

Michael Field
“The Sleeping Venue”
GIORGIONE
The Dresden Gallery (1892)

Here is Venus by our homes
And resting on the verdant swell
Of a soft country flanked with mountain domes:
She has left her arched shell,
Has left the barren wave that foams,
Amid earth's fruitful tilths to dwell.

Nobly lighted while she sleeps
As sward-lands or the corn-field sweeps,
Pure as are the things that man
Needs for life and using can
Never violate nor spot---
Thus she slumbers in no grot.
But on open ground,
With the great hill-sides around.

And her body has the curves,
The same extensive smoothness seen
In yonder breadths of pasture, in the swerves
Of the grassy mountain-green
That for her propping pillow serves:
There is a sympathy between
Her and Earth of largest reach,
For the sex that forms them each
Is a bond, a holiness,
That unconsciously must bless
And unite them, as they lie
Shameless underneath the sky
A long, opal cloud
Doth in noontide haze enshroud.

O'er her head her right arm bends;
And from the elbow raised aloft
Down to the crossing knees a line descends
Unimpeachable and soft
As the adjacent slope that ends
In chequered plain of hedge and croft.
Circular as lovely knolls,
Up to which a landscape rolls
With desirous sway, each breast
Rises from the level chest,
One in contour, one in round---
Either exquisite, low mound
Firm in shape and given
To the August warmth of heaven.

With bold freedom of incline,

With an uttermost repose,
From hip to herbage-cushioned foot the line
Of her left leg stretching shows
Against the turf direct and fine,
Dissimilar in grace to those
Little bays that in and out
By the ankle wind about;
Or that shallow bend, the right
Curled-up knee has brought to sight
Underneath its bossy rise,
Where the loveliest shadow lies!
Charmed umbrage rests
On her neck and by her breasts.

Her left arm remains beside
The plastic body's lower heavens,
Controlled by them, as when a river-side
With its sandy margin weaves
Deflections in a lenient tide;
Her hand the thigh's tense surface leaves,
Falling inward. Not even sleep
Dare invalidate the deep,
Universal pleasure sex
Must unto itself annex---
Even the stillest sleep; at peace,
More profound with rest's increase,
She enjoys the good
Of delicious womanhood.

Cheek and eyebrow touch the fold
Of the raised arm that frames her hair,
Her braided hair in colour like to old
Copper glinting here and there:
While through her skin of olive-gold
The scarce carnations mount and share
Faultlessly the oval space
Of her temperate, grave face.
Eyelids underneath the day
Wrinkle as full buds that stay,
Through the tranquil, summer hours,
Closed although they might be flowers;
The red lips shut in
Gracious secrets that begin.

On white drapery she sleeps,
That fold by fold is stained with shade;
Her mantle's ruddy pomegranate in heaps
For a cushion she has laid
Beneath her; and the glow that steeps
Its grain of richer depth is made
By an overswelling bank,
Tufted with dun grasses rank.

From this hillock's outer heaves
One small bush defines its leaves
Broadly on the sober blue
The pale cloud-bank rises to,
Whilst it sinks in bland
Sunshine on the distant land.

Near her resting-place are spread,
In deep or greener-lighted brown,
Wolds, that half-withered by the heat o'erhead,
Press up to a little town
Of castle, archway, roof and shed,
Then slope in grave continuance down:
On their border, in a group,
Trees of brooding foliage droop
Sidelong; and a single tree
Springs with bright simplicity,
Central from the sunlit plain.
Of a blue no flowers attain,
On the fair, vague sky
Adamantine summits lie.

And her resting is so strong
That while we gaze it seems as though
She had lain thus the solemn glebes among
In the ages far ago
And would continue, till the long,
Last evening of Earth's summer glow
In communion with the sweet
Life that ripens at her feet:
We can never fear that she
From Italian fields will flee,
For she does not come from far,
She is of the things that are;
And she will not pass
While the sun strikes on the grass.