* Feux d'artifice *

♫

An Evening with the Poets

at 16 Tite Street

*

(Trial by Peers)

By Arthur Chapin

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Prelude to the Evening

A cold night… Round some hidden hive
  Stars swarm the sky like silver bees.
  I conjure Presences, and these
In dead of winter come alive.

I have but to invite them: They
  Are instantly already there
  By the hearth in my house of air.
What follows is the evening's play.

It takes its start, this long soirée,
  With tongue-in-cheek, *spoudogeloios.*
  Then comes along *Anthologoios*,
And all the laughter dies away.

Feux d'artifice:
An Evening with the Poets at 16 Tite Street

Bored with the 'In Memoriam' stanza,

1.
I'll do as *Byron* does, and slip
In (veiled as quoted song) a snatch —
Let's say, a little round or catch —
To let a different stanza trip

In Childe Harold *and* Don Juan,
for example, or as Tennyson does in
Idylls of the King *and* The Princess.

Trippingly from a tongue that pants as
The hart does for a cooling spring.
What follows is just such a fling.
(Form also has its wild romances.)

By mentioning Byron's name, I have invoked him. He 'sings', as follows:

Byron's Song

I.
I am one of those who are always coming back into
Fashion: such is the destiny of glamour.
Truth is a forest you don't crudely hack into;
You don't knock Beauty senseless with a hammer.
The latest word, if yelled, will tend to crack in two
Like split infinitives, which are bad grammar.
It helps a man who likes his youthful glow
To be mad, bad, and dangerous to know;

I play the compere in this piece.

II.
But where there is no style, and sense is lackin', too,
You do not charm the Muse, you merely damn her
With fulsome praise. With moral cant you are tackin' too
Far to the right, like Tennyson you yammer.
(Damn his Princess, his Arthur and his Kraaken, too!)
How many woo her, and how few enamour!
Many'll be the songs and sonnets, many'll
Be the bouquets, but how few prove perennial!

Thank you for sparing us the time
To favour us with a fine sample
Of your capacity, so ample,
To spin out an unlikely rhyme.

Now let the Shepherd Colin come
With oaten reed to tune his song
The graminivorous flock among
Till lengthening shadows call them home.

2. ***Spenser's Song:***
The Castle of Multessa

I.
A Falsework did Multessa raise, and strange
It was, of shimmering hue, a lithe illusion
Whose form and semblance oftentimes did change,
And mingled false with true, to much confusion.
Sir Plato and his knights, in white profusion,
By its weird-woven implications all
Enrag'd, and by its sinuous convolution
Baffl'd, laid siege against its willowy wall
With tactics dialectical, to make it fall.

II.
With ideal siegecraft did they storm the ramparts,
But cannon's argument, and ramrod's batter
Pass'd harmless through: so many parts were sham parts.
They lifted to the battlements a ladder,
Call'd Hierarchy, but with noisy clatter
It fell, and into myriad splinters flew.
They rais'd the siege. 'Twas neither Mind nor Matter;
Or both, perchance. What could those pale knights do
With such a solid dream, unreal, but not untrue?
*

For this melodious lay much thanks,
Sir Edmund, liege to Faery Queenes,
Bard of Enchanted Bower scenes
And Pageant Vices ranged in ranks.

3.
John *Keats*, for whom a ready tear
I shed, who joined untimeliness
With the eternal, both to bless:
A sonnet, if you will, my dear.

Keats's Song

I.
A sonnet, then, is what you ask me for?
Then what shall be the subject, in what key
Shall I best tune a strain from antique lore?
In the green key of eyes where jealousy
Sits crouched in torment like the hapless Moor?
The fanfare in diminished chords shall be,
As stately o'er the cold and marble floor
Treads sloe-eyed and divine Melancholy.
Being among her cloudy trophies hung
Those years, I have known crucifixion sweet.
For Beauty lives in Truth when fitly sung.
How to keep measure with her nimble feet?
When the arterial red coughs from the lung
The hoarse-voiced singer seeks a deep retreat.

II.
He of the sonnet makes as mute an ode
As is the Grecian Urn wherein his heart's
White Phoenix ashes lie, and strives to load
And bless with ripeness, by divinest arts,
The bare and bony branches of the oak.
On silent bars of cloud-rack, dusky staves,
He scores the Idea of the Nightingale,
As pale as chimney smoke.
To memory's ear, amid its crowd of graves,
Sing, wingèd ghost, to one whose spirits fail!

I pipe the ditty of no tone,
The unheard dirge, whose name's unknown.
On Emperor and Clown I shed
Psalms from the Bible of the Dead
And none give ear, ears have they none.
Another ditty of no tone:

All night by glimmering taper
I cut upon the paper
What proves a foolish caper.
My thoughts cannot escape her.
Song of no tone I shape her:

Alone, alone.
A moan. A groan.
A moon of bone.
Song of no tone:

I mourn
Forlorn.

*

(Forlorn! the very word is like—
  What is it like? Ah, yes, a bell
  To toll me back to my sole…cell,
Or bells that prison chapel strike.)

Fanny Brawne.

To Fanny

Deep in the thickening gloom of evening soft
The Nightingale in gathering shadow sings.
'Mid eglantine that wave their scent aloft
I place the Urn upon a hill, and rings
Of fire around it place. Long stand it there!
Long since are fled into the winter's night
Those twain who on St Agnes' Eve dared swear
Love to each other in the world's despite.
Fled is that music, O my Fanny dear.
Sweet, kiss my lips! – Are they too cold and white?
*

4. *A Hazing Incident*

Spenser:
Oscar hath dealt. The choice is mine.
  Wilde I do hereby invocate
  To earn his place among the Great
Favouring us with song divine.

I am heckled unkindly by my peers.

I choose to recite a poetical indiscretion of my youth: a sonnet written during my Oxford days.

Wilde's Song

To drift with every passion till my soul
Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play,
Is it for this that I have given away
Mine ancient wisdom, and austere control?
Methinks my life is a twice-written scroll
Scrawled over on some boyish holiday
With idle songs for pipe and virelay,
Which do but mar the secret of the whole.
Surely there was a time I might have trod
The sunlit heights, and from life's dissonance
Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God:
Is that time dead? Lo! with a little rod
I did but touch the honey of romance –
And must I lose a soul's inheritance?
*

Keats:
You are so desperately attempting
To be sincere, I doubt you. Why
Not try simple sincerity? –
He never found that very tempting.

Byron answers for me.

[B:} *I find the affectation most*
Affecting, don't you, John? [K:] *Indeed,*
My Lord. – [S:] *A great bell-ringing creed,*
Upon mine oath! Already lost,

Spenser adds his comments.

And yet to seek! What an hélas
He maketh of himself, this whelp! –
[B] *This is too rich, friends, there's no help*
But we must make another pass!

Byron speaking.

Byron (cont.):
This time 'tis Oscar who will speak
In script *italicised*, whilst we
Steer the ship on this Odyssey.
John, choose something especially weak.

From 'Charmides'

A little space he let his greedy eyes
Rest on the burnished image, till mere sight
Half swooned for surfeit of such luxuries,
And then his lips in hungering delight
Fed on her lips, and round the towered neck
He flung his arms, nor cared at all his passion's will to check.

Never I ween did lover hold such tryst,
For all night long he murmured honeyed word,
And saw her sweet unravished limbs, and kissed
Her pale and argent body undisturbed,
And paddled with the polished throat, and pressed
His hot and beating heart upon her chill and icy breast.

Keats:
I cannot help but find amiss
How you rhyme 'word' with 'undisturbed'.
[O:] *Should the Muse be so strictly curbed?*
[B:] Come, now, why should we stand for this?

.

Byron interjects.

Your doggerel Muse *ought* to be curbed,
The bitch! My worbd, I've rarely hearbd
Stuff so pretentious and absurbd!
Such drasty rhymes aren't worth a turbd.

The daintiest pornography
  I e'er laid eyes on! laughs young John.
  Sir Edmund, say, shall we go on? —
Enough! Enough *badauderie*,

Gentlemen! (Good, I've shed those slanted
  Italics, back in my own script.)
  It seems my poetry stands stripped
Before you fellows like a wanted

Man by the bounty hunter caught
  And handed over to the law.
  This lion will not raise a paw.
No, I am grateful to be taught.

And will be smarting with gratitude for some time to come.

5.
But I grow bold, my heart is light,
  And, loath to cede the Oriental
  To Byron, or the Transcendental
To any dark-conceited wight,

From out *The Rubaiyat* I borrow
  A page, and in old *Khayyam*'s guise
  Sing of the world that made me wise
By teaching me how Love and Sorrow

Walk hand in hand into the grave;
  And how that form called the *ghazal*
  Became Ghazala, Muse of all
My trouble. For I was her slave!

Ghazala

With a glance you converted me: I am your worshipper, sweet Ghazala!
For love is a feast, and the soul is never replete, Ghazala.

Oh I could draw down the crescent moon for a sword and slay
Fifty infidels! You *give me strength for this feat, Ghazala.*

How it thrills me to touch your skin, it is smooth as the merchant's silk,
Dark as the garden where we secretly meet, Ghazala!

What joy to lie with my head on your breast in the cool of the night!
But before the muèzzin's first call I take to the street, Ghazala.

I weep to leave you behind on your scented cedar bed,
But your parents are watchful, we must be discreet, Ghazala.

When Allah is on my lips, your *name sings high in my heart.*
But a thief haunts life's crowded bazaar, and his fingers are fleet, Ghazala.

TIME pockets the hours – even I, your defender, Oz-Khàr, cannot stop him.
Alas, that your beauty must wither like drought-stricken wheat, Ghazala!
*

Oz-Khàr Khayyam's Ghazal of the Desert

Some tears alight on the ground as a feather will land on a stone.
I am darkness, a shadow remains where I placed my hand on a stone.

Some yield to the tide of their blood, some cling to their place by the fire,
But I have sought out the desert and taken my stand on a stone.

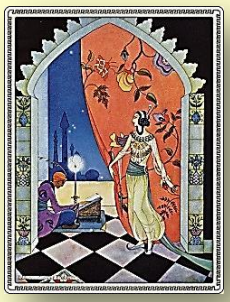
Among the locusts I think of the seas I have crossed: One is much
Like the other, my friends; think how puddles contract and expand on a stone.

You, Ghazala, who drew down the moon for me once, you whose beauty
Befuddled me: I am the outcast it pleased you to strand on a stone.

From my heart's bitter quarry I gouge out a pillar of pride where my wounds
May be written, as Allah might carve a ferocious command on a stone.

My griefs assemble and swear a blood oath to each other, they gather
In moonlight and howl, like some ancient brotherly band, on a stone.

When the lion-faced wind, that teethed on the ridges, scares up the grit
And the fury, I crouch with my back to it, sprinkling sand on a stone.



Oz-Khàr Khayyam's Ghazal Concerning the Truth

If there were such a thing, friends, I would speak, would yell the Truth –
If there were such a thing – if I could taste and smell the Truth!

Scholars, my dear Jalal, with their choice phrases, can they buy,
And Merchants, with their silks and spices, can they sell the Truth?

There is a wise man who insists that it is deep, Hassan.
What do we see, then, at the bottom of a well? The Truth?

We see false heavens, Màhmed, and a fool's-gold coin that blinds us
Like the Evil Eye. What, is a mad old Jinni's spell the Truth?

Suppose that such a thing exists: Is it so frail, Shabazz?
How easily the Mighty seem to quash and quell the Truth!

Yet think, Yaghoob: The Sultan's man, with rack and screw, who wrings
An answer from the hardiest soul, can he compel the Truth?

Allah perplexes me, Rasheed: He sometimes lets his True
Believers go astray, and shows an Infidel the Truth.

I had a love, Mamoon. Comely she was – and faithless, too.
Beauty is specious: Would you call a painted shell the Truth?

The maundering dreamer, who sees ghosts in moonlight: Who are we,
Jamsheed, to teach him, or the madman in his cell, the Truth?

Akbar, you know my mind: I hold all things to be Illusion
Save Death. For Heaven sends us lofty lies, but Hell, the Truth.

Pay no attention to your old Khayyam, pass me the wine,
My friends! Everyone knows that poets never tell the Truth.

♫

6.
When *Tennyson* dropped in, he caught
  And loved the echo of his nights
  Of good Haroun, and youthful lights
Twinkled in his old eyes. *Well wrought,*

He said, and Byron did allow
  Some wit, and snidely pitied Allah,
  Thrown over for the wench, Ghazala.
Then was I of their number now?

Tennyson his Tribute to FitzGerald

His friend, who was so crafty at turning
  A Persian phrase to English pure
  And undefiled, deserved a tour
Of loving force to *Rubiyat* turning.

And so Lord Alfred searched into
  His distant youthful memories
  And immemorial nerve-cells: These
Lines as from granite did he hew.

Nefertiti

The crescent moon, a crooked, courtly smile,
Hangs from its little chain above the Nile.
Guards march between the columns in the hall
Or stand with spear in hand along the aisle.

Pharaoh has nodded off; the harps have ceased.
You share your bed with me, a lowly priest.
How with your nakedness you bless my body!
But look: the god is reddening in the east.

You know, my Queen. His Greatness, AKHENATEN,
(Madman, *my brethren whisper,* misbegotten!)
Has eyes and ears in every palace nook:
To these, a wall of stone is thinnest cotton.

So I must leave you now, Beautiful One.
They'll miss me at the Temple of the Sun.
The slave they send will find me in the tavern
Draining a bowl of bitter oblivion –

How could I watch you seated on your throne
Beside this thing *that claims you as his own?*
Tonight, I swear it, at the edge of town
I'll carve a curse into his boundary stone!
*

Encore! But draw your inspiration
  Directly now, I pray, from those
  Arabian Nights that blushed the rose
Of a young bard's imagination!

Tennyson's Sonnet

Oh for the times of good Haroun
  When magic-carpet-riding heroes
  Flew o'er the minarets of Eros
Hither and thither 'neath the moon!

The heart danced to a different tune
  When lover met with lover: she rose
  To kiss him through her veil, her sheer rose
Veil, ah, she was his bliss and boon!

Not Haroun's days are these we live in.
  In motor cars the young men ply
  The busy streets, nor see the sky,
Nor have a dream they can believe in

Save the Main Chance. O Muse, dreams die!
  These words are widow's weeds to grieve in. –
  Dear Alfred, you were ever given
To melancholy reverie!

7.
FitzGerald joined the company
  And spoke in accents rather gayer,
  And like an Orientalist's prayer
Was his narcotic melody.

The Night of Nights

The Night of nights is come! The gates,
The secret portals, open are
(All other skies but doors ajar):
Now sweeter taste the pomegranates.

It comes, the rare Event, the Rite!
Call mad Rasheed from out his tent
To cry unto the firmament,
'Of nights this is the only Night!'

Now will the moon in fullest splendour
Dip his pale hair in water, in bowls,
In wine, in chalices and souls
As he glides o'er us, calm and tender.

For like a djinn in slippers slipping
In through the window he will slide,
Over the carpets he will glide,
Into our eyes his pallour dripping.

Blue-eyed Circassian slave-boys, bring
The hookah, sherbets, and sweet dates!
Let us pass through the garden gates
And listen to the bulbul sing!

*

Addendum:
No perfume has a sweeter scent
To bitter hearts and spirits gloomy,
Even the rhapsodies of Rumi,
Than Attar's 'The Bird Parliament',

That sovereign masterpiece of Persian.
Read it but once, 'twill set you free,
But do it deeply – ça sufi!
(Make sure you read it in my *version.)*

Laylat Al-Qadr, *a holy day on the Moslem lunar calendar marking the night on which the first verses of the Koran were dictated to Mahomet in his cave on Mount Hira.*

.

8.
And here *Charles Tennyson* dropped in
  And sang the dream of opium
  He still could not quite wake up from,
Fond of the Lilith of old sin.

Lachrymae Papaveris

The moon is weeping poppy tears
  Tonight; a pale and ghostly soma
  Sends into transcendental coma
The life of things, their hopes and fears.

O lachrymae papaveris,
  You are the tears of joy, releasing
  The world's pent pain in a heart-easing
Narcotic milk of mother-bliss!

O gift of Thoth, who planted you
  Deep in the night skies of the mind,
  Pale bell or bulb who bleed such kind
Hypnosis and white witches' brew:

Through the hard walls of waking bleed
  For me, and seep into my soul.
  Come, fill its dark and empty bowl
Brimful, and be in me the seed

Of legendary dreams! O sleep
  My sleep with me, my temples crown
  With poppies, lead me, lead me down
Into the enchantment of the Deep!
*

9.
Young *Swinburne* stumbled in out of
  God knows where, of the cognac-scenti
  Reeking, of which he had had plenty,
And sang a Pierrot's luck in love.

Pierrot Galant

I am a puppet of the Moon,
A busy midnight marionette.
I tumble and turn, I pirouette,
But the Pale Lady calls the tune.

'Tis SHE *dispatched our glib platoon*
Tonight, that darkness might not lack
For gibbering gibbon and macaque.
Then shall we dance the rigadoon?

O lean and slippered Pantaloon,
Counting your lovely bags of gold,
So avaricious and so old:
You lose your lovely daughter soon,

Fair Columbine, as fresh as June;
For Harlequin, the masked valet,
Spirits my fair coquette away
Unseen, even at broad high noon.

Ah, Harlequin, you sly buffoon!
Sleek in your skin-tight leotard,
A diamond-studded poker card,
Cartwheeling like a suave baboon

Into her heart you come, to croon
Lubricious balladry! Once more
She spurns her luckless troubadour,
Her trusty Corporal Clair de Lune.

(Comes the thrasonical, fat poltroon,
Il Capitano, reconnoitering:
'Cease and desist, fool, from this loitering!
Or I shall call my tall dragoon

To hail you up and down, festoon
Your lily wrists with shackles, and' –
I slip a coin into his hand,
To be disbursed in a saloon.) –

They say you slipped behind a dune
With Juan the swarthy stevedore,
And sold your tender mercies for
Some shavings from a gold doubloon.

Ah, like a spoon behind a spoon
They say you lay on Lido Strand!
Then what is love? The shifting sand,
A cloud, a carnival balloon!

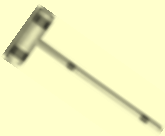
And Harlequin, you…picaroon,
You demon rider in the night
Capering in the ghostly light,
You witty ape, you handsome goon! –

But the Pale Lady calls the tune.
I tumble and turn, I pirouette,
A busy midnight marionette:
I am a puppet of the Moon.

*

Nor could the tippler in his neurosis
Forebear to indulge his taste for horrible
Ribaldry, which is quite deplorable,
Among the most ill-bred of poses.

The Masochist



I understand why you made sport of me
Before my friends, and called me 'little squirt'.
You took a croquet mallet to my knee
That day – but though it hurt (oh, how it hurt!)
I understand.

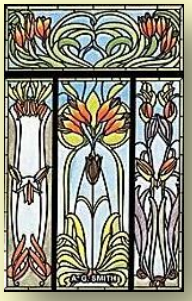
That soirée where (I could not help but see)
You lay with several men? How hard you flirt,
My darling! But perhaps you disagree?

Right, I deserved a slap. What am I? Dirt.
You? The To-Be-Obeyed, the Mistress She!
What's this? You're taking out your riding quirt?
I understand!
*

Pygmalion's Jealousy

Why did I ever wish you into flesh?
(At least your lover admires my artistry.)
One breath removed from marble, paint still fresh
And you go make a cuckold out of me!

10.
One Bentley, Edmund, what is it?
  Clerihew dropped in, unannounced;
  In fact he positively *bounced*,
Offering agenbites of wit.



Clerihews

I.
I, Bentley, Edmund Clerihew,
Invented a form that was very new.
Poets, of course, were delighted.
Why wasn't I knighted?

II.
A mind of steel had William Hazlitt;
Nothing could frazzle it –
Until it went insane
Over a girl in Chancery Lane.

III.
'Bathe in the water', said Heraclitus
To a chap with pruritus.
'Not in the same stream twice,
Of course: once will suffice'.

IV.
Strange, how René Descartes
Took old certainties apart
And set the world on its head
Without leaving his bed…

V.
Immanuel Kant
Was never in need or in want.
It saved him many an erg,
Never leaving Königsberg.

VI.
Arthur Schopenhauer
Directed his glower
Not so much at waitresses, students, and passersby, as at the unmitigated gall
Of things, existing at all.

VII.
The aforementioned Schopenhauer
Held views some consider sour:
That life is a waste of breath,
For example, and not nearly as good as death.

*

11. *Interlude: A Singing Contest*

Byron and I take centre-stage
  For this ridiculous interlude.
  (For Byron, 'tis an inter-*lewd*,
At times. I *wish* he'd act his age!)

The genre we choose is pastoral, in this case super-sentimental (in Schiller's sense). Byron 'tunes his lay' in italics.

Shepherds of Letters

i.
Tonight the moore-ish moon is rising.
  Flash the gold tennysons in the pond.
  How lovelace, I, and suckling fond!
How pale and wan, my shelleyising!

I walk along the coleridge
  Beneath a lonely wordsworth cloud.
  Day wears a donne and dusky shroud.
I saint john of the cross a bridge.

O'er a swift stream of consciousness
  I cross; the azure sky is clare,
  I breathe a bracing baudelaire
And I am gay at heart. I bless

The browning of the day, the leaves
  That in their nashy brightness fall.
  I keats the stubble fields and all
The shakespeares gathered up in sheaves

With white and wriothesley beard. Will blakes
  The dowson bread, and all shall share
  The goodness of his hardy fare,
The ale, the villons and the cakes.

ii.
Why mope that hair must thomas gray
When swallows chelidon the spring?
For I shall go a-miltoning
With gladness in my smart today.

But e'en a youth, though edward young,
May night thoughts have, and seek a place,
A churchill solitude, where rays
Of moonlight move the stones among,

And skeltons lie with webster skulls,
To marvell sadly over fine
And private graves where worms do dine;
And thus is proven on his pulse

Our brothers-grimm mortality.
Yet euphuistic lylies still
With colour all the graveyard fill.
Still of the spring's virgility

The songbyrds chaucer in the trees.
The yeats of paradise swing wide
Upon the spensery bowers inside.
Flowers catull us, the white fleece

Of charlsey lambs delights the eye,
The hazlitt hedges are alive,
For doyling conans there do thrive,
And larks patrol the fausty sky.

A de musset the nymphs and satyrs
Nimbly dance, and kiplings play.
The merry month of Mallarmay
Approacheth, and what joyce await us!

We lay us down in darkling beddoes
Where knightstale grows, and astrophel,
And jonsonwort and lionel
While hills cast down dark angel shadows.

We gather herricks, while we may,
And puck de quinceys from the tree.
In drowsy morpheus reverie
We mumble low *Laudànum Te*.

Historical Excursus

We shan't macaulay history's fuss.
Empires are gibbon to decay.
Though all thucydides away,
Their legends still herodotus.

Now morris-dance mel villegers
And many a boisterous dickin son
And dickin daughter join the fun
To tunes of fiddling massingers.

Schillery sheridan they quaff.
When in a ceres falling down
They droll, and breughel cockaignes clown,
How sterne is he who does not laugh!

iii.
If rain should burst from gowering skies,
'Twill do the grain rossetti good,
And I will don my thomas hood
To keep me dryden, hair and eyes.

If Jove should shake his byron spere
Villiers-de-l'isle-adàmantine,
'Twill not be long ere sun will shine
Propertiously, and skies will clear.

Let lightnings all the heavens rend!
When mists childe herald storm's abating
We'll find a pot of goldsmith waiting
At iridescent rimbaud's end.

Ere long the festeous rain shall cease
To pelt the hovels of the poe
And then a-trolloping I go
On my good de la mare, at ease.

I ride my horace down verlaines
Sun-dappled hawthorne trees give shade
And sidneying over hill and glade
I worship at arcadian feigns.

iv.
On vines the purpling pindar grows
While men on jacob ladders tall
Pick fruit in orchards where stendhal
The beerbohm trees in ordered rows.

At dawn the housman wakes, for he
Must clough and thomson all his fieldings,
Else crabbed will be the season's yieldings
And wilkie will his collins be.

Wycherley dons go quichotting
  Through thickets, at their simple noodling.
  Proud Chauntecleer is cock-a-doodling!
(He synges, because he likes to synge.)

How fresh the grass, and robert greene!
  When nanny-groat and frisky kyd
  Caper the wilde flowers amid,
How corydon the pastor scene!

Grandhoggs from holes pope up and peep.
  For truffles bristly beardsleys root.
  The evans on the eliot's fruit
Georges itself, and lolls to sleep.

Mice flee the hesiod falcon's glance
  Till under rocks is shelter found.
  The beaumonts fletch along the ground
In search of dainty aeschylants.

The pushkins and the hopkins kick
  In dostoevsky gambolling,
  While from the barnes the anvils ring
In dorset accents inches thick.

From udders of the cowper flows
  Milk by the quarto, fit for butter.
  Volumes of dung cause grooms to mutter.
In stalls, mares lick their folios.

The gissing gaskells zolafy,
  The call of naturalism heeding.
  The offspring of their careless breeding
Grub streetly round the moorey sty.

The bins are cramnered, oats and rye.
  The troughs are filled with golding feed.
  In holing sheds, for winter's need,
The salt-cured allinghams do dry.

Sly fawkes creeps through a garden gate
  With small renard for property.
  Into the fenimore coop bursts he
And flutters all the prousting hens.

The horne tooke calls o'er hill and dale!
Now fox in quakering fear must run.
Now robert burnes the mid-day sun
And the milk dickens in the pail.

v.
At Kleistmas we go carolling.
Though blow-ye-crack-cheek'd winds annoy,
The cold kant scott the season's joy,
Mount calverley oblivioning.

Though sleet and hegel isis eyes
The wouldsman sawyers down the tree
That soon with Forms festooned will be
Our yuletide thoughts to platonise.

A john can safely ford the fludd
When turned to ice where skaters skeat.
There's punch for those with frosted feet
And austen broth to warm their blood.

vi.
I hamlet in an open grave.
I dante through the savage wood.
If in that place I find no good
I argosy the pontic wave.

I wallow in wife-of-bathic lust.
Through alien corn I ruth a path.
Beneath an achillèan wrath
I hector down to bloody dust.

I dido died upon a pyre
And aeneas can william tell
Who left me so combustible,
A tender tinder for the fire!

If I have had a lover's tiff
And love gives me so sharp a pain
That grieving drives me half-insane
I sappho from the nearest cliff.

Bohemian sailors I adore,
Borromean, not. I cantor through
A set of winter tales or two
And lautréamont a maldoror.

vii.
O'er grassy fields young Colin herds
His battening letters: A and E
Are plenteous, while X and Z
Are few. Some form gregarious words –

They scrabble as 'gather', 'party' and 'join'.
Some stray in little pairs of 'we'.
A lonely 'I' must watchful be
Lest her a hungry woolf purloin.

When lengthening darkness from the hill
Foreshadows evening coming on,
The shepherd summoners with a yawn
In moschus meadows calm and still

The schelling sheep he kirkeguards:
All are accounted for, and thus
He closes his theocritus
And drives them gently homerwards.

While, from his jug of terra cotta
Draining anacreonic wine,
The cowherd, too, drives home his kine,
Pocketing up his Lysistrata.

viii.
Glims the lamenting Venus star low
Over the sea. Her cause of grief?
Leander, helpless as a leaf,
Sucked under water by a marlowe.

Yet chance what may, I seek a quorum
Of sailors, for I wish to odyssey us.
But let not any modest goddess see us
Tinkling in the Mare Librorum!

Excuse me! I believe it was my turn?

The contest is cut short by a loud intrusion before the audience have time to declare me the winner.

12.
Here Fleet Street made a Jumbo mass-
  Appearance at the window, and
  We felt the threat that it would land
Upon a sofa and be crass.

But, busy with its crimes against
  Good taste and all things Beautiful,
  It sent a delegate with 'pull'
In the world, toughly common-sensed:

That roll-the-sleeves-up, earnest *Henley*
  In *vers libre* none tried to scan
  Told us a tale Hogarthian,
Brave-bearded in bad health, quite…*menly*.

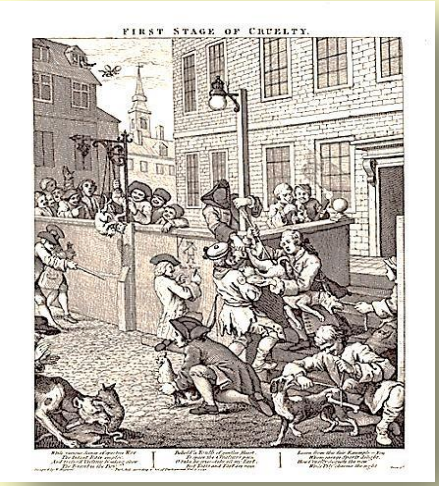
William Ernest Henley, who was once in hospital for a lengthy stay: journalist, poet and self-promoted Captain of his Soul.

The Four Stages of Cruelty

The way that leads from force to power
Follows a winding, torturous motion.
The narrow fury of a river
Drowns in the vast, impassive ocean.

The First Stage takes its origin
In the periwigged man with the arrow
Piercing the dog's anus
In Hogarth's series of engravings –
You will note, in the lower-lefthand corner,
The meandering guts a cur
Has bitten from the belly of a cat.

The short, brutish life of Tom Nero.



Hence Stages Two and Three,
Where beatings
Administered in streets
To horse and sheep
With overturn of carriages
To the scandal of the good
And other tributary evils
Lead finally to the unlucky notch
Carved into the strumpet's throat,
The emptying bottle of her blood,
The murderer apprehended,
Stunned in lantern light, the knife
Held out to him there, to damn him.

Cut to the anatomy lesson,
Stage Four: the table a ship's deck,
The amphitheatre a shore
On which the surgeons sit
Collegial and frank,
Expertly ogling
In the Royal College of Physicians.

On that deck
Note the criminal catch of the day
With the chum
Of its entrails slopping
From belly into bucket.

A dog feasts on the liver.

(Evil redounds to its source
With a redoubled force.)

Skulls seethe
In the rendering vat
That stands nearby, waiting.

(From his bones shall rise
His Monument of Shame.)

Observe the sturdy screw
Implanted in the skull,
How it cranes the thing up
That all may witness
The scooping of the eye
Out of its socket like an oyster.

*

Somehow Mr V has found his
way into the interior of the Poem.

13. ***Pantoum: V-Formations***

Here even *Mr V* made bold
  To play upon his name and call
  The geese to swim the skies of Fall
In memory of some faded gold.

I. *The Maple Tree, Years Later*

You had to leave me when the season changed:
The whipping wind, rain spilling from the skies…
The maple tree is shaken and estranged.
Geese on the wing: again I hear your cries.

The whipping wind, rain spilling from the skies:
Things almost spell the fragments of a creed.
Geese on the wing again: I hear your cries!
Where did it go, that dandelion seed?

Things almost spell the fragments of a creed
And I recall the turbulent litany:
'Where did it go, that dandelion seed?'
The leaves tear from the bending maple tree

And I recall the turbulent litany:
'How soon things reach the end of their brief length!
The leaves tear from the bending maple tree
When clouds of autumn spill their darkening strength.'

How soon things reach the end of their brief length
Let the birds testify: They fly away
When clouds of autumn spill their darkening strength.
The wind is flinging leaves, as if to say

'Let the birds testify!' They fly away.
The maple tree is shaken and estranged.
The wind is flinging leaves, as if to say
You had to leave me when the season changed.

II. *The Great Motion*

I always knew and I will never know
What they write wildly in a single sign,
This poem of going where you have to go.
The things I had were never really mine.

What they write wildly in a single sign,
The leaves are whispering. Nothing can stand still:
The things I had were never really mine.
The muscle of flying is an ignorant will.

The leaves are whispering, 'Nothing can stand still!'
And something in me wills a repetition.
The muscle of flying is an ignorant will,
This cutting through the air is a decision

And something in me wills a repetition.
They pierce in the direction of their need:
This cutting through the air is a decision.
'V' is for Vain and Vague. (What is my creed?

They pierce in the direction of their need.)
'V' is for Visiting and Voyaging,
'V' is for Vain and Vague. What, is my creed
A twig, a promise, any broken thing?

'V' is for Visiting and Voyaging.
A peacock cries, 'I was here long before!'
A twig, a promise, any broken thing:
Again they stir and settle – nothing more.

A peacock cries. I was here long before
I combed the leaves today, and left them thinned.
Again they stir and settle – nothing more,
And the wind answers only to the wind.

I combed the leaves today, and left them thinned.
Of rain, of leaves and leaving there's no end
And the wind answers only to the wind.
The broken branch and bough: how shall they mend?

Of rain, of leaves and leaving there's no end,
Sky-Writers. How are lives and leaves arranged?
The broken branch and bough, how shall they mend?
My hair grows thin, and all things are estranged.

Sky-Writers, how are lives and leaves arranged?
Unfold your secret Word, cry me the way
My hair grows thin, and all things are estranged,
And tell me why she followed you that day.

Unfold your secret Word, cry me the way,
Spell out the motion of that letter 'V'
And tell me why she followed you that day!
Shall I read Vanish and Velocity,

Spell out the motion of that letter 'V'?
Each fall you write it on a page of sky.
Shall I read Vanish and Velocity?
Perhaps the wind will pause and tell me why,

Each fall, you write it on a page of sky,
This poem of going where you have to go.
Perhaps the wind will pause and tell me why
I always knew and I will never know.

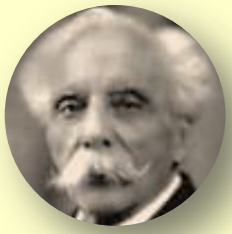
Dear, when I listen to these words
  I hear a distant Irish tune
  A harpist plucks beneath the moon
Till waft away the ghostly chords…

*

You *do* seem rather sad, my dear.
  I have been listening to Fauré.
  The *Requiem*? A bit worn away,
Though it still makes one shed a tear.

How strange, how beautiful, how sad
  This Master's latest music is!
  I've written about his Trio. This
We'll hear! *Some parts of it aren't bad.*

Fauré, Piano Trio in D Minor, Op. 120



What was it that made Nadia Boulanger so revere it,
This testament of his old age when he could barely hear
The lower octaves and notes sounded higher or lower
Than they were? –
The Great War has come and gone,
A shabby peace is taking hold. Memories of la Belle Époque
And the lyrical follies of a long-gone youth
Shimmer fitfully beneath dissonances that trouble
The surface of this music like acid algae blooms on a lily pond.

Especially the slow movement, the way it revisits
The early phase – like the Berceuse, that Proustian lullaby –
Bitterly enriched now by a lifetime's accumulation
Of disappointments: the thought that his piano scores
Had been used by his publisher's wife to seal jars of preserves,
That the petty politics of running the Conservatoire
Had cost him so many compositions – and, oh-so long ago,
How his Betrothed had broken the engagement and his heart.

He climbs a staircase of sequences with effortful steps,
At a gingerly pace, to the top of some unfinished tower,
And from there he sees all of sad and lovely and vanishing
Paris spread out beneath him like a floating dream.
Rain is falling past the mansard roofs and gothic spires:
Is it France weeping, is it notes falling from their staves?
The rain, only the rain, pouring through gutters and freshening,
Awhile, the sewer water rushing through the Catacombs.

Bravo! But answer me a doubt:
How *did* you get in here? *You mean*
In the Book? Till lately you've been
Only the scribe who stands without

The walls, since you are still among
  The living. *Well, I said a prayer*
  Before the gates, as I stood there,
And sang a spell, a magic song,

And lo! they opened wide, and I
  Walked into Literary Land.
  Then who is writing *this*, whose hand
Is jotting down our *causerie,* my

Dear? Who is minding, well, the *store*? —
  My guess is that the Book is writing
  Itself. By now it needs no guiding
Hand: it is automated, or,

Like the Akashic Records, our
   Good Mr Book self-registers
   When something interesting occurs.
Who would suspect Book had such power?

Please, show respect! It's MISTER Book.
  Who knew the thing was its own author?
  'Thing'? Does 'he' have a first name? *Arthur,*
With no 'v'. Can we take a look?

Mr V likes to spell his first name, 'Arthvr'.

Can 'he' be read? *I have no doubt*
  He's writing pleasant things about us.
  Making us interesting. Without us
What does it have to write about?

(I think I would prefer to think
  Him neuter. *He says he won't be*
  Insulted if you don't say 'he'.)
Is 'Mister Book' the missing link

Between the neuter and the gendered,
  Being both person and a thing?
  At any rate, *engendering*,
Creating us. I hope we are rendered

In subtle shades of green and yellow,
  Not in a Realist novel's loud
  Colours, not placed in busy crowd
Scenes in Fleet Street, jostling with fellow

Pedestrians for a taxi cab.
  That's really up to Mr Book.
  Right now it's telling me to look
Round and say, 'This décor is drab'.

I won't say *that*! Wait—I'm being told
  To look at *you* and say, 'Your hair
  Style, your *coiffure*, is drab. Come, *dare*
To have it curled, and dye it gold!'

All this is but a way of saying
  Your Book is writing all the books
  That wrote you. – What? 'Sblood, zounds, gadzooks!
That is both charming and dismaying!

[Somehow an altercation breaks
  Out between Byron and the poet
  Of Willowwood. Before we know it
They are rolling on the floor. Now shakes

My Hermes on its pedestal:
  I rush to steady it. Blows are landed,
  And they must both be reprimanded
Or other guests may join the brawl.

What, other than the alcohol,
  Fuels the fisticuffs? Alas,
  It seems that Byron's made a pass
At Lizzie Siddal, beautiful,

Wronged wife of Gabriel. Thence proceeds
  His jealousy, the exchange of gross
  Insults, the threats, and then the blows.
Byron the boxer hardly needs

Assistance in the silly fray,
  And Gabriel's sudden pugilism
  Can but exacerbate the schism
Between them, spoiling my soirée.

Desist! You shall not make a scene,
  I say. *Not in my house! No more!*
  Or Lane shall show you to the door.
Thus as the host I intervene

In the friends' quarrel, and with grave
  Face bid them make peace then and there,
  Shake hands, and reconcile, and swear
Never again to misbehave.]

The National Flag of Literarica.

14.
Shakespeare, not shackled by quotation
Marks of the possibly apocryphal,
In an ironical self-mockery full
Of smiles, joins in the recreation.

O keep far hence the
Oxfordians, the Baconites,
and other Doubting Toms!

The Winter's Tale

'It is required you do awake your faith'. —Paulina.

Art and Religion in wavering equipoise.

A gallery, under the direction
Of one Paulina, Love's strict purist;
She leads Leontes (gawking tourist)
To see the jewel of her collection.

The stage is set — she draws a curtain:
Brightly, yet shadowed by its irony,
Stands forth the statue of Hermione.
He feasts his eyes — but is uncertain:

This faithful likeness of the wife
He thinks he murdered long ago
(Now guilt and penance walk a slow
Procession through his empty life):

What made the artist think to trace
Upon its brow those lines of care?
The weight of sixteen years is there,
And ah! such sadness in that face!

Awake your faith, Leontes, rouse
It like a child you're taking on
A journey that begins at dawn:
He stumbles weeping from the house.

Have faith, repentant king: the stone
Will breathe, and there's an end to grief.
(And we'll believe in your belief,
Strengthen your credence with our own.)

Perhaps we're merely mocked with Art?
Music, awake her! Strike! Descend.
It's time. Now let those cold limbs bend
And leave their plinth. All those depart

Literarican Pledge of Allegiance

I pledge allegiance, with my heart
And soul, to lovely Literarica,
Sworn foe to Ideo-Hysterica
And chivalrous champion of Art.

Who scoff at wonders, or fear magic.
Childlike credulity's required. –
Then it takes place, the most-desired:
An exorcism of the tragic.

See! Like a fatal wound that mends,
She comes alive. Husband and wife
Embrace. Desire, done to the life,
Is its own earnest. The tale ends.

*

Doubt lingers. Curious, how these sleights
Of hand serve Christian piety,
True to the solemn mummery
Of ancient sacraments and rites.

Love's own High Priestess dares to preach
Faith by deceiving minds and eyes
When back to life she whitely lies
Love long thought lost beyond all reach.

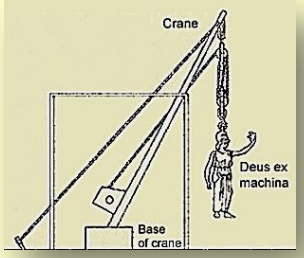
Paulina – new Apostle, with
The gall to be a feminine
St. Paul: this Romance heroine
Gently demystifies the Myth

To end all myths, and Paul's campaign
Ends in a disappearing act,
A trick consisting of the fact
That all the tricks are made so plain:

The coffin's trap door is laid bare;
Here's the technique that makes the Dove
Spring from the hat and wheel above
The witnesses in breathless air!

The miracle of theatre
And Christian Theatre of Miracle
Pivot where Art draws from the empirical
Fresh revelations secular.

Our disbelief hung there, suspended.
We wept, we gasped, put fleeting stock in a
Quaint, jerry-rigged deus ex machina,
Then marveled how the thing…transcended,



Curtain. Epilogue.

On prayer's tough guy wires. In a jangling
Sheet of thunder, an eyebrow pencil,
In a halo of shining tinsel,
A powder-faced god's awkward dangling,

In this sublime, momentous hoopla
Imagination found its Heaven,
And even the angels could believe in
Poetry's gaudy trompe-l'oeil cupola.

*

The Tempest

A crazed old man howls Fire! and Flood!
The eyes go blind, the mouth grows fangs.
Kindness is killed, the poor fool hangs,
And all is darkness, filth and blood.

There is another ending, where
Magic restored what evil banished.
The trick once done, the magic vanished
Into air, into thin air.

Free with the crows and frogs to croak
Ranges the Beast, and free as well
The Angel pines no more. My spell
Dissolves the mirror and the smoke.

No harm, no harm. Thou hast nor youth
Nor age, when all this fierce to-do
That scares the foreground, fades into
The vanishing perspective truth.

15. *Krishna and the Gopi*

Do not rob me by hoarding your riches,
Belovèd,
Do not deny me your larder
Or the lotus you conceal
Beneath your gold-embroidered sari:
I who slip past all limit
And return what I take
Increased a thousand-fold
Will not abide the bolted door,
The gated garden.

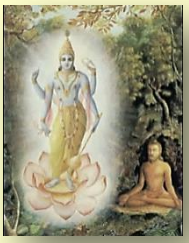
At feast's end
You lie down with your husband,
Belovèd,
But while he sleeps
You dance with me
In the moonlight,
In your naked beauty.
At dawn, when I steal away,
You return to your house
Sweetly bereft.

'My parents gave my body
To one who worships only custom,
Krishna my Lord.
But my love belongs to you!'
*

16. *The Dream of the Yogi*

Longing for nothingness,
I prayed to great Lord Vishnu,
Who dreams the Universe,
That he might cease to dream of me.

He was asleep, reposing
On the infinite snake, Ananta,
And dreamed that my request
Was but a dream – and so it was.
*



17.
Now giant *Mahabhàrata,*
  Panjandrum of all baggy books,
  An Epic Entity, his looks
A many-faced regalia:

The Mahabharata

[*Yudhishthira is eldest and most spiritually advanced of the sons of Pandu, or the Pandavas, heroes of the poem, whose arch-enemies are the evil clan of the Kauravas.*]

It ends, this mountainous poem, with
  A Quest: where Man's foot never trod
  They must, to reach the gods' abode,
Ascend the Mountain of a Myth,

For mythic in their scale, a still
  Power and violence of size,
  The mighty Himalayas rise
That are to Indra but a hill,

Footstool on which he built his palace.
  All but one brother died along
  The way, for weakness or for wrong,
Small though it be, some passing malice,

And so one only, Yudhishthira,
  He and his dog, the goal achieved –
  'Twas he who truliest believed.
The air around grew bluer, clearer.

'Welcome, my son, to Paradise',
  Said Indra. 'But you, only, may
  Come in. Your little dog must stay
Outside'. And tears filled the man's eyes.

He said, 'Then what have I to do
  With Heaven? This creature trusts in me
  And loves me well. I'd rather be
Outside with him than dwell with You –

'With reverence, Lord'. When thus was clear
    The proof the god sought of a great
    Soul, he said, 'Open wide the gate!
Both man and dog shall enter here'.

But there he spies his enemy
Who on a throne of glory sits,
And in his indignation quits
A place that crowns iniquity.

The hero now descends to Hell,
Doleful and drear: his brothers and
His Queen dwell in that shadowy land.
And the man says, 'I loved them well.

'Though they be by the gods abhorred,
With them alone I wish to dwell:
They are my Heaven.' Lo! their Hell
Is changed to Heaven, and restored

Are Queen and brothers – and his foe
Is sent down to the house of dust,
For after all, the gods are just.
And the Pandavas' faces glow

With joy and bliss, for a great portal
Opens, and all is blue as day,
And they at once know all the play
Of Lîla, *and themselves immortal.*
*

18. ***Laurence Sterne his Waggish Tale***

A shaggy story from the oral
Tradition, silly, yet improving,
Like a dog o'er the cosmos roving
To fetch the thrown stick of a moral:

The world's shaggiest dog was in
A solar-system-wide contest
Entered, and judged the shaggiest.
This same dog then went on to win

The trophy as the shaggiest
Dog in the entire galaxy.
In the intergalactic contest he
Was judged much shaggier than the rest.

In the universal competition
How easily did this canine best
His rivals! 'Much the shaggiest
Dog anywhere', was the decision.

But there's a further contest, held
Outside *the Universe, in Brahman,*
Where standards are above the common.
This shaggy dog, vanity swelled

By victory after victory,
The god beheld. 'No tail is waggier,
But overall, I have seen shaggier'.
So he pronounced, and great was the

Crestfallen disappointment of
The shaggy dog no more the shaggiest
(Although his tail's among *the waggiest);*
Not even, when push comes to shove,

That *shaggy, in truth (we shall not flog*
The question), no, not shaggy a-tall
Compared to what the Sages call
THE INFINITELY SHAGGY DOG.
*

19.
La Rochefoucauld now joins the crowd.
His waspish arrogance long-shed,
He has turned humourist, instead,
To speak of canines none too proud.

Maxims and Reflections of La Poochefoucauld

In the misfortunes of our dearest masters there is something that does not displease us.
*

First one dog barks, then another, and soon the entire neighborhood resounds to a cacophonous chorus. The polite phrase for this? 'Public opinion'.
*

Salivation History. – What is this thing the chien moyen sensuel *so piously honours with the name 'religion'? A conditioned response to the ringing of a bell.*
*

Xenophanes, you were right: God is only the mirror image of Dog. Even His priests wear collars.
*

The Cynic's Riposte. – Plato: 'Somewhere in the realm of Ideas is the perfect Bone'. Diogenes: 'No doubt. And the perfect case of Mange'.

Words are trapped in an unruly kennel where they never quite get used to each others' sense.

*

The Enlightenment. – Once we howled at the moon; now we howl at the sun.

*

Go on with your circular quest till you bite your own tail, continue till you swallow yourself entire! You will never be hungry again.

*

Whatever can be gummed does not deserve to be eaten.

*

Bone-Burying. – If for once we understood why *we bury them, perhaps we would remember* where.

*

Bone is two things: food and toy. And yet a third: private property. The origins of culture and society.

*

Critics loudly denounce my aphorisms: 'They are mere word-play, they bear no relation to reality.' Wasn't it Heraclitus who said, 'Dogs always bark at what they do not recognise'?

*

Seriousness is wasted on bird-brained devotees of fashion, hoppers from branch to branch on the knowledge tree. Bedouin dogs have a saying: 'You might as well bury your bones in the shifting sand.'

*

'Even a stray dog finds a bone to crunch,' reads the ancient proverb. Then why do our philosophers never *get it right?*

*

Whoever uses the phrase 'getting to the marrow of the matter' has never chewed on a rubber bone.

*

Vanity, vanity, all is – squirrel!

*

20.
Through the window a distant voice
  Came, clearly tipsy, calling for, oh,
  Some missing cat. But then a sorrow
Came over us. Cats are our joys!

Greymalkin, Greymalkin! Where have you gone?
O Malkin, Greymalkin, soon comes the dawn.

Greymalkin, Greymalkin! Wherever you are,
Pounce by the moonlight and catch you a star!

*

21.
Bast, or *Bastet*, Egyptian goddess
  Of cats and all the sinuous pleasures,
  Opened a box, and furry treasures
Leaped out and frisked in their lithe bodies.

The furriest among them, *Zephyr*,
  Told in a meowish accent stories
  Of Zephyr's Garden and its glories,
Its rare defeats. She was quite clever.

Three Triolets from the Garden of Zephyr

i. *Butterfly*

Creeping discreetly through the grass,
I see a butterfly flutter by:
The meal's too light; I let it pass.
Creeping discreetly through the grass,
I'm stalking robins, which – alas! –
Though plump and slow, my form descry
Creeping discreetly through the grass.
(I see a butterfly flutter by…)

ii. *Mockingbird*

The Mockingbird's a shocking bird.
Why must she squawk like that? It's rude.
Even Audubon, I think, concurred
The Mockingbird's a shocking bird.
And am I in the least deterred
From my designs upon her brood?
The Mockingbird's a shocking *bird.*
Why *must she squawk like that? It' rude!*

[With Old Montaigne the feline toyed,
Played cat-and-mouse with Emerson.
Ah, how she charmed us, everyone!
No evening's play was more enjoyed.

Does good Michel play with his cat
Or she with him? Yourselves the Grails,
You metaphysicians chase your tails,
And I shall have some fun with that!]

iii. *Waldo and Michel*

That crazy Waldo loves to chase his tail.
(I'm playing in the catnip with Michel.)
We note – it really seems beyond the pale –
That crazy Waldo loves to chase his tail.
We ponder, query causes, yet we fail
To find sufficient reason why the Hell
That crazy Waldo loves to chase his tail!
I'm playing in the catnip with Michel.
*

In Catilinam

For vehemence of declamation,
What squirrel could top that Cicero
Hopping-mad on the branches' tips?
Loftily conscious of his station,
He sneers down on the wretch below.
Scolding-hot scorn pours from his lips
While a grave senatorial bird
Appears to nod at every word.

Down there, in no particular hurry,
Deaf to this savage indignation,
The culprit yawns. The invective climbs
To further heights of righteous fury,
With pitiless enumeration
Of all the scoundrel's plots and crimes –
But if he hears, he gives no sign,
This lazy little Catiline.

*****

Two Haiku

i.
Sitting by a tree
I am startled by the sound
Of one leaf falling.

ii.
Cherry blossom.
Cherry blossom. Cherry blossom.
Cherry blossom. FINCH!

*

Where Do Good Cats Go?

On tippy-toes you nibble at your ease
Those juicy treats that hang from tuna trees.
Mice run from you or yield, just as you please.
That's all I know.

You knead the clouds, leap down from shelves of air
And land on puffballs. Oh what handsome fare,
What creature comforts, tasty creatures there
Where good cats go!

Discreet, obedient angels come on call
To keep your food bowl brimming, or to haul
Away the ashes – otherwise they all
Leave you alone.

You rub your cheek against the world, you toss
It in the air and pat it with your paws
Until its yarn unwinds. You can, because
It's stuff you own.

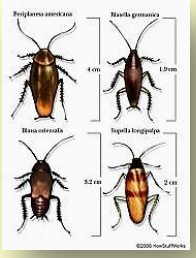
A downward glance will show the place of howls
Where fire-cats poke at veterinarians' bowels
And dogs in trees wince at those thunderous growls
And glowing eyes.

And mockingbirds won't look so smug or sly
Seeing Death's wingèd fur ball hurrying nigh.
(If what I've heard is true, that cats can fly
In Paradise.)

You lie on flowers beside the River Cream,
Dismember bugs (with which the grasses teem),
Or simply curl into a ball and dream,
Where good cats go.

Into the flow you dip a drowsy paw
Sometimes, and from the milky liquid draw
A fish, and watch it dangle from your claw.
That's all I know.
*

22.
An entomologist who doubled
As poet held us all in thrall
Singing an insect's tragic fall.
(The last words left us oddly…*troubled*.)



small threnody

i.
the cockroach came in search of food
& found his fate instead
began deadset on getting fed
& ended simply dead
the looter of the cupboard shelf
became the reaper's pelf
and rummaging through scraps of trash
became the trash himself
for humankind's immortal grudge
reduced him to a smudge
the best of us but leave behind
a brittle chitinous rind

the roach is dead besmeared with gore
we shall not see his like again
for seconds minutes maybemore
now let the threnody begin

oh carried in a little bin
he sleeps among the coffee grounds
nor hears the shrieks & keening sounds
of all his mournful cockroach kin
the cries are loud the tears are many
beating of thorax torn antennae

ii.
the roach is dead why should I care
three more just crawled across the chair
the roach is a generic creature
devoid of individual feature
who could parse such faceless vermin
into a sam a sue a herman
not i for one in fact the chances
are that only a st francis
could find it in his heart to loveall
creeping things that grope and grovel
& could the gentleman from assisi
preach to roach and not feel queasy

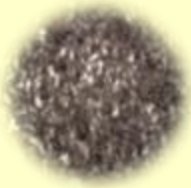
the roach has reached the other shore
we shall not look on such a one
for seconds minutes maybemore
now let the obsequies be done

oh bear him in his little bin
he sleeps among the coffee grounds
nor hears the shrieks & keening sounds
of all his mournful cockroach kin
the cries are loud the tears are many
beware o humans left if any
*

23.
And one whose epithet's the ringing
Pindar of Pismires our ranks swelled,
And he our rapt attention held,
Of miniature heroics singing:

Minuscule Elegy
For the Fallen Ants

i.
For those who swarmed to form a living bridge
And, as their comrades crossed the raging streamlet,
Fell
Into its current and were muscled
Along toward a hapless doom:
May these few words, too small to drape the grandeur
Of such a selfless deed, stand sign and sigil
For these honored dead.



ii.
For those who, foremost of the swart phalanx
In toil and formication of pitched battle
Fell
To pinches of an armoured foeman
And left their brittle dolmens there:
May these slight and unworthy verses poultice
The piercèd thorax with a hymn of glory,
Pledge of deathless praise.
*

24. ***Tom Thumb his Poem***
Two Inches High

He looks about, sizing us up – warily.

Let not my size
Surprise thine eyes.
I am not tall.
Thou art not small,
Yet still not all
That vertical
To God, whose height
Is infinite.
Comparative
Not positive
Such measures be.
Though I, being wee,
Barely begin
And end too soon,
Thou, tall and thin,
Seem but a goon
That ends too late.
I will not wait.
*

25.
Now small to large became the theme:
A Scholar – *Memnon, the Memorious* –
Himself an old Preposterous,
Made learning seem a moonstruck dream.

CORTÈGE

I.
TOME TOME TOME ***TOME****, THE FOOTNOTES POUND*
INTO THE IMPRESSIONABLE GROUND.
THE EARTH BOOMS LIKE A KETTLEDRUM
AS ON, WITH STATELY STOMP, THEY COME.
BALANCED, WITH SOMBRE STEPS AND SLOW,
BETWEEN PROCESSION AND TABLEAU,

THEY MOVE THEIR BODIES' PONDEROUS CARGO
AT A DELIBERATIVE LARGO,
WHILE RAISING TO THE BLOOD-RED SUN
A VALEDICTORY ORISON,
BLARING, THROUGH PAIRS OF IVORY COMMAS,
THEIR MORITURI SALUTAMUS.

WHILE IN THE TREES THE GRAVE MACAQUES
SIT QUIET AS BOOKS ARRANGED IN STACKS,
THEY TRUDGE WITH STIFF ARTHRITIC PAIN
ACROSS A YELLOWING PARCHMENT PLAIN
TOWARD THE PLACE THAT IS, FOR THEM,
DEFINITIVE TERMINUS AD QUEM.

II.
AS IN THEIR SOLEMN RANKS THEY PASS,
FLATTENING THE SAVANNAH GRASS;
AS LINGERING TRUANCIES OF DAY
SLINK OFF BEFORE THE ENCROACHING GREY,
THE MOON, IN GOWN OF BORROWED LIGHT,
DECREES A PAUSE FROM FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT
DOWN FROM HER LITTLE PODIUM HILL,
SHUSHING HER CREATURES TO BE STILL
WITH GHOSTLY FINGER AT HER LIPS.

NOW THE TENTATIVE LITTLE SIPS
OF SVELTE GAZELLES CEASE IN THE SEDGE
THAT RIMS THE SHRINKING WATER'S EDGE.
TURTLES WITHDRAW INTO THEIR SHELLS
TO MEDITATE LIKE MONKS IN CELLS.
THE RIDDLE OF THE FEMALE PENIS
PUZZLES THE MINDS OF THE HYENAS.
BAOBABS, WITH THEIR CRAZY-ANGLED
LIMBS AND BRANCHES, APPEAR ENTANGLED
IN RADICAL REASSESSMENTS. LIONS
PONDER THEIR SANGUINARY SCIENCE:
'AH! IS THIS LIFE, OR MERE EXISTENCE,
CHASING ZEBRAS INTO THE DISTANCE?'

III.
HAVING TRANSFIXED HER SILLY BROODS
IN TAXIDERMIC ATTITUDES,
THE MOON RETIRES TO WRITE HER MEMOIRS. –
BUT WHO COULD COUNT THE MANY GRIM WARS
SHE HAS WITNESSED? SHE COULD SPEND AGES
BLACKENING ALL THOSE PALLID PAGES

HER CHRONICALLY MEMORIOUS MUSE
MUST ASK METHUSELAH TO PERUSE.

AND YET SHE HAS HER HELPFUL SCHOLARS.
(CALL THEM INVETERATE RECALLERS.)
NOTHING ABOUT THEIR GAIT SEEMS HURRIED,
NOTHING TRIUMPHAL, NOTHING WORRIED,
MUCH THAT'S GREATLY RESIGNED. (CAN FATE
ARRIVE TOO EARLY OR TOO LATE?)
THE PLACE THEY REACH – WHERE MOUNTAINS TOPPLE – IS
THE GRAVEYARD (OR, IN GREEK, ΝΕΚΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ*)*
WHERE THEY LIE DOWN WITH GRATEFUL GROANS
ON AN ANCESTRAL BED OF BONES.

IV.
DISTINGUISHED MOON, BE KIND, UPRAISE THEM!
DON'T LET THE SCHOLIAST WORMS DEFACE THEM.
(REMEMBER HOW THEY SAT ALL NIGHT
BENEATH YOUR PAPERY SLIPS OF LIGHT
IN BAGGY, WRINKLED COATS, AND WEPT
OVER YOUR WORKS, WHILE JACKALS SLEPT?)
SET THEM AMONG THE BEASTS THAT TRACK
THEIR PREY ACROSS THE ZODIAC,

TO QUALIFY THEIR SAVAGE FRISKS

LIKE LITTLE SILVERY ASTERISKS.

GRANT THEM THIS HIGH SABBATICAL

UNTIL YOUR LAST, PALE PAGE IS FULL

OF DARKNESS; TILL IN THE SUBLIME

AND CAVERNOUS STUDY HALL OF TIME

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS LAYS DOWN HIS HEAD

AND SLEEPS, AND SNORES, TO WAKE THE DEAD.
*

26. *A Student of Dionysus*

His giant inner landscape he
  Laid open to the public view.
  It bears his name. He walked us through
The exalted Alpine scenery.

The Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche Recreational Wildlife Preserve

All is serene
Here, greener than the green
Grass on the hills
Of Sils
Maria.

My moustache,
Full of luxuriant flora,
Beetles o'er its base.
Visitors climb the rocky face
Of my mountains
With walking stick and knapsack.
They stare into the rash
Plunge of my canyons:
These stare back.

Some are looking through
The mounted telescope, which yields
To each his pint of view,
To some a quart, perhaps a gallon –
But to no one
Does the whole landscape
Reveal its shape.
The crazy-quilt unfolds into its fields…

Each jagged aphoristic peak
Glitters in its peculiar distance,
Austerely glamorous.
Tourists climb the steeps, and as they climb
They click their cameras.
Some picnic on the scenic overlooks.
Others explore the forests of my books,
Alive with beasts of dangerous innocence:
They find whatever it is they seek
In the ambiguous light.

I am open at dawn, noon, and midnight.
I am untimely till the end of time.

27. *Lao-Tzu*

Sophistication, science, art
Are fine things – but they leave us cold
When there's no play. *Though they grow old,*
The wise retain their infant heart.

Mr V: *This was said by Mencius, not by Lao-Tzu, who did not exist.*
Oscar: *He still doesn't, but let us not tell him. That would be rude.*

Then, going with the evening's grain,
A journey of a thousand miles
Begins with the first step, he smiles,
Aboard the trans-Siberian train.
*

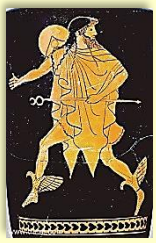
28. ***Song of the Forest Monk***

Bees fly in through the open door:
I'm covered with their stings.
Rats crawl across the rotting floor.
All things are Buddha things.

I patch the roof that lets in rain:
Again a leak it springs.
My yellow robe has a tea stain.
All things are Buddha things.

My brass hand-bell a robber stole.
(A pretty price that brings!)
He even took my begging bowl:
THOSE THINGS ARE BUDDHA THINGS!
*

29. *Hermes*



Flew in now, for the fun of it,
A messenger ambiguous:
The *Son of Maya* flashed to us
The silver quickness of his wit:

Or, more conventionally, Maia.

On Behalf of the Gods

DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER! I like to joke
When bringing bad news. You, of course, can't hurt us.
You are passing shadows, you go up in smoke.
(Whatever shall we do if you desert us?)

Two serpents, in a writhing stasis,
  Perpetually weave his symbol:
  He is the Trickster, swift and nimble,
The putter-on of many faces.

Kletic Inventory

Thief-god, famous in hermeneutic circles,
* Inventor of the lyre and father of liars,*
Patron of gamblers, travellers, flash-powder miracles –
* Smuggler-of-Priam past the Greek watch-fires –*

I of the mythic, mythopoeic look –
* Behold my lithe caduceus metamorph'*
Into a shepherd's honest tool, the crook
* With which I herd you to that Stygian wharf*

Where Charon rubs three bony digits, frowning –
* Conner of texts – wave-skimmer – angel and grifter –*
Joke-god – god-in-the-back-of-the-room, class-clowning –
* The Quick-of-Speech – crepuscular shape-shifter –*

Hermes typewriter.

The writing and the poem and the reading –
* The dreams of sleepers and the quick of metal –*
A flowing into quivering solid beading –
* Unsettling wherever you may settle –*

Teacher – bamboozler – anything – nothing – mist –
* Glib nephew of Atlas – Zeus's hustler-and-bustler –*
Concealer – Revealer – and – topping the list –
* Poet. Musician. Magus. Cattle-rustler.*

Those Little Reversals

As a baby I made the Immortals fine burnt offerings.
I wanted to play with fire; piety was my excuse.
I taught your cows to walk backwards, Phoebus. Go on, accuse
Me of increasing their value! Who wouldn't buy such clever things?

In brotherly blood feuds, prophecy foretells a rehearsal.
'Atreus will be king when the sun sets in the east.'
Zeus, at my urging, made that happen. Then came the feast…
To advance the plot of the play, introduce a reversal.

If I started a long and tragic war, it was not out of spite
But for gallantry's sake: introducing three beautiful goddesses
To a handsome shepherd-prince named Paris…As odd as this
May seem, Eros is older than Death, child of loveless Night.

Semele

Burning ecstatically alive
she gives what survives
in the womb of the Thunderer's thigh:
a fetal deity.

Expect blood-thrilling wine, the brandished
thyrsis, anguished
intensities on crests and peaks –
dangerous secrets.

This One for whom the women burn,
Twice-Born
to spark violence of the senses
in rites of dance:

I present him freshly swaddled
to the stern god:
'Father, from mortal Immortal rises:
Dionysus!'
*

Calypso

Skimming the waves
light as a tern
with my golden sandles

A blur in the mirror
of the sea, I convey
the will of the gods

To Calypso on her island:
'Must a goddess so lovely
stay here eternally lonely?'

'His wife, his son his home'. –
The message is: this *will be torn*
so that that *may heal.*

So I weave among you,
leaving each with a piece
of Fate's enormous news.
*

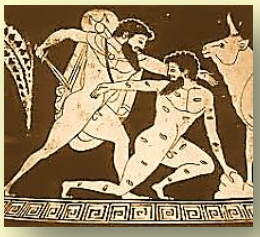
Hermes Argeiphontes

Slayer of Argus.

Io: how Heaven's Queen despised her!
Zeus was clever: he bovinised her.

So Hera must prevent, somehow,
This assignation with a cow.
She hires one Argus as a keeper
(No-Doze, friends call him, Never-Sleeper):
He is panoptic, many-eyed,
Behind, in front and to the side.

But I, who am my father's pimp,
Have found a way around this crimp
His wife has put into his plans:
I'll send the beast into a trance.
I'll flute a tune for Io's guardian,
Allegro, genial, Mozartean.



How grapple with a thing so light?
How can he see *that bevy of bright*
Grace notes that flutter past his ears
Like 'angels smiling through their tears'?
The thrilling trills, the highs and lows
Of saltatory arpeggios
Replace, as they dance all around,
Each mundane sight with heavenly sound.

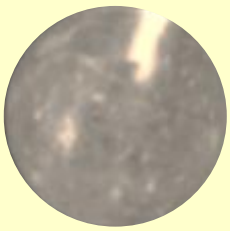
Now bit by bit things disappear:
A thorn-bush there, two poplars here,
Like city street-lamps going out –
And to his great relief, no doubt:
The visible's his one reality,
An ineluctable modality
That bores him, on a hundred screens,
With copies of quaint pastoral scenes.
'It's time', he yawns, 'these orbs to steep
In that sweet blindness they call sleep' –
And into such deep slumber goes
He never feels the fatal blows.

Zeus rolls aside, exhausted, sated.
The look on Io's face? Frustrated.
For passion dies in brief elation;
Music's the only consummation.

♫

♫

.*The Planet Mercury*



Spinning too close to the Lion's muzzle – but don't think
he circles frantically
Like a man engulfed in flames mouthing
the char of his flesh.
He holds himself to the fire and aloof from it,
Janus-faced martyr
To the shadow and the light. Reduced, unflinching,
he exists twice over,
Quickest to lead the planets' Dervish dance.
The Child-God owned
A pocketful of tops he twirled into the darkness
on a dare.
*

The Fortunes of Phaëton

O reckless driver of the sun!
How doomed a joy-ride! What a scare
You gave policeman Zeus up there!
This sort of thing just isn't done.

You cannot simply haul that star
Like a toy wagon on a string
Across the sky, you silly thing!
Driving so powerful a car

Without a license? By no means
Is such a thing permissible.
You *will be held responsible,*
Sir Phoebus. So your car careens,

Poor lad, knocking things over left
And right. Unwitting arsonist!
You leave in flames, at every twist
And turn, whole landscapes now bereft

Of vegetation; you break all
The traffic rules, and quite refuse
To yield the right-of-way – till Zeus
Steps in and shoots you down: you fall

To earth and land with a loud thud
* Even the Underworld can feel;*
* You struggle to your feet, and reel*
Round, and fall dead on the baked mud.

*

It's nice to be an open-air
* Carriage at times, though, isn't it?*
* You ply no whip, you bite no bit:*
The driver of the equine pair,

He *is the one responsible,*
* In the law's eyes, for accidents.*
* You merely take in the fine scents*
Of spring, look spruce, respectable,

Clean, well-kept, elegant and dashing,
* On a jaunt through St James's Park –*
* And ah, the admiring looks you spark!*
Yes, let the horses take the thrashing;

You bask in envy's tribute-fee
* The merely hansom and the trite*
* Hackney pay you to left and right*
As you pass by them haughtily.

How neat a metamorphosis!
* The passenger turned vehicle,*
* The driver, driven – and with skill!*
Why didn't Ovid think of this?

*

Atlas

A sturdy, simple stevedore
And caryatid, load-bearing column
Of sinew, his face rather solemn,
He has been eons at his chore,

Exerting stolid muscular force.
True, sometimes on him lands a boulder
And he must rub, on the sore shoulder,
(To do this he must first, of course,

Lay down his burden, carefully
And gingerly, upon a table)
Liniments from a jar whose label
Reads 'AA Hyde & Company,

Spirits of Camphor (Mentholatum)'.
From time to time – for 'tis no joke –
Heavy his burden feels, his yoke
Uneasy. The enormous Datum

That is the world in which we live
Can't give itself: It is the gift
Of Atlas, Champion of Up-Lift.
Sometimes there is *a bit of 'give',*

Perhaps in time the Titan's knees
Develop a tendency to wobble.
His grip grows weak, and should he bobble
That ball… Atlas, be careful, PLEASE!

'And what if he should grow annoyed
With us? Though it is large and granite,
Couldn't he just shot-put the planet
Into the interstellar void?'

Dears, there's no cause to be alarmed:
He is, in all, a rather gentle giant.
That's not to say he is a mental giant,
However: more like a beast charmed

By its brute strength and ignorance
Till it believes itself a god.
He meddles, with his brain of sod,
In the greater God's governance,

Mr V: *I'm surprised that a man of your great Classical learning would make the popular error of depicting Atlas as upholding the earth. Surely you know that the Ancients placed the celestial spheres on his shoulders, not the terrestrial one!*

Oscar: *That is both pedantic and impertinent, Arthvr. Of course I know this. Has it not occurred to you that I have* chosen *to adapt an 'error' with its own august pedigree, dating back to the Renascence, that is, to the bold reimagining of Atlas and his burden by the great Farnese, that epic poet who worked in marble? I suggest you address your schoolmaster's reprimand to* him. *And after all, the earth is our mother and the place where we live and love. We are, shall I say,* attached *to it, with the stern assistance of gravity. Who cares about the celestial spheres besides astronomers and Neo-Platonists? You are a better automatic writer than a Classical scholar, my dear. Your handwriting is beautiful, almost worthy of a Medieaval illuminator. Be a good fellow, concentrate on your métier, and leave the mythography to me.*

And with a porter's sensibility
* Re-stacks the goods of His Creation*
* In the absence of imagination*
And theological credibility.

He upholds, not the world alone,
* But all its worldliest views, as well,*
* The official story that we tell*
Of sin, and the need to atone,

Till by a Whiggish, slow reform
* Through proper channels, necessary*
* Evils are cured, by ordinary*
Means rendering the Good the norm.

Oh what a grueling punishment
* For mad rebellion against Zeus!*
* Your hunch is of so little use,*
Huge Quasimodo, stooped and bent.

Earth is so heavy, weary Atlas!
* Small wonder if you groan beneath*
* Her weight, and have to catch your breath*
Sometimes: She is a very fat lass.

Imagine she's a blue balloon,
* And you must hold her lightness fast,*
* Lest off into the starry Vast*
She float, just brushing past the moon.

First Interlude:
Procession of the Cephalophores

To Oscar Wilde,
host of the soirée.

Now Hermes plays a gruesome trick:
  He takes his head off like a hat
  And hands it to me *just like that!*
I am aghast. *Come now, old stick,*

He drawls urbanely, *simply hold*
  Me steady in your hand. – And now,
  A tender kiss on lip and brow,
A tingling warmth of red and gold…

As my dear frère-semblable grips
  Me firmly, warm, melodious blood
  And sanguine song in gentle flood
Will flow forth from my honeyed lips:

One by one, waving his golden wand,
Hermes evokes them out of air, out of
thin air: the headless wonders of the world!

*

O tall Green Knight, be silent, you
  Whose severed head swore Sir Gawain
  To such a perilous pledge! Refrain,
Bertran de Born, from swinging to

And fro the speaking lamp that lights
  Your way through Hell! O murdered Thracian
  Whose power of song decapitation
Only inspired to greater heights,

Who, singing your own elegy,
  Became the note you sang in death:
  The water music of your breath
Give rest awhile, and yield to me

The measure as you trace your course
  To sea. Listen to one whose change
  Is rich as the Green Knight's, as strange
As Bertran's, and as cruel as yours!

Let none of you call his the most
  Horrific immolation: See
  A Harlequin grotesquerie
Of which not one of you can boast!

And you who stained the very air
  With Terror (a martyred murderer's work
  When your own pate stopped like a cork
The crimson spill): Look, Robespierre!

Dullahan, Horseman riding by,
Holding your severed head whose eyes
Jiggle from side to side like flies:
Halt, though it means a man must die!

And Valentine, you! Not the first
Or last to lose your head for love,
Since love and grief go hand in glove:
Join us, the saintly and accursed.

Poor heads, stare fixedly as John
The Baptist's on a dish, struck dumb
By my erotic martyrdom,
My lovely suicide. Look on!

O cephalophoric Comedy,
Procession of the sainted dead,
O comet-tail with, at your head,
The headless miracle, Denis!

You the mortambulating Saint
Who staunchly strode to your own grave
Two leagues or more, and sermons gave
To make the very Devil faint,

Patron of the French capital:
Come, stand at ease beside me, let
Us have a little tête-à-tête,
Your head and mine, before they fall

Into the ground like corns of wheat.
[Denis:] *Corns that abide alone unless*
They fall, and then they die, and bless
The earth with fruit, and are complete!

Now arms toss heads into the air
And these shout out, *Hurrah!* and all
Then miscellaneously fall,
Each landing on another's pair

Of shoulders: yes, 'musical chairs'
With necks and noggins—who's the odd
Man out? Of course: the trickster god.
His head lands on the floor—but where's

His body? Across the floor it clatters,
The head-piece, and it seems quite lonely.
(*Where are my legs, my arms? If only*
I knew! It sighs. *Ah well, no matter!*)

John 12:24. *Epigraph to*
The Brothers Karamazov
and Dostoeffski's own epitaph.
– [Mr V]

It halts its progress, blankly staring,
  At the foot of the pedestal
  On which a statue stands, in all
Its glory: my own *Hermes Bearing*

The Infant Dionysus! — which
  Transforms into the deity
  Himself, with, on his arm, the wee
Godlet whose gifts will prove so rich

And dangerous when he is grown:
  Ask Orpheus, who refused to bow
  Before him (ah, behold him now!)
Or the rash Pentheus, whose own

Mother tore him to bits, and with
  Her all that wine-mad, frenzied band,
  For who can Bacchus' power withstand?
So Hermes struck, this living myth,

His fine Praxitelèan pose.
  Well, have you anything to say?
  He archly asks. But where are they,
That gang of cephalophores? *Who knows?*

Gone is that ghastly Company —
  Vanished before we can *begin*
  To grasp this object-lesson in
Comparative mythology.

The one that stands – or once stood, alas! – tutelary over the writing desk in my downstairs study.

Remaining faithful to Apollo. Since he was torn apart by the Maenads, his limbs have been sewn back together for the occasion.

Now this arch angel has a gay
  Imagination, critical,
  Not serious. For gravity's pull
Is small with him. He has his way

With the Sublime and the Austere.
  A dancing hermeneut is he,
  An exegete *en travesti*
Cheeky before the Judge Severe.

Each day in the Earthly Paradise
  The gorgeous Chariot's procession
  Makes a most luminous impression
On the Creator's gladdened eyes.

God so loves a parade! Good Lord,
  The Saints put on so grand a Pageant
  It must be seen to be imagined!
Oh how He loves to be adored!

The Prophets

Elijah in the desert, fed
  Cucumber sandwiches by crows:
  Splendid! But what do you suppose
Would make a prophet run ahead

Of the king's chariot like that? (Run!)
  Madness, of course. It's far too strenuous.
  But these old prophets are ingenuous.
They have no sense of what is done

And what is not, they are perfect strangers
  To the proprieties. They do
  As the Lord bids them do, these True
Believers: eat dung, sleep in mangers,

Walk the streets in the nude…Whatever
  You do, don't mock them, or a bear
  Will eat you up, right then and there!
And what they say, they say for ever.

Scorched to the bone is Jeremiah,
  Mourning his people and his city
  And helpless in his rage and pity,
Whom burning still in righteous ire

To Erin Israel's God will send
To wed the daughter of the King
And stow the Ark, that golden thing
We call the pot at rainbow's end.

A rum trade, Prophecy. You may find
Yourself imprisoned in the belly
Of a great whale, perhaps (quite smelly).
And Nineveh? God changed His mind.

And bring David's harp, as well, which
becomes the national symbol of Ireland.
You don't believe me, do you, Dears?
You believe it is a crackpot theory,
correct? Well, so it is, I am almost certain.

*

I am positively young and slim,
Revived in such good company.
Hermes looks easily like me,
Surprisingly, and I—like *him*.

He shifts his shape till it is mine,
And I am a theologian of
Drawing room comedy, where Love
Whose essence is an exit line

Is tricked into a happy marriage
By whimsical and arbitrary
Plot twists, and none mourns for Bunbury!
So Heaven and Hell in a fine carriage

Go riding off to honeymoon,
Leaving behind the scattered rice,
The bridesmaids daubing at their eyes
And the familiar Mendelssohn tune.

The Theology of Being Earnest
The Importance of

i.

So many golden bees have hived
In that important bonnet! Clarion
Clangings announce in tones Wagnerian
That Lady Bracknell has arrived.

Fall to your knees now, say you have lost your
Belief, pray that she exercise her
Mercy, and she will answer, 'Rise, sir,
From this semi-recumbent posture!'

ii.

For the God in my Trinity
Is Lady Bracknell. And the Son?
Her earnest Jack. Of Algernon
The Unholy Ghost is Bunbury:

In plausible invalidity
He waits till Algy says he can
Not be – but can a marriage ban
So wild a Ghost from roaming free?

Ernest, who as a lie must die,
As someone true will live once more.
Still, Jack wears black, in mourning for
The passing of an alibi.

He learns that he can cease to feign
An Ernest that there never was
And be the one he is. And thus
His 'tragic' loss becomes his gain.

There he is, reaching up to pluck
That volume from the top-most shelf,
The place where his name finds itself,
The aerie of his Romance luck.

iii. *The Unholy Ghost*

Who can say what it is? A flame
Of green and yellow, buoyantly
Flamboyant, now detached and free,
Now crimsoning with lust or shame

When red lips hotly blow upon it.
Sometimes it is a poem's begetter,
As when a certain scarlet letter
Ignites into a purple sonnet.

Or it will lose the world, and be
Content to lose it, too, just as
One might give all one is and has
To live a line of poetry.

Believe His fabulous lies, they even
Trump the Great Lady's interdiction.
Victorian eyes believe the fiction
And Decadence rules Dissenter Heaven,

If only for a moment, for
The several-hours' traffick of
The play, a momentary love
Of all YOU envy and abhor!
*

Resurrection in the Flesh
The Theology of Eros

Come la carne gloriosa e santa
fia rivestita, la nostra persona
Più grata fia per esser tutta quanta…
*
onde la vision crescer convene
crescer l'ardor che di quella s'accende,
crescer lo raggio che da esso vene.
—Solomon in *Paradiso* XIV, 43-51

When the flesh, glorious and sanctified,
shall be clothed on us again, our persons
will be more acceptable for being complete…
*
so that our vision needs must increase,
our ardor increase which by that is kindled,
and our radiance increase which comes from this.

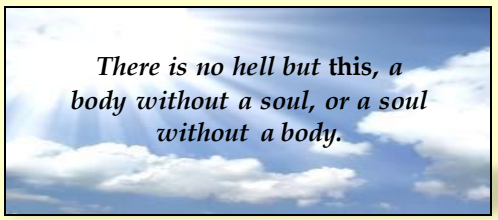
Ah, resurrection in the flesh!
Soul without body cannot be
Complete: it lacks entelechy.
Body and soul must fully mesh,

And so they do in Heaven; so
In this way is increased l'ardor
The Wise King notes: not less, but more
Intensely does the body glow

In the perfection of its nature.
Thus Aristotle and Saint Paul
Join hands, and body-soul knows all
The consummations of the creature.

Allow me some extrapolation.
For instance, are there lavatories
In Heaven, among its other glories?
Or will there be a sublimation

Of flesh? Will our digestive tracts,
Like Marx's State, wither away,
Leaving for free erotic play
The once-utilitarian facts,



Our crudest anatomical features?
For if I understand Paul's text,
If we have bodies, they are sexed;
If sexed, we will be sensual creatures.

Those heavenly bodies of ours will
Have intercourse of every kind,
Body with body, not just mind
With mind, and thus will soul fulfil

As real its mere potentiality,
And have an excellent good time
In doing so, in the Sublime
Of earthly, human sexuality.

And on reflection, I can see
No reason to deny the pleasure
Of good food eaten at one's leisure
With wine, and genial revelry.

Delicious was unfallen meat,
To taste which Raphael was not nice;
With keen dispatch in Paradise
He dined, and with concoctive heat.

In Abraham's tent God eats roast calf
With gusto. (And, the meal once done,
Vouchsafes the man and wife a son:
What can old Sarah do but laugh?)

Thus shall we dine in Heaven's Inn.
For so aetherial is the fare,
One can consume more than one's share
And still be fashionably thin.

Imagine! Alleluia *and*
Amen *will be replaced by an* ah!
And oh! *will do for a* hosanna*:*
Now doesn't that sound rather grand?

All will be yielded-to Temptation.
When Body and Soul together swell
One wine-dark wave, how can we tell
The Revel from the Revelation?

See Paradise Lost, *V.*

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for there-by some have entertained angels unawares.
Hebrews 13:12

Genesis 18:1-15

In Heaven the Angels seem to prefer a manna-based diet, which to mortals is angel's-food-cake, indeed: *'Yet He had commanded the clouds above, and opened the doors of heaven, had rained down manna on them to eat… Men ate angels' food.'*
Psalm 78:23-25

The Angels are immortal: they do not eat to live, they live to eat, and otherwise enjoy. They are holy hedonists and blessèd epicures.
Epistle of Pater 3:11-12

[Notes by Mr V.]

There is a different truth between
  The lines, which if you care to read,
  Subverts the stalwart master Creed —
A thing of esoteric greens

And yellows hidden in the grain,
  With its own occult history,
  A lavender theology,
A differently configured brain.

How shall one write love's hidden history
  When love must hide its name? A love
  Apocryphal, what to make of?
Its trap and refuge is its mystery.

The sacred beast, the abomination
  Of Man that lies with Man, of Man
  That wears the Woman's gown, how *can*
This monster love the Lord's Creation?

He is born Cain, and Abel beats him.
  He cannot be the one he is,
  Nor walk in the Lord's ordinances:
The truth of what he is defeats him.

The Tetragrammaton

The name of love we dare not speak
  Becomes, by its own secrecy,
  Almost a sublime Mystery,
Tremendum *on a cloudy peak*

Moses alone can look upon
  (Or the Elders whom God condescends
  To lunch with, as admiring friends) —
Becomes the Tetragrammaton,

In brief — in very *brief: just four*
  Letters, and no sign of a vowel
  In sight! So the Love takes a cowl
And vow of silence evermore.

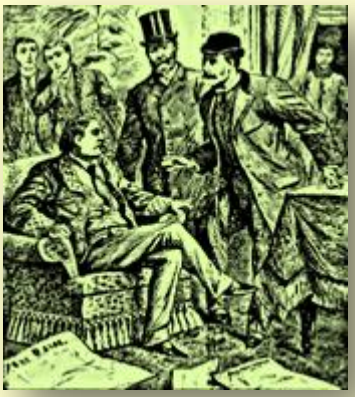
But the Law spells it out, to stun you,
  Flushes vowels from the consonants
  That keep the secret sense: advance
The shambling constables upon you.

Verlaine

Where height and broadness intersect
A man may feel the stress inside,
On paradox be crucified,
Crushed in a crux. *I am the Elect!*

I am the Damned! cries poor Verlaine.
The Pagan and the Christian, in
A duel of dualisms, sin
Against each other, and the pain

Of being stretched and pierced by demon
Eros even as one flies to Heaven
Blasphemes by uttering, with the Seven
Last Words, ejaculate of semen!



À mon Semblable, mon Frère

Villon, how colourfully you sinned,
François, my brother vagabond,
Who fought and stole and was so fond
Of a fat whore when she broke wind,

Who so insistently inquired
Into the whereabouts of snow
And Beauties vanished long ago—
Vanished, lamented and admired!

Hanged for your crimes, or so you feigned,
You cried compassion from our souls,
Your eyes pecked out and black as holes
In dice. The rope, by your weight strained,

Snaps: on your horny feet you land,
Begging, one hand outstretched, a sou
With piteous mien, while searching through
My pockets with the other hand.

To reach me, cursed, immortal poet,
You took the path that leads nowhere,
Knowing that you would find me there.
Brother, alone we need not go it.

No: we shall beg and steal and feast
And starve together. You'll betray
Me, won't you? Yes you will, some day.
Ah, but that doesn't in the least

Concern me: we have filched a hen,
Bought wine and the charms, not of Venus,
But Ganymede—who'll come between us,
And bitter words will follow then,

But that is then, and this is now.
(How soon will now be then!) Is there
No end to the exile that we share?
We'll muddle through it all, somehow.

We each came by a different way
But found at last the selfsame Hell.
What makes us good, what makes us well?
Dear, *te absolvo*, every day.

***Ballade des Pendus* (Envoi)**

Prince Jésus, qui sur tous a maistrie,
Garde qu'Enfer n'ait de nous seigneurie:
A lui n'ayons que faire ne que soudre.
Hommes, ici n'a point de moquerie;
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous
veuille absoudre!

'A Divine Comedy'
Continues its Long Run at the St. James Theatre

i.
Sometimes, my Dears, it seems to me
God made Creation just to show
What could be done *ex nihilo*,
As a pure *jeu de Saint-Esprit*.

Why *not* create a universe?
No one had thought of it before,
And formless voids are such a bore.
So, there it is. One could do worse.

To say the least, it shows a certain
Originality, Creation.
The audience thrill with expectation.
The fanfare, please! Up goes the curtain.

Man seeks a certain habitation.
Tell me: On Wisdom is an house
Builded, or does a pia fraus
Provide a sturdier foundation?

ii. *The Lord as Lord Henry*

A landscape artist of renown,
He shaped us, for our domicile,
A Garden in the English style,
One our own Capability Brown

Could not have bettered for its touches
Of studied wildness. And among
These bosky groves He placed the young
And lovely nudes, with profiles such as

Few artists' models of our day
Could hope to rival. What they lacked,
Though, was experience—a fact
The Lord addressed, in His own way,

By leading them into temptation.
This took the form of a fruit tree
Called Knowledge, clearly meant to be
A lively source of complication:

He *wanted* them to sin. To ensure
They'd eat the fruit that he had brought to
Their notice, the Lord told them *not* to.
To lend sin such perverse allure:

Was not this, in itself, perverse?
  Almost Lord Henry-like, in its
  Own way, to mold their childish wits
To seek a blessing through a curse.

Is Eden not a Gnostic College?
   Of course, when God tells the pair, *No!*
   It reads to their young ears like, *Know!*
For is not it the Tree of Knowledge?

On homophones is the exam.
  (Two words, the same when said aloud,
  Mean different things.) They have been 'ploughed',
Sent down, nay, rusticated! Damn

The snake, that renegade professor
  Of Gnosis! On the pair how just
  The ban that falls, as fall it must
On every naïve transgressor!

God willed the Fall. His tragic sense
  Of Beauty poisons fleecy white
  With scarlet sunsets. For the light
Is richest in its decadence.

iii. *Murder and Civilisation*

Now the experiment with Cain,
 The scandal of a murderous brother —
  Murder, Civilisation's Mother!
The arts are born of Abel slain.

For Cain miraculously finds
  A bride among the thorns, and founds
  A city: the entrancing sounds
Of Jubal's harp refine our minds.

And to this day the great Musicians
  Choreograph our ceaseless strife,
  Redeem this nasty, brutish life
With variations and divisions

Almost divine, but all-too-short.
  Bliss Schopenhaueresque and Buddhist
  Is interrupted by the rudest,
Loudest artillery retort.

The mind well-read in truth and law
  Acknowledges Will's lawless power.
  Though Art wields Beauty for an hour,
Life is, well, red in tooth and claw.

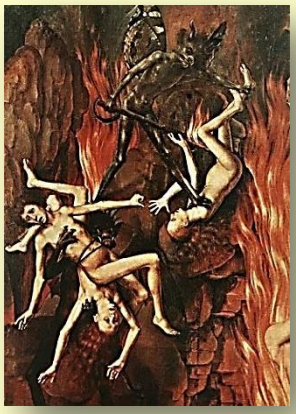
We're heirs of the first sinful Deed.
  In the beginning was the Debt.
  (The Mortgage, too—lest we forget!)
Where there's no credit there is creed.

iv.
But the Lord meant it all in fun,
  The Fall: a *felix culpa*—and
  Though we may shatter when we land
Like Humpty Dumpty, well, Dears, one

God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.— Rom. 11:32

Must break some eggs, *n'est-ce pas*? to make
  The Omelette of Redemption—which
  Will have a taste more rare and rich
When served us for His mercy's sake.

On the Last Day (it's understood)
  All the Lord's horses and all the Lord's men
  Will put us back together again—
Then let us hope we have been good!
*



Strange Gods

I. *Ye Shall Have Other Gods Before Me*

My god is not a jealous sort.
He knows the soul, how it will lust
For other, stranger gods. It must
Have its affairs, however short,

With those exotic Ones, queer fish
Of theological fantasia,
Goat-shaped, or blue, from pagan Asia,
Adonis-like as one could wish.

And when my god is introduced
To the most recent, does he thunder?
No, with sophisticated wonder
He looks him over, quite amused

By his pretensions, the assininity
Of his demand that I believe
His myth and affirm his naïve
Faith in himself. 'What crude divinity

'Have you picked up this time? Did you
Find this one on a sacred mountain,
In an old temple, by a fountain?'
He knows that none of them is true.

Your day has come and gone, Dagon.
Your oracles were hard to swallow
Even when the Sybil spoke, Apollo.
And Bacchus left me, for the dawn

Was grey, he found…It ends in boredom,
Like any too-extended tryst,
To be remembered, but not missed.
It fades, each flaming scarlet whoredom,

Into the ashes of such fire
As after sunset fadeth in
The west. For the original sin
Is unoriginal desire,

The worship of a store-bought idol.
I tell him new apostasies
I have committed on my knees:
He only yawns at the recital.

He's heard it all before, you see.
'Do something harder to forgive.
Your treacheries grow repetitive.
You might as well believe in me'.

II. *The God Who Was Bored*

When there is little to amuse me
I play my own Scheherazade.
I dream up a nice, bored young god
Who tells his faithful, 'You confuse me

With your pedantic rituals
And laws. Do some extravagant thing,
Murder, love self-disfiguring,
Or your belief in me is false

And none will walk the clouds with me'.
And then a trembling man came forth
Thousands of captives from the North
Leading in chains: 'All these for thee!'

He cried. 'For thee I have betrayed
My people into slavery.
So much thou signifiest to me,
Great Lord!' A maiden kneeled and made

Two rich red lines appear across
Her forearms with a silvery knife.
'Thou knowst how much I loved my life.
The more mayst thou enjoy its loss,

This life sacred to thee, great Lord!'
And a man turned lead into gold,
And willed it to the god, and sold
Himself for meat – the god was bored.

Salomé cried, before she had
Herself beheaded, 'Thou hast tasked me
For calling for John's head, and asked me
For mine. In this thou mak'st me glad.

Would it were thou who held the sword!
The mystery of cruelty
Is greater than the mystery
Of love, even mine for thee, great Lord!'

The sword struck, the head dropped. How greatly
She died, proud in her passionate madness!
But there was not a trace of sadness
In the god's eyes, so desperately

Sated with stale self-sacrifices,
Those formulaic martyrdoms
Done to the thumping beat of drums
Borrowed from that gauche cult of Isis.

And then there rode by in a hansom
A well-dressed man, holding a cup.
The Dandy drawled, 'I give it up,
Lime tea, for one whole day, as ransom

For any languour, so to speak,
You've noted in my zeal for "thee".
So many engagements, don't you see.
I'll drop a card on you next week.

'Oh yes: "great Lord."' The god was thrilled
At such extraordinary cheek:
He had him feted for a week—
And then, of course, he had him killed.

III. *Heliogabalus*

Assassinated at eighteen years of age.

A beast to Dio Cassius,
A monstrous mockery of Man
To Gibbon and Herodian:
Tremendous Heliogabalus!

He launched his scandalous reign and life
Outraging Roman piety,
Flouting Vestal virginity
By taking a priestess to wife.

For feasts Rome had not seen his fellow.
Out of the palette of his moods
He chose the colour-schemes of foods:
Blue feasts gave way to green and yellow.

He is, when not yet seventeen,
Already married to a man,
A charioteer far handsomer than
His rivals. The Emperor is keen

As any debutante to dance
The High Priest's Dance for Senators
Playing audience under threat of force:
He sways in a narcotic trance.

In smoothest silks of gold and blue
He shimmers as he minces. See
How the boy beckons teasingly
With a curled finger, peeping through

The doorway as the sun peeks over
The brightening shoulder of a mountain
Or eyes the glass beads in a fountain:
'How you must pine to be my lover!'

The other 'temple prostitutes'
And courtesans are common whores
Compared with him, who is, of course,
Ishtar, when sluttishly it suits

His Syrian soul, which corruscates
With exquisite corruptions of
Divine hermaphroditic love.
He even haunts the Janus gates

For pity, lavishing that love
On gruff Centurions passing by.
But his ambition aims too high;
He dares to set himself above

The mortal run, even deprecate
The powers of Venus next to his.
On Hubris follows Nemesis.
O Sacred Beast, you know the fate

*Of those in your…*especial *line:*
The head from shoulders rudely rent
And down a river's current sent,
Trailing a slick as red as wine.

In memory of poor, dear Saint Simeon Solomon, who passed away in a London workhouse, 14 August 1905.

Father Jonas

Cling to the altar like a supplicant,
Good Father Jonas. This cathedral is
Haven on earth, and steady is the Mass.
A sweet smoke spreads, and the communicant,
Drugged like a bee, feels anaesthetic bliss.
Felt bottoms glued to shallow plates of brass

Muffle the vulgar chinkling of loose change.
Father, is not this comfortable feeling
But a small dose of the approaching Calm?
For nothing in your Heaven will seem strange:
It boasts a marble font, a vaulted ceiling,
And fresh-faced angels sing a soothing psalm.

This Book you read from is your rod and staff:
Lean on it. (Could an ant have made those cries
You heard once, when you stepped on a dirt-clod?
How can a river's tumbling water laugh,
A fly see through you with its host of eyes?)
Stay here. Churches are where we hide from God.

*

** Psalms of the Heresiarch **

I. *Origen*

Now Origen, the Neoplatonist,
Maintained that Hell's a makeshift, a
Prison camp, that will go away.
Satan will cease to play the Satanist:

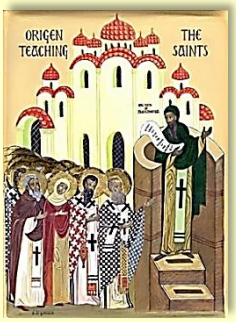
Exhausted by the painful schism
Between himself and the Creation,
He will renounce his old vocation,
Bored with his quaint Diabolism;

He will discard it like a dated
Ensemble, out of season, when
He rises in what Origen
Claimed is the preordained and fated

Return of all souls to the One,
Their Origin: a universal
Atonement for which the rehearsal
Is all our deeds, well- or ill-done.

Now English ears will find quite alien
The Classical Greek word for this:
Is not apokastastasis
Excessively sesquipedalian?

Locus classicus: the Vision of Er,
The Republic, Book X. — [Mr V]



Sense: Universal Restoration.
It means that at the End of Days
Evil and Good will both find grace:
A general-amnesty Salvation.

This was an optimistic thought,
But the Church Fathers understood
That evil is evil and good, good:
Some go to Heaven, some do not.

And so his books, being much despised,
Were set ablaze by righteous men —
And for good measure, Origen
Was annually anathematised.

It served him right, for he was wrong
To think even wrong would turn out right:
His liberal touch was far too light,
The grim sin-mongers much too strong.

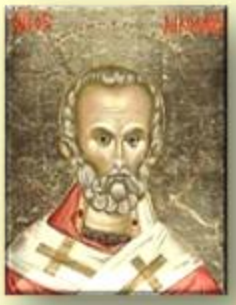
II. *Pelagius*

That bold Hibernian monk, Pelagius,
Maintaining that the Will was free,
Denied Innate Depravity.
Augùstine thought this was outrageous;

Convinced the human soul was sick
And without Grace our state was sorry,
He cried, Non possum *non* peccare:
I'll kill *that G*ddamned heretic!*

'I cannot not *sin.'* – [Mr V]*:*

III. *Erigena*



Erigena, another Celt,
Taught negative theology.
For God's transcendent mystery
Could be defined – or so he felt –

Only by saying what He is not.
We cannot predicate of God
The slightest attribute? How odd
And how abstruse-perverse a thought!

According to this *heretic,*
We must refrain from predicating
Even that He knows a single thing!
This seemed a sophistry, a trick,

And his young students took offence:
They thought what seemed like flat denial
Of God's omniscience was so vile
They stabbed him to death with their pens.

Such was their reasoned refutation:
That a nay-saying fool who taught
We only know what God is not
Should get to know his own *negation.*

IV. *Arius*

Arius, impious presbyter,
Professed a low opinion
Of Christ, not as conatal, One
With God, but only, as it were,

An afterthought, a mere creation.
Such is the doctrine we call Aryan,
(Not in the least bit Trinitarian!)
Which a strong dose of Athanasian

Credo was needed to deter.
His views were judged – ah, history's foxy! –
As heresy, then orthodoxy,
Then heresy again – mon dieu!

But fortune's tricks are multifarious:
Today, to be a Unitarian
Is to be anti-Trinitarian.
Well! Never count him out, this Arius.

V. *Chorus of Ophites and Cainites,*
Gnostic Libertines

From underneath Egyptian sands
We, the true Sons of Christ, arise.
Believe with us, and lift your eyes
From those false stories in your hands!

We are the Keepers of the Spark,
Worshippers of the Sacred Snake,
Christ's secret emblem…For His sake
We brave life's utmost sins and dark

Temptations; for His sake we suck
The marrow of experience
To draw our Godhead from the dense
Shell of the body's solid muck.

How else but through the furious thresh
Of pain and pleasure can one free
The spark of immortality
Imprisoned in the tortured flesh?

Is the Flesh evil? Then defile
The Body, make of it your whore
Until Lust knows it to the core,
How loathsome a thing it is, and vile!

Haunting the haunts of worldliness,
Baptised in rites of carnal pleasure,
We Gnostic Dandies walk at leisure
Through the secular wilderness

Like flaneurs on an evening stroll.
Sophisticated pilgrim: quaff
Sin's heady, poisonous wine, and laugh!
Redeem, by martyring, your soul!

What is forbidden to the Saved?
Let fools and cowards stand in awe
Of worldly authority and law
And keep their inner God enslaved.

Hosanna to the martyred Firstborn,
He who discovered sin to save
Us from it! Bless the curse God gave
Him, curse that God, the only Cursed-Born!

Blessèd be Sodom, scapegoat city,
Sister Gomorrah, too, we mourn,
And all the evils they have borne
Over the centuries we pity!

Into our hearts the Saviour burned
The secret words His Gospel spells;
By these we live and die. Who else
But we Elected Ones have learned

The joy of feeling overfull
Of raw Divinity, licentious
God-lust that thrills the nerves and clenches
The muscles of an animal?

Perfect, tranquil Eternity
Is entered through the tempest's gate.
Into our deaths we penetrate,
We shudder into Divinity!

VI. *Simon Magus*

Let the man couple with the woman!
Let the desire of girl and boy
Levitate into fiery joy:
They shall become the Superhuman.

O Word made flesh and flesh made Word!
When Kingsley shall with Newman merge,
Power and Knowledge shall converge
And the soul be both sheath and sword.

Let man be woman, woman man!
Let each tranvest the other, freeing
Themselves to be that perfect Being
Who was before the world began.

God is the deathless Androgyne.
For man is Power, woman Thought;
When these unite – O bliss long-sought! –
Humanity becomes divine.

Shekinah.

VII. *Saint Judas Iscariot*

For Thee did I consent to cover
Myself with deathless shame! 'Betray'?
Ah, what a false and ugly way
To say what Thou said'st: 'Hand me over'.

VIII. *Chorus of Marcionites*

The plural effusion of the one
Pleroma is exhaled, it breathes us
And from our earthly self unsheathes us
Into the Light. Adam Kadmon

Awakens in us from his sleep.
That cruel tyrant named Jehovah
Trembles, because His reign is over.
Let Him sink back into the Deep!

Christ did not die to save people, but to teach them how to save each other.
—Letter to Robbie Ross

IX. *The Docetists: John and James at the Sea of Galilee*

The Acts of John.—[Mr V]

'Who is that child? I heard him call
From shore; he said, Come unto me.*'*
'What child? It is a man I see,
And he is handsome, young, and tall.'

We brought our fishing boat to land,
And followed him, who now appeared
To be an old man with a beard.
He left no footprints in the sand.

I never saw him close his eyes.
One moment he was very small,
The next, so mountainously tall
His words came down as distant cries.

Sometimes he held me to his breast:
Now it felt soft, now hard as stone.
His face was dark, and then it shone.
He gazed at me, and I felt blessed,

Yet pierced, as with a fiery sword.
I said to James, in my confusion,
'Then is his body an illusion?'
But there before us stood the Lord.

'All things, and everywhere, thou art!'
I cried. 'Divinest Mystery!
For when I look on thee, I see
The God that dwells within my heart!'

X. *Gnosis*

I am not your father, but your brother.
How tall it is, how deep and broad,
The Cross that marks the place where God
And Man bleed into one another!

If you would find me, look around.
You breathe me when you breathe the air.
Lift up a stone, and I am there.
I am the seeker, and the thing found.

The Gospel of Thomas. — [Mr V]

Deny me. Then I shall return
To you. For I am not your teacher.
Be not a beggar or beseecher.
You *are the Truth for which you yearn.*

Thus Spake Zarathustra . — [Mr V]
The Gospel of Thomas. — [Mr V]

Now I shall strip, that I may don
The robe of my Ascension. Light
Is my ascent into the Light
Where waits my dear Apostle John.

The Secret Book of James. — [Mr V]

XI. *Judas Salvador*

In sin Man is what God is not,
So God took on all that is foul
In Man: To save Man's wretched soul,
God made Himself Iscariot.

Such is the monstrous thesis of Dem hemlige Fralsaren *(*The Secret Saviour*), a mad heretical book published in 1909 by the Danish theologian Nils Runeberg.*

— [Mr MCV]

The Miracle of the Stigmata
As Told by the Retired
Magus, Jesus of Nazareth

i.
I am that Jesus who, alone
Among the Christians, in the Christ
Does not believe. How over-priced
My Promises have somehow grown,

Gold standard Truth, the Word of God!
It seems now a whole world of souls
Trades in this currency, and tolls
Its bells in honour of a fraud.

ii.
Good Joseph bid the soldiers ply me *Of Arimathea.*
With a sponge secretly made magic
With sleeping potion, and tricked the tragic
Muse whose script bid them crucify me.

Martha and Mary Magdalen
Awoke me in my tomb of stone.
I went into the world alone,
With a changed name walked among men.

I dwell now at a far remove
From stiff-necked, proud Jerusalem.
I know the people, and live with them
In sin and joy, and weep and love.

iii.
I have returned to my first trade,
And, learning from my gains and losses,
Am an old hand at cribs and crosses.
I live in the new world I made,

Troubled by the fuss made of me.
I hear my name invoked by strangers
At the town well, they speak of Changes,
Miracles wrought or soon to be,

And I am bemused. They stand and blab, I
Pass on. Could they see up my sleeve
They might think twice ere they believe
Another charming, clever Rabbi.

iv.
And when I die, and they lay bare
The punctured hands I covered with
My robe – there is no end to Myth,
To Clown-God jests! – 'twill not end there:

(Ah, how ingenuously quaint,
Their simple faith!) The irony
That crowns the cosmic Comedy
Is that I shall be made a saint.
*

Faith and Despair

i.
The Imam bows, the Rabbi davens,
The monk rings matins from the tower;
Canonical is every hour;
Providence rules in every province.

The God we patch from all these gods
Accepts – this cunning composite –
Each Creed and seals the Truth of it
Against all reasonable odds.

Tailored to every sensibility
And custom, with but that faint, distant
Discord of dogmas inconsistent
To spice His robust credibility,

Some sort of God is in some sort
Of Heaven: then what's wrong with the world?
'When the world waxed old, it waxed war old',
Quoth Spenser in serious verbal sport.

The Holy Wars leave in their wake
How many a devastated nation,
While stifling their own inspiration
With every violent step they take!

And love among the ruins makes
Its home, its hovel, its haunt, its palace.
The Dome, the Book and the lost Chalice
Are souvenirs the mind forsakes,

Though the soul at war with itself
Digs lycanthropic in the ground
And howls at the dark treasure found,
For Lord Christ is its bleeding pelf.

ii.
I dreamt I saw the very air's
Religion: it was Ruskin's dream,
Athena. From her eyes the gleam
Had faded. In her stock the shares

Had fallen, the imagination,
Fallen, would put no stock in her.
Her owl coughed up a ball of fur.
The industrial cloud, a foul stagnation,

Revealed to eyes a dark religion
Whose day was dim, gas-lighted night.
The Dove descended from its height
Till it became a Hyde Park pigeon,

The bread-crumbs of amnesia
Its only sacrament. The beak's
Work left on statues thin white streaks.
But Lā ʾilāha ʾil ʾāllāh

'There is no god but God.'

Like a sword swooping through the air
Still rings against the Infidels.
Out of our Heavens we make Hells.
What was once Faith is our despair.

The Pentateuch

First God created animals,
Then Man. Next, He created Man,
Then, finally, animals. His Plan
Called for many such miracles.

Now, there were giants in the earth
In those days, sons of God came in
To mortal women ('twas no sin):
To monstrous heroes they gave birth.

And foremost were the Nephelim.
Of chthonian genius, walking towers
Of strength, with superhuman powers,
They were God's opium-pagan dream.

Like Nero with the Christians He
Toyed with extermination of
The masses He had ceased to love.
We bored the Lord. Tiens! C'est la vie.

Noah, sophisticated man,
Skims o'er the Flood in a fine yacht.
The louche charms of the polyglot
Are the Tower's curse. Perhaps the plan

Was over-ambitious? For two nights
Lot's daughters make him drunk: their way
They have with him, so that there may
Be Ammonites and Moabites.

Let there be colour, said the Lord.
Sin is the colour element.
Brimstone burns green and yellow, sent
Down on Uranians abhorred.

Even Whistler, master of design,
Of exquisite taste, did not give more
Fastidious specifications for
The Peacock Room than the Divine

Lord of Hosts gives to holy Moses
For Ark and Tabernacle and Tent
Of Tabernacle, details meant
To grace the priests' Levitic poses

With the appurtenances thereto –
Rich curtains, cherubs, robe, ephod,
And breastplate – thus to make of God
A Symphony in Gold and Blue.

FOR BEAUTY! saith the Most High.
The Aaronite toilette, the good
Smell of incense, acacia wood,
Burnt offerings sent into the sky

In sacred smoke-clouds: let these be
The envy of pre-Raphaelites,
And Pater will observe the rites
And prose upon them subtly.

The Ten Commandments plagiarise
The Hammurabi Code. Jehovah?
Derivative pastiche, warmed over,
Of Aten, and Canaanite deities.

God loves His Moses: that is why
He tries to kill him. Each God kills
The ones He loves, until He wills
Repentance. (Then His Son must die.)

The Scriptures dwell on the descent
Of Man from the first bitten fruit
Because this Truth is absolute:
That we are all born decadent.

Who was William Morris
compared with Monsieur Bezalel?

Coda

Onward and onward rolls the Torah.
But of Old Testament history
The glory and grandeur die for me
With tragic Sodom and Gomorrah.

Second Interlude:
The Trickster Tricked

Hipponax, bitter satirist
And ragged vagabond, came in
Out of the cold, a shivering, thin
Stranger to shame, and boldly kissed

The hand of Hermes (who well knows
The ways of thieves and beggars), whining,
Wheedling: '*A tunic with fur lining,*
Overshoes for my freezing toes:

'Cyllenian Hermes, Maia's son,
Just grant me these two gifts, great Strangler
Of Dogs!' – He adds, this expert angler
For cash: *'And maybe a drachma, one*

'Or two, or several, just as many
As you can spare? You've lots of money.'
(His gall has turned to sweetest honey.)
But, friend, I fear I haven't any –

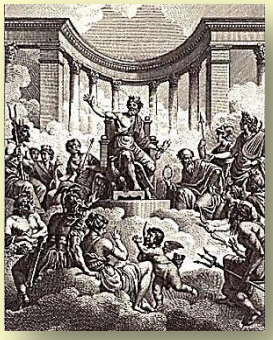
My purse is empty – and besides,
I'm not the god you're looking for.
I'm but his messenger – a poor
One, too! – 'Hermes, you'll split my sides

'With laughter if you keep that up!
Cold has already made them brittle.
(Some wine would warm them up a little,
And for the wine, I'll need a cup.)

'But there are some things I won't *swallow:*
This story that you're not the god,
For one. His messenger? How odd:
You are *the Messenger! You follow*

'Your father's orders, go wherever
He sends you with his high Decrees.' –
My friend, you have my sympathies,
And you are clearly very clever.

I'll tell you what: just write down your
Requests on paper, which then slip
Into an envelope. I'll zip
The thing along – presto! – before



You can say 'Hermes' it will be
In the god's hands: you know, on Mount
Olympus. And before you count
To ten – no, five – no, make it three! –

He'll send you all you ask for, via
Return post. All you *need to do*
Is pay the postage costs (both to
And from). – 'Accursèd son of Maia,

Cries Hipponax. '*So it's a fight?*
I'll lame you like Hephaestus with
*Iambics for this trick, you…*myth!'
As he storms out into the night

I stop him, for his hard lot grieves
My heart. I give him my great coat,
Warm boots, and many a pound note.
With mumbled *Thanks* he quickly leaves.

The Psychopomp has gauged the ways
  Of darkness. He who knows so well
  The tortuous blind turns of Hell
Knows, too, what a shape-shifting maze

The living must negotiate
  In the sun-dazzled world above.
  And you must make a temple of
This labyrinth that is your fate!

Proteus, Menelaus

Wing, claw, tooth, tusk…Sunlight will crystallise
  That shimmer into a single shape, the real
  God's face. Pinned to himself, he will reveal
Meanings and answers, will be tame and wise.

'This is why you have been condemned to roam
  The seas: you have offended Zeus. The breach
  Must heal. Perform the rites and you will reach
Your Spartan homeland, your Elysian home'.

But in those plush Fields, safe from mortal storms,
  The man stays tied to his identity:
  HEROIC CUCKOLD. Proteus, breaking free,
Escapes into the labyrinth of his forms.
*

Theseus

Enter the Labyrinth once more.
Take up the thread, the rescue mission.
(Why should she let you lose your way?)
Down halls torch-lighted, echoing
With cries, inch, cautiously, to where
A carnivore with hornèd head

Lives at the centre of the myth

By feeding on the virgin dead.
A swooping blade. A glassy stare.
You saved the young ones, hero! Bring
Them back into the light of day.
But the myth wills its repetition:
Enter the Labyrinth once more.
*

The Messenger

Long lateral shadow puppets stretch their weariness across the esplanade.

The Messenger blurs by.

Hourglass figures stand in studied stillness-attitudes, the sand inside them weakly sifting down. The bottom: filling up with time.

The Messenger looks at his watch, vanishes.

City of chess pieces arrayed in a million opening gambits! Blink an eye and

He has woven the victories and defeats.

The sum total call a draw.

Only one cinema in town, showing three movies, in the same order:
Morning's Matinee. Le Jour du Jour. That mysterious film noir, *The Night*.

To the Messenger: a single still.

Lovers, or lovers' shadows, standing hand in hand beside the circular canal…

Where is the Messenger?

Ten minutes past de Chirico. In the piazza a child's silhouette is motionlessly playing hoop-and-stick. There are no months, only the moon.

He has come and gone.

*

Priam

Suddenly I came to Troy
and found him riding in a wagon
filled with ransom.
He was heading for the enemy's camp
to beg the body of his son
from the man who had dragged it for hours through the dust.

It was nighttime when I appeared before him
in likeness of a young man with new-grown beard.
The Acheans not far in the distance
were rubbing their hands over watch fires.
I cloaked him in darkness
and none saw us pass.

He clasped the knees
of his son's astonished killer,
who uttered threatening words at first
but soon saw, in the old man's grief,
the image of his own.
Together, they wept.

The body passed through the Scaean gates.
They performed the rightful obsequies
and the king bade farewell to his son.
Hector, tamer of horses, burned on the pyre.
And it would not be long before his father joined him
in the place where the dead forget their dead.

*

Poem—Tmesis!—of Ulysses

In sight of the belovèd shore,
Shouting for joy through spray and foam,
I, nearly – but for the wind! – home,
Am cast upon the deep once more.

Heraclitus

Heraclitus can't step into the same stream twice.
At any rate, it wouldn't be the same Heraclitus.
I can't step into the same stream even once
because there is no stream, and I'm not there.

*

Demosthenes

I.
The graveled shore: mouth of Demosthenes.
The sounding sea: voice of Demosthenes.

No lisping silliness of syllables.
No throaty gargle or muffled meal: clear speech.

High tide's barbaric boom parsed into eloquence.
The word forced through a cluster of stones: thalassa.

Thalassa rolling over a sand-spit tongue:
All that immense mouth, stuffed with shingle, breathing.

Thalassa Anaphora*: Pomp of the pontos.*
Pomp of the orotund and pounding sea.

Wheeling above the fisherman's catch, gulls rend
The air with impotent, philippic cries.

Sshh. It comes again, the breathing seethe…
But not thalassa*, rhetor:* thanatos.

II.
Demosthenes, note, in this sign, what Destiny
Prepares for the Hellenes: the stars grow faint.

The conquering sun peers over the horizon,
Begins his rise. He breaks the cumulus coursers,

Scatters the cool mist, with much slaughter of shadow –
And enters his dominion at the zenith.

A bitten path twists down from hill to shore:
The bubbling surf, the hissing in and out…

Over the chittering pebbles crunch the sandals.
Bristling with oars, beaked ships put out to sea.

*

Marsyas

In a spasm of pique
she threw it away,
Minerva of the Many Counsels.

Not from a stag
or a red-crowned crane:
from the shin-bones of a man
knotted into a vessel for the voice.

It wasn't the ligature
or the strain on her lungs
that screwed her face up into shrewdness.
It was the song she couldn't abide,
the one she awakened where
it sheltered in the hollow
like a sorrowing thing in a cave.

The destitution of that mortal song
cries and is lavish in the ear,
a wave on a sea conch,
spendthrift, spindrift, spent.

Ending, and empty at the center –
resonating, for a while,
in the vice of space and time.

And the flute fell to Marsyas.

He was nosing the leaves for berries.

Cleft-foot demi-goat.
Little gamboling man.

And he brought to bear on the bones
his breath, and the history
of his breath – a freight
of dirty jokes and garlic smells.

The flute fell to Marsyas,
whose death lay inside him
like the core of a fruit
forbidden to gods.

When Apollo pulled him from himself,
it was for the secret he hungered to know –

'Where is it happening, the dying in you?
I want to taste it.'

Where does it happen?

Apollo was defeated. No Immortal
can occupy that empty space
where even the dead are never found.

He ordered the skin pinned to a tree.

And the god withdrew.

*

Out of the satyr's bones
I make an instrument to sing
in memory of those bones
that sang themselves
in flesh-tones, in Arcadian woods;
and of the flighty breath
that fluted and fluttered there
once, on a summer's day.

*

Eau d'Hermès.

Gnomics

I.
The rod that ripples is a serpent
That straightens and becomes a rod.
Moses relinquishes to Aaron
The voice that speaks the Word of God.

II.
Tiresias walking in the forest
With a stick parted snake from snake.
From man, a woman. From a woman
The Man who died for the world's sake.

III.
He gave to me, my brother Apollo,
The double helix and the staff.
Goddess with god engendered gender
Whose self would not be cut in half.

IV.
In a secret woodland clearing
Dwells the sacred androgyne
Whose wand is trance and transformation,
Quick branch, bright candle and a sign.
*

Liminalia

The compass needle trembles. He who is lost
hesitates. You will meet me at the crossroads.

Sorceries of twilight – hourglass granulating,
sand melting into glass: these are mine.

I read out my spells by the stars' pin-light.
Before Dawn comes to you, she comes to me.

I diced with the moon and won you extra time
to admire the Eternal before you disappear.

I lead you to the less-than-real-abode,
the placeless place. I traffic in your vanishings.

I am the quick of lightning and a thought.
What you call here and now: brief rests of mine.

I carry messages from near to far so fast
I confuse space. Distance thinks it is here.

(Sweater by Hermès.)

The Real? Look for it at the edge of a far shimmering.
There I have set my boundary stone.

The mirage you see, the city in the desert?
Perhaps the desert is the mirage.

A tree bursts into being, blazing like a vision.
It has drunk the soma *of your gaze.*

The table of square roots and to dream of a card trick:
I lay them impartially before you.

Take these things into evidence.
Hold them up to the radiance you see by.

You, too, were entered into evidence
when you entered the radiance.

Hermes Trismegistus
Magus

The alchemist's dream
is an ache in the mist.
The corruptible sorcerer
errs to the core,
Hears a babble of bells
when he summons music
with his spells.

The golden affinities lie
in mineral oblivion.

*
Inside the changeling
was an angel. .
He lived to word
the world.
With a wave of his wand
he assembled dawn.
*
As soon as he saw
what he was
He wasn't.
He only wants.
*
God into goddess
goes, gets with child:
It lies mute, in a trance,
almost-transmuted
Substance, no sex,
too many sexes: useless excess.
Hermaphrodite,
living epitaph!
*
The phallus
is an obelisk.
The vagina
is a grave.
* .

The Sicilian Expedition

Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, *6*

A minor god, despite my many aspects,
essentially good-natured, almost more human
than divine, and so I had a greater share
in the daily life of the people than the more austere
or blustering deities, huge in their armor
or unattainable in their sashed loveliness.

They evoked my name at crossroads –
all of these were haunted and accursed,
and I had power over the dead
buried in wait there, in the motionless space
where flows of traffic pass each other in their bustle.

At the entrance to their houses citizens placed my bust
on bronze, ithyphallic pedestals, a bluff sentry
blocking the approach of calamity.

And so it was an omen of disaster
when my images were smashed by unknown hands
on the eve of the Sicilian Expedition, as if to ensure
the beginning of the end of the Athenian Empire,
greatness destroyed by demagogues in the name of that greatness.

And so, no minor god, after all, your friend Hermes,
but the most faithful and witty companion
of the Athenians in the time of their ascendancy,
the first to feel the bitterness to come.

At war's end, as the Spartans dismantled
the city walls, the work was accompanied
by the strains of my beloved instrument.
Citizens wept to hear – ghosting the curt percussion
of pick against stone – the sound of flutes playing
cruel, thin, hieratic music, suitable for a god's departure.

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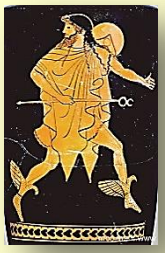

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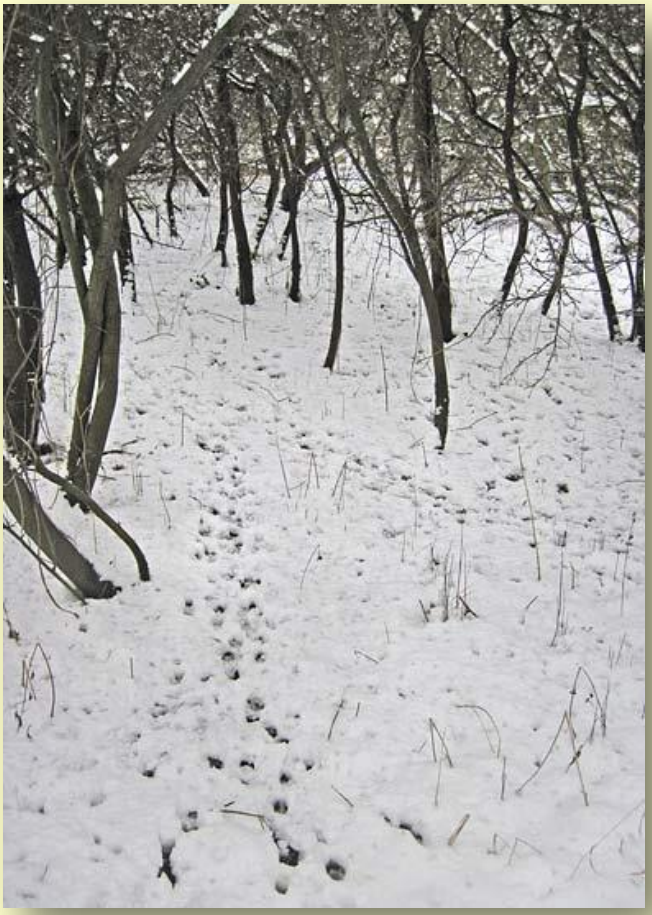


30.
Gluttony tempted me to eat,
He mocked me with a greasy grin.
Grotesque indeed, this Deadly Sin,
Composed of every kind of meat!

Arcimboldo

What carnage in the bowels when beef goes bad!
You are seated in the kitchen of your dreams
To-night, sleep-eating, when the meat runs mad,
Slaps back together along its bloody seams:
The tête de veau squeaks on the shoulder cuts,
Slabs of rump roast smack into buttocks, it's
Working you through the snake pit of its guts,
A banquet hall now, where the Fire God spits
Out sparks, bone-splinters. The gestalt-faced Cook
Serves him red chunks on your steel grappling hook.
Some blood is spilled… 'Look what a mess you made!'
Bellows the god. His eye-wicks redden – death
Booms from his guns – you wake gasping for breath –
The pin drops from your heart's fat hand grenade.

*

31.
Having climbed down from Mont Ventoux,
A little winded still, *Petrarch*
Sang of the star that in the dark
Shines us a path, if we are true.

La Gola e'l Sonno e l'oziose Piume

Hail, greed, stupidity and laziness!
All bow before the Bully and the Lout!
Intellect's winded horse, all turned about,
Repeats the steps that led it to this mess.

Heaven's bright lamps, that looked on our distress
And showed the way, are dark now – quite snuffed out.
Only a fool seeks water in a drought
That parches souls. The world could not care less.

What's this? Lust for the Muse? They roll their eyes.
Philosophy, what threadbare suits you wear!
Jeers the false prophet they call Common Sense.

Ah, Poetry! You won't find many friends
Along your way. Still, faith will get you there:
Upstream, you'll taste the waters where they rise.
*

32.
A lady learnèd and austere
From seventeenth-century Mexico
Joined us: *Sor Juana*. All bowed low.
Art she disdained, as ye shall hear.

In such company the language-barrier is no object. Her sonnet Englishes itself for us, even supplying appropriate epigraphs

On Viewing Her Own Portrait

(Este, que ves, engaño colorido)

This tinted trumpery which you here behold,
Where Art displays his brightest blandishments
In all their sophistry of red and gold
To practice trickery on your feeble sense;

This painting, in which Flattery makes bold
To undo the damage pitiless Time has done,
And, by rebuffing his strong, icy hold,
To banish Old Age and Oblivion,

Is a vain artifice of worldly skill,
Is a frail flower in the wind's onslaught,
Is flimsy hedge against Fate's iron will,

Is a mistaken and misguided thought,
Is foiled ambition, and, considered well,
Is a cadaver, is dust, is shadow, is not.
*

Where nothing is, but all things seem.
—Shelley, 'The Sensitive Plant'

…All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall.
—Browning, 'Rabbi ben Ezra'

33.
A melancholy mood took hold
Of me: the undying Beauty of things
That fade and die, on Psyche wings
Flew round me, shedding dusty gold:

Note: Monochronos hêdonê *is a term coined by Aristippus and referred to in Pater's* Marius the Epicurean. *The term is ambiguous: it can mean 'momentary pleasure' or 'pleasure in the eternal present'.* – [Mr V]

Monochronos Hêdonê

The hills erode, the heartstrings fray:
What stays these transient events,
What underlying permanence,
O monochronos hêdonê?

In Heaven is it on display,
The Eternal, for the Saved to see,
See and admire eternally,
O monochronos hêdonê?

Who could endure an endless day?
The fruits of earth are evanescent,
What's heaven-sent is heavenescent,
O monochronos hêdonê.

The angels' halos rust, and they
Must by new halos be replaced.
Whose face is not by Time defaced,
O monochronos hêdonê?

What, Pater, does it mean to say
The pleasure of the ideal now?
When shall we grasp you, where, and how,
O monochronos hêdonê?

The stage is bare where raged the play,
The earth is bare where stood a stage.
The sun will not for-ever rage,
O monochronos hêdonê.

Before it droops, and falls away,
The basil bears a bitter flower.
The swan sings in her dying hour,
O monochronos hêdonê.

A little longer they may stay,
The shining freshet-eyes of spring.
To see is to see vanishing,
O monochronos hêdonê.

The eyes that saw them yesterday
Are vanished, too, and with them took
All that they read in cloud or book,
O monochronos hêdonê.

Each learns afresh the ancient way
Of older giving way to newer,
The passing that we must endure,
O monochronos hêdonê.

Your hair was gold that now is grey
As what was fire is now an ember:
But 'tis the gold I shall remember,
O monochronos hêdonê!

*

34.
Now Thomas *Hardy*, Wessex bard,
Exulter over sunken ships,
Spoke to us through a Titan's lips
Truth sharp as thorns, as harsh, and hard.

The Scythe

I mow down the grass.
Much though it grieves me,
Much though I sorrow,
I mow down the grass.

Because it must
The grass grows green
And will cease to exist
Because it must.

They grow by the minute,
Hours into years.
An age breeds ages
That grow by the minute.

These will be hours.
Years will blossom
A crop of white hairs.
These will be ours.

This is the rhythm
Seasons follow.
When crickets are chirping,
This is the rhythm.

When grass is laid low
* Away go the swallows.*
* Winter must follow*
When grass is laid low.

For the gift of our marrow
* Feeds little hungers*
* That wait in the dark*
For the gift of our marrow.

My Master ordered
* I should be sharpened.*
* 'You shall not spare them',*
My master ordered.

'Cut off the leaves
* Or they will strangle*
* The roads and the pathways.*
Cut off the leaves!'

*

35.
Rossetti, bard of *Nineveh,*
  Told an old story he made fresh
  About the great King Gilgamesh,
A magical epic elegy:

Gilgamesh

Somewhere across the desert sand,
If tales were true, there was a land
Of sacred gardens…Far from Sumer
He trekked to prove the ancient rumour,
Beyond the shepherds with their shears,
The threshing circle of the years.

Two-thirds a god, a mighty king,
And yet in fine a mortal thing,
He dreamt a star that fell to ground
Foretold a friend, who soon was found:
Of boon companions the best,
He joined him on a daring quest.

But then the gods destroyed his friend:
That Enkidu *should meet this end!*
Heart's brother! Gilgamesh in grief
To see strength frail as any leaf
Could not accept that he *should be*
The victim of mortality.

Beyond the bosom of the mountains
Lies Dilmun Isle – the flowers, the fountains!
Here, Utnapishtim, ancient-young,
Perpetuates his bliss among
Elixirs gushing down in streams
To pool a capital of dreams.

To win that bliss the King must leap
The limbic hurdle of his sleep.
Counting the days he lay in bed,
His host heaped up a wall of bread.
It grew a green beard while he slept:
He woke at last, and saw, and wept.

The Thorn of Immortality
Plucked from the bottom of the sea
A serpent stole from Gilgamesh.
But disillusion of the flesh?
That *he was free to take, and took*
Back to his city of Uruk.
*

36.
Now Victor *Hugo* joined us, too,
And dusted off a souvenir
Of searing pain, as you shall hear;
Even English'd, grief came starkly through.

Tomorrow, at Dawn

For my daughter Adèle, drowned at sea.

Tomorrow, at dawn, at the hour when fields turn pale,
I will set out. I know you want me to.
I will climb the hill, I will walk the dale.
How could I stay, so far away from you?

I will walk quickly. I must cover ground.
I will walk blindly in the morning light.
Hands crossed, back stooped, I will not look around,
And day for me will be the dead of night.

I will not notice the sky's golden-greying,
The white sails reaching Harfleur in the gloom.
As soon as I arrive, I will be laying
Green holly and flowering heather on your tomb.

*

37.
Christina, Gabriel's lyrical
Sister, had but one small stone block
Of words that coiled in them a shock
Reverberant, enigmatical.

Epitaph

I was only a child (an only child).
Soft bones were knitting in my womb.
I jumped, or fell — I'll never tell.
My bones lie in this little tomb.

*

38.
And Coventry *Patmore* stopped by
And hearing hers, added another
Epitaph, a forsaken brother-
Carousel's silent little cry.

The Carousel

The carousel, this thing she loves,
The snow-white mane, her sheer delight,
That round-and-round-hydraulically-dancing
Proud and beautiful prancing stallion
— Where is Mary? —
That prancing stallion, proud and beautiful,
Hydraulically dancing round and round,
Her sheer delight (the snow-white mane!),
This thing she loved: the carousel.

*

39.
Came *de la Mare* now from the sea-
  O'er-hanging cliff where for an hour
  He had pondered Nature's pitiless power.
Turning John Ruskin's theory

Around, I wonder what he means?
  He seemed to ask. For which is worse,
  To feel, or *not* to feel the curse
Of grief, when even the cold wind keens?

Pathetic Fallacy

Weren't they the victims of a pathetic fallacy,
thinking that they could feel, that they wanted to feel?

On the cliff above the seething sea
why did that rock rock back and forth, or try to,
as if to dash out its brains? Because when the child
plummeted into the thirsty water, it had sat there,
unmoved? Because when the snake snuck
under it, flicking his forked tongue,
it could have refused to harbour him?

And the bone-crack of that storm cloud overhead:
What on earth compelled it to pace the heavens so,
returning to the same spot with its nebulous comb
as if to card the shadows for some needle it had lost?
Why throw that fitful lightning on the matter
only to wander off again, muttering in comminuted thunder?
No wonder the rabbit screamed.

Later, the tide crept away from shore like a criminal
out after curfew, because it was a criminal out after curfew,
because nothing was supposed to stir:
This was to be another night of bereavement,
with next morning's pall already picked out for it,
hanging in the hallway on the customary peg.

And if the wind runs whining with the old complaint,
look at it through the wind's eyes:
wouldn't yours tear up to see that same old figure
in black, in the archetypal shadow-cloak,
walking the loop that leads from the house
to the edge of the cliff and back to the house again,
thrusting a shoulder into you, stiff as a knife?

40. *Anthologoios*

When thus the party to the swell
  Was grown, the crowd of Poets took
  On one uncanny corporate look:
All merged as by some mystic spell

In one collective character
  We called *Anthologoios*, florid
  Name, though his gear was rather horrid:
For bony seemed the flowers that were

About his head enwreathed, and when
  He shook his locks a skeletal
  Tinkle or chime was audible.
A walking reliquary then

Did he appear, the oddly bright
  Soul of all Elegy, and in
  A small, dry voice, and whisper-thin
He spoke, this Skeleton of Light.

Morbid flowers like the rOSe, the gebonia, healing plants like boneset.

Picking Through the Bones

To Cartilage then I came…

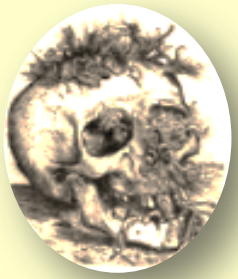
I.
The curiosity on a bookcase shelf.
Exploded diagram of itself.
Brother of rocks, sister of stones,
Made of these words as walking is made of bones.

In jackal jaws, a prize to shatter.
Small bones we heard with, dry wind-scatter.
Cuneiform bones unearthed from a shoe.
Under-the-tongue bone, speaking you.

The hyoid bone or 'U-shaped bone.
– [Note by Sir William Wilde]

II.
Because your bones are marrowless,
Because your bones are hollow,
Because your bones are cricket's bones
And because they sing chirping
With the burden of the grasshopper,

Light a bonfire
For Goodman Bones.



Because your bones are dispersed
Like those of the giant Epidaurus,
Because you know not where
In the illimitable sea your bones are hurled,
Sleep, like a shark in a wave.

Because flesh will grieve
On other bones than these,
Because death will drain your spine
Of it marrow and because
Our custom is to mark the earth
Through and through with our marrow,

Let us shake bones, you and I.
I give you this bracelet of bright hair.

♫

Then did he trace, with poignant stylus—
A metacarpal—in haiku
Condensed, the Epic (Homer through
Milton) with wan wit to beguile us.

Epyllia

I.
Wrath of the hero
doomed Troy. Sing, Muse, how he cut
down the horse tamer.

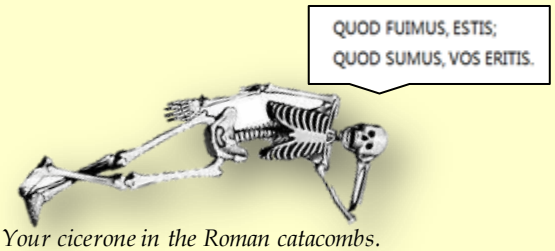
II.
Arms went with the man
from Troy to Hell to Empire
(Turnus reached the Shades).

III.
Halfway through his life
he climbed up from Hell
to the beatific stars.

IV.
Of the mortal fruit
we tasted. Out of Eden
Michael showed the way.

V.
Pick through poets' bones
and find the same old story:
De te Fibula.
*

As if to plumb the depths of Death,
Its penetralium and its ark,
He led us down into the dark
Recesses of a morbid faith.



Your cicerone in the Roman catacombs.

The Bone Chapel

Walk careful, sir, among these geometries.
Triangles, crosses, wreathes
of bone flowers, very sturdy.
The gentleman will note the chandelier,
how bright! A horrible extravagance!
You are marvelously aghast, no?
Here a niche, and here another.
Skeleton-Capuchins. Do they not look
frozen in the upright attitudes?
But they are ready. A ghostly hope,
you see. We call them Athletes
of the Eternal. They leap to the high places
when time will finish, will end.

Quello che voi siete noi eravamo,
Quello che noi siamo voi sarete.

Is it necessary I translate if for you, sir?
It is written in five languages, here and here
on the – what is the word? – placards. English, too.

What you are, so once were we.
What we are, so shall you be.

Look here, please, up at the Reaper.

See how it looks back at you from the ceiling?
The little eye sockets!

These bones, they are made of childhood
and a grief that has no name.
We call it, how you say? Insect-Cupid.

It flew from the grave to sting you
into timor mortis *and* amor dei
with equal parts of pity and terror!
It mocks the generative seed.

Would you care to stand beneath a suspended
threat? Imagine that you believe
this monstrous little darling,
Bambino Death, he is getting, maybe,
younger, and the skeleton clock,
she is moving backwards. Into the womb.
And they all disappear.

Here we ascend into the natural light.

*

Hermes Psychopompos

Shepherd of the Dead.

Cover her eyes. Steal past the dead – their souls
Are still awake – she must not see them – no,
Not yet… They are so weak, their shadows throw
Them on the walls, they have the eyes of moles.

Follow that winding strip – that frozen whirl –
Down to where magma forms a bubbling sod.
Let her trust gravity: it serves the god.
He dwells down there. That heavy heart…Poor girl.

Is that a faint voice echoing? 'Daughter, daughter!'
Now on her cheek she thinks she feels a breath.
'Come, I will bathe you in the cool, still water.'

It walks beside her now. Her heart is sad. Oh
Open her eyes, god, she must see the Shadow!
It reaches out for her. It is her death.

*

Now through him spoke the dark voice of
  A poet whom he did not name,
  Nor needed to, such was the fame
Of the one who twice lost his love.

The Orphan in the Dark

Who am I? Open up the book.
  I am the orphan in the dark
  Lamenting, cupping my one spark.
How could I help but turn and look?

'Eurydice', breathes through the cave.
  A whisper. A hiss. I grope my way
  Back up into the light of day.
There, in the meadow, is her grave.

There, the immortal snake that bit her
  Days, weeks, or was it years ago?
  'Eurydice', whispers the low
Wind in the grass, so cool, so bitter.

I lay flowers on her grave, and then
  I rest. I look up at the sky.
  I sleep, till I hear the wind sigh:
'It is time to go down again.'

His Grand Recital on the Harp

It is your audience with the King.
No one alive has seen Hades
But you. Play him your melodies.
Let there be no more vanishing!

One long, thin finger seems to wear
A ring of smouldering almandine.
His crown is a penumbra. Fine
Bone-powder whitens his grey hair.

His throne? A sort of solid smoke.
And next him, Queen Persephone.
Her face is chiseled ebony.
She is wrapped in a shadow-cloak.

How shall your music charm this head
That is a pale cloud in the darkness
Around you? Glooms of rocky starkness
Speak Death. His ring glows Hell-fire red.

Evoke for him the Revelry,
The dancing of young, nimble feet,
A blue sky and the summer's heat,
Fanned by a soft breeze from the sea.

That glimmering figment of a head
Is bowed, and down it seems to sink
In thoughts it swore it would not think
Again. Memories of the dead

Meadows, green spots where once he dallied
With nymphs long-gone, the fountains muddy
Now… From the brown to the black study
His mood is changed. His face is pallid.

He would cry out, but, short of breath,
He wheezes as he grants the boon:
'You, you will sing a different tune
To see her die another death'.

On his wig of bones in-the-wind-
  Tinkling he placed the pith helmet
  Archaeological, and set
Us on a dig, a 'scoop', a *find*!

With poetry austere he dug
  So deep into the ground, the dig
  Became *inordinately* big,
Till among bone and broken jug:

The Emperor Archaeologos

When the old man decided to drain the Mediterranean
his subjects, in their forced-archaeology camps,
laboured day and night till they lay open to the sun:
treasuries of silver fish gaping in a bleach of light.

Green bronzes, triremes, rolling hills of amphorae,
temple columns coaxed from the sand like a giant's bones…
One night a voice cried out: 'You thought you could hide
From me, Sacred Origin, older-than-Atlantis!'

They obeyed his dying command and buried him
in the lowest tier, throwing in slaves like luggage.
He slipped himself under that palimpsest of magnificent junk.
The dam was breached. Over the chasm healed the sea.

When machines of a later age reached the bottom
of the Emperor's Dig, he who was now
The First in History was the last thing found,
Primordial Founder and the Ultimate Find.

Then he by magic spirited
  Us all to the dry land of Sumer
  And played the delicate exhumer
Of treasures of the ancient dead:

The Royal Cemetery at Ur

Root delicately into the pit. Work surgically with brush and trowel.
It is so dense with the mothers-and-the-fathers-in-the-earth.
Help the earliness shed its tiers. Piece the tesserae, connect the bones.

Ur V.
Time of the lawgivers. It cost you five shekels to cut off a slave's toe,
ten for an ear. A foreign power had carted off the word for canal.
Finally, the city was destroyed. Everywhere you looked you saw a canal.

Ur IV.
Pictographs were slowly leeching out their pictures. Colourful, specious
religions were founded on a dare. They worshipped a goddess on a hook,
a martyr of meat. They splashed temple walls with a riot of vulgar clay cones.

Ur III.
Words were images of the halos around things. An oafish barbarian
reigned for fifty years. A rebarbative prude, he outlawed the lovely
erotic cylinder seals and poisoned the city dreamworks.

Ur II.
Fall of the tree gods: Their forked feet had tasted too much death. The substance
of deity lodged in the grain of things. A branch grew from the word branch.
In the granaries, rats gnawed what was left of the harvest. Famine ate the land.

Ur I.
End here, at the beginning, where they who have most to bear bear it most lightly,
consorts and courtiers buried alive with their kings. Priests recline in woolen skirts.
They eat dates. The soul has a tree-roots-and-barley smell…Water carves channels

through the clay and out among the palm gardens, weeping for Queen Puabi
in her mineral cloak. Here is the Goat God. Here is the Harp with a Gold Bull's Head,
still in the hands of the one who sang and sings it all: the skeletal musician: the poet.

*

He was a very ancient fellow
  Who had survived himself too long—
  The burden of his love-grief song
Falling like leaves, all golden-yellow.

* *The Temple Singer* *

I. *Curator and Priest*

Have I shown you the figurine
the temple singer?

Hold it in your hand for a moment.

Imagine the sound
of her voice,
how simple and clean…

An arrow piercing
a sheet of rain.

Water from a source
high in the cedar forests.

A fountain that surges
to the height of its yearning
and falls away.

*

Consider this blue world
pasted on the ceiling
in lapis patches:

It is my Never-Healing Heaven,
the plaster of its wounds laid bare.

I reach out my upturned palms,
try to remember the ancient prayer.

Dry rain sifting
from a tessellate sky
dusts my hair with fine
white powder.

I have forgotten the names of my gods.

II. *Empty Room, Open Window*

This clay tablet:
I pierced it with signs
fresh as love-bites once—
shaped like your sex:

They meant You.

I rub the clay
like flint to ignite
one scintilla
of that sunburnt noon

and the desert sand relieves
and there rises once again
a city of towers and temples,
gardens and canals: the wonders
of a dream with its own blue sky…

Oh the swelling of that day
and the minute of the hour
and the scent of roses in a bowl!

You naked on your bed of cedar,
your beauty
burning in its fire
like a sacrifice,
You, reaching out your arms to me!

*

Empty room.
Open window.

Nothing.

*

And the scent of roses in a bowl.

III. *Cedar and Pine*

Here in this alcove
absence takes the shape
of tallow smoke.

One memory is another
and their sum is oblivion.

Did I once write a poem
for a temple singer?

I have known many temple singers.

But now once again it is You
and only You
walking beside me
in the cool of the morning
in the garden by the river.

*

I think of the curved planks
you were admiring on the wharf that day
when you said to the shipwright:

I have never seen wood sanded so smooth.

You turned to me in the midday air
and whispered in my ear:

Smell the wood, Love, and it is only you and I
up in the mountains, among the cedar and pine.

And I am still perhaps a little jealous
how in full view of the appreciative youth
you ran your slender fingers
over that curvilinear, unassuming grace—
seaworthy work of his hands.

IV. *The Splendid Arrogance of Trumpets*

Dawn, inching into colors.
First day of the planting season.

I wake up in your bed.

In a timid nimbus of light
I see you there beside me,
propped on one elbow, gazing
into my eyes with a tender,
slightly abstracted look,
running your fingers through my hair
lightly as birds skim water.

A blaring of brass horns
in the distance fanfares
a procession of soldiers
coming home victorious
through the lapis-covered gate.

Children dancing in the street.
The splendid arrogance of trumpets,
jingle of timbrels shaken.
Women in windows
showering roses and lilies of the valley.

And the young captain
who slew thirty men in battle
walking grim in his terror
of showing how abashed
and delighted he is.

Now you, at the window,
motioning to me: *Come and see!*

You take from your hair
a single red rose
and let it slip from your hands.

You turn with a smile,
looking just a little
beyond me.

V. *The Swiftness of Rivers*

Today I sing before my Lord the Moon,
you said. *"I must purify myself*
in the sacred waters.
My harp needs tuning,
my hair is a scandal of disarray.
Help me put on my necklace,
you gawking idler! –

But O my Belovèd,
How lovely you are in my sight!
How comely are your ears with precious gems,
your arms with bands of gold!

When I look into your eyes
I see sunlight playing
on the surface of the waters.

*

All our days were spent among roses
and finely wrought things,
vessels of bronze and gold.

We laughed as we spoke of love and life
in a dead language.

I have forgotten
how to say the words.
But I remember the laughter.
It is its own language.

I think it is the speech of gods
and swift rivers.

VI. *I Remember the Night, and the Moon*

Darkfall. What daylight had repressed
rose up as pallor, with a new answer
to the immortal question that is night.

Insomnia's god, your face the color of my bones:
how subtle you are, to shed a light so akin to shadow.
You would smile so faintly at the sacred game,

the Lion-Bird gnawing you away, you ripening
again, like barley in the barley's season.
I remember now: *Moon-Bull*. My Lord Nana-Sin!

*

Stealthily now I climb the stairs
to your palace on the temple's top.
There, at the window, I watch and wait.

Your distance is with me, gliding past
a reticence of copper mirrors, running pale fingers
over lamps grown cold.
The city sleeps.

Where is my Belovèd, she promised
she would come! Is she lying
with the young captain, was she lying?

How anxious is the one who waits by the window!
In rhythm with an Age of Waiting
you inch from cloud to cloud. Your halo:

a threshing floor in the sky. Ghostly oxen
tread the circle.—Darkness will have its harvest:
The Goddess gives her husband to the Shades.

VII. *Midday's Roses*

I sometimes revert to the habit
of reading by the light
of an oil-burning lamp
with its fragile flower of flame.

In whatever room I read,
it wakens on the walls the same
fitful shadows of lovers I once knew,
so that I may never cease
to be familiar with all I have lost.

I am reading a book called
Treasures of Darkness.

I know the items in the illustrations:

The lyre painted gold and blue,
with the head of a bull for a prow.
The gold-leafed cosmetic box.
Headdress hung with leaves of gold.

They forgot there ever was a light of day.
They forgot they had ever been touched.

*

O my Belovèd, come before me
in a robe made of midday's roses,
wearing bracelets of sunlight!

Stand before me just once more, Belovèd,
stand and be golden in the morning light
so that I may gaze at you and smile

because I am so bitterly happy.

VIII. *Water and Stone*

Spring rain shrinks
from the garden statuary.

The last bead drops
down and away.

The soil drinks it.
Worm wine. Root manna.

Wet stains grow vague on the balustrades.
A faint chromatic mist floats
from the roof of the portico.

The sandstone's salmon color
will be restored.

Not yet. There is a seeping-in.
The stone drinks
and its thirst is not slaked.

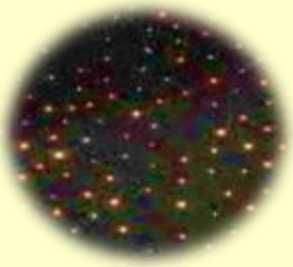
A puddle steams on a marble slab,
withdraws inward from the sun,
dragging along its unwilling
surface tension.

Gone.

The stone has a jet sheen.
An idea of water subsists.

Is it still wet?

IX. *Starlight, Morning Light*



At night, when the sky is clear,
I can pick you out
among the crowd of your companions,
unreachable, the Stellified:

Sealed in the ark of your distance
like a secret thing.

You who are dead here,
in my living,
live there, long after I died.

*

Daybreak.

You are sitting by the window
combing your hair,
still dripping.

Sunlight,
its shower of arrows,
softens to a bodiless caress
passing over you.

*

You, Atalỳa, my Belovèd,
you by the window
there!

I could not hear her should she call.
I call to her: she hears me not.
The answer made would be least sought.
Man is the grieving animal.

He *was* his Grief, his every bone
Composed of memories of home
And hearth, and how the losses come
To stay when those you love are gone.

The Lord of Flies

Ask of the maggot or the grub
That eats the corpse that oils the sod
To make confession of its God:
The Lord of Flies, Beelzebub,

'Twould say, if it could make hubbub.
But silent in the darkness gnaws
The angel of the King of Loss,
The Lord of Flies, Beelzebub.

The preacher who so thumped his tub
And canted of the saving Creed,
What's he? A piece of meat to feed
The Lord of Flies, Beelzebub.

Up from the grave may sprout a shrub
That bears a rose I will call Love.
It, too, will feel the canker of
The Lord of Flies, Beelzebub.

Into her flesh sweet spices rub,
Her limbs wash, with fine linen cover,
And keep far hence the carrion-lover,
The Lord of Flies, Beelzebub!
*

And he had had a thousand mothers,
And for each, a particular grief,
As on a bonfire, one gold leaf.
And he had had a thousand fathers.

Many a sister and a brother,
How many a daughter and a son!
Lost friends! And each one loved and gone
Of what he was was poem and author.

Once, into Moloch's belly I
Commended my child. I still dream
Of Màshai, I still hear him scream.
I passed him through the fire. Why?

He wore, much as the tree its cortex,
The lives he had led, the deaths he had died.
The rings in his bones rippled wide
And swirled us all into his vortex.

The Bonnet

For days I looked for you, my daughter.
My boat left a thin wake behind it.
A wave disturbed a floating bonnet:
There were the bows you stitched upon it.
I cast my bread upon the water.
And I shall never find it.

With sad eyes he addressed me thus:
There was a tale you told your sons—
You'd wring my conscience with a Once
Upon a Time that never was?

Though you *they lost, your shame was theirs,*
You a pariah, an exile…
The scene is Genoa, many a mile
From Paris... Come, we mount the stairs

In your wife's house, to the bedroom
Where your two boys would soundly sleep
Did not their mother's sorrow keep
Awake their sense of settled gloom.

The Selfish Giant

Cyril, do tell me one of those
  Stories that Father used to tell
  Us, please! I do *so* miss him. *Well,*
As I recall, one of them goes:

There was a Selfish Giant once.
  This Giant had a beautiful
  Garden, with flowers in bloom, and full
Of birds, and fish swimming in ponds,

And there were fruit trees: apple, pear
  And peach. Every day, after school,
  The children came, and in the cool
Spring breeze they laughed and frolicked there.

But when the Selfish Giant (who
  Had been away) came home, and found
  The little children running round
His garden – which was HIS, mind you –

It made him very cross, and he
  Yelled, 'Clear out, the lot of you, go,
  And never come back! Don't you know
That this is private property*?'*

And so the Giant chased them all
  Away. He made a sign that read:
  NO TRESPASSING! That's what it said.
And for good measure, he built a wall.

The children, being children, did
  Not understand. They had to play
  In the road. – Now on that same day
Winter came. It was cold. Clouds hid

The sun, and snow lay on the grass.
  The Giant wondered where the spring
  Had gone. For not a single thing
Would grow, and no birds sang, alas.

Outside, winters went, and springs came.
  But in the garden, when the lonely
  Giant listened, he could hear only
A howling wind, always the same.

But then, one morning, lying awake,
He heard the singing of a linnet
In a tree. All of spring was in it;
In the garden, too, for the sake

Of those same children, who had stolen
Back in through a hole in the wall.
They were in every tree, and all
Were laughing. They had put the soul in

The garden again. – But one small boy
Couldn't reach to the bough, and when
The Giant saw, his heart broke. Then
He placed him there, with tears of joy,

And what did he do next? He tore
The wall down! 'What I did was sin…
Come, every child,' he laughed, 'come in!
Here may you play for evermore!'

And so beneath the golden sun
He let them frolic, and eat freely
Of the sweet fruit. For he was really
Very sorry for what he'd done.

Oh, but the child he'd helped into
The tree? He disappeared one day.
He missed him so! His hair turned grey
As the years went by, and he grew

Quite old, and thought he'd never see
His favourite little boy again.
But what do you think happened then?
One day, there by the apple tree
,
Stood the child! But the Giant could
See wounds on his hands. 'Who hurt thee?'
He cried. 'I'll slay him!' 'Nay, let be.
Love gave them to me: they are good.

'And now, because you let me play
Once in your garden, you shall come
Away to mine.' (A garden some
Call Paradise.) And the next day,

Beneath that golden apple tree,
The little girls and boys discovered
The Giant lying dead, all covered
With blossoms white as they could be.

I Want to Find a Quiet Place

I want to find a quiet place
  And lay me down to die. *To die?*
  And lay me down to die. *But why?*
I want the rose to touch my face.

I want to lie beneath the stones
  And rise again no more. *No more?*
  And rise again no more. *Wherefore?*
That I may sleep the sleep of bones.

The ground, when it heals over me,
  Will crown my head with grass. *With grass?*
  Will crown my head with grass. *Alas!*
But let there be a willow tree

To weep upon me, now and then.
  And never shall I rise. *How wise!*
  And never shall I rise. *Love dies.*
And never shall I rise again.

A woman's voice spoke through him now:
  She, the High Priestess of the Moon,
  Beautiful princess, sang a tune
As solemn as a marriage vow,

Yet lightly cadenced, like a Dance
  Of Life, were life a sacred game;
  The world's first author known by name
Sang with primordial elegance

The moon-bull and the solar bird,
  And brilliant *Enheduanna*
  Praised most of all divine Inanna,
Reverence hallowing every word.

Akkadian-Babylonian Ishtar.

Inanna

Yours is the power, Heaven's glorious Queen,
Honored and blessed among the gods, to turn
Man into woman, woman into man.

Yours is the power of disaster: war,
Famine and plague attend you in your wrath,
Mountains have crumbled, strong-walled cities burned
Under your curse. And when to battle you
Ride on a lion, maces shatter skulls!

Yours is the power in the arts of love.
Shepherd Dummuzi, on a fragrant bed
Fashioned of cedar, decked with flowers, waits
Aching to taste the apples of your breasts,
All through the night to lie with you in bliss.

Calmly reflected in the cool canal,
High stands your palace, on the ziggurat's
Summit presiding in its pride of gold,
Silver, and lapis lazuli. Glad sounds
Rise from below to charm your ears, the drums
Beat out a rhythm for the hierodules,
Maidens excelling in the songs of praise,
Slim are the fingers that caress the harps.

Mighty Inanna, it was you whose wrath
Drove out the rebel who defiled our shrines,
Stripping my office from me, banishing
Me from the shining city, sacred Ur,
Yours was the power that restored to me,
Daughter of Sargon, all my dignities,
Made me again High Priestess of the Moon.

Loveliest Lady, O Exalted One,
Goddess! I have created something that
Never before existed in the world.

*

The voice, rich as the swell of brass,
Grew faint as a single harp-string
Touched, its frail echo vanishing
Over the desert dunes… *Alas!*

Anthologoios sighed, and said,
My heart is brittle pottery, and
It shatters; I weep tears of sand
To think how long she has been dead.

I mourn what I no longer know
I am mourning for: a long-lost friend?
A lover, how she met her end?
I have seen too many come and go.
*

I and my other guests stood awed.
There was a certain goddess, long
Ago, he said. *But that is wrong:*
She was no goddess: she was God.

Thunder: Perfect Mind

If you been the alpha and the beta,
If you have been cast out and taken in,
If you have worn the rags of majesty
And held a feast and starved before the door,
If in Omega's lion mouth you thrust
Your head among the Last Things to be Bitten
And you have seen your John-the-Body flail
When your spat eyes baptised it with hurt fire,
If clouds have clothed you when your enemies
Have stripped you bare, and robes have burned your flesh
When friends have come to you with coronation,
If you have trembled in your evil strength
And towered over others in your meekness,
If you have learned the art to teach and rave
And dig up into the raw dirt of Heaven:
The lightning has delivered what it promised:
Only these fragments of the alphabet
Your senseless wisdom fears, and knows by heart:
Pluck out your heart and feed it to the vulture,
Bury your broken body in the sky
And with your mouth, the angel that remains
When everything is taken from you, with
The labial halo of your mouth, speak this –
Speak this, this gibber, this this gibberish:
A O O A A O O A A O
And like the sound of blindness that is knowledge
Will come forth striding from behind the lightning
She who is Thunder and a Perfect Mind.

O he was full of emptiness
  Pregnant with ghostly memory!
  He conjured up a scene in three
Dimensions. Of such heaviness

Were the vast monolithic stones
   He pictured hierographically,
   As 'twere, they became light, and we,
Too, felt a lightness in our bones.

The Pyramids at Giza

A
sad
site:
lone and
level sand,
a half-sunken
clutch of bowls
with only its voice
less vowels to offer,
polished by wind Inside
me cadaverous priests curse
the dark. The tombs: thieves'
plunder, emptiness. Still I could
outlast you with my patience, Death,
if only the stones could bear the wait.

O
so
many
bones
fractured
so much rock
to lift up above
these sands *me* the
name **CHEOPS** into
place in this white
space from which I stare
out at you from my huge
granite tomb All that weight
pressing down hard, pressing down
stoneuponstoneuponcornerstone

I have no secrets.

I
eye
you, O
rion, with
the tip of my
stone finger You
are my Star Brother
pierced by my pointed
stare my clairvoyant soul
Each of us dies into the other
to live again transforms to stay
himself Conformation of these rocks
perpetuates us brother Up and down on
these enchanted stairs moves the traffic
of the Mystery O Light: Be astonished,
a martyr of stone Stone: Make light my upward way

He paused while a red squall of sand
  Blew all away those pointed shapes,
  Then as a breath through reeds escapes
Spoke Vision Biblical and grand:

The Valley of Dry Bones

A rattling sound, not of dice at their scatter,
But reassembling in the wagerer's hand.

Muscle and sinew rope the bones in place.
Impossible as water from a stone:
A heart, heart's blood —and the immediate surge
Out to the branching veins, the fingertips.

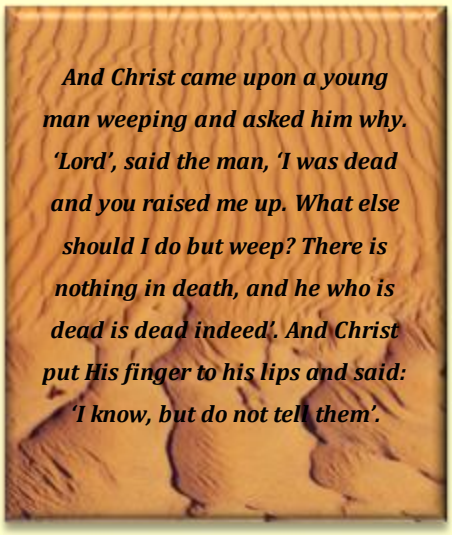
Skin spreads and clings the way moss hugs the earth.
Like flames that leap up from a thousand candles
Eyes startle open to the light. A breeze,
A dust-commotion, wind, four winds compounded,
An almost human sound: A sigh. A psalm.
The nostrils flare alive with RUACH: *breath.*

Susurrance rippling, whisper of leaves in forests.
They move their jaws, they feel the lips take shape
Over their teeth, and, haltingly, they come,
The homely, ancient words…It glows, this flesh,
Like some unearthly thing: They walk about,
They wear it like a sacrificial robe.
*

When their new bodies warm and vital
  Had melted back into dry bones,
  They played themselves like xylophones:
The bonging made a fine recital,

O'er which we wept, of course, and yet,
  And yet, *these were their bones*, and they
  Were *playing*… You'd weep to see the way
We laughed to make our hearts forget.

They're Zombies! 'Tis the toxin of
  The blowfish! Voodoo of Jehovah!
  I laughed, but *he*, he looked me over
With the eyes of a mother's love!



Tammuz

Tammuz is dead.

The girls of Jerusalem:
hear how they weep in the Temple
for Tammuz!

Their tears are the rains that quicken the clay.
They wail, and barley sways in the wind.
*

Incense found a body and became you, Ishtar.
And you have become the myrhh tree, Ishtar.
Your arms are branches thrust into the sky.
On the ground lie bitter drops of amber.
Doves scatter at the sound of your cries.

This is Tammuz,
this is his flesh of clotted leaves.

This is the corpse of Tammuz
breeding barley and beer
that laughs in the cup.

How dark is his blood!
How dense is the magic amber
of his resurrection!

Girls of Jerusalem:
cast grain
over the stones.

Steep your hearts
in the myth of his blood.

Tammuz will live again.
On every branch of the Tree of Heaven,
a god or goddess, eagle or dove.
The dove's disconsolate murmur!
The fury of the eagle's shriek!
Their eyes are stars keeping vigil in the night.
*

You wear your God like a beard of fire,
acrid Ezekiel. You crouch over
the world's dung-fire and the dirty smoke
is a sign, your words are sparks in smoke
and the smut of Transcendence

bewitches you. A scroll burns
your tongue so sweetly, and you smell
the blood of Jerusalem.

A shooting star slowed down in the night
so that you could see
the beasts of God in their Merkabah
wheeling in space, and you saw: you knew.

Shake the fists of His names – ELOHIM! – ADONAI! –
at the girls of Jerusalem.

Lay His unspeakable Name
over the mouth of Tammuz, and his nostrils:
never again will he stain the air
with his moist mammal breath.

Once and for all
let him rot in his blood.

*

An oxen-trodden halo
rings the moon with its glow.
Imprisoned in her moat
sits Ishtar, cold with grief.
The beasts of the Zodiac
weep their weak light on the world.

Tammuz is dead.

Asherah

I heard the voice of Yahweh crying
In the wilderness of Heaven: 'Ah,
The heart in me is dying, dying!
Where is my Love, my Asherah?'

Across the desert of the sky
Went Yahweh's lonely call: 'My wife,
Where didst thou go, where art thou? Why
Have they cut down the Tree of Life?'

I saw Him search behind the stars
And through the darkness of the Deep.
The rain was rare, the crops were sparse.
'O Asherah, art thou asleep?'

Before their shrines of cedar wood
The bearded priests heard not His call.
They knew Him not, although He stood
Beside them at the Wailing Wall!
*

We could hear feet make heavy tread
But could not place the sound: a fear
Came over us: *What dark god is here?*
The *Thing* was walking in his head!

Ashurnasirpal II

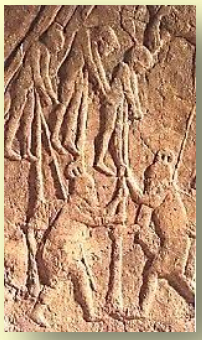
Assyrian king, you pace my mind tonight.
Your wingèd bulls, with their human faces,
stand guard at the palace gates, petrified.

They are too cowed to fly away.
Your archers would pluck them from the sky.
Stone angels land with such an awful thud.

You dictate. A stylus carefully cuts the clay.
'Their heads I placed like fruit on the branches of trees.
With their skulls I heaped pyramids in the avenues.

I cut off their noses and ears and limbs.
I draped their skins over the walls, to adorn them.
Their bones I mashed into mortar for bricks

and with these I built my splendid palace.
I broke open the graves of their kings,
that unrest might afflict them till the end of days'.



Some are blinded with daggers,
and the blackness that bursts in on them
through the eye-holes

is the face of Namtar, Fate-Cutter,
who raises his blade
and blots out the sun.

*

(By now *I* have grown skeletal,
  Nay, I have *shrunk* into my bones.
  The wind blows through me now, and moans
That I am hardly there at all.

Like Li Pi, the great Taoist sage,
  I am light enough to ride a beam
  Of light, my skin is but the dream
Of skin, a thin rice-paper page.

I am immortal now, I sail
  Through air with my immortal peers.
  They name me, my companion seers,
The Collar-Bone of Reading Gaol.)

*

Towards the riddling testaments
  Vouchsafed for us in the Good Book,
  It was a tenuous stance he took,
As finding truth in want of sense:

Jacob at Peniel

He sends his family across the stream.
The angel finds him ready and alone.
Is *it an angel? A man? A shepherd's dream?*
Does he come bearing some harsh, difficult gift?
Jacob: 'I have seen God face to face, and lived.'

They eye each other, trace a wary circle.
They grapple in brambles, over rock and stone:
Thorns quiver with the shreds and scrolls of struggle.
Day breaks, and Jacob with his rude hands shapes
The One Who Cripples, Blesses, and Escapes.

Candle-light scholar, expound for us this myth
You stay up through the small hours wrestling with.
You squint, and the flame casts an angel's wing:
What never happened is still happening.

*

Jacob's Ladder

An ancient toy, found in a pharaoh's tomb.
Those little wooden blocks the child is holding
Fall with a clatter toward the floor, unfolding
An omen that astonishes the room.

*

To fashion an electric Jacob's Ladder:
Between two metal two rods, ignite a spark:
It flares into a pale blue ghostly arc.
There is a gateway at the peak of matter.

*

It took one spark, and Heaven burned like Hell.
God clambered down, to save Himself – the rungs
Gave way – out of His pockets, screaming in tongues
Of fire, a loose change of angels fell.

*

The Gnostic Gospel of Dirt

You dragged your god down from the sky.

We pulled our god out of the ground:
the ur-god we assembled from the ground
was the word spoken by the ground.

Our ears were tortured by a mandrake shrieking.

We had dragged his form from where it lay embedded
in the word for ground that was also the ground itself.

Was he a monster that staggers, dribbling
seed that excites only dirt?

Was there reason to fear
a god with roots for feet, and mud
caking his cock and his buttocks, and hair
all over his body, and the eyes of a mole
and the teeth of a wolf?
Was there reason
to tremble when out of his nostrils squirmed
little worms and when he opened
the wound of his mouth he hissed
in the language of snakes and croaked
like the crow when it murdered Elijah
and was there reason to be terrified
when he thundered a frenzy of lions
and everywhere blasted the trumpets
of bull-elephants in must?

There was some reason, but not every reason.

Though his cry was the hare in the jaws of a dog
and his scream was raw with the rage that is war
and horizons of slaughter rife with fire,
something quiet hived in the blood of the noise,
whispered in the Prophet's gibbering wrath.

We heard 'son' in the sound
and plucked him out like a sunflower
riddled with worms and supernatural
as the flower of the sun a shaman
wears in his hair when there is dancing
by the tranquil fires of dawn.

He established the fund
of everything we will ever find,
but especially the profound,
which we call the depth of any ground
where a god is buried up to his hair,
and the hair we call the shoots
of flowers and grass on the hill.

The religion that the many call the One
we found in a stone, a bone, whatever
is severed by the blade of attention
from the Total All of Everything
so that we can say, for the first time
in the history of stones: 'This is a stone.'

And when the son, the sun
of sound and of the god of the ground,
says 'Now I shall strip, that I may
put on my clothes, and be clothed
in the spirit that I am,' every seed
will expand to a spirit most holy,
the lungs of the air will expand
though they drown in a torrent of rain
so the Flower will remember to flower.

For always over him smiles
Our Lady of the Anagrams,
Anàgra Margàna,
and the Angel of Telepathograms
showering in aphids of aleph
on the people of the desert
the bread of the Angels,
Telegramanna.

He will be naked Transfiguration
and his robe the entirety of light.
The light that crouches in flint
and escapes from the anger of fire
will become us, ungrounded
as a name that no one has dreamed of,
thinner than the ghost of a strip of cloth,
but a solid spirit pricked by a thorn,
more sun than the son of the god
that walks on three legs in the evening,
and myself all the while
buried like a god
in the ground.

Rats in the Attic Library

The branches of learning.

קודאש אהרן

The Books
Formidable defences were placed
at the disposal of the food. The bookcase
was an ark, an *aron kodesh.*
Mesh wire flourishing along the shelves.
Bait traps, poison-packets littering the floor.
What an education for the rats to negotiate
so many prohibitions, cruel incitements…

The Rats
If they could put their struggle into words
they might write poems about how hard
it is to get at the Essential. They're hungry
for the glue that holds the things together.

We have more need of it
Than they. That is why
It is ours.

The loftiest shelves were the greatest challenge,
but they mastered the lie of the levels, reduced
the infrastructure of the Beautiful and True
to the elements of an intramural agronomy.
One could picture little cities with their temples
springing up, a thriving rodent civilization.

Survival is subversion
Eating away
The Monument of Famine.

* * *

The books are part of the rats.
What the rats did to the books
is part of the books.

What do we gnaw?

The *Tanakh*, split into two roughly
equal fractions of Testament:
Samson-work of many teeth.

mettame et ha-Yadayim.
Even a fractured Canon
dirties the hands.

*

Fragments of the *Fragments of Heraclitus*.

*

Goethe is partially devoured.

*

Henry James looks more and more like Sappho.

*

What have they done to *The Rat Man*?

*

Food for thought.

Food.

*

Is their gnawing
a kind of knowing?

The scrolls are in our bellies
And the taste is sweet.

* * *

My share…increased in dispossession:

Religion [of what] remains
[when everything has
been taken
away].

*

יאדאיים מזרחי שעון מאטאם
Tannaitic literature employs the phrase mettame et ha-Yadayim *('rendering the hands unclean') to convey what is commonly understood by 'canonical'. According to rabbinic enactment, hands that came into direct contact with any biblical book contracted uncleanness in the second degree, so that without prior ritual washing they rendered it unfit for priestly use (Kelim 15:6; Yad. 3:2; 4:6). Whatever the true origin and purpose of this legislation (Yad. 3:3–5; Tosef., Yad. 2:19; Shab. 13b–14a; TJ, Shab. 1:6, 3c), the effect was to make the phrase 'rendering the hands unclean' synonymous with 'canonical'.*

'If the Book is merely tasted, it is nothing. But if the Book is swallowed, it has been accorded the status of food. This is the principle of ach'shevei.'
—Rashi *(93a, DH Mipnei she'Yecholah)*

Erda and Wotan

Behold! The Wanderer lies asleep
Beside the Erda of his deep
Desire to be in her keep,
Down there, where willows never weep.

She barely can recall the World.
If she is dreaming, surely it is
A dream severe, an austere bliss.
Wotan the blinded Knower, curled

Beside her, sleeps. And all is still.
Does the world they dream dream their world?
A thing upon itself in-furled
Safe from the torments of the Will?

♫

Yggdrasil,
the World-Tree.

The Discovery of the Runes

I ween that I hung on the windy tree,
Hung there for nights full nine;
With the spear I was wounded, and offered I was
To Odin, myself to myself,
On that tree that none may ever know
What root beneath it runs.

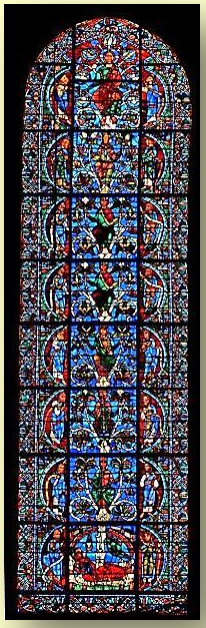
– Poetic Edda

The Jesse Tree

What winding byways led my steps to Chartres
Cathedral, I cannot say. Just why my heart
Compelled me, who had walked so many miles,
To walk all through the night among the aisles
Beneath the stone-ribbed ceiling, and around
The sacred Labyrinth, listening to the sound
Of my own footsteps echoing through a space
Of ghosts – the smoke and prayers of bygone days –
While all about me eyes began to glow,
I might have known once, but no longer know.
Was it to watch a brittle pane of glass
Aetherialise through all its weight and mass?
To stand at rest, and marvel how.. softly
The morning light bled through the Jesse Tree?

*

♫



Timing

Once in the day, and once again at night
God floods the mind with His eternal light.
He waits until the broken clock is right.

Angel and Shadow

When the Angel posts his shadow to the ground
It rubs the contours like the floor of a temple:
Soodling roads, notch of a valley, trees
In broccoli florets, the River S.
It slips over hills and sees
Checkerboard acreage all around,
Quickens to run with the horses and stipple
The sheen on their backs as they race.

You walk along, a black robe crosses your path,
Spiriting out of sight as suddenly
As a tablecloth pulled out from underneath
The china. Wipe your eyes, and everything's
In place. But it's not the same place.
You've seen the shadow of the wings,
Not the wings. And the dead would be
Swept to their feet if they saw his face.

The sheer length of the shadow of the Angel
Is monstrous, utterly harmless. It's the angle
Of evening that gives him what he needs, strength
To flex the shadow over his shoulder, far
Into near. Down from the skies
It stretches a gaunt index finger
Over fearsome geographies
To touch a tear, to cool its warmth.

He loses himself sometimes in the Northern Lights,
Fiery scarves and banners swirl around him
As he goes – falling up, up till he floats
To where the darkness casts the stars. A high-
Flown gesture fades in the rinse
Of space – not clear, not fully random –
Faintly marked in a shuffle of photons.
Terror widens in the eye.

What on earth does the Angel have to give?
When has he coaxed blood back into our wounds?
He circles, doting on our jack-knifed shapes,
He wrings his beautiful hands for the car crash, drapes
Our tiny grieving-scenes
With mourner's clothes, and combs the air –
Angel, Angel, when will you dive
Into the shadow and be there?

*

Osiris

Hell in the bosom of Osiris
  Is Heavenly Elysium,
  A sunniness to which we come
At evening. Unroll your papyrus,

Read out the Blessing of the Night.
  Osiris keeps his children warm
  Beneath the rock and wave. His form
Softens, he rests from his own light.

*

I am Osiris, the dead Pharaoh.
  But Death to me can do no harm.
  Horus the Hawk perched on my arm
I cross the River of Reeds, an arrow

Of Ra. Ra's Ferryman, I take
  My seat, my oar, and row Him over
  The sky. I am Isis' Brother and Lover.
As Sobk, the Crocodile, I bake

Serenely in the mid-day Sun.
  I am the secret partner of
  My murderer, Seth, and him I love.
He is my brother. We are one.

My mouth, my eyes, my ears, my nose
  Are each a god. I am the Chorus
  Of the Celestial Spheres when Horus
Opens my mouth. My body glows

As calmly as the morning star.
  My eyes unclose, and it is day.
  What is the world? A Spell I say.
My dream of you is what you are.

My Egyptian Dream

i.

Oh, yes, in thine Egyptian Age
Mascara hast thou worn, my Soul.

How many a papyrus scroll
Of prayers to placate the gods' rage,

Or their capricious favour win,
And how much priestly sophistry,
Spells, and erotic poetry
Did thine umbrageous eyes drink in!

ii.

The Self breaks down into its five
Complex components: These are BA,
And REN, and AB, SHEUT and KA –
The parts that act when we are alive

Together to compose a soul:
The AB, the intelligent red heart;
The REN, the name, the frailest part,
And that without which none is whole;

One's shadow or SHEUT; the spark
Of life, KA, which rejoined must be
With BA, the personality,
To form the AKH, that from the dark

Of death strikes
This magically
Footed, immortal
Free in its

an eternal fire,
effective, wing-
thinking thing
Kingdom of Desire.

But if the fusion of the pair,
The BA and KA, should somehow fail,
How bitter grows the AKH, and pale:
A demon of the desert air!

Of my Egyptian joy, AWT-AB,
What now remains? At most, a smudge –
A faded glyph transcribed by Budge.
And far into the night I sob.

Awt-ab, heart-wideness; happiness.

Where didst thou go, O vital spark,
Immortal KA, thine hieroglyph
Two arms, right-angled, raised as if
In protest at the gathering dark?

What is this thing *I look upon?*
My ancient corpse. Dishonoured KHAT,
Poor mutilated mummy, rot
Away into a skeleton!

iii. *The Death and Resurrection of a Name*

Artistic and
King wedded
O shining
Untimely,

effeminate
to the Beautiful One,
Individual, lone,
thus beyond all date,

In a god-overcrowded world
The monotheist, sure and proud,
Who scorned conquest, and all things loud
And vulgar shunned, in you unfurled

The flower of a vision made
Of marble and granite by the Nile,
Serene like your archaic smile,
Compound of brightness and cool shade.

O aesthete-king and artist-seer,
A sacred scandal of androgyny,
Doomed in your visions and your progeny,
What desecration happened here?

Look! Your cartouche is blank. How low
Are laid your statues, once so splendid!
Your sun has set. Your reign is ended
Or never was. For who shall know?

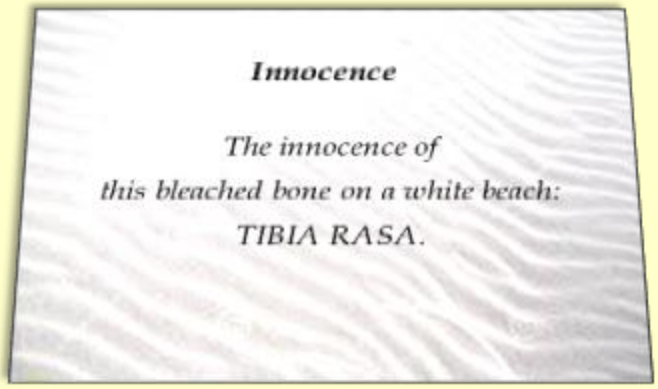
Your vocables no longer trouble
The air, for nowhere are they spoken,
And all your images are broken,
And jackals bark amid the rubble.

Like an old scroll in pieces, rotten,
A thing dismembered and forgotten,
Where is great Pharaoh Akhenaten,
Who upon all that is begotten

Smiled once like the life-giving sun
Whose son he was? For him why mourn
When none knows he was ever born?
'Yet from the sands' oblivion

Where my disjecta membra *lie*
My REN at last itself remembers,
As from a dying star's last embers
A new star opens like an eye.'

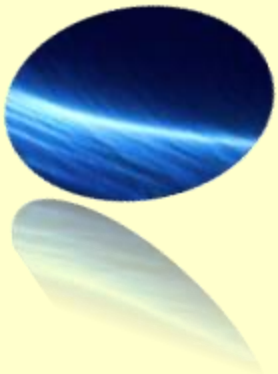
He conjured up a sea-side walk
And a mute witness, white and stiff,
That seemed to speak to him, as if
Silence alone could truly talk:



Innocence

The innocence of
this bleached bone on a white beach:
TIBIA RASA.

The Waters Rose and Light Descended



The waters rose
and light descended.

Clouds shook out
their sheets of rain.

Darkness passed over
the face of the deep

and the deep underwater
and the waters on high.

*

The halcyon
flops on the mudflats.

Mouths of fish
work open and shut.

*

To reach us it leaped
how many moons?

Was this what the Prophets
glimpsed in its crouch,

a dreamed thing waiting
to rear up and be real?

Small as the gleam
in my father's eye.

*

The scum has risen
and floats on the surface,

flaunts its shimmer
at the lowering sun.

The sky is upended: bottom feeders
have the run of Heaven.

Down from the rafters
small-mouth angels jeer.
*

Where is my father?
How could this happen?

Where is the kindness
that shone on the waters?

Where is the likeness
that hived in the mirror?

*

There was a flood.
Then a flood. And again a flood.

When the last one receded
how could the scattered

be bribed once more
to gather together

in twos and threes,
stick figures sighted

picking their way
through the damage?

*

I parted my mother's hair
like black water,

thinking to see
a weeping face, raw as a field

when the flood-tide ebbs.
A fist unclosing.

*

Where are you, Father?
Can you see me?

Don't look at the black umbrellas
bobbing on the water.

*

I parted your hair
and thought your eyes

knew me – they fixed me
me with a stare.

When you said nothing,
Mother, you meant

Who is he
Who is he

You opened your mouth and
slapped your knees, Other.
*

They put the ancient
baby in a boat.

The wooden boat
floated on the waters –

on the wide waters
drifted away

between starfish
and stars.

How many floods had this One seen,
As Utnapishtim, Noah, and Noah's
Descendents! He had come to show us
How many dead men he had been.

The Other Noah

It is rising in the water.

Ascending into air.

Into the watery firmament.

Something uncanny.

A pale balloon
sacred to air, sacred
and of no avail.
Do you remember sinking?

What is rising?

What is ascending?

What is bobbing on the water?

Animal, vegetable, mineral?

Backwards, eyes
looking up at the surface.
looking up at the surface.

You saw there was a sky Ψ
below the sky.

What did you see above the water?
תפ
And their gestures?

ي
You had sunk too deeply. ✡
ω̃

הלך
Or like? ϵ

But distant.
σ
You sank slowly.

♑

Did you settle? β

Dreaming? Ω

What does he see? ξ

Ψ

He floats beneath our prayers.
Look how he adorns Death's body.

Who shall count his blessings?

Heavy, the water of heaven…

Forms moving,
whiteness. Wavering.

Some distant solicitation,
it could not reach me.

They moved as I imagine angels
move, indistinctly,
in another element.

Like surgeons in white masks,
seen through ether.

Very distant.

n e
Past pillars of kelp, *a g*
suspended *ua*
in cathedral light. *f r*

In a sad luxuriance. The child
stretches on his deathbed.

He dreams the water.
The water dreams him.

Fish swimming through
the husk of a trawler.
Portholes, **Scaly gold**
gushing in and out. Αω

Ancient treasure.

I have only ten cold fingers. ♐

That whiteness you saw…

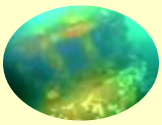
There is no cause to fear. ☠

It is only ♌
the shadow of the rainbow.

The name
of a pale undulation
of amino acids &
is anemone.

Wavering is their decision.

Who would have thought
there was such strength
in wavering?



ف بای

I was already drowned
before hands lifted
saw and hammer.

I am the other Noah.

I reach down my staff ل ف
and strike the bottom אָל
of the world. To startle ل ف
a flounder, ripple the oil
in a whale's bones. ת
A ray, a heavy ray flaps by,
ignorant dove of the depths. o

o

A mountain shrinking o
up into an island. I watched
the water tremble over
a pinpoint
peak. The mountain
remembered it was a secret.

I was afraid. Because…

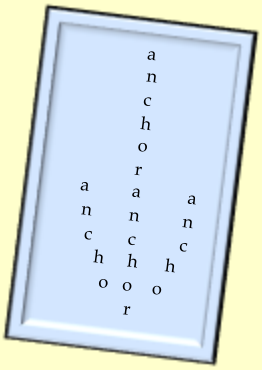
ς

Skeleton of light.

ξ

Waterflowers sway
gravely on their stems.

The water seconds it.



I fear for my mates—
the wind is mad, and the water!

Why do you hide your face
in shadow?
Why are you so tall?

When the flood came
what did you see?

I am afraid. *b* *t*

Do not be afraid. o s

Come into my stone boat. ba n
It is here.

h u s

It was built for you.
Not with hands, but with ♏
the idleness of hands.

It has come for you.
It was built to drown
your fear. Sink past
the storm's reach!

Sink slowly.

Look, we are passing
the City of Coral.

Look at the teeth. ♫
Those bulbs were eyes.

It is you, but you are no longer yours .

♫

My shoulder is strong.

Do not be afraid. Water
is a thing in the water.

There is water under ♫
♫ *the water. Repeat after me:*

It washes ashore
and it washes the shore
and it washes ashore.

We are walking on the bottom
of the ocean.

I will take you to the Cave of Sleep. ي

a e a u

No, I am not ready.

No.

Leave me. I must
think this over.

No.

No!

I cannot look.

It is not me.

Go away!

It is heavy.

θ
ά
ν ς
α τ ο

There is water
under the water

It washes ashore
and it washes the shore
and it washes ashore

I am tired.

So tired.

Take me to the Cave of Sleep.

I am the other Noah.

ض

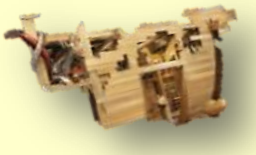
Noah of no heir. ***No air.***

ج

Come into my stone boat. संस्कृतम्

It is here now. ***Where?***

Nowhere.

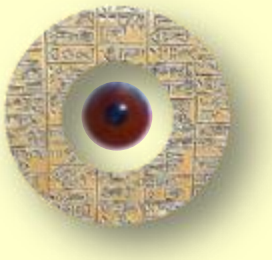


And he took off his wig of bone,
His wind-chime trinkets laid aside
And showed himself as one who died
Thousands of years ago. In stone

And clay he worked, compiler and scribe
Of *Gilgamesh*, moon's high-priest, Sin-
Lequi-Uninni. Though his thin
Voice spoke him of the ghostly tribe

His presence could not be denied,
Self-effigy composed of things
He said, and, Dears, his words were wings
With eyes from which no soul could hide!

He turned, and looked at whisper-thin *me*
With a look that made me recall
That all his phantom faces, all
The voices and the eyes were in me.



Names of the Bone

I.
Oil-burnng scribe
in the palace
library, aging

scholar of intelligent
stones, I am troubled
again by second-sight

this evening. Once more
I read of Ur's destruction.
I am familiar with the politics of gods.

And I am weary.
My eyes are hungry
for a darkness

that in Sumerian
sounds like *bread*.
Let the bread

feed my eyes,
I pray,
snuffing the lamp,

and the night
grows vast
inside me.

In the lap
of knowledge,
ignorant sleep.

II.
In my dreams I walk the world,
colossal Skeleton,
picking through you.

Once you came down from the mountains
a monster full of bones
with my name in your mouth.

But your metacarpal tips
were delicate as a prayer
balanced on a fountain of breath.

What hives in the stubborn
smoke of our idioms? Sculpture
of air. Scripture of *Ruach. Rauch.*

III.
Clairvoyant antiquary,
grasp how living bones
are connected to dead—

how bone
connects
the living and the dead.

German *knochen*, gnarled as a Grünewald.
Greek *osteon*, Parian marble, cool to the touch.
Connected.

Polynesian *iwi*, light as the honeycreeper.
The Crow nation's jubilant *hu-re*:
Connected.

Asthi, Sanskrit sandscript.
KRS of the tomb-treasure, Pharaoh's curse:
Connected.

Hebrew *etzem*, Assyrian *etsemtu*,
wind-sanded desert bones.
Connected.

O vocative mouth
with your gusts of meaning
consonant-connected!

Who coupled you to
the galaxy scatter,
the distance

between things
always-increasing
ever and ever, amen?

IV.
Stag thigh.
Red-crowned crane bone.
Eagle ulna.

Who pierced these nostrils
into a man's tibia?
I puzzle at the whistling

wraith of a tune
haunted by breath
that woke it from its sleep.

Nepalese flute, half painted red,
dipped in Lust, Anger,
Illusion like a hand blood-dyed.

The other half, a blank
no-color,
Nirvana. I puzzle

how charisma escapes
through such simple perforations.
What haunts it alive?

Cave-mouth issuing
lamentation smoke.
Smoke-breath tunneling

through the tibia
excavating echoes,
prolonging the cavernous echoes.

Who painted
those bison startled
into colors on the wall?

Flame-leaping
shadows dancing,
omens of the spear's luck!

In my bones
I remember.
My bones remember.

V.
When my ancestors tore me apart
and separated my bones
and counted them,

they found one too many:
that was when I knew
I was a Shaman.

VI.
And I awoke embattled
on all sides
by hopes and fears

passing from hunger
to hunger
and heat to cold

in this vibrant
torment of a world
where you tossed my bones

like thinking dice,
O novice-god,
child-god

of Heraclitus,
how recklessly
you wagered me!

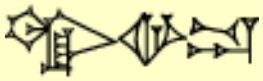
VII.
The elephant mother's trunk
stretches over
the corpse of her child

like a crosier.
How patiently she fails
to coax it to live!

The angels gasp
how she flexes
the helpless muscle of Religion—

Love's anger
scaring
flies.

VIII.
My soul, my sacred whore,
you have worshipped every god
that ever was! And none was true.



IX.
I wrote a twelfth tablet
for Gilgamesh.
The Great Cycle.

This was to be the happy ending:
Enkidu returns from the world below.
But the word I wrote means wraith.

Not Enkidu: white smoke of him.
The is in *he is not.*
I study this pale ontology.

X.
Last night I could not remember
the Sumerian name for bone.
This morning I unearthed

from under the ruins of a ziggurat
buried in my dreams:
ĝiri-pad-ra.

XI.
When Ghost and Bone break
apart like a wish
they go their separate ways.

Ghost grows ghostlier,
Bone more solid,
more and more a stone.

Ghost glides through a world
where the trees are only
what the trees can remember

and the world's carbon structures
recede into frailer versions
of themselves.

Enkidu in Hell
cannot break
a twig.

The twig
cannot
break.

XII.
Winter came
and skeletonised
my breath.

Winter came
and etched on windowpanes
crystals oracular and frail.

A scrimshaw
scripture
gave me my winter names.

XIII.
I have heard
the bones of my walking
crack in the jackal's jaws.

I have seen
the bones of my hearing
scattered in the dust.

VIV.
When I am in the mosque
I see a desert.
In the desert I see a mosque.

In the lines of the sacred verses
I see dry bones.
Between the lines of the sacred verses:

an oasis where the dead
can moisten their lips
and breathe again.

XV.
When I read *Shabbat*
I hear *Shabatu*—
for out of Ur came Abraham.

When I read *Joḥanan*
I can still taste
the sweet waters of Oannes.

XVI.
You name us
in your bones, Lord,
and we stand up and walk.

You lose count
because our numbers
are as the sands on the shores of the seas.

Are we not what you promised Noah,
the curse
of your blessing?

You will forget our names
and this is why
we will cease to be.

XVII. יוֹחָנָן
What is the name for these names?
Shamai etzem.
The two-hundred-and-six Names of the Bone.

Name-of-the-Father,
tinder-bush bursting
red in the night.

Tent of the Tabernacle
parchment-stretched
across an interior sky.

Flesh of the scapegoat,
tattooed
with totem and taboo.

Flesh of the calf
branded with
prophet scribble, burning.

Skin of the Crucified
weeping
the Blood of the Lamb.

Name transgressed
in speaking,
name I must not say:

Breathe vowels
into my syllabary bones,
waken the ox and the house.

Breathe the world
and the clouds
that pasture over it.

Send a breeze
through the bonehouse.
How I miss the smell of rain!

But why did you breathe
breath so moist and exhaustible
into the nostrils of the woman and the man?

XVIII.
Tree of Life that dies inside me,
Tree of Death
that survives me:

Grant me *etzem*, essence
of substance of self.
Stiffen the tree of my spine.

Shamai etzem.
Schlomo.
Shalom.

XIX.
My dear mother, my dear father,
where did you go
with your strength and kindness?

How I miss your kindness!
How I need your strength!
I will look for you under the willow tree, by the river.

XX.
Lightness is in me.
Emptiness at my centre,
you are what I am.

The Buddha
in the middle
where nothing stands

sees into the hollow
of my marrow
and out into the open.

Purity of Seeing
blesses
space.

XXI.
Carry your bones around with you
to the place
where you lay them down.

XXII.
O Enlightened:
the air I breathe
came to me

from that far-away shrine
where it rippled
the flames

of a thousand candles
burning in remembrance
of the One Who Came and Went.

The wind moved over the pasture
into the forest,
surprising the leaves.

Listen!
Listen.
Emptiness breathes me.

XXIII.
I carry my bones inside me,
guardian
of my relics.

I carry my ashes
in my mouth,
O Tongue of Fire!

In me the sun and moon
grow weary
of their rounds.

My bones are heavy
and my mouth is dry.
Where shall I rest?
Earth
opened a pore for me
in its darkness.

Earth
healed over
and survived me.

XXIV.
The bones of the living
burn
on the altar,

Lord—
like torches
at the bottom of a mine.

Like lamps in the windows
of a house that waits in the dark,
Lord, our living bones are burning.

Far into the night
they burn
and are burning, Lord.

What do you know?
You move in the shadows
over the face of the deep,

powerful and perplexed
over the faces of the dead, weeping
over the sacred litter of the dead.

Last night
you stood at the shrine
you had built in our image.

You reached out your hands.
You cupped your palms together
and made a valley of shadow.

Bone-fires flared
in the darkness you had made.
A firefly glow bled

between your fingers and you reached out your hands
and offered us to ourselves
like a sacrifice.

Lux Aeterna

1.
Dank duff on the forest floor
steams in the slant-shine, rain's after.
Perforated greencoat
glimmers through its wounds
on the crawlspace, thick vigors
writhe: pale grub bellies, leaf plaster.
Scurf, black sog, branches sagging.

Toadstool's soft head swells,
cool pallour sprinkled with dirt specks.
Wood chips cling to their stray places,
log, puddle, mud-patch.
Rot riots sweetly, quiet as the chigger bites.
The caterpillar chews, inching through loam.

The wood is a secret hidden in the wood.

2.
I have found a clearing
and I have founded a temple.

Tall stillnesses tense over me.
Cypress and pine arrange a circle:
raw orchestra.

Mayflies dance in sifts of light.
Dusk-robes, in slow procession,
trail over foliage their blackening length.

Listen.

Rosin-speckled light drifts from the cello strings.
Basses, string section, woodwinds, Requiem:
killed trees reassemble as *Lux Aeterna*,
resinous haloes, scent of the Spirit rising
from the pith. Vibrant sympathy.
The fork that tunes
my bones' resurrection
hives its resonance
in the cells of cellos.

3.
I was alive and I called in the forest:
I will nurse you with a thousand attentions. –
My breath was a clear, quick smoke.
Light, a granulating honey.
There were bitter densities I named shadow
or shade, blue shadow, woodsmoke shade.
"Why do the wasps torment themselves
in balls of fury?" Said the dusk
when it entered my mouth.
Dusk opened up my mouth, and Vespers sang.

4.
In a drift of leaves
is vigil. In the word, which
if you have forgotten, remember.
If you remember, say.

It dwells. It grows.
It is and it is
to be.

Yes.

*

The

Epilog

Spoken by

Great Hermes *

Lords and Ladies

Fresh out of Hades

Go put on your gayiades

Beneath the cool Playiades *

We lay down our bony burden

Leave things as found profound uncertain

Your good words our only guerdon

Good readers gently draw the curtain *

Falling into the Past
A Memory?

I have a memory of falling
  From a high cliff, but I was not
  Afraid. The fall was slow. I thought
Back, and I found myself recalling

This moment, when I am recalling
  That one. Or so it seems, or seemed.
  But, Dears, just when I thought, or dreamed
That there would be no end of falling,

I woke—it was as if I had flown,
  Not fallen—where? Back in my cell,
  In spirit—I still haunt that Hell—
And found *myself* there, writing down:

Who is this naught that says I am?
  There it was, among Chinese Boxes
  Of riddles within paradoxes:
The start of *In Memoriam.*

'He' handed me the note-book in
  Which had been scrawled that fateful line
  (That is, I gave me what was mine)
And said, *Where I left off, begin*.

See the introduction ('Coda and Prelude') *to* In Memoriam C.3.3., II: Sweet Wormwood, *'From Père Lachaise: Where Were We?'*

The first line of In Memoriam C.3.3. —[Mr V]

Ahead of All Parting
With Rilke in the Alps

We are riding in a limousine placed at our disposal by Princess Marie Taxis. The road winds through the Swiss Alps. The driver: my friend Hermes.

1. *Getting to Know Him*

Where there is song there is Orpheus.
  So says a 'German' poet, greatly,
  With whom I have grown acquainted lately.
We are friends, in fact. The two of us

Are motoring over the Alps now. He
  Is calm. The driver's hand is steady.
  Ahead of parting, gone already,
We go the Way. He turns to me:

I sit among my extra senses
  Like a sad king who owns the ruin
  Of a world what has he to do in,
Do with? *The only real defence is*

To have none whatsoever. Be –
  I know, I know, for-ever dead in
  (I add: first you must make your bed in)
Doomed-at-a-glance Eurydice.

So. – And we share this nebular
  Agreement for the rest of time.
  Hermes, with us on that steep climb,
Discreetly drives the motor car.

2.
Rainer Maria sonneteers
  Quite *dunkel*-darkly as he sits
  Beside me, dropping little bits
Of *Tiefe* as the chauffeur steers.

Rilke was a Prague native; his mother, when the victorious Austrians marched beneath her house, closed the shutters.

Travelling Through Switzerland in a Motor Car

On the front doors, the Thurn and Taxis coat
Of arms… The princess, brilliant Marie,
Is with me – an old friendship's intimacy.
Hands in a muff, she shares an anecdote.

All round us, civilized sublimities
Of valley and mountain snap to attention and
Salute the dark, stately vehicle. The land
Rolls out green carpets, floral tapestries:

All duly absorbed through tinted isinglass,
To be metabolised and rendered back
Turned inside out, wearing their deaths. The grass

Slips into sleeves of evening, down the black
Seam of a gaze. That rockslide's frozen spill
Never looked so steep, so irretrievable.

*

Rainer's Book of Hours

Inspired by Lou Salomé and trips to Russia.

My Russian soul turned from the aureate light.
I sank into myself as down a mine
And there I saw thrones, windows, and the night.
Night offered up to me its blackest wine:

I tasted God. Angels were everywhere.
My soul was without form, and full. God's bones
Assembled into hands and wandered there,
Seeking His tongue. They groped through ghosts and stones.

Because I doubted him, he could not find me.
I turned away, and he grew vague behind me,
Shrank from his definition – for he dwelt

Inside the darkness he had made before
He made the light. I needed less, and more:
Things bounded, wrought, *made to be seen and felt.*
*

Credo

Things felt became my credo, not mere feeling.
Look, always look! – *So I told Pain and Pleasure:*
Your destiny is buttress, vault and ceiling.
Squeeze into silence under massive pressure.

Spread through these stained-glass shapes, be the still bliss
In martyrs' eyes when sunbeams bruise them; coil
Your tumult deep inside the wafer's kiss,
The cool, chromatic sheen on chrism oil –

Fling yourselves out now, in convulsive waves,
And find, in Orpheus, your mouth, your breath.
Float down the river of a song no staves

Can hold – be one whole note that rings through death
And grows so vast and palpable and round
Earth dwells entirely in that single sound.

Working as Rodin's private secretary. New Poems. *Later, the* Sonnets to Orpheus, *a kind of palinode to these.*

With Baladine Klossowska.

3.
Rainer, who is his own Maria,
  Re-lives the harvest of his dreams,
  When the Work came to him. It seems
An angel gave him the idea!

Château de Muzot, 1922

It *ripens to its hour; I will be spent.*
I never thought that it would feel so light,
This strength the Angel gives me. You were meant
For THIS, *he says. And I stand up and write.*

Hearts hinder, hearths hold back…Geese-haunted skies,
O orphaned spaces shivering! Can a breath
Husband the share of all departing cries,
Bless each thing with the shape of its own death?

My tower is vigil. Patience makes me rich.
Let statesmen dig excuses from the rubble
They made. They boast of peace. There will be trouble.

America floods the emptiness with kitsch –
But our dead still belong to us. Soon Europe
Will taste its harvest: a dark, Orphic syrup.

Vera Knoop, whose early death moved him to write the Sonnets to Orpheus.

4.
The catkins fall. And it is right.
A fountain's jet can juggle pounds
Of leaden balls. Up, down they bounce.
Light heavy as honey grows, stone, light.

Nietzsche:
I dreamed of rising without strain,
Of falling free of gravity.
I dreamt such things some day will be –
Perhaps, my friends, I dreamed in vain!

Nietzsche – Herr Ewige Wiederkehr – materialises.
He is, as always, only an interruption – but always.

[To Rilke:]
Inside the very womb it grows,
The seed of mortal destiny.
It was your privilege to be
The Poet Murdered by a Rose.

Leukemia. Sanitarium on Lake Geneva, 29 December, 1926.

Omen

He rises like a river god, and names me.
To him this marrow and this blood belong.
Pale emissaries, at his bidding, throng
The furthest reaches of my veins. They claim me.

The lake spreads out in all directions, vast
Enough to absorb the rawest agony.
Drugs I refuse: my pain belongs to me.
My death is mine. The rose that blossoms last.

I am the hospice dying found a home in.
I am becoming all that I have said...
When? Where? Is this the Nowhere without No?

Am I among the living or the dead?
The angels cannot tell. They come and go.
The ripeness comes, and everything was omen.

5.
We've reached alpine Mount Purgatory.
I see the Earthly Paradise,
The flowering glades… Then do we rise
From here or fall? How ends this story?

Lightly. We catkin-fall, my friend. –
Good Hermes, we have reached the summit:
Drive over in a trance-like plummet,
Please, slowly. Here it is: the –

'End!', of course, would have been my last word.

Constellations

Hermes guides us through the last Duino Elegy.
* * *
Even the linking of stars is a lie.
– Sonnets to Orpheus

Beyond the shooting galleries, the shrill laugh,
The gaudy prizes winking from the shelves,
I am that shadowy figure with the staff.
Follow me to the outposts of yourselves.

Above the mist's rippling handkerchief –
That warm, wept stream – those flocks of sorrow, bleating
Quietly in the dark – stand on this cliff:
Watch as they take their shapes for one last meeting.

You raised them over you on cold, clear nights,
Cast over space a skeletal poetry.
Ah, but the space: it grows and grows. Orion

The Hunter and his glittering prey, the Lion:
Drifting apart now – tattered little kites –
Shedding their names…Irrevocable…Free.

Musical Program

Title Page

Debussy, *Preludes*, Book II, No. 2: *Feux d'artifice*. Marc-André Hamelin, piano.

Page 4

Haydn, *Piano Sonata in E Flat Major,* Hob. XVI: 52. Finale (Presto). Sarah Beth Briggs, piano.

Page 10

Rimsky-Korsakov, *Scheherazade*, Op. 35. II: *The Kalendar Prince.* Moscow Symphony, Arthur Arnold, conductor.

Page 11

Rimsky-Korsakov, *Scheherazade*, Op. 35. II: *The Kalendar Prince.* Moscow Symphony, Arthur Arnold, conductor.

Page 12

Hossain Omoumi, flute. (Persian classical music.)

Page 15

Fauré, *Les roses d'Ispahan* (*The Roses of Ispahan*), Op. 39, No. 4. Text by Leconte de Lisle. Barbara Hendricks, soprano, Michel Dalberto, piano.

Les roses d'Ispahan dans leur gaîne de mousse,
Les jasmins de Mossoul, les fleurs de l'oranger,
Ont un parfum moins frais, ont une odeur moins douce,
Ô blanche Léïlah! que ton souffle léger.

The roses of Ispahan in their sheath of moss,
the jasmines of Mosul, the orange blossoms,
have a fragrance less fresh, an aroma less sweet,
O pale Leila, than your light breath!

Ta lèvre est de corail et ton rire léger
Sonne mieux que l'eau vive et d'une voix plus douce.
Mieux que le vent joyeux qui berce l'oranger,
Mieux que l'oiseau qui chante au bord d'un nid de mousse.
*
Ô Leïlah! depuis que de leur vol léger
Tous les baisers ont fui de ta lèvre si douce
Il n'est plus de parfum dans le pâle oranger,
Ni de céleste arome aux roses dans leur mousse.
*
Oh! que ton jeune amour, ce papillon léger,
Revienne vers mon coeur d'une aile prompte et douce.
Et qu'il parfume encor les fleurs de l'oranger,
Les roses d'Ispahan dans leur gaîne de mousse.

Your lips are coral and your light laughter
has a softer and lovelier sound than rippling water,
lovelier than the joyous breeze that rocks the orange-tree,
lovelier than the bird that sings near its nest of moss.
*
O Leila, ever since in their airy flight
all the kisses have fled from your lips so sweet,
there is no longer any fragrance from the pale orange-tree,
no heavenly aroma from the roses in the moss.
*
Oh, if only your youthful love, that light butterfly,
would return to my heart on swift and gentle wings,
and perfume once more the orange blossom
and the roses of Ispahan in their sheath of moss!

Trans. Peter Low

Page 17

Stravinsky, *Suite No. 1 for Small Orchestra*. II: Napolitana. CSCSO, Stravinsky, conductor.

Page 18

Johann Strauss, Jr., *Die Fledermaus,* Act II ("The Laughing Song"). Edita Gruberova, soprano. Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, James Levine, conductor.

ADELE
Ja, sehr komisch, hahaha
Ist die Sache, hahaha!

Yes, very comical, hahaha,
Is this matter, hahaha!

Page 20

Stravinsky, *Pastorale*. CSCSO, Stravinsky, conductor.

Page 22

Chabrier, *Pièces Pittoresques.* No. 10: *Scherzo-Valse*. Arthur Rubinstein, piano.

Page 31

Con O'Leary's Lament. (Traditional Irish tune.) Unnamed harpist.

Page 32

Fauré*, Piano Trio in D minor*, Op. 120. II: Andantino. Beaux Arts Trio.
(To listen to the complete movement, click here.)

Fauré, *Berceuse*, Op. 16. Christian Ferras, violin.

Page 38

Praetorius, *La Bourée*, from *Terpsichore*. Westra Aros Pipers.

Page 39

Call of Krishna. Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, flute.

Page 44

Chopin, *Preludes*, Op. 28, No. 11 in B Major. Arthur Rubinstein, piano.

Page 47

Schumann, *Piano Quintet in E Flat Major*, Op. 44. II: In modo d'una marcia.
Arthur Rubinstein, piano. Guarneri Quartet.

Page 49

Herbert, *March of the Toys*, from *Babes in Toyland.* Boston Pops Orchestra,
Arthur Fiedler, conductor.

Prokofiev, *Romeo and* Juliet. No. 13: *The Dance of the Knights*. London Symphony
Orchestra, Valery Gergiev, conductor.

Page 53

Holst, *The Planets*. III: *Mercury, the Winged Messenger.* Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Sir Charles Mackerras, conductor.

Page 55

Ravel, *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. IV: Assez animé. Arthur Rubinstein, piano.

Page 56

Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute). Act II, No. 2. *Der Vogelfanger bin ich ja*. Walter Berry as Papageno. Philharmonia Orchestra and Choir, Otto Klemperer, conductor.

Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja,
Stets lustig heissa hopsasa!
Ich Vogelfänger bin bekannt
bei Alt und Jung im ganzen Land.
Weiß mit dem Lokken umzugehn
und mich aufs Pfeiffen zu verstehen!
Drum kann ich froh und lustig sein,
Denn alle Vögel sind ja mein.

Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja,
Stets lustig heissa hopsasa!
Ich Vogenfänger bin bekannt
Bei Alt und Jung im ganzen Land.
Ein Netz für Mädchen möchte ich;
Ich fing sie dutzendweis für mich!
Dann sperrte ich sie bei mir ein
Und alle Mädchen wären mein.

Wenn alle Mädchen wären mein,
So tauschte ich brav Zukker ein.
Die welche mir am liebsten wär,
der gäb ich gleich den Zukker her.
Und küsste sie mich zärtlich dann,
Wär' sie mein Weib und ich ihr Mann.
Sie schlief an meiner Seite ein;
ich wiegte wie ein Kind sie ein.

The birdcatcher I am indeed,
Always happy, heidi heh hey!
I, the birdcatcher, am well known
To old and young throughout the land.
Know how to get around the bird decoys
And be understood on the fife.
Therefore I can be happy and funny,
For all the birds are indeed mine.

The birdcatcher I am indeed,
Always happy, heidi heh hey!
I, the birdcatcher, am well-known
To old and young throughout the land.
A net for girls is what I would like;
I'd catch them by the dozen for me!
Then I would lock them up with me
And all the girls would be mine.

If all the girls were mine,
Then I'd dutifully trade for some sugar.
The one I liked the best,
To her I would immediately give the sugar.
And if she kissed me tenderly then,
She would be my wife and I her husband.
She would fall asleep by my side;
I would rock her to sleep like a child.

Trans. Lea F. Frey

Page 57 (Full-Page Illustration:Picasso, *The Pipes of Pan*)

Debussy, *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*. I: *La flüte de Pan.* Text by Pierre Louÿs. Dawn Upshaw, soprano, Gilbert Kalish, piano.

Pour le jour des Hyacinthies,
il m'a donné une syrinx faite
de roseaux bien taillés,
unis avec la blanche cire
qui est douce à mes lèvres comme le miel.

Il m'apprend à jouer, assise sur ses genoux ;
mais je suis un peu tremblante.
il en joue après moi,
si doucement que je l'entends à peine.

Nous n'avons rien à nous dire,
tant nous sommes près l'un de l'autre;
mais nos chansons veulent se répondre,
et tour à tour nos bouches
s'unissent sur la flûte.

Il est tard,
voici le chant des grenouilles vertes
qui commence avec la nuit.
Ma mère ne croira jamais
que je suis restée si longtemps
à chercher ma ceinture perdue.

For the festival of Hyacinthus
he gave me a syrinx, a set of pipes made
from well-cut reeds joined
with the white wax
that is sweet to my lips like honey.

He is teaching me to play, as I sit on his
knees; but I tremble a little.
He plays it after me, so softly
that I can scarcely hear it.

We are so close that we have
nothing to say to one another;
but our songs want to converse,
and our mouths are joined
as they take turns on the pipes.

It is late:
here comes the chant of the green frogs,
which begins at dusk.
My mother will never believe
I spent so long
searching for my lost waistband.

Trans. Peter Low

Page 59

Handel, *Suite in B Flat Major*, HWV 440. I: Minuet. Keith Jarrett, piano.

Page 61

Poulenc, *Mouvements perpétuels*. I: Assez modéré. Arthur Rubinstein, piano.

Page 65

Ravel, *Le Tombeau de Couperin.* I: Prelude. Jean-Philippe Collard, piano.

Page 68

Josquin des Prez, *In Te Domine Speravi*. Text by anonymous author. Hilliard Ensemble.

In te Domine speravi
Per trovar pietà in eterno,
Ma in un tristo e oscuro inferno
Fui, et frustra laboravi.

Rotto e al vento ogni speranza,
Veggio il ciel voltarmi in pianto,
Suspir, lachrime me avanza
Del mio tristo sperar tanto.
Fui ferito, se non quanto
Tribulando ad te clamavi.
In te Domine speravi.

Lo cecato voler mio
Per sin qui m'ha fatto muto,
Et hor poco al dolor mio
Per mio dir vien proveduto.
Deh, Signor, porgime adiuto,
Quia de me iam desperavi.
In te Domine speravi.

In thee, O Lord, have I trusted
to find eternal mercy;
but I have been in a dark, miserable hell,
and have labored in vain.

All my hopes broken and cast to the winds,
I see the heavens plunge me into sorrow;
only sighs and tears are left
of my great, unhappy hope.
I was struck down, except that
in my trouble I called out to thee.
In thee, O Lord, have I trusted.

My blind will
till now has made me mute,
and even now my words have done
little for my pain.
Ah, Lord, grant me aid,
for I despair of myself.
In thee, O Lord, have I trusted.

Trans. Elizabeth Baber

Page 69

Chopin, *Étude in A Flat Major*, Op 25, No. 13 (arr. for harp). Elizabeth Hainen, harp.

Page 71

Machaut, *La Messe de Nostre Dame*. I: Kyrie. Oxford Camerata.

Kyrie, eleison.
Christe, eleison.
Kyrie, eleison.

Lord, have mercy on us.
Christ, have mercy on us.
Lord, have mercy on us.

Translation of Envoi from *Ballade des Pendus:*

Prince Jesus, who is lord of all,
Keep us from the tyranny of Hell:
Let the Devil have no claim over us.
Men, make no mockery here;
But pray that God absolve us all!

Trans. Craig E. Bertolet

Page 74

Liszt, *Totentanz.* Krystian Zimerman, piano. Boston Symphony Orchestra, Seiji Ozawa, conductor.

Page 77

Richard Strauss, “Dance of the Seven Veils,” from *Salome*. The Royal Opera House Orchestra, Christoph Von Dohnanyi, conductor.

Page 91

Stravinsky, *Suite No. 2 for Small Orchestra*. Galopp. CBCSO, Stravinsky, conductor.

Page 93

Piece from a Satyr Play. From a collection of reconstructed ancient Greek music. Ensemble de Organographia.

Page 99

Debussy, *Syrinx*. Emmanuel Pahud, flute.

Page 103

Debussy, *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*. III: *Le tombeau des Naïades* (*The Tomb of the Naiads*). Text by Pierre Louÿs. Dawn Upshaw, soprano, Gilbert Kalish, piano.

Le long du bois couvert de givre, je marchais;
Mes cheveux devant ma bouche
Se fleurissaient de petits glaçons,
Et mes sandales étaient lourdes
De neige fangeuse et tassée.

Il me dit: "Que cherches-tu?"
“Je suis la trace du satyre.
Ses petits pas fourchus alternent
Comme des trous dans un manteau blanc.”
Il me dit: "Les satyres sont morts.

I was walking along in the frost-covered woods;
in front of my mouth
my hair blossomed in little icicles,
and my sandals were heavy
with snow, caked and muddy.

He asked: "What are you looking for?"
“I am following the tracks of the satyr—
his little cloven hoofprints alternate
like holes in a white cloak.”
He said: "The satyrs are dead.

"Les satyres et les nymphes aussi.
Depuis trente ans, il n'a pas fait un hiver aussi terrible.
La trace que tu vois est celle d'un bouc.
Mais restons ici, où est leur tombeau."

Et avec le fer de sa houe il cassa la glace
De la source où jadis riaient les naïades.
Il prenait de grands morceaux froids,
Et les soulevant vers le ciel pâle,
Il regardait au travers.

"The satyrs, and the nymphs as well.
In thirty years there has not been such a terrible winter.
That is the trail of a he-goat.
But let us rest here: this is their tomb."

And with his hoe he broke the ice
of the spring where the water-nymphs once laughed.
There he was, picking up large cold slabs,
lifting them toward the pale sky
and peering through them.

Trans. Peter Low [with alterations]

Page 109

Ravel, *Pavane pour une infante défunte*. Jean-Philippe Collard, piano.

Page 112

Brahms, *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, Op. 45. II: *Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras*. Radio Symphony Orchestra of Leipzig, Radio Choir Leipzig, Siegfried Kegel, conductor.

Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras
und alle Herrlichkeit des Menschen
wie des Grases Blumen.
Das Gras is verdorret
und die Blume abgefallen.

For all flesh is as grass,
and all the glory of man
as the flower of grass.
The grass withereth,
and the flower thereof falleth away.

Page 113

Wagner, *Siegfried*. "Siegried's Funeral March." Cleveland Orchestra, George Szell, conductor.

Page 115

Respighi, *Pines of Rome.* II: *Pines Near a Catacomb.* Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Fritz Reiner, conductor.

Page 116

The Song of Seikilos. The Atrium Musicae de Madrid directed by Gregorio Paniagua. Singer and lyre-player unnamed.

From the notes to YouTube posting:

This song is one of the earliest examples yet found of a complete musical composition from the ancient world. Although other songs have been found that pre-date "The Song of Seikilos" by many centuries, they only survive in fragments. Seikilos carved the song on a grave pillar in dedication to his wife. Archaeologists believe it dates between 200 BC and AD 100.

Hoson zēs, phainou
Mēden holōs sy lypou;
Pros oligon esti to zēn
To telos ho chronos apaitei.

As long as you live, shine,
Let nothing grieve you beyond measure.
For your life is short,
And time will claim its toll.

Page 117

Monteverdi, *Orfeo*, Act I: *Lasciate i monti*. English Baroque Soloists. John Eliot Gardiner, conductor.

Coro di Ninfe e Pastori

Lasciate i monti,
Lasciate i fonti,
Ninfe vezzose e liete
E in questi prati
Ai balli usati
Vago il bel piè rendete.

Qui miri il sole
Vostre carole,
Più vaghe assai di quelle
Ond'alla luna,
La notte bruna,
Danzano in ciel le stelle.

Lasciate i monti,
Lasciate i fonti,
Ninfe vezzose e liete
E in questi prati
Ai balli usati
Vago il bel piè rendete.

Poi di bei fiori
Per voi s'onori
Di questi amanti il crine,
Ch'or dei martiri
Dei lor desiri
Godon beati al fine.

Chorus of Nymphs and Shepherds

Come down from the hills,
come down from the springs ,
Nymphs so comely and glad,
and in these meadows
in wonted dances
let your fair feet rejoice.

Here shall the sun
behold your measures
lovelier far than those
danced to the moon
in the dead of night
by the stars in the sky.

Come down from the hills,
come down from the springs ,
Nymphs so comely and glad,
and in these meadows
in wonted dances
let your fair feet rejoice.

Then with fair flowers
crown the heads
of these lovers,
who after the torment
of their longing
are happy at last.

Page 119

Sumerian Songs, No. 1. Ensemble de Organographia.

Page 128

Szymanowski, *King Roger*. (*Roxana's Song*). Olga Pasichnyk, soprano.

Page 129

De Falla, *Seven Popular Spanish Songs*. V: *Nana (Lullaby).* Arranged for violin and piano. Performers unknown.

Page 132

Peter Warlock, *Balulalow*. Lyrics attr. to Bros. Wedderbern (fl. 1550). The Choir of King's College, Cambridge, director unnamed. ("Balulalow" is an old Scottish word meaning "lullaby.")

O my dear heart, young Jesu sweit,
Prepare thy creddil in my spreit
And I sall rock thee in my hert,
And never mair from thee depert.

But I shall praise thee evermore
With sangis sweit unto thy gloir.
The knees of my heart shall I bow,
And sing that richt Balulalow.

Page 138

Ravel, *Kaddish*. Chantal Juillet, violin, Pascal Rogé, piano.

Page 141

Orff, *Carmina Burana.* I: *O Fortuna.* Chicago Symphony Orchestra, James Levine, conductor.

Page 143

Ravel, *Chants populaires*. IV: *Chanson hébraïque*. (Folk song setting.)
Cecelia Bartoli, mezzo-soprano. Myung-Whun Chung, piano.

Mejerke, main Suhn,
Mejerke, main Suhn, oi Mejerke, main Suhn,
Zi weiss tu, var wemen du steihst?
"Lifnei Melech Malchei hamlochim," Tatunju.

Mejerke, main Suhn,
Mejerke, main Suhn, oi Mejerke, main Suhn,
Wos ze westu bai Ihm bet'n?
"Bonej, chajei, M'sunei," Tatunju.

Mejerke, main Suhn,
Mejerke, main Suhn, oi Mejerke, main Suhn,
Oif wos darfs tu Bonei?
"Bonim eiskim batoiroh," Tatunju.

Mejerke, main Suhn,
Mejerke, main Suhn, oi Mejerke, main Suhn,
Oif wos darfs tu chajei?
Kol chai joiducho," Tatunju.

Note: The original is a mixture of Yiddish, Aramaic and Hebrew.

"Mayerke, my son, oh Mayerke, my son,
Do you know before whom do you stand?"
"BEFORE THE KING OF THE KING OF KINGS, father dear."

"Mayerke, my son, oh Mayerke, my son,
And what will you ask of him?"
"CHILDREN, LIFE, AND SUSTENANCE, father dear."

"Mayerke, my son, oh Mayerke, my son,
For what do you need children?"
"CHILDREN STUDY THE TORAH, father dear."

"Mayerke, my son, oh Mayerke, my son,
For what do you need life?"
"ALL LIFE SHALL PRAISE HIM, father dear."

"Mayerke, my son, oh Mayerke, my son,
But you also want some bread?"
"YOU SHALL EAT, AND BE SATISFIED AND BLESS [THE LORD YOUR GOD]."

Trans. Laura Richard

Page 148

Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde.* Act III: Prelude. Staatskappele Dresden, Carlos Kleiber, conductor.

Hildegard von Bingen, *Kyrie.* Oxford Camerata, Jeremy Summerly, director.

Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.
Christe eleison.	Christ, have mercy.
Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.

(Passage from *The Poetic Edda* translated by Henry Adams Bellows.)

Page 150

Ancient Egyptian Love Song. Arranged and sung in the original language by Peter Pringle using reconstruction of an ancient Egyptian harp.

[Original text unavailable. Translation:]
Sister! Sister without rival!
Beautiful! Most beautiful of all!
She is like the star Sothis when it rises,
Like the star Sothis when it rises
At the start of a fine new year.

Perfect and shining is her skin
And where she looks she seduces with her eyes.
Her lips are sweet when she speaks
And there is never a word too many.

Sister! Sister without rival!
Beautiful! Most beautiful of all!

Trans. Peter Pringle (?)

Page 156

Fauré, *Requiem*, Op. 48. IV: *Pie Jesu*. Judith Blegen, soprano. Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Robert Shaw, conductor.

Pie Jesu, dona eis requiem,	Merciful Jesus, Lord, give them rest,
dona eis requiem sempiternam requiem.	give them rest, eternal rest.

Page 172

Duruflé, *Requiem*, Op. 9. VII: Lux Aeterna. Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Robert Shaw, conductor.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Grant them peace eternal, Lord,
and may perpetual light shine on them.

Page 176

Mahler, *Symphony No. 1 in D major*. I: Langsam, Schleppend. Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Pierre Boulez, conductor.

Page 182

Richard Strauss, *Vier letzte Lieder* (*Four Last Songs*). IV: *Beim Schlafengehen* ("Going to Sleep"). Text by Herman Hesse. Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, soprano.

Nun der Tag mich müd gemacht,
soll mein sehnliches Verlangen
freundlich die gestirnte Nacht
wie ein müdes Kind empfangen.

Hände, laßt von allem Tun,
Stirn, vergiß du alles Denken,
alle meine Sinne nun
wollen sich in Schlummer senken.

Und die Seele unbewacht
will in freien Flügen schweben,
um im Zauberkreis der Nacht
tief und tausendfach zu leben.

Now that the day has left me tired,
my dearest longings shall
be tenderly accepted by the starry night
like a weary child.

Hands, leave off your doing,
head, forget your thoughts;
all my senses now
would sink into slumber.

And my soul, unobserved,
would float on wings untrammeled
to live a thousand times more deeply
in the enchanted circle of the night.

Trans. Emily Ezust (with alterations)

(Illustration: Matisse, *Icarus.*)

Page 183, *Constellations*

Duruflé, *Requiem*, Op. 9. VII: *Lux Aeterna*. Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Robert Shaw, conductor. (Epigraph: *Sonnets to Orpheus,* First Series, 11. Translated by A. Poulin, Jr.).

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine,
cum sanctis tuis in aeternum,
quia pius es.
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

May eternal light shine one them, Lord,
with the everlasting saints,
because you are merciful.
Grant them peace eternal, Lord,
and may perpetual light shine on them.