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*De Rosis Nascentibus* from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century:

A Collection of English Translations

Stuart Gillespie

*De Rosis Nascentibus* is a poem with a remarkable reception history. Once part of the *Appendix Vergiliana*, it was later assigned to Ausonius when Jerome Aleander, around 1515, found an ancient manuscript of miscellaneous works in which it had been placed immediately after one of Ausonius' best-known poems. This traditional modern ascription to Ausonius lost favour over time, and was rejected by his late nineteenth-century editors Peiper and Schenkl, but Roger Green, whose editorial work on Ausonius has helped reawaken interest in the poet in recent years, would countenance its revival.<sup>1</sup> While such debates may make little or no perceptible difference to how translators have approached the work, it is a quirk of literary history that few ancient Latin poets had more familiar names in the early modern world than the now little-read Ausonius, and perhaps no poem then given to him was better known than this. The tradition of which these translations form a part also flows (one would suppose increasingly so as time goes on) from the wider response to this poem which shows itself in direct or indirect echoes from the sixteenth century onwards, most famously for Anglophone readers in Herrick's 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may', but often in play at some level when poets take roses for their subject.

Criticism and scholarship provide few useful reference points for these translations. Giovanni Cupaiuolo's book-length study and edition of the Latin poem is not concerned with English versions, and indeed claims that poetic responses around Europe are largely confined to the short period 1550-1700.<sup>2</sup> Those interested in translations into French and German will

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<sup>1</sup> *The Works of Ausonius*, edited by R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1991), p. 669.

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Cupaiuolo, *Il 'De rosis nascentibus': Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento* (Rome, 1984), p. 104.

find the best-known examples on the site <[http://dick.wursten.be/ausonius\\_rosa.htm](http://dick.wursten.be/ausonius_rosa.htm)>; numerous additional examples could be assembled. Wursten's linked 'Florilegium' page also includes a few imitations of, responses to, and smaller-scale borrowings from the poem (such as Herrick's). Synoptic critical discussions of such responses are a rarity, but they include H. M. Richmond's *The School of Love*, 1964, which now reads as something of a product of its time in characterizing the Latin poem as lacking 'the economy and energy of much great art'.<sup>1</sup> A still stronger period flavour attaches to J. M. Symonds' essay on 'The Pathos of the Rose in Poetry',<sup>2</sup> but this at least points to a wide range of sources and connections, linking the influence of *De Rosis* with that of Catullus C62 on poets English and European down to Waller.

Over time, successive editors have slightly modified the Latin text, so that no single redaction could fully represent what all these translators were using. The Latin text given here follows Loeb, which has the effect of suppressing one line which would have appeared in some earlier translators' texts.<sup>3</sup> For a plain prose version (Item 2 below), Hugh G. Evelyn-White's Loeb translation of 1919 has been adjusted. The ensuing English treatments are in date order, and the texts given without editorial intervention beyond the explicit correction of one or two intrusive printing or scribal errors.

The latest translation known to me is David Slavitt's (in *The Gnat and other Poems of Virgil*, 2011); unlike those included here, this is easily obtainable from libraries and

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<sup>1</sup> H. M. Richmond, *The School of Love: The Evolution of the Stuart Love Lyric* (Princeton, NJ, 1964), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive* (London, 1890), pp. 346-64.

<sup>3</sup> Before later editors discarded it as inauthentic, this appeared after line 9, and it is translated in Items 3 and 5 below: 'et caelestis aquae pondere tunc gravidas'.

bookshops. I am indebted to Andrew Radford for pointing out the version by Evelyn Martinengo-Cesaresco.

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\* \* \*

1

DE ROSIS NASCENTIBUS

VER erat et blando mordenti a frigore sensu  
spirabat croceo mane revecta dies.  
strictior eoos praecesserat aura iugales  
aestiferum suadens anticipare diem.  
errabam riguis per quadrua compita in hortis 5  
maturo cupiens me vegetare die.  
vidi concretas per gramina flexa pruinas  
pendere aut holerum stare cacuminibus,  
caulibus et teretes patulis concludere guttas  
vidi Paestano gaudere rosaria cultu 10  
exoriente novo roscida lucifero.  
rara pruinosis canebat gemma fructectis  
ad primi radios interitura die.  
Ambigeres, raperetne rosis Aurora ruborem  
an daret et flores tingeret orta dies. 15  
ros unus, color unus et unum mane duorum;  
sideris et floris nam domina una Venus.  
forsan et unus odor: sed celsior ille per auras

diffluit: expirat proximus iste magis.

communis Paphie dea sideris et dea floris 20

praecipit unius muricis esse habitum.

Momentum intererat, quo se nascentia florum  
germina conparibus dividerent spatiis.

haec viret angusto foliorum tecta galero,  
hanc tenui folio purpura rubra notat. 25

haec aperit primi fastigia celsa obelisci  
mucronem absolvens purpurei capitis.

vertice collectos illa exsinuabat amictus,  
iam meditans foliis se numerare suis:

nec mora: ridentis calathi patefecit honorem 30  
prodens inclusi semina densa croci.

haec modo, quae toto rutilaverat igne comarum  
pallida conlapsis deseritur foliis.

mirabar celerem fugitiva aetate rapinam  
et, dum nascuntur, consenuisse rosas. 35

ecce et defluxit rutili coma punica floris,  
dum loquor, et tellus tecta rubore micat.

tot species tantosque ortus variosque novatus  
una dies aperit, conficit ipsa dies.

Conquerimur, Natura, brevis quod gratia talis: 40  
ostentata oculis illico dona rapis.

quam longa una dies, aetas tam longa rosarum:  
cum pubescenti iuncta senecta brevis.

quam modo nascentem rutilus conspexit Eous,

hanc rediens sero vespere vidit anum. 45  
 sed bene, quod paucis licet interitura diebus  
 succedens aevum prorogat ipsa suum.  
 collige, virgo, rosas, dum flos novus et nova pubes,  
 et memor esto aevum sic properare tuum.

## 2

## Of Budding Roses

It was spring-time, and the day - brought back by saffron morn - was breathing softly after the biting cold. A shrewder air had run before dawn, moving me to forestall heat-bringing day. I was straying along the paths dividing the well-watered garden-plots, seeking to drink in the freshness of day's prime. I saw the rime hanging upon the bending grass or resting on the tops of garden herbs, and round drops rolling together upon the cabbage-leaves. I saw such rose-beds as Paestum cultivates shining with dew, at the new light (Morning Star) of the day. Upon the frosted bushes a white pearl glimmered here and there, to perish at the earliest rays of day. One might doubt whether Aurora steals blushes from the rose, or dayrise donates its colours to these flowers. One is the dew, one the tint, one the morn of both; for Venus is the one queen both of the morning-star and of the flower. Perhaps, too, one is their fragrance - but *that* is diffused on the breezes far above us; *this*, near at hand, breathes forth a sweetness more perceptible. The queen of Paphos, goddess of the star and flower alike, bids both be habited in one purple hue.

The time was just at hand for the teeming buds to split in equal segments. One is close capped with a covering of green leaves; another flecks her narrow sheath with ruddy purple; a third is opening the tip of her tapering spire and freeing the point of her crimson head. Another was disengaging at her peak her furled array, already planning to take count of herself with her petals. Then on a sudden she has laid open the glories of her smiling calyx, displaying the close-packed saffron seeds which lie within. Another, which but late had glowed with all the fires of her bloom, now fades, abandoned by her falling petals. I marvelled at the swift ruin wrought by the fleeting season, to see the roses all withered even while they bloom. See, even while I speak, a glowing flower has shed the ruddy honours of its head, and earth gleams, carpeted with crimson. These many forms, these various births and changes, a day brings forth and the same day ends.

Nature, we grieve that such beauty is short lived: once displayed to our eyes, immediately you snatch away your gifts. As long as is one day, so long is the life of the rose; her brief youth and age go hand in hand. The flower which the bright Morning Star beheld just being born, he sees, returning with late evening, a withered thing. But it is well; for though in a few days the rose must die, she springs anew, prolonging her own life. So, girl, gather the roses, while the bloom and your youth is fresh, and remember that so your lifetime hastes away.

## 3

John Ashmore, 1621

Ashmore's *The Poems of Horace, Englished* (London, 1621) was the first substantial selection of Horace to be translated into that language: it contained seventeen odes. It also contained a longer section of what the title page goes on to describe as 'poems (antient and modern) of diverse subjects, translated', and here (pp. 51-3) is found a version of *De Rosis Nascentibus*. Ashmore, who probably came from Ripon in Yorkshire, published no other known works, and his life is obscure, but the idea of this pocket volume of translations was in its small way a model which other writers, including further translators of Horace, soon followed.

*To the vertuous, and fairley spreading Buds  
of Beautie, Mistris Marie, Francis, and Ioane Metcalf,  
daughters of Sir Thomas Metcalf, Knight,  
he dedicates these Roses.*

*Ex Ausonio*

It's Spring, the Day, by fair *Aurora* led,  
Breath'd cooly; yet the Sense with pleasure fed:  
Quick Aire before the Eastern Steeds did run,  
Advising to prevent the scorching Sun.  
Then rov'd I in a garden by a spring;  
Where to delight me fitted every thing.  
A candid Pearle upon each grass-pile hung:  
Nor springly Pearles on the hearbes were flung:  
On cawles of Cobweb-lawne, glaz'd spangles plaid;

Which full of heavenly liquor down-ward swaid.  
 I saw the Rose-beds, with trim dressings proud;  
 Which till faire Day a deawie vaile did shrowd.  
 Ith' thickets Gems were scattered here and there:  
 Which hide themselves when *Phæbus* rayes appeare.  
 Whether the Rose *Auror'*, or she hath dy'd  
 The Rose with maidens-blush, tis not yet try'd.  
 Their Deaw, their Colour, and their Morn is one:  
 And both from *Venus* have protection.  
 Perhaps their favour's one: i'th'aire, That's spent;<>  
 This, neerer us, hath a farre sweeter sent.  
 One Goddess guides the Star, and the Flowre, too.  
 And, clad in Scarlet liveries, both goe.  
 Nor suddenly the branches of the Rose  
 In equall distances themselves disclose.  
 This bravely weares a Periwig on her head,  
 Her pretty Leaves are all with Purple spread.  
 From her square Base she climbs, and up ascendeth;  
 And (pointed with a Rubie-button) bendeth.  
 Her plaited Robes this gathers in the top,  
 Ready to open now her silken Shop.  
 Her smiling Treasures then she sheweth plaine,  
 And seeds of Saffron, which there safe remaine.  
 Shee that but now her golden Leaves did brandish,  
 Now pale (alas!) left of her Leaves doth languish.  
         I mus'd, to see their Beauty did not stay;  
 And, in their Cradle, that their Hairs grew gray.  
 Even while I speake, see how their Glory Sheds,  
 And how their *Punick*-pride the Ground o'r-spreads.  
 Such Shapes, such Births, and divers Changes growne  
 In one day, are in one day overthrowne.  
 We blame thee, Nature, that Flowrs soon decay:  
 Thou onely shew'st them, then tak'st them away.  
 The age of Roses but one day doth last:

Which being gon, their youthfull time is past.  
 Her, whom new born the Sun saw rising red,  
 Setting, he fainting sees on her Death-bed:  
 Yet her Short Life requited is, that she  
 Lives ever in her faire Posteritie.

Pull Roses, Virgins, while the time doth last:  
 And think how soon your Rose-time will be past.

## 4

Sir Richard Fanshawe, 1652

Fanshawe (1608-1666), Cavalier poet, Member of Parliament, briefly British ambassador to Portugal and Spain, published a number of translations, of which his *Selected Parts of Horace*, 1652, somewhat on the model of John Ashmore's Horace (above), concluded with two short versions of works by other poets. An *enface* Latin text is provided throughout.

## AUSONIUS his ROSES

Edyl. 14

'Twas *Spring*, and (bitter-sweet) the Saffron *Morn*  
 Blew hot, and cold from *Amalthea's* Horn.  
 A brisker gale usher'd *Aurora's* Ray,  
 And bad her Steeds out-strip the winged day.  
 Between the Gardens water'd beds I went,  
*Apollo's* growing fury to prevent.  
 On the bent grasse I saw congealed drops,  
 And Crystall pendants on the pot-herbs tops.  
 Broad Cabbages from leaf to leaf distill'd  
 The Orient Pearle, and all their bottles fill'd.  
 The hoarie Fruit-trees here and there a Gem  
 Had candi'd ore, to melt with the first Beam.  
 The Rose-trees in their *Pestan* Scarlet laught,  
 And with red lips the *Mornings Nectar* quaft.  
 'Tis doubted whether HESPER borrow'd,

Or lent, that paint, and dy'd the *Roses* red.  
*One* dew, *one* colour, *one* Celestiall power  
 Of *both*: For they are VENUS *Star* and *Flower*.  
 Perchance *one* odour too: but *That* being high,  
 Expires ith'aire: *This*, throws her Incense nigh.  
 The PAPHYAN Mistresse of the *Flow'r* and *Starre*,  
 Bade *both* her servants the *same* Liv'ry weare.  
 The moment came when on opposed Banks  
 The flowrie Squadrons plac'd themselves in Ranks.  
*One* lay conceal'd in her Leaves close green-hood:  
*Another* peeping through the Lattice stood.  
*This* opes her first aspiring Pyramed,  
 And ends it in a crimson poynted head.  
*That* looz'd her garment (gather'd in her lap)  
 And in her native silks her self did wrap;  
 Uncovers, *Now*, her laughing Cup, and showes  
 The golden Tuft which in her bottome growes.  
 She, that but now shone drest in all her haire,  
 Stands *pale*; forsook ev'n by those leaves she bare.  
 So sudden change I wondred to behold,  
 And *Roses* in their *Infancy* grown old.  
 Whilst I speak *This*, those envy'd Beauties shed  
 Their glorious locks: earth cover'd with their *dead*.  
 So *many* kinds, so *many* births of *Flow'rs*,  
*One day* discloses, and *one day* devours.  
 NATURE, why mad'st thou fading *Flow'rs*, so gay?  
 Why shewd'st us gifts, to snatch them streight away?  
*A day's a Roses Age*. How neere do meet  
 (Poore Bloome!) thy *Cradle*, and thy *Winding-sheet*?  
 Her whom the rising Sun saw newly born,  
 He sees a witherd corps at his return.  
 Yet, well with them: Who, though they quickly dye,  
 Survive themselves in their posterity.  
 Gather *your Roses Virgins*, whil'st they'r *new*:

For, being *past*, no Spring returns to *You*.

5

J.F. (*fl.* 1662)

This never-before-printed version is from the unique manuscript copy found in Bodleian MS Eng. poet. f. 17 (pp. 72-3), which according to its title page contains ‘a Collection of some poems and translations / Plac’d as they were done by I.F.’ (i.e. J.F.). J.F.’s identity is not known, but the date of the translation cannot be very remote from 1662, a date attached to one of the other poems in the manuscript. The punctuation is not always logical, and the orthography, too, sometimes gives the reader pause, but these features do not hide J.F.’s accomplishment as a poet-translator.

Ausonius his 14 Idyllium.

Roses.

Twass Spring: and back by saffron’d Morning roll’d  
 The Day exhal’d a gently biting Cold.  
 A sharper gale Sol’s Easterne Teames forewent,  
 Advising Noone’s fierce ardour to prevent:  
 Whilst I through my Fowre-alley’d Garden stray,  
 To take the early Fraisheur of the day,  
 Saw the chill, concrete Deaw in pearly ropes  
 Hang on the grasse, or stand on th’ Herbage tops,  
 The round drops play’d together on the broad  
 Colworts; drops big with heavenly Water’s load.  
 The Rose-buds (joy’d with Pæstane culture) were  
 Perfum’d with Deaw by rising Lucifer.  
 On th’ hoary Shrubs befeather’d were the gray  
 Gemmes that must perish by first Beames of Day.  
 Ambiguous whether tincture tooke the Morne  
 From Roses, or by them her Scarlet worne,  
 One hue of Starre and Flower, one morning Youth,  
 One Deaw, for Venus Lady is of both;

Perchance one Sent, were not the Starre's on high  
 Blowne through wide Heaven, the Rose's breath'd more nigh:  
 Of Starre and Flower the common Patronesse  
 Venus, prescribes to both one Purple dresse.  
 Twas but a moments intervall which did  
 The Periods of the Roses growth divide:  
 This lurkt within an All-green leavy Hat;  
 Some shew of purple sides discover'd that:  
 Opening the Blushing top. This sweet and brisk  
 Absolv'd the point of the faire Obelisk;  
 One disembosoming the folds that crowne't,  
 Aimes of itself in leaves to give account;  
 The full orbes smiling bravery straight displayes,  
 And the concealed Saffron-graines betrayes.  
 But whose late ruddy Tresses flame-like glar'd  
 Turns Pale, of the leaves all forsooke, straight bar'd.  
 I' Admired Flower's grace by time so swiftly torne,  
 And that the Rose grew old assoone as borne.  
 Loe while I speake, the Flower's dropt Periwig sprinkles  
 The Earth, which starr'd with that red Cover twinckles.  
 Such Shewes, so faire beginnings, and renewings  
 So various, one day raises, one day ruines.  
 O Nature, wee complaine thou mak'st sweet Flowers  
 Short-liv'd, thy Gifts assoone as showne devour'st.  
 How long one Day, so long-liv'd Roses be,  
 Their old-age knit to Adolescencey.  
 That Rose which the flame-colour'd Morne saw spring,  
 The Evening sees a shrunke decrepitate thing.  
 'Tis well yet, since they live so little space,  
 Roses prolong their Ages in their Race.  
 Maid, pluck thy Rose whilst young, and fresh thy May,  
 Remembring thine owne Age so hastes away.

Anonymous, 1673

This playful version, hovering between translation and imitation, appears in a collection of poems of amorous dalliance: *Holborn-Drollery. Or, The Beautiful Chloret surprized in the Sheets: All the Love-Songs and Poems with which she hath been Treated this Long-Vacation being Publish'd*. A framework is constructed by two prefatory letters, one from the beautiful Chloret and one from an admirer. The latter is addressed to 'the Ladies of Quality frequenting *Greys-Inn-Walks*'. Chloret, for her part, explains that she has discovered these poems, 'which I presum'd had been design'd no farther than my Cabinet', are now to be printed. Evidently the author of this particular contribution had some version of *De Rosis* before him; it is to be supposed he expected at least some of his readers to recognize his source, though there is no mention that the composition is not original.

On Chloris's *Garden*.

'Twas Spring, and promising the Infant-day,  
 Which in *Aurora*'s purple-bosome lay,  
 When to a Woodbine-Bow'r I went, and sate  
 Under the flower'd Canopy in State.  
 When strait my *Chloret* did her beams display,  
 Opening her Casements to let out the Day,  
 And scatter Odours, whilst the flow'rs prepare  
 With smiles to take their stock of fragrant Air.  
 In softer murmurs Crystal streams did glide,  
 And pay'd a Tribute to the Gardens Pride.  
 On the bent grass I saw congealed drops,  
 And Crystal pendants on the flowers tops.  
 The *Heliotrope* from leaf to leaf distill'd  
 The Orient pearl, (its flow'ry Cup being fill'd)  
 And seem'd to weep the Absence of the Sun,  
 Who turns and courts him till his Race be done.  
 The smiling blossoms here and there a gem  
 Had candi'd o're, to thaw with the first beam.  
 The Roses in their purer scarlet laught,

And with red lips the Mornings N<e>ctar quaft.  
 'Tis doubted if young *Chloret* borrowed,  
 Or lent the Colours both to *White* and *Red*;  
 These blush, when they too neer her lips are shown,  
 These gather'd by her hand are whiter grown:  
 And when these Rivals in her bosome lie,  
 They do surrender up their sweets, and die.  
 The moment came when on opposed Banks,  
 The lesser beauties did appear in Ranks;  
 One lay conceal'd in her leaves close green hood,  
 Another peeping through the Lattice stood:  
 This opes her first aspiring Pyramid,  
 And ends it in a crimson-pointed head.  
 Here Tulips grow, but these their sweets have lost,  
 And only can their glorious colours boast.  
 Displaying of their painted Cups, they show  
 The golden tufts which in their bosoms grow.  
 Those that but now shone prouder than the rest,  
 Stand Pale, and do their leaves and sweets devest;  
 With dying odours to their Urns they fall,  
 The Emblems each of their own funeral.  
 This sudden change I wondred to behold,  
 And Beauties in their infancy grown old;  
 But these sweet Beauties though they quickly die,  
 Survive themselves in their Posterity.  
 Gather thy Roses, *Chloret*, whilst they're new;  
 For when they fade, no spring returns to you.

7

Anonymous, 1693

This translation was published in the *Gentleman's Journal* for May 1693 (Vol. 2, pp. 143-4).  
 The letter format was conventional, but unsolicited contributions were indeed sent to the  
 journal's editor, Peter Motteux, by mail. The 'Mr S.' to whom it is ascribed may, like other  
 early contributors to the magazine, have been personally known to him.

SIR,

Roses in this Season seldom fail to please us; I cannot then begin better than with sending you these. They are of foreign Growth, and were transplanted out of *Ausonius's* Garden, yet their Graces are not in danger of fading.

Roses out of *Ausonius*, by Mr. S.

'Twas Spring; and at the golden break of Day,  
 When unconfin'd the nipping Breezes play;  
 And fresh cool Winds, with cheering Gales, invite  
 T' anticipate the heats of full grown Light:  
 Pleas'd, amidst Walks all beautiful and fair,  
 I breath'd the infant Morning's grateful Air.  
 Here, pearly Drops hung on the bending Grass,  
 A hoary Frost spread o're a neigh'bring place.  
 Here, brooding Moisture spreading Leaves imbues,  
 And kindly fills 'em with celestial Dews.  
 Here, lovely Roses do the Walks adorn,  
 And, blushing, seem another rising Morn.  
 Frost, here, like Gems on the young Bushes lay;  
 Gems lost like those above at elder day.  
 The hour was come, when in divided Banks  
 The blooming Roses stood display'd in Ranks.  
 One quite enclos'd in her impris'ning Green;  
 Another's purple Point just peeping seen.  
 A third, here, turning back her verdant Hood  
 Opens the smiling top of her young Bud.  
 An odorous Bosom here One proudly heaves,  
 And triumphs in her fair expanded Leaves.  
 Full blown (like laughing bowls of Juice divine) )  
 Thick golden Tuffts on their fair bottoms shine; )  
 And equally invite to Love, and Wine. )  
 But see, ah see, how soon their beauty's fled!  
 And all their bright attractive Tresses shed!

I wondred at this hasty Rape of time:  
 At Roses pale, and wither'd in their prime.  
 Swift as a thought their Charmes desert 'em all;  
 And scattering Leaves strow blushes as they fall.  
 Such Sweets, so many, such variety,  
 In one day spring, decay, and cease to be!  
 This hasty Fate, O Nature we lament,  
 Thy gifts are snatcht away as soon as sent.  
 Scarce, lovely Flow'rs one poor day can you boast;  
 Your bloom of Youth so soon in Age is lost:  
 So soon your beauties, and your sweets are fled;  
 Born with the Dawn, and in the Evening dead.  
 Yet happy, since succeeding Buds they give;  
 In whom again their falling beauties live.  
 So, young fair blooming Virgins ought to do,  
 And fading Charms by fruitful Love renew.

## 8

Anonymous, 1750

This version appeared anonymously in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1750 (Vol. 20, p. 423). Those who contributed verse compositions to this journal were usually amateurs.

The *ROSES*. Translated from Ausonius.

In that fair season, when *Aurora* brings  
*Etesian* breezes on her saffron wings;  
 When denser air anticipates the dawn  
 From *Titan's* horses blown to cool the lawn;  
 (Who, as they pant, a closer gale dispense,  
 Allay the heat, and steal upon the sense)  
 In *Pæstus* gardens I consum'd the day,

From morn's first blushes 'till the setting ray.  
 To mark the varying forms, which nature spreads,  
 On flow'ry banks, and vegetable beds,  
 The grass with hoary frost was overlaid,  
 Which glitter'd pendent from the bending blade;  
 Then crystal drops of dew, cohesive, round,  
 Play'd o'er the foliage, then impearl'd the ground.  
 Here roseate arbours caught my ravish'd sight,  
 Moist with the gentle sprinklings of the night;  
 Some scatter'd buds their verdant hue had lost,  
 And native purple, candy'd all with frost:  
 With envious frost, - which, when the op'ning day  
 Shot forth his beams, dissolv'd in tears away.  
 Whether the fragrant roses, to adorn  
 Their bloom, had stol'n the blushes of the morn;  
 Whether the morning star had deck'd his bow'r  
 With the sweet rapines of the pilfer'd flow'r;  
 Might doubtful seem: so plainly you cou'd trace  
 In each the same similitude of grace.  
 For star and flow'r attract the wond'ring view  
 With milder lustre, bath'd in early dew.  
 The planet, rolling in a distant sphere,  
 May waft ambrosial odours thro' his air;  
 Since *Venus*, mistress of the star, and flow'r,  
 On both her quintessence of sweets can pour.  
 Not long I gaz'd, before the stalks divide,  
 And, by degrees, unfold their crimson pride,  
 At equal intervals distinctly seen,  
 Whilst bord'ring purple edg'd the parting green:  
 This, like a spire, exalts its shining head,  
 Whose utmost praise is crown'd with kindling red;  
 Here one is quite conceal'd; another there  
 Unbinds its garments, struggling into air,  
 And courting praise, impatient of disguise,

Gives all its naked beauties to the eyes.  
 And now the rose, from its dark prison freed,  
 Displays a centre ting'd with saffron seed.  
 When, lo! its leafy honours, soon decay'd,  
 Fell to the ground, and wither'd on the glade.  
 With pity touch'd, I wonder'd how the flow'r  
 So newly born, should languish in an hour;  
 Grown bald in youth, its ruby-colour'd hair  
 Falling diffuses sweetness thro' the air;  
 In verdant robes no more the earth was drest,  
 But seem'd to sparkle in a scarlet vest.  
 Behold what strange vicissitude appears  
 In some few hours, as in revolving years;  
 Spring-time, and autumn, in one circling day  
 Begun, completed, ripens, dies away.  
 Of thee, dame nature, justly we complain,  
 Of pleasure sparing, prodigal of pain;  
 Thy richest gifts when we begin to prize,  
 Snatch'd is the much lov'd treasure from our eyes.  
 And roses, fairest objects we behold!  
 Fade while they flourish, in their nonage old.  
 To live and dazzle for a day at most  
 Is the poor gaudy permanence they boast.  
 Yet a young offspring from the lasting roots  
 Succeeds, and still supplies the lovely shoots;  
 With equal charms the little sucker thrives,  
 And in its heir the parent rose revives.  
 Ye tender virgins, in its transient spring,  
 Be sure to pluck the perishable thing;  
 Learn hence how soon the flow'r of beauty blows,  
 Alas! ye'll find it fading as the rose.

## C. A. Elton, 1814

Charles Abraham Elton's *Specimens of the Classic Poets* (London, 1814), a three-volume compilation of Elton's translations, was critically acclaimed. It includes several specimens of Ausonius, particularly epigrams, as well as *De Rosis* (III, 254-6). Ausonius, Elton's headnote to his selections observes, can be granted 'wit, fluency, and erudition', but 'elegance' is Elton's highest commendation. As well as verse both original and translated, Elton (1778-1853), a nonconformist, wrote on theological topics. He succeeded to the family baronetcy in 1842.

## ROSES

'Twas spring; the morn return'd in saffron veil,  
 And breathed a nipping coolness in the gale.  
 A keener air had harbinger'd the Dawn,  
 That drove her coursers o'er the eastern lawn.  
 The breezy cool allured my feet to stray  
 And thus anticipate the fervid day.  
 Through the broad walks I trod the garden bowers,  
 And roam'd, refresh'd against the noontide hours.  
 I saw the hoary dew's congealing drops  
 Bend the tall grass and vegetable tops;  
 On the broad leaves play'd bright the trembling gems,  
 And airy waters bow'd the laden stems.  
 There Pæstan roses blush'd before my view,  
 Bedrop'd with early morning's freshening dew;  
 The sprinkled pearls on every rose-bush lay,  
 Anon to melt before the beams of day.  
 'Twere doubtful, if the blossoms of the rose  
 Had rob'd the morning, or the morning those.  
 In dew, in tint the same, the star and flower;  
 For both confess the queen of beauty's power:  
 Perchance their sweets the same: but this more nigh  
 Exhales its breath; and that embalms the sky:  
 Of flower and star the Goddess is the same,

And both she tinged with hues of roseate flame.  
I saw a moment's interval divide  
The rose that blossom'd from the rose that died.  
This with its cap of tufted moss look'd green;  
That, tip'd with reddening purple, peep'd between:  
One rear'd its obelisk with opening swell,  
The bud unsheathed its crimson pinnacle;  
Another, gathering every purpled fold,  
Its foliage multiplied; its blooms unroll'd;  
The teeming chives shot forth; the petals spread;  
The bow-pot's glory rear'd its smiling head:  
While this, that ere the passing moment flew,  
Flamed forth one blaze of scarlet on the view;  
Now shook from withering stalk the waste perfume,  
Its verdure stript, and pale its faded bloom.  
I marvell'd at the spoiling flight of time,  
That roses thus grew old in earliest prime,  
E'en while I speak, the crimson leaves drop round,  
And a red brightness veils the blushing ground.  
These forms, these births, these changes, bloom, decay,  
Appear and vanish, in the self-same day.  
The flower's brief grace, oh Nature! moves my sighs,  
Thy gifts, just shown, are ravish'd from our eyes.  
One day the rose's age; and while it blows  
In dawn of youth, it withers to its close.  
The rose the glittering sun beheld, at morn,  
Spread to the light its blossoms newly born,  
When in his round he looks from evening skies,  
Already droops in age, and fades, and dies.  
Yet blest that, soon to fade, the numerous flower  
Succeeds herself, and still prolongs her hour.  
On virgins! roses cull, while yet ye may;  
So bloom your hours, and so shall haste away.

## Harriet Waters Preston

The now forgotten Harriet Waters Preston was born in Massachusetts in 1836 and died in 1911. Privately educated, she lived abroad in Italy, France, and England, returning to the USA in 1865. She became a prolific writer and translator: of Virgil's *Georgics* (1881), of the more contemporary Frédéric Mistral's *Mirèio* (1873) and the memoirs of Madame Desbordes-Valmore (also 1873). She published numerous original works, some reflecting her historical interests: *Troubadours and Trouvres* (1876), *The Private Lives of the Romans* (with Louise Dodge, 1886). Her interests in contemporary writers are further reflected in a biography of Alfred de Musset (1877) and her edition of the poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1900). The text is taken from *The Library of the World's Best Literature* (New York, 1917).

SPRING morning! and in all the saffron air,  
 The tingling freshness of a day to be!  
 The breeze that runs before the sun-steeds, ere  
 They kindle fire, appeared to summon me;  
 And I went forth by the prim garden beds  
 To taste that early freshness, and behold  
 The bending blades dew-frosted, and the heads  
 Of the tall plants impearled, and heavy-rolled  
 O'er spreading leaves, the sky-drops crystalline.  
 Here too were roses, as in Pæstum gay;  
 Dim through the morning mist I saw them shine,  
 Save where at intervals a blinding ray  
 Flashed from a gem that Sol would soon devour!  
 Verily, one knew not if the rosy Dawn  
 Borrowed her blushes from the rosy flower,  
 Or this from her; for that the two had on  
 The same warm color, the same dewy veil.  
 Yea, and why not? For flower alike and star

Live under Lady Venus, and exhale,  
 Mayhap, the self-same fragrance. But afar  
 The planet's breath is wafted and is spent,  
 The blossom sheds its fragrance at our side;  
 Yet still they wear the one habiliment  
 The Paphian goddess lent them, murex-dyed!

A moment more and the young buds were seen  
 Bursting their star-like sheathings. One was there  
 Who sported yet a fairy helm of green;  
 And one a crimson coronal did wear;  
 And one was like a stately pyramid  
 Tipped at the apex with a purple spire;  
 And one the foldings of her veil undid  
 From her fair head, as moved by the desire  
 To number her own petals. Quick, 'tis done!  
 The smiling casket opens, and we see  
 The crocus therein hidden from the sun  
 Dense-seeded. But another flower, ah me!  
 With flame-like hair afloat upon the breeze  
 Paled suddenly, of all her glory shorn.  
 "Alas for the untimely fate of these,  
 Who age the very hour wherein they're born,"  
 I cried. And even so, the chevelure  
 Of yon poor blossom dropped upon the mold,  
 Clothing it far and wide with color pure!  
 How can the same sunrising see unfold  
 And fade so many shapes of loveliness?  
 Ah cruel Nature, with thy boon of flowers  
 Too quick withdrawn! Ah youth, grim age doth press!  
 Ah life of roses, told in one day's hours!  
 The morning star beholds a birth divine  
 Whereof the evening star shall find no trace.  
 Think then upon the rose's endless line,

Since the one rose revisiteth her place  
 Never again! And gather, sweetest maid,  
 Gather young roses in the early dew  
 Of thine own years, remembering how they fade,  
 And how for thee the end is hastening too!

11

John Addington Symonds, 1890

One of the prolific Victorian scholars and writers, Symonds (1840-1893) published books and articles on a wide range of literary and cultural subjects, as well as verse of his own, and translations from a wide range of sources and languages. This translation appeared in his *Essays, Speculative and Suggestive* (London, 1890).

'Twas spring, and dawn returning breathed new-born  
 From saffron skies the bracing chill of morn.  
 Before day's orient chargers went a breeze,  
 That whispered: Rise, the sweets of morning seize!  
 In watered gardens where the cross-paths ran,  
 Freshness and health I sought ere noon began:  
 I watched from bending grasses how the rime  
 In clusters hung, or gemmed the beds of thyme;  
 How the round beads, on herb and leaf outspread,  
 Rolled with the weight of dews from heaven's height shed;  
 Saw the rose-gardens in their Paestan bloom  
 Hoar 'neath the dawn-star rising through the gloom.  
 On every bush those separate splendours gleam,  
 Doomed to be quench'd by day's first arrowy beam.  
 Here might one doubt: doth morn from roses steal  
 Their redness, or the rose with dawn anneal?  
 One hue, one dew, one morn makes both serene;  
 Of star and flower one Venus reigns the queen.  
 Perchance one scent have they; the star's o'erhead

Far, far exhales, the flower's at hand is shed.  
 Goddess of star, goddess of rose no less,  
 The Paphian flings o'er both her crimson dress.  
 Now had the moment passed wherein the brood  
 Of clustering buds seemed one twin sisterhood.  
 This flower, enlaced with leaves, shows naught but green;  
 That shoots a roseate streak from forth the screen:  
 One opes her pyramid and purple spire,  
 Emerging into plenitude of fire:  
 Another thrusts her verdant veil aside,  
 Counting her petals one by one with pride:  
 Expands her radiant cup of gorgeous hue,  
 And brings dense hidden veins of gold to view:  
 She who had burned erewhile, a flower of flame,  
 Now pales and droops her fainting head with shame:—  
 So that I mused how swift time steals all worth,  
 How roses age and wither with their birth;  
 Yea, while I speak, the flower with crimson crowned  
 Hath fallen and shed her glories on the ground.  
 So many births, forms, fates with changes fraught,  
 One day begins and one day brings to naught!  
 Grieve we that flowers should have so short a grace,  
 That Nature shows and steals her gifts apace?  
 Long as the day, so long the red rose lasts;  
 Eld following close on youth her beauty blasts:  
 That flower which Phosphor newly-born had known,  
 Hesper returning finds a wrinkled crone:  
 Yet well if, though some brief days past she die,  
 Her life be lengthened through posterity!  
 Pluck roses, girl, when flower, when youth is new,  
 Mindful the while that thus time flies for you.

Countess Evelyn Martinengo-Cesaresco, 1899

Cesaresco (1852-1931) was English by birth but married into an Italian family. She became a travel writer, publishing a number of books on the history and culture of Italy. Her essay 'Nature in the Last Latin Poets' took Ausonius as its main focus, and this is where this translation first appeared (*Contemporary Review*, 76 (1899), 239-48). The essay was also included in her book *The Outdoor Life in Greek and Roman Poets*, 1911.

It was the spring; the dawn a softer breeze  
 Sent through the chill air of the passing night,  
 And Nature prophesied the golden light,  
 Though still the mist lingered among the trees.

I wandered through the garden drinking in  
 The new life of the morning; from the stalks  
 Hung the dew-laden leaves across the walks,  
 And the wet roses watched the day begin.

Did Dawn take from the Rose its vermeil hue,  
 Or did the new-born Day make blush the flower?  
 Each wears the beauty of the morning hour,  
 To each the ruddy tint and heavenly dew.

Of each is Venus queen, the flower, the star,  
 And e'en one perfume dwells perchance in each;  
 But roses spread their sweets within our reach,  
 While the dawn's sweets are lost in vaults afar.

The little life of roses lasts an hour,  
 Age kills them, for they learn not to grow old:  
 The bud the morning star had seen unfold  
 The evening star sees droop and fade away.

Maiden! Gather the newly-opened rose,  
 And gather it or ere thy youth be past,

For if the rose's bloom will perish fast,  
The bloom of maidens all as quickly goes.

13

Helen Waddell, 1929

Helen Waddell's prize-winning account of the makers and singers of medieval Latin poetry, *The Wandering Scholars* (1927), provided a historical frame for the translations in her *Medieval Latin Lyrics* (1929), of which this is one. *The Wandering Scholars* probably did much to establish an idea of Ausonius among twentieth-century Anglophone readers. Here she writes, among much else, that Ausonius reminds her of 'half-a-dozen provincial governors in the *Dictionary of Chinese Biography*: of Han Yü, whose friends washed their hands in rose water before opening the manuscript of his poems, and who rid his province of a large and pestiferous crocodile by addressing to it a written censure ... still regarded as a model of Chinese composition'.<sup>1</sup>

Spring, and the sharpness of the golden dawn  
Before the sun was up a cooler breeze  
had blown, in promise of a day of heat,  
and I was walking in my formal garden,  
to freshen me, before the day grew old.

I saw the hoar frost stiff on the bent grasses,  
sitting in fat globes on the cabbage leaves,  
and all my Paestum roses laughing at me,  
dew-drenched, and in the East the morning star,  
and here and there a dewdrop glistening white,  
that soon must perish in the early sun.  
Think you, did Dawn steal colour from the roses,  
or was it new born day that stained the rose?  
To each one dew, one crimson, and one morning,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Wandering Scholars of the Middle Ages*, sixth edn (London, 1932), p. 6.

to star and rose, their lady Venus one.  
Mayhap one fragrance, but the sweet of Dawn  
drifts through the sky, and closer breathes the rose.

A moment dies: this bud that was new born  
has burgeoned even fold on even fold;  
This still is green, with her close cap of leaves,  
this shows a red stain on her tender sheath.  
This the first crimson of the loosened bud  
and now she thinks to unwind her coverings,  
and lo! the glory of the radiant chalice,  
scattering the close seeds of her golden heart.  
One moment, all on fire and crimson glowing,  
all pallid now and bare and desolate.

I marvelled at the flying rape of time;  
but now a rose was born: that rose is old.  
Even as I speak the crimson petals float  
down drifting, and the crimsoned earth is bright.

So many lovely things, so rare, so young,  
a day begat them, and a day will end.

O Earth, to give a flower so brief a grace!  
As long as a day is long, so long the life of a rose.  
The golden sun at morning sees her born,  
and late at eve returning finds her old.  
Yet wise is she, that hath so soon to die,  
and lives her life in some succeeding rose.  
O maid, while youth is with the rose and thee,  
pluck thou the rose: life is as swift for thee.