

1881

PANTHEA

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated "art for art's sake" and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Panthea (1881) - One of Wilde's long poems. Part of this work represents the poet's attempts to come to terms with Darwinian evolutionary thought. Opening line: Nay, let us walk from fire unto fire, ...

PANTHEA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There all day long the golden-vestured sun, Their torch-bearer, stands with his torch a-blaze, And when the gaudy web of noon is spun By its twelve maidens through the crimson haze Fresh from

Endymion's arms comes forth the moon, And the immortal Gods in
toils of mortal passions swoon.

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

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

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

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

But we oppress our natures, God or Fate Is our enemy, we starve
and feed On vain repentance- O we are born too late!

What balm for us in bruised poppy seed Who crowd into one finite
pulse of time The joy of infinite love and the fierce pain of infinite
crime.

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

Ah! but no ferry-man with laboring pole Nears his black shallop to
the flowerless strand, No little coin of bronze can bring the soul
Over Death's river to the sunless land, Victim and wine and vow
are all in vain, The tomb is sealed; the soldiers watch; the dead rise
not again.

We are resolved into the supreme air, We are made one with what
we touch and see, With our heart's blood each crimson sun is fair,

With our young lives each spring-impassioned tree
 Flames into green, the wildest beasts that range
 The moor our kinsmen are, all life is one,
 and all is change.

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

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

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

The boy's first kiss, the hyacinth's
 first bell, The man's last passion,
 and the last red spear That from the
 lily leaps, the asphodel Which will
 not let its blossoms blow for fear
 Of too much beauty, and the timid
 shame Of the young bridegroom at
 his lover's eyes,- these with the
 same One sacrament are consecrate,
 the earth Not we alone hath
 passions hymeneal, The yellow
 buttercups that shake for mirth
 At daybreak know a pleasure not
 less real Than we do, when in
 some fresh-blossoming wood We
 draw the spring into our hearts,
 and feel that life is good.

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

And thus without life's conscious
 torturing pain In some sweet
 flower we will feel the sun,
 And from the linnet's throat will
 sing again, And as two
 gorgeous-mailed snakes will run
 Over our graves, or as two
 tigers creep Through the hot
 jungle where the yellow-eyed
 huge lions sleep And give them
 battle! How my heart leaps up
 To think of that grand living
 after death In beast and bird
 and flower, when this cup,
 Being filled too full of spirit,
 bursts for breath, And with
 the pale leaves of some
 autumn day The soul earth's
 earliest conqueror becomes
 earth's last great prey.

O think of it! We shall inform ourselves Into all sensuous life, the goat-foot Faun, The Centaur, or the merry bright-eyed Elves That leave their dancing rings to spite the dawn Upon the meadows, shall not be more near Than you and I to nature's mysteries, for we shall hear The thrush's heart beat, and the daisies grow, And the wan snowdrop sighing for the sun On sunless days in winter, we shall know By whom the silver gossamer is spun, Who paints the diapered fritillaries, On what wide wings from shivering pine to pine the eagle flies.

Ay! had we never loved at all, who knows If yonder daffodil had lured the bee Into its gilded womb, or any rose Had hung with crimson lamps its little tree!

Methinks no leaf would ever bud in spring, But for the lovers' lips that kiss, the poet's lips that sing.

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

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

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

THE END