



A Green Bough, William Faulkner

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A Green Bough

I

WE SIT drinking tea

Beneath the lilacs on a summer afternoon
Comfortably, at our ease
With fresh linen on our knees,
And we sit, we three
In diffident contentedness
Lest we let each other guess
How happy we are
Together here, watching the young moon
Lying shyly on her back, and the first star.
There are women here:
Smooth-shouldered creatures in sheer scarves, that pass
And eye us strangely as they pass.
One of them, our hostess, pauses near:
— Are you quite all right, sir? she stops to ask.
— You are a bit lonely, I fear.
Will you have more tea? cigarettes? No? —
I thank her, waiting for her to go:
To us they are like figures on a masque.
— Who? — shot down
Last spring — Poor chap, his mind
.... doctors say ... hoping rest will bring —
Busy with their tea and cigarettes and books
Their voices come to us like tangled rooks.
We sit in silent amity.
— It was a morning in late May:
A white woman, a white wanton near a brake,
A rising whiteness mirrored in a lake;
And I, old chap, was out before the day
In my little pointed-eared machine,
Stalking her through the shimmering reaches of the sky.
I knew that I could catch her when I liked
For no nymph ever ran as swiftly as she could.
We mounted, up and up
And found her at the border of a wood:
A cloud forest, and pausing at its brink
I felt her arms and her cool breath.
The bullet struck me here, I think

In the left breast
And killed my little pointed-eared machine. I saw it fall
The last wine in the cup....
I thought that I could find her when I liked,
But now I wonder if I found her, after all.
One should not die like this
On such a day,
From angry bullet or other modern way.
Ah, science is a dangerous mouth to kiss.
One should fall, I think, to some Etruscan dart
In meadows where the Oceanides
Flower the wanton grass with dancing,
And, on such a day as this
Become a tall wreathed column: I should like to be
An ilex on an isle in purple seas.
Instead, I had a bullet through my heart —
— Yes, you are right:
One should not die like this,
And for no cause nor reason in the world.
'Tis well enough for one like you to talk
Of going in the far thin sky to stalk
The mouth of death: you did not know the bliss
Of home and children; the serene
Of living and of work and joy that was our heritage.
And, best of all, of age.
We were too young.
Still — he draws his hand across his eyes
— Still, it could not be otherwise.
We had been
Raiding over Mannheim. You've seen
The place? Then you know
How one hangs just beneath the stars and sees
The quiet darkness burst and shatter against them
And, rent by spears of light, rise in shuddering waves
Crested with restless futile flickerings.
The black earth drew us down, that night
Out of the bullet-tortured air:

A great black bowl of fireflies....
There is an end to this, somewhere:
One should not die like this —
One should not die like this.
His voice has dropped and the wind is mouthing his words
While the lilacs nod their heads on slender stalks,
Agreeing while he talks,
Caring not if he is heard or is not heard.
One should not die like this.
Half audible, half silent words
That hover like gray birds
About our heads.
We sit in silent amity.
I am cold, for now the sun is gone
And the air is cooler where we three
Are sitting. The light has followed the sun
And I no longer see
The pale lilacs stirring against the lilac-pale sky.
They bend their heads toward me as one head.
— Old man — they say — How did you die?
I — I am not dead.
I hear their voices as from a great distance — Not dead
He's not dead, poor chap; he didn't die —

II

LAXLY reclining, he watches the firelight going
Across the ceiling, down the farther wall
In cumulate waves, a golden river flowing
Above them both, down yawning dark to fall
Like music dying down a monstrous brain.
Laxly reclining, he sees her sitting there
With firelight like a hand laid on her hair,
With firelight like a hand upon the keys
Playing a music of lustrous silent gold.
Bathed in gold she sits, upon her knees
Her silent hands, palm upward, lie at ease,

Filling with gold at each flame's spurting rise,
Spilling gold as each flame sinks and sighs,
Watching her plastic shadow on the wall
In unison with the firelight lift and fall
To the music by the firelight played
Upon the keys from which her hands had strayed
And fallen.

A pewter bowl of lilies in the room
Seems to him to weigh and change the gloom
Into a palpable substance he can feel
Heavily on his hands, slowing the wheel
The firelight steadily turns upon the ceiling.
The firelight steadily hums, steadily wheeling
Until his brain, stretched and tautened, suddenly cracks.
Play something else.

And laxly sees his brain
Whirl to infinite fragments, like brittle sparks,
Vortex together again, and whirl again.
Play something else.

He tries to keep his tone
Lightly natural, watching the shadows thrown,
Watching the timid shadows near her throat
Link like hands about her from the dark.
His eyes like hurried fingers fumble and fly
About the narrow bands with which her dress is caught
And lightly trace the line of back and thigh.
He sees his brain disintegrate, spark by spark.
Play something else, he says.

And on the dark
His brain floats like a moon behind his eyes,
Swelling, retreating enormously. He shuts them
As one concealed suppresses two loud cries
And on the troubled lids a vision sees:
It is as though he watched her mount a stair
And rose with her on the suppleness of her knees,
Saw her skirts in swirling line on line,
Saw the changing shadows ripple and rise

After the flexing muscles; subtle thighs,
Rhythm of back and throat and gathered train.
A bursting moon, wheels spin in his brain.
As through a corridor rushing with harsh rain
He walks his life, and reaching the end
He turns it as one turns a wall
She plays, and softly playing, sees the room
Dissolve, and like a dream the still walls fade
And sink, while music softly played
Softly flows through lily-scented gloom.
She is a flower lightly cast
Upon a river flowing, dimly going
Between two silent shores where willows lean,
Watching the moon stare through the willow screen.
The hills are dark and cool, clearly remote,
Within whose shadow she has paused to rest.
Could she but stay here forever, where grave rain slants above them,
Rain as slow as starlight on her breast;
Could she but drift forever along these ways
Clearly shadowed, barred with veils of rain,
Beneath azure fields with stars in choired processional
To chant the silence from her heart again.
Laxly reclining, he feels the firelight beating
A clamor of endless waves upon the dark,
A swiftly thunderous surf swiftly retreating.
His brain falls hissing from him, a spark, a spark,
And his eyes like hurried fingers fumble and fly
Among the timid shadows near her throat,
About the narrow bands with which her dress is caught,
And lightly trace the line of back and thigh.
He sees his brain disintegrate, spark by spark,
And she turns as if she heard two cries.
He stands and watches her mount the stair
Step by step, with her subtle suppleness,
That nervous strength that was ever his surprise;
The lifted throat, the thin crisp swirl of dress
Like a ripple of naked muscles before his eyes.

A bursting moon: wheels spin in his brain,
And whirl in a vortex of sparks together again.
At the turn she stops, and trembles there,
Nor watches him as he steadily mounts the stair.

III

THE cave was ribbed with dark. Then seven lights
Like golden bats windy along the eaves
Awoke and slipped inverted anchorage
In seven echoes of an unheard sound.
The cave is ribbed with music. Rumored far
The gate behind the moonwashed sentinel
Clangs to his lifted mace. Then all the bats
Of light slant whirring down the inclined air.
The cave no more a cave is: ribs of music
Arch and crack the walls, the uncaged bats
From earth's core break its spun and floating crust.
Hissing seas rage overhead, and he
Staring up through icy twilight, sees
The stars within the water melt and sweep
In silver spears of streaming burning hair.
The seas roar past, shuddering rocks in seas
Mutter away like hoarse and vanquished horns.
Now comes dark again, he thinks, but finds
A wave of gold breaking a jewelled crest
And he is walled with gold. About him snored
Kings and mitred bishops tired of sin
Who dreamed themselves of heaven wearied,
And now may sleep, hear rain, and snore again.
One among them walks, whose citadel
Though stormed by sleep, is still unconquered.
In crimson she is robed, her golden hair,
Her mouth still yet unkissed, once housed her in
The sharp and quenchless sorrows of the world.
Kings in hell, robed in icy flame
Panted to crown them with her dreamless snows;

Gluttoned bishops, past the sentinel,
Couched in heaven, mewed for paradise.
Amid the dead walks she who, musicfleshed,
Whose mouth, two notes laid one on other for
A honeyed parting on the hived store;
Whose throat a sweetened reed had blown to be;
Whose breast was harped of silver and of two
Grave small singing birds uncaged; the chant
Of limbs to one another tuned and wed
That, as she walked, the air with music filled;
Now she, for whose caress once duke and king
And scarlet cardinal broke cords of fate,
From couch to couch her restless slumber seeks
And strokes indifferent lead with moaning hands.
The citted dead snore past, the hissing seas
Roar overhead again, and bows of coral
Whip gleaming fish in darts of unmouthed colors:
Trees of coral strip their colored leaves
Of fish, and each leaf has two bats of light
Where eyes would be, while other golden bats
Slipping among them, gleam their curving sides.
Thundering rocks crash down; spears of starlight
Shatter and break among them. Water-stallions
Neighing, crest the foaming rush of tides.
Drowning waves, airward rushing, crash
Columned upward, rake the stars and hear
A humming chord within the heavens bowled,
Then plunging back, they lose between the rocks
A dying rumor of the chanting stars.
The cave is ribbed with music; threads of sound
Gleam on the whirring wings of bats of gold,
Loop from the grassroots to the roots of trees
Thrust into sunlight, where the song of birds
Spins silver threads to gleam from bough to bough.
Grass in meadows cools his fancy's feet:
Dew is on the grass, and birds in hedges
Weave the sunlight with sharp streaks of flight.

Bees break apple bloom, and peach and clover
Sing in the southern air where aimless clouds
Go up the sky-hill, cropping it like sheep,
And startled pigeons, like a wind beginning,
Fill the air with sucking silver sound.
He would leave the cave, before the bats
Of light grow weary, to their eaves return,
While music fills the dark as wind fills sails
And Silence like a priest on thin gray feet
Tells his beads of minutes on beside.
The cave is ribbed with dark, the music flies,
The bats of light are eaved and dark again.
Before him as, the priest of Silence by
And all the whispering nuns of breathing blent
With Silence's self, he walks, the door beside
Stands the moonwashed sentinel to break
Its lichened sleep. Here halts the retinue.
The priest between his fingers lets his beads
Purr down. The nuns the timeless interval
Fill with all the still despair of breath.
He gateward turns. The sentinel his mace
Lifts in calm indifference. At the stroke
The sleeping gate wakes yawning back upon
Where gaunt Orion, swinging by his knees,
Crashes the arcing moon among the stars.

IV

and let
within the antiseptic atmosphere
of russel square grown brisk and purified
the ymca (the american express for this sole purpose too)
let lean march teasing the breasts of spring
horned like reluctant snails within
pink intervals
a brother there
so many do somanydo

from out the weary courtesy of time
fate a lady shopper takes her change
brightly in coppers somanydo
with soaped efficiency english food agrees
even with thos cook
here is a
tunnel a long one like a black period
with kissing punctuate on our left we see
forty poplars like the breasts of girls
taut with running
on our left we see
that blanched plateau wombing cunningly
hushing his brilliant counterattack saying
shhhhhh to general blah in the year mille
neufcentvingtsomethingorother
may five years defunct
in a patient wave of sleep till natures
stomach settles hearing their sucking boots
their brittle sweat harshly evaporating carrying
dung there was no time to drop
the general himself
is now on tour somewhere in the states
telling about the war
and here
battalioned crosses in a pale parade
the german burned his dead (which goes to show
god visited him with proper wrath)
o spring
above unsapped convolvulae of hills april
a bee sipping perplexed with pleasure o spring
o wanton o cruel
o bitter and new as fire
baring to the curved and hungry hand
of march your white unsubtle thighs
grass his feet no longer trouble grows
lush in lanes he
sleeps quietly decay

makes death a cuckold yes lady
8 rue diena we take care of that yes
in amiens youll find 3 good hotels

V

THERE is no shortening-breasted nymph to shake
The tickets that stem up the lidless blaze
Of sunlight stiffening the shadowed ways,
Nor does the haunted silence even wake
Nor ever stir.
No footfall trembles in the smoky brush
Where bright leaves flicker down the dappled shade:
A tapestry that cloaks this empty glade
And shudders up to still the pulsing thrush
And frighten her
With the contact of its unboned hands
Until she falls and melts into the night
Where inky shadows splash upon the light
Crowding the folded darkness as it stands
About each grave
Whose headstone glimmers dimly in the gloom
Threaded by the doves' unquiet calls,
Like memories that swim between the walls
And dim the peopled stillness of a room
Into a nave
Where no light breaks the thin cool panes of glass
To falling butterflies upon the floor;
While the shadows crowd within the door
And whisper in the dead leaves as they pass
Along the ground.
Here the sunset paints its wheeling gold
Where there is no breast to still in strife
Of joy or sadness, nor does any life
Flame these hills and vales grown sharp and cold
And bare of sound.

VI

MAN comes, man goes, and leaves behind
The bleaching bones that bore his lust;
The palfrey of his loves and hates
Is stabled at the last in dust.
He cozened it and it did bear
Him to wishing's utmost rim;
But now, when wishing's gained, he finds
It was the steed that cozened him.

VII

TRUMPETS of sun to silence fall
On house and barn and stack and wall.
Within the cottage, slowly wheeling,
The lamplight's gold turns on the ceiling.
Beneath the stark and windless vane
Cattle stamp and munch their grain;
Below the starry apple bough
Leans the warped and clotted plow.
The moon rolls up, while far away
And thin with sorrow, the sheepdog's bay
Fills the valley with lonely sound.
Slow leaves of darkness steal around.
The watch the watchman, Death, will keep
And man in amnesty may sleep.
The world is still, for she is old
And many's the bead of a life she's told.
Her gossip there, the watching moon
Views hill and stream and wave and dune
And many's the fair one she's seen wither:
They pass and pass, she cares not whither; —
Lovers' vows by her made bright,
The outcast cursing at her light;
Mazed within her lambence lies
All the strife of flesh that dies.

Then through the darkened room with whispers speaking
There comes to man the sleep that all are seeking.
The lurking thief, in sharp regret
Watches the far world, waking yet,
But which in sleep will soon be still;
While he upon his misty hill
Hears a dark bird briefly cry
From its thicket on the sky,
And curses the moon because her light
Marks every outcast under night.
Still swings the murderer, bent of knees
In a slightly strained repose,
Nor feels the faint hand of the breeze:
He now with Solomon all things knows:
That, lastly, breath is to a man
But to want and fret a span.

VIII

HE FURROWS the brown earth, doubly sweet
To a hushed great passage of wind
Dragging its shadow. Beneath his feet
The furrow breaks, and at its end
He turns. With peace about his head
Traverses he again the earth: his own,
Still with enormous promises of bread
And the clean smell of its strength upon him blown.
Against the shimmering azure of the wood
A blackbird whistles, cool and mellow;
And there, where for a space he stood
To fill his lungs, a spurting yellow
Rabbit bursts, its flashing scut
Muscled in erratic lines
Of fright from furrow hill to rut.
He shouts: the darkly liquid pines
Mirror his falling voice, as leaf
Raises clear brown depths to meet its falling self;

Then again the blackbird, thief
Of silence in a burnished pelf.
Inscribes the answer to all life
Upon the white page of the sky:
The furious emptiness of strife
For him to read who passes by.
Beneath the marbled sky go sheep
Slow as clouds on hills of green;
Somewhere waking waters sleep
Beyond a faintleaved willow screen.
Wind and sun and air: he can
Furrow the brown earth, doubly sweet
With his own sweat, since here a man
May bread him with his hands and feet.

IX

THE sun lies long upon the hills,
The plowman slowly homeward wends;
Cattle low, uneased of milk,
The lush grass to their passing bends.
Mockingbirds in the ancient oak
In golden madness swing and shake;
Sheep like surf against a cliff
Of green hills, slowly flow and break.
Then sun sank down, and with him went
A pageantry whose swords are sheathed
At last, as warriors long ago
Let fall their storied arms and breathed
This air and found this peace as he
Who across this sunset moves to rest,
Finds but simple scents and sounds;
And this is all, and this is best.

X

BeYOND the hill the sun swam downward

And he was lapped in azure seas;
The dream that hurt him, the blood that whipped him
Dustward, slowed and gave him ease.
Behind him day lay stark with labor
Of him who strives with earth for bread;
Before him sleep, tomorrow his circling
Sinister shadow about his head.
But now, with night, this was forgotten:
Phantoms of breath round man swim fast;
Forgotten his father, Death; Derision
His mother, forgotten by her at last.
Nymph and faun in this dusk might riot
Beyond all oceaned Time's cold greenish bar
To shrilling pipes, to cymbals' hissing
Beneath a single icy star
Where he, to his own compulsion
— A terrific figure on an urn —
Is caught between his two horizons,
Forgetting that he cant return.

XI

WHEN evening shadows grew around
And a thin moon filled the lane,
Their slowing breath made scarce a sound
Where Richard lay with Jane.
The world was empty of all save they
And Spring itself was snared,
And well's the fare of any day
When none has lesser fared:
Young breasts hollowed out with fire,
A singing fire that spun
The gusty tree of his desire
Till tree and gale were one;
And a small white belly yielded up
That they might try to make
Of youth and dark and spring a cup

That cannot fail nor slake.

XII

YOUNG Richard, striding toward town,
Felt life within him grown
Taut as a silver wire on which
Desire's sharp winds were blown
To a monstrous sound that lapped him close
With a rain of earth and fire,
Flaying him exquisitely
With whips of living wire.
Under the arch where Mary dwelt
And nights were brief and sharp,
Her ancient music fell with his
As cytharn falls with harp
And Richard's fire within her fire
Swirled up into the air,
And polarised was all breath when
A girl let down her hair.

XIII

WHEN I was young and proud and gay
And flowers in fields were thickening,
There was Tad and Ralph and Ray
All waiting for my picking.
And who, with such a page to spell
And the hand of Spring to spread it,
Could like the tale told just as well
By another who had read it?
Ah, not I! and if I had
— When I was young and pretty —
Not learned to spell, then there was Tad
And Ralph and Ray to pity.
There was Tad and Ray and Ralph,
And field and lane were sunny;

And ah! I spelled my page myself
Long ere I married Johnny.

XIV

HIS mother said: I'll make him
A lad has never been
(And rocked him closely, stroking
His soft hair's yellow sheen)
His bright youth will be metal
No alchemist has seen.
His mother said: I'll give him
A brave and high desire,
'Till all the dross of living
Burns clean within his fire.
He'll be strong and merry
And he'll be clean and brave,
And all the world will rue it
When he is dark in grave.
But dark will treat him kinder
Than man would anywhere
(With barren winds to rock him
— Though now he doesn't care —
And hushed and haughty starlight
To stroke his golden hair)
Mankind called him felon
And hanged him stark and high
Where four winds could watch him
Troubled on the sky.
Once he was quick and golden,
Once he was clean and brave.
Earth, you dreamed and shaped him:
Will you deny him grave?
Being dead he will forgive you
And all that you have done,
But he'll curse you if you leave him
Grinning at the sun.

XV

BONNY earth and bonny sky
And bonny was the sweep
Of sun and rain in apple trees
While I was yet asleep.
And bonny earth and bonny sky
And bonny'll be the rain
And sun among the apple trees
When I've long slept again.

XVI

BEHOLD me, in my feathered cap and doublet,
strutting across this stage that men call living:
the mirror of all youth and hope and striving.
Even you, in me, become a grimace.”
“Ay, in that belief you too are but a mortal,
thinking that peace and quietude and silence
are but the shadows of your little gestures
upon the wall of breathing that surrounds you.”
“Ho, old spectre, solemnly ribbed with wisdom!
D'ye think that I must feel your dark compulsions
and flee with kings and queens in whistling darkness?
I am star, and sun, and moon, and laughter.”
“What star is there that falls, with none to watch it?
What sun is there more permanent than darkness?
What moon is there that cracks not? ay, what laughter,
what purse is there that empties not with spending?”
“Ho.... One grows weary, posturing and grinning,
aping a dream to a house of peopled shadows!
Ah, 'twas you who stripped me bare and set me
gibbering at mine own face in a mirror.”
“Yes, it is I who, in the world's clear evening
with a silver star like a rose in a bowl of lacquer,
when you have played your play and at last are quiet,

will wait for you with sleep, and you can drown.”

XVII

o atthis
for a moment an aeon i pause plunging
above the narrow precipice of thy breast
what before thy white precipice the eagle
sharp in the sunlight and cleaving
his long blue ecstasy and what
wind on hilltops blond with the wings of the morning
what wind o atthis sweeping the april to lesbos
whitening the seas

XVIII

ONCE upon an adolescent hill
There lay a lad who watched amid the piled
And silver shapes of aircarved cumulae
A lone uncleaving eagle, and the still
Serenely blue dissolving of desire.
Easeful valleys of the earth had been: he looked not back,
Not down, he had not seen
Lush lanes of vernal peace, and green
Unebbing windless tides of trees; no wheeling gold
Upon the lamplit wall where is no speed
Save that which peaceful tongue 'twixt bed and supper wrought.
Here still the blue, the headlands; here still he
Who did not waken and was not awaked.
The eagle sped its lonely course and tall;
Was gone. Yet still upon his lonely hill the lad
Winged on past changing headlands where was laked
The constant blue
And saw the fleeing canyons of the sky
Tilt to banshee wire and slanted aileron,
And his own lonely shape on scudding walls
Where harp the ceaseless thunders of the sun.

XIX

GREEN is the water, green
The grave voluptuous music of the sun;
The pale and boneless fingers of a queen
Upon his body stoop and run.
Within these slow cathedraled corridors
Where ribs of sunlight drown
He joins in green caressing wars
With seamaids red and brown
And chooses one to bed upon
And lapped and lulled is he
By dimdissolving music of the sun
Requiemed down through the sea.

XX

HERE he stands, while eternal evening falls
And it is like a dream between gray walls
Slowly falling, slowly falling
Between two walls of gray and topless stone,
Between two walls with silence on them grown.
The twilight is severed with waters always falling
And heavy with budded flowers that never die,
And a voice that is forever calling
Sweetly and soberly.
Spring wakes the walls of a cold street,
Sows silver remembered seed in frozen places:
Upon meadows like still and simply smiling faces,
and wrinkled streams, and grass that knew her feet.
Here he stands, without the gate of stone
Between two walls with silence on them grown,
And littered leaves of silence on the floor;
Here, in a solemn silver of ruined springs
Among the smooth green buds, before the door
He stands and sings.

XXI

WHAT sorrow, knights and gentles? scroll and
Harp will prop the shaken sky
With the bronzehard fame of Roland
Who was not bronze, and so did die.
And ladies fair, why tears? why sighs?
There's still many a champion that'll
Feel the sharp goads of your eyes
As Roland did, in love and battle.
And be of cheer, ye valiant foemen.
Woman bore you: though amain
Life's gale may blow, there's born of woman
One who'll give you sleep again.
Weep not for Roland: envy him
Whose fame is fast in song and story,
While he, with myriad cherubim
Is lapped in ease, asleep in glory.

XXII

I SEE your face through the twilight of my mind,
A dusk of forgotten things, remembered things;
It is a corridor dark and cool with music
And too dim for sight,
That leads me to a door which brings
You, clothed in quiet sound for my delight.

XXIII

SOMEWHERE a moon will bloom and find me not,
Then wane the windless gardens of the blue;
Somewhere a lost green hurt (but better this
Than in rich desolation long forgot)
Somewhere a sweet remembered mouth to kiss —
Still, you fool; lie still: that's not for you.

XXIV

HOW canst thou be chaste, when lonely nights
And nights I lay beside in intimate loveliness
Thy grave beauty, girdle-slacked; and grief
So long my own was gone, and there was peace
Like azure wings my body along to lie
Wherein thy name like muted silver bells
Breathed over me, and found
Less joy, but less of grief than waking thou didst stir?
Then I did need but turn to thee, and then
My hand dreamed on thy little breast. Then flowed
Beneath my hand thy body's curve, and turned
To me within the famished lonely dark
Thy sleeping kiss.

XXV

WAS this the dream?
Thus: It seemed I lay
Upon a beach where sand and water kiss
With endless kissing in a dying fall. The moon
Walked in the water, trod with silver shoon
The quavering sands: naught else but this.
And then and soon, O soon
What wind
Shaped thee in Cnydos? shaped
Thy graven music? whence such guise
Doth starlight take nor beauty never taken
Yet hand so hungry for?
O I have seen
The ultimate hawk unprop the ultimate skies,
And with the curving image of his fall
Locked beak to beak. And waked
And waked. And then the moon
And quavering sands where kissing crept and slaked

And that was all.
(Or had I slept
And in the huddle of its fading, wept
That long waking ere I should sleep again?)

XXVI

STILL, and look down, look down:
Thy curious withdrawn hand
Unprobes, now spirit and sense unblend, undrown,
Knit by a word and sundered by a tense
Like this: Is: Was: and Not. Nor caught between
Spent beaches and the annealed insatiate sea
Dost myriad lie, cold and intact Selene,
On secret strand or old disastrous lee
Behind the fading mistral of the sense.

XXVII

THE Raven bleak and Philomel
Amid the bleeding trees were fixed.
His hoarse cry and hers were mixed
And through the dark their droppings fell
Upon the red erupted rose,
Upon the broken branch of peach
Blurred with scented mouths, that each
To another sing, and close.
'Mid all the passionate choristers
Of time and tide and love and death,
Philomel with jewelled breath
Dreams of flight, but never stirs.
On rose and peach their droppings bled;
Love a sacrifice has lain,
Beneath his hand his mouth is slain,
Beneath his hand his mouth is dead.
Then the Raven, bleak and blent
With all the slow despair of time,

Lets Philomel about him chime
Until her quiring voice is spent.
Philomel, on pain's red root
Bloomed and sang, and pain was not;
When she has sung and is forgot,
The Raven speaks, no longer mute.
The Raven bleak and Philomel
Amid the bleeding trees were fixed.
His hoarse cry and hers were mixed,
On rose and peach their droppings fell.

XXVIII

OVER the world's rim, drawing bland November
Reluctant behind them, drawing the moons of cold:
What do their lonely voices wake to remember
In this dust ere 'twas flesh? what restless old
Dream a thousand years was safely sleeping
Wakes my blood to sharp unease? what horn
Rings out to them? Was I free once, sweeping
Their wild and lonely skies ere I was born?
The hand that shaped my body, that gave me vision,
Made me a slave to clay for a fee of breath.
Sweep on, O wild and lonely: mine the derision,
Then the splendor and speed, the cleanness of death.
Over the world's rim, out of some splendid noon,
Seeking some high desire, and not in vain,
They fill and empty the red and dying moon
And, crying, cross the rim of the world again.

XXIX

AS to an ancient music's hidden fall
Her seed in the huddled dark was warm and wet
And three cold stars were riven in the wall:
Rain and fire and death above her door were set.
Her hands moaned on her breast in blind and supple fire,

Made light within her cave: she saw her harried
Body wrung to a strange and bitter lyre
Whose music once was pure strings simply married.
One to another in sleepy difference
Her thin and happy sorrows once were wed,
And what tomorrow's chords are recompense
For yesterday's single song unravished?
Three stars in her heart when she awakes
As winter's sleep breaks greening in soft rain,
And in the caverned earth spring's rumor shakes
As in her loins, the tilled and quickened grain.

XXX

GRAY the day, and all the year is cold,
Across the empty land the swallows' cry
Marks the southflown spring. Naught is bowled
Save winter, in the sky.
O sorry earth, when this bleak bitter sleep
Stirs and turns and time once more is green,
In empty path and lane grass will creep
With none to tread it clean.
April and May and June, and all the dearth
Of heart to green it for, to hurt and wake;
What good is budding, gray November earth?
No need to break your sleep for greening's sake.
The hushed plaint of wind in stricken trees
Shivers the grass in path and lane
And Grief and Time are tideless golden seas —
Hush, hush! He's home again.

XXXI

HE WINNOWERED it with bayonets
And planted it with guns,
And now the final cannonade
Is healed with rains and suns

He looks about — and leaps to stamp
The stubborn grinning seeds
Of olden plantings back beneath
His field of colored weeds.

XXXII

look, cynthia,
how abelard evaporates
the brow of time, and paris
tastes his bitter thumbs —
the worm grows fat, eviscerate,
but not on love, o cynthia.

XXXIII

DID I know love once? Was it love or grief,
This grave body by where I had lain,
And my heart, a single stubborn leaf
That will not die, though root and branch be slain?
Though warm in dark between the breasts of Death,
That other breast forgot where I did lie,
And from the tree are stripped the leaves of breath,
There's still one stubborn leaf that will not die
But restless in the sad and bitter earth,
Gains with each dawn a death, with dusk a birth.

XXXIV

THE ship of night, with twilightcolored sails,
Dreamed down the golden river of the west,
And Jesus' mother mused the sighing gales
While Jesus' mouth shot drinking on her breast.
Her soft doveslipped eyes strayed in the dusk
Creaming backward from the fallen day,
And a haughty star broke yellow musk
Where dead kings slept the long cold years away.

The hushed voices on the stair of heaven
Upward mounting, wake each drowsing king;
The dawn is milk to swell her breast, her seven
Sorrows crown her with a choiring ring;
A star to fleck young Jesus' eyes is given,
And white winds in the duskfilled sails to sing.

XXXV

THE courtesan is dead, for all her subtle ways,
Her bonds are loosed in brittle and bitter leaves;
Her last long backward look's to see who grieves
The imminent night of her reverted gaze.
Another will reign supreme, now she is dead
And winter's lean clean rain sweeps out her room,
For man's delight and anguish: with old new bloom
Crowning his desire, garlanding his head.
Thus the world, turning to cold and death
When swallows empty the blue and drowsy days
And lean rain scatters the ghost of summer's breath —
The courtesan that's dead, for all her subtle ways —
Spring will come! rejoice! But still is there
An old sorrow sharp as woodsmoke on the air.

XXXVI

GUSTY trees windily lean on green
eviscerated skies, the stallion, Wind,
against the sun's gold collar stamps, to lean
his weight. And once the furrowed day behind,
the golden steed browses the field he breaks
and full of flashing teeth where he has been
trees, the waiting mare his neighing shakes,
hold his heaving shape a moment seen.
Upon the hills, clashing the stars together,
stripping the tree of heaven of its blaze,
stabled, richly grained with golden weather —

within the trees that he has reft and raped
his fierce embrace by riven boughs in shaped,
while on the shaggy hills he stamps and neighs.

XXXVII

The race's splendor lifts her lip, exposes
Amid her scarlet smile her little teeth;
The years are sand the wind plays with; beneath,
The prisoned music of her deathless roses.
Within frostbitten rock she's fixed and glassed;
Now man may look upon her without fear.
But her contemptuous eyes back through him stare
And shear his fatuous sheep when he has passed.
Lilith she is dead and safely tombed
And man may plant and prune with naught to bruit
His heired and ancient lot to which he's doomed,
For quiet drowse the flocks when wolf is mute —
Ay, Lilith she is dead, and she is wombed,
And breaks his vine, and slowly eats the fruit.

XXXVIII

LIPS that of thy weary all seem weariest,
And wearier for the curled and pallid sly
Still riddle of thy secret face, and thy
Sick despair of its own ill obsessed;
Lay no hand to heart, do not protest
That smiling leaves thy tired mouth reconciled,
For swearing so keeps thee but ill beguiled
With secret joy of thine own flank and breast.
Weary thy mouth with smiling: canst thou bride
Thyself with thee, or thine own kissing slake?
Thy belly's waking doth itself deride
With sleep's sharp absence, coming so awake;
And near thy mouth thy twinned heart's grief doth hide
For there's no breast between: it cannot break.

XXXIX

LIKE to the tree that, young, reluctant yet
While sap's but troubled rumor of green spring;
Like to the leaf that in warm bud does cling
In maiden sleep unrefte though passionate;
Or like the cloud that, quickened and shaped for rain
But flees it in a silver hot despair;
The bird that dreams of flight and does not dare,
The sower who fears to sow and reaps no grain.
Beauty or gold or scarlet, then long sleep:
All this does buy brave trafficking with breath,
That though gray cuckold Time be horned by Death,
Then Death in turn is cuckold, unawake.
But sown cold years the stolen bread you reap
By all the Eves unsistered since the Snake.

XL

LADY, unawares still bride of sleep,
To thine own self sweet prisoner and fell
Thrall to the vassalled garrison that keep
Thy soft unguarded breast's white citadel;
Alas, oft-cozened maid, who'd not be twain
Yet self-confounded, while importunates
The foe repulsed, and single, dost remain
The frequent darling of the gods and fates.
Thou chaste? Why, I've lain lonely nights that fled
No swifter than thou came and bridged me
Who held thee as the fabric of thy bed
Where, turning on thy pillow's cheek, thy kiss
Took in thy citadel an enemy
Against whose mouth thy mouth sleeps on — like this.

XLI

HER unripe shallow breast is green among
The windy bloom of drunken apple trees,
And seven fauns importunate as bees
To sip the thin young honey of her tongue.
The old satyr, leafed and hidden, dreams her kiss
His beard amid, leaving his mouth in sight;
Dreams her body in a moony night
Shortening and shuddering into his;
Then sees a faun, bolder than the rest,
Slide his hand upon her sudden breast,
And feels the life in him go cold, and pass
Until the fire that kiss had brought to be
Gutters and faints away; 'tis night, and he
Laughing wrings the bitter wanton grass.

XLII

BENEATH the apple tree Eve's tortured shape
Glittered in the Snake's, her riven breast
Sloped his coils and took the sun's escape
To augur black her sin from east to west.
In winter's night man may keep him warm
Regretting olden sins he did omit;
With fetiches the whip of blood to charm,
Forgetting that with breath he's heir to it.
But old gods fall away, the ancient Snake
Is throned and crowned instead, and has for minion
That golden apple which will never slake
But ever feeds man's crumb of fire, when plover
And swallow and shrill northing birds whip over
Nazarene and Roman and Virginian.

XLIII

lets see I'll say — between two brief balloons
of skirts I saw grave chalices of knees
and momentarily the cloyed and cloudy bees

where hives her honeyed thighs those little moons
these slender moons' unsunder I would break
so soft I'd break that hushed virginity
of sleep that in her narrow house would she
find me drowsing when she came awake —
no — madam I love your daughter — I will say
from out some leafed dilemma of desire
the wind hales yawning spring still half undressed
the hand that once did short to sighs her breast
now slaps her white behind to rosy fire
— sir your health your money how are they —

XLIV

IF THERE be grief, then let it be but rain,
And this but silver grief for grieving's sake,
If these green woods be dreaming here to wake
Within my heart, if I should rouse again.
But I shall sleep, for where is any death
While in these blue hills slumbrous overhead
I'm rooted like a tree? Though I be dead,
This earth that holds me fast will find me breath.

The Eng