Classic Poetry Series

Amy Lowell

- poems -

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Amy Lowell (February 9, 1874 – May 12, 1925)

an American poet of the imagist school from Brookline, Massachusetts who posthumously won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1926.

Personal Life

Lowell was born into Brookline's prominent Lowell family, sister to astronomer Percival Lowell and Harvard president Abbott Lawrence Lowell.

She never attended college because her family did not consider that proper for a woman, but she compensated with avid reading and near-obsessive book collecting. She lived as a socialite and travelled widely, turning to poetry in 1902 after being inspired by a performance of Eleonora Duse in Europe.

Lowell was said to be lesbian, and in 1912 she and actress Ada Dwyer Russell were reputed to be lovers. Russell is reputed to be the subject of her more erotic work, most notably the love poems contained in 'Two Speak Together', a subsection of Pictures of the Floating World. The two women traveled to England together, where Lowell met Ezra Pound, who at once became a major influence and a major critic of her work. Pound considered her embrace of Imagism to be a kind of hi-jacking of the movement, and among his friends he referred to her as the "hippo-poetess". Lowell has been linked romantically to writer Mercedes de Acosta, but the only evidence of any contact between them is a brief correspondence about a planned memorial for Duse.

Lowell died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1925 at the age of 51. The following year, she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for What's O'Clock. That collection included the patriotic poem "Lilacs", which Louis Untermeyer said was the poem of hers he liked best.

Career

Her first published work appeared in 1910 in Atlantic Monthly. The first published collection of her poetry, A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass, appeared two years later in 1912. An additional group of uncollected poems was added to the volume The Complete Poetical Works of Amy Lowell, published in 1955 with an introduction by Louis Untermeyer, who considered himself her friend.

Though she sometimes wrote sonnets, Lowell was an early adherent to the "free verse" method of poetry and one of the major champions of this method. Untermeyer writes that "She was not only a disturber but an awakener." In many poems she dispenses with line breaks so that the work

looks like prose on the page. This technique she labeled "polyphonic prose".

Throughout her working life Lowell was a promoter of both contemporary and historical poets. Her book Fir-Flower Poets was a poetical re-working of literal translations of the works of ancient Chinese poets, notably Li Tai-po (A.D. 701-762). Her writing also included critical works on French literature. When she died she was attempting to complete her two-volume biography of John Keats. Writing of Keats, Lowell said that "The stigma of oddness is the price a myopic world always exacts of genius."

Lowell was a short but imposing figure who kept her hair in a bun and wore a pince-nez. She smoked cigars constantly, claiming that they lasted longer than cigarettes. A glandular problem kept her perpetually overweight, so that poet Witter Bynner once said, in a cruel comment repeated by Ezra Pound. and thereafter commonly misattributed to him, that she was a "hippopoetess."

Lowell not only published her own work but also that of other writers. According to Untermyer, she "captured" the Imagist movement from Ezra Pound. Pound threatened to sue her for bringing out her three-volume series Some Imagist Poets, and thereafter called the American Imagists the "Amygist" movement. Pound criticized her as not an imagist but merely a rich woman who was able to financially assist the publication of imagist poetry. She said that Imagism was weak before she took it up, whereas others said it became weak after Pound's "exile" towards Vorticism.

Altercation with F. Holland Day

Lowell was frustrated in composing her biography of Keats by the famous publisher and photographer, F. Holland Day. Day, alongside an unrivaled possession of Keatsiana, possessed exclusive copies of Fanny Brawne's letters to Keats. Fanny was the woman whom Keats had unsuccessfully pursued and the letters were therefore of considerable biographical interest. Lowell, who hoped to publish the definitive volume of biography, was forced to pursue a reluctant and rather mischievously reticent Day for these artifacts with little success.

Legacy

In the post-World War II years, Lowell, like other women writers, was largely forgotten, but with the renaissance of the women's movement in the 1970s, women's studies brought her back to light. According to Heywood Broun, however, Lowell personally argued against feminism.

Additional sources of interest in Lowell today come from the anti-war sentiment of the oft-taught poem "Patterns"; her personification of inanimate objects, as in "The Green Bowl," and "The Red Lacquer Music Stand"; and her lesbian themes, including the love poems addressed to Ada Dwyer Russell in "Two Speak Together" and her poem "The Sisters" which addresses her female poetic predecessors.

Eserleri:

"Fireworks". The Atlantic Monthly 115. April 1915.

Books

A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass (1912)
Sword Blades and Poppy Seed (1914)
Men, Women and Ghosts (1916)
Can Grande's Castle (1919)
Pictures of the Floating World (1919)
Legends (1921)
Fir-Flower Tablets (1921)
A Critical Fable.

What's O'Clock (1925)
East Wind (1926)
Ballads for Sale (1927)
The Complete Poetical Works of Amy Lowell (1925)
Selected Poems of Amy Lowell, ed. Melissa Bradshaw and Adrienne Munich (2002)
The Complete Poetical Works of Amy Lowell with an introduction by Louis Untermeyer (1955)

1777

I

The Trumpet-Vine Arbour

The throats of the little red trumpet-flowers are wide open,
And the clangour of brass beats against the hot sunlight.
They bray and blare at the burning sky.
Red! Red! Coarse notes of red,
Trumpeted at the blue sky.
In long streaks of sound, molten metal,
The vine declares itself.
Clang! -- from its red and yellow trumpets.
Clang! -- from its long, nasal trumpets,
Splitting the sunlight into ribbons, tattered and shot with noise.

I sit in the cool arbour, in a green-and-gold twilight.
It is very still, for I cannot hear the trumpets,
I only know that they are red and open,
And that the sun above the arbour shakes with heat.
My quill is newly mended,
And makes fine-drawn lines with its point.
Down the long, white paper it makes little lines,
Just lines -- up -- down -- criss-cross.
My heart is strained out at the pin-point of my quill;
It is thin and writhing like the marks of the pen.
My hand marches to a squeaky tune,
It marches down the paper to a squealing of fifes.
My pen and the trumpet-flowers,
And Washington's armies away over the smoke-tree to the Southwest.
'Yankee Doodle,' my Darling! It is you against the British,
Marching in your ragged shoes to batter down King George.
What have you got in your hat? Not a feather, I wager.
Just a hay-straw, for it is the harvest you are fighting for.
Hay in your hat, and the whites of their eyes for a target!
Like Bunker Hill, two years ago, when I watched all day from the house-top
Through Father's spy-glass.
The red city, and the blue, bright water,
And puffs of smoke which you made.
Twenty miles away,
Round by Cambridge, or over the Neck,
But the smoke was white -- white!
To-day the trumpet-flowers are red -- red --
And I cannot see you fighting,
But old Mr. Dimond has fled to Canada,
And Myra sings 'Yankee Doodle' at her milking.
The red throats of the trumpets bray and clang in the sunshine,
And the smoke-tree puffs dun blossoms into the blue air.

II

The City of Falling Leaves

Leaves fall,
Brown leaves,
Yellow leaves streaked with brown.
They fall,
Flutter,
Fall again.
The brown leaves,
And the streaked yellow leaves,
Loosen on their branches
And drift slowly downwards.
One,
One, two, three,
One, two, five.
All Venice is a falling of Autumn leaves --
Brown,
And yellow streaked with brown.

'That sonnet, Abate,
Beautiful,
I am quite exhausted by it.
Your phrases turn about my heart
And stifle me to swooning.
Open the window, I beg.
Lord! What a strumming of fiddles and mandolins!
'Tis really a shame to stop indoors.
Call my maid, or I will make you lace me yourself.
Fie, how hot it is, not a breath of air!
See how straight the leaves are falling.
Marianna, I will have the yellow satin caught up with silver fringe,
It peeps out delightfully from under a mantle.
Am I well painted to-day, `caro Abate mio'?
You will be proud of me at the `Ridotto', hey?
Proud of being `Cavalier Servente' to such a lady?'
'Can you doubt it, `Bellissima Contessa'?
A pinch more rouge on the right cheek,
And Venus herself shines less . . .'
'You bore me, Abate,
I vow I must change you!
A letter, Achmet?
Run and look out of the window, Abate.
I will read my letter in peace.'
The little black slave with the yellow satin turban
Gazes at his mistress with strained eyes.
His yellow turban and black skin
Are gorgeous -- barbaric.
The yellow satin dress with its silver flashings
Lies on a chair
Beside a black mantle and a black mask.
Yellow and black,
Gorgeous -- barbaric.

The lady reads her letter,
And the leaves drift slowly
Past the long windows.
'How silly you look, my dear Abate,
With that great brown leaf in your wig.
Pluck it off, I beg you,
Or I shall die of laughing.'

A yellow wall
Aflare in the sunlight,
Chequered with shadows,
Shadows of vine leaves,
Shadows of masks.
Masks coming, printing themselves for an instant,
Then passing on,
More masks always replacing them.
Masks with tricorns and rapiers sticking out behind
Pursuing masks with plumes and high heels,
The sunlight shining under their insteps.
One,
One, two,
One, two, three,
There is a thronging of shadows on the hot wall,
Filigreed at the top with moving leaves.
Yellow sunlight and black shadows,
Yellow and black,
Gorgeous -- barbaric.
Two masks stand together,
And the shadow of a leaf falls through them,
Marking the wall where they are not.
From hat-tip to shoulder-tip,
From elbow to sword-hilt,
The leaf falls.
The shadows mingle,
Blur together,
Slide along the wall and disappear.
Gold of mosaics and candles,
And night blackness lurking in the ceiling beams.
Saint Mark's glitters with flames and reflections.
A cloak brushes aside,
And the yellow of satin
Licks out over the coloured inlays of the pavement.
Under the gold crucifixes
There is a meeting of hands
Reaching from black mantles.
Sighing embraces, bold investigations,
Hide in confessionals,
Sheltered by the shuffling of feet.
Gorgeous -- barbaric
In its mail of jewels and gold,
Saint Mark's looks down at the swarm of black masks;
And outside in the palace gardens brown leaves fall,

Flutter,
Fall.
Brown,
And yellow streaked with brown.

Blue-black, the sky over Venice,
With a pricking of yellow stars.
There is no moon,
And the waves push darkly against the prow
Of the gondola,
Coming from Malamocco
And streaming toward Venice.
It is black under the gondola hood,
But the yellow of a satin dress
Glares out like the eye of a watching tiger.
Yellow compassed about with darkness,
Yellow and black,
Gorgeous -- barbaric.
The boatman sings,
It is Tasso that he sings;
The lovers seek each other beneath their mantles,
And the gondola drifts over the lagoon, aslant to the coming dawn.
But at Malamocco in front,
In Venice behind,
Fall the leaves,
Brown,
And yellow streaked with brown.
They fall,
Flutter,
Fall.

Amy Lowell

A Ballad of Footmen

Now what in the name of the sun and the stars
Is the meaning of this most unholy of wars?

Do men find life so full of humour and joy
That for want of excitement they smash up the toy?

Fifteen millions of soldiers with popguns and horses
All bent upon killing, because their 'of courses'

Are not quite the same. All these men by the ears,
And nine nations of women choking with tears.

It is folly to think that the will of a king
Can force men to make ducks and drakes of a thing

They value, and life is, at least one supposes,
Of some little interest, even if roses

Have not grown up between one foot and the other.
What a marvel bureaucracy is, which can smother

Such quite elementary feelings, and tag
A man with a number, and set him to wag

His legs and his arms at the word of command
Or the blow of a whistle! He's certainly damned,

Fit only for mince-meat, if a little gold lace
And an upturned moustache can set him to face

Bullets, and bayonets, and death, and diseases,
Because some one he calls his Emperor, pleases.

If each man were to lay down his weapon, and say,
With a click of his heels, 'I wish you Good-day,'

Now what, may I ask, could the Emperor do?
A king and his minions are really so few.

Angry? Oh, of course, a most furious Emperor!
But the men are so many they need not mind his temper, or

The dire results which could not be inflicted.
With no one to execute sentence, convicted

Is just the weak wind from an old, broken bellows.
What lackeys men are, who might be such fine fellows!

To be killing each other, unmercifully,
At an order, as though one said, 'Bring up the tea.'

Or is it that tasting the blood on their jaws

They lap at it, drunk with its ferment, and laws

So patiently builded, are nothing to drinking
More blood, any blood. They don't notice its stinking.

I don't suppose tigers do, fighting cocks, sparrows,
And, as to men - what are men, when their marrows

Are running with blood they have gulped; it is plain
Such excellent sport does not recollect pain.

Toll the bells in the steeples left standing. Half-mast
The flags which meant order, for order is past.

Take the dust of the streets and sprinkle your head,
The civilization we've worked for is dead.

Squeeze into this archway, the head of the line
Has just swung round the corner to `Die Wacht am Rhein'.

Amy Lowell

A Blockhead

Before me lies a mass of shapeless days,
Unseparated atoms, and I must
Sort them apart and live them. Sifted dust
Covers the formless heap. Reprieves, delays,
There are none, ever. As a monk who prays
The sliding beads asunder, so I thrust
Each tasteless particle aside, and just
Begin again the task which never stays.
And I have known a glory of great suns,
When days flashed by, pulsing with joy and fire!
Drunk bubbled wine in goblets of desire,
And felt the whipped blood laughing as it runs!
Spilt is that liquor, my too hasty hand
Threw down the cup, and did not understand.

Amy Lowell

A Coloured Print by Shokei

It winds along the face of a cliff
This path which I long to explore,
And over it dashes a waterfall,
And the air is full of the roar
And the thunderous voice of waters which sweep
In a silver torrent over some steep.

It clears the path with a mighty bound
And tumbles below and away,
And the trees and the bushes which grow in the rocks
Are wet with its jewelled spray;
The air is misty and heavy with sound,
And small, wet wildflowers star the ground.

Oh! The dampness is very good to smell,
And the path is soft to tread,
And beyond the fall it winds up and on,
While little streamlets thread
Their own meandering way down the hill
Each singing its own little song, until

I forget that 't is only a pictured path,
And I hear the water and wind,
And look through the mist, and strain my eyes
To see what there is behind;
For it must lead to a happy land,
This little path by a waterfall spanned.

Amy Lowell

A Fairy Tale

On winter nights beside the nursery fire
We read the fairy tale, while glowing coals
Builded its pictures. There before our eyes
We saw the vaulted hall of traceried stone
Uprear itself, the distant ceiling hung
With pendent stalactites like frozen vines;
And all along the walls at intervals,
Curled upwards into pillars, roses climbed,
And ramped and were confined, and clustered leaves
Divided where there peered a laughing face.
The foliage seemed to rustle in the wind,
A silent murmur, carved in still, gray stone.
High pointed windows pierced the southern wall
Whence proud escutcheons flung prismatic fires
To stain the tessellated marble floor
With pools of red, and quivering green, and blue;
And in the shade beyond the further door,
Its sober squares of black and white were hid
Beneath a restless, shuffling, wide-eyed mob
Of lackeys and retainers come to view
The Christening.
A sudden blare of trumpets, and the throng
About the entrance parted as the guests
Filed singly in with rare and precious gifts.
Our eager fancies noted all they brought,
The glorious, unattainable delights!
But always there was one unbidden guest
Who cursed the child and left it bitterness.

The fire falls asunder, all is changed,
I am no more a child, and what I see
Is not a fairy tale, but life, my life.
The gifts are there, the many pleasant things:
Health, wealth, long-settled friendships, with a name
Which honors all who bear it, and the power
Of making words obedient. This is much;
But overshadowing all is still the curse,
That never shall I be fulfilled by love!
Along the parching highroad of the world
No other soul shall bear mine company.
Always shall I be teased with semblances,
With cruel impostures, which I trust awhile
Then dash to pieces, as a careless boy
Flings a kaleidoscope, which shattering
Strews all the ground about with coloured sherds.
So I behold my visions on the ground
No longer radiant, an ignoble heap
Of broken, dusty glass. And so, unlit,
Even by hope or faith, my dragging steps
Force me forever through the passing days.

Amy Lowell

A Fixed Idea

What torture lurks within a single thought
When grown too constant, and however kind,
However welcome still, the weary mind
Aches with its presence. Dull remembrance taught
Remembers on unceasingly; unsought
The old delight is with us but to find
That all recurring joy is pain refined,
Become a habit, and we struggle, caught.
You lie upon my heart as on a nest,
Folded in peace, for you can never know
How crushed I am with having you at rest
Heavy upon my life. I love you so
You bind my freedom from its rightful quest.
In mercy lift your drooping wings and go.

Amy Lowell

A Gift

See! I give myself to you, Beloved!
My words are little jars
For you to take and put upon a shelf.
Their shapes are quaint and beautiful,
And they have many pleasant colours and lustres
To recommend them.
Also the scent from them fills the room
With sweetness of flowers and crushed grasses.

When I shall have given you the last one,
You will have the whole of me,
But I shall be dead.

Amy Lowell

A Japanese Wood-Carving

High up above the open, welcoming door
It hangs, a piece of wood with colours dim.
Once, long ago, it was a waving tree
And knew the sun and shadow through the leaves
Of forest trees, in a thick eastern wood.
The winter snows had bent its branches down,
The spring had swelled its buds with coming flowers,
Summer had run like fire through its veins,
While autumn pelted it with chestnut burrs,
And strewed the leafy ground with acorn cups.
Dark midnight storms had roared and crashed among
Its branches, breaking here and there a limb;
But every now and then broad sunlit days
Lovingly lingered, caught among the leaves.
Yes, it had known all this, and yet to us
It does not speak of mossy forest ways,
Of whispering pine trees or the shimmering birch;
But of quick winds, and the salt, stinging sea!
An artist once, with patient, careful knife,
Had fashioned it like to the untamed sea.
Here waves uprear themselves, their tops blown back
By the gay, sunny wind, which whips the blue
And breaks it into gleams and sparks of light.
Among the flashing waves are two white birds
Which swoop, and soar, and scream for very joy
At the wild sport. Now diving quickly in,
Questing some glistening fish. Now flying up,
Their dripping feathers shining in the sun,
While the wet drops like little glints of light,
Fall pattering backward to the parent sea.
Gliding along the green and foam-flecked hollows,
Or skimming some white crest about to break,
The spirits of the sky deigning to stoop
And play with ocean in a summer mood.
Hanging above the high, wide open door,
It brings to us in quiet, firelit room,
The freedom of the earth's vast solitudes,
Where heaping, sunny waves tumble and roll,
And seabirds scream in wanton happiness.

Amy Lowell

A Lady

You are beautiful and faded
Like an old opera tune
Played upon a harpsichord;
Or like the sun-flooded silks
Of an eighteenth-century boudoir.
In your eyes
Smoulder the fallen roses of out-lived minutes,
And the perfume of your soul
Is vague and suffusing,
With the pungence of sealed spice-jars.
Your half-tones delight me,
And I grow mad with gazing
At your blent colours.

My vigour is a new-minted penny,
Which I cast at your feet.
Gather it up from the dust,
That its sparkle may amuse you.

Amy Lowell

A Little Song

When you, my Dear, are away, away,
How wearily goes the creeping day.
A year drags after morning, and night
Starts another year of candle light.
O Pausing Sun and Lingering Moon!
Grant me, I beg of you, this boon.

Whirl round the earth as never sun
Has his diurnal journey run.
And, Moon, slip past the ladders of air
In a single flash, while your streaming hair
Catches the stars and pulls them down
To shine on some slumbering Chinese town.
O Kindly Sun! Understanding Moon!
Bring evening to crowd the footsteps of noon.

But when that long awaited day
Hangs ripe in the heavens, your voyaging stay.
Be morning, O Sun! with the lark in song,
Be afternoon for ages long.
And, Moon, let you and your lesser lights
Watch over a century of nights.

Amy Lowell

A London Thoroughfare. 2 A.M.

They have watered the street,
It shines in the glare of lamps,
Cold, white lamps,
And lies
Like a slow-moving river,
Barred with silver and black.
Cabs go down it,
One,
And then another,
Between them I hear the shuffling of feet.
Tramps doze on the window-ledges,
Night-walkers pass along the sidewalks.
The city is squalid and sinister,
With the silver-barred street in the midst,
Slow-moving,
A river leading nowhere.

Opposite my window,
The moon cuts,
Clear and round,
Through the plum-coloured night.
She cannot light the city:
It is too bright.
It has white lamps,
And glitters coldly.

I stand in the window and watch the
moon.
She is thin and lustreless,
But I love her.
I know the moon,
And this is an alien city.

Amy Lowell

A Lover

If I could catch the green lantern of the firefly
I could see to write you a letter.

Amy Lowell

A Petition

I pray to be the tool which to your hand
Long use has shaped and moulded till it be
Apt for your need, and, unconsideringly,
You take it for its service. I demand
To be forgotten in the woven strand
Which grows the multi-coloured tapestry
Of your bright life, and through its tissues lie
A hidden, strong, sustaining, grey-toned band.
I wish to dwell around your daylight dreams,
The railing to the stairway of the clouds,
To guard your steps securely up, where streams
A faery moonshine washing pale the crowds
Of pointed stars. Remember not whereby
You mount, protected, to the far-flung sky.

Amy Lowell

A Roxbury Garden

I

Hoops

Blue and pink sashes,
Criss-cross shoes,
Minna and Stella run out into the garden
To play at hoop.

Up and down the garden-paths they race,
In the yellow sunshine,
Each with a big round hoop
White as a stripped willow-wand.

Round and round turn the hoops,
Their diamond whiteness cleaving the yellow sunshine.
The gravel crunches and squeaks beneath them,
And a large pebble springs them into the air
To go whirling for a foot or two
Before they touch the earth again
In a series of little jumps.

Spring, Hoops!
Spit out a shower of blue and white brightness.
The little criss-cross shoes twinkle behind you,
The pink and blue sashes flutter like flags,
The hoop-sticks are ready to beat you.
Turn, turn, Hoops! In the yellow sunshine.
Turn your stripped willow whiteness
Along the smooth paths.

Stella sings:
'Round and round, rolls my hoop,
Scarcely touching the ground,
With a swoop,
And a bound,
Round and round.
With a bumpety, crunching, scattering sound,
Down the garden it flies;
In our eyes
The sun lies.
See it spin
Out and in;
Through the paths it goes whirling,
About the beds curling.
Sway now to the loop,
Faster, faster, my hoop.
Round you come,
Up you come,
Quick and straight as before.
Run, run, my hoop, run,
Away from the sun.'

And the great hoop bounds along the path,
Leaping into the wind-bright air.

Minna sings:
'Turn, hoop,
Burn hoop,
Twist and twine
Hoop of mine.
Flash along,
Leap along,
Right at the sun.
Run, hoop, run.
Faster and faster,
Whirl, twirl.
Wheel like fire,
And spin like glass;
Fire's no whiter
Glass is no brighter.
Dance,
Prance,
Over and over,
About and about,
With the top of you under,
And the bottom at top,
But never a stop.
Turn about, hoop, to the tap of my stick,
I follow behind you
To touch and remind you.
Burn and glitter, so white and quick,
Round and round, to the tap of a stick.'

The hoop flies along between the flower-beds,
Swaying the flowers with the wind of its passing.

Beside the foxglove-border roll the hoops,
And the little pink and white bells shake and jingle
Up and down their tall spires;
They roll under the snow-ball bush,
And the ground behind them is strewn with white petals;
They swirl round a corner,
And jar a bee out of a Canterbury bell;
They cast their shadows for an instant
Over a bed of pansies,
Catch against the spurs of a columbine,
Jostle the quietness from a cluster of monk's-hood.
Pat! Pat! behind them come the little criss-cross shoes,
And the blue and pink sashes stream out in flappings of colour.

Stella sings:
'Hoop, hoop,
Roll along,

Faster bowl along,
Hoop.
Slow, to the turning,
Now go! - Go!
Quick!
Here's the stick.
Rat-a-tap-tap it,
Pat it, flap it.
Fly like a bird or a yellow-backed bee,
See how soon you can reach that tree.
Here is a path that is perfectly straight.
Roll along, hoop, or we shall be late.'

Minna sings:
'Trip about, slip about, whip about
Hoop.
Wheel like a top at its quickest spin,
Then, dear hoop, we shall surely win.
First to the greenhouse and then to the wall
Circle and circle,
And let the wind push you,
Poke you,
Brush you,
And not let you fall.
Whirring you round like a wreath of mist.
Hoopety hoop,
Twist,
Twist.'

Tap! Tap! go the hoop-sticks,
And the hoops bowl along under a grape arbour.
For an instant their willow whiteness is green,
Pale white-green.
Then they are out in the sunshine,
Leaving the half-formed grape clusters
A-tremble under their big leaves.

'I will beat you, Minna,' cries Stella,
Hitting her hoop smartly with her stick.
'Stella, Stella, we are winning,' calls Minna,
As her hoop curves round a bed of clove-pinks.
A humming-bird whizzes past Stella's ear,
And two or three yellow-and-black butterflies
Flutter, startled, out of a pillar rose.
Round and round race the little girls
After their great white hoops.

Suddenly Minna stops.
Her hoop wavers an instant,
But she catches it up on her stick.
'Listen, Stella!'
Both the little girls are listening;

And the scents of the garden rise up quietly about them.
'It's the chaise! It's Father!
Perhaps he's brought us a book from Boston.'
Twinkle, twinkle, the little criss-cross shoes
Up the garden path.
Blue - pink - an instant, against the syringa hedge.
But the hoops, white as stripped willow-wands,
Lie in the grass,
And the grasshoppers jump back and forth
Over them.

II

Battledore and Shuttlecock

The shuttlecock soars upward
In a parabola of whiteness,
Turns,
And sinks to a perfect arc.
Plat! the battledore strikes it,
And it rises again,
Without haste,
Winged and curving,
Tracing its white flight
Against the clipped hemlock-trees.
Plat!
Up again,
Orange and sparkling with sun,
Rounding under the blue sky,
Dropping,
Fading to grey-green
In the shadow of the coned hemlocks.
'Ninety-one.' 'Ninety-two.' 'Ninety-three.'
The arms of the little girls
Come up - and up -
Precisely,
Like mechanical toys.
The battledores beat at nothing,
And toss the dazzle of snow
Off their parchment drums.
'Ninety-four.' Plat!
'Ninety-five.' Plat!
Back and forth
Goes the shuttlecock,
Icicle-white,
Leaping at the sharp-edged clouds,
Overturning,
Falling,
Down,
And down,
Tinctured with pink
From the upthrusting shine

Of Oriental poppies.

The little girls sway to the counting rhythm;
Left foot,
Right foot.
Plat! Plat!
Yellow heat twines round the handles of the battledores,
The parchment cracks with dryness;
But the shuttlecock
Swings slowly into the ice-blue sky,
Heaving up on the warm air
Like a foam-bubble on a wave,
With feathers slanted and sustaining.
Higher,
Until the earth turns beneath it;
Poised and swinging,
With all the garden flowing beneath it,
Scarlet, and blue, and purple, and white -
Blurred colour reflections in rippled water -
Changing - streaming -
For the moment that Stella takes to lift her arm.
Then the shuttlecock relinquishes,
Bows,
Descends;
And the sharp blue spears of the air
Thrust it to earth.

Again it mounts,
Stepping up on the rising scents of flowers,
Buoyed up and under by the shining heat.
Above the foxgloves,
Above the guelder-roses,
Above the greenhouse glitter,
Till the shafts of cooler air
Meet it,
Deflect it,
Reject it,
Then down,
Down,
Past the greenhouse,
Past the guelder-rose bush,
Past the foxgloves.

'Ninety-nine,' Stella's battledore springs to the impact.
Plunk! Like the snap of a taut string.
'Oh! Minna!'
The shuttlecock drops zigzagedly,
Out of orbit,
Hits the path,
And rolls over quite still.
Dead white feathers,
With a weight at the end.

III

Garden Games

The tall clock is striking twelve;
And the little girls stop in the hall to watch it,
And the big ships rocking in a half-circle
Above the dial.
Twelve o'clock!
Down the side steps
Go the little girls,
Under their big round straw hats.
Minna's has a pink ribbon,
Stella's a blue,
That is the way they know which is which.
Twelve o'clock!
An hour yet before dinner.
Mother is busy in the still-room,
And Hannah is making gingerbread.

Slowly, with lagging steps,
They follow the garden-path,
Crushing a leaf of box for its acrid smell,
Discussing what they shall do,
And doing nothing.

'Stella, see that grasshopper
Climbing up the bank!
What a jump!
Almost as long as my arm.'
Run, children, run.
For the grasshopper is leaping away,
In half-circle curves,
Shuttlecock curves,
Over the grasses.
Hand in hand, the little girls call to him:
'Grandfather, grandfather gray,
Give me molasses, or I'll throw you away.'

The grasshopper leaps into the sunlight,
Golden-green,
And is gone.

'Let's catch a bee.'
Round whirl the little girls,
And up the garden.
Two heads are thrust among the Canterbury bells,
Listening,
And fingers clasp and unclasp behind backs
In a strain of silence.

White bells,
Blue bells,
Hollow and reflexed.
Deep tunnels of blue and white dimness,
Cool wine-tunnels for bees.
There is a floundering and buzzing over Minna's head.

'Bend it down, Stella. Quick! Quick!'
The wide mouth of a blossom
Is pressed together in Minna's fingers.
The stem flies up, jiggling its flower-bells,
And Minna holds the dark blue cup in her hand,
With the bee
Imprisoned in it.
Whirr! Buzz! Bump!
Bump! Whiz! Bang!
BANG!!
The blue flower tears across like paper,
And a gold-black bee darts away in the sunshine.

'If we could fly, we could catch him.'
The sunshine is hot on Stella's upturned face,
As she stares after the bee.
'We'll follow him in a dove chariot.
Come on, Stella.'
Run, children,
Along the red gravel paths,
For a bee is hard to catch,
Even with a chariot of doves.

Tall, still, and cowled,
Stand the monk's-hoods;
Taller than the heads of the little girls.
A blossom for Minna.
A blossom for Stella.
Off comes the cowl,
And there is a purple-painted chariot;
Off comes the forward petal,
And there are two little green doves,
With green traces tying them to the chariot.
'Now we will get in, and fly right up to the clouds.
Fly, Doves, up in the sky,
With Minna and me,
After the bee.'

Up one path,
Down another,
Run the little girls,
Holding their dove chariots in front of them;
But the bee is hidden in the trumpet of a honeysuckle,
With his wings folded along his back.

The dove chariots are thrown away,
And the little girls wander slowly through the garden,
Sucking the salvia tips,
And squeezing the snapdragons
To make them gape.
'I'm so hot,
Let's pick a pansy
And see the little man in his bath,
And play we're he.'
A royal bath-tub,
Hung with purple stuffs and yellow.
The great purple-yellow wings
Rise up behind the little red and green man;
The purple-yellow wings fan him,
He dabbles his feet in cool green.
Off with the green sheath,
And there are two spindly legs.
'Heigho!' sighs Minna.
'Heigho!' sighs Stella.
There is not a flutter of wind,
And the sun is directly overhead.

Along the edge of the garden
Walk the little girls.
Their hats, round and yellow like cheeses,
Are dangling by the ribbons.
The grass is a tumult of buttercups and daisies;
Buttercups and daisies streaming away
Up the hill.
The garden is purple, and pink, and orange, and scarlet;
The garden is hot with colours.
But the meadow is only yellow, and white, and green,
Cool, and long, and quiet.
The little girls pick buttercups
And hold them under each other's chins.
'You're as gold as Grandfather's snuff-box.
You're going to be very rich, Minna.'
'Oh-o-o! Then I'll ask my husband to give me a pair of garnet earrings
Just like Aunt Nancy's.
I wonder if he will.
I know. We'll tell fortunes.
That's what we'll do.'
Plump down in the meadow grass,
Stella and Minna,
With their round yellow hats,
Like cheeses,
Beside them.
Drop,
Drop,
Daisy petals.
'One I love,
Two I love,

Three I love I say . . .'
The ground is peppered with daisy petals,
And the little girls nibble the golden centres,
And play it is cake.

A bell rings.
Dinner-time;
And after dinner there are lessons.

Amy Lowell

A Tale Of Starvation

There once was a man whom the gods didn't love,
And a disagreeable man was he.
He loathed his neighbours, and his neighbours hated him,
And he cursed eternally.

He damned the sun, and he damned the stars,
And he blasted the winds in the sky.
He sent to Hell every green, growing thing,
And he raved at the birds as they fly.

His oaths were many, and his range was wide,
He swore in fancy ways;
But his meaning was plain: that no created thing
Was other than a hurt to his gaze.

He dwelt all alone, underneath a leaning hill,
And windows toward the hill there were none,
And on the other side they were white-washed thick,
To keep out every spark of the sun.

When he went to market he walked all the way
Blaspheming at the path he trod.
He cursed at those he bought of, and swore at those he sold to,
By all the names he knew of God.

For his heart was soured in his weary old hide,
And his hopes had curdled in his breast.
His friend had been untrue, and his love had thrown him over
For the chinking money-bags she liked best.

The rats had devoured the contents of his grain-bin,
The deer had trampled on his corn,
His brook had shrivelled in a summer drought,
And his sheep had died unshorn.

His hens wouldn't lay, and his cow broke loose,
And his old horse perished of a colic.
In the loft his wheat-bags were nibbled into holes
By little, glutton mice on a frolic.

So he slowly lost all he ever had,
And the blood in his body dried.
Shrunken and mean he still lived on,
And cursed that future which had lied.

One day he was digging, a spade or two,
As his aching back could lift,
When he saw something glisten at the bottom of the trench,
And to get it out he made great shift.

So he dug, and he delved, with care and pain,
And the veins in his forehead stood taut.

At the end of an hour, when every bone cracked,
He gathered up what he had sought.

A dim old vase of crusted glass,
Prismed while it lay buried deep.
Shifting reds and greens, like a pigeon's neck,
At the touch of the sun began to leap.

It was dull in the tree-shade, but glowing in the light;
Flashing like an opal-stone,
Carved into a flagon; and the colours glanced and ran,
Where at first there had seemed to be none.

It had handles on each side to bear it up,
And a belly for the gurgling wine.
Its neck was slender, and its mouth was wide,
And its lip was curled and fine.

The old man saw it in the sun's bright stare
And the colours started up through the crust,
And he who had cursed at the yellow sun
Held the flask to it and wiped away the dust.

And he bore the flask to the brightest spot,
Where the shadow of the hill fell clear;
And he turned the flask, and he looked at the flask,
And the sun shone without his sneer.

Then he carried it home, and put it on a shelf,
But it was only grey in the gloom.
So he fetched a pail, and a bit of cloth,
And he went outside with a broom.

And he washed his windows just to let the sun
Lie upon his new-found vase;
And when evening came, he moved it down
And put it on a table near the place

Where a candle fluttered in a draught from the door.
The old man forgot to swear,
Watching its shadow grown a mammoth size,
Dancing in the kitchen there.

He forgot to revile the sun next morning
When he found his vase afire in its light.
And he carried it out of the house that day,
And kept it close beside him until night.

And so it happened from day to day.
The old man fed his life
On the beauty of his vase, on its perfect shape.
And his soul forgot its former strife.

And the village-folk came and begged to see
The flagon which was dug from the ground.
And the old man never thought of an oath, in his joy
At showing what he had found.

One day the master of the village school
Passed him as he stooped at toil,
Hoeing for a bean-row, and at his side
Was the vase, on the turned-up soil.

'My friend,' said the schoolmaster, pompous and kind,
'That's a valuable thing you have there,
But it might get broken out of doors,
It should meet with the utmost care.

What are you doing with it out here?'
'Why, Sir,' said the poor old man,
'I like to have it about, do you see?
To be with it all I can.'

'You will smash it,' said the schoolmaster, sternly right,
'Mark my words and see!'
And he walked away, while the old man looked
At his treasure despondingly.

Then he smiled to himself, for it was his!
He had toiled for it, and now he cared.
Yes! loved its shape, and its subtle, swift hues,
Which his own hard work had bared.

He would carry it round with him everywhere,
As it gave him joy to do.
A fragile vase should not stand in a bean-row!
Who would dare to say so? Who?

Then his heart was rested, and his fears gave way,
And he bent to his hoe again. . . .
A clod rolled down, and his foot slipped back,
And he lurched with a cry of pain.

For the blade of the hoe crashed into glass,
And the vase fell to iridescent sherds.
The old man's body heaved with slow, dry sobs.
He did not curse, he had no words.

He gathered the fragments, one by one,
And his fingers were cut and torn.
Then he made a hole in the very place
Whence the beautiful vase had been borne.

He covered the hole, and he patted it down,

Then he hobbled to his house and shut the door.
He tore up his coat and nailed it at the windows
That no beam of light should cross the floor.

He sat down in front of the empty hearth,
And he neither ate nor drank.
In three days they found him, dead and cold,
And they said: 'What a queer old crank!'

Amy Lowell

A Tulip Garden

Guarded within the old red wall's embrace,
Marshalled like soldiers in gay company,
The tulips stand arrayed. Here infantry
Wheels out into the sunlight. What bold grace
Sets off their tunics, white with crimson lace!
Here are platoons of gold-frocked cavalry,
With scarlet sabres tossing in the eye
Of purple batteries, every gun in place.
Forward they come, with flaunting colours spread,
With torches burning, stepping out in time
To some quick, unheard march. Our ears are dead,
We cannot catch the tune. In pantomime
Parades that army. With our utmost powers
We hear the wind stream through a bed of flowers.

Amy Lowell

A Winter Ride

Who shall declare the joy of the running!
Who shall tell of the pleasures of flight!
Springing and spurning the tufts of wild heather,
Sweeping, wide-winged, through the blue dome of light.
Everything mortal has moments immortal,
Swift and God-gifted, immeasurably bright.

So with the stretch of the white road before me,
Shining snowcrystals rainbowed by the sun,
Fields that are white, stained with long, cool, blue shadows,
Strong with the strength of my horse as we run.
Joy in the touch of the wind and the sunlight!
Joy! With the vigorous earth I am one.

Amy Lowell

Absence

My cup is empty to-night,
Cold and dry are its sides,
Chilled by the wind from the open window.
Empty and void, it sparkles white in the moonlight.
The room is filled with the strange scent
Of wistaria blossoms.
They sway in the moon's radiance
And tap against the wall.
But the cup of my heart is still,
And cold, and empty.

When you come, it brims
Red and trembling with blood,
Heart's blood for your drinking;
To fill your mouth with love
And the bitter-sweet taste of a soul.

Amy Lowell

After Hearing A Waltz By Bartok

But why did I kill him? Why? Why?
In the small, gilded room, near the stair?
My ears rack and throb with his cry,
And his eyes goggle under his hair,
As my fingers sink into the fair
White skin of his throat. It was I!

I killed him! My God! Don't you hear?
I shook him until his red tongue
Hung flapping out through the black, queer,
Swollen lines of his lips. And I clung
With my nails drawing blood, while I flung
The loose, heavy body in fear.

Fear lest he should still not be dead.
I was drunk with the lust of his life.
The blood-drops oozed slow from his head
And dabbled a chair. And our strife
Lasted one reeling second, his knife
Lay and winked in the lights overhead.

And the waltz from the ballroom I heard,
When I called him a low, sneaking cur.
And the wail of the violins stirred
My brute anger with visions of her.
As I throttled his windpipe, the purr
Of his breath with the waltz became blurred.

I have ridden ten miles through the dark,
With that music, an infernal din,
Pounding rhythmic inside me. Just Hark!
One! Two! Three! And my fingers sink in
To his flesh when the violins, thin
And straining with passion, grow stark.

One! Two! Three! Oh, the horror of sound!
While she danced I was crushing his throat.
He had tasted the joy of her, wound
Round her body, and I heard him gloat
On the favour. That instant I smote.
One! Two! Three! How the dancers swirl round!

He is here in the room, in my arm,
His limp body hangs on the spin
Of the waltz we are dancing, a swarm
Of blood-drops is hemming us in!
Round and round! One! Two! Three! And his sin
Is red like his tongue lolling warm.

One! Two! Three! And the drums are his knell.
He is heavy, his feet beat the floor
As I drag him about in the swell

Of the waltz. With a menacing roar,
The trumpets crash in through the door.
One! Two! Three! clangs his funeral bell.

One! Two! Three! In the chaos of space
Rolls the earth to the hideous glee
Of death! And so cramped is this place,
I stifle and pant. One! Two! Three!
Round and round! God! 'Tis he throttles me!
He has covered my mouth with his face!

And his blood has dripped into my heart!
And my heart beats and labours. One! Two!
Three! His dead limbs have coiled every part
Of my body in tentacles. Through
My ears the waltz jangles. Like glue
His dead body holds me athwart.

One! Two! Three! Give me air! Oh! My God!
One! Two! Three! I am drowning in slime!
One! Two! Three! And his corpse, like a clod,
Beats me into a jelly! The chime,
One! Two! Three! And his dead legs keep time.
Air! Give me air! Air! My God!

Amy Lowell

Aftermath

I learnt to write to you in happier days,
And every letter was a piece I chipped
From off my heart, a fragment newly clipped
From the mosaic of life; its blues and grays,
Its throbbing reds, I gave to earn your praise.
To make a pavement for your feet I stripped
My soul for you to walk upon, and slipped
Beneath your steps to soften all your ways.
But now my letters are like blossoms pale
We strew upon a grave with hopeless tears.
I ask no recompense, I shall not fail
Although you do not heed; the long, sad years
Still pass, and still I scatter flowers frail,
And whisper words of love which no one hears.

Amy Lowell

Aliens

The chatter of little people
Breaks on my purpose
Like the water-drops which slowly wear the rocks to powder.
And while I laugh
My spirit crumbles at their teasing touch.

Amy Lowell

Anticipation

I have been temperate always,
But I am like to be very drunk
With your coming.
There have been times
I feared to walk down the street
Lest I should reel with the wine of you,
And jerk against my neighbours
As they go by.
I am parched now, and my tongue is horrible in my mouth,
But my brain is noisy
With the clash and gurgle of filling wine-cups.

Amy Lowell

Apology

Be not angry with me that I bear
Your colours everywhere,
All through each crowded street,
And meet
The wonder-light in every eye,
As I go by.

Each plodding wayfarer looks up to gaze,
Blinded by rainbow haze,
The stuff of happiness,
No less,
Which wraps me in its glad-hued folds
Of peacock golds.

Before my feet the dusty, rough-paved way
Flushes beneath its gray.
My steps fall ringed with light,
So bright,
It seems a myriad suns are strown
About the town.

Around me is the sound of steepled bells,
And rich perfumed smells
Hang like a wind-forgotten cloud,
And shroud
Me from close contact with the world.
I dwell impearled.

You blazon me with jewelled insignia.
A flaming nebula
Rims in my life. And yet
You set
The word upon me, unconfessed
To go unguessed.

Amy Lowell

Apples of Hesperides

Glinting golden through the trees,
Apples of Hesperides!
Through the moon-pierced warp of night
Shoot pale shafts of yellow light,
Swaying to the kissing breeze
Swings the treasure, golden-gleaming,
Apples of Hesperides!

Far and lofty yet they glimmer,
Apples of Hesperides!
Blinded by their radiant shimmer,
Pushing forward just for these;
Dew-besprinkled, bramble-marred,
Poor duped mortal, travel-scarred,
Always thinking soon to seize
And possess the golden-glistening
Apples of Hesperides!

Orbed, and glittering, and pendent,
Apples of Hesperides!
Not one missing, still transcendent,
Clustering like a swarm of bees.
Yielding to no man's desire,
Glowing with a saffron fire,
Splendid, unassailed, the golden
Apples of Hesperides!

Amy Lowell

Astigmatism

The Poet took his walking-stick
Of fine and polished ebony.
Set in the close-grained wood
Were quaint devices;
Patterns in ambers,
And in the clouded green of jades.
The top was smooth, yellow ivory,
And a tassel of tarnished gold
Hung by a faded cord from a hole
Pierced in the hard wood,
Circled with silver.
For years the Poet had wrought upon this cane.
His wealth had gone to enrich it,
His experiences to pattern it,
His labour to fashion and burnish it.
To him it was perfect,
A work of art and a weapon,
A delight and a defence.
The Poet took his walking-stick
And walked abroad.

Peace be with you, Brother.

The Poet came to a meadow.
Sifted through the grass were daisies,
Open-mouthed, wondering, they gazed at the sun.
The Poet struck them with his cane.
The little heads flew off, and they lay
Dying, open-mouthed and wondering,
On the hard ground.
"They are useless. They are not roses," said the Poet.

Peace be with you, Brother. Go your ways.

The Poet came to a stream.
Purple and blue flags waded in the water;
In among them hopped the speckled frogs;
The wind slid through them, rustling.
The Poet lifted his cane,
And the iris heads fell into the water.
They floated away, torn and drowning.
"Wretched flowers," said the Poet,
"They are not roses."

Peace be with you, Brother. It is your affair.

The Poet came to a garden.
Dahlias ripened against a wall,
Gillyflowers stood up bravely for all their short stature,
And a trumpet-vine covered an arbour
With the red and gold of its blossoms.
Red and gold like the brass notes of trumpets.

The Poet knocked off the stiff heads of the dahlias,
And his cane lopped the gillyflowers at the ground.
Then he severed the trumpet-blossoms from their stems.
Red and gold they lay scattered,
Red and gold, as on a battle field;
Red and gold, prone and dying.
"They were not roses," said the Poet.

Peace be with you, Brother.
But behind you is destruction, and waste places.

The Poet came home at evening,
And in the candle-light
He wiped and polished his cane.
The orange candle flame leaped in the yellow ambers,
And made the jades undulate like green pools.
It played along the bright ebony,
And glowed in the top of cream-coloured ivory.
But these things were dead,
Only the candle-light made them seem to move.
"It is a pity there were no roses," said the Poet.

Peace be with you, Brother. You have chosen your part.

Amy Lowell

At Night

The wind is singing through the trees to-night,
A deep-voiced song of rushing cadences
And crashing intervals. No summer breeze
Is this, though hot July is at its height,
Gone is her gentler music; with delight
She listens to this booming like the seas,
These elemental, loud necessities
Which call to her to answer their swift might.
Above the tossing trees shines down a star,
Quietly bright; this wild, tumultuous joy
Quickens nor dims its splendour. And my mind,
O Star! is filled with your white light, from far,
So suffer me this one night to enjoy
The freedom of the onward sweeping wind.

Amy Lowell

Aubade

As I would free the white almond from the green husk
So I would strip your trappings off,
Beloved.
And fingering the smooth and polished kernel
I should see that in my hands glittered a gem beyond counting.

Amy Lowell

Autumn

They brought me a quilled, yellow dahlia,
Opulent, flaunting.
Round gold
Flung out of a pale green stalk.
Round, ripe gold
Of maturity,
Meticulously frilled and flaming,
A fire-ball of proclamation:
Fecundity decked in staring yellow
For all the world to see.
They brought a quilled, yellow dahlia,
To me who am barren
Shall I send it to you,
You who have taken with you
All I once possessed?

Amy Lowell

Azure and Gold

April had covered the hills
With flickering yellows and reds,
The sparkle and coolness of snow
Was blown from the mountain beds.

Across a deep-sunken stream
The pink of blossoming trees,
And from windless appleblooms
The humming of many bees.

The air was of rose and gold
Arabesqued with the song of birds
Who, swinging unseen under leaves,
Made music more eager than words.

Of a sudden, aslant the road,
A brightness to dazzle and stun,
A glint of the bluest blue,
A flash from a sapphire sun.

Blue-birds so blue, 'twas a dream,
An impossible, unconceived hue,
The high sky of summer dropped down
Some rapturous ocean to woo.

Such a colour, such infinite light!
The heart of a fabulous gem,
Many-faceted, brilliant and rare.
Centre Stone of the earth's diadem!

Centre Stone of the Crown of the World,
"Sincerity" graved on your youth!
And your eyes hold the blue-bird flash,
The sapphire shaft, which is truth.

Amy Lowell

Basket Dance

Dance!
Dance!
The priest is yellow with sunflower meal,
He is yellow with corn-meal,
He is yellow as the sun.
Dance!
Dance!
His little bells are ringing,
The bells tinkle like sunlight,
The sun is rising.
Dance!
Dance!
Perhaps I will throw you a basket,
Perhaps I will throw you my heart.

Lift the baskets, dancing,
Lower the baskets, dancing,
We have raised fruits,
Now we dance.
Our shadows are long,
The sunlight is bright between our shadows.
Do you want my basket?
Catch it!
Catch it!
But you cannot catch me,
I am more difficult.

Amy Lowell

Before Dawn

Life! Austere arbiter of each man's fate,
By whom he learns that Nature's steadfast laws
Are as decrees immutable; O pause
Your even forward march! Not yet too late
Teach me the needed lesson, when to wait
Inactive as a ship when no wind draws
To stretch the loosened cordage. One implores
Thy clemency, whose wilfulness innate
Has gone uncurbed and roughshod while the years
Have lengthened into decades; now distressed
He knows no rule by which to move or stay,
And teased with restlessness and desperate fears
He dares not watch in silence thy wise way
Bringing about results none could have guessed.

Amy Lowell

Before the Altar

Before the Altar, bowed, he stands
With empty hands;
Upon it perfumed offerings burn
Wreathing with smoke the sacrificial urn.
Not one of all these has he given,
No flame of his has leapt to Heaven
Firesouled, vermilion-hearted,
Forked, and darted,
Consuming what a few spare pence
Have cheaply bought, to fling from hence
In idly-asked petition.

His sole condition
Love and poverty.
And while the moon
Swings slow across the sky,
Athwart a waving pine tree,
And soon
Tips all the needles there
With silver sparkles, bitterly
He gazes, while his soul
Grows hard with thinking of the poorness of his dole.

"Shining and distant Goddess, hear my prayer
Where you swim in the high air!
With charity look down on me,
Under this tree,
Tending the gifts I have not brought,
The rare and goodly things
I have not sought.
Instead, take from me all my life!

"Upon the wings
Of shimmering moonbeams
I pack my poet's dreams
For you.
My wearying strife,
My courage, my loss,
Into the night I toss
For you.
Golden Divinity,
Deign to look down on me
Who so unworthily
Offers to you:
All life has known,
Seeds withered unsown,
Hopes turning quick to fears,
Laughter which dies in tears.
The shredded remnant of a man
Is all the span
And compass of my offering to you.

"Empty and silent, I
Kneel before your pure, calm majesty.
On this stone, in this urn
I pour my heart and watch it burn,
Myself the sacrifice; but be
Still unmoved: Divinity.”

From the altar, bathed in moonlight,
The smoke rose straight in the quiet night.

Amy Lowell

Behind a Wall

I own a solace shut within my heart,
A garden full of many a quaint delight
And warm with drowsy, poppied sunshine; bright,
Flaming with lilies out of whose cups dart
Shining things
With powdered wings.

Here terrace sinks to terrace, arbors close
The ends of dreaming paths; a wanton wind
Jostles the half-ripe pears, and then, unkind,
Tumbles a-slumber in a pillar rose,
With content
Grown indolent.

By night my garden is o'erhung with gems
Fixed in an onyx setting. Fireflies
Flicker their lanterns in my dazzled eyes.
In serried rows I guess the straight, stiff stems
Of hollyhocks
Against the rocks.

So far and still it is that, listening,
I hear the flowers talking in the dawn;
And where a sunken basin cuts the lawn,
Cinctured with iris, pale and glistening,
The sudden swish
Of a waking fish.

Amy Lowell

Bullion

MY thoughts
Chink against my ribs
And roll about like silver hail-stones.
I should like to spill them out,
And pour them, all shining,
Over you.
But my heart is shut upon them
And holds them straitly.
Come, You! and open my heart;
That my thoughts torment me no longer,
But glitter in your hair.

Amy Lowell

Carrefour

O you,
Who came upon me once
Stretched under apple-trees just after bathing,
Why did you not strangle me before speaking
Rather than fill me with the wild white honey of your words
And then leave me to the mercy
Of the forest bees?

Amy Lowell

Clear, With Light, Variable Winds

The fountain bent and straightened itself
In the night wind,
Blowing like a flower.
It gleamed and glittered,
A tall white lily,
Under the eye of the golden moon.
From a stone seat,
Beneath a blossoming lime,
The man watched it.
And the spray pattered
On the dim grass at his feet.

The fountain tossed its water,
Up and up, like silver marbles.
Is that an arm he sees?
And for one moment
Does he catch the moving curve
Of a thigh?
The fountain gurgled and splashed,
And the man's face was wet.

Is it singing that he hears?
A song of playing at ball?
The moonlight shines on the straight column of water,
And through it he sees a woman,
Tossing the water-balls.
Her breasts point outwards,
And the nipples are like buds of peonies.
Her flanks ripple as she plays,
And the water is not more undulating
Than the lines of her body.

'Come,' she sings, 'Poet!
Am I not more worth than your day ladies,
Covered with awkward stuffs,
Unreal, unbeautiful?
What do you fear in taking me?
Is not the night for poets?
I am your dream,
Recurrent as water,
Gemmed with the moon!'

She steps to the edge of the pool
And the water runs, rustling, down her sides.
She stretches out her arms,
And the fountain streams behind her
Like an opened veil.

* * * * *

In the morning the gardeners came to their work.
'There is something in the fountain,' said one.

They shuddered as they laid their dead master
On the grass.
'I will close his eyes,' said the head gardener,
'It is uncanny to see a dead man staring at the sun.'

Amy Lowell

Climbing

High up in the apple tree climbing I go,
With the sky above me, the earth below.
Each branch is the step of a wonderful stair
Which leads to the town I see shining up there.

Climbing, climbing, higher and higher,
The branches blow and I see a spire,
The gleam of a turret, the glint of a dome,
All sparkling and bright, like white sea foam.

On and on, from bough to bough,
The leaves are thick, but I push my way through;
Before, I have always had to stop,
But to-day I am sure I shall reach the top.

Today to the end of the marvelous stair,
Where those glittering pinacles flash in the air!
Climbing, climbing, higher I go,
With the sky close above me, the earth far below.

Amy Lowell

Convalescence

From out the dragging vastness of the sea,
Wave-fettered, bound in sinuous, seaweed strands,
He toils toward the rounding beach, and stands
One moment, white and dripping, silently,
Cut like a cameo in lazuli,
Then falls, betrayed by shifting shells, and lands
Prone in the jeering water, and his hands
Clutch for support where no support can be.
So up, and down, and forward, inch by inch,
He gains upon the shore, where poppies glow
And sandflies dance their little lives away.
The sucking waves retard, and tighter clinch
The weeds about him, but the land-winds blow,
And in the sky there blooms the sun of May.

Amy Lowell

Crepuscule du Matin

All night I wrestled with a memory
Which knocked insurgent at the gates of thought.
The crumbled wreck of years behind has wrought
Its disillusion; now I only cry
For peace, for power to forget the lie
Which hope too long has whispered. So I sought
The sleep which would not come, and night was fraught
With old emotions weeping silently.
I heard your voice again, and knew the things
Which you had promised proved an empty vaunt.
I felt your clinging hands while night's broad wings
Cherished our love in darkness. From the lawn
A sudden, quivering birdnote, like a taunt.
My arms held nothing but the empty dawn.

Amy Lowell

Crowned

You came to me bearing bright roses,
Red like the wine of your heart;
You twisted them into a garland
To set me aside from the mart.
Red roses to crown me your lover,
And I walked aureoled and apart.

Enslaved and encircled, I bore it,
Proud token of my gift to you.
The petals waned paler, and shriveled,
the thorns started through.
er thorns to proclaim me your lover,
A diadem woven with rue.

Amy Lowell

Decade

When you came, you were like red wine and honey,
And the taste of you burnt my mouth with its sweetness.
Now you are like morning bread,
Smooth and pleasant.
I hardly taste you at all for I know your savour,
But I am completely nourished.

Amy Lowell

Diya

Look, Dear, how bright the moonlight is to-night!
See where it casts the shadow of that tree
Far out upon the grass. And every gust
Of light night wind comes laden with the scent
Of opening flowers which never bloom by day:
Night-scented stocks, and four-o'clocks, and that
Pale yellow disk, upreared on its tall stalk,
The evening primrose, comrade of the stars.
It seems as though the garden which you love
Were like a swinging censer, its incense
Floating before us as a reverent act
To sanctify and bless our night of love.
Tell me once more you love me, that 't is you
Yes, really you, I touch, so, with my hand;
And tell me it is by your own free will
That you are here, and that you like to be
Just here, with me, under this sailing pine.
I need to hear it often for my heart
Doubts naturally, and finds it hard to trust.
Ah, Dearest, you are good to love me so,
And yet I would not have it goodness, rather
Excess of selfishness in you to need
Me through and through, as flowers need the sun.
I wonder can it really be that you
And I are here alone, and that the night
Is full of hours, and all the world asleep,
And none can call to you to come away;
For you have given all yourself to me
Making me gentle by your willingness.
Has your life too been waiting for this time,
Not only mine the sharpness of this joy?
Dear Heart, I love you, worship you as though
I were a priest before a holy shrine.
I'm glad that you are beautiful, although
Were you not lovely still I needs must love;
But you are all things, it must have been so
For otherwise it were not you. Come, close;
When you are in the circle of my arm
Faith grows a mountain and I take my stand
Upon its utmost top. Yes, yes, once more
Kiss me, and let me feel you very near
Wanting me wholly, even as I want you.
Have years behind been dark? Will those to come
Bring unguessed sorrows into our two lives?
What does it matter, we have had to-night!
To-night will make us strong, for we believe
Each in the other, this is a sacrament.
Beloved, is it true?

Amy Lowell

Dreams

I do not care to talk to you although
Your speech evokes a thousand sympathies,
And all my being's silent harmonies
Wake trembling into music. When you go
It is as if some sudden, dreadful blow
Had severed all the strings with savage ease.
No, do not talk; but let us rather seize
This intimate gift of silence which we know.
Others may guess your thoughts from what you say,
As storms are guessed from clouds where darkness broods.
To me the very essence of the day
Reveals its inner purpose and its moods;
As poplars feel the rain and then straightway
Reverse their leaves and shimmer through the woods.

Amy Lowell

Epitaph in a Church-Yard in Charleston, South Carolina

GEORGE AUGUSTUS CLOUGH

A NATIVE OF LIVERPOOL,

DIED SUDDENLY OF "STRANGER'S FEVER"

NOV'R 5th 1843

AGED 22

He died of "Stranger's Fever" when his youth
Had scarcely melted into manhood, so
The chiselled legend runs; a brother's woe
Laid bare for epitaph. The savage ruth
Of a sunny, bright, but alien land, uncouth
With cruel caressing dealt a mortal blow,
And by this summer sea where flowers grow
In tropic splendor, witness to the truth
Of ineradicable race he lies.
The law of duty urged that he should roam,
Should sail from fog and chilly airs to skies
Clear with deceitful welcome. He had come
With proud resolve, but still his lonely eyes
Ached with fatigue at never seeing home.

Amy Lowell

Epitaph of a Young Poet Who Died Before Having Achieved Success

Beneath this sod lie the remains
Of one who died of growing pains.

Amy Lowell

Falling Snow

The snow whispers around me
And my wooden clogs
Leave holes behind me in the snow.
But no one will pass this way
Seeking my footsteps,
And when the temple bell rings again
They will be covered and gone.

Amy Lowell

Fatigue

Stupefy my heart to every day's monotony,
Seal up my eyes, I would not look so far,
Chasten my steps to peaceful regularity,
Bow down my head lest I behold a star.
Fill my days with work, a thousand calm necessities
Leaving no moment to consecrate to hope,
Girdle my thoughts within the dull circumferences
Of facts which form the actual in one short hour's scope.

Give me dreamless sleep, and loose night's power over me,
Shut my ears to sounds only tumultuous then,
Bid Fancy slumber, and steal away its potency,
Or Nature wakes and strives to live again.

Let each day pass, well ordered in its usefulness,
Unlit by sunshine, unscarred by storm;
Dower me with strength and curb all foolish eagerness --
The law exacts obedience. Instruct, I will conform.

Amy Lowell

Flute-Priest Song For Rain

Whistle under the water,
Make the water bubble to the tones of the flute.
I call the bluebirds song into the water:
Wee-kee! Wee-kee-kee!
Dawn is coming,
The morning star shines upon us.
Bluebird singing to the West clouds,
Bring the humming rain.

Water-rattles shake,
Flute whistles,
Star in Heaven shines.
I blow the oriole's song,
The yellow song of the North.
I call rain clouds with my rattles:
Wee-kee-kee, oriole.
Pattering rain.

To the South I blow my whistle,
To the red parrot of the South I call.
Send red lightning,
Under your wings
The forked lightning.
Thunder-rattles whirl
To the sky waters.
Fill the springs.
The water is moving.
Wait -

Whistle to the East
With a magpie voice.
Wee-kee! Wee-kee-kee!
Call the storm-clouds
That they come rushing.
Call the loud rain.

Why does it not come?
Who is bad?
Whose heart is evil?
Who has done wickedness?
I weep,
I rend my garments,
I grieve for the sin which is in this place.
My flute sobs with the voice of all birds in the water.
Even to the six directions I weep and despair.
Come, O winds, from the sides of the sky,
Open your bird-beaks that rain may fall down.
Drench our fields, our houses,
Fill the land
With tumult of rain.

Amy Lowell

Fool's Money Bags

Outside the long window,
With his head on the stone sill,
The dog is lying,
Gazing at his Beloved.
His eyes are wet and urgent,
And his body is taut and shaking.
It is cold on the terrace;
A pale wind licks along the stone slabs,
But the dog gazes through the glass
And is content.

The Beloved is writing a letter.
Occasionally she speaks to the dog,
But she is thinking of her writing.
Does she, too, give her devotion to one
Not worthy?

Amy Lowell

Fragment

What is poetry? Is it a mosaic
Of coloured stones which curiously are wrought
Into a pattern? Rather glass that's taught
By patient labor any hue to take
And glowing with a sumptuous splendor, make
Beauty a thing of awe; where sunbeams caught,
Transmuted fall in sheafs of rainbows fraught
With storied meaning for religion's sake.

Amy Lowell

Francis II, King of Naples

Written after reading Trevelyan's "Garibaldi and the making of Italy"

Poor foolish monarch, vacillating, vain,
Decaying victim of a race of kings,
Swift Destiny shook out her purple wings
And caught him in their shadow; not again
Could furtive plotting smear another stain
Across his tarnished honour. Smoulderings
Of sacrificial fires burst their rings
And blotted out in smoke his lost domain.
Bereft of courtiers, only with his queen,
From empty palace down to empty quay.
No challenge screamed from hostile carabine.
A single vessel waited, shadowy;
All night she ploughed her solitary way
Beneath the stars, and through a tranquil sea.

Amy Lowell

Frankincense and Myrrh

My heart is tuned to sorrow, and the strings
Vibrate most readily to minor chords,
Searching and sad; my mind is stuffed with words
Which voice the passion and the ache of things:
Illusions beating with their baffled wings
Against the walls of circumstance, and hoards
Of torn desires, broken joys; records
Of all a bruised life's maimed imaginings.
Now you are come! You tremble like a star
Poised where, behind earth's rim, the sun has set.
Your voice has sung across my heart, but numb
And mute, I have no tones to answer. Far
Within I kneel before you, speechless yet,
And life ablaze with beauty, I am dumb.

Amy Lowell

Free Fantasia On Japanese Themes

All the afternoon there has been a chirping of birds,
And the sun lies warm and still on the western sides of swollen branches.
There is no wind;
Even the little twigs at the ends of the branches do not move,
And the needles of the pines are solid
Bands of inarticulated blackness
Against the blue-white sky.

Still, but alert;
And my heart is still and alert,
Passive with sunshine,
Avid of adventure.

I would experience new emotions,
Submit to strange enchantments,
Bend to influences
Bizarre, exotic,
Fresh with burgeoning.

I would climb a sacred mountain,
Struggle with other pilgrims up a steep path through pine-trees,
Above to the smooth, treeless slopes,
And prostrate myself before a painted shrine,
Beating my hands upon the hot earth,
Quieting my eyes upon the distant sparkle
Of the faint spring sea.

I would recline upon a balcony
In purple curving folds of silk,
And my dress should be silvered with a pattern
Of butterflies and swallows,
And the black band of my obi
Should flash with gold circular threads,
And glitter when I moved.
I would lean against the railing
While you sang to me of wars
Past and to come—
Sang, and played the samisen.

Perhaps I would beat a little hand drum
In time to your singing;
Perhaps I would only watch the play of light
Upon the hilt of your two swords.

I would sit in a covered boat,
Rocking slowly to the narrow waves of a river,
While above us, an arc of moving lanterns,
Curved a bridge,
A hiss of gold
Blooming out of darkness,
Rockets exploded,
And died in a soft dripping of colored stars.

We would float between the high trestles,
And drift away from other boats,
Until the rockets flared soundless,
And their falling stars hung silent in the sky,
Like wistaria clusters above the ancient entrance of a temple.

I would anything
Rather than this cold paper;
With outside, the quiet son on the sides of burgeoning branches,
And inside, only my books.

Amy Lowell

Fringed Gentians

Near where I live there is a lake
As blue as blue can be, winds make
It dance as they go blowing by.
I think it curtseys to the sky.

It's just a lake of lovely flowers
And my Mamma says they are ours;
But they are not like those we grow
To be our very own, you know.

We have a splendid garden, there
Are lots of flowers everywhere;
Roses, and pinks, and four o'clocks
And hollyhocks, and evening stocks.

Mamma lets us pick them, but never
Must we pick any gentians -- ever!
For if we carried them away
They'd die of homesickness that day.

Amy Lowell

From One Who Stays

How empty seems the town now you are gone!
A wilderness of sad streets, where gaunt walls
Hide nothing to desire; sunshine falls
Eery, distorted, as it long had shone
On white, dead faces tombed in halls of stone.
The whir of motors, stricken through with calls
Of playing boys, floats up at intervals;
But all these noises blur to one long moan.
What quest is worth pursuing? And how strange
That other men still go accustomed ways!
I hate their interest in the things they do.
A spectre-horde repeating without change
An old routine. Alone I know the days
Are still-born, and the world stopped, lacking you.

Amy Lowell

Generations

You are like the stem
Of a young beech-tree,
Straight and swaying,
Breaking out in golden leaves.
Your walk is like the blowing of a beech-tree
On a hill.
Your voice is like leaves
Softly struck upon by a South wind.
Your shadow is no shadow, but a scattered sunshine;
And at night you pull the sky down to you
And hood yourself in stars.

But I am like a great oak under a cloudy sky,
Watching a stripling beech grow up at my feet.

Amy Lowell

Grotesque

Why do the lilies goggle their tongues at me
When I pluck them;
And writhe and twist,
And strangle themselves against my fingers,
So that I can hardly weave the garland
For your hair?
Why do they shriek your name
And spit at me
When I would cluster them?
Must I kill them
To make them lie still,
And send you a wreath of lolling corpses
To turn putrid and soft
On your forehead
While you dance?

Amy Lowell

Happiness

Happiness, to some, elation;
Is, to others, mere stagnation.
Days of passive somnolence,
At its wildest, indolence.
Hours of empty quietness,
No delight, and no distress.

Happiness to me is wine,
Effervescent, superfine.
Full of tang and fiery pleasure,
Far too hot to leave me leisure
For a single thought beyond it.
Drunk! Forgetful! This the bond: it
Means to give one's soul to gain
Life's quintessence. Even pain
Pricks to livelier living, then
Wakes the nerves to laugh again,
Rapture's self is three parts sorrow.
Although we must die to-morrow,
Losing every thought but this;
Torn, triumphant, drowned in bliss.

Happiness: We rarely feel it.
I would buy it, beg it, steal it,
Pay in coins of dripping blood
For this one transcendent good.

Amy Lowell

Haunted

See! He trails his toes
Through the long streaks of moonlight,
And the nails of his fingers glitter:
They claw and flash among the tree-tops.
His lips suck at my open window,
And his breath creeps about my body
And lies in pools under my knees.
I can see his mouth sway and wobble,
Sticking itself against the window-jambs,
But the moonlight is bright on the floor,
Without a shadow.
Hark! a hare is strangling in the forest,
And the wind tears a shutter from the wall.

Amy Lowell

Hero-Worship

A face seen passing in a crowded street,
A voice heard singing music, large and free;
And from that moment life is changed, and we
Become of more heroic temper, meet
To freely ask and give, a man complete
Radiant because of faith, we dare to be
What Nature meant us. Brave idolatry
Which can conceive a hero! No deceit,
No knowledge taught by unrelenting years,
Can quench this fierce, untamable desire.
We know that what we long for once achieved
Will cease to satisfy. Be still our fears;
If what we worship fail us, still the fire
Burns on, and it is much to have believed.

Amy Lowell

Hoar-Frost

In the cloud gray mornings
I heard the herons Flying
And when I came into my garden,
My silken outer-garment
Trailed over withered leaves.
A dried leaf crumbles at a touch,
But I have seen many Autumns
With herons blowing like smoke
Across the sky.

Amy Lowell

Hora Stellatrix

The stars hang thick in the apple tree,
The south wind smells of the pungent sea,
Gold tulip cups are heavy with dew.
The night's for you, Sweetheart, for you!
Starfire rains from the vaulted blue.

Listen! The dancing of unseen leaves.
A drowsy swallow stirs in the eaves.
Only a maiden is sorrowing.
'T is night and spring, Sweetheart, and spring!
Starfire lights your heart's blossoming.

In the intimate dark there's never an ear,
Though the tulips stand on tiptoe to hear,
So give; ripe fruit must shrivel or fall.
As you are mine, Sweetheart, give all!
Starfire sparkles, your coronal.

Amy Lowell

In A Castle

I

Over the yawning chimney hangs the fog. Drip -- hiss -- drip -- hiss --
fall the raindrops on the oaken log which burns, and steams,
and smokes the ceiling beams. Drip -- hiss -- the rain never stops.

The wide, state bed shivers beneath its velvet coverlet. Above, dim,
in the smoke, a tarnished coronet gleams dully. Overhead hammers and chinks
the rain. Fearfully wails the wind down distant corridors, and there comes
the swish and sigh of rushes lifted off the floors. The arras blows sidewise
out from the wall, and then falls back again.

It is my lady's key, confided with much nice cunning, whisperingly.
He enters on a sob of wind, which gutters the candles almost to swaling.
The fire flutters and drops. Drip -- hiss -- the rain never stops.
He shuts the door. The rushes fall again to stillness along the floor.
Outside, the wind goes wailing.

The velvet coverlet of the wide bed is smooth and cold. Above,
in the firelight, winks the coronet of tarnished gold. The knight shivers
in his coat of fur, and holds out his hands to the withering flame.
She is always the same, a sweet coquette. He will wait for her.

How the log hisses and drips! How warm and satisfying will be her lips!

It is wide and cold, the state bed; but when her head lies under the coronet,
and her eyes are full and wet with love, and when she holds out her arms,
and the velvet counterpane half slips from her, and alarms
her trembling modesty, how eagerly he will leap to cover her, and blot himself
beneath the quilt, making her laugh and tremble.

Is it guilt to free a lady from her palsied lord, absent and fighting,
terribly abhorred?

He stirs a booted heel and kicks a rolling coal. His spur clinks
on the hearth. Overhead, the rain hammers and chinks. She is so pure
and whole. Only because he has her soul will she resign herself to him,
for where the soul has gone, the body must be given as a sign. He takes her
by the divine right of the only lover. He has sworn to fight her lord,
and wed her after. Should he be overborne, she will die adoring him, forlorn,
shriven by her great love.

Above, the coronet winks in the darkness. Drip -- hiss -- fall the raindrops.
The arras blows out from the wall, and a door bangs in a far-off hall.

The candles swale. In the gale the moat below plunges and spatters.

Will the lady lose courage and not come?

The rain claps on a loosened rafter.

Is that laughter?

The room is filled with lisps and whispers. Something mutters.
One candle drowns and the other gutters. Is that the rain
which pads and patters, is it the wind through the winding entries
which chatters?

The state bed is very cold and he is alone. How far from the wall
the arras is blown!

Christ's Death! It is no storm which makes these little chuckling sounds.
By the Great Wounds of Holy Jesus, it is his dear lady, kissing and
clasping someone! Through the sobbing storm he hears her love take form
and flutter out in words. They prick into his ears and stun his desire,
which lies within him, hard and dead, like frozen fire. And the little noise
never stops.

Drip -- hiss -- the rain drops.

He tears down the arras from before an inner chamber's bolted door.

II

The state bed shivers in the watery dawn. Drip -- hiss -- fall the raindrops.
For the storm never stops.

On the velvet coverlet lie two bodies, stripped and fair in the cold,
grey air. Drip -- hiss -- fall the blood-drops, for the bleeding never stops.
The bodies lie quietly. At each side of the bed, on the floor, is a head.
A man's on this side, a woman's on that, and the red blood oozes along
the rush mat.

A wisp of paper is twisted carefully into the strands of the dead man's hair.
It says, 'My Lord: Your wife's paramour has paid with his life
for the high favour.'

Through the lady's silver fillet is wound another paper. It reads,
'Most noble Lord: Your wife's misdeeds are as a double-stranded
necklace of beads. But I have engaged that, on your return,
she shall welcome you here. She will not spurn your love as before,
you have still the best part of her. Her blood was red, her body white,
they will both be here for your delight. The soul inside was a lump of dirt,
I have rid you of that with a spurt of my sword point. Good luck
to your pleasure. She will be quite complaisant, my friend, I wager.'

The end was a splashed flourish of ink.

Hark! In the passage is heard the clink of armour, the tread of a heavy man.
The door bursts open and standing there, his thin hair wavering
in the glare of steely daylight, is my Lord of Clair.

Over the yawning chimney hangs the fog. Drip -- hiss -- drip -- hiss --
fall the raindrops. Overhead hammers and chinks the rain which never stops.

The velvet coverlet is sodden and wet, yet the roof beams are tight.
Overhead, the coronet gleams with its blackened gold, winking and blinking.
Among the rushes three corpses are growing cold.

III

In the castle church you may see them stand,
Two sumptuous tombs on either hand
Of the choir, my Lord's and my Lady's, grand
In sculptured filigrees. And where the transepts of the church expand,
A crusader, come from the Holy Land,
Lies with crossed legs and embroidered band.
The page's name became a brand
For shame. He was buried in crawling sand,
After having been burnt by royal command.

Amy Lowell

In A Garden

Gushing from the mouths of stone men
To spread at ease under the sky
In granite-lipped basins,
Where iris dabble their feet
And rustle to a passing wind,
The water fills the garden with its rushing,
In the midst of the quiet of close-clipped lawns.

Damp smell the ferns in tunnels of stone,
Where trickle and plash the fountains,
Marble fountains, yellowed with much water.

Splashing down moss-tarnished steps
It falls, the water;
And the air is throbbing with it.
With its gurgling and running.
With its leaping, and deep, cool murmur.

And I wished for night and you.
I wanted to see you in the swimming-pool,
White and shining in the silver-flecked water.
While the moon rode over the garden,
High in the arch of night,
And the scent of the lilacs was heavy with stillness.

Night, and the water, and you in your whiteness, bathing!

Amy Lowell

In A Time Of Dearth

Before me,
On either side of me,
I see sand.
If I turn the corner of my house,
I see sand,
Long, brown
Lines and levels of flat
Sand.

If I could only see a caravan
Heave over the edge of it:
The camels wobbling and swaying,
Stepping like ostriches,
With rocking palanquins
Whose curtains conceal
Languors and faintnesses,
Muslins tossed aside,
And a disorder of cushions.
The swinging curtains would pique and solace me.
But I only see sand,
Long, brown sand -
Sand.

If I could only see a herd of Arab horses
Galloping,
Their manes and tails pulled straight
By the speed of their going;
Their bodies sleek and round
Like bellying sails.
They would beat the sand with their fore feet,
And scatter it with their hind feet,
So that it whirled in a cloud of orange,
And the sun through it
Was clip-edged, without rays, and dun.
But I only see sand,
Long, brown, hot sand -
Sand.

If I could only see a mirage,
Blue-white at the horizon,
With palm-trees about it;
Tall, windless palm-trees, grouped about a-glitter.
If I could strain toward it,
And think of the water creeping round my ankles,
Tickling under my knees,
Leeching up my sides,
Spreading over my back.
But I only feel the grinding beneath my feet.
And I only see sand,
Long, dry sand,
Scorching sand -
Sand.

If a sand-storm would only come
And spit against my windows,
Snapping upon them, and ringing their vibrations;
Swirling over the roof;
Seeping under the door-jamb;
Suffocating me and making me struggle for air.
But I only see sand -
Sand lying dead in the sun.
Lines and lines of sand -
Sand.

I will paste newspapers over the windows to shut out the sand;
I will fit them into one another, and fasten the corners.
Then I will strike matches
And read of politics and murders and festivals
Three years old.
But I shall not see the sand any more,
And I can read
While my matches last.

Amy Lowell

In Answer To A Request

You ask me for a sonnet. Ah, my Dear,
Can clocks tick back to yesterday at noon?
Can cracked and fallen leaves recall last June
And leap up on the boughs, now stiff and sere?
For your sake, I would go and seek the year,
Faded beyond the purple ranks of dune,
Blown sands of drifted hours, which the moon
Streaks with a ghostly finger, and her sneer
Pulls at my lengthening shadow. Yes, 'tis that!
My shadow stretches forward, and the ground
Is dark in front because the light's behind.
It is grotesque, with such a funny hat,
In watching it and walking I have found
More than enough to occupy my mind.

I cannot turn, the light would make me blind.

Amy Lowell

In Darkness

Must all of worth be travailled for, and those
Life's brightest stars rise from a troubled sea
Must years go by in sad uncertainty
Leaving us doubting whose the conquering blows,
Are we or Fate the victors? Time which shows
All inner meanings will reveal, but we
Shall never know the upshot. Ours to be
Wasted with longing, shattered in the throes,
The agonies of splendid dreams, which day
Dims from our vision, but each night brings back;
We strive to hold their grandeur, and essay
To be the thing we dream. Sudden we lack
The flash of insight, life grows drear and gray,
And hour follows hour, nerveless, slack.

Amy Lowell

In Excelsis

You -- you --
Your shadow is sunlight on a plate of silver;
Your footsteps, the seeding-place of lilies;
Your hands moving, a chime of bells across a windless air.

The movement of your hands is the long, golden running of light from a rising sun;
It is the hopping of birds upon a garden-path.

As the perfume of jonquils, you come forth in the morning.
Young horses are not more sudden than your thoughts,
Your words are bees about a pear-tree,
Your fancies are the gold-and-black striped wasps buzzing among red apples.
I drink your lips,
I eat the whiteness of your hands and feet.
My mouth is open,
As a new jar I am empty and open.
Like white water are you who fill the cup of my mouth,
Like a brook of water thronged with lilies.

You are frozen as the clouds,
You are far and sweet as the high clouds.
I dare to reach to you,
I dare to touch the rim of your brightness.
I leap beyond the winds,
I cry and shout,
For my throat is keen as is a sword
Sharpened on a hone of ivory.
My throat sings the joy of my eyes,
The rushing gladness of my love.

How has the rainbow fallen upon my heart?
How have I snared the seas to lie in my fingers
And caught the sky to be a cover for my head? How have you come to dwell with me,
Compassing me with the four circles of your mystic lightness,
So that I say "Glory! Glory!" and bow before you
As to a shrine?

Do I tease myself that morning is morning and a day after?
Do I think the air is a condescension,
The earth a politeness,
Heaven a boon deserving thanks?
So you -- air -- earth -- heaven --
I do not thank you,
I take you,
I live.
And those things which I say in consequence
Are rubies mortised in a gate of stone.

Amy Lowell

Interlude

When I have baked white cakes
And grated green almonds to spread on them;
When I have picked the green crowns from the strawberries
And piled them, cone-pointed, in a blue and yellow platter;
When I have smoothed the seam of the linen I have been working;
What then?
To-morrow it will be the same:
Cakes and strawberries,
And needles in and out of cloth
If the sun is beautiful on bricks and pewter,
How much more beautiful is the moon,
Slanting down the gauffered branches of a plum-tree;
The moon
Wavering across a bed of tulips;
The moon,
Still,
Upon your face.
You shine, Beloved,
You and the moon.
But which is the reflection?
The clock is striking eleven.
I think, when we have shut and barred the door,
The night will be dark
Outside.

Amy Lowell

Irony

An arid daylight shines along the beach
Dried to a grey monotony of tone,
And stranded jelly-fish melt soft upon
The sun-baked pebbles, far beyond their reach
Sparkles a wet, reviving sea. Here bleach
The skeletons of fishes, every bone
Polished and stark, like traceries of stone,
The joints and knuckles hardened each to each.
And they are dead while waiting for the sea,
The moon-pursuing sea, to come again.
Their hearts are blown away on the hot breeze.
Only the shells and stones can wait to be
Washed bright. For living things, who suffer pain,
May not endure till time can bring them ease.

Amy Lowell

J--K. Huysmans

A flickering glimmer through a window-pane,
A dim red glare through mud bespattered glass,
Cleaving a path between blown walls of sleet
Across uneven pavements sunk in slime
To scatter and then quench itself in mist.
And struggling, slipping, often rudely hurled
Against the jutting angle of a wall,
And cursed, and reeled against, and flung aside
By drunken brawlers as they shuffled past,
A man was groping to what seemed a light.
His eyelids burnt and quivered with the strain
Of looking, and against his temples beat
The all enshrouding, suffocating dark.
He stumbled, lurched, and struck against a door
That opened, and a howl of obscene mirth
Grated his senses, wallowing on the floor
Lay men, and dogs and women in the dirt.
He sickened, loathing it, and as he gazed
The candle guttered, flared, and then went out.

Through travail of ignoble midnight streets
He came at last to shelter in a porch
Where gothic saints and warriors made a shield
To cover him, and tortured gargoyles spat
One long continuous stream of silver rain
That clattered down from myriad roofs and spires
Into a darkness, loud with rushing sound
Of water falling, gurgling as it fell,
But always thickly dark. Then as he leaned
Unconscious where, the great oak door blew back
And cast him, bruised and dripping, in the church.
His eyes from long sojourning in the night
Were blinded now as by some glorious sun;
He slowly crawled toward the altar steps.
He could not think, for heavy in his ears
An organ boomed majestic harmonies;
He only knew that what he saw was light!
He bowed himself before a cross of flame
And shut his eyes in fear lest it should fade.

Amy Lowell

La Vie de Boheme

Alone, I whet my soul against the keen
Unwrinkled sky, with its long stretching blue.
I polish it with sunlight and pale dew,
And damascene it with young blowing leaves.
Into the handle of my life I set
Sprigs of mignonette
And periwinkle,
Twisted into sheaves.
The colors laugh and twinkle.
Twined bands of roadways, liquid in the sheen
Of street lamps and the ruby shine of cabs,
Glisten for my delight all down its length;
And there are sudden sparks
Of morning ripplings over tree-fluttered pools.
My soul is fretted full of gleams and darks,
Pulsing and still.
Smooth-edged, untarnished, girded in my soul
I walk the world.

But in its narrow alleys,
The low-hung dust-thick valleys
Where the mob shuffles its empty tread,
My soul is blunted against dullard wits,
Smeared with sick juices,
Nicked impotent for other than low uses.
Its arabesques and sparkling subtleties
Crusted to grey, and all its changing surfaces
Spread with unpalpitant monotonies.

I re-create myself upon the polished sky:
A honing-strop above converging roofs.
The patterns show again, like buried proofs
Of old, lost empires bursting on the eye
In hieroglyphed and graven splendor.
The whirling winds brush past my head,
And prodigal once more, a reckless spender
Of disregarded beauty, a defender
Of undesired faiths,
walk the world.

Amy Lowell

Late September

Tang of fruitage in the air;
Red boughs bursting everywhere;
Shimmering of seeded grass;
Hooded gentians all a'mass.

Warmth of earth, and cloudless wind
Tearing off the husky rind,
Blowing feathered seeds to fall
By the sun-baked, sheltering wall.

Beech trees in a golden haze;
Hardy sumachs all ablaze,
Glowing through the silver birches.
How that pine tree shouts and lurches!

From the sunny door-jamb high,
Swings the shell of a butterfly.
Scrape of insect violins
Through the stubble shrilly dins.

Every blade's a minaret
Where a small muezzin's set,
Loudly calling us to pray
At the miracle of day.

Then the purple-lidded night
Westering comes, her footsteps light
Guided by the radiant boon
Of a sickle-shaped new moon.

Amy Lowell

Lead Soldiers

The nursery fire burns brightly, crackling in cheerful little explosions
and trails of sparks up the back of the chimney. Miniature rockets
peppering the black bricks with golden stars, as though a gala
flamed a night of victorious wars.

The nodding mandarin on the bookcase moves his head forward and back, slowly,
and looks into the air with his blue-green eyes. He stares into the air
and nods - forward and back. The red rose in his hand is a crimson splash
on his yellow coat. Forward and back, and his blue-green eyes stare
into the air, and he nods - nods.

Tommy's soldiers march to battle,
Trumpets flare and snare-drums rattle.
Bayonets flash, and sabres glance -
How the horses snort and prance!
Cannon drawn up in a line
Glitter in the dizzy shine
Of the morning sunlight. Flags
Ripple colours in great jags.
Red blows out, then blue, then green,
Then all three - a weaving sheen
Of prismed patriotism. March
Tommy's soldiers, stiff and starch,
Boldly stepping to the rattle
Of the drums, they go to battle.

Tommy lies on his stomach on the floor and directs his columns.
He puts his infantry in front, and before them ambles a mounted band.
Their instruments make a strand of gold before the scarlet-tunicked soldiers,
and they take very long steps on their little green platforms,
and from the ranks bursts the song of Tommy's soldiers marching to battle.
The song jolts a little as the green platforms stick on the thick carpet.
Tommy wheels his guns round the edge of a box of blocks, and places
a squad of cavalry on the commanding eminence of a footstool.

The fire snaps pleasantly, and the old Chinaman nods - nods. The fire makes
the red rose in his hand glow and twist. Hist! That is a bold song
Tommy's soldiers sing as they march along to battle.

Crack! Rattle! The sparks fly up the chimney.

Tommy's army's off to war -
Not a soldier knows what for.
But he knows about his rifle,
How to shoot it, and a trifle
Of the proper thing to do
When it's he who is shot through.
Like a cleverly trained flea,

He can follow instantly
Orders, and some quick commands
Really make severe demands
On a mind that's none too rapid,
Leaden brains tend to the vapid.
But how beautifully dressed
Is this army! How impressed
Tommy is when at his heel
All his baggage wagons wheel
About the patterned carpet, and
Moving up his heavy guns
He sees them glow with diamond suns
Flashing all along each barrel.
And the gold and blue apparel
Of his gunners is a joy.
Tommy is a lucky boy.
Boom! Boom! Ta-ra!

The old mandarin nods under his purple umbrella. The rose in his hand shoots its petals up in thin quills of crimson. Then they collapse and shrivel like red embers. The fire sizzles.

Tommy is galloping his cavalry, two by two, over the floor. They must pass the open terror of the door and gain the enemy encamped under the wash-stand. The mounted band is very grand, playing allegro and leading the infantry on at the double quick. The tassel of the hearth-rug has flung down the bass-drum, and he and his dapple-grey horse lie overtripped, slipped out of line, with the little lead drumsticks glistening to the fire's shine.

The fire burns and crackles, and tickles the tripped bass-drum with its sparkles.

The marching army hitches its little green platforms valiantly, and steadily approaches the door. The overturned bass-drummer, lying on the hearth-rug, melting in the heat, softens and sheds tears. The song jeers at his impotence, and flaunts the glory of the martial and still upstanding, vaunting the deeds it will do. For are not Tommy's soldiers all bright and new?

Tommy's leaden soldiers we,
Glittering with efficiency.
Not a button's out of place,
Tons and tons of golden lace
Wind about our officers.
Every manly bosom stirs
At the thought of killing - killing!
Tommy's dearest wish fulfilling.
We are gaudy, savage, strong,

And our loins so ripe we long
First to kill, then procreate,
Doubling so the laws of Fate.
On their women we have sworn
To graft our sons. And overborne
They'll rear us younger soldiers, so
Shall our race endure and grow,
Waxing greater in the wombs
Borrowed of them, while damp tombs
Rot their men. O Glorious War!
Goad us with your points, Great Star!

The china mandarin on the bookcase nods slowly, forward and back -
forward and back - and the red rose writhes and wriggles,
thrusting its flaming petals under and over one another like tortured snakes.

The fire strokes them with its dartles, and purrs at them,
and the old man nods.

Tommy does not hear the song. He only sees the beautiful, new,
gaily-coloured lead soldiers. They belong to him, and he is very proud
and happy. He shouts his orders aloud, and gallops his cavalry past the door
to the wash-stand. He creeps over the floor on his hands and knees
to one battalion and another, but he sees only the bright colours
of his soldiers and the beautiful precision of their gestures.
He is a lucky boy to have such fine lead soldiers to enjoy.

Tommy catches his toe in the leg of the wash-stand, and jars the pitcher.
He snatches at it with his hands, but it is too late. The pitcher falls,
and as it goes, he sees the white water flow over its lip. It slips
between his fingers and crashes to the floor. But it is not water which oozes
to the door. The stain is glutinous and dark, a spark from the firelight
heads it to red. In and out, between the fine, new soldiers,
licking over the carpet, squirms the stream of blood, lapping at
the little green platforms, and flapping itself against the painted uniforms.

The nodding mandarin moves his head slowly, forward and back.
The rose is broken, and where it fell is black blood. The old mandarin leers
under his purple umbrella, and nods - forward and back, staring into the air
with blue-green eyes. Every time his head comes forward a rosebud pushes
between his lips, rushes into full bloom, and drips to the ground
with a splashing sound. The pool of black blood grows and grows,
with each dropped rose, and spreads out to join the stream from
the wash-stand. The beautiful army of lead soldiers steps boldly forward,
but the little green platforms are covered in the rising stream of blood.

The nursery fire burns brightly and flings fan-bursts of stars up the chimney,

as though a gala flamed a night of victorious wars.

Amy Lowell

Leisure

Leisure, thou goddess of a bygone age,
When hours were long and days sufficed to hold
Wide-eyed delights and pleasures uncontrolled
By shortening moments, when no gaunt presage
Of undone duties, modern heritage,
Haunted our happy minds; must thou withhold
Thy presence from this over-busy world,
And bearing silence with thee disengage
Our twined fortunes? Deeps of unhewn woods
Alone can cherish thee, alone possess
Thy quiet, teeming vigor. This our crime:
Not to have worshipped, marred by alien moods
That sole condition of all loveliness,
The dreaming lapse of slow, unmeasured time.

Amy Lowell

Lilacs

Lilacs,
False blue,
White,
Purple,
Color of lilac,
Your great puffs of flowers
Are everywhere in this my New England.
Among your heart-shaped leaves
Orange orioles hop like music-box birds and sing
Their little weak soft songs;
In the crooks of your branches
The bright eyes of song sparrows sitting on spotted eggs
Peer restlessly through the light and shadow
Of all Springs.
Lilacs in dooryards
Holding quiet conversations with an early moon;
Lilacs watching a deserted house
Settling sideways into the grass of an old road;
Lilacs, wind-beaten, staggering under a lopsided shock of bloom
Above a cellar dug into a hill.
You are everywhere.
You were everywhere.
You tapped the window when the preacher preached his sermon,
And ran along the road beside the boy going to school.
You stood by the pasture-bars to give the cows good milking,
You persuaded the housewife that her dishpan was of silver.
And her husband an image of pure gold.
You flaunted the fragrance of your blossoms
Through the wide doors of Custom Houses—
You, and sandal-wood, and tea,
Charging the noses of quill-driving clerks
When a ship was in from China.
You called to them: "Goose-quill men, goose-quill men,
May is a month for flitting."
Until they writhed on their high stools
And wrote poetry on their letter-sheets behind the propped-up ledgers.
Paradoxical New England clerks,
Writing inventories in ledgers, reading the "Song of Solomon" at night,
So many verses before bed-time,
Because it was the Bible.
The dead fed you
Amid the slant stones of graveyards.
Pale ghosts who planted you
Came in the nighttime
And let their thin hair blow through your clustered stems.
You are of the green sea,
And of the stone hills which reach a long distance.
You are of elm-shaded streets with little shops where they sell kites and marbles,
You are of great parks where every one walks and nobody is at home.
You cover the blind sides of greenhouses
And lean over the top to say a hurry-word through the glass
To your friends, the grapes, inside.

Lilacs,
False blue,
White,
Purple,
Color of lilac,
You have forgotten your Eastern origin,
The veiled women with eyes like panthers,
The swollen, aggressive turbans of jeweled pashas.
Now you are a very decent flower,
A reticent flower,
A curiously clear-cut, candid flower,
Standing beside clean doorways,
Friendly to a house-cat and a pair of spectacles,
Making poetry out of a bit of moonlight
And a hundred or two sharp blossoms.
Maine knows you,
Has for years and years;
New Hampshire knows you,
And Massachusetts
And Vermont.
Cape Cod starts you along the beaches to Rhode Island;
Connecticut takes you from a river to the sea.
You are brighter than apples,
Sweeter than tulips,
You are the great flood of our souls
Bursting above the leaf-shapes of our hearts,
You are the smell of all Summers,
The love of wives and children,
The recollection of gardens of little children,
You are State Houses and Charters
And the familiar treading of the foot to and fro on a road it knows.
May is lilac here in New England,
May is a thrush singing "Sun up!" on a tip-top ash tree,
May is white clouds behind pine-trees
Puffed out and marching upon a blue sky.
May is a green as no other,
May is much sun through small leaves,
May is soft earth,
And apple-blossoms,
And windows open to a South Wind.
May is full light wind of lilac
From Canada to Narragansett Bay.

Lilacs,
False blue,
White,
Purple,
Color of lilac.
Heart-leaves of lilac all over New England,

Roots of lilac under all the soil of New England,
Lilac in me because I am New England,
Because my roots are in it,
Because my leaves are of it,
Because my flowers are for it,
Because it is my country
And I speak to it of itself
And sing of it with my own voice
Since certainly it is mine.

Amy Lowell

Listening

'T is you that are the music, not your song.
The song is but a door which, opening wide,
Lets forth the pent-up melody inside,
Your spirit's harmony, which clear and strong
Sings but of you. Throughout your whole life long
Your songs, your thoughts, your doings, each divide
This perfect beauty; waves within a tide,
Or single notes amid a glorious throng.
The song of earth has many different chords;
Ocean has many moods and many tones
Yet always ocean. In the damp Spring woods
The painted trillium smiles, while crisp pine cones
Autumn alone can ripen. So is this
One music with a thousand cadences.

Amy Lowell

Loon Point

Softly the water ripples
Against the canoe's curving side,
Softly the birch trees rustle
Flinging over us branches wide.

Softly the moon glints and glistens
As the water takes and leaves,
Like golden ears of corn
Which fall from loose-bound sheaves,

Or like the snow-white petals
Which drop from an overblown rose,
When Summer ripens to Autumn
And the freighted year must close.

From the shore come the scents of a garden,
And between a gap in the trees
A proud white statue glimmers
In cold, disdainful ease.

The child of a southern people,
The thought of an alien race,
What does she in this pale, northern garden,
How reconcile it with her grace?

But the moon in her wayward beauty
Is ever and always the same,
As lovely as when upon Latmos
She watched till Endymion came.

Through the water the moon writes her legends
In light, on the smooth, wet sand;
They endure for a moment, and vanish,
And no one may understand.

All round us the secret of Nature
Is telling itself to our sight,
We may guess at her meaning but never
Can know the full mystery of night.

But her power of enchantment is on us,
We bow to the spell which she weaves,
Made up of the murmur of waves
And the manifold whisper of leaves.

Amy Lowell

Madonna of the Evening Flowers

All day long I have been working,
Now I am tired
I call: "Where are you?"
But there is only the oak-tree rustling in the wind.
The house is very quiet,
The sun shines in on your books,
On your scissors and thimble just put down,
But you are not there.
Suddenly I am lonely:
Where are you? I go about searching.

Then I see you,
Standing under a spire of pale blue larkspur,
With a basket of roses on your arm.
You are cool, like silver,
And you smile.
I think the Canterbury bells are playing little tunes.

You tell me that the peonies need spraying,
That the columbines have overrun all bounds,
That the pyrus japonica should be cut back and rounded.
You tell me all these things.
But I look at you, heart of silver,
White heart-flame of polished silver,
Burning beneath the blue steeples of the larkspur,
And I long to kneel instantly at your feet,
While all about us peal the loud, sweet, Te Deums of the Canterbury bells.

Amy Lowell

Malmaison

I

How the slates of the roof sparkle in the sun, over there, over there,
beyond the high wall! How quietly the Seine runs in loops and windings,
over there, over there, sliding through the green countryside! Like ships
of the line, stately with canvas, the tall clouds pass along the sky,
over the glittering roof, over the trees, over the looped and curving river.
A breeze quivers through the linden-trees. Roses bloom at Malmaison.
Roses! Roses! But the road is dusty. Already the Citoyenne Beauharnais
wearies of her walk. Her skin is chalked and powdered with dust,
she smells dust, and behind the wall are roses! Roses with
smooth open petals, poised above rippling leaves . . . Roses . . .
They have told her so. The Citoyenne Beauharnais shrugs her shoulders
and makes a little face. She must mend her pace if she would be back
in time for dinner. Roses indeed! The guillotine more likely.

The tiered clouds float over Malmaison, and the slate roof sparkles
in the sun.

II

Gallop! Gallop! The General brooks no delay. Make way, good people,
and scatter out of his path, you, and your hens, and your dogs,
and your children. The General is returned from Egypt, and is come
in a `caleche' and four to visit his new property. Throw open the gates,
you, Porter of Malmaison. Pull off your cap, my man, this is your master,
the husband of Madame. Faster! Faster! A jerk and a jingle
and they are arrived, he and she. Madame has red eyes. Fie! It is for joy
at her husband's return. Learn your place, Porter. A gentleman here
for two months? Fie! Fie, then! Since when have you taken to gossiping.
Madame may have a brother, I suppose. That -- all green, and red,
and glitter, with flesh as dark as ebony -- that is a slave; a bloodthirsty,
stabbing, slashing heathen, come from the hot countries to cure your tongue
of idle whispering.

A fine afternoon it is, with tall bright clouds sailing over the trees.

'Bonaparte, mon ami, the trees are golden like my star, the star I pinned
to your destiny when I married you. The gypsy, you remember her prophecy!
My dear friend, not here, the servants are watching; send them away,
and that flashing splendour, Roustan. Superb -- Imperial, but . . .
My dear, your arm is trembling; I faint to feel it touching me! No, no,
Bonaparte, not that -- spare me that -- did we not bury that last night!
You hurt me, my friend, you are so hot and strong. Not long, Dear,
no, thank God, not long.'

The looped river runs saffron, for the sun is setting. It is getting dark.
Dark. Darker. In the moonlight, the slate roof shines palely milkily white.

The roses have faded at Malmaison, nipped by the frost. What need for roses?
Smooth, open petals -- her arms. Fragrant, outcurved petals -- her breasts.
He rises like a sun above her, stooping to touch the petals, press them wider.
Eagles. Bees. What are they to open roses! A little shivering breeze
runs through the linden-trees, and the tiered clouds blow across the sky
like ships of the line, stately with canvas.

III

The gates stand wide at Malmaison, stand wide all day. The gravel
of the avenue glints under the continual rolling of wheels.
An officer gallops up with his sabre clicking; a mameluke gallops down
with his charger kicking. `Valets de pied' run about in ones, and twos,
and groups, like swirled blown leaves. Tramp! Tramp! The guard is changing,
and the grenadiers off duty lounge out of sight, ranging along the roads
toward Paris.

The slate roof sparkles in the sun, but it sparkles milkily, vaguely,
the great glass-houses put out its shining. Glass, stone, and onyx
now for the sun's mirror. Much has come to pass at Malmaison.
New rocks and fountains, blocks of carven marble, fluted pillars uprearing
antique temples, vases and urns in unexpected places, bridges of stone,
bridges of wood, arbours and statues, and a flood of flowers everywhere,
new flowers, rare flowers, parterre after parterre of flowers. Indeed,
the roses bloom at Malmaison. It is youth, youth untrammeled and advancing,
trundling a country ahead of it as though it were a hoop. Laughter,
and spur janglings in tessellated vestibules. Tripping of clocked
and embroidered stockings in little low-heeled shoes over smooth grass-plots.
India muslins spangled with silver patterns slide through trees --
mingle -- separate -- white day fireflies flashing moon-brilliance
in the shade of foliage.

'The kangaroos! I vow, Captain, I must see the kangaroos.'

'As you please, dear Lady, but I recommend the shady linden alley
and feeding the cockatoos.'

'They say that Madame Bonaparte's breed of sheep is the best in all France.'

'And, oh, have you seen the enchanting little cedar she planted
when the First Consul sent home the news of the victory of Marengo?'

Picking, choosing, the chattering company flits to and fro. Over the trees
the great clouds go, tiered, stately, like ships of the line
bright with canvas.

Prisoners'-base, and its swooping, veering, racing, giggling, bumping.
The First Consul runs plump into M. de Beauharnais and falls.
But he picks himself up smartly, and starts after M. Isabey. Too late,
M. Le Premier Consul, Mademoiselle Hortense is out after you. Quickly,

my dear Sir! Stir your short legs, she is swift and eager, and as graceful
as her mother. She is there, that other, playing too, but lightly, warily,
bearing herself with care, rather floating out upon the air than running,
never far from goal. She is there, borne up above her guests
as something indefinably fair, a rose above periwinkles. A blown rose,
smooth as satin, reflexed, one loosened petal hanging back and down.
A rose that undulates languorously as the breeze takes it,
resting upon its leaves in a faintness of perfume.

There are rumours about the First Consul. Malmaison is full of women,
and Paris is only two leagues distant. Madame Bonaparte stands
on the wooden bridge at sunset, and watches a black swan
pushing the pink and silver water in front of him as he swims,
crinkling its smoothness into pleats of changing colour with his breast.
Madame Bonaparte presses against the parapet of the bridge,
and the crushed roses at her belt melt, petal by petal, into the pink water.

IV

A vile day, Porter. But keep your wits about you. The Empress
will soon be here. Queer, without the Emperor! It is indeed,
but best not consider that. Scratch your head and prick up your ears.
Divorce is not for you to debate about. She is late? Ah, well,
the roads are muddy. The rain spears are as sharp as whetted knives.
They dart down and down, edged and shining. Clop-trop! Clop-trop!
A carriage grows out of the mist. Hist, Porter. You can keep on your hat.
It is only Her Majesty's dogs and her parrot. Clop-trop!
The Ladies in Waiting, Porter. Clop-trop! It is Her Majesty. At least,
I suppose it is, but the blinds are drawn.

'In all the years I have served Her Majesty she never before passed the gate
without giving me a smile!'

You're a droll fellow, to expect the Empress to put out her head
in the pouring rain and salute you. She has affairs of her own
to think about.

Clang the gate, no need for further waiting, nobody else will be coming
to Malmaison to-night.

White under her veil, drained and shaking, the woman crosses the antechamber.
Empress! Empress! Foolish splendour, perished to dust. Ashes of roses,
ashes of youth. Empress forsooth!

Over the glass domes of the hot-houses drenches the rain. Behind her
a clock ticks -- ticks again. The sound knocks upon her thought
with the echoing shudder of hollow vases. She places her hands on her ears,
but the minutes pass, knocking. Tears in Malmaison. And years to come
each knocking by, minute after minute. Years, many years, and tears,

and cold pouring rain.

'I feel as though I had died, and the only sensation I have
is that I am no more.'

Rain! Heavy, thudding rain!

V

The roses bloom at Malmaison. And not only roses. Tulips, myrtles,
geraniums, camelias, rhododendrons, dahlias, double hyacinths.
All the year through, under glass, under the sky, flowers bud, expand, die,
and give way to others, always others. From distant countries they have
been brought, and taught to live in the cool temperateness of France.
There is the `Bonapartea' from Peru; the `Napoleone Imperiale';
the `Josephinia Imperatrix', a pearl-white flower, purple-shadowed,
the calix pricked out with crimson points. Malmaison wears its flowers
as a lady wears her gems, flauntingly, assertively. Malmaison decks herself
to hide the hollow within.

The glass-houses grow and grow, and every year fling up hotter reflections
to the sailing sun.

The cost runs into millions, but a woman must have something
to console herself for a broken heart. One can play backgammon and patience,
and then patience and backgammon, and stake gold napoleons on each game won.
Sport truly! It is an unruly spirit which could ask better. With her jewels,
her laces, her shawls; her two hundred and twenty dresses, her fichus,
her veils; her pictures, her busts, her birds. It is absurd that she
cannot be happy. The Emperor smarts under the thought of her ingratitude.
What could he do more? And yet she spends, spends as never before.
It is ridiculous. Can she not enjoy life at a smaller figure?
Was ever monarch plagued with so extravagant an ex-wife. She owes
her chocolate-merchant, her candle-merchant, her sweetmeat purveyor;
her grocer, her butcher, her poulterer; her architect, and the shopkeeper
who sells her rouge; her perfumer, her dressmaker, her merchant of shoes.
She owes for fans, plants, engravings, and chairs. She owes
masons and carpenters, vintners, lingeres. The lady's affairs
are in sad confusion.

And why? Why?

Can a river flow when the spring is dry?

Night. The Empress sits alone, and the clock ticks, one after one.
The clock nicks off the edges of her life. She is chipped like
an old bit of china; she is frayed like a garment of last year's wearing.
She is soft, crinkled, like a fading rose. And each minute flows by
brushing against her, shearing off another and another petal.
The Empress crushes her breasts with her hands and weeps. And the tall clouds

sail over Malmaison like a procession of stately ships bound for the moon.

Scarlet, clear-blue, purple epauletted with gold. It is a parade of soldiers
sweeping up the avenue. Eight horses, eight Imperial harnesses,
four caparisoned postilions, a carriage with the Emperor's arms on the panels.
Ho, Porter, pop out your eyes, and no wonder. Where else under the Heavens
could you see such splendour!

They sit on a stone seat. The little man in the green coat of a Colonel
of Chasseurs, and the lady, beautiful as a satin seed-pod, and as pale.
The house has memories. The satin seed-pod holds his germs of Empire.
We will stay here, under the blue sky and the turreted white clouds.
She draws him; he feels her faded loveliness urge him to replenish it.
Her soft transparent texture woos his nervous fingering. He speaks to her
of debts, of resignation; of her children, and his; he promises that she
shall see the King of Rome; he says some harsh things and some pleasant.
But she is there, close to him, rose toned to amber, white shot with violet,
pungent to his nostrils as embalmed rose-leaves in a twilit room.

Suddenly the Emperor calls his carriage and rolls away
across the looping Seine.

VI

Crystal-blue brightness over the glass-houses. Crystal-blue streaks
and ripples over the lake. A macaw on a gilded perch screams;
they have forgotten to take out his dinner. The windows shake. Boom! Boom!
It is the rumbling of Prussian cannon beyond Pecq. Roses bloom at Malmaison.
Roses! Roses! Swimming above their leaves, rotting beneath them.
Fallen flowers strew the unraked walks. Fallen flowers for a fallen Emperor!
The General in charge of him draws back and watches. Snatches of music --
snarling, sneering music of bagpipes. They say a Scotch regiment
is besieging Saint-Denis. The Emperor wipes his face, or is it his eyes.
His tired eyes which see nowhere the grace they long for. Josephine!
Somebody asks him a question, he does not answer, somebody else does that.
There are voices, but one voice he does not hear, and yet he hears it
all the time. Josephine! The Emperor puts up his hand to screen his face.
The white light of a bright cloud spears sharply through the linden-trees.
`Vive l'Empereur!' There are troops passing beyond the wall,
troops which sing and call. Boom! A pink rose is jarred off its stem
and falls at the Emperor's feet.

'Very well. I go.' Where! Does it matter? There is no sword to clatter.
Nothing but soft brushing gravel and a gate which shuts with a click.

'Quick, fellow, don't spare your horses.'

A whip cracks, wheels turn, why burn one's eyes following a fleck of dust.

VII

Over the slate roof tall clouds, like ships of the line, pass along the sky.
The glass-houses glitter splotchily, for many of their lights are broken.
Roses bloom, fiery cinders quenching under damp weeds. Wreckage and misery,
and a trailing of petty deeds smearing over old recollections.

The musty rooms are empty and their shutters are closed, only in the gallery
there is a stuffed black swan, covered with dust. When you touch it,
the feathers come off and float softly to the ground. Through a chink
in the shutters, one can see the stately clouds crossing the sky
toward the Roman arches of the Marly Aqueduct.

Amy Lowell

March Evening

Blue through the window burns the twilight;
Heavy, through trees, blows the warm south wind.
Glistening, against the chill, gray sky light,
Wet, black branches are barred and entwined.

Sodden and spongy, the scarce-green grass plot
Dents into pools where a foot has been.
Puddles lie spilt in the road a mass, not
Of water, but steel, with its cold, hard sheen.

Faint fades the fire on the hearth, its embers
Scattering wide at a stronger gust.
Above, the old weathercock groans, but remembers
Creaking, to turn, in its centuried rust.

Dying, forlorn, in dreary sorrow,
Wrapping the mists round her withering form,
Day sinks down; and in darkness to-morrow
Travails to birth in the womb of the storm.

Amy Lowell

Market Day

White, glittering sunlight fills the market square,
Spotted and sprigged with shadows. Double rows
Of bartering booths spread out their tempting shows
Of globed and golden fruit, the morning air
Smells sweet with ripeness, on the pavement there
A wicker basket gapes and overflows
Spilling out cool, blue plums. The market glows,
And flaunts, and clatters in its busy care.
A stately minster at the northern side
Lifts its twin spires to the distant sky,
Pinnacled, carved and buttressed; through the wide
Arched doorway peals an organ, suddenly --
Crashing, triumphant in its pregnant tide,
Quenching the square in vibrant harmony.

Amy Lowell

Middle Age

Like black ice
Scrolled over with unintelligible patterns
by an ignorant skater
Is the dulled surface of my heart.

Amy Lowell

Mirage

How is it that, being gone, you fill my days,
And all the long nights are made glad by thee?
No loneliness is this, nor misery,
But great content that these should be the ways
Whereby the Fancy, dreaming as she strays,
Makes bright and present what she would would be.
And who shall say if the reality
Is not with dreams so pregnant. For delays
And hindrances may bar the wished-for end;
A thousand misconceptions may prevent
Our souls from coming near enough to blend;
Let me but think we have the same intent,
That each one needs to call the other, "friend!"
It may be vain illusion. I'm content.

Amy Lowell

Miscast I

I have whetted my brain until it is like a Damascus blade,
So keen that it nicks off the floating fringes of passers-by,
So sharp that the air would turn its edge
Were it to be twisted in flight.
Licking passions have bitten their arabesques into it,
And the mark of them lies, in and out,
Worm-like,
With the beauty of corroded copper patterning white steel.
My brain is curved like a scimitar,
And sighs at its cutting
Like a sickle mowing grass.

But of what use is all this to me!
I, who am set to crack stones
In a country lane!

Amy Lowell

Miscast II

My heart is like a cleft pomegranate
Bleeding crimson seeds
And dripping them on the ground.
My heart gapes because it is ripe and over-full,
And its seeds are bursting from it.

But how is this other than a torment to me!
I, who am shut up, with broken crockery,
In a dark closet!

Amy Lowell

Monadnock in Early Spring

Cloud-topped and splendid, dominating all
The little lesser hills which compass thee,
Thou standest, bright with April's buoyancy,
Yet holding Winter in some shaded wall
Of stern, steep rock; and startled by the call
Of Spring, thy trees flush with expectancy
And cast a cloud of crimson, silently,
Above thy snowy crevices where fall
Pale shrivelled oak leaves, while the snow beneath
Melts at their phantom touch. Another year
Is quick with import. Such each year has been.
Unmoved thou watchest all, and all bequeath
Some jewel to thy diadem of power,
Thou pledge of greater majesty unseen.

Amy Lowell

Music

The neighbour sits in his window and plays the flute.
From my bed I can hear him,
And the round notes flutter and tap about the room,
And hit against each other,
Blurring to unexpected chords.
It is very beautiful,
With the little flute-notes all about me,
In the darkness.

In the daytime,
The neighbour eats bread and onions with one hand
And copies music with the other.
He is fat and has a bald head,
So I do not look at him,
But run quickly past his window.
There is always the sky to look at,
Or the water in the well!

But when night comes and he plays his flute,
I think of him as a young man,
With gold seals hanging from his watch,
And a blue coat with silver buttons.
As I lie in my bed
The flute-notes push against my ears and lips,
And I go to sleep, dreaming.

Amy Lowell

New York at Night

A near horizon whose sharp jags
Cut brutally into a sky
Of leaden heaviness, and crags
Of houses lift their masonry
Ugly and foul, and chimneys lie
And snort, outlined against the gray
Of lowhung cloud. I hear the sigh
The goaded city gives, not day
Nor night can ease her heart, her anguished labours stay.

Below, straight streets, monotonous,
From north and south, from east and west,
Stretch glittering; and luminous
Above, one tower tops the rest
And holds aloft man's constant quest:
Time! Joyless emblem of the greed
Of millions, robber of the best
Which earth can give, the vulgar creed
Has seared upon the night its flaming ruthless screed.

O Night! Whose soothing presence brings
The quiet shining of the stars.
O Night! Whose cloak of darkness clings
So intimately close that scars
Are hid from our own eyes. Beggars
By day, our wealth is having night
To burn our souls before altars
Dim and tree-shadowed, where the light
Is shed from a young moon, mysteriously bright.

Where art thou hiding, where thy peace?
This is the hour, but thou art not.
Will waking tumult never cease?
Hast thou thy votary forgot?
Nature forsakes this man-begot
And festering wilderness, and now
The long still hours are here, no jot
Of dear communing do I know;
Instead the glaring, man-filled city groans below!

Amy Lowell

Nightmare: A Tale for an Autumn Evening

After a Print by George Cruikshank

It was a gusty night,
With the wind booming, and swooping,
Looping round corners,
Sliding over the cobble-stones,
Whipping and veering,
And careering over the roofs
Like a thousand clattering horses.
Mr. Spruggins had been dining in the city,
Mr. Spruggins was none too steady in his gait,
And the wind played ball with Mr. Spruggins
And laughed as it whistled past him.
It rolled him along the street,
With his little feet pit-a-patting on the flags of the sidewalk,
And his muffler and his coat-tails blown straight out behind him.
It bumped him against area railings,
And chuckled in his ear when he said 'Ouch!'
Sometimes it lifted him clear off his little patting feet
And bore him in triumph over three grey flagstones and a quarter.
The moon dodged in and out of clouds, winking.
It was all very unpleasant for Mr. Spruggins,
And when the wind flung him hard against his own front door
It was a relief,
Although the breath was quite knocked out of him.
The gas-lamp in front of the house flared up,
And the keyhole was as big as a barn door;
The gas-lamp flickered away to a sputtering blue star,
And the keyhole went out with it.
Such a stabbing, and jabbing,
And sticking, and picking,
And poking, and pushing, and prying
With that key;
And there is no denying that Mr. Spruggins rapped out an oath or two,
Rub-a-dub-dubbing them out to a real snare-drum roll.
But the door opened at last,
And Mr. Spruggins blew through it into his own hall
And slammed the door to so hard
That the knocker banged five times before it stopped.
Mr. Spruggins struck a light and lit a candle,
And all the time the moon winked at him through the window.
'Why couldn't you find the keyhole, Spruggins?'
Taunted the wind.
'I can find the keyhole.'
And the wind, thin as a wire,
Darted in and seized the candle flame
And knocked it over to one side
And pummelled it down - down - down -!
But Mr. Spruggins held the candle so close that it singed his chin,
And ran and stumbled up the stairs in a surprisingly agile manner,
For the wind through the keyhole kept saying, 'Spruggins! Spruggins!'
behind him.

The fire in his bedroom burned brightly.
The room with its crimson bed and window curtains
Was as red and glowing as a carbuncle.
It was still and warm.
There was no wind here, for the windows were fastened;
And no moon,
For the curtains were drawn.
The candle flame stood up like a pointed pear
In a wide brass dish.
Mr. Spruggins sighed with content;
He was safe at home.
The fire glowed - red and yellow roses
In the black basket of the grate -
And the bed with its crimson hangings
Seemed a great peony,
Wide open and placid.
Mr. Spruggins slipped off his top-coat and his muffler.
He slipped off his bottle-green coat
And his flowered waistcoat.
He put on a flannel dressing-gown,
And tied a peaked night-cap under his chin.
He wound his large gold watch
And placed it under his pillow.
Then he tiptoed over to the window and pulled back the curtain.
There was the moon dodging in and out of the clouds;
But behind him was his quiet candle.
There was the wind whisking along the street.
The window rattled, but it was fastened.
Did the wind say, 'Spruggins'?
All Mr. Spruggins heard was 'S-s-s-s-s -'
Dying away down the street.
He dropped the curtain and got into bed.
Martha had been in the last thing with the warming-pan;
The bed was warm,
And Mr. Spruggins sank into feathers,
With the familiar ticking of his watch just under his head.
Mr. Spruggins dozed.
He had forgotten to put out the candle,
But it did not make much difference as the fire was so bright . . .
Too bright!
The red and yellow roses pricked his eyelids,
They scorched him back to consciousness.
He tried to shift his position;
He could not move.
Something weighed him down,
He could not breathe.
He was gasping,
Pinned down and suffocating.
He opened his eyes.
The curtains of the window were flung back,
The fire and the candle were out,
And the room was filled with green moonlight.

And pressed against the window-pane
Was a wide, round face,
Winking - winking -
Solemnly dropping one eyelid after the other.
Tick - tock - went the watch under his pillow,
Wink - wink - went the face at the window.
It was not the fire roses which had pricked him,
It was the winking eyes.
Mr. Spruggins tried to bounce up;
He could not, because -
His heart flapped up into his mouth
And fell back dead.
On his chest was a fat pink pig,
On the pig a blackamoor
With a ten pound weight for a cap.
His mustachios kept curling up and down like angry snakes,
And his eyes rolled round and round,
With the pupils coming into sight, and disappearing,
And appearing again on the other side.
The holsters at his saddle-bow were two port bottles,
And a curved table-knife hung at his belt for a scimitar,
While a fork and a keg of spirits were strapped to the saddle behind.
He dug his spurs into the pig,
Which trampled and snorted,
And stamped its cloven feet deeper into Mr. Spruggins.
Then the green light on the floor began to undulate.
It heaved and hollowed,
It rose like a tide,
Sea-green,
Full of claws and scales
And wriggles.
The air above his bed began to move;
It weighed over him
In a mass of draggled feathers.
Not one lifted to stir the air.
They drooped and dripped
With a smell of port wine and brandy,
Closing down, slowly,
Trickling drops on the bed-quilt.
Suddenly the window fell in with a great scatter of glass,
And the moon burst into the room,
Sizzling - 'S-s-s-s-s - Spruggins! Spruggins!'
It rolled toward him,
A green ball of flame,
With two eyes in the center,
A red eye and a yellow eye,
Dropping their lids slowly,
One after the other.
Mr. Spruggins tried to scream,
But the blackamoor
Leapt off his pig
With a cry,

Drew his scimitar,
And plunged it into Mr. Spruggins's mouth.

Mr. Spruggins got up in the cold dawn
And remade the fire.
Then he crept back to bed
By the light which seeped in under the window curtains,
And lay there, shivering,
While the bells of St. George the Martyr chimed the quarter after seven.

Amy Lowell

November

The vine leaves against the brick walls of my house,
Are rusty and broken.
Dead leaves gather under the pine-trees,
The brittle boughs of lilac-bushes
Sweep against the stars.
And I sit under a lamp
Trying to write down the emptiness of my heart.
Even the cat will not stay with me,
But prefers the rain
Under the meagre shelter of a cellar window.

Amy Lowell

Nuit Blanche

I want no horns to rouse me up to-night,
And trumpets make too clamorous a ring
To fit my mood, it is so weary white
I have no wish for doing any thing.

A music coaxed from humming strings would please;
Not plucked, but drawn in creeping cadences
Across a sunset wall where some Marquise
Picks a pale rose amid strange silences.

Ghostly and vaporous her gown sweeps by
The twilight dusking wall, I hear her feet
Delaying on the gravel, and a sigh,
Briefly permitted, touches the air like sleet

And it is dark, I hear her feet no more.
A red moon leers beyond the lily-tank.
A drunken moon ogling a sycamore,
Running long fingers down its shining flank.

A lurching moon, as nimble as a clown,
Cuddling the flowers and trees which burn like glass.
Red, kissing lips, I feel you on my gown—
Kiss me, red lips, and then pass—pass.

Music, you are pitiless to-night.
And I so old, so cold, so languorously white.

Amy Lowell

Number 3 on the Docket

The lawyer, are you?
Well! I ain't got nothin' to say.
Nothin'!
I told the perlice I hadn't nothin'.
They know'd real well 'twas me.
Ther warn't no supposin',
Ketchin' me in the woods as they did,
An' me in my house dress.
Folks don't walk miles an' miles
In the drifted snow,
With no hat nor wrap on 'em
Ef everythin's all right, I guess.
All right? Ha! Ha! Ha!
Nothin' warn't right with me.
Never was.
Oh, Lord! Why did I do it?
Why ain't it yesterday, and Ed here agin?
Many's the time I've set up with him nights
When he had cramps, or rheumatizm, or somethin'.
I used ter nurse him same's ef he was a baby.
I wouldn't hurt him, I love him!
Don't you dare to say I killed him. 'Twarn't me!
Somethin' got aholt o' me. I couldn't help it.
Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do!
Yes, Sir.
No, Sir.
I beg your pardon, I - I -
Oh, I'm a wicked woman!
An' I'm desolate, desolate!
Why warn't I struck dead or paralyzed
Afore my hands done it.
Oh, my God, what shall I do!
No, Sir, ther ain't no extenuatin' circumstances,
An' I don't want none.
I want a bolt o' lightnin'
To strike me dead right now!
Oh, I'll tell yer.
But it won't make no diff'rence.
Nothin' will.
Yes, I killed him.
Why do yer make me say it?
It's cruel! Cruel!
I killed him because o' th' silence.
The long, long silence,
That watched all around me,
And he wouldn't break it.
I tried to make him,
Time an' agin,
But he was terrible taciturn, Ed was.
He never spoke 'cept when he had to,
An' then he'd only say 'yes' and 'no'.
You can't even guess what that silence was.

I'd hear it whisperin' in my ears,
An' I got frightened, 'twas so thick,
An' al'ays comin' back.
Ef Ed would ha' talked sometimes
It would ha' driven it away;
But he never would.
He didn't hear it same as I did.
You see, Sir,
Our farm was off'n the main road,
And set away back under the mountain;
And the village was seven mile off,
Measurin' after you'd got out o' our lane.
We didn't have no hired man,
'Cept in hayin' time;
An' Dane's place,
That was the nearest,
Was clear way 'tother side the mountain.
They used Marley post-office
An' ours was Benton.
Ther was a cart-track took yer to Dane's in Summer,
An' it warn't above two mile that way,
But it warn't never broke out Winters.
I used to dread the Winters.
Seem's ef I couldn't abear to see the golden-rod bloomin';
Winter'd come so quick after that.
You don't know what snow's like when yer with it
Day in an' day out.
Ed would be out all day loggin',
An' I set at home and look at the snow
Layin' over everythin';
It 'ud dazzle me blind,
Till it warn't white any more, but black as ink.
Then the quiet 'ud commence rushin' past my ears
Till I most went mad listenin' to it.
Many's the time I've dropped a pan on the floor
Jest to hear it clatter.
I was most frantic when dinner-time come
An' Ed was back from the woods.
I'd ha' give my soul to hear him speak.
But he'd never say a word till I asked him
Did he like the raised biscuits or whatever,
An' then sometimes he'd jest nod his answer.
Then he'd go out agin,
An' I'd watch him from the kitchin winder.
It seemed the woods come marchin' out to meet him
An' the trees 'ud press round him an' hustle him.
I got so I was scared o' th' trees.
I thought they come nearer,
Every day a little nearer,
Closin' up round the house.
I never went in t' th' woods Winters,
Though in Summer I liked 'em well enough.

It warn't so bad when my little boy was with us.
He used to go sleddin' and skatin',
An' every day his father fetched him to school in the pung
An' brought him back agin.
We scraped an' scraped fer Neddy,
We wanted him to have a education.
We sent him to High School,
An' then he went up to Boston to Technology.
He was a minin' engineer,
An' doin' real well,
A credit to his bringin' up.
But his very first position ther was an explosion in the mine.
And I'm glad! I'm glad!
He ain't here to see me now.
Neddy! Neddy!
I'm your mother still, Neddy.
Don't turn from me like that.
I can't abear it. I can't! I can't!
What did you say?
Oh, yes, Sir.
I'm here.
I'm very sorry,
I don't know what I'm sayin'.
No, Sir,
Not till after Neddy died.
'Twas the next Winter the silence come,
I don't remember noticin' it afore.
That was five year ago,
An' it's been gittin' worse an' worse.
I asked Ed to put in a telephone.
I thought ef I felt the whisperin' comin' on
I could ring up some o' th' folks.
But Ed wouldn't hear of it.
He said we'd paid so much for Neddy
We couldn't hardly git along as 'twas.
An' he never understood me wantin' to talk.
Well, this year was worse'n all the others;
We had a terrible spell o' stormy weather,
An' the snow lay so thick
You couldn't see the fences even.
Out o' doors was as flat as the palm o' my hand,
Ther warn't a hump or a holler
Fer as you could see.
It was so quiet
The snappin' o' the branches back in the wood-lot
Sounded like pistol shots.
Ed was out all day
Same as usual.
An' it seemed he talked less'n ever.
He didn't even say `Good-mornin'', once or twice,
An' jest nodded or shook his head when I asked him things.
On Monday he said he'd got to go over to Benton

Fer some oats.
I'd oughter ha' gone with him,
But 'twas washin' day
An' I was afeared the fine weather'd break,
An' I couldn't do my dryin'.
All my life I'd done my work punctual,
An' I couldn't fix my conscience
To go junketin' on a washin'-day.
I can't tell you what that day was to me.
It dragged an' dragged,
Fer ther warn't no Ed ter break it in the middle
Fer dinner.
Every time I stopped stirrin' the water
I heerd the whisperin' all about me.
I stopped oftener'n I should
To see ef 'twas still ther,
An' it al'ays was.
An' gittin' louder
It seemed ter me.
Once I threw up the winder to feel the wind.
That seemed most alive somehow.
But the woods looked so kind of menacin'
I closed it quick
An' started to mangle's hard's I could,
The squeakin' was comfortin'.
Well, Ed come home 'bout four.
I seen him down the road,
An' I run out through the shed inter th' barn
To meet him quicker.
I hollered out, `Hullo!'
But he didn't say nothin',
He jest drove right in
An' climbed out o' th' sleigh
An' commenced unharnessin'.
I asked him a heap o' questions;
Who he'd seed
An' what he'd done.
Once in a while he'd nod or shake,
But most o' th' time he didn't do nothin'.
'Twas gittin' dark then,
An' I was in a state,
With the loneliness
An' Ed payin' no attention
Like somethin' warn't livin'.
All of a sudden it come,
I don't know what,
But I jest couldn't stand no more.
It didn't seem 's though that was Ed,
An' it didn't seem as though I was me.
I had to break a way out somehow,
Somethin' was closin' in
An' I was stiflin'.

Ed's loggin' axe was ther,
An' I took it.
Oh, my God!
I can't see nothin' else afore me all the time.
I run out inter th' woods,
Seemed as ef they was pullin' me;
An' all the time I was wadin' through the snow
I seed Ed in front of me
Where I'd laid him.
An' I see him now.
There! There!
What you holdin' me fer?
I want ter go to Ed,
He's bleedin'.
Stop holdin' me.
I got to go.
I'm comin', Ed.
I'll be ther in a minit.
Oh, I'm so tired!
(Faints)

Amy Lowell

Obligation

Hold your apron wide
That I may pour my gifts into it,
So that scarcely shall your two arms hinder them
From falling to the ground.

I would pour them upon you
And cover you,
For greatly do I feel this need
Of giving you something,
Even these poor things.

Dearest of my Heart!

Amy Lowell

Off the Turnpike

Good ev'nin', Mis' Priest.
I jest stepped in to tell you Good-bye.
Yes, it's all over.
All my things is packed
An' every last one o' them boxes
Is on Bradley's team
Bein' hauled over to th' depot.
No, I ain't goin' back agin.
I'm stoppin' over to French's fer to-night,
And goin' down first train in th' mornin'.
Yes, it do seem kinder queer
Not to be goin' to see Cherry's Orchard no more,
But Land Sakes! When a change's comin',
Why, I al'ays say it can't come too quick.
Now, that's real kind o' you,
Your doughnuts is always so tasty.
Yes, I'm goin' to Chicago,
To my niece,
She's married to a fine man, hardware business,
An' doin' real well, she tells me.
Lizzie's be'n at me to go out ther for the longest while.
She ain't got no kith nor kin to Chicago, you know
She's rented me a real nice little flat,
Same house as hers,
An' I'm goin' to try that city livin' folks say's so pleasant.
Oh, yes, he was real generous,
Paid me a sight o' money fer the Orchard;
I told him 'twouldn't yield nothin' but stones,
But he ain't farmin' it.
Lor', no, Mis' Priest,
He's jest took it to set and look at the view.
Mebbe he wouldn't be so stuck on the view
Ef he'd seed it every mornin' and night for forty year
Same's as I have.
I dessay it's pretty enough,
But it's so pressed into me
I c'n see't with my eyes shut.
No. I ain't cold, Mis' Priest,
Don't shut th' door.
I'll be all right in a minit.
But I ain't a mite sorry to leave that view.
Well, mebbe 'tis queer to feel so,
An' mebbe 'taint.
My! But that tea's revivin'.
Old things ain't always pleasant things, Mis' Priest.
No, no, I don't cal'late on comin' back,
That's why I'd ruther be to Chicago,
Boston's too near.
It ain't cold, Mis' Priest,
It's jest my thoughts.
I ain't sick, only -
Mis' Priest, ef you've nothin' ter take yer time,

An' have a mind to listen,
Ther's somethin' I'd like ter speak about
I ain't never mentioned it,
But I'd like to tell yer 'fore I go.
Would you mind lowerin' them shades,
Fall twilight's awful grey,
An' that fire's real cosy with the shades drawed.
Well, I guess folks about here think I've be'n dret'ful onsociable.
You needn't say 'taint so, 'cause I know diff'rent.
An' what's more, it's true.
Well, the reason is I've be'n scared out o' my life.
Scared ev'ry minit o' th' time, fer eight year.
Eight mortal year 'tis, come next June.
'Twas on the eighteenth o' June,
Six months after I'd buried my husband,
That somethin' happened ter me.
Mebbe you'll mind that afore that
I was a cheery body.
Hiram was too,
Al'ays liked to ask a neighbor in,
An' ev'n when he died,
Barrin' low sperrits, I warn't averse to seein' nobody.
But that eighteenth o' June changed ev'rythin'.
I was doin' most o' th' farmwork myself,
With jest a hired boy, Clarence King, 'twas,
Comin' in fer an hour or two.
Well, that eighteenth o' June
I was goin' round,
Lockin' up and seein' to things 'fore I went to bed.
I was jest steppin' out t' th' barn,
Goin' round outside 'stead o' through the shed,
'Cause there was such a sight o' moonlight
Somehow or another I thought 'twould be pretty outdoors.
I got settled for pretty things that night, I guess.
I ain't stuck on 'em no more.
Well, them laylock bushes side o' th' house
Was real lovely.
Glitt'rin' and shakin' in the moonlight,
An' the smell o' them rose right up
An' most took my breath away.
The colour o' the spikes was all faded out,
They never keep their colour when the moon's on 'em,
But the smell fair 'toxicated me.
I was al'ays partial to a sweet scent,
An' I went close up t' th' bushes
So's to put my face right into a flower.
Mis' Priest, jest's I got breathin' in that laylock bloom
I saw, layin' right at my feet,
A man's hand!
It was as white's the side o' th' house,
And sparklin' like that lum'nous paint they put on gate-posts.
I screamed right out,

I couldn't help it,
An' I could hear my scream
Goin' over an' over
In that echo be'ind th' barn.
Hearin' it agin an' agin like that
Scared me so, I dar'sn't scream any more.
I jest stood ther,
And looked at that hand.
I thought the echo'd begin to hammer like my heart,
But it didn't.
There was only th' wind,
Sighin' through the laylock leaves,
An' slappin' 'em up agin the house.
Well, I guess I looked at that hand
Most ten minits,
An' it never moved,
Jest lay there white as white.
After a while I got to thinkin' that o' course
'Twas some drunken tramp over from Redfield.
That calmed me some,
An' I commenced to think I'd better git him out
From under them laylocks.
I planned to drag him in t' th' barn
An' lock him in ther till Clarence come in th' mornin'.
I got so mad thinkin' o' that all-fired brazen tramp
Asleep in my laylocks,
I jest stooped down and grabbed th' hand and give it an awful pull.
Then I bumped right down settin' on the ground.
Mis' Priest, ther warn't no body come with the hand.
No, it ain't cold, it's jest that I can't abear thinkin' of it,
Ev'n now.
I'll take a sip o' tea.
Thank you, Mis' Priest, that's better.
I'd ruther finish now I've begun.
Thank you, jest the same.
I dropped the hand's ef it'd be'n red hot
'Stead o' ice cold.
Fer a minit or two I jest laid on that grass
Pantin'.
Then I up and run to them laylocks
An' pulled 'em every which way.
True es I'm settin' here, Mis' Priest,
Ther warn't nothin' ther.
I peeked an' pryed all about 'em,
But ther warn't no man ther
Neither livin' nor dead.
But the hand was ther all right,
Upside down, the way I'd dropped it,
And glist'nin' fit to dazzle yer.
I don't know how I done it,
An' I don't know why I done it,
But I wanted to git that dret'ful hand out o' sight

I got in t' th' barn, somehow,
An' felt roun' till I got a spade.
I couldn't stop fer a lantern,
Besides, the moonlight was bright enough in all conscience.
Then I scooped that awful thing up in th' spade.
I had a sight o' trouble doin' it.
It slid off, and tipped over, and I couldn't bear
Ev'n to touch it with my foot to prop it,
But I done it somehow.
Then I carried it off be'ind the barn,
Clost to an old apple-tree
Where you couldn't see from the house,
An' I buried it,
Good an' deep.

I don't rec'lect nothin' more o' that night.
Clarence woke me up in th' mornin',
Hollerin' fer me to come down and set th' milk.
When he'd gone,
I stole roun' to the apple-tree
And seed the earth all new turned
Where I left it in my hurry.
I did a heap o' gardenin'
That mornin'.
I couldn't cut no big sods
Fear Clarence would notice and ask me what I wanted 'em fer,
So I got teeny bits o' turf here and ther,
And no one couldn't tell ther'd be'n any diggin'
When I got through.
They was awful days after that, Mis' Priest,
I used ter go every mornin' and poke about them bushes,
An' up and down the fence,
Ter find the body that hand come off of.
But I couldn't never find nothin'.
I'd lay awake nights
Hearin' them laylocks blowin' and whiskin'.
At last I had Clarence cut 'em down
An' make a big bonfire of 'em.
I told him the smell made me sick,
An' that warn't no lie,
I can't abear the smell on 'em now;
An' no wonder, es you say.
I fretted somethin' awful 'bout that hand
I wondered, could it be Hiram's,
But folks don't rob graveyards hereabouts.
Besides, Hiram's hands warn't that awful, starin' white.
I give up seein' people,
I was afeared I'd say somethin'.
You know what folks thought o' me
Better'n I do, I dessay,
But mebbe now you'll see I couldn't do nothin' diff'rent.
But I stuck it out,

I warn't goin' to be downed
By no loose hand, no matter how it come ther
But that ain't the worst, Mis' Priest,
Not by a long ways.
Two year ago, Mr. Densmore made me an offer for Cherry's Orchard.
Well, I'd got used to th' thought o' bein' sort o' blighted,
An' I warn't scared no more.
Lived down my fear, I guess.
I'd kinder got used to th' thought o' that awful night,
And I didn't mope much about it.
Only I never went out o' doors by moonlight;
That stuck.
Well, when Mr. Densmore's offer come,
I started thinkin' 'bout the place
An' all the things that had gone on ther.
Thinks I, I guess I'll go and see where I put the hand.
I was foolhardy with the long time that had gone by.
I know'd the place real well,
Fer I'd put it right in between two o' the apple roots.
I don't know what possessed me, Mis' Priest,
But I kinder wanted to know
That the hand had been flesh and bone, anyway.
It had sorter bothered me, thinkin' I might ha' imagined it.
I took a mornin' when the sun was real pleasant and warm;
I guessed I wouldn't jump for a few old bones.
But I did jump, somethin' wicked.
Ther warn't no bones!
Ther warn't nothin'!
Not ev'n the gold ring I'd minded bein' on the little finger.
I don't know ef ther ever was anythin'.
I've worried myself sick over it.
I be'n diggin' and diggin' day in and day out
Till Clarence ketched me at it.
Oh, I know'd real well what you all thought,
An' I ain't sayin' you're not right,
But I ain't goin' to end in no county 'sylum
If I c'n help it.
The shiv'rin' fits come on me sudden like.
I know 'em, don't you trouble.
I've fretted considerable about the 'sylum,
I guess I be'n frettin' all the time I ain't be'n diggin'.
But anyhow I can't dig to Chicago, can I?
Thank you, Mis' Priest,
I'm better now. I only dropped in in passin'.
I'll jest be steppin' along down to French's.
No, I won't be seein' nobody in the mornin',
It's a pretty early start.
Don't you stand ther, Mis' Priest,
The wind'll blow yer lamp out,
An' I c'n see easy, I got aholt o' the gate now.
I ain't a mite tired, thank you.
Good-night.

Amy Lowell

On Carpaccio's Picture

Swept, clean, and still, across the polished floor
From some unshuttered casement, hid from sight,
The level sunshine slants, its greater light
Quenching the little lamp which pallid, poor,
Flickering, unreplenished, at the door
Has striven against darkness the long night.
Dawn fills the room, and penetrating, bright,
The silent sunbeams through the window pour.
And she lies sleeping, ignorant of Fate,
Enmeshed in listless dreams, her soul not yet
Ripened to bear the purport of this day.
The morning breeze scarce stirs the coverlet,
A shadow falls across the sunlight; wait!
A lark is singing as he flies away.

Amy Lowell

Opal

You are ice and fire,
The touch of you burns my hands like snow.
You are cold and flame.
You are the crimson of amaryllis,
The silver of moon-touched magnolias.
When I am with you,
My heart is a frozen pond
Gleaming with agitated torches.

Submitted by Venus

Amy Lowell

Patience

Be patient with you?
When the stooping sky
Leans down upon the hills
And tenderly, as one who soothing stills
An anguish, gathers earth to lie
Embraced and girdled. Do the sun-filled men
Feel patience then?

Be patient with you?
When the snow-girt earth
Cracks to let through a spurt
Of sudden green, and from the muddy dirt
A snowdrop leaps, how mark its worth
To eyes frost-hardened, and do weary men
Feel patience then?

Be patient with you?
When pain's iron bars
Their rivets tighten, stern
To bend and break their victims; as they turn,
Hopeless, there stand the purple jars
Of night to spill oblivion. Do these men
Feel patience then?

Be patient with you?
You! My sun and moon!
My basketful of flowers!
My money-bag of shining dreams! My hours,
Windless and still, of afternoon!
You are my world and I your citizen.
What meaning can have patience then?

Amy Lowell

Patterns

I walk down the garden-paths,
And all the daffodils
Are blowing, and the bright blue squills.
I walk down the patterned garden-paths
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
With my powdered hair and jeweled fan,
I too am a rare
Pattern. As I wander down
The garden-paths.
My dress is richly figured,
And the train
Makes a pink and silver stain
On the gravel, and the thrift
Of the borders.
Just a plate of current fashion,
Tripping by in high-heeled, ribboned shoes.
Not a softness anywhere about me,
Only whalebone and brocade.
And I sink on a seat in the shade
Of a lime tree. For my passion
Wars against the stiff brocade.
The daffodils and squills
Flutter in the breeze
As they please.
And I weep;
For the lime-tree is in blossom
And one small flower has dropped upon my bosom.

And the plashing of waterdrops
In the marble fountain
Comes down the garden-paths.
The dripping never stops.
Underneath my stiffened gown
Is the softness of a woman bathing in a marble basin,
A basin in the midst of hedges grown
So thick, she cannot see her lover hiding,
But she guesses he is near,
And the sliding of the water
Seems the stroking of a dear
Hand upon her.
What is Summer in a fine brocaded gown!
I should like to see it lying in a heap upon the ground.
All the pink and silver crumpled up on the ground.

I would be the pink and silver as I ran along the paths,
And he would stumble after,
Bewildered by my laughter.
I should see the sun flashing from his sword-hilt and the
buckles on his shoes.
I would choose
To lead him in a maze along the patterned paths,
A bright and laughing maze for my heavy-booted lover.

Till he caught me in the shade,
And the buttons of his waistcoat bruised my body as he
clasped me,
Aching, melting, unafraid.
With the shadows of the leaves and the sundrops,
And the plopping of the waterdrops,
All about us in the open afternoon--
I am very like to swoon
With the weight of this brocade,
For the sun sifts through the shade.

Underneath the fallen blossom
In my bosom,
Is a letter I have hid.
It was brought to me this morning by a rider from the
Duke.
"Madam, we regret to inform you that Lord Hartwell
Died in action Thursday se'nnight."
As I read it in the white, morning sunlight,
The letters squirmed like snakes.
"Any answer, Madam," said my footman.
"No," I told him.
"See that the messenger takes some refreshment.
No, no answer."
And I walked into the garden,
Up and down the patterned paths,
In my stiff, correct brocade.
The blue and yellow flowers stood up proudly in the sun,
Each one.
I stood upright too,
Held rigid to the pattern
By the stiffness of my gown.
Up and down I walked,
Up and down.

In a month he would have been my husband.
In a month, here, underneath this lime,
We would have broke the pattern;
He for me, and I for him,
He as Colonel, I as Lady,
On this shady seat.
He had a whim
That sunlight carried blessing.
And I answered, "It shall be as you have said."
Now he is dead.

In Summer and in Winter I shall walk
Up and down
The patterned garden-paths
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
The squills and daffodils
Will give place to pillared roses, and to asters, and to snow.

I shall go
Up and down
In my gown.
Gorgeously arrayed,
Boned and stayed.
And the softness of my body will be guarded from embrace
By each button, hook, and lace.
For the man who should loose me is dead,
Fighting with the Duke in Flanders,
In a pattern called a war.
Christ! What are patterns for?

Amy Lowell

Penumbra

As I sit here in the quiet Summer night,
Suddenly, from the distant road, there comes
The grind and rush of an electric car.
And, from still farther off,
An engine puffs sharply,
Followed by the drawn-out shunting scrape of a freight train.
These are the sounds that men make
In the long business of living.
They will always make such sounds,
Years after I am dead and cannot hear them.

Sitting here in the Summer night,
I think of my death.
What will it be like for you then?
You will see my chair
With its bright chintz covering
Standing in the afternoon sunshine,
As now.
You will see my narrow table
At which I have written so many hours.
My dogs will push their noses into your hand,
And ask—ask—
Clinging to you with puzzled eyes.

The old house will still be here,
The old house which has known me since the beginning.
The walls which have watched me while I played:
Soldiers, marbles, paper-dolls,
Which have protected me and my books.
The front-door will gaze down among the old trees
Where, as a child, I hunted ghosts and Indians;
It will look out on the wide gravel sweep
Where I rolled my hoop,
And at the rhododendron bushes
Where I caught black-spotted butterflies.

The old house will guard you,
As I have done.
Its walls and rooms will hold you,
And I shall whisper my thoughts and fancies
As always,
From the pages of my books.

You will sit here, some quiet Summer night,
Listening to the puffing trains,
But you will not be lonely,
For these things are a part of me.
And my love will go on speaking to you

Through the chairs, and the tables, and the pictures,
As it does now through my voice,
And the quick, necessary touch of my hand.

Amy Lowell

Petals

Life is a stream
On which we strew
Petal by petal the flower of our heart;
The end lost in dream,
They float past our view,
We only watch their glad, early start.

Freighted with hope,
Crimsoned with joy,
We scatter the leaves of our opening rose;
Their widening scope,
Their distant employ,
We never shall know. And the stream as it flows
Sweeps them away,
Each one is gone
Ever beyond into infinite ways.
We alone stay
While years hurry on,
The flower fared forth, though its fragrance still stays.

Amy Lowell

Pickthorn Manor

I

How fresh the Dartle's little waves that day!
A steely silver, underlined with blue,
And flashing where the round clouds, blown away,
Let drop the yellow sunshine to gleam through
And tip the edges of the waves with shifts
And spots of whitest fire, hard like gems
Cut from the midnight moon they were, and sharp
As wind through leafless stems.
The Lady Eunice walked between the drifts
Of blooming cherry-trees, and watched the rifts
Of clouds drawn through the river's azure warp.

II

Her little feet tapped softly down the path.
Her soul was listless; even the morning breeze
Fluttering the trees and strewing a light swath
Of fallen petals on the grass, could please
Her not at all. She brushed a hair aside
With a swift move, and a half-angry frown.
She stopped to pull a daffodil or two,
And held them to her gown
To test the colours; put them at her side,
Then at her breast, then loosened them and tried
Some new arrangement, but it would not do.

III

A lady in a Manor-house, alone,
Whose husband is in Flanders with the Duke
Of Marlborough and Prince Eugene, she's grown
Too apathetic even to rebuke
Her idleness. What is she on this Earth?
No woman surely, since she neither can
Be wed nor single, must not let her mind
Build thoughts upon a man
Except for hers. Indeed that were no dearth
Were her Lord here, for well she knew his worth,
And when she thought of him her eyes were kind.

IV

Too lately wed to have forgot the wooing.
Too unaccustomed as a bride to feel
Other than strange delight at her wife's doing.
Even at the thought a gentle blush would steal
Over her face, and then her lips would frame
Some little word of loving, and her eyes
Would brim and spill their tears, when all they saw
Was the bright sun, slantwise

Through burgeoning trees, and all the morning's flame
Burning and quivering round her. With quick shame
She shut her heart and bent before the law.

V

He was a soldier, she was proud of that.
This was his house and she would keep it well.
His honour was in fighting, hers in what
He'd left her here in charge of. Then a spell
Of conscience sent her through the orchard spying
Upon the gardeners. Were their tools about?
Were any branches broken? Had the weeds
Been duly taken out
Under the 'spaliered pears, and were these lying
Nailed snug against the sunny bricks and drying
Their leaves and satisfying all their needs?

VI

She picked a stone up with a little pout,
Stones looked so ill in well-kept flower-borders.
Where should she put it? All the paths about
Were strewn with fair, red gravel by her orders.
No stone could mar their sifted smoothness. So
She hurried to the river. At the edge
She stood a moment charmed by the swift blue
Beyond the river sedge.
She watched it curdling, crinkling, and the snow
Purfled upon its wave-tops. Then, 'Hullo,
My Beauty, gently, or you'll wriggle through.'

VII

The Lady Eunice caught a willow spray
To save herself from tumbling in the shallows
Which rippled to her feet. Then straight away
She peered down stream among the budding sallows.
A youth in leather breeches and a shirt
Of finest broidered lawn lay out upon
An overhanging bole and deftly swayed
A well-hooked fish which shone
In the pale lemon sunshine like a spurt
Of silver, bowed and damascened, and girt
With crimson spots and moons which waned and played.

VIII

The fish hung circled for a moment, ringed
And bright; then flung itself out, a thin blade
Of spotted lightning, and its tail was winged
With chipped and sparkled sunshine. And the shade

Broke up and splintered into shafts of light
Wheeling about the fish, who churned the air
And made the fish-line hum, and bent the rod
Almost to snapping. Care
The young man took against the twigs, with slight,
Deft movements he kept fish and line in tight
Obedience to his will with every prod.

IX

He lay there, and the fish hung just beyond.
He seemed uncertain what more he should do.
He drew back, pulled the rod to correspond,
Tossed it and caught it; every time he threw,
He caught it nearer to the point. At last
The fish was near enough to touch. He paused.
Eunice knew well the craft - 'What's got the thing!'
She cried. 'What can have caused -
Where is his net? The moment will be past.
The fish will wriggle free.' She stopped aghast.
He turned and bowed. One arm was in a sling.

X

The broad, black ribbon she had thought his basket
Must hang from, held instead a useless arm.
'I do not wonder, Madam, that you ask it.'
He smiled, for she had spoke aloud. 'The charm
Of trout fishing is in my eyes enhanced
When you must play your fish on land as well.'
'How will you take him?' Eunice asked. 'In truth
I really cannot tell.
'Twas stupid of me, but it simply chanced
I never thought of that until he glanced
Into the branches. 'Tis a bit uncouth.'

XI

He watched the fish against the blowing sky,
Writhing and glittering, pulling at the line.
'The hook is fast, I might just let him die,'
He mused. 'But that would jar against your fine
Sense of true sportsmanship, I know it would,'
Cried Eunice. 'Let me do it.' Swift and light
She ran towards him. 'It is so long now
Since I have felt a bite,
I lost all heart for everything.' She stood,
Supple and strong, beside him, and her blood
Tingled her lissom body to a glow.

XII

She quickly seized the fish and with a stone
Ended its flurry, then removed the hook,
Untied the fly with well-poised fingers. Done,
She asked him where he kept his fishing-book.
He pointed to a coat flung on the ground.
She searched the pockets, found a shagreen case,
Replaced the fly, noticed a golden stamp
Filling the middle space.
Two letters half rubbed out were there, and round
About them gay rococo flowers wound
And tossed a spray of roses to the clamp.

XIII

The Lady Eunice puzzled over these.
'G. D.' the young man gravely said. 'My name
Is Gervase Deane. Your servant, if you please.'
'Oh, Sir, indeed I know you, for your fame
For exploits in the field has reached my ears.
I did not know you wounded and returned.'
'But just come back, Madam. A silly prick
To gain me such unearned
Holiday making. And you, it appears,
Must be Sir Everard's lady. And my fears
At being caught a-trespassing were quick.'

XIV

He looked so rueful that she laughed out loud.
'You are forgiven, Mr. Deane. Even more,
I offer you the fishing, and am proud
That you should find it pleasant from this shore.
Nobody fishes now, my husband used
To angle daily, and I too with him.
He loved the spotted trout, and pike, and dace.
He even had a whim
That flies my fingers tied swiftly confused
The greater fish. And he must be excused,
Love weaves odd fancies in a lonely place.'

XV

She sighed because it seemed so long ago,
Those days with Everard; unthinking took
The path back to the orchard. Strolling so
She walked, and he beside her. In a nook
Where a stone seat withdrew beneath low boughs,
Full-blossomed, hummed with bees, they sat them down.
She questioned him about the war, the share
Her husband had, and grown
Eager by his clear answers, straight allows
Her hidden hopes and fears to speak, and rouse

Her numbed love, which had slumbered unaware.

XVI

Under the orchard trees daffodils danced
And jostled, turning sideways to the wind.
A dropping cherry petal softly glanced
Over her hair, and slid away behind.
At the far end through twisted cherry-trees
The old house glowed, geranium-hued, with bricks
Bloomed in the sun like roses, low and long,
Gabled, and with quaint tricks
Of chimneys carved and fretted. Out of these
Grey smoke was shaken, which the faint Spring breeze
Tossed into nothing. Then a thrush's song

XVII

Needled its way through sound of bees and river.
The notes fell, round and starred, between young leaves,
Trilled to a spiral lilt, stopped on a quiver.
The Lady Eunice listens and believes.
Gervase has many tales of her dear Lord,
His bravery, his knowledge, his charmed life.
She quite forgets who's speaking in the gladness
Of being this man's wife.
Gervase is wounded, grave indeed, the word
Is kindly said, but to a softer chord
She strings her voice to ask with wistful sadness,

XVIII

'And is Sir Everard still unscathed? I fain
Would know the truth.' 'Quite well, dear Lady, quite.'
She smiled in her content. 'So many slain,
You must forgive me for a little fright.'
And he forgave her, not alone for that,
But because she was fingering his heart,
Pressing and squeezing it, and thinking so
Only to ease her smart
Of painful, apprehensive longing. At
Their feet the river swirled and chucked. They sat
An hour there. The thrush flew to and fro.

XIX

The Lady Eunice supped alone that day,
As always since Sir Everard had gone,
In the oak-panelled parlour, whose array
Of faded portraits in carved mouldings shone.
Warriors and ladies, armoured, ruffed, peruked.
Van Dykes with long, slim fingers; Holbeins, stout

And heavy-featured; and one Rubens dame,
A peony just burst out,
With flaunting, crimson flesh. Eunice rebuked
Her thoughts of gentler blood, when these had duked
It with the best, and scorned to change their name.

XX

A sturdy family, and old besides,
Much older than her own, the Earls of Crowe.
Since Saxon days, these men had sought their brides
Among the highest born, but always so,
Taking them to themselves, their wealth, their lands,
But never their titles. Stern perhaps, but strong,
The Framptons fed their blood from richest streams,
Scorning the common throng.
Gazing upon these men, she understands
The toughness of the web wrought from such strands
And pride of Everard colours all her dreams.

XXI

Eunice forgets to eat, watching their faces
Flickering in the wind-blown candle's shine.
Blue-coated lackeys tiptoe to their places,
And set out plates of fruit and jugs of wine.
The table glitters black like Winter ice.
The Dartle's rushing, and the gentle clash
Of blossomed branches, drifts into her ears.
And through the casement sash
She sees each cherry stem a pointed slice
Of splintered moonlight, topped with all the spice
And shimmer of the blossoms it uprears.

XXII

'In such a night -' she laid the book aside,
She could outnight the poet by thinking back.
In such a night she came here as a bride.
The date was graven in the almanack
Of her clasped memory. In this very room
Had Everard uncloaked her. On this seat
Had drawn her to him, bade her note the trees,
How white they were and sweet
And later, coming to her, her dear groom,
Her Lord, had lain beside her in the gloom
Of moon and shade, and whispered her to ease.

XXIII

Her little taper made the room seem vast,
Caverned and empty. And her beating heart

Rapped through the silence all about her cast
Like some loud, dreadful death-watch taking part
In this sad vigil. Slowly she undrest,
Put out the light and crept into her bed.
The linen sheets were fragrant, but so cold.
And brimming tears she shed,
Sobbing and quivering in her barren nest,
Her weeping lips into the pillow prest,
Her eyes sealed fast within its smothering fold.

XXIV

The morning brought her a more stoic mind,
And sunshine struck across the polished floor.
She wondered whether this day she should find
Gervase a-fishing, and so listen more,
Much more again, to all he had to tell.
And he was there, but waiting to begin
Until she came. They fished awhile, then went
To the old seat within
The cherry's shade. He pleased her very well
By his discourse. But ever he must dwell
Upon Sir Everard. Each incident

XXV

Must be related and each term explained.
How troops were set in battle, how a siege
Was ordered and conducted. She complained
Because he bungled at the fall of Liege.
The curious names of parts of forts she knew,
And aired with conscious pride her ravelins,
And counterscarps, and lunes. The day drew on,
And his dead fish's fins
In the hot sunshine turned a mauve-green hue.
At last Gervase, guessing the hour, withdrew.
But she sat long in still oblivion.

XXVI

Then he would bring her books, and read to her
The poems of Dr. Donne, and the blue river
Would murmur through the reading, and a stir
Of birds and bees make the white petals shiver,
And one or two would flutter prone and lie
Spotting the smooth-clipped grass. The days went by
Threaded with talk and verses. Green leaves pushed
Through blossoms stubbornly.
Gervase, unconscious of dishonesty,
Fell into strong and watchful loving, free
He thought, since always would his lips be hushed.

XXVII

But lips do not stay silent at command,
And Gervase strove in vain to order his.
Luckily Eunice did not understand
That he but read himself aloud, for this
Their friendship would have snapped. She treated him
And spoilt him like a brother. It was now
'Gervase' and 'Eunice' with them, and he dined
Whenever she'd allow,
In the oak parlour, underneath the dim
Old pictured Framptons, opposite her slim
Figure, so bright against the chair behind.

XXVIII

Eunice was happier than she had been
For many days, and yet the hours were long.
All Gervase told to her but made her lean
More heavily upon the past. Among
Her hopes she lived, even when she was giving
Her morning orders, even when she twined
Nosegays to deck her parlours. With the thought
Of Everard, her mind
Solaced its solitude, and in her striving
To do as he would wish was all her living.
She welcomed Gervase for the news he brought.

XXIX

Black-hearts and white-hearts, bubbled with the sun,
Hid in their leaves and knocked against each other.
Eunice was standing, panting with her run
Up to the tool-house just to get another
Basket. All those which she had brought were filled,
And still Gervase pelted her from above.
The buckles of his shoes flashed higher and higher
Until his shoulders strove
Quite through the top. 'Eunice, your spirit's filled
This tree. White-hearts!' He shook, and cherries spilled
And spat out from the leaves like falling fire.

XXX

The wide, sun-winged June morning spread itself
Over the quiet garden. And they packed
Full twenty baskets with the fruit. 'My shelf
Of cordials will be stored with what it lacked.
In future, none of us will drink strong ale,
But cherry-brandy.' 'Vastly good, I vow,'
And Gervase gave the tree another shake.
The cherries seemed to flow

Out of the sky in cloudfuls, like blown hail.
Swift Lady Eunice ran, her farthingale,
Unnoticed, tangling in a fallen rake.

XXXI

She gave a little cry and fell quite prone
In the long grass, and lay there very still.
Gervase leapt from the tree at her soft moan,
And kneeling over her, with clumsy skill
Unloosed her bodice, fanned her with his hat,
And his unguarded lips pronounced his heart.
'Eunice, my Dearest Girl, where are you hurt?'
His trembling fingers dart
Over her limbs seeking some wound. She strove
To answer, opened wide her eyes, above
Her knelt Sir Everard, with face alert.

XXXII

Her eyelids fell again at that sweet sight,
'My Love!' she murmured, 'Dearest! Oh, my Dear!'
He took her in his arms and bore her right
And tenderly to the old seat, and 'Here
I have you mine at last,' she said, and swooned
Under his kisses. When she came once more
To sight of him, she smiled in comfort knowing
Herself laid as before
Close covered on his breast. And all her glowing
Youth answered him, and ever nearer growing
She twined him in her arms and soft festooned

XXXIII

Herself about him like a flowering vine,
Drawing his lips to cling upon her own.
A ray of sunlight pierced the leaves to shine
Where her half-opened bodice let be shown
Her white throat fluttering to his soft caress,
Half-gasping with her gladness. And her pledge
She whispers, melting with delight. A twig
Snaps in the hornbeam hedge.
A cackling laugh tears through the quietness.
Eunice starts up in terrible distress.
'My God! What's that?' Her staring eyes are big.

XXXIV

Revulsed emotion set her body shaking
As though she had an ague. Gervase swore,
Jumped to his feet in such a dreadful taking

His face was ghastly with the look it wore.
Crouching and slipping through the trees, a man
In worn, blue livery, a humpbacked thing,
Made off. But turned every few steps to gaze
At Eunice, and to fling
Vile looks and gestures back. 'The ruffian!
By Christ's Death! I will split him to a span
Of hog's thongs.' She grasped at his sleeve, 'Gervase!

XXXV

What are you doing here? Put down that sword,
That's only poor old Tony, crazed and lame.
We never notice him. With my dear Lord
I ought not to have minded that he came.
But, Gervase, it surprises me that you
Should so lack grace to stay here.' With one hand
She held her gaping bodice to conceal
Her breast. 'I must demand
Your instant absence. Everard, but new
Returned, will hardly care for guests. Adieu.'
'Eunice, you're mad.' His brain began to reel.

XXXVI

He tried again to take her, tried to twist
Her arms about him. Truly, she had said
Nothing should ever part them. In a mist
She pushed him from her, clasped her aching head
In both her hands, and rocked and sobbed aloud.
'Oh! Where is Everard? What does this mean?
So lately come to leave me thus alone!'
But Gervase had not seen
Sir Everard. Then, gently, to her bowed
And sickening spirit, he told of her proud
Surrender to him. He could hear her moan.

XXXVII

Then shame swept over her and held her numb,
Hiding her anguished face against the seat.
At last she rose, a woman stricken - dumb -
And trailed away with slowly-dragging feet.
Gervase looked after her, but feared to pass
The barrier set between them. All his rare
Joy broke to fragments - worse than that, unreal.
And standing lonely there,
His swollen heart burst out, and on the grass
He flung himself and wept. He knew, alas!
The loss so great his life could never heal.

XXXVIII

For days thereafter Eunice lived retired,
Waited upon by one old serving-maid.
She would not leave her chamber, and desired
Only to hide herself. She was afraid
Of what her eyes might trick her into seeing,
Of what her longing urge her then to do.
What was this dreadful illness solitude
Had tortured her into?
Her hours went by in a long constant fleeing
The thought of that one morning. And her being
Bruised itself on a happening so rude.

XXXIX

It grew ripe Summer, when one morning came
Her tirewoman with a letter, printed
Upon the seal were the Deane crest and name.
With utmost gentleness, the letter hinted
His understanding and his deep regret.
But would she not permit him once again
To pay her his profound respects? No word
Of what had passed should pain
Her resolution. Only let them get
Back the old comradeship. Her eyes were wet
With starting tears, now truly she deplored

XL

His misery. Yes, she was wrong to keep
Away from him. He hardly was to blame.
'Twas she - she shuddered and began to weep.
'Twas her fault! Hers! Her everlasting shame
Was that she suffered him, whom not at all
She loved. Poor Boy! Yes, they must still be friends.
She owed him that to keep the balance straight.
It was such poor amends
Which she could make for rousing hopes to gall
Him with their unfulfilment. Tragical
It was, and she must leave him desolate.

XLI

Hard silence he had forced upon his lips
For long and long, and would have done so still
Had not she - here she pressed her finger tips
Against her heavy eyes. Then with forced will
She wrote that he might come, sealed with the arms
Of Crowe and Frampton twined. Her heart felt lighter
When this was done. It seemed her constant care
Might some day cease to fright her.

Illness could be no crime, and dreadful harms
Did come from too much sunshine. Her alarms
Would lessen when she saw him standing there,

XLII

Simple and kind, a brother just returned
From journeying, and he would treat her so.
She knew his honest heart, and if there burned
A spark in it he would not let it show.
But when he really came, and stood beside
Her underneath the fruitless cherry boughs,
He seemed a tired man, gaunt, leaden-eyed.
He made her no more vows,
Nor did he mention one thing he had tried
To put into his letter. War supplied
Him topics. And his mind seemed occupied.

XLIII

Daily they met. And gravely walked and talked.
He read her no more verses, and he stayed
Only until their conversation, balked
Of every natural channel, fled dismayed.
Again the next day she would meet him, trying
To give her tone some healthy sprightliness,
But his uneager dignity soon chilled
Her well-prepared address.
Thus Summer waned, and in the mornings, crying
Of wild geese startled Eunice, and their flying
Whirred overhead for days and never stilled.

XLIV

One afternoon of grey clouds and white wind,
Eunice awaited Gervase by the river.
The Dartle splashed among the reeds and whined
Over the willow-roots, and a long sliver
Of caked and slobbered foam crept up the bank.
All through the garden, drifts of skirling leaves
Blew up, and settled down, and blew again.
The cherry-trees were weaves
Of empty, knotted branches, and a dank
Mist hid the house, mouldy it smelt and rank
With sodden wood, and still unfalling rain.

XLV

Eunice paced up and down. No joy she took
At meeting Gervase, but the custom grown
Still held her. He was late. She sudden shook,
And caught at her stopped heart. Her eyes had shown

Sir Everard emerging from the mist.
His uniform was travel-stained and torn,
His jackboots muddy, and his eager stride
Jangled his spurs. A thorn
Entangled, trailed behind him. To the tryst
He hastened. Eunice shuddered, ran - a twist
Round a sharp turning and she fled to hide.

XLVI

But he had seen her as she swiftly ran,
A flash of white against the river's grey.
'Eunice,' he called. 'My Darling. Eunice. Can
You hear me? It is Everard. All day
I have been riding like the very devil
To reach you sooner. Are you startled, Dear?'
He broke into a run and followed her,
And caught her, faint with fear,
Cowering and trembling as though she some evil
Spirit were seeing. 'What means this uncivil
Greeting, Dear Heart?' He saw her senses blur.

XLVII

Swaying and catching at the seat, she tried
To speak, but only gurgled in her throat.
At last, straining to hold herself, she cried
To him for pity, and her strange words smote
A coldness through him, for she begged Gervase
To leave her, 'twas too much a second time.
Gervase must go, always Gervase, her mind
Repeated like a rhyme
This name he did not know. In sad amaze
He watched her, and that hunted, fearful gaze,
So unremembering and so unkind.

XLVIII

Softly he spoke to her, patiently dealt
With what he feared her madness. By and by
He pierced her understanding. Then he knelt
Upon the seat, and took her hands: 'Now try
To think a minute I am come, my Dear,
Unharmed and back on furlough. Are you glad
To have your lover home again? To me,
Pickthorn has never had
A greater pleasantness. Could you not bear
To come and sit awhile beside me here?
A stone between us surely should not be.'

XLIX

She smiled a little wan and ravelled smile,
Then came to him and on his shoulder laid
Her head, and they two rested there awhile,
Each taking comfort. Not a word was said.
But when he put his hand upon her breast
And felt her beating heart, and with his lips
Sought solace for her and himself. She started
As one sharp lashed with whips,
And pushed him from her, moaning, his dumb quest
Denied and shuddered from. And he, distrest,
Loosened his wife, and long they sat there, parted.

L

Eunice was very quiet all that day,
A little dazed, and yet she seemed content.
At candle-time, he asked if she would play
Upon her harpsichord, at once she went
And tinkled airs from Lully's `Carnival'
And `Bacchus', newly brought away from France.
Then jaunted through a lively rigadoon
To please him with a dance
By Purcell, for he said that surely all
Good Englishmen had pride in national
Accomplishment. But tiring of it soon

LI

He whispered her that if she had forgiven
His startling her that afternoon, the clock
Marked early bed-time. Surely it was Heaven
He entered when she opened to his knock.
The hours rustled in the trailing wind
Over the chimney. Close they lay and knew
Only that they were wedded. At his touch
Anxiety she threw
Away like a shed garment, and inclined
Herself to cherish him, her happy mind
Quivering, unthinking, loving overmuch.

LII

Eunice lay long awake in the cool night
After her husband slept. She gazed with joy
Into the shadows, painting them with bright
Pictures of all her future life's employ.
Twin gems they were, set to a single jewel,
Each shining with the other. Soft she turned
And felt his breath upon her hair, and prayed
Her happiness was earned.
Past Earls of Crowe should give their blood for fuel
To light this Frampton's hearth-fire. By no cruel

Affrightings would she ever be dismayed.

LIII

When Everard, next day, asked her in joke
What name it was that she had called him by,
She told him of Gervase, and as she spoke
She hardly realized it was a lie.
Her vision she related, but she hid
The fondness into which she had been led.
Sir Everard just laughed and pinched her ear,
And quite out of her head
The matter drifted. Then Sir Everard chid
Himself for laziness, and off he rid
To see his men and count his farming-gear.

LIV

At supper he seemed overspread with gloom,
But gave no reason why, he only asked
More questions of Gervase, and round the room
He walked with restless strides. At last he tasked
Her with a greater feeling for this man
Than she had given. Eunice quick denied
The slightest interest other than a friend
Might claim. But he replied
He thought she underrated. Then a ban
He put on talk and music. He'd a plan
To work at, draining swamps at Pickthorn End.

LV

Next morning Eunice found her Lord still changed,
Hard and unkind, with bursts of anger. Pride
Kept him from speaking out. His probings ranged
All round his torment. Lady Eunice tried
To sooth him. So a week went by, and then
His anguish flooded over; with clenched hands
Striving to stem his words, he told her plain
Tony had seen them, 'brands
Burning in Hell,' the man had said. Again
Eunice described her vision, and how when
Awoke at last she had known dreadful pain.

LVI

He could not credit it, and misery fed
Upon his spirit, day by day it grew.
To Gervase he forbade the house, and led
The Lady Eunice such a life she flew
At his approaching footsteps. Winter came
Snowing and blustering through the Manor trees.

All the roof-edges spiked with icicles
In fluted companies.
The Lady Eunice with her tambour-frame
Kept herself sighing company. The flame
Of the birch fire glittered on the walls.

LVII

A letter was brought to her as she sat,
Unsealed, unsigned. It told her that his wound,
The writer's, had so well recovered that
To join his regiment he felt him bound.
But would she not wish him one short 'Godspeed',
He asked no more. Her greeting would suffice.
He had resolved he never should return.
Would she this sacrifice
Make for a dying man? How could she read
The rest! But forcing her eyes to the deed,
She read. Then dropped it in the fire to burn.

LVIII

Gervase had set the river for their meeting
As farthest from the farms where Everard
Spent all his days. How should he know such cheating
Was quite expected, at least no dullard
Was Everard Frampton. Hours by hours he hid
Among the willows watching. Dusk had come,
And from the Manor he had long been gone.
Eunice her burdensome
Task set about. Hooded and cloaked, she slid
Over the slippery paths, and soon amid
The sallows saw a boat tied to a stone.

LIX

Gervase arose, and kissed her hand, then pointed
Into the boat. She shook her head, but he
Begged her to realize why, and with disjointed
Words told her of what peril there might be
From listeners along the river bank.
A push would take them out of earshot. Ten
Minutes was all he asked, then she should land,
He go away again,
Forever this time. Yet how could he thank
Her for so much compassion. Here she sank
Upon a thwart, and bid him quick unstrand

LX

His boat. He cast the rope, and shoved the keel
Free of the gravel; jumped, and dropped beside

Her; took the oars, and they began to steal
Under the overhanging trees. A wide
Gash of red lantern-light cleft like a blade
Into the gloom, and struck on Eunice sitting
Rigid and stark upon the after thwart.
It blazed upon their flitting
In merciless light. A moment so it stayed,
Then was extinguished, and Sir Everard made
One leap, and landed just a fraction short.

LXI

His weight upon the gunwale tipped the boat
To straining balance. Everard lurched and seized
His wife and held her smothered to his coat.
'Everard, loose me, we shall drown -' and squeezed
Against him, she beat with her hands. He gasped
'Never, by God!' The slidden boat gave way
And the black foamy water split - and met.
Bubbled up through the spray
A wailing rose and in the branches rasped,
And creaked, and stilled. Over the treetops, clasped
In the blue evening, a clear moon was set.

LXII

They lie entangled in the twisting roots,
Embraced forever. Their cold marriage bed
Close-canopied and curtained by the shoots
Of willows and pale birches. At the head,
White lilies, like still swans, placidly float
And sway above the pebbles. Here are waves
Sun-smitten for a threaded counterpane
Gold-woven on their graves.
In perfect quietness they sleep, remote
In the green, rippled twilight. Death has smote
Them to perpetual oneness who were twain.

Amy Lowell

Prayer for a profusion of sunflowers

Send sunflowers!
With my turkey-bone whistle
I am calling the birds
To sing upon the sunflowers.
For when the clouds hear them singing
They will come quickly,
And rain will fall upon our fields.
Send sunflowers!

Amy Lowell

Prayer for Lightning

My corn is green with red tassels,
I am praying to the lightning to ripen my corn,
I am praying to the thunder which carries the lightning.
Corn is sweet where lightning has fallen.
I pray to the six-coloured clouds.

Amy Lowell

Reaping

You want to know what's the matter with me, do yer?
My! ain't men blinder'n moles?
It ain't nothin' new, be sure o' that.
Why, ef you'd had eyes you'd ha' seed
Me changin' under your very nose,
Each day a little diff'rent.
But you never see nothin', you don't.
Don't touch me, Jake,
Don't you dars't to touch me,
I ain't in no humour.
That's what's come over me;
Jest a change clear through.
You lay still, an' I'll tell yer,
I've had it on my mind to tell yer
Fer some time.
It's a strain livin' a lie from mornin' till night,
An' I'm goin' to put an end to it right now.
An' don't make any mistake about one thing,
When I married yer I loved yer.
Why, your voice 'ud make
Me go hot and cold all over,
An' your kisses most stopped my heart from beatin'.
Lord! I was a silly fool.
But that's the way 'twas.
Well, I married yer
An' thought Heav'n was comin'
To set on the door-step.
Heav'n didn't do no settin',
Though the first year warn't so bad.
The baby's fever threw you off some, I guess,
An' then I took her death real hard,
An' a mopey wife kind o' disgusts a man.
I ain't blamin' yer exactly.
But that's how 'twas.
Do lay quiet,
I know I'm slow, but it's harder to say 'n I thought.
There come a time when I got to be
More wife agin than mother.
The mother part was sort of a waste
When we didn't have no other child.
But you'd got used ter lots o' things,
An' you was all took up with the farm.
Many's the time I've laid awake
Watchin' the moon go clear through the elm-tree,
Out o' sight.
I'd foller yer around like a dog,
An' set in the chair you'd be'n settin' in,
Jest to feel its arms around me,
So long's I didn't have yours.
It preyed on me, I guess,
Longin' and longin'
While you was busy all day, and snorin' all night.

Yes, I know you're wide awake now,
But now ain't then,
An' I guess you'll think diff'rent
When I'm done.
Do you mind the day you went to Hadrock?
I didn't want to stay home for reasons,
But you said someone 'd have to be here
'Cause Elmer was comin' to see t' th' telephone.
An' you never see why I was so set on goin' with yer,
Our married life hadn't be'n any great shakes,
Still marriage is marriage, an' I was raised God-fearin'.
But, Lord, you didn't notice nothin',
An' Elmer hangin' around all Winter!
'Twas a lovely mornin'.
The apple-trees was jest elegant
With their blossoms all flared out,
An' there warn't a cloud in the sky.
You went, you wouldn't pay no 'tention to what I said,
An' I heard the Ford chuggin' for most a mile,
The air was so still.
Then Elmer come.
It's no use your frettin', Jake,
I'll tell you all about it.
I know what I'm doin',
An' what's worse, I know what I done.
Elmer fixed th' telephone in about two minits,
An' he didn't seem in no hurry to go,
An' I don't know as I wanted him to go either,
I was awful mad at your not takin' me with yer,
An' I was tired o' wishin' and wishin'
An' gittin' no comfort.
I guess it ain't necessary to tell yer all the things.
He stayed to dinner,
An' he helped me do the dishes,
An' he said a home was a fine thing,
An' I said dishes warn't a home
Nor yet the room they're in.
He said a lot o' things,
An' I fended him off at first,
But he got talkin' all around me,
Clost up to the things I'd be'n thinkin',
What's the use o' me goin' on, Jake,
You know.
He got all he wanted,
An' I give it to him,
An' what's more, I'm glad!
I ain't dead, anyway,
An' somebody thinks I'm somethin'.
Keep away, Jake,
You can kill me to-morrer if you want to,
But I'm goin' to have my say.
Funny thing! Guess I ain't made to hold a man.

Elmer ain't be'n here for mor'n two months.
I don't want to pretend nothin',
Mebbe if he'd be'n lately
I shouldn't have told yer.
I'll go away in the mornin', o' course.
What you want the light fer?
I don't look no diff'rent.
Ain't the moon bright enough
To look at a woman that's deceived yer by?
Don't, Jake, don't, you can't love me now!
It ain't a question of forgiveness.
Why! I'd be thinkin' o' Elmer ev'ry minute;
It ain't decent.
Oh, my God! It ain't decent any more either way!

Amy Lowell

Reflections

When I looked into your eyes,
I saw a garden
With peonies, and tinkling pagodas,
And round-arched bridges
Over still lakes.
A woman sat beside the water
In a rain-blue, silken garment.
She reached through the water
To pluck the crimson peonies
Beneath the surface,
But as she grasped the stems,
They jarred and broke into white-green ripples,
And as she drew out her hand,
The water-drops dripping from it
Stained her rain-blue dress like tears.

Amy Lowell

Roads

I know a country laced with roads,
They join the hills and they span the brooks,
They weave like a shuttle between broad fields,
And slide discreetly through hidden nooks.
They are canopied like a Persian dome
And carpeted with orient dyes.
They are myriad-voiced, and musical,
And scented with happiest memories.
O Winding roads that I know so well,
Every twist and turn, every hollow and hill!
They are set in my heart to a pulsing tune
Gay as a honey-bee humming in June.
'T is the rhythmic beat of a horse's feet
And the pattering paws of a sheep-dog bitch;
'T is the creaking trees, and the singing breeze,
And the rustle of leaves in the road-side ditch.

A cow in a meadow shakes her bell
And the notes cut sharp through the autumn air,
Each chattering brook bears a fleet of leaves
Their cargo the rainbow, and just now where
The sun splashed bright on the road ahead
A startled rabbit quivered and fled.
O Uphill roads and roads that dip down!
You curl your sun-spattered length along,
And your march is beaten into a song
By the softly ringing hoofs of a horse
And the panting breath of the dogs I love.
The pageant of Autumn follows its course
And the blue sky of Autumn laughs above.

And the song and the country become as one,
I see it as music, I hear it as light;
Prismatic and shimmering, trembling to tone,
The land of desire, my soul's delight.
And always it beats in my listening ears
With the gentle thud of a horse's stride,
With the swift-falling steps of many dogs,
Following, following at my side.
O Roads that journey to fairyland!
Radiant highways whose vistas gleam,
Leading me on, under crimson leaves,
To the opaline gates of the Castles of Dream.

Amy Lowell

Sancta Maria, Succurre Miseris

Dear Virgin Mary, far away,
Look down from Heaven while I pray.
Open your golden casement high,
And lean way out beyond the sky.
I am so little, it may be
A task for you to harken me.

O Lady Mary, I have bought
A candle, as the good priest taught.
I only had one penny, so
Old Goody Jenkins let it go.
It is a little bent, you see.
But Oh, be merciful to me!

I have not anything to give,
Yet I so long for him to live.
A year ago he sailed away
And not a word unto today.
I've strained my eyes from the sea-wall
But never does he come at all.

Other ships have entered port
Their voyages finished, long or short,
And other sailors have received
Their welcomes, while I sat and grieved.
My heart is bursting for his hail,
O Virgin, let me spy his sail.

~Hull down on the edge of a sun-soaked sea
Sparkle the bellying sails for me.
Taut to the push of a rousing wind
Shaking the sea till it foams behind,
The tightened rigging is shrill with the song:
'We are back again who were gone so long.'~

One afternoon I bumped my head.
I sat on a post and wished I were dead
Like father and mother, for no one cared
Whither I went or how I fared.
A man's voice said, 'My little lad,
Here's a bit of a toy to make you glad.'

Then I opened my eyes and saw him plain,
With his sleeves rolled up, and the dark blue stain
Of tattooed skin, where a flock of quail
Flew up to his shoulder and met the tail
Of a dragon curled, all pink and green,
Which sprawled on his back, when it was seen.

He held out his hand and gave to me
The most marvellous top which could ever be.
It had ivory eyes, and jet-black rings,

And a red stone carved into little wings,
All joined by a twisted golden line,
And set in the brown wood, even and fine.

Forgive me, Lady, I have not brought
My treasure to you as I ought,
But he said to keep it for his sake
And comfort myself with it, and take
Joy in its spinning, and so I do.
It couldn't mean quite the same to you.

Every day I met him there,
Where the fisher-nets dry in the sunny air.
He told me stories of courts and kings,
Of storms at sea, of lots of things.
The top he said was a sort of sign
That something in the big world was mine.

~Blue and white on a sun-shot ocean.
Against the horizon a glint in motion.
Full in the grasp of a shoving wind,
Trailing her bubbles of foam behind,
Singing and shouting to port she races,
A flying harp, with her sheets and braces.~

O Queen of Heaven, give me heed,
I am in very utmost need.
He loved me, he was all I had,
And when he came it made the sad
Thoughts disappear. This very day
Send his ship home to me I pray.

I'll be a priest, if you want it so,
I'll work till I have enough to go
And study Latin to say the prayers
On the rosary our old priest wears.
I wished to be a sailor too,
But I will give myself to you.

I'll never even spin my top,
But put it away in a box. I'll stop
Whistling the sailor-songs he taught.
I'll save my pennies till I have bought
A silver heart in the market square,
I've seen some beautiful, white ones there.

I'll give up all I want to do
And do whatever you tell me to.
Heavenly Lady, take away
All the games I like to play,
Take my life to fill the score,
Only bring him back once more!

~The poplars shiver and turn their leaves,
And the wind through the belfry moans and grieves.
The gray dust whirls in the market square,
And the silver hearts are covered with care
By thick tarpaulins. Once again
The bay is black under heavy rain.~

The Queen of Heaven has shut her door.
A little boy weeps and prays no more.

Amy Lowell

Sea Shell

Sea Shell, Sea Shell,
Sing me a song, O Please!
A song of ships, and sailor men,
And parrots, and tropical trees,

Of islands lost in the Spanish Main
Which no man ever may find again,
Of fishes and corals under the waves,
And seahorses stabled in great green caves.

Sea Shell, Sea Shell,
Sing of the things you know so well.

Amy Lowell

September, 1918

This afternoon was the colour of water falling through sunlight;
The trees glittered with the tumbling of leaves;
The sidewalks shone like alleys of dropped maple leaves,
And the houses ran along them laughing out of square, open windows.
Under a tree in the park,
Two little boys, lying flat on their faces,
Were carefully gathering red berries
To put in a pasteboard box.
Some day there will be no war,
Then I shall take out this afternoon
And turn it in my fingers,
And remark the sweet taste of it upon my palate,
And note the crisp variety of its flights of leaves.
To-day I can only gather it
And put it into my lunch-box,
For I have time for nothing
But the endeavour to balance myself
Upon a broken world.

Amy Lowell

Solitaire

WHEN night drifts along the streets of the city,
And sifts down between the uneven roofs,
My mind begins to peek and peer.
It plays at ball in old, blue Chinese gardens,
And shakes wrought dice-cups in Pagan temples,
Amid the broken flutings of white pillars.
It dances with purple and yellow crocuses in its hair,
And its feet shine as they flutter over drenched grasses.
How light and laughing my mind is,
When all the good folk have put out their bed-room candles,
And the city is still!

Amy Lowell

Song

Oh! To be a flower
Nodding in the sun,
Bending, then upspringing
As the breezes run;
Holding up
A scent-brimmed cup,
Full of summer's fragrance to the summer sun.

Oh! To be a butterfly
Still, upon a flower,
Winking with its painted wings,
Happy in the hour.
Blossoms hold
Mines of gold
Deep within the farthest heart of each chaliced flower.

Oh! To be a cloud
Blowing through the blue,
Shadowing the mountains,
Rushing loudly through
Valleys deep
Where torrents keep
Always their plunging thunder and their misty arch of blue.

Oh! To be a wave
Splintering on the sand,
Drawing back, but leaving
Lingeringly the land.
Rainbow light
Flashes bright
Telling tales of coral caves half hid in yellow sand.

Soon they die, the flowers;
Insects live a day;
Clouds dissolve in showers;
Only waves at play
Last forever.
Shall endeavor
Make a sea of purpose mightier than we dream to-day?

Amy Lowell

Spring Day

Bath

The day is fresh-washed and fair, and there is a smell of tulips and narcissus in the air.

The sunshine pours in at the bath-room window and bores through the water in the bath-tub in lathes and planes of greenish-white. It cleaves the water into flaws like a jewel, and cracks it to bright light.

Little spots of sunshine lie on the surface of the water and dance, dance, and their reflections wobble deliciously over the ceiling; a stir of my finger sets them whirring, reeling. I move a foot, and the planes of light in the water jar. I lie back and laugh, and let the green-white water, the sun-flawed beryl water, flow over me. The day is almost too bright to bear, the green water covers me from the too bright day. I will lie here awhile and play with the water and the sun spots.

The sky is blue and high. A crow flaps by the window, and there is a whiff of tulips and narcissus in the air.

Breakfast Table

In the fresh-washed sunlight, the breakfast table is decked and white. It offers itself in flat surrender, tendering tastes, and smells, and colours, and metals, and grains, and the white cloth falls over its side, draped and wide. Wheels of white glitter in the silver coffee-pot, hot and spinning like catherine-wheels, they whirl, and twirl - and my eyes begin to smart, the little white, dazzling wheels prick them like darts. Placid and peaceful, the rolls of bread spread themselves in the sun to bask. A stack of butter-pats, pyramidal, shout orange through the white, scream, flutter, call: 'Yellow! Yellow! Yellow!' Coffee steam rises in a stream, clouds the silver tea-service with mist, and twists up into the sunlight, revolved, involuted, suspiring higher and higher, fluting in a thin spiral up the high blue sky. A crow flies by and croaks at the coffee steam. The day is new and fair with good smells in the air.

Walk

Over the street the white clouds meet, and sheer away without touching.

On the sidewalks, boys are playing marbles. Glass marbles, with amber and blue hearts, roll together and part with a sweet clashing noise. The boys strike them with black and red striped agates. The glass marbles spit crimson when they are hit, and slip into the gutters under rushing brown water. I smell tulips and narcissus in the air, but there are no flowers anywhere, only white dust whipping up the street, and a girl with a gay Spring hat and blowing skirts. The dust and the wind flirt at her ankles and her neat, high-heeled patent leather shoes. Tap, tap, the little heels pat the pavement, and the wind rustles among the flowers on her hat.

A water-cart crawls slowly on the other side of the way. It is green and gay
with new paint, and rumbles contentedly, sprinkling clear water over
the white dust. Clear zigzagging water, which smells of tulips and narcissus.

The thickening branches make a pink `grisaille' against the blue sky.

Whoop! The clouds go dashing at each other and sheer away just in time.
Whoop! And a man's hat careers down the street in front of the white dust,
leaps into the branches of a tree, veers away and trundles ahead of the wind,
jarring the sunlight into spokes of rose-colour and green.

A motor-car cuts a swathe through the bright air, sharp-beaked, irresistible,
shouting to the wind to make way. A glare of dust and sunshine
tosses together behind it, and settles down. The sky is quiet and high,
and the morning is fair with fresh-washed air.

Midday and Afternoon

Swirl of crowded streets. Shock and recoil of traffic. The stock-still
brick facade of an old church, against which the waves of people
lurch and withdraw. Flare of sunshine down side-streets. Eddies of light
in the windows of chemists' shops, with their blue, gold, purple jars,
darting colours far into the crowd. Loud bangs and tremors,
murmurings out of high windows, whirring of machine belts,
blurring of horses and motors. A quick spin and shudder of brakes
on an electric car, and the jar of a church-bell knocking against
the metal blue of the sky. I am a piece of the town, a bit of blown dust,
thrust along with the crowd. Proud to feel the pavement under me,
reeling with feet. Feet tripping, skipping, lagging, dragging,
plodding doggedly, or springing up and advancing on firm elastic insteps.
A boy is selling papers, I smell them clean and new from the press.
They are fresh like the air, and pungent as tulips and narcissus.

The blue sky pales to lemon, and great tongues of gold blind the shop-windows,
putting out their contents in a flood of flame.

Night and Sleep

The day takes her ease in slippered yellow. Electric signs gleam out
along the shop fronts, following each other. They grow, and grow,
and blow into patterns of fire-flowers as the sky fades. Trades scream
in spots of light at the unruffled night. Twinkle, jab, snap, that means
a new play; and over the way: plop, drop, quiver, is the sidelong
sliver of a watchmaker's sign with its length on another street.
A gigantic mug of beer effervesces to the atmosphere over a tall building,
but the sky is high and has her own stars, why should she heed ours?

I leave the city with speed. Wheels whirl to take me back to my trees
and my quietness. The breeze which blows with me is fresh-washed and clean,

it has come but recently from the high sky. There are no flowers
in bloom yet, but the earth of my garden smells of tulips and narcissus.

My room is tranquil and friendly. Out of the window I can see
the distant city, a band of twinkling gems, little flower-heads with no stems.
I cannot see the beer-glass, nor the letters of the restaurants and shops
I passed, now the signs blur and all together make the city,
glowing on a night of fine weather, like a garden stirring and blowing
for the Spring.

The night is fresh-washed and fair and there is a whiff of flowers in the air.

Wrap me close, sheets of lavender. Pour your blue and purple dreams
into my ears. The breeze whispers at the shutters and mutters
queer tales of old days, and cobbled streets, and youths leaping their horses
down marble stairways. Pale blue lavender, you are the colour of the sky
when it is fresh-washed and fair . . . I smell the stars . . . they are like
tulips and narcissus . . . I smell them in the air.

Amy Lowell

Storm-Racked

How should I sing when buffeting salt waves
And stung with bitter surges, in whose might
I toss, a cockleshell? The dreadful night
Marshals its undefeated dark and raves
In brutal madness, reeling over graves
Of vanquished men, long-sunken out of sight,
Sent wailing down to glut the ghoulish sprite
Who haunts foul seaweed forests and their caves.
No parting cloud reveals a watery star,
My cries are washed away upon the wind,
My cramped and blistering hands can find no spar,
My eyes with hope o'erstrained, are growing blind.
But painted on the sky great visions burn,
My voice, oblation from a shattered urn!

Amy Lowell

Stravinsky's Three Pieces

First Movement

Thin-voiced, nasal pipes
Drawing sound out and out
Until it is a screeching thread,
Sharp and cutting, sharp and cutting,
It hurts.
Whee-e-e!
Bump! Bump! Tong-ti-bump!
There are drums here,
Banging,
And wooden shoes beating the round, grey stones
Of the market-place.
Whee-e-e!
Sabots slapping the worn, old stones,
And a shaking and cracking of dancing bones;
Clumsy and hard they are,
And uneven,
Losing half a beat
Because the stones are slippery.
Bump-e-ty-tong! Whee-e-e! Tong!
The thin Spring leaves
Shake to the banging of shoes.
Shoes beat, slap,
Shuffle, rap,
And the nasal pipes squeal with their pigs' voices,
Little pigs' voices
Weaving among the dancers,
A fine white thread
Linking up the dancers.
Bang! Bump! Tong!
Petticoats,
Stockings,
Sabots,
Delirium flapping its thigh-bones;
Red, blue, yellow,
Drunkenness steaming in colours;
Red, yellow, blue,
Colours and flesh weaving together,
In and out, with the dance,
Coarse stuffs and hot flesh weaving together.
Pigs' cries white and tenuous,
White and painful,
White and -
Bump!
Tong!

Second Movement

Pale violin music whiffs across the moon,
A pale smoke of violin music blows over the moon,
Cherry petals fall and flutter,

And the white Pierrot,
Wreathed in the smoke of the violins,
Splashed with cherry petals falling, falling,
Claws a grave for himself in the fresh earth
With his finger-nails.

Third Movement

An organ growls in the heavy roof-groins of a church,
It wheezes and coughs.
The nave is blue with incense,
Writhing, twisting,
Snaking over the heads of the chanting priests.
`Requiem aeternam dona ei, Domine';
The priests whine their bastard Latin
And the censers swing and click.
The priests walk endlessly
Round and round,
Droning their Latin
Off the key.
The organ crashes out in a flaring chord,
And the priests hitch their chant up half a tone.
`Dies illa, dies irae,
Calamitatis et miseriae,
Dies magna et amara valde.'
A wind rattles the leaded windows.
The little pear-shaped candle flames leap and flutter,
`Dies illa, dies irae;'
The swaying smoke drifts over the altar,
`Calamitatis et miseriae;'
The shuffling priests sprinkle holy water,
`Dies magna et amara valde;'
And there is a stark stillness in the midst of them
Stretched upon a bier.
His ears are stone to the organ,
His eyes are flint to the candles,
His body is ice to the water.
Chant, priests,
Whine, shuffle, genuflect,
He will always be as rigid as he is now
Until he crumbles away in a dust heap.
`Lacrymosa dies illa,
Qua resurget ex favilla
Judicandus homo reus.'
Above the grey pillars the roof is in darkness.

Amy Lowell

Stupidity

Dearest, forgive that with my clumsy touch
I broke and bruised your rose.
I hardly could suppose
It were a thing so fragile that my clutch
Could kill it, thus.

It stood so proudly up upon its stem,
I knew no thought of fear,
And coming very near
Fell, overbalanced, to your garment's hem,
Tearing it down.

Now, stooping, I upgather, one by one,
The crimson petals, all
Outspread about my fall.
They hold their fragrance still, a blood-red cone
Of memory.

And with my words I carve a little jar
To keep their scented dust,
Which, opening, you must
Breathe to your soul, and, breathing, know me far
More grieved than you.

Amy Lowell

Suggested by the Cover of a Volume of Keats's Poems

Wild little bird, who chose thee for a sign
To put upon the cover of this book?
Who heard thee singing in the distance dim,
The vague, far greenness of the enshrouding wood,
When the damp freshness of the morning earth
Was full of pungent sweetness and thy song?

Who followed over moss and twisted roots,
And pushed through the wet leaves of trailing vines
Where slanting sunbeams gleamed uncertainly,
While ever clearer came the dropping notes,
Until, at last, two widening trunks disclosed
Thee singing on a spray of branching beech,
Hidden, then seen; and always that same song
Of joyful sweetness, rapture incarnate,
Filled the hushed, rustling stillness of the wood?

We do not know what bird thou art. Perhaps
That fairy bird, fabled in island tale,
Who never sings but once, and then his song
Is of such fearful beauty that he dies
From sheer exuberance of melody.

For this they took thee, little bird, for this
They captured thee, tilting among the leaves,
And stamped thee for a symbol on this book.
For it contains a song surpassing thine,
Richer, more sweet, more poignant. And the poet
Who felt this burning beauty, and whose heart
Was full of loveliest things, sang all he knew
A little while, and then he died; too frail
To bear this untamed, passionate burst of song.

Amy Lowell

Summer

Some men there are who find in nature all
Their inspiration, hers the sympathy
Which spurs them on to any great endeavor,
To them the fields and woods are closest friends,
And they hold dear communion with the hills;
The voice of waters soothes them with its fall,
And the great winds bring healing in their sound.
To them a city is a prison house
Where pent up human forces labour and strive,
Where beauty dwells not, driven forth by man;
But where in winter they must live until
Summer gives back the spaces of the hills.
To me it is not so. I love the earth
And all the gifts of her so lavish hand:
Sunshine and flowers, rivers and rushing winds,
Thick branches swaying in a winter storm,
And moonlight playing in a boat's wide wake;
But more than these, and much, ah, how much more,
I love the very human heart of man.
Above me spreads the hot, blue mid-day sky,
Far down the hillside lies the sleeping lake
Lazily reflecting back the sun,
And scarcely ruffled by the little breeze
Which wanders idly through the nodding ferns.
The blue crest of the distant mountain, tops
The green crest of the hill on which I sit;
And it is summer, glorious, deep-toned summer,
The very crown of nature's changing year
When all her surging life is at its full.
To me alone it is a time of pause,
A void and silent space between two worlds,
When inspiration lags, and feeling sleeps,
Gathering strength for efforts yet to come.
For life alone is creator of life,
And closest contact with the human world
Is like a lantern shining in the night
To light me to a knowledge of myself.
I love the vivid life of winter months
In constant intercourse with human minds,
When every new experience is gain
And on all sides we feel the great world's heart;
The pulse and throb of life which makes us men!

Amy Lowell

Sunshine Through A Cobwebbed Window

What charm is yours, you faded old-world tapestries,
Of outworn, childish mysteries,
Vague pageants woven on a web of dream!
And we, pushing and fighting in the turbid stream
Of modern life, find solace in your tarnished broideries.

Old lichened halls, sun-shaded by huge cedar-trees,
The layered branches horizontal stretched, like Japanese
Dark-banded prints. Carven cathedrals, on a sky
Of faintest colour, where the gothic spires fly
And sway like masts, against a shifting breeze.

Worm-eaten pages, clasped in old brown vellum, shrunk
From over-handling, by some anxious monk.
Or Virgin's Hours, bright with gold and graven
With flowers, and rare birds, and all the Saints of Heaven,
And Noah's ark stuck on Ararat, when all the world had sunk.

They soothe us like a song, heard in a garden, sung
By youthful minstrels, on the moonlight flung
In cadences and falls, to ease a queen,
Widowed and childless, cowering in a screen
Of myrtles, whose life hangs with all its threads unstrung.

Amy Lowell

Sword Blades And Poppy Seed

A drifting, April, twilight sky,
A wind which blew the puddles dry,
And slapped the river into waves
That ran and hid among the staves
Of an old wharf. A watery light
Touched bleak the granite bridge, and white
Without the slightest tinge of gold,
The city shivered in the cold.
All day my thoughts had lain as dead,
Unborn and bursting in my head.
From time to time I wrote a word
Which lines and circles overscored.
My table seemed a graveyard, full
Of coffins waiting burial.
I seized these vile abortions, tore
Them into jagged bits, and swore
To be the dupe of hope no more.
Into the evening straight I went,
Starved of a day's accomplishment.
Unnoticing, I wandered where
The city gave a space for air,
And on the bridge's parapet
I leant, while pallidly there set
A dim, discouraged, worn-out sun.
Behind me, where the tramways run,
Blossomed bright lights, I turned to leave,
When someone plucked me by the sleeve.
'Your pardon, Sir, but I should be
Most grateful could you lend to me
A carfare, I have lost my purse.'
The voice was clear, concise, and terse.
I turned and met the quiet gaze
Of strange eyes flashing through the haze.

The man was old and slightly bent,
Under his cloak some instrument
Disarranged its stately line,
He rested on his cane a fine
And nervous hand, an almandine
Smouldered with dull-red flames, sanguine
It burned in twisted gold, upon
His finger. Like some Spanish don,
Conferring favours even when
Asking an alms, he bowed again
And waited. But my pockets proved
Empty, in vain I poked and shoved,
No hidden penny lurking there
Greeted my search. 'Sir, I declare
I have no money, pray forgive,
But let me take you where you live.'
And so we plodded through the mire
Where street lamps cast a wavering fire.

I took no note of where we went,
His talk became the element
Wherein my being swam, content.
It flashed like rapiers in the night
Lit by uncertain candle-light,
When on some moon-forsaken sward
A quarrel dies upon a sword.
It hacked and carved like a cutlass blade,
And the noise in the air the broad words made
Was the cry of the wind at a window-pane
On an Autumn night of sobbing rain.
Then it would run like a steady stream
Under pinnacled bridges where minarets gleam,
Or lap the air like the lapping tide
Where a marble staircase lifts its wide
Green-spotted steps to a garden gate,
And a waning moon is sinking straight
Down to a black and ominous sea,
While a nightingale sings in a lemon tree.

I walked as though some opiate
Had stung and dulled my brain, a state
Acute and slumbrous. It grew late.
We stopped, a house stood silent, dark.
The old man scratched a match, the spark
Lit up the keyhole of a door,
We entered straight upon a floor
White with finest powdered sand
Carefully sifted, one might stand
Muddy and dripping, and yet no trace
Would stain the boards of this kitchen-place.
From the chimney, red eyes sparked the gloom,
And a cricket's chirp filled all the room.
My host threw pine-cones on the fire
And crimson and scarlet glowed the pyre
Wrapped in the golden flame's desire.
The chamber opened like an eye,
As a half-melted cloud in a Summer sky
The soul of the house stood guessed, and shy
It peered at the stranger warily.
A little shop with its various ware
Spread on shelves with nicest care.
Pitchers, and jars, and jugs, and pots,
Pipkins, and mugs, and many lots
Of lacquered canisters, black and gold,
Like those in which Chinese tea is sold.
Chests, and puncheons, kegs, and flasks,
Goblets, chalices, firkins, and casks.
In a corner three ancient amphorae leaned
Against the wall, like ships careened.
There was dusky blue of Wedgewood ware,
The carved, white figures fluttering there

Like leaves adrift upon the air.
Classic in touch, but emasculate,
The Greek soul grown effeminate.
The factory of Sevres had lent
Elegant boxes with ornament
Culled from gardens where fountains splashed
And golden carp in the shadows flashed,
Nuzzling for crumbs under lily-pads,
Which ladies threw as the last of fads.
Eggshell trays where gay beaux knelt,
Hand on heart, and daintily spelt
Their love in flowers, brittle and bright,
Artificial and fragile, which told aright
The vows of an eighteenth-century knight.
The cruder tones of old Dutch jugs
Glared from one shelf, where Toby mugs
Endlessly drank the foaming ale,
Its froth grown dusty, awaiting sale.
The glancing light of the burning wood
Played over a group of jars which stood
On a distant shelf, it seemed the sky
Had lent the half-tones of his blazonry
To paint these porcelains with unknown hues
Of reds dyed purple and greens turned blues,
Of lustres with so evanescent a sheen
Their colours are felt, but never seen.
Strange winged dragons writhe about
These vases, poisoned venoms spout,
Impregnate with old Chinese charms;
Sealed urns containing mortal harms,
They fill the mind with thoughts impure,
Pestilent drippings from the ure
Of vicious thinkings. 'Ah, I see,'
Said I, 'you deal in pottery.'
The old man turned and looked at me.
Shook his head gently. 'No,' said he.

Then from under his cloak he took the thing
Which I had wondered to see him bring
Guarded so carefully from sight.
As he laid it down it flashed in the light,
A Toledo blade, with basket hilt,
Damascened with arabesques of gilt,
Or rather gold, and tempered so
It could cut a floating thread at a blow.
The old man smiled, 'It has no sheath,
'Twas a little careless to have it beneath
My cloak, for a jostle to my arm
Would have resulted in serious harm.
But it was so fine, I could not wait,
So I brought it with me despite its state.'
'An amateur of arms,' I thought,

'Bringing home a prize which he has bought.'
'You care for this sort of thing, Dear Sir?'
'Not in the way which you infer.
I need them in business, that is all.'
And he pointed his finger at the wall.
Then I saw what I had not noticed before.
The walls were hung with at least five score
Of swords and daggers of every size
Which nations of militant men could devise.
Poisoned spears from tropic seas,
That natives, under banana trees,
Smear with the juice of some deadly snake.
Blood-dipped arrows, which savages make
And tip with feathers, orange and green,
A quivering death, in harlequin sheen.
High up, a fan of glancing steel
Was formed of claymores in a wheel.
Jewelled swords worn at kings' levees
Were suspended next midshipmen's dirks, and these
Elbowed stilettos come from Spain,
Chased with some splendid Hidalgo's name.
There were Samurai swords from old Japan,
And scimitars from Hindoostan,
While the blade of a Turkish yataghan
Made a waving streak of vitreous white
Upon the wall, in the firelight.
Foils with buttons broken or lost
Lay heaped on a chair, among them tossed
The boarding-pike of a privateer.
Against the chimney leaned a queer
Two-handed weapon, with edges dull
As though from hacking on a skull.
The rusted blood corroded it still.
My host took up a paper spill
From a heap which lay in an earthen bowl,
And lighted it at a burning coal.
At either end of the table, tall
Wax candles were placed, each in a small,
And slim, and burnished candlestick
Of pewter. The old man lit each wick,
And the room leapt more obviously
Upon my mind, and I could see
What the flickering fire had hid from me.
Above the chimney's yawning throat,
Shoulder high, like the dark wainscote,
Was a mantelshelf of polished oak
Blackened with the pungent smoke
Of firelit nights; a Cromwell clock
Of tarnished brass stood like a rock
In the midst of a heaving, turbulent sea
Of every sort of cutlery.
There lay knives sharpened to any use,

The keenest lancet, and the obtuse
And blunted pruning bill-hook; blades
Of razors, scalpels, shears; cascades
Of penknives, with handles of mother-of-pearl,
And scythes, and sickles, and scissors; a whirl
Of points and edges, and underneath
Shot the gleam of a saw with bristling teeth.
My head grew dizzy, I seemed to hear
A battle-cry from somewhere near,
The clash of arms, and the squeal of balls,
And the echoless thud when a dead man falls.
A smoky cloud had veiled the room,
Shot through with lurid glares; the gloom
Pounded with shouts and dying groans,
With the drip of blood on cold, hard stones.
Sabres and lances in streaks of light
Gleamed through the smoke, and at my right
A creese, like a licking serpent's tongue,
Glittered an instant, while it stung.
Streams, and points, and lines of fire!
The livid steel, which man's desire
Had forged and welded, burned white and cold.
Every blade which man could mould,
Which could cut, or slash, or cleave, or rip,
Or pierce, or thrust, or carve, or strip,
Or gash, or chop, or puncture, or tear,
Or slice, or hack, they all were there.
Nerveless and shaking, round and round,
I stared at the walls and at the ground,
Till the room spun like a whipping top,
And a stern voice in my ear said, 'Stop!
I sell no tools for murderers here.
Of what are you thinking! Please clear
Your mind of such imaginings.
Sit down. I will tell you of these things.'

He pushed me into a great chair
Of russet leather, poked a flare
Of tumbling flame, with the old long sword,
Up the chimney; but said no word.
Slowly he walked to a distant shelf,
And brought back a crock of finest delf.
He rested a moment a blue-veined hand
Upon the cover, then cut a band
Of paper, pasted neatly round,
Opened and poured. A sliding sound
Came from beneath his old white hands,
And I saw a little heap of sands,
Black and smooth. What could they be:
'Pepper,' I thought. He looked at me.
'What you see is poppy seed.
Lethean dreams for those in need.'

He took up the grains with a gentle hand
And sifted them slowly like hour-glass sand.
On his old white finger the almandine
Shot out its rays, incarnadine.
'Visions for those too tired to sleep.
These seeds cast a film over eyes which weep.
No single soul in the world could dwell,
Without these poppy-seeds I sell.'
For a moment he played with the shining stuff,
Passing it through his fingers. Enough
At last, he poured it back into
The china jar of Holland blue,
Which he carefully carried to its place.
Then, with a smile on his aged face,
He drew up a chair to the open space
'Twixt table and chimney. 'Without preface,
Young man, I will say that what you see
Is not the puzzle you take it to be.'
'But surely, Sir, there is something strange
In a shop with goods at so wide a range
Each from the other, as swords and seeds.
Your neighbours must have greatly differing needs.'
'My neighbours,' he said, and he stroked his chin,
'Live everywhere from here to Pekin.
But you are wrong, my sort of goods
Is but one thing in all its moods.'
He took a shagreen letter case
From his pocket, and with charming grace
Offered me a printed card.
I read the legend, 'Ephraim Bard.
Dealer in Words.' And that was all.
I stared at the letters, whimsical
Indeed, or was it merely a jest.
He answered my unasked request:
'All books are either dreams or swords,
You can cut, or you can drug, with words.
My firm is a very ancient house,
The entries on my books would rouse
Your wonder, perhaps incredulity.
I inherited from an ancestry
Stretching remotely back and far,
This business, and my clients are
As were those of my grandfather's days,
Writers of books, and poems, and plays.
My swords are tempered for every speech,
For fencing wit, or to carve a breach
Through old abuses the world condones.
In another room are my grindstones and hones,
For whetting razors and putting a point
On daggers, sometimes I even anoint
The blades with a subtle poison, so
A twofold result may follow the blow.

These are purchased by men who feel
The need of stabbing society's heel,
Which egotism has brought them to think
Is set on their necks. I have foils to pink
An adversary to quaint reply,
And I have customers who buy
Scalpels with which to dissect the brains
And hearts of men. Ultramundanes
Even demand some finer kinds
To open their own souls and minds.
But the other half of my business deals
With visions and fancies. Under seals,
Sorted, and placed in vessels here,
I keep the seeds of an atmosphere.
Each jar contains a different kind
Of poppy seed. From farthest Ind
Come the purple flowers, opium filled,
From which the weirdest myths are distilled;
My orient porcelains contain them all.
Those Lowestoft pitchers against the wall
Hold a lighter kind of bright conceit;
And those old Saxe vases, out of the heat
On that lowest shelf beside the door,
Have a sort of Ideal, 'couleur d'or'.
Every castle of the air
Sleeps in the fine black grains, and there
Are seeds for every romance, or light
Whiff of a dream for a summer night.
I supply to every want and taste.'
'Twas slowly said, in no great haste
He seemed to push his wares, but I
Dumfounded listened. By and by
A log on the fire broke in two.
He looked up quickly, 'Sir, and you?'
I groped for something I should say;
Amazement held me numb. 'To-day
You sweated at a fruitless task.'
He spoke for me, 'What do you ask?
How can I serve you?' 'My kind host,
My penniless state was not a boast;
I have no money with me.' He smiled.
'Not for that money I beguiled
You here; you paid me in advance.'
Again I felt as though a trance
Had dimmed my faculties. Again
He spoke, and this time to explain.
'The money I demand is Life,
Your nervous force, your joy, your strife!'
What infamous proposal now
Was made me with so calm a brow?
Bursting through my lethargy,
Indignantly I hurled the cry:

'Is this a nightmare, or am I
Drunk with some infernal wine?
I am no Faust, and what is mine
Is what I call my soul! Old Man!
Devil or Ghost! Your hellish plan
Revolts me. Let me go.' 'My child,'
And the old tones were very mild,
'I have no wish to barter souls;
My traffic does not ask such tolls.
I am no devil; is there one?
Surely the age of fear is gone.
We live within a daylight world
Lit by the sun, where winds unfurled
Sweep clouds to scatter pattering rain,
And then blow back the sun again.
I sell my fancies, or my swords,
To those who care far more for words,
Ideas, of which they are the sign,
Than any other life-design.
Who buy of me must simply pay
Their whole existence quite away:
Their strength, their manhood, and their prime,
Their hours from morning till the time
When evening comes on tiptoe feet,
And losing life, think it complete;
Must miss what other men count being,
To gain the gift of deeper seeing;
Must spurn all ease, all hindering love,
All which could hold or bind; must prove
The farthest boundaries of thought,
And shun no end which these have brought;
Then die in satisfaction, knowing
That what was sown was worth the sowing.
I claim for all the goods I sell
That they will serve their purpose well,
And though you perish, they will live.
Full measure for your pay I give.
To-day you worked, you thought, in vain.
What since has happened is the train
Your toiling brought. I spoke to you
For my share of the bargain, due.'
'My life! And is that all you crave
In pay? What even childhood gave!
I have been dedicate from youth.
Before my God I speak the truth!'
Fatigue, excitement of the past
Few hours broke me down at last.
All day I had forgot to eat,
My nerves betrayed me, lacking meat.
I bowed my head and felt the storm
Plough shattering through my prostrate form.
The tearless sobs tore at my heart.

My host withdrew himself apart;
Busied among his crockery,
He paid no farther heed to me.
Exhausted, spent, I huddled there,
Within the arms of the old carved chair.

A long half-hour dragged away,
And then I heard a kind voice say,
'The day will soon be dawning, when
You must begin to work again.
Here are the things which you require.'
By the fading light of the dying fire,
And by the guttering candle's flare,
I saw the old man standing there.
He handed me a packet, tied
With crimson tape, and sealed. 'Inside
Are seeds of many differing flowers,
To occupy your utmost powers
Of storied vision, and these swords
Are the finest which my shop affords.
Go home and use them; do not spare
Yourself; let that be all your care.
Whatever you have means to buy
Be very sure I can supply.'
He slowly walked to the window, flung
It open, and in the grey air rung
The sound of distant matin bells.
I took my parcels. Then, as tells
An ancient mumbling monk his beads,
I tried to thank for his courteous deeds
My strange old friend. 'Nay, do not talk,'
He urged me, 'you have a long walk
Before you. Good-by and Good-day!'
And gently sped upon my way
I stumbled out in the morning hush,
As down the empty street a flush
Ran level from the rising sun.
Another day was just begun.

Amy Lowell

Teatro Bambino. Dublin, N. H.

How still it is! Sunshine itself here falls
In quiet shafts of light through the high trees
Which, arching, make a roof above the walls
Changing from sun to shadow as each breeze
Lingers a moment, charmed by the strange sight
Of an Italian theatre, storied, seer
Of vague romance, and time's long history;
Where tiers of grass-grown seats sprinkled with white,
Sweet-scented clover, form a broken sphere
Grouped round the stage in hushed expectancy.

What sound is that which echoes through the wood?
Is it the reedy note of an oaten pipe?
Perchance a minute more will see the brood
Of the shaggy forest god, and on his lip
Will rest the rushes he is wont to play.
His train in woven baskets bear ripe fruit
And weave a dance with ropes of gray acorns,
So light their touch the grasses scarcely sway
As they the measure tread to the lilting flute.
Alas! 't is only Fancy thus adorns.

A cloud drifts idly over the shining sun.
How damp it seems, how silent, still, and strange!
Surely 't was here some tragedy was done,
And here the chorus sang each coming change?
Sure this is deep in some sweet, southern wood,
These are not pines, but cypress tall and dark;
That is no thrush which sings so rapturously,
But the nightingale in his most passionate mood
Bursting his little heart with anguish. Hark!
The tread of sandalled feet comes noiselessly.

The silence almost is a sound, and dreams
Take on the semblances of finite things;
So potent is the spell that what but seems
Elsewhere, is lifted here on Fancy's wings.
The little woodland theatre seems to wait,
All tremulous with hope and wistful joy,
For something that is sure to come at last,
Some deep emotion, satisfying, great.
It grows a living presence, bold and shy,
Cradling the future in a glorious past.

Amy Lowell

The Allies

August 14th, 1914

Into the brazen, burnished sky, the cry hurls itself. The zigzagging cry
of hoarse throats, it floats against the hard winds, and binds the head
of the serpent to its tail, the long snail-slow serpent of marching men.
Men weighed down with rifles and knapsacks, and parching with war.
The cry jars and splits against the brazen, burnished sky.

This is the war of wars, and the cause? Has this writhing worm of men
a cause?

Crackling against the polished sky is an eagle with a sword. The eagle is red
and its head is flame.

In the shoulder of the worm is a teacher.

His tongue laps the war-sucked air in drought, but he yells defiance
at the red-eyed eagle, and in his ears are the bells of new philosophies,
and their tinkling drowns the sputter of the burning sword. He shrieks,
'God damn you! When you are broken, the word will strike out new shoots.'

His boots are tight, the sun is hot, and he may be shot, but he is in
the shoulder of the worm.

A dust speck in the worm's belly is a poet.

He laughs at the flaring eagle and makes a long nose with his fingers.
He will fight for smooth, white sheets of paper, and uncurdled ink.
The sputtering sword cannot make him blink, and his thoughts are
wet and rippling. They cool his heart.

He will tear the eagle out of the sky and give the earth tranquillity,
and loveliness printed on white paper.

The eye of the serpent is an owner of mills.

He looks at the glaring sword which has snapped his machinery
and struck away his men.

But it will all come again, when the sword is broken to a million dying stars,
and there are no more wars.

Bankers, butchers, shop-keepers, painters, farmers - men, sway and sweat.
They will fight for the earth, for the increase of the slow, sure roots
of peace, for the release of hidden forces. They jibe at the eagle
and his scorching sword.

One! Two! - One! Two! - clump the heavy boots. The cry hurtles

against the sky.

Each man pulls his belt a little tighter, and shifts his gun
to make it lighter. Each man thinks of a woman, and slaps out a curse
at the eagle. The sword jumps in the hot sky, and the worm crawls on
to the battle, stubbornly.

This is the war of wars, from eye to tail the serpent has one cause:
PEACE!

Amy Lowell

The Artist

Why do you subdue yourself in golds and purples?
Why do you dim yourself with folded silks?
Do you not see that I can buy brocades in any draper’s shop,
And that I am choked in the twilight of all these colours.
How pale you would be, and startling,
How quiet;
But your curves would spring upward
Like a clear jet of flung water,
You would quiver like a shot-up spray of water,
You would waver, and relapse, and tremble.
And I too should tremble,
Watching.

Murex-dyes and tinsel—
And yet I think I could bear your beauty unshaded.

Amy Lowell

The Basket

I

The inkstand is full of ink, and the paper lies white and unspotted,
in the round of light thrown by a candle. Puffs of darkness sweep into
the corners, and keep rolling through the room behind his chair. The air
is silver and pearl, for the night is liquid with moonlight.

See how the roof glitters, like ice!

Over there, a slice of yellow cuts into the silver-blue, and beside it stand
two geraniums, purple because the light is silver-blue, to-night.

See! She is coming, the young woman with the bright hair.
She swings a basket as she walks, which she places on the sill,
between the geranium stalks. He laughs, and crumples his paper
as he leans forward to look. 'The Basket Filled with Moonlight',
what a title for a book!

The bellying clouds swing over the housetops.

He has forgotten the woman in the room with the geraniums. He is beating
his brain, and in his eardrums hammers his heavy pulse. She sits
on the window-sill, with the basket in her lap. And tap! She cracks a nut.
And tap! Another. Tap! Tap! Tap! The shells ricochet upon the roof,
and get into the gutters, and bounce over the edge and disappear.

'It is very queer,' thinks Peter, 'the basket was empty, I'm sure.
How could nuts appear from the atmosphere?'

The silver-blue moonlight makes the geraniums purple, and the roof glitters
like ice.

II

Five o'clock. The geraniums are very gay in their crimson array.
The bellying clouds swing over the housetops, and over the roofs goes Peter
to pay his morning's work with a holiday.

'Annette, it is I. Have you finished? Can I come?'

Peter jumps through the window.

'Dear, are you alone?'

'Look, Peter, the dome of the tabernacle is done. This gold thread
is so very high, I am glad it is morning, a starry sky would have
seen me bankrupt. Sit down, now tell me, is your story going well?'

The golden dome glittered in the orange of the setting sun. On the walls,

at intervals, hung altar-cloths and chasubles, and copes, and stoles,
and coffin palls. All stiff with rich embroidery, and stitched with
so much artistry, they seemed like spun and woven gems, or flower-buds
new-opened on their stems.

Annette looked at the geraniums, very red against the blue sky.

'No matter how I try, I cannot find any thread of such a red.
My bleeding hearts drip stuff muddy in comparison. Heigh-ho! See my little
pecking dove? I'm in love with my own temple. Only that halo's wrong.
The colour's too strong, or not strong enough. I don't know. My eyes
are tired. Oh, Peter, don't be so rough; it is valuable. I won't do
any more. I promise. You tyrannise, Dear, that's enough. Now sit down
and amuse me while I rest.'

The shadows of the geraniums creep over the floor, and begin to climb
the opposite wall.

Peter watches her, fluid with fatigue, floating, and drifting,
and undulant in the orange glow. His senses flow towards her,
where she lies supine and dreaming. Seeming drowned in a golden halo.

The pungent smell of the geraniums is hard to bear.

He pushes against her knees, and brushes his lips across her languid hands.
His lips are hot and speechless. He woos her, quivering, and the room
is filled with shadows, for the sun has set. But she only understands
the ways of a needle through delicate stuffs, and the shock of one colour
on another. She does not see that this is the same, and querulously murmurs
his name.

'Peter, I don't want it. I am tired.'

And he, the undesired, burns and is consumed.

There is a crescent moon on the rim of the sky.

III

'Go home, now, Peter. To-night is full moon. I must be alone.'

'How soon the moon is full again! Annette, let me stay. Indeed, Dear Love,
I shall not go away. My God, but you keep me starved! You write
`No Entrance Here', over all the doors. Is it not strange, my Dear,
that loving, yet you deny me entrance everywhere. Would marriage
strike you blind, or, hating bonds as you do, why should I be denied
the rights of loving if I leave you free? You want the whole of me,
you pick my brains to rest you, but you give me not one heart-beat.

Oh, forgive me, Sweet! I suffer in my loving, and you know it. I cannot feed my life on being a poet. Let me stay.'

'As you please, poor Peter, but it will hurt me if you do. It will crush your heart and squeeze the love out.'

He answered gruffly, 'I know what I'm about.'

'Only remember one thing from to-night. My work is taxing and I must have sight! I MUST!'

The clear moon looks in between the geraniums. On the wall, the shadow of the man is divided from the shadow of the woman by a silver thread.

They are eyes, hundreds of eyes, round like marbles! Unwinking, for there are no lids. Blue, black, gray, and hazel, and the irises are cased in the whites, and they glitter and spark under the moon. The basket is heaped with human eyes. She cracks off the whites and throws them away. They ricochet upon the roof, and get into the gutters, and bounce over the edge and disappear. But she is here, quietly sitting on the window-sill, eating human eyes.

The silver-blue moonlight makes the geraniums purple, and the roof shines like ice.

IV

How hot the sheets are! His skin is tormented with pricks, and over him sticks, and never moves, an eye. It lights the sky with blood, and drips blood. And the drops sizzle on his bare skin, and he smells them burning in, and branding his body with the name 'Annette'.

The blood-red sky is outside his window now. Is it blood or fire? Merciful God! Fire! And his heart wrenches and pounds 'Annette!'

The lead of the roof is scorching, he ricochets, gets to the edge, bounces over and disappears.

The bellying clouds are red as they swing over the housetops.

V

The air is of silver and pearl, for the night is liquid with moonlight. How the ruin glistens, like a palace of ice! Only two black holes swallow the brilliance of the moon. Deflowered windows, sockets without sight.

A man stands before the house. He sees the silver-blue moonlight, and set in it, over his head, staring and flickering, eyes of geranium red.

Annette!

Amy Lowell

The Blue Scarf

Pale, with the blue of high zeniths, shimmered over with silver, brocaded
In smooth, running patterns, a soft stuff, with dark knotted fringes,
it lies there,
Warm from a woman's soft shoulders, and my fingers close on it, caressing.
Where is she, the woman who wore it? The scent of her lingers and drugs me!
A languor, fire-shotted, runs through me, and I crush the scarf down
on my face,
And gulp in the warmth and the blueness, and my eyes swim
in cool-tinted heavens.
Around me are columns of marble, and a diapered, sun-flickered pavement.
Rose-leaves blow and patter against it. Below the stone steps a lute tinkles.
A jar of green jade throws its shadow half over the floor. A big-bellied
Frog hops through the sunlight and plops in the gold-bubbled water of a basin,
Sunk in the black and white marble. The west wind has lifted a scarf
On the seat close beside me, the blue of it is a violent outrage of colour.
She draws it more closely about her, and it ripples beneath
her slight stirring.
Her kisses are sharp buds of fire; and I burn back against her, a jewel
Hard and white; a stalked, flaming flower; till I break to
a handful of cinders,
And open my eyes to the scarf, shining blue in the afternoon sunshine.

How loud clocks can tick when a room is empty, and one is alone!

Amy Lowell

The Bombardment

Slowly, without force, the rain drops into the city. It stops a moment
on the carved head of Saint John, then slides on again, slipping and trickling
over his stone cloak. It splashes from the lead conduit of a gargoyle,
and falls from it in turmoil on the stones in the Cathedral square.
Where are the people, and why does the fretted steeple sweep about in the sky?
Boom! The sound swings against the rain. Boom, again! After it, only water
rushing in the gutters, and the turmoil from the spout of the gargoyle.
Silence. Ripples and mutters. Boom!

The room is damp, but warm. Little flashes swarm about from the firelight.
The lustres of the chandelier are bright, and clusters of rubies
leap in the bohemian glasses on the `etagere'. Her hands are restless,
but the white masses of her hair are quite still. Boom! Will it never cease
to torture, this iteration! Boom! The vibration shatters a glass
on the `etagere'. It lies there, formless and glowing,
with all its crimson gleams shot out of pattern, spilled, flowing red,
blood-red. A thin bell-note pricks through the silence. A door creaks.
The old lady speaks: 'Victor, clear away that broken glass.' 'Alas!
Madame, the bohemian glass!' 'Yes, Victor, one hundred years ago
my father brought it -' Boom! The room shakes, the servitor quakes.
Another goblet shivers and breaks. Boom!

It rustles at the window-pane, the smooth, streaming rain, and he is shut
within its clash and murmur. Inside is his candle, his table, his ink,
his pen, and his dreams. He is thinking, and the walls are pierced with
beams of sunshine, slipping through young green. A fountain tosses itself
up at the blue sky, and through the spattered water in the basin he can see
copper carp, lazily floating among cold leaves. A wind-harp in a cedar-tree
grieves and whispers, and words blow into his brain, bubbled, iridescent,
shooting up like flowers of fire, higher and higher. Boom!
The flame-flowers snap on their slender stems. The fountain rears up
in long broken spears of dishevelled water and flattens into the earth. Boom!
And there is only the room, the table, the candle, and the sliding rain.
Again, Boom! - Boom! - Boom! He stuffs his fingers into his ears.
He sees corpses, and cries out in fright. Boom! It is night,
and they are shelling the city! Boom! Boom!

A child wakes and is afraid, and weeps in the darkness. What has made
the bed shake? 'Mother, where are you? I am awake.' 'Hush, my Darling,
I am here.' 'But, Mother, something so queer happened, the room shook.'
Boom! 'Oh! What is it? What is the matter?' Boom! 'Where is Father?
I am so afraid.' Boom! The child sobs and shrieks. The house
trembles and creaks. Boom!

Retorts, globes, tubes, and phials lie shattered. All his trials
oozing across the floor. The life that was his choosing, lonely, urgent,
goaded by a hope, all gone. A weary man in a ruined laboratory,
that is his story. Boom! Gloom and ignorance, and the jig of drunken brutes.

Diseases like snakes crawling over the earth, leaving trails of slime.
Wails from people burying their dead. Through the window, he can see
the rocking steeple. A ball of fire falls on the lead of the roof,
and the sky tears apart on a spike of flame. Up the spire,
behind the lacings of stone, zigzagging in and out of the carved tracings,
squirms the fire. It spouts like yellow wheat from the gargoyles, coils round
the head of Saint John, and aureoles him in light. It leaps into the night
and hisses against the rain. The Cathedral is a burning stain on the white,
wet night.

Boom! The Cathedral is a torch, and the houses next to it begin to scorch.
Boom! The bohemian glass on the `etagere' is no longer there.
Boom! A stalk of flame sways against the red damask curtains.
The old lady cannot walk. She watches the creeping stalk and counts.
Boom! - Boom! - Boom!

The poet rushes into the street, and the rain wraps him in a sheet of silver.
But it is threaded with gold and powdered with scarlet beads. The city burns.
Quivering, spearing, thrusting, lapping, streaming, run the flames.
Over roofs, and walls, and shops, and stalls. Smearing its gold on the sky,
the fire dances, lances itself through the doors, and lisps and chuckles
along the floors.

The child wakes again and screams at the yellow petalled flower
flickering at the window. The little red lips of flame creep along
the ceiling beams.

The old man sits among his broken experiments and looks at
the burning Cathedral. Now the streets are swarming with people.
They seek shelter and crowd into the cellars. They shout and call,
and over all, slowly and without force, the rain drops into the city.
Boom! And the steeple crashes down among the people. Boom! Boom, again!
The water rushes along the gutters. The fire roars and mutters. Boom!

Amy Lowell

The Book Of Hours Of Sister Clotilde

The Bell in the convent tower swung.
High overhead the great sun hung,
A navel for the curving sky.
The air was a blue clarity.
Swallows flew,
And a cock crew.

The iron clanging sank through the light air,
Rustled over with blowing branches. A flare
Of spotted green, and a snake had gone
Into the bed where the snowdrops shone
In green new-started,
Their white bells parted.

Two by two, in a long brown line,
The nuns were walking to breathe the fine
Bright April air. They must go in soon
And work at their tasks all the afternoon.
But this time is theirs!
They walk in pairs.

First comes the Abbess, preoccupied
And slow, as a woman often tried,
With her temper in bond. Then the oldest nun.
Then younger and younger, until the last one
Has a laugh on her lips,
And fairly skips.

They wind about the gravel walks
And all the long line buzzes and talks.
They step in time to the ringing bell,
With scarcely a shadow. The sun is well
In the core of a sky
Domed silverly.

Sister Marguerite said: 'The pears will soon bud.'
Sister Angelique said she must get her spud
And free the earth round the jasmine roots.
Sister Veronique said: 'Oh, look at those shoots!
There's a crocus up,
With a purple cup.'

But Sister Clotilde said nothing at all,
She looked up and down the old grey wall
To see if a lizard were basking there.
She looked across the garden to where
A sycamore
Flanked the garden door.

She was restless, although her little feet danced,
And quite unsatisfied, for it chanced
Her morning's work had hung in her mind

And would not take form. She could not find
The beautifulness
For the Virgin's dress.

Should it be of pink, or damasked blue?
Or perhaps lilac with gold shotted through?
Should it be banded with yellow and white
Roses, or sparked like a frosty night?
Or a crimson sheen
Over some sort of green?

But Clotilde's eyes saw nothing new
In all the garden, no single hue
So lovely or so marvellous
That its use would not seem impious.
So on she walked,
And the others talked.

Sister Elisabeth edged away
From what her companion had to say,
For Sister Marthe saw the world in little,
She weighed every grain and recorded each tittle.
She did plain stitching
And worked in the kitchen.

'Sister Radegonde knows the apples won't last,
I told her so this Friday past.
I must speak to her before Compline.'
Her words were like dust motes in slanting sunshine.
The other nun sighed,
With her pleasure quite dried.

Suddenly Sister Berthe cried out:
'The snowdrops are blooming!' They turned about.
The little white cups bent over the ground,
And in among the light stems wound
A crested snake,
With his eyes awake.

His body was green with a metal brightness
Like an emerald set in a kind of whiteness,
And all down his curling length were disks,
Evil vermilion asterisks,
They paled and flooded
As wounds fresh-blooded.

His crest was amber glittered with blue,
And opaque so the sun came shining through.
It seemed a crown with fiery points.
When he quivered all down his scaly joints,
From every slot
The sparkles shot.

The nuns huddled tightly together, fear
Catching their senses. But Clotilde must peer
More closely at the beautiful snake,
She seemed entranced and eased. Could she make
Colours so rare,
The dress were there.

The Abbess shook off her lethargy.
'Sisters, we will walk on,' said she.
Sidling away from the snowdrop bed,
The line curved forwards, the Abbess ahead.
Only Clotilde
Was the last to yield.

When the recreation hour was done
Each went in to her task. Alone
In the library, with its great north light,
Clotilde wrought at an exquisite
Wreath of flowers
For her Book of Hours.

She twined the little crocus blooms
With snowdrops and daffodils, the glooms
Of laurel leaves were interwoven
With Stars-of-Bethlehem, and cloven
Fritillaries,
Whose colour varies.

They framed the picture she had made,
Half-delighted and half-afraid.
In a courtyard with a lozenged floor
The Virgin watched, and through the arched door
The angel came
Like a springing flame.

His wings were dipped in violet fire,
His limbs were strung to holy desire.
He lowered his head and passed under the arch,
And the air seemed beating a solemn march.
The Virgin waited
With eyes dilated.

Her face was quiet and innocent,
And beautiful with her strange assent.
A silver thread about her head
Her halo was poised. But in the stead
Of her gown, there remained
The vellum, unstained.

Clotilde painted the flowers patiently,
Lingering over each tint and dye.

She could spend great pains, now she had seen
That curious, unimagined green.
A colour so strange
It had seemed to change.

She thought it had altered while she gazed.
At first it had been simple green; then glazed
All over with twisting flames, each spot
A molten colour, trembling and hot,
And every eye
Seemed to liquefy.

She had made a plan, and her spirits danced.
After all, she had only glanced
At that wonderful snake, and she must know
Just what hues made the creature throw
Those splashes and sprays
Of prismed rays.

When evening prayers were sung and said,
The nuns lit their tapers and went to bed.
And soon in the convent there was no light,
For the moon did not rise until late that night,
Only the shine
Of the lamp at the shrine.

Clotilde lay still in her trembling sheets.
Her heart shook her body with its beats.
She could not see till the moon should rise,
So she whispered prayers and kept her eyes
On the window-square
Till light should be there.

The faintest shadow of a branch
Fell on the floor. Clotilde, grown staunch
With solemn purpose, softly rose
And fluttered down between the rows
Of sleeping nuns.
She almost runs.

She must go out through the little side door
Lest the nuns who were always praying before
The Virgin's altar should hear her pass.
She pushed the bolts, and over the grass
The red moon's brim
Mounted its rim.

Her shadow crept up the convent wall
As she swiftly left it, over all
The garden lay the level glow
Of a moon coming up, very big and slow.
The gravel glistened.

She stopped and listened.

It was still, and the moonlight was getting clearer.
She laughed a little, but she felt queerer
Than ever before. The snowdrop bed
Was reached and she bent down her head.
On the striped ground
The snake was wound.

For a moment Clotilde paused in alarm,
Then she rolled up her sleeve and stretched out her arm.
She thought she heard steps, she must be quick.
She darted her hand out, and seized the thick
Wriggling slime,
Only just in time.

The old gardener came muttering down the path,
And his shadow fell like a broad, black swath,
And covered Clotilde and the angry snake.
He bit her, but what difference did that make!
The Virgin should dress
In his loveliness.

The gardener was covering his new-set plants
For the night was chilly, and nothing daunts
Your lover of growing things. He spied
Something to do and turned aside,
And the moonlight streamed
On Clotilde, and gleamed.

His business finished the gardener rose.
He shook and swore, for the moonlight shows
A girl with a fire-tongued serpent, she
Grasping him, laughing, while quietly
Her eyes are weeping.
Is he sleeping?

He thinks it is some holy vision,
Brushes that aside and with decision
Jumps -- and hits the snake with his stick,
Crushes his spine, and then with quick,
Urgent command
Takes her hand.

The gardener sucks the poison and spits,
Cursing and praying as befits
A poor old man half out of his wits.
'Whatever possessed you, Sister, it's
Hatched of a devil
And very evil.

It's one of them horrid basilisks

You read about. They say a man risks
His life to touch it, but I guess I've sucked it
Out by now. Lucky I chucked it
Away from you.
I guess you'll do.'

'Oh, no, Francois, this beautiful beast
Was sent to me, to me the least
Worthy in all our convent, so I
Could finish my picture of the Most High
And Holy Queen,
In her dress of green.

He is dead now, but his colours won't fade
At once, and by noon I shall have made
The Virgin's robe. Oh, Francois, see
How kindly the moon shines down on me!
I can't die yet,
For the task was set.'

'You won't die now, for I've sucked it away,'
Grumbled old Francois, 'so have your play.
If the Virgin is set on snake's colours so strong, --'
'Francois, don't say things like that, it is wrong.'
So Clotilde vented
Her creed. He repented.

'He can't do no more harm, Sister,' said he.
'Paint as much as you like.' And gingerly
He picked up the snake with his stick. Clotilde
Thanked him, and begged that he would shield
Her secret, though itching
To talk in the kitchen.

The gardener promised, not very pleased,
And Clotilde, with the strain of adventure eased,
Walked quickly home, while the half-high moon
Made her beautiful snake-skin sparkle, and soon
In her bed she lay
And waited for day.

At dawn's first saffron-spired warning
Clotilde was up. And all that morning,
Except when she went to the chapel to pray,
She painted, and when the April day
Was hot with sun,
Clotilde had done.

Done! She drooped, though her heart beat loud
At the beauty before her, and her spirit bowed
To the Virgin her finely-touched thought had made.
A lady, in excellence arrayed,

And wonder-souled.
Christ's Blessed Mould!

From long fasting Clotilde felt weary and faint,
But her eyes were starred like those of a saint
Enmeshed in Heaven's beatitude.
A sudden clamour hurled its rude
Force to break
Her vision awake.

The door nearly leapt from its hinges, pushed
By the multitude of nuns. They hushed
When they saw Clotilde, in perfect quiet,
Smiling, a little perplexed at the riot.
And all the hive
Buzzed 'She's alive!'

Old Francois had told. He had found the strain
Of silence too great, and preferred the pain
Of a conscience outraged. The news had spread,
And all were convinced Clotilde must be dead.
For Francois, to spite them,
Had not seen fit to right them.

The Abbess, unwontedly trembling and mild,
Put her arms round Clotilde and wept, 'My child,
Has the Holy Mother showed you this grace,
To spare you while you imaged her face?
How could we have guessed
Our convent so blessed!

A miracle! But Oh! My Lamb!
To have you die! And I, who am
A hollow, living shell, the grave
Is empty of me. Holy Mary, I crave
To be taken, Dear Mother,
Instead of this other.'

She dropped on her knees and silently prayed,
With anguished hands and tears delayed
To a painful slowness. The minutes drew
To fractions. Then the west wind blew
The sound of a bell,
On a gusty swell.

It came skipping over the slates of the roof,
And the bright bell-notes seemed a reproof
To grief, in the eye of so fair a day.
The Abbess, comforted, ceased to pray.
And the sun lit the flowers
In Clotilde's Book of Hours.

It glistened the green of the Virgin's dress
And made the red spots, in a flushed excess,
Pulse and start; and the violet wings
Of the angel were colour which shines and sings.
The book seemed a choir
Of rainbow fire.

The Abbess crossed herself, and each nun
Did the same, then one by one,
They filed to the chapel, that incensed prayers
Might plead for the life of this sister of theirs.
Clotilde, the Inspired!

She only felt tired.

* * * * *

The old chronicles say she did not die
Until heavy with years. And that is why
There hangs in the convent church a basket
Of osiered silver, a holy casket,
And treasured therein
A dried snake-skin.

Amy Lowell

The Boston Athenaeum

Thou dear and well-loved haunt of happy hours,
How often in some distant gallery,
Gained by a little painful spiral stair,
Far from the halls and corridors where throng
The crowd of casual readers, have I passed
Long, peaceful hours seated on the floor
Of some retired nook, all lined with books,
Where reverie and quiet reign supreme!
Above, below, on every side, high shelved
From careless grasp of transient interest,
Stand books we can but dimly see, their charm
Much greater that their titles are unread;
While on a level with the dusty floor
Others are ranged in orderly confusion,
And we must stoop in painful posture while
We read their names and learn their histories.
The little gallery winds round about
The middle of a most secluded room,
Midway between the ceiling and the floor.
A type of those high thoughts, which while we read
Hover between the earth and furthest heaven
As fancy wills, leaving the printed page;
For books but give the theme, our hearts the rest,
Enriching simple words with unguessed harmony
And overtones of thought we only know.
And as we sit long hours quietly,
Reading at times, and at times simply dreaming,
The very room itself becomes a friend,
The confidant of intimate hopes and fears;
A place where are engendered pleasant thoughts,
And possibilities before unguessed
Come to fruition born of sympathy.
And as in some gay garden stretched upon
A genial southern slope, warmed by the sun,
The flowers give their fragrance joyously
To the caressing touch of the hot noon;
So books give up the all of what they mean
Only in a congenial atmosphere,
Only when touched by reverent hands, and read
By those who love and feel as well as think.
For books are more than books, they are the life,
The very heart and core of ages past,
The reason why men lived, and worked, and died,
The essence and quintessence of their lives.
And we may know them better, and divine
The inner motives whence their actions sprang,
Far better than the men who only knew
Their bodily presence, the soul forever hid
From those with no ability to see.
They wait here quietly for us to come
And find them out, and know them for our friends;
These men who toiled and wrote only for this,

To leave behind such modicum of truth
As each perceived and each alone could tell.
Silently waiting that from time to time
It may be given them to illuminate
Dull daily facts with pristine radiance
For some long-waited-for affinity
Who lingers yet in the deep womb of time.
The shifting sun pierces the young green leaves
Of elm trees, newly coming into bud,
And splashes on the floor and on the books
Through old, high, rounded windows, dim with age.
The noisy city-sounds of modern life
Float softened to us across the old graveyard.
The room is filled with a warm, mellow light,
No garish colours jar on our content,
The books upon the shelves are old and worn.
'T was no belated effort nor attempt
To keep abreast with old as well as new
That placed them here, tricked in a modern guise,
Easily got, and held in light esteem.
Our fathers' fathers, slowly and carefully
Gathered them, one by one, when they were new
And a delighted world received their thoughts
Hungrily; while we but love the more,
Because they are so old and grown so dear!
The backs of tarnished gold, the faded boards,
The slightly yellowing page, the strange old type,
All speak the fashion of another age;
The thoughts peculiar to the man who wrote
Arrayed in garb peculiar to the time;
As though the idiom of a man were caught
Imprisoned in the idiom of a race.
A nothing truly, yet a link that binds
All ages to their own inheritance,
And stretching backward, dim and dimmer still,
Is lost in a remote antiquity.
Grapes do not come of thorns nor figs of thistles,
And even a great poet's divinest thought
Is coloured by the world he knows and sees.
The little intimate things of every day,
The trivial nothings that we think not of,
These go to make a part of each man's life;
As much a part as do the larger thoughts
He takes account of. Nay, the little things
Of daily life it is which mold, and shape,
And make him apt for noble deeds and true.
And as we read some much-loved masterpiece,
Read it as long ago the author read,
With eyes that brimmed with tears as he saw
The message he believed in stamped in type
Inviolable for the slow-coming years;
We know a certain subtle sympathy,

We seem to clasp his hand across the past,
His words become related to the time,
He is at one with his own glorious creed
And all that in his world was dared and done.
The long, still, fruitful hours slip away
Shedding their influences as they pass;
We know ourselves the richer to have sat
Upon this dusty floor and dreamed our dreams.
No other place to us were quite the same,
No other dreams so potent in their charm,
For this is ours! Every twist and turn
Of every narrow stair is known and loved;
Each nook and cranny is our very own;
The dear, old, sleepy place is full of spells
For us, by right of long inheritance.
The building simply bodies forth a thought
Peculiarly inherent to the race.
And we, descendants of that elder time,
Have learnt to love the very form in which
The thought has been embodied to our years.
And here we feel that we are not alone,
We too are one with our own richest past;
And here that veiled, but ever smouldering fire
Of race, which rarely seen yet never dies,
Springs up afresh and warms us with its heat.
And must they take away this treasure house,
To us so full of thoughts and memories;
To all the world beside a dismal place
Lacking in all this modern age requires
To tempt along the unfamiliar paths
And leafy lanes of old time literatures?
It takes some time for moss and vines to grow
And warmly cover gaunt and chill stone walls
Of stately buildings from the cold North Wind.
The lichen of affection takes as long,
Or longer, ere it lovingly enfolds
A place which since without it were bereft,
All stript and bare, shorn of its chiefest grace.
For what to us were halls and corridors
However large and fitting, if we part
With this which is our birthright; if we lose
A sentiment profound, unsoundable,
Which Time's slow ripening alone can make,
And man's blind foolishness so quickly mar.

Amy Lowell

The Bungler

You glow in my heart
Like the flames of uncontrolled candles.
But when I go to warm my hands,
My clumsiness overturns the light,
and then I stumble
Against the tables and chairs.

Amy Lowell

The Captured Goddess

Over the housetops,
Above the rotating chimney-pots,
I have seen a shiver of amethyst,
And blue and cinnamon have flickered
A moment,
At the far end of a dusty street.

Through sheeted rain
Has come a lustre of crimson,
And I have watched moonbeams
Hushed by a film of palest green.

It was her wings,
Goddess!
Who stepped over the clouds,
And laid her rainbow feathers
Aslant on the currents of the air.

I followed her for long,
With gazing eyes and stumbling feet.
I cared not where she led me,
My eyes were full of colours:
Saffrons, rubies, the yellows of beryls,
And the indigo-blue of quartz;
Flights of rose, layers of chrysoprase,
Points of orange, spirals of vermilion,
The spotted gold of tiger-lily petals,
The loud pink of bursting hydrangeas.
I followed,
And watched for the flashing of her wings.

In the city I found her,
The narrow-streeted city.
In the market-place I came upon her,
Bound and trembling.
Her fluted wings were fastened to her sides with cords,
She was naked and cold,
For that day the wind blew
Without sunshine.

Men chaffered for her,
They bargained in silver and gold,
In copper, in wheat,
And called their bids across the market-place.

The Goddess wept.

Hiding my face I fled,
And the grey wind hissed behind me,
Along the narrow streets.

Amy Lowell

The Coal Picker

He perches in the slime, inert,
Bedaubed with iridescent dirt.
The oil upon the puddles dries
To colours like a peacock's eyes,
And half-submerged tomato-cans
Shine scaly, as leviathans
Oozily crawling through the mud.
The ground is here and there bestud
With lumps of only part-burned coal.
His duty is to glean the whole,
To pick them from the filth, each one,
To hoard them for the hidden sun
Which glows within each fiery core
And waits to be made free once more.
Their sharp and glistening edges cut
His stiffened fingers. Through the smut
Gleam red the wounds which will not shut.
Wet through and shivering he kneels
And digs the slippery coals; like eels
They slide about. His force all spent,
He counts his small accomplishment.
A half-a-dozen clinker-coals
Which still have fire in their souls.
Fire! And in his thought there burns
The topaz fire of votive urns.
He sees it fling from hill to hill,
And still consumed, is burning still.
Higher and higher leaps the flame,
The smoke an ever-shifting frame.
He sees a Spanish Castle old,
With silver steps and paths of gold.
From myrtle bowers comes the plash
Of fountains, and the emerald flash
Of parrots in the orange trees,
Whose blossoms pasture humming bees.
He knows he feeds the urns whose smoke
Bears visions, that his master-stroke
Is out of dirt and misery
To light the fire of poesy.
He sees the glory, yet he knows
That others cannot see his shows.
To them his smoke is sightless, black,
His votive vessels but a pack
Of old discarded shards, his fire
A peddler's; still to him the pyre
Is incensed, an enduring goal!
He sighs and grubs another coal.

Amy Lowell

The Country House

Did the door move, or was it always ajar?
The gladioli on the table are pale mauve.
I smell pale mauve and blue,
Blue soft like bruises—putrid—oozing—
The air oozes blue—mauve—
And the door with the black line where it does not shut!

I must pass that door to go to bed,
Or I must stay here
And watch the crack
Oozing air.

Is it—air?

Amy Lowell

The Cremona Violin

Part First

Frau Concert-Meister Altgelt shut the door.
A storm was rising, heavy gusts of wind
Swirled through the trees, and scattered leaves before
Her on the clean, flagged path. The sky behind
The distant town was black, and sharp defined
Against it shone the lines of roofs and towers,
Superimposed and flat like cardboard flowers.

A pasted city on a purple ground,
Picked out with luminous paint, it seemed. The cloud
Split on an edge of lightning, and a sound
Of rivers full and rushing boomed through bowed,
Tossed, hissing branches. Thunder rumbled loud
Beyond the town fast swallowing into gloom.
Frau Altgelt closed the windows of each room.

She bustled round to shake by constant moving
The strange, weird atmosphere. She stirred the fire,
She twitched the supper-cloth as though improving
Its careful setting, then her own attire
Came in for notice, tiptoeing higher and higher
She peered into the wall-glass, now adjusting
A straying lock, or else a ribbon thrusting

This way or that to suit her. At last sitting,
Or rather plumping down upon a chair,
She took her work, the stocking she was knitting,
And watched the rain upon the window glare
In white, bright drops. Through the black glass a flare
Of lightning squirmed about her needles. 'Oh!'
She cried. 'What can be keeping Theodore so!'

A roll of thunder set the casements clapping.
Frau Altgelt flung her work aside and ran,
Pulled open the house door, with kerchief flapping
She stood and gazed along the street. A man
Flung back the garden-gate and nearly ran
Her down as she stood in the door. 'Why, Dear,
What in the name of patience brings you here?

Quick, Lotta, shut the door, my violin
I fear is wetted. Now, Dear, bring a light.
This clasp is very much too worn and thin.
I'll take the other fiddle out to-night
If it still rains. Tut! Tut! my child, you're quite
Clumsy. Here, help me, hold the case while I -
Give me the candle. No, the inside's dry.

Thank God for that! Well, Lotta, how are you?
A bad storm, but the house still stands, I see.

Is my pipe filled, my Dear? I'll have a few
Puffs and a snooze before I eat my tea.
What do you say? That you were feared for me?
Nonsense, my child. Yes, kiss me, now don't talk.
I need a rest, the theatre's a long walk.'

Her needles still, her hands upon her lap
Patiently laid, Charlotta Altgelt sat
And watched the rain-run window. In his nap
Her husband stirred and muttered. Seeing that,
Charlotta rose and softly, pit-a-pat,
Climbed up the stairs, and in her little room
Found sighing comfort with a moon in bloom.

But even rainy windows, silver-lit
By a new-burst, storm-whetted moon, may give
But poor content to loneliness, and it
Was hard for young Charlotta so to strive
And down her eagerness and learn to live
In placid quiet. While her husband slept,
Charlotta in her upper chamber wept.

Herr Concert-Meister Altgelt was a man
Gentle and unambitious, that alone
Had kept him back. He played as few men can,
Drawing out of his instrument a tone
So shimmering-sweet and palpitant, it shone
Like a bright thread of sound hung in the air,
Afloat and swinging upward, slim and fair.

Above all things, above Charlotta his wife,
Herr Altgelt loved his violin, a fine
Cremona pattern, Stradivari's life
Was flowering out of early discipline
When this was fashioned. Of soft-cutting pine
The belly was. The back of broadly curled
Maple, the head made thick and sharply whirled.

The slanting, youthful sound-holes through
The belly of fine, vigorous pine
Mellowed each note and blew
It out again with a woody flavour
Tanged and fragrant as fir-trees are
When breezes in their needles jar.

The varnish was an orange-brown
Lustered like glass that's long laid down
Under a crumbling villa stone.
Purfled stoutly, with mitres which point
Straight up the corners. Each curve and joint
Clear, and bold, and thin.
Such was Herr Theodore's violin.

Seven o'clock, the Concert-Meister gone
With his best violin, the rain being stopped,
Frau Lotta in the kitchen sat alone
Watching the embers which the fire dropped.
The china shone upon the dresser, topped
By polished copper vessels which her skill
Kept brightly burnished. It was very still.

An air from `Orfeo' hummed in her head.
Herr Altgelt had been practising before
The night's performance. Charlotta had plead
With him to stay with her. Even at the door
She'd begged him not to go. 'I do implore
You for this evening, Theodore,' she had said.
'Leave them to-night, and stay with me instead.'

'A silly poppet!' Theodore pinched her ear.
'You'd like to have our good Elector turn
Me out I think.' 'But, Theodore, something queer
Ails me. Oh, do but notice how they burn,
My cheeks! The thunder worried me. You're stern,
And cold, and only love your work, I know.
But Theodore, for this evening, do not go.'

But he had gone, hurriedly at the end,
For she had kept him talking. Now she sat
Alone again, always alone, the trend
Of all her thinking brought her back to that
She wished to banish. What would life be? What?
For she was young, and loved, while he was moved
Only by music. Each day that was proved.

Each day he rose and practised. While he played,
She stopped her work and listened, and her heart
Swelled painfully beneath her bodice. Swayed
And longing, she would hide from him her smart.
'Well, Lottchen, will that do?' Then what a start
She gave, and she would run to him and cry,
And he would gently chide her, 'Fie, Dear, fie.

I'm glad I played it well. But such a taking!
You'll hear the thing enough before I've done.'
And she would draw away from him, still shaking.
Had he but guessed she was another one,
Another violin. Her strings were aching,
Stretched to the touch of his bow hand, again
He played and she almost broke at the strain.

Where was the use of thinking of it now,
Sitting alone and listening to the clock!
She'd best make haste and knit another row.

Three hours at least must pass before his knock
Would startle her. It always was a shock.
She listened - listened - for so long before,
That when it came her hearing almost tore.

She caught herself just starting in to listen.
What nerves she had: rattling like brittle sticks!
She wandered to the window, for the glisten
Of a bright moon was tempting. Snuffed the wicks
Of her two candles. Still she could not fix
To anything. The moon in a broad swath
Beckoned her out and down the garden-path.

Against the house, her hollyhocks stood high
And black, their shadows doubling them. The night
Was white and still with moonlight, and a sigh
Of blowing leaves was there, and the dim flight
Of insects, and the smell of aconite,
And stocks, and Marvel of Peru. She flitted
Along the path, where blocks of shadow pitted

The even flags. She let herself go dreaming
Of Theodore her husband, and the tune
From `Orfeo' swam through her mind, but seeming
Changed - shriller. Of a sudden, the clear moon
Showed her a passer-by, inopportune
Indeed, but here he was, whistling and striding.
Lotta squeezed in between the currants, hiding.

'The best laid plans of mice and men,' alas!
The stranger came indeed, but did not pass.
Instead, he leant upon the garden-gate,
Folding his arms and whistling. Lotta's state,
Crouched in the prickly currants, on wet grass,
Was far from pleasant. Still the stranger stayed,
And Lotta in her currants watched, dismayed.

He seemed a proper fellow standing there
In the bright moonshine. His cocked hat was laced
With silver, and he wore his own brown hair
Tied, but unpowdered. His whole bearing graced
A fine cloth coat, and ruffled shirt, and chased
Sword-hilt. Charlotta looked, but her position
Was hardly easy. When would his volition

Suggest his walking on? And then that tune!
A half-a-dozen bars from `Orfeo'
Gone over and over, and murdered. What Fortune
Had brought him there to stare about him so?
'Ach, Gott im Himmel! Why will he not go!'
Thought Lotta, but the young man whistled on,
And seemed in no great hurry to be gone.

Charlotta, crouched among the currant bushes,
Watched the moon slowly dip from twig to twig.
If Theodore should chance to come, and blushes
Streamed over her. He would not care a fig,
He'd only laugh. She pushed aside a sprig
Of sharp-edged leaves and peered, then she uprose
Amid her bushes. 'Sir,' said she, 'pray whose

Garden do you suppose you're watching? Why
Do you stand there? I really must insist
Upon your leaving. 'Tis unmannerly
To stay so long.' The young man gave a twist
And turned about, and in the amethyst
Moonlight he saw her like a nymph half-risen
From the green bushes which had been her prison.

He swept his hat off in a hurried bow.
'Your pardon, Madam, I had no idea
I was not quite alone, and that is how
I came to stay. My trespass was not sheer
Impertinence. I thought no one was here,
And really gardens cry to be admired.
To-night especially it seemed required.

And may I beg to introduce myself?
Heinrich Marohl of Munich. And your name?'
Charlotta told him. And the artful elf
Promptly exclaimed about her husband's fame.
So Lotta, half-unwilling, slowly came
To conversation with him. When she went
Into the house, she found the evening spent.

Theodore arrived quite wearied out and teased,
With all excitement in him burned away.
It had gone well, he said, the audience pleased,
And he had played his very best to-day,
But afterwards he had been forced to stay
And practise with the stupid ones. His head
Ached furiously, and he must get to bed.

Part Second

Herr Concert-Meister Altgelt played,
And the four strings of his violin
Were spinning like bees on a day in Spring.
The notes rose into the wide sun-mote
Which slanted through the window,
They lay like coloured beads a-row,
They knocked together and parted,
And started to dance,
Skipping, tripping, each one slipping

Under and over the others so
That the polychrome fire streamed like a lance
Or a comet's tail,
Behind them.
Then a wail arose - crescendo -
And dropped from off the end of the bow,
And the dancing stopped.
A scent of lilies filled the room,
Long and slow. Each large white bloom
Breathed a sound which was holy perfume from a blessed censer,
And the hum of an organ tone,
And they waved like fans in a hall of stone
Over a bier standing there in the centre, alone.
Each lily bent slowly as it was blown.
Like smoke they rose from the violin -
Then faded as a swifter bowing
Jumbled the notes like wavelets flowing
In a splashing, pashing, rippling motion
Between broad meadows to an ocean
Wide as a day and blue as a flower,
Where every hour
Gulls dipped, and scattered, and squawked, and squealed,
And over the marshes the Angelus pealed,
And the prows of the fishing-boats were spattered
With spray.
And away a couple of frigates were starting
To race to Java with all sails set,
Topgallants, and royals, and stunsails, and jibs,
And wide moonsails; and the shining rails
Were polished so bright they sparked in the sun.
All the sails went up with a run:
'They call me Hanging Johnny,
Away-i-oh;
They call me Hanging Johnny,
So hang, boys, hang.'
And the sun had set and the high moon whitened,
And the ship heeled over to the breeze.
He drew her into the shade of the sails,
And whispered tales
Of voyages in the China seas,
And his arm around her
Held and bound her.
She almost swooned,
With the breeze and the moon
And the slipping sea,
And he beside her,
Touching her, leaning -
The ship careening,
With the white moon steadily shining over
Her and her lover,
Theodore, still her lover!

Then a quiver fell on the crowded notes,
And slowly floated
A single note which spread and spread
Till it filled the room with a shimmer like gold,
And noises shivered throughout its length,
And tried its strength.
They pulled it, and tore it,
And the stuff waned thinner, but still it bore it.
Then a wide rent
Split the arching tent,
And balls of fire spurted through,
Spitting yellow, and mauve, and blue.
One by one they were quenched as they fell,
Only the blue burned steadily.
Paler and paler it grew, and - faded - away.
Herr Altgelt stopped.

'Well, Lottachen, my Dear, what do you say?
I think I'm in good trim. Now let's have dinner.
What's this, my Love, you're very sweet to-day.
I wonder how it happens I'm the winner
Of so much sweetness. But I think you're thinner;
You're like a bag of feathers on my knee.
Why, Lotta child, you're almost strangling me.

I'm glad you're going out this afternoon.
The days are getting short, and I'm so tied
At the Court Theatre my poor little bride
Has not much junketing I fear, but soon
I'll ask our manager to grant a boon.
To-night, perhaps, I'll get a pass for you,
And when I go, why Lotta can come too.

Now dinner, Love. I want some onion soup
To whip me up till that rehearsal's over.
You know it's odd how some women can stoop!
Fraeulein Gebnitz has taken on a lover,
A Jew named Goldstein. No one can discover
If it's his money. But she lives alone
Practically. Gebnitz is a stone,

Pores over books all day, and has no ear
For his wife's singing. Artists must have men;
They need appreciation. But it's queer
What messes people make of their lives, when
They should know more. If Gebnitz finds out, then
His wife will pack. Yes, shut the door at once.
I did not feel it cold, I am a dunce.'

Frau Altgelt tied her bonnet on and went
Into the streets. A bright, crisp Autumn wind
Flirted her skirts and hair. A turbulent,

Audacious wind it was, now close behind,
Pushing her bonnet forward till it twined
The strings across her face, then from in front
Slantingly swinging at her with a shunt,

Until she lay against it, struggling, pushing,
Dismayed to find her clothing tightly bound
Around her, every fold and wrinkle crushing
Itself upon her, so that she was wound
In draperies as clinging as those found
Sucking about a sea nymph on the frieze
Of some old Grecian temple. In the breeze

The shops and houses had a quality
Of hard and dazzling colour; something sharp
And buoyant, like white, puffing sails at sea.
The city streets were twanging like a harp.
Charlotta caught the movement, skippingly
She blew along the pavement, hardly knowing
Toward what destination she was going.

She fetched up opposite a jeweller's shop,
Where filigreed tiaras shone like crowns,
And necklaces of emeralds seemed to drop
And then float up again with lightness. Browns
Of striped agates struck her like cold frowns
Amid the gaiety of topaz seals,
Carved though they were with heads, and arms, and wheels.

A row of pencils knobbed with quartz or sard
Delighted her. And rings of every size
Turned smartly round like hoops before her eyes,
Amethyst-flamed or ruby-girdled, jarred
To spokes and flashing triangles, and starred
Like rockets bursting on a festal day.
Charlotta could not tear herself away.

With eyes glued tightly on a golden box,
Whose rare enamel piqued her with its hue,
Changeable, iridescent, shuttlecocks
Of shades and lustres always darting through
Its level, superimposing sheet of blue,
Charlotta did not hear footsteps approaching.
She started at the words: 'Am I encroaching?'

'Oh, Heinrich, how you frightened me! I thought
We were to meet at three, is it quite that?'
'No, it is not,' he answered, 'but I've caught
The trick of missing you. One thing is flat,
I cannot go on this way. Life is what
Might best be conjured up by the word: `Hell'.
Dearest, when will you come?' Lotta, to quell

His effervescence, pointed to the gems
Within the window, asked him to admire
A bracelet or a buckle. But one stems
Uneasily the burning of a fire.
Heinrich was chafing, pricked by his desire.
Little by little she wooed him to her mood
Until at last he promised to be good.

But here he started on another tack;
To buy a jewel, which one would Lotta choose.
She vainly urged against him all her lack
Of other trinkets. Should she dare to use
A ring or brooch her husband might accuse
Her of extravagance, and ask to see
A strict accounting, or still worse might be.

But Heinrich would not be persuaded. Why
Should he not give her what he liked? And in
He went, determined certainly to buy
A thing so beautiful that it would win
Her wavering fancy. Altgelt's violin
He would outscore by such a handsome jewel
That Lotta could no longer be so cruel!

Pity Charlotta, torn in diverse ways.
If she went in with him, the shopman might
Recognize her, give her her name; in days
To come he could denounce her. In her fright
She almost fled. But Heinrich would be quite
Capable of pursuing. By and by
She pushed the door and entered hurriedly.

It took some pains to keep him from bestowing
A pair of ruby earrings, carved like roses,
The setting twined to represent the growing
Tendrils and leaves, upon her. 'Who supposes
I could obtain such things! It simply closes
All comfort for me.' So he changed his mind
And bought as slight a gift as he could find.

A locket, frosted over with seed pearls,
Oblong and slim, for wearing at the neck,
Or hidden in the bosom; their joined curls
Should lie in it. And further to bedeck
His love, Heinrich had picked a whiff, a fleck,
The merest puff of a thin, linked chain
To hang it from. Lotta could not refrain

From weeping as they sauntered down the street.
She did not want the locket, yet she did.
To have him love her she found very sweet,

But it is hard to keep love always hid.
Then there was something in her heart which chid
Her, told her she loved Theodore in him,
That all these meetings were a foolish whim.

She thought of Theodore and the life they led,
So near together, but so little mingled.
The great clouds bulged and bellied overhead,
And the fresh wind about her body tingled;
The crane of a large warehouse creaked and jingled;
Charlotta held her breath for very fear,
About her in the street she seemed to hear:
'They call me Hanging Johnny,
Away-i-oh;
They call me Hanging Johnny,
So hang, boys, hang.'

And it was Theodore, under the racing skies,
Who held her and who whispered in her ear.
She knew her heart was telling her no lies,
Beating and hammering. He was so dear,
The touch of him would send her in a queer
Swoon that was half an ecstasy. And yearning
For Theodore, she wandered, slowly turning

Street after street as Heinrich wished it so.
He had some aim, she had forgotten what.
Their progress was confused and very slow,
But at the last they reached a lonely spot,
A garden far above the highest shot
Of soaring steeple. At their feet, the town
Spread open like a chequer-board laid down.

Lotta was dimly conscious of the rest,
Vaguely remembered how he clasped the chain
About her neck. She treated it in jest,
And saw his face cloud over with sharp pain.
Then suddenly she felt as though a strain
Were put upon her, collared like a slave,
Leashed in the meshes of this thing he gave.

She seized the flimsy rings with both her hands
To snap it, but they held with odd persistence.
Her eyes were blinded by two wind-blown strands
Of hair which had been loosened. Her resistance
Melted within her, from remotest distance,
Misty, unreal, his face grew warm and near,
And giving way she knew him very dear.

For long he held her, and they both gazed down
At the wide city, and its blue, bridged river.
From wooing he jested with her, snipped the blown

Strands of her hair, and tied them with a sliver
Cut from his own head. But she gave a shiver
When, opening the locket, they were placed
Under the glass, commingled and enlaced.

'When will you have it so with us?' He sighed.
She shook her head. He pressed her further. 'No,
No, Heinrich, Theodore loves me,' and she tried
To free herself and rise. He held her so,
Clipped by his arms, she could not move nor go.
'But you love me,' he whispered, with his face
Burning against her through her kerchief's lace.

Frau Altgelt knew she toyed with fire, knew
That what her husband lit this other man
Fanned to hot flame. She told herself that few
Women were so discreet as she, who ran
No danger since she knew what things to ban.
She opened her house door at five o'clock,
A short half-hour before her husband's knock.

Part Third

The `Residenz-Theater' sparked and hummed
With lights and people. Gebnitz was to sing,
That rare soprano. All the fiddles strummed
With tuning up; the wood-winds made a ring
Of reedy bubbling noises, and the sting
Of sharp, red brass pierced every ear-drum; patting
From muffled tympani made a dark slatting

Across the silver shimmering of flutes;
A bassoon grunted, and an oboe wailed;
The 'celli pizzicato-ed like great lutes,
And mutterings of double basses trailed
Away to silence, while loud harp-strings hailed
Their thin, bright colours down in such a scatter
They lost themselves amid the general clatter.

Frau Altgelt in the gallery, alone,
Felt lifted up into another world.
Before her eyes a thousand candles shone
In the great chandeliers. A maze of curled
And powdered periwigs past her eyes swirled.
She smelt the smoke of candles guttering,
And caught the glint of jewelled fans fluttering

All round her in the boxes. Red and gold,
The house, like rubies set in filigree,
Filliped the candlelight about, and bold
Young sparks with eye-glasses, unblushingly
Ogled fair beauties in the balcony.

An officer went by, his steel spurs jangling.
Behind Charlotta an old man was wrangling

About a play-bill he had bought and lost.
Three drunken soldiers had to be ejected.
Frau Altgelt's eyes stared at the vacant post
Of Concert-Meister, she at once detected
The stir which brought him. But she felt neglected
When with no glance about him or her way,
He lifted up his violin to play.

The curtain went up? Perhaps. If so,
Charlotta never saw it go.
The famous Fraeulein Gebnitz' singing
Only came to her like the ringing
Of bells at a festa
Which swing in the air
And nobody realizes they are there.
They jingle and jangle,
And clang, and bang,
And never a soul could tell whether they rang,
For the plopping of guns and rockets
And the chinking of silver to spend, in one's pockets,
And the shuffling and clapping of feet,
And the loud flapping
Of flags, with the drums,
As the military comes.
It's a famous tune to walk to,
And I wonder where they're off to.
Step-step-stepping to the beating of the drums.
But the rhythm changes as though a mist
Were curling and twisting
Over the landscape.
For a moment a rhythmless, tuneless fog
Encompasses her. Then her senses jog
To the breath of a stately minuet.
Herr Altgelt's violin is set
In tune to the slow, sweeping bows, and retreats and advances,
To curtsies brushing the waxen floor as the Court dances.
Long and peaceful like warm Summer nights
When stars shine in the quiet river. And against the lights
Blundering insects knock,
And the `Rathaus' clock
Booms twice, through the shrill sounds
Of flutes and horns in the lamplit grounds.
Pressed against him in the mazy wavering
Of a country dance, with her short breath quavering
She leans upon the beating, throbbing
Music. Laughing, sobbing,
Feet gliding after sliding feet;
His - hers -
The ballroom blurs -

She feels the air
Lifting her hair,
And the lapping of water on the stone stair.
He is there! He is there!
Twang harps, and squeal, you thin violins,
That the dancers may dance, and never discover
The old stone stair leading down to the river
With the chestnut-tree branches hanging over
Her and her lover.
Theodore, still her lover!

The evening passed like this, in a half faint,
Delirium with waking intervals
Which were the entr'acts. Under the restraint
Of a large company, the constant calls
For oranges or syrops from the stalls
Outside, the talk, the passing to and fro,
Lotta sat ill at ease, incognito.

She heard the Gebnitz praised, the tenor lauded,
The music vaunted as most excellent.
The scenery and the costumes were applauded,
The latter it was whispered had been sent
From Italy. The Herr Direktor spent
A fortune on them, so the gossips said.
Charlotta felt a lightness in her head.

When the next act began, her eyes were swimming,
Her prodded ears were aching and confused.
The first notes from the orchestra sent skimming
Her outward consciousness. Her brain was fused
Into the music, Theodore's music! Used
To hear him play, she caught his single tone.
For all she noticed they two were alone.

Part Fourth

Frau Altgelt waited in the chilly street,
Hustled by lackeys who ran up and down
Shouting their coachmen's names; forced to retreat
A pace or two by lurching chairmen; thrown
Rudely aside by linkboys; boldly shown
The ogling rapture in two bleary eyes
Thrust close to hers in most unpleasant wise.

Escaping these, she hit a liveried arm,
Was sworn at by this glittering gentleman
And ordered off. However, no great harm
Came to her. But she looked a trifle wan
When Theodore, her belated guardian,
Emerged. She snuggled up against him, trembling,
Half out of fear, half out of the assembling

Of all the thoughts and needs his playing had given.
Had she enjoyed herself, he wished to know.
'Oh! Theodore, can't you feel that it was Heaven!'
'Heaven! My Lottachen, and was it so?
Gebnitz was in good voice, but all the flow
Of her last aria was spoiled by Klops,
A wretched flutist, she was mad as hops.'

He was so simple, so matter-of-fact,
Charlotta Altgelt knew not what to say
To bring him to her dream. His lack of tact
Kept him explaining all the homeward way
How this thing had gone well, that badly. 'Stay,
Theodore!' she cried at last. 'You know to me
Nothing was real, it was an ecstasy.'

And he was heartily glad she had enjoyed
Herself so much, and said so. 'But it's good
To be got home again.' He was employed
In looking at his violin, the wood
Was old, and evening air did it no good.
But when he drew up to the table for tea
Something about his wife's vivacity

Struck him as hectic, worried him in short.
He talked of this and that but watched her close.
Tea over, he endeavoured to extort
The cause of her excitement. She arose
And stood beside him, trying to compose
Herself, all whipt to quivering, curdled life,
And he, poor fool, misunderstood his wife.

Suddenly, broken through her anxious grasp,
Her music-kindled love crashed on him there.
Amazed, he felt her fling against him, clasp
Her arms about him, weighing down his chair,
Sobbing out all her hours of despair.
'Theodore, a woman needs to hear things proved.
Unless you tell me, I feel I'm not loved.'

Theodore went under in this tearing wave,
He yielded to it, and its headlong flow
Filled him with all the energy she gave.
He was a youth again, and this bright glow,
This living, vivid joy he had to show
Her what she was to him. Laughing and crying,
She asked assurances there's no denying.

Over and over again her questions, till
He quite convinced her, every now and then
She kissed him, shivering as though doubting still.

But later when they were composed and when
She dared relax her probings, 'Lottachen,'
He asked, 'how is it your love has withstood
My inadvertence? I was made of wood.'

She told him, and no doubt she meant it truly,
That he was sun, and grass, and wind, and sky
To her. And even if conscience were unruly
She salved it by neat sophistries, but why
Suppose her insincere, it was no lie
She said, for Heinrich was as much forgot
As though he'd never been within earshot.

But Theodore's hands in straying and caressing
Fumbled against the locket where it lay
Upon her neck. 'What is this thing I'm pressing?'
He asked. 'Let's bring it to the light of day.'
He lifted up the locket. 'It should stay
Outside, my Dear. Your mother has good taste.
To keep it hidden surely is a waste.'

Pity again Charlotta, straight aroused
Out of her happiness. The locket brought
A chilly jet of truth upon her, soused
Under its icy spurting she was caught,
And choked, and frozen. Suddenly she sought
The clasp, but with such art was this contrived
Her fumbling fingers never once arrived

Upon it. Feeling, twisting, round and round,
She pulled the chain quite through the locket's ring
And still it held. Her neck, encompassed, bound,
Chafed at the sliding meshes. Such a thing
To hurl her out of joy! A gilded string
Binding her folly to her, and those curls
Which lay entwined beneath the clustered pearls!

Again she tried to break the cord. It stood.
'Unclasp it, Theodore,' she begged. But he
Refused, and being in a happy mood,
Twitted her with her inefficiency,
Then looking at her very seriously:
'I think, Charlotta, it is well to have
Always about one what a mother gave.

As she has taken the great pains to send
This jewel to you from Dresden, it will be
Ingratitude if you do not intend
To carry it about you constantly.
With her fine taste you cannot disagree,
The locket is most beautifully designed.'
He opened it and there the curls were, twined.

Charlotta's heart dropped beats like knitting-stitches.
She burned a moment, flaming; then she froze.
Her face was jerked by little, nervous twitches,
She heard her husband asking: 'What are those?'
Put out her hand quickly to interpose,
But stopped, the gesture half-complete, astounded
At the calm way the question was propounded.

'A pretty fancy, Dear, I do declare.
Indeed I will not let you put it off.
A lovely thought: yours and your mother's hair!'
Charlotta hid a gasp under a cough.
'Never with my connivance shall you doff
This charming gift.' He kissed her on the cheek,
And Lotta suffered him, quite crushed and meek.

When later in their room she lay awake,
Watching the moonlight slip along the floor,
She felt the chain and wept for Theodore's sake.
She had loved Heinrich also, and the core
Of truth, unlovely, startled her. Wherefore
She vowed from now to break this double life
And see herself only as Theodore's wife.

Part Fifth

It was no easy matter to convince
Heinrich that it was finished. Hard to say
That though they could not meet (he saw her wince)
She still must keep the locket to allay
Suspicion in her husband. She would pay
Him from her savings bit by bit - the oath
He swore at that was startling to them both.

Her resolution taken, Frau Altgelt
Adhered to it, and suffered no regret.
She found her husband all that she had felt
His music to contain. Her days were set
In his as though she were an amulet
Cased in bright gold. She joyed in her confining;
Her eyes put out her looking-glass with shining.

Charlotta was so gay that old, dull tasks
Were furbished up to seem like rituals.
She baked and brewed as one who only asks
The right to serve. Her daily manuals
Of prayer were duties, and her festivals
When Theodore praised some dish, or frankly said
She had a knack in making up a bed.

So Autumn went, and all the mountains round

The city glittered white with fallen snow,
For it was Winter. Over the hard ground
Herr Altgelt's footsteps came, each one a blow.
On the swept flags behind the currant row
Charlotta stood to greet him. But his lip
Only flicked hers. His Concert-Meistership

Was first again. This evening he had got
Important news. The opera ordered from
Young Mozart was arrived. That old despot,
The Bishop of Salzburg, had let him come
Himself to lead it, and the parts, still hot
From copying, had been tried over. Never
Had any music started such a fever.

The orchestra had cheered till they were hoarse,
The singers clapped and clapped. The town was made,
With such a great attraction through the course
Of Carnival time. In what utter shade
All other cities would be left! The trade
In music would all drift here naturally.
In his excitement he forgot his tea.

Lotta was forced to take his cup and put
It in his hand. But still he rattled on,
Sipping at intervals. The new catgut
Strings he was using gave out such a tone
The 'Maestro' had remarked it, and had gone
Out of his way to praise him. Lotta smiled,
He was as happy as a little child.

From that day on, Herr Altgelt, more and more,
Absorbed himself in work. Lotta at first
Was patient and well-wishing. But it wore
Upon her when two weeks had brought no burst
Of loving from him. Then she feared the worst;
That his short interest in her was a light
Flared up an instant only in the night.

`Idomeneo' was the opera's name,
A name that poor Charlotta learnt to hate.
Herr Altgelt worked so hard he seldom came
Home for his tea, and it was very late,
Past midnight sometimes, when he knocked. His state
Was like a flabby orange whose crushed skin
Is thin with pulling, and all dented in.

He practised every morning and her heart
Followed his bow. But often she would sit,
While he was playing, quite withdrawn apart,
Absently fingering and touching it,
The locket, which now seemed to her a bit

Of some gone youth. His music drew her tears,
And through the notes he played, her dreading ears

Heard Heinrich's voice, saying he had not changed;
Beer merchants had no ecstasies to take
Their minds off love. So far her thoughts had ranged
Away from her stern vow, she chanced to take
Her way, one morning, quite by a mistake,
Along the street where Heinrich had his shop.
What harm to pass it since she should not stop!

It matters nothing how one day she met
Him on a bridge, and blushed, and hurried by.
Nor how the following week he stood to let
Her pass, the pavement narrowing suddenly.
How once he took her basket, and once he
Pulled back a rearing horse who might have struck
Her with his hoofs. It seemed the oddest luck

How many times their business took them each
Right to the other. Then at last he spoke,
But she would only nod, he got no speech
From her. Next time he treated it in joke,
And that so lightly that her vow she broke
And answered. So they drifted into seeing
Each other as before. There was no fleeing.

Christmas was over and the Carnival
Was very near, and tripping from each tongue
Was talk of the new opera. Each book-stall
Flaunted it out in bills, what airs were sung,
What singers hired. Pictures of the young
'Maestro' were for sale. The town was mad.
Only Charlotta felt depressed and sad.

Each day now brought a struggle 'twixt her will
And Heinrich's. 'Twixt her love for Theodore
And him. Sometimes she wished to kill
Herself to solve her problem. For a score
Of reasons Heinrich tempted her. He bore
Her moods with patience, and so surely urged
Himself upon her, she was slowly merged

Into his way of thinking, and to fly
With him seemed easy. But next morning would
The Stradivarius undo her mood.
Then she would realize that she must cleave
Always to Theodore. And she would try
To convince Heinrich she should never leave,
And afterwards she would go home and grieve.

All thought in Munich centered on the part

Of January when there would be given
`Idomeneo' by Wolfgang Mozart.
The twenty-ninth was fixed. And all seats, even
Those almost at the ceiling, which were driven
Behind the highest gallery, were sold.
The inches of the theatre went for gold.

Herr Altgelt was a shadow worn so thin
With work, he hardly printed black behind
The candle. He and his old violin
Made up one person. He was not unkind,
But dazed outside his playing, and the rind,
The pine and maple of his fiddle, guarded
A part of him which he had quite discarded.

It woke in the silence of frost-bright nights,
In little lights,
Like will-o'-the-wisps flickering, fluttering,
Here - there -
Spurting, sputtering,
Fading and lighting,
Together, asunder -
Till Lotta sat up in bed with wonder,
And the faint grey patch of the window shone
Upon her sitting there, alone.
For Theodore slept.

The twenty-eighth was last rehearsal day,
'Twas called for noon, so early morning meant
Herr Altgelt's only time in which to play
His part alone. Drawn like a monk who's spent
Himself in prayer and fasting, Theodore went
Into the kitchen, with a weary word
Of cheer to Lotta, careless if she heard.

Lotta heard more than his spoken word.
She heard the vibrating of strings and wood.
She was washing the dishes, her hands all suds,
When the sound began,
Long as the span
Of a white road snaking about a hill.
The orchards are filled
With cherry blossoms at butterfly poise.
Hawthorn buds are cracking,
And in the distance a shepherd is clacking
His shears, snip-snipping the wool from his sheep.
The notes are asleep,
Lying adrift on the air
In level lines
Like sunlight hanging in pines and pines,
Strung and threaded,
All imbedded

In the blue-green of the hazy pines.
Lines - long, straight lines!
And stems,
Long, straight stems
Pushing up
To the cup of blue, blue sky.
Stems growing misty
With the many of them,
Red-green mist
Of the trees,
And these
Wood-flavoured notes.
The back is maple and the belly is pine.
The rich notes twine
As though weaving in and out of leaves,
Broad leaves
Flapping slowly like elephants' ears,
Waving and falling.
Another sound peers
Through little pine fingers,
And lingers, peeping.
Ping! Ping! pizzicato, something is cheeping.
There is a twittering up in the branches,
A chirp and a lilt,
And crimson atilt on a swaying twig.
Wings! Wings!
And a little ruffled-out throat which sings.
The forest bends, tumultuous
With song.
The woodpecker knocks,
And the song-sparrow trills,
Every fir, and cedar, and yew
Has a nest or a bird,
It is quite absurd
To hear them cutting across each other:
Peewits, and thrushes, and larks, all at once,
And a loud cuckoo is trying to smother
A wood-pigeon perched on a birch,
'Roo - coo - oo - oo -'
'Cuckoo! Cuckoo! That's one for you!'
A blackbird whistles, how sharp, how shrill!
And the great trees toss
And leaves blow down,
You can almost hear them splash on the ground.
The whistle again:
It is double and loud!
The leaves are splashing,
And water is dashing
Over those creepers, for they are shrouds;
And men are running up them to furl the sails,
For there is a capful of wind to-day,
And we are already well under way.

The deck is aslant in the bubbling breeze.
'Theodore, please.
Oh, Dear, how you tease!'
And the boatswain's whistle sounds again,
And the men pull on the sheets:
'My name is Hanging Johnny,
Away-i-oh;
They call me Hanging Johnny,
So hang, boys, hang.'
The trees of the forest are masts, tall masts;
They are swinging over
Her and her lover.
Almost swooning
Under the ballooning canvas,
She lies
Looking up in his eyes
As he bends farther over.
Theodore, still her lover!

The suds were dried upon Charlotta's hands,
She leant against the table for support,
Wholly forgotten. Theodore's eyes were brands
Burning upon his music. He stopped short.
Charlotta almost heard the sound of bands
Snapping. She put one hand up to her heart,
Her fingers touched the locket with a start.

Herr Altgelt put his violin away
Listlessly. 'Lotta, I must have some rest.
The strain will be a hideous one to-day.
Don't speak to me at all. It will be best
If I am quiet till I go.' And lest
She disobey, he left her. On the stairs
She heard his mounting steps. What use were prayers!

He could not hear, he was not there, for she
Was married to a mummy, a machine.
Her hand closed on the locket bitterly.
Before her, on a chair, lay the shagreen
Case of his violin. She saw the clean
Sun flash the open clasp. The locket's edge
Cut at her fingers like a pushing wedge.

A heavy cart went by, a distant bell
Chimed ten, the fire flickered in the grate.
She was alone. Her throat began to swell
With sobs. What kept her here, why should she wait?
The violin she had begun to hate
Lay in its case before her. Here she flung
The cover open. With the fiddle swung

Over her head, the hanging clock's loud ticking

Caught on her ear. 'Twas slow, and as she paused
The little door in it came open, flicking
A wooden cuckoo out: 'Cuckoo!' It caused
The forest dream to come again. 'Cuckoo!'
Smashed on the grate, the violin broke in two.

'Cuckoo! Cuckoo!' the clock kept striking on;
But no one listened. Frau Altgelt had gone.

Amy Lowell

The Crescent Moon

Slipping softly through the sky
Little horned, happy moon,
Can you hear me up so high?
Will you come down soon?

On my nursery window-sill
Will you stay your steady flight?
And then float away with me
Through the summer night?

Brushing over tops of trees,
Playing hide and seek with stars,
Peeping up through shiny clouds
At Jupiter or Mars.

I shall fill my lap with roses
Gathered in the milky way,
All to carry home to mother.
Oh! what will she say!

Little rocking, sailing moon,
Do you hear me shout -- Ahoy!
Just a little nearer, moon,
To please a little boy.

Amy Lowell

The Cross-Roads

A bullet through his heart at dawn. On the table a letter signed
with a woman's name. A wind that goes howling round the house,
and weeping as in shame. Cold November dawn peeping through the windows,
cold dawn creeping over the floor, creeping up his cold legs,
creeping over his cold body, creeping across his cold face.
A glaze of thin yellow sunlight on the staring eyes. Wind howling
through bent branches. A wind which never dies down. Howling, wailing.
The gazing eyes glitter in the sunlight. The lids are frozen open
and the eyes glitter.

The thudding of a pick on hard earth. A spade grinding and crunching.
Overhead, branches writhing, winding, interlacing, unwinding, scattering;
tortured twinings, tossings, creakings. Wind flinging branches apart,
drawing them together, whispering and whining among them. A waning,
lobsided moon cutting through black clouds. A stream of pebbles and earth
and the empty spade gleams clear in the moonlight, then is rammed again
into the black earth. Tramping of feet. Men and horses.
Squeaking of wheels.

'Whoa! Ready, Jim?'

'All ready.'

Something falls, settles, is still. Suicides have no coffin.

'Give us the stake, Jim. Now.'

Pound! Pound!

'He'll never walk. Nailed to the ground.'

An ash stick pierces his heart, if it buds the roots will hold him.
He is a part of the earth now, clay to clay. Overhead the branches sway,
and writhe, and twist in the wind. He'll never walk with a bullet
in his heart, and an ash stick nailing him to the cold, black ground.

Six months he lay still. Six months. And the water welled up in his body,
and soft blue spots chequered it. He lay still, for the ash stick
held him in place. Six months! Then her face came out of a mist of green.
Pink and white and frail like Dresden china, lilies-of-the-valley
at her breast, puce-coloured silk sheening about her. Under the young
green leaves, the horse at a foot-pace, the high yellow wheels of the chaise
scarcely turning, her face, rippling like grain a-blowing,
under her puce-coloured bonnet; and burning beside her, flaming within
his correct blue coat and brass buttons, is someone. What has dimmed the sun?
The horse steps on a rolling stone; a wind in the branches makes a moan.
The little leaves tremble and shake, turn and quake, over and over,
tearing their stems. There is a shower of young leaves,
and a sudden-sprung gale wails in the trees.

The yellow-wheeled chaise is rocking - rocking, and all the branches
are knocking - knocking. The sun in the sky is a flat, red plate,
the branches creak and grate. She screams and cowers, for the green foliage
is a lowering wave surging to smother her. But she sees nothing.
The stake holds firm. The body writhes, the body squirms.
The blue spots widen, the flesh tears, but the stake wears well
in the deep, black ground. It holds the body in the still, black ground.

Two years! The body has been in the ground two years. It is worn away;
it is clay to clay. Where the heart moulders, a greenish dust, the stake
is thrust. Late August it is, and night; a night flauntingly jewelled
with stars, a night of shooting stars and loud insect noises.
Down the road to Tilbury, silence - and the slow flapping of large leaves.
Down the road to Sutton, silence - and the darkness of heavy-foliaged trees.
Down the road to Wayfleet, silence - and the whirring scrape of insects
in the branches. Down the road to Edgarstown, silence - and stars like
stepping-stones in a pathway overhead. It is very quiet at the cross-roads,
and the sign-board points the way down the four roads, endlessly points
the way where nobody wishes to go.

A horse is galloping, galloping up from Sutton. Shaking the wide,
still leaves as he goes under them. Striking sparks with his iron shoes;
silencing the katydids. Dr. Morgan riding to a child-birth over Tilbury way;
riding to deliver a woman of her first-born son. One o'clock from
Wayfleet bell tower, what a shower of shooting stars! And a breeze
all of a sudden, jarring the big leaves and making them jerk up and down.
Dr. Morgan's hat is blown from his head, the horse swerves, and curves away
from the sign-post. An oath - spurs - a blurring of grey mist.
A quick left twist, and the gelding is snorting and racing
down the Tilbury road with the wind dropping away behind him.

The stake has wrenched, the stake has started, the body, flesh from flesh,
has parted. But the bones hold tight, socket and ball, and clamping them down
in the hard, black ground is the stake, wedged through ribs and spine.
The bones may twist, and heave, and twine, but the stake holds them still
in line. The breeze goes down, and the round stars shine, for the stake
holds the fleshless bones in line.

Twenty years now! Twenty long years! The body has powdered itself away;
it is clay to clay. It is brown earth mingled with brown earth. Only flaky
bones remain, lain together so long they fit, although not one bone is knit
to another. The stake is there too, rotted through, but upright still,
and still piercing down between ribs and spine in a straight line.

Yellow stillness is on the cross-roads, yellow stillness is on the trees.
The leaves hang drooping, wan. The four roads point four yellow ways,
saffron and gamboge ribbons to the gaze. A little swirl of dust
blows up Tilbury road, the wind which fans it has not strength to do more;
it ceases, and the dust settles down. A little whirl of wind
comes up Tilbury road. It brings a sound of wheels and feet.

The wind reels a moment and faints to nothing under the sign-post.
Wind again, wheels and feet louder. Wind again - again - again.
A drop of rain, flat into the dust. Drop! - Drop! Thick heavy raindrops,
and a shrieking wind bending the great trees and wrenching off their leaves.

Under the black sky, bowed and dripping with rain, up Tilbury road,
comes the procession. A funeral procession, bound for the graveyard
at Wayfleet. Feet and wheels - feet and wheels. And among them
one who is carried.

The bones in the deep, still earth shiver and pull. There is a quiver
through the rotted stake. Then stake and bones fall together
in a little puffing of dust.

Like meshes of linked steel the rain shuts down behind the procession,
now well along the Wayfleet road.

He wavers like smoke in the buffeting wind. His fingers blow out like smoke,
his head ripples in the gale. Under the sign-post, in the pouring rain,
he stands, and watches another quavering figure drifting down
the Wayfleet road. Then swiftly he streams after it. It flickers
among the trees. He licks out and winds about them. Over, under,
blown, contorted. Spindrift after spindrift; smoke following smoke.
There is a wailing through the trees, a wailing of fear,
and after it laughter - laughter - laughter, skirling up to the black sky.
Lightning jags over the funeral procession. A heavy clap of thunder.
Then darkness and rain, and the sound of feet and wheels.

Amy Lowell

The Cyclists

Spread on the roadway,
With open-blown jackets,
Like black, soaring pinions,
They swoop down the hillside,
The Cyclists.

Seeming dark-plumaged
Birds, after carrion,
Careening and circling,
Over the dying
Of England.

She lies with her bosom
Beneath them, no longer
The Dominant Mother,
The Virile -- but rotting
Before time.

The smell of her, tainted,
Has bitten their nostrils.
Exultant they hover,
And shadow the sun with
Foreboding.

Amy Lowell

The Dinner-Party

Fish

'So . . .' they said,
With their wine-glasses delicately poised,
Mocking at the thing they cannot understand.
'So . . .' they said again,
Amused and insolent.
The silver on the table glittered,
And the red wine in the glasses
Seemed the blood I had wasted
In a foolish cause.

Game

The gentleman with the grey-and-black whiskers
Sneered languidly over his quail.
Then my heart flew up and laboured,
And I burst from my own holding
And hurled myself forward.
With straight blows I beat upon him,
Furiously, with red-hot anger, I thrust against him.
But my weapon slithered over his polished surface,
And I recoiled upon myself,
Panting.

Drawing-Room

In a dress all softness and half-tones,
Indolent and half-reclined,
She lay upon a couch,
With the firelight reflected in her jewels.
But her eyes had no reflection,
They swam in a grey smoke,
The smoke of smouldering ashes,
The smoke of her cindered heart.

Coffee

They sat in a circle with their coffee-cups.
One dropped in a lump of sugar,
One stirred with a spoon.
I saw them as a circle of ghosts
Sipping blackness out of beautiful china,
And mildly protesting against my coarseness
In being alive.

Talk

They took dead men's souls
And pinned them on their breasts for ornament;
Their cuff-links and tiaras
Were gems dug from a grave;
They were ghouls battening on exhumed thoughts;
And I took a green liqueur from a servant
So that he might come near me
And give me the comfort of a living thing.

Eleven O'Clock

The front door was hard and heavy,
It shut behind me on the house of ghosts.
I flattened my feet on the pavement
To feel it solid under me;
I ran my hand along the railings
And shook them,
And pressed their pointed bars
Into my palms.
The hurt of it reassured me,
And I did it again and again
Until they were bruised.
When I woke in the night
I laughed to find them aching,
For only living flesh can suffer.

Amy Lowell

The End

Throughout the echoing chambers of my brain
I hear your words in mournful cadence toll
Like some slow passing-bell which warns the soul
Of sundering darkness. Unrelenting, fain
To batter down resistance, fall again
Stroke after stroke, insistent diastole,
The bitter blows of truth, until the whole
Is hammered into fact made strangely plain.
Where shall I look for comfort? Not to you.
Our worlds are drawn apart, our spirit's suns
Divided, and the light of mine burnt dim.
Now in the haunted twilight I must do
Your will. I grasp the cup which over-runs,
And with my trembling lips I touch the rim.

Amy Lowell

The Exeter Road

Panels of claret and blue which shine
Under the moon like lees of wine.
A coronet done in a golden scroll,
And wheels which blunder and creak as they roll
Through the muddy ruts of a moorland track.
They daren't look back!

They are whipping and cursing the horses. Lord!
What brutes men are when they think they're scored.
Behind, my bay gelding gallops with me,
In a steaming sweat, it is fine to see
That coach, all claret, and gold, and blue,
Hop about and slue.

They are scared half out of their wits, poor souls.
For my lord has a casket full of rolls
Of minted sovereigns, and silver bars.
I laugh to think how he'll show his scars
In London to-morrow. He whines with rage
In his varnished cage.

My lady has shoved her rings over her toes.
'Tis an ancient trick every night-rider knows.
But I shall relieve her of them yet,
When I see she limps in the minuet
I must beg to celebrate this night,
And the green moonlight.

There's nothing to hurry about, the plain
Is hours long, and the mud's a strain.
My gelding's uncommonly strong in the loins,
In half an hour I'll bag the coins.
'Tis a clear, sweet night on the turn of Spring.
The chase is the thing!

How the coach flashes and wobbles, the moon
Dripping down so quietly on it. A tune
Is beating out of the curses and screams,
And the cracking all through the painted seams.
Steady, old horse, we'll keep it in sight.
'Tis a rare fine night!

There's a clump of trees on the dip of the down,
And the sky shimmers where it hangs over the town.
It seems a shame to break the air
In two with this pistol, but I've my share
Of drudgery like other men.
His hat? Amen!

Hold up, you beast, now what the devil!
Confound this moor for a pockholed, evil,
Rotten marsh. My right leg's snapped.

'Tis a mercy he's rolled, but I'm nicely capped.
A broken-legged man and a broken-legged horse!
They'll get me, of course.

The cursed coach will reach the town
And they'll all come out, every loafer grown
A lion to handcuff a man that's down.
What's that? Oh, the coachman's bulleted hat!
I'll give it a head to fit it pat.
Thank you! No cravat.

~They handcuffed the body just for style,
And they hung him in chains for the volatile
Wind to scour him flesh from bones.
Way out on the moor you can hear the groans
His gibbet makes when it blows a gale.
'Tis a common tale.~

Amy Lowell

The Fool Errant

The Fool Errant sat by the highway of life
And his gaze wandered up and his gaze wandered down,
A vigorous youth, but with no wish to walk,
Yet his longing was great for the distant town.

He whistled a little frivolous tune
Which he felt to be pulsing with ecstasy,
For he thought that success always followed desire,
Such a very superlative fool was he.

A maiden came by on an ambling mule,
Her gown was rose-red and her kerchief blue,
On her lap she carried a basket of eggs.
Thought the fool, "There is certainly room for two."

So he jauntily swaggered towards the maid

And put out his hand to the bridle-rein.
"My pretty girl," quoth the fool, "take me up,
For to ride with you to the town I am fain."

But the maiden struck at his upraised arm
And pelted him hotly with eggs, a score.
The mule, lashed into a fury, ran;
The fool went back to his stone and swore.

Then out of the cloud of settling dust
The burly form of an abbot appeared,
Reading his office he rode to the town.
And the fool got up, for his heart was cheered.

He stood in the midst of the long, white road
And swept off his cap till it touched the ground.
"Ah, Reverent Sir, well met," said the fool,
"A worthier transport never was found.

"I pray you allow me to mount with you,
Your palfrey seems both sturdy and young."
The abbot looked up from the holy book
And cried out in anger, "Hold your tongue!

"How dare you obstruct the King's highroad,
You saucy varlet, get out of my way."
Then he gave the fool a cut with his whip

And leaving him smarting, he rode away.

The fool was angry, the fool was sore,
And he cursed the folly of monks and maids.
"If I could but meet with a man," sighed the fool,
"For a woman fears, and a friar upbraids."

Then he saw a flashing of distant steel
And the clanking of harness greeted his ears,
And up the road journeyed knights-at-arms,
With waving plumes and glittering spears.

The fool took notice and slowly arose,
Not quite so sure was his foolish heart.
If priests and women would none of him
Was it likely a knight would take his part?

They sang as they rode, these lusty boys,
When one chanced to turn toward the highway's side,
"There's a sorry figure of fun," jested he,
"Well, Sirrah! move back, there is scarce room to ride."

"Good Sirs, Kind Sirs," begged the crestfallen fool,
"I pray of your courtesy speech with you,
I'm for yonder town, and have no horse to ride,
Have you never a charger will carry two?"

Then the company halted and laughed out loud.
"Was such a request ever made to a knight?"
"And where are your legs," asked one, "if you start,
You may be inside the town gates to-night."

"'T is a lazy fellow, let him alone,
They've no room in the town for such idlers as he."
But one bent from his saddle and said, "My man,
Art thou not ashamed to beg charity!

"Thou art well set up, and thy legs are strong,
But it much misgives me lest thou'rt a fool;
For beggars get only a beggar's crust,
Wise men are reared in a different school."

Then they clattered away in the dust and the wind,
And the fool slunk back to his lonely stone;
He began to see that the man who asks
Must likewise give and not ask alone.

Purple tree-shadows crept over the road,
The level sun flung an orange light,
And the fool laid his head on the hard, gray stone
And wept as he realized advancing night.

A great, round moon rose over a hill
And the steady wind blew yet more cool;
And crouched on a stone a wayfarer sobbed,
For at last he knew he was only a fool.

Amy Lowell

The Foreigner

Have at you, you Devils!
My back's to this tree,
For you're nothing so nice
That the hind-side of me
Would escape your assault.
Come on now, all three!

Here's a dandified gentleman,
Rapier at point,
And a wrist which whirls round
Like a circular joint.
A spatter of blood, man!
That's just to anoint

And make supple your limbs.
'Tis a pity the silk
Of your waistcoat is stained.
Why! Your heart's full of milk,
And so full, it spills over!
I'm not of your ilk.

You said so, and laughed
At my old-fashioned hose,
At the cut of my hair,
At the length of my nose.
To carve it to pattern
I think you propose.

Your pardon, young Sir,
But my nose and my sword
Are proving themselves
In quite perfect accord.
I grieve to have spotted
Your shirt. On my word!

And hullo! You Bully!
That blade's not a stick
To slash right and left,
And my skull is too thick
To be cleft with such cuffs
Of a sword. Now a lick

Down the side of your face.
What a pretty, red line!
Tell the taverns that scar
Was an honour. Don't whine
That a stranger has marked you.
* * * * *
The tree's there, You Swine!

Did you think to get in
At the back, while your friends

Made a little diversion
In front? So it ends,
With your sword clattering down
On the ground. 'Tis amends

I make for your courteous
Reception of me,
A foreigner, landed
From over the sea.
Your welcome was fervent
I think you'll agree.

My shoes are not buckled
With gold, nor my hair
Oiled and scented, my jacket's
Not satin, I wear
Corded breeches, wide hats,
And I make people stare!

So I do, but my heart
Is the heart of a man,
And my thoughts cannot twirl
In the limited span
'Twixt my head and my heels,
As some other men's can.

I have business more strange
Than the shape of my boots,
And my interests range
From the sky, to the roots
Of this dung-hill you live in,
You half-rotted shoots

Of a mouldering tree!
Here's at you, once more.
You Apes! You Jack-fools!
You can show me the door,
And jeer at my ways,
But you're pinked to the core.

And before I have done,
I will prick my name in
With the front of my steel,
And your lily-white skin
Shall be printed with me.
For I've come here to win!

Amy Lowell

The Forsaken

Holy Mother of God, Merciful Mary. Hear me! I am very weary. I have come
from a village miles away, all day I have been coming, and I ache for such
far roaming. I cannot walk as light as I used, and my thoughts grow confused.
I am heavier than I was. Mary Mother, you know the cause!

Beautiful Holy Lady, take my shame away from me! Let this fear
be only seeming, let it be that I am dreaming. For months I have hoped
it was so, now I am afraid I know. Lady, why should this be shame,
just because I haven't got his name. He loved me, yes, Lady, he did,
and he couldn't keep it hid. We meant to marry. Why did he die?

That day when they told me he had gone down in the avalanche, and could not
be found until the snow melted in Spring, I did nothing. I could not cry.
Why should he die? Why should he die and his child live? His little child
alive in me, for my comfort. No, Good God, for my misery! I cannot face
the shame, to be a mother, and not married, and the poor child to be reviled
for having no father. Merciful Mother, Holy Virgin, take away this sin I did.
Let the baby not be. Only take the stigma off of me!

I have told no one but you, Holy Mary. My mother would call me 'whore',
and spit upon me; the priest would have me repent, and have
the rest of my life spent in a convent. I am no whore, no bad woman,
he loved me, and we were to be married. I carried him always in my heart,
what did it matter if I gave him the least part of me too? You were a virgin,
Holy Mother, but you had a son, you know there are times when a woman
must give all. There is some call to give and hold back nothing.
I swear I obeyed God then, and this child who lives in me is the sign.
What am I saying? He is dead, my beautiful, strong man! I shall never
feel him caress me again. This is the only baby I shall have.
Oh, Holy Virgin, protect my baby! My little, helpless baby!

He will look like his father, and he will be as fast a runner and as good
a shot. Not that he shall be no scholar neither. He shall go to school
in winter, and learn to read and write, and my father will teach him to carve,
so that he can make the little horses, and cows, and chamois,
out of white wood. Oh, No! No! No! How can I think such things,
I am not good. My father will have nothing to do with my boy,
I shall be an outcast thing. Oh, Mother of our Lord God, be merciful,
take away my shame! Let my body be as it was before he came.
No little baby for me to keep underneath my heart for those long months.
To live for and to get comfort from. I cannot go home and tell my mother.
She is so hard and righteous. She never loved my father, and we were born
for duty, not for love. I cannot face it. Holy Mother, take my baby away!
Take away my little baby! I don't want it, I can't bear it!

And I shall have nothing, nothing! Just be known as a good girl.
Have other men want to marry me, whom I could not touch, after having known

my man. Known the length and breadth of his beautiful white body,
and the depth of his love, on the high Summer Alp, with the moon above,
and the pine-needles all shiny in the light of it. He is gone, my man,
I shall never hear him or feel him again, but I could not touch another.
I would rather lie under the snow with my own man in my arms!

So I shall live on and on. Just a good woman. With nothing to warm my heart
where he lay, and where he left his baby for me to care for. I shall not be
quite human, I think. Merely a stone-dead creature. They will respect me.
What do I care for respect! You didn't care for people's tongues
when you were carrying our Lord Jesus. God had my man give me my baby,
when He knew that He was going to take him away. His lips will comfort me,
his hands will soothe me. All day I will work at my lace-making,
and all night I will keep him warm by my side and pray the blessed Angels
to cover him with their wings. Dear Mother, what is it that sings?
I hear voices singing, and lovely silver trumpets through it all. They seem
just on the other side of the wall. Let me keep my baby, Holy Mother.
He is only a poor lace-maker's baby, with a stain upon him,
but give me strength to bring him up to be a man.

Amy Lowell

The Fruit Garden Path

The path runs straight between the flowering rows,
A moonlit path, hemmed in by beds of bloom,
Where phlox and marigolds dispute for room
With tall, red dahlias and the briar rose.
'T is reckless prodigality which throws
Into the night these wafts of rich perfume
Which sweep across the garden like a plume.
Over the trees a single bright star glows.
Dear garden of my childhood, here my years
Have run away like little grains of sand;
The moments of my life, its hopes and fears
Have all found utterance here, where now I stand;
My eyes ache with the weight of unshed tears,
You are my home, do you not understand?

Amy Lowell

The Fruit Shop

Cross-ribboned shoes; a muslin gown,
High-waisted, girdled with bright blue;
A straw poke bonnet which hid the frown
She pluckered her little brows into
As she picked her dainty passage through
The dusty street. 'Ah, Mademoiselle,
A dirty pathway, we need rain,
My poor fruits suffer, and the shell
Of this nut's too big for its kernel, lain
Here in the sun it has shrunk again.
The baker down at the corner says
We need a battle to shake the clouds;
But I am a man of peace, my ways
Don't look to the killing of men in crowds.
Poor fellows with guns and bayonets for shrouds!
Pray, Mademoiselle, come out of the sun.
Let me dust off that wicker chair. It's cool
In here, for the green leaves I have run
In a curtain over the door, make a pool
Of shade. You see the pears on that stool -
The shadow keeps them plump and fair.'
Over the fruiterer's door, the leaves
Held back the sun, a greenish flare
Quivered and sparked the shop, the sheaves
Of sunbeams, glanced from the sign on the eaves,
Shot from the golden letters, broke
And splintered to little scattered lights.
Jeanne Tourmont entered the shop, her poke
Bonnet tilted itself to rights,
And her face looked out like the moon on nights
Of flickering clouds. 'Monsieur Popain, I
Want gooseberries, an apple or two,
Or excellent plums, but not if they're high;
Haven't you some which a strong wind blew?
I've only a couple of francs for you.'
Monsieur Popain shrugged and rubbed his hands.
What could he do, the times were sad.
A couple of francs and such demands!
And asking for fruits a little bad.
Wind-blown indeed! He never had
Anything else than the very best.
He pointed to baskets of blunted pears
With the thin skin tight like a bursting vest,
All yellow, and red, and brown, in smears.
Monsieur Popain's voice denoted tears.
He took up a pear with tender care,
And pressed it with his hardened thumb.
'Smell it, Mademoiselle, the perfume there
Is like lavender, and sweet thoughts come
Only from having a dish at home.
And those grapes! They melt in the mouth like wine,
Just a click of the tongue, and they burst to honey.

They're only this morning off the vine,
And I paid for them down in silver money.
The Corporal's widow is witness, her pony
Brought them in at sunrise to-day.
Those oranges - Gold! They're almost red.
They seem little chips just broken away
From the sun itself. Or perhaps instead
You'd like a pomegranate, they're rarely gay,
When you split them the seeds are like crimson spray.
Yes, they're high, they're high, and those Turkey figs,
They all come from the South, and Nelson's ships
Make it a little hard for our rigs.
They must be forever giving the slips
To the cursed English, and when men clips
Through powder to bring them, why dainties mounts
A bit in price. Those almonds now,
I'll strip off that husk, when one discounts
A life or two in a nigger row
With the man who grew them, it does seem how
They would come dear; and then the fight
At sea perhaps, our boats have heels
And mostly they sail along at night,
But once in a way they're caught; one feels
Ivory's not better nor finer - why peels
From an almond kernel are worth two sous.
It's hard to sell them now,' he sighed.
'Purses are tight, but I shall not lose.
There's plenty of cheaper things to choose.'
He picked some currants out of a wide
Earthen bowl. 'They make the tongue
Almost fly out to suck them, bride
Currants they are, they were planted long
Ago for some new Marquise, among
Other great beauties, before the Chateau
Was left to rot. Now the Gardener's wife,
He that marched off to his death at Marengo,
Sells them to me; she keeps her life
From snuffing out, with her pruning knife.
She's a poor old thing, but she learnt the trade
When her man was young, and the young Marquis
Couldn't have enough garden. The flowers he made
All new! And the fruits! But 'twas said that he
Was no friend to the people, and so they laid
Some charge against him, a cavalcade
Of citizens took him away; they meant
Well, but I think there was some mistake.
He just pottered round in his garden, bent
On growing things; we were so awake
In those days for the New Republic's sake.
He's gone, and the garden is all that's left
Not in ruin, but the currants and apricots,
And peaches, furred and sweet, with a cleft

Full of morning dew, in those green-glazed pots,
Why, Mademoiselle, there is never an eft
Or worm among them, and as for theft,
How the old woman keeps them I cannot say,
But they're finer than any grown this way.'
Jeanne Tourmont drew back the filigree ring
Of her striped silk purse, tipped it upside down
And shook it, two coins fell with a ding
Of striking silver, beneath her gown
One rolled, the other lay, a thing
Sparked white and sharply glistening,
In a drop of sunlight between two shades.
She jerked the purse, took its empty ends
And crumpled them toward the centre braids.
The whole collapsed to a mass of blends
Of colours and stripes. 'Monsieur Popain, friends
We have always been. In the days before
The Great Revolution my aunt was kind
When you needed help. You need no more;
'Tis we now who must beg at your door,
And will you refuse?' The little man
Bustled, denied, his heart was good,
But times were hard. He went to a pan
And poured upon the counter a flood
Of pungent raspberries, tanged like wood.
He took a melon with rough green rind
And rubbed it well with his apron tip.
Then he hunted over the shop to find
Some walnuts cracking at the lip,
And added to these a barberry slip
Whose acrid, oval berries hung
Like fringe and trembled. He reached a round
Basket, with handles, from where it swung
Against the wall, laid it on the ground
And filled it, then he searched and found
The francs Jeanne Tourmont had let fall.
'You'll return the basket, Mademoiselle?'
She smiled, 'The next time that I call,
Monsieur. You know that very well.'
'Twas lightly said, but meant to tell.
Monsieur Popain bowed, somewhat abashed.
She took her basket and stepped out.
The sunlight was so bright it flashed
Her eyes to blindness, and the rout
Of the little street was all about.
Through glare and noise she stumbled, dazed.
The heavy basket was a care.
She heard a shout and almost grazed
The panels of a chaise and pair.
The postboy yelled, and an amazed
Face from the carriage window gazed.
She jumped back just in time, her heart

Beating with fear. Through whirling light
The chaise departed, but her smart
Was keen and bitter. In the white
Dust of the street she saw a bright
Streak of colours, wet and gay,
Red like blood. Crushed but fair,
Her fruit stained the cobbles of the way.
Monsieur Popain joined her there.
'Tiens, Mademoiselle,
c'est le General Bonaparte, partant pour la Guerre!'

Amy Lowell

The Garden by Moonlight

A black cat among roses,
Phlox, lilac-misted under a first-quarter moon,
The sweet smells of heliotrope and night-scented stock.
The garden is very still,
It is dazed with moonlight,
Contented with perfume,
Dreaming the opium dreams of its folded poppies.
Firefly lights open and vanish
High as the tip buds of the golden glow
Low as the sweet alyssum flowers at my feet.
Moon-shimmer on leaves and trellises,
Moon-spikes shafting through the snowball bush.
Only the little faces of the ladies' delight are alert and staring,
Only the cat, padding between the roses,
Shakes a branch and breaks the chequered pattern
As water is broken by the falling of a leaf.
Then you come,
And you are quiet like the garden,
And white like the alyssum flowers,
And beautiful as the silent sparks of the fireflies.
Ah, Beloved, do you see those orange lilies?
They knew my mother,
But who belonging to me will they know
When I am gone.

Amy Lowell

The Giver Of Stars

Hold your soul open for my welcoming.
Let the quiet of your spirit bathe me
With its clear and rippled coolness,
That, loose-limbed and weary, I find rest,
Outstretched upon your peace, as on a bed of ivory.

Let the flickering flame of your soul play all about me,
That into my limbs may come the keenness of fire,
The life and joy of tongues of flame,
And, going out from you, tightly strung and in tune,
I may rouse the blear-eyed world,
And pour into it the beauty which you have begotten.

Amy Lowell

The Great Adventure Of Max Breuck

1

A yellow band of light upon the street
Pours from an open door, and makes a wide
Pathway of bright gold across a sheet
Of calm and liquid moonshine. From inside
Come shouts and streams of laughter, and a snatch
Of song, soon drowned and lost again in mirth,
The clip of tankards on a table top,
And stir of booted heels. Against the patch
Of candle-light a shadow falls, its girth
Proclaims the host himself, and master of his shop.

2

This is the tavern of one Hilverdink,
Jan Hilverdink, whose wines are much esteemed.
Within his cellar men can have to drink
The rarest cordials old monks ever schemed
To coax from pulpy grapes, and with nice art
Improve and spice their virgin juiciness.
Here froths the amber beer of many a brew,
Crowning each pewter tankard with as smart
A cap as ever in his wantonness
Winter set glittering on top of an old yew.

3

Tall candles stand upon the table, where
Are twisted glasses, ruby-sparked with wine,
Clarets and ports. Those topaz bumpers were
Drained from slim, long-necked bottles of the Rhine.
The centre of the board is piled with pipes,
Slender and clean, the still unbaptized clay
Awaits its burning fate. Behind, the vault
Stretches from dim to dark, a groping way
Bordered by casks and puncheons, whose brass stripes
And bands gleam dully still, beyond the gay tumult.

4

'For good old Master Hilverdink, a toast!'
Clamoured a youth with tassels on his boots.
'Bring out your oldest brandy for a boast,
From that small barrel in the very roots
Of your deep cellar, man. Why here is Max!
Ho! Welcome, Max, you're scarcely here in time.
We want to drink to old Jan's luck, and smoke
His best tobacco for a grand climax.

Here, Jan, a paper, fragrant as crushed thyme,
We'll have the best to wish you luck, or may we choke!'

5

Max Breuck unclasped his broadcloth cloak, and sat.
'Well thought of, Franz; here's luck to Mynheer Jan.'
The host set down a jar; then to a vat
Lost in the distance of his cellar, ran.
Max took a pipe as graceful as the stem
Of some long tulip, crammed it full, and drew
The pungent smoke deep to his grateful lung.
It curled all blue throughout the cave and flew
Into the silver night. At once there flung
Into the crowded shop a boy, who cried to them:

6

'Oh, sirs, is there some learned lawyer here,
Some advocate, or all-wise counsellor?
My master sent me to inquire where
Such men do mostly be, but every door
Was shut and barred, for late has grown the hour.
I pray you tell me where I may now find
One versed in law, the matter will not wait.'
'I am a lawyer, boy,' said Max, 'my mind
Is not locked to my business, though 'tis late.
I shall be glad to serve what way is in my power.

7

Then once more, cloaked and ready, he set out,
Tripping the footsteps of the eager boy
Along the dappled cobbles, while the rout
Within the tavern jeered at his employ.
Through new-burst elm leaves filtered the white moon,
Who peered and splashed between the twinkling boughs,
Flooded the open spaces, and took flight
Before tall, serried houses in platoon,
Guarded by shadows. Past the Custom House
They took their hurried way in the Spring-scented night.

8

Before a door which fronted a canal
The boy halted. A dim tree-shaded spot.
The water lapped the stones in musical
And rhythmic tappings, and a galliot

Slumbered at anchor with no light aboard.
The boy knocked twice, and steps approached. A flame
Winked through the keyhole, then a key was turned,
And through the open door Max went toward
Another door, whence sound of voices came.
He entered a large room where candelabra burned.

9

An aged man in quilted dressing gown
Rose up to greet him. 'Sir,' said Max, 'you sent
Your messenger to seek throughout the town
A lawyer. I have small accomplishment,
But I am at your service, and my name
Is Max Breuck, Counsellor, at your command.'
'Mynheer,' replied the aged man, 'obliged
Am I, and count myself much privileged.
I am Cornelius Kurler, and my fame
Is better known on distant oceans than on land.

10

My ship has tasted water in strange seas,
And bartered goods at still uncharted isles.
She's oft coquetted with a tropic breeze,
And sheered off hurricanes with jaunty smiles.'
'Tush, Kurler,' here broke in the other man,
'Enough of poetry, draw the deed and sign.'
The old man seemed to wizen at the voice,
'My good friend, Grootver, --' he at once began.
'No introductions, let us have some wine,
And business, now that you at last have made your choice.'

11

A harsh and disagreeable man he proved to be,
This Grootver, with no single kindly thought.
Kurler explained, his old hands nervously
Twisting his beard. His vessel he had bought
From Grootver. He had thought to soon repay
The ducats borrowed, but an adverse wind
Had so delayed him that his cargo brought
But half its proper price, the very day
He came to port he stepped ashore to find
The market glutted and his counted profits naught.

12

Little by little Max made out the way
That Grootver pressed that poor harassed old man.
His money he must have, too long delay
Had turned the usurer to a ruffian.
'But let me take my ship, with many bales
Of cotton stuffs dyed crimson, green, and blue,
Cunningly patterned, made to suit the taste
Of mandarin's ladies; when my battered sails
Open for home, such stores will I bring you
That all your former ventures will be counted waste.

13

Such light and foamy silks, like crinkled cream,
And indigo more blue than sun-whipped seas,
Spices and fragrant trees, a massive beam
Of sandalwood, and pungent China teas,
Tobacco, coffee!' Grootver only laughed.
Max heard it all, and worse than all he heard
The deed to which the sailor gave his word.
He shivered, 'twas as if the villain gaffed
The old man with a boat-hook; bleeding, spent,
He begged for life nor knew at all the road he went.

14

For Kurler had a daughter, young and gay,
Carefully reared and shielded, rarely seen.
But on one black and most unfriendly day
Grootver had caught her as she passed between
The kitchen and the garden. She had run
In fear of him, his evil leering eye,
And when he came she, bolted in her room,
Refused to show, though gave no reason why.
The spinning of her future had begun,
On quiet nights she heard the whirring of her doom.

15

Max mended an old goosequill by the fire,
Loathing his work, but seeing no thing to do.
He felt his hands were building up the pyre
To burn two souls, and seized with vertigo
He staggered to his chair. Before him lay
White paper still unspotted by a crime.
'Now, young man, write,' said Grootver in his ear.
'`If in two years my vessel should yet stay
From Amsterdam, I give Grootver, sometime
A friend, my daughter for his lawful wife.' Now swear.'

16

And Kurler swore, a palsied, tottering sound,
And traced his name, a shaking, wandering line.
Then dazed he sat there, speechless from his wound.
Grootver got up: 'Fair voyage, the brigantine!'
He shuffled from the room, and left the house.
His footsteps wore to silence down the street.
At last the aged man began to rouse.
With help he once more gained his trembling feet.
'My daughter, Mynheer Breuck, is friendless now.
Will you watch over her? I ask a solemn vow.'

17

Max laid his hand upon the old man's arm,
'Before God, sir, I vow, when you are gone,
So to protect your daughter from all harm
As one man may.' Thus sorrowful, forlorn,
The situation to Max Breuck appeared,
He gave his promise almost without thought,
Nor looked to see a difficulty. 'Bred
Gently to watch a mother left alone;
Bound by a dying father's wish, who feared
The world's accustomed harshness when he should be dead;

18

Such was my case from youth, Mynheer Kurler.
Last Winter she died also, and my days
Are passed in work, lest I should grieve for her,
And undo habits used to earn her praise.
My leisure I will gladly give to see
Your household and your daughter prosperous.'
The sailor said his thanks, but turned away.
He could not brook that his humility,
So little wonted, and so tremulous,
Should first before a stranger make such great display.

19

'Come here to-morrow as the bells ring noon,
I sail at the full sea, my daughter then
I will make known to you. 'Twill be a boon
If after I have bid good-by, and when
Her eyeballs scorch with watching me depart,
You bring her home again. She lives with one

Old serving-woman, who has brought her up.
But that is no friend for so free a heart.
No head to match her questions. It is done.
And I must sail away to come and brim her cup.

20

My ship's the fastest that owns Amsterdam
As home, so not a letter can you send.
I shall be back, before to where I am
Another ship could reach. Now your stipend --'
Quickly Breuck interposed. 'When you once more
Tread on the stones which pave our streets. -- Good night!
To-morrow I will be, at stroke of noon,
At the great wharf.' Then hurrying, in spite
Of cake and wine the old man pressed upon
Him ere he went, he took his leave and shut the door.

21

'Twas noon in Amsterdam, the day was clear,
And sunshine tipped the pointed roofs with gold.
The brown canals ran liquid bronze, for here
The sun sank deep into the waters cold.
And every clock and belfry in the town
Hammered, and struck, and rang. Such peals of bells,
To shake the sunny morning into life,
And to proclaim the middle, and the crown,
Of this most sparkling daytime! The crowd swells,
Laughing and pushing toward the quays in friendly strife.

22

The 'Horn of Fortune' sails away to-day.
At highest tide she lets her anchor go,
And starts for China. Saucy popinjay!
Giddy in freshest paint she curtseys low,
And beckons to her boats to let her start.
Blue is the ocean, with a flashing breeze.
The shining waves are quick to take her part.
They push and spatter her. Her sails are loose,
Her tackles hanging, waiting men to seize
And haul them taut, with chanty-singing, as they choose.

23

At the great wharf's edge Mynheer Kurler stands,
And by his side, his daughter, young Christine.

Max Breuck is there, his hat held in his hands,
Bowing before them both. The brigantine
Bounces impatient at the long delay,
Curvets and jumps, a cable's length from shore.
A heavy galliot unloads on the walls
Round, yellow cheeses, like gold cannon balls
Stacked on the stones in pyramids. Once more
Kurler has kissed Christine, and now he is away.

24

Christine stood rigid like a frozen stone,
Her hands wrung pale in effort at control.
Max moved aside and let her be alone,
For grief exacts each penny of its toll.
The dancing boat tossed on the glinting sea.
A sun-path swallowed it in flaming light,
Then, shrunk a cockleshell, it came again
Upon the other side. Now on the lee
It took the 'Horn of Fortune'. Straining sight
Could see it hauled aboard, men pulling on the crane.

25

Then up above the eager brigantine,
Along her slender masts, the sails took flight,
Were sheeted home, and ropes were coiled. The shine
Of the wet anchor, when its heavy weight
Rose splashing to the deck. These things they saw,
Christine and Max, upon the crowded quay.
They saw the sails grow white, then blue in shade,
The ship had turned, caught in a windy flaw
She glided imperceptibly away,
Drew farther off and in the bright sky seemed to fade.

26

Home, through the emptying streets, Max took Christine,
Who would have hid her sorrow from his gaze.
Before the iron gateway, clasped between
Each garden wall, he stopped. She, in amaze,
Asked, 'Do you enter not then, Mynheer Breuck?
My father told me of your courtesy.
Since I am now your charge, 'tis meet for me
To show such hospitality as maiden may,
Without disdaining rules must not be broke.
Katrina will have coffee, and she bakes today.'

27

She straight unhasped the tall, beflowered gate.
Curled into tendrils, twisted into cones
Of leaves and roses, iron infoliate,
It guards the pleasance, and its stiffened bones
Are budded with much peering at the rows,
And beds, and arbours, which it keeps inside.
Max started at the beauty, at the glare
Of tints. At either end was set a wide
Path strewn with fine, red gravel, and such shows
Of tulips in their splendour flaunted everywhere!

28

From side to side, midway each path, there ran
A longer one which cut the space in two.
And, like a tunnel some magician
Has wrought in twinkling green, an alley grew,
Pleached thick and walled with apple trees; their flowers
Incensed the garden, and when Autumn came
The plump and heavy apples crowding stood
And tapped against the arbour. Then the dame
Katrina shook them down, in pelting showers
They plunged to earth, and died transformed to sugared food.

29

Against the high, encircling walls were grapes,
Nailed close to feel the baking of the sun
From glowing bricks. Their microscopic shapes
Half hidden by serrated leaves. And one
Old cherry tossed its branches near the door.
Bordered along the wall, in beds between,
Flickering, streaming, nodding in the air,
The pride of all the garden, there were more
Tulips than Max had ever dreamed or seen.
They jostled, mobbed, and danced. Max stood at helpless stare.

30

'Within the arbour, Mynheer Breuck, I'll bring
Coffee and cakes, a pipe, and Father's best
Tobacco, brought from countries harbouring
Dawn's earliest footstep. Wait.' With girlish zest
To please her guest she flew. A moment more
She came again, with her old nurse behind.
Then, sitting on the bench and knitting fast,
She talked as someone with a noble store

Of hidden fancies, blown upon the wind,
Eager to flutter forth and leave their silent past.

31

The little apple leaves above their heads
Let fall a quivering sunshine. Quiet, cool,
In blossomed boughs they sat. Beyond, the beds
Of tulips blazed, a proper vestibule
And antechamber to the rainbow. Dyes
Of prismed richness: Carmine. Madder. Blues
Tinging dark browns to purple. Silvers flushed
To amethyst and tinct with gold. Round eyes
Of scarlet, spotting tender saffron hues.
Violets sunk to blacks, and reds in orange crushed.

32

Of every pattern and in every shade.
Nacreous, iridescent, mottled, checked.
Some purest sulphur-yellow, others made
An ivory-white with disks of copper flecked.
Sprinkled and striped, tasselled, or keenest edged.
Striated, powdered, freckled, long or short.
They bloomed, and seemed strange wonder-moths new-fledged,
Born of the spectrum wedded to a flame.
The shade within the arbour made a port
To o'ertaxed eyes, its still, green twilight rest became.

33

Her knitting-needles clicked and Christine talked,
This child matured to woman unaware,
The first time left alone. Now dreams once balked
Found utterance. Max thought her very fair.
Beneath her cap her ornaments shone gold,
And purest gold they were. Kurler was rich
And heedful. Her old maiden aunt had died
Whose darling care she was. Now, growing bold,
She asked, had Max a sister? Dropped a stitch
At her own candour. Then she paused and softly sighed.

34

Two years was long! She loved her father well,
But fears she had not. He had always been
Just sailed or sailing. And she must not dwell
On sad thoughts, he had told her so, and seen

Her smile at parting. But she sighed once more.
Two years was long; 'twas not one hour yet!
Mynheer Grootver she would not see at all.
Yes, yes, she knew, but ere the date so set,
The 'Horn of Fortune' would be at the wall.
When Max had bid farewell, she watched him from the door.

35

The next day, and the next, Max went to ask
The health of Jufvrouw Kurler, and the news:
Another tulip blown, or the great task
Of gathering petals which the high wind strews;
The polishing of floors, the pictured tiles
Well scrubbed, and oaken chairs most deftly oiled.
Such things were Christine's world, and his was she
Winter drew near, his sun was in her smiles.
Another Spring, and at his law he toiled,
Unspoken hope counselled a wise efficiency.

36

Max Breuck was honour's soul, he knew himself
The guardian of this girl; no more, no less.
As one in charge of guineas on a shelf
Loose in a china teapot, may confess
His need, but may not borrow till his friend
Comes back to give. So Max, in honour, said
No word of love or marriage; but the days
He clipped off on his almanac. The end
Must come! The second year, with feet of lead,
Lagged slowly by till Spring had plumped the willow sprays.

37

Two years had made Christine a woman grown,
With dignity and gently certain pride.
But all her childhood fancies had not flown,
Her thoughts in lovely dreamings seemed to glide.
Max was her trusted friend, did she confess
A closer happiness? Max could not tell.
Two years were over and his life he found
Sphered and complete. In restless eagerness
He waited for the 'Horn of Fortune'. Well
Had he his promise kept, abating not one pound.

38

Spring slipped away to Summer. Still no glass
Sighted the brigantine. Then Grootver came
Demanding Jufvrouw Kurler. His trespass
Was justified, for he had won the game.
Christine begged time, more time! Midsummer went,
And Grootver waxed impatient. Still the ship
Tarried. Christine, betrayed and weary, sank
To dreadful terrors. One day, crazed, she sent
For Max. 'Come quickly,' said her note, 'I skip
The worst distress until we meet. The world is blank.'

39

Through the long sunshine of late afternoon
Max went to her. In the pleached alley, lost
In bitter reverie, he found her soon.
And sitting down beside her, at the cost
Of all his secret, 'Dear,' said he, 'what thing
So suddenly has happened?' Then, in tears,
She told that Grootver, on the following morn,
Would come to marry her, and shuddering:
'I will die rather, death has lesser fears.'
Max felt the shackles drop from the oath which he had sworn.

40

'My Dearest One, the hid joy of my heart!
I love you, oh! you must indeed have known.
In strictest honour I have played my part;
But all this misery has overthrown
My scruples. If you love me, marry me
Before the sun has dipped behind those trees.
You cannot be wed twice, and Grootver, foiled,
Can eat his anger. My care it shall be
To pay your father's debt, by such degrees
As I can compass, and for years I've greatly toiled.

41

This is not haste, Christine, for long I've known
My love, and silence forced upon my lips.
I worship you with all the strength I've shown
In keeping faith.' With pleading finger tips
He touched her arm. 'Christine! Beloved! Think.
Let us not tempt the future. Dearest, speak,
I love you. Do my words fall too swift now?
They've been in leash so long upon the brink.'
She sat quite still, her body loose and weak.
Then into him she melted, all her soul at flow.

42

And they were married ere the westering sun
Had disappeared behind the garden trees.
The evening poured on them its benison,
And flower-scents, that only night-time frees,
Rose up around them from the beamy ground,
Silvered and shadowed by a tranquil moon.
Within the arbour, long they lay embraced,
In such enraptured sweetness as they found
Close-partnered each to each, and thinking soon
To be enwoven, long ere night to morning faced.

43

At last Max spoke, 'Dear Heart, this night is ours,
To watch it pale, together, into dawn,
Pressing our souls apart like opening flowers
Until our lives, through quivering bodies drawn,
Are mingled and confounded. Then, far spent,
Our eyes will close to undisturbed rest.
For that desired thing I leave you now.
To pinnacle this day's accomplishment,
By telling Grootver that a bootless quest
Is his, and that his schemes have met a knock-down blow.'

44

But Christine clung to him with sobbing cries,
Pleading for love's sake that he leave her not.
And wound her arms about his knees and thighs
As he stood over her. With dread, begot
Of Grootver's name, and silence, and the night,
She shook and trembled. Words in moaning plaint
Wooed him to stay. She feared, she knew not why,
Yet greatly feared. She seemed some anguished saint
Martyred by visions. Max Breuck soothed her fright
With wisdom, then stepped out under the cooling sky.

45

But at the gate once more she held him close
And quenched her heart again upon his lips.
'My Sweetheart, why this terror? I propose
But to be gone one hour! Evening slips
Away, this errand must be done.' 'Max! Max!
First goes my father, if I lose you now!'

She grasped him as in panic lest she drown.
Softly he laughed, 'One hour through the town
By moonlight! That's no place for foul attacks.
Dearest, be comforted, and clear that troubled brow.

46

One hour, Dear, and then, no more alone.
We front another day as man and wife.
I shall be back almost before I'm gone,
And midnight shall anoint and crown our life.'
Then through the gate he passed. Along the street
She watched his buttons gleaming in the moon.
He stopped to wave and turned the garden wall.
Straight she sank down upon a mossy seat.
Her senses, mist-encircled by a swoon,
Swayed to unconsciousness beneath its wreathing pall.

47

Briskly Max walked beside the still canal.
His step was firm with purpose. Not a jot
He feared this meeting, nor the rancorous gall
Grootver would spit on him who marred his plot.
He dreaded no man, since he could protect
Christine. His wife! He stopped and laughed aloud.
His starved life had not fitted him for joy.
It strained him to the utmost to reject
Even this hour with her. His heart beat loud.
'Damn Grootver, who can force my time to this employ!'

48

He laughed again. What boyish uncontrol
To be so racked. Then felt his ticking watch.
In half an hour Grootver would know the whole.
And he would be returned, lifting the latch
Of his own gate, eager to take Christine
And crush her to his lips. How bear delay?
He broke into a run. In front, a line
Of candle-light banded the cobbled street.
Hilverdink's tavern! Not for many a day
Had he been there to take his old, accustomed seat.

49

'Why, Max! Stop, Max!' And out they came pell-mell,
His old companions. 'Max, where have you been?

Not drink with us? Indeed you serve us well!
How many months is it since we have seen
You here? Jan, Jan, you slow, old doddering goat!
Here's Mynheer Breuck come back again at last,
Stir your old bones to welcome him. Fie, Max.
Business! And after hours! Fill your throat;
Here's beer or brandy. Now, boys, hold him fast.
Put down your cane, dear man. What really vicious whacks!'

50

They forced him to a seat, and held him there,
Despite his anger, while the hideous joke
Was tossed from hand to hand. Franz poured with care
A brimming glass of whiskey. 'Here, we've broke
Into a virgin barrel for you, drink!
Tut! Tut! Just hear him! Married! Who, and when?
Married, and out on business. Clever Spark!
Which lie's the likeliest? Come, Max, do think.'
Swollen with fury, struggling with these men,
Max cursed hilarity which must needs have a mark.

51

Forcing himself to steadiness, he tried
To quell the uproar, told them what he dared
Of his own life and circumstance. Implied
Most urgent matters, time could ill be spared.
In jesting mood his comrades heard his tale,
And scoffed at it. He felt his anger more
Goaded and bursting; -- 'Cowards! Is no one loth
To mock at duty --' Here they called for ale,
And forced a pipe upon him. With an oath
He shivered it to fragments on the earthen floor.

52

Sobered a little by his violence,
And by the host who begged them to be still,
Nor injure his good name, 'Max, no offence,'
They blurted, 'you may leave now if you will.'
'One moment, Max,' said Franz. 'We've gone too far.
I ask your pardon for our foolish joke.
It started in a wager ere you came.
The talk somehow had fall'n on drugs, a jar
I brought from China, herbs the natives smoke,
Was with me, and I thought merely to play a game.

53

Its properties are to induce a sleep
Fraught with adventure, and the flight of time
Is inconceivable in swiftness. Deep
Sunken in slumber, imageries sublime
Flatter the senses, or some fearful dream
Holds them enmeshed. Years pass which on the clock
Are but so many seconds. We agreed
That the next man who came should prove the scheme;
And you were he. Jan handed you the crock.
Two whiffs! And then the pipe was broke, and you were freed.'

54

'It is a lie, a damned, infernal lie!'
Max Breuck was maddened now. 'Another jest
Of your befuddled wits. I know not why
I am to be your butt. At my request
You'll choose among you one who'll answer for
Your most unseasonable mirth. Good-night
And good-by, -- gentlemen. You'll hear from me.'
But Franz had caught him at the very door,
'It is no lie, Max Breuck, and for your plight
I am to blame. Come back, and we'll talk quietly.

55

You have no business, that is why we laughed,
Since you had none a few minutes ago.
As to your wedding, naturally we chaffed,
Knowing the length of time it takes to do
A simple thing like that in this slow world.
Indeed, Max, 'twas a dream. Forgive me then.
I'll burn the drug if you prefer.' But Breuck
Muttered and stared, -- 'A lie.' And then he hurled,
Distraught, this word at Franz: 'Prove it. And when
It's proven, I'll believe. That thing shall be your work.

56

I'll give you just one week to make your case.
On August thirty-first, eighteen-fourteen,
I shall require your proof.' With wondering face
Franz cried, 'A week to August, and fourteen
The year! You're mad, 'tis April now.
April, and eighteen-twelve.' Max staggered, caught
A chair, -- 'April two years ago! Indeed,
Or you, or I, are mad. I know not how

Either could blunder so.' Hilverdink brought
'The Amsterdam Gazette', and Max was forced to read.

57

'Eighteen hundred and twelve,' in largest print;
And next to it, 'April the twenty-first.'
The letters smeared and jumbled, but by dint
Of straining every nerve to meet the worst,
He read it, and into his pounding brain
Tumbled a horror. Like a roaring sea
Foreboding shipwreck, came the message plain:
'This is two years ago! What of Christine?'
He fled the cellar, in his agony
Running to outstrip Fate, and save his holy shrine.

58

The darkened buildings echoed to his feet
Clap-clapping on the pavement as he ran.
Across moon-misted squares clamoured his fleet
And terror-winged steps. His heart began
To labour at the speed. And still no sign,
No flutter of a leaf against the sky.
And this should be the garden wall, and round
The corner, the old gate. No even line
Was this! No wall! And then a fearful cry
Shattered the stillness. Two stiff houses filled the ground.

59

Shoulder to shoulder, like dragoons in line,
They stood, and Max knew them to be the ones
To right and left of Kurler's garden. Spine
Rigid next frozen spine. No mellow tones
Of ancient gilded iron, undulate,
Expanding in wide circles and broad curves,
The twisted iron of the garden gate,
Was there. The houses touched and left no space
Between. With glassy eyes and shaking nerves
Max gazed. Then mad with fear, fled still, and left that place.

60

Stumbling and panting, on he ran, and on.
His slobbering lips could only cry, 'Christine!
My Dearest Love! My Wife! Where are you gone?
What future is our past? What saturnine,

Sardonic devil's jest has bid us live
Two years together in a puff of smoke?
It was no dream, I swear it! In some star,
Or still imprisoned in Time's egg, you give
Me love. I feel it. Dearest Dear, this stroke
Shall never part us, I will reach to where you are.'

61

His burning eyeballs stared into the dark.
The moon had long been set. And still he cried:
'Christine! My Love! Christine!' A sudden spark
Pricked through the gloom, and shortly Max espied
With his uncertain vision, so within
Distracted he could scarcely trust its truth,
A latticed window where a crimson gleam
Spangled the blackness, and hung from a pin,
An iron crane, were three gilt balls. His youth
Had taught their meaning, now they closed upon his dream.

62

Softly he knocked against the casement, wide
It flew, and a cracked voice his business there
Demanded. The door opened, and inside
Max stepped. He saw a candle held in air
Above the head of a gray-bearded Jew.
'Simeon Isaacs, Mynheer, can I serve
You?' 'Yes, I think you can. Do you keep arms?
I want a pistol.' Quick the old man grew
Livid. 'Mynheer, a pistol! Let me swerve
You from your purpose. Life brings often false alarms --'

63

'Peace, good old Isaacs, why should you suppose
My purpose deadly. In good truth I've been
Blest above others. You have many rows
Of pistols it would seem. Here, this shagreen
Case holds one that I fancy. Silvered mounts
Are to my taste. These letters `C. D. L.'
Its former owner? Dead, you say. Poor Ghost!
'Twill serve my turn though --' Hastily he counts
The florins down upon the table. 'Well,
Good-night, and wish me luck for your to-morrow's toast.'

64

Into the night again he hurried, now
Pale and in haste; and far beyond the town
He set his goal. And then he wondered how
Poor C. D. L. had come to die. 'It's grown
Handy in killing, maybe, this I've bought,
And will work punctually.' His sorrow fell
Upon his senses, shutting out all else.
Again he wept, and called, and blindly fought
The heavy miles away. 'Christine. I'm well.
I'm coming. My Own Wife!' He lurched with failing pulse.

65

Along the dyke the keen air blew in gusts,
And grasses bent and wailed before the wind.
The Zuider Zee, which croons all night and thrusts
Long stealthy fingers up some way to find
And crumble down the stones, moaned baffled. Here
The wide-armed windmills looked like gallows-trees.
No lights were burning in the distant thorps.
Max laid aside his coat. His mind, half-clear,
Babbled 'Christine!' A shot split through the breeze.
The cold stars winked and glittered at his chilling corpse.

Amy Lowell

The Green Bowl

This little bowl is like a mossy pool
In a Spring wood, where dogtooth violets grow
Nodding in chequered sunshine of the trees;
A quiet place, still, with the sound of birds,
Where, though unseen, is heard the endless song
And murmur of the never resting sea.
'T was winter, Roger, when you made this cup,
But coming Spring guided your eager hand
And round the edge you fashioned young green leaves,
A proper chalice made to hold the shy
And little flowers of the woods. And here
They will forget their sad uprooting, lost
In pleasure that this circle of bright leaves
Should be their setting; once more they will dream
They hear winds wandering through lofty trees
And see the sun smiling between the leaves.

Amy Lowell

The Grocery

'Hullo, Alice!'
'Hullo, Leon!'
'Say, Alice, gi' me a couple
O' them two for five cigars,
Will yer?'
'Where's your nickel?'
'My! Ain't you close!
Can't trust a feller, can yer.'
'Trust you! Why
What you owe this store
Would set you up in business.
I can't think why Father 'lows it.'
'Yer Father's a sight more neighbourly
Than you be. That's a fact.
Besides, he knows I got a vote.'
'A vote! Oh, yes, you got a vote!
A lot o' good the Senate'll be to Father
When all his bank account
Has run away in credits.
There's your cigars,
If you can relish smokin'
With all you owe us standin'.'
'I dunno as that makes 'em taste any diff'rent.
You ain't fair to me, Alice, 'deed you ain't.
I work when anythin's doin'.
I'll get a carpenterin' job next Summer sure.
Cleve was tellin' me to-day he'd take me on come Spring.'
'Come Spring, and this December!
I've no patience with you, Leon,
Shilly-shallyin' the way you do.
Here, lift over them crates o' oranges
I wanter fix 'em in the winder.'
'It riles yer, don't it, me not havin' work.
You pepper up about it somethin' good.
You pick an' pick, and that don't help a mite.
Say, Alice, do come in out o' that winder.
Th' oranges c'n wait,
An' I don't like talkin' to yer back.'
'Don't you! Well, you'd better make the best o' what
you can git.
Maybe you won't have my back to talk to soon.
They look good in pyramids with the 'lectric light on 'em,
Don't they?
Now hand me them bananas
An' I'll string 'em right acrost.'
'What do yer mean
'Bout me not havin' you to talk to?
Are yer springin' somethin' on me?'
'I don't know 'bout springin'
When I'm tellin' you right out.
I'm goin' away, that's all.'
'Where? Why?

What yer mean - goin' away?'
'I've took a place
Down to Boston, in a candy store
For the holidays.'
'Good Land, Alice,
What in the Heavens fer!'
'To earn some money,
And to git away from here, I guess.'
'Ain't yer Father got enough?
Don't he give yer proper pocket-money?'
'He'd have a plenty, if you folks paid him.'
'He's rich I tell yer.
I never figured he'd be close with you.'
'Oh, he ain't. Not close.
That ain't why.
But I must git away from here.
I must! I must!'
'You got a lot o' reason in yer
To-night.
How long d' you cal'late
You'll be gone?'
'Maybe for always.'
'What ails yer, Alice?
Talkin' wild like that.
Ain't you an' me goin' to be married
Some day.'
'Some day! Some day!
I guess the sun'll never rise on some day.'
'So that's the trouble.
Same old story.
'Cause I ain't got the cash to settle right now.
You know I love yer,
An' I'll marry yer as soon
As I c'n raise the money.'
'You've said that any time these five year,
But you don't do nothin'.'
'Wot could I do?
Ther ain't no work here Winters.
Not fer a carpenter, ther ain't.'
'I guess you warn't born a carpenter.
Ther's ice-cuttin' a plenty.'
'I got a dret'ful tender throat;
Dr. Smiles he told me
I mustn't resk ice-cuttin'.'
'Why haven't you gone to Boston,
And hunted up a job?'
'Have yer forgot the time I went expressin'
In the American office, down ther?'
'And come back two weeks later!
No, I ain't.'
'You didn't want I should git hurted,
Did yer?

I'm a sight too light fer all that liftin' work.
My back was commencin' to strain, as 'twas.
Ef I was like yer brother now,
I'd ha' be'n down to the city long ago.
But I'm too clumsy fer a dancer.
I ain't got Arthur's luck.'
'Do you call it luck to be a disgrace to your folks,
And git locked up in jail!'
'Oh, come now, Alice,
`Disgrace' is a mite strong.
Why, the jail was a joke.
Art's all right.'
'All right!
All right to dance, and smirk, and lie
For a livin',
And then in the end
Lead a silly girl to give you
What warn't hers to give
By pretendin' you'd marry her -
And she a pupil.'
'He'd ha' married her right enough,
Her folks was millionaires.'
'Yes, he'd ha' married her!
Thank God, they saved her that.'
'Art's a fine feller.
I wish I had his luck.
Swellin' round in Hart, Schaffner & Marx fancy suits,
And eatin' in rest'rants.
But somebody's got to stick to the old place,
Else Foxfield'd have to shut up shop,
Hey, Alice?'
'You admire him!
You admire Arthur!
You'd be like him only you can't dance.
Oh, Shame! Shame!
And I've been like that silly girl.
Fooled with your promises,
And I give you all I had.
I knew it, oh, I knew it,
But I wanted to git away 'fore I proved it.
You've shamed me through and through.
Why couldn't you hold your tongue,
And spared me seein' you
As you really are.'
'What the Devil's the row?
I only said Art was lucky.
What you spitfirin' at me fer?
Ferget it, Alice.
We've had good times, ain't we?
I'll see Cleve 'bout that job agin to-morrer,
And we'll be married 'fore hayin' time.'
'It's like you to remind me o' hayin' time.

I've good cause to love it, ain't I?
Many's the night I've hid my face in the dark
To shut out thinkin'!'
'Why, that ain't nothin'.
You ain't be'n half so kind to me
As lots o' fellers' girls.
Gi' me a kiss, Dear,
And let's make up.'
'Make up!
You poor fool.
Do you suppose I care a ten cent piece
For you now.
You've killed yourself for me.
Done it out o' your own mouth.
You've took away my home,
I hate the sight o' the place.
You're all over it,
Every stick an' stone means you,
An' I hate 'em all.'
'Alice, I say,
Don't go on like that.
I can't marry yer
Boardin' in one room,
But I'll see Cleve to-morrer,
I'll make him --'
'Oh, you fool!
You terrible fool!'
'Alice, don't go yit,
Wait a minit,
I'll see Cleve --'
'You terrible fool!'
'Alice, don't go.
Alice --' (Door slams)

Amy Lowell

The Hammers

I

Frindsbury, Kent, 1786

Bang!
Bang!
Tap!
Tap-a-tap! Rap!
All through the lead and silver Winter days,
All through the copper of Autumn hazes.
Tap to the red rising sun,
Tap to the purple setting sun.
Four years pass before the job is done.
Two thousand oak trees grown and felled,
Two thousand oaks from the hedgerows of the Weald,
Sussex had yielded two thousand oaks
With huge boles
Round which the tape rolls
Thirty mortal feet, say the village folks.
Two hundred loads of elm and Scottish fir;
Planking from Dantzig.
My! What timber goes into a ship!
Tap! Tap!
Two years they have seasoned her ribs on the ways,
Tapping, tapping.
You can hear, though there's nothing where you gaze.
Through the fog down the reaches of the river,
The tapping goes on like heart-beats in a fever.
The church-bells chime
Hours and hours,
Dropping days in showers.
Bang! Rap! Tap!
Go the hammers all the time.
They have planked up her timbers
And the nails are driven to the head;
They have decked her over,
And again, and again.
The shoring-up beams shudder at the strain.
Black and blue breeches,
Pigtails bound and shining:
Like ants crawling about,
The hull swarms with carpenters, running in and out.
Joiners, calkers,
And they are all terrible talkers.
Jem Wilson has been to sea and he tells some wonderful tales
Of whales, and spice islands,
And pirates off the Barbary coast.
He boasts magnificently, with his mouth full of nails.
Stephen Pibold has a tenor voice,
He shifts his quid of tobacco and sings:
'The second in command was blear-eyed Ned:
While the surgeon his limb was a-lopping,

A nine-pounder came and smack went his head,
Pull away, pull away, pull away! I say;
Rare news for my Meg of Wapping!'
Every Sunday
People come in crowds
(After church-time, of course)
In curricles, and gigs, and wagons,
And some have brought cold chicken and flagons
Of wine,
And beer in stoppered jugs.
'Dear! Dear! But I tell 'ee 'twill be a fine ship.
There's none finer in any of the slips at Chatham.'

The third Summer's roses have started in to blow,
When the fine stern carving is begun.
Flutings, and twinings, and long slow swirls,
Bits of deal shaved away to thin spiral curls.
Tap! Tap! A cornucopia is nailed into place.
Rap-a-tap! They are putting up a railing filigreed like Irish lace.
The Three Town's people never saw such grace.
And the paint on it! The richest gold leaf!
Why, the glitter when the sun is shining passes belief.
And that row of glass windows tipped toward the sky
Are rubies and carbuncles when the day is dry.
Oh, my! Oh, my!
They have coppered up the bottom,
And the copper nails
Stand about and sparkle in big wooden pails.
Bang! Clash! Bang!
'And he swigg'd, and Nick swigg'd,
And Ben swigg'd, and Dick swigg'd,
And I swigg'd, and all of us swigg'd it,
And swore there was nothing like grog.'
It seems they sing,
Even though coppering is not an easy thing.
What a splendid specimen of humanity is a true British workman,
Say the people of the Three Towns,
As they walk about the dockyard
To the sound of the evening church-bells.
And so artistic, too, each one tells his neighbour.
What immense taste and labour!
Miss Jessie Prime, in a pink silk bonnet,
Titters with delight as her eyes fall upon it,
When she steps lightly down from Lawyer Green's whisky;
Such amazing beauty makes one feel frisky,
She explains.
Mr. Nichols says he is delighted
(He is the firm);
His work is all requited
If Miss Jessie can approve.
Miss Jessie answers that the ship is 'a love'.
The sides are yellow as marigold,

The port-lids are red when the ports are up:
Blood-red squares like an even chequer
Of yellow asters and portulaca.
There is a wide 'black strake' at the waterline
And above is a blue like the sky when the weather is fine.
The inner bulwarks are painted red.
'Why?' asks Miss Jessie. ''Tis a horrid note.'
Mr. Nichols clears his throat,
And tells her the launching day is set.
He says, 'Be careful, the paint is wet.'
But Miss Jessie has touched it, her sprigged muslin gown
Has a blood-red streak from the shoulder down.
'It looks like blood,' says Miss Jessie with a frown.

Tap! Tap! Rap!
An October day, with waves running in blue-white lines and a capful of wind.
Three broad flags ripple out behind
Where the masts will be:
Royal Standard at the main,
Admiralty flag at the fore,
Union Jack at the mizzen.
The hammers tap harder, faster,
They must finish by noon.
The last nail is driven.
But the wind has increased to half a gale,
And the ship shakes and quivers upon the ways.
The Commissioner of Chatham Dockyard is coming
In his ten-oared barge from the King's Stairs;
The Marine's band will play 'God Save Great George Our King';
And there is to be a dinner afterwards at the Crown, with speeches.
The wind screeches, and flaps the flags till they pound like hammers.
The wind hums over the ship,
And slips round the dog-shores,
Jostling them almost to falling.
There is no time now to wait for Commissioners and marine bands.
Mr. Nichols has a bottle of port in his hands.
He leans over, holding his hat, and shouts to the men below:
'Let her go!'
Bang! Bang! Pound!
The dog-shores fall to the ground,
And the ship slides down the greased planking.
A splintering of glass,
And port wine running all over the white and copper stem timbers.
'Success to his Majesty's ship, the Bellerophon!'
And the red wine washes away in the waters of the Medway.

II

Paris, March, 1814

Fine yellow sunlight down the rue du Mont Thabor.
Ten o'clock striking from all the clock-towers of Paris.

Over the door of a shop, in gilt letters:
'Martin - Parfumeur', and something more.
A large gilded wooden something.
Listen! What a ringing of hammers!
Tap!
Tap!
Squeak!
Tap! Squeak! Tap-a-tap!
'Blaise.'
'Oui, M'sieu.'
'Don't touch the letters. My name stays.'
'Bien, M'sieu.'
'Just take down the eagle, and the shield with the bees.'
'As M'sieu pleases.'
Tap! Squeak! Tap!
The man on the ladder hammers steadily for a minute or two,
Then stops.
'He! Patron!
They are fastened well, Nom d'un Chien!
What if I break them?'
'Break away,
You and Paul must have them down to-day.'
'Bien.'
And the hammers start again,
Drum-beating at the something of gilded wood.
Sunshine in a golden flood
Lighting up the yellow fronts of houses,
Glittering each window to a flash.
Squeak! Squeak! Tap!
The hammers beat and rap.
A Prussian hussar on a grey horse goes by at a dash.
From other shops, the noise of striking blows:
Pounds, thumps, and whacks;
Wooden sounds: splinters - cracks.
Paris is full of the galloping of horses and the knocking of hammers.
'Hullo! Friend Martin, is business slack
That you are in the street this morning? Don't turn your back
And scuttle into your shop like a rabbit to its hole.
I've just been taking a stroll.
The stinking Cossacks are bivouacked all up and down the Champs Elysees.
I can't get the smell of them out of my nostrils.
Dirty fellows, who don't believe in frills
Like washing. Ah, mon vieux, you'd have to go
Out of business if you lived in Russia. So!
We've given up being perfumers to the Emperor, have we?
Blaise,
Be careful of the hen,
Maybe I can find a use for her one of these days.
That eagle's rather well cut, Martin.
But I'm sick of smelling Cossack,
Take me inside and let me put my head into a stack
Of orris-root and musk.'

Within the shop, the light is dimmed to a pearl-and-green dusk
Out of which dreamily sparkle counters and shelves of glass,
Containing phials, and bowls, and jars, and dishes; a mass
Of aqueous transparence made solid by threads of gold.
Gold and glass,
And scents which whiff across the green twilight and pass.
The perfumer sits down and shakes his head:
'Always the same, Monsieur Antoine,
You artists are wonderful folk indeed.'
But Antoine Vernet does not heed.
He is reading the names on the bottles and bowls,
Done in fine gilt letters with wonderful scrolls.
'What have we here? `Eau Imperial Odontalgique.'
I must say, mon cher, your names are chic.
But it won't do, positively it will not do.
Elba doesn't count. Ah, here is another:
`Baume du Commandeur'. That's better. He needs something to smother
Regrets. A little lubricant, too,
Might be useful. I have it,
`Sage Oil', perhaps he'll be good now; with it we'll submit
This fine German rouge. I fear he is pale.'
'Monsieur Antoine, don't rail
At misfortune. He treated me well and fairly.'
'And you prefer him to Bourbons, admit it squarely.'
'Heaven forbid!' Bang! Whack!
Squeak! Squeak! Crack!
CRASH!
'Oh, Lord, Martin! That shield is hash.
The whole street is covered with golden bees.
They look like so many yellow peas,
Lying there in the mud. I'd like to paint it.
`Plum pudding of Empire'. That's rather quaint, it
Might take with the Kings. Shall I try?' 'Oh, Sir,
You distress me, you do.' 'Poor old Martin's purr!
But he hasn't a scratch in him, I know.
Now let us get back to the powders and patches.
Foolish man,
The Kings are here now. We must hit on a plan
To change all these titles as fast as we can.
`Bouquet Imperatrice'. Tut! Tut! Give me some ink -
`Bouquet de la Reine', what do you think?
Not the same receipt?
Now, Martin, put away your conceit.
Who will ever know?
`Extract of Nobility' - excellent, since most of them are killed.'
'But, Monsieur Antoine -'
'You are self-willed,
Martin. You need a salve
For your conscience, do you?
Very well, we'll halve
The compliments, also the pastes and dentifrices;
Send some to the Kings, and some to the Empresses.

`Oil of Bitter Almonds' - the Empress Josephine can have that.
`Oil of Parma Violets' fits the other one pat.'
Rap! Rap! Bang!
'What a hideous clatter!
Blaise seems determined to batter
That poor old turkey into bits,
And pound to jelly my excellent wits.
Come, come, Martin, you mustn't shirk.
`The night cometh soon' - etc. Don't jerk
Me up like that. `Essence de la Valliere' -
That has a charmingly Bourbon air.
And, oh! Magnificent! Listen to this! -
`Vinaigre des Quatre Voleurs'. Nothing amiss
With that - England, Austria, Russia and Prussia!
Martin, you're a wonder,
Upheavals of continents can't keep you under.'
'Monsieur Antoine, I am grieved indeed
At such levity. What France has gone through -'
'Very true, Martin, very true,
But never forget that a man must feed.'
Pound! Pound! Thump!
Pound!
'Look here, in another minute Blaise will drop that bird on the ground.'
Martin shrugs his shoulders. 'Ah, well, what then? -'
Antoine, with a laugh: 'I'll give you two sous for that antiquated hen.'
The Imperial Eagle sells for two sous,
And the lilies go up.
A man must choose!

III

Paris, April, 1814

Cold, impassive, the marble arch of the Place du Carrousel.
Haughty, contemptuous, the marble arch of the Place du Carrousel.
Like a woman raped by force, rising above her fate,
Borne up by the cold rigidity of hate,
Stands the marble arch of the Place du Carrousel.
Tap! Clink-a-tink!
Tap! Rap! Chink!
What falls to the ground like a streak of flame?
Hush! It is only a bit of bronze flashing in the sun.
What are all those soldiers? Those are not the uniforms of France.
Alas! No! The uniforms of France, Great Imperial France, are done.
They will rot away in chests and hang to dusty tatters in barn lofts.
These are other armies. And their name?
Hush, be still for shame;
Be still and imperturbable like the marble arch.
Another bright spark falls through the blue air.
Over the Place du Carrousel a wailing of despair.
Crowd your horses back upon the people, Uhlans and Hungarian Lancers,
They see too much.

Unfortunately, Gentlemen of the Invading Armies, what they do not see,
they hear.
Tap! Clink-a-tink!
Tap!
Another sharp spear
Of brightness,
And a ringing of quick metal lightness
On hard stones.
Workmen are chipping off the names of Napoleon's victories
From the triumphal arch of the Place du Carrousel.

Do they need so much force to quell the crowd?
An old Grenadier of the line groans aloud,
And each hammer tap points the sob of a woman.
Russia, Prussia, Austria, and the faded-white-lily Bourbon king
Think it well
To guard against tumult,
A mob is an undependable thing.
Ding! Ding!
Vienna is scattered all over the Place du Carrousel
In glittering, bent, and twisted letters.
Your betters have clattered over Vienna before,
Officer of his Imperial Majesty our Father-in-Law!
Tink! Tink!
A workman's chisel can strew you to the winds,
Munich.
Do they think
To pleasure Paris, used to the fall of cities,
By giving her a fall of letters!

It is a month too late.
One month, and our lily-white Bourbon king
Has done a colossal thing;
He has curdled love,
And soured the desires of a people.
Still the letters fall,
The workmen creep up and down their ladders like lizards on a wall.
Tap! Tap! Tink!
Clink! Clink!
'Oh, merciful God, they will not touch Austerlitz!
Strike me blind, my God, my eyes can never look on that.
I would give the other leg to save it, it took one.
Curse them! Curse them! Aim at his hat.
Give me the stone. Why didn't you give it to me?
I would not have missed. Curse him!
Curse all of them! They have got the `A'!'
Ding! Ding!
'I saw the Terror, but I never saw so horrible a thing as this.
`Vive l'Empereur! Vive l'Empereur!''
'Don't strike him, Fritz.
The mob will rise if you do.
Just run him out to the `quai',

That will get him out of the way.
They are almost through.'
Clink! Tink! Ding!
Clear as the sudden ring
Of a bell
'Z' strikes the pavement.
Farewell, Austerlitz, Tilsit, Presbourg;
Farewell, greatness departed.
Farewell, Imperial honours, knocked broadcast by the beating hammers
of ignorant workmen.
Straight, in the Spring moonlight,
Rises the deflowered arch.
In the silence, shining bright,
She stands naked and unsubdued.
Her marble coldness will endure the march
Of decades.
Rend her bronzes, hammers;
Cast down her inscriptions.
She is unconquerable, austere,
Cold as the moon that swims above her
When the nights are clear.

IV

Croissy, Ile-de-France, June, 1815

'Whoa! Victorine.
Devil take the mare! I've never seen so vicious a beast.
She kicked Jules the last time she was here,
He's been lame ever since, poor chap.'
Rap! Tap!
Tap-a-tap-a-tap! Tap! Tap!
'I'd rather be lame than dead at Waterloo, M'sieu Charles.'
'Sacre Bleu! Don't mention Waterloo, and the damned grinning British.
We didn't run in the old days.
There wasn't any running at Jena.
Those were decent days,
And decent men, who stood up and fought.
We never got beaten, because we wouldn't be.
See!'
'You would have taught them, wouldn't you, Sergeant Boignet?
But to-day it's everyone for himself,
And the Emperor isn't what he was.'
'How the Devil do you know that?
If he was beaten, the cause
Is the green geese in his army, led by traitors.
Oh, I say no names, Monsieur Charles,
You needn't hammer so loud.
If there are any spies lurking behind the bellows,
I beg they come out. Dirty fellows!'
The old Sergeant seizes a red-hot poker
And advances, brandishing it, into the shadows.

The rows of horses flick
Placid tails.
Victorine gives a savage kick
As the nails
Go in. Tap! Tap!
Jules draws a horseshoe from the fire
And beats it from red to peacock-blue and black,
Purpling darker at each whack.
Ding! Dang! Dong!
Ding-a-ding-dong!
It is a long time since any one spoke.
Then the blacksmith brushes his hand over his eyes,
'Well,' he sighs,
'He's broke.'
The Sergeant charges out from behind the bellows.
'It's the green geese, I tell you,
Their hearts are all whites and yellows,
There's no red in them. Red!
That's what we want. Fouche should be fed
To the guillotine, and all Paris dance the carmagnole.
That would breed jolly fine lick-bloods
To lead his armies to victory.'
'Ancient history, Sergeant.
He's done.'
'Say that again, Monsieur Charles, and I'll stun
You where you stand for a dung-eating Royalist.'
The Sergeant gives the poker a savage twist;
He is as purple as the cooling horseshoes.
The air from the bellows creaks through the flues.
Tap! Tap! The blacksmith shoes Victorine,
And through the doorway a fine sheen
Of leaves flutters, with the sun between.
By a spurt of fire from the forge
You can see the Sergeant, with swollen gorge,
Puffing, and gurgling, and choking;
The bellows keep on croaking.
They wheeze,
And sneeze,
Creak! Bang! Squeeze!
And the hammer strokes fall like buzzing bees
Or pattering rain,
Or faster than these,
Like the hum of a waterfall struck by a breeze.
Clank! from the bellows-chain pulled up and down.
Clank!
And sunshine twinkles on Victorine's flank,
Starting it to blue,
Dropping it to black.
Clack! Clack!
Tap-a-tap! Tap!
Lord! What galloping! Some mishap
Is making that man ride so furiously.

'Francois, you!
Victorine won't be through
For another quarter of an hour.' 'As you hope to die,
Work faster, man, the order has come.'
'What order? Speak out. Are you dumb?'
'A chaise, without arms on the panels, at the gate
In the far side-wall, and just to wait.
We must be there in half an hour with swift cattle.
You're a stupid fool if you don't hear that rattle.
Those are German guns. Can't you guess the rest?
Nantes, Rochefort, possibly Brest.'
Tap! Tap! as though the hammers were mad.
Dang! Ding! Creak! The farrier's lad
Jerks the bellows till he cracks their bones,
And the stifled air hiccoughs and groans.
The Sergeant is lying on the floor
Stone dead, and his hat with the tricolore
Cockade has rolled off into the cinders. Victorine snorts and lays back
her ears.
What glistens on the anvil? Sweat or tears?

V

St. Helena, May, 1821

Tap! Tap! Tap!
Through the white tropic night.
Tap! Tap!
Beat the hammers,
Unwearied, indefatigable.
They are hanging dull black cloth about the dead.
Lustreless black cloth
Which chokes the radiance of the moonlight
And puts out the little moving shadows of leaves.
Tap! Tap!
The knocking makes the candles quaver,
And the long black hangings waver
Tap! Tap! Tap!
Tap! Tap!
In the ears which do not heed.
Tap! Tap!
Above the eyelids which do not flicker.
Tap! Tap!
Over the hands which do not stir.
Chiselled like a cameo of white agate against the hangings,
Struck to brilliance by the falling moonlight,
A face!
Sharp as a frozen flame,
Beautiful as an altar lamp of silver,
And still. Perfectly still.
In the next room, the men chatter
As they eat their midnight lunches.

A knife hits against a platter.
But the figure on the bed
Between the stifling black hangings
Is cold and motionless,
Played over by the moonlight from the windows
And the indistinct shadows of leaves.

Tap! Tap!
Upholsterer Darling has a fine shop in Jamestown.
Tap! Tap!
Andrew Darling has ridden hard from Longwood to see to the work in his shop in Jamestown.
He has a corps of men in it, toiling and swearing,
Knocking, and measuring, and planing, and squaring,
Working from a chart with figures,
Comparing with their rules,
Setting this and that part together with their tools.
Tap! Tap! Tap!
Haste indeed!
So great is the need
That carpenters have been taken from the new church,
Joiners have been called from shaping pews and lecterns
To work of greater urgency.
Coffins!
Coffins is what they are making this bright Summer morning.
Coffins - and all to measurement.
There is a tin coffin,
A deal coffin,
A lead coffin,
And Captain Bennett's best mahogany dining-table
Has been sawed up for the grand outer coffin.
Tap! Tap! Tap!
Sunshine outside in the square,
But inside, only hollow coffins and the tapping upon them.
The men whistle,
And the coffins grow under their hammers
In the darkness of the shop.
Tap! Tap! Tap!

Tramp of men.
Steady tramp of men.
Slit-eyed Chinese with long pigtails
Bearing oblong things upon their shoulders
March slowly along the road to Longwood.
Their feet fall softly in the dust of the road;
Sometimes they call gutturally to each other and stop to shift shoulders.
Four coffins for the little dead man,
Four fine coffins,
And one of them Captain Bennett's dining-table!
And sixteen splendid Chinamen, all strong and able
And of assured neutrality.
Ah! George of England, Lord Bathhurst & Co.

Your princely munificence makes one's heart glow.
Huzza! Huzza! For the Lion of England!

Tap! Tap! Tap!
Marble likeness of an Emperor,
Dead man, who burst your heart against a world too narrow,
The hammers drum you to your last throne
Which always you shall hold alone.
Tap! Tap!
The glory of your past is faded as a sunset fire,
Your day lingers only like the tones of a wind-lyre
In a twilit room.
Here is the emptiness of your dream
Scattered about you.
Coins of yesterday,
Double napoleons stamped with Consul or Emperor,
Strange as those of Herculaneum -
And you just dead!
Not one spool of thread
Will these buy in any market-place.
Lay them over him,
They are the baubles of a crown of mist
Worn in a vision and melted away at waking.
Tap! Tap!
His heart strained at kingdoms
And now it is content with a silver dish.
Strange World! Strange Wayfarer!
Strange Destiny!
Lower it gently beside him and let it lie.
Tap! Tap! Tap!

Amy Lowell

The Lamp of Life

Always we are following a light,
Always the light recedes; with groping hands
We stretch toward this glory, while the lands
We journey through are hidden from our sight
Dim and mysterious, folded deep in night,
We care not, all our utmost need demands
Is but the light, the light! So still it stands
Surely our own if we exert our might.
Fool! Never can'st thou grasp this fleeting gleam,
Its glowing flame would die if it were caught,
Its value is that it doth always seem
But just a little farther on. Distraught,
But lighted ever onward, we are brought
Upon our way unknowing, in a dream.

Amy Lowell

The Last Quarter Of The Moon

How long shall I tarnish the mirror of life,
A spatter of rust on its polished steel!
The seasons reel
Like a goaded wheel.
Half-numb, half-maddened, my days are strife.

The night is sliding towards the dawn,
And upturned hills crouch at autumn's knees.
A torn moon flees
Through the hemlock trees,
The hours have gnawed it to feed their spawn.

Pursuing and jeering the misshapen thing
A rabble of clouds flares out of the east.
Like dogs unleashed
After a beast,
They stream on the sky, an outflung string.

A desolate wind, through the unpeopled dark,
Shakes the bushes and whistles through empty nests,
And the fierce unrests
I keep as guests
Crowd my brain with corpses, pallid and stark.

Leave me in peace, O Spectres, who haunt
My labouring mind, I have fought and failed.
I have not quailed,
I was all unmailed
And naked I strove, 'tis my only vaunt.

The moon drops into the silver day
As waking out of her swoon she comes.
I hear the drums
Of millenniums
Beating the mornings I still must stay.

The years I must watch go in and out,
While I build with water, and dig in air,
And the trumpets blare
Hollow despair,
The shuddering trumpets of utter rout.

An atom tossed in a chaos made
Of yeasting worlds, which bubble and foam.
Whence have I come?
What would be home?
I hear no answer. I am afraid!

I crave to be lost like a wind-blown flame.
Pushed into nothingness by a breath,
And quench in a wreath
Of engulfing death

This fight for a God, or this devil's game.

Amy Lowell

The Letter

Little cramped words scrawling all over
the paper
Like draggled fly's legs,
What can you tell of the flaring moon
Through the oak leaves?
Or of my uncertain window and the
bare floor

Spattered with moonlight?
Your silly quirks and twists have nothing
in them
Of blossoming hawthorns,
And this paper is dull, crisp, smooth,
virgin of loveliness
Beneath my hand.

I am tired, Beloved, of chafing my heart
against
The want of you;
Of squeezing it into little inkdrops,
And posting it.
And I scald alone, here, under the fire
Of the great moon.

Submitted by Venus

Amy Lowell

The Little Garden

A little garden on a bleak hillside
Where deep the heavy, dazzling mountain snow
Lies far into the spring. The sun's pale glow
Is scarcely able to melt patches wide
About the single rose bush. All denied
Of nature's tender ministries. But no, --
For wonder-working faith has made it blow
With flowers many hued and starry-eyed.
Here sleeps the sun long, idle summer hours;
Here butterflies and bees fare far to rove
Amid the crumpled leaves of poppy flowers;
Here four o'clocks, to the passionate night above
Fling whiffs of perfume, like pale incense showers.
A little garden, loved with a great love!

Amy Lowell

The Matrix

Goaded and harassed in the factory
That tears our life up into bits of days
Ticked off upon a clock which never stays,
Shredding our portion of Eternity,
We break away at last, and steal the key
Which hides a world empty of hours; ways
Of space unroll, and Heaven overlays
The leafy, sun-lit earth of Fantasy.
Beyond the ilex shadow glares the sun,
Scorching against the blue flame of the sky.
Brown lily-pads lie heavy and supine
Within a granite basin, under one
The bronze-gold glimmer of a carp; and I
Reach out my hand and pluck a nectarine.

Amy Lowell

The Painted Ceiling

My Grandpapa lives in a wonderful house
With a great many windows and doors,
There are stairs that go up, and stairs that go down,
And such beautiful, slippery floors.

But of all of the rooms, even mother's and mine,
And the bookroom, and parlour and all,
I like the green dining-room so much the best
Because of its ceiling and wall.

Right over your head is a funny round hole
With apples and pears falling through;
There's a big bunch of grapes all purply and sweet,
And melons and pineapples too.

They tumble and tumble, but never come down
Though I've stood underneath a long while
With my mouth open wide, for I always have hoped
Just a cherry would drop from the pile.

No matter how early I run there to look
It has always begun to fall through;
And one night when at bedtime I crept in to see,
It was falling by candle-light too.

I am sure they are magical fruits, and each one
Makes you hear things, or see things, or go
Forever invisible; but it's no use,
And of course I shall just never know.

For the ladder's too heavy to lift, and the chairs
Are not nearly so tall as I need.
I've given up hope, and I feel I shall die
Without having accomplished the deed.

It's a little bit sad, when you seem very near
To adventures and things of that sort,
Which nearly begin, and then don't; and you know
It is only because you are short.

Amy Lowell

The Painter on Silk

There was a man
Who made his living
By painting roses
Upon silk.

He sat in an upper chamber
And painted,
And the noises of the street
Meant nothing to him.

When he heard bugles, and fifes, and drums,
He thought of red, and yellow, and white roses
Bursting in the sunshine,
And smiled as he worked.

He thought only of roses,
And silk.
When he could get no more silk
He stopped painting
And only thought
Of roses.

The day the conquerors
Entered the city,
The old man
Lay dying.
He heard the bugles and drums,
And wished he could paint the roses
Bursting into sound.

Amy Lowell

The Paper Windmill

The little boy pressed his face against the window-pane and looked out
at the bright sunshiny morning. The cobble-stones of the square
glistened like mica. In the trees, a breeze danced and pranced,
and shook drops of sunlight like falling golden coins into the brown water
of the canal. Down stream slowly drifted a long string of galliots
piled with crimson cheeses. The little boy thought they looked as if
they were roc's eggs, blocks of big ruby eggs. He said, 'Oh!' with delight,
and pressed against the window with all his might.

The golden cock on the top of the `Stadhuis' gleamed. His beak was open
like a pair of scissors and a narrow piece of blue sky was wedged in it.
'Cock-a-doodle-do,' cried the little boy. 'Can't you hear me
through the window, Gold Cocky? Cock-a-doodle-do! You should crow
when you see the eggs of your cousin, the great roc.' But the golden cock
stood stock still, with his fine tail blowing in the wind.
He could not understand the little boy, for he said 'Cocorico'
when he said anything. But he was hung in the air to swing, not to sing.
His eyes glittered to the bright West wind, and the crimson cheeses
drifted away down the canal.

It was very dull there in the big room. Outside in the square, the wind
was playing tag with some fallen leaves. A man passed, with a dogcart
beside him full of smart, new milkcans. They rattled out a gay tune:
'Tiddity-tum-ti-ti. Have some milk for your tea. Cream for your coffee
to drink to-night, thick, and smooth, and sweet, and white,'
and the man's sabots beat an accompaniment: 'Plop! trop! milk for your tea.
Plop! trop! drink it to-night.' It was very pleasant out there,
but it was lonely here in the big room. The little boy gulped at a tear.

It was queer how dull all his toys were. They were so still.
Nothing was still in the square. If he took his eyes away a moment
it had changed. The milkman had disappeared round the corner,
there was only an old woman with a basket of green stuff on her head,
picking her way over the shiny stones. But the wind pulled the leaves
in the basket this way and that, and displayed them to beautiful advantage.
The sun patted them condescendingly on their flat surfaces, and they seemed
sprinkled with silver. The little boy sighed as he looked at his disordered
toys on the floor. They were motionless, and their colours were dull.
The dark wainscoting absorbed the sun. There was none left for toys.

The square was quite empty now. Only the wind ran round and round it,
spinning. Away over in the corner where a street opened into the square,
the wind had stopped. Stopped running, that is, for it never
stopped spinning. It whirred, and whirled, and gyrated, and turned.
It burned like a great coloured sun. It hummed, and buzzed, and sparked,
and darted. There were flashes of blue, and long smearing lines of saffron,
and quick jabs of green. And over it all was a sheen like a myriad
cut diamonds. Round and round it went, the huge wind-wheel,

and the little boy's head reeled with watching it. The whole square
was filled with its rays, blazing and leaping round after one another,
faster and faster. The little boy could not speak, he could only gaze,
staring in amaze.

The wind-wheel was coming down the square. Nearer and nearer it came,
a great disk of spinning flame. It was opposite the window now,
and the little boy could see it plainly, but it was something more
than the wind which he saw. A man was carrying a huge fan-shaped frame
on his shoulder, and stuck in it were many little painted paper windmills,
each one scurrying round in the breeze. They were bright and beautiful,
and the sight was one to please anybody, and how much more a little boy
who had only stupid, motionless toys to enjoy.

The little boy clapped his hands, and his eyes danced and whizzed,
for the circling windmills made him dizzy. Closer and closer
came the windmill man, and held up his big fan to the little boy
in the window of the Ambassador's house. Only a pane of glass
between the boy and the windmills. They slid round before his eyes
in rapidly revolving splendour. There were wheels and wheels of colours -
big, little, thick, thin - all one clear, perfect spin. The windmill vendor
dipped and raised them again, and the little boy's face was glued
to the window-pane. Oh! What a glorious, wonderful plaything!
Rings and rings of windy colour always moving! How had any one ever preferred
those other toys which never stirred. 'Nursie, come quickly. Look!
I want a windmill. See! It is never still. You will buy me one, won't you?
I want that silver one, with the big ring of blue.'

So a servant was sent to buy that one: silver, ringed with blue,
and smartly it twirled about in the servant's hands as he stood a moment
to pay the vendor. Then he entered the house, and in another minute
he was standing in the nursery door, with some crumpled paper on the end
of a stick which he held out to the little boy. 'But I wanted a windmill
which went round,' cried the little boy. 'That is the one you asked for,
Master Charles,' Nursie was a bit impatient, she had mending to do.
'See, it is silver, and here is the blue.' 'But it is only a blue streak,'
sobbed the little boy. 'I wanted a blue ring, and this silver
doesn't sparkle.' 'Well, Master Charles, that is what you wanted,
now run away and play with it, for I am very busy.'

The little boy hid his tears against the friendly window-pane. On the floor
lay the motionless, crumpled bit of paper on the end of its stick.
But far away across the square was the windmill vendor, with his big wheel
of whirring splendour. It spun round in a blaze like a whirling rainbow,
and the sun gleamed upon it, and the wind whipped it, until it seemed
a maze of spattering diamonds. 'Cocorico!' crowed the golden cock
on the top of the `Stadhuis'. 'That is something worth crowing for.'
But the little boy did not hear him, he was sobbing over the crumpled

bit of paper on the floor.

Amy Lowell

The Pike

In the brown water,
Thick and silver-sheened in the sunshine,
Liquid and cool in the shade of the reeds,
A pike dozed.
Lost among the shadows of stems
He lay unnoticed.
Suddenly he flicked his tail,
And a green-and-copper brightness
Ran under the water.

Out from under the reeds
Came the olive-green light,
And orange flashed up
Through the sun-thickened water.
So the fish passed across the pool,
Green and copper,
A darkness and a gleam,
And the blurred reflections of the willows on the opposite bank
Received it.

Amy Lowell

The Pleiades

By day you cannot see the sky
For it is up so very high.
You look and look, but it's so blue
That you can never see right through.

But when night comes it is quite plain,
And all the stars are there again.
They seem just like old friends to me,
I've known them all my life you see.

There is the dipper first, and there
Is Cassiopeia in her chair,
Orion's belt, the Milky Way,
And lots I know but cannot say.

One group looks like a swarm of bees,
Papa says they're the Pleiades;
But I think they must be the toy
Of some nice little angel boy.

Perhaps his jackstones which to-day
He has forgot to put away,
And left them lying on the sky
Where he will find them bye and bye.

I wish he'd come and play with me.
We'd have such fun, for it would be
A most unusual thing for boys
To feel that they had stars for toys!

Amy Lowell

The Poet

What instinct forces man to journey on,
Urged by a longing blind but dominant!
Nothing he sees can hold him, nothing daunt
His never failing eagerness. The sun
Setting in splendour every night has won
His vassalage; those towers flamboyant
Of airy cloudland palaces now haunt
His daylight wanderings. Forever done
With simple joys and quiet happiness
He guards the vision of the sunset sky;
Though faint with weariness he must possess
Some fragment of the sunset's majesty;
He spurns life's human friendships to profess
Life's loneliness of dreaming ecstasy.

Amy Lowell

The Pond

Cold, wet leaves
Floatingon moss-coloured water,
And the croaking of frogs-
Cracked bell-notes in the twilight.

Amy Lowell

The Precinct. Rochester

The tall yellow hollyhocks stand,
Still and straight,
With their round blossoms spread open,
In the quiet sunshine.
And still is the old Roman wall,
Rough with jagged bits of flint,
And jutting stones,
Old and cragged,
Quite still in its antiquity.
The pear-trees press their branches against it,
And feeling it warm and kindly,
The little pears ripen to yellow and red.
They hang heavy, bursting with juice,
Against the wall.
So old, so still!

The sky is still.
The clouds make no sound
As they slide away
Beyond the Cathedral Tower,
To the river,
And the sea.
It is very quiet,
Very sunny.
The myrtle flowers stretch themselves in the sunshine,
But make no sound.
The roses push their little tendrils up,
And climb higher and higher.
In spots they have climbed over the wall.
But they are very still,
They do not seem to move.
And the old wall carries them
Without effort, and quietly
Ripens and shields the vines and blossoms.

A bird in a plane-tree
Sings a few notes,
Cadenced and perfect
They weave into the silence.
The Cathedral bell knocks,
One, two, three, and again,
And then again.
It is a quiet sound,
Calling to prayer,
Hardly scattering the stillness,
Only making it close in more densely.
The gardener picks ripe gooseberries
For the Dean's supper to-night.
It is very quiet,
Very regulated and mellow.
But the wall is old,
It has known many days.

It is a Roman wall,
Left-over and forgotten.

Beyond the Cathedral Close
Yelp and mutter the discontents of people not mellow,
Not well-regulated.
People who care more for bread than for beauty,
Who would break the tombs of saints,
And give the painted windows of churches
To their children for toys.
People who say:
'They are dead, we live!
The world is for the living.'

Fools! It is always the dead who breed.
Crush the ripe fruit, and cast it aside,
Yet its seeds shall fructify,
And trees rise where your huts were standing.
But the little people are ignorant,
They chaffer, and swarm.
They gnaw like rats,
And the foundations of the Cathedral are honeycombed.

The Dean is in the Chapter House;
He is reading the architect's bill
For the completed restoration of the Cathedral.
He will have ripe gooseberries for supper,
And then he will walk up and down the path
By the wall,
And admire the snapdragons and dahlias,
Thinking how quiet and peaceful
The garden is.
The old wall will watch him,
Very quietly and patiently it will watch.
For the wall is old,
It is a Roman wall.

Amy Lowell

The Promise of the Morning Star

Thou father of the children of my brain
By thee engendered in my willing heart,
How can I thank thee for this gift of art
Poured out so lavishly, and not in vain.

What thou created never more can die,
Thy fructifying power lives in me
And I conceive, knowing it is by thee,
Dear other parent of my poetry!

For I was but a shadow with a name,
Perhaps by now the very name's forgot;
So strange is Fate that it has been my lot
To learn through thee the presence of that aim

Which evermore must guide me. All unknown,
By me unguessed, by thee not even dreamed,
A tree has blossomed in a night that seemed
Of stubborn, barren wood. For thou hast sown

This seed of beauty in a ground of truth.
Humbly I dedicate myself, and yet
I tremble with a sudden fear to set
New music ringing through my fading youth.

Amy Lowell

The Red Lacquer Music-Stand

A music-stand of crimson lacquer, long since brought
In some fast clipper-ship from China, quaintly wrought
With bossed and carven flowers and fruits in blackening gold,
The slender shaft all twined about and thickly scrolled
With vine leaves and young twisted tendrils, whirling, curling,
Flinging their new shoots over the four wings, and swirling
Out on the three wide feet in golden lumps and streams;
Petals and apples in high relief, and where the seams
Are worn with handling, through the polished crimson sheen,
Long streaks of black, the under lacquer, shine out clean.
Four desks, adjustable, to suit the heights of players
Sitting to viols or standing up to sing, four layers
Of music to serve every instrument, are there,
And on the apex a large flat-topped golden pear.
It burns in red and yellow, dusty, smouldering lights,
When the sun flares the old barn-chamber with its flights
And skips upon the crystal knobs of dim sideboards,
Legless and mouldy, and hops, glint to glint, on hoards
Of scythes, and spades, and dinner-horns, so the old tools
Are little candles throwing brightness round in pools.
With Oriental splendour, red and gold, the dust
Covering its flames like smoke and thinning as a gust
Of brighter sunshine makes the colours leap and range,
The strange old music-stand seems to strike out and change;
To stroke and tear the darkness with sharp golden claws;
To dart a forked, vermilion tongue from open jaws;
To puff out bitter smoke which chokes the sun; and fade
Back to a still, faint outline obliterate in shade.
Creeping up the ladder into the loft, the Boy
Stands watching, very still, prickly and hot with joy.
He sees the dusty sun-mote slit by streaks of red,
He sees it split and stream, and all about his head
Spikes and spears of gold are licking, pricking, flicking,
Scratching against the walls and furniture, and nicking
The darkness into sparks, chipping away the gloom.
The Boy's nose smarts with the pungence in the room.
The wind pushes an elm branch from before the door
And the sun widens out all along the floor,
Filling the barn-chamber with white, straightforward light,
So not one blurred outline can tease the mind to fright.

'O All ye Works of the Lord, Bless ye the Lord; Praise Him, and Magnify Him
for ever.
O let the Earth Bless the Lord; Yea, let it Praise Him, and Magnify Him
for ever.
O ye Mountains and Hills, Bless ye the Lord; Praise Him, and Magnify Him
for ever.
O All ye Green Things upon the Earth, Bless ye the Lord; Praise Him,
and Magnify Him for ever.'

The Boy will praise his God on an altar builded fair,
Will heap it with the Works of the Lord. In the morning air,

Spices shall burn on it, and by their pale smoke curled,
Like shoots of all the Green Things, the God of this bright World
Shall see the Boy's desire to pay his debt of praise.
The Boy turns round about, seeking with careful gaze
An altar meet and worthy, but each table and chair
Has some defect, each piece is needing some repair
To perfect it; the chairs have broken legs and backs,
The tables are uneven, and every highboy lacks
A handle or a drawer, the desks are bruised and worn,
And even a wide sofa has its cane seat torn.
Only in the gloom far in the corner there
The lacquer music-stand is elegant and rare,
Clear and slim of line, with its four wings outspread,
The sound of old quartets, a tenuous, faint thread,
Hanging and floating over it, it stands supreme -
Black, and gold, and crimson, in one twisted scheme!

A candle on the bookcase feels a draught and wavers,
Stippling the white-washed walls with dancing shades and quavers.
A bed-post, grown colossal, jigs about the ceiling,
And shadows, strangely altered, stain the walls, revealing
Eagles, and rabbits, and weird faces pulled awry,
And hands which fetch and carry things incessantly.
Under the Eastern window, where the morning sun
Must touch it, stands the music-stand, and on each one
Of its broad platforms is a pyramid of stones,
And metals, and dried flowers, and pine and hemlock cones,
An oriole's nest with the four eggs neatly blown,
The rattle of a rattlesnake, and three large brown
Butternuts uncracked, six butterflies impaled
With a green luna moth, a snake-skin freshly scaled,
Some sunflower seeds, wampum, and a bloody-tooth shell,
A blue jay feather, all together piled pell-mell
The stand will hold no more. The Boy with humming head
Looks once again, blows out the light, and creeps to bed.

The Boy keeps solemn vigil, while outside the wind
Blows gustily and clear, and slaps against the blind.
He hardly tries to sleep, so sharp his ecstasy
It burns his soul to emptiness, and sets it free
For adoration only, for worship. Dedicate,
His unsheathed soul is naked in its novitiate.
The hours strike below from the clock on the stair.
The Boy is a white flame suspiring in prayer.
Morning will bring the sun, the Golden Eye of Him
Whose splendour must be veiled by starry cherubim,
Whose Feet shimmer like crystal in the streets of Heaven.
Like an open rose the sun will stand up even,
Fronting the window-sill, and when the casement glows
Rose-red with the new-blown morning, then the fire which flows
From the sun will fall upon the altar and ignite
The spices, and his sacrifice will burn in perfumed light.

Over the music-stand the ghosts of sounds will swim,
`Viols d'amore' and `hautbois' accorded to a hymn.
The Boy will see the faintest breath of angels' wings
Fanning the smoke, and voices will flower through the strings.
He dares no farther vision, and with scalding eyes
Waits upon the daylight and his great emprise.

The cold, grey light of dawn was whitening the wall
When the Boy, fine-drawn by sleeplessness, started his ritual.
He washed, all shivering and pointed like a flame.
He threw the shutters open, and in the window-frame
The morning glimmered like a tarnished Venice glass.
He took his Chinese pastilles and put them in a mass
Upon the mantelpiece till he could seek a plate
Worthy to hold them burning. Alas! He had been late
In thinking of this need, and now he could not find
Platter or saucer rare enough to ease his mind.
The house was not astir, and he dared not go down
Into the barn-chamber, lest some door should be blown
And slam before the draught he made as he went out.
The light was growing yellower, and still he looked about.
A flash of almost crimson from the gilded pear
Upon the music-stand, startled him waiting there.
The sun would rise and he would meet it unprepared,
Labelled a fool in having missed what he had dared.
He ran across the room, took his pastilles and laid
Them on the flat-topped pear, most carefully displayed
To light with ease, then stood a little to one side,
Focussed a burning-glass and painstakingly tried
To hold it angled so the bunched and prismed rays
Should leap upon each other and spring into a blaze.
Sharp as a wheeling edge of disked, carnation flame,
Gem-hard and cutting upward, slowly the round sun came.
The arrowed fire caught the burning-glass and glanced,
Split to a multitude of pointed spears, and lanced,
A deeper, hotter flame, it took the incense pile
Which welcomed it and broke into a little smile
Of yellow flamelets, creeping, crackling, thrusting up,
A golden, red-slashed lily in a lacquer cup.

'O ye Fire and Heat, Bless ye the Lord; Praise Him, and Magnify Him
for ever.
O ye Winter and Summer, Bless ye the Lord; Praise Him, and Magnify Him
for ever.
O ye Nights and Days, Bless ye the Lord; Praise Him, and Magnify Him
for ever.
O ye Lightnings and Clouds, Bless ye the Lord; Praise Him, and Magnify Him
for ever.'

A moment so it hung, wide-curved, bright-petalled, seeming
A chalice foamed with sunrise. The Boy woke from his dreaming.
A spike of flame had caught the card of butterflies,

The oriole's nest took fire, soon all four galleries
Where he had spread his treasures were become one tongue
Of gleaming, brutal fire. The Boy instantly swung
His pitcher off the wash-stand and turned it upside down.
The flames drooped back and sizzled, and all his senses grown
Acute by fear, the Boy grabbed the quilt from his bed
And flung it over all, and then with aching head
He watched the early sunshine glint on the remains
Of his holy offering. The lacquer stand had stains
Ugly and charred all over, and where the golden pear
Had been, a deep, black hole gaped miserably. His dear
Treasures were puffs of ashes; only the stones were there,
Winking in the brightness.
The clock upon the stair
Struck five, and in the kitchen someone shook a grate.
The Boy began to dress, for it was getting late.

Amy Lowell

The Road to Avignon

A Minstrel stands on a marble stair,
Blown by the bright wind, debonair;
Below lies the sea, a sapphire floor,
Above on the terrace a turret door
Frames a lady, listless and wan,
But fair for the eye to rest upon.
The minstrel plucks at his silver strings,
And looking up to the lady, sings: --
Down the road to Avignon,
The long, long road to Avignon,
Across the bridge to Avignon,
One morning in the spring.

The octagon tower casts a shade
Cool and gray like a cutlass blade;
In sun-baked vines the cicalas spin,
The little green lizards run out and in.
A sail dips over the ocean's rim,
And bubbles rise to the fountain's brim.
The minstrel touches his silver strings,
And gazing up to the lady, sings: --
Down the road to Avignon,
The long, long road to Avignon,
Across the bridge to Avignon,
One morning in the spring.

Slowly she walks to the balustrade,
Idly notes how the blossoms fade
In the sun's caress; then crosses where
The shadow shelters a carven chair.
Within its curve, supine she lies,
And wearily closes her tired eyes.
The minstrel beseeches his silver strings,
And holding the lady spellbound, sings: --
Down the road to Avignon,
The long, long road to Avignon,
Across the bridge to Avignon,
One morning in the spring.

Clouds sail over the distant trees,
Petals are shaken down by the breeze,
They fall on the terrace tiles like snow;
The sighing of waves sounds, far below.
A humming-bird kisses the lips of a rose
Then laden with honey and love he goes.
The minstrel woos with his silver strings,
And climbing up to the lady, sings: --
Down the road to Avignon,
The long, long road to Avignon,
Across the bridge to Avignon,
One morning in the spring.

Step by step, and he comes to her,
Fearful lest she suddenly stir.
Sunshine and silence, and each to each,
The lute and his singing their only speech;
He leans above her, her eyes unclose,
The humming-bird enters another rose.
The minstrel hushes his silver strings.
Hark! The beating of humming-birds' wings!
Down the road to Avignon,
The long, long road to Avignon,
Across the bridge to Avignon,
One morning in the spring.

Amy Lowell

The Shadow

Paul Jannes was working very late,
For this watch must be done by eight
To-morrow or the Cardinal
Would certainly be vexed. Of all
His customers the old prelate
Was the most important, for his state
Descended to his watches and rings,
And he gave his mistresses many things
To make them forget his age and smile
When he paid visits, and they could while
The time away with a diamond locket
Exceedingly well. So they picked his pocket,
And he paid in jewels for his slobbering kisses.
This watch was made to buy him blisses
From an Austrian countess on her way
Home, and she meant to start next day.

Paul worked by the pointed, tulip-flame
Of a tallow candle, and became
So absorbed, that his old clock made him wince
Striking the hour a moment since.
Its echo, only half apprehended,
Lingered about the room. He ended
Screwing the little rubies in,
Setting the wheels to lock and spin,
Curling the infinitesimal springs,
Fixing the filigree hands. Chippings
Of precious stones lay strewn about.
The table before him was a rout
Of splashes and sparks of coloured light.
There was yellow gold in sheets, and quite
A heap of emeralds, and steel.
Here was a gem, there was a wheel.
And glasses lay like limpid lakes
Shining and still, and there were flakes
Of silver, and shavings of pearl,
And little wires all awhirl
With the light of the candle. He took the watch
And wound its hands about to match
The time, then glanced up to take the hour
From the hanging clock.
Good, Merciful Power!
How came that shadow on the wall,
No woman was in the room! His tall
Chiffonier stood gaunt behind
His chair. His old cloak, rabbit-lined,
Hung from a peg. The door was closed.
Just for a moment he must have dozed.
He looked again, and saw it plain.
The silhouette made a blue-black stain
On the opposite wall, and it never wavered

Even when the candle quavered
Under his panting breath. What made
That beautiful, dreadful thing, that shade
Of something so lovely, so exquisite,
Cast from a substance which the sight
Had not been tutored to perceive?
Paul brushed his eyes across his sleeve.

Clear-cut, the Shadow on the wall
Gleamed black, and never moved at all.

Paul's watches were like amulets,
Wrought into patterns and rosettes;
The cases were all set with stones,
And wreathing lines, and shining zones.
He knew the beauty in a curve,
And the Shadow tortured every nerve
With its perfect rhythm of outline
Cutting the whitewashed wall. So fine
Was the neck he knew he could have spanned
It about with the fingers of one hand.
The chin rose to a mouth he guessed,
But could not see, the lips were pressed
Loosely together, the edges close,
And the proud and delicate line of the nose
Melted into a brow, and there
Broke into undulant waves of hair.
The lady was edged with the stamp of race.
A singular vision in such a place.

He moved the candle to the tall
Chiffonier; the Shadow stayed on the wall.
He threw his cloak upon a chair,
And still the lady's face was there.
From every corner of the room
He saw, in the patch of light, the gloom
That was the lady. Her violet bloom
Was almost brighter than that which came
From his candle's tulip-flame.
He set the filigree hands; he laid
The watch in the case which he had made;
He put on his rabbit cloak, and snuffed
His candle out. The room seemed stuffed
With darkness. Softly he crossed the floor,
And let himself out through the door.

The sun was flashing from every pin
And wheel, when Paul let himself in.
The whitewashed walls were hot with light.

The room was the core of a chrysolite,
Burning and shimmering with fiery might.
The sun was so bright that no shadow could fall
From the furniture upon the wall.
Paul sighed as he looked at the empty space
Where a glare usurped the lady's place.
He settled himself to his work, but his mind
Wandered, and he would wake to find
His hand suspended, his eyes grown dim,
And nothing advanced beyond the rim
Of his dreaming. The Cardinal sent to pay
For his watch, which had purchased so fine a day.
But Paul could hardly touch the gold,
It seemed the price of his Shadow, sold.
With the first twilight he struck a match
And watched the little blue stars hatch
Into an egg of perfect flame.
He lit his candle, and almost in shame
At his eagerness, lifted his eyes.
The Shadow was there, and its precise
Outline etched the cold, white wall.
The young man swore, 'By God! You, Paul,
There's something the matter with your brain.
Go home now and sleep off the strain.'

The next day was a storm, the rain
Whispered and scratched at the window-pane.
A grey and shadowless morning filled
The little shop. The watches, chilled,
Were dead and sparkless as burnt-out coals.
The gems lay on the table like shoals
Of stranded shells, their colours faded,
Mere heaps of stone, dull and degraded.
Paul's head was heavy, his hands obeyed
No orders, for his fancy strayed.
His work became a simple round
Of watches repaired and watches wound.
The slanting ribbons of the rain
Broke themselves on the window-pane,
But Paul saw the silver lines in vain.
Only when the candle was lit
And on the wall just opposite
He watched again the coming of IT,
Could he trace a line for the joy of his soul
And over his hands regain control.

Paul lingered late in his shop that night
And the designs which his delight
Sketched on paper seemed to be
A tribute offered wistfully

To the beautiful shadow of her who came
And hovered over his candle flame.
In the morning he selected all
His perfect jacinths. One large opal
Hung like a milky, rainbow moon
In the centre, and blown in loose festoon
The red stones quivered on silver threads
To the outer edge, where a single, fine
Band of mother-of-pearl the line
Completed. On the other side,
The creamy porcelain of the face
Bore diamond hours, and no lace
Of cotton or silk could ever be
Tossed into being more airily
Than the filmy golden hands; the time
Seemed to tick away in rhyme.
When, at dusk, the Shadow grew
Upon the wall, Paul's work was through.
Holding the watch, he spoke to her:
'Lady, Beautiful Shadow, stir
Into one brief sign of being.
Turn your eyes this way, and seeing
This watch, made from those sweet curves
Where your hair from your forehead swerves,
Accept the gift which I have wrought
With your fairness in my thought.
Grant me this, and I shall be
Honoured overwhelmingly.'

The Shadow rested black and still,
And the wind sighed over the window-sill.

Paul put the despised watch away
And laid out before him his array
Of stones and metals, and when the morning
Struck the stones to their best adorning,
He chose the brightest, and this new watch
Was so light and thin it seemed to catch
The sunlight's nothingness, and its gleam.
Topazes ran in a foamy stream
Over the cover, the hands were studded
With garnets, and seemed red roses, budded.
The face was of crystal, and engraved
Upon it the figures flashed and waved
With zircons, and beryls, and amethysts.
It took a week to make, and his trysts
At night with the Shadow were his alone.
Paul swore not to speak till his task was done.
The night that the jewel was worthy to give.
Paul watched the long hours of daylight live
To the faintest streak; then lit his light,

And sharp against the wall's pure white
The outline of the Shadow started
Into form. His burning-hearted
Words so long imprisoned swelled
To tumbling speech. Like one compelled,
He told the lady all his love,
And holding out the watch above
His head, he knelt, imploring some
Littlest sign.
The Shadow was dumb.

Weeks passed, Paul worked in fevered haste,
And everything he made he placed
Before his lady. The Shadow kept
Its perfect passiveness. Paul wept.
He wooed her with the work of his hands,
He waited for those dear commands
She never gave. No word, no motion,
Eased the ache of his devotion.
His days passed in a strain of toil,
His nights burnt up in a seething coil.
Seasons shot by, uncognisant
He worked. The Shadow came to haunt
Even his days. Sometimes quite plain
He saw on the wall the blackberry stain
Of his lady's picture. No sun was bright
Enough to dazzle that from his sight.

There were moments when he groaned to see
His life spilled out so uselessly,
Begging for boons the Shade refused,
His finest workmanship abused,
The iridescent bubbles he blew
Into lovely existence, poor and few
In the shadowed eyes. Then he would curse
Himself and her! The Universe!
And more, the beauty he could not make,
And give her, for her comfort's sake!
He would beat his weary, empty hands
Upon the table, would hold up strands
Of silver and gold, and ask her why
She scorned the best which he could buy.
He would pray as to some high-niched saint,
That she would cure him of the taint
Of failure. He would clutch the wall
With his bleeding fingers, if she should fall
He could catch, and hold her, and make her live!
With sobs he would ask her to forgive
All he had done. And broken, spent,
He would call himself impertinent;

Presumptuous; a tradesman; a nothing; driven
To madness by the sight of Heaven.
At other times he would take the things
He had made, and winding them on strings,
Hang garlands before her, and burn perfumes,
Chanting strangely, while the fumes
Wreathed and blotted the shadow face,
As with a cloudy, nacreous lace.
There were days when he wooed as a lover, sighed
In tenderness, spoke to his bride,
Urged her to patience, said his skill
Should break the spell. A man's sworn will
Could compass life, even that, he knew.
By Christ's Blood! He would prove it true!

The edge of the Shadow never blurred.
The lips of the Shadow never stirred.

He would climb on chairs to reach her lips,
And pat her hair with his finger-tips.
But instead of young, warm flesh returning
His warmth, the wall was cold and burning
Like stinging ice, and his passion, chilled,
Lay in his heart like some dead thing killed
At the moment of birth. Then, deadly sick,
He would lie in a swoon for hours, while thick
Phantasmagoria crowded his brain,
And his body shrieked in the clutch of pain.
The crisis passed, he would wake and smile
With a vacant joy, half-imbecile
And quite confused, not being certain
Why he was suffering; a curtain
Fallen over the tortured mind beguiled
His sorrow. Like a little child
He would play with his watches and gems, with glee
Calling the Shadow to look and see
How the spots on the ceiling danced prettily
When he flashed his stones. 'Mother, the green
Has slid so cunningly in between
The blue and the yellow. Oh, please look down!'
Then, with a pitiful, puzzled frown,
He would get up slowly from his play
And walk round the room, feeling his way
From table to chair, from chair to door,
Stepping over the cracks in the floor,
Till reaching the table again, her face
Would bring recollection, and no solace
Could balm his hurt till unconsciousness
Stifled him and his great distress.

One morning he threw the street door wide
On coming in, and his vigorous stride
Made the tools on his table rattle and jump.
In his hands he carried a new-burst clump
Of laurel blossoms, whose smooth-barked stalks
Were pliant with sap. As a husband talks
To the wife he left an hour ago,
Paul spoke to the Shadow. 'Dear, you know
To-day the calendar calls it Spring,
And I woke this morning gathering
Asphodels, in my dreams, for you.
So I rushed out to see what flowers blew
Their pink-and-purple-scented souls
Across the town-wind's dusty scrolls,
And made the approach to the Market Square
A garden with smells and sunny air.
I feel so well and happy to-day,
I think I shall take a Holiday.
And to-night we will have a little treat.
I am going to bring you something to eat!'
He looked at the Shadow anxiously.
It was quite grave and silent. He
Shut the outer door and came
And leant against the window-frame.
'Dearest,' he said, 'we live apart
Although I bear you in my heart.
We look out each from a different world.
At any moment we may be hurled
Asunder. They follow their orbits, we
Obey their laws entirely.
Now you must come, or I go there,
Unless we are willing to live the flare
Of a lighted instant and have it gone.'

A bee in the laurels began to drone.
A loosened petal fluttered prone.

'Man grows by eating, if you eat
You will be filled with our life, sweet
Will be our planet in your mouth.
If not, I must parch in death's wide drouth
Until I gain to where you are,
And give you myself in whatever star
May happen. O You Beloved of Me!
Is it not ordered cleverly?'

The Shadow, bloomed like a plum, and clear,
Hung in the sunlight. It did not hear.

Paul slipped away as the dusk began
To dim the little shop. He ran

To the nearest inn, and chose with care
As much as his thin purse could bear.
As rapt-souled monks watch over the baking
Of the sacred wafer, and through the making
Of the holy wine whisper secret prayers
That God will bless this labour of theirs;
So Paul, in a sober ecstasy,
Purchased the best which he could buy.
Returning, he brushed his tools aside,
And laid across the table a wide
Napkin. He put a glass and plate
On either side, in duplicate.
Over the lady's, excellent
With loveliness, the laurels bent.
In the centre the white-flaked pastry stood,
And beside it the wine flask. Red as blood
Was the wine which should bring the lustihood
Of human life to his lady's veins.
When all was ready, all which pertains
To a simple meal was there, with eyes
Lit by the joy of his great emprise,
He reverently bade her come,
And forsake for him her distant home.
He put meat on her plate and filled her glass,
And waited what should come to pass.

The Shadow lay quietly on the wall.
From the street outside came a watchman's call
'A cloudy night. Rain beginning to fall.'

And still he waited. The clock's slow tick
Knocked on the silence. Paul turned sick.

He filled his own glass full of wine;
From his pocket he took a paper. The twine
Was knotted, and he searched a knife
From his jumbled tools. The cord of life
Snapped as he cut the little string.
He knew that he must do the thing
He feared. He shook powder into the wine,
And holding it up so the candle's shine
Sparked a ruby through its heart,
He drank it. 'Dear, never apart
Again! You have said it was mine to do.
It is done, and I am come to you!'

Paul Jannes let the empty wine-glass fall,
And held out his arms. The insentient wall
Stared down at him with its cold, white glare
Unstained! The Shadow was not there!
Paul clutched and tore at his tightening throat.

He felt the veins in his body bloat,
And the hot blood run like fire and stones
Along the sides of his cracking bones.
But he laughed as he staggered towards the door,
And he laughed aloud as he sank on the floor.

The Coroner took the body away,
And the watches were sold that Saturday.
The Auctioneer said one could seldom buy
Such watches, and the prices were high.

Amy Lowell

The Starling

Forever the impenetrable wall
Of self confines my poor rebellious soul,
I never see the towering white clouds roll
Before a sturdy wind, save through the small
Barred window of my jail. I live a thrall
With all my outer life a clipped, square hole,
Rectangular; a fraction of a scroll
Unwound and winding like a worsted ball.
My thoughts are grown uneager and depressed
Through being always mine, my fancy's wings
Are moulted and the feathers blown away.
I weary for desires never guessed,
For alien passions, strange imaginings,
To be some other person for a day.

Amy Lowell

The Taxi

When I go away from you
The world beats dead
Like a slackened drum.
I call out for you against the jutted stars
And shout into the ridges of the wind.
Streets coming fast,
One after the other,
Wedge you away from me,
ANd the lamps of the city prick my eyes
So that I can no longer see your face.
Why should I leave you,
To wound myself upon the sharp edges of the night?

Amy Lowell

The Temple

Between us leapt a gold and scarlet flame.
Into the hollow of the cupped, arched blue
Of Heaven it rose. Its flickering tongues up-drew
And vanished in the sunshine. How it came
We guessed not, nor what thing could be its name.
From each to each had sprung those sparks which flew
Together into fire. But we knew
The winds would slap and quench it in their game.
And so we graved and fashioned marble blocks
To treasure it, and placed them round about.
With pillared porticos we wreathed the whole,
And roofed it with bright bronze. Behind carved locks
Flowered the tall and sheltered flame. Without,
The baffled winds thrust at a column's bole.

Amy Lowell

The Travelling Bear

GRASS-BLADES push up between the cobblestones
And catch the sun on their flat sides
Shooting it back,
Gold and emerald,
Into the eyes of passers-by.
And over the cobblestones,
Square-footed and heavy,
Dances the trained bear.
The cobbles cut his feet,
And he has a ring in his nose
But still he dances,
For the keeper pricks him with a sharp stick,
Under his fur.
Now the crowd gapes and chuckles,
And boys and young women shuffle their feet in time to the dancing bear,
They see him wobbling
Against a dust of emerald and gold,
And they are greatly delighted.
The legs of the bear shake with fatigue
And his back aches,
And the shining grass-blades dazzle and confuse him.
But still he dances,
Because of the little, pointed stick.

Amy Lowell

The Tree Of Scarlet Berries

The rain gullies the garden paths
And tinkles on the broad sides of grass blades.
A tree, at the end of my arm, is hazy with mist.
Even so, I can see that it has red berries,
A scarlet fruit,
Filmed over with moisture.
It seems as though the rain,
Dripping from it,
Should be tinged with colour.
I desire the berries,
But, in the mist, I only scratch my hand on the thorns.
Probably, too, they are bitter.

Amy Lowell

The Trout

Naughty little speckled trout,
Can't I coax you to come out?
Is it such great fun to play
In the water every day?

Do you pull the Naiads' hair
Hiding in the lilies there?
Do you hunt for fishes' eggs,
Or watch tadpoles grow their legs?

Do the little trouts have school
In some deep sun-glinted pool,
And in recess play at tag
Round that bed of purple flag?

I have tried so hard to catch you,
Hours and hours I've sat to watch you;
But you never will come out,
Naughty little speckled trout!

Amy Lowell

The Way

At first a mere thread of a footpath half blotted out by the grasses
Sweeping triumphant across it, it wound between hedges of roses
Whose blossoms were poised above leaves as pond lilies float on the water,
While hidden by bloom in a hawthorn a bird filled the morning with singing.

It widened a highway, majestic, stretching ever to distant horizons,
Where shadows of tree-branches wavered, vague outlines invaded by sunshine;
No sound but the wind as it whispered the secrets of earth to the flowers,
And the hum of the yellow bees, honey-laden and dusty with pollen.
And Summer said, "Come, follow onward, with no thought save the longing to wander,
The wind, and the bees, and the flowers, all singing the great song of Nature,
Are minstrels of change and of promise, they herald the joy of the Future."

Later the solitude vanished, confused and distracted the road
Where many were seeking and jostling. Left behind were the trees and the flowers,
The half-realized beauty of quiet, the sacred unconscious communing.
And now he is come to a river, a line of gray, sullen water,
Not blue and splashing, but dark, rolling somberly on to the ocean.
But on the far side is a city whose windows flame gold in the sunset.
It lies fair and shining before him, a gem set betwixt sky and water,
And spanning the river a bridge, frail promise to longing desire,
Flung by man in his infinite courage, across the stern force of the water;
And he looks at the river and fears, the bridge is so slight, yet he ventures
His life to its fragile keeping, if it fails the waves will engulf him.
O Arches! be strong to uphold him, and bear him across to the city,
The beautiful city whose spires still glow with the fires of sunset!

Amy Lowell

The Wind

He shouts in the sails of the ships at sea,
He steals the down from the honeybee,
He makes the forest trees rustle and sing,
He twirls my kite till it breaks its string.
Laughing, dancing, sunny wind,
Whistling, howling, rainy wind,
North, South, East and West,
Each is the wind I like the best.
He calls up the fog and hides the hills,
He whirls the wings of the great windmills,
The weathercocks love him and turn to discover
His whereabouts -- but he's gone, the rover!
Laughing, dancing, sunny wind,
Whistling, howling, rainy wind,
North, South, East and West,
Each is the wind I like the best.

The pine trees toss him their cones with glee,
The flowers bend low in courtesy,
Each wave flings up a shower of pearls,
The flag in front of the school unfurls.
Laughing, dancing, sunny wind,
Whistling, howling, rainy wind,
North, South, East and West,
Each is the wind I like the best.

Amy Lowell

Thompson’s Lunch Room—Grand Central Station

STUDY IN WHITES
Wax-white—
Floor, ceiling, walls.
Ivory shadows
Over the pavement
Polished to cream surfaces
By constant sweeping.
The big room is coloured like the petals
Of a great magnolia,
And has a patina
Of flower bloom
Which makes it shine dimly
Under the electric lamps.
Chairs are ranged in rows
Like sepia seeds
Waiting fulfilment.
The chalk-white spot of a cook’s cap
Moves unglossily against the vaguely bright wall—
Dull chalk-white striking the retina like a blow
Thru the wavering uncertainty of steam.
Vitreous-white of glasses with green reflections,
Ice-green carboys, shifting—greener, bluer—with the jar of moving water.
Jagged green-white bowls of pressed glass
Rearing snow-peaks of chipped sugar
Above the lighthouse-shaped castors
Of grey pepper and grey-white salt.
Grey-white placards: “Oyster Stew, Cornbeef Hash, Frankfurters”:
Marble slabs veined with words in meandering lines.
Dropping on the white counter like horn notes
Through a web of violins,
The flat yellow lights of oranges,
The cube-red splashes of apples,
In high plated épergnes.
The electric clock jerks every half-minute:
“Coming!—Past!”
“Three beef-steaks and a chicken-pie,”
Bawled through a slide while the clock jerks heavily.
A man carries a china mug of coffee to a distant chair.
Two rice puddings and a salmon salad
Are pushed over the counter;
The unfulfilled chairs open to receive them.
A spoon falls upon the floor with the impact of metal striking stone,
And the sound throws across the room
Sharp, invisible zigzags
Of silver.

Amy Lowell

To a Friend

I ask but one thing of you, only one,
That always you will be my dream of you;
That never shall I wake to find untrue
All this I have believed and rested on,
Forever vanished, like a vision gone
Out into the night. Alas, how few
There are who strike in us a chord we knew
Existed, but so seldom heard its tone
We tremble at the half-forgotten sound.
The world is full of rude awakenings
And heaven-born castles shattered to the ground,
Yet still our human longing vainly clings
To a belief in beauty through all wrongs.
O stay your hand, and leave my heart its songs!

Amy Lowell

To A Husband

Brighter than fireflies upon the Uji River
Are your words in the dark, Beloved.

Amy Lowell

To an Early Daffodil

Thou yellow trumpeter of laggard Spring!
Thou herald of rich Summer's myriad flowers!
The climbing sun with new recovered powers
Does warm thee into being, through the ring
Of rich, brown earth he woos thee, makes thee fling
Thy green shoots up, inheriting the dowers
Of bending sky and sudden, sweeping showers,
Till ripe and blossoming thou art a thing
To make all nature glad, thou art so gay;
To fill the lonely with a joy untold;
Nodding at every gust of wind to-day,
To-morrow jewelled with raindrops. Always bold
To stand erect, full in the dazzling play
Of April's sun, for thou hast caught his gold.

Amy Lowell

To Elizabeth Ward Perkins

Dear Bessie, would my tired rhyme
Had force to rise from apathy,
And shaking off its lethargy
Ring word-tones like a Christmas chime.

But in my soul's high belfry, chill
The bitter wind of doubt has blown,
The summer swallows all have flown,
The bells are frost-bound, mute and still.

Upon the crumbling boards the snow
Has drifted deep, the clappers hang
Prismed with icicles, their clang
Unheard since ages long ago.

The rope I pull is stiff and cold,
My straining ears detect no sound
Except a sigh, as round and round
The wind rocks through the timbers old.

Below, I know the church is bright
With haloed tapers, warm with prayer;
But here I only feel the air
Of icy centuries of night.

Beneath my feet the snow is lit
And gemmed with colours, red, and blue,
Topaz, and green, where light falls through
The saints that in the windows sit.

Here darkness seems a spectred thing,
Voiceless and haunting, while the stars
Mock with a light of long dead years
The ache of present suffering.

Silent and winter-killed I stand,
No carol hymns my debt to you;
But take this frozen thought in lieu,
And thaw its music in your hand.

Amy Lowell

To John Keats

Great master! Boyish, sympathetic man!
Whose orbed and ripened genius lightly hung
From life's slim, twisted tendril and there swung
In crimson-sphered completeness; guardian
Of crystal portals through whose openings fan
The spiced winds which blew when earth was young,
Scattering wreaths of stars, as Jove once flung
A golden shower from heights cerulean.
Crumbled before thy majesty we bow.
Forget thy empurpled state, thy panoply
Of greatness, and be merciful and near;
A youth who trudged the highroad we tread now
Singing the miles behind him; so may we
Faint throbbings of thy music overhear.

Amy Lowell

To-Morrow To Fresh Woods And Pastures New

As for a moment he stands, in hardy masculine beauty,
Poised on the fircrested rock, over the pool which below him
Gleams in the wavering sunlight, waiting the shock of his plunging.
So for a moment I stand, my feet planted firm in the present,
Eagerly scanning the future which is so soon to possess me.

Amy Lowell

Towns in Colour

I

Red Slippers

Red slippers in a shop-window, and outside in the street, flaws of grey,
windy sleet!

Behind the polished glass, the slippers hang in long threads of red,
festooning from the ceiling like stalactites of blood, flooding the eyes
of passers-by with dripping colour, jamming their crimson reflections
against the windows of cabs and tram-cars, screaming their claret and salmon
into the teeth of the sleet, plopping their little round maroon lights
upon the tops of umbrellas.

The row of white, sparkling shop fronts is gashed and bleeding,
it bleeds red slippers. They spout under the electric light,
fluid and fluctuating, a hot rain - and freeze again to red slippers,
myriadly multiplied in the mirror side of the window.

They balance upon arched insteps like springing bridges of crimson lacquer;
they swing up over curved heels like whirling tanagers sucked
in a wind-pocket; they flatten out, heelless, like July ponds,
flared and burnished by red rockets.

Snap, snap, they are cracker-sparks of scarlet in the white, monotonous
block of shops.

They plunge the clangour of billions of vermilion trumpets
into the crowd outside, and echo in faint rose over the pavement.

People hurry by, for these are only shoes, and in a window, farther down,
is a big lotus bud of cardboard whose petals open every few minutes
and reveal a wax doll, with staring bead eyes and flaxen hair,
lolling awkwardly in its flower chair.

One has often seen shoes, but whoever saw a cardboard lotus bud before?

The flaws of grey, windy sleet beat on the shop-window where there are only
red slippers.

II

Thompson's Lunch Room - Grand Central Station

Study in Whites

Wax-white -
Floor, ceiling, walls.
Ivory shadows
Over the pavement
Polished to cream surfaces
By constant sweeping.
The big room is coloured like the petals
Of a great magnolia,
And has a patina
Of flower bloom
Which makes it shine dimly
Under the electric lamps.
Chairs are ranged in rows
Like sepia seeds
Waiting fulfilment.
The chalk-white spot of a cook's cap
Moves unglossily against the vaguely bright wall -
Dull chalk-white striking the retina like a blow
Through the wavering uncertainty of steam.
Vitreous-white of glasses with green reflections,
Ice-green carboys, shifting - greener, bluer - with the jar of moving water.
Jagged green-white bowls of pressed glass
Rearing snow-peaks of chipped sugar
Above the lighthouse-shaped castors
Of grey pepper and grey-white salt.
Grey-white placards: 'Oyster Stew, Cornbeef Hash, Frankfurters':
Marble slabs veined with words in meandering lines.
Dropping on the white counter like horn notes
Through a web of violins,
The flat yellow lights of oranges,
The cube-red splashes of apples,
In high plated `epergnes'.
The electric clock jerks every half-minute:
'Coming! - Past!'
'Three beef-steaks and a chicken-pie,'
Bawled through a slide while the clock jerks heavily.
A man carries a china mug of coffee to a distant chair.
Two rice puddings and a salmon salad
Are pushed over the counter;
The unfulfilled chairs open to receive them.
A spoon falls upon the floor with the impact of metal striking stone,
And the sound throws across the room
Sharp, invisible zigzags
Of silver.

III

An Opera House

Within the gold square of the proscenium arch,

A curtain of orange velvet hangs in stiff folds,
Its tassels jarring slightly when someone crosses the stage behind.
Gold carving edges the balconies,
Rims the boxes,
Runs up and down fluted pillars.
Little knife-stabs of gold
Shine out whenever a box door is opened.
Gold clusters
Flash in soft explosions
On the blue darkness,
Suck back to a point,
And disappear.
Hoops of gold
Circle necks, wrists, fingers,
Pierce ears,
Poise on heads
And fly up above them in coloured sparkles.
Gold!
Gold!
The opera house is a treasure-box of gold.
Gold in a broad smear across the orchestra pit:
Gold of horns, trumpets, tubas;
Gold - spun-gold, twittering-gold, snapping-gold
Of harps.
The conductor raises his baton,
The brass blares out
Crass, crude,
Parvenu, fat, powerful,
Golden.
Rich as the fat, clapping hands in the boxes.
Cymbals, gigantic, coin-shaped,
Crash.
The orange curtain parts
And the prima-donna steps forward.
One note,
A drop: transparent, iridescent,
A gold bubble,
It floats . . . floats . . .
And bursts against the lips of a bank president
In the grand tier.

IV

Afternoon Rain in State Street

Cross-hatchings of rain against grey walls,
Slant lines of black rain
In front of the up and down, wet stone sides of buildings.
Below,
Greasy, shiny, black, horizontal,
The street.

And over it, umbrellas,
Black polished dots
Struck to white
An instant,
Stream in two flat lines
Slipping past each other with the smoothness of oil.
Like a four-sided wedge
The Custom House Tower
Pokes at the low, flat sky,
Pushing it farther and farther up,
Lifting it away from the house-tops,
Lifting it in one piece as though it were a sheet of tin,
With the lever of its apex.
The cross-hatchings of rain cut the Tower obliquely,
Scratching lines of black wire across it,
Mutilating its perpendicular grey surface
With the sharp precision of tools.
The city is rigid with straight lines and angles,
A chequered table of blacks and greys.
Oblong blocks of flatness
Crawl by with low-geared engines,
And pass to short upright squares
Shrinking with distance.
A steamer in the basin blows its whistle,
And the sound shoots across the rain hatchings,
A narrow, level bar of steel.
Hard cubes of lemon
Superimpose themselves upon the fronts of buildings
As the windows light up.
But the lemon cubes are edged with angles
Upon which they cannot impinge.
Up, straight, down, straight - square.
Crumpled grey-white papers
Blow along the side-walks,
Contorted, horrible,
Without curves.
A horse steps in a puddle,
And white, glaring water spurts up
In stiff, outflaring lines,
Like the rattling stems of reeds.
The city is heraldic with angles,
A sombre escutcheon of argent and sable
And countercoloured bends of rain
Hung over a four-square civilization.
When a street lamp comes out,
I gaze at it for fully thirty seconds
To rest my brain with the suffusing, round brilliance of its globe.

V

An Aquarium

Streaks of green and yellow iridescence,
Silver shiftings,
Rings veering out of rings,
Silver - gold -
Grey-green opaqueness sliding down,
With sharp white bubbles
Shooting and dancing,
Flinging quickly outward.
Nosing the bubbles,
Swallowing them,
Fish.
Blue shadows against silver-saffron water,
The light rippling over them
In steel-bright tremors.
Outspread translucent fins
Flute, fold, and relapse;
The threaded light prints through them on the pebbles
In scarcely tarnished twinklings.
Curving of spotted spines,
Slow up-shifts,
Lazy convolutions:
Then a sudden swift straightening
And darting below:
Oblique grey shadows
Athwart a pale casement.
Roped and curled,
Green man-eating eels
Slumber in undulate rhythms,
With crests laid horizontal on their backs.
Barred fish,
Striped fish,
Uneven disks of fish,
Slip, slide, whirl, turn,
And never touch.
Metallic blue fish,
With fins wide and yellow and swaying
Like Oriental fans,
Hold the sun in their bellies
And glow with light:
Blue brilliance cut by black bars.
An oblong pane of straw-coloured shimmer,
Across it, in a tangent,
A smear of rose, black, silver.
Short twists and upstartings,
Rose-black, in a setting of bubbles:
Sunshine playing between red and black flowers
On a blue and gold lawn.
Shadows and polished surfaces,
Facets of mauve and purple,
A constant modulation of values.
Shaft-shaped,

With green bead eyes;
Thick-nosed,
Heliotrope-coloured;
Swift spots of chrysolite and coral;
In the midst of green, pearl, amethyst irradiations.

Outside,
A willow-tree flickers
With little white jerks,
And long blue waves
Rise steadily beyond the outer islands.

Amy Lowell

Two Lacquer Prints

The Emperor's Garden

ONCE, in the sultry heat of midsummer,
An Emperor caused the miniature mountains in his garden
To be covered with white silk,
That so crowned,
They might cool his eyes
With the sparkle of snow.

Meditation

A wise man,
Watching the stars pass across the sky,
Remarked:
In the upper air the fireflies move more slowly.

Amy Lowell

Two Travellers in the Place Vendome

Reign of Louis Philippe

A great tall column spearing at the sky
With a little man on top. Goodness! Tell me why?
He looks a silly thing enough to stand up there so high.

What a strange fellow, like a soldier in a play,
Tight-fitting coat with the tails cut away,
High-crowned hat which the brims overlay.

Two-horned hat makes an outline like a bow.
Must have a sword, I can see the light glow
Between a dark line and his leg. Vertigo

I get gazing up at him, a pygmy flashed with sun.
A weathercock or scarecrow or both things in one?
As bright as a jewelled crown hung above a throne.

Say, what is the use of him if he doesn't turn?
Just put up to glitter there, like a torch to burn,
A sort of sacrificial show in a lofty urn?

But why a little soldier in an obsolete dress?
I'd rather see a Goddess with a spear, I confess.
Something allegorical and fine. Why, yes -

I cannot take my eyes from him. I don't know why at all.
I've looked so long the whole thing swims. I feel he ought to fall.
Foreshortened there among the clouds he's pitifully small.

What do you say? There used to be an Emperor standing there,
With flowing robes and laurel crown. Really? Yet I declare
Those spiral battles round the shaft don't seem just his affair.

A togaed, laurelled man's I mean. Now this chap seems to feel
As though he owned those soldiers. Whew! How he makes one reel,
Swinging round above his circling armies in a wheel.

Sweeping round the sky in an orbit like the sun's,
Flashing sparks like cannon-balls from his own long guns.
Perhaps my sight is tired, but that figure simply stuns.

How low the houses seem, and all the people are mere flies.
That fellow pokes his hat up till it scratches on the skies.
Impudent! Audacious! But, by Jove, he blinds the eyes!

Amy Lowell

Venetian Glass

As one who sails upon a wide, blue sea
Far out of sight of land, his mind intent
Upon the sailing of his little boat,
On tightening ropes and shaping fair his course,
Hears suddenly, across the restless sea,
The rhythmic striking of some towered clock,
And wakes from thoughtless idleness to time:
Time, the slow pulse which beats eternity!
So through the vacancy of busy life
At intervals you cross my path and bring
The deep solemnity of passing years.
For you I have shed bitter tears, for you
I have relinquished that for which my heart
Cried out in selfish longing. And to-night
Having just left you, I can say: "'T is well.
Thank God that I have known a soul so true,
So nobly just, so worthy to be loved!"

Amy Lowell

Venus Transiens

Tell me,
Was Venus more beautiful
Than you are,
When she topped
The crinkled waves,
Drifting shoreward
On her plaited shell?
Was Botticelli's vision
Fairer than mine;
And were the painted rosebuds
He tossed his lady,
Of better worth
Than the words I blow about you
To cover your too great loveliness
As with a gauze
Of misted silver?
For me
You stand poised
In the blue and buoyant air,
Cinctured by bright winds,
Treading the sunlight.
And the waves which precede you
Ripple and stir
The sands at my feet.

Amy Lowell

Vintage

I will mix me a drink of stars, --
Large stars with polychrome needles,
Small stars jetting maroon and crimson,
Cool, quiet, green stars.
I will tear them out of the sky,
And squeeze them over an old silver cup,
And I will pour the cold scorn of my Beloved into it,
So that my drink shall be bubbled with ice.

It will lap and scratch
As I swallow it down;
And I shall feel it as a serpent of fire,
Coiling and twisting in my belly.
His snortings will rise to my head,
And I shall be hot, and laugh,
Forgetting that I have ever known a woman.

Amy Lowell

White And Green

Hey! My daffodil-crowned,
Slim and without sandals!
As the sudden spurt of flame upon darkness
So my eyeballs are startled with you,
Supple-limbed youth among the fruit-trees,
Light runner through tasselled orchards.
You are an almond flower unsheathed
Leaping and flickering between the budded branches.

Amy Lowell

White Currants

Shall I give you white currants?
I do not know why, but I have a sudden fancy for this fruit.
At the moment, the idea of them cherishes my senses,
And they seem more desirable than flawless emeralds.
Since I am, in fact, empty-handed,
I might have chosen gems out of India,
But I choose white currants.
Is it because the raucous wind is hurtling round the house-corners?
I see it with curled lips and stripped fangs, gaunt and haunting energy,
Come to snout, and nibble, and kill the little crocus roots.
Shall we call it white currants?
You may consider it as a symbol if you pelase.
You may find them tart, or sweet, or merely agreeable in colour,
So long as you accept them,
And me.

Amy Lowell

Wind

He shouts in the sails of the ships at sea,
He steals the down from the honeybee,
He makes the forest trees rustle and sing,
He twirls my kite till it breaks its string.
Laughing, dancing, sunny wind,
Whistling, howling, rainy wind,
North, South, East and West,
Each is the wind I like the best.

He calls up the fog and hides the hills,
He whirls the wings of the great windmills,
The weathercocks love him and turn to discover
His whereabouts -- but he's gone, the rover!
Laughing, dancing, sunny wind,
Whistling, howling, rainy wind,
North, South, East and West,
Each is the wind I like the best.

The pine trees toss him their cones with glee,
The flowers bend low in courtesy,
Each wave flings up a shower of pearls,
The flag in front of the school unfurls.
Laughing, dancing, sunny wind,
Whistling, howling, rainy wind,
North, South, East and West,
Each is the wind I like the best.

Amy Lowell

Women's harvest song

I am waving a ripe sunflower,
I am scattering sunflower pollen to the four world-quarters.
I am joyful because of my melons,
I am joyful because of my beans,
I am joyful because of my squashes.

The sunflower waves.
So did the corn wave
When the wind blew against it,
So did my white corn bend
When the red lightning descended upon it,
It trembled as the sunflower
When the rain beat down its leaves.

Great is a ripe sunflower,
And great was the sun above my corn-fields.
His fingers lifted up the corn-ears,
His hands fashioned my melons,
And set my beans full in the pods.
Therefore my heart is happy
And I will lay many blue prayer-sticks at the shrine of Ta-wa.
I will give corn to Ta-wa,
Yellow corn, blue corn, black corn.
I wave the sunflower,
The sunflower heavy with pollen.
I wave it, I turn it, I sing,
Because I am happy.

Amy Lowell

Women's song of the corn

How beautiful are the corn rows,
Stretching to the morning sun,
Stretching to the evening sun.
Very beautiful, the long rows of corn.

How beautiful is the white corn,
I husk it,
I grind it.
Very beautiful, my white corn.

How beautiful is the red corn,
I gather it and make fine meal,
I am glad doing this.
Very beautiful, my red corn.

How beautiful is the black corn,
I give it to my father,
To my mother,
I give it to my child.
Very beautiful, the black corn.

How beautiful is the mottled corn,
Like the sky with little clouds,
I eat it looking at the sky.
Very beautiful, my mottled corn.

Amy Lowell