

George Meredith (1828-1909)

5 *The Three Maidens*

There were three maidens met on the highway;  
The sun was down, the night was late:  
And two sang loud with the birds of May,  
O the nightingale is merry with its mate.

Said they to the youngest, Why walk you there so still? 5  
The land is dark, the night is late:  
O, but the heart in my side is ill,  
And the nightingale will languish for its mate.

Said they to the youngest, Of lovers there is store; 10  
The moon mounts up, the night is late:  
O, I shall look on man no more,  
And the nightingale is dumb without its mate.

Said they to the youngest, Uncross your arms and sing;  
The moon mounts high, the night is late:  
O my dear lover can hear no thing, 15  
And the nightingale sings only to its mate.

They slew him in revenge, and his true-love was his lure;  
The moon is pale, the night is late:  
His grave is shallow on the moor;  
O the nightingale is dying for its mate. 20

His blood is on his breast, and the moss-roots at his hair;  
The moon is chill, the night is late:  
But I will lie beside him there:  
O the nightingale is dying for its mate.

1859

(From *The Poetical Works of George Meredith*. With Some Notes  
by G. M. Trevelyan. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912)