Grass of Parnassus

Grass of Parnassus by Andrew Lang is a poetic collection celebrating nature, mythology, and the depth of human emotion through graceful and evocative verse.

TO RHODOCLEIA - ON HER MELANCHOLY SINGING.

"To Rhodocleia – On Her Melancholy Singing" brings forth a sorrow-drenched vision of a woman frozen in the memory of ancient grief. Within the first notes of her mournful voice, the past stirs—an echo not just of her own pain but of a lost civilization’s quiet dirge. The air around her feels weighted by the unspoken, and her presence becomes an emblem of mourning itself. She does not simply sing of sadness; she embodies the dusk between joy and resignation. The music she creates is not for the living alone, but for those who sleep in tombs, dust-draped and forgotten. Rhodocleia's gaze, described as distant and dimmed, tells of days when the sun felt softer and dreams were less fragile. Yet even in her sorrow, there is grace—a kind of nobility that time has not dared erase.

Her melancholy becomes its own language, one that transcends time and finds resonance in every heart that has known longing. It is not performative but deeply personal, arising from a place where memory burns slow and steady. She sings not to be heard, but because silence would betray the dead. Her voice conjures temples now broken and gardens now overgrown, still fragrant with remembered footsteps. In her tone, one hears the ache of poems once whispered to her in moonlight, their syllables now faded but not forgotten. She is not merely a mourner; she is history's voice, soft and insistent, reminding us that beauty does not always survive joyfully. Even the most cherished flower fades, yet its scent may linger for generations in the soil that

loved it.

There is strength in Rhodocleia’s endurance, for her sadness is not weakness but depth. To remain in grief, while still singing, is to carry more weight than silence ever could. Where others forget and move forward, she stays—an altar to memory and devotion. Those who hear her lament might mistake it for fragility, but it is instead a fierce loyalty to something unspoken. In a world that chases pleasure and speed, her slow, deliberate sorrow offers a sacred stillness. Listeners are drawn not because they seek answers, but because her presence allows them to feel their own buried grief safely. She becomes a mirror, quietly held up to every listener’s hidden ache.

And yet, this chapter does not only drape itself in shadows—it also teaches that mourning can preserve meaning. Through her song, the memory of Rufinus lives not as myth, but as an enduring breath between verses. The poem subtly reminds us that even those long gone are never truly lost if someone continues to sing of them. Rhodocleia's melody is both tribute and defiance—a refusal to let time erase what love once carved in stone. She sings, and in doing so, gives voice to every poet, every lover, every soul who once wept for what was beautiful and fleeting. Her lament is not a farewell, but a binding—tying past to present with threads of sound and silence alike.

This meditation on Rhodocleia invites modern readers to consider their own losses not as voids, but as connections to something larger than self. Memory, it implies, is not just a burden but a bond, a way of holding hands with those who came before. In a world driven by forward motion, the chapter’s stillness offers refuge—a place where feelings need not be rushed, and sorrow can be held with reverence. Rhodocleia’s story, while wrapped in melancholy, speaks not only of endings, but of how deeply we are changed by what we love. She shows us that even the saddest song can carry grace, and that sometimes, it is the mourners who teach the rest of us how to endure.

THE LIMIT OF LANDS.

The Limit of Lands opens with a stillness not born from peace but from distance—the kind that exists between the living and the realms that stretch beyond. Here, the earth does not speak in the voices of birds or the movement of green branches; instead, it whispers through wind over dry grass and through the shadows of stone. The sea marks the furthest edge of what the world allows, lapping gently at the shore as though it too knows this is a place where boundaries blur. No temples remain—only ruins, and no cries rise, only the hush of things ending. In this space, everything waits: the earth, the sea, even the soul, balanced between memory and something unnamed. Like a tide that recedes and returns without fail, this boundary between here and the beyond holds stories that never stop echoing through time.

A path winds through the dust and toward the poplars, sacred to Persephone—the goddess of shadowed realms and returning cycles. Their leaves tremble without wind, and that tremble seems to say what no lips do: that this place is not for the living, but not yet for the dead. Standing there, one feels neither fear nor longing, only a quiet surrender to what must come. The ancients once came here with offerings, hoping for favor or farewell. Now, the altars lie bare, but something in the air still remembers their chants. Time, in this place, moves differently—measured not by hours but by presence and absence, light and the fading of it. It's a setting not of despair, but of final understanding, where grief does not cry out but settles deep in the chest.

Even the sky feels thinner here, as if the gods themselves once walked this land and now watch from behind a veil of mist. The silence carries weight, not from emptiness but from everything it once held—love lost, farewells whispered, journeys paused. To walk this shore is to realize that all longing, whether for people or places or times now past, eventually brings us here, to the edge of what is. There is beauty in that truth, even if it's sharp. To grieve is to have loved, and to stand at the limit of lands is to

honor that love by carrying it, even into the unknown. The sea does not demand tears, but it reflects them back in silver if they fall.

For readers, this chapter invites more than passive reflection—it calls for a pause, a breath taken between action and acceptance. It reminds us that while life hurries forward, certain moments must be met in stillness. These spaces—emotional, spiritual, or even geographic—are the ones that shape us, not through loud declarations but through quiet realizations. The myths of Circe and Persephone offer more than legend; they offer metaphors for transformation. Circe's isle decayed, not because the magic died, but because no joy remains untouched by time. Persephone, with her dual existence, teaches us that part of being whole is knowing both light and shadow.

There is a kind of gentle closure in recognizing these truths. One does not have to carry every wound forever, but neither should they be erased. At the limits of lands, nothing is wasted—not loss, not silence, not the ache that comes with remembering. It is where endings lie, yes, but also where something else may begin—not loudly, but like a faint ripple on the edge of water. And as the mist folds back over the shore and the poplars rustle without wind, there is peace—not in forgetting, but in understanding. The journey may continue, but some part of the heart remains here, grounded in what once was, before it returns again to the world.

THE SHADE OF HELEN

The Shade of Helen opens not with the clang of armor or the shouts of battle, but with a voice drawn from memory and myth—a presence caught between time and truth. From the soft folds of a world untouched by mortal desire, Helen’s shade emerges not as a figure of conquest but of quiet sorrow. She does not ask to be remembered by glory or theft, but by the place where her spirit once walked under rainlight and starlit leaves. That world, marked by stillness and grace, seems more real to her than the chaos she was thrust into. It is not the golden face or fame that defines her now, but the ache of dislocation, the quiet pain of being made a symbol rather than a soul. Her lament is not one of pride but of absence—taken not just from a place, but from the very truth of herself.

The tale reframes Helen not as a temptress or a prize, but as a shadow mistaken for a flame. What fought for her, died for her, and cursed her name was never truly hers. She watches, powerless, as the drama unfolds around a mirage crafted by gods and misunderstood by men. Her essence remained far from Troy, untouched by those who claimed her. The world’s wars and passions were driven not by reality, but by a divine fiction born of vanity and misdirection. Through this, the poem critiques the illusions humans build—and how often, tragically, they believe in them with fatal conviction. Helen’s role becomes an emblem of how far longing can stray when shaped by fantasy rather than truth.

A dreamlike sorrow permeates her monologue, revealing that even the most beautiful among us may feel unseen. She did not choose the desires others cast upon her, nor did she seek the ruin left in her wake. Instead, she mourns the peace that once was hers before the gods spun a tale from clouds and let mortals bleed beneath it. The text draws a striking line between the soul and its reflection, suggesting that identity is not what others see, but what remains within after desire has faded. Her shade feels no

triumph in memory, only a soft despair that no one ever knew her as she truly was. The illusion of love, the madness of kings, and the price of beauty all feel like burdens rather than honors.

This story’s power lies in how it repositions Helen—not as a woman of action, but as a myth haunted by her own story. It becomes a meditation on the tragedy of being loved for a mask, a warning to those who chase ideals without understanding their cost. Her tale reminds readers that truth, once distorted, can cast long shadows across history. In this retelling, war was not waged for love but for a mirage, and Helen’s shade lives on not in triumph but in quiet exile. The longing for home, for simplicity, and for a time untouched by desire becomes a universal theme. Even the most famed are not immune to the grief of being misunderstood.

The deeper value of this chapter lies in its insight into the human condition. Our myths, the ones we hold up as noble or grand, may sometimes be built on shadows and mistaken dreams. Helen’s story, as told here, encourages readers to look past surfaces and question the stories we inherit. In doing so, it challenges us to ask: what illusions do we love? What wars—whether in history or within ourselves—have we fought for things never truly there? Her shade, quiet and unresolved, becomes not just a relic of the past but a mirror to our present. Through poetic restraint and emotional clarity, this chapter evokes the longing not just for truth, but for peace.

Pontus De Tyard, 1570

Pontus De Tyard, 1570 introduces a philosophical meditation that blends poetic sensitivity with emotional clarity, drawing readers into a realm where love, illusion, and grief dance together in delicate tension. It opens with a portrait of a woman whose life, untouched by love, becomes hollow—a succession of routine days with no trace of joy or transformation. Her solitude is not merely loneliness but a condition of existence deprived of beauty, where even wisdom becomes a dull, joyless inheritance. The hope for love, even as a mere echo or passing presence, represents her only path back to vibrancy. In this brief wish, she clings to the belief that love could still bring meaning, or at least offer a graceful conclusion to her sorrow. Love, in this vision, is less a sentiment than a sacred force capable of lifting a soul from the threshold of death back into light.

Yet just as hope flickers, the narrative casts its gaze toward the nature of dreams—a space often believed to level the human condition. Contrary to the idea that all dreamers experience equal delight or respite, Tyard proposes a grimmer view. Dreams are not a shared haven, but mirrors of our private joys and miseries, unfolding in silence. For some, they offer no escape from waking pain but instead a return to scenes of regret or fear. Others might find only haunting illusions of what can never be again. The dream, then, becomes a continuation of life’s unequal burdens—one person’s comfort can be another’s torment, even behind closed eyes. This undermines any comforting notion that sleep is a great equalizer, reinforcing the loneliness and specificity of inner suffering.

The text then journeys further into the mythic realm, revealing another dimension of despair in the transformation of the Sirens. Tyard connects them not merely with danger but with loss—maidens who once lived close to Proserpine before she vanished into the underworld. Their grief, deep and unresolved, remakes them into creatures of

seductive sorrow. Their enchanting voices do not spring from cruelty, but from mourning turned into power, echoing across seas. Sailors do not simply perish from lust; they are pulled into the vacuum of unresolved longing. This myth, reframed through Tyard’s lyrical lens, becomes a metaphor for how beauty born of pain can mesmerize and destroy, blurring the line between salvation and ruin.

In reframing the Sirens' tale, Tyard does more than retell a myth—he builds a meditation on what grief can become if not healed. The Sirens, once tender and loyal, now dwell in isolation, their allure a testament to the destructive power of unresolved attachment. Their transformation suggests that emotional despair, if left unchecked, does not disappear; it evolves into something capable of pulling others under. This reframing turns them into symbols not of danger alone, but of the fate that befalls those unable to let go of beauty lost. Their tragedy is not merely that they destroy, but that they are forever bound to their sorrow, unable to move forward or forget. Tyard invites us to consider: how often do we do the same?

Through these poetic meditations, Tyard constructs a deeply human exploration of longing and sorrow, enhanced by myth and reflection. The message is clear—happiness is not guaranteed, not in dreams, not even in death. What redeems the soul is not avoidance of pain, but the presence of something beautiful to hold onto—even if only for a moment. Love, even as a fleeting idea, remains the only force strong enough to counter the weight of despair. Dreams, myth, and memory may confuse the mind, but love, even when silent or distant, keeps the heart beating in hope. For readers, this serves as a quiet reminder that what rescues us from the darkness may not be grand or everlasting, but often simple and sincere.