

**PASTELS
IN PROSE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649668106

Pastels in Prose by Stuart Merrill

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

STUART MERRILL

**PASTELS
IN PROSE**



Copyright, 1899, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

PG
1278
M4

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA BARBARA



THE literary form known as a Prose Poem is, like the Song without Words in music, a peculiarly modern invention; I believe it is even more recent, and it is even more subtly suggestive. I do not mean that poetical prose has not always been written; it has not been so much written as prosaic poetry; but our language abounds in noble passages of it, and it will always be written as often as a lift of profound feeling gives thinking wings. Of course one recurs to the greatest Book of all when one speaks of this, and to the sublime passages scattered throughout both Testaments. In a measure the whole Bible is a prose poem in our version, and in the Bible Job and Ecclesiastes are notably prose poems, and in every prophet and every apostle there are passages of the noblest prose poetry. In fact, every strain of eloquence is a strain of

poetry; every impassioned plea or oration is a poem in prose. At times, at all times, deep emotion takes on movement and cadence, and the curious have often selected rhythmical passages from prose authors, and given them the typographical form of poetry, to show how men might be poets without knowing it. Indeed, some writers have intentionally imparted to their prose the flow of verse, as if one should modulate his walk to a dancing step, and have produced a vicious kind in literature, which is as different as possible from the Poem in Prose as the French have cultivated it.

I do not know whether Tourguénief, in his Prose Poems, which sound depths and reach heights untouched by the form before or since, received or gave an impulse in this irregular species of composition; perhaps he did both; but I am sure that the reader of the exquisite pieces in this book will be sensible of qualities and cognizant of traits common to them all, which they have in common with the kindred work of that very great artist. It seems to me that first of everything the reader will notice the beautiful reticence which characterizes them, as if the very freedom which the poets had found in their emancipation from the artificial tram-

mels of verse had put them on their honor, as it were, and bound them to brevity, to simplicity; as if they felt the responsibility they were under to be even more laconic, more delicate, more refined than they might have been in openly confessing the laws of prosody. What struck me most was that apparently none of them had abused his opportunity to saddle his reader with a moral. He had expressed his idea, his emotion, and then left it to take its chance, in a way very uncommon in English verse, at least, and equalled only, so far as I know, in some of the subtle felicities of Heinrich Heine. One would have thought it must fall out in just the other way; that the poet, having all the liberties of prose in his right, could not fail to explain and expound himself, and to make the application. But no; he fashions his pretty fancy on his lovely inspiration; sets it well on the ground, poises it, goes and leaves it. The thing cannot have been easy to learn, and it must always be most difficult to do, for it implies the most courageous faith in art, the finest respect for others, the wisest self-denial.

I do not know the history of the French Poem in Prose, but I am sure that, as we say in our graphic slang, it has come to stay.

It is a form which other languages must naturalize; and we can only hope that criticism will carefully guard the process, and see that it is not vulgarized or coarsened in it. The very life of the form is its aerial delicacy, its soul is that perfume of thought, of emotion, which these masters here have never suffered to become an argument. Its wonderful refinement, which is almost fragility, is happily expressed in the notion of "Pastels;" and more than once, forgetting that modern invention has found a way of fixing the chinks, I have felt, in going over these little pieces, that the slightest rudeness of touch might shake the bloom, the color, from them. As it is, I am certain they must be approached with sympathy by whoever would get all their lovely grace, their charm that comes and goes like the light in beautiful eyes.

W. D. HOWELLS.

NEW YORK, *April*, 1890.

A decorative, ornate frame with intricate scrollwork and floral motifs, enclosing the title text.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

SPECIAL acknowledgments are due to MM. Ephraïm Mikhaël, Pierre Quillard, and Achille Delaroche for the prose poems entitled, respectively, "Solitude," "The Brothers-at-Arms," and "The Conquering Dream," which were written for this volume; to Mme. Émile Hennequin for the six prose poems, by her late husband, selected by her for the translator from among hitherto unpublished manuscripts; and to MM. Catulle Mendès and Stéphane Mallarmé for their courtesy in enabling the translator to include in this collection versions of prose poems from the final proof-sheets of their new volumes.

S. M.