Classic Poetry Series

Algernon Charles Swinburne

- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

Algernon Charles Swinburne (April 5, 1837 - April 10, 1909)

Algernon Charles Swinburne was an English poet, playwright, novelist, and critic. He invented the roundel form, wrote several novels, and contributed to the famous Eleventh Edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in every year from 1903 to 1907 and again in 1909.

Biography

Swinburne was born at 7 Chester Street, Grosvenor Place, London, on 5 April 1837. He was the eldest of six children born to Captain (later Admiral) Charles Henry Swinburne and Lady Jane Henrietta, daughter of the 3rd Earl of Ashburnham. He grew up at East Dene in Bonchurch on the Isle of Wight and attended Eton College 1849-53, where he first started writing poetry, and then Balliol College, Oxford 1856-60 with a brief hiatus when he was rusticated from the university in 1859 for having publicly supported the attempted assassination of Napoleon III by Felice Orsini, returning in May 1860, though he never received a degree.

He spent summer holidays at Capheaton Hall in Northumberland, the house of his grandfather, Sir John Swinburne, 6th Baronet (1762–1860) who had a famous library and was President of the Literary and Philosophical Society in Newcastle upon Tyne. Swinburne considered Northumberland to be his native county, an emotion memorably reflected in poems like the intensely patriotic 'Northumberland', 'Grace Darling' and others. He enjoyed riding his pony across the moors (he was a daring horseman) 'through honeyed leagues of the northland border'. He never called it the Scottish border.

In the years 1857–60, Swinburne became one of Lady Pauline Trevelyan's intellectual circle at Wallington Hall and after his grandfather's death in 1860, would stay with William Bell Scott in Newcastle. In December 1862, Swinburne accompanied Scott and his guests, probably including Dante Gabriel Rossetti , on a trip to Tynemouth. Scott writes in his memoirs that as they walked by the sea, Swinburne declaimed the as yet unpublished 'Hymn to Proserpine' and 'Laus Veneris' in his lilting intonation, while the waves 'were running the whole length of the long level sands towards Cullercoats and sounding like far-off acclamations'.

At Oxford Swinburne met several Pre-Raphaelites, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He also met William Morris. After leaving college he lived in London and started an active writing career,

where Rossetti was delighted with his 'little Northumbrian friend', a reference to Swinburne's diminutive height—he was just over five feet tall.

His poetic works include: Atalanta in Calydon (1865), Poems and Ballads (1866), Songs before Sunrise (1871), Poems and Ballads Second Series, (1878) Tristram of Lyonesse (1882), Poems and Ballads Third Series (1889), and the novel Lesbia Brandon (published posthumously in 1952).

Poems and Ballads caused a sensation when it was first published , especially the poems written in homage of Sappho of Lesbos such as "Anactoria" and "Sapphics": Moxon and Co. transferred its publication rights to John Camden Hotten.Other poems in this volume such as "The Leper," "Laus Veneris," and "St Dorothy" evoke a Victorian fascination with the Middle Ages, and are explicitly mediaeval in style, tone and construction. Also featured in this volume are "Hymn to Proserpine", "The Triumph of Time" and "Dolores (Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs)".

Swinburne devised the poetic form called the roundel, a variation of the French Rondeau form, and some were included in A Century of Roundels dedicated to Christina Rossetti. Swinburne wrote to Edward Burne-Jones in 1883: "I have got a tiny new book of songs or songlets, in one form and all manner of metres ... just coming out, of which Miss Rossetti has accepted the dedication. I hope you and Georgie [his wife Georgiana, one of the MacDonald sisters] will find something to like among a hundred poems of nine lines each, twenty-four of which are about babies or small children". Opinions of these poems vary between those who find them captivating and brilliant, to those who find them merely clever and contrived. One of them, A Baby's Death, was set to music by the English composer Sir Edward Elgar as the song Roundel: The little eyes that never knew Light.

Swinburne was an alcoholic and algolagniac, and a highly excitable character. His health suffered as a result, and in 1879 at the age of 42 he was taken into care by his friend Theodore Watts, who looked after him for the rest of his life at The Pines, 11 Putney Hill, Putney SW15.Thereafter he lost his youthful rebelliousness and developed into a figure of social respectability. He died at the Pines,on 10 April 1909 at the age of 72 and was buried at St. Boniface Church, Bonchurch on the Isle of Wight.

Criticism

Swinburne is considered a decadent poet, although he perhaps professed to more vice than he actually indulged in; Oscar Wilde stated that Swinburne was "a braggart in matters of vice, who had done everything he could to convince his fellow citizens of his homosexuality and bestiality without being in the slightest degree a homosexual or a bestializer."

His mastery of vocabulary, rhyme and metre is impressive, although he has also been criticized for his florid style and word choices that only fit the rhyme scheme rather than contributing to the meaning of the piece. He is the virtual star of the third volume of George Saintsbury's famous History of English Prosody, and A. E. Housman, a more measured and even somewhat hostile critic, devoted paragraphs of praise to his rhyming ability.

Swinburne's work was once quite popular among undergraduates at Oxford and Cambridge, though today it has gone out of fashion. This is at least somewhat contextual, as it tends to mirror the popular and academic consensus regarding his work, although his Poems and Ballads, First Series and his Atalanta in Calydon have never been out of critical favour.

It was Swinburne's misfortune that the two works, published when he was nearly 30, soon established him as England's premier poet, the successor to Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning This was a position he held in the popular mind until his death, but sophisticated critics like A. E. Housman felt, rightly or wrongly,

that the job of being one of England's very greatest poets was beyond him.

After the first Poems and Ballads, Swinburne's later poetry is devoted more to philosophy and politics (notably, in favour of the unification of Italy, particularly in the volume Songs before Sunrise). He does not stop writing love poetry entirely (including his great epic-length poem, Tristram of Lyonesse), but the content is much less shocking. His versification, and especially his rhyming technique, remain in top form to the end.

T.S. Eliot read Swinburne's essays on the Shakespearean and Jonsonian dramatists in The Contemporaries of Shakespeare and The Age of Shakespeare and Swinburne's books on Shakespeare and Jonson. Writing on Swinburne in 'The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism', Eliot found that as a poet writing notes on poets, he had mastered his material, writing "'he is more reliable to them than Hazlitt, Coleridge , or Lamb : and his perception of relative values is almost always correct." However, Eliot disliked Swinburne's prose. About this he wrote "the tumultuous outcry of adjectives, the headstrong rush of undisciplined sentences, are the index to the impatience and perhaps laziness of a disorderly mind."

Eserleri:

A Century of Roundels (1883)
The poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne, 6 vols (1904)
The Tragedies of Algernon Charles Swinburne, 5 vols. (1905)
The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne (1925-7)
Tristram of Lyonesse (1917)
William Blake: A Critical Essay (1868)

A Baby's Death

A little soul scarce fledged for earth
Takes wing with heaven again for goal
Even while we hailed as fresh from birth
  A little soul.

Our thoughts ring sad as bells that toll,
Not knowing beyond this blind world's girth
What things are writ in heaven's full scroll.

Our fruitfulness is there but dearth,
And all things held in time's control
Seem there, perchance, ill dreams, not worth
  A little soul.

The little feet that never trod
Earth, never strayed in field or street,
What hand leads upward back to God
  The little feet?

A rose in June's most honied heat,
When life makes keen the kindling sod,
Was not so soft and warm and sweet.

Their pilgrimage's period
A few swift moons have seen complete
Since mother's hands first clasped and shod
  The little feet.

The little hands that never sought
Earth's prizes, worthless all as sands,
What gift has death, God's servant, brought
  The little hands?

We ask: but love's self silent stands,
Love, that lends eyes and wings to thought
To search where death's dim heaven expands.

Ere this, perchance, though love know nought,
Flowers fill them, grown in lovelier lands,
Where hands of guiding angels caught
  The little hands.

The little eyes that never knew
Light other than of dawning skies,
What new life now lights up anew
  The little eyes?

Who knows but on their sleep may rise
Such light as never heaven let through
To lighten earth from Paradise?

No storm, we know, may change the blue
Soft heaven that haply death descries
No tears, like these in ours, bedew
  The little eyes.

Was life so strange, so sad the sky,
  So strait the wide world's range,
He would not stay to wonder why
  Was life so strange?

Was earth's fair house a joyless grange
  Beside that house on high
Whence Time that bore him failed to estrange?

That here at once his soul put by
  All gifts of time and change,
And left us heavier hearts to sigh
  'Was life so strange?'

Angel by name love called him, seeing so fair
  The sweet small frame;
Meet to be called, if ever man's child were,
  Angel by name.

Rose-bright and warm from heaven's own heart he came,
  And might not bear
The cloud that covers earth's wan face with shame.

His little light of life was all too rare
  And soft a flame:
Heaven yearned for him till angels hailed him there
  Angel by name.

The song that smiled upon his birthday here
Weeps on the grave that holds him undefiled
Whose loss makes bitterer than a soundless tear
  The song that smiled.

His name crowned once the mightiest ever styled
Sovereign of arts, and angel: fate and fear
Knew then their master, and were reconciled.

But we saw born beneath some tenderer sphere
Michael, an angel and a little child,
Whose loss bows down to weep upon his bier
  The song that smiled.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Ballad of Burdens

A Ballad of Burdens

The burden of fair women. Vain delight,
   And love self-slain in some sweet shameful way,
And sorrowful old age that comes by night
   As a thief comes that has no heart by day,
   And change that finds fair cheeks and leaves them grey,
And weariness that keeps awake for hire,
   And grief that says what pleasure used to say;
This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of bought kisses. This is sore,
   A burden without fruit in childbearing;
Between the nightfall and the dawn threescore,
   Threescore between the dawn and evening.
   The shuddering in thy lips, the shuddering
In thy sad eyelids tremulous like fire,
   Makes love seem shameful and a wretched thing.
This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of sweet speeches. Nay, kneel down,
   Cover thy head, and weep; for verily
These market-men that buy thy white and brown
   In the last days shall take no thought for thee.
   In the last days like earth thy face shall be,
Yea, like sea-marsh made thick with brine and mire,
   Sad with sick leavings of the sterile sea.
This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of long living. Thou shalt fear
   Waking, and sleeping mourn upon thy bed;
And say at night "Would God the day were here,"
   And say at dawn "Would God the day were dead."
   With weary days thou shalt be clothed and fed,
And wear remorse of heart for thine attire,
   Pain for thy girdle and sorrow upon thine head;
This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of bright colours. Thou shalt see
   Gold tarnished, and the grey above the green;
And as the thing thou seest thy face shall be,
   And no more as the thing beforetime seen.
   And thou shalt say of mercy "It hath been,"
And living, watch the old lips and loves expire,
   And talking, tears shall take thy breath between;
This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of sad sayings. In that day
   Thou shalt tell all thy days and hours, and tell
Thy times and ways and words of love, and say
   How one was dear and one desirable,
   And sweet was life to hear and sweet to smell,

But now with lights reverse the old hours retire
  And the last hour is shod with fire from hell;
This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of four seasons. Rain in spring,
  White rain and wind among the tender trees;
A summer of green sorrows gathering,
  Rank autumn in a mist of miseries,
  With sad face set towards the year, that sees
The charred ash drop out of the dropping pyre,
  And winter wan with many maladies;
This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of dead faces. Out of sight
  And out of love, beyond the reach of hands,
Changed in the changing of the dark and light,
  They walk and weep about the barren lands
  Where no seed is nor any garner stands,
Where in short breaths the doubtful days respire,
  And time's turned glass lets through the sighing sands;
This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of much gladness. Life and lust
  Forsake thee, and the face of thy delight;
And underfoot the heavy hour strews dust,
  And overhead strange weathers burn and bite;
  And where the red was, lo the bloodless white,
And where the truth was, the likeness of a liar,
  And where the day was, the likeness of the night;
This is the end of every man's desire.

L'ENVOY

Princes, and ye whom pleasure quickeneth,
  Heed well this rhyme before your pleasure tire;
For life is sweet, but after life is death.
  This is the end of every man's desire.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Ballad of Death

Kneel down, fair Love, and fill thyself with tears,
Girdle thyself with sighing for a girth
Upon the sides of mirth,
Cover thy lips and eyelids, let thine ears
Be filled with rumour of people sorrowing;
Make thee soft raiment out of woven sighs
Upon the flesh to cleave,
Set pains therein and many a grievous thing,
And many sorrows after each his wise
For armlet and for gorget and for sleeve.

O Love's lute heard about the lands of death,
Left hanged upon the trees that were therein;
O Love and Time and Sin,
Three singing mouths that mourn now underbreath,
Three lovers, each one evil spoken of;
O smitten lips wherethrough this voice of mine
Came softer with her praise;
Abide a little for our lady's love.
The kisses of her mouth were more than wine,
And more than peace the passage of her days.

O Love, thou knowest if she were good to see.
O Time, thou shalt not find in any land
Till, cast out of thine hand,
The sunlight and the moonlight fail from thee,
Another woman fashioned like as this.
O Sin, thou knowest that all thy shame in her
Was made a goodly thing;
Yea, she caught Shame and shamed him with her kiss,
With her fair kiss, and lips much lovelier
Than lips of amorous roses in late spring.

By night there stood over against my bed
Queen Venus with a hood striped gold and black,
Both sides drawn fully back
From brows wherein the sad blood failed of red,
And temples drained of purple and full of death.
Her curled hair had the wave of sea-water
And the sea's gold in it.
Her eyes were as a dove's that sickeneth.
Strewn dust of gold she had shed over her,
And pearl and purple and amber on her feet.

Upon her raiment of dyed sendaline
Were painted all the secret ways of love
And covered things thereof,
That hold delight as grape-flowers hold their wine;
Red mouths of maidens and red feet of doves,
And brides that kept within the bride-chamber
Their garment of soft shame,
And weeping faces of the wearied loves

That swoon in sleep and awake wearier,
With heat of lips and hair shed out like flame.

The tears that through her eyelids fell on me
Made mine own bitter where they ran between
As blood had fallen therein,
She saying; Arise, lift up thine eyes and see
If any glad thing be or any good
Now the best thing is taken forth of us;
Even she to whom all praise
Was as one flower in a great multitude,
One glorious flower of many and glorious,
One day found gracious among many days:

Even she whose handmaiden was Love--to whom
At kissing times across her stateliest bed
Kings bowed themselves and shed
Pale wine, and honey with the honeycomb,
And spikenard bruised for a burnt-offering;
Even she between whose lips the kiss became
As fire and frankincense;
Whose hair was as gold raiment on a king,
Whose eyes were as the morning purged with flame,
Whose eyelids as sweet savour issuing thence.

Then I beheld, and lo on the other side
My lady's likeness crowned and robed and dead.
Sweet still, but now not red,
Was the shut mouth whereby men lived and died.
And sweet, but emptied of the blood's blue shade,
The great curled eyelids that withheld her eyes.
And sweet, but like spoilt gold,
The weight of colour in her tresses weighed.
And sweet, but as a vesture with new dyes,
The body that was clothed with love of old.

Ah! that my tears filled all her woven hair
And all the hollow bosom of her gown--
Ah! that my tears ran down
Even to the place where many kisses were,
Even where her parted breast-flowers have place,
Even where they are cloven apart--who knows not this?
Ah! the flowers cleave apart
And their sweet fills the tender interspace;
Ah! the leaves grown thereof were things to kiss
Ere their fine gold was tarnished at the heart.

Ah! in the days when God did good to me,
Each part about her was a righteous thing;
Her mouth an almsgiving,
The glory of her garments charity,
The beauty of her bosom a good deed,

In the good days when God kept sight of us;
Love lay upon her eyes,
And on that hair whereof the world takes heed;
And all her body was more virtuous
Than souls of women fashioned otherwise.

Now, ballad, gather poppies in thine hands
And sheaves of brier and many rusted sheaves
Rain-rotten in rank lands,
Waste marigold and late unhappy leaves
And grass that fades ere any of it be mown;
And when thy bosom is filled full thereof
Seek out Death's face ere the light altereth,
And say "My master that was thrall to Love
Is become thrall to Death."
Bow down before him, ballad, sigh and groan.
But make no sojourn in thy outgoing;
For haply it may be
That when thy feet return at evening
Death shall come in with thee.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Ballad of Dreamland

I hid my heart in a nest of roses,
Out of the sun's way, hidden apart;
In a softer bed than the soft white snow's is,
Under the roses I hid my heart.
Why would it sleep not? why should it start,
When never a leaf of the rose-tree stirred?
What made sleep flutter his wings and part?
Only the song of a secret bird.

Lie still, I said, for the wind's wing closes,
And mild leaves muffle the keen sun's dart;
Lie still, for the wind on the warm seas dozes,
And the wind is unquieter yet than thou art.
Does a thought in thee still as a thorn's wound smart?
Does the fang still fret thee of hope deferred?
What bids the lips of thy sleep dispart?
Only the song of a secret bird.

The green land's name that a charm encloses,
It never was writ in the traveller's chart,
And sweet on its trees as the fruit that grows is,
It never was sold in the merchant's mart.
The swallows of dreams through its dim fields dart,
And sleep's are the tunes in its tree-tops heard;
No hound's note wakens the wildwood hart,
Only the song of a secret bird.

ENVOI

In the world of dreams I have chosen my part,
To sleep for a season and hear no word
Of true love's truth or of light love's art,
Only the song of a secret bird.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Ballad Of François Villon, Prince Of All Ballad-Makers

Bird of the bitter bright grey golden morn
Scarce risen upon the dusk of dolorous years,
First of us all and sweetest singer born
Whose far shrill note the world of new men hears
Cleave the cold shuddering shade as twilight clears;
When song new-born put off the old world's attire
And felt its tune on her changed lips expire,
Writ foremost on the roll of them that came
Fresh girt for service of the latter lyre,
Villon, our sad bad glad mad brother's name!

Alas the joy, the sorrow, and the scorn,
That clothed thy life with hopes and sins and fears,
And gave thee stones for bread and tares for corn
And plume-plucked gaol-birds for thy starveling peers
Till death clipt close their flight with shameful shears;
Till shifts came short and loves were hard to hire,
When lilt of song nor twitch of twangling wire
Could buy thee bread or kisses; when light fame
Spurned like a ball and haled through brake and briar,
Villon, our sad bad glad mad brother's name!

Poor splendid wings so frayed and soiled and torn!
Poor kind wild eyes so dashed with light quick tears!
Poor perfect voice, most blithe when most forlorn,
That rings athwart the sea whence no man steers
Like joy-bells crossed with death-bells in our ears!
What far delight has cooled the fierce desire
That like some ravenous bird was strong to tire
On that frail flesh and soul consumed with flame,
But left more sweet than roses to respire,
Villon, our sad bad glad mad brother's name?

Prince of sweet songs made out of tears and fire,
A harlot was thy nurse, a God thy sire;
Shame soiled thy song, and song assoiled thy shame.
But from thy feet now death has washed the mire,
Love reads out first at head of all our quire,
Villon, our sad bad glad mad brother's name.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Cameo

THERE WAS a graven image of Desire
Painted with red blood on a ground of gold
Passing between the young men and the old,
And by him Pain, whose body shone like fire,
And Pleasure with gaunt hands that grasped their hire.
Of his left wrist, with fingers clenched and cold,
The insatiable Satiety kept hold,
Walking with feet unshod that pashed the mire.
The senses and the sorrows and the sins,
And the strange loves that suck the breasts of Hate
Till lips and teeth bite in their sharp indenture,
Followed like beasts with flap of wings and fins.
Death stood aloof behind a gaping grate,
Upon whose lock was written Peradventure.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Channel Crossing

Forth from Calais, at dawn of night, when sunset summer on autumn shone,
Fared the steamer alert and loud through seas whence only the sun was gone:
Soft and sweet as the sky they smiled, and bade man welcome: a dim sweet hour
Gleamed and whispered in wind and sea, and heaven was fair as a field in flower,
Stars fulfilled the desire of the darkling world as with music: the star-bright air
Made the face of the sea, if aught may make the face of the sea, more fair.
Whence came change? Was the sweet night weary of rest? What anguish awoke in the dark?
Sudden, sublime, the strong storm spake: we heard the thunders as hounds that bark.
Lovelier if aught may be lovelier than stars, we saw the lightnings exalt the sky,
Living and lustrous and rapturous as love that is born but to quicken and lighten and die.
Heaven's own heart at its highest of delight found utterance in music and semblance in fire:
Thunder on thunder exulted, rejoicing to live and to satiate the night's desire.
And the night was alive and an-hungered of life as a tiger from toils cast free:
And a rapture of rage made joyous the spirit and strength of the soul of the sea.
All the weight of the wind bore down on it, freighted with death for fraught:
And the keen waves kindled and quickened as things transfigured or things distraught.
And madness fell on them laughing and leaping; and madness came on the wind:
And the might and the light and the darkness of storm were as storm in the heart of Ind.
Such glory, such terror, such passion, as lighten and harrow the far fierce East,
Rang, shone, spake, shuddered around us: the night was an altar with death for priest.
The channel that sunders England from shores where never was man born free
Was clothed with the likeness and thrilled with the strength and the wrath of a tropic sea.
As a wild steed ramps in rebellion, and rears till it swerves from a backward fall,
The strong ship struggled and reared, and her deck was upright as a sheer cliff's wall.
Stern and prow plunged under, alternate: a glimpse, a recoil, a breath,
And she sprang as the life in a god made man would spring at the throat of death.
Three glad hours, and it seemed not an hour of supreme and supernal joy,
Filled full with delight that revives in remembrance a sea-bird's heart in a boy.
For the central crest of the night was cloud that thundered and flamed, sublime
As the splendour and song of the soul everlasting that quickens the pulse of time.
The glory beholden of man in a vision, the music of light overheard,
The rapture and radiance of battle, the life that abides in the fire of a word,
In the midmost heaven enkindled, was manifest far on the face of the sea,
And the rage in the roar of the voice of the waters was heard but when heaven breathed free.
Far eastward, clear of the covering of cloud, the sky laughed out into light
From the rims of the storm to the sea's dark edge with flames that were flowerlike and white.
The leaping and luminous blossoms of live sheet lightning that laugh as they fade
From the cloud's black base to the black wave's brim rejoiced in the light they made.
Far westward, throned in a silent sky, where life was in lustrous tune,
Shone, sweeter and surer than morning or evening, the steadfast smile of the moon.
The limitless heaven that enshrined them was lovelier than dreams may behold, and deep

As life or as death, revealed and transfigured, may shine on the soul through sleep.
All glories of toil and of triumph and passion and pride that it yearns to know
Bore witness there to the soul of its likeness and kinship, above and below.
The joys of the lightnings, the songs of the thunders, the strong sea's labour and rage,
Were tokens and signs of the war that is life and is joy for the soul to wage.
No thought strikes deeper or higher than the heights and the depths that the night made bare,
Illimitable, infinite, awful and joyful, alive in the summit of air--
Air stilled and thrilled by the tempest that thundered between its reign and the sea's,
Rebellious, rapturous, and transient as faith or as terror that bows men's knees.
No love sees loftier and fairer the form of its godlike vision in dreams
Than the world shone then, when the sky and the sea were as love for a breath's length seems--
One utterly, mingled and mastering and mastered and laughing with love that subsides
As the glad mad night sank panting and satiate with storm, and released the tides.
In the dense mid channel the steam-souled ship hung hovering, assailed and withheld
As a soul born royal, if life or if death be against it, is thwarted and quelled.
As the glories of myriads of glow-worms in lustrous grass on a boundless lawn
Were the glories of flames phosphoric that made of the water a light like dawn.
A thousand Phosphors, a thousand Hespers, awoke in the churning sea,
And the swift soft hiss of them living and dying was clear as a tune could be;
As a tune that is played by the fingers of death on the keys of life or of sleep,
Audible alway alive in the storm, too fleet for a dream to keep:
Too fleet, too sweet for a dream to recover and thought to remember awake:
Light subtler and swifter than lightning, that whispers and laughs in the live storm's wake,
In the wild bright wake of the storm, in the dense loud heart of the labouring hour,
A harvest of stars by the storm's hand reaped, each fair as a star-shaped flower.
And sudden and soft as the passing of sleep is the passing of tempest seemed
When the light and the sound of it sank, and the glory was gone as a dream half dreamed.
The glory, the terror, the passion that made of the midnight a miracle, died,
Not slain at a stroke, nor in gradual reluctance abated of power and of pride;
With strong swift subsidence, awful as power that is wearied of power upon earth,
As a God that were wearied of power upon heaven, and were fain of a new God's birth,
The might of the night subsided: the tyranny kindled in darkness fell:
And the sea and the sky put off them the rapture and radiance of heaven and of hell.
The waters, heaving and hungering at heart, made way, and were wellnigh fain,
For the ship that had fought them, and wrestled, and revelled in labour, to cease from her pain.
And an end was made of it: only remembrance endures of the glad loud strife;
And the sense that a rapture so royal may come not again in the passage of life.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Child's Battles

Praise of the knights of old
May sleep: their tale is told,
And no man cares:
The praise which fires our lips is
A knight's whose fame eclipses
All of theirs.

The ruddiest light in heaven
Blazed as his birth-star seven
Long years ago:
All glory crown that old year
Which brought our stout small soldier
With the snow!

Each baby born has one
Star, for his friends a sun,
The first of stars:
And we, the more we scan it,
The more grow sure your planet,
Child, was Mars.

For each one flower, perchance,
Blooms as his cognizance:
The snowdrop chill,
The violet unbeholden,
For some: for you the golden
Daffodil.

Erect, a fighting flower,
It breasts the breeziest hour
That ever blew,
And bent or broke things brittle
Or frail, unlike a little
Knight like you.

Its flower is firm and fresh
And stout like sturdiest flesh
Of children: all
The strenuous blast that parches
Spring hurts it not till March is
Near his fall.

If winds that prate and fret
Remark, rebuke, regret,
Lament, or blame
The brave plant's martial passion,
It keeps its own free fashion
All the same.

We that would fain seem wise
Assume grave mouths and eyes
Whose looks reprove

Too much delight in battle:
But your great heart our prattle
Cannot move.

We say, small children should
Be placid, mildly good
And blandly meek:
Whereat the broad smile rushes
Full on your lips, and flushes
All your cheek.

If all the stars that are
Laughed out, and every star
Could here be heard,
Such peals of golden laughter
We should not hear, as after
Such a word.

For all the storm saith, still,
Stout stands the daffodil:
For all we say,
Howe'er he look demurely,
Our martialist will surely
Have his way.

We may not bind with bands
Those large and liberal hands,
Nor stay from fight,
Nor hold them back from giving:
No lean mean laws of living
Bind a knight.

And always here of old
Such gentle hearts and bold
Our land has bred:
How durst her eye rest else on
The glory shed from Nelson
Quick and dead?

Shame were it, if but one
Such once were born her son,
That one to have borne,
And brought him ne'er a brother:
His praise should bring his mother
Shame and scorn.

A child high-souled as he
Whose manhood shook the sea
Smiles haply here:
His face, where love lies baslcing,
With bright shut mouth seems asking,
What is fear?

The sunshine-coloured fists
Beyond his dimpling wrists
Were never closed
For saving or for sparing--
For only deeds of daring
Predisposed.

Unclenched, the gracious hands
Let slip their gifts like sands
Made rich with ore
That tongues of beggars ravish
From small stout hands so lavish
Of their store.

Sweet hardy kindly hands
Like these were his that stands
With heel on gorge
Seen trampling down the dragon
On sign or flask or flagon,
Sweet Saint George.

Some tournament, perchance,
Of hands that couch no lance,
Might mark this spot
Your lists, if here some pleasant
Small Guenevere were present,
Launcelot.

My brave bright flower, you need
No foolish song, nor heed
It more than spring
The sighs of winter stricken
Dead when your haunts requicken
Here, my king.

Yet O, how hardly may
The wheels of singing stay
That whirl along
Bright paths whence echo raises
The phantom of your praises,
Child, my song!

Beyond all other things
That give my words fleet wings,
Fleet wings and strong,
You set their jesses ringing
Till hardly can I, singing,
Stint my song.

But all things better, friend,
And worse must find an end:

And, right or wrong,
'Tis time, lest rhyme should baffle,
I doubt, to put a snaffle
On my song.

And never may your ear
Aught harsher hear or fear,
Nor wolfish night
Nor dog-toothed winter snarling
Behind your steps, my darling,
My delight!

For all the gifts you give
Me, dear, each day you live,
Of thanks above
All thanks that could be spoken
Take not my song in token,
Take my love.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Child's Laughter

ALL the bells of heaven may ring,
All the birds of heaven may sing,
All the wells on earth may spring,
All the winds on earth may bring
    All sweet sounds together---
Sweeter far than all things heard,
Hand of harper, tone of bird,
Sound of woods at sundawn stirred,
Welling water's winsome word,
    Wind in warm wan weather,

One thing yet there is, that none
Hearing ere its chime be done
Knows not well the sweetest one
Heard of man beneath the sun,
    Hoped in heaven hereafter;
Soft and strong and loud and light,
Very sound of very light
Heard from morning's rosiest height,
When the soul of all delight
    Fills a child's clear laughter.

Golden bells of welcome rolled
Never forth such notes, nor told
Hours so blithe in tones so bold,
As the radiant mouth of gold
    Here that rings forth heaven.
If the golden-crested wren
Were a nightingale---why, then,
Something seen and heard of men
Might be half as sweet as when
    Laughs a child of seven.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Christmas Carol

THREE DAMSELS in the queen's chamber,
The queen's mouth was most fair;
She spake a word of God's mother
As the combs went in her hair.
Mary that is of might,
Bring us to thy Son's sight.

They held the gold combs out from her,
A span's length off her head;
She sang this song of God's mother
And of her bearing-bed.
Mary most full of grace,
Bring us to thy Son's face.

When she sat at Joseph's hand,
She looked against her side;
And either way from the short silk band
Her girdle was all wried.
Mary that all good may,
Bring us to thy Son's way.

Mary had three women for her bed,
The twain were maidens clean;
The first of them had white and red,
The third had riven green.
Mary that is so sweet,
Bring us to thy Son's feet.

She had three women for her hair,
Two were gloved soft and shod;
The third had feet and fingers bare,
She was the likest God.
Mary that wieldeth land,
Bring us to thy Son's hand.

She had three women for her ease,
The twain were good women:
The first two were the two Maries,
The third was Magdalen.
Mary that perfect is,
Bring us to thy Son's kiss.

Joseph had three workmen in his stall,
To serve him well upon;
The first of them were Peter and Paul,
The third of them was John.
Mary, God's handmaiden,
Bring us to thy Son's ken.

"If your child be none other man's,
But if it be very mine,
The bedstead shall be gold two spans,

The bedfoot silver fine.”
Mary that made God mirth,
Bring us to thy Son’s birth.

“If the child be some other man’s,
And if it be none of mine,
The manger shall be straw two spans,
Betwixen kine and kine.”
Mary that made sin cease,
Bring us to thy Son’s peace.

Christ was born upon this wise,
It fell on such a night,
Neither with sounds of psalteries,
Nor with fire for light.
Mary that is God’s spouse,
Bring us to thy Son’s house.

The star came out upon the east
With a great sound and sweet:
Kings gave gold to make him feast
And myrrh for him to eat.
Mary, of thy sweet mood,
Bring us to thy Son’s good.

He had two handmaids at his head,
One handmaid at his feet;
The twain of them were fair and red,
The third one was right sweet.
Mary that is most wise,
Bring us to thy Son’s eyes. Amen.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Clasp Of Hands

SOFT, small, and sweet as sunniest flowers
    That bask in heavenly heat
When bud by bud breaks, breathes, and cowers,
    Soft, small, and sweet.

A babe's hands open as to greet
    The tender touch of ours
And mock with motion faint and fleet

The minutes of the new strange hours
    That earth, not heaven, must mete;
Buds fragrant still from heaven's own bowers,
    Soft, small, and sweet.

A velvet vice with springs of steel
    That fasten in a trice
And clench the fingers fast that feel
    A velvet viceÑ

What man would risk the danger twice,
    Nor quake from head to heel?
Whom would not one such test suffice?

Well may we tremble as we kneel
    In sight of Paradise,
If both a babe's closed fists conceal
    A velvet vice.

Two flower-soft fists of conquering clutch,
    Two creased and dimpled wrists,
That match, if mottled overmuch,
    Two flower-soft fists---

What heart of man dare hold the lists
    Against such odds and such
Sweet vantage as no strength resists?

Our strength is all a broken crutch,
    Our eyes are dim with mists,
Our hearts are prisoners as we touch
    Two flower-soft fists.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Dead Friend

I.

Gone, O gentle heart and true,
  Friend of hopes foregone,
Hopes and hopeful days with you
  Gone?

  Days of old that shone
Saw what none shall see anew,
  When we gazed thereon.

Soul as clear as sunlit dew,
  Why so soon pass on,
Forth from all we loved and knew
  Gone?

II.

Friend of many a season fled,
  What may sorrow send
Toward thee now from lips that said
  'Friend'?

  Sighs and songs to blend
Praise with pain uncomforted
  Though the praise ascend?

Darkness hides no dearer head:
  Why should darkness end
Day so soon, O dear and dead
  Friend?

III.

Dear in death, thou hast thy part
  Yet in life, to cheer
Hearts that held thy gentle heart
  Dear.

  Time and chance may sear
Hope with grief, and death may part
  Hand from hand's clasp here:

Memory, blind with tears that start,
  Sees through every tear
All that made thee, as thou art,
  Dear.

IV.

True and tender, single-souled,
  What should memory do

Weeping o'er the trust we hold
  True?

  Known and loved of few,
But of these, though small their fold,
  Loved how well were you!

Change, that makes of new things old,
  Leaves one old thing new;
Love which promised truth, and told
  True.

V.

Kind as heaven, while earth's control
  Still had leave to bind
Thee, thy heart was toward man's whole
  Kind.

  Thee no shadows blind
Now: the change of hours that roll
  Leaves thy sleep behind.

Love, that hears thy death-bell toll
  Yet, may call to mind
Scarce a soul as thy sweet soul
  Kind.

VI.

How should life, O friend, forget
  Death, whose guest art thou?
Faith responds to love's regret,
  How?

  Still, for us that bow
Sorrowing, still, though life be set,
  Shines thy bright mild brow.

Yea, though death and thou be met,
  Love may find thee now
Still, albeit we know not yet
  How.

VII.

Past as music fades, that shone
  While its life might last;
As a song-bird's shadow flown
  Past!

  Death's reverberate blast

Now for music's lord has blown
  Whom thy love held fast.

Dead thy king, and void his throne:
  Yet for grief at last
Love makes music of his own
  Past.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Dialog

I.

Death, if thou wilt, fain would I plead with thee:
Canst thou not spare, of all our hopes have built,
One shelter where our spirits fain would be,
  Death, if thou wilt?

No dome with suns and dews impearled and gilt,
Imperial: but some roof of wildwood tree,
Too mean for sceptre's heft or swordblade's hilt.

Some low sweet roof where love might live, set free
From change and fear and dreams of grief or guilt;
Canst thou not leave life even thus much to see,
  Death, if thou wilt?

II.

Man, what art thou to speak and plead with me?
What knowest thou of my workings, where and how
What things I fashion? Nay, behold and see,
  Man, what art thou?

Thy fruits of life, and blossoms of thy bough,
What are they but my seedlings? Earth and sea
Bear nought but when I breathe on it must bow.

Bow thou too down before me: though thou be
Great, all the pride shall fade from off thy brow,
When Time and strong Oblivion ask of thee,
  Man, what art thou?

III.

Death, if thou be or be not, as was said,
Immortal; if thou make us nought, or we
Survive: thy power is made but of our dread,
  Death, if thou be.

Thy might is made out of our fear of thee:
Who fears thee not, hath plucked from off thine head
The crown of cloud that darkens earth and sea.

Earth, sea, and sky, as rain or vapour shed,
Shall vanish; all the shows of them shall flee:
Then shall we know full surely, quick or dead,
  Death, if thou be.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Dialogue

I
DEATH, if thou wilt, fain would I plead with thee:
Canst thou not spare, of all our hopes have built,
One shelter where our spirits fain would be,
Death, if thou wit?

No dome with suns and dews impearled and gilt,
Imperial: but some roof of wildwood tree,
Too mean for sceptre's heft or swordblade's hilt.

Some low sweet roof where love might live, set free
From change and fear and dreams of grief or guilt;
Canst thou not leave life even thus much to see,
Death, if thou wilt?

II
Man, what art thou to speak and plead with me?
What knowest thou of my workings, where and how
What things I fashion? Nay, behold and see,
Man, what art thou?

Thy fruits of life, and blossoms of thy bough,
What are they but my seedlings? Earth and sea
Bear nought but when I breathe on it must bow.

Bow thou too down before me: though thou be
Great, all the pride shall fade from off thy brow,
When Time and strong Oblivion ask of thee,
Man, what art thou ?

III
Death, if thou be or be not, as was said,
Immortal; if thou make us nought, or we
Survive: thy power is made but of our dread,
Death, if thou be.

Thy might is made out of our fear of thee:
Who fears thee not, hath plucked from off thine head
The crown of cloud that darkens earth and sea.

Earth, sea, and sky, as rain or vapour shed,
Shall vanish; all the shows of them shall flee:
Then shall we know full surely, quick or dead,
Death, if thou be.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Flower-Piece By Fantin

Heart's ease or pansy, pleasure or thought,
Which would the picture give us of these?
Surely the heart that conceived it sought
  Heart's ease.

Surely by glad and divine degrees
The heart impelling the hand that wrought
Wrought comfort here for a soul's disease.

Deep flowers, with lustre and darkness fraught,
From glass that gleams as the chill still seas
Lean and lend for a heart distraught
  Heart's ease.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Forsaken Garden

IN a coign of the cliff between lowland and highland,
    At the sea-down's edge between windward and lee,
Walled round with rocks as an inland island,
    The ghost of a garden fronts the sea.
A girdle of brushwood and thorn encloses
    The steep square slope of the blossomless bed
Where the weeds that grew green from the graves of its roses
        Now lie dead.

The fields fall southward, abrupt and broken,
    To the low last edge of the long lone land.
If a step should sound or a word be spoken,
    Would a ghost not rise at the strange guest's hand?
So long have the grey bare walks lain guestless,
    Through branches and briars if a man make way,
He shall find no life but the sea-wind's, restless
        Night and day.

The dense hard passage is blind and stifled
    That crawls by a track none turn to climb
To the strait waste place that the years have rifled
    Of all but the thorns that are touched not of time.
The thorns he spares when the rose is taken;
    The rocks are left when he wastes the plain.
The wind that wanders, the weeds wind-shaken,
        These remain.

Not a flower to be pressed of the foot that falls not;
    As the heart of a dead man the seed-plots are dry;
From the thicket of thorns whence the nightingale calls not,
    Could she call, there were never a rose to reply.
Over the meadows that blossom and wither
    Rings but the note of a sea-bird's song;
Only the sun and the rain come hither
        All year long.

The sun burns sere and the rain dishevels
    One gaunt bleak blossom of scentless breath.
Only the wind here hovers and revels
    In a round where life seems barren as death.
Here there was laughing of old, there was weeping,
    Haply, of lovers none ever will know,
Whose eyes went seaward a hundred sleeping
        Years ago.

Heart handfast in heart as they stood, "Look thither,"
    Did he whisper? "look forth from the flowers to the sea;
For the foam-flowers endure when the rose-blossoms wither,
    And men that love lightly may die---but we?"
And the same wind sang and the same waves whitened,
    And or ever the garden's last petals were shed,
In the lips that had whispered, the eyes that had lightened,

Love was dead.

Or they loved their life through, and then went whither?
And were one to the endÑbut what end who knows?
Love deep as the sea as a rose must wither,
As the rose-red seaweed that mocks the rose.
Shall the dead take thought for the dead to love them ?
What love was ever as deep as a grave ?
They are loveless now as the grass above them
Or the wave.

All are at one now, roses and lovers,
Not known of the cliffs and the fields and the sea.
Not a breath of the time that has been hovers
In the air now soft with a summer to be.
Not a breath shall there sweeten the seasons hereafter
Of the flowers or the lovers that laugh now or weep,
When as they that are free now of weeping and laughter
We shall sleep.

Here death may deal not again for ever;
Here change may come not till all change end.
From the graves they have made they shall rise up never,
Who have left nought living to ravage and rend.
Earth, stones, and thorns of the wild ground growing,
While the sun and the rain live, these shall be;
Till a last wind's breath upon all these blowing
Roll the sea.

Till the slow sea rise and the sheer cliff crumble,
Till terrace and meadow the deep gulfs drink,
Till the strength of the waves of the high tides humble
The fields that lessen, the rocks that shrink,
Here now in his triumph where all things falter,
Stretched out on the spoils that his own hand spread,
As a god self-slain on his own strange altar,
Death lies dead.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Jacobite's Exile

The weary day runs down and dies,
The weary night wears through:
And never an hour is fair wi' flower,
And never a flower wi' dew.

I would the day were night for me,
I would the night were day:
For then would I stand in my ain fair land,
As now in dreams I may.

O lordly flow the Loire and Seine,
And loud the dark Durance:
But bonnier shine the braes of Tyne
Than a' the fields of France;
And the waves of Till that speak sae still
Gleam goodlier where they glance.

O weel were they that fell fighting
On dark Drumossie's day:
They keep their hame ayont the faem
And we die far away.

O sound they sleep, and saft, and deep,
But night and day wake we;
And ever between the sea banks green
Sounds loud the sundering sea.

And ill we sleep, sae sair we weep
But sweet and fast sleep they:
And the mool that haps them roun' and laps them
Is e'en their country's clay;
But the land we tread that are not dead
Is strange as night by day.

Strange as night in a strange man's sight,
Though fair as dawn it be:
For what is here that a stranger's cheer
Should yet wax blithe to see?

The hills stand steep, the dells lie deep,
The fields are green and gold:
The hill-streams sing, and the hill-sides ring,
As ours at home of old.

But hills and flowers are nane of ours,
And ours are over sea:
And the kind strange land whereon we stand,
It wotsna what were we
Or ever we came, wi' scathe and shame,
To try what end might be.

Scathe and shame, and a waefu' name,

And a weary time and strange,
Have they that seeing a weird for dreeing
Can die, and cannot change.

Shame and scorn may we thole that mourn,
Though sair be they to dree:
But ill may we bide the thoughts we hide,
Mair keen than wind and sea.

Ill may we thole the night's watches,
And ill the weary day:
And the dreams that keep the gates of sleep,
A waefu' gift gie they;
For the songs they sing us, the sights they bring us,
The morn blaws all away.

On Aikenshaw the sun blinks braw,
The burn rins blithe and fain:
There's nought wi' me I wadna gie
To look thereon again.

On Keilder-side the wind blaws wide:
There sounds nae hunting-horn
That rings sae sweet as the winds that beat
Round banks where Tyne is born.

The Wansbeck sings with all her springs
The bents and braes give ear;
But the wood that rings wi' the sang she sings
I may not see nor hear;
For far and far thae blithe burns are,
And strange is a' thing near.

The light there lightens, the day there brightens,
The loud wind there lives free:
Nae light comes nigh me or wind blaws by me
That I wad hear or see.

But O gin I were there again,
Afar ayont the faem,
Cauld and dead in the sweet saft bed
That haps my sires at hame!

We'll see nae mair the sea-banks fair,
And the sweet grey gleaming sky,
And the lordly strand of Northumberland,
And the goodly towers thereby;
And none shall know but the winds that blow
The graves wherein we lie.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Lamentation

I.
WHO hath known the ways of time
Or trodden behind his feet?
There is no such man among men.
For chance overcomes him, or crime
Changes; for all things sweet
In time wax bitter again.
Who shall give sorrow enough,
Or who the abundance of tears?
Mine eyes are heavy with love
And a sword gone thorough mine ears,
A sound like a sword and fire,
For pity, for great desire;
Who shall ensure me thereof,
Lest I die, being full of my fears?

Who hath known the ways and the wrath,
The sleepless spirit, the root
And blossom of evil will,
The divine device of a god?
Who shall behold it or hath?
The twice-tongued prophets are mute,
The many speakers are still;
No foot has travelled or trod,
No hand has meted, his path.
Man’s fate is a blood-red fruit,
And the mighty gods have their fill
And relax not the rein, or the rod.

Ye were mighty in heart from of old,
Ye slew with the spear, and are slain.
Keen after heat is the cold,
Sore after summer is rain,
And melteth man to the bone.
As water he weareth away,
As a flower, as an hour in a day,
Fallen from laughter to moan.
But my spirit is shaken with fear
Lest an evil thing begin,
New-born, a spear for a spear,
And one for another sin.
Or ever our tears began,
It was known from of old and said;
One law for a living man,
And another law for the dead.
For these are fearful and sad,
Vain, and things without breath;
While he lives let a man be glad,
For none hath joy of his death.

II.
Who hath known the pain, the old pain of earth,

Or all the travail of the sea,
The many ways and waves, the birth
Fruitless, the labour nothing worth?
Who hath known, who knoweth, O gods? not we.
There is none shall say he hath seen,
There is none he hath known.
Though he saith, Lo, a lord have I been,
I have reaped and sown;
I have seen the desire of mine eyes,
The beginning of love,
The season of kisses and sighs
And the end thereof.
I have known the ways of the sea,
All the perilous ways,
Strange winds have spoken with me,
And the tongues of strange days.
I have hewn the pine for ships;
Where steeds run arow,
I have seen from their bridled lips
Foam blown as the snow.
With snapping of chariot-poles
And with straining of oars
I have grazed in the race the goals,
In the storm the shores;
As a greave is cleft with an arrow
At the joint of the knee,
I have cleft through the sea-straits narrow
To the heart of the sea.
When air was smitten in sunder
I have watched on high
The ways of the stars and the thunder
In the night of the sky;
Where the dark brings forth light as a flower,
As from lips that dissever;
One abideth the space of an hour,
One endureth for ever.
Lo, what hath he seen or known,
Of the way and the wave
Unbeholden, unsailed-on, unsown,
From the breast to the grave?

Or ever the stars were made, or skies,
Grief was born, and the kinless night,
Mother of gods without form or name.
And light is born out of heaven and dies,
And one day knows not another’s light,
But night is one, and her shape the same.

But dumb the goddesses underground
Wait, and we hear not on earth if their feet
Rise, and the night wax loud with their wings;
Dumb, without word or shadow of sound;

And sift in scales and winnow as wheat
Men’s souls, and sorrow of manifold things.

III.
Nor less of grief than ours
The gods wrought long ago
To bruise men one by one;
But with the incessant hours
Fresh grief and greener woe
Spring, as the sudden sun
Year after year makes flowers;
And these die down and grow,
And the next year lacks none.

As these men sleep, have slept
The old heroes in time fled,
No dream-divided sleep;
And holier eyes have wept
Than ours, when on her dead
Gods have seen Thetis weep,
With heavenly hair far-swept
Back, heavenly hands outspread
Round what she could not keep,

Could not one day withhold,
One night; and like as these
White ashes of no weight,
Held not his urn the cold
Ashes of Heracles?
For all things born one gate
Opens, no gate of gold;
Opens; and no man sees
Beyond the gods and fate.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Landscape By Courbet

Low lies the mere beneath the moorside, still
And glad of silence: down the wood sweeps clear
To the utmost verge where fed with many a rill
  Low lies the mere.

The wind speaks only summer: eye nor ear
Sees aught at all of dark, hears aught of shrill,
From sound or shadow felt or fancied here.

Strange, as we praise the dead man's might and skill,
Strange that harsh thoughts should make such heavy cheer,
While, clothed with peace by heaven's most gentle will,
  Low lies the mere.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Leave-Taking

A Leave-Taking

Let us go hence, my songs; she will not hear.
Let us go hence together without fear;
Keep silence now, for singing?time is over,
And over all old things and all things dear.
She loves not you nor me as we all love her.
Yea, though we sang as angels in her ear,
She would not hear.

Let us rise up and part; she will not know.
Let us go seaward as the great winds go,
Full of blown sand and foam; what help is here?
There is no help, for all these things are so,
And all the world is bitter as a tear.
And how these things are, though ye strove to show,
She would not know.

Let us go home and hence; she will not weep.
We gave love many dreams and days to keep,
Flowers without scent, and fruits that would not grow,
Saying, `If thou wilt, thrust in thy sickle and reap.'
All is reaped now; no grass is left to mow;
And we that sowed, though all we fell on sleep,
She would not weep.

Let us go hence and rest; she will not love.
She shall not hear us if we sing hereof,
Nor see love's ways, how sore they are and steep.
Come hence, let be, lie still; it is enough.
Love is a barren sea, bitter and deep;
And though she saw all heaven in flower above,
She would not love.

Let us give up, go down; she will not care.
Though all the stars made gold of all the air,
And the sea moving saw before it move
One moon?flower making all the foam?flowers fair;
Though all those waves went over us, and drove
Deep down the stifling lips and drowning hair,
She would not care.

Let us go hence, go hence; she will not see.
Sing all once more together; surely she,
She too, remembering days and words that were,
Will turn a little toward us, sighing; but we,
We are hence, we are gone, as though we had not been there.
Nay, and though all men seeing had pity on me,
She would not see.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Litany

FIRST ANTIPHONE.
ALL the bright lights of heaven
I will make dark over thee;
One night shall be as seven
That its skirts may cover thee;
I will send on thy strong men a sword,
On thy remnant a rod;
Ye shall know that I am the Lord,
Saith the Lord God.

SECOND ANTIPHONE.
All the bright lights of heaven
Thou hast made dark over us;
One night has been as seven
That its skirt might cover us;
Thou hast sent on our strong men a sword,
On our remnant a rod;
We know that thou art the Lord,
O Lord our God.

THIRD ANTIPHONE.
As the tresses and wings of the wind
Are scattered and shaken,
I will scatter all them that have sinned,
There shall none be taken;
As a sower that scattereth seed,
So will I scatter them;
As one breaketh and shattereth a reed,
I will break and shatter them.

FOURTH ANTIPHONE.
As the wings and the locks of the wind
Are scattered and shaken,
Thou hast scattered all them that have sinned,
There was no man taken;
As a sower that scattereth seed,
So hast thou scattered us;
As one breaketh and shattereth a reed,
Thou hast broken and shattered us.

FIFTH ANTIPHONE.
From all thy lovers that love thee
I God will sunder thee;
I will make darkness above thee,
And thick darkness under thee;
Before me goeth a light,
Behind me a sword;
Shall a remnant find grace in my sight?
I am the Lord.

SIXTH ANTIPHONE.
From all our lovers that love us

Thou God didst sunder us;
Thou madest darkness above us,
And thick darkness under us;
Thou hast kindled thy wrath for a light,
And made ready thy sword;
Let a remnant find grace in thy sight,
We beseech thee, O Lord.

SEVENTH ANTIPHONE.
Wilt thou bring fine gold for a payment
For sins on this wise?
For the glittering of raiment
And the shining of eyes,
For the painting of faces
And the sundering of trust,
For the sins of thine high places
And delight of thy lust?

For your high things ye shall have lowly,
Lamentation for song;
For, behold, I God am holy,
I the Lord am strong;
Ye shall seek me and shall not reach me
Till the wine-press be trod;
In that hour ye shall turn and beseech me,
Saith the Lord God.

EIGHTH ANTIPHONE.
Not with fine gold for a payment,
But with coin of sighs,
But with rending of raiment
And with weeping of eyes,
But with shame of stricken faces
And with strewing of dust,
For the sin of stately places
And lordship of lust;

With voices of men made lowly,
Made empty of song,
O Lord God most holy,
O God most strong,
We reach out hands to reach thee
Ere the wine-press be trod;
We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee,
O Lord our God.

NINTH ANTIPHONE.
In that hour thou shalt say to the night,
Come down and cover us;
To the cloud on thy left and thy right,
Be thou spread over us;
A snare shall be as thy mother,

And a curse thy bride;
Thou shalt put her away, and another
Shall lie by thy side.

Thou shalt neither rise up by day
Nor lie down by night;
Would God it were dark! thou shalt say;
Would God it were light!
And the sight of thine eyes shall be made
As the burning of fire;
And thy soul shall be sorely afraid
For thy soul’s desire.

Ye whom your lords loved well,
Putting silver and gold on you,
The inevitable hell
Shall surely take hold on you;
Your gold shall be for a token,
Your staff for a rod;
With the breaking of bands ye are broken,
Saith the Lord God.

TENTH ANTIPHONE.
In our sorrow we said to the night,
Fall down and cover us;
To the darkness at left and at right,
Be thou shed over us;
We had breaking of spirit to mother
And cursing to bride;
And one was slain, and another
Stood up at our side.

We could not arise by day,
Nor lie down by night;
Thy sword was sharp in our way,
Thy word in our sight;
The delight of our eyelids was made
As the burning of fire;
And our souls became sorely afraid
For our soul’s desire.

We whom the world loved well,
Laying silver and gold on us,
The kingdom of death and of hell
Riseth up to take hold on us;
Our gold is turned to a token,
Our staff to a rod;
Yet shalt thou bind them up that were broken,
O Lord our God.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Marching Song

We mix from many lands,
We march for very far;
In hearts and lips and hands
Our staffs and weapons are;
The light we walk in darkens sun and moon and star.

It doth not flame and wane
With years and spheres that roll,
Storm cannot shake nor stain
The strength that makes it whole,
The fire that moulds and moves it of the sovereign soul.

We are they that have to cope
With time till time retire;
We live on hopeless hope,
We feed on tears and fire;
Time, foot by foot, gives back before our sheer desire.

From the edge of harsh derision,
From discord and defeat,
From doubt and lame division,
We pluck the fruit and eat;
And the mouth finds it bitter, and the spirit sweet.

We strive with time at wrestling
Till time be on our side
And hope, our plumeless nestling,
A full-fledged eaglet ride
Down the loud length of storm its windward wings divide.

We are girt with our belief,
Clothed with our will and crowned;
Hope, fear, delight, and grief,
Before our will give ground;
Their calls are in our ears as shadows of dead sound.

All but the heart forsakes us,
All fails us but the will;
Keen treason tracks and takes us
In pits for blood to fill;
Friend falls from friend, and faith for faith lays wait to kill.

Out under moon and stars
And shafts of the urgent sun
Whose face on prison-bars
And mountain-heads is one,
Our march is everlasting till time's march be done.

Whither we know, and whence,
And dare not care wherethrough.
Desires that urge the sense,
Fears changing old with new,

Perils and pains beset the ways we press into;

Earth gives us thorns to tread,
And all her thorns are trod;
Through lands burnt black and red
We pass with feet unshod;
Whence we would be man shall not keep us, nor man's God.

Through the great desert beasts
Howl at our backs by night,
And thunder-forging priests
Blow their dead bale-fires bright,
And on their broken anvils beat out bolts for fight.

Inside their sacred smithies
Though hot the hammer rings,
Their steel links snap like withies,
Their chains like twisted strings,
Their surest fetters are as plighted words of kings.

O nations undivided,
O single people and free,
We dreamers, we derided,
We mad blind men that see,
We bear you witness ere ye come that ye shall be.

Ye sitting among tombs,
Ye standing round the gate,
Whom fire-mouthed war consumes,
Or cold-lipped peace bids wait,
All tombs and bars shall open, every grave and grate.

The locks shall burst in sunder,
The hinges shrieking spin,
When time, whose hand is thunder,
Lays hand upon the pin,
And shoots the bolts reluctant, bidding all men in.

These eyeless times and earless,
Shall these not see and hear,
And all their hearts burn fearless
That were afrost for fear?
Is day not hard upon us, yea, not our day near?

France! from its grey dejection
Make manifest the red
Tempestuous resurrection
Of thy most sacred head!
Break thou the covering cerecloths; rise up from the dead.

And thou, whom sea-walls sever
From lands unwalled with seas,

Wilt thou endure for ever,
O Milton's England, these?
Thou that wast his Republic, wilt thou clasp their knees?

These royalties rust-eaten,
These worm-corroded lies,
That keep thine head storm-beaten
And sunlike strength of eyes
From the open heaven and air of intercepted skies;

These princelings with gauze winglets
That buzz in the air unfurled,
These summer-swarming kinglets,
These thin worms crowned and curled,
That bask and blink and warm themselves about the world;

These fanged meridian vermin,
Shrill gnats that crowd the dusk,
Night-moths whose nestling ermine
Smells foul of mould and musk,
Blind flesh-flies hatched by dark and hampered in their husk;

These honours without honour,
These ghost-like gods of gold,
This earth that wears upon her
To keep her heart from cold
No memory more of men that brought it fire of old;

These limbs, supine, unbuckled,
In rottenness of rest,
These sleepy lips blood-suckled
And satiate of thy breast,
These dull wide mouths that drain thee dry and call thee blest;

These masters of thee mindless
That wear thee out of mind,
These children of thee kindless
That use thee out of kind,
Whose hands strew gold before thee and contempt behind;

Who have turned thy name to laughter,
Thy sea-like sounded name
That now none hearkens after
For faith in its free fame,
Who have robbed thee of thy trust and given thee of their shame;

These hours that mock each other,
These years that kill and die,
Are these thy gains, our mother,
For all thy gains thrown by?
Is this that end whose promise made thine heart so high?

With empire and with treason
The first right hand made fast,
But in man's nobler season
To put forth help the last,
Love turns from thee, and memory disavows thy past.

Lest thine own sea disclaim thee,
Lest thine own sons despise,
Lest lips shoot out that name thee
And seeing thee men shut eyes,
Take thought with all thy people, turn thine head and rise.

Turn thee, lift up thy face;
What ails thee to be dead?
Ask of thyself for grace,
Seek of thyself for bread,
And who shall starve or shame thee, blind or bruise thine head?

The same sun in thy sight,
The same sea in thine ears,
That saw thine hour at height,
That sang thy song of years,
Behold and hearken for thee, knowing thy hopes and fears.

O people, O perfect nation,
O England that shall be,
How long till thou take station?
How long till thralls live free?
How long till all thy soul be one with all thy sea?

Ye that from south to north,
Ye that from east to west,
Stretch hands of longing forth
And keep your eyes from rest,
Lo, when ye will, we bring you gifts of what is best.

From the awful northland pines
That skirt their wan dim seas
To the ardent Apennines
And sun-struck Pyrenees,
One frost on all their frondage bites the blossoming trees.

The leaves look up for light,
For heat of helpful air;
The trees of oldest height
And thin storm-shaken hair
Seek with gaunt hands up heavenward if the sun be there.

The woods where souls walk lonely,
The forests girt with night,
Desire the day-star only
And firstlings of the light

Not seen of slaves nor shining in their masters' sight.

We have the morning star,
O foolish people, O kings!
With us the day-springs are,
Even all the fresh day-springs;
For us, and with us, all the multitudes of things.

O sorrowing hearts of slaves,
We heard you beat from far!
We bring the light that saves,
We bring the morning star;
Freedom's good things we bring you, whence all good things are.

With us the winds and fountains
And lightnings live in tune;
The morning-coloured mountains
That burn into the noon,
The mist's mild veil on valleys muffled from the moon:

The thunder-darkened highlands
And lowlands hot with fruit,
Sea-bays and shoals and islands,
And cliffs that foil man's foot,
And all the flower of large-limbed life and all the root:

The clangour of sea-eagles
That teach the morning mirth
With baying of heaven's beagles
That seek their prey on earth,
By sounding strait and channel, gulf and reach and firth.

With us the fields and rivers,
The grass that summer thrills,
The haze where morning quivers,
The peace at heart of hills,
The sense that kindles nature, and the soul that fills.

With us all natural sights,
All notes of natural scale;
With us the starry lights;
With us the nightingale;
With us the heart and secret of the worldly tale.

The strife of things and beauty,
The fire and light adored,
Truth, and life-lightening duty,
Love without crown or sword,
That by his might and godhead makes man god and lord.

These have we, these are ours,
That no priests give nor kings;

The honey of all these flowers,
The heart of all these springs;
Ours, for where freedom lives not, there live no good things.

Rise, ere the dawn be risen;
Come, and be all souls fed;
From field and street and prison
Come, for the feast is spread;
Live, for the truth is living; wake, for night is dead.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Match

If love were what the rose is,
And I were like the leaf,
Our lives would grow together
In sad or singing weather,
Blown fields or flowerful closes,
Green pasture or gray grief;
If love were what the rose is,
And I were like the leaf.

If I were what the words are,
And love were like the tune,
With double sound and single
Delight our lips would mingle,
With kisses glad as birds are
That get sweet rain at noon;
If I were what the words are,
And love were like the tune.

If you were life, my darling,
And I your love were death,
We'd shine and snow together
Ere March made sweet the weather
With daffodil and starling
And hours of fruitful breath;
If you were life, my darling,
And I your love were death.

If you were thrall to sorrow,
And I were page to joy,
We'd play for lives and seasons
With loving looks and treasons
And tears of night and morrow
And laughs of maid and boy;
If you were thrall to sorrow,
And I were page to joy.

If you were April's lady,
And I were lord in May,
We'd throw with leaves for hours
And draw for days with flowers,
Till day like night were shady
And night were bright like day;
If you were April's lady,
And I were lord in May.

If you were queen of pleasure,
And I were king of pain,
We'd hunt down love together,
Pluck out his flying-feather,
And teach his feet a measure,
And find his mouth a rein;
If you were queen of pleasure,

And I were king of pain.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A New Year's Message To Joseph Mazzini

Send the stars light, but send not love to me.
Shelley.

I

Out of the dawning heavens that hear
Young wings and feet of the new year
Move through their twilight, and shed round
Soft showers of sound,
Soothing the season with sweet rain,
If greeting come to make me fain,
What is it I can send again?

2

I know not if the year shall send
Tidings to usward as a friend,
And salutation, and such things
Bear on his wings
As the soul turns and thirsts unto
With hungering eyes and lips that sue
For that sweet food which makes all new.

3

I know not if his light shall be
Darkness, or else light verily:
I know but that it will not part
Heart's faith from heart,
Truth from the trust in truth, nor hope
From sight of days unscaled that ope
Beyond one poor year's horoscope.

4

That faith in love which love's self gives,
O master of my spirit, lives,
Having in presence unremoved
Thine head beloved,
The shadow of thee, the semitone
Of thy voice heard at heart and known,
The light of thee not set nor flown.

5

Seas, lands, and hours, can these divide
Love from love's service, side from side,
Though no sound pass nor breath be heard
Of one good word?
To send back words of trust to thee
Were to send wings to love, when he
With his own strong wings covers me.

6

Who shall teach singing to the spheres,
Or motion to the flight of years?
Let soul with soul keep hand in hand
And understand,
As in one same abiding-place
We keep one watch for one same face
To rise in some short sacred space.

7

And all space midway is but nought
To keep true heart from faithful thought,
As under twilight stars we wait
By Time's shut gate
Till the slow soundless hinges turn,
And through the depth of years that yearn
The face of the Republic burn.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Night-Piece By Millet

Wind and sea and cloud and cloud-forsaking
Mirth of moonlight where the storm leaves free
Heaven awhile, for all the wrath of waking
  Wind and sea.

Bright with glad mad rapture, fierce with glee,
Laughs the moon, borne on past cloud's o'ertaking
Fast, it seems, as wind or sail can flee.

One blown sail beneath her, hardly making
Forth, wild-winged for harbourage yet to be,
Strives and leaps and pants beneath the breaking
  Wind and sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Ninth Birthday

Three times thrice hath winter's rough white wing
Crossed and curdled wells and streams with ice
Since his birth whose praises love would sing
  Three times thrice.

Earth nor sea bears flower nor pearl of price
Fit to crown the forehead of my king,
Honey meet to please him, balm, nor spice.

Love can think of nought but love to bring
Fit to serve or do him sacrifice
Ere his eyes have looked upon the spring
  Three times thrice.

II.

Three times thrice the world has fallen on slumber,
Shone and waned and withered in a trice,
Frost has fettered Thames and Tyne and Humber
  Three times thrice,

Fogs have swoln too thick for steel to slice,
Cloud and mud have soiled with grime and umber
Earth and heaven, defaced as souls with vice,

Winds have risen to wreck, snows fallen to cumber,
Ships and chariots, trapped like rats or mice,
Since my king first smiled, whose years now number
  Three times thrice.

III.

Three times thrice, in wine of song full-flowing,
Pledge, my heart, the child whose eyes suffice,
Once beheld, to set thy joy-bells going
  Three times thrice.

Not the lands of palm and date and rice
Glow more bright when summer leaves them glowing,
Laugh more light when suns and winds entice.

Noon and eve and midnight and cock-crowing,
Child whose love makes life as paradise,
Love should sound your praise with clarions blowing
  Three times thrice.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Sequence of Sonnets on the Death of Robert Browning

I1.
The clearest eyes in all the world they read
.
With sense more keen and spirit of sight more true
.
Than burns and thrills in sunrise, when the dew
.
Flames, and absorbs the glory round it shed,
.
As they the light of ages quick and dead,
.
Closed now, forsake us: yet the shaft that slew
.
Can slay not one of all the works we knew,
.
Nor death discrown that many-laurelled head.
.
The works of words whose life seems lightning wrought,
.
And moulded of unconquerable thought,
.
And quickened with imperishable flame,
.
Stand fast and shine and smile, assured that nought
.
May fade of all their myriad-moulded fame,
.
Nor England's memory clasp not Browning's name.[Composition Date:] December 13, 1889.II2.
Death, what hast thou to do with one for whom
.
Time is not lord, but servant? What least part
.
Of all the fire that fed his living heart,
.
Of all the light more keen that sundawn's bloom
.
That lit and led his spirit, strong as doom
.
And bright as hope, can aught thy breath may dart
.
Quench? Nay, thou knowest he knew thee what thou art,
.
A shadow born of terror's barren womb,
.
That brings not forth save shadows. What art thou,
.

To dream, albeit thou breathe upon his brow,

.

That power on him is given thee,--that thy breath

.

Can make him less than love acclaims him now,

.

And hears all time sound back the word it saith?

.

What part hast thou then in his glory, Death?III3.

A graceless doom it seems that bids us grieve:

.

Venice and winter, hand in deadly hand,

.

Have slain the lover of her sunbright strand

.

And singer of a stormbright Christmas Eve.

.

A graceless guerdon we that loved receive

.

For all our love, from that the dearest land

.

Love worshipped ever. Blithe and soft and bland,

.

Too fair for storm to scathe or fire to cleave,

.

Shone on our dreams and memories evermore

.

The domes, the towers, the mountains and the shore

.

That gird or guard thee, Venice: cold and black

.

Seems now the face we loved as he of yore.

.

We have given thee love--no stint, no stay, no lack:

.

What gift, what gift is this thou hast given us back?IV4.

But he--to him, who knows what gift is thine,

.

Death? Hardly may we think or hope, when we

.

Pass likewise thither where to-night is he,

.

Beyond the irremeable outer seas that shine
.
And darken round such dreams as half divine
.
Some sunlit harbour in that starless sea
.
Where gleams no ship to windward or to lee,
.
To read with him the secret of thy shrine.4.
There too, as here, may song, delight, and love,
.
The nightingale, the sea-bird, and the dove,
.
Fulfil with joy the splendour of the sky
.
Till all beneath wax bright as all above:
.
But none of all that search the heavens, and try
.
The sun, may match the sovereign eagle's eye.[Composition Date:] December 14[, 1889]
V5.
Among the wondrous ways of men and time
.
He went as one that ever found and sought
.
And bore in hand the lamp-like spirit of thought
.
To illume with instance of its fire sublime
.
The dusk of many a cloud-like age and clime.
.
No spirit in shape of light and darkness wrought,
.
No faith, no fear, no dream, no rapture, nought
.
That blooms in wisdom, naught that burns in crime,
.
No virtue girt and armed and helmed with light,
.
No love more lovely than the snows are white,
.
No serpent sleeping in some dead soul's tomb,
.

No song-bird singing from some live soul's height,

But he might hear, interpret, or illume

With sense invasive as the dawn of doom.VI6.

What secret thing of splendour or of shade

Surmised in all those wandering ways wherein

Man, led of love and life and death and sin,

Strays, climbs, or cowers, allured, absorbed, afraid,

Might not the strong and sun-like sense invade

Of that full soul that had for aim to win

Light, silent over time's dark toil and din,

Life, at whose touch death fades as dead things fade?

O spirit of man, what mystery moves in thee

That he might know not of in spirit, and see

The heart within the heart that seems to strive,

The life within the life that seems to be,

And hear, through all thy storms that whirl and drive,

The living sound of all men's souls alive?VII7.

He held no dream worth waking: so he said,

He who stands now on death's triumphal steep,

Awakened out of life wherein we sleep

And dream of what he knows and sees, being dead.

But never death for him was dark or dread:

"Look forth" he bade the soul, and fear not. Weep,

All ye that trust not in his truth, and keep

.
Vain memory's vision of a vanished head
.
As all that lives of all that once was he
.
Save that which lightens from his word: but we,
.
Who, seeing the sunset-coloured waters roll,
.
Yet know the sun subdued not of the sea,
.
Nor weep nor doubt that still the spirit is whole,
.
And life and death but shadows of the soul.[Composition Date:] December 15, 1890.Credits and CopyrightTogether with the editors, the Department ofEnglish (University of Toronto), and the University of Toronto Press,the following individuals share copyright for the work that wentinto this edition:Screen Design (Electronic Edition): Sian Meikle (University ofToronto Library)Scanning: Sharine Leung (Centre for Computing in the Humanities)

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Singing Lesson

Far-fetched and dear-bought, as the proverb rehearses,
Is good, or was held so, for ladies: but nought
In a song can be good if the turn of the verse is
  Far-fetched and dear-bought.

As the turn of a wave should it sound, and the thought
Ring smooth, and as light as the spray that disperses
Be the gleam of the words for the garb thereof wrought.

Let the soul in it shine through the sound as it pierces
Men's hearts with possession of music unsought;
For the bounties of song are no jealous god's mercies,
  Far-fetched and dear-bought.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Song in Time of Order. 1852

PUSH hard across the sand,
For the salt wind gathers breath;
Shoulder and wrist and hand,
Push hard as the push of death.

The wind is as iron that rings,
The foam-heads loosen and flee;
It swells and welters and swings,
The pulse of the tide of the sea.

And up on the yellow cliff
The long corn flickers and shakes;
Push, for the wind holds stiff,
And the gunwale dips and rakes.

Good hap to the fresh fierce weather,
The quiver and beat of the sea!
While three men hold together,
The kingdoms are less by three.

Out to the sea with her there,
Out with her over the sand;
Let the kings keep the earth for their share!
We have done with the sharers of land.

They have tied the world in a tether,
They have bought over God with a fee;
While three men hold together,
The kingdoms are less by three.

We have done with the kisses that sting,
The thief’s mouth red from the feast,
The blood on the hands of the king
And the lie at the lips of the priest.

Will they tie the winds in a tether,
Put a bit in the jaws of the sea?
While three men hold together,
The kingdoms are less by three.

Let our flag run out straight in the wind!
The old red shall be floated again
When the ranks that are thin shall be thinned,
When the names that were twenty are ten;

When the devil’s riddle is mastered
And the galley-bench creaks with a Pope,
We shall see Buonaparte the bastard
Kick heels with his throat in a rope.

While the shepherd sets wolves on his sheep
And the emperor halters his kine,

While Shame is a watchman asleep
And Faith is a keeper of swine,

Let the wind shake our flag like a feather,
Like the plumes of the foam of the sea!
While three men hold together,
The kingdoms are less by three.

All the world has its burdens to bear,
From Cayenne to the Austrian whips;
Forth, with the rain in our hair
And the salt sweet foam in our lips;

In the teeth of the hard glad weather,
In the blown wet face of the sea;
While three men hold together,
The kingdoms are less by three.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Song in Time of Revolution. 1860

THE HEART of the rulers is sick, and the high-priest covers his head:
For this is the song of the quick that is heard in the ears of the dead.

The poor and the halt and the blind are keen and mighty and fleet:
Like the noise of the blowing of wind is the sound of the noise of their feet.

The wind has the sound of a laugh in the clamour of days and of deeds:
The priests are scattered like chaff, and the rulers broken like reeds.

The high-priest sick from qualms, with his raiment bloodily dashed;
The thief with branded palms, and the liar with cheeks abashed.

They are smitten, they tremble greatly, they are pained for their pleasant things:
For the house of the priests made stately, and the might in the mouth of the kings.

They are grieved and greatly afraid; they are taken, they shall not flee:
For the heart of the nations is made as the strength of the springs of the sea.

They were fair in the grace of gold, they walked with delicate feet:
They were clothed with the cunning of old, and the smell of their garments was sweet.

For the breaking of gold in their hair they halt as a man made lame:
They are utterly naked and bare; their mouths are bitter with shame.

Wilt thou judge thy people now, O king that wast found most wise?
Wilt thou lie any more, O thou whose mouth is emptied of lies?

Shall God make a pact with thee, till his hook be found in thy sides?
Wilt thou put back the time of the sea, or the place of the season of tides?

Set a word in thy lips, to stand before God with a word in thy mouth;
That "the rain shall return in the land, and the tender dew after drouth."

But the arm of the elders is broken, their strength is unbound and undone:
They wait for a sign of a token; they cry, and there cometh none.

Their moan is in every place, the cry of them filleth the land:
There is shame in the sight of their face, there is fear in the thews of their hand.

They are girdled about the reins with a curse for the girdle thereon:
For the noise of the rending of chains the face of their colour is gone.

For the sound of the shouting of men they are grievously stricken at heart:
They are smitten asunder with pain, their bones are smitten apart.

There is none of them all that is whole; their lips gape open for breath;
They are clothed with sickness of soul, and the shape of the shadow of death.

The wind is thwart in their feet; it is full of the shouting of mirth;
As one shaketh the sides of a sheet, so it shaketh the ends of the earth.

The sword, the sword is made keen; the iron has opened its mouth;

The corn is red that was green; it is bound for the sheaves of the south.

The sound of a word was shed, the sound of the wind as a breath,
In the ears of the souls that were dead, in the dust of the deepness of death;

Where the face of the moon is taken, the ways of the stars undone,
The light of the whole sky shaken, the light of the face of the sun:

Where the waters are emptied and broken, the waves of the waters are stayed;
Where God has bound for a token the darkness that maketh afraid;

Where the sword was covered and hidden, and dust had grown in its side,
A word came forth which was bidden, the crying of one that cried:

The sides of the two-edged sword shall be bare, and its mouth shall be red,
For the breath of the face of the Lord that is felt in the bones of the dead.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Swimmer's Dream

Somno mollior unda

I
Dawn is dim on the dark soft water,
Soft and passionate, dark and sweet.
Love's own self was the deep sea's daughter,
Fair and flawless from face to feet,
Hailed of all when the world was golden,
Loved of lovers whose names beholden
Thrill men's eyes as with light of olden
Days more glad than their flight was fleet.

So they sang: but for men that love her,
Souls that hear not her word in vain,
Earth beside her and heaven above her
Seem but shadows that wax and wane.
Softer than sleep's are the sea's caresses,
Kinder than love's that betrays and blesses,
Blither than spring's when her flowerful tresses
Shake forth sunlight and shine with rain.

All the strength of the waves that perish
Swells beneath me and laughs and sighs,
Sighs for love of the life they cherish,
Laughs to know that it lives and dies,
Dies for joy of its life, and lives
Thrilled with joy that its brief death gives --
Death whose laugh or whose breath forgives
Change that bids it subside and rise.

II
Hard and heavy, remote but nearing,
Sunless hangs the severe sky's weight,
Cloud on cloud, though the wind be veering
Heaped on high to the sundawn's gate.
Dawn and even and noon are one,
Veiled with vapour and void of sun;
Nought in sight or in fancied hearing
Now less mighty than time or fate.

The grey sky gleams and the grey seas glimmer,
Pale and sweet as a dream's delight,
As a dream's where darkness and light seem dimmer,
Touched by dawn or subdued by night.
The dark wind, stern and sublime and sad,
Swings the rollers to westward, clad
With lustrous shadow that lures the swimmer,
Lures and lulls him with dreams of light.

Light, and sleep, and delight, and wonder,
Change, and rest, and a charm of cloud,
Fill the world of the skies whereunder

Heaves and quivers and pants aloud
All the world of the waters, hoary
Now, but clothed with its own live glory,
That mates the lightning and mocks the thunder
With light more living and word more proud.

III
Far off westward, whither sets the sounding strife,
Strife more sweet than peace, of shoreless waves whose glee
Scorns the shore and loves the wind that leaves them free,
Strange as sleep and pale as death and fair as life,
Shifts the moonlight-coloured sunshine on the sea.

Toward the sunset's goal the sunless waters crowd,
Fast as autumn days toward winter: yet it seems
Here that autumn wanes not, here that woods and streams
Lose not heart and change not likeness, chilled and bowed,
Warped and wrinkled: here the days are fair as dreams.

IV
O russet-robed November,
What ails thee so to smile?
Chill August, pale September,
Endured a woful while,
And fell as falls an ember
From forth a flameless pile:
But golden-girt November
Bids all she looks on smile.

The lustrous foliage, waning
As wanes the morning moon,
Here falling, here refraining,
Outbraves the pride of June
With statelier semblance, feigning
No fear lest death be soon:
As though the woods thus waning
Should wax to meet the moon.

As though, when fields lie stricken
By grey December's breath,
These lordlier growths that sicken
And die for fear of death
Should feel the sense requicken
That hears what springtide saith
And thrills for love, spring-stricken
And pierced with April's breath.

The keen white-winged north-easter
That stings and spurs thy sea
Doth yet but feed and feast her
With glowing sense of glee:
Calm chained her, storm released her,

And storm's glad voice was he:
South-wester or north-easter,
Thy winds rejoice the sea.

V
A dream, a dream is it all -- the season,
The sky, the water, the wind, the shore?
A day-born dream of divine unreason,
A marvel moulded of sleep -- no more?
For the cloudlike wave that my limbs while cleaving
Feel as in slumber beneath them heaving
Soothes the sense as to slumber, leaving
Sense of nought that was known of yore.

A purer passion, a lordlier leisure,
A peace more happy than lives on land,
Fulfils with pulse of diviner pleasure
The dreaming head and the steering hand.
I lean my cheek to the cold grey pillow,
The deep soft swell of the full broad billow,
And close mine eyes for delight past measure,
And wish the wheel of the world would stand.

The wild-winged hour that we fain would capture
Falls as from heaven that its light feet clomb,
So brief, so soft, and so full the rapture
Was felt that soothed me with sense of home.
To sleep, to swim, and to dream, for ever --
Such joy the vision of man saw never;
For here too soon will a dark day sever
The sea-bird's wing from the sea-wave's foam.

A dream, and more than a dream, and dimmer
At once and brighter than dreams that flee,
The moment's joy of the seaward swimmer
Abides, remembered as truth may be.
Not all the joy and not all the glory
Must fade as leaves when the woods wax hoary;
For there the downs and the sea-banks glimmer,
And here to south of them swells the sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Watch In The Night

Watchman, what of the night? -
Storm and thunder and rain,
Lights that waver and wane,
Leaving the watchfires unlit.
Only the balefires are bright,
And the flash of the lamps now and then
From a palace where spoilers sit,
Trampling the children of men.

Prophet, what of the night? -
I stand by the verge of the sea,
Banished, uncomforted, free,
Hearing the noise of the waves
And sudden flashes that smite
Some man's tyrannous head,
Thundering, heard among graves
That hide the hosts of his dead.

Mourners, what of the night? -
All night through without sleep
We weep, and we weep, and we weep.
Who shall give us our sons ?
Beaks of raven and kite,
Mouths of wolf and of hound,
Give us them back whom the guns
Shot for you dead on the ground.

Dead men, what of the night? -
Cannon and scaffold and sword,
Horror of gibbet and cord,
Mowed us as sheaves for the grave,
Mowed us down for the right.
We do not grudge or repent.
Freely to freedom we gave
Pledges, till life should be spent.

Statesman, what of the night? -
The night will last me my time.
The gold on a crown or a crime
Looks well enough yet by the lamps.
Have we not fingers to write,
Lips to swear at a need?
Then, when danger decamps,
Bury the word with the deed.

Warrior, what of the night? -
Whether it be not or be
Night, is as one thing to me.
I for one, at the least,
Ask not of dews if they blight,
Ask not of flames if they slay,
Ask not of prince or of priest

How long ere we put them away.

Master, what of the night? -
Child, night is not at all
Anywhere, fallen or to fall,
Save in our star-stricken eyes.
Forth of our eyes it takes flight,
Look we but once nor before
Nor behind us, but straight on the skies;
Night is not then any more.

Exile, what of the night? -
The tides and the hours run out,
The seasons of death and of doubt,
The night-watches bitter and sore.
In the quicksands leftward and right
My feet sink down under me;
But I know the scents of the shore
And the broad blown breaths of the sea.

Captives, what of the night? -
It rains outside overhead
Always, a rain that is red,
And our faces are soiled with the rain.
Here in the seasons' despite
Day-time and night-time are one,
Till the curse of the kings and the chain
Break, and their toils be undone.

Christian, what of the night? -
I cannot tell; I am blind.
I halt and hearken behind
If haply the hours will go back
And return to the dear dead light,
To the watchfires and stars that of old
Shone where the sky now is black,
Glowed where the earth now is cold.

High priest, what of the night? -
The night is horrible here
With haggard faces and fear,
Blood, and the burning of fire.
Mine eyes are emptied of sight,
Mine hands are full of the dust,
If the God of my faith be a liar,
Who is it that I shall trust?

Princes, what of the night? -
Night with pestilent breath
Feeds us, children of death,
Clothes us close with her gloom.
Rapine and famine and fright

Crouch at our feet and are fed.
Earth where we pass is a tomb,
Life where we triumph is dead.

Martyrs, what of the night? -
Nay, is it night with you yet?
We, for our part, we forget
What night was, if it were.
The loud red mouths of the fight
Are silent and shut where we are.
In our eyes the tempestuous air
Shines as the face of a star.

England, what of the night? -
Night is for slumber and sleep,
Warm, no season to weep.
Let me alone till the day.
Sleep would I still if I might,
Who have slept for two hundred years.
Once I had honour, they say;
But slumber is sweeter than tears.

France, what of the night? -
Night is the prostitute's noon,
Kissed and drugged till she swoon,
Spat upon, trod upon, whored.
With bloodred rose-garlands dight,
Round me reels in the dance
Death, my saviour, my lord,
Crowned; there is no more France.

Italy, what of the night? -
Ah, child, child, it is long!
Moonbeam and starbeam and song
Leave it dumb now and dark.
Yet I perceive on the height
Eastward, not now very far,
A song too loud for the lark,
A light too strong for a star.

Germany, what of the night ? -
Long has it lulled me with dreams;
Now at midwatch, as it seems,
Light is brought back to mine eyes,
And the mastery of old and the might
Lives in the joints of mine hands,
Steadies my limbs as they rise,
Strengthens my foot as it stands.

Europe, what of the night ? -
Ask of heaven, and the sea,
And my babes on the bosom of me,

Nations of mine, but ungrown.
There is one who shall surely requite
All that endure or that err:
She can answer alone:
Ask not of me, but of her.

Liberty, what of the night ? -
I feel not the red rains fall,
Hear not the tempest at all,
Nor thunder in heaven any more.
All the distance is white
With the soundless feet of the sun.
Night, with the woes that it wore,
Night is over and done.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Year's Burden -- 1870

Fire and wild light of hope and doubt and fear,
Wind of swift change, and clouds and hours that veer
As the storm shifts of the tempestuous year;
  Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.

Hope sits yet hiding her war-wearied eyes,
Doubt sets her forehead earthward and denies,
But fear brought hand to hand with danger dies,
  Dies and is burnt up in the fire of fight.

Hearts bruised with loss and eaten through with shame
Turn at the time's touch to devouring flame;
Grief stands as one that knows not her own name,
  Nor if the star she sees bring day or night.

No song breaks with it on the violent air,
But shrieks of shame, defeat, and brute despair;
Yet something at the star's heart far up there
  Burns as a beacon in our shipwrecked sight.

O strange fierce light of presage, unknown star,
Whose tongue shall tell us what thy secrets are,
What message trembles in thee from so far?
  Cry wellaway. but well befall the right.

From shores laid waste across an iron sea
Where the waifs drift of hopes that were to be,
Across the red rolled foam we look for thee,
  Across the fire we look up for the light.

From days laid waste across disastrous years,
From hopes cut down across a world of fears,
We gaze with eyes too passionate for tears,
  Where faith abides though hope be put to flight.

Old hope is dead, the grey-haired hope grown blind
That talked with us of old things out of mind,
Dreams, deeds and men the world has left behind;
  Yet, though hope die, faith lives in hope's despite.

Ay, with hearts fixed on death and hopeless hands
We stand about our banner while it stands
Above but one field of the ruined lands;
  Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.

Though France were given for prey to bird and beast,
Though Rome were rent in twain of king and priest,
The soul of man, the soul is safe at least
  That gives death life and dead men hands to smite.

Are ye so strong, O kings, O strong men? Nay,
Waste all ye will and gather all ye may,

Yet one thing is there that ye shall not slay,
  Even thought, that fire nor iron can affright.

The woundless and invisible thought that goes
Free throughout time as north or south wind blows,
Far throughout space as east or west sea flows,
  And all dark things before it are made bright.

Thy thought, thy word, O soul republican,
O spirit of life, O God whose name is man:
What sea of sorrows but thy sight shall span?
  Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.

With all its coils crushed, all its rings uncurled,
The one most poisonous worm that soiled the world
Is wrenched from off the throat of man, and hurled
  Into deep hell from empire's helpless height.

Time takes no more infection of it now;
Like a dead snake divided of the plough,
The rotten thing lies cut in twain; but thou,
  Thy fires shall heal us of the serpent's bite.

Ay, with red cautery and a burning brand
Purge thou the leprous leaven of the land;
Take to thee fire, and iron in thine hand,
  Till blood and tears have washed the soiled limbs white.

We have sinned against thee in dreams and wicked sleep;
Smite, we will shrink not; strike, we will not weep;
Let the heart feel thee; let thy wound go deep;
  Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.

Wound us with love, pierce us with longing, make
Our souls thy sacrifices; turn and take
Our hearts for our sin-offerings lest they break,
  And mould them with thine hands and give them might.

Then, when the cup of ills is drained indeed,
Will we come to thee with our wounds that bleed,
With famished mouths and hearts that thou shalt feed,
  And see thee worshipped as the world's delight.

There shall be no more wars nor kingdoms won,
But in thy sight whose eyes are as the sun
All names shall be one name, all nations one,
  All souls of men in man's one soul unite.

O sea whereon men labour, O great sea
That heaven seems one with, shall these things not be?
O earth, our earth, shall time not make us free?
  Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

A Year's Carols

JANUARY
HAIL, January, that bearest here
On snowbright breasts the babe-faced year
    That weeps and trembles to be born.
Hail, maid and mother, strong and bright,
Hooded and cloaked and shod with white,
    Whose eyes are stars that match the morn.
Thy forehead braves the storm's bent bow,
Thy feet enkindle stars of snow.

FEBRUARY
Wan February with weeping cheer,
Whose cold hand guides the youngling year
    Down misty roads of mire and rime,
Before thy pale and fitful face
The shrill wind shifts the clouds apace
    Through skies the morning scarce may climb.
Thine eyes are thick with heavy tears,
But lit with hopes that light the year's.

MARCH
Hail, happy March, whose foot on earth
Rings as the blast of martial mirth
    When trumpets fire men's hearts for fray.
No race of wild things winged or finned
May match the might that wings thy wind
    Through air and sea, through scud and spray.
Strong joy and thou were powers twin-born
Of tempest and the towering morn.

APRIL
Crowned April, king whose kiss bade earth
Bring forth to time her lordliest birth
    When Shakespeare from thy lips drew breath
And laughed to hold in one soft hand
A spell that bade the world's wheel stand,
    And power on life, and power on death,
With quiring suns and sunbright showers
Praise him, the flower of all thy flowers.

MAY
Hail, May, whose bark puts forth full-sailed
For summer; May, whom Chaucer hailed
    With all his happy might of heart,
And gave thy rosebright daisy-tips
Strange frarance from his amorous lips
    That still thine own breath seems to part
And sweeten till each word they say
Is even a flower of flowering May.

JUNE
Strong June, superb, serene, elate

With conscience of thy sovereign state
    Untouched of thunder, though the storm
Scathe here and there thy shuddering skies
And bid its lightning cross thine eyes
    With fire, thy golden hours inform
Earth and the souls of men with life
That brings forth peace from shining strife.

JULY
Hail, proud July, whose fervent mouth
Bids even be morn and north be south
    By grace and gospel of thy word,
Whence all the splendour of the sea
Lies breathless with delight in thee
    And marvel at the music heard
From the ardent silent lips of noon
And midnight's rapturous plenilune.

AUGUST
Great August, lord of golden lands,
Whose lordly joy through seas and strands
    And all the red-ripe heart of earth
Strikes passion deep as life, and stills
The folded vales and folding hills
    With gladness too divine for mirth,
The gracious glories of thine eyes
Make night a noon where darkness dies.

SEPTEMBER
Hail, kind September, friend whose grace
Renews the bland year's bounteous face
    With largess given of corn and wine
Through many a land that laughs with love
Of thee and all the heaven above,
    More fruitful found than all save thine
Whose skies fulfil with strenuous cheer
The fervent fields that knew thee near.

OCTOBER
October of the tawny crown,
Whose heavy-laden hands drop down
    Blessing, the bounties of thy breath
And mildness of thy mellowing might
Fill earth and heaven with love and light
    Too sweet for fear to dream of death
Or memory, while thy joy lives yet,
To know what joy would fain forget.

NOVEMBER
Hail, soft November, though thy pale
Sad smile rebuke the words that hail
    Thy sorrow with no sorrowing words

Or gratulate thy grief with song
Less bitter than the winds that wrong
    Thy withering woodlands, where the birds
Keep hardly heart to sing or see
How fair thy faint wan face may be.

DECEMBER
December, thou whose hallowing hands
On shuddering seas and hardening lands
    Set as a sacramental sign
The seal of Christmas felt on earth
As witness toward a new year's birth
    Whose promise makes thy death divine,
The crowning joy that comes of thee
Makes glad all grief on land or sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Adieux à Marie Stuart

I.

QUEEN, for whose house my fathers fought,
With hopes that rose and fell,
Red star of boyhood's fiery thought,
Farewell

They gave their lives, and I, my queen,
Have given you of my life,
Seeing your brave star burn high between
Men's strife.

The strife that lightened round their spears
Long since fell still: so long
Hardly may hope to last in years
My song.

But still through strife of time and thought
Your light on me too fell:
Queen, in whose name we sang or fought,
Farewell.

II.

There beats no heart on either border
Wherethrough the north blasts blow
But keeps your memory as a warder
His beacon-fire aglow.

Long since it fired with love and wonder
Mine, for whose April age
Blithe midsummer made banquet under
The shade of Hermitage.

Soft sang the burn's blithe notes, that gather
Strength to ring true:
And air and trees and sun and heather
Remembered you.

Old border ghosts of fight or fairy
Or love or teen,
These they forgot, remembering Mary
The Queen.

III.

Queen once of Scots and ever of ours
Whose sires brought forth for you
Their lives to strew your way like flowers,
Adieu.

Dead is full many a dead man's name

Who died for you this long
Time past: shall this too fare the same,
My song?

But surely, though it die or live,
Your face was worth
All that a man may think to give
On earth.

No darkness cast of years between
Can darken you:
Man's love will never bid my queen
Adieu.

IV.

Love hangs like light about your name
As music round the shell:
No heart can take of you a tame
Farewell.

Yet, when your very face was seen,
Ill gifts were yours for giving:
Love gat strange guerdons of my queen
When living.

O diamond heart unflawed and clear,
The whole world's crowning jewel!
Was ever heart so deadly dear
So cruel?

Yet none for you of all that bled
Grudged once one drop that fell:
Not one to life reluctant said
Farewell

V.

Strange love they have given you, love disloyal,
Who mock with praise your name,
To leave a head so rare and royal
Too low for praise or blame.

You could not love nor hate, they tell us,
You had nor sense nor sting:
In God's name, then, what plague befell us
To fight for such a thing?

'Some faults the gods will give' to fetter
Man's highest intent:
But surely you were something better

Than innocent !

No maid that strays with steps unwary
Through snares unseen,
But one to live and die for; Mary,
The Queen.

VI.

Forgive them all their praise, who blot
Your fame with praise of you:
Then love may say, and falter not
Adieu.

Yet some you hardly would forgive
Who did you much less wrong
Once: but resentment should not live
Too long.

They never saw your lip’s bright bow,
Your swordbright eyes,
The bluest of heavenly things below
The skies.

Clear eyes that love’s self finds most like
A swordblade’s blue,
A swordblade’s ever keen to strike,
Adieu.

VII.

Though all things breathe or sound of fight
That yet make up your spell,
To bid you were to bid the light
Farewell

Farewell the song says only, being
A star whose race is run:
Farewell the soul says never, seeing
The sun.

Yet, wellnigh as with flash of tears,
The song must say but so
That took your praise up twenty years
Ago,

More bright than stars or moons that vary,
Sun kindling heaven and hell,
Here, after all these years, Queen Mary,
Farewell

Algernon Charles Swinburne

After Death

THE FOUR boards of the coffin lid
Heard all the dead man did.

The first curse was in his mouth,
Made of grave's mould and deadly drouth.

The next curse was in his head,
Made of God's work discomfited.

The next curse was in his hands,
Made out of two grave-bands.

The next curse was in his feet,
Made out of a grave-sheet.

"I had fair coins red and white,
And my name was as great light;

I had fair clothes green and red,
And strong gold bound round my head.

But no meat comes in my mouth,
Now I fare as the worm doth;

And no gold binds in my hair,
Now I fare as the blind fare.

My live thews were of great strength,
Now am I waxen a span's length;

My live sides were full of lust,
Now are they dried with dust."

The first board spake and said:
"Is it best eating flesh or bread?"

The second answered it:
"Is wine or honey the more sweet?"

The third board spake and said:
"Is red gold worth a girl's gold head?"

The fourth made answer thus:
"All these things are as one with us."

The dead man asked of them:
"Is the green land stained brown with flame?

Have they hewn my son for beasts to eat,
And my wife's body for beasts' meat?

Have they boiled my maid in a brass pan,

And built a gallows to hang my man?”

The boards said to him:
“This is a lewd thing that ye deem.

Your wife has gotten a golden bed,
All the sheets are sewn with red.

Your son has gotten a coat of silk,
The sleeves are soft as curded milk.

Your maid has gotten a kirtle new,
All the skirt has braids of blue.

Your man has gotten both ring and glove,
Wrought well for eyes to love.”

The dead man answered thus:
“What good gift shall God give us?”

The boards answered him anon:
“Flesh to feed hell’s worm upon.”

Algernon Charles Swinburne

After Looking into Carlyles Reminiscences

I.

THREE MEN lived yet when this dead man was young
Whose names and words endure for ever one:
Whose eyes grew dim with straining toward the sun,
And his wings weakened, and his angel's tongue
Lost half the sweetest song was ever sung,
But like the strain half uttered earth hears none,
Nor shall man hear till all men's songs are done:
One whose clear spirit like an eagle hung
Between the mountains hallowed by his love
And the sky stainless as his soul above:
And one the sweetest heart that ever spake
The brightest words wherein sweet wisdom smiled.
These deathless names by this dead snake denied
Bid memory spit upon him for their sake.

II.

Sweet heart, forgive me for thine own sweet sake,
Whose kind blithe soul such seas of sorrow swam,
And for my love's sake, powerless as I am
For love to praise thee, or like thee to make
Music of mirth where hearts less pure would break,
Less pure than thine, our life-unspotted Lamb.
Things hatefullest thou hadst not heart to damn,
Nor wouldst have set thine heel on this dead snake.
Let worms consume its memory with its tongue,
The fang that stabbed fair Truth, the lip that stung
Men's memories uncorroded with its breath.
Forgive me, that with bitter words like his
I mix the gentlest English name that is,
The tenderest held of all that know not death.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Aholibah

IN the beginning God made thee
A woman well to look upon,
Thy tender body as a tree
Whereon cool wind hath always blown
Till the clean branches be well grown.

There was none like thee in the land;
The girls that were thy bondwomen
Did bind thee with a purple band
Upon thy forehead, that all men
Should know thee for God’s handmaiden.

Strange raiment clad thee like a bride,
With silk to wear on hands and feet
And plates of gold on either side:
Wine made thee glad, and thou didst eat
Honey, and choice of pleasant meat.

And fishers in the middle sea
Did get thee sea-fish and sea-weeds
In colour like the robes on thee;
And curious work of plaited reeds,
And wools wherein live purple bleeds.

And round the edges of thy cup
Men wrought thee marvels out of gold,
Strong snakes with lean throats lifted up,
Large eyes whereon the brows had hold,
And scaly things their slime kept cold.

For thee they blew soft wind in flutes
And ground sweet roots for cunning scent;
Made slow because of many lutes,
The wind among thy chambers went
Wherein no light was violent.

God called thy name Aholibah,
His tabernacle being in thee,
A witness through waste Asia;
Thou wert a tent sewn cunningly
With gold and colours of the sea.

God gave thee gracious ministers
And all their work who plait and weave:
The cunning of embroiderers
That sew the pillow to the sleeve,
And likeness of all things that live.

Thy garments upon thee were fair
With scarlet and with yellow thread;
Also the weaving of thine hair
Was as fine gold upon thy head,

And thy silk shoes were sewn with red.

All sweet things he bade sift, and ground
As a man grindeth wheat in mills
With strong wheels alway going round;
He gave thee corn, and grass that fills
The cattle on a thousand hills.

The wine of many seasons fed
Thy mouth, and made it fair and clean;
Sweet oil was poured out on thy head
And ran down like cool rain between
The strait close locks it melted in.

The strong men and the captains knew
Thy chambers wrought and fashioned
With gold and covering of blue,
And the blue raiment of thine head
Who satest on a stately bed.

All these had on their garments wrought
The shape of beasts and creeping things,
The body that availeth not,
Flat backs of worms and veinèd wings,
And the lewd bulk that sleeps and stings.

Also the chosen of the years,
The multitude being at ease,
With sackbuts and with dulcimers
And noise of shawms and psalteries
Made mirth within the ears of these.

But as a common woman doth,
Thou didst think evil and devise;
The sweet smell of thy breast and mouth
Thou madest as the harlot's wise,
And there was painting on thine eyes.

Yea, in the woven guest-chamber
And by the painted passages
Where the strange gracious paintings were,
State upon state of companies,
There came on thee the lust of these.

Because of shapes on either wall
Sea-coloured from some rare blue shell
At many a Tyrian interval,
Horsemen on horses, girdled well,
Delicate and desirable,

Thou saidest: I am sick of love:
Stay me with flagons, comfort me

With apples for my pain thereof
Till my hands gather in his tree
That fruit wherein my lips would be.

Yea, saidest thou, I will go up
When there is no more shade than one
May cover with a hollow cup,
And make my bed against the sun
Till my blood's violence be done.

Thy mouth was leant upon the wall
Against the painted mouth, thy chin
Touched the hair's painted curve and fall;
Thy deep throat, fallen lax and thin,
Worked as the blood's beat worked therein.

Therefore, O thou Aholibah,
God is not glad because of thee;
And thy fine gold shall pass away
Like those fair coins of ore that be
Washed over by the middle sea.

Then will one make thy body bare
To strip it of all gracious things,
And pluck the cover from thine hair,
And break the gift of many kings,
Thy wrist-rings and thine ankle-rings.

Likewise the man whose body joins
To thy smooth body, as was said,
Who hath a girdle on his loins
And dyed attire upon his head—
The same who, seeing, worshipped,

Because thy face was like the face
Of a clean maiden that smells sweet,
Because thy gait was as the pace
Of one that opens not her feet
And is not heard within the street—

Even he, O thou Aholibah,
Made separate from thy desire,
Shall cut thy nose and ears away
And bruise thee for thy body's hire
And burn the residue with fire.

Then shall the heathen people say,
The multitude being at ease;
Lo, this is that Aholibah
Whose name was blown among strange seas,
Grown old with soft adulteries.

Also her bed was made of green,
Her windows beautiful for glass
That she had made her bed between:
Yea, for pure lust her body was
Made like white summer-coloured grass.

Her raiment was a strong man’s spoil;
Upon a table by a bed
She set mine incense and mine oil
To be the beauty of her head
In chambers walled about with red.

Also between the walls she had
Fair faces of strong men portrayed;
All girded round the loins, and clad
With several cloths of woven braid
And garments marvellously made.

Therefore the wrath of God shall be
Set as a watch upon her way;
And whoso findeth by the sea
Blown dust of bones will hardly say
If this were that Aholibah.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

An Appeal

Art thou indeed among these,
Thou of the tyrannous crew,
The kingdoms fed upon blood,
O queen from of old of the seas,
England, art thou of them too
That drink of the poisonous flood,
That hide under poisonous trees?

Nay, thy name from of old,
Mother, was pure, or we dreamed
Purer we held thee than this,
Purer fain would we hold;
So goodly a glory it seemed,
A fame so bounteous of bliss,
So more precious than gold.

A praise so sweet in our ears,
That thou in the tempest of things
As a rock for a refuge shouldst stand,
In the bloodred river of tears
Poured forth for the triumph of kings;
A safeguard, a sheltering land,
In the thunder and torrent of years.

Strangers came gladly to thee,
Exiles, chosen of men,
Safe for thy sake in thy shade,
Sat down at thy feet and were free.
So men spake of thee then;
Now shall their speaking be stayed?
Ah, so let it not be!

Not for revenge or affright,
Pride, or a tyrannous lust,
Cast from thee the crown of thy praise.
Mercy was thine in thy might;
Strong when thou wert, thou wert just;
Now, in the wrong-doing days,
Cleave thou, thou at least, to the right.

How should one charge thee, how sway,
Save by the memories that were?
Not thy gold nor the strength of thy ships,

Nor the might of thine armies at bay,
Made thee, mother, most fair;
But a word from republican lips
Said in thy name in thy day.

Hast thou said it, and hast thou forgot?
Is thy praise in thine ears as a scoff?
Blood of men guiltless was shed,
Children, and souls without spot,
Shed, but in places far off;
Let slaughter no more be, said
Milton; and slaughter was not.

Was it not said of thee too,
Now, but now, by thy foes,
By the slaves that had slain their France,
And thee would slay as they slew -
"Down with her walls that enclose
Freemen that eye us askance,
Fugitives, men that are true!"

This was thy praise or thy blame
From bondsman or freeman--to be
Pure from pollution of slaves,
Clean of their sins, and thy name
Bloodless, innocent, free;
Now if thou be not, thy waves
Wash not from off thee thy shame.

Freeman he is not, but slave,
Whoso in fear for the State
Cries for surety of blood,
Help of gibbet and grave;
Neither is any land great
Whom, in her fear-stricken mood,
These things only can save.

Lo, how fair from afar,
Taintless of tyranny, stands
Thy mighty daughter, for years
Who trod the winepress of war;
Shines with immaculate hands;

Slays not a foe, neither fears;
Stains not peace with a scar.

Be not as tyrant or slave,
England; be not as these,
Thou that wert other than they.
Stretch out thine hand, but to save;
Put forth thy strength, and release;
Lest there arise, if thou slay,
Thy shame as a ghost from the grave.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

An Interlude

IN the greenest growth of the Maytime,
I rode where the woods were wet,
Between the dawn and the daytime;
The spring was glad that we met.

There was something the season wanted,
Though the ways and the woods smelt sweet;
The breath at your lips that panted,
The pulse of the grass at your feet.

You came, and the sun came after,
And the green grew golden above;
And the flag-flowers lightened with laughter,
And the meadow-sweet shook with love.

Your feet in the full-grown grasses
Moved soft as a weak wind blows;
You passed me as April passes,
With face made out of a rose.

By the stream where the stems were slender,
Your bright foot paused at the sedge;
It might be to watch the tender
Light leaves in the springtime hedge,

On boughs that the sweet month blanches
With flowery frost of May:
It might be a bird in the branches,
It might be a thorn in the way.

I waited to watch you linger
With foot drawn back from the dew,
Till a sunbeam straight like a finger
Struck sharp through the leaves at you.

And a bird overhead sang Follow,
And a bird to the right sang Here;
And the arch of the leaves was hollow,
And the meaning of May was clear.

I saw where the sun’s hand pointed,
I knew what the bird’s note said;
By the dawn and the dewfall anointed,
You were queen by the gold on your head.

As the glimpse of a burnt-out ember
Recalls a regret of the sun,
I remember, forget, and remember
What Love saw done and undone.

I remember the way we parted,
The day and the way we met;

You hoped we were both broken-hearted,
And knew we should both forget.

And May with her world in flower
Seemed still to murmur and smile
As you murmured and smiled for an hour;
I saw you turn at the stile.

A hand like a white wood-blossom
You lifted, and waved, and passed,
With head hung down to the bosom,
And pale, as it seemed, at last.

And the best and the worst of this is
That neither is most to blame
If you've forgotten my kisses
And I've forgotten your name.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Anactoria

MY LIFE is bitter with thy love; thine eyes
Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs
Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound,
And my blood strengthens, and my veins abound.
I pray thee sigh not, speak not, draw not breath;
Let life burn down, and dream it is not death.
I would the sea had hidden us, the fire
(Wilt thou fear that, and fear not my desire?)
Severed the bones that bleach, the flesh that cleaves,
And let our sifted ashes drop like leaves.
I feel thy blood against my blood: my pain
Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein.
Let fruit be crushed on fruit, let flower on flower,
Breast kindle breast, and either burn one hour.
Why wilt thou follow lesser loves? are thine
Too weak to bear these hands and lips of mine?
I charge thee for my life's sake, O too sweet
To crush love with thy cruel faultless feet,
I charge thee keep thy lips from hers or his,
Sweetest, till theirs be sweeter than my kiss:
Lest I too lure, a swallow for a dove,
Erotion or Erinna to my love.
I would my love could kill thee; I am satiated
With seeing thee live, and fain would have thee dead.
I would earth had thy body as fruit to eat,
And no mouth but some serpent's found thee sweet.
I would find grievous ways to have thee slain,
Intense device, and superflux of pain;
Vex thee with amorous agonies, and shake
Life at thy lips, and leave it there to ache;
Strain out thy soul with pangs too soft to kill,
Intolerable interludes, and infinite ill;
Relapse and reluctation of the breath,
Dumb tunes and shuddering semitones of death.
I am weary of all thy words and soft strange ways,
Of all love's fiery nights and all his days,
And all the broken kisses salt as brine
That shuddering lips make moist with waterish wine,
And eyes the bluer for all those hidden hours
That pleasure fills with tears and feeds from flowers,
Fierce at the heart with fire that half comes through,
But all the flower-like white stained round with blue;
The fervent underlid, and that above
Lifted with laughter or abashed with love;
Thine amorous girdle, full of thee and fair,
And leavings of the lilies in thine hair.
Yea, all sweet words of thine and all thy ways,
And all the fruit of nights and flower of days,
And stinging lips wherein the hot sweet brine
That Love was born of burns and foams like wine,
And eyes insatiable of amorous hours,
Fervent as fire and delicate as flowers,

Coloured like night at heart, but cloven through
Like night with flame, dyed round like night with blue,
Clothed with deep eyelids under and above—
Yea, all thy beauty sickens me with love;
Thy girdle empty of thee and now not fair,
And ruinous lilies in thy languid hair.
Ah, take no thought for Love's sake; shall this be,
And she who loves thy lover not love thee?
Sweet soul, sweet mouth of all that laughs and lives,
Mine is she, very mine; and she forgives.
For I beheld in sleep the light that is
In her high place in Paphos, heard the kiss
Of body and soul that mix with eager tears
And laughter stinging through the eyes and ears;
Saw Love, as burning flame from crown to feet,
Imperishable, upon her storied seat;
Clear eyelids lifted toward the north and south,
A mind of many colours, and a mouth
Of many tunes and kisses; and she bowed,
With all her subtle face laughing aloud,
Bowed down upon me, saying, 'Who doth thee wrong,
Sappho?' but thou—thy body is the song,
Thy mouth the music; thou art more than I,
Though my voice die not till the whole world die;
Though men that hear it madden; though love weep,
Though nature change, though shame be charmed to sleep.
Ah, wilt thou slay me lest I kiss thee dead?
Yet the queen laughed from her sweet heart and said:
'Even she that flies shall follow for thy sake,
And she shall give thee gifts that would not take,
Shall kiss that would not kiss thee' (yea, kiss me)
'When thou wouldst not'—when I would not kiss thee!
Ah, more to me than all men as thou art,
Shall not my songs assuage her at the heart?
Ah, sweet to me as life seems sweet to death,
Why should her wrath fill thee with fearful breath?
Nay, sweet, for is she God alone? hath she
Made earth and all the centuries of the sea,
Taught the sun ways to travel, woven most fine
The moonbeams, shed the starbeams forth as wine,
Bound with her myrtles, beaten with her rods,
The young men and the maidens and the gods?
Have we not lips to love with, eyes for tears,
And summer and flower of women and of years?
Stars for the foot of morning, and for noon
Sunlight, and exaltation of the moon;
Waters that answer waters, fields that wear
Lilies, and languor of the Lesbian air?
Beyond those flying feet of fluttered doves,
Are there not other gods for other loves?
Yea, though she scourge thee, sweetest, for my sake,
Blossom not thorns and flowers not blood should break.

Ah that my lips were tuneless lips, but pressed
To the bruised blossom of thy scourged white breast!
Ah that my mouth for Muses' milk were fed
On the sweet blood thy sweet small wounds had bled!
That with my tongue I felt them, and could taste
The faint flakes from thy bosom to the waist!
That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat
Thy breasts like honey! that from face to feet
Thy body were abolished and consumed,
And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!
Ah, ah, thy beauty! like a beast it bites,
Stings like an adder, like an arrow smites.
Ah sweet, and sweet again, and seven times sweet,
The paces and the pauses of thy feet!
Ah sweeter than all sleep or summer air
The fallen fillets fragrant from thine hair!
Yea, though their alien kisses do me wrong,
Sweeter thy lips than mine with all their song;
Thy shoulders whiter than a fleece of white,
And flower-sweet fingers, good to bruise or bite
As honeycomb of the inmost honey-cells,
With almond-shaped and roseleaf-coloured shells
And blood like purple blossom at the tips
Quivering; and pain made perfect in thy lips
For my sake when I hurt thee; O that I
Durst crush thee out of life with love, and die,
Die of thy pain and my delight, and be
Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee!
Would I not plague thee dying overmuch?
Would I not hurt thee perfectly? not touch
Thy pores of sense with torture, and make bright
Thine eyes with bloodlike tears and grievous light?
Strike pang from pang as note is struck from note,
Catch the sob's middle music in thy throat,
Take thy limbs living, and new-mould with these
A lyre of many faultless agonies?
Feed thee with fever and famine and fine drouth,
With perfect pangs convulse thy perfect mouth,
Make thy life shudder in thee and burn afresh,
And wring thy very spirit through the flesh?
Cruel? but love makes all that love him well
As wise as heaven and crueller than hell.
Me hath love made more bitter toward thee
Than death toward man; but were I made as he
Who hath made all things to break them one by one,
If my feet trod upon the stars and sun
And souls of men as his have alway trod,
God knows I might be crueller than God.
For who shall change with prayers or thanksgivings
The mystery of the cruelty of things?
Or say what God above all gods and years
With offering and blood-sacrifice of tears,

With lamentation from strange lands, from graves
Where the snake pastures, from scarred mouths of slaves,
From prison, and from plunging prows of ships
Through flamelike foam of the sea's closing lips—
With thwartings of strange signs, and wind-blown hair
Of comets, desolating the dim air,
When darkness is made fast with seals and bars,
And fierce reluctance of disastrous stars,
Eclipse, and sound of shaken hills, and wings
Darkening, and blind inexpiable things—
With sorrow of labouring moons, and altering light
And travail of the planets of the night,
And weeping of the weary Pleiads seven,
Feeds the mute melancholy lust of heaven?
Is not his incense bitterness, his meat
Murder? his hidden face and iron feet
Hath not man known, and felt them on their way
Threaten and trample all things and every day?
Hath he not sent us hunger? who hath cursed
Spirit and flesh with longing? filled with thirst
Their lips who cried unto him? who bade exceed
The fervid will, fall short the feeble deed,
Bade sink the spirit and the flesh aspire,
Pain animate the dust of dead desire,
And life yield up her flower to violent fate?
Him would I reach, him smite, him desecrate,
Pierce the cold lips of God with human breath,
And mix his immortality with death.
Why hath he made us? what had all we done
That we should live and loathe the sterile sun,
And with the moon wax paler as she wanes,
And pulse by pulse feel time grow through our veins?
Thee too the years shall cover; thou shalt be
As the rose born of one same blood with thee,
As a song sung, as a word said, and fall
Flower-wise, and be not any more at all,
Nor any memory of thee anywhere;
For never Muse has bound above thine hair
The high Pierian flower whose graft outgrows
All summer kinship of the mortal rose
And colour of deciduous days, nor shed
Reflex and flush of heaven about thine head,
Nor reddened brows made pale by floral grief
With splendid shadow from that lordlier leaf.
Yea, thou shalt be forgotten like spilt wine,
Except these kisses of my lips on thine
Brand them with immortality; but me—
Men shall not see bright fire nor hear the sea,
Nor mix their hearts with music, nor behold
Cast forth of heaven with feet of awful gold
And plumeless wings that make the bright air blind,
Lightning, with thunder for a hound behind

Hunting through fields unfurrowed and unsown—
But in the light and laughter, in the moan
And music, and in grasp of lip and hand
And shudder of water that makes felt on land
The immeasurable tremor of all the sea,
Memories shall mix and metaphors of me.
Like me shall be the shuddering calm of night,
When all the winds of the world for pure delight
Close lips that quiver and fold up wings that ache;
When nightingales are louder for love's sake,
And leaves tremble like lute-strings or like fire;
Like me the one star swooning with desire
Even at the cold lips of the sleepless moon,
As I at thine; like me the waste white noon,
Burnt through with barren sunlight; and like me
The land-stream and the tide-stream in the sea.
I am sick with time as these with ebb and flow,
And by the yearning in my veins I know
The yearning sound of waters; and mine eyes
Burn as that beamless fire which fills the skies
With troubled stars and travailing things of flame;
And in my heart the grief consuming them
Labours, and in my veins the thirst of these,
And all the summer travail of the trees
And all the winter sickness; and the earth,
Filled full with deadly works of death and birth,
Sore spent with hungry lusts of birth and death,
Has pain like mine in her divided breath;
Her spring of leaves is barren, and her fruit
Ashes; her boughs are burdened, and her root
Fibrous and gnarled with poison; underneath
Serpents have gnawn it through with tortuous teeth
Made sharp upon the bones of all the dead,
And wild birds rend her branches overhead.
These, woven as raiment for his word and thought,
These hath God made, and me as these, and wrought
Song, and hath lit it at my lips; and me
Earth shall not gather though she feed on thee.
As a shed tear shalt thou be shed; but I—
Lo, earth may labour, men live long and die,
Years change and stars, and the high God devise
New things, and old things wane before his eyes
Who wields and wrecks them, being more strong than they—
But, having made me, me he shall not slay.
Nor slay nor satiate, like those herds of his
Who laugh and live a little, and their kiss
Contents them, and their loves are swift and sweet,
And sure death grasps and gains them with slow feet,
Love they or hate they, strive or bow their knees—
And all these end; he hath his will of these.
Yea, but albeit he slay me, hating me—
Albeit he hide me in the deep dear sea

And cover me with cool wan foam, and ease
This soul of mine as any soul of these,
And give me water and great sweet waves, and make
The very sea's name lordlier for my sake,
The whole sea sweeter—albeit I die indeed
And hide myself and sleep and no man heed,
Of me the high God hath not all his will.
Blossom of branches, and on each high hill
Clear air and wind, and under in clamorous vales
Fierce noises of the fiery nightingales,
Buds burning in the sudden spring like fire,
The wan washed sand and the waves' vain desire,
Sails seen like blown white flowers at sea, and words
That bring tears swiftest, and long notes of birds
Violently singing till the whole world sings—
I Sappho shall be one with all these things,
With all high things for ever; and my face
Seen once, my songs once heard in a strange place,
Cleave to men's lives, and waste the days thereof
With gladness and much sadness and long love.
Yea, they shall say, earth's womb has borne in vain
New things, and never this best thing again;
Borne days and men, borne fruits and wars and wine,
Seasons and songs, but no song more like mine.
And they shall know me as ye who have known me here,
Last year when I loved Atthis, and this year
When I love thee; and they shall praise me, and say
'She hath all time as all we have our day,
Shall she not live and have her will'—even I?
Yea, though thou diest, I say I shall not die.
For these shall give me of their souls, shall give
Life, and the days and loves wherewith I live,
Shall quicken me with loving, fill with breath,
Save me and serve me, strive for me with death.
Alas, that neither moon nor snow nor dew
Nor all cold things can purge me wholly through,
Assuage me nor allay me nor appease,
Till supreme sleep shall bring me bloodless ease;
Till time wax faint in all his periods;
Till fate undo the bondage of the gods,
And lay, to slake and satiate me all through,
Lotus and Lethe on my lips like dew,
And shed around and over and under me
Thick darkness and the insuperable sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Anima Anceps

TILL death have broken
Sweet life's love-token,
Till all be spoken
That shall be said,
What dost thou praying,
O soul, and playing
With song and saying,
Things flown and fled?
For this we know not—
That fresh springs flow not
And fresh griefs grow not
When men are dead;
When strange years cover
Lover and lover,
And joys are over
And tears are shed.

If one day's sorrow
Mar the day's morrow—
If man's life borrow
And man's death pay—
If souls once taken,
If lives once shaken,
Arise, awaken,
By night, by day—
Why with strong crying
And years of sighing,
Living and dying,
Fast ye and pray?
For all your weeping,
Waking and sleeping,
Death comes to reaping
And takes away.

Though time rend after
Roof-tree from rafter,
A little laughter
Is much more worth
Than thus to measure
The hour, the treasure,
The pain, the pleasure,
The death, the birth;
Grief, when days alter,
Like joy shall falter;
Song-book and psalter,
Mourning and mirth.
Live like the swallow;
Seek not to follow
Where earth is hollow
Under the earth.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Anonymous Plays: XVII

YE TOO, dim watchfires of some darkling hour,
Whose fame forlorn time saves not nor proclaims
For ever, but forgetfulness defames
And darkness and the shadow of death devour,
Lift up ye too your light, put forth your power,
Let the far twilight feel your soft small flames
And smile, albeit night name not even their names,
Ghost by ghost passing, flower blown down on flower:
That sweet-tongued shadow, like a star's that passed
Singing, and light was from its darkness cast
To paint the face of Painting fair with praise:
And that wherein forefigured smiles the pure
Fraternal face of Wordsworth's Elidure
Between two child-faced masks of merrier days

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Anonymous Plays: XVIII

MORE yet and more, and yet we mark not all:
The Warning fain to bid fair women heed
Its hard brief note of deadly doom and deed;
The verse that strewed too thick with flowers the hall
Whence Nero watched his fiery festival;
That iron page wherein men's eyes who read
See, bruised and marred between two babes that bleed,
A mad red-handed husband's martyr fall;
The scene which crossed and streaked with mirth the strife
Of Henry with his sons and witchlike wife;
And that sweet pageant of the kindly fiend,
Who, seeing three friends in spirit and heart made one,
Crowned with good hap the true-love wiles he screened
In the pleached lanes of pleasant Edmonton.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Anonymous Plays:XVI - ‘Arden of Feversham’

MOTHER whose womb brought forth our man of men,
Mother of Shakespeare, whom all time acclaims
Queen therefore, sovereign queen of English dames,
Throned higher than sat thy sonless empress then,
Was it thy son’s young passion-guided pen
Which drew, reflected from encircling flames,
A figure marked by the earlier of thy names
Wife, and from all her wedded kinswomen
Marked by the sign of murderess? Pale and great,
Great in her grief and sin, but in her death
And anguish of her penitential breath
Greater than all her sin or sin-born fate,
She stands, the holocaust of dark desire,
Clothed round with song for ever as with fire.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Aperotos Eros

Strong as death, and cruel as the grave,
Clothed with cloud and tempest's blackening breath,
Known of death's dread self, whom none outbrave,
  Strong as death,

Love, brow-bound with anguish for a wreath,
Fierce with pain, a tyrant-hearted slave,
Burns above a world that groans beneath.

Hath not pity power on thee to save,
Love? hath power no pity? Nought he saith,
Answering: blind he walks as wind or wave,
  Strong as death.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

April

WHEN the fields catch flower
And the underwood is green,
And from bower unto bower
The songs of the birds begin,
I sing with sighing between.
When I laugh and sing,
I am heavy at heart for my sin;
I am sad in the spring
For my love that I shall not win,
For a foolish thing.

This profit I have of my woe,
That I know, as I sing,
I know he will needs have it so
Who is master and king,
Who is lord of the spirit of spring.
I will serve her and will not spare
Till her pity awake
Who is good, who is pure, who is fair,
Even her for whose sake
Love hath ta'en me and slain unaware.

O my lord, O Love,
I have laid my life at thy feet;
Have thy will thereof,
Do as it please thee with it,
For what shall please thee is sweet.
I am come unto thee
To do thee service, O Love;
Yet cannot I see
Thou wilt take any pity thereof,
Any mercy on me.

But the grace I have long time sought
Comes never in sight,
If in her it abideth not,
Through thy mercy and might,
Whose heart is the world's delight.
Thou hast sworn without fail I shall die,
For my heart is set
On what hurts me, I wot not why,
But cannot forget
What I love, what I sing for and sigh.

She is worthy of praise,
For this grief of her giving is worth
All the joy of my days
That lie between death's day and birth,
All the lordship of things upon earth.
Nay, what have I said?
I would not be glad if I could;
My dream and my dread

Are of her, and for her sake I would
That my life were fled.

Lo, sweet, if I durst not pray to you,
Then were I dead;
If I sang not a little to say to you,
(Could it be said)
O my love, how my heart would be fed;
Ah sweet who hast hold of my heart,
For thy love’s sake I live,
Do but tell me, ere either depart,
What a lover may give
For a woman so fair as thou art.

The lovers that disbelieve,
False rumours shall grieve
And evil-speaking shall part.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Armand Barbes

Fire out of heaven, a flower of perfect fire,
  That where the roots of life are had its root
  And where the fruits of time are brought forth fruit;
A faith made flesh, a visible desire,
That heard the yet unbreathing years respire
  And speech break forth of centuries that sit mute
  Beyond all feebler footprint of pursuit;
That touched the highest of hope, and went up higher;
A heart love-wounded whereto love was law,
A soul reproachless without fear or flaw,
  A shining spirit without shadow of shame,
A memory made of all men's love and awe;
  Being disembodied, so thou be the same,
  What need, O soul, to sign thee with thy name?

All woes of all men sat upon thy soul
  And all their wrongs were heavy on thy head;
  With all their wounds thy heart was pierced and bled,
And in thy spirit as in a mourning scroll
The world's huge sorrows were inscribed by roll,
  All theirs on earth who serve and faint for bread,
  All banished men's, all theirs in prison dead,
Thy love had heart and sword-hand for the whole.
"This was my day of glory," didst thou say,
When, by the scaffold thou hadst hope to climb
For thy faith's sake, they brought thee respite; "Nay,
I shall not die then, I have missed my day."
  O hero, O our help, O head sublime,
  Thy day shall be commensurate with time.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

At Sea

'Farewell and adieu' was the burden prevailing
Long since in the chant of a home-faring crew;
And the heart in us echoes, with laughing or wailing,
  Farewell and adieu.

Each year that we live shall we sing it anew,
With a water untravelled before us for sailing
And a water behind us that wrecks may bestrew.

The stars of the past and the beacons are paling,
The heavens and the waters are hoarier of hue:
But the heart in us chants not an all unavailing
  Farewell and adieu.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Athens: An Ode

ERE from under earth again like fire the violet kindle, [Str. I.
Ere the holy buds and hoar on olive-branches bloom,
Ere the crescent of the last pale month of winter dwindle,
Shrink, and fall as falls a dead leaf on the dead month's tomb,
Round the hills whose heights the first-born olive-blossom brightened,
Round the city brow-bound once with violets like a bride,
Up from under earth again a light that long since lightened
Breaks, whence all the world took comfort as all time takes pride.
Pride have all men in their fathers that were free before them,
In the warriors that begat us free-born pride have we:
But the fathers of their spirits, how may men adore them,
With what rapture may we praise, who bade our souls be free?
Sons of Athens born in spirit and truth are all born free men;
Most of all, we, nurtured where the north wind holds his reign:
Children all we sea-folk of the Salaminian seamen,
Sons of them that beat back Persia they that beat back Spain.
Since the songs of Greece fell silent, none like ours have risen;
Since the sails of Greece fell slack, no ships have sailed like ours;
How should we lament not, if her spirit sit in prison?
How should we rejoice not, if her wreaths renew their flowers?
All the world is sweeter, if the Athenian violet quicken:
All the world is brighter, if the Athenian sun return:
All things foul on earth wax fainter, by that sun's light stricken:
All ill growths are withered, where those fragrant flower-lights burn.
All the wandering waves of seas with all their warring waters
Roll the record on for ever of the sea-fight there,
When the capes were battle's lists, and all the straits were slaughter's,
And the myriad Medes as foam-flakes on the scattering air.
Ours the lightning was that cleared the north and lit the nations,
But the light that gave the whole world light of old was she:
Ours an age or twain, but hers are endless generations:
All the world is hers at heart, and most of all are we.

Ye that bear the name about you of her glory, [Ant. I.
Men that wear the sign of Greeks upon you sealed,
Yours is yet the choice to write yourselves in story
Sons of them that fought the Marathonian field.
Slaves of no man were ye, said your warrior poet,
Neither subject unto man as underlings:
Yours is now the season here wherein to show it,
If the seed ye be of them that knew not kings.
If ye be not, swords nor words alike found brittle
From the dust of death to raise you shall prevail:
Subject swords and dead men's words may stead you little,
If their old king-hating heart within you fail.
If your spirit of old, and not your bonds, be broken,
If the kingless heart be molten in your breasts,
By what signs and wonders, by what word or token,
Shall ye drive the vultures from your eagles' nests?
All the gains of tyrants Freedom counts for losses;
Nought of all the work done holds she worth the work,
When the slaves whose faith is set on crowns and crosses

Drive the Cossack bear against the tiger Turk.
Neither cross nor crown nor crescent shall ye bow to,
Nought of Araby nor Jewry, priest nor king:
As your watchword was of old, so be it now too:
As from lips long stilled, from yours let healing spring.
Through the fights of old, your battle-cry was healing,
And the Saviour that ye called on was the Sun:
Dawn by dawn behold in heaven your God, revealing
Light from darkness as when Marathon was won.
Gods were yours yet strange to Turk or Galilean,
Light and Wisdom only then as gods adored:
Pallas was your shield, your comforter was Pæan,
From your bright world's navel spake the Sun your Lord.

Though the names be lost, and changed the signs of Light and Wisdom be, [Ep. I.
By these only shall men conquer, by these only be set free:
When the whole world's eye was Athens, these were yours, and theirs were ye.
Light was given you of your wisdom, light ye gave the world again:
As the sun whose godhead lightened on her soul was Hellas then:
Yea, the least of all her children as the chosen of other men.
Change your hearts not with your garments, nor your faith with creeds that change:
Truth was yours, the truth which time and chance transform not nor estrange:
Purer truth nor higher abides not in the reach of time's whole range.
Gods are they in all men's memories and for all time's periods,
They that hurled the host back seaward which had scourged the sea with rods:
Gods for us are all your fathers, even the least of these as gods.
In the dark of days the thought of them is with us, strong to save,
They that had no lord, and made the Great King lesser than a slave;
They that rolled all Asia back on Asia, broken like a wave.
No man's men were they, no master's and no God's but these their own:
Gods not loved in vain nor served amiss, nor all yet overthrown:
Love of country, Freedom, Wisdom, Light, and none save these alone.
King by king came up against them, sire and son, and turned to flee:
Host on host roared westward, mightier each than each, if more might be:
Field to field made answer, clamorous like as wave to wave at sea.
Strife to strife responded, loud as rocks to clangorous rocks respond
Where the deep rings wreck to seamen held in tempest's thrall and bond,
Till when war's bright work was perfect peace as radiant rose beyond:
Peace made bright with fruit of battle, stronger made for storm gone down,
With the flower of song held heavenward for the violet of her crown
Woven about the fragrant forehead of the fostress maiden's town.
Gods arose alive on earth from under stroke of human hands:
As the hands that wrought them, these are dead, and mixed with time's dead sands:
But the godhead of supernal song, though these now stand not, stands.
Pallas is not, Phœbus breathes no more in breathing brass or gold:
Clytæmnestra towers, Cassandra wails, for ever: Time is bold,
But nor heart nor hand hath he to unwrite the scriptures writ of old.
Dead the great chryselephantine God, as dew last evening shed:
Dust of earth or foam of ocean is the symbol of his head:
Earth and ocean shall be shadows when Prometheus shall be dead.

Fame around her warriors living rang through Greece and lightened, [Str. 2.

Moving equal with their stature, stately with their strength:
Thebes and Lacedæmon at their breathing presence brightened,
Sense or sound of them filled all the live land's breadth and length.
All the lesser tribes put on the pure Athenian fashion,
One Hellenic heart was from the mountains to the sea:
Sparta's bitter self grew sweet with high half-human passion,
And her dry thorns flushed aflower in strait Thermopylæ.
Fruitless yet the flowers had fallen, and all the deeds died fruitless,
Save that tongues of after men, the children of her peace,
Took the tale up of her glories, transient else and rootless,
And in ears and hearts of all men left the praise of Greece.
Fair the war-time was when still, as beacon answering beacon,
Sea to land flashed fight, and thundered note of wrath or cheer;
But the strength of noonday night hath power to waste and weaken,
Nor may light be passed from hand to hand of year to year
If the dying deed be saved not, ere it die for ever,
By the hands and lips of men more wise than years are strong;
If the soul of man take heed not that the deed die never,
Clothed about with purple and gold of story, crowned with song.
Still the burning heart of boy and man alike rejoices,
Hearing words which made it seem of old for all who sang
That their heaven of heavens waxed happier when from free men's voices
Well-beloved Harmodius and Aristogeiton rang.
Never fell such fragrance from the flower-month's rose-red kirtle
As from chaplets on the bright friends' brows who slew their lord:
Greener grew the leaf and balmier blew the flower of myrtle
When its blossom sheathed the sheer tyrannicidal sword.
None so glorious garland crowned the feast Panathenæan
As this wreath too frail to fetter fast the Cyprian dove:
None so fiery song sprang sunwards annual as the pæan
Praising perfect love of friends and perfect country's love.

Higher than highest of all those heavens wherefrom the starry [Ant. 2.
Song of Homer shone above the rolling fight,
Gleams like spring's green bloom on boughs all gaunt and gnarry
Soft live splendour as of flowers of foam in flight,
Glows a glory of mild-winged maidens upward mounting
Sheer through air made shrill with strokes of smooth swift wings
Round the rocks beyond foot's reach, past eyesight's counting,
Up the cleft where iron wind of winter rings
Round a God fast clenched in iron jaws of fetters,
Him who culled for man the fruitful flower of fire,
Bared the darkling scriptures writ in dazzling letters,
Taught the truth of dreams deceiving men's desire,
Gave their water-wandering chariot-seats of ocean
Wings, and bade the rage of war-steeds champ the rein,
Showed the symbols of the wild birds' wheeling motion,
Waged for man's sake war with God and all his train.
Earth, whose name was also Righteousness, a mother
Many-named and single-natured, gave him breath
Whence God's wrath could wring but this word and none other—
He may smite me, yet he shall not do to death.

Him the tongue that sang triumphant while tormented
Sang as loud the sevenfold storm that roared erewhile
Round the towers of Thebes till wrath might rest contented:
Sang the flight from smooth soft-sanded banks of Nile,
When like mateless doves that fly from snare or tether
Came the suppliants landwards trembling as they trod,
And the prayer took wing from all their tongues together—
King of kings, most holy of holies blessed God.
But what mouth may chant again, what heart may know it,
All the rapture that all hearts of men put on
When of Salamis the time-transcending poet
Sang, whose hand had chased the Mede at Marathon?

Darker dawned the song with stormier wings above the watch-fire spread [Ep. 2.
Whence from Ida toward the hill of Hermes leapt the light that said
Troy was fallen, a torch funereal for the king's triumphal head.
Dire indeed the birth of Leda's womb that had God's self to sire
Bloomed, a flower of love that stung the soul with fangs that gnaw like fire:
But the twin-born human-fathered sister-flower bore fruit more dire.
Scarce the cry that called on airy heaven and all swift winds on wing,
Wells of river-heads, and countless laugh of waves past reckoning,
Earth which brought forth all, and the orbed sun that looks on everything,
Scarce that cry fills yet men's hearts more full of heart devouring dread
Than the murderous word said mocking, how the child whose blood he shed
Might clasp fast and kiss her father where the dead salute the dead.
But the latter note of anguish from the lips that mocked her lord,
When her son's hand bared against the breast that suckled him his sword,
How might man endure, O Æschylus, to hear it and record?
How might man endure, being mortal yet, O thou most highest, to hear?
How record, being born of woman? Surely not thy Furies near,
Surely this beheld, this only, blasted hearts to death with fear.
Not the hissing hair, nor flakes of blood that oozed from eyes of fire,
Nor the snort of savage sleep that snuffed the hungering heart's desire
Where the hunted prey found hardly space and harbour to respire;
She whose likeness called them—'Sleep ye, ho? what need of you that sleep?'
(Ah, what need indeed, where she was, of all shapes that night may keep
Hidden dark as death and deeper than men's dreams of hell are deep?)
She the murderess of her husband, she the huntress of her son,
More than ye was she, the shadow that no God withstands but one,
Wisdom equal-eyed and stronger and more splendid than the sun.
Yea, no God may stand betwixt us and the shadows of our deeds,
Nor the light of dreams that lighten darkness, nor the prayer that pleads,
But the wisdom equal-souled with heaven, the light alone that leads.
Light whose law bids home those childless children of eternal night,
Soothed and reconciled and mastered and transmuted in men's sight
Who behold their own souls, clothed with darkness once, now clothed with light.
King of kings and father crowned of all our fathers crowned of yore,
Lord of all the lords of song, whose head all heads bow down before,
Glory be to thee from all thy sons in all tongues evermore.

Rose and vine and olive and deep ivy-bloom entwining [Str. 3.
Close the goodliest grave that e'er they closeliest might entwine

Keep the wind from wasting and the sun from too strong shining
Where the sound and light of sweetest songs still float and shine.
Here the music seems to illume the shade, the light to whisper
Song, the flowers to put not odours only forth, but words
Sweeter far than fragrance: here the wandering wreaths twine crisper
Far, and louder far exults the note of all wild birds.
Thoughts that change us, joys that crown and sorrows that enthrone us,
Passions that enrobe us with a clearer air than ours,
Move and breathe as living things beheld round white Colonus,
Audibler than melodies and visibler than flowers.
Love, in fight unconquered, Love, with spoils of great men laden,
Never sang so sweet from throat of woman or of dove:
Love, whose bed by night is in the soft cheeks of a maiden,
And his march is over seas, and low roofs lack not Love;
Nor may one of all that live, ephemeral or eternal,
Fly nor hide from Love; but whoso clasps him fast goes mad.
Never since the first-born year with flowers first-born grew vernal
Such a song made listening hearts of lovers glad or sad.
Never sounded note so radiant at the rayless portal
Opening wide on the all-concealing lowland of the dead
As the music mingling, when her doomsday marked her mortal,
From her own and old men's voices round the bride's way shed,
Round the grave her bride-house, hewn for endless habitation,
Where, shut out from sunshine, with no bridegroom by, she slept;
But beloved of all her dark and fateful generation,
But with all time's tears and praise besprinkled and bewept:
Well-beloved of outcast father and self-slaughtered mother,
Born, yet unpolluted, of their blind incestuous bed;
Best-beloved of him for whose dead sake she died, her brother,
Hallowing by her own life's gift her own born brother's head:

Not with wine or oil nor any less libation [Ant. 3.
Hallowed, nor made sweet with humbler perfume's breath;
Not with only these redeemed from desecration,
But with blood and spirit of life poured forth to death;
Blood unspotted, spirit unsullied, life devoted,
Sister too supreme to make the bride's hope good,
Daughter too divine as woman to be noted,
Spouse of only death in mateless maidenhood.
Yea, in her was all the prayer fulfilled, the saying
All accomplished—Would that fate would let me wear
Hallowed innocence of words and all deeds, weighing
Well the laws thereof begot on holier air,
Far on high sublimely stablished, whereof only
Heaven is father; nor did birth of mortal mould
Bring them forth, nor shall oblivion lull to lonely
Slumber. Great in these is God, and grows not old.
Therefore even that inner darkness where she perished
Surely seems as holy and lovely, seen aright,
As desirable and as dearly to be cherished,
As the haunt closed in with laurels from the light,
Deep inwound with olive and wild vine inwoven,

Where a godhead known and unknown makes men pale,
But the darkness of the twilight noon is cloven
Still with shrill sweet moan of many a nightingale.
Closer clustering there they make sweet noise together,
Where the fearful gods look gentler than our fear,
And the grove thronged through with birds of holiest feather
Grows nor pale nor dumb with sense of dark things near.
There her father, called upon with signs of wonder,
Passed with tenderest words away by ways unknown,
Not by sea-storm stricken down, nor touched of thunder,
To the dark benign deep underworld, alone.

Third of three that ruled in Athens, kings with sceptral song for staff, [Ep. 3.
Gladdest heart that God gave ever milk and wine of thought to quaff,
Clearest eye that lightened ever to the broad lip's lordliest laugh,
Praise be thine as theirs whose tragic brows the loftier leaf engirds
For the live and lyric lightning of thy honey-hearted words,
Soft like sunny dewy wings of clouds and bright as crying of birds;
Full of all sweet rays and notes that make of earth and air and sea
One great light and sound of laughter from one great God's heart, to be
Sign and semblance of the gladness of man's life where men breathe free.
With no Loxian sound obscure God uttered once, and all time heard,
All the soul of Athens, all the soul of England, in that word:
Rome arose the second child of freedom: northward rose the third.
Ere her Boreal dawn came kindling seas afoam and fields of snow,
Yet again, while Europe groaned and grovelled, shone like suns aglow
Doria splendid over Genoa, Venice bright with Dandolo.
Dead was Hellas, but Ausonia by the light of dead men's deeds
Rose and walked awhile alive, though mocked as whom the fen-fire leads
By the creed-wrought faith of faithless souls that mock their doubts with creeds.
Dead are these, and man is risen again: and haply now the Three
Yet coequal and triune may stand in story, marked as free
By the token of the washing of the waters of the sea.
Athens first of all earth's kindred many-tongued and many-kinned
Had the sea to friend and comfort, and for kinsman had the wind:
She that bare Columbus next: then she that made her spoil of Ind.
She that hears not what man's rage but only what the sea-wind saith:
She that turned Spain's ships to cloud-wrack at the blasting of her breath,
By her strengths of strong-souled children and of strong winds done to death.
North and south the Great King's galleons went in Persian wise: and here
She, with Æschylean music on her lips that laughed back fear,
In the face of Time's grey godhead shook the splendour of her spear.
Fair as Athens then with foot upon her foeman's front, and strong
Even as Athens for redemption of the world from sovereign wrong,
Like as Athens crowned she stood before the sun with crowning song.
All the world is theirs with whom is freedom: first of all the free,
Blest are they whom song has crowned and clothed with blessing: these as we,
These alone have part in spirit with the sun that crowns the sea,

Algernon Charles Swinburne

August

THERE WERE four apples on the bough,
Half gold half red, that one might know
The blood was ripe inside the core;
The colour of the leaves was more
Like stems of yellow corn that grow
Through all the gold June meadow's floor.

The warm smell of the fruit was good
To feed on, and the split green wood,
With all its bearded lips and stains
Of mosses in the cloven veins,
Most pleasant, if one lay or stood
In sunshine or in happy rains.

There were four apples on the tree,
Red stained through gold, that all might see
The sun went warm from core to rind;
The green leaves made the summer blind
In that soft place they kept for me
With golden apples shut behind.

The leaves caught gold across the sun,
And where the bluest air begun,
Thirsted for song to help the heat;
As I to feel my lady's feet
Draw close before the day were done;
Both lips grew dry with dreams of it.

In the mute August afternoon
They trembled to some undertune
Of music in the silver air;
Great pleasure was it to be there
Till green turned duskier and the moon
Coloured the corn-sheaves like gold hair.

That August time it was delight
To watch the red moons wane to white
'Twixt grey seamed stems of apple-trees;
A sense of heavy harmonies
Grew on the growth of patient night,
More sweet than shapen music is.

But some three hours before the moon
The air, still eager from the noon,
Flagged after heat, not wholly dead;
Against the stem I leant my head;
The colour soothed me like a tune,
Green leaves all round the gold and red.

I lay there till the warm smell grew
More sharp, when flecks of yellow dew
Between the round ripe leaves had blurred

The rind with stain and wet; I heard
A wind that blew and breathed and blew,
Too weak to alter its one word.

The wet leaves next the gentle fruit
Felt smoother, and the brown tree-root
Felt the mould warmer: I too felt
(As water feels the slow gold melt
Right through it when the day burns mute)
The peace of time wherein love dwelt.

There were four apples on the tree,
Gold stained on red that all might see
The sweet blood filled them to the core:
The colour of her hair is more
Like stems of fair faint gold, that be
Mown from the harvest's middle floor.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Autumn And Winter

Three months bade wane and wax the wintering moon
Between two dates of death, while men were fain
Yet of the living light that all too soon
  Three months bade wane.

Cold autumn, wan with wrath of wind and rain,
Saw pass a soul sweet as the sovereign tune
That death smote silent when he smote again.

First went my friend, in life's mid light of noon,
Who loved the lord of music: then the strain
Whence earth was kindled like as heaven in June
  Three months bade wane.

A herald soul before its master's flying
Touched by some few moons first the darkling goal
Where shades rose up to greet the shade, espying
  A herald soul;

Shades of dead lords of music, who control
Men living by the might of men undying,
With strength of strains that make delight of dole.

The deep dense dust on death's dim threshold lying
Trembled with sense of kindling sound that stole
Through darkness, and the night gave ear, descrying
  A herald soul.

One went before, one after, but so fast
They seem gone hence together, from the shore
Whence we now gaze: yet ere the mightier passed
  One went before;

One whose whole heart of love, being set of yore
On that high joy which music lends us, cast
Light round him forth of music's radiant store.

Then went, while earth on winter glared aghast,
The mortal god he worshipped, through the door
Wherethrough so late, his lover to the last,
  One went before.

A star had set an hour before the sun
Sank from the skies wherethrough his heart's pulse yet
Thrills audibly: but few took heed, or none,
  A star had set.

All heaven rings back, sonorous with regret,
The deep dirge of the sunset: how should one
Soft star be missed in all the concourse met?

But, O sweet single heart whose work is done,
Whose songs are silent, how should I forget
That ere the sunset's fiery goal was won
  A star had set?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Ave atque Vale (In memory of Charles Baudelaire)

SHALL I strew on thee rose or rue or laurel,
   Brother, on this that was the veil of thee?
   Or quiet sea-flower moulded by the sea,
Or simplest growth of meadow-sweet or sorrel,
   Such as the summer-sleepy Dryads weave,
   Waked up by snow-soft sudden rains at eve?
Or wilt thou rather, as on earth before,
   Half-faded fiery blossoms, pale with heat
   And full of bitter summer, but more sweet
To thee than gleanings of a northern shore
   Trod by no tropic feet?

For always thee the fervid languid glories
   Allured of heavier suns in mightier skies;
   Thine ears knew all the wandering watery sighs
Where the sea sobs round Lesbian promontories,
   The barren kiss of piteous wave to wave
   That knows not where is that Leucadian grave
Which hides too deep the supreme head of song.
   Ah, salt and sterile as her kisses were,
   The wild sea winds her and the green gulfs bear
Hither and thither, and vex and work her wrong,
   Blind gods that cannot spare.

Thou sawest, in thine old singing season, brother,
   Secrets and sorrows unbeheld of us:
   Fierce loves, and lovely leaf-buds poisonous,
Bare to thy subtler eye, but for none other
   Blowing by night in some unbreathed-in clime;
   The hidden harvest of luxurious time,
Sin without shape, and pleasure without speech;
   And where strange dreams in a tumultuous sleep
   Make the shut eyes of stricken spirits weep;
And with each face thou sawest the shadow on each,
   Seeing as men sow men reap.

O sleepless heart and sombre soul unsleeping,
   That were athirst for sleep and no more life
   And no more love, for peace and no more strife!
Now the dim gods of death have in their keeping
   Spirit and body and all the springs of song,
   Is it well now where love can do no wrong,
Where stingless pleasure has no foam or fang
   Behind the unopening closure of her lips?
   Is it not well where soul from body slips
And flesh from bone divides without a pang
   As dew from flower-bell drips?

It is enough; the end and the beginning
   Are one thing to thee, who art past the end.
   O hand unclasp'd of unbeholden friend,
For thee no fruits to pluck, no palms for winning,

No triumph and no labour and no lust,
Only dead yew-leaves and a little dust.
O quiet eyes wherein the light saith naught,
Whereto the day is dumb, nor any night
With obscure finger silences your sight,
Nor in your speech the sudden soul speaks thought,
Sleep, and have sleep for light.

Now all strange hours and all strange loves are over,
Dreams and desires and sombre songs and sweet,
Hast thou found place at the great knees and feet
Of some pale Titan-woman like a lover,
Such as thy vision here solicited,
Under the shadow of her fair vast head,
The deep division of prodigious breasts,
The solemn slope of mighty limbs asleep,
The weight of awful tresses that still keep
The savour and shade of old-world pine-forests
Where the wet hill-winds weep?

Hast thou found any likeness for thy vision?
O gardener of strange flowers, what bud, what bloom,
Hast thou found sown, what gather'd in the gloom?
What of despair, of rapture, of derision,
What of life is there, what of ill or good?
Are the fruits gray like dust or bright like blood?
Does the dim ground grow any seed of ours,
The faint fields quicken any terrene root,
In low lands where the sun and moon are mute
And all the stars keep silence? Are there flowers
At all, or any fruit?

Alas, but though my flying song flies after,
O sweet strange elder singer, thy more fleet
Singing, and footprints of thy fleeter feet,
Some dim derision of mysterious laughter
From the blind tongueless warders of the dead,
Some gainless glimpse of Proserpine's veil'd head,
Some little sound of unregarded tears
Wept by effaced unprofitable eyes,
And from pale mouths some cadence of dead sighs--
These only, these the hearkening spirit hears,
Sees only such things rise.

Thou art far too far for wings of words to follow,
Far too far off for thought or any prayer.
What ails us with thee, who art wind and air?
What ails us gazing where all seen is hollow?
Yet with some fancy, yet with some desire,
Dreams pursue death as winds a flying fire,
Our dreams pursue our dead and do not find.
Still, and more swift than they, the thin flame flies,

The low light fails us in elusive skies,
Still the foil'd earnest ear is deaf, and blind
Are still the eluded eyes.

Not thee, O never thee, in all time's changes,
Not thee, but this the sound of thy sad soul,
The shadow of thy swift spirit, this shut scroll
I lay my hand on, and not death estranges
My spirit from communion of thy song--
These memories and these melodies that throng
Veil'd porches of a Muse funereal--
These I salute, these touch, these clasp and fold
As though a hand were in my hand to hold,
Or through mine ears a mourning musical
Of many mourners roll'd.

I among these, I also, in such station
As when the pyre was charr'd, and piled the sods.
And offering to the dead made, and their gods,
The old mourners had, standing to make libation,
I stand, and to the Gods and to the dead
Do reverence without prayer or praise, and shed
Offering to these unknown, the gods of gloom,
And what of honey and spice my seed-lands bear,
And what I may of fruits in this chill'd air,
And lay, Orestes-like, across the tomb
A curl of sever'd hair.

But by no hand nor any treason stricken,
Not like the low-lying head of Him, the King,
The flame that made of Troy a ruinous thing,
Thou liest and on this dust no tears could quicken.
There fall no tears like theirs that all men hear
Fall tear by sweet imperishable tear
Down the opening leaves of holy poets' pages.
Thee not Orestes, not Electra mourns;
But bending us-ward with memorial urns
The most high Muses that fulfil all ages
Weep, and our God's heart yearns.

For, sparing of his sacred strength, not often
Among us darkling here the lord of light
Makes manifest his music and his might
In hearts that open and in lips that soften
With the soft flame and heat of songs that shine.
Thy lips indeed he touch'd with bitter wine,
And nourish'd them indeed with bitter bread;
Yet surely from his hand thy soul's food came,
The fire that scarr'd thy spirit at his flame
Was lighted, and thine hungering heart he fed
Who feeds our hearts with fame.

Therefore he too now at thy soul's sunsetting,
God of all suns and songs, he too bends down
To mix his laurel with thy cypress crown,
And save thy dust from blame and from forgetting.
Therefore he too, seeing all thou wert and art,
Compassionate, with sad and sacred heart,
Mourns thee of many his children the last dead,
And hollows with strange tears and alien sighs
Thine unmelodious mouth and sunless eyes,
And over thine irrevocable head
Sheds light from the under skies.

And one weeps with him in the ways Lethean,
And stains with tears her changing bosom chill;
That obscure Venus of the hollow hill,
That thing transform'd which was the Cytherean,
With lips that lost their Grecian laugh divine
Long since, and face no more call'd Erycine--
A ghost, a bitter and luxurious god.
Thee also with fair flesh and singing spell
Did she, a sad and second prey, compel
Into the footless places once more trod,
And shadows hot from hell.

And now no sacred staff shall break in blossom,
No choral salutation lure to light
A spirit sick with perfume and sweet night
And love's tired eyes and hands and barren bosom.
There is no help for these things; none to mend,
And none to mar; not all our songs, O friend,
Will make death clear or make life durable.
Howbeit with rose and ivy and wild vine
And with wild notes about this dust of thine
At least I fill the place where white dreams dwell
And wreathe an unseen shrine.

Sleep; and if life was bitter to thee, pardon,
If sweet, give thanks; thou hast no more to live;
And to give thanks is good, and to forgive.
Out of the mystic and the mournful garden
Where all day through thine hands in barren braid
Wove the sick flowers of secrecy and shade,
Green buds of sorrow and sin, and remnants gray,
Sweet-smelling, pale with poison, sanguine-hearted,
Passions that sprang from sleep and thoughts that started,
Shall death not bring us all as thee one day
Among the days departed?

For thee, O now a silent soul, my brother,
Take at my hands this garland, and farewell.
Thin is the leaf, and chill the wintry smell,
And chill the solemn earth, a fatal mother,

With sadder than the Niobean womb,
And in the hollow of her breasts a tomb.
Content thee, howsoe'er, whose days are done;
There lies not any troublous thing before,
Nor sight nor sound to war against thee more,
For whom all winds are quiet as the sun,
All waters as the shore.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Babyhood

A baby shines as bright
If winter or if May be
On eyes that keep in sight
  A baby.

Though dark the skies or grey be,
It fills our eyes with light,
If midnight or midday be.

Love hails it, day and night,
The sweetest thing that may be
Yet cannot praise aright
  A baby.

II.

All heaven, in every baby born,
All absolute of earthly leaven,
Reveals itself, though man may scorn
  All heaven.

Yet man might feel all sin forgiven,
All grief appeased, all pain outworn,
By this one revelation given.

Soul, now forget thy burdens borne:
Heart, be thy joys now seven times seven:
Love shows in light more bright than morn
  All heaven.

III.

What likeness may define, and stray not
  From truth's exactest way,
A baby's beauty? Love can say not
  What likeness may.

The Mayflower loveliest held in May
  Of all that shine and stay not
Laughs not in rosier disarray.

Sleek satin, swansdown, buds that play not
  As yet with winds that play,
Would fain be matched with this, and may not:
  What likeness may?

IV.

Rose, round whose bed
Dawn's cloudlets close,
Earth's brightest-bred
  Rose!

No song, love knows,
May praise the head
Your curtain shows.

Ere sleep has fled,
The whole child glows
One sweet live red
  Rose.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Beaumont and Fletcher:IV

AN HOUR ere sudden sunset fired the west,
Arose two stars upon the pale deep east.
The hall of heaven was clear for night's high feast,
Yet was not yet day's fiery heart at rest
Love leapt up from his mother's burning breast
To see those warm twin lights, as day decreased,
Wax wider, till when all the sun had ceased
As suns they shone from evening's kindled crest
Across them and between, a quickening fire,
Flamed Venus, laughing with appeased desire.
Their dawn, scarce lovelier for the gleam of tears,
Filled half the hollow shell 'twixt heaven and earth
With sound like moonlight, mingling moan and mirth,
Which rings and glitters down the darkling years.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Before A Crucifix

Here, down between the dusty trees,
  At this lank edge of haggard wood,
Women with labour-loosened knees,
  With gaunt backs bowed by servitude,
Stop, shift their loads, and pray, and fare
Forth with souls easier for the prayer.

The suns have branded black, the rains
  Striped grey this piteous God of theirs;
The face is full of prayers and pains,
  To which they bring their pains and prayers;
Lean limbs that shew the labouring bones,
And ghastly mouth that gapes and groans.

God of this grievous people, wrought
  After the likeness of their race,
By faces like thine own besought,
  Thine own blind helpless eyeless face,
I too, that have nor tongue nor knee
For prayer, I have a word to thee.

It was for this then, that thy speech
  Was blown about the world in flame
And men's souls shot up out of reach
  Of fear or lust or thwarting shame -
That thy faith over souls should pass
As sea-winds burning the grey grass?

It was for this, that prayers like these
  Should spend themselves about thy feet,
And with hard overlaboured knees
  Kneeling, these slaves of men should beat
Bosoms too lean to suckle sons
And fruitless as their orisons?

It was for this, that men should make
  Thy name a fetter on men's necks,
Poor men's made poorer for thy sake,
  And women's withered out of sex?
It was for this, that slaves should be,
Thy word was passed to set men free?

The nineteenth wave of the ages rolls
  Now deathward since thy death and birth.
Hast thou fed full men's starved-out souls?
  Hast thou brought freedom upon earth?
Or are there less oppressions done
In this wild world under the sun?

Nay, if indeed thou be not dead,
  Before thy terrene shrine be shaken,
Look down, turn usward, bow thine head;

O thou that wast of God forsaken,
Look on thine household here, and see
These that have not forsaken thee.

Thy faith is fire upon their lips,
Thy kingdom golden in their hands;
They scourge us with thy words for whips,
They brand us with thy words for brands;
The thirst that made thy dry throat shrink
To their moist mouths commends the drink.

The toothed thorns that bit thy brows
Lighten the weight of gold on theirs;
Thy nakedness enrobes thy spouse
With the soft sanguine stuff she wears
Whose old limbs use for ointment yet
Thine agony and bloody sweat.

The blinding buffets on thine head
On their crowned heads confirm the crown;
Thy scourging dyes their raiment red,
And with thy bands they fasten down
For burial in the blood-bought field
The nations by thy stripes unhealed.

With iron for thy linen bands
And unclean cloths for winding-sheet
They bind the people's nail-pierced hands,
They hide the people's nail-pierced feet;
And what man or what angel known
Shall roll back the sepulchral stone?

But these have not the rich man's grave
To sleep in when their pain is done.
These were not fit for God to save.
As naked hell-fire is the sun
In their eyes living, and when dead
These have not where to lay their head.

They have no tomb to dig, and hide;
Earth is not theirs, that they should sleep.
On all these tombless crucified
No lovers' eyes have time to weep.
So still, for all man's tears and creeds,
The sacred body hangs and bleeds.

Through the left hand a nail is driven,
Faith, and another through the right,
Forged in the fires of hell and heaven,
Fear that puts out the eye of light:
And the feet soiled and scarred and pale
Are pierced with falsehood for a nail.

And priests against the mouth divine
  Push their sponge full of poison yet
And bitter blood for myrrh and wine,
  And on the same reed is it set
Wherewith before they buffeted
The people's disanointed head.

O sacred head, O desecrate,
  O labour-wounded feet and hands,
O blood poured forth in pledge to fate
  Of nameless lives in divers lands,
O slain and spent and sacrificed
People, the grey-grown speechless Christ!

Is there a gospel in the red
  Old witness of thy wide-mouthed wounds?
From thy blind stricken tongueless head
  What desolate evangel sounds
A hopeless note of hope deferred?
What word, if there be any word?

O son of man, beneath man's feet
  Cast down, O common face of man
Whereon all blows and buffets meet,
  O royal, O republican
Face of the people bruised and dumb
And longing till thy kingdom come!

The soldiers and the high priests part
  Thy vesture: all thy days are priced,
And all the nights that eat thine heart.
  And that one seamless coat of Christ,
The freedom of the natural soul,
They cast their lots for to keep whole.

No fragment of it save the name
  They leave thee for a crown of scorns
Wherewith to mock thy naked shame
  And forehead bitten through with thorns
And, marked with sanguine sweat and tears,
The stripes of eighteen hundred years

And we seek yet if God or man
  Can loosen thee as Lazarus,
Bid thee rise up republican
  And save thyself and all of us;
But no disciple's tongue can say
When thou shalt take our sins away.

And mouldering now and hoar with moss
  Between us and the sunlight swings

The phantom of a Christless cross
  Shadowing the sheltered heads of kings
And making with its moving shade
The souls of harmless men afraid.

It creaks and rocks to left and right
  Consumed of rottenness and rust,
Worm-eaten of the worms of night,
  Dead as their spirits who put trust,
Round its base muttering as they sit,
In the time-cankered name of it.

Thou, in the day that breaks thy prison,
  People, though these men take thy name,
And hail and hymn thee rearisen,
  Who made songs erewhile of thy shame,
Give thou not ear; for these are they
Whose good day was thine evil day.

Set not thine hand unto their cross.
  Give not thy soul up sacrificed.
Change not the gold of faith for dross
  Of Christian creeds that spit on Christ.
Let not thy tree of freedom be
Regrafted from that rotting tree.

This dead God here against my face
  Hath help for no man; who hath seen
The good works of it, or such grace
  As thy grace in it, Nazarene,
As that from thy live lips which ran
For man's sake, O thou son of man?

The tree of faith ingraffed by priests
  Puts its foul foliage out above thee,
And round it feed man-eating beasts
  Because of whom we dare not love thee;
Though hearts reach back and memories ache,
We cannot praise thee for their sake.

O hidden face of man, whereover
  The years have woven a viewless veil,
If thou wast verily man's lover,
  What did thy love or blood avail?
Thy blood the priests make poison of,
And in gold shekels coin thy love.

So when our souls look back to thee
  They sicken, seeing against thy side,
Too foul to speak of or to see,
  The leprous likeness of a bride,
Whose kissing lips through his lips grown

Leave their God rotten to the bone.

When we would see thee man, and know
  What heart thou hadst toward men indeed,
Lo, thy blood-blackened altars; lo,
  The lips of priests that pray and feed
While their own hell's worm curls and licks
The poison of the crucifix.

Thou bad'st let children come to thee;
  What children now but curses come?
What manhood in that God can be
  Who sees their worship, and is dumb?
No soul that lived, loved, wrought, and died,
Is this their carrion crucified.

Nay, if their God and thou be one,
  If thou and this thing be the same,
Thou shouldst not look upon the sun;
  The sun grows haggard at thy name.
Come down, be done with, cease, give o'er;
Hide thyself, strive not, be no more.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Before Dawn

SWEET LIFE, if life were stronger,
Earth clear of years that wrong her,
Then two things might live longer,
Two sweeter things than they;
Delight, the rootless flower,
And love, the bloomless bower;
Delight that lives an hour,
And love that lives a day.

From evensong to daytime,
When April melts in Maytime,
Love lengthens out his playtime,
Love lessens breath by breath,
And kiss by kiss grows older
On listless throat or shoulder
Turned sideways now, turned colder
Than life that dreams of death.

This one thing once worth giving
Life gave, and seemed worth living;
Sin sweet beyond forgiving
And brief beyond regret:
To laugh and love together
And weave with foam and feather
And wind and words the tether
Our memories play with yet.

Ah, one thing worth beginning,
One thread in life worth spinning,
Ah sweet, one sin worth sinning
With all the whole soul's will;
To lull you till one stilled you,
To kiss you till one killed you,
To feed you till one filled you,
Sweet lips, if love could fill;

To hunt sweet Love and lose him
Between white arms and bosom,
Between the bud and blossom,
Between your throat and chin;
To say of shame—what is it?
Of virtue—we can miss it;
Of sin—we can but kiss it,
And it's no longer sin:

To feel the strong soul, stricken
Through fleshly pulses, quicken
Beneath swift sighs that thicken,
Soft hands and lips that smite;
Lips that no love can tire,
With hands that sting like fire,
Weaving the web Desire

To snare the bird Delight.

But love so lightly plighted,
Our love with torch unlighted,
Paused near us unaffrighted,
Who found and left him free;
None, seeing us cloven in sunder,
Will weep or laugh or wonder;
Light love stands clear of thunder,
And safe from winds at sea.

As, when late larks give warning
Of dying lights and dawning,
Night murmurs to the morning,
"Lie still, O love, lie still;"
And half her dark limbs cover
The white limbs of her lover,
With amorous plumes that hover
And fervent lips that chill;

As scornful day represses
Night's void and vain caresses,
And from her cloudier tresses
Unwinds the gold of his,
With limbs from limbs dividing
And breath by breath subsiding;
For love has no abiding,
But dies before the kiss;

So hath it been, so be it;
For who shall live and flee it?
But look that no man see it
Or hear it unaware;
Lest all who love and choose him
See Love, and so refuse him;
For all who find him lose him,
But all have found him fair.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Before Parting

A MONTH or twain to live on honeycomb
Is pleasant; but one tires of scented time,
Cold sweet recurrence of accepted rhyme,
And that strong purple under juice and foam
Where the wine's heart has burst;
Nor feel the latter kisses like the first.

Once yet, this poor one time; I will not pray
Even to change the bitterness of it,
The bitter taste ensuing on the sweet,
To make your tears fall where your soft hair lay
All blurred and heavy in some perfumed wise
Over my face and eyes.

And yet who knows what end the scythèd wheat
Makes of its foolish poppies' mouths of red?
These were not sown, these are not harvested,
They grow a month and are cast under feet
And none has care thereof,
As none has care of a divided love.

I know each shadow of your lips by rote,
Each change of love in eyelids and eyebrows;
The fashion of fair temples tremulous
With tender blood, and colour of your throat;
I know not how love is gone out of this,
Seeing that all was his.

Love's likeness there endures upon all these:
But out of these one shall not gather love.
Day hath not strength nor the night shade enough
To make love whole and fill his lips with ease,
As some bee-builded cell
Feels at filled lips the heavy honey swell.

I know not how this last month leaves your hair
Less full of purple colour and hid spice,
And that luxurious trouble of closed eyes
Is mixed with meaner shadow and waste care;
And love, kissed out by pleasure, seems not yet
Worth patience to regret.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Before Sunset

Love's twilight wanes in heaven above,
  On earth ere twilight reigns:
Ere fear may feel the chill thereof,
  Love's twilight wanes.

Ere yet the insatiate heart complains
  'Too much, and scarce enough,'
The lip so late athirst refrains.

Soft on the neck of either dove
  Love's hands let slip the reins:
And while we look for light of love
  Love's twilight wanes.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Before the Mirror

I.
WHITE ROSE in red rose-garden
Is not so white;
Snowdrops that plead for pardon
And pine for fright
Because the hard East blows
Over their maiden rows
Grow not as this face grows from pale to bright.

Behind the veil, forbidden,
Shut up from sight,
Love, is there sorrow hidden,
Is there delight?
Is joy thy dower or grief,
White rose of weary leaf,
Late rose whose life is brief, whose loves are light?

Soft snows that hard winds harden
Till each flake bite
Fill all the flowerless garden
Whose flowers took flight
Long since when summer ceased,
And men rose up from feast,
And warm west wind grew east, and warm day night.

II.
"Come snow, come wind or thunder
High up in air,
I watch my face, and wonder
At my bright hair;
Nought else exalts or grieves
The rose at heart, that heaves
With love of her own leaves and lips that pair.

"She knows not loves that kissed her
She knows not where.
Art thou the ghost, my sister,
White sister there,
Am I the ghost, who knows?
My hand, a fallen rose,
Lies snow-white on white snows, and takes no care.

"I cannot see what pleasures
Or what pains were;
What pale new loves and treasures
New years will bear;
What beam will fall, what shower,
What grief or joy for dower;
But one thing knows the flower; the flower is fair."

III.
Glad, but not flushed with gladness,

Since joys go by;
Sad, but not bent with sadness,
Since sorrows die;
Deep in the gleaming glass
She sees all past things pass,
And all sweet life that was lie down and lie.

There glowing ghosts of flowers
Draw down, draw nigh;
And wings of swift spent hours
Take flight and fly;
She sees by formless gleams,
She hears across cold streams,
Dead mouths of many dreams that sing and sigh.

Face fallen and white throat lifted,
With sleepless eye
She sees old loves that drifted,
She knew not why,
Old loves and faded fears
Float down a stream that hears
The flowing of all men’s tears beneath the sky.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Ben Jonson: III

BROAD-BASED, broad-fronted, bounteous, multiform,
With many a valley impleached with ivy and vine,
Wherein the springs of all the streams run wine,
And many a crag full-faced against the storm,
The mountain where thy Muse's feet made warm
Those lawns that revelled with her dance divine
Shines yet with fire as it was wont to shine
From tossing torches round the dance aswarm.

Nor less, high-stationed on the grey grave heights,
High-thoughted seers with heaven's heart-kindling lights
Hold converse: and the herd of meaner things
Knows or by fiery scourge or fiery shaft
When wrath on thy broad brows has risen, and laughed,
Darkening thy soul with shadow of thunderous wings.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Benediction

Blest in death and life beyond man's guessing
Little children live and die, possest
Still of grace that keeps them past expressing
  Blest.

Each least chirp that rings from every nest,
Each least touch of flower-soft fingers pressing
Aught that yearns and trembles to be prest,

Each least glance, gives gifts of grace, redressing
Grief's worst wrongs: each mother's nurturing breast
Feeds a flower of bliss, beyond all blessing
  Blest.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Birth And Death

Birth and death, twin-sister and twin-brother,
Night and day, on all things that draw breath,
Reign, while time keeps friends with one another
  Birth and death.

Each brow-bound with flowers diverse of wreath,
Heaven they hail as father, earth as mother,
Faithful found above them and beneath.

Smiles may lighten tears, and tears may smother
Smiles, for all that joy or sorrow saith:
Joy nor sorrow knows not from each other
  Birth and death.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Bismarck at Canossa: Sonnets

NOT ALL disgraced, in that Italian town,
The imperial German cowered beneath thine hand,
Alone indeed imperial Hildebrand,
And felt thy foot and Rome's, and felt her frown
And thine, more strong and sovereign than his crown,
Though iron forged its blood-encrusted band.
But now the princely wielder of his land,
For hatred's sake toward freedom, so bows down,
No strength is in the foot to spurn: its tread
Can bruise not now the proud submitted head:
But how much more abased, much lower brought low,
And more intolerably humiliated,
The neck submissive of the prosperous foe,
Than his whom scorn saw shuddering in the snow!

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Blessed Among Women --To The Signora Cairoli

Blessed was she that bare,
    Hidden in flesh most fair,
For all men's sake the likeness of all love;
    Holy that virgin's womb,
    The old record saith, on whom
The glory of God alighted as a dove;
  Blessed, who brought to gracious birth
The sweet-souled Saviour of a man-tormented earth.

    But four times art thou blest,
    At whose most holy breast
Four times a godlike soldier-saviour hung;
    And thence a fourfold Christ
    Given to be sacrificed
To the same cross as the same bosom clung;
  Poured the same blood, to leave the same
Light on the many-folded mountain-skirts of fame.

    Shall they and thou not live,
    The children thou didst give
Forth of thine hands, a godlike gift, to death,
    Through fire of death to pass
    For her high sake that was
Thine and their mother, that gave all you breath?
  Shall ye not live till time drop dead,
O mother, and each her children's consecrated head?

    Many brought gifts to take
    For her love's supreme sake,
Life and life's love, pleasure and praise and rest,
    And went forth bare; but thou,
    So much once richer, and now
Poorer than all these, more than these be blest;
  Poorer so much, by so much given,
Than who gives earth for heaven's sake, not for earth's sake heaven.

    Somewhat could each soul save,
    What thing soever it gave,
But thine, mother, what has thy soul kept back?
    None of thine all, not one,
    To serve thee and be thy son,
Feed with love all thy days, lest one day lack;
  All thy whole life's love, thine heart's whole,
Thou hast given as who gives gladly, O thou the supreme soul.

The heart's pure flesh and blood,
The heaven thy motherhood,
The live lips, the live eyes, that lived on thee;
The hands that clove with sweet
Blind clutch to thine, the feet
That felt on earth their first way to thy knee;
The little laughter of mouths milk-fed,
Now open again to feed on dust among the dead;

The fair, strong, young men's strength,
Light of life-days and length,
And glory of earth seen under and stars above,
And years that bring to tame
Now the wild falcon fame,
Now, to stroke smooth, the dove-white breast of love;
The life unlived, the unsown seeds,
Suns unbeholden, songs unsung, and undone deeds.

Therefore shall man's love be
As an own son to thee,
And the world's worship of thee for a child;
All thine own land as one
New-born, a nursing son,
All thine own people a new birth undefiled;
And all the unborn Italian time,
And all its glory, and all its works, thy seed sublime.

That henceforth no man's breath,
Saying "Italy," but saith
In that most sovereign word thine equal name;
Nor can one speak of thee
But he saith "Italy,"
Seeing in two suns one co-eternal flame;
One heat, one heaven, one heart, one fire,
One light, one love, one benediction, one desire.

Blest above praise and prayer
And incense of men's air,
Thy place is higher than where such voices rise
As in men's temples make
Music for some vain sake,

This God's or that God's, in one weary wise;
  Thee the soul silent, the shut heart,
The locked lips of the spirit praise thee that thou art.

    Yea, for man's whole life's length,
    And with man's whole soul's strength,
We praise thee, O holy, and bless thee, O mother of lights;
    And send forth as on wings
    The world's heart's thanksgivings,
Song-birds to sing thy days through and thy nights;
  And wrap thee around and arch thee above
With the air of benediction and the heaven of love.

    And toward thee our unbreathed words
    Fly speechless, winged as birds,
As the Indian flock, children of Paradise,
    The winged things without feet,
    Fed with God's dew for meat,
That live in the air and light of the utter skies;
  So fleet, so flying a footless flight,
With wings for feet love seeks thee, to partake thy sight.

    Love like a clear sky spread
    Bends over thy loved head,
As a new heaven bends over a new-born earth,
    When the old night's womb is great
    With young stars passionate
And fair new planets fiery-fresh from birth;
  And moon-white here, there hot like Mars,
Souls that are worlds shine on thee, spirits that are stars.

    Till the whole sky burns through
    With heaven's own heart-deep hue,
With passion-coloured glories of lit souls;
    And thine above all names
    Writ highest with lettering flames
Lightens, and all the old starriest aureoles
  And all the old holiest memories wane,
And the old names of love's chosen, found in thy sight vain.

    And crowned heads are discrowned,
    And stars sink without sound,

And love's self for thy love's sake waxes pale
    Seeing from his storied skies
    In what new reverent wise
Thee Rome's most highest, her sovereign daughters, hail;
  Thee Portia, thee Veturia grey,
Thee Arria, thee Cornelia, Roman more than they.

    Even all these as all we
    Subdue themselves to thee,
Bow their heads haloed, quench their fiery fame;
    Seen through dim years divine,
    Their faint lights feminine
Sink, then spring up rekindled from thy flame;
  Fade, then reflower and reillume
From thy fresh spring their wintering age with new-blown bloom.

    To thy much holier head
    Even theirs, the holy and dead,
Bow themselves each one from her heavenward height;
    Each in her shining turn,
    All tremble toward thee and yearn
To melt in thine their consummated light;
  Till from day's Capitolian dome
One glory of many glories lighten upon Rome.

    Hush thyself, song, and cease,
    Close, lips, and hold your peace;
What help hast thou, what part have ye herein?
    But you, with sweet shut eyes,
    Heart-hidden memories,
Dreams and dumb thoughts that keep what things have been
  Silent, and pure of all words said,
Praise without song the living, without dirge the dead.

    Thou, strengthless in these things,
    Song, fold thy feebler wings,
And as a pilgrim go forth girt and shod,
    And where the new graves are,
    And where the sunset star,
To the pure spirit of man that men call God,
  To the high soul of things, that is
Made of men's heavenlier hopes and mightier memories;

To the elements that make
For the soul's living sake
This raiment of dead things, of shadow and trance,
That give us chance and time
Wherein to aspire and climb
And set our life's work higher than time or chance
The old sacred elements, that give
The breath of life to days that die, to deeds that live;

To them, veiled gods and great,
There bow thee and dedicate
The speechless spirit in these thy weak words hidden;
And mix thy reverent breath
With holier air of death,
At the high feast of sorrow a guest unbidden,
Till with divine triumphal tears
Thou fill men's eyes who listen with a heart that hears.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Change

But now life's face beholden
  Seemed bright as heaven's bare brow
With hope of gifts withholden
  But now.

  From time's full-flowering bough
Each bud spake bloom to embolden
  Love's heart, and seal his vow.

Joy's eyes grew deep with olden
  Dreams, born he wist not how;
Thought's meanest garb was golden;
  But now!

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Choriambics

Love, what ailed thee to leave life that was made lovely, we thought, with love?
What sweet visions of sleep lured thee away, down from the light above?

What strange faces of dreams, voices that called, hands that were raised to wave,
Lured or led thee, alas, out of the sun, down to the sunless grave?

Ah, thy luminous eyes! once was their light fed with the fire of day;
Now their shadowy lids cover them close, hush them and hide away.

Ah, thy snow-coloured hands! once were they chains, mighty to bind me fast;
Now no blood in them burns, mindless of love, senseless of passion past.

Ah, thy beautiful hair! so was it once braided for me, for me;
Now for death is it crowned, only for death, lover and lord of thee.

Sweet, the kisses of death set on thy lips, colder are they than mine;
Colder surely than past kisses that love poured for thy lips as wine.

Lov'st thou death? is his face fairer than love's, brighter to look upon?
Seest thou light in his eyes, light by which love's pales and is overshone?

Lo the roses of death, grey as the dust, chiller of leaf than snow!
Why let fall from thy hand love's that were thine, roses that loved thee so?

Large red lilies of love, sceptral and tall, lovely for eyes to see;
Thornless blossom of love, full of the sun, fruits that were reared for thee.

Now death's poppies alone circle thy hair, girdle thy breasts as white;
Bloodless blossoms of death, leaves that have sprung never against the light.

Nay then, sleep if thou wilt; love is content; what should he do to weep?
Sweet was love to thee once; now in thine eyes sweeter than love is sleep.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Chorus

from Atalanta in Calydon

When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain;
And the brown bright nigthingale amorous
Is half assuaged for Itylus,
For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,
The tongueless vigil, and all the pain.

Come with bows bent and emptying of quivers,
Maiden most perfect, lady of light,
With a noise of winds and many rivers,
With a clamour of waters, and with might;
Bind on thy sandals, O thou most fleet,
Over the splendour and speed of thy feet;
For the faint east quickens, the wan west shivers,
Round the feet of the day and the feet of the night.

Where shall we find her, how shall we sing to her,
Fold our hands round her knees, and cling?
O that man's heart were as fire and could spring to her,
Fire, or the strength of the streams that spring!
For the stars and the winds are unto her
As raiment, as songs of the harp-player;
For the risen stars and the fallen cling to her,
And the southwest-wind and the west-wind sing.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows and sins;
The days dividing lover and lover,
The light that loses, the night that wins;
And time remembered is grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,
And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

The full streams feed on flower of rushes,
Ripe grasses trammel a travelling foot,
The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes
From leaf to flower and flower to fruit;
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,
And the oat is heard above the lyre,
And the hoofed heel of a satyr crushes
The chestnut-husk at the chestnut-root.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,
Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with delight
The Maenad and the Bassarid;
And soft as lips that laugh and hide

The laughing leaves of the trees divide,
And screen from seeing and leave in sight
The god pursuing, the maiden hid.

The ivy falls with the Bacchanal's hair
Over her eyebrows hiding her eyes;
The wild vine slipping down leaves bare
Her bright breast shortening with sighs;
The wild vine slips with the weight of its leaves,
But the berried ivy catches and cleaves
To the limbs that glitter, the feet that scare
The wolf that follows, the fawn that flies.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Chorus from 'Atalanta'

WHEN the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
  The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
  With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain;
And the brown bright nightingale amorous
Is half assuaged for Itylus,
For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces.
  The tongueless vigil, and all the pain.

Come with bows bent and with emptying of quivers,
  Maiden most perfect, lady of light,
With a noise of winds and many rivers,
  With a clamour of waters, and with might;
Bind on thy sandals, O thou most fleet,
Over the splendour and speed of thy feet;
For the faint east quickens, the wan west shivers,
  Round the feet of the day and the feet of the night.

Where shall we find her, how shall we sing to her,
  Fold our hands round her knees, and cling?
O that man's heart were as fire and could spring to her,
  Fire, or the strength of the streams that spring!
For the stars and the winds are unto her
As raiment, as songs of the harp-player;
For the risen stars and the fallen cling to her,
  And the southwest-wind and the west-wind sing.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
  And all the season of snows and sins;
The days dividing lover and lover,
  The light that loses, the night that wins;
And time remember'd is grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,
And in green underwood and cover
  Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

The full streams feed on flower of rushes,
  Ripe grasses trammel a travelling foot,
The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes
  From leaf to flower and flower to fruit;
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,
And the oat is heard above the lyre,
And the hoofed heel of a satyr crushes
  The chestnut-husk at the chestnut-root.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,
  Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with delight
  The Maenad and the Bassarid;
And soft as lips that laugh and hide
The laughing leaves of the trees divide,
And screen from seeing and leave in sight

The god pursuing, the maiden hid.

The ivy falls with the Bacchanal's hair
Over her eyebrows hiding her eyes;
The wild vine slipping down leaves bare
Her bright breast shortening into sighs;
The wild vine slips with the weight of its leaves,
But the berried ivy catches and cleaves
To the limbs that glitter, the feet that scare
The wolf that follows, the fawn that flies.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Christmas Antiphones

I -- In Church

Thou whose birth on earth
  Angels sang to men,
While thy stars made mirth,
Saviour, at thy birth,
  This day born again;

As this night was bright
  With thy cradle-ray,
Very light of light,
Turn the wild world's night
  To thy perfect day.

God whose feet made sweet
  Those wild ways they trod,
From thy fragrant feet
Staining field and street
  With the blood of God;

God whose breast is rest
  In the time of strife,
In thy secret breast
Sheltering souls opprest
  From the heat of life;

God whose eyes are skies
  Love-lit as with spheres
By the lights that rise
To thy watching eyes,
  Orbed lights of tears;

God whose heart hath part
  In all grief that is,
Was not man's the dart
That went through thine heart,
  And the wound not his?

Where the pale souls wail,
  Held in bonds of death,
Where all spirits quail,
Came thy Godhead pale
  Still from human breath -

Pale from life and strife,
  Wan with manhood, came
Forth of mortal life,
Pierced as with a knife,
  Scarred as with a flame.

Thou the Word and Lord
  In all time and space

Heard, beheld, adored,
With all ages poured
  Forth before thy face,

Lord, what worth in earth
  Drew thee down to die?
What therein was worth,
Lord, thy death and birth?
  What beneath thy sky?

Light above all love
  By thy love was lit,
And brought down the Dove
Feathered from above
  With the wings of it.

From the height of night,
  Was not thine the star
That led forth with might
By no worldly light
  Wise men from afar?

Yet the wise men's eyes
  Saw thee not more clear
Than they saw thee rise
Who in shepherd's guise
  Drew as poor men near.

Yet thy poor endure,
  And are with us yet;
Be thy name a sure
Refuge for thy poor
  Whom men's eyes forget.

Thou whose ways we praised,
  Clear alike and dark,
Keep our works and ways
This and all thy days
  Safe inside thine ark.

Who shall keep thy sheep,
  Lord, and lose not one?
Who save one shall keep,
Lest the shepherds sleep?
  Who beside the Son?

From the grave-deep wave,
  From the sword and flame,
Thou, even thou, shalt save
Souls of king and slave
  Only by thy Name.

Light not born with morn
  Or her fires above,
Jesus virgin-born,
Held of men in scorn,
  Turn their scorn to love.

Thou whose face gives grace
  As the sun's doth heat,
Let thy sunbright face
Lighten time and space
  Here beneath thy feet.

Bid our peace increase,
  Thou that madest morn;
Bid oppressions cease;
Bid the night be peace;
  Bid the day be born.

II--OUTSIDE CHURCH

We whose days and ways
  All the night makes dark,
What day shall we praise
Of these weary days
  That our life-drops mark?

We whose mind is blind,
  Fed with hope of nought;
Wastes of worn mankind,
Without heart or mind,
  Without meat or thought;

We with strife of life
  Worn till all life cease,
Want, a whetted knife,
Sharpening strife on strife,
  How should we love peace?

Ye whose meat is sweet
  And your wine-cup red,
Us beneath your feet
Hunger grinds as wheat,
  Grinds to make you bread.

Ye whose night is bright
  With soft rest and heat,
Clothed like day with light,
Us the naked night
  Slays from street to street.

Hath your God no rod,
  That ye tread so light?

Man on us as God,
God as man hath trod,
  Trod us down with might.

We that one by one
  Bleed from either's rod.
What for us hath done
Man beneath the sun,
  What for us hath God?

We whose blood is food
  Given your wealth to feed,
From the Christless rood
Red with no God's blood,
  But with man's indeed;

How shall we that see
  Nightlong overhead
Life, the flowerless tree,
Nailed whereon as we
  Were our fathers dead -

We whose ear can hear,
  Not whose tongue can name,
Famine, ignorance, fear,
Bleeding tear by tear
  Year by year of shame,

Till the dry life die
  Out of bloodless breast,
Out of beamless eye,
Out of mouths that cry
  Till death feed with rest -

How shall we as ye,
  Though ye bid us, pray?
Though ye call, can we
Hear you call, or see,
  Though ye show us day?

We whose name is shame,
  We whose souls walk bare,
Shall we call the same
God as ye by name,
  Teach our lips your prayer?

God, forgive and give,
  For His sake who died?
Nay, for ours who live,
How shall we forgive
  Thee, then, on our side?

We whose right to light
  Heaven's high noon denies,
Whom the blind beams smite
That for you shine bright,
  And but burn our eyes,

With what dreams of beams
  Shall we build up day,
At what sourceless streams
Seek to drink in dreams
  Ere they pass away?

In what street shall meet,
  At what market-place,
Your feet and our feet,
With one goal to greet,
  Having run one race?

What one hope shall ope
  For us all as one
One same horoscope,
Where the soul sees hope
  That outburns the sun?

At what shrine what wine,
  At what board what bread,
Salt as blood or brine,
Shall we share in sign
  How we poor were fed?

In what hour what power
  Shall we pray for morn,
If your perfect hour,
When all day bears flower,
  Not for us is born?

III--BEYOND CHURCH

Ye that weep in sleep,
  Souls and bodies bound,
Ye that all night keep
Watch for change, and weep
  That no change is found;

Ye that cry and die,
  And the world goes on
Without ear or eye,
And the days go by
  Till all days are gone;

Man shall do for you,
  Men the sons of man,

What no God would do
That they sought unto
  While the blind years ran.

Brotherhood of good,
  Equal laws and rights,
Freedom, whose sweet food
Feeds the multitude
  All their days and nights

With the bread full-fed
  Of her body blest
And the soul's wine shed
From her table spread
  Where the world is guest,

Mingling me and thee,
  When like light of eyes
Flashed through thee and me
Truth shall make us free,
  Liberty make wise;

These are they whom day
  Follows and gives light
Whence they see to slay
Night, and burn away
  All the seed of night.

What of thine and mine,
  What of want and wealth,
When one faith is wine
For my heart and thine
  And one draught is health?

For no sect elect
  Is the soul's wine poured
And her table decked;
Whom should man reject
  From man's common board?

Gods refuse and choose,
  Grudge and sell and spare;
None shall man refuse,
None of all men lose,
  None leave out of care.

No man's might of sight
  Knows that hour before;
No man's hand hath might
To put back that light
  For one hour the more.

Not though all men call,
  Kneeling with void hands,
Shall they see light fall
Till it come for all
  Tribes of men and lands.

No desire brings fire
  Down from heaven by prayer,
Though man's vain desire
Hang faith's wind-struck lyre
  Out in tuneless air.

One hath breath and saith
  What the tune shall be -
Time, who puts his breath
Into life and death,
  Into earth and sea.

To and fro years flow,
  Fill their tides and ebb,
As his fingers go
Weaving to and fro
  One unfinished web.

All the range of change
  Hath its bounds therein,
All the lives that range
All the byways strange
  Named of death or sin.

Star from far to star
  Speaks, and white moons wake,
Watchful from afar
What the night's ways are
  For the morning's sake.

Many names and flames
  Pass and flash and fall,
Night-begotten names,
And the night reclaims,
  As she bare them, all.

But the sun is one,
  And the sun's name Right;
And when light is none
Saving of the sun,
  All men shall have light.

All shall see and be
  Parcel of the morn;
Ay, though blind were we,
None shall choose but see

When that day is born.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Christopher Marlowe

Crowned, girdled, garbed and shod with light and fire,
Son first-born of the morning, sovereign star!
Soul nearest ours of all, that wert most far.
Most far off in the abysm of time, thy lyre
Hung highest above the dawn-enkindled quire
Where all ye sang together, all that are,
And all the starry songs behind thy car
Rang sequence, all our souls acclaim thee sire.
"If all the pens that ever poets held
Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,"
And as with rush of hurtling chariots
The flight of all their spirits were impelled
Toward one great end, thy glory -- nay, not then,
Not yet might'st thou be praised enough of men.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Cleopatra

HER mouth is fragrant as a vine,
    A vine with birds in all its boughs;
Serpent and scarab for a sign
    Between the beauty of her brows
And the amorous deep lids divine.

Her great curled hair makes luminous
    Her cheeks, her lifted throat and chin.
Shall she not have the hearts of us
    To shatter, and the loves therein
To shred between her fingers thus?

Small ruined broken strays of light,
    Pearl after pearl she shreds them through
Her long sweet sleepy fingers, white
    As any pearl's heart veined with blue,
And soft as dew on a soft night.

As if the very eyes of love
    Shone through her shutting lids, and stole
The slow looks of a snake or dove;
    As if her lips absorbed the whole
Of love, her soul the soul thereof.

Lost, all the lordly pearls that were
    Wrung from the sea's heart, from the green
Coasts of the Indian gulf-river;
    Lost, all the loves of the world---so keen
Towards this queen for love of her.

You see against her throat the small
    Sharp glittering shadows of them shake;
And through her hair the imperial
    Curled likeness of the river snake,
Whose bite shall make an end of all.

Through the scales sheathing him like wings,
    Through hieroglyphs of gold and gem,
The strong sense of her beauty stings,
    Like a keen pulse of love in them,
A running flame through all his rings.

Under those low large lids of hers
    She hath the histories of all time;
The fruit of foliage-stricken years;
    The old seasons with their heavy chime
That leaves its rhyme in the world's ears.

She sees the hand of death made bare,
    The ravelled riddle of the skies,
The faces faded that were fair,
    The mouths made speechless that were wise,

The hollow eyes and dusty hair;

The shape and shadow of mystic things,
    Things that fate fashions or forbids;
The staff of time-forgotten Kings
    Whose name falls off the Pyramids,
Their coffin-lids and grave-clothings;

Dank dregs, the scum of pool or clod,
    God-spawn of lizard-footed clans,
And those dog-headed hulks that trod
    Swart necks of the old Egyptians,
Raw draughts of man's beginning God;

The poised hawk, quivering ere he smote,
    With plume-like gems on breast and back;
The asps and water-worms afloat
    Between the rush-flowers moist and slack;
The cat's warm black bright rising throat.

The purple days of drouth expand
    Like a scroll opened out again;
The molten heaven drier than sand,
    The hot red heaven without rain,
Sheds iron pain on the empty land.

All Egypt aches in the sun's sight;
    The lips of men are harsh for drouth,
The fierce air leaves their cheeks burnt white,
    Charred by the bitter blowing south,
Whose dusty mouth is sharp to bite.

All this she dreams of, and her eyes
    Are wrought after the sense hereof.
There is no heart in her for sighs;
    The face of her is more than love---
A name above the Ptolemies.

Her great grave beauty covers her
    As that sleek spoil beneath her feet
Clothed once the anointed soothsayer;
    The hallowing is gone forth from it
Now, made unmeet for priests to wear.

She treads on gods and god-like things,
    On fate and fear and life and death,
On hate that cleaves and love that clings,
    All that is brought forth of man's breath
And perisheth with what it brings.

She holds her future close, her lips
    Hold fast the face of things to be;

Actium, and sound of war that dips
    Down the blown valleys of the sea,
Far sails that flee, and storms of ships;

The laughing red sweet mouth of wine
    At ending of life's festival;
That spice of cerecloths, and the fine
    White bitter dust funereal
Sprinkled on all things for a sign;

His face, who was and was not he,
    In whom, alive, her life abode;
The end, when she gained heart to see
    Those ways of death wherein she trod,
Goddess by god, with Antony.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Comparisons

CHILD, when they say that others
    Have been or are like you,
Babes fit to be your brothers,
    Sweet human drops of dew,
Bright fruit of mortal mothers,
    What should one say or do?

We know the thought is treason,
    We feel the dream absurd;
A claim rebuked of reason,
    That withers at a word:
For never shone the season
    That bore so blithe a bird.

Some smiles may seem as merry,
    Some glances gleam as wise,
From lips as like a cherry
    And scarce less gracious eyes;
Eyes browner than a berry,
    Lips red as morning's rise.

But never yet rang laughter
    So sweet in gladdened ears
Through wall and floor and rafter
    As all this household hears
And rings response thereafter
    Till cloudiest weather clears.

When those your chosen of all men,
    Whose honey never cloys,
Two lights whose smiles enthrall men,
    Were called at your age boys,
Those mighty men, while small men,
    Could make no merrier noise.

Our Shakespeare, surely, daffed not
    More lightly pain aside
From radiant lips that quaffed not
    Of forethought's tragic tide:
Our Dickens, doubtless, laughed not
    More loud with life's first pride.

The dawn were not more cheerless
    With neither light nor dew
Than we without the fearless
    Clear laugh that thrills us through:
If ever child stood peerless,
    Love knows that child is you.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Concord

Reconciled by death's mild hand, that giving
Peace gives wisdom, not more strong than mild,
Love beholds them, each without misgiving
  Reconciled.

Each on earth alike of earth reviled,
Hated, feared, derided, and forgiving,
Each alike had heaven at heart, and smiled.

Both bright names, clothed round with man's thanksgiving,
Shine, twin stars above the storm-drifts piled,
Dead and deathless, whom we saw not living
  Reconciled.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Cor Cordium

O heart of hearts, the chalice of love's fire,
Hid round with flowers and all the bounty of bloom;
O wonderful and perfect heart, for whom
The lyrist liberty made life a lyre;
O heavenly heart, at whose most dear desire
Dead love, living and singing, cleft his tomb,
And with him risen and regent in death's room
All day thy choral pulses rang full choir;
O heart whose beating blood was running song,
O sole thing sweeter than thine own songs were,
Help us for thy free love's sake to be free,
True for thy truth's sake, for thy strength's sake strong,
Till very liberty make clean and fair
The nursing earth as the sepulchral sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Dead Love

Dead love, by treason slain, lies stark,
White as a dead stark-stricken dove:
None that pass by him pause to mark
  Dead love.

His heart, that strained and yearned and strove
As toward the sundawn strives the lark,
Is cold as all the old joy thereof.

Dead men, re-risen from dust, may hark
When rings the trumpet blown above:
It will not raise from out the dark
  Dead love.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Death And Birth

Death and birth should dwell not near together:
Wealth keeps house not, even for shame, with dearth:
Fate doth ill to link in one brief tether
  Death and birth.

Harsh the yoke that binds them, strange the girth
Seems that girds them each with each: yet whether
Death be best, who knows, or life on earth?

Ill the rose-red and the sable feather
Blend in one crown's plume, as grief with mirth:
Ill met still are warm and wintry weather,
  Death and birth.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Dedication

THE SEA gives her shells to the shingle,
The earth gives her streams to the sea;
They are many, but my gift is single,
My verses, the firstfruits of me.
Let the wind take the green and the grey leaf,
Cast forth without fruit upon air;
Take rose-leaf and vine-leaf and bay-leaf
Blown loose from the hair.

The night shakes them round me in legions,
Dawn drives them before her like dreams;
Time sheds them like snows on strange regions,
Swept shoreward on infinite streams;
Leaves pallid and sombre and ruddy,
Dead fruits of the fugitive years;
Some stained as with wine and made bloody,
And some as with tears.

Some scattered in seven years' traces,
As they fell from the boy that was then;
Long left among idle green places,
Or gathered but now among men;
On seas full of wonder and peril,
Blown white round the capes of the north;
Or in islands where myrtles are sterile
And loves bring not forth.

O daughters of dreams and of stories
That life is not wearied of yet,
Faustine, Fragoletta, Dolores,
Félise and Yolande and Juliette,
Shall I find you not still, shall I miss you,
When sleep, that is true or that seems,
Comes back to me hopeless to kiss you,
O daughters of dreams?

They are past as a slumber that passes,
As the dew of a dawn of old time;
More frail than the shadows on glasses,
More fleet than a wave or a rhyme.
As the waves after ebb drawing seaward,
When their hollows are full of the night,
So the birds that flew singing to me-ward
Recede out of sight.

The songs of dead seasons, that wander
On wings of articulate words;
Lost leaves that the shore-wind may squander,
Light flocks of untameable birds;
Some sang to me dreaming in class-time
And truant in hand as in tongue;
For the youngest were born of boy's pastime,

The eldest are young.

Is there shelter while life in them lingers,
Is there hearing for songs that recede,
Tunes touched from a harp with man's fingers
Or blown with boy's mouth in a reed?
Is there place in the land of your labour,
Is there room in your world of delight,
Where change has not sorrow for neighbour
And day has not night?

In their wings though the sea-wind yet quivers,
Will you spare not a space for them there
Made green with the running of rivers
And gracious with temperate air;
In the fields and the turreted cities,
That cover from sunshine and rain
Fair passions and bountiful pities
And loves without stain?

In a land of clear colours and stories,
In a region of shadowless hours,
Where earth has a garment of glories
And a murmur of musical flowers;
In woods where the spring half uncovers
The flush of her amorous face,
By the waters that listen for lovers,
For these is there place?

For the song-birds of sorrow, that muffle
Their music as clouds do their fire:
For the storm-birds of passion, that ruffle
Wild wings in a wind of desire;
In the stream of the storm as it settles
Blown seaward, borne far from the sun,
Shaken loose on the darkness like petals
Dropt one after one?

Though the world of your hands be more gracious
And lovelier in lordship of things
Clothed round by sweet art with the spacious
Warm heaven of her imminent wings,
Let them enter, unfledged and nigh fainting,
For the love of old loves and lost times;
And receive in your palace of painting
This revel of rhymes.

Though the seasons of man full of losses
Make empty the years full of youth,
If but one thing be constant in crosses,
Change lays not her hand upon truth;
Hopes die, and their tombs are for token

That the grief as the joy of them ends
Ere time that breaks all men has broken
The faith between friends.

Though the many lights dwindle to one light,
There is help if the heaven has one;
Though the skies be discrowned of the sunlight
And the earth dispossessed of the sun,
They have moonlight and sleep for repayment,
When, refreshed as a bride and set free,
With stars and sea-winds in her raiment,
Night sinks on the sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Dedication To Christina G. Rossetti

Songs light as these may sound, though deep and strong
The heart spake through them, scarce should hope to please
Ears tuned to strains of loftier thoughts than throng
  Songs light as these.

Yet grace may set their sometime doubt at ease,
Nor need their too rash reverence fear to wrong
The shrine it serves at and the hope it sees.

For childlike loves and laughters thence prolong
Notes that bid enter, fearless as the breeze,
Even to the shrine of holiest-hearted song,
  Songs light as these.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Dedication To Joseph Mazzini

Take, since you bade it should bear,
  These, of the seed of your sowing,
    Blossom or berry or weed.
Sweet though they be not, or fair,
  That the dew of your word kept growing,
    Sweet at least was the seed.

Men bring you love-offerings of tears,
  And sorrow the kiss that assuages,
    And slaves the hate-offering of wrongs,
And time the thanksgiving of years,
  And years the thanksgiving of ages;
    I bring you my handful of songs.

If a perfume be left, if a bloom,
  Let it live till Italia be risen,
    To be strewn in the dust of her car
When her voice shall awake from the tomb
  England, and France from her prison,
    Sisters, a star by a star.

I bring you the sword of a song,
  The sword of my spirit's desire,
    Feeble; but laid at your feet,
That which was weak shall be strong,
  That which was cold shall take fire,
    That which was bitter be sweet.

It was wrought not with hands to smite,
  Nor hewn after swordsmiths' fashion,
    Nor tempered on anvil of steel;
But with visions and dreams of the night,
  But with hope, and the patience of passion,
    And the signet of love for a seal.

Be it witness, till one more strong,
  Till a loftier lyre, till a rarer
    Lute praise her better than I,
Be it witness before you, my song,
  That I knew her, the world's banner-bearer,
    Who shall cry the republican cry.

Yea, even she as at first,
  Yea, she alone and none other,
    Shall cast down, shall build up, shall bring home;
Slake earth's hunger and thirst,
  Lighten, and lead as a mother;
    First name of the world's names, Rome.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Dickens: Sonnets

CHIEF in thy generation born of men
Whom English praise acclaimed as English-born,
With eyes that matched the worldwide eyes of morn
For gleam of tears or laughter, tenderest then
When thoughts of children warmed their light, or when
Reverence of age with love and labour worn,
Or godlike pity fired with godlike scorn,
Shot through them flame that winged thy swift live pen:
Where stars and suns that we behold not burn,
Higher even than here, though highest was here thy place,
Love sees thy spirit laugh and speak and shine
With Shakespeare and the soft bright soul of Sterne
And Fielding’s kindliest might and Goldsmith’s grace j
Scarce one more loved or worthier love than thine.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Discord

Unreconciled by life's fleet years, that fled
With changeful clang of pinions wide and wild,
Though two great spirits had lived, and hence had sped
  Unreconciled;

Though time and change, harsh time's imperious child,
That wed strange hands together, might not wed
High hearts by hope's misprision once beguiled;

Faith, by the light from either's memory shed,
Sees, radiant as their ends were undefiled,
One goal for each--not twain among the dead
  Unreconciled.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Dysthanatos

BY no dry death another king goes down
The way of kings. Yet may no free man’s voice,
For stern compassion and deep awe, rejoice
That one sign more is given against the crown,
That one more head those dark red waters drown
Which rise round thrones whose trembling equipoise
Is propped on sand and bloodshed and such toys
As human hearts that shrink at human frown.
The name writ red on Polish earth, the star
That was to outshine our England’s in the far
East heaven of empire where is one that saith
Proud words now, prophesying of this White Czar?
‘In bloodless pangs few kings yield up their breath,
Few tyrants perish by no violent death,’

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Eight Years Old

SUN, whom the faltering snow-cloud fears,
Rise, let the time of year be May,
Speak now the word that April hears,
Let March have all his royal way;
Bid all spring raise in winter's ears
All tunes her children hear or play,
Because the crown of eight glad years
On one bright head is set to-day.

II.

What matters cloud or sun to-day
To him who wears the wreath of years
So many, and all like flowers at play
With wind and sunshine, while his ears
Hear only song on every way?
More sweet than spring triumphant hears
Ring through the revel-rout of May
Are these, the notes that winter fears.

III.

Strong-hearted winter knows and fears
The music made of love at play,
Or haply loves the tune he hears
From hearts fulfilled with flowering May,
Whose molten music thaws his ears
Late frozen, deaf but yesterday
To sounds of dying and dawning years,
Now quickened on his deathward way.

IV.

For deathward now lies winter's way
Down the green vestibule of years
That each year brightens day by day
With flower and shower till hope scarce fears
And fear grows wholly hope of May.
But we—the music in our ears
Made of love's pulses as they play
The heart alone that makes it hears.

V.

The heart it is that plays and hears
High salutation of to-day.
Tongue falters, hand shrinks back, song fears
Its own unworthiness to play
Fit music for those eight sweet years,
Or sing their blithe accomplished way.
No song quite worth a young child's ears
Broke ever even from birds in May.

VI.

There beats not in the heart of May,
When summer hopes and springtide fears,
There falls not from the height of day,
When sunlight speaks and silence hears,
So sweet a psalm as children play
And sing, each hour of all their years,
Each moment of their lovely way,
And know not how it thrills our ears.

VII.

Ah child, what are we, that our ears
Should hear you singing on your way,
Should have this happiness? The years
Whose hurrying wings about us play
Are not like yours, whose flower-time fears
Nought worse than sunlit showers in May,
Being sinless as the spring, that hears
Her own heart praise her every day.

VIII.

Yet we too triumph in the day
That bare, to entrance our eyes and ears,
To lighten daylight, and to play
Such notes as darkness knows and fears,
The child whose face illumes our way,
Whose voice lifts up the heart that hears,
Whose hand is as the hand of May
To bring us flowers from eight full years.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

England CXVII

England, queen of the waves, whose green inviolate girdle enrings thee round,
Mother fair as the morning, where is now the place of thy foemen found?
Still the sea that salutes us free proclaims them stricken, acclaims thee crowned.
Time may change, and the skies grow strange with signs of treason, and fraud, and fear:
Foes in union of strange communion may rise against thee from far and near:
Sloth and greed on thy strength may feed as cankers waxing from year to year.

Yet, though treason and fierce unreason should league and lie and defame and smite,
We that know thee, how far below thee the hatred burns of the sons of night,
We that love thee, behold above thee the witness written of life in light.

Life that shines from thee shows forth signs that none may read not by eyeless foes:
Hate, born blind, in his abject mind grows hopeful now but as madness grows:
Love, born wise, with exultant eyes adores thy glory, beholds and glows.
Truth is in thee, and none may win thee to lie, forsaking the face of truth:
Freedom lives by the grace she gives thee, born again from thy deathless youth:
Faith should fail, and the world turn pale, wert thou the prey of the serpent's tooth.

Greed and fraud, unabashed, unawed, may strive to sting thee at heel in vain;
Craft and fear and mistrust may leer and mourn and murmur and plead and plain:
Thou art thou: and thy sunbright brow is hers that blasted the strength of Spain.

Mother, mother beloved, none other could claim in place of thee England's place:
Earth bears none that beholds the sun so pure of record, so clothed with grace:
Dear our mother, nor son nor brother is thine, as strong or as fair of face,
How shalt thou be abased? or how shalt fear take hold of thy heart? of thine,
England, maiden immortal, laden with charge of life and with hopes divine?
Earth shall wither, when eyes turned hither behold not light in her darkness shine.

England, none that is born thy son, and lives by grace of thy glory,

free,
Lives and yearns not at heart and burns with hope to serve as he worships thee;
None may sing thee: the sea-wind's wing beats down our songs as it hails the sea

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Envoi

Fly, white butterflies, out to sea,
Frail pale wings for the winds to try,
Small white wings that we scarce can see
  Fly.

Here and there may a chance-caught eye
Note in a score of you twain or three
Brighter or darker of tinge or dye.

Some fly light as a laugh of glee,
Some fly soft as a low long sigh:
All to the haven where each would be
  Fly.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Epilogue

Between the wave-ridge and the strand
I let you forth in sight of land,
  Songs that with storm-crossed wings and eyes
  Strain eastward till the darkness dies;
Let signs and beacons fall or stand,
  And stars and balefires set and rise;
Ye, till some lordlier lyric hand
  Weave the beloved brows their crown,
  At the beloved feet lie down.

O, whatsoever of life or light
Love hath to give you, what of might
  Or heart or hope is yours to live,
  I charge you take in trust to give
For very love's sake, in whose sight,
  Through poise of hours alternative
And seasons plumed with light or night,
  Ye live and move and have your breath
  To sing with on the ridge of death.

I charge you faint not all night through
For love's sake that was breathed on you
  To be to you as wings and feet
  For travel, and as blood to heat
And sense of spirit to renew
  And bloom of fragrance to keep sweet
And fire of purpose to keep true
  The life, if life in such things be,
  That I would give you forth of me.

Out where the breath of war may bear,
Out in the rank moist reddened air
  That sounds and smells of death, and hath
  No light but death's upon its path
Seen through the black wind's tangled hair,
  I send you past the wild time's wrath
To find his face who bade you bear
  Fruit of his seed to faith and love,
  That he may take the heart thereof.

By day or night, by sea or street,
Fly till ye find and clasp his feet
  And kiss as worshippers who bring
  Too much love on their lips to sing,
But with hushed heads accept and greet
  The presence of some heavenlier thing
In the near air; so may ye meet
  His eyes, and droop not utterly
  For shame's sake at the light you see.

Not utterly struck spiritless
For shame's sake and unworthiness

Of these poor forceless hands that come
Empty, these lips that should be dumb,
This love whose seal can but impress
These weak word-offerings wearisome
Whose blessings have not strength to bless
Nor lightnings fire to burn up aught
Nor smite with thunders of their thought.

One thought they have, even love; one light,
Truth, that keeps clear the sun by night;
One chord, of faith as of a lyre;
One heat, of hope as of a fire;
One heart, one music, and one might,
One flame, one altar, and one choir;
And one man's living head in sight
Who said, when all time's sea was foam,
"Let there be Rome"--and there was Rome.

As a star set in space for token
Like a live word of God's mouth spoken,
Visible sound, light audible,
In the great darkness thick as hell
A stanchless flame of love unsloken,
A sign to conquer and compel,
A law to stand in heaven unbroken
Whereby the sun shines, and wherethrough
Time's eldest empires are made new;

So rose up on our generations
That light of the most ancient nations,
Law, life, and light, on the world's way,
The very God of very day,
The sun-god; from their star-like stations
Far down the night in disarray
Fled, crowned with fires of tribulations,
The suns of sunless years, whose light
And life and law were of the night.

The naked kingdoms quenched and stark
Drave with their dead things down the dark,
Helmless; their whole world, throne by throne,
Fell, and its whole heart turned to stone,
Hopeless; their hands that touched our ark
Withered; and lo, aloft, alone,
On time's white waters man's one bark,
Where the red sundawn's open eye
Lit the soft gulf of low green sky.

So for a season piloted
It sailed the sunlight, and struck red
With fire of dawn reverberate
The wan face of incumbent fate

That paused half pitying overhead
  And almost had foregone the freight
Of those dark hours the next day bred
  For shame, and almost had forsworn
  Service of night for love of morn.

Then broke the whole night in one blow,
Thundering; then all hell with one throe
  Heaved, and brought forth beneath the stroke
  Death; and all dead things moved and woke
That the dawn's arrows had brought low,
  At the great sound of night that broke
Thundering, and all the old world-wide woe;
  And under night's loud-sounding dome
  Men sought her, and she was not Rome.

Still with blind hands and robes blood-wet
Night hangs on heaven, reluctant yet,
  With black blood dripping from her eyes
  On the soiled lintels of the skies,
With brows and lips that thirst and threat,
  Heart-sick with fear lest the sun rise,
And aching with her fires that set,
  And shuddering ere dawn bursts her bars,
  Burns out with all her beaten stars.

In this black wind of war they fly
Now, ere that hour be in the sky
  That brings back hope, and memory back,
  And light and law to lands that lack;
That spiritual sweet hour whereby
  The bloody-handed night and black
Shall be cast out of heaven to die;
  Kingdom by kingdom, crown by crown,
  The fires of darkness are blown down.

Yet heavy, grievous yet the weight
Sits on us of imperfect fate.
  From wounds of other days and deeds
  Still this day's breathing body bleeds;
Still kings for fear and slaves for hate
  Sow lives of men on earth like seeds
In the red soil they saturate;
  And we, with faces eastward set,
  Stand sightless of the morning yet.

And many for pure sorrow's sake
Look back and stretch back hands to take
  Gifts of night's giving, ease and sleep,
  Flowers of night's grafting, strong to steep
The soul in dreams it will not break,
  Songs of soft hours that sigh and sweep

Its lifted eyelids nigh to wake
  With subtle plumes and lulling breath
  That soothe its weariness to death.

And many, called of hope and pride,
Fall ere the sunrise from our side.
  Fresh lights and rumours of fresh fames
  That shift and veer by night like flames,
Shouts and blown trumpets, ghosts that glide
  Calling, and hail them by dead names,
Fears, angers, memories, dreams divide
  Spirit from spirit, and wear out
  Strong hearts of men with hope and doubt.

Till time beget and sorrow bear
The soul-sick eyeless child despair,
  That comes among us, mad and blind,
  With counsels of a broken mind,
Tales of times dead and woes that were,
  And, prophesying against mankind,
Shakes out the horror of her hair
  To take the sunlight with its coils
  And hold the living soul in toils.

By many ways of death and moods
Souls pass into their servitudes.
  Their young wings weaken, plume by plume
  Drops, and their eyelids gather gloom
And close against man's frauds and feuds,
  And their tongues call they know not whom
To help in their vicissitudes;
  For many slaveries are, but one
  Liberty, single as the sun.

One light, one law, that burns up strife,
And one sufficiency of life.
  Self-stablished, the sufficing soul
  Hears the loud wheels of changes roll,
Sees against man man bare the knife,
  Sees the world severed, and is whole;
Sees force take dowerless fraud to wife,
  And fear from fraud's incestuous bed
  Crawl forth and smite his father dead:

Sees death made drunk with war, sees time
Weave many-coloured crime with crime,
  State overthrown on ruining state,
  And dares not be disconsolate.
Only the soul hath feet to climb,
  Only the soul hath room to wait,
Hath brows and eyes to hold sublime
  Above all evil and all good,

All strength and all decrepitude.

She only, she since earth began,
The many-minded soul of man,
From one incognizable root
That bears such divers-coloured fruit,
Hath ruled for blessing or for ban
The flight of seasons and pursuit;
She regent, she republican,
With wide and equal eyes and wings
Broods on things born and dying things.

Even now for love or doubt of us
The hour intense and hazardous
Hangs high with pinions vibrating
Whereto the light and darkness cling,
Dividing the dim season thus,
And shakes from one ambiguous wing
Shadow, and one is luminous,
And day falls from it; so the past
Torments the future to the last.

And we that cannot hear or see
The sounds and lights of liberty,
The witness of the naked God
That treads on burning hours unshod
With instant feet unwounded; we
That can trace only where he trod
By fire in heaven or storm at sea,
Not know the very present whole
And naked nature of the soul;

We that see wars and woes and kings,
And portents of enormous things,
Empires, and agonies, and slaves,
And whole flame of town-swallowing graves;
That hear the harsh hours clap sharp wings
Above the roar of ranks like waves,
From wreck to wreck as the world swings;
Know but that men there are who see
And hear things other far than we.

By the light sitting on their brows,
The fire wherewith their presence glows,
The music falling with their feet,
The sweet sense of a spirit sweet
That with their speech or motion grows
And breathes and burns men's hearts with heat;
By these signs there is none but knows
Men who have life and grace to give,
Men who have seen the soul and live.

By the strength sleeping in their eyes,
The lips whereon their sorrow lies
  Smiling, the lines of tears unshed,
  The large divine look of one dead
That speaks out of the breathless skies
  In silence, when the light is shed
Upon man's soul of memories;
  The supreme look that sets love free,
  The look of stars and of the sea;

By the strong patient godhead seen
Implicit in their mortal mien,
  The conscience of a God held still
  And thunders ruled by their own will
And fast-bound fires that might burn clean
  This worldly air that foul things fill,
And the afterglow of what has been,
  That, passing, shows us without word
  What they have seen, what they have heard,

By all these keen and burning signs
The spirit knows them and divines.
  In bonds, in banishment, in grief,
  Scoffed at and scourged with unbelief,
Foiled with false trusts and thwart designs,
  Stripped of green days and hopes in leaf,
Their mere bare body of glory shines
  Higher, and man gazing surelier sees
  What light, what comfort is of these.

So I now gazing; till the sense
Being set on fire of confidence
  Strains itself sunward, feels out far
  Beyond the bright and morning star,
Beyond the extreme wave's refluence,
  To where the fierce first sunbeams are
Whose fire intolerant and intense
  As birthpangs whence day burns to be
  Parts breathless heaven from breathing sea.

I see not, know not, and am blest,
Master, who know that thou knowest,
  Dear lord and leader, at whose hand
  The first days and the last days stand,
With scars and crowns on head and breast,
  That fought for love of the sweet land
Or shall fight in her latter quest;
  All the days armed and girt and crowned
  Whose glories ring thy glory round.

Thou sawest, when all the world was blind,
The light that should be of mankind,

The very day that was to be;
And how shalt thou not sometime see
Thy city perfect to thy mind
Stand face to living face with thee,
And no miscrowned man's head behind;
The hearth of man, the human home,
The central flame that shall be Rome?

As one that ere a June day rise
Makes seaward for the dawn, and tries
The water with delighted limbs
That taste the sweet dark sea, and swims
Right eastward under strengthening skies,
And sees the gradual rippling rims
Of waves whence day breaks blossom-wise
Take fire ere light peer well above,
And laughs from all his heart with love;

And softlier swimming with raised head
Feels the full flower of morning shed
And fluent sunrise round him rolled
That laps and laves his body bold
With fluctuant heaven in water's stead,
And urgent through the growing gold
Strikes, and sees all the spray flash red,
And his soul takes the sun, and yearns
For joy wherewith the sea's heart burns;

So the soul seeking through the dark
Heavenward, a dove without an ark,
Transcends the unnavigable sea
Of years that wear out memory;
So calls, a sunward-singing lark,
In the ear of souls that should be free;
So points them toward the sun for mark
Who steer not for the stress of waves,
And seek strange helmsmen, and are slaves.

For if the swimmer's eastward eye
Must see no sunrise--must put by
The hope that lifted him and led
Once, to have light about his head,
To see beneath the clear low sky
The green foam-whitened wave wax red
And all the morning's banner fly -
Then, as earth's helpless hopes go down,
Let earth's self in the dark tides drown.

Yea, if no morning must behold
Man, other than were they now cold,
And other deeds than past deeds done,
Nor any near or far-off sun

Salute him risen and sunlike-souled,
  Free, boundless, fearless, perfect, one,
Let man's world die like worlds of old,
  And here in heaven's sight only be
  The sole sun on the worldless sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Epilogue:XXI 'Tristram of Lyonesse'

OUR MOTHER, which wast twice, as history saith,
Found first among the nations: once, when she
Who bore thine ensign saw the God in thee
Smite Spain, and bring forth Shakespeare: once, when death
Shrank, and Rome’s bloodhounds cowered, at Milton’s breath:
More than thy place, then first among the free,
More than that sovereign lordship of the sea
Bequeathed to Cromwell from Elizabeth,
More than thy fiery guiding- star, which Drake
Hailed, and the deep saw lit again for Blake,
More than all deeds wrought of thy strong right hand,
This praise keeps most thy fame’s memorial strong,
That thou wast head of all these streams of song,
And time bows down to thee as Shakespeare’s land.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Eros

Eros, from rest in isles far-famed,
With rising Anthesterion rose,
And all Hellenic heights acclaimed
  Eros.

The sea one pearl, the shore one rose,
All round him all the flower-month flamed
And lightened, laughing off repose.

Earth's heart, sublime and unashamed,
Knew, even perchance as man's heart knows,
The thirst of all men's nature named
  Eros.

II.

Eros, a fire of heart untamed,
A light of spirit in sense that glows,
Flamed heavenward still ere earth defamed
  Eros.

Nor fear nor shame durst curb or close
His golden godhead, marred and maimed,
Fast round with bonds that burnt and froze.

Ere evil faith struck blind and lamed
Love, pure as fire or flowers or snows,
Earth hailed as blameless and unblamed
  Eros.

III.

Eros, with shafts by thousands aimed
At laughing lovers round in rows,
Fades from their sight whose tongues proclaimed
  Eros.

But higher than transient shapes or shows
The light of love in life inflamed
Springs, toward no goal that these disclose.

Above those heavens which passion claimed
Shines, veiled by change that ebbs and flows,
The soul in all things born or framed,
  Eros.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Etude Realiste

A Baby's feet, like sea-shells pink,
  Might tempt, should heaven see meet,
An angel's lips to kiss, we think,
  A baby's feet.

Like rose-hued sea-flowers toward the heat
  They stretch and spread and wink
Their ten soft buds that part and meet.

No flower-bells that expand and shrink
  Gleam half so heavenly sweet
As shine on life's untrodden brink
  A baby's feet.

II.

A baby's hands, like rosebuds furled
  Whence yet no leaf expands,
Ope if you touch, though close upcurled,
  A baby's hands.

Then, fast as warriors grip their brands
  When battle's bolt is hurled,
They close, clenched hard like tightening bands.

No rosebuds yet by dawn impearled
  Match, even in loveliest lands,
The sweetest flowers in all the world -
  A baby's hands.

III.

A baby's eyes, ere speech begin,
  Ere lips learn words or sighs,
Bless all things bright enough to win
  A baby's eyes.

Love, while the sweet thing laughs and lies,
  And sleep flows out and in,
Sees perfect in them Paradise.

Their glance might cast out pain and sin,
  Their speech make dumb the wise,
By mute glad godhead felt within
  A baby's eyes.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Étude Réaliste (excerpts)

A baby's hands, like rosebuds furled
  Whence yet no leaf expands,
  Ope if you touch, though close upcurled,
A baby's hands.
  Then, fast as warriors grip their brands
  When battle's bolt is hurled,
  They close, clenched hard like tightening bands.
  No rosebuds yet by dawn impearled
  Match, even in loveliest lands,
The sweetest flowers in all the world--
  A baby's hands.

III

  A baby's eyes, ere speech begin,
  Ere lips learn words or sighs,
Bless all things bright enough to win
A baby's eyes.
  Love, while the sweet thing laughs and lies,
  And sleep flows out and in,
  Sees perfect in them Paradise.
  Their glance might cast out pain and sin,
  Their speech make dumb the wise,
  By mute glad godhead felt within
  A baby's eyes.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Eurydice - To Victor Hugo

Orpheus, the night is full of tears and cries,
  And hardly for the storm and ruin shed
  Can even thine eyes be certain of her head
Who never passed out of thy spirit's eyes,
But stood and shone before them in such wise
  As when with love her lips and hands were fed,
  And with mute mouth out of the dusty dead
Strove to make answer when thou bad'st her rise.

Yet viper-stricken must her lifeblood feel
  The fang that stung her sleeping, the foul germ
  Even when she wakes of hell's most poisonous worm,
Though now it writhe beneath her wounded heel.
  Turn yet, she will not fade nor fly from thee;
  Wait, and see hell yield up Eurydice.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Faustine

LEAN BACK, and get some minutes' peace;
Let your head lean
Back to the shoulder with its fleece
Of locks, Faustine.

The shapely silver shoulder stoops,
Weighed over clean
With state of splendid hair that droops
Each side, Faustine.

Let me go over your good gifts
That crown you queen;
A queen whose kingdom ebbs and shifts
Each week, Faustine.

Bright heavy brows well gathered up:
White gloss and sheen;
Carved lips that make my lips a cup
To drink, Faustine,

Wine and rank poison, milk and blood,
Being mixed therein
Since first the devil threw dice with God
For you, Faustine.

Your naked new-born soul, their stake,
Stood blind between;
God said "let him that wins her take
And keep Faustine."

But this time Satan throve, no doubt:
Long since, I ween,
God's part in you was battered out;
Long since, Faustine.

The die rang sideways as it fell,
Rang cracked and thin,
Like a man's laughter heard in hell
Far down, Faustine,

A shadow of laughter like a sigh,
Dead sorrow's kin;
So rang, thrown down, the devil's die
That won Faustine.

A suckling of his breed you were,
One hard to wean;
But God, who lost you, left you fair,
We see, Faustine.

You have the face that suits a woman
For her soul's screen—

The sort of beauty that's called human
In hell, Faustine.

You could do all things but be good
Or chaste of mien;
And that you would not if you could,
We know, Faustine.

Even he who cast seven devils out
Of Magdalene
Could hardly do as much, I doubt,
For you, Faustine.

Did Satan make you to spite God?
Or did God mean
To scourge with scorpions for a rod
Our sins, Faustine?

I know what queen at first you were,
As though I had seen
Red gold and black imperious hair
Twice crown Faustine.

As if your fed sarcophagus
Spared flesh and skin,
You come back face to face with us,
The same Faustine.

She loved the games men played with death,
Where death must win;
As though the slain man's blood and breath
Revived Faustine.

Nets caught the pike, pikes tore the net;
Lithe limbs and lean
From drained-out pores dripped thick red sweat
To soothe Faustine.

She drank the steaming drift and dust
Blown off the scene;
Blood could not ease the bitter lust
That galled Faustine.

All round the foul fat furrows reeked,
Where blood sank in;
The circus splashed and seethed and shrieked
All round Faustine.

But these are gone now: years entomb
The dust and din;
Yea, even the bath's fierce reek and fume
That slew Faustine.

Was life worth living then? and now
Is life worth sin?
Where are the imperial years? and how
Are you Faustine?

Your soul forgot her joys, forgot
Her times of teen;
Yea, this life likewise will you not
Forget, Faustine?

For in the time we know not of
Did fate begin
Weaving the web of days that wove
Your doom, Faustine.

The threads were wet with wine, and all
Were smooth to spin;
They wove you like a Bacchanal,
The first Faustine.

And Bacchus cast your mates and you
Wild grapes to glean;
Your flower-like lips were dashed with dew
From his, Faustine.

Your drenched loose hands were stretched to hold
The vine's wet green,
Long ere they coined in Roman gold
Your face, Faustine.

Then after change of soaring feather
And winnowing fin,
You woke in weeks of feverish weather,
A new Faustine.

A star upon your birthday burned,
Whose fierce serene
Red pulseless planet never yearned
In heaven, Faustine.

Stray breaths of Sapphic song that blew
Through Mitylene
Shook the fierce quivering blood in you
By night, Faustine.

The shameless nameless love that makes
Hell's iron gin
Shut on you like a trap that breaks
The soul, Faustine.

And when your veins were void and dead,

What ghosts unclean
Swarmed round the straitened barren bed
That hid Faustine?

What sterile growths of sexless root
Or epicene?
What flower of kisses without fruit
Of love, Faustine?

What adders came to shed their coats?
What coiled obscene
Small serpents with soft stretching throats
Caressed Faustine?

But the time came of famished hours,
Maimed loves and mean,
This ghastly thin-faced time of ours,
To spoil Faustine.

You seem a thing that hinges hold,
A love-machine
With clockwork joints of supple gold—
No more, Faustine.

Not godless, for you serve one God,
The Lampsacene,
Who metes the gardens with his rod;
Your lord, Faustine.

If one should love you with real love
(Such things have been,
Things your fair face knows nothing of,
It seems, Faustine);

That clear hair heavily bound back,
The lights wherein
Shift from dead blue to burnt-up black;
Your throat, Faustine,

Strong, heavy, throwing out the face
And hard bright chin
And shameful scornful lips that grace
Their shame, Faustine,

Curled lips, long since half kissed away,
Still sweet and keen;
You'd give him—poison shall we say?
Or what, Faustine?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Félise

WHAT shall be said between us here
Among the downs, between the trees,
In fields that knew our feet last year,
In sight of quiet sands and seas,
This year, Félise?

Who knows what word were best to say?
For last year's leaves lie dead and red
On this sweet day, in this green May,
And barren corn makes bitter bread.
What shall be said?

Here as last year the fields begin,
A fire of flowers and glowing grass;
The old fields we laughed and lingered in,
Seeing each our souls in last year's glass,
Félise, alas!

Shall we not laugh, shall we not weep,
Not we, though this be as it is?
For love awake or love asleep
Ends in a laugh, a dream, a kiss,
A song like this.

I that have slept awake, and you
Sleep, who last year were well awake.
Though love do all that love can do,
My heart will never ache or break
For your heart's sake.

The great sea, faultless as a flower,
Throbs, trembling under beam and breeze,
And laughs with love of the amorous hour.
I found you fairer once, Félise,
Than flowers or seas.

We played at bondsman and at queen;
But as the days change men change too;
I find the grey sea's notes of green,
The green sea's fervent flakes of blue,
More fair than you.

Your beauty is not over fair
Now in mine eyes, who am grown up wise.
The smell of flowers in all your hair
Allures not now; no sigh replies
If your heart sighs.

But you sigh seldom, you sleep sound,
You find love's new name good enough.
Less sweet I find it than I found
The sweetest name that ever love

Grew weary of.

My snake with bright bland eyes, my snake
Grown tame and glad to be caressed,
With lips athirst for mine to slake
Their tender fever! who had guessed
You loved me best?

I had died for this last year, to know
You loved me. Who shall turn on fate?
I care not if love come or go
Now, though your love seek mine for mate.
It is too late.

The dust of many strange desires
Lies deep between us; in our eyes
Dead smoke of perishable fires
Flickers, a fume in air and skies,
A steam of sighs.

You loved me and you loved me not;
A little, much, and overmuch.
Will you forget as I forget?
Let all dead things lie dead; none such
Are soft to touch.

I love you and I do not love,
Too much, a little, not at all:
Too much, and never yet enough.
Birds quick to fledge and fly at call
Are quick to fall.

And these love longer now than men,
And larger loves than ours are these.
No diver brings up love again
Dropped once, my beautiful Félise,
In such cold seas.

Gone deeper than all plummets sound,
Where in the dim green dayless day
The life of such dead things lies bound
As the sea feeds on, wreck and stray
And castaway.

Can I forget? yea, that can I,
And that can all men; so will you,
Alive, or later, when you die.
Ah, but the love you plead was true?
Was mine not too?

I loved you for that name of yours
Long ere we met, and long enough.

Now that one thing of all endures—
The sweetest name that ever love
Waxed weary of.

Like colours in the sea, like flowers,
Like a cat's splendid circled eyes
That wax and wane with love for hours,
Green as green flame, blue-grey like skies,
And soft like sighs—

And all these only like your name,
And your name full of all of these.
I say it, and it sounds the same—
Save that I say it now at ease,
Your name, Félise.

I said "she must be swift and white,
And subtly warm, and half perverse,
And sweet like sharp soft fruit to bite,
And like a snake's love lithe and fierce."
Men have guessed worse.

What was the song I made of you
Here where the grass forgets our feet
As afternoon forgets the dew?
Ah that such sweet things should be fleet,
Such fleet things sweet!

As afternoon forgets the dew,
As time in time forgets all men,
As our old place forgets us two,
Who might have turned to one thing then,
But not again.

O lips that mine have grown into
Like April's kissing May,
O fervent eyelids letting through
Those eyes the greenest of things blue,
The bluest of things grey,

If you were I and I were you,
How could I love you, say?
How could the roseleaf love the rue,
The day love nightfall and her dew,
Though night may love the day?

You loved it may be more than I;
We know not; love is hard to seize,
And all things are not good to try;
And lifelong loves the worst of these
For us, Félise.

Ah, take the season and have done,
Love well the hour and let it go:
Two souls may sleep and wake up one,
Or dream they wake and find it so,
And then—you know.

Kiss me once hard as though a flame
Lay on my lips and made them fire;
The same lips now, and not the same;
What breath shall fill and re-inspire
A dead desire?

The old song sounds hollower in mine ear
Than thin keen sounds of dead men's speech—
A noise one hears and would not hear;
Too strong to die, too weak to reach
From wave to beach.

We stand on either side the sea,
Stretch hands, blow kisses, laugh and lean
I toward you, you toward me;
But what hears either save the keen
Grey sea between?

A year divides us, love from love,
Though you love now, though I loved then.
The gulf is strait, but deep enough;
Who shall recross, who among men
Shall cross again?

Love was a jest last year, you said,
And what lives surely, surely dies.
Even so; but now that love is dead,
Shall love rekindle from wet eyes,
From subtle sighs?

For many loves are good to see;
Mutable loves, and loves perverse;
But there is nothing, nor shall be,
So sweet, so wicked, but my verse
Can dream of worse.

For we that sing and you that love
Know that which man may, only we.
The rest live under us; above,
Live the great gods in heaven, and see
What things shall be.

So this thing is and must be so;
For man dies, and love also dies.
Though yet love's ghost moves to and fro
The sea-green mirrors of your eyes,

And laughs, and lies.

Eyes coloured like a water-flower,
And deeper than the green sea's glass;
Eyes that remember one sweet hour—
In vain we swore it should not pass;
In vain, alas!

Ah my Félise, if love or sin,
If shame or fear could hold it fast,
Should we not hold it? Love wears thin,
And they laugh well who laugh the last.
Is it not past?

The gods, the gods are stronger; time
Falls down before them, all men's knees
Bow, all men's prayers and sorrows climb
Like incense towards them; yea, for these
Are gods, Félise.

Immortal are they, clothed with powers,
Not to be comforted at all;
Lords over all the fruitless hours;
Too great to appease, too high to appal,
Too far to call.

For none shall move the most high gods,
Who are most sad, being cruel; none
Shall break or take away the rods
Wherewith they scourge us, not as one
That smites a son.

By many a name of many a creed
We have called upon them, since the sands
Fell through time's hour-glass first, a seed
Of life; and out of many lands
Have we stretched hands.

When have they heard us? who hath known
Their faces, climbed unto their feet,
Felt them and found them? Laugh or groan,
Doth heaven remurmur and repeat
Sad sounds or sweet?

Do the stars answer? in the night
Have ye found comfort? or by day
Have ye seen gods? What hope, what light,
Falls from the farthest starriest way
On you that pray?

Are the skies wet because we weep,
Or fair because of any mirth?

Cry out; they are gods; perchance they sleep;
Cry; thou shalt know what prayers are worth,
Thou dust and earth.

O earth, thou art fair; O dust, thou art great;
O laughing lips and lips that mourn,
Pray, till ye feel the exceeding weight
Of God's intolerable scorn,
Not to be borne.

Behold, there is no grief like this;
The barren blossom of thy prayer,
Thou shalt find out how sweet it is.
O fools and blind, what seek ye there,
High up in the air?

Ye must have gods, the friends of men,
Merciful gods, compassionate,
And these shall answer you again.
Will ye beat always at the gate,
Ye fools of fate?

Ye fools and blind; for this is sure,
That all ye shall not live, but die.
Lo, what thing have ye found endure?
Or what thing have ye found on high
Past the blind sky?

The ghosts of words and dusty dreams,
Old memories, faiths infirm and dead.
Ye fools; for which among you deems
His prayer can alter green to red
Or stones to bread?

Why should ye bear with hopes and fears
Till all these things be drawn in one,
The sound of iron-footed years,
And all the oppression that is done
Under the sun?

Ye might end surely, surely pass
Out of the multitude of things,
Under the dust, beneath the grass,
Deep in dim death, where no thought stings,
No record clings.

No memory more of love or hate,
No trouble, nothing that aspires,
No sleepless labour thwarting fate,
And thwarted; where no travail tires,
Where no faith fires.

All passes, nought that has been is,
Things good and evil have one end.
Can anything be otherwise
Though all men swear all things would mend
With God to friend?

Can ye beat off one wave with prayer,
Can ye move mountains? bid the flower
Take flight and turn to a bird in the air?
Can ye hold fast for shine or shower
One wingless hour?

Ah sweet, and we too, can we bring
One sigh back, bid one smile revive?
Can God restore one ruined thing,
Or he who slays our souls alive
Make dead things thrive?

Two gifts perforce he has given us yet,
Though sad things stay and glad things fly;
Two gifts he has given us, to forget
All glad and sad things that go by,
And then to die.

We know not whether death be good,
But life at least it will not be:
Men will stand saddening as we stood,
Watch the same fields and skies as we
And the same sea.

Let this be said between us here,
One love grows green when one turns grey;
This year knows nothing of last year;
To-morrow has no more to say
To yesterday.

Live and let live, as I will do,
Love and let love, and so will I.
But, sweet, for me no more with you:
Not while I live, not though I die.
Goodnight, goodbye.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

First Footsteps

A little way, more soft and sweet
Than fields aflower with May,
A babe's feet, venturing, scarce complete
A little way.

Eyes full of dawning day
Look up for mother's eyes to meet,
Too blithe for song to say.

Glad as the golden spring to greet
Its first live leaflet's play,
Love, laughing, leads the little feet
A little way.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

For A Picture

That nose is out of drawing. With a gasp,
She pants upon the passionate lips that ache
With the red drain of her own mouth, and make
A monochord of colour. Like an asp,
One lithe lock wriggles in his rutilant grasp.
Her bosom is an oven of myrrh, to bake
Love's white warm shewbread to a browner cake.
The lock his fingers clench has burst its hasp.
The legs are absolutely abominable.
Ah! what keen overgust of wild-eyed woes
Flags in that bosom, flushes in that nose?
Nay! Death sets riddles for desire to spell,
Responsive. What red hem earth's passion sews,
But may be ravenously unripped in hell?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Four Songs Of Four Seasons

I. WINTER IN NORTHUMBERLAND
OUTSIDE the garden
The wet skies harden;
The gates are barred on
The summer side:
"Shut out the flower-time,
Sunbeam and shower-time;
Make way for our time,"
Wild winds have cried.
Green once and cheery,
The woods, worn weary,
Sigh as the dreary
Weak sun goes home:
A great wind grapples
The wave, and dapples
The dead green floor of the sea with foam.

Through fell and moorland,
And salt-sea foreland,
Our noisy norland
Resounds and rings;
Waste waves thereunder
Are blown in sunder,
And winds make thunder
With cloudwide wings;
Sea-drift makes dimmer
The beacon's glimmer;
Nor sail nor swimmer
Can try the tides;
And snowdrifts thicken
Where, when leaves quicken,
Under the heather the sundew hides.

Green land and red land,
Moorside and headland,
Are white as dead land,
Are all as one;
Nor honied heather,
Nor bells to gather,
Fair with fair weather
And faithful sun:
Fierce frost has eaten
All flowers that sweeten
The fells rain-beaten;
And winds their foes
Have made the snow's bed
Down in the rose-bed;
Deep in the snow's bed bury the rose.

Bury her deeper
Than any sleeper;
Sweet dreams will keep her

All day, all night;
Though sleep benumb her
And time o'ercome her,
She dreams of summer,
And takes delight,
Dreaming and sleeping
In love's good keeping,
While rain is weeping
And no leaves cling;
Winds will come bringing her
Comfort, and singing her
Stories and songs and good news of the spring.

Draw the white curtain
Close, and be certain
She takes no hurt in
Her soft low bed;
She feels no colder,
And grows not older,
Though snows enfold her
From foot to head;
She turns not chilly
Like weed and lily
In marsh or hilly
High watershed,
Or green soft island
In lakes of highland;
She sleeps awhile, and she is not dead.

For all the hours,
Come sun, come showers,
Are friends of flowers,
And fairies all;
When frost entrapped her,
They came and lapped her
In leaves, and wrapped her
With shroud and pall;
In red leaves wound her,
With dead leaves bound her
Dead brows, and round her
A death-knell rang;
Rang the death-bell for her,
Sang, "is it well for her,
Well, is it well with you, rose?" they sang.

O what and where is
The rose now, fairies,
So shrill the air is,
So wild the sky?
Poor last of roses,
Her worst of woes is
The noise she knows is

The winter's cry;
His hunting hollo
Has scared the swallow;
Fain would she follow
And fain would fly:
But wind unsettles
Her poor last petals;
Had she but wings, and she would not die.

Come, as you love her,
Come close and cover
Her white face over,
And forth again
Ere sunset glances
On foam that dances,
Through lowering lances
Of bright white rain;
And make your playtime
Of winter's daytime,
As if the Maytime
Were here to sing;
As if the snowballs
Were soft like blowballs,
Blown in a mist from the stalk in the spring.

Each reed that grows in
Our stream is frozen,
The fields it flows in
Are hard and black;
The water-fairy
Waits wise and wary
Till time shall vary
And thaws come back.
"O sister, water,"
The wind besought her,
"O twin-born daughter
Of spring with me,
Stay with me, play with me,
Take the warm way with me,
Straight for the summer and oversea."

But winds will vary,
And wise and wary
The patient fairy
Of water waits;
All shrunk and wizen,
In iron prison,
Till spring re-risen
Unbar the gates;
Till, as with clamor
Of axe and hammer,
Chained streams that stammer

And struggle in straits
Burst bonds that shiver,
And thaws deliver
The roaring river in stormy spates.

In fierce March weather
White waves break tether,
And whirled together
At either hand,
Like weeds uplifted,
The tree-trunks rifted
In spars are drifted,
Like foam or sand,
Past swamp and sallow
And reed-beds callow,
Through pool and shallow,
To wind and lee,
Till, no more tongue-tied,
Full flood and young tide
Roar down the rapids and storm the sea.

As men's cheeks faded
On shores invaded,
When shorewards waded
The lords of fight;
When churl and craven
Saw hard on haven
The wide-winged raven
At mainmast height;
When monks affrighted
To windward sighted
The birds full-flighted
Of swift sea-kings;
So earth turns paler
When Storm the sailor
Steers in with a roar in the race of his wings.

O strong sea-sailor,
Whose cheek turns paler
For wind or hail or
For fear of thee?
O far sea-farer,
O thunder-bearer,
Thy songs are rarer
Than soft songs be.
O fleet-foot stranger,
O north-sea ranger
Through days of danger
And ways of fear,
Blow thy horn here for us,
Blow the sky clear for us,
Send us the song of the sea to hear.

Roll the strong stream of it
Up, till the scream of it
Wake from a dream of it
Children that sleep,
Seamen that fare for them
Forth, with a prayer for them:
Shall not God care for them
Angels not keep?
Spare not the surges
Thy stormy scourges;
Spare us the dirges
Of wives that weep.
Turn back the waves for us:
Dig no fresh graves for us,
Wind, in the manifold gulfs of the deep.

O stout north-easter,
Sea-king, land-waster,
For all thine haste, or
Thy stormy skill,
Yet hadst thou never,
For all endeavour,
Strength to dissever
Or strength to spill,
Save of his giving
Who gave our living,
Whose hands are weaving
What ours fulfil;
Whose feet tread under
The storms and thunder;
Who made our wonder to work his will.

His years and hours,
His world's blind powers,
His stars and flowers,
His nights and days,
Sea-tide and river,
And waves that shiver,
Praise God, the giver
Of tongues to praise.
Winds in their blowing,
And fruits in growing;
Time in its going,
While time shall be;
In death and living,
With one thanksgiving,
Praise him whose hand is the strength of the sea.

II. SPRING IN TUSCANY

ROSE-RED lilies that bloom on the banner;
Rose-cheeked gardens that revel in spring;

Rose-mouthed acacias that laugh as they climb,
Like plumes for a queen's hand fashioned to fan her
With wind more soft than a wild dove's wing,
What do they sing in the spring of their time

If this be the rose that the world hears singing,
Soft in the soft night, loud in the day,
Songs for the fireflies to dance as they hear;
If that be the song of the nightingale, springing
Forth in the form of a rose in May,
What do they say of the way of the year?

What of the way of the world gone Maying,
What of the work of the buds in the bowers,
What of the will of the wind on the wall,
Fluttering the wall-flowers, sighing and playing,
Shrinking again as a bird that cowers,
Thinking of hours when the flowers have to fall?

Out of the throats of the loud birds showering,
Out of the folds where the flag-lilies leap,
Out of the mouths of the roses stirred,
Out of the herbs on the walls reflowering,
Out of the heights where the sheer snows sleep,
Out of the deep and the steep, one word.

One from the lips of the lily-flames leaping,
The glad red lilies that burn in our sight,
The great live lilies for standard and crown;
One from the steeps where the pines stand sleeping,
One from the deep land, one from the height,
One from the light and the might of the town.

The lowlands laugh with delight of the highlands,
Whence May winds feed them with balm and breath
From hills that beheld in the years behind
A shape as of one from the blest souls' islands,
Made fair by a soul too fair for death,
With eyes on the light that should smite them blind.

Vallombrosa remotely remembers,
Perchance, what still to us seems so near
That time not darkens it, change not mars,
The foot that she knew when her leaves were September's,
The face lift up to the star-blind seer,
That saw from his prison arisen his stars.

And Pisa broods on her dead, not mourning,
For love of her loveliness given them in fee;
And Prato gleams with the glad monk's gift
Whose hand was there as the hand of morning;
And Siena, set in the sand's red sea,

Lifts loftier her head than the red sand's drift.

And far to the fair south-westward lightens,
Girdled and sandalled and plumed with flowers,
At sunset over the love-lit lands,
The hill-side's crown where the wild hill brightens,
Saint Fina's town of the Beautiful Towers,
Hailing the sun with a hundred hands.

Land of us all that have loved thee dearliest,
Mother of men that were lords of man,
Whose name in the world's heart work a spell
My last song's light, and the star of mine earliest,
As we turn from thee, sweet, who wast ours for a span,
Fare well we may not who say farewell.

III. SUMMER IN AUVERGNE

THE sundawn fills the land
Full as a feaster's hand
Fills full with bloom of bland
Bright wine his cup;
Flows full to flood that fills
From the arch of air it thrills
Those rust-red iron hills
With morning up.

Dawn, as a panther springs,
With fierce and fire-fledged wings
Leaps on the land that rings
From her bright feet
Through all its lava-black
Cones that cast answer back
And cliffs of footless track
Where thunders meet.

The light speaks wide and loud
From deeps blown clean of cloud
As though day's heart were proud
And heaven's were glad;
The towers brown-striped and grey
Take fire from heaven of day
As though the prayers they pray
Their answers had.

Higher in these high first hours
Wax all the keen church towers,
And higher all hearts of ours
Than the old hills' crown,
Higher than the pillared height
Of that strange cliff-side bright
With basalt towers whose might
Strong time bows down.

And the old fierce ruin there
Of the old wild princes' lair
Whose blood in mine hath share
Gapes gaunt and great
Toward heaven that long ago
Watched all the wan land's woe
Whereon the wind would blow
Of their bleak hate.

Dead are those deeds; but yet
Their memory seems to fret
Lands that might else forget
That old world's brand;
Dead all their sins and days;
Yet in this red clime's rays
Some fiery memory stays
That sears their land.

IV. AUTUMN IN CORNWALL

THE year lies fallen and faded
On cliffs by clouds invaded,
With tongues of storms upbraided,
With wrath of waves bedinned;
And inland, wild with warning,
As in deaf ears or scorning,
The clarion even and morning
Rings of the south-west wind.

The wild bents wane and wither
In blasts whose breath bows hither
Their grey-grown heads and thither,
Unblest of rain or sun;
The pale fierce heavens are crowded
With shapes like dreams beclouded,
As though the old year enshrouded
Lay, long ere life were done.

Full-charged with oldworld wonders,
From dusk Tintagel thunders
A note that smites and sunders
The hard frore fields of air;
A trumpet stormier-sounded
Than once from lists rebounded
When strong men sense-confounded
Fell thick in tourney there.

From scarce a duskier dwelling
Such notes of wail rose welling
Through the outer darkness, telling
In the awful singer's ears
What souls the darkness covers,

What love-lost souls of lovers,
Whose cry still hangs and hovers
In each man's born that hears.

For there by Hector's brother
And yet some thousand other
He that had grief to mother
Passed pale from Dante's sight;
With one fast linked as fearless,
Perchance, there only tearless;
Iseult and Tristram, peerless
And perfect queen and knight.

A shrill-winged sound comes flying
North, as of wild souls crying
The cry of things undying,
That know what life must be;
Or as the old year's heart, stricken
Too sore for hope to quicken
By thoughts like thorns that thicken,
Broke, breaking with the sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Fragoletta

O LOVE! what shall be said of thee?
The son of grief begot by joy?
Being sightless, wilt thou see?
Being sexless, wilt thou be
Maiden or boy?

I dreamed of strange lips yesterday
And cheeks wherein the ambiguous blood
Was like a rose's—yea,
A rose's when it lay
Within the bud.

What fields have bred thee, or what groves
Concealed thee, O mysterious flower,
O double rose of Love's,
With leaves that lure the doves
From bud to bower?

I dare not kiss it, lest my lip
Press harder than an indrawn breath,
And all the sweet life slip
Forth, and the sweet leaves drip,
Bloodlike, in death.

O sole desire of my delight!
O sole delight of my desire!
Mine eyelids and eyesight
Feed on thee day and night
Like lips of fire.

Lean back thy throat of carven pearl,
Let thy mouth murmur like the dove's;
Say, Venus hath no girl,
No front of female curl,
Among her Loves.

Thy sweet low bosom, thy close hair,
Thy strait soft flanks and slenderer feet,
Thy virginal strange air,
Are these not over fair
For Love to greet?

How should he greet thee? what new name,
Fit to move all men's hearts, could move
Thee, deaf to love or shame,
Love's sister, by the same
Mother as Love?

Ah sweet, the maiden's mouth is cold,
Her breast-blossoms are simply red,
Her hair mere brown or gold,
Fold over simple fold

Binding her head.

Thy mouth is made of fire and wine,
Thy barren bosom takes my kiss
And turns my soul to thine
And turns thy lip to mine,
And mine it is.

Thou hast a serpent in thine hair,
In all the curls that close and cling;
And ah, thy breast-flower!
Ah love, thy mouth too fair
To kiss and sting!

Cleave to me, love me, kiss mine eyes,
Satiate thy lips with loving me;
Nay, for thou shalt not rise;
Lie still as Love that dies
For love of thee.

Mine arms are close about thine head,
My lips are fervent on thy face,
And where my kiss hath fed
Thy flower-like blood leaps red
To the kissed place.

O bitterness of things too sweet!
O broken singing of the dove!
Love’s wings are over fleet,
And like the panther’s feet
The feet of Love.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Genesis

In the outer world that was before this earth,
  That was before all shape or space was born,
Before the blind first hour of time had birth,
  Before night knew the moonlight or the morn;

Yea, before any world had any light,
  Or anything called God or man drew breath,
Slowly the strong sides of the heaving night
  Moved, and brought forth the strength of life and death.

And the sad shapeless horror increate
  That was all things and one thing, without fruit,
Limit, or law; where love was none, nor hate,
  Where no leaf came to blossom from no root;

The very darkness that time knew not of,
  Nor God laid hand on, nor was man found there,
Ceased, and was cloven in several shapes; above
  Light, and night under, and fire, earth, water, and air.

Sunbeams and starbeams, and all coloured things,
  All forms and all similitudes began;
And death, the shadow cast by life's wide wings,
  And God, the shade cast by the soul of man.

Then between shadow and substance, night and light,
  Then between birth and death, and deeds and days,
The illimitable embrace and the amorous fight
  That of itself begets, bears, rears, and slays,

The immortal war of mortal things that is
  Labour and life and growth and good and ill,
The mild antiphonies that melt and kiss,
  The violent symphonies that meet and kill,

All nature of all things began to be.
  But chiefliest in the spirit (beast or man,
Planet of heaven or blossom of earth or sea)
  The divine contraries of life began.

For the great labour of growth, being many, is one;
  One thing the white death and the ruddy birth;
The invisible air and the all-beholden sun,
  And barren water and many-childed earth.

And these things are made manifest in men
  From the beginning forth unto this day:
Time writes and life records them, and again
  Death seals them lest the record pass away.

For if death were not, then should growth not be,
  Change, nor the life of good nor evil things;

Nor were there night at all nor light to see,
  Nor water of sweet nor water of bitter springs.

For in each man and each year that is born
  Are sown the twin seeds of the strong twin powers;
The white seed of the fruitful helpful morn,
  The black seed of the barren hurtful hours.

And he that of the black seed eateth fruit,
  To him the savour as honey shall be sweet;
And he in whom the white seed hath struck root,
  He shall have sorrow and trouble and tears for meat.

And him whose lips the sweet fruit hath made red
  In the end men loathe and make his name a rod;
And him whose mouth on the unsweet fruit hath fed
  In the end men follow and know for very God.

And of these twain, the black seed and the white,
  All things come forth, endured of men and done;
And still the day is great with child of night,
  And still the black night labours with the sun.

And each man and each year that lives on earth
  Turns hither or thither, and hence or thence is fed;
And as a man before was from his birth,
  So shall a man be after among the dead.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

George Chapman:XI

HIGH priest of Homer, not elect in vain,
Deep trumpets blow before thee, shawms behind
Mix music with the rolling wheels that wind
Slow through the labouring triumph of thy train:
Fierce history, molten in thy forging brain,
Takes form and fire and fashion from thy mind,
Tormented and transmuted out of kind:
But howsoe’er thou shift thy strenuous strain,
Like Tailor1 smooth, like Fisher2 swollen, and now
Grim Yarrington3 scarce bloodier marked than thou,
Then bluff as Mayne’s4 or broad-mouthed Barry’s5 glee ,
Proud still with hoar predominance of brow
And beard like foam swept off the broad blown sea,
Where’er thou go, men’s reverence goes with thee.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Had I Wist

Had I wist, when life was like a warm wind playing
Light and loud through sundawn and the dew's bright trust,
How the time should come for hearts to sigh in saying
  'Had I wist' -

Surely not the roses, laughing as they kissed,
Not the lovelier laugh of seas in sunshine swaying,
Should have lured my soul to look thereon and list.

Now the wind is like a soul cast out and praying
Vainly, prayers that pierce not ears when hearts resist:
Now mine own soul sighs, adrift as wind and straying,
  'Had I wist.'

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Hendecasyllabics

In the month of the long decline of roses
I, beholding the summer dead before me,
Set my face to the sea and journeyed silent,
Gazing eagerly where above the sea-mark
Flame as fierce as the fervid eyes of lions
Half divided the eyelids of the sunset;
Till I heard as it were a noise of waters
Moving tremulous under feet of angels
Multitudinous, out of all the heavens;
Knew the fluttering wind, the fluttered foliage,
Shaken fitfully, full of sound and shadow;
And saw, trodden upon by noiseless angels,
Long mysterious reaches fed with moonlight,
Sweet sad straits in a soft subsiding channel,
Blown about by the lips of winds I knew not,
Winds not born in the north nor any quarter,
Winds not warm with the south nor any sunshine;
Heard between them a voice of exultation,
'Lo, the summer is dead, the sun is faded,
Even like as a leaf the year is withered,
All the fruits of the day from all her branches
Gathered, neither is any left to gather.
All the flowers are dead, the tender blossoms,
All are taken away; the season wasted,
Like an ember among the fallen ashes.
Now with light of the winter days, with moonlight,
Light of snow, and the bitter light of hoarfrost,
We bring flowers that fade not after autumn,
Pale white chaplets and crowns of latter seasons,
Fair false leaves (but the summer leaves were falser),
Woven under the eyes of stars and planets
When low light was upon the windy reaches
Where the flower of foam was blown, a lily
Dropt among the sonorous fruitless furrows
And green fields of the sea that make no pasture:
Since the winter begins, the weeping winter,
All whose flowers are tears, and round his temples
Iron blossom of frost is bound for ever.'

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Hermaphroditus

I.
LIFT UP thy lips, turn round, look back for love,
Blind love that comes by night and casts out rest;
Of all things tired thy lips look weariest,
Save the long smile that they are wearied of.
Ah sweet, albeit no love be sweet enough,
Choose of two loves and cleave unto the best;
Two loves at either blossom of thy breast
Strive until one be under and one above.
Their breath is fire upon the amorous air,
Fire in thine eyes and where thy lips suspire:
And whosoever hath seen thee, being so fair,
Two things turn all his life and blood to fire;
A strong desire begot on great despair,
A great despair cast out by strong desire.

II.
Where between sleep and life some brief space is,
With love like gold bound round about the head,
Sex to sweet sex with lips and limbs is wed,
Turning the fruitful feud of hers and his
To the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss;
Yet from them something like as fire is shed
That shall not be assuaged till death be dead,
Though neither life nor sleep can find out this.
Love made himself of flesh that perisheth
A pleasure-house for all the loves his kin;
But on the one side sat a man like death,
And on the other a woman sat like sin.
So with veiled eyes and sobs between his breath
Love turned himself and would not enter in.

III.
Love, is it love or sleep or shadow or light
That lies between thine eyelids and thine eyes?
Like a flower laid upon a flower it lies,
Or like the night’s dew laid upon the night.
Love stands upon thy left hand and thy right,
Yet by no sunset and by no moonrise
Shall make thee man and ease a woman’s sighs,
Or make thee woman for a man’s delight.
To what strange end hath some strange god made fair
The double blossom of two fruitless flowers?
Hid love in all the folds of all thy hair,
Fed thee on summers, watered thee with showers,
Given all the gold that all the seasons wear
To thee that art a thing of barren hours?

IV.
Yea, love, I see; it is not love but fear.
Nay, sweet, it is not fear but love, I know;
Or wherefore should thy body’s blossom blow

So sweetly, or thine eyelids leave so clear
Thy gracious eyes that never made a tear—
Though for their love our tears like blood should flow,
Though love and life and death should come and go,
So dreadful, so desirable, so dear?
Yea, sweet, I know; I saw in what swift wise
Beneath the woman's and the water's kiss
Thy moist limbs melted into Salmacis,
And the large light turned tender in thine eyes,
And all thy boy's breath softened into sighs;
But Love being blind, how should he know of this?

Au Musée du Louvre, Mars 1863.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Hertha

I AM that which began;
Out of me the years roll;
Out of me God and man;
I am equal and whole;
God changes, and man, and the form of them bodily; I am the soul.

Before ever land was,
Before ever the sea,
Or soft hair of the grass,
Or fair limbs of the tree,
Or the flesh-colour'd fruit of my branches, I was, and thy soul was in me.

First life on my sources
First drifted and swam;
Out of me are the forces
That save it or damn;
Out of me man and woman, and wild-beast and bird: before God was, I am.

Beside or above me
Naught is there to go;
Love or unlove me,
Unknow me or know,
I am that which unloves me and loves; I am stricken, and I am the blow.

I the mark that is miss'd
And the arrows that miss,
I the mouth that is kiss'd
And the breath in the kiss,
The search, and the sought, and the seeker, the soul and the body that is.

I am that thing which blesses
My spirit elate;
That which caresses
With hands uncreate
My limbs unbegotten that measure the length of the measure of fate.

But what thing dost thou now,
Looking Godward, to cry,
'I am I, thou art thou,
I am low, thou art high'?
I am thou, whom thou seekest to find him; find thou but thyself, thou art I.

I the grain and the furrow,
The plough-cloven clod
And the ploughshare drawn thorough,
The germ and the sod,
The deed and the doer, the seed and the sower, the dust which is God.

Hast thou known how I fashion'd thee,
Child, underground?
Fire that impassion'd thee,
Iron that bound,
Dim changes of water, what thing of all these hast thou known of or found?

Canst thou say in thine heart
Thou hast seen with thine eyes
With what cunning of art
Thou wast wrought in what wise,
By what force of what stuff thou wast shapen, and shown on my breast to the skies?

Who hath given, who hath sold it thee,
Knowledge of me?
Has the wilderness told it thee?
Hast thou learnt of the sea?
Hast thou communed in spirit with night? have the winds taken counsel with thee?

Have I set such a star
To show light on thy brow
That thou sawest from afar
What I show to thee now?
Have ye spoken as brethren together, the sun and the mountains and thou?

What is here, dost thou know it?
What was, hast thou known?
Prophet nor poet
Nor tripod nor throne
Nor spirit nor flesh can make answer, but only thy mother alone.

Mother, not maker,
Born, and not made;
Though her children forsake her,
Allured or afraid,
Praying prayers to the God of their fashion, she stirs not for all that have pray'd.

A creed is a rod,
And a crown is of night;
But this thing is God,
To be man with thy might,
To grow straight in the strength of thy spirit, and live out thy life as the light.

I am in thee to save thee,
As my soul in thee saith;
Give thou as I gave thee,

Thy life-blood and breath,
Green leaves of thy labour, white flowers of thy thought, and red fruit of thy death.

Be the ways of thy giving
As mine were to thee;
The free life of thy living,
Be the gift of it free;
Not as servant to lord, nor as master to slave, shalt thou give thee to me.

O children of banishment,
Souls overcast,
Were the lights ye see vanish meant
Alway to last,
Ye would know not the sun overshining the shadows and stars overpast.

I that saw where ye trod
The dim paths of the night
Set the shadow call'd God
In your skies to give light;
But the morning of manhood is risen, and the shadowless soul is in sight.

The tree many-rooted
That swells to the sky
With frondage red-fruited,
The life-tree am I;
In the buds of your lives is the sap of my leaves: ye shall live and not die.

But the Gods of your fashion
That take and that give,
In their pity and passion
That scourge and forgive,
They are worms that are bred in the bark that falls off; they shall die and not live.

My own blood is what stanches
The wounds in my bark;
Stars caught in my branches
Make day of the dark,
And are worshipp'd as suns till the sunrise shall tread out their fires as a spark.

Where dead ages hide under
The live roots of the tree,
In my darkness the thunder
Makes utterance of me;
In the clash of my boughs with each other ye hear the waves sound of the sea.

That noise is of Time,
As his feathers are spread
And his feet set to climb
Through the boughs overhead,
And my foliage rings round him and rustles, and branches are bent with his tread.

The storm-winds of ages
Blow through me and cease,
The war-wind that rages,
The spring-wind of peace,
Ere the breath of them roughen my tresses, ere one of my blossoms increase.

All sounds of all changes,
All shadows and lights
On the world's mountain-ranges
And stream-riven heights,
Whose tongue is the wind's tongue and language of storm-clouds on earth-shaking nights;

All forms of all faces,
All works of all hands
In unsearchable places
Of time-stricken lands,
All death and all life, and all reigns and all ruins, drop through me as sands.

Though sore be my burden
And more than ye know,
And my growth have no guerdon
But only to grow,
Yet I fail not of growing for lightnings above me or deathworms below.

These too have their part in me,
As I too in these;
Such fire is at heart in me,
Such sap is this tree's,
Which hath in it all sounds and all secrets of infinite lands and of seas.

In the spring-colour'd hours
When my mind was as May's
There brake forth of me flowers
By centuries of days,
Strong blossoms with perfume of manhood, shot out from my spirit as rays.

And the sound of them springing
And smell of their shoots
Were as warmth and sweet singing
And strength to my roots;

And the lives of my children made perfect with freedom of soul were my fruits.

I bid you but be;
I have need not of prayer;
I have need of you free
As your mouths of mine air;
That my heart may be greater within me, beholding the fruits of me fair.

More fair than strange fruit is
Of faiths ye espouse;
In me only the root is
That blooms in your boughs;
Behold now your God that ye made you, to feed him with faith of your vows.

In the darkening and whitening
Abysses adored,
With dayspring and lightning
For lamp and for sword,
God thunders in heaven, and his angels are red with the wrath of the Lord.

O my sons, O too dutiful
Toward Gods not of me,
Was not I enough beautiful?
Was it hard to be free?
For behold, I am with you, am in you and of you; look forth now and see.

Lo, wing'd with world's wonders,
With miracles shod,
With the fires of his thunders
For raiment and rod,
God trembles in heaven, and his angels are white with the terror of God.

For his twilight is come on him,
His anguish is here;
And his spirits gaze dumb on him,
Grown gray from his fear;
And his hour taketh hold on him stricken, the last of his infinite year.

Thought made him and breaks him,
Truth slays and forgives;
But to you, as time takes him,
This new thing it gives,
Even love, the beloved Republic, that feeds upon freedom and lives.

For truth only is living,

Truth only is whole,
And the love of his giving
Man's polestar and pole;
Man, pulse of my centre, and fruit of my body, and seed of my soul.

One birth of my bosom;
One beam of mine eye;
One topmost blossom
That scales the sky;
Man, equal and one with me, man that is made of me, man that is I.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Hesperia

OUT OF the golden remote wild west where the sea without shore is,
Full of the sunset, and sad, if at all, with the fulness of joy,
As a wind sets in with the autumn that blows from the region of stories,
Blows with a perfume of songs and of memories beloved from a boy,
Blows from the capes of the past oversea to the bays of the present,
Filled as with shadow of sound with the pulse of invisible feet,
Far out to the shallows and straits of the future, by rough ways or pleasant,
Is it thither the wind's wings beat? is it hither to me, O my sweet?
For thee, in the stream of the deep tide-wind blowing in with the water,
Thee I behold as a bird borne in with the wind from the west,
Straight from the sunset, across white waves whence rose as a daughter
Venus thy mother, in years when the world was a water at rest.
Out of the distance of dreams, as a dream that abides after slumber,
Strayed from the fugitive flock of the night, when the moon overhead
Wanes in the wan waste heights of the heaven, and stars without number
Die without sound, and are spent like lamps that are burnt by the dead,
Comes back to me, stays by me, lulls me with touch of forgotten caresses,
One warm dream clad about with a fire as of life that endures;
The delight of thy face, and the sound of thy feet, and the wind of thy tresses,
And all of a man that regrets, and all of a maid that allures.
But thy bosom is warm for my face and profound as a manifold flower,
Thy silence as music, thy voice as an odour that fades in a flame;
Not a dream, not a dream is the kiss of thy mouth, and the bountiful hour
That makes me forget what was sin, and would make me forget were it shame.
Thine eyes that are quiet, thine hands that are tender, thy lips that are loving,
Comfort and cool me as dew in the dawn of a moon like a dream;
And my heart yearns baffled and blind, moved vainly toward thee, and moving
As the refluent seaweed moves in the languid exuberant stream,
Fair as a rose is on earth, as a rose under water in prison,
That stretches and swings to the slow passionate pulse of the sea,
Closed up from the air and the sun, but alive, as a ghost rearisen,
Pale as the love that revives as a ghost rearisen in me.
From the bountiful infinite west, from the happy memorial places
Full of the stately repose and the lordly delight of the dead,
Where the fortunate islands are lit with the light of ineffable faces,
And the sound of a sea without wind is about them, and sunset is red,
Come back to redeem and release me from love that recalls and represses,
That cleaves to my flesh as a flame, till the serpent has eaten his fill;
From the bitter delights of the dark, and the feverish, the furtive caresses
That murder the youth in a man or ever his heart have its will.
Thy lips cannot laugh and thine eyes cannot weep; thou art pale as a rose is,
Paler and sweeter than leaves that cover the blush of the bud;
And the heart of the flower is compassion, and pity the core it encloses,
Pity, not love, that is born of the breath and decays with the blood.
As the cross that a wild nun clasps till the edge of it bruises her bosom,
So love wounds as we grasp it, and blackens and burns as a flame;
I have loved overmuch in my life; when the live bud bursts with the blossom,
Bitter as ashes or tears is the fruit, and the wine thereof shame.
As a heart that its anguish divides is the green bud cloven asunder;
As the blood of a man self-slain is the flush of the leaves that allure;
And the perfume as poison and wine to the brain, a delight and a wonder;
And the thorns are too sharp for a boy, too slight for a man, to endure.

Too soon did I love it, and lost love's rose; and I cared not for glory's;
Only the blossoms of sleep and of pleasure were mixed in my hair.
Was it myrtle or poppy thy garland was woven with, O my Dolores?
Was it pallor of slumber, or blush as of blood, that I found in thee fair?
For desire is a respite from love, and the flesh not the heart is her fuel;
She was sweet to me once, who am fled and escaped from the rage of her reign;
Who behold as of old time at hand as I turn, with her mouth growing cruel,
And flushed as with wine with the blood of her lovers, Our Lady of Pain.
Low down where the thicket is thicker with thorns than with leaves in the summer,
In the brake is a gleaming of eyes and a hissing of tongues that I knew;
And the lithe long throats of her snakes reach round her, their mouths overcome her,
And her lips grow cool with their foam, made moist as a desert with dew.
With the thirst and the hunger of lust though her beautiful lips be so bitter,
With the cold foul foam of the snakes they soften and redden and smile;
And her fierce mouth sweetens, her eyes wax wide and her eyelashes glitter,
And she laughs with a savour of blood in her face, and a savour of guile.
She laughs, and her hands reach hither, her hair blows hither and hisses,
As a low-lit flame in a wind, back-blown till it shudder and leap;
Let her lips not again lay hold on my soul, nor her poisonous kisses,
To consume it alive and divide from thy bosom, Our Lady of Sleep.
Ah daughter of sunset and slumber, if now it return into prison,
Who shall redeem it anew? but we, if thou wilt, let us fly;
Let us take to us, now that the white skies thrill with a moon unarisen,
Swift horses of fear or of love, take flight and depart and not die.
They are swifter than dreams, they are stronger than death; there is none that hath ridden,
None that shall ride in the dim strange ways of his life as we ride;
By the meadows of memory, the highlands of hope, and the shore that is hidden,
Where life breaks loud and unseen, a sonorous invisible tide;
By the sands where sorrow has trodden, the salt pools bitter and sterile,
By the thundering reef and the low sea-wall and the channel of years,
Our wild steeds press on the night, strain hard through pleasure and peril,
Labour and listen and pant not or pause for the peril that nears;
And the sound of them trampling the way cleaves night as an arrow asunder,
And slow by the sand-hill and swift by the down with its glimpses of grass,
Sudden and steady the music, as eight hoofs trample and thunder,
Rings in the ear of the low blind wind of the night as we pass;
Shrill shrieks in our faces the blind bland air that was mute as a maiden,
Stung into storm by the speed of our passage, and deaf where we past;
And our spirits too burn as we bound, thine holy but mine heavy-laden,
As we burn with the fire of our flight; ah love, shall we win at the last?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Hymn Of Man

In the grey beginning of years, in the twilight of things that began,
The word of the earth in the ears of the world, was it God? was it man?
The word of the earth to the spheres her sisters, the note of her song,
The sound of her speech in the ears of the starry and sisterly throng,
Was it praise or passion or prayer, was it love or devotion or dread,
When the veils of the shining air first wrapt her jubilant head?
When her eyes new-born of the night saw yet no star out of reach;
When her maiden mouth was alight with the flame of musical speech;
When her virgin feet were set on the terrible heavenly way,
And her virginal lids were wet with the dew of the birth of the day:
Eyes that had looked not on time, and ears that had heard not of death;
Lips that had learnt not the rhyme of change and passionate breath,
The rhythmic anguish of growth, and the motion of mutable things,
Of love that longs and is loth, and plume-plucked hope without wings,
Passions and pains without number, and life that runs and is lame,
From slumber again to slumber, the same race set for the same,
Where the runners outwear each other, but running with lampless hands
No man takes light from his brother till blind at the goal he stands:
Ah, did they know, did they dream of it, counting the cost and the worth?
The ways of her days, did they seem then good to the new-souled earth?
Did her heart rejoice, and the might of her spirit exult in her then,
Child yet no child of the night, and motherless mother of men?
Was it Love brake forth flower-fashion, a bird with gold on his wings,
Lovely, her firstborn passion, and impulse of firstborn things?
Was Love that nestling indeed that under the plumes of the night
Was hatched and hidden as seed in the furrow, and brought forth bright?
Was it Love lay shut in the shell world-shaped, having over him there
Black world-wide wings that impel the might of the night through air?
And bursting his shell as a bird, night shook through her sail-stretched vans,
And her heart as a water was stirred, and its heat was the firstborn man's.
For the waste of the dead void air took form of a world at birth,
And the waters and firmaments were, and light, and the life-giving earth.
The beautiful bird unbegotten that night brought forth without pain
In the fathomless years forgotten whereover the dead gods reign,
Was it love, life, godhead, or fate? we say the spirit is one
That moved on the dark to create out of darkness the stars and the sun.
Before the growth was the grower, and the seed ere the plant was sown;
But what was seed of the sower? and the grain of him, whence was it grown?
Foot after foot ye go back and travail and make yourselves mad;
Blind feet that feel for the track where highway is none to be had.
Therefore the God that ye make you is grievous, and gives not aid,
Because it is but for your sake that the God of your making is made.
Thou and I and he are not gods made men for a span,
But God, if a God there be, is the substance of men which is man.
Our lives are as pulses or pores of his manifold body and breath;
As waves of his sea on the shores where birth is the beacon of death.
We men, the multiform features of man, whatsoever we be,
Recreate him of whom we are creatures, and all we only are he.
Not each man of all men is God, but God is the fruit of the whole;
Indivisible spirit and blood, indiscernible body from soul.
Not men's but man's is the glory of godhead, the kingdom of time,
The mountainous ages made hoary with snows for the spirit to climb.

A God with the world inwound whose clay to his footsole clings;
A manifold God fast-bound as with iron of adverse things.
A soul that labours and lives, an emotion, a strenuous breath,
From the flame that its own mouth gives reillumed, and refreshed with death.
In the sea whereof centuries are waves the live God plunges and swims;
His bed is in all men's graves, but the worm hath not hold on his limbs.
Night puts out not his eyes, nor time sheds change on his head;
With such fire as the stars of the skies are the roots of his heart are fed.
Men are the thoughts passing through it, the veins that fulfil it with blood,
With spirit of sense to renew it as springs fulfilling a flood.
Men are the heartbeats of man, the plumes that feather his wings,
Storm-worn, since being began, with the wind and thunder of things.
Things are cruel and blind; their strength detains and deforms:
And the wearying wings of the mind still beat up the stream of their storms.
Still, as one swimming up stream, they strike out blind in the blast,
In thunders of vision and dream, and lightnings of future and past.
We are baffled and caught in the current and bruised upon edges of shoals;
As weeds or as reeds in the torrent of things are the wind-shaken souls.
Spirit by spirit goes under, a foam-bell's bubble of breath,
That blows and opens in sunder and blurs not the mirror of death.
For a worm or a thorn in his path is a man's soul quenched as a flame;
For his lust of an hour or his wrath shall the worm and the man be the same.
O God sore stricken of things! they have wrought him a raiment of pain;
Can a God shut eyelids and wings at a touch on the nerves of the brain?
O shamed and sorrowful God, whose force goes out at a blow!
What world shall shake at his nod? at his coming what wilderness glow?
What help in the work of his hands? what light in the track of his feet?
His days are snowflakes or sands, with cold to consume him and heat.
He is servant with Change for lord, and for wages he hath to his hire
Folly and force, and a sword that devours, and a ravening fire.
From the bed of his birth to his grave he is driven as a wind at their will;
Lest Change bow down as his slave, and the storm and the sword be still;
Lest earth spread open her wings to the sunward, and sing with the spheres;
Lest man be master of things, to prevail on their forces and fears.
By the spirit are things overcome; they are stark, and the spirit hath breath;
It hath speech, and their forces are dumb; it is living, and things are of death.
But they know not the spirit for master, they feel not force from above,
While man makes love to disaster, and woos desolation with love.
Yea, himself too hath made himself chains, and his own hands plucked out his eyes;
For his own soul only constrains him, his own mouth only denies.
The herds of kings and their hosts and the flocks of the high priests bow
To a master whose face is a ghost's; O thou that wast God, is it thou?
Thou madest man in the garden; thou temptedst man, and he fell;
Thou gavest him poison and pardon for blood and burnt-offering to sell.
Thou hast sealed thine elect to salvation, fast locked with faith for the key;
Make now for thyself expiation, and be thine atonement for thee.
Ah, thou that darkenest heaven--ah, thou that bringest a sword -
By the crimes of thine hands unforgiven they beseech thee to hear them, O Lord.
By the balefires of ages that burn for thine incense, by creed and by rood,
By the famine and passion that yearn and that hunger to find of thee food,
By the children that asked at thy throne of the priests that were fat with thine hire
For bread, and thou gavest a stone; for light, and thou madest them fire;

By the kiss of thy peace like a snake's kiss, that leaves the soul rotten at root;
By the savours of gibbets and stakes thou hast planted to bear to thee fruit;
By torture and terror and treason, that make to thee weapons and wings;
By thy power upon men for a season, made out of the malice of things;
O thou that hast built thee a shrine of the madness of man and his shame,
And hast hung in the midst for a sign of his worship the lamp of thy name;
That hast shown him for heaven in a vision a void world's shadow and shell,
And hast fed thy delight and derision with fire of belief as of hell;
That hast fleshed on the souls that believe thee the fang of the death-worm fear,
With anguish of dreams to deceive them whose faith cries out in thine ear;
By the face of the spirit confounded before thee and humbled in dust,
By the dread wherewith life was astounded and shamed out of sense of its trust,
By the scourges of doubt and repentance that fell on the soul at thy nod,
Thou art judged, O judge, and the sentence is gone forth against thee, O God.
Thy slave that slept is awake; thy slave but slept for a span;
Yea, man thy slave shall unmake thee, who made thee lord over man.
For his face is set to the east, his feet on the past and its dead;
The sun rearisen is his priest, and the heat thereof hallows his head.
His eyes take part in the morning; his spirit out-sounding the sea
Asks no more witness or warning from temple or tripod or tree.
He hath set the centuries at union; the night is afraid at his name;
Equal with life, in communion with death, he hath found them the same.
Past the wall unsurmounted that bars out our vision with iron and fire
He hath sent forth his soul for the stars to comply with and suns to conspire.
His thought takes flight for the centre wherethrough it hath part in the whole;
The abysses forbid it not enter: the stars make room for the soul.
Space is the soul's to inherit; the night is hers as the day;
Lo, saith man, this is my spirit; how shall not the worlds make way?
Space is thought's, and the wonders thereof, and the secret of space;
Is thought not more than the thunders and lightnings? shall thought give place?
Is the body not more than the vesture, the life not more than the meat?
The will than the word or the gesture, the heart than the hands or the feet?
Is the tongue not more than the speech is? the head not more than the crown?
And if higher than is heaven be the reach of the soul, shall not heaven bow down?
Time, father of life, and more great than the life it begat and began,
Earth's keeper and heaven's and their fate, lives, thinks, and hath substance in man.
Time's motion that throbs in his blood is the thought that gives heart to the skies,
And the springs of the fire that is food to the sunbeams are light to his eyes.
The minutes that beat with his heart are the words to which worlds keep chime,
And the thought in his pulses is part of the blood and the spirit of time.
He saith to the ages, Give; and his soul foregoes not her share;
Who are ye that forbid him to live, and would feed him with heavenlier air?
Will ye feed him with poisonous dust, and restore him with hemlock for drink,
Till he yield you his soul up in trust, and have heart not to know or to think?
He hath stirred him, and found out the flaw in his fetters, and cast them behind;
His soul to his soul is a law, and his mind is a light to his mind.
The seal of his knowledge is sure, the truth and his spirit are wed;
Men perish, but man shall endure; lives die, but the life is not dead.
He hath sight of the secrets of season, the roots of the years and the fruits;
His soul is at one with the reason of things that is sap to the roots.
He can hear in their changes a sound as the conscience of consonant spheres;
He can see through the years flowing round him the law lying under the years.

Who are ye that would bind him with curses and blind him with vapour of prayer?
Your might is as night that disperses when light is alive in the air.
The bow of your godhead is broken, the arm of your conquest is stayed;
Though ye call down God to bear token, for fear of you none is afraid.
Will ye turn back times, and the courses of stars, and the season of souls?
Shall God's breath dry up the sources that feed time full as it rolls?
Nay, cry on him then till he show you a sign, till he lift up a rod;
Hath he made not the nations to know him of old if indeed he be God?
Is no heat of him left in the ashes of thousands burnt up for his sake?
Can prayer not rekindle the flashes that shone in his face from the stake?
Cry aloud; for your God is a God and a Saviour; cry, make yourselves lean;
Is he drunk or asleep, that the rod of his wrath is unfelt and unseen?
Is the fire of his old loving-kindness gone out, that his pyres are acold?
Hath he gazed on himself unto blindness, who made men blind to behold?
Cry out, for his kingdom is shaken; cry out, for the people blaspheme;
Cry aloud till his godhead awaken; what doth he to sleep and to dream?
Cry, cut yourselves, gash you with knives and with scourges, heap on to you dust;
Is his life but as other gods' lives? is not this the Lord God of your trust?
Is not this the great God of your sires, that with souls and with bodies was fed,
And the world was on flame with his fires? O fools, he was God, and is dead.
He will hear not again the strong crying of earth in his ears as before,
And the fume of his multitudes dying shall flatter his nostrils no more.
By the spirit he ruled as his slave is he slain who was mighty to slay,
And the stone that is sealed on his grave he shall rise not and roll not away.
Yea, weep to him, lift up your hands; be your eyes as a fountain of tears;
Where he stood there is nothing that stands; if he call, there is no man that hears.
He hath doffed his king's raiment of lies now the wane of his kingdom is come;
Ears hath he, and hears not; and eyes, and he sees not; and mouth, and is dumb.
His red king's raiment is ripped from him naked, his staff broken down;
And the signs of his empire are stripped from him shuddering; and where is his crown?
And in vain by the wellsprings refrozen ye cry for the warmth of his sun -
O God, the Lord God of thy chosen, thy will in thy kingdom be done.
Kingdom and will hath he none in him left him, nor warmth in his breath;
Till his corpse be cast out of the sun will ye know not the truth of his death?
Surely, ye say, he is strong, though the times be against him and men;
Yet a little, ye say, and how long, till he come to show judgment again?
Shall God then die as the beasts die? who is it hath broken his rod?
O God, Lord God of thy priests, rise up now and show thyself God.
They cry out, thine elect, thine aspirants to heavenward, whose faith is as flame;
O thou the Lord God of our tyrants, they call thee, their God, by thy name.
By thy name that in hell-fire was written, and burned at the point of thy sword,
Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art smitten; thy death is upon thee, O Lord.
And the love-song of earth as thou diest resounds through the wind of her wings -
Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Hymn to Proserpine (After the Proclamation of the Christian

Vicisti, Galilæe
I have lived long enough, having seen one thing, that love hath an end;
Goddess and maiden and queen, be near me now and befriend.
Thou art more than the day or the morrow, the seasons that laugh or that weep;
For these give joy and sorrow; but thou, Proserpina, sleep.
Sweet is the treading of wine, and sweet the feet of the dove;
But a goodlier gift is thine than foam of the grapes or love.
Yea, is not even Apollo, with hair and harpstring of gold,
A bitter God to follow, a beautiful God to behold?
I am sick of singing; the bays burn deep and chafe: I am fain
To rest a little from praise and grievous pleasure and pain.
For the Gods we know not of, who give us our daily breath,
We know they are cruel as love or life, and lovely as death.
O Gods dethroned and deceased, cast forth, wiped out in a day!
From your wrath is the world released, redeemed from your chains, men say.
New Gods are crowned in the city; their flowers have broken your rods;
They are merciful, clothed with pity, the young compassionate Gods.
But for me their new device is barren, the days are bare;
Things long past over suffice, and men forgotten that were.
Time and the Gods are at strife; ye dwell in the midst thereof,
Draining a little life from the barren breasts of love.
I say to you, cease, take rest; yea, I say to you all, be at peace,
Till the bitter milk of her breast and the barren bosom shall cease.
Wilt thou take all, Galilean? but these thou shalt not take,
The laurel, the palms and the paean, the breasts of the nymphs in the brake;
Breasts more soft than a dove's, that tremble with tenderer breath;
And all the wings of the Loves, and all the joy before death;
All the feet of the hours that sound as a single lyre,
Dropped and deep in the flowers, with strings that flicker like fire.
More than these wilt thou give, things fairer than all these things?
Nay, for a little we live, and life hath mutable wings.
A little while and we die; shall life not thrive as it may?
For no man under the sky lives twice, outliving his day.
And grief is a grievous thing, and a man hath enough of his tears:
Why should he labour, and bring fresh grief to blacken his years?
Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath;
We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fullness of death.
Laurel is green for a season, and love is sweet for a day;
But love grows bitter with treason, and laurel outlives not May.
Sleep, shall we sleep after all? for the world is not sweet in the end;
For the old faiths loosen and fall, the new years ruin and rend.
Fate is a sea without shore, and the soul is a rock that abides;
But her ears are vexed with the roar and her face with the foam of the tides.
O lips that the live blood faints in, the leavings of racks and rods!
O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted Gods!
Though all men abase them before you in spirit, and all knees bend,
I kneel not neither adore you, but standing, look to the end.
All delicate days and pleasant, all spirits and sorrows are cast
Far out with the foam of the present that sweeps to the surf of the past:
Where beyond the extreme sea-wall, and between the remote sea-gates,
Waste water washes, and tall ships founder, and deep death waits:
Where, mighty with deepening sides, clad about with the seas as with wings,

And impelled of invisible tides, and fulfilled of unspeakable things,
White-eyed and poisonous-finned, shark-toothed and serpentine-curled,
Rolls, under the whitening wind of the future, the wave of the world.
The depths stand naked in sunder behind it, the storms flee away;
In the hollow before it the thunder is taken and snared as a prey;
In its sides is the north-wind bound; and its salt is of all men's tears;
With light of ruin, and sound of changes, and pulse of years:
With travail of day after day, and with trouble of hour upon hour;
And bitter as blood is the spray; and the crests are as fangs that devour:
And its vapour and storm of its steam as the sighing of spirits to be;
And its noise as the noise in a dream; and its depth as the roots of the sea:
And the height of its heads as the height of the utmost stars of the air:
And the ends of the earth at the might thereof tremble, and time is made bare.
Will ye bridle the deep sea with reins, will ye chasten the high sea with rods?
Will ye take her to chain her with chains, who is older than all ye Gods?
All ye as a wind shall go by, as a fire shall ye pass and be past;
Ye are Gods, and behold, ye shall die, and the waves be upon you at last.
In the darkness of time, in the deeps of the years, in the changes of things,
Ye shall sleep as a slain man sleeps, and the world shall forget you for kings.
Though the feet of thine high priests tread where thy lords and our forefathers trod,
Though these that were Gods are dead, and thou being dead art a God,
Though before thee the throned Cytherean be fallen, and hidden her head,
Yet thy kingdom shall pass, Galilean, thy dead shall go down to thee dead.
Of the maiden thy mother men sing as a goddess with grace clad around;
Thou art throned where another was king; where another was queen she is crowned.
Yea, once we had sight of another: but now she is queen, say these.
Not as thine, not as thine was our mother, a blossom of flowering seas,
Clothed round with the world's desire as with raiment, and fair as the foam,
And fleeter than kindled fire, and a goddess, and mother of Rome.
For thine came pale and a maiden, and sister to sorrow; but ours,
Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of flowers,
White rose of the rose-white water, a silver splendour, a flame,
Bent down unto us that besought her, and earth grew sweet with her name.
For thine came weeping, a slave among slaves, and rejected; but she
Came flushed from the full-flushed wave, and imperial, her foot on the sea.
And the wonderful waters knew her, the winds and the viewless ways,
And the roses grew rosier, and bluer the sea-blue stream of the bays.
Ye are fallen, our lords, by what token? we wise that ye should not fall.
Ye were all so fair that are broken; and one more fair than ye all.
But I turn to her still, having seen she shall surely abide in the end;
Goddess and maiden and queen, be near me now and befriend.
O daughter of earth, of my mother, her crown and blossom of birth,
I am also, I also, thy brother; I go as I came unto earth.
In the night where thine eyes are as moons are in heaven, the night where thou art,
Where the silence is more than all tunes, where sleep overflows from the heart,
Where the poppies are sweet as the rose in our world, and the red rose is white,
And the wind falls faint as it blows with the fume of the flowers of the night,
And the murmur of spirits that sleep in the shadow of Gods from afar
Grows dim in thine ears and deep as the deep dim soul of a star,
In the sweet low light of thy face, under heavens untrod by the sun,
Let my soul with their souls find place, and forget what is done and undone.
Thou art more than the Gods who number the days of our temporal breath;

Let these give labour and slumber; but thou, Proserpina, death.
Therefore now at thy feet I abide for a season in silence. I know
I shall die as my fathers died, and sleep as they sleep, even so.
For the glass of the years is brittle wherein we gaze for a span;
A little soul for a little bears up this corpse which is man.
So long I endure, no longer; and laugh not again, neither weep.
For there is no God found stronger than death; and death is a sleep.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Ilicet

THERE is an end of joy and sorrow;
Peace all day long, all night, all morrow,
But never a time to laugh or weep.
The end is come of pleasant places,
The end of tender words and faces,
The end of all, the poppied sleep.

No place for sound within their hearing,
No room to hope, no time for fearing,
No lips to laugh, no lids for tears.
The old years have run out all their measure;
No chance of pain, no chance of pleasure,
No fragment of the broken years.

Outside of all the worlds and ages,
There where the fool is as the sage is,
There where the slayer is clean of blood,
No end, no passage, no beginning,
There where the sinner leaves off sinning,
There where the good man is not good.

There is not one thing with another,
But Evil saith to Good: My brother,
My brother, I am one with thee:
They shall not strive nor cry for ever:
No man shall choose between them: never
Shall this thing end and that thing be.

Wind wherein seas and stars are shaken
Shall shake them, and they shall not waken;
None that has lain down shall arise;
The stones are sealed across their places;
One shadow is shed on all their faces,
One blindness cast on all their eyes.

Sleep, is it sleep perchance that covers
Each face, as each face were his lover's?
Farewell; as men that sleep fare well.
The grave's mouth laughs unto derision
Desire and dread and dream and vision,
Delight of heaven and sorrow of hell.

No soul shall tell nor lip shall number
The names and tribes of you that slumber;
No memory, no memorial.
"Thou knowest"—who shall say thou knowest?
There is none highest and none lowest:
An end, an end, an end of all.

Good night, good sleep, good rest from sorrow
To these that shall not have good morrow;
The gods be gentle to all these.

Nay, if death be not, how shall they be?
Nay, is there help in heaven? it may be
All things and lords of things shall cease.

The stooped urn, filling, dips and flashes;
The bronzèd brims are deep in ashes;
The pale old lips of death are fed.
Shall this dust gather flesh hereafter?
Shall one shed tears or fall to laughter,
At sight of all these poor old dead?

Nay, as thou wilt; these know not of it;
Thine eyes' strong weeping shall not profit,
Thy laughter shall not give thee ease;
Cry aloud, spare not, cease not crying,
Sigh, till thou cleave thy sides with sighing,
Thou shalt not raise up one of these.

Burnt spices flash, and burnt wine hisses,
The breathing flame's mouth curls and kisses
The small dried rows of frankincense;
All round the sad red blossoms smoulder,
Flowers coloured like the fire, but colder,
In sign of sweet things taken hence;

Yea, for their sake and in death's favour
Things of sweet shape and of sweet savour
We yield them, spice and flower and wine;
Yea, costlier things than wine or spices,
Whereof none knoweth how great the price is,
And fruit that comes not of the vine.

From boy's pierced throat and girl's pierced bosom
Drips, reddening round the blood-red blossom,
The slow delicious bright soft blood,
Bathing the spices and the pyre,
Bathing the flowers and fallen fire,
Bathing the blossom by the bud.

Roses whose lips the flame has deadened
Drink till the lapping leaves are reddened
And warm wet inner petals weep;
The flower whereof sick sleep gets leisure,
Barren of balm and purple pleasure,
Fumes with no native steam of sleep.

Why will ye weep? what do ye weeping?
For waking folk and people sleeping,
And sands that fill and sands that fall,
The days rose-red, the poppied hours,
Blood, wine, and spice and fire and flowers,
There is one end of one and all.

Shall such an one lend love or borrow?
Shall these be sorry for thy sorrow?
Shall these give thanks for words or breath?
Their hate is as their loving-kindness;
The frontlet of their brows is blindness,
The armlet of their arms is death.

Lo, for no noise or light of thunder
Shall these grave-clothes be rent in sunder;
He that hath taken, shall he give?
He hath rent them: shall he bind together?
He hath bound them: shall he break the tether?
He hath slain them: shall he bid them live?

A little sorrow, a little pleasure,
Fate metes us from the dusty measure
That holds the date of all of us;
We are born with travail and strong crying,
And from the birth-day to the dying
The likeness of our life is thus.

One girds himself to serve another,
Whose father was the dust, whose mother
The little dead red worm therein;
They find no fruit of things they cherish;
The goodness of a man shall perish,
It shall be one thing with his sin.

In deep wet ways by grey old gardens
Fed with sharp spring the sweet fruit hardens;
They know not what fruits wane or grow;
Red summer burns to the utmost ember;
They know not, neither can remember,
The old years and flowers they used to know.

Ah, for their sakes, so trapped and taken,
For theirs, forgotten and forsaken,
Watch, sleep not, gird thyself with prayer.
Nay, where the heart of wrath is broken,
Where long love ends as a thing spoken,
How shall thy crying enter there?

Though the iron sides of the old world falter,
The likeness of them shall not alter
For all the rumour of periods,
The stars and seasons that come after,
The tears of latter men, the laughter
Of the old unalterable gods.

Far up above the years and nations,
The high gods, clothed and crowned with patience,

Endure through days of deathlike date;
They bear the witness of things hidden;
Before their eyes all life stands chidden,
As they before the eyes of Fate.

Not for their love shall Fate retire,
Nor they relent for our desire,
Nor the graves open for their call.
The end is more than joy and anguish,
Than lives that laugh and lives that languish,
The poppied sleep, the end of all.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

In Guernsey - To Theodore Watts

The heavenly bay, ringed round with cliffs and moors,
Storm-stained ravines, and crags that lawns inlay,
Soothes as with love the rocks whose guard secures
  The heavenly bay.

O friend, shall time take ever this away,
This blessing given of beauty that endures,
This glory shown us, not to pass but stay?

Though sight be changed for memory, love ensures
What memory, changed by love to sight, would say -
The word that seals for ever mine and yours
  The heavenly bay.

II.

My mother sea, my fostress, what new strand,
What new delight of waters, may this be,
The fairest found since time's first breezes fanned
  My mother sea?

Once more I give me body and soul to thee,
Who hast my soul for ever: cliff and sand
Recede, and heart to heart once more are we.

My heart springs first and plunges, ere my hand
Strike out from shore: more close it brings to me,
More near and dear than seems my fatherland,
  My mother sea.

III.

Across and along, as the bay's breadth opens, and o'er us
Wild autumn exults in the wind, swift rapture and strong
Impels us, and broader the wide waves brighten before us
  Across and along.

The whole world's heart is uplifted, and knows not wrong;
The whole world's life is a chant to the sea-tide's chorus;
Are we not as waves of the water, as notes of the song?

Like children unworn of the passions and toils that wore us,
We breast for a season the breadth of the seas that throng,
Rejoicing as they, to be borne as of old they bore us
  Across and along.

IV.

On Dante's track by some funereal spell
Drawn down through desperate ways that lead not back
We seem to move, bound forth past flood and fell
  On Dante's track.

The grey path ends: the gaunt rocks gape: the black
Deep hollow tortuous night, a soundless shell,
Glares darkness: are the fires of old grown slack?

Nay, then, what flames are these that leap and swell
As 'twere to show, where earth's foundations crack,
The secrets of the sepulchres of hell
  On Dante's track?

V.

By mere men's hands the flame was lit, we know,
From heaps of dry waste whin and casual brands:
Yet, knowing, we scarce believe it kindled so
  By mere men's hands.

Above, around, high-vaulted hell expands,
Steep, dense, a labyrinth walled and roofed with woe,
Whose mysteries even itself not understands.

The scorn in Farinata's eyes aglow
Seems visible in this flame: there Geryon stands:
No stage of earth's is here, set forth to show
  By mere men's hands.

VI.

Night, in utmost noon forlorn and strong, with heart athirst and fasting,
Hungers here, barred up for ever, whence as one whom dreams affright
Day recoils before the low-browed lintel threatening doom and casting
  Night.

All the reefs and islands, all the lawns and highlands, clothed with light,
Laugh for love's sake in their sleep outside: but here the night speaks, blasting
Day with silent speech and scorn of all things known from depth to height.

Lower than dive the thoughts of spirit-stricken fear in souls forecasting
Hell, the deep void seems to yawn beyond fear's reach, and higher than sight
Rise the walls and roofs that compass it about with everlasting
   Night.

VII.

The house accurst, with cursing sealed and signed,
Heeds not what storms about it burn and burst:
No fear more fearful than its own may find
  The house accurst.

Barren as crime, anhungered and athirst,
Blank miles of moor sweep inland, sere and blind,
Where summer's best rebukes not winter's worst.

The low bleak tower with nought save wastes behind
Stares down the abyss whereon chance reared and nursed
This type and likeness of the accurst man's mind,
  The house accurst.

VIII.

Beloved and blest, lit warm with love and fame,
The house that had the light of the earth for guest
Hears for his name's sake all men hail its name
  Beloved and blest.

This eyrie was the homeless eagle's nest
When storm laid waste his eyrie: hence he came
Again, when storm smote sore his mother's breast.

Bow down men bade us, or be clothed with blame
And mocked for madness: worst, they sware, was best:
But grief shone here, while joy was one with shame,
  Beloved and blest.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

In Harbour

I.

Goodnight and goodbye to the life whose signs denote us
As mourners clothed with regret for the life gone by;
To the waters of gloom whence winds of the dayspring float us
  Goodnight and goodbye.

A time is for mourning, a season for grief to sigh;
But were we not fools and blind, by day to devote us
As thralls to the darkness, unseen of the sundawn's eye?

We have drunken of Lethe at length, we have eaten of lotus;
What hurts it us here that sorrows are born and die?
We have said to the dream that caressed and the dread that smote us
  Goodnight and goodbye.

II.

Outside of the port ye are moored in, lying
Close from the wind and at ease from the tide,
What sounds come swelling, what notes fall dying
  Outside?

They will not cease, they will not abide:
Voices of presage in darkness crying
Pass and return and relapse aside.

Ye see not, but hear ye not wild wings flying
To the future that wakes from the past that died?
Is grief still sleeping, is joy not sighing
  Outside?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

In Memory of Walter Savage Landor

Back to the flower-town, side by side,
The bright months bring,
New-born, the bridegroom and the bride,
Freedom and spring.
The sweet land laughs from sea to sea,
Filled full of sun;
All things come back to her, being free;
All things but one.
In many a tender wheaten plot
Flowers that were dead
Live, and old suns revive; but not
That holier head.

By this white wandering waste of sea,
Far north, I hear
One face shall never turn to me
As once this year:

Shall never smile and turn and rest
On mine as there,
Nor one most sacred hand be prest
Upon my hair.

I came as one whose thoughts half linger,
Half run before;
The youngest to the oldest singer
That England bore.

I found him whom I shall not find
Till all grief end,
In holiest age our mightiest mind,
Father and friend.

But thou, if anything endure,
If hope there be,
O spirit that man's life left pure,
Man's death set free,

Not with disdain of days that were
Look earthward now;
Let dreams revive the reverend hair,
The imperial brow;

Come back in sleep, for in the life
Where thou art not
We find none like thee. Time and strife
And the world's lot

Move thee no more; but love at least
And reverent heart
May move thee, royal and released,
Soul, as thou art.

And thou, his Florence, to thy trust
Receive and keep,
Keep safe his dedicated dust,
His sacred sleep.

So shall thy lovers, come from far,
Mix with thy name
As morning-star with evening-star
His faultless fame.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

In San Lorenzo

Is thine hour come to wake, O slumbering Night?
  Hath not the Dawn a message in thine ear?
  Though thou be stone and sleep, yet shalt thou hear
When the word falls from heaven--Let there be light.
Thou knowest we would not do thee the despite
  To wake thee while the old sorrow and shame were near;
  We spake not loud for thy sake, and for fear
Lest thou shouldst lose the rest that was thy right,
The blessing given thee that was thine alone,
The happiness to sleep and to be stone:
  Nay, we kept silence of thee for thy sake
Albeit we knew thee alive, and left with thee
The great good gift to feel not nor to see;
  But will not yet thine Angel bid thee wake?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

In Sark

Abreast and ahead of the sea is a crag's front cloven asunder
With strong sea-breach and with wasting of winds whence terror is shed
As a shadow of death from the wings of the darkness on waters that thunder
  Abreast and ahead.

At its edge is a sepulchre hollowed and hewn for a lone man's bed,
Propped open with rock and agape on the sky and the sea thereunder,
But roofed and walled in well from the wrath of them slept its dead.

Here might not a man drink rapture of rest, or delight above wonder,
Beholding, a soul disembodied, the days and the nights that fled,
With splendour and sound of the tempest around and above him and under,
  Abreast and ahead?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

In the Bay

I

Beyond the hollow sunset, ere a star
Take heart in heaven from eastward, while the west,
Fulfilled of watery resonance and rest,
Is as a port with clouds for harbour bar
To fold the fleet in of the winds from far
That stir no plume now of the bland sea's breast:II
Above the soft sweep of the breathless bay
Southwestward, far past flight of night and day,
Lower than the sunken sunset sinks, and higher
Than dawn can freak the front of heaven with fire,
My thought with eyes and wings made wide makes way
To find the place of souls that I desire.III

If any place for any soul there be,
Disrobed and disentrammelled; if the might
The fire and force that filled with ardent light
The souls whose shadow is half the light we see,
Survive and be suppressed not of the night;
This hour should show what all day hid from me.IV

Night knows not, neither is it shown to day,
By sunlight nor by starlight is it shown,
Nor to the full moon's eye nor footfall known,
Their world's untrodden and unkindled way.
Nor is the breath nor music of it blown
With sounds of winter or with winds of May.V

But here, where light and darkness reconciled
Held earth between them as a weanling child
Between the balanced hands of death and birth,
Even as they held the new-born shape of earth
When first life trembled in her limbs and smiled,
Here hope might think to find what hope were worth.VI

Past Hades, past Elysium, past the long
Slow smooth strong lapse of Lethe--past the toil
Wherein all souls are taken as a spoil,
The Stygian web of waters--if your song
Be quenched not, O our brethren, but be strong
As ere ye too shook off our temporal coil;VII

If yet these twain survive your worldly breath,
Joy trampling sorrow, life devouring death,
If perfect life possess your life all through
And like your words your souls be deathless too,
To-night, of all whom night encompasseth,
My soul would commune with one soul of you.VIII

Above the sunset might I see thine eyes
That were above the sundawn in our skies,
Son of the songs of morning,--thine that were

First lights to lighten that rekindling air
Wherethrough men saw the front of England rise
And heard thine loudest of the lyre-notes there--IX

If yet thy fire have not one spark the less,
O Titan, born of her a Titaness,
Across the sunrise and the sunset's mark
Send of thy lyre one sound, thy fire one spark,
To change this face of our unworthiness,
Across this hour dividing light from dark.X

To change this face of our chill time, that hears
No song like thine of all that crowd its ears,
Of all its lights that lighten all day long
Sees none like thy most fleet and fiery sphere's
Outlightening Sirius--in its twilight throng
No thunder and no sunrise like thy song. XI

Hath not the sea-wind swept the sea-line bare
To pave with stainless fire through stainless air
A passage for thine heavenlier feet to tread
Ungrieved of earthly floor-work? hath it spread
No covering splendid as the sun-god's hair
To veil or to reveal thy lordlier head?XII

Hath not the sunset shown across the sea
A way majestical enough for thee?
What hour save this should be thine hour--and mine,
If thou have care of any less divine
Than thine own soul; if thou take thought of me,
Marlowe, as all my soul takes thought of thine?XIII

Before the morn's face as before the sun
The morning star and evening star are one
For all men's lands as England. O, if night
Hang hard upon us,--ere our day take flight,
Shed thou some comfort from thy day long done
On us pale children of the latter light!XIV

For surely, brother and master and lord and king,
Where'er thy footfall and thy face make spring
In all souls' eyes that meet thee wheresoe'er,
And have thy soul for sunshine and sweet air--
Some late love of thine old live land should cling,
Some living love of England, round thee there.XV

Here from her shore across her sunniest sea
My soul makes question of the sun for thee,
And waves and beams make answer. When thy feet
Made her ways flowerier and their flowers more sweet
With childlike passage of a god to be,
Like spray these waves cast off her foemen's fleet.XVI

Like foam they flung it from her, and like weed
Its wrecks were washed from scornful shoal to shoal,
From rock to rock reverberate; and the whole
Sea laughed and lightened with a deathless deed
That sowed our enemies in her field for seed
And made her shores fit harbourage for thy soul.XVII

Then in her green south fields, a poor man's child,
Thou hadst thy short sweet fill of half-blown joy,
That ripens all of us for time to cloy
With full-blown pain and passion; ere the wild
World caught thee by the fiery heart, and smiled
To make so swift end of the godlike boy.XVIII

For thou, if ever godlike foot there trod
These fields of ours, wert surely like a god.
Who knows what splendour of strange dreams was shed
With sacred shadow and glimmer of gold and red
From hallowed windows, over stone and sod,
On thine unbowed bright insubmissive head?XIX

The shadow stayed not, but the splendour stays,
Our brother, till the last of English days.
No day nor night on English earth shall be
For ever, spring nor summer, Junes nor Mays,
But somewhat as a sound or gleam of thee
Shall come on us like morning from the sea.XX

Like sunrise never wholly risen, nor yet
Quenched; or like sunset never wholly set,
A light to lighten as from living eyes
The cold unlit close lids of one that lies
Dead, or a ray returned from death's far skies
To fire us living lest our lives forget.XXI

For in that heaven what light of lights may be,
What splendour of what stars, what spheres of flame
Sounding, that none may number nor may name,
We know not, even thy brethren; yea, not we
Whose eyes desire the light that lightened thee,
Whose ways and thine are one way and the same.XXII

But if the riddles that in sleep we read,
And trust them not, be flattering truth indeed,
As he that rose our mightiest called them,--he,
Much higher than thou as thou much higher than we--

There, might we say, all flower of all our seed,
All singing souls are as one sounding sea.XXXIII

All those that here were of thy kind and kin,
Beside thee and below thee, full of love,
Full-souled for song,--and one alone above
Whose only light folds all your glories in--
With all birds' notes from nightingale to dove
Fill the world whither we too fain would win.XXIV

The world that sees in heaven the sovereign light
Of sunlike Shakespeare, and the fiery night
Whose stars were watched of Webster; and beneath,
The twin-souled brethren of the single wreath,
Grown in kings' gardens, plucked from pastoral heath,
Wrought with all flowers for all men's heart's delight.XXV

And that fixed fervour, iron-red like Mars,
In the mid moving tide of tenderer stars,
That burned on loves and deeds the darkest done,
Athwart the incestuous prisoner's bride-house bars;
And thine, most highest of all their fires but one,
Our morning star, sole risen before the sun.XXVI

And one light risen since theirs to run such race
Thou hast seen, O Phosphor, from thy pride of place.
Thou hast seen Shelley, him that was to thee
As light to fire or dawn to lightning; me,
Me likewise, O our brother, shalt thou see,
And I behold thee, face to glorious face?XXVII

You twain the same swift year of manhood swept
Down the steep darkness, and our father wept.
And from the gleam of Apollonian tears
A holier aureole rounds your memories, kept
Most fervent-fresh of all the singing spheres,
And April-coloured through all months and years.XXVIII

You twain fate spared not half your fiery span;
The longer date fulfils the lesser man.
Ye from beyond the dark dividing date
Stand smiling, crowned as gods with foot on fate.
For stronger was your blessing than his ban,
And earliest whom he struck, he struck too late.XXIX

Yet love and loathing, faith and unfaith yet
Bind less to greater souls in unison,
And one desire that makes three spirits as one
Takes great and small as in one spiritual net
Woven out of hope toward what shall yet be done
Ere hate or love remember or forget.XXX

Woven out of faith and hope and love too great
To bear the bonds of life and death and fate:
Woven out of love and hope and faith too dear
To take the print of doubt and change and fear:
And interwoven with lines of wrath and hate
Blood-red with soils of many a sanguine year.XXXI

Who cannot hate, can love not; if he grieve,
His tears are barren as the unfruitful rain
That rears no harvest from the green sea's plain,
And as thorns crackling this man's laugh is vain.
Nor can belief touch, kindle, smite, reprieve
His heart who has not heart to disbelieve.XXXII

But you, most perfect in your hate and love,
Our great twin-spirited brethren; you that stand
Head by head glittering, hand made fast in hand,
And underfoot the fang-drawn worm that strove
To wound you living; from so far above,
Look love, not scorn, on ours that was your land.XXXIII

For love we lack, and help and heat and light
To clothe us and to comfort us with might.
What help is ours to take or give? but ye--
O, more than sunrise to the blind cold sea,
That wailed aloud with all her waves all night,
Much more, being much more glorious, should you be.XXXIV

As fire to frost, as ease to toil, as dew
To flowerless fields, as sleep to slackening pain,
As hope to souls long weaned from hope again
Returning, or as blood revived anew
To dry-drawn limbs and every pulseless vein,
Even so toward us should no man be but you.XXXV

One rose before the sunrise was, and one
Before the sunset, lovelier than the sun.
And now the heaven is dark and bright and loud
With wind and starry drift and moon and cloud,

And night's cry rings in straining sheet and shroud,
What help is ours if hope like yours be none?XXXVI

O well-beloved, our brethren, if ye be,
Then are we not forsaken. This kind earth
Made fragrant once for all time with your birth,
And bright for all men with your love, and worth
The clasp and kiss and wedlock of the sea,
Were not your mother if not your brethren we.XXXVII

Because the days were dark with gods and kings
And in time's hand the old hours of time as rods,
When force and fear set hope and faith at odds,
Ye failed not nor abased your plume-plucked wings;
And we that front not more disastrous things,
How should we fail in face of kings and gods?XXXVIII

For now the deep dense plumes of night are thinned
Surely with winnowing of the glimmering wind
Whose feet we fledged with morning; and the breath
Begins in heaven that sings the dark to death.
And all the night wherein men groaned and sinned
Sickens at heart to hear what sundawn saith.XXXIX

O first-born sons of hope and fairest, ye
Whose prows first clove the thought-unsounded sea
Whence all the dark dead centuries rose to bar
The spirit of man lest truth should make him free,
The sunrise and the sunset, seeing one star,
Take heart as we to know you that ye are.XL

Ye rise not and ye set not; we that say
Ye rise and set like hopes that set and rise
Look yet but seaward from a land-locked bay;
But where at last the sea's line is the sky's
And truth and hope one sunlight in your eyes,
No sunrise and no sunset marks their day.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

In The Orchard

LEAVE go my hands, let me catch breath and see;
Let the dew-fall drench either side of me;
Clear apple-leaves are soft upon that moon
Seen sidelong like a blossom in the tree;
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon.

The grass is thick and cool, it lets us lie.
Kissed upon either cheek and either eye,
I turn to thee as some green afternoon
Turns toward sunset, and is loth to die;
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon.

Lie closer, lean your face upon my side,
Feel where the dew fell that has hardly dried,
Hear how the blood beats that went nigh to swoon;
The pleasure lives there when the sense has died;
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon.

O my fair lord, I charge you leave me this:
Is it not sweeter than a foolish kiss?
Nay take it then, my flower, my first in June,
My rose, so like a tender mouth it is:
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon.

Love, till dawn sunder night from day with fire,
Dividing my delight and my desire,
The crescent life and love the plenilune,
Love me though dusk begin and dark retire;
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon.

Ah, my heart fails, my blood draws back; I know,
When life runs over, life is near to go;
And with the slain of love love’s ways are strewn,
And with their blood, if love will have it so;
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon.

Ah, do thy will now; slay me if thou wilt;
There is no building now the walls are built,
No quarrying now the corner-stone is hewn,
No drinking now the vine’s whole blood is spilt;
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon.

Nay, slay me now; nay, for I will be slain;
Pluck thy red pleasure from the teeth of pain,
Break down thy vine ere yet grape-gatherers prune,
Slay me ere day can slay desire again;
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon.

Yea, with thy sweet lips, with thy sweet sword; yea,
Take life and all, for I will die, I say;
Love, I gave love, is life a better boon?
For sweet night’s sake I will not live till day;

Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon.

Nay, I will sleep then only; nay, but go.
Ah sweet, too sweet to me, my sweet, I know
Love, sleep, and death go to the sweet same tune;
Hold my hair fast, and kiss me through it so.
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Insularum Ocelle

Sark, fairer than aught in the world that the lit skies cover,
Laughs inly behind her cliffs, and the seafarers mark
As a shrine where the sunlight serves, though the blown clouds hover,
  Sark.

We mourn, for love of a song that outsang the lark,
That nought so lovely beholden of Sirmio's lover
Made glad in Propontis the flight of his Pontic bark.

Here earth lies lordly, triumphal as heaven is above her,
And splendid and strange as the sea that upbears as an ark,
As a sign for the rapture of storm-spent eyes to discover,
  Sark.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Itylus

Swallow, my sister, O sister swallow,
How can thine heart be full of the spring?
A thousand summers are over and dead.
What hast thou found in the spring to follow?
What hast thou found in thine heart to sing?
What wilt thou do when the summer is shed?

O swallow, sister, O fair swift swallow,
Why wilt thou fly after spring to the south,
The soft south whither thine heart is set?
Shall not the grief of the old time follow?
Shall not the song thereof cleave to thy mouth?
Hast thou forgotten ere I forget?

Sister, my sister, O fleet sweet swallow,
Thy way is long to the sun and the south;
But I, fulfilled of my heart's desire,
Shedding my song upon height, upon hollow,
From tawny body and sweet small mouth
Feed the heart of the night with fire.

I the nightingale all spring through,
O swallow, sister, O changing swallow,
All spring through till the spring be done,
Clothed with the light of the night on the dew,
Sing, while the hours and the wild birds follow,
Take flight and follow and find the sun.

Sister, my sister, O soft light swallow,
Though all things feast in the spring's guest-chamber,
How hast thou heart to be glad thereof yet?
For where thou fliest I shall not follow,
Till life forget and death remember,
Till thou remember and I forget.

Swallow, my sister, O singing swallow,
I know not how thou hast heart to sing.
Hast thou the heart? is it all past over?
Thy lord the summer is good to follow,
And fair the feet of thy lover the spring:
But what wilt thou say to the spring thy lover?

O swallow, sister, O fleeting swallow,
My heart in me is a molten ember
And over my head the waves have met.
But thou wouldst tarry or I would follow
Could I forget or thou remember,
Couldst thou remember and I forget.

O sweet stray sister, O shifting swallow,
The heart's division divideth us.
Thy heart is light as a leaf of a tree;

But mine goes forth among sea-gulfs hollow
To the place of the slaying of Itylus,
The feast of Daulis, the Thracian sea.

O swallow, sister, O rapid swallow,
I pray thee sing not a little space.
Are not the roofs and the lintels wet?
The woven web that was plain to follow,
The small slain body, the flower-like face,
Can I remember if thou forget?

O sister, sister, thy first-begotten!
The hands that cling and the feet that follow,
The voice of the child's blood crying yet
Who hath remembered me? who hath forgotten?
Thou hast forgotten, O summer swallow,
But the world shall end when I forget.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

James Shirley: XIV

THE DUSK of day's decline was hard on dark
When evening trembled round thy glowworm lamp
That shone across her shades and dewy damp
A small clear beacon whose benignant spark
Was gracious yet for loiterers' eyes to mark,
Though changed the watchword of our English camp
Since the outposts rang round Marlowe's lion ramp,
When thy steed's pace went ambling round Hyde Park.

And in the thickening twilight under thee
Walks Davenant, pensive in the paths where he,
The blithest throat that ever carolled love
In music made of morning's merriest heart,
Glad Suckling, stumbled from his seat above
And reeled on slippery roads of alien art.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

John Day: XIII

DAY was a full-blown flower in heaven, alive
With murmuring joy of bees and birds aswarm,
When in the skies of song yet flushed and warm
With music where all passion seems to strive
For utterance, all things bright and fierce to drive
Struggling along the splendour of the storm,
Day for an hour put off his fiery form,
And golden murmurs from a golden hive
Across the strong bright summer wind were heard,
And laughter soft as smiles from girls at play
And loud from lips of boys brow-bound with May.
Our mightiest age let fall its gentlest word,
When Song, in semblance of a sweet small bird,
Lit fluttering on the light swift hand of Day.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

John Ford: VI

HEW hard the marble from the mountain’s heart
Where hardest night holds fast in iron gloom
Gems brighter than an April dawn in bloom,
That his Memnoniah likeness thence may start
Revealed, whose hand with high funereal art
Carved night, and chiselled shadow: be the tomb
That speaks him famous graven with signs of doom
Intrenched inevitably in lines athwart,
As on some thunder-blasted Titan’s brow
His record of rebellion. Not the day
Shall strike forth music from so stern a chord,
Touching this marble: darkness, none knows how,
And stars impenetrable of midnight, may.
So locms the likeness of thy soul, John Ford.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

John Marston: XII

THE BITTERNESS of death and bitterer scorn
Breathes from the broad-leafed aloe-plant whence thou
Wast fain to gather for thy bended brow
A chaplet by no gentler forehead worn.
Grief deep as hell, wrath hardly to be borne,
Ploughed up thy soul till round the furrowing plough
The strange black soil foamed, as a black beaked prow
Bids night-black waves foam where its track has torn.
Too faint the phrase for thee that only saith
Scorn bitterer than the bitterness of death
Pervades the sullen splendour of thy soul,
Where hate and pain make war on force and fraud
And all the strengths of tyrants; whence unflawed
It keeps this noble heart of hatred whole.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

John Webster: VII

THUNDER: the flesh quails, and the soul bows down.
Night: east, west, south, and northward, very night
Star upon struggling star strives into sight,
Star after shuddering star the deep storms drown.
The very throne of night, her very crown,
A man lays hand on, and usurps her right
Song from the highest of heaven’s imperious height
Shoots, as a fire to smite some towering town.
Rage, anguish, harrowing fear, heart-crazing crime,
Make monstrous all the murderous face of Time
Shown in the spheral orbit of a glass
Revolving. Earth cries out from all her graves.
Frail, on frail rafts, across wide-wallowing waves,
Shapes here and there of child and mother pass.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Laus Veneris

Asleep or waking is it? for her neck,
Kissed over close, wears yet a purple speck
Wherein the pained blood falters and goes out;
Soft, and stung softly — fairer for a fleck.

But though my lips shut sucking on the place,
There is no vein at work upon her face;
Her eyelids are so peaceable, no doubt
Deep sleep has warmed her blood through all its ways.

Lo, this is she that was the world's delight;
The old grey years were parcels of her might;
The strewings of the ways wherein she trod
Were the twain seasons of the day and night.

Lo, she was thus when her clear limbs enticed
All lips that now grow sad with kissing Christ,
Stained with blood fallen from the feet of God,
The feet and hands whereat our souls were priced.

Alas, Lord, surely thou art great and fair.
But lo her wonderfully woven hair!
And thou didst heal us with thy piteous kiss;
But see now, Lord; her mouth is lovelier.

She is right fair; what hath she done to thee?
Nay, fair Lord Christ, lift up thine eyes and see;
Had now thy mother such a lip — like this?
Thou knowest how sweet a thing it is to me.

Inside the Horsel here the air is hot;
Right little peace one hath for it, God wot;
The scented dusty daylight burns the air,
And my heart chokes me till I hear it not.

Behold, my Venus, my soul's body, lies
With my love laid upon her garment-wise,
Feeling my love in all her limbs and hair
And shed between her eyelids through her eyes.

She holds my heart in her sweet open hands
Hanging asleep; hard by her head there stands,
Crowned with gilt thorns and clothed with flesh like fire,
Love, wan as foam blown up the salt burnt sands —

Hot as the brackish waifs of yellow spume
That shift and steam — loose clots of arid fume
From the sea's panting mouth of dry desire;
There stands he, like one labouring at a loom.

The warp holds fast across; and every thread
That makes the woof up has dry specks of red;
Always the shuttle cleaves clean through, and he
Weaves with the hair of many a ruined head.

Love is not glad nor sorry, as I deem;
Labouring he dreams, and labours in the dream,
Till when the spool is finished, lo I see
His web, reeled off, curls and goes out like steam.

Night falls like fire; the heavy lights run low,
And as they drop, my blood and body so
Shake as the flame shakes, full of days and hours
That sleep not neither weep they as they go.

Ah yet would God this flesh of mine might be
Where air might wash and long leaves cover me,
Where tides of grass break into foam of flowers,
Or where the wind's feet shine along the sea.

Ah yet would God that stems and roots were bred
Out of my weary body and my head,
That sleep were sealed upon me with a seal,
And I were as the least of all his dead.

Would God my blood were dew to feed the grass,
Mine ears made deaf and mine eyes blind as glass,
My body broken as a turning wheel,
And my mouth stricken ere it saith Alas!

Ah God, that love were as a flower or flame,
That life were as the naming of a name,
That death were not more pitiful than desire,
That these things were not one thing and the same!

Behold now, surely somewhere there is death:
For each man hath some space of years, he saith,

A little space of time ere time expire,
A little day, a little way of breath.

And lo, between the sundawn and the sun,
His day's work and his night's work are undone;
And lo, between the nightfall and the light,
He is not, and none knoweth of such an one.

Ah God, that I were as all souls that be,
As any herb or leaf of any tree,
As men that toil through hours of labouring night,
As bones of men under the deep sharp sea.

Outside it must be winter among men;
For at the gold bars of the gates again
I heard all night and all the hours of it
The wind's wet wings and fingers drip with rain.

Knights gather, riding sharp for cold; I know
The ways and woods are strangled with the snow;
And with short song the maidens spin and sit
Until Christ's birthnight, lily-like, arow.

The scent and shadow shed about me make
The very soul in all my senses ache;
The hot hard night is fed upon my breath,
And sleep beholds me from afar awake.

Alas, but surely where the hills grow deep,
Or where the wild ways of the sea are steep,
Or in strange places somewhere there is death,
And on death's face the scattered hair of sleep.

There lover-like with lips and limbs that meet
They lie, they pluck sweet fruit of life and eat;
But me the hot and hungry days devour,
And in my mouth no fruit of theirs is sweet.

No fruit of theirs, but fruit of my desire,
For her love's sake whose lips through mine respire;
Her eyelids on her eyes like flower on flower,
Mine eyelids on mine eyes like fire on fire.

So lie we, not as sleep that lies by death,
With heavy kisses and with happy breath;
Not as man lies by woman, when the bride
Laughs low for love's sake and the words he saith.

For she lies, laughing low with love; she lies
And turns his kisses on her lips to sighs,
To sighing sound of lips unsatisfied,
And the sweet tears are tender with her eyes.

Ah, not as they, but as the souls that were
Slain in the old time, having found her fair;
Who, sleeping with her lips upon their eyes,
Heard sudden serpents hiss across her hair.

Their blood runs round the roots of time like rain:
She casts them forth and gathers them again;
With nerve and bone she weaves and multiplies
Exceeding pleasure out of extreme pain.

Her little chambers drip with flower-like red,
Her girdles, and the chaplets of her head,
Her armlets and her anklets; with her feet
She tramples all that winepress of the dead.

Her gateways smoke with fume of flowers and fires,
With loves burnt out and unassuaged desires;
Between her lips the steam of them is sweet,
The languor in her ears of many lyres.

Her beds are full of perfume and sad sound,
Her doors are made with music, and barred round
With sighing and with laughter and with tears,
With tears whereby strong souls of men are bound.

There is the knight Adonis that was slain;
With flesh and blood she chains him for a chain;
The body and the spirit in her ears
Cry, for her lips divide him vein by vein.

Yea, all she slayeth; yea, every man save me;
Me, love, thy lover that must cleave to thee
Till the ending of the days and ways of earth,
The shaking of the sources of the sea.

Me, most forsaken of all souls that fell;
Me, satiated with things insatiable;
Me, for whose sake the extreme hell makes mirth,
Yea, laughter kindles at the heart of hell.

Alas thy beauty! for thy mouth's sweet sake
My soul is bitter to me, my limbs quake
As water, as the flesh of men that weep,
As their heart's vein whose heart goes nigh to break.

Ah God, that sleep with flower-sweet finger-tips
Would crush the fruit of death upon my lips;
Ah God, that death would tread the grapes of sleep
And wring their juice upon me as it drips.

There is no change of cheer for many days,
But change of chimes high up in the air, that sways
Rung by the running fingers of the wind;
And singing sorrows heard on hidden ways.

Day smiteth day in twain, night sundereth night,
And on mine eyes the dark sits as the light;
Yea, Lord, thou knowest I know not, having sinned,
If heaven be clean or unclean in thy sight.

Yea, as if earth were sprinkled over me,
Such chafed harsh earth as chokes a sandy sea,
Each pore doth yearn, and the dried blood thereof
Gasps by sick fits, my heart swims heavily,

There is a feverish famine in my veins;
Below her bosom, where a crushed grape stains
The white and blue, there my lips caught and clove
An hour since, and what mark of me remains?

I dare not always touch her, lest the kiss
Leave my lips charred. Yea, Lord, a little bliss,
Brief bitter bliss, one hath for a great sin;
Nathless thou knowest how sweet a thing it is.

Sin, is it sin whereby men's souls are thrust
Into the pit? yet had I a good trust

To save my soul before it slipped therein,
Trod under by the fire-shod feet of lust.

For if mine eyes fail and my soul takes breath,
I look between the iron sides of death
Into sad hell where all sweet love hath end,
All but the pain that never finisheth.

There are the naked faces of great kings,
The singing folk with all their lute-playings;
There when one cometh he shall have to friend
The grave that covets and the worm that clings.

There sit the knights that were so great of hand,
The ladies that were queens of fair green land,
Grown grey and black now, brought unto the dust,
Soiled, without raiment, clad about with sand.

There is one end for all of them; they sit
Naked and sad, they drink the dregs of it,
Trodden as grapes in the wine-press of lust,
Trampled and trodden by the fiery feet.

I see the marvellous mouth whereby there fell
Cities and people whom the gods loved well,
Yet for her sake on them the fire gat hold,
And for their sakes on her the fire of hell.

And softer than the Egyptian lote-leaf is,
The queen whose face was worth the world to kiss,
Wearing at breast a suckling snake of gold;
And large pale lips of strong Semiramis,

Curled like a tiger's that curl back to feed;
Red only where the last kiss made them bleed;
Her hair most thick with many a carven gem,
Deep in the mane, great-chested, like a steed.

Yea, with red sin the faces of them shine;
But in all these there was no sin like mine;
No, not in all the strange great sins of them
That made the wine-press froth and foam with wine.

For I was of Christ's choosing, I God's knight,
No blinkard heathen stumbling for scant light;
I can well see, for all the dusty days
Gone past, the clean great time of goodly fight.

I smell the breathing battle sharp with blows,
With shriek of shafts and snapping short of bows;
The fair pure sword smites out in subtle ways,
Sounds and long lights are shed between the rows

Of beautiful mailed men; the edged light slips,
Most like a snake that takes short breath and dips
Sharp from the beautifully bending head,
With all its gracious body lithe as lips

That curl in touching you; right in this wise
My sword doth, seeming fire in mine own eyes,
Leaving all colours in them brown and red
And flecked with death; then the keen breaths like sighs,

The caught-up choked dry laughters following them,
When all the fighting face is grown a flame
For pleasure, and the pulse that stuns the ears,
And the heart's gladness of the goodly game.

Let me think yet a little; I do know
These things were sweet, but sweet such years ago,
Their savour is all turned now into tears;
Yea, ten years since, where the blue ripples blow,

The blue curled eddies of the blowing Rhine,
I felt the sharp wind shaking grass and vine
Touch my blood too, and sting me with delight
Through all this waste and weary body of mine

That never feels clear air; right gladly then
I rode alone, a great way off my men,
And heard the chiming bridle smite and smite,
And gave each rhyme thereof some rhyme again,

Till my song shifted to that iron one;
Seeing there rode up between me and the sun
Some certain of my foe's men, for his three
White wolves across their painted coats did run.

The first red-bearded, with square cheeks — alack,
I made my knave's blood turn his beard to black;
The slaying of him was a joy to see:
Perchance too, when at night he came not back,

Some woman fell a-weeping, whom this thief
Would beat when he had drunken; yet small grief
Hath any for the ridding of such knaves;
Yea, if one wept, I doubt her teen was brief.

This bitter love is sorrow in all lands,
Draining of eyelids, wringing of drenched hands,
Sighing of hearts and filling up of graves;
A sign across the head of the world he stands,

An one that hath a plague-mark on his brows;
Dust and spilt blood do track him to his house
Down under earth; sweet smells of lip and cheek,
Like a sweet snake's breath made more poisonous

With chewing of some perfumed deadly grass,
Are shed all round his passage if he pass,
And their quenched savour leaves the whole soul weak,
Sick with keen guessing whence the perfume was.

As one who hidden in deep sedge and reeds
Smells the rare scent made where a panther feeds,
And tracking ever slotwise the warm smell
Is snapped upon by the sweet mouth and bleeds,

His head far down the hot sweet throat of her —
So one tracks love, whose breath is deadlier,
And lo, one springe and you are fast in hell,
Fast as the gin's grip of a wayfarer.

I think now, as the heavy hours decease
One after one, and bitter thoughts increase
One upon one, of all sweet finished things;
The breaking of the battle; the long peace

Wherein we sat clothed softly, each man's hair
Crowned with green leaves beneath white hoods of vair;

The sounds of sharp spears at great tourneyings,
And noise of singing in the late sweet air.

I sang of love too, knowing nought thereof;
'Sweeter,' I said, 'the little laugh of love
Than tears out of the eyes of Magdalen,
Or any fallen feather of the Dove.

'The broken little laugh that spoils a kiss,
The ache of purple pulses, and the bliss
Of blinded eyelids that expand again —
Love draws them open with those lips of his,

'Lips that cling hard till the kissed face has grown
Of one same fire and colour with their own;
Then ere one sleep, appeased with sacrifice,
Where his lips wounded, there his lips atone.'

I sang these things long since and knew them not;
'Lo, here is love, or there is love, God wot,
This man and that finds favour in his eyes,'
I said, 'but I, what guerdon have I got?

'The dust of praise that is blown everywhere
In all men's faces with the common air;
The bay-leaf that wants chafing to be sweet
Before they wind it in a singer's hair.'

So that one dawn I rode forth sorrowing;
I had no hope but of some evil thing,
And so rode slowly past the windy wheat
And past the vineyard and the water-spring,

Up to the Horsel. A great elder-tree
Held back its heaps of flowers to let me see
The ripe tall grass, and one that walked therein,
Naked, with hair shed over to the knee.

She walked between the blossom and the grass;
I knew the beauty of her, what she was,
The beauty of her body and her sin,
And in my flesh the sin of hers, alas!

Alas! for sorrow is all the end of this.
O sad kissed mouth, how sorrowful it is!
O breast whereat some suckling sorrow clings,
Red with the bitter blossom of a kiss!

Ah, with blind lips I felt for you, and found
About my neck your hands and hair enwound,
The hands that stifle and the hair that stings,
I felt them fasten sharply without sound.

Yea, for my sin I had great store of bliss:
Rise up, make answer for me, let thy kiss
Seal my lips hard from speaking of my sin,
Lest one go mad to hear how sweet it is.

Yet I waxed faint with fume of barren bowers,
And murmuring of the heavy-headed hours;
And let the dove's beak fret and peck within
My lips in vain, and Love shed fruitless flowers.

So that God looked upon me when your hands
Were hot about me; yea, God brake my bands
To save my soul alive, and I came forth
Like a man blind and naked in strange lands

That hears men laugh and weep, and knows not whence
Nor wherefore, but is broken in his sense;
Howbeit I met folk riding from the north
Towards Rome, to purge them of their souls' offence,

And rode with them, and spake to none; the day
Stunned me like lights upon some wizard way,
And ate like fire mine eyes and mine eyesight;
So rode I, hearing all these chant and pray,

And marvelled; till before us rose and fell
White cursed hills, like outer skirts of hell
Seen where men's eyes look through the day to night,
Like a jagged shell's lips, harsh, untunable,

Blown in between by devils' wrangling breath;
Nathless we won well past that hell and death,
Down to the sweet land where all airs are good,
Even unto Rome where God's grace tarrieth.

Then came each man and worshipped at his knees
Who in the Lord God's likeness bears the keys
To bind or loose, and called on Christ's shed blood,
And so the sweet-souled father gave him ease.

But when I came I fell down at his feet,
Saying, 'Father, though the Lord's blood be right sweet,
The spot it takes not off the panther's skin,
Nor shall an Ethiop's stain be bleached with it.

'Lo, I have sinned and have spat out at God,
Wherefore his hand is heavier and his rod
More sharp because of mine exceeding sin,
And all his raiment redder than bright blood

'Before mine eyes; yea, for my sake I wot
The heat of hell is waxen seven times hot
Through my great sin.' Then spake he some sweet word,
Giving me cheer; which thing availed me not;

Yea, scarce I wist if such indeed were said;
For when I ceased — lo, as one newly dead
Who hears a great cry out of hell, I heard
The crying of his voice across my head.

'Until this dry shred staff, that hath no whit
Of leaf nor bark, bear blossom and smell sweet,
Seek thou not any mercy in God's sight,
For so long shalt thou be cast out from it.'

Yea, what if dried-up stems wax red and green,
Shall that thing be which is not nor has been?
Yea, what if sapless bark wax green and white,
Shall any good fruit grow upon my sin?

Nay, though sweet fruit were plucked of a dry tree,
And though men drew sweet waters of the sea,
There should not grow sweet leaves on this dead stem,
This waste wan body and shaken soul of me.

Yea, though God search it warily enough,
There is not one sound thing in all thereof;

Though he search all my veins through, searching them
He shall find nothing whole therein but love.

For I came home right heavy, with small cheer,
And lo my love, mine own soul's heart, more dear
Than mine own soul, more beautiful than God,
Who hath my being between the hands of her —

Fair still, but fair for no man saving me,
As when she came out of the naked sea
Making the foam as fire whereon she trod,
And as the inner flower of fire was she.

Yea, she laid hold upon me, and her mouth
Clove unto mine as soul to body doth,
And, laughing, made her lips luxurious;
Her hair had smells of all the sunburnt south,

Strange spice and flower, strange savour of crushed fruit,
And perfume the swart kings tread underfoot
For pleasure when their minds wax amorous,
Charred frankincense and grated sandal-root.

And I forgot fear and all weary things,
All ended prayers and perished thanksgivings,
Feeling her face with all her eager hair
Cleave to me, clinging as a fire that clings

To the body and to the raiment, burning them;
As after death I know that such-like flame
Shall cleave to me for ever; yea, what care,
Albeit I burn then, having felt the same?

Ah love, there is no better life than this;
To have known love, how bitter a thing it is,
And afterward be cast out of God's sight;
Yea, these that know not, shall they have such bliss

High up in barren heaven before his face
As we twain in the heavy-hearted place,
Remembering love and all the dead delight,
And all that time was sweet with for a space?

For till the thunder in the trumpet be,
Soul may divide from body, but not we
One from another; I hold thee with my hand,
I let mine eyes have all their will of thee,

I seal myself upon thee with my might,
Abiding alway out of all men's sight
Until God loosen over sea and land
The thunder of the trumpets of the night.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Leave-Taking

Let us go hence, my songs; she will not hear.
Let us go hence together without fear;
Keep silence now, for singing-time is over,
And over all old things and all things dear.
She loves not you nor me as all we love her.
Yea, though we sang as angels in her ear,
She would not hear.

Let us rise up and part; she will not know.
Let us go seaward as the great winds go,
Full of blown sand and foam; what help is here?
There is no help, for all these things are so,
And all the world is bitter as a tear.
And how these things are, though ye strove to show,
She would not know.

Let us go home and hence; she will not weep.
We gave love many dreams and days to keep,
Flowers without scent, and fruits that would not grow,
Saying 'If thou wilt, thrust in thy sickle and reap.'
All is reaped now; no grass is left to mow;
And we that sowed, though all we fell on sleep,
She would not weep.

Let us go hence and rest; she will not love.
She shall not hear us if we sing hereof,
Nor see love's ways, how sore they are and steep.
Come hence, let be, lie still; it is enough.
Love is a barren sea, bitter and deep;
And though she saw all heaven in flower above,
She would not love.

Let us give up, go down; she will not care.
Though all the stars made gold of all the air,
And the sea moving saw before it move
One moon-flower making all the foam-flowers fair;
Though all those waves went over us, and drove
Deep down the stifling lips and drowning hair,
She would not care.

Let us go hence, go hence; she will not see.
Sing all once more together; surely she,
She too, remembering days and words that were,
Will turn a little toward us, sighing; but we,
We are hence, we are gone, as though we had not been there.
Nay, and though all men seeing had pity on me,
She would not see.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Les Noyades

WHATEVER a man of the sons of men
Shall say to his heart of the lords above,
They have shown man verily, once and again,
Marvellous mercies and infinite love.

In the wild fifth year of the change of things,
When France was glorious and blood-red, fair
With dust of battle and deaths of kings,
A queen of men, with helmeted hair,

Carrier came down to the Loire and slew,
Till all the ways and the waves waxed red:
Bound and drowned, slaying two by two,
Maidens and young men, naked and wed.

They brought on a day to his judgment-place
One rough with labour and red with fight,
And a lady noble by name and face,
Faultless, a maiden, wonderful, white.

She knew not, being for shame's sake blind,
If his eyes were hot on her face hard by.
And the judge bade strip and ship them, and bind
Bosom to bosom, to drown and die.

The white girl winced and whitened; but he
Caught fire, waxed bright as a great bright flame
Seen with thunder far out on the sea,
Laughed hard as the glad blood went and came.

Twice his lips quailed with delight, then said,
"I have but a word to you all, one word;
Bear with me; surely I am but dead;"
And all they laughed and mocked him and heard.

"Judge, when they open the judgment-roll,
I will stand upright before God and pray:
'Lord God, have mercy on one man's soul,
For his mercy was great upon earth, I say.

"'Lord, if I loved thee—Lord, if I served—
If these who darkened thy fair Son's face
I fought with, sparing not one, nor swerved
A hand's-breadth, Lord, in the perilous place—

"'I pray thee say to this man, O Lord,
Sit thou for him at my feet on a throne.
I will face thy wrath, though it bite as a sword,
And my soul shall burn for his soul, and atone.

"'For, Lord, thou knowest, O God most wise,
How gracious on earth were his deeds towards me.

Shall this be a small thing in thine eyes,
That is greater in mine than the whole great sea?'

"I have loved this woman my whole life long,
And even for love's sake when have I said
'I love you'? when have I done you wrong,
Living? but now I shall have you dead.

"Yea, now, do I bid you love me, love?
Love me or loathe, we are one not twain.
But God be praised in his heaven above
For this my pleasure and that my pain!

"For never a man, being mean like me,
Shall die like me till the whole world dies.
I shall drown with her, laughing for love; and she
Mix with me, touching me, lips and eyes.

"Shall she not know me and see me all through,
Me, on whose heart as a worm she trod?
You have given me, God requite it you,
What man yet never was given of God."

O sweet one love, O my life's delight,
Dear, though the days have divided us,
Lost beyond hope, taken far out of sight,
Not twice in the world shall the gods do thus.

Had it been so hard for my love? but I,
Though the gods gave all that a god can give,
I had chosen rather the gift to die,
Cease, and be glad above all that live.

For the Loire would have driven us down to the sea,
And the sea would have pitched us from shoal to shoal;
And I should have held you, and you held me,
As flesh holds flesh, and the soul the soul.

Could I change you, help you to love me, sweet,
Could I give you the love that would sweeten death,
We should yield, go down, locked hands and feet,
Die, drown together, and breath catch breath;

But you would have felt my soul in a kiss,
And known that once if I loved you well;
And I would have given my soul for this
To burn for ever in burning hell.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Let Us Go

Let us go hence, my songs; she will not hear.
Let us go hence together without fear;
Keep silence now, for singing-time is over,
And over all old things and all things dear.
She loves not you nor me as all we love her.
Yea, though we sang as angels in her ear,
She would not hear.

Let us rise up and part; she will not know.
Let us go seaward as the great winds go,
Full of blown sand and foam; what help is here?
There is no help, for all these things are so,
And all the world is bitter as a tear.
And how these things are, though ye strove to show,
She would not know.

Let us go home and hence; she will not weep.
We gave love many dreams and days to keep,
Flowers without scent, and fruits that would not grow,
Saying 'If thou wilt, thrust in thy sickle and reap.'
All is reaped now; no grass is left to mow;
And we that sowed, though all we fell on sleep,
She would not weep.

Let us go hence and rest; she will not love.
She shall not hear us if we sing hereof,
Nor see love's ways, how sore they are and steep.
Come hence, let be, lie still; it is enough.
Love is a barren sea, bitter and deep;
And though she saw all heaven in flower above,
She would not love.

Let us give up, go down; she will not care.
Though all the stars made gold of all the air,
And the sea moving saw before it move
One moon-flower making all the foam-flowers fair;
Though all those waves went over us, and drove
Deep down the stifling lips and drowning hair,
She would not care.

Let us go hence, go hence; she will not see.
Sing all once more together; surely she,
She too, remembering days and words that were,
Will turn a little toward us, sighing; but we,
We are hence, we are gone, as though we had not been there.
Nay, and though all men seeing had pity on me,
She would not see.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Lines on the Death of Edward John Trelawny

LAST high star of the years whose thunder
Still men's listening remembrance hears,
Last light left of our fathers' years,
Watched with honour and hailed with wonder
Thee too then have the years borne under,
Thou too then hast regained thy peers.

Wings that warred with the winds of morning,
Storm-winds rocking the red great dawn,
Close at last, and a film is drawn
Over the eyes of the storm-bird, scorning
Now no longer the loud wind's warning,
Waves that threaten or waves that fawn.

Peers were none of thee left us living,
Peers of theirs we shall see no more.
Eight years over the full fourscore
Knew thee: now shalt thou sleep, forgiving
All griefs past of the wild world's giving,
Moored at last on the stormless shore.

Worldwide liberty's lifelong lover,
Lover no less of the strength of song,
Sea-king, swordsman, hater of wrong,
Over thy dust that the dust shall cover
Comes my song as a bird to hover,
Borne of its will as of wings along.

Cherished of thee were this brief song's brothers
Now that follows them, cherishing thee.
Over the tides and the tideless sea
Soft as a smile of the earth our mother's
Flies it faster than all those others,
First of the troop at thy tomb to be.

Memories of Greece and the mountain's hollow
Guarded alone of thy loyal sword
Hold thy name for our hearts in ward:
Yet more fain are our hearts to follow
One way now with the southward swallow
Back to the grave of the man their lord.

Heart of hearts, art thou moved not, hearing
Surely, if hearts of the dead may hear,
Whose true heart it is now draws near?
Surely the sense of it thrills thee, cheering
Darkness and death with the news now nearing
Shelley, Trelawny rejoins thee here.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Love and Sleep

Love and Sleep

Lying asleep between the strokes of night
I saw my love lean over my sad bed,
Pale as the duskiest lily's leaf or head,
Smooth-skinned and dark, with bare throat made to bite,
Too wan for blushing and too warm for white,
But perfect-coloured without white or red.
And her lips opened amorously, and said -
I wist not what, saving one word - Delight.

And all her face was honey to my mouth,
And all her body pasture to mine eyes;
The long lithe arms and hotter hands than fire
The quivering flanks, hair smelling of the south,
The bright light feet, the splendid supple thighs
And glittering eyelids of my soul's desire.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Love at Sea

WE ARE in love’s land to-day;
Where shall we go?
Love, shall we start or stay,
Or sail or row?
There’s many a wind and way,
And never a May but May;
We are in love’s hand to-day;
Where shall we go?

Our landwind is the breath
Of sorrows kissed to death
And joys that were;
Our ballast is a rose;
Our way lies where God knows
And love knows where.
We are in love’s hand to-day—

Our seamen are fledged Loves,
Our masts are bills of doves,
Our decks fine gold;
Our ropes are dead maids’ hair,
Our stores are love-shafts fair
And manifold.
We are in love’s land to-day—

Where shall we land you, sweet?
On fields of strange men’s feet,
Or fields near home?
Or where the fire-flowers blow,
Or where the flowers of snow
Or flowers of foam?
We are in love’s hand to-day—

Land me, she says, where love
Shows but one shaft, one dove,
One heart, one hand.
—A shore like that, my dear,
Lies where no man will steer,
No maiden land.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Love In A Mist

Light love in a mist, by the midsummer moon misguided,
Scarce seen in the twilight garden if gloom insist,
Seems vainly to seek for a star whose gleam has derided
  Light love in a mist.

All day in the sun, when the breezes do all they list,
His soft blue raiment of cloudlike blossom abided
Unrent and unwithered of winds and of rays that kissed.

Blithe-hearted or sad, as the cloud or the sun subsided,
Love smiled in the flower with a meaning whereof none wist
Save two that beheld, as a gleam that before them glided,
  Light love in a mist.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Love Lies Bleeding

Love lies bleeding in the bed whereover
Roses lean with smiling mouths or pleading:
Earth lies laughing where the sun's dart clove her:
  Love lies bleeding.

Stately shine his purple plumes, exceeding
Pride of princes: nor shall maid or lover
Find on earth a fairer sign worth heeding.

Yet may love, sore wounded scarce recover
Strength and spirit again, with life receding:
Hope and joy, wind-winged, about him hover:
  Love lies bleeding.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Madona Mia

UNDER green apple-boughs
That never a storm will rouse,
My lady hath her house
Between two bowers;
In either of the twain
Red roses full of rain;
She hath for bondwomen
All kind of flowers.

She hath no handmaid fair
To draw her curled gold hair
Through rings of gold that bear
Her whole hair's weight;
She hath no maids to stand
Gold-clothed on either hand;
In all the great green land
None is so great.

She hath no more to wear
But one white hood of vair
Drawn over eyes and hair,
Wrought with strange gold,
Made for some great queen's head,
Some fair great queen since dead;
And one strait gown of red
Against the cold.

Beneath her eyelids deep
Love lying seems asleep,
Love, swift to wake, to weep,
To laugh, to gaze;
Her breasts are like white birds,
And all her gracious words
As water-grass to herds
In the June-days.

To her all dews that fall
And rains are musical;
Her flowers are fed from all,
Her joy from these;
In the deep-feathered firs
Their gift of joy is hers,
In the least breath that stirs
Across the trees.

She grows with greenest leaves,
Ripens with reddest sheaves,
Forgets, remembers, grieves,
And is not sad;
The quiet lands and skies
Leave light upon her eyes;
None knows her, weak or wise,

Or tired or glad.

None knows, none understands,
What flowers are like her hands;
Though you should search all lands
Wherein time grows,
What snows are like her feet,
Though his eyes burn with heat
Through gazing on my sweet,
Yet no man knows.

Only this thing is said;
That white and gold and red,
God’s three chief words, man’s bread
And oil and wine,
Were given her for dowers,
And kingdom of all hours,
And grace of goodly flowers
And various vine.

This is my lady’s praise:
God after many days
Wrought her in unknown ways,
In sunset lands;
This was my lady’s birth;
God gave her might and mirth
And laid his whole sweet earth
Between her hands.

Under deep apple-boughs
My lady hath her house;
She wears upon her brows
The flower thereof;
All saying but what God saith
To her is as vain breath;
She is more strong than death,
Being strong as love.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

March: An Ode

I
Ere frost-flower and snow-blossom faded and fell, and the splendour of winter had passed out of sight,
The ways of the woodlands were fairer and stranger than dreams that fulfil us in sleep with delight;
The breath of the mouths of the winds had hardened on tree-tops and branches that glittered and swayed
Such wonders and glories of blossomlike snow or of frost that outlightens all flowers till it fade
That the sea was not lovelier than here was the land, nor the night than the day, nor the day than the night,
Nor the winter sublimer with storm than the spring: such mirth had the madness and might in thee made,
March, master of winds, bright minstrel and marshal of storms that enkindle the season they smite.

II
And now that the rage of thy rapture is satiate with revel and ravin and spoil of the snow,
And the branches it brightened are broken, and shattered the tree-tops that only thy wrath could lay low,
How should not thy lovers rejoice in thee, leader and lord of the year that exults to be born
So strong in thy strength and so glad of thy gladness whose laughter puts winter and sorrow to scorn?
Thou hast shaken the snows from thy wings, and the frost on thy forehead is molten: thy lips are aglow
As a lover's that kindle with kissing, and earth, with her raiment and tresses yet wasted and torn,
Takes breath as she smiles in the grasp of thy passion to feel through her spirit the sense of thee flow.

III
Fain, fain would we see but again for an hour what the wind and the sun have dispelled and consumed,
Those full deep swan-soft feathers of snow with whose luminous burden the branches implumed
Hung heavily, curved as a half-bent bow, and fledged not as birds are, but petalled as flowers,
Each tree-top and branchlet a pinnacle jewelled and carved, or a fountain that shines as it showers,
But fixed as a fountain is fixed not, and wrought not to last till by time or by tempest entombed,
As a pinnacle carven and gilded of men: for the date of its doom is no more than an hour's,
One hour of the sun's when the warm wind wakes him to wither the snow-flowers that froze as they bloomed.

IV

As the sunshine quenches the snowshine; as April subdues thee, and yields up his kingdom to May;
So time overcomes the regret that is born of delight as it passes in passion away,
And leaves but a dream for desire to rejoice in or mourn for with tears or thanksgivings; but thou,
Bright god that art gone from us, maddest and gladdest of months, to what goal hast thou gone from us now?
For somewhere surely the storm of thy laughter that lightens, the beat of thy wings that play,
Must flame as a fire through the world, and the heavens that we know not rejoice in thee: surely thy brow
Hath lost not its radiance of empire, thy spirit the joy that impelled it on quest as for prey.

V
Are thy feet on the ways of the limitless waters, thy wings on the winds of the waste north sea?
Are the fires of the false north dawn over heavens where summer is stormful and strong like thee
Now bright in the sight of thine eyes? are the bastions of icebergs assailed by the blast of thy breath?
Is it March with the wild north world when April is waning? the word that the changed year saith,
Is it echoed to northward with rapture of passion reiterate from spirits triumphant as we
Whose hearts were uplift at the blast of thy clarions as men's rearisen from a sleep that was death
And kindled to life that was one with the world's and with thine? hast thou set not the whole world free?

VI
For the breath of thy lips is freedom, and freedom's the sense of thy spirit, the sound of thy song,
Glad god of the north-east wind, whose heart is as high as the hands of thy kingdom are strong,
Thy kingdom whose empire is terror and joy, twin-featured and fruitful of births divine,
Days lit with the flame of the lamps of the flowers, and nights that are drunken with dew for wine,
And sleep not for joy of the stars that deepen and quicken, a denser and fierier throng,
And the world that thy breath bade whiten and tremble rejoices at heart as they strengthen and shine,
And earth gives thanks for the glory bequeathed her, and knows of thy reign that it wrought not wrong.

VII
Thy spirit is quenched not, albeit we behold not thy face in the crown of the steep sky's arch,
And the bold first buds of the whin wax golden, and witness arise of the thorn and the larch:

Wild April, enkindled to laughter and storm by the kiss of the wildest of winds that blow,
Calls loud on his brother for witness; his hands that were laden with blossom are sprinkled with snow,
And his lips breathe winter, and laugh, and relent; and the live woods feel not the frost's flame parch;
For the flame of the spring that consumes not but quickens is felt at the heart of the forest aglow,
And the sparks that enkindled and fed it were strewn from the hands of the gods of the winds of March.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Marzo Pazzo

Mad March, with the wind in his wings wide-spread,
Leaps from heaven, and the deep dawn's arch
Hails re-risen again from the dead
  Mad March.

Soft small flames on rowan and larch
Break forth as laughter on lips that said
Nought till the pulse in them beat love's march.

But the heartbeat now in the lips rose-red
Speaks life to the world, and the winds that parch
Bring April forth as a bride to wed
  Mad March.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Mater Dolorosa

Who is this that sits by the way, by the wild wayside,
In a rent stained raiment, the robe of a cast-off bride,
In the dust, in the rainfall sitting, with soiled feet bare,
With the night for a garment upon her, with torn wet hair?
She is fairer of face than the daughters of men, and her eyes,
Worn through with her tears, are deep as the depth of skies.

This is she for whose sake being fallen, for whose abject sake,
Earth groans in the blackness of darkness, and men's hearts break.
This is she for whose love, having seen her, the men that were
Poured life out as water, and shed their souls upon air.
This is she for whose glory their years were counted as foam;
Whose face was a light upon Greece, was a fire upon Rome.

Is it now not surely a vain thing, a foolish and vain,
To sit down by her, mourn to her, serve her, partake in the pain?
She is grey with the dust of time on his manifold ways,
Where her faint feet stumble and falter through year-long days.
Shall she help us at all, O fools, give fruit or give fame,
Who herself is a name despised, a rejected name?

We have not served her for guerdon. If any do so,
That his mouth may be sweet with such honey, we care not to know.
We have drunk from a wine-unsweetened, a perilous cup,
A draught very bitter. The kings of the earth stood up,
And the rulers took counsel together, to smite her and slay;
And the blood of her wounds is given us to drink today.

Can these bones live? or the leaves that are dead leaves bud?
Or the dead blood drawn from her veins be in your veins blood?
Will ye gather up water again that was drawn and shed?
In the blood is the life of the veins, and her veins are dead.
For the lives that are over are over, and past things past;
She had her day, and it is not; was first, and is last.

Is it nothing unto you then, all ye that pass by,
If her breath be left in her lips, if she live now or die?
Behold now, O people, and say if she be not fair,
Whom your fathers followed to find her, with praise and prayer,
And rejoiced, having found her, though roof they had none nor bread;
But ye care not; what is it to you if her day be dead?

It was well with our fathers; their sound was in all men's lands;
There was fire in their hearts, and the hunger of fight in their
hands.
Naked and strong they went forth in her strength like flame,
For her love's and her name's sake of old, her republican name.
But their children, by kings made quiet, by priests made wise,
Love better the heat of their hearths than the light of her eyes.

Are they children of these thy children indeed, who have sold,
O golden goddess, the light of thy face for gold?

Are they sons indeed of the sons of thy dayspring of hope,
Whose lives are in fief of an emperor, whose souls of a Pope?
Hide then thine head, O beloved; thy time is done;
Thy kingdom is broken in heaven, and blind thy sun.

What sleep is upon you, to dream she indeed shall rise,
When the hopes are dead in her heart as the tears in her eyes?
If ye sing of her dead, will she stir? if ye weep for her, weep?
Come away now, leave her; what hath she to do but sleep?
But ye that mourn are alive, and have years to be;
And life is good, and the world is wiser than we.

Yea, wise is the world and mighty, with years to give,
And years to promise; but how long now shall it live?
And foolish and poor is faith, and her ways are bare,
Till she find the way of the sun, and the morning air.
In that hour shall this dead face shine as the face of the sun,
And the soul of man and her soul and the world's be one.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Mater Triumphalis

Mother of man's time-travelling generations,
  Breath of his nostrils, heartblood of his heart,
God above all Gods worshipped of all nations,
  Light above light, law beyond law, thou art.

Thy face is as a sword smiting in sunder
  Shadows and chains and dreams and iron things;
The sea is dumb before thy face, the thunder
  Silent, the skies are narrower than thy wings.

Angels and Gods, spirit and sense, thou takest
  In thy right hand as drops of dust or dew;
The temples and the towers of time thou breakest,
  His thoughts and words and works, to make them new.

All we have wandered from thy ways, have hidden
  Eyes from thy glory and ears from calls they heard;
Called of thy trumpets vainly, called and chidden,
  Scourged of thy speech and wounded of thy word.

We have known thee and have not known thee; stood beside thee,
  Felt thy lips breathe, set foot where thy feet trod,
Loved and renounced and worshipped and denied thee,
  As though thou wert but as another God,

"One hour for sleep," we said, "and yet one other;
  All day we served her, and who shall serve by night?"
Not knowing of thee, thy face not knowing, O mother,
  O light wherethrough the darkness is as light.

Men that forsook thee hast thou not forsaken,
  Races of men that knew not hast thou known;
Nations that slept thou hast doubted not to waken,
  Worshippers of strange Gods to make thine own.

All old grey histories hiding thy clear features,
  O secret spirit and sovereign, all men's tales,
Creeds woven of men thy children and thy creatures,
  They have woven for vestures of thee and for veils.

Thine hands, without election or exemption,
  Feed all men fainting from false peace or strife,
O thou, the resurrection and redemption,
  The godhead and the manhood and the life.

Thy wings shadow the waters; thine eyes lighten
  The horror of the hollows of the night;
The depths of the earth and the dark places brighten
  Under thy feet, whiter than fire is white.

Death is subdued to thee, and hell's bands broken;
  Where thou art only is heaven; who hears not thee,

Time shall not hear him; when men's names are spoken,
  A nameless sign of death shall his name be.

Deathless shall be the death, the name be nameless;
  Sterile of stars his twilight time of breath;
With fire of hell shall shame consume him shameless,
  And dying, all the night darken his death.

The years are as thy garments, the world's ages
  As sandals bound and loosed from thy swift feet;
Time serves before thee, as one that hath for wages
  Praise or shame only, bitter words or sweet.

Thou sayest "Well done," and all a century kindles;
  Again thou sayest "Depart from sight of me,"
And all the light of face of all men dwindles,
  And the age is as the broken glass of thee.

The night is as a seal set on men's faces,
  On faces fallen of men that take no light,
Nor give light in the deeps of the dark places,
  Blind things, incorporate with the body of night.

Their souls are serpents winterbound and frozen,
  Their shame is as a tame beast, at their feet
Couched; their cold lips deride thee and thy chosen,
  Their lying lips made grey with dust for meat.

Then when their time is full and days run over,
  The splendour of thy sudden brow made bare
Darkens the morning; thy bared hands uncover
  The veils of light and night and the awful air.

And the world naked as a new-born maiden
  Stands virginal and splendid as at birth,
With all thine heaven of all its light unladen,
  Of all its love unburdened all thine earth.

For the utter earth and the utter air of heaven
  And the extreme depth is thine and the extreme height;
Shadows of things and veils of ages riven
  Are as men's kings unkingdomed in thy sight.

Through the iron years, the centuries brazen-gated,
  By the ages' barred impenetrable doors,
From the evening to the morning have we waited,
  Should thy foot haply sound on the awful floors.

The floors untrodden of the sun's feet glimmer,
  The star-unstricken pavements of the night;
Do the lights burn inside? the lights wax dimmer
  On festal faces withering out of sight.

The crowned heads lose the light on them; it may be
  Dawn is at hand to smite the loud feast dumb;
To blind the torch-lit centuries till the day be,
  The feasting kingdoms till thy kingdom come.

Shall it not come? deny they or dissemble,
  Is it not even as lightning from on high
Now? and though many a soul close eyes and tremble,
  How should they tremble at all who love thee as I?

I am thine harp between thine hands, O mother!
  All my strong chords are strained with love of thee.
We grapple in love and wrestle, as each with other
  Wrestle the wind and the unreluctant sea.

I am no courtier of thee sober-suited,
  Who loves a little for a little pay.
Me not thy winds and storms nor thrones disrooted
  Nor molten crowns nor thine own sins dismay.

Sinned hast thou sometime, therefore art thou sinless;
  Stained hast thou been, who art therefore without stain;
Even as man's soul is kin to thee, but kinless
  Thou, in whose womb Time sows the all-various grain.

I do not bid thee spare me, O dreadful mother!
  I pray thee that thou spare not, of thy grace.
How were it with me then, if ever another
  Should come to stand before thee in this my place?

I am the trumpet at thy lips, thy clarion
  Full of thy cry, sonorous with thy breath;
The graves of souls born worms and creeds grown carrion
  Thy blast of judgment fills with fires of death.

Thou art the player whose organ-keys are thunders,
  And I beneath thy foot the pedal prest;
Thou art the ray whereat the rent night sunders,
  And I the cloudlet borne upon thy breast.

I shall burn up before thee, pass and perish,
  As haze in sunrise on the red sea-line;
But thou from dawn to sunsetting shalt cherish
  The thoughts that led and souls that lighted mine.

Reared between night and noon and truth and error,
  Each twilight-travelling bird that trills and screams
Sickens at midday, nor can face for terror
  The imperious heaven's inevitable extremes.

I have no spirit of skill with equal fingers

At sign to sharpen or to slacken strings;
I keep no time of song with gold-perched singers
And chirp of linnets on the wrists of kings.

I am thy storm-thrush of the days that darken,
Thy petrel in the foam that bears thy bark
To port through night and tempest; if thou hearken,
My voice is in thy heaven before the lark.

My song is in the mist that hides thy morning,
My cry is up before the day for thee;
I have heard thee and beheld thee and give warning,
Before thy wheels divide the sky and sea.

Birds shall wake with thee voiced and feathered fairer,
To see in summer what I see in spring;
I have eyes and heart to endure thee, O thunder-bearer,
And they shall be who shall have tongues to sing.

I have love at least, and have not fear, and part not
From thine unnavigable and wingless way;
Thou tarriest, and I have not said thou art not,
Nor all thy night long have denied thy day.

Darkness to daylight shall lift up thy paean,
Hill to hill thunder, vale cry back to vale,
With wind-notes as of eagles AEschylean,
And Sappho singing in the nightingale.

Sung to by mighty sons of dawn and daughters,
Of this night's songs thine ear shall keep but one;
That supreme song which shook the channelled waters,
And called thee skyward as God calls the sun.

Come, though all heaven again be fire above thee;
Though death before thee come to clear thy sky;
Let us but see in his thy face who love thee;
Yea, though thou slay us, arise and let us die.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

May Janet

"STAND UP, stand up, thou May Janet,
And go to the wars with me."
He's drawn her by both hands
With her face against the sea.

"He that strews red shall gather white,
He that sows white reap red,
Before your face and my daughter's
Meet in a marriage-bed.

"Gold coin shall grow in the yellow field,
Green corn in the green sea-water,
And red fruit grow of the rose's red,
Ere your fruit grow in her."

"But I shall have her by land," he said,
"Or I shall have her by sea,
Or I shall have her by strong treason
And no grace go with me."

Her father's drawn her by both hands,
He's rent her gown from her,
He's ta'en the smock round her body,
Cast in the sea-water.

The captain's drawn her by both sides
Out of the fair green sea;
"Stand up, stand up, thou May Janet,
And come to the war with me."

The first town they came to
There was a blue bride-chamber;
He clothed her on with silk
And belted her with amber.

The second town they came to
The bridesmen feasted knee to knee;
He clothed her on with silver,
A stately thing to see.

The third town they came to
The bridesmaids all had gowns of gold;
He clothed her on with purple,
A rich thing to behold.

The last town they came to
He clothed her white and red,
With a green flag either side of her
And a gold flag overhead.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Mentana : First Anniversary

At the time when the stars are grey,
  And the gold of the molten moon
Fades, and the twilight is thinned,
And the sun leaps up, and the wind,
A light rose, not of the day,
  A stronger light than of noon.

As the light of a face much loved
  Was the face of the light that clomb;
As a mother's whitened with woes
Her adorable head that arose;
As the sound of a God that is moved,
  Her voice went forth upon Rome.

At her lips it fluttered and failed
  Twice, and sobbed into song,
And sank as a flame sinks under;
Then spake, and the speech was thunder,
And the cheek as he heard it paled
  Of the wrongdoer grown grey with the wrong.

"Is it time, is it time appointed,
  Angel of time, is it near?
For the spent night aches into day
When the kings shall slay not or pray,
And the high-priest, accursed and anointed,
  Sickens to deathward with fear.

"For the bones of my slain are stirred,
  And the seed of my earth in her womb
Moves as the heart of a bud
Beating with odorous blood
To the tune of the loud first bird
  Burns and yearns into bloom.

"I lay my hand on her bosom,
  My hand on the heart of my earth,
And I feel as with shiver and sob
The triumphant heart in her throb,
The dead petals dilate into blossom,
  The divine blood beat into birth.

"O my earth, are the springs in thee dry?
  O sweet, is thy body a tomb?
Nay, springs out of springs derive,
And summers from summers alive,
And the living from them that die;
  No tomb is here, but a womb.

"O manifold womb and divine,
  Give me fruit of my children, give!
I have given thee my dew for thy root,

Give thou me for my mouth of thy fruit;
Thine are the dead that are mine,
  And mine are thy sons that live.

"O goodly children, O strong
  Italian spirits, that wear
My glories as garments about you,
Could time or the world misdoubt you,
Behold, in disproof of the wrong,
  The field of the grave-pits there.

"And ye that fell upon sleep,
  We have you too with us yet.
Fairer than life or than youth
Is this, to die for the truth:
No death can sink you so deep
  As their graves whom their brethren forget.

"Were not your pains as my pains?
  As my name are your names not divine?
Was not the light in your eyes
Mine, the light of my skies,
And the sweet shed blood of your veins,
  O my beautiful martyrs, mine?

"Of mine earth were your dear limbs made,
  Of mine air was your sweet life's breath;
At the breasts of my love ye were fed,
O my children, my chosen, my dead,
At my breasts where again ye are laid,
  At the old mother's bosom, in death.

"But ye that live, O their brothers,
  Be ye to me as they were;
Give me, my children that live,
What these dead grudged not to give,
Who alive were sons of your mother's,
  Whose lips drew breath of your air.

"Till darkness by dawn be cloven,
  Let youth's self mourn and abstain;
And love's self find not an hour,
And spring's self wear not a flower,
And Lycoris, with hair unenwoven,
  Hail back to the banquet in vain.

"So sooner and surer the glory
  That is not with us shall be,
And stronger the hands that smite
The heads of the sons of night,
And the sound throughout earth of our story
  Give all men heart to be free."

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Messidor

Put in the sickles and reap;
  For the morning of harvest is red,
    And the long large ranks of the corn
    Coloured and clothed as the morn
Stand thick in the fields and deep
  For them that faint to be fed.
Let all that hunger and weep
  Come hither, and who would have bread
Put in the sickles and reap.

Coloured and clothed as the morn,
  The grain grows ruddier than gold,
    And the good strong sun is alight
    In the mists of the day-dawn white,
And the crescent, a faint sharp horn,
  In the fear of his face turns cold
As the snakes of the night-time that creep
  From the flag of our faith unrolled.
Put in the sickles and reap.

In the mists of the day-dawn white
  That roll round the morning star,
    The large flame lightens and grows
    Till the red-gold harvest-rows,
Full-grown, are full of the light
  As the spirits of strong men are,
Crying, Who shall slumber or sleep?
  Who put back morning or mar?
Put in the sickles and reap.

Till the red-gold harvest-rows
  For miles through shudder and shine
    In the wind's breath, fed with the sun,
    A thousand spear-heads as one
Bowed as for battle to close
  Line in rank against line
With place and station to keep
  Till all men's hands at a sign
Put in the sickles and reap.

A thousand spear-heads as one
  Wave as with swing of the sea
    When the mid tide sways at its height;
    For the hour is for harvest or fight
In face of the just calm sun,
  As the signal in season may be
And the lot in the helm may leap
  When chance shall shake it; but ye,
Put in the sickles and reap.

For the hour is for harvest or fight
  To clothe with raiment of red;

O men sore stricken of hours,
Lo, this one, is not it ours
To glean, to gather, to smite?
Let none make risk of his head
Within reach of the clean scythe-sweep,
When the people that lay as the dead
Put in the sickles and reap.

Lo, this one, is not it ours,
Now the ruins of dead things rattle
As dead men's bones in the pit,
Now the kings wax lean as they sit
Girt round with memories of powers,
With musters counted as cattle
And armies folded as sheep
Till the red blind husbandman battle
Put in the sickles and reap?

Now the kings wax lean as they sit,
The people grow strong to stand;
The men they trod on and spat,
The dumb dread people that sat
As corpses cast in a pit,
Rise up with God at their hand,
And thrones are hurled on a heap,
And strong men, sons of the land,
Put in the sickles and reap.

The dumb dread people that sat
All night without screen for the night,
All day without food for the day,
They shall give not their harvest away,
They shall eat of its fruit and wax fat:
They shall see the desire of their sight,
Though the ways of the seasons be steep,
They shall climb with face to the light,
Put in the sickles and reap.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Monotones

Because there is but one truth;
  Because there is but one banner;
    Because there is but one light;
Because we have with us our youth
  Once, and one chance and one manner
    Of service, and then the night;

Because we have found not yet
  Any way for the world to follow
    Save only that ancient way;
Whosoever forsake or forget,
  Whose faith soever be hollow,
    Whose hope soever grow grey;

Because of the watchwords of kings
  That are many and strange and unwritten,
    Diverse, and our watchword is one;
Therefore, though seven be the strings,
  One string, if the harp be smitten,
    Sole sounds, till the tune be done;

Sounds without cadence or change
  In a weary monotonous burden,
    Be the keynote of mourning or mirth;
Free, but free not to range;
  Taking for crown and for guerdon
    No man's praise upon earth;

Saying one sole word evermore,
  In the ears of the charmed world saying,
    Charmed by spells to its death;
One that chanted of yore
  To a tune of the sword-sweep's playing
    In the lips of the dead blew breath;

Therefore I set not mine hand
  To the shifting of changed modulations,
    To the smiting of manifold strings;
While the thrones of the throned men stand,
  One song for the morning of nations,
    One for the twilight of kings.

One chord, one word, and one way,
  One hope as our law, one heaven,
    Till slain be the great one wrong;
Till the people it could not slay,
  Risen up, have for one star seven,
    For a single, a sevenfold song.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Mourning

Alas my brother! the cry of the mourners of old
  That cried on each other,
All crying aloud on the dead as the death-note rolled,
  Alas my brother!

As flashes of dawn that mists from an east wind smother
  With fold upon fold,
The past years gleam that linked us one with another.

Time sunders hearts as of brethren whose eyes behold
  No more their mother:
But a cry sounds yet from the shrine whose fires wax cold,
  Alas my brother!

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Music: An Ode

WAS it light that spake from the darkness,
or music that shone from the word,
When the night was enkindled with sound
of the sun or the first-born bird?
Souls enthralled and entrammelled in bondage
of seasons that fall and rise,
Bound fast round with the fetters of flesh,
and blinded with light that dies,
Lived not surely till music spake,
and the spirit of life was heard.

Music, sister of sunrise, and herald of life to be,
Smiled as dawn on the spirit of man,
and the thrall was free.
Slave of nature and serf of time,
the bondman of life and death,
Dumb with passionless patience that breathed
but forlorn and reluctant breath,
Heard, beheld, and his soul made answer,
and communed aloud with the sea.

Morning spake, and he heard:
and the passionate silent noon
Kept for him not silence:
and soft from the mounting moon
Fell the sound of her splendour,
heard as dawn's in the breathless night,
Not of men but of birds whose note
bade man's soul quicken and leap to light:
And the song of it spake, and the light and the darkness
of earth were as chords in tune.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Nephelidia

From the depth of the dreamy decline of the dawn through a notable nimbus of nebulous noonshine,
Pallid and pink as the palm of the flag-flower that flickers with fear of the flies as they float,
Are they looks of our lovers that lustrously lean from a marvel of mystic miraculous moonshine,
These that we feel in the blood of our blushes that thicken and threaten with throbs through the throat?
Thicken and thrill as a theatre thronged at appeal of an actor's appalled agitation,
Fainter with fear of the fires of the future than pale with the promise of pride in the past;
Flushed with the famishing fullness of fever that reddens with radiance of rathe recreation,
Gaunt as the ghastliest of glimpses that gleam through the gloom of the gloaming when ghosts go aghast?
Nay, for the nick of the tick of the time is a tremulous touch on the temples of terror,
Strained as the sinews yet strenuous with strife of the dead who is dumb as the dust-heaps of death:
Surely no soul is it, sweet as the spasm of erotic emotional exquisite error,
Bathed in the balms of beatified bliss, beatific itself by beatitude's breath.
Surely no spirit or sense of a soul that was soft to the spirit and soul of our senses
Sweetens the stress of suspiring suspicion that sobs in the semblance and sound of a sigh;
Only this oracle opens Olympian, in mystical moods and triangular tenses--
"Life is the lust of a lamp for the light that is dark till the dawn of the day when we die."
Mild is the mirk and monotonous music of memory, melodiously mute as it may be,
While the hope in the heart of a hero is bruised by the breach of men's rapiers, resigned to the rod;
Made meek as a mother whose bosom-beats bound with the bliss-bringing bulk of a balm-breathing baby,
As they grope through the grave-yard of creeds, under skies growing green at a groan for the grimness of God.
Blank is the book of his bounty beholden of old, and its binding is blacker than bluer:
Out of blue into black is the scheme of the skies, and their dews are the wine of the bloodshed of things;
Till the darkling desire of delight shall be free as a fawn that is freed from the fangs that pursue her,
Till the heart-beats of hell shall be hushed by a hymn from the hunt that has harried the kennel of kings.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Non Dolet

It does not hurt. She looked along the knife
  Smiling, and watched the thick drops mix and run
  Down the sheer blade; not that which had been done
Could hurt the sweet sense of the Roman wife,
But that which was to do yet ere the strife
  Could end for each for ever, and the sun:
  Nor was the palm yet nor was peace yet won
While pain had power upon her husband's life.

It does not hurt, Italia. Thou art more
  Than bride to bridegroom; how shalt thou not take
  The gift love's blood has reddened for thy sake?
Was not thy lifeblood given for us before?
  And if love's heartblood can avail thy need,
  And thou not die, how should it hurt indeed?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Not A Child

'Not a child: I call myself a boy,'
Says my king, with accent stern yet mild,
Now nine years have brought him change of joy;
  'Not a child.'

How could reason be so far beguiled,
Err so far from sense's safe employ,
Stray so wide of truth, or run so wild?

Seeing his face bent over book or toy,
Child I called him, smiling: but he smiled
Back, as one too high for vain annoy -
  Not a child.

II.

Not a child? alack the year!
What should ail an undefiled
Heart, that he would fain appear
  Not a child?

Men, with years and memories piled
Each on other, far and near,
Fain again would so be styled:

Fain would cast off hope and fear,
Rest, forget, be reconciled:
Why would you so fain be, dear,
  Not a child?

III.

Child or boy, my darling, which you will,
Still your praise finds heart and song employ,
Heart and song both yearning toward you still,
  Child or boy.

All joys else might sooner pall or cloy
Love than this which inly takes its fill,
Dear, of sight of your more perfect joy.

Nay, be aught you please, let all fulfil
All your pleasure; be your world your toy:
Mild or wild we love you, loud or still,
  Child or boy.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Ode On The Insurrection In Candia

STR. 1

I laid my laurel-leaf
At the white feet of grief,
Seeing how with covered face and plumeless wings,
With unreverted head
Veiled, as who mourns his dead,
Lay Freedom couched between the thrones of kings,
A wearied lion without lair,
And bleeding from base wounds, and vexed with alien air.

STR. 2

Who was it, who, put poison to thy mouth,
Who lulled with craft or chant thy vigilant eyes,
O light of all men, lamp to north and south,
Eastward and westward, under all men's skies?
For if thou sleep, we perish, and thy name
Dies with the dying of our ephemeral breath;
And if the dust of death o'ergrows thy flame,
Heaven also is darkened with the dust of death.
If thou be mortal, if thou change or cease,
If thine hand fail, or thine eyes turn from Greece,
Thy firstborn, and the firstfruits of thy fame,
God is no God, and man is moulded out of shame.

STR. 3

Is there change in the secret skies,
In the sacred places that see
The divine beginning of things,
The weft of the web of the world?
Is Freedom a worm that dies,
And God no God of the free?
Is heaven like as earth with her kings
And time as a serpent curled
Round life as a tree?

From the steel-bound snows of the north,
From the mystic mother, the east,
From the sands of the fiery south,
From the low-lit clouds of the west,
A sound of a cry is gone forth;
Arise, stand up from the feast,
Let wine be far from the mouth,
Let no man sleep or take rest,
Till the plague hath ceased.

Let none rejoice or make mirth
Till the evil thing be stayed,
Nor grief be lulled in the lute,
Nor hope be loud on the lyre;

Let none be glad upon earth.
O music of young man and maid,
O songs of the bride, be mute.
For the light of her eyes, her desire,
Is the soul dismayed.

It is not a land new-born
That is scourged of a stranger's hand,
That is rent and consumed with flame.
We have known it of old, this face,
With the cheeks and the tresses torn,
With shame on the brow as a brand.
We have named it of old by name,
The land of the royallest race,
The most holy land.

STR. 4

Had I words of fire,
Whose words are weak as snow;
Were my heart a lyre
Whence all its love might flow
In the mighty modulations of desire,
In the notes wherewith man's passion worships woe;

Could my song release
The thought weak words confine,
And my grief, O Greece,
Prove how it worships thine;
It would move with pulse of war the limbs of peace,
Till she flushed and trembled and became divine.

(Once she held for true
This truth of sacred strain;
Though blood drip like dew
And life run down like rain,
It is better that war spare but one or two
Than that many live, and liberty be slain.)

Then with fierce increase
And bitter mother's mirth,
From the womb of peace,
A womb that yearns for birth,
As a man-child should deliverance come to Greece,
As a saviour should the child be born on earth.

STR. 5

O that these my days had been
Ere white peace and shame were wed
Without torch or dancers' din
Round the unsacred marriage-bed!

For of old the sweet-tongued law,
Freedom, clothed with all men's love,
Girt about with all men's awe,
With the wild war-eagle mated
The white breast of peace the dove,
And his ravenous heart abated
And his windy wings were furled
In an eyrie consecrated
Where the snakes of strife uncurled,
And her soul was soothed and sated
With the welfare of the world.

ANT. 1

  But now, close-clad with peace,
  While war lays hand on Greece,
The kingdoms and their kings stand by to see;
  "Aha, we are strong," they say,
  "We are sure, we are well," even they;
"And if we serve, what ails ye to be free?
  We are warm, clothed round with peace and shame;
But ye lie dead and naked, dying for a name."

ANT. 2

O kings and queens and nations miserable,
  O fools and blind, and full of sins and fears,
With these it is, with you it is not well;
  Ye have one hour, but these the immortal years.
These for a pang, a breath, a pulse of pain,
  Have honour, while that honour on earth shall be:
Ye for a little sleep and sloth shall gain
  Scorn, while one man of all men born is free.
Even as the depth more deep than night or day,
The sovereign heaven that keeps its eldest way,
So without chance or change, so without stain,
The heaven of their high memories shall nor wax nor wane.

ANT. 3

As the soul on the lips of the dead
  Stands poising her wings for flight,
    A bird scarce quit of her prison,
      But fair without form or flesh,
So stands over each man's head
  A splendour of imminent light,
    A glory of fame rearisen,
      Of day rearisen afresh
      From the hells of night.

In the hundred cities of Crete
  Such glory was not of old,

Though her name was great upon earth
And her face was fair on the sea.
The words of her lips were sweet,
Her days were woven with gold,
Her fruits came timely to birth;
So fair she was, being free,
Who is bought and sold.

So fair, who is fairer now
With her children dead at her side,
Unsceptred, unconsecrated,
Unapparelled, unhelped, unpitied,
With blood for gold on her brow,
Where the towery tresses divide;
The goodly, the golden-gated,
Many-crowned, many-named, many-citied,
Made like as a bride.

And these are the bridegroom's gifts;
Anguish that straitens the breath,
Shame, and the weeping of mothers,
And the suckling dead at the breast,
White breast that a long sob lifts;
And the dumb dead mouth, which saith,
How long, and how long, my brothers?"
And wrath which endures not rest,
And the pains of death.

ANT. 4

Ah, but would that men,
With eyelids purged by tears,
Saw, and heard again
With consecrated ears,
All the clamour, all the splendour, all the slain,
All the lights and sounds of war, the fates and fears;

Saw far off aspire,
With crash of mine and gate,
From a single pyre
The myriad flames of fate,
Soul by soul transfigured in funereal fire,
Hate made weak by love, and love made strong by hate.

Children without speech,
And many a nursing breast;
Old men in the breach,
Where death sat down a guest;
With triumphant lamentation made for each,
Let the world salute their ruin and their rest.

In one iron hour

The crescent flared and waned,
As from tower to tower,
Fire-scathed and sanguine-stained,
Death, with flame in hand, an open bloodred flower,
Passed, and where it bloomed no bloom of life remained.

ANT. 5

Hear, thou earth, the heavy-hearted
Weary nurse of waning races;
From the dust of years departed,
From obscure funereal places,
Raise again thy sacred head,
Lift the light up of thine eyes
Where are they of all thy dead
That did more than these men dying
In their godlike Grecian wise?
Not with garments rent and sighing,
Neither gifts of myrrh and gold,
Shall their sons lament them lying,
Lest the fame of them wax cold;
But with lives to lives replying,
And a worship from of old.

EPODE

O sombre heart of earth and swoln with grief,
That in thy time wast as a bird for mirth,
Dim womb of life and many a seed and sheaf,
And full of changes, ancient heart of earth,
From grain and flower, from grass and every leaf,
Thy mysteries and thy multitudes of birth,
From hollow and hill, from vales and all thy springs,
From all shapes born and breath of all lips made,
From thunders, and the sound of winds and wings,
From light, and from the solemn sleep of shade,
From the full fountains of all living things,
Speak, that this plague be stayed.
Bear witness all the ways of death and life
If thou be with us in the world's old strife,
If thou be mother indeed,
And from these wounds that bleed
Gather in thy great breast the dews that fall,
And on thy sacred knees
Lull with mute melodies,
Mother, thy sleeping sons in death's dim hall.
For these thy sons, behold,
Sons of thy sons of old,
Bear witness if these be not as they were;
If that high name of Greece
Depart, dissolve, decease
From mouths of men and memories like as air.

By the last milk that drips
Dead on the child's dead lips,
By old men's white unviolated hair,
By sweet unburied faces
That fill those red high places
Where death and freedom found one lion's lair,
By all the bloodred tears
That fill the chaliced years,
The vessels of the sacrament of time,
Wherewith, O thou most holy,
O Freedom, sure and slowly
Thy ministrant white hands cleanse earth of crime;
Though we stand off afar
Where slaves and slaveries are,
Among the chains and crowns of poisonous peace;
Though not the beams that shone
From rent Arcadion
Can melt her mists and bid her snows decrease;
Do thou with sudden wings
Darken the face of kings,
But turn again the beauty of thy brows on Greece;
Thy white and woundless brows,
Whereto her great heart bows;
Give her the glories of thine eyes to see;
Turn thee, O holiest head,
Toward all thy quick and dead,
For love's sake of the souls that cry for thee;
O love, O light, O flame,
By thine own Grecian name,
We call thee and we charge thee that all these be free.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

On An Old Roundel

Death, from thy rigour a voice appealed,
And men still hear what the sweet cry saith,
Crying aloud in thine ears fast sealed,
  Death.

As a voice in a vision that vanisheth,
Through the grave's gate barred and the portal steeled
The sound of the wail of it travelleth.

Wailing aloud from a heart unhealed,
It woke response of melodious breath
From lips now too by thy kiss congealed,
  Death

II.

Ages ago, from the lips of a sad glad poet
Whose soul was a wild dove lost in the whirling snow,
The soft keen plaint of his pain took voice to show it
  Ages ago.

So clear, so deep, the divine drear accents flow,
No soul that listens may choose but thrill to know it,
Pierced and wrung by the passionate music's throe.

For us there murmurs a nearer voice below it,
Known once of ears that never again shall know,
Now mute as the mouth which felt death's wave o'erflow it
  Ages ago.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

On Lamb’s Specimens of Dramatic Poets: Sonnets

I.

IF ALL the flowers of all the fields on earth
By wonder-working summer were made one,
Its fragrance were not sweeter in the sun,
Its treasure-house of leaves were not more worth
Than those wherefrom thy light of musing mirth
Shone, till each leaf whereon thy pen would run
Breathed life, and all its breath was benison.
Beloved beyond all names of English birth,
More dear than mightier memories; gentlest name
That ever clothed itself with flower-sweet fame,
Or linked itself with loftiest names of old
By right and might of loving; I, that am
Less than the least of those within thy fold,
Give only thanks for them to thee, Charles Lamb.

II.

So many a year had borne its own bright bees
And slain them since thy honey-bees were hived,
John Day, in cells of flower-sweet verse contrived
So well with craft of moulding melodies,
Thy soul perchance in amaranth fields at ease
Thought not to hear the sound on earth revived
Of summer music from the spring derived
When thy song sucked the flower of flowering trees
But thine was not the chance of every day:
Time, after many a darkling hour, grew sunny,
And light between the clouds ere sunset swam,
Laughing, and kissed their darkness all away,
When, touched and tasted and approved, thy honey
Took subtler sweetness from the lips of Lamb.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

On the Deaths of Thomas Carlyle and George Eliot: Sonnets

TWO SOULS diverse out of our human sight
Pass, followed one with love and each with wonder:
The stormy sophist with his mouth of thunder,
Clothed with loud words and mantled in the might
Of darkness and magnificence of night;
And one whose eye could smite the night in sunder,
Searching if light or no light were thereunder,
And found in love of loving-kindness light.
Duty divine and Thought with eyes of fire
Still following Righteousness with deep desire
Shone sole and stern before her and above,
Sure stars and sole to steer by; but more sweet
Shone lower the loveliest lamp for earthly feet,
The light of little children, and their love.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

On The Downs

A faint sea without wind or sun;
A sky like flameless vapour dun;
A valley like an unsealed grave
That no man cares to weep upon,
Bare, without boon to crave,
Or flower to save.

And on the lip's edge of the down,
Here where the bent-grass burns to brown
In the dry sea-wind, and the heath
Crawls to the cliff-side and looks down,
I watch, and hear beneath
The low tide breathe.

Along the long lines of the cliff,
Down the flat sea-line without skiff
Or sail or back-blown fume for mark,
Through wind-worn heads of heath and stiff
Stems blossomless and stark
With dry sprays dark,

I send mine eyes out as for news
Of comfort that all these refuse,
Tidings of light or living air
From windward where the low clouds muse
And the sea blind and bare
Seems full of care.

So is it now as it was then,
And as men have been such are men.
There as I stood I seem to stand,
Here sitting chambered, and again
Feel spread on either hand
Sky, sea, and land.

As a queen taken and stripped and bound
Sat earth, discoloured and discrowned;
As a king's palace empty and dead
The sky was, without light or sound;
And on the summer's head
Were ashes shed.

Scarce wind enough was on the sea,
Scarce hope enough there moved in me,
To sow with live blown flowers of white
The green plain's sad serenity,
Or with stray thoughts of light
Touch my soul's sight.

By footless ways and sterile went
My thought unsatisfied, and bent
With blank unspeculative eyes

On the untracked sands of discontent
Where, watched of helpless skies,
Life hopeless lies.

East and west went my soul to find
Light, and the world was bare and blind
And the soil herbless where she trod
And saw men laughing scourge mankind,
Unsmitten by the rod
Of any God.

Out of time's blind old eyes were shed
Tears that were mortal, and left dead
The heart and spirit of the years,
And on mans fallen and helmless head
Time's disanointing tears
Fell cold as fears.

Hope flowering had but strength to bear
The fruitless fruitage of despair;
Grief trod the grapes of joy for wine,
Whereof love drinking unaware
Died as one undivine
And made no sign.

And soul and body dwelt apart;
And weary wisdom without heart
Stared on the dead round heaven and sighed,
'Is death too hollow as thou art,
Or as man's living pride?'
And saying so died.

And my soul heard the songs and groans
That are about and under thrones,
And felt through all time's murmur thrill
Fate's old imperious semitones
That made of good and ill
One same tune still.

Then 'Where is God? and where is aid?
Or what good end of these?' she said;
'Is there no God or end at all,
Nor reason with unreason weighed,
Nor force to disenthral
Weak feet that fall?

'No light to lighten and no rod
To chasten men? Is there no God?'
So girt with anguish, iron-zoned,
Went my soul weeping as she trod
Between the men enthroned
And men that groaned.

O fool, that for brute cries of wrong
Heard not the grey glad mother's song
Ring response from the hills and waves,
But heard harsh noises all day long
Of spirits that were slaves
And dwelt in graves.

The wise word of the secret earth
Who knows what life and death are worth,
And how no help and no control
Can speed or stay things come to birth,
Nor all worlds' wheels that roll
Crush one born soul.

With all her tongues of life and death,
With all her bloom and blood and breath,
From all years dead and all things done,
In the ear of man the mother saith,
'There is no God, O son,
If thou be none.'

So my soul sick with watching heard
That day the wonder of that word,
And as one springs out of a dream
Sprang, and the stagnant wells were stirred
Whence flows through gloom and gleam
Thought's soundless stream.

Out of pale cliff and sunburnt health,
Out of the low sea curled beneath
In the land's bending arm embayed,
Out of all lives that thought hears breathe
Life within life inlaid,
Was answer made.

A multitudinous monotone
Of dust and flower and seed and stone,
In the deep sea-rock's mid-sea sloth,
In the live water's trembling zone,
In all men love and loathe,
One God at growth.

One forceful nature uncreate
That feeds itself with death and fate,
Evil and good, and change and time,
That within all men lies at wait
Till the hour shall bid them climb
And live sublime.

For all things come by fate to flower
At their unconquerable hour,

And time brings truth, and truth makes free,
And freedom fills time's veins with power,
As, brooding on that sea,
My thought filled me.

And the sun smote the clouds and slew,
And from the sun the sea's breath blew,
And white waves laughed and turned and fled
The long green heaving sea-field through,
And on them overhead
The sky burnt red

Like a furled flag that wind sets free,
On the swift summer-coloured sea
Shook out the red lines of the light,
The live sun's standard, blown to lee
Across the live sea's white
And green delight.

And with divine triumphant awe
My spirit moved within me saw,
With burning passion of stretched eyes,
Clear as the light's own firstborn law,
In windless wastes of skies
Time's deep dawn rise.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

On the Russian Persecution of the Jews: Sonnets

O SON of man, by lying tongues adored,
By slaughterous hands of slaves with feet red-shod
In carnage deep as ever Christian trod
Profaned with prayer and sacrifice abhorred
And incense from the trembling tyrant’s horde,
Brute worshippers or wielders of the rod,
Most murderous even of all that call thee God,
Most treacherous even that ever called thee Lord;
Face loved of little children long ago,
Head hated of the priests and rulers then,
If thou see this, or hear these hounds of thine
Run ravening as the Gadarean swine,
Say, was not this thy Passion, to foreknow
In death’s worst hour the works of Christian men?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

One Of Twain

One of twain, twin-born with flowers that waken,
Now hath passed from sense of sun and rain:
Wind from off the flower-crowned branch hath shaken
  One of twain.

One twin flower must pass, and one remain:
One, the word said soothly, shall be taken,
And another left: can death refrain?

Two years since was love's light song mistaken,
Blessing then both blossoms, half in vain?
Night outspeeding light hath overtaken
  One of twain.

Night and light? O thou of heart unwary,
Love, what knowest thou here at all aright,
Lured, abused, misled as men by fairy
  Night and light?

Haply, where thine eyes behold but night,
Soft as o'er her babe the smile of Mary
Light breaks flowerwise into new-born sight.

What though night of light to thee be chary?
What though stars of hope like flowers take flight?
Seest thou all things here, where all see vary
  Night and light?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Past Days

I.

Dead and gone, the days we had together,
Shadow-stricken all the lights that shone
Round them, flown as flies the blown foam's feather,
  Dead and gone.

Where we went, we twain, in time foregone,
Forth by land and sea, and cared not whether,
If I go again, I go alone.

Bound am I with time as with a tether;
Thee perchance death leads enfranchised on,
Far from deathlike life and changeful weather,
  Dead and gone.

II.

Above the sea and sea-washed town we dwelt,
We twain together, two brief summers, free
From heed of hours as light as clouds that melt
  Above the sea.

Free from all heed of aught at all were we,
Save chance of change that clouds or sunbeams dealt
And gleam of heaven to windward or to lee.

The Norman downs with bright grey waves for belt
Were more for us than inland ways might be;
A clearer sense of nearer heaven was felt
  Above the sea.

III.

Cliffs and downs and headlands which the forward-hasting
Flight of dawn and eve empurples and embrowns,
Wings of wild sea-winds and stormy seasons wasting
  Cliffs and downs,

These, or ever man was, were: the same sky frowns,
Laughs, and lightens, as before his soul, forecasting
Times to be, conceived such hopes as time discrowns.

These we loved of old: but now for me the blasting
Breath of death makes dull the bright small seaward towns,
Clothes with human change these all but everlasting
  Cliffs and downs.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Perinde AC Cadaver

In a vision Liberty stood
  By the childless charm-stricken bed
Where, barren of glory and good,
Knowing nought if she would not or would,
  England slept with her dead.

Her face that the foam had whitened,
  Her hands that were strong to strive,
Her eyes whence battle had lightened,
Over all was a drawn shroud tightened
  To bind her asleep and alive.

She turned and laughed in her dream
  With grey lips arid and cold;
She saw not the face as a beam
Burn on her, but only a gleam
  Through her sleep as of new-stamped gold.

But the goddess, with terrible tears
  In the light of her down-drawn eyes,
Spake fire in the dull sealed ears;
"Thou, sick with slumbers and fears,
  Wilt thou sleep now indeed or arise?

"With dreams and with words and with light
  Memories and empty desires
Thou hast wrapped thyself round all night;
Thou hast shut up thine heart from the right,
  And warmed thee at burnt-out fires.

"Yet once if I smote at thy gate,
  Thy sons would sleep not, but heard;
O thou that wast found so great,
Art thou smitten with folly or fate
  That thy sons have forgotten my word?

O Cromwell's mother, O breast
  That suckled Milton! thy name
That was beautiful then, that was blest,
Is it wholly discrowned and deprest,
  Trodden under by sloth into shame?

"Why wilt thou hate me and die?
  For none can hate me and live.
What ill have I done to thee? why
Wilt thou turn from me fighting, and fly,
  Who would follow thy feet and forgive?

"Thou hast seen me stricken, and said,
  What is it to me? I am strong:
Thou hast seen me bowed down on my dead
And laughed and lifted thine head,

And washed thine hands of my wrong.

"Thou hast put out the soul of thy sight;
Thou hast sought to my foemen as friend,
To my traitors that kiss me and smite,
To the kingdoms and empires of night
That begin with the darkness, and end.

"Turn thee, awaken, arise,
With the light that is risen on the lands,
With the change of the fresh-coloured skies;
Set thine eyes on mine eyes,
Lay thy hands in my hands."

She moved and mourned as she heard,
Sighed and shifted her place,
As the wells of her slumber were stirred
By the music and wind of the word,
Then turned and covered her face.

"Ah," she said in her sleep,
"Is my work not done with and done?
Is there corn for my sickle to reap?
And strange is the pathway, and steep,
And sharp overhead is the sun.

"I have done thee service enough,
Loved thee enough in my day;
Now nor hatred nor love
Nor hardly remembrance thereof
Lives in me to lighten my way.

"And is it not well with us here?
Is change as good as is rest?
What hope should move me, or fear,
That eye should open or ear,
Who have long since won what is best?

"Where among us are such things
As turn men's hearts into hell?
Have we not queens without stings,
Scotched princes, and fangless kings?
Yea," she said, "we are well.

"We have filed the teeth of the snake
Monarchy, how should it bite?
Should the slippery slow thing wake,
It will not sting for my sake;
Yea," she said, "I do right."

So spake she, drunken with dreams,
Mad; but again in her ears

A voice as of storm-swelled streams
Spake; "No brave shame then redeems
  Thy lusts of sloth and thy fears?

"Thy poor lie slain of thine hands,
  Their starved limbs rot in thy sight;
As a shadow the ghost of thee stands
Among men living and lands,
  And stirs not leftward or right.

"Freeman he is not, but slave,
  Who stands not out on my side;
His own hand hollows his grave,
Nor strength is in me to save
  Where strength is none to abide.

"Time shall tread on his name
  That was written for honour of old,
Who hath taken in change for fame
Dust, and silver, and shame,
  Ashes, and iron, and gold."

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Philip Massinger: V

CLOUDS here and there arisen an hour past noon
Chequered our English heaven with lengthening bars
And shadow and sound of wheel-winged thunder-cars
Assembling strength to put forth tempest soon,
When the clear still warm concord of thy tune
Rose under skies unscared by reddening Mars
Yet, like a sound of silver speech of stars,
With full mild flame as of the mellowing moon.
Grave and great-hearted Massinger, thy face
High melancholy lights with loftier grace
Than gilds the brows of revel: sad and wise,
The spirit of thought that moved thy deeper song,
Sorrow serene in soft calm scorn of wrong,
Speaks patience yet from thy majestic eyes.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Plus Intra

Soul within sense, immeasurable, obscure,
Insepulchred and deathless, through the dense
Deep elements may scarce be felt as pure
  Soul within sense.

From depth and height by measurers left immense,
Through sound and shape and colour, comes the unsure
Vague utterance, fitful with supreme suspense.

All that may pass, and all that must endure,
Song speaks not, painting shews not: more intense
And keen than these, art wakes with music's lure
    Soul within sense.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Plus Ultra

Far beyond the sunrise and the sunset rises
Heaven, with worlds on worlds that lighten and respond:
Thought can see not thence the goal of hope's surmises
  Far beyond.

Night and day have made an everlasting bond
Each with each to hide in yet more deep disguises
Truth, till souls of men that thirst for truth despond.

All that man in pride of spirit slights or prizes,
All the dreams that make him fearful, fain, or fond,
Fade at forethought's touch of life's unknown surprises
  Far beyond.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Prelude

Between the green bud and the red
Youth sat and sang by Time, and shed
  From eyes and tresses flowers and tears,
  From heart and spirit hopes and fears,
Upon the hollow stream whose bed
  Is channelled by the foamless years;
And with the white the gold-haired head
  Mixed running locks, and in Time's ears
Youth's dreams hung singing, and Time's truth
Was half not harsh in the ears of Youth.

Between the bud and the blown flower
Youth talked with joy and grief an hour,
  With footless joy and wingless grief
  And twin-born faith and disbelief
Who share the seasons to devour;
  And long ere these made up their sheaf
Felt the winds round him shake and shower
  The rose-red and the blood-red leaf,
Delight whose germ grew never grain,
And passion dyed in its own pain.

Then he stood up, and trod to dust
Fear and desire, mistrust and trust,
  And dreams of bitter sleep and sweet,
  And bound for sandals on his feet
Knowledge and patience of what must
  And what things may be, in the heat
And cold of years that rot and rust
  And alter; and his spirit's meat
Was freedom, and his staff was wrought
Of strength, and his cloak woven of thought.

For what has he whose will sees clear
To do with doubt and faith and fear,
  Swift hopes and slow despondencies?
  His heart is equal with the sea's
And with the sea-wind's, and his ear
  Is level to the speech of these,
And his soul communes and takes cheer
  With the actual earth's equalities,
Air, light, and night, hills, winds, and streams,
And seeks not strength from strengthless dreams.

His soul is even with the sun
Whose spirit and whose eye are one,
  Who seeks not stars by day, nor light
  And heavy heat of day by night.
Him can no God cast down, whom none
  Can lift in hope beyond the height
Of fate and nature and things done
  By the calm rule of might and right

That bids men be and bear and do,
And die beneath blind skies or blue.

To him the lights of even and morn
Speak no vain things of love or scorn,
  Fancies and passions miscreate
  By man in things dispassionate.
Nor holds he fellowship forlorn
  With souls that pray and hope and hate,
And doubt they had better not been born,
  And fain would lure or scare off fate
And charm their doomsman from their doom
And make fear dig its own false tomb.

He builds not half of doubts and half
Of dreams his own soul's cenotaph,
  Whence hopes and fears with helpless eyes,
  Wrapt loose in cast-off cerecloths, rise
And dance and wring their hands and laugh,
  And weep thin tears and sigh light sighs,
And without living lips would quaff
  The living spring in man that lies,
And drain his soul of faith and strength
It might have lived on a life's length.

He hath given himself and hath not sold
To God for heaven or man for gold,
  Or grief for comfort that it gives,
  Or joy for grief's restoratives.
He hath given himself to time, whose fold
  Shuts in the mortal flock that lives
On its plain pasture's heat and cold
  And the equal year's alternatives.
Earth, heaven, and time, death, life, and he,
Endure while they shall be to be.

"Yet between death and life are hours
To flush with love and hide in flowers;
  What profit save in these?" men cry:
  "Ah, see, between soft earth and sky,
What only good things here are ours!"
  They say, "what better wouldst thou try,
What sweeter sing of? or what powers
  Serve, that will give thee ere thou die
More joy to sing and be less sad,
More heart to play and grow more glad?"

Play then and sing; we too have played,
We likewise, in that subtle shade.
  We too have twisted through our hair
  Such tendrils as the wild Loves wear,
And heard what mirth the Maenads made,

  Till the wind blew our garlands bare
And left their roses disarrayed,
  And smote the summer with strange air,
And disengirdled and discrowned
The limbs and locks that vine-wreaths bound.

We too have tracked by star-proof trees
The tempest of the Thyiades
  Scare the loud night on hills that hid
  The blood-feasts of the Bassarid,
Heard their song's iron cadences
  Fright the wolf hungering from the kid,
Outroar the lion-throated seas,
  Outchide the north-wind if it chid,
And hush the torrent-tongued ravines
With thunders of their tambourines.

But the fierce flute whose notes acclaim
Dim goddesses of fiery fame,
  Cymbal and clamorous kettledrum,
  Timbrels and tabrets, all are dumb
That turned the high chill air to flame;
  The singing tongues of fire are numb
That called on Cotys by her name
  Edonian, till they felt her come
And maddened, and her mystic face
Lightened along the streams of Thrace.

For Pleasure slumberless and pale,
And Passion with rejected veil,
  Pass, and the tempest-footed throng
  Of hours that follow them with song
Till their feet flag and voices fail,
  And lips that were so loud so long
Learn silence, or a wearier wail;
  So keen is change, and time so strong,
To weave the robes of life and rend
And weave again till life have end.

But weak is change, but strengthless time,
To take the light from heaven, or climb
  The hills of heaven with wasting feet.
  Songs they can stop that earth found meet,
But the stars keep their ageless rhyme;
  Flowers they can slay that spring thought sweet,
But the stars keep their spring sublime;
  Passions and pleasures can defeat,
Actions and agonies control,
And life and death, but not the soul.

Because man's soul is man's God still,
What wind soever waft his will

Across the waves of day and night
To port or shipwreck, left or right,
By shores and shoals of good and ill;
And still its flame at mainmast height
Through the rent air that foam-flakes fill
Sustains the indomitable light
Whence only man hath strength to steer
Or helm to handle without fear.

Save his own soul's light overhead,
None leads him, and none ever led,
Across birth's hidden harbour-bar,
Past youth where shoreward shallows are,
Through age that drives on toward the red
Vast void of sunset hailed from far,
To the equal waters of the dead;
Save his own soul he hath no star,
And sinks, except his own soul guide,
Helmless in middle turn of tide.

No blast of air or fire of sun
Puts out the light whereby we run
With girded loins our lamplit race,
And each from each takes heart of grace
And spirit till his turn be done,
And light of face from each man's face
In whom the light of trust is one;
Since only souls that keep their place
By their own light, and watch things roll,
And stand, have light for any soul.

A little time we gain from time
To set our seasons in some chime,
For harsh or sweet or loud or low,
With seasons played out long ago
And souls that in their time and prime
Took part with summer or with snow,
Lived abject lives out or sublime,
And had their chance of seed to sow
For service or disservice done
To those days daed and this their son.

A little time that we may fill
Or with such good works or such ill
As loose the bonds or make them strong
Wherein all manhood suffers wrong.
By rose-hung river and light-foot rill
There are who rest not; who think long
Till they discern as from a hill
At the sun's hour of morning song,
Known of souls only, and those souls free,
The sacred spaces of the sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Prelude - Lohengrin

Love, out of the depth of things,
As a dewfall felt from above,
From the heaven whence only springs
  Love,

Love, heard from the heights thereof,
The clouds and the watersprings,
Draws close as the clouds remove.

And the soul in it speaks and sings,
A swan sweet-souled as a dove,
An echo that only rings
  Love.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Prelude - Tristan And Isolde

Fate, out of the deep sea's gloom,
When a man's heart's pride grows great,
And nought seems now to foredoom
  Fate,

Fate, laden with fears in wait,
Draws close through the clouds that loom,
Till the soul see, all too late,

More dark than a dead world's tomb,
More high than the sheer dawn's gate,
More deep than the wide sea's womb,
  Fate.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Quia Multum Amavit

Am I not he that hath made thee and begotten thee,
    I, God, the spirit of man?
Wherefore now these eighteen years hast thou forgotten me,
    From whom thy life began?
Thy life-blood and thy life-breath and thy beauty,
    Thy might of hands and feet,
Thy soul made strong for divinity of duty
    And service which was sweet.
Through the red sea brimmed with blood didst thou not follow me,
    As one that walks in trance?
Was the storm strong to break or the sea to swallow thee,
    When thou wast free and France?
I am Freedom, God and man, O France, that plead with thee;
    How long now shall I plead?
Was I not with thee in travail, and in need with thee,
    Thy sore travail and need?
Thou wast fairest and first of my virgin-vested daughters,
    Fairest and foremost thou;
And thy breast was white, though thy hands were red with slaughters,
    Thy breast, a harlot's now.
O foolish virgin and fair among the fallen,
    A ruin where satyrs dance,
A garden wasted for beasts to crawl and brawl in,
    What hast thou done with France?
Where is she who bared her bosom but to thunder,
    Her brow to storm and flame,
And before her face was the red sea cloven in sunder
    And all its waves made tame?
And the surf wherein the broad-based rocks were shaking
    She saw far off divide,
At the blast of the breath of the battle blown and breaking,
    And weight of wind and tide;
And the ravin and the ruin of throned nations
    And every royal race,
And the kingdoms and kings from the state of their high stations
    That fell before her face.
Yea, great was the fall of them, all that rose against her,
    From the earth's old-historied heights;
For my hands were fire, and my wings as walls that fenced her,
    Mine eyes as pilot-lights.
Not as guerdons given of kings the gifts I brought her,
    Not strengths that pass away;
But my heart, my breath of life, O France, O daughter,
    I gave thee in that day.
Yea, the heart's blood of a very God I gave thee,
    Breathed in thy mouth his breath;
Was my word as a man's, having no more strength to save thee
    From this worse thing than death?
Didst thou dream of it only, the day that I stood nigh thee,
    Was all its light a dream?
When that iron surf roared backwards and went by thee
    Unscathed of storm or stream:

When thy sons rose up and thy young men stood together,
One equal face of fight,
And my flag swam high as the swimming sea-foam's feather,
Laughing, a lamp of light?
Ah the lordly laughter and light of it, that lightened
Heaven-high, the heaven's whole length!
Ah the hearts of heroes pierced, the bright lips whitened
Of strong men in their strength!
Ah the banner-poles, the stretch of straightening streamers
Straining their full reach out!
Ah the men's hands making true the dreams of dreamers,
The hopes brought forth in doubt!
Ah the noise of horse, the charge and thunder of drumming,
And swaying and sweep of swords!
Ah the light that led them through of the world's life coming,
Clear of its lies and lords!
By the lightning of the lips of guns whose flashes
Made plain the strayed world's way;
By the flame that left her dead old sins in ashes,
Swept out of sight of day;
By thy children whose bare feet were shod with thunder,
Their bare hands mailed with fire;
By the faith that went with them, waking fear and wonder,
Heart's love and high desire;
By the tumult of the waves of nations waking
Blind in the loud wide night;
By the wind that went on the world's waste waters, making
Their marble darkness white,
As the flash of the flakes of the foam flared lamplike, leaping
From wave to gladdening wave,
Making wide the fast-shut eyes of thraldom sleeping
The sleep of the unclean grave;
By the fire of equality, terrible, devouring,
Divine, that brought forth good;
By the lands it purged and wasted and left flowering
With bloom of brotherhood;
By the lips of fraternity that for love's sake uttered
Fierce words and fires of death,
But the eyes were deep as love's, and the fierce lips fluttered
With love's own living breath;
By thy weaponed hands, brows helmed, and bare feet spurning
The bared head of a king;
By the storm of sunrise round thee risen and burning,
Why hast thou done this thing?
Thou hast mixed thy limbs with the son of a harlot, a stranger,
Mouth to mouth, limb to limb,
Thou, bride of a God, because of the bridesman Danger,
To bring forth seed to him.
For thou thoughtest inly, the terrible bridegroom wakes me,
When I would sleep, to go;
The fire of his mouth consumes, and the red kiss shakes me,
More bitter than a blow.

Rise up, my beloved, go forth to meet the stranger,
    Put forth thine arm, he saith;
Fear thou not at all though the bridesman should be Danger,
    The bridesmaid should be Death.
I the bridegroom, am I not with thee, O bridal nation,
    O wedded France, to strive?
To destroy the sins of the earth with divine devastation,
    Till none be left alive?
Lo her growths of sons, foliage of men and frondage,
    Broad boughs of the old-world tree,
With iron of shame and with pruning-hooks of bondage
    They are shorn from sea to sea.
Lo, I set wings to thy feet that have been wingless,
    Till the utter race be run;
Till the priestless temples cry to the thrones made kingless,
    Are we not also undone?
Till the immeasurable Republic arise and lighten
    Above these quick and dead,
And her awful robes be changed, and her red robes whiten,
    Her warring-robes of red.
But thou wouldst not, saying, I am weary and faint to follow,
    Let me lie down and rest;
And hast sought out shame to sleep with, mire to wallow,
    Yea, a much fouler breast:
And thine own hast made prostitute, sold and shamed and bared it,
    Thy bosom which was mine,
And the bread of the word I gave thee hast soiled, and shared it
    Among these snakes and swine.
As a harlot thou wast handled and polluted,
    Thy faith held light as foam,
That thou sentest men thy sons, thy sons imbruted,
    To slay thine elder Rome.
Therefore O harlot, I gave thee to the accurst one,
    By night to be defiled,
To thy second shame, and a fouler than the first one,
    That got thee first with child.
Yet I know thee turning back now to behold me,
    To bow thee and make thee bare,
Not for sin's sake but penitence, by my feet to hold me,
    And wipe them with thine hair.
And sweet ointment of thy grief thou hast brought thy master,
  And set before thy lord,
From a box of flawed and broken alabaster,
  Thy broken spirit, poured.
And love-offerings, tears and perfumes, hast thou given me,
  To reach my feet and touch;
Therefore thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee,
  Because thou hast loved much.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Quia Nominor Leo: Sonnets

I.
WHAT part is left thee, lion? Ravenous beast,
Which hadst the world for pasture, and for scope
And compass of thine homicidal hope
The kingdom of the spirit of man, the feast
Of souls subdued from west to sunless east,
From blackening north to bloodred south aslope,
All servile; earth for footcloth of the pope,
And heaven for chancel-ceiling of the priest;
Thou that hadst earth by right of rack and rod,
Thou that hadst Rome because thy name was God,
And by thy creed's gift heaven wherein to dwell;
Heaven laughs with all his light and might above
That earth has cast thee out of faith and love;
Thy part is but the hollow dream of hell.

II.

The light of life has faded from thy cause,
High priest of heaven and hell and purgatory:
Thy lips are loud with strains of oldworld story,
But the red prey was rent out of thy paws
Long since and they that dying brake down thy laws
Have with the fires of death-enkindled glory
Put out the flame that faltered on thy hoary
High altars, waning with the world's applause.
This Italy was Dante's Bruno died
Here Campanella, too sublime for pride,
Endured thy God's worst here, and hence went home.
And what art thou, that time's full tide should shrink
For thy sake downward? What art thou, to think
Thy God shall give thee back for birthright Rome?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Recollections

I.

Years upon years, as a course of clouds that thicken
Thronging the ways of the wind that shifts and veers,
Pass, and the flames of remembered fires requicken
  Years upon years.

Surely the thought in a man's heart hopes or fears
Now that forgetfulness needs must here have stricken
Anguish, and sweetened the sealed-up springs of tears.

Ah, but the strength of regrets that strain and sicken,
Yearning for love that the veil of death endears,
Slackens not wing for the wings of years that quicken -
  Years upon years.

II.

Years upon years, and the flame of love's high altar
Trembles and sinks, and the sense of listening ears
Heeds not the sound that it heard of love's blithe psalter
  Years upon years.

Only the sense of a heart that hearkens hears,
Louder than dreams that assail and doubts that palter,
Sorrow that slept and that wakes ere sundawn peers.

Wakes, that the heart may behold, and yet not falter,
Faces of children as stars unknown of, spheres
Seen but of love, that endures though all things alter,
  Years upon years.

III.

Years upon years, as a watch by night that passes,
Pass, and the light of their eyes is fire that sears
Slowly the hopes of the fruit that life amasses
  Years upon years.

Pale as the glimmer of stars on moorland meres
Lighten the shadows reverberate from the glasses
Held in their hands as they pass among their peers.

Lights that are shadows, as ghosts on graveyard grasses,
Moving on paths that the moon of memory cheers,
Shew but as mists over cloudy mountain passes
  Years upon years.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Rest

O Earth, lie heavily upon her eyes;
Seal her sweet eyes weary of watching, Earth;
Lie close around her; leave no room for mirth
With its harsh laughter, nor for sound of sighs.
She hath no questions, she hath no replies,
Hush'd in and curtain'd with a blessed dearth
Of all that irk'd her from the hour of birth;
With stillness that is almost Paradise.
Darkness more clear than noonday holdeth her,
Silence more musical than any song;
Even her very heart has ceased to stir:
Until the morning of Eternity
Her rest shall not begin nor end, but be;
And when she wakes she will not think it long.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Rococo

TAKE HANDS and part with laughter;
Touch lips and part with tears;
Once more and no more after,
Whatever comes with years.
We twain shall not remeasure
The ways that left us twain;
Nor crush the lees of pleasure
From sanguine grapes of pain.

We twain once well in sunder,
What will the mad gods do
For hate with me, I wonder,
Or what for love with you?
Forget them till November,
And dream there's April yet;
Forget that I remember,
And dream that I forget.

Time found our tired love sleeping,
And kissed away his breath;
But what should we do weeping,
Though light love sleep to death?
We have drained his lips at leisure,
Till there's not left to drain
A single sob of pleasure,
A single pulse of pain.

Dream that the lips once breathless
Might quicken if they would;
Say that the soul is deathless;
Dream that the gods are good;
Say March may wed September,
And time divorce regret;
But not that you remember,
And not that I forget.

We have heard from hidden places
What love scarce lives and hears:
We have seen on fervent faces
The pallor of strange tears:
We have trod the wine-vat's treasure,
Whence, ripe to steam and stain,
Foams round the feet of pleasure
The blood-red must of pain.

Remembrance may recover
And time bring back to time
The name of your first lover,
The ring of my first rhyme;
But rose-leaves of December
The frosts of June shall fret,
The day that you remember,

The day that I forget.

The snake that hides and hisses
In heaven we twain have known;
The grief of cruel kisses,
The joy whose mouth makes moan;
The pulse’s pause and measure,
Where in one furtive vein
Throbs through the heart of pleasure
The purpler blood of pain.

We have done with tears and treasons
And love for treason’s sake;
Room for the swift new seasons,
The years that burn and break,
Dismantle and dismember
Men’s days and dreams, Juliette;
For love may not remember,
But time will not forget.

Life treads down love in flying,
Time withers him at root;
Bring all dead things and dying,
Reaped sheaf and ruined fruit,
Where, crushed by three days’ pressure,
Our three days’ love lies slain;
And earlier leaf of pleasure,
And latter flower of pain.

Breathe close upon the ashes,
It may be flame will leap;
Unclose the soft close lashes,
Lift up the lids, and weep.
Light love’s extinguished ember,
Let one tear leave it wet
For one that you remember
And ten that you forget.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Rondel

THESE many years since we began to be,
What have the gods done with us? what with me,
What with my love? they have shown me fates and fears,
Harsh springs, and fountains bitterer than the sea,
Grief a fixed star, and joy a vane that veers,
These many years.

With her, my love, with her have they done well?
But who shall answer for her? who shall tell
Sweet things or sad, such things as no man hears?
May no tears fall, if no tears ever fell,
From eyes more dear to me than starriest spheres
These many years!

But if tears ever touched, for any grief,
Those eyelids folded like a white-rose leaf,
Deep double shells wherethrough the eye-flower peers,
Let them weep once more only, sweet and brief,
Brief tears and bright, for one who gave her tears
These many years.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Sapphics

All the night sleep came not upon my eyelids,
Shed not dew, nor shook nor unclosed a feather,
Yet with lips shut close and with eyes of iron
Stood and beheld me.

Then to me so lying awake a vision
Came without sleep over the seas and touched me,
Softly touched mine eyelids and lips; and I too,
Full of the vision,

Saw the white implacable Aphrodite,
Saw the hair unbound and the feet unsandalled
Shine as fire of sunset on western waters;
Saw the reluctant

Feet, the straining plumes of the doves that drew her,
Looking always, looking with necks reverted,
Back to Lesbos, back to the hills whereunder
Shone Mitylene;

Heard the flying feet of the Loves behind her
Make a sudden thunder upon the waters,
As the thunder flung from the strong unclosing
Wings of a great wind.

So the goddess fled from her place, with awful
Sound of feet and thunder of wings around her;
While behind a clamour of singing women
Severed the twilight.

Ah the singing, ah the delight, the passion!
All the Loves wept, listening; sick with anguish,
Stood the crowned nine Muses about Apollo;
Fear was upon them,

While the tenth sang wonderful things they knew not.
Ah the tenth, the Lesbian! the nine were silent,
None endured the sound of her song for weeping;
Laurel by laurel,

Faded all their crowns; but about her forehead,
Round her woven tresses and ashen temples
White as dead snow, paler than grass in summer,
Ravaged with kisses,

Shone a light of fire as a crown for ever.
Yea, almost the implacable Aphrodite
Paused, and almost wept; such a song was that song.
Yea, by her name too

Called her, saying, 'Turn to me, O my Sappho;'
Yet she turned her face from the Loves, she saw not
Tears for laughter darken immortal eyelids,
Heard not about her

Fearful fitful wings of the doves departing,
Saw not how the bosom of Aphrodite
Shook with weeping, saw not her shaken raiment,
Saw not her hands wrung;

Saw the Lesbians kissing across their smitten
Lutes with lips more sweet than the sound of lute-strings,
Mouth to mouth and hand upon hand, her chosen,
Fairer than all men;

Only saw the beautiful lips and fingers,
Full of songs and kisses and little whispers,
Full of music; only beheld among them
Soar, as a bird soars

Newly fledged, her visible song, a marvel,
Made of perfect sound and exceeding passion,
Sweetly shapen, terrible, full of thunders,
Clothed with the wind's wings.

Then rejoiced she, laughing with love, and scattered
Roses, awful roses of holy blossom;
Then the Loves thronged sadly with hidden faces
Round Aphrodite,

Then the Muses, stricken at heart, were silent;
Yea, the gods waxed pale; such a song was that song.
All reluctant, all with a fresh repulsion,
Fled from before her.

All withdrew long since, and the land was barren,
Full of fruitless women and music only.

Now perchance, when winds are assuaged at sunset,
Lulled at the dewfall,

By the grey sea-side, unassuaged, unheard of,
Unbeloved, unseen in the ebb of twilight,
Ghosts of outcast women return lamenting,
Purged not in Lethe,

Clothed about with flame and with tears, and singing
Songs that move the heart of the shaken heaven,
Songs that break the heart of the earth with pity,
Hearing, to hear them.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Satia te Sanguine

IF YOU loved me ever so little,
I could bear the bonds that gall,
I could dream the bonds were brittle;
You do not love me at all.

O beautiful lips, O bosom
More white than the moon's and warm,
A sterile, a ruinous blossom
Is blown your way in a storm.

As the lost white feverish limbs
Of the Lesbian Sappho, adrift
In foam where the sea-weed swims,
Swam loose for the streams to lift,

My heart swims blind in a sea
That stuns me; swims to and fro,
And gathers to windward and lee
Lamentation, and mourning, and woe.

A broken, an emptied boat,
Sea saps it, winds blow apart,
Sick and adrift and afloat,
The barren waif of a heart.

Where, when the gods would be cruel,
Do they go for a torture? where
Plant thorns, set pain like a jewel?
Ah, not in the flesh, not there!

The racks of earth and the rods
Are weak as foam on the sands;
In the heart is the prey for gods,
Who crucify hearts, not hands.

Mere pangs corrode and consume,
Dead when life dies in the brain;
In the infinite spirit is room
For the pulse of an infinite pain.

I wish you were dead, my dear;
I would give you, had I to give,
Some death too bitter to fear;
It is better to die than live.

I wish you were stricken of thunder
And burnt with a bright flame through,
Consumed and cloven in sunder,
I dead at your feet like you.

If I could but know after all,
I might cease to hunger and ache,

Though your heart were ever so small,
If it were not a stone or a snake.

You are crueller, you that we love,
Than hatred, hunger, or death;
You have eyes and breasts like a dove,
And you kill men’s hearts with a breath.

As plague in a poisonous city
Insults and exults on her dead,
So you, when pallid for pity
Comes love, and fawns to be fed.

As a tame beast writhes and wheedles,
He fawns to be fed with wiles;
You carve him a cross of needles,
And whet them sharp as your smiles.

He is patient of thorn and whip,
He is dumb under axe or dart;
You suck with a sleepy red lip
The wet red wounds in his heart.

You thrill as his pulses dwindle,
You brighten and warm as he bleeds,
With insatiable eyes that kindle
And insatiable mouth that feeds.

Your hands nailed love to the tree,
You stript him, scourged him with rods,
And drowned him deep in the sea
That hides the dead and their gods.

And for all this, die will he not;
There is no man sees him but I;
You came and went and forgot;
I hope he will some day die.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Sestina

I saw my soul at rest upon a day
As a bird sleeping in the nest of night,
Among soft leaves that give the starlight way
To touch its wings but not its eyes with light;
So that it knew as one in visions may,
And knew not as men waking, of delight.

This was the measure of my soul's delight;
It had no power of joy to fly by day,
Nor part in the large lordship of the light;
But in a secret moon-beholden way
Had all its will of dreams and pleasant night,
And all the love and life that sleepers may.

But such life's triumph as men waking may
It might not have to feed its faint delight
Between the stars by night and sun by day,
Shut up with green leaves and a little light;
Because its way was as a lost star's way,
A world's not wholly known of day or night.

All loves and dreams and sounds and gleams of night
Made it all music that such minstrels may,
And all they had they gave it of delight;
But in the full face of the fire of day
What place shall be for any starry light,
What part of heaven in all the wide sun's way?

Yet the soul woke not, sleeping by the way,
Watched as a nursling of the large-eyed night,
And sought no strength nor knowledge of the day,
Nor closer touch conclusive of delight,
Nor mightier joy nor truer than dreamers may,
Nor more of song than they, nor more of light.

For who sleeps once and sees the secret light
Whereby sleep shows the soul a fairer way
Between the rise and rest of day and night,
Shall care no more to fare as all men may,
But be his place of pain or of delight,
There shall he dwell, beholding night as day.

Song, have thy day and take thy fill of light
Before the night be fallen across thy way;
Sing while he may, man hath no long delight.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Seven Years Old

I.

SEVEN white roses on one tree,
Seven white loaves of blameless leaven,
Seven white sails on one soft sea,
Seven white swans on one lake's lee,
Seven white flowerlike stars in heaven,
All are types unmeet to be
For a birthday's crown of seven.

II.

Not the radiance of the roses,
Not the blessing of the bread,
Not the breeze that ere day grows is
Fresh for sails and swans, and closes
Wings above the sun's grave spread,
When the starshine on the snows is
Sweet as sleep on sorrow shed,

III.

Nothing sweetest, nothing best,
Holds so good and sweet a treasure
As the love wherewith once blest
Joy grows holy, grief takes rest,
Life, half tired with hours to measure,
Fills his eyes and lips and breast
With most light and breath of pleasure

IV.

As the rapture unpolluted,
As the passion undefiled,
By whose force all pains heart-rooted
Are transfigured and transmuted,
Recompensed and reconciled,
Through the imperial, undisputed,
Present godhead of a child.

V.

Brown bright eyes and fair bright head,
Worth a worthier crown than this is,
Worth a worthier song instead,
Sweet grave wise round mouth, full fed
With the joy of love, whose bliss is
More than mortal wine and bread,
Lips whose words are sweet as kisses,

VI.

Little hands so glad of giving,
Little heart so glad of love,
Little soul so glad of living,
While the strong swift hours are weaving
Light with darkness woven above,
Time for mirth and time for grieving,
Plume of raven and plume of dove,

VII.

I can give you but a word
Warm with love therein for leaven,
But a song that falls unheard
Yet on ears of sense unstirred
Yet by song so far from heaven,
Whence you came the brightest bird,
Seven years since, of seven times seven.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Siena

Inside this northern summer's fold
The fields are full of naked gold,
Broadcast from heaven on lands it loves;
The green veiled air is full of doves;
Soft leaves that sift the sunbeams let
Light on the small warm grasses wet
Fall in short broken kisses sweet,
And break again like waves that beat
Round the sun's feet.

But I, for all this English mirth
Of golden-shod and dancing days,
And the old green-girt sweet-hearted earth,
Desire what here no spells can raise.
Far hence, with holier heavens above,
The lovely city of my love
Bathes deep in the sun-satiate air
That flows round no fair thing more fair
Her beauty bare.

There the utter sky is holier, there
More pure the intense white height of air,
More clear men's eyes that mine would meet,
And the sweet springs of things more sweet.
There for this one warm note of doves
A clamour of a thousand loves
Storms the night's ear, the day's assails,
From the tempestuous nightingales,
And fills, and fails.

O gracious city well-beloved,
  Italian, and a maiden crowned,
Siena, my feet are no more moved
  Toward thy strange-shapen mountain-bound:
But my heart in me turns and moves,
O lady loveliest of my loves,
Toward thee, to lie before thy feet
And gaze from thy fair fountain-seat
Up the sheer street;

And the house midway hanging see
That saw Saint Catherine bodily,
Felt on its floors her sweet feet move,
And the live light of fiery love
Burn from her beautiful strange face,
As in the sanguine sacred place
Where in pure hands she took the head
Severed, and with pure lips still red
Kissed the lips dead.

For years through, sweetest of the saints,
  In quiet without cease she wrought,

Till cries of men and fierce complaints
  From outward moved her maiden thought;
And prayers she heard and sighs toward France,
"God, send us back deliverance,
Send back thy servant, lest we die!"
With an exceeding bitter cry
They smote the sky.

Then in her sacred saving hands
She took the sorrows of the lands,
With maiden palms she lifted up
The sick time's blood-embittered cup,
And in her virgin garment furled
The faint limbs of a wounded world.
Clothed with calm love and clear desire,
She went forth in her soul's attire,
A missive fire.

Across the might of men that strove
  It shone, and over heads of kings;
And molten in red flames of love
  Were swords and many monstrous things;
And shields were lowered, and snapt were spears,
And sweeter-tuned the clamorous years;
And faith came back, and peace, that were
Fled; for she bade, saying, "Thou, God's heir,
Hast thou no care?

"Lo, men lay waste thine heritage
Still, and much heathen people rage
Against thee, and devise vain things.
What comfort in the face of kings,
What counsel is there? Turn thine eyes
And thine heart from them in like wise;
Turn thee unto thine holy place
To help us that of God for grace
Require thy face.

"For who shall hear us if not thou
  In a strange land? what doest thou there?
Thy sheep are spoiled, and the ploughers plough
  Upon us; why hast thou no care
For all this, and beyond strange hills
Liest unregardful what snow chills
Thy foldless flock, or what rains beat?
Lo, in thine ears, before thy feet,
Thy lost sheep bleat.

"And strange men feed on faultless lives,
And there is blood, and men put knives,
Shepherd, unto the young lamb's throat;
And one hath eaten, and one smote,

And one had hunger and is fed
Full of the flesh of these, and red
With blood of these as who drinks wine
And God knoweth, who hath sent thee a sign,
If these were thine."

But the Pope's heart within him burned,
  So that he rose up, seeing the sign,
And came among them; but she turned
  Back to her daily way divine,
And fed her faith with silent things,
And lived her life with curbed white wings,
And mixed herself with heaven and died:
And now on the sheer city-side
Smiles like a bride.

You see her in the fresh clear gloom,
Where walls shut out the flame and bloom
Of full-breathed summer, and the roof
Keeps the keen ardent air aloof
And sweet weight of the violent sky:
There bodily beheld on high,
She seems as one hearing in tune
Heaven within heaven, at heaven's full noon,
In sacred swoon:

A solemn swoon of sense that aches
  With imminent blind heat of heaven,
While all the wide-eyed spirit wakes,
  Vigilant of the supreme Seven,
Whose choral flames in God's sight move,
Made unendurable with love,
That without wind or blast of breath
Compels all things through life and death
Whither God saith.

There on the dim side-chapel wall
Thy mighty touch memorial,
Razzi, raised up, for ages dead,
And fixed for us her heavenly head:
And, rent with plaited thorn and rod,
Bared the live likeness of her God
To men's eyes turning from strange lands,
Where, pale from thine immortal hands,
Christ wounded stands;

And the blood blots his holy hair
  And white brows over hungering eyes
That plead against us, and the fair
  Mute lips forlorn of words or sighs
In the great torment that bends down
His bruised head with the bloomless crown,

White as the unfruitful thorn-flower,
A God beheld in dreams that were
Beheld of her.

In vain on all these sins and years
Falls the sad blood, fall the slow tears;
In vain poured forth as watersprings,
Priests, on your altars, and ye, kings,
About your seats of sanguine gold;
Still your God, spat upon and sold,
Bleeds at your hands; but now is gone
All his flock from him saving one;
Judas alone.

Surely your race it was that he,
  O men signed backward with his name,
Beholding in Gethsemane
  Bled the red bitter sweat of shame,
Knowing how the word of Christian should
Mean to men evil and not good,
Seem to men shameful for your sake,
Whose lips, for all the prayers they make,
Man's blood must slake.

But blood nor tears ye love not, you
That my love leads my longing to,
Fair as the world's old faith of flowers,
O golden goddesses of ours!
From what Idalian rose-pleasance
Hath Aphrodite bidden glance
The lovelier lightnings of your feet?
From what sweet Paphian sward or seat
Led you more sweet?

O white three sisters, three as one,
  With flowerlike arms for flowery bands
Your linked limbs glitter like the sun,
  And time lies beaten at your hands.
Time and wild years and wars and men
Pass, and ye care not whence or when;
With calm lips over sweet for scorn,
Ye watch night pass, O children born
Of the old-world morn.

Ah, in this strange and shrineless place,
What doth a goddess, what a Grace,
Where no Greek worships her shrined limbs
With wreaths and Cytherean hymns?
Where no lute makes luxurious
The adoring airs in Amathus,
Till the maid, knowing her mother near,
Sobs with love, aching with sweet fear?

What do ye here?

For the outer land is sad, and wears
  A raiment of a flaming fire;
And the fierce fruitless mountain stairs
  Climb, yet seem wroth and loth to aspire,
Climb, and break, and are broken down,
And through their clefts and crests the town
Looks west and sees the dead sun lie,
In sanguine death that stains the sky
With angry dye.

And from the war-worn wastes without
In twilight, in the time of doubt,
One sound comes of one whisper, where
Moved with low motions of slow air
The great trees nigh the castle swing
In the sad coloured evening;
"Ricorditi di me, che son
La Pia"--that small sweet word alone
Is not yet gone.

"Ricorditi di me"--the sound
  Sole out of deep dumb days remote
Across the fiery and fatal ground
  Comes tender as a hurt bird's note
To where, a ghost with empty hands,
A woe-worn ghost, her palace stands
In the mid city, where the strong
Bells turn the sunset air to song,
And the towers throng.

With other face, with speech the same,
A mightier maiden's likeness came
Late among mourning men that slept,
A sacred ghost that went and wept,
White as the passion-wounded Lamb,
Saying, "Ah, remember me, that am
Italia." (From deep sea to sea
Earth heard, earth knew her, that this was she.)
"Ricorditi.

"Love made me of all things fairest thing,
  And Hate unmade me; this knows he
Who with God's sacerdotal ring
  Enringed mine hand, espousing me."
Yea, in thy myriad-mooded woe,
Yea, Mother, hast thou not said so?
Have not our hearts within us stirred,
O thou most holiest, at thy word?
Have we not heard?

As this dead tragic land that she
Found deadly, such was time to thee;
Years passed thee withering in the red
Maremma, years that deemed thee dead,
Ages that sorrowed or that scorned;
And all this while though all they mourned
Thou sawest the end of things unclean,
And the unborn that should see thee a queen.
Have we not seen?

The weary poet, thy sad son,
  Upon thy soil, under thy skies,
Saw all Italian things save one -
  Italia; this thing missed his eyes;
The old mother-might, the breast, the face,
That reared, that lit the Roman race;
This not Leopardi saw; but we,
What is it, Mother, that we see,
What if not thee?

Look thou from Siena southward home,
Where the priest's pall hangs rent on Rome,
And through the red rent swaddling-bands
Towards thine she strains her labouring hands.
Look thou and listen, and let be
All the dead quick, all the bond free;
In the blind eyes let there be sight;
In the eighteen centuries of the night
Let there be light.

Bow down the beauty of thine head,
  Sweet, and with lips of living breath
Kiss thy sons sleeping and thy dead,
  That there be no more sleep or death.
Give us thy light, thy might, thy love,
Whom thy face seen afar above
Drew to thy feet; and when, being free,
Thou hast blest thy children born to thee,
Bless also me.

Me that when others played or slept
Sat still under thy cross and wept;
Me who so early and unaware
Felt fall on bent bared brows and hair
(Thin drops of the overflowing flood!)
The bitter blessing of thy blood;
The sacred shadow of thy pain,
Thine, the true maiden-mother, slain
And raised again.

Me consecrated, if I might,
  To praise thee, or to love at least,

O mother of all men's dear delight,
  Thou madest a choral-souled boy-priest,
Before my lips had leave to sing,
Or my hands hardly strength to cling
About the intolerable tree
Whereto they had nailed my heart and thee
And said, "Let be."

For to thee too the high Fates gave
Grace to be sacrificed and save,
That being arisen, in the equal sun,
God and the People should be one;
By those red roads thy footprints trod,
Man more divine, more human God,
Saviour; that where no light was known
But darkness, and a daytime flown,
Light should be shown.

Let there be light, O Italy!
  For our feet falter in the night.
O lamp of living years to be,
  O light of God, let there be light!
Fill with a love keener than flame
Men sealed in spirit with thy name,
The cities and the Roman skies,
Where men with other than man's eyes
Saw thy sun rise.

For theirs thou wast and thine were they
Whose names outshine thy very day;
For they are thine and theirs thou art
Whose blood beats living in man's heart,
Remembering ages fled and dead
Wherein for thy sake these men bled;
They that saw Trebia, they that see
Mentana, they in years to be
That shall see thee.

For thine are all of us, and ours
  Thou; till the seasons bring to birth
A perfect people, and all the powers
  Be with them that bear fruit on earth;
Till the inner heart of man be one
With freedom, and the sovereign sun;
And Time, in likeness of a guide,
Lead the Republic as a bride
Up to God's side.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Sir William Gomm: Sonnets

I.
AT threescore years and five aroused anew
To rule in India, forth a soldier went
On whose bright-fronted youth fierce war had spent
Its iron stress of storm, till glory grew
Full as the red sun waned on Waterloo.
Landing, he met the word from England sent
Which bade him yield up rule: and he, content,
Resigned it, as a mightier warrior's due;
And wrote as one rejoicing to record
That 'from the first' his royal heart was lord
Of its own pride or pain; that thought was none
Therein save this, that in her perilous strait
England, whose womb brings forth her sons so great,
Should choose to serve her first her mightiest son.

II.

Glory beyond all flight of warlike fame
Go with the warrior's memory who preferred
To praise of men whereby men's hearts are stirred,
And acclamation of his own proud name
With blare of trumpet-blasts and sound and flame
Of pageant honour, and the titular word
That only wins men worship of the herd,
His country's sovereign good: who overcame
Pride, wrath, and hope of all high chance on earth,
For this land's love that gave his great heart birth.
O nursling of the sea-winds and the sea,
Immortal England, goddess ocean-born,
What shall thy children fear, what strengths not scorn,
While children of such mould are born to thee?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Sleep

Sleep, when a soul that her own clouds cover
Wails that sorrow should always keep
Watch, nor see in the gloom above her
  Sleep,

Down, through darkness naked and steep,
Sinks, and the gifts of his grace recover
Soon the soul, though her wound be deep.

God beloved of us, all men's lover,
All most weary that smile or weep
Feel thee afar or anear them hover,
  Sleep.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Song Before Death: From the French

SWEET MOTHER, in a minute's span
Death parts thee and my love of thee;
Sweet love, that yet art living man,
Come back, true love, to comfort me.
Back, ah, come back! ah wellaway!
But my love comes not any day.

As roses, when the warm West blows,
Break to full flower and sweeten spring,
My soul would break to a glorious rose
In such wise at his whispering.
In vain I listen; wellaway!
My love says nothing any day.

You that will weep for pity of love
On the low place where I am lain,
I pray you, having wept enough,
Tell him for whom I bore such pain
That he was yet, ah! wellaway!
My true love to my dying day.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Sorrow

SORROW, on wing through the world for ever,
Here and there for awhile would borrow
Rest, if rest might haply deliver
        Sorrow.

One thought lies close in her heart gnawn thorough
With pain, a weed in a dried-up river,
A rust-red share in an empty furrow.

Hearts that strain at her chain would sever
The link where yesterday frets to-morrow:
All things pass in the world, but never
        Sorrow.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

St. Dorothy

IT HATH been seen and yet it shall be seen
That out of tender mouths God's praise hath been
Made perfect, and with wood and simple string
He hath played music sweet as shawm-playing
To please himself with softness of all sound;
And no small thing but hath been sometime found
Full sweet of use, and no such humbleness
But God hath bruised withal the sentences
And evidence of wise men witnessing;
No leaf that is so soft a hidden thing
It never shall get sight of the great sun;
The strength of ten has been the strength of one,
And lowliness has waxed imperious.

There was in Rome a man Theophilus
Of right great blood and gracious ways, that had
All noble fashions to make people glad
And a soft life of pleasurable days;
He was a goodly man for one to praise,
Flawless and whole upward from foot to head;
His arms were a red hawk that alway fed
On a small bird with feathers gnawed upon,
Beaten and plucked about the bosom-bone
Whereby a small round fleck like fire there was:
They called it in their tongue lampadias;
This was the banner of the lordly man.
In many straits of sea and reaches wan
Full of quick wind, and many a shaken firth,
It had seen fighting days of either earth,
Westward or east of waters Gaditane
(This was the place of sea-rocks under Spain
Called after the great praise of Hercules)
And north beyond the washing Pontic seas,
Far windy Russian places fabulous,
And salt fierce tides of storm-swoln Bosphorus.

Now as this lord came straying in Rome town
He saw a little lattice open down
And after it a press of maidens' heads
That sat upon their cold small quiet beds
Talking, and played upon short-stringèd lutes;
And other some ground perfume out of roots
Gathered by marvellous moons in Asia;
Saffron and aloes and wild cassia,
Coloured all through and smelling of the sun;
And over all these was a certain one
Clothed softly, with sweet herbs about her hair
And bosom flowerful; her face more fair
Than sudden-singing April in soft lands:
Eyed like a gracious bird, and in both hands
She held a psalter painted green and red.

This Theophile laughed at the heart, and said;
Now God so help me hither and St. Paul,
As by the new time of their festival
I have good will to take this maid to wife.
And herewith fell to fancies of her life
And soft half-thoughts that ended suddenly.
This is man's guise to please himself, when he
Shall not see one thing of his pleasant things,
Nor with outwatch of many travailings
Come to be eased of the least pain he hath
For all his love and all his foolish wrath
And all the heavy manner of his mind.
Thus is he like a fisher fallen blind
That casts his nets across the boat awry
To strike the sea, but lo, he striketh dry
And plucks them back all broken for his pain
And bites his beard and casts across again
And reaching wrong slips over in the sea.
So hath this man a strangled neck for fee,
For all his cost he chuckles in his throat.

This Theophile that little hereof wote
Laid wait to hear of her what she might be:
Men told him she had name of Dorothy,
And was a lady of a worthy house.
Thereat this knight grew inly glorious
That he should have a love so fair of place.
She was a maiden of most quiet face,
Tender of speech, and had no hardihood
But was nigh feeble of her fearful blood;
Her mercy in her was so marvellous
From her least years, that seeing her school-fellows
That read beside her stricken with a rod,
She would cry sore and say some word to God
That he would ease her fellow of his pain.
There is no touch of sun or fallen rain
That ever fell on a more gracious thing.

In middle Rome there was in stone-working
The church of Venus painted royally.
The chapels of it were some two or three,
In each of them her tabernacle was
And a wide window of six feet in glass
Coloured with all her works in red and gold.
The altars had bright cloths and cups to hold
The wine of Venus for the services,
Made out of honey and crushed wood-berries
That shed sweet yellow through the thick wet red,
That on high days was borne upon the head
Of Venus' priest for any man to drink;
So that in drinking he should fall to think
On some fair face, and in the thought thereof

Worship, and such should triumph in his love.
For this soft wine that did such grace and good
Was new trans-shaped and mixed with Love's own blood,
That in the fighting Trojan time was bled;
For which came such a woe to Diomed
That he was stifled after in hard sea.
And some said that this wine-shedding should be
Made of the falling of Adonis' blood,
That curled upon the thorns and broken wood
And round the gold silk shoes on Venus' feet;
The taste thereof was as hot honey sweet
And in the mouth ran soft and riotous.
This was the holiness of Venus' house.

It was their worship, that in August days
Twelve maidens should go through those Roman ways
Naked, and having gold across their brows
And their hair twisted in short golden rows,
To minister to Venus in this wise:
And twelve men chosen in their companies
To match these maidens by the altar-stair,
All in one habit, crowned upon the hair.
Among these men was chosen Theophile.

This knight went out and prayed a little while,
Holding queen Venus by her hands and knees;
I will give thee twelve royal images
Cut in glad gold, with marvels of wrought stone
For thy sweet priests to lean and pray upon,
Jasper and hyacinth and chrysopras,
And the strange Asian thalamite that was
Hidden twelve ages under heavy sea
Among the little sleepy pearls, to be
A shrine lit over with soft candle-flame
Burning all night red as hot brows of shame,
So thou wilt be my lady without sin.
Goddess that art all gold outside and in,
Help me to serve thee in thy holy way.
Thou knowest, Love, that in my bearing day
There shone a laughter in the singing stars
Round the gold-ceilèd bride-bed wherein Mars
Touched thee and had thee in your kissing wise.
Now therefore, sweet, kiss thou my maiden's eyes
That they may open graciously towards me;
And this new fashion of thy shrine shall be
As soft with gold as thine own happy head.

The goddess, that was painted with face red
Between two long green tumbled sides of sea,
Stooped her neck sideways, and spake pleasantly:
Thou shalt have grace as thou art thrall of mine.
And with this came a savour of shed wine

And plucked-out petals from a rose's head:
And softly with slow laughs of lip she said,
Thou shalt have favour all thy days of me.

Then came Theophilus to Dorothy,
Saying: O sweet, if one should strive or speak
Against God's ways, he gets a beaten cheek
For all his wage and shame above all men.
Therefore I have no will to turn again
When God saith "go," lest a worse thing fall out.
Then she, misdoubting lest he went about
To catch her wits, made answer somewhat thus:
I have no will, my lord Theophilus,
To speak against this worthy word of yours;
Knowing how God's will in all speech endures,
That save by grace there may no thing be said.
Then Theophile waxed light from foot to head,
And softly fell upon this answering.
It is well seen you are a chosen thing
To do God service in his gracious way.
I will that you make haste and holiday
To go next year upon the Venus stair,
Covered none else, but crowned upon your hair,
And do the service that a maiden doth.
She said: but I that am Christ's maid were loth
To do this thing that hath such bitter name.
Thereat his brows were beaten with sore shame
And he came off and said no other word.
Then his eyes chanced upon his banner-bird,
And he fell fingering at the staff of it
And laughed for wrath and stared between his feet,
And out of a chafed heart he spake as thus:
Lo how she japes at me Theophilus,
Feigning herself a fool and hard to love;
Yet in good time for all she boasteth of
She shall be like a little beaten bird.
And while his mouth was open in that word
He came upon the house Janiculum,
Where some went busily, and other some
Talked in the gate called the gate glorious.
The emperor, which was one Gabalus,
Sat over all and drank chill wine alone.
To whom is come Theophilus anon,
And said as thus: Beau sire, Dieu vous aide.
And afterward sat under him, and said
All this thing through as ye have wholly heard.

This Gabalus laughed thickly in his beard.
Yea, this is righteousness and maiden rule.
Truly, he said, a maid is but a fool.
And japed at them as one full villainous,
In a lewd wise, this heathen Gabalus,

And sent his men to bind her as he bade.
Thus have they taken Dorothy the maid,
And haled her forth as men hale pick-purses:
A little need God knows they had of this,
To hale her by her maiden gentle hair.
Thus went she lowly, making a soft prayer,
As one who stays the sweet wine in his mouth,
Murmuring with eased lips, and is most loth
To have done wholly with the sweet of it.

Christ king, fair Christ, that knowest all men's wit
And all the feeble fashion of my ways,
O perfect God, that from all yesterdays
Abidest whole with morrows perfected,
I pray thee by thy mother's holy head
Thou help me to do right, that I not slip:
I have no speech nor strength upon my lip,
Except thou help me who art wise and sweet.
Do this too for those nails that clove thy feet,
Let me die maiden after many pains.
Though I be least among thy handmaidens,
Doubtless I shall take death more sweetly thus.

Now have they brought her to King Gabalus,
Who laughed in all his throat some breathing-whiles:
By God, he said, if one should leap two miles,
He were not pained about the sides so much.
This were a soft thing for a man to touch.
Shall one so chafe that hath such little bones?
And shook his throat with thick and chuckled moans
For laughter that she had such holiness.
What aileth thee, wilt thou do services?
It were good fare to fare as Venus doth.

Then said this lady with her maiden mouth,
Shamefaced, and something paler in the cheek:
Now, sir, albeit my wit and will to speak
Give me no grace in sight of worthy men,
For all my shame yet know I this again,
I may not speak, nor after downlying
Rise up to take delight in lute-playing,
Nor sing nor sleep, nor sit and fold my hands,
But my soul in some measure understands
God's grace laid like a garment over me.
For this fair God that out of strong sharp sea
Lifted the shapely and green-coloured land,
And hath the weight of heaven in his hand
As one might hold a bird, and under him
The heavy golden planets beam by beam
Building the feasting-chambers of his house,
And the large world he holdeth with his brows
And with the light of them astonisheth

All place and time and face of life and death
And motion of the north wind and the south,
And is the sound within his angel's mouth
Of singing words and words of thanksgiving,
And is the colour of the latter spring
And heat upon the summer and the sun,
And is beginning of all things begun
And gathers in him all things to their end,
And with the fingers of his hand doth bend
The stretched-out sides of heaven like a sail,
And with his breath he maketh the red pale
And fills with blood faint faces of men dead,
And with the sound between his lips are fed
Iron and fire and the white body of snow,
And blossom of all trees in places low,
And small bright herbs about the little hills,
And fruit pricked softly with birds' tender bills,
And flight of foam about green fields of sea,
And fourfold strength of the great winds that be
Moved always outward from beneath his feet,
And growth of grass and growth of sheavèd wheat
And all green flower of goodly-growing lands;
And all these things he gathers with his hands
And covers all their beauty with his wings;
The same, even God that governs all these things,
Hath set my feet to be upon his ways.
Now therefore for no painfulness of days
I shall put off this service bound on me.
Also, fair sir, ye know this certainly,
How God was in his flesh full chaste and meek
And gave his face to shame, and either cheek
Gave up to smiting of men tyrannous.

And here with a great voice this Gabalus
Cried out and said: By God's blood and his bones,
This were good game betwixen night and nones
For one to sit and hearken to such saws:
I were as lief fall in some big beast's jaws
As hear these women's jaw-teeth chattering;
By God a woman is the harder thing,
One may not put a hook into her mouth.
Now by St. Luke I am so sore adrouth
For all these saws I must needs drink again.
But I pray God deliver all us men
From all such noise of women and their heat.
That is a noble scripture, well I weet,
That likens women to an empty can;
When God said that he was a full wise man.
I trow no man may blame him as for that.

And herewithal he drank a draught, and spat,
And said: Now shall I make an end hereof.

Come near all men and hearken for God's love,
And ye shall hear a jest or twain, God wot.
And spake as thus with mouth full thick and hot;
But thou do this thou shalt be shortly slain.
Lo, sir, she said, this death and all his pain
I take in penance of my bitter sins.
Yea now, quoth Gabalus, this game begins.
Lo, without sin one shall not live a span.
Lo, this is she that would not look on man
Between her fingers folded in thwart wise.
See how her shame hath smitten in her eyes
That was so clean she had not heard of shame.
Certes, he said, by Gabalus my name,
This two years back I was not so well pleased.
This were good mirth for sick men to be eased
And rise up whole and laugh at hearing of.
I pray thee show us something of thy love,
Since thou wast maid thy gown is waxen wide.
Yea, maid I am, she said, and somewhat sighed,
As one who thought upon the low fair house
Where she sat working, with soft bended brows
Watching her threads, among the school-maidens.
And she thought well now God had brought her thence
She should not come to sew her gold again.

Then cried King Gabalus upon his men
To have her forth and draw her with steel gins.
And as a man hag-ridden beats and grins
And bends his body sidelong in his bed,
So wagged he with his body and knave's head,
Gaping at her, and blowing with his breath.
And in good time he gat an evil death
Out of his lewdness with his cursèd wives:
His bones were hewn asunder as with knives
For his misliving, certes it is said.
But all the evil wrought upon this maid,
It were full hard for one to handle it.
For her soft blood was shed upon her feet,
And all her body's colour bruised and faint.
But she, as one abiding God's great saint,
Spake not nor wept for all this travail hard.
Wherefore the king commanded afterward
To slay her presently in all men's sight.
And it was now an hour upon the night
And winter-time, and a few stars began.
The weather was yet feeble and all wan
For beating of a weighty wind and snow.
And she came walking in soft wise and slow,
And many men with faces piteous.
Then came this heavy cursing Gabalus,
That swore full hard into his drunken beard;
And faintly after without any word

Came Theophile some paces off the king.
And in the middle of this wayfaring
Full tenderly beholding her he said:

There is no word of comfort with men dead
Nor any face and colour of things sweet;
But always with lean cheeks and lifted feet
These dead men lie all aching to the blood
With bitter cold, their brows withouten hood
Beating for chill, their bodies swathed full thin:
Alas, what hire shall any have herein
To give his life and get such bitterness?
Also the soul going forth bodiless
Is hurt with naked cold, and no man saith
If there be house or covering for death
To hide the soul that is discomforted.

Then she beholding him a little said:
Alas, fair lord, ye have no wit of this;
For on one side death is full poor of bliss
And as ye say full sharp of bone and lean:
But on the other side is good and green
And hath soft flower of tender-coloured hair
Grown on his head, and a red mouth as fair
As may be kissed with lips; thereto his face
Is as God's face, and in a perfect place
Full of all sun and colour of straight boughs
And waterheads about a painted house
That hath a mile of flowers either way
Outward from it, and blossom-grass of May
Thickening on many a side for length of heat,
Hath God set death upon a noble seat
Covered with green and flowered in the fold,
In likeness of a great king grown full old
And gentle with new temperance of blood;
And on his brows a purfled purple hood,
They may not carry any golden thing;
And plays some tune with subtle fingering
On a small cithern, full of tears and sleep
And heavy pleasure that is quick to weep
And sorrow with the honey in her mouth;
And for this might of music that he doth
Are all souls drawn toward him with great love
And weep for sweetness of the noise thereof
And bow to him with worship of their knees;
And all the field is thick with companies
Of fair-clothed men that play on shawms and lutes
And gather honey of the yellow fruits
Between the branches waxen soft and wide:
And all this peace endures in either side
Of the green land, and God beholdeth all.
And this is girdled with a round fair wall

Made of red stone and cool with heavy leaves
Grown out against it, and green blossom cleaves
To the green chinks, and lesser wall-weed sweet,
Kissing the crannies that are split with heat,
And branches where the summer draws to head.

And Theophile burnt in the cheek, and said:
Yea, could one see it, this were marvellous.
I pray you, at your coming to this house,
Give me some leaf of all those tree-branches;
Seeing how so sharp and white our weather is,
There is no green nor gracious red to see.

Yea, sir, she said, that shall I certainly.
And from her long sweet throat without a fleck
Undid the gold, and through her stretched-out neck
The cold axe clove, and smote away her head:
Out of her throat the tender blood full red
Fell suddenly through all her long soft hair.
And with good speed for hardness of the air
Each man departed to his house again.

Lo, as fair colour in the face of men
At seed-time of their blood, or in such wise
As a thing seen increaseth in men's eyes,
Caught first far off by sickly fits of sight—
So a word said, if one shall hear aright,
Abides against the season of its growth.
This Theophile went slowly as one doth
That is not sure for sickness of his feet;
And counting the white stonework of the street,
Tears fell out of his eyes for wrath and love,
Making him weep more for the shame thereof
Than for true pain: so went he half a mile.
And women mocked him, saying: Theophile,
Lo, she is dead; what shall a woman have
That loveth such an one? so Christ me save,
I were as lief to love a man new-hung.
Surely this man has bitten on his tongue,
This makes him sad and writhled in his face.

And when they came upon the paven place
That was called sometime the place amorous
There came a child before Theophilus
Bearing a basket, and said suddenly:
Fair sir, this is my mistress Dorothy
That sends you gifts; and with this he was gone.
In all this earth there is not such an one
For colour and straight stature made so fair.
The tender growing gold of his pure hair
Was as wheat growing, and his mouth as flame.
God called him Holy after his own name;

With gold cloth like fire burning he was clad.
But for the fair green basket that he had,
It was filled up with heavy white and red;
Great roses stained still where the first rose bled,
Burning at heart for shame their heart withholds:
And the sad colour of strong marigolds
That have the sun to kiss their lips for love;
The flower that Venus' hair is woven of,
The colour of fair apples in the sun,
Late peaches gathered when the heat was done
And the slain air got breath; and after these
The fair faint-headed poppies drunk with ease,
And heaviness of hollow lilies red.

Then cried they all that saw these things, and said
It was God's doing, and was marvellous.
And in brief while this knight Theophilus
Is waxen full of faith, and witnesseth
Before the king of God and love and death,
For which the king bade hang him presently.
A gallows of a goodly piece of tree
This Gabalus hath made to hang him on.
Forth of this world lo Theophile is gone
With a wried neck, God give us better fare
Than his that hath a twisted throat to wear;
But truly for his love God hath him brought
There where his heavy body grieves him nought
Nor all the people plucking at his feet;
But in his face his lady's face is sweet,
And through his lips her kissing lips are gone:
God send him peace, and joy of such an one.

This is the story of St. Dorothy.
I will you of your mercy pray for me
Because I wrote these sayings for your grace,
That I may one day see her in the face.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Stage Love

WHEN the game began between them for a jest,
He played king and she played queen to match the best;
Laughter soft as tears, and tears that turned to laughter,
These were things she sought for years and sorrowed after.

Pleasure with dry lips, and pain that walks by night;
All the sting and all the stain of long delight;
These were things she knew not of, that knew not of her,
When she played at half a love with half a lover.

Time was chorus, gave them cues to laugh or cry;
They would kill, befool, amuse him, let him die;
Set him webs to weave to-day and break to-morrow,
Till he died for good in play, and rose in sorrow.

What the years mean; how time dies and is not slain;
How love grows and laughs and cries and wanes again;
These were things she came to know, and take their measure,
When the play was played out so for one man's pleasure.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Super Flumina Babylonis

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept,
    Remembering thee,
That for ages of agony hast endured, and slept,
    And wouldst not see.

By the waters of Babylon we stood up and sang,
    Considering thee,
That a blast of deliverance in the darkness rang,
    To set thee free.

And with trumpets and thunderings and with morning song
    Came up the light;
And thy spirit uplifted thee to forget thy wrong
    As day doth night.

And thy sons were dejected not any more, as then
    When thou wast shamed;
When thy lovers went heavily without heart, as men
    Whose life was maimed.

In the desolate distances, with a great desire,
    For thy love's sake,
With our hearts going back to thee, they were filled with fire,
    Were nigh to break.

It was said to us: "Verily ye are great of heart,
    But ye shall bend;
Ye are bondmen and bondwomen, to be scourged and smart,
    To toil and tend."

And with harrows men harrowed us, and subdued with spears,
    And crushed with shame;
And the summer and winter was, and the length of years,
    And no change came.

By the rivers of Italy, by the sacred streams,
    By town, by tower,
There was feasting with revelling, there was sleep with dreams,
    Until thine hour.

And they slept and they rioted on their rose-hung beds,
    With mouths on flame,
And with love-locks vine-chapleted, and with rose-crowned heads
    And robes of shame.

And they knew not their forefathers, nor the hills and streams
    And words of power,
Nor the gods that were good to them, but with songs and dreams
    Filled up their hour.

By the rivers of Italy, by the dry streams' beds,
    When thy time came,

There was casting of crowns from them, from their young men's heads,
    The crowns of shame.

By the horn of Eridanus, by the Tiber mouth,
    As thy day rose,
They arose up and girded them to the north and south,
    By seas, by snows.

As a water in January the frost confines,
    Thy kings bound thee;
As a water in April is, in the new-blown vines,
    Thy sons made free.

And thy lovers that looked for thee, and that mourned from far,
    For thy sake dead,
We rejoiced in the light of thee, in the signal star
    Above thine head.

In thy grief had we followed thee, in thy passion loved,
    Loved in thy loss;
In thy shame we stood fast to thee, with thy pangs were moved,
    Clung to thy cross.

By the hillside of Calvary we beheld thy blood,
    Thy bloodred tears,
As a mother's in bitterness, an unebbing flood,
    Years upon years.

And the north was Gethsemane, without leaf or bloom,
    A garden sealed;
And the south was Aceldama, for a sanguine fume
    Hid all the field.

By the stone of the sepulchre we returned to weep,
    From far, from prison;
And the guards by it keeping it we beheld asleep,
    But thou wast risen.

And an angel's similitude by the unsealed grave,
    And by the stone:
And the voice was angelical, to whose words God gave
    Strength like his own.

"Lo, the graveclothes of Italy that are folded up
    In the grave's gloom!
And the guards as men wrought upon with a charmed cup,
    By the open tomb.

"And her body most beautiful, and her shining head,
    These are not here;
For your mother, for Italy, is not surely dead:
    Have ye no fear.

"As of old time she spake to you, and you hardly heard,
    Hardly took heed,
So now also she saith to you, yet another word,
    Who is risen indeed.

"By my saying she saith to you, in your ears she saith,
    Who hear these things,
Put no trust in men's royalties, nor in great men's breath,
    Nor words of kings.

"For the life of them vanishes and is no more seen,
    Nor no more known;
Nor shall any remember him if a crown hath been,
    Or where a throne.

"Unto each man his handiwork, unto each his crown,
    The just Fate gives;
Whoso takes the world's life on him and his own lays down,
    He, dying so, lives.

"Whoso bears the whole heaviness of the wronged world's weight
    And puts it by,
It is well with him suffering, though he face man's fate;
    How should he die?

"Seeing death has no part in him any more, no power
    Upon his head;
He has bought his eternity with a little hour,
    And is not dead.

"For an hour, if ye look for him, he is no more found,
    For one hour's space;
Then ye lift up your eyes to him and behold him crowned,
    A deathless face.

"On the mountains of memory, by the world's wellsprings,
    In all men's eyes,
Where the light of the life of him is on all past things,
    Death only dies.

"Not the light that was quenched for us, nor the deeds that were,
    Nor the ancient days,
Nor the sorrows not sorrowful, nor the face most fair
    Of perfect praise."

So the angel of Italy's resurrection said,
    So yet he saith;
So the son of her suffering, that from breasts nigh dead
    Drew life, not death.

That the pavement of Golgotha should be white as snow,

Not red, but white;
That the waters of Babylon should no longer flow,
And men see light.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Swan Song

We are not sure of sorrow,
And joy was never sure;
To-day will die tomorrow;
Time stoops to no man’s lure;
And love grown faint and fretful,
With lips but half regretful
Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
Weeps that no loves endure.

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever,
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Tenebrae

At the chill high tide of the night,
  At the turn of the fluctuant hours,
When the waters of time are at height,
In a vision arose on my sight
  The kingdoms of earth and the powers.

In a dream without lightening of eyes
  I saw them, children of earth,
Nations and races arise,
Each one after his wise,
  Signed with the sign of his birth.

Sound was none of their feet,
  Light was none of their faces;
In their lips breath was not, or heat,
But a subtle murmur and sweet
  As of water in wan waste places.

Pale as from passionate years,
  Years unassuaged of desire,
Sang they soft in mine ears,
Crowned with jewels of tears,
  Girt with girdles of fire.

A slow song beaten and broken,
  As it were from the dust and the dead,
As of spirits athirst unsloken,
As of things unspeakable spoken,
  As of tears unendurable shed.

In the manifold sound remote,
  In the molten murmur of song,
There was but a sharp sole note
Alive on the night and afloat,
  The cry of the world's heart's wrong.

As the sea in the strait sea-caves,
  The sound came straitened and strange;
A noise of the rending of graves,
A tidal thunder of waves,
  The music of death and of change.

"We have waited so long," they say,
  "For a sound of the God, for a breath,
For a ripple of the refluence of day,
For the fresh bright wind of the fray,
  For the light of the sunrise of death.

"We have prayed not, we, to be strong,
  To fulfil the desire of our eyes;
- Howbeit they have watched for it long,
Watched, and the night did them wrong,

Yet they say not of day, shall it rise?

"They are fearful and feeble with years,
Yet they doubt not of day if it be;
Yea, blinded and beaten with tears,
Yea, sick with foresight of fears,
Yet a little, and hardly, they see.

"We pray not, we, for the palm,
For the fruit ingraffed of the fight,
For the blossom of peace and the balm,
And the tender triumph and calm
Of crownless and weaponless right.

"We pray not, we, to behold
The latter august new birth,
The young day's purple and gold,
And divine, and rerisen as of old,
The sun-god Freedom on earth.

"Peace, and world's honour, and fame,
We have sought after none of these things;
The light of a life like flame
Passing, the storm of a name
Shaking the strongholds of kings:

"Nor, fashioned of fire and of air,
The splendour that burns on his head
Who was chiefest in ages that were,
Whose breath blew palaces bare,
Whose eye shone tyrannies dead:

"All these things in your day
Ye shall see, O our sons, and shall hold
Surely; but we, in the grey
Twilight, for one thing we pray,
In that day though our memories be cold:

"To feel on our brows as we wait
An air of the morning, a breath
From the springs of the east, from the gate
Whence freedom issues, and fate,
Sorrow, and triumph, and death

"From a land whereon time hath not trod,
Where the spirit is bondless and bare,
And the world's rein breaks, and the rod,
And the soul of a man, which is God,
He adores without altar or prayer:

For alone of herself and her right
She takes, and alone gives grace:

And the colours of things lose light,
And the forms, in the limitless white
  Splendour of space without space:

"And the blossom of man from his tomb
  Yearns open, the flower that survives;
And the shadows of changes consume
In the colourless passionate bloom
  Of the live light made of our lives:

"Seeing each life given is a leaf
  Of the manifold multiform flower,
And the least among these, and the chief,
As an ear in the red-ripe sheaf
  Stored for the harvesting hour.

"O spirit of man, most holy,
  The measure of things and the root,
In our summers and winters a lowly
Seed, putting forth of them slowly
  Thy supreme blossom and fruit;

"In thy sacred and perfect year,
  The souls that were parcel of thee
In the labour and life of us here
Shall be rays of thy sovereign sphere,
  Springs of thy motion shall be.

"There is the fire that was man,
  The light that was love, and the breath
That was hope ere deliverance began,
And the wind that was life for a span,
  And the birth of new things, which is death

There, whosoever had light,
  And, having, for men's sake gave;
All that warred against night;
All that were found in the fight
  Swift to be slain and to save;

"Undisbranched of the storms that disroot us,
  Of the lures that enthrall unenticed;
The names that exalt and transmute us;
The blood-bright splendour of Brutus,
  The snow-bright splendour of Christ.

"There all chains are undone;
  Day there seems but as night;
Spirit and sense are as one
In the light not of star nor of sun;
  Liberty there is the light.

She, sole mother and maker,
  Stronger than sorrow, than strife;
Deathless, though death overtake her;
Faithful, though faith should forsake her;
  Spirit, and saviour, and life."

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Bloody Sun

"O WHERE have ye been the morn sae late,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
O where have ye been the morn sae late?
And I wot I hae but anither."
"By the water-gate, by the water-gate,
O dear mither."

"And whatten kin' o' wark had ye there to make,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
And whatten kin' o' wark had ye there to make?
And I wot I hae but anither."
"I watered my steeds with water frae the lake,
O dear mither."

"Why is your coat sae fouled the day,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
Why is your coat sae fouled the day?
And I wot I hae but anither."
"The steeds were stamping sair by the weary banks of clay,
O dear mither."

"And where gat ye thae sleeves of red,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
And where gat ye thae sleeves of red?
And I wot I hae but anither."
"I have slain my ae brither by the weary water-head,
O dear mither."

"And where will ye gang to mak your mend,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
And where will ye gang to mak your mend?
And I wot I hae not anither."
"The warldis way, to the warldis end,
O dear mither."

"And what will ye leave your father dear,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
And what will ye leave your father dear?
And I wot I hae not anither."
"The wood to fell and the logs to bear,
For he'll never see my body mair,
O dear mither."

"And what will ye leave your mither dear,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
And what will ye leave your mither dear?
And I wot I hae not anither."
"The wool to card and the wool to wear,
For ye'll never see my body mair,
O dear mither."

"And what will ye leave for your wife to take,

My merry son, come tell me hither?
And what will ye leave for your wife to take?
And I wot I hae not anither."
"A goodly gown and a fair new make,
For she'll do nae mair for my body's sake,
O dear mither."

"And what will ye leave your young son fair,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
And what will ye leave your young son fair?
And I wot ye hae not anither."
"A twiggen school-rod for his body to bear,
Though it garred him greet he'll get nae mair,
O dear mither."

"And what will ye leave your little daughter sweet,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
And what will ye leave your little daughter sweet?
And I wot ye hae not anither."
"Wild mulberries for her mouth to eat,
She'll get nae mair though it garred her greet,
O dear mither."

"And when will ye come back frae roamin',
My merry son, come tell me hither?
And when will ye come back frae roamin'?
And I wot I hae not anither."
"When the sunrise out of the north is comen,
O dear mither."

"When shall the sunrise on the north side be,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
When shall the sunrise on the north side be?
And I wot I hae not anither."
"When chuckie-stanes shall swim in the sea,
O dear mither."

"When shall stanes in the sea swim,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
When shall stanes in the sea swim?
And I wot I hae not anither."
"When birdies' feathers are as lead therein,
O dear mither."

"When shall feathers be as lead,
My merry son, come tell me hither?
When shall feathers be as lead?
And I wot I hae not anither."
"When God shall judge between the quick and dead,
O dear mither."

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Channel Tunnel: Sonnets

NOT for less love, all glorious France, to thee,
‘Sweet enemy’ called in days long since at end.
Now found and hailed of England sweeter friend,
Bright sister of our freedom now, being free;
Not for less love or faith in friendship we
Whose love burnt ever toward thee reprehend
The vile vain greed whose pursy dreams portend
Between our shores suppression of the sea.
Not by dull toil of blind mechanic art
Shall these be linked for no man’s force to part
Nor length of years and changes to divide,
But union only of trust and loving heart
And perfect faith in freedom strong to abide
And spirit at one with spirit on either side.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Complaint of Lisa

There is no woman living who draws breath
So sad as I, though all things sadden her.
There is not one upon life's weariest way
Who is weary as I am weary of all but death.
Toward whom I look as looks the sunflower
All day with all his whole soul toward the sun;
While in the sun's sight I make moan all day,
And all night on my sleepless maiden bed.
Weep and call out on death, O Love, and thee,
That thou or he would take me to the dead.
And know not what thing evil I have done
That life should lay such heavy hand on me.

Alas! Love, what is this thou wouldst with me?
What honor shalt thou have to quench my breath,
Or what shall my heart broken profit thee?
O Love, O great god Love, what have I done,
That thou shouldst hunger so after my death?
My heart is harmless as my life's first day:
Seek out some false fair woman, and plague her
Till her tears even as my tears fill her bed:
I am the least flower in thy flowery way,
But till my time be come that I be dead,
Let me live out my flower-time in the sun,
Though my leaves shut before the sunflower.

O Love, Love, Love, the kingly sunflower!
Shall he the sun hath looked on look on me,
That live down here in shade, out of the sun,
Here living in the sorrow and shadow of death?
Shall he that feeds his heart full of the day
Care to give mine eyes light, or my lips breath?
Because she loves him, shall my lord love her
Who is as a worm in my lord's kingly way?
I shall not see him or know him alive or dead;
But thou, I know thee, O Love, and pray to thee
That in brief while my brief life-days be done,
And the worm quickly make my marriage-bed.

For underground there is no sleepless bed.
But here since I beheld my sunflower
These eyes have slept not, seeing all night and day
His sunlike eyes, and face fronting the sun.
Wherefore, if anywhere be any death,
I fain would find and fold him fast to me,
That I may sleep with the world's eldest dead,
With her that died seven centuries since, and her
That went last night down the night-wandering way.
For this is sleep indeed, when labor is done,
Without love, without dreams, and without breath,
And without thought, O name unnamed! of thee.

Ah! but, forgetting all things, shall I thee?
Wilt thou not be as now about my bed
There underground as here before the sun?
Shall not thy vision vex me alive and dead,
Thy moving vision without form or breath?
I read long since the bitter tale of her
Who read the tale of Launcelot on a day,
And died, and had no quiet after death,
But was moved ever along a weary way,
Lost with her love in the underworld; ah me,
O my king, O my lordly sunflower,
Would God to me, too, such a thing were done!

But if such sweet and bitter things be done,
Then, flying from life, I shall not fly from thee.
For in that living world without a sun
Thy vision will lay hold upon me dead,
And meet and mock me, and mar my peace in death.
Yet if being wroth, God had such pity on her,
Who was a sinner and foolish in her day,
That even in hell they twain should breathe one breath,
Why should he not in some wise pity me?
So if I sleep not in my soft strait bed,
I may look up and see my sunflower
As he the sun, in some divine strange way.

O poor my heart, well knowest thou in what way
This sore sweet evil unto us was done.
For on a holy and a heavy day
I was arisen out of my still small bed
To see the knights tilt, and one said to me
"The king;" and seeing him, somewhat stopped my breath;
And if the girl spake more, I heard her not,
For only I saw what I shall see when dead,
A kingly flower of knights, a sunflower,
That shone against the sunlight like the sun,
And like a fire, O heart, consuming thee,
The fire of love that lights the pyre of death.

Howbeit I shall not die an evil death
Who have loved in such a sad and sinless way,
That this my love, lord, was no shame to thee.
So when mine eyes are shut against the sun,
O my soul's sun, O the world's sunflower,
Thou nor no man will quite despise me dead.
And dying I pray with all my low last breath
That thy whole life may be as was that day,
That feast-day that made trothplight death and me,
Giving the world light of thy great deeds done;
And that fair face brightening thy bridal bed,
That God be good as God hath been to her.

That all things goodly and glad remain with her,
All things that make glad life and goodly death;
That as a bee sucks from a sunflower
Honey, when summer draws delighted breath,
Her soul may drink of thy soul in like way,
And love make life a fruitful marriage-bed
Where day may bring forth fruits of joy to day
And night to night till days and nights be dead.
And as she gives light of her love to thee,
Give thou to her the old glory of days long done;
And either give some heat of light to me,
To warm me where I sleep without the sun.

O sunflower make drunken with the sun,
O knight whose lady's heart draws thine to her,
Great king, glad lover, I have a word to thee.
There is a weed lives out of the sun's way,
Hid from the heat deep in the meadow's bed,
That swoons and whitens at the wind's least breath,
A flower star-shaped, that all a summer day
Will gaze her soul out on the sunflower
For very love till twilight finds her dead.
But the great sunflower heeds not her poor death,
Knows not when all her loving life is done;
And so much knows my lord the king of me.

Ay, all day long he has no eye for me;
With golden eye following the golden sun
From rose-colored to purple-pillowed bed,
From birthplace to the flame-lit place of death,
From eastern end to western of his way,
So mine eye follows thee, my sunflower,
So the white star-flower turns and yearns to thee,
The sick weak weed, not well alive or dead,
Trod under foot if any pass by her,
Pale, without color of summer or summer breath
In the shrunk shuddering petals, that have done
No work but love, and die before the day.

But thou, to-day, to-morrow, and every day,
Be glad and great, O love whose love slays me.
Thy fervent flower made fruitful from the sun
Shall drop its golden seed in the world's way,
That all men thereof nourished shall praise thee
For grain and flower and fruit of works well done;
Till thy shed seed, O shining sunflower,
Bring forth such growth of the world's garden-bed
As like the sun shall outlive age and death.
And yet I would thine heart had heed of her
Who loves thee alive; but not till she be dead.
Come, Love, then, quickly, and take her utmost breath.

Song, speak for me who am dumb as are the dead;
From my sad bed of tears I send forth thee,
To fly all day from sun's birth to sun's death
Down the sun's way after the flying sun,
For love of her that gave thee wings and breath
Ere day be done, to seek the sunflower.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Death Of Richard Wagner

Mourning on earth, as when dark hours descend,
Wide-winged with plagues, from heaven; when hope and mirth
Wane, and no lips rebuke or reprehend
  Mourning on earth.

The soul wherein her songs of death and birth,
Darkness and light, were wont to sound and blend,
Now silent, leaves the whole world less in worth.

Winds that make moan and triumph, skies that bend,
Thunders, and sound of tides in gulf and firth,
Spake through his spirit of speech, whose death should send
  Mourning on earth.

The world's great heart, whence all things strange and rare
Take form and sound, that each inseparate part
May bear its burden in all tuned thoughts that share
  The world's great heart -

The fountain forces, whence like steeds that start
Leap forth the powers of earth and fire and air,
Seas that revolve and rivers that depart -

Spake, and were turned to song: yea, all they were,
With all their works, found in his mastering art
Speech as of powers whose uttered word laid bare
  The world's great heart.

From the depths of the sea, from the wellsprings of earth, from the wastes of the midmost night,
From the fountains of darkness and tempest and thunder, from heights where the soul would be,
The spell of the mage of music evoked their sense, as an unknown light
  From the depths of the sea.

As a vision of heaven from the hollows of ocean, that none but a god might see,
Rose out of the silence of things unknown of a presence, a form, a might,
And we heard as a prophet that hears God's message against him, and may not flee.

Eye might not endure it, but ear and heart with a rapture of dark delight,
With a terror and wonder whose core was joy, and a passion of thought set free,
Felt inly the rising of doom divine as a sundawn risen to sight
  From the depths of the sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Epitaph In Form Of A Ballad Which Villon Made For Himself And His Comrades, Expecting To Be Hanged Along With Them

Men, brother men, that after us yet live,
Let not your hearts too hard against us be;
For if some pity of us poor men ye give,
The sooner God shall take of you pity.
Here are we five or six strung up, you see,
And here the flesh that all too well we fed
Bit by bit eaten and rotten, rent and shred,
And we the bones grow dust and ash withal;
Let no man laugh at us discomforted,
But pray to God that he forgive us all.

If we call on you, brothers, to forgive,
Ye should not hold our prayer in scorn, though we
Were slain by law; ye know that all alive
Have not wit alway to walk righteously;
Make therefore intercession heartily
With him that of a virgin's womb was bred,
That his grace be not as a dry well-head
For us, nor let hell's thunder on us fall;
We are dead, let no man harry or vex us dead,
But pray to God that he forgive us all.

The rain has washed and laundered us all five,
And the sun dried and blackened; yea, perdie,
Ravens and pies with beaks that rend and rive
Have dug our eyes out, and plucked off for fee
Our beards and eyebrows; never are we free,
Not once, to rest; but here and there still sped,
Drive at its wild will by the wind's change led,
More pecked of birds than fruits on garden-wall;
Men, for God's love, let no gibe here be said,
But pray to God that he forgive us all.

Prince Jesus, that of all art lord and head,
Keep us, that hell be not our bitter bed;
We have nought to do in such a master's hall.
Be not ye therefore of our fellowhead,
But pray to God that he forgive us all.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Eve Of Revolution

The trumpets of the four winds of the world
  From the ends of the earth blow battle; the night heaves,
With breasts palpitating and wings refurled,
  With passion of couched limbs, as one who grieves
Sleeping, and in her sleep she sees uncurled
  Dreams serpent-shapen, such as sickness weaves,
Down the wild wind of vision caught and whirled,
  Dead leaves of sleep, thicker than autumn leaves,
        Shadows of storm-shaped things,
        Flights of dim tribes of kings,
  The reaping men that reap men for their sheaves,
        And, without grain to yield,
        Their scythe-swept harvest-field
  Thronged thick with men pursuing and fugitives,
    Dead foliage of the tree of sleep,
Leaves blood-coloured and golden, blown from deep to deep.

I hear the midnight on the mountains cry
  With many tongues of thunders, and I hear
Sound and resound the hollow shield of sky
  With trumpet-throated winds that charge and cheer,
And through the roar of the hours that fighting fly,
  Through flight and fight and all the fluctuant fear,
A sound sublimer than the heavens are high,
  A voice more instant than the winds are clear,
        Say to my spirit, "Take
        Thy trumpet too, and make
  A rallying music in the void night's ear,
        Till the storm lose its track,
        And all the night go back;
  Till, as through sleep false life knows true life near,
    Thou know the morning through the night,
And through the thunder silence, and through darkness light."

I set the trumpet to my lips and blow.
  The height of night is shaken, the skies break,
The winds and stars and waters come and go
  By fits of breath and light and sound, that wake
As out of sleep, and perish as the show
  Built up of sleep, when all her strengths forsake
The sense-compelling spirit; the depths glow,
  The heights flash, and the roots and summits shake
        Of earth in all her mountains,
        And the inner foamless fountains
  And wellsprings of her fast-bound forces quake;
        Yea, the whole air of life
        Is set on fire of strife,
  Till change unmake things made and love remake;

Reason and love, whose names are one,
Seeing reason is the sunlight shed from love the sun.

The night is broken eastward; is it day,
Or but the watchfires trembling here and there,
Like hopes on memory's devastated way,
In moonless wastes of planet-stricken air?
O many-childed mother great and grey,
O multitudinous bosom, and breasts that bare
Our fathers' generations, whereat lay
The weanling peoples and the tribes that were,
Whose new-born mouths long dead
Those ninefold nipples fed,
Dim face with deathless eyes and withered hair,
Fostress of obscure lands,
Whose multiplying hands
Wove the world's web with divers races fair
And cast it waif-wise on the stream,
The waters of the centuries, where thou sat'st to dream;

O many-minded mother and visionary,
Asia, that sawest their westering waters sweep
With all the ships and spoils of time to carry
And all the fears and hopes of life to keep,
Thy vesture wrought of ages legendary
Hides usward thine impenetrable sleep,
And thy veiled head, night's oldest tributary,
We know not if it speak or smile or weep.
But where for us began
The first live light of man
And first-born fire of deeds to burn and leap,
The first war fair as peace
To shine and lighten Greece,
And the first freedom moved upon the deep,
God's breath upon the face of time
Moving, a present spirit, seen of men sublime;

There where our east looks always to thy west,
Our mornings to thine evenings, Greece to thee,
These lights that catch the mountains crest by crest,
Are they of stars or beacons that we see?
Taygetus takes here the winds abreast,
And there the sun resumes Thermopylae;
The light is Athens where those remnants rest,
And Salamis the sea-wall of that sea.
The grass men tread upon

Is very Marathon,
The leaves are of that time-unstricken tree
That storm nor sun can fret
Nor wind, since she that set
Made it her sign to men whose shield was she;
Here, as dead time his deathless things,
Eurotas and Cephisus keep their sleepless springs.

O hills of Crete, are these things dead? O waves,
O many-mouthed streams, are these springs dry?
Earth, dost thou feed and hide now none but slaves?
Heaven, hast thou heard of men that would not die?
Is the land thick with only such men's graves
As were ashamed to look upon the sky?
Ye dead, whose name outfaces and outbraves
Death, is the seed of such as you gone by?
Sea, have thy ports not heard
Some Marathonian word
Rise up to landward and to Godward fly?
No thunder, that the skies
Sent not upon us, rise
With fire and earthquake and a cleaving cry?
Nay, light is here, and shall be light,
Though all the face of the hour be overborne with night.

I set the trumpet to my lips and blow.
The night is broken northward; the pale plains
And footless fields of sun-forgotten snow
Feel through their creviced lips and iron veins
Such quick breath labour and such clean blood flow
As summer-stricken spring feels in her pains
When dying May bears June, too young to know
The fruit that waxes from the flower that wanes;
Strange tyrannies and vast,
Tribes frost-bound to their past,
Lands that are loud all through their length with chains,
Wastes where the wind's wings break,
Displumed by daylong ache
And anguish of blind snows and rack-blown rains,
And ice that seals the White Sea's lips,
Whose monstrous weights crush flat the sides of shrieking ships;

Horrible sights and sounds of the unreached pole,
And shrill fierce climes of inconsolable air,
Shining below the beamless aureole
That hangs about the north-wind's hurtling hair,

A comet-lighted lamp, sublime and sole
  Dawn of the dayless heaven where suns despair;
Earth, skies, and waters, smitten into soul,
  Feel the hard veil that iron centuries wear
        Rent as with hands in sunder,
        Such hands as make the thunder
  And clothe with form all substance and strip bare;
        Shapes, shadows, sounds and lights
        Of their dead days and nights
  Take soul of life too keen for death to bear;
     Life, conscience, forethought, will, desire,
Flood men's inanimate eyes and dry-drawn hearts with fire.

Light, light, and light! to break and melt in sunder
  All clouds and chains that in one bondage bind
Eyes, hands, and spirits, forged by fear and wonder
  And sleek fierce fraud with hidden knife behind;
There goes no fire from heaven before their thunder,
  Nor are the links not malleable that wind
Round the snared limbs and souls that ache thereunder;
  The hands are mighty, were the head not blind.
        Priest is the staff of king,
        And chains and clouds one thing,
  And fettered flesh with devastated mind.
        Open thy soul to see,
        Slave, and thy feet are free;
  Thy bonds and thy beliefs are one in kind,
     And of thy fears thine irons wrought
Hang weights upon thee fashioned out of thine own thought.

O soul, O God, O glory of liberty,
  To night and day their lightning and their light!
With heat of heart thou kindlest the quick sea,
  And the dead earth takes spirit from thy sight;
The natural body of things is warm with thee,
  And the world's weakness parcel of thy might;
Thou seest us feeble and forceless, fit to be
  Slaves of the years that drive us left and right,
        Drowned under hours like waves
        Wherethrough we row like slaves;
  But if thy finger touch us, these take flight.
        If but one sovereign word
        Of thy live lips be heard,
  What man shall stop us, and what God shall smite?
     Do thou but look in our dead eyes,
They are stars that light each other till thy sundawn rise.

Thou art the eye of this blind body of man,
  The tongue of this dumb people; shalt thou not
See, shalt thou speak not for them?
  Time is wan And hope is weak with waiting, and swift thought
Hath lost the wings at heel wherewith he ran,
  And on the red pit's edge sits down distraught
To talk with death of days republican
  And dreams and fights long since dreamt out and fought;
      Of the last hope that drew
      To that red edge anew
  The firewhite faith of Poland without spot;
      Of the blind Russian might,
      And fire that is not light;
  Of the green Rhineland where thy spirit wrought;
    But though time, hope, and memory tire,
Canst thou wax dark as they do, thou whose light is fire?

I set the trumpet to my lips and blow.
  The night is broken westward; the wide sea
That makes immortal motion to and fro
  From world's end unto world's end, and shall be
When nought now grafted of men's hands shall grow
  And as the weed in last year's waves are we
Or spray the sea-wind shook a year ago
  From its sharp tresses down the storm to lee,
      The moving god that hides
      Time in its timeless tides
  Wherein time dead seems live eternity,
      That breaks and makes again
      Much mightier things than men,
  Doth it not hear change coming, or not see?
    Are the deeps deaf and dead and blind,
To catch no light or sound from landward of mankind?

O thou, clothed round with raiment of white waves,
  Thy brave brows lightening through the grey wet air,
Thou, lulled with sea-sounds of a thousand caves,
  And lit with sea-shine to thine inland lair,
Whose freedom clothed the naked souls of slaves
  And stripped the muffled souls of tyrants bare,
O, by the centuries of thy glorious graves,
  By the live light of the earth that was thy care,
      Live, thou must not be dead,
      Live; let thine armed head
  Lift itself up to sunward and the fair
      Daylight of time and man,
      Thine head republican,

With the same splendour on thine helmless hair
That in his eyes kept up a light
Who on thy glory gazed away their sacred sight;

Who loved and looked their sense to death on thee;
Who taught thy lips imperishable things,
And in thine ears outsang thy singing sea;
Who made thy foot firm on the necks of kings
And thy soul somewhile steadfast--woe are we
It was but for a while, and all the strings
Were broken of thy spirit; yet had he
Set to such tunes and clothed it with such wings
It seemed for his sole sake
Impossible to break,
And woundless of the worm that waits and stings,
The golden-headed worm
Made headless for a term,
The king-snake whose life kindles with the spring's,
To breathe his soul upon her bloom,
And while she marks not turn her temple to her tomb.

By those eyes blinded and that heavenly head
And the secluded soul adorable,
O Milton's land, what ails thee to be dead?
Thine ears are yet sonorous with his shell
That all the songs of all thy sea-line fed
With motive sound of spring-tides at mid swell,
And through thine heart his thought as blood is shed,
Requickening thee with wisdom to do well;
Such sons were of thy womb,
England, for love of whom
Thy name is not yet writ with theirs that fell,
But, till thou quite forget
What were thy children, yet
On the pale lips of hope is as a spell;
And Shelley's heart and Landor's mind
Lit thee with latter watch-fires; why wilt thou be blind?

Though all were else indifferent, all that live
Spiritless shapes of nations; though time wait
In vain on hope till these have help to give,
And faith and love crawl famished from the gate;
Canst thou sit shamed and self-contemplative
With soulless eyes on thy secluded fate?
Though time forgive them, thee shall he forgive,
Whose choice was in thine hand to be so great?

Who cast out of thy mind
The passion of man's kind,
And made thee and thine old name separate?
Now when time looks to see
New names and old and thee
Build up our one Republic state by state,
England with France, and France with Spain,
And Spain with sovereign Italy strike hands and reign.

O known and unknown fountain-heads that fill
Our dear life-springs of England! O bright race
Of streams and waters that bear witness still
To the earth her sons were made of! O fair face
Of England, watched of eyes death cannot kill,
How should the soul that lit you for a space
Fall through sick weakness of a broken will
To the dead cold damnation of disgrace?
Such wind of memory stirs
On all green hills of hers,
Such breath of record from so high a place,
From years whose tongues of flame
Prophesied in her name
Her feet should keep truth's bright and burning trace,
We needs must have her heart with us,
Whose hearts are one with man's; she must be dead or thus.

Who is against us? who is on our side?
Whose heart of all men's hearts is one with man's?
Where art thou that wast prophetess and bride,
When truth and thou trod under time and chance?
What latter light of what new hope shall guide
Out of the snares of hell thy feet, O France?
What heel shall bruise these heads that hiss and glide,
What wind blow out these fen-born fires that dance
Before thee to thy death?
No light, no life, no breath,
From thy dead eyes and lips shall take the trance,
Till on that deadliest crime
Reddening the feet of time
Who treads through blood and passes, time shall glance
Pardon, and Italy forgive,
And Rome arise up whom thou slewest, and bid thee live.

I set the trumpet to my lips and blow.
The night is broken southward; the springs run,
The daysprings and the watersprings that flow

Forth with one will from where their source was one,
Out of the might of morning: high and low,
The hungering hills feed full upon the sun,
The thirsting valleys drink of him and glow
As a heart burns with some divine thing done,
Or as blood burns again
In the bruised heart of Spain,
A rose renewed with red new life begun,
Dragged down with thorns and briers,
That puts forth buds like fires
Till the whole tree take flower in unison,
And prince that clogs and priest that clings
Be cast as weeds upon the dunghill of dead things.

Ah heaven, bow down, be nearer! This is she,
Italia, the world's wonder, the world's care,
Free in her heart ere quite her hands be free,
And lovelier than her loveliest robe of air.
The earth hath voice, and speech is in the sea,
Sounds of great joy, too beautiful to bear;
All things are glad because of her, but we
Most glad, who loved her when the worst days were.
O sweetest, fairest, first,
O flower, when times were worst,
Thou hadst no stripe wherein we had no share.
Have not our hearts held close,
Kept fast the whole world's rose?
Have we not worn thee at heart whom none would wear?
First love and last love, light of lands,
Shall we not touch thee full-blown with our lips and hands?

O too much loved, what shall we say of thee?
What shall we make of our heart's burning fire,
The passion in our lives that fain would be
Made each a brand to pile into the pyre
That shall burn up thy foemen, and set free
The flame whence thy sun-shadowing wings aspire?
Love of our life, what more than men are we,
That this our breath for thy sake should expire,
For whom to joyous death
Glad gods might yield their breath,
Great gods drop down from heaven to serve for hire?
We are but men, are we,
And thou art Italy;
What shall we do for thee with our desire?
What gift shall we deserve to give?
How shall we die to do thee service, or how live?

The very thought in us how much we love thee
  Makes the throat sob with love and blinds the eyes.
How should love bear thee, to behold above thee
  His own light burning from reverberate skies?
They give thee light, but the light given them of thee
  Makes faint the wheeling fires that fall and rise.
What love, what life, what death of man's should move thee,
  What face that lingers or what foot that flies?
        It is not heaven that lights
        Thee with such days and nights,
  But thou that heaven is lit from in such wise.
        O thou her dearest birth,
  Turn thee to lighten earth,
  Earth too that bore thee and yearns to thee and cries;
  Stand up, shine, lighten, become flame,
Till as the sun's name through all nations be thy name.

I take the trumpet from my lips and sing.
  O life immeasurable and imminent love,
And fear like winter leading hope like spring,
  Whose flower-bright brows the day-star sits above,
Whose hand unweariable and untiring wing
  Strike music from a world that wailed and strove,
Each bright soul born and every glorious thing,
  From very freedom to man's joy thereof,
        O time, O change and death,
      Whose now not hateful breath
  But gives the music swifter feet to move
      Through sharp remeasuring tones
        Of refluent antiphones
  More tender-tuned than heart or throat of dove,
  Soul into soul, song into song,
Life changing into life, by laws that work not wrong;

O natural force in spirit and sense, that art
  One thing in all things, fruit of thine own fruit,
O thought illimitable and infinite heart
  Whose blood is life in limbs indissolute
That still keeps hurtless thine invisible part
  And inextirpable thy viewless root
Whence all sweet shafts of green and each thy dart
  Of sharpening leaf and bud resundering shoot;
        Hills that the day-star hails,
        Heights that the first beam scales,
  And heights that souls outshining suns salute,
        Valleys for each mouth born

Free now of plenteous corn,
Waters and woodlands' musical or mute;
Free winds that brighten brows as free,
And thunder and laughter and lightning of the sovereign sea;

Rivers and springs, and storms that seek your prey;
With strong wings ravening through the skies by night;
Spirits and stars that hold one choral way;
O light of heaven, and thou the heavenlier light
Aflame above the souls of men that sway
All generations of all years with might;
O sunrise of the repossessing day,
And sunrise of all-renovating right;
And thou, whose trackless foot
Mocks hope's or fear's pursuit,
Swift Revolution, changing depth with height;
And thou, whose mouth makes one
All songs that seek the sun,
Serene Republic of a world made white;
Thou, Freedom, whence the soul's springs ran;
Praise earth for man's sake living, and for earth's sake man.

Make yourselves wings, O tarrying feet of fate,
And hidden hour that hast our hope to bear,
A child-god, through the morning-coloured gate
That lets love in upon the golden air,
Dead on whose threshold lies heart-broken hate,
Dead discord, dead injustice, dead despair;
O love long looked for, wherefore wilt thou wait,
And shew not yet the dawn on thy bright hair.
Not yet thine hand released
Refreshing the faint east,
Thine hand reconquering heaven, to seat man there?
Come forth, be born and live,
Thou that hast help to give
And light to make man's day of manhood fair:
With flight outflying the sphered sun,
Hasten thine hour and halt not, till thy work be done.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Garden of Prosperine

Here, where the world is quiet,
Here, where all trouble seems
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
In doubtful dreams of dreams;
I watch the green field growing
For reaping folk and sowing,
For harvest-time and mowing,
A sleepy world of streams.

I am tired of tears and laughter,
And men that laugh and weep;
Of what may come hereafter
For men that sow to reap:
I am weary of days and hours,
Blown buds of barren flowers,
Desires and dreams and powers
And everything but sleep.

Here life has death for neighbour,
And far from eye or ear
Wan waves and wet winds labour,
Weak ships and spirits steer;
They drive adrift, and whither
They wot not who make thither;
But no such winds blow hither,
And no such things grow here.

No growth of moor or coppice,
No heather-flower or vine,
But bloomless buds of poppies,
Green grapes of Proserpine,
Pale beds of blowing rushes,
Where no leaf blooms or blushes
Save this whereout she crushes
For dead men deadly wine.

Pale, without name or number,
In fruitless fields of corn,
They bow themselves and slumber
All night till light is born;
And like a soul belated,
In hell and heaven unmated,
By cloud and mist abated
Comes out of darkness morn.

Though one were strong as seven,
He too with death shall dwell,
Nor wake with wings in heaven,
Nor weep for pains in hell;
Though one were fair as roses,
His beauty clouds and closes;
And well though love reposes,

In the end it is not well.

Pale, beyond porch and portal,
Crowned with calm leaves, she stands
Who gathers all things mortal
With cold immortal hands;
Her languid lips are sweeter
Than love's who fears to greet her
To men that mix and meet her
From many times and lands.

She waits for each and other,
She waits for all men born;
Forgets the earth her mother,
The life of fruits and corn;
And spring and seed and swallow
Take wing for her and follow
Where summer song rings hollow
And flowers are put to scorn.

There go the loves that wither,
The old loves with wearier wings;
And all dead years draw thither,
And all disastrous things;
Dead dreams of days forsaken,
Blind buds that snows have shaken,
Wild leaves that winds have taken,
Red strays of ruined springs.

We are not sure of sorrow,
And joy was never sure;
Today will die tomorrow;
Time stoops to no man's lure;
And love, grown faint and fretful,
With lips but half regretful
Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
Weeps that no loves endure.

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be That no life lives for ever;

That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Then star nor sun shall waken,
Nor any change of light:
Nor sound of waters shaken,
Nor any sound or sight:
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,

Nor days nor things diurnal;
Only the sleep eternal
In an eternal night.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Halt Before Rome--September 1867

Is it so, that the sword is broken,
  Our sword, that was halfway drawn?
Is it so, that the light was a spark,
That the bird we hailed as the lark
Sang in her sleep in the dark,
And the song we took for a token
  Bore false witness of dawn?

Spread in the sight of the lion,
  Surely, we said, is the net
Spread but in vain, and the snare
Vain; for the light is aware,
And the common, the chainless air,
Of his coming whom all we cry on;
  Surely in vain is it set.

Surely the day is on our side,
  And heaven, and the sacred sun;
Surely the stars, and the bright
Immemorial inscrutable night:
Yea, the darkness, because of our light,
Is no darkness, but blooms as a bower-side
  When the winter is over and done;

Blooms underfoot with young grasses
  Green, and with leaves overhead,
Windflowers white, and the low
New-dropped blossoms of snow;
And or ever the May winds blow,
And or ever the March wind passes,
  Flames with anemones red.

We are here in the world's bower-garden,
  We that have watched out the snow.
Surely the fruitfuller showers,
The splendider sunbeams are ours;
Shall winter return on the flowers,
And the frost after April harden,
  And the fountains in May not flow?

We have in our hands the shining
  And the fire in our hearts of a star.
Who are we that our tongues should palter,
Hearts bow down, hands falter,
Who are clothed as with flame from the altar,
That the kings of the earth, repining,
  Far off, watch from afar?

Woe is ours if we doubt or dissemble,
  Woe, if our hearts not abide.
Are our chiefs not among us, we said,
Great chiefs, living and dead,

To lead us glad to be led?
For whose sake, if a man of us tremble,
  He shall not be on our side.

What matter if these lands tarry,
  That tarried (we said) not of old?
France, made drunken by fate,
England, that bore up the weight
Once of men's freedom, a freight
Holy, but heavy to carry
  For hands overflowing with gold.

Though this be lame, and the other
  Fleet, but blind from the sun,
And the race be no more to these,
Alas! nor the palm to seize,
Who are weary and hungry of ease,
Yet, O Freedom, we said, O our mother,
  Is there not left to thee one?

Is there not left of thy daughters,
  Is there not one to thine hand?
Fairer than these, and of fame
Higher from of old by her name;
Washed in her tears, and in flame
Bathed as in baptism of waters,
  Unto all men a chosen land.

Her hope in her heart was broken,
  Fire was upon her, and clomb,
Hiding her, high as her head;
And the world went past her, and said
(We heard it say) she was dead;
And now, behold, she bath spoken,
  She that was dead, saying, "Rome."

O mother of all men's nations,
  Thou knowest if the deaf world heard!
Heard not now to her lowest
Depths, where the strong blood slowest
Beats at her bosom, thou knowest,
In her toils, in her dim tribulations,
  Rejoiced not, hearing the word.

The sorrowful, bound unto sorrow,
  The woe-worn people, and all
That of old were discomforted,
And men that famish for bread,
And men that mourn for their dead,
She bade them be glad on the morrow,
  Who endured in the day of her thrall.

The blind, and the people in prison,
  Souls without hope, without home,
How glad were they all that heard!
When the winged white flame of the word
Passed over men's dust, and stirred
Death; for Italia was risen,
  And risen her light upon Rome.

The light of her sword in the gateway
  Shone, an unquenchable flame,
Bloodless, a sword to release,
A light from the eyes of peace,
To bid grief utterly cease,
And the wrong of the old world straightway
  Pass from the face of her fame:

Hers, whom we turn to and cry on,
  Italy, mother of men:
From the light of the face of her glory,
At the sound of the storm of her story,
That the sanguine shadows and hoary
Should flee from the foot of the lion,
  Lion-like, forth of his den.

As the answering of thunder to thunder
  Is the storm-beaten sound of her past;
As the calling of sea unto sea
Is the noise of her years yet to be;
For this ye knew not is she,
Whose bonds are broken in sunder;
  This is she at the last.

So spake we aloud, high-minded,
  Full of our will; and behold,
The speech that was halfway spoken
Breaks, as a pledge that is broken,
As a king's pledge, leaving in token
Grief only for high hopes blinded,
  New grief grafted on old.

We halt by the walls of the city,
  Within sound of the clash of her chain.
Hearing, we know that in there
The lioness chafes in her lair,
Shakes the storm of her hair,
Struggles in hands without pity,
  Roars to the lion in vain.

Whose hand is stretched forth upon her?
  Whose curb is white with her foam?
Clothed with the cloud of his deeds,
Swathed in the shroud of his creeds,

Who is this that has trapped her and leads,
Who turns to despair and dishonour
  Her name, her name that was Rome?

Over fields without harvest or culture,
  Over hordes without honour or love,
Over nations that groan with their kings,
As an imminent pestilence flings
Swift death from her shadowing wings,
So he, who hath claws as a vulture,
  Plumage and beak as a dove.

He saith, "I am pilot and haven,
  Light and redemption I am
Unto souls overlaboured," he saith;
And to all men the blast of his breath
Is a savour of death unto death;
And the Dove of his worship a raven,
  And a wolf-cub the life-giving Lamb.

He calls his sheep as a shepherd,
  Calls from the wilderness home,
"Come unto me and be fed,"
To feed them with ashes for bread
And grass from the graves of the dead,
Leaps on the fold as a leopard,
  Slays, and says, "I am Rome,"

Rome, having rent her in sunder,
  With the clasp of an adder he clasps;
Swift to shed blood are his feet,
And his lips, that have man for their meat,
Smoother than oil, and more sweet
Than honey, but hidden thereunder
  Festers the poison of asps.

As swords are his tender mercies,
  His kisses as mortal stings;
Under his hallowing hands
Life dies down in all lands;
Kings pray to him, prone where he stands,
And his blessings, as other men's curses,
  Disanoint where they consecrate kings.

With an oil of unclean consecration,
  With effusion of blood and of tears,
With uplifting of cross and of keys,
Priest, though thou hallow us these,
Yet even as they cling to thy knees
Nation awakens by nation,
  King by king disappears.

How shall the spirit be loyal
  To the shell of a spiritless thing?
Erred once, in only a word,
The sweet great song that we heard
Poured upon Tuscany, erred,
Calling a crowned man royal
  That was no more than a king.

Sea-eagle of English feather,
  A song-bird beautiful-souled,
She knew not them that she sang;
The golden trumpet that rang
From Florence, in vain for them, sprang
As a note in the nightingales' weather
  Far over Fiesole rolled.

She saw not--happy, not seeing -
  Saw not as we with her eyes
Aspromonte; she felt
Never the heart in her melt
As in us when the news was dealt
Melted all hope out of being,
  Dropped all dawn from the skies.

In that weary funereal season,
  In that heart-stricken grief-ridden time,
The weight of a king and the worth,
With anger and sorrowful mirth,
We weighed in the balance of earth,
And light was his word as a treason,
  And heavy his crown as a crime.

Banners of kings shall ye follow
  None, and have thrones on your side
None; ye shall gather and grow
Silently, row upon row,
Chosen of Freedom to go
Gladly where darkness may swallow,
  Gladly where death may divide.

Have we not men with us royal,
  Men the masters of things?
In the days when our life is made new,
All souls perfect and true
Shall adore whom their forefathers slew;
And these indeed shall be loyal,
  And those indeed shall be kings.

Yet for a space they abide with us,
  Yet for a little they stand,
Bearing the heat of the day.
When their presence is taken away,

We shall wonder and worship, and say,
"Was not a star on our side with us?
  Was not a God at our hand?"

These, O men, shall ye honour,
  Liberty only, and these.
For thy sake and for all men's and mine,
Brother, the crowns of them shine
Lighting the way to her shrine,
That our eyes may be fastened upon her,
  That our hands may encompass her knees.

In this day is the sign of her shown to you;
  Choose ye, to live or to die,
Now is her harvest in hand;
Now is her light in the land;
Choose ye, to sink or to stand,
For the might of her strength is made known to you
  Now, and her arm is on high.

Serve not for any man's wages,
  Pleasure nor glory nor gold;
Not by her side are they won
Who saith unto each of you, "Son,
Silver and gold have I none;
I give but the love of all ages,
  And the life of my people of old."

Fear not for any man's terrors;
  Wait not for any man's word;
Patiently, each in his place,
Gird up your loins to the race;
Following the print of her pace,
Purged of desires and of errors,
  March to the tune ye have heard.

March to the tune of the voice of her,
  Breathing the balm of her breath,
Loving the light of her skies.
Blessed is he on whose eyes
Dawns but her light as he dies;
Blessed are ye that make choice of her,
  Equal to life and to death.

Ye that when faith is nigh frozen,
  Ye that when hope is nigh gone,
Still, over wastes, over waves,
Still, among wrecks, among graves,
Follow the splendour that saves,
Happy, her children, her chosen,
  Loyally led of her on.

The sheep of the priests, and the cattle
  That feed in the penfolds of kings,
Sleek is their flock and well-fed;
Hardly she giveth you bread,
Hardly a rest for the head,
Till the day of the blast of the battle
  And the storm of the wind of her wings.

Ye that have joy in your living,
  Ye that are careful to live,
You her thunders go by:
Live, let men be, let them lie,
Serve your season, and die;
Gifts have your masters for giving,
  Gifts hath not Freedom to give;

She, without shelter or station,
  She, beyond limit or bar,
Urges to slumberless speed
Armies that famish, that bleed,
Sowing their lives for her seed,
That their dust may rebuild her a nation,
  That their souls may relight her a star.

Happy are all they that follow her;
  Them shall no trouble cast down;
Though she slay them, yet shall they trust in her,
For unsure there is nought nor unjust in her,
Blemish is none, neither rust in her;
Though it threaten, the night shall not swallow her,
  Tempest and storm shall not drown.

Hither, O strangers, that cry for her,
  Holding your lives in your hands,
Hither, for here is your light,
Where Italy is, and her might;
Strength shall be given you to fight,
Grace shall be given you to die for her,
  For the flower, for the lady of lands;

Turn ye, whose anguish oppressing you
  Crushes, asleep and awake,
For the wrong which is wrought as of yore;
That Italia may give of her store,
Having these things to give and no more;
Only her hands on you, blessing you;
  Only a pang for her sake;

Only her bosom to die on;
  Only her heart for a home,
And a name with her children to be
From Calabrian to Adrian sea

Famous in cities made free
That ring to the roar of the lion
  Proclaiming republican Rome.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Higher Pantheism in a Nutshell

One, who is not, we see; but one, whom we see not, is;
Surely this is not that; but that is assuredly this.

What, and wherefore, and whence? for under is over and under;
If thunder could be without lightning, lightning could be without thunder.

Doubt is faith in the main; but faith, on the whole, is doubt;
We cannot believe by proof; but could we believe without?

Why, and whither, and how? for barley and rye are not clover;
Neither are straight lines curves; yet over is under and over.

Two and two may be four; but four and four are not eight;
Fate and God may be twain; but God is the same as fate.

Ask a man what he thinks, and get from a man what he feels;
God, once caught in the fact, shows you a fair pair of heels.

Body and spirit are twins; God only knows which is which;
The soul squats down in the flesh, like a tinker drunk in a ditch.

More is the whole than a part; but half is more than the whole;
Clearly, the soul is the body; but is not the body the soul?

One and two are not one; but one and nothing is two;
Truth can hardly be false, if falsehood cannot be true.

Once the mastodon was; pterodactyls were common as cocks;
Then the mammoth was God; now is He a prize ox.

Parallels all things are; yet many of these are askew;
You are certainly I; but certainly I am not you.

Springs the rock from the plain, shoots the stream from the rock;
Cocks exist for the hen; but hens exist for the cock.

God, whom we see not, is; and God, who is not, we see;
Fiddle, we know, is diddle, and diddle, we take it, is dee.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The King's Daughter

WE WERE ten maidens in the green corn,
Small red leaves in the mill-water:
Fairer maidens never were born,
Apples of gold for the king’s daughter.

We were ten maidens by a well-head,
Small white birds in the mill-water:
Sweeter maidens never were wed,
Rings of red for the king’s daughter.

The first to spin, the second to sing,
Seeds of wheat in the mill-water;
The third may was a goodly thing,
White bread and brown for the king’s daughter.

The fourth to sew and the fifth to play,
Fair green weed in the mill-water;
The sixth may was a goodly may,
White wine and red for the king’s daughter.

The seventh to woo, the eighth to wed,
Fair thin reeds in the mill-water;
The ninth had gold work on her head,
Honey in the comb for the king’s daughter.

The ninth had gold work round her hair,
Fallen flowers in the mill-water;
The tenth may was goodly and fair,
Golden gloves for the king’s daughter.

We were ten maidens in a field green,
Fallen fruit in the mill-water;
Fairer maidens never have been,
Golden sleeves for the king’s daughter.

By there comes the king’s young son,
A little wind in the mill-water;
“Out of ten maidens ye’ll grant me one,”
A crown of red for the king’s daughter.

“Out of ten mays ye’ll give me the best,”
A little rain in the mill-water;
A bed of yellow straw for all the rest,
A bed of gold for the king’s daughter.

He’s ta’en out the goodliest,
Rain that rains in the mill-water;
A comb of yellow shell for all the rest,
A comb of gold for the king’s daughter.

He’s made her bed to the goodliest,
Wind and hail in the mill-water;

A grass girdle for all the rest,
A girdle of arms for the king’s daughter.

He’s set his heart to the goodliest,
Snow that snows in the mill-water;
Nine little kisses for all the rest,
An hundredfold for the king’s daughter.

He’s ta’en his leave at the goodliest,
Broken boats in the mill-water;
Golden gifts for all the rest,
Sorrow of heart for the king’s daughter.

“Ye’ll make a grave for my fair body,”
Running rain in the mill-water;
“And ye’ll streek my brother at the side of me,”
The pains of hell for the king’s daughter.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Last Oracle

eipate toi basilei, xamai pese daidalos aula.
ouketi PHoibos exei kaluban, ou mantida daphnen,
ou pagan laleousan . apesbeto kai lalon udor.

Years have risen and fallen in darkness or in twilight,
Ages waxed and waned that knew not thee nor thine,
While the world sought light by night and sought not thy light,
Since the sad last pilgrim left thy dark mid shrine.
Dark the shrine and dumb the fount of song thence welling,
Save for words more sad than tears of blood, that said:
Tell the king, on earth has fallen the glorious dwelling,
And the watersprings that spake are quenched and dead.
Not a cell is left the God, no roof, no cover
In his hand the prophet laurel flowers no more.
And the great king's high sad heart, thy true last lover,
Felt thine answer pierce and cleave it to the core.
And he bowed down his hopeless head
In the drift of the wild world's tide,
And dying, Thou hast conquered, he said,
Galilean; he said it, and died.
And the world that was thine and was ours
When the Graces took hands with the Hours
Grew cold as a winter wave
In the wind from a wide-mouthed grave,
As a gulf wide open to swallow
The light that the world held dear.
O father of all of us, Paian, Apollo,
Destroyer and healer, hear!

Age on age thy mouth was mute, thy face was hidden,
And the lips and eyes that loved thee blind and dumb;
Song forsook their tongues that held thy name forbidden,
Light their eyes that saw the strange God's kingdom come.
Fire for light and hell for heaven and psalms for pæans
Filled the clearest eyes and lips most sweet of song,
When for chant of Greeks the wail of Galileans
Made the whole world moan with hymns of wrath and wrong.
Yea, not yet we see thee, father, as they saw thee,
They that worshipped when the world was theirs and thine,
They whose words had power by thine own power to draw thee
Down from heaven till earth seemed more than heaven divine.
For the shades are about us that hover
When darkness is half withdrawn
And the skirts of the dead night cover
The face of the live new dawn.
For the past is not utterly past
Though the word on its lips be the last,
And the time be gone by with its creed
When men were as beasts that bleed,
As sheep or as swine that wallow,
In the shambles of faith and of fear.
O father of all of us, Paian, Apollo,

Destroyer and healer, hear!

Yet it may be, lord and father, could we know it,
We that love thee for our darkness shall have light
More than ever prophet hailed of old or poet
Standing crowned and robed and sovereign in thy sight.
To the likeness of one God their dreams enthralled thee,
Who wast greater than all Gods that waned and grew;
Son of God the shining son of Time they called thee,
Who wast older, O our father, than they knew.
For no thought of man made Gods to love or honour
Ere the song within the silent soul began,
Nor might earth in dream or deed take heaven upon her
Till the word was clothed with speech by lips of man.
And the word and the life wast thou,
The spirit of man and the breath;
And before thee the Gods that bow
Take life at thine hands and death.
For these are as ghosts that wane,
That are gone in an age or twain;
Harsh, merciful, passionate, pure,
They perish, but thou shalt endure;
Be their flight with the swan or the swallow,
They pass as the flight of a year.
O father of all of us, Paian, Apollo,
Destroyer and healer, hear!

Thou the word, the light, the life, the breath, the glory,
Strong to help and heal, to lighten and to slay,
Thine is all the song of man, the world's whole story;
Not of morning and of evening is thy day.
Old and younger Gods are buried or begotten
From uprising to downsetting of thy sun,
Risen from eastward, fallen to westward and forgotten,
And their springs are many, but their end is one.
Divers births of godheads find one death appointed,
As the soul whence each was born makes room for each;
God by God goes out, discrowned and disanointed,
But the soul stands fast that gave them shape and speech.
Is the sun yet cast out of heaven?
Is the song yet cast out of man?
Life that had song for its leaven
To quicken the blood that ran
Through the veins of the songless years
More bitter and cold than tears,
Heaven that had thee for its one
Light, life, word, witness, O sun,
Are they soundless and sightless and hollow,
Without eye, without speech, without ear?
O father of all of us, Paian, Apollo,
Destroyer and healer, hear!

Time arose and smote thee silent at his warning,
Change and darkness fell on men that fell from thee;
Dark thou satest, veiled with light, behind the morning,
Till the soul of man should lift up eyes and see.
Till the blind mute soul get speech again and eyesight,
Man may worship not the light of life within;
In his sight the stars whose fires grow dark in thy sight
Shine as sunbeams on the night of death and sin.
Time again is risen with mightier word of warning,
Change hath blown again a blast of louder breath;
Clothed with clouds and stars and dreams that melt in morning,
Lo, the Gods that ruled by grace of sin and death!
They are conquered, they break, they are stricken,
Whose might made the whole world pale;
They are dust that shall rise not or quicken
Though the world for their death's sake wail.
As a hound on a wild beast's trace,
So time has their godhead in chase;
As wolves when the hunt makes head,
They are scattered, they fly, they are fled;
They are fled beyond hail, beyond hollo,
And the cry of the chase, and the cheer.
O father of all of us, Paian, Apollo,
Destroyer and healer, hear!

Day by day thy shadow shines in heaven beholden,
Even the sun, the shining shadow of thy face:
King, the ways of heaven before thy feet grow golden;
God, the soul of earth is kindled with thy grace.
In thy lips the speech of man whence Gods were fashioned,
In thy soul the thought that makes them and unmakes;
By thy light and heat incarnate and impassioned,
Soul to soul of man gives light for light and takes.
As they knew thy name of old time could we know it,
Healer called of sickness, slayer invoked of wrong,
Light of eyes that saw thy light, God, king, priest, poet,
Song should bring thee back to heal us with thy song.
For thy kingdom is past not away,
Nor thy power from the place thereof hurled;
Out of heaven they shall cast not the day,
They shall cast not out song from the world.
By the song and the light they give
We know thy works that they live;
With the gift thou hast given us of speech
We praise, we adore, we beseech,
We arise at thy bidding and follow,
We cry to thee, answer, appear,
O father of all of us, Paian, Apollo,
Destroyer and healer, hear!

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Leper

NOTHING is better, I well think,
Than love; the hidden well-water
Is not so delicate to drink:
This was well seen of me and her.

I served her in a royal house;
I served her wine and curious meat.
For will to kiss between her brows,
I had no heart to sleep or eat.

Mere scorn God knows she had of me,
A poor scribe, nowise great or fair,
Who plucked his clerk's hood back to see
Her curled-up lips and amorous hair.

I vex my head with thinking this.
Yea, though God always hated me,
And hates me now that I can kiss
Her eyes, plait up her hair to see

How she then wore it on the brows,
Yet am I glad to have her dead
Here in this wretched wattled house
Where I can kiss her eyes and head.

Nothing is better, I well know,
Than love; no amber in cold sea
Or gathered berries under snow:
That is well seen of her and me.

Three thoughts I make my pleasure of:
First I take heart and think of this:
That knight's gold hair she chose to love,
His mouth she had such will to kiss.

Then I remember that sundawn
I brought him by a privy way
Out at her lattice, and thereon
What gracious words she found to say.

(Cold rushes for such little feet—
Both feet could lie into my hand:
A marvel was it of my sweet
Her upright body could so stand).

'Sweet friend, God give you thank and grace;
Now am I clean and whole of shame,
Nor shall men burn me in the face
For my sweet fault that scandals them.'

I tell you over word by word.
She, sitting edgewise on her bed,

Holding her feet, said thus. The third,
A sweeter thing than these, I said.

God, that makes time and ruins it
And alters not, abiding God,
Changed with disease her body sweet,
The body of love wherein she abode.

Love is more sweet and comelier
Than a dove's throat strained out to sing.
All they spat out and cursed at her
And cast her forth for a base thing.

They cursed her, seeing how God had wrought
This curse to plague her, a curse of his.
Fools were they surely, seeing not
How sweeter than all sweet she is.

He that had held her by the hair,
With kissing lips blinding her eyes,
Felt her bright bosom, strained and bare,
Sigh under him, with short mad cries.

Out of her throat and sobbing mouth
And body broken up with love,
With sweet hot tears his lips were loth
Her own should taste the savour of,

Yea, he inside whose grasp all night
Her fervent body leapt or lay,
Stained with sharp kisses red and white,
Found her a plague to spurn away.

I hid her in this wattled house,
I served her water and poor bread.
For joy to kiss between her brows
Time upon time I was nigh dead.

Bread failed; we got but well-water
And gathered grass with dropping seed.
I had such joy of kissing her,
I had small care to sleep or feed.

Sometimes when service made me glad
The sharp tears leapt between my lids,
Falling on her, such joy I had
To do the service God forbids.

'I pray you let me be at peace,
Get hence, make room for me to die.'
She said that: her poor lip would cease,
Put up to mine, and turn to cry.

I said, ‘Bethink yourself how love
Fared in us twain, what either did;
Shall I unclothe my soul thereof?
That I should do this, God forbid.’

Yea, though God hateth us, he know
That hardly in a little thing
Love faileth of the work it does
Till it grow ripe for gathering.

Six months, and now my sweet is dead.
A trouble takes me; I know not
If all were done well, all well said,
No word or tender deed forgot.

Too sweet, for the least part in her,
To have shed life out by fragments; yet,
Could the close mouth catch breath and stir,
I might see something I forget.

Six months, and I still sit and hold
In two cold palms her two cold feet.
Her hair, half grey half ruined gold,
Thrills me and burns me in kissing it.

Love bites and stings me through, to see
Her keen face made of sunken bones.
Her worn-off eyelids madden me,
That were shot through with purple once.

She said, ‘Be good with me, I grow
So tired for shame’s sake, I shall die
If you say nothing:’ even so.
And she is dead now, and shame put by.

Yea, and the scorn she had of me
In the old time, doubtless vexed her then.
I never should have kissed her. See
What fools God’s anger makes of men!

She might have loved me a little too,
Had I been humbler for her sake.
But that new shame could make love new
She saw not—yet her shame did make.

I took too much upon my love,
Having for such mean service done
Her beauty and all the ways thereof,
Her face and all the sweet thereon.

Yea, all this while I tended her,

I know the old love held fast his part:
I know the old scorn waxed heavier,
Mixed with sad wonder, in her heart.

It may be all my love went wrong—
A scribe’s work writ awry and blurred,
Scrawled after the blind evensong—
Spoilt music with no perfect word.

But surely I would fain have done
All things the best I could. Perchance
Because I failed, came short of one,
She kept at heart that other man’s.

I am grown blind with all these things:
It may be now she hath in sight
Some better knowledge; still there clings
The old question. Will not God do right?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Litany Of Nations

CHORUS

If with voice of words or prayers thy sons may reach thee,
  We thy latter sons, the men thine after-birth,
  We the children of thy grey-grown age, O Earth,
O our mother everlasting, we beseech thee,
By the sealed and secret ages of thy life;
  By the darkness wherein grew thy sacred forces;
  By the songs of stars thy sisters in their courses;
By thine own song hoarse and hollow and shrill with strife;
By thy voice distuned and marred of modulation;
  By the discord of thy measure's march with theirs;
  By the beauties of thy bosom, and the cares;
By thy glory of growth, and splendour of thy station;
By the shame of men thy children, and the pride;
  By the pale-cheeked hope that sleeps and weeps and passes,
  As the grey dew from the morning mountain-grasses;
By the white-lipped sightless memories that abide;
By the silence and the sound of many sorrows;
  By the joys that leapt up living and fell dead;
  By the veil that hides thy hands and breasts and head,
Wrought of divers-coloured days and nights and morrows;
Isis, thou that knowest of God what worlds are worth,
  Thou the ghost of God, the mother uncreated,
  Soul for whom the floating forceless ages waited
As our forceless fancies wait on thee, O Earth;
Thou the body and soul, the father-God and mother,
  If at all it move thee, knowing of all things done
  Here where evil things and good things are not one,
But their faces are as fire against each other;
By thy morning and thine evening, night and day;
  By the first white light that stirs and strives and hovers
  As a bird above the brood her bosom covers,
By the sweet last star that takes the westward way;
By the night whose feet are shod with snow or thunder,
  Fledged with plumes of storm, or soundless as the dew;
  By the vesture bound of many-folded blue
Round her breathless breasts, and all the woven wonder;
By the golden-growing eastern stream of sea;
  By the sounds of sunrise moving in the mountains;
  By the forces of the floods and unsealed fountains;
Thou that badest man be born, bid man be free.

GREECE

I am she that made thee lovely with my beauty
    From north to south:
Mine, the fairest lips, took first the fire of duty
    From thine own mouth.
Mine, the fairest eyes, sought first thy laws and knew them
    Truths undefiled;
Mine, the fairest hands, took freedom first into them,

A weanling child.
By my light, now he lies sleeping, seen above him
Where none sees other;
By my dead that loved and living men that love him;
(Cho.) Hear us, O mother.

ITALY

I am she that was the light of thee enkindled
When Greece grew dim;
She whose life grew up with man's free life, and dwindled
With wane of him.
She that once by sword and once by word imperial
Struck bright thy gloom;
And a third time, casting off these years funereal,
Shall burst thy tomb.
By that bond 'twixt thee and me whereat affrighted
Thy tyrants fear us;
By that hope and this remembrance reunited;
(Cho.) O mother, hear us.

SPAIN

I am she that set my seal upon the nameless
West worlds of seas;
And my sons as brides took unto them the tameless
Hesperides.
Till my sins and sons through sinless lands dispersed,
With red flame shod,
Made accurst the name of man, and thrice accursed
The name of God.
Lest for those past fires the fires of my repentance
Hell's fume yet smother,
Now my blood would buy remission of my sentence;
(Cho.) Hear us, O mother.

FRANCE

I am she that was thy sign and standard-bearer,
Thy voice and cry;
She that washed thee with her blood and left thee fairer,
The same was I.
Were not these the hands that raised thee fallen and fed thee,
These hands defiled?
Was not I thy tongue that spake, thine eye that led thee,
Not I thy child?
By the darkness on our dreams, and the dead errors
Of dead times near us;
By the hopes that hang around thee, and the terrors;
(Cho.) O mother, hear us.

RUSSIA

I am she whose hands are strong and her eyes blinded
    And lips athirst
Till upon the night of nations many-minded
    One bright day burst:
Till the myriad stars be molten into one light,
    And that light thine;
Till the soul of man be parcel of the sunlight,
    And thine of mine.
By the snows that blanch not him nor cleanse from slaughter
    Who slays his brother;
By the stains and by the chains on me thy daughter;
  (Cho.) Hear us, O mother.

SWITZERLAND

I am she that shews on mighty limbs and maiden
    Nor chain nor stain;
For what blood can touch these hands with gold unladen,
    These feet what chain?
By the surf of spears one shieldless bosom breasted
    And was my shield,
Till the plume-plucked Austrian vulture-heads twin-crested
    Twice drenched the field;
By the snows and souls untrampled and untroubled
    That shine to cheer us,
Light of those to these responsive and redoubled;
  (Cho.) O mother, hear us.

GERMANY

I am she beside whose forest-hidden fountains
    Slept freedom armed,
By the magic born to music in my mountains
    Heart-chained and charmed.
By those days the very dream whereof delivers
    My soul from wrong;
By the sounds that make of all my ringing rivers
    None knows what song;
By the many tribes and names of my division
    One from another;
By the single eye of sun-compelling vision;
  (Cho.) Hear us, O mother.

ENGLAND

I am she that was and was not of thy chosen,
    Free, and not free;
She that fed thy springs, till now her springs are frozen;
    Yet I am she.
By the sea that clothed and sun that saw me splendid
    And fame that crowned,

By the song-fires and the sword-fires mixed and blended
That robed me round;
By the star that Milton's soul for Shelley's lighted,
Whose rays insphere us;
By the beacon-bright Republic far-off sighted;
(Cho.) O mother, hear us.

CHORUS

Turn away from us the cross-blown blasts of error,
That drown each other;
Turn away the fearful cry, the loud-tongued terror,
O Earth, O mother.
Turn away their eyes who track, their hearts who follow,
The pathless past;
Shew the soul of man, as summer shews the swallow,
The way at last.
By the sloth of men that all too long endure men
On man to tread;
By the cry of men, the bitter cry of poor men
That faint for bread;
By the blood-sweat of the people in the garden
Inwalled of kings;
By his passion interceding for their pardon
Who do these things;
By the sightless souls and fleshless limbs that labour
For not their fruit;
By the foodless mouth with foodless heart for neighbour,
That, mad, is mute;
By the child that famine eats as worms the blossom
--Ah God, the child!
By the milkless lips that strain the bloodless bosom
Till woe runs wild;
By the pastures that give grass to feed the lamb in,
Where men lack meat;
By the cities clad with gold and shame and famine;
By field and street;
By the people, by the poor man, by the master
That men call slave;
By the cross-winds of defeat and of disaster,
By wreck, by wave;
By the helm that keeps us still to sunwards driving,
Still eastward bound,
Till, as night-watch ends, day burn on eyes reviving,
And land be found:
We thy children, that arraign not nor impeach thee
Though no star steer us,
By the waves that wash the morning we beseech thee,
O mother, hear us.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Lute And The Lyre

Deep desire, that pierces heart and spirit to the root,
Finds reluctant voice in verse that yearns like soaring fire,
Takes exultant voice when music holds in high pursuit
  Deep desire.

Keen as burns the passion of the rose whose buds respire,
Strong as grows the yearning of the blossom toward the fruit,
Sounds the secret half unspoken ere the deep tones tire.

Slow subsides the rapture that possessed love's flower-soft lute,
Slow the palpitation of the triumph of the lyre:
Still the soul feels burn, a flame unslaked though these be mute,
  Deep desire.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Masque of Queen Bersabe: A Miracle-Play

KING DAVID.
Knights mine, all that be in hall,
I have a counsel to you all,
Because of this thing God lets fall
Among us for a sign.
For some days hence as I did eat
From kingly dishes my good meat,
There flew a bird between my feet
As red as any wine.
This bird had a long bill of red
And a gold ring above his head;
Long time he sat and nothing said,
Put softly down his neck and fed
From the gilt patens fine:
And as I marvelled, at the last
He shut his two keen eyën fast
And suddenly woxe big and brast
Ere one should tell to nine.

PRIMUS MILES.
Sir, note this that I will say;
That Lord who maketh corn with hay
And morrows each of yesterday,
He hath you in his hand.

SECUNDUS MILES (Paganus quidam).
By Satan I hold no such thing;
For if wine swell within a king
Whose ears for drink are hot and ring,
The same shall dream of wine-bibbing
Whilst he can lie or stand.

QUEEN BERSABE.
Peace now, lords, for Godis head,
Ye chirk as starlings that be fed
And gape as fishes newly dead;
The devil put your bones to bed,
Lo, this is all to say.

SECUNDUS MILES.
By Mahound, lords, I have good will
This devil's bird to wring and spill;
For now meseems our game goes ill,
Ye have scant hearts to play.

TERTIUS MILES.
Lo, sirs, this word is there said,
That Urias the knight is dead
Through some ill craft; by Poulis head,
I doubt his blood hath made so red
This bird that flew from the queen's bed
Whereof ye have such fear.

KING DAVID.
Yea, my good knave, and is it said
That I can raise men from the dead?
By God I think to have his head
Who saith words of my lady's bed
For any thief to hear.

Et percutiat eum in capite.

QUEEN BERSABE.
I wis men shall spit at me,
And say, it were but right for thee
That one should hang thee on a tree;
Ho! it were a fair thing to see
The big stones bruise her false body;
Fie! who shall see her dead?

KING DAVID.
I rede you have no fear of this,
For, as ye wot, the first good kiss
I had must be the last of his;
Now are ye queen of mine, I wis,
And lady of a house that is
Full rich of meat and bread.

PRIMUS MILES.
I bid you make good cheer to be
So fair a queen as all men see,
And hold us for your lieges free;
By Peter's soul that hath the key,
Ye have good hap of it.

SECUNDUS MILES.
I would that he were hanged and dead
Who hath no joy to see your head
With gold about it, barred on red;
I hold him as a sow of lead
That is so scant of wit.

Tunc dicat NATHAN propheta

O king, I have a word to thee;
The child that is in Bersabe
Shall wither without light to see;
This word is come of God by me
For sin that ye have done.
Because herein ye did not right,
To take the fair one lamb to smite
That was of Urias the knight;
Ye wist he had but one.
Full many sheep I wot ye had,

And many women, when ye bade,
To do your will and keep you glad;
And a good crown about your head
With gold to show thereon.
This Urias had one poor house
With low-barred latoun shot-windows
And scant of corn to fill a mouse;
And rusty basnets for his brows,
To wear them to the bone.
Yea the roofs also, as men sain,
Were thin to hold against the rain;
Therefore what rushes were there lain
Grew wet withouten foot of men;
The stancheons were all gone in twain
As sick man's flesh is gone.
Nathless he had great joy to see
The long hair of this Bersabe
Fall round her lap and round her knee
Even to her small soft feet, that be
Shod now with crimson royally
And covered with clean gold.
Likewise great joy he had to kiss
Her throat, where now the scarlet is
Against her little chin, I wis,
That then was but cold.
No scarlet then her kirtle had
And little gold about it sprad;
But her red mouth was alway glad
To kiss, albeit the eyes were sad
With love they had to hold.

SECUNDUS MILES.
How! old thief, thy wits are lame;
To clip such it is no shame;
I rede you in the devil's name,
Ye come not here to make men game;
By Termagaunt that maketh grame,
I shall to-bete thine head.

Hic Diabolus capiat eum.

This knave hath sharp fingers, perfay;
Mahound you thank and keep alway,
And give you good knees to pray;
What man hath no lust to play,
The devil wring his ears, I say;
There is no more but wellaway,
For now am I dead.

KING DAVID.
Certes his mouth is wried and black,
Full little pence be in his sack;

This devil hath him by the back,
It is no boot to lie.

NATHAN.
Sitteth now still and learn of me;
A little while and ye shall see
The face of God's strength presently.
All queens made as this Bersabe,
All that were fair and foul ye be,
Come hither; it am I.

Et hìc omnes cantabunt.

HERODIAS.
I am the queen Herodias.
This headband of my temples was
King Herod's gold band woven me.
This broken dry staff in my hand
Was the queen's staff of a great land
Betwixen Perse and Samarie.
For that one dancing of my feet,
The fire is come in my green wheat,
From one sea to the other sea.

AHOLIBAH.
I am the queen Aholibah.
My lips kissed dumb the word of Ah
Sighed on strange lips grown sick thereby.
God wrought to me my royal bed;
The inner work thereof was red,
The outer work was ivory.
My mouth's heat was the heat of flame
For lust towards the kings that came
With horsemen riding royally.

CLEOPATRA.
I am the queen of Ethiope.
Love bade my kissing eyelids ope
That men beholding might praise love.
My hair was wonderful and curled;
My lips held fast the mouth o' the world
To spoil the strength and speech thereof.
The latter triumph in my breath
Bowed down the beaten brows of death,
Ashamed they had not wrath enough.

ABIHAIL.
I am the queen of Tyrians.
My hair was glorious for twelve spans,
That dried to loose dust afterward.
My stature was a strong man's length;
My neck was like a place of strength

Built with white walls, even and hard.
Like the first noise of rain leaves catch
One from another, snatch by snatch,
Is my praise, hissed against and marred.

AZUBAH.
I am the queen of Amorites.
My face was like a place of lights
With multitudes at festival.
The glory of my gracious brows
Was like God's house made glorious
With colours upon either wall.
Between my brows and hair there was
A white space like a space of glass
With golden candles over all.

AHOLAH.
I am the queen of Amalek.
There was no tender touch or fleck
To spoil my body or bared feet.
My words were soft like dulcimers,
And the first sweet of grape-flowers
Made each side of my bosom sweet.
My raiment was as tender fruit
Whose rind smells sweet of spice-tree root,
Bruised balm-blossom and budded wheat.

AHINOAM.
I am the queen Ahinoam.
Like the throat of a soft slain lamb
Was my throat, softer veined than his:
My lips were as two grapes the sun
Lays his whole weight of heat upon
Like a mouth heavy with a kiss:
My hair's pure purple a wrought fleece,
My temples therein as a piece
Of a pomegranate's cleaving is.

ATARAH.
I am the queen Sidonian.
My face made faint the face of man,
And strength was bound between my brows.
Spikenard was hidden in my ships,
Honey and wheat and myrrh in strips,
White wools that shine as colour does,
Soft linen dyed upon the fold,
Split spice and cores of scented gold,
Cedar and broken calamus.

SEMIRAMIS.
I am the queen Semiramis.
The whole world and the sea that is

In fashion like a chrysopras,
The noise of all men labouring,
The priest’s mouth tired through thanksgiving,
The sound of love in the blood’s pause,
The strength of love in the blood’s beat,
All these were cast beneath my feet
And all found lesser than I was.

HESIONE.
I am the queen Hesione.
The seasons that increased in me
Made my face fairer than all men’s.
I had the summer in my hair;
And all the pale gold autumn air
Was as the habit of my sense.
My body was as fire that shone;
God’s beauty that makes all things one
Was one among my handmaidens.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.
I am the queen of Samothrace.
God, making roses, made my face
As a rose filled up full with red.
My prows made sharp the straitened seas
From Pontus to that Chersonese
Whereon the ebbed Asian stream is shed.
My hair was as sweet scent that drips;
Love’s breath begun about my lips
Kindled the lips of people dead.

THOMYRIS.
I am the queen of Scythians.
My strength was like no strength of man’s,
My face like day, my breast like spring.
My fame was felt in the extreme land
That hath sunshine on the one hand
And on the other star-shining.
Yea, and the wind there fails of breath;
Yea, and there life is waste like death;
Yea, and there death is a glad thing.

HARHAS.
I am the queen of Anakim.
In the spent years whose speech is dim,
Whose raiment is the dust and death,
My stately body without stain
Shone as the shining race of rain
Whose hair a great wind scattereth.
Now hath God turned my lips to sighs,
Plucked off mine eyelids from mine eyes,
And sealed with seals my way of breath.

MYRRHA.
I am the queen Arabian.
The tears wherewith mine eyelids ran
Smelt like my perfumed eyelids' smell.
A harsh thirst made my soft mouth hard,
That ached with kisses afterward;
My brain rang like a beaten bell.
As tears on eyes, as fire on wood,
Sin fed upon my breath and blood,
Sin made my breasts subside and swell.

PASIPHAE.
I am the queen Pasiphae.
Not all the pure clean-coloured sea
Could cleanse or cool my yearning veins;
Nor any root nor herb that grew,
Flag-leaves that let green water through,
Nor washing of the dews and rains.
From shame's pressed core I wrung the sweet
Fruit's savour that was death to eat,
Whereof no seed but death remains.

SAPPHO.
I am the queen of Lesbians.
My love, that had no part in man's,
Was sweeter than all shape of sweet.
The intolerable infinite desire
Made my face pale like faded fire
When the ashen pyre falls through with heat.
My blood was hot wan wine of love,
And my song's sound the sound thereof,
The sound of the delight of it.

MESSALINA.
I am the queen of Italy.
These were the signs God set on me;
A barren beauty subtle and sleek,
Curled carven hair, and cheeks worn wan
With fierce false lips of many a man,
Large temples where the blood ran weak,
A mouth athirst and amorous
And hungering as the grave's mouth does
That, being an-hungred, cannot speak.

AMESTRIS.
I am the queen of Persians.
My breasts were lordlier than bright swans,
My body as amber fair and thin.
Strange flesh was given my lips for bread,
With poisonous hours my days were fed,
And my feet shod with adder-skin.
In Shushan toward Ecbatane

I wrought my joys with tears and pain,
My loves with blood and bitter sin.

EPHRATH.
I am the queen of Rephaim.
God, that some while refraineth him,
Made in the end a spoil of me.
My rumour was upon the world
As strong sound of swoln water hurled
Through porches of the straining sea.
My hair was like the flag-flower,
And my breasts carven goodlier
Than beryl with chalcedony.

PASITHEA.
I am the queen of Cypriotes.
Mine oarsmen, labouring with brown throats,
Sang of me many a tender thing.
My maidens, girdled loose and braced
With gold from bosom to white waist,
Praised me between their wool-combing.
All that praise Venus all night long
With lips like speech and lids like song
Praised me till song lost heart to sing.

ALACIEL.
I am the queen Alaciel.
My mouth was like that moist gold cell
Whereout the thickest honey drips.
Mine eyes were as a grey-green sea;
The amorous blood that smote on me
Smote to my feet and finger-tips.
My throat was whiter than the dove,
Mine eyelids as the seals of love,
And as the doors of love my lips.

ERIGONE.
I am the queen Erigone.
The wild wine shed as blood on me
Made my face brighter than a bride's.
My large lips had the old thirst of earth,
Mine arms the might of the old sea's girth
Bound round the whole world's iron sides.
Within mine eyes and in mine ears
Were music and the wine of tears,
And light, and thunder of the tides.

Et hìc exeant, et dicat Bersabe regina;

Alas, God, for thy great pity
And for the might that is in thee,
Behold, I woful Bersabe

Cry out with stoopings of my knee
And thy wrath laid and bound on me
Till I may see thy love.
Behold, Lord, this child is grown
Within me between bone and bone
To make me mother of a son,
Made of my body with strong moan;
There shall not be another one
That shall be made hereof.

KING DAVID.
Lord God, alas, what shall I sain?
Lo, thou art as an hundred men
Both to break and build again:
The wild ways thou makest plain,
Thine hands hold the hail and rain,
And thy fingers both grape and grain;
Of their largess we be all well fain,
And of their great pity:
The sun thou madest of good gold,
Of clean silver the moon cold,
All the great stars thou hast told
As thy cattle in thy fold
Every one by his name of old;
Wind and water thou hast in hold,
Both the land and the long sea;
Both the green sea and the land,
Lord God, thou hast in hand,
Both white water and grey sand;
Upon thy right or thy left hand
There is no man that may stand;
Lord, thou rue on me.
O wise Lord, if thou be keen
To note things amiss that been,
I am not worth a shell of bean
More than an old mare meagre and lean;
For all my wrong-doing with my queen,
It grew not of our heartès clean,
But it began of her body.
For it fell in the hot May
I stood within a paven way
Built of fair bright stone, perfay,
That is as fire of night and day
And lighteth all my house.
Therein be neither stones nor sticks,
Neither red nor white bricks,
But for cubits five or six
There is most goodly sardonyx
And amber laid in rows.
It goes round about my roofs,
(If ye list ye shall have proofs)
There is good space for horse and hoofs,

Plain and nothing perilous.
For the fair green weather's heat,
And for the smell of leavès sweet,
It is no marvel, well ye weet,
A man to waxen amorous.
This I say now by my case
That spied forth of that royal place;
There I saw in no great space
Mine own sweet, both body and face,
Under the fresh boughs.
In a water that was there
She wesshe her goodly body bare
And dried it with her owen hair:
Both her arms and her knees fair,
Both bosom and brows;
Both shoulders and eke thighs
Tho she wesshe upon this wise;
Ever she sighed with little sighs,
And ever she gave God thank.
Yea, God wot I can well see yet
Both her breast and her sides all wet
And her long hair withouten let
Spread sideways like a drawing net;
Full dear bought and full far fet
Was that sweet thing there y-set;
It were a hard thing to forget
How both lips and eyen met,
Breast and breath sank.
So goodly a sight as there she was,
Lying looking on her glass
By wan water in green grass,
Yet saw never man.
So soft and great she was and bright
With all her body waxen white,
I woxe nigh blind to see the light
Shed out of it to left and right;
This bitter sin from that sweet sight
Between us twain began.

NATHAN.
Now, sir, be merry anon,
For ye shall have a full wise son,
Goodly and great of flesh and bone;
There shall no king be such an one,
I swear by Godis rood.
Therefore, lord, be merry here,
And go to meat withouten fear,
And hear a mass with goodly cheer;
For to all folk ye shall be dear,
And all folk of your blood.

Et tunc dicant Laudamus.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Oblation

Ask nothing more of me, sweet;
  All I can give you I give.
    Heart of my heart, were it more,
More would be laid at your feet:
  Love that should help you to live,
    Song that should spur you to soar.

All things were nothing to give
  Once to have sense of you more,
    Touch you and taste of you sweet,
Think you and breathe you and live,
  Swept of your wings as they soar,
    Trodden by chance of your feet.

I that have love and no more
  Give you but love of you, sweet:
    He that hath more, let him give;
He that hath wings, let him soar;
  Mine is the heart at your feet
    Here, that must love you to live.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Pilgrims

Who is your lady of love, O ye that pass
Singing? and is it for sorrow of that which was
That ye sing sadly, or dream of what shall be?
For gladly at once and sadly it seems ye sing.
--Our lady of love by you is unbeholden;
For hands she hath none, nor eyes, nor lips, nor golden
Treasure of hair, nor face nor form; but we
That love, we know her more fair than anything.
--Is she a queen, having great gifts to give?
--Yea, these; that whoso hath seen her shall not live
Except he serve her sorrowing, with strange pain,
Travail and bloodshedding and bitterer tears;
And when she bids die he shall surely die.
And he shall leave all things under the sky
And go forth naked under sun and rain
And work and wait and watch out all his years.

--Hath she on earth no place of habitation?
--Age to age calling, nation answering nation,
Cries out, Where is she? and there is none to say;
For if she be not in the spirit of men,
For if in the inward soul she hath no place,
In vain they cry unto her, seeking her face,
In vain their mouths make much of her; for they
Cry with vain tongues, till the heart lives again.

--O ye that follow, and have ye no repentance?
For on your brows is written a mortal sentence,
An hieroglyph of sorrow, a fiery sign,
That in your lives ye shall not pause or rest,
Nor have the sure sweet common love, nor keep
Friends and safe days, nor joy of life nor sleep.
--These have we not, who have one thing, the divine
Face and clear eyes of faith and fruitful breast.

--And ye shall die before your thrones be won.
--Yea, and the changed world and the liberal sun
Shall move and shine without us, and we lie
Dead; but if she too move on earth and live,
But if the old world with all the old irons rent
Laugh and give thanks, shall we be not content?
Nay, we shall rather live, we shall not die,
Life being so little and death so good to give.

--And these men shall forget you.--Yea, but we
Shall be a part of the earth and the ancient sea,
And heaven-high air august, and awful fire,
And all things good; and no man's heart shall beat
But somewhat in it of our blood once shed
Shall quiver and quicken, as now in us the dead
Blood of men slain and the old same life's desire
Plants in their fiery footprints our fresh feet.

--But ye that might be clothed with all things pleasant,
Ye are foolish that put off the fair soft present,
That clothe yourselves with the cold future air;
When mother and father and tender sister and brother
And the old live love that was shall be as ye,
Dust, and no fruit of loving life shall be.
--She shall be yet who is more than all these were,
Than sister or wife or father unto us or mother.

--Is this worth life, is this, to win for wages?
Lo, the dead mouths of the awful grey-grown ages,
The venerable, in the past that is their prison,
In the outer darkness, in the unopening grave,
Laugh, knowing how many as ye now say have said,
How many, and all are fallen, are fallen and dead:
Shall ye dead rise, and these dead have not risen?
--Not we but she, who is tender and swift to save.

--Are ye not weary and faint not by the way,
Seeing night by night devoured of day by day,
Seeing hour by hour consumed in sleepless fire?
Sleepless: and ye too, when shall ye too sleep?
--We are weary in heart and head, in hands and feet,
And surely more than all things sleep were sweet,
Than all things save the inexorable desire
Which whoso knoweth shall neither faint nor weep.

--Is this so sweet that one were fain to follow?
Is this so sure where all men's hopes are hollow.
Even this your dream, that by much tribulation
Ye shall make whole flawed hearts, and bowed necks straight?
--Nay, though our life were blind, our death were fruitless,
Not therefore were the whole world's high hope rootless;
But man to man, nation would turn to nation,
And the old life live, and the old great world be great.

--Pass on then and pass by us and let us be,
For what light think ye after life to see?
And if the world fare better will ye know?
And if man triumph who shall seek you and say?
--Enough of light is this for one life's span,
That all men born are mortal, but not man:
And we men bring death lives by night to sow,
That man may reap and eat and live by day.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Roundel

A roundel is wrought as a ring or a starbright sphere,
With craft of delight and with cunning of sound unsought,
That the heart of the hearer may smile if to pleasure his ear
A roundel is wrought.
Its jewel of music is carven of all or of aught--
Love, laughter, or mourning--remembrance of rapture or fear--
That fancy may fashion to hang in the ear of thought.
As a bird's quick song runs round, and the hearts in us hear
Pause answer to pause, and again the same strain caught,
So moves the device whence, round as a pearl or tear,
A roundel is wrought.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Salt of the Earth

IF childhood were not in the world,
But only men and women grown;
No baby-locks in tendrils curled,
No baby-blossoms blown;

Though men were stronger, women fairer,
And nearer all delights in reach,
And verse and music uttered rarer
Tones of more godlike speech;

Though the utmost life of life’s best hours
Found, as it cannot now find, words;
Though desert sands were sweet as flowers
And flowers could sing like birds,

But children never heard them, never
They felt a child’s foot leap and run:
This were a drearier star than ever
Yet looked upon the sun.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Sea-Swallows

THIS FELL when Christmas lights were done,
Red rose leaves will never make wine;
But before the Easter lights begun;
The ways are sair fra' the Till to the Tyne.

Two lovers sat where the rowan blows
And all the grass is heavy and fine,
By the gathering-place of the sea-swallows
When the wind brings them over Tyne.

Blossom of broom will never make bread,
Red rose leaves will never make wine;
Between her brows she is grown red,
That was full white in the fields by Tyne.

"O what is this thing ye have on,
Show me now, sweet daughter of mine?"
"O father, this is my little son
That I found hid in the sides of Tyne.

"O what will ye give my son to eat,
Red rose leaves will never make wine?"
"Fen-water and adder's meat,
The ways are sair fra' the Till to the Tyne."

"Or what will ye get my son to wear,
Red rose leaves will never make wine?"
"A weed and a web of nettle's hair,
The ways are sair fra' the Till to the Tyne."

"Or what will ye take to line his bed,
Red rose leaves will never make wine?"
"Two black stones at the kirkwall's head,
The ways are sair fra' the Till to the Tyne."

"Or what will ye give my son for land,
Red rose leaves will never make wine?"
"Three girl's paces of red sand,
The ways are sair fra' the Till to the Tyne."

"Or what will ye give me for my son,
Red rose leaves will never make wine?"
"Six times to kiss his young mouth on,
The ways are sair fra' the Till to the Tyne."

"But what have ye done with the bearing-bread,
And what have ye made of the washing-wine?
Or where have ye made your bearing-bed,
To bear a son in the sides of Tyne?"

"The bearing-bread is soft and new,
There is no soil in the straining wine:

The bed was made between green and blue,
It stands full soft by the sides of Tyne.

“The fair grass was my bearing-bread,
The well-water my washing-wine;
The low leaves were my bearing-bed,
And that was best in the sides of Tyne.”

“O daughter, if ye have done this thing,
I wot the greater grief is mine;
This was a bitter child-bearing,
When ye were got by the sides of Tyne.

“About the time of sea-swallows
That fly full thick by six and nine,
Ye’ll have my body out of the house,
To bury me by the sides of Tyne.

“Set nine stones by the wall for twain,
Red rose leaves will never make wine;
For the bed I take will measure ten,
The ways are sair fra’ the Till to the Tyne.

“Tread twelve girl’s paces out for three,
Red rose leaves will never make wine;
For the pit I made has taken me,
The ways are sair fra’ the Till to the Tyne.”

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Song Of The Standard

Maiden most beautiful, mother most bountiful, lady of lands,
Queen and republican, crowned of the centuries whose years are thy sands,
See for thy sake what we bring to thee, Italy, here in our hands.

This is the banner thy gonfalon, fair in the front of thy fight,
Red from the hearts that were pierced for thee, white as thy mountains are white,
Green as the spring of thy soul everlasting, whose life-blood is light.

Take to thy bosom thy banner, a fair bird fit for the nest,
Feathered for flight into sunrise or sunset, for eastward or west,
Fledged for the flight everlasting, but held yet warm to thy breast.

Gather it close to thee, song-bird or storm-bearer, eagle or dove,
Lift it to sunward, a beacon beneath to the beacon above,
Green as our hope in it, white as our faith in it, red as our love.

Thunder and splendour of lightning are hid in the folds of it furled;
Who shall unroll it but thou, as thy bolt to be handled and hurled,
Out of whose lips is the honey, whose bosom the milk of the world?

Out of thine hands hast thou fed us with pasture of colour and song;
Glory and beauty by birthright to thee as thy garments belong;
Out of thine hands thou shalt give us as surely deliverance from wrong.

Out of thine eyes thou hast shed on us love as a lamp in our night,
Wisdom a lodestar to ships, and remembrance a flame-coloured light;
Out of thine eyes thou shalt shew us as surely the sun-dawn of right.

Turn to us, speak to us, Italy, mother, but once and a word,
None shall not follow thee, none shall not serve thee, not one that has heard;
Twice hast thou spoken a message, and time is athirst for the third.

Kingdom and empire of peoples thou hadst, and thy lordship made one
North sea and south sea and east men and west men that look on the sun;
Spirit was in thee and counsel, when soul in the nations was none.

Banner and beacon thou wast to the centuries of storm-wind and foam,
Ages that clashed in the dark with each other, and years without home;
Empress and prophetess wast thou, and what wilt thou now be, O Rome?

Ah, by the faith and the hope and the love that have need of thee now,
Shines not thy face with the forethought of freedom, and burns not thy brow?
Who is against her but all men? and who is beside her but thou?

Art thou not better than all men? and where shall she turn but to thee?
Lo, not a breath, not a beam, not a beacon from midland to sea;
Freedom cries out for a sign among nations, and none will be free.

England in doubt of her, France in despair of her, all without heart -
Stand on her side in the vanward of ages, and strike on her part!
Strike but one stroke for the love of her love of thee, sweet that thou art!

Take in thy right hand thy banner, a strong staff fit for thine hand;
Forth at the light of it lifted shall foul things flock from the land;
Faster than stars from the sun shall they fly, being lighter than sand.

Green thing to green in the summer makes answer, and rose-tree to rose;
Lily by lily the year becomes perfect; and none of us knows
What thing is fairest of all things on earth as it brightens and blows.

This thing is fairest in all time of all things, in all time is best -
Freedom, that made thee, our mother, and suckled her sons at thy breast;
Take to thy bosom the nations, and there shall the world come to rest.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Sundew

A LITTLE marsh-plant, yellow green,
And pricked at lip with tender red.
Tread close, and either way you tread
Some faint black water jets between
Lest you should bruise the curious head.

A live thing maybe; who shall know?
The summer knows and suffers it;
For the cool moss is thick and sweet
Each side, and saves the blossom so
That it lives out the long June heat.

The deep scent of the heather burns
About it; breathless though it be,
Bow down and worship; more than we
Is the least flower whose life returns,
Least weed renascent in the sea.

We are vexed and cumbered in earth's sight
With wants, with many memories;
These see their mother what she is,
Glad-growing, till August leave more bright
The apple-coloured cranberries.

Wind blows and bleaches the strong grass,
Blown all one way to shelter it
From trample of strayed kine, with feet
Felt heavier than the moorhen was,
Strayed up past patches of wild wheat.

You call it sundew: how it grows,
If with its colour it have breath,
If life taste sweet to it, if death
Pain its soft petal, no man knows:
Man has no sight or sense that saith.

My sundew, grown of gentle days,
In these green miles the spring begun
Thy growth ere April had half done
With the soft secret of her ways
Or June made ready for the sun.

O red-lipped mouth of marsh-flower,
I have a secret halved with thee.
The name that is love's name to me
Thou knowest, and the face of her
Who is my festival to see.

The hard sun, as thy petals knew,
Coloured the heavy moss-water:
Thou wert not worth green midsummer
Nor fit to live to August blue,

O sundew, not remembering her.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Tribe of Benjamin: XV

SONS born of many a loyal Muse to Ben,
All true-begotten, warm with wine or ale,
Bright from the broad light of his presence, hail!
Prince Randolph, nighest his throne of all his men,
Being highest in spirit and heart who hailed him then
King, nor might other spread so blithe a sail:
Cartwright, a soul pent in with narrower pale,
Praised of thy sire for manful might of pen:
Marmion, whose verse keeps alway keen and fine
The perfume of their Apollonian wine
Who shared with that stout sire of all and thee
The exuberant chalice of his echoing shrine:
Is not your praise writ broad in gold which he
Inscribed, that all who praise his name should see?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Triumph Of Time

Before our lives divide for ever,
While time is with us and hands are free,
(Time, swift to fasten and swift to sever
Hand from hand, as we stand by the sea)
I will say no word that a man might say
Whose whole life's love goes down in a day;
For this could never have been; and never,
Though the gods and the years relent, shall be.

Is it worth a tear, is it worth an hour,
To think of things that are well outworn?
Of fruitless husk and fugitive flower,
The dream foregone and the deed forborne?
Though joy be done with and grief be vain,
Time shall not sever us wholly in twain;
Earth is not spoilt for a single shower;
But the rain has ruined the ungrown corn.

It will grow not again, this fruit of my heart,
Smitten with sunbeams, ruined with rain.
The singing seasons divide and depart,
Winter and summer depart in twain.
It will grow not again, it is ruined at root,
The bloodlike blossom, the dull red fruit;
Though the heart yet sickens, the lips yet smart,
With sullen savour of poisonous pain.

I have given no man of my fruit to eat;
I trod the grapes, I have drunken the wine.
Had you eaten and drunken and found it sweet,
This wild new growth of the corn and vine,
This wine and bread without lees or leaven,
We had grown as gods, as the gods in heaven,
Souls fair to look upon, goodly to greet,
One splendid spirit, your soul and mine.

In the change of years, in the coil of things,
In the clamour and rumour of life to be,
We, drinking love at the furthest springs,
Covered with love as a covering tree,
We had grown as gods, as the gods above,
Filled from the heart to the lips with love,
Held fast in his hands, clothed warm with his wings,
O love, my love, had you loved but me!

We had stood as the sure stars stand, and moved
As the moon moves, loving the world; and seen
Grief collapse as a thing disproved,
Death consume as a thing unclean.
Twain halves of a perfect heart, made fast
Soul to soul while the years fell past;
Had you loved me once, as you have not loved;

Had the chance been with us that has not been.

I have put my days and dreams out of mind,
Days that are over, dreams that are done.
Though we seek life through, we shall surely find
There is none of them clear to us now, not one.
But clear are these things; the grass and the sand,
Where, sure as the eyes reach, ever at hand,
With lips wide open and face burnt blind,
The strong sea-daisies feast on the sun.

The low downs lean to the sea; the stream,
One loose thin pulseless tremulous vein,
Rapid and vivid and dumb as a dream,
Works downward, sick of the sun and the rain;
No wind is rough with the rank rare flowers;
The sweet sea, mother of loves and hours,
Shudders and shines as the grey winds gleam,
Turning her smile to a fugitive pain.

Mother of loves that are swift to fade,
Mother of mutable winds and hours.
A barren mother, a mother-maid,
Cold and clean as her faint salt flowers.
I would we twain were even as she,
Lost in the night and the light of the sea,
Where faint sounds falter and wan beams wade,
Break, and are broken, and shed into showers.

The loves and hours of the life of a man,
They are swift and sad, being born of the sea.
Hours that rejoice and regret for a span,
Born with a man's breath, mortal as he;
Loves that are lost ere they come to birth,
Weeds of the wave, without fruit upon earth.
I lose what I long for, save what I can,
My love, my love, and no love for me!

It is not much that a man can save
On the sands of life, in the straits of time,
Who swims in sight of the great third wave
That never a swimmer shall cross or climb.
Some waif washed up with the strays and spars
That ebb-tide shows to the shore and the stars;
Weed from the water, grass from a grave,
A broken blossom, a ruined rhyme.

There will no man do for your sake, I think,
What I would have done for the least word said.
I had wrung life dry for your lips to drink,
Broken it up for your daily bread:
Body for body and blood for blood,

As the flow of the full sea risen to flood
That yearns and trembles before it sink,
I had given, and lain down for you, glad and dead.

Yea, hope at highest and all her fruit,
And time at fullest and all his dower,
I had given you surely, and life to boot,
Were we once made one for a single hour.
But now, you are twain, you are cloven apart,
Flesh of his flesh, but heart of my heart;
And deep in one is the bitter root,
And sweet for one is the lifelong flower.

To have died if you cared I should die for you, clung
To my life if you bade me, played my part
As it pleased you — these were the thoughts that stung,
The dreams that smote with a keener dart
Than shafts of love or arrows of death;
These were but as fire is, dust, or breath,
Or poisonous foam on the tender tongue
Of the little snakes that eat my heart.

I wish we were dead together to-day,
Lost sight of, hidden away out of sight,
Clasped and clothed in the cloven clay,
Out of the world's way, out of the light,
Out of the ages of worldly weather,
Forgotten of all men altogether,
As the world's first dead, taken wholly away,
Made one with death, filled full of the night.

How we should slumber, how we should sleep,
Far in the dark with the dreams and the dews!
And dreaming, grow to each other, and weep,
Laugh low, live softly, murmur and muse;
Yea, and it may be, struck through by the dream,
Feel the dust quicken and quiver, and seem
Alive as of old to the lips, and leap
Spirit to spirit as lovers use.

Sick dreams and sad of a dull delight;
For what shall it profit when men are dead
To have dreamed, to have loved with the whole soul's might,
To have looked for day when the day was fled?
Let come what will, there is one thing worth,
To have had fair love in the life upon earth:
To have held love safe till the day grew night,
While skies had colour and lips were red.

Would I lose you now? would I take you then,
If I lose you now that my heart has need?
And come what may after death to men,

What thing worth this will the dead years breed?
Lose life, lose all; but at least I know,
O sweet life's love, having loved you so,
Had I reached you on earth, I should lose not again,
In death nor life, nor in dream or deed.

Yea, I know this well: were you once sealed mine,
Mine in the blood's beat, mine in the breath,
Mixed into me as honey in wine,
Not time, that sayeth and gainsayeth,
Nor all strong things had severed us then;
Not wrath of gods, nor wisdom of men,
Nor all things earthly, nor all divine,
Nor joy nor sorrow, nor life nor death.

I had grown pure as the dawn and the dew,
You had grown strong as the sun or the sea.
But none shall triumph a whole life through:
For death is one, and the fates are three.
At the door of life, by the gate of breath,
There are worse things waiting for men than death;
Death could not sever my soul and you,
As these have severed your soul from me.

You have chosen and clung to the chance they sent you,
Life sweet as perfume and pure as prayer.
But will it not one day in heaven repent you?
Will they solace you wholly, the days that were?
Will you lift up your eyes between sadness and bliss,
Meet mine, and see where the great love is,
And tremble and turn and be changed? Content you;
The gate is strait; I shall not be there.

But you, had you chosen, had you stretched hand,
Had you seen good such a thing were done,
I too might have stood with the souls that stand
In the sun's sight, clothed with the light of the sun;
But who now on earth need care how I live?
Have the high gods anything left to give,
Save dust and laurels and gold and sand?
Which gifts are goodly; but I will none.

O all fair lovers about the world,
There is none of you, none, that shall comfort me.
My thoughts are as dead things, wrecked and whirled
Round and round in a gulf of the sea;
And still, through the sound and the straining stream,
Through the coil and chafe, they gleam in a dream,
The bright fine lips so cruelly curled,
And strange swift eyes where the soul sits free.

Free, without pity, withheld from woe,

Ignorant; fair as the eyes are fair.
Would I have you change now, change at a blow,
Startled and stricken, awake and aware?
Yea, if I could, would I have you see
My very love of you filling me,
And know my soul to the quick, as I know
The likeness and look of your throat and hair?

I shall not change you. Nay, though I might,
Would I change my sweet one love with a word?
I had rather your hair should change in a night,
Clear now as the plume of a black bright bird;
Your face fail suddenly, cease, turn grey,
Die as a leaf that dies in a day.
I will keep my soul in a place out of sight,
Far off, where the pulse of it is not heard.

Far off it walks, in a bleak blown space,
Full of the sound of the sorrow of years.
I have woven a veil for the weeping face,
Whose lips have drunken the wine of tears;
I have found a way for the failing feet,
A place for slumber and sorrow to meet;
There is no rumour about the place,
Nor light, nor any that sees or hears.

I have hidden my soul out of sight, and said
'Let none take pity upon thee, none
Comfort thy crying: for lo, thou art dead,
Lie still now, safe out of sight of the sun.
Have I not built thee a grave, and wrought
Thy grave-clothes on thee of grievous thought,
With soft spun verses and tears unshed,
And sweet light visions of things undone?

'I have given thee garments and balm and myrrh,
And gold, and beautiful burial things.
But thou, be at peace now, make no stir;
Is not thy grave as a royal king's?
Fret not thyself though the end were sore;
Sleep, be patient, vex me no more.
Sleep; what hast thou to do with her?
The eyes that weep, with the mouth that sings?'

Where the dead red leaves of the years lie rotten,
The cold old crimes and the deeds thrown by,
The misconceived and the misbegotten,
I would find a sin to do ere I die,
Sure to dissolve and destroy me all through,
That would set you higher in heaven, serve you
And leave you happy, when clean forgotten,
As a dead man out of mind, am I.

Your lithe hands draw me, your face burns through me,
I am swift to follow you, keen to see;
But love lacks might to redeem or undo me;
As I have been, I know I shall surely be;
'What should such fellows as I do?' Nay,
My part were worse if I chose to play;
For the worst is this after all; if they knew me,
Not a soul upon earth would pity me.

And I play not for pity of these; but you,
If you saw with your soul what man am I,
You would praise me at least that my soul all through
Clove to you, loathing the lives that lie;
The souls and lips that are bought and sold,
The smiles of silver and kisses of gold,
The lapdog loves that whine as they chew,
The little lovers that curse and cry.

There are fairer women, I hear; that may be;
But I, that I love you and find you fair,
Who are more than fair in my eyes if they be,
Do the high gods know or the great gods care?
Though the swords in my heart for one were seven,
Should the iron hollow of doubtful heaven,
That knows not itself whether night-time or day be,
Reverberate words and a foolish prayer?

I will go back to the great sweet mother,
Mother and lover of men, the sea.
I will go down to her, I and none other,
Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me;
Cling to her, strive with her, hold her fast:
O fair white mother, in days long past
Born without sister, born without brother,
Set free my soul as thy soul is free.

O fair green-girdled mother of mine,
Sea, that art clothed with the sun and the rain,
Thy sweet hard kisses are strong like wine,
Thy large embraces are keen like pain.
Save me and hide me with all thy waves,
Find me one grave of thy thousand graves,
Those pure cold populous graves of thine
Wrought without hand in a world without stain.

I shall sleep, and move with the moving ships,
Change as the winds change, veer in the tide;
My lips will feast on the foam of thy lips,
I shall rise with thy rising, with thee subside;
Sleep, and not know if she be, if she were,
Filled full with life to the eyes and hair,

As a rose is fulfilled to the roseleaf tips
With splendid summer and perfume and pride.

This woven raiment of nights and days,
Were it once cast off and unwound from me,
Naked and glad would I walk in thy ways,
Alive and aware of thy ways and thee;
Clear of the whole world, hidden at home,
Clothed with the green and crowned with the foam,
A pulse of the life of thy straits and bays,
A vein in the heart of the streams of the sea.

Fair mother, fed with the lives of men,
Thou art subtle and cruel of heart, men say.
Thou hast taken, and shalt not render again;
Thou art full of thy dead, and cold as they.
But death is the worst that comes of thee;
Thou art fed with our dead, O mother, O sea,
But when hast thou fed on our hearts? or when,
Having given us love, hast thou taken away?

O tender-hearted, O perfect lover,
Thy lips are bitter, and sweet thine heart.
The hopes that hurt and the dreams that hover,
Shall they not vanish away and apart?
But thou, thou art sure, thou art older than earth;
Thou art strong for death and fruitful of birth;
Thy depths conceal and thy gulfs discover;
From the first thou wert; in the end thou art.

And grief shall endure not for ever, I know.
As things that are not shall these things be;
We shall live through seasons of sun and of snow,
And none be grievous as this to me.
We shall hear, as one in a trance that hears,
The sound of time, the rhyme of the years;
Wrecked hope and passionate pain will grow
As tender things of a spring-tide sea.

Sea-fruit that swings in the waves that hiss,
Drowned gold and purple and royal rings.
And all time past, was it all for this?
Times unforgotten, and treasures of things?
Swift years of liking and sweet long laughter,
That wist not well of the years thereafter
Till love woke, smitten at heart by a kiss,
With lips that trembled and trailing wings?

There lived a singer in France of old
By the tideless dolorous midland sea.
In a land of sand and ruin and gold
There shone one woman, and none but she.

And finding life for her love's sake fail,
Being fain to see her, he bade set sail,
Touched land, and saw her as life grew cold,
And praised God, seeing; and so died he.

Died, praising God for his gift and grace:
For she bowed down to him weeping, and said
'Live;' and her tears were shed on his face
Or ever the life in his face was shed.
The sharp tears fell through her hair, and stung
Once, and her close lips touched him and clung
Once, and grew one with his lips for a space;
And so drew back, and the man was dead.

O brother, the gods were good to you.
Sleep, and be glad while the world endures.
Be well content as the years wear through;
Give thanks for life, and the loves and lures;
Give thanks for life, O brother, and death,
For the sweet last sound of her feet, her breath,
For gifts she gave you, gracious and few,
Tears and kisses, that lady of yours.

Rest, and be glad of the gods; but I,
How shall I praise them, or how take rest?
There is not room under all the sky
For me that know not of worst or best,
Dream or desire of the days before,
Sweet things or bitterness, any more.
Love will not come to me now though I die,
As love came close to you, breast to breast.

I shall never be friends again with roses;
I shall loathe sweet tunes, where a note grown strong
Relents and recoils, and climbs and closes,
As a wave of the sea turned back by song.
There are sounds where the soul's delight takes fire,
Face to face with its own desire;
A delight that rebels, a desire that reposes;
I shall hate sweet music my whole life long.

The pulse of war and passion of wonder,
The heavens that murmur, the sounds that shine,
The stars that sing and the loves that thunder,
The music burning at heart like wine,
An armed archangel whose hands raise up
All senses mixed in the spirit's cup
Till flesh and spirit are molten in sunder —
These things are over, and no more mine.

These were a part of the playing I heard
Once, ere my love and my heart were at strife;

Love that sings and hath wings as a bird,
Balm of the wound and heft of the knife.
Fairer than earth is the sea, and sleep
Than overwatching of eyes that weep,
Now time has done with his one sweet word,
The wine and leaven of lovely life.

I shall go my ways, tread out my measure,
Fill the days of my daily breath
With fugitive things not good to treasure,
Do as the world doth, say as it saith;
But if we had loved each other — O sweet,
Had you felt, lying under the palms of your feet,
The heart of my heart, beating harder with pleasure
To feel you tread it to dust and death —

Ah, had I not taken my life up and given
All that life gives and the years let go,
The wine and honey, the balm and leaven,
The dreams reared high and the hopes brought low?
Come life, come death, not a word be said;
Should I lose you living, and vex you dead?
I never shall tell you on earth; and in heaven,
If I cry to you then, will you hear or know?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Two Dreams

I WILL that if I say a heavy thing
Your tongues forgive me; seeing ye know that spring
Has flecks and fits of pain to keep her sweet,
And walks somewhile with winter-bitten feet.
Moreover it sounds often well to let
One string, when ye play music, keep at fret
The whole song through; one petal that is dead
Confirms the roses, be they white or red;
Dead sorrow is not sorrowful to hear
As the thick noise that breaks mid weeping were;
The sick sound aching in a lifted throat
Turns to sharp silver of a perfect note;
And though the rain falls often, and with rain
Late autumn falls on the old red leaves like pain,
I deem that God is not disquieted.
Also while men are fed with wine and bread,
They shall be fed with sorrow at his hand.

There grew a rose-garden in Florence land
More fair than many; all red summers through
The leaves smelt sweet and sharp of rain, and blew
Sideways with tender wind; and therein fell
Sweet sound wherewith the green waxed audible,
As a bird's will to sing disturbed his throat
And set the sharp wings forward like a boat
Pushed through soft water, moving his brown side
Smooth-shapen as a maid's, and shook with pride
His deep warm bosom, till the heavy sun's
Set face of heat stopped all the songs at once.
The ways were clean to walk and delicate;
And when the windy white of March grew late,
Before the trees took heart to face the sun
With ravelled raiment of lean winter on,
The roots were thick and hot with hollow grass.

Some roods away a lordly house there was,
Cool with broad courts and latticed passage wet
From rush-flowers and lilies ripe to set,
Sown close among the strewings of the floor;
And either wall of the slow corridor
Was dim with deep device of gracious things;
Some angel's steady mouth and weight of wings
Shut to the side; or Peter with straight stole
And beard cut black against the aureole
That spanned his head from nape to crown; thereby
Mary's gold hair, thick to the girdle-tie
Wherein was bound a child with tender feet;
Or the broad cross with blood nigh brown on it.

Within this house a righteous lord abode,
Ser Averardo; patient of his mood,
And just of judgment; and to child he had

A maid so sweet that her mere sight made glad
Men sorrowing, and unbound the brows of hate;
And where she came, the lips that pain made strait
Waxed warm and wide, and from untender grew
Tender as those that sleep brings patience to.
Such long locks had she, that with knee to chin
She might have wrapped and warmed her feet therein.
Right seldom fell her face on weeping wise;
Gold hair she had, and golden-coloured eyes,
Filled with clear light and fire and large repose
Like a fair hound's; no man there is but knows
Her face was white, and thereto she was tall;
In no wise lacked there any praise at all
To her most perfect and pure maidenhood;
No sin I think there was in all her blood.

She, where a gold grate shut the roses in,
Dwelt daily through deep summer weeks, through green
Hushed hours of rain upon the leaves; and there
Love made him room and space to worship her
With tender worship of bowed knees, and wrought
Such pleasure as the pained sense palates not
For weariness, but at one taste undoes
The heart of its strong sweet, is ravenous
Of all the hidden honey; words and sense
Fail through the tune's imperious prevalence.

In a poor house this lover kept apart,
Long communing with patience next his heart
If love of his might move that face at all,
Tuned evenwise with colours musical;
Then after length of days he said thus: "Love,
For love's own sake and for the love thereof
Let no harsh words untune your gracious mood;
For good it were, if anything be good,
To comfort me in this pain's plague of mine;
Seeing thus, how neither sleep nor bread nor wine
Seems pleasant to me, yea no thing that is
Seems pleasant to me; only I know this;
Love's ways are sharp for palms of piteous feet
To travel, but the end of such is sweet:
Now do with me as seemeth you the best."
She mused a little, as one holds his guest
By the hand musing, with her face borne down:
Then said: "Yea, though such bitter seed be sown,
Have no more care of all that you have said;
Since if there is no sleep will bind your head,
Lo, I am fain to help you certainly;
Christ knoweth, sir, if I would have you die;
There is no pleasure when a man is dead."
Thereat he kissed her hands and yellow head
And clipped her fair long body many times;

I have no wit to shape in written rhymes
A scanted tithe of this great joy they had.

They were too near love's secret to be glad;
As whoso deems the core will surely melt
From the warm fruit his lips caress, hath felt
Some bitter kernel where the teeth shut hard:
Or as sweet music sharpens afterward,
Being half disrelished both for sharp and sweet;
As sea-water, having killed over-heat
In a man's body, chills it with faint ache;
So their sense, burdened only for love's sake,
Failed for pure love; yet so time served their wit,
They saved each day some gold reserves of it,
Being wiser in love's riddle than such be
Whom fragments feed with his chance charity.
All things felt sweet were felt sweet overmuch;
The rose-thorn's prickle dangerous to touch,
And flecks of fire in the thin leaf-shadows;
Too keen the breathèd honey of the rose,
Its red too harsh a weight on feasted eyes;
They were so far gone in love's histories,
Beyond all shape and colour and mere breath,
Where pleasure has for kinsfolk sleep and death,
And strength of soul and body waxen blind
For weariness, and flesh entoiled with mind,
When the keen edge of sense foretasteth sin.

Even this green place the summer caught them in
Seemed half deflowered and sick with beaten leaves
In their strayed eyes; these gold flower-fumèd eves
Burnt out to make the sun's love-offering,
The midnoon's prayer, the rose's thanksgiving,
The trees' weight burdening the strengthless air,
The shape of her stilled eyes, her coloured hair,
Her body's balance from the moving feet—
All this, found fair, lacked yet one grain of sweet
It had some warm weeks back: so perisheth
On May's new lip the tender April breath:
So those same walks the wind sowed lilies in
All April through, and all their latter kin
Of languid leaves whereon the autumn blows—
The dead red raiment of the last year's rose—
The last year's laurel, and the last year's love,
Fade, and grow things that death grows weary of.

What man will gather in red summer-time
The fruit of some obscure and hoary rhyme
Heard last midwinter, taste the heart in it,
Mould the smooth semitones afresh, refit
The fair limbs ruined, flush the dead blood through
With colour, make all broken beauties new

For love’s new lesson—shall not such find pain
When the marred music labouring in his brain
Frets him with sweet sharp fragments, and lets slip
One word that might leave satisfied his lip—
One touch that might put fire in all the chords?
This was her pain: to miss from all sweet words
Some taste of sound, diverse and delicate—
Some speech the old love found out to compensate
For seasons of shut lips and drowsiness—
Some grace, some word the old love found out to bless
Passionless months and undelighted weeks.
The flowers had lost their summer-scented cheeks,
Their lips were no more sweet than daily breath:
The year was plagued with instances of death.

So fell it, these were sitting in cool grass
With leaves about, and many a bird there was
Where the green shadow thickliest impleached
Soft fruit and writhen spray and blossom bleached
Dry in the sun or washed with rains to white:
Her girdle was pure silk, the bosom bright
With purple as purple water and gold wrought in.
One branch had touched with dusk her lips and chin,
Made violet of the throat, abashed with shade
The breast’s bright plaited work: but nothing frayed
The sun’s large kiss on the luxurious hair.
Her beauty was new colour to the air
And music to the silent many birds.
Love was an-hungred for some perfect words
To praise her with; but only her low name
“Andrevuola” came thrice, and thrice put shame
In her clear cheek, so fruitful with new red
That for pure love straightway shame’s self was dead.

Then with lids gathered as who late had wept
She began saying: “I have so little slept
My lids drowse now against the very sun;
Yea, the brain aching with a dream begun
Beats like a fitful blood; kiss but both brows,
And you shall pluck my thoughts grown dangerous
Almost away.” He said thus, kissing them:
“O sole sweet thing that God is glad to name,
My one gold gift, if dreams be sharp and sore
Shall not the waking time increase much more
With taste and sound, sweet eyesight or sweet scent?
Has any heat too hard and insolent
Burnt bare the tender married leaves, undone
The maiden grass shut under from the sun?
Where in this world is room enough for pain?”

The feverish finger of love had touched again
Her lips with happier blood; the pain lay meek

In her fair face, nor altered lip nor cheek
With pallor or with pulse; but in her mouth
Love thirsted as a man wayfaring doth,
Making it humble as weak hunger is.
She lay close to him, bade do this and this,
Say that, sing thus: then almost weeping-ripe
Crouched, then laughed low. As one that fain would wipe
The old record out of old things done and dead,
She rose, she heaved her hands up, and waxed red
For wilful heart and blameless fear of blame;
Saying "Though my wits be weak, this is no shame
For a poor maid whom love so punisheth
With heats of hesitation and stopped breath
That with my dreams I live yet heavily
For pure sad heart and faith's humility.
Now be not wroth and I will show you this.

"Methought our lips upon their second kiss
Met in this place, and a fair day we had
And fair soft leaves that waxed and were not sad
With shaken rain or bitten through with drouth;
When I, beholding ever how your mouth
Waited for mine, the throat being fallen back,
Saw crawl thereout a live thing flaked with black
Specks of brute slime and leper-coloured scale,
A devil's hide with foul flame-writhen grail
Fashioned where hell's heat festers loathsomest;
And that brief speech may ease me of the rest,
Thus were you slain and eaten of the thing.
My waked eyes felt the new day shuddering
On their low lids, felt the whole east so beat,
Pant with close pulse of such a plague-struck heat,
As if the palpitating dawn drew breath
For horror, breathing between life and death,
Till the sun sprang blood-bright and violent."

So finishing, her soft strength wholly spent,
She gazed each way, lest some brute-hoovèd thing,
The timeless travail of hell's childbearing,
Should threat upon the sudden: whereat he,
For relish of her tasted misery
And tender little thornprick of her pain,
Laughed with mere love. What lover among men
But hath his sense fed sovereignly 'twixt whiles
With tears and covered eyelids and sick smiles
And soft disaster of a painèd face?
What pain, established in so sweet a place,
But the plucked leaf of it smells fragrantly?
What colour burning man's wide-open eye
But may be pleasurably seen? what sense
Keeps in its hot sharp extreme violence
No savour of sweet things? The bereaved blood

And emptied flesh in their most broken mood
Fail not so wholly, famish not when thus
Past honey keeps the starved lip covetous.

Therefore this speech from a glad mouth began,
Breathed in her tender hair and temples wan
Like one prolonged kiss while the lips had breath:
"Sleep, that abides in vassalage of death
And in death's service wears out half his age,
Hath his dreams full of deadly vassalage,
Shadow and sound of things ungracious;
Fair shallow faces, hooded bloodless brows,
And mouths past kissing; yea, myself have had
As harsh a dream as holds your eyelids sad.

"This dream I tell you came three nights ago:
In full mid sleep I took a whim to know
How sweet things might be; so I turned and thought;
But save my dream all sweet availed me not.
First came a smell of pounded spice and scent
Such as God ripens in some continent
Of utmost amber in the Syrian sea;
And breaths as though some costly rose could be
Spoiled slowly, wasted by some bitter fire
To burn the sweet out leaf by leaf, and tire
The flower's poor heart with heat and waste, to make
Strong magic for some perfumed woman's sake.
Then a cool naked sense beneath my feet
Of bud and blossom; and sound of veins that beat
As if a lute should play of its own heart
And fearfully, not smitten of either part;
And all my blood it filled with sharp and sweet
As gold swoln grain fills out the huskèd wheat;
So I rose naked from the bed, and stood
Counting the mobile measure in my blood
Some pleasant while, and through each limb there came
Swift little pleasures pungent as a flame,
Felt in the thrilling flesh and veins as much
As the outer curls that feel the comb's first touch
Thrill to the roots and shiver as from fire;
And blind between my dream and my desire
I seemed to stand and held my spirit still
Lest this should cease. A child whose fingers spill
Honey from cells forgotten of the bee
Is less afraid to stir the hive and see
Some wasp's bright back inside, than I to feel
Some finger-touch disturb the flesh like steel.
I prayed thus; Let me catch a secret here
So sweet, it sharpens the sweet taste of fear
And takes the mouth with edge of wine; I would
Have here some colour and smooth shape as good
As those in heaven whom the chief garden hides

With low grape-blossom veiling their white sides
And lesser tendrils that so bind and blind
Their eyes and feet, that if one come behind
To touch their hair they see not, neither fly;
This would I see in heaven and not die.
So praying, I had nigh cried out and knelt,
So wholly my prayer filled me: till I felt
In the dumb night's warm weight of glowing gloom
Somewhat that altered all my sleeping-room,
And made it like a green low place wherein
Maids mix to bathe: one sets her small warm chin
Against a ripple, that the angry pearl
May flow like flame about her: the next curl
Dips in some eddy coloured of the sun
To wash the dust well out; another one
Holds a straight ankle in her hand and swings
With lavish body sidelong, so that rings
Of sweet fierce water, swollen and splendid, fail
All round her fine and floated body pale,
Swayed flower-fashion, and her balanced side
Swerved edgeways lets the weight of water slide,
As taken in some underflow of sea
Swerves the banked gold of sea-flowers; but she
Pulls down some branch to keep her perfect head
Clear of the river: even from wall to bed,
I tell you, was my room transfigured so.
Sweet, green and warm it was, nor could one know
If there were walls or leaves, or if there was
No bed's green curtain, but mere gentle grass.
There were set also hard against the feet
Gold plates with honey and green grapes to eat,
With the cool water's noise to hear in rhymes:
And a wind warmed me full of furze and limes
And all hot sweets the heavy summer fills
To the round brim of smooth cup-shapen hills.
Next the grave walking of a woman's feet
Made my veins hesitate, and gracious heat
Made thick the lids and leaden on mine eyes:
And I thought ever, surely it were wise
Not yet to see her: this may last (who knows?)
Five minutes; the poor rose is twice a rose
Because it turns a face to her, the wind
Sings that way; hath this woman ever sinned,
I wonder? as a boy with apple-rind,
I played with pleasures, made them to my mind,
Changed each ere tasting. When she came indeed,
First her hair touched me, then I grew to feed
On the sense of her hand; her mouth at last
Touched me between the cheek and lip and past
Over my face with kisses here and there
Sown in and out across the eyes and hair.
Still I said nothing; till she set her face

More close and harder on the kissing-place,
And her mouth caught like a snake's mouth, and stung
So faint and tenderly, the fang scarce clung
More than a bird's foot: yet a wound it grew,
A great one, let this red mark witness you
Under the left breast; and the stroke thereof
So clove my sense that I woke out of love
And knew not what this dream was nor had wit;
But now God knows if I have skill of it."

Hereat she laid one palm against her lips
To stop their trembling; as when water slips
Out of a beak-mouthed vessel with faint noise
And chuckles in the narrowed throat and cloys
The carven rims with murmuring, so came
Words in her lips with no word right of them,
A beaten speech thick and disconsolate,
Till his smile ceasing waxed compassionate
Of her sore fear that grew from anything—
The sound of the strong summer thickening
In heated leaves of the smooth apple-trees:
The day's breath felt about the ash-branches,
And noises of the noon whose weight still grew
On the hot heavy-headed flowers, and drew
Their red mouths open till the rose-heart ached;
For eastward all the crowding rose was slaked
And soothed with shade; but westward all its growth
Seemed to breathe hard with heat as a man doth
Who feels his temples newly feverous.
And even with such motion in her brows
As that man hath in whom sick days begin,
She turned her throat and spake, her voice being thin
As a sick man's, sudden and tremulous;
"Sweet, if this end be come indeed on us,
Let us love more;" and held his mouth with hers.
As the first sound of flooded hill-waters
Is heard by people of the meadow-grass,
Or ever a wandering waif of ruin pass
With whirling stones and foam of the brown stream
Flaked with fierce yellow: so beholding him
She felt before tears came her eyelids wet,
Saw the face deadly thin where life was yet,
Heard his throat's harsh last moan before it clomb:
And he, with close mouth passionate and dumb,
Burned at her lips: so lay they without speech,
Each grasping other, and the eyes of each
Fed in the other's face: till suddenly
He cried out with a little broken cry
This word, "O help me, sweet, I am but dead."
And even so saying, the colour of fair red
Was gone out of his face, and his blood's beat
Fell, and stark death made sharp his upward feet

And pointed hands: and without moan he died.
Pain smote her sudden in the brows and side,
Strained her lips open and made burn her eyes:
For the pure sharpness of her miseries
She had no heart's pain, but mere body's wrack;
But at the last her beaten blood drew back
Slowly upon her face, and her stunned brows
Suddenly grown aware and piteous
Gathered themselves, her eyes shone, her hard breath
Came as though one nigh dead came back from death;
Her lips throbbed, and life trembled through her hair.

And in brief while she thought to bury there
The dead man that her love might lie with him
In a sweet bed under the rose-roots dim
And soft earth round the branchèd apple-trees,
Full of hushed heat and heavy with great ease,
And no man entering divide him thence.
Wherefore she bade one of her handmaidens
To be her help to do upon this wise.
And saying so the tears out of her eyes
Fell without noise and comforted her heart:
Yea, her great pain eased of the sorest part
Began to soften in her sense of it.
There under all the little branches sweet
The place was shapen of his burial;
They shed thereon no thing funereal,
But coloured leaves of latter rose-blossom,
Stems of soft grass, some withered red and some
Fair and fresh-blooded; and spoil splendider
Of marigold and great spent sunflower.

And afterward she came back without word
To her own house; two days went, and the third
Went, and she showed her father of this thing.
And for great grief of her soul's travailing
He gave consent she should endure in peace
Till her life's end; yea, till her time should cease,
She should abide in fellowship of pain.
And having lived a holy year or twain
She died of pure waste heart and weariness.
And for love's honour in her love's distress
This word was written over her tomb's head;
"Here dead she lieth, for whose sake Love is dead."

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Way Of The Wind

The wind's way in the deep sky's hollow
None may measure, as none can say
How the heart in her shows the swallow
  The wind's way.

Hope nor fear can avail to stay
Waves that whiten on wrecks that wallow,
Times and seasons that wane and slay.

Life and love, till the strong night swallow
Thought and hope and the red last ray,
Swim the waters of years that follow
  The wind's way.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Year of the Rose

From the depths of the green garden-closes
Where the summer in darkness dozes
Till autumn pluck from his hand
An hour-glass that holds not a sand;
From the maze that a flower-belt encloses
To the stones and sea-grass on the strand
How red was the reign of the roses
Over the rose-crowned land!

The year of the rose is brief;
From the first blade blown to the sheaf,
From the thin green leaf to the gold,
It has time to be sweet and grow old,
To triumph and leave not a leaf
For witness in winter's sight
How lovers once in the light
Would mix their breath with its breath,
And its spirit was quenched not of night,
As love is subdued not of death.

In the red-rose land not a mile
Of the meadows from stile to stile,
Of the valleys from stream to stream,
But the air was a long sweet dream
And the earth was a sweet wide smile
Red-mouthed of a goddess, returned
From the sea which had borne her and burned,
That with one swift smile of her mouth
Looked full on the north as it yearned,
And the north was more than the south.

For the north, when winter was long,
In his heart had made him a song,
And clothed it with wings of desire,
And shod it with shoon as of fire,
To carry the tale of his wrong
To the south-west wind by the sea,
That none might bear it but he
To the ear of the goddess unknown
Who waits till her time shall be
To take the world for a throne.

In the earth beneath, and above
In the heaven where her name is love,
She warms with light from her eyes
The seasons of life as they rise,
And her eyes are as eyes of a dove,
But the wings that lift her and bear
As an eagle's, and all her hair
As fire by the wind's breath curled,
And her passage is song through the air,
And her presence is spring through the world.

So turned she northward and came,
And the white-thorn land was aflame
With the fires that were shed from her feet,
That the north, by her love made sweet,
Should be called by a rose-red name;
And a murmur was heard as of doves,
And a music beginning of loves
In the light that the roses made,
Such light as the music loves,
The music of man with maid.

But the days drop one upon one,
And a chill soft wind is begun
In the heart of the rose-red maze
That weeps for the roseleaf days
And the reign of the rose undone
That ruled so long in the light,
And by spirit, and not by sight,
Through the darkness thrilled with its breath,
Still ruled in the viewless night,
As love might rule over death.

The time of lovers is brief;
From the fair first joy to the grief
That tells when love is grown old,
From the warm wild kiss to the cold,
From the red to the white-rose leaf,
They have but a season to seem
As rose-leaves lost on a stream
That part not and pass not apart
As a spirit from dream to dream,
As a sorrow from heart to heart.

From the bloom and the gloom that encloses
The death-bed of Love where he dozes
Till a relic be left not of sand
To the hour-glass that breaks in his hand;
From the change in the grey garden-closes
To the last stray grass of the strand,
A rain and ruin of roses
Over the red-rose land.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Thomas Decker: VIII

OUT of the depths of darkling life where sin
Laughs piteously that sorrow should not know
Her own ill name, nor woe be counted woe;
Where hate and craft and lust make drearier din
Than sounds through dreams that grief holds revel in;
What charm of joy-bells ringing, streams that flow,
Winds that blow healing in each note they blow,
Is this that the outer darkness hears begin?

O sweetest heart of all thy time save one,
Star seen for love’s sake nearest to the sun,
Hung lamplike o’er a dense and doleful city,
Not Shakespeare’s very spirit, howe’er more great,
Than thine toward man was more compassionate,
Nor gave Christ praise from lips more sweet with pity.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Thomas Heywood: X

TOM, if they loved thee best who called thee Tom.
What else may all men call thee, seeing thus bright
Even yet the laughing and the weeping light
That still thy kind old eyes are kindled from?
Small care was thine to assail and overcome
Time and his child Oblivion: yet of right
Thy name has part with names of lordlier might
For English love and homely sense of home,
Whose fragrance keeps thy small sweet bayleaf young
And gives it place aloft among thy peers
Whence many a wreath once higher strong Time has hurled:
And this thy praise is sweet on Shakespeare's tongue—
'O good old man, how well in thee appears
The constant service of the antique world!'

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Thomas Middleton: IX

A WILD MOON riding high from cloud to cloud,
That sees and sees not, glimmering far beneath,
Hell’s children revel along the shuddering heath
With dirge-like mirth and raiment like a shroud:
A worse fair face than witchcraft’s, passion-proud,
With brows blood-flecked behind their bridal wreath
And lips that bade the assassin’s sword find sheath
Deep in the heart whereto love’s heart was vowed:
A game of close contentious crafts and creeds
Played till white England bring black Spain to shame:
A son’s bright sword and brighter soul, whose deeds
High conscience lights for mother’s love and fame:
Pure gipsy flowers, and poisonous courtly weeds:
Such tokens and such trophies crown thy name.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Three Faces

I.--VENTIMIGLIA

The sky and sea glared hard and bright and blank:
Down the one steep street, with slow steps firm and free,
A tall girl paced, with eyes too proud to thank
  The sky and sea.

One dead flat sapphire, void of wrath or glee,
Through bay on bay shone blind from bank to bank
The weary Mediterranean, drear to see.

More deep, more living, shone her eyes that drank
The breathless light and shed again on me,
Till pale before their splendour waned and shrank
  The sky and sea.

II.--GENOA

Again the same strange might of eyes, that saw
In heaven and earth nought fairer, overcame
My sight with rapture of reiterate awe,
  Again the same.

The self-same pulse of wonder shook like flame
The spirit of sense within me: what strange law
Had bid this be, for blessing or for blame?

To what veiled end that fate or chance foresaw
Came forth this second sister face, that came
Absolute, perfect, fair without a flaw,
  Again the same?

III.--VENICE

Out of the dark pure twilight, where the stream
Flows glimmering, streaked by many a birdlike bark
That skims the gloom whence towers and bridges gleam
  Out of the dark,

Once more a face no glance might choose but mark
Shone pale and bright, with eyes whose deep slow beam
Made quick the twilight, lifeless else and stark.

The same it seemed, or mystery made it seem,
As those before beholden; but St. Mark
Ruled here the ways that showed it like a dream
  Out of the dark.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Time And Life

I.

Time, thy name is sorrow, says the stricken
Heart of life, laid waste with wasting flame
Ere the change of things and thoughts requicken,
  Time, thy name.

Girt about with shadow, blind and lame,
Ghosts of things that smite and thoughts that sicken
Hunt and hound thee down to death and shame.

Eyes of hours whose paces halt or quicken
Read in bloodred lines of loss and blame,
Writ where cloud and darkness round it thicken,
  Time, thy name.

II.

Nay, but rest is born of me for healing,
- So might haply time, with voice represt,
Speak: is grief the last gift of my dealing?
  Nay, but rest.

All the world is wearied, east and west,
Tired with toil to watch the slow sun wheeling,
Twelve loud hours of life's laborious quest.

Eyes forspent with vigil, faint and reeling,
Find at last my comfort, and are blest,
Not with rapturous light of life's revealing -
  Nay, but rest.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

To A Cat

STATELY, kindly, lordly friend,
        Condescend
Here to sit by me, and turn
Glorious eyes that smile and burn,
Golden eyes, love's lustrous meed,
On the golden page I read.

All your wondrous wealth of hair,
        Dark and fair,
Silken-shaggy, soft and bright
As the clouds and beams of night,
Pays my reverent hand's caress
Back with friendlier gentleness.

Dogs may fawn on all and some
        As they come;
You, a friend of loftier mind,
Answer friends alone in kind.
Just your foot upon my hand
Softly bids it understand.

Morning round this silent sweet
        Garden-seat
Sheds its wealth of gathering light,
Thrills the gradual clouds with might,
Changes woodland, orchard, heath,
Lawn, and garden there beneath.

Fair and dim they gleamed below:
        Now they glow
Deep as even your sunbright eyes,
Fair as even the wakening skies.
Can it not or can it be
Now that you give thanks to see ?

May not you rejoice as I,
        Seeing the sky
Change to heaven revealed, and bid
Earth reveal the heaven it hid
All night long from stars and moon,
Now the sun sets all in tune?

What within you wakes with day
        Who can say?
All too little may we tell,
Friends who like each other well,
What might haply, if we might,
Bid us read our lives aright.

Wild on woodland ways your sires
        Flashed like fires;
Fair as flame and fierce and fleet

As with wings on wingless feet
Shone and sprang your mother, free,
Bright and brave as wind or sea.

Free and proud and glad as they,
        Here to-day
Rests or roams their radiant child,
Vanquished not, but reconciled,
Free from curb of aught above
Save the lovely curb of love.

Love through dreams of souls divine
        Fain would shine
Round a dawn whose light and song
Then should right our mutual wrong---
Speak, and seal the love-lit law
Sweet Assisi's seer foresaw.

Dreams were theirs; yet haply may
        Dawn a day
When such friends and fellows born,
Seeing our earth as fair at morn,
May for wiser love's sake see
More of heaven's deep heart than we.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

To Catullus

My brother, my Valerius, dearest head
Of all whose crowning bay-leaves crown their mother
Rome, in the notes first heard of thine I read
  My brother.

No dust that death or time can strew may smother
Love and the sense of kinship inly bred
From loves and hates at one with one another.

To thee was Caesar's self nor dear nor dread,
Song and the sea were sweeter each than other:
How should I living fear to call thee dead
  My brother?

Algernon Charles Swinburne

To Dora Dorian

Child of two strong nations, heir
Born of high-souled hope that smiled,
Seeing for each brought forth a fair
  Child,

By thy gracious brows, and wild
Golden-clouded heaven of hair,
By thine eyes elate and mild,

Hope would fain take heart to swear
Men should yet be reconciled,
Seeing the sign she bids thee bear,
  Child.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

To Dr. John Brown: Sonnets

BEYOND the north wind lay the land of old
Where men dwelt blithe and blameless, clothed and fed
With joy’s bright raiment and with love’s sweet bread,
The whitest flock of earth’s maternal fold.
None there might wear about his brows enrolled
A light of lovelier fame than rings your head,
Whose lovesome love of children and the dead
All men give thanks for: I far off behold
A dear dead hand that links us, and a light
The blithest and benignest of the night,
The night of death’s sweet sleep, wherein may be
A star to show your spirit in present sight
Some happier island in the Elysian sea
Where Rab may lick the hand of Marjorie.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

To John Nichol: Sonnets

FRIEND of the dead, and friend of all my days
Even since they cast off boyhood, I salute
The song saluting friends whose songs are mute
With full burnt-offerings of clear-spirited praise.
That since our old young years our several ways
Have led through fields diverse of flower and fruit
Yet no cross wind has once relaxed the root
We set long since beneath the sundawn's rays,
The root of trust whence towered the trusty tree,
Friendship this only and duly might impel
My song to salutation of your own;
More even than praise of one unseen of me
And loved the starry spirit of Dobell,
To mine by light and music only known.

II.

But more than this what moves me most of all
To leave not all unworded and unsped
The whole heart's greeting of my thanks unsaid
Scarce needs this sign, that from my tongue should fall
His name whom sorrow and reverent love recall,
The sign to friends on earth of that dear head
Alive, which now long since untimely dead
The wan grey waters covered for a pall.
Their trustless reaches dense with tangling stems
Took never life more taintless of rebuke,
More pure and perfect, more serene and kind,
Than when those clear eyes closed beneath the Thames,
And made the now more hallowed name of Luke
Memorial to us of morning left behind.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

To Victor Hugo

IN the fair days when God
By man as godlike trod,
And each alike was Greek, alike was free,
God's lightning spared, they said,
Alone the happier head
Whose laurels screened it; fruitless grace for thee,
To whom the high gods gave of right
Their thunders and their laurels and their light.

Sunbeams and bays before
Our master's servants wore,
For these Apollo left in all men's lands;
But far from these ere now
And watched with jealous brow
Lay the blind lightnings shut between God's hands,
And only loosed on slaves and kings
The terror of the tempest of their wings.

Born in those younger years
That shone with storms of spears
And shook in the wind blown from a dead world's pyre,
When by her back-blown hair
Napoleon caught the fair
And fierce Republic with her feet of fire,
And stayed with iron words and hands
Her flight, and freedom in a thousand lands:

Thou sawest the tides of things
Close over heads of kings,
And thine hand felt the thunder, and to thee
Laurels and lightnings were
As sunbeams and soft air
Mixed each in other, or as mist with sea
Mixed, or as memory with desire,
Or the lute's pulses with the louder lyre.

For thee man's spirit stood
Disrobed of flesh and blood,
And bare the heart of the most secret hours;
And to thine hand more tame
Than birds in winter came
High hopes and unknown flying forms of powers,
And from thy table fed, and sang
Till with the tune men's ears took fire and rang.

Even all men's eyes and ears
With fiery sound and tears
Waxed hot, and cheeks caught flame and eyelids light,
At those high songs of thine
That stung the sense like wine,
Or fell more soft than dew or snow by night,
Or wailed as in some flooded cave

Sobs the strong broken spirit of a wave.

But we, our master, we
Whose hearts, uplift to thee,
Ache with the pulse of thy remembered song,
We ask not nor await
From the clenched hands of fate,
As thou, remission of the world's old wrong;
Respite we ask not, nor release;
Freedom a man may have, he shall not peace.

Though thy most fiery hope
Storm heaven, to set wide ope
The all-sought-for gate whence God or Chance debars
All feet of men, all eyes—
The old night resumes her skies,
Her hollow hiding-place of clouds and stars,
Where nought save these is sure in sight;
And, paven with death, our days are roofed with night.

One thing we can; to be
Awhile, as men may, free;
But not by hope or pleasure the most stern
Goddess, most awful-eyed,
Sits, but on either side
Sit sorrow and the wrath of hearts that burn,
Sad faith that cannot hope or fear,
And memory grey with many a flowerless year.

Not that in stranger's wise
I lift not loving eyes
To the fair foster-mother France, that gave
Beyond the pale fleet foam
Help to my sires and home,
Whose great sweet breast could shelter those and save
Whom from her nursing breasts and hands
Their land cast forth of old on gentler lands.

Not without thoughts that ache
For theirs and for thy sake,
I, born of exiles, hail thy banished head;
I whose young song took flight
Toward the great heat and light
On me a child from thy far splendour shed,
From thine high place of soul and song,
Which, fallen on eyes yet feeble, made them strong.

Ah, not with lessening love
For memories born hereof,
I look to that sweet mother-land, and see
The old fields and fair full streams,
And skies, but fled like dreams

The feet of freedom and the thought of thee;
And all between the skies and graves
The mirth of mockers and the shame of slaves.

She, killed with noisome air,
Even she! and still so fair,
Who said "Let there be freedom," and there was
Freedom; and as a lance
The fiery eyes of France
Touched the world's sleep and as a sleep made pass
Forth of men's heavier ears and eyes
Smitten with fire and thunder from new skies.

Are they men's friends indeed
Who watch them weep and bleed?
Because thou hast loved us, shall the gods love thee?
Thou, first of men and friend,
Seest thou, even thou, the end?
Thou knowest what hath been, knowest thou what shall be?
Evils may pass and hopes endure;
But fate is dim, and all the gods obscure.

O nursed in airs apart,
O poet highest of heart,
Hast thou seen time, who hast seen so many things?
Are not the years more wise,
More sad than keenest eyes,
The years with soundless feet and sounding wings?
Passing we hear them not, but past
The clamour of them thrills us, and their blast.

Thou art chief of us, and lord;
Thy song is as a sword
Keen-edged and scented in the blade from flowers;
Thou art lord and king; but we
Lift younger eyes, and see
Less of high hope, less light on wandering hours;
Hours that have borne men down so long,
Seen the right fail, and watched uplift the wrong.

But thine imperial soul,
As years and ruins roll
To the same end, and all things and all dreams
With the same wreck and roar
Drift on the dim same shore,
Still in the bitter foam and brackish streams
Tracks the fresh water-spring to be
And sudden sweeter fountains in the sea.

As once the high God bound
With many a rivet round
Man's saviour, and with iron nailed him through,

At the wild end of things,
Where even his own bird’s wings
Flagged, whence the sea shone like a drop of dew,
From Caucasus beheld below
Past fathoms of unfathomable snow;

So the strong God, the chance
Central of circumstance,
Still shows him exile who will not be slave;
All thy great fame and thee
Girt by the dim strait sea
With multitudinous walls of wandering wave;
Shows us our greatest from his throne
Fate-stricken, and rejected of his own.

Yea, he is strong, thou say’st,
A mystery many-faced,
The wild beasts know him and the wild birds flee;
The blind night sees him, death
Shrinks beaten at his breath,
And his right hand is heavy on the sea:
We know he hath made us, and is king;
We know not if he care for anything.

Thus much, no more, we know;
He bade what is be so,
Bade light be and bade night be, one by one;
Bade hope and fear, bade ill
And good redeem and kill,
Till all men be aweary of the sun
And his world burn in its own flame
And bear no witness longer of his name.

Yet though all this be thus,
Be those men praised of us
Who have loved and wrought and sorrowed and not sinned
For fame or fear or gold,
Nor waxed for winter cold,
Nor changed for changes of the worldly wind;
Praised above men of men be these,
Till this one world and work we know shall cease.

Yea, one thing more than this,
We know that one thing is,
The splendour of a spirit without blame,
That not the labouring years
Blind-born, nor any fears,
Nor men nor any gods can tire or tame;
But purer power with fiery breath
Fills, and exalts above the gulfs of death.

Praised above men be thou,

Whose laurel-laden brow,
Made for the morning, droops not in the night;
Praised and beloved, that none
Of all thy great things done
Flies higher than thy most equal spirit’s flight;
Praised, that nor doubt nor hope could bend
Earth’s loftiest head, found upright to the end

Algernon Charles Swinburne

To Walt Whitman In America

Send but a song oversea for us,
  Heart of their hearts who are free,
Heart of their singer, to be for us
  More than our singing can be;
Ours, in the tempest at error,
With no light but the twilight of terror;
  Send us a song oversea!

Sweet-smelling of pine-leaves and grasses,
  And blown as a tree through and through
With the winds of the keen mountain-passes,
  And tender as sun-smitten dew;
Sharp-tongued as the winter that shakes
The wastes of your limitless lakes,
  Wide-eyed as the sea-line's blue.

O strong-winged soul with prophetic
  Lips hot with the bloodheats of song,
With tremor of heartstrings magnetic,
  With thoughts as thunders in throng,
With consonant ardours of chords
That pierce men's souls as with swords
  And hale them hearing along,

Make us too music, to be with us
  As a word from a world's heart warm,
To sail the dark as a sea with us,
  Full-sailed, outsinging the storm,
A song to put fire in our ears
Whose burning shall burn up tears,
  Whose sign bid battle reform;

A note in the ranks of a clarion,
  A word in the wind of cheer,
To consume as with lightning the carrion
  That makes time foul for us here;
In the air that our dead things infest
A blast of the breath of the west,
  Till east way as west way is clear.

Out of the sun beyond sunset,
  From the evening whence morning shall be,
With the rollers in measureless onset,
  With the van of the storming sea,
With the world-wide wind, with the breath
That breaks ships driven upon death,
  With the passion of all things free,

With the sea-steeds footless and frantic,
  White myriads for death to bestride
In the charge of the ruining Atlantic
  Where deaths by regiments ride,

With clouds and clamours of waters,
With a long note shriller than slaughter's
  On the furrowless fields world-wide,

With terror, with ardour and wonder,
  With the soul of the season that wakes
When the weight of a whole year's thunder
  In the tidestream of autumn breaks,
Let the flight of the wide-winged word
Come over, come in and be heard,
  Take form and fire for our sakes.

For a continent bloodless with travail
  Here toils and brawls as it can,
And the web of it who shall unravel
  Of all that peer on the plan;
Would fain grow men, but they grow not,
And fain be free, but they know not
  One name for freedom and man?

One name, not twain for division;
  One thing, not twain, from the birth;
Spirit and substance and vision,
  Worth more than worship is worth;
Unbeheld, unadored, undivined,
The cause, the centre, the mind,
  The secret and sense of the earth.

Here as a weakling in irons,
  Here as a weanling in bands,
As a prey that the stake-net environs,
  Our life that we looked for stands;
And the man-child naked and dear,
Democracy, turns on us here
  Eyes trembling with tremulous hands

It sees not what season shall bring to it
  Sweet fruit of its bitter desire;
Few voices it hears yet sing to it,
  Few pulses of hearts reaspire;
Foresees not time, nor forehears
The noises of imminent years,
  Earthquake, and thunder, and fire:

When crowned and weaponed and curbless
  It shall walk without helm or shield
The bare burnt furrows and herbless
  Of war's last flame-stricken field,
Till godlike, equal with time,
It stand in the sun sublime,
  In the godhead of man revealed.

Round your people and over them
  Light like raiment is drawn,
Close as a garment to cover them
  Wrought not of mail nor of lawn;
Here, with hope hardly to wear,
Naked nations and bare
  Swim, sink, strike out for the dawn.

Chains are here, and a prison,
  Kings, and subjects, and shame;
If the God upon you be arisen,
  How should our songs be the same?
How, in confusion of change,
How shall we sing, in a strange
  Land, songs praising his name?

God is buried and dead to us,
  Even the spirit of earth,
Freedom; so have they said to us,
  Some with mocking and mirth,
Some with heartbreak and tears;
And a God without eyes, without ears,
  Who shall sing of him, dead in the birth?

The earth-god Freedom, the lonely
  Face lightening, the footprint unshod,
Not as one man crucified only
  Nor scourged with but one life's rod;
The soul that is substance of nations,
Reincarnate with fresh generations;
  The great god Man, which is God.

But in weariest of years and obscurest
  Doth it live not at heart of all things,
The one God and one spirit, a purest
  Life, fed from unstanchable springs?
Within love, within hatred it is,
And its seed in the stripe as the kiss,
  And in slaves is the germ, and in kings.

Freedom we call it, for holier
  Name of the soul's there is none;
Surelier it labours if slowlier,
  Than the metres of star or of sun;
Slowlier than life into breath,
Surelier than time into death,
  It moves till its labour be done.

Till the motion be done and the measure
  Circling through season and clime,
Slumber and sorrow and pleasure,
  Vision of virtue and crime;

Till consummate with conquering eyes,
A soul disembodied, it rise
  From the body transfigured of time.

Till it rise and remain and take station
  With the stars of the worlds that rejoice;
Till the voice of its heart's exultation
  Be as theirs an invariable voice;
By no discord of evil estranged,
By no pause, by no breach in it changed,
  By no clash in the chord of its choice.

It is one with the world's generations,
  With the spirit, the star, and the sod;
With the kingless and king-stricken nations,
  With the cross, and the chain, and the rod;
The most high, the most secret, most lonely,
The earth-soul Freedom, that only
  Lives, and that only is God.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

To William Bell Scott

THE LARKS are loud above our leagues of whin
Now the sun’s perfume fills their glorious gold
With odour like the colour: all the wold
Is only light and song and wind wherein
These twain are blent in one with shining din.
And now your gift, a giver’s kingly-souled,
Dear old fast friend whose honours grow not old,
Bids memory’s note as loud and sweet begin.
Though all but we from life be now gone forth
Of that bright household in our joyous north
Where I, scarce clear of boyhood just at end,
First met your hand; yet under life’s clear dome,
Now seventy strenuous years have crowned my friend,
Shines no less bright his full-sheaved harvest-home.

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Wasted Love

What shall be done for sorrow
  With love whose race is run?
Where help is none to borrow,
  What shall be done?

In vain his hands have spun
  The web, or drawn the furrow:
No rest their toil hath won.

His task is all gone thorough,
  And fruit thereof is none:
And who dare say to-morrow
  What shall be done?

Algernon Charles Swinburne