

**ESSAY
ON MARRIAGE**
BY ANNE FINCH

Sidgwick & Jackson

ESSAY ON MARRIAGE

- PART ONE -

Across the golden water-meadows lie
The elms' long shadows. Slowly, you and I,
Along the narrow track of hard earth, pass
Between the river bank and the high grass
Brilliant with flowers. The delightful air
Touches our hands, our foreheads, and our hair,
We know each other well, have loved, and fought,
Bred, worked, and (with some difficulty) taught
Ourselves to live together. We can talk
Easily, or keep silent, as we walk.

*the serenity of
a June evening*

*on the upper
reaches of the
Thames*

All stresses are relaxed. We can forget
That we have histories; that our wills are set
In certain patterns; that our minds can range
Only the hither edge of time and change.

*lightens our
hearts*

Westward the red sun sinks. A heron flies
To the high wood. Eastward in darkness lies
A hemisphere of troubled countries, scarred
By shifting battlefronts. There now the hard
Burden of alien tyranny oppresses
Whole populations, and the bold successes
Of rebels bring appalling punishment
Down on the unconcerned and innocent.

*a world conflict
rages*

but we are free

Here we are sheltered. Between day and night,
The pulsing shadows and the warm sweet light,
Deep in a sea-bound fortress, we enjoy
A short release, and our freed thoughts deploy
Beyond the near objectives.

*to enjoy our
friendship*

Now we stand
Above the swift, smooth water. Now your hand
Touches my wrist. In the mind's eye, we see
The vaster movements of society,
And, as its substance, dwarfed by the immense
Historic scale, the agents of events,
Nameless unnumbered millions, whose unknown
Habits and impulses are like our own,
And, in each individual complex, seek
A satisfaction fitting and unique.

*and to explore
its implications*

- PART TWO -

*Within the
framework of
marriage*

One institution dominate
Our private lives and diverse fates –
Marriage, to whose apparent norm
A vast majority conform,
Although, as anyone might guess
Not always with entire success.

*much goes
unrecorded,*

If some obliging person cares
To take around some questionnaires
(And the authorities devise
A method of detecting lies),
Then in the home, the pub, the church
We might conduct some real research,
And from a random group collect
A note on what they all expect
Of marriage, an account of what,
In actual fact, they find they've got.

*and known
opinion is
confused and
contradictory.*

But how can we systematize
These infinite varieties –
A strict and noble discipline;
A method of avoiding sin;
A crown of thorns; a bed of roses;
A civil contract, which imposes
Some sacrifices, but provides
Comfort; a decent form which hides
Embittered grief; a running fight;
A Way of keeping warm at night,
Or of insuring for old age,
Or saving a cook-housemaid's wage,
Getting a child, or leaving off
Some job of which one's had enough'
Or rousing envy in one's friends?

*certain distinc-
tions can how-
ever be made:*

But one or other version tends
From time to time, from place to place,
To be the unacknowledged base
Of current fashion, and create
Standards from which to deviate.

*emphasis may
be laid on the
preservation of
the family as a
social institu-
tion*

In France, where the assumption's been
That marriages are made between
Fortunes, and families, and firms
In social and commercial terms,

It seems the newly married pair
May reasonably hope to share
Some mutual friends, some common aim,
And, with fair confidence, can claim
To understand in some degree
Their function in society.
They with good conscience undertake
Familiar duties, while they make
Some reservations, that provide
Freedom to exercise (outside
A home that must not be disgraced)
The claims of individual taste.

*or on the
satisfaction of
individual
impulses.*

A briefer history creates
Prevailing patterns in the States,
Where ethic and behaviour fit
A social pattern less well-knit,
And all combines to publicise
Youth, energy, and enterprise;
And the prevailing type has been
The one you loved at seventeen,
Here, therefore, in the natural course
Development involves divorce,
Where both the customers explain
They only want the same again.

*it is not easy
to combine both.*

But in this ancient island state
We, higher than enjoyment, rate
Stability, and are content
To know some disillusionment,
And our inertia is such
We may put up with far too much,
While a persistent inner voice
Questions the wisdom of the choice
By which we hoped perhaps to prove
That marriage can be made for love
And still successfully sustain
Social and economic strain.

*love, as
publicised, is at
least partly
illusion;*

O, love, in your sweet name enough
Illusory pretentious stuff
Is talked and written. Myth and dream
Fix the contemporary scheme
In alien shapes. Can we not make
Some simple statement which will shake
Our valued preconceptions loose;
And, putting to a better use

*earlier forms of
culture survive
in us*

The innocent and candid sense
Of everyday experience,
Build up a picture of known fact
More subtle, brilliant and exact?

Tradition is no guide. The old
Romantic impulse has gone cold;
The Christian ethic has in fact
Small bearing on the way we act'
And the inevitable urge
To let a new style emerge
(Masked by adherence to some creed
We can't believe in, and don't need)
Appears, sporadic and abrupt,
As something formless or corrupt,
Conflicting with the other drives
And broader movement of our lives;
While still an individual past
Weighs on us too, and breeds the last
Infirmity of intellect –
We must achieve what we expect.

*and the
immediate scene
is the focus of
our own earlier
histories.*

This gifted girl, whose gestures give
East, ecstasy, a will to live,
Can never finally erase
The image of a lovely face
Once seen at some high, Florentine
Window' and no mature design
Can quite re-animate your first
Pleasure when, at a sweet breast nursed,
You tasted the extreme delight
Of love that came to you by right.

*disappointed, we
may seek
some easy
course,*

*but continuous
adaptation is
required of us,*

No wonder that, in later days,
We doubt if any love repays
The trouble; and so case about
For somebody to help us out,
And let us only play the part
That we already know by heart.

Alas, we never do succeed
In getting what we feel we need
On these unrealistic terms.
For still the living world affirms
Its nature; stubbornly presents
Its irreversible events.

*and only in
development
can satisfaction
be achieved.*

I lost a father once, and you
A mother, Must we still be true
To these vast, distant shadows? How
Can we escape them in the actual now?
Can we not love as equals? Know we must
Jointly exploit our fantasies, but just
Within a playing margin. Ask no more
Than the occasion offers' know some core,
In both, of independent. Shall we find
Fate, and each other, then will grow more kind?

There are those

- PART THREE -

*who indulge
trifling impulses*

On an immense, untidy stage
The miscellaneous types engage
In drama, tragedy, and farce.
Consider first, the well-known class
Of husbands who would never miss
The birthday, or the good-bye kiss,
Who mow the lawn, and push the pram,
And think the world of Christ and Pam –
Yet can't resist abrupt embraces
Behind the office filing cases,
And let their idle fingers slip
Down any neat, attractive hip.

*with disap-
pointing results.*

And wives, of course, have also tried
A little nonsense on the side;
Playing for safety, the protest
'Of course, we love our husbands best',
And innocently wonder why
Their turnover is rather high.

*Others spread
their risks,*

While others, possibly more wise,
Or else less active, stabilise
Better' when circumstance allows
They like two men about the house.
Husband and lover jointly can
Discharge the duties of a man.
One makes her laugh, one lets her cry,
One pays the rent, one tells her why
He loves her, one can sit for hours
Just listening, one buys her flowers,
One likes to guide her, one is led
And one, or both, make good in bed.

*but with only
intermittent
success*

It seems a happy fate to choose,
But oh, the racket that ensues,
If either dares to put about
The notion that it can't work out!
The wretched husband has to hear
How very pleased he was last year
(While that attractive blonde still cared)
To find his obligations shared.
He never tried to understand
His lonely wife, nor gave a hand
With washing up, but, when she pined
Went out. And she was left behind.
Why did she not go up and pack?
Instead, when he at last got back,
He found her cheerful. Why complain?
The method can be used again.

*and at other
people's
expense.*

*a fundamen-
tally unstable
situation*

The lover, though he may not mind
A status as somewhat undefined,
Suffers as well; he can enjoy
The carefree passions of a boy,
But they bring in, when all is done,
The portion of a younger son
Who has eternity to wait
Before he's lord of the estate.

*promotes
unworthy*

He, naturally, can't suggest
That temporary terms suit best
His forward planning; that, in short,
A time arises when he ought
To fix his future, find a flat,
Have his own peg for his own hat,
And settle down, and take a wife,
Get children, and insure his life.

His mistress, though he never mentions
The subject, doubts his real intentions,
And when a pretty face goes by
Sees a grim future in his eye—
'Her figure's exquisite, but come,
She really is a little dumb.'
That witty creature, who can draw
A crowd of people off the floor,
She looks at very much askance—
'Poor thing, she never learned to dance'.

*and disingenu-
ous action.*

*On the other
hand, a
debilitated
fidelity*

She may do better if instead
She lets the dear boy have his head,
And hardly can exclaim too much
In praise (but in her voice a touch,
A mere inflection, hints that he
Can't really take it seriously).
Then they may have some years to go
Before he splits the status quo.

For it is possible to find
Stable arrangements of this kind,
And the conventional converse
May even work out rather worse—
For couples who have reached the stage
When nothing alters but their age.
They are not tempted by affairs,
But, sitting in the usual chairs,
He reads the paper, while she knits,
He quotes some items, she by fits
And starts recounts what's going on,
The talking to she gave young John,
The scarcity of eggs, the poor
Behaviour of the girls next door.
One talks, and one half-listens, then
The conversation spurts again
(After a short, insipid lull)
Chilly, disorganised, and dull.

*offers no
protection to
love*

*or any
guarantee of
domestic bliss.*

He once bought presents home, her glance
Condemned him for extravagance'
She made him welcome once, but he
Sluggishly waiting for his tea,
Did not re-act at all, and now,
Dispirited, they don't know how
To reach each other. The embrace
Inept and sudden, that takes place
Every so often, only serves
To give her an attach of nerves,
And make him snappish, since his pride
Has one more item now to hide.

The house is pretty clean; the grub
Is middling; he enjoys the pub
And she the pictures; every night
He puts the cat out, she the light.
Their growing children soon detect
They need not show (or feel) respect.
Ill-mannered, anxious, undecided,

*But sexual
frustration is
only part of
the problem.*

Skilled in exploiting a divided
Authority, they rudely seek
The heaven of which they dare not speak—
Safety and warmth. A fairly strong
But hidden sense of something wrong
Produces inconclusive fights—
He stands on reason, she on rights,
And in the end they have to own
They far prefer to sleep alone.

*Over-
emphasised, as a
dominating
obsession*

But would one really recommend
Such men to find a part-time friend?
Or could the poor wife be consoled
By some brisk, sensual, overbold
Commercial man, or plumber's mate
Who did the trick, and slammed the gate?
Or is fate kinder to the girl,
Who, plunging in a social whirl,
Knocks up a simply splendid score
In lovers, and looks round for more?

*with
standardised
movements*

At parties, when she first arrives
An element of choice survives,
And, if she's fortunate, she sees
A hero for her fantasies.
But, struggling through the crowds between,
She can't resist the old routine
And automatically picks out
The *next best thing* she finds about.
He makes some jokes, and gets some drinks,
And asks her what she really thinks
About the paintings on the wall,
Not having noticed them at all
She says they're lousy, and is most
Surprised to find that he's her host.

*expressing the
weariness of
empty hearts,*

The drink begins to take effect,
She makes no effort to select
The next encounter (has he guessed
How very nice she is undressed?_.
They talk of politics and art
And why this couple live apart,
And mention, with subdued delight
That shocking scene the other night,

The next drink has a different taste . . .
Somebody's arm is round here waist . . .
She gets a semi-vacant chair . . .

A kiss lands vaguely in her hair . . .
She strokes the head against her knee . . .
And talks about democracy.

So time in some confusion passes,
A girl sits on a tray of glasses,
Someone is sick, some go away
(They may have work to do next day),
Some new friends pull her to her feet
And guide her to the empty street.

*the splendid
energy of the
sexual impulse
is spent in
mean effort,*

One says goodnight, one takes her arm
And comments on the vulgar charm
Of moonlight; gets her to her door
(A flatlet on the seventh floor).
She offers him some tea; instead
They find themselves across the bed.
A button bounces on the ground
(She thinks, I must make sure it's found).
He takes his jacket off. A tall
Contorted shadow on the wall
Maps all his movements. There she traces
The moment he jerks off his braces,
And keeps her head turned till it hurts—
Men look so silly in their shirts.

*and inhabits a
friendless
desert,*

*where even
adventure is
monotonous,
and
meaningless,*

What arts, what subtleties avail
When even a new love is stale,
When even in the trampled garden grows
Only a gum and paper rose?
They, drowsy and befuddled, seek
Some barely adequate technique.
They take no trouble, waste no time,
But make it work all right, and climb
Under the covers. Only then
She wonders what girls see in men.

*except as the
effect of buried
causes.*

She sleeps. A lorry down below
Wakes her at last. The curtains blow,
And cold light strikes the tumbled bed.
With caution, she turns round her head
And sees, with only faint surprise,
A face she fails to recognise.

*The past also
dominates:*

It's very difficult to know
How far experiment should go;
Excesses can give some return
To those who are disposed to learn,

a man who,

But not to anyone who makes
Only identical mistakes.

*remembering
from his
childhood*

However, if you now incline
To take a strictly moral line,
Remember, as you lay the blame,
You might have turned out just the same
If, in the past, your private fate
Had been, like theirs, unfortunate.

*pain and
disappointment,*

*develops his
view of Woman
in magical
terms,*

Behind our actions, and behind
The set of a directing mind,
The threads of history go back
Along a fixed, forgotten track,
Determining, to some extent,
The person that we now present.

A fine example may be found
By anyone who looks around
Among those men who disapprove
Of the profane, incestuous love
Of women, who, their view implies,
Are simply witches in disguise.

*and, expecting
everything
from her,*

His mother, at an early date
Taught him too well to love, and hate,
And when the thing got out of hand
Father turned up, and made a stand.
And it was fully understood
That love depends on being good.
If not, abruptly from his lips
The source of life and pleasure slips.

*receives little,
and loses
himself.*

The witches, later on, refine
On the original design.
'You can be good or bad', they say,
'We love you madly either way'.
'Where is the catch?' 'Oh, yes, it's true
There are three things you mustn't do'.
'What are they?' 'Well, you'll get to know,
Don't bother now, we love you so'.

*So, finding
that love is to
be had on
easier terms,*

Bright eyes, flushed faces, tumbled hair,
A shoulder and a breast laid bare,
It seems that they may set him free
From the parental tyranny.
But, woken in a chill of fright,
By someone weeping in the night,

*he avoids the
parental conflict*

Guilt, and compassion, and desire
Hold him. What is it they require
To expiate the unconscious crime?
His love, his money, and his time.

*by keeping
women at a
safe distance.*

He gets perhaps an odd half-hour
Of easy and apparent power,
While they, with much improved success
Practise the black art they profess.
All that he gives a girl she keeps,
And eats his heart out while he sleeps.

*and refusing
any major
commitment.*

So why not cut the whole thing out?
There are alternatives about,
Seamen and students, dons and dancers,
Boys in the Guards who know the answers,
Chauffeurs, and ageing men of leisure—
There's cerebral or sensual pleasure
Or both; his problem's largely solved
If families are not involved.

*Others of more
ordinary tastes.*

Attaining to a state of grace
He has his mother in her place;
His father, undisturbed, may be
The guardian of the sacred tree
Since, fearing to pursue and slay,
He dropped his sword and came away.

*who accept
their natural
responsibilities,*

The witches now retire dismayed
(He knows they need not be obeyed),
And they are floored by a convention
Which only gives them such attention
May be deflected in mid-street
By any flue-eyed boy they meet.

*may establish
only*

How sweet how easy, how serene
The other love. How bright and clear the scene
Once woman—free. For quite a time he thrives
Avoiding the main issue of our lives.

*the appearance
of success, and*

But it's conceivable I chose
To make my sample up of those
Who, weak, or stupid, or perverse,
Might be expected to do worse
In love and marriage than the rest
Still, if the truth must be confessed,
We find the same effects displayed
By people of a higher grade.

*in their be-
wildered
attempts*

The college girl, who must resign
A job which doesn't quite combine
With cooking, cleaning, and a child,
May be for years unreconciled.
Efficiently, she sweeps and dusts,
While a whole range of talent rusts,
And, with her children not yet grown,
She does it all too much alone.

*to reach a better
understanding*

She loves her husband (and devotes
Much time to typing out his notes),
But, with her family and friends
Dispersed, a lot too much depends
On him. She hesitates to chat,
Domestic gossip may fall flat—
It's clear that he would rather stop
Discussing other people's shop.

He sees the children happy, knows
How smoothly the whole household goes
Then suddenly she breaks a plate,
Tells him he's left it all too late—
In bed, of course, he rather suits,
But really, men are callous brutes.

ultimately fail.

He listens with complete surprise,
Then strokes her shoulder, dries her eyes,
Admitting that it does seem tough,
He's sorry; isn't that enough?

She, feeling as she did at school
When something made her look a fool,
Does up her face, and gets a book
And tries politely not to look,
When (as it seems to her) his chief
Expression is of pure relief.

This situation won't improve
So long as no-one makes a move
At least, to set the problem out
As something to be thought about;
But, as a deep frustration mounts
It starts to fail on other counts,
And actually, is no less grave
When the persistently behave
Correctly. What can take the place
Of loving and spontaneous grace?

While they, to pass the time, discuss
The drunkard on the morning bus.
Regret, and pity, and despair
Hang like a poison in the air.

- PART ONE -



- PART FOUR -

But this brisk sceptical review
Is fundamentally untrue.
I did not, as you note, remark
That breathless evening in the park
When, fingers touching, he and she
(One eddy in eternity)
Moved with angelic poise between
The shadowy tree trunks and the green
Smooth water, and, astonished, learned
The riches of a love returned.

Nor did I set before your eyes
The pleasures of Joint enterprise:
A house—where the light scented breeze
Blows back the curtains. They, at east
Under the cherry tree survey
The promise of a brilliant May.
Swelling and ripening, row on row,
The tidy vegetables grow.

Along the border, overnight,
Pale buds have opened into bright
Flower, and in the grass the neat
Pied daisies cluster at their feet.
Now in a leisure hour they can
Observe, and meditate, and plan—
Should they extend the strawberry bed,
Or creosote the potting shed,
And is there anything at all
Will flourish on a north-east wall?

Outside the home their range extends;
Plays, books and music, work, and friends
Substance and tension can supply
Which nourishes their unity;
Until in time one can record
How love, enduring, may afford

*But brilliant
moments occur*

*and real satis-
factions are
found*

*of a wide
variety and over
long periods.*

Pleasures most liberal and rare
Which early passion does not share.
In some rich, personal design
Knowledge and tenderness combine,
While a serene, well-tempered peace
Breathes of contentment and release,
And the frequented hearth supplies
A solace in calamities.

*Set-backs are
not always
fatal*

Even when choice and chance create
The terms of some less pleasant fate
Which can (as I have shown) be seen
As shocking, pitiful, or mean,
No circumstance can wholly kill
Imagination or good will.
Nor is there reason to despair
Of those who certain traces bear,
For ever on their souls engraved,
Of love dishonoured or enslaved.
For the creating spirit finds
Its nourishment of diverse kinds,
And, through accepted pain, at length
Renews and amplifies its strength,
While, on an unexpected course,
Contentment flows from some new source.

*although major
decisions are
difficult:*

Hazards there are, and some so grave
That neither man nor wife can save
The home and contract; and they take
The final risk of a clean break.
Yet conscience, children or the fear
Of change, may keep them as they were,
And does it at enormous cost
When all they ever loved is lost.

*as, for instance,
when early
rapture*

Think of this man, who takes a wife
As anchor in a drifting life;
Seeing her beautiful, and kind,
He seeks, in her more tranquil mind
And yielding body, to assuage
His daemon's melancholy rage.
His passion and his need excites
Pity and love, and so unites
Two creatures, whom the fates have sent
To be each other's complement

*is succeeded by
stultifying
disappointment*

The seasons move, the dazzling glow
Of youth and spring must sometime go,
And in their suggestion of routine.
For in the sanctuary he sought
Freely, his restless heart is caught,
And in unwilling bondage lies
Betrayed by its necessities.

Inevitably, he throws out
Disturbing hints of guilt and doubt,
Yet, at the ebb of night, while she
Weeps for her insufficiency
And his unkindness, he presents
A blank face of indifference.

For what can he do now, to clear
The thunder-laden atmosphere
Which, by its nature, must distil
A poison for his heart and will?
She, seeking some dramatic change
Of face, and character and range,
Gets a new job, or buys a hat,
Or studies art, or cleans the flat.
But soon enough she gets to know
That readjustment must be slow—
It's hard to treat with grace and ease
A person whom one does not please.

If in a new love he finds scope
For friendship, and delight, and hope,
She will be left without defence
Unless affection and good sense
To some extent, can override
The impulses of wounded pride.
Moreover, if they are restrained
Some of the lost ground is regained;
For, as he leaves the usual grooves,
His temper probably improves
(Less regularly now assailed
By situations where he's failed),
And the release may do a lot
Towards working loose the hardened knot
Of inner conflict; and his wife
Has chance of a nicer life.

*which, having
drained their
resources,*

*may, forcing
their interests
elsewhere.*

*involve other
people,*

*temporarily or
permanently,
according to
their assess-
ment*

Whatever way the problem's solved
By the three people most involved
(Whose habits, character, and force
Determine the specific course),
The total outcome must depend
On what they finally intend
And in what terms they view the whole
Historic meaning of their role.

For to our minds, which cannot see
An isolated entity,
There is no pleasure and no pain
Which can be counted loss or gain
Excepting as, through days and years
Its weight and relevance appears.

The morning sun, the breath of May
Can charm our willing hearts away;
The crown of beauty is a sense
Of rarity and transience
But, while the earth, and sea and sky
In their unique conjunctions lie,
Beneath the weather and the tides
An oceanic current rides
Creating climates, which will give
The wider context where we live.

Here we should recollect the best
Example of joint interest—
Children, who stage by stage undo
An egotism built for two.

The baby, newly-born, presents
Incalculable elements,
And the habitual stresses must
In a new system readjust,
Where sleeping in their causes lie
The cycles of mortality.

Now the unpractised parents find
In a distinctive form and mind
An echo of themselves, whose tone
Throbs in the caverns of their own
Identity, across a range
Both threatened and enlarged by change
Whose gift, to all that lives, must be
Danger and opportunity.

*of immediate
and remoter
values;*

*particularly a
regards their
children*

*through whom,
recreated,*

*they have
known some
enlargement of
their own
natures,*

So they, in some sense born again
Re-learn, between delight and pain,
How in fulfilment must begin
New processes of discipline.
For, in the person they suppose
Well-known, a stranger is disclosed
In whom they see, with waking eyes,
New flaws and new abilities,
While day by day the child affirms
His growing nature in new terms.

*and in whose
development*

First, between sleep and sleep, he learns
The way to suck, and soon discerns
One face (as his maturing sight
Composes form of dark and light),
One prototype of love, a source
Of bounty, a protecting force,
Within whose orbit he can rest
Sheltered, and satisfied, and blest.

*through various
stages*

Then his expanding senses find
New objects for a seeking mind,
In which the images diverge
Of self and not-self, and the urge
For power to know and rule and act
Is tested in a world of fact.

*their own
quality is
tested*

As, by degrees, his father takes
More dominant a part, he makes
New explorations in the wide
Realms of experience, outside
His infant range, and learns to be
Acquainted with authority
And from his parents' deeds and moods
Derives his basic attitudes.

*An individual
and
contemporary
view of human
existence*

- PART FIVE -

What can we offer then? Our fate
Is unexampled, and the great
Interpretations of the past
Cannot be conjured to outlast
Their function; we must learn to be
Freed children of our history.

*cannot be
expressed in
static form.*

For any view of life, applied
Untested, to events outside
The world that nourished it, confirms
The limitations of its terms
The sin of Classicism lies
In its own logic. Energies
Securely balanced, must create
Closed systems. In an ancient state
The habitations of the mind
Were in these noble forms designed.
That world was smaller. Change was slow,
And men could more completely know
A narrower range. Then myth contained
The unknown, and the unexplained;
Before Copernicus had brought
A scientific mode of thought
To question the eternal skies,
And, challenging authorities,
Made the earth spin.

The restless play
Of free enquiry wears away
The ancient dykes. A stormy light
Shows vistas with no end in sight.
The world of nature and of mind
Expanding, shifting, unconfined,
Must be interpreted again
Before the soul can well sustain
Confusion and complexity.

Then the Romantic heresy
Appears. The double-edged event,
The shadowy, the immanent,
The hardly-known, the half-conceived,
The possible, the unachieved
Are subject matter. Poets sense
The impact of experience
In its obscurer forms' extend
Their range of consciousness and tend
To undervalue and disown
The near, the well-lit and well-known.
Haunted by Time, they view events
As functions of impermanence,
And so, for self-protection, cling
To their specific suffering
Which seeks no outcome; has no cure,
Demanding only to endure.

*But pre-
occupation
with change
and diversity*

*may be self-
destructive,*

Nostalgic longing is the theme
Of the world's best romantic dream,
And Tristan and Isolde tell
The dismal story very well—
How they avoided with finesse
The vulgar boredom of success.

They in a world of shadows moved
Where love, untested and unproved,
Fed on itself, and could achieve
Only a brilliant make-believe;
And, as the actual world withdrew,
Lost every impulse to renew
Its character and fate, and turned
Self-immolating. Then they learned
The logic of their destiny,
And paid its final penalty
When love and death together gave
The consummation of the grave.

And other lovers—those whose fame
Still lives in fable—bear the same
Sign of frustration and have set
A pattern we might well forget
If we have courage now to face
The boundlessness of time and space,
And, in the way we think and live,
Develop some alternative
Interpretations, which admit
The facts that they were made to fit.

For we are pilgrims in a land
No-one can wholly understand,
And the viaticum, bestowed
By others, can become a load
Whose steady pressure may destroy
All love, and energy, and joy.

But we need insight, strength, and skill
To re-direct a sluggish will,
And there are many who incline
To take what may appear the line
Of least resistance, and accept
Assumptions totally inept,
And only ask that they may be
Protected by their fantasy.

*and it is a hard
and endless
task*

*To overcome our
Natural fear
And lethargy;*

*and, with a
complex and
varying
environment,*

But, limited and incomplete,
They live committed to defeat:
The changing world does not disclose
Its opportunities to those
Who, lacking a robuster sense
Of growth, must stick to self-defence.

So, when the laden airs condense
In cloud along the mountainside,
A man might dream of what they hide,
And fashion, detailed and entire,
The landscape of his heart's desire;
Then, when the mists divide, may see
A featureless reality,
And go, reluctant and alone,
Across a waste of heath and stone,
Pursuing the ambiguous shade
Of which his fantasies were made.

More fortunate will be the choice
Of those whose energies rejoice
When the astonishing sun bursts through
And all things are created new.
The weather and the seasons meet
In forms that time will not repeat:
Softly the blessed sunlight fills
The fluid contours of the hills;
While, brilliant, fleeting, and unique,
They see it strike the furthest peak.
Within their nearer vision lies
A cluster of societies.

Where the plants and living creatures fine
The food and cover of their kind.
Knowing no impulse to go back
They mark the prospect of their track
And, without terror or remorse,
Set out on their eventful course.

Finis

*maintain a
living
equilibrium*

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