TO A MOCKING-BIRD: FROM TAORMINA

The nightingale has a golden heart,
And a silver heart the wren;
But, oh, for me the bold, bright bird
That sings with the heart of men!

His music is not of seas forlorn,
His magic is not of tears;
From tilted throat his raptures float;
And tumble in laughter and jeers.

He does not cease when daylight dies,
But he sings right on to the dark;
The stars or moon may die or swoon,
In the drip of the rain — O hark!

He does not cease when spring is done,
And his mate with love is fled;
A fairer thing than love or spring
Is life. And the fall is red.

Sing, nightingales and silver wrens
And fairy throats that can;
But the bird I love is the darling bird
With the free, proud heart of a man.
AFTER READING THE RUBAIYAT

Still burning, let me cast the cup of youth aside,
Or else, with one deep, purple draught,
Crush it and toss its unregretted pieces wide
To windwards, and the latter days abide.

What if the spicery of summer be forspent,
And night's own argent madness gone?
The shining Bacchanal of youth was always rent
By cries the circling dark and stars had sent.

And tho' warm-lidded lechery was sweet, I knew
The discontent of higher dreams,
And how the red-lipped sweetness changed and staled
and grew
A thing the dewy dancers feared to view.

O loveliest of all the wreathed revellers,
Break, break the cup, the wine forswear.
Courageous, thee and me a lordlier vintage stirs —
The blood of life's unraped warriors.
A WINTER'S NIGHT

The wind has reverenced the splendor of the night.
   Westward upon the green and saffron light
Of dusk it passed, with vasty wings and voice not low,
   Fleeing with awe the splendor of the night.

Were I the wind to-night, the tangled stars and snow
   My aweless wings' unfettered might would know.
O joy, the tranced splendor of the air to shake
   And starward hurl like spray the errant snow!

Ah, for the tyranny of furious wings, to wake
   Superb, this ecstasy of calm; to slake
My passion-winnowed heart with tempests' windy woe!
   I would to-night the storms were all awake!
THAT PARTING

And so we part!
With your vague, sweet smile,
I with a breaking heart;
To your vague, sweet ways,
Where the failures start.

We lingered long!
For mere idleness,
For your mouth like song;
For the flattery,
For your beauty strong.

Our lips' last touch!
Yours cold as mere consent,
Mine colder were there such.
And you will never know,
And I have known too much.

Parting sublime!
Already you've forgot,
I will forget in time.
You sigh without regret,
And I have heart to rhyme.
BEFORE DAWN

Breath of the dawn, breath of the dawn,
Breathe on my heart of thine eagerness.
Up from the sea, youthful with thee,
Be drawn
For a spell and a healing to me.
In my stress.

With the shining of silver yet on thy feet,
With the fleecing of stars that are flameless fleet,
With the cool of the sea for the cool of thine eyes,
Arise
And come to my need!
From the grey of the unstarred eastern skies
Oh, speed!

Up from the sea, up from the sea,
Come with thine eagerness, girlishly;
Sweep with the quiver and gleaming of thee
Dark from my heart like dew from the lawn;
With the cool of thy coming, half stars and half sun,
Deliver my soul from the deeds that are done —
Breath of the dawn, breath of the dawn,
Purify me.
LONGING

At last the sunset and the quietness;
The iron clutch of day loosened at last.
Here where the sky is limpid loveliness
And depth on depth of peace, I may forget
The fretful work-a-day and midgy round of things . . .
A smothered pain the long, long day.
Nor does forgetting come with dark and nights of dream;
But sweet with pain and filmèd tenderness
This hour of the pity of all things. . . .
Grey as slow tears, the dusk blurs out the trees;
The colors ebb beneath the western marge;
And homing come the birds —
Not singly come they, but,
With throated happiness, together.
But we no more shall come together home,
Nor hear their twittering gusts,
Nor watch the deep west come more deep
Till we behold the stars,
So bright they must but now have wept.
Oh, for one hour to-night,
One little hour with you —
To touch your hand —
To lean within the halo of your perfume —
To watch, as those sweet many times,
Together, love, the young, white moon,
Like some strange petal blown into our round of space
From out the cool abysses of the night,
Where unknown blossoms bloom for unknown eyes
To gaze upon in wistfulness.
A little while to watch,
And then, together, home.
PHAON IN HADES

To-day the very dead would love his face;  
And, loving them, I wish that to their place  
Of woe his feet might find awhile the way,  
And ease them with perfection for a space.  
His beauty is so beautiful to-day.

As, when its freight of dew is blown away,  
The grass uprises, so would they uprise,  
Those ancient dead, and shake their anguish grey,  
Breathing his coolness and his glad surprise  
As 'tware the blow and glittering of day.

Ashine with clinging petals and late tears,  
Sweet with aroma of Sicilian green,  
I see the dear, dear dead make way and lean  
To catch the summer of his mouth, the sheen  
Of laughter in those eyes that wisdom fears.

And, ah! Persephone! She hath forgot  
The pallor and the poppied heaviness —  
Upon her wine-red heart her hand is hot.  
If thus the very dead, 'twere sure excess  
Of blame, were I to love his beauty less!
GIRGENTI

So many here have struggled, fought the fight!
Life after life so many here have flung
As incense to the gods, that served — for what
Save Cerberus' toll to nothingness?
Of what avail to them, to us,
Their gaunt resistance and their trust?
Across the clear, sad light of centuries,
Their epitaph reveals what line of comfort?
Those that with lit, courageous eyes opposed
The mean, the merely earth, the less than highest,
Was recompense or special profit theirs?
Did their names less profoundly plumb
The chasms of oblivion
Than theirs that never fought,
But, lightly submissive, spread
The purple for their summer hearts
Within the garden's cool,
Called for the golden cups, the snowy wine,
The honey-comb, and Aphrodite's flutes?
To which was happiness the sooner comrade?
Sweeter than chaplets hold you sweat and blood!
Than easy pomp, strife and hot tears!
Which likelier served the gods?
Behold the gods of both in ambered death
Of fairy tales and poets' guile!
Which hold in heritage
Elysian meadows and eternal May?
Poor trade, indeed, hoped immortality
For hot lips and the certain spring!
Ah! but the nobler struggle did bequeath
Impetus, blossom-bearing warmth unto
That blind and mighty impulse to perfection —
The race's slow, incessant upward surge!

Dreams! dreams! About, about, behold
Their bastard-souled successors,
Legitimate in blood alone!

Here once were millions; gazing hence, one saw
The high-hung walls, the teeming market place,
The colors and the colonnades,
The curving city's brilliant amplitude.

There hangs upon that northern crag,
As some dirt-wasp had hovelled there,
The drab inheritor of all that purpose;
Slattern of villages, where sat the lily-crowned!

Golden Girgenti!

Of soft Sicilian cities goldenest!

Gone, all gone thy gold,
Save where the rhythm of the ripened fields
Sweeps mellowing to the sea;
Save where the lonely temples lift their pride,
And on their maimed and desecrated fronts
The evening light lays heavenly pure hands.
Gone thy gold; thy beauty, childless, gone;
Gone alike the strugglers and the strife.

Only the bland, unflashing blue, the Libyan,
Holds yet its immemorial loveliness.
Thus from the lofty temple steps at gaze,
My thoughts came faltering.
But my proud heart leaped up in glittering mail
And called:
    Tho' the gods be dead or never were;
Tho' death blow out the flame and soul be dust;
    Tho' generation follow generation
Level, no higher footing gained, no hope,
Broad day will sometime flood the race
Upon some mountain won with agony;
Tho' all dissolve and leave no mist of gold—
Yet vision only and the strife therefor
Shall I accept as life?
If here, across this present's windy peak, I gaze
Back, back across the infinite years,
And forward thro' the infinite to be—
Above the human rabble, past the soft
Guzzlers against the fertile breasts of life,
    I see, I do behold, how proudly, them
Whom blind nobility, heroic uselessness,
Impelled to scorn all acquiescence, brute
And easy; to strike to the blood's last crimson for
    The dream of their own making;
Defenders, tho' creators, of their own
Divinity; soldiers in sweat, in blood,
    Before the mouth of death.
So long as one remain, but one,
To shout the battle cry and take no quarter,
So long the velvet case of life is infamous,
So long I stand with him and beard the world!
Girgenti, O Girgenti, vanished all thy sons!
And only spring with equal glory spreads
Across thy hills its billows of deep bloom.
Empedocles, thy loveliest, is gone;
And Daedalus is dead; his wings no more
Shall darken up the east or shake the sea;
Nor any make return whose name thy mouth
Smiled to repeat. Yet not to them
My heart gives hail across the grave.
Oh, not to them whose heralding
Sufficient heaven gave to their attempt.
But to thy sons, that, silently,
Oblivion-crowned,
Battled as tho' the very gods made part,
And from their golden ramparts called applause.
Them do I hail across the heavy mold;
And them unborn, fordoomed to like red death,
Whose swords submit not chance, nor fate, nor flesh...

My brothers, proud, tho' unworthy, let me stand with you
In stubborn rank against the wall of doom,
Opposing meek acceptance of the world;
Scornful of scorn and vileness and black sloth;
Battling, we know not why; dying, we care not how;
Glimpsing our kinship with the farther stars;
Defeated always — but how splendidly!
THE HAPPY ISLES

How comes the spring in those far lands of yours?
Tremulous as here — and full of wings?
Full, too, of secrets and the hint
Of half divine events?
Do twilights there unfold
Blue shadow petals to the swarm of stars?
And does the hem of rapture darkness wears
Glisten, as here, with tears?

This hour that we loved most,
My long forgetting like a garment falls.
How long away! From you how long!
Failure and tears and strife,
The intermittent bubbling up
Of that deep loneliness
All know, yet know not to resist —
These come, but coming, wake not surely in my heart
Its lack of you.

But yours, yours always, are the Happy Isles!
Their transient, fortuitous discovery —
Rarer each year that seen and falls —
Brings back the need of you.
And every failing breath sent from their shores
Seems meant for two.
Let but the darkling hour as now
Move mystical upon the tides of spring,
And from the vague horizon’s verge they rise.
The air is unheard music that we knew;
Ahead, familiarly, the purple shallows shine;
I turn, I turn
To whom alone with me is sovereign there,
And, missing you.
Miss, too, the opal of their magic coves,
And scant the fugitive, bland hour.

But no! that thought would shade your eyes,
Tho’ fresh with immortality.
Oh, think not you can ever bring me pain—
Or pain such only as clear sunsets cast;
Their shining wings uplift us and their peace seems home,
But sadness is their soul,
And all their lustral loveliness wells up from tears.

Perhaps, there, too, in those far lands of yours,
Springtime comes flowing like a tide of dreams,
Mysterious, on bluer wings,
Laving in magic more profound the curve of lovelier shores.

Yet, even there, perhaps,
Your unaccustomed eyes yearn back
Across the spirit-footed ocean of the air,
And you are homesick for the earth,
Twilight, and stars that are not worlds but flowers—
Homesick, perhaps, tho’ Paradise be yours,
For me and for those isles. . . .
They fade; the world returns,
And with them fades
The conjured vision of your bidding place.
Soon may they come again;
Soon; on the waters blue of twilight,
Tremulous, full of wings,
The purple of unrisen stars about their base,
And on their crest the calm of sunset.
EPILOGUE

O God, author of song
And of the will to righteousness,
Thee have I loved in guise of him,
The golden-haired, the beautiful,
The incense-tainted leader of the Nine,
With dim, averted eyes and prescience of pain —
Knowing Thee frail and perishable, fit for youth.

The gardens of the air were mine to walk with Thee,
Dewed with the stars,
Swept with the tinted splendors of the suns.
Yet was the bliss too blissful to commend,
And Thou, I knew, wert half divine, no more.
Thro' the live luxury
Of that aerial rapture always
Crashed the vast battle sounds of earth,
Where, tho' the many died, myself died not,
Where, tho' the many bled, myself unwounded went.
The pagan god, Thyself half-seen,
Is not enough, O God!

Here, on the breaking verge of youth,
Secureless from the fringes of the forward storm,
I face the riven grey and call to Thee,
O God of righteousness, to Thee!
Must I forswear song and the darling rapture,
Thy gifts, tho' taintless of the earth, yet beautiful?
And bend me to the living of the life, half-armed,
Lacking not valiance, but the accoutrements wherewith
Valiance may save itself from scorn?

O God, hear Thou my faith which is as rock:
Thou art! All else is circumstance,
    Random and unessential incident —
Save this: in me Thou art.
And so my moment wheels to its sure end
Huge with divinity, its orbit as the sun's,
    Accounted and accountable as all
The chaos-floating, golden universe.
    But mine to mar;
Mine to deliver unto death
True to the disposition of its essence,
Or in fulfillment bastard utterly.
    Eternal Thou; but I
Swift-passing, in the passing powerful
    Myself to darken with deliberate choice.
    One life, but one, is mine.
    I would not have it pass
Failing its high, potential utmost,
A quivering of music-shaken strings — no more.

Giver of bliss and pain, of song and prayer,
    Thou God that dost demand
Single allegiance of the soul that sees
    Thee dual only and at enmity —
Hearken my choice, my supplication hark.
    Tear out the rapture and the wings —
    Take back thy gift of song —
Take, take the madness of the olive and the vine
With all their ecstasies, unless they be
Not oil for gleaming of the games and clustered gold,
Not wine for leafy laughter of the feast,
But aid and chrismed healing for the wounds
Of them that smitten lie on that broad way
Known to the dusty sandals from Samaria.
Crush Thou, O God, the petalled crimson of my life,
So Thou but mold the remnant clay
To shape not all unworthy of the Thee in me.