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OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

Alfred Tennyson
The Major Works

Edited with an Introduction and Notes by
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TITHONUS (*Final Version*)

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.
Me only cruel immortality
Consumes: I wither slowly in thine arms,
Here at the quiet limit of the world,
A white-hair'd shadow roaming like a dream
The ever-silent spaces of the East,
Far-folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn.

[10]

Alas! for this gray shadow, once a man—
So glorious in his beauty and thy choice,
Who madest him thy chosen, that he seem'd
To his great heart none other than a God!
I ask'd thee, 'Give me immortality.'
Then didst thou grant mine asking with a smile,
Like wealthy men who care not how they give.
But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,
And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,
And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd
To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
Immortal age beside immortal youth,
And all I was, in ashes. Can thy love,
Thy beauty, make amends, tho' even now,
Close over us, the silver star, thy guide,
Shines in those tremulous eyes that fill with tears
To hear me? Let me go: take back thy gift:
Why should a man desire in any way
To vary from the kindly race of men,
Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance^o
Where all should pause, as is most meet for all?

[20]

[30]

A soft air fans the cloud apart; there comes
A glimpse of that dark world where I was born.

Once more the old mysterious glimmer steals
From thy pure brows, and from thy shoulders pure,
And bosom beating with a heart renew'd.
Thy cheek begins to redden thro' the gloom,
Thy sweet eyes brighten slowly close to mine,
Ere yet they blind the stars, and the wild team
Which love thee, yearning for thy yoke, arise,
And shake the darkness from their loosen'd manes,
And beat the twilight into flakes of fire.

[40]

Lo! ever thus thou growest beautiful
In silence, then before thine answer given
Departest, and thy tears are on my cheek.

Why wilt thou ever scare me with thy tears,
And make me tremble lest a saying learnt,
In days far-off, on that dark earth, be true?
'The Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts.'

[50]

Aye me! ay me! with what another heart
In days far-off, and with what other eyes
I used to watch—if I be he that watch'd—
The lucid outline forming round thee; saw
The dim curls kindle into sunny rings;
Changed with thy mystic change, and felt my blood
Glow with the glow that slowly crimson'd all
Thy presence and thy portals, while I lay,
Mouth, forehead, eyelids, growing dewy-warm
With kisses balmier than half-opening buds
Of April, and could hear the lips that kiss'd
Whispering I knew not what of wild and sweet,
Like that strange song I heard Apollo sing,
While Ilion like a mist rose into towers.^o

[60]

Yet hold me not for ever in thine East:
How can my nature longer mix with thine?
Coldly thy rosy shadows bathe me, cold
Are all thy lights, and cold my wrinkled feet
Upon thy glimmering thresholds, when the steam
Floats up from those dim fields about the homes
Of happy men that have the power to die,
And grassy barrows of the happier dead.

[70]

Release me, and restore me to the ground;
 Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave:
 Thou wilt renew thy beauty morn by morn;
 I earth in earth forget these empty courts,
 And thee returning on thy silver wheels.

ENOCH ARDEN (1864)

Long lines of cliff breaking have left a chasm;
 And in the chasm are foam and yellow sands;
 Beyond, red roofs about a narrow wharf
 In cluster; then a moulder'd church; and higher
 A long street climbs to one tall-tower'd mill;
 And high in heaven behind it a gray down
 With Danish barrows; and a hazelwood,^o
 By autumn nutters haunted, flourishes
 Green in a cuplike hollow of the down.

Here on this beach a hundred years ago,
 Three children of three houses, Annie Lee,
 The prettiest little damsel in the port,
 And Philip Ray the miller's only son,
 And Enoch Arden, a rough sailor's lad
 Made orphan by a winter shipwreck, play'd
 Among the waste and lumber of the shore,
 Hard coils of cordage, swarthy fishing-nets,
 Anchors of rusty fluke, and boats updrawn;
 And built their castles of dissolving sand
 To watch them overflow'd, or following up
 And flying the white breaker, daily left
 The little footprint daily wash'd away.

[10]

[20]

A narrow cave ran in beneath the cliff:
 In this the children play'd at keeping house.
 Enoch was host one day, Philip the next,
 While Annie still was mistress; but at times
 Enoch would hold possession for a week:
 'This is my house and this my little wife.'
 'Mine too' said Philip 'turn and turn about.'
 When, if they quarrell'd, Enoch stronger-made
 Was master: then would Philip, his blue eyes
 All flooded with the helpless wrath of tears,
 Shriek out 'I hate you, Enoch,' and at this

[30]

- 343 l. 280. *prophecy*. Christ's prophecy: 'Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn him whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him' (Luke 12: 3–5).
- l. 290. *him*. Maud's dead brother.
- l. 291. *wolf*. Maud's father.
- l. 296. *rat*. The common brown or grey rat (*Rattus Norvegicus*) was introduced to Britain in the 18th century and proceeded to force out the native black rat (of Great Plague fame), which is now almost extinct. One story, put about by Jacobites (Catholic opponents of the Protestant royal family imported onto the British throne in 1714) was that the 'Norwegian Rat' came over from Hanover with the first Hanoverian monarch.
- 344 l. 317. *keeper*. Maud's brother.
- l. 318. *dead man*. The narrator considers himself dead. *spectral bride*. Maud.
- Part III*
- 345 l. 4. *time of year*. The passing daffodils (l. 6) tell us it is now late spring.
- ll. 6–7. *Charioteer* | *And starry Gemini*. Constellations in the British sky, to the north and west respectively.
- l. 10. *She*. Maud.
- l. 14. *Lion's breast*. In the constellation of Leo. The Lion is the symbolic animal of Britain.
- 346 l. 34. *giant deck*. The deck of a giant troop ship, preparing to sail to the Crimea.
- l. 36. *dreary phantom*. 'Of Maud' (T). The narrator has two different visions of Maud, as an accusing Phantom (for instance at ll. 32, 82) and as a spirit in 'a band of the blest' (ll. 10). His resolve banishes the grimmer of these two apparitions.
- l. 45. *a giant liar*. The Russian Czar, Nicholas I.
- l. 50. *peace, that I deem'd no peace*. In the first edition Tennyson had put 'the long, long canker of peace', and was attacked by the critics. *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* (Sept. 1855), for instance, said: 'if any man comes forward to say that the slaughter of 30,000 Englishmen in the Crimea tends to prevent women poisoning their babies, for the sake of the burial fees, in Birmingham, he is bound to show cause, and not bewilder our notions of morals and lexicography by calling thirty years of intermitted war (absolute peace we have not had during the interval) a "long, long canker of peace"' (quoted in Ricks, ii. 584). The issue of Tennyson's identification with a pro-war philosophy, or alternatively his criticism of such a philosophy by

- putting these words into the mouth of a madman who had recently killed a man, has been much debated by critics.
- 346 l. 51. *Black*. i.e. the Black Sea.
- 348 *Tithonus (Final version)*. For the earlier version of this poem, written soon after Hallam's death, see above, p. 81. Tennyson's friend Thackeray (the novelist) was editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, and asked the poet for copy in 1859. 'I ferreted among my old books and found this *Tithonus*, written upwards of a quarter of a century ago' (*Memoir*, i. 459). He revised it, adding lengthy passages, and it was published in the *Cornhill*, Feb. 1860. According to the legend, Tithonus was a beautiful young man, with whom the goddess Aurora (the Dawn) fell in love. He was allowed to live with her, and asked for eternal life to keep her company through eternity—but he should have asked for eternal *youth*, because he aged and grew more infirm and shrunken, but unable to die. Eventually he was transformed into the grasshopper.
- l. 30. *ordinance*. The allotted span of mortal life.
- 349 ll. 62–3. *Apollo . . . towers*. Troy (Ilion) was built to the sound of Apollo playing his lyre.
- 351 *Enoch Arden*. Written from Nov. 1861 to Apr. 1862, and published in *Enoch Arden and Other Poems* (1864). Tennyson conceded that the poem was 'founded on a theme given me by the sculptor Woolner. I believe that this particular story came out of Suffolk, but something like the same story is told in Brittany' (*Memoir*, ii. 7). Critics today tend to be sneeringly dismissive of the alleged sentimentality of this tale, and its last three lines (ll. 909–11) are sometimes put forward as amongst the most bathetic, worst poetry of the 19th century. Yet *Enoch Arden* was enormously successful in the poet's own day, and there are reasons for that: it remains a powerfully compressed example of the poetry of affect.
- l. 7. *Danish barrows*. There are many burial-mounds and barrows in England associated with the Danish invasions of the 9th century.
- 353 l. 100. *Friday fare*. Fish were traditionally eaten on Fridays.
- 354 l. 131. *isles a light*. The sun makes 'islands of light on the sea' (T). The 'offing' is the sea far enough away from land that a ship needs no pilot to navigate it.
- 357 l. 239. *glass*. Telescope.
- 359 l. 326. *garth*. Kitchen garden.
- 363 l. 494. '*Under the palm-tree*'. The method of seeking guidance by consulting the Bible at random has a long pedigree. Annie has lighted on Judges 4: 5: 'And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Beth-el in Mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.'
- 364 l. 527. *the summer of the world*. 'The equator' (T).
- 367 l. 657. *ghostly wall*. The chalk cliffs of much of the southern English coastline are strikingly white.