

POEMS

C.S. LEWIS

EDITED BY WALTER HOOPER


A HARVEST HBJ BOOK

amy,

Merry Christmas!

Love,

Kerry



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POEMS

BY C. S. LEWIS

THE PILGRIM'S REGRESS
THE PROBLEM OF PAIN
THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS
AND SCREWTAPE PROPOSES A TOAST
BROADCAST TALKS
THE ABOLITION OF MAN
CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOUR
BEYOND PERSONALITY
THE GREAT DIVORCE
GEORGE MACDONALD: AN ANTHOLOGY
MIRACLES
TRANSPOSITION AND OTHER ADDRESSES
MERE CHRISTIANITY
SURPRISED BY JOY
REFLECTIONS ON THE PSALMS
THE WORLD'S LAST NIGHT AND OTHER ESSAYS
THE FOUR LOVES
LETTERS TO MALCOLM: CHIEFLY ON PRAYER
POEMS
OF OTHER WORLDS
LETTERS OF C. S. LEWIS
NARRATIVE POEMS

For Children

THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE
PRINCE CASPIAN
THE VOYAGE OF THE DAWN TREADER
THE SILVER CHAIR
THE HORSE AND HIS BOY
THE MAGICIAN'S NEPHEW
THE LAST BATTLE

Fiction

OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET
PERELANDRA
THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH
TILL WE HAVE FACES
THE DARK TOWER AND OTHER STORIES

C. S. LEWIS

POEMS

EDITED BY WALTER HOOPER

HBJ

A Harvest/HBJ Book
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers
San Diego New York London

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Orlando, Florida 32887.

The poems from *Pilgrim's Regress* as listed in the Appendix are reprinted by permission of Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Lewis, Clive Staples, 1898-1963.

Poems.

(A Harvest/HBJ book)

[PR6023.E926A17 1977] 821'.9'12 77-4733

ISBN 0-15-672248-8

Printed in the United States of America

G H I J

Preface

C. S. Lewis published his first poem, '*Quam Bene Saturno*', in the *Cherbourg School Magazine* of 1913. The young classical student writes 'after Tibullus' as many others have done. He begins:

Alas! what happy days were those
When Saturn ruled a peaceful race . . .

and ends:

But now . . . With Jove our haughty lord
No peace we know but many a wound:
And famine, slaughter, fire and sword
With grim array our path surround.

He was then fourteen. He never tired of the Classical Poets; throughout his life we find him happy to use Pagan deities as spiritual symbols. Occasionally he attempts the metres of the Latin lyrics in English: Sapphics (p. 2), Asclepiads (p. 33), Alcaics (p. 41), Hendecasyllabics (p. 78), not to mention the 'Scazons' of p. 118 which are not in strict classical metre, but loosely imitate the general effect.

Lewis' ambition to become a great poet really began with the publication in 1919 (when he was twenty) of *Spirits in Bondage: A Cycle of Lyrics* under the transparent pseudonym of Clive Hamilton (his own first name and his mother's maiden name). The poems abound in what he called 'thoughtful wishing' (not wishful thinking) and his purpose is clear in the opening lyric:

In my coracle of verses I will sing of lands unknown,
Flying from the scarlet city where a Lord that knows no pity
Mocks the broken people praying round his iron throne,
—Sing about the Hidden Country fresh and full of quiet green,
Sailing over seas uncharted to a port that none has seen.

Seven years later, as a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, Clive Hamilton published *Dymer* (1926), a long narrative poem in nine cantos of rhyme royal. In the Preface to the second edition (1950) Lewis recalls much of the psychological motivation behind *Dymer*. He was an idealist

and an atheist when he wrote the poem. There were other experiments in writing long poems but none were ever published. *Till We Have Faces* was, in its infancy, a poem; it grew into a novel.

Lewis, however, continued to write short lyrics all his life. Many are included in his first prose work, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933). Others were published during the thirties in the *Oxford Magazine* under a new pseudonym—Nat Whilk (Anglo-Saxon for 'I know not whom'). But his voice had changed: Lewis became a Christian in 1929. And 'the new voice', says Owen Barfield, 'with its unmistakable note of magisterial humility, when it spoke in 1933 in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, was already the voice of the author of *Screwtape*, of the *Personal Heresy*, of the *Broadcast Talks*, of the Founding President of the Socratic Club'. As for his other poems, though many were published they are not easy to come by. Twenty-four appeared (between 1946 and 1954) in the pages of *Punch* over the initials 'N.W.' There were also occasional contributions to the *Spectator*, *Time and Tide* and other magazines. Their history is recorded in the appendix to this volume.

A sampling of all Lewis' works will reveal the same man in his poetry as in his clear and sparkling prose. His wonderful imagination is the guiding thread. It is continuously at work—in his first school poem, through *Screwtape*, literary criticism, planetary romances, and fairytales. It is basic to the man. And this is why, I think, his admirers find it so pleasant to be instructed by him in subjects they have hitherto cared so little for. Everything he touched had his kind of magic about it. His poetry, like his prose, is teeming with ideas and the good fruits of humour, wit, common sense, and scholarship.

The reader will be struck by the range of these poems: there is room for God and the Pagan deities, unicorns and space-ships. Lewis did not, of course, believe in the factual existence of Dryads (any more than Spenser or Milton); nor did he believe in their non-existence as a nihilist would. The whole rich and genial universe of mythological beings—giants, dragons, paradises, gods—were to him abbreviated symbols of qualities present in the world, or as Lewis in one place calls them, 'words of a language which speaks the else unspeakable'. When Subjectivists throw the gods out with the bath-water they empty out truths we cannot recover. 'Nature', he says, 'has that in her which compels us to invent

giants: and only giants will do'. We find, as well, a defence for talking-beasts in 'Impenitence' where Lewis calls them:

Masks for Man, cartoons, parodies by Nature
Formed to reveal us.

Now let me say something about the compiling of this book. Lewis began collecting his poems over ten years ago for a volume to be called *Young King Cole and other Pieces*. Some poems, including two from *The Pilgrim's Regress*, had been typed; others, added later, were in his handwriting. They were in no particular order. It was not always easy to determine his final version of a poem, especially if there were slightly different versions or if the poem had already appeared in print. Nor is it clear that the selection he had made represented a considered judgement on his part; for, as I discovered in conversation with him, he simply did not know what he had written. Anyone who had lived in his house could have understood this. Although Lewis owned a huge library, he possessed few of his own works. His phenomenal memory recorded almost everything he had read *except* his own writings—an appealing fault. Often, when I quoted lines from his own poems he would ask who the author was. He was a very great scholar, but no expert in the field of C. S. Lewis.

I have, therefore, felt justified in collecting everything I could find among his literary remains and in following my judgement as to what should be printed. I found some poems scribbled on scraps of paper or in the flyleaves of books. Others came from notebooks and are at least as old as the poems in *The Pilgrim's Regress*. As most of these had never been given titles, I usually drew titles from among the lines. Even the headings for the five Parts are taken from Lewis' own works. The present collection excludes, however, his own youthful publications of poetry *Spirits in Bondage* and *Dymer*, but includes the poems scattered through his first prose work, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, as well as subsequent pieces published in periodicals. I have chosen to arrange the poems more or less topically rather than attempt a chronological ordering. This is because I often had little else to go by except Lewis' handwriting and, too, I know from experience that he was continually revising them.

While I was his secretary he sometimes used to dictate poems. Even after he thought one was completed he might suggest a change here.

Then a change there. Because of this, I warn readers from attempting to date his poems on internal evidence. For instance, the poem which in this volume is entitled 'To A Friend' was originally written 'To C. W.' and later published (1942) as 'To G. M.' It is best to fight shy of what Lewis himself called the 'Personal Heresy': reading a man's works as autobiography.

The fact that he did not publish these poems during his lifetime suggests that Lewis was hesitant about their publication. He knew his poems were very unlike most contemporary verse. Because of this, he could not be certain of the reaction of his readers. The answer is not far to seek. In the poem, 'A Confession', Lewis says with ironical disappointment:

I am so coarse, the things the poets see
Are obstinately invisible to me.
For twenty years I've stared my level best
To see if evening—any evening—would suggest
A patient etherized upon a table;
In vain. I simply wasn't able.

Lewis found Mr Eliot's comparison of an evening to a patient on an operating table unpleasant, one example of the decay of proper feelings. He mistrusted, in fact, the free play of mere immediate experience. He believed, rather, that man's attitudes and actions should be governed by, what he calls in the same poem, Stock Responses (e.g. love is sweet, death bitter, and virtue lovely). Man must, for his own safety and pleasure, be taught to copy the Stock Responses in hopes that he may, by willed imitation, *make* the proper responses. He found this perfectly summed up in Aristotle's 'We learn how to do things by doing the things we are learning to do'. This concern is expressed, directly or indirectly, in almost all of Lewis' books, but most clearly in his defence of Milton's style (*A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'*, Ch. VIII). His belief that poetry did not need to be eccentric to enrich a response and of 'being normal without being vulgar', one of the characteristics which distinguish him from many contemporary poets, made him think he might be classed as an Angry Old Man. If so, he concluded that he was much less angry with

things in general than are the Young Men, and having perhaps the better claim to Age than some do to Youth.

It is possible that some who have read those poems which have appeared in periodicals will be confused by his revisions and new titles. Because of this, I have appended to this volume a list of the published poems, indicating (1) whether they have been revised; (2) their original titles, if different; and (3) their original sources. This apparatus is not meant to suggest that Lewis had high pretensions about his poetry. It most certainly means, on the other hand, that for me this has been one of those rare jobs in which labour is more pleasure than anything else.

I want to thank the editors of *The Cambridge Review*, *The Chervell*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *The Month*, *The Oxford Magazine*, *Punch*, *The Spectator*, *Time and Tide* and *The Times Literary Supplement* for permission to reprint some of the poems in this book; they are acknowledged individually in the appendix. I am indebted to Mr Charles Böhmer whose initiative and generosity made this venture possible, to Mr George Sayer for lending me poems given him by Lewis, to Mr Owen Barfield for his useful criticism, and to Dr and Mrs Austin Farrer for their encouragement and wise counsel. Finally, I am deeply grateful to Major W. H. Lewis for allowing me the honour of editing his brother's poems.

WALTER HOOPER

Oxford
1964

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A CONFESSION

Part I

THE HIDDEN COUNTRY

A CONFESSION

I am so coarse, the things the poets see
Are obstinately invisible to me.
For twenty years I've stared my level best
To see if evening—any evening—would suggest
A patient etherized upon a table;
In vain. I simply wasn't able.
To me each evening looked far more
Like the departure from a silent, yet a crowded, shore
Of a ship whose freight was everything, leaving behind
Gracefully, finally, without farewells, marooned mankind.

Red dawn behind a hedgerow in the east
Never, for me, resembled in the least
A chilblain on a cocktail-shaker's nose;
Waterfalls don't remind me of torn underclothes,
Nor glaciers of tin-cans. I've never known
The moon look like a hump-backed crone—
Rather, a prodigy, even now
Not naturalized, a riddle glaring from the Cyclops' brow
Of the cold world, reminding me on what a place
I crawl and cling, a planet with no bulwarks, out in space.

Never the white sun of the wintriest day
Struck me as *un crachat d'estaminet*.
I'm like that odd man Wordsworth knew, to whom
A primrose was a yellow primrose, one whose doom
Keeps him forever in the list of dunces,
Compelled to live on stock responses,
Making the poor best that I can
Of dull things . . . peacocks, honey, the Great Wall, Aldebaran,
Silver weirs, new-cut grass, wave on the beach, hard gem,
The shapes of horse and woman, Athens, Troy, Jerusalem.

IMPENITENCE

All the world's wiseacres in arms against them
Shan't detach my heart for a single moment
From the man-like beasts of the earthy stories—
Badger or Moly.

Rat the oarsman, neat Mrs Tiggy Winkle,
Benjamin, pert Nutkin, or (ages older)
Henryson's shrill Mouse, or the Mice the Frogs once
Fought with in Homer.

Not that I'm so craz'd as to think the creatures
Do behave that way, nor at all deluded
By some half-false sweetness of early childhood
Sharply remembered.

Look again. Look well at the beasts, the true ones.
Can't you see? . . . cool primness of cats, or coney's
Half indignant stare of amazement, mouse's
Twinkling adroitness,

'Tipsy bear's rotundity, toad's complacency . . .
Why! they all cry out to be used as symbols,
Masks for Man, cartoons, parodies by Nature
Formed to reveal us

Each to each, not fiercely but in her gentlest
Vein of household laughter. And if the love so
Raised—it will, no doubt—splashes over on the
Actual archtypes,

Who's the worse for that? Marry, gup! Begone, you
Fusty kill-joys, new Manichaeans! Here's a
Health to Toad Hall, here's to the Beaver doing
Sums with the Butcher!

A CLICHÉ CAME OUT OF ITS CAGE

I

You said 'The world is going back to Paganism'. Oh bright
Vision! I saw our dynasty in the bar of the House
Spill from their tumblers a libation to the Erinyes,
And Leavis with Lord Russell wreathed in flowers, heralded with
flutes,
Leading white bulls to the cathedral of the solemn Muses
To pay where due the glory of their latest theorem.
Hestia's fire in every flat, rekindled, burned before
The Lardergods. Unmarried daughters with obedient hands
Tended it. By the hearth the white-arm'd venerable mother
Domum servabat, lanam faciebat. Duly at the hour
Of sacrifice their brothers came, silent, corrected, grave
Before their elders; on their downy cheeks easily the blush
Arose (it is the mark of freemen's children) as they trooped,
Gleaming with oil, demurely home from the palaestra or the dance.
Walk carefully, do not wake the envy of the happy gods,
Shun Hubris. The middle of the road, the middle sort of men,
Are best. Aidos surpasses gold. Reverence for the aged
Is wholesome as seasonable rain, and for a man to die
Defending the city in battle is a harmonious thing.
Thus with magistral hand the Puritan Sophrosune
Cooled and schooled and tempered our uneasy motions;
Heathendom came again, the circumspection and the holy fears . . .
You said it. Did you mean it? Oh inordinate liar, stop.

Or did you mean another kind of heathenry?
 Think, then, that under heaven-roof the little disc of the earth,
 Fortified Midgard, lies encircled by the ravening Worm.
 Over its icy bastions faces of giant and troll
 Look in, ready to invade it. The Wolf, admittedly, is bound;
 But the bond will break, the Beast run free. The weary gods,
 Scarred with old wounds, the one-eyed Odin, Tyr who has lost a
 hand,
 Will limp to their stations for the last defence. Make it your hope
 To be counted worthy on that day to stand beside them;
 For the end of man is to partake of their defeat and die
 His second, final death in good company. The stupid, strong
 Unteachable monsters are certain to be victorious at last,
 And every man of decent blood is on the losing side.
 Take as your model the tall women with yellow hair in plaits
 Who walked back into burning houses to die with men,
 Or him who as the death spear entered into his vitals
 Made critical comments on its workmanship and aim.
 Are these the Pagans you spoke of? Know your betters and crouch,
 dogs;
 You that have Vichy-water in your veins and worship the event,
 Your goddess History (whom your fathers called the strumpet
 Fortune).

PAN'S PURGE

I dreamt that all the planning of peremptory humanity
Had crushed Nature finally beneath the foot of Man;
Birth-control and merriment, Earth completely sterilized,
Bungalow and fun-fair, had fulfilled our Plan;
But the lion and the unicorn were sighing at the funeral,
Crying at the funeral,
Sobbing at the funeral of the god Pan.

And the elephant was crying. The pelican in his piety
Struck his feathered bosom till the blood ran,
And howling at humanity the owl and iguanodon,
The bittern and the buffalo, their dirge began,
But dangerously, suddenly, a strange ecstatic shuddering,
A change that set me shuddering
Through all the wailful noises of the beasts ran.

No longer were they sorrowful, but stronger and more horrible,
It had only been a rumour of the death of Pan.
The scorpions and the mantichores and corpulent tarantulas
Were closing in around me, hissing *Long live Pan!*
And forth with rage unlimited the Northwind drew his scimitar,
In wrath with ringing scimitar
He came, with sleet and shipwreck, for the doom of Man.

And now, descending, ravening, loud and large, the avalanche,
And after it the earthquake, was loosed upon Man.
Towering and cloven-hoofed, the power of Pan came over us,
Stamped, bit, tore, broke. It was the end of Man;
Except where saints and savages were kept from his ravaging,
And crept out when the ravaging
Was ended, on an empty earth. The new world began.

A small race—a smiling heaven—all round the silences
Returned; there was comfort for corrected Man.
Flowered turf had swallowed up the towered cities; following
His flocks and herds where nameless, untainted rivers ran,
Leisurely he pondered, at his pleasure wandering,
Measurelessly wandering . . .
Clear, on the huge pastures, the young voice of Man.

NARNIAN SUITE

I

March for Strings, Kettledrums, and Sixty-three Dwarfs

With plucking pizzicato and the prattle of the kettledrum
We're trotting into battle mid a clatter of accoutrement;
Our beards are big as periwigs and trickle with opopanax,
And trinketry and treasure twinkle out on every part of us—
(Scrape! Tap! The fiddle and the kettledrum).

The chuckle-headed humans think we're only petty poppetry
And all our battle-tackle nothing more than pretty bric-a-brac;
But a little shrub has prickles, and they'll soon be in a pickle if
A scud of dwarfish archery has crippled all their cavalry—
(Whizz! Twang! The quarrel and the javelin).

And when the tussle thickens we can writhe and wriggle under it;
Then dagger-point'll tickle 'em, and grab and grip'll grapple 'em,
And trap and trick'll trouble 'em and tackle 'em and topple 'em
Till they're huddled, all be-diddled, in the middle of our caperings—
(Dodge! Jump! The wriggle and the summersault).

When we've scattered 'em and peppered 'em with pebbles from our
catapults
We'll turn again in triumph and by crannies and by crevices
Go back to where the capitol and cradle of our people is,
Our forges and our furnaces, the caverns of the earth—
(Gold! Fire! The anvil and the smithying).

2

March for Drum, Trumpet, and Twenty-one Giants

With stumping stride in pomp and pride
We come to thump and floor ye;
We'll bump your lumpish heads to-day
And tramp your ramparts into clay,
And as we stamp and romp and play
Our trump'll blow before us—
(*crescendo*) Oh tramp it, tramp it, tramp it, trumpet, trumpet blow
before us!

We'll grind and break and bind and take
And plunder ye and pound ye!
With trundled rocks and bludgeon blow,
You dunderheads, we'll dint ye so
You'll blunder and run blind, as though
By thunder stunned, around us—
By thunder, thunder, thunder, thunder stunned around us!

Ho! tremble town and tumble down
And crumble shield and sabre!
Your kings will mumble and look pale,
Your horses stumble or turn tail,
Your skimble-scamble counsels fail,
So rumble drum belaboured—
(*Diminuendo*) Oh rumble, rumble, rumble, rumble, rumble drum
belaboured!

THE MAGICIAN AND THE DRYAD

MAGICIAN

Out of your dim felicity of leaves, oh Nymph appear,
Answer me in soft-showery voice, attempt the unrooted dance
—My art shall sponsor the enormity. Now concentrate,
Arouse, where in your vegetative heart it drowns deep
In seminal sleep, your feminine response. *Conjuro te*
Per Hecates essentiam et noctis silentia,
Breaking by Trivia's name your prison of bark. Beautiful, awake.

DRYAD

Risen from the deep lake of my liberty, into your prison
She has come, cruel commander.

MAGICIAN

I have given speech to the dumb.
Will you not thank me, silver lady?

DRYAD

Oh till now she drank
With thirst of myriad mouths the bursting cataracts of the sun,
The drizzle of gentler stars, an indivisible small rain.
Wading the dark earth, made of earth and light, cradled in air,
All that she was, she was all over. Now the mask you call
A Face has blotted out the ambient hemisphere's embrace;
Her light is screwed into twin nodules of tormenting sight;
Searing divisions tear her into five. She cannot hear
But only see, the moon; earth has no taste; she cannot breathe
At every branch vibrations of the sky. For a dome of severance,
A helmet, a dark, rigid box of bone, has overwhelmed
Her hair . . . that was her lungs . . . that was her nerves . . . that
kissed the air.
Crushed in a brain, her thought that circled coolly in every vein

Turns into poison, thickens like a man's, ferments and burns.
She was at peace when she was in her unity. Oh now release
And let her out into the seamless world, make her forget.

MAGICIAN

Be free. Relapse. And so she vanishes. And now the tree
Grows barer every moment. The leaves fall. A killing air,
Sighing from the country of Man, has withered it. The tree will die.

THE TRUE NATURE OF GNOMES

Paracelsus somewhere in his writings tells us
A gnome moves through earth like an arrow in the air,
At home like a fish within the seamless, foamless
Liberty of the water that yields to it everywhere.

Beguiled with pictures, I fancied in my childhood
Subterranean rivers beside glimmering wharfs,
Hammers upon anvils, pattering and yammering,
Torches and tunnels, the cities of the dwarfs;

But in perfect blackness underneath the surface,
In a silence unbroken till the planet cracks,
Their sinewy bodies through the dense continuum
Move without resistance and leave no tracks.

Gravel, marl, blue clay—all's one to travel in;
Only one obstacle can impede a gnome—
A cave or a mine-shaft. Not their very bravest
Would venture across it for a short cut home.

There is the unbridgeable. To a gnome the air is
Utter vacuity. If he thrust out his face

Into a cavern, his face would break in splinters,
Bursting as a man would burst in interstellar space.

With toiling lungs a gnome can breathe the soil in,
Rocks are like a headwind, stiff against his chest,
Chief 'midst his pleasures is the quiet leaf mould,
Like air in meadowy valleys when the wind's at rest.

Like silvan freshness are the lodes of silver,
Cold, clammy, fog-like, are the leaden veins
Those of gold are prodigally sweet like roses,
Gems stab coolly like the small spring rains.

THE BIRTH OF LANGUAGE

How near his sire's careering fires
Must Mercury the planet run;
What wave of heat must lave and beat
That shining suburb of the Sun

Whose burning flings supernal things
Like spindrift from his stormy crown;
He throws and shakes in rosy flakes
Intelligible virtues down,

And landing there, the candent air
A transformation on them brings,
Makes each a god of speech with rod
Enwreathed and sandals fledged with wings.

Due west (the Sun's behest so runs)
They seek the wood where flames are trees;
In crimson shade their limbs are laid
Besides the pure quicksilver seas,

Where thick with notes of liquid throats
The forest melody leaps and runs
Till night lets robe the lightless globe
With darkness and with distant suns.

Awake they spring and shake the wing;
And on the trees whose trunks are flames
They find like fruit (with rind and root
And fronds of fire) their proper names.

They taste. They burn with haste. They churn
With upright plumes the sky's abyss;
Far, far below, the arbours glow
Where once they felt Mercurial bliss.

They ache and freeze through vacant seas
Of night. Their nimbleness and youth
Turns lean and frore; their meaning more,
Their being less. Fact shrinks to truth.

They reach this Earth. There each has birth
Miraculous, a word made breath,
Lucid and small for use in all
Man's daily needs; but dry like death.

So dim below these symbols show,
Bony and abstract every one.
Yet if true verse but lift the curse,
They feel in dreams their native Sun.

THE PLANETS

Lady LUNA, in light canoe,
By friths and shallows of fretted cloudland
Cruises monthly; with chrism of dews
And drench of dream, a drizzling glamour,
Enchants us—the cheat! changing sometime
A mind to madness, melancholy pale,
Bleached with gazing on her blank count'nance
Orb'd and ageless. In earth's bosom
The shower of her rays, sharp-feathered light
Reaching downward, ripens silver,
Forming and fashioning female brightness,
—Metal maidenlike. Her moist circle
Is nearest earth. Next beyond her
MERCURY marches;—madcap rover,
Patron of pilf'ers. Pert quicksilver
His gaze begets, goblin mineral,
Merry multitude of meeting selves,
Same but sundered. From the soul's darkness,
With wreathèd wand, words he marshals,
Guides and gathers them—gay bellwether
Of flocking fancies. His flint has struck
The spark of speech from spirit's tinder,
Lord of language! He leads forever
The spangle and splendour, sport that mingles
Sound with senses, in subtle pattern,
Words in wedlock, and wedding also
Of thing with thought. In the third region
VENUS voyages . . . but my voice falters;
Rude rime-making wrongs her beauty,
Whose breasts and brow, and her breath's sweetness
Bewitch the worlds. Wide-spread the reign
Of her secret sceptre, in the sea's caverns,

In grass growing, and grain bursting,
Flower unfolding, and flesh longing,
And shower falling sharp in April.
The metal copper in the mine reddens
With muffled brightness, like muted gold,
By her fingers form'd. Far beyond her
The heaven's highway hums and trembles,
Drums and dindles, to the driv'n thunder
Of SoL's chariot, whose sword of light
Hurts and humbles; beheld only
Of eagle's eye. When his arrow glances
Through mortal mind, mists are parted
And mild as morning the mellow wisdom
Breathes o'er the breast, broadening eastward
Clear and cloudless. In a clos'd garden
(Unbound her burden) his beams foster
Soul in secret, where the soil puts forth
Paradisal palm, and pure fountains
Turn and re-temper, touching coolly
The uncomely common to cordial gold;
Whose ore also, in earth's matrix,
Is print and pressure of his proud signet
On the wax of the world. He is the worshipp'd male,
The earth's husband, all-beholding,
Arch-chemic eye. But other country
Dark with discord dins beyond him,
With noise of nakers, neighing of horses,
Hammering of harness. A haughty god
MARs mercenary, makes there his camp
And flies his flag; flaunts laughingly
The graceless beauty, grey-eyed and keen,
—Blond insolence—of his blithe visage
Which is hard and happy. He hews the act,
The indifferent deed with dint of his mallet
And his chisel of choice; achievement comes not
Unhelped by him; —hired gladiator

Of evil and good. All's one to Mars,
The wrong righted, rescued meekness,
Or trouble in trenches, with trees splintered
And birds banished, banks fill'd with gold
And the liar made lord. Like handiwork
He offers to all—earns his wages
And whistles the while. White-feathered dread
Mars has mastered. His metal's iron
That was hammered through hands into holy cross,
Cruel carpentry. He is cold and strong,
Necessity's son. Soft breathes the air
Mild, and meadowy, as we mount further
Where rippled radiance rolls about us
Moved with music—measureless the waves'
Joy and jubilee. It is Jove's orbit,
Filled and festal, faster turning
With arc ampler. From the Isles of Tin
Tyrian traders, in trouble steering
Came with his cargoes; the Cornish treasure
That his ray ripens. Of wrath ended
And woes mended, of winter passed
And guilt forgiven, and good fortune
Jove is master; and of jocund revel,
Laughter of ladies. The lion-hearted,
The myriad-minded, men like the gods,
Helps and heroes, helms of nations
Just and gentle, are Jove's children,
Work his wonders. On his wide forehead
Calm and kingly, no care darkens
Nor wrath wrinkles: but righteous power
And leisure and largess their loose splendours
Have wrapped around him—a rich mantle
Of ease and empire. Up far beyond
Goes SATURN silent in the seventh region,
The skirts of the sky. Scant grows the light,
Sickly, uncertain (the Sun's finger

Daunted with darkness). Distance hurts us,
And the vault severe of vast silence;
Where fancy fails us, and fair language,
And love leaves us, and light fails us
And Mars fails us, and the mirth of Jove
Is as tin tinkling. In tattered garment,
Weak with winters, he walks forever
A weary way, wide round the heav'n,
Stoop'd and stumbling, with staff groping,
The lord of lead. He is the last planet
Old and ugly. His eye fathers
Pale pestilence, pain of envy,
Remorse and murder. Melancholy drink
(For bane or blessing) of bitter wisdom
He pours for his people, a perilous draught
That the lip loves not. We leave all things
To reach the rim of the round welkin,
Heaven's hermitage, high and lonely.

PINDAR SANG

Pindar stood with his chorus on the dancing floor. The stern poet
Uttered his dark glory. Light as a flight of tumbling birds
Was the dipping and soaring of his syllables and the wheeling maze.
Demure as virgins, young men of noble houses, trained and severe,
Strongly as if it were a battle and resolutely danced his ode;
Their faces rigid, but their limbs and garments flowed like water.

'Unless a god in secret helps the work, trouble and skill
Are unavailing; the laborious plodder's wages are oblivion,
For a soul's weight is born with her. My wisdom is the birth of
heaven;

In heaven itself the everlasting gods dare not begin
A feast or dance without the favour and assent of the grave Charites.

'For gods and men are of one stock and came of the same womb
Though an utter separation is between them, and we are nothing
While their unshakable, eternal floor is the firmament of bronze.
They look down; they behold the isle of Delos far below,
Set like a star amid the deep-blue world's level expanse.

'But we are tethered to Hope that will promise anything without
blushing,

And the flowing water of foreknowledge is far away beyond our reach.
Therefore neither ashore nor in the hollow ships will any praise
Be given to an act on which the doer does not stake his life.

(At Pindus the glory of the Dorian spear burst into flower.)

And we live for a day. What are we? What are we not? A man
Is a dream about a shadow. Only when a brightness falls from heaven
Can human splendour expand and glow and mortal days grow soft.

'Not even to Kadmos though a peer for Gods, not to the Aiakid
Peleus, was there allowed a perfect, whole, unslippery life;

Though these were fortunate, men say, beyond all human bounds
And heard the gold-drown'd Muses singing on their marriage day.

Over the mountain and to seven-gated Thebes the song

Drew near when deep-dark-eyed Harmonia became Kadmos' bride,

And Peleus took the Nereid Thetis, and had gods for guests.

He also had sorrow afterwards for Achilles' sake, his son,

And Kadmos, weeping for his daughter; even though the Father of the
skies

Had lain in Semele's desired bed and white embrace.

'Take the god's favour when it comes. Now from one quarter, now
From another, the wing'd weathers ride above us. Not for long,
If it grows heavy with goodness, will fortune remain good.

'Once over Lerna a shower of snow turned into flakes of gold;
Once, following the doe of the Pleiades whose horns were charactered
with gold,

Herakles hunted far beyond the Ister till he found

A land that lies at the other side of the North Wind. And he stood

Gazing upon the trees of that country; he was struck with sweet
desire.

But do not therefore imagine that ever you, by land or sea,
Will find the miraculous road into the Hyperborean place.
Of unattainable longings sour is the fruit; griding madness.

'Bless'd is the man who does not enter into the grave, the hollow
earth,

Before he has seen at Eleusis the acts unspeakable which show
The end and new beginning of our life, the divine gift.

Some find the road that leads beyond the tower of Kronos, and the
isles

Where no one labours, no one bruises the flower of his white hand
Wounding with spade or oar the parsimonious earth or bitter sea.
Golden are the flowers they pick for garlands in the righteous wood.

'But the voice of the Pierides is hateful to all the enemies of Zeus,
And the melody that makes drowsy with delight the eagle on his
sceptre

Is torture to those who lie in Tartaros. Hundred-headed Typhon
Struggles in anguish as he hears it, vomiting lava and smoke.'

The heaven-descended nobles of the pure Dorian blood,
Not thinking they understood him, but silent in reverence for the
god

And for the stern poet, heard him and understood it all.

Tears stood in their eyes because of the beauty of the young men who
danced.

HERMIONE IN THE HOUSE OF PAULINA

How soft it rains, how nourishingly soft and green
Has grown the dark humility of this low house
Where sunrise never enters, where I have not seen
The moon by night nor heard the footfall of a mouse,
Nor looked on any face but yours
Nor changed my posture in my place of rest
For fifteen years—oh how this quiet cures
My pain and sucks the burning from my breast.

It sucked out all the poison of my will and drew
All hot rebellion from me, all desire to break
The silence you commanded me. . . . Nothing to do,
Nothing to fear or wish for, not a choice to make,
Only to be; to hear no more
Cock-crowing duty calling me to rise,
But slowly thus to ripen laid in store
In this dim nursery near your watching eyes.

Pardon, great spirit, whose tall shape like a golden tower
Stands over me or seems upon slow wings to move,
Colouring with life my paleness, with returning power,
By sober ministrations of severest love;
Pardon, that when you brought me here,
Still drowned in bitter passion, drugged with life,
I did not know . . . pardon, I thought you were
Paulina, old Antigonus' young wife.

YOUNG KING COLE

By enemies surrounded,
All venomously minded
Against him, to hound him
 To death, there lived a king
Who was great and merry-hearted,
He ate and drank and sported,
When his wounds smarted
 He would dance and sing.

With gossiping and stories,
With possets of Canary,
With goliards and glory,
 He made the time pass;
His merriment heightened
As his territory straitened,
And his grip tightened
 On the stem of his glass.

When his foes assaulted
He rose and exulted
Like a lover as he vaulted
 On his gaunt horse,
Sublime and elated,
But each time he was defeated,
For the lower gods hated him
 Without remorse.

So his realm diminished;
Overwhelmed, it vanished,
He held at the finish
 But a small river-isle;
With his queen, amid the saplings

And the green rippling,
With his Fool and his Chaplain,
Held it for a while;

Till, breathing anger,
The heathen in their hunger
Came with clangour
To the river banks
With their commissars and harlots,
With their bombers and their hurlers
Of flame, with their snarling
And the rattle of their tanks.

Fast came their orders
For the last king's murder;
From the reedy borders
The grey batteries spoke.
The long endeavour
Of those strong four lovers
Relaxed forever
Amid stench and smoke.

From their fresh, unpolluted
Flesh there sprouted
A tree fair-fruited,
And its smell and taste
Were big with Eden;
Every twig was laden
With gold unheeded
In the flowery waste.

Past the gossamer and midges,
Past the blossomy region
Of the bees, past the pigeons'
Green world, towards the blue,
Past the eagles' landings

Many a league ascending,
Above Alps and Andes
Infallibly it grew;

And it cast warm joys on
The vast horizons,
But its shadow was poison
To the evil-eyed.
Yes: they ought to have felled it.
They were caught unshielded.
Paralysed, they beheld it;
They despaired and died.

THE PRODIGALITY OF FIRDAUSI

Firdausi the strong Lion among poets, lean of purse
And lean with age, had finished his august mountain of verse,
The great *Shah Nameh* gleaming-glaciered with demon wars,
Bastioned with Rustem's bitter labours and Isfendiyar's,
Shadowed with Jamshid's grief and glory as with eagles' wings,
Its foot-hills dewy-forested with the amours of kings,
Clashing with rhymes that rush like snow-fed cataracts blue and
cold;

And the king commanded to be given him an elephant's burden of gold.

Firdausi the carved Pillar among poets was not dear
To government. They smiled at the king's word. The Grand Vizier
Twisted his pale face, making parsimonious mouths, and said
'Send the old rhymers thirty thousand silver pounds instead—
The price of ten good vineyards and a fine Circassian girl.'
This pleased them and they called a secretarial shape, a churl,
A pick-thank without understanding and of base descent,
And bade it deliver their bounty, and with mincing paces it went.

It found the Cedar among poets in the baths that day,
At ease, discoursing with his friends. Exalted men were they,
Taking their wine and sugared roseleaves in an airy hall,
Poets or theologians or saints or warriors all
Or lovers or astronomers. Like honey-drops the speech
Distilled in apophthegms or verses from the lips of each,
On roses and predestination and heroic wars
And rhetoric, and the brevity of the life of man, and the stars.

With courtesy the Lily among poets asked its will.
The bearers laid the silver at his feet. The hall was still,
The churl grew pale. Firdausi beckoned to the Nubian slave
Who had dried their feet; to him the first ten thousand coins he
gave.

Ten thousand more immediately he gave the fair-haired boy
Who waved the fan, saying 'My son, may Allah send you joy;
And in your grandson's house in unbelieving Frangistan
Make it your boast that once you spoke with the splendour of Iran.'

Lastly the Heaven of poets to the churl himself returned
The remnant. 'You look pale, my friend,' he said. 'Well have you
earned

This trifle for your courtesy and for the heat of the day.'
Clutching his silver, silently, the creature slunk away,
And dogs growled as he passed and beggars spat. Laughter and
shame

Wait upon all his progeny; on him, Gehenna's flame.
Immediately the discourse in the baths once more began
On the beauty of women and horses and the brevity of the life of man.

LE ROI S'AMUSE

Jove gazed
On woven mazes
Of patterned movement as the atoms whirled.
His glance turned
Into dancing, burning
Colour-gods who rushed upon that sullen world,
Waking, re-making, exalting it anew—
Silver and purple, shrill-voiced yellow, turgid crimson, and virgin blue.

Jove stared
On overbearing
And aching splendour of the naked rocks.
Where his gaze smote,
Hazily floated
To mount like thistledown in countless flocks,
Fruit-loving, root-loving gods, cool and green
Of feathery grasses, heather and orchard, pollen'd lily, the olive and the
bean.

Jove laughed.
Like cloven-shafted
Lightning, his laughter into brightness broke.
From every dint
Where the severed splinters
Had scattered a Sylvan or a Satyr woke;
Ounces came pouncing, dragon-people flew,
There was spirited stallion, squirrel unrespectful, clanging raven and
kangaroo.

Jove sighed.
The hoving tide of
Ocean trembled at the motion of his breath.

The sigh turned
Into white, eternal,
Radiant Aphrodite unafraid of death;
A fragrance, a vagrant unrest on earth she flung,
There was favouring and fondling and bravery and building and chuckling
music and suckling of the young.

Jove thought.
He strove and wrought at
A thousand clarities; from his brows sprang
With earnest mien
Stern Athene;
The cold armour on her shoulders rang.
Our sires at the fires of her lucid eyes began
To speak in symbols, to seek out causes, to name the creatures; they
became Man.

World and Man
Unfurled their banner—
It was gay Behemoth on a sable field.
Fresh-robed
In flesh, the ennobled
Spirits carousing in their myriads reeled;
There was frolic and holiday. Jove laughed to see
The abyss empeopled, his bliss imparted, the throng that was his and no
longer he.

VITREA CIRCE

The name of Circe
Is wrongly branded
(Though Homer's verses
 Portrayed her right)
By heavy-handed
And moral persons
Misunderstanding
 Her danger bright.

She used not beauty
For man's beguiling,
She craved no suitor;
 Sea-chances brought
To her forest-silent
And crimson-fruited
And snake-green island
 Her guests unsought.

She watched those drunken
And tarry sailors
Eat nectar-junket
 And Phoenix-nests;
Each moment paler
With pride, she shrunk at
Their leering, railing,
 Salt-water jests.

They thought to pluck there
Her rosial splendour?
They thought their luck there
 Was near divine?
When the meal ended

She rose and struck them
With wand extended
And made them swine.

With smiles and kisses
No man she tempted;
She scorned love's blisses
And toils, until
There came, undream't of,
The tough Ulysses,
From fate exempted
By Pallas' will.

Then flashed above her
(Poor kneeling Circe,
Her snares discovered)
The hero's blade.
She lay at mercy,
His slave, his lover,
Forgot her curses,
Blushed like a maid.

She'd none to warn her.
He hacked and twisted
Her hedge so thorny;
It let him pass.
Her awful distance,
Her vestal scornings,
Were bright as crystals,
They broke like glass.

THE LANDING

The ship's stride faltered with her change of course, awaking us.
Suddenly I saw the land. Astern, the east was red;
Budding like a flower from the pale and rippled vacancy,
The island rose ahead.

All, then, was true; such lands, in solid verity,
Dapple the last sea that laps against the sky;
Apple-gold, the headlands of the singing Hesperides
On glass-clear water lie.

Once before I'd seen it, but that was from Helicon,
Clear and distinct in the circle of a lens,
Peering on tip-toes, one-eyed, through a telescope
—Goddesses' country, never men's.

Now we were landing. Bright beasts and manifold
Came like old familiars, nosing at our knees;
Nameless their kinds—Adam's naming of the animals
Reached not those outer seas.

Up from the shore then, benumbed with hope, we went upon
Danceable lawns and under gum-sweet wood,
Glancing ever up to where a green hill at the centre of
The hush'd island stood.

We climbed to the top and looked over upon limitless
Waters, untravelled, further west. But the three
Daughters of Hesperus were only painted images
Hand-fast around a tree,

And instead of the Dragon we found a brazen telescope
That burned our eyes there, flashing in the sun.

It was turned to the west. As once before on Helicon,
We looked through it, one by one.

There, once again, I beheld it, small and perilous,
Distant beyond measure, in the circle of the lens
—But this time, surely, the true one, the Hesperides'
Country which is not men's.

Hope died—rose again—quivered, and increased in us
The strenuous longing. We re-embarked to find
That genuine and utter West. Far astern and east of us
The first hope sank behind.

THE DAY WITH A WHITE MARK

All day I have been tossed and whirled in a preposterous happiness:
Was it an elf in the blood? or a bird in the brain? or even part
Of the cloudily crested, fifty-league-long, loud uplifted wave
Of a journeying angel's transit roaring over and through my heart?

My garden's spoiled, my holidays are cancelled, the omens harden;
The plann'd and unplann'd miseries deepen; the knots draw tight.
Reason kept telling me all day my mood was out of season.
It was, too. In the dark ahead the breakers only are white.

Yet I—I could have kissed the very scullery taps. The colour of
My day was like a peacock's chest. In at each sense there stole
Ripplings and dewy sprinkles of delight that with them drew
Fine threads of memory through the vibrant thickness of the soul.

As though there were transparent earths and luminous trees should
grow there,
And shining roots worked visibly far down below one's feet,

So everything, the tick of the clock, the cock crowing in the yard
Probing my soil, woke diverse buried hearts of mine to beat,

Recalling either adolescent heights and the inaccessible
Longings and ice-sharp joys that shook my body and turned me pale,
Or humbler pleasures, chuckling as it were in the ear, mumbling
Of glee, as kindly animals talk in a children's tale.

Who knows if ever it will come again, now the day closes?
No-one can give me, or take away, that key. All depends
On the elf, the bird, or the angel. I doubt if the angel himself
Is free to choose when sudden heaven in man begins or ends.

DONKEYS' DELIGHT

Ten mortal months I courted
A girl with bright hair,
Unswerving in my service
As the old lovers were.
Almost she had learned to call me
Her dear love. But then,
One moment changed the omens,
She was cold again.
For carelessly, unfairly,
With one glance of his eyes,
A gay, light-hearted sailor
Bore away the prize,
Unbought, which I had sought with
Many gifts and sighs.

In stern disdain I turned to
The Muses' service then,
To seek how the unspeakable

Could be fixed by a pen,
Not to flinch though the ink that
I must use, they said,
Was my dearest blood, nearest
My heart, the richest red.
I obeyed them, I made them
Many a costly lay,
Till carelessly, unfairly,
A boy passed that way
Who set ringing with his singing
All the fields and lanes;
They gave him their favour,
Lost were all my pains.

Then I passed to a Master
Who is higher in repute,
Trusting to find justice
At the world's root.
With rigid fast and vigil,
Silence, and shirt of hair,
The narrow way to Paradise
I walked with care.
But carelessly, unfairly,
At the eleventh hour there came,
Reckless and feckless,
Without a single claim,
A dare-devil, a ne'er-do-well
Who smelled of shag and gin;
Before me (and far warmer
Was his welcome) he went in.

I stood still in the chill
Of the Great Morning,
Aghast. Then at last
—Oh, I was late learning—

I repented, I entered
Into the excellent joke,
The absurdity. My burden
Rolled off as I broke
Into laughter; and soon after
I had found my own level;
With Balaam's Ass daily
Out at grass I revel,
Now playing, now braying
Over the meadows of light,
Our soaring, creaking *Gloria*,
Our donkeys' delight.

THE SMALL MAN ORDERS HIS WEDDING

With tambourines of amber, queens
In rose and lily garlanded
Shall go beside my noble bride
With dance and din and harmony,
And sabre clash and tabor crash
And lantern-light and torches flash
On shield and helmet, plume and sash,
The flower of all my armoury;

Till drawn at length by tawny strength
Of lions, lo! her chariot;
Their pride will brook no bridle—look,
No bit they bear, no farrier
Ere shod those feet that plod the street
Silent as ghosts; their savage heat
Is gentled as they draw my sweet,
New tamed herself, to marry me.

New swell from all the belfries tall,
Till towers reel, the revelry
Of iron tongue untiring swung
To booms and clangs of merriment!
While some prepare with trumpet blare
Before my gates to greet us there
When home we come; and everywhere
Let drum be rumbled steadily.

Once in, the roar and din no more
Are heard. The hot festivity
And blazing dies; from gazing eyes
These shadowy halls deliver her.
Yet neither flute nor blither lute
With pluck of amorous string be mute
Where happy maids their queen salute
And candle flames are quivering.

With decent stealth o'er fleecy wealth
Of carpets tripping soberly,
Depart each maid! Your part is played
And I to all her nobleness
Must mate my bare estate. How fair
The whole room has become! The air
Burns as with incense everywhere
Around, beneath, and over her.

What flame before our chamber door
Shines in on love's security?
Fiercer than day, its piercing ray
Pours round us unendurably.
It's Aphrodite's saffron light,
And Jove's monarchical presence bright
And Genius burning through the night
The torch of man's futurity.

For her the swords of furthest lords
Have flashed in fields ethereal;
The dynasts seven incline from heaven
With glad regard and serious,
And ponder there beyond our air
The infinite unborn, and care
For history, while the mortal pair
Lie drowned in dreaming weariness.

THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND

Hard light bathed them—a whole nation of eyeless men,
Dark bipeds not aware how they were maimed. A long
Process, clearly, a slow curse,
Drained through centuries, left them thus.

At some transitional stage, then, a luckless few,
No doubt, must have had eyes after the up-to-date,
Normal type had achieved snug
Darkness, safe from the guns of heav'n;

Whose blind mouths would abuse words that belonged to their
Great-grandsires, unabashed, talking of *light* in some
Eunuch'd, etiolated,
Fungoid sense, as a symbol of

Abstract thoughts. If a man, one that had eyes, a poor
Misfit, spoke of the grey dawn or the stars or green-
Sloped sea waves, or admired how
Warm tints change in a lady's cheek,

None complained he had used words from an alien tongue,
None question'd. It was worse. All would agree. 'Of course,'

Came their answer. 'We've all felt
Just like that.' They were wrong. And he

Knew too much to be clear, could not explain. The words—
Sold, raped, flung to the dogs—now could avail no more;
Hence silence. But the mouldwarps,
With glib confidence, easily

Showed how tricks of the phrase, sheer metaphors could set
Fools concocting a myth, taking the words for things.
Do you think this a far-fetched
Picture? Go then about among

Men now famous; attempt speech on the truths that once,
Opaque, carved in divine forms, irremovable,
Dread but dear as a mountain-
Mass, stood plain to the inward eye.

ON BEING HUMAN

Angelic minds, they say, by simple intelligence
Behold the Forms of nature. They discern
Unerringly the Archtypes, all the verities
Which mortals lack or indirectly learn.
Transparent in primordial truth, unvarying,
Pure Earthness and right Stonehood from their clear,
High eminence are seen; unveiled, the seminal
Huge Principles appear.

The Tree-ness of the tree they know—the meaning of
Arboreal life, how from earth's salty lap
The solar beam uplifts it, all the holiness
Enacted by leaves' fall and rising sap;

But never an angel knows the knife-edged severance
Of sun from shadow where the trees begin,
The blessed cool at every pore caressing us
—An angel has no skin.

They see the Form of Air; but mortals breathing it
Drink the whole summer down into the breast.
The lavish pinks, the field new-mown, the ravishing
Sea-smells, the wood-fire smoke that whispers *Rest*.
The tremor on the rippled pool of memory
That from each smell in widening circles goes,
The pleasure and the pang—can angels measure it?
An angel has no nose.

The nourishing of life, and how it flourishes
On death, and why, they utterly know; but not
The hill-born, earthy spring, the dark cold bilberries
The ripe peach from the southern wall still hot,
Full-bellied tankards foamy-topped, the delicate
Half-lyric lamb, a new loaf's billowy curves,
Nor porridge, nor the tingling taste of oranges—
An angel has no nerves.

Far richer they! I know the senses' witchery
Guards us, like air, from heavens too big to see;
Imminent death to man that barb'd sublimity
And dazzling edge of beauty unsheathed would be.
Yet here, within this tiny, charm'd interior,
This parlour of the brain, their Maker shares
With living men some secrets in a privacy
Forever ours, not theirs.

THE ECSTASY

Long had we crept in cryptic
Delights and doubts on tiptoes,
The air growing purer, clearer
Continually; and nearer
We went on to the centre of
The garden, hand in hand, finger on lip.

On right and left uplifted
The fountains rose with swifter
And steadier urgency, argent
On steely pillars, larger
Each moment, spreading foamy plumes
Thinner and broader under the blinding sun.

The air grows warmer; firmer
The silence grips it; murmur
Of insect buzz nor business
Of squirrel or bird there is not—
Only the fluttering of the butterflies
Above the empty lawns, dance without noise.

So on we fared and forded
A brook with lilies bordered,
So cold it wrung with anguish
Bitterly our hearts. But language
Cannot at all make manifest
The quiet centre we found on the other side.

Never such seal of silence
Did ice on streams or twilight
On birds impose. The pauses
In nature by her laws are

Imperfect; under the surface beats
A sound too constant to be ever observed.

From birth its stroke with equal
Dull rhythm, relentless sequence,
Taps on, unfelt, unaltered,
With beat that never falters—
Now known, like breathing, only when
It stopped. The permanent background failed our ear.

Said the voice of the garden, heard in
Our hearts, 'That was the burden
Of Time, his sombre drum-beat.
Here—oh hard to come by!—
True stillness dwells and will not change,
Never has changed, never begins nor ends.'

Who would not stay there, blither
Than memory knows? but either
Whisper of pride essayed us
Or meddling thought betrayed us,
Then shuddering doubt—oh suddenly
We were outside, back in the wavering world.

THE SABOTEUSE

Pity hides in the wood,
The years and tides,
The earth, the bare moon,
Death and birth,
The freezing skies, the sun
And the populous seas
Against her, one and all,
Are furiously incensed.

They have clashed spears to drown
The noise of her tears;
They have whetted swords. Still
They cannot forget.
Her faint noise in the wood
Destroys all,
A soul-tormenting treason
Threatening revolt.

They beat with clamorous gongs
And din with hammers
To stun so light a noise.
They fear if once
Pity were heard aloud
In the strong city,
Topless towers would fall,
Engines stop.

Horribly alarmed, they have levied
Their war and armed
All natural things against her.
From horns and stings,
Mandibles, claws and paws

And the human hand,
From suns and ice, like a deer
Pity runs;

Lest, if she wept in peace,
While they slept,
(So they believe) the slow-
Descending stream
Would grow to a pool, spread,
Widen and overflow
And creep forth from the wood,
Grown strong and deep.

And they would wake at morning
And find a lake
Lapping against their walls,
Mining, sapping,
Patiently eating away
The strong foundations
Of the towers of pain, rising
An inch in an hour;

Till the compassionate water
Would ripple and splash
Far overhead, and the Powers
Lay drowned and dead
Below, sharing the dark
With shark and squid
And the forgotten shapes
Of rotting wheels.

Therefore they woke destruction
Against her and invoked
The Needs of the Sum of Things
And the Coming Race
And the Claims of Order—oh all

The holiest names
Known in our hearts. They even
Included her own.

THE LAST OF THE WINE

You think if we sigh, drinking the last decanter,
We're sensual toppers, and thence you are ready to prose
And read your lecture. Need you? Why should you banter
Or badger us? Better imagine it thus; suppose

A man to have come from Atlantis eastward sailing—
Lemuria has fallen in the fury of a tidal wave,
The cities are drowned, the pitiless all-prevailing
Inhuman sea is Numinor's salt grave.

To Europe he comes from Lemuria, saved from the wreck
Of the gilded, loftily builded, countless fleet
With the violet sails. A phial hangs from his neck,
Holding the last of a golden cordial, subtle and sweet.

Unnamed is Europe, untamed; wet desolation
Of unwelcoming woods, the elk, the mammoth and the bear,
The fen and the forest. Men of a barbarous nation
On the sand in a circle standing await him there.

Horribly ridged are their foreheads. Weapons of bone,
Unhandy and blunt, they brandish in their clumsy grips.
Their females set up a screaming, their bagpipes drone;
They gaze and mumble. He raises the flask to his lips.

It brings to his mind the strings, the flutes, the tabors,
How he drank with poets at the banquet, robed and crowned,

He recalls, the pillared halls carved with the labours
Of curious masters, (Lemuria's cities lie drowned),

The festal nights; the jest that flashed for a second
Light as a bubble, bright with a thousand years
Of nurture; the honour and virtue, the grace unreckoned
That sat like a robe on the Atlantean peers.

It has made him remember ladies, proud glances,
Fearless and peerless beauty, flower-like hair,
Ruses and mockery, the music of grave dances
(Where musicians played, huge fishes goggle and stare).

He sighs, like us; then rises and turns to meet
Those naked men. Will they make him their spoil and prey
Or salute him as god and brutally fawn at his feet?
And which would be worse? He pitches the phial away.

AS ONE OLDSTER TO ANOTHER

Well, yes the old bones ache. There were easier
Beds thirty years back. Sleep, then importunate,
Now with reserve doles out her favours;
Food disagrees; there are draughts in houses.

Headlong, the down night train rushes on with us,
Screams through the stations . . . how many more? Is it
Time soon to think of taking down one's
Case from the rack? Are we nearly there now?

Yet neither loss of friends, nor an emptying
Future, nor England tamed and the ruin of
Long-built hopes thus far have taught my
Obstinate heart a sedate deportment.

Still beauty calls as once in the mazes of
Boyhood. The bird-like soul quivers. Into her
Flash darts of unfulfill'd desire and
Pierce with a bright, unabated anguish.

Armed thus with anguish, joy met us even in
Youth—who forgets? This side of the terminus,
Then, now, and always, thus, and only
Thus, were the doors of delight set open.

BALLADE OF DEAD GENTLEMEN

Where, in what bubbly land, below
What rosy horizon dwells to-day
That worthy man Monsieur Cliquot
Whose widow has made the world so gay?
Where now is Mr Tanqueray?
Where might the King of Sheba be
(Whose wife stopped dreadfully long away)?
Mais où sont messieurs les maris?

Say where did Mr Beeton go
With rubicund nose and whiskers grey
To dream of dumplings long ago,
Of syllabubs, soups, and *entremets*?
In what dim isle did Twankey lay
His aching head? What murmuring sea
Lulls him after the life-long fray?
Mais où sont messieurs les maris?

How Mr Grundy's cheeks may glow
By a bathing-pool where lovelies play,
I guess, but shall I ever know?
Where—if it comes to that, *who*, pray—

Is Mr Masham? Sévigné
And Mr Siddons and Zebedee
And Gamp and Hemans, where are they?
Mais où sont messieurs les maris?

Princesses all, beneath your sway
In this grave world they bowed the knee;
Libertine airs in Elysium say
Mais où sont messieurs les maris?

THE ADAM UNPARADISED

Faltering, with bowed heads, our altered parents
Slowly descended from their holy hill,
All their good fortune left behind and done with,
Out through the one-way pass

Into the dangerous world, these strange countries.
No rumour in Eden had reached the human pair
Of things not men, yet half like men, that wandered
The earth beyond its walls;

But now they heard the mountains stirred and shaken,
All the heap'd crags re-echoing, the deep tarns
And caverns shuddering and the abysmal gorges
With dismal drums of Dwarfs;

Or, some prodigious night, waked by a thumping
Shock as of piles being driven two miles away,
Ran till the sunrise shone upon the bouncing
Monopods at their heels;

Or held their breath, hiding, and saw their elders,
The race of giants—the bulldozer's pace,

Heads like balloons, toad-thick, ungainly torsos—
Dotting the plain like ricks.

They had more to fear once Cain had killed a quarter
Of human kind and stolen away, and the womb
Of an unsmiling Hominid to the turncoat
Had littered ominous sons.

A happy noise of liquid shapes, a lapping
Of small waves up and up the hills till all
Was smooth and silver, the clear Flood ascended
Ending that crew; but still

Memory, not built upon a fake from Piltdown,
Reaches us. We know more than bones can teach.
Eve's body's language, Seth within her quickening,
Taught him the sickening fear.

He passed the word. Before we're born we have heard it.
Long-silenced ogres boom, voices like gongs
Reverberate in the mind, a Dwarf-drum rolls,
Trolls wind unchancy horns.

THE ADAM AT NIGHT

Except at the making of Eve Adam slept
Not at all (as men now sleep) before the Fall;
Sin yet unborn, he was free from that dominion
Of the blind brother of death who occults the mind.

Instead, when stars and twilight had him to bed
And the dutiful owl, whirring over Eden, had hooted
A warning to the other beasts to be hushed till morning
And curbed their plays that the Man should be undisturbed,

He would lie, relaxed, enormous, under a sky
Starry as never since; he would set ajar
The door of his mind. Into him thoughts would pour
Other than day's. He rejoined Earth, his mother.

He melted into her nature. Gradually he felt
As though through his own flesh the elusive growth,
The hardening and spreading of roots in the deep garden;
In his veins, the wells filling with the silver rains,

And, thrusting down far under his rock-crust,
Finger-like, rays from the heavens that probed, bringing
To bloom the gold and diamond in his dark womb.
The seething, central fires moved with his breathing.

He guided his globe smoothly in the heaven, riding
At one with his planetary peers around the Sun;
Courteously he saluted the hard virtue of Mars
And Venus' liquid glory as he spun between them.

Over Man and his mate the Hours like waters ran
Till darkness thinned in the east. The treble lark,

Carolling, awoke the common people of Paradise
To yawn and scratch, to bleat and whinny, in the dawn.

Collected now in themselves, human and erect,
Lord and Lady walked on the dabbled sward,
As if two trees should arise dreadfully gifted
With speech and motion. The Earth's strength was in each.

SOLOMON

Many a column of cedar was in Solomon's hall,
Much jade of China on the inlaid wall.
Cast aloft by the fountains with their soft foam,
A tremor of light was dancing in the emerald dome.

The popinjays on their perches without stopping praised
The unspeakable Name. The flamingoes and the peacocks blazed.
Incense richly darkened the day. Princes stood
Waiting—a motley diapason of robes hotly hued.

Like the column of a palm-tree, like a dolomite tower,
Like the unbearable noon-day in the glare of its power,
So solemn and so radiant was Solomon to behold,
Men feared his immense forehead and his beard of gold.

At his entry on the dais there went round
Flash of diamond, rustle of raiment, and a sighing sound
From among his ladies. They were wrung with desire,
Enslaving the heart. Musicians plucked the grave wire.

Like thunder at a distance came from under his feet
The rumble of captive Jinn and of humbled Efreet;
Column and foundation trembled; to Solomon's ring
Hell's abyss was obedient, and to the spells of the King.

By his bed lay crouching many a deadly Jinn;
He erected glory on their subjected sin,
By adamant will he was seeking the Adamite state,
The flame-like monarchy of Man. But he came late.

He was wrong. It was possible no longer. Among leaves
Bird-shaken, dew-scattering, it would have wakened Eve's
Maiden-cool laughter, could that lady have foretold
All his tragic apparatus—wives, magic, and gold.

THE LATE PASSENGER

The sky was low, the sounding rain was falling dense and dark,
And Noah's sons were standing at the window of the Ark.

The beasts were in, but Japhet said, 'I see one creature more
Belated and unmated there come knocking at the door.'

'Well let him knock,' said Ham, 'Or let him drown or learn to swim.
We're overcrowded as it is; we've got no room for him.'

'And yet it knocks, how terribly it knocks,' said Shem, 'Its feet
Are hard as horn—but oh the air that comes from it is sweet.'

'Now hush,' said Ham, 'You'll waken Dad, and once he comes to see
What's at the door, it's sure to mean more work for you and me.'

Noah's voice came roaring from the darkness down below,
'Some animal is knocking. Take it in before we go.'

Ham shouted back, and savagely he nudged the other two,
'That's only Japhet knocking down a brad-nail in his shoe.'

Said Noah, 'Boys, I hear a noise that's like a horse's hoof.'
Said Ham, 'Why, that's the dreadful rain that drums upon the roof'

Noah tumbled up on deck and out he put his head;
His face went grey, his knees were loosed, he tore his beard and said,

'Look, look! It would not wait. It turns away. It takes its flight.
Fine work you've made of it, my sons, between you all to-night!

'Even if I could outrun it now, it would not turn again
—Not now. Our great discourtesy has earned its high disdain.

'Oh noble and unmated beast, my sons were all unkind;
In such a night what stable and what manger will you find?

'Oh golden hoofs, oh cataracts of mane, oh nostrils wide
With indignation! Oh the neck wave-arched, the lovely pride!

'Oh long shall be the furrows ploughed across the hearts of men
Before it comes to stable and to manger once again,

'And dark and crooked all the ways in which our race shall walk,
And shrivelled all their manhood like a flower with broken stalk,

'And all the world, oh Ham, may curse the hour when you were born;
Because of you the Ark must sail without the Unicorn.'

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

Breathless was the air over Bethlehem. Black and bare
 Were the fields; hard as granite the clods;
Hedges stiff with ice; the sedge in the vice
 Of the pool, like pointed iron rods.
And the deathly stillness spread from Bethlehem. It was shed
 Wider each moment on the land;
Through rampart and wall into camp and into hall
 Stole the hush; all tongues were at a stand.
At the Procurator's feast the jocular freedman ceased
 His story, and gaped. All were glum.
Travellers at their beer in a tavern turned to hear
 The landlord; their oracle was dumb.
But the silence flowed forth to the islands and the North
 And smoothed the unquiet river bars
And levelled out the waves from their revelling and paved
 The sea with cold reflected stars.
Where the Caesar on Palatine sat at ease to sign,
 Without anger, signatures of death,
There stole into his room and on his soul a gloom,
 And his pen faltered, and his breath.
Then to Carthage and the Gauls, past Parthia and the Falls
 Of Nile and Mount Amara it crept;
The romp and war of beast in swamp and jungle ceased,
 The forest grew still as though it slept.
So it ran about the girth of the planet. From the Earth
 A signal, a warning, went out
And away behind the air. Her neighbours were aware
 Of change. They were troubled with a doubt.

Salamanders in the Sun that brandish as they run
 Tails like the Americas in size

Were stunned by it and dazed; wondering, they gazed
Up at Earth, misgiving in their eyes.
In Houses and Signs Ousiarchs divine
Grew pale and questioned what it meant;
Great Galactal lords stood back to back with swords
Half-drawn, awaiting the event,
And a whisper among them passed, 'Is this perhaps the last
Of our story and the glories of our crown?
—The entropy worked out?—The central redoubt
Abandoned? The world-spring running down?'
Then they could speak no more. Weakness overbore
Even them. They were as flies in a web,
In their lethargy stone-dumb. The death had almost come;
The tide lay motionless at ebb.

Like a stab at that moment, over Crab and Bowman,
Over Maiden and Lion, came the shock
Of returning life, the start and burning pang at heart,
Setting Galaxies to tingle and rock;
And the Lords dared to breathe, and swords were sheathed
And a rustling, a relaxing began,
With a rumour and noise of the resuming of joys,
On the nerves of the universe it ran.
Then pulsing into space with delicate, dulcet pace
Came a music, infinitely small
And clear. But it swelled and drew nearer and held
All worlds in the sharpness of its call.
And now divinely deep, and louder, with the sweep
And quiver of inebriating sound,
The vibrant dithyramb shook Libra and the Ram,
The brains of Aquarius spun round;
Such a note as neither Throne nor Potentate had known
Since the Word first founded the abyss,
But this time it was changed in a mystery, estranged,
A paradox, an ambiguous bliss.

Heaven danced to it and burned. Such answer was returned
To the hush, the *Favete*, the fear
That Earth had sent out; revel, mirth and shout
Descended to her, sphere below sphere.
Saturn laughed and lost his latter age's frost,
His beard, Niagara-like, unfroze;
Monsters in the Sun rejoiced; the Inconstant One,
The unwedded Moon, forgot her woes.
A shiver of re-birth and deliverance on the Earth
Went gliding. Her bonds were released.
Into broken light a breeze rippled and woke the seas,
In the forest it startled every beast.
Capripods fell to dance from Taproban to France,
Leprechauns from Down to Labrador,
In his green Asian dell the Phoenix from his shell
Burst forth and was the Phoenix once more.

So death lay in arrest. But at Bethlehem the bless'd
Nothing greater could be heard
Than a dry wind in the thorn, the cry of the One new-born,
And cattle in stall as they stirred.

Part II

THE BACKWARD GLANCE

EVOLUTIONARY HYMN

Lead us, Evolution, lead us
Up the future's endless stair:
Chop us, change us, prod us, weed us.
For stagnation is despair:
Groping, guessing, yet progressing,
Lead us nobody knows where.

Wrong or justice in the present,
Joy or sorrow, what are they
While there's always jam to-morrow,
While we tread the onward way?
Never knowing where we're going,
We can never go astray.

To whatever variation
Our posterity may turn
Hairy, squashy, or crustacean,
Bulbous-eyed or square of stern,
Tusked or toothless, mild or ruthless,
Towards that unknown god we yearn.

Ask not if it's god or devil,
Brethren, lest your words imply
Static norms of good and evil
(As in Plato) throned on high;
Such scholastic, inelastic,
Abstract yardsticks we deny.

Far too long have sages vainly
Glossed great Nature's simple text;
He who runs can read it plainly,
'Goodness=what comes next.'

By evolving, Life is solving
All the questions we perplexed.

On then! Value means survival-
Value. If our progeny
Spreads and spawns and licks each rival,
That will prove its deity
(Far from pleasant, by our present
Standards, though it well may be).

PRELUDE TO SPACE

An Epithalamium

So Man, grown vigorous now,
Holds himself ripe to breed,
Daily devises how
To ejaculate his seed
And boldly fertilize
The black womb of the unconsenting skies.

Some now alive expect
(I am told) to see the large,
Steel member grow erect,
Turgid with the fierce charge
Of our whole planet's skill,
Courage, wealth, knowledge, concentrated will;

Straining with lust to stamp
Our likeness on the abyss—
Bombs, gallows, Belsen camp,
Pox, polio, Thais' kiss
Or Judas', Moloch's fires
And Torquemada's (sons resemble sires).

Shall we, when the grim shape
Roars upward, dance and sing?
Yes: if we honour rape,
If we take pride to fling
So bountifully on space
The sperm of our long woes, our large disgrace.

SCIENCE-FICTION CRADLESONG

By and by Man will try
To get out into the sky,
Sailing far beyond the air
From Down and Here to Up and There.
Stars and sky, sky and stars
Make us feel the prison bars.

Suppose it done. Now we ride
Closed in steel, up there, outside;
Through our port-holes see the vast
Heaven-scape go rushing past.
Shall we? All that meets the eye
Is sky and stars, stars and sky.

Points of light with black between
Hang like a painted scene
Motionless, no nearer there
Than on Earth, everywhere
Equidistant from our ship.
Heaven has given us the slip.

Hush, be still. Outer space
Is a concept, not a place.
Try no more. Where we are

Never can be sky or star.
From prison, in a prison, we fly;
There's no way into the sky.

AN EXPOSTULATION

Against too many writers of science fiction

Why did you lure us on like this,
Light-year on light-year, through the abyss,
Building (as though we cared for size!)
Empires that cover galaxies,
If at the journey's end we find
The same old stuff we left behind,
Well-worn Tellurian stories of
Crooks, spies, conspirators, or love,
Whose setting might as well have been
The Bronx, Montmartre, or Bethnal Green?

Why should I leave this green-floored cell,
Roofed with blue air, in which we dwell,
Unless, outside its guarded gates,
Long, long desired, the Unearthly waits,
Strangeness that moves us more than fear,
Beauty that stabs with tingling spear,
Or Wonder, laying on one's heart
That finger-tip at which we start
As if some thought too swift and shy
For reason's grasp had just gone by?

ODORA CANUM VIS

A defence of certain modern biographers and critics

Come now, don't be too eager to condemn
Our little smut-hounds if they wag their tails
(Or shake like jellies as the tails wag them)
The moment the least whiff of sex assails
Their quivering snouts. Such conduct after all,
Though comic, is in them quite natural.

As those who have seen no lions must revere
A bull for Pan's *fortissimo*, or those
Who never tasted wine will value beer
Too highly, so the smut-hound, since he knows
Neither God, hunger, thought, nor battle, must
Of course hold disproportioned views on lust.

Of all the Invaders that's the only one
Even he could not escape; so have a heart,
Don't tie them up or whip them, let them run.
So! Cock your ears, my pretties! Play your part!
The dead are all before you, take your pick.
Fetch! Paid for! Slaver, snuff, defile and lick.

ON A VULGAR ERROR

No. It's an impudent falsehood. Men did not
Invariably think the newer way
Prosaic, mad, inelegant, or what not.

Was the first pointed arch esteemed a blot
Upon the church? Did anybody say
How modern and how ugly? They did not.

Plate-armour, or windows glazed, or verse fire-hot
With rhymes from France, or spices from Cathay,
Were these at first a horror? They were not.

If, then, our present arts, laws, houses, food
All set us hankering after yesterday,
Need this be only an archaising mood?

Why, any man whose purse has been let blood
By sharpers, when he finds all drained away
Must compare how he stands with how he stood.

If a quack doctor's breezy ineptitude
Has cost me a leg, must I forget straightway
All that I can't do now, all that I could?

So, when our guides unanimously decry
The backward glance, I think we can guess why.

THE FUTURE OF FORESTRY

How will the legend of the age of trees
Feel, when the last tree falls in England?
When the concrete spreads and the town conquers
The country's heart; when contraceptive
Tarmac's laid where farm has faded,
Tramline flows where slept a hamlet,
And shop-fronts, blazing without a stop from
Dover to Wrath, have glazed us over?
Simplest tales will then bewilder
The questioning children, 'What was a chestnut?
Say what it means to climb a Beanstalk.
Tell me, grandfather, what an elm is.
What was Autumn? They never taught us.'
Then, told by teachers how once from mould
Came growing creatures of lower nature
Able to live and die, though neither
Beast nor man, and around them wreathing
Excellent clothing, breathing sunlight—
Half understanding, their ill-acquainted
Fancy will tint their wonder-paintings
—Trees as men walking, wood-romances
Of goblins stalking in silky green,
Of milk-sheen froth upon the lace of hawthorn's
Collar, pallor on the face of birchgirl.
So shall a homeless time, though dimly
Catch from afar (for soul is watchful)
A sight of tree-delighted Eden.

LINES DURING A GENERAL ELECTION

Their threats are terrible enough, but we could bear
All that; it is their promises that bring despair.
If beauty, that anomaly, is left us still,
The cause lies in their poverty, not in their will.
If they had power ('amenities are bunk'), conceive
How their insatiate gadgetry by this would leave
No green, nor growth, nor quietude, no sap at all
In England from The Land's-End to the Roman Wall.
Think of their roads—broad as the road to Hell—by now
Murdering a million acres that demand the plough,
The thick-voiced Tannoy blaring over Arthur's grave,
And all our coasts one Camp till not the tiniest wave
Stole from the beach unburdened with its festal scum
Of cigarette-ends, orange-peel, and chewing-gum.
Nor would one island's rape suffice. Their visions are
Global; they mean the desecration of a Star;
Their happiest fancies dwell upon a time when Earth,
Flickering with sky-signs, gibbering with mechanic mirth,
One huge celestial charabanc, will stink and roll
Through patient heaven, subtopianized from pole to pole.

THE CONDEMNED

There is a wildness still in England that will not feed
In cages; it shrinks away from the touch of the trainer's hand,
Easy to kill, not easy to tame. It will never breed
In a zoo for the public pleasure. It will not be planned.

Do not blame us too much if we that are hedgerow folk
Cannot swell the rejoicings at this new world you make
—We, hedge-hogged as Johnson or Borrow, strange to the yoke
As Landor, surly as Cobbett (that badger), birdlike as Blake.

A new scent troubles the air—to you, friendly perhaps—
But we with animal wisdom have understood that smell.
To all our kind its message is Guns, Ferrets, and Traps,
And a Ministry gassing the little holes in which we dwell.

THE GENUINE ARTICLE

You do not love the Bourgeoisie. Of course: for they
Begot you, bore you, paid for you, and punched your head;
You work with them; they're intimate as board and bed;
How could you love them, meeting them thus every day?
You love the Proletariat, the thin, far-away
Abstraction which resembles any workman fed
On mortal food as closely as the shiny red
Chessknight resembles stallions when they stamp and neigh.

For kicks are dangerous; riding schools are painful, coarse
And ribald places. Every way it costs far less
To learn the harmless manage of the wooden horse

—So calculably taking the small jumps of chess.
Who, that can love nonentities, would choose the labour
Of loving the quotidian face and fact, his neighbour?

ON THE ATOMIC BOMB

Metrical Experiment

So; you have found an engine
Of injury that angels
Might dread. The world plunges,
Shies, snorts, and curvets like a horse in danger.

Then comfort her with fondlings,
With kindly word and handling,
But do not believe blindly
This way or that. Both fears and hopes are swindlers.

What's here to dread? For mortals
Both hurt and death were certain
Already; our light-hearted
Hopes from the first sentenced to final thwarting.

This marks no huge advance in
The dance of Death. His pincers
Were grim before with chances
Of cold, fire, suffocation, Ogpu, cancer.

Nor hope that this last blunder
Will end our woes by rending
Tellus herself asunder—
All gone in one bright flash like dryest tinder.

As if your puny gadget
Could dodge the terrible logic

Of history! No; the tragic
Road will go on, new generations trudge it.

Narrow and long it stretches,
Wretched for one who marches
Eyes front. He never catches
A glimpse of the fields each side, the happy orchards.

TO THE AUTHOR OF *FLOWERING RIFLE*

Rifles may flower and terrapins may flame
But truth and reason will be still the same.
Call them Humanitarians if you will,
The merciful are promised mercy still;
Loud fool! to think a nickname could abate
The blessing given to the compassionate.
Fashions in polysyllables may fright
Those Charlies on the Left of whom you write;
No wonder; since it was from them you learned
How white to black by jargon can be turned,
And though your verse outsoars with eagle pride
Their nerveless rhythms (of which the old cow died)
Yet your shrill covin-politics and theirs
Are two peas in a single pod—who cares
Which kind of shirt the murdering Party wears?
Repent! Recant! Some feet of sacred ground,
A target to both gangs, can yet be found,
Sacred because, though now it's no-man's-land,
There stood your father's house; there you should stand.

TO ROY CAMPBELL

Dear Roy—Why should each wowzer on the list
Of those you damn be dubbed Romanticist?
In England the romantic stream flows not
From waterish Rousseau but from manly Scott,
A right branch on the old European tree
Of valour, truth, freedom, and courtesy,
A man (though often slap-dash in his art)
Civilized to the centre of his heart,
A man who, old and cheated and in pain,
Instead of snivelling, got to work again,
Work without end and without joy, to save
His honour, and go solvent to the grave;
Yet even so, wrung from his failing powers,
One book of his would furnish ten of ours
With characters and scenes. The very play
Of mind, I think, is birth-controlled to-day.

It flows, I say, from Scott; from Coleridge too.
A bore? A sponge? A laudanum-addict? True;
Yet Newman in that ruinous master saw
One who restored our faculty for awe,
Who re-discovered the soul's depth and height,
Who pricked with needles of the eternal light
An England at that time half numbed to death
With Paley's, Bentham's, Malthus' wintry breath.
For this the reigning Leftist cell may be
His enemies, no doubt. But why should we?

Newman said much the same of Wordsworth too.
Now certain critics, far from dear to you,
May also fondle Wordsworth. But who cares?
Look at the facts. He's far more ours than theirs;
Or, if we carve him up, then all that's best
Falls to our share—we'll let them take the rest.

By rights the only half they should enjoy
Is the rude, raw, unlicked, North Country boy.

CORONATION MARCH

Blow the trumpet! guardee tramp it!
Once to lord it thus was vulgar;
Then we could afford it; empire simpered,
Gold and gunboats were an ace of trumps.
Ranting poets then were plenty,
Loyalty meant royalties. Life is changing.
Now that bandogs mouth at random
Lion fallen into age and clawless,
Mid their snarling is the time for skirling
Pipes, and carefree scarlet. Therefore,
Rumble in the pageant drum-beat's magic,
Bunting wave on frontage bravely,
Grammar of heraldic rules unfolded
Spill forth gold and gules, and needling
Spire in floodlight pierce the midnight,
Pale as paper! Bright as any trumpet
Twinkle under taper gold of saintly
Crown of Edward; faintlier silver's
Elven gleam give female answer
With robe and globe and holiness of mitre.
Bray the trumpet, rumble tragic
Drum-beat's magic, sway the logic
Of legs that march a thousand in a uniform,
Flags and arches, the lion and the unicorn
Romp it, rampant, pompous tramping . . .
Some there are that talk of Alexander
With a tow-row-row-row-row-row.

'MAN IS A LUMPE WHERE ALL
BEASTS KNEADED BE'

Is this your duty? Never lay your ear
Back to your skull and snarl, bright Tiger! Down
Bruin! Grimalkin back! Did you not hear
Man's voice and see Man's frown?

Too long, sleek purring Panther, you have paid
Your flatteries; far too long about my breast
You, Snake, like ivy have coiled. I'll not be stayed,
I know my own way best.

Down, the whole pack! or else . . . so; now you are meek.
But then, alas, your eyes. Poor cowering brutes,
Your boundless pain, your strength to bear so weak—
It bites at my heart-roots.

Oh, courage. I'll come back when I've grown shepherd
To feed you, and grown child to lead you all
Where there's green pasture waiting for the leopard
And for the wolf a stall;

But not before I've come where I am bound
And made the end and the beginning meet,
When over and under Earth I have travelled round
The whole heaven's milky street.

ON A PICTURE BY CHIRICO

Two sovereign horses standing on the sand. There are no men,
The men have died, the houses fallen. A thousand years' war
Conclude in grass and graves, and bones and waves on a bare shore
Are rolled in a cold evening when there is rain in the air.

These were not killed and eaten with the rest. They were too swift
And strong for the last, stunted men to hunt in the great dearth.
Then they were already terrible. They inherit the large earth,
The pleasant pastures, resonant with their snorting charge.

Now they have come to the end of land. They meet for the first
time

In early, bitter March the falling arches of the sea, vast
And vacant in the sunset light, where once the ships passed.
They halt, sniffing the salt in the air, and whinny with
their lips.

These are not like the horses we have ridden; that old look
Of half-indignant melancholy and delicate alarm's gone.
Thus perhaps looked the breeding-pair in Eden when a day shone
First upon tossing manes and glossy flanks at play.

They are called. Change overhangs them. Their neighing is half
speech.

Death-sharp across great seas, a seminal breeze from the far side
Calls to their new-crowned race to leave the places where Man
died—

The offer, is it? the prophecy, of a Houyhnhnms' Land?

ON A THEME FROM NICOLAS OF CUSA
(*De Docta Ignorantia*, III. ix.)

When soul and body feed, one sees
Their differing physiologies.
Firmness of apple, fluted shape
Of celery, or tight-skinned grape
I grind and mangle when I eat,
Then in dark, salt, internal heat,
Annihilate their natures by
The very act that makes them I.

But when the soul partakes of good
Or truth, which are her savoury food,
By some far subtler chemistry
It is not they that change, but she,
Who feels them enter with the state
Of conquerors her opened gate,
Or, mirror-like, digests their ray
By turning luminous as they.

WHAT THE BIRD SAID EARLY IN THE YEAR

I heard in Addison's Walk a bird sing clear
'This year the summer will come true. This year. This year.

'Winds will not strip the blossom from the apple trees
This year, nor want of rain destroy the peas.

'This year time's nature will no more defeat you,
Nor all the promised moments in their passing cheat you.

'This time they will not lead you round and back
To Autumn, one year older, by the well-worn track'.

'This year, this year, as all these flowers foretell,
We shall escape the circle and undo the spell.

'Often deceived, yet open once again your heart,
Quick, quick, quick, quick!—the gates are drawn apart '

THE SALAMANDER

I stared into the fire; blue waves
Of shuddering heat that rose and fell,
And blazing ships and blinding caves,
Canyons and streets and hills of hell;
Then presently amidst it all
I saw a living creature crawl.

Forward it crept and pushed its snout
Between the bars, and with sad eyes
Into my quiet room looked out,
As men looked out upon the skies;
And from its scalding throat there came
A faint voice hissing like a flame:

'This is the end, the stratosphere,
The rim of the world where all life dies,
The vertigo of space, the fear
Of nothingness; before me lies
Blank silence, distances untold
Of unimaginable cold.

'Faint lights that fitfully appear
Far off in that immense abyss
Are but reflections cast from here,
There is no other fire but this,
This speck of life, this fading spark
Enisled amid the boundless dark.

'Blind Nature's measureless rebuke
To all we value, I received
Long since (though wishes bait the hook

With tales our ancestors believed)
And now can face with fearless eye
Negation's final sovereignty.'

INFATUATION

Body and soul most fit for love can best
Withstand it. I am ill, and cannot rest,
Therefore I'm caught. Disease is amorous, health
At love's door has the pass both in and out.
Want cannot choose but grub with needy snout
In ravenous dreams, let temperance wait on wealth.
Don't think of her tonight . . . the very strain
Wears the will down; then in she comes by stealth.

How am I made that such a thing can trouble
My fancy for a day? Her brain's a bubble,
Her soul, a traveller's tale. Her every thrust
And trick I understand . . . the mould so mean,
And she the thousandth copy, comes between
My thoughts and me . . . unfrank, unfit for trust,
Yet ignorant in her cunning, a blind tool,
When nature bids her, labouring as she must.

Back to my book. Read. Read. Don't think upon her,
Where every thought is hatred and dishonour.
I do not love her, like her, wish her well.
Is it mere lust? But lust can quench his thirst
In any water; rather, at the first,
There was one moment when I could not tell
The thing she surely is. I stood unarmed
That moment, and the stroke that moment fell.

She stood, an image lost as soon as seen,
Like beauty in a vision half-caught between
Two aimless and long-lumbering dreams of night.
The thing I seek for was not anywhere
At any time on earth. That huntress air
And morning freshness was not hers by right.
She spoke, she smiled; put out what seemed the flame,
Left me the cold charred sticks, the ashes white.

And from these sprang the dream I dare not chase,
Lest, the long hunt being over, I embrace
My shadow. (Furies wait upon that bed)
It plucks me at the elbow . . . 'love can reach
That other soul of hers . . . charity teach
Atrophied powers once more to raise the head,
Sweet charity.' But she can never learn;
And what am I, whose voice should wake the dead?

How could she learn, who never since her birth
Looked out of her desires and saw the earth
Unshadowed by herself. She knows that man
Has whimsies, and will talk, and take concern
With wonderings and desires that serve no turn
Of woman. She would ape, (for well she can),
The rapt disciple at her need, till mask
Was needless . . . And all ends where it began.

Her holiest moods are gaudy desecrations
Of poor half holy things: her exaltations
Are frothed from music, moonlight, wine and dance;
Love is to her a dream of bridal dresses,
Friendship, a tittering hour of girl's caresses,
Virtue, a steady purpose to advance,
Honoured, and safe, by the old well-proven roads,
No loophole left to passion or to chance.

I longed last night to make her know the truth
That none of them has told her. Flushed with youth,
Dazed with a half-hour triumph, she held the crowd.
She loved the boys that buzzed on her like flies,
She loved the envy in the women's eyes,
Faster she talked. I longed to cry aloud,
'What, has no brother told you yet, with whom
With what, you share the power that makes you proud?'

Could she have looked so noble, and no seed
Of spirit in her at all? But mother-greed
Has linked her boy-like splendour to the yoke.
Venus infernal taught such voice and eyes
To bear themselves abroad for merchandise . . .
Horrible woman-nature, at one stroke
Making the beauty, bending beauty down
To ruthless tasks, before the spirit awoke.

Thank heaven, though I were meshed and made secure,
Its odds, she'd never have me. I am poor . . .
Thank heaven, for if she did, what comes behind!
Can I not see her now, marked with my name,
Among my friends (shame not to hide my shame),
And her glib tongue runs on and rambles blind
Through slippery paths, revealing and revealing,
While they for my sake cover it and are kind.

Kind? Let them look at home. Which of them all
Knows how his act or word next hour may fall?
Into them, too, this might have come, unbidden,
Unlooked for. For each one of us, down below
The caldron brews in the dark. We do not know
By whom, or on what fields, we are reined and ridden.
There are not acts; spectators of ourselves
We wait and watch the event, the cause is hidden.

All power in man is mummary: good report
A fable: this apparent mind, the sport
For mumbling dynasts old as wind and tide.
Talk, posture, gild it over . . . still the motion
That moves us is not ours, but in the ocean
Of hunger and bleak fear, like buoys we ride,
And seem to move ourselves, and in the waves
Lifting and falling take our shame and pride.

VOWELS AND SIRENS

Chosen to seduce you,
 Those dove-like vowels;
Deuro—Kudos—Odusseus.
 Opening the bay, his prow

Appeared. Air rang with
 Siren voices;
The hero, bound, in anguish,
 Strove to retract his choice.

Nothing of solace
 For lovers' longings
They breathed. Of vanished knowledge
 Was their intemperate song,

A music that resembled
 Some earlier music
That men are born remembering.
 What all the gods refuse—

The backward journey
 To the steep river's

Hid source, the great returning—
The Sirens feigned to give.

Cool voices, lying
Words abuse us,
Cooing *Kudos Achaiôn*,
Warbling their half-true news.

THE PRUDENT JAILER

Always the old nostalgia? Yes.
We still remember times before
We had learned to wear the prison dress
Or steel rings rubbed our ankles sore.

Escapists? Yes. Looking at bars
And chains, we think of files; and then
Of black nights without moon or stars
And luck befriending hunted men.

Still when we hear the trains at night
We envy the free travellers, whirled
In how few moments past the sight
Of the blind wall that bounds our world.

Our Jailer (well he may) prefers
Our thoughts should keep a narrower range.
'The proper study of prisoners
Is prison,' he tells us. Is it strange?

And if old freedom in our glance
Betrays itself, he calls it names
'Dope'—'Wishful thinking'—or 'Romance',
Till tireless propaganda tames.

All but the strong whose hearts they break,
All but the few whose faith is whole.
Stone walls cannot a prison make
Half so secure as rigmarole.

AUBADE

Eight strokes sound from within. The crowd, assembled
Outside, stare at the gate (it disregards them).
What lure brings them so early, under driving
Smoke-grey cloud with a hint of rain, before their
Day's work? Might pity draw them? Was the motive
Self-pleased—say, Pharisaical—delight in
Earth's old *lex talionis*? Easy answers,
Yet both short of the truth perhaps. The sharpest
Cause might be that amid the swirl of phantoms—
Film, broadcast, propaganda, picture-thinking—
Death, like cancer or crime or copulation,
Stands out real; and the soul with native hunger
(Called *sensationalism* in cultured circles)
Seeks food ev'n in the dingiest of quarters.
I, snugged down in a bed, in warm refinement,
Dare not judge what attraction called and kept them,
Packed thus, waiting an hour or so to see the
Jail's black flag running up between the chimneys.

PATTERN

Some believe the slumber
Of trees is in December
 When timber's naked under sky
And squirrel keeps his chamber.

But I believe their fibres
Awake to life and labour
 When turbulence comes roaring up
The land in loud October,

And plunders, strips, and sunders
And sends the leaves to wander
 And undisguises prickly shapes
Beneath the golden splendour.

Then form returns. In warmer,
Seductive days, disarming
 Its firmer will, the wood grew soft
And put forth dreams to murmur.

Into earnest winter
With spirit alert it enters;
 The hunter wind and the hound frost
Have quelled the green enchanter.

AFTER ARISTOTLE

Ἀρετὰ πολύμοχθε

Virtue, thou whom men with toil
Seek as their most precious spoil,
Gladly here in Greece for thy
Beauty, Virgin, men will die
And will live laborious days
And pass, unwearying, hard assays;
So arch-potent is thy touch
Upon mortal hearts, and such
Thy unfading fruit; by far
More esteemed than riches are;
Dearer than, and loved beyond
Our father kind, our mother fond;
Dearer even than the deep-
Dark eyes of the god of Sleep.

Swift as hounds in chase of thee
Leda's twin-born progeny
And Heracles, whom Zeus begot,
To their last hour fainted not;
Following through labours long
Thee who mak'st thy lovers strong;
So for thee Achilles and
Aias sought the silent land.

And now of late the nursling of
Atarneus town for thy dear love
Thought it not much to throw away
The sunlight of our mortal day.
Therefore all the daughters nine
Of Mnemosyne divine

Beyond the reach of death will raise
His name in song, nor from his praise
Disjoin the lauds of Zeus who best
Champions the truth of host to guest
And hallows the fine cords that tie
Friendship indissolubly.

REASON

Set on the soul's acropolis the reason stands
A virgin, arm'd, commercing with celestial light,
And he who sins against her has defiled his own
Virginity: no cleansing makes his garment white;
So clear is reason. But how dark imagining,
Warm, dark, obscure and infinite, daughter of Night:
Dark is her brow, the beauty of her eyes with sleep
Is loaded, and her pains are long, and her delight.
Tempt not Athene. Wound not in her fertile pains
Demeter, nor rebel against her mother-right.
Oh who will reconcile in me both maid and mother,
Who make in me a concord of the depth and height?
Who make imagination's dim exploring touch
Ever report the same as intellectual sight?
Then could I truly say, and not deceive,
Then wholly say, that I BELIEVE.

TO ANDREW MARVELL

Marvell, they say your verse is faint
Beside the range of Donne's;
Too clear for them, too free from taint
Of noise, your music runs.

Their sultry minds can ill conceive
How godlike power should dwell
Except where lungs with torment heave
And giant muscles swell.

The better swordsman with a smile
His cool *passado* gives;
Smooth is the flooding of the Nile
By which all Egypt lives.

Sweetness and strength from regions far
Withdrawn and strange you bring,
And look no stronger than a star,
No graver than the spring.

LINES WRITTEN IN A COPY OF
MILTON'S WORKS

Alas! the happy beasts at pasture play
All, all alike; all of one mind are they;
By Nature with indifferent kindness blessed,
None loves a special friend beyond the rest;
No sparrow lacks a friend with whom to roam
All day for seeds till evening bids them home;
Whom if with cunning beak the cruel kite
Or peasant's arrow snatch from him tonight,
With a new friend next day, content, he wings his flight.
Not so is Man, who in his fellows finds
(Hard fate!) discordant souls and alien minds!
To him, though searching long, will scarce be shown
One heart amidst a thousand like his own;
Or if, at last relenting, fate shall send
In answer to his prayer, the authentic friend,
Him in some unsuspected hour, some day
He never dreaded, Death will snatch away
And leave behind a loss that time can ne'er allay.

Who now can charm to rest each eating care?
Who now the secrets of my bosom share?
Who now can while away with the delight
Of his discourse the livelong winter night,
When cracking nuts and hissing apples roast
Upon the hearth and from his southern coast
The wet wind in the elm-tree branches roars
And makes one vast confusion out of doors?

Alone I walk the fields and plains, alone
The dark vales with dense branches overgrown.
Here, as day fades, I wait, and all around
I hear the rain that falls with sullen sound.

SCHOLAR'S MELANCHOLY

The mind too has her fossils to record her past,
Cold characters, immobile, of what once was new
And hot with life. Old papers, as we rummage through
Neglected drawers, still show us where the pen, fast, fast,
Ate up the sheets: and wondering, we remember vast
Designs and knowledge gathered, and intent to do
What we were able then to have done . . . something drew
A sponge across that slate. The ferly would not last.

Though Will can stretch his viaduct with level thrust
High above shagg'd woods, quaking swamp, and desert dust
Of changing times, yet he must dig for his material
In local quarries of the varying moment—must
Use wattle and daub in countries without stone, and trust
To basest matter the proud arches' form imperial.

Part III

A LARGER WORLD

WORMWOOD

Thou only art alternative to God, oh, dark
And burning island among spirits, tenth hierarchy,
Wormwood, immortal Satan, Ahriman, alone
Second to Him to whom no second else were known,
Being essential fire, sprung of His fire, but bound
Within the lightless furnace of thy Self, bricked round
To rage in the reverberated heat from seven
Containing walls: hence power thou hast to rival heaven.
Therefore, except the temperance of the eternal love
Only thy absolute lust is worth the thinking of.
All else is weak disguising of the wishful heart,
All that seemed earth is Hell, or Heaven. God is: thou art:
The rest, illusion. How should man live save as glass
To let the white light without flame, the Father, pass
Unstained: or else—opaque, molten to thy desire,
Venus infernal starving in the strength of fire!

Lord, open not too often my weak eyes to this.

VIRTUE'S INDEPENDENCE

I have scraped clean the plateau from the filthy earth,
Earth the unchaste, the fruitful, the great grand maternal,
Sprawling creature, lolling at random and supine
The broad-faced, sluttish helot, the slave wife
Grubby and warm, who opens unashamed
Her thousand wombs unguarded to the lickeroous sun.
Now I have scoured my rock clean from the filthy earth
On it no root can strike and no blade come to birth,
And though I starve of hunger it is plainly seen
That I have eaten nothing common or unclean.

I have by fasting purged away the filthy flesh,
Flesh the hot, moist, salt scum, the obscenity
And parasitic tetter, from my noble bones.
I have torn from my breasts—I was an udder'd beast—
My child, for he was fleshly. Flesh is caught
By a contagion carried from impure
Generation to generation through the body's sewer.
And now though I am barren, yet no man can doubt
I am clean and my iniquities are blotted out.

I have made my soul (once filthy) a hard, pure, bright
Mirror of steel: no damp breath breathes upon it
Warming and dimming: it would freeze the finger
If any touched it. I have a mineral soul.
Minerals eat no food and void no excrement.
So I, borrowing nothing and repaying
Nothing, neither growing nor decaying,
Myself am to myself, a mortal God, a self-contained
Unwindowed monad, unindebted and unstained.

POSTURING

Because of endless pride
Reborn with endless error,
Each hour I look aside
Upon my secret mirror
Trying all postures there
To make my image fair.

Thou givest grapes, and I,
Though starving, turn to see
How dark the cool globes lie
In the white hand of me,
And linger gazing thither
Till the live clusters wither.

So should I quickly die
Narcissus-like of want,
But, in the glass, my eye
Catches such forms as haunt
Beyond nightmare, and make
Pride humble for pride's sake.

Then and then only turning
The stiff neck round, I grow
A molten man all burning
And look behind and know
Who made the glass, whose light makes
dark, whose fair
Makes foul, my shadowy form reflected
there
That self-Love, brought to bed of Love
may die and bear
Her sweet son in despair.

DECEPTION

Iron will eat the world's old beauty up.
Girder and grid and gantry will arise,
Iron forest of engines will arise,
Criss-cross of iron crotchet. For your eyes
No green or growth. Over all, the skies
Scribbled from end to end with boasts and lies.
(When Adam ate the irrevocable apple, Thou
Saw'st beyond death the resurrection of the dead.)

Clamour shall clean put out the voice of wisdom,
The printing-presses with their clapping wings,
Fouling your nourishment. Harpy wings,
Filling your minds all day with foolish things,
Will tame the eagle Thought: till she sings
Parrot-like in her cage to please dark kings.
(When Israel descended into Egypt, Thou
Didst purpose both the bondage and the coming out.)

The new age, the new art, the new ethic and thought,
And fools crying, Because it has begun
It will continue as it has begun!
The wheel runs fast, therefore the wheel will run
Faster for ever. The old age is done,
We have new lights and see without the sun.
(Though they lay flat the mountains and dry up the sea,
Wilt thou yet change, as though God were a god?)

DEADLY SINS

Through our lives thy meshes run
Deft as spiders' catenation,
Crossed and crossed again and spun
Finer than the fiend's temptation.

Greed into herself would turn
All that's sweet: but let her follow
Still that path, and greed will learn
How the whole world is hers to swallow

Sloth that would find out a bed
Blind to morning, deaf to waking,
Shuffling shall at last be led
To the peace that knows no breaking.

Lechery, that feels sharp lust
Sharper from each promised staying,
Goes at long last—go she must—
Where alone is sure allaying.

Anger, postulating still
Inexcusables to shatter,
From the shelter of thy will
Finds herself her proper matter.

Envy had rather die than see
Other's course her own outflying;
She will pay with death to be
Where her Best brooks no denying.

Pride, that from each step, anew
Mounts again with mad aspiring,

Must find all at last, save you,
Set too low for her desiring.

Avarice, while she finds an end,
Counts but small the largest treasure.
Whimperingly at last she'll bend
To take free what has no measure.

So inexorably thou
On thy shattered foes pursuing,
Never a respite dost allow
Save what works their own undoing.

THE DRAGON SPEAKS

Once the worm-laid egg shattered in the wood.
I came forth shining into the trembling wood;
The sun was on my scales, dew upon the grasses,
The cold, sweet grasses and the sticky leaves.
I loved my speckled mate. We played at druery
And sucked warm milk dropping from the ewes' teats.

Now I keep watch on the gold in my rock cave
In a country of stones: old, deplorable dragon,
Watching my hoard. In winter night the gold
Freezes through tough scales my cold belly;
Jagged crowns, cruelly twisted rings,
Icy and knobb'd, are the old dragon's bed.

Often I wish I had not eaten my wife
(Though worm grows not to dragon till he eats worm).
She could have helped me, watch and watch about,
Guarding the gold; the gold would have been safer.
I could uncoil my tired body and take
Sometimes a little sleep when she was watching.

Last night under the moonset a fox barked,
Startled me; then I knew I had been sleeping.
Often an owl flying over the country of stones
Startles me; then I think that I must have slept,
Only a moment. That very moment a Man
Might have come from the towns to steal my gold.

They make plots in the towns to take my gold,
They whisper of me in the houses, making plans,
Merciless men. Have they not ale upon the benches,
Warm wives in bed, and song, and sleep the whole night?
I leave my cave once only in the winter
To drink at the rock pool; in summer twice.

They have no pity for the old, lugubrious dragon.
Lord that made the dragon, grant me thy peace,
But say not that I should give up the gold,
Nor move, nor die. Others would have the gold.
Kill rather, Lord, the Men and the other dragons;
Then I can sleep; go when I will to drink.

DRAGON-SLAYER

I have come back with victory got—
But stand away—touch me not
Even with your clothes. I burn red-hot.

The worm was bitter. When she saw
My shield glitter beside the shaw
She spat flame from her golden jaw.

When on my sword her vomit spilt
The blade took fire. On the hilt
Beryl cracked, and bubbled gilt.

When sword and sword arm were all flame
With the very heat that came
Out of the brute, I flogged her tame.

In her own spew the worm died.
I rolled her round and tore her wide
And plucked the heart from her boiling side.

When my teeth were in the heart
I felt a pulse within me start
As though my breast would break apart.

It shook the hills and made them reel
And spun the woods round like a wheel.
The grass singed where I set my heel.

Behemoth is my serving man!
Before the conquered hosts of Pan
Riding tamed Leviathan,
Loud I sing for well I can
RESURGAM and *IO PAEAN*,
Io, Io, Io, PAEAN!

Now I know the stake I played for,
Now I know what a worm's made for!

LILITH

When Lilith means to draw me
Within her secret bower,
She does not overawe me
With beauty's pomp and power,
Nor, with angelic grace
Of courtesy, and the pace
Of gliding ships, comes veiled at evening hour.

Eager, unmasked, she lingers
Heart-sick and hunger sore;
With hot, dry, jewelled fingers
Stretched out, beside her door,
Offering with gnawing haste
Her cup, whereof who taste,
(She promises not better) thirst far more.

What moves me, then, to drink it?
—Her spells, which all around
So change the land, we think it
A great waste where a sound
Of wind like tales twice told
Blusters, and cloud is rolled
Always above yet no rain falls to ground.

Across drab iteration
Of bare hills, line on line,
The long road's situation
Leads on. The witch's wine,
Though promising nothing, seems
In that land of no streams,
To promise best—the unrelished anodyne.

A PAGEANT PLAYED IN VAIN

Watching the thought that moves
Within my conscient brain,
I learn how often that appearance proves
A pageant played in vain.

Holding what seems the helm,
I make a show to steer,
But winds, for worse and better, overwhelm
My purpose, and I veer.

Thus, if thy guidance reach
Only my head, then all
Hardest attempt of mine serves but to teach
How oddly the dice fall.

To limbs, and loins, and heart,
Search with thy chemic beam,
Strike where the self I know not lives apart,
Beneath the surface dream.

Break, Sun, my crusted earth,
Pierce, razor-edged, within,
Where blind, immortal metals have their birth,
And crystals clear begin.

Thy spirit in secret flows
About our lives. In gloom,
The mother helping not nor hindering, grows
The child within the womb.

WHEN THE CURTAIN'S DOWN

I am not one that easily flits past in thought
The ominous stream, imagining death made for nought.
This person, mixed of body and breath, to which concurred
Once only one articulation of thy word,
Will be resolved eternally: nor can time bring
(Else time were vain) once back again the self-same thing.
Therefore among the riddles that no man has read
I put thy paradox, Who liveth and was dead.
As Thou hast made substantially, Thou wilt unmake
In earnest and for everlasting. Let none take
Comfort in frail supposal that some hour and place
To those who mourn recovers the wished voice and face.
Whom Thy great *Exit* banishes, no after age
Of epilogue leads back upon the lighted stage.
Where is Prince Hamlet when the curtain's down? Where fled
Dreams at the dawn, or colours when the light is sped?
We are thy colours, fugitive, never restored,
Never repeated again. Thou only art the Lord,
Thou only art holy. In the shadowy vast
Of thine Osirian wings Thou dost enfold the past.
There sit in throne antediluvian, cruel kings,
There the first nightingale that sang to Eve yet sings,
There are the irrecoverable guiltless years,
There, yet unfallen, Lucifer among his peers.

For thou art also a deity of the dead, a god
Of graves, with necromancies in thy potent rod;
Thou art Lord of the unbreathable transmortal air
Where mortal thinking fails: night's nuptial darkness, where
All lost embraces intermingle and are bless'd,
And all die, but all are, while Thou continuest.

DIVINE JUSTICE

God in His mercy made
The fixed pains of Hell.
That misery might be stayed,
God in His mercy made
Eternal bounds and bade
Its waves no further swell.
God in His mercy made
The fixed pains of Hell.

EDEN'S COURTESY

Such natural love twixt beast and man we find
That children all desire an animal book,
And all brutes, not perverted from their kind,
Woo us with whinny, tongue, tail, song, or look:
So much of Eden's courtesy yet remains.
But when a creature's dread, or mine, has built
A wall between, I think I feel the pains
That Adam earned and do confess my guilt.
For till I tame sly fox and timorous hare
And lording lion in my self, no peace
Can be without; but after, I shall dare
Uncage the shadowy zoo and war will cease;
Because the brutes within, I do not doubt,
Are archetypal of the brutes without.

THE METEORITE

Among the hills a meteorite
Lies huge; and moss has overgrown,
And wind and rain with touches light
Made soft, the contours of the stone.

Thus easily can Earth digest
A cinder of sidereal fire,
And make the translunary guest
Thus native to an English shire.

Nor is it strange these wanderers
Find in her lap their fitting place,
For every particle that's hers
Came at the first from outer space.

All that is Earth has once been sky;
Down from the Sun of old she came,
Or from some star that travelled by
Too close to his entangling flame.

Hence, if belated drops yet fall
From heaven, on these her plastic power
Still works as once it worked on all
The glad rush of the golden shower.

TWO KINDS OF MEMORY

Oh still vacation, silver
Pause and relaxing of severer laws,
Oh Memory the compassionate,
Forever in dim labyrinths of reverie
The cruel past disarming and refashioning!

But iron Memory, tyrant
Importunate by night, with lucid torture
Still back into the merciless
Unalterable fact, the choking halter of
The finished past, where nothing grows, coercing us!

Well did our brooding elders
Appoint both king and queen, two powers with joint
Authority in the underworld;
Persephone, the lost and found, the ineffable
Daughter of the buried spring, the wise, the wonderful;

But made her consort Hades
Stern and exact, whom no one's prayer can turn
Nor length of years can mitigate.
On Orpheus when, the second time, he forfeited
Eurydice, he gazed, correct and pitiless.

His mercies ev'n are cursèd
Mockeries of life, cold, cold as lunar rock,
And all his famed Elysium
Worthless, if former joys in all their earthliness
Are there repeated, manically, dizzily,

And round forever, bound for
No goal, upon a circling track, the soul

Re-lives her past;—Orion on
His quarry, and upon his foe the warrior,
Ever pursuing or forever triumphing.

In her the heaviest burthen
Grows light; old shame or sorrow or heart-blight
Seen in her glass turn magical;
A splendour, a rich gloom, a dewy tenderness
Silently overgrows the graves of tragedy.

And joys remembered, poisoning
A moment on the past which was their home,
Soon without longer tarrying
Take flight and never rest until they light upon
The branches of the deep-leaved woods of Paradise.

Who calls such magic falsehood
Must swear the mummy tells of the dead Pharaoh
More truth than all the merriment
And gold of all the harvests ever told us of
The seed that yearly breaks from yearly burial.

RE-ADJUSTMENT

I thought there would be a grave beauty, a sunset splendour
In being the last of one's kind: a topmost moment as one watched
The huge wave curving over Atlantis, the shrouded barge
Turning away with wounded Arthur, or Ilium burning.
Now I see that, all along, I was assuming a posterity
Of gentle hearts: someone, however distant in the depths of time,
Who could pick up our signal, who could understand a story. There
won't be.

Between the new *Hominidae* and us who are dying, already
There rises a barrier across which no voice can ever carry,
For devils are unmaking language. We must let that alone forever.
Uproot your loves, one by one, with care, from the future,
And trusting to no future, receive the massive thrust
And surge of the many-dimensional timeless rays converging
On this small, significant dew drop, the present that mirrors all.

NEARLY THEY STOOD

Nearly they stood who fall.
Themselves, when they look back,
See always in the track
One torturing spot where all
By a possible quick swerve
Of will yet unenslaved—
By the infinitesimal twitching of a nerve—
Might have been saved.

Nearly they fell who stand.
These with cold after-fear
Look back and note how near
They grazed the Siren's land,

Wondering to think that fate,
By threads so spidery-fine,
The choice of ways so small, the event so great,
Should thus entwine.

Therefore I sometimes fear
Lest oldest fears prove true,
Lest, when no bugle blew
My mort, when skies looked clear,
I may have stepped one hair's
Breadth past the hair-breadth bourn
Which, being once crossed forever unawares,
Forbids return.

RELAPSE

Out of the wound we pluck
The shrapnel. Thorns we squeeze
Out of the hand. Even poison forth we suck,
And after pain have ease.

But images that grow
Within the soul have life
Like cancer and, often cut, live on below
The deepest of the knife,

Waiting their time to shoot
At some defenceless hour
Their poison, unimpaired, at the heart's root,
And, like a golden shower,

Unanswerably sweet,
Bright with returning guilt,

Fatally in a moment's time defeat
Our brazen towers long-built;

And all our former pain
And all our surgeon's care
Is lost, and all the unbearable (in vain
Borne once) is still to bear.

LATE SUMMER

I, dusty and bedraggled as I am,
Pestered with wasps and weeds and making jam,
Blowzy and stale, my welcome long outstayed,
Proved false in every promise that I made,
At my beginning I believed, like you,
Something would come of all my green and blue.
Mortals remember, looking on the thing
I am, that I, even I, was once a spring.

TO A FRIEND

If knowledge like the mid-day heat
Uncooled with cloud, unstirred with breath
Of undulant air, begins to beat
On minds one moment after death,

From your rich soil what lives will spring,
What flower-entangled paradise,
Through what green walks the birds will sing,
What med'cinable gums, what spice,

Apples of what smooth gold! But fear
Gnaws at me for myself; the noon
That nourishes Earth can only sear
And scald the unresponding Moon.

Her gaping valleys have no soil,
Her needle-pointed hills are bare;
Water, poured on those rocks, would boil,
And day lasts long, and long despair.

TO CHARLES WILLIAMS

Your death blows a strange bugle call, friend, and all is hard
To see plainly or record truly. The new light imposes change,
Re-adjusts all a life-landscape as it thrusts down its probe from the sky,
To create shadows, to reveal waters, to erect hills and deepen glens.
The slant alters. I can't see the old contours. It's a larger world
Than I once thought it. I wince, caught in the bleak air that blows on
the ridge.

Is it the first sting of the great winter, the world-waning? Or the cold of
spring?

A hard question and worth talking a whole night on. But with whom?
Of whom now can I ask guidance? With what friend concerning your
death

Is it worth while to exchange thoughts unless—oh unless it were you?

AFTER VAIN PRETENCE

When the grape of the night is pressed
Nearly dry, and the trains rest
And roads are empty and the moon low,
Out of my body's breast I go,
Insecure, as a child escaped,
Animula flittering in the night unshaped;
Lacking wings; but I leap so high
It wants but a little more to fly.
Down I swoop with a seven-league stride
From church's spire to river side,
There scarce touching the ground, and then
Up to the elm-tree tops again;
Rising higher each leap and still
Sinking lower again, until
Lured to venture at last too much
I dream of flying indeed—no touch
Of earth between; then, holding breath
I poise on a perilous edge. But faith
All goes out of my soul—too late!
Air is emptiness: man has weight.
Unsupported I drop like lead
To where my body awakes in bed
Screaming-scared—and yet glad, as one
Who, after vain pretence, has done
With keeping company too great
For his lean purse and low estate.

ANGEL'S SONG

I know not, I,
What the men together say,
How lovers, lovers die
And youth passes away.

Cannot understand
Love that mortal bears
To native, native land,
All lands are theirs;

Why at grave they grieve
For one voice and face,
And not, and not receive
Another in its place.

I above the cone
Of the circling night
Flying, never have known
Less or greater light.

Sorrow it is they call
This cup whence my lip
(Woe's me!) never in all
My endless days can sip.

JOYS THAT STING

Oh doe not die, says Donne, *for I shall hate
All women so*. How false the sentence rings.
Women? But in a life made desolate
It is the joys once shared that have the stings.

To take the old walks alone, or not at all,
To order one pint where I ordered two,
To think of, and then not to make, the small
Time-honoured joke (senseless to all but you);

To laugh (oh, one'll laugh), to talk upon
Themes that we talked upon when you were there,
To make some poor pretence of going on,
Be kind to one's old friends, and seem to care,

While no one (O God) through the years will say
The simplest, common word in just your way.

OLD POETS REMEMBERED

One happier look on your kind, suffering face,
And all my sky is domed with cloudless blue;
Eternal summer in a moment's space
Breathes with sweet air and glows and warms me through.

One droop of your dear mouth, one tear of yours,
One gasp of Faith half-strangled by its foe,
And down through a waste world of slag and sewers
And hammering and loud wheels once more I go.

Thus, what old poets told me about love
(Tristram's obedience, Isoud's sovereignty . . .)
Turns true in a dread mode I dreamed not of,
—What once I studied, now I learn to be;

Taught, oh how late! in anguish, the response
I might have made with exultation once.

AS THE RUIN FALLS

All this is flashy rhetoric about loving you.
I never had a selfless thought since I was born.
I am mercenary and self-seeking through and through:
I want God, you, all friends, merely to serve my turn.

Peace, re-assurance, pleasure, are the goals I seek,
I cannot crawl one inch outside my proper skin:
I talk of love—a scholar's parrot may talk Greek—
But, self-imprisoned, always end where I begin.

Only that now you have taught me (but how late) my lack.
I see the chasm. And everything you are was making
My heart into a bridge by which I might get back
From exile, and grow man. And now the bridge is breaking.

For this I bless you as the ruin falls. The pains
You give me are more precious than all other gains.

AS THE RUIN FALLS

Part IV

FURTHER UP AND FURTHER IN

POEM FOR PSYCHOANALYSTS AND/OR THEOLOGIANS

Naked apples, woolly-coated peaches
Swelled on the garden's wall. Unbounded
Odour of windless, spice-bearing trees
Surrounded my lying in sacred turf,
Made dense the guarded air—the forest of trees
Buoyed up therein like weeds in ocean
Lived without motion. I was the pearl,
Mother-of-pearl my bower. Milk-white the cirrus
Streaked the blue egg-shell of the distant sky,
Early and distant, over the spicy forest;
Wise was the fangless serpent, drowsy.
All this, indeed, I do not remember.
I remember the remembering, when first waking
I heard the golden gates behind me
Fall to, shut fast. On the flinty road,
Black-frosty, blown on with an eastern wind,
I found my feet. Forth on journey,
Gathering thin garment over aching bones,
I went. I wander still. But the world is round.

NOON'S INTENSITY

Till your alchemic beams turn all to gold
There must be many metals. From the night
You will not yet withdraw her silver light,
And often with Saturnian tints the cold
Atlantic swells at morning shall enfold
The Cornish cliffs burnished with copper bright;
Till trained by slow degrees we have such sight
As dares the pure projection to behold.
Even when Sol comes ascendant, it may be
More perfectly in him our eyes shall see
All baser virtues; thus shall hear you talking
And yet not die. Till then, you have left free,
Unscorched by your own noon's intensity
One cool and evening hour for garden walking.

SWEET DESIRE

These faint wavering far-travell'd gleams
Coming from your country, fill me with care. That scent,
That sweet stabbing, as at the song of thrush,
That leap of the heart—too like they seem
To another air; unlike as well
So that I am dazed with doubt. As a dungeoned man
Who has heard the hinge on the hook turning
Often. Always that opened door
Let new tormentors in. If now at last
It open again, but outward, offering free way,
(His kind one come, with comfort) he
Yet shrinks, in his straw, struggling backward,

From his dear, from his door, into the dark'st corner,
Furthest from freedom. So, fearing, I
Taste not but with trembling. I was tricked before.
All the heraldry of heaven, holy monsters,
With hazardous and dim half-likeness taunt
Long-haunted men. The like is not the same.
Always evil was an ape. I know.
Who passes to paradise, within that pure border
Finds there, refashioned, all that he fled from here.
And yet . . .

But what's the use? For yield I must,
Though long delayed, at last must dare
To give over, to be eased of my iron casing,
Molten at thy melody, as men of snow
In the solar smile. Slow-paced I come,
Yielding by inches. And yet, oh Lord, and yet,
—Oh Lord, let not likeness fool me again.

CAUGHT

You rest upon me all my days
The inevitable Eye,
Dreadful and undeflected as the blaze
Of some Arabian sky;

Where, dead still, in their smothering tent
Pale travellers crouch, and, bright
About them, noon's long-drawn Astonishment
Hammers the rocks with light.

Oh, for but one cool breath in seven,
One air from northern climes,
The changing and the castle-clouded heaven
Of my old Pagan times!

But you have seized all in your rage
Of Oneness. Round about,
Beating my wings, all ways, within your cage,
I flutter, but not out.

FORBIDDEN PLEASURE

Quick! The black, sulphurous, never quenched,
Old festering fire begins to play
Once more within. Look! By brute force I have wrenched
Unmercifully my hands the other way.

Quick, Lord! On the rack thus, stretched tight,
Nerves clamouring as at nature's wrong.
Scorched to the quick, whipp'd raw—Lord, in this plight
You see, you see no man can suffer long.

Quick, Lord! Before new scorpions bring
New venom—ere fiends blow the fire
A second time—quick, show me that sweet thing
Which, 'spite of all, more deeply I desire.

THE NAKED SEED

My heart is empty. All the fountains that should run
 With longing, are in me
Dried up. In all my countryside there is not one
 That drips to find the sea.
I have no care for anything thy love can grant
 Except the moment's vain
And hardly noticed filling of the moment's want
 And to be free from pain.
Oh, thou that art unwearying, that dost neither sleep
 Nor slumber, who didst take
All care for Lazarus in the careless tomb, oh keep
 Watch for me till I wake.
If thou think for me what I cannot think, if thou
 Desire for me what I
Cannot desire, my soul's interior Form, though now
 Deep-buried, will not die,
—No more than the insensible dropp'd seed which grows
 Through winter ripe for birth
Because, while it forgets, the heaven remembering throws
 Sweet influence still on earth,
—Because the heaven, moved moth-like by thy beauty, goes
 Still turning round the earth.

SCAZONS

Walking to-day by a cottage I shed tears
When I remembered how once I had walked there
With my friends who are mortal and dead. Years
Little had healed the wound that was laid bare.

Out little spear that stabs! I, fool, believed
I had outgrown the local, unique sting,
I had transmuted wholly (I was deceived)
Into Love universal the lov'd thing.

But Thou, Lord, surely knewest thine own plan
When the angelic indifferencies with no bar
Universally loved, but Thou gav'st man
The tether and pang of the particular,

Which, like a chemic drop, infinitesimal,
Plashed into pure water, changing the whole,
Embodies and embitters and turns all
Spirit's sweet water into astringent soul,

That we, though small, might quiver with Fire's same
Substantial form as Thou—not reflect merely
Like lunar angels back to Thee cold flame.
Gods are we, Thou hast said; and we pay dearly.

LEGION

Lord, hear my voice, my present voice I mean,
Not that which may be speaking an hour hence
(For I am Legion) in an opposite sense,
And not by show of hands decide between
The multiple factions which my state has seen
Or will see. Condescend to the pretence
That what speaks now is I; in its defence
Dissolve my parliament and intervene.

Thou wilt not, though we asked it, quite recall
Free will once given. Yet to this moment's choice
Give unfair weight. Hold me to this. Oh strain
A point—use legal fictions; for if all
My quarrelling selves must bear an equal voice,
Farewell, thou hast created me in vain.

PILGRIM'S PROBLEM

By now I should be entering on the supreme stage
Of the whole walk, reserved for the late afternoon.
The heat was to be over now; the anxious mountains,
The airless valleys and the sun-baked rocks, behind me.

Now, or soon now, if all is well, come the majestic
Rivers of foamless charity that glide beneath
Forests of contemplation. In the grassy clearings
Humility with liquid eyes and damp, cool nose
Should come, half-tame, to eat bread from my hermit hand.
If storms arose, then in my tower of fortitude—

It ought to have been in sight by this—I would take refuge;
But I expected rather a pale mackerel sky,
Feather-like, perhaps shaking from a lower cloud
Light drops of silver temperance, and clovery earth
Sending up mists of chastity, a country smell,
Till earnest stars blaze out in the established sky
Rigid with justice; the streams audible; my rest secure.

I can see nothing like all this. Was the map wrong?
Maps can be wrong. But the experienced walker knows
That the other explanation is more often true.

SONNET

*Dieu a établi la prière pour communiquer à ses
creatures la dignité de la causalité.—PASCAL*

The Bible says Sennacherib's campaign was spoiled
By angels: in Herodotus it says, by mice—
Innumerably nibbling all one night they toiled
To eat his bowstrings piecemeal as warm wind eats ice.

But muscular archangels, I suggest, employed
Seven little jaws at labour on each slender string,
And by their aid, weak masters though they be, destroyed
The smiling-lipped Assyrian, cruel-bearded king.

No stranger that omnipotence should choose to need
Small helps than great—no stranger if His action lingers
Till men have prayed, and suffers their weak prayers indeed
To move as very muscles His delaying fingers,

Who, in His longanimity and love for our
Small dignities, enfeebles, for a time, His power.

THE PHOENIX

The Phoenix flew into my garden and stood perched upon
A sycamore; the feathered flame with dazzling eyes
Lit up the whole lawn like a bonfire on midsummer's eve.

I ran out, slipping on the grass, reeling beneath
The news I bore: 'The Sole Bird is not fabulous! Look! Look!'
The dark girl, passing in the road, heard me. Her eyes
Lit up (I saw her features flood-lit in those golden rays)
So that I called, or else the Bird called, and we went
Over the wet lawn—shadows for our train—towards the Wonder.
Then, looking round, I saw her eyes . . . could it be true?
Was I deceived? . . . oh, say I was deceived . . . I thought her eyes
Had all along been fixed on me, not on the Bird.

Thrice-honoured Lady, make not of your spoon your meat, for silver
(How much less, tin or wood?) contains no nourishment.
I will be all things, any thing, to you, save only that.
Break not our hearts by telling me you never saw
The Phoenix, that my trumpery silhouette, thrusting between,
Made an eclipse. For I had dreamed that I had caught
For His own beak a silver, shining fish such as He loves,
And, having little of my own to offer Him,
Was building much on this miraculous draught. If the line breaks,
Oh with what empty hands you send me back to Him!

THE NATIVITY

Among the oxen (like an ox I'm slow)
I see a glory in the stable grow
Which, with the ox's dullness might at length
Give me an ox's strength.

Among the asses (stubborn I as they)
I see my Saviour where I looked for hay;
So may my beastlike folly learn at least
The patience of a beast.

Among the sheep (I like a sheep have strayed)
I watch the manger where my Lord is laid;
Oh that my baa-ing nature would win thence
Some woolly innocence!

PRAYER

Master, they say that when I seem
To be in speech with you,
Since you make no replies, it's all a dream
—One talker aping two.

They are half right, but not as they
Imagine; rather, I
Seek in myself the things I meant to say,
And lo! the wells are dry.

Then, seeing me empty, you forsake
The Listener's rôle, and through
My dead lips breathe and into utterance wake
The thoughts I never knew.

And thus you neither need reply
Nor can; thus, while we seem
Two talking, thou art One forever, and I
No dreamer, but thy dream.

LOVE'S AS WARM AS TEARS

Love's as warm as tears,
Love is tears:
Pressure within the brain,
Tension at the throat,
Deluge, weeks of rain,
Haystacks afloat,
Featureless seas between
Hedges, where once was green.

Love's as fierce as fire,
Love is fire:
All sorts—infernal heat
Clinkered with greed and pride,
Lyric desire, sharp-sweet,
Laughing, even when denied,
And that empyreal flame
Whence all loves came.

Love's as fresh as spring,
Love is spring:
Bird-song hung in the air,
Cool smells in a wood,
Whispering 'Dare! Dare!'
To sap, to blood,
Telling 'Ease, safety, rest,
Are good; not best.'

Love's as hard as nails,
Love is nails:
Blunt, thick, hammered through
The medial nerves of One
Who, having made us, knew
The thing He had done,
Seeing (with all that is)
Our cross, and His.

NO BEAUTY WE COULD DESIRE

Yes, you are always everywhere. But I,
Hunting in such immeasurable forests,
Could never bring the noble Hart to bay.

The scent was too perplexing for my hounds;
Nowhere sometimes, then again everywhere.
Other scents, too, seemed to them almost the same.

Therefore I turn my back on the unapproachable
Stars and horizons and all musical sounds,
Poetry itself, and the winding stair of thought.

Leaving the forests where you are pursued in vain
—Often a mere white gleam—I turn instead
To the appointed place where you pursue.

Not in Nature, not even in Man, but in one
Particular Man, with a date, so tall, weighing
So much, talking Aramaic, having learned a trade;

Not in all food, not in all bread and wine
(Not, I mean, as my littleness requires)
But this wine, this bread . . . no beauty we could desire.

STEPHEN TO LAZARUS

But was I the first martyr, who
Gave up no more than life, while you,
Already free among the dead,
Your rags stripped off, your fetters shed,
Surrendered what all other men
Irrevocably keep, and when
Your battered ship at anchor lay
Seemingly safe in the dark bay
No ripple stirs, obediently
Put out a second time to sea
Well knowing that your death (in vain
Died once) must all be died again?

FIVE SONNETS

I

You think that we who do not shout and shake
Our fists at God when youth or bravery die
Have colder blood or hearts less apt to ache
Than yours who rail. I know you do. Yet why?
You have what sorrow always longs to find,
Someone to blame, some enemy in chief;
Anger's the anaesthetic of the mind,
It does men good, it fumes away their grief.
We feel the stroke like you; so far our fate
Is equal. After that, for us begin
Half-hopeless labours, learning not to hate,
And then to want, and then (perhaps) to win
A high, unearthly comfort, angel's food,
That seems at first mockery to flesh and blood.

2

There's a repose, a safety (even a taste
 Of something like revenge?) in fixed despair
 Which we're forbidden. We have to rise with haste
 And start to climb what seems a crazy stair.
 Our consolation (for we are consoled,
 So much of us, I mean, as may be left
 After the dreadful process has unrolled)
 For one bereavement makes us more bereft.
 It asks for all we have, to the last shred;
 Read Dante, who had known its best and worst—
 He was bereaved and he was comforted
 —No one denies it, comforted—but first
 Down to the frozen centre, up the vast
 Mountain of pain, from world to world, he passed.

3

Of this we're certain; no one who dared knock
 At heaven's door for earthly comfort found
 Even a door—only smooth, endless rock,
 And save the echo of his cry no sound.
 It's dangerous to listen; you'll begin
 To fancy that those echoes (hope can play
 Pitiful tricks) are answers from within;
 Far better to turn, grimly sane, away.
 Heaven cannot thus, Earth cannot ever, give
 The thing we want. We ask what isn't there
 And by our asking water and make live
 That very part of love which must despair
 And die and go down cold into the earth
 Before there's talk of springtime and re-birth.

4

Pitch your demands heaven-high and they'll be met.
 Ask for the Morning Star and take (thrown in)

Your earthly love. Why, yes; but how to set
One's foot on the first rung, how to begin?
The silence of one voice upon our ears
Beats like the waves; the coloured morning seems
A lying brag; the face we loved appears
Fainter each night, or ghastlier, in our dreams.
'That long way round which Dante trod was meant
For mighty saints and mystics not for me,'
So Nature cries. Yet if we once assent
To Nature's voice, we shall be like the bee
That booms against the window-pane for hours
Thinking that way to reach the laden flowers.

5

'If we could speak to her,' my doctor said,
'And told her, "Not that way! All, all in vain
You weary out your wings and bruise your head,"
Might she not answer, buzzing at the pane,
"Let queens and mystics and religious bees
Talk of such inconceivables as glass;
The blunt lay worker flies at what she sees,
Look there—ahead, ahead—the flowers, the grass!"
We catch her in a handkerchief (who knows
What rage she feels, what terror, what despair?)
And shake her out—and gaily out she goes
Where quivering flowers stand thick in summer air,
To drink their hearts. But left to her own will
She would have died upon the window-sill.'

EVENSONG

Now that night is creeping
O'er our travail'd senses,
To Thy care unsleeping
We commit our sleep.
Nature for a season
Conquers our defences,
But th' eternal Reason
Watch and ward will keep.

All the soul we render
Back to Thee completely,
Trusting Thou wilt tend her
Through the deathlike hours,
And all night remake her
To Thy likeness sweetly,
Then with dawn awake her
And give back her powers.

Slumber's less uncertain
Brother soon will bind us
—Darker falls the curtain,
Stifling-close 'tis drawn:
But amidst that prison
Still Thy voice can find us,
And, as Thou hast risen,
Raise us in Thy dawn.

THE APOLOGIST'S EVENING PRAYER

From all my lame defeats and oh! much more
From all the victories that I seemed to score;
From cleverness shot forth on Thy behalf
At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;
From all my proofs of Thy divinity,
Thou, who wouldst give no sign, deliver me.

Thoughts are but coins. Let me not trust, instead
Of Thee, their thin-worn image of Thy head.
From all my thoughts, even from my thoughts of Thee,
O thou fair Silence, fall, and set me free.
Lord of the narrow gate and the needle's eye,
Take from me all my trumpery lest I die.

FOOTNOTE TO ALL PRAYERS

He whom I bow to only knows to whom I bow
When I attempt the ineffable Name, murmuring *Thou*,
And dream of Pheidian fancies and embrace in heart
Symbols (I know) which cannot be the thing Thou art.
Thus always, taken at their word, all prayers blaspheme
Worshipping with frail images a folk-lore dream,
And all men in their praying, self-deceived, address
The coinage of their own unquiet thoughts, unless
Thou in magnetic mercy to Thyself divert
Our arrows, aimed unskillfully, beyond desert;
And all men are idolators, crying unheard
To a deaf idol, if Thou take them at their word.

Take not, oh Lord, our literal sense. Lord, in Thy great,
Unbroken speech our limping metaphor translate.

AFTER PRAYERS, LIE COLD

Arise my body, my small body, we have striven
Enough, and He is merciful; we are forgiven.
Arise small body, puppet-like and pale, and go,
White as the bed-clothes into bed, and cold as snow,
Undress with small, cold fingers and put out the light,
And be alone, hush'd mortal, in the sacred night,
—A meadow whipt flat with the rain, a cup
Emptied and clean, a garment washed and folded up,
Faded in colour, thinned almost to raggedness
By dirt and by the washing of that dirtiness.
Be not too quickly warm again. Lie cold; consent
To weariness' and pardon's watery element.
Drink up the bitter water, breathe the chilly death;
Soon enough comes the riot of our blood and breath.

Part V

A FAREWELL TO SHADOW-LANDS

How glad am I that I have found
Thy way of life, thy way of thought,
Thy way of love, thy way of pain,
Thy way of life, thy way of thought,
Thy way of love, thy way of pain,

I shall be a shadow, a shadow,
A shadow, a shadow, a shadow,
A shadow, a shadow, a shadow,
A shadow, a shadow, a shadow,
A shadow, a shadow, a shadow,
A shadow, a shadow, a shadow,

Because that's what I am, and I shall be
So long as I live, and I shall be
The shadow, the shadow, the shadow,
The shadow, the shadow, the shadow,
The shadow, the shadow, the shadow,

If we are to be a shadow, a shadow,
If we are to be a shadow, a shadow,
If we are to be a shadow, a shadow,
If we are to be a shadow, a shadow,
If we are to be a shadow, a shadow,

EPIGRAMS AND EPITAPHS

I

Lady, to this fair breast I know but one
Fair rival; to the heart beneath it, none.

2

Have you not seen that in our days
Of any whose story, song, or art
Delights us, our sincerest praise
Means, when all's said, 'You break my heart'?

3

I woke from a fool's dream, to find all spent
Except one little sixpence, worn and bent.
The same day, in the nick of time, I found
The market where my sixpence buys a pound.
Sirs, tell me was the bargain good or bad?
The price was cheap. The price was all I had.

4

Strange that a trick of light and shade could look
So like a living form that, first, I gave
The shadow mind and meaning: then, mistook
His will for mine; and, last, became his slave.

5

If we had remembered earlier our Father's house
Where we grew together, and that old kindness,
You would not now be dying, oh my sister, my spouse,
Pierced with my sword in the battle's heat and the blindness.

6

Save yourself. Run and leave me. I must go back.
 Though we have escaped the sentry and are past the wall,
 Though returning means mockery and the whip and the rack,
 Yet their sending is too strong; I must turn at their call.
 Save yourself. Leave me. I must go back.

7

. . . Spirit? Who names her lies.
 Who cares for a bodiless ghost without any eyes
 Or feet to run with at all, or ear for the call
 Of the rushing rain, and the crack of the opening skies?
 But I'd have a body, a bird's fleet body that flies.

8

All things (e.g. a camel's journey through
 A needle's eye) are possible, it's true.
 But picture how the camel feels, squeezed out
 In one long bloody thread from tail to snout.

9

Lady, a better sculptor far
 Chiselled those curves you smudge and mar,
 And God did more than lipstick can
 To justify your mouth to man.

10

Erected by her sorrowing brothers
 In memory of Martha Clay.
 Here lies one who lived for others;
 Now she has peace. And so have they.

11

She was beautifully, delicately made,
 So small, so unafraid,
 Till the bomb came.
 Bombs are the same,
 Beautifully, delicately made.

12

No; the world will not break,
 Time will not stop.
 Do not for the dregs mistake
 The first bitter drop.

When first the collar galls
 Tired horses know
 Stable's not near. Still falls
 The whip. There's far to go.

13

Here lies one kind of speech
 That in the unerring hour when each
 Idle syllable must be
 Weighed upon the balance, she,
 Though puzzled and ashamed, I think,
 To watch the scales of thousands sink,
 Will see with her old woodland air
 (That startled, yet unflinching stare,
 Half elf, half squirrel, all surprise)
 Hers quiver and demurely rise.

14

From end to end of the bright airy ward,
 From end to end of each delirious day,

The wireless gibbered, hammered, squealed and roared;
That was the pain no drugs could drive away.
I asked for an hour of silence—half an hour—
Ten minutes—to die sane. It wasn't granted.
Why should one Prig, one High-brow, have the power
To stop what all those honest fellows wanted?
Therefore, oh God, if heaven, as they tell,
Is full of music, yet in mercy save
For me one nook of silence even in hell,
And therefore, stranger, tip-toe past this grave;
And let posterity know this of me—
I died both for, and of, democracy.

15

(Emendation for the end of Goethe's *Faust*)

Solids whose shadow lay
Across time, here
(All subterfuge dispelled)
Show hard and clear;
Fondled impossibles
Wither outside;
Within, the Wholly Masculine
Confronts His bride.

16

My grave my pillory, by this blabbing stone
Forbidden to sleep unknown,
I feel like fire my neighbours' eyes because
All here know what I was.
Think, stranger, of that moment when I too
First, and forever, knew.

Here lies the whole world after one
Peculiar mode; a buried sun,
Stars and immensities of sky
And cities here discarded lie.
The prince who owned them, having gone,
Left them as things not needed on
His journey; yet with hope that he,
Purged by aeonian poverty
In lenten lands, hereafter can
Resume the robes he wore as man.

APPENDIX

Previous publications of poems already printed

Such poems are listed below in alphabetical order, the title being followed by (1) the abbreviation 'Rev.' when the text first published has been revised by the author; (2) the abbreviation 'Or.' introducing the original title, when it differs from that given in this volume; (3) the publication, volume, date and page-number of the original issue. The following abbreviations are used for periodicals, etc.

CR	<i>The Cambridge Review</i>
M	<i>The Month</i>
OM	<i>The Oxford Magazine</i>
P	<i>Punch</i>
S	<i>The Spectator</i>
TT	<i>Time and Tide</i>
TLS	<i>The Times Literary Supplement</i>
<i>Pilgrim's</i>	

Regress C. S. Lewis: *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism*. London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd., 1943.

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THE ADAM AT NIGHT (Rev. Or. 'Adam at Night'). P, CCXVI (May 11, 1949), p. 510.

THE ADAM UNPARADISED (Rev. Or. 'A Footnote to Pre-History'). P, CCXVII (Sept. 14, 1949), p. 304.

AFTER ARISTOTLE. OM, LXXIV (Feb. 23, 1956), p. 296.

AS ONE OLDSTER TO ANOTHER (Rev.). P, CCXVIII (March 15, 1950), pp. 294-5.

BALLADE OF DEAD GENTLEMEN. P, CCXX (March 28, 1951), p. 386.

THE BIRTH OF LANGUAGE (Rev.). P, CCX (Jan. 9, 1946), p. 32.

CAUGHT. *Pilgrim's Regress*, pp. 147-8.

A CLICHÉ CAME OUT OF ITS CAGE (Rev. Part I). *Nine: A Magazine of Poetry and Criticism*, II (May, 1950), p. 114.

- THE CONDEMNED (Rev. Or. 'Under Sentence'). *S*, CLXXV (Sept. 7, 1945), p. 219.
- A CONFESSION (Rev. Or. *Spartan Nactus*). *P*, CCXXVII (Dec. 1, 1954), p. 685.
- CORONATION MARCH. *OM*, LV (May 6, 1937), p. 565.
- THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND. *P*, CCXXI (Sept. 12, 1951), p. 303.
- THE DAY WITH A WHITE MARK (Rev.). *P*, CCXVII (Aug. 17, 1949), p. 170.
- DECEPTION. *Pilgrim's Regress*, p. 187.
- DIVINE JUSTICE. *Pilgrim's Regress*, p. 180.
- DONKEYS' DELIGHT (Rev.). *P*, CCXIII (Nov. 5, 1947), p. 442.
- DRAGON-SLAYER. *Pilgrim's Regress*, pp. 195-6.
- THE DRAGON SPEAKS (Rev.). *Pilgrim's Regress*, pp. 192-3.
- EPIGRAMS AND EPITAPHS:
- No. 11 (Or. 'Epitaph'). *TT*, XXIII (June 6, 1942), p. 460;
- No. 12 (Or. 'On Receiving Bad News'). *TT*, XXVI (Dec. 29, 1945), p. 1093;
- No. 14 (Rev. Or. 'Epitaph'). *S*, CLXXXI (July 30, 1948), p. 142;
- No. 15 (Rev. Or. 'Epanorthosis (for the end of Goethe's *Faust*)'). *CR*, LXXVII (May 26, 1956), p. 610;
- No. 16 (Or. 'Epitaph in a Village Churchyard'). *TT*, XXX (March 19, 1949), p. 272;
- No. 17 (Or. 'Epitaph'). *M*, II (July, 1949), p. 8.
- EVOLUTIONARY HYMN. *CR*, LXXIX (Nov. 30, 1957), p. 227.
- AN EXPOSTULATION (Against too many writers of science fiction). *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, XVI (June, 1959), p. 47.
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- FORBIDDEN PLEASURE. *Pilgrim's Regress*, p. 189.
- THE FUTURE OF FORESTRY. *OM*, LVI (Feb. 10, 1938), p. 383.
- HERMIONE IN THE HOUSE OF PAULINA (Rev.). *Augury: An Oxford Miscellany of Verse and Prose*, Ed. by Alex M. Hardie and Keith C. Douglas. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1940, p. 28.

IMPENITENCE. *P*, CCXV (July, 1953), p. 91.

THE LANDING (Rev.). *P*, CCXV (Sept. 15, 1948), p. 237.

THE LAST OF THE WINE (Rev. Or. 'The End of the Wine'). *P*, CCXIII (Dec. 3, 1947), p. 538.

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LILITH. *Pilgrim's Regress*, pp. 190-1.

THE MAGICIAN AND THE DRYAD. (Rev. Or. 'Conversation Piece: The Magician and the Dryad'). *P*, CCXVII (July 20, 1949), p. 71.

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THE METEORITE. *TT*, XXVII (Dec. 7, 1946), p. 1183.

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ON BEING HUMAN (Rev.). *P*, CCX (May 8, 1946), p. 402.

ON A PICTURE BY CHIRICO (Rev.). *S*, CLXXXII (May 6, 1949), p. 607.

ON A THEME FROM NICHOLAS OF CUSA (Rev. Or. 'On Another Theme from Nicholas of Cusa'). *TLS* (Jan. 21, 1955), p. 43.

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TO CHARLES WILLIAMS (Rev. Or. 'On the Death of Charles Williams'). *Britain To-day*, No. 112 (Aug. 1945), p. 14.

TO A FRIEND (Rev. Or. 'To G. M.'). *S*, CLXIX (Oct. 9, 1942), p. 335.

TO THE AUTHOR OF 'FLOWERING RIFLE' (Rev. Or. 'To Mr. Roy Campbell'). *The Cherwell*, LVI (May 6, 1939), p. 35.

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VIRTUE'S INDEPENDENCE. *Pilgrim's Regress*, p. 183.

VITREA CIRCE (Rev.). *P*, CCXIV (June 23, 1948), p. 543.

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WHEN THE CURTAIN'S DOWN. *Pilgrim's Regress*, p. 197.

WORMWOOD. *Pilgrim's Regress*, p. 177.

YOUNG KING COLE (Rev. Or. 'Dangerous Oversight'). *P*, CCXII (May 21, 1947), p. 434.

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POEMS

C.S. LEWIS

Although C. S. Lewis never published a book of verse during his lifetime, he wrote poetry from the age of fourteen. He included a number of short lyrics in his first prose work, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, and his novel *Till We Have Faces* had its beginnings as a long poem.

There is a great variety in the subjects of these poems—God and the pagan deities, unicorns and spaceships, nature, love, age, and reason. Walter Hooper, who edited this collection after Lewis's death, points out that the same man is revealed in his poetry as in his prose: "His wonderful imagination is the guiding thread . . ."

"Idea poems which reiterate themes known to have occupied Lewis's ingenious and provocative mind . . . a book that will take an important place in the Lewis canon."

—Clyde S. Kilby, *The New York Times Book Review*

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Cover design by Richard Mantel

A Harvest/HBJ Book

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1250 Sixth Avenue, San Diego, CA 92101

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