

Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864)
Two poems
(edited by Niall Rudd)

Landor was the last English amateur to write fluently and passionately in Latin. At various points throughout his life his kindly but impulsive nature got him into trouble. He was expelled from Rugby, rusticated from Oxford, ordered to leave Como, involved in trouble in Florence, and (following a libel suit) was forced to leave Bristol for the continent. He made a rather unsuccessful marriage, had a number of affairs, and failed to persuade his life-long love (Sophia Jane Swift) to commit herself to him. He held strong opinions in unorthodox combinations. Though a member of the Church of England, he was critical of the hierarchy, and held that in Ireland the Roman Catholic Church should have the same official status. Though he became a Tory, he was strongly opposed to monarchy, and supported revolutions in France, Italy, and America. His inheritance enabled him to devote his life to travel (especially in Italy) and to writing. He had a small number of close and devoted friends, including writers like Southey, Hazlitt, and Browning, but beyond them he knew many important people, and his colourful personality ensured that he would be admired as a celebrity.

Landor was a prolific writer. His prose works take up twelve volumes, and his poetry four (see Bibliography below). But until 1999 there was no modern edition of his Latin poetry. In that year Sutton's two-volume edition appeared with notes and translations. This could have been an epoch-making work of scholarship; but unfortunately the text (both Latin and English) has numerous misprints, and the translation, though at times neat and idiomatic, is often unreliable.

Bibliography: Walter Savage Landor, *The Complete Works*, ed. T. Earle Welby (Prose, Vols.I-XII) and Stephen Wheeler (Poems, Vols. XIII-XVI), 1927-36.

R.H. Super, *The Publication of Landor's Works*, London, 1954. (This shows how it is often impossible to assign a poem to a precise date).

- *Walter Savage Landor, A Biography*, London 1957 (with extensive bibliography).

D.F. Sutton, *The Complete Latin Poetry of Walter Savage Landor*, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2 vols., 1999.

I

From *Dry Sticks, Faggoted*, 1858 (Sutton, vol.2, pp.58-60)

Landor wrote extensively about the Crimean War (1853-6), in which Britain, France and Turkey opposed Russia. The action referred to here was the battle of Inkerman (Nov.5, 1854), which was an important phase in the siege of Sevastopol. Though the allies eventually won, a combination of bad luck and bad management led to appalling suffering. The first and last stanzas make general comments on the disaster as it affects Britain. The others report the details as if the writer was on the spot; he sees the soldier's death and the effect on his wife as symbols of the general horror.

In subject and tone the poem resembles Tennyson's famous description of the charge of the light brigade, which had taken place at Balaclava on October the 25th. *The Times* (November 14) spoke of 'some hideous blunder'. Tennyson toned this down to 'someone had blundered', mentioning neither Lord Cardigan nor Lord Lucan. In describing Inkerman Landor, too, avoids names, but with his devastating antithesis in the last two lines he lays the blame squarely on the high command.

Amicus meus, strenuus miles, vulneratus

Perfusa quanto sanguine hyems tepet

Britannico de fonte! Virilium

Semper fuisti victimarum

Prodiga Taurica Chersonese!

Quis vulneratum deferet auribus 5

Nuper relictæ celsum animi virum?

Pallebit ut conjux sub Haemo

Vipereo moritura morsu.

Spes insusurret credula credulae

Jam Jam reversurum edomito Scytha, 10

Jam Jamque sanandum; salutem

Contulerit popularis aura.

Equus sed idem non revehet domum,

Discerptus ille est sulphureo globo,

Restabat ante atque inter hostes 15

Solus eques, medius suorum.

Plerosque mortis perpetuus sopor

Pressit: quibusdam cara parentium,

Quibusdam et ipsis cariora

Nomina contremuere labro. 20

Sublimiore, o Anglia, anhelitu
Nunquam attigisti culmina gloriae,
Nec fortiores militarunt
Sub ducibus magis imperitis.

My friend, a vigorous soldier, wounded

With how much blood is the winter being warmed, drenched from the fountain of England! You always were lavish, Tauric Chersonese, with the sacrifices of men! Who will relay to the ears of the woman who has recently been widowed that her husband, a man of such high courage, has been wounded? She will grow pale as the wife did below Haemus when she was about to die from a serpent's bite. Hope, eager to believe, may whisper to the woman, who is equally eager, that soon, very soon, he will be coming home after the defeat of Russia, that soon, very soon, he is to become better; the general rumour will have brought news that he is out of danger.

But his own horse will not carry him home. (That animal has been ripped apart by a reeking cannon-ball.) With the enemy in front of him and around him he was the only cavalryman left from among his own side. Most succumbed to the everlasting sleep of death; in some cases the dear names of their parents, in others names even dearer than they were to themselves trembled on their lips. Never, England, have you reached the peaks of glory with more noble gasps of exertion; never have more gallant soldiers served under commanders more incompetent.

Commentary

Metre: Alcaic (after the Greek Alcaeus, 7th to 6th century BCE.)

_ _ U _ _ _ UU _ U U
 _ _ U _ _ _ UU _ U U
 _ _ U _ _ _ U _ U U
 _ UU _ UU _ U _ U U

The metre, no doubt, was chosen because Horace had employed it to celebrate Roman valour in his patriotic odes (e.g. 3.2-5, 4.4 and 14); but 3.5 refers to the loss of Regulus' army in 255 B.C.E., and tells how the Carthaginians sent Regulus to Rome to negotiate terms for the return of the prisoners. Regulus, however, persuaded the senate to abandon the prisoners, and then returned to face death in Carthage, demonstrating that a general should take responsibility for his failures.

Elisions: in *sanguine hyems* (1) the final - *e* probably disappeared; cf. *ille est* (14) and the final - *a* in *Anglia anhelitu* (21); the same may have happened to the final *e* of *atque* and *ante* (15) and *sublimiore* (21). But in the final -*um* of *celsum* (6) and *reversurum* (10), and in the final -*am* of *quibusdam* (19) the vowel was nasalised and the *m* was not pronounced. In this last category (and in other cases which do not occur here) the voice, like that of an Italian opera-singer, glided quickly from one syllable to the next.

Title The soldier was Major David Paynter, a kinsman of Landor's close friend, Rose Paynter. For her, see Super's index.

Lines 2-4 The Tauric Chersonese: The Taurians' peninsula, now the Crimea.

According to Herodotus (4.103) the Taurians used to sacrifice any shipwrecked men and any Greeks captured in their raids to a maiden goddess (identified by the Greeks with Artemis); cf. Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 38-9.

Line 6 *Relicta*: at this point the husband is known to be dead, but the poet represents the news as being conveyed by stages.

Lines 7-8 The *conju(n)x* is Eurydice. The story of how Orpheus almost succeeded in rescuing Eurydice from the underworld is told by Virgil in *Georgics* 4.485-502; she had been killed by a snake in Thrace (see the names in 461ff.). Here the Thracian background is established by Mt. Haemus - also in the Black Sea area, though at the western end. Sutton mistakenly identifies the woman as Cleopatra, who in 30 B.C.E. committed suicide with the aid of an asp in Egypt.

Line 9 Notice the function of the sibilants, the personification of *Spes*, and the juxtaposition of *credulus credulae* (the last being possible only in an inflected language, where the sense is supplied primarily by the endings rather than the word-order).

Line 10 *Jam jam*: the repetition stresses the imminence of the action; cf. Horace, *Odes* 2.20.9; *Epodes* 17.1. But Horace does not repeat the expression in consecutive lines.

Scytha: Russia.

Line 12 *popularis aura*: a phrase used by Horace (*Odes* 3.2.20) to describe the people's shifting favour

Line 14 *sulphureo globo*: literally 'a sulphurous ball'; a striking invention.

Line 17 *perpetuus sopor*: from Horace, *Odes* 1.24.5, on the death of Quintilius.

Line 19 In the interests of metre and sense I have emended Sutton's *carior* to *cariora*.

Line 21 *Sublimiore . . . anhelitu*: in their note on Horace, *Odes* 1.15.31 (*sublimi fugies mollis anhelitu*) Nisbet-Hubbard argued strongly that *sublimis* is used as the equivalent of a Greek medical term meaning 'short' or 'shallow', and that the phrase means 'with short gasps'. In the Loeb volume, perhaps wrongly, I took *sublimi* to

mean, 'head in air', describing a coward fleeing in panic, not looking where he is going. Landor seems to have extended that meaning to 'proud'.

Line 22 The *o* is not elided before *Anglia*, leaving a hiatus.



II

From *Heroic Idylls*, 1863 (Sutton, vol.2, p.152).

Ad Psychen cum catello

Psyche, nobilis es neque es superba,
Idcirco tibi quem petis catellum
Committo tenerum: hunc scio fovebis,
Quantum nescio, nec sciens faterer
Si mollem in gremio sinas cubare 5
Et narem gelidum applices tepenti.
Priscum est huic genus (id manet legendum
In libris veterum sacris) priusquam
Nos essemus homunculi, creatum.
Forti pectore saepe militabat 10
Insignis genitor, minus fidelis
(Aiunt) conjugio: ut pudica proles,
Et constantior ut tibi sit uni,
Hanc collo injice sericam catenam.

To Psyche with her puppy

Psyche, you come from a distinguished family, yet you are not arrogant. That is why I am giving you the young puppy which you want. You will, I'm sure, be kind to him - how kind, I don't know; nor, if I did, would I reveal it if you let the cuddlesome fellow snooze on your lap and put his cold nose against your warm one. He is of ancient stock (that much can be checked in the sacred writings of the men of old) established

before little creatures like ourselves existed. His famous sire often campaigned with a valiant heart, less than faithful, they say, to his marriage. To make sure that his offspring is clean-living and more loyal to you alone, put this lead of silk on his neck.

Commentary

Metre: Hendecasyllables (i.e. eleven syllables).

U _ _ UU _ U _ U _ U

The sight of a pretty girl with a pet reminds Landor of Catullus' poem about Lesbia and her sparrow (no.2); this explains his choice of metre. Catullus claimed to be jealous of the bird - an idea implied here in vv.3-6.

Line 10 *Forti*: because *pectore* needs an adjective, I have printed *forti* in place of Sutton's *forte*.

militabat: this is printed in Sutton's apparatus. I adopt it here in preference to his *militabit*, because the behaviour of the puppy's sire is a matter of rumour (*aiunt* in line 12), which refers to the past as opposed to the future.

It has been suggested that Landor may have adopted the persona of Cupid as his speaker. But this proves unlikely in view of the short sequel (p.154) in which Psyche acknowledges the silken lead but claims that, because of his empty purse, Landor could not manage a lead of gold; this poverty is blamed on the thievery of a priest and of Landor's wife - a pair now laughing at him.