

The Hyperion Library of World Literature



THE DAY

MORNING
MIDDAY
EVENING
NIGHT

A Poem by
GIUSEPPE PARINI

Translated into English blank verse, with an
Introduction, Notes and Appendix by

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M.A. (Cantab.)

With a portrait of Parini



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To
MY WIFE
*in gratitude for much help
this translation is inscribed.*

Italian

MORNING

TO FASHION

AWAY from these pages all blear eyes, that
a hundred years have dimmed ! Away all
dew-drop noses of sad old men. 'This is no treatise
on the grave administration of state offices, on
laws severe, or on worrying domestic economy—
that wretched appanage of hoary age. To thee
most charming Goddess who with so easy a bridle
dost curb and guide to-day our brilliant youth,
to thee alone is this tiny book dedicated and
consecrated. Who does not revere and honour
thee as deity supreme now that thou hast achieved
so quick a victory over thy chief enemies, frigid
Reason, pedantic Sense, and withering Rule, and
hast freed from the most ancient bonds this lucky
century ? May it please thee then to take under thy
protection this little Poem, which may thereof
perhaps be not unworthy. Place it on the peaceful
altars where gentle Ladies and amiable Youths
offer the morning hours in sacrifice to themselves.
It covets only this, this alone will be its contentment
and its pride. To have thy better liking, it has
thrown off the yoke of servile rhyme and moves
with freedom in blank verse, knowing that therein
thou hast special pleasure and delight. It does

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not aspire to immortality like other books which, flattered too much by their Authors, have through thy sudden intervention been buried in oblivion. As it is born for thee and consecrated to thee alone, so will it be content to live during such moment only as thou appearest under one and the same aspect while thinking to change thyself and rise again in more graceful forms. If it shall please thee to regard this Morning with gentle eye, perhaps the Midday and the Evening will follow, and their Author will endeavour so to compose and adorn them that thou shalt like them as well as this.

MORNING

Whether, Young Sir, thy blood celestial flow
Most pure by long descent from noble loins,
Or purchas'd dignities the blood's defect
Make good by aid of wealth thy frugal father
5 Amass'd in few short years by sea or land,
Hearken to me, of pleasant Rites the Teacher.

For now I'll show thee how to cheat these days
Of life, these days so slow and wearisome,
Days of annoying dull unending length,
10 Tedium unbearable. And thou shalt know
What cares the Morning, what the Afternoon,
And what the Eventide require of thee,
If 'mid thine hours of leisure there be time
15 To turn thine ears and listen to my verses.

Duty devout thou hast already paid,
In Gallic lands and eke in Albion,
At altars that to Venus hallow'd are
And to the gambler Mercury ; thou bear'st
Imprinted yet the marks of all thy zeal.
20 'Tis time now to repose. In vain doth Mars
Offer to thee his risky comradeship ;
For what a fool's the man who ventures life

1. *Giovin Signore*. The poem is addressed by Parini, not to a special individual but to any young noble. See Introduction.

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- To gain mere honour. And to thee of course
The very thought of blood is odious.
Nor less dost thou abhor the dreary tasks
25 Of Pallas the divine, knowing too well
Those precincts, the forbidding haunts of gloom
Where noble arts and sciences are chang'd
To monsters and to shapes so unsubstantial
That the dread spectres make their ample vaults
30 Ever re-echo with the shrieks of youth.
First then attend and hear what pleasant cares
The easy hand of Morn should bring to thee.
With Dawn the Morning rises, ere the Sun
35 Above the far horizon big appears,
To wake with joy the life of plain and wave
And beast and herb. Then the good countryman
Quits his dear bed warm'd through the chilly night
By company of faithful spouse and babes ;
40 And shouldering the sacred implements
Ceres and Pales anciently devis'd,
Drives the slow ox before him toward the field ;
And as he moves along the narrow path
Stirring the dainty curving boughs he shakes
The dewy drops that glistening refract
45 Gem-like the young rays of the Sun. Then too
Rises the smith, once more the sounding forge

16-30. Venus and Mercury, Love and Gaming ; Mars,
War ; Pallas, Learning. The young hero is exhausted by a tour
that included London and Paris.

41. Ceres, Goddess of corn ; Pales, of pastures.

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- He opens and again his hand he sets
To works begun, though yesternight unfinish'd ;
Whether he labour to secure with key
Of puzzling wards and iron engines strong
50 The coffer'd wealth of the uneasy rich,
Or cunningly with gold and silver chasing
To ornament such jewell'd toys and vases
As may adorn the bride or deck the table.
But what ? The very sound of these my words
Sets thee aquake ? Lifts upright on thy head
Hair bristling like the prickly porcupine ?
55 Ah, such is not thy morning Sir, 'tis true ;
No frugal meal at sunset didst thou share ;
By the uncertain twilight didst not seek
Thy rest in bedding rude and comfortless
60 As th' humble crowd are all condemn'd to do.
For you, offspring of heav'n, for you great
council
Of earthly Demigods, another lot
Hath Jove benign ordain'd ; by a new way,
With other arts and laws, 'tis mine to guide you.
Far later were the hours of night prolong'd
65 By thee among th'assemblies, and the scenes
Of vocal stage, and haunts of poignant play.
Tired at last, in golden coach reclining,
With hurrying rattling wheels and crashing din
70 Of flying horse-hoofs, far and wide thou shook'st
The still nocturnal air, while round thee shining

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The flame of thy proud torches broke the gloom,
 75 As once dark Pluto's chariot made re-echo
 The whole Sicilian land from sea to sea,
 While bridal torches and the snaky locks
 Of Furies shone in dazzling pomp before him.

Such thy majestic home-coming ; but here
 Awaited thee fresh duties at the table
 O'erspread with pungent foods, and joyous wines
 80 Grown on the hills of France, of Tuscany,
 Of Spain, or glowing in the Hungarian bottle
 That Bacchus with green ivy crown'd, and said
 Sit there, the tables' queen. Somnus at last
 85 With his own hand shook up the downy bed
 That now receiv'd thee, while thy faithful servant
 Lower'd the silken curtains, and the note
 Of cock-crow sweetly lull'd thee fast asleep
 With the same voice that calls the world awake.

90 Right is it then that from thy weary senses
 Morpheus lift not the poppies' clinging spell

71-76. Pluto carrying off Proserpine to the Lower Regions. The Giovin Signore would before coming home conduct his Lady to her husband's palace (cf. 414-420). There was no public lighting in Milan till 1786, when lanterns hung out in the streets were introduced (cf. "Night," 74-76, also Cantù and Mazzoni). It was a privilege of the nobles to be preceded at night by running footmen with torches.

81-83. i.e. Tokay, as noted by Cantù. Ivy was sacred to Bacchus, god of wine.

84. Somnus, god of sleep.

91-92. Morpheus, son of Somnus. The poppy an attribute of Morpheus. The tenacity of its juice, opium, is poetically extended to the drowsiness following sleep.

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Till the full blaze of day by chinks and crannies
 Of thy gilt shutters try to filter through,
 95 And draw faint patterns on thy chamber wall
 In little gleams from yon high radiant Sun
 That hangs above thy head. Now here should be
 The very first of all the cares that fill
 With elegance thy day ; and here should I
 Unmoor and steer my boat on voyage of song
 100 With precepts apt for noble enterprises.

90-100. Dominici's synopsis of the four divisions of the Giovin Signore's Day may perhaps be usefully amplified as follows :—

The Day of the Giovin Signore

Morning :

He wakes ; Receptions and Toilet.

From about noon when the sun is overhead ("Morning" 90-100) till the sun is sinking westward and the shadows lengthen ("Midday" 24-28).

Midday :

He attends the Lady's Toilet-reception and Dinner.

From the westering of the sun ("Midday" 24-28), till sunset ("Evening" 1-25).

Evening :

Drive with the Lady ; Visits ; Corso.

From sunset ("Evening" 1-25) till descent of night with humid veil ("Evening" 495-510), stars ("Night" 140-147), and darkness ("Night" 4-28, 69-76).

Night :

(1) He attends a great assembly with the Lady.

From nightfall and indoors-lighting-up ("Night" 37-54, 170-171, 194-196), till dawn and cock-crow ("Morning" 65-89).

(2) He rests.

From dawn ("Morning" 65-89) till about noon ("Morning" 90-100).

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Already have the courteous valets heard
 Near them the clang of metal, that thy hand
 Afar set ringing. Promptly did they run,
 Threw back the jealous boards that hid the light,
 105 And set a steady guard lest Phoebus' shafts
 In flight direct should dare thine eyes to wound.
 Lift now thyself ever so little, and lean
 On gently yielding pillows that afford
 110 Thy shoulder soft support. Then lightly, lightly
 Gliding thy right fore-finger o'er thine eyes
 To clear the last of the Cimmerian mist,
 And forming with the lips a tiny bow
 115 Sweet to behold, yawn silently. Ah me,
 Couldst thou in act so delicate be seen
 By the stern Captain, who on battlefield
 Uttering with twisted lips a shout that rends
 All well-made ears to pieces, guides the squadrons
 120 Hither and thither, ah could he but see
 Thy fair example what deep shame were his !
 Shame bitt'rer than Minerva's on the day
 When playing on the flute, her cheeks puff'd out,
 So foul a face was in the brook reflected.

101-113. Parini's hero has the advantage of a cord- or wire-hung bell over Pope's Belinda, whose bell needed also a knock on the floor with a slipper. The "Rape of the Lock" was printed in 1712, before house bells worked with wires were introduced. Phoebus, the sun-god of the Greeks. The mythical Cimmerians lived in the dimness of eternal fog.

122-124. Minerva, goddess of wisdom and the arts, having invented the flute, was mocked by Juno and Venus for the

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125 But now behold, thy page well comb'd and neat
 Enters again. He seeks to know thy choice,
 Which of the wonted bev'rages to-day
 In precious cup thou wouldst prefer to drink ;
 130 Choose as thou wilt, all from the Indies came
 Both cups and drinks. If hot sweet draughts
 to-day
 Be best to offer for thy stomach's comfort,
 That so temp'ring by rule the natural warmth
 With something warm, digestion be the gainer,
 Choose chocolate, brown tribute sent to thee
 135 By Guatemalans and those Caribbeans
 Who dress their hair so barb'rously in feathers.
 Should hypochondria's torments thee oppress,
 Or thy fair form to corpulence incline,
 140 Then honour with thy lips the nectar flowing
 Steaming and fragrant from the roasted bean
 That far Aleppo sent, or Mocha proud
 For ever busy with a thousand ships.
 'Twas well indeed that from its ancient home
 145 A kingdom issued, and with venturous sails

grimace she made in playing it ; and to satisfy herself she looked at her face in a fountain. Finding they were right, she threw the flute away and cursed any who should find it. Marsyas was the victim.

134-136. Chocolate, so called from the Mexican word "Chocolatl", part of the Spaniards' acquisition from conquests in America.

140-143. Coffee from Syria or Arabia.

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Challenged the tempests of a stranger sea,
 Encounter'd wondrous monsters and withstood
 Dangers and fears and hunger pitiless
 Spurning the bounds age-long inviolate.

- 150 Sure, Cortes and Pizarro justly deem'd
 The blood that flowed in limbs of human form
 Beyond the Ocean was no human blood ;
 So thunders and explosions they ordain'd,
 And, heeding ne'er a whisper of compassion,
 They headlong flung from high ancestral thrones
 155 Mexican Kings and noble Incas too.
 Surely, 'twas very just and right, for so
 There came for thee, thou jewel among heroes,
 A new delight to soothe thy palate.

Heav'n,

- Oh Heav'n forbid that at this very moment,
 When at thy ready lips the chosen cup
 160 Thou hast, a servant indiscreet announce
 To thee all unexpectedly the tailor,
 The villain tailor who, not glad enough
 That he has shar'd with thee the richest silks,
 Dares yet present an endless bill and ask
 Payment as well. Alas, that wholesome drink

144-157. Cortes (b. 1485, d. 1554) conqueror of Mexico, Pizarro (d. 1541) of Peru. Their overthrow of those civilizations, and the severities of the conquerors—praised by the poet for the reason given—are a strong, if rather evident example of Parini's irony.

164. See Appendix.

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- 165 'Twould sour in the digestion, and thou'dst utter
 At home, abroad, at theatre or Corso,
 Plebeian eructations all day long.

- Yet one there is, welcome at any hour ;
 Though unexpected, never let him wait
 170 To be announc'd. It is the sweet preceptor
 Who guides thy steps and checks them at his
 pleasure.

- Crossing the threshold let him pause upright,
 Then tortoise-like he should his shoulders raise,
 175 Draw in his neck a little while the chin
 Sinks downward, and he gently brings to 's lip
 The very brim's edge of his plumèd hat.

- Seek thou as freely too my Lord's bedside,
 180 Skill'd tutor of the pliant voice to sing
 In moving strains ; and thou who show'st the way
 To stir the strings under a master's bow,
 And thrill the hollow wood in harmony.

- My Lord, there's yet one more, the choicest gem
 185 Of the resplendent crown about thy bed ;
 He's just arriv'd from Seine, the Graces' mother,
 Bringing divine ambrosia to sprinkle
 Upon the lips of sicken'd Italy.

- 190 When he appears, the clipped Italian words
 Must yield before their despot. The new accents

169-223. At the young hero's *petit lever*, his dancing-, music- and French-masters have the right of entry.

190-191. Clipp'd : The last syllables being dropped by a

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Disorder or confuse them, but distinct
And clear retrieve them from their resting places
At need, and so present them to the mind.

Meanwhile the vulgar on whose low behalf
I'd never lift the veil of mysteries

240 Thus venerable, will be well content
Watching from time to time thy palace door
To see the famous masters of the arts
Go in and out ; and oh how wide they'll gape,
And swallow stupified thy words of wisdom !

But now I see thou can'st no longer bear

245 The lazy blankets, and in vain do sloth
And warmth allure thee with caressing comfort.
A nobler wish besets thy soul exalted,
The high desire to spend the hours of day.

Up then, ye servants of the loftiest rank,

250 Ministers undefil'd, worthy to wait
Upon the bodies of exalted lords ;
'The panoply of my divine Achilles,
Of my Rinaldo, bring. See in a flash
Thy valets prompt t' obey thy signs. They fly
255 To the thick o' the work. One robes thee in silk
gown

That's branch'd all over with Chinese device ;
Another, if cold weather should require,

252-253. Achilles, famed in Homer's *Iliad* ; Rinaldo, in Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso", and in Tasso's "Gerusalemme Liberata".

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With good warm furs will swathe thee to the feet.

260 Here's one fits to the body a white apron
Whose ample folds drop to protect the hose.
From beak of crystal which another tilts
Above thy hands sweet-scented waters flow
In downward stream, and from thy hands again

265 He catches them within a limpid bowl.
Soaps do they offer thee that spread around
Odours of musk reviv'd ; and the crush'd fruit
O' the Rhodopean tree that long ago
Was a fair maid ; lamenting still in vain,
Oh Demophon, oh come my Demophon,

270 Through deathless change she calls unchangingly.
Now one presents to thee a dripping sponge
Soak'd in sweet essences thy teeth to cleanse ;
And one, to give thy cheeks their white complexion,
With ready hand a liquor fit prepares.

275 Enough about thyself : now for a little
Devote thy thoughts to one who's not unworthy
Even of thee. Thou know'st that heav'n appoints
To the young Lord a partner feminine,
The weary burden of this life inert

280 With him to share. Thou'rt pale at once ? Nay
nay,

267-274. *Del redivivo muschio*, i.e. the musk-deer living again in the fragrance. *Che a Ródope fu già vaga donzella*, alluding to the old story of Phyllis who, in despair at the long absence of Demophon, slew herself and was changed into an almond tree. *Util licore*, according to Mazzoni, white lead, ceruse.

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As when, alighting with thee from the coach,
As thy prompt helping hand was offer'd her
'Twas with a sportive smile that she declin'd it
420 Mounting the wide stairs of her husband's
dwelling.

But let not that content thine anxious mind ;
Never let duties so imperative
Forgotten be. Alas, how many demons
Love to come out in the nocturnal horror
425 And charge with peril the calm rest of mortals.

Perchance, which heav'n forbid, the little dog
Might interrupt the dear dreams of thy Lady
With sudden barks ; and she convulsively
430 Shrink shivering, while the cold sweat her face
And the soft pillow bath'd. Nay worse, the maker
Of happy dreams and sad might new compound
One awful medley of ideas diverse,

435 A dread chimera to appal her mind ;
In breathless agitation and affright,
Try as she may to cry she cannot cry
Nor any sob escape her strangl'd throat.

440 Often besides, the golden money lost
At play i' th' ev'ning just gone by doth bring
No less the Lady than the Cavalier
Long wakefulness. Sometimes again the cause
Is noble envy of the beauteous friend
Admir'd by many ; or again sometimes

432-435. The maker of dreams, Morpheus.

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445 A jealous fit 'twill be. Then too the husbands
Importunate, revolving o'er and o'er
Within their minds the ancient usages,
And thinking what a mighty deed they've done
Yielding the day to others, love to keep
450 With superstition the just claims of Hymen
And to be tyrants of nocturnal shades,
Rather to their chaste wives' alarm, who thus
Foresee in a few years their freshest bloom
Of beauty snatch'd away.

455 Now Sir thou'rt taught
With what unhappy and how many chances
Night's dread alarms are wont to plague the
Ladies,

So be not slow to ask the news of thine.

Yet while thy faithful messenger's away
460 Thou wilt not pass the time in idleness
My noble Lord. E'en now through the sweet land
The worthy peasant's following the plough,
Hard'ning his hand, rejoicing that his sweat
465 Shall yield gilt coaches and rare feasts for thee.

Now for thy sake the diligent mechanic
Is plying chisel, axe and beam and needle,
On thy behalf the minister of Themis
Is watching or contending. Here behold,

455-458. See Appendix.

466-467. i.e. Mason, carpenter, weaver and tailor.

468-469. Themis, goddess of justice ; her ministers, lawyers,
and perhaps in Parini's intention partial magistrates.

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- 470 For thee the *toilette* waits ; e'en nature's worth
 And beauty thus by art thou shalt increase,
 So that thou may'st in going forth to-day
 Blessing the people with such view benign
 Gratefully pay the world for all its labours.
- 475 But now three times and four with rapid steps
 My Lord the room has cross'd, his hair dishevell'd
 And o'er his shoulders spread ; so us'd to look
 The terrible Cumæan Sorceress
 When, shaken by the spirit's pow'r, aloud
- 480 She prophesied. Thus from his head he caus'd
 The harmful ferment to evaporate

470. *Toilette*, strictly the fine linen cover spread over a dressing table ; hence the table and apparatus, and the act of dressing. It has been remarked that some of the variants have *teletta* and *tavoletta*, Italian forms ; as if later Parini wished to escape from the French phrase. There had however appeared in Italian, already in the seventeenth century, the forms *toilette*, *toelette*, and *tuelette* (cf. Mazzoni, Dominici).

474. See Appendix.

479-480. Virgil (*Æneid*, vi, 47-51) describes the Cumæan Sybil's frenzy at the approach of Phœbus : a passage which Dryden (70-79) thus translates :—

Thus while she said
 (And shiv'ring at the sacred entry staid),
 Her colour chang'd ; her face was not the same ;
 And hollow groans from her deep spirit came.
 Her hair stood up ; convulsive rage possess'd
 Her trembling limbs, and heav'd her lab'ring breast.
 Greater than human kind she seem'd to look,
 And with an accent more than mortal spoke.
 Her staring eyes with sparkling fury roll ;
 When all the god came rushing on her soul.

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- Of sprinkl'd oils and powders that might gnaw
 The tender skin, or e'en the temples stab
- 485 Atrociously with headache. Now behold him
 Seated and wrapp'd around in snowy linen.
 In front of him the mirror seemingly
 Takes pride to hold within its heart the form
 Divine and aid those eyes' strict scrutiny
 Upon thine ever-varying handiwork,
- 490 Oh Architect o' the beautiful hair. Around him
 A thousand odours float, which daintily
 The zephyr loves to rob from various
 Pomatums, clogging with its unguent breath
 The lightest wing of butterfly that roams
- 495 About the vases. First do thou inquire
 His pleasure wherewithal thou shalt besprinkle
 The hair ; if jess'mine or white orange flower,
 Jonquil or amber priz'd in days gone by.
 But if the married Lady whom my Lord
- 500 Holds dear suffer the nuptial pains, and now
 The tender flanks have cast a tedious burden,
 Ah then beware of scents, shun shun them all,
 Lest thou become of three lives in one moment
 Th' insidious murderer. So simple be
- 505 In such event thy balsams, nor thou hasty

490. i.e. The hairdresser, who at that period used to build up the hair or the wig in marvels of craftsmanship. The whole passage, 475-565, is addressed to him.

498. *L'ambra* ; extract of ambergris (cf. Dominici).

503-504. See Appendix.

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To use them ere the nostrils of my Lord,
And thine, upon them make decision. Then
Take thou in hand the polish'd comb, and plough
With the blunt tooth light furrows through the
tresses ;

510 Disturb them too and tease them with the comb ;
Bring them at last into a comely order,
The artistry of thine adaptive mind.

Though short my words yet long thy task will be,
Nor ended ere more strange events entangle
515 And cut the thread of thine emprise. Pray watch
The mirror closely, there thou'lt see my Lord
Not seldom bite impatiently his lips,
His face flush red. Often again thou'lt hear
If thy right hand be not to-day so cunning
520 Sharp frequent stamps of his convulsive foot
With curt articulation of the voice
In threats and condemnations. Be prepar'd
Even to see sometimes my gentle Lord

525 In furious agitation, both his hands
Plung'd in his hair, his finger-nails in a second
Tumbling the studious work of many an hour.
What more ? If some unlucky day the fancy
Possess thee the head's edifice to build
530 Harmonious to his face, and thou forget
To take thy rule from him who yesterday
Arriv'd from France, alas for thee poor wretch,
What cruel thunderbolt hangs o'er thy pate !

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For thou shalt see thy Lord rise to his feet
535 And pouring from his eyes disdain and wrath
Curse thee with thousand torments. And to make
Thy shame the greater he shall condescend
The foul words of the vulgar to usurp,
Threaten thy back to cudgel, ev'ry thing
540 Hurl topsy-turvy scattering the floor
With crystal fragments, crisping irons and pots
And combs all in an instant. Even so,
When at the altar of the Thunderer
Or of the Goddess who from Nile recover'd
545 The emblem vile, the bull his bonds did burst
All double-knotted and escap'd at large,
There was a sight to see upon the ground,
Ruin of tripods and divining rods
With axes, bandages and cups and knives !
Trembl'd the arch'd vaults with hideous echo
550 Of bellowings, on ev'ry side pale priests
And standers-by slipp'd quick away to cover
From shock and fury of the savage beast,
Who once in flow'ry girth so quietly
His gilded horns beneath the sacred hand
555 Humble presented. Take thou heart however
And bravely suffering preserve thyself
For better fortune. Like a fire of straw
Is fire of anger in a noble heart.
Soon shalt thou see my Lord so tractable

543-544. i.e. At a sacrifice to Zeus or to Isis.