

The burden of sad sayings. In that day
 Thou shalt tell all thy days and hours, and tell
 Thy times and ways and words of love, and say
 How one was dear and one desirable,
 And sweet was life to hear and sweet to smell,
 But now with lights reverse the old hours retire
 And the last hour is shod with fire from hell;
 This is the end of every man's desire.

50 The burden of four seasons. Rain in spring,
 White rain and wind among the tender trees;
 A summer of green sorrows gathering,
 Rank autumn in a mist of miseries,
 With sad face set towards the year, that sees
 The charred ash drop out of the dropping pyre,
 And winter wan with many maladies;
 This is the end of every man's desire.

60 The burden of dead faces. Out of sight
 And out of love, beyond the reach of hands,
 Changed in the changing of the dark and light,
 They walk and weep about the barren lands
 Where no seed is nor any garner stands,
 Where in short breaths the doubtful days respire,
 And time's turned glass lets through the sighing sands,
 This is the end of every man's desire.

70 The burden of much gladness. Life and lust
 Forsake thee, and the face of thy delight;
 And underfoot the heavy hour strews dust,
 And overhead strange weathers burn and bite;
 And where the red was, lo the bloodless white,
 And where truth was, the likeness of a liar,
 And where day was, the likeness of the night;
 This is the end of every man's desire.

BEFORE THE MIRROR

L'ENVOY

Princes, and ye whom pleasure quickeneth,
 Heed well this rhyme before your pleasure tire;
 For life is sweet, but after life is death.
 This is the end of every man's desire.

Rondel

Kissing her hair I sat against her feet,
 Wove and unwove it, wound and found it sweet;
 Made fast therewith her hands, drew down her eyes,
 Deep as deep flowers and dreamy like dim skies;
 With her own tresses bound and found her fair,
 Kissing her hair.

Sleep were no sweeter than her face to me,
 Sleep of cold sea-bloom under the cold sea;
 What pain could get between my face and hers?
 What new sweet thing would love not relish worse?
 Unless, perhaps, white death had kissed me there,
 Kissing her hair?

Before the Mirror

(VERSES WRITTEN UNDER A PICTURE)

Inscribed to J. A. Whistler

White rose in red rose-garden
 Is not so white;
 Snowdrops that plead for pardon
 And pine for fright

Because the hard East blows
Over their maiden rows
Grow not as this face grows from pale to bright.

Behind the veil, forbidden,
Shut up from sight,
10 Love, is there sorrow hidden,
Is there delight?
Is joy thy dower or grief,
White rose of weary leaf,
Late rose whose life is brief, whose loves are light?

Soft snows that hard winds harden
Till each flake bite
Fill all the flowerless garden
Whose flowers took flight
Long since when summer ceased,
20 And men rose up from feast,
And warm west wind grew east, and warm day night.

II

'Come snow, come wind or thunder
High up in air,
I watch my face, and wonder
At my bright hair;
Nought else exalts or grieves
The rose at heart, that heaves
With love of her own leaves and lips that pair.

30 'She knows not loves that kissed her
She knows not where.
Art thou the ghost, my sister,
White sister there,
Am I the ghost, who knows?
My hand, a fallen rose,
Lies snow-white on white snows, and takes no care.

BEFORE THE MIRROR

'I cannot see what pleasures
Or what pains were;
What pale new loves and treasures
New years will bear;
What beam will fall, what shower,
What grief or joy for dower;
But one thing knows the flower; the flower is fair.'

III

Glad, but not flushed with gladness,
Since joys go by;
Sad, but not bent with sadness,
Since sorrows die;
Deep in the gleaming glass
She sees all past things pass,
And all sweet life that was lie down and lie.

There glowing ghosts of flowers
Draw down, draw nigh;
And wings of swift spent hours
Take flight and fly;
She sees by formless gleams,
She hears across cold streams,
Dead mouths of many dreams that sing and sigh.

Face fallen and white throat lifted,
With sleepless eye
She sees old loves that drifted,
She knew not why,
Old loves and faded fears
Float down a stream that hears
The flowing of all men's tears beneath the sky.

Hendecasyllabics

In the month of the long decline of roses
 I, beholding the summer dead before me,
 Set my face to the sea and journeyed silent,
 Gazing eagerly where above the sea-mark
 Flame as fierce as the fervid eyes of lions
 Half divided the eyelids of the sunset;
 Till I heard as it were a noise of waters
 Moving tremulous under feet of angels
 Multitudinous, out of all the heavens;
 10 Knew the fluttering wind, the fluttered foliage,
 Shaken fitfully, full of sound and shadow;
 And saw, trodden upon by noiseless angels,
 Long mysterious reaches fed with moonlight,
 Sweet sad straits in a soft subsiding channel,
 Blown about by the lips of winds I knew not,
 Winds not born in the north nor any quarter,
 Winds not warm with the south nor any sunshine;
 Heard between them a voice of exultation,
 'Lo, the summer is dead, the sun is faded,
 20 Even like as a leaf the year is withered,
 All the fruits of the day from all her branches
 Gathered, neither is any left to gather.
 All the flowers are dead, the tender blossoms,
 All are taken away; the season wasted,
 Like an ember among the fallen ashes.
 Now with light of the winter days, with moonlight,
 Light of snow, and the bitter light of hoarfrost,
 We bring flowers that fade not after autumn,
 Pale white chaplets and crowns of latter seasons,
 30 Fair false leaves (but the summer leaves were falsen),
 Woven under the eyes of stars and planets
 When low light was upon the windy reaches
 Where the flower of foam was blown, a lily
 Dropt among the sonorous fruitless furrows
 And green fields of the sea that make no pasture:

SAPPHICS

Since the winter begins, the weeping winter,
 All whose flowers are tears, and round his temples
 Iron blossom of frost is bound for ever.'

Sapphics

All the night sleep came not upon my eyelids,
 Shed not dew, nor shook nor unclosed a feather,
 Yet with lips shut close and with eyes of iron
 Stood and beheld me.

Then to me so lying awake a vision
 Came without sleep over the seas and touched me,
 Softly touched mine eyelids and lips; and I too,
 Full of the vision,

Saw the white implacable Aphrodite,
 Saw the hair unbound and the feet unsandalled
 Shine as fire of sunset on western waters;
 Saw the reluctant

Feet, the straining plumes of the doves that drew her,
 Looking always, looking with necks reverted,
 Back to Lesbos, back to the hills whereunder
 Shone Mitylene;

Heard the flying feet of the Loves behind her
 Make a sudden thunder upon the waters,
 As the thunder flung from the strong unclosing
 Wings of a great wind.

So the goddess fled from her place, with awful
 Sound of feet and thunder of wings around her;
 While behind a clamour of singing women
 Severed the twilight.

Ah the singing, ah the delight, the passion!
 All the Loves wept, listening; sick with anguish,
 Stood the crowned nine Muses about Apollo;
 Fear was upon them,

While the tenth sang wonderful things they knew not.
 30 Ah the tenth, the Lesbian! the nine were silent,
 None endured the sound of her song for weeping;
 Laurel by laurel,

Faded all their crowns; but about her forehead,
 Round her woven tresses and ashen temples
 White as dead snow, paler than grass in summer,
 Ravaged with kisses,

Shone a light of fire as a crown for ever.
 Yea, almost the implacable Aphrodite
 Paused, and almost wept; such a song was that song.
 40 Yea, by her name too

Called her, saying, 'Turn to me, O my Sappho;
 Yet she turned her face from the Loves, she saw not
 Tears for laughter darken immortal eyelids,
 Heard not about her

Fearful fitful wings of the doves departing,
 Saw not how the bosom of Aphrodite
 Shook with weeping, saw not her shaken raiment,
 Saw not her hands wrung;

Saw the Lesbians kissing across their smitten
 50 Lutes with lips more sweet than the sound of lute-strings,
 Mouth to mouth and hand upon hand, her chosen,
 Fairer than all men;

Only saw the beautiful lips and fingers,
 Full of songs and kisses and little whispers,
 Full of music; only beheld among them
 Soar, as a bird soars

Newly fledged, her visible song, a marvel,
 Made of perfect sound and exceeding passion,
 Sweetly shapen, terrible, full of thunders,
 Clothed with the wind's wings.

Then rejoiced she, laughing with love, and scattered
 Roses, awful roses of holy blossom;
 Then the Loves thronged sadly with hidden faces
 Round Aphrodite,

Then the Muses, stricken at heart, were silent;
 Yea, the gods waxed pale; such a song was that song.
 All reluctant, all with a fresh repulsion,
 Fled from before her.

All withdrew long since, and the land was barren,
 Full of fruitless women and music only.
 Now perchance, when winds are assuaged at sunset,
 Lulled at the dewfall,

By the grey sea-side, unassuaged, unheard of,
 Unbeloved, unseen in the ebb of twilight,
 Ghosts of outcast women return lamenting,
 Purged not in Lethe,

Clothed about with flame and with tears, and singing
 Songs that move the heart of the shaken heaven,
 Songs that break the heart of the earth with pity,
 Hearing, to hear them.

At Eleusis

Men of Eleusis, ye that with long staves
 Sit in the market-houses, and speak words
 Made sweet with wisdom as the rare wine is
 Thickened with honey; and ye sons of these
 Who in the glad thick streets go up and down

I the nightingale all spring through,
 20 O swallow, sister, O changing swallow,
 All spring through till the spring be done,
 Clothed with the light of the night on the dew,
 Sing, while the hours and the wild birds follow,
 Take flight and follow and find the sun.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anactoria

τίνος αἶ τὸ πειθοί
 μάψ σαγηνεύσας φιλότατα;
 SAPPHO.

My life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes
 Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs
 Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound,
 And my blood strengthens, and my veins abound.
 I pray thee sigh not, speak not, draw not breath;
 Let life burn down, and dream it is not death.
 I would the sea had hidden us, the fire
 (Wilt thou fear that, and fear not my desire?)
 Severed the bones that bleach, the flesh that cleaves,
 And let our sifted ashes drop like leaves.
 I feel thy blood against my blood: my pain
 Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein.
 Let fruit be crushed on fruit, let flower on flower,
 Breast kindle breast, and either burn one hour.
 Why wilt thou follow lesser loves? are thine
 Too weak to bear these hands and lips of mine?

I charge thee for my life's sake, O too sweet
 To crush love with thy cruel faultless feet,
 I charge thee keep thy lips from hers or his,
 20 Sweetest, till theirs be sweeter than my kiss:
 Lest I too lure, a swallow for a dove,
 Erotion or Erinna to my love.
 I would my love could kill thee; I am satiated
 With seeing thee live, and fain would have thee dead.
 I would earth had thy body as fruit to eat,
 And no mouth but some serpent's found thee sweet.
 I would find grievous ways to have thee slain,
 Intense device, and superflux of pain;
 Vex thee with amorous agonies, and shake
 30 Life at thy lips, and leave it there to ache;
 Strain out thy soul with pangs too soft to kill,
 Intolerable interludes, and infinite ill;
 Relapse and reluctance of the breath,
 Dumb tunes and shuddering semitones of death.
 I am weary of all thy words and soft strange ways,
 Of all love's fiery nights and all his days,
 And all the broken kisses salt as brine
 That shuddering lips make moist with waterish wine,
 And eyes the bluer for all those hidden hours
 40 That pleasure fills with tears and feeds from flowers,
 Fierce at the heart with fire that half comes through,
 But all the flowerlike white stained round with blue;
 The fervent underlid, and that above
 Lifted with laughter or abashed with love;
 Thine amorous girdle, full of thee and fair,
 And leavings of the lilies in thine hair.
 Yea, all sweet words of thine and all thy ways,
 And all the fruit of nights and flower of days,
 And stinging lips wherein the hot sweet brine
 50 That Love was born of burns and foams like wine,
 And eyes insatiable of amorous hours,
 Fervent as fire and delicate as flowers,
 Coloured like night at heart, but cloven through
 Like night with flame, dyed round like night with blue,

Clothed with deep eyelids under and above –
 Yea, all thy beauty sickens me with love;
 Thy girdle empty of thee and now not fair,
 And ruinous lilies in thy languid hair.
 Ah, take no thought for Love's sake; shall this be,
 And she who loves thy lover not love thee?
 Sweet soul, sweet mouth of all that laughs and lives,
 Mine is she, very mine; and she forgives.
 For I beheld in sleep the light that is
 In her high place in Paphos, heard the kiss
 Of body and soul that mix with eager tears
 And laughter stinging through the eyes and ears;
 Saw Love, as burning flame from crown to feet,
 Imperishable, upon her storied seat;
 Clear eyelids lifted toward the north and south,
 A mind of many colours, and a mouth
 Of many tunes and kisses; and she bowed,
 With all her subtle face laughing aloud,
 Bowed down upon me, saying, 'Who doth thee wrong,
 Sappho?' but thou – thy body is the song,
 Thy mouth the music; thou art more than I,
 Though my voice die not till the whole world die;
 Though men that hear it madden; though love weep,
 Though nature change, though shame be charmed to sleep.
 Ah, wilt thou slay me lest I kiss thee dead?
 Yet the queen laughed from her sweet heart and said:
 'Even she that flies shall follow for thy sake,
 And she shall give thee gifts that would not take,
 Shall kiss that would not kiss thee' (yea, kiss me)
 'When thou wouldst not? – when I would not kiss thee!
 Ah, more to me than all men as thou art,
 Shall not my songs assuage her at the heart?
 Ah, sweet to me as life seems sweet to death,
 Why should her wrath fill thee with fearful breath?
 Nay, sweet, for is she God alone? hath she
 Made earth and all the centuries of the sea,
 Taught the sun ways to travel, woven most fine
 The moonbeams, shed the starbeams forth as wine,

Bound with her myrtles, beaten with her rods,
 The young men and the maidens and the gods?
 Have we not lips to love with, eyes for tears,
 And summer and flower of women and of years?
 Stars for the foot of morning, and for noon
 Sunlight, and exaltation of the moon;
 Waters that answer waters, fields that wear
 100 Lilies, and languor of the Lesbian air?
 Beyond those flying feet of fluttered doves,
 Are there not other gods for other loves?
 Yea, though she scourge thee, sweetest, for my sake,
 Blossom not thorns and flowers not blood should break.
 Ah that my lips were tuneless lips, but pressed
 To the bruised blossom of thy scourged white breast!
 Ah that my mouth for Muses' milk were fed
 On the sweet blood thy sweet small wounds had bled!
 That with my tongue I felt them, and could taste
 110 The faint flakes from thy bosom to the waist!
 That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat
 Thy breasts like honey! that from face to feet
 Thy body were abolished and consumed,
 And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!
 Ah, ah, thy beauty! like a beast it bites,
 Stings like an adder, like an arrow smites.
 Ah sweet, and sweet again, and seven times sweet,
 The paces and the pauses of thy feet!
 Ah sweeter than all sleep or summer air
 120 The fallen fillets fragrant from thine hair!
 Yea, though their alien kisses do me wrong,
 Sweeter thy lips than mine with all their song;
 Thy shoulders whiter than a fleece of white,
 And flower-sweet fingers, good to bruise or bite
 As honeycomb of the inmost honey-cells,
 With almond-shaped and roseleaf-coloured shells
 And blood like purple blossom at the tips
 Quivering; and pain made perfect in thy lips
 For my sake when I hurt thee; O that I
 130 Durst crush thee out of life with love, and die,

Die of thy pain and my delight, and be
 Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee!
 Would I not plague thee dying overmuch?
 Would I not hurt thee perfectly? not touch
 Thy pores of sense with torture, and make bright
 Thine eyes with bloodlike tears and grievous light?
 Strike pang from pang as note is struck from note,
 Catch the sob's middle music in thy throat,
 Take thy limbs living, and new-mould with these
 A lyre of many faultless agonies?
 Feed thee with fever and famine and fine drouth,
 With perfect pangs convulse thy perfect mouth,
 Make thy life shudder in thee and burn afresh,
 And wring thy very spirit through the flesh?
 Cruel? but love makes all that love him well
 As wise as heaven and crueller than hell.
 Me hath love made more bitter toward thee
 Than death toward man; but were I made as he
 Who hath made all things to break them one by one,
 If my feet trod upon the stars and sun
 And souls of men as his have alway trod,
 God knows I might be crueller than God.
 For who shall change with prayers or thanksgivings
 The mystery of the cruelty of things?
 Or say what God above all gods and years
 With offering and blood-sacrifice of tears,
 With lamentation from strange lands, from graves
 Where the snake pastures, from scarred mouths of slaves,
 From prison, and from plunging prows of ships
 Through flamelike foam of the sea's closing lips –
 With thwartings of strange signs, and wind-blown hair
 Of comets, desolating the dim air,
 When darkness is made fast with seals and bars,
 And fierce reluctance of disastrous stars,
 Eclipse, and sound of shaken hills, and wings
 Darkening, and blind inexpiable things –
 With sorrow of labouring moons, and altering light
 And travail of the planets of the night,

And weeping of the weary Pleiads seven,
 170 Feeds the mute melancholy lust of heaven?
 Is not his incense bitterness, his meat
 Murder? his hidden face and iron feet
 Hath not man known, and felt them on their way
 Threaten and trample all things and every day?
 Hath he not sent us hunger? who hath cursed
 Spirit and flesh with longing? filled with thirst
 Their lips who cried unto him? who bade exceed
 The fervid will, fall short the feeble deed,
 Bade sink the spirit and the flesh aspire,
 180 Pain animate the dust of dead desire,
 And life yield up her flower to violent fate?
 Him would I reach, him smite, him desecrate,
 Pierce the cold lips of God with human breath,
 And mix his immortality with death.
 Why hath he made us? what had all we done
 That we should live and loathe the sterile sun,
 And with the moon wax paler as she wanes,
 And pulse by pulse feel time grow through our veins?
 Thee too the years shall cover; thou shalt be
 190 As the rose born of one same blood with thee,
 As a song sung, as a word said, and fall
 Flower-wise, and be not any more at all,
 Nor any memory of thee anywhere;
 For never Muse has bound above thine hair
 The high Pierian flower whose graft outgrows
 All summer kinship of the mortal rose
 And colour of deciduous days, nor shed
 Reflex and flush of heaven about thine head,
 Nor reddened brows made pale by floral grief
 200 With splendid shadow from that lordlier leaf.
 Yea, thou shalt be forgotten like spilt wine,
 Except these kisses of my lips on thine
 Brand them with immortality; but me –
 Men shall not see bright fire nor hear the sea,
 Nor mix their hearts with music, nor behold
 Cast forth of heaven, with feet of awful gold

And plumeless wings that make the bright air blind,
 Lightning, with thunder for a hound behind
 Hunting through fields unfurrowed and unsown,
 But in the light and laughter, in the moan
 And music, and in grasp of lip and hand
 And shudder of water that makes felt on land
 The immeasurable tremor of all the sea,
 Memories shall mix and metaphors of me.
 Like me shall be the shuddering calm of night,
 When all the winds of the world for pure delight
 Close lips that quiver and fold up wings that ache;
 When nightingales are louder for love's sake,
 And leaves tremble like lute-strings or like fire;
 Like me the one star swooning with desire
 Even at the cold lips of the sleepless moon,
 As I at thine; like me the waste white noon,
 Burnt through with barren sunlight; and like me
 The land-stream and the tide-stream in the sea.
 I am sick with time as these with ebb and flow,
 And by the yearning in my veins I know
 The yearning sound of waters; and mine eyes
 Burn as that beamless fire which fills the skies
 With troubled stars and travailing things of flame;
 And in my heart the grief consuming them
 Labours, and in my veins the thirst of these,
 And all the summer travail of the trees
 And all the winter sickness; and the earth,
 Filled full with deadly works of death and birth,
 Sore spent with hungry lusts of birth and death,
 Has pain like mine in her divided breath;
 Her spring of leaves is barren, and her fruit
 Ashes; her boughs are burdened, and her root
 Fibrous and gnarled with poison; underneath
 Serpents have gnawn it through with tortuous teeth
 Made sharp upon the bones of all the dead,
 And wild birds rend her branches overhead.
 These, woven as raiment for his word and thought,
 These hath God made, and me as these, and wrought