**The Palace of Art**

I built my soul a [lordly pleasure-house](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/1.html),  
      Wherein at ease for aye to dwell.  
I said, "O Soul, make merry and carouse,   
      Dear soul, for all is well."

A huge crag-platform, smooth as burnish'd brass,  
      I chose. The ranged ramparts bright  
From level meadow-bases of deep grass   
      Suddenly scaled the light.

Thereon I built it firm. Of ledge or shelf  
      The rock rose clear, or winding stair.  
[My soul would live alone unto herself](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/2.html)   
      In her high palace there.

And "while the world runs round and round," I said,  
      "Reign thou apart, a quiet king,  
Still as, while Saturn whirls his stedfast shade  
      Sleeps on his luminous ring."

To which my soul made answer readily:  
      "Trust me, in bliss I shall abide  
In this great mansion, that is built for me,  
      So royal-rich and wide."

Four courts I made, East, West and South and North,  
      In each a squared lawn, wherefrom  
The golden gorge of dragons spouted forth   
      A flood of fountain-foam.

And round the cool green courts there ran a row  
      Of cloisters, branch'd like mighty woods,  
Echoing all night to that sonorous flow  
       Of spouted fountain-floods.

And round the roofs a gilded gallery  
      That lent broad verge to distant lands,  
Far as the wild swan wings, to where the sky  
       Dipt down to sea and sands.

From those four jets four currents in one swell  
      Across the mountain stream'd below  
In misty folds, that floating as they fell  
      Lit up a torrent-bow.

And high on every peak a statue seem'd  
      To hang on tiptoe, tossing up  
A cloud of incense of all odour steam'd  
      From out a golden cup.

So that she thought, "And who shall gaze upon  
      My palace with unblinded eyes,  
While this great bow will waver in the sun,  
      And that sweet incense rise?"

For that sweet incense rose and never fail'd,  
      And, while day sank or mounted higher,  
The light aerial gallery, golden-rail'd,  
      Burnt like a fringe of fire.

Likewise the deep-set windows, stain'd and traced,  
       Would seem slow-flaming crimson fires  
From shadow'd grots of arches interlaced,  
      And tipt with frost-like spires.

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Full of long-sounding corridors it was,  
       over-vaulted grateful gloom,  
Thro' which the livelong day my soul did pass,  
       Well-pleased, from room to room.

Full of great rooms and small the palace stood,  
      All various, each a perfect whole  
From living Nature, fit for every mood  
       And change of my still soul.

For some were hung with arras green and blue,  
      Showing a gaudy summer-morn,  
Where with puff'd cheek the belted hunter blew  
      His wreathed bugle-horn.

One seem'd all dark and red — a tract of sand,  
      And some one pacing there alone,  
Who paced for ever in a glimmering land,  
      Lit with a low large moon.

One show'd an iron coast and angry waves  
      You seem'd to hear them climb and fall  
And roar rock-thwarted under bellowing caves,  
      Beneath the windy wall.

And one, a full-fed river winding slow  
      By herds upon an endless plain,  
The ragged rims of thunder brooding low,  
      With shadow-streaks of rain.

And one, the reapers at their sultry toil.  
      In front they bound the sheaves. Behind  
Were realms of upland, prodigal in oil,  
      And hoary to the wind.

And one a foreground black with stones and slags,  
      beyond, a line of heights, and higher  
All barr'd with long white cloud the scornful crags,  
      And highest, snow and fire.

And one, [an English home](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/18.html) — gray twilight pour'd  
      On dewy pastures, dewy trees,  
Softer than sleep — all things in order stored,  
      A haunt of ancient Peace.

Nor these alone, but every landscape fair,  
      As [fit for every mood of mind](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/9.html),  
Or gay, or grave, or sweet, or stern, was there,  
      Not less than truth design'd.

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Or the [maid-mother by a crucifix](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/4.html).  
      In tracts of pasture sunny-warm.  
Beneath branch-work of costly sardonyx  
      Sat smiling, babe in arm.

Or in a clear-wall'd city on the sea,  
      Near gilded organ-pipes, her hair  
with white roses, slept [Saint Cecily](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/5.html);   
      An angel look'd at her.

Or thronging all one porch of Paradise  
      A group of Houris bow'd to see  
The dying [Islamite](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/22.html), with hands and eyes  
      That said, We wait for thee.

Or mythic Uther's [deeply-wounded son](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/6.html)  
      In some fair space of sloping greens  
Lay, dozing in the vale of Avalon,  
      And watch'd by weeping queens.

Or hollowing one hand against his ear,   
      To list a foot-fall, ere he saw  
The wood-nymph, stay'd the [Ausonian king](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/7.html) to hear  
      Of wisdom and of law.

Or over hills with peaky tops engrail'd,  
      And many a tract of palm and rice,  
The throne of [Indian Cama](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/10.html) slowly sail'd  
      A summer fann'd with spice.

Or [sweet Europa](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/19.html)'s mantle blew unclasp'd,  
      From off her shoulder backward borne:  
From one hand droop'd a crocus: one hand grasp'd  
      The mild bull's golden horn.

Or else flush'd Ganymede, his rosy thigh  
      Half-buried in the Eagle's down,  
Sole as a flying star shot thro' the sky  
      Above the pillar'd town.

Nor these alone: but every legend fair  
      Which the supreme [Caucasian mind](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/11.html)  
Carved out of Nature for itself was there'  
      Not less than life design'd.

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Then in the towers I placed great bells that swung,  
      Moved of themselves, with silver sound;   
And with [choice paintings of wise men](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/13.html) I hung  
      The royal dais round.

For there was Milton like a seraph strong,  
      Beside him Shakespeare bland and mild;  
And there the world-worn Dante grasp'd his song,  
      And somewhat grimly smiled.

And there the [Ionian father of the rest](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/14.html);  
      A million wrinkles carved his skin;  
A hundred winters snow'd upon his breast,  
      From cheek and throat and chin.

Above, the fair hall-ceiling stately-set  
      Many an arch high- up did lift,  
And angels rising and descending met  
      With interchange of gift.

Below was all [mosaic choicely plann'd](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/20.html)  
      With cycles of the human tale  
Of this wide world, the times of every land  
      So wrought they will not fail.

The people here, a beast of burden slow,  
      Toil'd onward, prick'd with goads and stings;  
Here play'd, a tiger, rolling to and fro  
      The heads and crowns of kings;

Here rose, an athlete, strong to break or bind  
     All force in bonds that might endure,  
And here once more like some sick man declined,  
      And trusted any cure.

But over these she trod: and those great bells  
     Began to chime. She took her throne:  
She sat betwixt the shining Oriels.  
      To sing her songs alone.

And thro' the topmost Oriels, coloured flame  
      Two godlike faces gazed below;  
Plato the wise, and large-brow'd [Verulam](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/8.html),  
      The first of those who know.

And all those names that in their motion were  
     Full-welling fountain-heads of change,  
Betwixt the slender shafts were blazon'd fair  
      In diverse raiment strange:

Thro' which the lights' rose, amber, emerald, blue,  
      Flush'd in her temples and her eyes,  
And from her lips, as morn from Memnon, drew  
      Rivers of melodies.

No nightingale delighteth to prolong  
      Her low preamble all alone,  
More than my soul to hear her echo'd song  
      Throb thro' the ribbed stone;

Singing and murmuring in her feastful mirth,  
     Joying to feel herself alive,  
Lord over Nature, Lord of the visible earth,  
      Lord of the senses five;

Communing with herself: "All these are mine,  
      And let the world have peace or wars,  
'T is one to me." She — when young night divine  
      Crown'd dying day with stars,

Making sweet close of his delicious toils —   
      Lit light in wreaths and anadems,  
And pure quintessences of precious oils  
      In hollow'd moons of gems,

To [mimic heaven](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/15.html); and clapt her hands and cried,  
      I marvel if my still delight  
In this great house so royal-rich, and wide,  
      Be flatter'd to the height.

"O all things fair to sate my various eyes!  
      O shapes and hues that please me well!  
O silent faces of the Great and Wise,  
      My Gods, with whom I dwell!

"O God-like isolation which art mine,  
      I can but count thee perfect gain,  
What time I watch the darkening droves of swine  
      That range on yonder plain.

"In filthy sloughs they roll a prurient skin,  
      They graze and wallow, breed and sleep;  
And oft some brainless devil enters in,  
      And drives them to the deep."

Then of the moral instinct would she prate  
      And of the rising from the dead,  
As hers by right of full-accomplish'd Fate;  
      And at the last she said:

"I take possession of man's mind and deed.  
      I care not what the sects may brawl.  
I sit as God holding no form of creed,  
      But contemplating all."

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Full oft the riddle of the painful earth  
      Flash'd thro' her as she sat alone,  
Yet not the less held she her solemn mirth,   
      And intellectual throne.

And so she throve and prosper'd: so three years  
      She prosper'd; on the fourth she fell,  
Like Herod, when the shout was in his ears,  
      Struck thro' with pangs of hell.

Lest she should fail and perish utterly,  
      God, before whom ever lie bare  
The abysmal deeps of Personality,  
      Plagued her with [sore despair](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/16.html).

When she would think, where'er she turn'd her sight  
      The airy hand confusion wrought,  
Wrote, "[Mene, mene](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/21.html)," and divided quite  
      The kingdom of her thought.

Deep dread and loathing of her solitude  
      Fell on her, from which mood was born  
Scorn of herself; again, from out that mood  
      Laughter at her self-scorn.

"What! is not this my place of strength," she said,  
      "My spacious mansion built for me,  
Whereof the strong foundation-stones were laid  
      Since my first memory."

But in dark corners of her palace stood  
      uncertain shapes; and unawares  
On white-eyed phantasms weeping tears of blood,  
      And horrible nightmares,

And hollow shades enclosing hearts of flame,  
      And, with dim fretted foreheads all,  
On corpses three-months-old at noon she came,  
      That stood against the wall.

A spot of dull stagnation, without light  
      Or power of movement, seem'd my soul,  
'Mid onward-sloping motions infinite  
      Making for one sure goal.

A still salt pool, lock'd in with bars of sand,  
      Left on the shore; that hears all night  
The plunging seas draw backward from the land  
      Their moon-led waters white.

A star that with the choral starry dance  
      Join'd not, but stood, and standing saw  
The hollow orb of moving Circumstance   
      Roll'd round by one fix'd law.

Back on herself her serpent pride had curl'd  
      "No voice," she shriek'd in that lone hall,  
"No voice breaks thro' the stillness of this world:  
      One deep, deep silence all!"

She, mouldering with the dull earth's mouldering sod,  
      Inwrapt tenfold in slothful shame,  
Lay there exiled from eternal God,  
      Lost to her place and name;

And death and life she hated equally,  
      And nothing saw, for her despair,  
But dreadful time, dreadful eternity,  
      No comfort anywhere;

Remaining utterly confused with fears,  
      And ever worse with growing time,  
And ever unrelieved by dismal tears,  
      And all alone in crime:

Shut up as in a crumbling tomb, girt round  
      With blackness as a solid wall,  
Far off she seem'd to hear the dully sound  
      Of human footsteps fall.

As in strange lands a traveller walking slow,  
      In doubt and great perplexity,  
A little before moon-rise hears the low  
      Moan of an unknown sea;

And knows not if it be thunder, or a sound  
      Of rocks thrown down, or one deep cry  
Of great wild beasts; then thinketh, "I have found  
      A new land, but I die."

She howl'd aloud, "I am on fire within.  
      There comes no murmur of reply.  
What is it that will take away my sin,  
      And save me lest I die?"

So when four years were wholly finished,   
      She threw her royal robes away.  
"Make me a cottage in the vale," she said,  
      "Where I may mourn and pray.

"Yet [pull not down my palace towers](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/palaceofart/17.html), that are   
     So lightly, beautifully built.  
Perchance I may return with others there  
      When I have purged my guilt."

1832; revised 1842