

Gérard de Nerval

Selected Poems



Moonrise over the Sea (1822) - Caspar David Friedrich (German, 1774-1840)

[Artvee](#)

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Translator's Introduction

Gérard de Nerval was the pen-name of Gérard Labrunie (1808-1855), essayist, translator, poet, playwright, and travel writer. He was a major figure during the era of French Romanticism, and is best known for his novellas and poetry, especially the collection *Les Filles du feu* (*The Daughters of Fire*), which contained a set of eight novellas, including *Sylvie*, and a selection of poems including *El Desdichado*. Nerval played a major role in introducing French readers to the works of German Romantic authors, including Goethe and Schiller, initially through his prose translation of the first part of Goethe's *Faust*. His later work, merging poetry and journalism in a fictional manner, influenced Proust, particularly *Sylvie* which explored the theme of time lost and recalled. His last novella, *Aurélia ou Le Rêve et La Vie*, which drew on his interest in the significance of dreams, also influenced André Breton and the Surrealist movement.

At college, he met Théophile Gautier, who became a lifelong friend, and in 1836 accompanied Gautier on a trip to Belgium. In 1840 he took over the latter's column in *La Presse*.

He began to experience serious mental health problems in 1841. In late 1842 and 1843, Nerval travelled to, and around, the Near East, later publishing articles deriving from his travels, and *Voyage en Orient* which expanded on his journey. Between 1844 and 1847, Nerval travelled to Belgium, the Netherlands, and London, writing about his experiences. At the same time, he was writing novellas and opera librettos, and translating the poems of his friend Heinrich Heine, publishing a selection of these in 1848. His last years were troubled by severe emotional and financial problems, and he sadly took his own life in January 1855. In 1867, Gautier wrote a touching reminiscence of him, '*La Vie de Gérard*', which was included in his *Portraits et Souvenirs Littéraires* of 1875.

First Song (Premier Chant)

Winter is fleeing; the balmy Spring
Returns with its Cupids, and Flora,
Let those who've never loved, love,
Tomorrow; and those who have, love once more!

Winter was ruler over the weather,
When Venus emerged from the sea;
Her first breath gave birth to Spring,
And Spring set the whole world free.

Burning summer owns the rich harvest,
Autumn will ripe grapes enclose,
Chill winter is coated with icicles,
But Spring owns love, and the rose.

Winter is fleeing; the balmy Spring
Returns with its Cupids, and Flora,
Let those who've never loved, love,
Tomorrow; and those who have, love once more!

Note: The refrain is a rendering of that of the anonymous Latin silver age poem *Pervigilium Veneris*: 'Cras amet qui nunquam amavit; quique amavit cras amet.'

Ode (*À Béranger*)

Songs – they were his whole existence!
Like to a vaporous fog of longing,
The breath of desire, a living presence,
Over his generous heart went sighing;
Always hopeful, the tremulous gleam
Of France's happiness, ever his dream;
But the haters are forever implacable.
He respected the laws...abhorred crime,
Yet Virtue must sit down, many a time,
On the same bench as the criminal.

What did he commit? Why proscribed?
Ah! His songs always: come, be brave!
You sought to stifle satire, well-bribed,
Rather than hear the lessons that it gave.
When a sect, full of turbulent thought,
Raising its threatening head, yet unbought,
Defies the worst of sovereign decrees,
You remain mute, not seeking redress;
Rather than use the power you possess,
You merely assault his refrains, at ease ...

O Béranger! Beloved muse of ours!
You whose voice sounds out, above,
Joining the memory, in silent hours,
Of this land to that of all that you love;
Tender friend, and poet sublime,
Your noble songs, devoid of crime,
Will gain victory through their story,
Over the jealous powers that oppress.
Singing our glory, the words they utter
Are, like the history of sweet success,
That makes our very hearts flutter.
A day will come, when France is sure

To do justice to your virtues; our eyes
Will see your statue, resplendent, rise...
Though you will, alas, sing no more!

The poet on earth must fight, we see,
At every moment against misery,
His detractors, odious by design,
Till the day when, breaking his chain,
The law comes to terminate his pain,
And place him amidst the gods divine.

But we, charmed by his mad desire,
When he sang of endless liberty,
Let us hasten, children of the lyre,
To sound the voice, here, of posterity,
And celebrate our poet, now, instead,
Place the bright garland on his head;
Let us not wait till he's extinguished...
If in the struggle that begins anew,
His fate must be captivity, let you,
And I, cry: 'Glory, to the vanquished!'

Note: Pierre-Jean de Béranger (1780-1857) was a French poet and writer of popular songs, celebrated for his liberal and humanitarian views. After the downfall of Napoleon, his songs and poems were highly critical of the restored Bourbon monarchy.

Choir of love (*Choeur d'Amour*)

Here, we now pass
Enchanted days!
From hearts, sad alas,
Boredom fades.
Lost is the plash
Of restless waves.

Frivolous hours
That we must seize,
Mad passions of ours
Desires that please,
Fly, failing powers,
As pleasures cease!

The Cousin (*La Cousine*)

Winter has its pleasures; and often, on Sunday,
The sun turning the white frost yellow, as ever,
One can walk out with one's cousin, all day...
– 'And don't be late', says mother, 'for dinner.'

And when, one's had one's fill of the Tuileries,
Viewing flowery beds, beneath black trees,
The girl feels quite cold... giving you notice
That she feels the advance of the evening mist.

So, one returns, talking, of the day, this same,
That fled so swiftly... with so discreet a flame:
And senses – on entering, one's appetite stirring,
At the foot of the stairs – the turkey, roasting.

In the Woods (*Dans les Bois*)

In spring, the bird is born to sing:
His voice, have you not heard?...
It's simple, pure, and touching,
In the woods, the voice of the bird!

In summer, the bird seeks the bird
He'll love – and loves once only!
Such sweetness, peace, and loyalty,
In the woods – a home to the bird!

Then, when autumn mists are stirred,
He's silent... for chill skies gleam.
Alas! How fortunate it must seem,
In the woods – the death of the bird!



Moonrise over the Sea (1822) - Caspar David Friedrich (German, 1774-1840)

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Childhood (*L'Enfance*, 1822)

How sweet were those days of my childhood
Always bright, free of cares and sorrow;
I lived sweet existence, for ill or for good,
Without giving a thought to tomorrow.

What good has knowledge brought me,
That serves Progress, ever the rage?
Who needs science and technology,
When one lives in the Golden Age!

My heart, a novice, still tender
Knew naught of the darkness of life,
Culling flowers, as if forever,
Unaware of the thorns, free of strife.
Pure, was every childish caress,
Untainted by Time's bitterness.

How could I know, exempt from all pain,
That here, in this vast universe of ours,
All the evils of Hell pursue their course,
And establish, through that, their domain?

We are far from those blessed days,
From the reign of Saturn and Rhea,
When the Virtues, not evil ways,
Were worshipped, on earth, together.
For, then, in that fortunate country,
All were children; and all were happy.

April (*Avril*)

Fine days already – now dusty, and bright,
A sky of pure azure and tender light,
The burning walls, the longer evening –
And nothing green as yet – scarce a glow
Of reddish hue adorns, for us below,
Black branches through the air ascending!

This fine weather weighs on me – ennui.
It is only after days of rain, we'll see
The verdancy, the soft pink of spring,
That must appear, as in some painting;
A nymph fresh-engendered will emerge,
Smiling, there, beside the watery verge.

Gaiety (*Gaieté*)

Little piqueton from Mareuil,
Clearer than wine from Argenteuil,
How sovereign your flavour!
The Romans in ancient Paris,
Never understood your finish,
They preferred a Suresnes ever.

You, pink liqueur, oh pretty wine!
Seemingly made of blood divine,
From a nymph of the countryside;
Beading at the rim, as desired,
Of a glass of ribbed crystal, fired
With the tint of a fern inside.

You quench the thirst I suffer
After a fine wine, in summer,
I imbibed the night before;
Sour, and yet sweet, your taste
With which my palate's graced,
On waking, refreshing me more.

Ah! How gaily in morning light,
All uncertain, I tread the height,
Lost in your vines' green depths!...
Without Richelet's book of rhymes,
To discover a word which chimes
With, and perfectly echoes 'epts'.

Note: A piqueton, or piquette, is a lower alcohol drink made from water, sugar and grape-must. In the early nineteenth century Argenteuil and Suresnes, now suburbs of Paris, were important wine-producing areas. César-Pierre Richelet published his revised *Dictionnaire de Rimes* in 1692, many times reprinted.

Fantasy (*Fantaisie*)



Ruins of the Château de Pierrefonds (1825-1872)
Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (French, 1796 - 1875)

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There's a tune for which I'd happily
Give Rossini, Mozart, and Weber,
A languid, funereal air, that ever
Holds a secret charm, solely for me.

Now, every time that I hear it played,
My soul is two hundred years younger:
It's of Louis XIII's day; there, arrayed,
A verdant hill, the sun gilds as it lingers,

And, a chateau of brick, bordered by stone,
Stained-glass windows, tinted with red,
Surrounded by parkland; a river's shown
Bathing its foot, among flowers outspread;

There, a lady, at a high window, I see,
Blonde, with dark eyes, in antique dress,
Whom in some other existence, maybe,
I have seen before...and recall no less!

Note: Louis XIII reigned from 1610 to 1643, a comparable style of contemporary dress in England was that of the court of Charles I.

In the Country of Chimeras (*Sur le Pays de Chimères*)

In the country of chimeras
I have arrested my flight:
Lead me safely, as I alight,
In traversing the heathers,
The rocks and ruins, aright.

See how swiftly the trees,
Crowded together, wither;
Those cliffs in the rising breeze,
Swaying, hither and thither.
Now, the wind sighs and screams!

Among these rocks, the streams
Are mingling with the river;
I hear that sound of water,
Always dear to my dreams!
Plaintive whispers sublime,
All I longed for, and adore...
An echo heard once more,
Like the voice of lost time,

A heron's rasp, now sounds;
And an owl's call resounds,
They mingle their sad song;
From every bush, their long
Thin, spiny arms stretch out,
Their strange roots wind about;
Worms, and serpents, form
Knots, midst the stony rout,
Bellies, all slippery, swarm.

By branches that intertwine,
At every step I'm caught!
The mice traverse their line,

Of moss, and here, unsought
Fugitive flies, with a sigh,
Thousands of them, pass by;
While brighter things, also,
Light the path with their glow.

Is it here we'll find our nemesis?
Should we travel on, or stay?
Everything, round us, menaces,
Everything shines and grimaces,
Set to strike, or send us astray;
The trees and rocks are treacherous;
The flames, luminous, tremulous,
Gleam, without lighting the way!...

Notre Dame (*Notre-Dame de Paris*)

Notre-Dame is old: she may see, furthermore,
The burial of Paris, whose birth she once saw.
In a thousand years, perhaps, Time will fell
Her vast carcass, as a wolf topples an ox,
Twist her frame, and with dull tooth, as well,
Gnaw at the stones, as it chews solid rocks!

Many people, from every country, will view
That austere ruin, and gaze, there, in dream
Fresh from reading Hugo's strange tale, anew:
And the old cathedral, once living, will seem,
Just as she was, in her glory, and power,
A shade, from the dead, in unearthly hour!



Notre-Dame de Paris (1854) - Johan Barthold Jongkind (Dutch, 1819-1891)

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Note: Victor Hugo's Gothic novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*) is set in Paris, in 1482, in and around the cathedral. The novel tells the story of the Gypsy girl, *La Esmeralda*, and the misshapen bell-ringer, *Quasimodo*, the ward of the archdeacon, *Claude Frollo*.

An Amorous Flame (*Une Amoureuse Flamme*)

An amorous flame
Consumes my fair days;
Ah! Peace, at her name,
You flee me, always!

At my window am I,
Or walking, all day,
To see her go by,
Or return, if I may.

Her walk ever beguiles,
Her charm and her grace,
Her mouth, sweet smiles,
Her eyes, and her face;

Her voice, enchanting,
I bathe there, in bliss,
Her hand, so caressing,
Alas! And her kiss...

An amorous flame
Consumes my fair days;
Ah! Peace, at her name,
You flee me, always!

My heart races, ever
When I see her appear;
My heart, so tender,
How to keep you, here?

O caress of pure flame!
Could my spirit but move
To breathe out her name
In the kiss that spells love!

In the Luxembourg Gardens (*Une Allée du Luxembourg*)

The young girl passed me by, at that hour,
Like a spirited bird, once again,
In her hand was a glowing flower,
On her lips was a fresh refrain.

She, perhaps, possesses the only heart
That could ever respond to mine,
Her glance, alone, owning the art
Of brightening night with its sign!

But no – fair youth is over for me...
Farewell, sweet ray that I knew –
Perfume, a young girl, harmony...
Happiness passed – from my view!

Note: the stylistic influence of Heinrich Heine here, later apparent in Alexander Blok's middle period.

The Butterflies (*Les Papillons*)

I

‘Of all that’s most beautiful to the eye,
That we miss when chill winter’s here,
Which seems best?’ – ‘The rose,’ say I;
– ‘I, the green meadows clear;’
– ‘I, the harvest, the sunlight brings
To the furrows, beneath the sky’;
– ‘I, the nightingale that sings’;
– And I, every butterfly!

The butterfly, stemless flower
That flutters;
Caught, if it should alight;
In infinite Nature,
The harmony,
Between flower and bird in flight...

When summer returns, on high,
I head for the woods, alone:
And deep in the grass, I lie,
In a green shroud of my own.
Over my head, unsought,
There, each of them, above,
Passes by like a thought
Of poetry, or of love!

Here’s the ‘Grayling’
Yellow and black;
The ‘Purple Emperor’ there,
Flickering, sparkling,
Rich velvet, now back,
Shimmering in the air.

The swift 'Red Admiral', too,
It seems a birdlike thing,
Its black and splendid wing
Bearing a ribbon or two.
'The 'Clouded Yellow' on high,
Like lightning goes flashing by...
But here's the joyous 'Fritillary';
Which is the only one for me!

II

Like a silken fan,
It there deploys
Its coat bordered with silver;
Gilded to plan,
In golden poise,
Of a greenish, varying, colour.

Here, is the 'Zebra Swallowtail'
Striped in fawn and black anew;
The 'Marble White', in dark detail,
The 'Glasswing', streaked in blue;
Here, the 'Brown Argus', like a dead leaf,
'Large Blue, and 'Camberwell Beauty',
And the fine 'Peacock' that, in relief,
On each wing shows an eye all fiery!

But fields fade in the evening light;
And the moths take flight,
Noisily, beating,
And 'Hawkmoths' in dark hues,
With the shadows fuse,
Oftentimes retreating.

Here's the 'Giant Peacock', pink-eyes
Drawn on a greyish ground,
Only at night it softly flies,

Like to a bat, all around;
The 'Bombyx', of the privet,
Striped with yellow and air;
The 'Winter Moth', that's set
To live when the trees are bare.

The 'Death's Head Hawkmoth' shows
Its skeletal skull, and glows,
White on black is its marking.
Such the countryfolk fear
To see when it draws near,
And quivers, in the evening.

I detest those moths again,
Sombre guests of the night,
That flutter over the plain,
From seven until midnight;
But you, butterflies, I adore,
Slight butterflies of the day,
Proving one emblem more
Of poetry and love, alway!

III

Woe, butterflies I adore,
Emblems for evermore,
Woe to you, in your beauty...
A finger, alas will crumple
The velvet of each petal
In passing by you, brusquely...

A girl, her smile quite gentle,
Possessed of a tender heart,
Piercing yours, with a needle,
Will gaze, surprised, as you start:
Your legs will collapse, and fail,
At the touch of her white nail,

And your antennae quiver,
With the pain death will deliver...

Sunset (*Le Coucher du Soleil*)



Paris, The Seine And The Louvre At Sunset - Henri Zuber (French, 1844–1909)

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When the evening sun crosses the Tuileries,
And sets all the Louvre's windows ablaze,
I'm the Grande Allée, bathed in its rays
My two ponds, immersed in my reveries!

From there, my friends, it's a lovely sight
To see, as the night spreads her veil afar,
The rich sunset – setting the heart alight,
Framed, fittingly, in the arch of the Star!

Note: The Arc de l'Étoile, the Arch of the Star, on the Champs-Élysées, in Paris, is better known as the Arc de Triomphe.

Gothic Song (Chanson Gothique)

Beautiful spouse
Your tears in showers!
They are the dew
Befitting flowers.

Beautiful things
Have but one spring.
To Time's footprints
May roses cling!

Must we choose to be
Blond or brunette?
Pleasure's the god
Of this world yet.

The Relay-Station (*Le Relais*)

On the way, we halt, and descend, one by one;
Then, between the houses, adventurously slip,
Eyes weary of seeing those flicks of the whip
On the horses' backs, and our bodies all numb.

And suddenly, there, lies a sweet verdant spot,
A damp valley with lilacs, silent and green,
And murmuring under the poplars, a stream,
So, the road and its noise are quickly forgot!

We lie in the grass, breathe its life, at leisure,
Drunk with the scent of cut hay; it's a pleasure
To think of nothing, and gaze at the sky...
Alas! 'Travellers, board again!' comes the cry.

Waking in the Coach (*Le Réveil en Voiture*)

Here's what I see: the trees bordering the road,
Seem fleeing together, the rout of an army;
As if stirred by the wind, the surface, below,
Rolls by, in waves of stones, and greenery!

Bell-towers conduct, across the green plain,
Their hamlets with houses coated in plaster,
Roofed with red tiles, driven onward again,
Like sheep, backs marked, one after another!

Those intoxicated hills sway, the river,
Seizes the vale like a boa constrictor,
Sliding to gather and swallow the sheep...
I'm posting away; I've woken from sleep!

Spain (*Espagne*)

My sweet country of Spain,
Who would flee your lovely sky,
City, and mountain, and plain,
Your eternal Spring, on high;

Your intoxicating air, so pure,
Your nights, as lovely to our eyes,
Your fields, that God might lure,
Were he to quit his paradise.

Arabia, who watched you bow,
Though from your presence sent,
Left on your queen's fair brow,
His crown of the Orient!

To your enchanted shore,
An echo passed, over the sea,
The ancient refrain of the Moor:
'Love, Glory, and Liberty!

The Disinherited (*El Desdichado*)

I am the darkness – the widower – the un-consoled,
The prince of Aquitaine in the ruined tower;
My sole *star* is dead – and my constellated lute
Bears the black *sun* of *Melancholy*'s hour.

You who consoled me in funereal night,
Bring me Posillipo, the sea that Italy knows,
The flower, that pleased my grieving heart,
The trellis, where the vine entwines the rose.

Am I Phoebus or Love? ... Biron or Lusignan?
My brow's still red from the queen's kiss; unwise
I dreamed in the grotto where the Sirens swim...

And twice victorious crossed the Acheron:
Plucking from Orpheus' lyre, one by one,
All its saintly sighs, and its magical cries.



The Raft of the Medusa (1818) - Théodore Géricault (French, 1791-1824)

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Note: The Spanish title, meaning the unfortunate or ill-starred one, was the motto adopted by the disinherited *Ivanhoe* in Walter Scott's novel. The Hill of Posillipo is situated to the west of the city of Naples, and is the site of Virgil's tomb. Biron was a friend of Henri IV, Lusignan a noble family; both were associated with the Valois. A number of personal references are best pursued by reading a biography of Nerval, of his early meeting with 'Adrienne' and later relationship with the actress Jenny Colon.

Myrtho (*Myrtho*)

Myrtho, I think of you, divine enchantress,
Of proud Posillipo, lit with the flames' glare,
Of your brow flooded with Eastern light,
The black grapes twined in your golden hair.

It was in your cup I drank intoxication,
When they saw me praying at Iacchus' feet,
And, from your laughing eyes' secret lightening,
The Muses made me one of the sons of Greece.

I know why the volcano erupts once more...
You stirred it with agile foot but yesterday,
And suddenly ash drowned the horizon's circle.

Since a Norman duke broke your gods of clay,
Eternally, beneath Virgil's laurel spray,
The pale hydrangea is wed to the green myrtle.

Note: Aphrodite Myrtho, Myrto, or Venus Murcia, to whom myrtle was sacred, is the counterpart to the dark prince of El Desdichado. Alchemically she is De Nerval's feminine principle to be fused with the masculine. Iacchus was an epithet of the god Dionysus (Bacchus) and the name of the torch-bearer at the Eleusinian mysteries, herald of the child born of the underworld. Historically the hydrangea was associated with the single life, or unrequited love, the myrtle with love itself. The Duchy of Naples was conquered by the Normans (Roger II of Sicily) in 1137. Posillipo is opposite the volcano, Vesuvius, and there are the ruins of a temple on the Point of Posillipo.

Anteros (*Antéros*)

You ask why I have such anger in my heart,
And, on my flexible neck, an untamed head;
It is that I come from the race of Antaeus;
Against the victorious god, I turn the dart.

Yes, I am one who's inspired by the Avenger;
He marked my forehead with his teeth again.
Under Abel's pallor, blood-stained, alas,
I sometimes show the implacable sign of Cain!

Jehovah! The last, defeated by your kingdom,
Who, from the depths of hell, cried: 'O tyranny!'
Was my ancestor Belus, or my father Dagon...

They plunged me three times in Cocytus' waters;
Protecting my Amalekite mother, I, alone,
Reseed the teeth of the old dragon at her feet.

Note: Anteros was the Greek god of requited love, and the avenger of unrequited love. Antaeus was the son of the Earth, who lost his strength if lifted from the ground, he was defeated by Heracles. Baal (Bel, or Belus) and Dagon were Canaanite deities. Cocytus was a river of the underworld, a river of lamentation. The Amalekites were enemies of the Israelites. Mythically, the dragon's teeth, from which an army sprang were planted separately by Jason and by Cadmus.

Horus (*Horus*)

Trembling, Kneph, the god, shook the starry House:
Isis, the mother, risen from her bed, then made
The sign of hatred towards her savage spouse;
In her green eyes shone passions of elder days.

‘Do you see him?’ she cried, ‘the old lecher dies;
Through his mouth the frosts of earth take flight;
Bind his lame feet, destroy his squinting sight,
He’s the god of craters, king of the winter’s ice!

The new spirit summons, the eagle is done,
Cybele’s robe, for him, do I now put on...
The beloved son of Hermes and Osiris!’

The goddess fled away on her golden shell,
Her adored image returning on the swell,
And the sky shone beneath the scarf of Iris.

Note: Kneph, is Amon-Ra the great god of Egypt. Isis was the Egyptian mother-goddess (Cybele was her equivalent in Asia Minor): consort of Osiris she bore the child Horus-Harpocrates, the new sun. Isis returns as Venus from the waves. This is the alchemical fusion of the male and female principles which produces gold, a process sacred to Hermes Trismegistos. Iris’ scarf is the rainbow, she being sky-messenger for Hera (the Greek great-goddess).

Delfica (*Delfica*)

Do you know it, Daphne, that ballad of old,
At the sycamore-foot, beneath the white laurel,
That song of love that resounds forever?...
Under olive, trembling willow, or myrtle?...

Do you know it, the Temple with vast peristyle,
And the lemons, bitter, marked by your teeth,
And the grotto so fatal to imprudent guests,
Where the vanquished dragon's ancient seed sleeps?...

Those gods you endlessly weep will return!
Time, bring back the order of classic days;
Earth's prophetic breath your rest perturbs...

Yet the sibyl with Latinate face still sleeps
Under the arch of Constantine, always
– And the austere portico nothing disturbs.



Priestess of Delphi (1891) - John Collier (English, 1850 – 1934)
[Artvee](#)

Note: The Pythian oracle at Delphi on the slopes of Mount Parnassus was sacred to Apollo. There are references, in Gerard's writings, to a visit to the Temple of Isis at Pompeii with an English girl, Octavia (who tasted a lemon), and to the Temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli. The laurel, with which poets were crowned, was sacred to Daphne, she being transformed to that tree to escape Apollo's pursuit, and a mask of Artemis, or one of her huntresses. The Sibyl, it is said, was inspired to prophecy by chewing laurel leaves which contain hydrocyanic acid. Constantine's Arch is in Rome. The Tiburtine sibyl proclaimed the advent of Christianity; Constantine the Great played a key role in ensuring the dominance of Christianity over the pagan gods, whose possible return is evoked in the poem.

Artemis (*Artémis*)

The thirteenth returns...She's the first, as ever;
And always the sole one – or the sole instant;
For are you queen, O you, the first or the last?
Are you king, are you, the sole or last lover?...

Love him who loved you from cradle to bier;
She, I alone loved, still loves me tenderly:
She is death – or the dead one...O joy! O torment!
The rose she holds is the *Rose trémiere*.

Neapolitan saint with your hands full of fire,
Rose with violet heart, Saint Gudula's flower:
Have you found your cross in the desert of heaven?

White roses: fall! You insult our gods,
Fall, white wraiths, from your burning skies;
– She, saint of the abyss, holier to my eyes!

Note: The *Rose trémiere* is the hollyhock. St Gudula was a Brabant saint (late 7th-early 8th century), patroness of Brussels. A demon wishing to interrupt her prayers extinguished the light she carried, but divine power rekindled it. The flower-like fungus once called 'tremella deliquescens' (*Dacrymyces deliquescens*), is known as 'Sinte Goulds lampken' (St. Gudula's lantern). The adjective Neapolitan presumably denotes a blending of pale ice and crimson fire, as does the white rose with the violet heart. Artemis, Apollo's sister, was the Greek virgin-goddess of the chase, who slew Orion, sent the wild boar that killed Adonis, and punished Actaeon for viewing her bathing. Artemisia II of Caria (her name derived from that of the goddess) was celebrated as an example of chaste love and widowhood, having 'married', and ruled alongside, her brother Mausolus, for whom on his death she raised the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Erythrae (Érythrée)

Column of Sapphire, laced with pure arabesques —
'Reappear!' — cry the pigeons, seeking their nest.

'From your granite brow, now, to your azure feet,
Let the Judaeon purple unfold, pleat on pleat!

If you see where Benares reclines by her river,
Take your quiver, and don your armour of gold:

For there flies the Vulture, high over Palani;
Flooding the sea, are white butterflies untold.

Mahadeva! Float your sails on the water,
Strew your purple flowers over the stream:
On the Atlantic, falls Cathay's white snow.'

But the Priestess, as roseate-faced as ever,
Sleeps under the Arch of the Sun, in dream,
And nothing disturbs the severe portico.

Note: Erythrae in ancient Ionia, on the Kara Burun peninsula, opposite Chios, contained the temple of the Erythraean Sibyl, a priestess of Apollo (see Michelangelo's rendering of her in the Sistine Chapel). Benares (now Varanasi) in India, lies on the River Ganges. Palani, with its famous temple dedicated to Murugan, son of the god Shiva (Ganesh was his brother), is further south in Tamil Nadu. Murugan, circled the world on a peacock (symbol of pride), but was deemed the lesser brother by his father, and adopted the hermit's life. Mahadeva is an epithet of Shiva. The poem evokes the poet's theme of loss, and the hope of renewal from some remote or ancient source; of unrequited or lost love, and the hope of union or reunion with that beloved. The last lines echo the last lines of his poem *Delfica*.

Golden Lines (Vers Dorée)

Well, then! All is sentient!

(Pythagoras)

Free-thinker, Man, do you think you alone
Think, while life explodes everywhere?
Your freedom employs the powers you own,
But world is absent from all your affairs.

Respect an active spirit in the creature:
Each flower is a soul open to Nature;
In metal a mystery of love is sleeping;
'All is sentient!' Has power over your being.

Fear the gaze in the blind wall that watches:
There is a verb attached to matter itself...
Do not let it serve some impious purpose!

Often a hidden god inhabits obscure being;
And like an eye, born, covered by its eyelids,
Pure spirit grows beneath the surface of stones!

Epitaph (*Épitaphe*)

At times, he lived as gaily as a starling,
By turns, a carefree, and a tender lover,
At times, clouded, dreamy, a sad Clitandre.
Then, one day, he heard the doorbell ringing.

It was Death! So, he asked him if he'd wait
Till his last sonnet's full stop was delivered;
And then, unmoved, laid himself down, in state,
In the coffin's depths, where his body shivered.

He was an idle fellow, or so they'll say,
Letting his ink run dry from day to day,
Seeking all, knowing nothing, it would appear.

And when the moment came, and, tired of life,
One wintry eve, his soul was freed from strife,
He vanished crying: 'Why, then, was I here?'

Note: Clitandre is the unrequited lover in Pierre Corneille's play of that name.



The Death of Chatterton - Henry Wallis (English, 1830 - 1916)
[Artvee](#)

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