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The Collected Poems of

ROY CAMPBELL

by the same author

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

THE WAYZGOOSE

ADAMASTOR

THE GEORGIAD

FLOWERING REEDS

MITHRAIC EMBLEMS

FLOWERING RIFLE

TALKING BRONCO

prose

BROKEN RECORD

TAURINE PROVENCE

The
Collected Poems of
ROY CAMPBELL

THE BODLEY HEAD LONDON

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To Mary

This volume represents all my published verse which is not actually under revision.

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R. C.

CONTENTS

Lyrical

Dedication to Mary Campbell [15](#)

ADAMASTOR

(1930)

The Theology of Bongwi, the Baboon [17](#)

Hialmar [17](#)

Mazeppa [19](#)

A Veld Eclogue: The Pioneers [22](#)

Buffel's Kop [26](#)

Rounding the Cape [27](#)

The Making of a Poet [27](#)

A Song for the People [28](#)

The Serf [30](#)

The Zulu Girl [30](#)

To a Pet Cobra [31](#)

The Albatross [32](#)

Silence [37](#)

The Festivals of Flight [37](#)

The Zebras [40](#)

Tristan da Cunha [40](#)

The Sisters [43](#)

Resurrection [44](#)

Mass at Dawn	47
Horses on the Camargue	47
The Sleeper	48
The Palm	49
Estocade	51
Autumn	52
An Open Window	52
Sonnet	54
The Garden	54
The Snake	55

THE FLAMING TERRAPIN

(1924)

The Flaming Terrapin	59
----------------------	--------------------

FLOWERING REEDS

(1933)

The Flowering Reed	95
Canaan	95
Song	97
The Shell	98
Autumn Plane	98
The Flame	99
The Road to Arles	99
The Flower	100

The Blue Wave	100
Wings	101
Swans	101
On Top of the Caderau	102
Vespers on the Nile	102
Choosing a Mast	103
The Secret Muse	105
The Rejoneador	106
La Clemence	106
Reflection	107
The Louse Catchers	107
The Albatross	108
The Olive Tree I	109
The Olive Tree II	109
A Sleeping Woman	110
The Gum Trees	110
Overtime	113

MITHRAIC EMBLEMS

(1936)

Mithraic Frieze	115
The Altar	116
The Solar Enemy	116
Illumination	117
The Seven Swords	117
The First Sword	118

The Second Sword	118
The Third Sword	119
The Fourth Sword	119
The Fifth Sword	120
The Sixth Sword	120
The Seventh Sword	121
The Raven I	121
The Raven II	122
The Raven's Nest	122
Death of the Bull	123
The Snake, the Scorpion, and the Dog	123
The Dawn	124
The Morning	124
San Juan Sings	125
The Meeting	125
Mithras Speaks I	126
Mithras Speaks II	126
To the Sun	127
The Sling	127
The Crystal	131
The Hat	131
A Jug of Water	132
To the Survivors	135
After the Horse-fair	136
Faith	138
Familiar Dæmon	141
Vaquero to his Wife	142

The Dead Torero	<u>143</u>
Pomegranates	<u>143</u>
Vaquero's Lament on getting a Cheque	<u>145</u>
Dedication of a Tree	<u>146</u>
Toril	<u>146</u>
Written in the Horse-truck	<u>148</u>
Rust	<u>148</u>
Junction of Rails: Voice of the Steel	<u>149</u>
Toledo, July 1936	<u>153</u>
Hot Rifles	<u>153</u>
Christ in Uniform	<u>154</u>
The Alcazar Mined	<u>154</u>
The Mocking Bird	<u>155</u>
The Fight	<u>155</u>
Christ in the Hospital	<u>157</u>
Posada	<u>158</u>

TALKING BRONCO
(1946)

Luís de Camões	<u>159</u>
The Skull in the Desert	<u>159</u>
San Juan de la Cruz	<u>163</u>
En Una Noche Oscura	<u>164</u>

BRIDEGROOM

(1947)

Songs between the Soul and the Bridegroom [165](#)

Satirical

Dedication to Mary Campbell [175](#)

ADAMASTOR

(1930)

Georgian Spring [181](#)

St. Peter of the Three Canals [182](#)

Solo and Chorus from 'The Conquistador' [185](#)

In the Town Square [187](#)

To a Young Man with Pink Eyes [189](#)

African Moonrise [190](#)

Poets in Africa [191](#)

To a Contemporary [194](#)

Amphisbæna [195](#)

Home Thoughts in Bloomsbury [196](#)

The Truth about Rhodes [196](#)

Holism [197](#)

A Temperance Official at the Exhibition of South African
Paintings [197](#)

Black Magic [197](#)

On Professor Drennan's Verse [197](#)

On Some South African Novelists	198
On the Same	198
Polybius Jubb, as Vegetarian	198
Polybius Jubb's Defence of Highbrows	198
On the Death of a Journalist	199
The Land Grabber	199
The Death of Polybius Jubb	199

THE GEORGIAD
(1933)

The Georgiad	201
--------------	---------------------

THE WAYZGOOSE
(1928)

The Wayzgoose	243
---------------	---------------------

MITHRAIC EMBLEMS
(1936)

Survey Thyself?	269
'Creeping Jesus'	270
Whatever Comes	272
A Good Resolution	272
The Pommitos	273

To a Pommie Critic	274
X. Y. Z.	274
Testament of a Vaquero	276
To 'the Future'	277
The Prodigal	277

TALKING BRONCO
(1946)

Dreaming Spires	279
Snapshot of Nairobi	282
Washing Day	283
The Beveridge Plan	283
On the Martyrdom of F. Garcia Lorca	283
Reflections	284
The Volunteer's Reply to the Poet	286
Kwa Heri!	287

<i>Notes</i>	291
<i>Index of Titles</i>	295



Lyrical



Dedication to Mary Campbell

When in dead lands where men like brutish herds
Rush to and fro by aimless frenzies borne,
Firing a golden fusillade of words,
Lashing his laughter like a knotted scourge,
A poet of his own disdain is born
And dares among the rabble to emerge—

His humble townsfolk sicken to behold
This monstrous changeling whom they schooled in
vain,
Who brings no increase to their hoard of gold,
Who lives by sterner laws than they have known
And worships, even where their idols reign,
A god superbly stronger than their own.

Accursèd in the temples of the Pagan
His evil fame is borne on every wind:
His name is thundered by the priests of Dagon
And all Philistia whispers with the plot
To shear his sleeping head, his eyes to blind,
And chain his ankle to a trundling shot;

For That which o'er their cities far-espied
Decreed his spirit like a torch to shine
Has fired him with the peacock's flaunting pride
Who still would fan his embers to a blaze
Though it were but to startle grunting swine

Or herds of sleepy cattle to amaze.

Insulting their dull sense with gorgeous dyes,
The matador of truth, he trails his scorn
Before their lowered horns and bloodshot eyes—
For never can their stubborn necks be tamed
Until they know how laughter must be borne
And learn to look on beauty unashamed.

Even this were victory, though by his foes
On every side with plunging hoofs beset,
Reeling at last beneath their leaden blows,
Behind some heap of filth he should be flung
Whereon the spider spreads his dusty net
And the cold viper hatches out her young.

But when the Muse or some as lovely sprite,
Friend, lover, wife, in such a form as thine,
Thrilling a mortal frame with half her light
And choosing for her guise such eyes and hair
As scarcely veil the subterfuge divine,
Descends with him his lonely fight to share—

He knows his gods have watched him from afar,
And he may take her beauty for a sign
That victory attends him as a star,
Shaped like a Valkyrie for his delight
In lovely changes through the day to shine
And be the glory of the long blue night.

When my spent heart had drummed its own retreat,
You rallied the red squadron of my dreams,

Turning the crimson rout of their defeat
Into a white assault of seraphim
Invincibly arrayed with flashing beams
Against a night of spectres foul and grim.

Sweet sister; through all earthly treasons true,
My life has been the enemy of slumber:
Bleak are the waves that lash it, but for you
And your clear faith, I am a locked lagoon
That circles with its jagged reef of thunder
The calm blue mirror of the stars and moon.



ADAMASTOR
(1930)

The Theology of Bongwi, the Baboon

This is the wisdom of the Ape
Who yelps beneath the Moon—
'Tis God who made me in His shape
He is a Great Baboon.
'Tis He who tilts the moon askew
And fans the forest trees,
The heavens which are broad and blue
Provide him his trapeze;
He swings with tail divinely bent
Around those azure bars
And munches to his Soul's content
The kernels of the stars;
And when I die, His loving care
Will raise me from the sod
To learn the perfect Mischief there,
The Nimbleness of God.

Hialmar

The firing ceased and like a wounded foe
The day bled out in crimson: wild and high
A far hyena sent his voice of woe
Tingling in faint hysteria through the sky.

Thick lay the fatal harvest of the fight
In the grey twilight when the newly-dead
Collect those brindled scavengers of night
Whose bloodshot eyes must candle them to bed.

The dead slept on: but one among them rose
Out of his trance, and turned a patient eye
To where like cankers in a burning rose,
Out of the fading scarlet of the sky,

Great birds, descending, settled on the stones:
He knew their errand and he knew how soon
The wolf must make a pulpit of his bones
To skirl his shrill hosannas to the moon.

Great adjutants came wheeling from the hills,
And chaplain crows with smug, self-righteous
face,
And vultures bald and red about the gills
As any hearty colonel at the base.

All creatures that grow fat on beauty's wreck,
They ranged themselves expectant round the kill,

And like a shrivelled arm each raw, red neck
Lifted the rusty dagger of its bill.

Then to the largest of that bony tribe
‘O merry bird’, he shouted, ‘work your will,
I offer my clean body as a bribe
That when upon its flesh you’ve gorged your fill,

‘You’ll take my heart and bear it in your beak
To where my sweetheart combs her yellow hair
Beside the Vaal: and if she bids you speak
Tell her you come to represent me there.

‘Flounce out your feathers in their sleekest trim,
Affect the brooding softness of the dove—
Yea, smile, thou skeleton so foul and grim,
As fits the bland ambassador of love!

‘And tell her, when the nights are wearing late
And the grey moonlight smoulders on her hair,
To brood no more upon her ghostly mate
Nor on the phantom children she would bear.

‘Tell her I fought as blindly as the rest,
That none of them had wronged me whom I killed,
And she may seek within some other breast
The promise that I leave her unfulfilled.

‘I should have been too tired for love or mirth
Stung as I am, and sickened by the truth—
Old men have hunted beauty from the earth
Over the broken bodies of our youth!’



Mazeppa

To Katherine Macdonald Maclean

Helpless, condemned, yet still for mercy croaking
Like a trussed rooster swinging by the claws,
They hoisted him: they racked his joints asunder;
They lashed his belly to a thing of thunder—
A tameless brute, with hate and terror smoking,
That never felt the bit between its jaws.

So when his last vain struggle had subsided,
His gleeful butchers wearied of the fun:
Looping the knots about his thighs and back,
With lewd guffaws they heard his sinews crack,
And laughed to see his lips with foam divided,
His eyes too glazed with blood to know the sun.

A whip cracked, they were gone: alone they
followed
The endless plain: the long day volleyed past
With only the white clouds above them speeding
And the grey steppe into itself receding,
Where each horizon, by a vaster swallowed,
Repeated but the bareness of the last.

Out of his trance he wakened: on they flew:
The blood ran thumping down into his brain:

With skull a-dangle, facing to the sky
That like a great black wind went howling by,
Foaming, he strove to gnash the tethers through
That screwed his flesh into a knot of pain.

To him the earth and sky were drunken things—
Bucked from his senses, jolted to and fro,
He only saw them reeling hugely past,
As sees a sailor soaring at the mast,
Who retches as his sickening orbit swings
The sea above him and the sky below.

Into his swelling veins and open scars
The python cords bit deeper than before
And the great beast, to feel their sharpened sting,
Looping his body in a thundrous sling
As if to jolt his burden to the stars,
Recoiled, and reared, and plunged ahead once
more.

Three days had passed, yet could not check nor
tire

That cyclone whirling in its spire of sand:
Charged with resounding cordite, as they broke
In sudden flashes through the flying smoke,
The fusillading hoofs in rapid fire
Rumbled a dreary volley through the land.

Now the dark sky with gathering ravens hums:
And vultures, swooping down on his despair,
Struck at the loose and lolling head whereunder
The flying coffin sped, the hearse of thunder,

Whose hoof-beats with the roll of muffled drums
Led on the black processions of the air.

The fourth sun saw the great black wings
 descending
Where crashed in blood and spume the charger
 lay:
From the snapped cords a shapeless bundle falls

Scarce human now, like a cut worm he crawls
Still with a shattered arm his face defending
As inch by inch he drags himself away.

Who'd give a penny for that strip of leather?
Go, set him flapping in a field of wheat,
Or take him as a pull-through for your gun,
Or hang him up to kipper in the sun,
Or leave him here, a strop to hone the weather
And whet the edges of the wind and sleet.

Who on that brow foresees the gems aglow?
Who, in that shrivelled hand, the sword that
 swings
Wide as a moonbeam through the farthest regions,
To crop the blood-red harvest of the legions,
Making amends to every cheated crow
And feasting vultures on the fat of kings.

This is that Tartar prince, superbly pearled,
Whose glory soon on every wind shall fly,
Whose arm shall wheel the nations into battle,
Whose wacry, rounding up the tribes like cattle,

Shall hurl his cossacks rumbling through the world
As thunder hurls the hail-storm through the sky.

And so it is whenever some new god,
Boastful, and young, and avid of renown,
Would make his presence known upon the earth—
Choosing some wretch from those of mortal birth,
He takes his body like a helpless clod
And on the croup of genius straps it down.

With unseen hand he knots the cord of pain,
Unseen the winged courser strains for flight:
He leads it forth into some peopled space
Where the dull eyes of those who throng the place
See not the wings that wave, the thews that strain,
But only mark the victim of their might.

Left for the passing rabble to admire,
He fights for breath, he chokes, and rolls his eyes:
They mime his agonies with loud guffaws,
They pelt him from the place with muddy paws,
Nor do they hear the sudden snort of fire
To which the tether snaps, the great wings rise. . . .

Vertiginously through the heavens rearing,
Plunging through chasms of eternal pain,
Splendours and horrors open on his view,
And wingèd fiends like fiercer kites pursue,
With hateful patience at his side careering,
To hook their claws of iron on his brain.

With their green eyes his solitude is starlit,

That lamp the dark and lurk in every brier:
He sinks obscure into the night of sorrow
To rise again, refulgent on the morrow,
With eagles for his ensigns, and the scarlet
Horizon for his Rubicon of fire.

Out of his pain, perhaps, some god-like thing,
Is born. A god has touched him, though with
whips:

We only know that, hooted from our walls,
He hurtles on his way, he reels, he falls,
And staggers up to find himself a king
With truth a silver trumpet at his lips.



A Veld Eclogue: The Pioneers

On the bare veld where nothing ever grows
Save beards and nails and blisters on the nose,
Johnny and Piet, two simple shepherds, lay
Watching their flock grow thinner every day—
Their one joint Nanny-goat, poor trustful thing,
That by the fence had waited since last spring
Lest any of the stakes that there were stuck
Should sprout a withered leaf for her to suck.
Rough was the labour of those hardy swains,
Sometimes they lay and waited for the rains,
Sometimes with busy twigs they switched the flies
Or paused to damn a passing nigger's eyes:
Sometimes, as now, they peeled them off their
hose

And hacked the jiggers^[1] from their gnarly toes.
At times they lay and watched their blisters heal,
At others, sweated forth a scanty meal
Prone on their backs between their Nanny's shins

After the manner of the Roman twins.
What wonder then, at such a flurry kept,
That sometimes—oftenest of all—they slept?
Yet for all that their simple hearts were gay,
And often would they trill the rustic lay,
For though the times were hard they could not bilk
Their brains of nonsense or their guts of milk;
And loud upon the hills with merry clang

The grand old saga of ‘Ferreira’^[2] rang,
Till the baboons upon the topmost krans
Would leap for joy, career into a dance,
And all their Simian dignity forgot
Would hold a sort of Nagmaal^[3] on the spot,
Or, if to such comparisons we stoop—
A special rally of the Empire Group.^[4]
Think not that I on racial questions touch,
For one was Durban-born, the other Dutch.
I draw no line between them: for the two
Despise each other, and with reason too!
But, in this case, they had both forgave the sin,
Each loved the other as a very twin—
One touch of tar-brush makes the whole world kin.
That they were true-bred children of the veld
It could as easily be seen as smelt,
For clumsier horsemen never sat astride,
Worse shots about their hunting never lied—
Though Piet once laid a lioness out straight,
I must confess—through aiming at its mate;
And Johnny, though he stalked extremely well,
Even against the wind the game could smell:
Even a pole-cat wheezing with catarrh
Could have perceived his presence from afar.
One knew them at a glance for Pioneers
Though Piet, but two years since, had washed his
ears:

Their musty jackets and moth-eaten hair
Showed them for children of the Open Air;
Besides red tufts, there shone upon their faces
That ‘nameless something’ which Bolitho^[5] traces

To gazing out across the ‘open spaces’,
As if the sharpest Taakhaar that he knows
Can see an inch beyond his own red nose,
As if the meanest cockney in existence
Can’t see the sky at a far greater distance
With sun and moon and stars to blink his eyes on
Much farther off than any fenced horizon,
And Sirius and Aldebaran, forsooth,
As far away as he is from the truth.
But ‘nameless somethings’ and ‘unbounded
spaces’

Are still the heritage of ‘younger races’—
At least our novelists will have it so,
And, reader, who are we to tell them, ‘No!’
We, who have never heard the ‘call’, or felt
The witching whatdyecallum of the veld?
As for that ‘nameless something’, it was there
Plain as the grime upon their ragged hair—
Bolitho calls it an ‘inspired alertness’
And so it seemed (in spite of their inertness)—
A worried look, as if they half-expected
Something to happen, or half-recollected
Anything having happened there at all
Since old Oom Jaapie’s heifer calved last fall.
As for the ‘boundless spaces’—wild and free
They stretched around as far as eye could see,
Which, though not very far, was yet enough
To show a tree, four houses, and a bluff.
Geographers, who say the world’s a sphere,
Are either ignorant, or mazed with beer,
Or liars—or have never read two pages
Of any of our novelists or sages

Who tell us plainly that the world's more wide
On the colonial than the other side,
That states and kingdoms are less vast and grand
Than ranches, farms and mealie-planted land,
And that wherever on the world's bald head
A province or protectorate is spread
The place straightway to vast proportions jumps
As with the goitre or a dose of mumps—
So that in shape our cosmos should compare
Less with an apple than a warty pear.
For all our scenery's in grander style
And there are far more furlongs to the mile
In Africa than Europe—though, no doubt
None but colonials have found this out.
For though our Drakenberg's most lofty scalps
Would scarcely reach the waist-line of the Alps,
Though Winterberg, besides the Pyrenees,
Would scarcely reach on tip-toe to their knees,
Nobody can deny that our hills rise
Far more majestically—for their size!
I mean that there is something grander, yes,
About the veld, than I can well express,
Something more vast—perhaps I don't mean that

—

Something more round, and square, and steep, and
flat—

No, well perhaps it's not quite that I mean
But something, rather, half-way in between,
Something more 'nameless'—That's the very
word!

Something that can't be felt, or seen, or heard,
Or even thought—a kind of mental mist

That doesn't either matter or exist
But without which it would go very hard
With many a local novelist and bard—
Being the only trick they've ever done,
To bring in local colour where there's none:
And if I introduce the system too,
Blame only the traditions I pursue.
We left our shepherds in their open spaces
Sunning the 'nameless somethings' on their faces,
And also (but that's neither here nor there)
Scratching the 'nameless somethings' in their hair.
And there I'll leave them to complete my rhyme
In conversation learned and sublime:

PIET

That you're a poet, Johnny, you declare
Both in your verses and your length of hair,
And sure, why not? we've prophets in the land
Fit with the best of Israel's line to stand—
For Balaam's donkey only made him curse
But Totius' Ox^[6] inspired him into verse,
And I have often thought some work of note
Could well be written round our faithful goat;
The heroes of Thermopylae were writers
And sculptors too—in spite of being fighters—
The heroes of Bull-hoek and Bondleswaard^[7]
Should not be backward in the field of art.
Come—the Jew's-harp!—I'll thrum it while you
sing,
Arise, and soar on music's golden wing!

JOHNNY

A simple goat was in her owners blest,
They milked her twice a day, then let her rest:
No wrangling rose between them—all was fair—
Which owned the head, or tail, they did not care:
Think not that I on racial questions touch
For one was British and the other Dutch.

So Johnny sang. His song was brief and true—
Had Creswell, Smuts or Hertzog half his nous,
There would be far more goats on the Karroo
And far less in the Senate and the House.

Buffel's Kop

(OLIVE SCHREINER'S GRAVE)

In after times when strength or courage fail,
May I recall this lonely hour: the gloom
Moving one way: all heaven in the pale
Roaring: and high above the insulted tomb
An eagle anchored on full spread of sail
That from its wings let fall a silver plume.

Rounding the Cape

The low sun whitens on the flying squalls,
Against the cliffs the long grey surge is rolled
Where Adamastor from his marble halls
Threatens the sons of Lusus as of old.

Faint on the glare uptowers the dauntless form,
Into whose shade abysmal as we draw,
Down on our decks, from far above the storm,
Grin the stark ridges of his broken jaw.

Across his back, unheeded, we have broken
Whole forests: heedless of the blood we've
 spilled,

In thunder still his prophecies are spoken,
In silence, by the centuries, fulfilled.

Farewell, terrific shade! though I go free
Still of the powers of darkness art thou Lord:
I watch the phantom sinking in the sea
Of all that I have hated or adored.

The prow glides smoothly on through seas
 quiescent:

But where the last point sinks into the deep,
The land lies dark beneath the rising crescent,
And Night, the Negro, murmurs in his sleep.



The Making of a Poet

In every herd there is some restive steer
Who leaps the cows and heads each hot stampede,
Till the old bulls unite in jealous fear
To hunt him from the pastures where they feed.

Lost in the night he hears the jungles crash
And desperately, lest his courage fail,
Across his hollow flanks with sounding lash
Scourges the heavy whipcord of his tail.

Far from the phalanxes of horns that ward
The sleeping herds he keeps the wolf at bay,
At nightfall by the slinking leopard spooed,
And goaded by the fly-swarm through the day.



A Song for the People

I sing the people; shall the Muse deny
The weak, the blind, the humble and the lame
Who have no purpose save to multiply,
Who have no will save all to be the same:
I sing the people as I watch, untamed,
Its aimless pomps and generations roll—
A monster whom the drunken gods have maimed
And set upon a road that has no goal.

How fiercely callous Nature plies her whips
When that tame hydra on the light uprears
Huge buttock-faces slashed with flabby lips,
Gouged into eyes, and tortured into ears.
A shapeless mass to any rhythm worked,
See how its legs to raucous music stir
As if some string of sausages were jerked,
And tugged, and worried by a snarling cur!

Do they too have their loves, and with these clods
Of bodies do they dare on their bodes
To parody our dalliance, or the gods',
By coupling in the chilly sport of toads?
Do they too feel and hate—under our wheels
Could they be crushed the deeper in the slime
When forth we ride elate with bloody heels,
Or jingle in the silver spurs of rhyme?

Funnelled with roaring mouths that gorp like cod
And spit the bitten ends of thick cigars,
This is the beast that dares to praise its god
Under the calm derision of the stars!
When from the lonely beacons that we tend
We gaze far down across the nameless flats,
Where the dark road of progress without end
Is cobbled with a line of bowler hats,

Searching the lampless horror of that fen,
We think of those whose pens or swords have
made

Steep ladders of the broken bones of men
To climb above its everlasting shade:
Of men whose scorn has turned them into gods,
Christ, tyrants, martyrs, who in blood or fire
Drove their clean furrows through these broken
clods

Yet raised no harvest from such barren mire.

In the cold hour when poets light their tapers
And the tall Muse glides naked to the door,
When by its love, its drinks, its evening papers,
All Babel has been lulled into a snore,
The pious poet in that silence hears
Like some pure hymn uplifting his desires
How Nero's fiddle shrills across the years
And to its music leap the dancing fires—

And the great Master of the radiant spheres
Turns from the sleeping multitudes in scorn
To where he sees our lonely flames and hears,

As when before him sang the sons of morn,
Down the far ages ringing lofty chimes,
Above the prayers of that huge carrion soul,
Our sacrifices, miracles, and crimes,
Up to the Throne their sounding anthems roll.



The Serf

His naked skin clothed in the torrid mist
That puffs in smoke around the patient hooves,
The ploughman drives, a slow somnambulist,
And through the green his crimson furrow grooves.
His heart, more deeply than he wounds the plain,
Long by the rasping share of insult torn,
Red clod, to which the war-cry once was rain
And tribal spears the fatal sheaves of corn,
Lies fallow now. But as the turf divides
I see in the slow progress of his strides
Over the toppled clods and falling flowers,
The timeless, surly patience of the serf
That moves the nearest to the naked earth
And ploughs down palaces, and thrones, and
towers.

The Zulu Girl

To F. C. Slater

When in the sun the hot red acres smoulder,
Down where the sweating gang its labour plies,
A girl flings down her hoe, and from her shoulder
Unslings her child tormented by the flies.

She takes him to a ring of shadow pooled
By thorn-trees: purpled with the blood of ticks,
While her sharp nails, in slow caresses ruled,
Prowl through his hair with sharp electric clicks,

His sleepy mouth plugged by the heavy nipple,
Tugs like a puppy, grunting as he feeds:
Through his frail nerves her own deep languors
 ripple
Like a broad river sighing through its reeds.

Yet in that drowsy stream his flesh imbibes
An old unquenched unsmotherable heat—
The curbed ferocity of beaten tribes,
The sullen dignity of their defeat.

Her body looms above him like a hill
Within whose shade a village lies at rest,
Or the first cloud so terrible and still

That bears the coming harvest in its breast.



To a Pet Cobra

With breath indrawn and every nerve alert,
As at the brink of some profound abyss,
I love on my bare arm, capricious flirt,
To feel the chilly and incisive kiss
Of your lithe tongue that forks its swift caress
Between the folded slumber of your fangs,
And half reveals the nacreous recess
Where death upon those dainty hinges hangs.

Our lonely lives in every chance agreeing,
It is no common friendship that you bring,
It was the desert starved us into being,
The hate of men that sharpened us to sting:
Sired by starvation, suckled by neglect,
Hate was the surly tutor of our youth:
I too can hiss the hair of men erect
Because my lips are venomous with truth.

Where the hard rock is barren, scorched the
 spring,
Shrivelled the grass, and the hot wind of death
Hornets the crag with whirred metallic wing—
We drew the fatal secret of our breath:
By whirlwinds bugled forth, whose funnelled
 suction
Scrolls the spun sand into a golden spire,
Our spirits leaped, hosannas of destruction,

Like desert lilies forked with tongues of fire.

Dainty one, deadly one, whose folds are panthered
With stars, my slender Kalihari flower,
Whose lips with fangs are delicately anthered,
Whose coils are volted with electric power,
I love to think how men of my dull nation
Might spurn your sleep with inadvertent heel
To kindle up the lithe retaliation
And caper to the slash of sudden steel.

There is no sea so wide, no waste so steril
But holds a rapture for the sons of strife:
There shines upon the topmost peak of peril
A throne for spirits that abound in life:
There is no joy like theirs who fight alone,
Whom lust or gluttony have never tied,
Who in their purity have built a throne,
And in their solitude a tower of pride.

I wish my life, O suave and silent sphinx,
Might flow like yours in some such strenuous line,
My days the scales, my years the bony links,
The chain the length of its resilient spine:
And when at last the moment comes to strike,
Such venom give my hilted fangs the power,
Like drilling roots the dirty soil that spike,
To sting these rotted wastes into a flower.

The ranges moved like long two-handed saws
Notching the scarlet west with jagged line:

Swerved like a thin blue scythe, and smoothly
reaping

Their mushroom minarets and toadstool towers,
My speed had set the steel horizon sweeping
And razed the Indies like a field of flowers:

Feathered with palm and eyed with broad lagoons,
Fanned open to the dimly-burning sky,
A peacock-train of fierce mesmeric moons,
The coast of Africa had rustled by:

The broad curve of the west, with nightward tilt,
Wheeled down, and nations stood upon their
crowns:

Each tower a crutch, each chimney-stack a stilt,
Across the nether sky, their fog-red towns

Went striding—while up far opposing seas
I by earth's sunward wheel was steeply borne
To see the green foam-heaved antipodes
Capsize their thousand islands on the morn.

Then through the gloom wherein, like tiny spiders
Webbed their flimsy rays, the systems spawn,
Up dim blue rocks of cloud, with scarlet fibres,
Crawled the gigantic lichens of the dawn;

Striped with the fiery colours of the sky,
Tigered with war-paint, ramping as they rolled,
The green waves charged the sunrise letting fly

Their porpoises like boomerangs of gold.

Exploding from white cotton-pods of cloud
I saw the tufted gulls before me blow,
The black cape-hens beneath me, and the proud
White gannet in his catapult of snow.

The cliff-ringed islands where the penguins nest
Sheltered their drowsy legions from the foam
When evening brought the cormorants to rest,
Gondolas of the tempest, steering home:

To sleep or cackle, grouped in homely rings,
I left them roosting warm in their own dung,
And while they fattened there, with homeless
wings

The great harp of the hurricanes I strung:

Towering far up amid the red star-sockets,
I saw deep down, in vast flotillas shoaled,
The phosphorescent whales, like bursting rockets,
Bore through the gloom their long ravines of gold.

Far coral islands rose in faint relief
Each with its fringe of palms and shut lagoon,
Where, with a running fuse of spray, the reef
Set off the golden crackers of the moon.

By nameless capes, where the slow thunder
prowls,
I dared the shapeless phantoms of the night,
Relentless as the noon to dazzled owls,
Inflicting beauty on their hate of light.

Squelching like sodden shoes, with canvas
trailing,
Doomed vessels swung their teetering yards on
high,
Or downward as they plunged, with syrens
wailing,
Reared to the stars their tempest-throttled cry.

I read my doom in those great shattered ribs
Nor with vague fancies drugged my truth-of-sight,
I knew the stars for momentary squibs
In the perpetual horror of the night:

I saw how vile a thing it is to die
Save when careering on their sunward course,
The strong heart cracks, the shivered senses fly,
Stunned by their own expenditure of force.

Erect, unterrified, though robbed of breath,
In those wild hours of triumph had I died,
The shades around, as in a meteor's death,
Had seen annihilation glorified.

My stiff quills made the hurricane their lyre
Where, pronged with azure flame, the black rain
streams:

Huge brindled shadows barred with gloomy fire
Prowling the red horizon of my dreams,

Thick storm-clouds threatened me with dense
eclipse,
The wind made whirling rowels of the stars—

Over black waves where sky-careering ships
Gibbet the moon upon their crazy spars,

From bow-bent wings I shot my white resilience
Grazing the tempest like a shaft of light,
Till with the sunrise, shivering into trillions
Of winged fish, I saw the wave ignite.

Through calms that seemed the swoon of all the
gales,

On snowy frills that softest winds had spun,
I floated like a seed with silken sails
Out of the sleepy thistle of the sun.

I had been dashed in the gold spray of dawns,
And hit with silver by the stars' faint light,
The red moon charged at me with lowered horns,
Buffalo-shouldered by the gloom of night:

Broidering earth's senseless matter with my sight,
Weaving my life around it like a robe,
Onward I draw my silken clues of flight,
Spooled by the wheeling glories of the globe.

The globe, revolving like a vast cocoon,
Unwound its threading leagues at my desire:
With burning stitches by the sun and moon
My life was woven like a shawl of fire.

Clashing the surf-white fringe that round it runs,
Its giant mesh of fire-shot silk, unfurled
And braided with a chain of flashing suns,
Fleeces the craggy shoulders of the world:

How dimly now its threads are ravelled out,
Its gorgeous colours smoulder from my brain,
While my numbed memory, the world about,
Rays forth its thin meridians of pain.

My eyes with wild funereal trophies blaze
Like dying torches—spoils of azure nights
And the slain suns my speed has shorn of rays
And dashed to bleed upon the western heights.

Night surges up the black reef of the world,
Shaking the skies in ponderous collapse,
I hear the long horizons, steeply hurled,
Rush cataracting down through starless gaps.

No more to rise, the last sun bombs the deep
And strews my shattered senses with its light—
My spirit knows the silence it must keep
And with the ocean hankers for the night.



Silence

I know your footfall hushed and frail,
Fair siren of the snow-born lake
Whose surface only swans should sail
And only silver hymns should break,
Or thankful prayers devout as this
White trophy of a night of sighs
Where Psyche celebrates the kiss
With which a sister closed her eyes.

The Festivals of Flight

Too sensitively nerved to bear
Domestication, O my friends
On a perpetual change of air
Whose sole stability depends,

By what phenomenal emotion,
Alas, is each of us obsessed
That travel, flight, and ceaseless motion
Must keep us in a state of rest?

Schooled by the new gymnastic Muse
In barbarous academies,
The rifle and the running noose
Conferred upon us their degrees,

To play our more precarious parts
Trapezed above the rolling decks
Or in the high equestrian arts
To graduate with broken necks.

Yet I could wish, before I perish,
To make my peace with God above
Or, like a millionaire, to cherish
My purse with soft marsupial love,

Or like a poet woo the moon,
Riding an arm-chair for my steed,
And with a flashing pen harpoon

Terrific metaphors of speed—

Speed, motion, flight!—the last hosanna
Of routed angels: sword that fights
The coward free: unfailing manna
Of earth's fastidious Israelites!

Valise of invalids on tour:
Refuge of refugees in flight:
Home of the homeless: sinecure
Of hunted thieves at dead of night.

Nirvana of the record-breakers,
Heaven in which our senses swim,
Aviary of aviators
And poultry-run of seraphim!

Safari to the unexplored
With rough first-aid for Cupid's darts,
Perambulator of the Bored
And ambulance of broken hearts!

Deranger of the intellects
Of those who flee before a curse,
Fixative of blurred effects,
And laxative of minor verse!

Mecca of all mechanic progress:
Destination, course, and goal
Of those who've none: Circean Ogress
Whose snouted trophy is my soul!

Tourist, who leaves with ten-league boots

His spoor of Castles down the Rhine:
Smoker of immense cheroots—
The funnels of the Cunard Line!

Of cranks, the boomerang and waddy:
Of rogues, the assegai and kerry:
Black Maria to the Body,
To the Soul a Stygian ferry!

Pope of the gypsies: sole religion
Of those who sail with every breeze:
The Son, the Father, and the Pigeon
To wandering aborigines!

To Thee our heathen hymns are hurled
From where we wander in the clouds—
Sonatas on the fog-horn skirled,
The pibroch of the creaking shrouds.

Lead, kindly ignis fatuus, far
Amid the world's encircling gloom:
In my last trek be thou the star
To whom I hitch my disselboom.^[8]

Far from the famed memorial arch
Towards a lonely grave I come,
My heart in its funereal march
Goes beating like a muffled drum,

Yet lest when midnight winds are loud
I should not see the way to go,
Let every gross proverbial cloud

Its shabby silver lining show:

And you shall lend me, if you please,
That in the mode I may appear,
Your shirt, tormented Hercules!
Laocoön! your bandolier.

The Zebras

To Chips Rafferty

From the dark woods that breathe of fallen
 showers,
Harnessed with level rays in golden reins,
The zebras draw the dawn across the plains
Wading knee-deep among the scarlet flowers.
The sunlight, zithering their flanks with fire,
Flashes between the shadows as they pass
Barred with electric tremors through the grass
Like wind along the gold strings of a lyre.

Into the flushed air snorting rosy plumes
That smoulder round their feet in drifting fumes,
With dove-like voices call the distant fillies,
While round the herds the stallion wheels his
 flight,
Engine of beauty volted with delight,
To roll his mare among the trampled lilies.

Tristan da Cunha

To Robert Lyle

Snore in the foam; the night is vast and blind;
The blanket of the mist about your shoulders,
Sleep your old sleep of rock, snore in the wind,
Snore in the spray! the storm your slumber lulls,
His wings are folded on your nest of boulders
As on their eggs the grey wings of your gulls.

No more as when, so dark an age ago,
You hissed a giant cinder from the ocean,
Around your rocks you furl the shawling snow
Half sunk in your own darkness, vast and grim,
And round you on the deep with surly motion
Pivot your league-long shadow as you swim.

Why should you haunt me thus but that I know
My surly heart is in your own displayed,
Round whom such leagues in endless circuit flow,
Whose hours in such a gloomy compass run—
A dial with its league-long arm of shade
Slowly revolving to the moon and sun.

My pride has sunk, like your grey fissured crags,
By its own strength o'ertopped and betrayed:
I, too, have burned the wind with fiery flags

Who now am but a roost for empty words,
An island of the sea whose only trade
Is in the voyage of its wandering birds.

Did you not, when your strength became your pyre
Deposed and tumbled from your flaming tower,
Awake in gloom from whence you sank in fire,
To find, Antaeus-like, more vastly grown,
A throne in your own darkness, and a power
Sheathed in the very coldness of your stone?

Your strength is that you have no hope or fear,
You march before the world without a crown,
The nations call you back, you do not hear,
The cities of the earth grow grey behind you,
You will be there when their great flames go down
And still the morning in the van will find you.

You march before the continents, you scout
In front of all the earth; alone you scale
The mast-head of the world, a lorn look-out,
Waving the snowy flutter of your spray
And gazing back in infinite farewell
To suns that sink and shores that fade away.

From your grey tower what long regrets you fling
To where, along the low horizon burning,
The great swan-breasted seraphs soar and sing,
And suns go down, and trailing splendours
 dwindle,
And sails on lonely errands unreturning
Glow with a gold no sunrise can rekindle.

Turn to the night; these flames are not for you
Whose steeple for the thunder swings its bells;
Grey Memnon, to the tempest only true,
Turn to the night, turn to the shadowing foam,
And let your voice, the saddest of farewells,
With sullen curfew toll the grey wings home.

The wind, your mournful syren, haunts the gloom;
The rocks, spray-clouded, are your signal guns
Whose stony nitre, puffed with flying spume,
Rolls forth in grim salute your broadside hollow
Over the gorgeous burials of suns
To sound the tocsin of the storms that follow.

Plunge forward like a ship to battle hurled,
Slip the long cables of the failing light,
The level rays that moor you to the world:
Sheathed in your armour of eternal frost,
Plunge forward, in the thunder of the fight
To lose yourself as I would fain be lost.

Exiled like you and severed from my race
By the cold ocean of my own disdain,
Do I not freeze in such a wintry space,
Do I not travel through a storm as vast
And rise at times, victorious from the main,
To fly the sunrise at my shattered mast?

Your path is but a desert where you reap
Only the bitter knowledge of your soul:
You fish with nets of seaweed in the deep
As fruitlessly as I with nets of rhyme—

Yet forth you stride, yourself the way, the goal,
The surges are your strides, your path is time.

Hurled by what aim to what tremendous range!
A missile from the great sling of the past,
Your passage leaves its track of death and change
And ruin on the world: you fly beyond
Leaping the current of the ages vast
As lightly as a pebble skims a pond.

The years are undulations in your flight
Whose awful motion we can only guess—
Too swift for sense, too terrible for sight,
We only know how fast behind you darken
Our days like lonely beacons of distress:
We know that you stride on and will not harken.

Now in the eastern sky the fairest planet
Pierces the dying wave with dangled spear,
And in the whirring hollows of your granite
That vaster sea to which you are a shell
Sighs with a ghostly rumour, like the drear
Moan of the nightwind in a hollow cell.

We shall not meet again; over the wave
Our ways divide, and yours is straight and
 endless,
But mine is short and crooked to the grave:
Yet what of these dark crowds amid whose flow
I battle like a rock, aloof and friendless,
Are not their generations vague and endless
The waves, the strides, the feet on which I go?



The Sisters

After hot loveless nights, when cold winds stream
Sprinkling the frost and dew, before the light,
Bored with the foolish things that girls must dream
Because their beds are empty of delight,

Two sisters rise and strip. Out from the night
Their horses run to their low-whistled pleas—
Vast phantom shapes with eyeballs rolling white
That sneeze a fiery steam about their knees:

Through the crisp manes their stealthy prowling
 hands,
Stronger than curbs, in slow caresses rove,
They gallop down across the milk-white sands
And wade far out into the sleeping cove:

The frost stings sweetly with a burning kiss
As intimate as love, as cold as death:
Their lips, whereon delicious tremors hiss,
Fume with the ghostly pollen of their breath.

Far out on the grey silence of the flood
They watch the dawn in smouldering gyres expand
Beyond them: and the day burns through their
 blood
Like a white candle through a shuttered hand.



Resurrection

The sun leaves rosy with his breath
A heaven rinsed with silver rains,
And on the golden verge of death
The lingering storm in glory gains:

While the red light and rolling thunder
Unvanquished from their fight withdraw:
Dim to the eyes' yet vibrant wonder
Whom such a vision held in awe,

Exhaling in the mists of gold
From every pollen-wreathed husk,
His triumphs in the stars foretold,
A shade emerges in the dusk,

A wrestler such as Jacob knew
Whose strength increases with the hours,
A Hercules of matchless thew
Whose body is the breath of flowers—

So evening with a god grew full
When Jove, amid such blossomed thorns,
Raised, in the lily-breathing Bull,
The silver moonrise of his horns.

Antaeus of the fallen storms,
The resurrection of the power
Whose splendours in the frailest forms

The most unconquerably tower,

The Form whose challenge, high and loud,
The whistling fifes of wind had spun,
Whose rolling muscles to a proud
Repulse had dared the noonday sun,

Whose heavy torrent-hurling shock
Had filled the roaring gullies, bowed
The groaning tree, and split the rock—
Had worn no armour but a cloud,

And now from the wet earth reborn,
All Africa his phoenix pyre,
Out of a thousand leagues of thorn
Had softly smouldered into fire.

The lightning sinews of his limbs
Are in that soft effulgence furled
And on the breath of incense swims
The thunderbolt his anger hurled.

Diffusing on through endless space,
Majestic peace without a flaw,
Wild is the light that from his face
The woods and dreaming waters draw.

The skies are with his trophies hung—
The Bull, the Lion, and the Bear;
What spoil of victories unsung
Remains to be erected there?

The gorgeous Ram that horns his lyre

Of silence: whose great pelt is rolled
To quilt a thousand hills with fire
In the acacia's fleece of gold—

Round which, astream through flowering vales,
Dread guardians, pythoning the spoils,
Lit by the moon with glittering scales
The great Zambezi wreath their coils—

Shorn from the shoulders of the morning
By his strong arm of thunder, yields
Its shaggy hide, his thews adorning
In all the fragrance of the fields.

Yet through the wreaths of cloudy fire
That crown the hazard of his quest,
Still to new victories aspire
The broodings of his dark unrest.

And his long gaze, down some immense
Horizon of horizons drawn,
Yearns to the fleeced magnificence
And fire of its perennial dawn.

Short is the peace, though hushed and breathless,
In which we feel the victor's will
And its intrinsic hydra, deathless,
Reviving at the self-same rill.



Mass at Dawn

I dropped my sail and dried my dripping seines
Where the white quay is chequered by cool planes
In whose great branches, always out of sight,
The nightingales are singing day and night.
Though all was grey beneath the moon's grey
 beam,
My boat in her new paint shone like a bride,
And silver in my baskets shone the bream:
My arms were tired and I was heavy-eyed,
But when with food and drink, at morning-light,
The children met me at the water-side,
Never was wine so red or bread so white.

Horses on the Camargue

To A. F. Tschiffely

In the grey wastes of dread,
The haunt of shattered gulls where nothing moves
But in a shroud of silence like the dead,
I heard a sudden harmony of hooves,
And, turning, saw afar
A hundred snowy horses unconfined,
The silver runaways of Neptune's car
Racing, spray-curl'd, like waves before the wind.
Sons of the Mistral, fleet
As him with whose strong gusts they love to flee,
Who shod the flying thunders on their feet
And plumed them with the snortings of the sea;
Theirs is no earthly breed
Who only haunt the verges of the earth
And only on the sea's salt herbage feed—
Surely the great white breakers gave them birth.
For when for years a slave,
A horse of the Camargue^[9], in alien lands,
Should catch some far-off fragrance of the wave
Carried far inland from his native sands,
Many have told the tale
Of how in fury, foaming at the rein,
He hurls his rider; and with lifted tail,
With coal-red eyes and cataracting mane,

Heading his course for home,
Though sixty foreign leagues before him sweep,
Will never rest until he breathes the foam
And hears the native thunder of the deep.
But when the great gusts rise
And lash their anger on these arid coasts,
When the scared gulls career with mournful cries
And whirl across the waste like driven ghosts:
When hail and fire converge,
The only souls to which they strike no pain
Are the white-crested fillies of the surge
And the white horses of the windy plain.
Then in their strength and pride
The stallions of the wilderness rejoice;
They feel their Master's trident^[10] in their side,
And high and shrill they answer to his voice.
With white tails smoking free,
Long streaming manes, and arching necks, they
show
Their kinship to their sisters of the sea—
And forward hurl their thunderbolts of snow.
Still out of hardship bred,
Spirits of power and beauty and delight
Have ever on such frugal pastures fed
And loved to course with tempests through the
night.

The Sleeper

She lies so still, her only motion
The waves of hair that round her sweep
Revolving to their hushed explosion
Of fragrance on the shores of sleep.
Is it my spirit or her flesh
That takes this breathless, silver swoon?
Sleep has no darkness to enmesh
That lonely rival of the moon,
Her beauty, vigilant and white,
That wakeful through the long blue night,
Watches, with own sleepless eyes,
The darkness silver into day,
And through their sockets burns away
The sorrows that have made them wise.

The Palm

Blistered and dry was the desert I trod
When out of the sky with the step of a god,
Victory-vanned, with her feathers out-fanned,
The palm tree alighting my journey delayed
And spread me, inviting, her carpet of shade.
Vain were evasions, though urgent my quest,
And there as the guest of her rustling persuasions
To lie in the shade of her branches was best.
Like a fountain she played, spilling plume over
plume in

A leafy cascade for the winds to illumine,
Ascending in brilliance and falling in shade,
And spurning the ground with a tiptoe resilience,
Danced to the sound of the music she made.
Her voice intervened on my shadowed seclusion
Like a whispered intrusion of seraph or fiend,
In its tone was the hiss of the serpent's wise
tongue

But soft as the kiss of a lover it stung—
'Unstrung is your lute? For despair are you silent?
Am I not an island in oceans as mute?
Around me the thorns of the desert take root;
Though I spring from the rock of a region accurst,
Yet fair is the daughter of hunger and thirst
Who sings like the water the valleys have nursed,
And rings her blue shadow as deep and as cool
As the heavens of azure that sleep on a pool.
And you, who so soon by the toil were undone,

Could you guess through what horrors my beauty
had won

Ere I crested the noon as the bride of the sun?
The roots are my anchor struck fast in the hill,
The higher I hanker, the deeper they drill,
Through the red mortar their claws interlock
To ferret the water through warrens of rock.
Each inch of my glory was wrenched with a groan,
Corroded with fire from the base of my throne
And drawn like a wire from the heart of a stone:
Though I soar in the height with a shape of delight
Uplifting my stem like the string of a kite,
Yet still must each grade of my climbing be told
And still from the summit my measure I hold,
Sounding the azure with plummet of gold.
Partaking the strain of the heavenward pride
That soars me away from the earth I deride,
Though my stem be a rein that would tether me
down

And fasten a chain on the height of my crown,
Yet through its tense nerve do I measure my might,
The strain of its curb is the strength of my flight:
And when, by the hate of the hurricane blown,
It doubles its forces with fibres that groan,
Exulting I ride in the tower of my pride
To feel that the strength of the blast is my own . . .
Rest under my branches, breathe deep of my balm
From the hushed avalanches of fragrance and
calm,

For suave is the silence that poises the palm.
The wings of the egrets are silken and fine,
But hushed with the secrets of Eden are mine:

Your spirit that grieves like the wind in my leaves
Shall be robbed of its care by those whispering
thieves

To study my patience and hear, the day long,
The soft foliations of sand into song—
For bitter and cold though it rasp to my root,
Each atom of gold is the chance of a fruit,
The sap is the music, the stem is the flute,
And the leaves are the wings of the seraph I shape
Who dances, who springs in a golden escape,
Out of the dust and the drought of the plain,
To sing with the silver hosannas of rain.’



Estocade

A clumsy bull, obscene and fat,
Who wears the devil's pointed hat
And cloven shoe,
Seems from my brain a sylph to call
To tease him with my flaming shawl
And thrust his shoulders through.

Dull eyes, like owls', that shrink away
Insulted from the light of day
In bloodshot gloom,
In my red silk see only night
And in my flame of steel no light
To glorify their doom—

No more can this blind passion claim,
Across whose blurred instinctive aim
My cape I swung,
Into a tumbled heap diverting
Its steel-shot bulk with redly-squirting
Nose and lolling tongue.

For though to frenzy still be stirred
The unwieldy lecher of the herd,
Still to its brain
I am all wings and airy lightness
And make a comet of my whiteness
In that black sky of pain.



Autumn

I love to see, when leaves depart,
The clear anatomy arrive,
Winter, the paragon of art,
That kills all forms of life and feeling
Save what is pure and will survive.

Already now the clanging chains
Of geese are harnessed to the moon:
Stripped are the great sun-clouding planes:
And the dark pines, their own revealing,
Let in the needles of the noon.

Strained by the gale the olives whiten
Like hoary wrestlers bent with toil
And, with the vines, their branches lighten
To brim our vats where summer lingers
In the red froth and sun-gold oil.

Soon on our hearth's reviving pyre
Their rotted stems will crumble up:
And like a ruby, panting fire,
The grape will redden on your fingers
Through the lit crystal of the cup.

An Open Window

An open window where the blue
Wind washed the snowy flowers with dew,
My lateness to deride,
Across my sunken pillow threw
The morning's silver pride
When I from sullen dreams awoke
And to my doubts, before they spoke,
Unbidden thoughts replied—

‘We were not idle though you slept
But, secret spiders, we have kept
The track of wasted hours:
In corners you had left unswept
The busy toil was ours
By which, before the dawn was red,
A thousand suns of silk were spread
To catch the falling showers.

‘Our webs are lit with stars of dew:
Pulleyed with pearls, each frosty clue
Its maze of glory runs,
While we, reflecting every hue,
As eager as the Sons
Of Morning to exalt their Sire,
Shoot forth our rays of liquid fire
To multiply the sun's.

‘Before the lark had left the corn,
Your love had bathed, and to the morn
Was up to show the way:
We saw how with her blood the dawn
Had fused its silver ray
Till on your bed’s cool-quilted snows,
Flushed as the phantom of a rose,
Her lighted shadow lay.

‘Nor slow to follow in her way
See how, in lovely disarray,
New hope, with limbs aglow,
Stands at the chilly brink of day
And hesitating so,
In that clear current, half in fright
At the swift tremor of delight,
Has dipped a rosy toe.’

Sonnet

The teeth of pleasure, when they hiss
So fiercely through the rasping rind,
Reach but the verges of that bliss
The fruit has lost its form to find.
The fruit's a fiction of the mind
Whose scent and taste our senses miss,
Save when, to fiery thought refined,
They draw a fragrance from your kiss
As thrilling as the deep-drawn breath
With which the blood begins to flare
When life is triggered by a hair
And stands upon the peak of death,
Elate, with scarlet cape outspread,
Before a bull with lowered head.

The Garden

Where not a breeze the silence raids
And by the outer noon forgot,
Strayed sunbeams crack with ruby shot
The smooth gold rind of the grenades:
Lit only by the falling stream,
The Form familiar to my rest
With fluid arm and naked breast
Flushes the crystal of my theme,
Yet on its clearness sheds no haze
Of sorrow more than if a glass
Between me and the sun should pass
To share the unimpeded rays.
Soft fall the laurel-scented hours
Rinsed with the golden light, and long
For those in faith and virtue strong
Shall rain upon their bed of flowers:
While through its fall of silver sheer
Ascends the music of the spring
With fluted throat and jewelled wing
To sing as ever through the year,
How Love was like a Laurel sprung
Within whose quiet ring of shade
Beauty and Wit, like man and maid,
Have lain as we since earth was young—
While all the crowns that glory weaves
To buckle on victorious brows
Were offered for their tent of boughs,
Around whose stillness vainly grieves

The valour that has daunted time,
And all the deathless flow of rhyme
Is but a wind among the leaves.



The Snake

Damp clods with corn may thank the showers,
But when the desert boulder flowers
No common buds unfold—
A Jove to Danae's bridal showers
Immortal fire and gold,
And high above the wastes will tower
The hydra stem, the deathless flower.

A glory, such as from scant seed
The thirsty rocks suffice to breed
Out of the rainless glare,
Was born in me of such a need
And of a like despair,
But fairer than the aloe sprang
And hilted with a sharper fang.

The heart whom shame or anger sears
Beyond the cheap relief of tears
Its secret never opes,
Save to the loveliest of fears,
The most divine of hopes,
And only when such seeds may find
A tough resistance in the rind—

Hard husks the self-same truth express
As, yielding to the sweet excess
Of hoarded gems within,

They crack to show the rich recess
Our thirsty lips would win,
When ripe grenades that drink the sun
Resolving into rubies run.

So from the old Anchises' tomb
All that the fire could not consume,
The living ichor, flowed,
A serpent from the rocky womb
Where barren death abode,
With lifted crest and radiant gyre
Revolving into wheels of fire.

No rock so pure a crystal rears
But filed with water, thawed with years,
Or by its prophet struck,
Its breast may sparkle into tears
For thirsting hordes to suck.
But it was to a sorer dint
And flashing from a harder flint

That, smitten by its angry god,
My heart recoiling to the rod
Rilled forth its stream of pride,
A serpent from the rifted clod
On rolling wheels to ride,
Who reared, as if their birth were one,
To gaze, an equal, on the Sun.

His eyes like slots of jet inlaid
On their smooth triangle of jade,
Were vigilant with fire,

His armour stripped the sun for braid
And wore the stars for tire
And slid the glory of its greaves
A stream of moonlight through the leaves.

Immortal longings hold his sight
Still sunward to that source of light
Drained from whose crystal spars
His slender current rolls its bright
Alluvium of stars,
And through its winding channel trails
The shingle of his burnished scales.

The news that such a king was crowned
Has made a solitude around
His vigil hushed and calm,
Where, with the fruits of Eden wound,
He girds the stripling Palm
And shares her starry shade with none
Save with the silence and the sun.

His teeth stained crimson with her flowers,
There through the blue enchanted hours
Rocked by the winds to rest,
Her fragrance lulls his folded powers
When slumber sinks his crest
Through his own circles clear and cool
As through the ripples of a pool.

A crystal freshet through whose sluice
The noonday beams their light reduce
To one melodious line,

And flow together like the juice
That circles in the vine,
His frosty ichor drinks the sun
And fuses fire and ice in one.

When by the horror-breathing wraith
The soul is scorched of hope and faith,
This form survives the fire,
The living self no flame can scathe,
The spine, the ringing wire
That silver through its alloy sings
And fresh in each exertion springs.

Blest is the stony ground, where smite
No rains but of the angry light,
And rich beyond all dreams,
Whose stubborn seed will not ignite
Save to such deathless beams
As first through emeralds fire did ray
And into diamonds shot the day:

And blest exchange for vain delight,
For dreams, the tyrants of the night,
And passions—of the day,
Is his whose clear, unchanging sight
Through triumph, change, decay,
In such a serpent's coiled repose
His secret architecture knows.



THE FLAMING TERRAPIN (1924)

PART ONE

Maternal Earth stirs redly from beneath
Her blue sea-blanket and her quilt of sky,
A giant Anadyomene from the sheath
And chrysalis of darkness; till we spy
Her vast barbaric haunches, furred with trees,
Stretched on the continents, and see her hair
Combed in a surf of fire along the breeze
To curl about the dim sierras, where
Faint snow-peaks catch the sun's far-swivelled
beams:

And, tinder to his rays, the mountain-streams
Kindle, and volleying with a thunder-stroke
Out of their roaring gullies, burst in smoke
To shred themselves as fine as women's hair,
And hoop gay rainbows on the sunlit air.
Winnowed by radiant eagles, in whose quills
Sing the swift gales, and on whose waving plumes
Flashing sunbeams ignite—the towering hills
Yearn to the sun, rending the misty fumes
That clogged their peaks, and from each glistening
spire
Fling to the winds their rosy fleece of fire.

Far out to sea the gales with savage sweep
Churning the water, waken drowsy fins
Huge fishes to propel from monstrous sleep,
That spout their pride as the red day begins,
‘We are the great volcanoes of the deep!’
Now up from the intense creative Earth
Spring her strong sons: the thunder of their mirth
Vibrates upon the shining rocks and spills
In floods of rolling music on the hills.
Action and flesh cohere in one clean fusion
Of force with form: the very ethers breed
Wild harmonies of song: the frailest reed
Holds shackled thunder in its heart’s seclusion.
And every stone that lines my lonely way,
Sad tongueless nightingale without a wing,
Seems on the point of rising up to sing
And donning scarlet for its dusty grey!
How often have I lost this fervent mood,
And gone down dingy thoroughfares to brood
On evils like my own from day to day;
‘Life is a dusty corridor,’ I say,
‘Shut at both ends.’ But far across the plain,
Old Ocean growls and tosses his grey mane,
Pawing the rocks in all his old unrest
Of lifting lazily on some white crest
His pale foam-feathers for the moon to burn—
Then to my veins I feel new sap return,
Strength tightens up my sinews long grown dull,
And in the old charred crater of the skull
Light strikes the slow somnambulistic mind
And sweeps her forth to ride the rushing wind,
And stamping on the hill-tops high in air,

To shake the golden bonfire of her hair.

This sudden strength that catches up men's souls
And rears them up like giants in the sky,
Giving them fins where the dark ocean rolls,
And wings of eagles when the whirlwinds fly,
Stands visible to me in its true self
(No spiritual essence or wing'd elf
Like Ariel on the empty winds to spin).

I see him as a mighty Terrapin,
Rafting whole islands on his stormy back,
Built of strong metals molten from the black
Roots of the inmost earth: a great machine,
Thoughtless and fearless, governing the clean
System of active things: the winds and currents
Are his primeval thoughts: the raging torrents
Are moods of his, and men who do great deeds
Are but the germs his awful fancy breeds.

For when the winds have ceased their ghostly
speech

And the long waves roll moaning from the beach,
The Flaming Terrapin that towed the Ark
Rears up his hump of thunder on the dark,
And like a mountain, seamed with rocky scars,
Tufted with forests, barnacled with stars,
Crinkles white rings, as from its ancient sleep
Into a foam of life he wakes the Deep.

His was the crest that from the angry sky
Tore down the hail: he made the boulders fly
Like balls of paper, splintered icebergs, hurled
Lassoos of dismal smoke around the world,
And like a bunch of crisp and crackling straws,

Coughed the sharp lightning from his craggy jaws.
His was the eye that blinked beyond the hill
After the fury of the flood was done,
And breaching from the bottom, cold and still,
Leviathan reared up to greet the Sun.
Perched on the stars around him in the air,
White angels rinsed the moonlight from their hair,
And the drowned trees into new flowers unfurled
As it sank dreaming down upon the world.
As he rolled by, all evil things grew dim.
The Devil, who had scoffed, now slunk from him
And sat in Hell, dejected and alone,
Rasping starved teeth against an old dry bone.

Before the coral reared its sculptured fern
Or the pale shellfish, swinging in the waves
With pointed steeples, had begun to turn
The rocks to shadowy cities—from dark caves
The deep and drowsy poisons of the sea
Mixed their corrosive strength with horny stones,
And coaxed new substances from them to be
The ponderous material of his bones.
The waves by slow erosion did their part
Shaping his heavy bonework from the mass,
And in that pillared temple grew a heart
That branched with mighty veins, through which to
pass
His blood, that, filtering the tangled mesh,
Built walls of gristle, clogged each hollow gap
With concrete vigour, till through bone and flesh
Flowed the great currents of electric sap.
While thunder clanging from the cloudy rack

With elemental hammers fierce and red,
Tempered the heavy target of his back,
And forged the brazen anvil of his head.

Freed from the age-long agonies of birth
This living galleon oars himself along
And roars his triumph over all the earth
Until the sullen hills burst into song.
His beauty makes a summer through the land,
And where he crawls upon the solid ground,
Gigantic flowers, exploding from the sand,
Spread fans of blinding colour all around.
His voice has roused the amorphous mud to life—
Dust thinks: and tired of spinning in the wind,
Stands up to be a man and feel the strife
Of brute-thoughts in the jungle of his mind.
Bellerophon, the primal cowboy, first
Heard that wild summons on the stillness burst,
As, from the dusty mesa leaping free,
He slewed his white-winged broncho out to sea,
And shaking loose his flaming curls of hair,
Shot whistling up the smooth blue roads of air:
As he rose up, the moon with slanted ray
Ruled for those rapid hoofs a shining way,
And streaming from their caves, the sirens came
Riding on seals to follow him: the flame
Of their moon-tinselled limbs had flushed the dim
Green depths, and as when winds in Autumn skim
Gold acres, rustling plume with fiery plume,
Their long hair flickered skyward in the gloom,
Tossed to the savage rhythms of their tune.
Till, far across the world, the rising moon

Heard, ghost-like, in the embered evening sky
Their singing fade into a husky sigh,
And splashed with stars and dashed with stinging
spray,

The dandy of the prairies rode away!
That voice on Samson's mighty sinews rang
As on a harp's tense chords: each fibre sang
In all his being: rippling their strings of fire,
His nerves and muscles, like a wondrous lyre,
Vibrated to that sound; and through his brain
Proud thoughts came surging in a gorgeous train.
He rose to action, slew the grumbling bear,
Hauled forth the flustered lion from its lair
And swung him yelping skyward by the tail:
Tigers he mauled, with tooth and ripping nail
Rending their straps of fire, and from his track
Slithering like quicksilver, pouring their black
And liquid coils before his pounding feet,
He drove the livid mambas of deceit.
Oppression, like a starved hyæna, sneaked
From his loud steps: Tyranny, vulture-beaked,
Rose clapping iron wings, and in a cloud
Of smoke and terror, wove its own dark shroud,
As he strode by and in his tossing hair,
Rippled with sunshine, sang the morning air.

Like a great bell clanged in the winds of Time,
Linking the names of heroes chime by chime
That voice rolled on, and as it filled the night
Strong men rose up, thrilled with the huge delight
Of their own energy. Upon the snows
Of Ararat gigantic Noah rose,

Stiffened for fierce exertion, like the thong
That strings a bow before its arrow strong
Sings on the wind; and from his great fists hurled
Red thunderbolts to purify the world.

PART TWO

When Noah thundered with his monstrous axe
In the primeval forest, and his boys,
Shaping the timbers, curved their gristled backs,
The ranges rocked and rumbled with the noise.
And as the trees came crashing down lengthwise,
And sprayed their flustered birds into the skies,
That plumed confetti, soaring far and frail,
With such a feathered glory strewed the gale,
That to the firmament they reared a new
But brighter galaxy: and as they flew,
Their rolling pinions, whistlingly aflame,
Kindled in flame and music on the air.
Then, like a comet, the pale Phœnix rose
Blazing above the white star-tusking snows,
And smouldering from her tail, a long white fume
Followed that feathered rocket through the gloom.
To the scared nations, volleying through the calm,
Her phantom was a signal of alarm,
And mustering their herds in frenzied haste,
They rolled in dusty hordes across the waste.
Far in the clouds her fatal meteor shone,

Swelling the turmoil as she hurtled on
Presaging ruin. In his mane of gold
The flaming lion trembled to behold:
And the fierce buffaloes who scorn control
Hushed up the thunder of their hoofs and stole
Like shadows from the plain. Through brakes and
 thorns
Crashed the wild antelopes with slanted horns:
And tigers, scrawled with fierce electric rays,
Were dimmed to hueless spectres by the blaze.

Skittles to Noah's axe, the great trunks sprawled,
And with the weight of their own bodies hauled
Their screaming roots from earth: their tall green
 towers
Tilted, and at a sudden crack came down
With roaring cataracts of leaves and flowers
To crush themselves upon the rocks, and drown
The earth for acres in their leafy flood;
Heaped up and gashed and toppled in the mud,
Their coloured fruits poured forth their juicy gore
To make sweet shambles of the grassy floor.
When star by star, above the vaulted hill,
The sky poured out its hoarded bins of gold,
Night stooped upon the mountain-tops, and still
Those low concussions from the forest rolled,
And still more fiercely hounded by their dread
Lost in the wastes the savage tribesmen fled.

Out of its orbit sags the cratered sun
And strews its last red cinders on the land,
The hurricanes of chaos have begun

To buzz like hornets on the shifting sand.
Across the swamp the surly day goes down,
Voracious insects rise on wings that drone,
Stormed in a fog to where the mountains frown,
Locked in their tetanous agonies of stone.
The cold and plaintive jackals of the wind
Whine on the great waste levels of the sea,
And like a leper, faint and tatter-skinned,
The wan moon makes a ghost of every tree.

The Ark is launched; cupped by the streaming
 breeze,
The stiff sails tug the long reluctant keel,
And Noah, spattered by the rising seas,
Stands with his great fist fastened to the wheel.
Like driven clouds, the waves went rustling by,
Feathered and fanned across their liquid sky,
And, like those waves, the clouds in silver bars
Creamed on the scattered shingle of the stars.
All night he watched black water coil and burn,
And the white wake of phosphorous astern
Lit up the sails and made the lanterns dim,
Until it seemed the whole sea burned for him;
Beside the keel he saw the grey sharks move,
And the long lines of fire their fins would groove,
Seemed each a ghost that followed in its sleep
Those long phantasmal coffins of the deep;
And in that death-light, as the long swell rolled,
The tarpon was a thunderbolt of gold.
Then in the long night-watches he would hear
The whinnying stallions of the wind career.
And to their lost companions, in their flight,

Whine like forlorn cicalas through the night.

By day the sky put on a peacock dress,
And, from its far bewildering recess,
Snowed its white birds about the rolling hull—
The swift sea-swallow and the veering gull
Mixed in a mist of circling wings, whose swoops
Haloed her with a thousand silver hoops;
And from the blue waves, startled in a swarm,
On sunlit wings, butterflies of the storm!
The flying-fishes in their silver mail
Rose up like stars, and pattered down like hail,
While the blunt whale, ponderous in his glee,
Churned his broad flukes and siphoned up the sea,
And through it, as the creamy circles spread,
Heaved the superb Olympus of his head.

Then far away, all in a curve of gold,
Flounced round with spray and frilled with curling
foam,
Cleaving the ocean's flatness with its bold
Ridges of glory, rose a towering dome
As the great Terrapin, bulking on high,
Spread forth his huge dimensions on the sky.
Not even Teneriffe, that awful dyke,
When the sun strikes him silver to the spike,
Sends such a glory through his cloudy spray
As did the Flaming Terrapin that day,
Rushing to meet the Ark; with such a sweep
The blue Zambezi rumbles to the deep,
With such a roar white avalanches slide
To strip whole forests from a mountain's side.

But Noah drew his blunt stone anchor in
And heaved it at him; with a thund'rous din
The stony fluke impaled the brazen shell
And set it clanging like a surly bell.
Its impact woke the looped and lazy chain
And rattling swiftly out across the main,
Drawn by the anchor from its dark abode,
Into the light that glittering serpent flowed
Chafing the waves: then as a mustang colt,
Feeling the snaffle, lurches for a bolt—
With such a lurch, with such a frantic rear,
The Ark lunged forward on her mad career,
And the old Captain, with a grip of steel,
Laid his brown hands once more upon the wheel,
Bidding his joyous pilot haul him free
From the dead earth to dare the living sea!
Rowelled by that sharp prow to hissing hate,
The waves washed round her in a dreary spate,
And, as she passed, with slow vindictive swoop
Swerved in to gnash their teeth against the poop:
But like torn Hectors at the chariot wheel,
She dragged their mangled ruins with her keel:
Till puffed by growing rage to greater height,
Their foamy summits towered into the night
So steeply, that it seemed by God's decree
The Alps had all gone marching on the sea,
Or Andes had been liquefied and rolled
Their moonlit ridges in a surf of gold!

O, there were demons in the wind, whose feet,
Striding the foam, were clawed with stinging
sleet:

They rolled their eyes and lashed their scorpion
tails

And ripped long stripes into the shrieking sails.
High on the poop the dim red lantern glowed,
And soaring in the night, the pale ship rode:
Her shadow smeared the white moon black: her
spars

Round wild horizons buffeted the stars,
As through the waves, with icicles for teeth,
She gored huge tunnels, through whose gloom to
flee,

And down upon the crackling hull beneath
Toppled the white sierras of the sea!

On fiery Coloradoes she was hurled,
And where gaunt canyons swallowed up the light,
Down from the blazing daylight of the world,
She plunged into the corridors of night
Through gorges vast, between whose giant ribs
Of shadowing rock, the flood so darkly ran
That glimpses of the sky were feeble squibs
And faint blue powders flashing in the pan
Of that grim barrel, through whose craggy bore
The stream compelled her with explosive roar,
Until once more she burst as from a gun
Into the setting splendour of the sun:
Down unimagined Congoes proudly riding,
Buoyed on whose flow through many a grey
lagoon,

The husks of sleepy crocodiles went sliding
Like piles of floating lumber in the moon;
Then with the giddiness of her speed elate,

With sails spread like the gold wings of a moth,
Down the black Amazon, cresting the spate,
The smooth keel slithered on the rustling froth:
She moved like moonlight through the awful
woods,

And though the thunder hammered on his gong,
Half-dreaming, as beneath their frail white hoods
Sail the swift Nautili, she skimmed along—
Till, rafted by the forest, through whose thatch
The moon had struck its faint and ghostly match,
She saw the monsters that the jungle breeds—
Terrific larvæ crawled among the weeds
And from the fetid broth like horrid trees
Wavered their forked antennæ on the breeze,
And panthers' eyes, with chill and spectral stare,
Flashed their pale sulphur on the sunless air:
While phosphorescent flowers across the haze,
Like searchlights darted faint unearthly rays:
And gleaming serpents, shot with gold and pearl,
Poured out, as softly as a smoke might curl,
Their stealthy coils into that spectral light
There to lie curved in sleep, or taking flight,
Trundle their burnished hoops across the leaves,
Till the stream, casting wide its forest sleeves,
Heaved out its broad blue chest against the sea,
And from their leafy bondage they were free.
Round the spiked islands, where the wild clouds
scale

Flamboyant peaks, and fragrant meadows sweep,
A surf of roses roaring in the gale,
Down to the tufted shingles of the deep,
She passed, and squadrons of huge scarlet crabs

Scampered across the fringes of the land—
Some were as vast as the gnarled baobabs
That hook clawed roots into the desert sand.
There, where the Cyclops herds the mastodon
The sombre crags with lurid splendour shone,
As like a lighthouse towering on the sky,
He rolled the fiery cartwheel of his eye.
On the far headlands, chaired on heaps of bones,
Cannibal kings sat charcoaled on the light,
Till the ship passed, and from their reeking
 thrones,
They leapt to their canoes in craven flight,
And their slim keels like horses bounded free
To leap the foamy hurdles of the sea;
Like plunging hoofs their paddles spurned the
 foam,
And, as they rose to crest each frothing comb,
And swung wave-lifted in the whistling air,
The gusty moonlight smouldered on their hair.

Round the stark Horn with buckled masts she
 clove,
Round the lean fore-arm of the World she drove,
Round the stark Horn, the lupanar of Death,
Where she and that fierce Lesbian, half-aswoon,
Roll smoking in the blizzard's frosty breath,
While, like a skinny cockroach, the faint moon
Crawls on their tattered blanket, whose dark woof
Of knitted cloud shrouds their dread dalliance,
 proof
To the white archery of the sun, and those
Thin javelins that cold Orion throws.

Round the stark Horn, where bleak and stiffly
lined,
Hooked ridges form a cauldron for the wind,
And droning endless tunes, that gloomy sprite
Stoops to his dismal cookery all night,
And with his giant ladle skims the froth,
Boiling up icebergs in the stormy broth,
Brewing the spirits that in sinking ships
Drowned sailors tipple with their clammy lips.

The hurricanes are out!—the whole night long
Humming the cradle-song that lulls the dead,
Where rolling stiffly in a silent throng
Their waif-like corpses on a stormy bed
Toss in their deep deliriums, or sleep,
Lifting pale faces from their restless grave.
Only to sink into a trance more deep
As they loll back upon the pillowing wave.
Sailors, so still?—See where the water pales
To milky froth before the whistling gales,
Hear the shrill song, where brawling out of Hell,
Those savage song-birds come to ring your knell,
Hear the low moan, where thunder bursting free,
Mourns for the great tanned nurslings of the sea!
Papooses of the storm! The grey tides lead
Your savage orphaned souls to rest, and thin
Your voices to the rustling of a reed,
Your flesh to vapour, and your horny skin
To spider-threads—and still you lie and dream!
Though the mad hurricanes around your scream,
Twitter and moan, so shrill and piercing-sweet,
That in His stormy turret on the Moon

God even feels His starry rafters beat
Time to the rhythms of the dismal rune
That those ferocious nightingales repeat.
Its four sad candles dripping from their wicks,
The Southern Cross disconsolately swung,
And canted low its splintered crucifix,
While all around the wolfish winds gave tongue,
And, in the silence of the nether shore,
With hateful patience by the hunted ship,
Their slitting fangs and feet that leave no spoor
Raced all night long in drear companionship,
Till, through the shadows of the Southern floe
The awful ghost of Erebus at last
Flowered in the desolation of the snow,
Curling his fiery tresses on the blast:
And the red plumes that rustle in his crest
Tinged the pale icebergs as they loomed abreast
And faintly in the Night's funereal noon
Reared their immense tiaras to the moon:
As they drew near, they hit the dazzled sight
Like ships on fire, and stacked with flaming spears
Old Ocean shone, as swaying through the Night
He rafted up his monstrous chandeliers.
The wild Antarctic lights, ablaze on high,
Rippled their feathered glories up the sky;
As if a phoenix, moulting plume from plume,
Sprinkled his fading splendours on the gloom,
Zigzags of scarlet, combs of silver flame,
Shivering on the darkness, went and came,
And fifty hues, in fierce collision hurled,
Blazed on the hushed amazement of the world!

PART THREE

Now low along the skyline, furred and shagged
As bears, dense clouds in slow contortions
dragged

Ponderous bodies, and with clumsy stoop
Came shambling skyward in a sombre troop:
Like quarries shattered out of cliffs, their chaps,
Crammed with resounding cordite, from deep gaps
Exploded thunder, and with jagged spark
Flashed fangs of deathly pallor on the dark.
Drilled by the level sleet, and lashed with spray,
Confounded in the gloom the sailors lay,
Or huddled on the deck their watches kept
Until they whined for sleep: and if they slept,
Sleep was a long dark tunnel demon-scooped
Out of the Night's black rock, in which were
grouped

Huge grizzled bats, so aged and so thin
That, as with fruit parched in its wrinkled skin,
About the shrunk pulp of their bodies clung
A loose grey pouch of fur, and as they swung,
Like pennies in a beggar's greasy purse
Their dry bones jingled: and their blood-shot eyes,
The only light, winked redly to disperse
Lank shadows, which the canted stalagmites
Flung forward, dull as falling logs, to fade
Tapering on into the gloom, or rise
Up half-lit walls that lost themselves in shade.

They mourned dead summers: faint remembered
flowers

With ghosts of scent and colour filled their hours,
As like poor skeletons, whiskered and lean,
They crouched and prayed for death to intervene:
But life, a scorpion with tenacious hold,
Fastened upon their spirits with the cold
Relentless threat of its infinitude—
And though in that one thought the world seclude
Its fairest hopes, the sense of dying men
Invests it with a nameless horror, when
With sight unveiled and sure untingling ear,
Their souls reach out beyond the grave to hear
The whisper of the sea that has no shore.
And all around them as the grim night wore,
The fury of the tempest grew more blind—
Up in the shrouds the whanging of the wind
Wrung from the soulless metal of the wire
A shriek of agony: a sighing fire
Feathered the yards; like devil-rattled dice
Their cold bones shivered, and their fearful wails
Mixed with the hollow grinding of the ice
Above the slatted thunder of the sails.

There in the Night against whose stormy womb
A nameless cape, reared up into the gloom,
With cloudy sperm engendered ghastly forms,
Dread embryos of hurricanes and storms—
Coasting the snows they heard as in a dream
The death-cry and the agony supreme
Of the slow-drowning world. On tongues of flame
Out of the throat of Erebus it came

Drawn through the craggy windpipe of the world:
There where red lava, in Lofodens swirled,
Had funnelled to the sky its stormy flue
The death-gasp of the world came smoking
 through,
And on the sky's cold glass, frostily strewn,
Lay smeared in phthisic pallor round the moon.
In that great sigh the voices of the world
As in a shroud of ghostly sound were furled.
The souls of Nations, tossed like stormy trees,
With groans and heavy thunder filled the breeze,
And as each race, in travail with its doom,
Sent forth its hollow voice into the gloom,
The flying winds its faint, sad rumour bore
Till all was heard along that dismal shore.
Anarchy, jolted in a rattling car,
Crested the turrets of the storm, and plied
His crackling whip with forked lash to scar
Red weals across the gloom: with frantic stride
His gusty stallions clenched their bits and tore
His whirling spokes along the pitchy rack:
Their gaping nostrils drizzled foam and gore,
And where they passed the gurdy sea grew black.
Revolving up in mighty colonnades,
Thick maelstroms propped the dense and sagging
 shades
With pillared thunder, and with hideous twist,
Corkscrewed by whirlwinds, writhed athwart the
 mist.

But when their stormy pilot, through the spray,
Like a great ship churning a giant screw,

Rose tilting o'er the waves and thrashed his way
Across the grumbling sea, the weary crew
Forgot their pain and through that night of fear
Sang as they followed in his swift career,
Purged by their agonies of all the dross
Of fear and sloth, their spirits shed their gross
Rags of despair, and as in spangled pride
A python ripples from his shrivelled hide
To ride propelled on wheels of rolling fire,
Their souls emerging from their old attire
Glittered new-sheathed, as if in shining mail,
Steadfast through all the terrors of the gale.
Like moonlight the new splendour of their minds
Flushed their clean limbs: beauty ran all aflame
Through nerve and bone, and whistled in the
winds

Threading the burning fibres of their hair.
Fit men they seemed in vigour, brain, and blood,
To mend the swamping havoc of the Flood,
To breed great races and in pride to reign
Throned in the flowering cities of the plain.

But in their absence from the drowning earth,
The sooty Fiend, deep in his mirky firth
Of smoke, upon his throne of roasted bricks,
Bawled his fell triumph far along the Styx,
And Cerberus, his lean three-headed tyke,
Howled his response far down the surly dyke.
Around him then he gathered all his court—
Goblins and apes and elves of every sort.
Huge carrion crows came rasping rusty jaws
Hoarse as the friction of a hundred saws;

Toads pranced about him on their nimble shins
While others sawed their creaking violins:
Gaunt poetesses, shrieking of their sins,
Fresh from the world's asylums, like a rout
Of cackling turkeys, hedged him round about:
While lousy toucans, clanking hollow bills,
Sounded him on, as he bestrode the hills.

Towering like a steeple through the air
He stalks: the cascades of his molten hair
With streams of lava wash his ebon limbs:
His eyes, like wheels of fire with whirling rims,
Revolve in his gaunt skull, from which a tusk
Curves round his ear and glitters in the dusk.
Now he comes prowling on the ravaged earth,
He whores with Nature, and she brings to birth
Monsters perverse, and fosters feeble minds,
Nourishing them on stenches such as winds
Lift up from rotting whales. On earth again
Foul Mediocrity begins his reign:
All day, all night God stares across the curled
Rim of the vast abyss upon the world:
All night, all day the world with eyes as dim
Gazes as fatuously back at him.
He does not hear the forests when they roar
Some second purging deluge to implore,
When cities from his ancient rule revolt,
He grasps, but dares not wield, his thunderbolt.
Sodom, rebuilt, scorns the wilting power
That once played skittles with her tallest tower.
Each Nation's banner, like a stinking clout,
Infecting Earth's four winds, flaunts redly out,

Dyed with the bloody issues of a war,
For hordes of cheering victims to adore.
While old Plutocracy on gouty feet
Limps like a great splay camel down the street;
And Patriotism, Satan's angry son,
Rasps on the trigger of his rusty gun,
While priests and churchmen, heedless of the
 strife,
Find remedy in thoughts of after-life;
Had they nine lives, O muddled and perplexed,
They'd waste each one in thinking of the next!
Contentment, like an eating slow disease,
Settles upon them, fetters hands and knees;
While pale Corruption, round his ghastly form
Folding the cloudy terrors of the storm,
His shapeless spectre smothered in the blending
Of heavy fumes, o'er mirky towns descending,
Swims through the reek, with movements as of one
Who, diving after pearls, down from the sun
Along the shaft of his own shadow slides
With knife in grinning jaws; and as he glides,
Nearing the twilight of the nether sands,
Under him swings his body deft and slow,
Gathers his knees up, reaches down his hands
And settles on his shadow like a crow.
So dread Corruption, over human shoals,
Instead of pearls, comes groping after souls,
And the pure pearl of many a noble life
Falls to the scraping of his rusty knife.
Till glutted with his spoil, like some huge squid,
He reascends, in smeary vapours hid,
And, like those awful nightmares of the deep

When through the gloom propelled with backward
sweep
Out of their mirky bowels they discharge
The dark hydraulic jet that moves their large
Unwieldy trunks—back to his secret lair
He welters through the dense miasmal air
In inky vapours cloaking his retreat:
Ever-renewed, his soft and sucking feet
Break from his trunk, and wandering alone,
Grow into forms as ghastly as his own:
Which, in their turn, with equal vigour breed
And through the world disseminate his seed,
Till over every city, grim and vast,
The shadow of a brooding death is cast.

Amphion, whose music planted massive towers
And temples propped on cylinders of stone,
Seems to have risen to this world of ours,
Renounced his lyre, and now to dotage grown,
Across the world in pied pyjamas goes
Fluting a leaky bagpipe with his nose.
A merry piper! Let his flutings rear
New slums and brothels year on dismal year—
Houses where Sickness, wrapped in clogging
mist,
Clenches pale children in his bony fist,
And as he sucks his lean and hairy paws,
Slamming the huge porticullis of his jaws,
Enormous lice, like tiger, hog, and bear,
Go crashing in the jungles of his hair.
Let him build ships and muzzle them with dread
To carry death where they might carry bread,

And forge those iron fish, that from their decks,
They launch with thunder bottled in their necks
To strew the waves with limbs of mangled crews.
Let squinting guns command the fairest views,
And giant mills, the temples of despair,
Reared to dull Vulcan and to brutish Mars,
Wolfing huge coals with iron jaws aflare,
Roll their grim smoke to choke the trembling stars!

Youth of the world! pale lichens crawl apace
On Earth's fair limbs and cloud her shining face:
We lie in graves and dungeons and our chains
Are naught but our own sluggard nerves and veins!
See where the Ark, bearded with frost, rolls home,
Her faded ensign trailing in the foam,
Her fiery pilot, with his crest aflare,
Roars out his triumph on the morning air
Rending the gloom: fire-purpled clouds unroll
Their crimson banners round the stormy Pole!

PART FOUR

Thought reared me up to perch upon a crag
That, crooked in heaven like an evil snag,
Shipwrecked the soaring stars, and there I saw,
Clenching his tail within his foamy jaw,
The Kraken, Time, convolved in scaly fold,
Hug the round Earth and girdle her with gold.

Huge throes ran through his equatorial coil,
His spangles, as when water mixed with oil
Whorls rainbows, all disintegrating, swirled
Their violent colours, as whose flames unfurled,
Rippling his scales, all through him seemed to run
A thousand fiery serpents writhed in one,
While future ages rolled into my sight
Spreading prophetic visions on the night.

Far be the bookish Muses! Let them find
Poets more spruce, and with pale fingers wind
The bays in garlands for their northern kind.
My task demands a virgin muse to string
A lyre of savage thunder as I sing.
You who sit brooding on the crags alone,
Nourished on sunlight in a world of stone,
Muse of the Berg, muse of the sounding rocks
Where old Zambezi shakes his hoary locks,
And as they tremble to his awful nod,
Thunder proclaims the presence of a god!
You who have heard with me, when daylight
 drops,
Those gaunt muezzins of the mountain-tops,
The grey baboons, salute the rising moon
And watched with me the long horizons swoon
In twilight, when the lorn hyæna's strain
Reared to the clouds its lonely tower of pain.
Now while across the night with dismal hum
The hurricanes, your meistersingers, come,
Choose me some lonely hill-top in the range
To be my Helicon, and let me change
This too-frequented Hippocrene for one

That thunders flashing to my native sun
Or in the night hushes his waves to hear
How, armed and crested with a sable plume,
Like a dark cloud, clashing a ghostly spear,
The shade of Tchaka strides across the gloom.
Write what I sing in red corroding flame,
Let it be hurled in thunder on the dark,
And as the vast earth trembles through its frame,
Salute with me the advent of the Ark!

Now from their frosty fetters bursting free,
To dare once more the terrors of the sea,
The Ark and her grim pilot churned the foam,
Crested the waves, and hoisted sail for home.
Fierce currents trailed her in their rustling train,
Swishing their silver skirts along the main,
And the grim night, as like proud queens they
 swayed,
Re-echoed with the great frou-frou they made.
Northward she seethed before the rising gales,
And with the starlight frosted on her sails,
Forth, like a shivering marshfire, flew to skim
With dancing flame the far horizon's rim.
Till in the growing light, tufting the grey
Blank levels with a mead of flowery spray,
The sirens like a sheaf of lilies sprang,
Streaking the depths with faint and snowy limbs,
And in pale constellations, moved and sang
Buoyed on the cadence of their own shrill hymns:
And as the spheres through level ether, bowled
By their own music, chime with tongues of gold—
So to their harmonies the sirens moved

And through the tide their shining orbits grooved.
From their red lips forth rippled on the air
Visible music: shapes with tossing hair
Skipped on the winds, and with a ringing cry,
Rolled in harmonious battle down the sky.
Their tongues like silver hammers beat the air
To crystal armour for those shapes to wear:
Out of each dusty mouthful of the wind
Their throats with vibrant shuttles wove and
twined

Glittering robes, by vocal magic wrought
To clothe those airy phantoms of their thought.
And the pale squadrons, clashing through the mists
Tilted by starlight in their windy lists,
Till every one was slain, and the last white
Lingering singer slithered out of sight,
And trailing white foam-roses in her curls,
Sank wavering down to dream among the pearls.
The winds died down: but music filled the sails
With all the speed and beauty of the gales,
And like a nun with twilight-slippered feet,
Sighed on beside the Ark: sounding more sweet
As faintlier it passed, her ghostly tread
Smoothed the untroubled sea, and carpeted
The level mirrors with reflected stars
That floated there like huge white nenuphars,
While dying echoes, leaning to the sail,
Shouldered her onward through the twilight pale.

Cleaving the deep, that miracle of ships,
As smoothly as a psalm divides the lips,
Passed on her way: and still beneath her drawn

Her pale reflection moved, as when the Dawn,
Across the Ocean's polished floors of gloom,
Sweeps her faint shadow with a golden broom.
Smooth as a lover's hand, ere sleep, may slide
O'er the gold sunburn of a woman's side
To drain the moonlight smouldering from her hair

She stroked the water with her keel, and where
She passed along, it silvered into foam
And burned to take her roving beauty home.
She, whose white form had been the splendid
theme

Of chanting hurricanes in their supreme
And wildest inspiration: she, whose white
Virginity appeased the lust of Night,
When in his star-slung hammock, worked with red
Stitches of lightning as with scarlet thread,
She swayed to his embraces as she lay
Dandled in thunder, cosseted in spray!
Now from his couch of terrors borne apart,
She slides alone; the silence on her heart
Weighs down with all the precious weight of gold,
While through the shades, serene and chaste and
cold,
She rears aloft her moon-emboldened form,
With child of high endeavour by the Storm.

New signals greeted now the flying ship,
Like lambs the merry waves were seen to skip,
As shepherd winds drove forth their foamy sheep
To rustle through the verdure of the deep:
No more the cruising shark with whispers thin

Through their crisp fleeces sheared his sickle fin
Beside the keep, portending death and woe:
But joyful omens in unceasing flow
Saluted her, as racing with the gales,
She rolled escorted by the rolling whales.

Now far along the skyline, like a white
Signal of triumph through the muffled light,
An Albatross, wheeling in awful rings,
Spanned the serene horizon with his wings,
And towering upward on his scythes of fire,
Smote the thick air, that, stung with beams of light,
Clanged to his harpings like a smitten lyre
Tolling the solemn death-knell of the Night.
Till, rearing higher, he caught the blinding glow
Of sunlight frozen in his plumes of snow,
As his ethereal silver soared to fade
Into the light its own white wings had made,
And, fusing slowly, Albatross and sun
Mingled their two faint radiances in one.

The tranced crew hailed with a thrilling cry
That snowy sign: but hardly had the sigh
Of the last echo died, when on their sight
Dawned a vast Presence, reddening the Night,
As the old Dragon, from his native slime,
Leviathan, the eldest child of Time,
Projected his gaunt skull upon the gloom,
In tones of thunder prophesying doom.
The blood-red ridges of his drooping gills
Arched the horizon like a range of hills:
In fiery whirlpools, glaring on the skies,

Through blood and foam he churned his rolling
eyes

And ruled their long blue rays across the dark
To fix in pallid focus on the Ark.

The sails lit up: the long illumined hull,
Polished with fire, shone like a naked skull,
And the whole ship, in bridal white arrayed,
Stood chiselled out in flame against the shade.

Then the old Serpent, with a voice that fell
Loud as the hammer of a groaning bell
That rocks a steeple—launched his fatal cry
Hounding the laden echoes through the sky:
‘Yawn, you great gaps: you starred abysses, yawn
To swill the fiery vintage of the Dawn:
Nature’s grim forces heavy with their sleep
Rise up in red rebellion from the deep:
And strong, chained thunders, rifting stone from
stone,

Surge underground with subterraneous moan:
Volcanoes, in eruption loud and dire,
Sprawl on the Night with baobabs of fire
And writhe their horrid branches to the Moon
With crackling din. Hark how the shrill Typhoon
Skirls in the towers of Sodom like a cricket
Fiddling her death-dance: splintered like a wicket,
Tall Babel crumples up! The gaunt abyss
Sucks in the darkness with a mournful hiss
Gaping for hunger: swirling in its throat
The shadows of a stormy whirlpool float.
Let old Corruption on his spangled throne
Tremble to hear! The jagged rifts of stone

Roar for his mangled carrion: old Earth
Writhes in the anguish of a second birth,
And now casts off her shrivelled hide, to be
The sun's fair bride, as bright and pure as he!
Fleeced like a god in rosy curls of fire
With massive limbs, stiffened by fierce desire,
He leaps, and as she yields her golden thigh,
Gigantic copulations shake the sky!
Old Noah's sons, in pomp and princely pride,
Through all the gardens of the world will ride,
And steepled cities stun the hollow sky
With thunderclaps of bells as they go by,
While at their sides, their stately wives shall pass
Like rays of moonlight on the waving grass,
With flowers twined and scarlet plumes aflare
Like rockets in the midnight of their hair!
He spoke and sank; and as a cauldron boils
The sea, drawn downward in his horrid coils,
Funnelled a gloomy whirlpit, till the world
Of waters on a single pivot swirled,
And, slowly slackening, once more untwined
Its foamy rings, and rolled before the wind;
But not for long, for the fierce Terrapin,
With one sharp wrench, had snapped the linking
cable

And sounded downwards: with a rending din
Half the flat Ocean, tilting like a table,
Rose in a wave, whose long white foamy lip
Slobbered the stars with froth, and sucked the ship
Heavenward on its hoary-whiskered rim.
Dizzy she soared that foaming ridge to skim,
And as a top, whipped into frantic pain,

Scribbles the dust, so on the boiling main
She swirled and eddied: till the snowy crest
Rearing her like the star that gilds the west,
High as the clouds, sank with a strident roar
To strand her on the far, the promised shore!
So a fierce mænad, all her rites performed,
From where among the woods she raved and
stormed,

Comes panting, as her frenzy fades away,
To lie sleep-towsled on the moonlit hay.
The dauntless crew, turbulent in their mirth,
Sprang from the decks to stamp the solid earth,
Calling their wives: and as those stately girls
Up from the hatches, wreathed in glimmering
curls,

Set foot upon the shore, a sudden surf
Of flowers foamed up to canopy the turf:
They strayed the fields, among the flowers they
rolled

Like plundering bees, dabbled with dusty gold,
And watched the light, which, trembling as it
grew,

Up through the clouds on silver pinions flew.

But the old Terrapin, freed from his load,
On sterner Errands took his lonely road
Over far continents. All through the land
His breath in cyclones pillared up the sand
And drove it on before him. In his ire
He spewed up thunder, and like slots of fire
The loopholed sockets of his eyes betrayed
Their gun-like pupils, as they smeared the shade

With clouds of pitch, and forking through the haze,
Riddled the gloom with fierce electric rays.
Before him floundered havoc, but behind,
Flowers with their scented tassels beat the wind:
After the winter of his wrath he led
A soft atoning Spring and from the red
Cinders he spread before him, as she passed,
Petals and leaves unravelled on the blast,
And tossed their rosy curls like conscious things
Fanned by the glimmering rainbows of her wings.

As a fierce train, maned like a ramping lion
With smoke and fire, thunders on rolling iron
Pounding grim tunes, and grinds with flashing
wheel
Rockets of flame from parallels of steel,
And, as the rails curve, shoots from flanks of brass
Tangents of fire to singe the whiskered grass—
So the mad Terrapin, with mighty shoulders
Shunting the hills, moved upon rolling boulders
That, like huge wheels, propelled with savage
might,
Revolved their molten globes across the night.

Till far upon a mountain's twinkling spire,
He saw the Devil on his throne of fire
Ruling the world: and launched his fatal shock
Of thunder: as it leapt from rock to rock
Blackening the gulf beneath, and out behind
Its tattered fringes reddened on the wind,
The old Fiend heard it come, and pale with fear
Felt his harsh tresses writhe themselves and rear

Like shocks of wheat. Under his gaudy throne
Avernus yawned with hollow jaws of stone,
As like a skittle to the thunderclap
He sprawled far out into the windy gap,
And, on his baffled pinions loosely flung,
Down through the gloom in huge gyrations swung.
Like a stone toppled from an endless hill,
Compelled as by some fierce insensate will,
Colliding and rebounding from the crags,
Sheer through the deep he tore his whistling rags.
And while through those grim vaults and starless
gaps

He rumbled in his hideous collapse,
The damned, each like a grey hook-tailed baboon,
Grown blind with yearning on the fruitless moon,
Hearing his fall, stole forth in rustling troops,
Crammed the cold ledges of the cliff that stoops
Bowed o'er the pit, and there with groping sight
Followed his sinking phantom through the night.
For weary months from cliff to crag he fell,
Until at last the grim recess of Hell,
Stunned by his fall, gave forth a horrid groan
From all its jolted battlements of stone.
And as he dragged his body from the flood,
Pocking deep craters in the sucking mud,
The Dead, like weary snipe, rising on high,
Whined through the gusty pallor of the sky,
And left him there, rending the night with moans,
To nurse the mangled relics of his bones.

After he sank, the clouds from sappy locks
Wrung their last tears the slow descending dew,

The dawn put forth upon the eastern rocks
A milky thigh, and donned a silver shoe,
And through the half-drawn curtains of the mist
Lingered and swayed, a frail somnambulist,
As in fair tresses, on the wind unfurled,
She trawled the rosy morning through the world.

The props of stone that carry the whole night
Upon their shoulders, when her pitchy crows
Perch with faint-spangled wings upon their white
Helmets of frost, and cling with gnarly toes
To their steep Krantzes—in that sudden blaze
Became red beacons, from whose palisade,
Hurled as by some huge fist across the haze,
The Sun burst upward like a red grenade!

PART FIVE

Down on their airy beds,
As the thin leaves fade on the willows,
The Stars, outwatched, upon cloudy pillows
Nuzzled their curly heads.
Feathering heaven with ripples of fire,
The birds stormed up to the sun's dominions,
And the tense air hummed like a silver lyre
To the stroke of their burning pinions.
Where Behemoth rolled on a river of gold,
Far down in the valleys below,

The lilies of Africa rustled and beat
Their giddy white flames with the whistle of sleet,
As they quilted the land with snow.

With the sun on their tansied hair,
And the wind in their scarlet quills,
White Seraphim rose aflare
From the tops of the snow-clad hills.
As a song on the strings of a lyre
Rolls and ripples and dances,
As, surging through forests, a fire
Shaking its furious lances
Till the bare boughs crackle and twine,
On wheels of revolving smoke
In ruin advances—
So from the eastern skies they broke,
And with fierce tresses ablaze,
On billows of fire uprose
To riddle the gloom with the shafted rays
That they twanged from their golden bows.

From the blue vault, with rosy glow,
In shimmering descent,
Ten thousand angels fell like snow,
Ten thousand tumbling angels went
Careering on the winds, and hurled
Their rainbow-lazos to pursue
The wild, unbroken world!
Saddled on shooting stars they flew
And rode them down with manes aflare,
Stampeding with a wild halloo,
Gymnastic on the rushing air.

Down on the hills, with a shatter of flame,
The topsy-turvy horsemen came,
The angel cowboys, flaring white,
With lariats twirling, cracking whips,
And long hair foaming in the light,
Vaulting on the saw-backed ridges
Where they tear the sky to strips,
And the rack of thunder bridges
Mountain-tops in dense eclipse:
And the raven cloud, in rout,
Fled like redly smoking ships,
The raven clouds, that with a shout,
Pelting flowers, they beat about
And hounded through the sky.
With ruin sagging from their spars,
Raked by the shrapnel of the stars,
Careering madly by
To roll, torpedoed by a blood-red moon,
Stark crazy on the blast of the typhoon.
And when the champions of the light
Had put their tattered sails to flight,
Star-high they hung above the cliffs suspended,
On scarlet plumes so fierce and splendid
That the sun's beams were turned to running
 springs
And rippled in the glory of their long spread
 wings.

Out of the Ark's grim hold
A torrent of splendour rolled—
From the hollow resounding sides,
Flashing and glittering, came

Panthers with sparkled hides,
And tigers scribbled with flame,
And lions in grisly trains
Cascading their golden manes.
They ramped in the morning light,
And over their stripes and stars
The sun-shot lightnings, quivering bright,
Rippled in zigzag bars.
The wildebeest frisked with the gale
On the crags of a hunchback mountain,
With his heels in the clouds, he flirted his tail
Like the jet of a silvery fountain.
Frail oribi sailed with their golden-skinned
And feathery limbs laid light on the wind.
And the springbok bounced, and fluttered, and
flew,
Hooping their spines on the gaunt karroo.
Gay zebras pranced and snorted aloud—
With the crackle of hail their hard hoofs pelt,
And thunder breaks from the rolling cloud
That they raise on the dusty Veld.
O, hark how the rapids of the Congo
Are chanting their rolling strains,
And the sun-dappled herds a-skipping to the song,
go
Kicking up the dust on the great, grey plains—
Tsessebe, Koodoo, Buffalo, Bongo,
With the fierce wind foaming in their manes.

PART SIX

High on the streams of ether, through the void
The angel riders of the air deployed
Their glittering files, as if in one hooped line
Of flame, the far horizons to confine,
And spin a running girdle round the earth—
A belt of fire, in whose expanding girth,
Struck by the sun with one white melting ray,
In all but hue, the ranks dissolved away:
And all their gorgeous dyes, diffusing through
Each other, slowly mingled and withdrew
Each draining from the glimmering maze its own
Soluble flame, in fluid ease alone
To glide in its own channel: till between
The gold and scarlet ribbons, ran the green,
And in one blaze of watery fire unfurled,
The Rainbow looped the mountains of the world.
Now the Earth meets the Sun: through nerve and
limb

Trembling she feels his fiery manhood swim:
Huge spasms rend her, as in red desire
He leaps and fills her gushing womb with fire:
And as he labours, sounding through the skies,
The thunders of their merriment arise!
Now each small seed, thrilled with their mighty
lust,

Builds up its leafy palace out of dust
And through its rustling trellises, in springs
Of crystal light, the swift wind flows and sings:
Vibrant with life, each clod of turf, inspired,
Shoots forth a gorgeous flower as if it fired
A rocket at the sky. The steepled trees

Rocked with their great bells clanging in the
Breeze

As she passed by with golden locks aswirl,
Of all earth's progeny the fairest girl!
In robes of rustling air she ran to play,
Tripping on trembling lilies all the way,
And the hushed Ocean, puckered into smiles,
Foamed at her feet around its shining isles:
And trees and mountains heard her joyful song
On plumes of towering eagles borne along,
And higher yet, where eagles fear to fly,
Banded by soaring echoes through the sky.
She slid with white feet planted in a shell
That smoothed the water with its whorled prow
Across the deep. Lorn as a midnight bell
Is the remembrance of her beauty now.
The sea's faint marble veined with green and gold
Framed her white image as she glided by:
The clouds, her hoarded fragrances to hold,
Spread seines of tasselled fire across the sky,
And a gay rainbow, curved to catch the pale
Rays of the morning, served her for a sail.

The Flaming Terrapin, his labours done,
Humped like a cloud o'er mountain, crag and field
Rose on the skyline. The far-shooting sun
Splintered its arrows on his armoured shield,
From whose bright dome in sudden ricochets
Recoiling flashed the long reflected rays:
While, rolling his red eyes, a double moon
That lit the hill-sides with a second noon,
He sank to rest. His golden ridges, tiered

Above the foam, now slowly disappeared:
And as clouds roll immense and globed and still
To burst in thunder round a lonely hill,
The slow foam gathered round him: o'er his wild
Mountainous outline, ponderously piled,
It hung one moment, poised in grim suspense,
And then swamped crashing down, and from its
dense

Vortex of thunder, with a gradual sweep
Rolled forth in groaning circles on the deep:
Halo on halo, ring on gleaming ring,
Reached out, in long subsiding curves, to fling
The rude waves back and with a foamy crown
Proclaim the Monarch as he sounded down!
Back to the deep he sinks and in a proud
Disintegration, like a raining cloud,
Reversing the grand process of his birth,
Returned his borrowed vigour to the Earth.
That vital fluid, straining through the pores
Of the vast ocean, on the wind upsoars
In rolling clouds that globe around the Sun,
Whence, rinsed as from his fiery curls, they run
In sparkling showers which, teeming in the Earth,
Rouse up the soil to energies of birth,
And shoot new vigour up through giant stems
Wider to spread their leafy diadems,
While from the glad red turf the eager grain
Springs dancing to the silver flutes of rain.
Thence into livelier forms his vigour swims
In fluid grace to beautify the limbs
Of swift wild creatures pasturing in herds,
Through whose lithe bodies, as they graze the

plain,
It flows like music—soaping into curds
Of froth along the Koodoo's gusty mane,
And slithering in the muscles of the Roan,
And in great Buffaloes, loading with stone
Their horny brows, as with resounding stride
And battering force, in one fierce shock that pulls
The screaming turf up, their huge forms collide
And thunder clothes the battle-angry bulls!
Feeding a myriad forms with life and light,
Speed for the race, and courage for the fight,
And Man, triumphant, feels their strength and
speed
Thrill through his frame as music through a reed.

Now by each silent pool and fringed lagoon
The faint flamingoes burn among the weeds:
And the green Evening, tended by the Moon,
Sprays her white egrets on the swinging reeds.
Her wings are spangled with the fiery grain
They winnow from the skies, and through the night,
Shoot their soft rays to gild the glistening main:
The swift winds simmer in her ghostly light.
The miser, leaning o'er his greasy hoard,
Cannot her brighter alchemy resist:
The murderer has wiped his grisly sword,
The rusty carbine trembles in his fist;
The trigger turns into a golden pin,
The barrel swings, a lily tall and frail,
And the dark soul, forgetful of his sin,
Walks singing through the terrors of the gale.
Under the feet of pale somnambulists

The thorns are turned to flowers gold and white:
Roses for those sad hunters of the mists
Flame in the secret gardens of the night.
Where each young Hercules, tired of the chase,
Has lain, the earth becomes a mass of flowers:
His pleated muscles and his burning face
Are sweeter to the earth than April showers,
And where he slept the flaming corn aspires
To harp the wind along on golden wires.

High on the top of Ararat alone
Old Noah stood: beneath him faintly blown,
Great aasvogels, like beetles on a pond,
Veered in slow circles o'er the gulf beyond.
The dusk came on: faint shades began to streak
Across the dim cathedral of the peak,
And from his craggy pulpit, the baboon
Rose on the skyline, mitred with the moon.
Over far Edens waved the golden lights
Trailing their gorgeous fringes o'er the heights.
Under the dying splendours of the day,
Rolling around him from his frosty throne,
Ridged with red skies, his mighty kingdom lay
Stretching to heaven. Zone on sweeping zone,
Huge circles outward swirled without a bound,
The world's immense horizons ringed him round,
Receding, merging on until the whole
Creation on the pivot of his soul
Seemed to be wheeling: star on lonely star
Haloed him with its orbit from afar.
He was the axle of the wheel, the pole
Round which the galaxies and systems roll,

And from his being, making months and years
Issued the vase momentum of the spheres.
Those mighty rings seemed but the ripples flung
From his great soul in lofty triumph swung,
An Aphrodite rising from the deep
Of old despairs. Matter's forlorn desire,
Through souls of men, in mighty deeds to leap,
Rose in his soul and crowned itself with fire.
And as the Night, serene and chaste and cold,
Down the faint air on starry pinions rolled,
Loud shouts of triumph through the valleys ran,
And Noah turned to watch, far in the west,
The sun's great phoenix fold her scarlet fan
And sink in ruin from the snowy crest.
There as amid the growing shades he stood
Facing alone the sky's vast solitude,
That space, which gods and demons fear to scan,
Smiled on the proud irreverence of Man.

Night is a Captain hustling up his stars,
Loud is the stumping of their boots of gold
Along the frosty horns and deep-cut scars
Of old bull-mountains sulking in the cold
Vacuums whereto they thrust their snouts to feel
Release from laden pressures or to hear
The humming spokes that twinkle in the wheel
Of many a roving sun. Set in their sheer
Grey brows, the caved unmasking eyes with dim
Secrets are slowly filled: wisdom undreamed
Makes heavier their pine-quilled heads where
swim
Ponderous fancies: grooved in quartz and seamed

In slate, they pattern their tremendous schemes—
Dead lava scrawled with wrinkled epics: lust
Expressed in stony groins, where distant streams
Dash into puffs of dust
Or trail thin fibres down the slopes to break
And crinkle on the star-bright lake.

Though the dark sky has gathered stormy numbers
Of vultures to be snowed upon my corpse;
Though the weak arc of Heaven warps
Beneath the darkness that encumbers
The night beyond; though we believe the end
Is but the end, and that the torn flesh crumbles
And the fierce soul, rent from its temple, tumbles
Into the gloom where empty winds contend,
In gnat-like vortex droning—what is this
That makes us stamp upon the mountain-tops,
So fearless at the brink of the abyss,
Where into space the sharp rock-rampart drops
And bleak winds hiss?
It is the silent chanting of the soul:
‘Though times shall change and stormy ages roll,
I am that ancient hunter of the plains
That raked the shaggy flitches of the Bison:
Pass, world: I am the dreamer that remains,
The Man, clear-cut against the last horizon!’

FLOWERING REEDS
(1933)

To my Mother

The Flowering Reed

When the red brands of day consume
And in the darkening Rhone illumine
The still reflections of the reed,
I saw its passing leagues of gloom,
Torrential in their strength and speed,
Resisted by a rosy plume
That burned far down among the weed;
As in the dark of Tullia's tomb
The frail wick-tethered phantom set
To watch, remember and regret,
Thawing faint tears to feed its fume
Of incense, spent in one long sigh
The centuries that thundered by
To battle, scooping huge moraines
Across the wreck of fifty reigns;
It held a candle to the eye
To show how much must pass and die
To set such scatheless phantoms free,
Or feather with one reed of rhyme
The boulder-rolling Rhone of time,
That rafts our ruin to the sea.

Canaan

Beneath us stream the golden hours
The slower for our hearts, where now,
Two ripe grenades on the same bough,
Their globes of bronze together swung,
Have stayed the stream they overhung
With fallen heaps of flowers.

For never was she half so fair
Whose colours bleed the red rose white
And milk the lilies of their light:
In her snowed breasts where sorrow dies,
All the white rills of Canaan rise,
And cedars in her hair.

Half-way across a flowery land
Through which our still reluctant feet
Must pass, for every halt too fleet,
We pause upon the topmost hill
Whence streams of wine and honey spill
To some rapacious strand.

There, sisters of the milky way,
The rills of Canaan sing and shine:
Diluvial in the waves of wine
Whose gulls are rosy-footed doves
The glorious bodies of my loves
Like dolphins heave the spray—

Red Rhones towards the sounding shore
Through castled gorges roaring down
By many a tiered and towery town,
High swollen with a spate of hours,
And strewn with all the dying flowers
That we shall love no more—

Torrential in the nightingale,
My spirit hymns them as they go
For wider yet their streams must flow
With flowery trophies heaped more high
Before they drain their sources dry
And those clear fountains fail.

I cannot think (so blue the day)
That those fair castalies of dreams
Or the cool naiads of their streams,
Or I, the willow in whose shade
Their wandering music was delayed,
Should pass like ghosts away.

The azure triumphs on the height:
Life is sustained with golden arms:
The fire-red cock with loud alarms
Arising, drums his golden wings
And in the victory he sings,
The Sun insults the night.

O flying hair and limbs of fire
Through whose frail forms, that fade and pass,
Tornadoing as flame through grass,
Eternal beauty flares alone

To build herself a blazing throne
Out of the world's desire—

The summer leaves are whirled away:
The fallen chestnut in the grass
Is trampled by the feet that pass
And like the young Madonna's heart
With rosy portals gashed apart
Bleeds for the things I say.



Song

You ask what far-off singing
Has mingled with our rest.
It is my love that, winging
The deep wave of your breast,
With white sail homeward turning,
Sings at the golden oar
Of a white city burning
On the battle-tented shore.

The Shell

The azure films upon her eyes
Are folded like the wings of terns;
But still the wavering tide returns,
And in her hair an ocean sighs:
Still in her flesh the Anger glows
And in her breathing seems to hiss
The phantom of the fiercest kiss
With which we slew its crimson rose—
As in a flushed barbaric shell
Whose lips of coral, sharked with pearls,
Of the remembered surges tell,
A ghostly siren swells the roar
And sings of some deserted shore
Within whose caves the ocean swirls.

Autumn Plane

Peeled white and washed with fallen rain,
A dancer weighed with jingling pearls,
The girl-white body of a plane,
In whose red hair the Autumn swirls,
Stands out, soliciting the cruel
Flame of the wintry sun, and dies,
If only to the watcher's eyes,
In red-gold anguish glowing; fuel
To that cold fire, as she assumes
(Brunhilde) her refulgent plumes
In leaves that kindle as they die,
Of all that triumphs and returns
The furious aurora burns
Against the winter-boding sky.

The Flame

In the blue darkness of your hair,
Smouldering on from birth to death,
My love is like the burnish there
That I can kindle with a breath.
Or like the flame in this black wine
Upon whose raven wings we rise
Lighter in spirit than the sighs
With which the purple roses twine:
Like a great star with steady beam
It runs against a darkened stream,
And from its onrush of despairs
Draws all the splendours my blood,
As I have seen the Rhone in flood
Drawn starward by the golden hairs.

The Road to Arles

From the cold huntress shorn of any veil
Bare trees, the target of her silver spite,
Down the long avenue in staggy flight
Are hunted by the hungers of the gale:
Along the cold grey torrent of the sky
Where branch the fatal trophies of his brows,
Actæon, antlered in the wintry boughs,
Rears to the stars his mastiff-throttled cry.
Pride has avenging arrows for the eyes
That strip her beauty silver of disguise,
And she has dogs before whose pace to flee—
In front a waste, behind a bended bow,
And a long race across the stony Crau
Torn in each gust, and slain in every tree.

The Flower

Let no light word your silence mar:
This one red flame be all you say,
Between the old and new desire
A solitary point of fire,
The hesitation of a star
Between the twilight and the day.

So rich the pollen of your breath
It is sufficient to be dumb,
Foreknowing, as the moment slips,
That in the parting of our lips
The hour has slain a rose whose death
Will colour all our days to come.

The Blue Wave

The blue wave resembles
The moment we hold
By its tresses of gold,
For it flushes and trembles,
And is drawn by the fiery
Low sun from the sea
Where his sister and he,
Sailing home to their eyrie
Like eagles to nest,
Bear it on like the hour
That we hold in our power,
When the day like a dragon
Has sunken its crest,
And the star in our flagon
Is that in the West.

Wings

When gathering vapours climb in storm
The steep sierras of delight,
Wings of your hair I love to form
And on its perfume soar from sight.
For in those great black plumes unfurled
The darkest condor of my thought
May stretch his aching sinews taut
And fling his shadow on the world.
When sick of self my moods rebel,
The demon from his secret hell,
The eagle from his cage of brass,
They have been lent such scented wings
Over the wreck of earthly things
In silence with the sun to pass.

Swans

The dark trees slept, none to the azure true,
Save where alone, the glory of the glade,
The cone of one tall cypress cut the blue
And azure on the marble dreamed its shade:
As long as I could feel it next to mine
Her body was illumined by my ghost,
As through the silver of the lighted host
Might flush the ruby reflex of the wine.
The night ran like a river deep and blue:
The reeds of thought, with humming silver wands,
Brushed by our silence like a fleet of swans,
Sang to the passing wave their faint adieu.
Stars in that current quenched their dying flame
Like folding flowers: till down the silent streams,
Swan-drawn among the lilies, slumber came,
Veiling with rosy hand the lamp of dreams.

On the Top of the Caderau

The splintering hail of the night was continued
By the shimmering beams of a morning that
 sinewed
The lowlands with silver, and trawled to the
 plains,
Rill-threaded, the sweep of its glittering seines:
As we rode to the summit (high over a cliff
It would dizzy the kestrel to plummet) the wind
 was a stiff
Bee-line to the sun, that it flew like a thundering
 kite,
Tunny-finned, and humming with gems, in the
 ocean of light.
And red on the blue-black blinding azure, your
 coat
Like a banner of fire in the storming of heaven
 afloat,
A flaunted bridle challenge was swung for the
 sunbeam to gore
By the jewelled Aquilon, a glittering toreador;
And under the blue-black buffeted rook of your
 hair
Your face was a silvery cry in the solitude there,
As you reared your white horse on the summit
 reminding me this—
That the steepest nevasas of rapture rise over the
 deepest abyss.



Vespers on the Nile

When to their roost the sacred ibis file,
Mosquito-thin against the fading West,
And palm-trees, fishing in the crimson Nile,
Dangle their windless effigies of rest,

Scarce to the moon's hushed conquest of the blue
Have waked the wingless warblers of the bogs,
Or to the lunar sabbath staunchly true
The jackals sung their first selenologues,

When through the waste, far-flung as from a
steep
First in low rumours, then in sounding choir,
The lamentation of an ancient people
Sounds from the waters and the sands of fire.

The centuries have heard that plaint persist,
Since Pharaoh's foreman stood with lifted quirt,
Or swung the bloody sjambok in his fist
To cut the sluggard through his hairy shirt.

This was the strain, the Amphionic lyre,
By which were carted Thebes' colossal stones,
Which though it lifted pyramid and spire
Yet rang their ruin in prophetic tones.

Still theirs the agony, still theirs the bondage,
Still theirs the toil, their recompense forlorn

To crop the thistles, bite the withered frondage
And rasp the bitter stubble of the corn.

Still as if Pharaoh's sjambok cut their rumps,
Sick for some Zion of the vast inane,
The effort of a thousand rusty pumps
Wheezes untiring through their shrill refrain.

Where royal suns descending left no stains,
Where forms of power and beauty change and
 pass,
One epic to eternity remains—
The heehawhallelujahs of the Ass.

Choosing a Mast

This mast, new-shaved, through whom I rive the
ropes,
Says she was once an oread of the slopes,
Graceful and tall upon the rocky highlands,
A slender tree as vertical as noon,
And her low voice was lovely as the silence
Through which a fountain whistles to the moon,
Who now of the white spray must take the veil
And, for her songs, the thunder of the sail.

I chose her for her fragrance, when the spring
With sweetest resins swelled her fourteenth ring
And with live amber welded her young thews:
I chose her for the glory of the Muse,
Smoother of forms, that her hard-knotted grain,
Grazed by the chisel, shaven by the plane,
Might from the steel as cool a burnish take
As from the bladed moon a windless lake.

I chose her for her eagerness of flight
Where she stood tiptoe on the rocky height
Lifted by her own perfume to the sun,
While through her rustling plumes with eager
sound
Her eagle spirit, with the gale at one,
Spreading wide pinions, would have spurned the
ground

And her own sleeping shadow, had they not
With thymy fragrance charmed her to the spot.

Lover of song, I chose this mountain pine
Not only for the straightness of her spine
But for her songs: for there she loved to sing
Through a long noon's repose of wave and wing,
The fluvial swirling of her scented hair
Sole rill of song in all that windless air,
And her slim form the naiad of the stream
Afloat upon the languor of its theme;

And for the soldier's fare on which she fed:
Her wine the azure, and the snow her bread;
And for her stormy watches on the height,
For only out of solitude or strife
Are born the sons of valour and delight;
And lastly for her rich, exulting life,
That with the wind stopped not its singing breath
But carolled on, the louder for its death.

Under a pine, when summer days were deep,
We loved the most to lie in love or sleep:
And when in long hexameters the west
Rolled his grey surge, the forest for his lyre,
It was the pines that sang us to our rest,
Loud in the wind and fragrant in the fire,
With legioned voices swelling all night long,
From Pelion to Provence, their storm of song.

It was the pines that fanned us in the heat,
The pines, that cheered us in the time of sleet,

For which sweet gifts I set one dryad free;
No longer to the wind a rooted foe,
This nymph shall wander where she longs to be
And with the blue north wind arise and go,
A silver huntress with the moon to run
And fly through rainbows with the rising sun;

And when to pasture in the glittering shoals
The guardian mistral drives his thundering foals,
And when like Tartar horsemen racing free
We ride the snorting fillies of the sea,
My pine shall be the archer of the gale
While on the bending willow curves the sail
From whose great bow the long keel shooting
home
Shall fly, the feathered arrow of the foam.



The Secret Muse

Between the midnight and the morn,
To share my watches late and lonely,
There dawns a presence such as only
Of perfect silence can be born.
On the blank parchment falls the glow
Of more than daybreak: and one regal
Thought, like the shadow of an eagle,
Grazes the smoothness of its snow.
Though veiled to me that face of faces
And still that form eludes my art,
Yet all the gifts my faith has brought
Along the secret stair of thought
Have come to me on those hushed paces
Whose footfall is my beating heart.

The Rejoneador

While in your lightly veering course
A seraph seems to take his flight,
The swervings of your snowy horse,
Volted with valour and delight,
In thundering orbit wheel the Ring
Which Apis pivots with his pain
And of whose realm, with royal stain,
His agony anoints you king.
His horns the moon, his hue the night,
The dying embers of his sight
Across their bloody film may view
The star of morning rise in fire,
Projectile of the same desire
Whose pride is animate in you.

La Clemence

When with white wings and rhyme of rapid oars
The sisters of your speed, as fleet as you,
With silver scythes, the reapers of the blue,
Turn from their harvest to the sunset shores;

When the pine-heaving mistral rolls afar
The sounding gust that your stiff pinion loves,
And rose-lit sails, a thousand homing doves
With foamy ribbons draw the wave-born Star;

May you be first her rising torch to greet
And first within the distant port to ride,
Your triangle of silver for her guide,
Your pearling prow a sandal to her feet.



Reflection

My thought has learned the lucid art
By which the willows lave their limbs,
Whose form upon the water swims
Though in the air they rise apart.
For when with my delight I lie,
By purest reason unreproved,
Psyche usurps the outward eye
To trace her inward sculpture grooved
In one melodious line, whose flow
With eddying circle now invests
The rippled silver of her breasts,
Now shaves a flank of rose-lit snow,
Or rounds a cheek where sunset dies
In the black starlight of her eyes.

The Louse Catchers

(after Rimbaud)

When the child's brow, with torment flushing red,
Implores white dreams to shed their hazy veils,
Two sisters, tall and fair, approach his bed
Whose fingers glint with silver-pointed nails.

They seat him by a window, where the blue
Air bathes a sheaf of flowers: with rhythms calm,
Into his heavy hair where falls the dew,
Prowl their long fingers terrible in charm.

He hears their breathing whistle in long sighs
Flowering with ghostly pollen; and the hiss
Of spittle on the lips withdrawn, where dies
From time to time the fancy of a kiss.

Brushing cool cheeks their feathered lashes flick
The perfumed silences: through drifting veils
He hears their soft electric fingers click
The death of tiny lice with regal nails.

Drowsed in the deep wines of forgetfulness,
Delirious harmonies his spirit hears
And to the rhythm of their slow caress
Wavers and pauses on the verge of tears.



The Albatross

(after Baudelaire)

Sometimes, for sport, the men of loafing crews
Snare the great albatrosses of the spray
That, indolent companions of their cruise,
Pursue the gliding vessels on their way.

Scarce have they fished aboard these airy kings
When, helpless on such unaccustomed floors,
They piteously droop their vast white wings
And trail them at their sides like drifting oars.

How comical, how ugly, and how meek
Appears this soarer of celestial snows:
One with his pipe teases the golden beak,
One, limping, mocks the cripple as he goes.

Like him the shining poet sunward steers,
Whose rushing plumes the hurricanes inflate,
But stranded on the earth to rabble jeers
The great wings of the giant baulk his gait.



The Olive Tree I

In bare country shorn of leaf,
By no remote sierra screened,
Where pauses in the wind are brief
As the remorse of a fiend,
The stark Laocoön this tree
Forms of its knotted arm and thigh
In snaky tussle with a sky
Whose hatred is eternity,
Through his white fronds that whirl and seethe
And in the groaning root he screws,
Makes heard the cry of all who breathe,
Repulsing and accusing still
The Enemy who shaped his thews
And is inherent to his will.

The Olive Tree II

Curbed athlete hopeless of the palm,
If in the rising moon he hold,
Discobolos, a quoit of gold
Caught in his gusty sweep of arm,
Or if he loom against the dawn,
The circle where he takes his run
To hurl the discus of the sun
Is by his own dark shadow drawn:
The strict arena of his game
Whose endless effort is denied
More room for victory or pride
Than what he covers with his shame.

A Sleeping Woman

Reddening through the gems of frost
That twinkle on the milk-white thorn,
Softly hesitates the morn
In whom as yet no star is lost.
From skies the colour of her skin,
So touched with golden down, so fair,
Where glittering cypress seems to spin
The black refulgence of her hair,
Clear as a glass the day replies
To every feature save her eyes
But shows their lashes long and fine
Across her cheek by slumber drawn,
As the black needles of the pine
Are feathered on the flush of dawn.

The Gum Trees

To Alister Kershaw

Half-hid by leaves, in lofty shoots,
The long lit files of stems arise,
An orchestra of silver flutes
That sing with movement to the eyes:

A movement born of rustling sound,
A rapid stillness, anchored flight,
That far along the level ground
Carries the distance out of sight.

Each interval between their feet
A dryad's stride, as they recede
In immobility more fleet
Than in the whizzing wind of speed,

Far on the sky, with crests aflame,
The tapering avenues unite,
And to a single target aim
The keen velocities of sight;

They snare the eye with clues of speed,
And with the wandering gaze elope:
The sight must follow where they lead,
As running water does the slope;

The impetus their beauty breeds
Is like a silver current hurled
Majestic through the noiseless reeds
Of some less transitory world;

Out of the bounds at which we stick
To what dimensions are they freed
By such superb arithmetic
To multiply their strength and speed?

Along the red-lit rim of space
In lofty cadences they rhyme,
Their march is one victorious race
Of immobility with time;

Far down each rapid colonnade
Their paces cut the shadows white,
They step across their pools of shade
With intervals of silver light;

In shuttered ranks across the gale
They flicker to the moon's white fire,
Like sleepers to an airy rail
They rush beneath her golden tyre;

Softly as a breeze that slumbers
They glide across the tufted floor,
For their motion is in numbers
And the shadows are their spoor.

They are the footfalls of the light,
Slipped with rustling leaves they run
Across the darkness of the night

To fetch the white blaze of the sun;

But as the gloom around them fades,
The old hallucination flees,
They swiften through the rushing shades
Their endless marathon of trees;

The winds they wrestled with are thrown,
The miles they trekked are spurned and dead,
But there before the blazing throne
They blacken into shapes of dread,

And on and on without control
Still in the same direction tread:
They, too, have dreamed they sought a goal
When merely from themselves they fled!

Their giant skeletons of shade
Are blackly charred upon the eye,
In motley rags of gloom arrayed
They wear the scorn of earth and sky.

The dusty winds begin to sweep,
The distance stretched before them lies,
Antaeus-like from caves of sleep
Their old antagonists arise.



Overtime

To Peter Eaton

Amongst the ponderous tomes of learning.
Dull texts of medicine and law,
With idle thumb the pages turning
In sudden carnival, I saw,
Revelling forth into the day
In scarlet liveries, nine or ten
Survivors of their own decay—
The flayed anatomies of men:
And marked how well the scalpel's care
Was aided by the painter's tones
To liven with a jaunty air
Their crazy trellises of bones.
In regimental stripes and bands
Each emphasised the cause he serves—
Here was a grenadier of glands
And there a gay hussar of nerves:
And one his skin peeled off, as though
A workman's coat, with surly shrug
The flexion of the thews to show,
Treading a shovel, grimly dug.
Dour sexton, working overtime,
With gristly toes he hooked his spade
To trench the very marl and slime
In which he should have long been laid.
The lucky many of the dead—

Their suit of darkness fits them tight,
Buttoned with stars from foot to head
They wear the uniform of Night;
But some for extra shift are due
Who, slaves for any fool to blame,
With a flayed sole the ages through
Must push the shovel of their fame.

MITHRAIC EMBLEMS (1936)



Mithraic Frieze

*Vers lou mitan 'i 'n biou, que vai lou pougne
Au vèntre un escourpioun, un chin lou mordre
Em' uno serp . . . qu'à si ped fai d'oundado.
Lou brau, plus fort que tout, a tengu tèsto,
Quand un jouvent enmantela dóu ristre,
Un fier jouvent, conifa de la boneto
De liberta, eè tanco sa ligoussou
E lou coto. En dessus dóu mourtolage
Un courpatios esfraious voulastrejo.
Devine lou quau pou, aquéu mistèri!*

MISTRAL

[In the middle is a bull which a scorpion is about to sting in the belly: a dog also bites it: and a snake undulates at its feet. The bull, stronger than all, has held its own, till a man in a cape, a proud young man, crested with the bonnet of liberty, seizes it by the muzzle and stabs it. Above the dying beast a frightful raven flies. Let him divine the mystery who can!]

THE ALTAR

Mithraic symbols wreath the shrine
whereon, like flower-fed bulls, are slain
my years, exhaling in their pain
the lily's ghost and bleeding wine;
the trumpets of whose throats of gold
cry pæan to the victor steel;
whose souls in airy nimbus rolled
deride the deaths to which they kneel;
and from the sacred flames they feast
in hymns of incense re-aspire
to praise His throne of silver fire,
Who all the leas with lilies fleeced
to feed each great snow-shouldered beast
in whom these squandered days expire.

THE SOLAR ENEMY

Enemy of my inward night
and victor of its bestial Signs
whose arm against the Bull designs
the red veronicas of light:
your cape a roaring gale of gold
in furious auroras swirled,
the scarlet of its outward fold
is of a dawn beyond the world—
a sky of intellectual fire
through which the stricken beast may view
its final agony aspire
to sun the broad æolian blue—
my own lit heart, its rays of fire,
the seven swords that run it through.

ILLUMINATION

I halt and tremble at the height
to which you lift my dreaming gaze
through curls of fire, upon the white
abrupt sierras of my days;
O hyacinthal star! whose shining
phasm to film, the flesh will glow
a rose against the dawn, designing
the skeleton, a frond of snow,
while on the rosy splendour drawn,
like webs of frost against the dawn,
the nerves of joy and pain are spun
fine as the thistled hair of fays
and myriad as the coloured rays
an eyelash fibres from the sun.

THE SEVEN SWORDS

Of seven hues in white elision,^[11]
the radii of your silver gyre,
are the seven swords of vision
that spoked the prophets' flaming tyre;
their sistered stridences ignite
the spectrum of the poets' lyre
whose unison becomes a white
revolving disc of stainless fire,
and sights the eye of that sole star
that, in the heavy clods we are,
the kindred seeds of fire can spy,
or, in the cold shell of the rock,
the red yolk of the phoenix-cock
whose feathers in the meteors fly.

THE FIRST SWORD

The first's of lunar crystal hewn,
a woman's beauty, through whose snows
the volted ecstasy outglows
a dolphin dying in the noon;
and fights for love, as that for life,
and leaps and turns upon its side
and swirls the anger of its strife
a radiant iris far and wide,
bronze, azure, and auroral rose
faint-flushing through its nacreous snows—
electric in a god's strong hand
this sword was tempered in my blood
when all its tides were at the flood
and heroes fought upon the strand.

THE SECOND SWORD

Clear spirits of the waveless sea
have steeped the second in their light,
a low blue flame, the halcyon's flight
passing at sunset swift and free
along the miles of tunny-floats
when the soft swell in slumber rolls
and sways the lanterns on their poles
and idly rocks the drifting boats;
when evening strews the rosy fleece
and the low conches sound from far,
a lonely bird whose sword of air
is hilted with the evening star
has slain upon the shrine of peace
the daily slaving forms I wear.

THE THIRD SWORD

Like moonbeams on a wintry sea
the third is sorrowful and pale
and from my vision guards the grail
whose glory I shall never see;
a boreal streamer burning green,
it shivers in a land of shade
as if some wandering Cain had seen
his soul reflected in its blade.
It glitters in some frozen hold
that leaves its icy hilt unthawn;
its radius is a flame of cold,
the skyline of an arctic dawn;
Vulcan in forging it grew old
and sorrow froze when it was drawn.

THE FOURTH SWORD

In crimson sash and golden vest
a gay dædalion of the day
transfixing with a sworded ray
its black and melancholy breast,
the tiger-fly with whirring vans
rifles a sombre grape, whose heart,
red-glowing to the hilted dart,
seems a lit furnace that he fans—
so to the soured and black despairs
my blasted vine in autumn bears,
so horneted with strident wings,
to his own trumpet peal and drum
the toreadoring sylph will come
and anger is the sword he brings.

THE FIFTH SWORD

Silent and vertical and dim
the lunar flambeau of a prayer
that rising in the frosty air
is silvered by the seraphim,
thawing the night with airy blade,
like a funereal candle set
to burn the fuel of regret
(though in the noon it casts a shade)
the fifth, a lifetime to consume,
in vigilance is still the same,
a sword of silver in the gloom
it guards a grief that is my shame;
by day a cypress on a tomb,
but in the night it is a flame.

THE SIXTH SWORD

From that Toledo of the brain
where none but perfect steel is wrought,
of all its cities thronged with thought
that soars the farthest from the plain,
clear lightning with a sheath of gold,
a scarlet tassel at the hilt,
a blade the noonday sun to jilt
and sparkle in a cherub's hold,
the sixth salutes the last Crusade
and her, by all the world betrayed,
who reared its red and golden streamer
upon the ramparts of Castile—
of the great West the sole redeemer
and rainbow of the Storms of Steel.

THE SEVENTH SWORD

The seventh arms a god's desire
who lusts, in Psyche, to possess
his white reluctant pythoness;
as in the fugitive of fire,
pale ice, the sworded flame is caught;
or the red images of ire
in the pure person of a thought.
As arctic crystals that would shun,
but each become, the living sun,
where best his image may be sought;
so to the shining sword he probes,
her breasts are lighted, and their globes
each to a vase of crystal wrought.

THE RAVEN I

The flesh-devouring bird of time
sails overhead; of his dark flight
the streamers of immortal rhyme
illuminate the Scandinavian Night:
all joys on which our lives are flown
in those great wings of darkness flare—
the blue flame that my lover's hair
trawls like the moonrise on the Rhône:
the red flame that the circling wine
swivels around these sombre walls
when friendship is the most divine
and far too soon the morning falls—
are fuel that his flight consumes
to burnish those unageing plumes.

THE RAVEN II

Upon the red crag of my heart
his gorgeous pinions came to rest
where year by year with curious art
he piles the faggots of his nest,
old forest antlers lichen-hoary
and driftwood fished from lunar seas
that once had blossomed with the lory
and trumpeted the golden bees:
and steeper yet he stacks the pyre
to tempt the forked, cremating fire
to strike, to kindle, and consume:
till answering beacons shall attest
that fire is in the Raven's nest
and resurrection in the tomb.

THE RAVEN'S NEST

His home of firewood from the skies
reclaims the fire, a bride to house:
dumb claws of thunderstricken boughs,
that clenched in imprecation rise
their scent and colour to implore
as first from out the sun it came—
and all that Burning can restore
of sweated resins, leafing flame,
of whistling tongues and scented air,
to bud with singing hearts, to bear
one crop of nightingales and fruits,
and foliate in plumes and wings
until the verdure flies and sings
and birds are flowering from the roots.

DEATH OF THE BULL

Those horns, the envy of the moon,
now, targeting the sun, have set:
the eyes are cinders of regret
that were the tinder of the noon.
But from the hornèd Alp that kneels,
as if the Rhône should sluice its flood,
out of a Wound that never heals
rills forth the lily-scented blood,
the snow-fed wine of scarlet stain,
that widens, flowering through the plains,
and from the Wound its anguish drains—
as you may hear from one who drank,
down on his knees, beside the bank,
and lost the memory of pain.

THE SNAKE, THE SCORPION, AND THE DOG

Now the slain victim to the sun
would rise (his mortal ruin shed);
his soul its base alloy to shun
casts forth the parasites it fed;
their ancient ruler to deride
his earthly emanations spring
like courtiers round a fallen king—
his guile, a serpent at his side,
with venom forks the mortal sting;
the forceps fix his dangled stones
as to the scorpion he atones
that envy is a creeping thing;
while at his shoulder tugs the beast
he gorged the fattest at his feast.

THE DAWN

Tug, monsters, at the badgered meat
out of whose needs yourselves were born;
into the east you tug the morn
whose victory is your defeat;
drink, thirsty swords, the central star—
your cup of blood; your kiss of steel
shall blaze the rising orb afar
of which you twinkle in the wheel;
and every drop that thence is wrung
its parent circle shall repeat;
a gem of humming rays, be hung
like dew the rising god to greet,
to turn the ancient valleys young
and bathe His westward-wending feet.

THE MORNING

The woods have caught the singing flame
in live bouquets of loveliest hue—
the scarlet fink, the chook, the sprew,
that seem to call me by my name.
Such friendship, understanding, truth,
this morning from its Master took
as if San Juan de la Cruz
had written it in his own book,
and went on reading it aloud
until his voice was half the awe
with which this loneliness is loud,
and every word were what I saw
live, shine, or suffer in that Ray
whose only shadow is our day.

SAN JUAN SINGS

—As if San Juan sang aloud
until his song became whatever
drew my sight: the sailing cloud:
the Sea that rushes on forever,
and the Sun that makes it proud:
the blue wind tethered to the tree
grazing the poppies by my side—
the wind so blue you cannot see,
so light and swift you cannot ride!
the City White, above the air,
(the City where I long to go)
and the sunbeams playing there
as windblown threads of golden hair
are scattered on a nape of snow.

THE MEETING

It is too cheap to say ‘delight’
when speaking of so rare a thing—
I met that Rider on the height
who taught the morning cocks to sing.
To me so humble (best of meetings!)
he spoke—and visible the word!
one wedded nimbus our two greetings
that the frost made be seen as heard.
As our two cigarettes their fumes,
as our two horses snorted plumes,
so mingled were the words we spoke:
sufficed but greeting and good-bye
down from the cheeks of Dawn to stroke
and rosy feathers from the sky.

MITHRAS SPEAKS I

‘A flitting rainbow in your life,
your body but a passing cloud,
remember this when you are proud
or when you look upon a knife.’
(He said) ‘We work for the same Boss
though you are earth and I a star,
and herdsmen both, though my guitar
is strung to strum the world across!
as if you’d known me all your life
go with good luck as with a wife;
though there’s a line you may not cross
you will not find it in this land
and you can sleep on this kaross’^[12]
(He stroked the meadow with his hand).

MITHRAS SPEAKS II

‘The World put down its lovely mane,
your fathers strokes it with their ships;
they won you, with their guns and whips,
the huge hosannah of the plain.
Through the lush lilies as you crash
and rein horizons in your hold,
while, baying fire, the aloes slash
your stirrups with their fangs of gold—
Sing, Cowboy! string your strong guitar!
For each Vaquero is a star
and Abel’s sons the line will cross,
under the stretched, terrific wings,
the outspread arms (our soaring King’s)—
the man they made an Albatross!’

TO THE SUN

Oh let your shining orb grow dim,
Of Christ the mirror and the shield,
That I may gaze through you to Him,
See half the miracle revealed,
And in your seven hues behold
The Blue Man walking on the Sea;
The Green, beneath the summer tree,
Who called the children; then the Gold,
With palms; the Orange, flaring bold
With scourges; Purple in the garden
(As Greco saw): and then the Red
Torero (Him who took the toss
And rode the black horns of the cross—
But rose snow-silver from the dead!)

THE SLING

Guarding the cattle on my native hill
This was my talisman. Its charm was known
High in the blue and aquiline ozone,
And by my tireless armourer, the rill,
Smoothing his pellets to my hand or eye:
And how its meteors sang into the sky
The eagles of the Berg remember still.

I wore this herdsman's bracelet all day long:
To me it meant 'To-morrow' and 'Perhaps',
The insults of Goliath, his collapse,
Much fighting, and (who knows?) a life of song.
So fine a jewel at his wrist to swing
(For it was Chance) has seldom graced a king—
As I have dangled on a rawhide thong.

It spelt me luck in every polished stone
That to its mark, or thereabouts, had won:
For it had been to a poor herdsman's son
A stirrup once, to vault into a throne
And ride a nation over its despair;
To me, it seemed an amulet of prayer,
Remembering David and the warrior Joan.

I thought of the incendiary hope
Such herdsmen brought to cities from the hills.
Taught by the rash example of the rills,

Leaping in fire, to rush the headlong slope,
To gather impetus for height that's lost,
And hurtle through, regardless of the cost,
Where cunning or precaution have no scope.

When I have felt the whiff of madness' wing,
And rioted in barrios of shame,
Where all they gave me was a thirsty flame,
To burn my lips, that could no longer sing—
Around my fevered pulse to cool the flame,
There ghosted at my wrist an airy sling
And drew me to a garden, or a spring.

My link, in its long absence, with delight:
My handcuff (if I looked upon a knife)
That chained me to the miracle of life
Through a long frost and winter of the sprite:
And ready, at most need, to arm my prayer,
As once, when cries and feathers filled the air,
It saved a silver egret from a kite.

When stranded on these unfamiliar feet
Without a horse, and in the Stranger's land,
Like any tamest Redneck to your hand,
I shuffled with the Charlies in the street
Forgetting I was born a Centaur's foal;
When like the rest, I would have sawn my soul
Short at the waist, where man and mount should
meet—

Its tightened thong would jerk me to control,
And never let the solar memory set

Of those blue highlands which are Eden yet
For all the rage of dynamite or coal—
Whose sunrise is the vision that I see then,
That, hurled like Bruce's heart amongst the
 heathen,
Leads on our White Commando to its goal!

Where none break ranks though down the whole
 race treks,
It taught me how to separate, and choose;
The uniform they ordered, to refuse—
The hornrimmed eyes, the ringworm round their
 necks;
And, when the Prince of herdsmen rode on high,
To rope those hikers with that bolshie tie,
To save my scruff, and see without the specs:—

Choosing my pebbles (to distinguish, free)
I had dispensed with numbers; finding how,
Since Space was always Here as Time was Now,
Extent of either means a Fig to me;
To the whole field I can prefer a flower
And know that States are foundered by an hour
While centuries may groan to fell a tree.

By its cool guidance I unread my books
And learned, in spite of theories and charts,
Things have a nearer meaning to their looks
Than to their dead analyses in parts;
And how (for all the outfit be antique)
Our light is in our heads; and we can seek
The clearest information in our hearts.

It taught me to inflict or suffer pain:
That my worst fortune was to serve me right,
And though it be the fashion to complain,
Self-pity is the ordure of the sprite,
But faith its ichor; and though in my course,
A rival knot the grass to spill my horse,
That trusting all to luck is half the fight.

It taught me that the world is not for Use;
But is, to each, the fruit of his desire,
From whose superb Grenade to swill the juice,
Some thaw its rosy frost into a fire—
Leaving the husks they most expect to find
To those insisting on the horny rind;
For it rewards as we to it aspire.

So ripe a fruit, so ruddy, and so real!—
To-night it bleeds, as when in days gone by
(Aldebaran a rowel at my heel)
I rounded up the cattle on the sky
Against the Berg's Toledo-steeped walls—
As now, upon the mesas of Castile
Beside the city that it most recalls.

For him whose teeth can crack the bitter rind—
Still to his past the future will reply,
And build a sacred city in his mind
With singing towers to thunder in the wind:
To light his life will shine the herdsman King
Who whirls our great Pomegranate in his sling
To herd the other planets through the sky.

Slung at his wrist will hang the phantom stress
Of David's stone—to weigh that all is right;
Even to daunt him should the weak unite
In one Goliath, he'll accept and bless,
Whose home's the Earth, and Everywhere his bed
A sheepskin saddle to his seat or head,
And Here and Now his permanent address.



The Crystal

To form the idiom of her flesh
I faceted in clearest thought
An arctic crystal in whose mesh
Of frosty rays the sun is caught
That from its central pulse of fire
Vibrates the arrebol it stains,
And forks the azure of her veins
Through flushed auroras of desire.
Though nerves of splendour lace the jewel,
Though to my rasp its ice be fuel
And bright within it burn the brands:
I might have breathed upon a glass—
To feel my purpose through it pass
It runs like water through my hands.

The Hat

Beneath our feet we heard the soaring larks;
The sunlight had the hum of winnowed chaff,
And the blue wind was sown with tingling sparks,
That blew my hat away to make you laugh.
Over the land it sailed, collecting height,
Flapped in the face of each offended crow,
And scared the speckled falcon of the Baux,
Adventurously taunting it to fight.
Like Saturn's in its whirling shady brim,
Far down, its giant shadow coursed the plain—
Never did autogyre so lively skim
As did the flying discus of my brain;
And though my skull, a mile or so behind,
Left to the cold phrenologizing wind,
Shone bald and egg-like in the noonday sun—
This fantasy was left to hatch alone,
A sudden brainwave, breaching through the bone,
That for a breathless minute made us one
With that unsated wish in us, that lives
Out of this merely positive degree
In the wide region of superlatives,
Translating every rash hyperbole
We utter, into life and action there;
Out of our foibles founding pyramids;
And friezing dizzy Parthenons of air
With deeds that our heredity forbids.

A Jug of Water

To Armand Guibert

The snow-born sylph, her spools of glory spun,
Forgets the singing journeys that she came
To fill this frosty chrysalis of flame
Where sleeps a golden echo of the Sun.

The silver life and swordplay of the noon
Caught in mid-slash; the wildfire of the scar
Whose suds of thunder in a crystal jar
Compose a silent image of the moon.

Shut rainbow; hushed appeasement of the spray;
Meeting of myriad dews, as if to show
Aurora's hand from out whose cup of snow
The solar horses drink the fires of day.

A masquer so anonymously white
Who smiles without a face: a cloister frail
In whose clear precinct music takes the veil
And sings, but to the vision, with its light;—

It was the psalm and incense of the plain,
The sleep-heard music humming on the roofs,
The candle lighted by our horses' hoofs
When we rode home by moonlight after rain.

When tinder to a star it lay at night
Holding it like a glow-worm in its hand;
Or in a shallow ripple shaved the sand
Filming a stormy shipwreck of the light—

Still was its only study to acquire
Embryon ecstasies, the sperm of power—
Rose of the dawn, or nimbus of the shower
To sail, a ship of love, on seas of fire.

Its luck was always to sustain a King,
The jingled spur and stirrup of the cloud—
To launch a swan by the same art endowed
Or smooth the pebbles for a David's sling.

True phoenix-fuel whom no burning mars
But pain and fire resuscitate afresh,
It has put on all forms of flame or flesh
And trawled the lovely bodies of the stars.

And once it was a youth before he died
To form this lily-calyx for the light,
Who made a pond his palace of delight
And thought himself beside the sun enskied.

With stars and flying clouds about him rolled
High in that silver paradise ensphered,
Down from his gaze his fatal beauty sheered,
A marble precipice, with ferns of gold.

Echo his dirge, the zephyr is his shroud,
Whose pride with running water was but one:
And both a brief reflection of the sun

Which any sigh suffices for a cloud.

Though every passing yearner for the skies
Out of his glass construct a secret hell,
If with our own reflections we must dwell
Let them be seen in one another's eyes.

This crystal by a different hand is wheeled,
And here the sun its circle seems to dim
That we may see undazzled through to Him
Of whom it is the mirror or the shield.

Stagnant in drains where beauty scorns to bathe,
Yet who has seen it unalloyed with Light
Has seen black snow, has seen unanswered faith,
And courage unrewarded with delight.

Pool in the grime by city lanterns scarred,
Stainless it still from every contact came
As the light incense, orphan of the flame,
Survives the baser fuel it has charred.

Sight of the Earth, for every star an eye,
The element by which it sees and thinks,
It signs upon that stark and rocky Sphinx
Her smile of resignation to the sky.

Here though in exile from the singing shower,
It seems to boast its quiet faith—'To me
The world is like a trogon-feathered tree
That never sheds its leaves except to flower.'

It says it is the blossom in our blood

With folded petals smiling out the sere,
Brown, shuffled slippers of the limping year—
The leaves that drift and whisper in the mud.

Complain those burned brown leaves? then let
 them go!
(Though who should whimper whom the sun has
 kissed?)

That flowers may come, outsilvering the mist,
To stain the boasted ermines of the snow.

And now the world's great autumn blows at last,
The brown horde yells before it, questing death—
Folding its cape, this waits with baited breath
To flaunt its cool evasion of the blast.

White armour of the world's exultant strife,
In it the sunbeam is a lance at rest:
And like a sword the lightning in its breast
Lies hidden, with the miracle of life.

Wings, flowers, and flames are folded in its peace

This common water where the sunlight falls;
Shake it, and from your hand you can release
A flight of coloured pigeons round the walls.

Rest, twinkling valour! on my friendly sill
When sheep are rabid, serpents well may rest.
(Coil, Christian Tagus, round the sacred hill,
That wears the steep Alcazar for a crest!)

But when your great commandos, in the rain

Shall gallop singing on our thirsty lands,
Down on my knees, my hat between my hands,
I'll drink the huge elation of the plain.

Your spirit sings (and to its sister sprite)
That love is God, that dying is renewal,
That we are flames, and the black world is fuel
To hearts that burn and battle for delight.



To the Survivors

For the Marquis of Baroncelli-Javon

The rust that paints their cities red
And makes their cast-iron idols reel:
The russet locust-swarm that's spread
Upon their wilting crops of steel:—

This gift of our protecting Sire,
The Solar Christ, to purge the lands—
Is like the good Promethean fire
At which to warm our scatheless hands.

By it the human heart relumed,
Shall blaze once more with ruby light—
The strong shall seize it unconsumed,
The rest will crumble at its sight.

The brave from out its grudging crust
Will pull the treasure that it keeps—
Within the red sheath of the rust,
The white Excalibur that sleeps:—

One from its ash breathe new desire;
One from its embers snatch the Star
That glances with a triple fire
And tips the Trident of Cailar^[13]:—

One will blow flames, when nations drowse,
With which to burn prophetic lips:
And some find shares, with cruiser-prows
To heave the curling turf like ships.

Then, like Niagara set free,
Ride on, you fine Commando^[14]: vain
Were looking back, for all you'd see
Were 'Charlies' running for their train!

For none save those are worthy birth
Who neither life nor death will shun:
And we plough deepest in the Earth
Who ride the nearest to the Sun.



After the Horse-fair

A mule, the snowball of a beast!
(Ring out the duros, test the tune)
And a guitar, the midnight lark,
That rises silvering the dark
An hour before the rosy-fleeced
Arrival of the Moon.

The gypsies quarried from the gloom,
For their carouse, a silver hall:
And jingled harness filled the lands
With gay pesetas changing hands,
So silvery, there seemed no room
For any moon at all.

Two figtrees on a whitewashed wall
Were playing chess; a lamp was queen:
Beneath the civil guard were seen
With tricornered hats—a game of cards:
One bottle was between them all,
Good health, and kind regards.

A stable with an open door
And in the yard a dying hound:
Out on the dunes a broken spoor
Converging into twenty more—
When torches had been flashed around
Was all they could restore.

A wind that blows from other countries
Shook opals from the vernal palms
Birdshot of the silver huntress
By which the nightingale was slain:
With stitch of fire the distant farms
Were threaded by the train.

One rider, then, and all alone—
The long Castilian Veld before:
To show the way his shadow straight
Went on ahead and would not wait,
But seemed, so infinitely grown,
Equator to the moor.

Till with a faint adoring thunder,
Their lances raised to Christ the King,
Through all the leagues he had to go—
An army chanting smooth and low,
Across the long mirage of wonder
He heard the steeples sing.

And as, far off, the breaking morn
Had hit the high seraphic town,
He prayed for lonesome carbineers
And wakeful lovers, rash of years,
Who've harvested the lunar corn
Before the crops were brown.

For thieves: the gate-man late and lonely
With his green flag; for tramps that sprawl:
And lastly for a frozen guy
That towed six mules along the sky

And felt among them all the only,
Or most a mule of all!



Faith

To Wyndham Lewis

While the land drowns
And through the spacious hours
The dark herd browses,
Low horns with level sweep
Like sickles, half in sleep,
The golden lilies reap
And mow the flowers.

White egrets^[15] ride
Each bossy croup and dome
Of sombre hide,
Like silver plumes that wave
Black hearses to the grave
Or on the midnight wave
The torching foam:—

Some of them bolder
Flit round my horse: and one
Lights on my shoulder
Preening his ermine there
But with as little care
As of the passing air
Or faded sun.

Signal and sign
Of snowy truce to men!
Unfurl the fine
White thistles of your frills,
Fan from my brain its ills,
And from your slender quills
Shed me a pen—

That I may write
All that from here I mark:
How, singed with light,
Black-bodied though it goes
The hornèd crescent shows,
Where one hind-quarter glows,
Branded, the Dark!

Though from a star—
So horned, so black with spite,
Might seem from far
The thunder-bearing world
Through soot and fury hurled,
On its dark hump is furled
A flame as white.

Cyphered with Light
(Its Master's brand and name)
Though dim to sight,
Its shadow loom to seat
The solar paraclete
Faint-silvered, like a sleet
Of ghostly flame—

Just as this moon,
Far straying bull, now lost
Beyond the dune:
It bears an egret white
To torch it through the night,
Save but to Faith, its light
A wraith of frost.

Patience will keep
That phantom torch aglow
That seems asleep
To all but watchful eyes:
And live to see it rise
Sun-drawn into the skies
With swans of snow.

For they'll survive
Who from an offal-leap
Can feed and thrive,
Thanking their God for life,
As for a friend or wife;
And count the pain or strife
As over-cheap.

To be a slave
Content: or driven, first
Of the mad wave,
In the front rank to fight—
What matter Left or Right,
So in our hearts the light
For which we thirst?

For humble herds are we
As those with which we ride,
And daily see
In our toil, that warns,
The boaster with his scorns
Thrown by the very horns
That were his pride.

Then—with the worst
Accepted, best to trust—
Only can burst
This passion so divine
As blackens all the shine
Of wealth, the lust of wine,
The wine of lust—

The seeded spark
That in the few can spring,
To whom the dark
Is room and scope; the Night,
When most a foe to sight,
The fiercest appetite
For what we bring.

From sky to sky that bleeds
Derided warnings,
As hornèd Tagus leads
His myriad waves to graze
With moonèd brows ablaze,
To trample down the days
And toss the mornings!—

Our chosen herds,
All torch-lit with the snow
Of ghostly birds,
Mooned by the droving Light
And surging on with might,
Are rivers to the Night
Through which we go!



Familiar Dæmon

Measuring out my life in flagons
(No coffee-spoon to skim the flood)
You were the prince of thirsty dragons,
The gay carouser of my blood:
We could not part, our love was such,
But gasconading, shared the fun
While every cripple's shouldered crutch
Was sighted at me like a gun.
What sport to-day? to swim or fly?
Or fish for thunder in the sky?
What laughter out of hell to fetch,
Or joy from peril, have you planned,
You sunward rider, that you stretch
The downswung stirrup of my hand?

Vaquero to his Wife

Since from his charred mechanic Hells
Now to his native form restored,
The azure soul of Steel rebels
Refulgent in a single Sword
Whose edge of Famine, honed with ire,
Flames forth his threat to all the lands
Where wheels and furnaces conspire
To rob the skill from human hands,
From human hearts the solar fire;
And since the yellow, spangled Fay
Rifting her dungeons to the day,
Bewitching all, in havoc flies
To daunt the great and fool the wise,
And scatter carnage in her play,
But soon, her fearful vengeance done,
Will sparkle only for the eyes
And be a daughter to the Sun—
By what laws other should we hold
Than those they leave without repeal,
That breathed your cheeks with down of Gold
And shinned my horse with rods of Steel?

The Dead Torero

Such work can be the mischief of an hour.
This drunken-looking doll without a face
Was lovely Florentino. This was grace
And virtue smiling on the face of Power.

Shattered, that slim Toledo-tempered spine!
Hollow, the chrysalis, his gentle hand,
From which those wide imperial moths were
 fanned
Each in its hushed miraculous design!

He was the bee, with danger for his rose!
He died the sudden violence of Kings,
And from the bullring to the Virgin goes
Floating his cape. He has no need for wings.

Pomegranates

To Thomas Earp

Sung by the nightingale to birth
Whose ringing pearls were all the dew
With which, the long dry summer through,
The rainless azure fed their dearth—

Pomegranates, colder than the noon,
In whom a maiden breast rebels,
Forcing the smooth gold of their shells
To split with rubies to the moon.

In whose half-opened husks we see,
Where the rich blood of autumn swells,
The membranes and the rosy cells
To which the sunbeam was the bee:—

Like musing brows with patience fraught
Until their secret gems be shown,
And through their inward toil alone
Made royal with a crown of thought:—

As to some poet's labours wed
To dream Golcondas from despair,
Till some pure act of faith or prayer
Shall freeze the crimson tears they shed:—

Like lovers' hearts to ripeness grown
The rapturous red wine they bleed
Is chambered in each lustrous seed
As light within a carven stone.

Warm-flushing through their films of frost
With rosy smiles and crystal teeth
A yielding beauty seems to breathe
Whose language on our lips is lost.

Their speech in coolness dies away,
Thawed by a breath, they change and tremble
As the lips they most resemble
When one red kiss is all they say.

Too fain in fragrance to escape,
Their form eludes the clearest phrase
When Psyche, in a sister's praise,
Would carve her crystals in their shape.

In vain her vision seeks to prove
The secret structure of those grains
Whose dewy membranes and lit veins
Remind her most of those I love.

If new similitudes to try,
Fusing them with her speech, she sips
Those seeds whose death upon the lips
Is half a kiss and half a sigh—

Moulding those phrases with her tongue
That melt as sweetly, by a spell
So transient that she cannot tell

If they be tasted, kissed, or sung—

Their gems so ruddy to the eye
Are snow upon the mouth that sips:
But even when they cheat the lips
And, born of song, on perfume die,—

Are most conspiring with her theme
The true resemblance to disclose,
And tell the secrets of the rose
Whose changing reveries they seem.



Vaquero's Lament on getting a Cheque

With a black streamer fasten our guitar
For mourning is the colour we must choose—
Black as my horse, the darker for a star,
Who shoals the glittering mackerel of his thews
In one great midnight wave—to match your hair.
(As he is to the ground, it to the air,
Liquid and light, a traveller in fire.)
Then pour the wine; for whose one ruby spark,
Its gloom is more religious, deep, and dark,
And turn on me the eyes that never tire,
Darker than wine is, darker than your hair,
Yet burnished by the same eternal morning.
I am in love with black; and we go mourning
(Girl, horse, guitar, and wine) for buried care.

Dedication of a Tree

To 'Peter Warlock'

This laurel-tree to Heseltine I vow
With one cicada silvering its shade—
Who lived, like him, a golden gasconade,
And will die whole when winter burns the bough:
Who in one hour, resounding, clear, and strong,
A century of ant-hood far out-glow,
And burns more sunlight in a single song
Than they can store against the winter snows.



Toril

CROWD Another Bull! another Bull!

OX You heard?

Your number's up, the people gave the
word!

BULL Feasted on flowers, the darling of the days,
To-day I've ghastly asphodels to graze,
Harsh sand to bite, and my own blood to
swill—

Whose dewlap loved the golden-rolling
rill,

When through the rushes, burnished like
its tide,

The lovely cirrus of my thews would
slide,

My heart flame-glazing through the silken
skin

Joy of its mighty furnace lit within.

These crescent horns that scimitared the
moon,

These eyes, the flaming emeralds of noon,
Whose orbs were fuel to the deathless
rays

And burned the long horizon with their
gaze—

All now to be cut down, and soon to trail

A sledge of carrion at a horse's tail!

OX Flame in the flaming noon, I've seen you run.
The Anvil of Toledo's now your Sun,
Whose angry dawn beyond these gates
has spread
Its crimson cape, the sunrise of the dead:
Whose iron clangs for you, whose doom
you feel,
The target of its burnished ray of steel!

BULL Ox as you are, what should you know of
this
Who never neared the verge of that
abyss?

OX Ox as I am, none better knows than I
Who led your father's father here to die.
Declaiming clown, I am the mute, the
wise;
Poets would read enigmas in my eyes.
My being is confederate with pain,
Mine to endure as yours is to complain;
I am the thinker, satisfied to know,
And bought this wisdom for a life of woe.
Be brave, be patient, and reserve your
breath.

BULL But tell me what is blacker than this Death?

OX My impotence.

BULL It was your soul that spoke!—

More hideous than this martyrdom?

OX The Yoke!



Written in the Horse-truck

Full of adieus as this late train
The World's great Autumn blows at last
And far and shrill across the plain
Whistles the engine of the Past.
Stitching the night with threads of fire,
A stream of fire-flies lit with pain,
Though Life should prove a shunting train
That rumbles on the wheels of ire,
With contraband I've lit my pipe
The strong tobacco of my Luck,
There are few tears for us to wipe
Who travel in the cheapest truck
Whose lamp swings like an orange, ripe
And ready for the Muse to pluck.

Rust

See there, and there it gnaws, the Rust—
Voet-ganger^[16] of the coming swarm
Whose winged innumerable storm
Shall grind their pylons into dust.

Whose dropped asphyxiating dung
Shall fall exploding blood and mire;
Whose cropping teeth of rattled fire
Shall make one cud of old and young;—

Till turning from the carnage then
Themselves in anger to devour,
Shall die a race of weary men—

And all to spring the dainty flower
That, herding on that blasted heath,
A cowboy chews between his teeth.

Junction of Rails: Voice of the Steel

Cities of cinemas and lighted bars,
Smokers of tall bituminous cigars,
Whose evenings are a smile of golden teeth—
Upon your cenotaphs I lay this wreath
And so commend you to the moon and stars.

For I attain your presence in the dark
Deriding gossip Reuter's twittered spark
And reach you rails that, swifter in career,
Arrive as due as they depart from here—
I am a tour on which the hours embark.

Through me the moon, in ruled meridian steel,
Unwinding journeys from a burnished reel,
Stitches the world with threads of fire: each clue,
Pulleys with rolling-stock as webs with dew,
A nerve for sleeping capitals to feel.

Their life-blood circulating in my veins,
With runnelled iron I irrigate the plains
And spider touring metal through the rock,
While to the same tentacular tick-tock
My scarecrow signals semaphore their trains.

Under this bleak mechanical display
I screen an inward knowledge, when the day
X-rays the fingers of my open hand

Over the chess-board acres of the land
Whose towns are shifted peons in the play.

Progress, the blue macadam of their dream,
Its railed and shining hippodrome of steam,
Glazed by cool horsepower, varnished clean with
 wheels,
Filming their destiny in endless reels,
Defers the formal ending that they scheme.

They greet each other in these gliding cars,
Read the same nightly journal of the stars,
And when the rail rings I can hear the bells
Ringing for dinner in the world's hotels
And after that that the closing of the bars.

Though they have taught the lightning how to lie
And made their wisdom to misread the sky
I hold their pulses: through my ringing loom
Their trains with flying shuttles weave a doom
I am too sure a prophet to defy.

And when they jargon through the wind and rain
Breathing false hopes upon a frosty pane,
I hear the sad electrocuted words
Thud from the wires like stiffly-frozen birds
That warming hands resuscitate in vain.

The de Profundis of each canine hell
Voices their needs in its voluptuous swell:
While from the slums the radio's hollow strain
From hungry guts ventriloquizing pain

Belies them, as it sobs that all is well.

Then like a flawless magnet to the fact
Into my secret knowledge I attract
Their needles of dissimulated fear
Whose trembling fingers indicate me here
The focus of their every mood and act.

What hopes are theirs, what knowledge they forgo
From day to day procrastinating woe—
I, balancing each project and desire,
Funambulize upon my strands of fire
Too many aspirations not to know.

I am plexus of their myriad schemes,
And were I flesh the ruin would undo me
Of all the purposes they sinew through me,
Of thwarted embassies, and beaten teams,
And home-returning honeymoons as gloomy.

How shrill the long hosannas of despair
With which those to-fro scolopendras bear,
Statesmen to conferences, troops to war—
All that concerted effort can restore
Like rattled cans to porters of despair!

But in the waiting-room where Time has beckoned
His vanguard, every moment must be reckoned
And fierce anticipation push the clock
Though for each same reiterated second
The whole world swing its pendulum of rock.

Far on the plain my waving pennons stream,

In the blue light the white horsetailing steam:
Or where they storm the night with rosy cirrus—
(Armoured incendiary, plummy Pyrrhus!)
Through palaces of ice where eagles scream.

From fog-red docks, the sink of rotting drains,
Where, tipsy giants, reel the workless cranes:
Where in dead liners, that the rust attacks,
Sprung decks think back beyond the saw and axe,
And masts put on the green of country lanes—

I tentacle the news: relay the mails:
And sense the restive anger that prevails
Wherever shafts descend or girders rise:
And day and night their steel-to-steel replies
Hum in my bolts and tingle in my rails.

These tons of metal rusting in the rain
(Iron on strike) are singing one refrain:
Let steel hang idle, burning rust devour,
Till Beauty smile upon the face of Power
And Love unsheathe me from the rust again . . .

My rails that rove me through the whispered corn
Bring me the tidings of a world unborn:
My sleepers escalating to the skies
Beyond the far horizons seem to rise
And form a Jacob's ladder to the morn.

And I often thought by lonely sidings—
What shepherd or what cowboy in his ridings
Forges the Sword so terrible and bright

That brings not peace, but fury of delight,
And of whose coming I have had the tidings.

They are the tidings of a world's relief:
My aching rails run out for their belief
To where a halted Star or rising Crescent
Above a byre or sheepfold hangs quiescent,
And meditation reaps the golden sheaf—

The joy that veld and kopje thrice restored
To that bleak wilderness the city horde—
When once the living radios of God,
By ravens fed, the lonely places trod,
And talked with foxes, and with lions roared.

A sword is singing and a scythe is reaping
In those great pylons prostrate in the dust,
Death has a sword of valour in his keeping
To arm our souls towards the future leaping:
And holy holy holy is the rust
Wherein the blue Excaliburs are sleeping!



Toledo, July 1936

Toledo, when I saw you die
And heard the roof of Carmel crash,
A spread-winged phoenix from its ash
The Cross remained against the sky!
With horns of flame and haggard eye
The mountain vomited with blood,
A thousand corpses down the flood
Were rolled gesticulating by,
And high above the roaring shells
I heard the silence of your bells
Who've left these broken stones behind
Above the years to make your home,
And burn, with Athens and with Rome,
A sacred city of the mind.

Hot Rifles

Our rifles were too hot to hold,
The night was made of tearing steel,
And down the street the volleys rolled
Where as in prayer the snipers kneel.
From every cranny, rift, or creek,
I heard the fatal furies scream,
And the moon held the river's gleam
Like a long rifle to its cheek.
Of all that fearful fusillade
I reckoned not the gain or loss
To see (her every forfeit paid)
And grander, though her riches fade,
Toledo, hammered on the Cross,
And in her Master's wounds arrayed.

Christ in Uniform

Close at my side a girl and boy
Fell firing, in the doorway here,
Collapsing with a strangled cheer
As on the very couch of joy,
And onward through a wall of fire
A thousand others rolled the surge,
And where a dozen men expire
A hundred myrmidons emerge—
As if the Christ, our Solar Sire,
Magnificent in their intent,
Returned the bloody way he went,
Of so much blood, of such desire,
And so much valour proudly spent,
To weld a single heart of fire.

The Alcazar Mined

This Rock of Faith, the thunder-blasted—
Eternity will hear it rise
With those who (Hell itself out-lasting)
Will lift it with them to the skies!
Till whispered through the depths of Hell
The censored Miracle be known,
And flabbergasted Fiends re-tell
How fiercer tortures than their own
By living faith were overthrown;
How mortals, thinned to ghastly pallor,
Gangrened and rotting to the bone,
With winged souls of Christian valour
Beyond Olympus or Valhalla
Can heave ten thousand tons of stone!

The Mocking Bird

Like an old Cobra broken with a stick,
As in the ward with other crocks I lay
(Flies on the roof their sole arithmetic
Which they must count to pass the time of day)—
Born of my wound, or out of Bosch remembered,
Or by my own delirium designed,
A strange blue bird, it seemed I knew the kind
And the fierce look with which his eyes were
embered,

For they had been spectators of the Fall—
Perched on my foot, I knew his ringing call,
And ‘Shoo!’ I cried, ‘you phantom, fade away!
For here are canyons forested with sleep,
The woods are silent, and the shades are deep,
While you intrude the colours of the day.
I flinch before your lit triumphal pinion,
Your bloodshot gaze, the memory of strife,
Your cry, the laughing mockery of Life,
So raucous here, where sleep should have
dominion!’

But as he would have flown I rose to follow,
A will was born where all things else were
hollow,
And through those caverns of ancestral cedar
Where all but downward streams had lost their
way

His voice of mocking laughter was my leader—
The blue hallucination of a jay!



The Fight

One silver-white and one of scarlet hue,
Storm-hornets humming in the wind of death,
Two aeroplanes were fighting in the blue
Above our town; and if I held my breath,
It was because my youth was in the Red
While in the White an unknown pilot flew—
And that the White had risen overhead.

From time to time the crackle of a gun
Far into flawless ether faintly railed,
And now, mosquito-thin, into the Sun,
And now like mating dragonflies they sailed:
And, when like eagles near the earth they drove,
The Red, still losing what the White had won,
The harder for each lost advantage strove.

So lovely lay the land—the towers and trees
Taking the seaward counsel of the stream:
The city seemed, above the far-off seas,
The crest and turret of a Jacob's dream,
And those two gun-birds in their frantic spire
At death-grips for its ultimate regime—
Less to be whirled by anger than desire.

Till (Glory!) from his chrysalis of steel
The Red flung wide the fatal fans of fire:
I saw the long flames, ribboning, unreel,

And slow bitumen trawling from his pyre.
I knew the ecstasy, the fearful throes,
And the white phoenix from his scarlet sire,
As silver in the Solitude he rose.

The towers and trees were lifted hymns of praise,
The city was a prayer, the land a nun:
The noonday azure strumming all its rays
Sang that a famous battle had been won,
As signing his white Cross, the very Sun,
The Solar Christ and captain of my days
Zoomed to the zenith; and his will was done.



Christ in the Hospital

Al Padre Evaristo, Carmelita Descalzo, Toledo

Ixions of the slow wheel of the day
They had come down at last, but not to stay,
And at the fall of night, with even sway,
Were slowly wheeling up the other way.

And he who felt the finest in the Ward
Was scarcely better than a broken stick;
His spine ran through him like a rusty sword
Rasping its meagre scabbard to the quick.

Through the dim pane he saw the stars take flight
Like pigeons scattered by the crash and groan
Of the great world, with pendulum of stone
Dingdonging in the steeple of the Night.

He heard, far off, the people stream their course
Whipped by their pleasures into frantic tops—
As the grey multitude (when twilight drops)
Goes out to trade its boredom for remorse.

The Moon, a soldier with a bleeding eye,
Returning to the war, beheld these things.
And long grey tom-cats crept across the sky
Between the chimneys where the wireless sings.

Never seemed anything so steep or tall
(Sierra, iceberg, or the tower of noon),
As what he saw when turning from the moon—
The bloody Christ that hung upon the wall!

Great Albatross, of every storm the Birth!—
His bleeding pinions bracketed a Night
Too small for His embrace; and from his height,
As from an Eagle's, cowered the plaintive Earth!



Posada

Outside, it froze. On rocky arms
Sleeping face-upwards to the sun
Lay Spain. Her golden hair was spun
From sky to sky. Her mighty charms
Breathed soft beneath her robe of farms
And gardens: while her snowy breasts,
Sierras white, with crimson crests,
Were stained with sunset. At the Inn,
A priest, a soldier, and a poet
(Fate-summoned, though they didn't know it)
Met there, a shining hour to win.
A song, a blessing, and a grin
Were melted in one cup of mirth,
The Eternal Triumvirs of Earth
Foresaw their golden age begin.

TALKING BRONCO (1946)



Luís de Camões

Camões, alone, of all the lyric race,
Born in the black aurora of disaster,
Can look a common soldier in the face:
I find a comrade where I sought a master:
For daily, while the stinking crocodiles
Glide from the mangroves on the swampy shore,
He shares my awning on the dhow, he smiles,
And tells me that he lived it all before.
Through fire and shipwreck, pestilence and loss,
Led by the ignis fatuus of duty
To a dog's death—yet of his sorrows king—
He shouldered high his voluntary Cross,
Wrestled his hardships into forms of beauty,
And taught his gorgon destinies to sing.

The Skull in the Desert

To Desmond MacCarthy

I am not one his bread who peppers
With stars of nebulous illusion,
But learned, with soldiers, mules, and lepers
As comrades of my education,
The Economy of desolation
And Architecture of confusion

On the bare sands, where nothing else is
Save death, and like a lark in love,
Gyrating through the vault above,
The ace of all created things
Flies singing Gloria in Excelsis
And spreads the daybreak from his wings:

I found a horse's empty cranium,
Which the hyenas had despised,
Wherein the wind ventriloquised
And fluting huskily afar
Sang of the rose and the geranium
And evenings lit with azahar.

Foaled by the Apocalypse, and stranded
Some wars, or plagues, or famines back,
To bleach beside the desert track,

He kept his hospitable rule:
A pillow for the roving bandit,
A signpost to the stricken mule.

A willing host, adeptly able,
Smoking a long cheroot of flame,
To catalyse the sniper's aim
Or entertain the poet's dream,
By turns a gunrest or a table,
An inspiration, and a theme—

He served the desert for a Sphinx
And to the wind for a guitar,
For in the harmony he drinks
To rinse his whirring casque of bone
There hums a rhythm less its own
Than of the planet and the star.

No lion with a lady's face
Could better have become the spot
Interrogating time and space
And making light of their replies
As he endured the soldier's lot
Of dissolution, sand, and flies.

So white a cenotaph to show
You did not have to be a banker
Or poet of the breed we know:
Subjected to a sterner law,
The luckless laughter of the ranker
Was sharked upon his lipless jaw.

All round, the snarled and windrowed sands
Expressed the scandal of the waves,
And in this orphan of the graves
As in a conch, there seemed to roar
Reverberations of the Hand
That piles the wrecks along the shore.

Twice I had been the Ocean's refuse
As now the flotsam of the sand,
Far worse at sea upon the land
Than ever in the drink before
For Triton, with his sons and nephews,
To gargle and to puke ashore.

To look on him, my tongue could taste
The bony mandibles of death
Between my cheeks: across the waste
The drought was glaring like a gorgon
But in that quaint outlandish organ
With spectral whinny, whirled the breath.

The wind arrived, the gorgon-slayer,
Defied the wind that rose to whelm it,
And swirled like water in the helmet
Of that dead brain, with crystal voices,
Articulating in a prayer
The love with which the rain rejoices—

The zephyr from the blue Nevadas,
Stirrugged with kestrels, smoothly rinking
The level wave where halcyons drowse,
Came with the whirr of the cicadas,

With the green song of orchards drinking
And orioles fluting in the boughs.

All the green juices of creation,
And those with which our veins are red,
Were mingled in his jubilation
And sang the swansong of the planet
Amidst the solitudes of granite
And the grey sands that swathe the dead.

All I had left of will or mind,
Which fire or fever had not charred,
Was but the shaving, husk, and shard:
But that sufficed to catch the air
And from the pentecostal wind
Conceive the whisper of a prayer.

And soon that prayer became a hymn
By feeding on itself. The skies
Were tracered by the seraphim
With arrows from the dim guitars
That on their strings funambulise
The tap-dance of the morning stars.

When frowsy proverbs lose their force
And tears have dried their queasy springs,
To hope and pray for crowns and wings
It follows as a thing of course,
When you've phrenologised the horse
That on the desert laughs and sings.

I leave the Helmet and the Spear

To the hyena-bellied muses
That farm this carnage from the rear:
But of the sacrifice they fear
And of the strain their sloth refuses
Elect me as the engineer.

Make of my bones your fife and organ,
Red winds of pestilence and fire!
But from the rust on the barbed-wire
And scurf upon the pool that stinks
I fetch a nosegay for the Gorgon
And a conundrum for the Sphinx:

For all the freight of Stygian ferries,
Roll on the days of halcyon weather,
The oriole fluting in the cherries,
The sunlight sleeping on the farms,
To say the Rosary together
And sleep in one another's arms!

San Juan de la Cruz

To Eve Kirk

When that brown bird, whose fusillading heart
Is triggered on a thorn the dark night through,
Has slain the only rival of his art
That burns, with flames for feathers, in the blue—
I think of him in whom those rivals met
To burn and sing, both bird and star, in one:
The planet slain, the nightingale would set
To leave a pyre of roses for the Sun.
His voice an iris through its rain of jewels—
Or are they tears, those embers of desire,
Whose molten brands each gust of song re-fuels?

—

He crucifies his heart upon his lyre,
Phoenix of Song, whose deaths are his renewals,
With pollen for his cinders, bleeding fire!



En Una Noche Oscura

(Translated from St. John of the Cross)

Upon a gloomy night,
With all my cares to loving ardours flushed,
(O venture of delight!)
With nobody in sight
I went abroad when all the house was hushed.

In safety, in disguise,
In darkness, up the secret stair I crept,
(O happy enterprise!)
Concealed from other eyes
When all my home at length in silence slept.

Upon that lucky night,
In secrecy, inscrutable to sight,
I went without discerning
And with no other light
Except for that which in my heart was burning.

It lit and led me through,
More certain than the light of noonday clear,
To where One waited near
Whose presence well I knew,
There, where no other presence might appear.

O Night that was my guide!
O Darkness dearer than the morning's pride,
O Night that joined the lover
To the beloved bride,
Transfiguring them each into the other!

Within my flowering breast,
Which only for himself entire I save,
He sank into his rest
And all my gifts I gave,
Lulled by the airs with which the cedars wave.

Over the ramparts fanned,
While the fresh wind was fluttering his tresses,
With his serenest hand
My neck he wounded, and
Suspended every sense in its caresses.

Lost to myself I stayed,
My face upon my lover having laid
From all endeavour ceasing:
And, all my cares releasing,
Threw them amongst the lilies there to fade.



Songs between the Soul and the Bridegroom

(Translated from St. John of the Cross)

BRIDE Where can your hiding be,
Beloved, that you left me thus to moan
While like the stag you flee
Leaving the wound with me?
I followed calling loud, but you had
flown.

O shepherds, you that, yonder,
Go through the sheepfolds of the slope on
high,
If you, as there you wander,
Should chance my love to spy,
Then tell him that I suffer, grieve, and die.

To fetch my loves more near,
Amongst these mountains and ravines I'll
stray,
Nor pluck flowers, nor for fear
Of prowling beasts delay,
But pass through forts and frontiers on my
way.

O thickets, densely-trammelled,
Which my love's hand has sown along the

height:
O field of green, enamelled
With blossoms, tell me right
If he has passed across you in his flight.

Diffusing showers of grace
In haste among these groves his path he
took,
And only with his face,
Glancing around the place,
Has clothed them in his beauty with a
look.

O who my grief can mend!
Come, make the last surrender that I yearn
for,
And let there be an end
Of messengers you send
Who bring me other tidings than I burn
for.

All those that haunt the spot
Recount your charm, and wound me
worst of all
Babbling I know not what
Strange rapture they recall
Which leaves me stretched and dying
where I fall.

How can you thus continue
To live, my life, where your own life is
not?

With all the arrows in you
And, like a target, shot
By that which in your breast he has begot.

Why then did you so pierce
My heart, nor heal it with your touch
 sublime?

Why, like a robber fierce,
Desert me every time
And not enjoy the plunder of your crime?

Come, end my sufferings quite
Since no-one else suffices for physician:
And let mine eyes have sight
Of you, who are their light,
Except for whom I scorn the gift of
 vision.

Reveal your presence clearly
And kill me with the beauty you discover,
For pains acquired so dearly
From love, cannot recover
Save only through the presence of the
 lover.

O brook of crystal sheen,
Could you but cause, upon your silver
 fine,
Suddenly to be seen
The eyes for which I pine
Which in my inmost heart my thoughts
 design!

With-hold their gaze, my Love,
For I take wing.

BRIDEGROOM Turn, Ringdove, and alight.
The wounded stag above
The slope is now in sight
Fanned by the wind and freshness of your
flight.

BRIDE My love's the mountain range,
The valleys each with solitary grove,
The islands that are strange,
The streams with sounds that change,
The whistling of the lovesick winds that
rove.

Before the dawn comes round
Here is the night, dead-hushed with all its
glamours,
The music without sound,
The solitude that clamours,
The supper that revives us and enamours.

Now flowers the marriage bed
With dens of lions fortified around it
With tent of purple spread,
In peace securely founded,
And by a thousand shields of gold
surmounted.

Tracking your sandal-mark
The maidens search the roadway for your

sign,
Yearning to catch the spark
And taste the scented wine
That emanate a balm that is divine.

Deep-cellar'd is the cavern
Of my love's heart, I drank of him alive:
Now, stumbling from the tavern,
No thoughts of mine survive,
And I have lost the flock I used to drive.

He gave his breast; seraphic
In savour was the science that he taught;
And there I made my traffic
Of all, withholding naught,
And promised to become the bride he
sought.

My spirit I prepare
To serve him with her riches and her
beauty.
No flocks are now my care,
No other toil I share,
And only now in loving is my duty.

So now if from this day
I am not found among the haunts of men,
Say that I went astray,
Love-stricken, from my way,
That I was lost, but have been found
again.

Of flowers and emerald's sheen
Collected when the dews of dawning
shine,
A wreath of garlands green
(That flower for you) we'll twine
Together with one golden hair of mine.

One hair (upon my nape
You loved to watch it flutter, fall, and
rise)
Preventing your escape
Has snared you for a prize
And held you to be wounded from my
eyes.

When you at first surmised me
Your gaze was on my eyes imprinted so,
That it effeminised me,
And my eyes were not slow
To worship that which set your own
aglow.

Scorn not my humble ways,
And if my hue is tawny do not loathe me.
On me you well may gaze
Since, after that, the rays
Of every grace and loveliness will clothe
me.

Chase all the foxes hence
Because our vine already flowers apace:
And while with roses dense

Our posy we enlace,
Let no one on the hillside show his face.

Cease, then, you arctic gale,
And come, recalling love, wind of the
South:

Within my garden-pale
The scent of flowers exhale
Which my Beloved browses with his
mouth.

BRIDEGROOM Now, as she long aspired,
Into the garden comes the bride, a guest:
And in its shade retired
Has leant her neck to rest
Against the gentle arm of the Desired.

Beneath the apple-tree,
You came to swear your troth and to be
mated,
Gave there your hand to me,
And have been new-created
There where your mother first was
violated.

You birds with airy wings,
Lions, and stags, and roebucks leaping
light,
Hills, valleys, creeks, and springs,
Waves, winds, and ardours bright,
And things that rule the watches of the
night:

By the sweet lyre and call
Of sirens, now I conjure you to cease
Your tumults one and all,
Nor echo on the wall
That she may sleep securely and at peace.

BRIDE Oh daughters of Judea,
While yet our flowers and roses in their
flesh hold
Ambrosia, come not near,
But keep the outskirts clear
And do not dare to pass across our
threshold.

Look to the mountain peak,
My darling, and stay hidden from the
view.
And do not dare to speak
But watch her retinue
Who sails away to islands strange and
new.

BRIDEGROOM The dove so snowy-white,
Returning to the Ark, her frond bestows:
And seeking to unite
The mate of her delight
Has found him where the shady river
flows.

In solitude she bided,
And in the solitude her nest she made:
In solitude he guided

His loved-one through the shade
Whose solitude the wound of love has
made.

BRIDE Rejoice, my love, with me
And in your beauty see us both reflected:
By mountain-slope and lea,
Where purest rills run free,
We'll pass into the forest undetected:

Then climb to lofty places
Among the caves and boulders of the
granite,
Where every track effaces,
And, entering, leaves no traces,
And revel in the wine of the pomegranate.

Up there, to me you'll show
What my own soul has longed for all the
way:
And there, my love, bestow
The secret which you know
And only spoke about the other day.

The breathing air so keen;
The song of Philomel: the waving charm
Of groves in beauty seen:
The evening so serene,
With fire that can consume yet do not
harm.

With none our peace offending,

Aminadab had vanished with his
slaughters:
And now the siege had ending,
The cavalcades descending
Were seen within the precinct of the
waters.



Satirical



Dedication to Mary Campbell

None will break ranks—WILFRED OWEN

Folly in towns, like maggots in a corpse,
But wisdom breeds with leisure in the dorps;
Vain is the trek where haste with nature strives
If at the journey's end a fool arrives;
Cool as the Roman, as the tortoise slow,
I lay my road around me as I go,
For there's less wisdom in a hasty thing
Than in the daftest butterfly of spring.
I write no telegrams that cannot wait
Because to-morrow they'd be out of date,
What news I have (it's not a vast amount)
Myself I carry, and myself recount—
No Reuter, but a postman of the sun
Who loves to loiter when the others run.
My pen the spur, my rhyme the jingled rein,
My hand the downswung stirrup of my brain,
Although I've had to spurt to save my hide
A canter is my ordinary stride;
I like to feel the landscape moving by
Gradual and smooth and almost on the sly,
For I'm the sort of guy that rides and sings.
Train-window, tourist insight into things
Was never in my line; the way I go
Zigzags too quickly but arrives too slow;

I call at friendly shelters by the way
And often turn the midnight into day;
My horse would bear me slumbering afar,
And I have been arrested by a Star!
They never could recruit me for their Scouts
Because I had so many ins-and-outs—
I'd plant my scouting pole to bear me fruit
And in its shade lie pillowed at the root
Absent from roll-call, by a dream delayed
When Bugles sound the Bolshevik parade.
When due for duty off to draw my cash,
To paint the city and to cut a dash
With saddle-bags ding-donging like the bells
That ring for dinner in the world's hotels;
And when the duros cease their happy din
To greet my messmate, Hunger, with a grin—
That sterling chap sham bolshies do not know,
Whose hat the moon is, and his coat the snow,
So staunch a friend when all the rest depart
To sharpen wit and fortify the heart,
For fasts revive our pleasures when they cloy
And are the springboards of Eternal Joy:
You ask old Ghandi, or my friend the priest—
First in the fast is foremost in the feast!
Across the world more lightly we can sail
Than Attila (whose kitchen was his tail).^[17]
Diogenes to me was an esquire
Who thought his house insured against the fire,
While you and I with no more luggage pass
Than springbok bounding over plains of grass—
Free as the air, responsible to none,
Soldiers of chance, and troopers of the Sun.

Luck on our side, we play at pitch and toss
Christ for our king and Mithras for our boss;
Procrastination saves me half my time—
To live comes first with me—to them a crime:
That shadow-chorus to whose chant I act
In all their emptiness the only fact,
For having twice set foot upon their shore
As I have done on half a dozen more.
Cunctator, though no Fabian, I must fight
As best befits who travel swift and light.
I like this sort of warfare: a cadet
Of Bolivar, Sertorius, and de Wet
My forces I collect and then disband
And when the least expected am at hand
Although not there, forever in their mind,
Six years although I left them all behind.
I scorn the goose-step of their massed attack
And fight with my guitar slung on my back,
Against a regiment I oppose a brain
And a dark horse against an armoured train:
I like to trick their marksmen having shown
My dummy image from behind a stone,
To hear their yell of triumph when they score
And then to snipe off half a dozen more.
In their day-dreams they've killed me thrice a day
Swearing I'm dead they daily blaze away
And all their noisy shelling of the kop
Only proclaims who's fighting there on top.
They're the pink Tommies, all in order lined,
Poking each other onward from behind
To face one single muzzle-loading gun,
Because it gets its nitre from the sun.

But, as it is, the odds are on my side,
This age is broken ground on which we ride,
Fatal to heavy troops, this great Waste Land
Was for the neat guerilla nicely planned,
Whose only luggage is his light guitar,
Whose compass is the love-delighting Star,
Who takes advice from every winding stream
Or stone (the pillow of a Jacob's dream),
Makes of the wilderness his posh hotel,
And drinks his fill where armies dry the well.
Of phalanxes this era breaks the line
And seems with my own tactics to combine;
Added to that, they're loaded with despair
The meanest sin that blackens earth or air!
Weighed down by conscious guilt themselves they
dread

More than the fiercest enemy ahead.
Vain is the frosty non-committal sneer,
Against the human laugh, the human tear,
And the sad rictus of each cynic grin
Betrays the toxins rioting within—
But may the Devil all my molars pull
When I grow tired of torrying John Bull!
For he was never braver with his gun
Than when he numbered ninety-nine to one;
Number and repetition are his law—
'None will break ranks,' as Owen long foresaw;
Jock Stot's the same—but when the bullets whistle
Up goes the White flag, and down comes the
Thistle . . .

. . . These are the guys that have no time to wait

Though wisdom has a trick of coming late,
A butterfly that stops at every flower
And with a golden leisure hoards the hour,
Which these have squandered in their breathless
haste

And through their open bilges run to waste.
So how to round them up? and where impound
This legion of the lost that can't be found?
No need to hurry; with an easy mind
We catch them—where they left themselves
behind!

For without one exception to the rule
They just can't keep from hanging round their
school.

It holds the sum of all their earthly joys
And they'll be Masters if they can't be boys;
And here to prove it running to the minute
Shunts in the train with all the 'Old Boys' in it.
The chaps all shouted like a single fool
'Woodley! Old Woodley! Welcome home to
School!'

Then the new Master from his study burst
Not quite so much a Coward as the first
He cracked a joke, made everybody laugh—
John Bull, Jock Stot, and little Jacky Calf.
Back to the fields where Waterloo was won,
Majuba lost (they blame it on the sun!),
They came out hiking in their shorts and specs
And the sun passed his brand around their necks,
So well Apollo knows that bovine crew
He always ropes them with a red lasso;
One uniform he has for dons or scholars

Red knee-caps and the ringworm for their collars.
To find a red-neck cheap upon this day
You do not need to wander far away—
Each comes with his pink halter to your hand
And noosing one you seem to noose the band:
Rodin outdone, this concourse seems to be
A thousand Calais burghers on the spree,
So many of them and so like as fleas
You cannot see the Woodleys for the trees.

To you I hand them, with this bunch of keys.



ADAMASTOR

(1930)



Georgian Spring

Who does not love the spring deserves no lovers

For peaches bloom in Georgia in the spring,
New quarterlies resume their yellow covers,
Anthologies on every bookshelf sing.
The publishers put on their best apparel
To sell the public everything it wants—
A thousand meek soprano voices carol
The loves of homosexuals or plants.
Now let the Old Cow perish, for the tune
Would turn the fatted calf to bully beef:
We know, we know, that ‘silver in the Moon’,
That ‘skies are blue’ was always our belief:
That ‘grass is green’ there can be no denying,
That titled whores in love can be forgot—
All who have heard poor Georgiana sighing
Would think it more surprising were they not:
As for the streams, why, any carp or tench
Could tell you that they ‘sparkle on their way’.
Now for the millionth time the ‘country wench’
Has lost her reputation ‘in the hay’.
But still the air is full of happy voices,
All bloody: but no matter, let them sing!
For who would frown when all the world
 rejoices,
And who would contradict when, in the spring,
The English Muse her annual theme rehearses
To tell us birds are singing in the sky?

Only the poet slams the door and curses,
And all the little sparrows wonder why!



St. Peter of the Three Canals

(THE FISHER'S PRAYER)

High in his niche above the town,
The three canals with garbage brown,
The rolling waves, and windy dunes—
An old green idol, thunder-scarred,
On whom the spray has crusted hard,
A shell-backed saint, whom time maroons

High stranded on the Rock of Ages,
Of all the ocean-gods and mages
The last surviving Robinson—
Saint Peter-Neptune fronts the wind,
In whose Protean rôle combined
All deities and creeds are One.

For when the Three-in-One grow thrifty,
Saint Peter, he is One in Fifty,
Saint Peter, he is All in All!
And I have heard the fishers tell
How when from forth the jaws of hell
No other saint would heed their call,

Doomed wretches at the swamping rowlocks
Have seen a saintly Castor-Pollux,
Walking the waves, a burning wraith,

Speed to their aid with strides that quicken
As light as Mother Carey's chicken
Foot-webbed with Mercy and with Faith.

Oh, strong is he when winds are strident
To tame the water with his trident
And bold is he when thunders fly,
And swift—outspeeding as he runs
The corposants of Leda's sons—
To head the sailor's drowning cry.

By his high tower of creviced rock
The time is always twelve o'clock—
High tower, high time to save our souls!
And hark! his husky bells are calling
By faith and ivy kept from falling
When the night-long mistral rolls.

Deriding Newton, firm and fast,
His crazy tower withstands the blast
A shining miracle to prove—
For all can see, when winds are great,
It needs more faith to keep him straight
Than would a range of mountains move.

Around him float on airy sculls
Bright angels in the form of gulls
His seaward messages to go:
Deep in his bosom nest the doves
In token of seraphic loves,
To keep his garments—white as snow.

Archbishop of the deep-sea Tritons,
When round his head the glory lightens,
Mitred by the moon with flame,
Safe in the harbour that he guards
The masts, adoring, lift their yards
The signal of the cross to frame.

Among the clouds his feet are set,
And in his hands the spangled net
Where souls of men, as small red fish
Smoked with spindrift, soused in spray,
And salted till the Judgment Day,
Await the great Millennial Dish.

Amphibious saint, crustacean idol,
At once celestial and tidal,
To his bland creed all doubt atones—
Where Dagon weds with Mother Carey,
Jehovah woos a Mermaid Mary,
And Thetis sins with Davey Jones.

Arch-patriarch of Navigation,
He bears the lifebuoy of Salvation
To souls that flounder in the lurch:
With God he walks the azure decks,
Great Quartermaster-Pontifex
Whose vessel is the Holy Church.

Her sails are swelled with hymns, her spars
Are pulleyed with the moon and stars
From which depend, a hardy gang,
Her crew of human fears and hopes—

And metaphysics are the ropes
By which those desperadoes hang.

Her ropes with love and faith are spliced,
Her compass is the Cross of Christ,
Pointing the quarters of the world,
And her auxiliary steam
The vapour of the prophet's dream
To waft her when the winds are furled.

With track of fire she cleaves the distance,
To genuflexions of her pistons
The rapture of the turbine rolls:
Her stokehold is the deep Avernus
Where Satan feeds the roaring furnace
And sinners are the burning coals. . . .

O Captain of the Saint-filled Ark,
Ere loaded to the Plimsoll mark
Your saintly cargo put to sea,
And we attend the Great Inspection,
The Roll-call of the Resurrection,
The pay-day of Eternity—

Remember in your high promotion
How once, poor flotsam of the Ocean,
You followed such a trade as mine.
The winter nights, have you forgotten,
When hauling on a seine as rotten
You cracked your knuckles on the line?

Have you forgot the cramp that clinches

Your shoulder, turning at the winches—
And not a mullet in the mesh?
Have you forgotten Galilee—
The night you floundered in the sea
Because your faith was in your flesh?

Be with me, then, when nights are lone
And from the pampas of the Rhone,
Thrilling with sleet, the great guns blow:
When the black mistral roars avenging
Increase the horse-power of my engine,
Hallow my petrol ere I go!



Solo and Chorus from 'The Conquistador'

Solo Come, we are hungry; bake us bread,
Great sun: you torrents, grind the flour:
Nuggets of gold and rubies red,
Sprinkle the buns that we devour:
Bring the great rocks from ovens dark,
Digest the grim diluvial cakes—
The old ships-biscuits of the Ark,
The cookery of seas and lakes.

Chorus O bake us the red, the blue,
The boulders of the broad Karroo.

Solo The sun eats mud and fire: in sleep
We hanker for such foods, alas,
Our thoughts like flocks of springbok
sweep
The vastitudes of bitter grass:
With rasp of roots our pasture creaks,
Tugging harsh stems our tongues are curled

—
Come quit these pastures for the peaks
Before we devastate the world.

Chorus Not while so green a salad fills
The blue bowl of the circling hills

Solo Up there, the sun on grills of gold

Fries the red clouds for you and me,
The huge cooks of the whirlwind scold
And on their spits revolve the free,
Roast phœnixes, for all who ask,
With battered breast and frizzled legs—
Then leave your dull prosaic task
And feast upon the angels' eggs!

*Chorus Our farms are ringed with peaceful trees
Where fatter poultry roost than these.*

Solo The frisky gnus that gallop there
And kick their heels into the sky,
Singed by the stars, with tails aflare,
Stampede across the mountains high:
They'll fire the grass, they'll char the roots
And bring a famine on the herds—
We strove to pacify the brutes,
It was too late to bandy words.

*Chorus No more these rolling plains, O chief,
Shall thunder under tons of beef.*

Solo O sound the sanguinary drums
As to the North our rule extends,
And if you do not trust your guns,
Diplomacy will gain your ends:
Recall the fights your fathers won
Against such odds, in such a fix—
The rattle of the maxim-gun
Against the clattering of sticks.

Chorus When the hurly-burly's done
Let smoke and thunder quench the sun.

Solo Then fly, my wolf-pack, on before,
Swift in your pilgrimage of hope,
And I shall follow on your spoor
To kiss the bunions of the Pope:
A thousand priests, behind our thunder,
Shall follow with the crow and kite,
To cure the wounds of those we plunder
With words of mercy, hope, and light!

In the Town Square

To those who lingered out of doors
The Night was cold: in trance of lead
The Town slept save for thieves and whores,
A poet, and the watchful dead.

Even the moon withheld her gold,
The teller, Night, through cloudy bars,
Into his sack with fingers cold
Counted his scanty change of stars.

Numbed scarecrows slept on either hand,
Once human, whom through changing moon,
The nameless hungers of the land
Had hunted into gaunt baboons.

Out of the ghastly Cenotaph
That next the Lavatory looms,
The echo of a ghostly laugh
Came rolling from the world of tombs.

And in its wake faint whispers whirred
Like startled bats some gust might stir
In a long tunnel: there I heard
The ghostly myrmidons confer;

The friends that once, superbly mounted,
Had laughed and galloped by my side
Now some sad mystery recounted

To which the hollow vault replied.

Voice after voice, as when by night
The crickets call, or from a mine
Long water-logged, with plaintive flight,
The shrill mosquitoes upward whine—

Faint, insect-like and thin it came,
The wistful sound those heroes made,
Ferreted down by Deathless Fame
Into the warrens of the shade.

Between the marble and the metal
I heard their reedy voices pipe,
Where the blue-burnished angels settle
Like flies upon a slab of tripe.

Then one by one they ceased to quire,
As when a storm-cloud shades the West
The shaven poets of the mire
Their marshy music hush to rest.

The Town slept on. So cheaply fine
Its walls embalmed its festered soul—
But far along the sky's red line
There seemed a quiet mist to roll,

The soul of Africa, the grey
Hushed emanation of her hills,
The drowsy poison of her day,
The hand that fondles while it kills,

The subtle anæsthetic breath,

The vengeful sting that gives no pain
But deals around it worse than death
The palsied soul, the mildewed brain.



To a Young Man with Pink Eyes

Indigenous to realms unreal
Where such necessities are free
As only through our wounds we feel
And only through our tears may see,
Through the fair garden of your mind
Whistles the blue flight of the dove,
A sound of bees pervades the wind
And vegetables making love.

Narcissus of what liliated pool,
In what fair Eden do you sigh?
Out of its mirror clear and cool
What bullfrog ogles you to die?
What guarantee do you embody,
O ace of automatic hearts,
O patent soul, asbestos body,
And brain of unassembled parts?

The feathered cupidons divert you
And shady groves delight your eyes
Far from the icy crags of virtue,
Where only eagles dare to rise:
In equanimity you plunge
The rosy flannel of your sight,
And with boracic vision sponge
The irritation of the light.

While the soft fondant of your eye
Adhesive to all comfort stays,
Mine like a lighthouse round the sky
Swivels its fierce tormented rays,
And while those flagging fins, your ears,
Flounder you gently down the scale,
My own among the whirling spheres
Propel me like an angry whale.

Into my Paradise whose bound,
A ridge of rocks without a tree,
By fiery clouds is circled round
And washed with thunder by the sea,
Experience, warding the grey gates,
A gorgon with erected crest,
Admits the cold infernal hates
Whose company I love the best.

Unguarded by the sword of Michael,
The fruit of knowledge tempts the tooth,
And on their tyres of moonlight cycle
The hissing cobras of the truth:
There Power, among the gloomy hills,
Electric in the panther burns,
And Wisdom in the python rills
A stream of starlight through the ferns.

Each to himself a holy book
How vainly we mythologize,
When but a difference in the look
Adjusts the difference in the eyes—
For though as steel to pork impinge

Our looks, O youth of little guile,
Why is it I with pain who twinge,
And you unfeelingly who smile?

African Moonrise

To Tony Van den Bergh

The wind with foetid muzzle sniffed its feast,
The carrion town, that lulled its crowds to rest
Like the sprawled carcase of some giant beast
That hives the rustling larvæ in its breast.

When the cold moon rose glinting from the fen
And snailed her slime of fire along the hill,
Insomnia, the Muse of angry men,
To other themes had chid my faithless quill.

But wide I flung the shutters on their hinges
And watched the moon as from the gilded mire
Where the black river trails its reedy fringes,
She fished her shadow with a line of fire.

Against her light the dusty palms were charred:
The frogs, her faithless troubadours, were still,
Alone, it seemed, I kept my trusty guard
Over the stone-grey silence of the hill,

Till a starved mongrel tugging at his chain
With fearful jerks, hairless and wide of eye,
From where he crouched, a thrilling spear of pain,
Hurled forth his Alleluia to the sky.

Fierce tremors volted through his bony notches
And shook the skirling bag-pipe of his hide—
Beauty has still one faithful heart who watches,
One last Endymion left to hymn her pride!

Sing on, lone voice! make all the desert ring.
My listening spirit kindles and adores . . .
Such were my voice, had I the heart to sing,
But mine should be a fiercer howl than yours!



Poets in Africa

For grazing innocence a salad
Of lilies in the bud,
For those who dine on words a ballad,
For you and me a name of mud,
A rash of stars upon the sky,
A pox of flowers on the earth—
To such diseases of the eye
Habituated from our birth,

We had no time for make-believe
So early each began
To wear his liver on his sleeve,
To snarl, and be an angry man:
Far in the desert we have been
Where Nature, still to poets kind,
Admits no vegetable green
To soften the determined mind,

But with snarled gold and rumbled blue
Must disinfect the sight
Where once the tender maggots grew
Of faith and beauty and delight.
Each with a blister on his tongue,
Each with a crater in his tooth,
Our nerves are fire: we have been stung
By the tarantulas of truth.

Each like a freezing salamander
Impervious and immune,
No snivelling sentiment shall pander
To our flirtations with the moon,
And though with gay batrachian chirrup
Her poets thrill the swampy reach,
Not with so glutinous a syrup
As moonlight shall we grease our speech.

Our cook, the Sun, in craggy kitchens
Amid the howling waste
Has fried the terrible sour lichens
So dainty to a poet's taste,
Which sovereign remedy is ours
Against the earth's infectious scars,
Its annual eczema of flowers
The pullulation of its stars—

Whose itch corrodes the soft medulla
Of kindlier brains than ours
Wherein, attuned to local colour,
Each cheap colonial virtue flowers,
Flits like a moth from bloom to blossom
Or to protective markings trusts,
In shady corners playing possum
To gratify its private lusts.

The fauna of this mental waste,
They cheer our lonely way
And round our doleful footsteps haste
To skip, to gambol, and to play;
The kite of Mercy sails above

With reeking claws and cry that clangs,
The old grey wolf of Brother-Love
Slinks in our track with yellow fangs.

And it is sweet at times to hear,
Out of the turf we trod,
Hysterical with pain and fear,
The blood of Abel screech to God,
Hurled shivering up through vaults immense
Where, whirling round the empty sky,
Green fossils of Omnipotence,
The bones of his Creator fly.

True sons of Africa are we,
Though bastardized with culture,
Indigenous, and wild, and free,
As wolf, as pioneer and vulture—
Yea, though for us the vision blurring
No membrane nictitates the light,
Though we are cursed with sense and hearing
And doubly cursed with second sight,

Still doomed that skyward screech to hear
That haunted us in youth,
We shall grow terrible through fear,
We shall grow venomous with truth,
And through these plains where thought meanders
Through sheepish brains in wormy life,
Our lives shall roll like fierce Scamanders
Their red alluvium of strife.

When in the moonlight, red and bloody,

The night has smeared the plain,
We rise from awful nights of study
With coal-red eyes and whirling brain—
Our minds like dark destructive engines
Prepare those catapults and slings
In whose preliminary vengeance
The thunder of the Future sings.

What though we have no walls or bastions
To shield our riddled hearts?—
Arrowed like convicts, twin Sebastians
Each in his uniform of darts,
When in his crimson garb outlandish
The martyr turns a porcupine,
Who such fearful spikes can brandish,
Who in more fiendish war-paint shine?

To a Contemporary

Around the galleries you frame,
Forbid to smoke or spit,
Dark repetitions of the same
Derisive demon sit—
Far in the pit his faces glimmer,
Shirt-fronted in the stalls,
His myriad spectacles a-shimmer
Confront the lighted halls:
One Hydra throngs the loaded stands,
One Argus gives the glance,
One Briareus claps the hands
When down the stage the dance,
Trumpeted on by fiery lights
With fanfares of phlogiston,
Tarantulates in scarlet tights
For flashing arms to piston.
Their breasts ballooned with lust and song,
The fat sopranos kick—
Nor does one false manœuvre wrong
That strict arithmetic;
Upon a simultaneous heel
Your sorrows learned their drill,
To kick as high, as swiftly wheel,
And sing as falsely shrill.

Amphisbæna

1ST HEAD

Give place to me, presumptuous sequel,
I from the egg was first to come.

2ND HEAD

Till time can prove our forces equal
Your face must dangle at my bum.

1ST HEAD

At every notch upon my spine
Has hung a better head than you,
I string such beads upon a line
And thread with skulls my endless clue.
Snap but the single slender sinew
Which centuries to link us spun,
And you must cease, while I continue
Coeval with the moon and sun.
I am the ever-full clepsydra
From which such drops as you must flow,
My eyes are Argus, heads are hydra,
Though masked a single face to show.
Still as it lengthens growing slenderer
Though motions to your end may go,
Scolopendra, scolopendra,
The regimental minutes flow

To mine, restoring all you steal:
For every inch you gain in space,
I wind a year upon my reel
And am the winner of the race.

2ND HEAD

Yet while I can I'll move in front,
As long as I've the strength to haul.
Your only science is to shunt,
That is, if you can move at all!
You cannot scare me with such notions,
Or fright me with a mask of stone—
Your glaring, that would freeze my motions,
Is yet Medusa to your own.

Home Thoughts in Bloomsbury

Of all the clever people round me here
I most delight in Me—
Mine is the only voice I care to hear,
And mine the only face I like to see.

The Truth about Rhodes

His friends contend that Rhodes is with the saints,
His foes consign him to the Stygian shore;
But all who see him here in Roworth's paints
Will gasp for brandy and dispute no more.

Holism

The love of Nature burning in his heart,
Our new Saint Francis offers us his book—
The saint who fed the birds at Bondleswaart
And fattened up the vultures at Bull Hoek.

A Temperance Official at the Exhibition of South African Paintings

He stares entranced on sunsets, clouds, and plains,
With rapture eyes the mountains and the rivers—
He's taking tips for diagrams of brains
And charts of swollen livers.

Black Magic

(‘H. Wodson, a name to conjure with in the journalistic world.’—*Natal Advertiser*, edited by H. Wodson.)

Sound the dread word. Beelzebub, appear!
For Wodson’s name is written on the wall.
The door gapes open, hush, what have we here?
. . . Only a printer’s devil after all.



On Professor Drennan's Verse

Who forced the Muse to this alliance?
A Man of more degrees than parts—
The jilted Bachelor of Science
And Widower of Arts.

On Some South African Novelists

You praise the firm restraint with which they write

—

I'm with you there, of course:

They use the snaffle and the curb all right,

But where's the bloody horse?



On the Same

Far from the vulgar haunts of men
Each sits in her 'successful room',
Housekeeping with her fountain pen
And writing novels with her broom.

Polybius Jubb, as Vegetarian

A globular highbrow I knew
Who had an aversion for stew,
But sad to relate
The less that he ate
The Laager and Laager he grew.



Polybius Jubb's Defence of Highbrows

There once came a highbrow from Britain
Whose praises can never be written,
So steep rose his highbrow
From his heel to his eyebrow,
With a bump in the middle to sit on.



On the Death of a Journalist

Angels received his dying breath,
This last kind act his spirit shrives;
He has done more good by his death
Than could a saint with fifty lives.

The Land Grabber

ON A POET WHO OFFERED HIS HEART FOR
A HANDFUL OF SOUTH AFRICAN SOIL

The bargain is fair and the bard is no robber,
A handful of dirt for a heartfelt of slobber.



The Death of Polybius Jubb

He died in attempting to swallow,
Which proves that, though fat, he was hollow—
For in gasping for space
He swallowed his face,
And hadn't the courage to follow.

THE GEORGIAD (1933)

PART ONE

‘Since Georgians are my theme why should I
choose
Any but the most broadly smiling muse?
Inspire me, Fun, and set my fancy gliding,
I’ll be your Graves and you my Laura Riding,
Or since the metaphor has set you frowning,
That other Robert and his Mrs. Browning.
Let us commune together, soul with soul,
And of our two half-wits compound a whole:
Swap brains with me “for better or for worse”
Till neither knows which writes the other’s verse:
Think all my thoughts, though they be stale and
few,
And when you think I’ll think the same as you.
For when “two minds without a single thought,
Two heart that beat as one,” in touch are brought,
There’s nothing for it but to burst all fetters
And form a joint Hermaphrodite-of-letters—
A Janus-headed monster, feared of men,
Facing both ways, armed with a double pen,

Able, at once, both to advance and shunt,
To speak behind, and prophesy in front:
A sort of Amphisbæna, strange to see,
Each with his face where t'other's rump should
be:

A quadruped most difficult to class
Though half a man, yet totally an ass:
To Darwin's theories a flat negation
But a loud "Yes!" to Donne's interrogation—
"Were not a calf a monster that were grown
Faced like a Man though better than her own?"
Shall we allow this double child of Bashan
To Yankify our unresisting nation
And, all unrivalled, play its sounding parts
As heavy Pop-and-Momma to the arts
While critics, awed to deepest reverence, bow
And play the Hindu to this hybrid Cow
Though at its loftiest flights the Muses laugh
As at the antics of Pasiphae's calf:
Shall it alone the "Unknowable" invoke
While we remain in ignorance and smoke
Blinded by knowledge, crippled by good taste,
And on the hither side of madness placed?
Not while we live! Then let us arm to meet
This mino-mooncalf of our modern Crete,
But leave the banderillas in their place
Nor shake the red muleta in its face—
We've but to join our heads and hands and hearts,
And leave to instinct all the other parts,
And straight we'll launch into the great
"Unknown"
Our double shape, the double of their own,

Able to sniff its way in the “Unknowable,”^[18]
To dive profound below the Unbelowable,
Or better still (a sport that is most lovable)
To soar sublime above the Unabovable:
There like a Handley-Page with roaring engine
The slaughtered corpse of poetry avenging
With the Unhearable their ears we’ll din—
Now let the Unbeginnable begin!

Already I can feel the awful change
Insensibly through all my members range:
My manhood, with unfeelable sensations,
Is changing into ladies’ combinations,
This hairy thigh, which pants enclosed before,
Now shivers in a flimsy silken drawer,
Half of your corset round my ribs is locking,
Along my shin there crawls a long blue stocking,
Bang on your nose my spectacles appear
And (Wow!) an ear-ring slits my tender ear;
These cami-knickers are too tight, I vow,
But it is you must “wear the trousers” now.
Once I was One: but now, it seems, I’m two,
And can’t make out which one of me is you,
But what care we, so happily in tune,
And off to Georgia for our honeymoon’!

So spoke a Poet to his willing Muse,
And soon as told the blissful change ensues;
Now fully armed the direst foe to meet,
This new ‘Orlando’ flounces to his feet,
And with a virginally vulpine air,
The hair-pins falling from his frowsy hair,

First meets his own approval in the glass,
Then tries his voice, to see if it will pass,
And finds the organ, beat it if you can,
Able to lisp as sweetly as a man,
Or roll far down into as deep a bass
As any lady-writer in the place.
It was a voice of 1930 model
And in a Bloomsbury accent it could yodel
Between its tonsils drawling out long O's
Along its draughty, supercilious nose:
Or coo in satire gentle and polite
To fill the soul of Humbert with delight:
But then alas, changing its tone and mood,
It could at times be quite unkind and rude,
And give a growl the stoutest heart to scare,
Or startle Humbert from his dreamy stare
Among the weeping willows of his hair,
Whereon, I only wish it for the best,
He'd sometimes hang his harp up for a rest.
His voice thus tried, our hero turns about
And in the mirror, with a joyful shout,
Seeing his new physique, decides to patent
The whole machine, in which, so far from latent,
Both sexes rampantly dispute the field
And at alternate moments gain or yield.
This was no neuter of a doubtful gender,
But both in him attained their fullest splendour,
Unlike our modern homos, who are neither,
He could be homosexual with either
And heterosexual with either, too—
A damn sight more than you or I could do!
A child could see he was no tame result

Of boarding-school, or 'varsity, or cult,
No mass-reaction from a moral reign,
But the live product of a poet's brain
Pumped full to bursting of divine afflatus,
And with a fifty-horsepower apparatus.
No cruel War was midwife to his state,
No youthful accident had warped his fate,
His feelings worked upon no Freudian plan
In which the child is father to the 'Nan,'
Nor would he dogmatise his pet perversions
With psycho-analytical assertions.
His sexual foundations were not laid
In the Scout Movement or the Church Brigade,
He had no high ideals or moral saws
With which to break the old Hebraic laws,
With Edward Carpenter he had no patience
Nor from the 'Sonnets' would he make quotations,
No Lesbian governess had got the start of him
Or tampered early with the female part of him:
Even his misdemeanours, the most sooty,
Were more of a diversion than a duty:
He was not even member of some Church-
Society for sexual research,
Like Bertrand Russell or the wise MacCarthy—
For frowsiness his disrespect was hearty:
He read no text-books: took himself for granted
And often did precisely what he wanted:
Taking his pleasures in and out of season,
He gave for his perversity no reason,
But leaped alive (as you have seen) in rhyme
And forged ahead to have a happy time.
His apparatus was as cutely planned

As any new invention in the land—
I've seen machines for sewing that are able
To be turned all at once into a table,
Canoes that can be paddled all day long
Then turned into a tent at evensong,
Walking-stick-rifles, and 'Onoto'-guns,
As sported by Chicago's crooked sons,
Able, at once, to sign a bogus cheque
And pink a stray policeman in the neck:
But this put all such trifles in the shade,
And beggared Bloomsbury of half its trade,
While Chelsea swelled the ranks of unemployed
And many a reputation was destroyed
Behind the mystic editorial veils
Where in the subtle strife of heads or tails
The latter, as by magic, still prevails—
For vainly may a Lewis sweat his brains,
The masterpiece in darkness still remains,
While any dolt whose industry's behind
Can win the reputation for a mind,
Praised by his chums, by young and old be read,
And have a halo floating round his head . . .
But when and how our hero thus prevailed—
His spoor must first to other crimes be trailed:
How, excommunicated first by Freud
And then by Jung, who both declared him void,
He lived to triumph, and remained unhung—
All this in loud heroics shall be sung.
For from the old proverbial cabbage tree
No sooner was our Frankenstein^[19] set free
Than for a name he racks his nimble wits
And on 'Androgyno' precisely hits,

Christens himself, then out into the street
As fast as he can scamper on his feet
To find a lover: for within him rages
The red-hot bonfire, which if none assuages,
With sonnets he must fill a thousand pages.

Now hawthorn blooms above the daisied slope
Where lovelorn poets after milkmaids grope,
Or troop whore-hunting down the country lanes
With flashing spectacles and empty brains,
To hang their trousers on the flowering spray
And sport with lousy gypsies in the hay.
Here Bulbo comes his amorous hours to pass
Tickled by spiders on a tump of grass:
And sure, what blushing milkmaid would despise
Humpty's great belly and protruding eyes,
Who in his verses plainly has revealed
That when he ogles every maid must yield!
If they should fail to win the joys they sing
Or get a cuff to make their ear-drums ring,
It makes no difference, they forgive the crime
And finish off the merry feat in rhyme—
Editors are the safest go-betweens—
All maids are willing in the magazines:
More lonely hearts are linked by the Reviews
Than by the 'Link' of 'Matrimonial News,'
And any one who feels a trifle flighty
Can get off in 'The London Aphrodite',
Where upon every page, always in 'hay'
These donkeys jack their mares the livelong day,
Here's the first number—see, upon the cover,
The living image of a country lover,

In woolly underpants, a sort of Faun
Who seems to wish he never had been drawn;
With small sheep's-trotters dangling weak and ill,
And arms uplifted as in Swedish drill,
Upon his Clydesdale Pegasus he rocks,
That, rearing proudly, squats upon its hocks,
Raises, like rabbits' paws, its short fore-legs
And for some unseen cake, or biscuit, begs.
But from such horses let me turn my mind,
That beg in front and trot about behind!
The Gypsies, too!—you'd think that cadging clan
Had Pegasus hitched to their trundling van,
So many poets after them will gaze
And sigh to share their vermin-eaten ways.
Others in London sigh with equal force
For Sussex downs and whiffs of Kentish gorse,
And though the trains puff out from morn till eve,
Vastly prefer to stay at home and grieve.
Some to the pubs, muffled like bolshies, go
To sink themselves into a fit of woe:
These are the guys that find the world forlorn
And wish (correctly) they had not been born:
Blaspheming all the universal plan
Because their tart prefers some better man,
Each loves to sit there and astronomise
The floating specks that swim before his eyes,
His world a dream, his life a trickle of stout,
With sleeps between, and death for chucker-out.
These to the country well their way might find
But thirst and passion make them stay behind—
For each is, as his verses make quite plain,
A fine Don Juan in his own back lane.

Now Spring, sweet laxative of Georgian strains,
Quickens the ink in literary veins,
The Stately Homes of England ope their doors
To piping Nancy-boys and crashing Bores,
Where for week-ends the scavengers of letters
Convene to chew the fat about their betters—
Over the soup, Shakespeare is put in place,
Wordsworth is mangled with the sole and plaice,
And Milton's glory that once shone so clear
Now with the gravy seems to disappear,
Here Shelley with the orange peel is torn
And Byron's gored by a tame cuckold's horn;
While here ungainly monarchy, annexed
By more ungainly Somebody, is vexed
And turning in her grave exclaims, 'What next!
In life did fat and asthma scant my breath,
Then spare me from the Tape-worm, Lord, in
death.'

But now the knives and forks are cleared away
My wanton muse, continuing the day,
Summons, from Venus' grove, a moulted dove
To Georgiana's Summer School of Love.

Like some Y.M. and W.C.A.

It welcomes waifs whom love has cast away—
A sort of Hostel where we seem to feel
The earnest pulsing of some high ideal—
'Be your own Shakespeare. Step it with the
fashion.

Broadcast your love and Pelmanise your Passion.
Our short-cut to the Passions and the Arts—
A correspondence course in seven parts—
Try it! We sterilise our Cupid's darts.

Up-to-date methods: breezy situation:
And only twenty minutes from the station.
Good vegetarian catering. Worth your while!
And furnished in the “Ye Old Tea Shoppe” style:
The beds are heated up at nine precisely—
And Raymond plays the gramophone so nicely!’
Hither flock all the crowd whom love has
wrecked

Of intellectuals without intellect
And sexless folk whose sexes intersect:
All who in Russell’s burly frame admire
The ‘lineaments of gratified desire,’
And of despair have baulked the yawning
precipice

By swotting up his melancholy recipes
For ‘happiness’—of which he is the cook
And knows the weight, the flavour, and the look,
Just how much self-control you have to spice it
with,
And the right kind of knife you ought to slice it
with:

How to ‘rechauffe’ the stock-pot of desire
Although the devil pisses on the fire:
How much long-suffering and how much bonhomie
You must stir up, with patience and economy,
To get it right: then of this messy stew
Take the square root, and multiply by two,
And serve lukewarm, before the scum congeals,
An appetiser for your hearth-side meals.
All who have learned this grim felicity
And swotted bliss up, like the Rule of Three,
As if life were a class-examination

And there were penance in cohabitation:
All who of 'Happiness' have learned the ropes
From Bertrand Russell or from Marie Stopes,
To put their knowledge into practice, some
With fierce determination dour and glum,
But all with earnest faces, hither come;
And hither, too, the poets of the land
Even though in 'Happiness' they take no hand.
Even Jack Squire, forlornest of the undone,
Who weeps for rivers half-an-hour from London,
Who weeps for fishes that he cannot catch
And makes a funeral of a Rugby Match,
Though quite respectable as you and I are
Comes here quite often (or I am a liar),
Though not in person, yet in soul—on fire
To puff, to praise, to flatter and admire.
Here, when once more the urge of Spring unfetters
The tough old matriarchs of English letter,
Each titled bawd, born under Venus' ban,
Too gaunt and bony to attract a man
But proud in love to scavenge what she can,
Among her peers will set some cult in fashion
Where pedantry may masquerade as passion.
And straight in raptured sonnets will expose
The bunions of her gnarled iambic toes:
But in the next week's number reappears
Licking the tepid limejuice of her tears
And grieving at the transience of delight
Which her own gruff moustaches put to flight.
For even when the balance hangs in doubt
Their own poor wittols always cut them out,
So in a week or two, their griefs to smother,

They've all paired off again with one another,
Or in some sort of breakdown fall away,
A nervous one, a novel, or a play,
Which magistrates suppress, I can't think why,
For were I one I should not be so shy,
But would suppress our whole shrill female choir
From the chaste nymph that glows with vestal fire
To these old derelicts of wrecked desire:
And if MacCarthy started to defend them
Back to their brooms and saucepans I would send
 them,
And pack him after in a housemaid's cap—
Although MacCarthy's not a bad old chap.
What use a magistrate who cannot hush
Torrents of tears and cataracts of gush?
Though Desmond makes me laugh, they make me
 blush.

Here, too, the spirit of the Spring exults
In wilder fêtes and more outlandish cults:
For as all nations have their sacred anibal
(Excuse my cold)—Christian as well as cannibal:
The wild Australians, their Kangaroo,
And Hottentots, their mantis—both 'taboo':
The valiant Spaniards (Mithras' fiery breed)
Their angry Bull: the Bedouin their steed:
Their feathered snake—the Zulus and the Aztecs,
And the bad Afghans their connubial 'pasteques';
So the meek Georgians have their tribal god
And in their language, which is far from odd,
Spell it with the same letters (D, O, G,)
As, backwards, spell the true Divinity . . .

So hither flock (amongst the other Boobies)
The priests and high-priestesses of Anubis,
And hither all their shaggy minions bring
Till with their howls the woods and valleys ring.
Here grim 'Canute' whose one besetting vice
Is biting polar-bears on bergs of ice
(So says the Georgian poetess in song)
Chief of the canine army, trots along:
Behind him spreads the never ending throng
Of all the bow-wows, poodles, tykes, and curs
That Georgian poets ever hymned in verse,
And from their throats as weird a music flows
As ever from their masters' lips arose.
Now, while their owners do the same indoors,
Across the lawn they shank it on all fours,
To argue, fight, and copulate, and piddle
Around the sacred lamp-post in the middle
Which was erected by the joint subscription
Of Georgian writers, with the just inscription,
'Let no hard heart a passing tear refuse
To the dumb martyrs of the Georgian Muse.'
All shapes and breeds and sizes here are found
Square, sausage-shaped, triangular, and round;
Bass, tenor, and falsetto—with one voice
They praise the sacred pillar, and rejoice.
The garden lawn provides a sort of Lido
For basking 'Billykins' and sprawling 'Fido,'
The garden path—a sort of Rotten Row
Where oft a merry pick-a-back they go;
While 'Snap' and 'Spot' their playful whiskers
twitch
The lustful 'Towser' quits his lawful bitch,

The bashful ‘Mamie,’ famed in Georgian lay,
Who straight is covered by the faithful ‘Tray,’
And so the amorous springtime glides away.
Why should I name the whole illustrious throng
Each Argus and Cuchulainn, who have long
Been famous in the annals of our song?
But of the chief cynolaters who there
Foregathered for devotion, psalm, and prayer,
First Bottomley^[20] (Horatio) was seen,
With pet on leash, to pace the shaven green,
And oft in verse addressed the faithful ‘Toby’
That bit his poor old Muse with hydrophobie.
Next him Jack Squire through his own tear-drops
sploshes

In his great, flat, trochaical goloshes,
And far behind him leaves a spoor of mud
To sprout a thousand lilies of Malud—
Now as he would exalt to deathless Fame
His vanished Lycidas, ‘Willie’ by name,
And to the dead man’s pet his grief expresses,
Outslobbering the bulldog he caresses,
Like some strange Orpheus for Eurydice
Inciting Cerberus to sympathy,
The patient monster as he listens drops
A sympathetic trickle from his chops,
And both together mix the mutual moan,
Squire for the dead, and Fido for a bone.
Partners in grief, in watery tourney vie
The rheumy jowl and the poetic eye,
While with its tail for baton, keeping time,
The poet wags his mangy stump of rhyme.
Nor at his football match is Squire more gay—

Heart-rending verse describes funereal play;
While swarming adjectives in idle ranks,
As dumb spectators, load the groaning planks,
See the fat nouns, like porky forwards, sprawl
Into a scrum that never heels the ball—
A mass of moving bottoms like a sea,
All fatter than his head, if that could be;
While still attentive at their clumsy calves
The adverbs pine away, dejected halves,
The verbs hang useless by, like unfed threes
With trousers idly flapping in the breeze,
And while they strike their arm-pits for some heat
Or idly stamp their splayed trochaic feet,
The two full-backs of alternating rhyme
Walk sadly up and down to kill the time.
Not even troutfishing can staunch his tears—
With rod and line the wailful bard appears
And in a fainting fit of grief must fall
On seeing that the fishes are so small . . .
Ah Willie, Willie, better have been hung
Than exorcised thus in the canine tongue,
What had you done to Squire save live and die
The apple, nay, the onion, of his eye?
May some kind god my funeral defend
From such a poet and from such a friend,
Who by his comrade's death is less put out
Than by his pity for a 'wagging' trout,
And should one near my coffin show his face
May some wing'd Bulldog of Cerberean race,
With rabid fangs and fiercely wagging stump,
Be there to tear the trousers off his rump!
Next, when he makes his theme the thought of

Death,

In gasps and shudders comes his craven breath
And well may such as he be feared to die,
Lest Shanks, in turn, should sing his threnody.
A speedy death to all his verse he fears
Who so attempts to pickle it in tears,
Taking as raw material for his lays
The good old English beer he loves to praise,
To which all other exit he denies
Save through the whizzing hosepipe of his eyes.
But still in vain (Un-Niobean Squire!)
Instead of stone he gurgles into mire,
Can nothing, then, his woeful heart beguile,
No earthly pleasure soothe him to a smile?
Yes, when his editorial hands he rubs
And demonstrates, this laureate of the pubs,
That ‘all good poets have belonged to clubs.’
‘Froth-blowing’ Dantes throng into his mind
And ‘Kit-Kat’ Miltons, heartily inclined:
Or best of all to staunch his tearful flow—
When some great poet to the grave must go,
The parson-jackal ceases from his groans
To make his pulpit of the Lion’s bones,
Then comes the simper to his drooping jaws,
Upon the royal mane he wipes his paws
And he who shed for ‘Willie’ his last tear
Will lift his leg for Lawrence on his bier—
Assyrian Lawrence, featured like a man
But necked with thunder on a taurine plan:
The bull was native to his sombre fire,
(As the small puppy to the soul of Squire)
A hefty beast, magnificently thewed,

Valiant, and with a fiery faith endued,
Fit game for Lewis' toreadoring skill
And worthy such a Mithras, if you will,
Who faced him in his towering prime of life
And gaily dared him to the mortal strife—
But not for you, pale son of grief and fright,
Who come no nearer to the mental fight
Than when the savage fury in its breast
Is by the gold torero laid to rest,
The noble carcass from its crimson pool
Is trundled by the All-important Mule
Who wags his ears the shouting throng to see—
In all the arena none so pleased as he!
Pocket unscathed your undertaker's fee.
For as your bent, so must your function be:
But since to grief your weeping muse is vowed,
Go mourn your Willies like a raining cloud,
And shame to show your sun-detested sight
Among the sons of valour and delight
Whose deaths the Muses mourn with golden lyre
And with whose breath melodious swans aspire
To die for ever into hymns of fire.

But of all other cults that here are found,
The cult of 'Youth' most firmly holds its ground—
'Young poets' as they call them in 'The Nation'
Or 'writers of the younger generation'—
Spry youths, some under ninety, I could swear,
For two had teeth and one a tuft of hair
And all a die-hard look of grim despair:
Real Peter Pans, who never age in mind,
But at the age of ninety wake to find

They've left ripe age and manhood far behind.
But to describe the rest would be a bore
Though of strange cults there were as many more:
For now the sun and moon are changing shift,
The worker stars come out into the lift
And at their windows, with their pipes alit,
Exchanging gossip with their neighbours sit,
While poor Orion, followed by his tyke,
Trudges upon his way, without a bike,
And finds Androgyno, whom we've neglected,
Well on the road (as you may have expected)
Half way to Georgiana's Y.M. hostel
Where all await him as a new apostle,
And where we'll meet him soon—but give him
time
To battle through some miles of slush and slime
Along the country roads, whose gutters ring
With the loud gushings of the Georgian Spring.

PART TWO

Hail, Mediocrity, beneath whose spell
Lion and fox as loving neighbours dwell,
While, like some Saturn of the age of Boost,
The great Tu Quoque rules the golden roost
Lulling the muses with his drowsy boon,
While poets fabianise the sun and moon
And for the equal favours of his throne

Contend in mediocrity alone:

For it is sweet with modesty to swell
When one has not a ghost of pride to quell—
Puffed up with Modesty the ambitious toad
May safely swell, and fear not to explode,
Until, ballooned with emptiness, he rise
To dwarf the ox he envies for his size:
But it is meet a man should hang his head
If he be on the milk of muses bred—
As some in Whitechapel were bottle-fed.
Long live the Dog and his attendant clown
Since modesty's the measure of renown:
And so, as one, when wolves are on his course,
To save his life will sacrifice his horse,
He who would rise must rather walk than ride
And fling to tugging curs his hamstrung pride.
Then farewell, Pegasus, you've got the spavin,
Let those who will upon your carcass raven,
But with that noisy pack I'll have my jest—
For can I not be humbler than the rest?
Down to the depths I'll drive my starveling soul,
Out-tunnelling the shovel-headed mole,
To where in shady caverns underground
The sacred throne of Modesty is found,
Where sheepish-looking tigers slink around
And bashful peacocks perched on wooden pegs
Sit moping with their tails between their legs:
Here orioles and rollers shun the view
And trogons love to moult the long year through,
While if the red flamingoes seem to flame,
It's only that they're blushing out of shame.
Here social eagles, chattering in flocks,

Have quit their lonely eyries on the rocks
For farm-yard barns, the synagogues of owls,
And hutches whitened by the dung of fowls.
Here the blood racehorse with the useful dray
Stands tugging from the selfsame shock of hay
And lifts no hoof to spurn it from his way:
On gouty feet here limps the slow gazelle,
And though all night the nightingale may swell
Her silver stream, the bullfrog bears the bell:
Here the blue phosphor of the lowly snail
Outshines the splendour of the comet's tail
For o'er the high the humble still prevail—
All creatures here the laws of God forswear—
The wistful lion, and the bleating bear;
But dearest to the Deity, her throne
Encircling with a motley human zone
And nearest to the centre of the Pit,
First in humility if last in wit,
A thousand poets shank it on all fours—
Thither my muse her downward passage bores
To where these creeping Jesuses ascend,
Helping each other upward as they wend
With downcast faces, each in terror lest
He holds his head an inch above the rest,
And glowering round him with suspicious eye
Lest any of his fellows on the sly
Should swagger in his gait, or chuck a chest,
Or lift his sunken chin from off his breast.
On my meek errand through their yielding ranks,
Down, down I slither on my four tired shanks,
Until at last to Humbert's side I crawl
And cower beside the humblest of them all.

Let any now of 'arrogance' accuse me
Or my true share of modesty refuse me,
As to his ears my soft complaint I coo
In whom the whole commercial tribe I woo—
Each knight and pundit of the weekly scrawl
From him to Bennett (weakest of all)
From those who've praised me higher than the
 skies

To those, more rare and fifty times more wise,
Who had the caution first to damn my eyes—
For if one scribbles in the cause of Cash
To praise a satirist is wildly rash;
And so be warned by me, you Bulls and Bears,
And in your literary stocks and shares,
Don't gamble with satirical affairs:
And all you Nicolsons and Arnold Bennetts
Be circumspect with Satire, even when it's
To show you have the taste (which you have not)
To know true poetry from Tommy Rot:
For thus your tails before my boot to stick—
It's hardly worth the pleasure of a kick,
It makes me hesitate, and spoils my fun,
Who love to take my victims on the run:
And as for you (whose praise my conscience
 shelves)

It only makes you want to kick yourselves,
And like poor Humbert (whom I still pursue,
In him addressing all your tribe and you)
Turn somersaults of such amazing daring
As dislocate both dignity and bearing:
For when I put his betters to the course,
He was the first to cheer his tonsils hoarse:

My passes brought the colour to his cheeks,
The loudest he to cheer my veroniques,
Behind the barricades, with valour full,
He thought no shame to jeer each bleeding bull—
A ‘penetrating’ mind was then revealed
And ‘Georgian corpses’ strewed the bloody field:
With wild comparisons my muse he scared—
Even to Milton’s was the minx compared:
But she, wise hussy, with no flatterer trades—
And when she’d drenched his midnight serenades,
Straight, keening like a banshee in the wind
He mourns, in her, her ‘hate of human kind.’
A bird’s-nest wig, a melancholy face—
Are these the ensigns of the human race?
If what in human form my muse adores
Is not in what it most resembles yours,
Humbert, you have no reason to repine;
Broadcast your love, it’s no affair of mine,
And much good may it do the poor old world
In your B.B. embraces to be furled!
But if of such affections I am shy
Your verse and looking-glass will tell you why.
Remember this when next you name in vain
The fierce Achilles, taunter of the slain,
For whom your ‘Argive nightingales’ complain,
Who loved one man and plagued a thousand more
Than you in your philanthropy adore—
Of ‘Hector’ and of ‘Agamemnon’ too
To what but fighting was the glory due?
I’ll own my fault—that what I love is rare:—
The shapely limbs, the tossing flame of hair,
The eyes whose flame a winged sylph reveals

Riding to battle on their crystal wheels:
The body tigered with blue straps of muscle,
The limbs that spring resilient to the tussle,
The diamond valour that has far more worth
Than golden crowns and dignity of birth:
The glance of friendship, keen, and staunch, and
true,

Signalled above the heads of such as you
By one or two whose love is not unfurled
Like a salvation banner to the world;
The faces, forms of women, ever new,
That milk the lily, bleed the rose of hue:
The rosy cheeks, the crystal teeth, the eyes
Where dreams the noon or through the midnight
skies

In glittering dance the Pleiades arise:
The ferns of gold that plume a nape of pearl
Or, lovelier still, the locks of raven swirl,
Stronger in perfume, subtler in their hue,
Where sapphires shoot the night with rays of blue,
Where every breeze a different burnish brings,
And in whose plumes, spreading his scented
wings,

To heights supreme the condor, Beauty, springs:
The breasts (inspired and conscious with the ghost
That flushes through them) like the lighted Host,
Twin, silver, sacramental loaves that shine
On the smooth marble of a sacred shrine
Lit by the reflex of the chalice wine:
The grooves and facets of the crystal skin,
The veins of purple wine that pulse within,
The shapely leg, the finely-tapered shin,

The fleece of Colchos, or of Astrakhan,
The wild sea-wave that bears the ship of Man,
Whose greed is life, whose race is unconfined
And hurls a thousand wrecks before the wind—
Love-shattered bards, cuckolds whose heads are
sore,

And disillusioned novelists galore,
Who blame it all upon the poor old War:—
Women! but for the flicker of whose smile
Ten times the woes they bring us were worth
while:

Who mock at horn-rimmed spectacles, and pass
The soulful poet for a soulful Ass:
But for the gay, the generous, and the brave,
Will float with Aphrodite from the wave
Or raise another Helen from the grave:
Women, who love the outward signs of power,
Wit, valour, strength, and Danae's golden shower,
Whom, for their speech by day, their love by night,
At moments I could find it in my sprite
To pardon half of them for what they write;
Women, in whom still burns the ancient fire,
The last of England's glories to expire;
Of all earth's beauties swiftest to ignite,
Longest to cool, most skilful in delight,
And fiercely foremost in the amorous fight! . . .
These for my 'fellows,' Humbert, I declare,
And in two lands my fellowship I'll share—
(Since I belong to neither here nor there)
Spain for the brave, and England for the fair!
Spain for the hardness that has kept men whole,
Free from that windy swelling of the soul

That feeds a million loafers on the dole,
While dogs and cats are canonised and crowned
And Matriarchy rampant stalks around;
England for Beauty, and the vision sweet
Of you, and all your Georgian kind complete,
Serving as footstools to her dainty feet—
Where for a long, long time your place must be
Until, a wonder to the earth and sea,
Some Mister Pankhurst rise to set you free!
Meanwhile let love and laughter wing my soul
And what is there to laugh at save the droll?
And when I hate, my hate shall bare a spike
Clear in intention, though it fail to strike—
Not like your own that dribbles, week by week,
Like lukewarm bilge out of a running leak,
Scented with lavender and stale cologne
Lest by its true effluvium should be known
The stagnant depth of envy that you swim in,
Who hate like gigolos and fight like women:
There's time enough to live, to laugh, to fight,
Until incapable of more delight,
When beauty drives me doddering from the door
To cut my love in pieces for the poor,
And to the world in general deal about
A benefit it well could do without.
Then, when my dealings with the best are through,
I'll learn your wide philanthropy of you
And turn like you the remnant of my sprite
To love humanity for very spite:
Or join some summer school of high ideals
Where fageyism feeds on what it feels
And love affairs are thrown in free with meals:

Where all are one where no distinction matters,
And all are free to lick each other's platters:
Where, sharing all with all, in mutual praise,
Each pensioner for board and lodging pays
With sonnet-sequences, reviews, or plays:
Then, like a prodigal contrite and dumb,
Once more to Georgiana's I may come,
No more to set it in a dismal hum,
But humbly, as a penitent, to share
My broken spirit and my heart's despair
And, as an equal, claim a lodging there—
As monks, too tired the tide of life to stem,
Renounce the world when it renounces them—
And having lived my early days too fast
Make one long lenten Sunday of my last,
By sharing out my last desires and fancies
With tough old suffragettes and ageing nancies.
Then through my weekly columns I may pour
The sentiments that dowagers adore,
Nor hate but with a sanctimonious smile,
Nor, save in greasy piety, revile.
Then, when to rouse some future poet's scorn,
My daily photograph salutes the morn,
Without a face, a feature, or a plan,
More like a weeping willow than a man,
With trailing hair, as dreamy as a sheep,
And a great bow (to make the typists weep),
While in my button-hole my soft heart glows
(Or on my sleeve) like Abie's Irish Rose;
A Fabian Shakespeare of the Summer Schools
To other poets laying down my rules;
The spinster's dream, the walking Which-is-which

Between yourself and Wilhelmina Stitch—
Then I may quit my lyre, my loves, the dance,
The cape of scarlet, and the ‘Joyous Lance,’
And turning pimp, whore out my withered Muse
To judge the limericks in the reviews,
With Georgiana holding grim assizes
To dole out guinea and half-guinea prizes;
Then, Humbert, I may put you in the shade
And beggar you of more than half your trade.
I may, who knows? But until then, adieu,
For then we’ll meet as equals, I and you,
Bury the past, and to our mutual weal,
Carouse great bumpers till our senses reel,
Pledging each other loyally, as peers,
In rare old vintages of Granny’s tears.
But now too squeamish for such heady potions
With mere cold water I dilute my notions:
Not mine to vie with you in love or hate,
But mine to mock at fools in solemn state,
From your own ranks, log-rolled into renown,
I’ll choose my dwarf, my jester, and my clown,
Mark down each monkey, measure each giraffe,
And show the antics of each solemn calf
Whose humble head (with parsley fitlier crowned)
Should in the circle of the bays be found.
But of all animals the Ark contained
Which was more decent, dignified, restrained,
And which for solemn bearing could surpass
Nature’s unique philosopher, the Ass?
Of all, most calculating in his mind
But calculating still his wrongs to find,
Searching through life with crooked intellect

For things to which his conscience may object,
And, with a more than mathematic skill,
For causes against which to pit his will.
Though truth be in the Obvious often found,
He scorns to seek it save in things profound:
Far happier with a complicated lie
Than with a simple truth that hits the eye:
Whichever way he goes, his grudging will
Shunts in the opposite direction still,
The intricate is all he does not doubt
And what's through contradictions worried out.
First of earth's protestants, his single voice,
When Eden heard the morning stars rejoice,
Was lifted in complaint: in that loud vote
He struck the first meek English Liberal note:
And in his sluggish vegetarian veins
The spirit of objection still remains,
That sees no fun save in progressive change
Even if it be from normal health to mange.
He roars with agony at Venus' thrill
And takes his pleasures as a bitter pill
Or social duty, much against his will;
And when he leaps enthroned in stallion state,
Less with hot flame, than pedantry, elate,
Ponders the physiology of birth,
And strives, of sex, 'the meaning' to unearth:
And, if he found it, would not stop to breathe
But straight the sex of meaning would unsheathe,
And, even that discovered, would not wait,
But work out its relation to 'the State'—
Wasting his life, poor startled fugitive
From life, to find a reason why we live:

Who, even when his weapon's in employ,
Knows not the thundering scalade of joy
When love commanding cries 'lay on, MacDuff
And cursed be he who first cries, "Hold,
 enough!"

Who, if he had the power to read and write,
Would fill our Shaws and Russells with delight,
For he, like them, believes that black is white,
Is never sadder than when all goes well
And only could be happy in a Hell:
For with deep broodings and colossal pains
They hatch Utopias from their dusty brains
Which are but Hells, where endless boredom
 reigns—

Middle-class Hells, built on a cheap, clean plan,
Edens of abnegation, dread to scan,
Founded upon a universal ban:
For banned from thence is all that fires or thrills,
Pain, vengeance, danger, or the clash of wills—
So vastly greater is their fear of strife
And hate of danger than their love of life:
And Russell's only happiness of mind
(His frail bird's-nest against the boisterous wind
Of living) can be only built and lined
Out of the tearings of his own thin hair
'On the foundations of complete despair.'
But happiness to a true man will come,
Sometimes, for merely sitting on his bum:
And even when we war with mortal spite
There is a joy for ever in the fight.
That's a strange form of happiness that comes
Through being puzzled out of moral sums,

Though Russell thinks his happiness is clear
If, answering to his philosophic leer,
Some milder form of misery appear—
Fool! the disdainful goddess shuns your trap
Who cares for moral virtues not a rap:
Sulla died happy though a lump of vice
And eaten inchmeal by a swarm of lice—
Courage was his, although a rogue heart-whole—
The Ass was foreign to the Roman soul.
Nor knew the Greeks, save in the laughing page,
The philosophic emblem of our age,
Whose Hoof is stamped on all, whose voice is
 law,
Whom every poet serves with reverent awe,
And makes his voice one deafening he-haw,
One loud complaint of devastating griefs
Against his life, his loves, and his beliefs,
Still in his tender disillusion sore
Because, ten years ago, there was a war,
Seeing in all things woes to wound his nerves
Save in the damp philosophy he serves,
Which is the fountain-source of all his woes,
And yet to which the fool for healing goes,
And wonders why he should return all damp
In spirit, with a belly-ful of cramp.
Though living forms buoyed on the surface flow
And all that's dead and rotten sinks below,
These navigators, lubberly and sick,
Sail all by theory—they know the trick—
For truth in obvious things is never found
But only hid in the obscure profound:
The well-known capes that on the skyline swerve,

The stars that guide us, and the winds that serve—
At these old fads they never deign to look,
And as for reefs, they are not in the book,
But down below, invisible and dim,
The complexes in soft inertia swim,
Huge useless squids that out of shame or fright
Have sunk insulted from the conscious light—
To these their zigzag courses are related,
By these each ship of fools is navigated:
None with his quadrant ever deigns to sight
The intellect, that sun of fire and light;
And when the ship's piled up, the labour lost,
And all the cargo to the tempest tossed,
They'll blame all things in the revolving year
Save the philosophy by which they steer,
By which they'll prove you, with a final air,
The rock they've split on shouldn't have been
 there,
And that the world's all wrong whose winds and
 tides
Don't tally with the tables and the guides;
With pity they regard those hopeless fools
That, ignorant of their preciser rules,
Unscathed upon the rolling billows dance,
And trim their canvas to the winds of chance—
And, what's far worse and more benighted still,
Who trust in some slight vestige of free-will
By shortening canvas when the wind's too strong
And keeping watches when the nights are long.
But now we reach the sorrow-blasted shore
Where seas of ink and sighs eternal roar,
Where bleak crest-fallen cliffs together lean,

Sad ramparts of our Northern Mitylene,
Where wrecks of sad romances strew the rocks,
Where ink-stained Nereids wash their thick blue
socks

And wailful sirens through their weedy hair
Keep up a doleful chorus of despair:
Where all is swathed in puritanic gloom
And passion reeks of duty, death, and doom,
Self-sacrifice, forlorn-ness, and distress—
And every bosom wells with loneliness,
All passion spent, but spent in doleful howls
And answered only by the midnight owls,
The doves and cupids of that frosty steep,
That never waken save to sigh and weep.
Not to fair Cyprus or the Lesbian shore
But to the frowning steep of Elsinore,
Holding our course among the tear-logged wrecks,
We sail, with thunder vascoing our decks:
Where Venus never smiled, but in her place
Some withered Nornie of the boreal race,
With sour, nut-cracking, vegetarian face,
Furrowed with tears, weeps out her rheumy eyes
And makes an English climate with her sighs.
Here the grim muses clothed in frowsy stuffs,
Brogues, collars, tweeds, neck-ties, and starchen
cuffs,
Each with a heavy text-book in her hand
Like guards around a frowning fortress stand,
Grim guards enough to awe the Nancy race,
The trolls and elves of that romantic place,—
But yet no match for Adam's wandering sons
For one, at least, has run beneath their guns

Armed with no warlike cutlass, brick, or bat,
But his strong back (and scarce a shirt to that)
To dare the rushing hosepipes of their eyes
And all the loud bombardment of their sighs:
Sonnet to left, sonnet to right was thundered,
But without scathe (while all the Nancies
wondered)

He pushed his way among that scarecrow race
And shoved the Chief-high-Nornies into place;
But only when their flag of truce they raise
To bribe his laughter with their public praise,
And all their little nancy husbands too
By wireless, daily paper, and review,
For his indulgence have been forced to sue—
It's only then his funds of patience end,
And lest he be mistaken for their friend,
(Which loudly to the public they proclaim)
He strikes a blow to clear his honest fame.
Yet with such heat their admiration rages
They praise it (long before they cut the pages)^[21]
And kiss the very boot on which they've sat—
Even Humbert wouldn't do anything like that
(He may have kissed the boot before he felt it
But after that more gingerly he smelt it).
So, when too late to ponder or retract
The fatal paper-knife reveals the fact,
Who shall condemn them if in that sad hour
They find that boot-polish tastes somewhat sour
And in a hurry try to spit it out—
Though it must leave a nasty taste no doubt.
There is no fury like a flatterer spurned,
For even worms will turn, when they are turned

Bottom-side-upward with a hob-nailed toe,
And not allowed to grovel as they go.

We left our hero on the muddy track,
On life and daylight having turned his back,
Lured by the lush advertisement of Passion
Which 'Love and Letters' publish without fashion,
Free, I believe—the Editor's a friend,
And not a bad old fellow in the end:
I have to grant him this (although I know him)
Or there'd be no one left to praise this poem
Amongst the pillars of my reputation
Who've propped my fame, without my invitation,
As they do that of every Nellie, Gertie
Or Daisy that was ever six-and-thirty,
Or ever left her own unlettered stews
To skivvy in the kitchen of the Muse.
With bleak Orion trudging overhead
Androgyno upon his journey sped—
If I've digressed, it was to give him time
To cover a few miles of slush and slime
Which ever thickened as he neared his goal:
But with a waterproof he armed his soul
And vainly splashed each over-brimming rill
Against the fierce goloshes of his Will.
Soon he had passed the gate, the oaken drive,
And shortly at the Hostel did arrive:
Washed and brushed up (it didn't take him long)
He hurried up to join the waiting throng,
The shining galaxy of Georgian song,
Who wait to welcome him (announced by wire)
With curiosity and tense desire,

A hundred beating hearts to let or hire,
Cheap, piping-hot, with bed-and-breakfast free—
A sonnet by the week is all the fee,
And if it's only full of high ideals
They'll give you credit for the extra meals.

Now chatter fills the great baronial hall,
The boarders at their evening gossip sprawl,
While in the centre Georgiana sits,
The high-priestess of their funereal wits—
But suicide was in her looks and air
And in her eyes the darkness of despair.
Her gruff moustaches drooping from her mouth,
One to the North, the other to the South,
Seemed more the whiskers of some brine-wet seal
Than of a priestess of the High Ideal—
Spent passion from her eyes had sprung a leak
And from her fountain-pen: that very week
She had been jilted more than seven times
And couldn't cope with it for all her rhymes.
The old 'Matronas' of the Southern Race
Can run their 'houses' with a smiling face,
Business and pleasure to one end unite
And cheques (instead of verse) their clients write

But where bad sonnets only grease the wheels,
Alas for the poor bawd of High Ideals!
Seeing her plight in every glance confessed,
One hoary sage, for dinner having dressed,
And hoping so to soothe her troubled breast,
Thus to the faded nymph his theme addressed:—
“Alas, poor Georgiana, what's amiss?”

Like Sappho poised above the steep abyss
In what new flood of Stephen's would you drown,
Through what new gulph of bathos hurtle down?
So rapt is your expression that I guess
You have, as usual, nothing to express—
Then seize your lyre! but sing of love no more
Nor glide a ghost around each fast-shut door
To satirise new beauties with your praise
Or blast their lilies in your love-lorn lays.
Sing but of country joys and you shall rise,
Praised by the world, from prize to golden prize:
Now to the soil address your bumpkin Muse,
To some old rick declaim your billets-doux:
Or drive, slow trudging down some boggy road
Your Clydesdale Pegasus with creaking load:
When by your bower some nightingale complains,
Sing but like him and with as little brains:
Or like the brooklet, with as small pretence
To style, to wit, to poetry, or sense—
Squire will accord a fellow-Georgian's praise,
And Gosse, though deader than his own dead lays,
Out of his tomb will sprout a sprig of bays:
Seek some old farm (the image of your mind)
Where in some farmer's ledger you may find
Fodder to please the ruminative mind,
Which, thrice-digested, into cud refined,
May clatter down in cantos from behind:
There, safe-sequestered in some rustic glen,
Write with your spade, and garden with your pen,
Shovel your couplets to their long repose
And type your turnips down the field in rows.
Equal your skill, no matter which is which,

To dig an ode, or to indite a ditch,
With lumbering cantos to upload a cart
Or with a pitch-fork to unload your heart,
Or with your fountain-pen to spray the flowers,
The hosepipe of your literary hours.
There, while in rhyme you keep the farmer's
 books,
Your soulful face will scare away the rooks,
While wondering yokels all around you sit,
Relieved of every labour by your wit,
Which, while it fetches, carries, ploughs, or digs,
Or trickles into hogwash for the pigs,
At the same time will leave your talents free
To make each strophe a catastrophe—
Till the departed prophets of your race,
Grainger, and Thomson of the creeping pace,
Shall own your Muse, in almanacks supreme,
Arch-mistress of the slowly crawling theme . . .”
But vainly plied the sage his honeyed tongue—
He might as well have left his theme unsung,
For Georgiana only rolled her eye,
Licked up a luscious tear, and heaved a sigh:
Till through the crowd Androgyno appeared
And to her side his joyous passage steered.
No sooner has the new-comer arrived
Than at his touch her ailing pulse revived,
The tears ran vertical back to her eyes,
Back to her lungs returned the squandered sighs,
Back to her heart the groans: and every sonnet,
A homing bee, back to her buzzing bonnet:
While on her face a blush began to dawn
As rosy as a slowly-cooking prawn.

That loving heart, that late had broken been,
Was now stuck-to with true love secotine—
You couldn't have believed with what a grace
The little bits of cardboard stuck in place.
As for Androgyno, his lovesick gaze
Upon her face search-lighted all its rays,
While from two batteries of shining eyes
Each at the other, in amazement, shies
So many arrows as could not be scored
Though all the darts were sticking in the board—
And still they played scoring good shots in plenty
(Everyone was a nineteen or a twenty)
While all around the watchers gazed, and swore
They'd never in their lives beheld before
So fierce and keenly-fought a game of darts,
Played thus with eye-beams upon beating hearts.
They played like fiends and neither was the
winner

Until the gong was rung to go to dinner.
But Andro then was in no mood for eating—
His blood was rising and his heart was beating,
His pulse could not be reckoned save in millions,
And 'Come,' he cried 'now for a game of
billiards!'

His cue was chalked and ready for the fray,
To cannon off the cushions straight way—
But Georgiana used her coyest arts
In the meantime to keep him playing darts,
For she was hungry: so with all the throng
They both obeyed the summons of the gong.

PART THREE

Dinner, most ancient of the Georgian rites,
The noisy prelude of loquacious nights,
At the mere sound of whose unholy gong
The wagging tongue feels resolute and strong,
Senate of bores and parliament of fools,
Where gossip in her native empire rules;
What doleful memories the word suggests—
When I have sat like Job among the guests,
Sandwiched between two bores, a hapless prey,
Chained to my chair, and cannot get away,
Longing, without the appetite to eat,
To fill my ears, more than my mouth, with meat,
And stuff my eardrums full of fish and bread
Against the din to wad my dizzy head:
When I have watched each mouthful that they poke
Between their jaws, and praying they might choke,
Found the descending lump but cleared the way
For further anecdotes and more to say.
O Dinners! take my curse upon you all,
But literary dinners most of all,
Where I have suffered, choked with evening dress
And ogled by some frowsy poetess,
While pretty housemaids with their ankles fine,
Serving the dishes, pouring out the wine,
Seem sent on purpose with their dainty legs
To tantalise our patience to the dregs
As with loose thoughts and roving eyes astray
We strive to focus on ‘the latest play.’

Give me my dinners silent and alone,
Or with some sparks to frowsiness unknown,
A girl or two whose eyes with mirth are lit
And there like kings in council let us sit
While laughter rattles on the wheels of wit:
Far from the stuffy haunts of the genteel
Let the gay Muse prepare the epic meal,
And set me down with John or Cecil Gray,
So swift to wing the moonlight hours away,
While to our jests the rafters rock and roar
And chairs and tables canter on the floor
To swagger in the great Valhallan halls
Till care, a wreck, beneath the table falls!
But cursed be poetesses, thin or fat,
Who give these dinners of eternal chat,
Where knife and fork dissect the latest plays
And criticism serves for mayonnaise;
Where of the Hawthornden the latest winner
Is served as joint or sirloin of the dinner,
And, succulent to busy tongues as pork,
Suffers the martyrdom of knife and fork:
Where the last novel, in a salver set,
Is masticated, à la vinaigrette,
By hungry cannibals till naught remains
Of the poor calf that wrote it, or his brains,
All his fine feelings and his tender fancies
Ruthlessly ravened by his fellow-nancies,
The fruit of all his labour sucked to strips
And nothing left of it, but peel and pips—
Cain had more Christian mercy on his brother
Than literary nancies on each other.
But what the nancies cannot shred to straws,

A sight less dainty in their dental saws,
Grim poetesses, with nut-cracker jaws,
That uppercut the nose each time they shut,
Soon crunch to pieces, be it tough as gut—
Small chance for life when that portcullis slams,
Like the huge jaws of Polynesian clams,
Or like the Lamia's jagged, hungry leer—
'All hope abandon ye who enter here!'

I who have chased the spouters of the brine,
Yea, even dared in Bloomsbury to dine,
Swear by the monsters of the earth and seas
That Nature has no parallel for these.

But with the coffee, Gossip hoists her sails
And over literary chat prevails:

Like summer whirlwinds, raising as they run
A cloud of dust to hide the golden sun,
Distorting even the strong arms of oaks,
So on her way the angry goddess smokes
Funnelled with roaring mouths, whose trombone
blare

Scatters the legioned echoes of the air;
Through the assembled throng she rumbles past
And every brain, a feather in the blast,
And every tongue, a fluttering leaf of noise,
Surrenders to her all-commanding joys.

When sparrows loudest raise their twittering cries
We know there is a falcon in the skies:

When loudest cluck the dunghill-scratching dames
We know some eagle to the zenith flames

Casting his shadow on their farmyard games:
So when the gossips loudest squeak and cluck,
Or startled heads beneath their pinions tuck,

Look up, and see whose shadow cuts the ray
In those clear heights of intellectual day
Where eagles mate, who only stoop to slay:
Perhaps some Lewis, winged with laughter, soars
And in his wake the laughing thunder roars
To see the fear he scatters as he goes
And hear the cackle of his dunghill foes—
How Ellis Roberts^[22] to his perch will cling
And shamming dead, his head beneath his wing,
Though always full of literary news,
When Lewis writes, suppresses the reviews:
How this same Roberts, stuttering, explains
His bright blue funk of honesty and brains,
And trapped, repents the evil of his ways
Stampeding headlong into frantic praise^[23]:
How Nicolson who in his weekly crack
Will slap the meanest scribbler on the back,
Who praises every Gertie, Bess, or Nelly,
That ever farrowed novels from her belly,
At the mere thought of Lewis goes quite blue
And to cackle turns his weekly coo—
And so with all the weekly-scrawling crew.
Though to fight cleanly back they are not able,
They'll get their own back at the dinner-table
Where, armed with knife and fork, entrenched they
sit
Encouraged more by numbers than by wit,
And by the wordy goddess urged to battle
Fight out their Bannockburns of tittle-tattle,
While truth in terror from the slaughter flies
And probability in anguish dies—
For Gossip over all our fates presides

And rules from far the literary tides,
And he who best performs her sacred rites
The goddess for his industry requites,
And to more dinners cordially invites.
Androgyno, to boredom swift-inured
Soon on his fork has got a novel skewered,
And though he'd never read it in his life,
Was slashing at it boldly with his knife.
Loud and more loud the wordy tempest roared
And crashing bores by others were out-bored,
Till one by one, with leaden maces floored,
The minor crashers were constrained to yield
And super-bores alone contend the field.
Next to his new-found love our hero sat,
But she, alas, began to smell a rat,
For every glance in his direction shot
A doubly warm response from him begot—
From guest to guest his roving glances wandered
And many an amorous twinkle there he
squandered:

The bees were wakened in a hundred bonnets
And the air hummed with germinating sonnets.
'Twas then she realised it with a start—
The monster was untrue, he had no heart,
Or else too much, which made it ten times worse
(The thought came to her in a tragic verse)
For, sure enough, his love was Humbert's kind,
Though not, like it, Platonic, of the mind,
Yet it extended out of time and space
To all the members of the human race—
Even as far as to the tables' tail,
Where Mr. Georgiana, plump and hale,

Sat basking (while some deep dispute he carried
on)

In the reflected glory of his harridan:
While from his temples spirally outspread
The bovine trophies never to be shed
And, like the royal Koodoo's, proudly rolled,
High overhead, their rugged wheels of gold,
A record head for Rowland Ward to stuff
And on a varnished shield to nail the scruff,
Seventy-seven inches on the curve—
There's no such head in Mweru reserve!
Even the devil dwindles to a duiker,
Who prides himself as something of a spiker,
But who must suffer jealousies untold
To see these shining ornaments unrolled.
Nor could Androgyno remain unsmitten,
His admiration on his face was written,
As down the table-length, in optic morse,
His amorous glances wing their sprightly course,
And Mr. Georgiana in reply
Sits dot-dash-dotting with his great, glad eye.
But Georgiana, watching, writhes with pain
And mournful sonnets flicker through her brain,
Upon her tongue dries up the very spittle
All green with envy of her own good wittol
Though she's so great and he's so very little,
Save in respect of his colossal horning—
Yet even that he owes to her adorning;
But it's the innocent that always suffer,
As said the Devil, that egregious duffer,
After his mother beat him all her might
Because his father came home drunk one night.

However that may be, it's hardly nice
That envy should a happy pair unsplice
Who lecture (both the wittol and the wife)
Upon the Radio, about married life,
As if their life were one protracted kiss
And they the models of connubial bliss,
Though it is true they burn with the same flame—
Fickle in faith, in failure still the same,
They have to get their thrills at second-hand
By scavenging whatever comes to hand:
Content and proud to take a minor share
And lap the leavings of each light affair—
Love's mopping fly-by-nights that furtive whistle
Far from the battles of the blood and gristle,
And from the face of Venus shrink away
Like owls insulted by the light of day;
Still hungering to touch, and taste, and feel,
But for the thrills they sigh for, too genteel,
They come in life no nearer to the real
Than through the tender filaments to feel
The gentle pulses of some high ideal.
No quaker glares on bawdry so askance,
No Wesleyan so eyes the Sunday dance
As these regard true lovers in their prime
As yet unsoured by impotence or time.
And on these lines they run their country hostel,
'Decorum first!' the cry of each apostle,
While the mild erethism of their souls
Shrinks from the lusty bed where Venus rolls
And where, gymnastic in their disarray,
True lovers toss their stormy sheets at play
Like shoals of happy dolphins in the spray.

These Dunmow fitchers of the B.B.C.
Well in connubial friendship might agree—
They peeped through key-holes at the world of
 passion
And finding it against the current fashion,
Decided they would shut the door upon its
Brutality, and copulate in sonnets,
Or at the most, when they were feeling quizzical,
A slight indulgence even in the physical
Could do no harm if it were nice and soulful—
But what served most to keep them sad and doleful
Was that such charities were rarely flung them:
And so there dawned a sympathy among them,
For oft, their sad discomfitures to smother,
They had to be content with one another:
Or with their equals in shipwrecked romances
From tough old suffragettes to ageing nancies.

But thus to threaten their connubial honey,
Since it was worth a lot of ready money,
In both of them it was extremely rash—
And there'd have been a great financial crash,
If Andro had not by his vile behaviour
Acted, unwittingly, the part of saviour:
For he was none of those half-hearted fools
Who, hesitating, fall between two stools:
In such predicaments he, nothing loth,
Would cheat the proverb, and sit down on both.
So when love's Y.M.W.C.A.,
Their dinner done, and said their noisy say,
Forming half-sections, with an army's tread,
Along the old oak staircase filed to bed—

Androgyno, with Georgiana mated,
Into the seventh heaven was translated:
But in his raptures losing all control,
Went far beyond the limits of the soul,
And gave her such a thundering bastinada
As would have sunk the invincible Armada—
Squeals, yells, hysteria, and groans satanic
Through all the house disperse a sort of panic.
And Mr. Georgiana tucks his head
Under his blankets, trembling in his bed,
Thinking some convict's managed to escape
Intent on murder, battery, and rape:
And likewise all the terror-stricken lovers
Who hid like rabbits underneath the covers.
Yet not for long in Georgiana's arms
Our hero lies; but spreading new alarms,
As soon as she collapses, to loud cries,
From bed to bed the amorous fury flies.
The beds, late soothed with homosexual snores,
Began to gallop wildly on the floors;
Like bucking broncos, arching their steel steeds,
Those clanking, grim, four-posted quadrupeds
Stampeded, hurdling o'er each others' heads,
As in some wild Grand National of beds.
Like trucks in railway smashes, back to front,
They telescope, rebound, collide, and shunt;
Half Bloomsbury was in that tempest rocked
And some were pleased, but all were truly
shocked:

For many a bloodless Fabian learned that night
To his distress, his horror, and affright,
To the destruction of all things genteel

And bloody slaughter of each high ideal,
Far more than any text-book of complexes
Or treatise on the 'meaning of the sexes'
Could have informed him: Freud and Jung and
Ellis,

And all the rumblings in the Red Indian bellies,
And all the dark gods that infest our stomachs,
Banshees and bunyips, that perplex and flummox,
That from the unconscience regulate our habits
And in the solar-plexus breed like rabbits,
All these (which it would take ten years to study)
And many other devils wild and bloody
In our Androgyno were then let loose
To put the latest text-books out of use.
Even Mr. Georgiana got his share—
They picked him up next morning on the stair
And brought him to (his nostrils softly shocking)
By holding to his nose a thick blue stocking
Which had belonged (for how long, I forget)
To some old literary suffragette.

Next morning while Androgyno, still tight,
Was sleeping off the efforts of the night,
The indignant boarders all together got
And held a great mass meeting on the spot,
Then telegraphed their horror and distress
To Freud and Jung—an urgent S.O.S.
On the next aeroplane was shipped a yellow
Professor, a most melancholy fellow,
With a great lumping text-book in his fist
And strict instructions (written in a list)
To prove Androgyno did not exist.

Confronted with the culprit, he was ready—
His non-existence had been proved already
Before he'd started, in Freud's own laboratory,
With many freaks of analytic oratory.
So having, on our hero's rank and station,
Even on his rights to clinic tabulation,
And on his title to classification,
Pronounced the ban of excommunication,
With many a hideous howl of execration,
He left by aeroplane, as he had come,
Thinking he'd struck Androgyno quite dumb—
Who for his sermon had not cared a damn,
But having cursed the hostel for a sham,
Punched the hostess, and kicked the poor
 proprietor,
Went back to London feeling somewhat quieter.
Where now he's editing a posh review—
For solid industry has pulled him through,
Where in the subtle strife of heads or tails
The latter, as by magic, still prevails.
Here ends my fable, just as I could wish,
And if for any moral you should fish,
You may sit trolling minnows day and night
For all I care—yet never feel a bite.
And if you should regret the precious time
You've spent to read (as I to write) this rhyme,
Deploring that a poet thus should sink
To daubing simpletons with Stephen's ink,
Who, long before this fantasy was written,
Were blue with it as any ancient Briton,
And covered with their own from head to foot
As any grimy chimney-sweep with soot—

Remember how King David spent his leisure,
Between his deep devotions and his pleasure,
Leaving at times both muse and concubines
To hack the foreskins off the philistines—
An innocent and pleasing hobby, such
As to his fame supplies a human touch,
Endearing him as do the anecdotes
Of Alfred's cakes and Shelley's paper boats—
Such intimate and unimportant details
As Plutarch in his lives of heroes retails,
Opinions as he does so that such facts
Endear as much as high, heroic acts:
And so in David's case, and so in mine—
Though foreskin-snipping was not his chief line,
Such foibles served to pass his idler hours
Without diminishing his lyric powers
And in no way detracting from his fame
And prowess in love's broncho-busting game,
Where many a lively filly he bestrode
And to the winning-post of glory rode.
So in all eyes I hope these lines will clear me,
And to the world in general endear me—
Especially to all dog-breeding fans,
To septuagenarian Peter-Pans,
To Bloomsburies, to Fabians, to Sissies,
To swotters-up of philosophic blisses,
To busybodies of the wagging tongue
And all whose follies have remained unsung,
Some of whom are good fellows, I admit,
And gain in niceness what they lack in wit:
But whose collective dictatorial rule
Would wake the devil in the tamest mule—

For they're all members of the self-same school,
And drilled, like Fascists, to enforce on all
The standards of the middling and the small:
By force of numbers sure of their position
Armed, not with wit, but endless repetition,
With endless space and time to cut their capers
Whether in weekly or in daily papers,
Resolved all other causes to defy
And boost the pusillanimous on high!
So if you be so vulgar or stiff-necked
As to my Hebrew pastimes to object,
Think that in this, at least, my muse has been
Upon the side of progress and hygiene—
For doctors much to praise in it can see
And with the ancient Yiddishers agree:
And you should praise my easy moderation,
For I stop short of the wholesale castration
With which the great Anonymous would frame
Our whole identity into one same
Class, sex, community, where even name
Shall in the end be sacrificed to number,
And all distinctions in the dust shall slumber.
When by the mother on the sire begot
And quite resigned to being what-is-not,
Their fellow-ciphers shall address our sons
Not as Tom Smiths but 'Number Twenty-Ones,'
When they baptise our daughters, from the score,
With indexes of Pitmanistic lore,
Not as Penelopes, Dianas, Trixies,
But 'Nine-three-double-Os' and 'Five-eight-
sises.'

When prudery, anonymity, and chat

Have killed all difference between this and that,
And progress has reformed this cosmic frame
To that great Nothing out of which it came—
The ghosts and neuters who frequent that scene,
That moonlit people of the might-have-been,
Reading this page in that eventless time
Shall praise me for the meekness of my rhyme,
Who in an era of annihilation
Refrained from the wild rage of mutilation,
And gave self and identity to many
Who in their own existence hadn't any;
Singling out types from masses without name,
Which, but for my discriminating aim
Would all have seemed one genus and the same;
And from those types selecting persons too,
Who, but for me, would have remained, like you,
Dear Reader, in the world's ill-kept account,
Recurring decimals of the same amount,
Or, at the most, but very vulgar fractions
Of their respective cults, and groups, and factions;
By means of artificial respiration
Preserving Squires and Humberts for the nation
Who, much too busy to have time to think
And raking in the guineas as they clink,
Might otherwise have drowned in their own ink—
For which my muse deserves a special mention,
If not a medal, and myself a pension.

We poets get small chance to air our views:
But any scavenger, on the reviews
Or on the B.B.C., can blow his trump,
And in each column has a tub to thump,

With endless time and quantities of ink
To misinterpret what we write and think.
Small leisure for such tactics has the muse—
In my whole life I've printed twelve reviews
Mostly attacks, but all confessed and signed—
I scorn to pull the trigger from behind.
But when each dolt on whom the boot's conferred,
Punched by a line or welted by a word,
Takes half a year the buffet to divert
And half the next to prove it doesn't hurt,
Decrying, when it sends him to the floor,
The very weapon which he praised before,
What's to be thought but what I most opine—
That one has but to write, and at each line,
As lizards drop their tails for sudden dread,
A thousand philistines their foreskins shed.



THE WAYZGOOSE (1928)

PART ONE

Attend my fable if your ears be clean,
In fair Banana Land we lay our scene—
South Africa, renowned both far and wide
For politics and little else beside:
Where, having torn the land with shot and shell,
Our sturdy pioneers as farmers dwell,
And, 'twixt the hours of strenuous sleep, relax
To shear the fleeces or to fleece the blacks:
Where every year a fruitful increase bears
Of pumpkins, cattle, sheep, and millionaires—
A clime so prosperous both to men and kine
That which were which a sage could scarce
define;^[24]

Where fat white sheep upon the mountains bleat
And fatter politicians in the street;
Where lemons hang like yellow moons ashine
And grapes the size of apples load the vine;
Where apples to the weight of pumpkins go
And donkeys to the height of statesmen grow,
Where trouts the size of salmon throng the creeks

And worms the size of magistrates—the beaks;
Where the precocious tadpole, from his bog,
Becomes a journalist ere half a frog;
Where every shrimp his proud career may carve
And only brain and muscle have to starve.
The ‘garden colony’ they call our land,
And surely for a garden it was planned:
What apter phrase with such a place could cope
Where vegetation has so fine a scope,
Where *weeds* in such variety are found
And all the rarest *parasites* abound,
Where pumpkins to professors are promoted
And turnips into Parliament are voted?
Where else do men by vegetating vie
And run to seed so long before they die?
In Eden long ere colonies took root
Knowledge was first delivered from a Fruit,
All Sciences from one poor Tree begin
And have a vegetable origin,
And to this day, as I have often seen,
It is accounted learned to be *green*.
What wonder then if fruits should still be found
Purveying wisdom to the world around.
What wonder if, assuming portly airs,
Beetroots should sit in editorial chairs,
Or any cabbage win the critics’ praise
Who wears his own green leaves instead of bays!
What wonder then if, as the ages pass,
Our universities, with domes of glass,
Should to a higher charter prove their claims
And be exalted to tomato-frames,
Whose crystal roofs should hatch with genial ray

A hundred mushroom poets every day;
Where Brussels scientists should hourly sprout
And little shrubs as sages burgeon out;
Where odes from beds of guano should be sprung
And new philosophies from horses' dung?
Wisdom in stones some reverend poet found,
But here it is as common as the ground—
Behold our Vegetable Athens rise
Where all the *acres* in the Land are *wise*!

The Rising Sunset brightened on the scene
Somewhere around the coast of Karridene—
Seldom do suns such striking talent show
As when they set Natalian woods aglow,
And surely from the stir that this one made
He might have been a student at the Slade—
Save for his lack of frame and awkward size
He might have won the Gundelfinger Prize:^[25]
A hundred guineas would have been his glow
worth

Had it been signed by Goodman or by Roworth.

[26]

Around him swam the mists of orange tint
And little cloudlets of boracic lint,
Beneath him puffed the waves (the tide was full)
As if they had been made of cotton-wool.
Never has dawned since Durban was a city
A sun so realistic or so pretty,
And now through mists that simmered with the
dawn

His hard-boiled face had reddened like a prawn:
Beneath, the wild bananas waved about

And from the woods uprose a joyful shout—
For here, the fauns and dryads of the scene,
Did all the Learned of the Land convene
To solemnize with many a graceful rite
That sacred festival the Wayzgoose hight.^[27]
Hither had flocked, with cushions and with tents,
The hoary prophets of To-day's Events;
Behind them thronged the squadrons of the Press,
And many a doughty wight, in times of stress,
Whose typewriter like any maxim-gun
Had crackled deadly insults at 'the Hun':
Two Art Academies arrived in troops
And Durban sent its literary 'groups'—
All who upon the wings of 'uplift' rise
To boost colonial culture to the skies,
All whom their own sarcastic fates pursue
To write for 'Voorslag' or the 'S.A.Q.'—
Statesmen-philosophers with earnest souls,
Whose lofty theories embrace the Poles,
Yet only prove their minds are full of Holes,^[28]
And public orators, each one of whom
Had talked both Boer and Briton to their doom,
And slain, the feat of Samson to surpass,
Whole thousands with the jawbone of an ass—
The pale blue Naiads from their streams of ink
With pale blue stockings, such as never shrink,
With pale blue spectacles and pale blue stays,
And pale blue insight into human ways—
Nymphs of the novel, pert and picturesque,
And wooden hamadryads of the desk—
All these came flocking to the scene, and more
Whom to describe would only be a bore;

But this is true—deny it he who dare!—
That all the Lions of the Press were there.
They came grey-trousered, and they came tweed-
capped,
And brought their food in their own writings
wrapped:
Here Wodson's saws, transparent in the grease,
Wrapped a fat fowl with many a tasteful crease;
Here a whole 'Mercury' with ample sheaf
Served as the trouser to a leg of beef;
And there 'Sundowner's' wit, turned outside in,
Served as the puttee to a turkey's shin—
Alas for 'Idler's' sayings, wise and neat,
Each for some sausage was the winding sheet!
'Words of the Wise' the yellow mustard stained,
'Temperance notes' with beery froth were veined.
'Art Causeries' were littered far and near,
And 'Wesleyan Items' soaked in lager beer.
Rivers of gravy irrigate the sheet
That lately glowed with patriotic heat;
Here mental food with physical was pent
And mayonnaise with criticism blent.
With busy hands, in their own jokes and puns,
Their wives had wrapped the biscuits and the
buns;
Blue-bottles, unabashed by Russel's rage,
Here skate in graceful circles o'er his page;
Over his text they skim with motions fleet,
Upon his climaxes they wipe their feet,
And here and there they pause—punctilious flies!

To punctuate his text and dot his I's.

Under their fairy-gliding feet, in vain
The loud infinitive may split in twain—
They link the missing parts with greasy spoor
And prepositions to the verb restore.
Through mixing metaphors still unperplexed,
Betwixt colliding arguments, unvexed,
They weave their tracks, their hieroglyphs they
score,
And leave it less a muddle than before!
But one poor cockroach halts with doleful mien,
Caught by ‘Vermilion’s’ catchy style between
Two sentences of labyrinthine gyre,
And seems the way of exit to inquire:
Poor beast! in vain your hairy legs you hitch,
In vain your sensitive antennæ twitch—
A vast abyss on either side is gapped:
Like Theseus in the Cretan mazes trapped,
Think you this awful darkness to escape
That never deviates into form or shape?
But stay! a rescuing fly with slender clue
Speeds to his aid like Ariadne true
Unravelling a sinuous trail of germs
Along whose tracks the wretch to safety squirms.
Here good advice in anchovy is drenched
And patriotic fire in gravy quenched;
Here racialism in a martial ballad,
Spattered with oil, is turned into a salad;
And o’er some sad obituary, here,
The battered orange sheds an amber tear—
Such chaos lay for many acres round
And reams of greasy paper strewed the ground.

Storms in a teapot often have occurred,
But teapots in a storm are rarely heard;
Yet here, behold, a teapot they produce
Wrapped in a storm of scurrilous abuse
Levelled at Hertzog and at Tielman Roos,^[29]
Yet it emerges with as little harm
As Roos or he have reason for alarm:
Unbroken, though by fierce invectives shot,
Uncracked by epithets, the fragile pot
From forth the tempest and the paper fray,
Emerges with as little scathe as they.
What strange paralysis your wit must trammel
That cannot even crack this frail enamel!
Anger is but the powder, style the aim,
But Wit the shot that bags the wary game!
Ah, 'Mercury' and 'Tiser,' my dear friends,
How much, alas, on hateful wit depends—
Wit, the irreverent, wit, the profane,
Wit, whom you shun with heart, and soul, and
brain!

Yet without wit your anger has no point,
And when you strive to blister, you anoint;
You flatter to insult, you praise to shame,
And soar to panegyric when you blame.
Yea, without wit, you merely soothe and lull,
Both tamely fierce, and passionately dull!
I once was made the victim of your praise,
Your admiration withered up my bays,
Humbled and cowed I limped about the street,
Nor dared my image in the glass to meet.
Such damp humiliation weighed me down
When 'Tiser' sang my praises through the town,

And I—could anyone be deeper shamed?—
A laureate of the drapers was proclaimed.
But now I pass the Scylla of your praise,
The dread Charybdis of your love I graze—
With flying sails my vessel speeds elate
To reach the peaceful haven of your hate!
Bred on the bland senilities of ‘Punch’
How can you serve us save to wrap our lunch?
Think you the soul of Hertzog to perturb
Or Tielman from his rogueries to curb?
Restrain your rage, another method try,
Praise them but once—and both of them will die!
Lo, with your fulminations, drowsing deep,
Bland Tielman lullabies his babes to sleep;
And Taakhaar’s children, round the cowdung fire,
Clamour for nightly readings from their sire.
See how his ‘vrew’ on nights of frost and sleet
Between her blankets folds the crackling sheet—
You serve from frost to guard her grimy toes
By day you play the kerchief to her nose,
Or in the chill of dawn, with acrid fume,
Under her porridge-pot the sticks illumine . . .
In vain, against your foes, this rage you spend,
Who only serve them as a Household Friend.
The chemist goes about with drooping lugs
For journalists monopolize the drugs.
What need of aspirin at two and six
When tuppence now will cure your sorest fix?
Read but a line—in drowsy slumber fall,
And wake to-morrow if you wake at all.
While Wodson demonstrates, to all who think,
The anæsthetic properties of ink,

While Russel chloroforms the land, and Hill
Continues strange emetics to distil,
What hope for Doctors—must they also starve
With no more carcasses to hack or carve?
Yet there's one strange disorder of the mind
For which the journalists no cure can find—
Wit, whom no vaccination can restrain,
Contagious wit, is quarantined in vain;
No sleeping draught can over Wit prevail
Which sings hoary critics in the tail.
Against this wild disorder of the brain
The 'Mercury' may fulminate in vain—
It scalds like fire, it pierces every pore,
It bites as hard as Bolitho can bore.
It burns like small-pox, it inflames the eyes,
And wipes out even journalists like flies;
And yet in spite of wit supreme they reign
And with their pens and rulers 'Rule the Main.'
Now water-seekers leave the land to Hill
Whose pen can bore more deeply than they drill,
White-ants and borers, turning boards to dust,
Give up their old professions in disgust,
Uncared for hangs the gimlet on the wall,
The Pen, the pen is mightier than the awl!
Shut in his shop, the ruined Butcher sighs
And o'er the hopeless prospect rolls his eyes,
For journalists are selling tripe too cheap,
And profiteering on the brains of sheep.
And Hill, at wholesale price, when all is said,
Can sell the contents of a whole calf's head.
Over the trades the journalists exult
And unemployment is the sad result.

You hoary sires, who send your sons to schools,
To learn good English and to keep its rules,
While deep into their wooden skulls, like tintacks,
The masters hammer in the rules of syntax—
What boots this weary labour and expense
Save to pervert them into common sense?
Save time and labour! teach them but to bore,
Cradle their youth in journalistic lore,
Teach them to walk in Dullness' narrow way,
And never from Tautology to stray,
Feed them on Kipling, nourish them on 'Punch'—
And in their works the World will wrap its lunch!

Alas, good souls, with what dyspeptic ire
You boast your race and patriotic fire!
Show first that English blood you love to brag
And prove the spirit—if you claim the Flag.
Is yours the giant race in times of yore
That bred a Dryden, or a Marvell bore?
Are you the English, you, that groaning sit
Shot through and riddled by a Dutchman's wit?
Is it so English under Tielman's blows
To whine your impotence in feeble prose,
Your Pegasus a mule, your Muse a trull,
And is it to be English—to be dull?
What are your threats of battles that impend
And what would these avail you in the end?
Rush headlong forth for politics to die,
Go, sacrifice tame mutton for a lie,
Choose bricks and bats, choose anything but Wit,
The only thing that helps your cause a whit!
Rather with Tielman would I stand in yoke

Than rank with you in impotence and smoke,
For to his ignorance is wit suspended
Like an old Tomcat with its tail appended,
But your own ignorance is purely Manx
And has no stump to tally with its shanks.
(O Tielman, I will love thee evermore,
So thou their nationality restore
And *plague* them into Englishmen once more!)
What's that within your hands—is that the Pen,
Once sharp, and once the implement of Men—
Was this, ye gods, the dainty Whistler's foil
When he from Ruskin let a tun of oil,
And, like a swordfish round a whale astreak,
Deep through the yielding blubber shot his beak?
Was this the huge harpoon that Marvell bore
To fish the corpse of Holland to the shore?
Was this the boomerang that Dryden threw
To crumple Flecknoe as I crumple you?
Alas, and has it come to this strange use?
Its stem all rusty and its point obtuse.
In Wodson's hand it scratches like a pin—
So rasps the cricket with his horny shin,
And, wrapped around it like a woollen bib,
Lo! Jubb's soft hand, perspiring, plies the nib.

Over this rhyme in cafés you will nod,
Seem unconcerned when most you feel the rod,
Affect a yawn, pretend a weary smile,
Deplore the taste, and criticize the style.
Yet when at home and by the world unseen,
On senseless paper you will vent your spleen,
Claw forth with trembling hand my dainty page

And hurl it on the dustbin in your rage—
In vain you'll strive to hide the blows you catch
And only in my absence, dare to scratch.
For there is one in this most sacred place,
English in wit—whatever be my race—
In Durban here—unmentionable brute!—
Who dares the voice of Dullness to refute:
Behold, in naked blasphemy I stalk
And dare to prove I am not made of PORK!
Your small horizon, from Berea to Bluff,
Rings you with peace: you may be grim and gruff,
But out beyond—the World will laugh enough!
My words, O Durban, round the World are blown
Where I, alone, of all your sons am known:
I circle Tellus with an airy robe—
Thou art the smear I leave upon the globe!
Cobham outsoared, I sail on Satire's wings
Satire, who dares to box the ears of kings,
And comes to statesmen as to roguish boys
To snatch from them their baubles and their toys.
In vain you'll strive to minimize my powers
Whose laughter will outlast your tallest towers.
I mock to last: you scold poor rats! to die
Save in my verse where you immortal lie—
Yea, when your grandsons bind my works in calf,
Your own unfeeling progeny will laugh
To see their grandsires pickled in my ink—
And Dullness will to future ages stink!

True poesy admits no curb at all
Though judges bellow, and though lawyers bawl;
Down on the gravest judge, as on a child,

My muse has looked, and as a parent, smiled:
For rhyme above the heads of monarchs sails
And wit outlasts the concrete of the goals.
Then hear the damned sedition that I sing,
A poet, though in rags, is thrice a king,
Who dares the world, without an army, face
And kick a mongrel town into its place!
Jostling with emperors, an outlaw gay,
Shouldering paunchy statesmen from his way,
Along the sounding thoroughfares of time
He swaggers in the clashing spurs of rhyme,
And all around him throng, with forms divine,
His gay seraglio of Muses Nine,
Those strapping girls whose love, to say the least,
Would make a rabid Mormon of a priest.

Now do you groan when Tielman flays your backs

You, who condone the bondage of the blacks?
The Lord, who sent the flies to Egypt's strand,
Now sends a Tielman to Banana Land.
When you at poets hurl your venom'd scrolls
And grudge us all the *riches* of our souls,
Why do you turn your envy, let me quiz,
To grudge poor Roos the *poverty* of his?
Alas, poor Tielman, what is he to blame?—
A Locust at the word of God he came,
With huge moustaches, like antennæ curled,
And paper wings to swoop across the world.
He spares your gum-trees and he spares your
 crops,
But on your testimonials he drops,

He chews certificates, your chits he gnaws,
And plays the devil with your paper laws:
Your flagstaffs like banana-leaves are ripped,
Your notice-boards like mealie-stems are
stripped,
Acres of paper desolated lie,
And groans of angered citizens reply.
Alas, poor Durbanites, which will you choose,
Which of the dread alternatives refuse,
This is the ultimatum that you shirk,
The awful question—Poverty or Work?
Work, that can turn a draper to a Man
And give a human accident a plan.
Work, that could make the sugar-planting race
Stand up and look a black man in the face!
Is it the sign of a ‘superior race’
To whine to have ‘the nigger kept in place’?
Where is his place save in his strength and sense,
And will he stand aside for impotence,
Does Evolution wait for those who lag
Or curtsy to a cheap colonial Flag?
Is this ‘White Labour’—lolling on this stool,
Fed by a black with every needful tool,
The white man sits and uses but his hands,
The black man does the thinking while he stands:
Five years in long apprenticeship were passed
Ere, fit to loaf, the white emerged at last,
And yet in kicks and blows the black must pay
Unless he learns the business in a day.
And will they strive to teach you Afrikaans,
O’er lingual hurdles coax your tongues to prance

You, through whose jaws the words with dismal
hum

Like groans of dying pork from Liebig's come?
And how will you in foreign tongues advance
Who only learned your own by some mischance?

Listen, how in the true Natalian twang
Your heathen tonsils meet with horrid clang,
And make your nose, as by deliberate choice,
A funnel for your all-too-frequent voice!
Plomer, 'twas you who, though a boy in age,
Awoke a sleepy continent to rage,
Who dared alone to thrash a craven race
And hold a mirror to its dirty face.
Praised in all countries where the Muse is known
But hunted like a felon from your own,
Whom shall I sacrifice, what blood infuse
On the neglected altar of your muse?—
Lo, him who took the name of 'Grub' in vain
Though he provides its wrapper with his brain,
Who thundered 'Grub Street!' from his paper
throne

Though Grub Street was Olympus to his own^[30]—
In vain would he recant the oaths he swore
And eat them back into his throat once more,
As frightened sharks, when sudden dangers loom,
Swallow their young ones back into their womb:
Caught in a puddle of his native ink,
Ere he could vanish down some friendly sink
To lie unnoticed in his destined drain
Where memory might fish for him in vain,—
Behold I haul him to the light displayed

To die the martyr of the scribbling trade!
Prone on the altar of your Muse he lies
And fatly in his own repentance fries,
As when Prime Hogs upon the embers twinge,
And the fat crackles, and the bristles singe,
The fusing limbs in their own blubber flare,
And up the chimney flies the reek of hair—
All that was mortal of him soars sublime
To reek for ever in the nose of Time.
You journalists with righteous wrath who swell
To see a brother turned into a smell—
Be warned by me and his own dreadful fate
Who dies your many sins to expiate—
Sooner with your own pens a lion assail
Or pick a sleeping mamba in the tail,
Than dare the great Apollo to abuse
Or squirt one drop of ink upon the Muse.
Sooner your own vile ink in buckets swill
And swallow both the paper and the quill—
Than dare, though journalists you be, our curse.
Which still can turn you into something *worse*.
We poets will forgive you all we can
With you the dog 'is father to the man';
'Tis Nature's whim that dogs, when taken short,
Still to the loftiest monument resort,
And oft we shrug and often we are mute
When you our sacred monuments pollute:
Dogs and colonials are in this alike—
One law suffices both for man and tyke—
But dogs are pleased with humble walls at times
And lift their legs unconscious of their crimes,
Yet what colonial would not run a mile

Might he some shining edifice defile?

PART TWO

Now with a slow gyration soars my rhyme
From the ridiculous to the sublime—
Alas, how far beyond his goal has strayed
My Pegasus, who loves in warlike raid,
O'er Durban thundering with his golden hoofs,
To drop great bombs of laughter on your roofs:
We left them at their sacred feast reclined
Diverse in shape though similar in mind.
Some sat apart upon a knoll and talked:
Others like Herons in the ditches stalked:
And all around lay, wallowing at ease,
Full many a porpoise of the beery seas
Who always write exactly what they drink,
And what they swill in laager, vent in ink.
And still new-comers to the Wayzgoose throng
And lady-novelists a thousand strong:
Some gathered flowers, some sprinted for a prize:
Some came with spectacles, and some with eyes:
Some came in char-à-bancs, and some on nags,
Some came in taxis, others came in rags:
Some came with beer and some with good advice,
Some came with morals, others came with lice;
Some came on spec and others came on bikes,
Some came with girls and others came with tykes;

Some came on purpose, others on a brake,
Some came by rail and others by mistake;
Some came by accident—a lucky fluke!
And others came because they feared rebuke.
Some came the food to dig a hungry tusk in,
But Wodson came to quote a ream of Ruskin.
Hill came to make a pun—but he forgot it,
And Sundowner a joke—but none could spot it.
Some arrived there because they knew the way,
Others got there because they went astray;
Some came with food, and some with airs and
graces,
And some with expectation on their faces;
Some out of curiosity, and some
To peel bananas with an inky thumb:
Some came with faces—others were like you,
Insulted Reader!—and they looked it too!
And some were red and fat—and that from
drinking:
Others were spare and lean—but not with
thinking.
Some came in hope and others came in fear,
Diverse in shape the multitude appear,
But all, with one indomitable will,
Loyal to Dullness—and to Dullness still!

Plomer came too, unable to resist,
To bash fat heads together with his fist,
But soon he lay upon the point of death,
Half-chloroformed by journalistic breath;
And statesmen came whose job it is to thump
And shout, and giving honesty the hump,

Too busy even to have time to think,
Drive half the world to war and half to drink:
Both parties there were fully represented—
Parties, in history unprecedented,
Each of whose ranks was totally supplied
By the deserters from the other side.
And which are Nats and which are S.A.P.—
‘Who shall decide when *Journals* disagree?’
And one was there whom I had seen before,
Full high in anticlimax he could soar
And probe ‘behind the button’^[31] Nature’s lore!
Forgive me, Statesman, that I have purloined
This deathless phrase by thine own genius coined,
Seek on, ‘Behind the BUTTON,’ in the Void—
Until you come upon the works of Freud!
Statesman-philosopher! I shake thy hand—
All tailors envy thee throughout the land
Whose BUTTON-HOLISM, without reverse,
Undoes the Trousers of the Universe!
Long be thy wisdom honoured, and thy race
Renowned for flinging smuts in ‘Beauty’s’ face!
Long may thy race perform its glorious part
And scatter smuts on every work of art:
Let Plomer’s art as smutty filth be banned—
And own us prophets in our native land!

Next Pollio came who dared, intrepid man,
To praise the name of Ruskin with Cézanne:
Strict judge! impartially his praise is got
Alike by painting and by Tommy Rot:
With equal hand distributing the bays,
Both Renoir and ‘Vermilion’ win his praise.

Yet when he paints the air is full of flies
And hungry vultures gather in the skies—
Rival of Zeuxis! from whose grapes 'tis said
The disillusioned birds in dudgeon fled:
But on his landscapes trusting flies remain
And from his sunsets sip the gory stain:
Still round his every masterpiece they hum
And thick as on a butcher's window drum:
How aptly by some journalistic sage
Was he misnamed the 'Turner' of our age—
Reversing Midas' gift, who has been known
To 'Turn' the style of Turner to his own.
Through all the country it is his to range
And with his district all his styles to change:
Shrewd as a pedlar, every town he knows
And changes his opinions where he goes:
In Cape Town, to the moderns he inclines,
In Durban—to Pre-Raphaelitic lines:
And yet howe'er he copies, still appears
The parodist of what he most reveres.
'Turner' and twister of a thousand styles,
Over his toil the Muse of Business smiles,
Pictures and public equally are 'sold,'
And what he turns to dross, *she* turns to *gold!*
While he inspired by mountain cloud and tide
Scatters broadcast o'er canvases as wide,
A 'Light that never was on Land or Sea,'
Nor, thank the Lord, is ever like to be!
Behold his swaddled suns, by nightfall kissed,
Staining the yellow napkins of the mist;
Behold the moon, still reeling from his blows,
Upon a cloudlet wipe its bleeding nose,

And here a rock above the skyline stare,
Seeming to ask what dunce had put him there.
Humble, for all his imitative zeal,
Even from Goodman will he deign to steal,
And, even then, the charge of theft escapes
By being duller still, than what he apes.
He passed upon his way with tender sighs
Of yearning for the Gundelfinger Prize:
No more will he forget his rank and station
To pant behind the younger generation—
Parnassus is too steep for failing years,
The heights are cold, the frost will nip his ears,
But down below—ambitious thoughts arise!
Are Comfort and the Gundelfinger Prize,
And there by strenuous feats of Almatademy
Lo, Honest Trade has founded its Academy!
Another ‘painter’ came as I presume
Wheeled in a bath-chair by his nom-de-plume,
Who weekly praised him (paint whate’er he
might)

In the third person—which was only right.
How much he paid himself such tricks to do
Only himself and his own alias knew,
Yet oft he cursed the younger generation
For ‘scratching backs’ and ‘mutual admiration.’
For it is wrong that artists fight in pairs—
Though any tradesman may exalt his wares
Or join his fellows in an honest guild,
Each by the other’s admiration thrilled,
And ready all, in one great yelping pack,
To stab a single artist in the back—
And it is wrong that two should fight abreast

When by a thousand yelping curs oppressed:
Far worse, when making rifles of our pens,
We drive them howling back into their dens.
How can young men such decent manners lack
That when they mob us—we should hit them back?

Pass, 'painter,' pass, take off that tearful gaze,
And Long live François in 'Vermilion's' praise!

Even the animals had scented fun:
'Jock'^[32] from the 'Bushveld' all the way had run.
That faithful quadruped with human soul
Whose tale has caused so many tears to roll.
Full many a raging lion he had mauled,
Never before had fear his heart appalled;
He only came to cock a playful ear,
To sniff the sandwiches and lap the beer;
He only meant his playful tail to switch,
Or hang around for some attractive bitch;
But when he to the gathering drew nigh,
So many curious monsters met his eye,
Down went his tail, his courage and his will—
For all I know, or care, he's running still.
The 'Early Bird' was there, in spats of mud,
A Tegwan^[33] from the clear Umgeni Flood;
The endless joke, for ever in his bill,
He tried to whisper in the ear of Hill,
But in his mouth there was a worm as well
(Though which were which it would be hard to
tell),
And straight into the ear of Hill it fell—
An awful joke—it tickled him like Hell!

Pleased with his damp abode, the worm remains,
And Hill gets half the credit of its brains;
The 'Early Bird' devoured his own poor joke,
And none the wiser, did not even choke.

Here was a man—I thought it was a mess,
A bottle-nosed Narcissus of the Press
Whom God had doomed through all his years to
blink

At his own image in a pool of ink,
In which his own reflection met his eye
And, like a bullfrog, ogled him to die.
Each day revived his ineffectual breath—
Quotidian suicide, diurnal death,
Inured to burial, he still defied,
And daily of his own reflections died.
Sublime he ruled, in his own thoughts benighted,
Woe to the wayward youth who may have slighted
Those high ideals which he supplied the link to—
There was no grovelling depth he would not sink
to,

Nor any villainy he would have shunned
To keep his soul pure or his paunch rotund!
What nectar of ethereal elements
Inspires this prophet of next week's events—
The fumes of some bituminous cigar,
Or something . . . round the corner . . . from the
Bar?

Born in old age: ere youth had yet begun,
Into his second childhood he had run:
A dotard, ere from swaddling he was freed,
Before he ran to play he ran to seed:

But, as those lizards which are kept in jars
Defy corruption, he, in smelly bars,
Preserved intact, no wight so hale as he,
A methylated Immortality—
Whisky he gulped with slobberings uncouth,
But lived in total abstinence of truth.

But last came Jubb with ‘Biltong’ in his hand—
Official organ of Banana Land:
Large was his ‘brow,’^[34] the wonder of its kind,
And as he walked it jutted out behind.
His head with aspidistras had been crowned,
And all the Durban Muses danced around—
Gorgons and highbrows and Chimæras dire
With tongues on wag and spectacles on fire.
Polybius Jubb, in thy kind self I see
The anagram of what a man should be.
So versatile thy Webb-like mind is spun
Thou jack-of-all-arts, but thou Lord of None!
See how thy various talents fully blown
Perform all other functions save their own:
A Socialist thou art in thought and act,
And yet thy business flourishes intact:
A Boss in trade, thou are securely placed,
And only art a Bolshevik in taste:
To kill a sheep, too tender is thy heart,
Yet wilt thou massacre a work of art.
Thou hast the praise of vegetables sung,
Yet play the Butcher to your mother tongue:
A linguist in your sleep, and in your prose
A chilled somnambulist with purple toes;
Music thou lovest, that forbidden fruit!

Yet thou are only musical when mute,
Or when thy nose, in slumber, plays the flute.
No vaccination on thy hide appears,^[35]
But on thy mind—immune to all ideas.
O great Eclectic—do I do thee wrong?
English, art, music, vegetables, and song,
All to the same consistency you mash.
Your life—a Kedgeree! Your mind—a hash!
Behold this page where by thy ‘drastic’ strength
Catullus was ‘reorganized’^[36] at length—
Misprints in galaxies the sight entranced,
And Afrikaans was yet out-Afrikaansed.
Left on thy hands, demented by his fears,
Here Baudelaire in Gibberish appears,
And Rimbaud’s ghost indignantly pursues
The brutal printer that defiled his muse.
Alone he seemed to stand—but at Jubb’s side
(In ink invisible her robes were dyed)
Hovered deodorized, in gaseous hues,
Fair Pyorrhœa, the Colonial Muse—
So in old times the punctual gods would perch
Who never left their heroes in the lurch.
’Twas She who first the flames of Genius lit
In Herman’s^[37] ‘Guide Book to the Infinite,’
Wherein the sage records and much admires
How his great-grandmother detected fires,
And of her telepathic powers doth tell,
Which he confuses with her sense of smell.
For when in suffocating fumes she woke
And found her room half-hidden in the smoke,
Some ‘supernormal power,’ he says, was nigh her

And warned her that the building was on fire!
'Tis She who when our Scots professors woo
Sadly reminds them of their 'mither's broo,'
'Tis She who makes our nature poets melt
With yearning for the bleak and barren veld,
Whither, though trains from every junction puff,
They never venture—sensibly enough!
Inspired by Her the lofty Drennan sprung
To write his poems—yet remain unhung:
'Twas due to Her—a couple rather odd,
That Drennan in the garden walked with God.
'Twas She who breathed the Theory Holistic,
And turned a general into a mystic:
'Twas She, alas, inspired the great 'Z.Z.',
Against my fist to break his addled head,
'Tis She this Humpty Dumpty now renews,
Not to hit back—but still to write reviews
And letters to the Press, in righteous vein,
Against the 'smutty Shakespeare' to complain.
To Her we also owe those doubtful boons,
The heavy Boonzaier's lumbering cartoons,
At whose laborious jokes we only laugh
As at the antics of some huge giraffe:
Still in the cause of politics he serves,
To Party prostitutes his blunted nerves,
For every fault he shows in other men
Commits ten crimes with his unwieldy pen,
Yet when he drops his pencil, contrite man!
He dares with reverence to name Cézanne—
So dying sinners, by their fears engrossed,
Turn from their crimes to name the Holy Ghost.
But halt, my muse, why should we thus reveal

What damp oblivion would else conceal?
Fair Pyorrhœa, whom we've left so long,
Stood as I said, unseen, amid the throng.
In ink invisible She dyed her charms
And dimmed the yellow freckles on her arms:
Colonial grace on all her motions hung
And wit colonial tittered on her tongue—
She seemed, as there She tossed her wanton curls,
The prototype of all colonial girls,
For like a V upturned, stork-like and thin,
Her long straight legs forked downward from her
chin;

Had there been room for one to intervene,
Her body like a goitre would have been—
But what of that? Colonial poets tell
That beauty only in the Soul can dwell
(Poor devils! they are right—at least as far
As goes their knowledge of what 'women' are):
A head, two shins, a knot of withered hair,
Suffice to make colonial 'women' fair.
The body is indecent: She had none
Nor would have deigned to own it had she one.
But ah! her Soul's dimensions to report—
Elephantiasis comes far too short!
Like some huge Zeppelin, its inflated cyst
Flew far above and hovered in the mist.
Her two long teeth protruded like a vole's—
In women still the sign of ardent souls,
And at her shoulders played, like eagle's wings,
Two wild banana leaves attached by strings.
There as she bent above her chosen Knight
A lovely fragrance ravished all his sprite,

From lentils cooking, seemed the scent to steal,
Or carrots at a vegetarian meal:
Proudly he felt that presence o'er him bow
And Laager still and Laager grew his 'brow,'
While all his Soul went yearning to the Muse,
Like a long drink sucked upward from his shoes.

All these and more came flocking to the place,
But most were of the journalistic race;
And what if total strangers butted in?
One touch of boredom makes the whole world kin.
And when their rites to Great God Grub were
paid,

To Dullness next the mighty concourse made
Libations of ambrosial lemonade:
And there, in honour of the Drowsy God,
Polybius Jubb proclaimed the Eisteddfod.
First they disputed who the first should sing,
Deciding, next, by lots to try the thing,
But ere the winner could be drawn or not,
Alas, poor lots! Polybius drew the Lot.
Vain was expostulation, forth he trod
And thus with sacred rage invoked the God,—
While o'er his head, a young banana-frond,
The Muse, unseen, upraised her magic wand—
'Anointed Dullness, faithful still to you,
And to Colonial Culture staunchly true,
With patriot zeal I string my native lyre
Where strings of biltong hum in place of wire—
My native lyre, unique in shape and size,
Whose frame the wishbone of a mule supplies,
And from whose cords the sounding notes are shed

Like putty dropping on a slab of lead.
Inspire my soul to prophecy sublime,
To frenzied platitude and halting rhyme,
Teach me with moon my dusty brains to shine
And contradict myself in every line . . . ’
No more these whirling words amazed our ears,
For in a trice, the God invoked appears—
Of ‘God’s Stepchildren’^[38] you have heard, I’ll
 wad,
But of Wod’s godson, Stepfather of God,
You have never heard: nor in good faith had I,
Yet there he was—and that you can’t deny:
Down with a thud he settles on his rump,
And rocks and caves reverberate the thump:
Ere God taught fishes in the sea to swim
Dullness was there, the World belonged to him:
In utter Night he did the skies immerse
And was the Northcliffe of the Universe,
And still, in spite of God, he holds his own
Ruling the Nations from his paper throne:
Of Tin Gods you may oft have heard or read
But this one was entirely made of lead.
From journalists he never wandered far,
And when he travelled in his cloudy car,
He hitched his Dinner Waggon to ‘The Star.’

The sacred aspidistra wreathed his brows—
Low at his feet the whole assembly bows:
The Judge then bids the rival bards proceed
Each from his works some chosen page to read,
But Jubb was first to take his stately stand
A huge Directory was in his hand,

And fast and thick as sounding hail can fly
Names and Addresses thundered through the sky!
Contagious yawns spread all around the place
And every dullard swallowed half his face:
Vain was it with such boredom to contend
For Jubb could have sustained it to the end,
The lady novelists their entrance scratched
Wodson and Hill their dying hopes despatched,
Herman in vain his tears of envy shed;
Even our great philosopher flushed red
And Holism was knocked upon the head!
Sublime the victor stood—and weighed a ton,
Polybius Jubb the Eisteddfod had won!

But here ‘Z.Z.’ his anger could not quench—
‘Prove first it was translated from the French,
From Afrikaans, from Russian, from the Zoo,
From anything—mere English will not do!’
But Jubb would not be thwarted by a fool who
Knew neither French nor Russian from the Zulu:
He showed his skill and jabbered in Hindoo—
As all Theosophists have learned to do:
‘Z.Z.’ was pleased, but wondered all the same
Whether from Russian or from French it came;
And so with all the anti-English crew,
Who muttered their approval and withdrew.

Even the God, lest he should be out-bored,
Astutely then declared that Jubb had scored,
And beckoning the victor, bade him rise
To loud ovations and receive the prize:
But though through pants and vest the God

explored

And from his pockets all the wealth outpoured,
He delved at first in vain and could not find
The Sacred Carrot with the golden rind,
Whose magic runt, no matter who might chew,
The more one nibbled it, the larger grew.
First he produced—some people thought it rude—
The missing part of ‘Portraits in the Nude,’^[39]
Then having seen his error, paled with fear
And coughed—Ahem, we’ll leave the matter here!
He thrust it back and fumbled once again
Drew forth a watch and then a rusty chain,
The more he delved, the less his pockets bulged—
But many an awful secret was divulged—
The work of poets altered in the proofs
And trampled by a thousand donkeys’ hoofs,
Dismembered manuscripts, reduced to splinters,
Bejubbified before they reached the printers;
Broken agreements, fragments of a play,
A bunch of lentils and a wisp of hay:
Then he produced an epoch-making article
Filched from the French in every single particle,
And signed by—hush, it must not be confessed—
For Pollio’s sake I will conceal the rest.
All these and more lay littered at his feet
Ere from his drawers he drew the promised treat,
But just as Jubb was sailing smooth and bland
To seize the sacred carrot in his hand,
He gave a sudden lurch, his face went blue
His ‘brow’ distended as to burst in two,
He gulped his face with one tremendous swallow,
Down it descended into caverns hollow;

But Jubb had not the enterprise to follow,
And with the wheezings of a punctured tyre,
Gave one last kick, and started to expire:
Let all kind friends this grievous loss deplore
He died as he had lived—a thorough Bore!

The reason of this shock was soon confessed,
In doleful strains my muse must sing the rest—
A *poet*, on his way to bathe, had stumbled
Nude, on the gathering: the heavens rumbled:
Chaste ladies screamed as at a hippogriff
And even on roast fowls, though cold and stiff,
The parsons' noses gave a little sniff:
Forth from the bush that awful vision peered
And like a flambeau flared his ginger beard.
A Tarzan on the fringes of the wood,
Hairy and huge, gorilla-like he stood:
He showed his shaggy face and hairy chest
But wild banana-leaves concealed the rest.
Some gasped, some stared, but it is fair to say
The lady-writers turned the other way.
He gave a growl, the journalists—a start,
Then wistfully they turned them to depart.
Whatever type of bores they may have been,
At least they proved they were not Gadarene,
Those had the sense to drown themselves: but
these
Stole meekly off between the darkening trees.

The Setting Sunrise darkened o'er the glade
Where late a thousand journalists had strayed,
For now they rattled home beneath the stars

And gaily sped the char-à-bancs and cars.
The field was left, a desolated space,
And slaughtered sausages bestrewed the place:
So thickly crumpled paper strewed the lea,
It seemed that all their writings there must be
That had not swept in sewers to the sea:
But all was still—here lay deserted crumbs
And drumsticks sucked by journalistic gums,
And one could learn, from all that there one saw,
How better than the pen they wield the jaw:
Like Flodden field or Bannockburn it seemed,
And over all the Wild Banana streamed.
Now with faint odour mounting to the skies
The ghosts of mangled sausages arise,
And spectral buns await the final end
With raptured Hallelujahs to ascend,
The twilight fell on Umkoomaas lagoon—
And silver in the silence rose the Moon.

MITHRAIC EMBLEMS (1936)



Survey Thyself?

Better in these dead seas of dudgeon
Than dead meat, be a living gudgeon,
To strike out hard, to do your trudgeon,
And swim!

Than perish in Narcissus' style
When with hushed, water-lurking wile,
His shadow played the crocodile
To him,
And seizing by his muddled head
Hung on, until the fool was dead,
Then stowed him in the river bed
To rot!

For youth is cheaper than buck's meat
Though far more delicate to eat:
I've swallowed mine—it was a treat,
And hot!

That minotaurish tragelaph
Of whom I've slain the fatted calf
Yet here survive—the human half
And twin;
And when from brooks I next would quaff
(In liquid form) my photograph,
Be its effect to make me laugh
And grin!

Snakes swallowing their tails no doubt
Find matters likewise slewed about
And like a stocking are turned out-
Side in.

‘Survey thyself’ is all the cry
‘With spectacles; mistrust the Eye’
So, Ego hypnotizes I
Within;
But if your navel is your Star
Within it quench your hot cigar,
And cool such thoughts, although you char
Your skin.

‘Creeping Jesus’

Pale crafty eyes beneath his ginger crop,
A fox’s snout with spectacles on top—
Eye to the keyhole, kneeling on the stair,
We often found this latter saint at prayer,
‘For your own sake,’ he’d tell you with a sigh
(He always did his kindness on the sly).
He paid mere friendship with his good advice
And swarmed with counsels as a cur with lice:
For his friends’ actions, with unerring snout,
He’d always fox his own low motives out,
And having found them, trot them out to view,
Saying it hurt him so much more than you!
Sober, astute, and modest in his mien,
Between extremes he always chose the *mean*,
For Epsom mounted quickly to his head
And he saw brown where other men see red.
Walking Locarno between friend and friend
He soured the quarrels he so loved to mend.
In him the ‘friend’ concealed the jealous ‘tante’
Who slandered women he could not supplant,
Whose faults he would invent and then reveal
On the pretext of trying to conceal.
He’d blurt a secret (none so sure as he)
By hiding it so hard that all could see.
He’d make men black in everybody’s eye—
Taking their part, so stoutly to deny
Things they had never done, nor none suspected . .

Until his stout defence was interjected!
No dun with more reluctance or regret
Ever came knocking to present a debt,
Than he so mildly, sadly would reproach
A friend—or any painful subject broach.
His martyred look no mortal could resist
More than a gossamer to Dempsey's fist,
It had the power to put you in the wrong
And suck excuses from a rawhide thong.
When of apologies your heart was poor
You always seemed to owe him more and more,
The star of Tartuffe by his own grew dim
And Pecksniff was a nincompoop to him!
He was the guy to censure or expunge
The folk on whom he'd condescend to sponge,
And when he ate you out of hearth and home,
On independence lecture you a tome.
A counter-jumper born of base degree
In all the world no greater snob than he,
Though he descended from some anglo-parson
Who had committed [something else than] arson,
And looked it—had you made his collar shunt
To tally with its owner, *back-to-front*!
So satisfied his smirk, so smug his snigger,
You'd take him for a deacon or a vicar;
His pale blue smile was full of deany dope
And in his hand a cake of Monkey Soap.
If we put up with him—'twas as a bug
In his own talent (an expensive rug),
But he abused its lovely silken floss,
One tiny insect spoiled the whole kaross:
The leather's perished, moulted all the hair,

But the old bug is still established there!



Whatever Comes

Need, when beset by hunger in the waste,
For food or friendship takes whatever comes.
The Tartars, scorning kitchens in their haste,
Could cook their food on horseback with their
 bums.

As beggars pool their botches by the way—
The lame upon the eyeless blinkers ride:
Or drunkards (herding phantom sheep that stray)
Who help each other on—from side to side!
Or if as wrecked survivors on a raft
Pecksniff with Bobadil had manned one craft
To share provisions—one his good advice,
And one his oaths and last remaining lice . . .
Instead of feeling sore you could have laughed
At your mistake, and let the truth suffice.

A Good Resolution

Enough of those who study the oblique,
Inverted archæologists, who seek
The New, as if it were some quaint antique—

Nomads of Time, and pungent with its must,
Who took the latest crinolines on trust
As wigwams for their vagrant wanderlust;—

Of jargons that a fuddled Celt will mix
By the blue light of methylated wicks,
Fishing dead words like kippers from the Styx;—

Sham Brownings, too, who'll cloud a shallow
stream,
Or in a haystack hide a needle theme
Till platitudes like propositions seem—

With *pontes asinorum* bridging ditches
That, fully-armed, without the aid of witches,
Old knights could hurdle in their cast-iron
breeches.

Hide poverty beneath a chequered shirt
And trust from common eyesight to divert
The jagged ribs that corrugate the dirt.

I will go stark: and let my meanings show
Clear as a milk-white feather in a crow

Or a black stallion on a field of snow.



The Pommitos

Of the dead bones
Accepting the rot,
And cursing us others for
Not:—
For standing up straight
In spite of the weight
And not lying down before
Shot.
Since standing or lying,
Swimming or flying,
May come to the same in the
End:—
Much it must matter
If, straighter or flatter,
We stand, or we wallow, or
Bend!

To a Pommie Critic

I cannot 'voice' your hesitations,
Your difficulties or your doubt?—
The rictus of your affectations
Would sprain my jaw and knock me out!
I see the obvious ten leagues off,
The lighthouse of my little theme;
It does not make me sneer or cough
That things resemble what they seem—
Philosophy? He is an ass
Who tries to fish in such a stream;
I skim the mirror of its cream
When beauty simpers in the glass;
And take whatever comes to pass
Though it should happen in a dream.

X. Y. Z.

Be shut, as tetanous as clams,
To wonder and delight;
Wait for your smug progressive trams
From morning sun till night—

Suspect your vision, and begin
Always in fear or doubt,
And rather than be taken in
Be bloody-well kicked out!

Some dryad of the Aspidistras
Select, to soothe your pain:
Let [Teacher] guide you to your mistress
And Sigmund pull the chain!

Only that Beauty shall be mine
That never slacks the strain—
A fighting salmon on the line,
A snorter at the rein!

For Beauty is, like nimble Wit,
Heedless of causing hurt,
Yet answers gratefully the bit,
The rowel and the quirt.

It must be branded like a steer
And torried with the cape
Lest in too tame an atmosphere

It lose its sprightly shape.

When so decayed a quadruped
Right on my path upreared,
Two-faced, like Janus, with each head
Wearing an old false beard,

Scorning the grim taboos of wowers
Although it raised a din,
I pulled 'Orlando' from his trousers
Like Marsyas from his skin—

Against their will such weird abortions
Are instruments of Grace
To emphasise the true proportions
Whose outline they deface.

No love is worthy to be crowned
Until its steel is proved,
And some such monster bites the ground,
Or gorgon is removed.

In Fafnir's gore the babe must wash,
Or bathe in Hydra's tears,
To make his hide a mackintosh
Impervious to the years.

No breed of monsters, freaks, or giants
But yields some magic serum,
With all Mythology and Science
To illustrate my Theorem!



Testament of a Vaquero

Herding his cattle on the dusty flat,
A cowboy whose guitar had lost its tone,
With the grey moonlight leaking through his hat,
Thus, on his ancient gelding as he sat,
From hungry guts ventriloquized alone—
‘At Oxford if I hadn’t proved a fool
(What tragedies my happy fate forbids!)
I’d be a Charlie sitting on a stool
And teaching mathematics to the kids.
My old professor in a thousand shifts,
My early friend, perhaps the last I’ll know,
I thank my Poverty for all my gifts
Who shares with me his coat of wind and snow.
All else I can bequeath to who requires—
To those who lack the true poetic fires
I leave the fine nystagmus of my eye
To lead them round the world in frantic gyres,
And land them in a garret or a sty;
That he for whom the fatted calf was fed,
So late returning homeward for the spree,
Shall find a full-grown toro in his stead
And thank his fortune for the nearest tree.
But I will hoard away my lack of gear—
The world my sun-baked spud, my stove the day!
And if at times its rind be charred and tough
Keen hunger is the knife that cuts the way—
There’s death in surfeit, dullness in ‘Enough.’
To the anatomists—my twisted spine—

Diploma of equestrian despite;
But to their patients half my Crusoe sleight
Of fishing out the cargo from the wreck;
And this light heart—to raft them to the calm
Green island with its periscope of palm,
And my Good Luck to Admiral the deck!
To those who dream of roses and of lilies—
(Earnest of faith) these breeches I got rent
When breaking in the pride of English fillies
(My warhorse still) and punching cows in Kent.
And to my children, all that I would save,
When empires crash and red battalions form,
The Celtic blood so buoyant to the storm,
That gay joy-riding foam of every wave!

To 'the Future'

You all-propitious season,
Older than Adam's race—
With what foresight and reason
You shame to show your face!

The Prodigal

John Bull, go fatten up your Son
Against my passing by,
And Jackie Calf! be underdone
Whether you roast or fry;
I'll take my time of Day from none—
Go carefully, say I!

When clocks like whirling windmills turn
And scarcely pause to chime
Like fast propellers at the stern
Of disappearing Time,
Then Time's to squander, Time's to burn,
And Leisure is no crime.

You've slung the World upon a cord
Your pendulum of rock;
Its every beat though you record,
I care no tick nor tock—
The Pen is mightier than the Sword,
But slower than the Clock.

Amphitryon may toot his horn
And puff-puff run to date,
But leisure was my cash and corn
Who've loitered in my gait,
Nor died of hurry, nor was born
Through fear of being late.



TALKING BRONCO (1946)



Dreaming Spires

Through villages of yelping tykes
With skulls on totem-poles, and wogs
Exclaiming at our motor bikes
With more amazement than their dogs:

Respiring fumes of pure phlogiston
On hardware broncos, half-machine,
With arteries pulsing to the piston
And hearts inducting gasoline:

Buckjumping over ruts and boulders,
The Centaurs of an age of steel
Engrafted all save head and shoulders
Into the horsepower of the wheel—

We roared into the open country,
Scattering vultures, kites, and crows;
All Nature scolding our effrontery
In raucous agitation rose.

Zoology went raving stark
To meet us on the open track—
The whole riff raff of Noah's Ark
With which the wilderness was black.

With kicks and whinnies, bucks and snorts,
Their circuses stamped by:
A herd of wildebeest cavorts,

And somersaults against the sky:

Across the stripes of zebras sailing,
The eyesight rattles like a cane
That's rattled down an area-railing
Until it blurs upon the brain.

The lions flee with standing hackles,
Leaving their feast before they've dined:
Their funeral poultry flaps and cackles
To share the breeze they feel behind.

Both wart- and road-hog vie together,
As they and we, petarding smoke,
Belly to earth and hell for leather,
In fumes of dust and petrol choke.

We catch the madness they have caught,
Stand on the footrests, and guffaw—
Till shadowed by a looming thought
And visited with sudden awe,

We close our throttles, clench the curb,
And hush the rumble of our tyres,
Abashed and fearful to disturb
The City of the Dreaming Spires—

The City of Giraffes!—a People
Who live between the earth and skies,
Each in his lone religious steeple,
Keeping a light-house with his eyes:

Each his own stairway, tower, and stylite,

Ascending on his saintly way
Up rungs of gold into the twilight
And leafy ladders to the day:

Chimneys of silence! at whose summit,
Like storks, the daydreams love to nest;
The Earth, descending like a plummet
Into the oceans of unrest,

They can ignore—whose nearer neighbour
The sun is, with the stairs and moon
That on their hides, with learned labour,
Tattooed the hieroglyphic rune.

Muezzins that from airy pylons
Peer out above the golden trees
Where the mimosas fleece the silence
Or slumber on the drone of bees:

Nought of this earth they see but flowers
Quilting a carpet to the sky
To where some pensive creny towers
Or Kilimanjaro takes the eye.

Their baser passions fast on greens
Where, never to intrude or push,
Their bodies live like submarines,
Far down beneath them, in the bush.

Around their head the solar glories,
With their terrestrial sisters fly—
Rollers, and orioles, and lories,
And trogons of the evening sky.

Their bloodstream with a yeasty leaven
Exalts them to the stars above,
As we are raised, though not to heaven,
By drink—or when we fall in love.

By many a dismal crash and wreck
Our dreams are weaned of aviation,
But these have beaten (by a neck!)
The steepest laws of gravitation.

Some animals have all the luck,
Who hurl their breed in nature's throat—
Out of a gumtree by a buck,
Or escalator—by a goat!

When I have worked my ticket, pension,
And whatsoever I can bum,
To colonise the fourth dimension,
With my Beloved, I may come,

And buy a pair of stilts for both,
And hire a periscope for two,
To vegetate in towering sloth
Out here amongst these chosen few . . .

Or so my fancies seemed to sing
To see, across the gulf of years,
The soldiers of a reigning King
Confront those ghostly halberdiers.

But someone kicks his starter back:
Anachronism cocks its ears.
Like Beefeaters who've got the sack

With their own heads upon their spears;

Like Leftwing Poets at the hint
Of work, or danger, or the blitz,
Or when they catch the deadly glint
Of satire, swordplay of the wits,—

Into the dusk of leafy oceans
They fade away with phantom tread;
And changing gears, reversing notions,
The road to Moshi roars ahead.



Snapshot of Nairobi

With orange-peel the streets are strown
And pips, beyond computing,
On every shoulder save my own,
That's fractured with saluting.

Washing Day

Amongst the rooftop chimneys where the breezes
Their dizzy choreography design,
Pyjamas, combinations, and chemises
Inflate themselves and dance upon the line.
Drilled by a loose disorder and abandon,
They belly and explode, revolve and swing,
As fearless of the precipice they stand on
As if there were religion in a string.
Annexing with their parachute invasion
The intimate behaviour of our life,
They argue, or embrace with kind persuasion,
And parody our dalliance or our strife.
We change ideas and moods like shirts or singlets,
Which, having shed, they rise to mock us still:
And the wind laughs and shakes her golden
 ringlets
To set them independent of our will.
They curtsey and collapse, revolve and billow—
A warning that, when least aware we lie,
The dreams are incubated in our pillow
That animate its chrysalis to fly.

The Beveridge Plan

Through land and sea supreme
Without a rift or schism
Roll on the Wowser's dream—
Fascidemokshevism!

On the Martyrdom of F. Garcia Lorca

Not only did he lose his life
By shots assassinated:
But with a hatchet and a knife
Was after that—translated.

Reflections

While Echo pined into a shade,
Narcissus, by the water's shelf,
Met with a lurking death, and made
An alligator of himself.

Of many selves we all possess
My meanest has the most persisted,
The one that joined the N.F.S.
When half humanity enlisted.

A shifty and insidious ghost,
Of all my selves he is the one,
Though it's with him I meet the most,
I'd go the longest way to shun.

When manhood crests the full red stream
Of comradeship, and breasts the surge,
Dreaming a chilled, amphibious dream,
He haunts the shallows by the verge.

Out of the mirrors in hotels
He makes for me, but as I pass,
Recedes into their glazing wells
And leaves no ripples on the glass.

Along the windows of the shops,
And in the tankard's curving base,
I have surprised him as he drops

Into the void without a trace.

He shaves the surfaces: he snails
His sheeny track along the walls:
The windows seem a myriad scales
Through which an endless serpent crawls.

His form is one, his number legion:
He incubates in hushed platoons,
Denizens of the glassy region
And of the vitreous lagoons.

Each time I step into the street
I multiply his gliding swarms,
Along the panes to launch a fleet
Of bloodless and reptilian forms.

I know the scar upon his cheek,
His limp, his stare, his friendly smile—
Though human in his main physique,
Yet saurian in his lurking guile.

Well on this side of make-believe,
Though edging always to the flanks,
He wears my chevrons on his sleeve
As though he'd earned them in the ranks.

In him, behind each sheet of glaze,
A Eunuch with a bowstring hides:
Under each film, with lidless gaze,
A sleepless alligator slides.

Within his heart, so chilled and squamous,

He knows I've but to sell my pride
To make him safe, and rich, and famous;
And he would fatten if I died.

In feigned petition from the sash
He swerves to me, and I from him:
But if one day you hear a splash,
You'll know he's fastened on a limb.

No ripple on the glassy frame
Will show you where a man was drowned;
But Echo, practising his Fame,
Will pine once more into a sound.

The Volunteer's Reply to the Poet

(‘WILL IT BE SO AGAIN?’)

. . . So the Soldier replied to the Poet,
Oh yes! it will all be the same,
But a bloody sight worse, and you know it
Since you have a hand in the game:
And you'll be the first in the racket
To sell us a similar dope,
Wrapped up in a rosier packet,
But noosed with as cunning a rope.
You coin us the catchwords and phrases
For which to be slaughtered; and then,
While thousands are blasted to blazes,
Sit picking your nose with your pen.
We know what you're bursting to tell us,
By heart. It is all very fine.
We must swallow the Bait that you sell us
And pay for your Hook and your Line.
But when we have come to the Isthmus
That bridges the Slump to the War,
We shall contact a new Father Christmas
Like the one we contacted before,
Deploring the one he replaces
Like you do (it's part of the show!)
But with those same mincing grimaces
And that mealy old kisser we know!
And he'll patent a cheap cornucopia,

For all that our purse can afford,
And rent us a flat in Utopia
With dreams for our lodging and board.
And we'll hand in our Ammo and Guns
As we handed them in once before,
And he'll lock them up safe; till our sons
Are conscripted for Freedom once more.
We can die for our faith by the million
And laugh at our bruises and scars,
But hush! for the Poet-Civilian
Is weeping, between the cigars.
Mellifluous, sweeter than Cadbury's,
The M.O.I. Nightingale (Hush!)
Is lining his funk-hole with Bradburies
So his feelings come out with a rush,
For our woes are the cash in his kitty
When his voice he so kindly devotes
In sentiment, pathos, and pity,
To bringing huge lumps to the throats
Of our widows, and sweethearts, and
 trollops,
Since it sells like hot cakes to the town
As he doles out the Goitre in dollops
And the public is gulping it down.
Oh well may he weep for the soldier,
Who weeps at a guinea a tear,
For although his invention gets mouldier,
It keeps him his job in the rear.
When my Mrs. the organ is wheeling
And my adenoids wheeze to the sky,
He will publish the hunger I'm feeling
And rake in his cheque with a sigh:

And when with a trayful of matches
And laces, you hawk in the street,
O comrades, in tatters and patches,
Rejoice! since we're in for a treat:
For when we have died in the gutter
To safeguard his income and state,
Be sure that the Poet will utter
Some beautiful thoughts on our Fate!

Kwa Heri!^[40]

Just when the sun relieves the sentry,
Orion, of the old K.As.^[41]
With his black face and glinting tunic:
And rears blood-crimson at the entry
(Since Yalta was another Munich)
His tarboosh with its badge of rays:

With the blue rumour of the pigeon
The solitude begins to coo,
And daylight to their dens to shepherd
The wolf the lion and the leopard
Askaris^[42] of the red religion
These times have forced on me and you,

Dark soldiers of my king! with ears
Like rifle-slings or teeth like saws,^[43]
Whom in this trade of shocks and changes,
Your weird misfeature less estranges
Than your two-leggedness endears
When Nature grins with fiercer jaws:

When round the raft with rigid fin
Patrolled the sentinel of fear,
Or when the reef, with fangs as red,
Devoured the remnant of the dead
Till death became one jagged grin
That gashed the day from ear to ear.

Or when, obscenely interlacing,
Cannibal trees were seen to strive,
And in the foetid forest area
Those huge green statues of malaria,
With chilly tentacles embracing,
Devoured each other's flesh alive.

From those who'll profit by such journeys
Few riflemen are like to hear—
Unesco's pale bloodsucking leeches
Who'll drink the healths and make the speeches:
Peace delegates, and sleek attorneys
Who'll farm this carnage from the rear.

But now those evil dreams are dying.
In the white hush above the world,
With glaciers soaring out of sight
The huge Kilima^[44] bursts the night
To which the ship of gold comes flying
With rosy spinnaker unfurled.

Like endless flocks of orient fleeces
Chiming with birds instead of bells
The lit mimosas from their branches
Let fall the spicy avalanches
Which every waking breeze releases,
Or bird, that in their frondage dwells.

Drive forth your hopes like steers and heifers
To graze across these golden plains
Since now for one freak hour is focused
No threat of hailstorm, drought or locust,

And now the gentlest of the zephyrs
Leads home the lions by their manes.

NOTES

- [1] *Jiggers*: subcutaneous parasites.
- [2] *Ferreira*: a smutty folk-song in Afrikaans.
- [3] *Nagmaal*: a reunion of South African peasants and their families for purposes of social festivity, commerce and religious debauchery.
- [4] *Empire Group*: a society whose meetings are mentally and morally analogous to the above.
- [5] *Bolitho*: Hector, not William. Prolific and popular interpreter of the ‘New Earth,’ the ‘Open Spaces,’ etc., to which he even relates the present writer’s poems. Accounting for the mental and physical ‘superiority’ of the Colonial to the European, B. writes—“‘It’s the distance that does it,” said my millionaire, looking at me with his rather fine head chiselled on a background of cream madonna-lilies, “it’s the distance that does it.””
- [6] *‘Totius’*: *nom de plume* of a popular Afrikaans bard. His masterpiece, *Die Os* (the Ox), is highly praised by Dr. Hermann, the Cape Town Bergson, on account of the poet’s having identified his mind and soul so completely with that of his subject. See *The Wayzgoose* (first page, with footnote).

‘A clime so prosperous both to men and kine
That which were which a sage could scarce define.’

- [7] *Bull Hoek* (pron. *hook*) and *Bondleswaart*: (i) shooting raid

on un-*armed

religious sect; (ii) bombing raid, by air, on a village which complained at a dog-tax.

[8] *Disselboom*: shaft of ox-wagon.

[9] *Camargue*: pampa at the mouth of the Rhône which together with

the Sauvage and the desert Crau form a vast grazing ground for thousands of wild cattle and horses. The Camarguais horses are a distinct race.

[10] *Trident*: dual allusion to the trident of Neptune and that carried by the guardians or cowboys of the Camargue.

[11] The seven colours of the rainbow when painted on a swiftly revolving disc combine to form the purest whiteness.

[12] *Kaross*. A rug made of fur or of the fleeces of antelopes, otters, or leopards.

[13] *Trident of Cailar*. The trident of the Camargue cowboys.

[14] *Commando*. Since this poem was written the word *Commando* has been appropriated to designate a special *infantry* unit. Formerly it referred to horsemen.

[15] The cattle-egret accompanies cowboys and their herds in order to feed on the grasshoppers their passing raises.

[16] *Voet-ganger*. Newly hatched locust—‘Foot-goer.’

[17] *Attila*: a Roman historian recounts that the Huns often used their meat as a saddle, thus making it more tender and obviating the necessity of cooking it.

[18] In justification of the succeeding self-contradictions, I quote from memory from the only two of these authors’ innumerable text-books which have fallen into my hands, and in which, by a special formula, everything is defined either as the antithesis of what it is or the essence of what it isn’t: ‘A poem has a theme because it has no

theme.’ ‘Concrete intelligence suffers from the illusion of knowledge.’

‘Poetry is an accurate sensation of the Unknown.’ Laforque’s is ‘an intellectually de-intellectualized intellect.’ (‘La plupart des hommes ont de la poésie une idée si vague que ce vague même de leur idée est pour eux la définition de la poésie.’ Paul Valery.)

[19] I mean the monster, nor his progenitor. The surname would be the same.

[20] ‘And Black Death came on Argus, having seen
Ulysses after twenty years had been’—
So wrote old Homer of Ulysses’ hound
And now Black Death my doggie you have found.
(HORATIO BOTTOMLEY: *Prison Poems*)

[21] This refers to the high praises bestowed on a limited edition of poems by a group of literary celebrities who were satirized in it. These lavish praises blatantly and laughably illustrate the methods by which the great Bloomsbury matriarchies conduct the business of reviewing: and their touching belief in the efficacy of a continuous tribute of lip-service from exalted journalistic positions as a defence against ridicule. As is seen in this case, the literary value of the book meant nothing. The social and political expedience of praising the author meant so much that it was done off-hand without consulting the contents of the book, though it only contained eighteen pages. In these matriarchies the ‘women’ produce the ‘art’ while the sexually segregated ‘husbands’ and their friends, as dependants and menials (all of course wearing the obligatory homosexual livery), carry out their instructions in the sphere of publicity. The time that elapsed between the lavish praises bestowed on this book and the half-hearted lampoons which subsequently followed (even allowing a month for recovery from shock) shows that two or three months must have elapsed between the praising of the book and the cutting of the pages.

In the former version of this poem I had Desmond MacCarthy's
[22] name here. I have learned since that he was entirely innocent.
For
the injustice done to him I take the opportunity of apologizing
publicly, as I have already done privately.

[23] See *Satire and Fiction*, a pamphlet by Wyndham Lewis and
Roy
Campbell.

[24] Example—'Wanted: a good short-horn typist.'—S.A. Paper.

[25] The Gundelfinger Prize is awarded annually to the most
successful
'painter' in Natal.

[26] Two local popular painters.

[27] This phenomenon occurs annually in S.A. It appears to be a
vast
corroboree of journalists, and to judge from their own reports of it,
it combines the functions of a bun-fight, an Eisteddfod and an
Olympic
contest. The Wayzgoose of this poem, however, is not only attended
by those who celebrate the function annually, but by all the swarms
of would-be poets, novelists, philosophers, etc., in South Africa,
who should all be compelled to attend such functions *daily*.

[28] See *Holism and Evolution*, by General J. Smuts.

[29] Minister of Justice for South Africa.

[30] Field Street, Durban.

[31] 'But *behind the button* there is a great *story* which Science
has not
yet discovered.'—General Smuts on 'Beauty.' 'Nobody ought to
deny that General Smuts is a *great poet*.'—*Professor Drennan*.

[32] 'Jock of the Bushveld,' a dog, one of the national heroes of
South
Africa, who occurs in a sentimental novel by Sir Percy FitzPatrick.

[33] Tegwan—an ungainly wading bird that spends half its time
building
houses and the other half messing about in the slime—like the
Early Bird who inhabits the same district, Durban North.

[34] I remember an occasion in Durban when a man delivered a lecture on ‘Why I am a highbrow.’ His brow was invisible and his only prominent feature was an enormous posterior, which suggested the poem, *Polybius Jubb’s Defence of Highbrows*.

[35] Not content with being enemies to the arts, about fifty Jubbs at every small-pox outbreak conscientiously object to science and do everything they can to spread the disease by proselytizing among uneducated people for anti-vaccination.

[36] ‘Voorslag will be drastically reorganized. Neither Mr. Campbell nor Mr. Plomer will be associated with it from now on’—(Voorslag). Voorslag nevertheless retained some of our MSS. to which they claimed a legal right, and we allowed them to be published after exacting the *promise that they would not be tampered with*. After having both solicited and accepted our MSS., the founders, without asking our permission and before publication, read them aloud at their public literary debauches. Then, after that, they made considerable alterations to the proofs, spoiling everything we wrote either by their bungling ‘improvements’ or by neglecting to correct the proofs.

[37] Another S. African ‘philosopher.’

[38] A South African novel.

[39] A story in William Plomer’s *I Speak of Africa*. It appeared first in a well-known Natal magazine and was mutilated without his permission before being printed.

[40] *Kwa Heri!*: Good-bye! (Swahili).

[41] *K.As.*: or K.A.Rs. King’s African Rifles.

[42] *Askari*: Arabic word for soldier, mispronounced by most African soldiers (as here) to accentuate penultimate syllable.

[43] *Ears like rifle-slings or teeth like saws*: Many African soldiers belonging to primitive tribes have their teeth filed to points or the lobes of their ears so perforated and stretched to carry such

ornaments

as cigarette tins, that the lobes have to be looped and wound round the upper cartilage of the ear, on parade, for fear that when sloping arms the soldiers might push their rifles through their own ears!

[44] *Kilima*: Mountain. In this case Kilimanjaro.

INDEX OF TITLES

African Moonrise, [190](#)

After the Horse-fair, [136](#)

Albatross, The, [32](#), [108](#)

Alcazar Mined, The, [154](#)

Altar, The, [116](#)

Amphisbæna, [195](#)

Autumn, [52](#)

Autumn Plane, [98](#)

Beveridge Plan, The, [283](#)

Black Magic, [197](#)

Blue Wave, The, [100](#)

Buffel's Kop, [26](#)

Canaan, [95](#)

Choosing a Mast, [103](#)

Christ in the Hospital, [157](#)

Christ in Uniform, [154](#)

'Creeping Jesus', [270](#)

Crystal, The, 131

Dawn, The, [124](#)

Dead Torero, The, [143](#)

Death of the Bull, [123](#)

Death of Polybius Jubb, The, [199](#)

Dedication of a Tree, [146](#)

Dedication to Mary Campbell, [15](#), [175](#)

Dreaming Spires, [279](#)

En Una Noche Oscura, [164](#)

Estocade, [51](#)

Faith, [138](#)

Familiar Dæmon, [141](#)

Festivals of Flight, The, [37](#)

Fifth Sword, The, [120](#)

Fight, The, [155](#)

First Sword, The, [118](#)

Flame, The, [99](#)

Flaming Terrapin, The, [59](#)

Flower, The, [100](#)

Flowering Reed, The, [95](#)

Fourth Sword, The, [119](#)

Garden, The, [54](#)

Georgiad, The, [201](#)

Georgian Spring, [181](#)

Good Resolution, A, [272](#)

Gum Trees, The, [110](#)

Hat, The, [131](#)

Hjalmar, [17](#)

Holism, [197](#)

Home Thoughts in Bloomsbury, [196](#)

Horses on the Camargue, [47](#)

Hot Rifles, [153](#)

Illumination, [117](#)

In the Town Square, [187](#)

Jug of Water, A, [132](#)

Junction of Rails: Voice of Steel, [149](#)

Kwa Heri!, [287](#)

La Clemence, [106](#)

Land Grabber, The, [199](#)

Louse Catchers, The, [107](#)

Luís de Camões, [159](#)

Making of a Poet, The, [27](#)

Mass at Dawn, [47](#)

Mazeppa, [19](#)

Meeting, The, [125](#)

Mithraic Frieze, [115](#)

Mithras Speaks I, [126](#)

Mithras Speaks II, [126](#)

Mocking Bird, The, [155](#)

Morning, The, [124](#)

Olive Tree, The I, [109](#)

Olive Tree, The II, [109](#)

On Professor Drennan's Verse, [197](#)

On Some South African Novelists, [198](#)

On the Death of a Journalist, [199](#)

On the Martyrdom of F. Garcia Lorca, [283](#)

On Top of the Caderau, [102](#)

Open Window, An, [52](#)

Overtime, [112](#)

Palm, The, [49](#)

Poets in Africa, [191](#)

Polybius Jubb, as Vegetarian, [198](#)

Polybius Jubb's Defence of Highbrows, [198](#)

Pomegranates, [143](#)

Pommitos, The, [273](#)

Posada, [158](#)

Prodigal, The, [277](#)

Raven, The I, [121](#)

Raven, The II, [122](#)

Raven's Nest, The, [122](#)

Reflection, [107](#)

Reflections, [284](#)

Rejoneador, The, [106](#)

Resurrection, [44](#)

Road to Arles, The, [99](#)

Rounding the Cape, [27](#)

Rust, [148](#)

St. Peter of the Three Canals, [182](#)

San Juan de la Cruz, [163](#)

San Juan Sings, [125](#)

Secret Muse, The, [105](#)

Second Sword, The, [118](#)

Serf, The, [30](#)

Seven Swords, The, [117](#)

Seventh Sword, The, [121](#)

Shell, The, [98](#)

Silence, [37](#)

Sisters, The, [43](#)

Sixth Sword, The, [120](#)

Skull in the Desert, The, [159](#)

Sleeper, The, [48](#)

Sleeping Woman, A, [110](#)

Sling, The, [127](#)

Snake, The, [55](#)

Snake, The Scorpion, and the Dog, The, [123](#)

Snapshot of Nairobi, [282](#)

Solar Enemy, The, [116](#)

Solo and Chorus from 'The Conquistador', [185](#)

Song, [97](#)

Song for the People, A, [28](#)

Sonnet, [54](#)

Survey Thyself?, [269](#)

Swans, [101](#)

Temperance Official at the Exhibition of South African Paintings, A, [197](#)

Testament of a Vaquero, [276](#)

Theology of Bongwi, the Baboon, The, [17](#)

Third Sword, The, [119](#)

To a Contemporary, [194](#)

To a Pet Cobra, [31](#)

To a Pommie Critic, [274](#)

To a Young Man with Pink Eyes, [189](#)

Toledo, July 1936, [153](#)

Toril, [146](#)

To 'the Future', [277](#)

To the Sun, [127](#)

To the Survivors, [135](#)

Tristan da Cunha, [40](#)

Truth about Rhodes, The, [196](#)

Vaquero's Lament on getting a Cheque, [145](#)

Vaquero to his Wife, [142](#)

Veld Eclogue: The Pioneers, A, [22](#)

Vespers on the Nile, [102](#)

Volunteer's Reply to the Poet, The, [286](#)

Washing Day, [283](#)

Wayzgoose, The, [243](#)

Whatever Comes, [272](#)

Wings, [101](#)

Written in the Horsetruck, [148](#)

X. Y. Z., [274](#)

Zebras, The, [40](#)

Zulu Girl, The, [30](#)

Transcriber's Notes:

Luis de Camoes and variants *to* Luís de Camões (global change)

Footnote on page 22 deleted: comprised "For this and following references see *Notes*, p. 291."

page 66: *avalances to avalanches*: With such a roar white avalanches slide

page 195: *Amphisboena to Amphisbæna* and also globally

page 206: *depise to despise*: And sure, what blushing milkmaid would despise

page 217: *weekliest to weakest*: From him to Bennett (weakest of all)

page 218: *Archilles to Achilles*: The fierce Achilles, taunter of the slain,

page 225: *bossom to bosom*: And every bosom wells with loneliness,

page 248: *vrew* retained on the assumption that *vrouw, vrow, vroa, vrou*, is intended

page 249: *small-box to small-pox*: It burns like small-pox, it inflames the eyes,

page 254: *to to too*: A funnel for your all-too-frequent voice!

page 254: his to him: Lo, him who took the name of 'Grub' in vain
note 7: (2) to (ii): (for consistency).

[The end of *The Collected Poems of Roy Campbell* by Roy Campbell]