

Classic Poetry Series

Christopher John Brennan

- 50 poems -

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Christopher John Brennan (1 November 1870 – 5 October 1932)

Christopher John Brennan was an Australian poet and scholar.

Biography

Brennan was born in Sydney, to Christopher Brennan (d.1919), a brewer, and his wife Mary Ann (d.1924), née Carroll, both Irish immigrants. His education took place at two schools in Sydney: he first attended St Aloysius' College, and after gaining a scholarship from Patrick Moran, he boarded at St Ignatius' College, Riverview. Brennan entered the University of Sydney in 1888, taking up studies in the Classics, and won a travelling scholarship to Berlin. There he met his future wife, Anna Elisabeth Werth; there, also, he encountered the poetry of [Stéphane Mallarmé](http://www.poemhunter.com/st-phane-mallarm-2/). About this time, he decided to become a poet. In 1893 Brennan's article "On the Manuscripts of Aeschylus" appeared in the Journal of Philology, Brennan began forming a theory about the descent of Aeschylus' extant manuscripts in 1888.

Returning to Australia, Brennan took up a position as a cataloguer in the public library, before being given a position at the University of Sydney. In 1914, he produced his major work, *Poems*: 1913. After Brennan's marriage broke up in 1922, he went to live with Violet Singer, the 'Vie' of his later poems, and, as a result of both his divorce and increasing drunkenness, he was removed from his position at the University in June 1925. The death of Violet Singer in an accident left him distraught, and he spent most of his remaining years in poverty. Brennan died in 1932, after developing cancer.

Brennan was not a lyric poet. It was not emotion that drove his work, rather, it displays at its best an architectural, and mythological resonance that informs it. His chief work was designed to be read as a single poem, complete, yet formed of smaller works. It covers not only the basic details of his life, such as his wooing of his wife in the early portions, but also human profundities through mythology, as in the central Lilith section, and the Wanderer sequence. As such, it is among the most widely discussed works of Australian poetry, judging from the prominence of criticism about it and Brennan.

Brennan belonged to no particular group in Australian literature. Neither a balladist, nor a member of the emergent "Vision" school, his closest affinities are with the generation of the 1890s, such as [Victor Daley](http://www.poemhunter.com/victor-james-daley/). This is not surprising since the bulk of his work was produced during this period. However his importance in Australian letters rests upon the

seriousness he approached his task as a poet and his influence upon some later poets, such as [Vincent Buckley](http://www.poemhunter.com/vincent-thomas-buckley/).

Recognition

Brennan influenced many of Australian the writers of his generation and who succeeded him, including R. D. FitzGerald, A. D. Hope, [Judith Wright](http://www.poemhunter.com/judith-wright/) and [James McAuley](http://www.poemhunter.com/james-phillip-mcauley/). In remembrance, the Fellowship of Australian Writers established the Christopher Brennan Award which is presented annually to an Australian poet, recognising a lifetime achievement in poetry.

Brennan Hall and Library at St John's College within the University of Sydney, the Christopher Brennan building in the University's Arts Faculty, and the main library at Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview are named in his honour.

Works:

XXI poems: MDCCCXCIII-MDCCCXCVII: towards the source (Sydney : Angus and Robertson, 1897).

Poems: 1913 (Sydney : G. B. Philip and Son, 1914).

A chant of doom: and other verses (Sydney : Angus and Robertson, 1918).

The burden of Tyre (Sydney : Harry F. Chaplin, 1953).

The verse of Christopher Brennan ed. by A. R. Chisholm and J. J. Quinn (Sydney : Angus and Robertson, 1960).

The prose of Christopher Brennan ed. by A. R. Chisholm and J. J. Quinn (Sydney : Angus and Robertson, 1962).

Christopher Brennan ed. by Terry Sturm (St. Lucia, Qld : U. of Queensland Press, 1984).

1897

Deep in my hidden country stands a peak,
and none hath known its name
and none, save I, hath even skill to seek:
thence my wild spirit came.
Thither I turn, when the day's garish world
too long hath vex'd my sight,
and bare my limbs where the great winds are whirl'd
and life's undreaded might.
For there I know the pools of clearest blue,
glad wells of simple sooth,
there, steep'd in strength of glacier springs, renew
the lucid body of youth,
there I alone may know the joy of quest
and keen delight of cold,
or rest, what time the night with naked breast
and shaken hair of gold,
folds me so close, that her great breath would seem
to fill the darkling heart
with solemn certainty of ancient dream
or whisperingly to impart
aeonian life, larger than seas of light,
more limpid than the dawn:
there, when my foot hath touch'd the topmost height,
the fire from heaven is drawn.
If any murmur that my 'sdainful hand
withholds its sacrifice
where ranged unto the Law the peoples stand,
let this blown word suffice:
The gift of self is self's most sacred right:
only where none hath trod,
only upon my secret starry height
I abdicate to God.

Christopher John Brennan

An Hour's Respite

An hour's respite; once more the heart may dream:
the thunderwheels of passion thro' the eve,
distantly musical, vaporously agleam,
about my old pain leave
nought but a soft enchantment, vesper fable.
Sweet hour of dream! from the tense height of life
given back to this dear grass and perfumed shade,
across the golden darkness
I feel the simple flowerets where we stray'd
in the clear eyes unmix'd with starry strife.
Ah! wilt thou not even now arise,
low-laughing child haunting my old spring ways
and blossom freshly on my freshen'd gaze,
sororal in this hour of tenderness,
an hour of happy hands and clinging eyes —
on silent heartstrings
sweet memory fades in sweet forgetfulness.

Christopher John Brennan

And Does She Still Perceive

And does she still perceive, her curtain drawn,
white fields, where maiden Dawn
is anguish'd with the untold approach of joy?
or in the wooing forenoon softly pass
where of our little friends
that knew us, girl and boy,
the delicate feather-pinks, each dainty greeting bends
before her step, amid the pale sweet grass?
or warmer flush
our poppies with her blush
as the long day of love grows bold for the red kiss
and dreams of bliss
dizzy the brain and awe the youthful blood?
Surely her longing gaze hath call'd them forth
the bashful blue-eyed flower-births of the North,
forget-me-nots and violets of the wood,
those maids that slept beneath the snow, and every gracious thing
that glads the spring!
— Ah sweet! but dream me in thy landscape there
as I have pictured thee
and I shall rest the long day at thy knee
beneath thy hair:
and Thou and I unconscious of surprise
but innocently quiet and gravely glad
and just a little sad
with longing long repress'd,
shall fill with grace each other's welcome eyes
till the shy evening rise
and the streaming lilac-bloom enchant the drowsed air,
hushing it soft and warm round pillows press'd
by happy lovers' rest
lost in that timeless hour when breast is joined to breast.

Christopher John Brennan

And shall the living waters heed

And shall the living waters heed
our vain desire, insensate Art!
and fill the common dust I knead
upgather'd from the trodden mart?
As well might they forsake their clime
of virgin green and blue, to creep
in cities where our tears are slime,
where our unquicken'd bodies sleep.
— But thou, O soul, hast stood for sure
in the far paradisaal bower,
there where our passion sparkles pure
beneath the eternal morning hour.
and oft, in twilights listening,
my sleeping memories are stirr'd
by lavings of the unstaunched spring
upwelling in a sudden word.
Why shouldst thou come to squander here
the treasure of those deeps on me?
nay, where our fount is free and clear
stay there, and let me come to thee!

Christopher John Brennan

Autumn

Autumn: the year breathes dully towards its death,
beside its dying sacrificial fire;
the dim world's middle-age of vain desire
is strangely troubled, waiting for the breath
that speaks the winter's welcome malison
to fix it in the unremembering sleep:
the silent woods brood o'er an anxious deep,
and in the faded sorrow of the sun,
I see my dreams' dead colours, one by one,
forth-conjur'd from their smouldering palaces,
fade slowly with the sigh of the passing year.
They wander not nor wring their hands nor weep,
discrown'd belated dreams! but in the drear
and lingering world we sit among the trees
and bow our heads as they, with frozen mouth,
looking, in ashen reverie, towards the clear
sad splendour of the winter of the far south.

Christopher John Brennan

Because She Would Ask Me Why I Loved Her

If questioning would make us wise
No eyes would ever gaze in eyes;
If all our tale were told in speech
No mouths would wander each to each.

Were spirits free from mortal mesh
And love not bound in hearts of flesh
No aching breasts would yearn to meet
And find their ecstasy complete.

For who is there that lives and knows
The secret powers by which he grows?
Were knowledge all, what were our need
To thrill and faint and sweetly bleed?

Then seek not, sweet, the "If" and "Why"
I love you now until I die.
For I must love because I live
And life in me is what you give.

Christopher John Brennan

Black on the Depths

Black on the depths of blackest skies
whence even the levin seems withdrawn,
the cities threaten: burning eyes
ask what dread hand hath slain the dawn.

Christopher John Brennan

Come Out, Come Out

Come out, come out, ye souls that serve, why will ye die?
or will ye sit and stifle in your prison-homes
dreaming of some master that holds the winds in leash
and the waves of darkness yonder in the gaunt hollow of night?
nay, there is none that rules: all is a strife of the winds
and the night shall billow in storm full oft ere all be done.
For this is the hard doom that is laid on all of you,
to be that whereof ye dream, dreaming against your will.
But first ye must travel the many ways, and your close-wrapt souls
must be blown thro' with the rain that comes from the homeless dark:
for until ye have had care of the wastes there shall be no truce
for them nor you, nor home, but ever the ancient feud;
and the soul of man must house the cry of the darkling waves
as he follows the ridge above the waters shuddering to-wards night,
and the rains and the winds that roam an hunger'd for some heart's warmth.
Go: tho' ye find it bitter, yet must ye be bare
to the wind and the sea and the night and the wail of birds in the sky;
go: tho' the going be hard and the goal blinded with rain
yet the staying is a death that is never soften'd with sleep.

Christopher John Brennan

Dawns of the world, how I have known you all...

Dawns of the world, how I have known you all,
so many, and so varied, and the same!
dawns o'er the timid plains, or in the folds
of the arm'd hills, or by the unsleeping shore;
a chill touch on the chill flesh of the dark
that, shuddering, shrinks from its couch, and leaves
a homeless light, staring, disconsolate,
on the drear world it knows too well, the world
it fled and finds again, its wistful hope
unmet by any miracle of night,
that mocks it rather, with its shreds that hang
about the woods and huddled bulks of gloom
that crouch, malicious, in the broken combs,
witness to foulnesses else unreveal'd
that visit earth and violate her dreams
in the lone hours when only evil wakes.

Christopher John Brennan

Deep mists of longing blur the land

Deep mists of longing blur the land
as in your late October eve:
almost I think your hand might leave
its old caress upon my hand —
for sure this floating world of dream
hath touch'd that far reality
of memory's heaven; nor would I deem
the chance a strange one, if to thee
my feet should stray ere fall the night,
or, reaching to that lucent shore,
these eyes should wake on tenderer light
to greet the spring and thee once more.

Christopher John Brennan

Dies Dominica! the sunshine burns

Dies Dominica! the sunshine burns
strong incense on the breathing fields of morn:
lucid, intense, all colour towards it yearns
that souls of flowers on the air are born.

What claustral joy to-day is on the air
—expanding now and one with the celebrant sun—
and fills with pointed flame all things aware,
all flowers and souls that sing—and I am one!

Dies Dominica! the passion yearns,
and the world and the singer is but one flower
from out whose luminous chalice odour burns
intenser toward the blue thro' this keen hour:

—this hour is my eternity! the soul
rises, expanding ever, with the sight,
thro' flowers and colours, and the visible whole
of beauty mingled in one dream of light.

Christopher John Brennan

Droop'st thou and fail'st? but these have never tired

Droop'st thou and fail'st? but these have never tired;
winds of the region, free, they shine and sing,
unurged, unguerdon'd: hast thou then desired
to be with them and trail'st a useless wing?
Self-pity hath thee in her clinging damp,
and makes a siren-music of thy woes
to lure thy feet into that reptile-swamp
where rancour's muddy stream, festering, throes.
Cunning is her condolence with the snarl
of canker'd memory or the soft tear
for vanisht sweetness: come, an honest parle,
air for thy ailment! make these wrongs appear.
Ay, this hath spat at thee, and that hath flung
his native mud, and that with bilious guile
most plausible — what! hast thou loved and sung
as was in thee, and need'st do else than smile?
(Heed not that subtle demon that would prompt
to measure thee by them; so humbled yet
thou art not, nor so beggar'd thine accopt:
what thou art, that thou hast, and know'st thy debt.)
And in thy house of love the venom'd dart
was thrust within thy side — Even so! must then
the gather'd ripeness of thy mind and heart
be turn'd to flies? that is no way for men.
Who said, and rid himself of usual awe,
I prize not man, save as his metal rings
of god or hero? Hast thou made a law,
live by thy law: 'tis carrion hath no wings.

Christopher John Brennan

Each day I see the long ships coming into port

Each day I see the long ships coming into port
and the people crowding to their rail, glad of the shore:
because to have been alone with the sea and not to have known
of anything happening in any crowded way,
and to have heard no other voice than the crooning sea's
has charmed away the old rancours, and the great winds
have search'd and swept their hearts of the old irksome thoughts:
so, to their freshen'd gaze, each land smiles a good home.
Why envy I, seeing them made gay to greet the shore?
Surely I do not foolishly desire to go
hither and thither upon the earth and grow weary
with seeing many lands and peoples and the sea:
but if I might, some day, landing I reckon not where
have heart to find a welcome and perchance a rest,
I would spread the sail to any wandering wind of the air
this night, when waves are hard and rain blots out the land.

Christopher John Brennan

Epilogue: 1908

The droning tram swings westward: shrill
the wire sings overhead, and chill
midwinter draughts rattle the glass
that shows the dusking way I pass
to yon four turreted square tower
that still exalts the golden hour
where youth, initiate once, endears
a treasure richer with the years.

Dim-seen, the upper stories fleet
along the twisting shabby street;
beneath, the shop-fronts' cover'd ways
bask in their lampions' orange blaze,
or stare phantasmal, weirdly new,
in the electric's' ghastly blue:
and, up and down, I see them go,
along the windows pleas'd and slow
but hurrying where the darkness falls,
the city's drift of pavement thralls
whom the poor pleasures of the street
lure from their niggard homes, to meet
and mix, unknown, and feel the bright
banality 'twixt them and night:
so, in my youth, I saw them flit
where their delusive dream was lit;
so now I see them, and can read
the urge of their unwitting need
one with my own, however dark,
and questing towards one mother-ark.
But, past the gin-shop's ochrous flare,
sudden, a gap of quiet air
and gather'd dark, where, set a pace
beyond the pavement's coiling race
and mask'd by bulk of sober leaves,
the plain obtruncate chancel heaves,
whose lancet-windows faintly show
suffusion of a ruddy glow,
the lamp of adoration, dim
and rich with unction kept for Him
whom Bethlehem's manger first made warm,
the sweetest god in human form,
love's prisoner in the Eucharist,
man's pleading, patient amorist:
and there the sacring laver stands
where I was brought in pious hands,
a chrisom-child, that I might be
accepted of that company
who, thro' their journeying, behold
beyond the apparent heavens, controu'd
to likeness of a candid rose,
ascending where the gold heart glows,
cirque within cirque, the blessed host,

their kin, their comfort, and their boast.

With them I walk'd in love and awe
till I was ware of that grim maw
and lazar-pit that reek'd beneath:
what outcast howlings these? what teeth
gnashing in vain? and was that bliss
whose counter-hemisphere was this?
and could it be, when times fulfill'd
had made the tally of either guild,
that this mid-world, dredged clean in both,
should no more bar their gruesome troth?
So from beneath that choiring tent
I stepp'd, and tho' my spirit's bent
was dark to me as yet, I sought
a sphere appeas'd and undistraught;
and found viaticum and goal
in that hard atom of the soul,
that final grain of deathless mind,
which Satan's watch-fiends shall not find
nor the seven mills of darkness bruise,
for all permission to abuse;
stubborn, yet, if one seek aright,
translucent all within and bright
with sheen that bath no paradigm,
not where our proud Golcondas brim,
tho' sky and sea and leaf and flower,
in each rare mood of virtual power,
sleep in their gems' excepted day:
and so, nor long, the guarded ray
broke on my eagerness, who brought
the lucid diamond-probe of thought
and, driving it behind, the extreme
blind vehemence of travailing dream
against the inhibitory shell:
and found, no grim eternal cell
and presence of the shrouded Norn,
but Eden, clad in nuptial mom,
young, fair, and radiant with delight
remorse nor sickness shall requite.

Yes, Eden was my own, my bride;
whatever malices denied,
faithful and found again, nor long
absent from aura of wooing song:
but promis'd only, while the sun
must travel yet thro' times undone;
and life must guard the prize of youth,
and thought must steward into truth
the mines of magian ore divined
in rich Cipangos of the mind:
and I, that made my high attempt

no bliss whence any were exempt,
their fellow-pilgrim, I must greet
these listless captives of the street,
these fragments of an orphan'd drift
whose dower was our mother's thrift,
and, tho' they know it not, have care
of what would be their loving prayer
if skill bestow'd might, help them heed
their craving for the simple meed
to be together in the light
when loneliness and dark incite:
long is the way till we are met
where Eden pays her hoarded debt
and we are orb'd in her, and she
hath still'd her hungering to be,
with plentitude beyond impeach,
single, distinct, and whole in each:
and many an evening hour shall bring
the dark crowd's dreary loitering
to me who pass and see the tale
of all my striving, bliss or bale,
dated from either spire that strives
clear of the shoal of shiftless lives,
and promise, in all years' despite,
fidelity to old delight.

Christopher John Brennan

Fire in the Heavens

Fire in the heavens, and fire along the hills,
and fire made solid in the flinty stone,
thick-mass'd or scatter'd pebble, fire that fills
the breathless hour that lives in fire alone.

This valley, long ago the patient bed
of floods that carv'd its antient amplitude,
in stillness of the Egyptian crypt outspread,
endures to drown in noon-day's tyrant mood.

Behind the veil of burning silence bound,
vast life's innumerable busy littleness
is hush'd in vague-conjectured blur of sound
that dulls the brain with slumbrous weight, unless

some dazzling puncture let the stridence throng
in the cicada's torture-point of song.

Christopher John Brennan

Four springtimes lost: and in the fifth we stand

Four springtimes lost: and in the fifth we stand,
here in this quiet hour of glory, still,
while o'er the bridal land
the westering sun dwells in untroubled gold,
a bridegroom proud of his permitted will,
whom grateful rapture suffers not be bold,
but tender now and bland
his amber locks and bended gaze are shed,
brimming, above the couch'd and happy clime:
all is content and ripe delight, full-fed.
And as your fingers brush my hand
so too the winning time
would charm me from regretful reverie
that keeps me somewhat sad, remembering —
not the old woodland days, for thou art near
and hold'st them safely hid
to rise and shine again, when waning skies shall bid —
but later dawns o' the year, away from thee
liv'd thro', even here,
and golden embraces of the light-hearted time
when I was sad at heart, remembering
the clear enchantments of our single year,
our woodland prime of love, its violet-budded vow,
receding ever now
farther and farther down the past, a gleam
that turns to softest pearl the luminous haze
drifting between in from the golden days
when I was sad at inmost heart, remembering
thee and the woodland season of bright laughter: —
so in my perverse and most loitering dream
(O fading, fading days!)
each season claims the homage due, long after
its glory has faded to an outcast thing.

Christopher John Brennan

How Old is my heart, how old?

How old is my heart, how old, how old is my heart,
and did I ever go forth with song when the morn was new?
I seem to have trod on many ways: I seem to have left
I know not how many homes; and to leave each
was still to leave a portion of mine own heart,
of my old heart whose life I had spent to make that home
and all I had was regret, and a memory.

So I sit and muse in this wayside harbour and wait
till I hear the gathering cry of the ancient winds and again
I must up and out and leave the members of the hearth
to crumble silently into white ash and dust,
and see the road stretch bare and pale before me: again
my garment and my house shall be the enveloping winds
and my heart be fill'd wholly with their old pitiless cry.

Christopher John Brennan

I am driven everywhere from a clinging home

I am driven everywhere from a clinging home,
O autumn eves! and I ween'd that you would yet
have made, when your smouldering dwindled to odorous fume,
close room for my heart, where I might crouch and dream
of days and ways I had trod, and look with regret
on the darkening homes of men and the window-gleam,
and forget the morrows that threat and the unknown way.
But a bitter wind came out of the yellow-pale west
and my heart is shaken and fill'd with its triumphing cry:
You shall find neither home nor rest; for ever you roam
with stars as they drift and wilful fates of the sky!

Christopher John Brennan

I Am Shut Out Of Mine Own Heart

I am shut out of mine own heart
because my love is far from me,
nor in the wonders have I part
that fill its hidden empery:

the wildwood of adventurous thought
and lands of dawn my dream had won,
the riches out of Faery brought
are buried with our bridal sun.

And I am in a narrow place,
and all its little streets are cold,
because the absence of her face
has robb'd the sullen air of gold.

My home is in a broader day:
at times I catch it glistening
thro' the dull gate, a flower'd play
and odour of undying spring:

the long days that I lived alone,
sweet madness of the springs I miss'd,
are shed beyond, and thro' them blown
clear laughter, and my lips are kiss'd:

- and here, from mine own joy apart,
I wait the turning of the key: -
I am shut out of mine own heart
because my love is far from me

Christopher John Brennan

I said, This Misery Must End

I SAID, This misery must end:
Shall I, that am a man and know
that sky and wind are yet my friend,
sit huddled under any blow?
so speaking left the dismal room
and stept into the mother-night
all fill'd with sacred quickening gloom
where the few stars burn'd low and bright,
and darkling on my darkling hill
heard thro' the beaches' sullen boom
heroic note of living will
rung trumpet-clear against the fight;
so stood and heard, and rais'd my eyes
erect, that they might drink of space,
and took the night upon my face,
till time and trouble fell away
and all my soul sprang up to feel
as one among the stars that reel
in rhyme on their rejoicing way,
breaking the elder dark, nor stay
but speed beyond each trammelling gyre,
till time and sorrow fall away
and night be wither'd up, and fire
consume the sickness of desire.

Christopher John Brennan

I saw my life as whitest flame

I saw my life as whitest flame
light-leaping in a crystal sky,
and virgin colour where it came
pass'd to its heart, in love to die.
It wrapped the world in tender harm
rose-flower'd with one ecstatic pang:
God walk'd amid the hush'd alarm,
and all the trembling region rang
music, whose silver veils dispart
around the carven silences
Memnonian in the hidden heart —
now blithe, effulgorant majesties.

Christopher John Brennan

II. The Quest Of Silence

Secreta Silvarum: Prelude

Oh yon, when Holda leaves her hill
of winter, on the quest of June,
black oaks with emerald lamplets thrill
that flicker forth to her magic tune.
At dawn the forest shivers whist
and all the hidden glades awake;
then sunshine gems the milk-white mist
and the soft-swaying branches make
along its edge a woven sound
of legends that allure and flit
and horns wound towards the enchanted ground
where, in the light moon-vapours lit,
all night, while the black woods in mass,
serried, forbid with goblin fear,
fay-revels gleam o'er the pale grass
till shrill-throats ring the matins near.
Oh there, oh there in the sweet o' the year,
adventurous in the witching green,
last feal of the errant spear,
to seek the eyes of lost Undine
clear blue above the blue cold stream
that lingers till her plaint be done,
oh, and perchance from that sad dream
to woo her, laughing, to the sun
and that glad blue that seems to flow
far up, where dipping branches lift
sidelong their soft-throng'd frondage slow
and slow the thin cloud-fleecelets drift.
Oh, there to drowse the summer thro'
deep in some odorous twilit lair,
swoon'd in delight of golden dew
within the sylvan witches hair;
the while on half-veil'd eyes to feel
the yellow sunshafts broken dim,
and seldom waftures moth-like steal
and settle, on the bare-flung limb:
or under royal autumn, pall'd
in smouldering magnificence,
to feel the olden heart enthrall'd
in wisdoms of forgotten sense,
and mad desire and pain that fill'd
red August's heart of throbbing bloom
in one grave hour of knowledge still'd
where glory ponders o'er its doom:
and, when the boughs are sombre lace
and silence chisels silver rime,
o'er some old hearth, with dim-lit face,
to dream the vanish'd forest prime,
the springtime's sweet and June's delight,
more precious now that hard winds chill

the dews that made their mornings bright,
and Holda sleeps beneath her hill.

I

What tho' the outer day be brazen rude
not here the innocence of morn is fled:
this green unbroken dusk attests it wed
with freshness, where the shadowy breasts are nude,
hers guess'd, whose looks, felt dewy-cool, elude —
save this reproach that smiles on foolish dread:
wood-word, grave gladness in its heart, unsaid,
knoweth the guarded name of Quietude.
Nor start, if satyr-shapes across the path
tumble; it is but children: lo, the wrath
couchant, heraldic, of her beasts that pierce
with ivory single horn whate'er misplaced
outrageous nears, or whinny of the fierce
Centaur, or mailed miscreant unchaste.

II

O friendly shades, where anciently I grew!
me entering at dawn a child ye knew,
all little welcoming leaves, and jealous wove
your roof of lucid emerald above,
that scarce therethro' the envious sun might stray,
save smiling dusk or, lure for idle play,
such glancing finger your chance whim allows,
all that long forenoon of the tuneful boughs;
which growing on, the myriad small noise
and flitting of the wood-life's busy joys,
thro' tenuous weft of sound, had left, divined,
the impending threat of silence, clear, behind:
and, noon now past, that hush descended large
in the wood's heart, and caught me in its marge
of luminous foreboding widely flung;
so hourlong I have stray'd, and tho' among
the glimpsing lures of all green aisles delays
that revelation of its wondrous gaze,
yet am I glad to wander, glad to seek
and find not, so the gather'd tufts bespeak,
naked, reclined, its friendly neighbourhood —
as in this hollow of the rarer wood
where, listening, in the cool glen-shade, with me,
white-bloom'd and quiet, stands a single tree;
rich spilth of gold is on the eastward rise;
westward the violet gloom eludes mine eyes.
This is the house of Pan, not whom blind craze
and babbling wood-wits tell, where bare flints blaze,
noon-tide terrific with the single shout,
but whom behind each bole sly-peering out
the traveller knows, but turning, disappear'd
with chuckle of laughter in his thicket-beard,

and rustle of scurrying faun-feet where the ground
each autumn deeper feels its yellow mound.
Onward: and lo, at length, the secret glade,
soft-gleaming grey, what time the grey trunks fade
in the white vapours o'er its further rim.
'Tis no more time to linger: now more dim
the woods are throng'd to ward the haunted spot
where, as I turn my homeward face, I wot
the nymphs of twilight have resumed, unheard,
their glimmering dance upon the glimmering sward.

III

The point of noon is past, outside: light is asleep;
brooding upon its perfect hour: the woods are deep
and solemn, fill'd with unseen presences of light
that glint, allure, and hide them; ever yet more bright
(it seems) the turn of a path will show them: nay, but rest;
seek not, and think not; dream, and know not; this is best:
the hour is full; be lost: whispering, the woods are bent,
This is the only revelation; be content.

IIII

The forest has its horrors, as the sea:
and ye that enter from the staling lea
into the early freshness kept around
the waiting trunks that watch its rarer bound,
after the glistening song that, sprinkled, leaves
an innocence upon the glancing leaves;
O ye that dream to find the morning yet
secret and chaste, beside her mirror set,
some glimmering source o'ershadow'd, where the light
is coolness felt, whom filter'd glints invite
thro' the slow-shifting green transparency;
O ye that hearken towards pale mystery
a rustle of hidden pinions, and obey
the beckoning of each little leaf asway:
return, return, or e'er to warn you back
the shadow bend along your rearward track
longer and longer from the brooding west;
return, and evening shall bosom your rest
in the warm gloom that wraps the blazing hearth:
there hear from wither'd lips long wean'd of mirth
the tale that lulls old watches; — How they rode,
brave-glittering once, where the brave morning glow'd
along the forest-edges, and were lost
for ever, where the crossing trunks are most;
and, far beyond the dim arcades of song,
where moon-mist weaves a dancing elfin throng,
and far beyond the luring glades that brood
around a maiden thought of Quietude,
the savage realm begins, of lonely dread,
black branches from the fetid marish bred

that lurks to trap the loyal careless foot,
and gaping trunks protrude a snaky root
o'er slinking paths that centre, where beneath
a sudden rock on the short blasted heath,
bare-set, a cavern lurks and holds within
its womb, obscene with some corroding sin,
coil'd on itself and stirring, a squat shade
before the entrance rusts a broken blade.
The forest hides its horrors, as the sea.

V

No emerald spring, no royal autumn-red,
no glint of morn or sullen vanquish'd day
might venture against this obscene horror's sway
blackly from the witch-blasted branches shed.
No silver bells around the bridle-head
ripple, and on no quest the pennons play:
the path's romance is shuddering disarray,
or eaten by the marsh: the knights are dead.
The Lady of the Forest was a tale:
of the white unicorns that round her sleep
gamboll'd, no turf retains a print; and man,
rare traveller, feels, athwart the knitted bale
watching, now lord of loathly deaths that creep,
maliciously the senile leer of Pan.
Fire in the heavens, and fire along the hills,
and fire made solid in the flinty stone,
thick-mass'd or scatter'd pebble, fire that fills
the breathless hour that lives in fire alone.
This valley, long ago the patient bed
of floods that carv'd its antient amplitude,
in stillness of the Egyptian crypt outspread,
endures to drown in noon-days tyrant mood.
Behind the veil of burning silence bound,
vast life's innumerable busy littleness
is hush'd in vague-conjectured blur of sound
that dulls the brain with slumbrous weight, unless
some dazzling puncture let the stridence throng
in the cicada's torture-point of song.

Peace dwells in blessing o'er a place
folded within the hills to keep
and under dark boughs seawind-frayd:
and the kind slopes where soothings creep,
in the gold light or the green shade,
wear evermore the ancient face
of silence, and the eyes of sleep;
because they are listening evermore
unto the seawinds what they tell
to the wise, nodding, indifferent trees
high on the ridge that guard the dell,
of wars on many a far grey shore

and how the shores decay and fade
before the obstinate old seas:
and all their triumphing is made
a tale that dwindles with the eves,
while the soft dusk lingers, delay'd,
and drifts between the indolent leaves.

A gray and dusty daylight flows
athwart the shatter'd trceries,
pale absence of the ruin'd rose.
Here once, on labour-harden'd knees,
beneath the kindly vaulted gloom
that gather'd them in quickening ease,
they saw the rose of heaven bloom,
alone, in heights of musky air,
with many an angel's painted plume.
So, shadowing forth their dim-felt prayer,
the daedal glass compell'd to grace
the outer days indifferent stare,
where now its disenallow'd face
beholds the petal-ribs enclose
nought, in their web of shatter'd lace,
save this pale absence of the rose.

Breaking the desert's tawny level ring
three columns, an oasis; but no shade
falls from the curl'd acanthus-leaves; no spring
bubbles soft laughter for its leaning maid.
The cell is waste: where once the god abode
a burning desolation furls its wing:
enter, and lo! once more, the hopeless road
world-wide, the tawny desert's level ring.

Before she pass'd behind the glacier wall
that hides her white eternal sorceries
the northern witch, in clinging ermine pall,
cast one last look along the shallow seas,
a look that held them in its numbing thrall
and melted onward to the sandy leas
where our lorn city lives its lingering fall
and wistful summer shrinks in scant-clad trees.
Hence came one greyness over grass and stone:
the silent-lapping waters fade and tone
into the air and into them the land;
and all along our stagnant waterways
a drown'd and dusky gleaming sleeps, unbann'd,
the lurking twilight of her vanish'd gaze.

Out of no quarter of the charted sky
flung in the bitter wind intolerably,
abrupt, the trump that sings behind the end
exults alone. Here grass is none to bend:

the stony plain blackens with rapid night
that best reveals the land's inflicted blight
since in the smitten hero-hand the sword
broke, and the hope the long-dumb folk adored,
and over all the north a tragic flare
told Valhall perish'd and the void's despair
to dwell as erst, all disinhabited,
a vault above the heart its hungering led.
The strident clangour cuts; but space is whole,
inert, absorb'd in dead regret. Here, sole,
on the bare uplands, stands, vast thro' the gloom
staring, to mark an irretrievable doom,
the stranger stone, sphinx-couchant, thunder-hurl'd
from red star-ruin o'er the elder world.

This night is not of gentle draperies
or cluster'd banners where the star-breaths roam,
nor hangs above the torch a lurching dome
of purple shade that slips with phantom ease;
but, on our apathy encroaching, these,
stable, whose smooth defiance none hath clomb,
basalt and jade, a patience of the gnome,
polish'd and shadow-brimm'd transparencies.
Far, where our oubliette is shut, above,
we guess the ample lids that never move
beneath her brows, each massive arch inert
hung high-contemptuous o'er the blatant wars
we deem'd well waged for her, who may avert
some Janus-face that smiles on hidden stars.

Lightning: and, momentarily, the silhouette,
flat on the far horizon, comes and goes
of that night-haunting city; minaret,
dome, spire, all sharp while yet the levin glows.
Day knows it not; whether fierce noon-tide fuse
earth's rim with sky in throbbing haze, or clear
gray softness tinge afresh the enamell'd hues
of mead and stream, it shows no tipping spear.
Night builds it: now upon the marbled plain
a blur, discern'd lurking, ever more nigh;
now close against the walls that hem my reign
a leaguer-town, threatening my scope of sky.
So late I saw it; in a misty moon
it bulk'd, all dusky and transparent, dumb
as ever, fast in some prodigious swoon:
its battlements deserted — who might come?
— ay, one! his eyes, 'neath the high turban's plume,
watch'd mine, intent, behind the breast-high stone:
his face drew mine across the milky gloom:
a sudden moonbeam show'd it me, my own!

ONE! an iron core, shock'd and dispers'd

in throbs of sound that ebb across the bay:
I shudder: the one clang smites disarray
thro' all my sense, that starts awake, inhears'd
in the whole lifeless world: and some accurs'd
miasma steals, resumed from all decay,
where the dead tide lies flat round the green quay,
hinting what self-fordone despairs it nurs'd.
The corpse of time is stark upon the night:
my soul is coffin'd, staring, grave-bedight,
upon some dance of death that reels and feasts
around its living tomb, with vampire grin,
inverted sacraments of Satan's priests —
and, mask'd no more, the maniac face of sin.

There is a far-off thrill that troubles me:
a faint thin ripple of shadow, momentarily,
dies out across my lucid icy cell.
I am betrayed by winter to the spell
of morbid sleep, that somewhere rolls its waves
insidiously, gather'd from unblest graves,
to creep above each distant crumbled mole.
When that assault is full against my soul,
I must go down, thro' chapels black with mould,
past ruin'd doors, whose arches, ridged with gold,
catch, in their grooves, a gloom more blackly dript,
some stairway winding hours-long towards the crypt
where panic night lies stricken 'neath the curse
exuding from the dense enormous hearse
of some old vampire-god, whose bulk, within,
lies gross and festering in his shroud of sin.

Christopher John Brennan

III. The Shadow Of Lilith

The tuberose thickens the air: a swoon
lies close on open'd calyx and slipt sheath
thro' all the garden bosom-bound beneath
dense night that hangs, her own perturbing moon:
no star: and heaven and earth, seeking their boon,
meet in this troubled blood whereunder seethe
cravings of darkling bliss whose fumes enwreathe
some rose of rare-reveal'd delight: oh, soon! —
Ay, surely near — the hour consents to bless! —
and nearer yet, all ways of night converge
in that delicious dark between her breasts
whom night and bloom and wayward blood confess,
where all the world's desire is wild to merge
its multitude of single suffering nests.

Cloth'd now with dark alone, O rose and balm,
whence unto world-sear'd youth is healing boon,
what lures the tense dark round thy pulsing calm?
Or does that flood-tide of luxurious noon,
richly distill'd for thy sweet nutriment,
now traitor, hearken to some secret moon.
Eve's wifely guise, her dower that Eden lent,
now limbeck where the enamour'd alchemist
invokes the rarer rose, phantom descent;
thy dewy essence where the suns persist
is alter'd by occult yet natural rite:
among thy leaves it was the night we kiss'd.
Rare ooze of odour drowns our faint delight,
some spilth of love that languishes unshared,
a rose that bleeds unseen, the heart of night;
whose sweetness holds us, wondering, ensnared:
for cunning she, the outcast, to entice
to wake with her, remembering how she fared
in times before our time, when Paradise
shone once, the dew-gem in her heart, and base
betrayal gave her to the malefice
that all thro' time afflicts her lonely face,
and all the mournful widowhood of night
closed round her, and the wilderness of space:
O bleeding rose, alone! O heart of night!

This is of Lilith, by her Hebrew name
Lady of Night: she, in the delicate frame
that was of woman after, did unite
herself with Adam in unblest delight;
who, uncapacious of that dreadful love,
begat on her not majesty, as Jove,
but the worm-brood of terrors unconfest
that chose henceforth, as their avoided nest,
the mire-fed writhen thicket of the mind.
She, monsterward from that embrace declined,
could change her to Chimera and inspire

doubt of his garden-state, exciting higher
the arrowy impulse to dim descried
o'erhuman bliss, as after, on the wide
way of his travail, with enticing strain
and hint of nameless things reveal'd, a bane
haunted, the fabled siren, and was seen
later as Lamia and Melusine,
and whatsoe'er of serpent-wives is feign'd,
or malice of the vampire-witch that drain'd
fresh blood of fresh-born babes, a wicked blast:
faces of fear, beheld along the past
and in the folk's scant fireside lore misread,
of her that is the august and only dread,
close-dwelling, in the house of birth and death,
and closer, in the secrets of our breath -
or love occult, whose smile eludes our sight
in her flung hair that is the starry night

Christopher John Brennan

Interlude: The Casement

Once, when the sun-burst flew
its banner above broad seas and eastern hills,
my casement knew
that morning in her wondrous isle of youth distils
perpetual balm, and tidings trumpeted
of Eden air
winsome and quick, round many a wilding grace, unwed,
clad only in glad hair,
bade fancy soar
far and aloft along that limitless ecstasy
of crystal, towards some shore
where life were crown'd amidst a halcyon sea.
Now — desolate, despairful (lamentable retreat!
wreck'd wheels and spars!),
streaming from irresistible defeat
the broken field of stars:
and all our hope they bore, the appointed word
and that unbroken song
that should resolve our suffering dark in peace, deferr'd
— how long?

The window is wide and lo! beyond its bars
dim fields of fading stars
and cavern tracts, whence the great store of tears
that Beauty all the years
hath wept in wanderings of the eyeless dark,
remembering the long cark
whereunder we, her care, are silent bow'd,
invades with numbing shroud
this dwindling realm of listless avatars.
Dim fields of fading stars,
and shall yet ye with amaranth rapture burn
and maiden grace return
sprung soft and sudden on the fainting night,
rose passioning to white;
or must our task remain and hopeless art
that sickeneth the heart
from yon dull embers to evoke the ghost
of the first garden lost,
sad necromancers we? Then let the blast,
that waked you ancient, cast
into the deeps your useless lagging dearth,
O blazon'd shame of Earth,
who then might hail the last oblivion,
knowing you doomward blown
before the advance of night's relentless cars,
dim fields of fading stars!

40-'O white wind, numbing the world'

O WHITE wind, numbing the world
to a mask of suffering hate!
and thy goblin pipes have skirl'd
all night, at my broken gate.

O heart, be hidden and kept
in a half-light colour'd and warm,
and call on thy dreams that have slept
to charm thee from hate and harm.

They are gone, for I might not keep;
my sense is beaten and dinn'd;
there is no peace but a grey sleep
in the pause of the wind.

Christopher John Brennan

Interlude: The Hearth And The Window

Thou cricket, that at dusk in the damp weeds,
all that, alack! my sickly garden breeds,
silverest the brown air with thy liquid note
now eve is sharp, I, hearkening, dream remote
the home my exiled heart hath somewhere known
far from these busy days that make me lone,
in twilit past, where the soon autumn damp
is gather'd black above the yellow lamp
that guides my feet towards the rustic roof
infrequent, on the forest edge, aloof,
as I return, nor fail to greet the way
(ah, when?) the witness of my childish play,
and feel that soon the silver-piled snow
will make the watches warm beside the glow
that just reveals, amid the enfolding gloom,
the smoky joists of the familiar room:
and while thy supper-song is shrilling thro'
that well-kept nook, my musing shall renew
its kindred of romance, the friendly throng
that haunts the winters when the nights are long.

Dusk lowers in this uneasy pause of rain;
a blackness clings and thickens on the pane
and damp grows; westward only, watery pale,
two yellow streaks, wan glory, slowly fail:
night shall be loud and thick with driving spears. —
And this was also in the haunting years
this life hath never known, nor this abode,
when the lone window watch'd the lonely road
winding into the exiled west, across
the desolate plain, with, seldom on its fosse
tipt black against grey gloom, a poplar spire;
and I could know the sunset's broken fire
burn'd sombrely in many a leaden glass
whose look was dead amid the morbid grass
where never a dancing foot of harvest came
and ways were lost, a land of vanish'd name.

Christopher John Brennan

Interlude: The Window And The Hearth

Twice now that lucid fiction of the pane
dissolves, the sphere that winter's crystal bane
still-charm'd to glass the sad metempsychose
and futile ages of the suffering rose —
what, in its halt, the weary mood might show.
Earth stirs in me that stirs with roots below,
and distant nerves shrink with the lilac mist
of perfume blossom'd round the lure that, kist,
is known hard burn o'erflaked and cruel sting.
I would this old illusion of the spring
might perish once with all her airs that fawn
and traitor roses of the wooing dawn:
for none hath known the magic dream of gold
come sooth, since that first surge of light outroll'd
heroic, broke the august and mother sleep
and foam'd, and azure was the rearward deep;
and Eden afloat among the virgin boughs
fused, song-jewel sudden, and flesh was blithe with vows
to tread, divine, under the naked air;
nor knew, alas! self-doom'd thro' time to bear
lewd summer's dusty mock and roses' fall,
and cynic spring, returning, virginal.

Chimaera writhes beside the tragic flame
of the old hearth: her starting jaws proclaim,
a silent cry, the craven world's attaint.
Her vans that beat against a hard constraint
leaps, as the coals jet in a moment-spasm:
yet their taut ribs hurt not the serpent chasm
of shade, that slips swift to its absent den,
to settle, grimlier, at her throat again.
And, starward were their prison-roof increas'd,
no sun that bathes him for a dewy east
would light her mail, above the tainted air
a meteor-dazzling gem, but the red flare
kindle disastrous on our burning eyes
from where the sullen embers agonize,
once the heart's rose-flusht dream of living gold.
Therefore her croup, thro' many a lapsing fold,
is bound into the iron's night, to check
the frenzy that contorts her charging neck:
her life is flitting with the fitful red
splashing her flank as 'twere her courage bled
to curdle with the void, whose metal-cold
shall seal her gone, a block no art shall mould.
And now the shining tongues that sprang to lick
the obscene blackness in are tarnisht thick:
insidiously thro' each blank pane the dark
invades from space, vast cemetery: one spark
flies up, the lessen'd ghost of flame: her flight
stiffens, and is a settled piece of night.

Christopher John Brennan

Liminary

The hollow crystal of my winter dream
and silences, where thought for worship, white,
shimmer'd within the icy mirror-gleam,
vanishes down the flood of broader light.
The royal weft of arduous device
and starr'd with strangest gems, my shadowy pride
and ritual of illusive artifice
is shed away, leaving the naked side.
No more is set within the secret shrine
a wonder wherein day nor night has part;
my passing makes the ways of earth divine
with the wild splendours of a mortal heart.
A whisper thrills the living fringe of green
on my retreat; tiptoe the silence stands;
the breathless morn waits till her step be seen,
my summer bride, new life from nuptial lands.
The hidden places of her beauty hold
the savours shed o'er wastes of island air,
and her crown'd body's wealth of torrid gold
burns dusky in her summer-storm of hair.
Her breasts in baffling curves, an upward hope,
strain towards the lips pain'd with too eager life,
and the rich noons faint on each lustrous slope
where thunder-hush in the ardent brake is rife.
I cannot tell what god is in her gaze,
such depths of slumbrous passion drown my breath,
but where the charmed shadow clings and stays
Fate cowers before that high disdain of death.
Oh, take me to thy bosom's sultry beat,
steep all my sense in thy long breath of flame,
oppress me with thy summer's heavy heat,
consume all me that wears an uncrown'd name;
burn this my flesh to a clear web of light,
send thy keen airy spirit to search each vein,
that the hard pulse may throb with strong delight,
o'ermastering life and life's divinest pain.
Then, then we twain will seek each farthest way,
mingled in radiance over cloud and lea,
our joy shall swell the exultant heart of day,
our love shall tinge the rose of sky and sea.
And we shall know the steep pride of the hills
and the dark meditation of the wood,
or quench our rage where the red wine-god spills
o'er glowing rocks the madness of his blood.
Our link'd approach shall flush the water-maid
that dreams her limpid realm with wistful eyes,
our noon-tide rest shall haunt her memory's shade,
vexing her dim breast with unwonted sighs.
And where our fiercer joys have thrill'd the earth
shall burst hard stalks and cruel cups that keep
strong soul of seasons dead to fill the dearth
of lesser lives whose dream is dull with sleep.

And gloriously our summer's reign shall end:
in some dark pass that leads into the west,
burnt incense-wise, each blood shall sweetly blend,
exhaled in music from the love-slain breast,
some eve whose dragon-dying hides the sky
and holds the hour on its empurpled wings,
while pallid seers proclaim the doom-day nigh
and shuddering nations watch the death of kings.
See now the time (O eve of smoky brown!)
the morbid season of my close content,
drown'd flame, broad swathes of vapour closing down
round the clear gaze that pierces, vainly pent,
and knows how vain the hero-death that flung
far flame against the craven face of dark
(poor hero-heart the minstrel summer sung,
O brooding hidden over a bitter cark!),
how vain! did not the hot strength of the earth
exude in drifts of colour, dwindling
to dimmer odour-wafts, a hearted worth
the long-defeated tribes to altar bring.
The unslaked caravans of vast desire
seeking in furnace-sands some fierier rose
with deadly heart, the red crusades of ire
following some dusky king of mighty woes
unto a nameless fall in distant fight
(such only freedom from the daily mesh
spun by the crafty lord of wrong and right);
the pride and splendour of rebellious flesh,
full-sated with wild honey of summer's heart,
the golden lot of ignominy that cast
and craved the honour of a menial part,
to follow on bleeding feet, nor fell the last;
how high their pyre blazed with insensate will
that the last word of their red tale be told,
and o'er their darkening blood, a moment, still,
hung on horizon-wings the spirit's gold,
the ghost of flame, in the vast crucible
transmuted of some viewless Trismegist —
haply the same whose touch, inaudible,
dissolves the lingering leaf to evening mist.
Now with the lucid flower-cups in their hands
that star the pale fields of Thulean spring,
and silver from the moon-made table-lands
of snow, the glimmering distance vanishing,
with opals that engeal the Boreal gleam
and diamond-drip of ether's crystal thrill
miraculous, the cortèges of dream
over the hills of legend gathering, fill
the imaginary avenues of gloom
up to the watching windows that betray
the House of Contemplation, vaulted room
soaring, with shade that broods above pale day;

pale day that wastes even since morning, drain'd
by ambush'd mystery of its wanton breath:
see now the time that rises, pale, unstain'd,
the fixed light that charms the fields of death.
A little yet, a little — wait, O files
obedient to my dumb command — the brow
may waive its frigid lordliness, the wiles
of the spent heart becloud it — wait; and thou,
dark presence, large above the passing world,
biding the full hour of the fated stroke,
ere in the sudden gust of truth be whirl'd
the veils of kindly Maya, leaf or smoke,
let their suspense of smouldering glory be
yet mirror'd in this mind's unruffled pool
or e'er beneath the implacable certainty
of icy light and thought's untarnish'd rule
the vacant world stand rigid; let me yet
this vesper ween I am not all alone,
and ponder with luxurious regret
over the singing golden morning flown:
soon, soon enough the spirit, unreprieved,
shall on its proud predestin'd circle range,
in dread indifferent solitude removed
above the poignant pageantry of change,
and the broad brows whose curves are centuries
arise of Isis' carven front supreme
that bids the lucid soul in silence freeze,
the glittering crystal of my winter dream.

Christopher John Brennan

MDCCCXCIII: A Prelude

Sweet days of breaking light,
or yet the shadowy might
and blaze of starry strife
possess'd my life;

sweet dawn of Beauty's day,
first hint and smiling play
of the compulsive force
that since my course

across the years obeys;
not tho' all earlier days
in me were buried, not
were ye forgot. --

The northern kingdom's dream,
prison'd in crystal gleam,
heard the pale flutes of spring,
her thin bells ring;

the tranced maiden's eyes
open'd a far surmise,
and heavens and meadows grew
a tender blue

of petal-hearts that keep
thro' their dark winter-sleep
true memory of delight,
a hidden light.

Then by her well Romance
waiting the fabled chance
dream'd all the forest-scene
in shifting green;

and Melusina's gaze
lurk'd in the shadow'd glaze
of waters gliding still,
a witching ill;

or lost Undine wept
where the hid streamlet crept,
to the dusk murmuring low
her silvery woe.

Dim breaths in the dim shade
of the romantic glade
told of the timid pain
that hearken'd, fain,

how Beauty came to save
the prison'd life and wave

above the famish'd lands
her healing hands

(Beauty, in hidden ways
walking, a leafy maze
with magic odour dim,
far on life's rim;

Beauty, sweet pain to kiss,
Beauty, sharp pain to miss,
in sorrow or in joy
a dear annoy;

Beauty, with waiting years
that bind the fount of tears
well-won if once her light
shine, before night).

Then the shy heart of youth
dared know its weening sooth,
then first thy godhead, Sun,
it's life's light one,

what time the hour outroll'd
its banner blazon'd gold
and all the honey'd time
rang rich with rhyme—

rhyme, and the liquid laugh
of girlish spring, to quaff
granted each heart, and shed
about each head

a sound of harping blown
and airs of elfin tone
and gipsy waifs of song,
a dancing throng.

The yellow meads of May
acclaim'd the louder lay,
more rapturously athirst
for that fierce burst

of Summer's clarioning,
what time his fulgent wing
should cleave the crystal spell
his hot eyes tell

each charm beneath the veil
his eager hands assail
and his red lips be prest
against her breast,

filling her every vein
with the diviner pain
of life beyond all dream
burning, supreme—

(O natural ecstasy!
O highest grace, to be,
in every pulse to know
the Sungod's glow!)

Thence the exulting strain
sped onward as a rain
of gold-linked notes
from unseen throats,

till the mad heart, adust,
of August's aching lust
to do her beauty wrong
broke, and the song;

and in her popped fate
ken life, grown all too great,
illumed with grateful breath
the lips of death. --

But those deep fibres hold
the season's mortal gold,
by silent alchemy
of soul set free,

and woven in vision'd shower
as each most secret hour
sheds the continuing bliss
in song or kiss. --

O poets I have loved
when in my soul first moved
desire to breathe in one
love, song and sun,

your pages that I turn,
your jewelled phrases burn
richly behind a haze
of golden days. --

And, O ye golden days,
tho' since on stranger ways
to some undying war
the fatal star

of unseen Beauty draw

this soul, to occult law
obedient ever, not
are ye forgot.

Christopher John Brennan

My Heart Was Wandering in the Sands

MY heart was wandering in the sands,
a restless thing, a scorn apart;
Love set his fire in my hands,
I clasp'd the flame unto my heart.

Surely, I said, my heart shall turn
one fierce delight of pointed flame;
and in that holocaust shall burn
its old unrest and scorn and shame:

surely my heart the heavens at last
shall storm with fiery orisons,
and know, enthroned in the vast,
the fervid peace of molten suns.

The flame that feeds upon my heart
fades or flares, by wild winds controll'd;
my heart still walks a thing apart,
my heart is restless as of old.

Christopher John Brennan

O White Wind, Numbing the World

O WHITE wind, numbing the world
to a mask of suffering hate!
and thy goblin pipes have skirl'd
all night, at my broken gate.

O heart, be hidden and kept
in a half-light colour'd and warm,
and call on thy dreams that have slept
to charm thee from hate and harm.

They are gone, for I might not keep;
my sense is beaten and dinn'd;
there is no peace but a grey sleep
in the pause of the wind.

Christopher John Brennan

Of old, on her terrace at evening

Of old, on her terrace at evening
— not here — in some long-gone kingdom
oh, folded close to her breast!
Our gaze dwelt wide on the blackness
(was it trees? or a shadowy passion
the pain of an old-world longing
that it sobb'd, that it swell'd, that it shrank?)
— the gloom of the forest
blurr'd soft on the skirt of the night-skies
that shut in our lonely world.
Not here — in some long-gone world...
Close-lock'd in that passionate arm-clasp
no word did we utter, we stirr'd not:
the silence of Death, or of Love.
Only, round and over us,
that tearless infinite yearning,
and the Night with her spread wings rustling,
folding us with the stars.
Not here - in some long-gone kingdom
of old, on her terrace at evening,
oh, folded close to her heart!

Christopher John Brennan

Old wonder flush'd the east anew

Old wonder flush'd the east anew
and shed the golden air, and wing
of song that summon'd, from the dew
and rapture of the fields of spring,
old wonder blossom'd in my heart:
because the threatening dream of old,
that nightly wont to bid us part,
now changing, gave me to behold
thy rosy maidenhood that pass'd
and greeted me with stranger grace,
who knew that meeting for our last
and far from mine thy bidding-place.
And I have thank'd the threat of sleep,
because the secret heart that flow'd
with phantom wound was proven to keep
beneath its living springs bestow'd
the pang that seven years since was felt
keen thro' my life yet soft dispersed
along all veins that thrill or melt —
old wonder, blossom'd, not inhears'd:
and eyes perchance made dull and slow
by the long days' subtle dusty mesh
waked gladly from their fear, to know
old wonder, old and ever fresh.

Christopher John Brennan

Poppies

Where the poppy-banners flow
in and out amongst the corn,
spotless morn
ever saw us come and go

hand in hand, as girl and boy
warming fast to youth and maid,
half afraid
at the hint of passionate joy

still in Summer's rose unshown:
yet we heard nor knew a fear;
strong and clear
summer's eager clarion blown

from the sunrise to the set:
now our feet are far away,
night and day,
do the old-known spots forget?

Sweet, I wonder if those hours
breathe of us now parted thence,
if a sense
of our love-birth thrill their flowers.

Poppies flush all tremulous --
has our love grown into them,
root and stem;
are the red blooms red with us?

Summer's standards are outroll'd,
other lovers wander slow;
I would know
if the morn is that of old.

Here our days bloom fuller yet,
happiness is all our task;
still I ask --
do the vanish'd days forget?

Christopher John Brennan

Quis Pro Domino

Quis Pro Domino?

Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay--
Ay' verily: and by ministry of such men
As did His will upon the Saracen:
And Christendom owns not that man today
Who deems it not the holiest task to slay,
So utterly, that they rise not again,
Yon blatant heathenrie, past human ken
Outlawed to death, its raving spawn and prey.
And thou has lit one flame of love and wrath,
Who, all unterrified, didst take thy stand,
And tear the Beast, and baulk him of his spring.
O noble Belgium, lion in the path;
An inch of sword holding a foot of land;
A folk of men, showing a man for King!

Christopher John Brennan

Romance

Of old, on her terrace at evening
...not here...in some long-gone kingdom
O, folded close to her breast!...

--our gaze dwelt wide on the blackness
(was it trees? or a shadowy passion
the pain of an old-world longing
that it sobb'd, that it swell'd, that it shrank?)
--the gloom of the forest
blurr'd soft on the skirt of the night-skies
that shut in our lonely world.

...not here...in some long-gone world...

close-lock'd in that passionate arm-clasp
no word did we utter, we stirr'd not:
the silence of Death, or of Love...
only, round and over us
that tearless infinite yearning
and the Night with her spread wings rustling
folding us with the stars.

...not here...in some long-gone kingdom
of old, on her terrace at evening
O, folded close to her heart!...

Christopher John Brennan

Spring Breezes

Spring breezes over the blue,
now lightly frolicking in some tropic bay,
go forth to meet her way,
for here the spell hath won and dream is true.

O happy wind, thou that in her warm hair
mayst rest and play!
could I but breathe all longing into thee,
so were thy viewless wing
as flame or thought, hastening her shining way.

And now I bid thee bring
tenderly hither over a subject sea
that golden one whose grace hath made me king,
and, soon to glad my gaze at shut of day,
loosen'd in happy air
her charmed hair.

Christopher John Brennan

Spring-ripple of green along the way

Spring-ripple of green along the way,
keen splash of aery waves that play,
and in my heart
thy dreamy smart, O distant day!
Oh whisper hidden in the spring
of days when soul and song took wing
beneath her eyes,
twin smiling skies bent listening.
Oh cruel spell the season weaves!
heart-piercing smell of smoky eves,
all, all is old!
ironic gold that but deceives!
Strange spring, wilt only make me mourn?
Ah, for thy grace is overworn!
we are the ghost
of spring-tides lost and singing morn!

Christopher John Brennan

Summer Noon

Fire in the heavens, and fire along the hills,
and fire made solid in the flinty stone,
thick-massed or scattered pebble, fire that fills
the breathless hour that lives in fire alone.
This valley, long ago the patient bed
of floods that carved its antient amplitude,
in stillness of the Egyptian crypt outspread,
endures to drown in noon-day's tyrant mood.
Behind the veil of burning silence bound,
vast life's innumerable busy littleness
is hushed in vague-conjectured blur of sound
that dulls the brain with slumbrous weight, unless
some dazzling puncture let the stridence throng
in the cicada's torture-point of song.

Christopher John Brennan

Sweet Silence After Bells

Sweet silence after bells!
deep in the enamour'd ear
soft incantation dwells.

Filling the rapt still sphere
a liquid crystal swims,
precarious yet clear.

Those metal quiring hymns
shaped ether so succinct:
a while, or it dislimns,

the silence, wanly print
with forms of lingering notes,
inhabits, close. distinct;

and night, the angel, floats
on wings of blessing spread
o'er all the gather'd cotes

where meditation, wed
with love, in gold-lit cells,
absorbs the heaven that shed
sweet silence after bells.

Christopher John Brennan

The grand cortège of glory and youth is gone

The grand cortège of glory and youth is gone
flaunt standards, and the flood of brazen tone:
I alone linger, a regretful guest,
here where the hostelry has crumbled down,
emptied of warmth and life, and the little town
lies cold and ruin'd, all its bravery done,
wind-blown, wind-blown, where not even dust may rest.
No cymbal-clash warms the chill air: the way
lies stretch'd beneath a slanting afternoon,
the which no piled pyres of the slaughter'd sun,
no silver sheen of eve shall follow: Day,
ta'en at the throat and choked, in the huge slum
o' the common world, shall fall across the coast,
yellow and bloodless, not a wound to boast.
But if this bare-blown waste refuse me home
and if the skies wither my vesper-flight,
'twere well to creep, or ever livid night
wrap the disquiet earth in horror, back
where the old church stands on our morning's track,
and in the iron-entrellis'd choir, among
rust tombs and blazons, where an isle of light
is bosom'd in the friendly gloom, devise
proud anthems in a long forgotten tongue:
so cozening youth's despair o'er joy that dies.

Christopher John Brennan

The Pangs That Guard The Gates Of Joy

THE PANGS that guard the gates of joy,
the naked sword that will be kist,
how distant seem'd they to the boy,
white flashes in the rosy mist!

Ah, not where tender play was screen'd
in the light heart of leafy mirth
of that obdurate might we ween'd
that shakes the sure repose of earth.

And sudden, 'twixt a sun and sun,
the veil of dreaming is withdrawn:
lo, our disrupt dominion
and mountains solemn in the dawn;

hard paths that chase the dayspring's white,
and glooms that hold the nether heat:
oh, strange the world upheaved from night,
oh, dread the life before our feet!

Christopher John Brennan

The Twilight Of Disquietude

Scant majesty of stars prevails
across the uncreated night,
and fate is in the wind that wails
or clamours on the lonely height.

The years that go to make me man
this day are told a score and six
that should have set me magian
o'er my half-souls that struggle and mix.
But wisdom still remains a star
just hung within my aching ken,
and common prudence dwells afar
among contented homes of men.
In wide revolt and ruin tost
against whatever is or seems
my futile heart still wanders lost
in the same vast and impotent dreams.
On either hand life hurries by
its common joy, its common mirth;
I reach vague hands of sympathy,
a ghost upon this common earth.

I said, And let horizons tempt
and windy gates of eastern flame,
henceforth my place is close and kempt
who know their mockery the same.
Tho' nearer to my humble garth
no star may win its law's release,
patience shall tend my modest hearth
and trim a golden flame of peace,
wherein, perchance, from near and far
shall mingle boons right glad to wed,
the mild ray of the distant star
and the mild oil earth's patience bred.
— No roof-tree join'd the unfinish'd walls;
no lamp might shine, nor hearth-fire burn:
only the wind — the wind that calls —
may sing me welcome..who return.

The pangs that guard the gates of joy
the naked sword that will be kist,
how distant seem'd they to the boy,
white flashes in the rosy mist!
Ah, not where tender play was screen'd
in the light heart of leafy mirth
of that obdurate might we ween'd
that shakes the sure repose of earth.
And sudden, 'twixt a sun and sun,
the veil of dreaming is withdrawn:
lo, our disrupt dominion
and mountains solemn in the dawn;
hard paths that chase the dayspring's white,

and glooms that hold the nether heat:
oh, strange the world upheaved from night,
oh, dread the life before our feet!

My heart was wandering in the sands,
a restless thing, a scorn apart;
Love set his fire in my hands,
I clasped the flame unto my heart.
Surely, I said, my heart shall turn
one fierce delight of pointed flame;
and in that holocaust shall burn
its old unrest and scorn and shame:
surely my heart the heavens at last
shall storm with fiery orisons,
and know, enthroned in the vast,
the fervid peace of molten suns.
The flame that feeds upon my heart
fades or flares, by wild winds controll'd:
my heart still walks a thing apart,
my heart is restless as of old.

The banners of the king unfold
to tend me on my evening way:
my trumpets flood the air with gold;
my pride uplifts the vanquish'd day.
The riches of my heart are bled
to feed the passion of the west:
the limpid springs of life are shed,
and Beauty bares her secret breast.
Hasten, O night with nuptial breath!
O hour remote from any face!
vain-glories fade to sweetest death
heart-whelm'd in her divine embrace.

What of the battles I would win?
alas! their glory is unheard:
the wind of song wakes not their din
wandering in shadowy glens unstirr'd.
— And the great sorrows that I dream'd?
not all unscathed I thought to rise
high in the dateless dawn, redeem'd,
and bare before eternal eyes.
— And is it then the end of dream?
O heart, that long'd for splendid woe,
our shame to endure this dire extreme
of joy we scorned so long ago!

Disaster drives the shatter'd night
before its coming thro' the deep:
the soul is swept with monstrous flight
of fears upstartled from their sleep.
Its silent heaven is rolled away,

and shaken stars flit to and fro:
the mother-face is livid grey
with dumb apocalypse of woe.
The heart that knows its naked doom
awaits the unspoken shock of fate:
perchance, beyond these powers that loom
its hidden god shall rise more great.

The mother-deep, wise, yearning, bound,
I feel it press beneath my heart,
the deep where I were free and crown'd
o'er mine own realm, alone, apart.
It haunts, a grey unlit abysm,
thro' solitary eyelet-slits
pierced in the mean inflicted schism
where day deludes my purblind wits.
But mighty hands have lock'd the keep
and flung the key, long ages past:
there lies no way into the deep
that is myself, alone, aghast.

What do I know? myself alone,
a gulf of uncreated night,
wherein no star may e'er be shown
save I create it in my might.
What have I done? Oh foolish word,
and foolish deed your question craves!
think ye the sleeping depths are stirr'd
tho' tempest hound the madden'd waves?
What do I seek? I seek the word
that shall become the deed of might
whereby the sullen gulfs are stirr'd
and stars begotten on their night.

This is the sea where good and evil merge.
The night is black: we sail towards what sun
or lurid star may flare below the verge.
This is the night where good or bad is none.
O wandering soul upon this darkling surge,
does it not pain thee for the days now done,
the narrow days ere some dark god did urge
to seek some isle where life is whole and one!

Christopher John Brennan

The Watch At Midnight

Dead stars, beneath the midnight's granite cope
and round your dungeon-gulf that blindly grope
and fall not, since no lower than any place
needs when the wing is dash'd and foil'd the face:
is this your shadow on the watcher's thought
imposed, or rather hath his anguish taught
the dumb and suffering dark to send you out,
reptile, the doubles of his lurking doubt,
in coasts of night that well might be supposed
the exiled hall of chaos late-deposed,
to haunt across this hour's desuetude,
immense, that whelms in monumental mood
the broad waste of his spirit, stonily
strewn with the wreck of his eternity?

The plumes of night, unfurl'd
and eyed with fire, are whirl'd
slowly above this watch, funereal:
the vast is wide, and yet
no way lies open; set
no bar, but the flat deep rises, a placid wall.
Some throne thou think'st to win
or pride of thy far kin;
this incomplete and dusty hour to achieve:
know that the hour is one,
eternally begun,
eternally deferr'd, thy grasp a Danaid sieve.
O weary realm, O height
the which exhausted flight
familiar finds, home of its prompting ill!
here, there, or there, or there,
even the same despair;
rest in thy place, O fool, the heart eludes thee still.
Rest — and a new abyss
suddenly yawns, of this
the moment sole, and yet the counterpart:
and thou must house it, thou,
within thy fleshy Now,
thyself the abyss that shrinks, the unbounded hermit-heart:
the mightier heart untold
whose paining depths enfold
all loneliness, all height, all vision'd shores;
and the abyss uncrown'd,
blank failure thro' each bound
from the consummate point thy broken hope implores.

The trees that thro' the tuneful morn had made
bride-dusk for beams that pierce the melting shade,
or thro' the opulent afternoon had stood
lordly, absorb'd in hieratic mood, —
now stricken with misgiving of the night
rise black and ominous, as who invite

some fearful coming whose foreblown wind shall bow,
convuls'd and shuddering, each dishevell'd brow:
the garden that had sparkled thro' its sheen
all day, a self-sufficing gem serene,
hiding in emerald depths the vision'd white
of limbs that follow their own clear delight,
exhales towards the inaccessible skies,
commencing, failing, broken, scents or sighs:

O mother, only,
where that thou hidest thee,
crown for the lonely brow,
bosom for the spent wanderer,
or balm for ache:
O mother,
nightly —
undiscoverable —
O heart too vast to find,
whelming our little desire:
we wander and fail —
But on the zenith, mass'd, a glittering throng,
the distant stars dropt a disdainful song:

They said, because their parcel-thought
might nor her shadowy vast embrace,
nor be refurl'd within that nought
which is the hid heart of all place,
they said: She is not anywhere!
have we not sought her and not seen?
nor is there found in earth or air
a sign to tell if she hath been!
— O fools and blind, not to have found!
is her desire not as your own?
stirs she not in the arms that round
a hopeless clasp, lone with the lone!
And the tense lips towards her bliss
in secret cells of anguish'd prayer
might know her in the broken kiss
she prompts nor, prompting, fails to share.
We drift from age to age nor waste
our strenuous song's exultant tone,
disdaining or to rest or haste:
because each place is still our throne.

The anguish'd doubt broods over Eden; night
hangs her rent banners thro' the viewless height;
trophies and glories whence a trouble streams
of lamentable valour in old dreams:
out of its blank the watcher's soul is stirr'd
to take unto itself some olden word:

O thou that achest, pulse o' the unwed vast,

now in the distant centre of my brain
dizzily narrow'd, now beyond the last
calm circle widening of the starry plain,
where, on the scatter'd edge of my surmise,
the twilit dreams fail off and rule is spent
vainly on vagrant bands the gulfs invite
to break away to the dark: they, backward sent,
tho' dumb, with dire infection in their eyes,
startle the central seat: — O pulse of night,
passing the hard throb of sun-smitten blood
when the noon-world is fused in fire and blent
with my then unattained hero-mood;
what will with me the imperious instinct
that hounds the gulfs together on that place
vanishing utterly out of mortal trace,
the citadel where I would seem distinct —
if not thou ween'st a vanity, my deep
unlighted still, the which thy refluent sweep
intolerably dilates, a tide that draws
with lunatic desire, distraught and fond,
to some dark moon of vastness, hung beyond
our little limits of familiar cause,
as tho' the tense and tortured voids should dash
ruining amorously together, a clash
portentous with some rose of thinnest flame,
secret, exhaled in the annull'd abyss,
that, with this soul, passes in that fell kiss
and to the soft-sprung flush all sanctity
surrenders, centring in the blossom'd Name,
as the dark wings of silence lovingly
hover above the adventurous song that fares
forth to the void and finds no lip that shares
its rapture, just the great wings spreading wide.

O mother thou or sister or my bride,
inevitable, whom this hour in me declares,
were thine of old such rhythmic pangs that bore
my shivering soul, wind-waif upon the shore
that is a wavering twilight, thence astray
beneath the empty plainness of the day?
me thy first want conceived to some dim end,
that my unwelcom'd love might henceward tend
to the dumb home that draws it in thy breast
and the veil'd couch of some divine incest,
where thou didst wait some hour of sharp delight
to wither up in splendour the stark night
and haggard shame that ceremented thy dearth,
with purest diamond-blaze, some overbirth
of the dark fire thy foresight did enmesh
within this hither and thither harried flesh?
Ay, yet obscurely stirs, a monstrous worm
in the rear cavern of my dazzled thought,

a memory that wavers, formless form
of superhuman nuptials, clasp'd and caught
unto the breast that is our loathed tomb:
then, issuing from the violated womb,
tremendous birth of dreadful prodigies
begotten on the apocalyptic skies:
one moment's hope, one thrill alone was given
of pinions beating up the parting heaven;
but straight thereon the spectral mirk was riven
by shapes of snaky horror, grisly jaw,
cold fear, and scaly fold, and endless maw.
What terror clutch'd me, even as ecstasy
smote dire across transfigured mystery?
and whose the sin that doom'd thee to disgrace,
to haunt the shapeless dark, a burning face,

eyes that would cling to mine and lips that seek
some baffled kiss, some word they may not speak,
condemn'd to yearn where the worn foam is hoar
and vain against the unshaken nightly shore.
Nightly thy tempting comes, when the dark breeze
scatters my thought among the unquiet trees
and sweeps it, with dead leaves, o'er widow'd lands
and kingdoms conquer'd by no human hands;
nightly thou wouldst exalt me in the deep,
crown'd with the morn that shines beyond our sleep,
nightly renew those nuptials, and re-win
virginity, and shed the doubtful sin:
but I am born into dividual life
and I have ta'en the woman for my wife,
a flowery pasture fenced and soft with streams,
fill'd with slow ease and fresh with eastern beams
of coolest silver on the sliding wave:
such refuge the derisive morning gave,
shaped featly in thy similitude, to attract
earthward the gusty soul thy temptings rack'd.
I sicken with the long unsatisfied
waiting: the sombre gulfs of night divide:
no dawn is shown that keeps its grace nor soon
degraded not to brutal fires of noon;
and heavy on my soul the tyrant lays
his hand, and dazzles with his common blaze
eyes that are fain, when evening brings the dew,
to cool them in the grasses: few, how few
are now the hours that thou mayst claim as thine!
— And shall I not take heart? if no divine
revelment star me with the diadem
hermetic, magian, alchemic gem,
shall I not feel the earth with firmer tread

if abdicating to the viewless dead
the invaluable round of nothingness?

Kingdom awaits me, homage, swords, liesse,
battle, broad fame in fable, song: shall I
confide all hope to scanty shapes that fly
in dreams, whom even if they be all I know
not, or fore-runners of the One? I go,
shaking them from my spirit, to rule and mould
in mine own shape the gods that shall be old.
— Nay, not thus lightly, heart the winds have mock'd!
wings of fierce winds that o'er the star-strown height
sweep, and adown the wide world-ways unlock'd
feign for thy trouble a last conclusive fight:
O heart wherethro' these insolent powers stray,
pass and repass, and thou dost foolish hold
aught else inspires them than their cynic play,
the aimless idle sport they plann'd of old
to while the waste hours of their tedious state
and shall pursue when thou art seal'd in dust,
thou latest toy, framed for this silly fate,
to watch their pastime turning, tremble and trust
some deathless gain for thee should issue of it
implazed in stars on some thy kindred's brow;
O thou, all laughable for thy short wit,
not lightly thus shalt thou put off their slight
and steady thee to build in their despite
secure, some seat, and hold thy being safe,
joying in this at last that thou art thou,
distinct, no longer in wilful tides a waif:
O heart the winds have emptied of all clear
and natural impulse, O wasted brain
and spirit expent with straining from thy sphere,
turn thee to earth, if that be not a cheat,

and, childlike, lay thee in her torpid lap,
there to reflush these flaccid veins with sap
from spilth of sleep, where herbs of drowsy bane
spring in slow shade and death is sprinkled sweet,
with promis'd coolness dark — perchance a lure..
Thou sleep, at least, receive and wrap me sure
in midmost of thy softness, that no flare,
disastrous, from some rending of the veil,
nor dawn from springs beyond thy precincts, rare
with revelation, risen, or dewy-pale
exhaled from fields of death, disturb that full
absorption of robustness, and I wake
in placid large content, replete and dull,
fast-grown to earth, whom winds no longer shake.

Thick sleep, with error of the tangled wood,
and vapour from the evening marsh of sense,
and smoothness of the glide of Lethe, would
inaugurate his dullard innocence,
cool'd of his calenture, elaborate brute:

but, all deceitful of his craven hope,
the devious and covert ways of dream
shall lead him out upon no temper'd beam
or thick-grass'd ease, where herbs of soothing shoot
in asphodel, but on the shuddering scope
and the chill touch of endless distances
still thronging on the wingless soul that flees
along the self-pursuing path, to find
the naked night before it and behind.
What night is this, made denser, in his breast
or round him, suddenly or first confest
after its gradual thickening complete?
as tho' the mighty current, bearing fleet
the unresting stars, had here devolved its lees,
stagnant, contempt, on recreant destinies;
as tho' a settling of tremendous pens,
above the desolate dream, had shed immense
addition to the incumbence of despair
downward, across this crypt of stirless air,
from some henceforth infrangible attitude,
upon his breast, that knows no dawn renew'd,
builded enormously, each brazen stage,
with rigor of his hope in hopeless age
mummied, and look that turns his thew to stone:
even hers, that is his strangling sphinx, made known
with, on her breast, his fore-erected tomb,
engraven deep, the letters of his doom.

Terrible, if he will not have me else,
I lurk to seize and strangle, in the cells
where he hath made a dusk round his delight:
whether he woo the bride's incarnate bright
and natural rose to shimmer thro' the dense
of odour-motes whereby the brooding sense
flows forth beyond its aching bounds and lies,
full-brimm'd and sombre, around her clear disguise
that saturates the dusk with secret gold;
or the miraculous rose of Heaven to unfold
out from its heart of ruby fire and rain
unceasing drift of petals, and maintain
a tabernacle about the little hour
where his eternity hath phantom power:
and terrible I am moulded in the stone
that clamps for ever, rigid, stark, alone,
round nought but absence of the man he was,
some cell of that cold space against whose laws
he seeks a refuge in his inner deep
of love, and soften'd fire, and quicken'd sleep,
tho' knowing that I, the bride his sin dethroned
and exiled to the wastes that lie disown'd,
can bring that icy want even to the heart
of his most secret bliss, that he shall start

aghast, to see its burning centre fade
and know his hope, the impious, vain, unmade.
Lo now, beneath the watch of knitted boughs
he lies, close-folded to his newer spouse,
creature of morn, that hath ordain'd its fresh
dew and cool glimmer in her crystal flesh
sweetly be mix'd, with quicken'd breath of leaves
and the still charm the spotless dawning weaves.
But I have set my hand upon his soul

and moulded it to my unseen control;
and he hath slept within my shadowy hair
and guards a memory how in my far lair
the forces of tremendous passion stir:
my spectral face shall come between his eyes
and the soft face of her, my name shall rise,
unutter'd, in each thought that goes to her;
and in the quiet waters of her gaze
shall lurk a siren-lure that beckons him
down halls of death and sinful chambers dim:
he shall not know her nor her gentle ways
nor rest, content, by her sufficing source,
but, under stress of the veil'd stars, shall force
her simple bloom to perilous delight
adulterate with pain, some nameless night
stain'd with miasm of flesh become a tomb:
then baffled hope, some torch o' the blood to illumine
and flush the jewel hid beyond all height,
and sombre rage that burst the holy bourne
of garden-joy, murdering innocence,
and the distraught desire to bring a kiss
unto the fleeting centre of the abyss,
discovering the eternal lack, shall spurn
even that sun-god's garden of pure sense,
not wisely wasted with insensate will.
I am his bride and was and shall be still,
tho' infamous as devil's dam, a fear
to wives that watch the cradle-side and hear
how I devour the newling flesh, and none
shall void my claim upon his latest son,
because the father fell beneath my harm,
not god invented late, nor anxious charm;
tho' with the chemic mind he holds in trust

to show me gem, he celebrate the dust;
dumb earth, in garb of borrow'd beauty dight
by the fond day that curtains him in light;
green pleasaunces, whose smiling would attest
his heart true-born of her untroubled breast
and leaves that beckon on the woodland ways
of the stream-side, where expectation strays
of water-brides, swift blight to them that see,

because the waters are to mirror me:—
of these his hunted thought, seeking retreat
in narrow light, and some sure bosom-heat
to cherish him, and friendly face of kin,
shall mould him fancied ancestors, to win
some certitude that he is in his home
rescued from any doom that bids him roam,
and him the blossom of the day presume,
unheeding that its roots are in my womb
nor song may breathe a magic unconfest
of the anterior silence of my breast:
but I shall lurk within the sightless stare
of his impassive idols, housing there
an unknown that allures and makes him fain
to perish for his creatures' fancied gain;
and they shall gaze and see not while his brood
befouls their stony presence with much blood,
their children's, and their captive enemies',
stretch'd out, exenterate, on those callous knees,
and, last, their own, ere some ill-fortuned field
drink all of it, since faith forbids them yield
and brings to learn in full, the fool's just trade,
the gratitude of gods themselves have made.
Last, since a pinch of dust may quench the eyes
that took the azure curve of stainless skies

and still the fiercest heart, he seeks to whelm
infinite yearning with a little realm,
beating together with ungentle hands,
enslaved, the trembling spawn of generous lands,
whom he shall force, a busy swarm, to raise,
last bulwarks of his whelming discontent,
heaven-threatening Babels, iron Ninevehs
square-thought with rigid will, a monument
of stony rage in high defiant stones
eternized with blasphemous intent,
and carve the mountain-cone to hide his bones,
a wonder to blank tribes of shrunken days:
but in that cave before his upstart gates
where elder night endures unshaken, waits
that foe of settled peace, the smiling sphinx,
or foul Echidna's mass'd insidious links,
reminding him that all is vanities;
and when, at last, o'er his nine roods he lies,
stretch'd in the sarcophagus whereover grief
makes way before one huge gust of relief,
not the wing-blast of his vain shade shall drive
his wizen'd captives from their dungeon-hive,
and make a solitude about his bed;
nor the chill thought petrific his low head
exudes in rays of darkness, that beyond
this perturb'd sphere congeal, an orb of dread:

I, Lilith, on his tomb immensely throned,
with viewless face and viewless vans outspread;
in the wide waste of his unhallow'd work,
calm coils of fear, my serpent-brood shall lurk;
and I shall muse above the little dust
that was the flesh that held my word in trust.
Warrior and prince and poet, thou that fain
over some tract of lapsing years wouldst reign

nor know'st the crown that all thy wants confess
is Lilith's own, the round of nothingness:
warrior, whose witless game is but to feel
thyself authentic thro' the wielded steel
and give thy ghost assurance that thou art,
what aimless endless wars shall make thy heart
arena for the wheeling of their play!
king, that wast mighty in the easy way
of thy desire, what time these thews were young,
how bitter is the wisdom on thy tongue
in the late season, when a westering sun
shows thee thy work, that it is evil done!
O priest and poet, thou that makest God,
woe, when the path of thine illusion, trod
even to the end, reveals thee thy worn face,
eternal hermit of the unhallow'd place!
O man, the coward hope of thy despair
to be confounded with the driven air,
the grass that grows and knows not, the kind herds
that are not wrought with dreams nor any words,
to hollow out some refuge sunk as deep
as that was high thou hadst not sense to keep,
and here thy vexing shade to obliterate
ensuring that it rise not, soon or late,
thou knowing I claim thee whole when that thou art dead.
Go forth: be great, O nothing. I have said.

Thus in her hour of wrath, o'er Adam's head
Lilith, then first reveal'd, a name of dread,
thus in her hour of sorrow: and the rage,
that drove the giant-hunters in that age
since whelm'd beneath the weltering cataclysm,
was the mad flight from her instant abysm
and iron sadness and unsatisfied
despair of kings that by Euphrates' side
rein the wing'd steer or grasp the stony mane
of lions dared, if so they might obtain
surcease of lingering unnamed distress.
And if she kept the word forgetfulness
absorb'd, sole ear of sunken sleep, it is
to them that wander thro' Persepolis,
Ekbatan, or where else o'er arrow'd bricks
her snakes make the dry noise of trodden sticks,

known and well-known how that revolt was dash'd
and cruel keeps with lustral silence wash'd.
A name of dread reveal'd: and tho' forgot
in strenuous times to whom the lyre was not,
yet, when her hour awoke, the peoples heard
her coming and the winds no more deferr'd
that sweep along the expected day of wrath,
and rear'd the soaring aisles along her path
to house the massive gloom where she might dwell,
conjectured, hovering, impenetrable,
while o'er the mortal terror crouch'd beneath
the shuddering organ pour'd black wave of death;
when man withheld his hand from life, in fear
to find her, temptress, in the flesh most dear
or on the lowliest ways of simple peace —
vain-weening he that thus their feud might cease:
ay, and the cynic days that thought them blest
to know this earth a plunder-ground confest

and calm within them of the gluttoned beast
knew her, the emptiness that, when the feast
hath quench'd its lamps, makes, in the invaded hall,
stray'd steps, reverberated from the wall,
sound on the ear like some portentous stride,
companion's fixt, to mock our tread, beside,
nor near and show his apprehended guise
familiar, ease to our intended eyes.
Lilith, a name of dread: yet was her pain
and loving to her chosen ones not vain
hinted, who know what weight of gelid tears
afflicts the widow'd uplands of the spheres,
and whence the enrapturing breaths are sent that bring
a perfume of the secular flowering
of the far-bleeding rose of Paradise,
that mortal hearts in censer-fume arise
unto the heart that were an ardent peace,
and whence the sibyl-hints of song, that cease
in pale and thrilling silence, lest they wrong
her beauty, whose love bade live their fleeting throng,
even hers, who is the silence of our thought,
as he that sleeps in hush'd Valvins hath taught.

She is the night: all horror is of her
heap'd, shapeless, on the unclaim'd chaotic marsh
or huddled on the looming sepulchre
where the incult and scanty herb is harsh.
She is the night: all terror is of her
when the distemper'd dark begins to boil
with wavering face of larve and oily blur
of pallor on her suffocating coil.
Or majesty is hers, when marble gloom
supports her, calm, with glittering signs severe

and grandeur of metallic roof of doom,
far in the windows of our broken sphere.
Or she can be all pale, under no moon
or star, with veiling of the glamour cloud,
all pale, as were the fainting secret soon
to be exhaled, bride-robed in clinging shroud.
For she is night, and knows each wooing mood:
and her warm breasts are near in the charm'd air
of summer eve, and lovingly delude
the aching brow that craves their tender care.
The wooing night: all nuptials are of her;
and she the musky golden cloud that hangs
on maiden blood that burns, a boding stir
shot thro' with flashes of alluring pangs,
far off, in creeks that slept unvisited
or moved so smoothly that no ripple creas'd
their mirror'd slip of blue, till that sweet dread
melted the air and soft sighs stole, releas'd;

and she the shame of brides, veiling the white
of bosoms that for sharp fulfilment yearn;
she is the obscure centre of delight
and steals the kiss, the kiss she would return
deepen'd with all the abysm that under speech
moves shudderingly, or as that gulf is known
to set the astonied spouses each from each
across the futile sea of sighs, alone.
All mystery, and all love, beyond our ken,
she woos us, mournful till we find her fair:
and gods and stars and songs and souls of men
are the sparse jewels in her scatter'd hair.

This rose, the lips that kiss, and the young breast
they kindle, flush'd throughout its waking snows;
and this, that tremulous on the morning blows,
heart's youth some golden dew of dream hath blest;
auroras, grace and sooth! no tragic west
shed splendid the red anger of your close:
how soon within this wandering barrow grows
the canker'd heap of petals once caress'd!
Old odours of the rose are sickening; night,
hasten above the corpse of old delight,
if in decay the heart cherish some heat,
to breed new spice within the charnel-mould,
that eyes unseal'd with living dew may greet
the morning of the deathless rose of gold.

Christopher John Brennan

The winter eve is clear and chill

The winter eve is clear and chill:
the world of air is folded still;
the quiet hour expects the moon;
and yon my home awaits me soon
behind the panes that come and go
with dusk and firelight wavering low:
and I must bid the prompting cease
that bids me, in this charmed peace,
— as tho' the hour would last my will —
follow the roads and follow still
the dream that holds my heart in trance
and lures it to the fabled chance
to find, beyond these evening ways,
the morning and the woodland days
and meadows clear with gold, and you
as once, ere I might dare to woo.

Christopher John Brennan

The Yellow Gas

The yellow gas is fired from street to street
past rows of heartless homes and hearths unlit,
dead churches, and the unending pavement beat
by crowds - say rather, haggard shades that flit

round nightly haunts of their delusive dream,
where'er our paradisaic instinct starves: -
till on the utmost post, its sinuous gleam
crawls in the oily water of the wharves;

where Homer's sea loses his keen breath, hemm'd
what place rebellious piles were driven down -
the priestlike waters to this task condemn'd
to wash the roots of the inhuman town! -

where fat and strange-eyed fish that never saw
the outer deep, broad halls of sapphire light,
glut in the city's draught each nameless maw:
- and there, wide-eyed unto the soulless night,

methinks a drown'd maid's face might fitly show
what we have slain, a life that had been free,
clean, large, nor thus tormented - even so
as are the skies, the salt winds and the sea.

Ay, we had saved our days and kept them whole,
to whom no part in our old joy remains,
had felt those bright winds sweeping thro' our soul
and all the keen sea tumbling in our veins,

had thrill'd to harps of sunrise, when the height
whitens, and dawn dissolves in virgin tears,
or caught, across the hush'd ambrosial night,
the choral music of the swinging spheres,

or drunk the silence if nought else - But no!
and from each rotting soul distill in dreams
a poison, o'er the old earth creeping slow,
that kills the flowers and curdles the live streams,

that taints the fresh breath of re-risen day
and reeks across the pale bewildered moon:
- shall we be cleans'd and how? I only pray,
red flame or deluge, may that end be soon!

Christopher John Brennan

Under a sky of uncreated mud

Under a sky of uncreated mud
or sunk beneath the accursed streets, my life
is added up of cupboard-musty weeks
and ring'd about with walls of ugliness:
some narrow world of ever-streaming air.
My days of azure have forgotten me.
Nought stirs, in garret-chambers of my brain,
except the squirming brood of miseries
older than memory, while, far out of sight
behind the dun blind of the rain, my dreams
of sun on leaves and waters drip thro' years
nor stir the slumbers of some sullen well,
beneath whose corpse-fed weeds I too shall sink.

Christopher John Brennan

Was it the sun that broke my dream

Was it the sun that broke my dream
or was't the dazzle of thy hair
caught where our olden meadows seem
themselves again and yet more fair?
Ah, sun that woke me, limpid stream,
then in spring-mornings' rapture of air!
Was it the sun that broke my dream
or was 't the dazzle of thy hair?
And didst not thou beside me gleam,
brought hither by a tender care
at least my slumbering grief to share?
Are only the cold seas supreme?
Was it the sun that broke my dream?

Christopher John Brennan

When Summer Comes In Her Glory

When summer comes in her glory and brave the whole earth blows,
when colours burn and perfumes impassion the gladden'd air
then methinks thy laughter seeks me on every breeze that goes
and I feel thy breathing warmth about me everywhere.
Or in the dreamy eve, when our soul is spread in the skies,
when Life for an hour is hush'd, and the gaze is wide to behold
what day may not show nor night, then sure it were no surprise
to find thee beside me sitting, the pitying eyes of old.
But ah, when the winter rains drive hard on the blacken'd pane
and the grief of the lonely wind is lost in the waste outside,
when the room is high and chill and I seek my place in vain,
I know that seas splash cold in the night and the world is wide.

Christopher John Brennan

When the spring mornings grew more long

When the spring mornings grew more long
early I woke from dream that told
of dreaded parting and the cold
of the gray dawns when I should long
to see once more that clear light fall
upon my hands and know that near
the yellow meadows shone with dear
small flowers and hear thy laughter fall
— as now I long only to wake
once in that quiet shine of spring
and dream an hour the hour will bring
thy laughing call that bids me wake

Christopher John Brennan

White dawn, that tak'st the heaven with sweet surprise

White dawn, that tak'st the heaven with sweet surprise
of amorous artifice,
art thou the bearer of my perfect hour
divine, untrod,
from some forgotten window of Paradise
by mighty winds of God
blown down the world, before my haunted eyes
at length to flower?
Nay, virgin dawn, yet art thou all too known,
too crowded light
to take my boundless hour of flaming peace:
thou common dayspring cease;
and be there only night, the only night,
more than all other lone:
be the sole secret world
one rose unfurl'd,
and nought disturb its blossom'd peace intense,
that fills the living deep beyond all dreams of sense
enmesh'd in errorous multiplicity:
— let be
nought but her coming there:
what else were fair?
It asks no golden web, no censer-fire
to tell the dense incarnate mystery
where one delight is wed with one desire.
No leaves bestrow
that passage to the rose of all fulfill'd delight;
no silver trumpets blow
majestic rite,
but silence that is sigh'd from faery lands,
or wraps the feet of Beauty where she treads
dim fields of fading stars,
be round our meeting heads,
and seeking hands:
draw near, ye heavens, and be our chamber-bars;
and thou, maternal heart of holy night,
close watch, what hush'd and sacramental tide
a soul goes forth wide-eyed,
to meet the archangel-sword of loneliest delight

Christopher John Brennan