Algernon Charles Swinburne
Poems and Ballads &
Atalanta in Calydon
TABLE OF DATES

1837  5 April: Algernon Charles Swinburne born to Captain Charles Henry Swinburne, later Admiral, the second son of Sir John Edward Swinburne (the baronetcy went back to the seventeenth century) and Lady Jane Henrietta Swinburne, daughter of the third Earl of Ashburnham; he was the first of six surviving children.

1837–49 Much of Swinburne’s childhood spent on the Isle of Wight (East Dene, Bonchurch) and at his paternal grandfather’s estate, Capheaton in Northumberland, with visits to Ashburnham Place in Sussex. His religious formation was Anglo-Catholic. Riding, swimming and reading in the libraries at Capheaton and Ashburnham were principal pastimes.

Browning’s Sordello published in 1840.

1849–54 Educated at Eton. Suffered bullying, was probably flogged and a witness of floggings, a recurrent interest throughout his creative life. It is not known why he left Eton. He read Shakespeare unexpurgated, Lamb’s Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets, and steeped himself in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama; wrote at least three imitations of Elizabethan drama. Also read Sappho, Hugo and Landor, lifelong idols. Presented to Wordsworth in 1849, and later to Samuel Rogers.


In France, the coup d’état of 1851 and the formation of the Second Empire under Napoleon III, Swinburne’s tête noire, in 1852; Hugo in exile.

1854–6 Prepared for Oxford by two private tutors, the first near Capheaton and the second near Bristol. While in Northumberland he was befriended and encouraged by Lady

Pauline Trevelyen, who lived nearby and exercised a stabilizing influence on Swinburne until she died in 1866. Visited France and Germany in 1855.

Tennyson’s Maud in 1855; first edition of Whitman’s Leaves of Grass in 1855.

1856–60 Matriculated at Balliol College, Oxford, where at first he studied in the School of Classical Greats (Benjamin Jowett was his tutor) but later decided to read for Honours in Law and Modern History. He was an original member of the Old Mortality Society, a radical group which discussed literary and political topics; he wrote essays for its magazine Undergraduate Papers. In 1857 he met William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones (later Burne-Jones) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who were painting Arthurian murals for the Union debating hall. Rejected Christianity and became an enthusiastic republican. Continued his intensive study of French literature and Elizabethan drama; also read and imitated medieval and Pre-Raphaelite poetry. Rusticated in November 1859, he returned to Oxford in April 1860, but failed to take a degree. Wrote the earliest of the poems in Poems and Ballads.

William Morris’s The Defence of Guenevere published in 1856; in 1857 Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du mal published; he is prosecuted, found guilty of obscenity and blasphemy, and fined. First part of Hugo’s La Légende des siècles published in 1859. Tennyson’s Idylls of the King also published in 1859.

1860 The Admiral gave Swinburne an allowance to live in London, where he visited Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Morris and Ford Madox Brown. The Queen-Mother and Rosamond attracted little attention. Death of Swinburne’s paternal grandfather, Sir John Edward Swinburne, whom he had greatly admired.


The Risorgimento culminated in the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy; Venetia would be annexed in 1866 and Papal Rome in 1870. Mazzini, however, true to his republican principles, opposed the new Italian state.
1862 Travelled to Paris and then to the Pyrenees. Published poems in *Once a Week* and *Spectator*; reviewed Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal* and Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. He wrote an epistolary novel, *A Year’s Letters*. After the death of Rossetti’s wife, Elizabeth Siddal, he moved with him into Tudor House in Cheyne Walk in Chelsea. Besides Morris and Burne-Jones, visitors included James McNeill Whistler and Simeon Solomon.

Swinburne defended George Meredith’s *Modern Love*, the morality of which had been attacked in the *Spectator*.

1863 Travelled to Paris with Whistler, and met the painters Édouard Manet and Henri Fantin-Latour. Back in London, Swinburne’s drinking and behaviour became immoderate. His favourite sister Edith died in September of tuberculosis. The family travelled to Italy after her death, except for Swinburne, who stayed for four months with relatives. He developed a romantic interest in his cousin Mary Gordon; they collaborated on stories, rode; he worked on *Atalanta in Calydon*.

1864 Travelled to Paris with Houghton and then to Italy where he visited Landor. Break-up of Tudor House; friendship with Rossetti was strained. Mary Gordon announced her marriage to Colonel Disney-Leith, probably the greatest romantic disappointment of Swinburne’s life. Perhaps began work on the novel *Lesbia Brandon*, never finished. Completed *Atalanta in Calydon* while staying three months in Cornwall with the painter John William Inchbold.

Browning’s *Dramatis Personae*.

1865 Published *Atalanta in Calydon* in March, which brought him fame. His father sold East Dene and the family soon moved to Holmwood, Shiplake, Henley-on-Thames. Swinburne found new lodgings in London and in November published *Chasteland*, a verse drama based on an episode in the life of Mary Stuart, the first in a trilogy of plays about her; an early draft of the drama was nearly complete in 1861. The reviews were not favourable. Close friendship with George Powell, with whom he shared an interest in flagellation.

Death of Landor, to whom Swinburne dedicated *Atalanta in Calydon*.

1866 Published *Poems and Ballads* in July, which brought him notoriety and much angry critical abuse. Fearing litigation, the publisher Moxon & Co. withdrew the book in early August; by mid-September it was on sale again, reissued by John Camden Hotten, one of whose specialties was erotic literature. At Hotten’s request, Swinburne responded to his critics with *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (see Appendix I).

First volume of the anthology *Le Parnasse contemporain* (later volumes in 1871 and 1876).

1867 Met his idol Mazzini, who encouraged him to write political poetry. His convulsive fits, followed by fainting, to which he had been subject since the early 1860s, became more serious in July; he stayed with his family until September. This became a pattern: dissolute life in London threatening his health followed by recuperation in Holmwood. Late in the year he began an affair with Adah Isaacs Menken, a famous American actress and performer; it lasted about six months. Published *William Blake: A Critical Study*, begun in the early 1860s; included a statement of art for art’s sake.

Baudelaire died in August; a premature rumour of his death in May inspired Swinburne to write ‘Ave atque Vale’. William Morris’s *Life and Death of Jason* appeared, for which Swinburne published an appreciation.

1868 Frequent a flagellation brothel (as he had perhaps done earlier). In September he stayed with Powell at a cottage in Normandy; rumours of the irregular domestic ménage circulated. Further fits followed by recovery upon his removal from London. Read a French translation of the *Mahabharata*, with excessive enthusiasm according to William Rossetti.

First part of Browning’s *The Ring and the Book*.

1869 Travelled with Burton through France, stayed again with Powell in Normandy. Back in London, then in Holmwood.

Tennyson’s *Holy Grail*, in reaction to which Swinburne started an overture to the story of Tristram and Isolt (published in 1871).

1870 Finished ‘Hertha’ and ‘The Eve of Revolution’. Battle with Hotten, who threatened Swinburne with an injunction if another publisher brought out his work. The other publisher, Ellis, meanwhile delayed nervously about *Songs before Sunrise*. 

1871
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Ellis published <em>Songs before Sunrise</em>. Reviewed Simeon Solomon’s <em>A Vision of Love</em> and worked on <em>Bothwell</em>, the second and longest part of the trilogy about Mary Stuart. Dissolute living injured his health, and he was again retrieved by the Admiral. In October, Robert Buchanan launched a polemical attack on Rossetti and Swinburne, ‘The Fleshy School of Poetry’.</td>
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<td>1872</td>
<td>Published <em>Under the Microscope</em>, his response to Buchanan, in which he also mocked Tennyson’s Arthurian poems. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, under the stress of the controversy, collapsed and broke permanently with Swinburne. Theodore Watts (later Watts-Dunton) intervened on Swinburne’s behalf with Hotten. Death of Théophile Gautier; Swinburne wrote elegies for him in Greek, Latin, French and English; they were published the next year.</td>
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<td>1873</td>
<td>Simeon Solomon arrested for soliciting at a men’s toilet; Swinburne expressed his loathing and they did not meet again.</td>
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<td>1874</td>
<td><em>Bothwell</em> published in May by Chatto and Windus, who had bought Hotten’s press.</td>
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<td>1875</td>
<td><em>Songs of Two Nations</em> (i.e., France and Italy). Discussed with Jowett the plan of <em>Erechtheus</em>, his more rigorous imitation of a Greek tragedy. Wrote ‘A Forsaken Garden’ and ‘By the North Sea’. Mocked Buchanan in print, who then sued Swinburne for libel, and who won in court the next year.</td>
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<td>1876</td>
<td><em>Erechtheus</em> published; began controversy with F. J. Furnivall and mocked the new Shakespeare Society; their quarrel would be revived in the early 1880s.</td>
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<td>1877</td>
<td>Serial publication of <em>A Year’s Letters</em>; translated Villon. Published ‘The Sailing of the Swallow’, which would form the first canto of <em>Tristram of Lyonesse</em>. Father died; inherited £5,000; more dissipation.</td>
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<td>1878</td>
<td><em>Poems and Ballads, Second Series</em> published, the earliest poems of which dated from 1867; ‘inscribed to Richard F. Burton’. Very seriously ill.</td>
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<td>1879</td>
<td>Watts moved Swinburne temporarily into the house Watts shared with his sister; from there he went again to Holmwood, where Lady Jane Swinburne and Watts agreed that he must not live in London. Holiday on the coast in September, after which Watts and Swinburne moved into The Pines, Putney. Composed ‘On the Cliffs’ and ‘Thalassius’, which appeared in the next year in <em>Songs of the Springtides</em>.</td>
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<td>1880</td>
<td><em>Songs of the Springtides, Studies in Song</em> (including ‘By the North Sea’ and a skilful translation from Aristophanes), and <em>Heptalogia</em>, a collection of seven parodies of contemporary poets, himself included.</td>
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<td>1881</td>
<td>Bertie Mason, Watts’s nephew, left The Pines for several months; Swinburne despondent.</td>
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<td>1882</td>
<td><em>Mary Stuart</em>, the final instalment of the trilogy, published and coldly received. Death of Dante Gabriel Rossetti; Watts, though not Swinburne, attended the funeral. <em>Tristram of Lyonesse</em> dedicated ‘to my best friend Theodore Watts’. At the end of November, travelled to Paris to see <em>Le Roi s’amuse</em>; met Hugo and Leconte de Lisle, ‘the Frenchman I most wanted to see outside of the master’s own peculiar circle’.</td>
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<td>1883</td>
<td><em>A Century of Roundels</em>, dedicated to Christina Rossetti.</td>
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<td>1884</td>
<td><em>A Midsummer Holiday</em>.</td>
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<td>1885</td>
<td>Death of Hugo. Death of Lord Houghton.</td>
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<td>1886</td>
<td>Met Thomas J. Wise, who later produced several forged ‘first editions’ of Swinburne’s poems.</td>
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<td>1887</td>
<td><em>Loctrine</em>; essay and attack on ‘Whitmania’.</td>
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<td>1888</td>
<td>Quarrel with Whistler, ‘Mr Whistler’s Lectures on Art’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td><em>Poems and Ballads, Third Series</em>. Swinburne visited by writers of the ’Nineties. Max Beerbohm recounts his 1899 visit in the essay ‘No. 2. The Pines’. Arthur Symons’s visits over a decade recorded in his <em>Memoirs</em>.</td>
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<td>1890</td>
<td>Death of Richard Burton.</td>
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<td>1891</td>
<td>Renewed correspondence with Mary Disney-Leith (formerly Mary Gordon).</td>
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<td>1892</td>
<td><em>The Sisters</em>. Death of Tennyson; some writers (including Yeats) sought to have Swinburne made Poet Laureate.</td>
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1893 Death of Jowett.
1894 *Astrophel*, dedicated to William Morris.
1896 Watts becomes Watts-Dunton. Publication of *A Tale of Balen*, with a dedication 'to my mother'. In autumn, the death of William Morris, followed by the death of Swinburne's mother.
1898 Death of Burne-Jones.
1899 *Rosamund, Queen of the Lombards*, dedicated to Mary Disney-Leith.
1902 Began work on *The Duke of Gandia*, one act of which was published in 1908.
1904 Publication of *A Channel Passage* ('in memory of William Morris and Edward Burne Jones') and of *Poems*, in six volumes (includes *Atalanta* and *Erechtheus*).
1905 *Tragedies*, in five volumes.
1909 Death of Swinburne. His sister Isabel organized a Church of England burial despite his wishes.

FURTHER READING

T. S. Eliot, 'Swinburne as Poet' (1920) in *Selected Essays* (Faber, 1932, 3rd ed. 1951)
A. E. Housman, 'Swinburne' (1910) in Christopher Ricks (ed.), *Collected Poems and Selected Prose* (Penguin, 1988)
Clyde K. Hyder (ed.), *Swinburne as Critic* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972)
Georges Lafourcade, *La Jeunesse de Swinburne* (Paris, 1928)
Ezra Pound, 'Swinburne Versus His Biographers' (1918) in *Literary Essays* (New Directions, 1954)
Rikky Rooksby and Nicholas Shrimpton (eds.), *The Whole Music of Passion* (Scolar Press, 1993)

The following abbreviations have been used in the Preface and Notes:

Lafourcade Georges Lafourcade, *La Jeunesse de Swinburne* (Paris, 1928)
OED *Oxford English Dictionary*
Even where her parted breast-flowers have place,
Even where they are cloven apart — who knows not this?
Ah! the flowers cleave apart
And their sweet fills the tender interspace;
Ah! the leaves grown thereof were things to kiss
Ere their fine gold was tarnished at the heart.

Ah! in the days when God did good to me,
Each part about her was a righteous thing;
Her mouth an almsgiving,
The glory of her garments charity,
The beauty of her bosom a good deed,
In the good days when God kept sight of us;
Love lay upon her eyes,
And on that hair whereof the world takes heed;
And all her body was more virtuous
Than souls of women fashioned otherwise.

Now, ballad, gather poppies in thine hands
And sheaves of brier and many rusted sheaves
Rain-rotten in rank lands,
Waste marigold and late unhappy leaves
And grass that fades ere any of it be mown;
And when thy bosom is filled full thereof
Seek out Death's face ere the light altereth,
And say 'My master that was thrall to Love
Is become thrall to Death.'

Bow down before him, ballad, sigh and groan,
But make no sojourn in thy outgoing;
For haply it may be
That when thy feet return at evening
Death shall come in with thee.

Lors dit en plorant; Hélas trop malheureux homme et mauldict
pescher, onques ne verrai-je clémence et miséricorde de Dieu.
Ores m'en irai-je d'icy et me cacherai dedans le mont Horsel, en
requérant de faveur et d'amoureuse merci ma douce dame Vénus,
car pour son amour serai-je bien à tout jamais damné en enfer. Voicy
la fin de tous mes faits d'armes et de toutes mes belles chansons.
Hélas, trop belle estoyt la face de ma dame et ses yeux, et en mauvais
jour je vis ces chouses-là. Lors s'en alla tout en gémissant et se
retourna chez elle, et là vescut tristement en grand amour près de sa
dame. Puis après advint que le pape vit un jour esclater sur son
baston force belles fleurs rouges et blanches et maints boutons de
feuilles, et ainsi vit-il reverdir toute l’escorce. Ce dont il eut grande
caintie et moutl s’en esmut, et grande pitié lui prit de ce chevalier
qui s’en estoit dépari sans espoir comme un homme misérable et
damné. Doncques envoya force messagers devers luy pour le
ramener, disant qu’il aurait de Dieu grace et bonne absolusion de
son grand pesché d’amour. Mais onques plus ne le virent; car
toujours demeura ce pauvre chevalier auprès de Vénus la haulte et
forte déesse es flancs de la montagne amoureuse.

Livre des grandes merveilles d’amour, escript en latin et en
françois par Maistre Antoine Gaget. 1530.

Asleep or waking is it? for her neck,
Kissed over close, wears yet a purple speck
Wherein the pained blood falters and goes out;
Soft, and stung softly – fairer for a fleck.

But though my lips shut sucking on the place,
There is no vein at work upon her face;
Her eyelids are so peaceable, no doubt
Deep sleep has warmed her blood through all its ways.

Lo, this is she that was the world’s delight;
The old grey years were parcels of her might;
The strewings of the ways wherein she trod
Were the twain seasons of the day and night.
Lo, she was thus when her clear limbs enticed
All lips that now grow sad with kissing Christ,
Stained with blood fallen from the feet of God,
The feet and hands whereat our souls were priced.

Alas, Lord, surely thou art great and fair.
But lo her wonderfully woven hair!
And thou didst heal us with thy piteous kiss;
But see now, Lord; her mouth is lovelier.

She is right fair; what hath she done to thee?
Nay, fair Lord Christ, lift up thine eyes and see;
Had now thy mother such a lip—like this?
Thou knowest how sweet a thing it is to me.

Inside the Horsel here the air is hot;
Right little peace one hath for it, God wot;
The scented dusty daylight burns the air,
And my heart chokes me till I hear it not.

Behold, my Venus, my soul's body, lies
With my love laid upon her garment-wise,
Feeling my love in all her limbs and hair
And shed between her eyelids through her eyes.

She holds my heart in her sweet open hands
Hanging asleep; hard by her head there stands,
Crowned with gilt thorns and clothed with flesh like fire,
Love, wan as foam blown up the salt burnt sands—

Hot as the brackish waifs of yellow spume
That shift and steam—loose clots of arid fume
From the sea's panting mouth of dry desire;
There stands he, like one labouring at a loom.

The warp holds fast across; and every thread
That makes the woof up has dry specks of red;
Always the shuttle cleaves clean through, and he
Weaves with the hair of many a ruined head.

Love is not glad nor sorry, as I deem;
Labouring he dreams, and labours in the dream,
Till when the spool is finished, lo I see
His web, reeled off, curls and goes out like steam.

Night falls like fire; the heavy lights run low,
And as they drop, my blood and body so
Shake as the flame shakes, full of days and hours
That sleep not neither weep they as they go.

Ah yet would God that flesh of mine might be
Where air might wash and long leaves cover me,
Where tides of grass break into foam of flowers,
Or where the wind's feet shine along the sea.

Ah yet would God that stems and roots were bred
Out of my weary body and my head,
That sleep were sealed upon me with a seal,
And I were as the least of all his dead.

Would God my blood were dew to feed the grass,
Mine ears made deaf and mine eyes blind as glass,
My body broken as a turning wheel,
And my mouth stricken ere it saith Alas!

Ah God, that love were as a flower or flame,
That life were as the naming of a name,
That death were not more pitiful than desire,
That these things were not one thing and the same!

Behold now, surely somewhere there is death:
For each man hath some space of years, he saith,
A little space of time ere time expire,
A little day, a little way of breath.

And lo, between the sundawn and the sun,
His day's work and his night's work are undone;
And lo, between the nightfall and the light,
He is not, and none knoweth of such an one.
Ah God, that I were as all souls that be,
As any herb or leaf of any tree,
As men that toil through hours of labouring night,
As bones of men under the deep sharp sea.

Outside it must be winter among men;
For at the gold bars of the gates again
I heard all night and all the hours of it
The wind’s wet wings and fingers drip with rain.

Knights gather, riding sharp for cold; I know
The ways and woods are strangled with the snow;
And with short song the maidens spin and sit
Until Christ’s birthnight, lily-like, arow.

The scent and shadow shed about me make
The very soul in all my senses ache;
The hot hard night is fed upon my breath,
And sleep beholds me from afar awake.

Alas, but surely where the hills grow deep,
Or where the wild ways of the sea are steep,
Or in strange places somewhere there is death,
And on death’s face the scattered hair of sleep.

There lover-like with lips and limbs that meet
They lie, they pluck sweet fruit of life and eat;
But me the hot and hungry days devour,
And in my mouth no fruit of theirs is sweet.

No fruit of theirs, but fruit of my desire,
For her love’s sake whose lips through mine resprise;
Her eyelids on her eyes like flower on flower,
Mine eyelids on mine eyes like fire on fire.

So lie we, not as sleep that lies by death,
With heavy kisses and with happy breath;
Not as man lies by woman, when the bride
Laughs low for love’s sake and the words he saith.
POEMS AND BALLADS

Me, most forsaken of all souls that fell;
Me, satiated with things insatiable;
Me, for whose sake the extreme hell makes mirth,
Yea, laughter kindles at the heart of hell.

Alas thy beauty! for thy mouth's sweet sake
My soul is bitter to me, my limbs quake
As water, as the flesh of men that weep,
As their heart's vein whose heart goes nigh to break.

Ah God, that sleep with flower-sweet finger-tips
Would crush the fruit of death upon my lips;
Ah God, that death would tread the grapes of sleep
And wring their juice upon me as it drips.

There is no change of cheer for many days,
But change of chimes high up in the air, that sways
Rung by the running fingers of the wind;
And singing sorrows heard on hidden ways.

Day smiteth day in twain, night sundereth night,
And on mine eyes the dark sits as the light;
Yea, Lord, thou knowest I know not, having sinned,
If heaven be clean or unclean in thy sight.

Yea, as if earth were sprinkled over me,
Such chafed harsh earth as chokes a sandy sea,
Each pore doth yearn, and the dried blood thereof
Gasps by sick fits, my heart swims heavily,

There is a feverish famine in my veins;
Below her bosom, where a crushed grape stains
The white and blue, there my lips caught and clove
An hour since, and what mark of me remains?

I dare not always touch her, lest the kiss
Leave my lips charred. Yea, Lord, a little bliss,
Brief bitter bliss, one hath for a great sin;
Nathless thou knowest how sweet a thing it is.

LAUS VENERIS

Sin, is it sin whereby men's souls are thrust
Into the pit? yet had I a good trust
To save my soul before it slipped therein,
Trod under by the fire-shod feet of lust.

For if mine eyes fail and my soul takes breath,
I look between the iron sides of death
Into sad hell where all sweet love hath end,
All but the pain that never finisheth.

There are the naked faces of great kings,
The singing folk with all their lute-playings;
There when one cometh he shall have to friend
The grave that covets and the worm that clings.

There sit the knights that were so great of hand,
The ladies that were queens of fair green land,
Grown grey and black now, brought unto the dust,
Soiled, without raiment, clad about with sand.

There is one end for all of them; they sit
Naked and sad, they drink the dregs of it,
Trodden as grapes in the wine-press of lust,
Trampled and trodden by the fiery feet.

I see the marvellous mouth whereby there fell
Cities and people whom the gods loved well,
Yet for her sake on them the fire got hold,
And for their sakes on her the fire of hell.

And softer than the Egyptian lote-leaf is,
The queen whose face was worth the world to kiss,
Wearing at breast a suckling snake of gold;
And large pale lips of strong Semiramis,

Curled like a tiger's that curl back to feed;
Red only where the last kiss made them bleed;
Her hair most thick with many a carven gem,
Deep in the mane, great-chested, like a steed.
Yea, with red sin the faces of them shine;
But in all these there was no sin like mine;
No, not in all the strange great sins of them
That made the wine-press froth and foam with wine.

For I was of Christ's choosing, I God's knight,
No blinkard heathen stumbling for scant light;
I can well see, for all the dusty days
Gone past, the clean great time of goodly fight.

I smell the breathing battle sharp with blows,
With shriek of shafts and snapping short of bows;
The fair pure sword smites out in subtle ways,
Sounds and long lights are shed between the rows

Of beautiful mailed men; the edged light slips,
Most like a snake that takes short breath and dips
Sharp from the beautifully bending head,
With all its gracious body lithe as lips

That curl in touching you; right in this wise
My sword doth, seeming fire in mine own eyes,
Leaving all colours in them brown and red
And flecked with death; then the keen breaths like sighs,

The caught-up choked dry laughters following them,
When all the fighting face is grown a flame
For pleasure, and the pulse that stuns the ears,
And the heart's gladness of the goodly game.

Let me think yet a little; I do know
These things were sweet, but sweet such years ago,
Their savour is all turned now into tears;
Yea, ten years since, where the blue ripples blow,

The blue curled eddies of the blowing Rhine,
I felt the sharp wind shaking grass and vine
Touch my blood too, and sting me with delight
Through all this waste and weary body of mine

That never feels clear air; right gladly then
I rode alone, a great way off my men,
And heard the chiming bridle smite and smite,
And gave each rhyme thereof some rhyme again,

Till my song shifted to that iron one;
Seeing there rode up between me and the sun
Some certain of my foe's men, for his three
White wolves across their painted coats did run.

The first red-bearded, with square cheeks — alack,
I made my knife's blood turn his beard to black;
The slaying of him was a joy to see:
Perchance too, when at night he came not back,

Some woman fell a-weeping, whom this thief
Would beat when he had drunken; yet small grief
Hath any for the ridding of such knaves;
Yea, if one wept, I doubt her teen was brief.

This bitter love is sorrow in all lands,
Draining of eyelids, wringing of drenched hands,
Sighing of hearts and filling up of graves;
A sign across the head of the world he stands,

An one that hath a plague-mark on his brows;
Dust and spilt blood do track him to his house
Down under earth; sweet smells of lip and cheek,
Like a sweet snake's breath made more poisonous

With chewing of some perfumed deadly grass,
Are shed all round his passage if he pass,
And their quenched savour leaves the whole soul weak,
Sick with keen guessing whence the perfume was.

As one who hidden in deep sedge and reeds
Smells the rare scent made where a panther feeds,
And tracking ever slotwise the warm smell
Is snapped upon by the sweet mouth and bleeds,
His head far down the hot sweet throat of her—
So one tracks love, whose breath is deadlier,
And lo, one springe and you are fast in hell,
Fast as the gin's grip of a wayfarer.

I think now, as the heavy hours decease
One after one, and bitter thoughts increase
One upon one, of all sweet finished things;
The breaking of the battle; the long peace

Wherein we sat clothed softly, each man's hair
Crowned with green leaves beneath white hoods of vair;
The sounds of sharp spears at great tourneyings,
And noise of singing in the late sweet air.

I sang of love too, knowing nought thereof;
'Sweeter,' I said, 'the little laugh of love
Than tears out of the eyes of Magdalen,
Or any fallen feather of the Dove.

'The broken little laugh that spoils a kiss,
The ache of purple pulses, and the bliss
Of blinded eyelids that expand again—
Love draws them open with those lips of his,

'Lips that cling hard till the kissed face has grown
Of one same fire and colour with their own;
Then ere one sleep, appeased with sacrifice,
Where his lips wounded, there his lips atone.'

I sang these things long since and knew them not;
'Lo, here is love, or there is love, God wot,
This man and that finds favour in his eyes,'
I said, 'but I, what guerdon have I got?

'The dust of praise that is blown everywhere
In all men's faces with the common air;
The bay-leaf that wants chafing to be sweet
Before they wind it in a singer's hair.'

So that one dawn I rode forth sorrowing;
I had no hope but of some evil thing,
And so rode slowly past the windy wheat
And past the vineyard and the water-spring,

Up to the Horsel. A great elder-tree
Held back its heaps of flowers to let me see
The ripe tall grass, and one that walked therein,
Naked, with hair shed over to the knee.

She walked between the blossom and the grass;
I knew the beauty of her, what she was,
The beauty of her body and her sin,
And in my flesh the sin of hers, alas!

Alas! for sorrow is all the end of this.
O sad kissed mouth, how sorrowful it is!
O breast whereat some suckling sorrow clings,
Red with the bitter blossom of a kiss!

Ah, with blind lips I felt for you, and found
About my neck your hands and hair enwound,
The hands that stifle and the hair that stings,
I felt them fasten sharply without sound.

Yea, for my sin I had great store of bliss:
Rise up, make answer for me, let thy kiss
Seal my lips hard from speaking of my sin,
Lest one go mad to hear how sweet it is.

Yet I waxed faint with fume of barren bowers,
And murmuring of the heavy-headed hours;
And let the dove's beak fret and peck within
My lips in vain, and Love shed fruitless flowers.

So that God looked upon me when your hands
Were hot about me; yea, God brake my bands
To save my soul alive, and I came forth
Like a man blind and naked in strange lands
That hears men laugh and weep, and knows not whence
Nor wherefore, but is broken in his sense;
   Howbeit I met folk riding from the north
Towards Rome, to purge them of their souls’ offence,
And rode with them, and spake to none; the day
Stunned me like lights upon some wizard way,
   And ate like fire mine eyes and mine eyesight;
So rode I, hearing all these chant and pray,
And marvelled; till before us rose and fell
White cursed hills, like outer skirts of hell
   Seen where men’s eyes look through the day to night,
Like a jagged shell’s lips, harsh, untunable,
Blown in between by devil’s wrangling breath;
Nathless we won well past that hell and death,
   Down to the sweet land where all airs are good,
Even unto Rome where God’s grace tarrieth.

Then came each man and worshipped at his knees
Who in the Lord God’s likeness bears the keys
   To bind or loose, and called on Christ’s shed blood,
And so the sweet-souled father gave him ease.

But when I came I fell down at his feet,
Saying, ‘Father, though the Lord’s blood be right sweet,
   The spot it takes not off the panther’s skin,
Nor shall an Ethiop’s stain be bleached with it.
‘Lo, I have sinned and have spat out at God,
Wherefore his hand is heavier and his rod
   More sharp because of mine exceeding sin,
And all his raiment redder than bright blood

‘Before mine eyes; yea, for my sake I wot
The heat of hell is waxen seven times hot
   Through my great sin.’ Then spake he some sweet word,
Giving me cheer; which thing availed me not;

Yea, scarce I wist if such indeed were said;
For when I ceased — lo, as one newly dead
   Who hears a great cry out of hell, I heard
The crying of his voice across my head.

‘Until this dry shred staff, that hath no whit
Of leaf nor bark, bear blossom and smell sweet,
   Seek thou not any mercy in God’s sight,
For so long shalt thou be cast out from it.’

Yea, what if dried-up stems wax red and green,
Shall that thing be which is not nor has been?
   Yea, what if sapless bark wax green and white,
Shall any good fruit grow upon my sin?

Nay, though sweet fruit were plucked of a dry tree,
And though men drew sweet waters of the sea,
   There should not grow sweet leaves on this dead stem,
This waste wan body and shaken soul of me.

Yea, though God search it warily enough,
There is not one sound thing in all thereof;
   Though he search all my veins through, searching them
He shall find nothing whole therein but love.

For I came home right heavy, with small cheer,
And lo my love, mine own soul’s heart, more dear
   Than mine own soul, more beautiful than God,
Who hath my being between the hands of her —

Fair still, but fair for no man saving me,
As when she came out of the naked sea
   Making the foam as fire whereon she trod,
And as the inner flower of fire was she.

Yea, she laid hold upon me, and her mouth
Clove unto mine as soul to body doth,
   And, laughing, made her lips luxurious;
Her hair had smells of all the sunburnt south,
Strange spice and flower, strange savour of crushed fruit,
And perfume the swart kings tread underfoot
   For pleasure when their minds wax amorous,
Charred frankincense and grated sandal-root.

And I forgot fear and all weary things,
All ended prayers and perished thanksgivings,
   Feeling her face with all her eager hair
Cleave to me, clinging as a fire that clings

To the body and to the raiment, burning them;
As after death I know that such-like flame
   Shall cleave to me for ever; yea, what care,
Albeit I burn then, having felt the same?

Ah love, there is no better life than this;
To have known love, how bitter a thing it is,
   And afterward be cast out of God’s sight;
Yea, these that know not, shall they have such bliss

High up in barren heaven before his face
As we twain in the heavy-hearted place,
   Remembering love and all the dead delight,
And all that time was sweet with for a space?

For till the thunder in the trumpet be,
Soul may divide from body, but not we
   One from another; I hold thee with my hand,
I let mine eyes have all their will of thee,

I seal myself upon thee with my might,
Abiding alway out of all men’s sight
   Until God loosen over sea and land
The thunder of the trumpets of the night.

EXPLICIT LAUS VENERIS.

Phaedra

HIPPOLYTUS; PHÆDRA; CHORUS OF TRÆZENIAN WOMEN

HIPPOLYTUS.
Lay not thine hand upon me; let me go;
Take off thine eyes that put the gods to shame;
What, wilt thou turn my loathing to thy death?

PHÆDRA.
Nay, I will never loosen hold nor breathe
Till thou have slain me; godlike for great brows
Thou art, and thewed as gods are, with clear hair:
Draw now thy sword and smite me as thou art god,
For verily I am smitten of other gods,
Why not of thee?

CHORUS.

O queen, take heed of words;
Why wilt thou eat the husk of evil speech?
Wear wisdom for that veil about thy head
And goodness for the binding of thy brows.

PHÆDRA.
Nay, but this god hath cause enow to smite;
If he will slay me, baring breast and throat,
I lean toward the stroke with silent mouth
And a great heart. Come, take thy sword and slay;
Let me not starve between desire and death,
But send me on my way with glad wet lips;
For in the vein-drawn ashen-coloured palm
Death’s hollow hand holds water of sweet draught
To tip and slake dried mouths at, as a deer
Specked red from thorns laps deep and loses pain.
Yea, if mine own blood ran upon my mouth,
I would drink that. Nay, but be swift with me;
Set thy sword here between the girdle and breast,
For I shall grow a poison if I live.
A Leave-Taking

Let us go hence, my songs; she will not hear.
Let us go hence together without fear;
Keep silence now, for singing-time is over,
And over all old things and all things dear.
She loves not you nor me as all we love her.
Yea, though we sang as angels in her ear,
She would not hear.

Let us rise up and part; she will not know.
Let us go seaward as the great winds go,
Full of blown sand and foam; what help is here?
There is no help, for all these things are so,
And all the world is bitter as a tear.
And how these things are, though ye strove to show,
She would not know.

Let us go home and hence; she will not weep.
We gave love many dreams and days to keep,
Flowers without scent, and fruits that would not grow,
Saying ‘If thou wilt, thrust in thy sickle and reap.’
All is reaped now; no grass is left to mow;
And we that sowed, though all we fell on sleep,
She would not weep.

Let us go hence and rest; she will not love.
She shall not hear us if we sing hereof,
Nor see love’s ways, how sore they are and steep.
Come hence, let be, lie still; it is enough.
Love is a barren sea, bitter and deep;
And though she saw all heaven in flower above,
She would not love.

Let us give up, go down; she will not care.
Though all the stars made gold of all the air,
And the sea moving saw before it move
One moon-flower making all the foam-flowers fair;

Itylus

Though all those waves went over us, and drove
Deep down the stiffing lips and drowning hair,
She would not care.

Let us go hence, go hence; she will not see.
Sing all once more together; surely she,
She too, remembering days and words that were,
Will turn a little toward us, sighing; but we,
We are hence, we are gone, as though we had not been there.
Nay, and though all men seeing had pity on me,
She would not see.

Itylus

Swallow, my sister, O sister swallow,
How can thine heart be full of the spring?
A thousand summers are over and dead.
What hast thou found in the spring to follow?
What hast thou found in thine heart to sing?
What wilt thou do when the summer is shed?

O swallow, sister, O fair swift swallow,
Why wilt thou fly after spring to the south,
The soft south whither thine heart is set?

Shall not the grief of the old time follow?
Shall not the song thereof cleave to thy mouth?
Hast thou forgotten ere I forget?

Sister, my sister, O fleet sweet swallow,
Thy way is long to the sun and the south;
But I, fulfilled of my heart’s desire,
Shedding my song upon height, upon hollow,
From tawny body and sweet small mouth
Feed the heart of the night with fire.
I the nightingale all spring through,
O swallow, sister, O changing swallow,
All spring through till the spring be done,
Clothed with the light of the night on the dew,
Sing, while the hours and the wild birds follow,
Take flight and follow and find the sun.

Sister, my sister, O soft light swallow,
Though all things feast in the spring’s guest-chamber,
How hast thou heart to be glad thereof yet?
For where thou fliest I shall not follow,
Till life forget and death remember,
Till thou remember and I forget.

Swallow, my sister, O singing swallow,
I know not how thou hast heart to sing.
Hast thou the heart? is it all past over?
Thy lord the summer is good to follow,
And fair the feet of thy lover the spring:
But what wilt thou say to the spring thy lover?

O swallow, sister, O fleeting swallow,
My heart in me is a molten ember
And over my head the waves have met.
But thou wouldst tarry or I would follow,
Could I forget or thou remember,
Couldst thou remember and I forget.

O sweet stray sister, O shifting swallow,
The heart’s division divideth us.
Thy heart is light as a leaf of a tree;
But mine goes forth among sea-gulfs hollow
To the place of the slaying of Itrylus,
The feast of Daulis, the Thracian sea.

O swallow, sister, O rapid swallow,
I pray thee sing not a little space.
Are not the roofs and the lintels wet?
The woven web that was plain to follow,
The small slain body, the flowerlike face,
Can I remember if thou forget?

O sister, sister, thy first-begotten!
The hands that cling and the feet that follow,
The voice of the child’s blood crying yet
Who hath remembered me? who hath forgotten?
Thou hast forgotten, O summer swallow,
But the world shall end when I forget.

Anactoria

τίνος αὖ τῷ πελώρι
μᾶς σαγηνεύουσας φιλότατα;
SAPPHO.

My life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes
Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs
Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound,
And my blood strengthens, and my veins abound.
I pray thee sigh not, speak not, draw not breath;
Let life burn down, and dream it is not death.
I would the sea had hidden us, the fire
(Wilt thou fear that, and fear not my desire?)
Severed the bones that bleach, the flesh that cleaves,
And let our sifted ashes drop like leaves.
I feel thy blood against my blood: my pain
Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein.
Let fruit be crushed on fruit, let flower on flower,
Breast kindle breast, and either burn one hour.
Why wilt thou follow lesser loves? are thine
Too weak to bear these hands and lips of mine?
I charge thee for my life's sake, O too sweet
To crush love with thy cruel faultless feet,
I charge thee keep thy lips from hers or his,
Sweetest, till theirs be sweeter than my kiss:
Lest I too lure, a swallow for a dove,
Erosion or Erinna to my love.
I would my love could quell thee; I am satiated
With seeing thee live, and fain would have thee dead.
I would earth had thy body as fruit to eat,
And no mouth but some serpent's found thee sweet.
I would find grievous ways to have thee slain,
Intense device, and superflux of pain;
Vex thee with amorous agonies, and shake
Life at thy lips, and leave it there to ache;
Strain out thy soul with pangs too soft to kill,
Intolerable interludes, and infinite ill;
Relapse and reluctance of the breath,
Dumb tunes and shuddering semitones of death.
I am weary of all thy words and soft strange ways,
Of all love's fiery nights and all his days,
And all the broken kisses salt as brine
That shuddering lips make moist with waterish wine,
And eyes the bluer for all those hidden hours
That pleasure fills with tears and feeds from flowers,
Fierce at the heart with fire that half comes through,
But all the flowerlike white stained round with blue;
The fervent underlid, and that above
Lifted with laughter or abashed with love;
Thine amorous girdle, full of thee and fair,
And leavings of the lilies in thine hair.
Yea, all sweet words of thine and all thy ways,
And all the fruit of nights and flower of days,
And stinging lips wherein the hot sweet brine
That Love was born of burns and foams like wine,
And eyes insatiable of amorous hours,
Fervent as fire and delicate as flowers,
Coloured like night at heart, but cloven through
Like night with flame, dyed round like night with blue,

Clothed with deep eyelids under and above –
Yea, all thy beauty sickens me with love;
Thy girdle empty of thee and now not fair,
And ruinous lilies in thy languid hair.
Ah, take no thought for Love's sake; shall this be,
And she who loves thy lover not love thee?
Sweet soul, sweet mouth of all that laughs and lives,
Mine is she, very mine; and she forgives.
For I beheld in sleep the light that is
In her high place in Paphos, heard the kiss
Of body and soul that mix with eager tears
And laughter stinging through the eyes and ears;
Saw Love, as burning flame from crown to feet,
Imperishable, upon her storied seat;
Clear eyelids lifted toward the north and south,
A mind of many colours, and a mouth
Of many tunes and kisses; and she bowed,
With all her subtle face laughing aloud,
Bowed down upon me, saying, 'Who doth thee wrong,
Sappho?' but thou – thy body is the song,
Thy mouth the music; thou art more than I,
Though my voice die not till the whole world die;
Though men that hear it madden; though love weep,
Though nature change, though shame be charmed to sleep.
Ah, wilt thou say me lest I kiss thee dead?
Yet the queen laughed from her sweet heart and said:
'Even she that flies shall follow for thy sake,
And she shall give thee gifts that would not take,
Shall kiss that would not kiss thee' (yea, kiss me)
'When thou wouldst not' – when I would not kiss thee!
Ah, more to me than all men as thou art,
Shall not my songs assuage her at the heart?
Ah, sweet to me as life seems sweet to death,
Why should her wrath fill thee with fearful breath?
Nay, sweet, for is she God alone? hath she
Made earth and all the centuries of the sea,
Taught the sun ways to travel, woven most fine
The moonbeams, shed the starbeams forth as wine,
Bound with her myrtles, beaten with her rods,
The young men and the maidens and the gods?
Have we not lips to love with, eyes for tears,
And summer and flower of women and of years?
Stars for the foot of morning, and for noon
Sunlight, and exaltation of the moon;
Waters that answer waters, fields that wear
Lilies, and languor of the Lesbian air?
Beyond those flying feet of fluttered doves,
Are there not other gods for other loves?
Yea, though she scourge thee, sweetest, for my sake,
Blossom not thorns and flowers not blood should break.
Ah that my lips were tuneless lips, but pressed
To the bruised blossom of thy scourged white breast!
Ah that my mouth for Muses’ milk were fed
On the sweet blood thy sweet small wounds had bled!
That with my tongue I felt them, and could taste
The faint flakes from thy bosom to the waist!
That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat
Thy breasts like honey! that from face to feet
Thy body were abolished and consumed,
And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!
Ah, ah, thy beauty! like a beast it bites,
Stings like an adder, like an arrow smites.
Ah sweet, and sweet again, and seven times sweet,
The paces and the pauses of thy feet!
Ah sweeter than all sleep or summer air
The fallen fillets fragrant from thine hair!
Yea, though their alien kisses do me wrong,
Sweeter thy lips than mine with all their song;
Thy shoulders whiter than a fleece of white,
And flower-sweet fingers, good to bruise or bite
As honeycomb of the inmost honey-cells,
With almond-shaped and roseleaf-coloured shells
And blood like purple blossom at the tips
Quivering; and pain made perfect in thy lips
For my sake when I hurt thee; O that I
Durst-crush thee out of life with love, and die,
Die of thy pain and my delight, and be
Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee!
Would I not plague thee dying overmuch?
Would I not hurt thee perfectly? not touch
Thy pores of sense with torture, and make bright
Thine eyes with bloodlike tears and grievous light?
Strike pang from pang as note is struck from note,
Catch the sob’s middle music in thy throat,
Take thy limbs living, and new-mould with these
A lyre of many faultless agonies?
Feed thee with fever and famine and fine drouth,
With perfect pangs convulse thy perfect mouth,
Make thy life shudder in thee and burn afresh,
And wring thy very spirit through the flesh?
Cruel? but love makes all that love him well
As wise as heaven and crueler than hell.
Me hath love made more bitter toward thee
Than death toward man; but were I made as he
Who hath made all things to break them one by one,
If my feet trod upon the stars and sun
And souls of men as his have alway trod,
God knows I might be crueler than God.
For who shall change with prayers or thanksgivings
The mystery of the cruelty of things?
Or say what God above all gods and years
With offering and blood-sacrifice of tears,
With lamentation from strange lands, from graves
Where the snake pastures, from scarred mouths of slaves,
From prison, and from plunging prows of ships
Through flamelike foam of the sea’s closing lips –
With thwartings of strange signs, and wind-blown hair
Of comets, desolating the dim air,
When darkness is made fast with seals and bars,
And fierce reluctance of disastrous stars,
Eclipse, and sound of shaken hills, and wings
Darkening, and blind inexpiable things –
With sorrow of labouring moons, and altering light
And travail of the planets of the night,
And weeping of the weary Pleiads seven,
Feeds the mute melancholy lust of heaven?
Is not his incense bitterness, his meat
Murder? his hidden face and iron feet
Hath not man known, and felt them on their way
Threaten and trample all things and every day?
Hath he not sent us hunger? who hath cursed
Spirit and flesh with longing? filled with thirst
Their lips who cried unto him? who bade exceed
The fervid will, fall short the feeble deed,
Bade sink the spirit and the flesh aspire,

Pain animate the dust of dead desire,
And life yield up her flower to violent fate?
Him would I reach, him smite, him desecrate,
Pierce the cold lips of God with human breath,
And mix his immortality with death.
Why hath he made us? what had all we done
That we should live and loathe the sterile sun,
And with the moon wax paler as she wanes,
And pulse by pulse feel time grow through our veins?
Thee too the years shall cover; thou shalt be

As the rose born of one same blood with thee,
As a song sung, as a word said, and fall
Flower-wise, and be not any more at all,
Nor any memory of thee anywhere;
For never Muse has bound above thine hair
The high Pierian flower whose graft outgrows
All summer kinship of the mortal rose
And colour of deciduous days, nor shed
Reflex and flush of heaven about thine head,
Nor reddened brows made pale by floral grief
With splendid shadow from that lordlier leaf.
Yea, thou shalt be forgotten like spilt wine,
Except these kisses of my lips on thine
Brand them with immortality; but me—
Men shall not see bright fire nor hear the sea,
Nor mix their hearts with music, nor behold
Cast forth of heaven, with feet of awful gold

And plumeless wings that make the bright air blind,
Lightning, with thunder for a hound behind
Hunting through fields unfurrowed and unsown,

But in the light and laughter, in the moan
And music, and in grasp of lip and hand
And shudder of water that makes felt on land
The immeasurable tremor of all the sea,
Memories shall mix and metaphors of me.
Like me shall be the shuddering calm of night,
When all the winds of the world for pure delight
Close lips that quiver and fold up wings that ache;
When nightingales are louder for love’s sake,
And leaves tremble like lute-strings or like fire;

Like me the one star swooning with desire
Even at the cold lips of the sleepless moon,
As I at thine; like me the waste white noon,
Burnt through with barren sunlight; and like me
The land-stream and the tide-stream in the sea.
I am sick with time as these with ebb and flow,
And by the yearning in my veins I know
The yearning sound of waters; and mine eyes
Burn as that beamless fire which fills the skies
With troubled stars and travailing things of flame;

And in my heart the grief consuming them
Labours, and in my veins the thirst of these,
And all the summer travail of the trees
And all the winter sickness; and the earth,
Filled full with deadly works of death and birth,
Sore spent with hungry lusts of birth and death,
Has pain like mine in her divided breath;
Her spring of leaves is barren, and her fruit
Ashes; her boughs are burdened, and her root
Fibrous and gnarled with poison; underneath

Serpents have gnawn it through with tortuous teeth
Made sharp upon the bones of all the dead,
And wild birds rend her branches overhead.
These, woven as raiment for his word and thought,
These hath God made, and me as these, and wrought
Song, and hath lit it at my lips; and me
Earth shall not gather though she feed on thee.
As a shed tear shalt thou be shed; but I—
Lo, earth may labour, men live long and die,
Years change and stars, and the high God devise
New things, and old things wane before his eyes
Who yields and wrecks them, being more strong than
They—
But, having made me, he shall not slay.
Nor slay nor satiate, like those herds of his
Who laugh and live a little, and their kiss
Contents them, and their loves are swift and sweet,
And sure death grasps and gains them with slow feet,
Love they or hate they, strive or bow their knees—
And all these end; he hath his will of these.
Yea, but albeit he slay me, hating me—
Albeit he hide me in the deep dear sea
And cover me with cool wan foam, and ease
This soul of mine as any soul of these,
And give me water and great sweet waves, and make
The very sea’s name lordlier for my sake,
The whole sea sweeter—albeit I die indeed
And hide myself and sleep and no man heed,
Of me the high God hath not all his will.
Blossom of branches, and on each high hill
Clean air and wind, and under in clamorous vales
Fierce noises of the fiery nightingales,
Buds burning in the sudden spring like fire,
The wan washed sand and the waves’ vain desire,
Sails seen like blown white flowers at sea, and words
That bring tears swiftest, and long notes of birds
Violently singing till the whole world sings—
I Sappho shall be one with all these things,
With all high things for ever; and my face
Seen once, my songs once heard in a strange place,
Cleave to men’s lives, and waste the days thereof
With gladness and much sadness and long love.
Yea, they shall say, earth’s womb has borne in vain
New things, and never this best thing again;

Borne days and men, borne fruits and wars and wine,
Seasons and songs, but no song more like mine.
And they shall know me as ye who have known me here,
Last year when I loved Atthis, and this year
When I love thee; and they shall praise me, and say
‘She hath all time as all we have our day,
Shall she not live and have her will’—even I?
Yea, though thou diest, I say I shall not die.
For these shall give me of their souls, shall give
Life, and the days and loves wherewith I live,
Shall quicken me with loving, fill with breath,
Save me and serve me, strive for me with death.
Alas, that neither moon nor snow nor dew
Nor all cold things can purge me wholly through,
Assuage me nor allay me nor appease,
Till supreme sleep shall bring me bloodless ease;
Till time wax faint in all his periods;
Till fate undo the bondage of the gods,
And lay, to slake and satiate me all through,
Lotus and Lethe on my lips like dew,
And shed around and over and under me
Thick darkness and the insuperable sea.

Hymn to Proserpine
(AFTER THE PROCLAMATION IN ROME OF THE
CHRISTIAN FAITH)

Vicisti, Galilae.

I have lived long enough, having seen one thing, that love
hath an end;
Goddess and maiden and queen, be near me now and
befriend.
Thou art more than the day or the morrow, the seasons that
laugh or that weep;
For these give joy and sorrow; but thou, Proserpina, sleep.
Sweet is the treading of wine, and sweet the feet of the dove;
The days rose-red, the poppied hours,
Blood, wine, and spice and fire and flowers,
There is one end of one and all.

Shall such an one lend love or borrow?
Shall these be sorry for thy sorrow?
Shall these give thanks for words or breath?
Their hate is as their loving-kindness;
The frontlet of their brows is blindness,
The armlet of their arms is death.

Lo, for no noise or light of thunder
Shall these grave-clothes be rent in sunder;
He that hath taken, shall he give?
He hath rent them: shall he bind together?
He hath bound them: shall he break the tether?
He hath slain them: shall he bid them live?

A little sorrow, a little pleasure,
Fate metes us from the dusty measure
That holds the date of all of us;
We are born with travail and strong crying,
And from the birth-day to the dying
The likeness of our life is thus.

One girds himself to serve another,
Whose father was the dust, whose mother
The little dead red worm therein;
They find no fruit of things they cherish;
The goodness of a man shall perish,
It shall be one thing with his sin.

In deep wet ways by grey old gardens
Fed with sharp spring the sweet fruit hardens;
They know not what fruits wane or grow;
Red summer burns to the utmost ember;
They know not, neither can remember,
The old years and flowers they used to know.

Ah, for their sakes, so trapped and taken,
For theirs, forgotten and forsaken,
Watch, sleep not, gird thyself with prayer.
Nay, where the heart of wrath is broken,
Where long love ends as a thing spoken,
How shall thy crying enter there?

Though the iron sides of the old world falter,
The likeness of them shall not alter
For all the rumour of periods,
The stars and seasons that come after,
The tears of latter men, the laughter
Of the old unalterable gods.

Far up above the years and nations,
The high gods, clothed and crowned with patience,
Endure through days of deathlike date;
They bear the witness of things hidden;
Before their eyes all life stands chidden,
As they before the eyes of Fate.

Not for their love shall Fate retire,
Nor they relent for our desire,
Nor the graves open for their call.
The end is more than joy and anguish,
Than lives that laugh and lives that languish,
The poppied sleep, the end of all.

Hermaphroditus

1
Lift up thy lips, turn round, look back for love,
Blind love that comes by night and casts out rest;
Of all things tired thy lips look weariest,
Save the long smile that they are wearied of.
Ah sweet, albeit no love be sweet enough,
Choose of two loves and cleave unto the best;
Two loves at either blossom of thy breast
Strive until one be under and one above.
Their breath is fire upon the amorous air,
   Fire in thine eyes and where thy lips suspire:
And whosoever hath seen thee, being so fair,
   Two things turn all his life and blood to fire;
A strong desire begot on great despair,
   A great despair cast out by strong desire.

Where between sleep and life some brief space is,
With love like gold bound round about the head,
   Sex to sweet sex with lips and limbs is wed,
Turning the fruitful feud of hers and his
To the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss;
   Yet from them something like as fire is shed
That shall not be assuaged till death be dead,
Though neither life nor sleep can find out this.
Love made himself of flesh that perisheth
   A pleasure-house for all the loves his kin;
But on the one side sat a man like death,
   And on the other a woman sat like sin.
So with veiled eyes and sobs between his breath
   Love turned himself and would not enter in.

Love, is it love or sleep or shadow or light
That lies between thine eyelids and thine eyes?
   Like a flower laid upon a flower it lies,
Or like the night's dew laid upon the night.
Love stands upon thy left hand and thy right,
   Yet by no sunset and by no moonrise
Shall make thee man and ease a woman's sighs,
Or make thee woman for a man's delight.
To what strange end hath some strange god made fair
   The double blossom of two fruitless flowers?
Hid love in all the folds of all thy hair,
Fed thee on summers, watered thee with showers,
Given all the gold that all the seasons wear
   To thee that art a thing of barren hours?

IV
Yea, love, I see; it is not love but fear.
   Nay, sweet, it is not fear but love, I know;
Or wherefore should thy body's blossom blow
   So sweetly, or thine eyelids leave so clear
Thy gracious eyes that never made a tear --
   Though for their love our tears like blood should flow,
   Though love and life and death should come and go,
So dreadful, so desirable, so dear?
Yea, sweet, I know; I saw in what swift wise
   Beneath the woman's and the water's kiss
   Thy moist limbs melted into Salmacis,
   And the large light turned tender in thine eyes,
   And all thy boy's breath softened into sighs;
   But Love being blind, how should he know of this?

Au Musée du Louvre, Mars 1863.

Fragoletta

O Love! what shall be said of thee?
The son of grief begot by joy?
Being sightless, wilt thou see?
Being sexless, wilt thou be
Maiden or boy?

I dreamed of strange lips yesterday
And cheeks wherein the ambiguous blood
Was like a rose's -- yea,
A rose's when it lay
Within the bud.
Faustine

Ave Faustina Imperatrix, moritura te salutant.

Lean back, and get some minutes' peace;
    Let your head lean
Back to the shoulder with its fleece
    Of locks, Faustine.

The shapely silver shoulder stoops;
    Weighed over clean
With state of splendid hair that droops
    Each side, Faustine.

Let me go over your good gifts
    That crown you queen;
A queen whose kingdom ebbs and shifts
    Each week, Faustine.

Bright heavy brows well gathered up:
    White gloss and sheen;
Carved lips that make my lips a cup
    To drink, Faustine,

Wine and rank poison, milk and blood,
    Being mixed therein
Since first the devil threw dice with God
    For you, Faustine.

Your naked new-born soul, their stake,
    Stood blind between;
God said 'let him that wins her take
    And keep Faustine.'

But this time Satan threw, no doubt;
    Long since, I ween,
God's part in you was battered out;
    Long since, Faustine.

The die rang sideways as it fell,
    Rang cracked and thin,
Like a man's laughter heard in hell
    Far down, Faustine,

A shadow of laughter like a sigh,
    Dead sorrow's kin;
So rang, thrown down, the devil's die
    That won Faustine.

A suckling of his breed you were,
    One hard to wean;
But God, who lost you, left you fair,
    We see, Faustine.

You have the face that suits a woman
    For her soul's screen –
The sort of beauty that's called human
    In hell, Faustine.

You could do all things but be good
    Or chaste of mien;
And that you would not if you could,
    We know, Faustine.

Even he who cast seven devils out
    Of Magdalen
Could hardly do as much, I doubt,
    For you, Faustine.

Did Satan make you to spite God?
    Or did God mean
To scourge with scorpions for a rod
    Our sins, Faustine?

I know what queen at first you were,
    As though I had seen
Red gold and black imperious hair
    Twice crown Faustine.
As if your fed sarcophagus
Spared flesh and skin,
You come back face to face with us,
The same Faustine.

She loved the games men played with death,
Where death must win;
As though the slain man's blood and breath
Revived Faustine.

Nets caught the pike, pikes tore the net;
Lithe limbs and lean
From drained-out pores dripped thick red sweat
To soothe Faustine.

She drank the steaming drift and dust
Blown off the scene;
Blood could not ease the bitter lust
That galled Faustine.

All round the foul fat furrows reeked,
Where blood sank in;
The circus splashed and seethed and shrieked
All round Faustine.

But these are gone now: years entomb
The dust and din;
Yea, even the bath's fierce reek and fume
That slew Faustine.

Was life worth living then? and now
Is life worth sin?
Where are the imperial years? and how
Are you Faustine?

Your soul forgot her joys, forgot
Her times of teen;
Yea, this life likewise will you not
Forget, Faustine?

For in the time we know not of
Did fate begin
Weaving the web of days that wove
Your doom, Faustine.

The threads were wet with wine, and all
Were smooth to spin;
They wove you like a Bacchanal,
The first Faustine.

And Bacchus cast your mates and you
Wild grapes to glean;
Your flower-like lips were dashed with dew
From his, Faustine.

Your drenched loose hands were stretched to hold
The vine's wet green,
Long ere they coined in Roman gold
Your face, Faustine.

Then after change of soaring feather
And winnowing fin,
You woke in weeks of feverish weather,
A new Faustine.

A star upon your birthday burned,
Whose fierce serene
Red pulseless planet never yearned
In heaven, Faustine.

Stray breaths of Sapphic song that blew
Through Mitylene
Shook the fierce quivering blood in you
By night, Faustine.

The shameless nameless love that makes
Hell's iron gin
Shut on you like a trap that breaks
The soul, Faustine.
And when your veins were void and dead,
What ghosts unclean
Swarmed round the straitened barren bed
That hid Faustine?

What sterile growths of sexless root
Or epicene?
What flower of kisses without fruit
Of love, Faustine?

What adders came to shed their coats?
What coiled obscene
Small serpents with soft stretching throats
Caressed Faustine?

But the time came of famished hours,
Maimed loves and mean,
This ghastly thin-faced time of ours,
To spoil Faustine.

You seem a thing that hinges hold,
A love-machine
With clockwork joints of supple gold –
No more, Faustine.

Not godless, for you serve one God,
The Lampsacene,
Who metes the gardens with his rod;
Your lord, Faustine.

If one should love you with real love
(Such things have been,
Things your fair face knows nothing of,
It seems, Faustine);

That clear hair heavily bound back,
The lights wherein
Shift from dead blue to burnt-up black;
Your throat, Faustine,

Strong, heavy, throwing out the face
And hard bright chin
And shameful scornful lips that grace
Their shame, Faustine,

Curled lips, long since half kissed away,
Still sweet and keen;
You’d give him – poison shall we say?
Or what, Faustine?

A Cameo

There was a graven image of Desire
Painted with red blood on a ground of gold
Passing between the young men and the old,
And by him Pain, whose body shone like fire,
And Pleasure with gaunt hands that grasped their hire.
Of his left wrist, with fingers clenched and cold,
The insatiable Satiety kept hold,
Walking with feet unshod that pashed the mire.
The senses and the sorrows and the sins,
And the strange loves that suck the breasts of Hate
Till lips and teeth bite in their sharp indenture,
Followed like beasts with flap of wings and fins.
Death stood aloof behind a gaping grate,
Upon whose lock was written Peradventure.

Song before Death
(from the French)

Sweet mother, in a minute’s span
Death parts thee and my love of thee;
Sweet love, that yet art living man,
Unwinds the gold of his,
With limbs from limbs dividing
And breath by breath subsiding;
For love has no abiding,
But dies before the kiss;

So hath it been, so be it;
For who shall live and flee it?
But look that no man see it
Or hear it unaware;
Lest all who love and choose him
See Love, and so refuse him;
For all who find him lose him,
But all have found him fair.

Dolores
(Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs)

Cold eyelids that hide like a jewel
Hard eyes that grow soft for an hour;
The heavy white limbs, and the cruel
Red mouth like a venomous flower;
When these are gone by with their glories,
What shall rest of thee then, what remain,
O mystic and sombre Dolores,
Our Lady of Pain?

Seven sorrows the priests give their Virgin;
But thy sins, which are seventy times seven,
Seven ages would fail thee to purge in,
And then they would haunt thee in heaven:
Fierce midnights and famishing morrows,
And the loves that complete and control
All the joys of the flesh, all the sorrows
That wear out the soul.

O garment not golden but gilded,
O garden where all men may dwell,
O tower not of ivory, but builded
By hands that reach heaven from hell;
O mystical rose of the mire,
O house not of gold but of gain,
O house of unquenchable fire,
Our Lady of Pain!

O lips full of lust and of laughter,
Curled snakes that are fed from my breast,
Bite hard, lest remembrance come after
And press with new lips where you pressed.
For my heart too springs up at the pressure,
Mine eyelids too moisten and burn;
Ah, feed me and fill me with pleasure,
Ere pain come in turn.

In yesterday's reach and to-morrow's,
Out of sight though they lie of to-day,
There have been and there yet shall be sorrows
That smite not and bite not in play.
The life and the love thou despiest,
These hurt us indeed, and in vain,
O wise among women, and wisest,
Our Lady of Pain.

Who gave thee thy wisdom? what stories
That stung thee, what visions that smote?
Wert thou pure and a maiden, Dolores,
When desire took thee first by the throat?
What bud was the shell of a blossom
That all men may smell to and pluck?
What milk fed thee first at what bosom?
What sins gave thee suck?
We shift and bedeck and bedrape us,
    Thou art noble and nude and antique;
Libitina thy mother, Priapus
    Thy father, a Tuscan and Greek.
We play with light loves in the portal,
    And wince and relent and refrain;
Loves die, and we know thee immortal,
    Our Lady of Pain.

Fruits fail and love dies and time ranges;
    Thou art fed with perpetual breath,
And alive after infinite changes,
    And fresh from the kisses of death;
Of languors rekindled and rallies,
    Of barren delights and unclean,
Things monstrous and fruitless, a pallid
    And poisonous queen.

Could you hurt me, sweet lips, though I hurt you?
    Men touch them, and change in a trice
The lilies and languors of virtue
    For the raptures and roses of vice;
Those lie where thy foot on the floor is,
    These crown and caress thee and chain,
O splendid and sterile Dolores,
    Our Lady of Pain.

There are sins it may be to discover,
    There are deeds it may be to delight.
What new work wilt thou find for thy lover,
    What new passions for daytime or night?
What spells that they know not a word of
    Whose lives are as leaves overblown?
What tortures undreamt of, unheard of,
    Unwritten, unknown?

Ah beautiful passionate body
    That never has ached with a heart!
On thy mouth though the kisses are bloody,
    Though they sting till it shudder and smart,
More kind than the love we adore is,
    They hurt not the heart or the brain,
O bitter and tender Dolores,
    Our Lady of Pain.

As our kisses relax and redouble,
    From the lips and the foam and the fangs
Shall no new sin be born for men’s trouble,
    No dream of impossible pangs?
With the sweet of the sins of old ages
    Wilt thou satiate thy soul as of yore?
Too sweet is the rind, say the sages,
    Too bitter the core.

Hast thou told all thy secrets the last time,
    And bared all thy beauties to one?
Ah, where shall we go then for pastime,
    If the worst that can be has been done?
But sweet as the rind was the core is;
    We are fain of thee still, we are fain,
O sanguine and subtle Dolores,
    Our Lady of Pain.

By the hunger of change and emotion,
    By the thirst of unbearable things,
By despair, the twin-born of devotion,
    By the pleasure that winces and stings,
The delight that consumes the desire,
    The desire that outruns the delight,
By the cruelty deaf as a fire
    And blind as the night,
By the ravenous teeth that have smitten
Through the kisses that blossom and bud,
By the lips intertwined and bitten
Till the foam has a savour of blood,
By the pulse as it rises and falters,
By the hands as they slacken and strain,
I adjure thee, respond from thine altars,
Our Lady of Pain.

Wilt thou smile as a woman disdaining
The light fire in the veins of a boy?
But he comes to thee sad, without feigning,
Who has wearied of sorrow and joy;
Less careful of labour and glory
Than the elders whose hair has uncurled;
And young, but with fancies as hoary
And grey as the world.

I have passed from the outermost portal
To the shrine where a sin is a prayer;
What care though the service be mortal?
O our Lady of Torture, what care?
All thine the last wine that I pour is,
The last in the chalice we drain,
O fierce and luxurious Dolores,
Our Lady of Pain.

All thine the new wine of desire,
The fruit of four lips as they clung
Till the hair and the eyelids took fire,
The foam of a serpentine tongue,
The froth of the serpents of pleasure,
More salt than the foam of the sea,
Now felt as a flame, now at leisure
As wine shed for me.

Ah thy people, thy children, thy chosen,
Marked cross from the womb and perverse!
They have found out the secret to cozen
The gods that constrain us and curse;
They alone, they are wise, and none other;
Give me place, even me, in their train,
O my sister, my spouse, and my mother,
Our Lady of Pain.

For the crown of our life as it closes
Is darkness, the fruit thereof dust;
No thorns go as deep as a rose’s,
And love is more cruel than lust.
Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses or wives;
And marriage and death and division
Make barren our lives.

And pale from the past we draw nigh thee,
And satiate with comfortless hours;
And we know thee, how all men belie thee,
And we gather the fruit of thy flowers;
The passion that slays and recovers,
The pangs and the kisses that rain
On the lips and the limbs of thy lovers,
Our Lady of Pain.

The desire of thy furious embraces
Is more than the wisdom of years,
On the blossom though blood lie in traces,
Though the foliage be sodden with tears.
For the lords in whose keeping the door is
That opens on all who draw breath
Gave the cypress to love, my Dolores,
The myrtle to death.
And they laughed, changing hands in the measure,
   And they mixed and made peace after strife;
Pain melted in tears, and was pleasure;
   Death tingled with blood, and was life.
Like lovers they melted and tingled,
   In the dusk of thine innermost face;
In the darkness they murmured and mingled,
   Our Lady of Pain.

In a twilight where virtues are vices,
   In thy chapels, unknown of the sun,
To a tune that enthralls and entices,
   They were wed, and the twain were as one.
For the tune from thine altar hath sounded
   Since God bade the world's work begin,
And the fume of thine incense abounded,
   To sweeten the sin.

Love listens, and paler than ashes,
   Through his curls as the crown on them slips,
Lifts languid wet eyelids and lashes,
   And laughs with insatiable lips.
Thou shalt hush him with heavy caresses,
   With music that scares the profane;
Thou shalt darken his eyes with thy tresses,
   Our Lady of Pain.

Thou shalt blind his bright eyes though he wrestle,
   Thou shalt chain his light limbs though he strive;
In his lips all thy serpents shall nestle,
   In his hands all thy cruelties thrive.
In the daytime thy voice shall go through him,
   In his dreams he shall feel thee and ache;
Thou shalt kindle by night and subdue him
   Asleep and awake.

Thou shalt touch and make redder his roses
   With juice not of fruit nor of bud;
When the sense in the spirit repose,
   Thou shalt quicken the soul through the blood.
Thine, thine the one grace we implore is,
   Who would live and not languish or feign,
O sleepless and deadly Dolores,
   Our Lady of Pain.

Dost thou dream, in a respite of slumber,
   In a lull of the fires of thy life,
Of the days without name, without number,
   When thy will stung the world into strife;
When, a goddess, the pulse of thy passion
   Smote kings as they revelled in Rome;
And they hailed thee re-risen, O Thalassian,
   Foam-white, from the foam?

When thy lips had such lovers to flatter;
   When the city lay red from thy rods,
And thine hands were as arrows to scatter
   The children of change and their gods;
When the blood of thy foes made fervent
   A sand never moist from the main,
As one smote them, their lord and thy servant,
   Our Lady of Pain.

On sands by the storm never shaken,
   Nor wet from the washing of tides;
Nor by foam of the waves overtaken,
   Nor winds that the thunder bestrides;
But red from the print of thy paces,
   Made smooth for the world and its lords,
Ringed round with a flame of fair faces,
   And splendid with swords.
There the gladiator, pale for thy pleasure,  
Drew bitter and perilous breath;  
There torments laid hold on the treasure  
Of limbs too delicious for death;  
When thy gardens were lit with live torches;  
When the world was a steed for thy rein;  
When the nations lay prone in thy porches,  
Our Lady of Pain.

When, with flame all around him aspirant,  
Stood flushed, as a harp-player stands,  
The implacable beautiful tyrant,  
Rose-crowned, having death in his hands;  
And a sound as the sound of loud water  
Smote far through the flight of the fires,  
And mixed with the lightning of slaughter  
A thunder of lyres.

Dost thou dream of what was and no more is,  
The old kingdoms of earth and the kings?  
Dost thou hunger for these things, Dolores,  
For these, in a world of new things?  
But thy bosom no fasts could emaciate,  
No hunger compel to complain  
Those lips that no bloodshed could satiate,  
Our Lady of Pain.

As of old when the world’s heart was lighter,  
Through thy garments the grace of thee glows,  
The white wealth of thy body made whiter  
By the blushes of amorous blows,  
And seamed with sharp lips and fierce fingers,  
And branded by kisses that bruise;  
When all shall be gone that now lingers,  
Ah, what shall we lose?

Thou wert fair in the fearless old fashion,  
And thy limbs are as melodies yet,  
And move to the music of passion  
With lithe and lascivious regret.  
What ailed us, O gods, to desert you  
For creeds that refuse and restrain?  
Come down and redeem us from virtue,  
Our Lady of Pain.

All shrines that were Vestal are flameless,  
But the flame has not fallen from this;  
Though obscure be the god, and though nameless  
The eyes and the hair that we kiss;  
Low fires that love sits by and forges  
Fresh heads for his arrows and thine;  
Hair loosened and soiled in mid orgies  
With kisses and wine.

Thy skin changes country and colour,  
And shrivels or swells to a snake’s.  
Let it brighten and bloat and grow duller,  
We know it, the flames and the flake,  
Red brands on it smitten and bitten,  
Round skies where a star is a stain,  
And the leaves with thy litanies written,  
Our Lady of Pain.

On thy bosom though many a kiss be,  
There are none such as knew it of old.  
Was it Alciphron once or Arisbe,  
Male ringlets or feminine gold,  
That thy lips met with under the statue,  
Whence a look shot out sharp after thieves  
From the eyes of the garden-god at you  
Across the fig-leaves?
Then still, through dry seasons and moister,
One god had a wreath to his shrine;
Then love was the pearl of his oyster,\(^1\)
And Venus rose red out of wine.
We have all done amiss, choosing rather
Such loves as the wise gods disdain;
Intercede for us thou with thy father,
Our Lady of Pain.

In spring he had crowns of his garden,
Red corn in the heat of the year,
Then hoary green olives that harden
When the grape-blossom freezes with fear;
And milk-budded myrtles with Venus
And vine-leaves with Bacchus he trod;
And ye said, ‘We have seen, he hath seen us,
A visible God.’

What broke off the garlands that girt you?
What sundered you spirit and clay?
Weak sins yet alive are as virtue
To the strength of the sins of that day.
For dried is the blood of thy lover,
Ipsithilla, contracted the vein;
Cry aloud, ‘Will he rise and recover,
Our Lady of Pain?’

Cry aloud; for the old world is broken:
Cry out; for the Phrygian is priest,
And rears not the bountiful token
And spreads not the fatherly feast.
From the midstof Ida, from shady
Recesses that murmur at morn,
They have brought and baptized her, Our Lady,
A goddess new-born.

\(^1\)Nam te praecipue in suis urbibus colit ora
Hellespontia, ceteris ostrosior oris.
\textit{Catull. Carm.} xviii.
But the worm shall revive thee with kisses;
Thou shalt change and transmute as a god,
As the rod to a serpent that hisses,
As the serpent again to a rod.
Thy life shall not cease though thou doff it;
Thou shalt live until evil be slain,
And good shall die first, said thy prophet,
Our Lady of Pain.

Did he lie? did he laugh? does he know it,
Now he lies out of reach, out of breath,
Thy prophet, thy preacher, thy poet,
Sin's child by incestuous Death?
Did he find out in fire at his waking,
Or discern as his eyelids lost light,
When the bands of the body were breaking
And all came in sight?

Who has known all the evil before us,
Or the tyrannous secrets of time?
Though we match not the dead men that bore us
At a song, at a kiss, at a crime—
Though the heathen outface and outlive us,
And our lives and our longings are twain—
Ah, forgive us our virtues, forgive us,
Our Lady of Pain.

Who are we that embalm and embrace thee
With spices and savours of song?
What is time, that his children should face thee?
What am I, that my lips do thee wrong?
I could hurt thee—but pain would delight thee;
Or caress thee—but love would repel;
And the lovers whose lips would excite thee
Are serpents in hell.

Who now shall content thee as they did,
Thy lovers, when temples were built
And the hair of the sacrifice braided
And the blood of the sacrifice spilt,
In Lampsacus fervent with faces,
In Aphaca red from thy reign,
Who embraced thee with awful embraces,
Our Lady of Pain?

Where are they, Cotyttio or Venus,
Astarte or Ashtaroth, where?
Do their hands as we touch come between us?
Is the breath of them hot in thy hair?
From their lips have thy lips taken fever,
With the blood of their bodies grown red?
Hast thou left upon earth a believer
If these men are dead?

They were purple of raiment and golden,
Filled full of thee, fiery with wine,
Thy lovers, in haunts unbeholden,
In marvellous chambers of thine.
They are fled, and their footprints escape us,
Who appraise thee, adore, and abstain,
O daughter of Death and Priapus,
Our Lady of Pain.

What ails us to fear overmeasure,
To praise thee with timorous breath,
O mistress and mother of pleasure,
The one thing as certain as death?
We shall change as the things that we cherish,
Shall fade as they faded before,
As foam upon water shall perish,
As sand upon shore.
We shall know what the darkness discovers,  
   If the grave-pit be shallow or deep;  
And our fathers of old, and our lovers,  
   We shall know if they sleep not or sleep.  
We shall see whether hell be not heaven,  
   Find out whether tares be not grain,  
And the joys of thee seventy times seven,  
   Our Lady of Pain.

The Garden of Proserpine

Here, where the world is quiet;  
   Here, where all trouble seems  
Dead winds’ and spent waves’ riot  
   In doubtful dreams of dreams;  
I watch the green field growing  
   For reaping folk and sowing,  
For harvest-time and mowing,  
   A sleepy world of streams.

I am tired of tears and laughter,  
   And men that laugh and weep;  
Of what may come hereafter  
   For men that sow to reap:  
I am weary of days and hours,  
   Blown buds of barren flowers,  
Desires and dreams and powers  
   And everything but sleep.

Here life has death for neighbour,  
   And far from eye or ear  
Wan waves and wet winds labour,  
   Weak ships and spirits steer;  
They drive adrift, and whither  
   They wot not who make thither;  
But no such winds blow hither,  
   And no such things grow here.

No growth of moor or coppice,  
   No heather-flower or vine,  
But bloomless buds of poppies,  
   Green grapes of Proserpine;  
Pale beds of blowing rushes  
   Where no leaf blooms or blushes  
Save this whereout she crushes  
   For dead men deadly wine.

Pale, without name or number,  
   In fruitless fields of corn,  
They bow themselves and slumber  
   All night till light is born;  
And like a soul belated,  
   In hell and heaven unmated,  
By cloud and mist abated  
   Comes out of darkness morn.

Though one were strong as seven,  
   He too with death shall dwell,  
Nor wake with wings in heaven,  
   Nor weep for pains in hell;  
Though one were fair as roses,  
   His beauty clouds and closes;  
And well though love reposes,  
   In the end it is not well.

Pale, beyond porch and portal,  
   Crowned with calm leaves, she stands  
Who gathers all things mortal  
   With cold immortal hands;  
Her languid lips are sweeter  
   Than love's who fears to greet her  
To men that mix and meet her  
   From many times and lands.
NOTES

POEMS AND BALLADS

A Ballad of Life and A Ballad of Death

Swinburne relished the most lurid accounts of Lucrezia Borgia’s cruelty and sexual adventurousness, as in Victor Hugo’s Lucrèce Borgia (1833), which he read at Eton, and Alexandre Dumas’s Crimes Célèbres (1839–1842). He would also have known of Byron’s theft of a strand of her hair and the poem by Landor which it inspired, ‘On Seeing a Hair of Lucretia Borgia’ (1825, 1846). In the early 1860s he had written part of a projected long story about Borgia; Randolph Hughes, who edited the fragment in 1942, sifts through the evidence for Swinburne’s sources for that work. The two poems open Poems and Ballads with Swinburne’s favourite femme fatale and, in addition, introduce the volume as a whole; the roses in the envoy to the first poem refer to the poems in the collection.

A central figure in the brilliant court at Ferrara, Borgia had received sophisticated verse in her praise (from Bembo and Ariosto among others). Swinburne’s two poems are ‘Italian canzoni of the exactest type’, in the words of William Rossetti, who adds that they have taken ‘the tinge which works of this class have assumed in Mr. Dante G. Rossetti’s volume of translations The Early Italian Poets [1861]’. That is, they consist of several stanzas in a rhyme scheme which is unique to each poem, include both pentameter and trimeter lines, and conclude with an envoy. Rossetti’s drawing of a woman playing a lute surrounded by three lecherous men, a work that evolved into his watercolour of Borgia, has also been adduced as an influence (cf. Virginia Surtees’ catalogue raisonné of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s paintings and drawings, catalogue numbers 47 and 48).

The rhyme ‘moon’ and ‘swoon’ (lines 5–6, ‘A Ballad of Life’) occurs in Tennyson’s ‘Fatima’ (1832), an adaptation of Sappho. For the blue eyelds (line 8, ‘A Ballad of Life’) as a sign of either fatigue or pregnancy, see Leah Marcus, Unediting the Renaissance, 1996, pp. 5–17. The phrase ‘whole soul’ (line 65, ‘A Ballad of Life’) is common in Tennyson and Browning as well as in Swinburne; it occurs twice in ‘Fatima’. ‘Sendaline’ (line 41, ‘A Ballad of Death’) is sendal, a thin rich silken material (the OED cites Swinburne alone for the form ‘sendaline’). The phrase ‘who knows not this’ (cf. line 86, ‘A Ballad of Death’) appears in Edward Young’s Night Thoughts (Night II, line 386) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s translation of a sonnet by Bonagiuanta Urbiciani, da Lucca, ‘Of Wisdom and Foresight’ (1861).

The diction is frequently biblical: for example, ‘righteous’ (line 70, ‘A Ballad of Life’), ‘lift up thine eyes’ (line 54, ‘A Ballad of Death’), ‘vesture’ (line 79, ‘A Ballad of Death’). ‘Honeycomb’, ‘spikenard’, and ‘frankincense’ (lines 64–7, ‘A Ballad of Death’) appear in the Song of Solomon. Swinburne’s diction throughout the collection is influenced by the Authorized Version; I have usually given references only in cases of allusion. In 1876, Swinburne planned to ‘subjoin in the very smallest capitals’ the words ‘In honorem D. Lucretiae Estensis Borgiae’ and ‘In obitum D. Lucretiae Estensis Borgiae’ under the titles of the respective poems (Lang, 3, 200).


Laus Veneris

The ‘Praise of Venus’ is Swinburne’s adaptation of the Tannhäuser legend, which emerged shortly after the time of the minnesinger’s death (c. 1270) in an anonymous ballad that tells the story of the knight who had been living in Venus Mountain but who, sated with pleasure, feels remorse and travels to Rome in order to obtain absolution. The pope, leaning on a dry dead staff, tells him that it will sprout leaves before the poet receive God’s grace. Swinburne’s fictitious French epigraph takes up the story at this point:

Then he said weeping, Alas, too unhappy a man and a cursed sinner, I shall never see the mercy and pity of God. Now I shall go from here and hide myself within Mount Horsel [Venus Mountain], entreating my sweet lady Venus of her favour and loving mercy, since for her love I shall be damned to Hell for all eternity. This is the end of all my feats of arms and all my pretty songs. Alas, too beautiful was the face and the eyes of my lady, it was on an evil day that I saw them. Then he went away groaning and returned to her, and lived sadly there in great love with his lady. Afterward it happened that the pope one day saw fine red and white flowers and many leafy buds break forth from his staff, and in this way he saw all the bark become green again. Of which he was much afraid and moved, and he took great pity on this knight who had departed without hope like a man who is miserable and damned. Therefore he sent many messengers after him to bring him back, saying that he would have God’s grace and good absolution for his great sin of love. But they never
saw him; for this poor knight remained forever beside Venus, the high strong goddess, in the amorous mountainside.

*Book of the great wonders of love, written in Latin and French by Master Antoine Gaget. 1530.*

The story was popular among German Romantic writers. Ludwig Tieck introduced it in his story ‘Der getreue Eckard und der Tannhäuser’ (1799); Swinburne may have read the translation Thomas Carlyle made in 1827. The ballad itself became well known early in the century when it was printed in a collection of folksongs in 1806 and retold later by Grimm; Clemens Brentano, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Joseph von Eichendorff, Franz Grillparzer, and others also made use of it. Heinrich Heine’s poem ‘Der Tannhäuser. Eine Legende’ (1847) was a source for Wagner’s opera, which Baudelaire defended in *La Revue européenne* after its first performance in Paris in 1861. However, neither Wagner nor Baudelaire’s comment were direct sources for Swinburne; at most he could have read about the opera, and he received Baudelaire’s pamphlet only after he had written the poem. (See, however, Anne Walder, *Swinburne’s Flowers of Evil*, 1976, p. 88.) Swinburne may have known William Morris’s ‘The Hill of Venus’ (published in 1870 in *The Earthly Paradise* but according to his daughter written in the early sixties).

Clyde Hyder in ‘Swinburne’s *Laws Veneris* and the Tannhäuser Legend’ (PMLA, 45.4, December 1930, 1201–13) sorts out the different cases for influences and sources, one of which he identifies as a translation of the Tannhäuser ballad that appeared in the newspaper *Once a Week* on 17 August 1861. For Burne-Jones’s paintings of the subject (the earliest begun in 1861, the most famous painted in 1873–8) and their relation to Swinburne, see Kirsten Powell, ‘Burne-Jones, Swinburne, and *Laws Veneris*’ (in *Pre-Raphaelism and Medievalism in the Arts*, ed. Liana Cheney, 1992). While visiting Fantin-Latour’s studio in Paris in 1863, Swinburne saw a sketch of the Tannhäuser in the Venuesberg. J. W. Thomas in *Tannhäuser: Man and Legend* (1974) provides information about Tannhäuser, the legend, and its later uses.

The poem is a dramatic monologue written in the stanza Edward Fitz-Gerald used to translate the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám (1859); Swinburne, however, links pairs of stanzas by rhyming their third lines. In the poem, Venus has survived into the Middle Ages, but her stature has been diminished; nonetheless, we have glimpses of her former power both in its destructive aspect (lines 117–37, for example, include Adonis, the favourite of Aphrodite, killed by a boar) and in her incarnation as Venus Anadyomene, rising from the sea (lines 389–92).

Swinburne’s vision of hell is indebted to Dante’s second circle of hell, reserved for lustful sinners. Helen, Cleopatra, and Semiramis in lines 193–204 recall the sequence Semiramis, Cleopatra, and Helen in *Inferno* 5: 52–63. Swinburne’s description of Semiramis draws loosely on Assyrian art, knowledge of which, thanks to Henry Layard and the British Museum, had entered both popular culture and works by Tennyson and Rossetti. The line immediately following the description of the lustful sinners in Swinburne, ‘Yea, with red sin the faces of them shine’ (line 205), is modelled on the line ‘culpa rubet vultus meus’ from ‘Dies Irae’, as Lafourd’s points out.

‘Great-chested’ in line 204 does not appear in the *OED*, but ‘deep-chested’ occurs in Landor, Tennyson, and Longfellow. For the ‘long lights’ of line 216, cf. the ‘long light’ of Tennyson’s *The Princess* (1847; the song between Parts 3 and 4). ‘Doubt’ in line 252 means ‘suspect’, and ‘teen’ in that line means ‘grief’. ‘Slotwise’ in line 267, for which the *OED* gives Swinburne as the first citation, is derived from ‘slot’, the track of an animal. ‘Springe’ and ‘gin’ in lines 271–2 are both snares, the latter in this case for men. ‘Vair’ in line 278 is fur from squirrel. The elder-tree of line 305 is the European *Sambucus nigra* and not the American *Sambucus canadensis*, which does not grow large. ‘To save my soul alive’ (line 331) resembles Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s line ‘To save his dear son’s soul alive’ in ‘Sister Helen’, line 192 (1853, 1857, 1870; see also his translation of Cavalcanti’s sonnet to Pope Boniface VIII, 1861, line 13). It derives from Ezekiel 18:27. ‘Wizard’ in line 338 is an adjective meaning ‘bewitched’ or ‘enchanted’. Lines 369–70 recall James Shirley’s couplet ‘Only the actions of the just / Smell sweet, and blossom in their dust’, from one of his most famous lyrics, ‘The glories of our blood and state’, at the end of *The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses*.

‘Explicit’ in the closing formula is a medieval Latin word which came to be regarded as a verb in the third person singular, meaning ‘here ends’ (a book, piece, etc.). It was current until the sixteenth century.


There is a reproduction of the first four stanzas of a manuscript of ‘Laws Veneris’ in Wise’s *1919 Bibliography*.

*Phaedra*

Euripides, Seneca and Racine wrote the major extant dramas about Hippolytus and Phaedra, but the combination of masochism and sexual aggressiveness in Swinburne’s Phaedra is not derived from his models. Despite his contempt for Euripides and very limited esteem of Racine, he includes a discriminating comparison of *Hippolytus* and *Phèdre* in his essay on Philip Massinger (1889; reprinted in *Contemporaries of Shakespeare*, pp. 201–2).
Ityulus

The poem is a monologue by Philomela, the sister of Procne, who is the wife of Tereus, the king of Thrace (line 48). He lusts after Philomela, rapes her, and then cuts off her tongue and hides her. Philomela tells her story by weaving the events in the design of a tapestry (line 52), which she sends to Procne. The sisters revenge themselves by killing Ityulus, the son of Tereus and Procne, and cooking him. Procne feeds him to Tereus and afterwards reveals what they have done; Tereus pursues them in a rage, but they are saved by the gods, who turn Philomela into a nightingale (line 19) and Procne into a swallow.

In Daulis (line 48), in central Greece, the women murdered Ityulus, according to Thucydides (ii. 29). Swinburne appears to locate it on the Thracian coast, perhaps mistaking a detail from Matthew Arnold's 'Philomela' (1853). The wet roofs and lintels (line 51) may suggest the blood of Ityulus; cf. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 6, line 646 ('manant penetralia tabo', 'the room drips with gore'). 'Ityulus' is the name in Homer; 'Irys' is more common. In Greek poetry, it is Procne who becomes the nightingale.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 6, is the major source of the story. There are references to it in Homer (Odyssey, Book 19, lines 518-523), Aeschylus (Agamemnon, lines 1140-9 and Suppliantes, lines 58-67), and Apollodorus. In addition to Matthew Arnold, Catulle Mendes was inspired by the legend; see 'Le Rossignol' in *Philoméla* (1863), which appeared shortly before Swinburne wrote his poem.

Swinburne combines iambics and anapests in stanzas of six tetrameters rhyming *abcabc*. 'Swallow' is a constant feminine rhyme in each stanza.

Anactoria

Swinburne's admiration for Sappho was unbounded. In a posthumously published appreciation ('Sappho', *The Saturday Review*, 21 February 1914, p. 228) he wrote:

Judging even from the mutilated fragments fallen within our reach from the broken altar of her sacrifice of song, I for one have always agreed with all Grecian tradition in thinking Sappho to be beyond all question and comparison the very greatest poet that ever lived. Eschylus is the greatest poet who ever was also a prophet; Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist who ever was also a poet; but Sappho is simply nothing less — as she is certainly nothing more — than the greatest poet who ever was at all. Such at least is the simple and sincere profession of my lifelong faith.
(line 198) is a reflection of light. In line 302, the lotus produces dreamy forgetfulness, and Lethe is the river of oblivion.


The poem is in heroic couplets; all sentences come to a stop at the end of a line.

_Hymn to Proserpine_

Constantine I, the first Christian Roman emperor, issued the Edict of Milan in 313 with the Eastern Roman emperor Licinius; it established religious toleration of Christians and protected their legal rights. Constantine’s policy went further than official toleration, and he began to establish Rome as a Christian state. His nephew Julian (emperor from 361 to 363) announced his conversion to paganism in 361 and hence is known as Julian the Apostate (see L. M. Findlay, ‘The Art of Apostasy’, Victorian Poetry 28:1, Spring 1999, pp. 69–78, for the Victorian controversies over ‘national apostasy’ and the image of Julian). He became a fierce opponent of Christians, but his opposition had no lasting effect; his legendary dying words (‘Vicisti, Galilaeae’, ‘Thou hast conquered, Galilaei’) were reported in Greek by Theodoret, the Bishop of Cyrhhus, in the fifth century.

Proserpine, or Persephone, is the wife of Hades and the queen (lines 2, 92) of the underworld; the river Lethe (line 36) and poppies (line 97) are associated with the oblivion of death. She is also Kore, a maiden (lines 2, 92) and the daughter of Demeter, the earth (line 93). She and Demeter are the subject of the mysteries at Eleusis. Swinburne contrasts the new queen of heaven (line 76), the Jewish (line 85, ‘slave among slaves’) virgin (lines 75, 81) mother of Christ, with Venus, the former queen. Venus is described as she rose from the sea (lines 78, 86–9); she is the ‘mother of Rome’ (line 80) both as Aeneas’s mother and as Venus Genetrix; and she is called Cytherean (line 73) after her birthplace in Cythera.

‘I have lived long enough’ (line 1) quotes Macbeth’s line from Act V, Scene 3, line 22. ‘Galilean’ (lines 23, 35, 74) is ‘used by pagans as a contemptuous designation for Christ’ (OED). In Greek ‘unspeakable things’ (line 52, ἀπόφασις) can refer to the Eleusinian mysteries. L. M. Findlay (Swinburne, Selected Poems, 1982, pp. 257–8) suggests that the description of the wave of the world (line 54) is indebted to Turner’s painting _The Slave Ship_ (1834) and Ruskin’s defence of the painting in _Modern Painters_ (1843). ‘Viewless ways’ (line 87) may have been influenced by Shakespeare’s ‘viewless winds’ (Measure for Measure, Act III, Scene 1, line 124) or Keats’s ‘viewless wings’ (‘Ode to a Nightingale’, line 33, 1820). The footnote in Greek by Epictetus is the source of Swinburne’s line 108; the remark survives in Marcus Aurelius’s _Meditations_, 4.41.


The metre is hexameter with both iambics and anapests. The rhyme is in couplets, and there is an internal rhyme at the end of the third foot. All sentences come to a full stop at the end of a metrical line except for line 105.

_Ilicet_

‘Ilicet’ is a Latin exclamation of dismay, ‘It’s all over.’

The stooped urn (line 49) is tilted, inclined (the only OED citation for this meaning); to ‘flash’ is to rise and dash, as with the tide. ‘Date’ (line 195) is the ‘limit, term or end of a period of time’ (obsolete or archaic, _OED_).

For ‘no memory, no memorial’ (line 39), cf. Milton, _Paradise Lost_ Book 1, line 362 and Nehemiah 2:20. ‘Blood-red’ (line 74) is a common colour in Shelley, Tennyson, and Morris. For watching and not sleeping (line 123), cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:6 and recall Gethsemane.

The metre is iambic tetrameter; the six-line stanza rhymes _aabcb_, where ‘a’ and ‘c’ are feminine rhymes.

_Hermaphroditus_

Swinburne’s appended note ‘At Museum of the Louvre, March 1863’ indicates that the poem is a response to the Hellenistic sculpture of the sleeping Hermaphroditus, in the Louvre. On the topic of the androgynous and hermaphroditic in this period, see A. J. L. Busst, ‘The Image of the Androgynous in the Nineteenth Century’ in Ian Fletcher’s _Romantic Mythologies_ (1967), and Franca Franchi’s _Le Metamorfosi di Zambinella_ (1991). Busst contrasts the theme of hermaphroditism as the perfection of human existence (the androgynous universal man of the Saint-Simonians and others), current in the first half of the nineteenth century, with the decadent
hermaphrodite of the later nineteenth century. The latter was popularized by Henri de Latouche’s once famous Fragoletta (1829); Gautier (Mademoiselle de Maupin, 1836, and ‘Contralto’, 1852), Balzac (Séraphîta, 1835, and La Fille aux yeux d’or, 1835), and Baudelaire (Les Bijoux, 1857) were also influenced by it.

In defence of his choice of subject, Swinburne quotes from Shelley’s description in ‘The Witch of Atlas’ (1820) of the Louvre sculpture; see ‘Notes on Poems and Reviews’ (Appendix 1). For hermaphroditism in Swinburne’s early unpublished Laugh and Lie Down, see Edward Philip Schuldt, Four Early Unpublished Plays of Algernon Charles Swinburne (doctoral dissertation from the University of Reading, 1976), pp. 206–10; he corrects all previous discussions. In Lesbia Brandon, begun in 1864, Swinburne emphasizes the feminine aspects of Herbert Seyton’s appearance and his likeness to his sister (see, for example, pp. 3, 16, 30, 34 and 164 in Hughes’s edition, 1952).

Ovid (Metamorphoses, Book 4) is the main source for the story of Hermaphroditus. Salamis (line 53), the nymph of a spring, falls in love with him, but he rejects her. She prays that the gods will unite them; the gods do so, forming one being.

For the figurative use of ‘pleasure-house’ (line 24), contrast Tennyson, ‘The Palace of Art’ (1832, 1842): ‘I built my soul a lordly pleasure-house, / Wherein at ease for aye to dwell’ (lines 1–2).

The four sonnets are of the Italian kind, with two quatrains and two tercets. Note that Swinburne only uses four rhymes per sonnet, as Rossetti does occasionally in A House of Love (including several early sonnets). The first three sonnets rhyme abba abba cde dcd; the last rhymes abba abba cdd ccd.

Frigoletta

William Rossetti writes that the poem ‘has to be guessed at, and is guessed at with varying degrees of horror and repugnance: it is only readers of De Latouche’s novel of the same name who can be certain that they see how much it does, and how much else it does in no wise, mean.’ Latouche’s novel (1829) narrates the story of the hermaphrodite Fragoletta (the name is a diminutive of the Italian word for strawberry and occurs in Casanova and elsewhere); much of the plot is concerned with the complications of bisexual love. Swinburne was dismissive of Latouche’s art, and in A Note on Charlotte Brontë, 1877, he referred to the ‘Rhadamantine author of Fragoletta’; who certainly, to judge by his own examples of construction, had some right to pronounce with authority how a novel ought not to be written; nonetheless, he was more excited in private, as when he wrote that he dare not trust another work of Latouche’s out of his sight (Lang, 1, 46). Swinburne read Gautier’s 1839 review of a drama of the same name as Latouche’s novel, in which he wrote that ‘Fragoletta est un titre pimpant, égrillard, croustilleux, qui promet beaucoup de choses très-difficile à dire, et surtout à représenter’ (‘Fragoletta is a chic, ribald, spicy title which promises many things very difficult to say and above all to represent’).

The five-line iambic stanza consists of two tetrameters, two trimeters, and a dimeter, rhyming abaab.

Rondel

The rondel is Swinburne’s naturalization of the French rondeau, a fixed form that nonetheless has had many variations. Clément Marot and others established the most common formula: a poem in octosyllabic or decasyllabic lines, consisting of three stanzas made of five, three and five lines respectively. There are only two rhymes, and a refrain (called the rentrement) made from the first half of the first line is added, unrhymed, to the end of the second and third stanzas. Much of the skill of the rondeau is in placing the rentrement in new contexts. The form was popular in the first half of the sixteenth century in France, but was disdained by the Pléiade and long thereafter. Alfred de Musset used it for some of his light verse in the nineteenth century. Théodore de Banville included four rondaux in his first book, Les Caritatides (1842); Swinburne referred to Banville’s ‘most flexible and brilliant style’ (though one which ‘hardly carries weight enough to tell across the Channel’) in his 1862 essay on Baudelaire.

‘These many years’ is a biblical phrase; see Ezra 5:11, Luke 15:29 (the parable of the prodigal son) and Romans 15:23.

Swinburne adapts the form by using one constant rhyme throughout the poem (in iambic pentameter) and one new rhyme per stanza. The rentrement becomes a rhymed iambic dimeter at the end of each stanza. Two manuscripts of the poem are reproduced in John S. Mayfield’s These Many Years (1947).

Satia Te Sanguine

The title, ‘glut thyself with blood’, derives from the phrase ‘satia te sanguine quem sitisti’ (‘glut thyself with the blood for which thou hast thirsted’), uttered by Queen Tomyris of the Massagetai as she dropped the severed head of Cyrus, the great Persian king who had treacherously killed her son, into a bowl of human blood. The story is recounted by Herodotus (at the end of the first book of his History) and other ancient sources (see Pauyla
is composed of nine quatrains with cross rhymes. The remaining stanzas of the section are made of tetrameter lines of both iambics and anapests rhyming 
ababc. The third section consists of iambic trimeter lines in stanzas rhyming ababc

Anima Anceps

The title means literally ‘two-fold soul’. The source is a formula which Victor Hugo is likely to have invented, in Book 8, Chapter 6 of Notre-Dame de Paris (1831):

Alors levant la main sur l’égypienne il s’écria d’une voix funèbre: <I nunc, anima anceps, et sit tibi Deus misericors!>

C'était la redoutable formule dont on avait coutume de clore ces sombres cérémonies. C'était le signal convenu du prêtre au bourreau.

[Then he raised his hand over the gypsy girl and pronounced somberly: ‘Go therefore, divided soul, and may God be merciful to you.’ It was the awful formula by which it was customary to conclude these grim ceremonies. It was the appointed signal of the priest to the hangman.]

Parts of Arthur Clough’s Dipsychus (1865; the title means ‘double-minded’ or ‘double-souled’) were published in 1862 and 1863; Swinburne frequently quotes from the poem in his later letters, while maintaining reservations about Clough’s merits.

For the address to the soul, cf. Hadrian’s lines ‘Animula, vagula, blandula’, translated by Matthew Prior, Byron and others. For the rhyme ‘rafter’ and ‘laughter’ (lines 34 and 35), cf. Shelley’s ‘Lines (“When the lamp is shattered”’) (1824), lines 29 and 31.

It is written in iambic dimeter; the rhyme scheme is aaabccbbddbeeb. All rhymes except for b are feminine.

In the Orchard

The poem is inspired by an anonymous Provençal alba, or dawn-song (a genre without a fixed metre or form in which a lover laments the imminent separation from the other lover at the break of day). It begins ‘En un vergier’ (‘In an orchard’) and consists of six stanzas of four lines each; the last line of each stanza is the refrain ‘Oy Dieus, oy Dieus, de l’abla!, tan tost ve’ (‘Ah God, ah God, the dawn! it comes so fast’). The text was available in editions like F. J. M. Raynouard’s Choix des poésies originales des troubadours (1821) and C. A. F. Mahn’s Gedichte der Troubadours (1856). A convenient modern edition is R. T. Hill and T. C. Bergin, Anthology of the Provençal Troubadours (2nd ed., 1973). For more information about the genre, see Eos: An Enquiry into the Theme of Lovers’ Meetings and Partings at Dawn in Poetry, ed. Arthur T. Hatto, 1965. Pound translated the alba as ‘Alba Innominata’ in 1910. By ‘Provençal burden’ Swinburne indicates that he is adopting the music or undersong of Provençal lyric, rather than offering a translation. ‘Burden’, in addition, refers to the refrain at the end of each stanza.

The OED gives no instance of ‘pleni luego’ (line 23) between c. 1600 and Swinburne in 1878.

The poem is in iambic pentameter and rhymes aabab; the b rhyme (‘soon’ in the refrain) is constant throughout.

A Match

‘Closes’ (line 5) are enclosures. The reference in lines 35–6 is to dice and cards, respectively.

The metre is iambic trimeter, the rhyme scheme is abccaba. The a and c rhymes are feminine.


Faustine

Published in the Spectator, 31 May 1862.

In Notes on Poems and Reviews (Appendix 1) Swinburne explains that ‘the idea that gives [these verses] such life as they have is simple enough: the transmigration of a single soul, doomed as though by accident from the first to all evil and no good, through many ages and forms, but clad always in the same type of fleshly beauty. The chance which suggested to me this poem was one which may happen any day to any man – the sudden sight of a living face which recalled the well-known likeness of another dead for centuries: in this instance, the noble and faultless type of the elder Faustina, as seen in coin and bust.’ (According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the elder Faustina’s coiffure is depicted with a coronal of plaits on top; the
The metre is iambic; ‘devil’ in line 19 ought to be scanned as a monosyllable. The four-line quatrains rhyme abab and alternate between tetrameter and dimeter lines. The last word of each quatrain is ‘Faustine’, for which Swinburne finds forty-one rhymes.

A Cameo

A description of a cameo, with the allegorical figures of Desire, Pain, Pleasure, Satieý, Hate and Death, as well as a crowd of senses, sorrows, sins and strange loves. Strictly speaking, cameos are not painted (line 2). For the title, compare Gautier’s Émaux et Camées (1852) and his intention that ‘chaque pièce [of that collection] devait être un médaillon’. For contemporary sonnets on works of art, recall Rossetti’s ‘Sonnets for Pictures’, published in 1850. For the topic of ekphrasis in general, see John Hollander’s The Gazer’s Spirit (1995).

‘Pash’ (line 8), to smash violently, may be influenced by the intransitive use of the word ‘said of the dashing action of sudden heavy rain... and of the action of beating or striking water as by the feet of the horse’ (OED).

The sonnet is of the Italian sort; it rhymes abba abba cde cde.

Song Before Death

The poem is a translation from a song in Letter 68 of Sade’s Aline et Valcour, his philosophical epistolary novel published in 1795:

Air: Romance de Nina.

Mère adorée, en un moment
La mort t’enlève à ma tendresse!
Toï qui survivis, ô mon amant!
Revien consoler ta maîtresse.
Ah! qu’il revienne (hâ, hêlas! hêlas!
Mais le bien-aimé ne vient pas.

Comme la rose au doux printemps
S’entrouvre au souffle du zephyre,
Mon âme à ces tendres accents
S’ouvrirait de même au désir.
En vain, j’écoute: hêlas! hêlas!
Le bien-aimé ne parle pas.
Before Dawn

The metre is iambic trimeter. The stanza rhymes \textit{aaab\textsuperscript{c}c}, where \textit{a} and \textit{c} have feminine endings. On rhyming triplets, see Swinburne’s discussion of Robert Herrick (1891; reprinted in \textit{Studies in Prose and Poetry}, 1894). With ‘no abiding’ (line 71), compare 1 Chronicles 29:15, ‘our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding’.

Dolores

Dolores is Swinburne’s anti-madonna; her name derives from the phrase ‘Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows’ (which, in French, is Swinburne’s sub-title). ‘Our Lady of Pain’, Swinburne’s pagan darker Venus, is his answer to the Christian ‘Our Lady of Sorrows’, although his paganism is tinged with his own interest in sadomasochism (see Lang, 1, 123). Words and phrases from the Bible (lines 10 and 439: Matthew 18:21–2; line 137: Matthew 9:17 and elsewhere; lines 371–2: Exodus 7:9–12; line 328: Matthew 13:24–40), the Loreto Litany of the Blessed Virgin (line 19 and ‘tower of ivory’; line 21 and ‘mystical rose’; line 22 and ‘house of gold’), the prayers of the Mass (e.g. lines 133–4 and the taking of communion), the ‘Ave Maria’ (line 39 and ‘blessed among women’), and the Lord’s Prayer (lines 279 and 391) are blasphemously deployed. Baudelaire’s poems ‘À une Madame’ and ‘Les Litanies de Satan’ (1857) are models for Swinburne; he writes admiringly about these two poems in particular in his 1862 \textit{Spectator} review of \textit{Les Fleurs du Mal}.

Libitina (lines 51, 423) is the Roman goddess of burials, misidentified since antiquity with Venus; Priapus (lines 51, 423) is the ithyphallic god of gardens (lines 303, 313), whose cult was centred in Lampsacus (line 405). The prayer to Dolores to intercede with her father Priapus on our behalf (line 311) is a parody of Catholic prayer. Priapus is the subject of three poems once attributed to Catullus (line 340); Swinburne quotes two lines of one of these in a note to line 307: ‘for in its cities the coast of the Hellespont, more oStoreous than most, honours you particularly’. One of his lyrics (\textit{Carmina} 32) is addressed to the girl Ipsitilla (cf. Swinburne’s line 326).

Swinburne reverses the usual associations of cypress and myrtle in lines 175–6. The Thalassian in line 223 is Aphrodite Anadyomene, risen again in Roman cruelty. The gladiatorial combats follow in the next stanzas, for which Lafourcade adds the preface to Gautier’s \textit{Mademoiselle de Maupin} (1835) as an influence. Nero is introduced in lines 249–56 (see Linda Dowling, ‘Nero and the Aesthetics of Torture’, \textit{The Victorian Newsletter}, Fall 1984, pp. 2–5, on the aestheticized Nero in the nineteenth century). Alciphron and Ariste (line 299) are names that occur in Greek history and mythology, but Swinburne is most likely using them simply as the names of a male and a female lover.

The stanzas beginning at line 329 describe Cybele, the ‘Great Mother of the Gods’, whose worship, characterized by ecstatic states and insensibility to pain, arose in Phrygia (line 330), where her main cult was located on Mount Dindymus (line 345). It later spread to Greece and Rome, where one of her Latin names was the ‘Idaean Mother’ (line 333). Her priests castrated themselves as Cybele’s lover, Attis, did; Catullus, \textit{Carmina} 63, relates that legend (line 340). In ‘Notes on Poems and Reviews’ (Appendix 1), Swinburne contrasts Dolores, ‘the darker Venus’, with both the Virgin Mary and Cybele.

Cotys or Cotyto (line 409, Cotytto) was a Thracian goddess later worshipped organically in Corinith and Sicily as well as in Thrace. Astarte (in Greek) or Ashtaroth (in the Bible) are names for Ishtar, the Mesopotamian goddess of love and war. Privately, Swinburne associates the ‘European Cotytto’ and the ‘Asiatic Aphrodite of Aphaca’ (Lang, 1, 406) with Sade and with sadomasochistic indulgence (see Lang, 1, 312).

‘Seventy seven times seven’ (lines 10 and 439) recalls Matthew 18:22. J. C. Maxwell (\textit{Notes and Queries}, Vol. 21, January 1974, p. 15) offers a parallel to and possible source of line 159 in Thackeray’s \textit{The Newcomes} (1855), Chapter 65, ‘before marriages and cares and divisions had separated us’. Perhaps ‘live torches’ (line 245) refer to humans burnt alive; however, the \textit{OED} offers no example of such a usage. A ‘visible God’ (line 320) echoes \textit{Timon of Athens}, Act 4, Scene 3. The rod in lines 371–2 recalls Aaron’s rod in Exodus 7. Line 379 may invoke Sade, and line 380 alludes to the allegory of sin and death in \textit{Paradise Lost}, Book 2; the \textit{OED} records an obsolete usage of ‘incestuous’ meaning ‘begotten of incest’. The tares and grain of line 438 recall Christ’s parable in Matthew 13.

The metre combines iambcs and anapests in seven trimeter lines concluded by the dimerter eighth line, which always consists of an iamb followed by an anapest; in every other stanza, the refrain is ‘Our Lady of Pain’. The rhyme scheme is \textit{ababcd}, where \textit{a} and \textit{c} are regularly feminine; ‘Dolores’ appears nine times in this position. The metre and stanza is very close to those of some poems by William Prad, such as ‘Song for the Fourteenth of February’ (1827), except that Swinburne’s last line is shorter by a foot than Prad’s and so clinches each stanza. Swinburne read Prad at school and respected his work (Lang, 3, 314), though cooly (\textit{Studies in Prose and Poetry}, 1891, 1894, p. 100). Byron used the same versification (that is, with the trimeter final line) in ‘Stanzas to [Augusta]’ (1816); however, Swinburne was critical of Byron for ‘having . . . so bad an ear for metre’ (\textit{Essays and}}

The initial 'runtity-tuntity-tum' of Shenstone and Cowper; the comic improvements of Gay and others; the apparently casual inspiration which made Byron get rid of the jolt and jingle, by the simple expedient of alternative double rhyme, in Händel's Garden of Roses; the perfecting of this form by Praed—these surely form a genealogical tree of sufficient interest as they stand.

A. E. Housman refers to this stanza 'which Swinburne dignified and strengthened till it yielded a combination of speed and magnificence which nothing in English had possessed before' (lecture on Swinburne delivered in 1910).

There is a reproduction of two stanzas of 'Dolores' in Wise's 1919 Bibliography, p. 160.

The Garden of Proserpine

See 'Hymn to Proserpine' (page 334) for the figure of Proserpine, who in this poem stands at the garden-entrance to the world of the dead, wearing a crown of poppies and having prepared a wine of oblivion from the poppies.

At a dinner party in the 1870s, while speaking about Poems and Ballads in relation to his experiences, Swinburne said that there were three poems

which beyond all the rest were autobiographical—'The Triumph of Time', 'Dolores', and 'The Garden of Proserpine'. 'The Triumph of Time' was a monument to the sole real love of his life—a love which had been the tragic destruction of all his faith in women. 'Dolores' expressed the passion with which he had sought relief, in the madness of the fleshly Venus, from his ruined dreams of the heavenly. 'The Garden of Proserpine' expressed his revolt against the flesh and its fevers, and his longing to find a refuge from them in a haven of undisturbed rest...

(W. H. Mallock, Memoirs of Life and Literature, 1920; quoted in Rooksby, p. 102.)

Wordsworth's 'A slumber did my spirit seal' (1800) and Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' (1819) famously invoke the easeful or restful condition of death. Tennyson's 'The Lotos-Eaters' (1832), Matthew Arnold's 'Requiescat' (1853), and Christina Rossetti's sonnet 'Rest' (1862) continue this Romantic theme.

The imagery of line 76 derives from falconry. 'Diurnal' (line 94) may recall Wordsworth ('A slumber did my spirit seal').

The metre is iambic trimeter, and the rhyme scheme is ababcbb, where b is the only masculine rhyme. Christina Rossetti frequently used three consecutive rhymes in poems, though not with feminine endings; cf. a poem in a similar mood, 'Dream-Land' (1862). Swinburne discusses the triplet rhyme in a short piece on Robert Herrick (Studies in Prose and Poetry, [1891] 1894, p. 46), where he praises an instance of it in Herrick as 'worthy of Miss Rossetti herself; and praise of such work can go no higher'. See the note to 'A Match' for examples of iambic trimeter octaves. The octave of 'The Garden of Proserpine' is identical to the stanza of Dryden's song 'Farewell ungrateful traitor' from Act 5 of The Spanish Fryar. Saintsbury, in A History of English Prosody (1906, Vol. 2, p. 379), writes that Dryden's song 'joins the music of the seventeenth century to that of the nineteenth, and Dryden to Swinburne'.

Hesperia

Hesperia, the west, is the location of the Fortunatae Insulae (line 35), the 'Islands of the Blest', home of the happy dead; see Atalanta in Calydon, lines 510–25. Both Dolores, 'Our Lady of Pain' (line 60), and Proserpine, 'Our Lady of Sleep' (line 72), are invoked here.

In 1887, Swinburne opposed the inclusion of 'Hesperia' in a selection of his poems on the ground that it was 'too long, too vague, and too dependent on the two preceding poems' (Lang, 5, 208); William Rossetti, in his criticism of 1866, made similar comments.

The metre may be described as a modification of accentual dactylic hexameter /x/x/xx/xx/xx/x/. However, Swinburne had a strong antipathy to the dactyl. In an essay on Coleridge, he disparaged the 'feeble and tuneless form of metre called hexameters in English; if form of metre that may be called which has neither metre nor form' (Essays and Studies, [1869] 1875, p. 272). In his preface to his translation in anapests of the 'Grand Chorus of Birds' from Aristophanes (1886), he famously declared that in English 'all variations and combinations of anapestic, iambic, or trochaic metre are as natural and pliable as all dactylic and spondaic forms of verse are unnatural and abhorrent'.

In this poem he modified the classical metre in two ways: first, his verses rhyme ababcd . . . , where feminine and masculine endings, respectively, alternate. Thus, in every other line, the last foot consists of a single stressed syllable, rather than of two syllables (i.e., it is catalectic). Second, Swinburne introduced 'anacrustic' syllables, as the term then was; that is, he added to the beginning of a line one or two unstressed syllables which precede the six metrical feet and which are not part of the scanion. Otherwise, Swinburne stayed close to the classical metre: he substituted spondees for dactyls, and