

The Poetry of Aldous Huxley

Aldous Huxley

Contents

The Poetry Collections	5
The Burning Wheel	7
Contents	8
The Burning Wheel.	10
PHILOCLEA IN THE FOREST.	19
I.	19
II.	20
III.	20
II.	26
II. From the Crest	31
The Defeat of Youth	35
II.	36
III.	37
IV.	37
V.	38
VI. In the Hay-loft	38
VII.	39
VIII. Mountains	39
IX.	40
X. In the Little Room	40
XI.	41
XII.	41
XIII.	42
XIV.	42
XV.	43
XVI.	43
XVII. In the Park	44

XVIII.	44
XIX.	45
XX. Self-torment	45
XXI.	46
XXII. The Quarry in the Wood	46
Winter Dream	50
Italy	55
Waking	58
The Louse-Hunters	74
Leda	76
I	90
II	90
III	90
IV	91
V	91
VI	92
VII	92
VIII	93
I	94
II	96
III	96
IV	97
V	97
II.	97
III.	98
VI	98
VII	99
VIII	100
IX	101
X	102
XI	102
The Cicadas and Other Poems	103
Theatre of Varieties	106
II	109

List of Poems in Chronological Order **122**

List of Poems in Alphabetical Order **129**

The Poetry Collections

During World War I, Huxley spent much of his time at Garsington Manor near Oxford, home of Lady Ottoline Morrell, working as a farm labourer. There he met several Bloomsbury figures, including Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead and Clive Bell.

The Burning Wheel

Contents

- THE BURNING WHEEL.
- DOORS OF THE TEMPLE.
- VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM.
- DARKNESS.
- MOLE.
- THE TWO SEASONS.
- TWO REALITIES.
- QUOTIDIAN VISION.
- VISION.
- THE MIRROR.
- VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF LAFORGUE.
- PHILOSOPHY.
- PHILOCLEA IN THE FOREST.
- BOOKS AND THOUGHTS.
- CONTRARY TO NATURE AND ARISTOTLE.
- ESCAPE.
- THE GARDEN.
- THE CANAL.
- THE IDEAL FOUND WANTING.
- MISPLACED LOVE.
- SONNET.

- SENTIMENTAL SUMMER.
- THE CHOICE.
- THE HIGHER SENSUALISM.
- SONNET.
- FORMAL VERSES.
- PERILS OF THE SMALL HOURS.
- COMPLAINT.
- RETURN TO AN OLD HOME.
- FRAGMENT.
- THE WALK.

The Burning Wheel.

Wearied of its own turning,
Distressed with its own busy restlessness,
Yearning to draw the circumferent pain —
The rim that is dizzy with speed —
To the motionless centre, there to rest,
The wheel must strain through agony
On agony contracting, returning
Into the core of steel.
And at last the wheel has rest, is still,
Shrunk to an adamant core:
Fulfilling its will in fixity.
But the yearning atoms, as they grind
Closer and closer, more and more
Fiercely together, beget
A flaming fire upward leaping,
Billowing out in a burning,
Passionate, fierce desire to find
The infinite calm of the mother's breast.
And there the flame is a Christ-child sleeping,
Bright, tenderly radiant;
All bitterness lost in the infinite
Peace of the mother's bosom.
But death comes creeping in a tide
Of slow oblivion, till the flame in fear
Wakes from the sleep of its quiet brightness
And burns with a darkening passion and pain,
Lest, all forgetting in quiet, it perish.
And as it burns and anguishes it quickens,
Begetting once again the wheel that yearns —
Sick with its speed — for the terrible stillness
Of the adamant core and the steel-hard chain.
And so once more
Shall the wheel revolve till its anguish cease
In the iron anguish of fixity;
Till once again
Flame billows out to infinity,
Sinking to a sleep of brightness
In that vast oblivious peace.

DOORS OF THE TEMPLE.

Many are the doors of the spirit that lead
Into the inmost shrine:

And I count the gates of the temple divine,
Since the god of the place is God indeed.
And these are the gates that God decreed
Should lead to his house: — kisses and wine,
Cool depths of thought, youth without rest,
And calm old age, prayer and desire,
The lover's and mother's breast,
The fire of sense and the poet's fire.

But he that worships the gates alone,
Forgetting the shrine beyond, shall see
The great valves open suddenly,
Revealing, not God's radiant throne,
But the fires of wrath and agony.

VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM.

Up from the darkness on the laughing stage
A sudden trap-door shot you unawares,
Incarnate Tragedy, with your strange airs
Of courteous sadness. Nothing could assuage
The secular grief that was your heritage,
Passed down the long line to the last that bears
The name, a gift of yearnings and despairs
Too greatly noble for this iron age.

Time moved for you not in quotidian beats,
But in the long slow rhythm the ages keep
In their immortal symphony. You taught
That not in the harsh turmoil of the streets
Does life consist; you bade the soul drink deep
Of infinite things, saying: "The rest is naught."

DARKNESS.

My close-walled soul has never known
That innermost darkness, dazzling sight,
Like the blind point, whence the visions spring
In the core of the gazer's chrysolite ...
The mystic darkness that laps God's throne
In a splendour beyond imagining,
So passing bright.

But the many twisted darkneses
That range the city to and fro,
In aimless subtlety pass and part
And ebb and glutinously flow;
Darkness of lust and avarice,
Of the crippled body and the crooked heart ...
These darkneses I know.

MOLE.

Tunnelled in solid blackness creeps
The old mole-soul, and wakes or sleeps,
He knows not which, but tunnels on
Through ages of oblivion;
Until at last the long constraint
Of each-hand wall is lost, and faint
Comes daylight creeping from afar,
And mole-work grows crepuscular.
Tunnel meets air and bursts; mole sees
Men hugely walking ... or are they trees?
And far horizons smoking blue,
And chasing clouds for ever new?
Green hills, like lighted lamps aglow
Or quenching 'neath the cloud-shadow;
Quenching and blazing turn by turn,
Spring's great green signals fitfully burn.
Mole travels on, but finds the steering
A harder task of pioneering
Than when he thridded through the strait
Blind catacombs that ancient fate
Had carved for him. Stupid and dumb
And blind and touchless he had come
A way without a turn; but here,
Under the sky, the passenger
Chooses his own best way; and mole
Distracted wanders, yet his hole
Regrets not much wherein he crept,
But runs, a joyous nympholept,
This way and that, by all made mad —
River nymph and oread,
Ocean's daughters and Lorelei,
Combing the silken mystery,
The glaucous gold of her rivery tresses —
Each haunts the traveller, each possesses
The drunken wavering soul awhile;
Then with a phantom's cock-crow smile
Mocks craving with sheer vanishment.

Mole-eyes grow hawk's: knowledge is lent
In grudging dribblets that pay high
Unconscionable usury
To unrelenting life. Mole learns
To travel more secure; the turns
Of his long way less puzzling seem,
And all those magic forms that gleam
In airy invitation cheat
Less often than they did of old.

The earth slopes upward, fold by fold
Of quiet hills that meet the gold
Serenity of western skies.
Over the world's edge with clear eyes
Our mole transcendent sees his way
Tunnelled in light: he must obey
Necessity again and thrice
Close catacombs as erst he did,
Fate's tunnellings, himself must bore
Through the sunset's inmost core.
The guiding walls to each-hand shine
Luminous and crystalline;
And mole shall tunnel on and on,
Till night let fall oblivion.

THE TWO SEASONS.

Summer, on himself intent,
Passed without, for nothing caring
Save his own high festival.
My windows, blind and winkless staring,
Wondered what the pageant meant,
Nor ever understood at all.
And oh, the pains of sentiment!
The loneliness beyond all bearing ...
Mucus and spleen and gall!

But now that grey November peers
In at my fire-bright window pane?
And all its misty spires and trees
Loom in upon me through the rain
And question of the light that cheers
The room within — now my soul sees
Life, where of old were sepulchres;
And in these new-found sympathies
Sinks petty hopes and loves and fears,
And knows that life is not in vain.

TWO REALITIES.

A waggon passed with scarlet wheels
And a yellow body, shining new.
“Splendid!” said I. “How fine it feels
To be alive, when beauty peels
The grimy husk from life.” And you
Said, “Splendid!” and I thought you’d seen
That waggon blazing down the street;
But I looked and saw that your gaze had been
On a child that was kicking an obscene
Brown ordure with his feet.

Our souls are elephants, thought I,
Remote behind a prisoning grill,
With trunks thrust out to peer and pry
And pounce upon reality;
And each at his own sweet will
Seizes the bun that he likes best
And passes over all the rest.

QUOTIDIAN VISION.

There is a sadness in the street,
And sullenly the folk I meet
Droop their heads as they walk along,
Without a smile, without a song.
A mist of cold and muffling grey
Falls, fold by fold, on another day
That dies unwept. But suddenly,
Under a tunnelled arch I see
On flank and haunch the chestnut gleam
Of horses in a lamplit steam;
And the dead world moves for me once more
With beauty for its living core.

VISION.

I had been sitting alone with books,
Till doubt was a black disease,
When I heard the cheerful shout of rooks
In the bare, prophetic trees.

Bare trees, prophetic of new birth,
You lift your branches clean and free
To be a beacon to the earth,
A flame of wrath for all to see.

And the rooks in the branches laugh and shout
To those that can hear and understand;
“Walk through the gloomy ways of doubt
With the torch of vision in your hand.”

THE MIRROR.

Slow-moving moonlight once did pass
Across the dreaming looking-glass,
Where, sunk inviolably deep,
Old secrets unforgotten sleep
Of beauties unforgettable.

But dusty cobwebs are woven now
Across that mirror, which of old
Saw fingers drawing back the gold
From an untroubled brow;
And the depths are blinded to the moon,
And their secrets forgotten, for ever untold.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF LAFORGUE.

Youth as it opens out discloses
The sinister metempsychosis
Of lilies dead and turned to roses
Red as an angry dawn.
But lilies, remember, are grave-side flowers,
While slow bright rose-leaves sail
Adrift on the music of happiest hours;
And those lilies, cold and pale,
Hide fiery roses beneath the lawn
Of the young bride's parting veil.

PHILOSOPHY.

“God needs no christening,”
Pantheist mutters,
“Love opens shutters
On heaven’s glistening.
Flesh, key-hole listening,
Hears what God utters” ...
Yes, but God stutters.

PHILOCLEA IN THE FOREST.

I.

‘TWas I that leaned to Amoret
With: “What if the briars have tangled Time,
Till, lost in the wood-ways, he quite forget
How plaintive in cities at midnight sounds the chime
Of bells slow-dying from discord to the hush whence
they rose and met.

“And in the forest we shall live free,
Free from the bondage that Time has made
To hedge our soul from its liberty?
We shall not fear what is mighty, and unafraid
Shall look wide-eyed at beauty, nor shrink from its majesty.”

But Amoret answered me again:
“We are lost in the forest, you and I;
Lost, lost, not free, though no bonds restrain;
For no spire rises for comfort, no landmark in the sky,
And the long glades as they curve from sight are dark
with a nameless pain.

And Time creates what he devours, —
Music that sweetly dreams itself away,
Frail-swung leaves of autumn and the scent of flowers,
And the beauty of that poised moment, when the day
Hangs ‘twixt the quiet of darkness and the mirth of the
sunlit hours.”

II.

Mottled and grey and brown they pass,
The wood-moths, wheeling, fluttering;
And we chase and they vanish; and in the grass
Are starry flowers, and the birds sing
Faint broken songs of the dying spring.
And on the beech-bole, smooth and grey,
Some lover of an older day
Has carved in time-blurred lettering
One word only— “Alas.”

III.

Lutes, I forbid you! You must never play,
When shimmeringly, glimpse by glimpse
Seen through the leaves, the silken figures sway
In measured dance. Never at shut of day,
When Time perversely loitering limps
Through endless twilights, should your strings
Whisper of light remembered things
That happened long ago and far away:
Lutes, I forbid you! You must never play...

And you, pale marble statues, far descried
Where vistas open suddenly,
I bid you shew yourselves no more, but hide
Your loveliness, lest too much glorified
By western radiance slantingly
Shot down the glade, you turn from stone
To living gods, immortal grown,
And, ageless, mock my beauty's fleeting pride,
You pale, relentless statues, far descried...

BOOKS AND THOUGHTS.

Old ghosts that death forgot to ferry
Across the Lethe of the years-
These are my friends, and at their tears
I weep and with their mirth am merry.
On a high tower, whose battlements
Give me all heaven at a glance,
I lie long summer nights in trance,
Drowsed by the murmurs and the scents
That rise from earth, while the sky above me
Merges its peace with my soul's peace,
Deep meeting deep. No stir can move me,
Nought break the quiet of my release:
In vain the windy sunlight raves
At the hush and gloom of polar caves.

CONTRARY TO NATURE AND ARISTOTLE.

One head of my soul's amphisbaena
Turns to the daytime's dust and sweat;
But evenings come, when I would forget
The sordid strife of the arena.

And then my other self will creep
Along the scented twilight lanes
To where a little house contains
A hoard of books, a gift of sleep.

Its windows throw a friendly light
Between the narrowing shutter slats,
And, golden as the eyes of cats,
Shine me a welcome through the night.

ESCAPE.

I seek the quietude of stones
Or of great oxen, dewlap-deep
In meadows of lush grass, where sleep
Drifts, tufted, on the air or drones
On flowery traffic. Sleep atones
For sin, comforting eyes that weep.
O'er me, Lethean darkness, creep
Unfelt as tides through dead men's bones!

In that metallic sea of hair,
Fragrance! I come to drown despair
Of wings in dark forgetfulness.
No love ... Love is self-known, aspires
To heights unearthly. I ask less, —
Sleep born of satisfied desires.

THE GARDEN.

There shall be dark trees round me: — I insist
On cypresses: I'm terribly romantic —
And glimpsed between shall move the whole Atlantic,
Now leaden dull, now subtle with grey mist,
Now many jewelled, when the waves are kissed
By revelling sunlight and the corybantic
South-Western wind: so, troubled, passion-frantic,
The poet's mind boils gold and amethyst.

There shall be seen the infinite endeavour
Of a sad fountain, white against the sky
And poised as it strains up, but doomed to break
In weeping music; ever fair and ever
Young ... and the bright-eyed wood-gods as they slake
Their thirst in it, are silent, reverently ...

THE CANAL.

No dip and dart of swallows wakes the black
Slumber of the canal: — a mirror dead
For lack of loveliness remembered
From ancient azures and green trees, for lack
Of some white beauty given and flung back,
Secret, to her that gave: no sun has bled
To wake an echo here of answering red;
The surface stirs to no leaf's wind-blown track.

Between unseeing walls the waters rest,
Lifeless and hushed, till suddenly a swan
Glides from some broader river blue as day,
And with the mirrored magic of his breast
Creates within that barren water-way
New life, new loveliness, and passes on.

THE IDEAL FOUND WANTING.

I'm sick of clownery and Owlglass tricks;
Damn the whole crowd of you I I hate you all.
The same, night after night, from powdered stall
To sweating gallery, your faces fix
In flux an idiot mean. The Apteryx
You worship is no victory; you call
On old stupidity, God made to crawl
For tempting with world-wisdom's narcotics.

I'll break a window through my prison! See,
The sunset bleeds among the roofs; comes night,
Dark blue and calm as music dying out.
Is it escape? No, the laugh's turned on me!
I kicked at cardboard, gaped at red limelight;
You laughed and cheered my latest knockabout.

MISPLACED LOVE.

Red wine that slowly leaned and brimmed the shell
Of pearl, where lips had touched, as light and swift
As naked petals of the rose adrift
Upon the lazy-luted ritournelle
Of summer bee-song: laughing as they fell,
Gold memories: dream incense, childhood's gift,
Blue as the smoke that far horizons lift,
Tenuous as the wings of Ariel: —

These treasured things I laid upon the pyre;
And the flame kindled, and I fanned it high,
And, strong in hope, could watch the crumbling past.
Eager I knelt before the waning fire,
Phoenix, to greet thine immortality ...
But there was naught but ashes at the last.

SONNET.

Were I to die, you'd break your heart, you say.
Well, if it do but bend, I'm satisfied —
Bend and rebound — for hearts are temper-tried,
Mild steel, not hardened, with the spring and play
Of excellent tough swords. It's not that way
That you'll be perishing. But when I've died,
When snap! my light goes out, what will betide
You, if the heart-breaks give you leave to stay?

What will be left, I wonder, if you lose
All that you gave me? "All? A year or so
Out of a life," you say. But worlds, say I,
Of kisses timeless given in ecstasy
That gave me Real You. I die: you go
With me. What's left? Limbs, clothes, a pair of shoes?...

SENTIMENTAL SUMMER.

The West has plucked its flowers and has thrown
Them fading on the night. Out of the sky's
Black depths there smiles a greeting from those eyes,
Where all the Real, all I have ever known
Of the divine is held. And not alone
Do I stand here now ... a presence seems to rise:
Your voice sounds near across my memories,
And answering fingers brush against my own.

Yes, it is you: for evening holds those strands
Of fire and darkness twined in one to make
Your loveliness a web of magic mesh,
Whose cross-weft harmony of soul and flesh
Shadows a thought or glows, when smiles awake,
Like sunlight passionate on southern lands.

THE CHOICE.

Comrade, now that you're merry
And therefore true,
Say — where would you like to die
And have your friend to bury
What once was you?
“On the top of a hill
With a peaceful view
Of country where all is still?”...
Great God, not I!
I'd lie in the street
Where two streams meet
And there's noise enough to fill
The outer ear,
While within the brain can beat
Marches of death and life,
Glory and joy and fear,
Peace of the sort that moves
And clash of strife
And routs of armies fleeing.
There would I shake myself clear
Out of the deep-set grooves
Of my sluggish being.

THE HIGHER SENSUALISM.

There's a church by a lake in Italy
Stands white on a hill against the sky?
And a path of immemorial cobbles
Leads up and up, where the pilgrim hobbles
Past a score or so of neat reposories,
Where you stop and breathe and tell your rosaries
To the shrined terra-cotta mannikins,
That expound with the liveliest quirks and grins
Known texts of Scripture. But no long stay
Should the pilgrim make upon his way;
But as means to the end these shrines stand here
To guide to something holier,
The church on the hilltop.

Your heaven's so,
With a path leading up to it past a row
Of votary Priapulids;
At each you pause and tell your beads
Along the quintuple strings of sense:
Then on, to face Heaven's eminence,
New stimulated, new inspired.

SONNET.

If that a sparkle of true starshine be
That led my way; if some diviner thing
Than common thought urged me to fashioning
Close-woven links of burnished poetry;
Then all the heaven that one time dwelt in me
Has fled, leaving the body triumphing.
Dead flesh it seems, with not a dream to bring
Visions that better warm immediacy.

Why have my visions left me, what could kill
That feeble spark, which yet had life and heat?
Fulfilment shewed a present rich and fair:
I strive to mount, but catch the nearest still:
Souls have been drowned between heart's beat and beat,
And trapped and tangled in a woman's hair.

FORMAL VERSES.

I.

Mother of all my future memories,
Mistress of my new life, which but to-day
Began, when I beheld, deep in your eyes,
My own love mirrored and the warm surprise
Of the first kiss swept both our souls away,

Your love has freed me; for I was oppressed
By my own devil, whose unwholesome breath
Tarnished my youth, leaving to me at best
Age lacking comfort of a soul at rest
And weariness beyond the hope of death.

II.

Ah, those were days of silent happiness!
I never spoke, and had no need to speak,
While on the windy down-land, cheek by cheek,
The slow-driven sun beheld us. Each caress
Had oratory for its own defence;
And when I kissed or felt her fingers press,
I envied not Demosthenes his Greek,
Nor Tully for his Latin eloquence.

PERILS OF THE SMALL HOURS.

When life burns low as the fire in the grate
And all the evening's books are read,
I sit alone, save for the dead
And the lovers I have grown to hate.

But all at once the narrow gloom
Of hatred and despair expands
In tenderness: thought stretches hands
To welcome to the midnight room

Another presence: — a memory
Of how last year in the sunlit field,
Laughing, you suddenly revealed
Beauty in immortality.

For so it is; a gesture strips
Life bare of all its make-believe.
All unprepared we may receive
Our casual apocalypse.

Sheer beauty, then you seemed to stir
Unbodied soul; soul sleeps to-night,
And love comes, dimming spirit's sight,
When body plays interpreter.

COMPLAINT.

I have tried to remember the familiar places, —
The pillared gloom of the beechwoods, the towns
by the sea, —
I have tried to people the past with dear known faces,
But you were haunting me.

Like a remorse, insistent, pitiless,
You have filled my spirit, you were ever at hand;
You have mocked my gods with your new loveliness:
Broken the old shrines stand.

RETURN TO AN OLD HOME.

In this wood — how the hazels have grown! —
I left a treasure all my own
Of childish kisses and laughter and pain;
Left, till I might come back again
To take from the familiar earth
My hoarded secret and count its worth.
And all the spider-work of the years,
All the time-spun gossamers,
Dewed with each succeeding spring;
And the piled up leaves the Autumns fling
To the sweet corruption of death on death...
At the sudden stir of my spirit's breath
All scattered. New and fair and bright
As ever it was, before my sight
The treasure lay, and nothing missed.
So having handled all and kissed,
I put them back, adding one new
And precious memory of you.

FRAGMENT.

We're German scholars poring over life,
As over a Greek manuscript that's torn
And stained beyond repair. Our eyes of horn
Read one or two poor letters; and what strife,
What books on books begotten for their sake!
But we enjoy it; and meanwhile neglect
The line that's left us perfect from the wrecked
Rich argosy, clear beyond doubts to make
Conjectures of. So in my universe
Of scribbled half-hid meanings you appear,
Sole perfect symbol of the highest sphere;
And life's great matrix crystal, whose depths nurse
Soul's infinite reflections, glows in you
With now uncertain radiance...

THE WALK.

I. THROUGH THE SUBURBS.

Provincial Sunday broods above the town:
The street's asleep; through a dim window drifts
A small romance that hiccoughs up and down
An air all trills and runs and sudden lifts
To yearning sevenths poised ... not Chopin quite,
But, oh, romantic; a tinsel world made bright
With rose and honeysuckle's paper blooms,
And where the moon's blue limelight and the glooms
Of last-act scenes of passion are discreet.
And when the tinkling stops and leaves the street
Blank in the sunlight of the afternoon
You feel a curtain dropped. Poor little tune!
Perhaps our grandmother's dull girlhood days
Were fired by you with radiances of pink,
Heavenly, brighter far than she could think
Anything might be ... till a greater blaze
Tinged life's horizon, when he kissed her first,
Our grandpapa. But a thin ghost still plays
In music down the street, echoing the plaint
Of far romance with its own sadder song
Of Everyday; and as they walk along, ...
The young man and the woman, deep immersed
In all the suburb-comedy around ...
They seem to catch coherence in the sound
Of that ghost-music, and the words come faint: —
Oh the months and the days,
Oh sleeps and dinners,
Oh the planning of ways
And quotidian means!
Oh endless vistas of mutton and greens,
Oh weekly mimblings of prayer and praise,
Oh Evenings with All the Winners!
Monday sends the clothes to the wash
And Saturday brings them home again:
Mon Dieu, la vie est par trop moche
And Destiny is a sale caboche;
But I'll give you heaven
In a dominant seven,
And you shall not have lived in vain.

“In vain,” the girl repeats, “in vain, in vain ...”
Your suburb’s whole philosophy leads there.
The ox-stall for our happiness, for pain,
Poignant and sweet, the dull narcotic ache
Of wretchedness, and in resigned despair
A grim contentment ... ashen fruits to slake
A nameless, quenchless thirst. The tinkling rain
Of that small sentimental music wets
Your parching suburb: it may sprout ... who knows?...
In something red and silken like a rose,
In sheaves of almost genuine violets.

Faint chords, your sadness, secular, immense,
Brim to the bursting this poor Actual heart.
For surging through the floodgates that the sense
On sudden lightly opens sweeps the Whole
Into the narrow compass of its part.

He.

Inedited sensation of the soul!
You’d have us bless the Hire-Purchase System,
Which now allows the poorest vampers
To feel, as they abuse their piano’s dampers,
That angels have stooped down and kissed ’em
With Ave-Maries from the infinite.
But poor old Infinite’s dead. Long live his heir,
Lord Here-and-Now ... for all the rest
Is windy nothingness, or at the best
Home-made Chimera, bodied with despair,
Headed with formless, foolish hope.

She.

No, no!

We live in verse, for all things rhyme
With something out of space and time.

He.

But in the suburb here life needs must flow
In journalistic prose ...

She.

But we have set
Our faces towards the further hills, where yet
The wind untainted and unbound may blow.

II. From the Crest

So through the squalor, till the sky unfolds
To right and left its fringes, penned no more,
A thin canal, 'twixt shore and ugly shore
Of hovels, poured contiguous from the moulds
Of Gothic horror. Town is left at last,
Save for the tentacles that probe,... a squat
Dun house or two, allotments, plot on plot
Of cabbage, jejune, ripe or passed,
Chequering with sick yellow or verdigris
The necropolitan ground; and neat paved ways
That edge the road ... the town's last nerves ... and cease,
As if in sudden shame, where hedges raise
Their dusty greenery on either hand.
Their path mounts slowly up the hill;
And, as they walk, to right and left expand
The plain and the golden uplands and the blue
Faint smoke of distances that fade from view;
And at their feet, remote and still?
The city spreads itself.

He.

That glabrous dome that lifts itself so grand,
There in the marsh, is the omphalos,
The navel, umbo, middle, central boss
Of the unique, sole, true Cloud-Cuckoo Land.
Drowsy with Sunday bells and Sunday beer
Afoam in silver rumkins, there it basks,
Thinking of labours past and future tasks
And pondering on the end, forever near,
Yet ever distant as the rainbow's spring.
For still in Cuckoo-Land they're labouring,
With hopes undamped and undiscouraged hearts:
A little musty, but superb, they sit,
Piecing a god together bit by bit
Out of the chaos of his sundered parts.
Unmoved, nay pitying, they view the grins
And lewd grimaces of the folk that jeer ...
The vulgar herd, gross monster at the best,
Obscenum Mobile, the uttermost sphere,
Alas, too much the mover of the rest,
Though they turn sungates to its widdershins ...

And in some half a million years perhaps
God may at last be made ... a new, true Pan,
An Isis templed in the soul of man,
An Aphrodite with her thousand paps
Streaming eternal wisdom.
Yes, and man's vessel, all pavilioned out
With silk and flags in the fair wind astream,
Shall make the port at last, with a great shout
Ringing from all her decks, and rocking there shall dream
For ever, and dream true ... calm in those roads
As lovers' souls at evening, when they swim
Between the despairing sunset and the dim
Blue memories of mountains lost to sight
But, like half fancied, half remembered episodes
Of childhood, guessed at through the veils of night.
And the worn sailors at the mast who heard
The first far bells and knew the sound for home,
Who marked the land-weeds and the sand-stained foam
And through the storm-blast saw a wildered bird
Seek refuge at the mast-head ... these at last
Shall earn due praise when all the hubbub's past;
And Cuckoo-Landers not a few shall prove.

She.

You have fast closed the temple gates;
You stand without in the noon-tides glow,
But the innermost darkness, where God waits,
You do not know, you cannot know.

The Defeat of Youth and Other Poems
CONTENTS

- THE DEFEAT OF YOUTH
- I. UNDER THE TREES.
- VI. IN THE HAY-LOFT.
- VIII. MOUNTAINS.
- X. IN THE LITTLE ROOM.
- XVII. IN THE PARK.
- XX. SELF-TORMENT.

- XXII. THE QUARRY IN THE WOOD.
- SONG OF POPLARS
- THE REEF
- WINTER DREAM
- THE FLOWERS
- THE ELMS
- OUT OF THE WINDOW
- INSPIRATION
- SUMMER STILLNESS
- ANNIVERSARIES
- ITALY
- THE ALIEN
- A LITTLE MEMORY
- WAKING
- BY THE FIRE
- VALEDICTORY
- LOVE SONG
- PRIVATE PROPERTY
- REVELATION
- MINOAN PORCELAIN
- THE DECAMERON
- IN UNCERTAINTY TO A LADY
- CRAPULOUS IMPRESSION (To J.S.)
- THE LIFE THEORETIC
- COMPLAINT OF A POET MANQUÉ

- SOCIAL AMENITIES
- TOPIARY
- ON THE BUS
- POINTS AND LINES
- PANIC
- RETURN FROM BUSINESS
- STANZAS
- POEM
- SCENES OF THE MIND
- L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE
- THE LOUSE-HUNTERS

The Defeat of Youth

I. UNDER THE TREES.

There had been phantoms, pale-remembered shapes
Of this and this occasion, sisterly
In their resemblances, each effigy
Crowned with the same bright hair above the nape's
White rounded firmness, and each body alert
With such swift loveliness, that very rest
Seemed a poised movement: ... phantoms that impressed
But a faint influence and could bless or hurt
No more than dreams. And these ghost things were she;
For formless still, without identity,
Not one she seemed, not clear, but many and dim.
One face among the legions of the street,
Indifferent mystery, she was for him
Something still uncreated, incomplete.

II.

Bright windy sunshine and the shadow of cloud
Quicken the heavy summer to new birth
Of life and motion on the drowsing earth;
The huge elms stir, till all the air is loud
With their awakening from the muffled sleep
Of long hot days. And on the wavering line
That marks the alternate ebb of shade and shine,
Under the trees, a little group is deep
In laughing talk. The shadow as it flows
Across them dims the lustre of a rose,
Quenches the bright clear gold of hair, the green
Of a girl's dress, and life seems faint. The light
Swings back, and in the rose a fire is seen,
Gold hair's aflame and green grows emerald bright.

III.

She leans, and there is laughter in the face
She turns towards him; and it seems a door
Suddenly opened on some desolate place
With a burst of light and music. What before
Was hidden shines in loveliness revealed.
Now first he sees her beautiful, and knows
That he must love her; and the doom is sealed
Of all his happiness and all the woes
That shall be born of pregnant years hereafter.
The swift poise of a head, a flutter of laughter —
And love flows in on him, its vastness pent
Within his narrow life: the pain it brings,
Boundless; for love is infinite discontent
With the poor lonely life of transient things.

IV.

Men see their god, an immanence divine,
Smile through the curve of flesh or moulded clay,
In bare ploughed lands that go sloping away
To meet the sky in one clean exquisite line.
Out of the short-seen dawns of ecstasy
They draw new beauty, whence new thoughts are born
And in their turn conceive, as grains of corn
Germ and create new life and endlessly
Shall live creating. Out of earthly seeds
Springs the aerial flower. One spirit proceeds
Through change, the same in body and in soul —
The spirit of life and love that triumphs still
In its slow struggle towards some far-off goal
Through lust and death and the bitterness of will.

V.

One spirit it is that stirs the fathomless deep
Of human minds, that shakes the elms in storm,
That sings in passionate music, or on warm
Still evenings bosoms forth the tufted sleep
Of thistle-seeds that wait a travelling wind.
One spirit shapes the subtle rhythms of thought
And the long thundering seas; the soul is wrought
Of one stuff with the body — matter and mind
Woven together in so close a mesh
That flowers may blossom into a song, that flesh
May strangely teach the loveliest holiest things
To watching spirits. Truth is brought to birth
Not in some vacant heaven: its beauty springs
From the dear bosom of material earth.

VI. In the Hay-loft

The darkness in the loft is sweet and warm
With the stored hay ... darkness intensified
By one bright shaft that enters through the wide
Tall doors from under fringes of a storm
Which makes the doomed sun brighter. On the hay,
Perched mountain-high they sit, and silently
Watch the motes dance and look at the dark sky
And mark how heartbreakingly far away
And yet how close and clear the distance seems,
While all at hand is cloud — brightness of dreams
Unrealisable, yet seen so clear,
So only just beyond the dark. They wait,
Scarce knowing what they wait for, half in fear;
Expectance draws the curtain from their fate.

VII.

The silence of the storm weighs heavily
On their strained spirits: sometimes one will say
Some trivial thing as though to ward away
Mysterious powers, that imminently lie
In wait, with the strong exorcising grace
Of everyday's futility. Desire
Becomes upon a sudden a crystal fire,
Defined and hard: — If he could kiss her face,
Could kiss her hair! As if by chance, her hand
Brushes on his ... Ah, can she understand?
Or is she pedestalled above the touch
Of his desire? He wonders: dare he seek
From her that little, that infinitely much?
And suddenly she kissed him on the cheek.

VIII. Mountains

A stronger gust catches the cloud and twists
A spindle of rifted darkness through its heart,
A gash in the damp grey, which, thrust apart,
Reveals black depths a moment. Then the mists
Shut down again; a white uneasy sea
Heaves round the climbers and beneath their feet.
He strains on upwards through the wind and sleet,
Poised, or swift moving, or laboriously
Lifting his weight. And if he should let go,
What would he find down there, down there below
The curtain of the mist? What would he find
Beyond the dim and stifling now and here,
Beneath the unsettled turmoil of his mind?
Oh, there were nameless depths: he shrank with fear.

IX.

The hills more glorious in their coat of snow
Rise all around him, in the valleys run
Bright streams, and there are lakes that catch the sun,
And sunlit fields of emerald far below
That seem alive with inward light. In smoke
The far horizons fade; and there is peace
On everything, a sense of blessed release
From wilful strife. Like some prophetic cloak
The spirit of the mountains has descended
On all the world, and its unrest is ended.
Even the sea, glimpsed far away, seems still,
Hushed to a silver peace its storm and strife.
Mountains of vision, calm above fate and will,
You hold the promise of the freer life.

X. In the Little Room

London unfurls its incense-coloured dusk
Before the panes, rich but a while ago
With the charred gold and the red ember-glow
Of dying sunset. Houses quit the husk
Of secrecy, which, through the day, returns
A blank to all enquiry: but at nights
The cheerfulness of fire and lamp invites
The darkness inward, curious of what burns
With such a coloured life when all is dead —
The daylight world outside, with overhead
White clouds, and where we walk, the blaze
Of wet and sunlit streets, shops and the stream
Of glittering traffic — all that the nights erase,
Colour and speed, surviving but in dream.

XI.

Outside the dusk, but in the little room
All is alive with light, which brightly glints
On curving cup or the stiff folds of chintz,
Evoking its own whiteness. Shadows loom,
Bulging and black, upon the walls, where hang
Rich coloured plates of beauties that appeal
Less to the sense of sight than to the feel,
So moistly satin are their breasts. A pang,
Almost of pain, runs through him when he sees
Hanging, a homeless marvel, next to these,
The silken breastplate of a mandarin,
Centuries dead, which he had given her.
Exquisite miracle, when men could spin
Jay's wing and belly of the kingfisher!

XII.

In silence and as though expectantly
She crouches at his feet, while he caresses
His light-drawn fingers with the touch of tresses
Sleeked round her head, close-banded lustrously,
Save where at nape and temple the smooth brown
Sleaves out into a pale transparent mist
Of hair and tangled light. So to exist,
Poised 'twixt the deep of thought where spirits drown
Life in a void impalpable nothingness,
And, on the other side, the pain and stress
Of clamorous action and the gnawing fire
Of will, focal upon a point of earth — even thus
To sit, eternally without desire
And yet self-known, were happiness for us.

XIII.

She turns her head and in a flash of laughter
Looks up at him: and helplessly he feels
That life has circled with returning wheels
Back to a starting-point. Before and after
Merge in this instant, momentarily the same:
For it was thus she leaned and laughing turned
When, manifest, the spirit of beauty burned
In her young body with an inward flame,
And first he knew and loved her. In full tide
Life halts within him, suddenly stupefied.
Sight blackness, lightning-struck; but blindly tender
He draws her up to meet him, and she lies
Close folded by his arms in glad surrender,
Smiling, and with drooped head and half closed eyes.

XIV.

“I give you all; would that I might give more.”
He sees the colour dawn across her cheeks
And die again to white; marks as she speaks
The trembling of her lips, as though she bore
Some sudden pain and hardly mastered it.
Within his arms he feels her shuddering,
Piteously trembling like some wild wood-thing
Caught unawares. Compassion infinite
Mounts up within him. Thus to hold and keep
And comfort her distressed, lull her to sleep
And gently kiss her brow and hair and eyes
Seems love perfected — templed high and white
Against the calm of golden autumn skies,
And shining quenchlessly with vestal light.

XV.

But passion ambushed by the aerial shrine
Comes forth to dance, a hoofed obscenity,
His satyr's dance, with laughter in his eye,
And cruelty along the scarlet line
Of his bright smiling mouth. All uncontrolled,
Love's rebel servant, he delights to beat
The maddening quick dry rhythm of goatish feet
Even in the sanctuary, and makes bold
To mime himself the godhead of the place.
He turns in terror from her trance-calmed face,
From the white-lidded languor of her eyes,
From lips that passion never shook before,
But glad in the promise of her sacrifice:
"I give you all; would that I might give more."

XVI.

He is afraid, seeing her lie so still,
So utterly his own; afraid lest she
Should open wide her eyes and let him see
The passionate conquest of her virgin will
Shine there in triumph, starry-bright with tears.
He thrusts her from him: face and hair and breast,
Hands he had touched, lips that his lips had pressed,
Seem things deadly to be desired. He fears
Lest she should body forth in palpable shame
Those dreams and longings that his blood, aflame
Through the hot dark of summer nights, had dreamed
And longed. Must all his love, then, turn to this?
Was lust the end of what so pure had seemed?
He must escape, ah God! her touch, her kiss.

XVII. In the Park

Laughing, "To-night," I said to him, "the Park
Has turned the garden of a symbolist.
Those old great trees that rise above the mist,
Gold with the light of evening, and the dark
Still water, where the dying sun evokes
An echoed glory — here I recognize
Those ancient gardens mirrored by the eyes
Of poets that hate the world of common folks,
Like you and me and that thin pious crowd,
Which yonder sings its hymns, so humbly proud
Of holiness. The garden of escape
Lies here; a small green world, and still the bride
Of quietness, although an imminent rape
Roars ceaselessly about on every side."

XVIII.

I had forgotten what I had lightly said,
And without speech, without a thought I went,
Steeped in that golden quiet, all content
To drink the transient beauty as it sped
Out of eternal darkness into time
To light and burn and know itself a fire;
Yet doomed — ah, fate of the fulfilled desire! —
To fade, a meteor, paying for the crime
Of living glorious in the denser air
Of our material earth. A strange despair,
An agony, yet strangely, subtly sweet
And tender as an unpassionate caress,
Filled me ... Oh laughter! youth's conceit
Grown almost conscious of youth's feebleness!

XIX.

He spoke abrupt across my dream: "Dear Garden,
A stranger to your magic peace, I stand
Beyond your walls, lost in a fevered land
Of stones and fire. Would that the gods would harden
My soul against its torment, or would blind
Those yearning glimpses of a life at rest
In perfect beauty — glimpses at the best
Through unpassed bars. And here, without, the wind
Of scattering passion blows: and women pass
Glitter-eyed down putrid alleys where the glass
Of some grimed window suddenly parades —
Ah, sickening heart-beat of desire! — the grace
Of bare and milk-warm flesh: the vision fades,
And at the pane shows a blind tortured face."

XX. Self-torment

The days pass by, empty of thought and will:
His thought grows stagnant at its very springs,
With every channel on the world of things
Dammed up, and thus, by its long standing still,
Poisons itself and sickens to decay.
All his high love for her, his fair desire,
Loses its light; and a dull rancorous fire,
Burning darkness and bitterness that prey
Upon his heart are left. His spirit burns
Sometimes with hatred, or the hatred turns
To a fierce lust for her, more cruel than hate,
Till he is weary wrestling with its force:
And evermore she haunts him, early and late,
As pitilessly as an old remorse.

XXI.

Streets and the solitude of country places
Were once his friends. But as a man born blind,
Opening his eyes from lovely dreams, might find
The world a desert and men's larval faces
So hateful, he would wish to seek again
The darkness and his old chimeric sight
Of beauties inward — so, that fresh delight,
Vision of bright fields and angelic men,
That love which made him all the world, is gone.
Hating and hated now, he stands alone,
An island-point, measureless gulfs apart
From other lives, from the old happiness
Of being more than self, when heart to heart
Gave all, yet grew the greater, not the less.

XXII. The Quarry in the Wood

Swiftly deliberate, he seeks the place.
A small wind stirs, the copse is bright in the sun:
Like quicksilver the shine and shadow run
Across the leaves. A bramble whips his face,
The tears spring fast, and through the rainbow mist
He sees a world that wavers like the flame
Of a blown candle. Tears of pain and shame,
And lips that once had laughed and sung and kissed
Trembling in the passion of his sobbing breath!
The world a candle shuddering to its death,
And life a darkness, blind and utterly void
Of any love or goodness: all deceit,
This friendship and this God: all shams destroyed,
And truth seen now.
Earth fails beneath his feet.

SONG OF POPLARS

Shepherd, to yon tall poplars tune your flute:
Let them pierce, keenly, subtly shrill,
The slow blue rumour of the hill;
Let the grass cry with an anguish of evening gold,
And the great sky be mute.

Then hearken how the poplar trees unfold
Their buds, yet close and gummed and blind,
In airy leafage of the mind,
Rustling in silvery whispers the twin-hued scales
That fade not nor grow old.

“Poplars and fountains and you cypress spires
Springing in dark and rusty flame,
Seek you aught that hath a name?
Or say, say: Are you all an upward agony
Of undefined desires?

“Say, are you happy in the golden march
Of sunlight all across the day?
Or do you watch the uncertain way
That leads the withering moon on cloudy stairs
Over the heaven’s wide arch?

“Is it towards sorrow or towards joy you lift
The sharpness of your trembling spears?
Or do you seek, through the grey tears
That blur the sky, in the heart of the triumphing blue,
A deeper, calmer rift?”

So; I have tuned my music to the trees,
And there were voices, dim below
Their shrillness, voices swelling slow
In the blue murmur of hills, and a golden cry
And then vast silences.

THE REEF

My green aquarium of phantom fish,
Goggling in on me through the misty panes;
My rotting leaves and fields spongy with rains;
My few clear quiet autumn days — I wish

I could leave all, clearness and mistiness;
Sodden or goldenly crystal, all too still.

Yes, and I too rot with the leaves that fill
The hollows in the woods; I am grown less

Than human, listless, aimless as the green
Idiot fishes of my aquarium,
Who loiter down their dim tunnels and come
And look at me and drift away, nought seen

Or understood, but only glazedly
Reflected. Upwards, upwards through the shadows,
Through the lush sponginess of deep-sea meadows
Where hare-lipped monsters batten, let me ply

Winged fins, bursting this matrix dark to find
Jewels and movement, mintage of sunlight
Scattered largely by the profuse wind,
And gulfs of blue brightness, too deep for sight.

Free, newly born, on roads of music and air
Speeding and singing, I shall seek the place
Where all the shining threads of water race,
Drawn in green ropes and foamy meshes. There,

On the red fretted ramparts of a tower
Of coral rooted in the depths, shall break
An endless sequence of joy and speed and power:
Green shall shatter to foam; flake with white flake

Shall create an instant's shining constellation
Upon the blue; and all the air shall be
Full of a million wings that swift and free
Laugh in the sun, all power and strong elation.

Yes, I shall seek that reef, which is beyond
All isles however magically sleeping
In tideless seas, uncharted and unconned
Save by blind eyes; beyond the laughter and weeping

That brood like a cloud over the lands of men.
Movement, passion of colour and pure wings,
Curving to cut like knives — these are the things
I search for: — passion beyond the ken

Of our foiled violences, and, more swift
Than any blow which man aims against time,
The invulnerable, motion that shall rift
All dimness with the lightning of a rhyme,

Or note, or colour. And the body shall be
Quick as the mind; and will shall find release
From bondage to brute things; and joyously
Soul, will and body, in the strength of triune peace,

Shall live the perfect grace of power unwasted.
And love consummate, marvellously blending
Passion and reverence in a single spring
Of quickening force, till now never yet tasted,

But ever ceaselessly thirsted for, shall crown
The new life with its ageless starry fire.
I go to seek that reef, far down, far down
Below the edge of everyday's desire,

Beyond the magical islands, where of old
I was content, dreaming, to give the lie
To misery. They were all strong and bold
That thither came; and shall I dare to try?

Winter Dream

OH wind-swept towers,
Oh endlessly blossoming trees,
White clouds and lucid eyes,
And pools in the rocks whose unplumbed blue is pregnant
With who knows what of subtlety
And magical curves and limbs —
White Anadyomene and her shallow breasts
Mother-of-pearled with light.

And oh the April, April of straight soft hair,
Falling smooth as the mountain water and brown;
The April of little leaves unblinded,
Of rosy nipples and innocence
And the blue languor of weary eyelids.

Across a huge gulf I fling my voice
And my desires together:
Across a huge gulf ... on the other bank
Crouches April with her hair as smooth and straight and brown
As falling waters.
Oh brave curve upwards and outwards.
Oh despair of the downward tilting —
Despair still beautiful
As a great star one has watched all night
Wheeling down under the hills.
Silence widens and darkens;
Voice and desires have dropped out of sight.
I am all alone, dreaming she would come and kiss me.

THE FLOWERS

Day after day,
At spring's return,
I watch my flowers, how they burn
Their lives away.

The candle crocus
And daffodil gold
Drink fire of the sunshine —
Quickly cold.

And the proud tulip —
How red he glows! —
Is quenched ere summer
Can kindle the rose.

Purple as the innermost
Core of a sinking flame,
Deep in the leaves the violets smoulder
To the dust whence they came.

Day after day
At spring's return,
I watch my flowers, how they burn
Their lives away,
Day after day ...

THE ELMS

ine as the dust of plummy fountains blowing
Across the lanterns of a revelling night,
The tiny leaves of April's earliest growing
Powder the trees — so vaporously light,
They seem to float, billows of emerald foam
Blown by the South on its bright airy tide,
Seeming less trees than things beatified,
Come from the world of thought which was their home.

For a while only. Rooted strong and fast,
Soon will they lift towards the summer sky
Their mountain-mass of clotted greenery.
Their immaterial season quickly past,
They grow opaque, and therefore needs must die,
Since every earth to earth returns at last.

OUT OF THE WINDOW

In the middle of countries, far from hills and sea,
Are the little places one passes by in trains
And never stops at; where the skies extend
Uninterrupted, and the level plains
Stretch green and yellow and green without an end.
And behind the glass of their Grand Express
Folk yawn away a province through,
With nothing to think of, nothing to do,
Nothing even to look at — never a “view”
In this damned wilderness.
But I look out of the window and find
Much to satisfy the mind.
Mark how the furrows, formed and wheeled
In a motion orderly and staid,
Sweep, as we pass, across the field
Like a drilled army on parade.
And here’s a market-garden, barred
With stripe on stripe of varied greens ...
Bright potatoes, flower starred,
And the opacous colour of beans.
Each line deliberately swings
Towards me, till I see a straight
Green avenue to the heart of things,
The glimpse of a sudden opened gate
Piercing the adverse walls of fate ...
A moment only, and then, fast, fast,
The gate swings to, the avenue closes;
Fate laughs, and once more interposes
Its barriers.
The train has passed.

INSPIRATION

Noonday upon the Alpine meadows
Pours its avalanche of Light
And blazing flowers: the very shadows
Translucent are and bright.
It seems a glory that nought surpasses —
Passion of angels in form and hue —
When, lo! from the jewelled heaven of the grasses
Leaps a lightning of sudden blue.
Dimming the sun-drunk petals,
Bright even unto pain,
The grasshopper flashes, settles,
And then is quenched again.

SUMMER STILLNESS

The stars are golden instants in the deep
Flawless expanse of night: the moon is set:
The river sleeps, entranced, a smooth cool sleep
Seeming so motionless that I forget
The hollow booming bridges, where it slides,
Dark with the sad looks that it bears along,
Towards a sea whose unreturning tides
Ravish the sighted ships and the sailors' song.

ANNIVERSARIES

Once more the windless days are here,
Quiet of autumn, when the year
Halts and looks backward and draws breath
Before it plunges into death.
Silver of mist and gossamers,
Through-shine of noonday's glassy gold,
Pale blue of skies, where nothing stirs
Save one blanched leaf, weary and old,
That over and over slowly falls
From the mute elm-trees, hanging on air
Like tattered flags along the walls
Of chapels deep in sunlit prayer.
Once more ... Within its flawless glass
To-day reflects that other day,
When, under the bracken, on the grass,
We who were lovers happily lay
And hardly spoke, or framed a thought
That was not one with the calm hills
And crystal sky. Ourselves were nought,
Our gusty passions, our burning wills
Dissolved in boundlessness, and we
Were almost bodiless, almost free.

The wind has shattered silver and gold.
Night after night of sparkling cold,
Orion lifts his tangled feet
From where the tossing branches beat
In a fine surf against the sky.
So the trance ended, and we grew
Restless, we knew not how or why;
And there were sudden gusts that blew
Our dreaming banners into storm;
We wore the uncertain crumbling form
Of a brown swirl of windy leaves,
A phantom shape that stirs and heaves
Shuddering from earth, to fall again
With a dry whisper of withered rain.

Last, from the dead and shrunken days
We conjured spring, lighting the blaze
Of burnished tulips in the dark;
And from black frost we struck a spark
Of blue delight and fragrance new,
A little world of flowers and dew.
Winter for us was over and done:
The drought of fluttering leaves had grown
Emerald shining in the sun,
As light as glass, as firm as stone.
Real once more: for we had passed
Through passion into thought again;
Shaped our desires and made that fast
Which was before a cloudy pain;
Moulded the dimness, fixed, defined
In a fair statue, strong and free,
Twin bodies flaming into mind,
Poised on the brink of ecstasy.

Italy

There is a country in my mind,
Lovelier than a poet blind
Could dream of, who had never known
This world of drought and dust and stone
In all its ugliness: a place
Full of an all but human grace;
Whose dells retain the printed form
Of heavenly sleep, and seem yet warm
From some pure body newly risen;
Where matter is no more a prison,
But freedom for the soul to know
Its native beauty. For things glow
There with an inward truth and are
All fire and colour like a star.
And in that land are domes and towers
That hang as light and bright as flowers
Upon the sky, and seem a birth
Rather of air than solid earth.

Sometimes I dream that walking there
In the green shade, all unaware
At a new turn of the golden glade,
I shall see her, and as though afraid
Shall halt a moment and almost fall
For passing faintness, like a man
Who feels the sudden spirit of Pan
Brimming his narrow soul with all
The illimitable world. And she,
Turning her head, will let me see
The first sharp dawn of her surprise
Turning to welcome in her eyes.
And I shall come and take my lover
And looking on her re-discover
All her beauty: — her dark hair
And the little ears beneath it, where
Roses of lucid shadow sleep;
Her brooding mouth, and in the deep
Wells of her eyes reflected stars ...

Oh, the imperishable things
That hands and lips as well as words
Shall speak! Oh movement of white wings,
Oh wheeling galaxies of birds ...!

THE ALIEN

A petal drifted loose
From a great magnolia bloom,
Your face hung in the gloom,
Floating, white and close.

We seemed alone: but another
Bent o'er you with lips of flame,
Unknown, without a name,
Hated, and yet my brother.

Your one short moan of pain
Was an exorcising spell:
The devil flew back to hell;
We were alone again.

A LITTLE MEMORY

White in the moonlight,
Wet with dew,
We have known the languor
Of being two.

We have been weary
As children are,
When over them, radiant,
A stooping star,
 Bends their Good-Night,
Kissed and smiled: —
Each was mother,
Each was child.
 Child, from your forehead
I kissed the hair,
Gently, ah, gently:
And you were
 Mistress and mother
When on your breast
I lay so safely
And could rest.

Waking

Darkness had stretched its colour,
Deep blue across the pane:
No cloud to make night duller,
No moon with its tarnish stain;
But only here and there a star,
One sharp point of frosty fire,
Hanging infinitely far
In mockery of our life and death
And all our small desire.

Now in this hour of waking
From under brows of stone,
A new pale day is breaking
And the deep night is gone.
Sordid now, and mean and small
The daylight world is seen again,
With only the veils of mist that fall
Deaf and muffling over all
To hide its ugliness and pain.

But to-day this dawn of meanness
Shines in my eyes, as when
The new world's brightness and cleanness
Broke on the first of men.
For the light that shows the huddled things
Of this close-pressing earth,
Shines also on your face and brings
All its dear beauty back to me
In a new miracle of birth.

I see you asleep and unpassioned,
White-faced in the dusk of your hair —
Your beauty so fleetingly fashioned
That it filled me once with despair
To look on its exquisite transience
And think that our love and thought and laughter
Puff out with the death of our flickering sense,
While we pass ever on and away
Towards some blank hereafter.

But now I am happy, knowing
That swift time is our friend,
And that our love's passionate glowing,
Though it turn ash in the end,
Is a rose of fire that must blossom its way
Through temporal stuff, nor else could be
More than a nothing. Into day
The boundless spaces of night contract
And in your opening eyes I see
Night born in day, in time eternity.

BY THE FIRE

We who are lovers sit by the fire,
Cradled warm 'twixt thought and will,
Sit and drowse like sleeping dogs
In the equipoise of all desire,
Sit and listen to the still
Small hiss and whisper of green logs
That burn away, that burn away
With the sound of a far-off falling stream
Of threaded water blown to steam,
Grey ghost in the mountain world of grey.
Vapours blue as distance rise
Between the hissing logs that show
A glimpse of rosy heat below;
And candles watch with tireless eyes
While we sit drowsing here. I know,
Dimly, that there exists a world,
That there is time perhaps, and space
Other and wider than this place,
Where at the fireside drowsily curled
We hear the whisper and watch the flame
Burn blinkless and inscrutable.
And then I know those other names
That through my brain from cell to cell
Echo — reverberated shout
Of waiters mournful along corridors:
But nobody carries the orders out,
And the names (dear friends, your name and yours)
Evoke no sign. But here I sit
On the wide hearth, and there are you:
That is enough and only true.
The world and the friends that lived in it
Are shadows: you alone remain
Real in this drowsing room,
Full of the whispers of distant rain
And candles staring into the gloom.

VALEDICTORY

had remarked — how sharply one observes
When life is disappearing round the curves
Of yet another corner, out of sight! —
I had remarked when it was “good luck” and “good night”
And “a good journey to you,” on her face
Certain enigmas penned in the hieroglyphs
Of that half frown and queer fixed smile and trace
Of clouded thought in those brown eyes,
Always so happily clear of hows and ifs —
My poor bleared mind! — and haunting whys.

There I stood, holding her farewell hand,
(Pressing my life and soul and all
The world to one good-bye, till, small
And smaller pressed, why there I'd stand
Dead when they vanished with the sight of her).
And I saw that she had grown aware,
Queer puzzled face! of other things
Beyond the present and her own young speed,
Of yesterday and what new days might breed
Monstrously when the future brings
A charger with your late-lamented head:
Aware of other people's lives and will,
Aware, perhaps, aware even of me ...
The joyous hope of it! But still
I pitied her; for it was sad to see
A goddess shorn of her divinity.
In the midst of her speed she had made pause,
And doubts with all their threat of claws,
Outstripped till now by her unconsciousness,
Had seized on her; she was proved mortal now.
“Live, only live! For you were meant
Never to know a thought's distress,
But a long glad astonishment
At the world's beauty and your own.
The pity of you, goddess, grown
Perplexed and mortal.”
Yet ... yet ... can it be
That she is aware, perhaps, even of me?

And life recedes, recedes; the curve is bare,
My handkerchief flutters blankly in the air;
And the question rumbles in the void:
Was she aware, was she after all aware?

LOVE SONG

Dear absurd child — too dear to my cost I've found —
God made your soul for pleasure, not for use:
It cleaves no way, but angled broad obtuse,
Impinges with a slabby-bellied sound
Full upon life, and on the rind of things
Rubs its sleek self and utters purr and snore
And all the gamut of satisfied murmurings,
Content with that, nor wishes anything more.

A happy infant, daubed to the eyes in juice
Of peaches that flush bloody at the core,
Naked you bask upon a south-sea shore,
While o'er your tumbling bosom the hair floats loose.

The wild flowers bloom and die; the heavens go round
With the song of wheeling planetary rings:
You wriggle in the sun; each moment brings
Its freight for you; in all things pleasures abound.

You taste and smile, then this for the next pass over;
And there's no future for you and no past,
And when, absurdly, death arrives at last,
'Twill please you awhile to kiss your latest lover.

PRIVATE PROPERTY

All fly — yet who is misanthrope? —
The actual men and things that pass
Jostling, to wither as the grass
So soon: and (be it heaven's hope,
Or poetry's kaleidoscope,
Or love or wine, at feast, at mass)
Each owns a paradise of glass
Where never a yearning heliotrope
Pursues the sun's ascent or slope;
For the sun dreams there, and no time is or was.

Like fauns embossed in our domain,
We look abroad, and our calm eyes
Mark how the goatish gods of pain
Revel; and if by grim surprise
They break into our paradise,
Patient we build its beauty up again.

REVELATION

At your mouth, white and milk-warm sphinx,
I taste a strange apocalypse:
Your subtle taper finger-tips
Weave me new heavens, yet, methinks,
I know the wiles and each iynx
That brought me passionate to your lips:
I know you bare as laughter strips
Your charnel beauty; yet my spirit drinks
 Pure knowledge from this tainted well,
And now hears voices yet unheard
Within it, and without it sees
That world of which the poets tell
Their vision in the stammered word
Of those that wake from piercing ecstasies.

MINOAN PORCELAIN

Her eyes of bright unwinking glaze
All imperturbable do not
Even make pretences to regard
The justing absence of her stays,
Where many a Tyrian gallipot
Excites desire with spilth of nard.
The bistred rims above the fard
Of cheeks as red as bergamot
Attest that no shamefaced delays
Will clog fulfilment, nor retard
Full payment of the Cyprian's praise
Down to the last remorseful jot.
Hail priestess of we know not what
Strange cult of Mycenean days!

THE DECAMERON

Noon with a depth of shadow beneath the trees
Shakes in the heat, quivers to the sound of lutes:
Half shaded, half sunlit, a great bowl of fruits
Glistens purple and golden: the flasks of wine
Cool in their panniers of snow: silks muffle and shine:
Dim velvet, where through the leaves a sunbeam shoots,
Rifts in a pane of scarlet: fingers tapping the roots
Keep languid time to the music's soft slow decline.

Suddenly from the gate rises up a cry,
Hideous broken laughter, scarce human in sound;
Gaunt clawed hands, thrust through the bars despairingly,
Clutch fast at the scented air, while on the ground
Lie the poor plague-stricken carrions, who have found
Strength to crawl forth and curse the sunshine and die.

IN UNCERTAINTY TO A LADY

I am not one of those who sip,
Like a quotidian bock,
Cheap idylls from a languid lip
Prepared to yawn or mock.

I wait the indubitable word,
The great Unconscious Cue.
Has it been spoken and unheard?
Spoken, perhaps, by you ...?

CRAPULOUS IMPRESSION

(To J.S.)

Still life, still life ... the high-lights shine
Hard and sharp on the bottles: the wine
Stands firmly solid in the glasses,
Smooth yellow ice, through which there passes
The lamp's bright pencil of down-struck light.
The fruits metallicly gleam,
Globey in their heaped-up bowl,
And there are faces against the night
Of the outer room — faces that seem
Part of this still, still life ... they've lost their soul.

And amongst these frozen faces you smiled,
Surprised, surprisingly, like a child:
And out of the frozen welter of sound
Your voice came quietly, quietly.
“What about God?” you said. “I have found
Much to be said for Totality.
All, I take it, is God: God's all —
This bottle, for instance ...” I recall,
Dimly, that you took God by the neck —
God-in-the-bottle — and pushed Him across:
But I, without a moment's loss
Moved God-in-the-salt in front and shouted: “Check!”

THE LIFE THEORETIC

While I have been fumbling over books
And thinking about God and the Devil and all,
Other young men have been battling with the days
And others have been kissing the beautiful women.
They have brazen faces like battering-rams.
But I who think about books and such —
I crumble to impotent dust before the struggling,
And the women palsy me with fear.
But when it comes to fumbling over books
And thinking about God and the Devil and all,
Why, there I am.
But perhaps the battering-rams are in the right of it,
Perhaps, perhaps ... God knows.

COMPLAINT OF A POET MANQUÉ

We judge by appearance merely:
If I can't think strangely, I can at least look queerly.
So I grew the hair so long on my head
That my mother wouldn't know me,
Till a woman in a night-club said,
As I was passing by,
"Hullo, here comes Salome ..."

I looked in the dirty gilt-edged glass,
And, oh Salome; there I was —
Positively jewelled, half a vampire,
With the soul in my eyes hanging dizzily
Like the gatherer of proverbial samphire
Over the brink of the crag of sense,
Looking down from perilous eminence
Into a gulf of windy night.
And there's straw in my tempestuous hair,
And I'm not a poet: but never despair!
I'll madly live the poems I shall never write.

SOCIAL AMENITIES

I am getting on well with this anecdote,
When suddenly I recall
The many times I have told it of old,
And all the worked-up phrases, and the dying fall
Of voice, well timed in the crisis, the note
Of mock-heroic ingeniously struck —
The whole thing sticks in my throat,
And my face all tingles and pricks with shame
For myself and my hearers.
These are the social pleasures, my God!
But I finish the story triumphantly all the same.

TOPIARY

Hailing sometimes to understand
Why there are folk whose flesh should seem
Like carrion puffed with noisome steam,
Fly-blown to the eye that looks on it,
Fly-blown to the touch of a hand;
Why there are men without any legs,
Whizzing along on little trollies
With long long arms like apes':
Failing to see why God the Topiarist
Should train and carve and twist
Men's bodies into such fantastic shapes:
Yes, failing to see the point of it all, I sometimes wish
That I were a fabulous thing in a fool's mind,
Or, at the ocean bottom, in a world that is deaf and blind,
Very remote and happy, a great goggling fish.

ON THE BUS

Sitting on the top of the 'bus,
I bite my pipe and look at the sky.
Over my shoulder the smoke streams out
And my life with it.
"Conservation of energy," you say.
But I burn, I tell you, I burn;
And the smoke of me streams out
In a vanishing skein of grey.
Crash and bump ... my poor bruised body!
I am a harp of twittering strings,
An elegant instrument, but infinitely second-hand,
And if I have not got phthisis it is only an accident.
Droll phenomena!

POINTS AND LINES

Instants in the quiet, small sharp stars,
Pierce my spirit with a thrust whose speed
Baffles even the grasp of time.
Oh that I might reflect them
As swiftly, as keenly as they shine.
But I am a pool of waters, summer-still,
And the stars are mirrored across me;
Those stabbing points of the sky
Turned to a thread of shaken silver,
A long fine thread.

PANIC

The eyes of the portraits on the wall
Look at me, follow me,
Stare incessantly:
I take it their glance means nothing at all?
— Clearly, oh clearly! Nothing at all ...

Out in the gardens by the lake
The sleeping peacocks suddenly wake;
Out in the gardens, moonlit and forlorn,
Each of them sounds his mournful horn:
Shrill peals that waver and crack and break.
What can have made the peacocks wake?

RETURN FROM BUSINESS

Evenings in trains,
When the little black twittering ghosts
Along the brims of cuttings,
Against the luminous sky,
Interrupt with their hurrying rumour every thought
Save that one is young and setting,
Headlong westering,
And there is no recapture.

STANZAS

Thought is an unseen net wherein our mind
Is taken and vainly struggles to be free:
Words, that should loose our spirit, do but bind
New fetters on our hoped-for liberty:
And action bears us onward like a stream
Past fabulous shores, scarce seen in our swift course;
Glorious — and yet its headlong currents seem
Backwaters of some nobler purer force.

There are slow curves, more subtle far than thought,
That stoop to carry the grace of a girl's breast;
And hanging flowers, so exquisitely wrought
In airy metal, that they seem possessed
Of souls; and there are distant hills that lift
The shoulder of a goddess towards the light;
And arrowy trees, sudden and sharp and swift,
Piercing the spirit deeply with delight.

Would I might make these miracles my own!
Like a pure angel, thinking colour and form,
Hardening to rage in a flame of chiselled stone,
Spilling my love like sunlight, golden and warm
On noonday flowers, speaking the song of birds
Among the branches, whispering the fall of rain,
Beyond all thought, past action and past words,
I would live in beauty, free from self and pain.

POEM

Books and a coloured skein of thoughts were mine;
And magic words lay ripening in my soul
Till their much-whispered music turned a wine
Whose subtlest power was all in my control.

These things were mine, and they were real for me
As lips and darling eyes and a warm breast:
For I could love a phrase, a melody,
Like a fair woman, worshipped and possessed.

I scorned all fire that outward of the eyes
Could kindle passion; scorned, yet was afraid;
Feared, and yet envied those more deeply wise
Who saw the bright earth beckon and obeyed.

But a time came when, turning full of hate
And weariness from my remembered themes,
I wished my poet's pipe could modulate
Beauty more palpable than words and dreams.

All loveliness with which an act informs
The dim uncertain chaos of desire
Is mine to-day; it touches me, it warms
Body and spirit with its outward fire.

I am mine no more: I have become a part
Of that great earth that draws a breath and stirs
To meet the spring. But I could wish my heart
Were still a winter of frosty gossamers.

SCENES OF THE MIND

I have run where festival was loud
With drum and brass among the crowd
Of panic revellers, whose cries
Affront the quiet of the skies;
Whose dancing lights contract the deep
Infinity of night and sleep
To a narrow turmoil of troubled fire.
And I have found my heart's desire
In beechen caverns that autumn fills
With the blue shadowiness of distant hills;
Whose luminous grey pillars bear
The stooping sky: calm is the air,
Nor any sound is heard to mar
That crystal silence — as from far,
Far off a man may see
The busy world all utterly
Hushed as an old memorial scene.
Long evenings I have sat and been
Strangely content, while in my hands
I held a wealth of coloured strands,
Shimmering plaits of silk and skeins
Of soft bright wool. Each colour drains
New life at the lamp's round pool of gold;
Each sinks again when I withhold
The quickening radiance, to a wan
And shadowy oblivion
Of what it was. And in my mind
Beauty or sudden love has shined
And wakened colour in what was dead
And turned to gold the sullen lead
Of mean desires and everyday's
Poor thoughts and customary ways.
Sometimes in lands where mountains throw
Their silent spell on all below,
Drawing a magic circle wide
About their feet on every side,
Robbed of all speech and thought and act,
I have seen God in the cataract.
In falling water and in flame,
Never at rest, yet still the same,
God shows himself. And I have known
The swift fire frozen into stone,
And water frozen changelessly
Into the death of gems. And I
Long sitting by the thunderous mill
Have seen the headlong wheel made still,
And in the silence that ensued
Have known the endless solitude
Of being dead and utterly nought.
Inhabitant of mine own thought,

L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE
(From the French of Stéphane Mallarmé.)

I would immortalize these nymphs: so bright
Their sunlit colouring, so airy light,
It floats like drowsing down. Loved I a dream?
My doubts, born of oblivious darkness, seem
A subtle tracery of branches grown
The tree's true self — proving that I have known
No triumph, but the shadow of a rose.
But think. These nymphs, their loveliness ... suppose
They bodied forth your senses' fabulous thirst?
Illusion! which the blue eyes of the first,
As cold and chaste as is the weeping spring,
Beget: the other, sighing, passioning,
Is she the wind, warm in your fleece at noon?
No, through this quiet, when a weary swoon
Crushes and chokes the latest faint essay
Of morning, cool against the encroaching day,
There is no murmuring water, save the gush
Of my clear fluted notes; and in the hush
Blows never a wind, save that which through my reed
Puffs out before the rain of notes can speed
Upon the air, with that calm breath of art
That mounts the unwrinkled zenith visibly,
Where inspiration seeks its native sky.
You fringes of a calm Sicilian lake,
The sun's own mirror which I love to take,
Silent beneath your starry flowers, tell
How here I cut the hollow rushes, well
Tamed by my skill, when on the glaucous gold
Of distant lawns about their fountain cold
A living whiteness stirs like a lazy wave;
And at the first slow notes my panpipes gave
These flocking swans, these naiads, rather, fly
Or dive. Noon burns inert and tawny dry,
Nor marks how clean that Hymen slipped away
From me who seek in song the real A.
Wake, then, to the first ardour and the sight,
O lonely faun, of the old fierce white light,
With, lilies, one of you for innocence.
Other than their lips' delicate pretence,
The light caress that quiets treacherous lovers,
My breast, I know not how to tell, discovers
The bitten print of some immortal's kiss.
But hush! a mystery so great as this
I dare not tell, save to my double reed, 71
Which, sharer of my every joy and need,
Dreams down its cadenced monologues that we
Falsely confuse the beauties that we see
With the bright palpable shapes our song creates:
My flute, as loud as passion modulates,
Purges the common dream of flank and breast,

Bloom then, O Syrinx, in thy flight malign,
 A reed once more beside our trysting-lake.
 Proud of my music, let me often make
 A song of goddesses and see their rape
 Profanely done on many a painted shape.
 So when the grape's transparent juice I drain,
 I quell regret for pleasures past and feign
 A new real grape. For holding towards the sky
 The empty skin, I blow it tight and lie
 Dream-drunk till evening, eyeing it.
 Tell o'er
 Remembered joys and plump the grape once more.
 Between the reeds I saw their bodies gleam
 Who cool no mortal fever in the stream
 Crying to the woods the rage of their desire:
 And their bright hair went down in jewelled fire
 Where crystal broke and dazzled shudderingly.
 I check my swift pursuit: for see where lie,
 Bruised, being twins in love, by languor sweet,
 Two sleeping girls, clasped at my very feet.
 I seize and run with them, nor part the pair,
 Breaking this covert of frail petals, where
 Roses drink scent of the sun and our light play
 'Mid tumbled flowers shall match the death of day.
 I love that virginal fury — ah, the wild
 Thrill when a maiden body shrinks, defiled,
 Shuddering like arctic light, from lips that sear
 Its nakedness ... the flesh in secret fear!
 Contagiously through my linked pair it flies
 Where innocence in either, struggling, dies,
 Wet with fond tears or some less piteous dew.
 Gay in the conquest of these fears, I grew
 So rash that I must needs the sheaf divide
 Of ruffled kisses heaven itself had tied.
 For as I leaned to stifle in the hair
 Of one my passionate laughter (taking care
 With a stretched finger, that her innocence
 Might stain with her companion's kindling sense
 To touch the younger little one, who lay
 Child-like unblushing) my ungrateful prey
 Slips from me, freed by passion's sudden death,
 Nor heeds the frenzy of my sobbing breath.

Let it pass! others of their hair shall twist
A rope to drag me to those joys I missed.
See how the ripe pomegranates bursting red
To quench the thirst of the mumbling bees have bled;
So too our blood, kindled by some chance fire,
Flows for the swarming legions of desire.
At evening, when the woodland green turns gold
And ashen grey, 'mid the quenched leaves, behold!
Red Etna glows, by Venus visited,
Walking the lava with her snowy tread
Whene'er the flames in thunderous slumber die.
I hold the goddess!
Ah, sure penalty!

But the unthinking soul and body swoon
At last beneath the heavy hush of noon.
Forgetful let me lie where summer's drouth
Sifts fine the sand and then with gaping mouth
Dream planet-struck by the grape's round wine-red star.

Nymphs, I shall see the shade that now you are.

The Louse-Hunters

(From the French of Rimbaud).

When the child's forehead, full of torments red,
Cries out for sleep and its pale host of dreams,
His two big sisters come unto his bed,
Having long fingers, tipped with silvery gleams.

They set him at a casement, open wide
On seas of flowers that stir in the blue airs,
And through his curls, all wet with dew, they slide
Those terrible searching finger-tips of theirs.

He hears them breathing, softly, fearfully,
Honey-sweet ruminations, slow respired:
Then a sharp hiss breaks time and melody —
Spittle indrawn, old kisses new-desired.

Down through the perfumed silences he hears
Their eyelids fluttering: long fingers thrill,
Probing a lassitude bedimmed with tears,
While the nails crunch at every louse they kill.

He is drunk with Languor — soft accordion-sigh,
Delirious wine of Love in Idleness;
Longings for tears come welling up and die,
As slow or swift he feels their magical caress.

Leda

CONTENTS

- LEDA
- THE BIRTH OF GOD
- ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH
- SYMPATHY
- MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM
- FROM THE PILLAR
- JONAH

- VARIATIONS ON A THEME
- A MELODY BY SCARLATTI
- A SUNSET
- LIFE AND ART
- FIRST PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- SECOND PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- FIFTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- NINTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- MORNING SCENE
- VERREY'S
- FRASCATI'S
- FATIGUE
- THE MERRY-GO-ROUND
- BACK STREETS
- LAST THINGS
- GOTHIC
- EVENING PARTY
- BEAUTY
- SOLES OCCIDERE ET REDIRE POSSUNT

Leda

BROWN and bright as an agate, mountain-cool, Eurotas singing slips from pool
 to pool; Down rocky gullies; through the cavernous pines And chestnut groves; down
 where the terraced vines And gardens overhang; through valleys grey With olive trees,
 into a soundless bay Of the Ægean. Silent and asleep Lie those pools now: but where
 they dream most deep, Men sometimes see ripples of shining hair And the young grace
 of bodies pale and bare, Shimmering far down — the ghosts these mirrors hold Of all
 the beauty they beheld of old, White limbs and heavenly eyes and the hair's river of
 gold, For once these banks were peopled: Spartan girls Loosed here their maiden girdles
 and their curls, And stooping o'er the level water stole His darling mirror from the sun
 through whole Rapturous hours of gazing. The first star Of all this milky constellation,
 far Lovelier than any nymph of wood or green, Was she whom Tyndarus had made his
 queen For her sheer beauty and subtly moving grace — Leda, the fairest of our mortal
 race. Hymen had lit his torches but one week About her bed (and still o'er her young
 cheek Passed rosy shadows of those thoughts that sped Across her mind, still virgin,
 still unwed, For all her body was her own no more), When Leda with her maidens to
 the shore Of bright Eurotas came, to escape the heat Of summer noon in waters coolly
 sweet. By a brown pool which opened smooth and clear Below the wrinkled water of a
 weir They sat them down under an old fir-tree To rest: and to the laughing melody Of
 their sweet speech the river's rippling bore A liquid burden, while the sun did pour
 Pure colour out of heaven upon the earth. The meadows seethed with the incessant
 mirth Of grasshoppers, seen only when they flew Their curves of scarlet or sudden daz-
 zling blue. Within the fir-tree's round of unpierced shade The maidens sat with laughter
 and talk, or played, Gravely intent, their game of knuckle-bones; Or tossed from hand
 to hand the old dry cones Littered about the tree. And one did sing A ballad of some
 far-off Spartan king, Who took a wife, but left her, well-away! Slain by his foes upon
 their wedding-day. "That was a piteous story," Leda sighed, "To be a widow ere she
 was a bride." "Better," said one, "to live a virgin life Alone, and never know the name
 of wife And bear the ugly burden of a child And have great pain by it. Let me live
 wild, A bird untamed by man!" "Nay," cried another, "I would be wife, if I should not
 be mother. Cypris I honour; let the vulgar pay Their gross vows to Lucina when they
 pray. Our finer spirits would be blunted quite By bestial teeming; but Love's rare de-
 light Wings the rapt soul towards Olympus' height." "Delight?" cried Leda. "Love to me
 has brought Nothing but pain and a world of shameful thought. When they say love is
 sweet, the poets lie; 'Tis but a trick to catch poor maidens by. What are their boasted
 pleasures? I am queen To the most royal king the world has seen; Therefore I should, if
 any woman might, Know at its full that exquisite delight. Yet these few days since I was
 made a wife Have held more bitterness than all my life, While I was yet a child." The
 great bright tears Slipped through her lashes. "Oh, my childish years! Years that were
 all my own, too sadly few, When I was happy — and yet never knew How happy till to-
 day!" Her maidens came About her as she wept, whispering her name, Leda, sweet Leda,
 with a hundred dear Caressing words to soothe her heavy cheer. At last she started up
 with a fierce pride Upon her face. "I am a queen," she cried, "But had forgotten it a

while; and you, Wenches of mine, you were forgetful too. Undress me. We would bathe
ourselves." So proud A queen she stood, that all her maidens bowed In trembling fear
and scarcely dared approach To do her bidding. But at last the brooch Pinned at her
shoulder is undone, the wide Girdle of silk beneath her breasts untied; The tunic falls
about her feet, and she Steps from the crocus folds of drapery, Dazzlingly naked, into
the warm sun. God-like she stood; then broke into a run, Leaping and laughing in the
light, as though Life through her veins coursed with so swift a flow Of generous blood
and fire that to remain Too long in statted queenliness were pain To that quick soul,
avid of speed and joy. She ran, easily bounding, like a boy, Narrow of haunch and slim
and firm of breast. Lovelier she seemed in motion than at rest, If that might be, when
she was never less, Moving or still, than perfect loveliness. At last, with cheeks afire
and heaving flank, She checked her race, and on the river's bank Stood looking down
at her own echoed shape And at the fish that, aimlessly agape, Hung midway up their
heaven of flawless glass, Like angels waiting for eternity to pass. Leda drew breath and
plunged; her gasping cry Splashed up; the water circled brokenly Out from that pearly
shudder of dipped limbs; The glittering pool laughed up its flowery brims, And every-
thing, save the poor fish, rejoiced: Their idiot contemplation of the Moist, The Cold,
the Watery, was in a trice Ended when Leda broke their crystal paradise. Jove in his
high Olympian chamber lay Hugely supine, striving to charm away In sleep the long,
intolerable noon. But heedless Morpheus still withheld his boon, And Jove upon his
silk-pavilioned bed Tossed wrathful and awake. His fevered head Swarmed with a thou-
sand fancies, which forecast Delights to be, or savoured pleasures past. Closing his eyes,
he saw his eagle swift, Headlong as his own thunder, stoop and lift On pinions upward
labouring the prize Of beauty ravished for the envious skies. He saw again that bright,
adulterous pair, Trapped by the limping husband unaware, Fast in each other's arms,
and faster in the snare — And laughed remembering. Sometimes his thought Went
wandering over the earth and sought Familiar places — temples by the sea, Cities and
islands; here a sacred tree And there a cavern of shy nymphs. He rolled About his bed,
in many a rich fold Crumpling his Babylonian coverlet, And yawned and stretched. The
smell of his own sweat Brought back to mind his Libyan desert-fane Of mottled granite,
with its endless train Of pilgrim camels, reeking towards the sky Ammonian incense
to his hornèd deity; The while their masters worshipped, offering Huge teeth of ivory,
while some would bring Their Ethiop wives — sleek wineskins of black silk, Jellied and
huge from drinking asses' milk Through years of tropical idleness, to pray For offspring
(whom he ever sent away With prayers unanswered, lest their ebon race Might breed
and blacken the earth's comely face). Noon pressed on him a hotter, heavier weight. O
Love in Idleness! how celibate He felt! Libido like a nemesis Scourged him with itching
memories of bliss. The satin of imagined skin was sleek And supply warm against his
lips and cheek, And deep within soft hair's dishevelled dusk His eyelids fluttered; like
a flowery musk The scent of a young body seemed to float Faintly about him, close
and yet remote — For perfume and the essence of music dwell In other worlds among
the asphodel Of unembodied life. Then all had flown; His dream had melted. In his

bed, alone, Jove sweating lay and moaned, and longed in vain
 To still the pulses of his burning pain. In sheer despair at last he leapt from bed,
 Opened the window and thrust forth his head
 Into Olympian ether. One fierce frown
 Rifted the clouds, and he was looking down
 Into a gulf of azure calm; the rack
 Seethed round about, tempestuously black;
 But the god's eye could hold its angry thunders back. There lay the world,
 down through the chasméd blue, stretched out from edge to edge unto his view;
 And in the midst, bright as a summer's day
 At breathless noon, the Mediterranean lay;
 And Ocean round the world's dim fringes tossed
 His glaucous waves in mist and distance lost;
 And Pontus and the livid Caspian Sea
 Stirred in their nightmare sleep uneasily. And
 'twixt the seas rolled the wide fertile land,
 Dappled with green and tracts of tawny sand,
 And rich, dark fallows and fields of flowers aglow
 And the white, changeless silences of snow;
 While here and there towns, like a living eye
 Unclosed on earth's blind face, towards the sky
 Glanced their bright conscious beauty. Yet the sight
 Of his fair earth gave him but small delight
 Now in his restlessness: its beauty could
 Do nought to quench the fever in his blood. Desire lends sharpness to his searching eyes;
 Over the world his focused passion flies
 Quicker than chasing sunlight on a day
 Of storm and golden April. Far away
 He sees the tranquil rivers of the East,
 Mirrors of many a strange barbaric feast,
 Where un-Hellenic dancing-girls contort
 Their yellow limbs, and gibbering masks make sport
 Under the moons of many-coloured light
 That swing their lantern-fruitage in the night
 Of overarching trees. To him it seems
 An alien world, peopled by insane dreams.
 But these are nothing to the monstrous shapes — Not men so
 much as bastardy of apes — That meet his eyes in Africa. Between
 Leaves of grey fungoid pulp and poisonous green,
 White eyes from black and browless faces stare.
 Dryads with star-flowers in their woolly hair
 Dance to the flaccid clapping of their own
 Black dangling dugs through forests overgrown,
 Platted with writhing creepers. Horrified,
 He sees them how they leap and dance, or glide,
 Glimpse after black glimpse of a satin skin,
 Among unthinkable flowers, to pause and grin
 Out through a trellis of suppurating lips,
 Of mottled tentacles barbed at the tips
 And bloated hands and wattles and red lobes
 Of pendulous gristle and enormous probes
 Of pink and slashed and tasselled flesh . . .
 He turns Northward his sickened sight. The desert burns
 All life away. Here in the forkéd shade
 Of twin-humped towering dromedaries laid,
 A few gaunt folk are sleeping: fierce they seem
 Even in sleep, and restless as they dream.
 He would be fearful of a desert bride
 As of a brown asp at his sleeping side,
 Fearful of her white teeth and cunning arts.
 Further, yet further, to the ultimate parts
 Of the wide earth he looks, where Britons go
 Painted among their swamps, and through the snow
 Huge hairy snuffling beasts pursue their prey — Fierce men, as hairy and as huge as they.
 Bewildered furrows deepen the Thunderer's scowl;
 This world so vast, so variously foul — Who
 can have made its ugliness? In what
 Revolting fancy were the Forms begot
 Of all these monsters? What strange deity — So barbarously not a Greek! — was he
 Who could mismake such beings in his own
 Distorted image. Nay, the Greeks alone
 Were men; in Greece alone were bodies fair,
 Minds comely. In that all-but-island there,
 Cleaving the blue sea with its promontories,
 Lies the world's hope, the seed of all the glories
 That

are to be; there, too, must surely live
 She who alone can medicinally give
 Ease with her beauty to the Thunderer's pain.
 Downwards he bends his fiery eyes again,
 Glaring on Hellas. Like a beam of light,
 His intent glances touch the mountain height
 With passing flame and probe the valleys deep,
 Rift the dense forest and the age-old sleep
 Of vaulted antres on whose pebbly floor
 Gallop the loud-hoofed Centaurs; and the roar
 Of more than human shouting underground
 Pulses in living palpable waves of sound
 From wall to wall, until it rumbles out
 Into the air; and at that hollow shout
 That seems an utterance of the whole vast hill,
 The shepherds cease their laughter and are still.
 Cities asleep under the noonday sky
 Stir at the passage of his burning eye;
 And in their huts the startled peasants blink
 At the swift flash that bursts through every chink
 Of wattled walls, hearkening in fearful wonder
 Through lengthened seconds for the crash of thun-
 der — Which follows not: they are the more afraid.
 Jove seeks amain. Many a country
 maid, Whose sandalled feet pass down familiar ways
 Among the olives, but whose spirit strays
 Through lovelier lands of fancy, suddenly
 Starts broad awake out of her dream to see
 A light that is not of the sun, a light
 Darted by living eyes, consciously bright;
 She sees and feels it like a subtle flame
 Mantling her limbs with fear and maiden shame
 And strange desire. Longing and terrified,
 She hides her face, like a new-wedded bride
 Who feels rough hands that seize and hold her fast;
 And swooning falls. The terrible light
 has passed; She wakes; the sun still shines, the olive trees
 Tremble to whispering silver in the breeze
 And all is as it was, save she alone
 In whose dazed eyes this deathless light
 has shone: For never, never from this day forth will she
 In earth's poor passion find felicity,
 Or love of mortal man. A god's desire
 Has seared her soul; nought but the same strong fire
 Can kindle the dead ash to life again,
 And all her years will be a lonely pain.
 Many a thousand had he looked upon,
 Thousands of mortals, young and old; but none
 — Virgin, or young ephebus, or the flower
 Of womanhood culled in its full-blown
 hour — Could please the Thunderer's sight or touch his mind;
 The longed-for loveliness was yet to find.
 Had beauty fled, and was there nothing fair
 Under the moon? The fury of despair
 Raged in the breast of heaven's Almighty Lord;
 He gnashed his foamy teeth and rolled and roared
 In bull-like agony. Then a great calm
 Descended on him: cool and healing balm
 Touched his immortal fury. He had spied
 Young Leda where she stood, poised on the river-side.
 Even as she broke the river's smooth expanse,
 Leda was conscious of that hungry glance,
 And knew it for an eye of fearful power
 That did so hot and thunderously lour,
 She knew not whence, on her frail nakedness.
 Jove's heart held but one thought: he must possess
 That perfect form or die — possess or die.
 Unheeded prayers and supplications fly,
 Thick as a flock of birds, about his ears,
 And smoke of incense rises; but he hears
 Nought but the soft falls of that melody
 Which is the speech of Leda; he can see
 Nought but that almost spiritual grace
 Which is her body, and that heavenly face
 Where gay, sweet thoughts shine through, and eyes are bright
 With purity and the soul's inward light.
 Have her he must: the teasel-fingered burr
 Sticks not so fast in a wild beast's tangled fur
 As that insistent longing in the soul
 Of mighty Jove. Gods, men, earth, heaven, the whole
 Vast universe was blotted from his thought
 And nought remained but Leda's laughter, nought
 But Leda's eyes. Magnified by his lust,
 She was

the whole world now; have her he must, he must . . . His spirit worked; how should he
 gain his end
 With most deliciousness? What better friend,
 What counsellor more subtle
 could he find
 Than lovely Aphrodite, ever kind
 To hapless lovers, ever cunning, too,
 In
 all the tortuous ways of love to do
 And plan the best? To Paphos then! His will
 And
 act were one; and straight, invisible,
 He stood in Paphos, breathing the languid air
 By
 Aphrodite's couch. O heavenly fair
 She was, and smooth and marvellously young!
 On
 Tyrian silk she lay, and purple hung
 About her bed in folds of fluted light
 And shadow,
 dark as wine. Two doves, more white
 Even than the white hand on the purple lying-
 Like a pale flower wearily dropped, were flying
 With wings that made an odoriferous
 stir,
 Dropping faint dews of bakkaris and myrrh,
 Musk and the soul of sweet flowers
 cunningly
 Ravished from transient petals as they die.
 Two stripling cupids on her ei-
 ther hand
 Stood near with winnowing plumes and gently fanned
 Her hot, love-fevered
 cheeks and eyelids burning. Another, crouched at the bed's foot, was turning
 A mass
 of scattered parchments — vows or complaints
 Or glad triumphant thanks which Venus'
 saints,
 Martyrs and heroes, on her altars strewed
 With bitterest tears or gifts of grati-
 tude.
 From the pile heaped at Aphrodite's feet
 The boy would take a leaf, and in his
 sweet,
 Clear voice would read what mortal tongues can tell
 In stammering verse of those
 ineffable
 Pleasures and pains of love, heaven and uttermost hell.
 Jove hidden stood and
 heard him read these lines
 Of votive thanks — Cypris, this little silver lamp to thee
 I dedicate. It was my fellow-watcher, shared with me
 Those swift, short hours, when
 raised above my fate
 In Sphenura's white arms I drank
 Of immortality. "A pretty
 lamp, and I will have it placed
 Beside the narrow bed of some too chaste
 Sister of virgin
 Artemis, to be
 A night-long witness of her cruelty.
 Read me another, boy," and Venus
 bent
 Her ear to listen to this short lament.
 Cypris, Cypris, I am betrayed! Under the
 same wide mantle laid I found them, faithless, shameless pair! Making love with tangled
 hair. "Alas," the goddess cried, "nor god, nor man,
 Nor medicinable balm, nor magic
 can
 Cast out the demon jealousy, whose breath
 Withers the rose of life, save only time
 and death." Another sheet he took and read again.
 Farewell to love, and hail the long,
 slow pain
 Of memory that backward turns to joy. O I have danced enough and enough
 sung; My feet shall be still now and my voice mute; Thine are these withered wreaths,
 this Lydian flute, Cypris; I once was young. And piëtous Aphrodite wept to think
 How
 fadingly upon death's very brink
 Beauty and love take hands for one short kiss — And
 then the wreaths are dust, the bright-eyed bliss
 Perished, and the flute still. "Read on,
 read on." But ere the page could start, a lightning shone
 Suddenly through the room,
 and they were 'ware
 Of some great terrible presence looming there.
 And it took shape
 — huge limbs, whose every line
 A symbol was of power and strength divine,
 And it was
 Jove. "Daughter, I come," said he, "For counsel in a case that touches me
 Close, to the
 very life." And he straightway
 Told her of all his restlessness that day
 And of his sight of
 Leda, and how great
 Was his desire. And so in close debate
 Sat the two gods, planning
 their rape; while she,
 Who was to be their victim, joyously
 Laughed like a child in the
 sudden breathless chill
 And splashed and swam, forgetting every ill
 And every fear and
 all, save only this:
 That she was young, and it was perfect bliss
 To be alive where suns

so goldenly shine,And bees go drunk with fragrant honey-wine,And the cicadas sing
 from morn till night,And rivers run so cool and pure and bright . . .Stretched all her
 length, arms under head, she layIn the deep grass, while the sun kissed awayThe drops
 that sleeked her skin. Slender and fineAs those old images of the gods that shineWith
 smooth-worn silver, polished through the yearsBy the touching lips of countless wor-
 shippers,Her body was; and the sun's golden heatClothed her in softest flame from head
 to feetAnd was her mantle, that she scarcely knewThe conscious sense of nakedness.
 The blue,Far hills and the faint fringes of the skyShimmered and pulsed in the heat un-
 easily,And hidden in the grass, cicadas shrillDizzied the air with ceaseless noise, untilA
 listener might wonder if they criedIn his own head or in the world outside.Sometimes
 she shut her eyelids, and wrapped roundIn a red darkness, with the muffled soundAnd
 throb of blood beating within her brain,Savoured intensely to the verge of painHer own
 young life, hoarded it up behindHer shuttered lids, until, too long confined,It burst
 them open and her prisoned soulFlew forth and took possession of the wholeExquisite
 world about her and was madeA part of it. Meanwhile her maidens played,Singing
 an ancient song of death and birth,Seed-time and harvest, old as the grey earth,And
 moving to their music in a danceAs immemorial. A numbing tranceCame gradually
 over her, as thoughFlake after downy-feathered flake of snowHad muffled all her senses,
 drifting deepAnd warm and quiet.From this all-but sleepShe started into life again; the
 skyWas full of a strange tumult suddenly — Beating of mighty wings and shrill-voiced
 fearAnd the hoarse scream of rapine following near.In the high windlessness above her
 flew,Dazzlingly white on the untroubled blue,A splendid swan, with outstretched neck
 and wingSpread fathom wide, and closely followingAn eagle, tawny and black. This
 god-like pairCircled and swooped through the calm of upper air,The eagle striking
 and the white swan still'Scaping as though by happy miracleThe imminent talons. For
 the twentieth timeThe furious hunter stooped, to miss and climbA mounting spiral
 into the height again.He hung there poised, eyeing the grassy plainFar, far beneath,
 where the girls' upturned facesWere like white flowers that bloom in open placesA-
 mong the scarcely budded woods. And theyBreathlessly watched and waited; long he
 lay,Becalmed upon that tideless sea of light,While the great swan with slow and creak-
 ing flightWent slanting down towards safety, where the streamShines through the trees
 below, with glance and gleamOf blue aerial eyes that seem to giveSense to the sightless
 earth and make it live.The ponderous wings beat on and no pursuit:Stiff as the painted
 kite that guards the fruit,Afloat o'er orchards ripe, the eagle yetHung as at anchor,
 seeming to forgetHis uncaught prey, his rage unsatisfied.Still, quiet, dead . . . and
 then the quickest-eyedHad lost him. Like a star unsphered, a stoneDropped from the
 vault of heaven, a javelin thrown,He swooped upon his prey. Down, down he came,And
 through his plumes with a noise of wind-blown flameLoud roared the air. From Leda's
 lips a cryBroke, and she hid her face — she could not see him die,Her lovely, hapless
 swan.Ah, had she heard,Even as the eagle hurtled past, the wordThat treacherous
 pair exchanged. "Peace," cried the swan;"Peace, daughter. All my strength will soon be
 gone,Wasted in tedious flying, ere I comeWhere my desire hath set its only home." "Go,"

said the eagle, "I have played my part, Roused pity for your plight in Leda's heart (Pity the mother of voluptuousness). Go, father Jove; be happy; for success Attends this moment." On the queen's numbed sense Fell a glad shout that ended sick suspense, Bidding her lift once more towards the light Her eyes, by pity closed against a sight Of blood and death — her eyes, how happy now To see the swan still safe, while far below, Brought by the force of his eluded stroke So near to earth that with his wings he woke A gust whose sudden silvery motion stirred The meadow grass, struggled the sombre bird Of rage and rapine. Loud his scream and hoarse With baffled fury as he urged his course Upwards again on threshing pinions wide. But the fair swan, not daring to abide This last assault, dropped with the speed of fear Towards the river. Like a winged spear, Outstretching his long neck, rigid and straight, Aimed at where Leda on the bank did wait With open arms and kind, uplifted eyes And voice of tender pity, down he flies. Nearer, nearer, terribly swift, he sped Directly at the queen; then widely spread Resisting wings, and breaking his descent 'Gainst his own wind, all speed and fury spent, The great swan fluttered slowly down to rest And sweet security on Leda's breast. Menacingly the eagle wheeled above her; But Leda, like a noble-hearted lover Keeping his child-beloved from tyrannous harm, Stood o'er the swan and, with one slender arm Imperiously lifted, waved away The savage foe, still hungry for his prey. Baffled at last, he mounted out of sight And the sky was void — save for a single white Swan's feather moulted from a harassed wing That down, down, with a rhythmic balancing From side to side dropped sleeping on the air. Down, slowly down over that dazzling pair, Whose different grace in union was a birth Of unimagined beauty on the earth: So lovely that the maidens standing round Dared scarcely look. Couched on the flowery ground Young Leda lay, and to her side did press The swan's proud-arching opulent loveliness, Stroking the snow-soft plumage of his breast With fingers slowly drawn, themselves caressed By the warm softness where they lingered, loth To break away. Sometimes against their growth Ruffling the feathers inlaid like little scales On his sleek neck, the pointed finger-nails Rapped on the warm, dry, puckered skin beneath; And feeling it she shuddered, and her teeth Grated on edge; for there was something strange And snake-like in the touch. He, in exchange, Gave back to her, stretching his eager neck, For every kiss a little amorous peck; Rubbing his silver head on her gold tresses, And with the nip of horny dry caresses Leaving upon her young white breast and cheek And arms the red print of his playful beak. Closer he nestled, mingling with the slim Austerity of virginal flank and limb His curved and florid beauty, till she felt That downy warmth strike through her flesh and melt The bones and marrow of her strength away. One lifted arm bent o'er her brow, she lay With limbs relaxed, scarce breathing, deathly still; Save when a quick, involuntary thrill Shook her sometimes with passing shudderings, As though some hand had plucked the aching strings Of life itself, tense with expectancy. And over her the swan shook slowly free The folded glory of his wings, and made A white-walled tent of soft and luminous shade To be her veil and keep her from the shame Of naked light and the sun's noonday flame. Hushed lay the earth and the wide, careless sky. Then one

sharp sound, that might have been a cry
Of utmost pleasure or of utmost pain,
Broke sobbing forth, and all was still again.

THE BIRTH OF GOD

NIGHT is a void about me; I lie alone;
And water drips, like an idiot clicking his
tongue, Senselessly, ceaselessly, endlessly drips
Into the waiting silence, grown Empty
for this small inhuman sound. My love is gone, my love who is tender and young.
O smooth warm body! O passionate lips!
I have stretched forth hands in the dark and
nothing found: The silence is huge as the sky — I lie alone — My narrow room, a
darkness that knows no bound.

How shall I fill this measureless
Deep void that the taking away
Of a child's slim beauty has made?
Slender she is and small, but the loneliness
She has left is a night no
stars allay, And I am cold and afraid.

Long, long ago, cut off from the wolfish pack,
From the warm, immediate touch of
friends and mate, Lost and alone, alone in the utter black
Of a forest night, some far-off,
beast-like man, Cowed by the cold indifferent hate
Of the northern silence, crouched in
fear, When through his bleared and suffering mind
A sudden tremor of comfort ran, And
the void was filled by a rushing wind,
And he breathed a sense of something friendly
and near, And in privation the life of God began.

Love, from your loss shall a god be born to fill
The emptiness, where once you
were, With friendly knowledge and more than a lover's will
To ease despair? Shall I feed
longing with what it hungers after,
Seeing in earth and sea and air
A lover's smiles, hearing a lover's laughter,
Feeling love everywhere?

The night drags on. Darkness and silence grow,
And with them my desire has
grown, My bitter need. Alas, I know, I know that here I lie alone.

ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH

BENEATH the sunlight and blue of all-but Autumn
The grass sleeps goldenly; wood-
land and distant hill Shine through the gauzy air in a dust of golden pollen,
And even the glittering leaves are almost still.

Scattered on the grass, like a ragman's bundles carelessly dropped,
Men sleep out-
stretched or, sprawling, bask in the sun; Here glows a woman's bright dress and here
a child is sitting, And I lie down and am one of the sleepers, one

Like the rest of this tumbled crowd. Do they all, I wonder, Feel anguish grow with
the calm day's slow decline, Longing, as I, for a shattering wind, a passion
Of bodily pain to be the soul's anodyne?

SYMPATHY

THE irony of being two . . . ! Grey eyes, wide open suddenly, Regard me and enquire;
I see a face
Grave and unquiet in tenderness. Heart-rending question of women — never
answered: "Tell me, tell me, what are you thinking of?" Oh, the pain and foolishness of
love! What can I do but make my old grimace, Ending it with a kiss, as I always do?

MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM

DIAPHENIA, drunk with sleep, Drunk with pleasure, drunk with fatigue, Feels her
Corydon's fingers creep — Ring-finger, middle finger, index, thumb — Strummingly

over the smooth sleek drum
Of her thorax. Meanwhile Händel's Gigue Turns in Corydon's absent mind
To Yakka-Hoola. She can find No difference in the thrilling touch
Of one who, now, in everything Is God-like. "Was there ever such Passion as ours?" His pianoing Gives place to simple arithmetic's Simplest constataions: — six Letters in Gneiss and three in Gnu: Luncheon to-day cost three and two; In a year — he couldn't calculate Three-sixty-five times thirty-eight, Figuring with printless fingers on Her living parchment. "Corydon! I faint, faint, faint at your dear touch. Say, is it possible . . . to love too much?"

FROM THE PILLAR

SIMEON, the withered stylite, Sat gloomily looking down Upon each roof and skylight
In all the seething town.

And in every upper chamber, On roofs, where the orange flowers Make weary men remember
The perfume of long-dead hours,

He saw the wine-drenched riot Of harlots and human beasts, And how celestial quiet
Was shattered by their feasts.

The steam of fetid vices From a thousand lupanars, Like smoke of sacrifices, Reeked
up to the heedless stars.

And the saint from his high fastness Of purity apart Cursed them and their unchasteness,
And envied them in his heart.

JONAH

A CREAM of phosphorescent light Floats on the wash that to and fro Slides round his feet — enough to show
Many a pendulous stalactite Of naked mucus, whorls and wreaths
And huge festoons of mottled tripes And smaller palpitating pipes Through which a yeasty liquor seethes.

Seated upon the convex mound Of one vast kidney, Jonah prays And sings his canticles and hymns,
Making the hollow vault resound God's goodness and mysterious ways, Till the great fish spouts music as he swims.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

SWAN, Swan, Yesterday you were The whitest of things in this dark winter. To-day the snow has made of your plumes
An unwashed pocket handkercher, An unwashed pocket handkercher . . . "Lancashire, to Lancashire!" — Tune of the antique trains long ago: Each summer holiday a milestone
Backwards, backwards: — Tenby, Barmouth, and year by year All the different hues of the sea, Blue, green and blue. But on this river of muddy jade
There swims a yellow swan, And along the bank the snow lies dazzlingly white.

A MELODY BY SCARLATTI

HOW clear under the trees, How softly the music flows, Rippling from one still pool to another
Into the lake of silence.

A SUNSET

OVER against the triumph and the close — Amber and green and rose — Of this short day, The pale ghost of the moon grows living-bright
Once more, as the last light Ebbs slowly away. Darkening the fringes of these western glories
The black

phantasmagories Of cloud advance With noiseless footing — vague and villainous shapes, Wrapped in their ragged fustian capes, Of some grotesque romance. But overhead where, like a pool between Dark rocks, the sky is green And clear and deep, Floats windlessly a cloud, with curving breast Flushed by the fiery west, In god-like sleep . . . And in my mind opens a sudden door That lets me see once more A little room With night beyond the window, chill and damp, And one green-lighted lamp Tempering the gloom, While here within, close to me, touching me (Even the memory Of my desire Shakes me like fear), you sit with scattered hair; And all your body bare Before the fire Is lapped about with rosy flame. . . . But still, Here on the lonely hill, I walk alone; Silvery green is the moon's lamp overhead, The cloud sleeps warm and red, And you are gone.

LIFE AND ART

YOU have sweet flowers for your pleasure; You laugh with the bountiful earth In its richness of summer treasure: Where now are your flowers and your mirth? Petals and cadenced laughter, Each in a dying fall, Droop out of life; and after Is nothing; they were all.

But we from the death of roses That three suns perfume and gild With a kiss, till the fourth discloses A withered wreath, have distilled The fulness of one rare phial, Whose nimble life shall outrun The circling shadow on the dial, Outlast the tyrannous sun.

FIRST PHILOSOPHER'S SONG

A POOR degenerate from the ape, Whose hands are four, whose tail's a limb, I contemplate my flaccid shape And know I may not rival him,

Save with my mind — a nimbler beast Possessing a thousand sinewy tails, A thousand hands, with which it scales, Greedy of luscious truth, the greased

Poles and the coco palms of thought, Thrids easily through the mangrove maze Of metaphysics, walks the taut Frail dangerous liana ways

That link across wide gulfs remote Analogies between tree and tree; Outruns the hare, outhops the goat; Mind fabulous, mind sublime and free!

But oh, the sound of simian mirth! Mind, issued from the monkey's womb, Is still umbilical to earth, Earth its home and earth its tomb.

SECOND PHILOSOPHER'S SONG

IF, O my Lesbia, I should commit, Not fornication, dear, but suicide, My Thames-blown body (Pliny vouches it) Would drift face upwards on the oily tide With the other garbage, till it putrefied.

But you, if all your lovers' frozen hearts Conspired to send you, desperate, to drown — Your maiden modesty would float face down, And men would weep upon your hinder parts.

'Tis the Lord's doing. Marvellous is the plan By which this best of worlds is wisely planned. One law He made for woman, one for man: We bow the head and do not understand.

FIFTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONG

A MILLION million spermatozoa, All of them alive: Out of their cataclysm but one poor Noah Dare hope to survive.

And among that billion minus one Might have chanced to be Shakespeare, another Newton, a new Donne — But the One was Me.

Shame to have ousted your betters thus, Taking ark while the others remained outside! Better for all of us, froward Homunculus, If you'd quietly died!

NINTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONG

GOD'S in His Heaven: He never issues (Wise Man!) to visit this world of ours. Unchecked the cancer gnaws our tissues, Stops to lick chops and then again devours.

Those find, who most delight to roam 'Mid castles of remotest Spain, That there's, thank Heaven, no place like home; So they set out upon their travels again.

Beauty for some provides escape, Who gain a happiness in eyeing The gorgeous buttocks of the ape Or Autumn sunsets exquisitely dying.

And some to better worlds than this Mount up on wings as frail and misty As passion's all-too-transient kiss (Though afterwards — oh, omne animal triste!)

But I, too rational by half To live but where I bodily am. Can only do my best to laugh. Can only sip my misery dram by dram.

While happier mortals take to drink, A dolorous dipsomaniac, Fuddled with grief I sit and think, Looking upon the bile when it is black.

Then brim the bowl with atrabilious liquor! We'll pledge our Empire vast across the flood: For Blood, as all men know, than Water's thicker, But water's wider, thank the Lord, than Blood.

MORNING SCENE

LIGHT through the latticed blind Spans the dim intermediate space With parallels of luminous dust To gild a nuptial couch, where Goya's mind Conceived those agonising hands, that hair Scattered, and half a sunlit bosom bare, And, imminently above them, a red face Fixed in the imbecile earnestness of lust.

VERREY'S

HERE, every winter's night at eight, Epicurus lies in state, Two candles at his head and two Candles at his feet. A few Choice spirits watch beneath the vault Of his dim chapel, where default Of music fills the pregnant air With subtler requiem and prayer Than ever an organ wrought with notes Spouted from its tubal throats. Black Ethiopia's Holy Child, The Cradled Bottle, breathes its mild Meek spirit on the ravished nose, The palate and the tongue of those Who piously partake with me Of this funereal agape.

FRASCATI'S

BUBBLE-BREASTED swells the dome Of this my spiritual home, From whose nave the chandelier, Schaffhausen frozen, tumbles sheer. We in the round balcony sit, Lean o'er and look into the pit Where feed the human bears beneath, Champing with their gilded teeth. What negroid holiday makes free With such priapic revelry? What songs? What gongs? What nameless rites? What gods like wooden stalagmites? What steam of blood or kidney pie? What blasts of Bantu melody? Ragtime. . . . But when the wearied

BandSwoons to a waltz, I take her hand.And there we sit in blissful calm,Quietly sweating palm to palm.

FATIGUE

THE mind has lost its Aristotelian elegance of shape: there is only a darkness where bubbles and inconsequent balloons float up to burst their luminous cheeks and vanish.A woman with a basket on her head: a Chinese lantern quite askew: the vague bright bulging of chemists' window bottles; and then in my ears the distant noise of a great river of people. And phrases, phrases — It is only a question of saddle-bags,Stane Street and Gondibert,Foals in Iceland (or was it Foals in aspic?).As that small reddish devil turns away with an insolent jut of his hindquarters, I become aware that his curling pug's tail is an electric bell-push. But that does not disquiet me so much as the sight of all these polished statues twinkling with high lights and all of them grotesque and all of them colossal.

THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

THE machine is ready to start. The symbolic beasts grow resty, curveting where they stand at their places in the great blue circle of the year. The Showman's voice rings out. "Montez, mesdames et messieurs, montez. You, sir, must bestride the Ram. You will take the Scorpion. Yours, madame, is the Goat. As for you there, blackguard boy, you must be content with the Fishes. I have allotted you the Virgin, mademoiselle." . . . "Polisson!" "Pardon, pardon. Evidemment, c'est le Sagittaire qu'on demande. Ohé, les dards! The rest must take what comes. The Twins shall counterpoise one another in the Scales. So, so. Now away we go, away."Ha, what keen air. Wind of the upper spaces. Snuff it deep, drink in the intoxication of our speed. Hark how the music swells and rings. . . . sphery music, music of every vagabond planet, every rooted star; sound of winds and seas and all the simmering millions of life. Moving, singing . . . so with a roar and a rush round we go and round, for ever whirling on a ceaseless Bank Holiday of drunken life and speed.But I happened to look inwards among the machinery of our roundabout, and there I saw a slobbering cretin grinding at a wheel and sweating as he ground, and grinding eternally. And when I perceived that he was the author of all our speed and that the music was of his making, that everything depended on his grinding wheel, I thought I would like to get off. But we were going too fast.

BACK STREETS

BACK streets, gutters of stagnating darkness where men breathe something that is not so much air as a kind of rarefied slime. . . . I look back down the tunnelled darkness of a drain to where, at the mouth, a broader, windier water-way glitters with the gay speed and motion of sunlit life. But around all is dimly rotting; and the inhabitants are those squamous, phosphorescent creatures that darkness and decay beget. Little men, sheathed tightly in clothes of an exaggeratedly fashionable cheapness, hurry along the pavements, jaunty and at the same time furtive. There is a thin layer of slime over all of them. And then there are the eyes of the women, with their hard glitter that is only of the surface. They see acutely, but in a glassy, superficial way, taking in the objects round them no more than my western windows retain the imprint of the sunset

that enriches them. Back streets, exhalations of a difficult puberty, I once lived on the fringes of them.

LAST THINGS

THERE have been visions, dark in the minds of men, death and corruption dancing across the secular abyss that separates eternity from time to where sits the ineluctable judge, waiting, waiting through the ages, and ponders all his predestinated decrees. There will be judgment, and each, in an agony of shame, reluctant yet compelled, will turn his own accuser. For *Tunc tua gesta noxia Secreta quoque turpia Videbunt mille millia Virorum circumstantia*. There under the unwinking gaze of all the legions of just men made perfect, the poor prisoner will uncover each dirty secret of his heart, will act over again each shameful scene of his life. And those eyes of saints and angels will shine impassively down upon his beastliness, and to him, as he looks at their steady brilliance, they will seem a million of little blazing loopholes slotted in the walls of hell. Hildebert, this was your vision as you brooded over death and judgment, hell and heaven, in your cloister, a thousand years ago. Do you not envy us our peace of mind who know not four ultimates, but only one? For whom the first of the Last Things is also the last — us, whom death annihilates with all our shame and all our folly, leaving no trace behind.

GOTHIC

SHARP spires pierce upwards, and the clouds are full of tumbling bells. Reckless, breakneck, head over heels down an airy spiral of stairs run the bells. “Upon Paul’s steeple stands a tree.” Up again and then once more to the bottom, two steps at a time. “As full of apples as can be.” Up again and down again: centuries of climbing have not worn the crystal smoothness of the degrees. Along the bellying clouds the little boys of London Town come running, running as best they may, seeing that at every step they sink ankle-deep through the woolly surface into the black heart of thunder beneath. The apples on the trees are swaying in the wind, rocking to the clamour of bells. The leaves are of bright green copper, and rattle together with a scaly sound. At the roots of the tree sit four gargoyles playing a little serious game with dice. The hunch-backed ape has won from the manticore that crooked French crown with a hole in it which the manticore got from the friar with the strawberry nose; he had it in turn as an alms from the grave knight who lies with crossed legs down there, through the clouds and the dizzy mist of bell-ringing, where the great church is a hollow ship, full of bright candles, and stable in the midst of dark tempestuous seas.

EVENING PARTY

“SANS Espoir, sans Espoir . . .” sang the lady while the piano laboriously opened its box of old sardines in treacle. One detected ptomaine in the syrup. Sans Espoir . . . I thought of the rhymes — soir, nonchaloir, reposoir — the dying falls of a symbolism grown sadly suicidal before the broad Flemish back of the singer, the dewlaps of her audience. Sans Espoir. The listeners wore the frozen rapture of those who gaze upon the uplifted Host. Catching one another’s eye, we had a simultaneous vision of pews, of hyenas and hysteria. Three candles were burning. They behaved like English aristocrats

in a French novel — perfectly, impassively. I tried to imitate their milordliness. One of the candles flickered, snickered. Was it a draught or was it laughter? Flickering, snickering — candles, you betrayed me. I had to laugh too.

BEAUTY

I

THERE is a sea somewhere — whether in the lampless crypts of the earth, or among sunlit islands, or that which is an unfathomable and terrifying question between the archipelagos of stars — there is a sea (and perhaps its tides have filled those green transparent pools that glint like eyes in a spring storm-cloud) which is for ever troubled and in travail — a bubbling and a heaving up of waters as though for the birth of a fountain. The sick and the crippled lie along the brims in expectation of the miracle. And at last, at last . . . A funnel of white water is twisted up and so stands, straight and still by the very speed of its motion. It drinks the light; slowly it is infused with colour, rose and mother-of-pearl. Slowly it takes shape, a heavenly body. O dazzling Anadyomene! The flakes of foam break into white birds about her head, fall again in a soft avalanche of flowers. Perpetual miracle, beauty endlessly born.

II

STEAMERS, in all your travelling have you trailed the meshes of your long expiring white nets across this sea, or dipped in it your sliding rail, or balanced your shadow far far down upon its glass-green sand? Or, forgetting the preoccupations of commerce and the well-oiled predestination of your machinery, did you ever put in at the real Paphos?

III

IN the city of Troy, whither our Argonautical voyages had carried us, we found Helen and that lamentable Cressid who was to Chaucer the feminine paradox, untenably fantastic but so devastatingly actual, the crystal ideal — flawed; and to Shakespeare the inevitable trull, flayed to show her physiological machinery and the logical conclusion of every the most heartrendingly ingenuous gesture of maidenhood. (But, bless you! our gorge doesn't rise. We are cynically well up in the damning Theory of woman, which makes it all the more amusing to watch ourselves in the ecstatic practice of her. Unforeseen perversity.) Fabulous Helen! At her firm breasts they used to mould delicate drinking cups which made the sourest vinegar richly poisonous. The geometry of her body had utterly outwitted Euclid, and the Philosophers were baffled by curves of a subtlety infinitely more elusive and Eleusinian than the most oracular speculations of

Parmenides. They did their best to make a coherent system out of the incompatible, but empirically established, facts of her. Time, for instance, was abolished within the circle of her arms. "It is eternity when her lips touch me," Paris had remarked. And yet this same Paris was manifestly and notoriously falling into a decline, had lost whatever sense or beauty he once possessed, together with his memory and all skill in the nine arts which are memory's daughters. How was it then, these perplexed philosophers wondered, that she could at one and the same moment give eternity like a goddess, while she was vampiring away with that divine thirsty mouth of hers the last dregs of a poor mortal life? They sought an insufficient refuge in Heraclitus' theory of opposites. Meanwhile Troilus was always to be found at sunset, pacing up and down the walls by the western gate — quite mad. At dusk the Greek camp-fires would blossom along Xanthus banks — one after another, a myriad lights dancing in the dark. As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night, O'er heaven's pure azure spreads her something light. He would repeat the simile to himself, but could never remember the correct epithets. Not that they mattered — any more than anything else.

IV

THERE are fine cities in the world — Manhattan, Ecbatana and Hecatompylus — but this city of Troy is the most fabulous of them all. Rome was seven hills of butcher's meat, Athens an abstraction of marble, in Alexandria the steam of kidney-puddings revolted the coenobites, darkness and size render London inappreciable, Paris is full of sparrows, the snow lies gritty on Berlin, Moscow has no verisimilitude, all the East is peopled by masks and apes and larvæ. But this city of Troy is most of all real and fabulous with its charnel beauty. "Is not Helen the end of our search — paradisaal little World, symbol and epitome of the Great? Dawn sleeps in the transparent shadow of roses within her ear. The stainless candour of infinity — far-off peaks in summer and the Milky Way — has taken marvellous form in her. The Little World has its meteors, too, comets and shadowy clouds of hair, stars at whose glance men go planet-struck. Meteors — yes, and history it has. The past is still alive in the fragrance of her hair, and her young body breathes forth memories as old as the beginning of life — Eros first of gods. In her is the goal. I rest here with Helen." "Fool," I said, "quote your Faustus. I go further."

V

FURTHER — but a hundred Liliputian tethers prevent me, the white nerves which tie soul to skin. And the whole air is aching with epidermical magnetism. Further, further. But Troy is the birthplace of my homesickness. Troy is more than a patriotism, for it is built of my very flesh; the remembrance of it is a fire that sticks and tears

when I would pull it off. But further. One last look at Troilus where he stands by the western gate, staring over the plain. Further. When I have learnt the truth, I will return and build a new palace with domes less ominously like breasts, and there I will invent a safer Helen and a less paradoxical Cressid, and my harem will be a library for enlightenment.

VI

HERE are pagodas of diminishing bells. The leopard sleeps in the depth of his rosy cavern, and when he breathes it is a smell of irresistible sweetness; in the bestiaries he is the symbol of Christ in His sepulchre. This listening conch has collected all the rumours of pantheism; the dew in this veined cup is the sacrament of nature, while these pale thuribles worship in the dark with yellow lamps and incense. Everywhere alchemical profusion — the golden mintage of glades and ripples, vigils of passion enriched with silver under the fingers of the moon; everywhere lavishness, colour, music; the smoothness of machinery, incredible and fantastic ingenuities. God has lost his half-hunter in the desert. But we have not come to worship among these Gothic beeches, for all their pillars and the lace-work of their green windows. We are looking for other things than churches.

VII

TREES, the half-fossilised exuberances of a passionate life, petrified fountains of intemperance — with their abolition begins the realm of reason. Geometry, lines and planes, smooth edges, the ordered horror of perspectives. In this country there are pavements bright and sleek as water. The walls are precipices to which giants have nailed a perpetual cataract of marble. The fringes of the sky are scalloped with a pattern of domes and minarets. At night, too, the down-struck lamps are pyramids of phantom green and the perfect circle they make upon the pavement is magical. Look over the parapet of the Acropolis. The bridges go dizzily down on their swaying catenaries, the gull's flight chained fast. The walls drop clear into the valley, all the millions of basalt blocks calcined into a single red monolith, fluted with thirstily shining organ pipes, which seem for ever wet. There are no crevices for moss and toadflax, and even the claws of the yellow lichen slip on its polished flanks. The valley is all paved and inlaid with rivers of steel. No trees, for they have been abolished. "Glorious unnature," cries the watcher at the parapet. His voice launches into the abyss, following the curve of the bridges. "Glorious unnature. We have triumphed." But his laughter as it descends is like a flight of broken steps.

VIII

LET us abandon ourselves to Time, which is beauty's essence. We live among the perpetual degenerations of apotheoses. Sunset dissolves into soft grey snow and the deep ocean of midnight, boundless as forgetfulness or some yet undiscovered Pacific, contracts into the green puddle of the dawn. The flowers burn to dust with their own brightness. On the banks of ancient rivers stand the pitiful stumps of huge towers and the ghosts of dead men straining to return into life. The woods are full of the smell of transience. Beauty, then, is that moment of descent when apotheosis tilts its wings downwards into the gulf. The ends of the curve lose themselves parabolically somewhere in infinity. Our sentimental eyes see only the middle section of this degeneration, knowing neither the upper nor the lower extremes, which some have thought to meet, godhead and annihilation. Old Curiosity Shops! If I have said "Mortality is beauty," it was a weakness. The sense of time is a symptom of anæmia of the soul, through which flows angelic ichor. We must escape from the dust of the shop. Cloistered darkness and sleep offer us their lotuses. Not to perceive where all is ugly, eaten into by the syphilis of time, heart-sickening — this is beauty; not to desire where death is the only consummation — wisdom. Night is a measureless deep silence: daybreak brings back the foetid gutters of the town. O supreme beauty of a night that knows no limitations — stars or the jagged edges of cock-crowing. Desperate, my mind has desired it: never my blood, whose pulse is a rhythm of the world. At the other extreme, Beatrice lacks solidity, is as unresponsive to your kisses as mathematics. She too is an oubliette, not a way of life; an oubliette that, admittedly, shoots you upwards into light, not down to death; but it comes to the same thing in the end. What, then, is the common measure? To take the world as it is, but metaphorically, informing the chaos of nature with a soul, qualifying transience with eternity. When flowers are thoughts, and lonely poplars fountains of aspiring longing; when our actions are the poem of which all geographies and architectures and every science and all the unclassed individual odds and ends are the words, when even Helen's white voluptuousness matches some candour of the soul — then it will have been found, the permanent and living loveliness. It is not a far-fetched, dear-bought gem; no pomander to be smelt only when the crowd becomes too stinkingly insistent; it is not a birth of rare oboes or violins, not visible only from ten to six by state permission at a nominal charge, not a thing richly apart, but an ethic, a way of belief and of practice, of faith and works, mediæval in its implication with the very threads of life. I desire no Paphian cloister of pink monks. Rather a rosy Brotherhood of Common Life, eating, drinking; marrying and giving in marriage; taking and taken in adultery; reading, thinking, and when thinking fails, feeling immeasurably more subtly, sometimes perhaps creating. Arduous search for one who is chained by his desires to dead carcasses, whose eyes are dimmed with tears by the slow heart-breaking twilights full of old family ghosts laid in lavender, whose despair cries out for opiate and anodyne, craving gross sleep or a place on the airy unsupported pinnacles which hang in the sterile upper chambers of ether. *Ventre à*

terre, head in air — your centaurs are your only poets. Their hoofs strike sparks from the flints and they see both very near and immensely far.

SOLES OCCIDERE ET REDIRE POSSUNT

FOREWORD

JOHN RIDLEY, THE subject of this poem, was killed in February 1918. “If I should perish,” he wrote to me only five weeks before his death, “if I should perish — and one isn’t exactly a ‘good life’ at the moment — I wish you’d write something about me. It isn’t vanity (for I know you’ll do me, if anything, rather less than justice!), not vanity, I repeat; but that queer irrational desire one has for immortality of any kind, however short and precarious — for frankly, my dear, I doubt whether your verses will be so very much more perennial than brass. Still, they’ll be something. One can’t, of course, believe in any *au-delà* for one’s personal self; one would have first to believe in some kind of a friendly god. And as for being a spiritualist spook, one of those wretched beings who seem to spend their eternity in trying to communicate with the earth by a single telephone, where the number is always engaged, and the line chronically out of order — well, all I can say is, Heaven preserve me from such a future life. No, my only hope is you — and a damned poor guarantee for eternity. Don’t make of me a khaki image, I beg. I’d rather you simply said of me, as Erasmus did of his brother, ‘*Strenuus compotor, nec scortator ignavus.*’ I sincerely hope, of course, that you won’t have to write the thing at all — hope not, but have very little doubt you will. Good-bye.”

The following poem is a tentative and provisional attempt to comply with his request. Ridley was an adolescent, and suffered from that instability of mind “produced by the mental conflict forced upon man by his sensitiveness to herd suggestion on the one hand and to experience on the other” (I quote from Mr. Trotter’s memorable work on *Herd Instinct*), that characteristic instability which makes adolescence so feebly sceptical, so inefficient, so profoundly unhappy. I have fished up a single day from Ridley’s forgotten existence. It has a bedraggled air in the sunlight, this poor wisp of Lethean weed. Fortunately, however, it will soon be allowed to drop back into the water, where we shall all, in due course, join it. “The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been.”

I

BETWEEN the drawing of the blind
And being aware of yet another day
There came to him behind
Close, pregnant eyelids, like a flame of blue,
Intense, untroubled
by the wind,
A Mediterranean bay,
Bearing a brazen beak and foamless oars
To where,
marmoreally smooth and bright,
The steps soar up in one pure flight
From the sea’s
edge to the palace doors,
That have shut, have shut their valves of bronze —
And the windows too are lifeless eyes.
The galley grated on the stone;
He stepped out — and
was alone:
No white-sailed hopes, no clouds, nor swans
To shatter the ocean’s calm, to
break the sky’s.
Up the slow stairs:
Did he know it was a dream?
First one foot up, then

the other foot, Shuddering like a mandrake root
 That hears the truffle-dog at work
 And draws a breath to scream;
 To moan, to scream. The gates swing wide,
 And it is coolly dark inside,
 And corridors stretch out and out,
 Joining the ceilings to their floors,
 And parallels ring wedding bells
 And through a hundred thousand doors
 Perspective has abolished doubt.
 But one of the doors was shut,
 And behind it the subtlest lutanist
 Was shaking a broken necklace of tinkling notes,
 And somehow it was feminine music.
 Strange exultant fear of desire, when hearts
 Beat brokenly. He laid his hand on the latch —
 And woke among his familiar books and pictures;
 Real as his dream? He wondered. Ten to
 nine. Thursday. Wasn't he lunching at his aunt's?
 Distressing circumstance. But then
 he was taking Jenny out to dine,
 Which was some consolation. What a chin!
 Civilized ten thousand years, and still
 No better way than rasping a pale mask
 With imminent suicide, steel or obsidian:
 Repulsive task! And the more odious for being quotidian.
 If one should live till eighty-five . . .
 And the dead, do they still shave? The horrible
 dead, are they alive? But that lute, playing
 across his dream . . . Quick drops breaking
 the sleep of the water-wheel,
 Song and ebbing whisper of a summer stream,
 Music's endless inconsequence that would reveal
 To souls that listened for it, the all
 Unseizable confidence, the mystic Rose,
 Could it but find the magical fall
 That droops, droops and dies into the perfect close . . .
 And why so feminine? But one could feel
 The unseen woman sitting there behind
 The door, making her ceaseless slow appeal
 To all that prowls and growls in the caves
 beneath The libraries and parlours of the mind.
 If only one were rational, if only
 At least one had the illusion of being so . . .
 Nine o'clock. Still in bed. Warm, but how
 lonely! He wept to think of all those single
 beds, Those desperate night-long solitudes,
 Those mental Salons full of nudes. Shelley
 was great when he was twenty-four. Eight
 thousand nights alone — minus, perhaps,
 Six, or no! seven, certainly not more.
 Five little bits of heaven (Tum-de-rum,
 de-rum, de-rum), Five little bits of
 Heaven and one that was a lapse,
 High-priced disgust: it stopped him suddenly
 In the midst of laughter and talk with a
 tingling down the (Like infants' impoliteness,
 a terrible infant's brightness),
 And he would shut his eyes so as not to
 see His own hot blushes calling him a
 swine. Atrocious memory! For memory
 should be Of things secure and dead,
 being past, Not living and disquieting.
 At last He threw the nightmare of his
 blankets off. Cloudy ammonia, camels in
 your bath: The earth hath bubbles as the
 water hath: He was not of them, too,
 too solidly Always himself. What foam
 of kissing lips, Pouting, parting with
 the ghost of the seven sips One smacks
 for hiccoughs! Pitiably to be Quite so
 deplorably naked when one strips. There
 was his scar, a panel of old rose
 Slashed in the elegant buff of his trunk
 hose; Adonis punctured by his amorous
 boar, Permanent souvenir of the Great
 War. One of God's jokes, typically good,
 That wound of his. How perfect that he
 should Have suffered it for — what?

II

OH, the dear front page of the Times! Chronicle of essential history: Marriage, birth, and the sly mysteriousness Of lovers' greetings, of lovers' meetings, And dirty death, impartially paid To courage and the old decayed. But nobody had been born to-day, Nobody married that he knew, Nobody died and nobody even killed; He felt a little aggrieved — Nobody even killed. But, to make up: "Tuesday, Colchester train: Wanted Brown Eyes' address, with a view to meeting again." Dear Brown Eyes, it had been nice of her To talk so friendly to a lonely traveller! Why is it nobody ever talks to me? And now, here was a letter from Helen. Better to open it rather than thus— Dwell in a long muse and maze Over the scrawled address and the postmark, Staring stupidly. Love — was there no escape? Was it always there, always there? The same huge and dominant shape, Like Windsor Castle leaning over the plain; And the letter a vista cut through the musing forest, At the end the old Round Tower, Singing its refrain: Here we are, here we are, here we are again! The life so short, so vast love's science and art, So many conditions of felicity. "Darling, will you become a part Of my poor physiology? And, my beloved, may I have The latchkey of your history? And while this corpse is what it is Dear, we must share geographies." So many conditions of felicity. And now time was a widening gulf and space, A fixed between, and fate still kept them apart. Her voice quite gone; distance had blurred her face. The life so short, so vast love's science and art. So many conditions — and yet, once, Four whole days, Four short days of perishing time, They had fulfilled them all. But that was long ago, ah! long ago, Like the last horse bus, or the Christmas pantomime, Or the Bells, oh, the Bells, of Edgar Allan Poe.

III

"HELEN, your letter, proving, I suppose, That you exist somewhere in space, who knows? Somewhere in time, perhaps, arrives this morning, Reminding me with a note of Lutheran warning That faith's the test, not works. Works! — any fool Can do them if he tries to; but what school Can teach one to credit the ridiculous, The palpably non-existent? So with us, Votaries of the copulative cult, In this affair of love, quicumque vult, Whoever would be saved, must love without Adjunct of sense or reason, must not doubt Although the deity be far removed, Remote, invisible; who is not loved Best by voluptuous works, but by the faith That lives in absence and the body's death. I have no faith, and even in love remain Agnostic. Are you here? The fact is plain, Constatd by the heavenly vision of you, Maybe by the mouth's warm touch; and that I love you, I then most surely know, most painfully. But now you've robbed the temple, leaving me A poor invisibility to adore, Now that, alas, you're vanished, gone . . . no more; You take my drift. I only ask your leave To be a little unfaithful — not to you, My dear, to whom I was and will be true, But to your absence. Hence no cause to grieve; For absence may

be cheated of a kiss — Lightly and laughing — with no prejudice
To the so longed-for presence, which some day
Will crown the presence of Le Vostre J.
(As dear unhappy Troilus would say).”

IV

OH, the maggots, the maggots in his brains!
Words, words and words. A birth of
rhymes and the strangest, The most unlikely superfœtations — New deep thoughts
begot by a jingle upon a pun, New worlds glimpsed through the window of a word
That has ceased, somehow, to be opaque. All the muses buzzing in his head. Autobiography
crystallised under his pen, thus: “When I was young enough not to know youth, I was
a Faun whose loves were Byzantine Among stiff trees. Before me naked Truth Creaked
on her intellectual legs, divine In being inhuman, and was never caught By all my
speed; for she could outrun thought. Now I am old enough to know I am young, I
chase more plastic beauties, but inspire Life in their clay, purity in their dung With
the creative breath of my desire. And utter truth is now made manifest When on a
certain sleeping face and breast The moonlight dreams and silver chords are strung,
And a god’s hand touches the aching lyre.” He read it through: a pretty, clinquant
thing, Like bright spontaneous bird-song in the spring, Instinct with instinct, full of
dewy freshness. Yes, he had genius, if he chose to use it; If he chose to — but it was
too much trouble, And he preferred reading. He lit his pipe, Opened his book, plunged
in and soon was drowned In pleasant seas . . . to rise again and find One o’clock struck
and his unshaven face Still like a record in a musical box, And Auntie Loo miles off in
Bloomsbury.

V

i.

THE Open Sesame of “Master John,” And then the broad silk bosom of Aunt
Loo. “Dear John, this is a pleasure. How are you?” “Well, thanks. Where’s Uncle Will?”
“Your uncle’s gone To Bath for his lumbago. He gets on As well as anyone can hope to
do At his age — for you know he’s seventy-two; But still, he does his bit. He sits upon
The local Tribunal at home, and takes Parties of wounded soldiers out in brakes To see
the country. And three times a week He still goes up to business in the City; And then,
sometimes, at night he has to speak In Village Halls for the War Aims Committee.”

II.

“Well, have you any news about the war? What do they say in France?” “I daren’t
repeat The things they say.” “You see we’ve got some meat For you, dear John. Really,

I think before To-day I've had no lamb this year. We score By getting decent vegetables to eat, Sent up from home. This is a good receipt: The touch of garlic makes it. Have some more. Poor Tom was wounded on the twenty-third; Did you know that? And just to-day I heard News from your uncle that his nephew James Is dead — Matilda's eldest boy." "I knew One of those boys, but I'm so bad at names. Mine had red hair." "Oh, now, that must be Hugh."

III.

"Colonel McGillicuddy came to dine Quietly here, a night or two ago. He's on the Staff and very much in the know About all sorts of things. His special line Is Tanks. He says we've got a new design Of super-Tank, with big guns, that can go (I think he said) at thirty miles or so An hour. That ought to make them whine For peace. He also said, if I remember, That the war couldn't last beyond September, Because the Germans' trucks were wearing out And couldn't be replaced. I only hope It's true. You know your uncle has no doubt That the whole thing was plotted by the Pope . . ." ". . . Good-bye, dear John. We have had a nice talk. You must soon come again. Good-bye, good-bye. . . ." He tottered forth, full of the melancholy That comes of surfeit, and began to walk Slowly towards Oxford Street. The brazen sky Burned overhead. Beneath his feet the stones Were a grey incandescence, and his bones Melted within him, and his bowels yearned.

VI

THE crowd, the crowd — oh, he could almost cry To see those myriad faces hurrying by, And each a strong tower rooted in the past On dark unknown foundations, each made fast With locks nobody knew the secret of, No key could open: save that perhaps love Might push the bars half back and just peep in — And see strange sights, it may be. But for him They were locked donjons, every window bright With beckoning mystery; and then, Good Night! The lamp was out, they were passed, they were gone For ever . . . ever. And one might have been The hero or the friend long sought, and one Was the loveliest face his eyes had ever seen, (Vanished as soon) and he went lonely on. Then in a sudden fearful vision he saw The whole world spread before him — a vast sphere Of seething atoms moving to one law: "Be individual. Approach, draw near, Yes, even touch: but never join, never be Other than your own selves eternally." And there are tangents, tangents of thought that aim Out through the gaps between the patterned stars At some fantastic dream without a name That like the moon shining through prison bars, Visits the mind with madness. So they fly, Those soaring tangents, till the first jet tires, Failing, faltering half-way up the sky, And breaks — poor slender fountain that aspires Against the whole strength of the heavy earth Within whose womb,

darkly, it took birth. Oh, how remote he walked along the street, Jostling with other lumps of human meat! He was so tired. The café doors invite. Caverned within them, still lingers the night In shadowy coolness, soothing the seared sight. He sat there smoking, soulless and wholly crass, Sunk to the eyes in the warm sodden morass Of his own guts, wearily, wearily Ruminating visions of mortality — Memento Moris from the pink alcove, Nightmare oppressiveness of profane love. Cesspool within, and without him he could see Nothing but mounds of flesh and harlotry. Like a half-pricked bubble pendulous in space, The buttered leatheriness of a Jew's face Looms through cigar-smoke; red and ghastly white, Death's-head women fascinate the sight. It was the nightmare of a corpse. Dead, dead . . . Oh, to wake up, to live again! he fled From that foul place and from himself.

VII

TWIN domes of the Alhambra, Veiled tenderness of the sky above the Square: He sat him down in the gardens, under the trees, And in the dust, with the point of his umbrella, Drew pictures of the crosses we have to bear. The poor may starve, the sick have horrible pains — But there are pale eyes even in the London planes. Men may make war and money, mischief and love — But about us are colours and the sky above. Yes, here, where the golden domes ring clear, And the planes patiently, hopefully renew Their green refrain from year to year To the dim spring burden of London's husky blue, Here he could see the folly of it. How? Confine a boundless possible within The prison of an ineluctable Now? Go slave to pain, woo forth original sin Out of her lair — and all by a foolish Act? Madness! But now, Wordsworth of Leicester Square, He'd learnt his lesson, learnt by the mere fact Of the place existing, so finely unaware Of syphilis and the restless in and out Of public lavatories, and evening shout Of winners and disasters, races and war. Troubles come thick enough. Why call for more By suiting action to the divine Word? His spleen was chronic, true; but he preferred Its subtle agony to the brute force That tugged the barbs of deep-anchored remorse. The sunlight wrapped folds of soft golden silk About him, and the air was warm as milk Against his skin. Long sitting still had made Cramped soreness such a pleasure, he was afraid To shift his tortured limbs, lest he should mar Life's evenness. London's noise from afar Smoothed out its harshness to soothe his thoughts asleep, Sound that made silence much more calm and deep. The domes of gold, the leaves, emerald bright, Were intense, piercing arrows of delight. He did not think; thought was a shallow thing To his deep sense of life, of mere being. He looked at his hand, lying there on his knee, The blue veins branching, the tendons cunningly Dancing like jacks in a piano if he shook A knot-boned finger. Only to look and look, Till he knew it, each hair and every pore — It seemed enough: what need of anything more? Thought, a blind alley; action, which at best Is cudgelling water that goes back to rest As soon as you give over your violences. No, wisdom culls the flowers of the five senses, Savouring the secret sweetness they afford: Instead of which he had a

Medical Board
 Next week, and they would pass him fit. Good Lord!
 Well, let all pass. But one must outdo fate,
 Wear clothes more modish than the fashion, run
 Faster than time, not merely stand and wait;
 Do in a flash what cannot be undone
 Through ten eternities. Predestinate?
 So would God be — that is, if there were one:
 General epidemic which spoils nobody's fun.
 Action, action! Quickly rise and do
 The most irreparable things; beget,
 In one brief consummation of the will,
 Remorse, reaction, wretchedness,
 regret. Action! This was no time for sitting still.
 He crushed his hat down over his eyes
 And walked with a stamp to symbolise
 Action, action — left, right, left;
 Planting his feet with a slabby beat,
 Taking strange Procrustean steps,
 Lengthened, shortened to avoid
 Touching the lines between the stones — A thing which makes God so annoyed.
 Action, action! First of all
 He spent three pounds he couldn't afford
 In buying a book he didn't want,
 For the mere sake of having been
 Irrevocably extravagant. Then feeling very bold,
 he pressed
 The bell of a chance house; it might
 Disclose some New Arabian Night
 Behind its grimy husk, who knows?
 The seconds passed; all was dead.
 Arrogantly he rang once more.
 His heart thumped on sheer silence; but at last
 There was a shuffling;
 something behind the door
 Became approaching panic, and he fled.

VIII

“MISERY,” he said, “to have no chin,
 Nothing but brains and sex and taste:
 Only omissively to sin,
 Weakly kind and cowardly chaste.
 But when the war is over,
 I will go to the East and plant
 Tea and rubber, and make much money.
 I will eat the black sweat of niggers
 And flagellate them with whips.
 I shall be enormously myself,
 Incarnate Chin.”
 The anguish of thinking ill of oneself
 (St. Paul's religion, poignant beyond words)
 Turns ere you know it to faint minor thirds
 Before the ritualistic pomps of the world —
 The glass-grey silver of rivers, silken skies unfurled,
 Urim and Thummim of dawn and sun-setting,
 And the lawn sleeves of a great episcopal cloud,
 Matins of song and vesperal murmuring,
 Incense of night-long flowers and earth new-ploughed;
 All beauties of sweetness and all that shine or sing.
 Conscience is smoothed by beauty's subtle fingers
 Into voluptuousness, where nothing lingers
 Of bitterness, saving a sorrow that is
 Rather a languor than a sense of pain.
 So, from the tunnel of St. Martin's Lane
 Sailing into the open Square, he felt
 His self-reproach, his good resolutions melt
 Into an ecstasy, gentle as balm,
 Before the spire, etched black and white on the calm
 Of a pale windless sky, St. Martin's spire,
 And the shadows sleeping beneath the portico
 And the crowd hurrying, ceaselessly, to and fro.
 Alas, the bleached and slender tower that aches
 Upon the gauzy sky, where blueness breaks
 Into sweet hoarseness, veiled with love and tender
 As the dove's voice alone in the woods: too slender,
 Too finely pencilled — black and bleaching white
 On smoky mist, too clear in the keen light
 Of utmost summer: and oh! the lives that pass
 In one swift stream of colour, too, too bright,
 Too swift — and all the lives unknown,
 Alone. Alas. . . . A truce to summer and beauty and the pain
 Of being too consciously alive among
 The things that pass and the things that remain,
 (Oh, equal

sadness!) the pain of being young. Truce, truce. . . . Once again he fled; — All his life, it seemed, was a flight; — Fled and found Sanctuary in a cinema house. Huge faces loomed and burst, Like bubbles in a black wind. He shut his eyes on them and in a little Slept; slept, while the pictures Passed and returned, passed once more and returned. And he, like God in the midst of the wheeling world, Slept on; and when he woke it was eight o'clock. Jenny? Revenge is sweet; he will have kept Dear Jenny waiting.

IX

TALL straight poplars stand in a meadow; The wind and sun caress them, dappling The deep green grass with shine and shadow; And a little apart one slender sapling Sways in the wind and almost seems Conscious of its own supple grace, And shakes its twin-hued leaves and gleams With silvery laughter, filling the place Where it stands with a sudden flash of human Beauty and grace; till from her tree Steps forth the dryad, now turned woman, And sways to meet him. It is she. Food and drink, food and drink: Olives as firm and sleek and green As the breasts of a sea god's daughter, Swimming far down where the corpses sink Through the dense shadowy water. Silver and black on flank and back, The glossy sardine mourns its head. The red anchovy and the beetroot red, With carrots, build a gorgeous stair — Bronze, apoplexy and Venetian hair — And the green pallor of the salad round Sharpens their clarion sound. De lady take hors d'œuvres? and de gentleman too? Per due! Due! Echo answers: Du' . . . "So, Jenny, you've found another Perfect Man." "Perfect, perhaps; but not so sweet as you, Not such a baby." "Me? A baby. Why, I am older than the rocks on which I sit. . . ." Oh, how delightful, talking about oneself! Golden wine, pale as a Tuscan primitive, And wine's strange taste, half loathsome, half delicious: Come, my Lesbia, let us love and live. What though the mind still think that one thing's vicious More than another? If the thought can give This wine's rich savour to our laughing kiss, Let us preserve the Christian prejudice. Oh, there are shynesses and silences, Shynesses and silences! But luckily God also gave us wine. "Jenny, adorable—" (what draws the line At the mere word "love"?) "has anyone the right To look so lovely as you look to-night, To have such eyes, such a helmet of bright hair?" But candidly, he wondered, do I care? He heard her voice and himself spoke, But like faint light through a cloud of smoke, There came, unreal and far away, Mere sounds utterly empty — like the drone Of prayers, *crambe repetita*, prayers and praise, Long, long ago, in the old School Chapel days; Senseless, but so intrusive on one's own Interior life one couldn't even think . . . O sweet, rare, perilous, retchy drink! Another glass . . .

X

HOW cool is the moonless summer night, how sweet
After the noise and the dizzy
choking heat! The bloodless lamps look down upon their own
Green image in the polished roadway thrown,
And onward and out of sight the great road runs,
Smooth and dark as a river of calm bronze.
Freedom and widening space: his life expands,
Ready, it seems, to burst the iron bands
Of self, to fuse with other lives and be
Not one but the world, no longer "I" but "She."
See, like the dolorous memory
Of happy times in misery,
An aged hansom fills the street
With the superannuated beat
Of hollow hoofs and bells that chime
Out of another quieter time.
"Good-night," the last kiss, "and God
bless you, my dear." So, she was gone, she who had been so near,
So breathing-warm — soft mouth and hands and hair —
A moment since. Had she been really there,
Close at his side, and had he kissed her? It seemed
Unlikely as something somebody else
had dreamed and talked about at breakfast, being a bore:
Improbable, unsubstantial, dim, yet more
Real than the rest of life; real as the blaze
Of a sudden-seen picture, as the lightning phrase
With which the poet-gods strangely create
Their brief bright world beyond the reach of fate.
Yet he could wonder now if he had kissed
Her or his own loved thoughts. Did she exist
Now she was history and safely stowed
Down in the past? There (with a conscious smile),
There let her rest eternal. And meanwhile,
Lamp-fringed towards meeting parallels, the road
Stretched out and out, and the old weary
horse, Come from the past, went jogging his homeward course
Uphill through time to some demoded place,
On ghostly hoofs back to the safe Has-Been: —
But fact returns insistent as remorse;
Uphill towards Hampstead, back to the year of grace
Nineteen hundred and seventeen.

XI

BETWEEN the drawing of the blind
And being aware of yet another day . . .

The Cicadas and Other Poems

CONTENTS

- THEATRE OF VARIETIES
- A HIGHWAY ROBBERY
- CALIGULA OR THE TRIUMPH OF BEAUTY
- NERO AND SPORUS OR THE TRIUMPH OF ART
- NERO AND SPORUS
- MYTHOLOGICAL INCIDENT
- FEMMES DAMNÉES
- ARABIA INFELIX
- THE MOOR
- NOBLEST ROMANS
- ORION
- MEDITATION
- SEPTEMBER
- SEASONS
- STORM AT NIGHT
- MEDITERRANEAN
- TIDE
- FÊTE NATIONALE
- MIDSUMMER DAY
- AUTUMN STILLNESS
- APENNINE
- ALMERIA
- PAGAN YEAR
- ARMOUR

- SHEEP
- BLACK COUNTRY
- THE PERGOLA
- LINES
- THE CICADAS
- THE YELLOW MUSTARD

Theatre of Varieties

Circle on circle the hanging gardens descend, Sloping from upper darkness, each flower face Open, turned to the light and laughter and life Of the sun-like stage. And all the space between, Like the hot fringes of a summer sky, Is quick with trumpets, beats with the pulse of drums, Athwart whose sultry thunders rise and fall Flute fountains and the swallow flight of strings. Music, the revelation and marvellous lie! On the bright trestles tumblers, tamer of beasts, Dancers and clowns affirm their fury of life.

“The World-Renowned Van Hogen Mogen in The Master Mystery of Modern Times”.

He talks, he talks; more powerfully than even Music his quick words hammer on men’s minds. “Observe this hat, ladies and gentlemen; Empty, observe, empty as the universe Before the Head for which this Hat is made Was or could think. Empty, observe, observe.” The rabbit kicks; a bunch of paper flowers Blooms in the limelight; paper tape unrolls, Endless, a clue. “Ladies and gentlemen...” Sharp, sharp on malleable minds his words Hammer. The little Indian boy Enters the basket. Bright, an Ethiop’s sword Transfixes it and bleeding is withdrawn. Death draws and petrifies the watching faces. “Ladies and gentlemen”: the great Van Hogen Mogen Smiles and is kind. A puddle of dark blood Slowly expands. “The irremediable Has been and is no more.” Empty of all but blood, the basket gapes. “Arise!” he calls, and blows his horn. “Arise!” And bird-like from the highest gallery The little Indian answers. Shout upon shout, the hanging gardens reverberate. Happy because the irremediable is healed, Happy because they have seen the impossible, Because they are freed from the dull daily law, They shout, they shout. And great Van Hogen Mogen Modestly bows, graciously smiles. The band Confirms the lie with cymbals and bassoons, The curtain falls. How quickly the walls recede, How soon the petrified gargoyles re-become Women and men! who fill the warm thick air With rumour of their loves and discontents, Not suffering even great Hogen Mogen — Only begetter out of empty hats Of rose and rabbit, raiser from the dead To invade the sanctity of private life.

The Six Aerial Sisters Polpetini Dive dangerously from trapeze to far Trapeze, like stars, and know not how to fall. For if they did and if, of his silver balls, Sclopis, the juggler, dropped but one - but one Of all the flying atoms which he builds With his quick throwing into a solid arch What panic then would shake the pale flower faces Blooming so tranquilly in their hanging beds! What a cold blast of fear! But patrons must not, And since they must not, cannot be alarmed. Hence Sclopis, hence (the proof is manifest) The Six Aerial Ones infallibly Function, and have done, and for ever will.

Professor Chubb’s Automaton performs Upon the viols and virginals, plays chess, Ombre and loo, mistigri, tric-trac, pushpin, Sings Lilliburlero in falsetto, an-

swersAll questions put to it, and with its rubber feetNoiselessly dances the antique
heydiguy.“Is it a man?” the terrible infant wonders.And “no”, they say, whose business
it isTo say such infants nay. And “no” againThey shout when, after watching Dobbs
and DebsStep simultaneously through intricate dances,Hammer the same tune with
their rattling clogsIn faultless unison, the infant asks,“And they, are they machines?”

Music, the revelation and marvellous lie,Rebuilds in the minds of all a suave and
curvingKingdom of Heaven, where the saxophoneAffirms everlasting loves, the drums
denyDeath, and where great Tenorio, when he sings,Makes Picardy bloom only with
perfumed roses,And never a rotting corpse in all its earth.Play, music, play! In God’s
bright limelight eyesAn angel walks and with one rolling glanceBlesses each hun-
gry flower in the hanging gardens.“Divine,” they cry, having no words by whichTo
call the nameless spade a spade, “DivineZenocrate!” There are dark mysteriesWhose
name is beauty, strange revelations calledLove, and a gulph of pleasure and of awe-
Where words fall vain and wingless in the dark;The seen Ineffable, the felt but all-
UnknownAnd Undescribed, is God. “Divine, divine!”The god-intoxicated shout goes
up.“Divine Zenocrate!”“Father,” the terrible infant’s voice is shrill,“Say, father, why does
the lady wear no skirts?”She wears no skirts; God’s eyes have never been brighter.The
face flowers open in her emanation.She is suave and curving Kingdom of HeavenMade
visible, and in her sugared songThe ear finds paradise. Divine, divine!Her belly is like
a mound of wheat, her breastsAre towers, her hair like a flock of goats.Her foot is feat
with diamond toesAnd she - divine Zenocrate And she on legs of ruby goes.The face
flowers tremble in the rushing windOf her loud singing. A poet in the pitJots down
in tears the words of her Siren song.So every spirit as it is most pure,And hath in it
the more of heavenly light,So it the rarer body doth procureTo habit in, and is more
fairly dightWith cheerful grace and amiable sight:For of the soul the body form doth
take;And soul is form and doth the body make.“Now, boys, together. All with me,” she
criesThrough the long sweet suspense of dominant chords;“For of the soul,” her voice
is paradise,“For of the soul the body form doth take;And soul is form and doth the
body make.”Zenocrate, alone, alone divine!

God save the King. Music’s last practical jokeStill bugling in their ears of war and
glory,The folk emerge into the night.Already next week’s bills are being posted:Urim
and Thummim, cross-talk comedians;Ringpok, the Magian of Tibet;The Two Bedelias;
Ruby and Truby Dix;Sam Foy and Troupe of Serio-Comic Cyclists...Theatre of
immemorial varieties,Old mummery, but mummings never the same!Twice nightly
every night from now till doomsdayThe hanging gardens, bedded with pale flower
faces,Young flowers in the old old gardens, will echoWith ever new, with ever new
delight.

A HIGHWAY ROBBERY

It is a scene of murder - elegant, is it not?You lutanists, who play to naked Queens,As
summer sleep or music under trees,As luncheon on the grass - the grass on whichThe
country copulatives make sport, the paleGrass with the tall tubed hats, the inky coat-
sAnd rosy, rosy among the funeral black(Memento Vivere) a naked girl.But here the

sleepers bleed, the tumbling couples
Struggle, but not in love; the naked girl
Kneels at the feet of one who hesitates,
Voluptuously, between a rape and a murder.

Bandits angelical and you, rich corpses!
Truth is your sister, Goodness your
spouse. Towering skies lean down and tall,
tall trees impose their pale arsenical
benediction, Making all seem exquisitely
remote And small and silent, like a
village fair Seen from the hill-top,
far far below. And yet they walk on
the village green to whom The fair is
huge, tumultuous, formidable. Earth
Lies unremembered beneath the feet of
dancers Who, looking up, see not the
sky, but towers And bright invading
domes and the fierce swings, Scythe-
like, reaping and ravaging the quiet.
And when night falls, the shuddering
gas-flares scoop Out of the topless
dark a little vault Of smoky gold,
wherein the dancers still Jig away,
gods of a home-made universe.

CALIGULA OR THE TRIUMPH OF BEAUTY

Prow after prow, the floating ships
Bridge the blue gulph; the road is laid;
And Caesar on a piebald horse
Prances with all his cavalcade.

Drunk with their own quick blood they go.
The waves flash as with seeing eyes;
The tumbling cliff's mimic their speed,
And they have filled the vacant skies

With waltzing Gods and Virtues, set
Aeolus roaring with their shout,
Made Vesta's temple on the cape
Spin like a circus roundabout.

The twined caduceus in his hand,
And having golden wings for spurs,
Young Caesar dressed as God looks on
And cheers his jolly mariners;

Cheers as they heave from off the bridge
The trippers from the seaside town;
Laughs as they bang the bobbing heads
And shove them bubbling down to drown.

There sweeps a spiral curve of gesture
From the allegoric sky; Beauty, like
conscious lightning, runs Through
Jove's ribbed trunk and Juno's thigh,

Slides down the flank of Mars and takes
From Virtue's rump a dizzier twist,
Licks round a cloud and whirling
stoops Earthwards to Caesar's lifted fist.

A burgess tumbles from the bridge
Headlong, and hurrying Beauty slips
From Caesar through the plunging legs
To the blue sea between the ships.

NERO AND SPORUS OR THE TRIUMPH OF ART

The Christians by whose muddy light
Dimly, dimly I divine Your eyes and
see your pallid beauty Like a pale
night-primrose shine,

Colourless in the dark, revere
A God who slowly died that they
Might suffer the less, who bore the
pain Of all time in a single day,
The pain of all men in a single
Wounded body and sad heart.

The yellow marble, smooth as water,
Builds me a Golden House: and there
The marble Gods sleep in their
strength And the white Parian girls
are fair.

Roses and waxen oleanders,
Green grape bunches and the flushed
peach All beautiful things I taste,
touch, see, Knowing, loving,
becoming each.

The ship went down, my mother swam:
I wedded and myself was wed:
Old Claudius died of emperor-bane:
Old Seneca too slowly bled.

The wild beast and the victim both,
The ravisher and the wincing bride,
King of the world and a slave's
slave, Terror-haunted, deified —

All these, sweet Sporus, I, an artist, Am and, an artist, needs must be. Is the tune Lydian? I have loved you. And you have heard my symphony

Of wailing voices and clashed brass, With long shrill flutings that suspend Pain o'er a muttering gulph of terrors, And piercing blasts of joy that end,

Gods, in what discord! — could I have So hymned the Furies, were the bane Still sap within the hemlock stalk, The red swords virgin-bright again?

Or take a child's love that is all Worship, all tenderness and trust, A dawn-web, dewy and fragile - take And with the violence of lust

Tear and defile it. You shall hear The breaking dumbness and the thin Harsh crying that is the very music Of shame and the remorse of sin.

Christ died; the artist lives for all; Loves, and his naked marbles stand Pure as a column on the sky, Whose lips, whose breasts, whose thighs demand

Not our humiliation, not The shuddering of an after-shame; And of his agonies men know Only the beauty born of them.

Christ died, but living Nero turns Your mute remorse to song; he gives To idiot Fate eyes like a lover's, And while his music plays, God lives.

NERO AND SPORUS

II

Dark stirrings in the perfumed air Touch your cheeks, lift your hair. With softer fingers I caress, Sporus, all your loveliness. Round as a fruit, tree-tangled shines The moon; and fire-flies in the vines, Like stars in a delirious sky, Gleam and go out. Unceasingly The fountains fall, the nightingales Sing. But time flows and love avails Nothing. The Christians smoulder red; Their brave blue-hearted flames are dead; And you, sweet Sporus, you and I We too must die, we too must die.

MYTHOLOGICAL INCIDENT

Through the pale skeleton of woods Orion walks. The North Wind lays Its cold lips to the twin steel flutes That are his gun, and plays.

Knee-deep he goes, where penny-wiser Than all his kind who steal and hoard, Year after year some sylvan miser His copper wealth has stored.

The Queen of Love and Beauty lays In neighbouring beechen aisles her baits Bread-crumbs and the golden maize. Patiently she waits.

And when the unwary pheasant comes To fill his painted maw with crumbs, Accurately the sporting Queen Takes aim. The bird has been.

Secure, Orion walks her way. The Cyprian loads, presents, makes fire. He falls. 'Tis Venus all entire Attached to her recumbent prey.

FEMMES DAMNÉES

(from the French of Charles Baudelaire)

The lamps had languisht and their light was pale; On cushions deep Hippolyta reclined. Those potent kisses that had torn the veil From her young candour filled her dreaming mind.

With tempest-troubled eyes she sought the blue Heaven of her innocence, how far away! Like some sad traveller, who turns to view The dim horizons passed at dawn of day.

Tears and the muffled light of weary eyes, The stupor and the dull voluptuous trance, Limp arms, like weapons dropped by one who flies All served her fragile beauty to enhance.

Calm at her feet and joyful, Delphine lay And gazed at her with ardent eyes and bright, Like some strong beast that, having mauled its prey, Draws back to mark the imprint of its bite.

Strong and yet bowed, superbly on her knees, She snuffed her triumph, on that frailer grace Poring voluptuously, as though to seize The signs of thanks upon the other's face.

Gazing, she sought in her pale victim's eye The speechless canticle that pleasure sings, The infinite gratitude that, like a sigh, Mounts slowly from the spirit's deepest springs.

"Now, now you understand (for love like ours Is proof enough) that 'twere a sin to throw The sacred holocaust of your first flowers To those whose breath might parch them as they blow.

"Light falls my kiss, as the ephemeral wing That scarcely stirs the shining of a lake. What ruinous pain your lover's kiss would bring! A plough that leaves a furrow in its wake.

"Over you, like a herd of ponderous kine, Man's love will pass and his caresses fall Like trampling hooves. Then turn your face to mine; Turn, oh my heart, my half of me, my all!

"Turn, turn, that I may see their starry lights, Your eyes of azure; turn. For one dear glance I will reveal love's most obscure delights, And you shall drowse in pleasure's endless trance."

"Not thankless, nor repentant in the least Is your Hippolyta." She raised her head. "But one who from some grim nocturnal feast Returns at dawn feels less disquieted.

"I bear a weight of terrors, and dark hosts Of phantoms haunt my steps and seem to lead. I walk, compelled, behind these beckoning ghosts Down sliding roads and under skies that bleed.

"Is ours so strange an act, so full of shame? Explain the terrors that disturb my bliss. When you say, Love, I tremble at the name; And yet my mouth is thirsty for your kiss.

"Ah, look not so, dear sister, look not so! You whom I love, even though that love should be A snare for my undoing, even though Loving I am lost for all eternity."

Delphine looked up, and fate was in her eye. From the god's tripod and beneath his spell, Shaking her tragic locks, she made reply: "Who in love's presence dares to speak of hell?"

"Thinker of useless thoughts, let him be cursed, Who in his folly, venturing to vex A question answerless and barren, first With wrong and right involved the things of sex!

"He who in mystical accord conjoins Shadow with heat, dusk with the noon's high fire, Shall never warm the palsy of his loins At that red sun which mortals call desire.

"Go, seek some lubber groom's deflowering lust; Take him your heart and leave me here despised! Go - and bring back, all horror and disgust, The livid breasts man's love has stigmatized.

"One may not serve two masters here below." But the child answered: "I am torn apart, I feel my inmost being rent, as though A gulf had yawned - the gulf that is my heart.

"Naught may this monster's desperate thirst assuage, As fire 'tis hot, as space itself profound Naught stay the Fury from her quenchless rage, Who with her torch explores its bleeding wound.

"Curtain the world away and let us try If lassitude will bring the boon of rest. In your deep bosom I would sink and die, Would find the grave's fresh coolness on your breast."

Hence, lamentable victims, get you hence! Hell yawns beneath, your road is straight and steep. Where all the crimes receive their recompense Wind-whipped and seething in the lowest deep

With a huge roaring as of storms and fires, Go down, mad phantoms, doomed to seek in vain The ne'er-won goal of unassuaged desires, And in your pleasures find eternal pain!

Sunless your caverns are; the fever damps That filter in through every crannied vent Break out with marsh-fire into sudden lamps And steep your bodies with their frightful scent.

The barrenness of pleasures harsh and stale Makes mad your thirst and parches up your skin; And like an old flag volleying in the gale, Your whole flesh shudders in the blasts of sin.

Far from your kind, outlawed and reprobate, Go, prowl like wolves through desert worlds apart! Disordered souls, fashion your own dark fate, And flee the god you carry in your heart.

ARABIA INFELIX

Under a ceiling of cobalt And mirrored by as void a blue, Wet only with the wind-blown salt, The Arabian land implores a dew.

Parched, parched are the hills, and dumb That thundering voice of the ravine; Round the dead springs the birds are seen No more, no more at evening come

(Like lovely thoughts to one who dwells In quiet, like enchanting hopes) The leopards and the shy gazelles And the light-footed antelopes.

Death starts at every rattling gust
That in the withered torrent's bed
Whirls up a phantom of grey dust
And, dying, lets the ghost fall dead.

Dust in a dance may seem to live;
But laid, not blown, it brings to birth.
Not wind, but only rain can give
Life, and to a patient earth.

Hot wind from this Arabian land
Chases the clouds, withholds the rain.
No footstep prints the restless sand
Wherein who sows, he sows in vain.

If there were water, if there were
But a shower, a little fountain springing,
How rich would be the perfumed air,
And the green woods with shade and singing

Bright hills, but by the sun accursed,
Peaceful, but with the peace of hell — Once
on these barren slopes there fell
A plague more violent than thirst:

Anguish to kill inveterate pain
And mortal slaking of desire;
Dew, and a long-awaited rain —
A dew of blood, a rain of fire.

Into a vacant sky the moist
Gray pledge of spring and coming leaves
Swam, and the thirsty hills rejoiced,
All golden with their future sheaves.

Flower-phantoms in the parching air
Nodded, and trees ungrown were bowed;
With love like madness, like despair,
The mountain yearned towards the cloud.

And she in silence slowly came,
Oh! to transfigure, to renew,
Came laden with a gift of dew,
But with it dropped the lightning's flame;

A flame that rent the crags apart,
But rending made a road between
For water to the mountain's heart,
That left a scar, but left it green.

Faithless the cloud and fugitive;
An empty heaven nor burns, nor wets;
At peace, the barren land regrets
Those agonies that made it live.

THE MOOR

Champion of souls and holiness, upholder
Of all the virtues, father of the Church,
Honest, honest, honest Iago! how
Crusadingly, with what indignant zeal
(Ora pro nobis), caracoling on
Your high horse and emblazoned, gules on white,
Did you ride forth (Oh, pray for us), ride forth
Against the dark-skinned hosts of evil, ride,
Martyr and saint, against those paynim hosts,

Having for shield all Sinai, and for sword,
To smite rebellion and avenge the Lord,
The sharp, the shining certainty of faith!
(Ora pro nobis) point us out the Way.

"Lily bright and stinking mud:
Fair is fair and foul is ill. With her, on her, what you will.
This fire must be put out with blood,
Put out with blood."

But for a glint, a hint of questing eyes,
Invisible, darkness through darkness goes
On feet that even in their victim's dreaming
Wake not an echo. Lost, he is lost; and yet thus
wholly in darkness
Melted, the Moor is more Othello than when,
Green-glittering, the sharp Venetian day
Revealed him armed and kingly and commanding
Captain of men.

How still she lies, this naked Desdemona,
All but a child and sleeping and alone,
How still and white! Whose breasts, whose arms,
the very trustfulness
Of her closed eyelids and unhurried breath
More than a philtre maddeningly invite
Lust and those hands, those huge dark hands, and death.

"For oh, the lily and the mud!
Fair is still fair and foulness, ill. With her, on her, what you will.
This fire must be put out with blood."

Well, now the fire is out, and the light too; All, all put out. In Desdemona's place Lies now a carrion. That fixed grimace Of lidless eyes and starting tongue Derides his foolishness. Cover her face; This thing but now was beautiful and young. Honest Iago's Christian work is over; Short, short the parleying at the Golden Gate. "For I am one who made the Night ashamed Of his own essence, that his dark was dark; One who with good St. Jerome's filthy tongue Tainted desire and taught the Moor to scorn His love's pale body, and because she had Lain gladly in his arms, to call her whore And strangle her for whoredom." So he spoke, And with majestic motion heaven's high door Rolled musically apart its burnished vans To grant him entrance.

Turning back meanwhile From outer darkness, Othello and his bride Perceive the globe of heaven like one small lamp Burning alone at midnight in the abyss Of some cathedral cavern; pause, and then With face once more averted, hand in hand, Explore the unseen treasures of the dark.

NOBLEST ROMANS

Columns and unageing fountains, Jets of frost and living foam — Let them leap from seven mountains, The seven hills of Rome.

Flanked by arch and echoing arch, Let the streets in triumph go; Bid the aqueducts to march Tireless through the plain below.

Column-high in the blue air, Let the marble Caesars stand; Let the gods, who living were Romans, lift a golden hand.

Many, but each alone, a crowd, Yet of Romans, throng their shrine; Worshippers themselves divine, Gods to gods superbly bowed;

Romans bowed to shapes that they, Sculptors of the mind, set free; Suppliant that they may be Peers of those to whom they pray.

ORION

Tree-tangled still, autumn Orion climbs Up from among the North Wind's shuddering emblems Into the torrent void And dark abstraction of invisible power, The heart and boreal substance of the night.

Pleione flees before him, and behind, Still sunken, but prophetically near, Death in the Scorpion hunts him up the sky And round the vault of time, round the slow-curving year, Follows unescapably And to the end, aye, and beyond the end Will follow, follow; for of all the gods Death only cannot die.

The rest are mortal. And how many lie Already with their creatures' ancient dust! Dead even in us who live - or hardly live, Since of our hearts impiety has made,

Not tombs indeed (for they are holy; tombs Secretly live with everlasting Death's Dark and mysterious life), But curious shops and learned lumber rooms Of bone and stone and every mummied thing, Where Death himself his sacred sting Forgets (how studiously forgotten Amid the irrelevant to and fro of feet!), Where by the peeping and the chattering, The loud forgetfulness seemingly slain, He lies with all the rest - and yet we know, In secret yet we know, Death is not dead, not dead but only sleeping, And soon will rise again.

Not so the rest. Only the Scorpion burns
In our unpeopled heaven of empty names
And insubstantial echoes; only Death
Still claims our prayers, and still to those who
pray
Returns his own dark blood and quickening breath,
Returns the ominous mystery
of fear. Where are the gods of dancing and desire?
Anger and joy, laughter and tears and
wine,
Those other mysteries of fire and flame,
Those more divine than Death's — ah,
where are they? Only a ghost between the shuddering trees,
Only a name and ghostly
numbers climb;
And where a god pursued and fled,
Only a ghostly time, a ghostly
place
Attends on other ghostly times and places.
Orion and the rest are dead.

And yet to-night, here in the exulting wind,
Amid the enormous laughs of a soul
At once the world's and mine,
God-like Orion and all his brother stars
Shine as with living
eyes,
With eyes that glance a recognition, glance a sign
Across the quickened dark, across
the gulphs
That separate no more,
But, like wide seas that yet bring home the freight
Of man's mad yearning for a further shore,
Join with a living touch, unbrokenly,
Life to
mysterious life,
The Hunter's alien essence to my own.

Orion lives; yet I who know him living,
Elsewhere and otherwise
Know him for dead,
and dead beyond all hope,
For 'tis the infertile and unquickening death
Of measured
places and recorded times,
The death of names and numbers that he dies.
Only the
phantom of Orion climbs.
Put out the eyes, put out the living eyes
And look elsewhere;
yes, look and think and be
Elsewhere and otherwise.
But here and thus are also in
their right,
Are in their right divine to send this wind of laughter
Rushing through the
cloudless dark
And through my being; have a right divine
And imprescriptible now to
reveal
The starry god, the right to make me feel,
As even now, as even now I feel,
His
living presence near me in the night.

A curved and figured glass hangs between light and light,
Between the glow within
us and the glow
Of what mysterious sun without?
Vast over earth and sky, or focussed
burningly
Upon the tender quick, our spirits throw
Each way their images - each way
the forms
O! shall it be of beauty, shall it be
The naked skeletons of doubt?
Or else,
symbolically dark, the cloudy forms
Of mystery, or dark (but dark with death)
Shapes
of sad knowledge and defiling hate?
"Lighten our darkness, Lord." With what pure
faith,
What confident hope our fathers once implored
The Light! But 'tis the shitten
Lord of Flies
Who with his loathsome bounties now fulfils
On us their prayers. Our
fathers prayed for light.
Through windows at their supplication scoured
Bare of the
sacred blazons, but instead
Daubed with the dung-god's filth, all living eyes,
Whether of
stars or men, look merely dead;
While on the vaulted crystal of the night
Our guttering
souls project,
Not the Wild Huntsman, not the Heavenly Hosts,
But only times and
places, only names and ghosts.

And yet, for all the learned Lord of Dung,
The choice is ours, the choice is always
ours,
To see or not to see the living powers
That move behind the numbered points
and times.
The Fly King rules; but still the choice remains
With us his subjects, we
are free, are free
To love our fate or loathe it; to rejoice
Or weep or wearily accept; are
free,
For all the scouring of our souls, for all
The miring of their crystal, free to give
Even
to an empty sky, to vacant names,
Or not to give, our worship; free to turn
Lifewards,

within, without, to what transcends
The squalor of our personal ends and aims,
Or not to turn; yes, free to die or live;
Free to be thus and passionately here,
Or otherwise and elsewhere;
Free, in a word, to learn or not to learn
The art to think and musically do
And feel and be, the never more than now
Difficult art harmoniously to live
All poetry - the midnight of Macbeth
And ripe Odysseus and the undying light
Of Gemma's star and Cleopatra's death
And Falstaff in his cups; the art to live
That discipline of flowers, that solemn dance
Of sliding weights and harnessed powers
Which is a picture; or to live the grave
And stoical recession, row on row,
Of equal columns, live the passionate leaping,
The mutual yearning, meeting, marrying,
And then the flame-still rapture, the fierce trance
Of consummation in the Gothic night.

The choice is always ours. Then, let me choose
The longest art, the hard Promethean way
Cherishingly to tend and feed and fan
That inward fire, whose small precarious flame,
Kindled or quenched, creates
The noble or the ignoble men we are,
The worlds we live in and the very fates,
Our bright or muddy star.

Up from among the emblems of the wind
Into its heart of power, The Huntsman climbs,
and all his living stars
Are bright, and all are mine.

MEDITATION

What now caresses you, a year ago
Bent to the wind that sends a travelling wave
Almost of silver through the silky com
Westward of Calgary; or two weeks since
Bleated in Gloster market, lowed at Thame,
And slowly bled to give my lips desire;
Or in the teeming darkness, fathoms down,
Hung, one of millions, poised between the ooze
And the wind's foamy skirts; or feathered flew,
Or deathwards ran before the following gun.
And all day long, knee deep in the wet grass,
The piebald cows of Edam chewed and chewed,
That what was cheese might pulse thus feverishly;
And now, prophetically, even now
They ponder in their ruminating jaws
My future body, which in Tuscan fields
Yet grows, yet grunts among the acorns, yet
Is salt and iron, water and touchless air,
Is only numbers variously moved,
Is nothing, yet will love your nothingness.
Vast forms of dust, tawny and tall and vague,
March through the desert, creatures of the wind.
Wind, blowing whither, blowing whence, who knows?
Wind was the soul that raised them from the sand,
Moved and sustained their movement, and at last
Abating, let them fall in separate grains
Slowly to earth and left an empty sky.

SEPTEMBER

Spring is past and over these many days,
Spring and summer. The leaves of September
droop, Yellowing and all but dead on the patient trees.
Nor is there any hope in me. I walk
Slowly homewards. Night is empty and dark
Behind my eyes as it is dark without
And empty round about me and over me.
Spring is past and over these many days,
But, looking up, suddenly I see
Leaves in the upthrown light of a street lamp
shining, Clear and luminous, young and so transparent,
They seem but the coloured foam of air,
green fire, No more than the scarce-embodied thoughts of leaves.
And it is spring within that circle of light.
Oh, magical brightness! The old leaves are made new.
In the mind, too, some coloured accident
Of beauty revives and makes all young again,
A chance light shines and suddenly it is spring.

SEASONS

Blood of the world, time stanchless flows;The wound is mortal and is mine.I act,
but not to my design,Choose, but 'twas ever fate that chose,Would flee, but there are
doors that close.Winter has set its muddy signWithout me and within. The rose
Dies also in my heart and no stars shine.

But nightingales call back the sun;The doors are down and I can run,Can laugh,
for destiny is dead.All springs are hoarded in the flowers;Quick flow the intoxicating
hours,For wine as well as blood is red.

STORM AT NIGHT

Oh, how aquarium-still, how brooding-warmThis paradise! How peacefully in the
wombOf war itself, and at the heart of stormHow safely - safely a captive, in a tomb
lie and, listening to the wild assault,The pause and once-more fury of the gale,Feel
through the cracks of my sepulchral vaultThe fine-drawn probe of air, and watch
the paleUnearthly lightnings leaps across the skyLike sudden sperm and die and leap
again.The thunder calls and every spasm of fireBeckons, a signal, to that old desire
In calm for tempest and at ease for pain.Dreaming of strength and courage, here I lie.

MEDITERRANEAN

This tideless sapphire uniformly brimsIts jewelled circle of Tyrrhenian shore.No
vapours tarnish, not a cloud bedims,And time descending only more and more
Makes rich, makes deep the unretiring gem.And yet for me who look on it, how wide
The world of mud to which my thoughts condemnThis loathing vision of a sunken tide!
The ebb is mine. Life to its lowest neapWithdrawn reveals that black and hideous shoal
Where I lie stranded. Oh deliver meFrom this defiling death! Moon of the soul,
Call back the tide that ran so strong and deep,Call back the shining jewel of the sea.

TIDE

And if the tide should be for ever low,The silted channels turned to ooze and
mire?And this grey delta - if it still should grow,Bank after bank, and still the sea
retire?Retire beyond the halcyon hopes of noonAnd silver night, the thread of wind
and wave,Past all the dark compulsion of the moon,Past resurrection, past her power
to save?There is a firm consenting to disaster,Proud resignation to accepted pain.
Pain quickens him who makes himself its master,And quickening battle crowns both loss
and gain.But to this silting of the soul, who givesConsent is no more man, no longer
lives.

FÊTE NATIONALE

These lamps, like some miraculous gift of rain,Evoke an April from the dusty
weightOf leaves that hang resigned and know their fate,Expecting autumn: they are
young again.And young these dancers underneath the treesWho pass and pass, how
many all at one!Like things of wax beneath an Indian sun,Melted in music. Oh, to be
one of these,Of these the born inhabitants of earth,Each other's joyful captives! Oh,
to beSafe home from those far islands, where the free,Whose exile buys the honour of
their birth,Hark back across the liberating seaTo the lost continent of tears and mirth!

MIDSUMMER DAY

This day was midsummer, the longest tarrying
Time makes between two sleeps.
What have I done
With this longest of so few days, how spent,
Dear God, the golden,
golden gift of sun?
Virginal, when I rose, the morning lay
Ready for beauty's rape, for
wisdom's marrying.
I wrote: only an inky spider went,
Smear after smear, across the
unsullied day.
If there were other places, if there were
But other days than this longest
of few;
If one had courage, did one dare to do
That which alone might kill what now
defaces
This the one place of all the countless places,
This only day when one will never
dare!

AUTUMN STILLNESS

Gray is the air and silent as the sea's
Abysmal calm. One solitary bird
Calls from far
time and other boughs than these;
But the remembering silence sleeps, unstirred.
All seems achieved, dried up the source of things.
Or is the world too weary to invite
Winters
unborn and bid the latent springs
Break out in flower, in fragrance, voice and light?
June
once was here; in this autumnal amber
Lingers intangible the small clear trace
Of his
ephemeral flight, for ever still.
No more to hope, but only to remember:
Let there be
silence round the slumbering will,
And if time beckons, turn away your face.

APENNINE

In this parcht Apennine the sheep-bells must
Serve with their tinkling for the liquid
lapse
And coolness, even in the noonday dust,
Of absent streams - more liquidly, per-
haps,
Than water's self, if water were to gush
Between the dry ribs of these bleaching
hills:
For in the womb of every pregnant hush
A music sleeps; and when some phantom
tills,
Arabia's punctual blossoming discloses
Hues more than earthly, iris and evening
gold.
But vain those fountains, vain the ethereal roses!
There breathes no fragrance but
of roots and mould,
No quenching flows but in those humbler streams
Whose source is
earth, is earth and not our dreams.

ENDING OF 1930 VERSION:

For of all silence the most pregnant hush
Is music, and the waste that Fancy tills-
Breeds heavenly flowers... but flowers for our delight
Sometimes too pure, of too cele-
stial birth.
For in rich Fancy's and in art's despite
There blows no fragrance but of alien
earth,
No quenching flows but in the humble streams
Whose source is earth, is earth,
and not our dreams.

ALMERIA

Winds have no moving emblems here, but scour
A vacant darkness, an untempered
light;
No branches bend, never a tortured flower
Shudders, root-weary, on the verge of
flight;
Winged future, withered past, no seeds nor leaves
Attest those swift invisible
feet: they run
Free through a naked land, whose breast receives
All the fierce ardour of
a naked sun.
You have the Light for lover. Fortunate Earth!
Conceive the fruit of his
divine desire.
But the dry dust is all she brings to birth,
That child of clay by even
celestial fire.
Then come, soft rain and tender clouds, abate
This shining love that has
the force of hate.

PAGAN YEAR

Heaven's eyes are shut, but cannot wholly kill
The colours of the winter world. Sup-
pressed
And yet how strong, shining in secret, still
Cinder and brooding sable and plum
attest
The absent Light. He with his longed rebirth
Unclots the world to an airy dream
of leaves;
Shines on; the thin dream ripens into earth,
And the huge elms hang dark
above the sheaves.
Magical autumn! All the woods are foxes,
Dozing outstretched in
the almost silvery sun.
Oh, bright sad woods and melancholy sky,
Is there no cure for
beauty but to run
Yet faster as faster flee hours, flowers and doxies
And dying music,
until we also die?

ARMOUR

Crabs in their shells, because they cannot play
Don Juan or the flageolet, are
safe;
And every stout Sir Roger, stout Sir Ralph,
Every Black Prince, Bayard and
Bourchier may
(Their ribs and rumps hermetically canned)
Securely laugh at arrow,
sword and mace.
But in their polished and annealed embrace,
Beneath their iron kiss
and iron hand,
The soft defenceless lips and flowery breast,
The tender, tender belly
of love receive
From helm and clasping cop and urgent greave
So deep a bruise that,
mortally possessed,
Love dies. Only the vulnerable will
Holds what it takes and, holding,
does not kill.

SHEEP

Seeing a country churchyard, when the grey
Monuments walked, I with a second
glance,
Doubting, postponed the apparent judgment day
To watch instead the random
slow advance
Across the down of a hundred nibbling sheep.
And yet these tombs, half
fancied and half seen
In the dim world between waking and sleep,
These headstones
browsing on their plot of green,
Were sheep indeed and emblems of all life.
For man to
dust, dust turns to grass, and grass
Grows wool and feeds on grass. The butcher's knife-
Works magic, and the ephemeral sheep forms pass
Through swift tombs and through
silent tombs, until
Once more God's acre feeds across the hill.

BLACK COUNTRY

Count yourselves happy that you are not rewarded
For your deserts with brimstone
from on high.
Mean, mean among the slag-heaps, mean and sordid,
Your smoking town
proclaims its blasphemy.
And yet, too merciful, the offended light
Forgives not only, but
with vesperal gold
And roses of the sun repays your spite.
Shining transfigured in the
Northern cold,
Instead of chimneys rise Italian towers,
While temples at their feet, not
factories, shine;
And like the yet unbodied dream of flowers
Hangs the flushed smoke,
through which these eyes divine
Enormous gestures of the gods' fierce wooing,
The nacre-
ous flights, the limbs of bronze pursuing.
There is no future, there is no more past,
No
roots nor fruits, but momentary flowers.
Lie still, only lie still and night will last,
Silent
and dark, not for a space of hours,
But everlastingly. Let me forget
All but your per-
fume, every night but this,
The shame, the fruitless weeping, the regret.
Only lie still:
this faint and quiet bliss
Shall flower upon the brink of sleep and spread,
Till there is
nothing else but you and I
Clasped in a timeless silence. But like one
Who, doomed to
die, at morning will be dead,
I know, though night seem dateless, that the sky
Must
brighten soon before to-morrow's sun.

THE PERGOLA

Pillars, round which the wooden serpents clamber
Towards their own leaves, support
the emerald shade,
The eyes, the amethysts, the clustered amber,
That weave the ceiling
of this colonnade.
How many thousand Tyrrhenian Septembers
Muskily ripen in a sun-
warmed skin!
With all my autumns. For this tongue remembers
Grapes that made sweet
a sick child's medicine,
Grapes of the South and of the submarine
Dusk of an English
hot-house. But when night
Lids every shining glance of sky between
Leaves now extinct,
groping, bereft of sight,
I reach for grapes, but from an inward vine
Pluck sea-cold
nipples, still bedewed with brine.

LINES

All day the wheels turn;
All day long the roaring of wheels, the rasping
Weave their
imprisoning lattices of noise,
And hammers, hammers in the substance of the world-
Carve out another cavernous world, a narrow
Sepulchre, and seal it from the sky,
Lord,
with how great a stone!

Only a little beyond the factory walls
Silence is a flawless bowl of crystal,
Brimming,
brimming with who can say beforehand,
Who can, returning, even remember what
Beautiful secret. Only a little beyond
These hateful walls the birds among the branches
Secretly come and go.

Time also sleeps, but on the darkening threshold
Of each eternity pauses a momen-
t
And still is time, but empty; still is time,
And therefore knows his emptiness.
The walls are crumbled, the stone is rolled away
(Is there one within? is there a resurrec-
tion?);
Stars through the ruined lattices bear witness,
Bear further witness to the further
silence,
Witness to the night.

Night is pregnant; silence, alive with voices;
The fullness of the tomb is but cor-
ruption;
Only the lifted stone invites the messengers,
Only the empty sepulchre, and
only
Now and then, evokes
That from which from the sepulchre arises.

Shy strangers, visiting feet came softly treading,
Came very softly sometimes in the
darkness,
Oh, of what far nights and distant tombs!
Came suddenly into the empty
time,
Came secretly and lingered secretly,
And through the unsealed door
Beckoned me
on to follow.

I have made time empty again; empty, it invites them;
They do not come; have
rolled away the stone,
But lie unrisen, lie unvisited.
Merciful God, bid them to come
again!
Sometimes in winter
Sea-birds follow the plough,
And the bare field is all alive
with wings,
With their white wings and unafraid alightings,
Sometimes in winter. And
will they come again?

THE CICADAS

Sightless, I breathe and touch; this night of pines
Is needly, resinous and rough with
bark.
Through every crevice in the tangible dark
The moonlessness above it all but
shines.

Limp hangs the leafy sky; never a breeze
Stirs, nor a foot in all this sleeping
ground;
And there is silence underneath the trees
The living silence of continuous
sound.

For like inveterate remorse, like shrill
Delirium throbbing in the fevered brain,
An unseen people of cicadas fill
Night with their one harsh note, again, again.

Again, again, with what insensate zest!
What fury of persistence, hour by hour!
Filled with what devil that denies them rest,
Drunk with what source of pleasure and of power!

Life is their madness, life that all night long
Bids them to sing and sing, they know
not why; Mad cause and senseless burden of their song;
For life commands, and Life! is
all their cry.

I hear them sing, who in the double night
Of clouds and branches fancied that I
went Through my own spirit's dark discouragement,
Deprived of inward as of outward
sight:

Who, seeking, even as here in the wild wood,
A lamp to beckon through my tangled
fate, Found only darkness and, disconsolate,
Mourned the lost purpose and the vanished
good.

Now in my empty heart the crickets' shout
Re-echoing denials and still denials
With stubborn folly all my learned doubt,
In madness more than I in reason wise.

Life, life! The word is magical. They sing,
And in my darkened soul the great sun
shines; My fancy blossoms with remembered spring,
And all my autumns ripen on the
vines.

Life! and each knuckle of the fig-tree's pale
Dead skeleton breaks out with emerald
fire. Life! and the tulips blow, the nightingale
Calls back the rose, calls back the old
desire:

And old desire that is for ever new,
Desire, life's earliest and latest birth,
Life's instrument to suffer and to do,
Springs with the roses from the teeming earth;

Desire that from the world's bright body strips
Deforming time and makes each kiss
the first; That gives to hearts, to satiated lips
The endless bounty of to-morrow's thirst.

Time passes, and the watery moonrise peers
Between the tree-trunks. But no outer
light Tempers the chances of our groping years,
No moon beyond our labyrinthine night.

Clueless we go; but I have heard thy voice,
Divine Unreason! harping in the
leaves, And grieve no more; for wisdom never grieves,
And thou hast taught me
wisdom; I rejoice.

THE YELLOW MUSTARD

Cabined beneath low vaults of cloud,
Sultry and still, the fields do lie,
Like one wrapt living in his shroud,
Who stifles silently.

Stripped of all beauty not their own
The gulfs of shade, the golden bloom
Grey mountain-heaps of slag and stone
Wall in the silent tomb.

I, through this emblem of a mind
Dark with repinings, slowly went,
Its captive, and myself confined
In like discouragement.

When, at a winding of the way,
A sudden glory met my eye,
As though a single, conquering ray
Had rent the cloudy sky

And touched, transfiguringly bright
In that dull plain, one luminous field;
And there the miracle of light
Lay goldenly revealed.

And yet the reasons for despair
Hung dark, without one rift of blue;
No loophole to the living air
Had let the glory through.

In their own soil those acres found
The sunlight of a flowering weed;
For still there sleeps in every ground
Some grain of mustard seed.

The Poems

The temple at the headquarters of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood — from 1939 until his death in 1963, Huxley had an extensive association with the Vedanta Society of Southern California, founded and headed by Swami Prabhavananda. Together with Gerald Heard, Christopher Isherwood and other followers he was initiated by the Swami and was taught meditation and spiritual practices.

List of Poems in Chronological Order

- THE BURNING WHEEL.
- DOORS OF THE TEMPLE.
- VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM.
- DARKNESS.
- MOLE.
- THE TWO SEASONS.
- TWO REALITIES.
- QUOTIDIAN VISION.
- VISION.
- THE MIRROR.
- VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF LAFORGUE.
- PHILOSOPHY.
- PHILOCLEA IN THE FOREST.
- BOOKS AND THOUGHTS.
- CONTRARY TO NATURE AND ARISTOTLE.
- ESCAPE.
- THE GARDEN.
- THE CANAL.
- THE IDEAL FOUND WANTING.
- MISPLACED LOVE.
- SONNET.
- SENTIMENTAL SUMMER.
- THE CHOICE.
- THE HIGHER SENSUALISM.
- SONNET.

- FORMAL VERSES.
- PERILS OF THE SMALL HOURS.
- COMPLAINT.
- RETURN TO AN OLD HOME.
- FRAGMENT.
- THE WALK.
- THE DEFEAT OF YOUTH
- I. UNDER THE TREES.
- VI. IN THE HAY-LOFT.
- VIII. MOUNTAINS.
- X. IN THE LITTLE ROOM.
- XVII. IN THE PARK.
- XX. SELF-TORMENT.
- XXII. THE QUARRY IN THE WOOD.
- SONG OF POPLARS
- THE REEF
- WINTER DREAM
- THE FLOWERS
- THE ELMS
- OUT OF THE WINDOW
- INSPIRATION
- SUMMER STILLNESS
- ANNIVERSARIES
- ITALY
- THE ALIEN

- A LITTLE MEMORY
- WAKING
- BY THE FIRE
- VALEDICTORY
- LOVE SONG
- PRIVATE PROPERTY
- REVELATION
- MINOAN PORCELAIN
- THE DECAMERON
- IN UNCERTAINTY TO A LADY
- CRAPULOUS IMPRESSION (To J.S.)
- THE LIFE THEORETIC
- COMPLAINT OF A POET MANQUÉ
- SOCIAL AMENITIES
- TOPIARY
- ON THE BUS
- POINTS AND LINES
- PANIC
- RETURN FROM BUSINESS
- STANZAS
- POEM
- SCENES OF THE MIND
- L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE
- THE LOUSE-HUNTERS
- LEDA

- THE BIRTH OF GOD
- ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH
- SYMPATHY
- MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM
- FROM THE PILLAR
- JONAH
- VARIATIONS ON A THEME
- A MELODY BY SCARLATTI
- A SUNSET
- LIFE AND ART
- FIRST PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- SECOND PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- FIFTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- NINTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- MORNING SCENE
- VERREY'S
- FRASCATI'S
- FATIGUE
- THE MERRY-GO-ROUND
- BACK STREETS
- LAST THINGS
- GOTHIC
- EVENING PARTY
- BEAUTY
- SOLES OCCIDERE ET REDIRE POSSUNT

- THEATRE OF VARIETIES
- A HIGHWAY ROBBERY
- CALIGULA OR THE TRIUMPH OF BEAUTY
- NERO AND SPORUS OR THE TRIUMPH OF ART
- NERO AND SPORUS
- MYTHOLOGICAL INCIDENT
- FEMMES DAMNÉES
- ARABIA INFELIX
- THE MOOR
- NOBLEST ROMANS
- ORION
- MEDITATION
- SEPTEMBER
- SEASONS
- STORM AT NIGHT
- MEDITERRANEAN
- TIDE
- FÊTE NATIONALE
- MIDSUMMER DAY
- AUTUMN STILLNESS
- APENNINE
- ALMERIA
- PAGAN YEAR
- ARMOUR
- SHEEP

- BLACK COUNTRY
- THE PERGOLA
- LINES
- THE CICADAS
- THE YELLOW MUSTARD

List of Poems in Alphabetical Order

- A HIGHWAY ROBBERY
- A LITTLE MEMORY
- A MELODY BY SCARLATTI
- A SUNSET
- ALMERIA
- ANNIVERSARIES
- APENNINE
- ARABIA INFELIX
- ARMOUR
- AUTUMN STILLNESS
- BACK STREETS
- BEAUTY
- BLACK COUNTRY
- BOOKS AND THOUGHTS.
- BY THE FIRE
- CALIGULA OR THE TRIUMPH OF BEAUTY
- COMPLAINT OF A POET MANQUÉ
- COMPLAINT.
- CONTRARY TO NATURE AND ARISTOTLE.
- CRAPULOUS IMPRESSION (To J.S.)
- DARKNESS.
- DOORS OF THE TEMPLE.
- ESCAPE.
- EVENING PARTY
- FATIGUE

- FEMMES DAMNÉES
- FÊTE NATIONALE
- FIFTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- FIRST PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- FORMAL VERSES.
- FRAGMENT.
- FRASCATI'S
- FROM THE PILLAR
- GOTHIC
- I. UNDER THE TREES.
- IN UNCERTAINTY TO A LADY
- INSPIRATION
- ITALY
- JONAH
- L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE
- LAST THINGS
- LEDA
- LIFE AND ART
- LINES
- LOVE SONG
- MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM
- MEDITATION
- MEDITERRANEAN
- MIDSUMMER DAY
- MINOAN PORCELAIN

- MISPLACED LOVE.
- MOLE.
- MORNING SCENE
- MYTHOLOGICAL INCIDENT
- NERO AND SPORUS
- NERO AND SPORUS OR THE TRIUMPH OF ART
- NINTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- NOBLEST ROMANS
- ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH
- ON THE BUS
- ORION
- OUT OF THE WINDOW
- PAGAN YEAR
- PANIC
- PERILS OF THE SMALL HOURS.
- PHILOCLEA IN THE FOREST.
- PHILOSOPHY.
- POEM
- POINTS AND LINES
- PRIVATE PROPERTY
- QUOTIDIAN VISION.
- RETURN FROM BUSINESS
- RETURN TO AN OLD HOME.
- REVELATION
- SCENES OF THE MIND

- SEASONS
- SECOND PHILOSOPHER'S SONG
- SENTIMENTAL SUMMER.
- SEPTEMBER
- SHEEP
- SOCIAL AMENITIES
- SOLES OCCIDERE ET REDIRE POSSUNT
- SONG OF POPLARS
- SONNET.
- SONNET.
- STANZAS
- STORM AT NIGHT
- SUMMER STILLNESS
- SYMPATHY
- THE ALIEN
- THE BIRTH OF GOD
- THE BURNING WHEEL.
- THE CANAL.
- THE CHOICE.
- THE CICADAS
- THE DECAMERON
- THE DEFEAT OF YOUTH
- THE ELMS
- THE FLOWERS
- THE GARDEN.

- THE HIGHER SENSUALISM.
- THE IDEAL FOUND WANTING.
- THE LIFE THEORETIC
- THE LOUSE-HUNTERS
- THE MERRY-GO-ROUND
- THE MIRROR.
- THE MOOR
- THE PERGOLA
- THE REEF
- THE TWO SEASONS.
- THE WALK.
- THE YELLOW MUSTARD
- THEATRE OF VARIETIES
- TIDE
- TOPIARY
- TWO REALITIES.
- VALEDICTORY
- VARIATIONS ON A THEME
- VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF LAFORGUE.
- VERREY'S
- VI. IN THE HAY-LOFT.
- VIII. MOUNTAINS.
- VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM.
- VISION.
- WAKING

- WINTER DREAM
- X. IN THE LITTLE ROOM.
- XVII. IN THE PARK.
- XX. SELF-TORMENT.
- XXII. THE QUARRY IN THE WOOD.

The Ted K Archive

Aldous Huxley
The Poetry of Aldous Huxley

www.thetedkarchive.com