

# **Selected Poems**

Percy Shelley



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# Selected Poems

Selected Poems

**Percy Shelley**

## WHEN THE LAMP IS SHATTERED

When the lamp is shattered,  
The light in the dust lies dead;  
When the cloud is scattered,  
The rainbow's glory is shed;  
When the lute is broken,  
Sweet tones are remembered not;  
When the lips have spoken,  
Loved accents are soon forgot.

As music and splendor  
Survive not the lamp and the lute,  
The heart's echoes render  
No song when the spirit is mute:—  
No song but sad dirges,  
Like the wind through a ruined cell,  
Or the mournful surges  
That ring the dead seaman's knell.

When hearts have once mingled,  
Love first leaves the well-built nest;  
The weak one is singled  
To endure what it once possessed.  
O Love! who bewailest  
The frailty of all things here,  
Why choose you the frailest  
For your cradle, your home, and your bier?

Its passions will rock thee,  
As the storms rock the ravens on high;  
Bright reason will mock thee,  
Like the sun from a wintry sky.  
From thy nest every rafter  
Will rot, and thine eagle home  
Leave thee naked to laughter,  
When leaves fall and cold winds come.

## The Witch of Atlas

Before those cruel twins whom at one birth  
    Incestuous Change bore to her father Time,  
Error and Truth, had hunted from the earth  
    All those bright natures which adorned its prime,  
And left us nothing to believe in, worth  
    The pains of putting into learned rhyme,  
A Lady Witch there lived on Atlas mountain  
Within a cavern by a secret fountain.

Her mother was one of the Atlantides.  
    The all-beholding Sun had ne'er beholden  
In his wide voyage o'er continents and seas  
    So fair a creature, as she lay enfolden  
In the warm shadow of her loveliness;  
    He kissed her with his beams, and made all golden  
The chamber of gray rock in which she lay.  
She, in that dream of joy, dissolved away.

'Tis said she first was changed into a vapor;  
    And then into a cloud,—such clouds as flit  
(Like splendor-winged moths about a taper)  
    Round the red west when the Sun dies in it;  
And then into a meteor, such as caper  
    On hill-tops when the Moon is in a fit;  
Then into one of those mysterious stars  
Which hide themselves between the Earth and Mars.

Ten times the Mother of the Months had ben  
    Her bow beside the folding-star, and bidden  
With that bright sign the billows to indent  
    The sea-deserted sand—(like children chidden,  
At her command they ever came and went)—  
    Since in that cave a dewy splendor hidden  
Took shape and motion. With the living form  
Of this embodied Power the cave grew warm.

A lovely Lady garmented in light  
    From her own beauty: deep her eyes as are  
Two openings of unfathomable night  
    Seen through a temple's cloven roof; her hair  
Dark; the dim brain whirls dizzy with delight,  
    Picturing her form. Her soft smiles shone afar;  
And her low voice was heard like love, and drew  
All living things towards this wonder new.

And first the spotted cameleopard came;

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And then the wise and fearless elephant;  
Then the sly serpent, in the golden flame  
Of his own volumes intervolved. All gaunt  
And sanguine beasts her gentle looks made tame,—  
They drank before her at her sacred fount;  
And every beast of beating heart grew bold,  
Such gentleness and power even to behold.

The brinded lioness led forth her young,  
That she might teach them how they should forego  
Their inborn thirst of death; the pard unstrung  
His sinews at her feet, and sought to know,  
With looks whose motions spoke without a tongue,  
How he might be as gentle as the doe.  
The magic circle of her voice and eyes  
All savage natures did imparadise.

And old Silenus, shaking a green stick  
Of lilies, and the Wood-gods in a crew,  
Came blithe as in the olive-copses thick  
Cicade are, drunk with the noonday dew;  
And Dryope and Faunus followed quick,  
Teazing the God to sing them something new;  
Till in this cave they found the Lady lone,  
Sitting upon a seat of emerald stone.

And universal Pan, 'tis said, was there.  
And, though none saw him,—through the adamant  
Of the deep mountains, through the trackless air,  
And through those living spirits like a want,—  
He passed out of his everlasting lair  
Where the quick heart of the great world doth pant,  
And felt that wondrous Lady all alone,—  
And she felt him upon her emerald throne.

And every Nymph of stream and spreading tree,  
And every Shepherdess of Ocean's flocks  
Who drives her white waves over the green sea,  
And Ocean with the brine on his grey locks,  
And quaint Priapus with his company,—  
All came, much wondering how the enwombed rocks  
Could have brought forth so beautiful a birth:  
Her love subdued their wonder and their mirth.

The herdsmen and the mountain-maidens came,  
And the rude kings of pastoral Garamant—  
Their spirits shook within them, as a flame  
Stirred by the air under a cavern gaunt:  
Pygmies and Polyphemes, by many a name,  
Centaur and Satyr, and such shapes as haunt  
Wet clefts,—and lumps neither alive nor dead,

The Witch of Atlas



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Dog-headed, bosom-eyed, and bird-footed.

For she was beautiful. Her beauty made  
    The bright world dim, and everything beside  
Seemed like the fleeting image of a shade.  
    No thought of living spirit could abide  
(Which to her looks had ever been betrayed)  
    On any object in the world so wide,  
On any hope within the circling skies,—  
But on her form, and in her inmost eyes.

Which when the Lady knew; she took her spindle,  
    And twined three threads of fleecy mist, and three  
Long lines of light, such as the dawn may kindle  
    The clouds and waves and mountains with, and she  
As many starbeams, ere their lamps could dwindle  
    In the belated moon, wound skilfully;  
And with these threads a subtle veil she wove—  
A shadow for the splendour of her love.

The deep recesses of her odorous dwelling  
    Were stored with magic treasures:—sounds of air  
Which had the power all spirits of compelling,  
    Folded in cells of crystal silence there;  
Such as we hear in youth, and think the feeling  
    will never die—yet, ere we are aware,  
The feeling and the sound are fled and gone  
And the regret they leave remains alone.

And there lay Visions swift and sweet and quaint,  
    Each in its thin sheath like a chrysalis;—  
Some eager to burst forth; some weak and faint  
    With the soft burden of intensest bliss  
It is their work to bear to many a saint  
    Whose heart adores the shrine which holiest is,  
Even Love's; and others, white, green, grey, and black,  
And of all shapes:—and each was at her beck.

And odours in a kind of aviary  
    Of ever-blooming Eden-trees she kept,  
Clipped in a floating net a love-sick Fairy  
    Had woven from dew-beams while the moon yet slept.  
As bats at the wired window of a dairy,  
    They beat their vans; and each was an adept—  
When loosed and missioned, making wings of winds—  
To stir sweet thoughts or sad in destined minds.

And liquors clear and sweet, whose healthful might  
    Could medicine the sick soul to happy sleep,  
And change eternal death into a night  
    Of glorious dreams—or, if eyes needs must weep,

## Selected Poems

Could make their tears all wonder and delight—  
    She in her crystal phials did closely keep:  
If men could drink of those clear phials, 'tis said  
The living were not envied of the dead.

Her cave was stored with scrolls of strange device,  
    The works of some Saturnian Archimage,  
Which taught the expiations at whose price  
    Men from the Gods might win that happy age  
Too lightly lost, redeeming native vice,—  
    And which might quench the earth-consuming rage  
Of gold and blood, till men should live and move  
Harmonious as the sacred stars above:—

And how all things that seem untameable,  
    Not to be checked and not to be confined,  
Obey the spells of Wisdom's wizard skill;  
    Time, earth, and fire, the ocean and the wind,  
And all their shapes, and man's imperial will;—  
    And other scrolls whose writings did unbind  
The inmost lore of love—let the profane  
Tremble to ask what secrets they contain.

And wondrous works of substances unknown,  
    To which the enchantment of her Father's power  
Had changed those ragged blocks of savage stone,  
    Were heaped in the recesses of her bower;  
Carved lamps and chalices, and phials which shone  
    In their own golden beams—each like a flower  
Out of whose depth a firefly shakes his light  
Under a cypress in a starless night.

At first she lived alone in this wild home,  
    And her own thoughts were each a minister,  
Clothing themselves or with the ocean-foam,  
    Or with the wind, or with the speed of fire,  
To work whatever purposes might come  
    Into her mind: such power her mighty Sire  
Had girt them with, whether to fly or run  
Through all the regions which he shines upon.

The Ocean-nymphs and Hamadryades,  
    Oreads, and Naiads with long weedy locks,  
Offered to do her bidding through the seas,  
    Under the earth, and in the hollow rocks,  
And far beneath the matted roots of trees,  
    And in the gnarled heart of stubborn oaks;  
So they might live for ever in the light  
Of her sweet presence—each a satellite.

"This may not be," the Wizard Maid replied.

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"The fountains where the Naiades bedew  
Their shining hair at length are drained and dried;  
The solid oaks forget their strength, and strew  
Their latest leaf upon the mountains wide;  
The boundless ocean like a drop of dew  
Will be consumed; the stubborn centre must  
Be scattered like a cloud of summer dust.

"And ye, with them, will perish one by one.  
If I must sigh to think that this shall be,  
If I must weep when the surviving Sun  
Shall smile on your decay—oh ask not me  
To love you till your little race is run;  
I cannot die as ye must.—Over me  
Your leaves shall glance—the streams in which ye dwell  
Shall be my paths henceforth; and so farewell."

She spoke and wept. The dark and azure well  
Sparkled beneath the shower of her bright tears,  
And every little circlet where they fell  
Flung to the cavern—roof inconstant spheres  
And intertangled lines of light. A knell  
Of sobbing voices came upon her ears  
From those departing forms, o'er the serene  
Of the white streams and of the forest green.

All day the Wizard Lady sat aloof;  
Spelling out scrolls of dread antiquity  
Under the cavern's fountain—lighted roof;  
Or broidering the pictured poesy  
Of some high tale upon her growing woof,  
Which the sweet splendor of her smiles could dye  
In hues outshining heaven—and ever she  
Added some grace to the wrought poesy:—

While on her hearth lay blazing many a piece  
Of sandal—wood, rare gums, and cinnamon.  
Men scarcely know how beautiful fire is;  
Each flame of it is as a precious stone  
Dissolved in ever—moving light, and this  
Belongs to each and all who gaze thereon.'  
The Witch beheld it not, for in her hand  
She held a woof that dimmed the burning brand.

This Lady never slept, but lay in trance  
All night within the fountain—as in sleep.  
Its emerald crags glowed in her beauty's glance:  
Through the green splendour of the water deep  
She saw the constellations reel and dance  
Like fireflies—and withal did ever keep  
The tenor of her contemplations calm,

The Witch of Atlas

## Selected Poems

With open eyes, closed feet, and folded palm.

And, when the whirlwinds and the clouds descended

From the white pinnacles of that cold hill,

She passed at dewfall to a space extended,

Where, in a lawn of flowering asphodel

Amid a wood of pines and cedars blended,

There yawned an inextinguishable well

Of crimson fire, full even to the brim,

And overflowing all the margin trim:--

Within the which she lay when the fierce war

Of wintry winds shook that innocuous liquor,

In many a mimic moon and bearded star,

O'er woods and lawns. The serpent heard it flicker

In sleep, and, dreaming still, he crept afar.

And, when the windless snow descended thicker

Than autumn-leaves, she watched it as it came

Melt on the surface of the level flame.

She had a boat which some say Vulcan wrought

For Venus, as the chariot of her star;

But it was found too feeble to be fraught

With all the ardours in that sphere which are,

And so she sold it, and Apollo bought

And gave it to this daughter: from a car,

Changed to the fairest and the lightest boat

Which ever upon mortal stream did float.

And others say that, when but three hours old,

The firstborn Love out of his cradle leapt,

And clove dun chaos with his wings of gold,

And, like a horticultural adept,

Stole a strange seed, and wrapped it up in mould,

And sowed it in his mother's star, and kept

Watering it all the summer with sweet dew,

And with his wings fanning it as it grew.

The plant grew strong and green--the snowy flower

Fell, and the long and gourd-like fruit began

To turn the light and dew by inward power

To its own substance: woven tracery ran

Of light firm texture, ribbed and branching, o'er

The solid rind, like a leaf's veined fan,--

Of which Love scooped this boat, and with soft motion

Piloted it round the circumfluous ocean.

This boat she moored upon her fount, and lit

A living spirit within all its frame,

Breathing the soul of swiftness into it.

Couched on the fountain--like a panther tame

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(One of the twain at Evan's feet that sit,  
Or as on Vesta's sceptre a swift flame,  
Or on blind Homer's heart a winged thought—  
In joyous expectation lay the boat.

Then by strange art she kneaded fire and snow  
Together, tempering the repugnant mass  
With liquid love—all things together grow  
Through which the harmony of love can pass;  
And a fair Shape out of her hands did flow—  
A living image which did far surpass  
In beauty that bright shape of vital stone  
Which drew the heart out of Pygmalion.

A sexless thing it was, and in its growth  
It seemed to have developed no defect  
Of either sex, yet all the grace of both.  
In gentleness and strength its limbs were decked;  
The bosom lightly swelled with its full youth;  
The countenance was such as might select  
Some artist that his skill should never die,  
Imaging forth such perfect purity.

From its smooth shoulders hung two rapid wings  
Fit to have borne it to the seventh sphere,  
Tipped with the speed of liquid lightnings,  
Dyed in the ardours of the atmosphere.  
She led her creature to the boiling springs  
Where the light boat was moored, and said "Sit here,"  
And pointed to the prow, and took her seat  
Beside the rudder with opposing feet.

And down the streams which clove those mountains vast,  
Around their inland islets, and amid  
The panther-peopled forests (whose shade cast  
Darkness and odors, and a pleasure hid  
In melancholy gloom) the pinnace passed;  
By many a star-surrounded pyramid  
Of icy crag cleaving the purple sky,  
And caverns yawning round unfathomably.

The silver noon into that winding dell,  
With slanted gleam athwart the forest-tops,  
Tempered like golden evening, feebly fell;  
A green and glowing light, like that which drops  
From folded lilies in which glow-worms dwell  
When Earth over her face Night's mantle wraps;  
Between the severed mountains lay on high,  
Over the stream, a narrow rift of sky.

And, ever as she went, the Image lay

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With folded wings and unawakened eyes;  
And o'er its gentle countenance did play  
    The busy dreams, as thick as summer flies,  
Chasing the rapid smiles that would not stay,  
    And drinking the warm tears, and the sweet sighs  
Inhaling, which with busy murmur vain  
They has aroused from that full heart and brain.

And ever down the prone vale, like a cloud  
    Upon a stream of wind, the pinnacle went:  
Now lingering on the pools, in which abode  
    The calm and darkness of the deep content  
In which they paused; now o'er the shallow road  
    Of white and dancing waters, all besprent  
With sand and polished pebbles:—mortal boat  
In such a shallow rapid could not float.

And down the earthquaking cataracts, which shiver  
    Their snow-like waters into golden air,  
Or under chasms unfathomable ever  
    Sepulchre them, till in their rage they tear  
A subterranean portal for the river,  
    It fled. The circling sunbows did upbear  
Its fall down the hoar precipice of spray,  
Lighting it far upon its lampless way.

And, when the Wizard Lady would ascend  
    The labyrinths of some many-winding vale  
Which to the inmost mountain upward tend,  
    She called "Hermaphroditus!"—and the pale  
And heavy hue which slumber could extend  
    Over its lips and eyes, as on the gale  
A rapid shadow from a slope of grass,  
Into the darkness of the stream did pass

And it unfurled its heaven-coloured pinions;  
    With stars of fire spotting the stream below,  
And from above into the Sun's dominions  
    Flinging a glory like the golden glow  
In which Spring clothes her emerald-winged minions,  
    All interwoven with fine feathery snow,  
And moonlight splendour of intensest rime  
With which frost paints the pines in winter-time.

And then it winnowed the elysian air  
    Which ever hung about that Lady bright,  
With its ethereal vans: and, speeding there,  
    Like a star up the torrent of the night,  
Or a swift eagle in the morning glare  
    Breasting the whirlwind with impetuous flight,  
The pinnacle, oared by those enchanted wings,

## Selected Poems

Clove the fierce streams towards their upper springs.

The water flashed,—like sunlight, by the prow  
Of a noon—wandering meteor flung to heaven;  
The still air seemed as if its waves did flow  
In tempest down the mountains; loosely driven,  
The Lady's radiant hair streamed to and fro;  
Beneath, the billows, having vainly striven  
Indignant and impetuous, roared to feel  
The swift and steady motion of the keel.

Or, when the weary moon was in the wane,  
Or in the noon of interlunar night,  
The Lady Witch in visions could not chain  
Her spirit; but sailed forth under the light  
Of shooting stars, and bade extend amain  
Its storm—outspeeding wings the Hermaphrodite;  
She to the austral waters took her way,  
Beyond the fabulous Thamondocana.

Where, like a meadow which no scythe has shaven,  
Which rain could never bend or whirlblast shake,  
With the antarctic constellations paven,  
Canopus and his crew, lay the austral lake—  
There she would build herself a windless haven  
Out of the clouds whose moving turrets make  
The bastions of the storm, when through the sky  
The spirits of the tempest thundered by:—

A haven beneath whose translucent floor  
The tremulous stars sparkled unfathomably;  
And around which the solid vapours hoar,  
Based on the level waters, to the sky  
Lifted their dreadful crags, and, like a shore  
Of wintry mountains, inaccessibly  
Hemmed—in with rifts and precipices grey,  
And hanging crags, many a cove and bay.

And, whilst the outer lake beneath the lash  
Of the wind's scourge foamed like a wounded thing  
And the incessant hail with stony clash  
Ploughed up the waters, and the flagging wing  
Of the roused cormorant in the lightningflash  
Looked like the wreck of some wind—wandering  
Fragment of inky thunder—smoke—this haven  
Was as a gem to copy heaven engraven.

On which that Lady played her many pranks,  
Circling the image of a shooting star  
(Even as a tiger on Hydaspes' banks  
Outspeeds the antelopes which speediest are)

The Witch of Atlas

## Selected Poems

In her light boat; and many quips and cranks  
    She played upon the water; till the car  
Of the late moon, like a sick matron wan,  
To journey from the misty east began.

And then she called out of the hollow turrets  
    Of those high clouds, white, golden, and vermilion,  
The armies of her ministering spirits.  
    In mighty legions million after million  
They came, each troop emblazoning its merits  
    On meteor flags; and many a proud pavilion  
Of the intertexture of the atmosphere  
They pitched upon the plain of the calm mere.

They framed the imperial tent of their great Queen  
    Of woven exhalations, underlaid  
With lambent lightning–fire, as may be seen  
    A dome of thin and open ivory inlaid  
With crimson silk. Cressets from the serene  
    Hung there, and on the water for her tread  
A tapestry of fleece–like mist was strewn,  
Dyed in the beams of the ascending moon.

And on a throne o'erlaid with starlight, caught  
    Upon those wandering isles of aery dew  
Which highest shoals of mountain shipwreck not,  
    She sate, and heard all that had happened new  
Between the earth and moon since they had brought  
    The last intelligence: and now she grew  
Pale as that moon lost in the watery night,  
And now she wept, and now she laughed outright.

These were tame pleasures.—She would often climb  
    The steepest ladder of the crudded rack  
Up to some beaked cape of cloud sublime,  
    And like Arion on the dolphin's back  
Ride singing through the shoreless air. Oft–time,  
    Following the serpent lightning's winding track,  
She ran upon the platforms of the wind,  
And laughed to hear the fireballs roar behind.

And sometimes to those streams of upper air  
    Which whirl the earth in its diurnal round  
She would ascend, and win the Spirits there  
    To let her join their chorus. Mortals found  
That on those days the sky was calm and fair,  
    And mystic snatches of harmonious sound  
Wandered upon the earth where'er she passed,  
And happy thoughts of hope, too sweet to last.

But her choice sport was, in the hours of sleep,

The Witch of Atlas



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To glide adown old Nilus, where he threads  
Egypt and Ethiopia from the steep  
Of utmost Axume until he spreads,  
Like a calm flock of silver-fleeced sheep,  
His waters on the plain,—and crested heads  
Of cities and proud temples gleam amid,  
And many a vapour-belted pyramid:—

By Mīris and the Mareotid lakes,  
Strewn with faint blooms like bridal-chamber floors,  
Where naked boys bridling tame water-snakes,  
Or charioteering ghastly alligators,  
Had left on the sweet waters mighty wakes  
Of those huge forms;—within the brazen doors  
Of the Great Labyrinth slept both boy and beast,  
Tired with the pomp of their Osirian feast.

And where within the surface of the river  
The shadows of the massy temples lie,  
And never are erased, but tremble ever  
Like things which every cloud can doom to die,—  
Through lotus-paven canals, and wheresoever  
The works of man pierced that serenest sky  
With tombs and towers and fanes,—'twas her delight  
To wander in the shadow of the night.

With motion like the spirit of that wind  
Whose soft step deepens slumber, her light feet  
Passed through the peopled haunts of humankind,  
Scattering sweet visions from her presence sweet,—  
Through fane and palace-court, and labyrinth mined  
With many a dark and subterranean street  
Under the Nile; through chambers high and deep  
She passed, observing mortals in their sleep.

A pleasure sweet doubtless it was to see  
Mortals subdued in all the shapes of sleep.  
Here lay two sister-twins in infancy;  
There a lone youth who in his dreams did weep;  
Within, two lovers linked innocently  
In their loose locks which over both did creep  
Like ivy from one stem; and there lay calm  
Old age with snow-bright hair and folded palm.

But other troubled forms of sleep she saw,  
Not to be mirrored in a holy song,—  
Distortions foul of supernatural awe,  
And pale imaginings of visioned wrong,  
And all the code of Custom's lawless law  
Written upon the brows of old and young.  
"This," said the Wizard Maiden, "is the strife

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Which stirs the liquid surface of man's life."

And little did the sight disturb her soul.

We, the weak mariners of that wide lake,  
Where'er its shores extend or billows roll,

Our course unpiloted and starless make  
O'er its wild surface to an unknown goal;

But she in the calm depths her way could take,  
Where in bright bowers immortal forms abide  
Beneath the weltering of the restless tide.

And she saw princes couched under the glow

Of sunlike gems; and round each temple—court  
In dormitories ranged, row after row,

She saw the priests asleep,—all of one sort,  
For all were educated to be so.

The peasants in their huts, and in the port  
The sailors she saw cradled on the waves,  
And the dead lulled within their dreamless graves.

And all the forms in which those spirits lay

Were to her sight like the diaphanous  
Veils in which those sweet ladies oft array

Their delicate limbs who would conceal from us  
Only their scorn of all concealment: they

Move in the light of their own beauty thus.  
But these and all now lay with sleep upon them,  
And little thought a Witch was looking on them.

She all those human figures breathing there

Beheld as living spirits. To her eyes  
The naked beauty of the soul lay bare,

And often through a rude and worn disguise  
She saw the inner form most bright and fair:

And then she had a charm of strange device,  
Which, murmured on mute lips with tender tone,  
Could make that spirit mingle with her own.

Alas! Aurora, what wouldst thou have given

For such a charm, when Tithon became grey—  
Or how much, Venus, of thy silver heaven

Wouldst thou have yielded, ere Proserpina  
Had half (oh why not all?) the debt forgiven

Which dear Adonis had been doomed to pay—  
To any witch who would have taught you it  
The Heliad doth not know its value yet.

'Tis said in after times her spirit free

Knew what love was, and felt itself alone.  
But holy Dian could not chaster be

Before she stooped to kiss Endymion

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Than now this Lady,—like a sexless bee,  
Tasting all blossoms and confined to none:  
Among those mortal forms the Wizard Maiden  
Passed with an eye serene and heart unladen.

To those she saw most beautiful she gave  
Strange panacea in a crystal bowl.  
They drank in their deep sleep of that sweet wave,  
And lived thenceforward as if some control,  
Mightier than life, were in them; and the grave  
Of such, when death oppressed the weary soul,  
Was as a green and overarching bower  
Lit by the gems of many a starry flower.

For, on the night when they were buried, she  
Restored the embalmer's ruining, and shook  
The light out of the funeral—lamps, to be  
A mimic day within that deathly nook;  
And she unwound the woven imagery  
Of second childhood's swaddling—bands, and took  
The coffin, its last cradle, from its niche,  
And threw it with contempt into a ditch,

And there the body lay, age after age,  
Mute, breathing, beating, warm, and undecaying,  
Like one asleep in a green hermitage,—  
With gentle smiles about its eyelids playing,  
And living in its dreams beyond the rage  
Of death or life; while they were still arraying  
In liveries ever new the rapid, blind,  
And fleeting generations of mankind.

And she would write strange dreams upon the brain  
Of those who were less beautiful, and make  
All harsh and crooked purposes more vain  
Than in the desert is the serpent's wake  
Which the sand covers. All his evil gain  
The miser, in such dreams, would rise and shake  
Into a beggar's lap; the lying scribe  
Would his own lies betray without a bribe.

The priests would write an explanation full,  
Translating hieroglyphics into Greek,  
How the God Apis really was a bull,  
And nothing more; and bid the herald stick  
The same against the temple—doors, and pull  
The old cant down: they licensed all to speak  
Whate'er they thought of hawks and cats and geese,  
By pastoral letters to each diocese.

The king would dress an ape up in his crown

The Witch of Atlas

## Selected Poems

And robes, and seat him on his glorious seat,  
And on the right hand of the sunlike throne  
    Would place a gaudy mock-bird to repeat  
The chatterings of the monkey. Every one  
    Of the prone courtiers crawled to kiss the feet  
Of their great emperor when the morning came;  
And kissed—alas, how many kiss the same!

The soldiers dreamed that they were blacksmiths, and  
    Walked out of quarters in somnambulism;  
Round the red anvils you might see them stand  
    Like Cyclopes in Vulcan's sooty abysm,  
Beating their swords to ploughshares:—in a band  
    The jailors sent those of the liberal schism  
Free through the streets of Memphis—much, I wis,  
To the annoyance of king Amasis.

And timid lovers, who had been so coy  
    They hardly knew whether they loved or not,  
Would rise out of their rest, and take sweet joy,  
    To the fulfilment of their inmost thought;  
And, when next day the maiden and the boy  
    Met one another, both, like sinners caught,  
Blushed at the thing which each believed was done  
Only in fancy—till the tenth moon shone;

And then the Witch would let them take no ill;  
    Of many thousand schemes which lovers find,  
The Witch found one,—and so they took their fill  
    Of happiness in marriage warm and kind.  
Friends who, by practice of some envious skill,  
    Were torn apart (a wide wound, mind from mind)  
She did unite again with visions clear  
Of deep affection and of truth sincere.

These were the pranks she played among the cities  
    Of mortal men. And what she did to Sprites  
And Gods, entangling them in her sweet ditties,  
    To do her will, and show their subtle sleights,  
I will declare another time; for it is  
    A tale more fit for the weird winter-nights  
Than for these garish summer-days, when we  
Scarcely believe much more than we can see.

**TO NIGHT**

Swiftly walk o'er the western wave,  
    Spirit of Night!  
Out of the misty eastern cave,  
Where, all the long and lone daylight,  
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,  
Which make thee terrible and dear--  
    Swift be thy flight!

Wrap thy form in a mantle gray,  
    Star-inwrought!  
Blind with thine hair the eyes of day;  
Kiss her until she be wearied out,  
Then wander o'er city, and sea, and land,  
Touching all with thine opiate wand--  
    Come, long-sought!

When I arose and saw the dawn,  
    I sighed for thee;  
When light rode high, and the dew was gone,  
And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,  
And the weary day turned to his rest,  
Lingering like an unloved guest,  
    I sighed for thee.

Thy brother Death came, and cried,  
    Wouldst thou me?  
Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,  
Murmured like a noontide bee,  
Shall I nestle near thy side?  
Wouldst thou me?--And I replied,  
    No, not thee!

Death will come when thou art dead,  
    Soon, too soon--  
Sleep will come when thou art fled;  
Of neither would I ask the boon  
I ask of thee, beloved Night--  
Swift be thine approaching flight,  
    Come soon, soon!

**TO JANE**

The keen stars were twinkling  
And the fair moon was rising among them,  
Dear Jane:  
The guitar was tinkling,  
But the notes were not sweet till you sung them  
Again.  
As the moon's soft splendor  
O'er the faint cold starlight of heaven  
Is thrown,  
So your voice most tender  
To the strings without soul had then given  
Its own.

The stars will awaken,  
Though the moon sleep a full hour later,  
Tonight;  
No leaf will be shaken  
Whilst the dews of your melody scatter  
Delight.  
Though the sound overpowers,  
Sing again, with your dear voice revealing  
A tone  
Of some world far from ours  
Where music and moonlight and feeling  
Are one.

**TO COLERIDGE**

Oh! there are spirits of the air,  
    And genii of the evening breeze,  
And gentle ghosts, with eyes as fair  
    As star-beams among twilight trees:  
Such lovely ministers to meet  
Oft hast thou turned from men thy lonely feet.

With mountain winds, and babbling springs,  
    And moonlight seas, that are the voice  
Of these inexplicable things,  
    Thou dost hold commune, and rejoice  
When they did answer thee, but they  
Cast, like a worthless boon, thy love away.

And thou hast sought in starry eyes  
    Beams that were never meant for thine,  
Another's wealth: tame sacrifice  
    To a fond faith ! still dost thou pine?  
Still dost thou hope that greeting hands,  
Voice, looks, or lips, may answer thy demands?

Ah! wherefore didst thou build thine hope  
    On the false earth's inconstancy?  
Did thine own mind afford no scope  
    Of love, or moving thoughts to thee?  
That natural scenes or human smiles  
Could steal the power to wind thee in their wiles?

Yes, all the faithless smiles are fled  
    Whose falsehood left thee broken-hearted;  
The glory of the moon is dead;  
    Night's ghosts and dreams have now departed;  
Thine own soul still is true to thee,  
But changed to a foul fiend through misery.

This fiend, whose ghastly presence ever  
    Beside thee like thy shadow hangs,  
Dream not to chase: the mad endeavour  
    Would scourge thee to severer pangs.  
Be as thou art. Thy settled fate,  
Dark as it is, all change would aggravate.

## TO A SKYLARK

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!  
    Bird thou never wert,  
That from Heaven, or near it,  
    Pourest thy full heart  
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still and higher  
    From the earth thou springest  
Like a cloud of fire;  
    The blue deep thou wingest,  
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning  
    Of the sunken sun  
O'er which clouds are bright'ning,  
    Thou dost float and run,  
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

The pale purple even  
    Melts around thy flight;  
Like a star of Heaven  
    In the broad daylight  
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight:

Keen as are the arrows  
    Of that silver sphere,  
Whose intense lamp narrows  
    In the white dawn clear  
Until we hardly see—we feel that it is there.

All the earth and air  
    With thy voice is loud.  
As, when night is bare,  
    From one lonely cloud  
The moon rains out her beams, and heaven is overflowed.

What thou art we know not;  
    What is most like thee?  
From rainbow clouds there flow not  
    Drops so bright to see  
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

Like a poet hidden  
    In the light of thought,  
Singing hymns unbidden,  
    Till the world is wrought  
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not:



Selected Poems

Like a high-born maiden  
In a palace tower,  
Soothing her love-laden  
Soul in secret hour

With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower:

Like a glow-worm golden  
In a dell of dew,  
Scattering unbeholden  
Its aerial hue

Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view:

Like a rose embowered  
In its own green leaves,  
By warm winds deflowered,  
Till the scent it gives

Makes faint with too much sweet these heavy-winged thieves.

Sound of vernal showers  
On the twinkling grass,  
Rain-awakened flowers,  
All that ever was

Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass.

Teach us, sprite or bird,  
What sweet thoughts are thine:  
I have never heard  
Praise of love or wine

That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.

Chorus hymeneal  
Or triumphal chaunt  
Matched with thine, would be all  
But an empty vaunt--

A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.

What objects are the fountains  
Of thy happy strain?  
What fields, or waves, or mountains?  
What shapes of sky or plain?

What love of thine own kind? what ignorance of pain?

With thy clear keen joyance  
Languor cannot be:  
Shadow of annoyance  
Never came near thee:

Thou lovest, but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.

Waking or asleep,  
Thou of death must deem

## Selected Poems

Things more true and deep  
Than we mortals dream,  
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream?

We look before and after,  
And pine for what is not:  
Our sincerest laughter  
With some pain is fraught;  
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Yet if we could scorn  
Hate, and pride, and fear;  
If we were things born  
Not to shed a tear,  
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

Better than all measures  
Of delightful sound,  
Better than all treasures  
That in books are found,  
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!

Teach me half the gladness  
That thy brain must know,  
Such harmonious madness  
From my lips would flow  
The world should listen then, as I am listening now!

## THE CLOUD

I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers,  
From the seas and the streams;  
I bear light shade for the leaves when laid  
In their noonday dreams.  
From my wings are shaken the dews that waken  
The sweet buds every one,  
When rocked to rest on their mother's breast,  
As she dances about the sun.  
I wield the flail of the lashing hail,  
And whiten the green plains under,  
And then again I dissolve it in rain,  
And laugh as I pass in thunder.

I sift the snow on the mountains below,  
And their great pines groan aghast;  
And all the night 'tis my pillow white,  
While I sleep in the arms of the blast.  
Sublime on the towers of my skiey bowers,  
Lightning, my pilot, sits;  
In a cavern under is fettered the thunder,  
It struggles and howls at fits;

Over earth and ocean, with gentle motion,  
This pilot is guiding me,  
Lured by the love of the genii that move  
In the depths of the purple sea;  
Over the rills, and the crags, and the hills,  
Over the lakes and the plains,  
Wherever he dream, under mountain or stream,  
The Spirit he loves remains;  
And I all the while bask in Heaven's blue smile,  
Whilst he is dissolving in rains.

The sanguine Sunrise, with his meteor eyes,  
And his burning plumes outspread,  
Leaps on the back of my sailing rack,  
When the morning star shines dead;  
As on the jag of a mountain crag,  
Which an earthquake rocks and swings,  
An eagle alit one moment may sit  
In the light of its golden wings.  
And when Sunset may breathe, from the lit sea beneath,  
Its ardors of rest and of love,

And the crimson pall of eve may fall  
From the depth of Heaven above,  
With wings folded I rest, on mine aery nest,

## Selected Poems

As still as a brooding dove.  
That orb'd maiden with white fire laden,  
Whom mortals call the Moon,  
Glides glimmering o'er my fleece-like floor,  
By the midnight breezes strewn;  
And wherever the beat of her unseen feet,  
Which only the angels hear,  
May have broken the woof of my tent's thin roof,  
The stars peep behind her and peer;  
And I laugh to see them whirl and flee,  
Like a swarm of golden bees,  
When I widen the rent in my wind-built tent,  
Till the calm rivers, lakes, and seas,  
Like strips of the sky fallen through me on high,  
Are each paved with the moon and these.

I bind the Sun's throne with a burning zone,  
And the Moon's with a girdle of pearl;  
The volcanoes are dim, and the stars reel and swim  
When the whirlwinds my banner unfurl.  
From cape to cape, with a bridge-like shape,  
Over a torrent sea,  
Sunbeam-proof, I hang like a roof,—  
The mountains its columns be.  
The triumphal arch through which I march  
With hurricane, fire, and snow,  
When the Powers of the air are chained to my chair,  
Is the million-colored bow;  
The sphere-fire above its soft colors wove,  
While the moist Earth was laughing below.

I am the daughter of Earth and Water,  
And the nursling of the Sky;  
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores;  
I change, but I cannot die.  
For after the rain when with never a stain  
The pavilion of Heaven is bare,  
And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams  
Build up the blue dome of air,  
I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,  
And out of the caverns of rain,  
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,  
I arise and unbuild it again.

**A SUMMER EVENING CHURCHYARD, LECHLADE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE.**

THE wind has swept from the wide atmosphere  
    Each vapour that obscured the sunset's ray,  
And pallid Evening twines its beaming hair  
In duskier braids around the languid eyes of Day:  
    Silence and Twilight, unbeloved of men,  
    Creep hand in hand from yon obscurest glen.

They breathe their spells towards the departing day,  
    Encompassing the earth, air, stars, and sea;  
Light, sound, and motion, own the potent sway,  
Responding to the charm with its own mystery.  
    The winds are still, or the dry church-tower grass  
    Knows not their gentle motions as they pass.

Thou too, aerial pile, whose pinnacles  
    Point from one shrine like pyramids of fire,  
Obey'st I in silence their sweet solemn spells,  
Clothing in hues of heaven thy dim and distant spire,  
    Around whose lessening and invisible height  
    Gather among the stars the clouds of night.

The dead are sleeping in their sepulchres:  
    And, mouldering as they sleep, a thrilling sound,  
Half sense half thought, among the darkness stirs,  
Breathed from their wormy beds all living things around,  
    And, mingling with the still night and mute sky,  
    Its awful hush is felt inaudibly.

Thus solemnized and softened, death is mild  
    And terrorless as this serenest night.  
Here could I hope, like some enquiring child  
Sporting on graves, that death did hide from human sight  
    Sweet secrets, or beside its breathless sleep  
    That loveliest dreams perpetual watch did keep.

## STANZAS WRITTEN IN DEJECTION NEAR NAPLES

The sun is warm, the sky is clear,  
    The waves are dancing fast and bright,  
Blue isles and snowy mountains wear  
    The purple noon's transparent might,  
    The breath of the moist earth is light,  
Around its unexpanded buds;  
    Like many a voice of one delight  
The winds, the birds, the ocean floods,  
The city's voice itself, is soft like Solitude's.

I see the deep's untrampled floor  
    With green and purple seaweeds strown;  
I see the waves upon the shore,  
    Like light dissolved in star-showers, thrown:  
    I sit upon the sands alone,—  
The lightning of the noontide ocean  
    Is flashing round me, and a tone  
Arises from its measured motion,  
How sweet! did any heart now share in my emotion.

Alas! I have nor hope nor health,  
    Nor peace within nor calm around,  
Nor that content surpassing wealth  
    The sage in meditation found,  
    And walked with inward glory crowned—  
Nor fame nor power, nor love, nor leisure,  
    Others I see whom these surround—  
Smiling they live, and call life pleasure;—  
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure.

Yet now despair itself is mild,  
    Even as the winds and waters are;  
I could lie down like a tired child,  
    And weep away the life of care  
    Which I have born and yet must bear,  
Till death like sleep might steal on me,  
    And I might feel in the warm air  
My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea  
Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony.

Some might lament that I were cold,  
    As I, when this sweet day is gone,  
Which my lost heart, too soon grown old,  
    Insults with this untimely moan;  
    They might lament—for I am one  
Whom men love not,—and yet regret,

## Selected Poems

Unlike this day, which, when the sun  
Shall on its stainless glory set,  
Will linger, though enjoyed, like joy in memory yet.

## SONG OF PROSERPINE

Sacred Goddess, Mother Earth,  
    Thou from whose immortal bosom  
Gods and men and beasts have birth,  
    Leaf and blade, and bud and blossom,  
Breathe thine influence most divine  
On thine own child, Proserpine.

If with mists of evening dew  
    Thou dost nourish these young flowers  
Till they grow in scent and hue  
    Fairest children of the Hours,  
Breathe thine influence most divine  
On thine own child, Proserpine.



**SONG**

Rarely, rarely comest thou,  
    Spirit of Delight!  
Wherefore hast thou left me now  
    Many a day and night?  
Many a weary night and day  
'Tis since thou art fled away.

How shall ever one like me  
    Win thee back again?  
With the joyous and the free  
    Thou wilt scoff at pain.  
Spirit false! thou hast forgot  
All but those who need thee not.

As a lizard with the shade  
    Of a trembling leaf,  
Thou with sorrow art dismayed;  
    Even the sighs of grief  
Reproach thee, that thou art not near,  
And reproach thou wilt not her.

Let me set my mournful ditty  
    To a merry measure;—  
Thou wilt never come for pity,  
    Thou wilt come for pleasure;  
Pity then will cut away  
Those cruel wings, and thou wilt stay.

I love all that thou lovest,  
    Spirit of Delight!  
The fresh Earth in new leaves dressed,  
    And the starry night;  
Autumn evening, and the morn  
When the golden mists are born.

I love snow and all the forms  
    Of the radiant frost;  
I love waves, and winds, and storms,  
    Everything almost  
Which is Nature's, and may be  
Untainted by man's misery.

I love tranquil solitude,  
    And such society  
As is quiet, wise, and good;  
    Between thee and me  
What difference? but thou dost possess

## Selected Poems

The things I seek, not love them less.

I love Love—though he has wings,  
And like light can flee,  
But above all other things,  
Spirit, I love thee—  
Thou art love and life! O come!  
Make once more my heart thy home!

### OZYMANDIAS

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: `Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.  
And on the pedestal these words appear —  
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'

**ON A DEAD VIOLET**

The odor from the flower is gone  
    Which like thy kisses breathed on me;  
The color from the flower is flown  
    Which glowed of thee and only thee!

A shrivelled, lifeless, vacant form,  
    It lies on my abandoned breast;  
And mocks the heart, which yet is warm,  
    With cold and silent rest.

I weep—my tears revive it not;  
    I sigh—it breathes no more on me:  
Its mute and uncomplaining lot  
    Is such as mine should be.

## MUTABILITY

We are the clouds that veil the midnight moon;  
How restlessly they speed, and gleam, and quiver,  
Streaking the darkness radiantly!—yet soon  
Night closes round, and they are lost forever:

Or like forgotten lyres, whose dissonant strings  
Give various response to each varying blast,  
To whose frail frame no second motion brings  
One mood or modulation like the last.

We rest.—A dream has power to poison sleep;  
We rise.—One wandering thought pollutes the day;  
We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep;  
Embrace fond foe, or cast our cares away:

It is the same!—For, be it joy or sorrow,  
The path of its departure still is free:  
Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;  
Nought may endure but Mutability.

## LOVE'S PHILOSOPHY

The fountains mingle with the river,  
    And the rivers with the ocean;  
The winds of heaven mix forever  
    With a sweet emotion;  
Nothing in the world is single;  
    All things by a law divine  
In another's being mingle—  
    Why not I with thine?

See, the mountains kiss high heaven,  
    And the waves clasp one another;  
No sister flower could be forgiven  
    If it disdained its brother;  
And the sunlight clasps the earth,  
    And the moonbeams kiss the sea;—  
What are all these kissings worth,  
    If thou kiss not me?

## THE INDIAN SERENADE

I arise from dreams of thee  
In the first sweet sleep of night,  
When the winds are breathing low,  
And the stars are shining bright  
I arise from dreams of thee,  
And a spirit in my feet  
Hath led me—who knows how?  
To thy chamber window, Sweet!

The wandering airs they faint  
On the dark, the silent stream—  
The champak odors fail  
Like sweet thoughts in a dream;  
The nightingale's complaint,  
It dies upon her heart;  
As I must on thine,  
Oh, beloved as thou art!

O lift me from the grass!  
I die! I faint! I fail!  
Let thy love in kisses rain  
On my lips and eyelids pale.  
My cheek is cold and white, alas!  
My heart beats loud and fast;—  
Oh! press it to thine own again,  
Where it will break at last.

## HYMN OF PAN

FROM the forests and highlands  
    We come, we come;  
From the river-girt islands,  
    Where loud waves are dumb  
Listening to my sweet pipings.  
    The wind in the reeds and the rushes,  
    The bees on the bells of thyme,  
    The birds on the myrtle-bushes,  
    The cicale above in the lime,  
    And the lizards below in the grass,  
Were as silent as ever old Tmolus was,  
    Listening to my sweet pipings.

Liquid Peneus was flowing,  
    And all dark Temple lay  
In Pelion's shadow, outgrowing  
    The light of the dying day,  
Speded by my sweet pipings.  
    The Sileni and Sylvans and fauns,  
    And the Nymphs of the woods and wave  
    To the edge of the moist river-lawns,  
    And the brink of the dewy caves,  
And all that did then attend and follow,  
Were silent with love,—as you now, Apollo,  
    With envy of my sweet pipings.

I sang of the dancing stars,  
    I sang of the dedal earth,  
And of heaven, and the Giant wars,  
    And love, and death, and birth.  
And then I changed my pipings,—  
Singing how down the vale of Maenalus  
    I pursued a maiden, and clasped a reed:  
Gods and men, we are all deluded thus;  
    It breaks in our bosom, and then we bleed.  
All wept—as I think both ye now would,  
If envy or age had not frozen your blood—  
    At the sorrow of my sweet pipings.

## ODE TO THE WEST WIND

### I

O WILD West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being

Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead  
Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,  
Pestilence-stricken multitudes! O thou  
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,  
Each like a corpse within its grave, until  
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill  
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)  
With living hues and odours plain and hill;

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;  
Destroyer and preserver; hear, O hear!

### II

Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,

Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,  
Shook from the tangled boughs of heaven and ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning! there are spread  
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,  
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Mænad, even from the dim verge  
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,  
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night  
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,  
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere  
Black rain, and fire, and hail, will burst: O hear!

### III

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams

The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,  
Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,



## Selected Poems

Beside a pumice isle in Baiæ's bay,  
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers  
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss, and flowers  
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou  
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below  
The sea—blooms and the oozy woods which wear  
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,  
And tremble and despoil themselves: O hear!

### IV

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;

If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;  
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
Than thou, O uncontrollable! if even  
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,  
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed  
Scarce seem'd a vision—I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.  
O! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd  
One too like thee—tameless, and swift, and proud.

### V

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:

What if my leaves are falling like its own?  
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,  
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,  
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth;  
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth

## Selected Poems

Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?