



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
AT LOS ANGELES











SONNETS AND POEMS  
OF  
ANTHERO DE QUENTAL

TRANSLATED BY  
S. GRISWOLD MORLEY

.



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## PREFACE

Connoisseurs are well aware of the high rank attained by Portuguese lyric poetry in the nineteenth century. Though the quantity is small, as would be expected from a minor nation, the quality is extremely fine. The poems of João de Deus, Anthero de Quental, and Guerra Junqueiro stand on a level with the very best produced in England, France, and Italy. The Portuguese are endowed with an intensity and profundity of emotion denied to many other peoples and, in addition, they possess the sure sense of form which one usually associates with the French race. Both of these gifts, together with a Germanic penchant for metaphysical speculation, are found in the extraordinary *Sonnets* of Anthero de Quental.

Anthero de Quental was born April 18, 1842, in Ponta Delgada (Azores), and committed suicide in the public square of the same city on September 11, 1891. Nearly all his life, however, was spent on the mainland of Portugal. He attended the famous university at Coimbra from 1854 to 1865, and finally graduated in law. But his college years were devoted largely to riotous living, reading philosophy, and writing verse. He was known as a leader of

advanced thought, both in the city and in the nation. Not only was he in theory a radical, but he published political pamphlets remarkable for their vigor and style. He came of a wealthy and aristocratic family, yet, carried away by Socialism, he learned the trade of typesetter and practiced it, alone, in Paris (1866-67) till ill health drove him home discouraged. In the field of literature, he led an attack upon Antonio Feliciano de Castilho, the revered incarnation of a previous Arcadian age (1865). During 1867-68 he traveled in Spain, France, and the United States. His political activities were renewed upon his return to Portugal. The year 1871 found him in full battle, organizing the Portuguese Socialist party, and initiating a series of *Conferencias democraticas* (*Democratic Lectures*), which were promptly suppressed as dangerous by the authorities. But all these generous and feverish activities burned themselves out before the poet reached the age of thirty. Neither his genius nor his physique was fitted for the strain of prolonged strife. A neurotic tendency, hereditary in his family, finally assumed the form of an incurable spinal disease. He withdrew into retirement, first at Oporto, then at Villa do Conde, and saw only a few friends, chief among whom for a time was J. P. Oliveira Martins, a famous historian and the collector of Quental's *Sonnets*. Suffering physical torture, insomnia, and

purely mental anguish which a less sensitive person can with difficulty comprehend, the poet lived "in a state of moral depression in which all action was distasteful to him." At intervals he returned to his birthplace, and there he chose to prove that his often expressed passion for Nirvana was not a literary pose.

The *Sonnets* are conceded to be Anthero de Quental's most enduring work. Of his several other volumes of verse, I need mention only the *Odes modernas* (ed. 1, 1865, ed. 2, 1875), which contained a few sonnets and various poems in other forms, of a revolutionary character. The first sonnets were published in 1861 (*Sonetos de Anthero*), another volume appeared in 1881 (*Sonetos*); then the *Sonetos completos, publicados por J. P. Oliveira Martins*, in 1886. The last collection was reissued in cheaper form, with an appendix of translations, in 1890. The *Poems* translated in the present volume were never printed by the author, but were given out by the editor of the *Sonetos completos*. The poet was, in fact, so modest that only one purely literary work of his was published at his own instance, and he destroyed more work than saw the light.

Oliveira Martins classified the *Sonnets* in five periods, corresponding more or less exactly to stages in the poet's development. I have retained this division, which serves to emphasize the fact that

the *Sonnets* are nothing else than a diary of Anthero's spiritual progress. Their absolute sincerity is self-evident, and we do not need the writer's testimony that "they follow, as exactly as the notes in a diary, the successive phases of my intellectual and emotional life." And if one observes closely, he will see that they have a more universal application, that in Anthero's heart, more truly than in Victor Hugo's, the thought of the whole world echoed, and in his *Sonnets* may be read "the evolution of European thought in the second half of the nineteenth century."

Oliveira Martins' foreword, from which I have quoted the last phrase, is inaccurate in some respects, but it furnishes an invaluable interpretation of his friend's moods, and I shall utilize it freely in the pages immediately following. It is necessary to state first that the poet's early training, received from his mother, was that of strict Catholicism. From this point of departure began the tortuous mental development which is laid bare in the *Sonnets*, and this fact explains the vacillation between belief and doubt visible in the first period, when his powerful mentality was struggling against the family teaching.

"The first period, 1860-62," says Oliveira Martins, "contains in embryo all the later ones. . . . It reveals a sensitive soul, but displays already an



interest in metaphysics, in its rudimentary phase of theological doubt, and it shows glimpses of sadness, like wisps of cloud that pass over the surface of the sun, foretelling a storm for the morrow." These sonnets are not romantic, nor do they reflect the prevailing optimism of their time. Rather, they anticipate the spirit of Schopenhauer, though no one in Portugal read him then. Love, when it appears as a theme, is represented in an idealistic form, as a blessing to be attained only in Heaven. At times the poet appears to believe in God, at others the deity is only an interrogation. "The childish efforts of this first period to know whether or not God exists, are enough in themselves, and in the way in which they are expressed, to show us that the poet has not yet left the spheres of the elementary representation of beings, for the comprehensive sphere of rational abstractions. . . ."

"The second series bears the date of 1862-66. Psychologically it is the least original, artistically it is the most brilliant. *A Dream of the Orient*, *Idyll*, *The Palace of Delight*, are masterpieces of coloring. Perhaps for this very reason, the poet's state of mind did not compel him to draw so much upon himself, and, besides, at that time he lived a more natural life; therefore, perhaps, he felt it and painted it better in all its colors and images. The nebula of the first

period began to resolve itself into a mental tragedy, which sometimes takes the form of a hashish-eater's dream, sometimes of despairing fury, irony like a dagger, and piercing cries." This period of raging, sarcastic bitterness, which for some of the Romantics lasted all their lives, occupied only four years in Anthero de Quental's. That was because none of them possessed his germ of abstract thought.

In the third period (1864-74), a relatively sterile one, because the poet's energies were then absorbed by pamphleteering and organization, the virile voice of a man of action makes itself heard. Stoicism, which had appeared in flashes in the earlier years (*Despair*), becomes more insistent (*The Ideal, More Light, Hymn to Reason*), and we believe that a courageous spirit is about to overcome the doubts of the philosopher. "Struggling furiously against disillusionment, falling back crushed, Anthero withdrew within himself, and appealed to the energy of his manly instinct." But in the struggle between his poetic vision and his critical philosophy, the balance inclined toward the latter, as he read more widely and observed and thought more profoundly.

In the fourth epoch (1874-80), "the silence and darkness which previously had appeared as terrifying surprises, gain a preëminent position in the realm of things; that which was till then only a momentary

spite, becomes a system. Anthero de Quental is now, in philosophy, a nihilist; in politics, an anarchist; he is everything negative, everything excessive; and he is all this so dogmatically and positively that for that very reason we hesitate to believe that he really is what he claims. We can not doubt his sincerity, but his very violence testifies against him." The expression of his systematic pessimism is transcendental irony (*A Family Dispute*, *The Unconscious One*, *Divine Comedy*). This in itself represents a progress from violence toward a kindly smile, from despairing Satanist to intelligent reasoner.

In the sonnets of the last period (1880-84) one reads the effect of intense physical anguish working upon a supersensitive mind. The result was not despair, nor complete faith, but a desperate yet hopeful search for some power or state, whether the Blessed Virgin, or Nirvana, or simple non-existence, which might afford him relief. Oliveira Martins made his friend out to be a convert to Buddhism, but Anthero declared that his belief was broader than that. He never came to formulate systematically his final philosophy, which he called "Psychodynamism, or Panpsychism," and it was probably more a state of emotion than a logical structure. Oliveira Martins sees in such expressions of Christian faith as *To the Most Holy Virgin* and *In*

*God's Hand*, a "transcendental humor, an intimate mingling of piety and irony, never before put into verse." Perhaps so; these poems appear to me rather the embodiment in a received religious form of the relief felt by the poet at his escape from the terrors of Naturalism, which he feared, through the door provided by his new-found philosophy. However that may be, the marvelous sonnets of this last epoch bear witness to an enviable spiritual repose. Their pure serenity lifts one to a realm in which move, let us say, Chopin's *Thirteenth Prelude*, or *The Winter's Tale*.

Anthero de Quental has been called a victim of "*le mal du siècle*." It is true that certain sonnets are mere transcriptions of the spirit of *Rolla*. But that was only the beginning of his development—a starting point from which he reached ideas that were entirely beyond the grasp of Musset. One has only to read the sequence called *The Ideal* to comprehend the distance which Anthero traversed. The Sonnets I and II might have been written by Musset; IV, possibly by a dreamy Leopardi, but from V on, one finds the genuine Anthero de Quental, the mystic lover of the ideal soaring to the farthest limits of space in search of his beloved, but met even there by doubt which drives him back in despair upon himself.

He is worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with Leopardi. Both may be ranked as pessimists, but with how great a difference! The great Italian impresses one as all of a piece, consistent, sure of himself; proudly, incisively, and intellectually firm in unbelief, he flaunts his despair like a banner. Anthero is infinitely contradictory, never quite the same on two successive days, humble, friendly, now dejected, now trusting, sometimes a coward, sometimes brave, but always seeking an ideal which eludes him. So, if the bold spirit of Leopardi defies the world and challenges the hereafter, rising above common humanity, Anthero de Quental, despite his superior intelligence, places himself on a level with the humblest.

“Safe in the faith of humble generations,  
In the communion of our ancient race.”

That is why his friends called him an involuntary Christian, and spoke of him among themselves as “Saint Anthero.”

For the reader who now approaches Anthero de Quental for the first time—the vast majority, without doubt—a word of more specific guidance may not be out of place. The sonnets which are most popular, judging by the choice of translators into French, Italian, Castilian, and German, are those

in which rich color or concrete narrative images predominate: *A Dream of the Orient*, *Idyll*, *A Dream*, *The Palace of Delight*, *Mors-Amor*, *Divine Comedy*, *More Light*, *Ignotus*. To them should be added *The Visit*, *The Shulamite*, *Romantic Sepulcher*, *The Convert*, and a few others of brilliant workmanship. They are not, however, the most characteristic of Quental's thought, nor, perhaps, even the most beautiful. To the philosophic mind, the two sequences in which he successfully attempted to translate the metaphysical into forms of beauty—*In Praise of Death*, *The Ideal*—must make a rare appeal, and with them such sonnets as *Nirvana*, *Logos*, *Transcendentalism*, *Homo*, *Nox*, and *Spirituality*. In *Evolution*, *Redemption*, *Contemplation*, the doctrine of evolution, projected beyond the physical into the spiritual, is set forth in striking poetic images; sometimes it expands into the transmigration of souls (*In the Arena*, *Metempsychosis*). *Thesis and Antithesis* is a profound and impartial commentary on political radicalism, as timely today as when it was first written. In dramatizing the abstract, few have ever rivalled Anthero de Quental. His poetry is a marvelous synthesis of rational philosophy and vivid emotional imagination.

One does not need to be either a specialist or a philosopher to appreciate such noble, human poems

## PREFACE

as *Despair*, *The Journey*, *Struggle*, *Quia Aeternus*, *To a Poet*, *Despondency*, *Stoicism*, *Lachrymae Rerum*, *Ad Amicos*, *Death's Message*, *Communion*, *In God's Hand*. To my mind, these are the finest of all. In this marvelous diary of a profound and sensitive soul, one may say that there is a sonnet for every mood of the intellectual man. When was utter dejection ever expressed more completely than in *Despondency*? The opposite mood, joy in vigorous health and eagerness to take an active part in life, finds a splendid outpouring in *More Light*. And the last sonnet, fitting close, though written seven years before the poet's death, breathes forth, in poetry as beautiful as ever came from the brain of man, the absolute relief felt by a mind worn out with inquiry, and ready to sink like a tired child into the arms of sustaining belief.

Then, apart from the *Sonnets*, there are the five magnificent, I almost said gorgeous, *Poems* rescued from destruction by Oliveira Martins, poems whose pessimism is forgotten in admiration for their perfect symmetry and their rich and bold imagery. One will search long to find a more impressive indictment of creation than the *Hymn to Morning*. *The Prisoners* has been called "a Beethoven sonata in words, one of the sublimest poems created by modern scepticism." These two have never before been made accessible to English readers.

Technically, Anthero's *Sonnets* approach perfection. The absolute sincerity of the writer's expression is equaled only by his technical mastery. The form is strictly Petrarchan, and the division into quatrains and tercets is preserved with care. The single-moulded line, natural to the Latin tongues, is much in evidence, and, carried over as it necessarily is to some extent into the translations, will appear there rather as a blemish than as a beauty, I fear, for English readers are accustomed to a sonnet of broken rhythms, declamatory in style, like blank verse. The *Sonnets*, in the original, are perfectly limpid, straightforward, and concise. The first dozen betray in spots the halting step of a beginner, but from *Ad Amicos* on one seldom meets with the slightest evidence of straining to adapt words to thought. Their clarity and the symmetry of their modeling will appear at a glance, I believe, even in the imperfect mirror of these versions. The reader may be assured that the original Portuguese flows as smoothly "as a river of oil." Anthero's *Sonnets* have not the jewelled brilliance of Hérédia's, which glow with the color of rubies and sapphires; one could compare them rather to opals, lit from within by a fire of intellectual passion.

In his own words, Anthero considered the sonnet a virginal lyric form, especially suited to the



expression of the soul's purest, timidest yearnings. To employ it for objective description is, he says, as unfitting as to wear a maiden's dress in a revelry.

The original volume of the *Sonetos completos* contains 109 sonnets, of which 97 are translated here. The twelve omitted are all from the first and second periods. The sequence *In Praise of Death* has been already published in *The University of California Chronicle* (vol. 19, no. 4); three other poems (*A Dream of the Orient*, *Lachrymae Rerum*, *In God's Hand*) appeared, in a somewhat different form than the present, in *Poet-Lore* (Winter, 1918).

Translations of some or all of the *Sonetos* exist in German, French, Italian, Castilian, and other European languages. In English, Mr. Edgar Prestage, the eminent authority on Portuguese literature, has rendered sixty-four (*Anthero de Quental: Sixty-four Sonnets, englished by Edgar Prestage*, London, David Nutt, 1894). Mr. Prestage strove, as he states himself, for extreme literalness, and the poetic quality of the renderings suffered somewhat from that preoccupation. His *Introduction* is of high value, and he has included a translation of Anthero's autobiographical letter to Wilhelm Storck, a document which is indispensable for an understanding of the poet's spiritual life. Dr. Richard Garnett is said to have translated eight sonnets, never publicly printed.

Mr. Aubrey F. G. Bell, in his *Poems from the Portuguese* (Oxford, 1913), includes three sonnets of Anthero, and the poem *Shadows*. These are all the English translations that I am acquainted with.

I gratefully acknowledge the kindness of Mr. Leonard Bacon, the translator of the *Song of Roland* and the *Lay of the Cid*, who gave me, in a careful revision of my work, the benefit of his fine sense of rhythm and word-values. My friend, Dr. L. M. Price, has been unwearied with helpful suggestions. I thank them both for saving me from many a bad blunder.

One last word. I am entirely opposed in general to the amorphous esthetic doctrine of Benedetto Croce, but I subscribe gladly to his remarks on the subject of translation. Exact translation, he says, is never possible; "the translation which passes for good is an approximation which has original value as a work of art, and can stand by itself." This is above all true for translations of poetry.

I should like these versions to be judged as English poetry. Scholars, I believe, will find that they very seldom warp the thought of the original, and never in any essential. But if they smack of the translation, if they are prosy and halting, if they constantly suggest to the reader that they are something else than good original verse, then they are a failure, so far as I am concerned.

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# SONNETS

1860-1862





## IGNOTO DEO

What mortal beauty can compare to thee,  
O dream-wrought vision of this ardent soul?  
Thy glorious light in me is imaged whole,  
As the clear sun is mirrored in the sea.

The world is vast—my yearning counseled me  
To seek thee here. With humble faith I stole  
Over the earth, a clement God my goal.  
I found his altar—but no votary.

No mortal part is that which I revere  
In thee. What art thou here? A pitying glance,  
A drop of honey in a poisoned vase.

Dream of my dreams, pure essence of a tear  
That once I shed! If thou art true, perchance,  
In heaven, at least, reveal to me thy face!

## LAMENT

A flood of light bursts o'er the precipice!  
Behold the sun! The bridegroom cometh forth!  
Is there a single care on all the earth  
That in such glorious radiance must not cease?

The stunted flower in a rocky crease,  
The raging sea, the ice floe of the north;  
What creature does God deem so little worth  
That he will not vouchsafe it rest and peace?

God is the father of each living thing,  
He knows His children's every suffering,  
And His wide love encompasses each one.

Ah! If God, in this hour of sanctity,  
Grants joy to all, and none is sad but I—  
Son I may be, but an abandoned son!

## TO SANTOS VALENTE

Narrow in life the cup of pleasure is:  
Broad as the ocean, and as ocean deep,  
And, like it, barren in its salty sweep,  
The bitter chalice of our miseries.

And yet the soul, who, mid uncertainties,  
An humble pilgrim, slow his course doth keep,  
Nothing but joy and love from life would reap;  
Through all, spite all, no other hope is his.

It is God's law that man should thus aspire  
Greatly; and so illusion masters life,  
Bids us seek light, and offers only shade!

If God hath lit in us an ardent fire  
Of love and pain in everlasting strife,  
Why grant us hope, if hope must be betrayed?

## THE TORMENT OF THE IDEAL

I found the Beauty which can never die,  
And I was sad. As from a mountain wall  
One spans the immeasurable interval  
Down to the land and sea, and 'neath his eye

The hugest vessels and the towers most high  
Dwindle and fuse; even so the world and all  
That it contains I saw assume a pall,  
As fade the clouds which rim the sunset sky.

Who can give form to the Idea? In vain  
I strive with stubborn Matter, in the dark;  
I find that naught exists without a flaw.

I am baptized a poet, and remain  
Seated amid imperfect forms, a mark,  
Cheerless and pale, of the eternal law.

## TO FLORIDO TELLES

When I compare power, or gold, or fame  
—Blessings which flatter even as they defile—  
With that supreme affection, pure of guile,  
Which men call love, and is refinèd flame;

I see that those are like a cunning dame  
Who hides her evil 'neath a modest smile;  
And he who seeks them has a heart as vile  
As who deserts his mate for pleasant shame.

Of pride is born that sterile joy, and all  
Its splendor is a sham and a pretense;  
Conceit its path, and vanity its goal.

Passion creates its brilliance magical,  
And passion's tempest sweeps it also hence.  
But love's pure splendor—that springs from the soul!

## PSALM

Let us have hope in God! 'Twas he did knead  
In his strong hands the inert mass of clay,  
Impotent, cold; and in a single day  
He gave it all its worth: light, motion, deed.

He gave to the most poor of soul a meed  
Of love and longing; toward the certain way  
Those who avoid him, those who go astray,  
And those who walk in anguish, doth he lead.

And I, who love him, who to him aspire,  
Who toward more life and truer radiance grope,  
Will he refuse the goal of my desire?

He sought his haters; will he not receive  
Me, who beseech his aid? O God, my Hope,  
My Father, and my Refuge, I believe!

## TO JOÃO DE DEUS

If it be law, in the dark realm of thought,  
That every inquiry for truth be vain,  
That shade must grow, and longed-for light must wane,  
And each new questing come anew to naught;

'Tis also law, howbeit with torment fraught,  
That man must seek again, and yet again,  
That he shall hold no matter proved and plain  
Save by his understanding it be taught.

What choice shall the soul make, so tossed about,  
One hour swayed by faith, the next by doubt?  
Which way it look, it turns back desolate.

No power but God's can save us from such strife.  
Let us seek knowledge in another life,  
Earth be an exile, heaven our native state.

## TO ALBERTO TELLES

Alone! The hermit in his mountain cell,  
God visits him, and cheers him as he lies;  
The sailor, buffeted by raging skies  
Hopes for a favoring breeze to serve him well. . .

Alone! But he whom fate has forced to dwell  
Far from his own, still guards their memories;  
God does not rob him of his hope, who sighs  
At night on some deserted pinnacle. . .

Alone! He can not be, though in despair,  
Who knows one bond that links him to his fate,  
Be it belief, desire, or even care. . .

But who moves through a multitude, unknown,  
Who walks with folded arms, in scornful state,  
He is indeed abandoned and alone!



## TO ALBERTO SAMPAIO

Speak not to me of glory! Hers is not  
The altar that I seek with reverence,  
Bearing my gifts; a fire far more intense  
Inspires my sacrifice—a faith more hot.

Glory! What in her should I worship? What,  
Save mist o'er chasms hanging in suspense?  
What can she offer of the love immense,  
The love that breathes a blessing on man's lot?

Another love, eternal, fair, there is,  
A steady beacon o'er tempestuous seas,  
Powerful, tender, gleaming ever higher.

None other would I seek, and I would choose  
In that pure ecstasy my soul to fuse.  
Let me ne'er burn with any other fire!

## TO GERMANO MEYRELLES

Evil and grief are life's realities,  
And joy, a figment of the imagination;  
Good is a fancy, born of brief elation,  
Whilst every day and hour some evil sees.

What should by nature be, to that which is  
Gives us no clue, no certain indication;  
If in a blessing of the mind's creation  
We trust, what shall we reap but miseries?

Ah! Could we only quit our daily woe,  
Close fast our eyes, and live in dreams immersed!  
But also by the unseen man's heart is torn.

Perchance we might forget! Yet even so  
Our ills would not forsake us. For the worst  
Of all man's ills is ever to be born!

## AD AMICOS

In vain we struggle. Like a heavy haze,  
Uncertainty encompasses our lives.  
Whate'er the soul creates, howe'er it strives,  
It goes astray at last in its own maze.

Thought vanishes like dew in the sun's rays,  
With all the thousand projects it contrives;  
The ambitious will, whence every choice derives,  
Is shattered, as a wave is dashed in sprays.

Children of Love, our souls are as a hymn  
To light, to fertile good, to liberty,  
Prophetic of the holy citadel;

But in a lonely desert, vast and grim,  
Echo our helpless cries; for Destiny  
Soars o'er the world, mute and immutable.

## TO A CRUCIFIX

A thousand years ago, good Christ, thy cry  
Rose from the cross to God, and not in vain,  
Believer, did'st thou reckon all the pain,  
For, to thy thought, ideal dawn was nigh.

Why did the echo of thy footsteps die,  
And of thy speech (O Word!) the stirring strain?  
Thou'rt dead . . . ah! sleep in peace! Come not again;  
Back to the tomb despairing thou would'st fly.

Thou would'st find now, as then, a vale of tears,  
The same humanity, with the same fears,  
Under the same dull heaven, bare and chill . . .

Thou would'st see now, as then, a world bled pale,  
And hear it sadly ask: "To what avail  
Was shed thy blood, O Christ, on Calvary's hill?"

## DESPAIR

Flee, thought of love, on sorrow's sable wing,  
Come not again, thou shadow of an hour  
That once I clasped so close. Go, as a shower  
Moves on before the impelling wind in spring.

To think that we should cast away the thing  
Nearest our heartstrings! And who would devour  
The very blood that gives that heart its power,  
He sips our cup, and like a friend doth cling!

Hope is an empty dream—is that not strange?—  
Whilst pain is ever with us. All deceives  
Except misfortune; who with it shall cope?

If to endure in silence were revenge! . . .  
Withdraw into thyself, O soul that grieves,  
Happiness may perchance dispense with hope!



1862-1866





## A LIVING LOVE\*

I wish to love, but with a love that lives!  
I'm weary of a timid heavenly lyre,  
I loathe the mere delirious desire  
That to a silly brain a dog-day gives.

A love of life and luster! Light that cleaves,  
Molten, my being! not kisses that expire  
In empty air—delirious desire—  
But love—the sort of love that truly lives!

Living and hot! And then the light of day  
Will not dissolve out of my grasp its charm,  
Like mist that some vague phantasy conceives,

Nor will it wither in the sun's hot ray.  
What orb in all the firmament can harm  
A love, however feeble, if it lives?

---

\*The repetition of rhyme words in this sonnet exists in the original.

## THE VISIT

With flowering thistle was my room bestarr'd;  
I perfumed it with musk of wondrous scent;  
I clothed me in rich purple, and I went  
My songs rehearsing, like an ancient bard.

My hands and face anointed I with nard  
Grown in the gardens of the Orient;  
And thus, arrayed with worthy ornament,  
I waited my mysterious reward.

Who was the visitor? What royal maid,  
What fairy, or what angel, unafraid  
Would leave for my poor hut her throne above?

Nor princesses nor fairies. Nay, my flower,  
It was thy memory which sought the door,  
Wrought all of gold and light, of my heart's love!

## THE SHULAMITE

Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat.—*The Song of Songs.*

Who walketh in the vineyard there without,  
Under the shadow of the clouded moon,  
His breathing gentle as a child's, his shoon  
Light on the paths through which he roves in doubt?

A dream awoke me—what was that? Methought  
I felt his presence here so close, so soon. . .  
Be it at midnight, or at desert noon,  
Who loveth, even dreaming findeth out.

O daughters of Jerusalem, make haste  
And run to my beloved. Say I fell  
Asleep, but let him no wise be distressed,

And if I went, as is my wont, to take  
My rest, and slumbered quickly, it was well;  
For though I sleep, still is my heart awake. . .

## A DREAM OF THE ORIENT

Sometimes I dream myself an island king  
Hemm'd round by far-off Oriental seas,  
Where balsam-freighted night encanopies  
The full moon, on the water quivering.

Magnolia and vanilla-blossoms fling  
Their scent upon the drowsy, limpid breeze,  
And vaguely, on the beach beneath the trees,  
The filmy ripples curve and break and cling.

While I, within my ivory balcony,  
Recline, absorbed in endless revery,  
Thou, love, dost wander where the shadows fall

Across the moonlit garden, deep and calm,  
Or liest underneath a slender palm,  
A friendly lion coming to thy call.

## AT FIFTEEN YEARS

I love the mountains and their shadowy sweep,  
Flung o'er the continents in giant sprawls  
Of blackened rock, as some huge spider crawls,  
Stretching his monstrous legs from steep to steep.

What ardent visions in the thundering deep  
Thence meet our eyes! And, 'twixt those soaring walls,  
What wondrous memories the sky recalls!  
And what great stars, above them, watch our sleep!

I love mysterious grandeur, vast and wild,  
Be it a potent thought, or the rich flower  
Of some colossal, overshadowing tree.

But in thee goodness is enough, my child.  
Do thou but love and smile—is that slight power?  
I wish naught tiny in the world save thee!

## IDYLL

When we two walk together, hand in hand,  
And pluck the lilies growing by the mill,  
And clamber, never stopping, up the hill  
Where last night's dewdrops, yet untarnished, stand;

Or, from the treeless summit, view the strand  
And watch the evening clouds, that slowly fill  
The far horizon, forming at their will  
Fantastic ruins of a sunken land:

How suddenly, at times, you cease to speak,  
Your fingers quiver, color leaves your cheek,  
And in your eyes a fire unwonted darts!

Ocean and wind together seem to pray;  
The poetry of nature makes its way,  
Subtle and loving, deep within our hearts.

## NOCTURNE

Spirit who hoverest near me, when the breeze  
Drops seaward, drowsing in the moon's new light,  
Elusive child of fluctuating night,  
Thou only knowest well my miseries.

As a far song floats o'er the darkening trees  
And sad and slow instils its subtle might,  
So thou dost my tumultuous heart invite  
By gentle ways, to oblivion and ease.

To thee alone do I confide my dream,  
My instinct for the light, and for supreme,  
Eternal Good, which lures me toward its throne;

And thou dost comprehend my nameless ill,  
The ideal passion which consumes me still,  
Thou, Genius of the Night, and thou alone!

## DREAM

One night I dreamed—nor do dreams always lie—  
That a great whirlwind snatched me from my bed  
And carried me through spaces star-bespread,  
Where an eternal dawn illumines the sky.

The stars, who guard the morning, saw me nigh,  
And at my weary face and drooping head  
They gazed, and wondered; and methought they said:  
“Poor friend, where is our sister?” anxiously.

But I let fall mine eyes, lest they betray  
The utter bitterness that ate my heart,  
And shrinking, silent, I passed on my way,

Nor dared I tell the stars, that constant shine,  
Thy sisters pure and true, how false thou art,  
And how unworthy them, O love of mine!



## APPARITION

Some day, my love (that day may soon be here,  
So violent I feel my heart's pulsation),  
Thou shalt recall with sad commiseration  
The timid vows I whispered in thine ear.

Then, as thou sitt'st, a flickering candle near,  
Secluded in thy virgin meditation,  
I shall escape the tomb's incarceration  
And specterlike before thine eyes appear.

And thou, my angel, seeing me glide past,  
Shalt moan and reach imploring hands toward me,  
Striving to clutch my robe and hold me fast.

“O hear me! Wait!” But I shall flee thy embrace  
Like a vain dream, and, heeding not thy plea,  
Shall disappear like smoke in ambient space!

## AWAKENING

In dreams, at times, when my vain sufferings,  
My agony, allow me still to dream,  
As the lark, singing, mounts a morning beam,  
My soul to very heaven mounts and sings.

It sings the light, the dawn, the star that brings  
Another day, a dead world to redeem. . .  
It sings the joy of life, the rapturous gleam  
That permeates with love our daily things.

But, suddenly, a damp and chilling wind  
Blows o'er my dream: I waken, and I find  
The night is black and mute. Watching above,

Pain waits to be my comrade, as of yore. . .  
My songs of light, angel whom I adore,  
Are naught but dreams, and dream is all my love.

## MOTHER

A mother—who should soothe my grievous days  
And watch this frosty night through by my bed,  
And with her pitying hands renew the thread  
Of my poor life, which each new trial frays;

And who should bear me, sleeping, down the ways  
That lead perforce through shadowed vales of dread,  
And gently lave my sorely-wounded head  
In the cool river of her loving gaze.

I would yield all my sterile knowledge, all  
My manly pride, and never fear to fall;  
I'd be again a helpless infant, free

From care, content, docile to each behest,  
If only I might sleep upon thy breast,  
If thou, my dear one, couldst't my mother be!

## IN THE CHAPEL

Upon a cross, within a leaf-hid shrine,  
I saw the Christ convulsed in mortal throes.  
How intimately kin, methought, are those  
Immortal sorrows of the Christ and mine!

For, children both of love, the same divine  
And fiery mirage had brushed our brows;  
And the same hatred, masked by loving shows,  
Betrayed us to the rabble's base design.

And then, as from the immemorial wood  
The slow and solemn shadow stole, we stood,  
Two vanquished beings, martyrs to our fate,

And looked on one another. Equal woe!  
Which was the paler then I do not know,  
Nor which more weary, more disconsolate.

## VELUT UMBRA

I smoke and ponder. Near the sinking sun  
Mount many-colored castles in the sky,  
And now they fling a sheaf of sparks on high,  
Now smoke, like some misplaced volcanic cone.

And then, what are those vague forms moving on,  
Which seem in some mad dream of love to sigh?  
Souls that, afloat 'twixt light and horror, ply  
The bark of that aerial Acheron.

We both are left alone; for my cigar,  
O sun! burns out as thy torch meets the sea.  
The solitude enshrouds me like a cloak.

O western clouds! O vague shapes from afar!  
I understand your hues. For I, as ye,  
See all my pride and beauty melt in smoke!

## MEA CULPA

I do not doubt that in harmonious train  
The world revolves, poised on its axis bright;  
That man is rising slowly toward the light,  
While rock and fly to manhood will attain.

I call not God a tyrant, nor complain;  
I call not heaven life's benumbing night;  
Nor order, chance; nor law, an oversight;  
Nor our existence, one brief hour of pain.

Nature is still my mother. . . . That I know.  
And if to her fair face I can not show  
An answering smile; if I am in despair;

If nothing serves to thaw my icy heart;  
If gall and desolation are my part;  
I must believe 'tis I alone who err!

## THE PALACE OF DELIGHT

In dreams I deem myself an errant knight.  
By dark, by dawn, o'er deserts lone and bleak,  
An ardent paladin of love, I seek  
The far-famed magic palace of Delight!

With armor pierced, shattered my sword in fight,  
My spirit falters, wavering and weak. . . .  
When lo! the towers, from a distant peak,  
Burst in refulgent glory on my sight!

Eager and loud I beat the door, and cry:  
"Open! the Disinherited am I,  
The Wanderer. Open, ye gates of gold!"

The gates of gold clang open, and I pass  
The long-sought portals. But within, alas!  
Are only chill, obscurity, and mould!

## IDEAL

Not out of lilies she whom I adore  
Is fashioned, nor of purple-petaled roses;  
No form divinely languid she discloses  
Such as the slender Aphrodite wore.

She is not Circe, whose fell fingers pour  
The philter which mid ruins she composes;  
Neither an Amazon, whose stern hand closes  
Upon a horse's mane still moist with gore.

Myself I question, yet I cannot feel  
What name to give this vision, whom my fates  
One instant hide from me, the next reveal:

A cloud; a dimly-glimpsed mirage of fire;  
Ideal of one who dreams alone, and waits;  
The impalpable fruition of Desire.



## WHILE OTHERS FIGHT

Would that I too might wield a soldier's sword!  
Would the intoxicating fray might bear  
Me to the fields where Death and Fate repair,  
And kings and rulers hang upon their word!

Then would I, while the din of battle roared,  
Breathe deep the red arena's fiery air . . .  
Or fall in glory, shrouded in the glare  
Which from the tawny-gleaming falchions poured!

I would not then behold my useless years,  
Blighted at dawn, pass by with naught begun  
Save dreams, vexation of the soul and tears!

I would not then behold, within my frail  
Fingers, the roses wither, one by one,  
Of this my youth, so sterile and so pale!

## DESPONDENCY

O let her go, the broken-hearted bird  
Whose nest is scattered and whose young are slain.  
Let the wind whirl her o'er the lonely plain,  
With pinions torn and desperate cry unheard. . . .

O let her go, the ship, that undeterr'd  
Met the typhoon, and wrestled it in vain,  
As night rose misty from the seething main  
And the strong spirit of the south wind stirr'd. . . .

O let it go, that pitiable soul  
Whose peace is lost, whose faith has ceased to grope.  
Let death, the calm and silent, make it whole. . . .

O let it go, that note which lingers so  
From someone's dying song . . . and the last hope . . .  
And love . . . and life . . . yes, life itself may go!

## DAS UNNENNBARE

O rare illusion, passing to and fro  
Rocked on the wave of my unrestful dream,  
And who dost trail thy garment's misty gleam  
Against the weary pallor of my brow,

Thou vanishest when first the breezes blow  
Of peaceful night. How often do I seem  
Close to the knowledge of thy name supreme,  
Mysterious fairy! yet I can not know!

What fate is mine! This sickly light of dawn  
Appears an evening light, from one late cloud,  
Livid and fluttering, when the sun has gone.

Not even night reveals thy loveliness!  
Only in distant dreams am I allowed  
To guess thee! nor in dreams, to see thy face!



## METEMPSYCHOSIS

Daughters of pleasure, ardent as the sun,  
Tell me, what are your dreams, the orgy past?  
Does ne'er the fleeting image of your last  
Existence trembling o'er your fibers run?

In other incarnations, to the moan  
Of other winds, on other planets cast,  
What forms were yours? What cold material waste  
Did your hot souls transfuse to flesh and bone?

Beasts of the jungle ye were wont to rove,  
Panthers or tigresses, with fangs of love  
Dragging a bloodless body through the wood.

Bite, then, this palpitating flesh of mine,  
Ye undulating beasts, whose limbs entwine . . .  
Tigresses! Wolves! Come on, and drink my blood!

## TO A WOMAN

To suffer and to sorrow wert thou born.  
Had fortune decked with precious furnishings  
Thy cradle, in a palace-hall of kings,  
Instead of in a cottage rough and worn;

Had'st thou been given flowers to adorn  
Thy bosom, and the blessings money brings;  
If life had showered pleasures from its wings—  
Still had thy heart been weary and forlorn.

It was to be. Thy distant-gazing eyes,  
That are not of this world, in which I read  
Infinite mysteries of far-off skies,

Thy magic voice, that half-forgetful air,  
All speak to me, and make me know indeed  
That sorrow was from birth thy fatal share.

## A VOICE IN AUTUMN

Harken, my weary heart, to the wise words  
That Nature speaketh: "Better had'st thou been  
Exposed, a naked babe, to hunger keen,  
And bred in a lone waste of rocky fjords;

"Better have moaned, in childhood, with the hordes  
Who roam the coldest, cruelest demesne,  
Than to be rocked, as thou, by Beauty, in  
A cradle swinging to Illusion's chords.

"Better thy visionary soul had moved,  
Silent and sad, mid motley crowds that streamed  
Indifferent or hostile, toward their goal,

"Nor seen one flower of all that thou hast loved;  
Better have hated, suffered, raged—than dreamed  
The ideal dreams that have enthralled thy soul!"

## ROMANTIC SEPULCHER

There, where the breakers mark a long white line, a  
Roaring, eternal, sullen, in the haze, b  
And the wind howls over the sandy glaze, c  
There be the grave of this worn heart of mine. a

Let the sun scorch it when the bare cliffs shine a  
With furnace heat, on sluggish summer days; b  
In winter savage storms shall clutch and raise c  
The desert dust, and fling it on my shrine; a

Till my heart too disintegrate to dust e  
And float away upon each wandering gust e  
That passes toward the ocean over me. . . d

With all its struggles, all its waste resolve e  
And its insensate love, let it dissolve e  
In that unfruitful, in that bitter sea. d





1864-1874



## THE IDEAL

## I

If ancient gods and ancient dreams divine  
Are vanished in our murky modern air,  
And hostile winds have quenched the light of prayer  
On dolmen altar and in temple shrine;

If Sinai wears a veil, and grasses pine  
On its dry slopes, finding no water there;  
And all the olden prophets slumber, where,  
Forgotten, they have reached some sheltering vine;

If heaven is shut, and now no angel goes  
Down Jacob's ladder (that of Jesus!), nay,  
Not one, our supplications to receive;

'Tis that faith's lily now no longer grows,  
And God himself has turned his face away,  
And hid the light which makes men to believe.

## II

O pallid Christ! O guide divine! Thy hand,  
So gentle, once so sure, now trembles so  
That it can scarcely point our path, as though  
Thy mighty heart were flagging and unmanned.

No more do prophets o'er the thirsty land  
The sacred word of destiny let flow;  
Within the burning bush the mystic glow  
Is vanished, which erstwhile the shepherd scanned.

Vanished from mortal vision—for the earth,  
Slipped from God's hand, rolls on, as a cross twists  
And falls from dying fingers to the hearth!

For now no more his potent name stands writ  
Across the stars; the stars, like atheists,  
Confess no law except the infinite.

## III

So, we must rise and seek another way!  
Fling a new bridge across the swirling tide  
For souls to pass; another home provide  
Upon the mountain, near the sun's first ray.

Is bread denied us here? Why do we stay?  
Forward! the world is free, the world is wide.  
None will gainsay us, and on every side  
Lie boundless life and light and charity!

Forward! the dead remain beneath the sod:  
But let the quick press on, and from them smite,  
Like wayside dust, the ancient cults of God.

Gentle was Jesus' bosom, full of love.  
What does it matter? If there be more light  
Beyond his bosom, thither we must move.

## IV

Conquer thyself a future, then, alone,  
Since thy celestial guides have cast thee o'er,  
O Man! abandoned on an unknown shore,  
Inglorious beggar! King without a throne!

Ah! heaven is pure, but cruel! thou wast prone  
To hope in it, but if thou can'st no more,  
And if thy disillusioned heart be sore,  
Torn from the perjured love so dearly known;

Arise, and with the proud, majestic ease  
Of a lone will, by stoic trial taught,  
With the last effort of a hero soul,

Make of thy prison walls a temple; seize  
Within the glowing circle of thy thought  
Immensity, eternal, living, whole.

## v

Who is the Ideal? Who ever saw the face  
Of that veiled pilgrim of the dark design?  
What man has kissed her hidden hand divine?  
Who, boasted of her glance's loving grace?

A pallid image, which the waters trace,  
Reflecting, and obliterate; a fine,  
Uncertain light, too tremulous to shine;  
A cloud, that winds create and winds erase.

Stretch forth, stretch forth to her your pleading arms,  
Thin from the fever of your heavy dream,  
All ye who through the spheres pursue her charms!

To thee, O weeping soul, soul sad with pain,  
No love in all the world can beauteous seem  
Save that cold virgin shrouded in disdain!

## VI

There is no other love! Life does not hold  
A better screen to fend our nakednesses,  
Nor any sweeter balsam soothes and dresses  
Our ancient wound—so many centuries old!

Whether she timid flee, or striding bold,  
Advance as one who loves and love confesses;  
Doth she appear, or hide in dim recesses—  
Ah! Ever will she be the bride foretold!

Toward thee, cold maid, all our desires reach  
As exiled men their arms impatient stretch,  
By day, by night, toward their loved native land.

Our passionate souls, however thou may'st flee,  
Shall probe the infinite in search of thee  
Till we return triumphant with thy hand!



## VII

O wondrous marriage! Union intimate  
And solemn! where the illimitable skies  
Shall be the couch of love, its tapestries  
And dais be the stars, in royal state!

The nuptials of Desire, intoxicate  
With happiness at last! Hot fantasies  
Of one who sweeps through space with ardent eyes  
Fixed on ideals sublime, inviolate!

There, where imagination goes astray  
In dreams of sovereign beauty, where the night  
Is more effulgent than on earth our day;

There, where God answers to the human voice  
Out of the bosom of eternal light;  
'Tis there, O Truth, that we shall kiss thy face!

## VIII

There! But alas! no mortal knoweth where!  
Hope, dauntless heart! The heaven of thy desire,  
The heaven of Thought, where faithful souls aspire,  
In vain thou seek'st it in that boundless sphere!

Immensity is dumb; and space, austere,  
Glows day and night in vain with magic fire;  
Ideal roses for their flower require  
A spring too long for any cosmic year.

Not one of you in your vast edifice,  
O worlds and suns and orbs and constellations,  
Contains Truth's shrine, her long-sought Paradise.

The Word, the Idea, the Essence, and the Grace  
Are not made manifest to men and nations  
Save in the deathless heaven of Consciousness!

## TO A CRUCIFIX

Upon reading, after twelve years, the sonnet of like title  
in the First Part.

No, not in vain thy generous blood was shed,  
Nor was thy anguish vain, whoe'er thou be,  
Ancient plebeian, who upon the tree  
Wast like a rebel thief nailed until dead.

From thy reviled blood a host was bred  
Of men in arms, invincible and free.  
"Peace to mankind, and war on gods!"—For thee  
In vain an idler's creed is made and said.

Thou the protesting poor did'st symbolize;  
With thee the people, a new race, began:  
That tragic lineage in thee had rise.

So we, the Commons, shall forget no more,  
As we look back, we heirs of that new man,  
That Jesus also was our ancestor.

## A DIALOGUE

The cross spake to the earth on which it stood,  
To the rough hill and somber vale below:  
“What art thou, chasm and cage, where blind and rude  
Contention plunges every life in woe?”

“Thou slave condemned to labor, what of good  
And great with all thy efforts can'st thou show?  
Resign'd, thou art a shapeless mass of mud;  
Rebellious, but a fiery lava-flow!”

“No lofty free sierra can compare  
With me in stately grandeur. Love am I,  
And firmness; I am peace, and thou art war!”

“Sadness art thou, O base and gloomy dross,  
Whilst I am light and spirit!” This reply  
Earth made: “Nature itself am I, O cross!”

## MORE LIGHT

Let sodden libertines adore the night,  
And those who wallow in their nameless dens,  
And those who slink unnoticed, mute and tense,  
Upon the brink of some forgotten height.

Thou, Luna, with thy pallid, misty light,  
Cover them, hide them, dull their every sense  
To vice's everlasting consequence,  
To sorrow, sharper than a serpent's bite!

But I shall love the holy morning hour,  
And noontide, fertile in activity,  
And murmuring even's peaceful ebbing power.

In open light let my life's work be done!  
Then, when death's shadow nears, still let me see  
The friend of heroes, the unclouded sun!

## THESIS AND ANTITHESIS

## I

I know not what the New Idea is worth,  
Now I have seen her rushing disarrayed,  
Wild-eyed, through streets lit by a barricade,  
Like a bacchante mad with lustful mirth.

Her bloodshot glance roves fiercely o'er the earth;  
Of smoke and fire her drunken breath is made;  
The goddess vast of soul to whom we prayed  
Has given all Medea's furies birth.

A truculent and irritable age  
Calls epilepsy thought, and thinks a page  
Of Word Divine with bayonet-point to write.

Ideas seek a realm forever stable,  
A heaven of crystal, pure, unalterable;  
For Thought is not a fire, it is a light!

## II

Within a crystal heaven of stainless days  
Perchance some distant Deity may dwell,  
While Being, as a godlike spectacle,  
Passes in changing dreams before his gaze.

But man must live and work his restless ways  
On earth, where his imperious fates compel;  
The air of earth his potent lungs must swell;  
On this grim earth he curses or he prays.

Thought is incarnate in a heaving breast;  
Flames are its pulse, leaping in wild unrest,  
And passions ardent as the living sun!

Fight, then, upon the arid, brutal earth  
Till hero-blood impregnate it to birth,  
Till by the whirl of struggle it be spun!

## JUSTITIA MATER

Within the solemn wood the cult holds sway,  
Eternal, intimate, of primal force;  
The mountains' rugged summits are the source  
Of an unconquered spirit, bold as they.

In starry space there takes his mystic way  
A nameless One, who marks the suns their course;  
The sea obeys the accent, sad and hoarse,  
Of a rude god who revels in the fray.

But in the grimy cities, where full-spread  
Rebellion lifts her dripping-gory head,  
Dreadful as fire before a gale at night,

There is a loftier work, a nobler fame:  
It is to challenge history's clear flame  
And fight the eternal battles of the Right!



## WORDS OF A CERTAIN DEAD MAN

A thousand years and more have I been dead,  
In wind and rain upon this rock set high;  
No specter more emaciate than I,  
No weather-vane than I more buffeted.

Only my spirit lives; and it is wed  
To one fixed thought of bitter constancy:  
“Dead, and entombed alive!” These words defy  
My courage. . . Nothing else can cause me dread.

I know well that I lived. . . . ’Twas but one day.  
The next, idolaters appeared, and they  
Gave me an altar, worshipped by the crowd;

As if I were a *person!* as if Life  
Could be a *person!*—then, after some strife,  
They said I was a God. . . . and wove my shroud!

## TO A POET

*Surge et ambula*

Unruffled spirit, who art wont to lie  
Drowsing beneath ancestral cedarn shade,  
Like to some Levite, who in rapture prayed  
Beneath his altar, far from earthly cry,

Awake! the hour has come! Before the high  
And radiant sun sepulchral shadows fade. . . .  
A new world but awaits the signal made  
To split its outworn chrysalid and fly. . . .

Listen! and hear the clamor of the throng!  
It is thy brethren rising! and their song  
Is all of war. Alarum voices scream!

Rise, soldier of the future, heed the word,  
And forge thyself, dreamer, a flaming sword  
Out of the shimmering substance of thy dream!

## HYMN TO REASON

Reason, sister of Justice and of Love,  
Bend down once more to listen as I pray.  
I speak as a free soul, who knows no sway  
But thine alone, nor other power above.

Through thee it is those shifting atoms move  
That we call suns and worlds, yet never stray;  
Virtue by thee has ever had her way,  
Through thee the flower of courage ever throve.

Through thee new thoughts survived the pangs of birth  
Upon the grim arena's blood-soaked earth;  
And they who glimpse the future, heretics,

Through thee can suffer with unquailing sight:  
Mother of robust sons, who in the fight  
Upon their shields thy powerful name affix!



1874 - 1880



## HOMO

Ye do not know me, tenants of the air,  
Boughs of the forest, starry orbs of space,  
Not one of you has seen my secret face,  
Not one has well interpreted my prayer.

No one knows who I am—and yet the bare  
Rock cliff for countless years has spied my place  
Of exile, and the sea has watched me pace,  
And adolescent dawn has viewed my care.

I am the monstrous issue of the earth;  
No parents have I; but the shadowy  
Primeval humus gave me casual birth.

Sunlight and shade my twin inheritance,  
Satan perchance I am; or I may be  
Jehovah's bastard; or—no one, perchance!

## A FAMILY DISPUTE

*Dixit insipiens in corde suo: non est Deus*

## I

Come from the clouds, lift up thine head and heed  
The words thy rebel children have to say,  
Thou old Jehovah, bearded long and gray,  
Who from thy castled heaven see'st them bleed:

“Down with brute force and arbitrary deed!  
No more shall that stern tyrant have his way  
Whose firm and stealthy hand kept us at bay  
A thousand years and longer. We are freed!

“Thou layest wrapped in sloth and sleep the while,  
But we met on our pathway Liberty,  
Who welcomed us with strangely luring smile. . . .

“We know the truth and see it face to face.  
O God of terror, great Divinity,  
What art thou but an empty commonplace?”



## II

But the old tyrant in his lonely sky,  
He of the indurated heart and proud,  
Who one day, when his mind was in a cloud,  
Let his own son be slain on Calvary,

Smiled a strange smile, hearing the various cry  
That rose from out the agitated crowd  
Of foolish folk, as impudent as loud,  
Who dared to bandy words with the Most High:

“Vanitas vanitatum” (thus he spake)  
“How vainly man inclines to what is new,  
Yet can do naught but point out my mistake!

“Ages before the earth’s corruption bore  
Your parents, silly children much like you,  
I knew all that—and infinitely more!”

## MORS LIBERATRIX

“Within thy hand, O somber-visaged knight,  
Knight of the pitch-black coat of mail and horse,  
There gleams a sword wrought out of meteors,  
Which cleaves the darkness like a star of light.

“Thou dost not pause in thy adventurous flight,  
Wrapp’d in the gloom thou sheddest on the course.  
Thy weapon’s tawny rays are the sole force  
That from the baleful murk emerges bright.”

“If the sword scintillates that I employ,”  
(The black knight answered when I questioned him)  
“The sword is Truth, and hers the brilliancy.

“I strike, but save. I crush and I destroy,  
But I console. I ravage, but redeem,  
And, being Death, am also Liberty.”

## THE UNCONSCIOUS ONE

There's a familiar specter walks with me  
Whose form I sometimes look on with disgust;  
Again, I follow him with eager trust.  
His face withal he never lets me see.

An ancient specter, mute and grave, is he,  
And seems to wish that nothing be discussed.  
Often, before that figure primly just,  
I ope my lips—and close them hastily.

Once only dared I question him, and then  
With beating heart: "Who art thou, I implore,  
Phantom whose sight I loathe and love the same?"

"Thy kin," he said, "conceited sons of men,  
Have called me God ten thousand years and more.  
But, for myself, I do not know my name."

## MORS-AMOR

That coal-black steed, whose beating hoofs resound,  
As evening falls, and pierce my dream-filled days,  
That steed, who measures the fantastic ways  
Of the night-world, with strong and rhythmic bound,

Whence comes he? O'er what awe-inspiring ground  
Has his course led him, that so wild he neighs,  
Sublime and shadowy, and his tost mane strays  
With some ineffable spark of horror crowned?

Upon him sits a rider, firm, severe,  
Of formidable mien, but calm of breath,  
And dress'd in shining armor. Free of fear

He sits the monstrous beast, and thus they move  
Together. Says the black steed: "I am Death!"  
The rider makes the answer: "I am Love!"

## STOICISM

O thou who lovest not, nor dost revere  
Nor hope, eternal spirit of negation,  
My heart is frozen by thine exhalation,  
Through thee the springtide of my life is sere.

As in an evil dream, I cross a drear  
Domain of hollow, dark hallucination,  
And only hear the long reverberation  
Of an eternal *no*, from sphere to sphere.

Why dost thou sigh, and why dost thou lament,  
O coward heart? Thou canst not check the stream  
Of Fate with all thine egotistic plaint.

Leave to the weakling, to the dreamy youth,  
The vanity of hope, and its vain gleam.  
Dare thou serene to face the abyss of truth!

## ANIMA MEA

Once I saw Death before me, face to face,  
Erect, I say, before me, as a snake  
That slept upon the path starts up to make  
The care-free traveler check his placid pace.

What a mad gesture! What a wild grimace  
The fell bacchante's! Well my heart might quake!  
I said to her: "What comest thou to take,  
Thou famished wolf, that prowlest in this place?"

"Fear not," she answered—and a sinister  
Ironic sneer, cruel, yet calm indeed,  
Curled her cold lips, so mystic and so dread—

"I do not seek thy body. I can spare  
That splendid trophy. 'Tis thy soul I need."  
"My soul," I answered, "is already dead."

## DIVINE COMEDY

Stretching its arms toward the far-distant sky<sup>a</sup>  
 And to the unseen gods its protest sending,<sup>b</sup>  
 Mankind exclaims: "Ye deities unbending,<sup>c</sup>  
 Whose servant is triumphant destiny,<sup>d</sup>

"Oh why did ye create us? Time flows by<sup>e</sup>  
 Without a pause, and generates unending<sup>f</sup>  
 Sorrow, illusion, sin and struggle, blending<sup>g</sup>  
 In one delirious whirl of cruelty."<sup>h</sup>

"Were it not better, in the clement peace<sup>i</sup>  
 Of nothingness and that which yet has had<sup>j</sup>  
 No life, to sleep till time itself shall cease?"<sup>k</sup>

"Why did ye from our sleep to pain translate us?"<sup>l</sup>  
 But hark! The gods, in accents still more sad,<sup>m</sup>  
 Make answer: "Men! Ah, why did ye create us?"<sup>n</sup>

## SPIRITUALITY

## I

Doubt, like a hurricane of death and wrack,  
Blew on the universe. Sudden the night  
Descended, and upon the world a blight  
Of dense and icy mist came in its track.

No bird now sings, nor in the zodiac  
Gleams any orb; no flower cheers the sight.  
A subtle poison, shrewd as aconite,  
Has slowly turned divine creation black.

And, in that silence of a glacial tomb,  
That monstrous night, which floats above and **spreads**  
Its lethal shroud over all mortal heads,

One humble flower, mystic mid the gloom,  
Some protest of existence to express,  
Unfolds in a deep quoin of Consciousness.



## II

Sleep mid the frost, O thou immaculate flower!  
Struggle, and beg of light the final rays  
From those fast-cooling orbs that rush through space  
Dragging their aureoles, more dim each hour.

In vain! The abyss, insatiate to devour,  
Longs to expunge thy frail existence' trace.  
Out of the eternal well surges apace  
Primeval shadow massed in deadly power.

Thou too shalt die. The universal doom  
Which swathes the world shall hear thy moaning death;  
In the eternal void thy last perfume,

Lingering, melting, gently shall disperse,  
As a sick child exhales its dying breath,  
The final sigh of our lost Universe.

## THE CONVERT

Among the children of a cursèd age  
I too sate boldly at the impious feast,  
Where, underneath the lusting of the beast,  
Moan helpless yearnings earth can not assuage.

I spat upon our altars in a rage  
Of gall and ordure, jeering with the rest. . . .  
But one day all my boasted firmness ceased;  
My contrite heart was stirred by some presage!

Weary, deserted, sickened of the road,  
Loosing the tears it could no more repress,  
My sad soul turned its wayward steps to God!

I shrouded thought in faith's benignant mists,  
Peace came to me in stark forgetfulness. . . .  
I only need to know if God exists!

## SPECTERS

Specters who keep unfailing vigil near  
While I steal hard-won slumber, and who bend  
Over my fitful rest, so soon to end,  
And fill my nights with starts of sudden fear;

What boots it that I keep my record clear  
For stainless justice, that my days I spend  
In constant wrestling, from the Fates to rend  
Some atom of the knowledge I revere,

If I must see, upon me riveted,  
Those cursèd, tragic eyes, that never rest;  
If, even sleeping, with unmeasured grief,

My soul still feels them drop upon my bed,  
Drop one by one upon my anguished breast  
The cold, benumbing tears of unbelief!

## TO THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN

*Full of Grace, Mother of Mercy*

In a vague dream of fluctuating sense  
That held me through a long and bitter night,  
'Twas then thy gaze of pity met my sight,  
Of pity, nay, of sadness, grave, intense!

It was not youth's familiar vehemence,  
Nor beauty's gleam, as commonplace as bright;  
Other the softness, other was the light  
Than nature knows in all her elements.

A mystic suffering; a blessèd grace  
Wrought out of pardon, out of tenderness,  
And of the peace of man's expiring hour. . . .

O sad and pitying vision from the spheres!  
Gaze on me thus in silence, thus in tears,  
And let me dream while life and breath endure!

## NOX

O Night, toward thee my weary thoughts are bound  
When, by the light of day, there meet my eyes  
Such sterile strife, so many agonies,  
Such useless torments as my life surround.

In thee, at least, the long laments are drowned  
That ever from our tragic dungeon rise.  
Eternal Evil checks her raving cries  
In thee, and for a space forgets to wound.

Oh, if thou too could'st sleep, and, sleeping, fall  
Upon the world, and, fallen there, forget,  
Unchanging, silent, calm, perpetual!

So should the world forget both strife and light  
And slumber in thy breast inviolate,  
Night of oblivion, everlasting Night!

## THE JOURNEY

Upon the narrow way, where may be found  
Never a flower nor bird nor spring nor tree,  
Only the mountains' brute aridity,  
And glare and fever from the sandy ground,

Upon that narrow way am I now bound,  
And fearless pass, and fearless do I see  
The phantoms that spring up in front of me  
And think to deal my sturdy heart a wound.

Who are ye, pilgrims coming from all sides?  
Grief, Disappointment, Weariness, and Pain.  
Behind them, Death creeps slowly into view.

I know you well. Ye are to be my guides  
On the last journey. Welcome once again,  
Silent companions, and Death, welcome too!

## QUIA AETERNUS

Thou did'st not die, though vain philosophy  
With pride proclaim it loudly to the folk.  
Not with such ease does man shake off the yoke  
Set on his neck by heavenly tyranny.

They boast in vain, and the grand victory  
That Reason—sore deluded!—dares invoke  
Is but a novel and more subtle cloak  
For thy eternal, tragic irony.

No, specter, no! Thou art not dead; for Thought  
Must face thee as before; scholars find naught  
In books to help them lift thy baffling veil.

And the lewd revelers who know no laws,  
How often, as they tilt the cup, must pause,  
Their fingers trembling, and their lips how pale!

## UPON THE WHIRLWIND

As I lie dreaming, visions of the night,  
Specters of my own thoughts, file through my brain,  
Like flocks that tropic winds raise in their train,  
Which vast tornadoes whirl in helpless flight.

In a strange spiral, like an erring kite,  
I see them flutter, and faint cries of pain  
Come to me, and, as through a misty rain,  
At times their features dimly reach my sight.

O phantoms of myself and of my soul,  
Swung on the swell of that aerial sea,  
Who gaze at me with formidable calm,

Who are ye, brethren and tormentors all?  
Wretched and cruel visions, who are ye?  
Alas for me! I know not who I am!



## IGNOTUS

“Where hidest thou? In vain we urge our prayer,  
Sighing and lifting up our hands in vain!  
Our hearts already weary, and we strain  
Our voices till they break—and we despair!

“The Spirit of this solitude we dare  
To seek, in heaven, on earth and in the main;  
Only our beaten cries return again  
From boundless space—we do not find thee there!

“Call, Where? O where? ye heavens and thou earth!”  
But with a tone of boredom, void of mirth,  
The ancient Spirit makes reply in kind:

“Do not complain, ye men of anxious thought,  
For I, through all eternity, have sought  
Also myself—nor ever yet did find!”

## IN THE ARENA

Far, far from here, I know not when, nor where  
The planet lies on which my lines were cast. . . .  
And yet so far in dim-remembered past  
Methinks I dreamed the while I wandered there. . . .

Mild was the ambient world, and light as air. . . .  
Existence dawned there luminous and vast. . . .  
I . . . floated like a sunbeam—till a blast  
Caught me one day, and dashed me to despair.

I fell, and in a flash myself I found  
In bestial struggle on the cruel sands  
Where brutal fury rioted unbound.

That hour I felt a monster in me grow,  
And I became a beast, with claws for hands.  
Therefore it is I rage mid lions now!

## NIRVANA

Beyond the radiant Universe of light,  
Freighted with forms, with rumors and desire,  
Beyond the strife of life, more vast and higher,  
A void extends, too dim for mortal sight.

The waves our tempests raise to such a height  
Reach there as ebbing ripples, and expire.  
Being has there an end, absorbed entire  
In stagnant calm, inert, indefinite.

And when our thought, escaping, breaks the chain  
That binds it to that lifeless world, and when  
Once more the realm of nature meets its view,

Bathed in life's fair and ample light—it feels  
Disgust at all the Universe reveals:  
Hollow illusion, meaningless, untrue.

## CONSULTATION

Round my cold bed I summoned once again  
The choicest memories of former years,  
Those vague forms which at night, with tender fears,  
Bend o'er the bosom where they once have lain.

I asked them: "Was it worth perchance the pain  
In this great narrow world bedewed with tears  
To have been born? Speak truly, though it sears,  
Poor memories that to my heart I strain."

But they—unhappy visions!—sad of mien  
And pale became, and tremulous the while,  
Even the blithest, even the most serene;

And each one of them, separate and slow,  
Gazing on me with gentle, poignant smile,  
Replied: "Ah no! it was not worth it, no!"

## VISION

Once I saw Love; but in his ashy face  
There dwelt no more a smile; deep in his gaze  
I read a thought, fixed there by sad, slow days,  
Of truceless grief, of utter weariness.

Like some lone ghost he floated on through space  
Enveloped in a cloak of leaden haze.  
He wrung his thin arms in a mortal daze  
Of pain, bereft of all his joy and grace.

Out of his tattered pinions, one by one,  
He plucked the feathers, foully stained and blown,  
And sobbed profoundly as they downward whirled,

Sobbed in an unrepentant rage of hate. . . .  
And from the specter's eyes the passionate  
And parching tears fell slowly o'er the world!



1880 - 1884





## TRANSCENDENTALISM

At last the tempests in my heart abate, *u*  
And welcome peace descends on me again; *b*  
I know, at last, how those delights are vain *b*  
For which men wrestle with the World and Fate *u*

With moistened brow I came to penetrate *u*  
The inmost precincts of Illusion's fane, *b*  
And found there, in a rush of blinding pain, *b*  
Darkness and dust, matter inanimate. *u*

It is not in the world, howe'er immense *c*  
It seems to us in youthhood, that the soul *u*  
Can quench its yearning, vague and yet intense. . . *c*

Beyond the realm that sight or touch explores, *c*  
Above the desert and the lonely pole, *d*  
'Tis there the impassive spirit floats and soars. *c*

## EVOLUTION

Once I was rock, and then, ages ago,  
A trunk or branch of some huge forest dome;  
A wave, I curled and dashed myself in foam  
On reefs of granite, immemorial foe.

As a wild beast, I roared, and, crouching low,  
Slunk through the heather to my cavern home;  
Or, mesozoic monster, on the scum  
Of glaucous swamps I fed, a towering show.

Today I am a man—and dimly see,  
Hid in the shade below, the varied stair  
That drops in spirals through immensity. . . .

The infinite I question, and my soul  
Is sad. . . Yet, groping the empty air,  
Freedom I worship, freedom is my goal.

## IN PRAISE OF DEATH

## I

In the profoundest hours of the night,  
The Unconscious shakes me, and I start with fear.  
It is as though some fiend of hell crept near  
And clutched my sturdy heart with all his might.

Not that my mind is startled by the sight  
Of shapes that in the solemn void appear,  
Nor is my reason laboring to sear  
Some keen remorse it can not put to flight.

No nightly phantasms drive me desperate,  
Nor graveyard specters that my room invade,  
Nor terror in my heart of God or Fate;

No, none of these! a well-hole, dank of breath,  
A wall of silence, rimm'd about with shade,  
And far away the knell-like tread of Death.

## II

Deeper and deeper in the wood of dream  
My wounded soul advances with each day,  
Guided by phantasy along the way  
Where vague forgetfulness is law supreme.

Darkness lies thick, and chill mist-banners stream  
In that strange world, and constant breezes play;  
My fretful senses, cast in disarray,  
Trust to the forms that in the shadows teem.

What mystic longings turn my brain to fire?  
Before me yawns a silent, vast abyss,  
Nirvana, fathomless to those above!

But on my barren journey, I aspire  
Only to meet thee and to know thy kiss,  
Mysterious Death, sister to Truth and Love!

## III

I know not who thou art, nor do I try  
To learn thy name, such is my confidence.  
I am content to feel that, in the tense  
And form-filled blackness, thou remainest nigh.

Through the chill silence and obscurity  
I track thy steps, and with unquailing sense  
At thy command I contemplate the immense  
Abysses of the future, from on high.

For thee I enter the nocturnal maze,  
Peopled by visions from a nameless land,  
And strive to catch thy penetrating gaze. . . .

One hour enough to comprehend thee whole,  
Funereal Beatrice with icy hand. . . .  
The only Beatrice who can console!

## IV

For a long time I did not know (with shame  
I think how blind I was, and stupefied!)  
Who thou couldst be, who traveled by my side,  
Impassive comrade, day and night the same.

Often, 'tis true, when agony became  
My constant lot, and respite was denied,  
To thee I raised my troubled eyes, and tried,  
Last friend of mine, to call upon thy name.

But then I neither loved nor knew thee well;  
My sluggish thought upon thy silent brow,  
Austere and peaceful, could no message spell.

At last, an inner light illumed the scroll. . . .  
I know thy name, I feel thy kinship now,  
Death, coëternal sister of my soul!

## v

What shall I call thee, figure austere-brow'd,  
Who hast by fortune in my pathway strayed,  
When my o'er-burdened heart gave way, dismayed  
By hardships, sickened of the endless road?

A yawning gulf thine eyes seem to the crowd;  
They cloak their faces, and start back afraid.  
But I have faith in thee, O deep-veiled shade:  
Silent to all, to me thou speak'st aloud.

Daughter of night! each day more manifest  
Within thine eyes, profound and mystical,  
The signs of the Ideal appear to me. . . .

So, I shall sleep within thy changeless breast,  
Safe in the peace that shelters one and all,  
Inviolable Death, who makest free!

## VI

Who dreads Non-being, he only fears the dust  
Of thy great, silent, mortuary hall,  
Night without end, tenantless interval,  
Darkness of Death, shadowy, cool, august.

Not I: my spirit, humble but robust,  
Enters with faith thy court funereal.  
Others thy cinerary voids appall;  
For me, thy harsh face smiles, and moves to trust.

I am lured by thy holy peace and strange,  
Thy matchless silence, sealed against all change,  
Where love is grief's eternal attribute.

It may be sin to seek thee consciously,  
But not to worship and to dream of thee,  
Non-being, who art the only Absolute.



## CONTEMPLATION

Dreaming with open eyes, I go my ways  
No more mid beings palpable to sense,  
But I behold the changeless elements  
Which soaring thought and spirit with them raise.

What is the world before me? Drifting haze,  
Fragments of entities, unreal pretense,  
A fog of treachery and impotence  
Rolling o'er voids too deep for human gaze.

Forth from the all-embracing mist and gloom  
Issues a wailing murmur. 'Tis a dole  
Sent from the deeps of life, the poignant moan

Of things, that blindly in the throbbing womb  
Of night, push upward toward another goal,  
Another light, felt dimly, but unknown.

## LACRYMAE RERUM

O Night, to Reason and to Death akin,  
Confidant and interpreter of Fate,  
How often have I stood before the gate  
Of thy dim shrine, eager to peer within!

Whither are bound thy suns, like Bedawin  
Uneasy roaming where their laws dictate?  
And man, why does he wander desolate  
Seeking some certain balm for his chagrin?

But, with the pomp of a funereal rite,  
Silent, triumphant, sinister, the night  
Sweeps on, and the slow hours trail her wings.

Upon me rests a pall of gloom and doubt;  
And, plunged in a deep dream, I hear without  
The sigh and rustle of strange, shadowy things. . .

## REDEMPTION

## I

O voices of the trees and sea and sky!  
At times, when, fevered by a dream of pain,  
Your potent song lulls me to rest again,  
I think you suffer torment even as I.

O twilight Word! Mysterious psalmody!  
Intimate breath borne from the dumb domain!  
Does not the world through thee vaguely complain  
As if thy vaporous murmur were a sigh?

A spirit dwells in space; on every hand  
A cruel eagerness for freedom fills  
These transient forms, and makes them shake and  
moan.

Your alien speech I only understand,  
O voices of the sea and wood and hills!  
Your captive souls are brothers to mine own!

## II

Ocean, weep not, nor ye, O winds and trees!  
Choir of murmuring voices from the years,  
Of voices primitive and dim with tears,  
Like ghosts entombed who mourn their liberties. . .

Bursting the shade of twilight fantasies  
Ye shall rise radiantly to other spheres  
Out of those dreams and those unworthy fears  
Which wring from you your strange, complaining pleas.

Souls in the limbo of existence yet,  
Ye shall awake one day in Consciousness,  
And as, transmuted to pure thought, ye soar,

Ye shall behold the Form that lies beget  
Fall clean away, like a discarded dress,  
And suffering shall visit you no more.

## THE INNER VOICE

I lie enveloped in a dream of pain,  
Broken by flashes of fantastic light;  
A troop of apparitions from the night  
Files ever past, and stirs my restless brain.

With a wild roar as of a stormy main  
Tossing its breakers to a fearful height,  
The monstrous Universe looms on my sight,  
Lit by the lightnings of a hurricane. . . .

Long lamentation, tragic sobbing, come  
In ceaseless echoes to my ear, a moan  
Of one-toned horror, dying, then renewed. . . .

Only within my heart, that I can plumb  
And mete, a voice, even to me unknown,  
Makes secret protest, and affirms the Good!

## STRUGGLE

Night is asleep, reclining on the hills.  
The moon, a tranquil dream of Lethe, creeps  
Over the dark horizon. The wind sleeps.  
The valleys sleep. Silent are all the rills. . . .

But in my brain celestial night instils  
A tide of wakeful thoughts. Out of the deeps  
A phantom troop of misty wanderers sweeps,  
Of Destinies and Souls, whose nearness thrills!

Impenetrable problem . . . Thought recoils  
With fear before it! . . . Yet, with dripping pores,  
Haggard as if exhausted by long toils,

I search the peopled shades unconsciously,  
And all the while o'er solitary shores  
Echoes thy immemorial voice, O sea!

## LOGOS

Thou, whom I see not, and who yet dost go  
Before me, nay, within me—who hast wrought  
About me the affections and the thought  
Whence all my ends and my beginnings flow;

Strange being (if thou art a being), so  
To snatch and bear me, like a babe upcaught,  
Through realms innominate and ways unsought,  
Full of delight and fear, of yes and no!

Naught art thou but a reflex of my soul,  
Yet, when I should confront thee with calm brow,  
Thy sight confuses me, and I implore thee.

If I am still, thou comest. . . . When I call,  
Thou dost not answer. . . . My near kin art thou  
And my afflictor. . . . Tyrant! I adore thee!

## WITH THE DEAD

Those I have loved, where are they? Gone, dis-  
persed,  
Seized in the vortex of the hurricane,  
Upraised, as in a dream, mid visions vain,  
By the wild flight and roar of worlds accurst.

And I myself, having my feet immersed  
In the same whirling flood, behold a train  
Of weltering faces floating down that main  
And glimpsed through livid bubbles as they burst.

But when I gain a moment's pause, and close  
My heavy eyelids, then anew do those  
Whom once I loved draw near; with me they brood.

I see them, hear them, and my voice they hear,  
Joined in the ancient love which we revere,  
The ideal communion of eternal Good.



## OCEANO NOX

Beside the sea, which hoarsely sent its great  
And tragic voice to landward, while the wind  
Blew fitful past me, as across the mind  
A thought may flash, and seek, and hesitate,

Beside the sea I sate disconsolate,  
Scanning the sullen sky, with mist-clouds lined,  
And, in my revery, questioned the blind  
Lament that rose from things of every state.

“What restless whim disquiets you, O forces  
Obscure, and beings that begin to be?  
What thought is that which moves you in your  
    courses?”

But from the vast horizon where doth hide  
Forever the Unconscious, comes to me  
A roar, a distant plaint—and naught beside.

## COMMUNION

I shall repress my tears! Mark now this thing,  
My soul, how many men have wandered by,  
How many men before have cursed the sky  
And its cold light, with raised hands quivering!

“A ghastly light! It blights the very spring!”  
But still their patient hearts fought valiantly,  
By instinct led to lean, they knew not why,  
On their brave faith, obscure and comforting.

What am I more than they? The selfsame fate  
Binds me that binds the folk of countless nations.  
I shall pursue my path, however strait,

Beside me many a mute but friendly face;  
Safe in the faith of humble generations,  
In the communion of our ancient race.

## SOLEMNIA VERBA

I spake unto my heart: "How many hours  
We wandered in vain pathways! Turn thy sight  
And see now, from this cold and austere height,  
The barren plains to which our tears were showers.

"Ashes and dust, where once grew gentle flowers!  
Darkness, where shone a tender vernal light!  
Gaze and despair, thou sower of the night,  
See where a ruined world below us cowers!"

And yet my heart, assured in constancy  
By the hard school of unrelenting strife,  
And given faith by pure excess of pain,

Made answer: "From this height 'tis Love I see!  
Living was not in vain, if this be life,  
Nor is the loss and sorrow aught but gain."

## DEATH'S MESSAGE

“Come unto me, all ye who live in strife;  
Come unto me, all ye who suffer pain;  
And ye who, filled with weariness of life,  
Regard your proper works as void and vain.

“In me, the Woes more keen than any knife,  
Passion and Doubt and Evil, cease again.  
The floods of Grief, in every bosom rife,  
Vanish in me as rivers in the main.”

Death spake these words. Mysterious messenger,  
Silent revealer of things hid from sight,  
Veiled hierarch as dumb and cold as clay,

Lo! Silence is more eloquent in her  
Than in the sea its clamor; and her night  
Is more resplendent than the light of day.

## IN GOD'S HAND

In the right hand of God, in his right hand  
My heart has found a resting-place at last.  
Adown the narrow stairway I have passed  
That leads us from Illusion's magic land.

Like to the mortal flowers with which a band  
Of children vainly deck them, I have cast  
Away the transitory figment, and the vast  
Deceit that Passion and the Ideal demand.

As a small child, upon a gloomy day,  
Whose mother lifts him, smiling distantly,  
And bears him, at her breast, upon her way,

Past woods and seas, o'er desert sand and sod. . . .  
Sleep thy deep sleep, O heart of mine now free,  
Sleep thou forever in the hand of God!



# POEMS





## POEMS

“When he wrote the first sonnet of the fifth series  
(1880-84)

‘At last the tempests in my heart abate,  
And welcome peace descends on me again,’

Anthero de Quental resolved to destroy all his *gloomy* poems. He felt remorse at ever having been in a state of mind which he now regarded with horror. He considered that these dismal verses could not console anyone and might hurt many. He destroyed them, therefore, with the violence of a character intermittently tender and frenzied, like a woman's. From this shipwreck in which some real masterpieces perished, I saved these poems; and I was able to save them because I chanced to have them among the manuscripts which he had sent me in letters, and in some cases as the text of messages concerning the state of his mind, a sort of rimed epistles.”

OLIVEIRA MARTINS.

## THE PRISONERS

Resting their foreheads on the dungeon bars,  
The pallid prisoners observe the sky.  
On slanting ray the sun, about to die,  
Sends a last gleam to usher in the stars.

Far in the shadow, on the dreamy plain,  
The hum of voices drowns till it ends.  
The sadness of the universe descends,  
Heavy and silent, out of space again.

The prisoners are sighing. Bands of birds  
Are passing swiftly, passing full of haste,  
As if absorbed in intimate unrest,  
As if absorbed in thoughts too grave for words.

Thus speak the prisoners: "No spot in all  
The world loses for aye the eternal light.  
Even a bird has liberty of flight,  
But man is shut behind a prison wall!

What is your goal? and whither do ye press?  
"Toward light? Toward dawn? To infinity? O where?"  
The flock unwilling answers from the air:  
"Toward night, the dark, the abyss, and nothingness!"

The prisoners are sighing. Comes the wind,  
Rises and passes on with fitful start,  
As one who hides a sorrow in his heart,  
As one who bears a woe with stoic mind.

Thus speak the prisoners: "What poignant pain,  
What immemorial secrets, or what wrath,  
Wayfarer on the never-ending path,  
Carries thee moaning o'er the lonely plain?"

"What seekest thou? From what remote recess  
Do holy visions beckon thee to bliss?"  
The wind moves on, nor answer makes but this:  
"The night, the dark, the abyss, and nothingness!"

Again the prisoners are moved, and sigh.  
Like ancient sorrows never quite at rest,  
Like longings dimly sensed and unexpressed,  
The stars emerge against the darkening sky.

They contemplate each other from afar,  
Silent, mysterious and inscrutable,  
As one who bears a grief he may not tell,  
As one whom love has branded with its scar.

Thus speak the prisoners: "Is it your mission  
Prime and eternal problems to resolve?  
See ye a light around which worlds revolve,  
Which sends you floods of supreme intuition?"

"What is your hope? Within that holy space  
What fair solutions of our riddles lie?"  
But the sad stars make only this reply:  
"The night, the dark, the abyss, and nothingness!"

Thus the night passes. Gently, thoughtfully,  
The pine grove whispers to itself, and stirs.  
Leaning against the bars, the prisoners  
Shed silent tears, and contemplate the sky.

## THE VANQUISHED

There come three horsemen slowly riding by  
Along a solitary path of stones,  
The wind, within the noisy forest, moans,  
And night falls, leaden, from the sullen sky.

To broken swords their fingers feebly cling,  
The dusty chargers droop their weary heads;  
About the knights the garments hang in shreds,  
And from their wounds the blood drips darkening.

Defeat, the friend of treason and of fears,  
Has bowed their foreheads with her mighty hand.  
Upon the black horizon of the land  
A blood-red spot of sunset disappears.

Then lifts his arms to heaven the foremost knight,  
And sobbing speaks, "I loved and I was loved!  
A rapturous vision raised me up and moved  
Through endless spaces in a car of light!

"In lofty flight I mounted to the sphere  
Where the souls live who love each other well,  
Contented, free and good, as they who dwell  
Among the stars, where spring reigns all the year.

“Why must the blast of pestilent desire  
Invade the azure of immaculate love?  
Alas for him upon whose forehead drove  
One day its fierce and withering breath of fire!

“The fragrant dark-red passion-flower of lust  
Unfolds its petals languidly at dawn,  
But from its purple chalice I have drawn  
Nothing but poison, rottenness and must.

“Brothers, I loved. I loved and I was loved. . . .  
Therefore I wander on a weary road,  
And from my wounded breast escapes the blood,  
Disdainful of the form through which it roved.”

The second rider answered, and there curled  
His lips a smile of tragic bitterness,  
“I loved mankind, and dreamed of happiness  
Bestowed by daring justice on the world.

“Moving through many a homicidal brawl  
I ever raised an ardent voice for right,  
I spake to races plunged in ignorant night  
And bade them rise, as with a clarion call.

“When will the sun of justice light the land?  
When will the day of ransom set us free?  
My sword betrayed me ere the victory,  
And all my seed fell on the shifting sand.

“The nations hold before them, all unread,  
The future’s book, and smile a bestial smile.  
The people on its dunghill sleeps the while  
As if it drowsed within a royal bed.

“Brothers, I loved my fellowmen, and fought  
For them with just intent and willing hand. . . .  
Therefore I die of hunger, and the sand  
Drinks up my life-blood, sacrificed for naught.”

The third knight spoke, “I loved but God; on Him  
I set my soul and all my earthly hope.  
He was my fortress and my shield, to cope  
With worldly perils, treacherous and grim.

“I called upon Him in that shameful hour  
When sin and evil beat against my breast,  
I strove to know Him with a wild unrest  
And probed a thousand arts of doubtful power.

“What whirlwinds of destruction fiercely lash  
The temple, sacrosanct and ages old?  
The stars of heaven, darkened now and cold,  
Plunge to disaster with a dreadful crash!

“The vain days reek of languor and disgust.  
The sun’s light wavers and the saints despair. . . .  
Woe unto them who clasp their hands in prayer!  
Woe to believers! Woe to those who trust!

“Brothers, I made of God my being’s goal . . . .  
Therefore I wander comfortless, disgrac’d,  
Dragging across the endless desert waste  
A bloodless body and a dying soul.”

Then all three, joining in a deep sigh, went  
Their tired way, dropping their nerveless hands  
Against their hacked and unavailing brands  
In weakness and supreme abandonment;

And plunged into the dubious dying light  
That cloaked the mighty mountain as a hood;  
They plunged into the impenetrable wood,  
Into the pallor of the silent night.



## AMID THE SHADOWS

There comes at times to take a seat near mine  
(The night is falling, stripping bare the flowers)  
There comes to seek me, in the doubtful hours,  
A spirit satin-winged, that seems divine.

Lightly it lays its soft and slender fingers  
(Strange perfumes scatter from the quiet night)  
It lays its hand, compassionate and light  
Upon my bleeding heart,—and still it lingers.

And then I hear that pitying vision speak  
(The vaporous space is filled with sighs and fears)  
I hear it say: "What mean these silent tears?  
Why is thy life so empty and so bleak?"

"Come thou with me! Enfolded in mine arms,"  
(In the deep night a saintly silence reigns)  
"Sleeping thou shalt escape the world of pains  
Rapt in a dream of magic light and charms.

"For I am native of a distant sphere"  
(The night is infinitely sweet and pure)  
"Where love endures, aye, love and faith endure,  
Where an unchanging dawn shines ever clear.

“There do I live, and thou shalt come with me”  
(The night is throbbing like a radiant star)  
“For I have come to seek thee, from afar,  
To bring thee peace, poor friend, and set thee free.”

These are the words of that nocturnal soul  
(A mournful murmur whispers in the air)  
Its loving accents have a sound as fair  
As water flowing in a crystal bowl.

Drowsy and motionless I hear her speak  
(The night pours forth the music of its woes)  
My limbs are stark as if the muscles froze,  
My thought is mute and shadowy and weak.

I gaze at her, absorbed in grief and dread  
(The night is empty as a monstrous tomb)  
I turn upon her eyes that feel their doom,  
And answer: “Well thou knowest I am dead.”

## HYMN TO MORNING

O thou, most chaste and joyous Light of morn!  
Rise pure and vibrant in the limpid sky  
And hearten them who still triumphantly  
Can harbor hope—O stainless Light new-born!

But in my somber heart thou dost instil  
Thine own unmeasured sadness. I prefer  
Black-visaged Night, the sister of despair,  
Night, solitary, dense, immovable,

The silent void in which no star glows bright,  
No breezes murmur and no bird can sing,  
And thought itself sinks slowly slumbering—  
Dearer to me than holy morning Light!

For Night the image is of Nothingness,  
An image of the peace where change is none,  
Of that inviolate oblivion  
Which man, outworn with sorrow, learns to bless.

For in the shadows, peering far ahead,  
Concentrate thought can probe the utter naught  
And scorn the tortures of our living lot  
And can forget, as one already dead.

Then, bold interrogating Destiny,  
I know it guilty, and reject it, whole,  
And, turning, fix my gaze, with tranquil soul,  
Upon the august void that sets me free.

For Night the image is of Truth, who dwells  
Aloof, unknowing transitory things,  
Far from the passions and the glitterings  
Where sorrow lurks and falsehood weaves her spells.

But thou, O radiant, glorious Light of day,  
Of what art thou the symbol? Of deceit,  
The eternal net which in its infinite  
Mysterious meshes snares our hearts of clay!

Yea, symbol of betrayal and confusion,  
Of promises each morning new y born  
And ever and eternally forsworn—  
Mother of Life, and Mother of Illusion!

Let others, filled with faith, await thy sight,  
Toward thee with suppliant hands confiding grope,  
Let others stake their happiness and hope  
On promise of the vain days' vainer light.

Not I! I see thee and I think: What pain,  
What agony, what torture yet unknown,  
Await me in the bosom of this dawn?  
And cry aloud: Why must day come again?

I would, fair Light, that thou did'st not exist!  
Hadst ne'er existed! So the universe  
Had lain potential, and escaped its curse,  
Shrouded forever in a cowl of mist!

What gift bring'st thou the world with each new day?  
Only the knowledge, only the deep sense  
Of everlasting, cureless impotence;  
Hounding desire, and all the world its prey!

What is the substance of the loveliest years?  
Dissensions, combats, sorrows, and complaints!  
What is their substance? Miseries, constraints,  
Illusions, bruising, agonies, and fears!

Inexorable sower of wild grain,  
The Sun, unwearied, strides on through space,  
While from his lap, spurting in rich excess,  
Stream the innumerable seeds of Pain!

Ah, how it grows, the cursèd crop, beneath  
The burning light! How it vibrates and groans  
Under the rushing winds of life, and moans  
With a monotonous and plangent breath!

And grows, and in voluptuous waves it spreads,  
In waves of barbarous fecundity  
With all the toughness, all the energy,  
Subtle, invincible, of poisonous weeds!

Ancient corruption feeds its veins; the long  
Corruption of the fatal primal soil,  
And from the venomed sap issues a spoil  
Of mortal perfume, sickening sweet and strong.

And this profound and languorous perfume,  
Distilled of who knows what magnetic lures,  
Poetic charms, and carnal calentures,  
By it the world is poisoned to its doom!

Dawn, like a bugle sounding through a wood,  
Placid, inflexible, awakes from sleep  
The miseries of earth; and with a deep,  
Horizon-filling shout the fearsome brood,

Wry-visaged, angry, ravening, blind, and void  
Of pity, rises once again and draws  
A hasty sword for fray that cannot pause;  
—An army ever vanquished, ne'er destroyed!

How many, in this morning hour of force,  
Brandish their virgin weapons with the light,  
Craving the formidable test of fight,  
Confident, cruel, knowing no remorse,

And eve shall see them, on the rocky plain  
Fallen, and rolling in a reek of blood,  
Hurl against heaven, with the ruddy flood,  
A final curse, as venomous as vain!

How many, too, standing, but all forgot,  
The night shall find against some wayside stone,  
Shedding, annihilated and alone,  
The silent tears that are the loser's lot!

And why? With what intent? Why lur'st thou men,  
Inexorable Light, O Light serene,  
Toward strife inexpiable, life unseen,  
With lying visions that inflame the brain?

To be a plaything for a single day  
In the indifferent calloused hand of Fate;  
An ignis fatuus, that, mediate  
'Twixt birth and death, flares out its transient ray!

To be, upon a weary frozen waste,  
Lit by deceptive and malignant orbs,  
Like shadows whom a fleeting dream absorbs,  
Like sorry specters huddled by the blast!

Ah, no! Thou glorious and triumphant Light!  
Shake as thou wilt from thy rich cloak outspread  
Charm and seduction on my passive head:  
Still art thou sad and fitful in my sight!

In my sight thou art mournful, pallid-lipped,  
And bitter to the heart, O Light of day!  
Like some forgotten torch whose wavering ray  
Haunts the recesses of a monstrous crypt.

In vain thou risest; vainly, from above,  
My heart thou drenchest in a loving flood.  
Only the greater horror chills my blood;  
I cannot love thee, do not wish to love!

O Symbol of the universal Lie,  
Of the appearance of unstable things,  
Who hidest, in thy shifty facetings,  
Beneath thy smiles eternal pravity;

Thou Symbol of Illusion, at whose flame  
The Infinite brought forth a Universe  
Foredoomed to evil, sin, and sorrow's curse,  
Sign of Existence, cursèd be thy name!



## THE BLACK FAIRY

Icy her lips, piercing and chill as doom  
The glance from her pale eyes, an aged crone  
Lifted me to her bosom waste and wan,  
Lifted me in her arms that seemed a tomb.

She kissed me silently and long; and long  
She drew me close against her clammy face . . . .  
Ah! how my soul resented her caress  
And writhed beneath her kisses as a thong!

Where'er she set her lips, my flesh became  
A shriveled parchment, and my hair turned white.  
My bones in loathing shrank away. The blight  
Of her chill breath was scorching more than flame.

The Black Fay sent from her pale eyes a dart  
Into my veins, and thickened all my blood.  
Silence o' death in an o'erwhelming flood  
Engulfed my drained and faintly throbbing heart.

And when I looked about me, in a daze,  
The world appeared a vision, far below:  
A sea of mist, a vast illusive show,  
And sunlight seemed the moon's unearthly rays. . . .

As 'twere the specter of a world now dead,  
A tattered world, in fading fog outlined,  
Aerial ruin shaken by the wind,  
Colorless, formless, aimlessly outspread.

And all that lovers of the world adore,  
Fortune and glamor, hope and laughter, all,  
I watched them tremble, and incline, and fall  
Inert, with dying pallor sicklied o'er.

That moment there was opened in my heart  
A fearsome gulf—and 'n its soundless deep  
I heard a rushing cataclysm sweep,  
As though the universe were wrenched apart.

O Reason! crone of piercing glance and dread,  
And breath more deadly than a leprosy!  
For that chill kiss which once thou gavest me,  
Spirit of Night, my blessing on thy head!

I bless thee for my anguish, though it slay,  
And for the poignant grief that shot me through  
When all I worshipped crumbled, and I knew  
Out of what night is wrought the light of day!

Yea! for the tears and for the wholesome pain  
Of disillusion; . . . for the austere peace  
Of my dead heart, in which desires cease  
And with them hope . . . I bless thee once again!

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