

1890

IMPRESSIONS DE THEATRE

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. Impressions de Theatre (1890) - A collection of Wilde's shorter poems meant as tributes to the theatrical personalities of his day including Fabien Dei Frenchi, Phedre, Portia, Queen Henrietta Maria, and Camma.

FABIEN DEI FRANCHI To My Friend Henry Irving

The silent room, the heavy creeping shade, The dead that travel fast, the opening door, The murdered brother rising through the floor, The ghost's white fingers on thy shoulders laid, And then the lonely duel in the glade, The broken swords, the stifled scream, the gore, Thy grand revengeful eyes when all is o'er, These things are well enough, - but thou wert made For more august creation! frenzied Lear Should at thy bidding wander on the heath With the shrill fool to mock him, Romeo For thee should lure his love, and desperate fear Pluck Richard's recreant dagger from its sheath Thou trumpet set for Shakespeare's lips to blow!

PHEDRE To Sarah Bernhardt

How vain and dull this common world must seem To such a One as thou, who should'st have talked At Florence with Mirandola, or walked Through the cool olives of the Academe: Thou should'st have gathered reeds from a green stream For goat-foot Pan's shrill piping, and have played With the white girls in that Phaeacian glade Where grave Odysseus wakened from his dream.

Ah! surely once some urn of Attic clay Held thy wan dust, and thou hast come again Back to this common world so dull and vain, For thou wert weary of the sunless day, The heavy fields of scentless asphodel, The loveless lips with which men kiss in Hell.

I. PORTIA To Ellen Terry

I marvel not Bassanio was so bold To peril all he had upon the lead, Or that proud Aragon bent low his head, Or that Morocco's fiery heart grew cold: For in that gorgeous dress of beaten gold Which is more golden than the golden sun, No woman Veronese looked upon Was half so fair as thou whom I behold.

Yet fairer when with wisdom as your shield The sober-suited lawyer's gown you donned And would not let the laws of Venice yield Antonio's heart to that accursed Jew O Portia! take my heart; it is thy due: I think I will not quarrel with bond.

Written at the Lyceum Theatre

II. QUEEN HENRIETTA MARIA To Ellen Terry

In the lone tent, waiting for victory, She stands with eyes marred
by the mists of pain, Like some wan lily overdrenched with rain;
The clamorous clang of arms, the ensanguined sky, War's ruin, and
the wreck of chivalry, To her proud soul no common fear can
bring: Bravely she tarrieth for her Lord the King, Her soul a-flame
with passionate ecstasy.

O Hair of Gold! O crimson lips! O Face Made for the luring and the
love of man!

With thee I do forget the toil and stress.

The loveless road that knows no resting place, Time's straitened
pulse, the soul's dread weariness, My freedom and my life
republican!

Written at the Lyceum Theatre

III. CAMMA To Ellen Terry

As one who poring on a Grecian urn Scans the fair shapes some
Attic hand hath made, God with slim goddess, goodly man with
maid, And for their beauty's sake is loath to turn And face the
obvious day, must I not yearn For many a secret moon of indolent
bliss, When is the midmost shrine of Artemis I see thee standing,
antique-limbed, and stern?

And yet- methinks I'd rather see thee play That serpent of old Nile,
whose witchery Made Emperors drunken,- come, great Egypt,
shake Our stage with all thy mimic pageants! Nay, I am growing
sick of unreal passions, make The world thine Actium, me thine
Anthony!

Written at the Lyceum Theatre

THE END