



Poems

by

ROLAND HARRIS

Poems

by

ROLAND HARRIS



Clunie Press, Blairgowrie, Scotland

ISBN 902965 00 X

I

VERSES FOR SIMPLE PEOPLE

I have been reading new verses,
Sails set on our sad tide :
There I find regrets, and curses,
And yieldings that are not sure,
And love of love that has died.

Sad are their scarfed slow barges;
They are full of lament
That none know where Red Hugh hearses
Nor care for O'Rahilly
In his banishment.

Wide sails woe's dark sea immerses;
They boast with a quiet sorrow
That the crowns of the queens would
Be forgotten with the whores tomorrow,
But for blind singers and their verses.

To death's idle sea their search is
Sadly foredoomed, nor act-inspire
Us till 'twere pity death were so
Deathless, and the eager fire
Winged but with a chaplet of verses.

Involved as the dark blood's course is,
Perhaps they do not speak straight,
Knowing that the silence of verse is
The immaculate—lest a fool prate
And dilate their meaning to less.

I have been reading their verses;
But my people are simple people,
Expecting everything; and if none sing
Simply for them, the bells in the steeple
Would cast down curses and not with joy ring.

Simple people, reading no real verses,
Acting folly, and loving, and making
A great love out of folly's suffering,
And a tune out of what's tolled in the steeple.
I will write verses for simple people—

Those simple people I despise,
Whom time in breathing mummifies,
Who pray to God (and some God blesses)
Somewhat too late for their distresses;
Flea-minds who pelmanise the mysteries—

I will speak straight, and only
Simple people shall read my verses :
Swift, acting men who make immortal
Marrow in folly's bones and blinkers,
No heart-sinkers raising hats to hearses.

My people are the silence in those verses,
Without that reconcileless subtlety
Which buys its love shamefacedly,
Regretfully, illegally,
As if it were stolen property.

COMEDY OF OLD IRON

Sometimes I feel like an empty tin
Dumped at the derelict end of town,
Who should be shining shield to rich food within,
Not unlabelled, anonymous, ploughed-field brown.

Sometimes I think: if they only would—
Who left me here to be licked by the rat—
Make guns or bullets of me so that
I could destroy the evil and the good.

Or even fill me with grease and butter
Full as a bean to make lean burghers fat,
So that their ponderous bowels could utter
Grumbling contentment and generate.

But I lie here with a rough-toothed grin,
Void as a field which will never be sown,
Destroyer nor preserver, rusty as sin,
Holder of rain which has fallen down.

Somewhere in the world my lost fulfilment
Moves like a crab that has lost its shell,
Unable to go forward, and hesitant
Before the ironic over-sensible.

A THEME FOR POETRY

'Passive suffering is not a theme for poetry'—Yeats

Shells fall, springs waste, for poetry
No theme, passives, here-such-as-we
Who bear; famine and war act free.

Famine has no throat for arrows;
Action suffers overthrows
Of vague and intangible foes :

Nobody, nothing, things which deflate
The tragic hero and elate—
No enemy so grand as Fate,

But cloak in night, a paper plot
A pattern traced with what is not
To be encompassed, save as nought.

After a week the breast is dry
That should have suckled prophecy;
Is this no theme for tragedy ?

Waking's an actless, frozen stream;
Sleep has nightmare, but no dream:
Is not this a tragic theme ?

Friend fails friend; the shy maid leers;
The just man stoops, the brave man fears;
Is not this a theme for tears ?

For those that die are more that grieve;
Never suffering is passive,
Suffering that has to live.

Suffering that cannot die
Weeps between the earth and sky;
Friend, you shall have no peace, nor I,

Until this theme of poetry
Is dumb, kennelled this barking day,
And no least life lives, not one flea.

COME WIND, WHAT SHALL I SING OF ?

How do you choose
in the waste of sky
the way your invisible
arrows fly ?

Were there a maiden,
I could pursue her !
A shrine, grow quickly
pilgrim, age in
sanctity.

Where is that fortress ?
It fell before me.
In Venice' lagoons
where do Antonio's
galleys lie ?

Well, if I fail there !
I am nothing, an air;
but I with wind share
the cloudy lightning,
and I sing

Out of the waste of sky
invincible arrows
of beauty and danger,
when the strong Stranger
bends me, and trains his eye !

A CANCER OF THE SHOULDER

Who was as bright as a sailor
As any leader of the cloudy fleet
Knows his faring day doomed
Cut black as tunnel mouth;

Walks the hard city with restless feet
Past the roadmenders: the dead
Seem cables carrying life's power,
And graves are opened to lay them ?

Bends sideways his head to listen
Where on his shoulder the cruel bird
Brought from islands below experience
Hoarsely repeats its obscene learning.

Bright leader ! now as the weeds
Dark on the grey sea's wave;
Who has only pain to ease
The panic of his dreadful knowledge.

NIGHT-WATCHMAN ON CROYDON ROAD

The roadworks hold the road
With sentinel lamps,
Far shadow-darters, fifty—
And the Greeks in their ships ?

The watchman on sackcloth dozes
Before Troy's towers,
A royal marshmallow-purple
His brazier's flower.

Dawn comes near on stealthy foot,
And he will waken
To find his sentinels' eyes blank,
All his towers taken—

His engines of mighty war
Grunting to roll out tar,
His guns of great calibre
Carriers of water.

A VISITOR TO THE BLIND SCHOOL

Take off your white gloves, lady,
Bare your white arms;
Here eyes are fingertips,
Pupils are palms.

Pare down those crimson arrows'
Amorous chase;
Here's no pursuit, lady,
Sit in your place.

Pack off those suitors who are
Halled in your ears;
Greater guests enter when
Darkness appears.

On threads of wire the blind,
Lady O lady,
Pin poppy-heads, eye-beads
Reconciled darkly :

Those to whom dark is dark
Find work to hand;
Only the half-blind can
Not understand

Why day nor dark keep faith
And we are beguiled;
Stare, lady, at light-source like
This idiot child

Hand-idle as some poet,
Large head ruth-wry,
Pale lips apart, as if
To prophesy;

Question the straight-head sure
Blindly adept
Pupils for whom dark is
A promise kept.

One late for a meeting, quiet
You enter, so
Quiet not a face stirs; and yet
Blind children know,

Half-rise with a strange unrest,
Half-curtsey to you,
Knowing you come more than guest,
As pupil too;

Take off your white gloves, lady,
In these dark schools
See with your finger tips
How the sun cools.

IN THE RUINED CITY OF DUSSELDORF

(1)

In the ruined city of Dusseldorf
Officers crowd in the bars of messes;
The young stand sprucely side by side
Like glasses turned upside down and dried
Lining shelves in the bars of messes;
The elder like old books no-one buys
In antiquarians for they are
Too little known to be ever read,
Or known so well, the poor scholar
Replaces them with a shake of the head.
Is it reserve or is it emptiness?
That talk taps like a ping-pong ball
Along the table and all in all
As very similar, if at all—
Tapping and rapping littlenesses
Like hail and rain and dust that fall
In the ruined city of Dusseldorf.

(2)

Bed-frames, cisterns, oven-tiles,
Rusted wires and bric-a-brac,
Under the railway bridge of piles
Footsteps echo, the night is black;
The thin sliver of the moon
In a clouded whey of sky
Offers to long queues of streets
A small ration of light, and by
And by the crowded trams
Shudder with sound of sheathed swords;
Rhine bridge is fallen, and the shams
Of shop-signs are fallen from words;
Black's a la mode in the fashion-centre,
There the family dwells supreme—
Black is the fashion if you enter—

In the cellar of a dream;
And desire to live making
Remaining alive life's end and aim
Clings to the citizen of this dream-city
With a mother's affectionate unpity,
Or as a clinging wife taking
Submissively all his strength from him.

(3)

And at the canteen doors are met
Beggars-urchins, black-silver eyes
Like bathroom mirrors in shivering sweat;
The girls wait with a mild surmise;
A Greek plays on a clarinet,
He has yellow skin and oil-black hair,
And he grins without his eyes;
Soldiers round the tables din,
Row on row of shaven necks
Who with sixpence, teas and snacks
Preserve their similarities.

Outside it is cold and wet
Underneath the ruined stars.
In the ruined city looms
No outline, but a silhouette
Suggesting emptiness of rooms
Of palaces of broken tombs.
Underneath the ruined stars
Officers drive off in cars.

(4)

O my brother ! O my companion
In messes in canteens in queues
In cellars in follies in stews,

Why do we waste our time in
Driving at one-another
Girding at one-another,
Ruling one-another not ourselves ?

When the streets are distresses
And the bridges and stanchions
Ruin about us and time passes
In messes in canteens in guesses
Envies and surmise of treacheries ?

Ruling one another, and never ourselves,
Till a few years will see us
As similar as now that delves
Graves in ruined cities for us;
When we are silhouetted men
In the cold sweat of might-have-been,
Wedded to dying not living then.
Inside the canteen of the bone
The worm shall find salvation;
Our failure shall be writ in stone
Too well and yet too little known;
We shall shine more white and clean
But as like as we have been
In not loving one-another;

O my companion ! O my brother !

THE MINER

He, groping in mine's darkness, feels
Grass spray and fern, closed flowers
That swayed beneath the visiting moon
Was it in time was it
In time at all ?

Leaves murmur under the drill's din
An obligato of ancient woods;
The ring of hammer hides the voice of birds :
They call him,
Their bright plumage,
Their free wings O

Out where earth is fair and there's a use for eyes,
And beauty is not swathed in centuries.

THE BURIAL OF MY AUNT

When my aunt died, they buried her in deal-wood,
Not cedar-wood, cypress, with musk and sweet-scented amber;
A short shift hardly reaching to her womanhood;
Her withered hand unclenched, loosed its small hold on life;
Her flesh, grown large with sitting, and thrice stricken,
Just turning to straw-colour, the dried summer of grass;
And her eyes were closed, she looked out no more at them.
Little respect they paid her age and life of courage;
As little love they had given before this came to pass
And the great fire in her dried her body to grass.

When they carried her gravewards, that shoddy aristocrat,
Her brilliant husband followed, talented and sardonic;
Her younger sons were leaves whirled in the war's wild season;
One daughter had early eloped to New Zealand with a lover;
She had been left to stare at the flags in the garden
And the old Angoras, mangy for want of care.
A few mourners followed: a daughter well-established,
A sister with ogre-eye directed to pettiness; the eldest son,
And my mother, blind with the knowledge of new solitude,
Of an opportunity gone for ever, for everyone.

They came from dark aisles of yew and steeple-shadow,
A small cortege, in rough winds, under broken cloud,
By ponderous headstones to the cheap end's iron railing:
I tell you, there was nothing splendid, nothing fitting,
Save the sorrow in my mother's heart and the son's!
And the bearers were all small men, weighed down by the coffin.
I recall these indignant things, for I recall
How often in ungoverned childhood she, patiently
Guided my spirit, and soothed my body's clumsiness,
Shielding me from the grey whip of her husband's eyes.

They came between black marbles to the open house of her;
The priest who led them wrapped his black cloak about him.
But the path rose from Autumn, a majesty came on him,
His cloak loosed slow wings lined with the crimson of blood.
One of them dirty foreigners, the sister said—

His black hair, spade-beard jet black, and long slow pace
Were monuments of death; he towered above her,
Over that slow and impotent cortege; he did honour
To the sunken magnificence and glory gone for ever !
His shoulders covered the sky an angry cloud.

He turned then; the earth descended, the blessed earth covered
her;

But we felt our shame and nakedness cold and alone for ever.
The cloak turned back from the clasp, its slow ominous wings
Flashed once, and were folded; then only the sombre showed;
The sky overcame us, the wind grew cold, we were left alone
With no sorrow only of death, but the sorrow of life
Seized on by no equal spirit that could reveal it glorious,
But given to spendthrifts; until a better trustee
Recalled it, and gave cerement equal with kings and saviours.
So we turned to ourselves, and left her with fitting companions.

FRANCISCAN MASS

The organ loft
views tonsured heads
where hair will grow
mouse-brown and soft.

Robes purple-gold
pontificate,
hide, underneath,
the bifurcate.

Sanctity seems
a joined garment.
The prelate bows
to Host-descent;

Ah Christ ! in pagan seed
I drift with the wind,
divide as a wound;
I bow with the reed.

THE SCHOOLROOM EMPTIES

The schoolroom empties; down stone steps tumble
a babble of children's voices; straight-backed desks
look upright and surprised; learning humble
as litter lies in wastepaper arabesques.

The sun clings quiet on the distempered wall
in tall oblongs flawed by the window glass.

The master closes a book, and breathes contented,
with the inward smile of one who has seen swans pass
morning time under old elms in the park,
on the tree-dark lake breasting dust from the water;
a vision of swans into October work.

The book closes, but questions one to ten
recur unanswered. It is difficult for a man
to enter the minds of children like a swan;
or to close the book on them, for they return
for something they have forgotten, or some whim,
when he is quiet as milk, inch deep in cream,
with their rough tongues they lap at him;
and when he sleeps, they stir him with a dream.
Most often he is wakened by one vague child,
high-bridged, streak-toothed, distemper faced, with spoiled
slum eyes unwinking, wide and wild.

This hair-fallen-forward wrapped-in-self wax idiot,
light-of-life flawed by window of man and wife
faulty or cheap glass, comes in like a cheat
and picks the mind's pocket of all other thought;
runs off and buys himself a gimcrack mirror;
sees ever no world new, nor other self
such as, head down through legs, a boy sees clear
with supernatural creative error;
but least like children, as from growth most far,
nor in one plane, the present, like them all,
but in one place of it, himself, lives caged and small.

Between fulfilment and its prophecy
we live, between worlds unborn and dead;
growth is the principle of our beauty,
striving to speak the inward sense of things :
not learnt-by-heart, nor shop-bought rootless flower,
nor million dead perfections of newsprint,
nor ordered anarchy of absolute political power;
nor holy Aquinas even, scholared saint, in the Vatican,
save as he is both after and before :
one with the tangled childish script, and
with long roots like a prophet's beard and hair.

But not so complex is the idiot present,
made of a past identical and empty,
and futured so to no development.
Cracked in the fit's heat, Dostoevsky's held
All in the fragile vase; but this child ill
with emptiness is dropsy-full of wind.
The master thinks : an outworn style in masonry,
eventually too the poetry is still;
growth moves, and beauty, like a vision of swans.
His peace the idiot pierces to the centre,
child who in enters, whom he cannot enter.

The outworn school dark prison high and fast;
the cast-off socks of learning, like waste paper,
are not the tragic buskin of plays past.
It would be well, he thinks, losing his swans,
to hold the wall as effortless as the sun
brightens the steep, drab, school partition,
in centuries of flame quiet as a nun;
which rises, as on seamen long adrift,
first warm from night, (stirring the swans at home);
then high and fierce its terrible gaze does loom
over their vacant faces, grazed by the sheetless boom.

THE ART CLASS

Nature pours sheep over the meadow;
Stripes tiger and spots pard to go
Patterned in perilous shadow.

Drives dragons of cloud to run
Round the hesperidean sun;
Wrinkles the sultry plain;

Sets sails on the roughskinned sea,
On the snake's slough, which he
Discards indifferently;

Graves glass with frostiness'
Careless inexactness;
Timeless and formless

Infinite forms,
Spaceless and traceless
Patterns and norms :

She, careless of wealth,
Alters all with a breath,
Leaves no trace beneath—

As the bird in the sky
Forgets its pathway
Quicker than watcher's eye.

With scalpel and potato, I
Get no pattern, yet employ
An indelible, dark dye.

Ah, having has no need
For time and form and greed,
Nor doing for reward :

Hymns are for sinners here—
The angels in their sphere
Burn silent, careless, clear.

THE PROCESSION OF TOM MURGATROYD

Tom Murgatroyd a long time sat
 Still on his life's tombstone,
Quite dead, not in the least upset,
 Comfortable and alone.

Thirty years, they say, he sat there,
 Sheltered from wind and rain,
And none knew if he lived, or where,
 Or if he would again.

But now he buried must be,
 And risk a positive move,
Poor Tom ! a man whom none did see
 In danger or in love;

Decent, provident, and kind
 He, as his mourners, was;
They don full black, pull down the blind,
 And follow Tom's black hearse.

The plumes shake out their dusty years,
 The steeds stamp slow as thought;
There followed twice a hundred cars,
 And all a town on foot.

Decent and orderly death took
 The streets by mild consent,
Priest and lawyer in his book
 Signed their last testament.

As they had died, so lived they then
 On Tom's fine funeral day,
All followed his example
 As they had done away.

GUY FAWKES' NIGHT

A folded handkerchief, November night
Blindfolds the pale facades, the plaster grief
 Of so many, of so many
Respectable houses which fringe the Square.

Quickly the small Prometheans gather;
Smoke in dark vultures spreads, wheels thickly,
 Flames mount, griefs glimmer and fade.
The small artillery of remembrance crackles.

Piles of October leaves; fallen chill and damp,
Kerchiefs of numberless platforms of farewell,
 Show unexpected ardour,
Transmuted by the searching tongue of fire.

Figures of wild myth leap beside the glow;
Parched stars sparkle skyward to grapple with
 The fixed serene immortals;
Night is huge with a small child's shadow.

ON THE SEA-FRONT

Walk on the front at night, lamps throw
Your shadow on the rocks below :
 Over sea, over sands
With equal ease it goes or stands;
Is wrecked, unites unhurt; drowns dry;
Leaps at a wall, falls without cry.

All qualities accrue to it
Of hero, god, or hypocrite :
 Complaisant, hurtless quite
And bold. Yet manlike turns from light;
Stretches out on the rack of time;
Huddles beneath a sleeping form.

THE HIGH COUNTRY

Hazed in itself hides vision of distance
Away towards source of light a high country;
Here burns heart by the smoke-blind mirror,
Here swims hope in the tide-thwarting sea :
Dash down the mirror to sprinkle like water !

Frost in the night, still early in April,
Gathers the silver-scaled fragments in pattern :
Heart astonished in a dream of marvel
Sees hints while house sleeps that challenge wonder;
The fair line forms on the translucent screen.

Lovely the leaf-veined hands of patient winter
That on morning's window frostily glimmer,
Guide heart awakening to the amazing mirror,
Then vanish as spirits, revealing joyous
To bright-voiced dawn the outbursting life.

As through a window fronded with frost
Eye unreflecting tangles in beauty,
Leaps loose as salmon from swiftfall net,
Through carvel waters cuts from the coast
To its high country of original light,

So the nightridden heart is hot to forget
Images of itself at the spurred hag's heels;
Protean to downsurge of a whitefall beauty
Draws to that deep pool, poised—then startles through
To vision of distance hid in the white hills.

THE NIGHT PHONE

(from Pictures in a Hospital)

Phone's bell
showers ice
cold drops
over
darkness.

Gasping
from night's
pool it
shakes out
night in
our eyes.
Someone
answers :
like rain
in gusts
intel-
ligence
of pain
spits, flits
across
ether :
is known.

So, in the night of day
rarely, rarely,
beauty
startles
and we obey.

PARTING IN HOSPITAL

(from Pictures in Hospital)

You had better say goodbye
To him now, for he must die.

Nothing further to be said,
Standing by the quiet bed;

Nothing further will he hear;
Nothing now to call him near.

In his mind a dragon curled
Around the apple of the world.

In the travail of his birth
There was much pain and little mirth.

In his growing he gathered might
As an oak, from dark and light :

Going now to sleep and night.

Then goodbye, my dove, my fair one, then goodbye.

Nothing further to be said
Care-wan by the quiet bed,
Standing by the quiet bed.

II

THE SPARROW

to whom
 every crumb
 is an affair of violence and debate

jerks with a
 hop with a
 rapid lust, then wriggles belly-down

in the dust.
 Family-fussed
 he flies in Sunday mobs to a brown Kew,

unaware (one suspects) of a fruitful
 isolation :
 so passion

intense but trivial pecks every brown
 berry of his
 communities.

Self, important in inverse proportion,
 he flits and feeds,
 timid as reeds

but brave as air, in the very mouth
 of the terrible
 crocodile,

town—impudent and assertive, as if
 well aware
 that God does care.

THE CORMORANT

On a tall post
weed-grown and black,
perches
the cormorant
with undulant neck :
his sharp beak black
on the silver stars,
the shallow diver's
bane of the silver fishes !

THE HERON

A reedy rivulet
in a bare meadow
will sometimes shelter
the lightning-beaked
long-legged heron,
knobbly-kneed—
as circumstance
articulates straightness in the world,
distorting to make feasible—

he, startled, will rise
with slow, ungainly
haste; but once at proper
broad-winged attitude,
moves like a grey wind.

Resting again,
on one
leg,
he demonstrates the
superfluity
of rational argument
to a winged creature.

SWANS

Swans flying fly hard, not high,
 Pass close over with angry striving wings,
Air crying out under their beat and gust;
 They carry their heavy crown, as fleeing kings.

Unreadily take air's opportunity;
 Their beauty, heavy as a summer tree's,
Clings to the water, which equal carries
 Islands and continents, as these

Whose gentle habitat is rivers,
 Lakes, ponds, sheltered and willowed lane;
No giant barbaric albatross, the easy rider
 Carefree in the vertical tempest's mane.

Their song mere make-believe; their lurching walk
 Ungainly; appetite rude, and stretch
Of spiteful strength—Helen so seen
 Magnifies swiftly to a Glumdalclitch.

But see them rather like the vanguard cloud
 With arched wings in the heaven-reflecting wars;
Or convoying their young in watchful order,
 Sharing all nature's fears and hopeful dares;

Serenely moving in the windward calm
 Among burnt Autumn in the evening reach,
As in the twilight of lost life we glimpse
 Things which we most regret, and cannot touch;

Or in moment of dire need, as Gogarty
 Recalled their beauty in the perilous river,
Recall those desperate wings against the wind
 Struggling to rise from the long, dark water

As men from knowledge strive to mysteries;
 Then yield; recall the soft returning surge
When water receives them once more, and in dusk they burn
 On the smooth lake in phantom, silver fires.

THE GREY GULL

On the neighbour's
roof gutter
the grey gull dips
his yellow beak,
the red spot in the cool
rain-water;
jerks back his head
to swallow,
white throat throbbing;
silver drops
are spilt,
glitter
by the window;
raises his bright
suspicious eyes,
moves off a step, gawkily—
then launches on air,
falls away, wings,
tail feathers
spread
wide.

THE LARK

The only bird which does not fly
as a black silhouette
but is chameleon to light,
the lark,
is a white song in a white sky,
known only by the ariette
and shadow of its sound,

a faint radiance of song,
a colourless music like the October sun,
a poplar leaf turning in silver-grey on the edge of form,

something gone far but which you can almost remember,
the sea in the pearl-drift spiral found beyond eye of proof,
the sky-sunken star screened by filmy distance and veils
of openness;

its nest also hidden in open
insignificance, of grass—
a bodyguard even for important people.

Coming one day upon
such naive privacy where the plough must pass,
my farmer,
a lark-like practical man
of shy inward song
and carefree fatal love,
preserved that island oasis
under its branching palms of song
green in the brown fertile desert,
avoiding it with his iron heel—
a tribute we are more in need of than the lark—

there stayed the shy bird with her eggs
and a heart too loud for singing,
but though in peril
happier than in a vague a-sexual love;

knowing peril lodges in the branches too,
there is only one room in a city
and we had better stay where we belong
there by like paradox of faint invisible music
preserve strong heart and be valued by country minds.

THE THREE CROWS

On crossed staves of anger—
prophet-fleshless, prophet-lean,
beggar-ragged, time-has-been,
symbol of that intersection
Eliot spoke of and saint knows,—
shaken by the southern
violence of the wind,
hang three crows.

As weed under dark water,
or under the blank face
of a boy learning, trace
memory, anticipation,
the timeless moment of play,
the note under the desk,
so lifted feathers refined
lustres of dark day.

Now they to warn another
are kept in and punished—
their rash, unagile burnished
stook-thief companion,
to whom, nervous but phlegmatic,
danger comes expected but
not thought of; undermined
by long-sighted gun-didactic.

There hang the three crows with
quizzical perkiness that made
life possible for them but did
not save them, cockney-fashion
in a trench; thin, dead, and small,
with not even their gleaned crumbs
under the seagull's shifting table of wind—
but Autumn, fulfiller of all,

has emptied air of their
bright night, their ruffled wings of flight,
their dark eyes of light,
cocked heads of curious question;
the white mere fable survives,
is immortal; the swallows'
round nests, they too are blind
under the eaves.

All our fears, all our despairs
are secret hopes, the squirrel
granary, the sheaves, are full;
and I no shucked man,
still in first husk whole of hope,
record this sadly only,
no laughter-cynical south wind,
nor justice leaden misanthrope.

III

FAITH AND LOVE

The three substitutes
In love for faith
Are memory, hope
And sudden death.

O bracelet of bright
Hair; O golden reef
Wherein the stately
Galleons lie
Etched on a grief
Of tapestry,
Faintly stirring
In an antique air,
Out of the danger
Of dreams moored
Unreal ships! all
On the pool of night.
Byzantium is no
Harbour eternal.

O lovely queen,
Resolute Judith,
Deirdre and Helen!
If deep regret
Could realise hope,
Those ancient queens
Should be lovely yet.

Angelo's roof
Flakes, but not fast
As wing or hoof
Who knows no past;
Hope, that is fear
In bas-relief,
Is woman's wit
Unreconciled
At knowing she is
Born plain, not mild.
There is no faith
In hope at all.

O bright bullet
Keeper of faith,
And olivet
To savage death,
To promises that came
That came to naught
But ruinous shame!
In these ruined
Streets abound
Prophecies
Of rusty sound,
Palaced outlines,
Anterooms—
But day which brings
Fulfillment round
Shows them as no
Outlines but as
Silhouettes and tombs.
O shrill swift song
Of shortest lines,
Salome to tedious Johns,
Plucking the beard
Of prophecies—
For the bracelet
Of bright hair,

And the rage at
Time and death
The resignation that
Is not reconciled beneath,
And the kindred
With those blind
Lions and leopards,
And the lovely
Emanations
Of the spirit and the mind
In the mummied
Verse confined,
Are unfaith
Unfaith unfaith
To Deirdre, Helen,
Judith, and their kind—
O shrill swift song,
You are sure but
You are wrong;
For the notes of music are
Silent as the furthest star;
Notes of the musician
Music's silence are.

There is no faith,
No faith at all,
In loss of life,
Hope, grief, of all.

But I know,
Brothers, why
You sing thus,
And thus could I.
I know that when
Parting happens I
Shall be unmanned
Shall cry and
Before torture best
Is best to say
Goodbye now
Before we are unmanned.

Regrets and angers,
Fears of decay,
Are things that will not
Be allayed;
But love radars
Their dangers and burns
Their hangars and they
Melt in the short
Anguish of a raid.

Faith! she and I
Have faith, and risk the saying;
Who have heard
The voice crying
Like a mocking bird
Beware beware
A false happiness
Is sadder than despair—
Have the intense
Substitute for experience.

The time will come
When we shall be
Semantic in our unity,
Fit only for verses,
Beyond fear or the
Sudden song of death;
Moored in the anchorage
Of intellect
Beyond sound of the sea.
When old men walk, hands
Unfit for caressing
Dangle at arms' ends
Like puppets' hands—
I have watched mine
Veined with blue ribbands
At blood's ebb; and hers,
Hers will be hands of sorrow.
Love, we have not
Forgot tomorrow.

But when the danger
Of dreams is over,
The hammering of gold
Through night and day,
And the materialist
Pathos of poets
Has said their angry
Sorrowful say—
Their omephagous worm
Shall devour us!—
When the grey ice
Draws over our eyes
And song is still,
Like a frozen bird;
We shall still see
The bird as it flies,
We shall still hear
The song we heard :
For what they could never
Capture in verse—
The silence of music,
The beauty of queens—
That we have won
From us through us
Through the divine
Gift of grace,
Which is, surpassing
The told and untold
In the passing of Judith,
Deirdre, Helen, and now—
For it may be today—
Of her my beloved, joining
The queens of old.

For there is no faith,
No faith at all,
But in loss of life,
Hope, grief, and all.

IV

PRIVATE WORLDS

These our delights are
To us and we share
Them together, no other
Is there with us,
No other, none;

They vanish with us.

And these are our sorrows
Private to us,
Like drops of the sea
Shining only for us
Bitterly; which we share;

They vanish with us.

If you stay longer
Than I, or I hunger
For after you here
With this memory,
We whichever

Stays separate from us

Shall be first person
In a world of ones
Third-personed he, it, she;
Shall wonder at what
Has vanished utterly

With you, or with me.

TO HER WHO FOR HER GRACE MUST ABSENT BE

The holy fathers, the high saints,
Who in the desert dwelt,
With palms of peace and gentleness,
Guiltless to share our guilt,

God in his courteous mercy sent
Companions of his grace
When they world-sick and weary
Found solitude no peace;

Such was their deserving love !
So great, dear love, to me,
The chastening of your absence's
Heart-breaking courtesy.

I in the desert of quiet mind,
You far, shall never rest,
Nor can its deep sands soften
The knocking in my breast.

When that is silent, dear, at last
All time beneath my feet
To make the trackless journey far
Beyond the cells of Scete,

Then on this coward carrion
Where warlock vultures wheel,
Confer your mercy's merciless
Deserted burial;

Still welcome ! as to travellers
The well beside the road,
Or to the desert fathers
The visiting grace of God.

VICTORIA AFTER THE OFFICE

At evening hour,
when cold creeps about ankles, hides under footsoles,
and lost walkers
and last walkers
are a sound only or only a deeper shadow
wearing with icy bravado a jaunty-feather of frosty
breath
to prove they live;
at the hour of iced air's nocturnalities,
I remember the noon of your arms.

At the going home
to chance lodgings become habitual,
past the trust relying on stone, concrete, steel,
bronze safes, the written word, the signature, the
lawyer's stamp,
and all the giant distrustful securities of the city;

in the winter evening
while hens huffle featherspread together in quiet country
coops
and only the fox burns slinking in night or the
torch on the waters raising the unwary fish;

at the hour of thieves;

I remember the resurrection of your embrace,
the firm frail-hope of flesh,

and under the great arch of stations
in the sour smell of steam
from night's arch immense
hang like a lamp from an invisible wire
trust to the tenuous fidelity of the soul,
(as the stars in the stations of the East)
and burn brightly!

RENDEZVOUS

First greeting's
true sign is
friction's meeting,
parts too apart
alighting in design,
as a bird breaks
into its image
in the tensioned lake;

a sudden
foreknowledge
of death,
and the life between
unknown and the remembered
the winged meeting
rising skyward,
a windhover.

Mind is a lone lake
in the high mountains,
with its pine and star;
and meeting should be there.

But the tongue shapes
courtesies of convention,
wings are folded
as an umbrella,
the scene
no more convincing
than a poster.

Ah! first meeting is
twi-pained of thirst
and after-thirst;
a little lake shut
in the mountain walls
of getting and forgetting;
the zenith of a star
between the coming
and the going away;

A London day
ingemmed with pavements gray,
bargesail's birdwing,
the river swirling,
the gallery of portraits,
yours in wineglass gleaming;
the noise of train and tram;
the roadway's macadam
shining in the rain,
a shining bar
that holds us joined
and far.

Memory dip down
toward the lake;
the shy bird ripples
under your hair.

Memory awake
between the fore
and afterpain
those intercool
fresh images
of London's dustiness
laved in a mountain pool.

INSCRIPTION TO A BOOK OF CHINESE GHOST AND
LOVE STORIES

This present scene were it not Chinese,
I should have hesitated
To send to you, unread;
But so will surely please
With Orient taste and symmetries.

What separates is what unites:
Under the willow tree
These lovers linkedly
Death now draws closer by
A myriad days and nights.

Some always were, now all are ghosts—
A rare condition
In life, hurtless as stone,
Harmless as air, of none
Advised; admired and pitied most.

Separateness and rarity
Are the strongest bond and state
Out of place, out of date;
So with these lovers we
Extenuate affinity.

So loved they at a far remove !
Star in their day, for all
Lovers to follow; and shall
In night the East above
Orientalise our love.

ANOTHER INSCRIPTION TO THE SAME BOOK

If I could express complete
Proportion in a perfect love,
Such a few lines would I choose,
And a verse set on a fly-leaf.

Chinese draftsmen have engraved
Dynasties a thumbnail wide.
On these lovers long since dead
Centuries have commented.

What is long life, if not this
Commentary to a kiss?
This learned edition
Of a lyric poem?

So this book, love, like a wise
Scholar shall amend my text;
Where I fail, shall clearly tell
When it speaks of true love well.

EPILOGUE TO THE SAME

You have not a lotus flower,
Or plum blossom to let fall in my way;
Nor I the blue gown of a scholar
Nor orchid-perfumed ink to make air fragrant.

Yet we're with ghosts familiar:
Have we not often, alone or companied,
Disturbedly known a spirit near;
And smiled, beloved, at the empty air?

LOVE'S ABSENCE

Within this little room at night
The lamp a small horizon makes,
Two hemispheres, of shade and light,
In a small world of books.

Earth darkens, and the pane absorbs
The meaning of the room: the head
Bent to its books; faint notes, papers,
Three chairs, and a bed.

Beyond this shadow sounds the sea.
The lamp burns cold and round.
So is my life, when she's away,
A shadow and a sound.

THIS WOMAN WHOM I LOVE

This woman whom I love
More than all things which move
Or as a summer grove
Drowse the day through;

This woman through whose love
I love all things which move,
In her my thoughts rove
All the day through;

In her my thoughts rove;
And as all things which love
Truly find rest in love,
My thoughts rest too.

LOVE ON HOLIDAY

My love is a crowded beach
Full of gay holiday;
She is the wave that runs
Shining along the bay.

My love is the pleasure ship
That carries all to find
Treasures in a small voyage
On seas smooth and kind.

She is the cliff-coach climbing
To the height of heaven's hill.
Joy to the strong, joy is she,
And strength to the weak will.

Were she the lonely sand
The salt tides cover;
Were she the ship of death
I will voyage with her;

I will stand by her side
When the waves come over,
Though heaven's chariot's fall
To darkness ever !

MENACE

Doors are locked, windows closed;
A soft lamp-sun warms the air.
Happiness might surely be
Here in a country cottage found,
With simple people, free from care.

One by one small tapers go
Stairwards from that private sun,
Loaned stars, whose only office is
To seal the wax of sleep about
Our eyelids, one by one.

All's out, and toil in peace composed.
The youngling dark about the house
Licks up the fire-milk last of light.
The owl of evil hunts unheard,
The haunted wood's extraneous.

But one there cannot sleep because
Love's absence wakes him with sharp claws;
Him the greater night enfolds,
The greater night who holds
Limp centuries in its jaws.

HAVENS

The gull is fair whose glancing shakes
Sea-light on long dark hills,
And on the storm of winter makes
A haven of strong wings.

The green woods strip for winter
That makes the summer fair,
They hold to the earth's centre
And wrestle with the air.

So bright, so fair, her presence is,
So winged, so strong, is she
When in chill winter's absence
Ships still must stand the sea.

The glancing wingèd beauty,
It calls the land to mind,
Where deep roots guard for ever
Harbours of no wind.

IN A VOLUME OF CHINESE POETRY

These pages' silent lutes
Your fingers, opening, play;
All that death mutes.

These innocent who kneel
At the jade throne of death,
Your Mandarin-eyes repeal.

These ghosts at the green doorway
Who turn, and sadly wave—
Exile unfriending all!—

You with your voice recall,
All that death mutes.

THE MARRIED LOVER

Love you forever? 'Tis a task
Would set on unlove love's death-mask.
Before we two may rest as one
We must be two and each alone;
Should you one sundered moment steal
And we live so linked-separate
I must be for one hour less real
And time be undeterminate.
Rather, I know, would you give place.
Than choose this mask without a face.

There is a time when I must be
Sever'd from you and you from me;
For love is free, but life must chime
To the strict clock and keep his time:
Living stays us man and wife
It is the working-out of life;
Living we must together come,
Are not the answer, but the sum;
And could we live on we must be
Separate for eternity.

For ever love as promise is
Not sequent to life's premises;
I must turn and face the spears
Of every minute's sixty fears;
Every day is born a foe;
Every night an overthrow;
Every year a giant does grow
Imperilling our walled towers.
Yet in your kisses lost and hair
I halt the giant world of despair.

Love as a dancer flaunts the pall,
Blood's cloak deceives the heavenly bull.
There is a pebble long has lain
David-moment to Giant Disdain,

Shaping, smoothing, colours choosing
Past the future of time's losing,
And matadorial as a dart,
This stone, the burning of the heart,
Flings to enflare another star
That shall be fair as you, love, are.

You have the Egyptian's star, which led
Anthony from the war, instead
By your's and love's load compassed,
And death, the rock that whitens all;
Bright exequy and funeral!
Having too the casuistical
Venomed gift of God to Eve
Love's sin, the ear which will believe;
And freeing me, love, do more enslave
To your's and love's than to death's grave.

I have my moon, my love, as you.
Wanings of shut reserve renew
Tracery delicate as air
Which my own uglinesses tear.
Wandering between death and birth
Call me not suddenly to earth,
Unless persuasion musical
With old enchantments magical
Has power to charm a spirit's ear;
Else am I far, when seeming near.

Who would be near! and more away
To be more present coldly stay.
For know, my love, though halves make whole,
Two wholes may make an oversoul.
Then this our planetary desire,
Tiding our wishes equal pull,
Shall make us one with earth and fire.
Since then, nor death nor life dis sever
But parting strengthens our together.
What's time to love? And what is ever?

THOSE WHO HAVE POWER TO BLESS

We are of those blessed lovers
Who loved before they knew,
Without pursuit or fleeing;
And met as pilgrims do,

Whose eyes, bent on the going,
Turn once to ask the day
And find their end's companion
Travelling that same way.

I did not pass through sense to touch
The spirit in you shrined;
You took my hand, my dear, but when
Your love had made it kind.

You did not my embracing reach
Secondary to a fear;
For we were one, my darling,
Before we once were near.

I think the earth would tremble
If arm in arm were crossed
Without this imperceptible
Commingling; the kindest lust

Burns out the spirit's centre
Responsive though to need;
And death therein doth enter
His doomed and fruitful seed.

But in our spirit's completing
Is life where senses meet,
For skies are one about us,
And time one to our feet.

We are of those blessed pilgrims
Whom the immortals guide
To find for all salvation;
And worship side by side.

WHAT MEN NEED

Certain things are needed, they are few:
Love, warmth, and food, and we can do.

Soil rich, strong spade, and dig with sweat
Or find a kind neighbour; you shall eat.

Plait close, small osiers, sure of skill,
You shall find shelter, if you will.

But love is a gift of no proportion,
Courage irrelevant as caution:

Plant nine good deeds in a row,
If the gods nod, then, love will grow;

Beckon the beggar-child out from the wind,
Love will not see you, love is blind.

Love is a needle drawing the wound
Of solitude together; a healing sound

Out of hearing of all calling:
Unhappy doers and diggers! knowing

Power as inadequate as pity
To fire a gun, to hear that ditty.

IN THE CONCLUSION

In the conclusion
Is the dedication
Of what is worthy
To the creator.

I send back these songs
For signature;
To be corrected by
The making eye.

Were word there aught
Worthy of thy
Report, one shine as if
It were not mine,

That I make over
To her my lover,
All that is worthy
That I discover.

Not as thy maker
O divine loveliness!
But as a walker
Humbly in meadows,

Who seeing the flower
Growing so fair,
Would pluck it and place
It in her hair.