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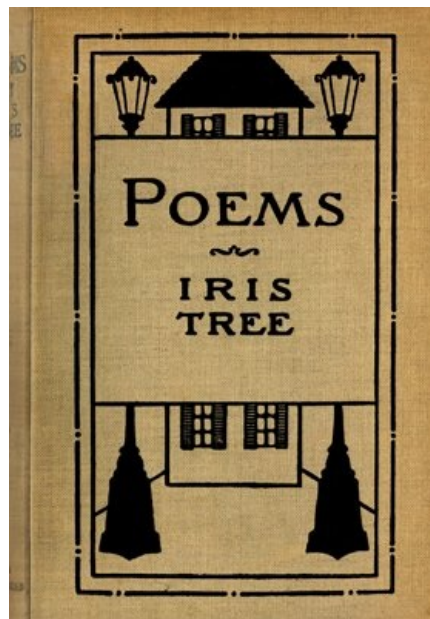
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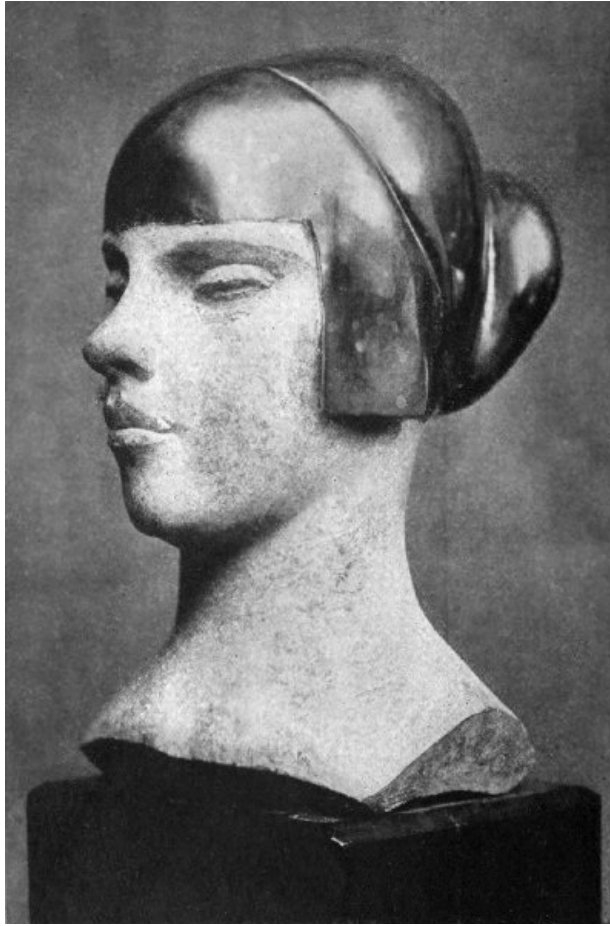
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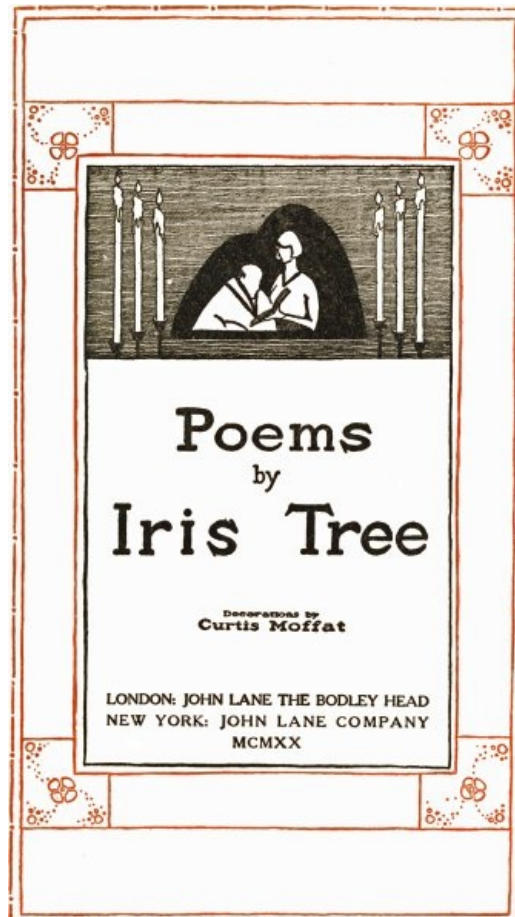
POEMS BY IRIS TREE

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HEAD OF IRIS TREE

By JACOB EPSTEIN





Poems
by
Iris Tree

Decorations by
Curtis Moffat

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ROCKETS AND ASHES



You preach to me of laws, you tie my limbs
With rights and wrongs and arguments of good,
You choke my songs and fill my mouth with hymns,
You stop my heart and turn it into wood.

I serve not God, but make my idol fair
From clay of brown earth, painted bright with blood,
Dressed in sweet flesh and wonder of wild hair
By Beauty's fingers to her changing mood.

The long line of the sea, the straight horizon,
The toss of flowers, the prance of milky feet,
And moonlight clear as glass my great religion,
And sunrise falling on the quiet street.

The coloured crowd, the unrestrained, the gay,
And lovers in the secret sheets of night
Trembling like instruments of music, till the day
Stands marvelling at their sleeping bodies white.

Age creeps upon your timid little faces
Beneath each black umbrella sly and slow,
Proud in the unimportance of your places
You sit in twilight prophesying woe.

So dim and false and grey, take my compassion,
I from my pageant golden as the day
Pity your littleness from all my passion,
Leave you my sins to weep and whine away!

1914

We are the caretakers of empty houses,
The moon leans her slender body against the door,
But the lock is jarred with rust.
The sun looks in through the window,
But its closed shutters are as blinded eyes.
Our souls are full of dead and beautiful things
Like bowls of potpourri,
A dust of petals
Rustling through the tired fingers of a ghost.

1918

From far away the lost adventures gleam,
The print of childhood's feet that dance and run,
The love of her who showed me to the sun
In triumph of creation, who did seem
With vivid spirit like a rainbow stream
To paint the shells, young blossoms, one by one
Each strange and delicate toy, whose hands have spun
The woven cloth of wonder like a dream ...
The row of soldiered books, authority
Sharp as the scales I strummed upon the keys,
The priest who damned the things I dared not praise,
Rebellion, love made sad with mystery—
And like a firefly through the twilit trees
Romance, the golden play-boy of my days.

1917

Give me, O God, the power of laughter still,
I shall have need of humour, deftest foil
Against the army of infuriated pride,
Against the shields of reason, and the spears
Of savage moments, sharp-edged bitterness;
Against the blazoned armour of intolerance,
And all the flags of sentiment waved aloft....

Love, Humour, and Rebellion, go with me,
Three musketeers of faithful following.
We will fear nothing.—Is not laughter brave,
That unconcerned goes rippling through despair?
Is not rebellion brave, that fiercely moves
Against the buttressed prisons of the world?
And is not love the bravest of them all,
So frail to hold his white hands up to Heaven
While the red fists are threatening all around,
And hate is beating on the battledrums?
As d'Artagnan upon a starved grey horse
Goes singing ballads on adventurous roads,
I ride my fancy blithely into danger
To throw my gauntlet at the feet of pride
And stick my roses in the cap of Love....

1916

Winding down the street in wearied gaiety, the barrel-organ dribbled out its song
Merged with the thud of feet forever dallying indifferent and indefinite along.
The houses stood like rows of cripples, some paralysed, some hunch-backed and some bent with age,
They seemed at war, their chimneys threatening, their brows hung heavy in a sombre rage.
Crab-like the children crawled, while always hammering above their heads the scolding shrewish tongue;
They grew as bloodless flowers unflourishing, waxen and pale from out the dust and dung.
Above I saw the strip of sunset fluttering, even as washed-out rags upon the line,
I listened to the sparrows twittering, and the hours ticking in a slow decline.
Then beaded on the hem of evening, the coloured lights were threaded here and there,
Till proud with sweets and plumes and oranges, the shops grew brilliant in the tinsel glare.
Grey was the death-bed of the twilight, shuddering the faint hands of the day stretched to the night,
Fending it off, or feebly wavering over the pallid glints of stolen light.
And grey the faces that were gathering among the fallen ashes of the day,
And red the faces, yellow, flickering, under the lamps upon the long highway.
And some were gashed with smiles, and quaint grimaces of hate and pain and hunger and despair,
And some wore coloured hats and meek frivolities, limp ribbons, and false pansies in their hair,
But all were cold, and all seemed passionless; there shone no zest or splendour in their lives,
Nor hope in anything but holidays, or watching funerals, or taking wives.
I dared not think, for truth rose horrible, slapping the face with coarse uncaring hand,
But like them cheated into merriment, I wilfully refused to understand;
Turned me away from wan-eyed poverty, trod pity underfoot, oh, danced on grief,
Bade the crowd sing and fill my desolation, bade them be glad and hide my disbelief.

16

Strange we so love the world—for presently, out of my window looking on the city,
I blessed the night, and the roofs slumbering all huddled, and I felt no shame nor pity
For all our dusty days of journeying amid the wreck and ruins of our dreams,
Meandering in a bleared forgetfulness, where lethe laps the wharf of sleeping streams.
I only breathed the air, intensified by the ascending breath of million lungs,
And heard the labouring metropolis, quickened by whispers of a million tongues;
And felt a king of splendid loneliness, and felt an atom of the peopled spaces,
And felt again my lordly egoism, one face distinct among the blur of faces.

1913

17

Tranquility stirred by a sudden spasm,
Knives of rain that cut the silence,
Storms that rattle the bones of the forest,
Calm of the marble-terraced night
Charred with the spattering of rockets.

Drums will I hear and battles now,
And the long death howl of wolves by night,
Watching the moon on the forest tops,
Walking with delicate frightened steps
To the slaughter-house of a red sunrise.

1918

I could explain
The complicated lore that drags the soul
From what shall profit him
To gild damnation with his choicest gold.
But you
Are poring over precious books and do not hear
Our plaintive, frivolous songs;
For we in stubborn vanity ascend
On ladders insecure,
Toward the tottering balconies
To serenade our painted paramours;
Caught by the lure of dangerous pale hands,
Oblivion's heavy lids on sleepless eyes
That cheat between unrest and false repose.
And we are haunted
By spectral Joy once murdered in a rage,
Now taking shape of Pleasure,
Disguised in many clothes and skilful masks.
I could disclose
The truth that hangs between our lies
And jostles sleep to semi-consciousness;
Truth, that stings like nettles
Our frail hands dare not pluck
From out our garden's terraced indolence.
We are not happy,
And you make us dumb with loving hands
Reproachful on our lips.
Nor can we sob our sorrows on your breast,
For we have bartered diamonds for glass,
Our tears for smiles,
Eternity for now.

1917

I feel in me a manifold desire
From many lands and times and clamouring peoples,
And I the Queen
Of crowding vagabonds,
Ghosts of lost years in seeming fancy dress,
With pathos of torn laces
And broken swords;
Cut-throats and kings and poets
Who have loved me
In visions wild, not knowing
What I was.
In me no end
Even where the last content
Clasps on my head a crown
Of shining endurance—
I slip from all my robes
Into the rags of a tattered romance;
The stars crowd at the window,
Their jealous destiny
Raps at the door—
They bob and wink and leer,
And I must leave the lamplight for the road
To keep strange company.
Farewell and Hail!

1917

Silence—
Somewhere on earth
There is a purpose that I miss or have forgotten.
The trees stand bolt upright
Like roofless pillars of a broken temple.
There is a purpose in Heaven,
But for me
Nothing.
1917

I should like to say to the world:

I have launched my soul like a ship upon free waters;

Beautiful she stands in the docks with proud masts cutting the sky,

Perfectly poised, her white sails spreading like wings,

Her figurehead a woman with breasts that daunt the spray,

Her flag a flutter of coloured exuberance.

I should like to see her plunging out of the idle harbour

Where the sulky tide drifts scum, and the sailors wrangle and shout,

In a thunder of churning waves ramping before her like dappled stallions,

Blossoming behind her a field of etiolate lilies....

But to the mimicking, plotting, miserly, cynical,

To the rabble and gabble that dance and kill on the quay,

I can only say that my soul is a sleeping gondola

Lulled by a jester's mandolin, till night is atinkle with tunes

And lantern-lights, along the indolent backwaters.

1915

You pass as in a drugged delirium
Wrought strange upon the mind's distraction;
You sing a blasphemous Te Deum
To harlot virgins, and a fraction
Of your fulginous colour passes,
Stains my spirit's great conception
As it dips into your glasses.
I that am the sole exception
To your stillborn, false devices,
I that know you, I that hate you,
I that drank now spit your vices
Through my loathing reinstate you;
Dive once more into the stagnance,
Kiss your cynic lips and drink you,
Concentrate your cruel fragrance,
Steal your flowers before I sink you,
Lift with hate instead of praises,
Show you honour of my scorning,
Garlanded you go to blazes
With my rhymes for your adorning!

1913

O faces that look so coldly at me,
Colder than dawn through the windows of festival,
Colder than dawn with her grey nun's face.
You blame me, you curse me with your eyes,
While your lips are filled with flattering syllables,
With tinkling bells that harass my calm,
Disturb my silence and shatter my thoughts.
Your laughter waltzes like musical boxes,
How can I hear the triumphant symphonies?
The scarlet rhapsodies and beryl-cold sonatas? ...
Ah, strangers, ah, vacant tedious faces,
Bobbing beneath the feathery hats,
You have stolen the wings of birds for your garnishing,
And the stars and the dim pale petals of the sea
To make your breasts resplendent, to glitter your dress,—
How I might love you and weep for you,
Crowning your brows with a wreath of songs
If you could understand my singing,
If you could understand my love!
But you are waltzing with your marionettes
And marching to the music of the clock—
I cannot bear you to watch me
With those cold eyes through which I see,
Emptiness only and dust.

1918

I see myself in many different dresses,
In many moods, and many different places;
All gold amid the grey where solemn faces
Are silence to my mirth—a flame that blesses
From yellow lamp the darkness which oppresses ...
Or mid the dancers in their trivial laces
Aloof, as in the ring a lion paces,
Disdainful of their slander or caresses.
I see myself the child of many races,
Poisoners, martyrs, harlots and princesses;
Within my soul a thousand weary traces
Of pain and joy and passionate excesses—
Eternal beauty that our brief love chases
With snatch of desperate hands and dying tresses.

1917

There are songs enough of love, of joy, of grief:
Roads to the sunset, alleys to the moon;
Poems of the red rose and the golden leaf,
Fantastic faery and gay ballad tune.

The long road unto nothing I will sing,
Sing on one note, monotonous and dry,
Of sameness, calmness and the years that bring
No more emotion than the fear to die.

Grey house, grey house and after that grey house,
Another house as grey and steep and still:
An old cat tired of playing with a mouse,
A sick child tired of chasing down the hill.

Shuffle and hurry, idle feet, and slow,
Grim face and merry face, so ugly all!
Why do you hurry? Where is there to go?
Why are you shouting? Who is there to call?

Lovers still kissing, feverish to drain
Stale juices from the shrivelled fruit of lust:
A black umbrella held up in the rain,
The raindrops making patterns in the dust.

If this distaste I hold for fools is such,
Shall I not spit upon myself as well?
Do I not eat and drink and smile as much?
Do I not fatten also in this hell?

Sadness and joy—if they were melted up,
Things that were great—upon the fires of time
Drop but as soup in the accustomed cup,
Settle in stagnance, trickle into grime.

Faith, freedom, art that fire a man or two
And set him like a pilgrim on his way
With Beauty's face before him—what of you,
Priest, Butcher, Scholar, King, upon that day?

The dullard-masses that no god can save!
If I were God, to rise and strike you down
And break your churches in an angry wave
And make a furious bonfire of your town!

God in a coloured globe, alone and still,
Embroidering wonders with a fearless brain,
On loom of spaces measureless, to fill
The empty air with passion and with pain.

Emblazon all the heavens with desire
And Wisdom delved for in the depths of time—
Thoughts sculptured mountainous, and fancy's fire
Caught in the running swiftness of a rhyme.

Passion high-pedestalled, pangs turned to treasure,
Perfected and undone and built afresh
With concentrated agony and Pleasure ...
If I were God, and not a weight of flesh!

1914

How often, when the thought of suicide
With ghostly weapon beckons us to die,
The ghosts of many foods alluring glide
On golden dishes, wine in purple tide
To drown our whim. Things danced before the eye
Like tasselled grapes to Tantalus: The sly
Blue of a curling trout, the battened pride
Of ham in frills, complacent quails that lie
Resigned to death like heroes—July peas,
Expectant bottles foaming at the brink—
White bread, and honey of the golden bees—
A peach with velvet coat, some prawns in pink,
A slice of beef carved deftly, Stilton cheese,
And cup where berries float and bubbles wink.

1917

It is still something to have cheated God
And bored the Devil with so easy prey,
And in the midst of summer woods to raise
A leafless tree whose stark limbs mock at Heaven,
Flaunting an iron hatred in the midst of hope—
Yet sometimes in the loneliness of night
My buried longings blossom on the boughs,
My wistful longings come out star by star,
Till the great sky is light with my desire,
And on the winds my songs are galloping....
Ah, to what dismal greyness creeps the soul
Too weak, too tired, to struggle from the slough!
My weapons rust, my pen is in the dust,
The moulting feathers plucked from out my wings
Lie dangling in the hats I stole them for.
My heart is floating in a claret cup,
My brain is toppling drunken at the brim,
My life is drowned within the lurid dregs.
I turn and fold my hands in a last appeal,
What heaven shall I pray to and for what,
Now that my songs to penny tunes are set,
And nothing is to save of me but flesh?

1913

What words that move on wings in a long drift
Can waft this silence into weary ears,
And steal into the veins and fingertips
Of restless bodies, like magnificent ships
Proud from the seas that calmly sail through fears,
Mean streets, and miseries, with passage swift.
What words pricked from the stars and shimmering together,
Or swept like little winds through leaves alert,
Can filter through the chinks of bolted doors
Deaf to the clamours knocking without pause,
Steeled with indifference against all hurt,
Deaf to the cry of man, and rack of weather:
To sing the hubbub of this glittering night,
Where all the lamps each with a separate soul
Throb to the ecstasies of dancing life;
And Beauty, gleaming high her magic knife
Cuts free the tethered heart from long control
And flings it like a ball with mad delight
Into the silver lap of the young moon.
What needles quick, what threads, what fingers fine
Can broider tapestries as rich as these,
Stranger than dreams and drifting melodies,
Transparent as the gods we half divine,
Frail as the thoughts that dwindle in a swoon
Ghostly before begetting. Tinged with pain
That glimmers pale on hands we cannot find,
And visioned faces that our dreams create
Born in the land forbidden us of fate
And longed for all our lives ... What words can bind
Forever Joy, that never comes again!

1915

I think myself
The fool of tragedy strutting upon the stage
Where murder creeps and whispers.
The jester clad in piebald tights
Half black, half golden, with no company
Save bells that jingle,
And an effigy,
The grinning image painted like myself
Upon a stick....

I think myself
The fool of comedy mournfully straying
Amid the revellers,
Loving the moon and my own shadow
With its strange solemn gestures—
Loving the painted moon
That lets me play with shadows.

I am the jester on an empty stage
Playing a pantomime
To spectres in the stalls,
Listening at last
For ghostly mirth and phantom hands applauding,
And for some king with decadent tired fingers
To fling a white gardenia at my feet.

1918

The adored, wild, strange, irresistible,
How they fail one at the last!
What is there in your faces
That we should worship with our souls?
Most lovable, perfidious,
Vague—
Molesting even our visions
With treacherous pathos.
O vulgarity, mediocrity, stupidity,
What is it in you that makes us lavish our love,
Covering your meagre bodies
With our passionate mantle, dyed with blood and dreams?
Life and its grey days, and time
Are a thin curtain through which you shadow,
Or a dim glass through which you peer.
You climb in at the windows of our souls
With ladders and stratagems,
You mope in corners with reproachful eyes.
But what do you do for us
Lute players, dancers, deceivers,
Other than lie with red lips
And cajole with tears of beryl?
People—
Men and women with laughable, tragic faces
Winking at love,
Treading our songs and illusions
Under petulant feet!

1917

What do you ask of me with your beauty, what are you urging
Of labour and painful aspiring to flatter your perfection?
What secretness of love with terrible blushes surging
Unseen, have found in you at last their passionate reflection?

What dreams that lovers knew, as sleep with subtle magic
Tore off the rags of life and made her dance with body spangled,
Drew back the vacant hours, the tedious and the tragic,
And showed the glittering souls from bodies we had mangled;—

What visions made you, emblem of longing and love that has died unrequited,
And all lost joys, and tears, and beauty passionately given,
Winked at by folly, skewered by the butcher, danced on and slighted,
That now spring up from death, showing their slayers the colours of Heaven?

You have burst from the ground with your joy, you are pining and bleeding,
Your scent is heavy with sorrowful love; oh, memories clinging,
What do you ask of my soul with such fierceness of pleading,
I that was glad to forget ... What do you need of my singing?

1916

Like flocks of tired birds when autumn comes,
My spirit flags across the darkening fields
And melts into the drabness of the sky
And falls like dust upon the huddled corn.
But many wizened faces brown and sad
Peer from the bushes as I wander past,—
They tell me all those things that old men say
As youth looks up through tears with pallid cheek.
"When you are grey and crooked as ourselves,
When you have bowed before all other gods,
And found them false, then shall you come at last
To that dark King of grief, and he shall bless
Your bread with tears, and manacle your hands,
And call you slave and lover." ...
Shall not a child take Pain for company
And share her loneliness with him?
Does not a youth know tears
In the first bitterness of broken love?
Is Grief so proud a king that none shall come
To seek him save the blind, the halt, the lame? ...
He is a tramp, a beggar, and a clown,
He sits a jester at the feet of kings
And scurries with the leaves in Autumn's train.
He rides the wooden horses at a fair,
And dances with the jiggers on the stage.
Led by the violins of discontent
That whine their music to my listening soul,
I dance with him the dance of withered leaves,
We dance together to the tunes of rain
Played on one note upon the only string.

1913

Oh, just beyond the curve of ideal quest
That changes as a sea wave to the wind,
Beyond the cloud that folds around a star,
And dawn, that stands ajar to let us in,
Lies that to which our loves and dreams have gone,
The paradise of all we might have been,
While we are washed back downwards in the dark
Where tides recede, to dwindle with the foam.

1917

Ah! you, from the small high-walled acre of your lives,
Your windows only looking upon gardens,
Only perceiving love and death and truth
As facts that come to pass,
That pass and leave you still
Within your safe small prisons,
Older, duller,
To walk and talk among the evergreens.
You have never known
Delight of dying slowly,
Poisoned with raptures
In many hues from the slim-cut decanters of death—
The tunes
That dishevel and smooth,
Cajole and melancholize—
The dance
Which is a whirling of leaves
In their last scorn of sorrow
Flung upwards by the wind
Into the haggard face of winter—
Nor felt your souls go blowing like balloons
Tossed by impulsive hands;
Nor slid as skaters swiftly
Over the crackling crystals of perilous ice,
Buffeted with bouquets and blinded with confetti ...
You have not felt the abandon
Of light love
Dragged by the hair across a slippery floor....

1916

Mouth of the dust I kiss, corruption absolute,
Worm, that shall come at last to be my paramour,
Envenomed, unseen wanderer who alone is mute,
Yet greater than gods or heroes that have gone before.

For you I sheave the harvest of my hair,
For you the whiteness of my flesh, my passion's valour,
For you I throw upon the grey screen of the air
My prism-like conceptions, my gigantic colour.

For you the delicate hands that fashion to make great
Clay, and white paper, plant a tongue in silence,
For you the battle-frenzy, and the might of hate,
Science for giving wounds, and healing science.

For you the heart's wild love, beauty, long care,
Virginity, passionate womanhood, perfected wholeness,
For you the unborn child that I prepare,
You, flabby, boneless, brainless, senseless, soulless!

1913

The curtains are drawn as though it still were night,
A slip of dawn between them is a dangling silver ribbon;
And all about the room is quietness—Each patient chair
Erect, alert, in place. A letter on the table and a book
Lie as you left them, now bereft of purpose—
Garish a little in the room's sedateness, you
Returning dressed so frivolously in all your coloured clothes!
How grey and sober, full of placid wit
The furniture, the pictures on the wall;
How steely swift the light, stabbing you to the heart
As you stand at the window, bright as rushing blood.
Garish your hair, your shoes, your startling chalky face
And white, white gloves ...
What time is it? ... Still ticks the tireless clock,
With face grimacing ... nearly six it is....
Yet hurries not nor lingers, like our hearts,
For in its dial eternity is housed—
A cock should crow ... there are no cocks in town!
But a water cart with surly noise below
Grates unconcerned along the disconsolate street.
How cold and how familiar all these things,
To you so lonely in the enormous dawn
Slowly unfastening that vermilion dress ...

1916

The darkness of the trees at deep midnight
And sombreness of shadows in the lake;
A mountain in the starlight wide awake
Dreaming to Heaven with imperial might
Of lifted shoulders, huge against the bright
Bespattered jewelry of stars—the ache
Of silence, and the sobbing tides that break
From music. Slumbering cities—candle light
Snuffed in the flooding darkness, and the train
Of Queens that go to scaffold for a sin—
Or splash of blackness manifest of pain,
Hamlet among his court, a Harlequin
Of tragedies ... Mysterious ... And again
Venetian masks against a milky skin.

1917

These curious looms where we have spun our fancies,
These intricate webs where our desires are threaded,
These weird trapezes that our passion frenzies
Strange acrobats to catch them dizzy headed.
These tightening strings upon our spirit's fiddles
Tuneful or out of tune where music hungers
From writhing bow, these intertwining riddles
Mazes and labyrinths and storms and languors.
These colours twinging on a prism's edges,
These speckled patterns of fanatic madness
From glittering eyeballs, these unresting dredges
For pearls within the depths of sadness and of gladness—
O tortuous thoughts, what are you seeking after
As flies around a carcass with a humming dreary,
Gibing the silent dead with treacherous laughter,
Molesting quietness and waking up the weary!
What then, what then, can sleep not crush you to forgetting
With all her body's beauty, cannot peace submerge you
O wrangling, juggling, jangling, pirouetting—
What hope can drag you from the small desires that urge you?
You have lassoed the moon and trapped the sun's bright lion,
And trodden out the red stars into ashes,
Destroyed night's temple and broken the pillars of iron,
And striped the snowy horses of the clouds with zebra gashes ...
You have debauched the world! And as I sit here weary,
Deafened with your demands and torn in tatters,
The world seems suddenly most passionless and dreary,
A poor bewildered clown—and nothing matters.

1916

My pain has all the patience of a nun
Who kneels and prays for Heaven on the stone,
In some chill cellar where the amens moan,
Ave Maria, the long penance spun
Forever. And the tapers one by one
Stand like cold angels round the Virgin's throne.
My soul is tired from kneeling all alone,
Its little candles yearning to the sun.

Long have I dreamed of Paradise and seen
Bright mirages of glory on the grey
Of sad horizons; I have kept the green
Surprise of spring through winter and dismay,
Tasting within the bitter dregs of spleen
Drugs that bring peace, and wine that maketh gay.

1917

The scandal-monger after all is right—
The old and cunning voice with weary repetition
Is justified in all dull words and warnings.
I see at last how you,
Spendthrift of passion
In love's bankruptcy,
Borrow new beauty from each passing face—
How being too lavish you did steal
From generous hands—
You are the idol builder and the robber of temples,
Praising with passionate psalms
The thing you cannot worship—
And yet your prayers have stirred
Belief in us—
We see beyond the false and weary face
Into your haggard soul and trust from pity—
We hear beyond the idle music of your voice,
A wisdom taught by cruelty
And a tired scorn of treachery and guile—
We see your wounds and weep,
You meet our pity with a traitor's kiss—
For, you are schooled in suffering and schooled
In teaching pain to others—
And all that mob of furious accusation
To which you turn the cheek, or curse so well,
Are but the ghosts of bodies you have murdered,
That drive you on in vengeance to fresh crime.
1917

Woods of brown gloom sombring with the hush of death,
Wind's lassitude that sets the tired leaves shivering,
Starved yellow leaves sighing beneath the feet, a breath
Consumptive, old, and fever-red leaves quivering,
As with an earthward flutter like a ghostly butterfly
Listless they perish, wavering and hovering.
Skeleton branches where the rooks flap wings and cry,
Perched upon ribs and fingers; and the white mists covering
The far-off hills and bloodless visage of the sun.
No noise save the meandering dribble of a rivulet,
No noise save of the slow hours dropping one by one
As embers, no colour save Time's ashen coverlet....
How melancholy here the gayest tunes would sound
From shrill carousers riotous and merry all,
As echoes of lost joy their dancing feet upon the ground,
As funeral bagpipes at a burial.
And I who wander passionless and forlorn,
A leaf-forsaken tree symbolic of dejection,
In rags of old desires, dispirited and torn,
See in the stagnant glass of Time my soul's reflection.

1916

I feel so much alone,
And yet I know that many hopes are storming
My shut heart;
For I am bolted fast in my own house.
I pace distracted through its corridors
To the music of Love's knocking hands
Against the gate,
Or silence when they sleep.
I cannot find the key to let them in,
I, my own host and guest and ghost,
Imprisoned in myself!

1917

I know it to be true that those who live
As do the grasses and the lilies of the field
Receiving joy from Heaven, sweetly yield
Their joy to Earth, and taking Beauty, give.

But we are gathered for the looms of Fate
That Time with ever-turning multiplying wheels
Spins into complex patterns and conceals
His huge invention with forms intricate.

Each generation blindly fills the plan,
A sorry muddle or an inspiration of God
With many processes from out the sod,
The Earth and Heaven are mingled and made man.

We must be tired and sleepless, gaily sad,
Frothing like waves in clamorous confusion,
A chemistry of subtle interfusion,
Experiments of genius that the ignorant call mad.

We spell the crimes of our unruly days,
We see a fabled Arcady in our mind,
We crave perfection that we may not find.
Time laughs within the clock and Destiny plays.

You peasants and you hermits, simple livers!
So picturesquely pure, all unconcerned
While we give up our bodies to be burned,
And dredge for treasure in the muddy rivers.

We drink and die and sell ourselves for power,
We hunt with treacherous steps and stealthy knife,
We make a gaudy havoc of our life
And live a thousand ages in an hour.

Our loves are spoilt by introspective guile,
We vivisect our souls with elaborate tools,
We dance in couples to the tune of fools,
And dream of harassed continents the while.

Subconscious visions hold us and we fashion
Delirious verses, tortured statues, spasms of paint,
Make cryptic perorations of complaint,
Inverted religion, and perverted passion.

But since we are children of this age,
In curious ways discovering salvation,
I will not quit my muddled generation,
But ever plead for Beauty in this rage.

Although I know that Nature's bounty yields
Unto simplicity a beautiful content,
Only when battle breaks me and my strength is spent
Will I give back my body to the fields.

1917

Shall we be christened poets, children of God,
For blowing sighs into the listeners' ears,
For tugging at the moaning bells of death,
And coming as the autumn grave-digger
To close the eyes of flowers, and shut the fingers
Of wind upon the rushes,
Of music upon silence?
Shall we be given wreathes of bay and laurel
For forcing tragedy into a rhyme
As a gaunt beggar in a spangled vest?
The poet ever wanders after Death,
The flunkey on a funeral chariot
Pouring the wine at feasts of burial;
And all the roses that he plucks from summer
Are carried to the crypts to deck a corpse....
How shall the world learn how to laugh again
When all its songs have only learnt to weep?
1919

When I am weary at the antic chance,
The hobby-horses and the wooden lance,
The hope and fear in jugglery, and see
How starved the juggler, mean and miserly,
And life a laboured trick—the years advance
A shrilling chorus in affected dance
With lust of many eyes that watch and wink
Fixed on them; or a clown in feverish pink
Will draw gross laughter by a hideous prance—
Vulgarity and sin and souls askance,
Where fiddles squeal and all the follies spin—
Till, when the stage is empty, Harlequin
Through curtained silence trips as from a trance
With blushing flowers for Columbine—Romance.

1917

I

I crouched upon cushions and wallowed in their somnolent caresses,
 And—listening with dread for the moment of my own silence
 Rending the flimsy lace of whisperings—
 My gnome dances before me
 Behind a fan of smoke,
 My dwarf squats on my shoulders
 Tweeking their moulted wings,
 My ape peers in the mirror of my face
 Mimicking my soul's gaunt gestures—
 My wolf bays through my moonly loneliness
 Blotching the night with howls—
 My laughter goes whining away on the wind,
 Laughs that are whipped by a soul too sick with merriment,
 Too satiate with humour's emptiness!...

II

Ah! loveliness with little pointed feet
 Dancing across the leer of ugliness,
 Skimming like a gold thread
 Through a necklace of vile masks—
 Lifting with lotus fingers
 The blue arras of nightmare—
 Loveliness like a delicate silver flute
 Pressed to a negro's lips—

III

Do you then wish for all those griefs
 Whose snarling hands you kiss,
 Kneeling in adoration to a dagger
 As saints before a cross?
 You who have tossed all flowers away,
 Coveting the drenched red peonies of blood
 Their javelin-petals wet with slaughter,—
 Do you then crave your own blood's offering,
 Your own breast's pallor pierced with knives of flame?
 In your ears are the pattering of the hunter's feet,
 Softer than death, and omens mouthed by winds of twilight,
 You lean across the precipice of time
 Calling and crying
 For the last abyssmal passion of self-slaughter—

IV

Waiting,
 Like grey cloud-giants climbing the hills of Heaven
 Carrying vast burdens over the crags of chaos—
 Waiting,
 Like trees that hear the far-off moan of winds,
 Like listening trees that hug their branches round them,
 Their leaves whispering lividly the rumour of storms,
 Waiting like a vast arch of quietness
 Through which a screaming messenger shall dart—
 Like a dense hood of silence
 Pierced by a sword of music—
 Waiting, like the deathly stillness of a pool
 Reflecting the diver poised before he plunges....

SMOKE



Now is the evening dipped knee-deep in blood
And the dun hills stand fearful in their places.
Cunning in sin, we shuffle down the streets
With burdens of vainglory on our backs,
Spinning with spider-hands the miser's web
Or sitting placid, gay and fat with ease.
But out beyond, the armies of the world
March doomwards to the rhythm of the drum
Under the thirsting sun. Death holds his state:

His skeleton hands are filled with scarlet spoil:
He stands on flaming ramparts, waving high
The ensign of decay. All his bones are dressed
With livid roses; all his pillars black
Are girt in ashen poppies, and on dust
He raises up his awful golden throne.

Oh! your fierce shrieks have fainted on deaf ears;
Your tears have flowed on feet of carven stone;
Your blood is spilt for the boiling-pot of God
Where good and evil mix; and all your rage
Is but a thin smoke wafted in His face.

1914

Blow upon blow they bruise the daylight wan,
Scar upon scar they rend the quiet shore;
They ride on furious, leaving every man
Crushed like a maggot by the hoofs of war:
Gods that grow tired of paradisial water
And fill their cups with steaming wine of slaughter.

I fear a thing more terrible than death:
The glamour of the battle grips us yet—
As crowds before a fire that hold their breath
Watching the burning houses, and forget
All they will lose, but marvel to behold
Its dazzling strength, the glamour of its gold.

I fear the time when slow the flame expires,
When this kaleidoscope of roaring color
Fades, and rage faints; and of the funeral-fires
That shone with battle, nothing left of valour
Save chill ignoble ashes for despair
To strew with widowed hands upon her hair.

Livid and damp unfolds the winding-sheet,
Hiding the mangled body of the Earth:
The slow grey aftermath, the limping feet
Of days that shall not know the sound of mirth,
But pass in dry-eyed patience, with no trust
Save to end living and be heaped with dust.

That stillness that must follow where Death trod,
The sullen street, the empty drinking-hall,
The tuneless voices cringing praise to God,
Deaf gods, that did not heed the anguished call,
Now to be soothed with humbleness and praise,
With fawning kisses for the hand that slays.

Across the world from out the fevered ground
Decay from every pore exhales its breath;
A cloak of penance winding close around
The bright desire of spring. And unto Death,
As to a conquering king, we yield the keys
Of Beauty's gates upon our bended knees.

The maiden loverless shall go her ways,
And child unfathered feed on crust and husk;
The sun that was the glory of our days
Shining as tinsel till the moody dusk
Into our starving outstretched arms shall lay
Her silent sleep, the only boon we pray.

1914

A ragged drummer rides along the street,
And at his coming
The silence fills with tunes and rustling feet
And voices humming.
He rode a year ago from far away,
On charger prancing,
With bright new buttons and with ribbons gay,
And banners dancing.
Oh, he was fatter than the bursting drum
He bore so proudly,
His roaring music woke the silence dumb
To thunder loudly.
And by his side the old men and the young
Had followed cheering
Into the sunset smiling as they sung,
Nor thought of fearing.
They left their lovers and their mothers' lap,
Their homes demolish,
"For, look, I have a ribbon for my cap,
A sword to polish!"
And so the town was silent once again,
Though tunes of battle
Beat fearful in the wind, or in the rain
Ghost drums would rattle.
But at the chuckling dice or careful loom,
Or candled churches
A few forgot or prayed or followed doom
With drunken lurches....
Now loom and bar and church disgorge the throng,
In huddled masses
They stand aghast to hear the drummer's song
As back he passes—
Palsied and drear and bent he turns alone
In rags and tatters,
And on a soundless barrel with a bone
He beats and batters.
"Where march your feet so gaily, careless crowd,
That we may kiss them?
Where sound your little songs that rang so loud
To us that miss them?"
There are no songs, no happy marching feet,
No favours flying:
The drummer passes ... on the quiet street
The sun is dying.
Sun that must bleed to death so red and brave!...
Have done with weeping,
But put your ribbons on a soldier's grave
As he lies sleeping.

1914

MIDNIGHT

Suddenly
 Shutting our lips upon a jest
 As we are sipping thoughts from little glasses,
 A gun bursts thunder and the echoing streets
 Quiver with startled terrors—
 How swift runs fear: quicksilver that is free!
 Now every muscle weakens, every pulse
 Is set at gallop-pace and every nerve
 Stretched taut with horror and a wild revolt....
 How sweetly spins the world to noise of music,
 How sweet to live life's arrogant adventure!
 Live in a vain world wracked with a thousand pangs,
 Limp in a dull street housed with crumbling dreams,
 To breathe and eat and sleep and love and sigh
 A little longer, oh a little year!
 Forgotten prayers rise up in resurrection,
 And resolutions of new wondrous lives
 Choke up our hearts and fling us to our knees....
 Worms creep in dreadful hunger from the ground,
 The lurid silent people loved by death,
 And peer into our eyes with sly forebodings
 To drag our body's glory from the light.
 Though all the world should fall into their cells
 And lie within their larders shelf on shelf—
 Yet will I toss the sheets of dust away,
 Yet *will I* be the mistress of the sun!

* * * * *

1 A. M.

Look how they struggle in a mist of fire,
 Those hunchbacked chimneys and distorted domes—
 Now gloat on Hell, the colour seems to roar,
 An army fierce upon its own destruction,
 A famished monster tearing in its claws
 Gigantic foods to glut its lean desire
 Digesting all the world!...
 Look at the eager people open-mouthed
 That stand as foolish rabbits hypnotised
 By the uncoiling rhythm of a snake,
 Their earth adoring senses caught awhile
 In the red whirlwind of ascending wings;
 Their spirits straining upward upon strings
 Like kites and air balloons, but more grotesque,
 Lacking the ephemeral beauty of a toy—
 Yet for an hour
 Dyed with the colour that their drabness fears
 They kiss the feet of beauty as she passes
 Starwards, tremendous in a coat of fire.

* * * * *

3 A. M.

The dawn seems drained of blood so colourless—
 Slowly the river moves as though in sleep
 While silent barges
 Slide from the mist like dreams;
 The intricate patterns of the scaffolding
 Are drawn against the sky
 More delicate than lace.
 All the shimmering lights
 Have shrunk away from morning
 As a blue peacock sheaves his starry tail....
 I am alone, most utterly alone,
 More lonely than the last man in the world
 Straying amid the dust of vanished lives.
 More lonely than a spirit stolen from heaven
 Who stands beside that nebulous cold river
 Dividing sleep from death,
 Eternity from time

Ecstasy from time....

Nothing disturbs the white peace of the dawn,
She brings no feverous memories of night
And sheds no tears.

Only two hours ago
Fire walked in crimson armour through the city
Piercing the night's black tent with glittering javelins,
While shrieks and whispered omens flew like bats
Among the silver foliage of the stars....
But rage has left no furrow in the sky,
No wake of sparks across the placid water....
This is the ominous and sacred hour
When priest-like the world kneels
Bowed low toward the empty throne of day—
Soon will the herald trumpet-blast be heard
And the flamingo messengers will come
Flocking from out the burnished cage of sunrise....
This is the hour of nothing,
Colourless and chill
Oblivion's hands are folded on the world,
As sits an idol holding in his fingers
A scentless lotus carven out of stone.

* * * * *

4 A. M.

Leaving the dun river with hurried tapping feet
And up the long uncomfortable street
With eyes uninterested yet forced to see and read
The dingy notices once sharp and bright with greed,
Now drear with want, that swear the Queen's Hotel
And Brown's Hotel and King's are doing well—
A soldier and a beggar mock me as I go,
The light steals after me, emerging slow
And pale from the dim alleys shadow-crouched.
I hurried by the drunkard as he slouched
From lamp-post unto lamp-post.... Then I saw
Caught in the mirror of a tailor's door
My own reflection as I hurried past,
My flaring colours and my face aghast—
The scarlet tassel of my hat that hung
Limp as a spent flame, and my skirt that clung
About my knees and fluttered at the back:
An injured moth, with sulphur stripes and black,
My bag flamboyant as a pillar-box;
My frayed gilt fringe of hair and tarnished locks.
Jagged and crude and swift I seemed to pass
Painted too brightly on that temperate glass.
... An omnibus from sudden corner reels:
Silence lies mangled underneath the wheels.

1915

O flattery, imposture, battle show,
What banners have you woven from the parted raiment,
What crimes from Calvary, what endless flow
Of blood from blood, revenge, exacted payment!

How have you turned the simple truth to lies
Made capital from creeds and missed their beauty,
Exalted vainly with self-pitying sighs
The wrongs enacted in the name of duty.

And ever quoting God for your excuse,
Bribing divinity to cloak your shame,
You train the spirit for material use,
You sacrifice men's hearts to feed your flame.

When shall the world be rid of these bald priests,
Pig-snouted with their gilded wolfish ears,
The scarlet cardinals of drunken feasts
Whose hands are washed in blood, whose feet in tears?

1916

What will happen to the beggar, and the sinner, and the sad,
And the drunk that drinks for sorrow, and the maimed, and mad;
What will happen to the starving, and the rebel run from drilling,
Cowardly, afraid of fighting, and the child who stole a shilling?
They shall go to prison black
With a striped shirt on the back,
Feast on bread and water there
In a cell, without a care.
They shall learn at least their duty,
Never tempted more of beauty—
They shall walk in rows and praise the Lord,
And one or two shall hang upon a cord—
And two or three shall die of grief alone—
(And this is well, for sinners should atone,
And five or six shall curse the God that made them,
(And this is wicked, for the priests forbade them,
And those that grew from dust shall go to dust
Downtrodden. Saith the preacher:—"God is just."

1917

If I were what I would be, and could break
The buttressed fortress of stupidity
Where laws are sentinels, and lies the masonry,
Surrounded with inertia, weedy lake,
Where centuries of mud lie curdled, and the fake
Grandeur of cardboard turrets, solemn puppetry—
The gods are blinking at us sleepily,
Tired of our games, the muddles that we make,
The bloodshed, idol worshipping, the chess
Of king, queen, castle, bishop, knight and pawn—
The rigid squares of black and white, they dress
With their perpetual challenge—faded, worn,
Are all the creeds and praises you profess
To weary gods that stretch themselves and yawn.

1917

The ghostly blood of thee is in my veins,
Back through the centuries of death and birth,
Sometime I thrilled with thy gigantic pains,
My kin lie somewhere covered with thine earth.

And ever as in dreams I seem to see
Those streets and people with their colours cold;
Thou hast the singing hungers of the sea,
The tides of restless passion ages old.

I know thy humours and their contradiction,
I know thy fevers and hallucinations,
I see beneath the painted mask of fiction
Thy face of fierce and weary exaltations.

And art thou come to gaze with wakened eyes
Into the sick world's travail and her grief,
Dost thou from thy long battling surmise
The end of battle and the world's relief?

While we are creeping in our crooked ways
Along the crumbling roads of worn-out creeds
Where Ignorance walks royally through days
That smell of death, decay and bloody deeds.

While we still cry to God for strength to kill,
Reminding Him that Britain rules the waves,
And grind young bones for the commercial mill,
And build munition works among the graves.

Still crying "Honour," "Country" and "The Flag,"
"The last heroic fight in Freedom's name!"
Though Kings make mouths at Kings, and Prelates brag—
They boast of murder and they reek of shame!...

Thou that hast touched the mystic wounds of God,
And strewn with broken hearts the Virgin's feet,
Feeling beneath the burden and the rod
His justice and Her pity in the street.

Justice and Pity, crying in the wind—
We only hear the guns that never cease,
The flapping of our flags has made us blind!
We may not see the sacred gods of peace.

But thou dost build fanatic temples for them,
And thou dost pave the road with sanity,
And all the train of bitter ghosts adore them,
Who died to puff a monarch's vanity.

I hear thy orchestras of holy cheers,
The drum that life has snatched away from death,
And all the sighing rhythm of thy tears,
And the brave laughter of thy trumpet-breath.

PEACE! But a cynic whispered in my ear
How kings like worms still wrangled for a crown
That lay amid the dust—and I could hear
A hum of money-changing in the town.

I feared that afterwards, when all is won,
We shall forget the meaning of thy deed—
And man will creep as he has always done
Along the little gutters of his greed.

1917

How deeply nurtured is your foolishness,
Calling destruction great and slaughter brave,
Making large triumph of a little grave,
Imperial purple of a mourning dress,
The gun an emblem of your godliness—
A fluttering ribbon or a banner's wave,
A medal or a bayonet, or rave
Of singing, marching in the forward press
Of hatred to the banging of a band;
Your country's honour and the world's release.
Are *they* not strong in courage who withstand
The armies of your folly and shall cease
To tarnish with spilt life their motherland?
Cowards—or martyrs—crucified for peace.

1917

Of all who died in silence far away
Where sympathy was busy with other things,
Busy with worlds, inventing how to slay,
Troubled with rights and wrongs and governments and kings.

The little dead who knew so large a love,
Whose lives were sweet unto themselves a shepherding
Of hopes, ambitions, wonders in a drove
Over the hills of time, that now are graves for burying.

Of all the tenderness that flowed to them,
A milky way streaming from out their mother's breast,
Stars were they to her night, and she the stem
From which they flowered—now barren and left unblessed.

Of all the sparkling kisses that they gave
Spangling a secret radiance on adoring hands,
Now stifled in the darkness of a grave
With kiss of loneliness and death's embracing bands.

No more!—And we, the mourners, dare not wear
The black that folds our hearts in secrecy of pain,
But must don purple and bright standards bear,
Vermilion of our honour, a bloody train.

We dare not weep who must be brave in battle—
"Another death—another day—another inch of land—
The dead are cheering and the ghost drums rattle" ...
The dead are deaf and dumb and cannot understand....

Of all who died in darkness far away
Nothing is left of them but LOVE, who triumphs now,
His arms held crosswise to the budding day,
The passion-red roses clustering his brow.

1917

And afterwards, when honour has made good,
And all you think you fight for shall take place,
A late rejoicing to a crippled race;
The bulldog's teeth relax and snap for food,
The eagles fly to their forsaken brood,
Within the ravaged nest. When no disgrace
Shall spread a blush across the haggard face
Of anxious Pride, already flushed with blood.

In victory will you have conquered Hate,
And stuck old Folly with a bayonet
And battered down the hideous prison gate?
Or will the fatted gods be gloried yet,
Glutted with gold and dust and empty state,
The incense of our anguish and our sweat?

1917

Pity the slain that laid away their lives,
Pity the prisoners mangled with gyves,
Thin little children and widowed wives,
And the broken soldier who survives.

Pity the woman whose body was sold
For a little bread or a little gold,
And a little fire to keep out the cold,
So tired, and fearful of growing old.

Pity the people in the grey street
Before the dawn trooping with listless feet
Down to their work in the dust and the heat,
For a little bread and a little meat.

Pity the criminal sentenced to die,
Loving life so, with the world in his eye,
In his ears and his heart, with the passionate cry
Of love that will call when he may not reply.

Pity them all, the imperative faces
That peer through the dark where we sleep in our laces,
Where we skulk among cushions in opulent places,
With indolent postures and frivolous graces.

Eyes that prick the darkness, fingers thin
Tearing at hypocrisy, and Sin
That batters the door and staggers in....
The streets surround with clamour and din,

Drowning our flutes, till the cries of the city
Flurry us, flutter us, force us to pity,
Force us to sigh and arrange a committee,
Tea-party charity danced to a ditty....

The scarlet ribbons flutter and wave,
A rebel flag on a rebel grave,
But to us the strong alone are brave,
And only the rich are worthy to save!

Yet who shall blame us, plaited and curled,
Where silk banners fly and the red flags are furled,
Flags that blow where the dead are hurled,
Tattered and dripping with blood of the world!

1918

FLAME



You have understood so little of me, and my adoration
That shone upon my forehead, like a crown of curious stones,
You turned into a cap and bells for Folly's coronation
And made a foolish tinkling from my laughter and my
moans.

You have led me through the market like an ass upon the halter,
You have fed me upon thistles; I was driven by the crowd;
But my faith in what I am, my conceit, you cannot alter;
I was proud in pomp and purple, as a clown I leave you proud!

A greater pride than sits upon a throne for mere adorning,
A fiercer strength than in the gods of wood that cannot bow;
I tore my purple into rags and knelt to bear your scorning,
And I am rebel leader to a band of beggars now.

In the twilight of my love I stand and strew the bitter ashes;
They are blown into my eyes again, the fires that shone for you;
In the blushing of the sunset their ghostly fervour flashes
As they sink for everlasting in the darkness and the dew.

Your heart is as a moonstone hieroglyphed with secret letters;
You have never read my passion, as I never learnt their sign,
But I praise your haunting beauty and I bear the bruise of fetters
And I reel from your remembrance as I spill the ancient wine.
All those women I have envied with their pink and foolish faces,
Moths that have out-distanced me in circling round your head,
For the strangeness of your kisses and the curse of your embraces
And the frenzy of pursuing where your despot feet have led.

I will shout, and tear the darkness; I will snuff the candles sacred
With the rage of my abasement, with the blast of my farewell;
I will smile with cynic softness, but my tears are dropping acrid
And sizzling in a gutter down the white-hot streets of Hell!

1914

Lulled are the dazzling colours of the day,
And mild the heavens, burnt out like an ash.
Hungry and strange along the shadowed dusk
Walks Melancholy, and with bitter mouth
Sucks the last juices from the sun's ripe fruit.
Now can I sing the sickly lines of love
And of love's failure, spell my sorrows out
In the sad spaces of the gloaming night,
And stooping, huddled, hide me in the dark.
My words were fireless in the flaming sun,
And all the throats of flowers from their content
Puffed back my pinings proudly in my face
And bade me give them tunes to make them dance....
Lean, hungry, like my love the moon looks down
From the white solitudes of Heaven. All aghast
And sterile as the arms of my desire
She flings her light despairing on the sky.
The night is strange and still, for dropping tears,
Or burying hatred in a deep-dug grave.

1914

Washed at my feet by the curded foam of sluggish waves,
As the rain splinters and the mud gleams with malicious light,
Like a frail shell, million tinged and quaintly wrought
The thought of you, which held against mine ear
Hums all the echoed melodies of your soul;
The sigh of wearied life, the ebbing sweet of love,
The little tunes of wine mixed with the chants of death,
The following of beauty's fugitive limbs
Whose classic feet, and rapturous pale breast
Gleam on the clouds and foam,
Call to her lovers.—

Thus standing in the blasting of the wind,
And numb with ceaseless drip of moments from the cloud
Of lowering hours, I toy with this strange relic of the sea,
Turned with such perfectness from her tumultuous wheels,
Thoughts of you million tinged and quaintly wrought.

1916

My poems cannot laugh. They are the voice
Of birds that mourn and cry above the sea,
And this wild joy my love has brought to me
Lies dumb and knows not how it shall rejoice.

I am most weary of the petulant songs I sing,
Most tired of tunes that only learn to weep,
And long to turn my dreams from their pale sleep
Into a gentle minstrelsy with harp of silver string;

To fashion for my love one perfect verse
Symmetrically threaded by beauty word on word,
Flowing and flashing like the luted laughter of a bird
To bless the soul with music which I ravished with a curse.

But as a coward in the general gloom
I mimic fortune with my tunes of ill,
Nor pipe despite her wistful mirth and trill
Of love that moves with music into Doom;

Of love that thrills with joy the graveyard cold,
And like a gay canary in a cage
Mocks at his prison, and with flippant rage
Flaunts his bright wing to fill the gloom with gold.

1916

On the hill there is a tavern, long-loved, well-remembered,
Where all the sleepy afternoon the little tables dream,
And the cool green bottles ranged, laugh and gleam with golden highlights,
And the waiters wrangle, and the flies, with murmurs merged and mixed.
We will go there, you and I, to wake the nodding contentment,
And toast our fancies reverently with red wine and with white wine,
And with eyes mesmerised to the horizon gazing,
Dream our iridescent dreams and sigh our shadowy sighs.

1916

Oh canst thou not hear in my heart all its whispering fears
Whose wind-like voices
Flutter the leaves of my hope and bow them with tears
While the body rejoices.
Till all the pomp and beauty of day, the Cardinal Sun
Trailing his scarlet vesture
Leaves after light the pale hills sullen and dun,
Turns with a gesture
Colour and glory to smoke that is deathly and grey.
I follow the shadows of sorrow
That press so close to the dancing heels of the day
And darken the morrow.
The world turns pale and cold, for I seem to see
Beyond its golden visor
The leering skull that derides at our lives and me
Being older than life and wiser....
I hear the cry of the world that writhes to the lash of the whip
Beyond the sound of the treetops singing
To the wind's persuasive violins and bells of dews that drip,
Or rush of feathers winging....
Dost thou fear death as I? Ah no, but thy lips are against my cheek
Murmuring tenderly
The perfumed lies stolen from spring that wistfully through the bleak
Windows of frost so slenderly
Steals her little ghost's flute. Thou tellest of things that might be
If life were as kind as a lover,
If we were beloved of the world and the world of we.
Thy white words hover
Dove-like in rose leaf evenings over the nest
Silvering heaven
With rustle of lovers that nestle together for rest.
If I could have given
My tired lips to kisses and my body to sleep and to thee,
Ah then and then only
The dust were as gentleness mingling thy beauty with me
And death were not lonely.

1916

As in the silence the clear moonlight drips
Among the fields that love her drowsily,
These passionate moments trickle on through time,
From soul to languorous soul.
Like mad musicians upon fretted harps,
The senses play upon the poignant nerves,—
And colours clothe our mood
As smoke against the light, as shimmering prisms
Irised with pallors of an opal's heart
In which the glittered pattern of desire
Smoulders and changes....
O love, thou nightingale-throated singer,
Thread on thy jewelled chords from start to star
And keep thy silver delicate delight
Out of the flush and lustre that makes mad.
Let thy fairy feet
Go tripping down a scarcely scented path,
Between an avenue of breathless flowers.
The hours glide by as swans across a lake,
Across the luminous waters of desire,
And beat as wings the rustle of soft words,
As love bends down,
Breathing his adoration on a fainting mouth.

1917

I can but give thee unsubstantial things
Wrapt as in rose-leaves between thought and thought,
No gems or garments marvellously wrought
On ivory spools with rare embroiderings.
Nor for thy fingers precious, fabled rings
That cardinals have worn, and queens have bought
With blood and beauty. I have only sought
A song that hovers on illusive wings.

Accept from me a dream that hath no art,
I give my empty hands for thee to hold,
Take thou the gift of silence for my part,
With all the deeper things I have not told.
Yet if thou canst, decipher in my heart
Its passions writ in hieroglyphs of gold.

1917

I have no other friend but thee,
But while I tell thee all my thought
Thine ears are buzzing with gossip of dreams,
Soothsayings and sighs, and little things—
How canst thou listen to me?

II

Perchance I roamed under the old moon too long,
And when my cheek grew pale
I laid it against thine to feel the blood beat back
Responsive in the double rose of joy—
But I feel thee shifting away into loneliness
Where the ghost moon glides between us....

III

When at a masquerade
I meet thee in the shrill indifferent throng,
Our faces painted each in some disguise
Of varnished revelry;
I whisper in thine ear
Fables, and flatteries, and inconsequent tales,
Trivial as the dust that whirls about our feet,
And shower the multicoloured streamers high
Where Folly is king of midnight—
Suddenly dost thou snatch thy mask aside,
And thy still face looks out,
Weary and overwise
Where the mad pretence avails not.

IV

Long ago we walked together in a garden;
It was evening and the leaves fell down;
Silently we passed over the dead, the fallen,
Over flowers and branches that were withered there—
And the air was weary with the scent of other days,
A fragrance faint and pensive.
The sighing of the leaves beneath our feet
Were as old dreams retold,
Stirred from the golden quilt of memory,
And farewells rang their whispering bells,
Tolling the days away.
But peace lay folded between our hands
As we thought of the vanishing years
And of love dying in the arms of love.

V

Sometimes I look into the glass
And see my face without the conquering light
That gave me glamour when I gave thee love.
Fain would I bathe in the fountains of beauty,
To glitter with the crystals of her sparkling desire,
And touch with my feet the floors of a bright paven Hell,
And rear my head among the lilies of Heaven.
I would be for thee
As a ring of white flowers on the sward,
As a red fire playing to thy breath,
As a flock of kingfishers
Surprised from the dark fringe of rushes!
Remember only this,
My will toward all loveliness, and look
Deep in thyself for my reflected soul.

VI

Be perfect—for I love thee more in thought
Than thou canst reach in every trivial day.
Since days are as the flowers on a wreath
That wither while we bind them each to each.
Only the soul is timeless, and no round of days
Can wall it in a little space of ground.
Sometimes our minds are cheated by the clock
And crave love, wisdom, joy within an hour,
But the patient spirit stands
Waiting the last fulfilment.
Around thy soul my thoughts are as garlands
Or as an endless rosary.
Be perfect! lest my psalm should falter
And my hands part from the unriveted faith
With Amen scarcely sighed.

1917

Bodies heaving like waves,
Sighing through the dishevelled tresses of foam,
The massive whiteness of limbs flung out of shadow,
Splashed with ecstasial moonlight,
Sculptured voluptuously in ephemeral marbles.
Lingering touch of fingers,
Cooler than the curving ringlets of spray
Fluting the new-blown petals of a shell,
And kisses murmuring as the lips of darkness
Against the ivory forehead of the moon.

1919

Your face to me is like a beautiful city
Dreaming forever by the rough wild sea,
And I the ship upon a wilderness of waves
Heavily laden with memories....
I roam over all the earth
Making rhymes of you, and singing songs,
Because your face will never let me rest,
Because I can not frame it in a star
Surrounded with my cloudy reveries,
Because I may not pluck it like a flower
To breathe the incense of its perfumed soul—
Your face is like the carved hilt of a sword
Whose sheath is in my breast!

1918

Oh! why will you not let me love you
Well enough?
You have plucked my blossoms,
Gathered the leaves
And revived them with water;
But all the tortuous roots
Delving for your spirit
In subterranean passions
With a blind unresting desire,
Have you felt them, have you known?
In the blackest night of sleep
Though I be sunk a thousand fathoms
In the cerulean depths of slow oblivion,
My soul still swims toward you
Against the envious pressure of the tide....
You who are so tired, so filled with sleep
That you would brush a rose-leaf from your cheek
Lest its heaviness should stir your rest,
How can you shoulder the weight of my great burden
That is too vast for me to bear alone?
I tell you
Love is no little thing,
No moth-winged Cupid painted on the air,
No thin flute music petaling the silence
As leaves that flutter from a cherry tree.
It is the thought that broods upon its death,
The dread of mountains looking to the storm
Ere shrieks of lightning cleave their breasts in twain.
It is the fire that pillars up the stars
To mix its flame with their eternal gold.
Oh, listen to me!
You shall hear my message sung from sphere to sphere
As star-dust pouring a path through Heaven.
You shall know me
In the pensive shadows of trees,
In the luminary phantoms
Reflected in the stillness of a lake;
In the arrows of sunlight shot through meshing leaves
And quivering in the moss;
In the abandoned play of breakers
Showering their crystals to the moon;
In the folly of rainbow dolphins.
I only ask of you
To be the diver in my deepest pool,
To bring from out its blue obscurity
The things my life has moulded unaware,
Treasures my passion and my hunger fashioned
In loneliness of prayer unlit by life,
Created out of nothing save myself
Within the blind fast silence of the soul.

1918

My devotion kneels to you,
Holding a candle to illumine your face.
My loneliness is your shadow
Along the solitary roads.
My passion is a book between your hands
Whose leaves are as the leaves of violets,
A volume of pressed flowers
Scenting your fingers though you read it not.
And my white faith
Is a silken surplice clothing you in peace.

1919

As launched upon the loneliness of time
We float and dream of what the waves conceal,
Each like a thought that rolls with rapid zeal
Succeeded by a breaker of fierce crime,
Or curling passion, or a rhythm of rhyme,
Or indolent ripple sighing at the keel—
Beyond us, though our fretted longings reel,
The lulled horizon sleeps, the still hours climb—
So toss our weary ships, till from afar
Our visioned island rises suddenly,
Where palaces like cloudy colours are,
With scented gardens terraced to the sea,
The silver steps to our appointed star
Where gleam the spires that pierce eternity.
1917

Many things I'd find to charm you,
Books and scarves and silken socks,
All the seven rainbow colours
Black and white with 'broidered clocks.
Then a stick of polished whalebone
And a coat of tawny fur,
And a row of gleaming bottles
Filled with rose-water and myrrh.
Rarest brandy of the 'fifties,
Old liqueurs in leather kegs,
Golden Sauterne, copper sherry
And a nest of plover's eggs.
Toys of tortoise-shell and jasper,
Little boxes cut in jade;
Handkerchiefs of finest cambric,
Damask cloths and dim brocade.
Six musicians of the Magyar,
Madness making harmony;
And a bed austere and narrow
With a quilt from Barbary.
You shall have a bath of amber,
A Venetian looking-glass,
And a crimson-chested parrot
On a lawn of terraced grass.
Then a small Tanagra statue
Found anew in ruins old,
Or an azure plate from Persia,
Or my hair in plaits of gold;
Or my scalp that like an Indian
You shall carry for a purse,
Or my spilt blood in a goblet ...
Or a volume of my verse.

1916

LAMPLIGHT AND STARLIGHT



The eternal flame of laughter and desire
Breaks the long darkness with a little glance,
Till all the gloom is radiant in a dance
Of yellow hopefulness, reflecting fire
That dreams from Heaven's lamps as we aspire
Sadly toward their jubilation—Romance
Of faery glitter in the streets of chance—
Those beacon-trees that blossom from the mire
Within the fog of our despairing gloom;
In the glum alleys, down the haunted night
Through tunnelling of subterranean doom,
Among the grovelling shadows, kingly bright,
They bear their coronets of golden bloom
To front our anguish with their brave delight.

1917

Richer than fields of corn that fire in summer,
Strange as the moon on forest rising sudden,
More fearful and beloved than peace or silence,
Heart with my heart at pace in throbbing fever,
Calling towards me with a voice incessant.
Thou that begot me: From whose streets triumphant
I, coloured fiercely with thy passion, wakened!
I sucked red wine, not milk, from thy gaunt bosom,
My senses in thy fearfulness found beauty,
And honey in thine oaths and lamentations.
I played about thy feet that know not resting
And bathed me in the sweat of thine endeavour.

When on thy gala-nights the thronged lamps glitter,
Sparkle like sequins, and the plumes of shadow
With curling smoke, with rain and rippling gutter
Are tossed in feathered gaiety about thee—
Thick grow the crowded streets in coloured pageant,
Kaleidoscope of people, circling, crossing,
Till the brain frenzies to a thousand patterns,
While the ears buzz with noises of their laughter;
Shouts hoarse and coarse and shrill in one great roaring,
As of the angry ocean in her travail ...
They haunt me in the tranquil of the forest,
Those faces pain has marked and toil has mangled;
Pangs greater than the lonely Crucifixion
Here crucified each day with lust and hunger,
Hung up unlovely in the open market;
Made gay with paper garlands, covered over
With tinsel loincloth, painted like a puppet,
Lest the elect in passing should be startled,
Lest they should smear the blameless brow of honour!
With bloody shoes and spinning-wheels of traffic
Vermilion-splashed, the city rushes onward,
And thorns of death and lust and fruitless labour
Lie underneath the feet forever dancing.
Gay tunes are rasped upon a weary fiddle,
Or voice of moaning in the tinkling cymbal,
Offspring of humour from disaster's bowels.
I love the bitter and the rude, the drunken,
The tramps and thieves that skulk among the shadows;
The faces red as fire and dead as ashes,
A million faces scattered like confetti,
All changing, whirling, trodden into nothing.
There Beauty wanders strange, an-hungered, weary,
Throned on a dust-heap, or triumphant reeling
In mad disorder from the couch of chaos.

O ragged Beauty, through the mournful houses,
How frail the feet that lead the dawn towards us,
Blushed in the sunrise with a great ambition,
Spent in the evening like a rose of fever,
Fainting before us paler than a lily.
While here each day self-satisfied and placid
Moves opulent among the groves of summer;
The larks delight, the laughter of the thrushes,
The kindly peasants in their ruddy orchard,
Please for a while until the spirit sickens
And turns her panting to her ancient lover.

Oh, well I know the quickening of the pulses,
Joy bursting through disgust as field and pasture
Grow fewer, paler, till the eager houses
Like hungry animals eat up the spaces
And close upon the miles that God created,
With triumph of man's greed. As warriors listening
To the far rhythm in the drums of battle,
As seamen hear the mighty tide-wave bursting,
I feel the scamper of your feet approaching
And your great starving arms and strangling fingers
That drag me back to my perverted Heaven!

Slowly the pale feet of morning
Tread out the ashes of midnight still burning with feverous lamplight,
 Colourless, cold, as the rainclad
Sleep-druggèd river that carries the wreckage of cities out sea-ward.
 Slowly the fingers of dawn-light
Snuff out the candles that yearned to those Gods of delirium,
 Sleep-huge as shadows grimacing
From niches made black with the smoke of a fire-spangled passion.
 Smoothly the wild hair of darkness
Is plaited for rest, and the faces of visions are covered with sleep veils.
 Patiently, Morning, the priestess
Drones out a psalm for the souls that we damned in the blackness,
 Gashed with the daggers of street-lights,
Crushing the poisonous berries of sinister kisses,—
 Morning with healing and kindness
Folds up the dresses dishevelled with terror and laughter,
 Sweeps up the rags of our shadows
That danced in a red smoke of dreams on the walls of oblivion.

1919

What have I to do with them,
The red athletes in their snow-white clothes?
They are sun lovers and moon haters,
Toiling or playing in the fields
Whereon no shadows lie,
Pensively, whispering together—
They are space lovers and haters of the stars,
Soundly they sleep by night nor ever see
The tiaraed brows of darkness.
I weary of their striving upward and onward,
Away from the green hush of twilight,
Where silence drips from the trees,
Away from the solemn avenues
Where the ghosts blow by
Along with a drift of leaves.

Let us linger awhile
Far away from the frets and wars of the world,
From the strong men
With their strident hymning voices and marching feet—
Let us walk alone
For the love of our own shadows
Stretching their length on lawns of powdered silver,
With behind us the sky's grey curtain
Drawn backward from the moon....
Let us sit by the fireside
And hear the wind's shrill orchestras,
Fiddle and fife and flute,
And omened bagpipe screaming....
Let us lie abed and dream
Through the long summer's morning
Of trivial things, and beautiful....
Let us dance with Folly when midnight knocks on his golden gong;
Let us run through pools of wine
And be splashed with purple.
Let us, being sick, make merry,
And rejoice when we are weary.
Let us sit by our grave as at a banquet,
Drinking to Death.

What have we to do with them,
Sons of the sun and the soil,
Daughters of the hearth and the field?
They that remake the world
Melting our idols for silver,
Our goblets for gold;
Tearing our temples down
To build their red brick villages.

The doomed world faints into mist,
World of our indolence and dreams,
And the faces and bodies we love
Sink through oblivion, and are seen
Dimly, as divers through the waters.
Old worlds and new worlds!
Let us slip between them,
And float on the stream that floweth nowhither—
Our red ambitions burn
To a blue smoke of forgetting;
Our moonshine faints on the tide that goeth out,
As the sun leers to the tide that cometh in.

1918

Among the crumbling arches of decay
Where all around the red new buildings crept,
Where huge machines had rolled the past away,
And the dead princes lay accursed and slept;

Among the ruins I beheld a man
Who heeded not the engines as they neared,
Painting dead carnivals upon a fan,
He smiled and trifled with his pointed beard.

And here and there were flung a mess of things,
Tokens and fripperies and faded dresses,
Kept from the courtships of a thousand kings,
Tossed roses for the tossing of caresses.

A carven sabre hung upon the wall,
A toy thing, with no rust of blood upon it,
A tray of glasses, an embroidered shawl,
A muff, a bottle and a feathered bonnet.

And mirrors flashed their argent memories
Out of the shadows where they laughed and gleamed,
While ghostly faces of past vanities
Come back to dream there where they once had dreamed.

The stranger turned his head and bowed to me
And waved me vaguely to a gilded chair.
I spoke: "You are a connoisseur, I see,
You really have a fine collection there."

He bowed to me again, and in his hand
Dangled a string of gems, they caught my eye
With beckoning lights—I could not understand—
His fingers seemed to touch them like a sigh

So much he loved their frail inconsequence.
I spoke of progress conquering decay,
And tired the stillness with my common sense
Loud-spoken in the jargon of the day.

But I have never met so queer a man,
"I better love my memories," he said,
"Look at those painted figures on the fan,
How delicate and wistful are the dead."

1917

As a nun's face from her black draperies
So full of mystery the moon looks down.
She dreams of a passion that shall outlive time,
Of Beauty's face beheld unveiled and close,
Of God Who blows the worlds like bubbles up,
Smiling away, to watch them swell and die.
She dreams of music played among the stars
When the slow tongues of silence are unloosed.
Above the city glittering giddily,
Above the jostling heads of man she moves,
Strange as a dreamer walking in her sleep.

1912

The sun is lord of life and colour,
Blood of the rose and hyacinth,
Hair of the sea and forests,
Crown of the cornfields,
Body of the hills.
The moon is the harlot of Death,
Slaughterer of the Sun,
Priestess and poisoner she goes
With all her silver flock of wandering souls,
Her chant of wailing waters,
The bed of shimmering dust from which she comes
Bound all around with bandages of mist....
The living are as blossoms and fruit on the tree,
The dead are as lilies and wind on the marshes;
The living are as cherries that bow to the morning
Beckoning to the loitering stranger,
The wind, to sing them his eerie ballads.
The dead are as frozen skeleton branches
Whereon the stillness perches like an owl....
The dead are as snows on the cherry orchard.

1918

I

All down the somnolent street where pale tinged houses dream
The negroes go, black faces crowding together;
And between the palm leaves dancing with lethargic gestures,
The bright long water spreads, green as a parrot's wing—
We have rest here and a monotony of wheels,
A peaceful noise like bees that moan in June—
And the sun rusts not, but his brazen heraldries
Tarnished with evening are burnished with the dawn.
Yet pain comes stabbing in the night with silver knife through the window,
A blanched moon full of fear and the burden of desire—
And nothing rids us utterly of grief,
We who have pilgrim souls that will not sleep.

II

Moonlight planting the world with lilies, so hushed it seems and scented,
But in the chapel is a droning where the negroes chant their hymns
And we in aureoled loneliness go down the street contented,
With hearts that beat for pleasure to the rhythm of our limbs.

1917

Oh, have I bartered and forgotten thee,
Selling thy tarnished twilights for gold sun,
Relinquishing thy dreams that used to run
A ragged troop along thy streets with me?
Cast off the glitter of thy jewelry,
Thy lamp-light, starlight, colours crudely spun,
The eloquent ugliness, the roofs of dun,
The fogs that swathe in bands of mystery?
Mother of dreams and laughter and despair!
Thy joy my Heaven is, my Hell thy pain,
Thy labyrinthian streets wind everywhere,
Thy sins and passions baffle me again;
And all my hopes thy lamps that flick and glare,
And all my griefs thy beggars in the rain.

1918

I am going
 Up and down the roads and alleys
 Through the forests of the city,
 Hunting thoughts, hunting dreams.
 My mind shall wander through the streets
 Whistling to a vague adventure,
 Plucking strange fancies where they lurk and peer
 And casting them away.
 Dusk is creeping through the town
 Lighting the lamps and loitering,
 Leaving smoky clouds of shadow,
 Hovering clouds of peace;
 And behind her race the winds
 Whining to the scent of darkness,
 Scattering the dust
 With their swift hounds' feet...
 I am a hunter in the city's jungle,
 Exploring all her secret mysteries.
 I know her well,
 The moaning highways,
 And whispering alleys,
 The chimney-dishevelled roofs
 Where the moon walks delicately
 As a stray spectral cat;
 The little forlorn squares
 Where one tree stands
 Drooping bedraggled hair and fingers
 Over the benches where the people sit
 And stir not from their sullen postures,
 Staring out where evening passes
 With such a sauntering dreamy step.
 I know her parks that spring had decked with garlands,
 Fluttered with flags and child imaginings,
 Powdered with blossoms exquisite and shy,
 Haunted with lovers and their last year's ghosts.
 Now stripped with autumn, as the ragpicker
 Wrapped in his tattered coat emaciate
 Picks up the littered wreck of holiday
 To mount the dust heap where our memories lie
 Sprawled in a mess of ruins...
 I know her monotone of gloomy mansions,
 Repeating each in each a dull despair,
 Indifferent and dignified;
 Those tarnished prisons lined with white and gold,
 With dismal silences of velvet carpets,
 Where starving souls are kept
 Feeding upon each other's isolations,
 Not daring to escape...
 Some roads seem steep as mountains, weary me
 With their crude temples built in praise of lust,
 Squatting and smiling at some hideous dream
 Of fat bejewelled goddesses, or gods
 Frock-coated, undismayed by prayers and tears,
 Their hats atilt like halos on their heads...

I love the ribald multi-coloured crowd,
 Its radiant loves, and laughters, all the faces
 That are as songs, as flowers, as hovering stardust...
 I love the memory-crustled taverns
 In which my heart has leapt to a fiddler's tune
 Until the dawn,
 Like a white minstrel stopped to sing
 Fantastic serenades, and called me forth
 Where through the crystal chandeliers of morning
 Dew-prismed shone the sun...
 I love the narrow streets whose crippled houses
 Are bathed in vitriol twilights,
 Spitting smoke,
 Or making oaths and mouths at one another...
 While between

The glaring tinsel lights of shop and window
 Are gaps of goblin darkness passaging
 Into Cimmerian depths of mystery and sin....
 Wan children stare at me, and in their eyes
 I see the flickering pallor of the lamps,
 Reflective of the solitude of stars....
 And I am thrilled
 With horror and the hope for tragedies....

But, they surround my heart these weary streets,
 Yea, in my soul they cut their mournful paths,
 And through them pass forever
 Those shadow figures trudging through the grey
 Like penitent souls through haunted corridors....
 Ah, Grief, thou wanderer,
 Thou maker of music, lingering and sweet!
 Here dost thou pause to play thy shrill faint tunes,
 Thy fingers touch the stops to loose our tears,
 And shake our hearts, and fold our hands in prayer.
 Through all the winding mazes of the city
 Thy stooping shoulders and thy pitiful face are seen,
 And thou dost stand before the gate of brass,
 And by the iron door,
 Under the windows where we sit and wait
 For some sweet promise to unfold itself
 From the shut scrolls of sleep,
 And at the dusty curtain that divides
 Glory from Death,
 And lover from the lover....

Now in my room I sit
 And round me falls the darkness
 In rustling folds of peace.
 But round my heart I know
 No scarves of sleep and silence can be bound
 To shut the city out.
 For I shall feel the rush of streets
 Shooting inquisitive fingers into chaos,
 Piercing the night's remote divinity.
 And I shall never rid me of these scars
 That time and man have cut into my thought,
 Never shake off my shoulders
 The burden of the city's pain.
 Oh, never shall we escape thee,
 Mother of mutiny and want,
 Thou beautiful mistress of Grief....
 Oh, never shall we escape thy insomniac nights
 Beating with ineloquent hands
 The tambourines of time,
 The drums of war;
 Fevering our minds
 With the swollen traffic of thoughts,
 The wheels and rattle of an endless search....

Tired I am with wandering,
 Pricked with the lights and jostled by the worlds,
 More jaded than the Moon, more hopeless, grey,
 Than that sad pilgrim lost amid the stars!...

1918

Laughter and singing come with the morning,
When Life doth mask his face with a gilded visor,
And dons his arrogant clothes.
But in the night,
When the unsheathed moon stands naked and pale,
We too put off our opulent disguise
And stand alone in the baffling darkness,
Fighting with our sins,
Weeping for our loneliness,
That moon-like gropes forever through the desolate air.

1918

In the night I hear my loneliness calling
The long shrill note of the seabird's cry
Over the fuming spite of breakers,
Over the brumous, sulky tides.
All the ocean is craving Heavenward,
And the wild sky crushes downward toward the sea,
Where the clouds stoop their passionate bodies,
And the waves rear their supplicating hands.
Mine eyes grow tired of looking outward forever,
Away from the firelight and my sleeping idols,
To where the darkness is shattered with gusts of white,
Wings of ship, and bird, and cloud, and wave,
Flashing their signals of unrest.—
My longing is a warm thing in a cold street,
Taking refuge by the chinks of lighted doors—
My longing is a pale ghost stepping into the sunlight
That falls in golden curtains sumptuous and hushed—
My longing is a fiddler making a thin tune through the silence,
Through the heavy pauses of sleep.—
Ah! Stop up my ears lest I hear my longing call,
Lest I hear my loneliness crying!

1918

How beautiful is the world's delight,
How trivial, yet as sweet as a passing dream
That makes the harassed sleeper in the night
Smile, and on waking sigh. Forever the stream
Of time moves onward; as in coloured boats
A thousand souls go sailing,
And stilly down the tide my spirit floats
Singing or wailing
To the tune the waters make. Here we forget a space
The crawling sins of man that sting and gloat,
The pain and fear that haggars every face,
But vaguely and remote
The strident trumpet and the clamorous voices sound—
Grief doth forget to curse her Gods or pray,
While pagan follies squander all around
Their brief gay hours in holiday;
For all prayers die when laughter is on the lips.—
How frail the moods of joy, how sweet to see them pass
Like bubbles on the tide, like coloured ships
Sailing on glass!

1918

The leaves are singing, and the sea,
And the sand in the wind,
Blown grass and hurrying people;
Full of melodious strings and lutes and flutes
Rustling and whispering forever.
The sad music of Life is in my ears,
Never ceasing, never asleep,
And my heart is strung between chord and chord
Like a crucifix in a rosary.

1918

How soundly sleepeth the fool,
With profane snore taunting the solemn-pillared night—
He hath no dreams of restless, subtle forms
That shift across a feverish vacancy;
Nor doth he hear the drums of time
Beating against oblivion tunes of war,
Goaded the crippled hours on their endless march—
But waketh to yawn in the face of the sun,
Then turneth back to sleep....

How soundly the wise man sleepeth,
Couched royally in the purple of the dark
With his white mistress, Peace—
And when the morning stealeth on his rest,
As a rose he doth pluck her from the spreading tree of days,
And reviveth his heart
With the perfume of the world....
But 'twixt the wise and the foolish
Many nights shed sorrow and fear,
And nets are spread for timid feet,
And the waves beat on the shifting sand....

1918

Moonlit lilacs under the window,
And the pale smell of their falling blossoms,
And the white floating beams like luminous moths
Fluttering from bloom to bloom.
Sprays of lilac flowers
Frothing at the green verge of midnight waves,
Frozen to motionless icicles.
Moonlight flows over me,
Spreads her bright watery hair over my face,
Full of illicit, marvellous perfumes
Wreathed with syringa and plaited with hyacinths;
Hair of the moonlight falling about me,
Straight and cool as the drooping tresses of rain.

1918

Old woman forever sitting
Alone in the large hotel under the fans,
Infinitely alone where around you spin
So many lives like painted tops,
Smearing the void a moment with their hues,
Giddily catching at balance as they pause.
What crime was yours, old woman,
What sin against the Earth
That she should give you now
A cap of dust and furrows on your cheeks,
And at the end
A hole dug in the mould?
Is death the promise of Fate's last rebound,
Revenge of Time that waits within the clock
And laughs awry at life,
For a kiss, for a dream, for a child that you bore,
For a fresh rose pinned to your bosom?
The owl is in your spirit,
Blinking through the oldest tree of wisdom—
And now your fingers are weaving
The cold pale invisible blossoms of death
Into a waxen wreath,
And Time
Sits down beside you knitting with quick hands
Grey counterpanes to cover up a grave!

1918

Loneliness I love,
And that is why they have called me forth into the streets.
Loneliness I love,
But the crowd has clutched at me with fawning hands,...
My spirit speaks
In the scented quietness of a divine melancholy
Murmuring the tunes
For which my dreams are the delicate instruments.
The shadowy silences
Have made me beautiful and dressed me in velvet dignities,
And that is why
The noise of tambourines has maddened my soul into dancing,
And I am clad
In the lust-lipped whispering of furtive caresses.
Holiness I love,
And touching the virginal pierced feet of martyrs,
The crucified feet
Nestled among lilies and hallowing candles.
Holiness I love
And the melodious absolution falling on my sins.
But that is why
Blasphemous priests have forced my hands to tear
The vesture of secrecy
Which hides the human nakedness of God.

* * * * *

1918

I met an Indian underneath a tree, under a ragged tree,
His face was yellow and wrinkled like some stone whereon a God had writ
And his emaciated fingers drew circles in the dust....
I bent my mouth to his ear, crying "O father, O Prophet!
I have wandered far over the earth troubled with doubts that will not let me rest,
Canst thou not tell me with all thy wizardries and meditations
The purpose of our lives upon this world,
The secret truth Earth shelters in her womb?"

But he was listening to the whispering of the mountains,
To the boom of God's paces on the rocks,
And the swishing steps of his followers in the rivers.
Then suddenly he pointed to the arched doorway in between the hills,
And the mysterious purple curtain of the dusk that drooped from cliff to cliff.
I saw in his eyes the vision of highborn ghosts,
Of divine ivory faces wreathed with the flowers of wisdom—
And I knew that he had found only the half-spoken promises of Heaven....

* * * * *

I saw a drunkard laughing in a tavern,
His cup was tilted and the wine spilt crimson on the sprawled arms and distracted hair of a woman fallen
asleep,
I watched him there and wondered
If ever the bubbling goblins of wine had whispered him life's secret.
But he raised the cup of his carousals and gazed at emptiness,
Toasting some wild, irreverent dream,
Some flame-red salamander pirouetting among the dead waste ashes of time—
And I knew that he had found only the secrets of sleep....

122

* * * * *

A woman sat within a little house,
Scolding and singing ballads to her child,
And all around came the quarrel of children's voices.
Yet one boy sat apart within the furthest corner of the room
Painting an animal with coloured chalks.
I lingered by the fire thinking of life, its vanities and mysteries,
But the woman did not heed me,
Nor her pale son that sat so hunched and still,
Painting his visions with the broken chalks,
For they had discovered the absorbing painful secrets of giving birth....

* * * * *

It was evening as I wandered,
By a lake two lovers leaned, smiling to see their faces in the water,
For they had found within each other's souls
An argent flattering mirror wherein to gaze and see their faces change with all the moods and shadows of the
day....
Not here should I discover the answer to bring light into my darkness,
Into the dim psychic crystals of my soul opalled with the changing colours of unrest—
So I went away into the loneliness, asking the forests and the mountains and the sea
The knowledge of life's baffling mysteries.
But they were roaring in a wind of memories,
Gathering the rain into their bodies to make them fierce and strong,
Heaving their shoulders upward to the morning,
Crowning their foreheads with sunlight.
And I knew that they were Life itself,
The pushing vehemence that rushes from the strangling arms of Death,
Nor could they guess
The purpose of God's beauty in their joy....

123

1918

124

From the fathomless depth of my boredom, from the
last room of its emptiness, an elf has come to play
with me.

As comes a little gold spider to a prison cell teasing the
criminal from his darkness to tear at a thread of sunlight,
and kiss the mouth of a shy morning whispering through
the window.

An elf has come to dance with me, blown like a leaf on
the path of my autumn lassitude.

Sprightly one, dervish! You are the living adventure
born of my dead childhood, you are the small god in the
temples of my unbelief, you are the bird that nests in ruined
temples, laying your silver eggs by moonlight and singing
when the pagan birds are still.

You are the dream-sower in the fields of sleep, you have
jingled the star-bells on the hood of darkness, and from the
knarled, stark tree of time have flung me the apple of
eternal laughter.

1919

Lolling in snow, like kings in ermine coats, the gilt-crowned
bottles lie.... Our thoughts are dangled in
a laughter of leaves as bunches of blue and yellow grapes
for faery beggars, for ragged fancies to pluck and taste.

Our music shall be the minstrelsy of ghostly ballad-mongers
that have stolen from the ashen banquets of death to bless
our revels.

Our spirits shall flit like those winged faces of cherubs
that never can alight, but swing forever on the azure ribbons
of the sky.

And all our dreams and kisses shall be as the rose-leaves
falling on ancient festivals, as the shadows of rose-leaves
falling on phantom lovers in the sleep-pillared temples of
our first archaic passion.

1918

The roots of our longing are probing the heart of night,
delving and twining together that our ultimate truth
may grow out of the darkness that bewilders and nourishes.
Out of the earth, the dust, the crystals of frost that bind
themselves like a tight crown over our heads.

Through the mould and the frost our hair and fingers shall
prick their spears of pallor and flame, and in the green
ardour of our up-rushing leaves the red goblets of fire
shall open, and masses of white flowers, milky as the star-sprays
that droop over Heaven, shall splash their bright
foam from the darkness, as waves that rise and break into
a fountain of blossoms.

1919

Sun-aureoled lilies are your priestesses,
They stand like choirs in silver surplices,
Melodious streams of silence fill the room,
And pensive listeners lean within the gloom
Of purple quietness. A laughter full of holiness—
Like the wild bells of lilies ringing in the loneliness
Of star-reflected gardens walled with night,—
Thrills from your soul which empties its delight
As rain on lilies, or as sunlight falling slenderly
To gild their ivory temples, and as moonlight shutting tenderly
Their alabaster doors.... A white peace grows,
And love, within your spirit like a lily and a rose.

1918

Starlit silences!
Breeding fears, swarming with sudden deaths,
With separations, burdens, and despairs,
Weaving slow eerie fancies in my brain ...
Forlorn shorn monks go down the cloisters of quietness
With tortured crucifixes cut in ivory
Clasped in their praying hands,
And psalmed with lips renunciate of kisses ...
Forgotten days are painted on the night
In parables and symbols of remorse
That jeer from out the wind-stirred tapestries.
The hangman's rope coils upward like a snake
Out of the death-coloured waters,
While the black barges pass
Funereal,
Carrying doom from mist to mist....
And madmen steal about the wintry parks
Under the high glum walls of an asylum,
With eyes lit up in phosphorescent ecstasies,
With fumbling hands
That grope for things invisibly obscene.
Even the clock
Grown idiot too from keeping madmen's time
Gibbers the hours away in irrelevant chimes....
Silence embalms the dead with scented bands
And is the watchman to deserted houses,
And draws the violet curtain on the day,
And fits a mask of silver to the moon.
Silence brings corpses from the crypts of memory
And sits them round us in the empty chairs,
Opens the secret chambers of our hopes
And shows us there in awful pantomime
Lust wreathing love with poppies and with ashes,
And Beauty dressing Sin for carnival,
And Peace made drunken with a cup of blood.
It winds as ivy round our listening thoughts
Shutting all sounds away, enclosing us
Within its stifled virid twilight....

129

Cry out, sing, make noises,
Bacchantes, revellers, clowns!
Bring myriad lamps in clusters, likening grapes
That spill the wine of light into our gloom;
Pressing against our lips
The red grape-kisses of pleasure.
Bring the hounds,
The garlanded white ones,
To bay and snarl and tear the flying rags
Of stillness shadowing away!
Lean over me, O Life,
And whisper all thy lying flatteries
That drag me back from Silence and her dead.
I have kept vigil on my soul too long
Within this vast cathedral of dim sleep,
Languidly gathering
The cold grey lilies of the stars
To slip between her passive waxen hands....

1918

130

The mountain is an Emperor.
The clouds are his beard, and the stars his diadem;
His bauble is the moon;
He is dressed in silver forests, and the mist his train;
His feet are two white rivers.

1917

I know what happiness is—
It is the negation of thought,
The shutting off
Of all those brooding phantoms that surround
As dank trees in a forest
Cutting the daylight into rags,
Caging the sun
In rusted prison bars.
Happiness loves to lie at a river's edge
And make no song,
But listen to the water's murmuring wisdom,
The kissing touch of leaves wind-bowed together,
The feathery swish of cloud wings on a hill;
Opening wide the violet-petalled doors
Of every shy and cloistered sense,
That all the scent and music of the world
May rush into the soul.
And happiness expands
The rainbow arch for a procession of dreams,
For moth-like fancies winged with evening,
For dove-breasted silences,
For shadowy reveries
And starry pilgrims....

I know what happiness is—
It is the giving back to Earth
Of all our furtive thefts,
The lurid jewels that we stole away
From passion, sin and pain,
Because they glittered strangely, luring us
With their forbidden beauty.
Because our childish fingers curiously
Crave the pale secrets of the moon
And grope for dangerous toys.
Happiness comes in giving back to Earth
The things we took from her with violent hands,
Remembering only
That her dust is our garment,
Her fruits our endeavour,
Her waters our priestess,
Her leaves our interpreters to God,
Her hills our infinite patience.

1918

Long hath the pen lain idle in my hand,
Or traced slow sentences without a rhyme,
Words strung at random to beguile the time
As children threading beads upon a strand.
I have strayed far away from fairyland
Whose little hills grow steep and hard to climb;
I creep along the valleys in the slime,
Or hide me like an ostrich in the sand.

For I have sought a mellow idleness,
To be forever buried as a fly
Lies casketed in amber; where the stress
Of peril, hunger, Death can never cry
To wake me from my sanguine weariness,
Or cloud the lucid stillness with a sigh.

1918

I laid my heart on a stone
And stood in the wood to watch.
Presently a priest came by;
He hid it in his cowl
And buried it in the graveyard.
Now is it grown into a cyclamen tree,
Clustering over the wall,
Beckoning far along the twilight road;
Nodding and singing where the cypress moans,
Ringing its little bells while the great bell tolls.
Whiter than ghosts are its flowers,
And its scent is sweeter than ghostly music—
All the men and priests that pass
In the night when the stars lean down,
Smell the heavy fragrance there
And feel the gentle touch of dripping dew.
Then they cross themselves and go
Hurriedly, warily,
Dreaming of pale women,
Under the pale stars.

1918

The cold light steals into my soul
Revealing its emptiness,
The cold winds batter at my heart
And make its lonely tenant shake with fear—
The raindrops slide across the window-glass
Like sighs that fall from patient weariness;
And coldly smiling time
Peers with his clock-face, ticking in my brain
The pulse of a monotonous remorse.

1918

The caravans of spring are in the town,
Lighting their brilliant torches in the park,
Dangling their bells, engirdling each stark
Black tree with coloured rings. The houses frown
Against the beryl sky, yet wear a crown
Of hazy dream, or flash a golden spark
Of sun-fire in their windows glum and dark;
The people blow like petals up and down.

But London tires at evening, each grey street
Mourns as the slow procession passes by,
Traffic and crowd, and Time on loitering feet.
Spring droops his lute, the slender echoes sigh,
And wistfully the jaded revellers meet,
Their pomp in tatters and their wreaths awry.

1918

I dread the beauty of approaching spring
Now the old month is dead and the young moon
Has pierced my heart with her sharp silver horns.
My tired soul is startled out of sleep
By all the urging joy of bud and leaf,
And in the barren yard where I have paced
Content with prison and despair's monotony,
The trees break into music wild and shrill,
And flowers come out like stars amid the dust,
Bewildering my loneliness with beauty....
For winter with her melancholy face
Shone back my miseries as in a glass,
And wept and whined in harmony with me;
And I could listen by the withering ashes
To the ill-omened drum of dropping rain,
And sighing harken sighs and mute feel silence,
And cold stretch forth my hand into the snows,
And hating, hear the laughter of the wind
Whose mad hands tear the sky.
But now again the promise of the spring
Shall lift my martyred spirit from the dust,
To where the lilled altar shines with peace,
And the white priestess comes
Crowning each candle with a gold desire
Engirdling with pallors
The forehead of a divine ghost.
Ah, but they die, these gods, the candles dwindle
And spring is but a radiant beckoning
To death that follows slowly, silently....

O flitting swallows, fleeting laugh of wind,
O flash of silver in the wings of dawn
That are spread out and closed. O hush of night
Breathless with love, oh swish of whispering tide
That swells and shrinks upon the dreaming shore.
O gentle eyes of children wonder-wide
That grow too soon to weariness and close;
O scuttling run of rabbit on the hills,
And flight of lazy rooks above the elm;
O birds' eggs frail, tinged faintly, nestled close,
And mystery of flower in the bud.
O burning galaxy of buttercups,
And drone of bees above the pouting rose,—
O twilit lovers stilled with reverie
And footprints of them swerving on the sand
And darkness of them clasped against the sky!
I see beyond the glory of your days
The grey days marching one behind the other
To the bleak tunes of silence.
When mists shall smear the radiance of the moon
And the lean thief shall pass,
Snatching the glittering toys away from love,
Plucking the feathers from the wings of peace.
And Life herself, grown old and crooked now,
Shall go the way that her long shadow points,
Her long black shadow down the roads of sleep.

1918

I cannot think that you have gone away,
You loved the earth—and life lit up your eyes,
And flickered in your smile that would surmise
Death as a song, a poem, or a play.
You were reborn afresh with every day,
And baffled fortune in some new disguise.
Ah! can it perish when the body dies,
Such youth, such love, such passion to be gay?

We shall not see you come to us and leave
A conqueror—nor catch on fairy wing
Some slender fancy—nor new wonders weave
Upon the loom of your imagining.
The world is wearier, grown dark to grieve
Her child that was a pilgrim and a king.

1917

At evening when the twilight curtains fall,
Before the lamps are lit within my room,
My memories hang bright upon the gloom,
Like ancient frescoes painted on the wall.

And I can hear the call of birds and bells
And shadowy sound of waves, and wind through leaves
And wind that rustles through the burnished sheaves,
And far off voices whispering farewells.

I dream again the joy I used to know
While straying by the sea that hardly sighed
A sorrow in my singing, as the tide
Crept up to clasp me, smiled, and let me go.

And I remember all the glad lost hours,
The racing of brown rabbits on the hill,
The winds that prowled around the lonely mill,
Laburnum laughter, music of the flowers.

The berries plucked with loitering delight,
Staining the dusk with purple, till the thought
Of starry little ghosts behind us caught
Our hearts and made us fearful of the night.

The London evenings huddled in the rain
Whose misty prisms shone with lamplight pale,
Making our hearts seem sinister and frail,
Fainting our thoughts with mystery and pain.

I have a world of memories to dream,
To touch with loving fingers as a sigh
Revives a little flame and lets it die.
Ah, were the days as lovely as they seem

Now that they look so peaceful lying dead?
And is it all the hope of Joy we have,
The broken trophies of the things she gave
And took away to give us dreams instead?

The things we love and lose before we find
The way to love them well enough and keep,
That now are woven on the looms of sleep
That now are only music of the wind.

1918

London grows sad at evening,
And we at the windows sit
To watch her moods,
Wearying with her.
Even a noise of laughter from the street
Sounds in our ears
Like something dropped and shattered on the stone.
Then her musician comes,
A wandering, malicious spirit;
The organ grinder, playing those old tunes
We know too well,
That hurt us with fatigue.
Till Hope like a harlequin,
His glitter hidden in a ragged coat,
The lamplighter, goes by,
Planting his pale flames in the dusk.
1918

Ah! the spring,
Sudden, surprising,
Melting the iron scales around the heart
As the earliest sun
Melts the cold case of dew on leaves—
Ah! the streets like odorous rivers
Chanting the echoes of seas—
Ah! the flowers in shop-windows
Beseeching, persuasive,
Reluctant to let their beauty flow away
From thoughts that mirror them in passing—
Beautiful exiles
Fluttering in their chains,
Thrilled with the noise of bees,
The music of meadows
Still hovering around them—
Flower fingers, flower-touches,
Passional, reminiscent,
Rippling the soul's still waters—
Flower galaxies,
Enamelled bridges arching from dream to dream,
Garlands splashing over the eyes of satyrs,
The furtive woodland eyes,
The pointed inquisitive ears—
Pallid flowers foaming on hill-crests,
Gushing heavenwards
From a sea of stormy mountains—
Opening and shutting exquisite doors,
As the senses open to music,
Shut upon silence,
Open to beauty,
Close their caskets upon love—
Ah! the flowers in the windows,
Amorous of poets
Making a chaplet of song!

1919

O God,
We have nothing to give Thee,
We are as fog that drifts on the river,
As the wailing of voices blown through mist—
We are as those that carry bags of dust
Heaping them with the dust—
We are covered with the dust of days,
We are pale from the dust of dreamless nights
Shaken before we were rested—
At dawn we are found by the sun
Adrift, labouring, thinking of nothing—
Our wine is bitter, it has made us drunk,
Our bread is coarse,
We are always athirst and hungry....
O God, we have been patient,
We have grown old in weariness,
Our lives are as the labouring of the wind—
We are huddled together in the dawn,
The sleeping houses pass us,
The dawn is a field of nettles
Stinging us from rest....
O God,
We have nothing to give Thee but patience,
We have suffered evil and believed Thee good,
Thy face is the gentleness of the distance,
The river is placid with the thought of Thee—
Our tears have washed us harder than the rocks,
And like the rocks we wait,
Grow old with waiting....
Weariness, the river
Flowing through banks of sleep....
O God, we have nothing to give Thee,
Take our great weariness,
We that have never lived and never slept,
Take our long weariness, O God!...

1919

Transcribers' Notes:

Punctuation, hyphenation, and spelling were not changed.

Ellipses are reproduced as printed in the original book.

Most of the poems' titles appear only in the Table of Contents, not with the poems themselves.

When the Transcriber could not to determine whether a verse at the top of a page was a new stanza or part of the stanza on the previous page, the latter was assumed.

Page [42](#): "sombring" was printed that way.

Page [89](#): "Because I can not" was printed with "can" and "not" as separate words.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK POEMS ***

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