

POEMS  
GUSTAVO BECQUER  
1836—1870.

I.

Like the breeze that dries the blood  
Upon the darkening battle-field,  
Laden with perfumes and sweet sounds,  
In the vague silence of the night;

Symbol of tenderness and grief,  
The English bard in awful verse  
The sweet Ophelia paints, who, mad,  
Passes with flowers and with song.

II.

Sometimes I meet her in “the world”  
She passes close to me:  
She passes smiling and I say:  
How can she laugh ?

Then to my lips rises another smile,  
It is the mask of pain,

And then I think Perhaps she only laughs  
As I do now!

III.

I ventured to the deepest depths  
Of earth and of the heavens,  
And saw their bounds; or with my eyes,  
Or with my spirit's eye.

But ah ! a heart's abyss I reached,  
And over bent to see,  
But both my soul and eyes recoiled,  
So deep it was, so black!

IV.

Why, my child, are thine eyes green?  
Green as the sea, thou complainest.  
Green are the eyes of the Naiads,  
Green are those of Minerva,  
And green, too, are the eyes  
Of the houris of the prophet.

Green is the gala garment  
Of the groves in Springtime;  
Among its seven colors,  
Brilliant, the rainbow shows it.  
Green are emeralds also;  
Who hopes has green for his color;

And green are the waves of Ocean,  
And the laurel of the poets.

V.

I am dark and I am ardent,  
The symbol of passion am I;  
Filled is my soul with desire of joy,  
Me art thou calling ? Oh ! no, not thee.

My brow is pale, my tresses are golden,  
I can pour out on thee endless delight;  
I keep a treasure of tenderness,  
Me art thou calling? Oh! no, not thee.

I am a dream, I am the Impossible,  
Vain phantasm of mist and light;  
Bodiless am I, I am intangible,  
I cannot love thee, - Oh! come, come, thou!

VI.

Her hand between my hands,  
Her eyes upon my eyes,  
Her head so amorously  
Resting upon my shoulder,  
God knows how many times  
With lagging footsteps,  
We have wandered together  
Beneath the lofty elm-trees

That to her dwelling's entrance  
Lent mystery and shade.

And yesterday -hardly  
A year passed like a breath,  
With what exquisite grace,  
With what admirable aplomb  
She said, when an officious  
Friend had presented us:  
"It seems to me that somewhere  
I have seen you." Oh! ye fools.

Gossips of drawing-rooms,  
Who go about in search  
Of gallant embroglios,  
What a story you have lost  
How savory were this food,  
To be devoured in chorus,  
Sotto voce behind the fan  
Of feathers and of gold!

Oh ! moon discreet and chaste!  
Leafy and lofty elm-trees!  
Walls of her dwelling,  
Threshold of her portal,  
Be silent! let the secret  
Go not forth from you!  
Be silent, since for my part,  
I have forgotten all.  
And she -she- there is no mask  
Equal to her face.

VII.

When o'er thy breast thou bendest  
Thy melancholy brow,  
A bruised and broken lily  
Thou seem'st to me.

For giving thee the purity  
Whose symbol the lily is,  
As He made it, so God made thee  
Of gold and snow.

VIII.

Know, if at times thy ruby lips  
An unseen fire doth burn-,  
The soul that with the eyes can speak,  
Can just as well kiss with a look

IX.

First Voice.

Waves have a gentle harmony,  
Violets have an odor sweet,  
And silver mists the cool night has,  
Light and gold the day.  
Better still have I-  
For I have Love!

Second Voice.

Applauding voices, radiant clouds,  
Breath envious, though the foot it kiss,  
An isle of dreams where lies repose  
For anxious souls,  
Sweet drunkenness  
This - Glory is.

Third Voice.

A burning coal all glory is,  
Vanity a shadow that flies,  
All is falsehood, glory, gold;  
What I adore  
Alone is truth-  
Tis Liberty!  
Thus the mariners passed by singing  
The eternal song:  
And the foam the oars threw upwards  
Fell, and smote the shore.  
Wilt thou come? they cried; and, smiling,  
Past I let them go.  
Once I went; still, I am certain  
My clothes are drying on the sands.

X.

As from a wound one tears the steel,  
I tore my love out of my heart,

Although I felt that life itself  
I tore away with it.

And from the altar I had raised  
Within my soul, her image cast.  
The lamp of faith that in it burned,  
Went out before the empty shrine.

Though firm to fight I undertake,  
Visions of her still fill my mind;  
When shall I sleep and dream the dream  
In which all dreaming ends!

## XI.

In the salon's dark corner,  
Forgotten, sometimes, by its master,  
Covered with dust, and silent,  
The harp is seen.

In its chords, how many notes slumber,  
As the birds sleep in the branches,  
Expecting the hand of snow  
That may awake them!

Ah! I thought, how often does genius  
Sleep thus in the depths of the soul,  
And, like Lazarus, waits for a voice  
That shall bid it : "Arise and walk !"

XII.

She passed along enveloped in her beauty,  
I let her pass me by;  
I did not even turn to look at her, and yet  
At my ear something murmured : “It is she”

Who was 't who joined the evening to the morning?

I know not, but I knew  
That in a brief and fleeting summer night  
Two twilights were united, and - “it was”

XIII.

Why do you tell me? I know she is changeable,  
Haughty and vain and capricious, too.  
Rather than feeling from her soul,  
Water will flow from the sterile rock.

I know that her heart is a nest of serpents,  
That no fibre it owns that responds to love.  
She's an inanimate statue, but ah!  
She's so beautiful!

XIV.

She wounded me from a dark hiding place,  
And with a kiss she sealed her treachery;  
She put her arms around my neck, and thro'  
My shoulder, in cold blood she pierced my heart.

And joyously she goes upon her way,  
Undaunted, happy, smiling; why? you ask?  
Because no blood is flowing from the wound,  
Because the dead man stands erect.

XV.

As the miser guards his treasure,  
Guarded I my grief;  
I would prove that something is eternal  
To her who swore to me eternal love.

But to-day I seek it vainly, hearing  
Time who slew it, say:  
Oh! miserable clay, eternally  
Thou canst not even suffer.

XVI.

The invisible atoms of the air  
Palpitate 'round me, all on fire;  
The heavens break up in rays of gold,  
And the earth trembles with delight.

There floats on waves of harmony  
The sound of kisses and beating wings.  
My eyelids close -oh! what is happening?  
'Tis love that passes.

XVII.

Whene'er the fleeting moments of the past  
My love and I recall,  
Trembling there shines upon her lashes dark  
A tear about to fall.

At last it falls, and like a dewdrop rolls,  
As we think, she and I,  
That as to-day for yesterday, to-morrow  
We for to-day shall sigh.

XVIII.

Sighs are air and go to the air.  
Tears are water and go to the sea.  
Tell me, woman, when love is forgotten,  
Knowest thou whither it goes?

XIX.

Thine eye is blue, and when thou laugh'st,  
Its gentle light recalls to me  
The morning's tremulous brilliancy  
Reflected in the sea.

Thine eye is blue and when thou weep'st  
The shining tears thine eye that wet  
Seem to me like the drops of dew

Upon a violet.

Thine eye is blue, and when a thought  
    Illuming in its depths doth lie,  
It sees a lost and wandering star  
    Within the evening sky.

XX.

Dost thou wish that of this nectar delicious  
    The dregs shall not be bitter?  
Oh, breathe it in, close to thy lips approach it,  
    And leave it then.

Dost thou wish we may ever keep a gentle  
    Memory of this love?  
Let us love much to-day and then to-morrow  
    Let us say: "Farewell."

XXI.

In the shining of a lightning flash our birth is,  
And still endures its brilliance when we die;  
    So short is living!

The glory and the love that we run after  
Are shadows of a dream that we pursue,  
    To wake is dying!

XXII.

How lives this rose, I pray that thou hast gathered,  
Thus resting on thy heart?  
Never before on earth did I contemplate  
On the volcano the flower.

XXIII.

To-day the earth and the heavens smile on me;  
To-day the sun strikes to my inmost soul;  
To-day I saw her -saw her- she looked at me-  
To-day I believe in God!

XXIV.

The night came on, no refuge did I find;  
I was athirst; my tears I drank;  
I was an-hungred and my swollen eyes  
I closed, that I might die.

I stood within a desert! Yet my ear  
Was wounded by hoarse clamor of the crowds.  
I was an orphan, poor,—the world around  
A desert was for me.

XXV.

For a look, a world;

For a smile, a heaven;  
For a kiss—I know not  
What I would give thee for a kiss!

XXVI.

What is poetry? thou say'st, and meanwhile fixest  
On my eye thine eye of deepest blue;  
What is poetry? And canst thou ask it?  
Why,—poetry—is—thou!

XXVII.

A tear was trembling in her eyes,  
And on my lips a pardoning word;  
Pride spoke -straightway her tear was dried,  
And on my lips the word expired.

I go one way, another she;  
But thinking on our mutual love,  
I say: Why was I silent then?  
And she will say : Why wept not I ?

XXVIII.

Gigantic waves that thundering break  
Upon remote and desert shores,-  
Wrapped in the sheet of hurrying foam,  
Bear me away with you!

Tempestuous gusts that sweep away  
From the tall grove the withered leaves,-  
In the blind whirlwind dragged along,  
Bear me away with you!

Storm-clouds that break the ray of light  
And blind with fire its loosened fringe,-  
Snatched swiftly in the darkening mist,  
Bear me away with you!

Bear me away in pity, where  
Madness effaces memory.  
Bear me away ! I fear to stay  
Here with my grief alone.

#### XXIX.

As in an open book I read  
Within the depths of thy dear eyes;  
Why should the lips attempt to feign  
Smiles that the eyes refute?

Weep ! to confess be not ashamed  
That thou a little loved me once,  
Weep ! for now no one looks at us,  
See, I am a man and yet I weep.

#### XXX.

I put the light aside, and on the edge  
Of the disordered bed I sat me down,  
Mute, sombre, with my eyes immovably  
Fastened upon the wall.

How long did I stay thus? I know not: passed  
The dread intoxication of my grief,  
The light was going out, and lo! the sun  
Laughed on my balcony.

Nor do I know, during those awful hours,  
Of what I thought or what took place in me;  
I but remember that I wept and cursed,  
'And that within that night-time I grew old.

XXXI.

A question 'tis of words, and notwithstanding  
Never shall you and I  
Agree together after what has happened  
With whom the fault may lie.

Pity love has no dictionary  
Wherein one might see  
When pride is nothing else than pride alone,  
And when 'tis dignity!

XXXII.

Thou wast the hurricane and I the tower,  
Lofty, defiant of thy power o'er me;  
Thou must have spent thyself or overturned me;-  
It could not be!

Thou wast the ocean, I the rock erect  
That firm awaits the great sea's ebb and flow;  
Thou must have broken thyself or overwhelmed me-  
It could not be!

Thou beautiful, I haughty; and accustomed,  
One to sweep all away, one not to yield;  
Narrow the path, the shock inevitable-  
It could not be!