

from *ATALANTA IN CALYDON*

CHORUS.

When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain;
And the brown bright nightingale amorous
Is half assuaged for Itylus,
For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,
The tongueless vigil, and all the pain.

Come with bows bent and with emptying of quivers.
Maiden most perfect, lady of light,
With a noise of winds and many rivers,
With a clamour of waters, and with might;
Bind on thy sandals, O thou most fleet,
Over the splendour and speed of thy feet;
For the faint east quickens, the wan west shivers,
Round the feet of the day and the feet of the night.

Where shall we find her, how shall we sing to her,
Fold our hands round her knees, and cling?
O that man's heart were as fire and could spring to her,
Fire, or the strength of the streams that spring!

For the stars and the winds are unto her
As raiment, as songs of the harp-player;
For the risen stars and the fallen cling to her,
And the southwest-wind and the west-wind sing.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows, and sins;
The days dividing lover and lover,
The light that loses, the night that wins;
And time remembered is grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,
And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

The full streams feed on flower of rushes,
Ripe grasses trammel a travelling foot,
The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes
From leaf to flower and flower to fruit,
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,
And the oat is heard above the lyre,
And the hoofèd heel of a satyr crushes
The chestnut-husk at the chestnut-root.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,
Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with delight
The Maenad and the Bassarid;

And soft as lips that laugh and hide
The laughing leaves of the trees divide,
And screen from seeing and leave in sight
The god pursuing, the maiden hid.

The ivy falls with the Bacchanal's hair
Over her eyebrows hiding her eyes;
The wild vine slipping down leaves bare
Her bright breast shortening into sighs;
The wild vine slips with the weight of its leaves.
But the berried ivy catches and cleaves
To the limbs that glitter, the feet that scare
The wolf that follows, the fawn that flies.

[...]

For an evil blossom was born
Of sea-foam and the frothing of blood,
Blood-red and bitter of fruit,
And the seed of it laughter and tears,
And the leaves of it madness and scorn;
A bitter flower from the bud,
Sprung of the sea without root,
Sprung without graft from the years.

The weft of the world was untorn
That is woven of the day on the night,

The hair of the hours was not white
Nor the raiment of time overworn,
When a wonder, a world's delight,
A perilous goddess was born,
And the waves of the sea as she came
Clove, and the foam at her feet,
Fawning, rejoiced to bring forth
A fleshly blossom, a flame
Filling the heavens with heat
To the cold white ends of the north.

And in air the clamorous birds,
And men upon earth that hear
Sweet articulate words
Sweetly divided apart,
And in shallow and channel and mere
The rapid and footless herds,
Rejoiced, being foolish of heart.

For all they said upon earth,
She is fair, she is white like a dove,
And the life of the world in her breath
Breathes, and is born at her birth;
For they knew thee for mother of love,
And knew thee not mother of death.

What hadst thou to do being born,

Mother, when winds were at ease,
As a flower of the springtime of corn,
A flower of the foam of the seas?
For bitter thou wast from thy birth,
Aphrodite, a mother of strife;
For before thee some rest was on earth,
A little respite from tears,
A little pleasure of life;
For life was not then as thou art,
But as one that waxeth in years
Sweet-spoken, a fruitful wife;
Earth had no thorn, and desire
No sting, neither death any dart;
What hadst thou to do amongst these,
Thou, clothed with a burning fire,
Thou, girt with sorrow of heart,
Thou, sprung of the seed of the seas
As an ear from a seed of corn,
As a brand plucked forth of a pyre,
As a ray shed forth of the morn,
For division of soul and disease,
For a dart and a sting and a thorn?
What ailed thee then to be born?

Was there not evil enough,
Mother, and anguish on earth
Born with a man at his birth,

Wastes underfoot, and above
Storm out of heaven, and dearth
Shaken down from the shining thereof,
Wrecks from afar overseas
And peril of shallow and firth,
And tears that spring and increase
In the barren places of mirth,
That thou, having wings as a dove,
Being girt with desire for a girth,
That thou must come after these,
That thou must lay on him love?

Thou shouldst not so have been born:
But death should have risen with thee,
Mother, and visible fear,
Grief, and the wringing of hands,
And noise of many that mourn;
The smitten bosom, the knee
Bowed, and in each man's ear
A cry as of perishing lands,
A moan as of people in prison,
A tumult of infinite griefs;
And thunder of storm on the sands,
And wailing of wives on the shore;
And under thee newly arisen
Loud shoals and shipwrecking reefs,
Fierce air and violent light,

Sail rent and sundering oar,
Darkness; and noises of night;
Clashing of streams in the sea,
Wave against wave as a sword,
Clamour of currents, and foam,
Rains making ruin on earth,
Winds that wax ravenous and roam
As wolves in a wolfish horde;
Fruits growing faint in the tree,
And blind things dead in their birth
Famine, and blighting of corn,
When thy time was come to be born.

All these we know of; but thee
Who shall discern or declare?
In the uttermost ends of the sea
The light of thine eyelids and hair.
The light of thy bosom as fire
Between the wheel of the sun
And the flying flames of the air?
Wilt thou turn thee not yet nor have pity,
But abide with despair and desire
And the crying of armies undone,
Lamentation of one with another
And breaking of city by city;
The dividing of friend against friend,
The severing of brother and brother;

Wilt thou utterly bring to an end?

Have mercy, mother!

For against all men from of old

Thou hast set thine hand as a curse,

And cast out gods from their places.

These things are spoken of thee.

Strong kings and goodly with gold

Thou hast found out arrows to pierce,

And made their kingdoms and races

As dust and surf of the sea.

All these, overburdened with woes

And with length of their days waxen weak,

Thou slewest; and sentest moreover

Upon Tyro an evil thing,

Rent hair and a fetter and blows

Making bloody the flower of the cheek,

Though she lay by a god as a lover,

Though fair, and the seed of a king.

For of old, being full of thy fire,

She endured not longer to wear

On her bosom a saffron vest,

On her shoulder an ashwood quiver;

Being mixed and made one through desire

With Enipeus, and all her hair

Made moist with his mouth, and her breast

Filled full of the foam of the river.

[...]

But up in heaven the high gods one by one
Lay hands upon the draught that quickeneth,
Fulfilled with all tears shed and all things done,
And stir with soft imperishable breath
The bubbling bitterness of life and death,
And hold it to our lips and laugh; but they
Preserve their lips from tasting night or day,
Lest they too change and sleep, the fates that spun,
The lips that made us and the hands that slay;
Lest all these change, and heaven bow down to none,
Change and be subject to the secular sway
And terrene revolution of the sun.
Therefore they thrust it from them, putting time away.

I would the wine of time, made sharp and sweet
With multitudinous days and nights and tears
And many mixing savours of strange years,
Were no more trodden of them under feet,
Cast out and spilt about their holy places:
That life were given them as a fruit to eat
And death to drink as water; that the light
Might ebb, drawn backward from their eyes, and night
Hide for one hour the imperishable faces.
That they might rise up sad in heaven, and know
Sorrow and sleep, one paler than young snow,

One cold as blight of dew and ruinous rain,
Rise up and rest and suffer a little, and be
Awhile as all things born with us and we,
And grieve as men, and like slain men be slain.

For now we know not of them; but one saith
The gods are gracious, praising God; and one,
When hast thou seen? or hast thou felt his breath
Touch, nor consume thine eyelids as the sun,
Nor fill thee to the lips with fiery death?
None hath beheld him, none
Seen above other gods and shapes of things,
Swift without feet and flying without wings,
Intolerable, not clad with death or life,
Insatiable, not known of night or day,
The lord of love and loathing and of strife
Who gives a star and takes a sun away;
Who shapes the soul, and makes her a barren wife
To the earthly body and grievous growth of clay;
Who turns the large limbs to a little flame
And binds the great sea with a little sand;
Who makes desire, and slays desire with shame;
Who shakes the heaven as ashes in his hand;
Who, seeing the light and shadow for the same,
Bids day waste night as fire devours a brand,
Smites without sword, and scourges without rod;
The supreme evil, God.

Yea, with thine hate, O God, thou hast covered us,
One saith, and hidden our eyes away from sight,
And made us transitory and hazardous,
Light things and slight;
Yet have men praised thee, saying, He hath made man thus,
And he doeth right.
Thou hast kissed us, and hast smitten; thou hast laid
Upon us with thy left hand life, and said,
Live: and again thou hast said, Yield up your breath,
And with thy right hand laid upon us death.
Thou hast sent us sleep, and stricken sleep with dreams,
Saying, Joy is not, but love of joy shall be,
Thou hast made sweet springs for all the pleasant streams,
In the end thou hast made them bitter with the sea.
Thou hast fed one rose with dust of many men;
Thou hast marred one face with fire of many tears;
Thou hast taken love, and given us sorrow again;
With pain thou hast filled us full to the eyes and ears.
Therefore because thou art strong, our father, and we
Feeble; and thou art against us, and thine hand
Constrains us in the shallows of the sea
And breaks us at the limits of the land;
Because thou hast bent thy lightnings as a bow,
And loosed the hours like arrows; and let fall
Sins and wild words and many a wingèd woe
And wars among us, and one end of all;

Because thou hast made the thunder, and thy feet
Are as a rushing water when the skies
Break, but thy face as an exceeding heat
And flames of fire the eyelids of thine eyes;
Because thou art over all who are over us;
Because thy name is life and our name death;
Because thou art cruel and men are piteous,
And our hands labour and thine hand scattereth;
Lo, with hearts rent and knees made tremulous,
Lo, with ephemeral lips and casual breath,
At least we witness of thee ere we die
That these things are not otherwise, but thus;
That each man in his heart sigheth, and saith,
That all men even as I,
All we are against thee, against thee, O God most high.

from *POEMS AND BALLADS (FIRST SERIES)*

THE TRIUMPH OF TIME

Before our lives divide for ever,

While time is with us and hands are free,

(Time, swift to fasten and swift to sever

Hand from hand, as we stand by the sea)

I will say no word that a man might say

Whose whole life's love goes down in a day;

For this could never have been; and never,

Though the gods and the years relent, shall be.

Is it worth a tear, is it worth an hour,

To think of things that are well outworn?

Of fruitless husk and fugitive flower,

The dream foregone and the deed forborne?

Though joy be done with and grief be vain,

Time shall not sever us wholly in twain;

Earth is not spoilt for a single shower;

But the rain has ruined the ungrown corn.

[...]

I have put my days and dreams out of mind,

Days that are over, dreams that are done.

Though we seek life through, we shall surely find

There is none of them clear to us now, not one.
But clear are these things; the grass and the sand,
Where, sure as the eyes reach, ever at hand,
With lips wide open and face burnt blind,
The strong sea-daisies feast on the sun.

The low downs lean to the sea; the stream,
One loose thin pulseless tremulous vein,
Rapid and vivid and dumb as a dream,
Works downward, sick of the sun and the rain;
No wind is rough with the rank rare flowers;
The sweet sea, mother of loves and hours,
Shudders and shines as the grey winds gleam,
Turning her smile to a fugitive pain.

Mother of loves that are swift to fade,
Mother of mutable winds and hours.
A barren mother, a mother-maid,
Cold and clean as her faint salt flowers.
I would we twain were even as she,
Lost in the night and the light of the sea,
Where faint sounds falter and wan beams wade,
Break, and are broken, and shed into showers.

The loves and hours of the life of a man,
They are swift and sad, being born of the sea.
Hours that rejoice and regret for a span,

Born with a man's breath, mortal as he;
Loves that are lost ere they come to birth,
Weeds of the wave, without fruit upon earth.
I lose what I long for, save what I can,
My love, my love, and no love for me!

It is not much that a man can save
On the sands of life, in the straits of time,
Who swims in sight of the great third wave
That never a swimmer shall cross or climb.
Some waif washed up with the strays and spars
That ebb-tide shows to the shore and the stars;
Weed from the water, grass from a grave,
A broken blossom, a ruined rhyme.

[...]

Yea, I know this well: were you once sealed mine,
Mine in the blood's beat, mine in the breath,
Mixed into me as honey in wine,
Not time, that sayeth and gainsayeth,
Nor all strong things had severed us then;
Not wrath of gods, nor wisdom of men,
Nor all things earthly, nor all divine,
Nor joy nor sorrow, nor life nor death.

I had grown pure as the dawn and the dew,

You had grown strong as the sun or the sea.
But none shall triumph a whole life through:
For death is one, and the fates are three.
At the door of life, by the gate of breath,
There are worse things waiting for men than death;
Death could not sever my soul and you,
As these have severed your soul from me.

You have chosen and clung to the chance they sent you,
Life sweet as perfume and pure as prayer.
But will it not one day in heaven repent you?
Will they solace you wholly, the days that were?
Will you lift up your eyes between sadness and bliss,
Meet mine, and see where the great love is,
And tremble and turn and be changed? Content you;
The gate is strait; I shall not be there.

[...]

And I play not for pity of these; but you,
If you saw with your soul what man am I,
You would praise me at least that my soul all through
Clove to you, loathing the lives that lie;
The souls and lips that are bought and sold,
The smiles of silver and kisses of gold,
The lapdog loves that whine as they chew,
The little lovers that curse and cry.

There are fairer women, I hear; that may be;
 But I, that I love you and find you fair,
Who are more than fair in my eyes if they be,
 Do the high gods know or the great gods care?
Though the swords in my heart for one were seven,
Would the iron hollow of doubtful heaven,
That knows not itself whether night-time or day be,
 Reverberate words and a foolish prayer?

I will go back to the great sweet mother,
 Mother and lover of men, the sea.
I will go down to her, I and none other,
 Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me;
Cling to her, strive with her, hold her fast:
O fair white mother, in days long past
Born without sister, born without brother,
 Set free my soul as thy soul is free.

O fair green-girdled mother of mine,
 Sea, that art clothed with the sun and the rain,
Thy sweet hard kisses are strong like wine,
 Thy large embraces are keen like pain.
Save me and hide me with all thy waves,
Find me one grave of thy thousand graves,
Those pure cold populous graves of thine
 Wrought without hand in a world without stain.

I shall sleep, and move with the moving ships,
Change as the winds change, veer in the tide;
My lips will feast on the foam of thy lips,
I shall rise with thy rising, with thee subside;
Sleep, and not know if she be, if she were,
Filled full with life to the eyes and hair,
As a rose is fulfilled to the roseleaf tips
With splendid summer and perfume and pride.

This woven raiment of nights and days,
Were it once cast off and unwound from me,
Naked and glad would I walk in thy ways,
Alive and aware of thy ways and thee;
Clear of the whole world, hidden at home,
Clothed with the green and crowned with the foam,
A pulse of the life of thy straits and bays,
A vein in the heart of the streams of the sea.

Fair mother, fed with the lives of men,
Thou art subtle and cruel of heart, men say.
Thou hast taken, and shalt not render again;
Thou art full of thy dead, and cold as they.
But death is the worst that comes of thee;
Thou art fed with our dead, O mother, O sea,
But when hast thou fed on our hearts? or when,
Having given us love, hast thou taken away?

O tender-hearted, O perfect lover,
Thy lips are bitter, and sweet thine heart.
The hopes that hurt and the dreams that hover,
Shall they not vanish away and apart?
But thou, thou art sure, thou art older than earth;
Thou art strong for death and fruitful of birth;
Thy depths conceal and thy gulfs discover;
From the first thou wert; in the end thou art.

And grief shall endure not for ever, I know.
As things that are not shall these things be;
We shall live through seasons of sun and of snow,
And none be grievous as this to me.
We shall hear, as one in a trance that hears,
The sound of time, the rhyme of the years;
Wrecked hope and passionate pain will grow
As tender things of a spring-tide sea.

Sea-fruit that swings in the waves that hiss,
Drowned gold and purple and royal rings.
And all time past, was it all for this?
Times unforgotten, and treasures of things?
Swift years of liking and sweet long laughter,
That wist not well of the years thereafter
Till love woke, smitten at heart by a kiss,
With lips that trembled and trailing wings?

[...]

The pulse of war and passion of wonder,
The heavens that murmur, the sounds that shine,
The stars that sing and the loves that thunder,
The music burning at heart like wine,
An armed archangel whose hands raise up
All senses mixed in the spirit's cup
Till flesh and spirit are molten in sunder—
These things are over, and no more mine.

These were a part of the playing I heard
Once, ere my love and my heart were at strife;
Love that sings and hath wings as a bird,
Balm of the wound and heft of the knife.
Fairer than earth is the sea, and sleep
Than overwatching of eyes that weep,
Now time has done with his one sweet word,
The wine and leaven of lovely life.

I shall go my ways, tread out my measure,
Fill the days of my daily breath
With fugitive things not good to treasure,
Do as the world doth, say as it saith;
But if we had loved each other—O sweet,
Had you felt, lying under the palms of your feet,
The heart of my heart, beating harder with pleasure
To feel you tread it to dust and death—

Ah, had I not taken my life up and given
All that life gives and the years let go,
The wine and honey, the balm and leaven,
The dreams reared high and the hopes brought low?
Come life, come death, not a word be said;
Should I lose you living, and vex you dead?
I never shall tell you on earth; and in heaven,
If I cry to you then, will you hear or know?

ITYLUS

Swallow, my sister, O sister swallow,
How can thine heart be full of the spring?
A thousand summers are over and dead.
What hast thou found in the spring to follow?
What hast thou found in thine heart to sing?
What wilt thou do when the summer is shed?

O swallow, sister, O fair swift swallow,
Why wilt thou fly after spring to the south,
The soft south whither thine heart is set?
Shall not the grief of the old time follow?
Shall not the song thereof cleave to thy mouth?
Hast thou forgotten ere I forget?

Sister, my sister, O fleet sweet swallow,
Thy way is long to the sun and the south;
But I, fulfilled of my heart's desire,
Shedding my song upon height, upon hollow,
From tawny body and sweet small mouth
Feed the heart of the night with fire.

I the nightingale all spring through,
O swallow, sister, O changing swallow,
All spring through till the spring be done,
Clothed with the light of the night on the dew,

Sing, while the hours and the wild birds follow,
Take flight and follow and find the sun.

Sister, my sister, O soft light swallow,
Though all things feast in the spring's guest-chamber,
How hast thou heart to be glad thereof yet?
For where thou fliest I shall not follow,
Till life forget and death remember,
Till thou remember and I forget.

Swallow, my sister, O singing swallow,
I know not how thou hast heart to sing.
Hast thou the heart? is it all past over?
Thy lord the summer is good to follow,
And fair the feet of thy lover the spring:
But what wilt thou say to the spring thy lover?

O swallow, sister, O fleeting swallow,
My heart in me is a molten ember
And over my head the waves have met.
But thou wouldst tarry or I would follow,
Could I forget or thou remember,
Couldst thou remember and I forget.

O sweet stray sister, O shifting swallow,
The heart's division divideth us.
Thy heart is light as a leaf of a tree;

But mine goes forth among sea-gulfs hollow
To the place of the slaying of Itylus,
The feast of Daulis, the Thracian sea.

O swallow, sister, O rapid swallow,
I pray thee sing not a little space.
Are not the roofs and the lintels wet?
The woven web that was plain to follow,
The small slain body, the flowerlike face,
Can I remember if thou forget?

O sister, sister, thy first-begotten!
The hands that cling and the feet that follow,
The voice of the child's blood crying yet
Who hath remembered me? who hath forgotten?
Thou hast forgotten, O summer swallow,
But the world shall end when I forget.

A MATCH

If love were what the rose is,
 And I were like the leaf,
Our lives would grow together
In sad or singing weather,
Blown fields or flowerful closes,
 Green pleasure or grey grief;
If love were what the rose is,
 And I were like the leaf.

If I were what the words are,
 And love were like the tune,
With double sound and single
Delight our lips would mingle,
With kisses glad as birds are
 That get sweet rain at noon;
If I were what the words are,
 And love were like the tune.

If you were life, my darling,
 And I your love were death,
We'd shine and snow together
Ere March made sweet the weather
With daffodil and starling
 And hours of fruitful breath;
If you were life, my darling,
 And I your love were death.

If you were thrall to sorrow,
 And I were page to joy,
We'd play for lives and seasons
With loving looks and treasons
And tears of night and morrow
 And laughs of maid and boy;
If you were thrall to sorrow,
 And I were page to joy.

If you were April's lady,
 And I were lord in May,
We'd throw with leaves for hours
And draw for days with flowers,
Till day like night were shady
 And night were bright like day;
If you were April's lady,
 And I were lord in May.

If you were queen of pleasure,
 And I were king of pain,
We'd hunt down love together,
Pluck out his flying-feather,
And teach his feet a measure,
 And find his mouth a rein;
If you were queen of pleasure,
 And I were king of pain.

DOLORES
(NOTRE-DAME DES SEPT DOULEURS)

Cold eyelids that hide like a jewel
 Hard eyes that grow soft for an hour;
The heavy white limbs, and the cruel
 Red mouth like a venomous flower;
When these are gone by with their glories,
 What shall rest of thee then, what remain,
O mystic and sombre Dolores,
 Our Lady of Pain?

Seven sorrows the priests give their Virgin;
 But thy sins, which are seventy times seven,
Seven ages would fail thee to purge in,
 And then they would haunt thee in heaven:
Fierce midnights and famishing morrows,
 And the loves that complete and control
All the joys of the flesh, all the sorrows
 That wear out the soul.

O garment not golden but gilded,
 O garden where all men may dwell,
O tower not of ivory, but builded
 By hands that reach heaven from hell;
O mystical rose of the mire,
 O house not of gold but of gain,

O house of unquenchable fire,
Our Lady of Pain!

O lips full of lust and of laughter,
Curled snakes that are fed from my breast,
Bite hard, lest remembrance come after
And press with new lips where you pressed.
For my heart too springs up at the pressure,
Mine eyelids too moisten and burn;
Ah, feed me and fill me with pleasure,
Ere pain come in turn.

In yesterday's reach and to-morrow's,
Out of sight though they lie of to-day,
There have been and there yet shall be sorrows
That smite not and bite not in play.
The life and the love thou despisest,
These hurt us indeed, and in vain,
O wise among women, and wisest,
Our Lady of Pain.

Who gave thee thy wisdom? what stories
That stung thee, what visions that smote?
Wert thou pure and a maiden, Dolores,
When desire took thee first by the throat?
What bud was the shell of a blossom
That all men may smell to and pluck?

What milk fed thee first at what bosom?

What sins gave thee suck?

[...]

There are sins it may be to discover,

There are deeds it may be to delight.

What new work wilt thou find for thy lover,

What new passions for daytime or night?

What spells that they know not a word of

Whose lives are as leaves overblown?

What tortures undreamt of, unheard of,

Unwritten, unknown?

Ah beautiful passionate body

That never has ached with a heart!

On thy mouth though the kisses are bloody,

Though they sting till it shudder and smart,

More kind than the love we adore is,

They hurt not the heart or the brain,

O bitter and tender Dolores,

Our Lady of Pain.

As our kisses relax and redouble,

From the lips and the foam and the fangs

Shall no new sin be born for men's trouble,

No dream of impossible pangs?

With the sweet of the sins of old ages

Wilt thou satiate thy soul as of yore?

Too sweet is the rind, say the sages,
Too bitter the core.

Hast thou told all thy secrets the last time,
And bared all thy beauties to one?
Ah, where shall we go then for pastime,
If the worst that can be has been done?
But sweet as the rind was the core is;
We are fain of thee still, we are fain,
O sanguine and subtle Dolores,
Our Lady of Pain.

By the hunger of change and emotion,
By the thirst of unbearable things,
By despair, the twin-born of devotion,
By the pleasure that winces and stings,
The delight that consumes the desire,
The desire that outruns the delight,
By the cruelty deaf as a fire
And blind as the night,

By the ravenous teeth that have smitten
Through the kisses that blossom and bud,
By the lips intertwined and bitten
Till the foam has a savour of blood,
By the pulse as it rises and falters,
By the hands as they slacken and strain,

I adjure thee, respond from thine altars,
Our Lady of Pain.

Wilt thou smile as a woman disdain
The light fire in the veins of a boy?
But he comes to thee sad, without feigning,
Who has wearied of sorrow and joy;
Less careful of labour and glory
Than the elders whose hair has uncurled;
And young, but with fancies as hoary
And grey as the world.

I have passed from the outermost portal
To the shrine where a sin is a prayer;
What care though the service be mortal?
O our Lady of Torture, what care?
All thine the last wine that I pour is,
The last in the chalice we drain,
O fierce and luxurious Dolores,
Our Lady of Pain.

All thine the new wine of desire,
The fruit of four lips as they clung
Till the hair and the eyelids took fire,
The foam of a serpentine tongue,
The froth of the serpents of pleasure,
More salt than the foam of the sea,

Now felt as a flame, now at leisure
As wine shed for me.

Ah thy people, thy children, thy chosen,
Marked cross from the womb and perverse!
They have found out the secret to cozen
The gods that constrain us and curse;
They alone, they are wise, and none other;
Give me place, even me, in their train,
O my sister, my spouse, and my mother,
Our Lady of Pain.

For the crown of our life as it closes
Is darkness, the fruit thereof dust;
No thorns go as deep as a rose's,
And love is more cruel than lust.
Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses or wives;
And marriage and death and division
Make barren our lives.

And pale from the past we draw nigh thee,
And satiate with comfortless hours;
And we know thee, how all men belie thee,
And we gather the fruit of thy flowers;
The passion that slays and recovers,
The pangs and the kisses that rain

On the lips and the limbs of thy lovers,
Our Lady of Pain.

The desire of thy furious embraces
Is more than the wisdom of years,
On the blossom though blood lie in traces,
Though the foliage be sodden with tears.
For the lords in whose keeping the door is
That opens on all who draw breath
Gave the cypress to love, my Dolores,
The myrtle to death.

And they laughed, changing hands in the measure,
And they mixed and made peace after strife;
Pain melted in tears, and was pleasure;
Death tingled with blood, and was life.
Like lovers they melted and tingled,
In the dusk of thine innermost fane;
In the darkness they murmured and mingled,
Our Lady of Pain.

In a twilight where virtues are vices,
In thy chapels, unknown of the sun,
To a tune that enthralls and entices,
They were wed, and the twain were as one.
For the tune from thine altar hath sounded
Since God bade the world's work begin,

And the fume of thine incense abounded,
To sweeten the sin.

Love listens, and paler than ashes,
Through his curls as the crown on them slips,
Lifts languid wet eyelids and lashes,
And laughs with insatiable lips.

Thou shalt hush him with heavy caresses,
With music that scares the profane;
Thou shalt darken his eyes with thy tresses,
Our Lady of Pain.

Thou shalt blind his bright eyes though he wrestle,
Thou shalt chain his light limbs though he strive;
In his lips all thy serpents shall nestle,
In his hands all thy cruelties thrive.
In the daytime thy voice shall go through him,
In his dreams he shall feel thee and ache;
Thou shalt kindle by night and subdue him
Asleep and awake.

Thou shalt touch and make redder his roses
With juice not of fruit nor of bud;
When the sense in the spirit reposes,
Thou shalt quicken the soul through the blood.
Thine, thine the one grace we implore is,
Who would live and not languish or feign,

O sleepless and deadly Dolores,
Our Lady of Pain.

[...]

They shall pass and their places be taken,
The gods and the priests that are pure.
They shall pass, and shalt thou not be shaken?
They shall perish, and shalt thou endure?
Death laughs, breathing close and relentless
In the nostrils and eyelids of lust,
With a pinch in his fingers of scentless
And delicate dust.

But the worm shall revive thee with kisses;
Thou shalt change and transmute as a god,
As the rod to a serpent that hisses,
As the serpent again to a rod.
Thy life shall not cease though thou doff it;
Thou shalt live until evil be slain,
And good shall die first, said thy prophet,
Our Lady of Pain.

Did he lie? did he laugh? does he know it,
Now he lies out of reach, out of breath,
Thy prophet, thy preacher, thy poet,
Sin's child by incestuous Death?

Did he find out in fire at his waking,
Or discern as his eyelids lost light,
When the bands of the body were breaking
And all came in sight?

Who has known all the evil before us,
Or the tyrannous secrets of time?
Though we match not the dead men that bore us
At a song, at a kiss, at a crime—
Though the heathen outface and outlive us,
And our lives and our longings are twain—
Ah, forgive us our virtues, forgive us,
Our Lady of Pain.

Who are we that embalm and embrace thee
With spices and savours of song?
What is time, that his children should face thee?
What am I, that my lips do thee wrong?
I could hurt thee—but pain would delight thee;
Or caress thee—but love would repel;
And the lovers whose lips would excite thee
Are serpents in hell.

Who now shall content thee as they did,
Thy lovers, when temples were built
And the hair of the sacrifice braided
And the blood of the sacrifice spilt,

In Lampsacus fervent with faces,
In Aphaca red from thy reign,
Who embraced thee with awful embraces,
Our Lady of Pain?

Where are they, Cotytto or Venus,
Astarte or Ashtaroth, where?
Do their hands as we touch come between us?
Is the breath of them hot in thy hair?
From their lips have thy lips taken fever,
With the blood of their bodies grown red?
Hast thou left upon earth a believer
If these men are dead?

They were purple of raiment and golden,
Filled full of thee, fiery with wine,
Thy lovers, in haunts un beholden,
In marvellous chambers of thine.
They are fled, and their footprints escape us,
Who appraise thee, adore, and abstain,
O daughter of Death and Priapus,
Our Lady of Pain.

What ails us to fear overmeasure,
To praise thee with timorous breath,
O mistress and mother of pleasure,
The one thing as certain as death?

We shall change as the things that we cherish,
 Shall fade as they faded before,
As foam upon water shall perish,
 As sand upon shore.

We shall know what the darkness discovers,
 If the grave-pit be shallow or deep;
And our fathers of old, and our lovers,
 We shall know if they sleep not or sleep.
We shall see whether hell be not heaven,
 Find out whether tares be not grain,
And the joys of thee seventy times seven,
 Our Lady of Pain.

THE GARDEN OF PROSERPINE

Here, where the world is quiet;
Here, where all trouble seems
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
In doubtful dreams of dreams;
I watch the green field growing
For reaping folk and sowing,
For harvest-time and mowing,
A sleepy world of streams.

I am tired of tears and laughter,
And men that laugh and weep;
Of what may come hereafter
For men that sow to reap:
I am weary of days and hours,
Blown buds of barren flowers,
Desires and dreams and powers
And everything but sleep.

Here life has death for neighbour,
And far from eye or ear
Wan waves and wet winds labour,
Weak ships and spirits steer;
They drive adrift, and whither
They wot not who make thither;
But no such winds blow hither,
And no such things grow here.

No growth of moor or coppice,
No heather-flower or vine,
But bloomless buds of poppies,
Green grapes of Proserpine,
Pale beds of blowing rushes
Where no leaf blooms or blushes
Save this whereout she crushes
For dead men deadly wine.

Pale, without name or number,
In fruitless fields of corn,
They bow themselves and slumber
All night till light is born;
And like a soul belated,
In hell and heaven unmated,
By cloud and mist abated
Comes out of darkness morn.

Though one were strong as seven,
He too with death shall dwell,
Nor wake with wings in heaven,
Nor weep for pains in hell;
Though one were fair as roses,
His beauty clouds and closes;
And well though love reposes,
In the end it is not well.

Pale, beyond porch and portal,
Crowned with calm leaves, she stands
Who gathers all things mortal
With cold immortal hands;
Her languid lips are sweeter
Than love's who fears to greet her
To men that mix and meet her
From many times and lands.

She waits for each and other,
She waits for all men born;
Forgets the earth her mother,
The life of fruits and corn;
And spring and seed and swallow
Take wing for her and follow
Where summer song rings hollow
And flowers are put to scorn.

There go the loves that wither,
The old loves with wearier wings;
And all dead years draw thither,
And all disastrous things;
Dead dreams of days forsaken,
Blind buds that snows have shaken,
Wild leaves that winds have taken,
Red strays of ruined springs.

We are not sure of sorrow,
And joy was never sure;
To-day will die to-morrow;
Time stoops to no man's lure;
And love, grown faint and fretful,
With lips but half regretful
Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
Weeps that no loves endure.

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Then star nor sun shall waken,
Nor any change of light:
Nor sound of waters shaken,
Nor any sound or sight:
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,
Nor days nor things diurnal;
Only the sleep eternal
In an eternal night.

FÉLISE

...

The dust of many strange desires
Lies deep between us; in our eyes
Dead smoke of perishable fires
Flickers, a fume in air and skies,
A steam of sighs.

You loved me and you loved me not;
A little, much, and overmuch.
Will you forget as I forgot?
Let all dead things lie dead; none such
Are soft to touch.

I love you and I do not love,
Too much, a little, not at all;
Too much, and never yet enough.
Birds quick to fledge and fly at call
Are quick to fall.

And these love longer now than men,
And larger loves than ours are these.
No diver brings up love again
Dropped once, my beautiful Félice,
In such cold seas.

Gone deeper than all plummets sound,
Where in the dim green dayless day
The life of such dead things lies bound
As the sea feeds on, wreck and stray
And castaway.

Can I forget? yea, that can I,
And that can all men; so will you,
Alive, or later, when you die.
Ah, but the love you plead was true?
Was mine not too?

I loved you for that name of yours
Long ere we met, and long enough.
Now that one thing of all endures--
The sweetest name that ever love
Waxed weary of.

Like colours in the sea, like flowers,
Like a cat's splendid circled eyes
That wax and wane with love for hours,
Green as green flame, blue-grey like skies,
And soft like sighs—

And all these only like your name,
And your name full of all of these.
I say it, and it sounds the same—

Save that I say it now at ease,
Your name, Félise.

I said “she must be swift and white,
And subtly warm, and half perverse,
And sweet like sharp soft fruit to bite,
And like a snake's love lithe and fierce.”
Men have guessed worse.

What was the song I made of you
Here where the grass forgets our feet
As afternoon forgets the dew?
Ah that such sweet things should be fleet,
Such fleet things sweet!

As afternoon forgets the dew,
As time in time forgets all men,
As our old place forgets us two,
Who might have turned to one thing then
But not again.

O lips that mine have grown into
Like April's kissing May,
O fervent eyelids letting through
Those eyes the greenest of things blue,
The bluest of things grey,

If you were I and I were you,
How could I love you, say?
How could the roseleaf love the rue,
The day love nightfall and her dew,
Though night may love the day?

You loved it may be more than I;
We know not; love is hard to seize.
And all things are not good to try;
And lifelong loves the worst of these
For us, Félise.

Ah, take the season and have done,
Love well the hour and let it go:
Two souls may sleep and wake up one,
Or dream they wake and find it so,
And then—you know.

Kiss me once hard as though a flame
Lay on my lips and made them fire;
The same lips now, and not the same;
What breath shall fill and re-inspire
A dead desire?

The old song sounds hollower in mine ear
Than thin keen sounds of dead men's speech—
A noise one hears and would not hear;

Too strong to die, too weak to reach
From wave to beach.

We stand on either side the sea,
Stretch hands, blow kisses, laugh and lean
I toward you, you toward me;
But what hears either save the keen
Grey sea between?

A year divides us, love from love,
Though you love now, though I loved then.
The gulf is strait, but deep enough;
Who shall recross, who among men
Shall cross again?

Love was a jest last year, you said,
And what lives surely, surely dies.
Even so; but now that love is dead,
Shall love rekindle from wet eyes,
From subtle sighs?

For many loves are good to see;
Mutable loves, and loves perverse;
But there is nothing, nor shall be,
So sweet, so wicked, but my verse
Can dream of worse.

...

from *SONGS BEFORE SUNRISE*

HERTHA

I am that which began;

Out of me the years roll;

Out of me God and man;

I am equal and whole;

God changes, and man, and the form of them bodily; I am the soul.

Before ever land was,

Before ever the sea,

Or soft hair of the grass,

Or fair limbs of the tree,

Or the flesh-coloured fruit of my branches, I was, and thy soul was in me.

First life on my sources

First drifted and swam;

Out of me are the forces

That save it or damn;

Out of me man and woman, and wild-beast and bird; before God was, I am.

Beside or above me

Nought is there to go;

Love or unlove me,

Unknow me or know,

I am that which unloves me and loves; I am stricken, and I am the blow.

I the mark that is missed
And the arrows that miss,
I the mouth that is kissed
And the breath in the kiss,

The search, and the sought, and the seeker, the soul and the body that is.

I am that thing which blesses
My spirit elate;
That which caresses
With hands uncreate

My limbs unbegotten that measure the length of the measure of fate.

But what thing dost thou now,
Looking Godward, to cry
“I am I, thou art thou,
I am low, thou art high”?

I am thou, whom thou seekest to find him; find thou but thyself, thou art I.

I the grain and the furrow,
The plough-cloven clod
And the ploughshare drawn thorough,
The germ and the sod,

The deed and the doer, the seed and the sower, the dust which is God.

Hast thou known how I fashioned thee,
Child, underground?
Fire that impassioned thee,

Iron that bound,
Dim changes of water, what thing of all these hast thou known of or found?

Canst thou say in thine heart
Thou hast seen with thine eyes
With what cunning of art
Thou wast wrought in what wise,
By what force of what stuff thou wast shapen, and shown on my breast to the skies?

Who hath given, who hath sold it thee,
Knowledge of me?
Hath the wilderness told it thee?
Hast thou learnt of the sea?
Hast thou communed in spirit with night? have the winds taken counsel with thee?

Have I set such a star
To show light on thy brow
That thou sawest from afar
What I show to thee now?
Have ye spoken as brethren together, the sun and the mountains and thou?

What is here, dost thou know it?
What was, hast thou known?
Prophet nor poet
Nor tripod nor throne
Nor spirit nor flesh can make answer, but only thy mother alone.

Mother, not maker,
Born, and not made;
Though her children forsake her,
Allured or afraid,

Praying prayers to the God of their fashion, she stirs not for all that have prayed.

A creed is a rod,
And a crown is of night;
But this thing is God,
To be man with thy might,

To grow straight in the strength of thy spirit, and live out thy life as the light.

I am in thee to save thee,
As my soul in thee saith;
Give thou as I gave thee,
Thy life-blood and breath,

Green leaves of thy labour, white flowers of thy thought, and red fruit of thy death,

Be the ways of thy giving
As mine were to thee;
The free life of thy living,
Be the gift of it free;

Not as servant to lord, nor as master to slave, shalt thou give thee to me.

O children of banishment,
Souls overcast,
Were the lights ye see vanish meant

Alway to last,
Ye would know not the sun overshadowing the shadows and stars overpast.

I that saw where ye trod
The dim paths of the night
Set the shadow called God
In your skies to give light;
But the morning of manhood is risen, and the shadowless soul is in sight.

The tree many-rooted
That swells to the sky
With frondage red-fruited,
The life-tree am I;
In the buds of your lives is the sap of my leaves: ye shall live and not die.

But the Gods of your fashion
That take and that give,
In their pity and passion
That scourge and forgive,
They are worms that are bred in the bark that falls off; they shall die and not live.

My own blood is what stanches
The wounds in my bark;
Stars caught in my branches
Make day of the dark,
And are worshipped as suns till the sunrise shall tread out their fires as a spark.

Where dead ages hide under
The live roots of the tree,
In my darkness the thunder
Makes utterance of me;

In the clash of my boughs with each other ye hear the waves sound of the sea.

That noise is of Time,
As his feathers are spread
And his feet set to climb
Through the boughs overhead,

And my foliage rings round him and rustles, and branches are bent with his tread.

The storm-winds of ages
Blow through me and cease,
The war-wind that rages,
The spring-wind of peace,

Ere the breath of them roughen my tresses, ere one of my blossoms increase.

All sounds of all changes,
All shadows and lights
On the world's mountain-ranges
And stream-riven heights,

Whose tongue is the wind's tongue and language of storm-clouds on earth-shaking
nights;

All forms of all faces,
All works of all hands

In unsearchable places
Of time-stricken lands,
All death and all life, and all reigns and all ruins, drop through me as sands.

Though sore be my burden
And more than ye know,
And my growth have no guerdon
But only to grow,
Yet I fail not of growing for lightnings above me or deathworms below.

These too have their part in me,
As I too in these;
Such fire is at heart in me,
Such sap is this tree's,
Which hath in it all sounds and all secrets of infinite lands and of seas.

In the spring-coloured hours
When my mind was as May's,
There brake forth of me flowers
By centuries of days,
Strong blossoms with perfume of manhood, shot out from my spirit as rays.

And the sound of them springing
And smell of their shoots
Were as warmth and sweet singing
And strength to my roots;
And the lives of my children made perfect with freedom of soul were my fruits.

I bid you but be;

I have need not of prayer;

I have need of you free

As your mouths of mine air;

That my heart may be greater within me, beholding the fruits of me fair.

More fair than strange fruit is

Of faiths ye espouse;

In me only the root is

That blooms in your boughs;

Behold now your God that ye made you, to feed him with faith of your vows.

In the darkening and whitening

Abysses adored,

With dayspring and lightning

For lamp and for sword,

God thunders in heaven, and his angels are red with the wrath of the Lord.

O my sons, O too dutiful

Toward Gods not of me,

Was not I enough beautiful?

Was it hard to be free?

For behold, I am with you, am in you and of you; look forth now and see.

Lo, winged with world's wonders,

With miracles shod,

With the fires of his thunders
For raiment and rod,
God trembles in heaven, and his angels are white with the terror of God.

For his twilight is come on him,
His anguish is here;
And his spirits gaze dumb on him,
Grown grey from his fear;
And his hour taketh hold on him stricken, the last of his infinite year.

Thought made him and breaks him,
Truth slays and forgives;
But to you, as time takes him,
This new thing it gives,
Even love, the beloved Republic, that feeds upon freedom and lives.

For truth only is living,
Truth only is whole,
And the love of his giving
Man's polestar and pole;
Man, pulse of my centre, and fruit of my body, and seed of my soul.

One birth of my bosom;
One beam of mine eye;
One topmost blossom
That scales the sky;
Man, equal and one with me, man that is made of me, man that is I.

BEFORE A CRUCIFIX

Here, down between the dusty trees,
At this lank edge of haggard wood,
Women with labour-loosened knees,
With gaunt backs bowed by servitude,
Stop, shift their loads, and pray, and fare
Forth with souls easier for the prayer.

The suns have branded black, the rains
Striped grey this piteous God of theirs;
The face is full of prayers and pains,
To which they bring their pains and prayers;
Lean limbs that shew the labouring bones,
And ghastly mouth that gapes and groans.

God of this grievous people, wrought
After the likeness of their race,
By faces like thine own besought,
Thine own blind helpless eyeless face,
I too, that have nor tongue nor knee
For prayer, I have a word to thee.

It was for this then, that thy speech
Was blown about the world in flame
And men's souls shot up out of reach
Of fear or lust or thwarting shame—

That thy faith over souls should pass
As sea-winds burning the grey grass?

It was for this, that prayers like these
Should spend themselves about thy feet,
And with hard overlaboured knees
Kneeling, these slaves of men should beat
Bosoms too lean to suckle sons
And fruitless as their orisons?

It was for this, that men should make
Thy name a fetter on men's necks,
Poor men's made poorer for thy sake,
And women's withered out of sex?
It was for this, that slaves should be,
Thy word was passed to set men free?

The nineteenth wave of the ages rolls
Now deathward since thy death and birth.
Hast thou fed full men's starved-out souls?
Hast thou brought freedom upon earth?
Or are there less oppressions done
In this wild world under the sun?

Nay, if indeed thou be not dead,
Before thy terrene shrine be shaken,
Look down, turn usward, bow thine head;

O thou that wast of God forsaken,
Look on thine household here, and see
These that have not forsaken thee.

Thy faith is fire upon their lips,
Thy kingdom golden in their hands;
They scourge us with thy words for whips,
They brand us with thy words for brands;
The thirst that made thy dry throat shrink
To their moist mouths commends the drink.

The toothèd thorns that bit thy brows
Lighten the weight of gold on theirs;
Thy nakedness enrobes thy spouse
With the soft sanguine stuff she wears
Whose old limbs use for ointment yet
Thine agony and bloody sweat.

The blinding buffets on thine head
On their crowned heads confirm the crown;
Thy scourging dyes their raiment red,
And with thy bands they fasten down
For burial in the blood-bought field
The nations by thy stripes unhealed.

With iron for thy linen bands
And unclean cloths for winding-sheet

They bind the people's nail-pierced hands,
They hide the people's nail-pierced feet;
And what man or what angel known
Shall roll back the sepulchral stone?

[...]

Thou bad'st let children come to thee;
What children now but curses come?
What manhood in that God can be
Who sees their worship, and is dumb?
No soul that lived, loved, wrought, and died,
Is this their carrion crucified.

Nay, if their God and thou be one,
If thou and this thing be the same,
Thou shouldst not look upon the sun;
The sun grows haggard at thy name.
Come down, be done with, cease, give o'er;
Hide thyself, strive not, be no more.

from *POEMS AND BALLADS, SECOND SERIES*

AGE AND SONG

(To Barry Cornwall)

I

In vain men tell us time can alter
Old loves or make old memories falter,
 That with the old year the old year's life closes.
The old dew still falls on the old sweet flowers,
The old sun revives the new-fledged hours,
 The old summer rears the new-born roses.

II

Much more a Muse that bears upon her
Raiment and wreath and flower of honour,
 Gathered long since and long since woven,
Fades not or falls as fall the vernal
Blossoms that bear no fruit eternal,
 By summer or winter charred or cloven.

III

No time casts down, no time upraises,
Such loves, such memories, and such praises,
 As need no grace of sun or shower,
No saving screen from frost or thunder

To tend and house around and under
The imperishable and fearless flower.

IV

Old thanks, old thoughts, old aspirations,
Outlive men's lives and lives of nations,
Dead, but for one thing which survives—
The inalienable and unpriced treasure,
The old joy of power, the old pride of pleasure,
That lives in light above men's lives.

A BALLAD OF DREAMLAND

I hid my heart in a nest of roses,
Out of the sun's way, hidden apart;
In a softer bed than the soft white snow's is,
Under the roses I hid my heart.
Why would it sleep not? why should it start,
When never a leaf of the rose-tree stirred?
What made sleep flutter his wings and part?
Only the song of a secret bird.

Lie still, I said, for the wind's wing closes,
And mild leaves muffle the keen sun's dart;

Lie still, for the wind on the warm sea dozes,
And the wind is unquieter yet than thou art.
Does a thought in thee still as a thorn's wound smart?
Does the fang still fret thee of hope deferred?
What bids the lids of thy sleep dispart?
Only the song of a secret bird.

The green land's name that a charm encloses,
It never was writ in the traveller's chart,
And sweet on its trees as the fruit that grows is,
It never was sold in the merchant's mart.
The swallows of dreams through its dim fields dart,
And sleep's are the tunes in its tree-tops heard;
No hound's note wakens the wildwood hart,
Only the song of a secret bird.

ENVOI

In the world of dreams I have chosen my part,
To sleep for a season and hear no word
Of true love's truth or of light love's art,
Only the song of a secret bird.

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE FRENCH OF VILLON
THE COMPLAINT OF THE FAIR ARMOURESS

Meseemeth I heard cry and groan
That sweet who was the armourer's maid;
For her young years she made sore moan,
And right upon this wise she said;
"Ah fierce old age with foul bald head,
To spoil fair things thou art over fain;
Who holdeth me? who? would God I were dead!
Would God I were well dead and slain!

"Lo, thou hast broken the sweet yoke
That my high beauty held above
All priests and clerks and merchant-folk;
There was not one but for my love
Would give me gold and gold enough,
Though sorrow his very heart had riven,
To win from me such wage thereof
As now no thief would take if given.

"I was right chary of the same,
God wot it was my great folly,
For love of one sly knave of them,
Good store of that same sweet had he;
For all my subtle wiles, perdie,

God wot I loved him well enow;
Right evilly he handled me,
But he loved well my gold, I trow.

“Though I gat bruises green and black,
I loved him never the less a jot;
Though he bound burdens on my back,
If he said ‘Kiss me and heed it not’
Right little pain I felt, God wot,
When that foul thief’s mouth, found so sweet,
Kissed me—Much good thereof I got!
I keep the sin and the shame of it.

“And he died thirty year agone.
I am old now, no sweet thing to see;
By God, though, when I think thereon,
And of that good glad time, woe’s me,
And stare upon my changed body
Stark naked, that has been so sweet,
Lean, wizen, like a small dry tree,
I am nigh mad with the pain of it.

“Where is my faultless forehead’s white,
The lifted eyebrows, soft gold hair,
Eyes wide apart and keen of sight,
With subtle skill in the amorous air;
The straight nose, great nor small, but fair,

The small carved ears of shapeliest growth,
Chin dimpling, colour good to wear,
And sweet red splendid kissing mouth?

“The shapely slender shoulders small,
Long arms, hands wrought in glorious wise,
Round little breasts, the hips withal
High, full of flesh, not scant of size,
Fit for all amorous masteries;
The large loins, and the flower that was
Planted above my strong round thighs
In a small garden of soft grass?

“A writhled forehead, hair gone grey,
Fallen eyebrows, eyes gone blind and red,
Their laughs and looks all fled away,
Yea, all that smote men’s hearts are fled;
The bowed nose, fallen from goodlihead;
Foul flapping ears like water-flags;
Peaked chin, and cheeks all waste and dead,
And lips that are two skinny rags:

“Thus endeth all the beauty of us.
The arms made short, the hands made lean,
The shoulders bowed and ruinous,
The breasts, alack! all fallen in;
The flanks too, like the breasts, grown thin;

As for the sweet place, out on it!

For the lank thighs, no thighs but skin,
They are specked with spots like sausage-meat.

“So we make moan for the old sweet days,
Poor old light women, two or three
Squatting above the straw-fire’s blaze,
The bosom crushed against the knee,
Like faggots on a heap we be,
Round fires soon lit, soon quenched and done;
And we were once so sweet, even we!
Thus fareth many and many an one.”

from *SONGS OF THE SPRINGTIDES*

ON THE CLIFFS

μερωωνος αηδων. - *Sappho*.

Between the moondawn and the sundown here
The twilight hangs half starless; half the sea
Still quivers as for love or pain or fear
Or pleasure mightier than these all may be
A man's live heart might beat
Wherein a God's with mortal blood should meet
And fill its pulse too full to bear the strain
With fear or love or pleasure's twin-born, pain.
Fiercely the gaunt woods to the grim soil cling
That bears for all fair fruits
Wan wild sparse flowers of windy and wintry spring
Between the tortive serpent-shapen roots
Wherethrough their dim growth hardly strikes and shoots
And shews one gracious thing
Hardly, to speak for summer one sweet word
Of summer's self scarce heard.
But higher the steep green sterile fields, thick-set
With flowerless hawthorn even to the upward verge
Whence the woods gathering watch new cliffs emerge
Higher than their highest of crowns that sea-winds fret,
Hold fast, for all that night or wind can say,

Some pale pure colour yet,
Too dim for green and luminous for grey.
Between the climbing inland cliffs above
And these beneath that breast and break the bay,
A barren peace too soft for hate or love
Broods on an hour too dim for night or day.

[...]

Nay, sad may be man's memory, sad may be
The dream he weaves him as for shadow of thee,
But scarce one breathing-space, one heartbeat long,
Wilt thou take shadow of sadness on thy song.
Not thou, being more than man or man's desire,
Being bird and God in one,
With throat of gold and spirit of the sun;
The sun whom all our souls and songs call sire,
Whose godhead gave thee, chosen of all our quire,
Thee only of all that serve, of all that sing
Before our sire and king,
Borne up some space on time's world-wandering wing,
This gift, this doom, to bear till time's wing tire—
Life everlasting of eternal fire.

Thee only of all; yet can no memory say
How many a night and day
My heart has been as thy heart, and my life

As thy life is, a sleepless hidden thing,
Full of the thirst and hunger of winter and spring,
That seeks its food not in such love or strife
As fill men's hearts with passionate hours and rest.
From no loved lips and on no loving breast
Have I sought ever for such gifts as bring
Comfort, to stay the secret soul with sleep.
The joys, the loves, the labours, whence men reap
Rathe fruit of hopes and fears,
I have made not mine; the best of all my days
Have been as those fair fruitless summer strays,
Those water-waifs that but the sea-wind steers,
Flakes of glad foam or flowers on footless ways
That take the wind in season and the sun,
And when the wind wills is their season done.

For all my days as all thy days from birth
My heart as thy heart was in me as thee,
Fire; and not all the fountains of the sea
Have waves enough to quench it, nor on earth
Is fuel enough to feed,
While day sows night and night sows day for seed.

We were not marked for sorrow, thou nor I,
For joy nor sorrow, sister, were we made,
To take delight and grief to live and die,
Assuaged by pleasures or by pains affrayed

That melt men's hearts and alter; we retain
A memory mastering pleasure and all pain,
A spirit within the sense of ear and eye,
A soul behind the soul, that seeks and sings
And makes our life move only with its wings
And feed but from its lips, that in return
Feed of our hearts wherein the old fires that burn
Have strength not to consume
Nor glory enough to exalt us past our doom.

[...]

What have our gods then given us? Ah, to thee,
Sister, much more, much happier than to me,
Much happier things they have given, and more of grace
Than falls to man's light race;
For lighter are we, all our love and pain
Lighter than thine, who knowest of time or place
Thus much, that place nor time
Can heal or hurt or lull or change again
The singing soul that makes his soul sublime
Who hears the far fall of its fire-fledged rhyme
Fill darkness as with bright and burning rain
Till all the live gloom inly glows, and light
Seems with the sound to cleave the core of night.

The singing soul that moves thee, and that moved

When thou wast woman, and their songs divine
Who mixed for Grecian mouths heaven's lyric wine
Fell dumb, fell down reproved
Before one sovereign Lesbian song of thine.
That soul, though love and life had fain held fast,
Wind-winged with fiery music, rose and past
Through the indrawn hollow of earth and heaven and hell,
As through some strait sea-shell
The wide sea's immemorial song,—the sea
That sings and breathes in strange men's ears of thee
How in her barren bride-bed, void and vast,
Even thy soul sang itself to sleep at last.

To sleep? Ah, then, what song is this, that here
Makes all the night one ear,
One ear fulfilled and mad with music, one
Heart kindling as the heart of heaven, to hear
A song more fiery than the awakening sun
Sings, when his song sets fire
To the air and clouds that build the dead night's pyre?
O thou of divers-coloured mind, O thou
Deathless, God's daughter subtle-souled—lo, now,
Now too the song above all songs, in flight
Higher than the day-star's height,
And sweet as sound the moving wings of night!
Thou of the divers-coloured seat—behold,
Her very song of old!—

O deathless, O God's daughter subtle-souled!
That same cry through this boskage overhead
Rings round reiterated,
Palpitates as the last palpitated,
The last that panted through her lips and died
Not down this grey north sea's half sapped cliff-side
That crumbles toward the coastline, year by year
More near the sands and near;
The last loud lyric fiery cry she cried,
Heard once on heights Leucadian,—heard not here.

Not here; for this that fires our northland night,
This is the song that made
Love fearful, even the heart of love afraid,
With the great anguish of its great delight.
No swan-song, no far-fluttering half-drawn breath,
No word that love of love's sweet nature saith,
No dirge that lulls the narrowing lids of death,
No healing hymn of peace-prevented strife,—
This is her song of life.

I love thee,—hark, one tenderer note than all—
At this, of old time, once—one low long fall,
Sighing—one long low lovely loveless call,
Dying—one pause in song so flamelike fast—
At this, long since in old time overpast—
One soft first pause and last.

One,—then the old rage of rapture's fieriest rain
Storms all the music-maddened night again.

Child of God, close craftswoman, I beseech thee,
Bid not ache nor agony break nor master,
Lady, my spirit—
O thou her mistress, might her cry not reach thee?
Our Lady of all men's loves, could Love go past her,
Pass, and not hear it?

She hears not as she heard not; hears not me,
O treble-natured mystery,—how should she
Hear, or give ear?—who heard and heard not thee;
Heard, and went past, and heard not; but all time
Hears all that all the ravin of his years
Hath cast not wholly out of all men's ears
And dulled to death with deep dense funeral chime
Of their reiterate rhyme.
And now of all songs uttering all her praise,
All hers who had thy praise and did thee wrong,
Abides one song yet of her lyric days,
Thine only, this thy song.

O soul triune, woman and god and bird,
Man, man at least has heard.
All ages call thee conqueror, and thy cry
The mightiest as the least beneath the sky

Whose heart was ever set to song, or stirred
With wind of mounting music blown more high
Than wildest wing may fly,
Hath heard or hears,—even Æschylus as I.
But when thy name was woman, and thy word
Human,—then haply, surely then meseems
This thy bird's note was heard on earth of none,
Of none save only in dreams.
In all the world then surely was but one
Song; as in heaven at highest one sceptred sun
Regent, on earth here surely without fail
One only, one imperious nightingale.
Dumb was the field, the woodland mute, the lawn
Silent; the hill was tongueless as the vale
Even when the last fair waif of cloud that felt
Its heart beneath the colouring moonrays melt,
At high noon of midnight half withdrawn,
Bared all the sudden deep divine moondawn.
Then, unsaluted by her twin-born tune,
That latter timeless morning of the moon
Rose past its hour of moonrise; clouds gave way
To the old reconquering ray,
But no song answering made it more than day;
No cry of song by night
Shot fire into the cloud-constraining light.
One only, one Æolian island heard
Thrill, but through no bird's throat,

In one strange manlike maiden's godlike note,
The song of all these as a single bird.
Till the sea's portal was as funeral gate
For that sole singer in all time's ageless date
Singled and signed for so triumphal fate,
All nightingales but one in all the world
All her sweet life were silent; only then,
When her life's wing of womanhood was furled,
Their cry, this cry of thine was heard again,
As of me now, of any born of men.
Through sleepless clear spring nights filled full of thee,
Rekindled here, thy ruling song has thrilled
The deep dark air and subtle tender sea
And breathless hearts with one bright sound fulfilled.
Or at midnight to me
Swimming, and birds about my happier head
Skimming, one smooth soft way by water and air,
To these my bright born brethren and to me
Hath not the clear wind borne or seemed to bear
A song wherein all earth and heaven and sea
Were molten in one music made of thee
To enforce us, O our sister of the shore,
Look once in heart back landward and adore?
For songless were we sea-mews, yet had we
More joy than all things joyful of thee—more,
Haply, than all things happiest; nay, save thee,
In thy strong rapture of imperious joy

Too high for heart of sea-borne bird or boy,
What living things were happiest if not we?
But knowing not love nor change nor wrath nor wrong,
No more we knew of song.

Song, and the secrets of it, and their might,
What blessings curse it and what curses bless,
I know them since my spirit had first in sight,
Clear as thy song's words or the live sun's light,
The small dark body's Lesbian loveliness
That held the fire eternal; eye and ear
Were as a god's to see, a god's to hear,
Through all his hours of daily and nightly chime,
The sundering of the two-edged spear of time:
The spear that pierces even the sevenfold shields
Of mightiest Memory, mother of all songs made,
And wastes all songs as roseleaves kissed and frayed
As here the harvest of the foam-flowered fields;
But thine the spear may waste not that he wields
Since first the God whose soul is man's live breath,
The sun whose face hath our sun's face for shade,
Put all the light of life and love and death
Too strong for life, but not for love too strong,
Where pain makes peace with pleasure in thy song,
And in thine heart, where love and song make strife,
Fire everlasting of eternal life.

from *STUDIES IN SONG*
BY THE NORTH SEA

I.

A land that is lonelier than ruin;
A sea that is stranger than death:
Far fields that a rose never blew in,
Wan waste where the winds lack breath;
Waste endless and boundless and flowerless
But of marsh-blossoms fruitless as free:
Where earth lies exhausted, as powerless
To strive with the sea.

Far flickers the flight of the swallows,
Far flutters the weft of the grass
Spun dense over desolate hollows
More pale than the clouds as they pass:
Thick woven as the weft of a witch is
Round the heart of a thrall that hath sinned,
Whose youth and the wrecks of its riches
Are waifs on the wind.

The pastures are herdless and sheepless,
No pasture or shelter for herds:
The wind is relentless and sleepless,
And restless and songless the birds;
Their cries from afar fall breathless,

Their wings are as lightnings that flee;
For the land has two lords that are deathless:
 Death's self, and the sea.

These twain, as a king with his fellow,
 Hold converse of desolate speech:
And her waters are haggard and yellow
 And crass with the scurf of the beach:
And his garments are grey as the hoary
 Wan sky where the day lies dim;
And his power is to her, and his glory,
 As hers unto him.

In the pride of his power she rejoices,
 In her glory he glows and is glad:
In her darkness the sound of his voice is,
 With his breath she dilates and is mad:
'If thou slay me, O death, and outlive me,
 Yet thy love hath fulfilled me of thee.'
'Shall I give thee not back if thou give me,
 O sister, O sea?'

And year upon year dawns living,
 And age upon age drops dead:
And his hand is not weary of giving,
 And the thirst of her heart is not fed:
And the hunger that moans in her passion,

And the rage in her hunger that roars,
As a wolf's that the winter lays lash on,
Still calls and implores.

Her walls have no granite for girder,
No fortalice fronting her stands:
But reefs the bloodguiltiest of murder
Are less than the banks of her sands:
These number their slain by the thousand;
For the ship hath no surety to be,
When the bank is abreast of her bows and
Aflush with the sea.

No surety to stand, and no shelter
To dawn out of darkness but one,
Out of waters that hurtle and welter
No succour to dawn with the sun
But a rest from the wind as it passes,
Where, hardly redeemed from the waves,
Lie thick as the blades of the grasses
The dead in their graves.

A multitude noteless of numbers,
As wild weeds cast on an heap:
And sounder than sleep are their slumbers,
And softer than song is their sleep;
And sweeter than all things and stranger

The sense, if perchance it may be,
That the wind is divested of danger
 And scatheless the sea.

That the roar of the banks they breasted
 Is hurtless as bellowing of herds,
And the strength of his wings that invested
 The wind, as the strength of a bird's;
As the sea-mew's might or the swallow's
 That cry to him back if he cries,
As over the graves and their hollows
 Days darken and rise.

As the souls of the dead men disburdened
 And clean of the sins that they sinned,
With a lovelier than man's life guerdoned
 And delight as a wave's in the wind,
And delight as the wind's in the billow,
 Birds pass, and deride with their glee
The flesh that has dust for its pillow
 As wrecks have the sea.

When the ways of the sun wax dimmer,
 Wings flash through the dusk like beams;
As the clouds in the lit sky glimmer,
 The bird in the graveyard gleams;
As the cloud at its wing's edge whitens

When the clarions of sunrise are heard,
The graves that the bird's note brightens
Grow bright for the bird.

As the waves of the numberless waters
That the wind cannot number who guides
Are the sons of the shore and the daughters
Here lulled by the chime of the tides:
And here in the press of them standing
We know not if these or if we
Live truliest, or anchored to landing
Or drifted to sea.

In the valley he named of decision
No denser were multitudes met
When the soul of the seer in her vision
Saw nations for doom of them set;
Saw darkness in dawn, and the splendour
Of judgment, the sword and the rod;
But the doom here of death is more tender
And gentler the god.

And gentler the wind from the dreary
Sea-banks by the waves overlapped,
Being weary, speaks peace to the weary
From slopes that the tide-stream hath sapped;
And sweeter than all that we call so

The seal of their slumber shall be
Till the graves that embosom them also
 Be sapped of the sea.

II.

For the heart of the waters is cruel,
 And the kisses are dire of their lips,
And their waves are as fire is to fuel
 To the strength of the sea-faring ships,
Though the sea's eye gleam as a jewel
 To the sun's eye back as he dips.

Though the sun's eye flash to the sea's
 Live light of delight and of laughter,
And her lips breathe back to the breeze
 The kiss that the wind's lips waft her
From the sun that subsides, and sees
 No gleam of the storm's dawn after.

And the wastes of the wild sea-marches
 Where the borderers are matched in their might—
Bleak fens that the sun's weight parches,
 Dense waves that reject his light—
Change under the change-coloured arches
 Of changeless morning and night

The waves are as ranks enrolled
Too close for the storm to sever:
The fens lie naked and cold,
But their heart fails utterly never:
The lists are set from of old,
And the warfare endureth for ever.

[...]

V.
For the sea too seeks and rejoices,
Gains and loses and gains,
And the joy of her heart's own choice is
As ours, and as ours are her pains:
As the thoughts of our hearts are her voices,
And as hers is the pulse of our veins.

Her fields that know not of dearth
Nor lie for their fruit's sake fallow
Laugh large in the depth of their mirth
But inshore here in the shallow,
Embroided with encumbrance of earth,
Their skirts are turbid and yellow.

The grime of her greed is upon her,
The sign of her deed is her soil;
As the earth's is her own dishonour,

And corruption the crown of her toil:
She hath spoiled and devoured, and her honour
Is this, to be shamed by her spoil.

But afar where pollution is none,
Nor ensign of strife nor endeavour,
Where her heart and the sun's are one,
And the soil of her sin comes never,
She is pure as the wind and the sun,
And her sweetness endureth for ever.

VI.

Death, and change, and darkness everlasting,
Deaf, that hears not what the daystar saith,
Blind, past all remembrance and forecasting,
Dead, past memory that it once drew breath;
These, above the washing tides and wasting,
Reign, and rule this land of utter death.

Change of change, darkness of darkness, hidden,
Very death of very death, begun
When none knows,—the knowledge is forbidden—
Self-begotten, self-proceeding, one,
Born, not made—abhorred, unchained, unhidden,
Night stands here defiant of the sun.

Change of change, and death of death begotten,
Darkness born of darkness, one and three,
Ghostly godhead of a world forgotten,
Crowned with heaven, enthroned on land and sea,
Here, where earth with dead men's bones is rotten,
God of Time, thy likeness worships thee.

Lo, thy likeness of thy desolation,
Shape and figure of thy might, O Lord,
Formless form, incarnate miscreation,
Served of all things living and abhorred;
Earth herself is here thine incarnation,
Time, of all things born on earth adored.

All that worship thee are fearful of thee;
No man may not worship thee for fear:
Prayers nor curses prove not nor disprove thee,
Move nor change thee with our change of cheer:
All at last, though all abhorred thee, love thee,
God, the sceptre of whose throne is here.

Here thy throne and sceptre of thy station,
Here the palace paven for thy feet;
Here thy sign from nation unto nation
Passed as watchword for thy guards to greet,
Guards that go before thine exaltation,
Ages, clothed with bitter years and sweet.

Here, where sharp the sea-bird shrills his ditty,
 Flickering flame-wise through the clear live calm,
Rose triumphal, crowning all a city,
 Roofs exalted once with prayer and psalm,
Built of holy hands for holy pity,
 Frank and fruitful as a sheltering palm.

Church and hospice wrought in faultless fashion,
 Hall and chancel bounteous and sublime,
Wide and sweet and glorious as compassion,
 Filled and thrilled with force of choral chime,
Filled with spirit of prayer and thrilled with passion
 Hailed a God more merciful than Time.

Ah, less mighty, less than Time prevailing,
 Shrunk, expelled, made nothing at his nod,
Less than clouds across the sea-line sailing,
 Lies he, stricken by his master's rod.
'Where is man?' the cloister murmurs wailing;
 Back the mute shrine thunders—'Where is God?'

Here is all the end of all his glory—
 Dust, and grass, and barren silent stones.
Dead, like him, one hollow tower and hoary
 Naked in the sea-wind stands and moans,
Filled and thrilled with its perpetual story:

Here, where earth is dense with dead men's bones.

Low and loud and long, a voice for ever,
Sounds the wind's clear story like a song.
Tomb from tomb the waves devouring sever,
Dust from dust as years relapse along;
Graves where men made sure to rest, and never
Lie dismantled by the seasons' wrong.

Now displaced, devoured and desecrated,
Now by Time's hands darkly disinterred,
These poor dead that sleeping here awaited
Long the archangel's re-creating word,
Closed about with roofs and walls high-gated
Till the blast of judgment should be heard,

Naked, shamed, cast out of consecration,
Corpse and coffin, yea the very graves,
Scoffed at, scattered, shaken from their station,
Spurned and scourged of wind and sea like slaves,
Desolate beyond man's desolation,
Shrink and sink into the waste of waves.

Tombs, with bare white piteous bones protruded,
Shroudless, down the loose collapsing banks,
Crumble, from their constant place detruded,
That the sea devours and gives not thanks.

Graves where hope and prayer and sorrow brooded
Gape and slide and perish, ranks on ranks.

Rows on rows and line by line they crumble,
They that thought for all time through to be.
Scarce a stone whereon a child might stumble
Breaks the grim field paced alone of me.
Earth, and man, and all their gods wax humble
Here, where Time brings pasture to the sea.

VII.

But afar on the headland exalted,
But beyond in the curl of the bay,
From the depth of his dome deep-vaulted
Our father is lord of the day.
Our father and lord that we follow,
For deathless and ageless is he;
And his robe is the whole sky's hollow,
His sandal the sea.

Where the horn of the headland is sharper,
And her green floor glitters with fire,
The sea has the sun for a harper,
The sun has the sea for a lyre.
The waves are a pavement of amber,
By the feet of the sea-winds trod

To receive in a god's presence-chamber
Our father, the God.

Time, haggard and changeful and hoary,
Is master and God of the land:
But the air is fulfilled of the glory
That is shed from our lord's right hand.
O father of all of us ever,
All glory be only to thee
From heaven, that is void of thee never,
And earth, and the sea.

O Sun, whereof all is beholden,
Behold now the shadow of this death,
This place of the sepulchres, olden
And emptied and vain as a breath.
The bloom of the bountiful heather
Laughs broadly beyond in thy light
As dawn, with her glories to gather,
At darkness and night.

Though the Gods of the night lie rotten
And their honour be taken away
And the noise of their names forgotten,
Thou, Lord, art God of the day.
Thou art father and saviour and spirit,
O Sun, of the soul that is free

And hath grace of thy grace to inherit
Thine earth and thy sea.

The hills and the sands and the beaches,
The waters adrift and afar,
The banks and the creeks and the reaches,
How glad of thee all these are!
The flowers, overflowing, overcrowded,
Are drunk with the mad wind's mirth:
The delight of thy coming unclouded
Makes music of earth.

I, last least voice of her voices,
Give thanks that were mute in me long
To the soul in my soul that rejoices
For the song that is over my song.
Time gives what he gains for the giving
Or takes for his tribute of me;
My dreams to the wind everliving,
My song to the sea.

from *THE HEPTALOGIA* (or, *The Seven Against Sense*)

THE POET AND THE WOODLOUSE

Said a poet to a woodlouse—“Thou art certainly my brother;
I discern in thee the markings of the fingers of the Whole;
And I recognize, in spite of all the terrene smut and smother,
In the colours shaded off thee, the suggestions of a soul.

“Yea,” the poet said, “I smell thee by some passive divination,
I am satisfied with insight of the measure of thine house;
What had happened I conjecture, in a blank and rhythmic passion,
Had the æons thought of making thee a man, and me a louse.

“The broad lives of upper planets, their absorption and digestion,
Food and famine, health and sickness, I can scrutinize and test;
Through a shiver of the senses comes a resonance of question,
And by proof of balanced answer I decide that I am best.”

“Man, the fleshly marvel, always feels a certain kind of awe stick
To the skirts of contemplation, cramped with nympholeptic weight:
Feels his faint sense charred and branded by the touch of solar caustic,
On the forehead of his spirit feels the footprint of a Fate.”

“Notwithstanding which, O poet,” spake the woodlouse, very blandly,
“I am likewise the created,—I the equipoise of thee;

I the particle, the atom, I behold on either hand lie
The inane of measured ages that were embryos of me.

“I am fed with intimations, I am clothed with consequences,
And the air I breathe is coloured with apocalyptic blush:
Ripest-budded odours blossom out of dim chaotic stench,
And the Soul plants spirit-lilies in sick leagues of human slush.

“I am thrilled half cosmically through by cryptophantic surgings,
Till the rhythmic hills roar silent through a spongy kind of blee:
And earth’s soul yawns disembowelled of her pancreatic organs,
Like a madrepora if mesmerized, in rapt catalepsy.

“And I sacrifice, a Levite—and I palpitate, a poet;—
Can I close dead ears against the rush and resonance of things?
Symbols in me breathe and flicker up the heights of the heroic;
Earth’s worst spawn, you said, and cursed me? look! approve me! I have wings.

“Ah, men’s poets! men’s conventions crust you round and swathe you mist-like,
And the world’s wheels grind your spirits down the dust ye overtrod:
We stand sinlessly stark-naked in effulgence of the Christlight,
And our polecat chokes not cherubs; and our skunk smells sweet to God.

“For He grasps the pale Created by some thousand vital handles,
Till a Godshine, bluey winnowed through the sieve of thunderstorms,
Shimmers up the non-existent round the churning feet of angels;
And the atoms of that glory may be seraphs, being worms.

“Friends, your nature underlies us and your pulses overlap us;
Ye, with social sores unbandaged, can ye sing right and steer wrong?
For the transient cosmic, rooted in imperishable chaos,
Must be kneaded into drastics as material for a song.

“Eyes once purged from homebred vapours through humanitarian passion
See that monochrome a despot through a democratic prism;
Hands that rip the soul up, reeking from divine evisceration,
Not with priestlike oil anoint him, but a stronger-smelling chrism.

“Pass, O poet, retransfigured! God, the psychometric rhapsode,
Fills with fiery rhythms the silence, stings the dark with stars that blink;
All eternities hang round him like an old man’s clothes collapsèd,
While he makes his mundane music—*and he will not stop, I think.*”

SONNET FOR A PICTURE

That nose is out of drawing. With a gasp,
She pants upon the passionate lips that ache
With the red drain of her own mouth, and make
A monochord of colour. Like an asp,
One lithe lock wriggles in his rutilant grasp.
Her bosom is an oven of myrrh, to bake
Love's white warm shewbread to a browner cake.
The lock his fingers clench has burst its hasp.
The legs are absolutely abominable.
Ah! what keen overgust of wild-eyed woes
Flags in that bosom, flushes in that nose?
Nay! Death sets riddles for desire to spell,
Responsive. What red hem earth's passion sews,
But may be ravenously unripped in hell?

from *TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE*

...

Yet of these lives inlaid with hopes and fears,
Spun fine as fire and jewelled thick with tears,
These lives made out of loves that long since were,
Lives wrought as ours of earth and burning air,
Fugitive flame, and water of secret springs,
And clothed with joys and sorrows as with wings,
Some yet are good, if aught be good, to save
Some while from washing wreck and wrecking wave.
Was such not theirs, the twain I take, and give
Out of my life to make their dead life live
Some days of mine, and blow my living breath
Between dead lips forgotten even of death?
So many and many of old have given my twain
Love and live song and honey-hearted pain,
Whose root is sweetness and whose fruit is sweet,
So many and with such joy have tracked their feet,
What should I do to follow? yet I too,
I have the heart to follow, many or few
Be the feet gone before me; for the way,
Rose-red with remnant roses of the day
Westward, and eastward white with stars that break,
Between the green and foam is fair to take
For any sail the sea-wind steers for me
From morning into morning, sea to sea.

[...]

And as one moved and marvelling Iseult said:

“Great pity it is and strange it seems to me
God could not do them so much right as we,
Who slay not men for witless evil done;
And these the noblest under God’s glad sun
For sin they knew not he that knew shall slay,
And smite blind men for stumbling in fair day.
What good is it to God that such should die?
Shall the sun’s light grow sunnier in the sky
Because their light of spirit is clean put out?”

And sighing, she looked from wave to cloud about,
And even with that the full-grown feet of day
Sprang upright on the quivering water-way,
And his face burned against her meeting face
Most like a lover’s thrilled with great love’s grace
Whose glance takes fire and gives; the quick sea shone
And shivered like spread wings of angels blown
By the sun’s breath before him; and a low
Sweet gale shook all the foam-flowers of thin snow
As into rainfall of sea-roses shed
Leaf by wild leaf on that green garden-bed
Which tempests till and sea-winds turn and plough:
For rosy and fiery round the running prow

Fluttered the flakes and feathers of the spray,
And bloomed like blossoms cast by God away
To waste on the ardent water; swift the moon
Withered to westward as a face in swoon
Death-stricken by glad tidings: and the height
Throbbled and the centre quivered with delight
And the depth quailed with passion as of love,
Till like the heart of some new-mated dove
Air, light, and wave seemed full of burning rest,
With motion as of one God's beating breast.

And her heart sprang in Iseult, and she drew
With all her spirit and life the sunrise through,
And through her lips the keen triumphant air
Sea-scented, sweeter than land-roses were,
And through her eyes the whole rejoicing east
Sun-satisfied, and all the heaven at feast
Spread for the morning; and the imperious mirth
Of wind and light that moved upon the earth,
Making the spring, and all the fruitful might
And strong regeneration of delight
That swells the seedling leaf and sapling man,
Since the first life in the first world began
To burn and burgeon through void limbs and veins,
And the first love with sharp sweet procreant pains
To pierce and bring forth roses; yea, she felt
Through her own soul the sovereign morning melt,

And all the sacred passion of the sun;
And as the young clouds flamed and were undone
About him coming, touched and burnt away
In rosy ruin and yellow spoil of day,
The sweet veil of her body and corporal sense
Felt the dawn also cleave it, and incense
With light from inward and with effluent heat
The kindling soul through fleshly hands and feet.
And as the august great blossom of the dawn
Burst, and the full sun scarce from sea withdrawn
Seemed on the fiery water a flower afloat,
So as a fire the mighty morning smote
Throughout her, and incensed with the influent hour
Her whole soul's one great mystical red flower
Burst, and the bud of her sweet spirit broke
Rose-fashion, and the strong spring at a stroke
Thrilled, and was cloven, and from the full sheath came
The whole rose of the woman red as flame:
And all her Mayday blood as from a swoon
Flushed, and May rose up in her and was June.
So for a space her heart as heavenward burned:
Then with half summer in her eyes she turned,
And on her lips was April yet, and smiled,
As though the spirit and sense unreconciled
Shrank laughing back, and would not ere its hour
Let life put forth the irrevocable flower.

[...]

There was a bower beyond man's eye more fair
Than ever summer dews and sunniest air
Fed full with rest and radiance till the boughs
Had wrought a roof as for a holier house
Than aught save love might breathe in; fairer far
Than keeps the sweet light back of moon and star
From high kings' chambers: there might love and sleep
Divide for joy the darkling hours, and keep
With amorous alternation of sweet strife
The soft and secret ways of death and life
Made smooth for pleasure's feet to rest and run
Even from the moondawn to the kindling sun,
Made bright for passion's feet to run and rest
Between the midnight's and the morning's breast,
Where hardly though her happy head lie down
It may forget the hour that wove its crown;
Where hardly though her joyous limbs be laid
They may forget the mirth that midnight made.
And thither, ere sweet night had slain sweet day,
Iseult and Tristram took their wandering way,
And rested, and refreshed their hearts with cheer
In hunters' fashion of the woods; and here
More sweet it seemed, while this might be, to dwell
And take of all world's weariness farewell
Than reign of all world's lordship queen and king.
Nor here would time for three moons' changes bring

Sorrow nor thought of sorrow; but sweet earth
Fostered them like her babes of eldest birth,
Reared warm in pathless woods and cherished well.
And the sun sprang above the sea and fell,
And the stars rose and sank upon the sea;
And outlaw-like, in forest wise and free,
The rising and the setting of their lights
Found those twain dwelling all those days and nights.
And under change of sun and star and moon
Flourished and fell the chaplets woven of June,
And fair through fervours of the deepening sky
Panted and passed the hours that lit July,
And each day blessed them out of heaven above,
And each night crowned them with the crown of love.
Nor till the might of August overhead
Weighed on the world was yet one roseleaf shed
Of all their joy's warm coronal, nor aught
Touched them in passing ever with a thought
That ever this might end on any day
Or any night not love them where they lay,
But like a babbling tale of barren breath
Seemed all report and rumour held of death,
And a false bruit the legend tear-impearled
That such a thing as change was in the world.
And each bright song upon his lips that came,
Mocking the powers of change and death by name,
Blasphemed their bitter godhead, and defied

Time, though clothed round with ruin as kings with pride,
To blot the glad life out of love: and she
Drank lightly deep of his philosophy
In that warm wine of amorous words which is
Sweet with all truths of all philosophies.
For well he wist all subtle ways of song,
And in his soul the secret eye was strong
That burns in meditation, till bright words
Break flamelike forth as notes from fledgeling birds
That feel the soul speak through them of the spring.
So fared they night and day as queen and king
Crowned of a kingdom wide as day and night.
Nor ever cloudlet swept or swam in sight
Across the darkling depths of their delight
Whose stars no skill might number, nor man's art
Sound the deep stories of its heavenly heart.
Till, even for wonder that such life should live,
Desires and dreams of what death's self might give
Would touch with tears and laughter and wild speech
The lips and eyes of passion, fain to reach,
Beyond all bourne of time or trembling sense,
The verge of love's last possible eminence.
Out of the heaven that storm nor shadow mars,
Deep from the starry depth beyond the stars,
A yearning ardour without scope or name
Fell on them, and the bright night's breath of flame
Shot fire into their kisses; and like fire

The lit dew lightened on the leaves, as higher
Night's heart beat on toward midnight. Far and fain
Somewhiles the soft rush of rejoicing rain
Solaced the darkness, and from steep to steep
Of heaven they saw the sweet sheet lightning leap
And laugh its heart out in a thousand smiles,
When the clear sea for miles on glimmering miles
Burned as though dawn were strewn abroad astray,
Or, showering out of heaven, all heaven's array
Had paven instead the waters: fain and far
Somewhiles the burning love of star for star
Spake words that love might wellnigh seem to hear
In such deep hours as turn delight to fear
Sweet as delight's self ever. So they lay
Tranced once, nor watched along the fiery bay
The shine of summer darkness palpitate and play.
She had nor sight nor voice; her swooning eyes
Knew not if night or light were in the skies;
Across her beauty sheer the moondawn shed
Its light as on a thing as white and dead;
Only with stress of soft fierce hands she prest
Between the throbbing blossoms of her breast
His ardent face, and through his hair her breath
Went quivering as when life is hard on death;
And with strong trembling fingers she strained fast
His head into her bosom; till at last,
Satiated with sweetness of that burning bed,

His eyes afire with tears, he raised his head
And laughed into her lips; and all his heart
Filled hers; then face from face fell, and apart
Each hung on each with panting lips, and felt
Sense into sense and spirit in spirit melt.

“Hast thou no sword? I would not live till day;
O love, this night and we must pass away,
It must die soon, and let not us die late.”

“Take then my sword and slay me; nay, but wait
Till day be risen; what, wouldst thou think to die
Before the light take hold upon the sky?”

“Yea, love; for how shall we have twice, being twain,
This very night of love’s most rapturous reign?
Live thou and have thy day, and year by year
Be great, but what shall I be? Slay me here;
Let me die not when love lies dead, but now
Strike through my heart: nay, sweet, what heart hast thou?
Is it so much I ask thee, and spend my breath
In asking? nay, thou knowest it is but death.
Hadst thou true heart to love me, thou wouldst give
This: but for hate’s sake thou wilt let me live.”

Here he caught up her lips with his, and made
The wild prayer silent in her heart that prayed,

And strained her to him till all her faint breath sank
And her bright light limbs palpitated and shrank
And rose and fluctuated as flowers in rain
That bends them and they tremble and rise again
And heave and straighten and quiver all through with bliss
And turn afresh their mouths up for a kiss,
Amorous, athirst of that sweet influent love;
So, hungering towards his hovering lips above,
Her red-rose mouth yearned silent, and her eyes
Closed, and flashed after, as through June's darkest skies
The divine heartbeats of the deep live light
Make open and shut the gates of the outer night.

Long lay they still, subdued with love, nor knew
If cloud or light changed colour as it grew,
If star or moon beheld them; if above
The heaven of night waxed fiery with their love,
Or earth beneath were moved at heart and root
To burn as they, to burn and bring forth fruit
Unseasonable for love's sake; if tall trees
Bowed, and close flowers yearned open, and the breeze
Failed and fell silent as a flame that fails:
And all that hour unheard the nightingales
Clamoured, and all the woodland soul was stirred,
And depth and height were one great song unheard,
As though the world caught music and took fire
From the instant heart alone of their desire.

So sped their night of nights between them: so,
For all fears past and shadows, shine and snow,
That one pure hour all-golden where they lay
Made their life perfect and their darkness day.
And warmer waved its harvest yet to reap,
Till in the lovely fight of love and sleep
At length had sleep the mastery; and the dark
Was lit with soft live gleams they might not mark,
Fleet butterflies, each like a dead flower's ghost,
White, blue, and sere leaf-coloured; but the most
White as the sparkle of snow-flowers in the sun
Ere with his breath they lie at noon undone
Whose kiss devours their tender beauty, and leaves
But raindrops on the grass and sere thin leaves
That were engraven with trceries of the snow
Flowerwise ere any flower of earth's would blow;
So swift they sprang and sank, so sweet and light
They swam the deep dim breathless air of night.
Now on her rose-white amorous breast half bare,
Now on her slumberous love-dishevelled hair,
The white wings lit and vanished, and afresh
Lit soft as snow lights on her snow-soft flesh,
On hand or throat or shoulder; and she stirred
Sleeping, and spake some tremulous bright word,
And laughed upon some dream too sweet for truth,
Yet not so sweet as very love and youth

That there had charmed her eyes to sleep at last.
Nor woke they till the perfect night was past,
And the soft sea thrilled with blind hope of light.
But ere the dusk had well the sun in sight
He turned and kissed her eyes awake and said,
Seeing earth and water neither quick nor dead
And twilight hungering toward the day to be,
“As the dawn loves the sunlight I love thee.”
And even as rays with cloudlets in the skies
Confused in brief love’s bright contentious wise,
Sleep strove with sense rekindling in her eyes;
And as the flush of birth scarce overcame
The pale pure pearl of unborn light with flame
Soft as may touch the rose’s heart with shame
To break not all reluctant out of bud,
Stole up her sleeping cheek her waking blood;
And with the lovely laugh of love that takes
The whole soul prisoner ere the whole sense wakes,
Her lips for love’s sake bade love’s will be done.
And all the sea lay subject to the sun.

[...]

And now, O Love, what comfort? God most high,
Whose life is as a flower’s to live and die,
Whose light is everlasting: Lord, whose breath
Speaks music through the deathless lips of death

Whereto time's heart rings answer: Bard, whom time
Hears, and is vanquished with a wandering rhyme
That once thy lips made fragrant: Seer, whose sooth
Joy knows not well, but sorrow knows for truth,
Being priestess of thy soothsayings: Love, what grace
Shall these twain find at last before thy face?
This many a year they have served thee, and deserved,
If ever man might yet of all that served,
Since the first heartbeat bade the first man's knee
Bend, and his mouth take music, praising thee,
Some comfort; and some honey indeed of thine
Thou hast mixed for these with life's most bitter wine,
Commending to their passionate lips a draught
No deadlier than thy chosen of old have quaffed
And blessed thine hand, their cupbearer's: for not
On all men comes the grace that seals their lot
As holier in thy sight, for all these feuds
That rend it, than the light-souled multitude's,
Nor thwarted of thine hand nor blessed; but these
Shall see no twilight, Love, nor fade at ease,
Grey-grown and careless of desired delight,
But lie down tired and sleep before the night.
These shall not live till time or change may chill
Or doubt divide or shame subdue their will,
Or fear or slow repentance work them wrong,
Or love die first: these shall not live so long.
Death shall not take them drained of dear true life

Already, sick or stagnant from the strife,
Quenched: not with dry-drawn veins and lingering breath
Shall these through crumbling hours crouch down to death.
Swift, with one strong clean leap, ere life's pulse tire,
Most like the leap of lions or of fire,
Sheer death shall bound upon them: one pang past,
The first keen sense of him shall be their last,
Their last shall be no sense of any fear,
More than their life had sense of anguish here.

[...]

And ere her ear might hear her heart had heard,
Nor sought she sign for witness of the word;
But came and stood above him newly dead,
And felt his death upon her: and her head
Bowed, as to reach the spring that slakes all drouth;
And their four lips became one silent mouth.
So came their hour on them that were in life
Tristram and Iseult: so from love and strife
The stroke of love's own hand felt last and best
Gave them deliverance to perpetual rest.
So, crownless of the wreaths that life had wound,
They slept, with flower of tenderer comfort crowned;
From bondage and the fear of time set free,
And all the yoke of space on earth and sea
Cast as a curb for ever: nor might now

Fear and desire bid soar their souls or bow,
Lift up their hearts or break them: doubt nor grief
More now might move them, dread nor disbelief
Touch them with shadowy cold or fiery sting,
Nor sleepless languor with its weary wing,
Nor harsh estrangement, born of time's vain breath,
Nor change, a darkness deeper far than death.
And round the sleep that fell around them then
Earth lies not wrapped, nor records wrought of men
Rise up for timeless token: but their sleep
Hath round it like a raiment all the deep;
No change or gleam or gloom of sun and rain,
But all time long the might of all the main
Spread round them as round earth soft heaven is spread,
And peace more strong than death round all the dead.
For death is of an hour, and after death
Peace: nor for aught that fear or fancy saith,
Nor even for very love's own sake, shall strife
Perplex again that perfect peace with life.
And if, as men that mourn may deem or dream,
Rest haply here than there might sweeter seem,
And sleep, that lays one hand on all, more good
By some sweet grave's grace given of wold or wood
Or clear high glen or sunbright wind-worn down
Than where life thunders through the trampling town
With daylong feet and nightlong overhead,
What grave may cast such grace round any dead,

What so sublime sweet sepulchre may be
For all that life leaves mortal, as the sea?
And these, rapt forth perforce from earthly ground,
These twain the deep sea guards, and girdles round
Their sleep more deep than any sea's gulf lies,
Though changeless with the change in shifting skies,
Nor mutable with seasons: for the grave
That held them once, being weaker than a wave,
The waves long since have buried: though their tomb
Was royal that by ruth's relenting doom
Men gave them in Tintagel: for the word
Took wing which thrilled all piteous hearts that heard
The word wherethrough their lifelong lot stood shown,
And when the long sealed springs of fate were known,
The blind bright innocence of lips that quaffed
Love, and the marvel of the mastering draught,
And all the fraughtage of the fateful bark,
Loud like a child upon them wept King Mark,
Seeing round the sword's hilt which long since had fought
For Cornwall's love a scroll of writing wrought,
A scripture writ of Tristram's hand, wherein
Lay bare the sinless source of all their sin,
No choice of will, but chance and sorcerous art,
With prayer of him for pardon: and his heart
Was molten in him, wailing as he kissed
Each with the kiss of kinship—"Had I wist,
Ye had never sinned nor died thus, nor had I

Borne in this doom that bade you sin and die
So sore a part of sorrow." And the king
Built for their tomb a chapel bright like spring
With flower-soft wealth of branching tracery made
Fair as the frondage each fleet year sees fade,
That should not fall till many a year were done.
There slept they wedded under moon and sun
And change of stars: and through the casements came
Midnight and noon girt round with shadow and flame
To illumine their grave or veil it: till at last
On these things too was doom as darkness cast:
For the strong sea hath swallowed wall and tower,
And where their limbs were laid in woful hour
For many a fathom gleams and moves and moans
The tide that sweeps above their coffined bones
In the wrecked chancel by the shivered shrine:
Nor where they sleep shall moon or sunlight shine
Nor man look down for ever: none shall say,
Here once, or here, Tristram and Iseult lay:
But peace they have that none may gain who live,
And rest about them that no love can give,
And over them, while death and life shall be,
The light and sound and darkness of the sea.

from *A CHANNEL PASSAGE AND OTHER POEMS*

THE LAKE OF GAUBE

The sun is lord and god, sublime, serene,
And sovereign on the mountains: earth and air
Lie prone in passion, blind with bliss unseen
By force of sight and might of rapture, fair
As dreams that die and know not what they were.
The lawns, the gorges, and the peaks, are one
Glad glory, thrilled with sense of unison
In strong compulsive silence of the sun.

Flowers dense and keen as midnight stars aflame
And living things of light like flames in flower
That glance and flash as though no hand might tame
Lightnings whose life outshone their stormlit hour
And played and laughed on earth, with all their power
Gone, and with all their joy of life made long
And harmless as the lightning life of song,
Shine sweet like stars when darkness feels them strong.

The deep mild purple flaked with moonbright gold
That makes the scales seem flowers of hardened light,
The flamelike tongue, the feet that noon leaves cold,
The kindly trust in man, when once the sight
Grew less than strange, and faith bade fear take flight,

Outlive the little harmless life that shone
And gladdened eyes that loved it, and was gone
Ere love might fear that fear had looked thereon.

Fear held the bright thing hateful, even as fear,
Whose name is one with hate and horror, saith
That heaven, the dark deep heaven of water near,
Is deadly deep as hell and dark as death.

The rapturous plunge that quickens blood and breath
With pause more sweet than passion, ere they strive
To raise again the limbs that yet would dive
Deeper, should there have slain the soul alive.

As the bright salamander in fire of the noonshine exults and is glad of his day,
The spirit that quickens my body rejoices to pass from the sunlight away,
To pass from the glow of the mountainous flowerage, the high multitudinous bloom,
Far down through the fathomless night of the water, the gladness of silence and gloom.
Death-dark and delicious as death in the dream of a lover and dreamer may be,
It clasps and encompasses body and soul with delight to be living and free:
Free utterly now, though the freedom endure but the space of a perilous breath,
And living, though girdled about with the darkness and coldness and strangeness of
death:

Each limb and each pulse of the body rejoicing, each nerve of the spirit at rest,
All sense of the soul's life rapture, a passionate peace in its blindness blest.
So plunges the downward swimmer, embraced of the water unfathomed of man,
The darkness unplummeted, icier than seas in midwinter, for blessing or ban;
And swiftly and sweetly, when strength and breath fall short, and the dive is done,

Shoots up as a shaft from the dark depth shot, sped straight into sight of the sun;
And sheer through the snow-soft water, more dark than the roof of the pines above,
Strikes forth, and is glad as a bird whose flight is impelled and sustained of love.
As a sea-mew's love of the sea-wind breasted and ridden for rapture's sake
Is the love of his body and soul for the darkling delight of the soundless lake:
As the silent speed of a dream too living to live for a thought's space more
Is the flight of his limbs through the still strong chill of the darkness from shore to shore.
Might life be as this is and death be as life that casts off time as a robe,
The likeness of infinite heaven were a symbol revealed of the lake of Gaube.

Whose thought has fathomed and measured

The darkness of life and of death,

The secret within them treasured,

The spirit that is not breath?

Whose vision has yet beholden

The splendour of death and of life?

Though sunset as dawn be golden,

Is the word of them peace, not strife?

Deep silence answers: the glory

We dream of may be but a dream,

And the sun of the soul wax hoary

As ashes that show not a gleam.

But well shall it be with us ever

Who drive through the darkness here,

If the soul that we live by never,

For aught that a lie saith, fear.

Posthumously published

The High Victorian Tone

Thus runs our wise man's song:
Being dark, it must be light:
And most things are so wrong
That all things must be right;
God must mean well, he works so ill by this world's laws.

This, when our souls are drowning,
Falls on them like a benison;
This satisfies our Browning
And this delights our Tennyson:
And soothed Britannia simpers in serene applause.

Poeta Loquitur

If a person conceives an opinion
That my verses are stuff that will wash,
Or my Muse has one plume on her pinion,
That person's opinion is bosh.
My philosophy, politics, free-thought!
Are worth not three skips of a flea,
And the emptiest thoughts that can be thought
Are mine on the sea.

In a maze of monotonous murmur
Where reason roves ruined by rhyme,
In a voice neither graver nor firmer
Than the bells on a fool's cap chime,
A party pretentiously pensive,
With a Muse that deserves to be skinned,
Makes language and metre offensive
With rhymes on the wind.

A perennial procession of phrases
Pranked primly, though pruriently prime,
Precipitates preachings on praises
In a ruffianly riot of rhyme
Through the pressure of print on my pages:
But reckless the reader must be
Who imagines me one of the sages
That steer through Time's sea.

Mad mixtures of Frenchified offal
With insults to Christendom's creed,
Blind blasphemy, schoolboylike scoff, all
These blazon me blockhead indeed.
I conceive myself obviously some one
Whose audience will never be thinned,
But the pupil must needs be a rum one
Whose teacher is wind.

In my poems, with ravishing rapture
Storm strikes me and strokes me and stings:
But I'm scarcely the bird you might capture
Out of doors in the thick of such things.
I prefer to be well out of harm's way
When tempest makes tremble the tree,
And the wind with omnipotent arm-sway
Makes soap of the sea.

Hanging hard on the rent rags of others,
Who before me did better, I try
To believe them my sisters and brothers,
Though I know what a low lot am I.
The mere sight of a church sets me yelping
Like a boy that at football is shinned!
But the cause must indeed be past helping
Whose gospel is wind.

All the pale past's red record of history
Is dusty with damnable deeds;
But the future's mild motherly mystery
Peers pure of all crowns and all creeds.
Truth dawns on time's resonant ruin,
Frank, fulminant, fragrant, and free:
And apparently this is the doing
Of wind on the sea.

Fame flutters in front of pretension
Whose flagstaff is flagrantly fine:
And it cannot be needful to mention
That such beyond question is mine.
Some singers indulging in curses,
Though sinful, have splendidly sinned:
But my would-be maleficent verses
Are nothing but wind.