

Classic Poetry Series

Charles Heavyses
- poems -

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Charles Heavysege(2 May 1816 – 14 July 1876)

Charles Heavysege (May 2, 1816 – July 14, 1876) was a Canadian poet and dramatist. "He was one of the first serious poets to emerge in Canada, and his play *Saul* was hailed on its appearance as the greatest verse drama in English since the time of Shakespeare."

Born in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, England, Heavysege emigrated to Montreal in 1853 where he worked as a wood carver. In 1860 he became a reporter for the *Montreal Transcript*, and later for the *Montreal Daily Witness*, where he eventually became city editor.

As a poet, Heavysege was mainly influenced by [John Milton](http://www.poemhunter.com/john-milton/) and [Shakespeare](http://www.poemhunter.com/william-shakespeare) and the Bible." His first published work was *The revolt of Tartarus*, a poem in six parts, published in two editions: one under his own name in London in 1852, and a second, heavily edited and published anonymously in Montreal, in 1855.

He published *Sonnets* in 1855, *Saul: a drama in three parts* in 1857, *Count Filippo; or, the unequal marriage* in 1860, *The Owl* (an imitation of Poe's "The Raven") and *The Huntsman* in 1864, *The Advocate* (a prose work) and *Jephthah's daughter* in 1865, and *Jezebel* in 1867.

During his lifetime, *Saul* was Heavysege's best-known work. Nathaniel Hawthorne passed on a copy to the *North British Review*, where it was given a laudatory (unsigned) review by Coventry Patmore, who called it "indubitably the best poem ever written out of Great Britain." That was followed by further favorable reviews in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Galaxy*, and *New York Evening Post*. *Saul* was published in two further editions, in 1859 (also in Montreal) and 1869 (in Boston). (The Boston edition was reprinted in 1876 and again in 1967.) Other admirers of *Saul* were Canadian Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald and American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Highly regarded in the 1860s and 1870s, Heavysege "was one of the first of the Anglo-Canadian poets to achieve international recognition; he paved the way for later poets such as [Charles Sangster](http://www.poemhunter.com/charles-sangster) and [Charles G.D Roberts](http://www.poemhunter.com/sir-charles-gd-roberts/)"

W.D. Lighthall, who included Heavysege's work in his 1889 anthology *Songs of*

the Great Dominion, wrote of him: "His work is in no sense distinctively Canadian. Canadians do not read him; but they claim him as perhaps their greatest, most original writer, if they could weigh him aright and appreciate him; and he will probably always command their awe, and refuse to be forgotten."

However, his reputation declined in later decades: "In the nationalist 1920's critics disparaged Heavyside's poetry on the grounds that he was not really a Canadian writer, although he continued to be read by poets like W.W.E. Ross, Ralph Gustafson, and A.J.M. Smith.... Today his crude but vigorous poetry is underrated by Canadian criticism."

In 1956, while dismissing Saul and Count Filippo as "Victorian dinosaurs," Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye acknowledged Heavyside as the "first poet who really came to grips with" what Frye considered to be "the central Canadian tragic theme" (that being "the indifference of nature to human values"): "His third poem, Jephthah's Daughter, seems to me to reflect more directly the influence of his Canadian environment, as its main themes are loneliness, the indifference of nature, and the conception of God as a force of nature."

Saul was produced as a radio drama by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1974.

After Defeat (Extract From Saul)

All's over here;--let us withdraw and weep
Down in the red recesses of our hearts,
Or, in our spirits, silent, curse the cravens
Whom uttered execrations too much honour.
Home, home, let us, dishonoured,--home if there
Be yet for a home, and the Philistines
Drive us not forth to miserable exile.
Will they allow us, like to a breathed hare,
Spent, to return and repossess our form?
Will they endure us in Gibeah? or must we
Discover some dark den on Lebanon,
And dwell with lions? or must we with foxes
Burrow, and depend on cunning for our food?
Better with lions and with foxes mating,
Than be companions of the brood of Israel;
Yea, better with the hill-wolf famishing,
Than battening with the drove that forms the world.

Charles Heavyside

Childhood Alone Is Glad

Childhood alone is glad. With it time flees
In constant mimes and bright festivities.
It, like the ever-restless butterfly,
Or seeks or settles on some flower of joy.
Youth chases pleasure, but oft starteth pain;
And love, youth's birthright, oft is love in vain;
While manhood follows wealth, or woos ambition,
That are but courted cares; and, with transition
Insensible, he enters upon age;
Thence gilding like a spectre from life's stage,
E'en through the door of dotage. So he passes
To second childhood; but, as quickening gases,
Being fled, leave zestless a once cheering draught,
We grow not merry though the dotard laughed.

Charles Heavyside

Clouds

Hushed in a calm beyond mine utterance,
See in the western sky the evening spread;
Suspended in its pale, serene expanse,
Like scattered flames, the glowing cloudlets red.
Clear are those clouds; and that pure sky's profound,
Transparent as a lake of hyaline;
Nor motion, nor the faintest breath of sound,
Disturb the steadfast beauty of the scene.
Far o'er the vault the winnowed welkin wide,
From the bronzed east unto the whitened west,
Moored, seem, in their sweet, tranquil, roseate pride,
Those clouds the fabled islands of the blest;
The lands where pious spirits breathe in joy,
And love and worship all their hours employ.

Charles Heavyside

Conscious Madness (Extract From Saul)

What ails me? what impels me on, until
The big drops fall from off my brow? Whence comes
This strange affliction?--Oh, thus to the driven
About!--I will stand still: no move me aught
That can. Ah, shake me, thing; shake me again
Like an old thorn i' th' blast! 'Tis leaving me;
Oh, that it were for ever! Oh, how long
Shall this fierce malady continue, these
Dread visitations? See, 'tis here again!
What's here again? Or who? Here's none save I;--
And yet there's some one here. 'Tis here, 'tis here
Within my brain:--no, it is in my heart,--
Within my soul; where rise again black thoughts
And horrible conceptions, that from hell
Might have come up. All blasphemies that my ears
Ever heard; my horridest ideas in dreams;
And impious conceits, that even a fiend
Methinks could scarcely muster, swarm within
Me, rank and black as summer flies on ordure.
Oh, what a den this moment is my breast!
How cold I feel, how cruel and invidious.
Now let no child of mine approach me; neither
Do thou come near to me, Ahinoam,
Their mother and the wife I dearly love;
For now the universe appears one field
On which to spend my rancour. Oh, disperse,
Fit, nor return with thy o'erwhelming shadows!
Oh that it would begone and leave me in
My sorrow! Surely 'tis enough to live
In lone despair. To reign is care enough,
Even in rude health; but to be harassed thus
By an unnamed affliction;--and why harassed?
Oh, why am I thus harassed? I have heard
Of wretches raging under sharp remorse;
Of cruel monarchs, in their latter days,
Falling a prey to an accusing conscience;
But why should I, whose faults smite but myself,
Be thus tormented?

Charles Heavyside

Haunts Of A Demon (Extract From Saul)

The Jewish king now walks at large and sound,
Yet of our emissary Malzah hear we nothing:
Go now, sweet spirit, and, if need be, seek
This world all over for him:--find him out,
Be he within the bounds of earth and hell.

He is a most erratic spirit, so
May give thee trouble (as I give thee time)
To find him, for he may be now diminished,
And at the bottom of some silken flower,
Wherein, I know, he loves, when evening comes,
To creep and lie all night, encanopied
Beneath the manifold and scented petals;
Fancying, he says, he bids the world adieu,
And is again a slumberer in heaven:
Or, in some other vein, perchance thou'lt find him
Within the halls or dens of some famed city.
Give thou a general search, in open day,
I' th' town and country's ample field; and next
Seek him in dusky cave, and in dim grot;
And in the shadow of the precipice,
Prone or supine extended motionless;
Or, in the twilight of o'erhanging leaves,
Swung at the nodding arm of some vast beech.
By moonlight seek him on the mountain, and
At noon in the translucent waters salt or fresh;
Or near the dank-marg'd fountain, or clear well,
Watching the tad-pole thrive on suck of venom;
Or where the brook runs O'er the stones, and smooths
Their green locks with its current's crystal comb.
Seek him in rising vapours, and in clouds
Crimson or dun; and often on the edge
Of the gray morning and the tawny eve:
Search in the rocky alcove and woody bower;
And in the crow's-nest look, and every
Pilgrim-crowd-drawing Idol, wherein he
Is wont to sit in darkness and be worshipped.

If thou shouldst find him not in these, search for him

By the lone melancholy tarns of bitterns;
And in the embosomed dells, whereunto maidens
Resort to bathe within the tepid pool.
Look specially there, and, if thou seest peeping
Satyr or faun, give chase and call out 'Malzah!'
For he shall know thy voice and his own name.

Charles Heavyside

Last Words Of Saul (Extract From Saul)

Now let me die, for I indeed was slain
With my three sons. Where are ye, sons? Oh let me
Find ye, that I may perish with you; dying,
Cover you with my form, as doth the fowl
Cover her chickens! Oh, Philistia
Thou now art compensated,--now are getting
Rich with this crimson, hot, and molten tide;
That waits not patient to be coined in drops,
But rushes, in an ingot-forming stream,
Out of the mine and mintage of my heart!
Oh my three poor dead sons, where are you? Ye
Have gone before me into the hereafter
Upon such innocently-flighted steps.
That I, with feet cumbered with clots of blood,
Shall lose of you all glimpse, and then my soul
Shall drop to the abyss. Gush faster, blood,
And gallop with my soul towards Hades,
That yawns obscure.

Charles Heavysege

Night

'Tis solemn darkness; the sublime of shade;
Night, by no stars nor rising moon relieved;
The awful blank of nothingness arrayed,
O'er which my eye-balls roll in vain, deceived.
Upward, around, and downward I explore,
E'en to the frontiers of the ebon air,
But cannot, though I strive, discover more
Than what seems one huge cavern of despair.
Oh, Night, art thou so grim, when, black and bare
Of moonbeams, and no cloudlets to adorn,
Like a nude Ethiop 'twixt two houris fair,
Thou stand'st between the evening and the morn?
I took thee for an angel, but have wooed
A cacodaemon in mine ignorant mood.

Charles Heavyside

Secrets Of The Heart

Open, my heart, thy ruddy valves;
It is thy master calls;
Let me go down, and, curious, trace
Thy labyrinthine halls.
Open, O heart, and let me view
The secrets of thy den;
Myself unto myself now show
With introspective ken.
Expose thyself, thou covered nest
Of passions, and be seen;
Stir up thy brood, that in unrest
Are ever piping keen.
Ah! what a motley multitude,
Magnanimous and mean!

Charles Heavyside

Song From Count Filippo

WHO is lord of lordly fate,--
Lady of her lot's estate?
He who rules himself is he,
She who tempts not fate is she.

Who in peril stands of pain?
Who is sure to suffer stain?
He who climbs a thorny tree,
Gathers juicy berries she.

Charles Heavyside

The Coming Of Morn

See how the Morn awakes. Along the sky
Proceeds she with her pale, increasing light,
And, from the depths of the dim canopy,
Drives out the shadows of departing night.
Lo, the clouds break, and gradually more wide
Morn openeth her bright, rejoicing gates;
And ever, as the orient valves divide,
A costlier aspect on their breadth awaits.

Lo, the clouds break, and in each opened schism
The coming Phoebus lays huge beams of gold,
And roseate fire and glories that the prism
Would vainly strive before us to unfold;
And, while I gaze, from out the bright abysm
A flaming disc is to the horizon rolled.

Charles Heavyside

The Dead

How great unto the living seem the dead!
How sacred, solemn; how heroic grown;
How vast and vague, as they obscurely tread
The shadowy confines of the dim unknown!-
For they have met the monster that we dread,
Have learned the secret not to mortal shown.
E'en as gigantic shadows on the wall
The spirit of the daunted child amaze,
So on us thoughts of the departed fall,
And with phantasma fill our gloomy gaze.
Awe and deep wonder lend the living lines,
And hope and ecstasy the borrowed beams;
While fitful fancy the full form divines,
And all is what imagination dreams.

Charles Heavyside

The Fallen Angels

'Twas on a day, and in high, radiant heaven,
An angel lay beside a lake reclined,
Against whose shores the rolling waves were driven,
And beat the measure to the dancing wind.
There, rapt, he meditated on that story
Of how Jehovah did of yore expel
Heaven's aborigines from grace and glory-
Those mighty angels that did dare rebel.
And, as he mused upon their dread abode
And endless penance, from his drooping hands
His harp down sank, and scattered all abroad
Its rosy garland on the golden sands;
His soul mute wondering that the All-wise Spirit
Should have allowed the doom of such demerit.

Charles Heavyside

The Infinite

The day was lingering in the pale north-
west,
And night was hanging o'er my head-
Night, where a myriad stars were spread;
While down in the east, where the light was
least,
Seemed the home of the quiet dead.
And, as I gazed on the field sublime,
To watch the bright, pulsating stars,
Adown the deep where the angels sleep
Came drawn the golden chime
Of those great spheres that sound the years
For the horologe of time.
Millenniums numberless they told,
Millenniums a millionfold
From the ancient hour of prime.

Charles Heavyside

The Stream

'Twas Sabbath morn. I lay 'neath pensive spell,
And saw, in reverie or waking dream,
My life elapse, in likeness of a stream
That in a slant and steady torrent fell,
As if it gushed beneath the force supreme
Of some high reservoir or lofty well.
E'en such a stream I saw as, from a bank
Verdant with mosses and perpetual dank,
I have observed leap forth when heavy rains
Have, through the uplands filtered, fed earth's veins
To bursting. This I saw with troubled eye,
Anticipating when the stream no more
In ceaseless, crystalline cascade should pour,
But sudden stop, or slowly dribble dry.

Charles Heavyside

Winter Night

The stars are glittering in the frosty sky,
Frequent as pebbles on a broad sea-coast;
And o'er the vault the cloud-like galaxy
Has marshalled its innumerable host.
Alive all heaven seems! with wondrous glow
Tenfold refulgent every star appears,
As if some wide, celestial gale did blow,
And thrice illumine the ever-kindled spheres.
Orbs, with glad orbs rejoicing, burning, beam,
Ray-crowned, with lambent lustre in their zones,
Till o'er the blue, bespangled spaces seem
Angels and great archangels on their thrones;
A host divine, whose eyes are sparkling gems,
And forms more bright than diamond diadems.

Charles Heavyside