
WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

1775–1864

On Seeing a Hair of Lucretia Borgia¹

Borgia, thou once wert almost too august
 And high for adoration—now thou’rt dust;
 All that remains of thee these plaits infold,
 Calm hair, meandering with pellucid gold!

1825, 1846

On his Seventy-fifth Birthday

I strove with none; for none was worth my strife,
 Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art;
 I warmed both hands before the fire of life,
 It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

1849

1849

Mother, I cannot mind my wheel

Mother, I cannot mind my wheel;
 My fingers ache, my lips are dry:
 Oh! if you felt the pain I feel!
 But oh, who ever felt as I!
 5 No longer could I doubt him true,
 All other men may use deceit;
 He always said my eyes were blue,
 And often swore my lips were sweet.

1806

Rose Aylmer¹

Ah, what avails the sceptered race,
 Ah, what the form divine!
 What every virtue, every grace!
 Rose Aylmer, all were thine.

1. 1480–1519; Duchess of Ferrara, whose court became a notable center for scholars, poets, and artists.

1. The daughter of the fourth Baron Aylmer

(hence “the sceptered race,” line 1). She became a friend of Landor’s in 1794 at the age of seventeen and died suddenly in Calcutta, six years later.

- 5 Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes
 May weep, but never see,
 A night of memories and of sighs
 I consecrate to thee

1806

Past ruined Ilion

- Past ruined Ilion Helen¹ lives,
 Alcestis rises from the shades;²
 Verse calls them forth; 'tis verse that gives
 Immortal youth to mortal maids.
- 5 Soon shall oblivion's deepening veil
 Hide all the peopled hills you see,
 The gay, the proud, while lovers hail
 These many summers you and me.
- The tear for fading beauty check,
 10 For passing glory cease to sigh;
 One form shall rise above the wreck,
 One name, Ianthe, shall not die.

1831

Twenty years hence

- Twenty years hence my eyes may grow
 If not quite dim, yet rather so,
 Still yours from others they shall know
 Twenty years hence.
- 5 Twenty years hence though it may hap
 That I be called to take a nap
 In a cool cell where thunderclap
 Was never heard,
- There breathe but o'er my arch of grass
 10 A not too sadly sighed *Alas*,
 And I shall catch, ere you can pass,
 That wingèd word.

1846

1. Helen of Troy ("Ilion").

2. Alcestis gave her own life in exchange for that

of her husband but was rescued from Hades ("the shades") by Hercules.

The Three Roses¹

When the buds began to burst,
 Long ago, with Rose the First
 I was walking; joyous then
 Far above all other men,
 5 Till before us up there stood
 Britonferry's² oaken wood,
 Whispering, "*Happy as thou art,
 Happiness and thou must part.*"
 Many summers have gone by
 10 Since a Second Rose and I
 (Rose from that same stem) have told
 This and other tales of old.
 She upon her wedding day
 Carried home my tenderest lay:³
 15 From her lap I now have heard
 Gleeful, chirping, Rose the Third.
 Not for *her* this hand of mine
 Rhyme with nuptial wreath shall twine;
 Cold and torpid it must lie,
 20 Mute the tongue, and closed the eye.

1855

Dirce

Stand close around, ye Stygian set,¹
 With Dirce in one boat conveyed!
 Or Charon, seeing, may forget
 That he is old and she a shade.

1831

Well I remember how you smiled

Well I remember how you smiled
 To see me write your name upon
 The soft sea-sand . . . "*O! what a child!
 You think you're writing upon stone!*"
 5 I have since written what no tide
 Shall ever wash away, what men
 Unborn shall read o'er ocean wide
 And find Ianthe's name again.

1863

1. The first Rose was Rose Aylmer; the second, her niece; and the third, her grandniece.
 2. In Wales.

3. Landor's epithalamion, *To a Bride*.

1. I.e., the shades of the dead, ferried by Charon over the river Styx to Hades.