffer, for they see  
The work of their own hearts, and this must be  
Our chastisement or recompense -- O child!  
I would that thine were like to be more mild  
For both our wretched sakes ... for thine the most  
Who feelest already all that thou hast lost  
Without the power to wish it thine again;  
And as slow years pass, a funereal train  
Each with the ghost of some lost hope or friend

Following it like its shadow, wilt thou bend  
No thought on my dead memory?

"Alas, love!  
Fear me not ... against thee I would not move  
A finger in despite. Do I not live  
That thou mayst have less bitter cause to grieve?  
I give thee tears for scorn and love for hate;  
And that thy lot may be less desolate  
Than his on whom thou tramplest, I refrain  
From that sweet sleep which medicines all pain.  
Then, when thou speakest of me, never say  
'He could forgive not.' Here I cast away  
All human passions, all revenge, all pride;  
I think, speak, act no ill; I do but hide  
Under these words, like embers, every spark  
Of that which has consumed me -- quick and dark  
The grave is yawning ... as its roof shall cover  
My limbs with dust and worms under and over  
So let Oblivion hide this grief ... the air  
Closes upon my accents, as despair  
Upon my heart -- let death upon despair!"

He ceased, and overcome leant back awhile,  
Then rising, with a melancholy smile  
Went to a sofa, and lay down, and slept  
A heavy sleep, and in his dreams he wept  
And muttered some familiar name, and we  
Wept without shame in his society.  
I think I never was impressed so much;  
The man who were not, must have lacked a touch  
Of human nature ... then we lingered not,  
Although our argument was quite forgot,

*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation* - Percy Bysshe Shelley

But calling the attendants, went to dine  
At Maddalo's; yet neither cheer nor wine  
Could give us spirits, for we talked of him  
And nothing else, till daylight made stars dim;  
And we agreed his was some dreadful ill  
Wrought on him boldly, yet unspeakable,  
By a dear friend; some deadly change in love  
Of one vowed deeply which he dreamed not of;  
For whose sake he, it seemed, had fixed a blot  
Of falsehood on his mind which flourished not  
But in the light of all-beholding truth;  
And having stamped this canker on his youth  
She had abandoned him -- and how much more  
Might be his woe, we guessed not -- he had store  
Of friends and fortune once, as we could guess  
From his nice habits and his gentleness;  
These were now lost ... it were a grief indeed  
If he had changed one unsustaining reed  
For all that such a man might else adorn.  
The colours of his mind seemed yet unworn;  
For the wild language of his grief was high,  
Such as in measure were called poetry;  
And I remember one remark which then  
Maddalo made. He said: "Most wretched men  
Are cradled into poetry by wrong,  
They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

If I had been an unconnected man  
I, from this moment, should have formed some plan  
Never to leave sweet Venice, -- for to me  
It was delight to ride by the lone sea;  
And then, the town is silent -- one may write  
Or read in gondolas by day or night,  
Having the little brazen lamp alight,

Unseen, uninterrupted; books are there,  
Pictures, and casts from all those statues fair  
Which were twin-born with poetry, and all  
We seek in towns, with little to recall  
Regrets for the green country. I might sit  
In Maddalo's great palace, and his wit  
And subtle talk would cheer the winter night  
And make me know myself, and the firelight  
Would flash upon our faces, till the day  
Might dawn and make me wonder at my stay:  
But I had friends in London too: the chief  
Attraction here, was that I sought relief  
From the deep tenderness that maniac wrought  
Within me -- 'twas perhaps an idle thought --  
But I imagined that if day by day  
I watched him, and but seldom went away,  
And studied all the beatings of his heart  
With zeal, as men study some stubborn art  
For their own good, and could by patience find  
An entrance to the caverns of his mind,  
I might reclaim him from his dark estate:  
In friendships I had been most fortunate --  
Yet never saw I one whom I would call  
More willingly my friend; and this was all  
Accomplished not; such dreams of baseless good  
Oft come and go in crowds or solitude  
And leave no trace -- but what I now designed  
Made for long years impression on my mind.  
The following morning, urged by my affairs,  
I left bright Venice.

After many years  
And many changes I returned; the name  
Of Venice, and its aspect, was the same;



*Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation* - Percy Bysshe Shelley

But Maddalo was travelling far away  
Among the mountains of Armenia.  
His dog was dead. His child had now become  
A woman; such as it has been my doom  
To meet with few, -- a wonder of this earth, 590  
Where there is little of transcendent worth, --  
Like one of Shakespeare's women: kindly she,  
And, with a manner beyond courtesy,  
Received her father's friend; and when I asked  
Of the lorn maniac, she her memory tasked,  
And told as she had heard the mournful tale:  
"That the poor sufferer's health began to fail  
Two years from my departure, but that then  
The lady who had left him, came again.  
Her mien had been imperious, but she now 600  
Looked meek -- perhaps remorse had brought her low.  
Her coming made him better, and they stayed  
Together at my father's -- for I played,  
As I remember, with the lady's shawl --  
I might be six years old -- but after all  
She left him" ... "Why, her heart must have been tough:  
How did it end?" "And was not this enough?  
They met -- they parted" -- "Child, is there no more?"  
"Something within that interval which bore  
The stamp of why they parted, how they met: 610  
Yet if thine aged eyes disdain to wet  
Those wrinkled cheeks with youth's remembered tears,  
Ask me no more, but let the silent years  
Be closed and cered over their memory  
As yon mute marble where their corpses lie."  
I urged and questioned still, she told me how  
All happened -- but the cold world shall not know.

“Night Song of a Wandering Shepherd in Asia” - Leopardi

What doest thou in heaven, O moon?  
Say, silent moon, what doest thou?  
Thou risest in the evening; thoughtfully  
Thou wanderest o'er the plain,  
Then sinkest to thy rest again.  
And art thou never satisfied  
With going o'er and o'er the selfsame ways?  
Art never wearied? Dost thou still  
Upon these valleys love to gaze?  
How much thy life is like  
The shepherd's life, forlorn!  
He rises in the early dawn,  
He moves his flock along the plain;  
The selfsame flocks, and streams, and herbs  
He sees again;  
Then drops to rest, the day's work o'er;  
And hopes for nothing more.  
Tell me, O moon, what signifies his life  
To him, thy life to thee? Say, whither tend  
My weary, short-lived pilgrimage,  
Thy course, that knows no end?

And old man, gray, infirm,  
Half-clad, and barefoot, he,  
Beneath his burden bending wearily,  
O'er mountain and o'er vale,  
Sharp rocks, and briars, and burning sand,  
In wind, and storm, alike in sultry heat  
And in the winter's cold,  
His constant course doth hold;  
On, on, he, panting, goes,  
Nor pause, nor rest he knows;  
Through rushing torrents, over watery wastes;  
He falls, gets up again,

And ever more and more he hastes,  
Torn, bleeding, and arrives at last  
Where ends the path,  
Where all his troubles end;  
A vast abyss and horrible,  
Where plunging headlong, he forgets them all.  
Such scene of suffering, and of strife,  
O moon, is this our mortal life.  
In travail man is born;  
His birth too oft the cause of death,  
And with his earliest breath  
He pain and torment feels: e'en from the first,  
His parents fondly strive  
To comfort him in his distress;  
And if he lives and grows,  
They struggle hard, as best they may,  
With pleasant words and deeds to cheer him up,  
And seek with kindly care,  
To strengthen him his cruel lot to bear.  
This is the best that they can do  
For the poor child, however fond and true.  
But wherefore give him life?  
Why bring him up at all,  
If this be all?  
If life is nought but pain and care,  
Why, why should we the burden bear?  
O spotless moon, such is  
Our mortal life, indeed;  
But thou immortal art,  
Nor wilt, perhaps, unto my words give heed.

Yet thou, eternal, lonely wanderer,  
Who, thoughtful, lookest on this earthly scene,  
Must surely understand

What all our sighs and sufferings mean;  
What means this death,  
This color from our cheeks that fades,  
This passing from the earth, and losing sight  
Of every dear, familiar scene.  
Well must thou comprehend  
The reason of these things; must see  
The good the morning and the evening bring:  
Thou knowest, thou, what love it is  
That brings sweet smiles unto the face of spring;  
The meaning of the Summer's glow,  
And of the Winter's frost and snow,  
And of the silent, endless flight of Time.  
A thousand things to thee their secrets yield,  
That from the simple shepherd are concealed.  
Oft as I gaze at thee,  
In silence resting o'er the desert plain,  
Which in the distance borders on the sky,  
Or following me, as I, by slow degrees,  
My flocks before me drive;  
And when I gaze upon the stars at night,  
In thought I ask myself,  
"Why all these torches bright?  
What mean these depths of air,  
This vast, this silent sky,  
This nightly solitude? And what am I?"  
Thus to myself I talk; and of this grand,  
Magnificent expanse,  
And its untold inhabitants,  
And all this mighty motion, and this stir  
Of things above, and things below,  
No rest that ever know,  
But as they still revolve, must still return  
Unto the place from which they came,--

“Night Song of a Wandering Shepherd in Asia” - Leopardi

Of this, alas, I find nor end nor aim!  
But thou, immortal, surely knowest all.  
This I well know, and feel;  
From these eternal rounds,  
And from my being frail,  
Others, perchance, may pleasure, profit gain;  
To me life is but pain.

My flock, now resting there, how happy thou,  
That knowest not, I think, thy misery!  
O how I envy thee!  
Not only that from suffering  
Thou seemingly art free;  
That every trouble, every loss,  
Each sudden fear, thou canst so soon forget;  
But more because thou sufferest  
No weariness of mind.  
When in the shade, upon the grass reclined,  
Thou seemest happy and content,  
And great part of the year by thee  
In sweet release from care is spent.  
But when I sit upon the grass  
And in the friendly shade, upon my mind  
A weight I feel, a sense of weariness,  
That, as I sit, doth still increase  
And rob me of all rest and peace.  
And yet I wish for nought,  
And have, till now, no reason to complain.  
What joy, how much I cannot say;  
But thou some pleasure dost obtain.  
My joys are few enough;  
But not for that do I lament.  
Ah, couldst thou speak, I would inquire:  
Tell me, dear flock, the reason why

Each weary breast can rest at ease,  
While all things round him seem to please;  
And yet, if I lie down to rest,  
I am by anxious thoughts oppressed?

Perhaps, if I had wings  
Above the clouds to fly,  
And could the stars all number, one by one,  
Or like the lightning leap from rock to rock,  
I might be happier, my dear flock,  
I might be happier, gentle moon!  
Perhaps my thought still wanders from the truth,  
When I at others' fortunes look:  
Perhaps in every state beneath the sun,  
Or high, or low, in cradle or in stall,  
The day of birth is fatal to us all.

Christina Rossetti

“Italia, io ti saluto!” (from *A Pageant and Other Poems*, 1881)

To come back from the sweet South, to the North  
Where I was born, bred, look to die;  
Come back to do my day's work in its day,  
Play out my play--  
Amen, amen, say I.  
To see no more the country half my own,  
Nor hear the half familiar speech,  
Amen, I say; I turn to that bleak North  
Whence I came forth--  
The South lies out of reach.  
But when our swallows fly back to the South,  
To the sweet South, to the sweet South,  
The tears may come again into my eyes  
On the old wise,  
And the sweet name to my mouth.

“You who look on passed ages as a glass” (Unpublished 1835-1870)

You who look on passed ages as a glass  
To shadow forth the future, in your home  
Peacefully dwelling little heeding some  
But loving many; as the visions pass  
Turn from them for a moment to the grass  
And solemn sun & blue o'erarching dome  
And in the hush of nature think on Rome  
Not as it is now but as it once was.  
As of the mighty dead think without hope  
But if you will indulge a hopeful pile  
Yea if you will write about it in rhyme  
For if it once had a too mighty scope  
To be all as the sun fails not to smile  
It shall be nothing to the end of time.