

Giacomo Leopardi



The Canti

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Translator's Note.

The poems of the *Canti* below are complete but not in their originally published order. I have taken the liberty of re-arranging them into four groups, Personal (Poems 1-11), Philosophical (12-24), 'Romantic' (25-34), and Political (35-41). These categories are not exact, as Leopardi frequently blends elements together in the one poem, but they may help the reader, as they helped me, to adjust to his variations in style. The original published position of each poem is given in Roman numerals in the brackets following the poem's title.

1. To Silvia (XXI)

Silvia, do you remember
those moments, in your mortal life,
when beauty still shone
in your sidelong, laughing eyes,
and you, light and thoughtful,
leapt beyond girlhood's limits?

The quiet rooms and the streets
around you, sounded
to your endless singing,
when you sat, happily content,
intent on that woman's work,
the vague future, arriving alive in your mind.
It was the scented May, and that's how
you spent your day.

I would leave my intoxicating studies,
and the turned-down pages,
where my young life,
the best of me, was left,
and from the balcony of my father's house
strain to catch the sound of your voice,
and your hand, quick,
running over the loom.
I'd look at the serene sky,

the gold lit gardens and paths:
this side the mountains, that side the far-off sea.
And human tongue cannot say
what I felt then.

What sweet thoughts,
what hope, what hearts, O my Silvia!
How all human life and fate
appeared to us then!
When I recall that hope
such feelings pain me,
harsh, disconsolate,
I brood on my own destiny.
Oh Nature, Nature
why do you not give now
what you promised then? Why
do you so deceive your children?

Attacked, and conquered, by secret disease,
you died, my tenderest one, and did not see
your years flower, or feel your heart moved,
by sweet praise of your black hair
your shy, loving looks.
No friends talked with you,
on holidays, about love.

My sweet hopes died also
little by little: to me too
Fate has denied those years.
Oh, how you've passed me by,
dear friend of my new life,
my saddened hope!

Is this the world, the dreams,
the loves, events, delights,
we spoke about so much together?
Is this our human life?
At the advance of Truth
you fell, unhappy one,
and from the distance,
with your hand you pointed
towards death's coldness and the silent grave.

2. The Infinite (XII)

It was always dear to me, this solitary hill,
and this hedgerow here, that closes off my view,
from so much of the ultimate horizon.
But sitting here, and watching here,
in thought, I create interminable spaces,
greater than human silences, and deepest
quiet, where the heart barely fails to terrify.
When I hear the wind, blowing among these leaves,
I go on to compare that infinite silence
with this voice, and I remember the eternal
and the dead seasons, and the living present,
and its sound, so that in this immensity
my thoughts are drowned, and shipwreck
seems sweet to me in this sea.

3. The Evening Of The Holiday (XIII)

The night is sweet and clear, without a breeze,
and the moon rests in the gardens,
calm on the roofs, and reveals, clear,
far off, every mountain. O my lady,
the paths are still, and the night lights
shine here and there from the balconies:
you sleep, and sleep gently welcomed you
to your quiet room: nothing
troubles you: you still don't know, or guess
with how deep a wound you've hurt my heart.
You sleep: I gaze at the sky
that seems so kind to my eyes:
gaze on ancient all-powerful Nature,
who created me for pain. She said:
'I refuse you hope, even hope, and may
your eyes not shine, except with tears.'
Today was holy: now rest
from pleasure, remember in dream, perhaps,
how many you liked today, how many
liked you: not I, it's not I that hope
to fill your thoughts. Instead I ask
what life has left me, throw myself
to earth, cry out, and tremble: oh,
terrible days of green youth! Ah, on the road
nearby, I hear the solitary song
of the worker returning to his poor

lodging, late, after the revels:
and it grips my heart fiercely
to think the whole world passes,
and scarcely leaves a trace. See: the holiday's
over: some nondescript day follows:
time carries off all mortal things.
Where now's the sound of all those
ancient peoples? Where are the cries
of our famous ancestors, Rome's
vast empire, its weapons, the clash
of arms, crossing land and sea?
All's peace and silence: the world
rests entirely, and we speak of them no more.
Now I remember, in my young days,
when the longed-for holiday was awaited,
how, once it had passed, I lay, in sadness,
pressed tight to my sheets: and, deep in the night,
a song I heard in the streets,
died, little by little, far off,
crushing my heart, as now.

4. To the Moon (XIV)

O lovely moon, now I'm reminded
how almost a year since, full of anguish,
I climbed this hill to gaze at you again,
and you hung there, over that wood, as now,
clarifying all things. Filled with mistiness,
trembling, that's how your face seemed to me,
with all those tears that welled in my eyes, so
troubled was my life, and is, and does not change,
O moon, my delight. And yet it does help me,
to record my sadness and tell it, year by year.
Oh how sweetly it hurts, when we are young,
when hope has such a long journey to run,
and memory is so short,
this remembrance of things past, even if it
is sad, and the pain lasts!

5. Saturday Night In The Village (XXV)

The girl comes from the fields,
at sunset,
carrying her sheaf of grass: in her fingers
a bunch of violets and roses:
she's ready, as before,
to wreath her hair and bodice,
for tomorrow's holiday.

The old woman sits spinning,
facing the dying sunlight,
on the stairway, with her neighbours,
telling the tale of her own young days,
when she dressed for the festival,
and still slim and lovely,
danced all evening, with those young
boys, companions of her fairer season.

Already the whole sky darkens,
the air turns deep blue: already
shadows of hills and roofs return,
on the young moon's pale rising.

Now the bells are witness
to the coming holiday:
you would say the heart
might take comfort from the sound.

A gang of little boys
shout in the tiny square,
leaping here and there,

making a happy din:
and the farmhand, whistling,
returns for his simple meal,
dreams of his day of rest.

When the other lights are quenched, all round,
and everything else is silent,
I hear the hammer ringing, I hear
the carpenter sawing: he's still awake
in the lamplight, in his shut workshop,
hurrying and straining,
to finish his task before dawn.

This is the best of the seven days,
full of hope and joy:
tomorrow the hours will bring
anxiety and sadness, and make each
turn, in thought, to their accustomed toil.

Lively boy,
your life's sweet flowering
is like this day of gladness,
a clear day, unclouded,
that heralds life's festival.
Enjoy the sweet hour, my child,
this pleasant, delightful season.
I'll say nothing, more: let it not grieve you
if your holiday, like mine, is slow to arrive.

6. To Himself (XXVIII)

Now you'll rest forever
my weary heart. The last illusion has died
I thought eternal. Died. I feel, in truth,
not only hope, but desire
for dear illusion has vanished.
Rest forever. You've laboured
enough. Not a single thing is worth
your beating: the earth's not worthy
of your sighs. Bitter and tedious,
life is, nothing more: and the world is mud.
Be silent now. Despair
for the last time. To our race Fate
gave only death. Now scorn Nature,
that brute force
that secretly governs the common hurt,
and the infinite emptiness of all.

7. Night-Song Of A Wandering Shepherd of Asia **(XXIII)**

Why are you there, Moon, in the sky? Tell me
why you are there, silent Moon.

You rise at night, and go
contemplating deserts: then you set.

Are you not sated yet
with riding eternal roads?

Are you not weary, still wishing
to gaze at these valleys?

It mirrors your life,
the life of a shepherd.

He rises at dawn:

he drives his flock over the fields, sees
the flocks, the streams, the grass:

tired at evening he rests:
expecting nothing more.

Tell me, O Moon, what life is
worth to a shepherd, or
your life to you? Tell me: where
does my brief wandering lead,
or your immortal course?

Like an old man, white-haired, infirm,
barefoot and half-naked,
with a heavy load on his shoulders,
running onwards, panting,

over mountains, through the valleys,
on sharp stones, in sand and thickets,
wind and storm, when the days burn
and when they freeze,
through torrents and marshes,
falling, rising, running faster,
faster, without rest or pause,
torn, bleeding: till he halts
where all his efforts,
all the roads, have led:
a dreadful, vast abyss
into which he falls, headlong, forgetting all.
Virgin Moon,
such is the life of man.

Man is born in labour:
and there's a risk of death in being born.
The very first things he learns
are pain and anguish: from the first
his mother and father
console him for being born.
Then as he grows
they both support him, go on
trying, with words and actions,
to give him heart,
console him merely for being human:
there's nothing kinder
a parent can do for a child.

Yet why bring one who needs
such comforting to life,
and then keep him alive?
If life is a misfortune,
why grant us such strength?
Such is the human condition,
inviolate Moon.
But you who are not mortal,
care little, maybe, for my words.

Yet you, lovely, eternal wanderer,
so pensive, perhaps you understand
this earthly life,
this suffering, the sighs that exist:
what this dying is, this last
fading of our features,
the vanishing from earth, the losing
all familiar, loving company.
And you must understand
the 'why' of things, and view the fruits
of morning, evening,
silence, endless passing time.
You know (you must) at what sweet love
of hers the springtime smiles,
the use of heat, and whom the winter
benefits with frost.
You know a thousand things, reveal

a thousand things still hidden from a simple shepherd.

Often as I gaze at you
hanging so silently, above the empty plain
that the sky confines with its far circuit:
or see you steadily
follow me and my flock:
or when I look at the stars blazing in the sky,
musing I say to myself:
'What are these sparks,
this infinite air, this deep
infinite clarity? What does this
vast solitude mean? And what am I?'
So I question. About these
magnificent, immeasurable mansions,
and their innumerable family:
and the steady urge, the endless motion
of all celestial and earthly things,
circling without rest,
always returning to their starting place:
I can't imagine
their use or fruit. But you, deathless maiden,
I'm sure, know everything.
This I know, and feel,
that others, perhaps, may gain
benefit and comfort from
the eternal spheres, from
my fragile being: but to me life is evil.

O flock at peace, O happy creatures,
I think you have no knowledge of your misery!
How I envy you!
Not only because
you're almost free of worries:
quickly forgetting all hardship,
every hurt, each deep fear:
but because you never know tedium.
When you lie in the shade, on the grass,
you're peaceful and content:
and you spend most of the year
untroubled, in that state.
If I sit on the grass, in the shade,
weariness clouds my mind,
and, as if a thorn pricked me,
sitting there I'm still further
from finding peace and rest.
Yet there's nothing I need,
and I've known no reason for tears.
I can't say what you enjoy
or why: but you're fortunate.
O my flock: there's little still
I enjoy, and that's not all I regret.
If you could speak, I'd ask you:
'Tell me, why are all creatures
at peace, idle, lying
in sweet ease: why, if I lie down

to rest, does boredom seize me?’

If I had wings, perhaps,
to fly above the clouds,
and count the stars, one by one,
or roam like thunder from crest to crest,
I’d be happier, my sweet flock,
I’d be happier, bright moon.
Or perhaps my thought
strays from truth, gazing at others’ fate:
perhaps whatever form, whatever state
it’s in, its cradle or its fold,
the day of birth is dark to one that’s born.

8. First Love (X)

My thoughts turn to the day when I felt love
war in me, for the first time, and I said:
'Ah, if this is love, how it torments me!'

When, with eyes fixed wholly on the ground,
I marvelled at her, she who was first to open,
all innocent, the passage to my heart.

Ah, Love, how badly you've treated me!
Why does such sweet affection bring
so much desire, and so much grief?

And why did such delight enter my heart
not serenely, not entire and pure,
but filled with agony and trouble?

Tell me, gentle heart, what fear
what anguish entered with that thought,
compared with which all pleasures were annoyance?

Fulfilling thought that offered up yourself,
in the day and night, when all things seem
to be at peace in this hemisphere,

you troubled me, unquiet, happy,
wretched, lying beneath the covers,

throbbing strongly at every moment.

And whenever, sad, afflicted, weary,
I closed my eyes in sleep: sleep vanished
consumed by fever and delirium.

Oh how the sweet vision rose, living,
among the shadows, my closed eyes
gazing at it beneath my eyelids!

Oh, how that sweetest of motions spread
through my bones, oh, how a thousand
confused thoughts rolled through

my trembling soul! As a breeze, flows
through the heights of an ancient forest,
and creates a long, uncertain murmuring.

And oh, my heart, while I was silent, while
I failed to struggle, what did you say, as she departed,
she the source of pain and throbbing?

I'd no sooner felt the burning
of that blaze of love, than the little breeze
that fanned the flame, flew on its way.

I lay there sleepless in the dawn,
and heard those horses, that would leave me lost,
stamping their hooves outside my ancestral home.

And I, secret, timid, and unsure, turned
my eager hearing, eyes open in vain,
towards the balcony in the darkness,

to hear the last words, that might fall
from her lips: to hear that voice:
alas, since heaven took all else away.

The servants' voices often struck
my doubting ear, and a chill took me,
and my heart beat more fiercely!

And when that dear voice finally sank
into my heart, mixed with the sounds
of carriage wheels and horses:

I was left deserted, huddled trembling
on my bed, and, eyes closed, pressed
my hand to my heart and sighed.

Later, stupefied, dragging my
shaking limbs round the silent room,
I said: 'What else could ever move my heart?'

Then the bitterest memory
rooted in my mind, and closed my heart
to all other voices, every other form.

And a deep grief searched my breast,
as when the heavens rain widely,
washing the fields with melancholy.

Nor did I, a boy of eighteen summers
recognise you, Love, when you first tried
your power on one born to weep.

When I scorned every joy, and the stars'
smiles did not please, not dawn's
calm silence, not green fields.

Even the love of glory was silent
in my heart that it used to warm,
where once love of beauty lived.

My eyes would not return to my studies,
and that which I thought had made
all other desires vain, seemed vain itself.

Ah how could I have altered so, in myself,
how had one love taken all others from me?
Ah, in truth, how changeable we are!

Only my heart pleased, and that
perpetual dialogue buried in my heart,
keeping a guard on grief.

And my eyes that searched the earth or myself,
and allowed no fugitive or wandering glance
to light on any face, vile or lovely:

fearing to disturb the bright, virgin
image that I held in my heart, as waves
in a lake may be stirred by the breeze.

And that regret, for not having fully
delighted in fleeting days,
that weighs on the spirit,

changing to poison past delight,
stung my heart wholly: while shame
with its harsh bite still had no power.

I swear to heaven, to you, great spirits,
that there was no low desire in my heart:
it burned with pure, unblemished fire.

That fire still lives, affection lives,
the lovely image breathes in my thought,
from which I draw no delight that is not

heavenly, and that, alone, satisfies me.

9. The Solitary Bird (XI)

Solitary bird, you sing
from the crest of the ancient tower
to the landscape, while day dies:
while music wanders the valley.
Spring brightens
the air around, exults in the fields,
so the heart is moved to see it.
Flocks are bleating, herds are lowing:
more birds happily make a thousand
circles in the clear sky, all around,
celebrating these happy times:
you gaze pensively, apart, at it all:
no companions, and no flight,
no pleasures call you, no play:
you sing, and so see out
the year, the sweet flowering of your life.

Ah, how like
your ways to mine! Pleasure and Joy
youth's sweet companions,
and, Love, its dear friend,
sighing, bitter at passing days,
I no longer care for them, I don't know why:
indeed I seem to fly far from them:
seem to wander, a stranger
in my native place,

in the springtime of my life.
This day, yielding to evening now,
is a holiday in our town.
You can hear a bell ring in the clear sky,
you can hear the cannon's iron thunder,
echoing away, from farm to farm.
Dressed for the festival
young people here
leave the houses, fill the streets,
to see and be seen, with happy hearts.
I go out, alone,
into the distant country,
postpone all delight and joy
to some other day: and meanwhile
my gaze takes in the clear air,
brings me the sun that sinks and vanishes
among the distant mountains,
after the cloudless day, and seems to say,
that the beauty of youth diminishes.

You, lonely bird, reaching the evening
of this life the stars grant you,
truly, cannot regret
your existence: since your every
action is born of nature.
But I, if I can't
evade through prayer,
the detested threshold of old age,

when these eyes will be dumb to others,
and the world empty, and the future
darker and more irksome than the present,
what will I think of such desires?
Of these years of mine? Of what happened?
Ah I'll repent, and often,
un-consoled, I'll gaze behind me.

10. Imitation (XXXV)

Poor frail leaf
far from your own branch,
where are you flying? – The wind
tore *me* from the beech that bore me.
Whirling, in flight, it takes me
from the forest to the plain,
from the valley to the mountain.
I myself journey
forever: ignoring all the rest.
I go where all things go,
where, of nature, goes
the flower of the rose,
and the flower of the laurel.

Note: The original French poem is by Antoine-Vincent Arnault (1766-1834)

11. Scherzo (XXXVI)

When as a boy I set myself
to learn from the Muses,
one of them grasped me by the hand
and all that day
led me around,
to contemplate her workshop.
Little by little she showed me
the instruments of her art,
and all their diverse uses
the effect of each of them
when they're employed in prose
or they're employed in verses.
I marvelled, and I said:
'And Muse, your file?' The Goddess
said: 'Worn out: we do without it.'
'Shouldn't it be repaired,' I added, 'if it's done for?'
She replied: 'It should, but it's something we've no
time for.'

12. Moon-Set (XXXII)

As on a lonely night
the moon descends,
over the silvery waters and fields,
where the breeze sighs,
and distant shadows make
a thousand vague aspects,
and deceptive objects,
among the tranquil waves,
the branches, hedges, hills, and villages:
and, lost at the sky's end,
behind Alps or Apennines, or
in endless Tyrrhenian deeps,
sets, and dims the world,
so that shadows scatter, and a single
gloom darkens valley and mountain,
so night remains alone,
and the carter on the road salutes,
with mournful song, the last gleam
of vanishing light that led him on:

so youth melts away,
and leaves
our mortal state. The shadows
and the forms of delighted
illusion flee: and all the distant
hopes our mortal nature

trusts in, grow less.
Life remains, dark,
abandoned. The uncertain traveller
strains his eyes, blindly, in vain,
to find some goal or reason in the long
road ahead: and sees
how human habitation becomes
truly foreign to him, and he to it.

Our wretched life
would have seemed
too happy and joyful, up there, if youth,
whose every good brings a thousand ills,
had been allowed to last a lifetime.
The law that sentences
all creatures to death, would be too mild,
if half of life
had not first been made
harsher than the vilest death.
The eternal made a worthy discovery
of immortal intellect: old age,
worst of all evils, where desire
clings, but hope is quenched,
the founts of pleasure run dry, pain
often grows, and good will not return.

You, hills and shores,
the glory in the west, that silvered

the veil of night, has died,
yet you will not
be widowed long: from the east
you'll see the sky
whiten anew, and dawn will rise:
then the sun will quickly follow
and, shine out
with powerful flames,
flooding you, and the eternal realms,
with torrents of light.
But mortal life, will not brighten
with new light, or new dawn,
once lovely youth is gone.
It will be lonely to the end: the gods
have set no limit to the gloom
that darkens old age, except the tomb.

13. Wild Broom (XXXIV)
(or The Flower of the Desert)

*'And men loved darkness rather than
the light'*

John, III:19

Fragrant broom,
content with deserts:
here on the arid slope of Vesuvius,
that formidable mountain, the destroyer,
that no other tree or flower adorns,
you scatter your lonely
bushes all around. I've seen before
how you beautify empty places
with your stems, circling the City
once the mistress of the world,
and it seems that with their grave,
silent, aspect they bear witness,
reminding the passer-by
of that lost empire.
Now I see you again on this soil,
a lover of sad places abandoned by the world,
a faithful friend of hostile fortune.
These fields scattered
with barren ash, covered
with solid lava,
that resounds under the traveller's feet:

where snakes twist and couple
in the sun, and the rabbits return
to their familiar cavernous burrows:
were once happy, prosperous farms.
They were golden with corn, echoed
to lowing cattle:
there were gardens and palaces,
the welcome leisure retreats
for powerful, famous cities,
which the proud mountain crushed
with all their people, beneath the torrents
from its fiery mouth. Now all around
is one ruin,
where you root, gentle flower, and as though
commiserating with others' loss, send
a perfume of sweetest fragrance to heaven,
that consoles the desert. Let those
who praise our existence visit
these slopes, to see how carefully
our race is nurtured
by loving Nature. And here
they can justly estimate
and measure the power of humankind,
that the harsh nurse, can with a slight movement,
obliterate one part of, in a moment, when we
least fear it, and with a little less gentle
a motion, suddenly,
annihilate altogether.

The 'magnificent and progressive fate'
of the human race
is depicted in this place.

Proud, foolish century, look,
and see yourself reflected,
you who've abandoned
the path, marked by advancing thought
till now, and reversed your steps,
boasting of this regression
you call progress.

All the intellectuals, whose evil fate
gave them you for a father,
praise your babbling, though
they often make a mockery
of you, among themselves. But I'll
not vanish into the grave in shame:
As far as I can, I'll demonstrate,
the scorn for you, openly,
that's in my heart,
though I know oblivion crushes
those hated by their own time.

I've already mocked enough
at that fate I'll share with you.

You pursue Freedom, yet want thought
to be slave of a single age again:
by thought we've risen a little higher
than barbarism, by thought alone civilisation

grows, only thought guides public affairs
towards the good.

The truth of your harsh fate
and the lowly place Nature gave you
displease you so. Because of it
you turn your backs on the light
that illuminated you: and in flight,
you call him who pursues it vile,
and only him great of heart
who foolishly or cunningly mocks himself
or others, praising our human state above the stars.

A man generous and noble of soul,
of meagre powers and weak limbs,
doesn't boast and call himself
strong and rich in possessions,
doesn't make a foolish pretence
of splendid living or cutting a fine
figure among the crowd:
but allows himself to appear
as lacking wealth and power,
and says so, openly, and gives
a true value to his worth.

I don't consider a man
a great-hearted creature, but stupid,
who, born to die, nurtured in pain,
says he is made for joy,
and fills pages with the stench

of pride, promising
an exalted destiny on earth,
and a new happiness, unknown to heaven
much less this world, to people
whom a surging wave, a breath
of malignant air, a subterranean tremor,
destroys so utterly that they
scarcely leave a memory behind.

He has a noble nature
who dares to raise his voice
against our common fate,
and with an honest tongue,
not compromising truth,
admits the evil fate allotted us,
our low and feeble state:
a nature that shows itself
strong and great in suffering,
that does not add to its miseries with fraternal
hatred and anger, things worse
than other evils, blaming mankind
for its sorrows, but places blame
on Her who is truly guilty, who is the mother
of men in bearing them, their stepmother in malice.
They call her enemy:
and consider
the human race
to be united, and ranked against her,
from of old, as is true,

judge all men allies, embrace
all with true love, offering sincere
prompt support, and expecting it
in the various dangers and anguish
of the mutual war on her. And think
it as foolish to take up arms against men
and set up nets and obstacles
against their neighbours as it would be in war,
surrounded by the opposing army, in the most
intense heat of battle,
to start fierce struggles with friends,
forgetting the enemy,
to incite desertion, and wave their swords
among their own forces.

If such thoughts were revealed
to the crowd, as they used to be,
along with the horror that first
brought men together in social contract
against impious Nature,
then by true wisdom
the honest, lawful intercourse
of citizens would be partly renewed,
and justice and piety, would own
to another root than foolish pride,
on which the morals of the crowd
are as well founded
as anything else that's based on error.

Often I sit here, at night,
on these desolate slopes,
that a hardened lava-flow has clothed
with brown, and which seem to undulate still,
and over the gloomy waste,
I see the stars flame, high
in the purest blue,
mirrored far off by the sea:
the universe glittering with sparks
that wheel through the tranquil void.
And then I fix my eyes on those lights
that seem pin-pricks,
yet are so vast in form
that earth and sea are really a pin-prick
to them: to whom man,
and this globe where man is nothing,
are completely unknown: and gazing
at those still more infinitely remote,
knots, almost, of stars,
that seem like mist to us, to which
not only man and earth but all
our stars, infinite in number and mass,
with the golden sun,
are unknown, or seem like points
of misted light, as they appear
from earth: what do you seem like,
then, in my thoughts, O children
of mankind? And mindful of

your state here below, of which
the ground I stand on bears witness,
and that, on the other hand, you believe
that you've been appointed the master
and end of all things: and how often
you like to talk about the creators
of all things universal, who descended
to this obscure grain of sand called earth,
for you, and happily spoke to you, often:
and that, renewing these ridiculous dreams,
you still insult the wise, in an age
that appears to surpass the rest
in knowledge and social customs: what feeling is it,
then, wretched human race, what thought
of you finally pierces my heart?
I don't know if laughter or pity prevails.

As a little apple that falls from a tree:
late autumn ripeness,
and nothing else, bringing it to earth:
crushes, wastes, and covers
in a moment, the sweet nests
of a tribe of ants, carved out
of soft soil, with vast labour,
and the works, the wealth,
that industrious race had vied
to achieve, with such effort,
and created in the summer: so the cities

of the farthest shores
that the sea bathed,
were shattered, confounded, covered
in a few moments, by a night of ruin,
by ashes, lava and stones,
hurled to the heights of heaven
from the womb of thunder,
falling again from above,
mingled in molten streams,
or by the vast overflow
of liquefied masses,
metals and burning sand,
descending the mountainside
racing over the grass: so that now
the goats graze above them,
and new cities rise beside them, whose base
is their buried, demolished walls
that the cruel mountain seems to crush underfoot.
Nature has no more love or care
for the seed of man
than for the ants: and if the destruction
of one is rarer than that of the other,
it's for no other reason
than that mankind is less rich in offspring.

Fully eighteen hundred years
have passed, since those once-populated cities
vanished, crushed by fiery force,

yet the farmer intent
on his vines, this dead
and ashen soil barely nourishes,
still lifts his gaze
with suspicion,
to the fatal peak
that sits there brooding,
no gentler than ever, still threatening
to destroy him, his children, and his
meagre possessions. And often
the wretch, lying awake
on the roof of his house, where
the wandering breezes blow at night,
jumps up now and again, and checks
the course of the dreadful boiling,
that pours from that inexhaustible lap
onto its sandy slopes, and illuminates
the bay of Capri, the ports
of Naples and Mergellina.
And if he sees it nearing, or hears
the water bubbling, feverishly, deep
in the well, he wakes his children, quickly
wakes his wife, and fleeing, with whatever
of their possessions they can grasp,
watches from the distance, as his familiar
home, and the little field
his only defence against hunger,
fall prey to the burning tide,

crackling as it arrives, inexorably
spreading over all this, and hardening.
Lifeless Pompeii returns to the light of heaven
after ancient oblivion, like a buried
skeleton, that piety or the greed
for land gives back to the open air:
and, from its empty forum,
through the ranks of broken
columns, the traveller contemplates
the forked peak and the smoking summit,
that still threatens the scattered ruins.
And, like night's secret horror,
through the empty theatres,
the twisted temples, the shattered
houses, where the bat hides its brood,
like a sinister brand
that circles darkly through silent palaces,
the glow of the deathly lava runs,
reddening the shadows
from far away, staining the region round.
So, indifferent to man, and the ages
he calls ancient, and the way descendants
follow on from their ancestors,
Nature, always green, proceeds instead
by so long a route
she seems to remain at rest. Meanwhile empires fall,
peoples and tongues pass: She does not see:
and man lays claim to eternity's merit.

And you, slow-growing broom,
who adorn this bare landscape
with fragrant thickets,
you too will soon succumb
to the cruel power of subterranean fire,
that, revisiting places
it knows, will stretch its greedy margin
over your soft forest. And you'll bend
your innocent head, without a struggle,
beneath that mortal burden:
yet a head that's not been bent in vain
in cowardly supplication
before a future oppressor: nor lifted
in insane pride towards the stars,
or beyond the desert, where
you were born and lived,
not through intent, but chance:
and you'll have been so much wiser
so much less unsound than man, since you
have never believed your frail species,
can be made immortal by yourself, or fate.

14. The Calm After The Storm (XXIV)

The storm has gone:
I hear the joyful birds, the hen,
returning to the path,
renews her cackling. See the clear sky
opening from the west, over the mountain:
the landscape clarifies,
the river gleams bright in the valley.
Now every heart is happy, on every side
there's the noise of work
as they return to business.
The craftsman comes to the door,
his work in hand, singing,
to gaze at the humid sky:
a girl runs out to draw water
that's charged with fresh rain:
and, from street to street,
the vegetable seller
raises his cry again
See the sun return, see how it's smiling
from hills and farms. The servants
open balconies, terraces, lodges:
hear the harness clinking, far off
along the highway: as the traveller's carriage
moves, once more, down the road.

Every heart is happy.

When was life as sweet,
as pleasant as it is now?
When did men turn
to their work, or bend to
their studies with such love? Or begin
some new venture? Or were so forgetful
of old wrongs? Joy is born of pain:
vain joy, the fruit
of fear past, in one shaken,
and fearful of death,
who abhorred life before:
fear that made men sweat and tremble
in enduring anguish,
shivering, silent, pale: seeing
lightning, cloud, and wind,
moving to attack them.

O kindly Nature,
these are your gifts,
these are the delights
you give to mortals. To be free
of pain is our delight.
You scatter ills with generous hands: grief
appears of itself, and pleasure, that's so often
born of trouble, through the monstrous,
and the miraculous, is our only gain. The human
race, dear to the gods! Happy enough
to gain a breathing space

from sorrow: blessed
when death heals you of every grief.

15. Masterful Thought (XXVI)

Sweetest, powerful
lord of my deepest mind:
terrible, but dear
gift of the heavens: companion
of my darkest days,
Thought, that often stirs inside me.

Who does not talk of your secret
nature? Who does not know its power
among us? Yet often, since human
language gains its own impetus
from your action, it often seems strange
to those who listen to what you create.

How lonely my mind
has become, since you
took it as your home!
All my other thoughts vanish,
swift as flashes of lightning
all around: Like a tower
on an empty plain,
you stand alone, gigantic, among them.

What are earthly affairs,
what is all life to me,
compared with you!

What intolerable tedium,
our leisure, familiar trades,
the vain hopes of vain pleasure,
beside that joy,
the heavenly joy that comes from you!

Just as a traveller is happy
to turn his eyes from bare rock
in the rugged Apennines,
towards some far green sunlit field,
so I turn willingly from harsh, dry
mundane conversations, as if
towards a happy garden, and your space
restores my senses again.

It seems well nigh incredible
I've endured this wretched life,
and this foolish world,
for so long without you:
almost impossible to comprehend
how others can sigh
with desire for anything
except what resembles you.

Fear of death has never entered
my heart, since I first learned
from experience what life was.
That final necessity
this strange world sometimes praises,
yet abhors and trembles at,
seems like a jest to me today:
and if danger threatens, I pause
and smile, to contemplate its menace.

I've always despised
cowards, and ungenerous
spirits. Now any shameful act
stings me at once:
examples of human baseness
stir my soul, at once, to scorn.
I feel myself greater
than this insolent age
that nourishes itself on empty hope,
in love with gossip, hostile to virtue:
foolish, it asks for sense,
without seeing how life
becomes more and more senseless.
I scorn human judgement: and tread down
that fickle crowd, hostile
to true thought, who despise your worth.

What allegiance does not yield
to that from which you rise?
Indeed what other allegiance
but this has power among mortals?
Avarice, pride, hatred, disdain,
love of honour, power,
what are they but whims
compared to this? Only one allegiance
is alive to us: eternal law
has only decreed one

over-ruling lord of the human heart.

Life has no worth or meaning
except in this, which is all to us:
which alone absolves fate
for placing mortals here
to suffer, with no other purpose:
in this one allegiance,
life is more noble than death,
if not to fools, to hearts that are not base,

Sweet thought, because of your joys,
to have endured our human troubles,
and suffered this mortal life
for many years, has not been in vain:
and expert though I am in pain,
I'd still be prepared
to take to the road for such a purpose:
since I've never journeyed,
weary, through the sands,
among the venomous snakes,
and reached you, without my pain
being eased by your great blessing.

What a world, what a new
immensity, what a paradise it is
to which your marvellous enchantment
seemed to lift me! Where I used
to wander in that strange light,
forgetting my earthly state,
and everything of our reality,
among the dreams, I think,
that immortals know. Alas, you are,
in the end, a dream, sweet thought,
one that adorns truth for the most part:
yet a dream, a clear illusion. But you,
among nature's happy illusions,
are divine: because you are so strong,

and vital, that you can endure tenaciously
against truth, and even adapt to truth,
and not dissolve, till you meet with death.

O my thought, it's true, that you,
the only vital part of my days,
delightful cause of infinite pain,
will sometime be quenched with me in death:
you whose signs I feel alive in my soul,
such that you'll be my lord for ever.

Other noble illusions
often fail in the face
of truth. The more I turn
to gaze at her,
of whom I love to speak with you,
the greater grows the delight,
the greater the delirium, I breathe.

Angelic beauty!

Wherever I look, among the lovely faces,
they are only painted images
of your face. It seems to me, you
are the sole fount of every other
loveliness, of every true beauty.

When, since I first saw you,
were you not the ultimate goal
of my deepest cares? What part of the day
passed when I did not think of you?
How often did my dreams lack
your sovereign image? Lovely as a dream,
angelic form,

in earthly place,
in the high realms of the universe,
what do I ask for, or hope to see
that is more beautiful than your eyes,
or own that is sweeter than thought of you?

16. Love And Death (XXVII)

*'Those whom the gods love die
young'*

Menander

Fate gave birth, at the same moment,
to the brothers, Love and Death.
The world owns to none
so fine, nor do the stars.
From the former, the Good is born,
and the greatest pleasure,
to be found in the ocean of being:
the latter annuls our greatest
pain, and all our greatest evil.
Often the boy, Love,
joys in keeping company,
with a beautiful girl,
sweet to see, not
as cowardly people paint her:
and flying together through human life
they are the wise heart's greatest solace.
No heart was ever wiser
than when pierced by love, nor firmer
in scorning wretched life,
nor so ready to face danger
for any lord but this one:
Love, where you give your help,

courage is born, is roused:
then the human race is wise
in what it does, not as so often,
only wise in thought.

When a new loving
affection is born,
in the deepest heart,
we feel the languid desire to die,
simultaneously in our soul:
how, who knows? But such
is the power and true first effect of love.
Perhaps the desolation here
terrifies our sight: perhaps a mortal finds
this world uninhabitable,
without that new,
sole, infinite happiness
his thoughts create:
and by reason of that great storm
presaged in his heart, seeks quiet,
seeks to reach harbour,
driven by desire,
that roars and darkens all around.

Then, when formidable power
wraps everything about,
and invading passion flashes in the heart,
how often you, Death,
are invoked, with intense
desire, by the troubled lover!
How often at evening, how often
when the weary body is abandoned to dawn,

he might call himself blessed
never to rise again,
or see the bitter light!
And often at the sound of the funeral bell
the dirge that takes
the dead to their eternal rest,
he envies, from his heart's depths,
with many ardent sighs,
he who joins the lost in their ancient home.
Even the untaught man,
the farmer, ignorant
of all virtue derived from wisdom,
even a shy and timid girl,
who once felt her hair stand on end
at the name of death, dares
to fix her gaze on the tomb,
on the winding sheet, with calm constancy,
dares to meditate on
poison or the knife,
and feel, deep in her mind,
the courtesy of death.
So love leads his disciples
to death. Yet often
the internal struggle is so great
a mortal cannot endure its strength,
and either the frail body yields
to those terrible forces, and in that way
Death prevails, aided by his brother's power:

or Love drives them towards the depths,
so the unlearned farmer,
and the tender girl,
fell themselves with violent hand
while the world,
to which heaven grants
peace and old age, mocks them.

Sweet lords, friends
of the human race,
to whom nothing in this vast
universe compares, and whom no power
but fate can overcome,
may it grant one of you
to enter fervid, happy,
intelligent minds.
And you, lovely Death,
whom I've always called on, and honoured
since my early years, who alone
in the world take pity on human troubles,
if you have ever been honoured
by me, if I have tried to address
the crowd's ingratitude
for your divine status,
don't delay, favour this
unfamiliar prayer,
close these sad eyes of mine
to the light, now, O king of the ages.

Whenever the hour falls when you come
in answer to my prayer, you'll find me
armed, head high,
and firm against fate:
not heaping praise on the flailing hand
stained with my innocent blood,
nor blessing you, from cowardice,
like the human race of old:
I'll throw away every vain hope
that consoles the childish world,
every foolish comfort,
and I'll not hope for any
other moment, but yours alone:
and only wait calmly
for that day when I lay my sleeping
head on your virgin breast.

17. Bas-Relief On An Ancient Tomb (XXX)
(Where The Dead Girl is Shown
Departing, and Taking Leave of her Family)

Lovely girl, where are you going?
Who calls you, far
from your loved ones?
Do you abandon your father's house
so soon, wandering off, alone? Will you
return to this threshold? Will you ever make
those who mourn you today, happy again?

Your eyes are dry, and your attitude brave,
but you still seem unhappy. It would be hard
to tell from your serious aspect,
whether your road is pleasant
or sorrowful, joyful or sad
the place you travel to. Alas, I could never
decide myself, nor perhaps has
the world decided, whether
you should be called hated by heaven,
or beloved: wretched or fortunate.

Death calls: at the dawn of day,
comes the final moment. You'll not return
to the nest you left. You've left
the sight of your sweet
parents forever. The place

you go to lies underground:
there's your dwelling for all time.
Perhaps you're blessed: but he who gazes,
thoughtfully, at your fate, must sigh.

I think that never to see
the light is best. But, being born,
to vanish at that time when beauty
first displays her limbs and face,
and the world begins
to bow down before her from afar:
when every hope is flowering,
long before truth has flashed its gloomy
rays against her joyful brow:
and like mist condensing
to a fleeing cloud-form on the horizon,
as if she had not been,
renounce the future
for the tomb's dark silence,
this, though to our intellect
it seems best, strikes the heart
deeply, in profound pity.

Mother Nature, bewailed and feared,
by those of the animal kingdom,
you marvel, not worth our praise,
who bear and nourish to kill,
if it's a mortal ill

to die before our time, why
bring it on innocent heads?
If it's a good, why make this parting
more gloomy, inconsolable,
than every other ill,
for those who go, and those who live?

Wretched, wherever they gaze,
wretched, where they turn or run,
this sensitive species!
It pleased you that youthful
hopes of life
should be illusions: trouble-filled
the tide of their years: Death their only
shield against evil: the inevitable goal,
the immutable law
ruling human life. Ah, after
the sad journey why not at least
make the ending happy? Rather
than this certain future,
the living keep before their eyes,
the sole comfort
for our miseries,
clothed in black robes,
veiled with sad shade,
why make the harbour more fearful
a sight than ever the waves were?

Given the harsh fate of dying
to which you destine us,
we whom you abandon, in our innocence,
unknowingly, unwillingly, to life,
then he who dies is more enviable
than he who witnesses the death

of those he loves. Yet though it's true,
as I fervently believe,
that life is pain,
and death a gift, who could wish,
as indeed he should
for the death of those he cares for,
himself to still remain
behind, diminished:
to see the beloved one
with whom he's spent so many years
carried from the threshold,
a farewell with no hope of ever
meeting again
on this world's roads:
then left alone, abandoned on earth,
to gaze around, and in familiar places
remember the lost companion?
O Nature, how, ah how, can your heart allow
such embraces to be loosened,
friend from friend,
brother from brother,
child from father,
lover from lover: one dying,
the other granted life? How can
you make such grief
our fate, that mortals
survive a mortal love? But Nature
bestows its care on other things,

than our good or ill.

18. On A Lovely Lady's Image (XXX1)
(Carved on her Tomb)

You were such, who now are buried
dust and skeleton. Placed motionless,
helpless, above the earth and bone,
mute, gazing at the flight of ages,
stands the sole guardian
of grief and memory, the image
of lost beauty. That sweet glance
that made men tremble as it gazed
at them, motionless, as now: those lips,
from whose depths pleasure flowed,
as though from a full urn: that neck,
once circled by desire: that loving hand,
that often, lightly opened, felt
the hand it clasped grow cold:
and the breast, at which men
visibly paled, once lived:
now they are earth
and bone: and stone conceals
the sad and shameful sight.

So fate diminishes
that image, that seemed to us
a living vision of heaven. Eternal
mystery of our being. One moment, Beauty,
the fount of vast, exalted thoughts,

ineffable feelings, towers over us, and seems
like a tremulous radiance
immortal nature casts on this arena,
the sign and sure hope
of blessed realms and the golden world,
of a superhuman fate,
granted to our mortal state:
next moment, at a light touch,
what was but now
an angelic face becomes vile,
abominable, base, and the
marvellous ideal that took
its being from it, vanishes
at once from the mind.

Infinite desires
and noble visions
are created in the mind
by virtue of harmonious knowledge:
so that the human spirit wanders
secretly through a sea of delight,
as though swimming ardently
in play through the Ocean:
But if a discordant note
strikes the ear, that paradise
turns to nothingness in a moment.

How does human nature reach

so high, if it is merely
wretched, frail, dust and shadow?
Yet if it is somehow noble,
how can our finest thoughts and acts
be kindled and quenched
for such slight, ignoble reasons?

19. To Spring (or Of The Ancient Myths) (VII)

Because the sun renews
the injured heavens, and Zephyrus revives
the dull air, and the dark shadows of clouds
are driven off, scattered down the valleys;
birds trust their fragile forms
to the wind, and the light of day
brings new desire for love, fresh hope,
penetrating the woods and through
the melting frost, to waking creatures:
perhaps human spirits, drowned in grief
and weariness might remake
the age of beauty, which tragedy, and the black
torch of truth, consumed
before its time? Are Phoebus's rays
truly quenched in darkness
forever? Fragrant Spring
can you rouse and inspire
this frozen heart that knows
old age's bitterness in the flower of youth?

Are you alive, O sacred Nature,
are you alive? Alive, and your maternal voice
gathered to an unaccustomed hearing?
Your rivers were once home to the bright nymphs,
the liquid founts were placid haunts and mirrors.
And the rugged mountain ridges, the tangled

woods (today the remote haunt of the winds)
trembled to the arcane dance
of immortal footsteps: and the shepherd
leading his thirsty flock through the flickering
mid-day shadows of the flowering
river-banks, heard the shrill piping
of woodland Pan echoing
along the stream: saw the waves
tremble, amazed, and, saw, vaguely,
the quiver-bearing goddess
descending into the warm flood,
washing the grime and dust of the bloody chase
from her white flanks and virgin arms.

Once, the grass and flowers breathed,
and the woods. The gentle airs,
the clouds, and the lamp of the sun,
were aware of humanity, then, when
the traveller followed you with intent eyes,
Cyprian Planet, in the empty night,
you, naked above the hills and shores,
his companion on the road, the image
of mortal thought. When, fleeing
the impure towns
and deadly anger and shame,
men clasped the rugged tree-trunks,
deep in dense woods,
and thought that living flame surged

through the dry veins, leaves breathed:
that they clasped in their arms the hidden heartbeat
of sorrowful Daphne, or sad Phyllis, or heard
Clymene's disconsolate daughters weeping
for Phaethon, drowned by the Sun in the Italian
River.

Nor, harsh cliffs, were the mournful sounds
of human misery lost
as they struck you,
while timorous Echo haunted your spaces,
not the wind's vain wandering,
but a nymph's unhappy spirit, she,
whom the weight of love and harsh fate
robbed of her limbs. From caves,
and naked cliffs, and desolate haunts,
she taught a message, her understanding
of our high and broken lament,
to the arching sky. You too, nightingale,
the tale declares, were expert
in human fate, you who sing now
the coming of the re-born year,
and in the deep
quiet of the countryside, through the dark silent air,
mourn your ancient wrong, an ill vengeance,
anger and pity to make the sun grow pale.

But your race is unknown to us:

grief does not form those varying
notes of yours, and free of guilt,
and so less dear to us, they climb the dark valley.
Ah, since the halls of Olympus
are empty, and thunder strays blindly
among dark clouds and mountains,
filling guilty or innocent hearts
with the same cold terror: and their native land
is alien to her children, the sad spirits
she produces: lovely Nature
listen to the unhappy cares,
and unjust fate of mortals,
and rekindle the ancient flame
in me: if you still live,
if there's truly one thing
at least in heaven, or on
the naked earth, or in the deep sea,
that may not pity but observes our pain.

Note: The nightingale refers to the myth of Procne,
Philomela and Tereus.

20. Hymn To The Patriarchs (VIII)
(Or: The Beginnings Of The Human Race)

And you, sung by your grieving sons,
you, glorious fathers of the human race,
will be spoken of with praise: dearer
to the eternal mover of the stars, and so much
less to be wept for, than we whom a gentler
age produces. The irreparable afflictions
of wretched mortals, born to weep,
who find their last day and the darkened
tomb sweeter than ethereal light,
were not imposed by pity or the direct
rule of Heaven. And though ancient error
delivered the human race to the tyrannous
grip of disease and misfortune,
the cause of your ancient cry, the worse crimes
of your children, their unquiet minds,
and greater madness raised Olympus's weapons
and the neglected hands of nurturing Nature
against us: so life's flame was detested,
and our birth from the maternal womb
was hateful, and, in violence, despairing
Erebus emerged from the earth.

O ancient father and leader
of the human family you first saw
the sun, the glorious fires of the turning spheres,

and the fresh verdure of the fields, and watched
the breezes wandering through the young meadows:
when the cliffs and deserted valleys
echoed to the rushing mountain streams,
their roar unheard: when the fair
future sites of famous peoples,
their noisy cities, still unknown, were ruled
by peace: and silent and alone
the clear rays of Phoebus and the golden moon
climbed the uncultivated hills. Oh, empty
places of the earth, untouched by crime
and sad event! Oh unhappy father
what pain for your offspring,
and what a vast chain of bitter events
destiny prepares! See the greedy field
is stained with a brother's blood, through a brothers'
murder, in an unprecedented act of anger,
and the bright air knows evil wings of death.
The fearful exiled fratricide, fleeing
the solitary shadows and the secret anger
of the winds in the deepest woods,
raises the first city roofs, the haunts and kingdom
of all-consuming care: and for the first time
desperate contrition, breathless, ill,
brings blind mortals together and shuts them
in shared shelters: so wicked hands
rejected the curving plough, and it was shameful
to sweat in the fields: the idle occupied

the gates of the wicked: slothful bodies
tamed natural vigour, minds were languid
and indolent: and weakened humanity
accepted servitude, the ultimate harm.

And you, to whom a white dove first brought
the certain sign of promised hope,
from blind air and soaking hills:
for whom the drowned sun, rising
from ancient evening cloud,
painted a rainbow on the dark sky:
oh, you rescue the evil generation
from the hostile sky and the waves moaning
over clouded ridges. The people saved
repopulate the earth, renewing savage affections,
wicked works, and the pain that follows.
Impious hands mock the inaccessible kingdom
of the vengeful sea, and weeping and wickedness
are taught to alien shores and other stars.

Now I think of you, also, father of the elect,
strong, just: and of the generous children
born from your seed. I will speak of how you
were sitting, resting, screened by the midday shade,
of your tent, on the sweet plain of Mamre,
space and pasture for your flocks:
of how angels disguised as travellers
brought divine grace: and, O son

of wise Rebecca, how in the evening
by the rustic well in the sweet vale of Haran,
haunt of shepherds and of idle hours,
love for Laban's lovely daughter pierced you:
unconquered Love, that condemned your proud
willing spirit to long exile, and long trouble,
and the odious burden of servitude.

There was indeed a time (The Muses' song
and the cry of fame have not indeed fed the avid
crowd on error or empty shadows), a time
when this poor earth was friendly and pleasant
and dear to our race, and our fallen age
flowed with gold. True, streams of pure milk
did not flow down the face
of native cliffs, shepherds did not
drive tigers to the fold with their flocks,
or wolves to the springs
for their pleasure: but the human
race did live then in ignorance
of its fate, and trouble, free of misery:
a sweet primal veil of kind illusion was drawn
over the hidden laws of nature
and heaven: and content with hope
our peaceful ship reached harbour.

And a happy race still lives in the vast
forests of California, whose hearts

are not withered by pale care, whose limbs
harsh disease does not waste: the woods
feed them, the hollow cliffs shelter them,
the watered valley refreshes them, death's
dark day looms over them unseen. Oh,
wise nature's realms are defenceless
against our sinful daring! Their shores and caves
and peaceful woods lie open to our un-abating
fury: those violated races learn
misery's invasion, unprecedented
greed: and happiness, fleeing, naked,
is pursued, into the western deeps.

21. Sappho's Last Song (IX)

Calm night, modest rays of the descending moon: and you, herald of the day, that rise above the cliffs, among the silent woods: you seemed dear and pleasant to my eyes while I was ignorant of fate and the Furies: now no gentle prospect smiles on my despair. For us an unaccustomed joy revives only when the dust-filled flow of the south-wind blows through the liquid air and over the quivering fields, and when the chariot, Jupiter's heavy chariot, above our heads, thunders, and splits the shadowy sky. In cliffs or deepest valleys we take joy in the storm, in the widespread flight of the stricken flocks, or in the sound and conquering fury of water, on the shifting banks of the deep river.

Your mantle is lovely, O sacred sky, and you are lovely dew-wet earth. Ah, not one part of that infinite beauty was granted to wretched Sappho by the gods, or pitiless fate. O Nature, I am only a humble and troubled guest in your proud kingdom, a lover scorned, and I turn heart and eyes

in vain, in supplication, towards
your graceful form. No sunlit place,
nor the dawn light at heaven's gate
smiles on me: the brightly coloured birds
sing, but not for me, the murmur of the beech
trees is not for me: and where the bright river
shows its pure flood, beneath the shade
of the weeping willows, it draws back
its lithe waters disdainfully
from my sliding foot, touching
the perfumed shores in its retreat.

What fault, what wicked excess
stained me at birth, that heaven turned
me towards ill and her face from fortune?
How did childhood, when life
is ignorant of wrong, sin, so that stripped
of youth, its flower, my iron-dark thread
was wound on the spindle
of indomitable Fate? Incautious words
spill from my lips: the events of destiny
move in hidden ways. All is hidden,
except our unhappiness. Neglected children
we are born to weep, and our purpose lies
in the lap of the gods. Oh the cares, the hopes
of our youth! But the Father gave dreams,
sweet dreams eternal dominion
over men: virtue in plain dress

does not shine among brave deeds
or learned lines of verse.

We die. The worthless veil fallen to earth,
the naked spirit will fly towards Dis,
erasing the cruel error of the blind
dispenser of Fate. And you, live as happily
as any mortal ever lived on earth, you,
through whom a long unrequited love
long loyalty, and the vain fury
of implacable desire gripped me. Jupiter
has not sprinkled me with happiness
from his bitter jar, and my illusions died
with my childhood dreams. All
the happiest days of our youth are gone.
Illness follows: old age: and the shadow
of icy death. See, Tartarus is left
of all the prizes hoped for,
the sweet illusions: and the dark goddess,
black night, and the silent shore
confine the proud intellect.

22. To Count Carlo Pepoli (XIX)

Dear Pepoli, how do you endure
this wearisome and troubling sleep
that we call life? By what hopes
is your heart sustained? In what thoughts,
in what happy or irksome works do you employ
that leisure your distant ancestors bequeathed you
this heavy and exhausting gift? All life
is idle, in every human condition,
if all the effort, that is aimed
at nothing worthy, and has no power
to realise its intent, is rightly named
idleness. And if I should call the labouring
crowd, seen at tranquil dawn and evening,
breaking the soil, or tending crops and herds,
idle, I would be right, since their life
is to sustain life, and life has no value
to the human race of itself alone.

The experienced sailor spends days
and nights in idleness: the endless sweat
of the workshops is idle: the soldier
on watch is idle, and in the danger of war:
and the miserly merchant lives in idleness:
whatever the care, the sweat, the watches,
the dangers, no one gains lovely happiness
for himself or others, though it's all
mortal nature desires and searches for.

Yet for all the desire that has lead mortals
to be blessed with useless sighing
since the day when the world was born
nature has made a sort of medicine,
amongst life's unhappiness, the various
necessities, that have to be provided
by thought and effort, and the day is
full, even if it may not be joyful,
for the human family: so that desire
is troubled and confused, and has less scope
to disturb the heart. So the creatures,
in whose hearts the desire to be happy
lives, no less vainly than it does in ours,
intent on what is needed for their lives,
spend their time less sadly, and less burdened,
than us, not condemning the slow hours.
But we, who trust to others' hands
to provide our living, are left with
a greater necessity that none
but ourselves can supply, and that
with pain and tedium: I mean the necessity
of getting through our lives: cruel, unconquerable
necessity, that no accumulated wealth,
no rich flocks, or fertile fields,
no great halls, or purple robes can free
the human race from. When one of us,
scornful of the empty years, and hating
the light above, and inclined

to anticipate slow fate, fails to turn
a suicidal hand against himself,
the harsh sting of insatiable desire
that longs uselessly for happiness
makes him search all Italy
for a thousand ineffectual cures
that cannot compensate for the one
that Nature intends for us.

One man is occupied night and day
cultivating his clothes and hairstyle,
his gestures and bearing, the vanity
of coaches and horses, crowded salons,
echoing squares and public gardens,
gambling, dining and envied dancing:
a smile never far from his lips: ah, but
deep in his heart, heavy, fixed, immovable,
like a column of steel, eternal tedium sits,
against which youth's vigour
is powerless, unshaken by
sweet words from rosebud lips,
or a tender glance, trembling
from two dark eyes, the dear glance,
the mortal thing most worthy of heaven.

Some other, turning to flee our sad
human fate, crosses the globe, spending
his time changing countries and climes,

wandering seas and hills: and all
the confines of space, that the infinite fields
of nature entire open to men, he adds
to his wandering. Ah, black care
sits high on his prow, and in every clime,
under every sky, happiness is called to
in vain: sadness lives and rules.

There are those who choose to pass their time
in the cruel work of war, and idly stain
their hands with their brothers' blood:
and those comforted by others' pain,
thinking to make themselves less sad
by making others wretched, and using up
the time by doing harm. And those who
oppress virtue, wisdom and the arts:
and those who trample on their own
and other races, troubling the ancient peace
of foreign shores, with war, trade, fraud,
consuming the life their fate has granted.

A gentler desire, a sweeter concern
rules you in the flower of youth, the lovely
April of your years, to some the happiest
and best gift of heaven, but heavy, bitter,
hostile to one without a country. You are
moved and roused to study verse,
and rehearse the beauty that appears rare,

slight, fugitive in this world, in speech,
with what vague imagination and our
own true error, more benign than nature
or the gods, produce so richly for us.
That man is a thousand times fortunate
who does not lose the fallen power
of dear imaginings through the years:
whom fate allows to keep his youthful
heart forever: who in his vigour
and in his failing years, beautifies
nature with his thoughts,
as he once did in his green age,
making dead things and the desert bloom.
May heaven grant you such: may the flame
that warms your heart today keep you
a lover of poetry in old age. I already feel
the sweet deceptions of my early years
failing me, and their delightful images
fade from my eyes, those I so loved,
that recalling them, always, to my final hour,
will make me desire them, and weep.
When my heart is wholly frozen,
chilled, and the calm and solitary smile
of open fields, the dawn song of the birds,
in spring, and the silent moon over the hills
and ridges in a clear sky, cannot move
my soul: when every beauty
of art or nature seems lifeless

and still to me: when every noble feeling
every tender affection is alien, strange:
then stripped of my only solace
I will choose other studies, less sweet,
on which the thankless residue of a life
of iron can be based. I will search for
the bitter truths, the hidden destiny
of mortal, and eternal things: why
the human race was born, and burdened
with pain and misery: to what final goal
fate and nature drive us: who delights in
or benefits from our sorrows:
by what rules or laws this mysterious
universe moves: on which the wise
heap praise, and to which I pay homage.

I'll spend my idle days in these
speculations: since truth, once known,
has its sad delights. And if in reasoning
on truth this way, my words prove
unpleasant to others, or misunderstood,
I'll not grieve, since all my old desire
for glory will be quenched: no longer
that goddess vain, but blinder still
than chance, or fate, or love.

Note: Count Pepoli, of Bologna, was a man of letters
and vice-president of the Accademia dei Felsinei.

Leopardi recited this poem at one of the meetings of the Academy.

23. Fragment (From Simonides I: XL)

Every earthly event
is in Jupiter's power, Jupiter's, O my son,
According to his will
he ordains all things.
But our blind thought is anxious
and troubled by distant futures,
though human fate,
since heaven decrees what falls,
is to endure from day to day.
Lovely hope feeds all here
on sweet illusions,
so we weary ourselves in vain:
One lives for a brighter day,
another a better age,
and no one lives on earth
whose mind does not dream
that Pluto god of wealth, and all
the gods, will be generous and kind.
See how before hope is achieved
the one's overcome by age,
the other drawn to dark Lethe by disease:
This one by cruel war, and that by the tide
of a rapacious sea: another consumed
by black care, or twisting the sad noose
round his neck, seeks peace below.
A fierce and motley tribe,

of a thousand ills,
torments and consumes wretched mortals.
But in my judgement
a wise man, free of common error,
should not accept such suffering,
nor devote so much love
to sadness and his own harm.

24. Fragment (From Simonides II: XLI)

Things human last so short a time:
he spoke true
the blind poet of Chios:
similar in nature are
the leaves, and humanity.
But there are few who take
these words to heart. All have
unquiet hope, the child
of youth, to live with them.
While the flower of our
green age shows bright,
the free, proud soul
vainly feeds a hundred sweet thoughts,
not knowing death or age: in health
and strength a man cares nothing for disease.
But he's a fool who cannot see
how swiftly youth beats its wings,
how close the cradle
is to the pyre.
You, about to tread
the fatal path
to Pluto's realms:
to present delight
commit brief life.

Note. The blind poet of Chios is Homer.

25. The Dream (XV)

It was dawn, the sun insinuated
the day's first light through the balcony's
closed shutters to my blind room.
In that moment, when sleep shadows
our eyelids more lightly, more gently,
the image of her who first taught me
to love, then left me to grieve,
stood there, next to me, gazing at my face.
She didn't seem dead, only saddened,
an image of unhappiness. She stretched
her right hand to my cheek, and sighing said:
'Do you still live, and retain any memory
of me?' 'Oh my dear,' I replied, 'Where
and how do you come to me, in beauty?
Ah, how I grieved for you, and grieve:
I thought you would never know: and
it made my grief for you more desolate.
But will you leave me again?
I greatly fear it. Now say what happened?
Are you as before? And what torments you
within?' She said: 'Forgetfulness stifles
your thoughts, sleep enshrouds them.
I am dead, a few moons ago
you saw me for the last time.' Vast
sorrow oppressed my heart at that voice.
She said: 'I vanished in the first flower of youth,

when life is sweetest, and before the heart
knows the vanity of human hope
as certain. Mortal sickness has not long
to wait for what will free it
from all trouble: but the young gain no
solace in death, and cruel is our fate
when hope is quenched beneath earth.
Knowledge of what nature hides is no help
to those innocent of life, and blind grief
easily conquers an immature wisdom.’
‘Oh dear unfortunate one, be silent,’ I said,
‘be silent, such words break my heart.
Oh my delight, you are dead then,
and I am living, and was it decreed
in heaven that your dear and tender body
should endure those last sweats,
while this wretched one of mine
should be untouched? Oh despite those
moments when I thought you no longer lived,
that I would never see you again in this world,
I still cannot believe. Ah, what is this thing
called death? If only I could know,
now, and so protect my defenceless
head from fate’s atrocious hatred.
I am young, but this youth of mine
consumes itself and is lost like old-age
I dread, though it’s still far from me.
The flower of my youth is little

different to age.’ She said: ‘We were born to weep, we two, happiness never smiled on our lives: heaven delighted in our troubles.’ ‘Now if this eyelid is wet with tears,’ I replied, ‘and our parting makes your face pale, and your heart heavy with anguish, tell me: did a spark of love, or pity, ever turn your heart towards this wretched lover, while you lived? Then, I despaired, but dragged myself, in hope, through days and nights: now my mind wearies itself with empty doubt. So if sorrow at my darkened life, even once, oppressed you, don’t hide it, I beg you, and the memory will help me, now our future has been taken from us.’ She said: ‘O unhappy one, be comforted. I did not grudge you pity while I was alive, nor now: I was wretched too. Do not complain of it, unlucky child.’ I cried out: ‘In the name of our misfortunes, and the love that destroys me, of our delighted youth, and the lost hopes of our life, allow me, my dear one, to touch your hand.’ And she, sadly, gently, held it out to me. Now, as I covered it with kisses, and held it

to my heaving breast, trembling with
sweet distress, my face and chest
sweating with fever, my voice caught
in my throat, my vision shook in the light.
Then, fixing her gaze on me, tenderly,
she said: 'Oh my dear, have you forgotten
already, that I am stripped of beauty?
O, unhappy one, you tremble and burn
with love, in vain. Now is the last farewell.
Our wretched minds and bodies
are severed for eternity. You are not living
for me, nor will again: fate has already shattered
the loyalty you promised.' Then I tried
to cry out in agony, and roused myself
from sleep, trembling, my eyes
filled with disconsolate tears. She still
stood before my gaze: and in the uncertain
rays of the sun, I believed I saw her yet.

26. The Solitary Life (XVI)

Now the hen exults with beating wings
in her closed run, and the countryman
goes by the balcony, and the rising sun
throws its tremulous rays
on the falling drops
of morning rain that wake me,
striking softly on my cabin roof.
I rise and bless the light cloud,
and the first murmur of the birds,
the fresh breeze, the smiling slopes:
because I've seen you and I know you
too well, sad city walls, where hate
follows sorrow as its companion, and I
will live in sorrow, and so die, and soon!
Though Nature still shows me some rare
pity here, how much kinder she was
to me once! And Nature, you divert
your gaze from the miserable: scorning
misfortune and trouble, you serve
your queen, happiness. There's no friend
or refuge left, in sky or earth,
for the wretched, except the knife.

Sometimes, I sit in a lonely place,
on a slope at the margin of the lake,
that is wreathed with silent plants.

There, as noon wheels in the sky, the sun
paints his tranquil image, the grass
and leaves are unbending in the breeze,
and no wave wrinkles, no cicada ticks,
no bird lifts a feather on the branch,
no butterfly flickers, no voice or movement
can be heard or seen, near or far.

The deepest quiet grips the banks:
then I sit so motionless I almost lose myself,
and forget the world: and it seems to me
my limbs are so still, no spirit or feeling
can ever stir them again, and their primal calm
is merged with the silence of the place.

Love, you have flown so far
from my heart, which once was warm,
red-hot rather. Ruin gripped it
with a chill hand, turned it to ice
in the flower of youth. I recall the time
when you pierced me. It was that sweet,
irrevocable time, when to youth's eyes
the world's unhappy landscape
smiles like a vision of paradise.

To a youth his heart leaps
with virgin hope and desire:
and he prepares for the task
of living, as a poor mortal
does for a joyful dance. But, Love,

I no sooner knew you, than Fate
shattered my life, and nothing seemed
right for these eyes but endless weeping.
Still, when I sometimes meet the face
of a lovely young girl in the open fields,
in the silence of dawn, or when the sun
shines on roofs and hills and meadows:
or when in the placid calm
of a summer night, my wandering steps
pass a rural village, I contemplate
the lonely earth, and hear the quick song
of a girl in her hidden room,
adding hours of night to her daytime labours:
this heart of mine, of stone, begins
to tremble: ah, but it soon returns
to iron sleep: so that all gentle feelings
are strangers to my breast.

O, dear Moon, under whose tranquil rays
the hares dance in the woods: so the hunter
curses at dawn when he finds
false, intricate trails, and error's web
leads him away from their forms: welcome,
benign queen of night. Your rays
pour down among bushes and cliffs,
over lonely ruins, and onto the knife
of the pale thief whose ears catch
the sound of wheels and horses

far off, or a clatter of feet
on the silent road: then suddenly,
with the rattle of arms, and loud cries,
and a dreadful face, he turns the heart
of the traveller to ice, whom he shortly
leaves, naked, half-dead, among the rocks.
You pour your white light on the city limits,
on the vile voluptuary, who hugs the walls
of houses and keeps to the secret
shadows, and stops, and is afraid
of burning lamps and open
balconies. Pouring down on wicked minds,
your aspect will always seem benign to me,
among these landscapes where you reveal
to my sight nothing but delightful hills
and open plains. Yet, once, I, innocent
that I was, accused your lovely rays
in peopled places, that exposed me to human sight,
and exposed human faces to my gaze.
Now I'll always praise you, when I watch you
sailing through the clouds, or,
serene highness of the eternal realms,
as you look down on these pale human haunts.
You'll often see me, silent and alone,
wandering the woods and the green banks,
or seated on the grass, content enough
if heart remains, and breath, for me to sigh.

27. To His Lady (XVIII)

Dearest beauty, who inspire
my love from afar, who hide your face,
except when deep in sleep
your image moves my heart,
or in fields where the light
of day and nature's smile are brighter:
perhaps you blessed that innocent
age that is called Golden,
or fly as an airy spirit
among men? Or does greedy fate
hide you from us till some later time?

Now no hope is left me
of ever gazing at you:
unless it may be, when naked and alone,
my spirit travels those new paths
to a foreign place. Once, in the fresh
dawn of my dark uncertain day,
I thought you were a traveller
in this arid land. But nothing on this earth
resembles you: and if there were an equal
to your face, gestures, spirit, that beauty
though similar would still be less.

Among all this suffering
that fate creates for human beings,

if anyone on earth loved you
as my imagination forms you,
he'd be blessed in this life:
and I see clearly how your love
might make me seek out praise and virtue,
as in my first youth. Now heaven
grants no solace for our troubles:
and, with you, mortal life would be
like that which heaven reveals.

Through the valleys, where the song
of the weary farmer echoes,
and I sit and mourn
youthful error that deserts me:
and in the hills where I recall, weeping,
lost desires, and the lost hope
of my days: thinking of you
my feelings wake. And if I might
hold your noble image, in this dark age
and sinful atmosphere, and be content
with that vision rather than the truth.

If you are one of those
eternal Ideas, that the eternal mind
scorns to clothe in solid form,
to endure the pain of our deathly life
among fallen bodies,
or if you are received in another earth,
in the highest circling, among
the innumerable worlds, and a star
closer and brighter than the sun
illuminates you, who breathe a purer air:
accept your unknown lover, in this hymn
from this world of unhappy and brief days.

28. Memories (XXII)

Lovely stars of the Plough, I never dreamed
I would return to gaze at you, as before,
sparkling above my father's gardens,
or meditate on you, from the window
of the same house I lived in as a child,
where I saw an end to all my happiness.
What imaginings, what fancies the sight
of you, the lights of your company,
used to create then in my thoughts!
Then I used to sit silent on green grass,
spending the greater part of the evening,
watching the sky, hearing the croaking
of frogs far off in the countryside!
And the fireflies flickering here and there
in hedges, flowers, the breeze sighing
from scented roadways, the cypress trees,
that woodland: under my father's roof
conversation echoed, and the calm work
of the servants. What immense thoughts,
what sweet dreams breathed in me at the sight
of the distant ocean, those azure hills
that I can see from here, and that I hoped
to cross one day, imagining secret worlds
and arcane delights to support my existence!
Ignorant of my fate, how often
I wished to exchange this sad

naked life of mine, for death.

I never thought in my heart that in my green youth I'd be condemned to waste away in my barbarous native place, among a vile, loutish race: where learning and wisdom are foreign words, and a cause of mockery and laughter: they hate and ignore me, not just through envy, since they don't think me superior to them, but they consider that I do think so, in my heart, even though I give no sign of that to anyone. Hidden, abandoned here, I spend my time, without love, without life: becoming coarse, perhaps, among this crowd of ill-wishers: this place strips me of all pity and virtue, and makes me scornful of all mankind, oppressed by the herd: and meanwhile the hours of my dear youth fly by: dearer than fame and laurels, dearer than the pure light of day, or breathing: I lose you, without delight, uselessly, in this inhuman place, among my troubles, O sole flower of my arid life.

The wind comes bringing the sound of the hour striking from the clock tower. I remember how it used to comfort me

when I was a child, in my darkened room,
waiting every night, in inexorable terror,
for dawn's sighing. Here there's nothing I see
and feel that doesn't stir visions inside me,
or fails to make some sweet memory rise.
In itself, sweet: but thoughts of the present
bring sorrow, vain desire for the past,
and its sadness, and the words: 'I was'.
That lodge there, facing the last rays
of the sun, those painted walls, the cattle
they picture, and the daylight rising
on open country, offered my leisure
a thousand delights, while, wherever I was,
I had that powerful illusion, speaking with me,
at my side. In these old rooms, lit
by the snow outside, while the wind
whistled round the wide casements,
our games and our shouting echoed,
at that age when the shameful, bitter
mystery of things appears to us full
of sweetness: the child, like
a naïve lover, sees deceptive life,
whole and un-tasted, and worships
the heavenly beauty he imagines.

O hope, hope, pleasant illusion
of those first years! Often in speech

I return to you: whom I can't forget
despite time's changes, and the tide
of thoughts and feelings. I know
that glory and honour are phantoms:
joy and goodness mere desire: life,
worthless misery, bears no fruit. Yet,
however void my years, dark and arid
my mortal state, Fate, I know, robs me
of little. Ah, but whenever I think
of you again, O ancient hope of mine,
and of my first dear imaginings,
and then consider my vile, sad
life, and realise that death
is what remains of all that hope,
I feel my heart shrink, and feel
I'll never be reconciled to my fate.
And when death, wished for so long,
arrives, and when my misfortunes
are at an end, when the earth
is a foreign vale to me, and the future
vanishes from sight, I'll still
remember you: and that vision
will still make me sigh, embitter me
at having lived in vain, and temper
the fatal day's delight with pain.

And already in the first tumult of youth,
of happiness, and anguish, and desire,

I often called on death, and sat
for a long time beside the water,
thinking of ending hope and grief
below the surface. Then when a secret
illness placed my life in danger,
I wept for my youth, and the flower
of my poor days, fading away
in time: and often, late at night,
sitting on my bed, sadly creating
poetry, in the dim lamplight,
mourned, with night and silence,
the fleeting soul, and, in my weakness,
even sang a funeral elegy to myself.

Who can remember you without sighs,
first threshold of youth, O lovely days,
impossible to describe, when young girls
first began to smile at a rapturous mortal:
everything is smiling as it gathers
around him: envy, not yet roused,
or still benign, is silent: and isn't it
as if, (unaccustomed miracle!), the world
reaches out its hand to assist him, forgives
his errors, applauds his first appearance
in life, and bowing low shows it accepts
him as a man, and names him so?
Fleeting days! Vanishing like a gleam
of lightning. And what human being ever

remains ignorant of misfortune, once
that lovely season is done, when the best
of times, his youth, ah youth, has gone?

O Nerina! Do I not hear these places
speak of you? Could you truly have
slipped from my mind? Where have you
gone, my sweetest one, that all I find
of you are memories? I no longer see you
in your native land: that window's deserted
from which you used to talk with me,
from which the starlight is sadly reflected.
Where are you, whose voice
I no longer hear as I once did,
when every remote sound your lips gave
made my face grow pale as it reached me?
Time passes. Your days are gone,
my sweet love. You have vanished.
To pass through this world is given to others,
and to make a home among these fragrant hills.
You vanished so swiftly: and your life was like
a dream. Here you danced: on your brow
joy shone out, and that confident illusion,
that light of youth, shone out, till fate
quenched them, and you lay there, dead.
Ah Nerina, the ancient love reigns
in my heart. Whenever I go to dinners,
or celebrations, I often say to myself:

‘Oh, Nerina, you never dress
for dinners, or celebrations now.’
If May returns, when lovers go with branches
full of flowers, and songs, to their girls,
I say: ‘My Nerina, spring never
returns for you, love never returns.
With every clear day, every flowered
field I see, and every joy I feel, I say:
‘Nerina no longer feels the joy: she sees
neither fields nor sky.’ Ah, you are gone,
my eternal sigh: you are gone, and bitter
memory is the companion to all my vague
imaginings, all my tender feelings,
the dear, sad tremors of my heart.

29. The Re-awakening (Il Risorgimento: XX)

I thought the sweet troubles
of my first youth were lost,
after my fresh springtime:
all the sweet troubles,
all the tender feelings,
of my deepest heart,
all that in this world
makes us glad to feel.

What grief and tears were
scattered, in that new life,
when the pain first ended
in my frozen heart!
Every tremor ended,
love faded in me,
and the sighs diminished
in my icy breast!

I wept for life, deadened
by me, and earth
made barren, locked
in eternal cold:
empty the day, silent
the night, lonelier, darker:
the moon quenched for me,
the stars quenched in the sky.

Yet the old affection
was the source of weeping:
my heart was still alive
deep in my chest.

Wearied imagination
searched for old visions:
and my sadness
still brought its pain.

Soon that last grief
was quenched in me,
and no strength was left me
to mourn any more.
I lay there: senseless, stunned,
not asking for solace:
as if dead, forsaken,
my heart abandoned.

How different I was
from him who once nourished
such ardour, lovely error,
deep in his soul!
The wakeful swallow
singing in the dawn light,
outside my window,
did not move my heart:

nor in pallid autumn,
in the lonely farmlands
the evening chimes,
or the fugitive sun.
I saw twilight shine
in vain on silent roads,
in vain the valley echoed
to the sad nightingale.

And you, tender eyes,
furtive, wandering glances,
you, immortal love
god of gentle lovers,
and you bright, naked
hand placed in my hand,
you too countered my
solid stupor in vain.

Robbed of every sweetness,
sad: but not troubled,
my state was peaceful,
my face was serene.
I might have wished for
the end of my existence:
but all desire was quenched,
in my exhausted breast.

Like the poor bare remains
of a diminished age,
so I lived through
the April of my years:
O my heart, I suffered
those ineffable days,
that heaven allows us,
so brief and so fleeting.

Who has roused me now
from my deep forgetful peace?
What new power is this,
that I feel inside?
Sweet tremors, visions,
throbbing, blessed error,
surely you are denied
to my heart forever?

Are you really that lone
light of my days?
The affection I lost
in earliest times?
In the sky, on green banks,
wherever vision gazes,
all breathes sadness to me,
all gives me delight.

The fields, woods and mountains
return to life as I have:
the fountain speaks to my heart
the ocean speaks to me.
Who brings back my tears
after such long neglect?
And how can the world
appear so changed to me?

Perhaps, O wretched heart,
hope turned to you with laughter?
Ah, I shall never see
the face of hope again.
Nature's tremors were innate
in me, its sweet illusions.
My sufferings lulled
my inborn powers to sleep.

But fate and misfortune
did not annul or conquer:
nor unhappy truth
with its darkened face.
I know it does not match
my wandering fancy:
I know Nature is deaf to us,
and knows no charity.

She is not truly careful
of us, only our survival:
provided we endure grief
she cares for nothing else.
The wretched man discovers
no pity from mankind:
so that in his flight
every mortal scorns him.

And this sad age is free
of intellect or virtue:
and there's no true concern
now for naked glory.
And you, trembling eyes,
you, celestial rays,
I know you shine in vain,
love cannot burn in you.

No secret, no intimate
affection can burn there:
that white breast hides not
a single glowing spark.
Rather it mocks at
other's tender feelings:
disdain is the reward
for that celestial fire.

Yet still I feel the old
known illusions:
and my soul marvels
at its own tremors.
In you, my heart, this last
spirit, and ardour is born:
and all my solace
comes from you alone.

I know that fate and nature,
beauty and the world,
fail the noble spirit,
the gentle and the pure.
But if you're alive, poor heart,
if you do not yield to fate,
then I'll not call her pitiless,
she who gave me life.

30. Consalvo (XVII)

Consalvo lay close to the end of life
on earth: he who was once so scornful
of his fate: but now no more, since in the first
years of manhood, a wished-for oblivion
now hung above his head. On that fatal day,
he lay abandoned by his dearest friends,
as he had been abandoned for so long:
since no friend on earth is left, at last,
to those who scorn the earth itself.
Still, Elvira, famed for divine beauty,
was by his side, whom pity had brought
to console him in his lonely state, she
who was always and solely in his mind:
knowing her power, knowing a single look
of hers, delightful, a word, longed-for, sweet,
repeated a thousand on a thousand times,
in his constant thoughts, had always been
the food and sustenance of this unhappy lover:
though she had heard not one word of love
from him. Always overpowering fear
had been stronger than deep desire
in his soul, since as a boy he had
become a slave through excessive love.

But at last death broke the former bonds
of speech. Sensing the hour that sets

men free, by certain signs, and taking hold of her hand, as she was about to leave him, clasping that whitest of hands tightly, he said: 'You leave, Elvira, and the time now forces you from me, farewell. I do not hope to see you again. So, farewell now. I render the greatest thanks to you that lips could give, for your care. He who can will reward you, if virtue is rewarded by heaven.' She had grown pale, and her breast heaved on hearing what he said: since human hearts are always oppressed with grief when anyone, even a stranger, leaves this world and says farewell forever. And she wished to contradict the dying man, hiding the approach of death. But he prevented her speaking, and spoke again: 'Death comes to me, as you know, like one desired, prayed for many times, and not feared: and this day of my death seems joyful. It weighs on me, it's true, that I'm losing you forever. Ah, I part forever from you. My heart breaks at those words. Never to see those eyes again, or to hear that voice! Tell me: Elvira, will you not grant me a kiss before you abandon me to eternity? One kiss alone for a whole existence? A grace requested should not be denied a dying man. Nor will I ever boast

about that gift, I, half-dead, whose lips
will be closed in a while, eternally,
by a strange hand.' Having spoken,
he fixed his cold lips, with a sigh,
in supplication, on the hand he adored.

The loveliest of women remained motionless
and thoughtful in aspect, and fixed her gaze,
sparkling with a thousand graces, on that
of the unhappy man, where a last tear
glistened. Nor had she the heart to scorn
his request, and render the last goodbye
bitter with denial: rather she was overcome
by pity for that ardour, well known to her.
And that heavenly face, and that mouth,
desired so deeply, for so many years
the goal of all his dreams and sighs,
gently approaching the suffering face,
discoloured by its mortal affliction,
pressed kiss after kiss, in utter kindness
and from deep pity, on the trembling lips
of that anxious, and enraptured lover.

What became of you then, Consalvo?
How did life, death and misfortune appear
as he was dying? With beloved Elvira's
hand that he still held, pressed to a heart
beating with the last tremors of love and death,

he said: 'Ah, Elvira, my Elvira! Then I am
still on earth: those lips were truly
your lips, and I grasp your hand!
It seems like a dying vision, a dream,
a thing incredible. Ah. Elvira, how much
I owe to death! My love has not been hidden
from you for all time, not from you nor
others: truly love cannot be concealed
on earth. My actions, my troubled look,
my eyes had made it clear to you: but my
words had not. The infinite love that governs
my heart would still have been silent,
forever, if dying had not made me bolder.
Now I shall die content with my destiny,
and no longer regret that I saw
the light of day. Life was not in vain,
since it was granted to my mouth
to kiss your mouth. Rather I think
my fate has been happy. This world
owns two lovely things: love and death.
Heaven brings me one in the flower
of youth: and in the other I consider
myself fortunate. Ah, if you had only,
just once, calmed and requited
my great love, then earth would have
changed to paradise forever
to my altered eyes. I would even
have suffered old age, abhorrent

old age, with a quiet heart, since the memory of one moment would have sufficed to endure it: and to say: "I have been happy, with more than all others' happiness." Ah, but heaven does not allow earthly nature to be so blessed. No one is permitted to love with such joy. And yet I would have had the power to endure the whips of the executioner, the wheel, the fires, flying to them from your arms: and even gone down to dreadful everlasting darkness.

Oh, Elvira, Elvira, oh, happy is he, oh blessed above the immortals, to whom your smile of love's revealed! Next is he who sheds his lifeblood for you! It is allowed, allowed to mortals, not just a dream as I long thought, allowed for us to know happiness. I knew it when I first gazed at you. It happened through my dying. And even in such pain I cannot find it in my heart to condemn this fatal day.

Now you are blessed, my Elvira, and your face adorns the earth. No one will love you as I loved you. No such love to equal it will be born. Ah, how often,

how often, wretched Consalvo, called out
to you, how long he grieved, and wept!
How pale I grew, at Elvira's name,
frozen at the heart: how I used to tremble
at the harsh stone of your threshold,
at that angelic voice, at the aspect
of your brow, I, who do not fear death!
But breath and life grow less at the sound
of love. My time has passed, and it
will not be granted me to recall this day.
Elvira: farewell. Your image vanishes
from my heart at last, with my vital flame.
Farewell. If this love of mine was not
a burden to you, send a sigh towards
my tomb, tomorrow, when night falls.

He fell silent: and in a moment his spirit
ebbed with the sound: and his first day
of happiness fled from sight, before the dark.

31. Aspasia (XXIX)

Aspasia, your image sometimes enters
my thoughts. Either it gleams
fugitively, in strangers' faces,
in busy places: or the glorious
vision appears on empty plains
under the clear sky, silent stars,
like a sweet harmony echoed
in my almost amazed soul.

Adored so much, you gods, and once
so much my delight and torment! I never
scent the fragrance of a flowery bank,
or the perfume of blooms in a city street,
without seeing you as you were that day,
enclosed in your charming apartment,
that was full of fresh petals of spring,
dressed in the colours of dark violet,
your angelic form revealed to me,
curving from under gleaming
furs, and you surrounded
by secret voluptuousness: while you,
clever seductress, showered fervent
echoing kisses on the curved lips
of your children, often stretching out
your white neck, and clutching them,
they not knowing why, to your hidden,

desirable breast, with a gentle hand.
A new heaven and earth appeared,
to my mind, and an almost divine light.
So it was that your arm, with living force,
drove that arrow into my defended heart,
which, once fixed there, I carried, crying out,
till the sun returned twice in its circling.

Lady, your beauty seemed to me
like a divine light in my mind. Beauty
and music have a similar effect:
often both reveal the high mystery
of unknown Elysium. Then the wounded
man must live desiring that child
of his own mind, that image of love,
containing so much of the Olympians
in itself: in all its looks, and dress, and speech,
equal to that lady the rapturous lover desires,
and thinks in his confusion that he loves.
Now indeed he serves and loves the idea,
and not the lady whose body he embraces.
He is angered at last to realise his error,
his mistaken objective, and often, wrongly,
blames his lady: feminine understanding
seldom reaches to that exalted image:
woman cannot conceive or even begin
to understand what her own beauty
can inspire in a generous lover. She holds

no similar concept in her slender brow,
and, in the vital flashes of her glances,
man is deceived, wrong to hope,
wrong to demand deep feelings, strange
and more than human, in one who in all
her nature is less than man. Since, just
as her limbs are softer and more tender,
so her mind is less capable and weaker.

So, Aspasia, you were never able
to imagine what you inspired
for a time in my mind. You never knew
what immeasurable love, intense pain,
what unspeakable tremors and delirium
you stirred in me: and there will never be
a moment when you could understand.
In the same way, the musician cannot
conceive what he creates, with hand or voice,
in his listeners. That Aspasia, whom I loved,
is dead. Once the object of my whole life, she
is lost forever: except when she returns
from time to time, then vanishes,
a dear ghost. But you live on,
not merely beautiful, but lovelier
it seems to me than all others.
Only the fire born from you is quenched:
since I loved not you but that Goddess
who once had life, now burial, in my heart.

I adored her for so long: her heavenly beauty
pleased me so, that though I was clearly
aware from the first moment
of what you were, your arts and wiles,
when I saw her lovely eyes in yours,
I desired you while she lived,
not deceived, but driven, by my pleasure
in that sweet resemblance, to suffer
a long and bitter slavery for you.

Boast of it now, as you may. Say you were
the only one of all your sex to whom I submitted
to bow my noble head, to whom I willingly
gave my indomitable heart. Say you were
the first and I hope the last, it's true, to see
my brow bend in supplication, fearful
before you, trembling (I burn to repeat it
with shame and scorn), beside myself,
hanging slavishly on all your wishes,
every word, each action, paling at your
superb disdain, my face glowing at some
sign of kindness, changing my colour
and looks at every glance. The spell broke,
and my chains were shattered too, and fell
to the ground: and I was happy. And though
I'm filled with tedium, I'm content,
after such long slavery, such madness,
to embrace freedom and sense. And though

a life devoid of affection, and noble illusion,
is like a midwinter night empty of stars,
it's my solace and my revenge for a fate
that's hard enough for me, that idle
and immobile on the grass I can gaze
at sea and land and sky, and I can smile.

32. Fragment (Alcetas and Melissus: XXXVII)

Alcetas:

Listen, Melissus: I'll tell you a dream
I had tonight, that comes to mind on
seeing the moon again. I was standing
at the window that faces the meadow,
gazing at the sky: and suddenly, look,
the moon broke loose: and it seemed
the nearer it came in its fall
the bigger it grew: till it landed
with a bang in the midst of the meadow:
and it was the size of a bucket, and spewed
a shower of sparks, that hissed as loud
as a glowing coal when you plunge it
in water, and quench it. Just like that,
the moon, I say, in the midst of the meadow,
quenched itself, darkening, little by little,
and all the grass around was smoking.
Then gazing at the sky, I saw a sort of
gleam was left, a scar or a gaping hole,
it might have torn away from: so that
it made me shiver: and I'm still shaking.

Melissus:

You're right to worry, it's likely,

that the moon would fall in your field!

Alcetas:

Who knows? Don't we often see a star fall
in summer?

Melissus:

There are so many stars up there
no harm if one or two of them fall,
there's thousands left. But only one
moon in the sky, and no one's ever
seen it fall, except in dreams.

33. Fragment (Separation: XXXVIII)

I who wander before this threshold
call in vain on rain and tempest
that they might keep her here with me.

Surely the wind roared in the forest,
among the clouds the thunder roaring,
'ere dawn was in the heavens shining.

O dear clouds, O sky, O earth, O branches,
my lady now departs: have pity, if ever
was pity in this world for wretched lovers.

O storm, now stir yourself, O rain-clouds
now gather yourself to overwhelm me,
until the sun bears day to other lands.

Clear sky, the dying winds, on every hand
the leaves and grasses rest, the cruel sun
dazzles me with light, filled with tears.

34. Fragment (Turned to Stone: XXXIX)

The rays of light were dying in the west:
the cottage-smoke was motionless, still
the sound of village dogs, and people:

when she, intent on lovers' meeting,
found herself deep in a landscape
happier, more charming than all others.

There the moon spread all its brightness,
through every level, and turned the trees
to silver, that wreathed the place around.

The branches were sighing in the wind,
and weeping ever, with the nightingale,
a stream within the wood made sweet lament.

The sea shone in the distance, and the land,
the forest, and the summits, one by one,
of all the mountain-tops were revealed.

The darkened valley lay in tranquil shadow,
and the moonlight's dew-wet brightness
covered the little hills all around.

The lady took her lonely way in silence
and felt the breeze filled with fragrance,

passing across her face, so gently.

Vain to ask if she were happy:
she took pleasure in the vistas,
and the great good her heart promised.

O sweet serene moments, how you vanish!
What delights us here, except our hopes,
never lasts for us, or even lingers.

See the night troubled, and then darken
the face of heaven that was so lovely,
and all her pleasure turn to fear.

A storm cloud, the herald of the cyclone,
rose from behind the mountain, deepened,
so the moon and stars were hidden.

She saw it spread on every side
and, gradually, mount through the air,
to form a sort of mantle overhead.

The little light there was grew fainter:
and in the wood the wind was rising,
the wood that was her happy destination.

Every moment the wind grew stronger,
till all the birds, awake, in their fear,
fluttered about among the leaves.

And the gathering cloud descended
towards the shore, till one edge touched
the mountain, the other edge the sea.

Now all was sunk in darkness's lap,
and the rain began its beating,
the sound increasing as the cloud neared.

The lightning flashed in a fearful manner
behind the clouds, making her eyes blink,
the earth was gloomy, and the air reddened.

Wretchedly, she felt her body tremble:
the thunder rumbled with the same echo
as torrents flowing downward from the heights.

She paused sometimes, and gazed in terror
at the darkened air, and hurried on,
her hair and robes streaming out behind her.

So she breasted the harsh tempest,
that sighed against her face and scattered
those icy drops of water through dark air.

Like a wild beast thunder assailed her,
roaring horribly without ceasing:
all the while the rain and wind grew stronger.

And it was terrible to see around her,
dust and leaves, stones and branches flying,
and sounds the heart fears to imagine.

She hid her eyes against the lightning flashes
that wearied and strained her sight, and clutching
her robes to her, sped faster through the storm.

But the lightning still blazed in her face
so brightly, that at last she stood motionless
in fear, and all her courage ebbed away.

Then she turned back. And at that moment
the lightning ceased, the night grew dark,
the thunder quietened, the wind was still.

All was silent: and she had turned to stone.

35. To Italy (I)

O my country, I see the walls, arches
columns, statues, lone
towers of our ancestors,
but I do not see the glory,
I do not see the iron and the laurel in which
our forefathers were clasped. Now, defenceless,
you show your naked breast and brow.
Ah, how wounded,
what blood and bruises! Oh how I see you
loveliest of ladies! I ask the sky
and the earth: tell me, tell me:
who reduced her to this? And worse,
imprisoned both her arms in chains:
so with loosened hair, without a veil,
she sits on the ground, neglected, disconsolate,
hiding her face
between her knees, and weeping.
Weep, my Italy, with good reason,
you, born to outdo nations,
in good fortune and in ill.

If your eyes were two living fountains
your weeping would be unequal
to your hurt and your disgrace:
once a lady, now you're a poor servant.
Who can speak or write of you,

remembering your past glories,
and not say: 'Once great, you are so no longer'?
Why? Why? Where is the ancient power,
where the weapons, courage, and endurance?
Who lowered your sword?
Who betrayed you? What art or effort
or superior force
stripped you of your cloak and laurel wreath?
How did you fall, and when,
from such heights to such depths?
Does no one fight for you? Not one
of your own defend you? To arms, arms: I alone
I'll fight, I'll fall, alone.
Heaven, grant that my blood
might set Italian hearts on fire.

Where are your sons? I hear the sound of weapons
and the wagons, and the voices, and the drums:
your sons are fighting
on a foreign field.
Listen, Italy: listen. I see, oh, around me,
the swell of troops and horsemen,
smoke, dust, the glitter of swords,
like lightning in the mist.
Surely you're neither comforted nor willing for
your trembling sight to witness so dubious a fate?
Why should the youth of Italy
fight in such fields? O powers,

that Italians should fight for another country.
O wretch, lost in war,
not for his homeland and a loyal wife,
and beloved sons,
but at the hands of another's enemies,
for another's race: who cannot say in dying:
'Dear land of my birth, see,
how I render the life you gave me.'

Oh blessed, and dear and fortunate
those ancient days when our people
rushed to die in ranks for their country:
And you, O narrow pass,
honoured and glorious for ever,
where Persia and fate were not strong enough
for a few brave and generous spirits!
I think your grass and stone and waves
and mountains, tell the passer-by
with indistinct voices
how the unconquered ranks of corpses
sacrificed for Greece
covered all that shore.
Then Xerxes, cruel and cowardly,
fled over the Hellespont
to be mocked to the last generation:
and Simonides climbed
the hill of Antela, where the sacred band
in dying made themselves deathless,

to gaze on the earth and sea and sky.

And both cheeks wet with tears,
with beating heart, and stumbling feet,
he took his lyre in his hand:

‘You, most blessed of all,
who each offered yourself to the enemy lance,
for love of her who gave you to the light,
you the Greeks revered, the world admired,
what was that love so great that led
young men to war and danger,
what love drew them to their bitter fate?
How, sons, could you find such joy,
in that last moment, when smiling
you rushed to the harsh, sad pass?
Each of you seemed like one who goes to dance
not die, or goes to a glorious feast:
but dark Tartarus awaited
you, and the dread waves:
no wife or child accompanied you
when you died, on that cruel shore,
without kisses, without grief.

But not without deep hurt to the Persians,
and eternal anguish.

Like a lion in a herd of bulls
that leaps on the back of one, and tears
its back with its teeth,

and bites its flanks or thighs,
so the anger and courage of Greek hearts
raged amongst the Persian ranks.
See the horses and riders levelled,
see where the shattered tents and wagons
block the flight of the defeated,
and the tyrant, pale, escaping,
runs with the leaders:
see how the Greek heroes drenched
and stained with barbarous blood,
bringing infinite grief to the Persians,
fall one against the other, gradually
defeated by their wounds. Oh live, live,
you blessed ones,
while the world can speak and write.

The stars stripped from the sky, falling to the sea,
will sooner be drowned, hissing, in the deep,
than our love for you
be past and done.

Your tomb's an altar: where the mothers
come to show their little ones the glorious
traces of your blood. See how I bend,
O blessed ones, to the soil,
and kiss the turf and stones,
that will be praised, famous for ever,
from pole to pole.

Ah if only I were with you, below,

and the kind earth was moistened by my blood.
If fate's opposed, and will not consent
that I fall in war, and close
my dying eyes, for Greece,
then, if the powers above so will,
may that lesser fame,
of your poet, the future may bring,
endure as long as yours shall endure.'

Note: Leopardi contemplates the Italian troops in Napoleon's armies, and then recalls the ancient Greek heroes of Thermopylae and Salamis who repulsed the Persians.

36. On the Proposed Dante Monument in Florence **(II)**

Because our people
sheltering under the white wing of peace,
will never see the Italian spirit freed
from the bonds of ancient sleep
until this unhappy land returns
to the example set by her early days,
take care, O Italy,
to honour those past, since you
are widowed of such men today,
when there's none worthy of honour.
Turn, and gaze, O my homeland,
at that vast crowd of immortals,
and weep, and be scornful of yourself,
since grief without scorn is foolish now.
Turn, and be ashamed, and rouse yourself,
and spur yourself on
by thinking of our ancestors, our children.

The eager visitor, foreign in looks
and understanding and speech, would
indeed search the soil
of Tuscany to find
where that poet lies through whose verse
Homer is not unique.
And he would learn, ah shame,

not only that his ashes and naked bone
are still exiled,
after their burial, in foreign earth,
but there is not a stone to him,
for whose virtues all the world honours you,
Florence, within your walls.
Oh you compassionate ones, through whom
such sad and base dishonour will be erased!
Noble, generous ones, you've undertaken a fine
labour,
and your love will be repaid,
by those whom love of Italy inspires.

Love of Italy: oh dear friends,
may love of this wretched land spur you on,
she, towards whom loyalty now
is dead in every heart, so that the sky
grants us bitter days after fair ones.
Oh, my sons, may pity, grief and anger
at the pain that bathes
her cheeks and veil, give you courage
and crown your efforts.
What words or song are appropriate
for you, who give not only true care and thought,
but labour, and display the eternal merit
of artistry and the hand's skill and virtue,
in this sweet enterprise?
What verses can I send you that might have

the power to kindle fresh light
in your heart and burning spirit?

The great subject will inspire you,
a blade to prick and pierce your breast.
Who could describe the tide and storm
of your fury or your deep emotions?
Who could paint your dazed expression,
the lightning of your eyes?
How could a mortal voice capture
the measure of divine things?
'Be far away, profanity, far from me'. Oh
Italy, what tears have been denied a noble
monument!
How can it die, how or when
can your glory be erased by time?
O, dear divine arts, ever-living:
you, by whom our wrongs are sweetened,
a solace to our unfortunate race,
intent on honouring Italian virtue
among the ruins of Italy.

See, I also want
to honour our grieving mother:
I bring what I can
joining my song to your work,
seated where your chisel gives life to marble.
O glorious father of Tuscan verse,

if news of things on earth,
of her you raised so high,
ever reaches your shores,
I know you feel no joy for yourself,
since bronze and marble are less enduring
than wax and sand, compared with the fame
you left among us: and if you've ever
been, or shall be, absent from our minds,
I hope our ills will grow, if they can grow,
and your people weep forever
at a wholly darkened world.

But you will be happy, not for yourself,
but for your poor country, if ever
the example of her ancestors
rouses her sick and slumbering sons
with such virtue that they raise their heads a moment.
Ah, what long torment you see
afflicting her, who was so troubled
at saying farewell to you
when you rose again to Paradise!
She must seem so abased to you today
who was a fortunate and royal lady then.
She's so wretched now
that, stunned, you can't believe it.
I'm silent about other enemies and sorrows,
but not the most recent and the cruellest,
through which your country has seen

the depths of night touch her threshold.

Blessed are you, fated
not to live through such horrors,
who have not seen Italian women
in the arms of barbarous soldiers:
not seen enemy weapons in foreign fury
sack, and lay waste, town and country:
not seen divine works of Italian skill
dragged to servitude beyond the Alps,
trains of wagons filling roads of grief:
the harsh gestures and the proud commands:
not heard the insults, and the evil voice
of freedom that delivers them,
among the noise of chains and whips.
Who did not grieve? What did not suffer?
What was left untouched by those felons?
What temple, or altar, or crime?

Why were such perverse times ours?
Why were we destined to be born, or
why were we not destined to die first,
bitter fate? We've been forced to see
our country made servant, made slave,
her virtue eroded
by the biting file, with no aid
and no comfort given us
to ease at all the pitiless ills

that tore her. Ah, dear one,
we have not given our blood,
our life for you: and I am not
dead of your cruel fate.

There is anger and pity in our hearts:
many of us have fought, died
but not for dying Italy,
no: for her oppressors.

Dante, if you do not feel scorn,
you must have altered from what you were
on earth. Ah, worthy
of a better death, Italians lay dying
on the foul Russian plains, and air, sky,
men and beasts made fierce war on them.
They fell, squadron after squadron,
half-clothed, bloodstained, exhausted,
the ice the only sheet for their bodies.
Then, drawing their last breath,
remembering their longed-for mother,
said: 'Oh if we'd been conquered by steel,
and not by cloud and wind, but for you,
our homeland. See, we are far from you,
when time should be smiling sweetly on us,
ignored by everyone,
dying for those who are destroying you.

The northern wastes, the hissing woods,

were witness to their sorrows.
They reached such a pass
the abandoned corpses, unburied,
on the dread ocean of snow,
were torn apart by wild creatures,
and the names of the noble and the brave,
will always be lost among those
of the cowardly and base. Dear spirits,
rest in peace, though your misfortune
is eternal: and may it be your solace
that you will have no solace
in this or any future age.
Sleep in the clasp of your immense
affliction, o true sons of her
whose supreme hurt
only your hurt can equal.

Your country does not complain
of you, but those who sent you
to war against her,
so that she weeps most bitterly
and confounds her tears with yours.
Oh that pity for her who dims
all others' glory,
might be born in the heart of one
who might raise her, dull and weary,
from so dark and deep
a chasm! O glorious spirit,

say: is love for your Italy dead?
say: is the fire that burned you quenched?
say: will the myrtle never be renewed
that eased our troubles for so long?
Will our wreaths be scattered on the earth?
Will no one ever rise
to equal you at all?

Are we lost forever? Is our
shame without limits?
While I have life in me I'll cry:
'Turn to your ancestors, you broken branches:
gaze at these ruins,
words and paintings, marbles, temples:
think what earth you tread: and if the light
of these examples does not stir you,
why linger? Rise and go.
This seedbed, this school of great spirits
is no place for such decayed morals:
if she's filled with cowards,
she were better widowed and alone.'

37. To Angelo Mai (III)

(On His Discovering A Copy of Cicero's De Re Publica)

Ardent Italian, do you never tire
of raising our ancestors
from the tomb? Of bringing them
to speak to this dead age overcast
with such clouds of boredom? Why do they come
to our ears so strongly now, so often,
those ancient voices of ours,
mute for so long? Why so many
resurrections? In a fecund lightning-flash
their pages come: for this age alone
the dusty cloisters
have kept safe the sacred, generous
words of our ancestors. What courage,
zealous Italian, does fate inspire in you?
Or perhaps fate fights with mortal courage in vain?

Surely it must be by the gods' high counsel,
when our desperate neglect
is duller and deeper, each moment,
almost, that strikes us with our ancestors'
fresh calls. The heavens are still
faithful to Italy: some immortal
still cares for us:
and since now or never is the time

to trust ourselves to the disused
powers of our native Italy,
we hear how great the clamour is
from the tombs, and why the soil reveals
these forgotten heroes,
asking at this late hour if you
delight, our country, in cowardice.

O glorious one, do you still nourish
hopes of us? Are we not
wholly ruined? Perhaps the future's
not unknown to you? I am distraught,
with no refuge from grief, what will be
is hidden from me, and what I see
is such that it makes hope seem
a folly and a dream. Noble spirits,
a foul, dishonourable crew succeed
to your place: in your blood,
every worth of work or word
is mocked: no longer shame or envy
of your lasting fame: neglect
surrounds your monuments: and we
have become a base example for future ages.

Noblest of minds, now no one else cares
about our high ancestry,
it falls to you, on whom fate breathes
kindly, to you, to offer up with both hands

those former times, when the ancients raised
their heads out of dark oblivion,
with the buried arts,
those godlike ancestors to whom nature
spoke without unveiling, in whom was enclosed
the generous calm of Rome and Athens.
Oh ages, oh ages lost
in eternal sleep, when Italy's ruin
was incomplete, when we disdained
base idleness, and the wind in flight
drew sparks more intensely from this soil.

Your sacred ashes were still warm,
Dante, unconquered enemy
of fortune, to whose grief and scorn
Hell was friendlier than earth.
Hell: is that not a better place
than this? And the sweet strings
still trembled, Petrarch,
unhappy lover, from the touch
of your hand. Ah, Italian poetry
was born in sadness. Yet the ills
that grieve us are lighter and hurt less
than the boredom that drowns us. Oh you,
blessed ones, to whom life was tears! Irritation
binds our swaddling bands: for us, by the cradle
and above the tomb, sits motionless nullity.

While all your life, Columbus, ardent son
of Liguria, was with stars and sea,
beyond the Pillars of Hercules, and lands
where men thought they heard the waves
hiss as they quenched the sun, committed
to the infinite swell, you found the rays
of fallen Sol once more, and the daylight
born again there, as ours merged with the deep:
and, overcoming all Nature's barriers,
an immense and unknown land was the glory
of your voyage, and your return
with all its risks. Ah, but the world does not
grow greater by being known, it grows less,
and the sounding air, the kindly earth, the sea
seem vaster to the child than the learned man.

Where have our happy dreams gone,
the unknown harbours
of unknown peoples, the diurnal
houses of the stars, the young Aurora's
remote bed, and the hidden nocturnal
sleep of the greatest planet?
See they vanish in a moment,
the world's captured on a flimsy chart:
see, all's the same, and only nothingness
grows by discovery. O dear imaginings,
you're denied us
when truth arrives: our minds separate

from you forever: the years part us
from your first stupendous powers:
and the solace for our pain disappears.

You, Ariosto, meanwhile, were born to sweet
dreams, and the primal sun, shone
on your face, carefree singer of love and arms,
who filled life with happy illusions,
in an age less sad than ours:
Italy's new hope. O chambers, O towers,
O ladies, O cavaliers,
O gardens, O palaces, thinking of you,
my mind is lost in a thousand
empty pleasures. Vanities, lovely follies,
and strange thoughts,
filled human life: what remains, now the leaves
are stripped from things? Only the certainty
of seeing all is empty, except sadness.

O Tasso, Tasso, then heaven prepared
your excellent mind for us:
weeping and little else for you.
Oh sad Torquato! The sweet song
could not solace you, or melt the ice
your soul possessed, once warm
but chilled by hatred, fouled
by the envy of tyrant and citizen. Love,
Amor, abandoned you, that last deception

of our life. Nothingness seemed real,
a solid shade to you, and the world
an empty wasteland. Your eyes were not raised
to tardy honours: the last hour was mercy
not ruin for you. He who knows our ills
asks for death and not a laurel wreath.

If you wish for anguish, return,
return to us, rise
from the mute and melancholy tomb,
O sad example of misfortune. Our life
grows worse than that which seemed
so wicked and so dark to you. O dear one,
who will sympathise with you
when no one cares for any but himself?
Who, today, would not call your mortal anguish
foolish, now everything great and rare
is called madness:
when something worse than envy,
indifference, greets the highest? O who
when measure rather than poetry reigns,
would offer you the laurel wreath once more?

O unfortunate spirit, from your time
until now only one Italian
with a famous name has risen
above his shameful and cowardly age,
Alfieri, the fierce Piedmontese, to whom

heaven, not this waste and arid land
of mine, gave a heart of manly courage:
he alone, unarmed (ardent memory!) made war
on tyrants through the drama: the world
at least was given
that pitiful conflict, that vain field
for impotent anger. He was the first to enter
that arena, and no one followed, since now neglect
and brutish silence have wholly crushed us.

He passed his entire life, immaculate,
angry and disdainful,
and death saw him escape the worst.
Vittorio, this was not the place or time
for you. Other ages, other regions
are needed for noble minds. Now
we live content with inaction,
led by mediocrity: the wise have fallen
and the crowd have risen to form this single space
where the world is levelled. O famous explorer,
go on: wake the dead,
now that the living are asleep: arm the mute
tongues of former heroes: so that, at last,
this age of mud may either stir to life, and rise
to noble action, or sink in shame.

Note: Angelo Mai (1782-1854) was the custodian of
the Vatican Library from 1819, and a discoverer and

editor of ancient manuscripts. Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803) was a poet and playwright.

38. For The Marriage of His Sister Paolina (IV)

Leaving, at last, the silences
of your native nest, and the blessed
shades, and the ancient illusion, heaven's gift,
that, to your eyes, enhances these lonely shores,
fate draws you to the noise
and dust of life: my sister, you learn
the shameful state harsh skies prescribe for us,
you, who in a grave
and mournful time
will add unhappy children
to sad Italy. Provide strong examples
to your offspring. Cruel fate denies
helpful breezes
to human virtue,
nor can a pure soul live in a frail breast.

You will have wretched
or cowardly sons. Choose the wretched.
Corrupted custom sets a vast gulf
between fate and worth. Ah, the child
born today, in the twilight
of mankind, acquires its life and senses too late.
Birth is fate's: yours the sovereign
care of the heart, that your sons
will not grow to be friends
of fortune, or playthings of base fear

and hope: then the future ages
will call you happy:
for (sinful custom
of false idle slaves)
dead, we praise the virtue we scorned alive.

Ladies, our country expects
much from you: and the sweet rays
of your eyes were not granted their power
to tame steel and fire, in scorn, or to harm
the human race. The wise and strong act
and think according to your judgement: and all
that the sun's bright chariot circles bows to you.
I ask you the reason
for this age of ours. Is it your hands
that quenched the sacred fire
of our youth? Our nature thinned
and broken by you? The mind
sleeping, the will ignoble,
our native courage lacking
in muscle and sinew: is yours the blame?

Love, if we think truly, is the spur
to noble actions, and beauty the teacher
of deep affections. That spirit must be severed
from love whose heart's core does not rejoice
when the winds war together, and Olympus
gathers the clouds, and the thunder of the storm

strikes the mountain. O brides,
O virgins, I think that he
who flinches from danger, unworthy
of our country, and sets his heart
his common affections on base things,
moves you to hatred and scorn:
if women's hearts burn to love
men, and not mere children.

May you hate to be known
as mothers of a cowardly race. May your children
grow used to bearing the pain and grief
of virtue, and scorning and condemning
all that this shameful age prizes and adores,
live for their country, learning its noble deeds,
and what this land owes to their ancestors.
Just as the sons of Sparta
grew to honour Greece,
among the memories and fame
of ancient heroes:
till the young bride strapped
the sword to her dear one's side,
only to loosen her dark hair
over his bloodless naked corpse,
returned to her on his intact shield.

Virginia, your soft cheek
touched by the all-powerful hand

of beauty, and your noble disdain,
troubled the foolish Lord of Rome.
You were pure, and were at that stage
where sweet dreams summon,
when your father's harsh steel pierced
that white breast,
and willingly you descended
to Erebus. 'O father,' she said, 'let time
loosen and unmake my limbs, prepare
a tomb for me, before an impious
tyrant's bed possesses me.
And if Rome gains life and strength
from my blood, let me expire.'

O generous one, though the sun
shone with a greater splendour on you
than it does today, let your prize
and solace be that tomb your sweet native land
honours with tears. See how the Roman people,
alight with a new anger,
gather round your remains. See the dust
befoul the tyrant's head:
and freedom flare
in forgetful hearts: and ardent Roman arms
advance over defeated lands
from the dark pole to the torrid zone.
So a woman's fate
stirs eternal Rome

once more, from its deep slumber.

Note: Virginia was killed by her Roman father to save her from a forced marriage to Appius Claudius (who in 451**BC** helped give Rome its first legal code, but was later perceived as a would-be tyrant). The events caused an uprising when the Decemviri (the Commission of Ten Men) were overthrown.

39. To A Winner In The Games (V)

Blessed youth, know the face of glory
and the joyful voices,
and how a hard-won virtue surpasses
effeminate idleness. Listen: listen,
generous champion (your courage sets
the reward of your fame against the swift
flow of the years) listen and lift your heart
towards noble desires. The arena,
and the stadium echo for you, and tremble
as popular applause calls you to glory.
Today, our beloved country
prepares to renew the ancient exemplars
in you, resplendent in your youthfulness.

It was not he who gazed stupidly
at the Olympian course, naked athletes,
and the gymnasium's rigour,
without being stirred to emulation
by the lovely palm and the crown,
who stained his hand
with barbarians' blood at Marathon.
Such as perhaps had washed the dusty flanks
and manes of his conquering team in the Alpheus,
and now led Greek standards and Greek spears
against the pale swarms of weary fleeing Persians:
till the wide banks and servile shores of Euphrates

echoed with mournful cries.

Is it vanity that rouses and frees
the rekindled spark
of natural virtue? And revives the sunken
fervour of vital spirits, dulled
in the sick breast? Since Phoebus
first turned his sad wheels, has human effort
ever been other than a game? And is truth
less a vanity than the lie? Nature gave
happy illusions, felicitous shadows,
to console us: and when foolish custom
could no longer shake off certain error
the nation changed its study
of the glorious to dark, bare, inaction.

Perhaps a time will come when indifferent
herds will browse
the ruins of Italy, and the Seven Hills
will feel the plough: and perhaps
in only a few years, sly foxes
will inhabit Latin cities, and the dark woods'
murmuring surround the high walls:
if fate cannot rid perverted minds
of this sad forgetfulness
for the things of their country,
and if heaven remembering past greatness,
is not kind, in averting

the final ruin of an abject race.

O worthy son, grieve that you survive
of our unhappy country.

When she bore the palm, which she has lost
through our fatal error, you would have
brought her fame. That age is gone:
today no one looks for honour from her womb:
but lift your spirit to heaven for yourself alone:
what value does our life have? Only to be despised:
blessed only when no danger threatens,
and we forget ourselves, when we do not measure
the hurt of slow destructive hours, or listen to their
flow:
blessed only when we draw back
from Lethe's channel, to seek more grace.

40. Marcus Junius Brutus (VI)

When the pride of Rome lay
wholly ruined in the Thracian dust,
so that fate prepared
the tramp of barbarous cavalry,
for green Italy and the Tiber's banks,
and called a host of Goths, from naked woods
the freezing Bear oppressed,
to pierce Rome's noble walls:
Brutus, panting, wet with fraternal blood,
in the dark night in a lonely place,
ready now to die, cursed
hell and the inexorable gods,
stirring the drowsy air in vain
with his angry call.

'Dumb courage, the empty mists,
the unquiet fields of shadows,
are your haunts, and repentance
follows you. The unhappy crowd
are a mockery and derision to you,
gods of marble (if there are gods,
by Phlegethon or among the clouds),
a race you look to for temples, and insult
mortally with your fraudulent rule.
Does earthly piety serve only
to stir divine hatred? Do you sit there,

Jupiter, aiding the impious? And when
the storm flies through the air, and you
hurl your swift lightning, is it against
the pious you brandish the sacred fire?

Unconquerable fate, and iron
necessity, crush the weak
slave of death: and the wretch whose power
fails, opposing them, takes solace
in the inevitability of ruin. Are ills
less cruel that have no redress? Does one
devoid of hope feel no pain?
O ignoble fate, the noble man, unused
to yielding, wages
eternal mortal war on you: and when
the tyranny of your right hand overcomes him
with its weight, he will shrug it off indomitably,
ceremoniously, piercing his side
with the bitter steel,
and smiling mockingly at the dark shadows.

Those who enter Tartarus by violence
displease the gods. Such courage
is absent from mild eternal hearts.
Perhaps the gods created our troubles,
our bitter fortune, and unhappy affections,
as an amusing spectacle for their idleness?
Nature, once queen and goddess

ordained not misery and guilt for us
but a free and pure life
in the forest. Now impious customs
have beaten her sacred kingdom to the earth,
and encumbered our lives with alien laws,
does kindly Nature rise up,
when the strong reject
their unhappy times,
and accuse the arrow that is not hers?

The wild creatures, happy, ignorant of guilt,
and their own misfortune,
are led by old age serenely
to their unrecognised end. But if pain
led them to strike their brows
against harsh trees, or hurl their bodies
headlong to the wind, from stony mountains,
O shadowy intelligence,
no arcane law would oppose
their wretched wish. Only you, of all
the many species heaven creates,
Sons of Prometheus, regret life:
only to you, O wretched men,
if slow fate delays,
does Jupiter deny the shores of death.

And you rise, bright moon, from a sea
that flows with our blood,

and explore this unquiet night,
and this land fatal to Italy's bravest.
The victor tramples on kindred hearts,
the hills tremble, ancient Rome
sinks from highest glory to disaster:
can you be so calm? You saw
Lavinia's people born, and the years
of joy, and unfading laurels:
and you will shed your immutable rays
on the silent peaks, when,
to servile Italy's shame,
this solitary place echoes again,
to barbarous footsteps.

See how the birds, the wild creatures,
hearts filled with their habitual lives,
among the naked rocks, the green branches,
ignore the great disaster, the altered
fate of the world: and when the roofs
of the industrious farmers first redden,
the birds will rouse the valleys
with their morning songs,
and the wild beasts will chase
the weaker host of lesser creatures.
Oh fate! Oh vain humanity! We are
an abject part of things: and our ills
have not troubled the bloodstained turf,
the caves filled with groans,

human cares have not obscured the stars.

I do not call on the deaf kings
of Cocytus or Olympus,
or shameful earth, or moribund night:
nor you, future age of knowledge,
furthest bound of dark death. Can tears
assuage a scornful end, or words or gifts
from the base crowd adorn it? Time
alters for the worse: it would be wrong
to entrust the honour of noble minds,
the last revenge for misery,
to decayed generations. Let the dark bird
hover over me with its cruel wings:
wild beasts crush my nameless remains,
storms disperse them,
winds scatter my fame, and all memory of me.

Note: Marcus Junius Brutus, was one of the conspirators who assassinated Julius Caesar. He committed suicide after the defeat at Philippi in 42**BC**. Leopardi treats his death as marking the death of the Roman Republic and its values. Lavinia was the wife of Aeneas, the mythical Trojan father of the Roman people.

41. Palinode To Marchese Gino Capponi (XXXII)

*'Constant sighing doesn't
help'*

Petrarch

My honest Gino, I was wrong: wrong for years
and wildly wrong. I thought life wretched
and empty, and the age that now unfolds
the most stupid of all. The language I used
seemed, and was, intolerant of this blessed
mortal race, if men ought to call themselves
mortal, or dare do so. Noble people laughed
at me in wonder and scorn from that fragrant
Eden they inhabit, and I ought to call myself
lonely, unfortunate, incapable of pleasure,
and ignorant of it, to believe my own fate
universal, and the human species a partner
in my ills. At last there shone, vivid,
to my eyes, through the cigar smoke
of honour, murmurs of crackling pastries,
military cries, commanders
of ices and drinks, among the clash
of cups, and brandished
spoons, the flash of the daily
papers. I realised then, I saw
public happiness, and the sweetness
of mortal destiny. I saw the excellence

and the value of earthly things,
a human path all flowers, and saw
how nothing here can last or displease.
Nor did I fail to see the studies, the mighty
works, the sense, virtues, and noble wisdom
of my century. And indeed I saw kingdoms,
duchies and empires, from Morocco to Cathay,
from the Pole to the Nile, and Boston to Goa,
rushing in fierce competition on the track
of soul's Happiness: seizing her by her
streaming hair, or at least by the tail
of her boa. Seeing all this and reflecting
deeply on the huge spread-out pages,
I was ashamed of my grave, long-standing
error, and indeed ashamed of myself.

Oh, Gino, the thread of the Fates is spinning
a golden age today. Every newspaper
born of so many languages and columns,
promises it to the world from every shore,
simultaneously. Universal love, railways,
the multiplicity of commerce, steam,
the printing press, and cholera unite,
the widely scattered peoples and climates:
it's no real wonder if oaks and pines
exude milk and honey, or dance
to the sound of a waltz. So has the
power of alembics and retorts increased,

of machines that challenge the heavens,
and so it will increase in the ages
that follow: the seed of Shem, Ham,
and Japheth flies, and will fly,
to greater and greater things forever.

True, the earth won't live on acorns,
unless hunger forces it to: nor end
the use of iron. But often it will
scorn silver and gold, content
with paper money. Nor will
the generous race hold back its hand
from blood, the blood of its own: Europe
indeed, and the far side of the Atlantic
the fresh nurse of true community,
will be full of strife, whenever this crowd
of brothers take the field against each other,
for pepper, or cinnamon, or some
other fatal spice, or for sugar canes,
or anything else they can turn to gold.
Courage and virtue, faith and modesty,
love of justice, will always,
in whatever political system, be wholly
and utterly alien, wholly unhappy,
oppressed, defeated: since nature
has always placed them down below,
in every age. Bold impudence,
deceit, and mediocrity will always rule,

fated to rise to the surface. Authority and power, concentrated or devolved, however you wish, will be abused by those who have it, in whatever name. Nature and fate engraved this primal law in adamant: and Volta and Davy can't cancel it with electricity, nor England with all her machines, nor this new century with all its river of political tracts. The good will always grieve, the bad rejoice in mockery: the world will always take up arms against noble spirits, forever. Slander, envy and hate will pursue true honour: the weak will feed the strong, the indigent beggar must cultivate and serve the rich, whatever the form of communal order, however near or far the equator or pole, eternally, unless the day arrives when our race no longer knows its home or daylight.

These slight remains and traces of past ages must still impress themselves on this age of gold: since the human race has a thousand conflicting, discordant parts and principles, in its nature: and human intellect and power has never served to make peace

our of hatred, from the day our glorious
race was born, and never will,
however wise or potent our century's
newspapers or treaties. Yet human happiness
will be found in weightier things, wholesome,
not seen before. Our clothes
of wool or silk will become softer
day by day. Farmers and craftsmen
hastening to throw off rough garments,
will hide their coarse skin in cotton,
and clothe their backs in beaver-furs.
Carpets, blankets, chairs, settees,
stools and dining tables, beds and other
kinds of furnishings will be more usable,
or at least easier on the eye, adorning
apartments with this month's beauty:
the wondrous kitchen will be ablaze
with new forms of pots and pans.
Journeys or rather flights will be
swifter than anyone dare imagine,
Paris to Calais, and London: London
to Liverpool: and under the Thames'
broad flood the tunnel will be open,
bold, immortal work that should have
been opened years ago. The less
frequented streets will be lit better
than now, yet just as safe, in sovereign
cities, and perhaps, in lesser towns,

the major roads, sometimes.
Such the delights and blessed destiny
that heaven ordains for future peoples.

How fortunate those the midwife
holds mewling in her arms,
as I write, whom the vision awaits
of the days, sighed-for, when lengthy
study will reveal, and every infant
will absorb with its milk, what weight
of salt, of meat, how many tons of flour,
its native town consumes: how many
births and deaths, the old priest notes
every year: when hill and plain, I think,
and even the vast tracts of ocean,
will be covered by magazines,
the work of steam-driven presses
printing thousands of copies a second,
as if by a flight of cranes that suddenly
steals daylight from the broad landscape:
magazines, journals, the life and spirit
of the universe, sole fount of wisdom
for this age and all those to come!

As a child, with great care,
raises a structure, out of twigs
and bits of paper, shaped
like a church, tower, or palace,

and, when it's done, levels it,
because the paper and twigs
are needed for another effort,
so, no sooner does nature find
that any work of hers, however
artistically noble to contemplate,
is perfect, she starts to undo it,
allotting the parts to something else.
And so to preserve themselves from
this foolish game, whose meaning
is eternally hidden, human beings
employ their talents a thousand ways
with skilful hands: since for all their efforts
cruel Nature, like a persistent child,
indulges her caprice, amuses herself,
without cease, creating and destroying.
So an infinite, varied family
of incurable ills and troubles
oppresses the frail mortal, irremediably
fated to die: so a hostile, destructive force
strikes him from within and from
all sides, intense and relentless,
from his day of birth: indefatigably
tires him, wearies him, till he lies
crushed and spent beside his cruel mother.
These final miseries of our mortal state,
O gentle spirit, old age and death,
whose origin is when the infant's mouth

sucks at the tender breast that gives it life,
are things the happy nineteenth century
can no more end than the ninth or tenth
could, I think, and no more than future
ages will have the power to do.

So, if we're entitled sometimes to call
the truth by its proper name, all who are
born will never be anything but wretched,
not only in civic realms and ways,
but in every other aspect of life,
incurably, and by a universal law,
that embraces earth and heaven.

But the greatest minds of my century
have discovered a new, almost divine
programme: lacking the power
to make a single person happy,
they've ignored the one, to search for
the happiness of many: finding it easily
among the sad and wretched, they make
one happy smiling people: and the mob
will marvel at this miracle, not yet announced
in newspapers, pamphlets or magazines.

Oh minds, oh judgement, oh superhuman acumen
of the age that unfolds! Oh, Gino,
what solid philosophy, what wisdom,
in the most sublime and most abstruse
subjects, my century and yours will teach

the future ages! With what constancy
it admires today what it mocked the day
before, and will destroy tomorrow,
gathering the fragments together,
to set them among incense the day after!
How we should treasure, what faith it inspires,
the harmony of feeling of this century,
rather this year, that unfolds! When we
compare our feelings with this year's feelings,
which are bound to be different to next year's
feelings, with what care we should avoid
the slightest sign of divergence! And how far
our wisdom has travelled in philosophy
when we contrast modern times with ancient!

Dear Gino, a friend of yours, a true
master of poetry, learned in all the arts,
and sciences and human disciplines,
and critic of those minds that have been
and are and will be, said to me: 'Forget
your own feelings. This virile age
no longer cares for them, it's dedicated
to the harsh study of economics, its gaze
is fixed on public things. What's the point
of exploring your own soul? Don't search
inside yourself for poetic subjects. Sing
the needs of this century, mature hope,
memorable sentences!' That raised a solemn

smile, when the word 'hope' was mentioned,
a ridiculous word to my profane ear,
like the babbling of an infant's tongue
not long after it's been weaned. Now
I've reversed my course, taken a track
opposite to that before, seeing clearly
at last from unmistakable signs that I
shouldn't contradict, oppose my own century,
if I want praise and fame, but conform to it,
with faithful flattery: 'so by a short
and easy path we travel to the stars'.
Though desirous of the stars, I doubt
I'll ever have the matter to make
a song about our century's needs,
since the ever-increasing markets
and production provide so generously
for them: but I'll certainly sing of hope,
of which the gods now grant us
a visible sign: now young men's lips
and cheeks display, as a token of fresh
felicity, liberal lengths of hair.

O hail, O signs of salvation, O first
lights of the glorious age that rises.
See how heaven and earth laugh
before you, and the girls' glances
sparkle, and, through feasts and gatherings,
your fame, you bearded heroes, already flies.

Flourish, for our country's sake, flourish
O modern race of true men. Italy will
flourish: all of Europe, from the mouth
of Tagus to Hellespont, will flourish in your
woolly shade, and earth rest, secure.
And you, begin by greeting your bristly
fathers with laughter, O infant race,
destined for golden days: and do not fear
the innocuous gloom on those dear faces.
Laugh, O tender race: the fruit of so much
talk has been preserved for you: to see
joy rule, to see cities and towns, and age
and youth, all happy in equal contentment,
with flowing beards, beards two foot long.

Note: Gino Capponi (1792-1876) a Catholic, liberal,
and Florentine man of letters.

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