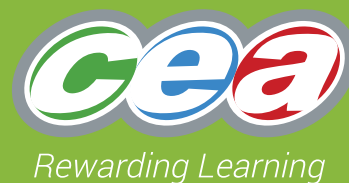


GCE



CCEA GCE A2 Support Material
English Literature
POETRY ANTHOLOGY

For use with the Specification for first teaching from Autumn 2016
and first examination in Summer 2018

Version 2: Issued - September 2017

GCE ENGLISH LITERATURE

A2 Level

Poetry Anthology

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THE ANNIVERSARY

All kings, and all their favourites,
All glory of honours, beauties, wits,
The sun itself, which makes times, as they pass,
Is elder by a year, now, than it was
When thou and I first one another saw:
All other things, to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay;
This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday,
Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

Two graves must hide thine and my corse,
If one might, death were no divorce.
Alas, as well as other princes, we
(Who prince enough in one another be)
Must leave at last in death, these eyes and ears,
Oft fed with true oaths, and with sweet salt tears;
But souls where nothing dwells but love
(All other thoughts being inmates) then shall prove
This, or a love increased there above,
When bodies to their graves, souls from their graves remove.

And then we shall be thoroughly blest,
But we no more, than all the rest.
Here upon earth, we're kings, and none but we
Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be;
Who is so safe as we? Where none can do
Treason to us, except one of us two.
True and false fears let us refrain,
Let us love nobly, and live, and add again
Years and years unto years, till we attain
To write threescore, this is the second of our reign.

JOHN DONNE

THE FLEA

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
Me it sucked first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be;
Confess it, this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,
 Yet this enjoys before it woo,
 And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
 And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, nay more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, we're met,
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
 Though use make you apt to kill me,
 Let not to this, self-murder added be,
 And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?
In what could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou
Find'st not thyself, nor me, the weaker now;
 'Tis true, then learn how false, fears be;
 Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,
 Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

THE GOOD MORROW

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then,
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room, an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres
Without sharp north, without declining west?
What ever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

JOHN DONNE

A JET RING SENT

Thou art not so black, as my heart,
Nor half so brittle, as her heart, thou art;
What wouldst thou say? Shall both our properties by thee be spoke,
Nothing more endless, nothing sooner broke?

Marriage rings are not of this stuff;
Oh why should aught less precious, or less tough
Figure our loves? Except in thy name thou have bid it say,
I am cheap, and naught but fashion, fling me away.

Yet stay with me since thou art come,
Circle this finger's top, which didst her thumb.
Be justly proud, and gladly safe, that thou dost dwell with me,
She that, oh, broke her faith, would soon break thee.

THE SUN RISING

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school-boys, and sour prentices,
Go tell court-huntsmen that the King will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices;
Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams, so reverend and strong
Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long:
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,
Whether both th'Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

She's all states, and all princes, I,
Nothing else is.
Princes do but play us; compared to this,
All honour's mimic; all wealth alchemy.
Thou sun art half as happy'as we, –
In that the world's contracted thus;
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere.

JOHN DONNE

THE TRIPLE FOOL

I am two fools, I know,
For loving, and for saying so
In whining poetry;
But where's that wiseman, that would not be I,
If she would not deny?
Then as th'earth's inward narrow crooked lanes
Do purge sea water's fretful salt away,
I thought, if I could draw my pains
Through rhyme's vexation, I should them allay.
Grief brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,
For, he tames it, that fetters it in verse.

But when I have done so,
Some man, his art and voice to show,
Doth set and sing my pain,
And, by delighting many, frees again
Grief, which verse did restrain.
To love and grief tribute of verse belongs,
But not of such as pleases when 'tis read,
Both are increased by such songs:
For both their triumphs so are published,
And I, which was two fools, do so grow three;
Who are a little wise, the best fools be.

A VALEDICTION: FORBIDDING MOURNING

As virtuous men pass mildly away,
 And whisper to their souls, to go,
 Whilst some of their sad friends do say,
 The breath goes now, and some say, no:

So let us melt, and make no noise,
 No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,
 'Twere profanation of our joys
 To tell the laity our love.

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,
 Men reckon what it did and meant,
 But trepidation of the spheres,
 Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love
 (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
 Absence, because it doth remove
 Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love, so much refined,
 That ourselves know not what it is,
 Inter-assured of the mind,
 Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
 Though I must go, endure not yet
 A breach, but an expansion,
 Like gold to aery thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
 As stiff twin compasses are two,
 Thy soul the fixed foot, makes no show
 To move, but doth, if th'other do.

And though it in the centre sit,
 Yet when the other far doth roam,
 It leans, and hearkens after it,
 And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must
 Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
 Thy firmness makes my circle just,
 And makes me end, where I begun.

JOHN DONNE

ELEGY 5 HIS PICTURE

Here take my picture, though I bid farewell.
Thine, in my heart, where my soul dwells, shall dwell.
'Tis like me now, but I dead, 'twill be more
When we are shadows both, than 'twas before.
When weather-beaten I come back; my hand,
Perhaps with rude oars torn, or sun-beams tanned,
My face and breast of haircloth, and my head
With care's rash sudden hoariness o'erspread,
My body's a sack of bones, broken within,
And powder's blue stains scattered on my skin;
If rival fools tax thee to've loved a man,
So foul, and coarse, as oh, I may seem then,
This shall say what I was: and thou shalt say,
Do his hurts reach me? Doth my worth decay?
Or do they reach his judging mind, that he
Should now love less, what he did love to see?
That which in him was fair and delicate,
Was but the milk, which in love's childish state
Did nurse it: who now is grown strong enough
To feed on that, which to disused tastes seems tough.

THOU HAST MADE ME

Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?
Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste,
I run to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday;
I dare not move my dim eyes any way,
Despair behind, and death before doth cast
Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste
By sin in it, which it towards hell doth weigh;
Only thou art above, and when towards thee
By thy leave I can look, I rise again;
But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
That not one hour myself I can sustain;
Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art,
And thou like adamant draw mine iron heart.

JOHN DONNE

I AM A LITTLE WORLD

I am a little world made cunningly
Of elements, and an angelic sprite,
But black sin hath betrayed to endless night
My world's both parts, and oh, both parts must die.
You which beyond that heaven which was most high
Have found new spheres, and of new lands can write,
Pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
Drown my world with my weeping earnestly,
Or wash it if it must be drowned no more:
But oh it must be burnt! alas the fire
Of lust and envy have burnt it heretofore,
And made it fouler; let their flames retire,
And burn me O Lord, with a fiery zeal
Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heal.

THIS IS MY PLAY'S LAST SCENE

This is my play's last scene, here heavens appoint
My pilgrimage's last mile; and my race
Idly, yet quickly run, hath this last pace,
My span's last inch, my minute's latest point,
And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoint
My body, and soul, and I shall sleep a space,
But my 'ever-waking part shall see that face,
Whose fear already shakes my every joint:
Then, as my soul, to' heaven her first seat, takes flight,
And earth-born body, in the earth shall dwell,
So, fall my sins, that all may have their right,
To where they're bred, and would press me, to hell.
Impute me righteous, thus purged of evil,
For thus I leave the world, the flesh, the devil.

DEATH BE NOT PROUD

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so;
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me;
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and souls delivery.
Thou'art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

SPIT IN MY FACE YE JEWS, AND PIERCE MY SIDE

Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side,
Buffet, and scoff, scourge, and crucify me,
For I have sinned, and sinned, and only he,
Who could do no iniquity, hath died:
But by my death can not be satisfied
My sins, which pass the Jews' impiety:
They killed once an inglorious man, but I
Crucify him daily, being now glorified.
Oh let me then, his strange love still admire:
Kings pardon, but he bore our punishment.
And Jacob came clothed in vile harsh attire
But to supplant, and with gainful intent:
God clothed himself in vile man's flesh, that so
He might be weak enough to suffer woe.

JOHN DONNE

BATTER MY HEART

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for, you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me'and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurpt town, to another due,
Labour to'admit you, but oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue,
Yet dearly'I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy,
Divorce me'untie, or break that knot again.
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you'enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

SINCE SHE WHOM I LOVED HATH PAID HER LAST DEBT

Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt
To nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her soul early into heaven ravishèd,
Wholly in heavenly things my mind is set.
Here the admiring her my mind did whet
To seek thee God; so streams do show the head;
But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet.
But why should I beg more love, when as thou
Dost woo my soul, for hers offering all thine:
And dost not only fear lest I allow
My love to saints and angels, things divine,
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Lest the world, flesh, yea Devil put thee out.

A HYMN TO GOD THE FATHER

I

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive those sins, through which I run,
And do run still: though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For, I have more.

II

Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I've won
Others to sin? and, made my sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year, or two: but wallowed in, a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

III

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by thy self, that at my death thy son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, thou hast done,
I fear no more.

WILLIAM BLAKE

THE ECCHOING GREEN

The Sun does arise,
And make happy the skies;
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring;
The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around
To the bells' chearful sound,
While our sports shall be seen
On the Ecchoing Green.

Old John with white hair
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak
Among the old folk.
They laugh at our play,
And soon they all say:
'Such, such were the joys
When we all, girls & boys,
In our youth-time were seen
On the Ecchoing Green.'

Till the little ones weary,
No more can be merry;
The sun does descend,
And our sports have an end.
Round the laps of their mothers
Many sisters and brothers,
Like birds in their nest,
Are ready for rest,
And sport no more seen
On the darkening Green.

THE LAMB

Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life & bid thee feed
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, wooly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb.
He is meek & he is mild;
He became a little child.
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb, God bless thee!
Little Lamb, God bless thee!

WILLIAM BLAKE

THE LITTLE BLACK BOY

My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
White as an angel is the English child,
But I am black, as if bereav'd of light.

My mother taught me underneath a tree,
And sitting down before the heat of day,
She took me on her lap and kissed me,
And pointing to the east, began to say:

“Look on the rising sun: there God does live,
And gives his light and gives his heat away;
And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive
Comfort in morning, joy in the noon day.

And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love;
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear,
The cloud will vanish; we shall hear his voice,
Saying: ‘Come out from the grove, my love & care,
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice.’ ”

Thus did my mother say, and kissed me.
And thus I say to little English boy:
When I from black and he from white cloud free,
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy,

I'll shade him from the heat, till he can bear
To lean in joy upon our father's knee;
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him, and he will then love me.

THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER (SONGS OF INNOCENCE)

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry “weep! ’weep! ’weep! ’weep!”
So your chimneys I sweep, & in soot I sleep.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curl’d like a lamb’s back, was shav’d; so I said,
“Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head’s bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.”

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned & Jack,
Were all of them lock’d up in coffins of black.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open’d the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind;
And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father, & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho’ the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

WILLIAM BLAKE

HOLY THURSDAY (SONGS OF INNOCENCE)

'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
The children walking two & two, in red & blue & green,
Grey-headed beards walk'd before, with wands as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames' waters flow.

O what a multitude they seem'd, these flowers of London town!
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own.
The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,
Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song,
Or like harmonious thunders the seats of heaven among.
Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor;
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door.

INFANT JOY

"I have no name;
I am but two days old."
What shall I call thee?
"I happy am,
Joy is my name."
Sweet joy befall thee!

Pretty joy!
Sweet joy but two days old,
Sweet joy I call thee:
Thou dost smile,
I sing the while,
Sweet joy befall thee!

INTRODUCTION (SONGS OF EXPERIENCE)

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk'd among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed Soul,
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might controll
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!

“O Earth, O Earth return!
Arise from out the dewy grass;
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumberous mass.

Turn away no more.
Why wilt thou turn away?
The starry floor,
The wat'ry shore,
Is giv'n thee till the break of day.”

WILLIAM BLAKE

HOLY THURSDAY (SONGS OF EXPERIENCE)

Is this a holy thing to see
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduc'd to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine,
And their fields are bleak & bare,
And their ways are fill'd with thorns;
It is eternal winter there.

For where-e'er the sun does shine,
And where-e'er the rain does fall,
Babe can never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appall.

THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER (SONGS OF EXPERIENCE)

A little black thing among the snow,
Crying "'weep! 'weep!" in notes of woe!
"Where are thy father & mother, say?"
"They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil'd among the winter's snow,
They clothed me in clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy & dance & sing,
They think they have done me no injury;
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King,
Who make up a heaven of our misery."

THE TYGER

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? What the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

WILLIAM BLAKE

THE GARDEN OF LOVE

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore;

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys & desires.

THE LITTLE VAGABOND

Dear Mother, dear Mother, the Church is cold,
But the Ale-house is healthy & pleasant & warm;
Besides I can tell where I am used well,
Such usage in heaven will never do well.

But if at the Church they would give us some Ale,
And a pleasant fire our souls to regale,
We'd sing and we'd pray all the live-long day,
Nor ever once wish from the Church to stray.

Then the Parson might preach & drink & sing,
And we'd be as happy as birds in the spring;
And modest dame Lurch, who is always at Church,
Would not have bandy children nor fasting nor birch.

And God, like a father rejoicing to see
His children as pleasant and happy as he,
Would have no more quarrel with the Devil or the Barrel,
But kiss him & give him both drink and apparel.

LONDON

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear:

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every black'ning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls;

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

INFANT SORROW

My mother groan'd, my father wept.
Into the dangerous world I leapt:
Helpless, naked, piping loud,
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my father's hands,
Striving against my swadling bands,
Bound and weary I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.

WILLIAM BLAKE

THE SCHOOL BOY

I love to rise in a summer morn
When the birds sing on every tree;
The distant huntsman winds his horn,
And the sky-lark sings with me.
O! what sweet company.

But to go to school in a summer morn,
O! it drives all joy away;
Under a cruel eye outworn,
The little ones spend the day
In sighing and dismay.

Ah! then at times I drooping sit,
And spend many an anxious hour,
Nor in my book can I take delight,
Nor sit in learning's bower,
Worn thro' with the dreary shower.

How can the bird that is born for joy
Sit in a cage and sing?
How can a child when fears annoy
But droop his tender wing,
And forget his youthful spring?

O! father & mother, if buds are nip'd
And blossoms blown away,
And if the tender plants are strip'd
Of their joy in the springing day
By sorrow and care's dismay,

How shall the summer arise in joy,
Or the summer fruits appear?
Or how shall we gather what griefs destroy,
Or bless the mellowing year
When the blasts of winter appear?

ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S HOMER

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific — and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise —
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

JOHN KEATS

SLEEP AND POETRY

As I lay in my bed slepe full unmete
Was unto me, but why that I ne might
Rest I ne wist, for there n'as erthly wight
(As I suppose) had more of hertis ese
Than I, for I n'ad sicknesse nor dise.

— CHAUCER

What is more gentle than a wind in summer?
What is more soothing than the pretty hummer
That stays one moment in an open flower,
And buzzes cheerily from bower to bower?
What is more tranquil than a musk-rose blowing
In a green island, far from all men's knowing?
More healthful than the leafiness of dales?
More secret than a nest of nightingales?
More serene than Cordelia's countenance?
More full of visions than a high romance?
What, but thee, Sleep? Soft closer of our eyes!
Low murmurer of tender lullabies!
Light hoverer around our happy pillows!
Wreather of poppy buds, and weeping willows!
Silent entangler of a beauty's tresses!
Most happy listener! when the morning blesses
Thee for enlivening all the cheerful eyes
That glance so brightly at the new sun-rise.

But what is higher beyond thought than thee?
Fresher than berries of a mountain tree?
More strange, more beautiful, more smooth, more regal,
Than wings of swans, than doves, than dim-seen eagle?
What is it? And to what shall I compare it?
It has a glory, and naught else can share it:
The thought thereof is awful, sweet and holy,
Chasing away all worldliness and folly,
Coming sometimes like fearful claps of thunder,
Or the low rumblings earth's regions under;
And sometimes like a gentle whispering
Of all the secrets of some wondrous thing
That breathes about us in the vacant air;
So that we look around with prying stare,
Perhaps to see shapes of light, aerial limning,
And catch soft floatings from a faint-heard hymning;
To see the laurel wreath, on high suspended,

That is to crown our name when life is ended.
Sometimes it gives a glory to the voice,
And from the heart up-springs, rejoice! rejoice!
Sounds which will reach the Framer of all things,
And die away in ardent mutterings.

No one who once the glorious sun has seen,
And all the clouds, and felt his bosom clean
For his great Maker's presence, but must know
What 'tis I mean, and feel his being glow:
Therefore no insult will I give his spirit,
By telling what he sees from native merit.

O Poesy! for thee I hold my pen,
That am not yet a glorious denizen
Of thy wide heaven – Should I rather kneel
Upon some mountain-top until I feel
A glowing splendour round about me hung,
And echo back the voice of thine own tongue?
O Poesy! For thee I grasp my pen,
That am not yet a glorious denizen
Of thy wide heaven; yet, to my ardent prayer,
Yield from thy sanctuary some clear air,
Smooth'd for intoxication by the breath
Of flowering bays, that I may die a death
Of luxury, and my young spirit follow
The morning sunbeams to the great Apollo,
Like a fresh sacrifice; or, if I can bear
The o'erwhelming sweets, 'twill bring me to the fair
Visions of all places: a bowery nook
Will be elysium – an eternal book
Whence I may copy many a lovely saying
About the leaves, and flowers – about the playing
Of nymphs in woods and fountains; and the shade
Keeping a silence round a sleeping maid;
And many a verse from so strange influence
That we must ever wonder how, and whence
It came. Also imaginings will hover
Round my fire-side, and haply there discover
Vistas of solemn beauty, where I'd wander
In happy silence, like the clear Meander
Through its lone vales; and where I found a spot
Of awfuller shade, or an enchanted grot,
Or a green hill o'erspread with chequer'd dress
Of flowers, and fearful from its loveliness,

JOHN KEATS

Write on my tablets all that was permitted,
All that was for our human senses fitted.
Then the events of this wide world I'd seize
Like a strong giant, and my spirit tease,
Till at its shoulders it should proudly see
Wings to find out an immortality.

Stop and consider! Life is but a day;
A fragile dewdrop on its perilous way
From a tree's summit; a poor Indian's sleep
While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep
Of Montmorenci. Why so sad a moan?
Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown;
The reading of an ever-changing tale;
The light uplifting of a maiden's veil;
A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air;
A laughing schoolboy, without grief or care,
Riding the springy branches of an elm.

O for ten years, that I may overwhelm
Myself in poesy! so I may do the deed
That my own soul has to itself decreed.
Then I will pass the countries that I see
In long perspective, and continually
Taste their pure fountains. First the realm I'll pass
Of Flora, and old Pan: sleep in the grass,
Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,
And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;
Catch the white-handed nymphs in shady places,
To woo sweet kisses from averted faces, –
Play with their fingers, touch their shoulders white
Into a pretty shrinking with a bite
As hard as lips can make it: till agreed,
A lovely tale of human life we'll read.
And one will teach a tame dove how it best
May fan the cool air gently o'er my rest;
Another, bending o'er her nimble tread,
Will set a green robe floating round her head,
And still will dance with ever varied ease,
Smiling upon the flowers and the trees:
Another will entice me on, and on
Through almond blossoms and rich cinnamon,
Till in the bosom of a leafy world
We rest in silence, like two gems upcurl'd
In the recesses of a pearly shell.

And can I ever bid these joys farewell?
 Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
 Where I may find the agonies, the strife
 Of human hearts: for lo! I see afar,
 O'er-sailing the blue cragginess, a car
 And steeds with streamy manes – the charioteer
 Looks out upon the winds with glorious fear:
 And now the numerous tramplings quiver lightly
 Along a huge cloud's ridge; and now with sprightly
 Wheel downward come they into fresher skies,
 Tipt round with silver from the sun's bright eyes,
 Still downward with capacious whirl they glide;
 And now I see them on the green hill's side
 In breezy rest among the nodding stalks.
 The charioteer with wondrous gesture talks
 To the trees and mountains; and there soon appear
 Shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear,
 Passing along before a dusky space
 Made by some mighty oaks: as they would chase
 Some ever-fleeting music, on they sweep.
 Lo! how they murmur, laugh, and smile, and weep:
 Some with upholden hand and mouth severe;
 Some with their faces muffled to the ear
 Between their arms; some, clear in youthful bloom,
 Go glad and smilingly athwart the gloom;
 Some looking back, and some with upward gaze;
 Yes, thousands in a thousand different ways
 Flit onward – now a lovely wreath of girls
 Dancing their sleek hair into tangled curls;
 And now broad wings. Most awfully intent
 The driver of those steeds is forward bent,
 And seems to listen: O that I might know
 All that he writes with such a hurrying glow!

The visions all are fled – the car is fled
 Into the light of heaven, and in their stead
 A sense of real things comes doubly strong,
 And, like a muddy stream, would bear along
 My soul to nothingness: but I will strive
 Against all doubtings, and will keep alive
 The thought of that same chariot, and the strange
 Journey it went.

Is there so small a range
 In the present strength of manhood, that the high

JOHN KEATS

Imagination cannot freely fly
 As she was wont of old? prepare her steeds,
 Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds
 Upon the clouds? Has she not shown us all?
 From the clear space of ether, to the small
 Breath of new buds unfolding? From the meaning
 Of Jove's large eyebrow, to the tender greening
 Of April meadows? Here her altar shone,
 E'en in this isle; and who could paragon
 The fervid choir that lifted up a noise
 Of harmony, to where it aye will poise
 Its mighty self of convoluting sound,
 Huge as a planet, and like that roll round,
 Eternally around a dizzy void?
 Ay, in those days the Muses were nigh cloy'd
 With honours; nor had any other care
 Than to sing out and soothe their wavy hair.

Could all this be forgotten? Yes, a schism
 Nurtured by foppery and barbarism
 Made great Apollo blush for this his land.
 Men were thought wise who could not understand
 His glories; with a puling infant's force
 They sway'd about upon a rocking-horse,
 And thought it Pegasus. Ah, dismal-soul'd!
 The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd
 Its gathering waves – ye felt it not. The blue
 Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew
 Of summer nights collected still to make
 The morning precious: beauty was awake!
 Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead
 To things ye knew not of, — were closely wed
 To musty laws lined out with wretched rule
 And compass vile; so that ye taught a school
 Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit,
 Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,
 Their verses tallied. Easy was the task:
 A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
 Of Poesy. Ill-fated, impious race!
 That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,
 And did not know it, —no, they went about,
 Holding a poor, decrepit standard out,
 Mark'd with most flimsy mottoes, and in large
 The name of one Boileau!

O ye whose charge
 It is to hover round our pleasant hills!
 Whose congregated majesty so fills
 My boundly reverence, that I cannot trace
 Your hallow'd names, in this unholy place,
 So near those common folk; did not their shames
 Affright you? Did our old lamenting Thames
 Delight you? Did ye never cluster round
 Delicious Avon, with a mournful sound,
 And weep? Or did ye wholly bid adieu
 To regions where no more the laurel grew?
 Or did ye stay to give a welcoming
 To some lone spirits who could proudly sing
 Their youth away, and die? 'Twas even so.
 But let me think away those times of woe:
 Now 'tis a fairer season; ye have breathed
 Rich benedictions o'er us; ye have wreathed
 Fresh garlands: for sweet music has been heard
 In many places; – some has been upstirr'd
 From out its crystal dwelling in a lake,
 By a swan's ebon bill; from a thick brake,
 Nested and quiet in a valley mild,
 Bubbles a pipe; fine sounds are floating wild
 About the earth: happy are ye and glad.

These things are doubtless; yet in truth we've had
 Strange thunders from the potency of song;
 Mingled indeed with what is sweet and strong,
 From majesty: but in clear truth the themes
 Are ugly clubs, the Poets Polyphemes
 Disturbing the grand sea. A drainless shower
 Of light is poesy; 'tis the supreme of power;
 'Tis might half slumb'ring on its own right arm:
 The very archings of her eyelids charm
 A thousand willing agents to obey,
 And still she governs with the mildest sway:
 But strength alone, though of the Muses born,
 Is like a fallen angel: trees uptorn,
 Darkness, and worms, and shrouds, and sepulchres
 Delight it; for it feeds upon the burrs
 And thorns of life; forgetting the great end
 Of poesy, that it should be a friend
 To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.

JOHN KEATS

Yet I rejoice: a myrtle fairer than
 E'er grew in Paphos, from the bitter weeds
 Lifts its sweet head into the air, and feeds
 A silent space with ever-sprouting green.
 All tenderest birds there find a pleasant screen,
 Creep through the shade with jaunty fluttering,
 Nibble the little cupped flowers and sing.
 Then let us clear away the choking thorns
 From round its gentle stem; let the young fawns,
 Yeaned in after-times, when we are flown,
 Find a fresh sward beneath it, overgrown
 With simple flowers: let there nothing be
 More boisterous than a lover's bended knee;
 Nought more ungentle than the placid look
 Of one who leans upon a closed book;
 Nought more untroubled than the grassy slopes
 Between two hills. All hail, delightful hopes!
 As she was wont, th' imagination
 Into most lovely labyrinths will be gone,
 And they shall be accounted poet kings
 Who simply tell the most heart-easing things.
 Oh may these joys be ripe before I die!

Will not some say that I presumptuously
 Have spoken? that from hastening disgrace
 'Twere better far to hide my foolish face?
 That whining boyhood should with reverence bow
 Ere the dread thunderbolt could reach? How!
 If I do hide myself, it sure shall be
 In the very fane, the light of Poesy:
 If I do fall, at least I will be laid
 Beneath the silence of a poplar shade;
 And over me the grass shall be smooth shaven;
 And there shall be a kind memorial graven.
 But off, Despondence! Miserable bane!
 They should not know thee, who athirst to gain
 A noble end, are thirsty every hour.
 What though I am not wealthy in the dower
 Of spanning wisdom; though I do not know
 The shiftings of the mighty winds that blow
 Hither and thither all the changing thoughts
 Of man: though no great minist'ring reason sorts
 Out the dark mysteries of human souls
 To clear conceiving: yet there ever rolls
 A vast idea before me, and I glean

Therefrom my liberty; thence too I've seen
 The end and aim of Poesy. 'Tis clear
 As anything most true; as that the year
 Is made of the four seasons – manifest
 As a large cross, some old cathedral's crest,
 Lifted to the white clouds. Therefore should I
 Be but the essence of deformity,
 A coward, did my very eye-lids wink
 At speaking out what I have dared to think.
 Ah! rather let me like a madman run
 Over some precipice; let the hot sun
 Melt my Dedalian wings, and drive me down
 Convulsed and headlong! Stay! an inward frown
 Of conscience bids me be more calm awhile.
 An ocean dim, sprinkled with many an isle,
 Spreads awfully before me. How much toil!
 How many days! what desperate turmoil!
 Ere I can have explored its widenesses.
 Ah, what a task! upon my bended knees,
 I could unsay those – No, impossible!
 Impossible!

For sweet relief I'll dwell
 On humbler thoughts, and let this strange assay
 Begun in gentleness die so away.
 E'en now all tumult from my bosom fades:
 I turn full-hearted to the friendly aids
 That smooth the path of honour; brotherhood,
 And friendliness, the nurse of mutual good.
 The hearty grasp that sends a pleasant sonnet
 Into the brain ere one can think upon it;
 The silence when some rhymes are coming out;
 And when they're come, the very pleasant rout:
 The message certain to be done to-morrow.
 'Tis perhaps as well that it should be to borrow
 Some precious book from out its snug retreat,
 To cluster round it when we next shall meet.
 Scarce can I scribble on: for lovely airs
 Are fluttering round the room like doves in pairs;
 Many delights of that glad day recalling,
 When first my senses caught their tender falling.
 And with these airs come forms of elegance
 Stooping their shoulders o'er a horse's prance,
 Careless, and grand – fingers soft and round
 Parting luxuriant curls; – and the swift bound

JOHN KEATS

Of Bacchus from his chariot, when his eye
 Made Ariadne's cheek look blushing.
 Thus I remember all the pleasant flow
 Of words at opening a portfolio.

Things such as these are ever harbingers
 To trains of peaceful images: the stirs
 Of a swan's neck unseen among the rushes;
 A linnet starting all about the bushes:
 A butterfly, with golden wings broad parted,
 Nestling a rose, convulsed as though it smarted
 With over pleasure – many, many more,
 Might I indulge at large in all my store
 Of luxuries: yet I must not forget
 Sleep, quiet with his poppy coronet:
 For what there may be worthy in these rhymes
 I partly owe to him: and thus, the chimes
 Of friendly voices had just given place
 To as sweet a silence, when I 'gan retrace
 The pleasant day, upon a couch at ease.
 It was a poet's house who keeps the keys
 Of pleasure's temple. Round about were hung
 The glorious features of the bards who sung
 In other ages – cold and sacred busts
 Smiled at each other. Happy he who trusts
 To clear Futurity his darling fame!
 Then there were fauns and satyrs taking aim
 At swelling apples with a frisky leap
 And reaching fingers, 'mid a luscious heap
 Of vine-leaves. Then there rose to view a fane
 Of liny marble, and thereto a train
 Of nymphs approaching fairly o'er the sward:
 One, loveliest, holding her white hand toward
 The dazzling sun-rise; two sisters sweet
 Bending their graceful figures till they meet
 Over the trippings of a little child:
 And some are hearing, eagerly, the wild
 Thrilling liquidity of dewy piping.
 See, in another picture, nymphs are wiping
 Cherishingly Diana's timorous limbs;—
 A fold of lawny mantle dabbling swims
 At the bath's edge, and keeps a gentle motion
 With the subsiding crystal: as when ocean
 Heaves calmly its broad swelling smoothness o'er
 Its rocky marge, and balances once more

The patient weeds, that now unshent by foam
Feel all about their undulating home.

Sappho's meek head was there half smiling down
At nothing; just as though the earnest frown
Of over thinking had that moment gone
From off her brow, and left her all alone.

Great Alfred's too, with anxious, pitying eyes,
As if he always listen'd to the sighs
Of the goaded world; and Kosciusko's, worn
By horrid suffrance – mightily forlorn.

Petrarch, outstepping from the shady green,
Starts at the sight of Laura; nor can wean
His eyes from her sweet face. Most happy they!
For over them was seen a free display
Of out-spread wings, and from between them shone
The face of Poesy: from off her throne
She overlook'd things that I scarce could tell.
The very sense of where I was might well
Keep Sleep aloof: but more than that there came
Thought after thought to nourish up the flame
Within my breast; so that the morning light
Surprised me even from a sleepless night;
And up I rose refresh'd, and glad, and gay,
Resolving to begin that very day
These lines; and howsoever they be done,
I leave them as a father does his son.

JOHN KEATS

THE EVE OF ST. AGNES

I

St. Agnes' Eve — Ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl for all its feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers while he told
His rosary and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

II

His prayer he saith, this patient, holy man:
Then takes his lamp, and riseth from his knees,
And back returneth, meagre, barefoot, wan,
Along the chapel aisle by slow degrees:
The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze,
Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails:
Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries,
He passeth by and his weak spirit fails
To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.

III

Northward he turneth through a little door,
And scarce three steps, ere Music's golden tongue
Flatter'd to tears this aged man and poor.
But no—already had his death-bell rung;
The joys of all his life were said and sung;
His was harsh penance on St. Agnes' Eve:
Another way he went, and soon among
Rough ashes sat he for his soul's reprieve,
And all night kept awake, for sinners' sake to grieve.

IV

That ancient Beadsman heard the prelude soft;
And so it chanced, for many a door was wide,
From hurry to and fro. Soon, up aloft,
The silver, snarling trumpets 'gan to chide:
The level chambers, ready with their pride,

Were glowing to receive a thousand guests:
 The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,
 Star'd, where upon their heads the cornice rests,
 With hair blown back, and wings put crosswise on their breasts.

V

At length burst in the argent revelry,
 With plume, tiara, and all rich array,
 Numerous as shadows haunting faerily
 The brain, new-stuff'd in youth with triumphs gay
 Of old romance. These let us wish away,
 And turn, sole-thoughted, to one Lady there,
 Whose heart had brooded, all that wintry day,
 On love, and wing'd St. Agnes' saintly care,
 As she had heard old dames full many times declare.

VI

They told her how, upon St. Agnes' Eve,
 Young virgins might have visions of delight,
 And soft adorings from their loves receive
 Upon the honey'd middle of the night,
 If ceremonies due they did aright;
 As, supperless to bed they must retire,
 And couch supine their beauties, lily white;
 Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require
 Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire.

VII

Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline:
 The music, yearning like a God in pain,
 She scarcely heard: her maiden eyes divine,
 Fix'd on the floor, saw many a sweeping train
 Pass by – she heeded not at all: in vain
 Came many a tiptoe, amorous cavalier,
 And back retired; not cool'd by high disdain,
 But she saw not: her heart was elsewhere:
 She sigh'd for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year.

JOHN KEATS

VIII

She danced along with vague, regardless eyes,
Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short:
The hallow'd hour was near at hand: she sighs
Amid the timbrels, and the throng'd resort
Of whisperers in anger, or in sport;
'Mid looks of love, defiance, hate, and scorn,
Hoodwink'd with faery fancy; all amort,
Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn,
And all the bliss to be before to-morrow morn.

IX

So, purposing each moment to retire,
She linger'd still. Meantime, across the moors
Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire
For Madeline. Beside the portal doors,
Buttress'd from moonlight, stands he, and implores
All saints to give him sight of Madeline,
But for one moment in the tedious hours,
That he might gaze and worship all unseen;
Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss – in sooth such things have been.

X

He ventures in: let no buzz'd whisper tell,
All eyes be muffled, or a hundred swords
Will storm his heart, Love's fev'rous citadel:
For him, those chambers held barbarian hordes,
Hyena foemen, and hot-blooded lords,
Whose very dogs would execrations howl
Against his lineage: not one breast affords
Him any mercy in that mansion foul,
Save one old beldame, weak in body and in soul.

XI

Ah, happy chance! the aged creature came,
Shuffling along with ivory-headed wand,
To where he stood, hid from the torch's flame,
Behind a broad hall-pillar, far beyond
The sound of merriment and chorus bland.
He startled her; but soon she knew his face,
And grasp'd his fingers in her palsied hand,

Saying, 'Mercy, Porphyro! hie thee from this place;
They are all here to-night, the whole blood-thirsty race!

XII

'Get hence! get hence! there's dwarfish Hildebrand;
He had a fever late, and in the fit
He cursèd thee and thine, both house and land:
Then there's that old Lord Maurice, not a whit
More tame for his grey hairs – Alas me! flit!
Flit like a ghost away.' - 'Ah, Gossip dear,
We're safe enough; here in this arm-chair sit,
And tell me how' - 'Good saints! Not here, not here;
Follow me, child, or else these stones will be thy bier.'

XIII

He follow'd through a lowly archèd way,
Brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume;
And as she mutter'd 'Well-a-well-a-day!
He found him in a little moonlight room,
Pale, latticed, chill and silent as a tomb.
'Now tell me where is Madeline,' said he,
'O tell me, Angela, by the holy loom
Which none but secret sisterhood may see,
When they St. Agnes' wool are weaving piously.'

XIV

'St. Agnes! Ah! It is St. Agnes' Eve—
Yet men will murder upon holy days.
Thou must hold water in a witch's sieve,
And be liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays
To venture so: it fills me with amaze
To see thee, Porphyro! – St. Agnes' Eve!
God's help! my lady fair the conjuror plays
This very night: good angels her deceive!
But let me laugh awhile, I've mickle time to grieve.'

XV

Feebly she laugheth in the languid moon,
While Porphyro upon her face doth look,
Like puzzled urchin on an aged crone
Who keepeth closed a wondrous riddle-book,

JOHN KEATS

As spectacled she sits in chimney nook.
But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told
His lady's purpose; and he scarce could brook
Tears, at the thought of those enchantments cold,
And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old.

XVI

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,
Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart
Made purple riot: then doth he propose
A stratagem, that makes the beldame start:
'A cruel man and impious thou art!
Sweet lady! Let her pray, and sleep, and dream
Alone with her good angels, far apart
From wicked men like thee. Go, go! — I deem
Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem.'

XVII

'I will not harm her, by all saints I swear!
Quoth Porphyro: 'O may I ne'er find grace
When my weak voice shall whisper its last prayer,
If one of her soft ringlets I displace,
Or look with ruffian passion in her face.
Good Angela, believe me, by these tears;
Or I will, even in a moment's space,
Awake, with horrid shout, my foemen's ears,
And beard them, though they be more fang'd than wolves and bears.'

XVIII

'Ah! why wilt thou affright a feeble soul?
A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing,
Whose passing-bell may ere the midnight toll;
Whose prayers for thee, each morn and evening,
Were never miss'd.' — Thus plaining, doth she bring
A gentler speech from burning Porphyro;
So woeful and of such deep sorrowing,
That Angela gives promise she will do
Whatever he shall wish, betide her weal or woe.

XIX

Which was, to lead him, in close secrecy,
 Even to Madeline's chamber, and there hide
 Him in a closet, of such privacy
 That he might see her beauty unespied,
 And win perhaps that night a peerless bride,
 While legion'd faeries paced the coverlet,
 And pale enchantment held her sleepy-eyed.
 Never on such a night have lovers met,
 Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt.

XX

'It shall be as thou wishest,' said the Dame:
 'All cates and dainties shall be stored there
 Quickly on this feast-night: by the tambour frame
 Her own lute thou wilt see: no time to spare,
 For I am slow and feeble, and scarce dare
 On such a catering trust my dizzy head.
 Wait here, my child, with patience; kneel in prayer
 The while. Ah! Thou must needs the lady wed,
 Or may I never leave my grave among the dead.'

XXI

So saying, she hobbled off with busy fear.
 The lover's endless minutes slowly pass'd;
 The dame return'd and whisper'd in his ear
 To follow her; with aged eyes aghast
 From fright of dim espial. Safe at last
 Through many a dusky gallery, they gain
 The maiden's chamber, silken, hush'd, and chaste;
 Where Porphyro took covert, pleased amain.
 His poor guide hurried back with agues in her brain.

XXII

Her falt'ring hand upon the balustrade,
 Old Angela was feeling for the stair,
 When Madeline, St. Agnes' charmed maid,
 Rose, like a mission'd spirit, unaware:
 With silver taper's light, and pious care,
 She turn'd, and down the aged gossip led
 To a safe level matting. Now prepare,

JOHN KEATS

Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed;
She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove fray'd and fled.

XXIII

Out went the taper as she hurried in;
Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died:
She closed the door, she panted, all akin
To spirits of the air, and visions wide:
No utter'd syllable, or, woe betide!
But to her heart, her heart was voluble,
Paining with eloquence her balmy side;
As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.

XXIV

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imag'ries,
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep damask'd wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

XXV

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for Heaven's grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint:
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven— Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

XXVI

Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
 Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
 Unclasps her warmèd jewels one by one;
 Loosens her fragrant bodice; by degrees
 Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
 Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,
 Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
 In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
 But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

XXVII

Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,
 In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,
 Until the poppièd warmth of sleep oppress'd
 Her soothèd limbs, and soul fatigued away;
 Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day;
 Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain;
 Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
 Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
 As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.

XXVIII

Stol'n to this paradise, and so entranced,
 Porphyro gazed upon her empty dress,
 And listen'd to her breathing, if it chanced
 To wake into a slumberous tenderness;
 Which when he heard, that minute did he bless,
 And breath'd himself: then from the closet crept,
 Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness,
 And over the hush'd carpet, silent, stept,
 And 'tween the curtains peep'd, where, lo! – how fast she slept.

XXIX

Then by the bed-side, where the faded moon
 Made a dim, silver twilight, soft he set
 A table, and, half anguish'd, threw thereon
 A cloth of woven crimson, gold, and jet:—
 O for some drowsy Morphean amulet!
 The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,

JOHN KEATS

The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarionet,
Affray his ears, though but in dying tone:—
The hall-door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.

XXX

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanched linen, smooth and lavender'd,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.

XXXI

These delicacies he heap'd with glowing hand
On golden dishes and in baskets bright
Of wreathed silver: sumptuous they stand
In the retired quiet of the night,
Filling the chilly room with perfume light. —
'And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake!
Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite;
Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes' sake,
Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache.'

XXXII

Thus whispering, his warm, unnerved arm
Sank in her pillow. Shaded was her dream
By the dusk curtains: - 'twas a midnight charm
Impossible to melt as icèd stream:
The lustrous salvers in the moonlight gleam;
Broad golden fringe upon the carpet lies:
It seem'd he never, never could redeem
From such a stedfast spell his lady's eyes;
So mus'd awhile, entoil'd in woofed phantasies.

XXXIII

Awakening up, he took her hollow lute,—
 Tumultuous,—and, in chords that tenderest be,
 He play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute,
 In Provence call'd 'La belle dame sans mercy':
 Close to her ear touching the melody;—
 Wherewith disturb'd, she utter'd a soft moan:
 He ceased—she panted quick—and suddenly
 Her blue affrayèd eyes wide open shone:
 Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone.

XXXIV

Her eyes were open, but she still beheld,
 Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep:
 There was a painful change, that nigh expell'd
 The blisses of her dream so pure and deep,
 At which fair Madeline began to weep,
 And moan forth witless words with many a sigh,
 While still her gaze on Porphyro would keep;
 Who knelt, with joinèd hands and piteous eye,
 Fearing to move or speak, she look'd so dreamingly.

XXXV

'Ah Porphyro!' said she, 'but even now
 Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear,
 Made tunable with every sweetest vow;
 And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear:
 How changed thou art! How pallid, chill, and drear!
 Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,
 Those looks immortal, those complainings dear!
 O leave me not in this eternal woe,
 For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go.'

XXXVI

Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far
 At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
 Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star
 Seen 'mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
 Into her dream he melted, as the rose
 Blendeth its odour with the violet,—

JOHN KEATS

Solution sweet: meantime the frost-wind blows
Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet
Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set.

XXXVII

'Tis dark: quick pattereth the flaw-blown sleet:
'This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline!
'Tis dark: the iced gusts still rave and beat:
'No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine!
Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine.
Cruel! what traitor could thee hither bring?
I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine,
Though thou forsakest a deceivèd thing;—
A dove forlorn and lost with sick unprunèd wing.'

XXXVIII

'My Madeline! sweet dreamer! lovely bride!
Say, may I be for aye thy vassal blest?
Thy beauty's shield, heart-shaped and vermeil-dyed?
Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest
After so many hours of toil and quest,
A famish'd pilgrim, —saved by miracle.
Though I have found, I will not rob thy nest,
Saving of thy sweet self; if thou think'st well
To trust, fair Madeline, to no rude infidel.

XXXVIX

Hark! 'tis an elfin storm from faery land,
Of haggard seeming, but a boon indeed:
Arise—arise! the morning is at hand;—
The bloated wassailers will never heed:—
Let us away, my love, with happy speed;
There are no ears to hear, or eyes to see,—
Drown'd all in Rhenish and the sleepy mead.
Awake! arise! my love, and fearless be,
For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee.'

XL

She hurried at his words, beset with fears,
For there were sleeping dragons all around
At glaring watch, perhaps, with ready spears.
Down the wide stairs a darkling way they found;
In all the house was heard no human sound.
A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door;
The arras, rich with horsemen, hawk, and hound,
Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar;
And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor.

XLI

They glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall;
Like phantoms to the iron porch they glide,
Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,
With a huge empty flagon by his side:
The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide,
But his sagacious eye an inmate owns:
By one and one, the bolts full easy slide:—
The chains lie silent on the footworn stones;
The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groans.

XLII

And they are gone: ay, ages long ago
These lovers fled away into the storm.
That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,
And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form
Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm,
Were long be-nightmared. Angela the old
Died palsy-twitch'd, with meagre face deform;
The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,
For aye unsought-for slept among his ashes cold.

JOHN KEATS

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

I

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thy happiness,—
That thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singing of summer in full-throated ease.

II

O, for a draught of vintage, that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stainèd mouth;
That I might drink and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

III

Fade far way, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

IV

Away! away! For I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,

Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
 But here there is no light,
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

V

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
 But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
 Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
 And mid-May's eldest child,
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

VI

Darkling I listen; and for many a time
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,
 Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
 To take into the air my quiet breath;
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
 To thy high requiem become a sod.

VII

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
 No hungry generations tread thee down;
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown:
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
 The same that oft-times hath
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

VIII

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
 Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well

JOHN KEATS

And she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:— do I wake or sleep?

ODE ON A GRECIAN URN

I

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness!
 Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
 What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
 Of deities or mortals, or of both,
 In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
 What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
 What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

II

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
 Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
 Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

III

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,
 For ever piping songs for ever new;
 More happy love! more happy, happy love!
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
 For ever panting and for ever young;
 All breathing human passion far above,
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

JOHN KEATS

IV

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea-shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

V

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'

ODE TO PSYCHE

I

O Goddess! Hear these tuneless numbers, wrung
 By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,
 And pardon that thy secrets should be sung,
 Even into thine own soft-conchèd ear:
 Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see
 The wingèd Psyche with awaken'd eyes?
 I wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly,
 And, on the sudden, fainting with surprise,
 Saw two fair creatures, couchèd side by side
 In deepest grass, beneath the whisp'ring roof
 Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran
 A brooklet, scarce espied:

II

'Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers fragrant-eyed,
 Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian,
 They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;
 Their arms embracèd, and their pinions too;
 Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu
 As if disjoinèd by soft-handed slumber,
 And ready still past kisses to outnumber
 At tender eye-dawn of aurorean love:
 The winged boy I knew;
 But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?
 His Psyche true!

III

O latest-born and loveliest vision far
 Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!
 Fairer than Phoebe's sapphire-region'd star,
 Or Vesper, amorous glow-worm of the sky;
 Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,
 Nor altar heap'd with flowers;
 Nor virgin-choir to make delicious moan
 Upon the midnight hours;
 No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet
 From chain-swung censer teeming;

JOHN KEATS

No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

IV

O brightest! though too late for antique vows,
Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,
When holy were the haunted forest boughs,
Holy the air, the water, and the fire;
Yet even in these days so far retired
From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,
Fluttering among the faint Olympians,
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired.
So let me be thy choir, and make a moan
Upon the midnight hours;
Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
From swingèd censer teeming;
Thy shrine, thy grove, the oracle, thy heat
Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

V

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branchèd thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees
Fledge the wild-ridgèd mountains steep by steep;
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep;
And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same:
And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win,
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
To let the warm Love in!

TO AUTUMN

I

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
 Conspiring with him how to load and bless
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
 And still more, later flowers for the bees,
 Until they think warm days will never cease,
 For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

II

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
 Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
 Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
 Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
 Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers;
 And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
 Steady thy laden head across a brook;
 Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
 Thou watchest the last ooziings, hours by hours.

III

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, –
 While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river shallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
 Hedge-cricket sing; and now with treble soft
 The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft,
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

JOHN KEATS

ODE ON MELANCHOLY

I

No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
 Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd
 By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
 Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
 Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
 For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
 And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

II

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
 Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
 And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
 Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
 Or on the wealth of globèd peonies;
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
 Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
 And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

III

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
 And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
 Turning to Poison while the bee-mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of Delight
 Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
 Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine:
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
 And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

ON SEEING THE ELGIN MARBLES

My spirit is too weak: – mortality
 Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
 And each imagin'd pinnacle and steep
 Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
 Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.
 Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep,
 That I have not the cloudy winds to keep
 Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.
 Such dim-conceivèd glories of the brain
 Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;
 So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
 That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
 Wasting of old Time – with a billowy main –
 A sun – a shadow of a magnitude.

THE SEA

It keeps eternal whisperings around
 Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell
 Gluts twice ten thousand caverns, till the spell
 Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.
 Often 'tis in such gentle temper found,
 That scarcely will the very smallest shell
 Be mov'd for days from where it sometime fell,
 When last the winds of Heaven were unbound.
 Oh ye! who have your eye-balls vex'd and tired,
 Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea;
 Oh ye! whose ears are dinn'd with uproar rude,
 Or fed too much with cloying melody –
 Sit ye near some old cavern's mouth, and brood
 Until ye start, as if the sea-nymphs quired!

JOHN KEATS

WHEN I HAVE FEARS

When I have fears that I may cease to be
 Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charact'ry,
 Hold like rich garnerers the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
 Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
 Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
 That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
 Of unreflecting love, — then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think,
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

BRIGHT STAR! WOULD I WERE STEDFAST AS THOU ART

Bright star! would I were stedfast as thou art —
 Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
 Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
 Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
 Of snow upon the mountains and the moors —
No — yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
 Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
 Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever — or else swoon to death.

ODE ON INDOLENCE

“They toil not, neither do they spin.”

I

One morn before me were three figures seen,
 With bowèd necks, and joinèd hands, side-faced;
 And one behind the other stepp'd serene,
 In placid sandals, and in white robes graced;
 They pass'd, like figures on a marble urn,
 When shifted round to see the other side;
 They came again; as when the urn once more
 Is shifted round, the first seen shades return;
 And they were strange to me, as may betide
 With vases, to one deep in Phidian lore.

II

How is it, Shadows! that I knew ye not?
 How came ye muffled in so hush a mask?
 Was it a silent deep-disguisèd plot
 To steal away, and leave without a task
 My idle days? Ripe was the drowsy hour;
 The blissful cloud of summer-indolence
 Benumb'd my eyes; my pulse grew less and less;
 Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower:
 O, why did ye not melt, and leave my sense
 Unhaunted quite of all but – nothingness?

III

A third time pass'd they by, and passing, turn'd
 Each one the face a moment whiles to me;
 Then faded, and to follow them I burn'd
 And ached for wings, because I knew the three;
 The first was a fair Maid, and Love her name;
 The second was Ambition, pale of cheek,
 And ever watchful with fatiguèd eye;
 The last, whom I love more, the more of blame
 Is heap'd upon her, maiden most unmeek, –
 I knew to be my demon Poesy.

JOHN KEATS

IV

They faded, and, forsooth! I wanted wings:
O folly! What is Love? And where is it?
And for that poor Ambition! it springs
From a man's little heart's short fever-fit;
For Poesy! – no, – she has not a joy, –
At least for me, – so sweet as drowsy noons,
And evenings steep'd in honey'd indolence;
O, for an age so shelter'd from annoy,
That I may never know how change the moons,
Or hear the voice of busy common-sense!

V

And once more came they by; – alas! wherefore?
My sleep had been embroider'd with dim dreams;
My soul had been a lawn besprinkled o'er
With flowers, and stirring shades, and baffled beams:
The morn was clouded, but no shower fell,
Tho' in her lids hung the sweet tears of May;
The open casement press'd a new leav'd vine,
Let in the budding warmth and throstle's lay;
O Shadows! 'twas a time to bid farewell!
Upon your skirts had fallen no tears of mine.

VI

So, ye three Ghosts, adieu! Ye cannot raise
My head cool-bedded in the flowery grass;
For I would not be dieted with praise,
A pet-lamb in a sentimental farce!
Fade softly from my eyes, and be once more
In masque-like figures on the dreamy urn;
Farewell! I yet have visions for the night,
And for the day faint visions there is store;
Vanish, ye Phantoms! From my idle spright,
Into the clouds, and never more return!

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
 Alone and palely loitering?
 The sedge is wither'd from the lake,
 And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
 So haggard and so woe-begone?
 The squirrel's granary is full,
 And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow
 With anguish moist and fever dew;
 And on thy cheeks a fading rose
 Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads,
 Full beautiful — a faery's child;
 Her hair was long, her foot was light,
 And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
 And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
 She look'd at me as she did love,
 And made sweet moan.

I set her on my pacing steed,
 And nothing else saw all day long;
 For sidelong would she lean, and sing
 A faery's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
 And honey wild, and manna dew;
 And sure in language strange she said —
 'I love thee true!'

She took me to her elfin grot,
 And there she wept and sigh'd full sore,
 And there I shut her wild, wild eyes
 With kisses four.

And there she lullèd me asleep,
 And there I dream'd — ah! woe betide!
 The latest dream I ever dream'd
 On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
 Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
 They cried — 'La Belle Dame sans Merci
 Hath thee in thrall!'

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
 With horrid warning gapèd wide,
 And I awoke and found me here,
 On the cold hill's side.

And this is why I sojourn here,
 Alone and palely loitering,
 Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
 And no birds sing.

EMILY DICKINSON

I'M "WIFE" – I'VE FINISHED THAT –

I'm "wife" – I've finished that –
That other state –
I'm Czar - I'm "Woman" now –
It's safer so –

How odd the Girl's life looks
Behind this soft Eclipse –
I think that Earth feels so
To folks in Heaven – now –

This being comfort – then
That other kind – was pain –
But why compare?
I'm "Wife"! Stop there!

THERE'S A CERTAIN SLANT OF LIGHT

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons –
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –
'Tis the seal Despair –
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –
Shadows – hold their breath –
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death –

I FELT A FUNERAL, IN MY BRAIN

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading – treading – till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum –
Kept beating – beating – till I thought
My Mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down –
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing – then –

EMILY DICKINSON

HOW THE OLD MOUNTAINS DRIP WITH SUNSET

How the old Mountains drip with Sunset
How the Hemlocks burn –
How the Dun Brake is draped in Cinder
By the Wizard Sun –

How the old Steeples hand the Scarlet
Till the Ball is full –
Have I the lip of the Flamingo
That I dare to tell?

Then, how the Fire ebbs like Billows –
Touching all the Grass
With a departing – Sapphire – feature –
As a Duchess passed –

How a small Dusk crawls on the Village
Till the Houses blot
And the odd Flambeau, no men carry
Glimmer on the Street –

How it is Night – in Nest and Kennel –
And where was the Wood –
Just a Dome of Abyss is Bowing
Into Solitude –

These are the visions flitted Guido –
Titian – never told –
Domenichino dropped his pencil –
Paralyzed, with Gold –

THERE CAME A DAY AT SUMMER'S FULL

There came a Day at Summer's full,
Entirely for me –
I thought that such were for the Saints,
Where Resurrections – be –

The Sun, as common, went abroad,
The flowers, accustomed, blew,
As if no soul the solstice passed
That maketh all things new –

The time was scarce profaned, by speech –
The symbol of a word
Was needless, as at Sacrament,
The Wardrobe – of our Lord –

Each was to each The Sealed Church,
Permitted to commune this – time –
Lest we too awkward show
At Supper of the Lamb.

The Hours slid fast – as Hours will,
Clutched tight, by greedy hands –
So faces on two Decks, look back,
Bound to opposing lands –

And so when all time had leaked,
Without external sound
Each bound the Other's Crucifix –
We gave no other Bond –

Sufficient troth, that we shall rise –
Deposed – at length, the Grave –
To that new Marriage,
Justified – through Calvaries of Love –

EMILY DICKINSON

I HEARD A FLY BUZZ – WHEN I DIED –

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset – when the King
Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable – and then it was
There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –

IT WAS NOT DEATH, FOR I STOOD UP

It was not Death, for I stood up,
And all the Dead lie down –
It was not Night, for all the Bells
Put out their Tongues, for Noon.

It was not Frost, for on my Flesh
I felt Siroccos – crawl –
Nor Fire – for just my Marble feet
Could keep a Chancel cool –

And yet, it tasted, like them all,
The Figures I have seen
Set orderly, for Burial,
Reminded me, of mine –

As if my life were shaven,
And fitted to a frame,
And could not breathe without a key,
And 'twas like Midnight, some –

When everything that ticked – has stopped –
And Space stares – all around –
Or Grisly frosts – first Autumn morns,
Repeal the Beating Ground –

But, most, like Chaos – Stopless – cool –
Without a Chance, or Spar –
Or even a Report of Land –
To justify – Despair.

EMILY DICKINSON

I CANNOT LIVE WITH YOU –

I cannot live with You –
It would be Life –
And Life is over there –
Behind the Shelf

The Sexton keeps the Key to –
Putting up
Our Life – His Porcelain
Like a Cup –

Discarded of the Housewife –
Quaint – or Broke –
A newer Sevres pleases –
Old Ones crack –

I could not die – with You –
For One must wait
To shut the Other's Gaze down –
You – could not –

And I – Could I stand by
And see You – freeze –
Without my Right of Frost –
Death's privilege?

Nor could I rise – with You –
Because Your Face
Would put out Jesus' –
That New Grace

Glow plain – and foreign
On my homesick Eye –
Except that You than He
Shone closer by –

They'd judge Us – How –
For You – served Heaven – You know,
Or sought to –
I could not –

Because You saturated Sight –
And I had no more Eyes,
For sordid excellence
As Paradise

And were You lost, I would be –
Though My Name
Rang loudest
On the Heavenly fame –

And were You – saved –
And I – condemned to be
Where You were not –
That self – were Hell to Me –

So We must meet apart –
You there – I – here –
With just the Door ajar
That Oceans are – and Prayer –
And that White Sustenance –
Despair –

ONE NEED NOT BE A CHAMBER – TO BE HAUNTED –

One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –
One need not be a House –
The Brain has Corridors – surpassing
Material Place –

Far safer, of a Midnight Meeting
External Ghost,
Than its interior Confronting –
That Cooler Host.

Far safer, through an Abbey gallop,
The Stones a'chase –
Than Unarmed, one's a'self encounter –
In lonesome Place –

Ourself behind ourself, concealed –
Should startle most –
Assassin hid in our Apartment
Be Horror's least.

The Body – borrows a Revolver –
He bolts the Door –
O'erlooking a superior spectre –
Or More –

EMILY DICKINSON

BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH –

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For his Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –
The Dews drew quivering and Chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity –

AN AWFUL TEMPEST MASHED THE AIR –

An awful Tempest mashed the air –
The clouds were gaunt, and few –
A Black – as of a Spectre's Cloak
Hid Heaven and Earth from view.

The creatures chuckled on the Roofs –
And whistled in the air –
And shook their fists –
And gnashed their teeth –
And swung their frenzied hair.

The morning lit – the Birds arose –
The Monster's faded eyes
Turned slowly to his native coast –
And peace – was Paradise!

EMILY DICKINSON

THE LAST NIGHT THAT SHE LIVED

The last Night that She lived
It was a Common Night
Except the Dying – this to Us
Made Nature different

We noticed smallest things –
Things overlooked before
By this great light upon our Minds
Italicized – as 'twere.

As We went out and in
Between Her final Room
And Rooms where Those to be alive
Tomorrow were, a Blame

That Others could exist
While She must finish quite
A Jealousy for Her arose
So nearly infinite –

We waited while She passed –
It was a narrow time –
Too jostled were Our Souls to speak
At length the notice came.

She mentioned, and forgot –
Then lightly as a Reed
Bent to the Water, struggled scarce –
Consented, and was dead –

And We – We placed the Hair –
And drew the Head erect –
And then an awful leisure was
Belief to regulate –

SHE ROSE TO HIS REQUIREMENT

She rose to His Requirement – dropt
The Playthings of Her Life
To take the honorable Work
Of Woman, and of Wife –

If aught She missed in Her new Day,
Of Amplitude, or Awe –
Or first Prospective – Or the Gold
In using, wear away,

It lay unmentioned – as the Sea
Develops Pearl, and Weed,
But only to Himself – be known
The Fathoms they abide –

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

I

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
And *that* cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,
The young birds are chirping in the nest,
The young fawns are playing with the shadows,
The young flowers are blowing toward the west—
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free.

II

Do you question the young children in the sorrow,
Why their tears are falling so?
The old man may weep for his to-morrow
Which is lost in Long Ago;
The old tree is leafless in the forest,
The old year is ending in the frost,
The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest,
The old hope is hardest to be lost.
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
Do you ask them why they stand
Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,
In our happy Fatherland?

III

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their looks are sad to see,
For the man's hoary anguish draws and presses
Down the cheeks of infancy.
'Your old earth,' they say, 'is very dreary;
Our young feet,' they say, 'are very weak!
Few paces have we taken, yet are weary —
Our grave-rest is very far to seek.
Ask the aged why they weep, and not the children;
For the outside earth is cold;
And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,
And the graves are for the old.'

IV

'True,' say the children, 'it may happen
 That we die before our time;
 Little Alice died last year — her grave is shapen
 Like a snowball, in the rime.
 We looked into the pit prepared to take her:
 Was no room for any work in the close clay!
 From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,
 Crying, "Get up, little Alice! it is day."
 If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,
 With your ear down, little Alice never cries;
 Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
 For the smile has time for growing in her eyes:
 And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in
 The shroud by the kirk-chime!
 It is good when it happens,' say the children,
 'That we die before our time.'

V

Alas, alas, the children! they are seeking
 Death in life, as best to have;
 They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,
 With a cerement from the grave.
 Go out, children, from the mine and from the city,
 Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do;
 Pluck you handfuls of the meadow cow-slips pretty,
 Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through!
 But they answer, 'Are your cowslips of the meadows
 Like our weeds anear the mine?
 Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,
 From your pleasures fair and fine!'

VI

'For oh,' say the children, 'we are weary,
 And we cannot run or leap;
 If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
 To drop down in them and sleep.
 Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,
 We fall upon our faces, trying to go;
 And, underneath, our heavy eyelids drooping,
 The reddest flower would look as pale as snow;'

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

For, all day, we drag our burden tiring
Through the coal-dark, under-ground —
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories, round and round.’

VII

‘For, all day, the wheels are droning, turning, —
Their wind comes in our faces, —
Till our hearts turn, — our head with pulses burning,
And the walls turn in their places:
Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling,
Turns the long light that drops adown the wall,
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling,
All are turning, all the day, and we with all.
And all day, the iron wheels are droning,
And sometimes we could pray,
“O ye wheels” (breaking out in a mad moaning),
“Stop! be silent for to-day!”’

VIII

Aye! be silent! Let them hear each other breathing
For a moment, mouth to mouth!
Let them touch each other’s hands, in a fresh wreathing
Of their tender human youth!
Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or reveals:
Let them prove their living souls against the notion
That they live in you, or under you, O wheels! —
Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,
Grinding life down from its mark;
And the children’s souls, which God is calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark.

IX

Now tell the poor young children, O my brothers,
To look up to Him and pray;
So the blessed One who blesseth all the others
Will bless them another day.
They answer, ‘Who is God that He should hear us,
While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred?’

When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us
 Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word.
 And *we* hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)
 Strangers speaking at the door:
 Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him,
 Hears our weeping any more?

X

‘Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,
 And at midnight’s hour of harm,
 “Our Father,” looking upward in the chamber,
 We say softly for a charm.
 We know no other words, except “Our Father,”
 And we think that, in some pause of angels’ song,
 God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,
 And hold both within His right hand which is strong.
 “Our Father!” If He heard us, He would surely
 (For they call Him good and mild)
 Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,
 “Come and rest with Me, My child.”’

XI

‘But no!’ say the children, weeping faster,
 ‘He is speechless as a stone;
 And they tell us, of His image is the master
 Who commands us to work on.
 Go to!’ say the children — ‘up in Heaven,
 Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find.
 Do not mock us; grief has made us un-believing —
 We look up for God, but tears have made us blind.’
 Do you hear the children weeping and disproving,
 O my brothers, what ye preach?
 For God’s possible is taught by His world’s loving,
 And the children doubt of each.

XII

And well may the children weep before you!
They are weary ere they run;
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
Which is brighter than the sun.
They know the grief of man, without its wisdom;
They sink in man's despair, without its calm;
Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom,
Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm, —
Are worn, as if with age, yet unretrievingly
The harvest of its memories cannot reap —
Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly.
Let them weep! let them weep!

XIII

They look up, with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they mind you of their angels in high places,
With eyes turned on Deity! —
'How long,' they say, 'how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart, —
Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,
And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?
Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
And your purple shows your path!
But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper
Than the strong man in his wrath.'

THE MASK

I

I have a smiling face, she said,
 I have a jest for all I meet,
 I have a garland for my head
 And all its flowers are sweet, —
 And so you call me gay, she said.

II

Grief taught to me this smile, she said,
 And Wrong did teach this jesting bold;
 These flowers were plucked from garden-
 bed
 While a death-chime was tolled.
 And what now will you say? — she said.

III

Behind no prison-grate, she said,
 Which slurs the sunshine half a mile,
 Live captives so uncomforted
 As souls behind a smile.
 God's pity let us pray, she said.

IV

I know my face is bright, she said, —
 Such brightness, dying suns diffuse;
 I bear upon my forehead shed
 The sign of what I lose, —
 The ending of my day, she said.

V

If I dared leave this smile, she said,
 And take a moan upon my mouth,
 And tie a cypress round my head,
 And let my tears run smooth, —
 It were the happier way, she said.

VI

And since that must not be, she said,
 I fain your bitter world would leave.
 How calmly, calmly, smile the Dead,
 Who do not, therefore, grieve!
 The yea of Heaven is yea, she said.

VII

But in your bitter world, she said,
 Face-joy's a costly mask to wear.
 'Tis bought with pangs long nourishèd,
 And rounded to despair.
 Grief's earnest makes life's play, she said.

VIII

Ye weep for those who weep? she said —
 Ah fools! I bid you pass them by.
 Go, weep for those whose hearts have
 bled
 What time their eyes were dry.
 Whom sadder can I say? she said.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

THE FACE OF ALL THE WORLD IS CHANGED

The face of all the world is changed, I think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,
And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee anear.
The names of country, heaven, are changed away
For where thou art or shalt be, there or here;
And this ... this lute and song ... loved yesterday
(The singing angels know) are only dear,
Because thy name moves right in what they say.

WHAT CAN I GIVE THEE BACK

What can I give thee back, O liberal
And princely giver, who hast brought the gold
And purple of thine heart, unstained, untold,
And laid them on the outside of the wall
For such as I to take or leave withal,
In unexpected largesse? am I cold,
Ungrateful, that for these most manifold
High gifts, I render nothing back at all?
Not so; not cold, – but very poor instead.
Ask God who knows. For frequent tears have run
The colours from my life, and left so dead
And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done
To give the same as pillow to thy head.
Go farther! Let it serve to trample on.

AND YET, BECAUSE THOU OVERCOMEST SO

And yet, because thou overcomest so,
 Because thou art more noble and like a king,
 Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling
 Thy purple around me, till my heart shall grow
 Too close against thine heart, henceforth to know
 How it shook when alone. Why, conquering
 May prove as lordly and complete a thing
 In lifting upward, as in crushing low!
 And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword
 To one who lifts him from the bloody earth, —
 Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,
 Here ends my strife. If *thou* invite me forth,
 I rise above abasement at the word.
 Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.

BELOVÈD, MY BELOVÈD, WHEN I THINK

Belovèd, my Belovèd, when I think
 That thou wast in the world a year ago,
 What time I sate alone here in the snow
 And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink
 No moment at thy voice ... but, link by link,
 Went counting all my chains, as if that so
 They never could fall off at any blow
 Struck by thy possible hand ... why, thus I drink
 Of life's great cup of wonder! Wonderful,
 Never to feel thee thrill the day or night
 With personal act or speech, — nor ever cull
 Some prescience of thee with the blossoms white
 Thou sawest growing! Atheists are as dull,
 Who cannot guess God's presence out of sight.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

LET THE WORLD'S SHARPNESS LIKE A CLASPING KNIFE

Let the world's sharpness like a clasping knife
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,
And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. Life to life —
I lean upon thee, dear, without alarm,
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
The lilies of our lives may reassure
Their blossoms from their roots, accessible
Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer:
Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill.
God only, who made us rich, can make us poor.

IF I LEAVE ALL FOR THEE, WILT THOU EXCHANGE

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,
When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors ... another home than this?
Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is
Filled by dead eyes too tender to know change?
That's hardest. If to conquer love, has tried,
To conquer grief, tries more ... as all things prove;
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love.
Yet love me — wilt thou? Open thine heart wide,
And fold within, the wet wings of thy dove.

HIRAM POWERS' GREEK SLAVE

They say Ideal beauty cannot enter
The house of anguish. On the threshold stands
An alien Image with ensnackled hands,
Called the Greek Slave! as if the artist meant her
(That passionless perfection which he lent her,
Shadowed not darkened where the sill expands)
To, so, confront man's crimes in different lands
With man's ideal sense. Pierce to the centre,
Art's fiery finger! – and break up ere long
The serfdom of this world! appeal, fair stone,
From God's pure heights of beauty against man's wrong!
Catch up in thy divine face, not alone
East griefs but west, – and strike and shame the strong,
By thunders of white silence, overthrown.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

A CURSE FOR A NATION

PROLOGUE

I heard an angel speak last night,
And he said, 'Write!
Write a Nation's curse for me,
And send it over the Western Sea.'

I faltered, taking up the word:
'Not so, my lord!
If curses must be, choose another
To send thy curse against my brother.

For I am bound by gratitude,
By love and blood
To brothers of mine across the sea,
Who stretch out kindly hands to me.'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou write
My curse to-night.
From the summits of love a curse is driven,
As lightning is from the tops of heaven.'

'Not so,' I answered. 'Evermore
My heart is sore
For my own land's sins: for little feet
Of children bleeding along the street:

For parked-up honours that gainsay
The right of way:
For almsgiving through a door that is
Not open enough for two friends to kiss:

For love of freedom which abates
Beyond the Straits:
For patriot virtue starved to vice on
Self-praise, self-interest and suspicion:

For an oligarchic parliament
And bribes well-meant.
What curse to another land assign,
When heavy-souled for the sins of mine?'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou write
My curse to-night.
Because thou hast strength to see and hate
A foul thing done *within* thy gate.'

'Not so,' I answered once again.
'To curse, choose men.
For I, a woman, have only known
How the heart melts and the tears run down.'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou write
My curse to-night.
Some women weep and curse, I say
(And no one marvels), night and day.

And thou shalt take their part to-night,
Weep and write.
A curse from the depths of womanhood
Is very salt, and bitter, and good.'

So thus I wrote, and mourned indeed,
What all may read.
And thus, as was enjoined on me,
I send it over the Western Sea.

THE CURSE

I
Because ye have broken your own chain
With the strain
Of brave men climbing a Nation's height,
Yet thence bear down with brand and thong
On souls of others, — for this wrong
This is the curse. Write.

Because yourselves are standing straight
In the state
Of Freedom's foremost acolyte,
Yet keep calm footing all the time
On writhing bond-slaves, — for this crime
This is the curse. Write.

Because ye prosper in God's name,
 With a claim
 To honour in the old world's sight,
 Yet do the fiend's work perfectly
 In strangling martyrs, — for this lie
 This is the curse. Write.

II

Ye shall watch while kings conspire
 Round the people's smouldering fire,
 And, warm for your part,
 Shall never dare — O shame!
 To utter the thought into flame
 Which burns at your heart.
 This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while nations strive
 With the bloodhounds, die or survive,
 Drop faint from their jaws,
 Or throttle them backward to death,
 And only under your breath
 Shall favour the cause.
 This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while strong men draw
 The nets of feudal law
 To strangle the weak,
 And, counting the sin for a sin,
 Your soul shall be sadder within
 Than the word ye shall speak.
 This is the curse. Write.

When good men are praying erect
 That Christ may avenge His elect
 And deliver the earth,
 The prayer in your ears, said low,
 Shall sound like the tramp of a foe
 That's driving you forth.
 This is the curse. Write.

When wise men give you their praise,
 They shall pause in the heat of the phrase,
 As if carried too far.
 When ye boast your own charters kept true,
 Ye shall blush; — for the thing which ye do
 Derides what ye are.
 This is the curse. Write.

When fools cast taunts at your gate,
 Your scorn ye shall somewhat abate
 As ye look o'er the wall,
 For your conscience, tradition, and name
 Explode with a deadlier blame
 Than the worst of them all.
 This is the curse. Write.

Go, wherever ill deeds shall be done,
 Go, plant your flag in the sun
 Beside the ill-doers!
 And recoil from clenching the curse
 Of God's witnessing Universe
 With a curse of yours.
This is the curse. Write.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

A FALSE STEP

I

Sweet, thou hast trod on a heart.
Pass! there's a world full of men;
And women as fair as thou art
Must do such things now and then.

II

Thou only hast stepped unaware, —
Malice, not one can impute;
And why should a heart have been there
In the way of a fair woman's foot?

III

It was not a stone that could trip,
Nor was it a thorn that could rend:
Put up thy proud underlip!
'Twas merely the heart of a friend.

IV

And yet peradventure one day
Thou, sitting alone at the glass,
Remarking the bloom gone away,
Where the smile in its dimplement was,

V

And seeking around thee in vain
From hundreds who flattered before,
Such a word as, 'Oh, not in the main
Do I hold thee less precious, but more!'...

VI

Thou'lt sigh, very like, on thy part,
'Of all I have known or can know,
I wish I had only that Heart
I trod upon ages ago!'

VOID IN LAW

I

Sleep, little babe, on my knee,
 Sleep, for the midnight is chill,
 And the moon has died out in the tree,
 And the great human world goeth ill.
 Sleep, for the wicked agree:
 Sleep, let them do as they will.
 Sleep.

II

Sleep, thou hast drawn from my breast
 The last drop of milk that was good;
 And now, in a dream, suck the rest,
 Lest the real should trouble thy blood.
 Suck, little lips dispossessed,
 As we kiss in the air whom we would.
 Sleep.

III

O lips of thy father! the same,
 So like! Very deeply they swore
 When he gave me his ring and his name,
 To take back, I imagined, no more!
 And now is all changed like a game,
 Though the old cards are used as of yore?
 Sleep.

IV

'Void in law,' said the Courts. Something wrong
 In the forms? Yet, 'Till death part us two,
 I, James, take thee, Jessie,' was strong,
 And ONE witness competent. True
 Such a marriage was worth an old song,
 Heard in Heaven though, as plain as the New.
 Sleep.

V

Sleep, little child, his and mine!
 Her throat has the antelope curve,
 And her cheek just the colour and line
 Which fade not before him nor swerve:
 Yet *she* has no child! — the divine
 Seal of right upon loves that deserve.
 Sleep.

VI

My child! though the world take her part,
 Saying, 'She was the woman to choose,
 He had eyes, was a man in his heart,' —
 We twain the decision refuse:
 We ... weak as I am, as thou art ...
 Cling on to him, never to loose.
 Sleep.

VII

He thinks that, when done with this place,
 All's ended? he'll new-stamp the ore?
 Yes, Caesar's — but not in our case.
 Let him learn we are waiting before
 The grave's mouth, the heaven's gate, God's face,
 With implacable love evermore.
 Sleep.

VIII

He's ours, though he kissed her but now;
 He's ours, though she kissed in reply;
 He's ours, though himself disavow,
 And God's universe favour the lie;
 Ours to claim, ours to clasp, ours below,
 Ours above ... if we live, if we die.
 Sleep.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

IX

Ah, baby, my baby, too rough
Is my lullaby? What have I said?
Sleep! When I've wept long enough
I shall learn to weep softly instead,
And piece with some alien stuff
My heart to lie smooth for thy head.
Sleep.

X

Two souls met upon thee, my sweet;
Two loves led thee out to the sun:
Alas, pretty hands, pretty feet,
If the one who remains (only one)
Set her grief at thee, turned in a heat
To thine enemy, – were it well done?
Sleep.

XI

May He of the manger stand near
And love thee! An infant He came
To His own who rejected Him here,
But the Magi brought gifts all the same.
I hurry the cross on my Dear!
My gifts are the griefs I declaim!
Sleep.

MY HEART AND I

I

Enough! we're tired, my heart and I.
 We sit beside the headstones thus,
 And wish that name were carved for us.
 The moss reprints more tenderly
 The hard types of the mason's knife,
 As heaven's sweet life renews earth's life
 With which we're tired, my heart and I.

II

You see we're tired, my heart and I.
 We dealt with books, we trusted men,
 And in our own blood drenched the pen,
 As if such colours could not fly.
 We walked too straight for fortune's end,
 We loved too true to keep a friend;
 At last we're tired, my heart and I.

III

How tired we feel, my heart and I!
 We seem of no use in the world;
 Our fancies hang grey and uncurled
 About men's eyes indifferently;
 Our voice which thrilled you, so will let
 You sleep; our tears are only wet:
 What do we here, my heart and I?

IV

So tired, so tired, my heart and I!
 It was not thus in that old time
 When Ralph sate with me 'neath the lime
 To watch the sunset from the sky.
 'Dear love, you're looking tired,' he said;
 I, smiling at him, shook my head:
 'Tis now we're tired, my heart and I.

V

So tired, so tired, my heart and I!
 Though now none takes me on his arm
 To fold me close and kiss me warm
 Till each quick breath end in a sigh
 Of happy languor. Now, alone,
 We lean upon this graveyard stone,
 Uncheered, unloved, my heart and I.

VI

Tired out we are, my heart and I.
 Suppose the world brought diadems
 To tempt us, crusted with loose gems
 Of powers and pleasures? Let it try.
 We scarcely care to look at even
 A pretty child, or God's blue heaven,
 We feel so tired, my heart and I.

VII

Yet who complains? My heart and I?
 In this abundant earth no doubt
 Is little room for things worn out:
 Disdain them, break them, throw them by.
 And if before the days grew rough
 We *once* were loved, used, — well enough,
 I think, we've fared, my heart and I.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

FIRST NEWS FROM VILLA-FRANCA

I

Peace, peace, peace, do you say?
What! — with the enemy's guns in our ears?
With the country's wrong not rendered back?
What! — while Austria stands at bay
In Mantua, and our Venice bears
The cursed flag of the yellow and black?

II

Peace, peace, peace, do you say?
And this the Mincio? Where's the fleet,
And where's the sea? Are we all blind
Or mad with the blood shed yesterday,
Ignoring Italy under our feet,
And seeing things before, behind?

III

Peace, peace, peace, do you say?
What! — uncontested, undenied?
Because we triumph, we succumb?
A pair of Emperors stand in the way
(One of whom is a man, beside),
To sign and seal our cannons dumb?

IV

No, not Napoleon! — he who mused
At Paris, and at Milan spake,
And at Solferino led the fight:
Not he we trusted, honoured, used
Our hopes and hearts for ... till they break —
Even so, you tell us ... in his sight.

V

Peace, peace, is still your word?
We say you lie then! — that is plain.
There *is* no peace, and shall be none.
Our very Dead would cry 'Absurd!'
And clamour that they died in vain,
And whine to come back to the sun.

VI

Hush! More reverence for the Dead!
They've done the most for Italy
Evermore since the earth was fair.
Now would that *we* had died instead,
Still dreaming peace meant liberty,
And did not, could not mean despair.

VII

Peace, you say? — yes, peace, in truth!
But such a peace as the ear can achieve
'Twixt the rifle's click and the rush of the ball,
'Twixt the tiger's spring and the crunch of the tooth,
'Twixt the dying atheist's negative
And God's Face — waiting, after all!

THE FORCED RECRUIT

SOLFERINO, 1859

I

In the ranks of the Austrian you found him,
 He died with his face to you all;
 Yet bury him here where around him
 You honour your bravest that fall.

II

Venetian, fair-featured and slender,
 He lies shot to death in his youth,
 With a smile on his lips over-tender
 For any mere soldier's dead mouth.

III

No stranger, and yet not a traitor,
 Though alien the cloth on his breast,
 Underneath it how seldom a greater
 Young heart, has a shot sent to rest!

IV

By your enemy tortured and goaded
 To march with them, stand in their file,
 His musket (see) never was loaded,
 He facing your guns with that smile!

V

As orphans yearn on to their mothers,
 He yearned to your patriot bands;—
 'Let me die for our Italy, brothers,
 If not in your ranks, by your hands!

VI

Aim straightly, fire steadily! spare me
 A ball in the body which may
 Deliver my heart here, and tear me
 This badge of the Austrian away!

VII

So thought he, so died he this morning.
 What then? many others have died.
 Aye, but easy for men to die scorning
 The death-stroke, who fought side by side —

VIII

One tricolour floating above them;
 Struck down 'mid triumphant acclaims
 Of an Italy rescued to love them
 And blazon the brass with their names.

IX

But he, — without witness or honour,
 Mixed, shamed in his country's regard,
 With the tyrants who march in upon her,
 Died faithful and passive: 'twas hard.

X

'Twas sublime. In a cruel restriction
 Cut off from the guerdon of sons,
 With most filial obedience, conviction,
 His soul kissed the lips of her guns.

XI

That moves you? Nay, grudge not to show it,
 While digging a grave for him here:
 The others who died, says your poet,
 Have glory, — let *him* have a tear.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

MOTHER AND POET

TURIN, AFTER NEWS FROM GAETA,
1861

I

Dead! One of them shot by the sea in the east,
And one of them shot in the west by the sea.
Dead! both my boys! When you sit at the feast
And are wanting a great song for Italy free,
Let none look at *me!*

II

Yet I was a poetess only last year,
And good at my art, for a woman, men said;
But *this* woman, *this*, who is agonised here,
— The east sea and west sea rime on in her head
For ever instead.

III

What art can a woman be good at? Oh, vain!
What art *is* she good at, but hurting her breast
With the milk-teeth of babes, and a smile at the pain?
Ah, boys, how you hurt! you were strong as you pressed,
And I proud, by that test.

IV

What art's for a woman! To hold on her knees
Both darlings! to feel all their arms round her throat,
Cling, strangle a little! to sew by degrees
And 'broider the long-clothes and neat little coat;
To dream and to dote.

V

To teach them ... It stings there! *I* made them indeed
Speak plain the word *country*. *I* taught them, no doubt,
That a country's a thing men should die for at need.
I prated of liberty, rights, and about
The tyrant cast out.

VI

And when their eyes flashed ... O my beautiful eyes! ...
 I exulted; nay, let them go forth at the wheels
 Of the guns, and denied not. But then the surprise
 When one sits quite alone! Then one weeps, then one kneels!
 God, how the house feels!

VII

At first, happy news came, in gay letters moiled
 With my kisses, — of camp-life and glory, and how
 They both loved me; and, soon coming home to be spoiled,
 In return would fan off every fly from my brow
 With their green laurel-bough.

VIII

Then was triumph at Turin: 'Ancona was free!'
 And some one came out of the cheers in the street,
 With a face pale as stone, to say something to me.
 My Guido was dead! I fell down at his feet,
 While they cheered in the street.

IX

I bore it; friends soothed me; my grief looked sublime
 As the ransom of Italy. One boy remained
 To be leant on and walked with, recalling the time
 When the first grew immortal, while both of us strained
 To the height he had gained.

X

And letters still came, shorter, sadder, more strong,
 Writ now but in one hand, 'I was not to faint, —
 One loved me for two — would be with me ere long:
 And *Viva l'Italia!* — *he* died for, our saint,
 Who forbids our complaint.'

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

XI

My Nanni would add, 'he was safe, and aware
Of a presence that turned off the balls, — was imprest
It was Guido himself, who knew what I could bear,
And how 'twas impossible, quite dispossessed,
To live on for the rest.'

XII

On which, without pause, up the telegraph-line
Swept smoothly the next news from Gaeta: — *Shot.*
Tell his mother. Ah, ah, 'his,' 'their' mother, — not 'mine,'
No voice says 'My mother' again to me. What!
You think Guido forgot?

XIII

Are souls straight so happy that, dizzy with Heaven,
They drop earth's affections, conceive not of woe?
I think not. Themselves were too lately forgiven
Through THAT Love and Sorrow which reconciled so
The Above and Below.

XIV

O Christ of the five wounds, who look'dst through the dark
To the face of Thy mother! consider, I pray,
How we common mothers stand desolate, mark,
Whose sons, not being Christs, die with eyes turned away,
And no last word to say!

XV

Both boys dead? but that's out of nature. We all
Have been patriots, yet each house must always keep one.
'Twere imbecile, hewing out roads to a wall;
And, when Italy's made, for what end is it done
If we have not a son?

XVI

Ah, ah, ah! When Gaeta's taken, what then?
 When the fair wicked queen sits no more at her sport
 Of the fire-balls of death crashing souls out of men?
 When the guns of Cavalli with final retort
 Have cut the game short?

XVII

When Venice and Rome keep their new jubilee,
 When your flag takes all heaven for its white, green, and red,
 When *you* have your country from mountain to sea,
 When King Victor has Italy's crown on his head,
 (And *I* have my Dead) —

XVIII

What then? Do not mock me. Ah, ring your bells low,
 And burn your lights faintly! *My* country is *there*,
 Above the star pricked by the last peak of snow:
 My Italy's THERE, with my brave civic Pair,
 To disfranchise despair!

XIX

Forgive me. Some women bear children in strength,
 And bite back the cry of their pain in self-scorn;
 But the birth-pangs of nations will wring us at length
 Into wail such as this — and we sit on forlorn
 When the man-child is born.

XX

Dead! One of them shot by the sea in the east,
 And one of them shot in the west by the sea.
 Both! both my boys! If in keeping the feast
 You want a great song for your Italy free,
 Let none look at *me!*

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

