

Selected Poems, Aldous Huxley

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SONG OF POPLARS

SHEPHERD, to yon tall poplars tune your flute:
Let them pierce, keenly, subtly shrill,
The slow blue rumour of the hill;
Let the grass cry with an anguish of evening gold,
And the great sky be mute.
Then hearken how the poplar trees unfold
Their buds, yet close and gummed and blind,
In airy leafage of the mind,
Rustling in silvery whispers the twin-hued scales
That fade not nor grow old.
"Poplars and fountains and you cypress spires
Springing in dark and rusty flame,
Seek you aught that hath a name?
Or say, say: Are you all an upward agony

Of undefined desires?

"Say, are you happy in the golden march
Of sunlight all across the day?
Or do you watch the uncertain way
That leads the withering moon on cloudy stairs
Over the heaven's wide arch?

"Is it towards sorrow or towards joy you lift
The sharpness of your trembling spears?
Or do you seek, through the grey tears
That blur the sky, in the heart of the triumphing blue,
A deeper, calmer rift?"

So; I have tuned my music to the trees,
And there were voices dim below
Their shrillness, voices swelling slow
In the blue murmur of hills, and a golden cry
And then vast silences.

THE REEF

MY green aquarium of phantom fish,
Goggling in on me through the misty panes;
My rotting leaves and fields spongy with rains;
My few clear quiet autumn days—I wish
I could leave all, clearness and mistiness;
Sodden or goldenly crystal, all too still.
Yes, and I too rot with the leaves that fill
The hollows in the woods; I am grown less
Than human, listless, aimless as the green
Idiot fishes of my aquarium,
Who loiter down their dim tunnels and come
And look at me and drift away, nought seen
Or understood, but only glazedly
Reflected. Upwards, upwards through the shadows,
Through the lush sponginess of deep-sea meadows
Where hare-lipped monsters batten, let me ply
Winged fins, bursting this matrix dark to find
Jewels and movement, mintage of sunlight
Scattered largely by the profuse wind,
And gulfs of blue brightness, too deep for sight.
Free, newly born, on roads of music and air
Speeding and singing, I shall seek the place
Where all the shining threads of water race,
Drawn in green ropes and foamy meshes. There,
On the red fretted ramparts of a tower
Of coral rooted in the depths, shall break
An endless sequence of joy and speed and power:
Green shall shatter to foam; flake with white flake
Shall create an instant's shining constellation
Upon the blue; and all the air shall be
Full of a million wings that swift and free
Laugh in the sun, all power and strong elation.
Yes, I shall seek that reef, which is beyond
All isles however magically sleeping
In tideless seas, uncharted and unconned
Save by blind eyes: beyond the laughter and weeping
That brood like a cloud over the lands of men.
Movement, passion of colour and pure wings,
Curving to cut like knives—these are the things
I search for:—passion beyond the ken
Of our foiled violences, and, more swift
Than any blow which man aims against time,
The invulnerable, motion that shall rift
All dimness with the lightning of a rhyme,
Or note, or colour. And the body shall be

Quick as the mind; and will shall find release
From bondage to brute things; and joyously
Soul, will and body, in the strength of triune peace,
Shall live the perfect grace of power unwasted.
And love consummate, marvellously blending
Passion and reverence in a single spring
Of quickening force, till now never yet tasted,
But ever ceaselessly thirsted for, shall crown
The new life with its ageless starry fire.
I go to seek that reef, far down, far down
Below the edge of everyday's desire,
Beyond the magical islands, where of old
I was content, dreaming, to give the lie
To misery. They were all strong and bold
That thither came; and shall I dare to try?

THE FLOWERS

DAY after day,
At spring's return,
I watch my flowers, how they burn
Their lives away.
The candle crocus
And daffodil gold
Drink fire of the sunshine—
Quickly cold.
And the proud tulip—
How red he glows!—
Is quenched ere summer
Can kindle the rose.
Purple as the innermost
Core of a sinking flame,
Deep in the leaves the violets smoulder
To the dust whence they came.
Day after day
At spring's return,
I watch my flowers, how they burn
Their lives away,
Day after day....

THE ELMS

FINE as the dust of plummy fountains blowing
Across the lanterns of a revelling night,
The tiny leaves of April's earliest growing
Powder the trees—so vaporously light,
They seem to float, billows of emerald foam
Blown by the South on its bright airy tide,
Seeming less trees than things beatified,
Come from the world of thought which was their home.
For a while only. Rooted strong and fast,
Soon will they lift towards the summer sky
Their mountain-mass of clotted greenery.
Their immaterial season quickly past,
They grow opaque, and therefore needs must die,
Since every earth to earth returns at last.

OUT OF THE WINDOW

IN the middle of countries, far from hills and sea,
Are the little places one passes by in trains

And never stops at; where the skies extend
Uninterrupted, and the level plains
Stretch green and yellow and green without an end.
And behind the glass of their Grand Express
Folk yawn away a province through,
With nothing to think of, nothing to do,
Nothing even to look at—never a “view”
In this damned wilderness.
But I look out of the window and find
Much to satisfy the mind.
Mark how the furrows, formed and wheeled
In a motion orderly and staid,
Sweep, as we pass, across the field
Like a drilled army on parade.
And here’s a market-garden, barred
With stripe on stripe of varied greens....
Bright potatoes, flower starred,
And the opacous colour of beans.
Each line deliberately swings
Towards me, till I see a straight
Green avenue to the heart of things,
The glimpse of a sudden opened gate
Piercing the adverse walls of fate....
A moment only, and then, fast, fast,
The gate swings to, the avenue closes;
Fate laughs, and once more interposes
Its barriers.
The train has passed.
SUMMER STILLNESS.

THE stars are golden instants in the deep
Flawless expanse of night: the moon is set:
The river sleeps, entranced, a smooth cool sleep
Seeming so motionless that I forget
The hollow booming bridges, where it slides,
Dark with the sad looks that it bears along,
Towards a sea whose unreturning tides
Ravish the sighted ships and the sailors’ song.

INSPIRATION

NOONDAY upon the Alpine meadows
Pours its avalanche of Light
And blazing flowers: the very shadows
Translucent are and bright.
It seems a glory that nought surpasses—
Passion of angels in form and hue—
When, lo! from the jewelled heaven of the grasses
Leaps a lightning of sudden blue.
Dimming the sun-drunk petals,
Bright even unto pain,
The grasshopper flashes, settles,
And then is quenched again.

ANNIVERSARIES

ONCE more the windless days are here,
Quiet of autumn, when the year
Halts and looks backward and draws breath
Before it plunges into death.
Silver of mist and gossamers,
Through-shine of noonday’s glassy gold,
Pale blue of skies, where nothing stirs

Save one blanched leaf, weary and old,
That over and over slowly falls
From the mute elm-trees, hanging on air
Like tattered flags along the walls
Of chapels deep in sunlit prayer.
Once more... Within its flawless glass
To-day reflects that other day,
When, under the bracken, on the grass,
We who were lovers happily lay
And hardly spoke, or framed a thought
That was not one with the calm hills
And crystal sky. Ourselves were nought,
Our gusty passions, our burning wills
Dissolved in boundlessness, and we
Were almost bodiless, almost free.
The wind has shattered silver and gold;
Night after night of sparkling cold,
Orion lifts his tangled feet
From where the tossing branches beat
In a fine surf against the sky.
So the trance ended, and we grew
Restless, we knew not how or why;
And there were sudden gusts that blew
Our dreaming banners into storm;
We wore the uncertain crumbling form
Of a brown swirl of windy leaves,
A phantom shape that stirs and heaves
Shuddering from earth, to fall again
With a dry whisper of withered rain.
Last, from the dead and shrunken days
We conjured spring, lighting the blaze
Of burnished tulips in the dark;
And from black frost we struck a spark
Of blue delight and fragrance new,
A little world of flowers and dew.
Winter for us was over and done:
The drought of fluttering leaves had grown
Emerald shining in the sun,
As light as glass, as firm as stone.
Real once more: for we had passed
Through passion into thought again;
Shaped our desires and made that fast
Which was before a cloudy pain;
Moulded the dimness, fixed, defined
In a fair statue, strong and free,
Twin bodies flaming into mind,
Poised on the brink of ecstasy.

ITALY

THERE is a country in my mind,
Lovelier than a poet blind
Could dream of, who had never known
This world of drought and dust and stone
In all its ugliness: a place
Full of an all but human grace;
Whose dells retain the printed form
Of heavenly sleep, and seem yet warm
From some pure body newly risen;
Where matter is no more a prison,
But freedom for the soul to know
Its native beauty. For things glow
There with an inward truth and are

All fire and colour like a star.
And in that land are domes and towers
That hang as light and bright as flowers
Upon the sky, and seem a birth
Rather of air than solid earth.
Sometimes I dream that walking there
In the green shade, all unaware
At a new turn of the golden glade,
I shall see her, and as though afraid
Shall halt a moment and almost fall
For passing faintness, like a man
Who feels the sudden spirit of Pan
Brimming his narrow soul with all
The illimitable world. And she,
Turning her head, will let me see
The first sharp dawn of her surprise
Turning to welcome in her eyes.
And I shall come and take my lover
And looking on her re-discover
All her beauty:—her dark hair
And the little ears beneath it, where
Roses of lucid shadow sleep;
Her brooding mouth, and in the deep
Wells of her eyes reflected stars.
Oh, the imperishable things
That hands and lips as well as words
Shall speak! Oh movement of white wings,
Oh wheeling galaxies of birds!

THE ALIEN

A PETAL drifted loose
From a great magnolia bloom,
Your face hung in the gloom,
Floating, white and close.
We seemed alone: but another
Bent o'er you with lips of flame,
Unknown, without a name,
Hated, and yet my brother.
Your one short moan of pain
Was an exorcising spell:
The devil flew back to hell;
We were alone again.

A LITTLE MEMORY

WHITE in the moonlight,
Wet with dew,
We have known the languor
Of being two.
We have been weary
As children are,
When over them, radiant,
A stooping star,
Bends their Good-Night,
Kissed and smiled:—
Each was mother,
Each was child.
Child, from your forehead
I kissed the hair,
Gently, ah, gently:
And you were
Mistress and mother

When on your breast
I lay so safely
And could rest.

WAKING

DARKNESS had stretched its colour,
Deep blue across the pane:
No cloud to make night duller,
No moon with its tarnish stain;
But only here and there a star,
One sharp point of frosty fire,
Hanging infinitely far
In mockery of our life and death
And all our small desire.
Now in this hour of waking
From under brows of stone,
A new pale day is breaking
And the deep night is gone.
Sordid now, and mean and small
The daylight world is seen again,
With only the veils of mist that fall
Deaf and muffling over all
To hide its ugliness and pain.
But to-day this dawn of meanness
Shines in my eyes, as when
The new world's brightness and cleanness
Broke on the first of men.
For the light that shows the huddled things
Of this close-pressing earth,
Shines also on your face and brings
All its dear beauty back to me
In a new miracle of birth.
I see you asleep and unpassioned,
White-faced in the dusk of your hair—
Your beauty so fleetingly fashioned
That it filled me once with despair
To look on its exquisite transience
And think that our love and thought and laughter
Puff out with the death of our flickering sense,
While we pass ever on and away
Towards some blank hereafter.
But now I am happy, knowing
That swift time is our friend,
And that our love's passionate glowing,
Though it turn ash in the end,
Is a rose of fire that must blossom its way
Through temporal stuff, nor else could be
More than a nothing. Into day
The boundless spaces of night contract
And in your opening eyes I see
Night born in day, in time eternity.

BY THE FIRE

WE who are lovers sit by the fire,
Cradled warm 'twixt thought and will,
Sit and drowse like sleeping dogs
In the equipoise of all desire,
Sit and listen to the still
Small hiss and whisper of green logs
That burn away, that burn away

With the sound of a far-off falling stream
Of threaded water blown to steam,
Grey ghost in the mountain world of grey.
Vapours blue as distance rise
Between the hissing logs that show
A glimpse of rosy heat below;
And candles watch with tireless eyes
While we sit drowsing here. I know,
Dimly, that there exists a world,
That there is time perhaps, and space
Other and wider than this place,
Where at the fireside drowsily curled
We hear the whisper and watch the flame
Burn blinkless and inscrutable.
And then I know those other names
That through my brain from cell to cell
Echo—reverberated shout
Of waiters mournful along corridors:
But nobody carries the orders out,
And the names (dear friends, your name and yours)
Evoke no sign. But here I sit
On the wide hearth, and there are you:
That is enough and only true.
The world and the friends that lived in it
Are shadows: you alone remain
Real in this drowsing room,
Full of the whispers of distant rain
And candles staring into the gloom.

VALEDICTORY

I HAD remarked—how sharply one observes
When life is disappearing round the curves
Of yet another corner, out of sight!—
I had remarked when it was “good luck” and “good night”
And “a good journey to you,” on her face
Certain enigmas penned in the hieroglyphs
Of that half frown and queer fixed smile and trace
Of clouded thought in those brown eyes,
Always so happily clear of hows and ifs—
My poor bleared mind!—and haunting whys.
There I stood, holding her farewell hand,
(Pressing my life and soul and all
The world to one good-bye, till, small
And smaller pressed, why there I’d stand
Dead when they vanished with the sight of her).
And I saw that she had grown aware,
Queer puzzled face! of other things
Beyond the present and her own young speed,
Of yesterday and what new days might breed
Monstrously when the future brings
A charger with your late-lamented head:
Aware of other people’s lives and will,
Aware, perhaps, aware even of me....
The joyous hope of it! But still
I pitied her; for it was sad to see
A goddess shorn of her divinity.
In the midst of her speed she had made pause,
And doubts with all their threat of claws,
Outstripped till now by her unconsciousness,
Had seized on her; she was proved mortal now.
“Live, only live? For you were meant
Never to know a thought’s distress,

But a long glad astonishment
At the world's beauty and your own.
The pity of you, goddess, grown
Perplexed and mortal!"
Yet ... yet ... can it be
That she is aware, perhaps, even of me?
And life recedes, recedes; the curve is bare,
My handkerchief flutters blankly in the air;
And the question rumbles in the void:
Was she aware, was she after all aware?

PRIVATE PROPERTY

ALL fly--yet who is misanthrope?--
The actual men and things that pass
Jostling, to wither as the grass
So soon: and (be it heaven's hope,
Or poetry's kaleidoscope,
Or love or wine, at feast, at mass)
Each owns a paradise of glass
Where never a yearning heliotrope
Pursues the sun's ascent or slope;
For the sun dreams there, and no time is or was.
Like fauns embossed in our domain,
We look abroad, and our calm eyes
Mark how the goatish gods of pain
Revel; and if by grim surprise
They break into our paradise,
Patient we build its beauty up again.

REVELATION

AT your mouth, white and milk-warm sphinx,
I taste a strange apocalypse:
Your subtle taper finger-tips
Weave me new heavens, yet, methinks,
I know the wiles and each iynx
That brought me passionate to your lips:
I know you bare as laughter strips
Your charnel beauty; yet my spirit drinks
Pure knowledge from this tainted well,
And now hears voices yet unheard
Within it, and without it sees
That world of which the poets tell
Their vision in the stammered word
Of those that wake from piercing ecstasies.

MINOAN PORCELAIN

HER eyes of bright unwinking glaze
All imperturbable do not
Even make pretences to regard
The jutting absence of her stays,
Where many a Tyrian gallipot
Excites desire with spilth of nard.
The bistrred rims above the fard
Of cheeks as red as bergamot
Attest that no shamefaced delays
Will clog fulfilment, nor retard
Full payment of the Cyprian's praise
Down to the last remorseful jot.

Hail priestess of we know not what
Strange cult of Mycenean days!

IN UNCERTAINTY TO A LADY

I AM not one of those who sip,
Like a quotidian bock,
Cheap idylls from a languid lip
Prepared to yawn or mock.
I wait the indubitable word,
The great Unconscious Cue.
Has it been spoken and unheard?
Spoken, perhaps, by you?

CRAPULOUS IMPRESSION

STILL life, still life ... the high-lights shine
Hard and sharp on the bottles: the wine
Stands firmly solid in the glasses,
Smooth yellow ice, through which there passes
The lamp's bright pencil of down-struck light.
The fruits metallicly gleam,
Globey in their heaped-up bowl,
And there are faces against the night
Of the outer room-faces that seem
Part of this still, still life ... they've lost their soul.
And amongst these frozen faces you smiled,
Surprised, surprisingly, like a child:
And out of the frozen welter of sound
Your voice came quietly, quietly.
"What about God?" you said. "I have found
Much to be said for Totality.
All, I take it, is God: God's all-
This bottle, for instance..." I recall,
Dimly, that you took God by the neck-
God-in-the-bottle-and pushed Him across:
But I, without a moment's loss
Moved God-in-the-salt in front and shouted: "Check!"

COMPLAINT OF A POET MANQUÉ

WE judge by appearance merely:
If I can't think strangely, I can at least look queerly.
So I grew the hair so long on my head
That my mother wouldn't know me,
Till a woman in a night-club said,
As I was passing by,
"Hullo, here comes Salome."
I looked in the dirty gilt-edged glass,
And, oh Salome! there I was-
Positively jewelled, half a vampire,
With the soul in my eyes hanging dizzily
Like the gatherer of proverbial samphire
Over the brink of the crag of sense,
Looking down from perilous eminence
Into a gulf of windy night.
And there's straw in my tempestuous hair,
And I'm not a poet: but never despair!
I'll madly live the poems I shall never write.

SOCIAL AMENITIES

I AM getting on well with this anecdote,
When suddenly I recall
The many times I have told it of old,
And all the worked-up phrases, and the dying fall
Of voice, well timed in the crisis, the note
Of mock-heroic ingeniously struck—
The whole thing sticks in my throat,
And my face all tingles and pricks with shame
For myself and my hearers.
These are the social pleasures, my God!
But I finish the story triumphantly all the same.

TOPIARY

FAILING sometimes to understand
Why there are folk whose flesh should seem
Like carrion puffed with noisome steam,
Fly-blown to the eye that looks on it,
Fly-blown to the touch of a hand;
Why there are men without any legs,
Whizzing along on little trollies
With long long arms like apes':
Failing to see why God the Topiarist
Should train and carve and twist
Men's bodies into such fantastic shapes:
Yes, failing to see the point of it all, I sometimes wish
That I were a fabulous thing in a fool's mind,
Or, at the ocean bottom, in a world that is deaf and blind,
Very remote and happy, a great goggling fish.

ON THE 'BUS

SITTING on the top of the 'bus,
I bite my pipe and look at the sky.
Over my shoulder the smoke streams out
And my life with it.
"Conservation of energy," you say.
But I burn, I tell you, I burn;
And the smoke of me streams out
In a vanishing skein of grey.
Crash and bump ... my poor bruised body!
I am a harp of twittering strings,
An elegant instrument, but infinitely second-hand,
And if I have not got phthisis it is only an accident.
Droll phenomena!

POINTS AND LINES

INSTANTS in the quiet, small sharp stars,
Pierce my spirit with a thrust whose speed
Baffles even the grasp of time.
Oh that I might reflect them
As swiftly, as keenly as they shine.
But I am a pool of waters, summer-still,
And the stars are mirrored across me;
Those stabbing points of the sky
Turned to a thread of shaken silver,
A long fine thread.

PANIC

THE eyes of the portraits on the wall
Look at me, follow me,
Stare incessantly:
I take it their glance means nothing at all?
—Clearly, oh clearly! Nothing at all....
Out in the gardens by the lake
The sleeping peacocks suddenly wake;
Out in the gardens, moonlit and forlorn,
Each of them sounds his mournful horn:
Shrill peals that waver and crack and break.
What can have made the peacocks wake?

STANZAS

THOUGHT is an unseen net wherein our mind
Is taken and vainly struggles to be free:
Words, that should loose our spirit, do but bind
New fetters on our hoped-for liberty:
And action bears us onward like a stream
Past fabulous shores, scarce seen in our swift course;
Glorious—and yet its headlong currents seem
But backwaters of some diviner force.
There are slow curves, more subtle far than thought,
That stoop to carry the grace of a girl's breast;
And hanging flowers, so exquisitely wrought
In airy metal, that they seem possessed
Of souls; and there are distant hills that lift
The shoulder of a god towards the light;
And arrowy trees, sudden and sharp and swift,
Piercing the spirit deeply with delight.
Would I might make these miracles my own!
Like a pure angel, thinking colour and form;
Hardening to rage in a flame of chiselled stone;
Spilling my love like sunlight, golden and warm
On noonday flowers; speaking the song of birds
Among the branches; whispering the fall of rain;
Beyond all thought, past action and past words,
I would live in beauty, free from self and pain.

POEM

BOOKS and a coloured skein of thoughts were mine;
And magic words lay ripening in my soul
Till their much-whispered music turned a wine
Whose subtlest power was all in my control.
These things were mine, and they were real for me
As lips and darling eyes and a warm breast:
For I could love a phrase, a melody,
Like a fair woman, worshipped and possessed.
I scorned all fire that outward of the eyes
Could kindle passion; scorned, yet was afraid;
Feared, and yet envied those more deeply wise
Who saw the bright earth beckon and obeyed.
But a time came when, turning full of hate
And weariness from my remembered themes,
I wished my poet's pipe could modulate
Beauty more palpable than words and dreams.
All loveliness with which an act informs

The dim uncertain chaos of desire
Is mine to day; it touches me, it warms
Body and spirit with its outward fire.
I am mine no more: I have become a part
Of that great earth that draws a breath and stirs
To meet the spring. But I could wish my heart
Were still a winter of frosty gossamers.

SCENES OF THE MIND

I HAVE run where festival was loud
With drum and brass among the crowd
Of panic revellers, whose cries
Affront the quiet of the skies;
Whose dancing lights contract the deep
Infinity of night and sleep
To a narrow turmoil of troubled fire.
And I have found my heart's desire
In beechen caverns that autumn fills
With the blue shadowiness of distant hills;
Whose luminous grey pillars bear
The stooping sky: calm is the air,
Nor any sound is heard to mar
That crystal silence—as from far,
Far off a man may see
The busy world all utterly
Hushed as an old memorial scene.
Long evenings I have sat and been
Strangely content, while in my hands
I held a wealth of coloured strands,
Shimmering plaits of silk and skeins
Of soft bright wool. Each colour drains
New life at the lamp's round pool of gold;
Each sinks again when I withhold
The quickening radiance, to a wan
And shadowy oblivion
Of what it was. And in my mind
Beauty or sudden love has shined
And wakened colour in what was dead
And turned to gold the sullen lead
Of mean desires and everyday's
Poor thoughts and customary ways.
Sometimes in lands where mountains throw
Their silent spell on all below,
Drawing a magic circle wide
About their feet on every side,
Robbed of all speech and thought and act,
I have seen God in the cataract.
In falling water and in flame,
Never at rest, yet still the same,
God shows himself. And I have known
The swift fire frozen into stone,
And water frozen changelessly
Into the death of gems. And I
Long sitting by the thunderous mill
Have seen the headlong wheel made still,
And in the silence that ensued
Have known the endless solitude
Of being dead and utterly nought.
Inhabitant of mine own thought,
I look abroad, and all I see
Is my creation, made for me:
Along my thread of life are pearled

The moments that make up the world.

L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE

(From the French of Stéphane Mallarmé.)

I WOULD immortalize these nymphs; so bright
Their sunlit colouring, so airy light,
It floats like drowsy down. Loved I a dream?
My doubts, born of oblivious darkness, seem
A subtle tracery of branches grown
The tree's true self-proving that I have known,
Thinking it love, the blushing of a rose.
But think. These nymphs, their loveliness ... suppose
They bodied forth your senses' fabulous thirst?
Illusion! which the blue eyes of the first,
As cold and chaste as is the weeping spring,
Beget: the other, sighing, passioning,
Is she the wind, warm in your fleece at noon?
No; through this quiet, when a weary swoon
Crushes and chokes the latest faint essay
Of morning, cool against the encroaching day,
There is no murmuring water, save the gush
Of my clear fluted notes; and in the hush
Blows never a wind, save that which through my reed
Puffs out before the rain of notes can speed
Upon the air, with that calm breath of art
That mounts the unwrinkled zenith visibly,
Where inspiration seeks its native sky.
You fringes of a calm Sicilian lake,
The sun's own mirror which I love to take,
Silent beneath your starry flowers, tell
How here I cut the hollow rushes, well
Tamed by my skill, when on the glaucous gold
Of distant lawns about their fountain cold
A living whiteness stirs like a lazy wave;
And at the first slow notes my panpipes gave
These flocking swans, these naiads, rather, fly
Or dive. Noon burns inert and tawny dry,
Nor marks how clean that Hymen slipped away
From me who seek in song the real A.
Wake, then, to the first ardour and the sight,
O lonely faun, of the old fierce white light,
With, lilies, one of you for innocence.
Other than their lips' delicate pretence,
The light caress that quiets treacherous lovers,
My breast, I know not how to tell, discovers
The bitten print of some immortal's kiss.
But hush! a mystery so great as this
I dare not tell, save to my double reed,
Which, sharer of my every joy and need,
Dreams down its cadenced monologues that we
Falsely confuse the beauties that we see
With the bright palpable shapes our song creates:
My flute, as loud as passion modulates,
Purges the common dream of flank and breast,
Seen through closed eyes and inwardly caressed,
Of every empty and monotonous line.
Bloom then, O Syrinx, in thy flight malign,
A reed once more beside our trysting-lake.
Proud of my music, let me often make
A song of goddesses and see their rape
Profanely done on many a painted shape.
So when the grape's transparent juice I drain,

I quell regret for pleasures past and feign
A new real grape. For holding towards the sky
The empty skin, I blow it tight and lie
Dream-drunk till evening, eyeing it.
Tell o'er
Remembered joys and plump the grape once more.
Between the reeds I saw their bodies gleam
Who cool no mortal fever in the stream
Crying to the woods the rage of their desire:
And their bright hair went down in jewelled fire
Where crystal broke and dazzled shudderingly.
I check my swift pursuit: for see where lie,
Bruised, being twins in love, by languor sweet,
Two sleeping girls, clasped at my very feet.
I seize and run with them, nor part the pair,
Breaking this covert of frail petals, where
Roses drink scent of the sun and our light play
'Mid tumbled flowers shall match the death of day.
I love that virginal fury—ah, the wild
Thrill when a maiden body shrinks, defiled,
Shuddering like arctic light, from lips that sear
Its nakedness ... the flesh in secret fear!
Contagiously through my linked pair it flies
Where innocence in either, struggling, dies,
Wet with fond tears or some less piteous dew.
Gay in the conquest of these fears, I grew
So rash that I must needs the sheaf divide
Of ruffled kisses heaven itself had tied.
For as I leaned to stifle in the hair
Of one my passionate laughter (taking care
With a stretched finger, that her innocence
Might stain with her companion's kindling sense
To touch the younger little one, who lay
Child-like unblushing) my ungrateful prey
Slips from me, freed by passion's sudden death
Nor heeds the frenzy of my sobbing breath.
Let it pass! others of their hair shall twist
A rope to drag me to those joys I missed.
See how the ripe pomegranates bursting red
To quench the thirst of the mumbling bees have bled;
So too our blood, kindled by some chance fire,
Flows for the swarming legions of desire.
At evening, when the woodland green turns gold
And ashen grey, 'mid the quenched leaves, behold!
Red Etna glows, by Venus visited,
Walking the lava with her snowy tread
Whene'er the flames in thunderous slumber die.
I hold the goddess!
Ah, sure penalty!
But the unthinking soul and body swoon
At last beneath the heavy hush of noon.
Forgetful let me lie where summer's drouth
Sifts fine the sand and then with gaping mouth
Dream planet-struck by the grape's round wine-red star.
Nymphs, I shall see the shade that now you are.

MOLE

TUNNELLED in solid blackness creeps
The old mole-soul, and wakes or sleeps,
He knows not which, but tunnels on
Through ages of oblivion;
Until at last the long constraint
Of each hand-wall is lost, and faint

Comes daylight creeping from afar,
And mole-work grows crepuscular.
Tunnel meets air and bursts; mole sees
Men as strange as walking trees?
And far horizons smoking blue,
And chasing clouds for ever new;
Green hills, like lighted lamps aglow
Or quenched beneath the cloud-shadow;
Quenching and blazing turn by turn,
Spring's great green signals fitfully burn.
Mole travels on, but finds the steering
A harder task of pioneering
Than when he thridded through the strait
Blind catacombs that ancient fate
Had carved for him. Stupid and dumb
And blind and touchless he had come
A way without a turn; but here,
Under the sky, the passenger
Chooses his own best way; and mole
Distracted wanders, yet his hole
Regrets not much wherein he crept,
But runs, a joyous nympholept,
This way and that, by all made mad—
River nymph and oread,
Ocean's daughters and Lorelei,
Combing the silken mystery,
The glaucous gold of her rivery tresses—
Each haunts the traveller, each possesses
The drunken wavering soul awhile;
Then with a phantom's cock-crow smile
Mocks craving with sheer vanishment.
Mole-eyes grow hawk's: knowledge is lent
In grudging dribblets that pay high
Unconscionable usury.
To unrelenting life. Mole learns
To travel more secure; the turns
Of his long way less puzzling seem,
And all those magic forms that gleam
In airy invitation cheat
Less often than they did of old.
The earth slopes upward, fold by fold
Of quiet hills that meet the gold
Serenity of western skies.
Over the world's edge with clear eyes
Our mole transcendent sees his way
Tunnelled in light: he must obey
Necessity again and thridd
Close catacombs as erst he did,
Fate's tunnellings, himself must bore
Through the sunset's inmost core.
The guiding walls to each-hand shine
Luminous and crystalline;
And mole shall tunnel on and on,
Till night let fall oblivion.

TWO REALITIES

A WAGGON passed with scarlet wheels
And a yellow body, shining new.
"Splendid!" said I. "How fine it feels
To be alive, when beauty peels
The grimy husk from life." And you
Said, "Splendid!" and I thought you'd seen
That waggon blazing down the street;

But I looked and saw that your gaze had been
On a child that was kicking an obscene
Brown ordure with his feet.
Our souls are elephants, thought I,
Remote behind a prisoning grill,
With trunks thrust out to peer and pry
And pounce upon reality;
And each at his own sweet will
Seizes the bun that he likes best
And passes over all the rest.

QUOTIDIAN VISION

THERE is a sadness in the street,
And sullenly the folk I meet
Droop their heads as they walk along,
Without a smile, without a song.
A mist of cold and muffling grey
Falls, fold by fold, on another day
That dies unwept. But suddenly,
Under a tunnelled arch I see
On flank and haunch the chestnut gleam
Of horses in a lamplit steam;
And the dead world moves for me once more
With beauty for its living core.

THE MIRROR

SLOW-moving moonlight once did pass
Across the dreaming looking-glass,
Where, sunk inviolably deep,
Old secrets unforgotten sleep
Of beauties unforgettable.
But dusty cobwebs are woven now
Across that mirror, which of old
Saw fingers drawing back the gold
From an untroubled brow;
And the depths are blinded to the moon,
And their secrets forgotten, for ever untold.
VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF LAFORGUE.
YOUTH as it opens out discloses
The sinister metempsychosis
Of lilies dead and turned to roses
Red as an angry dawn.
But lilies, remember, are grave-side flowers,
While slow bright rose-leaves sail
Adrift on the music of happiest hours;
And those lilies, cold and pale,
Hide fiery roses beneath the lawn
Of the young bride's parting veil.

PHILOSOPHY

"GOD needs no christening,"
Pantheist mutters,
"Love opens shutters
On heaven's glistening,
Flesh, key-hole listening,
Hear what God utters"....
Yes, but God stutters.

PHILOCLEA IN THE FOREST

I

'Twas I that leaned to Amoret
With: "What if the briars have tangled Time,
Till, lost in the wood-ways, he quite forget
How plaintive in cities at midnight sounds the chime
Of bells slow-dying from discord to the hush whence they rose and met?
"And in the forest we shall live free,
Free from the bondage that Time has made
To hedge our soul from its liberty;
We shall not fear what is mighty, and unafraid
Shall look wide-eyed at beauty, nor shrink from its majesty."
But Amoret answered me again:
"We are lost in the forest, you and I;
Lost, lost, not free, though no bonds restrain;
For no spire rises for comfort, no landmark in the sky,
And the long glades as they curve from sight are dark with a nameless pain.
And Time creates what he devours,—
Music that sweetly dreams itself away,
Frail-swung leaves of autumn and the scent of flowers,
And the beauty of that poised moment, when the day
Hangs 'twixt the quiet of darkness and the mirth of the sunlit hours."

II

MOTTLED and grey and brown they pass,
The wood-moths, wheeling, fluttering;
And we chase and they vanish; and in the grass
Are starry flowers, and the birds sing
Faint broken songs of the dying spring.
And on the beech-hole, smooth and grey,
Some lover of an older day
Has carved in time-blurred lettering
One world only:—"Alas."

III

LUTES, I forbid you! You must never play,
When shimmeringly, glimpse by glimpse
Seen through the leaves, the silken figures sway
In measured dance. Never at shut of day,
When Time perversely loitering limps
Through endless twilights, should your strings
Whisper of light remembered things
That happened long ago and far away:
Lutes, I forbid you! You must never play....
And you, pale marble statues, far descried
Where vistas open suddenly,
I bid you shew yourselves no more, but hide
Your loveliness, lest too much glorified
By western radiance slantingly
Shot down the glade, you turn from stone
To living gods, immortal grown,
And, ageless, mock my beauty's fleeting pride,
You pale, relentless statues, far descried....

BOOKS AND THOUGHTS

OLD ghosts that death forgot to ferry
Across the Lethe of the years—
These are my friends, and at their tears
I weep and with their mirth am merry.
On a high tower, whose battlements
Give me all heaven at a glance,
I lie long summer nights in trance,

Drowsed by the murmurs and the scents
That rise from earth, while the sky above me
Merges its peace with my soul's peace,
Deep meeting deep. No stir can move me,
Nought break the quiet of my release:
In vain the windy sunlight raves
At the hush and gloom of polar caves.

THE HIGHER SENSUALISM

THERE'S a church by a lake in Italy
Stands white on a hill against the sky;
And a path of immemorial cobbles
Leads up and up, where the pilgrim hobbles
Past a score or so of neat repositories,
Where you stop and breathe and tell your rosaries
To the shrined terra-cotta mannikins,
That expound with the liveliest quirks and grins
Known texts of Scripture. But no long stay
Should the pilgrim make upon his way;
But as means to the end these shrines stand here
To guide to something holier,
The church on the hill top.
Your heaven's so
With a path leading up to it past a row
Of votary Priapulids;
At each you pause and tell your beads
Along the quintuple strings of sense:
Then on, to face Heaven's eminence,
New stimulated, new inspired.

FORMAL VERSES

I

MOTHER of all my future memories,
Mistress of my new life, which but to-day
Began, when I beheld, deep in your eyes,
My own love mirrored and the warm surprise
Of the first kiss swept both our souls away,
Your love has freed me; for I was oppressed
By my own devil, whose unwholesome breath
Tarnished my youth, leaving to me at best
Age lacking comfort of a soul at rest
And weariness beyond the hope of death.

II

AH, those were days of silent happiness!
I never spoke, and had no need to speak,
While on the windy down-land, cheek by cheek,
The slow-driven sun beheld us. Each caress
Had oratory for its own defence;
And when I kissed or felt her fingers press,
I envied not Demosthenes his Greek,
Nor Tully for his Latin eloquence.

PERILS OF THE SMALL HOURS.

WHEN life burns low as the fire in the grate
And all the evening's books are read,
I sit alone, save for the dead
And the lovers I have grown to hate.
But all at once the narrow gloom
Of hatred and despair expands

In tenderness: thought stretches hands
To welcome to the midnight room
Another presence:—a memory
Of how last year in the sunlit field,
Laughing, you suddenly revealed
Beauty in immortality.
For so it is; a gesture strips
Life bare of all its make-believe.
All unprepared we may receive
Our casual apocalypse.
Sheer beauty, then you seemed to stir
Unbodied soul; soul sleeps to night,
And love comes, dimming spirit's sight,
When body plays interpreter.

RETURN TO AN OLD HOME

IN this wood—how the hazels have grown!—
I left a treasure all my own
Of childish kisses and laughter and pain;
Left, till I might come back again
To take from the familiar earth
My hoarded secret and count its worth.
And all the spider-work of the years,
All the time-spun gossamers,
Dewed with each succeeding spring;
And the piled up leaves the Autumns fling
To the sweet corruption of death on death....
At the sudden stir of my spirit's breath
All scattered. New and fair and bright
As ever it was, before my sight
The treasure lay, and nothing missed.
So having handled all and kissed,
I put them back, adding one new
And precious memory of you.

The end