

THE CICADAS

AND OTHER POEMS

By Aldous Huxley

NOVELS

Point Counter Point
Those Barren Leaves
Antic Hay
Crome Yellow

SHORT STORIES

Brief Candles
Two or Three Graces
Little Mexican
Mortal Coils
Limbo

ESSAYS AND BELLES LETTRES

Music at Night
Vulgarity in Literature
Do What You Will
Proper Studies
Jesting Pilate
Along the Road
On the Margin

POETRY

Leda

DRAMA

The Discovery, adapted from
Frances Sheridan

Chatto & Windus

T H E
C I C A D A S

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

ALDOUS HUXLEY

CHATTO & WINDUS, LONDON

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THE CICADAS

AND OTHER POEMS

*

THEATRE OF VARIETIES

CIRCLE on circle the hanging gardens descend,
Sloping from upper darkness, each flower face
Open, turned to the light and laughter and life
Of the sun-like stage. And all the space between,
Like the hot fringes of a summer sky,
Is quick with trumpets, beats with the pulse of drums,
Athwart whose sultry thunders rise and fall
Flute fountains and the swallow flight of strings.
Music, the revelation and marvellous lie !
On the bright trestles tumblers, tamers of beasts,
Dancers and clowns affirm their fury of life.

‘The World-Renowned Van Hogen Mogen in
The Master Mystery of Modern Times.’

He talks, he talks ; more powerfully than even
Music his quick words hammer on men’s minds.

‘ Observe this hat, ladies and gentlemen ;
Empty, observe, empty as the universe
Before the Head for which this Hat is made
Was or could think. Empty, observe, observe.’
The rabbit kicks ; a bunch of paper flowers
Blooms in the limelight ; paper tape unrolls,
Endless, a clue. ‘ Ladies and gentlemen . . . ’
Sharp, sharp on malleable minds his words
Hammer. The little Indian boy
Enters the basket. Bright, an Ethiop’s sword
Transfixes it and bleeding is withdrawn.
Death draws and petrifies the watching faces.
‘ Ladies and gentlemen ’ : the great Van Hogen Mogen
Smiles and is kind. A puddle of dark blood
Slowly expands. ‘ The irremediable
Has been and is no more.’
Empty of all but blood, the basket gapes.
‘ Arise ! ’ he calls, and blows his horn. ‘ Arise ! ’
And bird-like from the highest gallery
The little Indian answers.
Scout upon shout, the hanging gardens reverberate.
Happy because the irremediable is healed,
Happy because they have seen the impossible,
Because they are freed from the dull daily law,

They shout, they shout. And great Van Hogen Mogen
Modestly bows, graciously smiles. The band
Confirms the lie with cymbals and bassoons,
The curtain falls. How quickly the walls recede,
How soon the petrified gargoyles re-become
Women and men ! who fill the warm thick air
With rumour of their loves and discontents,
Not suffering even great Hogen Mogen—
Only begetter out of empty hats
Of rose and rabbit, raiser from the dead—
To invade the sanctity of private life.

The Six Aerial Sisters Polpetini
Dive dangerously from trapeze to far
Trapeze, like stars, and know not how to fall.
For if they did and if, of his silver balls,
Sclopis, the juggler, dropped but one—but one
Of all the flying atoms which he builds
With his quick throwing into a solid arch—
What panic then would shake the pale flower faces
Blooming so tranquilly in their hanging beds !
What a cold blast of fear ! But patrons must not,
And since they must not, cannot be alarmed.
Hence Sclopis, hence (the proof is manifest)

The Six Aerial Ones infallibly
Function, and have done, and for ever will.

Professor Chubb's Automaton performs
Upon the viols and virginals, plays chess,
Ombre and loo, mistigri, tric-trac, pushpin,
Sings Lilliburlero in falsetto, answers
All questions put to it, and with its rubber feet
Noiselessly dances the antique heydiguy.
'Is it a man?' the terrible infant wonders.
And 'no,' they say, whose business it is
To say such infants nay. And 'no' again
They shout when, after watching Dobbs and Debs
Step simultaneously through intricate dances,
Hammer the same tune with their rattling clogs
In faultless unison, the infant asks,
'And they, are they machines?'

Music, the revelation and marvellous lie,
Rebuilds in the minds of all a suave and curving
Kingdom of Heaven, where the saxophone
Affirms everlasting loves, the drums deny
Death, and where great Tenorio, when he sings,
Makes Picardy bloom only with perfumed roses,

And never a rotting corpse in all its earth.
Play, music, play ! In God's bright limelight eyes
An angel walks and with one rolling glance
Blesses each hungry flower in the hanging gardens.
' Divine,' they cry, having no words by which
To call the nameless spade a spade, ' Divine
Zenocrate ! ' There are dark mysteries
Whose name is beauty, strange revelations called
Love, and a gulph of pleasure and of awe
Where words fall vain and wingless in the dark ;
Thè seen Ineffable, the felt but all-Unknown
And Undescribed, is God. ' Divine, divine ! '
The god-intoxicated shout goes up.
' Divine Zenocrate ! '
' Father,' the terrible infant's voice is shrill,
' Say, father, why does the lady wear no skirts ? '
She wears no skirts ; God's eyes have never been brighter.
The face flowers open in her emanation.
She is the suave and curving Kingdom of Heaven
Made visible, and in her sugared song
The ear finds paradise. Divine, divine !
Her belly is like a mound of wheat, her breasts
Are towers, her hair like a flock of goats.
Her foot is feat with diamond toes

And she—divine Zenocrate—
And she on legs of ruby goes.
The face flowers tremble in the rushing wind
Of her loud singing. A poet in the pit
Jots down in tears the words of her Siren song.
So every spirit as it is most pure,
And hath in it the more of heavenly light,
So it the rarer body doth procure
To habit in, and is more fairly dight
With cheerful grace and amiable sight :
For of the soul the body form doth take ;
And soul is form and doth the body make.
' Now, boys, together. All with me,' she cries
Through the long sweet suspense of dominant chords
' For of the soul,' her voice is paradise,
' For of the soul the body form doth take ;
And soul is form and doth the body make.'
Zenocrate, alone, alone divine !

God save the King. Music's last practical joke
Still bugling in their ears of war and glory,
The folk emerge into the night.
Already next week's bills are being posted :—
Urim and Thummim, cross-talk comedians ;

Ringpok, the Magian of Tibet ;
The Two Bedelias ; Ruby and Truby Dix ;
Sam Foy and Troupe of Serio-Comic Cyclists . . .
Theatre of immemorial varieties,
Old mummary, but mummers never the same !
Twice nightly every night from now till doomsday
The hanging gardens, bedded with pale flower faces,
Young flowers in the old old gardens, will echo
With ever new, with ever new delight.

PICTURE BY GOYA

A HIGHWAY ROBBERY

It is a scene of murder—elegant, is it not ?
You lutanists, who play to naked Queens,
As summer sleep or music under trees,
As luncheon on the grass—the grass on which
The country copulatives make sport, the pale
Grass with the tall tubed hats, the inky coats
And rosy, rosy among the funeral black
(*Memento Vivere*) a naked girl.
But here the sleepers bleed, the tumbling couples
Struggle, but not in love ; the naked girl
Kneels at the feet of one who hesitates,
Voluptuously, between a rape and a murder.

Bandits angelical and you, rich corpses !
Truth is your sister, Goodness your spouse.
Towering skies lean down and tall, tall trees
Impose their pale arsenical benediction,
Making all seem exquisitely remote
And small and silent, like a village fair

Seen from the hill-top, far far below.
And yet they walk on the village green to whom
The fair is huge, tumultuous, formidable. Earth
Lies unremembered beneath the feet of dancers
Who, looking up, see not the sky, but towers
And bright invading domes and the fierce swings,
Scythe-like, reaping and ravaging the quiet.
And when night falls, the shuddering gas-flares scoop
Out of the topless dark a little vault
Of smoky gold, wherein the dancers still
Jig away, gods of a home-made universe.

CALIGULA

OR THE TRIUMPH OF BEAUTY

PROW after prow, the floating ships
Bridge the blue gulph ; the road is laid ;
And Caesar on a piebald horse
Prances with all his cavalcade.

Drunk with their own quick blood they go.
The waves flash as with seeing eyes ;
The tumbling cliffs mimic their speed,
And they have filled the vacant skies

With waltzing Gods and Virtues, set
Aeolus roaring with their shout,
Made Vesta's temple on the cape
Spin like a circus roundabout.

The twined caduceus in his hand,
And having golden wings for spurs,
Young Caesar dressed as God looks on
And cheers his jolly mariners ;

Cheers as they heave from off the bridge
The trippers from the seaside town ;
Laughs as they bang the bobbing heads
And shove them bubbling down to drown.

There sweeps a spiral curve of gesture
From the allegoric sky ;
Beauty, like conscious lightning, runs
Through Jove's ribbed trunk and Juno's thigh,

Slides down the flank of Mars and takes
From Virtue's rump a dizzier twist,
Licks round a cloud and whirling stoops
Earthwards to Caesar's lifted fist.

A burgess tumbles from the bridge
Headlong, and hurrying Beauty slips
From Caesar through the plunging legs
To the blue sea between the ships.

NERO AND SPORUS

OR THE TRIUMPH OF ART

THE Christians by whose muddy light
Dimly, dimly I divine
Your eyes and see your pallid beauty
Like a pale night-primrose shine,

Colourless in the dark, revere
A God who slowly died that they
Might suffer the less, who bore the pain
Of all time in a single day,
The pain of all men in a single
Wounded body and sad heart.

The yellow marble, smooth as water,
Builds me a Golden House ; and there
The marble Gods sleep in their strength
And the white Parian girls are fair.

Roses and waxen oleanders,
Green grape bunches and the flushed peach—
All beautiful things I taste, touch, see,
Knowing, loving, becoming each.

The ship went down, my mother swam :
I wedded and myself was wed :
Old Claudius died of emperor-bane :
Old Seneca too slowly bled.

The wild beast and the victim both,
The ravisher and the wincing bride,
King of the world and a slave's slave,
Terror-haunted, deified——

All these, sweet Sporus, I, an artist,
Am and, an artist, needs must be.
Is the tune Lydian ? I have loved you.
And you have heard my symphony

Of wailing voices and clashed brass,
With long shrill flutings that suspend
Pain o'er a muttering gulph of terrors,
And piercing blasts of joy that end,

Gods, in what discord !—could I have
So hymned the Furies, were the bane
Still sap within the hemlock stalk,
The red swords virgin-bright again ?

Or take a child's love that is all
Worship, all tenderness and trust,
A dawn-web, dewy and fragile—take
And with the violence of lust

Tear and defile it. You shall hear
The breaking dumbness and the thin
Harsh crying that is the very music
Of shame and the remorse of sin.

Christ died ; the artist lives for all ;
Loves, and his naked marbles stand
Pure as a column on the sky,
Whose lips, whose breasts, whose thighs
demand

Not our humiliation, not
The shuddering of an after-shame ;
And of his agonies men know
Only the beauty born of them.

Christ died, but living Nero turns
Your mute remorse to song ; he gives
To idiot Fate eyes like a lover's,
And while his music plays, God lives.

NERO AND SPORUS

II

DARK stirrings in the perfumed air
Touch your cheeks, lift your hair.
With softer fingers I caress,
Sporus, all your loveliness.
Round as a fruit, tree-tangled shines
The moon ; and fire-flies in the vines,
Like stars in a delirious sky,
Gleam and go out. Unceasingly
The fountains fall, the nightingales
Sing. But time flows and love avails
Nothing. The Christians smoulder red ;
Their brave blue-hearted flames are dead ;
And you, sweet Sporus, you and I
We too must die, we too must die.

MYTHOLOGICAL INCIDENT

THROUGH the pale skeleton of woods
Orion walks. The North Wind lays
Its cold lips to the twin steel flutes
That are his gun, and plays.

Knee-deep he goes, where penny-wiser
Than all his kind who steal and hoard,
Year after year some sylvan miser
His copper wealth has stored.

The Queen of Love and Beauty lays
In neighbouring beechen aisles her baits—
Bread-crumbs and the golden maize.
Patiently she waits.

And when the unwary pheasant comes
To fill his painted maw with crumbs,
Accurately the sporting Queen
Takes aim. The bird has been.

Secure, Orion walks her way.
The Cyprian loads, presents, makes fire.
He falls. 'Tis Venus all entire
Attached to her recumbent prey.

FEMMES DAMNÉES

(From the French of Charles Baudelaire)

THE lamps had languisht and their light was pale ;
On cushions deep Hippolyta reclined.
Those potent kisses that had torn the veil
From her young candour filled her dreaming mind.

With tempest-troubled eyes she sought the blue
Heaven of her innocence, how far away !
Like some sad traveller, who turns to view
The dim horizons passed at dawn of day.

Tears and the muffled light of weary eyes,
The stupor and the dull voluptuous trance,
Limp arms, like weapons dropped by one who flies—
All served her fragile beauty to enhance.

Calm at her feet and joyful, Delphine lay
And gazed at her with ardent eyes and bright,
Like some strong beast that, having mauled its prey,
Draws back to mark the imprint of its bite.

Strong and yet bowed, superbly on her knees,
She snuffed her triumph, on that frailer grace
Poring voluptuously, as though to seize
The signs of thanks upon the other's face.

Gazing, she sought in her pale victim's eye
The speechless canticle that pleasure sings,
The infinite gratitude that, like a sigh,
Mounts slowly from the spirit's deepest springs.

' Now, now you understand (for love like ours
Is proof enough) that 'twere a sin to throw
The sacred holocaust of your first flowers
To those whose breath might parch them as they blow.

' Light falls my kiss, as the ephemeral wing
That scarcely stirs the shining of a lake.
What ruinous pain your lover's kiss would bring !
A plough that leaves a furrow in its wake.

' Over you, like a herd of ponderous kine,
Man's love will pass and his caresses fall
Like trampling hooves. Then turn your face to mine ;
Turn, oh my heart, my half of me, my all !

‘ Turn, turn, that I may see their starry lights,
Your eyes of azure ; turn. For one dear glance
I will reveal love’s most obscure delights,
And you shall drowse in pleasure’s endless trance.’

‘ Not thankless, nor repentant in the least
Is your Hippolyta.’ She raised her head.
‘ But one who from some grim nocturnal feast
Returns at dawn feels less disquieted.

‘ I bear a weight of terrors, and dark hosts
Of phantoms haunt my steps and seem to lead.
I walk, compelled, behind these beckoning ghosts
Down sliding roads and under skies that bleed.

‘ Is ours so strange an act, so full of shame ?
Explain the terrors that disturb my bliss.
When you say, Love, I tremble at the name ;
And yet my mouth is thirsty for your kiss.

‘ Ah, look not so, dear sister, look not so !
You whom I love, even though that love should be
A snare for my undoing, even though
Loving I am lost for all eternity.’

Delphine looked up, and fate was in her eye.

From the god's tripod and beneath his spell,

Shaking her tragic locks, she made reply :

' Who in love's presence dares to speak of hell ?

' Thinker of useless thoughts, let him be cursed,

Who in his folly, venturing to vex

A question answerless and barren, first

With wrong and right involved the things of sex !

' He who in mystical accord conjoins

Shadow with heat, dusk with the noon's high fire,

Shall never warm the palsy of his loins

At that red sun which mortals call desire.

' Go, seek some lubber groom's deflowering lust ;

Take him your heart and leave me here despised !

Go—and bring back, all horror and disgust,

The livid breasts man's love has stigmatized.

' One may not serve two masters here below.'

But the child answered : ' I am torn apart,

I feel my inmost being rent, as though

A gulf had yawned—the gulf that is my heart.

‘ Naught may this monster’s desperate thirst assuage,—
As fire ’tis hot, as space itself profound—
Naught stay the Fury from her quenchless rage,
Who with her torch explores its bleeding wound.

‘ Curtain the world away and let us try
If lassitude will bring the boon of rest.
In your deep bosom I would sink and die,
Would find the grave’s fresh coolness on your breast.’

Hence, lamentable victims, get you hence !
Hell yawns beneath, your road is straight and steep.
Where all the crimes receive their recompense
Wind-whipped and seething in the lowest deep

With a huge roaring as of storms and fires,
Go down, mad phantoms, doomed to seek in vain
The ne’er-won goal of unassuaged desires,
And in your pleasures find eternal pain !

Sunless your caverns are ; the fever damps
That filter in through every crannied vent
Break out with marsh-fire into sudden lamps
And steep your bodies with their frightful scent.

The barrenness of pleasures harsh and stale
Makes mad your thirst and parches up your skin ;
And like an old flag volleying in the gale,
Your whole flesh shudders in the blasts of sin.

Far from your kind, outlawed and reprobate,
Go, prowl like wolves through desert worlds apart !
Disordered souls, fashion your own dark fate,
And flee the god you carry in your heart.

A R A B I A I N F E L I X

UNDER a ceiling of cobalt
And mirrored by as void a blue,
Wet only with the wind-blown salt,
The Arabian land implores a dew.

Parched, parched are the hills, and dumb
That thundering voice of the ravine ;
Round the dead springs the birds are seen
No more, no more at evening come

(Like lovely thoughts to one who dwells
In quiet, like enchanting hopes)
The leopards and the shy gazelles
And the light-footed antelopes.

Death starts at every rattling gust
That in the withered torrent's bed
Whirls up a phantom of grey dust
And, dying, lets the ghost fall dead

Dust in a dance may seem to live ;
But laid, not blown, it brings to birth.
Not wind, but only rain can give
Life, and to a patient earth.

Hot wind from this Arabian land
Chases the clouds, withholds the rain.
No footstep prints the restless sand
Wherein who sows, he sows in vain.

If there were water, if there were
But a shower, a little fountain springing,
How rich would be the perfumed air,
And the green woods with shade and singing

Bright hills, but by the sun accursed,
Peaceful, but with the peace of hell—
Once on these barren slopes there fell
A plague more violent than thirst :

Anguish to kill inveterate pain
And mortal slaking of desire ;
Dew, and a long-awaited rain—
A dew of blood, a rain of fire.

Into a vacant sky the moist
Grey pledge of spring and coming leaves
Swam, and the thirsty hills rejoiced,
All golden with their future sheaves.

Flower-phantoms in the parching air
Nodded, and trees ungrown were bowed ;
With love like madness, like despair,
The mountain yearned towards the cloud.

And she in silence slowly came,
Oh ! to transfigure, to renew,
Came laden with a gift of dew,
But with it dropped the lightning's flame ;

A flame that rent the crags apart,
But rending made a road between
For water to the mountain's heart,
That left a scar, but left it green.

Faithless the cloud and fugitive ;
An empty heaven nor burns, nor wets ;
At peace, the barren land regrets
Those agonies that made it live.

THE MOOR

CHAMPION of souls and holiness, upholder
Of all the virtues, father of the Church,
Honest, honest, honest Iago ! how
Crusadingly, with what indignant zeal
(*Ora pro nobis*), caracoling on
Your high horse and emblazoned, gules on white,
. Did you ride forth (Oh, pray for us), ride forth
Against the dark-skinned hosts of evil, ride,
Martyr and saint, against those paynim hosts,
Having for shield all Sinai, and for sword,
To smite rebellion and avenge the Lord,
The sharp, the shining certainty of faith !
(*Ora pro nobis*) point us out the Way.

‘ Lily bright and stinking mud :
Fair is fair and foul is ill.
With her, on her, what you will.
This fire must be put out with blood,
Put out with blood.’

But for a glint, a hint of questing eyes,
Invisible, darkness through darkness goes
On feet that even in their victim's dreaming
Wake not an echo.

Lost, he is lost ; and yet thus wholly in darkness
Melted, the Moor is more Othello than when,
Green-glittering, the sharp Venetian day
Revealed him armed and kingly and commanding
Captain of men.

How still she lies, this naked Desdemona,
All but a child and sleeping and alone,
How still and white !
Whose breast, whose arms, the very trustfulness
Of her closed eyelids and unhurried breath
More than a philtre maddeningly invite
Lust and those hands, those huge dark hands, and death.

‘ For oh, the lily and the mud !
Fair is still fair and foulness, ill.
With her, on her, what you will.
This fire must be put out with blood.’

Well, now the fire is out, and the light too ;
All, all put out. In Desdemona's place
Lies now a carrion. That fixed grimace
Of lidless eyes and starting tongue
Derides his foolishness. Cover her face ;
This thing but now was beautiful and young.
Honest Iago's Christian work is over ;
Short, short the parleying at the Golden Gate.
' For I am one who made the Night ashamed
Of his own essence, that his dark was dark ;
• One who with good St. Jerome's filthy tongue
Tainted desire and taught the Moor to scorn
His love's pale body, and because she had
Lain gladly in his arms, to call her whore
And strangle her for whoredom.' So he spoke,
And with majestic motion heaven's high door
Rolled musically apart its burnished vans
To grant him entrance.

Turning back meanwhile
From outer darkness, Othello and his bride
Perceive the globe of heaven like one small lamp

Burning alone at midnight in the abyss
Of some cathedral cavern ; pause, and then
With face once more averted, hand in hand,
Explore the unseen treasures of the dark.

Romans bowed to shapes that they,
Sculptors of the mind, set free ;
Supplicant that they may be
Peers of those to whom they pray.

NOBLEST ROMANS

COLUMNS and unageing fountains,
Jets of frost and living foam—
Let them leap from seven mountains,
The seven hills of Rome.

Flanked by arch and echoing arch,
Let the streets in triumph go ;
Bid the aqueducts to march
Tireless through the plain below.

Column-high in the blue air,
Let the marble Caesars stand ;
Let the gods, who living were
Romans, lift a golden hand.

Many, but each alone, a crowd,
Yet of Romans, throng their shrine ;
Worshippers themselves divine,
Gods to gods superbly bowed ;

ORION

TREE-TANGLED still, autumn Orion climbs
Up from among the North Wind's shuddering emblems
Into the torrent void
And dark abstraction of invisible power,
The heart and boreal substance of the night.

Pleione flees before him, and behind,
Still sunken, but prophetically near,
Death in the Scorpion hunts him up the sky
And round the vault of time, round the slow-curving year,
Follows unescapably
And to the end, aye, and beyond the end
Will follow, follow ; for of all the gods
Death only cannot die.

The rest are mortal. And how many lie
Already with their creatures' ancient dust !
Dead even in us who live—or hardly live,
Since of our hearts impiety has made,
Not tombs indeed (for they are holy ; tombs

Secretly live with everlasting Death's
Dark and mysterious life),
But curious shops and learned lumber rooms
Of bone and stone and every mummied thing,
Where Death himself his sacred sting
Forgets (how studiously forgotten
Amid the irrelevant to and fro of feet!),
Where by the peeping and the chattering,
The loud forgetfulness seemingly slain,
He lies with all the rest—and yet we know,
In secret yet we know,
Death is not dead, not dead but only sleeping,
And soon will rise again.

Not so the rest. Only the Scorpion burns
In our unpeopled heaven of empty names
And insubstantial echoes ; only Death
Still claims our prayers, and still to those who pray
Returns his own dark blood and quickening breath,
Returns the ominous mystery of fear.
Where are the gods of dancing and desire ?
Anger and joy, laughter and tears and wine,
Those other mysteries of fire and flame,
Those more divine than Death's—ah, where are they ?

Only a ghost between the shuddering trees,
Only a name and ghostly numbers climb ;
And where a god pursued and fled,
Only a ghostly time, a ghostly place
Attends on other ghostly times and places.
Orion and the rest are dead.

And yet to-night, here in the exulting wind,
Amid the enormous laughters of a soul
At once the world's and mine,
God-like Orion and all his brother stars
Shine as with living eyes,
With eyes that glance a recognition, glance a sign
Across the quickened dark, across the gulphs
That separate no more,
But, like wide seas that yet bring home the freight
Of man's mad yearning for a further shore,
Join with a living touch, unbrokenly,
Life to mysterious life,
The Hunter's alien essence to my own.

Orion lives ; yet I who know him living,
Elsewhere and otherwise
Know him for dead, and dead beyond all hope,

For 'tis the infertile and unquickenng death
Of measured places and recorded times,
The death of names and numbers that he dies.
Only the phantom of Orion climbs.
Put out the eyes, put out the living eyes
And look elsewhere ; yes, look and think and be
Elsewhere and otherwise.
But *here* and *thus* are also in their right,
Are in their right divine to send this wind of laughter
Rushing through the cloudless dark
And through my being ; have a right divine
And imprescriptible now to reveal
The starry god, a right to make me feel,
As even now, as even now I feel,
His living presence near me in the night.

A curved and figured glass hangs between light and light,
Between the glow within us and the glow
Of what mysterious sun without ?
Vast over earth and sky, or focussed burningly
Upon the tender quick, our spirits throw
Each way their images—each way the forms
O ! shall it be of beauty, shall it be
The naked skeletons of doubt ?

Or else, symbolically dark, the cloudy forms
Of mystery, or dark (but dark with death)
Shapes of sad knowledge and defiling hate ?

‘ Lighten our darkness, Lord.’ With what pure faith,
What confident hope our fathers once implored
The Light ! But ’tis the shitten Lord of Flies
Who with his loathsome bounties now fulfils
On us their prayers. Our fathers prayed for light.
Through windows at their supplication scoured
Bare of the sacred blazons, but instead
Daubed with the dung-god’s filth, all living eyes,
Whether of stars or men, look merely dead ;
While on the vaulted crystal of the night
Our guttering souls project,
Not the Wild Huntsman, not the Heavenly Hosts,
But only times and places, only names and ghosts.

And yet, for all the learned Lord of Dung,
The choice is ours, the choice is always ours,
To see or not to see the living powers
That move behind the numbered points and times.
The Fly King rules ; but still the choice remains
With us, his subjects, we are free, are free

To love our fate or loathe it ; to rejoice
Or weep or wearily accept ; are free,
For all the scouring of our souls, for all
The miring of their crystal, free to give
Even to an empty sky, to vacant names,
Or not to give, our worship ; free to turn
Lifewards, within, without, to what transcends
The squalor of our personal ends and aims,
Or not to turn ; yes, free to die or live ;
Free to be thus and passionately here,
Or otherwise and elsewhere ;
Free, in a word, to learn or not to learn
The art to think and musically do
And feel and be, the never more than now
Difficult art harmoniously to live
All poetry—the midnight of Macbeth
And ripe Odysseus and the undying light
Of Gemma's star and Cleopatra's death
And Falstaff in his cups ; the art to live
That discipline of flowers, that solemn dance
Of sliding weights and harnessed powers
Which is a picture ; or to live the grave
And stoical recession, row on row,
Of equal columns, live the passionate leaping,

The mutual yearning, meeting, marrying,
And then the flame-still rapture, the fierce trance
Of consummation in the Gothic night.

The choice is always ours. Then, let me choose
The longest art, the hard Promethean way
Cherishingly to tend and feed and fan
That inward fire, whose small precarious flame,
Kindled or quenched, creates
The noble or the ignoble men we are,
The worlds we live in and the very fates,
Our bright or muddy star.

Up from among the emblems of the wind
Into its heart of power,
The Huntsman climbs, and all his living stars
Are bright, and all are mine.

MEDITATION

WHAT now caresses you, a year ago
Bent to the wind that sends a travelling wave
Almost of silver through the silky corn
Westward of Calgary ; or two weeks since
Bleated in Gloster market, lowed at Thame,
And slowly bled to give my lips desire ;
Or in the teeming darkness, fathoms down,
Hung, one of millions, poised between the ooze
And the wind's foamy skirts ; or feathered flew,
Or deathwards ran before the following gun.
And all day long, knee deep in the wet grass,
The piebald cows of Edam chewed and chewed,
That what was cheese might pulse thus feverishly ;
And now, prophetically, even now
They ponder in their ruminating jaws
My future body, which in Tuscan fields
Yet grows, yet grunts among the acorns, yet
Is salt and iron, water and touchless air,
Is only numbers variously moved,
Is nothing, yet will love your nothingness.

Vast forms of dust, tawny and tall and vague,
March through the desert, creatures of the wind.
Wind, blowing whither, blowing whence, who knows?—
Wind was the soul that raised them from the sand,
Moved and sustained their movement, and at last
Abating, let them fall in separate grains
Slowly to earth and left an empty sky.

S E P T E M B E R

SPRING is past and over these many days,
Spring and summer. The leaves of September droop,
Yellowing and all but dead on the patient trees.
Nor is there any hope in me. I walk
Slowly homewards. Night is as empty and dark
Behind my eyes as it is dark without
And empty round about me and over me.
Spring is past and over these many days,
But, looking up, suddenly I see
Leaves in the upthrown light of a street lamp shining,
Clear and luminous, young and so transparent,
They seem but the coloured foam of air, green fire,
No more than the scarce-embodied thoughts of leaves.
And it is spring within that circle of light.
Oh, magical brightness ! The old leaves are made new
In the mind, too, some coloured accident
Of beauty revives and makes all young again,
A chance light shines and suddenly it is spring.

SEASONS

BLOOD of the world, time stanchless flows ;
The wound is mortal and is mine.
I act, but not to my design,
Choose, but 'twas ever fate that chose,
Would flee, but there are doors that close.
Winter has set its muddy sign
Without me and within. The rose
Dies also in my heart and no stars shine.

But nightingales call back the sun ;
The doors are down and I can run,
Can laugh, for destiny is dead.
All springs are hoarded in the flowers ;
Quick flow the intoxicating hours,
For wine as well as blood is red.

S T O R M A T N I G H T

Oh, how aquarium-still, how brooding-warm
This paradise ! How peacefully in the womb
Of war itself, and at the heart of storm
How safely—safely a captive, in a tomb—
I lie and, listening to the wild assault,
The pause and once-more fury of the gale,
Feel through the cracks of my sepulchral vault
The *fine-drawn* probe of air, and watch the pale
Unearthly lightnings leap across the sky
Like sudden sperm and die and leap again.
The thunder calls and every spasm of fire
Beckons, a signal, to that old desire
In calm for tempest and at ease for pain.
Dreaming of strength and courage, here I lie.

MEDITERRANEAN

THIS tideless sapphire uniformly brims
Its jewelled circle of Tyrrhenian shore.
No vapours tarnish, not a cloud bedims,
And time descending only more and more
Makes rich, makes deep the unretiring gem.
And yet for me who look on it, how wide
The world of mud to which my thoughts condemn
This loathing vision of a sunken tide !
The ebb is mine. Life to its lowest neap
Withdrawn reveals that black and hideous shoal
Where I lie stranded. Oh deliver me
From this defiling death ! Moon of the soul,
Call back the tide that ran so strong and deep,
Call back the shining jewel of the sea.

T I D E

AND if the tide should be for ever low,
The silted channels turned to ooze and mire ?
And this grey delta—if it still should grow,
Bank after bank, and still the sea retire ?
Retire beyond the halcyon hopes of noon
And silver night, the threat of wind and wave,
Past all the dark compulsion of the moon,
Past resurrection, past her power to save ?
There is a firm consenting to disaster,
Proud resignation to accepted pain.
Pain quickens him who makes himself its master,
And quickening battle crowns both loss and gain.
But to this silting of the soul, who gives
Consent is no more man, no longer lives.

FETE NATIONALE

THESE lamps, like some miraculous gift of rain,
Evoke an April from the dusty weight
Of leaves that hang resigned and know their fate,
Expecting autumn : they are young again.
And young these dancers underneath the trees
Who pass and pass, how many all at one !
Like things of wax beneath an Indian sun,
Melted in music. Oh, to be one of these,
Of these the born inhabitants of earth,
Each other's joyful captives ! Oh, to be
Safe home from those far islands, where the free,
Whose exile buys the honour of their birth,
Hark back across the liberating sea
To the lost continent of tears and mirth !

M I D S U M M E R D A Y

THIS day was midsummer, the longest tarrying
Time makes between two sleeps. What have I done
With this longest of so few days, how spent,
Dear God, the golden, golden gift of sun?
Virginal, when I rose, the morning lay
Ready for beauty's rape, for wisdom's marrying.
I wrote : only an inky spider went,
Smear after smear, across the unsullied day.
If there were other places, if there were
But other days than this longest of few ;
If one had courage, did one dare to do
That which alone might kill what now defaces
This the one place of all the countless places,
This only day when one will never dare !

AUTUMN STILLNESS

GRAY is the air and silent as the sea's
Abysmal calm. One solitary bird
Calls from far time and other boughs than these ;
But the remembering silence sleeps, unstirred.
All seems achieved, dried up the source of things.
Or is the world too weary to invite
Winters unborn and bid the latent springs
Break out in flower, in fragrance, voice and light ?
June once was here ; in this autumnal amber
Lingers intangible the small clear trace
Of his ephemeral flight, for ever still.
No more to hope, but only to remember :—
Let there be silence round the slumbering will,
And if time beckons, turn away your face.

A P E N N I N E

IN this parcht Apennine the sheep-bells must
Serve with their tinkling for the liquid lapse
And coolness, even in the noonday dust,
Of absent streams—more liquidly, perhaps,
Than water's self, if water were to gush
Between the dry ribs of these bleaching hills :
For in the womb of every pregnant hush
A music sleeps ; and when some phantom tills,
Arabia's punctual blossoming discloses
Hues more than earthly, iris and evening gold.
But vain those fountains, vain the ethereal roses !
There breathes no fragrance but of roots and mould,
No quenching flows but in those humbler streams,
Whose source is earth, is earth and not our dreams.

ALMERIA

WINDS have no moving emblems here, but scour
A vacant darkness, an untempered light ;
No branches bend, never a tortured flower
Shudders, root-weary, on the verge of flight ;
Winged future, withered past, no seeds nor leaves
Attest those swift invisible feet : they run
Free through a naked land, whose breast receives
All the fierce ardour of a naked sun.
You have the Light for lover. Fortunate Earth !
Conceive the fruit of his divine desire.
But the dry dust is all she brings to birth,
That child of clay by even celestial fire.
Then come, soft rain and tender clouds, abate
This shining love that has the force of hate.

P A G A N Y E A R

HEAVEN'S eyes are shut, but cannot wholly kill
The colours of the winter world. Suppressed
And yet how strong, shining in secret, still
Cinder and brooding sable and plum attest
The absent Light. He with his longed rebirth
Unclots the world to an airy dream of leaves ;
Shines on ; the thin dream ripens into earth,
And the huge elms hang dark above the sheaves.
Magical autumn ! All the woods are foxes,
Dozing outstretched in the almost silvery sun.
Oh, bright sad woods and melancholy sky,
Is there no cure for beauty but to run
Yet faster as faster flee hours, flowers and doxies
And dying music, until we also die ?

A R M O U R

CRABS in their shells, because they cannot play
Don Juan or the flageolet, are safe ;
And every stout Sir Roger, stout Sir Ralph,
Every Black Prince, Bayard and Bouchier may
(Their ribs and rumps hermetically canned)
Securely laugh at arrow, sword and mace.
But in their polished and annealed embrace,
Beneath their iron kiss and iron hand,
The soft defenceless lips and flowery breast,
The tender, tender belly of love receive
From helm and clasp and cop and urgent greave
So deep a bruise that, mortally possessed,
Love dies. Only the vulnerable will
Hold what it takes and, holding, does not kill.

S H E E P

SEEING a country churchyard, when the grey
Monuments walked, I with a second glance,
Doubting, postponed the apparent judgment day
To watch instead the random slow advance
Across the down of a hundred nibbling sheep.
And yet these tombs, half fancied and half seen
In the dim world between waking and sleep,
These headstones browsing on their plot of green,
Were sheep indeed and emblems of all life.
For man to dust, dust turns to grass, and grass
Grows wool and feeds on grass. The butcher's knife
Works magic, and the ephemeral sheep forms pass
Through swift tombs and through silent tombs, until
Once more God's acre feeds across the hill.

BLACK COUNTRY

COUNT yourselves happy that you are not rewarded
For your deserts with brimstone from on high.
Mean, mean among the slag-heaps, mean and sordid,
Your smoking town proclaims its blasphemy.
And yet, too merciful, the offended light
Forgives not only, but with vesperal gold
And roses of the sun repays your spite.
Shining transfigured in the Northern cold,
Instead of chimneys rise Italian towers,
While temples at their feet, not factories, shine ;
And like the yet unbodied dream of flowers
Hangs the flushed smoke, through which these eyes
 divine
Enormous gestures of the gods' fierce wooing,
The nacreous flights, the limbs of bronze pursuing.

CARPE NOCTEM

THERE is no future, there is no more past,
No roots nor fruits, but momentary flowers.
Lie still, only lie still and night will last,
Silent and dark, not for a space of hours,
But everlastingly. Let me forget
All but your perfume, every night but this,
The shame, the fruitless weeping, the regret.
Only lie still : this faint and quiet bliss
Shall flower upon the brink of sleep and spread,
Till there is nothing else but you and I
Clasped in a timeless silence. But like one
Who, doomed to die, at morning will be dead,
I know, though night seem dateless, that the sky
Must brighten soon before to-morrow's sun.

THE PERGOLA

PILLARS, round which the wooden serpents clamber
Towards their own leaves, support the emerald shade,
The eyes, the amethysts, the clustered amber,
That weave the ceiling of this colonnade.
How many thousand Tyrrhenian Septembers
Muskily ripen in a sun-warmed skin !
With all my autumns. For this tongue remembers
Grapes that made sweet a sick child's medicine,
Grapes of the South and of the submarine
Dusk of an English hot-house. But when night
Lids every shining glance of sky between
Leaves now extinct, groping, bereft of sight,
I reach for grapes, but from an inward vine
Pluck sea-cold nipples, still bedewed with brine.

L I N E S

ALL day the wheels turn ;
All day long the roaring of wheels, the rasping
Weave their imprisoning lattices of noise,
And hammers, hammers in the substance of the world
Carve out another cavernous world, a narrow
Sepulchre, and seal it from the sky,
Lord, with how great a stone !

Only a little beyond the factory walls
Silence is a flawless bowl of crystal,
Brimming, brimming with who can say beforehand,
Who can, returning, even remember what
Beautiful secret. Only a little beyond
These hateful walls the birds among the branches
Secretly come and go.

Time also sleeps, but on the darkening threshold
Of each eternity pauses a moment
And still is time, but empty ; still is time,
And therefore knows his emptiness.

The walls are crumbled, the stone is rolled away
(Is there one within ? is there a resurrection ?) ;
Stars through the ruined lattices bear witness, '
Bear shining witness to the further silence,
Witness to the night.

Night is pregnant ; silence, alive with voices ;
The fullness of the tomb is but corruption ;
Only the lifted stone invites the messengers,
Only the empty sepulchre, and only
Now and then, evokes
That which from the sepulchre arises.

Shy strangers, visiting feet came softly treading,
Came very softly sometimes in the darkness,
Oh, of what far nights and distant tombs !
Came suddenly into the empty time,
Came secretly and lingered secretly,
And through the unsealed door
Beckoned me on to follow.

I have made time empty again ; empty, it invites them ;
They do not come ; have rolled away the stone,

But lie unrisen, lie unvisited.
Merciful God, bid them to come again !
Sometimes in winter
Sea-birds follow the plough,
And the bare field is all alive with wings,
With their white wings and unafraid alightings,
Sometimes in winter. And will they come again ?

THE CICADAS

SIGHTLESS, I breathe and touch ; this night of pines
Is needly, resinous and rough with bark.
Through every crevice in the tangible dark
The moonlessness above it all but shines.

Limp hangs the leafy sky ; never a breeze
Stirs, nor a foot in all this sleeping ground ;
And there is silence underneath the trees—
The living silence of continuous sound.

For like inveterate remorse, like shrill
Delirium throbbing in the fevered brain,
An unseen people of cicadas fill
Night with their one harsh note, again, again.

Again, again, with what insensate zest !
What fury of persistence, hour by hour !
Filled with what devil that denies them rest,
Drunk with what source of pleasure and of power !

Life is their madness, life that all night long
Bids them to sing and sing, they know not why ;
Mad cause and senseless burden of their song ;
For life commands, and Life ! is all their cry.

I hear them sing, who in the double night
Of clouds and branches fancied that I went
Through my own spirit's dark discouragement,
Deprived of inward as of outward sight :

Who, seeking, even as here in the wild wood,
A lamp to beckon through my tangled fate,
Found only darkness and, disconsolate,
Mourned the lost purpose and the vanished good.

Now in my empty heart the crickets' shout
Re-echoing denials and still denials
With stubborn folly all my learned doubt,
In madness more than I in reason wise.

Life, life ! The word is magical. They sing,
And in my darkened soul the great sun shines ;
My fancy blossoms with remembered spring,
And all my autumns ripen on the vines.

Life ! and each knuckle of the fig-tree's pale
Dead skeleton breaks out with emerald fire.
Life ! and the tulips blow, the nightingale
Calls back the rose, calls back the old desire :

And old desire that is for ever new,
Desire, life's earliest and latest birth,
Life's instrument to suffer and to do,
Springs with the roses from the teeming earth ;

Desire that from the world's bright body strips
Deforming time and makes each kiss the first ;
That gives to hearts, to satiated lips
The endless bounty of to-morrow's thirst.

Time passes, and the watery moonrise peers
Between the tree-trunks. But no outer light
Tempers the chances of our groping years,
No moon beyond our labyrinthine night.

Clueless we go ; but I have heard thy voice,
Divine Unreason ! harping in the leaves,
And grieve no more ; for wisdom never grieves,
And thou hast taught me wisdom ; I rejoice.

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