

THE SONNET MADE FOR NERO & VILLON

(Upanishad of El Khoudr)

T

HEN one returned—in gold and violet
Clad utterly, even as those Viewers¹ that were
The bane of Orn's old murderers,²—crying: *Sir,*
Albeit Love's last euphrasy beset
To-morrow's dawn, this day abides to wet
Love's lids with weeping, whose lithe harp-player,³
With fluent fingers resonant of her
Thou knowest of, seeks mirth,⁴ no less. And yet
What bifold shadows quest life's baffled strain,
Hoarse-tongued and dominant!

It is enough —

I answered,—that this multiversant⁵ Love
Seeks dawn,⁶ and always dawn's light loss of gain.

— Then ended, leaving others to explain
The meaning of the dozen⁷ lines above.

Notes to the Sonnet made for
Maya

[1] The implication here is obvious, and not peculiarly Chinese: thus, the Tasmanian word for the shadow is also that for the spirit; the Algonquin Indians describe a man's soul as *otahchuk*, "his shadow"; and the Abipones made the one word *loákal* serve for "shadow, soul, echo, image."

[2] The second, and common to all men, of the six paths or ways (*gâti*) of existence: the other five being allotted to: (1) angels; (3) demons; (4) hungry devils, or *pretas*; (5) brute beasts; and (6) sinners in hell.

[3] A vice regarded with especial reprehension by Chinamen of the Taoist persuasion: and punished, according to the *Yü Li Ch' ao Chuan*, in the Sixth Court of Purgatory, where the proud (along with those who tear or obliterate worthy books) are enclosed in a net of thorns and eaten by locusts, prior to the removal of their skins, to be rolled up into spills. The ideogram rendered "even as of old" in the last line of the octave may perhaps refer, secondarily, to this traditional torment.

[4] The expression is exact: for a Chinaman, it should be remembered, may have as many as three legal fathers: (1) his actual father; (2) an adopted father, generally a male relative to whom he has been given as an heir; and (3) the man his widowed mother may marry. This third father, however, is entitled to only one year's mourning instead of the usual three, since in China, unless through exceptional circumstances, it is not considered creditable for a widow to marry again.

[5] Literally, "allied by Kwannon," the Chinese Goddess of Mirth and Mercy, she who "hears prayers" and, as is hinted above,

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is the bestower of children,—by whose birth “two” (the parents) may become “three.” This appears to the present writer perhaps the most subtly rendered thought to be found in this present collection, for all that a number of scholars have believed the true significance of Gerald Musgrave’s verses may be best appreciated by regarding this sonnet as an acrostic.