

FROM HIGH CRESTS

POETRY BY ETON LANGFORD

From High Crests (2001)
A Place to Bloom (2000)

FROM HIGH CRESTS

ETON LANGFORD

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DEDICATION

To readers who the fine delights
Of verse appreciate,
This output of my days and nights
I wish to dedicate.

Eton Langford

THE RAIN

after Shelley

I MAKE haste to the earth
And anoint its rebirth
When my mother, the cloud, is above,
And then mildly caress
The irradiant dress
Of the hills with immaculate love.

I descend upon leas
And respond to their pleas
When they pine for my kiss in their thirst;
Then I nourish with ease,
As they flow to the seas,
All the rivers whose growth I have nursed.

I protect, as I fly,
Bashful lovers who lie
Undisturbed in their secretive nests,
While the world is at bay
And far out of their way
On its tiresome, oblivious quests.

When the spring air is dry,
I breathe out with a sigh
And the flowers all bloom at my will
And, when autumn is near,
I shed many a tear
Over moors while the granaries fill.

Inconsolable birds
Voice their songs without words
In their fond expectation of me,
And then play in the sun
Once their hearts I have won
With the gift of how warm I can be.

I roam, wave upon wave,
When the mariners crave
The sweet taste of moist myrrh on their lips;
Then I plunge and dissolve,
Rise anew and evolve
Into fog which embraces their ships.

From high crests I can wend
And with care do I tend
To the needs of green life born on earth,
Which I raise from the ground
In a medley unbound
By tall hemlocks of singular girth.

Over mountains I creep,
Upon castles I weep
As they slowly concede to decay;
Then I cover in moss
All that crumbles to loss
When men die and may not have their say.

Once my tears are all gone,
I give way to the sun
And my brilliant sprays overshine
All that flashes on high
And bewitches the eye
On a bow decked in splendor divine.

Though in change I am donned,
I'm the bridge and the bond
Between heaven and earth in their strife;
I am shy yet sublime,
Unaffected by time,
As refulgent in death as in life.

SUMMER MORNING

after Coleridge

THE PEACE of summer morning
Illuminates the weald
And spreads its rays adorning
Deep longings unconcealed.

The merry birds are tweeting
While flying overhead;
The misty night is fleeting
And hails the day ahead.

On beds of fragrant flowers
Small critters slumber on,
Though from their mossy bowers
Fair finches greet the dawn.

The forest's blossom rallies
In council for advice
On hills and in the valleys:
A blooming paradise.

How peaceful is this setting
Where nothing is amiss,
Where verdure helps forgetting
Distress and its abyss!

The only creature missing
This charming scene is man,
Though earth and sky are kissing
Upon the mountains' span.

While he may deem that reason
Is life's most dazzling feat,
There is no day or season
When nature's not complete.

To praise her though he pleases,
Proud man is never mild
If his ambition seizes
The riches of the wild.

The trees lie undefended
From lawlessness and greed
When care is not extended
To Mother Nature's need.

When woods are decimated
And all their treasures lost,
Who else but man is fated
To bear this heavy cost?

ULYSSES

after Hölderlin

ULYSSES THOUGHT that he had lost
Olympus' wry smile
When his frail boat by waves was tossed
Upon the Cyclops isle.

He found that he had even more
Which could be swiftly lost,
And that what fate too often stole
Claimed but a modest cost.

What little he bemoaned he had
Was much more than he thought:
He could have been content and glad
For his quite happy lot.

I, likewise, when I fear I've lost
All hope amidst regret,
Recall that every bridge I've crossed
Has made me richer yet.

WINTER REST

after Novalis

IN FROZEN realms where snow to spring's will never bends,
The laden branches of the firs quake full of fright
And only the audacious sunlight solace lends
To bashful birds which fear the loneliness of flight.

Dark, weary thoughts and waking dreams enshroud my mind
And dismal visions veil in haze my feeble sight,
Which stares into the void and little comfort finds.
How haunting is the moving specter of the night!

The day grows dim when dirges spread their aching blight
And broken skies unleash their curse of ice, and when
Grey, heavy clouds both earth and tameless seas unite
In tongues of frost with words unbridled by the pen.

The lure of winter rest, the sun's abiding shine
Are both forgotten by the wind's unceasing might
As years grow old and weak while youthful hopes decline
And I await the solemn verdict of the night.

Just you, dear mother, gently calling from within
Your peaceful nest of withered leaves and wilted thyme,
Entrance my senses like a fair and lambent queen
Whose calls reach forth from far beyond your grave and time.

The birds are still, the wick of joy was drowned by fear
And lost within the restless sea of aimless plight
When stars are growing dim and midnight's call draws near.
Beware the strange and sullen silence of the night!

NARCISSUS

after Shelley

WHAT CRYPT of shadows is our ever-warring world!
Within our hasty days, its guises change so fast
That even wise men's sturdy roots are torn and hurled
To dry dispassion, tomb of care which cannot last.

One day indulged by fame, forgotten but the next,
Narcissus wastes his youth while captive to cheap praise,
Then shrivels with remorse when charm by age is vexed
And far too late it is to mend his haughty ways.

While he is idolized, too many reap but scorn
And centuries may pass before their gifts are known,
For few indeed to immortality are born:
Throughout their tortured time, they often tread alone.

THE CHARGE OF YOUTH

after Keats

SPREAD FORTH your wings and fly, fair youth!
Though time is terse and winds are strong,
No brisker bird can glide as smooth.
Fly out and roam, your day's not long!

Old age will come, so soar in song!
Break free of chains—the time is right—
And do not waste your gift for wrong:
Dive forth and chase away the night!

All spite shall burn, red skies alight,
For naught can stop the glow of truth.
The world's old ways will die in flight,
For who can stop the charge of youth?

PERFECTION

after Shakespeare

MY COYNESS if I could perchance allay,
I might, for once, corral the force of will
To stand before you, true in every way,
And state my love, however short of skill.
The breath of beauty follows where you lead
And never few are those who crave your heart.
Though nobler be their sight or fair indeed,
Not one of them warm comfort can impart.
With every day, in graces you increase
And gentler is your mien as years go by;
My fondness of your charm will never cease,
But shall instead persist until I die.
Seldom is wit with beauty thus combined,
And this is how perfection is defined.

MIDNIGHT HOUR

after Henley

WERE THOUGHT and reason taken for their word
And life's slow course to gloom and death
Allowed to hover over man's absurd
Existence in his every breath,
Love's touch and shine would all be lost
And gone at envy's heavy cost.

Yet I, unmoved by time, despair or grief,
Shall rise above all tests of strength
To fight against the night hour's horrid thief
And never sway at any length.
When heartened by your candid charm,
No grief or care can cause me harm.

TIME'S SIEVE

after Pope

BENEATH A tall magnolia I sat
And watched the slender birch trees oft caressed
By wind and sunny tenderness, and blessed
With quiet air above the grassy mat.

Beyond the trees, a tall Artesian fount
Would pour its misty sprinkle on the lake,
Where turtles basked before the sun to take
The pulse of Pan's calm heart, in restful count.

An aged and stately yew concealed a thrush
Whose rapturous refrain enticed the ear
And voiced a call his fellows to endear
And spot new friends within the covert lush.

The rueful reeds esconded waterfowl
Which sat in slumber with their fluffy young
While cotton clouds above were sparsely flung
And charmed the air in pledges of avowal.

A chilly gust of autumn wind then passed:
The wary thrush flew off; the geese stood still,
And then I heard the mumble of the mill
And its blunt call, whose rhythm paced too fast.

How sly is Time! In peace I wished to live,
Not bend my mind upon the day's old cares;
If only I had caught him unawares,
I might have fooled him and his greedy sieve.

ANCIENT PROPHECY

after Cowper

THE TENDER, torpid sun floats bored and heavy over vines
And casts his gentle, crimson rays upon the Apennines.
Above the calm and golden hill, Agrippa's villa stands:
A marble mansion reigning firm atop the ripened lands.

The day is old; the evening star awakes its tender spark
To guide the laborers' return from toil before the dark.
Before the peaceful manor's lush and ivied colonnade,
Two soft, enamored voices hide and whisper in the shade:

“O, wretchedness! We are so far from our Brittonic home...
What good is Rome's dull paradise if free we cannot roam?
Though our great master's generous and shelters us from sweat,
Our dormant woods of Albion are fair and greener yet.”

“Along the rill we'd walk each night to watch its grace unfold,
Until by shackles we were seized and then to Cæsar sold.
Farewell, sweet home, your pristine shores we'll never see again,
Nor hear the light and gleeful song of the belovèd wren!”

“Our peaceful isle’s been conquered too and promptly overrun
By clouds of war which overthrew the power of the sun.
Forever shall our humble land be bound to foreign whim:
Too hopeless is her future now, forlorn and surely dim.”

“Do not despair, my love!” replied at once the other voice,
“Though we do not, in distant days, our people shall rejoice.
Once Rome grows old, her force shall wane and our descendants’ tongue
Will grow deep roots on all the globe and own it before long.”

“Our bold successors will awake and, with a mighty strike,
Will seize yet undiscovered lands and own them all alike.
Their workings and their industry will spread their wondrous wings
‘Til even Clio’s harp pays heed, and these great exploits sings.”

“Though now unfavored and dismissed on Caesar’s kingdom’s fringe,
One day, on our fair Albion the world’s full fate shall hinge.
The choicest treasures of the past in there will find abode,
And to the greatest minds and bards she’ll be sweet mother lode.”

“Her kings and queens shall rule their realm in an unbroken line
And make our island’s fame unmatched: both splendid and divine.
How ancient will our world then be, and surely long extinct,
Although, by then, the universe will have but barely blinked!”

“And yet, what pride and joy it is to know that our own kin
Shall be the heirs of the sun’s grace, like planets as they spin!
Most fortunate we are, indeed, to know that humankind
A future nobler than our own on Earth shall never find.”

PRIMROSES

after Brontë

OUR PATHS converged at the dawn of a day
When love was young and the primroses graced
A quiet grove in the care of a fey;
On that morn, my young heart knew no haste.

We laughed and kissed in the gardens, unseen,
Where Jove and Mars on their pedestals stood
Firm watch far above, by the green
And luxurious spread of the wood.

Too long ago was all this and I sigh
As time invites me to visit anew
The sleepy fountains and tries to deny
That your days in my arms were so few.

TO REMEMBRANCE

after Keats

THE WEB of silence, ether which retains
My distant days' dim trace of tears on sand,
Is a slim amphora whose dark wine pains
My drowsy brain with thoughts forever banned.
Deceitful lords of long ago and old

Remittances unpaid for lack of trust

Sojourn with me and raise again the dead

Desire which once would turn my heart to lust
And careless love, when nothing but the cold

Despair of loneliness could cause me dread.

Where do you linger, spirit of the night?
I wish to drink your potion cup, then lie
And fall into a dream to seep your light,
Whose brightness wanes. In vain I weep and sigh:
To steal the wings of Mercury, the god

Whose intercessor you have been on earth,

No science, skill or spirit can assist

My solitary quest. I sense the dearth
Of calming waters spilled upon the sod

Where shy Juventas lies, embraced by mist.

Both cherished and disdained by man you are.
I stare at your wide portal, locked and veiled,
And often do I hear your wan guitar
Which keeps me in your labyrinth of failed
And buried dreams. Remembrance! You must not
 Delight yourself and feast on fallen fruit
 From aerial Elysium, where long
 Your scepter held dominion absolute.
You must undo the heavy Gordian knot
 Which keeps me bound to your unhappy song.

APOCALYPSE

WHEN THE skies break out with thunder
And pale ghosts the stars outnumber,
When the sword of lightning falls
And the owl of midnight calls,
When the ocean's growl is grey
And dim hope has naught to say,
 Haggard Death shall play his lute,
 His reign cruel and absolute.

When choked prayers fail to free
Breaths of immortality,
When gaunt visions spell cold doom,
Sorrow, pain and clouds of gloom,
When all creatures hide and hear
Ravens shriek, benumbed by fear,
 All regret shall be in vain,
 Murdered and eclipsed by pain.

When the frigid air is borne
By the might which mauls the morn,
When the nightingale is slain
By the raspy, roaring rain,
When the lovers' hope is sunk
By dark poison deeply drunk,
Not a soul resist shall dare:
All shall tremble and despair.

TIMES OF YOUTH

TIMES OF youth and days of old:
Resurrect you if I could,
Never would I need to brood
On my errors in their fold.

Mournful longings of the past
Fed by waning hope for light:
Quickly melt you if I might,
Greener thoughts could grow at last.

Troubled hours of years to come:
Never shall I fall again
Prey to your pale worries when
Love is dead and joy is mum.

My short days shall all be gone
Long before the world is gray;
I must bask without delay
In the bright rays of the sun.

Never should a man relent
To the tempests of the heart.
Do not wait 'til woes depart
For, by then, all life is spent!

TRANSIENT BEAUTY

after Wordsworth

BREATH OF spring and fresh romances flown
Farther than where clouds their dew have wept!
Hither sweep your hand upon all seeds unsown:
Reap the gold in winter's wardship kept!

Bashfully, the moon of March ascends,
Shedding rays of silver light on bright
Dreams of green demesnes, whose rousing blends
Green emotions fed by her delight.

Spoiled by sunny streams of warmth, the earth
Lures the mind of man away from cold
Misery to calm, resplendent birth
Shaped anew in firm and fitting mould.

Decked in snowdrops, Spring displays her crown
Carried high by nymphs and satyrs, proud
Envoys quick to hail their queen, whose gown
Cloaks the woods and awes the blooming crowd.

Dozing off on waves of rolling grass,
Lovers breathe the scent of youth and live
Fleeting hours of joy while bees amass
Nectar drops which lilies gladly give.

Transient beauty doomed to die! By what
Spell of old did crass reality
Close the grip of time and swiftly cut
Roots which fed your immortality?

Pleasant summer's not too far behind,
But by autumn's end you'll be asleep,
Bound to rise anew within my mind
While, in winter, faithful watch I keep.

TWO YOUTHS ASTRAY

FAR DEEP within the woods, there lies a seldom-trodden trail
Whose winding way is paved along by rustling, fallen leaves
And flanked by ancient maple trees. This nest of branches weaves
The woodland spirits' canopy, in autumn hued and pale.

To reach this path, explorers must traverse the hurdling crests
Of stately mountains guarded keenly day and night, and yet
The souls of some too often find themselves much lured and set
On walking underneath this shielding roof where beauty rests.

Where does this pathway lead? No sage would know, for not a soul
Who made his way that far has yet returned to speak of it.
Man's told of this enchanted trail in deepest dreams divinely lit,
When doubts are fooled and leery eyes, in passing, grasp its role.

Though hidden and remote, this solitary road allures
The restless fancy bound to earth by pale reality,
And gives man's aimless days their restful, fresh finality
When blissful poesy the gloom of droning life obscures.

I knew two youths who strayed from home and found this path one night.
Bemused by its unearthly call, they veered and probed away;
Alas, they reached the very end, and there they longed to stay.
Among the stars, their love now dwells in bright, eternal light.

LIFE'S FATE

OLD SERVILE sleep descends on heavy wings
From laden summits wrapped in icy clouds
When, glassy-eyed, the owl of midnight sings
Of snowy mist which starry light enshrouds.

Atop the ancient firs, the birds lie still
And cling to life as sucklings to their womb
In crypt-like valleys, where the frozen rill
Encased the trout in quick and early tomb.

What moves within the cave below the lake?
A gaunt and shapeless spectre lurks beneath
The mantle of the earth, whose embers quake
And melt the lurid winter's spiny teeth.

How delicate is all which grows above
The burning bosom of our earthen sphere,
Encased in Gaia's moist and gentle glove,
Whose sap refreshes nature year by year!

Though trustful constancy may seem to reign
Above all things which bear the fruits of joy,
These need much more than light and earth and rain
And more indeed than nature can deploy.

What comforts does Life have? Her subtle strength
Is but a leaf blown over by the winds,
Distraught by death, and cruelly plagued at length
By patient dæmons and by wakeful fiends.

Upon the vaulted panoply of stars,
Our humble globe drifts sluggishly, well seen
By fiery asters whose greed stems and mars
The will of Life and her fugacious sheen.

The splendid titans of the evening sky
Shine blindingly, far stronger than our Sun
And, though quite far their blazing course may lie,
A clash may chance before our star is gone.

What then of Earth, its valleys and its peaks,
Of summer love, of countless birds, of Life,
Who all her aims in sequestration seeks,
Away from lightless grave or cosmic strife?

Dark mysteries to man these riddles are,
For our dim sight such views cannot contain:
We were not born to dream and plan too far,
No matter how much ruse and wit we feign.

Though we should know that Life might die in pain,
We cannot help but live within our shell,
For trials to dodge divine conceit are vain
And thoughts too deep sheer madness could foretell.

Sprung of low birth upon an orb of clay,
Man's musings may well take him far indeed,
Though powerless is he to fathom, nay,
To change Life's fate, though dire may be her need.

SEPULCHRAL FLAME

after Bradstreet

LINDEN TREE branches whisper your name
Cherished by flowers, blessed by the sky,
Carved on a stone. The sepulchre's flame
Kindles and keeps your memory nigh.

When your departure day I bemoan,
Endless your absence seems to have been.
Deep in my heart regret you have sown,
Darker than weeping willows have seen.

TO HOPEFULNESS

after Keats

SUCH VILE infusion calls me to the brink
Of ruthless fear and callous doubt sown deep
Within my heart, where tides of malice bring
To mind deep wells whence cheerlessness I seep!
I lie, forgotten by the vim of peace,
 Beneath the elderberry tree, whose wine
 And flowers make me dream of restful waves
 Which crash upon the shores of night. I pine
For days when toil, distress and tears might cease
 And I am spared the sight of solitary graves.

Thick, lulling clouds obscure the sight of day
And sprinkle tears of time upon the ground,
Whose sturdy coat compels the grass to pay
A debt of dew in silence free of bound.
As elms and birches grow, so does concern
 On shoulders bent by old, abandoned dreams,
 Or heavy over eye lids—closed by fright—
 Which may not ever see the merry leams
Bestowed by joy on man. Indeed, more stern
 Than thirst or death can be a spirit's blight.

Unknown to day, besought in vain by night,
Flight's ecstasy in heaven's music shines,
Though light and voices tremble to the sight
Of sorrow's dawn, when star-ward hope declines.
Unique and candid is the charming dance
 Of graceful cranes, whose wings spread out to seek
 The land of palm trees, where Euterpe's spell
 Bewitched the clever lyre bird's will, whose beak
Sings royal chants and thrills, as in a trance,
 The deafest ear, its woe and thirst to quell.

I bid farewell to sadness as I see
How love of youth and bliss, unchecked by time,
Inspire the soul—as in a gleeful spree—
To burn, and then from ashes soar and shine.
All deep regret, resented as it should,
 Must taste of life, suspire and promptly die
 A hasty death, unheeded and alone,
 For peace and hopefulness while not a sigh
Is heard. Unkind dejection may not brood;
 Good souls must soar to a celestial dome.

ENGLISH

after Keats

HOW UNDYING is your song,
Most resplendent English tongue!
You're a tree with countless leaves:
Words whose rustling wonder weaves!

To the mind your sound ascends
And, with swift command, it blends
Beauty with the joys of peace,
Whose delights can never cease.

On thick branches, your fruits grow
And, upon my heart, they sow
Lasting stories fed by time,
Mournful longings clothed in rhyme,
Marvels great and unsurpassed,
Fancies of the ages past.

Upon these, the wilful mind
Can indulge, within to find
Bright reflections of its dreams
In the mirror of your streams,
Spread on silk and wrapped in gold
With light touch by craft of old.

Unabashed, from your warm nest,
Eagles proudly fly in quest
For the freedom of the skies
Where the muses' shelter lies,
Whence the spirits gather near
Bards and wrights, their thoughts to hear
By your fountain, in the shade,
Where dark worries are allayed.

Often I'm inclined to mourn
That of you I was not born:
You have reared me like your own
And, within your arms, I've grown
To delight in your pure taste—
Without bounds and without haste—
And take pride that you outshine
All the glories of my time.

SOLEMNITY OF SNOW

after Shelley

THE SLEEP of reason quells my fears away
From doubt, and lifts my mind upon the wings
Of carelessness, well sheltered on my way
To places where no man or ghost may sing,
 Where all humanity is mute as stone
 Or chained to ignorance: a wretched drone.

Unmoved I lie and rest while, all around
My secret grotto, winds may blow and die
Upon the summits clad in ice and bound
For other trails of time, where many sigh
 In secret envy of my quiet home,
 Where calm and comfort linger all alone.

No other life endures on high, though, in a cleft
Upon the mountain's rib, a strange and humble plant
Has found a trough where rain drops fall bereft
Of love, while waiting for green leaves which can't
 Abide the laws of night, but rather pine
 To die and live anew upon the crested line.

Beneath, the storm and clouds enshroud the scene
And never let one sound disturb the white
Solemnity of snow, whose bright flakes seem
To live and die like us, in the plain sight
 Of sun or moon rays, under stars
 Whose endless swarm all other beauty mars.

At last, I breathe the wintry air below
The frozen crown of endless solitude,
Inwrought with fragile pearls which grow
And spread across in listless multitude,
 As if within a sea shell where the sand
 Is well protected from the ocean's hand.

Between the rock and air there's no divide
To tear my spirit down, to dare me keep
My eyes upon the ground, upon the side
Of life whence knowledge cannot leap
 Into the space below me, far more vast
 Than any precipice where faithless hope is cast.

PRISONER'S DILEMMA

WHEN I run out of words
And the wind drives away
All the lonesome and sorrowful birds,
I imagine the day
When to dust I shall turn
And all knowledge of me can then burn.

When the past fills my eyes
And old faces appear
For odd reasons which reason defies,
I remember how near
Is the keeper of time,
Whether fate is accursed or sublime.

Then I linger in thought,
Until late in the night,
In the maelstrom of doubt where I'm caught,
And I venture to write
A terse, cryptic lament,
Though my letter to life can't be sent.

FLEDGLINGS

IN THE hollow of a tree by the river,
 There are fledglings whose voices quiver
Like the melody of morning, unworried
 That the moon by the sun is hurried.

Like these chicks, I'm content to unravel,
 Undisturbed on my earthly travel,
The undying and ravishing wonder
 Of this world, which no storm can sunder.

BOUNDLESS DREAMS

after Shelley

HOW BRITTLE is the vessel of my boundless dreams
When briny waves crash longingly upon the shore
Of wisdom drenched in lust for peace! It seems
As though its hull has been consumed or bled by war.

The sun is faint. The stars have died away and must
Have slowly slipped into the caving pit of space,
Whence certainty of will cannot escape the rust
On swords unfit to win their long and futile race.

The herded thoughts of ill and brutish minds are high
Upon the firmament where sanguine words should dwell,
And never can dry truth beset and burn the lie
Encased in gold on heavy monuments from hell.

Where staleness dwells, so does the deadly sea of sand,
Amassing layers spread upon the ocean floor,
Unbending in its ruthless rage, resolved to strand—
Upon the rim of night—the fated ship of lore.

At last, what little love remains must ebb and face
The unsuspected void enveloping all hope,
And then succumb to the pale ghost who wields the mace,
Or even hang by a most sturdy silken rope.

SUMMERTIDE

after Shelley

THE DULCET rays of summertide extend
Their wings below the wavy crowns of trees,
Where slabs of stone adorn a path and blend
Their way across a kingdom owned by bees.

Across the waterfall, a house of stone
Stands quiet by the ivied moorland, where
The human footstep often strides alone,
Though crescent moon beams always visit there.

I'm like a raven on a branch of life,
Distrustful of my fate and of my ways,
Yet knowing that more clever is the knife
Of time, than any fox who sings my praise.

Alone with my own thoughts, protected by the heights
Of oak and elm trees, where I lie in sleep,
I feel unknown: untouched by all the lights
Spread out by stars from their celestial keep.

Across the fallows and the firths I fly
On ample whiffs of wistful stupor quelled
By the recess of chaos when I try
To tame fierce words whose ore was never welled.

As rain and winds might shred tall peaks to dust,
So does the world grow old and rise anew
Though, by sheer mutability, it must
Reveal its secrets to a chosen few.

FOND MEMORIES

THE LIGHT that blinds the moth at dusk
Is like the elephant's white tusk,
Which charms the eye but robs the purse:
A gentle animal's great curse.

Alike, when love by time is borne
Within a mind to duty sworn,
Fond memories the heart enslave
And both are carried to the grave.

SPLENDID FLAME

THE OUTBURST of a star
Has travelled very far
To show its splendid flame
On high.

In passing, when it came,
Its glow was all the same
As when it longed to die
Astray.

It wilted with a sigh,
Unfearful to defy
The biddings of its day
And sleep.

There is no better way
To dwindle and decay
Than, like a star, to weep
Away.

GOLDEN FRUIT

A CAITIFF born in heaven tried amain
To buy the chance to be
Reborn, instead of overslaughed and slain
For what he longed to see.

The stinging nettle growing on the tor
Necked out to watch this foe
And, in its envy, craved for more
Sharp hairs than it could grow.

The golden fruit was more than man could scorn,
And thus he climbed the tree
Whence hands of plunder stole the bounty borne
By every breathing bee.

Alas, these outcast creatures seemed to think
That there was still some chance
For grace to call them from the lurid brink
Of shame, where Furies dance.

BEAUTY'S TWIN

after Shelley

A PENDULUM is but a slave of time:
What its trapped spirit wants is hidden where
The folding waves can find a friendly clime,
Unlike the bloodied dagger of despair.

Inveigled by amorphous accolades
Of lust, the lure to scry and linger thin
In search of faithful memories soon fades
If hungry eyes ensorcel beauty's twin.

Æolian caresses cannot calm
The mind of Argus on his callous charge,
Though knavish gods have chosen to embalm
His eyes within a noble avian barge.

How brazen... I still crave the fleeting thrill
To break the sundial as Saint Elmo strikes the mast
Of ships, and make grey time stand still.
O, might it die so that I breathe at last!

LETTERS ARE DUST

LETTERS ARE dust
Wearily cast,
Sculpted on stone,
Resting alone;

Words on a slab,
Spelt by Queen Mab,
Torn from the sky,
Voiced upon high;

Thoughts from above,
Painted by love,
Ready to bloom
Over the moon;

Rhythms unheard,
Blissful and stirred,
Pining to be
Leaves on a tree.

PAGAN PRAYER

SAVE ME from the dark:

Help me be a lark

Flying in the air

Free of any care!

Take me from the deep:

Show me how to keep

All I love on earth

Fit for my rebirth!

MOIRA'S WHIM

A FAWN was ousted into light
At Moira's playful whim;
His mother's keening birthed delight
Too rapturous to limn.

If Circe were to steer his craft
To her Olympian shore,
His hair onto the wind she'd graft
Jove's favor to restore.

Into this fawn you have been turned
To quell his jealous lust,
Which never has so brightly burned
Nor risen quite so fast.

BETTER WORLDS

THE FRIEND a man wished for did not exist
And many books he read to no avail,
Though his deep longing could not be dismissed:
There's but one end to every human tale.

He lived behind long shelves, where he could delve
Into the past or future, while his day
Was clocked only by time, which counts to twelve
And leaves its lasting marks upon wet clay.

Unlike forgotten men, he longed to dwell
Where better worlds were spread before his eyes,
And live under a charming, wishful spell
Than taste reality's long trail of lies.

LOVE'S BREW

ANOTHER TURTLE in the sun
Or nightingale perched on a tree;
Another day whose course has run
For living things, for you and me;

Another nursling stirs anew,
Its dull fate longing to defy;
Another pair will drink love's brew,
But now, for once, it's you and I.

MELODIOUS QUEST

COUCHED ON a cloud of immortal unrest,
Harmonies ring in the light of the moon,
Neither diluted nor rising too soon:
All in a lively, melodious quest.

Plumed by bright meteors burning on high,
Hither they call me and weltering waves
Whisper my name while faint starlight engraves
Dreams of despair in the billowing sky.

Freed from the darkness of wearisome truth,
Wildly I sail on an ocean for ghosts,
Wide though remote from the cavern which hosts
Earthlings inclined to the dire and uncouth.

Calm is the night and remote is the call
Voiced by the seagulls imprisoned ashore.
Soothed by your kisses, I covet once more
Endless repose and within you I fall.

IMPASSE

after Wilbur

THE RESTLESS lizard climbing on the wall
Can hardly fathom where the end may lie
To his audacious quest, and this is why
He doesn't know that, in the end, he'll fall.

Again he tries but then again he slides
And into cold obscurity he's thrown.
Without advice, he cannot grasp alone
What laws the unavoidable betides.

If only he were told that he should not
Defy his earthly bounds and pose as bird,
He would look neither joyless nor absurd,
And might escape the impasse where he's caught.

RAYS OF STARLIGHT

IF FISH we were, we could not swim,
Nor live our days at Cora's whim.
We differ as the sea from land,
Which write men's epitaphs on sand.

Transfixed by time, we hardly mean
What the pale universe has seen
Embodied many times before:
Dim rays of starlight, nothing more.

PASSION SPENT

MY LUST was like a blossom cradled by its sheen,
 Though bold. On wings of night it fled
Much swifter than what Nature might have felt or seen;
 My heart sank deep as if of lead.

It was and wasn't, for it may have lived or died.
 What counted then was that it would
Survive in me, where letters could have wept or sighed,
 Eternal in their haunting mood.

Unbuilt by storms and then restored to heights by love,
 It surged and trebled like a song
More tender than the sun and whiter than a dove
 Whose graces timid hopes prolong.

ECHOED THOUGHT

THE INNER sphere of echoed thought beholds
The urn of changing vapor from the height
Of lost remembrance. Darkly, mist unfolds
A weight of madding blindness with such might
That all within the realm of misery is stirred
To joyless life, announcing its pursuit
Of softer voices, pantingly interred
By sparkless fires, unmoved in their dispute,
Outsoared by unextinguished will man's gold to loot.

The mastery of unfulfilled descent
Within the madness of the shattered wreck
Which binds all light to us, dim mortals, lent
By desolation is for Phoenix birds to peck.
Indomitable as the burning heat
Of blazing suns whose rays descend on me,
The task of breathing is a hurtful feat
Whose worth is difficult to see.
What oracle might have foreseen my fate's decree?

THE MYSTIC

THE MOON shines brightly in the evening sky,
Bedecked by Venus on her daily ride
Across the constant stream of stars which lie
Outspread on high, as bright across as wide.

Upon the desert sand there lies a trace
Of caravans meandering along
The silken dunes, along the quiet face
Of drowsy earth, as in a peaceful song.

A mystic watches falling stars descend
While fantasy delivers him away
From there and then and into stories penned
By shrewd magicians of another day.

Is he on earth or is he far away,
Where nothing but the zodiac reminds
Him of the mortal shell in which he may
Still dwell and where his peace no homestead finds?

An hour, a day, a year, a life: how long
Before he can discard his earthly coat
And turn into an angel whose fair song
Accompanies an ever-sailing boat?

SILENT BEAUTY

SHE SAT all quiet on the grass:
A leaf of autumn trapped in ice
Too long before it could amass
What spring might never give it twice.

She sat there every morning while
The stream of her kind beauty flowed
Like a lithe barge along the ancient Nile,
Whose trembling contour shyly glowed.

She was the last rose of her kind,
Whose fragrance dwindled and would die;
The world would turn and try to find
Some other gem and barely sigh.

For many she was naught, though I,
Within my troubled heart, knew well
That life would turn into a lie
When time would sing her parting knell.

If pearls like her are doomed to fade,
The world is stained by an eclipse
And tears are shed upon the blade
Of edicts voiced by lurid lips.

NOTHING LEFT TO SAY

THERE IS nothing left to say
Once the wind has blown away
All the leaves from their high nest
To its cradle in the west,
Where the hills and meadows were
Filled with plaintive dulcimer
Notes descending from the cot
Of the lonely knight, who sought
His good fortune far from home,
In a land where armies roam
At the will of greedy kings,
Of whose deeds the minstrel sings
To the gullible, poor crowd
Whose slow thoughts are borne aloud
From the markets and the streets
To the richly ornate seats
Held by anarchy and pride
In a pose which cannot hide

All their perfidy and lust
For the harvests of the just,
Who must sob in misery
Waiting for eternity,
Where they fancy they'll receive
What is due to those who give
Of themselves upon this earth,
On whose face they're cursed with birth—
One as beggar, one as lord,
Neither of his own accord,
Though both human through and through,
About which no man can do
Anything to cast away
The frail moulding of his clay,
Or to summon from the pit
Of his mind what he sees fit
To console himself today
And endure on his long way
From his rise until his fall
To the dark and eerie call
Of the scythe which severs life
Far more cruelly than the knife
Which sheds blood upon the ground

Once the boar caves to the hound
Trained to heed its master's call
To the end and above all,
Just as nature has ordained
What by man cannot be feigned,
And what ultimately braves
All mere mortals to their graves,
Though what still remains behind
Is for wiser men to find
In the song of the old knight
And the western wind's great might
As it blows the leaves away
When there's nothing left to say.

KING OF CLUBS

WHAT MIGHT have brightened sober days
Is now a poison clearly seen
Within the labyrinthine ways
Of hearts and their fugacious queen.

The king of clubs once owned my dreams
And all the diamonds in the crown,
But then long years and clever schemes
Paid back the debt which trod me down.

I did once play a game of spades
Which brought me quick and short relief,
Though I knew well that he who wades
Through life is but a drowning thief.

And now, that all the deck is stacked
Against the joy of yesterdays,
The bridge to knavery is wracked
And youth is trumped inside a maze.

CHILDHOOD SONG

THERE WAS an actor once, whose age
Was far too young
To warrant tragedy on stage.

A sapling's roots were harshly wrung
And hurled far out of way,
Where to a barren rock they clung.

I, likewise, did not have a say
When I was torn and flung,
And yet I lived to thrive today.

This is my childhood song.

CONSTANCY

CONSTANCY OF will is a power
Present where few may expect.
Those who won't rear it reject
Dreams to blossom into a flower.

BIRD'S NEST

A YOUTH once heard the helpless cries
Of chicks whose nest had fallen off
A tree branch, while their parents' sighs
Spoke wailingly like a rebuff
To fate and its prosaic lies.

I helped the child to mend the wrong
Which had befallen unannounced
And to restore the carefree song
Whose charming stream had been denounced
Before it could proceed for long.

I then remembered someone good
Who had once helped me in my plight
And felt fulfilled, like one who could
Allay a hatchling's fear of flight,
As every good heart has and should.

GIFT OF JOY

YOU WARN me that our bond can't last,
That time and space will drive away
Our love, whose passions cannot stay
Our lives' injunctions once they're cast.

I lend compassion to your doubt,
Though I already know full well
That heartfelt ardor cannot dwell
Too long where wisdom's yet to sprout.

I'd rather hide this knowledge deep
Within my mind and dream along,
Because what binds us is a song
Whose gift of joy lures time to sleep.

HYPNOS

THE PASSINGS of our age are a disturbing dream.
Though longer than our lives, they sometimes feels as brief
As our own rapid days, whose swiftly flowing stream
Bears memory downstream: a light and helpless leaf.

The mind grows ripe with age and urges thoughts to leave
The cradle of their youth for more alluring shores,
Yet—late in life—fear finds it troubling to conceive
A kinder image for men's punmeled faith to store.

When sleep bewitches reason on its restless course,
The wind of power breathes its daring way across
The distant, fleeting kingdom of its dismal source
Where long-forgotten songs lie captive to their loss.

The heavy cataracts of wonted, dull display
And leaden tension creeping down on silent man
Throw freedom and its passion into disarray
And wake the fiendish force whose roar unfurls their ban.

The sign of spent desires—a breeze of the unseen—
Takes shape upon the cloudy shore's unlevelled sand.
Alas, man cannot linger in the realm between
True form and wish, before fair Hypnos takes his hand.

REASON'S CANDLE

WHEN SOME decline to solve the riddle
Of how emotions rule their minds,
They'd rather talk away and fiddle
With vicious thoughts their boredom finds.

Yet boredom carries far more weight
When man's distress is served by wit
Than any task, however great,
If reason's candle is unlit.

Of greater worth are musing men
Who act on what their lives could be
Than others scribbling with the pen
What their dim, narrow visions see.

A POETESS

SHE LONGS to burn the writings of the fools
Whose stilted words turn harvests into chaff,
And live unknown than prize the empty rules
Which steer their ship and prompt the wise to laugh.

Though Shakespeare, Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, Keats,
Longfellow, Pope and Dryden are long dead,
She'd sooner delve into their metric feats
Than into rhymes whose dullness weighs like lead.

Dead praises share no kingly gift, so when
Her mind is numbed by frivolous display,
She leaves the sheep to their ordeal, and then
Ignores what laureled braggarts care to say.

