

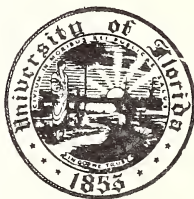


R. J. Harris  
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HELIODORA

*And Other Poems*



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# Heliodora

*And Other Poems*

*by* H. D.

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MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



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## *Note*

The poem *Lais* has in italics a translation of the Plato epigram in the Greek Anthology. *Heliodora* has in italics the two Meleager epigrams from the Anthology. In *Nossis* is the translation of the opening lines of the *Garland of Meleager* and the poem of *Nossis* herself in the Greek Anthology. The four *Sappho* fragments are re-worked freely. The *Odyssey* is a translation of the opening of the first book. The *Ion* is a translation of the latter part of the first long chorus of the *Ion* of Euripides.



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WASH of cold river  
in a glacial land,  
Ionian water,  
chill, snow-ribbed sand,  
drift of rare flowers,  
clear, with delicate shell-  
like leaf enclosing  
frozen lily-leaf,  
camellia texture,  
colder than a rose;

wind-flower  
that keeps the breath  
of the north-wind—  
these and none other;

intimate thoughts and kind  
reach out to share  
the treasure of my mind,  
intimate hands and dear  
draw garden-ward and sea-ward  
all the sheer rapture  
that I would take  
to mould a clear  
and frigid statue;

rare, of pure texture,  
beautiful space and line,  
marble to grace  
your inaccessible shrine.





## *Holy Satyr*

MOST holy Satyr,  
like a goat,  
with horns and hooves  
to match thy coat  
of russet brown,  
I make leaf-circlets  
and a crown of honey-flowers  
for thy throat;  
where the amber petals  
drip to ivory,  
I cut and slip  
each stiffened petal  
in the rift  
of carven petal;  
honey horn  
has wed the bright  
virgin petal of the white  
flower cluster: lip to lip  
let them whisper,  
let them lilt, quivering.

Most holy Satyr,  
like a goat,

hear this our song,  
accept our leaves,  
love-offering,  
return our hymn,  
like echo fling  
a sweet song,  
answering note for note.

## *Lais*

LET her who walks in Paphos  
take the glass,  
let Paphos take the mirror  
and the work of frosted fruit,  
gold apples set  
with silver apple-leaf,  
white leaf of silver  
wrought with vein of gilt.

Let Paphos lift the mirror,  
let her look  
into the polished centre of the disk.

Let Paphos take the mirror;  
did she press  
flowerlet of flame-flower  
to the lustrous white  
of the white forehead?  
did the dark veins beat  
a deeper purple  
than the wine-deep tint  
of the dark flower?

Did she deck black hair  
one evening, with the winter-white  
flower of the winter-berry,  
did she look (reft of her lover)  
at a face gone white  
under the chaplet  
of white virgin-breath?

Lais, exultant, tyrannizing Greece,  
Lais who kept her lovers in the porch,  
lover on lover waiting,  
(but to creep  
where the robe brushed the threshold  
where still sleeps Lais,)  
so she creeps, Lais,  
to lay her mirror at the feet  
of her who reigns in Paphos.

Lais has left her mirror  
for she sees no longer in its depth  
the Lais' self  
that laughed exultant  
tyrannizing Greece.

Lais has left her mirror,  
for she weeps no longer,

finding in its depth,  
a face, but other  
than dark flame and white  
feature of perfect marble.

*Lais has left her mirror,  
(so one wrote)  
to her who reigns in Paphos;  
Lais who laughed a tyrant over Greece,  
Lais who turned the lovers from the porch,  
that swarm for whom now  
Lais has no use;  
Lais is now no lover of the glass,  
seeing no more the face as once it was,  
wishing to see that face and finding this.*

*Heliodora*

HE and I sought together,  
Over the spattered table,  
rhymes and flowers,  
gifts for a name.

He said, among others,  
I will bring  
(and the phrase was just and good,  
but not as good as mine,)  
“the narcissus that loves the rain.”

We strove for a name,  
while the light of the lamps burnt thin  
and the outer dawn came in,  
a ghost, the last at the feast  
or the first,  
to sit within  
with the two that remained  
to quibble in flowers and verse  
over a girl's name.

He said, “the rain loving,”  
I said, “the narcissus, drunk,  
drunk with the rain.”

Yet I had lost  
for he said,  
“the rose, the lover’s gift,  
is loved of love,”  
he said it,  
“loved of love;”  
I waited, even as he spoke,  
to see the room filled with a light,  
as when in winter  
the embers catch in a wind  
when a room is dank;  
so it would be filled, I thought,  
our room with a light  
when he said  
(and he said it first,)  
“the rose, the lover’s delight,  
is loved of love,”  
but the light was the same.

Then he caught,  
seeing the fire in my eyes,  
my fire, my fever, perhaps,  
for he leaned  
with the purple wine  
stained on his sleeve,

and said this:  
“did you ever think  
a girl’s mouth  
caught in a kiss,  
is a lily that laughs?”

I had not.  
I saw it now  
as men must see it forever afterwards;  
no poet could write again,  
“the red-lily,  
a girl’s laugh caught in a kiss;”  
it was his to pour in the vat  
from which all poets dip and quaff,  
for poets are brothers in this.

So I saw the fire in his eyes,  
it was almost my fire,  
(he was younger,)  
I saw the face so white,  
my heart beat,  
it was almost my phrase;  
I said, “surprise the muses,  
take them by surprise;



it is late,  
rather it is dawn-rise,  
those ladies sleep, the nine,  
our own king's mistresses."

A name to rhyme,  
flowers to bring to a name,  
what was one girl faint and shy,  
with eyes like the myrtle,  
(I said: "her underlids  
are rather like myrtle,")  
to vie with the nine?

Let him take the name,  
he had the rhymes,  
"the rose, loved of love,  
the lily, a mouth that laughs,"  
he had the gift,  
"the scented crocus,  
the purple hyacinth,"  
what was one girl to the nine?

He said:  
"I will make her a wreath;"  
he said:  
"I will write it thus:

*I will bring you the lily that laughs,  
I will twine  
with soft narcissus, the myrtle,  
sweet crocus, white violet,  
the purple hyacinth, and last,  
the rose, loved-of-love,  
that these may drip on your hair  
the less soft flowers,  
may mingle sweet with the sweet  
of Heliodora's locks,  
myrrh-curled."*

(He wrote myrrh-curled,  
I think, the first.)

I said:  
"they sleep, the nine,"  
when he shouted swift and passionate:  
"*that* for the nine!  
above the hills  
the sun is about to wake,  
*and to-day white violets  
shine beside white lilies  
adrift on the mountain side;  
to-day the narcissus opens  
that loves the rain."*

I watched him to the door,  
catching his robe  
as the wine-bowl crashed to the floor,  
spilling a few wet lees,  
(ah, his purple hyacinth!)

I saw him out of the door,  
I thought:  
there will never be a poet  
in all the centuries after this,  
who will dare write,  
after my friend's verse,  
"a girl's mouth  
is a lily kissed."

## *Helen*

ALL Greece hates  
the still eyes in the white face,  
the lustre as of olives  
where she stands,  
and the white hands.

All Greece reviles  
the wan face when she smiles,  
hating it deeper still  
when it grows wan and white,  
remembering past enchantments  
and past ills.

Greece sees unmoved,  
God's daughter, born of love,  
the beauty of cool feet  
and slenderest knees,  
could love indeed the maid,  
only if she were laid,  
white ash amid funereal cypresses.

## *Nossis*

I THOUGHT to hear him speak  
the girl might rise  
and make the garden silver,  
as the white moon breaks,  
“Nossis,” he cried, “a flame.”

I said:  
“a girl that’s dead  
some hundred years;  
a poet – what of that?  
for in the islands,  
in the haunts of Greek Ionia,  
Rhodes and Cyprus,  
girls are cheap.”

I said, to test his mood,  
to make him rage or laugh or sing or weep,  
“in Greek Ionia and in Cyprus,  
many girls are found  
with wreaths and apple-branches.”

“Only a hundred years or two or three,  
has she lain dead

yet men forget;”  
he said,  
“I want a garden,”  
and I thought  
he wished to make a terrace on the hill,  
bend the stream to it,  
set out daffodils,  
plant Phrygian violets,  
such was his will and whim,  
I thought,  
to name and watch each flower.

His was no garden  
bright with Tyrian violets,  
his was a shelter  
wrought of flame and spirit,  
and as he flung her name  
against the dark,  
I thought the iris-flowers  
that lined the path  
must be the ghost of Nossis.

*“Who made the wreath,  
for what man was it wrought?”*

*peak, fashioned all of fruit-buds,  
song, my loveliest,  
say Meleager brought to Diocles,  
(a gift for that enchanting friend)  
memories with names of poets.*

*He sought for Moero, lilies,  
and those many,  
red-lilies for Anyte,  
for Sappho, roses,  
with those few, he caught  
that breath of the sweet-scented  
leaf of iris,  
the myrrh-iris,  
to set beside the tablet  
and the wax  
which Love had burnt,  
when scarred across by Nossis:"*

when she wrote:

*"I Nossis stand by this:  
I state that love is sweet:  
if you think otherwise  
assert what beauty  
or what charm*

*after the charm of love,  
retains its grace?*

*"Honey," you say:  
honey? I say "I spit  
honey out of my mouth:  
nothing is second-best  
after the sweet of Eros."*

*I Nossis stand and state  
that he whom Love neglects  
has naught, no flower, no grace,  
who lacks that rose, her kiss."*

I thought to hear him speak  
the girl might rise  
and make the garden silver  
as the white moon breaks,  
"Nossis," he cried, "a flame."



## *Centaur Song*

NOW that the day is done,  
now that the night creeps soft  
and dims the chestnut clusters'  
radiant spike of flower,  
O sweet, till dawn  
break through the branches  
of our orchard-garden,  
rest in this shelter  
of the osier-wood and thorn.

They fall,  
the apple-flowers;  
nor softer grace has Aphrodite  
in the heaven afar,  
nor at so fair a pace  
open the flower-petals  
as your face bends down,  
while, breath on breath,  
your mouth wanders  
from my mouth o'er my face.

What have I left  
to bring you in this place,

already sweet with violets?  
(those you brought  
with swathes of earliest grass,  
forest and meadow balm,  
flung from your giant arms  
for us to rest upon.)

Fair are these petals  
broken by your feet;  
your horse's hooves  
tread softer than a deer's;  
your eyes, startled,  
are like the deer eyes  
while your heart  
trembles more than the deer.

O earth, O god,  
O forest, stream or river,  
what shall I bring  
that all the day hold back,  
that Dawn remember Love  
and rest upon her bed,  
and Zeus, forgetful not of Danæ or Maia,  
bid the stars shine forever.

*Oread*

WHIRL up, sea –  
whirl your pointed pines,  
splash your great pines  
on our rocks,  
hurl your green over us,  
cover us with your pools of fir.

*The Pool*

**A**RE you alive?  
I touch you.

You quiver like a sea-fish.

I cover you with my net.

What are you—banded one?

## *Thetis*

**H**E had asked for immortal life  
in the old days and had grown old,  
now he had aged apace,  
he asked for his youth,  
and I, Thetis, ganted him

freedom under the sea  
drip and welter of weeds,  
the drift of the fringing grass,  
the gift of the never-withering moss,  
and the flowering reed,

and most,  
beauty of fifty nereids,  
sisters of nine,  
I one of their least,  
yet great and a goddess,  
granted Pelius,

love under the sea,  
beauty, grace infinite:

So I crept, at last,  
a crescent, a curve of a wave,

(a man would have thought,  
had he watched for his nets  
on the beach)  
a dolphin, a glistening fish,  
that burnt and caught for its light,  
the light of the undercrest  
of the lifting tide,  
a fish with silver for breast,  
with no light but the light  
of the sea it reflects.

Little he would have guessed,  
(had such a one  
watched by his nets,)  
that a goddess flung from the crest  
of the wave the blue of its own  
bright tress of hair,  
the blue of the painted stuff  
it wore for dress.

No man would have known save he,  
whose coming I sensed as I strung  
my pearl and agate and pearl,  
to mark the beat and the stress  
of the lilt of my song.

*Who dreams of a son,  
save one,  
childless, having no bright  
face to flatter its own,  
who dreams of a son?*

*Nereids under the sea,  
my sisters, fifty and one,  
(counting myself)  
they dream of a child  
of water and sea,  
with hair of the softest,  
to lie along the curve  
of fragile, tiny bones,  
yet more beautiful each than each,  
hair more bright and long,  
to rival its own.*

*Nereids under the wave,  
who dreams of a son  
save I, Thetis, alone?*

*Each would have for a child,  
a stray self, furtive and wild,  
to dive and leap to the wind,  
to wheedle and coax*

*the stray birds bright and bland  
of foreign strands,  
to crawl and stretch on the sands,  
each would have for its own,  
a daughter for child.*

*Who dreams, who sings of a son?  
I, Thetis, alone.*

When I had finished my song,  
and dropped the last seed-pearl,  
and flung the necklet  
about my throat  
and found it none too bright,  
not bright enough nor pale  
enough, not like the moon that creeps  
beneath the sea,  
between the lift of crest and crest,  
had tried it on  
and found it not  
quite fair enough  
to fill the night  
of my blue folds of bluest dress  
with moon for light,  
I cast the beads aside and leapt,



myself all blue  
with no bright gloss  
of pearls for crescent light;

but one alert, all blue and wet,  
I flung myself, an arrow's flight,  
straight upward  
through the blue of night  
that was my palace wall,  
and crept to where I saw the mark  
of feet, a rare foot-fall:

Achilles' sandal on the beach,  
could one mistake?  
perhaps a lover or a nymph,  
lost from the tangled fern and brake,  
that lines the upper shelf of land,  
perhaps a goddess or a nymph  
might so mistake

Achilles' footprint for the trace  
of a bright god alert to track  
the panther where he slinks for thirst  
across the sand;

perhaps a goddess or a nymph,  
might think a god had crossed the track

of weed and drift,  
had broken here this stem of reed,  
had turned this sea-shell to the light:

So she must stoop, this goddess girl,  
or nymph, with crest of blossoming wood  
about her hair for cap or crown,  
must stoop and kneel and bending down,  
must kiss the print of such a one.

Not I, the mother, Thetis self,  
I stretched and lay, a river's slim  
dark length,  
a rivulet where it leaves the wood,  
and meets the sea,  
I lay along the burning sand,  
a river's blue.

*At Ithaca*

OVER and back,  
the long waves crawl  
and track the sand with foam;  
night darkens and the sea  
takes on that desperate tone  
of dark that wives put on  
when all their love is done.

Over and back,  
the tangled thread falls slack,  
over and up and on;  
over and all is sewn;  
now while I bind the end,  
I wish some fiery friend  
would sweep impetuously  
these fingers from the loom.

My weary thoughts  
play traitor to my soul,  
just as the toil is over;  
swift while the woof is whole,  
turn now my spirit, swift,  
and tear the pattern there,  
the flowers so deftly wrought,

the border of sea-blue,  
the sea-blue coast of home.

The web was over-fair,  
that web of pictures there,  
enchantments that I thought  
he had, that I had lost;  
weaving his happiness  
within the stitching frame,  
weaving his fire and fame,  
I thought my work was done,  
I prayed that only one  
of those that I had spurned,  
might stoop and conquer this  
long waiting with a kiss.

But each time that I see  
my work so beautifully  
inwoven and would keep  
the picture and the whole,  
Athene steels my soul,  
slanting across my brain,  
I see as shafts of rain  
his chariot and his shafts,

I see the arrows fall,  
I see my lord who moves  
like Hector, lord of love,  
I see him matched with fair  
bright rivals and I see  
those lesser rivals flee.

*We Two*

WE two are left:  
I with small grace reveal  
distaste and bitterness;  
you with small patience  
take my hands;  
though effortless,  
you scald their weight  
as a bowl, lined with embers,  
wherein droop  
great petals of white rose,  
forced by the heat  
too soon to break.

We two are left:  
as a blank wall, the world,  
earth and the men who talk,  
saying their space of life  
is good and gracious,  
with eyes blank  
as that blank surface  
their ignorance mistakes  
for final shelter  
and a resting-place.

We two remain:  
yet by what miracle,  
searching within the tangles of my brain,  
I ask again,  
have we two met within  
this maze of dædal paths  
in-wound mid grievous stone,  
where once I stood alone?

## *Fragment Thirty-six*

*I know not what to do:  
my mind is divided.*

SAPPHO

I KNOW not what to do,  
my mind is reft:  
is song's gift best?  
is love's gift loveliest?  
I know not what to do,  
now sleep has pressed  
weight on your eyelids.

Shall I break your rest,  
devouring, eager?  
is love's gift best?  
nay, song's the loveliest:  
yet were you lost,  
what rapture  
could I take from song?  
what song were left?

I know not what to do:  
to turn and slake  
the rage that burns,  
with my breath burn



and trouble your cool breath?  
so shall I turn and take  
snow in my arms?  
(is love's gift best?)  
yet flake on flake  
of snow were comfortless,  
did you lie wondering,  
wakened yet unawake.

Shall I turn and take  
comfortless snow within my arms?  
press lips to lips  
that answer not,  
press lips to flesh  
that shudders not nor breaks?

Is love's gift best?  
shall I turn and slake  
all the wild longing?  
O I am eager for you!  
as the Pleiads shake  
white light in whiter water  
so shall I take you?

My mind is quite divided,  
my minds hesitate,

so perfect matched,  
I know not what to do:  
each strives with each  
as two white wrestlers  
standing for a match,  
ready to turn and clutch  
yet never shake muscle nor nerve nor tendon;  
so my mind waits  
to grapple with my mind,  
yet I lie quiet,  
I would seem at rest.

I know not what to do:  
strain upon strain,  
sound surging upon sound  
makes my brain blind;  
as a wave-line may wait to fall  
yet (waiting for its falling)  
still the wind may take  
from off its crest,  
white flake on flake of foam,  
that rises,  
seeming to dart and pulse  
and rend the light,  
so my mind hesitates

above the passion  
quivering yet to break,  
so my mind hesitates  
above my mind,  
listening to song's delight.

I know not what to do:  
will the sound break,  
rending the night  
with rift on rift of rose  
and scattered light?  
will the sound break at last  
as the wave hesitant,  
or will the whole night pass  
and I lie listening awake?

## *Flute Song*

**L**ITTLE scavenger away,  
touch not the door,  
beat not the portal down,  
cross not the sill,  
silent until  
my song, bright and shrill,  
breathes out its lay.

Little scavenger avaunt,  
tempt me with jeer and taunt,  
yet you will wait to-day;  
for it were surely ill  
to mock and shout and revel;  
it were more fit to tell  
with flutes and calathes,  
your mother's praise.

## *After Troy*

WE flung against their gods,  
invincible, clear hate;  
we fought;  
frantic, we flung the last  
imperious, desperate shaft

and lost:  
we knew the loss  
before they ever guessed  
fortune had tossed to them  
her favour and her whim;  
but how were we depressed?  
we lost yet as we pressed  
our spearsmen on their best,  
we knew their line invincible  
because there fell  
on them no shiverings  
of the white enchanteress,  
radiant Aphrodite's spell:

we hurled our shafts of passion,  
noblest hate,  
and knew their cause was blest,  
and knew their gods were nobler,

better taught in skill,  
subtler with wit of thought,  
yet had it been God's will  
that *they* not we should fall,  
we know those fields had bled  
with roses lesser red.

## *Cassandra*

*O Hymen king.*

**H**YMEN, O Hymen king,  
what bitter thing is this?  
what shaft, tearing my heart?  
what scar, what light, what fire  
searing my eye-balls and my eyes with flame?  
nameless, O spoken name,  
king, lord, speak blameless Hymen.

Why do you blind my eyes?  
why do you dart and pulse  
till all the dark is home,  
then find my soul  
and ruthless draw it back?  
scaling the scaleless,  
opening the dark?  
speak, nameless, power and might;  
when will you leave me quite?  
when will you break my wings  
or leave them utterly free  
to scale heaven endlessly?

A bitter, broken thing,  
my heart, O Hymen lord,

yet neither drought nor sword  
baffles men quite,  
why must they feign to fear  
my virgin glance?  
feigned utterly or real  
why do they shrink?  
my trance frightens them,  
breaks the dance,  
empties the market place;  
if I but pass they fall  
back, frantically;  
must always people mock?  
unless they shrink and reel  
as in the temple  
at your uttered will.

O Hymen king,  
lord, greatest, power, might,  
look for my face is dark,  
burnt with your light,  
your fire, O Hymen lord;  
is there none left  
can equal me  
in ecstasy, desire?  
is there none left



can bear with me  
the kiss of your white fire?  
is there not one,  
Phrygian or frenzied Greek,  
poet, song-swept, or bard,  
one meet to take from me  
this bitter power of song,  
one fit to speak, Hymen,  
your praises, lord?

May I not wed  
as you have wed?  
may it not break, beauty,  
from out my hands, my head, my feet?  
may Love not lie beside me  
till his heat  
burn me to ash?  
may he not comfort me, then,  
spent of all that fire and heat,  
still, ashen-white and cool  
as the wet laurels,  
white, before your feet  
step on the mountain-slope,  
before your fiery hand  
lift up the mantle

covering flower and land,  
as a man lifts,  
O Hymen, from his bride,  
(cowering with woman eyes,) the veil?  
O Hymen lord, be kind.

## *Epigrams*

### I

**O**RUTHLESS, perilous, imperious hate,  
you can not thwart  
the promptings of my soul,  
you can not weaken nay nor dominate  
Love that is mateless,  
Love the rite,  
the whole measure of being:  
would you crush with bondage?  
nay, you would love me not  
were I your slave.

### 2

Torture me not with this or that or this,  
Love is my master,  
you his lesser self;  
while you are Love,  
I love you generously,  
be Eros,  
not a tyrannous, bitter mate:  
Love has no charm  
when Love is swept to earth:

you'd make a lop-winged god,  
frozen and contrite,  
of god up-darting,  
winged for passionate flight.

## *Fragment Forty*

*Love . . . bitter-sweet.*

SAPPHO

I

KEEP love and he wings  
with his bow,  
up, mocking us,  
keep love and he taunts us  
and escapes.

Keep love and he sways apart  
in another world,  
outdistancing us.

Keep love and he mocks,  
ah, bitter and sweet,  
your sweetness is more cruel  
than your hurt.

Honey and salt,  
fire burst from the rocks  
to meet fire  
spilt from Hesperus.

Fire darted aloft and met fire :  
in that moment  
love entered us.

2

Could Eros be kept?  
he were prisoned long since  
and sick with imprisonment;  
could Eros be kept?  
others would have broken  
and crushed out his life.

Could Eros be kept?  
we too sinning, by Kypris,  
might have prisoned him outright.

Could Eros be kept?  
nay, thank him and the bright goddess  
that he left us.

3

Ah, love is bitter and sweet,  
but which is more sweet,  
the sweetness  
or the bitterness?  
none has spoken it.

Love is bitter,  
but can salt taint sea-flowers,  
grief, happiness?

Is it bitter to give back  
love to your lover  
if he crave it?

Is it bitter to give back  
love to your lover  
if he wish it  
for a new favourite?  
who can say,  
or is it sweet?

Is it sweet  
to possess utterly?  
or is it bitter,  
bitter as ash?

4

I had thought myself frail;  
a petal,  
with light equal  
on leaf and under-leaf.

I had thought myself frail;  
a lamp,  
shell, ivory or crust of pearl,  
about to fall shattered,  
with flame spent.

I cried:  
"I must perish,  
I am deserted,  
an outcast, desperate  
in this darkness,"  
(such fire rent me with Hesperus,)  
then the day broke.

5

What need of a lamp  
when day lightens us,  
what need to bind love  
when love stands  
with such radiant wings  
over us?

What need —  
yet to sing love,  
love must first shatter us,



## *Toward the Piræus*

**S***LAY* with your eyes, Greek,  
men over the face of the earth,  
slay with your eyes, the host,  
puny, passionless, weak.

*Break as the ranks of steel  
broke when the Persian lost:  
craven, we hated them then:  
now we would count them Gods  
beside these, spawn of the earth.*

*Grant us your mantle, Greek;  
grant us but one  
to fright (as your eyes) with a sword,  
men, craven and weak,  
grant us but one to strike  
one blow for you, passionate Greek.*

### I

You would have broken my wings,  
but the very fact that you knew  
I had wings, set some seal  
on my bitter heart, my heart  
broke and fluttered and sang.

You would have snared me,  
and scattered the strands of my nest;  
but the very fact that you saw,  
sheltered me, claimed me,  
set me apart from the rest

Of men – of *men*, made you a god,  
and me, claimed me, set me apart  
and the song in my breast,  
yours, yours forever –  
if I escape your evil heart.

2

I loved you:  
men have writ and women have said  
they loved,  
but as the Pythoness stands by the altar,  
intense and may not move,

till the fumes pass over;  
and may not falter or break,  
till the priest has caught the words  
that mar or make  
a deme or a ravaged town;

so I, though my knees tremble,  
my heart break,  
must note the rumbling,  
heed only the shuddering  
down in the fissure beneath the rock  
of the temple floor;

must wait and watch  
and may not turn nor move,  
nor break from my trance to speak  
so slight, so sweet,  
so simple a word as love.

3

What had you done  
had you been true,  
I can not think,  
I may not know.

What could we do  
were I not wise,  
what play invent,  
what joy devise?

What could we do  
if you were great?

(Yet were you lost,  
who were there then,  
to circumvent  
the tricks of men?)

What can we do,  
for curious lies  
have filled your heart,  
and in my eyes  
sorrow has writ  
that I am wise.

4

If I had been a boy,  
I would have worshipped your grace,  
I would have flung my worship  
before your feet,  
I would have followed apart,  
glad, rent with an ecstasy  
to watch you turn  
your great head, set on the throat,  
thick, dark with its sinews,

burned and wrought  
like the olive stalk,  
and the noble chin  
and the throat.

I would have stood,  
and watched and watched  
and burned,  
and when in the night,  
from the many hosts, your slaves,  
and warriors and serving men  
you had turned  
to the purple couch and the flame  
of the woman, tall like the cypress tree  
that flames sudden and swift and free  
as with crackle of golden resin  
and cones and the locks flung free  
like the cypress limbs,  
bound, caught and shaken and loosed,  
bound, caught and riven and bound  
and loosened again,  
as in rain of a kingly storm  
or wind full from a desert plain.

So, when you had risen  
from all the lethargy of love and its heat,

you would have summoned me,  
me alone,  
and found my hands,  
beyond all the hands in the world,  
cold, cold, cold,  
intolerably cold and sweet.

5

It was not chastity that made me cold nor  
fear,  
only I knew that you, like myself, were sick  
of the puny race that crawls and quibbles  
and lisps  
of love and love and lovers and love's deceit.

It was not chastity that made me wild, but  
fear  
that my weapon, tempered in different heat,  
was over-matched by yours, and your hand  
skilled to yield death-blows, might break

With the slightest turn – no ill will meant –  
my own lesser, yet still somewhat fine-  
wrought,  
fiery-tempered, delicate, over-passionate  
steel.

## *Moonrise*

WILL you glimmer on the sea?  
will you fling your spear-head  
on the shore?  
what note shall we pitch?  
we have a song,  
on the bank we share our arrows;  
the loosed string tells our note:

O flight,  
bring her swiftly to our song.  
she is great,  
we measure her by the pine trees.

*At Eleusis*

**W**HAT *they did,*  
*they did for Dionysos,*  
*for ecstasy's sake:*

now take the basket,  
think;  
think of the moment you count  
most foul in your life;  
conjure it,  
supplicate,  
pray to it;  
your face is bleak, you retract,  
you dare not remember it:

stop;  
it is too late.  
the next stands by the altar step,  
a child's face yet not innocent,  
it will prove adequate, but you,  
I could have spelt your peril at the gate,  
yet for your mind's sake,  
though you could not enter,  
wait.



*What they did,  
they did for Dionysos,  
for ecstasy's sake:*

Now take the basket —  
(ah face in a dream,  
did I not know your heart,  
I would falter,  
for each that fares onward  
is my child;  
ah can you wonder  
that my hands shake,  
that my knees tremble,  
I a mortal, set in the goddess' place?)

*Fragment Forty-one*

*. . . thou flittest to Andromeda.*

SAPPHO

I

AM I blind alas,  
am I blind?

I too have followed  
her path.

I too have bent at her feet.

I too have wakened to pluck  
amaranth in the straight shaft,  
amaranth purple in the cup,  
scorched at the edge to white.

Am I blind?

am I the less ready for her sacrifice?

am I the less eager to give  
what she asks,

she the shameless and radiant?

Am I quite lost,

I towering above you and her glance,  
walking with swifter pace,

with clearer sight,  
with intensity  
beside which you two  
are as spent ash?

Nay, I give back to the goddess the gift  
she tendered me in a moment  
of great bounty.

I return it. I lay it again  
on the white slab of her house,  
the beauty she cast out  
one moment, careless.

Nor do I cry out:  
“why did I stoop?  
why did I turn aside  
one moment from the rocks  
marking the sea-path?  
Aphrodite, shameless and radiant,  
have pity, turn, answer us.”

Ah no – though I stumble toward  
her altar-step,  
though my flesh is scorched and rent,  
shattered, cut apart,  
slashed open;

though my heels press my own wet life  
black, dark to purple,  
on the smooth, rose-streaked  
threshold of her pavement.

2

Am I blind alas, deaf too  
that my ears lost all this?  
nay, O my lover,  
shameless and still radiant,  
I tell you this:

I was not asleep,  
I did not lie asleep on those hot rocks  
while you waited.  
I was not unaware when I glanced  
out toward the sea  
watching the purple ships.

I was not blind when I turned.  
I was not indifferent when I strayed aside  
or loitered as we three went  
or seemed to turn a moment from the path  
for that same amaranth.

I was not dull and dead when I fell  
back on our couch at night.  
I was not indifferent when I turned  
and lay quiet.  
I was not dead in my sleep.

3

Lady of all beauty,  
I give you this:  
say I have offered small sacrifice,  
say I am unworthy your touch,  
but say not:  
"she turned to some cold, calm god,  
silent, pitiful, in preference."

Lady of all beauty,  
I give you this:  
say not:  
"she deserted my altar-step,  
the fire on my white hearth  
was too great,  
she fell back at my first glance."

Lady, radiant and shameless,  
I have brought small wreaths,

(they were a child's gift,)  
I have offered myrrh-leaf,  
crisp lentisk,  
I have laid rose-petal  
and white rock-rose from the beach.

But I give now a greater,  
I give life and spirit with this.  
I render a grace  
no one has dared to speak,  
lest men at your altar greet him  
as slave, callous to your art;  
I dare more than the singer  
offering her lute,  
the girl her stained veils,  
the woman her swathes of birth,  
or pencil and chalk,  
mirror and unguent box.

I offer more than the lad  
singing at your steps,  
praise of himself,  
his mirror his friend's face,  
more than any girl,  
I offer you this:

(grant only strength  
that I withdraw not my gift,)  
I give you my praise and this:  
the love of my lover  
for his mistress.

## *Telesila*

*In Argos—that statue of her;  
at her feet the scroll of her  
love-poetry, in her hand a helmet.*

WAR is a fevered god  
who takes alike  
maiden and king and clod,  
and yet another one,  
(ah withering peril!)  
deprives alike,  
with equal skill,  
alike indifferently,  
hoar spearsman of his shaft,  
wan maiden of her zone,  
even he,  
Love who is great War's  
very over-lord.

War bent  
and kissed the forehead,  
yet Love swift,  
planted on chin  
and tenderest cyclamen lift  
of fragrant mouth,



fevered and honeyed breath,  
breathing o'er and o'er  
those tendrils of her hair,  
soft kisses  
like bright flowers.

Love took  
and laid the sweet,  
(being extravagant,)  
on lip and chin and cheek,  
but ah he failed  
even he,  
before the luminous eyes  
that dart  
no suave appeal,  
alas, impelling me  
to brave incontinent,  
grave Pallas' high command.

And yet the mouth!  
ah Love ingratiate,  
how was it you,  
so poignant, swift and sure,  
could not have taken all  
and left me free,

free to desert the Argives,  
let them burn,  
free yet to turn  
and let the city fall:  
yea, let high War  
take all his vengeful way,  
for what am I?  
I cannot save nor stay  
the city's fall.

War is a fevered god,  
(yet who has writ as she  
the power of Love?)  
War bent and kissed the forehead,  
that bright brow,  
ignored the chin  
and the sweet mouth,  
for that and the low laugh were his,  
Eros ingratiate,  
who sadly missed  
in all the kisses count,  
those eyebrows  
and swart eyes,  
O valiant one  
who bowed

falsely and vilely trapped us,  
traitorous lord.

And yet,  
(remembrance mocks,)  
should I have bent the maiden  
to a kiss?  
Ares the lover  
or enchanting Love?  
but had I moved  
I feared  
for that astute regard;  
for that bright vision,  
how might I have erred?  
I might have marred and swept  
another not so sweet  
into my exile;  
I might have kept a look  
recalling many and many a woman's look,  
not this alone,  
astute, imperious, proud.

And yet  
I turn and ask  
again, again, again,

who march to death,  
what was it worth,  
reserve and pride and hurt?  
what is it worth  
to such as I  
who turn to meet  
the invincible Spartans'  
massed and serried host?  
what had it cost, a kiss?

*Fragment Sixty-eight*

*. . . even in the house of Hades.*

SAPPHO

I

I ENVY you your chance of death,  
how I envy you this.

I am more covetous of him  
even than of your glance,  
I wish more from his presence  
though he torture me in a grasp,  
terrible, intense.

Though he clasp me in an embrace  
that is set against my will  
and rack me with his measure,  
effortless yet full of strength,  
and slay me  
in that most horrible contest,  
still, how I envy you your chance.

Though he pierce me – imperious –  
iron – fever – dust –  
though beauty is slain  
when I perish,  
I envy you death.

What is beauty to me?  
has she not slain me enough,  
have I not cried in agony of love,  
birth, hate,  
in pride crushed?

What is left after this?  
what can death loose in me  
after your embrace?  
your touch,  
your limbs are more terrible  
to do me hurt.

What can death mar in me  
that you have not?

2

What can death send me  
that you have not?  
you gathered violets,  
you spoke:  
“your hair is not less black,  
nor less fragrant,  
nor in your eyes is less light,  
your hair is not less sweet

with purple in the lift of lock;"  
why were those slight words  
and the violets you gathered  
of such worth?

How I envy you death;  
what could death bring,  
more black, more set with sparks  
to slay, to affright,  
than the memory of those first violets,  
the chance lift of your voice,  
the chance blinding frenzy  
as you bent?

3

So the goddess has slain me  
for your chance smile  
and my scarf unfolding  
as you stooped to it;  
so she trapped me  
with the upward sweep of your arm  
as you lifted the veil,  
and the swift smile and selfless.

Could I have known?  
nay, spare pity,  
though I break,  
crushed under the goddess' hate,  
though I fall beaten at last,  
so high have I thrust my glance  
up into her presence.

Do not pity me, spare that,  
but how I envy you  
your chance of death.



*Lethe*

NOR skin nor hide nor fleece  
    Shall cover you,  
Nor curtain of crimson nor fine  
Shelter of cedar-wood be over you,  
    Nor the fir-tree  
    Nor the pine.

Nor sight of whin nor gorse  
    Nor river-yew,  
Nor fragrance of flowering bush,  
Nor wailing of reed-bird to waken you,  
    Nor of linnet,  
    Nor of thrush.

Nor word nor touch nor sight  
    Of lover, you  
Shall long through the night but for this:  
The roll of the full tide to cover you  
    Without question,  
    Without kiss.

*Sitalkas*

THOU art come at length  
more beautiful  
than any cool god  
in a chamber under  
Lycia's far coast,  
than any high god  
who touches us not  
here in the seeded grass:  
aye, than Argestes  
scattering the broken leaves.

## *Hermonax*

GODS of the sea;  
GIno,  
leaving warm meads  
for the green, grey-green fastnesses  
of the great deeps;  
and Palemon,  
bright seeker of sea-shaft,  
hear me.

Let all whom the sea loves,  
come to its altar front,  
and I  
who can offer no other sacrifice to thee  
bring this.

Broken by great waves,  
the wavelets flung it here,  
this sea-gliding creature,  
this strange creature like a weed,  
covered with salt foam,  
torn from the hillocks of rock.

I, Hermonax,  
caster of nets,

risking chance,  
plying the sea craft,  
came on it.

Thus to sea god,  
gift of sea wrack;  
I, Hermonax, offer it  
to thee, Ino,  
and to Palemon.

## *Orion Dead*

(Artemis speaks.)

THE cornel-trees  
uplift from the furrows,  
the roots at their bases,  
strike lower through the barley-sprays.

So arise and face me.

I am poisoned with the rage of song.

I once pierced the flesh  
of the wild deer,  
now I am afraid to touch  
the blue and the gold-veined hyacinths?

I will tear the full flowers  
and the little heads  
of the grape-hyacinths,  
I will strip the life from the bulb  
until the ivory layers  
lie like narcissus petals  
on the black earth.

Arise,  
lest I bend an ash-tree

into a taut bow,  
and slay – and tear  
all the roots from the earth.

The cornel-wood blazes  
and strikes through the barley-sprays  
but I have lost heart for this.

I break a staff,  
I break the tough branch.  
I know no light in the woods.  
I have lost pace with the wind.

## *Charioteer*

*In that manner (archaic) he finished the statue of his brother. It stands mid-way in the hall of laurels . . . between the Siphnians' offering and the famous tripod of Naxos.*

ONLY the priest  
of the inmost house  
has such height,  
only the faun  
in the glade  
such light, strong ankles,  
only the shade of the bay-tree  
such rare dark  
as the darkness  
caught under the fillet  
that covers your brow,  
only the blade  
of the ash-tree  
such length, such beauty  
as thou,  
O my brother;  
and only the gods  
have such love  
as I bring you;

but now,  
taut with love,  
more than any bright lover,  
I vowed  
to the innermost  
god of the temple,  
this vow.

God of beauty, I cried,  
as the four stood alert,  
awaiting the shout  
at the goal  
to be off;  
god of beauty,  
I cried to that god,  
if he merit the laurel,  
I dedicate all of my soul  
to you; to you  
all my strength and my power;  
if he merit the bay,  
I will fashion a statue  
of him, of my brother,  
out of thought,  
and the strength of my wrist  
and the fire of my brain;



I will strive night and day  
till I mould from the clay,  
till I strike from the bronze,  
till I conjure the rock,  
the chisle, the tool,  
to embody this image;  
an image to startle,  
to capture men's hearts,  
to make all other bronze,  
all art to come after,  
a mock,  
all beauty to follow,  
a shell that is empty;  
I'll stake all my soul  
on that beauty,  
till God shall awake  
again in men's hearts,  
who have said he is dead,  
our King and our Lover.

Then the start,  
ah the sight,  
ah but dim, veiled with tears,  
(so Achilles must weep  
who finds his friend dead,)

will he win ?  
then the ring of the steel  
as two met at the goal,  
entangled and foul,  
misplaced at the start,  
who, who blunders? not you?  
what omens are set?  
alas, gods of the track,  
what ill wreaks its hate,  
speak it clear,  
let me know  
what evil, what fate?  
for the ring of sharp steel  
told two were in peril,  
two, two, one is you,  
already involved  
with the fears of defeat;  
two grazed;  
which must go?

As the wind,  
Althaia's beauty came;  
as one after a cruel march,  
catches sight,  
toward the cold dusk,  
of the flower

that's her name-sake,  
strayed apart  
toward the road-dust,  
from the stream  
in the wood-depth,  
so I in that darkness,  
my mouth bitter  
with sheer loss,  
took courage,  
my heart spoke,  
remembering how she spoke:  
"I will seek hour by hour  
fresh cones, resin  
and pine-flowers,  
flower of pine,  
laurel flower;  
I will pray:  
'let him come  
back to us,  
to our home,  
with the trophy of zeal,  
with the love and the proof  
of the favour of god;  
let him merit the bay.'  
(I expect it,)

I myself on earth pray  
that our father may pray;  
his voice nearer the gods  
must carry beyond  
my mere mortal prayer:  
'O my father beyond,  
look down and be proud,  
ask this thing  
that we win,  
ask it straight of the gods.' "

Was he glad,  
did he know?  
for the strength  
of his prayer and her prayer  
met me now  
in one flame,  
all my head, all my brow  
was one flame,  
taut and beaten  
and faintly aglow,  
as the wine-cup  
encrusted and beaten and fine  
with the pattern of leaves,  
(so my brow,)

yet metallic and cool,  
as the gold of the frigid metal  
that circles the heat  
of the wine.

Then the axel-tree cleft,  
not ours, gods be blest;  
now but three of you left,  
three alert and abreast,  
three – one streak of what fire?  
three straight for the goal:  
ah defeat,  
ah despair,  
still fate tricked our mares,  
for they swerved,  
flanks quivering and wet,  
as the wind  
at the mid-stretch  
caught and fluttered a white scarf;  
a veil shivering,  
only the fluttering  
of a white band,  
yet unnerved and champing,  
they turned,  
(only knowing the swards of Achæa)

and he, O my love,  
that stranger,  
his stallions  
stark frenzied and black,  
had taken the inmost course,  
overtook,  
overcame,  
overleapt,  
and crowded you back.

O those horses  
we loved and we prized;  
I had gathered Alea mint  
and soft branch  
of the vine-stock in flower,  
I had stroked Elaphia;  
as one prays to a woman  
"be kind,"  
I had prayed Daphnaia;  
I had threatened Orea  
for her trick  
of out-pacing the three,  
even these,  
I had almost despaired  
at her fleet, proud pace,

O the four,  
O swift mares of Achæa.

Should I pray them again?  
or the gods of the track?  
or Althaia at home?  
or our father who died for Achæa?  
or our fathers beyond  
who had vanquished the east?  
should I threaten or pray?

The sun struck the ridge of white marble  
before me:  
white sun on white marble  
was black:  
the day was of ash,  
blind, unrepentant, despoiled,  
my soul cursed the race and the track,  
you had lost.

*You*, lost at the last?

Ah fools,  
so you threatened to win?  
ah fools,  
so you knew my brother?

Greeks all,  
all crafty and feckless,  
even so, had you guessed  
what ran in his veins and mine,  
what blood of Achæa,  
had you dared,  
dared enter the contest,  
dared aspire with the rest?

You had gained,  
you outleapt them;  
a sudden, swift lift of the reins,  
a sudden, swift, taut grip of the reins,  
as suddenly loosed,  
you had gained.

When death comes  
I will see  
no vision of after,  
(as some count  
there may be an hereafter,)  
no thought of old lover,  
no girl, no woman,  
neither mother,  
nor yet my father



who died for Achæa,  
neither God with the harp  
and the sun on His brow,  
but thou,  
O my brother.

When death comes,  
instead of a vision,  
(I will catch it in bronze)  
you will stand  
as you stood at the end,  
(as the herald announced it,  
proclaiming aloud,  
"Achæa has won,")  
in-reining them now,  
so quiet,  
not turning to answer  
the shout of the crowd.

## *The Look-out*

BETTER the wind, the sea, the salt  
in your eyes,  
than this, this, this.

You grumble and sweat;  
my ears are acute  
to catch your complaint,  
almost the sea's roar is less  
than your constant threat  
of "back and back to the shore,  
and let us rest."

You grumble and curse your luck  
and I hear:  
" O Lynceus,  
aloft by the prow,  
his head on his arms,  
his eyes half closed,  
almost asleep,  
to watch for a rock,  
(and hardly ever we need  
his 'to left' or 'to right')  
let Lynceus have my part,  
let me rest like Lynceus."

"Rest like Lynceus!"  
I'd change my fate for yours,  
the very least,  
I'd take an oar with the rest.

"Like Lynceus,"  
as if my lot were the best.

O God, if I could speak,  
if I could taunt the lot  
of the wretched crew,  
with my fate, my work.

But I may not,  
I may not tell  
of the forms that pass and pass,  
of that constant old, old face  
that leaps from each wave  
to wait underneath the boat  
in the hope that at last she's lost.

Could I speak,  
I would tell of great mountains  
that flow, great weeds  
that float and float  
to tangle our oars

if I fail "to left, to right;"  
where the dolphin leaps  
you saw a sign from the god,  
I saw why he leapt from the deep.

"To right, to left;"  
it is easy enough  
to lean on the prow, half asleep,  
and you think,  
"no work for Lynceus."  
No work?

If only you'd let me take an oar,  
if only my back could break with the hurt,  
if the sun could blister my feet,  
pain, pain that I might forget  
the face that just this moment  
passed through the prow  
when you said, "asleep."

Many and many a sight  
if I could speak,  
many and many tales I'd tell,  
many and many a struggle,  
many a death,

many and many my hurts  
and my pain so great,  
I'd gladly die  
if I did not love the quest.

Grumble and swear and curse,  
brother, god and the boat,  
and the great waves,  
but could you guess  
what strange terror lurks in the sea-depth,  
you'd thank the gods for the ship,  
the timber and giant oars, god-like,  
and the god-like quest.

If you could see as I,  
what lurks in the sea-depth,  
you'd pray to the ropes  
and the solid timbers  
like god, like god;

you'd pray to the oars and your work,  
you'd pray and thank  
the boat for her very self;  
timber and oar and plank  
and sail and the sail-ropes,  
these are beautiful things and great.

But Lynceus at the prow  
has nothing to do but wait  
till we reach a shoal or some rocks  
and then he has only to lift his arms,  
right, left;  
O brother,  
I'd change my place  
for the worst seat  
in the cramped bench,  
for an oar, for an hour's toil,  
for sweat and the solid floor.

I'd change my place  
as I sit with eyes half closed,  
if only I could see just the ring  
cut by the boat,  
if only I could see just the water,  
the crest and the broken crest,  
the bit of weed that rises on the crest,  
the dolphin only when he leaps.

But Lynceus,  
though they cannot guess  
the hurt, though they do not thank

the oars for the dead peace  
of heart and brain worn out,  
you must wait,  
alert, alert, alert.

## Odyssey

M<sup>USE,</sup>  
*tell me of this man of wit,  
who roamed long years  
after he had sacked  
Troy's sacred streets.*

All the rest  
who had escaped death,  
returned,  
fleeing battle and the sea;  
only Odysseus,  
captive of a goddess,  
desperate and home-sick,  
thought but of his wife and palace;  
but Calypso,  
that nymph and spirit,  
yearning in the furrowed rock-shelf,  
burned  
and sought to be his mistress;  
but years passed,  
the time was ripe,  
the gods decreed,  
(although traitors plot



to betray him in his own court,)  
he was to return  
to Ithaca;  
and all the gods pitied him;  
but Poseidon  
steadfast to the last  
hated  
god-like Odysseus.

The sea-god visited  
a distant folk,  
Ethiopians,  
who at the edge of earth  
are divided into two parts,  
(half watch the sun rise,  
half, the sun set,)  
there the hecatomb  
of slain sheep and oxen  
await his revels:  
and while he rejoiced,  
seated at the feast,  
the rest of the gods  
gathered in the palace of Olympian Zeus;  
and the father of men and of gods spoke  
thus :

(for he remembered bright Egisthus,  
slain of Agamemnon's child,  
great Orestes:)

O you spirits,  
how men hate the gods,  
for they say evil comes of us,  
when they themselves,  
by their own wickedness,  
court peril  
beyond their fate;  
so Egisthus, defiant,  
sought Agamemnon's wife  
and slew Agamemnon  
returning to his own palace,  
though we ourselves  
sent bright Hermes,  
slayer of Argos,  
to warn him  
lest Orestes,  
attaining to man's estate,  
demand his inheritance  
and take vengeance:  
we forbade him to strike the king,  
we warned him to respect his wife:

but could Hermes  
of gracious aspect,  
subtle with kindly speech,  
thus avert the foul work?

Then the grey-eyed Athene,  
the goddess, spoke:  
O my father, Kronos begot,  
first among the great,  
his death at least was just,  
so may all perish who err thus;  
but my heart is rent  
for the prudent Odysseus,  
who, exiled from his friends,  
is kept too long distressed  
in an island, sea swept,  
in the sea midst,  
a forest island,  
haunt of a spirit,  
child of Atlas,  
crafty of thought,  
who knows the sea depth,  
who supports the high pillars  
which cut sky from earth;  
it is his child

who keeps Odysseus  
lamenting with broken heart,  
ceaseless to tempt him  
with soft and tender speech,  
that he forget Ithaca;  
but Odysseus,  
yearning to see but the smoke  
drift above his own house,  
prefers death;  
your heart, is it not touched,  
O Olympian?  
did not Odysseus please you  
when he made sacrifice  
before the Grecian ships  
in great Troy?  
why are you angry, Zeus?

Then Zeus,  
keeper of the clouds,  
answering her, spoke:  
O my child,  
what quaint words  
have sped your lips,  
for how could I forget  
the god-like Odysseus,

a spirit surpassing men,  
first to make sacrifice  
to the deathless  
in the sky-space?  
but Poseidon,  
girder of earth,  
though yet he spares his life,  
nurtures unending hate;  
he goads him from place to place  
because of the Cyclops  
blinded of Odysseus,  
Polyphemus, half-god,  
greatest of the Cyclops,  
whom the nymph Thoosa,  
child of Phorcys,  
king of the waste sea, begot  
when she lay with Poseidon  
among the shallow rocks:  
but come,  
let us plot  
to reinstate Odysseus,  
and Poseidon must abandon his wrath;  
for what can one god accomplish,  
striving alone  
to defy all the deathless?

Then the grey-eyed Athene,  
the goddess, spoke:  
O my father, Kronos begot,  
first among the great,  
if then it seems just  
to the highest,  
that Odysseus return  
to his own house,  
let us swiftly send  
Hermes, slayer of Argos,  
your attendant,  
that he state  
to the fair-haired nymph,  
our irrevocable wish,  
that Odysseus,  
valiant of heart,  
be sent back:  
and I will depart to Ithaca,  
to incite his son,  
to put courage in his heart,  
that he call to the market place  
the long-haired Greeks  
and shut his gates  
to the pretendants  
who ceaselessly devour his flocks,

sheep and horned oxen  
of gentle pace:  
that he strive  
for his father's sake  
and gain favour  
in men's thoughts,  
I will send him to Sparta,  
to Pylos' sandy waste.

*She spoke  
and about her feet  
clasped bright sandals,  
gold-wrought, imperishable,  
which lift her above sea,  
across the land stretch,  
wind-like,  
like the wind breath.*

*From the Masque*

*Hyacinth*

I

YOUR anger charms me,  
and yet all the time  
I think of chaste, slight hands,  
veined snow;  
snow craters filled  
with first wild-flowerlets;  
glow of ice-gentian,  
whitest violet;  
snow craters  
and the ice ridge  
spilling light;  
dawn and the lover  
chaste dawn leaves bereft –  
I think of these  
and snow-cooled Phrygian wine.

Your anger charms me subtly  
and I know  
that you would take  
the still hands



where I'd rest;  
you would despoil  
for very joy of theft;  
list, lady,  
I would give you one last hint:  
quench your red mouth  
in some cold forest lake,  
cover your russet locks  
with arum leaf,  
quench out the colour,  
still the fevered glance,  
cover your want,  
your fire insatiate,  
I can not match your fervour,  
nay, nor still my ache  
with any  
but white hands inviolate.

2

Take the red spoil  
of grape and pomegranate,  
the red camellia,  
the most, most red rose;  
take all the garden spills,  
inveterate,

prodigal spender  
just as summer goes,  
the red scales of the deep in-folded spice,  
the Indian, Persian and the Syrian pink,  
their scent undaunted  
even in that faint,  
unmistakable fragrance  
of the late tuberose,  
(heavy its petals,  
eye-lids of dark eyes  
that open languorous  
and more languorous close – the east,  
further than scent  
of our wind-smitten isle,)  
take these:

O lady, take them,  
prodigal  
I cull and offer this and this and these  
last definite whorls  
of clustered peonies,  
the last, the first  
that stained our stainless ledge  
of blue and white  
and the white foam of sea,

rocks,  
and that strait ledge  
whiter than the rock  
the Parians break  
from their enchanted hill;  
take, lady,  
but leave me with my weed and shell  
and those slight, hovering gull-wings that  
recall  
silver of far Hymettus' asphodel.

3

Take all  
for you have taken everything,  
but do not let me see you taking this;  
Adonis lying spent with Venus' care,  
Adonis dying were a lesser ache  
than this,  
to have even your slightest breath  
breathe in the crystal air  
where he takes breath.

Take all  
for you have taken everything,  
save the broad ledge of sea

which no man takes,  
take all  
for you have taken mirth and ease  
and all the small delights  
of simple poets,  
the lilt of rhyme,  
the sway and lift and fall,  
the first spring gold  
your fire has scorched to ash,  
the fresh winds  
that go halt  
where you have passed,  
the Tyrian iris  
I so greatly loved,  
its dark head speared  
through its wet spray of leaves.

Take all,  
but ah, lady, a fool, a poet  
may even know when you have taken all:  
up on the mountain slope  
one last flower cleaves  
to the wet marge of ice,  
the blue of snow,  
keep all your riot

in the swales below,  
of grape and autumn,  
take all, taking these,  
for you and autumn yet  
can not prevail  
against that flame, that flower,  
(ice, spark or jewel,)  
the cyclamen,  
parting its white cyclamen leaves.

4

O, I am ill with dust  
as you with stain,  
O, I am worthless,  
weary, world-bedragged,  
nevertheless to mountains  
still the rain  
falls on the tangle  
of dead under-brush,  
freshens the loam,  
the earth and broken leaves  
for that hoar-frost  
of later star or flower,

the fragile host  
of Greek anemones.

Say I am little meet  
to call the youth,  
say I have little magic  
to enchant,  
but is that reason  
why your flaring will  
should sweep and scorch,  
should lap and seethe and fill  
with last red flame  
the tender ditch and runnel  
which the spring freshet  
soon must fill again?

White violets  
have no place  
on your hot brow;  
how can I bring you  
what the spring must bring?  
what can I offer?  
lush and heady mallow?  
the fire-grass  
or the serpent-spotted

fire-flower?

O take them,  
for I stand a ruinous cloud  
between you  
and the chaste uplifted hill.

O take them swiftly  
and more swiftly go,  
for spring is distant yet,  
for spring is far;  
you have your tense, short space  
of blazing sun,  
your melons, vines,  
your terraces of fruit;  
now all you have,  
all, all I gladly give  
who long but for the ridge,  
the crest and hollow,  
the lift and fall,  
the reach and distant ledge  
of the sun-smitten,  
wind-indented snow.

*The bird-choros of*

*Ion*

BIRDS from Parnassus,  
swift

you dart  
from the loftiest peaks;  
you hover, dip,  
you sway and perch  
undaunted on the gold-set cornice;  
you eagle,  
god's majestic legate,  
who tear, who strike  
song-birds in mid-flight,  
my arrow whistles toward you,  
swift  
be off;

ah drift,  
ah drift  
so soft, so light,  
your scarlet foot so deftly placed  
to waft you neatly  
to the pavement,  
swan, swan



and do you really think  
your song  
that tunes the harp of Helios,  
will save you  
from the arrow-flight?  
turn back,  
back  
to the lake of Delos;

lest all the song notes  
pause and break  
across a blood-stained throat  
gone songless,  
turn back,  
back  
ere it be too late,  
to wave-swept Delos.

Alas, and still another,  
what ?  
you'd place your mean nest  
in the cornice?  
sing, sing  
my arrow-string,  
tell to the thief

that plaits its house  
for fledglings  
in the god's own house,  
that still the Alpheus  
whispers sweet  
to lure  
the birdlets to the place,  
that still the Isthmus  
shines with forests;  
on the white statues  
must be found  
no straw nor litter  
of bird-down,  
Phœbos must have his portal fair;

and yet, O birds,  
though this my labour  
is set,  
though this my task is clear,  
though I must slay you,  
I, god's servant,  
I who take here  
my bread and life  
and sweep the temple,  
still I swear

that I would save you,  
birds or spirits,  
winged songs  
that tell to men god's will;

still, still  
the Alpheus whispers clear  
to lure the bird-folk  
to its waters,  
ah still  
the Isthmus  
blossoms fair;  
lest all the song notes  
pause and break  
across a blood-stained throat  
gone songless,  
turn back,  
back  
ere it be too late,  
to wave-swept Delos.













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