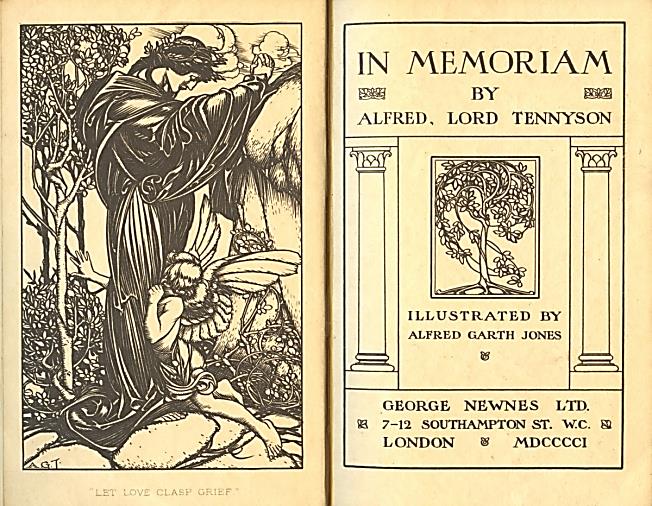
**\* *Authors and Arthurs* \***



[♫](http://www.youtube.com/balulalow2.mp3)

***Tennyson and I***

***Table of Contents***

Urania or Uranus? 3

*In Memoriam A.H.H.*  9

The Arthur Cycle 18

By the Ivory Gate 29

Valediction Forbidding Mourning 32

Appendix: Musical Program 34

***Tennyson and I***

***Urania or Uranus?***

*My mind has wandered onto the*

*estate of his childhood and youth,*

*Somersby, still haunted by his ghost.*

1.

I stand before your old yew tree;

It sends up, at my tender stroke,

‘A fruitful cloud’, and I invoke *See* In Memoriam, *Section 39.*

Melodious Melpomene,

As once you did. I wear the buskin

And not the comic sock; in umber

And solemn black arrayed, I number

Myself among the sons of Ruskin:

A fallen son, who lost his way

To Ferry Hinksey, and in the mire

Found an unclean Sublime. Desire,

Mad passion, rubbed his art away

To show, beneath its satin sheen,

The cankers on his pagan soul.—

What, am I maudlin? But the rôle

Demands it!—I will set the scene

Inside a hotel, or a prison,

Or nowhere. My soul wears a hair

Shirt, ugly, itchy. A cast is there

Of spirits made of books. I listen

To the Heavenly Hosts of Literature.

You had a higher Muse, Alfred:

Urania, with her star-crowned head,

The Muse of Faith. Here I demur:

For *my* Urania, ‘Heavenly Muse

That on the sacred top,’ and so

Forth, was *Uranian*, you know,

And given, thus, to different views

On Heaven, and Hell, and good and evil,

And, certainly, of false and true.

Do I seem evil, false to you?

One man’s God is another’s Devil.

I doubt it will much please the Saints

To see an unrepentant son

Of Sodom at the Gates. They’d shun

A man like me. My poor heart faints!

With trepidation will I cross

The bar. Till then I, too, would speak

Of tragic love; for I, too, seek

What gain a soul may glean from loss.

2.

*You and that love of yours! You lost*

*Your dignity and honour for it.*

*You would not let the world ignore it.*

*My dear sir, was it worth the cost?*

*To indulge a not-so-secret shame*

*You killed the heart of your good wife,*

*And ruined your own brilliant life*

*For ‘Love that dare not speak its name’. He quotes the fateful closing line from*

*Alfred Douglas’s poem, ‘Two Loves’,*

*As for your two poor sons: you made used against me in the Trials.*

*Them orphans! When all’s said and done*

*Are not these two the same and one,*

*‘The lips betraying, the life betrayed’? From my poem, ‘Humanitad’.*

3.

Let’s talk about *your* love, my friend:

Look in your heart, sir: are you sure

That it was all so very pure

And virtuous as you pretend?

You read through the *Symposium*

Together, surely (doubtless on

A riverbank or rich green lawn):

Did not your heart beat like a drum?

Was not this love you think ‘Platonic’

A thing much deeper, more intense,

Compounded of both soul *and* sense,

Its sheer persistence half-daemonic?—

Uranus sired the goddess whose

Dominion is *our* sort oflove.

Why strain to set yourself above

Your nature by a moral ruse?

Your words are truer than you know *See* In Memoriam,

When you compare your love for him *Section 60.*

To one a wife, or maiden slim,

Feels for her husband or her beau.

You pair your love with the Bard’s for

*His* friend, the beautiful young man.

‘I love thee,’ so you write, ‘nor can

The soul of Shakespeare love thee more’.—

Shakespeare, whose name will never fade,

Whose passion for his Willie Hughes *See* The Portrait of Mr W.H.

(That boyish, sorrow-bringing Muse)

Put the Dark Lady in the shade!

**Metaphor may poeticise

Or render vague, but not conceal

A truth you can’t help but reveal

To all initiated eyes;

Reveal it even to the Press,

That Cerberus ever-set to pounce:

Did not the thunderous *Times* denounce *Arthur Hallam.*

Your ‘amatory tenderness’?

Love longs for immortality, *As Socrates argues in* The Symposium.

And what is *In Memoriam*

If not a great love poem*? I am*

*Dismayed by your perversity*.

4.

*How can you speak such blasphemies!*

*Things so impertinent, so wrong!*

*Stealing the measure of my song*

*To mock a friendship’s Mysteries!*

*If you had known my noble friend*

*You might have put yourself to school*

*And never played the brazen fool*

*Who came to such a wretched end.*

*‘Apostle of Beauty’! Ah, the shame*

*You brought upon Art’s sacred cause,*

*For fame, for money and applause!*

*You made it seem a sordid game.*

*You were committed, not to art,*

*But to celebrity*.—I *was*

My art! *Indeed, a noble cause!*

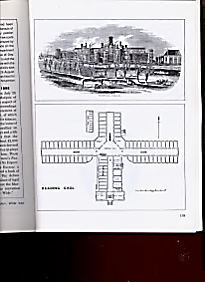
*How bravely you took Oscar’s part!*

*What you committed, petty crime*

*Against true art, but paved the way for*

*Much greater crimes you justly pay for.*

Your ‘Mrs Grundy’ is sublime!



Ah, what a shame, how you betrayed

*Your* special gift—the sensuous, free

Yet serious play of imagery

And sound—as you grew old and staid!

Weren’t you an aesthete in your youth,

Drunk on the beauty of your rhymes?

You aged, you truckled to the times,

And cant usurped poetic truth.

I *truckled, sir? Recall the way*

*You curried the disfavour of press*

*And public; you were lost—confess!—*

*With no bourgeois to épater.*

*What insolence you showed! (The scorn*

*You heaped upon the public was*

*Such* public *scorn.). They let it pass*

*Till too outrageous to be borne.*

5.

How public was the private pain

*You* uttered in an elegy

That’s more autobiography

Than paean to a fallen swain!

The uses of adversity

Are bittersweet. The elegies

Became a habit, a release,

A spur to creativity;

Grief was convenient to your Muse.

For if—to put it cynically—

To love is good for poetry,

‘Tis better still to love and lose.

*Did I not own it half a sin*

*To put in words the grief I felt,*

*To make parade of pain, and melt*

*In idle tears, as if to win*

*The praise that comes to constancy?*

*The questions and objections I*

*Put to myself did I not try Somersby Manor.*

*To answer, with sincerity,*

*By crying out for all mankind*

*Against the loss of dearest things?*

*And though my faith had injured wings,*

*And skipped and fluttered in the wind,*

**

*It kept its homing instinct sound.*

*Through doubt’s obscure and savage wood*

*It struggled towards whatever good*

*Might in the truth of things be found,*

*And found it in futurity,*

*In progress towards perfection of*

*A race sworn to the God of Love—*

*A humanised divinity.*

6.

Then you turned Sage, and so became *Worse, ‘The Ancient Sage’.*

The official portrait of yourself,

A bust upon a study shelf

With an august and chiseled name.

One thinks of Wordsworth, once how great!

Who sold his soul, and did not know it;

Who, born a visionary poet,

Died a mere Poet Laureate.

You *have your epigrams, that hallow*

*The superficial and the shallow,*

*The sophomoric and the callow*

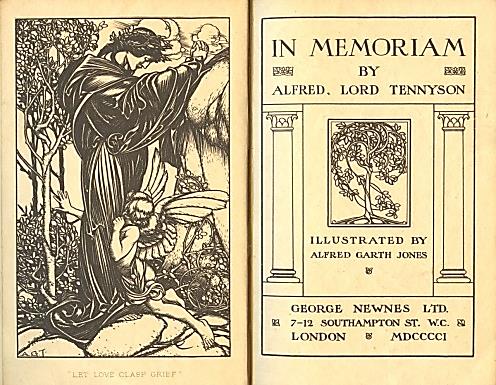
*And have the pith of a marshmallow!*

*A corpulent heresiarch,*

*You stooped to wallow in the mire*

*Of unimaginative desire*

*And drowned in lust your spirit’s spark.*

*A dissipated Magus, with*

*Your cult of poets, catamites*

*And stable boys, you taught them rites*

*Of shameful gnosis, and a myth*

*To flatter all the prettiest faces,*

*Perfumed with Platonism, and*

*Keats, and the Higher Twaddle, and grand*

*Gestures, and wine, and cigarette cases!*

*What have you given our English Youth?*

*An overstimulated brain,*

*An underfed soul, and disdain*

*For wisdom, decency, and truth.*

*Of all things new most reverent,*

*In awe of vogue, and trend, and pose,*

*They have, beneath their stylish clothes,*

*The soul of an adverstisement.*

*Their only god ‘Self-Realisation,’*

*They live in slavery to their senses,*

*Consumers of experiences*

*With a bankrupt imagination.*

*Now Tennyson resembles Curzon*

*And that poetic cant about speaking against my nomination to*

*The Child as model for us all! the Crabbett Club (summer of 1891?).*

*What is it but a gilded pall*

*For sins you would not live without?*

*You wonder why good folk take fright*

*To see unsteadily walking past*

*An unrepentant paederast,*

*And shield their children from the sight?*

*Without a conscience or an aim*

*You lived and wrote; your room and board*

*Most richly you deserve.—*My Lord,

May I say nothing?—*Shame, sir, shame!* *He and Somersby Manor vanish.*

**

***In Memoriam A.H.H.***

****** *Somersby Manor.*

1.

Read with kind eyes, dear Tennyson,

This Grieving Song. Grudge not to lend

The form in which you mourned your friend

To one who asks your benison.

I add a fin-de-siècle clarity

As muttering winds, bleak, Hyperborean,

Fan the ashes of our Victorian

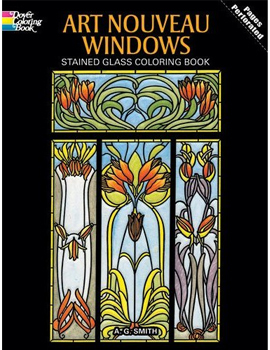
Bonfire of Empire and austerity.

So loftily vulgar and virtue-*bent*,

This so-progressive century,

Now burying both itself and me,

Deserves a stranger testament.

Tastefully grand, your Hall of Woe—

And yet (I trust you’ll take me lightly)

I thought I might refurbish slightly,

Adding a touch more Art Nouveau?

My sorrow takes a different path

Than yours. My style of grief demands a

Boudoir, an intimate sort of stanza,

Where (prelude, tryst, and aftermath)

Love lives its brief ABBAs;

Where eyes, then hands, then lips may meet

Blissfully, till reluctant feet

Bear them upon their separate ways.

2.

Your stanza is a coach and four:

The pace is slow and funerary;

Inside the coach, a solitary

Passenger sits head bowed, heart-sore.

Solemnly onward the wheels roll,

Bearing you and your weary load

Of grief down the high royal road

Into the vexed Victorian soul,

That shrinks from science’s cold facts,

Not knowing what her fate shall be,

Survival or blank nullity,

Whilst space’s vast and empty tracts,

When at the sky she dares to look,

Stretch out before her on all sides,

And in her nameless fear she hides

Her fragile faith inside a Book.

For what does science leave us with,

That gives the soul no food, no scope?

‘Immortal soul….’ A desperate hope

In the survival of a myth.

Your elegiac coach was half

An ambulance. Even the Queen  *‘Next to the Bible,* In Memoriam

Upon your sturdy words would lean  *is my comfort’, she said, referring*

In her long grief, as on a staff. *to her grief over Prince Albert’s death.*

This carriage I dare requisition

For curious jaunts far from the highways,

Down shady lanes and crooked byways,

Pursuing quite another vision.

Your vehicle, wheels by tears greased,

Determined to end cheerfully,

With a galop’s forced gaiety

Crashes into a wedding feast.

I choose to name it *l’Hirondelle*, *‘The Swallow’.*

My borrowed, begged or stolen coach,

And warn all those who would approach

The black, vibrating vehicle

That what is going on inside

Is a thing sordid and illicit:

For though I will not be explicit,

I’ll say that the poor soul who died *Emma Bovary, of course.*

Drooling black liquids from her lips

Is in the throes of *petit mort*

Foreshadowing what will, before

Long, be the Great One. And the whip’s

Reverberation as it cracks,

With creak of wheels and clatter of hooves

And driver cursing as it moves,

This coach, uneasily, leaving tracks

Down mud-bespattered Paris streets,

Is the fore-echo of her doom.

She writhes inside a rattling tomb.

The rain shakes down its winding sheets*.*

3.

*Rein in your silly Pegasus,*

*Oscar. Your flights of fancy pall.*

*I ask, what right have you at all Actually, the form had been used before,*

*To use my unique stanza thus, by Lord Cherbury, among others.*

*Presume upon my poem’s title,*

*And light your small match at my bonfire?*

*Compared with which, yours is a wan fire.*

*All that you say is a recital,*

*A repetition or a theft.*

*You are no seer, merely a sayer,*

*A charlatan, a strolling player.*

*And look at you, you’ve nothing left!*

A work of art’s no destination,

It is a starting point for new

Departures. What is one to do

But meet Creation with Creation?

Admittedly, my Lord, I was

Nothing if not *jusque’au-boutiste*

By taste and temperament, nor least

In the experimental Cause

I pressed in poetry and prose.

Extremes meet, in ways mystical,

For drinks, at the Café Royal.

And where the night may lead, who knows?

*If you’re inviting me, thank you*

*No, though your offer’s very gracious.*

Sarcasm in a soul as spacious

As yours, sir, seems somewhat *voulu.*

4.

You know I place you far above *Discomfited by his angry attitude,*

That singer with the honeyed lips, *I attempt to flatter him by saying*

He of the cognac and the whips, *terrible things about his contemporaries,*

So orotund when he drinks of *opinions I do not in fact hold.*

The ocean of alliteration:

How harmlessly the fires of sin burn

In the adolescent Hell of Swinburne!

*Enfant terrible* of the nation



Once, spreading anarchy like rabies,

He goes to seed, a dry, deaf reed, in

His suburban Garden of Eden,

Watts-Duntonised, and kissing babies.

Arnold? The failing that defeats

His strengths strengthens his weaknesses.

The man is self-deceived: he is

A Keatsian poet who scorns Keats.

Look what a frigid elegy

He writes for his friend Arthur Clough!

Fine diction, images enough,

But a tone that says, *Look at me!*

*I got it right.* You *went astray*.

No note of genuine mourning pierces

The self-complacency of ‘Thyrsis’.

It is a cold and donnish lay.



Through Mystery and Mystification

Rossetti leads us towards the Yonder,

But is at times inclined to wander

In mists of Personification.

Browning’s a genius, true, but wrong

Notes mar his measure. No, he lacks

Finesse. You, whilst he sometimes hacks

Through language, coax it into song.

His prosody I cannot brook.

He writes novels in rough blank verse;

Fiction’s blessing is poetry’s curse.

How fat a thing is *Th’ Ring and th’ Book*!

Inspired he often is—though one

Could wish it a more careful rapture.

And yet how deftly does he capture

Soul-states, he knows them to the bone!  *Alfred is not mollified.*

5.

*As for* your *poetry, ‘tis all*

*Rank plagiarism—though that tinge*

*Of gaucherie that makes one cringe*

*Is, in its way, original.*

A thing is public property

Once published; it is common food

For thought. *Your stolen lines are good.*

*The rest is mediocrity,*



*Inflated rhetoric, pastiche!*

*What reader of sound judgment thinks*

*Well of that stilted thing, ‘The Sphinx’?*

*Your Muse, sir, should be on a leash.*

*And how portentously you weary us*

*In* Salomé*, as hierophant*

*Of Symbolism! Ah, you can’t*

*Believe that you wrote something serious?*

*That flowery rant of Jokanaan…*

*‘The satyr and nymph have fled’? Has he*

 *Been reading Monsieur Pierre Louÿs?*

*Oh how they all go on and on!*

(It is my soul! Ruskin is John,

Pater is Salomé, who slays

The thing she loves—and ah, she pays

For that, as pay she must, anon!)

6.

Lord Alfred, let this rancour cease!

I didn’t mean to pain you when

I spoke so frankly. Once again

Have I burned through your masterpiece.

Pity me in my misery!

The light is dim, and I must strain

To parse your words. Alas, my brain

Is clouded. Keep me company.

*You found friendship a mystery,*

*With acolytes and lovers only*

*For company. Did you feel lonely,*

*At times, without quite knowing why?*

*Well, Oscar, let’s put by our quarrel*

*And talk about my poetry.*

*This time I promise to pass by*

*The question whether it was moral*

*Or otherwise, your fatal love*

*For that vain youth. Let us discuss*

*What in my poem touches us*

*As all-too-human creatures of*

*Religious longing. Endless Life*

*Is what we crave. Do we not need,*

*In this confounding world, a Creed*

*To guide us through the smoke and strife?*

7.

Your nobly unpersuasive faith

Persuades us as a passionate doubt

We cannot help but care about

More deeply than we mourn the wraith

Of that young friend whose passing you

Immortalised in song. Oh how

You beg the seasons to avow

Their faith in what we humans do!

*I cried to Nature, all unanswered,*

*To speak the holy name of God.*

*I could not bear to face this broad*

*Bewilderment unblessed, unsponsored.*

Your soul speaks ever in ‘Two Voices,’

Of faith and doubt, hope and despair.

Which is the truer of the pair?

It’s clear: although your conscious choice is

To affirm and to believe, within

Your soul prevails that sad, that lonely

Voice, singing of its losses. Only

This sorrowing voice is genuine.

Nothing in art, or life, or science

Brings back the one you used to meet

At 67, Wimpole Street.

Religion fails the old reliance.

Lyell has changed all. Did Christ say,

*Suffer the little dinosaurs*

*To come unto me*? Who taught coarse

Darwinian ape-man how to pray?

Some things will thrive, the rest will fail.

From variations infinite

Evolves this Law austere, as it

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/holst_neptune.mp3)

Is written in the Book of Shale.



8.

*Once, Oscar, on a mystic even*

*Out on this lawn, I felt a Soul*

*Breathe on my own, and make it whole.*

*(Two souls that touch touch also Heaven.)*

*The vision faded by and by,*

*But brought this hope, which eased my dread:*

*That Death itself had freed my dead*

*Dear friend to Life that cannot die;*

*That we in Heaven, hand in hand,*

*Might walk together, two as one,*

*Repeating in a finer tone*

*Words once exchanged on street and strand.*

On quads of Art, and banks of Higher

Criticism, conversing by

A river, under a golden sky,

Amid the glittering dome and spire!

This would be very Heaven, surely:

A leisured University town,

Where Peter, dressed in cap and gown,

Directs a choir that sings demurely,

And, with a grave and owlish face,

Greets freshmen angels with a few

Kindly remarks, then points them to

Their rooms, their tutors, and valets.

How gladly I would join you there!

What leisure to enjoy, what talks

Strolling along tree-shaded walks

In the umbrageous evening air!

We’d speak in measured, flowing feet

That through the listening conduits glide

Like graceful swans that breast the tide.

For Poetry is God’s helpmeet

Here on the lawns beyond the Wars,

And chiefly of Hallam now she sings,

Bright, haloed Hallam: how his wings

Are light, and woven of the stars;

How in the radiance of your friend

Was shadowed forth a finer life

Destined to rise above the strife

And crown with Peace the latter end.

Look! Punting down the river’s wending

Come Graces, Splendours, Spirits, Glories,

Recounting all of History’s stories

And how they reached this happy ending!

Ah, gentle reconciliation

Of Nature’s ravening tooth and claw

With the Creator’s sacred Law

Through Evolution’s mediation!

*Hallam was hallowed by the earth*

*We shared, knitted as family members.*

*These halls rang out with laughter; embers*

*Winked kindly from the homely hearth.*

*The snide esprit of the cafés*

*Could not breach such a citadel.*—

Your grief was landed, settled well

Into the turf of gentry days.

Still, I recount but half the story:

How oft you wing, from west to east,

On clean, fresh lyric gusts, to feast

On an authentic morning glory!

But sometimes, too, there is a taste of

Cold mutton in your funeral baked

Meats, some leftover grief that’s ached

Too long, and thrift has made a waste of.

9.

*How without malice you deflate!*

*A most infuriating gift!*

*Even as you debase you lift.*

*Might this explain the special hate*

*You stirred up with those genial stings? We have something else in common::*

*It was the honey in your gall we both found the Alps disappointing.*

*That pained your victims most of all; Elizabeth Browning took you to task for*

*They envied you your generous wings. lack of cringing awe before the Sublime.*

*We cannot hold your jests against*

*You: this, of course, is what we hold*

*Against you. You are so calmly bold,*

*You leave us even more incensed. (Said with a smile.)*

My levity was tactical,

A dangerous art of levitation.

Ah, with what vengeful gravitation

Things ponderous land when back they fall!

*But my dear friend! I am bespoken.*

*My little children call for me*

*To help them trim the glittering tree.*

*And yet, to leave you here, heartbroken…*

*I bid you stay with us. Take part*

*In our festivities this Christmas.*

There’s room, then, for a ragged Dismas

At the rich table of your heart?

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/merry_gentlemen.mp4)

If you speak from mere charity,

 Dear Alfred, ah, I can’t stay here!

*Agàpe, Oscar*. But I fear

That ends in ‘pay’. *Christ’s love is free.*

*Think not of losses now, nor grieve.*

*‘Mid glowing lights, and eyes that shine,*

*Savour the cakes, the goodly wine!*

*For gaily falls this Christmas-eve.*

**\* *T h e A r t h u r C y c l e* \***



[**♫**](http://inmemoriamc33.com/chausson_legende_arthur.mp3)

***Tennyson and I***

***The Arthur Cycle***

*Tennyson and I again,*

*haunting Somersby Manor.*

1.

Must *every* male child be named Arthur?

In tribute to that grand Ideal

Whose own wife doubted he was real…

One must not take this any farther!

\*

Alfred, my excellent good friend,

Sing me a song of Camelot,

Won’t you? *Oh, dear! I’d rather not,*

*But since you ask: attend, attend!*



2. *King Arthur*

*O spotless fool, royal cuckold:*

*The torch, the torch will not be passed!*

*Why must the lilies fade so fast,*

*So fast the roses? I am old.*

*Your knights were many, and true and bold!*

*Your ladies, they had golden hair.*

*All that is beautiful and fair*

*Is as unthreaded cloth of gold.*

*Thrice must Sir Bedivere be told,*

*‘Give back the brand Excalibur!’*

*Ere he relinquish it to her*

*Who gave it you to have and hold,*

*The Lady of the Lake, to fold*

*Into the waters whence it came,*

*That shining sword of golden flame.*

*But now ‘tis done, as was foretold.*

*(Strictly his lot to each is doled.)*

*Now on a dim and dusky barge*

*Three queens shall take you in their charge*

*Wailing and weeping unconsoled*

*Over your body pale and cold,*

*And take it to Avilion*

*Whose other name’s Oblivion.*

*And the Round Table will be sold*

*At auction, the silk gown will mould,*

*A death-moth-eaten souvenir*

*Of what was once Queen Guinevere.*

*I weep, but tell what must be told,*

*The story of this king of old,*

*King Arthur, and his soul so vast!*

*And how the torch that was not passed,*

*On misty evenings, on the wold*

*That like a tapestry unrolled*

*Spreads out its endless waste of green,*

*That fatuous fire by fools is seen,*

*Sometimes, a Grail of fine fool’s gold,*

*And how they chase across that wold*

*A phantom (and to phantoms turn)*

*That warms them not, although it burn,*

*And leaves the ‘nighted world quite cold.*

3. *The Wicker Man*

*You brought upon yourself a fate*

*That you would not have wished upon*

*Your worst of enemies.* It’s done,

Enough! It’s done! It’s far too late

To change what happened. Why tear off

The bandage and the scab beneath

And pull the dagger from the sheath

And stab my heart and make me cough

Up blood again and let out cries

And seep again the morbid fluids?

What, is my soul some sort of Druid’s

Plaything, a hapless sacrifice

In cage of wicker set ablaze

And destroyed so flamboyantly

Pity and terror to ecstasy

Are driven? Through an acrid haze

To see it writhe, that blackening speck,

A small fire lost in a great fire,

The gods of savage men desire,

But spare me, pray, arrah! *vos prec*.

4. *The Green Man*

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/machaut_rondeau.mp3)

You chop him into bits and serve

Him as an archetype-ragout

Or hearty, seething mythic stew,

And in your every vein and nerve

He’ll magically reanimate

And your own inner viridescence

Invigourate. You’ll feel his presence

Within you as an altered gait,

A lighter step, a suppler wrist,

A languid new vitality

With just a *soupçon* of ennui

To scandalise the moralist.

Two or three inches of transcendence,

That’s all he asks for, from the ground,

That, and a band of angels round

His head to clown, and dance attendance.

Look at his skull! Out of the eye

Sockets, the nostrils, and the mouth

Spring green carnations and the youth

Eternal of regeneracy!

5.*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

He also comes in an edition

*De luxe*: a Knight, in skin of calf,

Whose head, swung by his hand, will laugh

At you, Sir Gawain, with derision

Quite supernatural, for you

Have severed it with an axe blow.

It says, as it sways to and fro,

That you’ve a debt will soon fall due:

Soon you must offer him *your* head

In what of course is a *Green* Chapel.

But first Eve offers you an apple.

Move back a step. You are half-dead

From questing for the giant’s lair

When in a castle you are offered

Harbourage—and much more is proffered:

One Bertilak de Hautdesert

A lovely wife hath; to your bed

She comes, night after night. Her plan?

Seduction! But you, virtuous man,

Preserve your chivalrous maidenhead,

It remains unviolated,

Although not so your sacred vow

To give back the wife’s girdle, now

The talisman that saves your head.

For on the point of hewing you

The Green Knight pauses at the sight

Of it and laughs: ‘twas all a light-

Hearted bit of fun, much ado!

Morgan Le Fay’s behind this jest,

That sometimes devious, sinister

Or merely mischievous half-sister

Of Arthur: it was all a test

Of Gawain’s vaunted chastity,

And of the ideals of the Court,

And withal a malicious sport

Queen Guinevere to terrify.

\*

And as the Green Knight doffs his head

To Sir Gawain, for courtaisìe,

I take my hat off to *you*, Dee-ah,

Who don’t believe a word I’ve said.

6. *Merlin and Vivien*

*The charm you should have kept, that charm*

*You gave her: ah, she understands!*

*The woven steps, the waving hands!*

*The power she has to do you harm*

*You put into those hands that doom*

*You to a hollow oak for ever.*

*You, whom we thought so very clever,*

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/chausson_viviane.mp3)

*You made the Tree of Life your tomb!*

*Poor wizard, wizened but not wise,*

*Who made from music Camelot’s gate*

*And knew before it came your fate,*

*And still believed her lying eyes!*

*You, the wand-waver, a mere tool*

*O, ay, it is but twenty pages long;*

*But every page having an ample marge,*

*And every marge enclosing in the midst*

*A square of text no larger than the limbs of fleas;*

*And every square of text an awful charm,*

*Writ in a language that has long gone by,*

*\* \* \**

*And every margin scribbled, crost, and cramm’d*

*With comment, densest condensation, hard*

*For mind and eye; but the long sleepless nights*

*Of my long life have made it easy to me.*

*And none can read the text, not even I;*

*And none can read the comment but myself;*

*And in the comment did I find the charm.*

*—Idylls of the King, ‘Merlin and Vivien’*

*In the hands of one so profoundly*

*Unworthy! I denounce you roundly,*

*Hapless magician, gifted fool!*

7. *Princess Ida and The Lady of Shalott*

Your *Princess*, though: what, from sheer chivalry

She must renounce her independence

And submit to the man’s transcendence,

Foregoing gifts and mental rivalry,

Eunuch self-castrated to flatter

The vanity of the poor male,

The *victim*, lest his manhood fail?

Must treat her mind as a small matter

Compared with her predestined rôle

As selfless servant wife and doting

Mother—and how *he* must be gloating,

Your husband who has killed your soul!

Decked out in hollow-clanging blank

Verse and Arthurian trumpery,

Poems of such complacency

Have but Philistia’s Muse to thank.

But Oh! the Lady of Shalott

Whose mirror cracked when she forgot

She must not look on Lancelot,

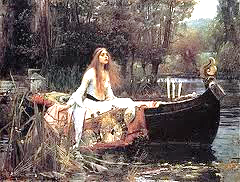
She drifts down dead to Camelot,

The Lady of Shalott, Elaine!

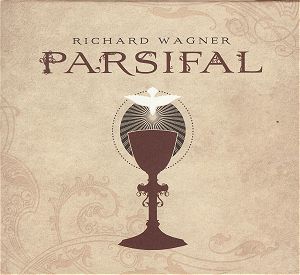
Her web flown hopeless, floating wide,

What she must do she did, and died:

If love brings death, death ends love’s pain.



[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/wagner_liebestod.mp3)

8.

*And shall I speak of Galahad*

*Who perserveres o’er sea and land*

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/corpus_christi.mp3)

*Till he alone of all that band*

*Beholds the Grail, and yet is sad?*

*For nothing now can be the same.*

*Ah, back into the world he goes,*

*And all he knew no longer knows,*

*And ‘home’ sounds like a foreign name!*

*All things look skeletal and old*

*As branches when November winds*

*Strip their bright leaves away like sins*

*And leave them purified and cold.*

*His heart is pure, and so is snow*

*Unsmutched, a virgin sheet of white.*

*He prays upon a winter’s night*

*In his stone chapel, head bowed low.*

*Infinite Love will ruin Love*

*Of earthly kind, so dear a waste!*

*And kisses leave a bitter taste*

*When human love’s not love enough.*

*He only wants to die a death*

*Of his own choosing: he would be*

*Of flesh entirely, wholly free*

*And rise toward Heaven like a breath.*



9. *The Fairie Queene and the Labyrinth of Allegory*

Complexities, in the end, defeat

Design. The maze grows only denser.

Think of those episodes in Spenser

Where plain knights weave in dark conceit

‘Mongst nymphs and wizards and what-not,

Until the allegory spins

So many myths of origins

That Virgil’s oak is overwrought

With Ovid’s ivy. ‘Hard begin’, The Faerie Queene, *III, iii, 21.*

What is your end? You have too many

 Of these to be said to have any,

And fewer the ways out than in.

So highly charged with gorgeous Eros,

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/midsummer2.mp3)

Infected will unwilling serves

Erected wit, and sensory nerves

Are insolent squires to his knight-heroes.

A knight may ‘gainst his interest act,

His better judgment; what he fears he *Prince Arthur and the Fairy Queen (Fuseli).*

Is overtaken by: his Circe

Turns hoggish mind to bodily fact.

The thread tatters to threads, to broken

Endings leading. But these are new

Beginnings, each a chance to do

It all again, new vows are spoken

In a tempestuous wedding of

The pagan and the mediaeval,

 Protestant God and Catholic Devil.

It is the straying that we love.

\*

Spenser, you hated us, it’s true. *Hated the Irish, that is.*

Hysteria mars your fantasy.

But though you fear to set him free,

Eros exuberates from you.

You wrestle to the ground but can’t

Pin down the daemon. He will rise

Again. What spell could exorcise

The Protean from the Protestant?

10. *Childe Harold*

Childe Harold sings his anxious song

Of influences that make him pine

To go a quest that will, in fine,

At a dark tower, and a throng

Of palely loitering phantoms, end—

 Though first he through a plashed and muddy

Waste, as through a dead scholar’s study

Littered with scribbled leaves, must wend

With steadfast and obdùrate will

Set against Time and its *It Was*.

But why so hard a quest? Because

Opposed, irreconcilable

Are power and will, good, and the means

Of good? Because triumphant life

Achieved through such a ghastly strife

Might just as well be death? The scenes

Of misty squalour through the which

 He struggles are composed of naught

But splendid failures, all they wrought

A poverty that makes them rich,

A wealth that leaves them poor indeed.

Who steals my purse, steals trash: how true!

Accumulations vast accrue

Until they bloom into a weed.

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/wagner_tristan.mp3)

11. *Arcturus Redux?*

*Oh once in a blue Cambrian moon,*

*Perhaps, stray knights will constellate*

*Into a court, can we but wait!*

*A king will strike a fork, and tune*

*Their disparate notes into a Song*

*Of Solomon uniting God*

*And Aphrodite. On a broad*

*Heraldic field that noble throng*

*Will clash the shield and break the lance,*

*Before a gateway by a clever*

*Sorcerer built to last for ever,*

*Since made of Music and Romance.*

*A supernatural resource*

*Endangered, rare, exhaustible*

*Are the real, loyal, true, frail, spell-*

*Bound, binding few. But does their force*

*Diminish over time, will jackals*

*Inherit the high halls, the Round*

*Table? Merlin’s already bound*

*Inside an oak, in wooden shackles.*

*Who shall be judge of Lancelot?*

*Or so high-minded and severe*

*As to condemn poor Guinevere?*

*Yet with their passion comes the rot.*

*Fear Arthur’s justice! Look and see:*

 *His trusty friend, ah, such a charmer!*

*Lies dead and crumpled in his armour.*

*The Queen has joined a nunnery.*

\*

*Some say that he will come again.*

*Some wounds take centuries to heal,*

*And many times the earth will reel*

*And we as blind as drunken men*

*Will trail a slick of blood behind us*

*As down the hall of time we stumble,*

*And many a tower will rise and crumble*

*Till by the full moon he will find us*

*Feasting like wolves with small red eyes*

*And bloody mouths upon each other,*

*Friend upon friend, brother on brother,*

*Lips stained with gore and smeared with lies,*

*And he will have his hands full then,*

*Assembling once more the knights*

*He’ll need to set it all to rights:*

*Why should he ever come again?*

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/purcell_arthur.mp3)



***Tennyson and I***

***By the Ivory Gate***

*Scene: Somersby Manor.*

Still by the Ivory Gate we linger,

On the Astral Plane, in Purgatory,

Or…Ah, where, Alfred, where are we?

*In a space thinner than this finger,*

*Oscar. We are in the in-between*

*And* are *the in-between. For we*

*Are neither here nor there, you see.*

Alfred, please tell me, have you seen

Your Arthur? Was yours a true dream?

Do our most-feigning lies become

Realities? Or did doubt numb

The sense that felt the life of him?



*I have not seen him, have not even*

*Left this old place. No, I remain*

*Upon the Purgatorial Plane,*

*Ambiguous between earth and Heaven.*

Unfinished business keeps *me* here.

But you, Alfred, what makes you stay?

Do you not long to see him? Say

What makes you haunt this old house. *Fear!*

*Fear that I will not see him there,*

*Or will not recognise him. (He*

*May be much changed.) Ah, will he be*

*The one who once breathed English air?*

*And will he wish to see me? Will*

*He even recognise the face*

*Of one he loved in bygone days?*

*Are fleshly memories with him still?*

*Or what if mere oblivion*

*Awaits me, and my soul shall die,*

*Extinguished like a firefly*

*Within the furnace of the sun?*

No, all the Arthurs we have known

Or dreamed: my Goring, Windermere,

Saville, Balfour, Clifton, your dear

Hallam, and he who from a stone

Drew forth a sword, and by that sword

Preserved the Christianity

Of Britain when barbarity

Descended in a ravenous horde:

We’ll see them all, we’ll revel in

A cornucopia of Authors

And Arthurs, like old friends or brothers

They’ll join us in a genial din!

No stern arthuritarian Father

Will we cognise, but pure Arthurity,

Time-mellowed, quick with all futurity,

All excellences Mind can gather.

All will take on one royal Roman

Name, *Rex Arcturus*, Guardian

Of Ursa Major, a Star Man.

*Oscar, Oscar! You’re such a showman!*

*One Arthur only, and one Author*

*I long to see. But be at ease,*

*Enjoy your superfluities.*

Arthur’s your Brother, I your Other. *Tennyson and Somersby Manor vanish.*



***The Ascension of Lord Alfred Tennyson***

*I knock at the door of Someresby Manor.*

*Tennyson answers it, breathless with excitement.*

*It* is *like* In Memoriam!

*Like the* Commedia*, my friend:*

*Grievous, but cheerful at the end.*

*Oh what a happy man I am!*

*I’m leaving Somersby. Tonight*

*Is our last meeting. Whispers some*

*Still small voice that the time has come*

*When I must rise into the Light.*

*I know I shall see Arthur there,*

*Though in what shape I know not. Faith*

*Will bring me past the bar of Death.*

*The time has come. My earthly share*

*Goes to the Lady of the Lake.*

*Excalibur, the appointed sword,*

*Has been relinquished and restored.*

*Let Arthur his last journey make.*

*Am I not Arthur, Arthur I?*

*Aboard the vessel of our death*

*We breathe as one the shining breath*

*Of the new Life that cannot die.*

*And you must follow where I go.*

*No more malingering upon*

*The ‘darkling plain’! There is a dawn*

*After the darkness here below.*

**\*** *Vanishes, leaving behind only a*

*sort of mystical, Arthurian glow.*



 ***Musical Program***

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/schubert_richter.mp3)

**Title Page**

Peter Warlock, *Balulalow.* Setting of an anonymous text from the 16th century.

The Choir of King’s College, Cambridge.

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 15, *Tennyson and I: In Memoriam A.H.H.***

Holst, *The Planets*, Op. 32. VII: *Neptune, the Mystic* (excerpt). Chicago Symphony Orchestra, James Levine, conductor.

**Page 17, *Tennyson and I: In Memoriam A.H.H.***

[*God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlsJD8RlhbI)(trad.) Sung by Annie Lennox.

**Page 18, *The Arthur Cycle* (title page)**

Chausson, *La légende du roi Arthur avec choeur*. La Société Philharmonique de

Mirande, conducted by Max Fouga.

**Page 21, *The Arthur Cycle***

Guillaume de Machaut, *Puis qu’en oubli* (rondeau). Rogers Covey-Crump, Mark

Padmore and Paul Hillier.

Puis qu'en oubli sui de vous, dous amis,  
Vie amoureuse et joie à Dieu commant.  
  
Mar vi le jour que m'amour en vous mis,  
Puis qu'en oubli sui de vous, dous amis.

Mais ce tenray que je vous ay promis,  
C'est que jamais n'aray nul autre amant.  
Puis qu'en oubli sui de vous, dous amis,  
Vie amoureuse et joie à Dieu commant.

Since I am forgotten by you, sweet friend,  
I bid farewell to a life of love and joy.  
  
Unlucky was the day I placed my love in you;  
Since I am forgotten by you, sweet friend.

But what was promised you I will sustain:  
That I shall never have any other love.  
Since I am forgotten by you, sweet friend,  
I bid farewell to a life of love and joy.

**Page 23, *The Arthur Cycle***

Chausson, *Viviane*, Op. 5. Orchestre Symphonique de Nancy, Jérôme Kaltenbach,

conductor.

**Page 24, *The Arthur Cycle***

Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*. Act III: *Mild und leise* (Isolde’s *Liebestod*.) Kirsten

Flagstad, soprano, Philharmonia Orchestra, Wilhelm Furtwängler, conductor.

**Page 25, *The Arthur Cycle***

Peter Warlock, *Corpus Christi*. Text: Anon. carol, ca. 1500. Blossom Street, Hilary

Campbell, conductor.

*Lulley, lully, lulley, lully,*  
*The faucon hath born my mak away.*

He bare hym up, he bare hym down,  
He bare hym into an orchard brown.

In that orchard ther was an hall,  
That was hanged with purpill and pall.

And in that hall ther was a bede,  
Hit was hangid with gold so rede.

And yn that bede ther lythe a knyght,  
His wowndes bledyng day and nyght.

By that bedes side ther kneleth a may,  
And she wepeth both nyght and day.

And by that bedes side ther stondith a ston,  
*Corpus Christi* wretyn theron.

“One theory about the meaning of the carol is that it is concerned with the legend of the Holy Grail. In Arthurian traditions of the Grail story, the Fisher King is the knight who is the Grail's protector, and whose legs are perpetually wounded. When he is wounded his kingdom suffers and becomes a wasteland. This would explain the reference to ’an orchard brown.’

“The text may be an allegory in which the crucifixion is described as a wounded knight. The bleeding knight could be Christ who bleeds for the sins of humanity endlessly. Christ is most probably represented as a knight as he is battling sin and evil by his continual pain. The "orchard brown" to which the knight was conveyed becomes, in this reading, the "orchard" of wooden crosses that covered the hill of Golgotha/Calvary where Christ – along with many others – was Crucified, while the "hall... hanged with purpill and pall" could be a representation of the tomb in which Christ was placed after Crucifixion. This allegorical interpretation would tie in with the seven stanzas possibly representing the Seven Deadly Sins. The maiden who is by the knight's side could be Mary. There is religious symbolism throughout the carol. The falcon may have several possible meanings. It may be that, as a bird of prey, it represents those who killed Christ and sent him to heaven. It may also represent a new beginning and freedom, which Christ gained on his death. The colours in the carol are also significant. The purple and gold are signs of wealth, although these were also colours that referred to the Church due to its wealth. The pall (black velvet) probably refers to death. An interpretation of the inscription on the stone may also be that it marks the location of the grail itself, still guarded by the Fisher King.”—From *Corpus Christi Carol* (Wikipedia),

based on an article in *The Independent* currrently inaccessible on the Web.

**Page 26, *The Arthur Cycle***

Mendelssohn, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: Scherzo*.* Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, Valery Gergiev, conductor.

**Page 27, *The Arthur Cycle***

Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde.* Act III: Prelude. ORTF Orchestra, Karl Böhm, conductor.

**Page 28, *The Arthur Cycle***

Purcell, *King Arthur*, Act V, Scene II: *Fairest isle, all isles excelling.* Barbara Bonney,

soprano. Concentus Musicus, Nikolai Harnancourt, conductor.

VENUS  
Fairest isle, all isles excelling,  
Seat of pleasure and of love;  
Venus here will choose her dwelling,  
And forsake her Cyprian grove.  
Cupid from his fav'rite nation,  
Care and envy will remove;  
Jealousy that poisons passion,  
And despair that dies for love.

Gentle murmurs, sweet complaining,  
Sighs that blow the fire of love;  
Soft repulses, Kind disdaining,  
Shall be all the pains you prove.

Ev'ry swain shall pay his duty,  
Grateful ev'ry nymph shall prove;  
And as these excel in beauty,  
Those shall be renown'd for love.

**Page 32, *Tennyson and I: By the Ivory Gate***

Schubert, *Piano Sonata in B Flat Major*, D. 960. II: Andante Sostenuto. Sviatoslav

Richter, piano.