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THRENODIES



# THRENODIES

BY

JOHN MYERS O'HARA

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TO THE MEMORY  
OF MY FATHER AND MOTHER

*Of this edition two hundred copies  
have been printed.*

*No.*

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THRENODIES



## THE STREET OF DREAMS

**A** LONG the street of dreams,  
Deserted now and ever overcast,  
With no familiar gleams  
Of golden lamps that lit it in the past,  
I glance with tears and linger to the last.

Along the street of dreams,  
I listen for a footstep in the night ;  
Afar, at first, it seems,  
Elusive as an echo in its flight,  
Then near, and nearer, at the threshold quite.

Along the street of dreams,  
O sadness of the unreturning sound,  
When, from the heart's extremes,  
Forsaken in the shadows that surround,  
We lose it in a silence more profound.

## IN PATRIS MEI MEMORIAM

### I

**I**N the lone hour of winter and the wind  
His warrior soul went forth ; the fateful night  
Lifting in awful vastness to affright,  
And heaven's remotest star the journey's end ;  
But the illimitable way could send  
No terror to his soul ; the ultimate light  
Flickered afar, and on the eternal height  
A waiting seraph bade him to ascend.  
And if the tragic bourne of life shall be  
The final road to rest's eternity,  
Then all is well with him ; and if there are  
Embattled ways that go from star to star,  
His soul shall still achieve ; eternal sleep,  
Eternal life, either is his to keep.

## IN PATRIS MEI MEMORIAM

### II

The funeral marches for the mighty dead,  
    In slow procession, dole that answers dole,  
    Through the unlifting shadow on my soul,  
Pass with far echo to a martial tread ;  
The ashen twilight deepens overhead  
    As one accordant bell begins to toll,  
    And in the after-silence to console,  
Voices accost me from the vast and dread.  
And as the shining gates of dream divide,  
    The seraphs stand expectant on the steep,  
    And softer than a music heard in sleep  
The mournful bugle sweeps the shadow wide ;  
A road of radiance slants across the deep,  
    And he descends it slowly to my side.

IN PATRIS MEI MEMORIAM

III

By the fond name that was his own and mine,  
The last upon his lips that strove with doom,  
He called me and I saw the light assume  
A sudden glory and around him shine ;  
And nearer now I saw the laureled line  
Of the august of Song before me loom,  
And knew the voices, erstwhile through the gloom,  
That whispered and forbade me to repine.  
And with farewell, a shaft of splendor sank  
Out of the stars and faded as a flame,  
And down the night, on clouds of glory, came  
The battle seraphs halting rank on rank ;  
And lifted heavenward to heroic peace,  
He passed and left me hope beyond surcease.

## THE CANDLES

**T**HE candles of death  
Burn at her head,  
Burn for the soul that has fled ;

In deep of the night,  
Flicker and trace  
Phantom smiles on her face.

The candles of death  
Burn in their frame,  
Burn with funereal flame ;

In deep of the night,  
Flicker and keep  
Ritual watch o'er her sleep.

## AVRIL FUNÈBRE

**A**PRIL, bereft of her,  
One with the vanished Mays that knew her not,  
The countless Junes that still in joy shall come ;

How can you fling  
So heartlessly your blossoms to the wind,  
And laugh from frantic throats of all your birds ?

April, your ecstasy  
Runs bridal in its rapture o'er the earth,  
And pours in other hearts a chalice'd bliss ;

But brings to me,  
A discord in the unremitting song,  
The haunting shadow of autumnal death.

AD MATREM AMANTISSIMAM ET CARISSIMAM FILII IN ÆTERNUM FIDELITAS

WITH all the fairest angels nearest God,  
The ineffable true of heart around the throne,  
There shall I find you waiting when the flown  
Dream leaves my heart insentient as the clod ;  
And when the grief-retracing ways I trod  
Become a shining path to thee alone,  
My weary feet, that seemed to drag as stone,  
Shall once again, with wings of fleetness shod,  
Fare on, beloved, to find you ! Just beyond  
The seraph throng await me, standing near  
The gentler angels, eager and apart ;  
Be there, near God's own fairest, with the fond  
Sweet smile that was your own, and let me hear  
Your voice again and clasp you to my heart.

## THE PRIMROSE

THE primrose that she loved — I see it bloom,  
As on a shrine, beside the vesper sill ;  
And her sweet spirit in the silent room,  
So sentient of her now, is with me still.

The primrose that she loved — a gentle flame,  
Like her fair soul, the fairest of the flowers ;  
It shares the sigh that breathes my mother's name,  
Love's prayer and incense in the shadowed hours.

## EVOCATION

THE evening lamp,  
The shades pulled low, the world  
Shut out with night ;

The reading time,  
The cherished books, the one  
Loved presence near ;

Benefic hour,  
So like her soul, of joy  
Serene and deep.

I dreamed no day  
Could ever come, O death,  
When she could go.

How clearly now  
I bring her back, the light  
Upon her face ;

And see her sit,  
A gentle ghost, beside  
The unlit lamp.

## THE GOAL OF THE SHADOW

**T**URN to the shadow, my soul!  
Turn for the solace thou cravest,  
Rest for the weakest and bravest,  
Balm for the whole  
Of the heart at the goal  
Of the shadow, my soul!

Turn to the shadow, my soul!  
Nothing is there to affright thee,  
Voices of fear that benight thee  
Die like a toll  
Far away at the goal  
Of the shadow, my soul!

Turn to the shadow, my soul!  
Pass through the Night unappalling,  
Fathom the Great Silence falling,  
Slip from thy dole  
And sink down at the goal  
Of the shadow, my soul!

## THE DREAM

*"Is the tide in? . . . . I had a dream." . . . .*

I HAD a dream,  
A dream of fair expanses,  
A dream of golden light, a dream of day ;

I caught a gleam —  
The vision that entrances  
The eyes of our beloved who are away ;

I had a dream,  
A dream of things hereafter,  
A dream of olden joy in other lands ;

It was supreme,  
Alone of love and laughter,  
Of smiles and happy tears and meeting hands ;

I had a dream,  
A dream beside a river,  
A river that was flowing to the sea ;

And it would seem  
A summons to deliver  
My spirit to the tide that rose for me ;

I had a dream,  
A dream of voices calling,  
And one sweet voice so clear above them all ;

And down the stream  
A phantom dusk was falling,  
And I was drifting seaward to the call ;

I had a dream,  
A dream of waves abating,  
Of rifts of silver breaking on a shore ;

On death's extreme,  
Where with the dawn was waiting  
The one beloved that I shall see no more.

## ELEGY

AS the tired day  
Stoops at the western gate  
Her sandals to undo,  
And in the amber blue  
Of vesper skies  
The one fair star is late,  
My eyes  
Take tears from my sad heart ;

And thoughts as gray  
Gather a deeper night  
Than now descends on me,  
Wherein I cannot see  
In any niche  
A lamp's unfailing light,  
From which  
Old loves, consoled, depart ;

But vain to say,  
Beloved, the void is dumb,  
And all the stars a snare  
To widen its despair,  
For love must sigh  
A prayer when death shall come,  
And I  
Would be whate'er thou art !

## AUTUMNAL GRIEF

**L**EAVES on the ground,  
Dead as hope in my heart ;  
Only a withered sound  
The wild gusts start.

Bare branches, too,  
Lift like my soul a lyre,  
Where winds of song rush through  
With wasted fire.

And the harsh sky,  
Callous to my despair,  
From one who may not die  
Repels the prayer.

## TWILIGHT AT WOODLAWN

THE vesper through the silent vista steals —  
Beside a cross a marble angel kneels ;

And in the loveliest city of the dead,  
A carpet of autumnal leaves is spread ;

But not as velvet for a royal room —  
I tread its ashen echo to a tomb.

The gray forgetting of the lonely years  
Forbids my arid eyes the olden tears ;

And age, that leaves me dreaming where I stand,  
Has dried my sorrow like the desert sand.

## DOMIDUCA

O DOMIDUCA, dearest deity !  
Joy of the home-returning, all my heart  
Ascends in prayer, mingled with tears, to thee !

O Goddess of the hearth, who ne'er would part,  
But bring the absent dear one evermore  
Home to the watcher waiting at the door.

O Domiduca, tenderer than all,  
When life is ended, take me by the hand  
And guide me where the darker shadows fall !  
Ah, show the immortal threshold where they stand  
Eager to greet me, even as of old,  
With the fond smile my eyes no more behold.

AT EASTER

FLOWERS of Christ,  
Pallid flowers,  
Flowers of the Resurrection,  
Languorous Easter lilies  
Filling the chancel,  
How my heart drinks deep,  
Deep of your perfume.

But I see  
Other flowers,  
Flowers from the slopes of Eryx,  
Regal indolent roses  
Piled on an altar,  
Up to the marble  
Knees of a Goddess.

## TENEBRA CRUCIS

O CREED of love and laughter, creed of youth,  
Here, at the crest of years,  
I know you keep for life a deeper truth  
Than abnegation's tears.

But no idyllic verity can make  
Death spare nor age delay,  
And Time, that leaves them unperturbed, must take  
The happy Gods away.

And I must see, when memory would call  
Old faith to ease my loss,  
Upon the bright Hellenic sunshine fall  
The shadow of the Cross.

## THE ROAD TO ACADEME

ONE golden hour of immemorial dream —  
Alone I walked the road to Academe,  
And saw the river grow a thread of gray  
Among the olives, while the orb of day  
Flushed Lycabettos with a final beam.

I paused where Plato, at the grove's extreme,  
Seemed pensively to watch the rosy gleam  
Relinquish all the summits nor delay  
One golden hour !

Sleep brought oblivion of the sordid scheme,  
And made me royal in my soul's esteem ; —  
The great Greek bade his new disciple stay,  
And leisurely we took the homeward way ;  
I was companion of the mind supreme  
One golden hour !

## THE TRINAL GLORY

**T**HE trinal glory! beauty, love, and death!  
These are the three, and worthy of the breath,  
The singing breath that soars to find the stars;

These are the end, of all that makes or mars;  
No other choric altars build for me,  
O life, but these, the perfect trinity!

Death, love, and beauty! brighter than the sun  
That on her blazing lyre of temples shone  
When Greece with marble pæan smote the light;

And stormed the world with her harmonic might  
Of golden singers, singing to despair  
Their love of beauty, making death so fair.

PARENTALIA

WITH fruit and garland for the rustic shrine  
Came Roman youth and maid,  
And poured a fond libation with the wine  
For each ancestral shade.

They came in their confiding faith to make  
The old parental rite,  
And dreamed the manes took the wheaten cake  
Upon the altar white.

And so with kindred reverence I keep  
The night that souls return,  
But at my vigil window where I weep  
The Christian candles burn.

## ELEUSIS

(TO J. L. H.)

I PASSED in dream the ruined Dipylon  
While yet the rosy tremor of the dawn,  
Reaching above the summits to the skies,  
Scarce limned the distance where Eleusis lies.

Along the Sacred Way, a soul apart,  
I walked with holy ardor in my heart,  
Serenely as the myriads that strode,  
In ages gone, the tomb-companioned road ;

A pilgrim to the Greater Mystery,  
I had no hint of what it held for me,  
But hopeful of the ritual to come,  
I journeyed toward the Telesterium.

. . . . .

No lips reveal the secret of those rites,  
O Friend, Friend of my heart, but when the nights  
Are void of any hope, and as I gaze,  
Conjecture sinks to ashes with the blaze,

Your words recur, and like the Grecian wise,  
You make me see the journey with your eyes,  
From the crowned city, where had dwelt the soul,  
To dissolution's Eleusinian goal ;

You give me Nature's mood to go with peace  
Along the Via Sacra of surcease,  
Although no answer to my question may  
Come back to be a torch upon the way.

AN URN FROM HADRA

PENSIVE I left the old sarcophagi,  
The stelæ carved for unimagined fame,  
And heard a ghostly whisper and a sigh  
As toward the room of yellow urns I came.

And one of many lifted from the sands,  
In Alexandria's necropolis,  
Depressed me with the dream of ashen hands  
That reached to clasp it from a dread abyss.

My glance upon the Grecian letters fell,  
A faded semi-circle on the gold ;  
They seemed to blur anew with some farewell  
Of phantom grief by cycles unconsolated.

A vision rose like vapor from the urn —  
The homing hoopoes crossed the waning light ;  
I saw the glow on Ptolemy's palace burn,  
The wave of Mareolis meet the night ;

And writhing seaward in the windy gust,  
The flame of Pharos floated to the skies ;  
Beyond Rhacotis whirled the desert's dust,  
O'er Hadra's tombs the moon began to rise ;

And by a cypress-circled stele knelt  
A girl with hidden face and golden hair ;  
I read the carven epitaph and felt  
The sudden tremor of a strange despair.

. . . . .

*Passer, my dust reposes at thy feet !*

*When youth was mine and beauty hers, alas,  
Death spared me not for love ! O pause and greet  
Karysta, in the city, should she pass ;*

*And tell her that Diyllus waits her still*

*In dewy fields beyond the sombre stream ;  
Ah, thou shalt know her by the tears that fill  
Her eyes and veil the azure of their beam !*

## LETHE

SO noiselessly it flowed he scarcely knew  
If such could be, a little space away,  
Shadow or river stealing dimly through  
The ashen day.

He stood a brooding while beside the brink,  
Then made a cup, with palms that curved as one,  
To hold the water while his heart should drink  
Oblivion.

But from the wave he saw her eyes of dream,  
Sad as the past's remorseless mirror framed,  
Look upward into his, and from the stream  
He slunk ashamed.

## ANASYRTOLIS

SWEET shade of Anasyrtolis,  
O thou, with life untimely done,  
That flittest on the fields of Dis ;

No lips have thy sad lips to kiss,  
So oft from Lykas turned in fun,  
Sweet shade of Anasyrtolis.

He makes the beechen shadow his,  
Since thou no more with song art one,  
That flittest on the fields of Dis.

His flocks untended stray amiss,  
His steps the myrtle covert shun,  
Sweet shade of Anasyrtolis.

Art thou forgotten all to bliss,  
With soft and shy caress for none,  
That flittest on the fields of Dis ?

Hast thou no memory of this  
Fair land beneath the mortal sun,  
Sweet shade of Anasyrtolis  
That flittest on the fields of Dis ?

## SPRING IN LESBOS

O PHILOMEL, messenger of the Spring,  
What olden strain of grief is thine to sing?  
The light wind lifts the apple boughs in bloom  
And the white petals drift across a tomb,  
And Sappho's name seems hidden where they heap  
A snow of fragrance on eternal sleep.

The dim sea turns to amethyst above  
No weary galley from a land of love,  
But the long olive slopes are still the same  
As when the girls from Cos and Sardis came,  
A nubile throng that quivered to the note,  
O Philomel, from thy ecstatic throat.

O Philomel, messenger of the Spring,  
What olden pang of heart is thine to sing?  
The little theatre of long ago,  
With named and carven seats, was just below,  
The temple where her lovers listened long  
To the wild passion of her pristine song.

The marble fragments gleaming at my feet  
Restore themselves in dream as Sappho's seat,  
The last rays wreath it with a rosy fire  
And take the shape symmetric of her lyre,  
And thy despair where wind and bough rejoice,  
O Philomel, is her enraptured voice.

## THE ANSWER

AND the high Gods made answer to my prayer!  
Oracular they came, and bade me dare  
A vatic height, serene and doubting not;  
And thrice I did accost them, asking what,  
Ye throned Olympians, is life? And love?  
And what is death, the mystery above  
All thought of things divine? And then I heard  
Their voices roll the heaven-shaking word;  
And life and love they answered me, but death  
Caught as a vital anguish at their breath;  
Helpless they seemed, speech-stricken, and I saw,  
With foreheads bending to eternal law,  
Great shadows half enfold them, half reveal  
Divinity discrowned, and chariots wheel  
Skyward with shattered thunder—they were gone,  
Lost in the storm-cloud! radiant broke the dawn!  
But the high Gods returned not! Even so,  
They, too, methought, must die before they know!

ET EGO IN ARCADIA

HE stooped and read,  
Upon the tomb,  
No words the dead  
Addressed to doom ;

With careless laugh,  
He slowly traced  
The epitaph  
By time defaced ;

A shepherd lad,  
He found no gray  
Appeal that bade  
The passer stay ;

No long regret  
For mortal bliss,  
Lamented yet,  
But only this ;

A line he knelt  
To clearer see ;  
"I, too, have dwelt  
In Arcady."

## THE TRYST

AS one to arms of love,  
With bridal stars above,  
He went to death ;

And sped elate of soul,  
As runner to the goal  
With rhythmic breath ;

So light of heart he flew,  
The Greek but dimly knew  
The mortal fear ;

He went to death as might  
A victor through the night,  
The triumph near.

ATROPOS

A TROPOS, dread  
One of the Three,  
Holding the thread  
Woven for me ;

Grimly thy shears,  
Steely and bright,  
Menace the years  
Left for delight.

Grant it may chance,  
Just as they close,  
June shall entrance  
Earth with the rose ;

Reigning as though,  
Bliss to the breath,  
Endless and no  
Whisper of death.

FOR A POET'S TOMB

**H**E carved a weeping nymph with bended head,  
Her shoulder hidden by the flowing hair,  
To lean against the portal of the dead  
And sorrow there ;

He made the marble take a rhythmic grace,  
For beauty more than song he deemed divine,  
And in a blithe procession at the base  
He linked the Nine.

## SISTE VIATOR

**S**TAY, traveller! 't is my tomb! no more the day  
Shall shine for me along the Appian Way!  
And yet, though dust, I speak; and lest my urn  
You pass unheeding, never to return,  
I bid you pause and read beneath the vine,  
That wreathes the tomb as once the brow of mine,  
A name the Muses loved; for I have seen  
High Helicon, and Delos, and the green  
Of Mitylenean hills, and humbly trod  
Where Pindar took his supper with the God;  
Tibullus was my friend, and Ovid knew  
The unlamenting voice that speaks to you;  
A poet I, as they; now ashes here,  
I crave the passing tribute of a tear!

## VALE

**B**RIGHT pageant of the world that I must leave,  
Splendor of regal nights and epic days,  
Enchant me still lest I should stoop to grieve,  
While greener in death's shadow grow the bays.

I sought for beauty and I worshipped it  
In marble temples with the pride of song ;  
The spacious vista of my dreams was lit  
With all the moods that unto art belong.

And I shall pass as the great Pagans passed,  
The wearers of the purple in their might ;  
The loss of earth may daunt me at the last,  
But not the terror of eternal night.

## THE DYING PAGAN

*θανατος τριλλιστος*

O DEITY of Epidauros, now  
I lift no prayer, Asklepios, to thee!  
Although the air is cool upon my brow,  
And evening wafts the vernal balm to me,  
And life is sweet in its serenity.

I would not live! To Thanatos I breathe  
The sigh that rises fainter from my heart;  
Around my pallid brow I would not wreath  
One final garland for the poet's art,  
For I am tired of all, with all would part.

The leafy murmurs deepen where I trod  
The way of holy shadow, and I hear  
The solemn whisper of the Chthonian God,  
A sound of infinite soothing to my ear,  
Above all earthly voices overdear.

The healing fountain in the Tholos lifts  
Its limpid prayer that sinks in silver spray;  
Across the ripple in the basin drifts  
The crimson tremor of the dying day,  
The valediction of its parting ray.

And deeper now than on thy lyre of leaves,  
Oaks of Dodona, comes to me the sigh  
Of that consoleless wind that grieves and grieves  
With voice subdued for one about to die,  
The sole caress that soothes me where I lie.

I hear it as I heard it when a child,  
And still the brooding awe comes back to me,  
But only yields an exaltation mild,  
A ghost of transient ardor that I see  
Pass in the pallid light of memory.

The olive orchards in the distance grow  
A slope of velvet to my weary sight ;  
I just discern the shadowed path and know  
The carven Nike is the glimmer white,  
And feel no last despair for art's delight.

The golden temple Polykleitos reared,  
With marble grace entrances me no more,  
And all its votive beauty I revered  
Has lost the lure that drew me to adore,  
Where others but the boon of health implore.

Its curve of Doric columns that I love  
Becomes a shining blur upon my eyes,  
And just beyond their shimmer is a dove  
That in unceasing circles flies and flies,  
Chaonia's bird that wakes no least surmise.

The sun's receding beam forsakes the crest,  
The lurking shadow deepens in the room ;  
I breathe the fragrance with a keener zest,  
And see with brighter vision in the gloom,  
The last refulgence ere the hour of doom.

O fair Dione, on thy myrrhine base,  
White figurine I worshipped long ago,  
Why should I turn to thee with haggard face  
When youth alone, with all its ardent glow,  
The joy of thy beneficence may know ?

O thou, with flush of roses at thy feet,  
The last red garland on thy altar laid,  
No more in quest of beauty shall I meet  
The vision of perfection that I prayed,  
Thy marble contour in no mortal maid.

And yet I turn to thee, for thou art still  
The one Olympian to me benign,  
But I shall never feel the plastic thrill,  
Nor gloat again upon each lovely line  
My eyes discern from knee to shoulder shine.

And have I worshipped, Goddess, but in vain,  
I who was ever captive to thy thrall ?  
Thy gift was pleasure but I found it pain,  
Pain in the end, and of thy raptures all  
Not one supreme caress would I recall.

How futile is devotion to thee now,  
And yet I half surrender to thy smile,  
So potent is the memory of how  
Its unresisted ardor could beguile,  
A thought that makes the shadow lift the while.

But nevermore, O Goddess, shall I steep  
My senses in the memories that throng ;  
I have no single joy for Time to keep,  
No sorrow for the years that art or song  
With their immortal echo might prolong.

I ask no consolation at the end,  
No solace from the faiths that I disdain ;  
I have no prayer of any kind to send  
To any God for any loss or gain,  
For any prayer would be an effort vain.

The summons comes to my assenting soul ;  
I feel the icy rigor slowly creep  
Through arm and limb and reach the final goal,  
My heart whose last pulsations faintly keep  
A fitful struggle with unwaking sleep.

All things grow dark around me, none are near,  
No grieving few, no mother, child, or wife ;  
And it is well, I would not have them here,  
Not one of all I knew and loved in life —  
Alone I choose to pass from mortal strife.

## PRAYER

O HERMES, guide of spirits, lead me now,  
And Persiphrassa, empress of the dead!  
The breath of life is gone, and I, a shade,  
May now descend the unreturning way;  
The slope is gentle to the land of rest,  
The air is sweet, and every shadow kind;  
I see the river and the ebon bark,  
The ghostly shore, the fields of asphodel —  
Farewell, O earth, farewell forevermore!



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