

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH
AND OTHER POEMS

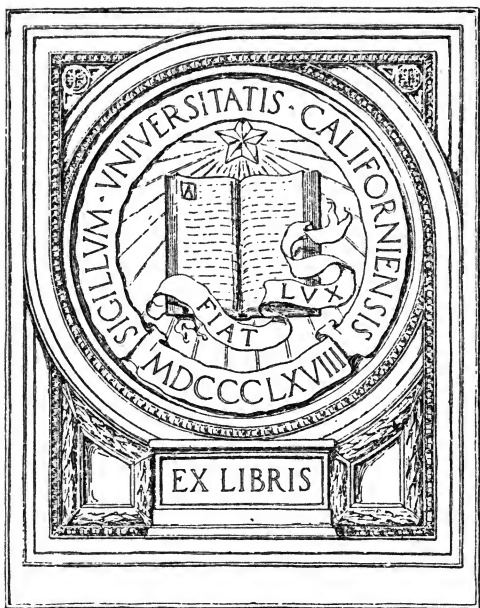


HERBERT S. GORMAN

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THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

A VOLUME OF POEMS

BY

HERBERT S. GORMAN



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
CANDACE	3
THE MELODY OF PATRICK MURPHY	5
EINSTEIN PRACTICES	8
THE HISTORY OF EGYPT	9
IACCHOS	10
THE MANDRAKE ROOT	11
THE INTOLERABLE PROCESSION	13
TO A FALSE FRIEND	15
MYCERINUS	16
THE WARNING	18
ROSES	20
LILITH, LILITH	21
RAINY NIGHT	22
THE PAPER ROSE	24
LESÈ MAJESTÉ	26

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE BURNING BUSH	27
BRIEF OUTLINE	30
“LOOK HERE, UPON THIS PICTURE”	32
JEAN	34
NINON PLUCKS THE LAST ROSE	35
LOVE’S FANATIC	47
“O PASSIONLESS AND PALE”	49
THE LAST SUNSET	50
THE WHITE BEAST	52
THE WHITE BONES OF THIS LADY	53
THE SON OF DAWN	54
THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH	82
INTERMEZZO BETWEEN TWO GRIEFS	85
MORGAN SULKS	89
PALE HANDS	90
INDIFFERENCE	91
THE LAST FIRE	93
GREEN BANKS	95
THE DARK OCEAN OF LOVE	96

CONTENTS

	PAGE
KALEIDOSCOPE: SUBWAY HOUR	99
MIDNIGHT	100
SICK DAYS	102
THE FATALIST	103
THE LOCKED DOOR	104
THE RIDERS	105
NIGHTMARE	106
IN THE DARK, IN THE NIGHT	108
THE LONELY CABIN	109
JEWELS	111
AFTER LOVE	113
MASTERBROOK	114
THE SATYRS AND THE MOON	116
THE DESERTED HOUSE	118
TWO SONNETS AT CORNWALL	120
TO MY WIFE, JEAN	122

THE BARCAROLE OF
JAMES SMITH



CANDACE

IN Ethiopia the sun
Shines forever. Cinnamon
And aromatics spice the air,
And Candace is black and rare.

The Troglodytes in caverns dwell;
The Macrobian with long years swell;
The Ichthyophagi eat fish;
But Candace is all my wish.

Bring ivory and scented myrrh
To lay before the feet of her
Who, carved of black basalt and Night,
Shall find in me a neophyte.

These women whiter than the sun
Are pale with ardors left undone;

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

Their veins are filled with snow and ice
And timidly they ponder twice.

But Candace, but Candace
Has blood as black as ebony
That roars through veins that ache and
 yearn
And for her sultry breasts I burn.

The morning bursts in twisted fire
Before the birth of my desire,
But noonday heat brings back to me
The swarthy limbs of Candace.

Heap sandalwood upon the flame
And smite the cymbals at her name
And beat the drums while blood throbs free
For Candace, for Candace.

THE MELODY OF PATRICK MURPHY

THE twilight lopes along the street,
A lithe grey beast with padded feet
That make no sound. . . . A slow moon slips
Above dark trees, and starshine drips
About the worn and splintered stoop
Where Patrick Murphy sits, adroop
With sweaty labor. . . . Patrick sees
The Night and shapes his melodies.

“A million stars have fallen down
Upon the Babylonian waste,
And guttered moons have scorched the
crown
Of Janus' hill, the double-faced.

“And masons, such a brown-limbed rabble,
Have builded shafts beyond compare

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

From Taj Mahal to ancient Babel
And Ninus' Hanging Gardens rare.

"But all their building is a dream
And all those masons long ago
Have rotted: they went out like steam
Or frosty air or melting snow.

"And all the bricks that I have laid
The Great House Wrecker lists upon
His Domesday Book. . . . A sorry trade,
As insubstantial as the dawn.

"So build no more, say I, with bricks:
They vanish, but the twilight stays,
And twilight has a million tricks
That will outlast my building days.

"Come, smoke of twilight, to my hand:
I'll shape you to a dusky dome,
A place where all the gods may stand,
Outlasting Nineveh and Rome.

"My back is broken with the weight
Of trowelling these wretched houses,

THE MELODY OF PATRICK MURPHY

So let me build a mansion great
Where nothing but the wind carouses.

“The moon shall hang above the door
To glow on subterranean nights,
And all the stars flash on the floor
Like glittering electric lights.”

Now Night, the black behemoth, goes
With lurching stagger through the rows
Of dark astonished houses stunned
To sickly trances, moribund
With rotten shibboleths, denials
And compromises and vain trials.
And Patrick Murphy seems to hear
New voices as he drinks his beer,
And, after Night's abysmal span,
Awaits the white Leviathan
Of nascent day that swims along
To his uncomprehended song.

EINSTEIN PRACTICES

EINSTEIN on the violin
Drew long notes with quivering zeal.
The music, rising sharp and thin,
Caught him taut from wrist to heel.

Einstein carved a commonplace
Upon the Night's black ivory
And lifted up his rabbit-face
To smirk upon the mockery.

Einstein's bow obeyed the wrist
And Einstein loomed for all to know,
When, with uncomprehended twist,
The wrist turned victim to the bow.

And Einstein in a lonely place
Ran like a rabbit out and in,
Surprise upon his meager face,
And hatred for his violin.

THE HISTORY OF EGYPT

BALD-HEADED Egyptians with chin-
beards that thrust

At rakish angles made slaves eat the dust,
Lashed their backs in quarries of hard stone,
Tore dark flesh and sweetened their pride
with bone.

The Pyramids, the Sphinx rose in the air,
And Cheops is buried under the painted
stair

Somewhere, somewhere;

And now the dream of the slave is one with
Time;

He strolls with Sphinxes and Hawks through
beds of lime;

With Berenice he loiters, laughs and lingers,
While Pyramids shine like jewels on horny
fingers.

IACCHOS

DARK figure of Iacchos
Sprawled across the sill of the Night,
Sertorous breathing, gigantic limbs in
throes
Of nightmare. The moon shines white
And spatters with silver flakes the heavy
loins.
Dark blood in the veins that thunder;
Night with day in ecstasy joins
And Time stands still with wonder.
Time stands still and observes the body;
The winds like hounds worry the skirts of
Night. . .
Morning breaks, and chambermaids clad in
shoddy
Dresses air the sheets in the broad daylight.

THE MANDRAKE ROOT

THE mandrake root! Your face is grey as
iron;

Your eyes are chilled with something dead
and bleak;

You have the pride in sorrow that Lord
Byron

Enchanted London with. And for a week

You've fumbled through the leaves and
touched the quick

Of this despairing plant and felt it crack
Between your nervous fingers. Are you
sick?—

For mandrakes are an aphrodisiac.

O, come. This will not do. The feeble
note

You play is like a drop within a cup

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

No louder than the pulses in your throat
That bid you now to pull this damned
thing up.

One root is in your heart; the other, in
The heart you filled and emptied with a
curse. . . .

A sturdy pull and everything that's been
Will merely echo that it might be worse.

The mandrake root! O pull it up forever
And flings its bleeding leaves upon the
ground,
And understand that Time is like a river
That washes hollow wounds without a
sound.

THE INTOLERABLE PROCESSION

A PROCESSION of pall-bearers carry the
body

With measured steps from his heart to his
brain.

Through the rivers of blood he hears them
marching

To an old refrain.

Slow and indefinite thunder of footsteps
From six naked bearers who carry the body
High on their shoulders. The bier is
stained

And dripping and bloody.

All night as he lies with his eyes staked
open

And torn apart by the chains of thought,

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

The steady thud of the feet come toward
him

Till he has no doubt.

The swaying bier and the white still body
Are borne in the night from his heart to his
brain,

With the horrible even sound of footsteps
Beating an old refrain.

TO A FALSE FRIEND

BECAUSE the steel was brittle
And snapt before the thrust,
And something fine, grown little,
Resolved itself to dust,
We have no mode of greeting,
No pleasure to afford,
Who see between our meeting
A silence like a sword.

We cannot count the measure
Of secret suicide
And Time will have no leisure
To tell which of us died
When with your twisted laughter
You struck beneath a cloak
And silence followed after
And no one living spoke.

MYCERINUS

MYCERINUS held the key
To modern mutability.

With torches spouting ruddy flame
He held the Night beyond the door,
And all the day he hunted game,
The yellow lion and the boar.

The dark fell down upon his roof
And shouted at the iron gate,
But Mycerinus held aloof
And drained an empty glass to Fate.

Six years of life had he to live;
He turned the night to day with fire
And doubled Time, a fugitive
Who dodged the shadow of desire.

MYCERINUS

And Night and Day the torch and hunt
Held wide the hollow eyes to life
That Mycerinus might confront
Auspiciously the threatened knife.

THE WARNING

WHERE is that music? Run through the
long grass now

With delicate white feet and I will follow
you,
Listening to music. You have taught me
how.

What is colder against your feet than the
dew?

Little icy fingers like needles pricking
in;
And if you stand too long your flesh will turn
blue.

We will go back before that music so thin
Stops its vague delirium. Step, and hold
your breath
While cold little fingers tap your fragile skin.

THE WARNING

Here is the door. I beg for the twentieth
Time that you come. The music plays.
It will not stop,
And the icy fingers of dew are like death.

See, you are shivering now. You are like
to drop.

ROSES

NOW close your great white eyelids. . .
Do not let

Your heart be troubled by this icy wind
That blows against you bitter with the fret
Of dying roses, roses torn and thinned.

What have you now to do with roses? See,
The day is tarnished and the dark wings
fall.

Forget the roses and their mystery:
Remember only that you plucked them
all.

LILITH, LILITH

LILITH, Lilith wept for the moon:
Its icy beauty troubled her sleep,
Stirred and thrilled her breast with a tune
Of crystal notes that fluttered the deep.
Climbing up the tower of light,
She sought the sound and followed the
flame:
Cold as snow, implacably white,
The moon spun high and muttered her
name.

White as Adam's body of yore
And like that flesh she never could thrill,
Far and pale as Paradise door,
The vision flooded meadow and hill. . . .
She, the flame, the passionate flower,
Awoke and cried for waking so soon. . . .
In a glimmering scented sleepless bower,
Lilith, Lilith wept for the moon.

RAINY NIGHT

MIDNIGHT falls: the rain spins through
the streets:

Desolate arc-lights stare like the eyes of
fishes

Seen through walls of glass, and the cold wind
slaps

Heavily, like a wet rag, against our faces.

A long procession of dark umbrellas lumber
Up the Avenue like a string of turtles. . . .

Automobiles bark like husky dogs

As they whirr along through pools of watery
jewels.

Where shall we walk now, you with the
Trojan eyes?

You with the desolate face from the rain-
soaked plains

RAINY NIGHT

About Skamander, where shall we turn in the
dark?

Heavily shouts the wind like the sullen voices
Of rushing spearmen: heavily sound the
shields

Smitten together across the night with a noise
like thunder.

We two, here.

Spun along with the wind and the rain
together,

Where are the tall bleak Trojan towers of our
dream?

Midnight falls:

We whirl and whirl with the rain:

We change and change with the wind and
the slow bell tolls. . . .

You with the Trojan eyes,

How the towers rush down upon us. . . .

How the world is blown like a mist through
our dream,

Blown through the flaming white feet of the
terrible rain.

THE PAPER ROSE

THE building sag to right and left
And shake upon the wires of Time
Their sceneries. Bereft
Of reason I observe the chime
Of bells that ring the slow hours out.
The sun goes walking down the street
With slothful steps. A doubt
Of sun and moon and stars complete
Is like a crawling snake within
The hollow cavern of my mind.
The daylight blows so thin
That soul and eyes are almost blind.
The tattered world begins to fade
And puppets oozing sawdust strut
With painted mouths. Afraid
I walk and keep my eyelids shut.

THE PAPER ROSE

The world swings like a tarnished rose
Of paper drooping from the hand
Of some mad child who goes
By roads he does not understand.

In what sad marsh where lizards crawl
Will his indifferent feet sink down,
Till child and rose and all
In pismires suffocate and drown?

LESE MAJESTÉ

THE idle chatter, rising like a fountain
In slender gushes, sinks in silver mist
Upon white shoulders. Higgins, from his
mountain
Of watchful inattention, seems to list.

Colossus of wise butlers, for a minute
He sways in clouds of conversation, turns
His face against small flocks of words, and in
it
I catch a lightning flash that twists and
burns.

Now imperturbable he sees the lady
Depart in warm chinchilla, thinks of her
As something set apart and is afraid he
Might comprehend her motor's feline purr.

THE BURNING BUSH

HE talks of kings and in his eyes at times
I catch parading banners tossing by
He puts to rout my gathering cloud of
rhymes

By smiling suddenly and lifting high
His weather-beaten forehead to the sky.
With speculative twists he throws the ball
Of chatter with agility most spry
And keeps the thread, nor loses it at all.

His face is like old oak the sun has burned
To mellow beauty, and his eye is such
That if it suddenly on me is turned
I am aware of things that matter much
In analysing why the common touch
Of sight to sight means more than words may
say,

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

And why the earth may sometimes seem a
smutch
Of soot upon the lintel of the day.

He grows in greatness to his words and I
Diminish in their magic to an ear
Existing solely for the thoughts that fly
In colored ardency from him so near
And I so far, thoughts longer than a
year
With wisdom heaped on wisdom, yet they
pass
As swiftly as a half-unconscious tear
Dropped suddenly upon a heated glass.

He hitches up his one suspender, chews
Tobacco with a ruminating air,
Dissects with equanimity the news
Of warring nations, with a word lays bare
The white nerve-centers of some great
affair
And solves the riddle that a statesman
died

THE BURNING BUSH

To find the key to, turns a knowing
stare

Upon humanity—and once he sighed.

He sits upon this battered hulk, the earth,
And plays with theory as men with dice.

He knows the nations from their feeble birth
In prehistoric fields of sliding ice.

Through age and age he traces each
device

That man perfected for the sake of Man,
And has no need to brood upon them twice,
But places each within its proper plan.

Incompetent he may be for a world
Too eager of delight to know a seer

Who reads the heavens as a sign unfurled
And finds philosophy a spinning drear.

But there are times I feel that gods are
near

And through the windows of his eyes a
light,

Auspicious, awful and divinely clear,
Glows like the burning bush across the night.

BRIEF OUTLINE

HIS eyes were hollow moons burnt out and
dead,

White distances that seemed to tilt and reel
Through skies forgotten, and his daily meal
Was dim extinguished things that men had
said

Before the world fell in upon his head.

He could not ever hope to gravely deal
With common things upon which Time's
dark seal

Hung heavy with the soulessness of lead.

And if at times his thoughts would wander
far

Beyond the tight embraces of his glen
Be very sure he called them home in
fright.

BRIEF OUTLINE

His background was the memory of a star
Seen once by him but cloaked to other men
In something that their weakness called
the night.

“LOOK HERE, UPON THIS PICTURE”

For Elinor Wylie

YOUR'S is a delicate hunger
For delicate things;
You are a glittering monger
Of glittering rings.

You would be happy in Hellas
And violet-crowned,
Cold, with an art to compel us
To bow to the ground.

You would be ice to the many
And fire to the few,
Innocent, adamant, canny,
Unfaithful and true.

Palaces, chariots, battle
Would leave you unstirred;
Wonder would start at the rattle
Some infant had whirred.

“LOOK HERE, UPON THIS PICTURE”

You would escape to a mountain
That shone in a bay,
Fashioning songs by a fountain
And dreaming all day.

You would be hard as the agate
That glows in your verse,
Ready to stand on the fagot,
A martyr perverse.

You would be sudden and tender
And weep for a while
Stirred by a daffodil slender
And hurt by a smile.

You are a shield that is broken,
A spear that is split,
A hunger, a pride that has spoken
And sorry for it.

Your's is a cloak of white magic
That covers a child
Proudly defiant, half-tragic
And always half-wild.

JEAN

THOUGH you have air and sunlight and
the gift
Of glowing moons and stars in skies that
sorrow
Has never travelled over, still regret
Enfolds you in his delicate grey net,
And over all the world your eyelids lift
Expectant to horizons of tomorrow.

NINON PLUCKS THE LAST ROSE

WHEN Lais turned her face against the
wind

For that last time she let the mirror fall
From hands grown cold with terror, having
seen

That Time's disastrous feet had tracked
strange journeys

Upon her snow.

That red and white that was Love's history
Grew dumb and featureless and like the
moon,

A cold and sinister betrayal. Fright,
That whelmed the once-so-perfect eyes and
mouth,

Sucked all the face within and disappeared
On noiseless feet with hope. She did not
stir

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

When loudly on the tessellated floor
The mirror crashed, its fragments darting
up
Like angry sparks of fire. She did not
stir,
But watched the twilight with reluctant
feet
And stealthy movements creep across the
room.
And all this took a moment, took the time
It takes a rose to fall upon the ground.
And in that moment all her years flashed
by
Like water rushing through a weir; then
darkness,
And silence, and the ending of all songs.

And that's the ending of the tale, Dorine,
And the beginning of another story
That was not quite the same. No story
ends
But it begins another for no thing
Is ever finished and our joy and grief

NINON PLUCKS THE LAST ROSE

Are ineluctably bound up in that.
Time only puts one period to tales
And that is generally carved in stone.

François, my shawl. Dorine, we'll walk a
while

Between the rose-bushes and let the wind
Blow amorously on your eyelids. See!
A petal in your hair! In mine the snows
Of all the faded roses in the world
Begin to settle. . . . And I smile, you see;
But sadly, somewhat. . . . somewhat sadly,
yes. . . .

You see my roses whiter than the bosom
That once above them trembled, redder
than

The lips that laughed at Time but yesterday
And yet in this young twilight are so grave.
And all those roses are gone now, they say.
These are new roses, yet they look the
same;

They carry on the tale. And Beauty goes;
It goes forever and it stays forever,

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

But not the same. How Molière would
laugh

To catch his Ninon a philosopher!

He'd look so gravely at me, purse his lips,
Assault me with the name—Anaximander,
And beg my views on Plato having witnessed
I led a circumspect Platonic life.

The rogue! And yet behind his laughter
lay

The tragedy of all eternal puppets
Who pull against the wires and pull in vain.
Poor Molière! So tragic and so tired
And so betrayed! Scarron was better
play. . . .

Scarron or Fontenelle. . . . Ah, I remember,
And when a woman starts remembering
The snows of Time are falling heavily.
They hiss about me in the air unseen,
Cold flakes that bite my face and arms and
bosom.

The cloak of Beauty wears a little thin;
I am uncovered somewhat. Dorine, turn
Your eyes away and look upon the roses

NINON PLUCKS THE LAST ROSE

Nor heed the sentimentalizing strain
Of one quite old enough for better sense.
Ah, roses, roses! They are lamps for you;
They burn like tiny torches in the dimness
Of all this green. My lutist, do you follow?
Then play me some quaint air by Raimon

Lully

With many pauses where faint notes
descend

Like petals on a windless summer day. . . .
My summer day is windless now; it blows
No longer to the Isle of Heart's Desire.

Dear child, I had a hungry thought of you
When your bright face and clear, untroubled
eyes

Were toward me then. Forgive me, but I
thought

If I could tear her beauty with my nails
I should be somewhat eased. Ah, do not
start. . . .

The thought was madness. See, it is quite
gone.

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

The tiger in the blood snarls only once
When women look upon the face of Time.
In that disastrous mirror they behold
The shadow of the great finality.
I would not harm you, you nor anyone.
And even if I did I should not change;
I should be quite the same. . . or nearly
so.

Your pink and white is yours and shall be
stolen
By grimmer hands than mine will ever be,
Although, God knows, my palms are hot with
wishing.

What is he playing now, my long-faced
lutist?

*Oh rose, depart, depart;
The summer of the heart
Waits not upon the rose
But with the first frost goes.*

He'll bury me before my blood is cold.
I have a chilling tragic vein. . . . The twi-
light
Is medicine to this. . . . I wonder now

NINON PLUCKS THE LAST ROSE

If twilight is not after all the best
For broken beauty. . . . Shadows are so
gracious. . . .

If I could tell you all my dates and facts,
Mistakes, imbroglios, and silly triumphs
It would not aid you in the years you walk
The yet unmeasured road to what will be.
We go our way and Fate provides the
issue.

I have been lauded; men have been my
gnats,
My buzzing servitors that served them-
selves

At heart, and Time has found me smiling
back

In gentle irony at comprehending
The chilled hypocrisy of lustful hearts.
These silken shapes called men are known to
me,

Infinitesimal tadpoles of Time
Who flutter tiny fins and feel themselves
Portentous frogs. And all success is this:

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

To make them think you know them for great
frogs.

These impecunious inheritors
Of newly minted days that strangely bear
The old eternal fading stamp of Time,
Are children, cruel children, in their
hearts.

They will tear up your dream without a
word

And stamp upon your heart with muddy
feet.

I know it all so well. Do you not think
That I have conned the lesson set for me?
My salon was a gesture made by wit
Against a dull and oxlike world. I sought
The glittering creators of my time,
Sought Molière, Scarron and Fontenelle,
St. Evremonde, La Rochefoucauld. . . .
They came. . . .

And all those hours of talk have gone for
nothing.

Scarron would read romances, always listen
To sage advice from me because he loved

NINON PLUCKS THE LAST ROSE

The swaying of my throat whenas I talked.
And it was so with others. All would
come,

Not for the intellect but for the woman.
And if I thought this poem was ill-made,
Or brought suggestions to that dialog,
Why, they would smile and cry, "Ninon is
witty!"

"Ninon, Ninon, Ninon!" and all the time
I wanted so to give them of my brain,
To cry, "I understand," to talk of life,
Philosophy and letters, not of love.
I ached to match my brain against their
brains

Not in the idle game of fleeting wit
But in the great essential things of life.
They would not let me think! They would
not let

Me be another thing but what I was
In their diseased malicious fancies. No!
I was Ninon the courtesan of Paris,
The new Aspasia of contemptuous Time!
And so they forced me down into the mould

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

That cold malignant Beauty shaped for me,
And as they saw me so I am today.
The gold is tarnished and the colors
faded. . . .

I tell you now that Beauty is a curse,
That if I had my days to live again
I should be sure to hang myself tomorrow.
My whole life has been shaped by other
souls;

The time has made me. I have been the
sport

Of all the gods who shake us out like dice.

I was so beautiful and yet so far
From all that world of Beauty that I felt
About me surging like a mighty sea.
I stood so close to clear immortal things
And yet I could not pass that lovely dæmon
Of longing eyes and luring hair that stood
Between me and my dream and was myself.

The night is growing on us. Twilight shifts
From veil to veil of shadow. I have
reached

NINON PLUCKS THE LAST ROSE

An icy pinnacle and I will turn
Away at last from all this emptiness,
And, vexed with trivialities of Time,
Shut fast the door nor mind the consequences
And so prepare me for eternal gestures.
My rose blows thin: a devastating wind
Makes memories of the petals. I must
think

No more of roses but what made the rose
And you and me and hate and love and
Time.

The dew is falling; we must go away
From these sad flowers and their memories.
Here is one rose that's higher than the
rest,

And fuller blown, its petals slightly
scorched

With gazing all the day upon the sun.
I pluck it here for you. I place it here
Upon your breast where it may die in
peace.

And when the petals are quite faded know

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

That Ninon fades not so. . . . She fades, but
 stays;
And, midst the haughty march of hostile
 hours,
Not wholly unregarded in the wrack
Of fickle Beauty, makes an age her own,
And poises it—a brazen dome that stands
In majesty against the sliding years.
Nay, take the rose and keep it for my sake
And know me in it, and, in other days
Pluck other roses, finding me again.
For I have builded me a monument
That overthrows all time. I rise and laugh
In all the roses of this shifting world
Until all worlds and roses are no more.

LOVE'S FANATIC

WELL, here it is: you call for me: I
 come,
 But with an eagerness not quite my
 own,
Propelled by that decisive martyrdom
 That pleased the saints upon their faggot-
 throne.

You see them smiling in the cruel flame
 That exquisitely licks their willing limbs.
And finding some sad pleasure in the game
 Not quite embodied in their lusty hymns.

And so I come: and though I go, be sure
 That I will come again tomorrow, too,
And, Love's fanatic, hasten to endure
 That littleness that is so great in you.

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

I am the weakling of that helpless strength
That throws this broken body you despise
Before your carelessness, to find at length
The faith that sleeps behind your faithless
eyes.

“O PASSIONLESS AND PALE”

O PASSIONLESS and pale,
Yet vibrant with white lust,
The agonies that fail
Before this house of dust
Grow into me and come
To passion's martyrdom.

O made of snow that burns
With such an icy flame.
Desire within me turns
To something not the same
But stranger than desire,
Of mingled ice and fire.

THE LAST SUNSET

I REMEMBER

A sunset that was apple-green and threw
The pallor of dead women on your face
So sadly that I ached, I ached and knew.

I remember

That you were silent in that ghastly light,
The silence of dead women on your mouth,
And I was frightened at the coming night.

I remember

How still the trees were as we went our
way,
How terribly they poised and would not
stir,
And how the leaves were old and torn and
grey.

THE LAST SUNSET

I remember

These things today and would not quite
forget,

Although their meaning is as stale as love

And quite as empty as your brief regret.

THE WHITE BEAST

YOUR beauty is a delicate white beast
That runs forever through the midnight
trees

Of all the world, and I who follow, least
Of all the hounds who harry with the
breeze.

In dark disastrous woods some time be-
neath

A corpse-like moon and in beslavered mud
You will crash down, a victim to the teeth
That know no beauty but the taste of blood.

And I who follow baying at the night,
Arriving late as ever when the morn
Turns sickly yellow in the sun's sad light,
Will crouch beside the shape I would have
torn.

THE WHITE BONES OF THIS LADY

WE suffer from thin nerves that line our
bodies

Like rivers on a map: we shrink and turn
Like leaves against a fire that know the
anguish

Of flame and lean most eagerly to burn.

Your lifted face spins whitely in a shadow:

My eyes daze: into ashes flakes the mask:
And always underneath your restless body
I feel the bones that weary of their task.

White bones, most awful in your hidden
places,

You carry this white flesh a few short days,
And then turn deathward with vague recol-
lections

And shed the beauty I was mad to praise.

THE SON OF DAWN

I N St. Paul's Churchyard walked the yellow
fog

And yellow candles threw a broken light,
A fleeting, vague, discolored hint of dawn,
Upon two faces in a silent room.

The watchman's rattle ripped its sudden
way

Through tattered rags of mist and shouting
ran

The link-boys with their feeble wands of
flame

(Those smoky, half-choked roses of the
night)

Before slow coaches. London moved and
groaned,

A giant in a devastating ague,

And in the silent room the oldest man,

THE SON OF DAWN

His hair a glimmering crown of fine-spun
silver,
Turned to the younger with grave thoughtful
speech:

“If you could look through every crooked
street
You could not find a straight man, straight in
soul
And straight in spirit, too. Each has his
kink,
Some devilish twist of else-untangled
threads,
But when Fate with her rusty shears begins
The snipping—all’s a matter of no moment.
The scissors cut and all our threads blow
out,
Unraveling upon the reckless air.
And you who sit and smoke my best to-
bacco,
Virginian, brought from a land so new
That we must dream it half a dream as yet,
A phantom from beyond the vext Atlantic,

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

Have your kink, great or small. . . . And
I have mine. . . .

And that disastrous music called Kit Marlowe
Had his as well. The swift years run and
melt

Into our evening and yet they run
Not quite so far but Marlowe overtakes
them.

He rides upon a chanting wind of music
Blown from young England and our El
Dorado

Of fog and rain, dark London; rides and
sings

Eternally upon eternal winds
That never may abate although they ruffle
The golden apples of Hesperides
And round the vague capes of the Happy
Isles.

Here where we sit tonight in such a magic
Of fulfilled prophecies Kit Marlowe sat
Not more than half a hundred years ago
And cursed his God, the most religious man
Who ever cried out for a God to curse.

THE SON OF DAWN

He saw this London like a golden mine,
A bright Golconda of the heart, and dug
His fitful way to immortality.

These eyes that peer so dimly at you now
Looked into his (great hazel ones, they were)
And saw the bruised, deplorable desire
That harried him. These rheumy hollows
saw

His white eternal face at rest amidst
The broken mugs that strewed the Deptford
Tavern

On that last day when in him fell a world
Of thunder and great flame to little ashes."

The listener caught his breath and strained
his hands

For what should follow while the old man
watched

The climbing spirals of tobacco smoke.
Outside the watchman swung his heavy
rattle

So like the bubbling in a dying throat,
And down on London closer edged the fog.

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

The old man's wrinkled face so like a snake's
skin

Shone with strange ardor as he muttered on:

"Kit Marlowe wrote his plays. . . . You
have them there,

Unfading words set down in fading ink,
And there's the man . . . but there was more
of him

Unwritten then and now forever lost,
Although in darkness somewhere sounding
words

That once were his pass like bejeweled
queens

On lurching elephants across the swart
Arabias of our diminished minds.

He opened wide the doors for our young
sunrise

That others might step in and warm their
hearts

Before the measureless immortal flame,
And out upon the darkness went he, seeing
No friends but scoffers and two naked swords

THE SON OF DAWN

Like gilded fingers beckoning to Fate.
I sat just at his elbow that last time
And heard him crying in his agony,
And saw the tears in his bewildered eyes.
No single word of his escaped me there,
I heard it all—the swift delirium,
The rapt and broken attitude, the words
That fluid-flame and loneliness wrenched
 forth.
He cried on Love and on that harlot
 Fame;
He cried on poetry; he cried on death.
And only death gave answer, swift and
 strange.
Kit Marlowe sitting in the Deptford
 Tavern
With one slim bony hand upon my arm
Stared at me through the smoke and wagged
 his head
Like one possessed by divers fiends and
 laughed:
'All Cheap's astir with things fantastical
A spinning gnat of bright unreason bites

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

And swells me with the madness of myself.
Although, observe you, that the moon's not
 fallen,
At least, not yet and there's a breathing
 space
For all contemptible remonstrances
Against the splendor of all falling moons.
And what should be so strange if it should fall
For stranger birds fly through our London
 now
Than any falling moon that slips from
 heaven.
It will creep out tonight and with its flare
Set all us motes adance in silver mist.
We are such brave, mad, happy motes that
 dancing
To certain tunes will move us like old sack.
Ah, but this heathenish bright city, London,
Is compact with strange fantasies, a swarm
Of fiercely swaggering desirous things.
Some magic like old wine works in the
 blood
And we are all unbearable with youth.

THE SON OF DAWN

The city's bursting with rare essence, ringing
To indescribably delicious harps
And the long silver cries of slender
trumpets
And loud staccato drumming. London
shakes
In the great dawn like some white-blossomed
bush
And flings its multitudinous buds abroad
And over all the world they drift and settle.
The city aches with youth and exploration
And virgin continents float in the skies
For all our mariners—of seas and souls.'

He saw it all, how London would unfold
Beneath the spirit of the unexplored,
For he, the first into those shadowy
wastes,
Could hear the footsteps beating at his
heels.
And then his mind went blank; his tortured
face
Turned to the empty chair beside him; there

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

His mad imagination summoned up
The shape of Richard Bame, his enemy,
That Richard who had flattered him with
 hate.

The low hoarse voice of Marlowe swept
 along

In vague, ironic, pitiful confession :

'Now, Richard Bame, must I confess to you,
Slice open what I am that you may see
The bitter seeds that make me fertile,
 stirring

This somewhat rotten rind, Mortality,
To some dim greenness that may have a
 meaning?

It is a thankless task, as I must think,
For if there be a worthy seed in me
(One prescient with desirous prophecies)
You will be sure to find it with reluctance.
Am I not Faustus in your mind who sold
His vext immortal soul to Lucifer
For too much loving of red gold and musics
And for the clipping of white Helen's thighs?
The coil confounds you and you must protect

THE SON OF DAWN

Your ears against my vileness? Richard,
Time

Will take you out and trounce you
thoroughly

Because of this jade Helen that I drew
By divers devilish arts out of the sink
We call the world. If you could find a
Helen

Or some outlandish phoenix of like fame
And draw her from the darkness—but you
couldn't:

And if you could you would not be the
man

That I must still confess my errors to
And then be scurrilously damned at last.

Confession is a medicine that stales
The freshness of our pain. Here am I,
Richard,

Quite naked as our Father Adam was
For you to peer into and draw the rule
That you must draw to yet be Richard
Bame.

Look in and know me; never hesitate,

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

Or long for torches to set off the darkness.

I am but man and nothing more, and you

Are man but just a trifle less. You look

And clear your throat and still say nothing?

Hoh!

And likewise, Perdy! Do you hope to know

The man I was and am by peering in

And finding the sad wreckage that my soul

Has strenuously scattered on the floors,

Those floors unswept, undecorated, vile?

You could not, Richard, no! I speak for you.

You must have seen the blind whose filmy

eyes

Stare out like smoky windows on the day

And find it night, who cry, "The grass is

green,"

With countless quaverings, because a myth

Has taught them so. The same is true of

you

Whose vacant eyes are glassed with smoky

faith

That has grown bigotry, whose heart has

dried

THE SON OF DAWN

Into a shrivelled thing that knows not
youth

And all the dear perplexing urges that
Consume the heart of youth. Now am I
ranting

In quite the proper strain? What do you
say

About my "damnable opinions" and my
"scorn"

Of God's commands? What are the tunes
you set

The ballad-mongers hawking? What the
shame

You crown this vagrant poet of poor plays?

Now, Richard, I am loathe to straightly
speak

Of these things seeing that your mind is
set

Sword-edge against me, but the years will
know

And bear me out in my defense. I have

A still unceasing confidence in Time

Who travels not to right nor left but goes

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

The same inexorable middle path
With certain grim abandonments that hurt,
But what is to be carried down the ages
Will not be left behind. Time takes me,
 too,
With dearer things, and, Richard, I'm
 afraid
That if you land somewhere within To-
 morrow
It will be through a journey on my back.
You say I have no faith in God . . . The
 faith
You say I have not were a thing to lose
If in its mould it turns out men like you.
And that's a bitter thing, but I am bitter
With too much wormwood—for my cup is
 filled
Too many times a day. What is it,
 Richard?
You tax me that upon a time I said
Religion was a code that Man developed
To keep brute men in awe. Well, was it
 not?

THE SON OF DAWN

But, Richard, now I do retract the state-
ment,

For you are such a sturdy man of faith,
So infinitely swollen with your God,
And yet you are a brute when all is said.

Religion never kept your soul in awe,
That soul that constitutes itself a judge
Of other souls and apes the very Christos.

And as for brutishness you come at me
A blinded bull with eager will to gore.

Where is that "Christian charity" you
boast?

Is it about the loins of Leicester's whore?

And that "divine forgiveness" that you
sing?

Is it a mantle for the trulls at Court?

I'll change the simile. You come at me

Like some lean eager dog upon the track

Of one poor limping hare that has no
burrow,

Fangs anxious and dull eyes surmising meat.

This "righteous wrath" of yours becomes a
thing

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

That plagues me somewhat for it shows me
man

Not as I dreamt him. Would you know my
soul?

Come, Richard, from the darkness . . . Let
us talk

Here in the Deptford Tavern of my soul.

A tavern is conducive to ideals

And temples always worried me. Sit here

Before this stoup of wine and hear me talk,

Here in the Deptford Tavern, of my soul.

You will not read me in my work, not quite,

But make my music posture to such shapes

As would reveal the thing you'd have me be.

In fairness now you must enlarge your
hearing

Until it overtakes me. . . . Sit and listen.'

Then turning to the dull-wits who bestirred

Themselves to laugh at one whose laughter
echoes

Tonight among the spheres, he frowned and
cried:

THE SON OF DAWN

'Less noise, an't please you, gentlemen. I
have

A very reverend guest on knowledge bent,
A black crow of some parts that caws
"Laudate"

With any boy that chirps. There's no one
there?

Now, Richard, hear this landlord! What a
bear

For uncivility! Good landlord, listen:
You cannot see with my eyes, I am sure;
But if you could you would not own an
Inn.

Have I not charmed such shapes out of the
air

As to perplex the best of you, Barabbas,
And warlike Tamburlaine and Doctor
Faustus?

Why may I not then conjure Richard Bame
Out of the Nothingness that is the world
Into the Nothingness that is my mind?
Come hither, wench. They tell me I am
drunken,

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

And yet my only drink has been your lips,
A stray sip made in passing as I came
Into this tavern for confessional.
But such a drink that could make devils
 pale
And dancing saints throw off their smocks
 for joy.'
O, broken mind shot through with endless
 flashes
Of that divinity that knows no end!
I sat by him and heard him cry on Nothing
As though it were a man as he had cried
On Nothing all his helpless shattered days.
He cried upon a vacant chair and yet
Behind the vacancy stood Something there
That listened and gave heed and let slow
 tears
Drop on the flooring of the Deptford
 Tavern.
And through those soundless tears came
 Marlowe's voice:
'Your pardon, Richard Bame. This inter-
 lude

THE SON OF DAWN

Was not of my own choosing. I've a mind
To talk to any shadow that I meet
Albeit madness be the dull conjecture
Of these lost drippings from Time's gravy-
platter.

They sit and laugh and say you are not
there?

Ah, Richard, if they only had my eyes!
I will confess to you what Life is, Richard.
And that's a brave confession for a man
Who has endured the hardness of the world.
It is a darkness, as I take it, where
Our voices tremble back most strangely,
finding

No answer to their endless questionings.
We are deluded with extravagances
And unconsidered echoes that beguile
Our passing days with empty promises.
What, said I empty? Nay, not that, not
that!

For I have found no emptiness except
Within myself, and I have filled that
self

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

With such discordant tunes and monstrous
lumber

Of unimaginable mightinesses

That I have sickened with the surfeit of
it.

And yet I have been empty all the time!

If you can read this riddle, Richard Bame,

You are a most divine philosopher.

How can I best express me? Draw my
soul

As one would draw a landscape with black
chalk?

It is not easy, and mere words are such

That it is not the things we care for most

That are the easiest expressed. I think

(Now mark you that I only think this thing)

I am a man grown hungry with much life.

My appetite is satiate with things

I could not well digest for knowing them

Not fondly but too well. Like as a man

Who, ship-wrecked on a foreign isle, would
find

A multitude of melons in a wood

THE SON OF DAWN

And so subsist on them for many days.
This simile is pleasing, Richard Bame;
I will enlarge upon it for your sake.
The melons would be pleasant at the first,
But as life crept along and all his view
Became obscured with melons he would rage
And gnash his teeth in fury at the thought
Of nauseous melons. In his dreams at night
Huge melons would rise grinning and by
day
The passing wind would waft their choking
smell.
So he would rage and finally succumb
To cold inertness, drowned in melon juice.
And finally would come a day at last
When he would starve and gladly rather than
Be tomb to one more melon. And, indeed,
He could not touch them out of sickness. I,
Fond sir, am such a man and Life a thing
Like melons to me. I am hungry, yes,
But cannot eat for very weariness
And satiation of the thing I need.
With Life around me calling do I starve

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

For want of Life. A pleasant vapor, this!
It is not plain? It does not bear a reason?
Well, am I plain or do I bear a reason?
I am the eater and I am the eaten:
I'm Nothing and I'm Something and I sit
And make my faces at a doubting world
That does not know I am the greater doubt.
I have my dream and lose it and that's
all

That Life is, just a dream that's found and
lost.

With plucking of the roses of the world
I bruised myself and you must do the same
If ever, Richard, you intend to live.
I have seen cities in my dreams at night
Spangled with cressets, full of sounding
horns;

And I have seen triumphant kings go down
On roads of roses, driving chariots
Drawn by barbarian queens. The lashes
bit

Into their lustrous flesh and moaning rose.
My soul has been a city, Richard Bame,

THE SON OF DAWN

Full of loud sounds and swaying lights. My
soul

Has been a warlike king and driven down
Resounding avenues to pealing horns.

And, Richard, here's a secret for your ears:

My soul has been a captive queen and bent
In agony, chained to the gilded pole
Of some gold chariot of my desires.

And here's a deeper mystery than all:

My soul has been the city, king and slave
All at the same time. I have laughed and
wept

And moaned with agony in one same cry.

You understand me not? Then, Richard,
learn

To dip your tender nose into the wine
And it will furnish you your lacking wits.

What have I seen in drink? Why, Richard,
things

I dreamt about when sober, Pergamon
And unicorns and kings and Trasymene
And she whose beauty "launched a thousand
ships."

THE SON OF DAWN

From horses trampling down from Babylon
To find their mangers in Jerusalem,
And trumpets crying out of Nineveh
To ring their echoes back in London Town.
Now tell me, Richard, knew you Thomas
Nashe?

A golden lad and yet he hated me
More than Bob Greene because my eagle-
muse
Out-soared his lark. A mortal, Thomas
Nashe!

Of all the Mermaid birds a mortal man!
But I'd a baiter of vile bears and cocks
Who taught me more by saying slightly less.
And then there was our rapt-eyed musing
Will

Come out of Stratford Town, not long to
hold

The horses of our Aldermanic wind-bags.
He troubled me at times. He caught my
heart

In silver-netted secrecies of dreams
That are to be. An eagle-plume—his pen,

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

And dipped into the whole world's straining
heart.

Well, he may find the height I dreamt of
so,

But hardly without using me to climb.

All heathen, Richard? Fie! they were not
so,

But prophets out of Helicon who spoke
The words the world will dance to evermore.
"Come live with me and be my love—" Why,
wench,

I must have dreamt of you when writing
that

And there's an end of all philosophy.

Go, Richard Bame, back into shadowland

And write your ballads and your curses,
do.

I'll have no more of you. . . . Confession's
over.

Here is a wench that is more fair than you

And I will speak of fairy-tales no more.

Now he is gone. . . . What, he was never
there?

THE SON OF DAWN

Ah, wench, you have not looked through my
eyes yet.

They see such things! The lids are wrinkled
with

The burning visions they have faced upon.

Come, little mouth, and lay upon them. . . .

So . . .

Your lips are like damp petals and my
eyes,

My burning eyes, are cooling with their
touch.

More drink! Another tankard! Let me
live

For I've been dead a grievous, grievous
time.

Why is your throat so white? I saw a man
By Tyburn once—but we'll not speak of
that.

Why, throats and throats are in this world
. . . Some few

To cut but most to kiss, and yours is one
Was carved for kissing. Ah, why do you
start?

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

Who? Francis Archer? Well, why should
I fear?’

I saw the long swords, heard the tables
rumble

Apocalyptic thunders in my ears,
As Archer rushed upon him.

‘Ho,’ he cried,

My bright, mad poet of young England’s
dawn,

‘Your sword is long, my friend, but mine is
longer.

It reaches all the way to a man’s heart.

Here is a game for Sathanas to watch!’

And then the flaming bite of steel on steel.

The thud of feet, the clattering of benches,

The sucked-in breath, the gasping in the
throat,

And then that sudden cry that all my days

Will still be ringing in my deafened ears.

Some say it was despair but I say laughter,

A loud and sudden laugh as Marlowe
stepped

THE SON OF DAWN

Across the threshold of this hopeless world
To make his debonair amends to God.
Who knows what happened next? Alone I
knelt

Beside that slender body, saw the face
Upon the floor in pale serenity
Turned upward to the still eternal stars.”

Then silence crept about the shadowy room
Wherein the candles flickered and winked
out.

The old man listened to the night and heard
Somewhere behind the fog the morning stars
Singing together. . . . But the young man
turned

And listened to the watchman's heavy rattle
So like the bubbling in a dying throat
That reassured dark London all was well.

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

WITH willing arms I row and row
So dear a freight that I must know
The moment is the point of time
When James Smith changes, grows sublime,
And hurries to the flaming tryst
Of Love, that ancient alchemist,
And grows into his thoughts and comes
To half awaked millenniums.

I could imagine madrigals
With curiously dying falls
To creep into your little ears
And lift you with me through the years,
But you would barely understand
Why you were lifted, long for land,
And tell me to row back again
From heaven to the Vast Inane.

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

Meanwhile I sit and row the boat
And catch your laughter, watch your throat
And mouth sway perilously near
And burn away the atmosphere.
The sunset shakes me almost free
From river, boat, and lunacy.
You say it's rather like a fish
Of crimson on a golden dish?

It may be so. It may be I
Have other thoughts that signify
A closer meaning for us two. . . .
But I must row and what's to do?
If you could see yourself and be
The rower, look through eyes of me
Not knowing what was hid inside
Your little head—but that's denied.

You'll be the freight until the end:
I'll be the rower—and the friend.
And you will never know the thought
That makes you curiously wrought
In other substance than you are:
And I will steer by some vague star

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

That is not even lit for you,
And I daresay the star will do.

If I were not James Smith but one
Not haunted by the desert sun
Of too excessive visioning
Perhaps you'd be a different thing
And quite unusual, but that
At most is but conjectured at. . . .
So willingly I row and row
And let you wonder while I know.

INTERMEZZO BETWEEN TWO GRIEFS
BY JAMES SMITH

*T*HE slender flute! . . . Ah, now the dying
fall

*And delicate andantes of slow grief
But surely now it well was worth it all?
He wonders and observes a falling leaf.*

I

The smoke above the city marches
In swelling domes, in twisting arches,
And James Smith turns a dubious eye
Upon those monsters in the sky.
Those black behemoths! Such a herd
Of elephants absurdly stirred
By every little mouse of wind
Brings wonderment to James Smith's mind.

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

2

Crepuscular, the evening falls
To sleep behind the black atolls
Of smoke, and James, his vision doused,
Sits in the darkness quite unhoused,
Sits in the dark without a roof
While quaint stars wink their proud reproof
To one whose thoughts are quite as cold
As any dead man in the mould.

3

“The heart when it expends its fund
Of passion lies quite moribund;
The brain when it is sucked of thought
In cozy comfort then may rot;
The eye when it has seen too much
May turn it to the worm’s wet touch;
The mouth when it has said it all
May fill with dust and cease to call.”

4

So far James Smith . . . You will observe
The rather fatalistic verve

TWO GRIEFS

Not quite so neatly wondered out
But James may yet be stung by doubt.
By day—the smoke; by night—the fire
Of idiot stars in senseless choir,
And night and day—the worn-out shield
Reflecting a lost battle-field.

5

He walks between the dark and dark,
And all the while sits in the Park
Unhoused, unfriended, undeterred
From any swift ambitious word.
But James is wise and silence suits
His darkness. . . . Playing slender flutes
Until the moon from heaven drops
Requires a knowledge of the stops.

6

The thing that was cannot return
To fret a heart that's ceased to burn
The thing that was is on its way
With Carthage, Zeus and Yesterday

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

But James Smith, emptied of his grief,
Amazedly feels no relief
And learns from Time, his senseless friend,
That Memory pays a dividend.

*Meanwhile the flute. . . . Its silver music
swells*

In delicate andantes of slow grief.

But is it wise to fret one's self with spells?

At which Time drops a torn ironic leaf.

MORGAN SULKS

THE lady turned and quite declined
The chase, so Morgan, ill-resigned
To such a futile victory,
Grew sullen, scowled, and would not see
The end was quite the same as though
He'd run a hundred miles or so.

Whereat the lady, quite upset
Began to pout, began to fret;
And Morgan fiddled with his cup
And drank the tasteless mixture up.
Outside the twilight spun aloof,
Then squatted down upon the roof.

And long whips on the darkness rang;
The evening stars together sprang;
Their crystal hooves slashed through the dark;
A far world spurted like a spark;
And Morgan, sulking in the house,
Would even chase a useless mouse!

PALE HANDS

AT times I am engulfed in shadowy
trees

And haunted by your pale cerebral hands
That steal out of the dark in agonies
Of undecipherably vague demands.

They touch me on the mouth and on the
eyes

And through my hair they pass like dancing
flame;

They come between me and the iron skies,
Intolerable prophecies of shame.

What mad complexities of hidden things
Are lurking in these tiny palms that float
About me through the dark in lustrous rings
So amorously reaching for my throat?

INDIFFERENCE

AND if you cared would I sing better?
This

Is quite the mockery of all my grief,—
That Life's at best a sadly colored leaf,
And touched to crimson with an autumn
kiss.

That I may find a most unworthy bliss
In darkening the background for the
flare

Of one quick shade upon the changeless
air
May show the gods have made me quite
amiss.

But there it is Through pain and
pain I go
With just the eagerness you will not see

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

To taste the bitter pleasures I must
know

Be quite indifferent if you would be
The crimson in my grey: and do not let
Your heart be troubled lest my heart forget.

THE LAST FIRE

YOU saw the last fires burning on the hill
In that far autumn twilight when we
took
The future by the hand through woods as
still
As your heart is today, and crossed the
brook.

The brook that gurgled through the quietude
Was just a slender stream that sauntered
on.

How were we two to know the thing we
should—

That we had crossed our narrow Rubicon?

And after, in the shadow of the leaves,
When your great eyes grew with the grow-
ing night

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

They left the hollows where the twilight
grieves

And mirrored back the bonfire on the
height.

And what quick flame was in your eyes I
knew;

And how the moment caught us on our
way

Is Time's own story written for a few
In dust of ashes in your eyes today.

GREEN BANKS

THE pale green banks that kneel beside the
stream

Where yellow waters flow serenely on
Know something of the swiftness of our
dream,

For there we loved before the flood of dawn
Burst through the dykes of night and flung
us two

On sadly separate uneven ways—
And to what rock of chance your arms
upthrew

Is something I must guess at all my days.

There came an ending and I know it now
And what it was you know but will not tell:
And now there are but pale green banks that
bow

Above new waters that serenely swell.

THE DARK OCEAN OF LOVE

I

AND even now when certain things make
way

And I am stifled by vague contradictions,
I hardly think my mood will last a day

Or that these all-too-conscious male-
dictions

Will stir a hair on your dark lovely head

Or give you one sad sleepless hour for me,
For in that inner self that is not dead

You hold and fold me for eternity.

Long after what we both were is forgotten

And all my helpless love a thing for jeers,
And your white body as my own is rotten,

These moods will be a lesser thing than
tears.

THE DARK OCEAN OF LOVE

In these frail bodies that enfold our passion
So pallidly aware of love and lust,
We have reached something in some hidden
fashion
That will outlast the aching of our dust.

And you must know the secret of this wonder
Although it is not conscious in your
mind. . . .

Beyond the pain of spiritual blunder
I could see something if I were not blind.
So, helpless in my rage, I storm and curse
And build you out of clay and knock you
down,
Yet run to you between each halting verse
With eagerness to wear my thorny crown.

2

By me unnamed yet spoken in each act
That marks me individual and makes
My sole defense for being, you enact
In every gesture of my sad mistakes
A purpose blind to their condition. When
I least of all am worthy to be set

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

Among your passionate disciples, then
You stir about me like a vast regret.

Impalpably, like many waves you roll
Above me and around me and beyond;
I cannot seek but you will be the goal,
Though traveling beside me, strangely
fond.

I draw your life in every slightest breath:
Through me you live in wise and foolish
ways:

You are my birth, my life, my endless death,
My sleepless nights and half-determined
days.

There is no magic that shall ever turn
You into something I may comprehend:
Beyond the flesh you glitter and you burn
And in the flesh you find the promised
end. . . .

And I must live and die in you till Time
Becomes a distant pulse and nothing new
When I shall lose myself in my last rhyme
And drown in that dark ocean that is you.

KALEIDOSCOPE: SUBWAY HOUR

WHERE faces, whirling like a sea,
Spin into blackened yawning pits
And sweep down grinning toothless maws
To iron dragons rattling bits,
Where bells explode with brassy crash
And sudden shouts flare out of sight,
Fireworks of sound, I take my place
Upon the lintel of the Night.

Black waves of people foamed with cheeks
That bear the meager stamp of haste,
Dead faces with their smitten eyes,
By hurry torn and half defaced,
Smashed by the decade's aimless pile,
They swirl about me at the gate,
Rub elbows with the shadow, Death,
And jostle with contemptuous Fate.

MIDNIGHT

THE arc-light winks in irony
 Across the dark deserted street
And silence, like a sullen beast,
 Stands motionless on frozen feet.

The hungry cat slinks slowly by
 With craning neck and yellow eyes,
And stops beyond the pool of light
 That on the broken pavement lies.

He stretches forth a groping tongue
 To drink the light The round arc
 winks,
And in the swift eclipse the cat,
 Bewildered, hisses, turns and blinks.

The moon between the chimneys peers
 And glistens on the garbage cans

MIDNIGHT

And melts to silver mist the panes
Of glass in yawning window-spans.

The buildings stand like crowded tombs
With sleepers resting from carouse.
And nothing lives and moves except
The shadows in a vacant house.

SICK DAYS

WE come upon sick days:
The little room
That viewed your endless ways
Is like a tomb.

Lie still and do not move
And hold your breath
And be in life, poor love,
A hint of death.

THE FATALIST

FOR hours and hours we twist and turn
 Upon a bed that seems to burn;
And then, for hours and hours, we sleep
Engulphed in caverns cold and deep.

And when we wake the shaken sun
Spills in our room oblivion,
And we are one with Time and place,
With body's ache and beauty's face.

THE LOCKED DOOR

IF you should open the door
What would you find outside?
Only the rains that pour,
Only the wind that cried?

What is the reason you wait?
Why do you lock the door?
Who is it there at the gate
Knocking forevermore?

“Nothing,” you answer, “be still
Better to nail the door
Now you have had your will
I will go out no more.”

THE RIDERS

THE stallions of the Night
Ride down the sky
With thunder of far hooves
And whinnied cry.

The naked riders pause
Outside our door,
And, strangely gossiping,
Ride on once more.

I long to rise but feel
Your body cling
To me like cold, damp leaves
Slow-withering.

NIGHTMARE

AND by the quick spurt of a match I see
Your cold face etched against the
startled dark

That leaps sideways with terror at the flare
And then slinks back with velvet eyes that
mark

The horrible conjecture on my face
You lie so like the dead! The shadows play
Such tricks upon your eyelids, making them
Seem open with mad eyes that stare my
way.

Alone in darkness, straining for the sound
Of your faint breath I stand and after years
I hear that sound and breathe again and
live

And with relief burst into bitter tears.
O, you are living! See, you are not dead!
And glad and sorry I turn to my bed.

NIGHTMARE

My eyes spring open. Starting from my
sleep

I rise and light the candle that must throw
Its feeble reassurance on your face,
Setting the hollow brow and eyes aglow.
And as with stealthy steps I creep along,
The light before me like a thin spear veering,
Strange beasts of darkness scramble from your
bed,

Lifting their frightened snouts and dis-
appearing

Into the nothingness of Night. You turn
With muttered words but do not waken. I,
With sleepless eyes, stand by you till the
last

Dark furry beast pads out. You shudder,
sigh,

And so the long night eats itself away
Into the pale discomfiture of day.

IN THE DARK, IN THE NIGHT

IN the dark, in the night, I went down
To a street that I knew in the town,
To a street I had last seen through tears
And had lost in a jungle of years.

And the wind in the alley began
To revolve up and down like a man,
Like a man who could not find a door
That he knew had been there long before.

And the moon with a slow sullen stare
Bowed his heavy face over me there,
As I stood for a moment dry-eyed
By the houses that shuddered and sighed.

THE LONELY CABIN

WHERE the branches lift their cones
against a pale sky

Silence comes as ever on her furtive
feet,

Creeping through the dark road that we knew
in springtime

Round the lonely cabin where the shadows
meet.

Now I go no more there: rotting is the door-
way:

Overgrown with brambles is the little
path:

Grey and dank with dead leaves flows the
tiny streamlet

Where our dreams went sailing to the
ocean's wrath.

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

Scarlet was your young mouth, luminous
your white arms;

Darker than the forest was your loosened
hair.

Now there is a silence where the cabin mourns
you,

Crumbling in the stillness of the days that
were.

JEWELS

THE jewelry you wore is gleaming
 Upon my hands in such a light
That Time himself seems rapt and dreaming
 Of you and me and one short night.

The days that pass, the nights that leave us
 Such memories that will not go
Are only changing hues that grieve us,
 Returning to perplex us so.

The jewelry you wore is brighter
 Than my poor thoughts can ever be,
Remembering the bosom whiter
 Than drifting moonlight on the sea.

These jewels lit your slender fingers
 And deep between your breasts they shone;
Your brief caress upon them lingers
 And stirs me in the night alone.

THE BARCAROLE OF JAMES SMITH

You gleam for me somewhere, a jewel
 Between the gates of day and night:
And all you leave me are these cruel
 Embittered stones of red and white.

AFTER LOVE

WE who have lived our Yesterdays
So fully, so completely, pause at last
And find, with startled eyes that view the
past

And all its mad ambiguous ways,
That we have lived all our Tomorrows,
too:

And there is nothing left to say or do.

No summer suns that greatly set
On unforgotten days and crowded hours
Will rise again for us . . . Ironic powers
Take up the love we would forget
And hold it as a mirror where we see
How madly once we lived . . . and foolishly.

MASTERBROOK

NOW this was Masterbrook. He had a
way

Of lending such enlargement to his thought
By puffed up speech that he outshone the
day

Before the lesser fry which knew him not.

But wiser thinkers pricked the huge balloons
Of colored speech he soared so cleverly,
With needles of plain logic, and his tunes
From subtlety turned sheer banality.

And he was laughed at as such men are,
jeered

For their conspicuous affected airs;
And called a wind-bag, nothing to be feared
In this brief world of tangled vague affairs.

MASTERBROOK

So Masterbrook would talk down Time to
laughter

While wiser men would talk it up to grief,
And when he died, to thousands who came
after

He stood a symbol and departed chief.

THE SATYRS AND THE MOON

WITHIN the wood behind the hill
The moon got tangled in the trees.
Her splendor made the branches thrill
And thrilled the breeze.

The satyrs in the grotto bent
Their heads to see the wondrous sight.
“It is a god in banishment
Who stirs the night!”

The little satyr looked and guessed:
“It is an apple that one sees,
Brought from that garden of the West,
Hesperides.”

“It is a cyclops’ glaring eye.”
“A temple dome from Babylon.”
“A Titan’s cup of ivory.”
“A little sun.”

THE SATYRS AND THE MOON

The tiny satyr jumped for joy
And kicked his hoofs in utmost glee.
“It is a wondrous silver toy—
Bring it to me!”

A great wind whistled through the blue
And caught the moon and tossed it high;
A bubble of pale fire it flew
Across the sky.

The satyrs gasped and looked and smiled,
And wagged their heads from side to side
Except their shaggy little child,
Who cried and cried.

THE DESERTED HOUSE

WHEN houses were the fashion this one
reared

Its cool, contemplative serenity
Of pillared porch for all about to see
And ponder how its calmness rather steered
The mind into wide oceans where Time
feared

No devastating storms. . . . Sincerity
Spread its grave cloak on mutability
And toward this dwelling place the House
Gods veered.

All that was when small children spun their
note

And transient mortals laughed and wept
and sang

Within the pleasant rooms; but now,
alas,

THE DESERTED HOUSE

The very silence has an iron throat
And where the swift desirous voices rang
Eternal stillness tells how all things
pass.

TWO SONNETS AT CORNWALL

ACROSS the valley weaving sunlight
throws

Her thin transparent cloth of gold where
trees

Lie piled like Oriental jewelries

In heaps of shifting green. The river
flows

A subtly rippled blade of silver, glows

Like an enchanted sword upon the knees

Of some bright-mantled desert-prince who
sees

The summer and is still at what he knows.

The tawny hills like lions lift their heads

Into the curdling smoke of evening

And snuff the twilight . . . Over us the
reds

And lavenders of sunset drift and fling

TWO SONNETS AT CORNWALL

Their old eternal veils. . . . From where we lie
We look away into the night and sigh.

The last log of the sunset falls and flares
 To gold and hot vermilion ere it turns
 To crumbling ashes and a lone star burns
High up in heaven. Breaking through the
 snares

Of net-like clouds, the slender moon now
 dares

 Adventure forth like some pale deer who
 yearns

 For scented fields of dark immortal ferns
And lifts his golden horns and proudly stares.

The night is on us. . . . You and I must
 rise

 And journey downward to the quiet fires
Of little homes that lift against the skies
 Their slender gonfalons of smoke. . . .

 Desires

Are futile now. . . . Among our books and
 friends

The vague interminable highway ends.

TO MY WIFE, JEAN

THE third Spring since our first goes flam-
ing down

The dolorous tideways of the iron town,
And Life, grown perfect in your perfect
eyes,

Lifts me again into the ardent skies.

With gradual strength renewed, with vision
clear,

I mount the golden stairway of the year
And from the summit far as eye may scan
Behold the march of Time's bright caravan.

Across the deserts of dark sleep they go
In gold and silver and vermilion glow,
With high horns shattering the cloven night
With drums and dæmons, dancers, men of
might.

TO MY WIFE, JEAN

Outward our way. The caravan awaits.
We must depart through Time's unclosing
gates.

The music shakes the night: the camel-bells
Ring magic in our blood that throbs and
swells.

The trappings glitter on the ochre sands
With gold and colors from barbaric lands;
In royal purple and unfading rose
We fare upon the way that Cæsar goes.

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