



RUPERT HUGHES

Collected Poems

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE, LYRICS, SATIRE, AND PUBLIC VERSE

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

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ARCHIVAL IMAGES

Selected source-book witnesses

GYGES' RING

and Other Verse

By RUPERT HUGHES

MURRAY & GEE, INC.
CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

Title page of Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse (1949).

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INTRODUCTION

January 31, 1872, Lancaster, Missouri – September 9, 1956, Los Angeles, California

Rupert Hughes began publishing verse as a child and never quite stopped, even after his reputation expanded into music scholarship, magazine fiction, Broadway comedy, Hollywood screenwriting and direction, biography, radio commentary, and military and civic service. Born in Lancaster, Missouri, in 1872 and raised chiefly in Keokuk, Iowa, he learned art and classical culture from his mother, wrote household plays, spoke Latin as a teenager, and earned degrees at Adelbert College and Yale. His first long poetic success, *Gyges' Ring* (1901), transformed a classical tale from Herodotus and Plato into an uneasy dramatic monologue about looking, power, guilt, and erotic possession.

Hughes worked with uncommon range. He reported for the *New York Journal*, edited several magazines, wrote influential reference books on American composers, supplied libretti and songs, and found theatrical success with *Excuse Me*. He served for decades in the National Guard, and his inability to accompany the Fighting 69th to France because of impaired hearing remained a bitter disappointment. In 1917 he entered film work; more than fifty motion pictures would eventually derive from his writing, and he became an energetic participant in Hollywood's professional life. He was the first president of the Hollywood Writers Group, a predecessor of the Screen Writers Guild.

The poetry collected here reveals the same restless versatility. Formal sonnets and elegies sit beside comic dialect, translations, patriotic public verse, erotic lyrics, free verse, quatrains, and long character portraits. Hughes's 1949 *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* gathered work from across the career and reissued the 1901 monologue. Its retrospective character makes the book less a single-period statement than a self-curated map of his literary life. The poems move between Midwestern memory, New York spectacle, California gardens, war commemoration, domestic affection, bawdy comedy, and the ethical strain of watching other people.

His public career also carried serious controversy. Hughes's anti-Communism led him to cooperate with congressional investigators during the blacklist era, and some of his political writing and public statements were reactionary and prejudicial. A critical reading of his work must retain that history rather than turn the industrious polymath into an uncomplicated regional hero. He died in Los Angeles in 1956, still working after strokes had slowed him. This edition returns the poetry to view as one substantial, internally varied strand of a career that helped connect turn-of-the-century magazine culture to the institutions and contradictions of literary Hollywood.

I. VARIA

From Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse (1949)

The Man Who Looked at Godiva

Then she rode back, clothed on with chastity.
And one low churl, compact of thankless earth,
The fatal byword of all years to come,
Boring a little augur-hole in fear
Peeped—
but his eyes, before they had their will,
Were shrivelled into darkness in his head.
Tennyson,

GODIVA.

They call me vile because I gazed at her
Who published her great beauty to the day.
And God Himself, I think, misunderstood
The reason why I could not turn away.
And Heaven has seized my eyes, and it has pleased
The Lord, who kept me poor, to make me blind.
But God Himself can never confiscate
The image He has printed on my mind.
A blacksmith was I, as my sire before;
My wife a slattern, as her dam had been;
And snowy beauty, woman absolute,
Was what I oft had dreamed of, never seen.
To watch the very curves of horseshoes once
With thorough smiles my being all imbued;
Or straight slim nails; and anvil-shapes the same,-
My thought of her was just as little lewd.
All sweaty in my smithy I had spent
My years, my youth, all beauty-thirst denied.
Then came the word that she, our lady queen,

Along our street, as God her made, would ride.
Often, indeed, I'd seen her in her robes;
Often at night she darkled through a dream.
And now before my door, all manifest,
Her shapeliness would glide, and glow, and gleam!

Once she should pass, my sledge must clamor on,
My sooty life resume its dingy course.
Think you that any fear could clench my eyes
Against Godiva naked on her horse?
I shut my door, and through a cranny gazed,
That she might never know an added blush.
And in my gaze there was no sinful leer;
Nor in my heart desire, my cheek a flush.
I stared idolatrous as on a saint
In marble carven on a marble steed.
I saw her! her entire divine design!
My eyes devoured her, and my soul did feed.
She'd woven her hair like golden lace around,
But gracious breezes lifted it aside;
Her tear-sprent hands hid but her shamefast face;
For she was humble with such cause of pride!
Her arms, her bosom, and her ivory flank,
Her lines, her tint, her texture—
ah, my God!
That they should call my holy rapture vile!
And He reward my worship with His rod!
So I am blind—
yet am not blind at all;
For only he is blind that has not seen.
Within my darkened lids, aflame she rides
In deathless pageantry, my own, my queen.
Thus I have painted one great work at least
Whose rapt perfections cancel any pain.
So call me artist, if you will—
or beast.
I've lived! I've looked! Nor looked nor lived in vain!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Feet of Clay

They mock my cherished idol;

For, they say:

“Although his torse is golden,
His feet are clay.”
But in that very truth
I take my pride.
His earthen origin
I would not hide.
His stance is in and of
The common mire;
But his stature climbs and soars,
His thoughts aspire.
His breast’s a smoldering brazier

Filled with fire:

His heart is ever throbbing
With high desire.
His hands yearn always upward
Toward the skies.
The stars and all the suns
Call to his eyes.
So let them say
His feet are clay.
I lift my eyes above,
And I behold
The heart that aches with love,
The crown of gold.

Publication. *Gyges’ Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

A Girl Who Died Unwed

Whenever a woman dies, a city dies;
She cannot perish to herself alone.
Her death a thousand destinies denies,
And countless souls unborn her loss bemoan.
More than this girl these ceremonies close away,
The frost that froze the bud forestals the seed.
And scatters in the petals of her clay
Long lineages of hope, of dream, of deed.
Her roseless lips, her once-coquettish hair,
Her yester-radiant eyes, now quenched and dulled—
Thus confined, are themselves a coffin, where
Huge histories lie cancelled and annulled.
In her are wrapped, like pollen in those flowers—
Those wasted lilies in whose arms she fails—
How many souls, how many fruitful powers!
A host invisible her fate bewails.
In her, were latent girls with lips like rhyme,
And love whereof the world has never enough.
In her, staunch men were waiting for their time,
With strength for any but this one rebuff.
Some needed poet will go mute for life,
Lacking a siren fitted to inspire;
How he had sung, had she but been a wife,
And mothered, for his Muse, his heart's desire!
One future day, disaster will destroy
A woman, a vast army, or a state,
That had been saved had she but borne a boy
To clutch the hour just when the hour was great.

From her lean, thwarted loins there might have swarmed
Peoples increasing to the marge of doom.
Now nations, colonies in cohorts formed
March down with her to an abysmal tomb.
This death an oceanic harvest blights
In one pink rosebud plucked too soon,
As when a cosmic cataclysm smites
A fertile planet to a futile moon.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Womankind

O breasted ones, soft-bosomed ones!
Beloved of lovers, daughters, sons!
You of the clasping arms, the embracing thighs
Whereinbetween, unseen, there lies
The gate of life, goal of desire,
Whence we come forth as sparks of fire,
Whither return in yearning flame
Chaste as an altar, or void of shame.
Mothers or harlots, mistresses, wives,
Sinners or saints, fountains of lives,
Wastrels as wantons, wastrels as nuns.
O breasted ones! Sweet-bosomed ones!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

With a First Reader

Dear little child, this little book
Is less a primer than a key
To sunder gates where wonder waits
Your “Open Sesame!”
These tiny syllables look large;
They’ll fret your wide, bewildered eyes;
But “Is the cat upon the mat?”
Is passport to the skies.
For, yet awhile, and you shall turn
From Mother Goose to Avon’s swan;
From Mary’s lamb to grim Khayyam,
And Mancha’s mad-wise Don.
You’ll writhe at Jean Val jean’s disgrace;
And D’Artagnan and Ivanhoe
Shall steal your sleep; and you shall weep
At Sidney Carton’s woe.
You’ll find old Chaucer young once more,
Beaumont and Fletcher fierce with fire;
At your demand, John Milton’s hand
Shall wake his ivory lyre.
And learning other tongues, you’ll learn
All times are one; all men, one race:
Hear Homer speak, as Greek to Greek;
See Dante, face to face.
Arma virumque shall resound;
And Horace wreath his rhymes afresh;
You’ll rediscover Laura’s lover;
Meet Gretchen in the flesh.

Oh, could I find for the first time
The “Churchyard Elegy” again!
Retaste the sweets of new-found Keats;
Read Byron now as then!
Make haste to wander these old roads,
O envied little parvenue;
For all things trite shall leap alight
And bloom again for you.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

When You Sleep

How beautifully, how beautiful you sleep!
Your eyelids beautiful above your eyes.
Your snowy bosom hardly seems to rise
And fall as you half-breathe in dream-deeps deep.
One arm's above your head in ivory grace,
One sweet hand rests between your breasts.
I long to wake you, kissing your dear face
To bring you back from—
what mysterious quests?
To bring you back to earth ere I have cried,
“How beautifully, how beautiful you died!”

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Too Much Is None

More than so much is none at all to me.
Deaf to Too Loud, Too Bright I do not see;
Too Pretty has no spell.
My heart is but a gourd
Hung by a roadside well.
It holds but so much hoard.
As soon as it is filled
Then more is wasted, spilled;
My heart rejects it, whatsoever it be.
Adventurous violets that are the first
Upon the mossy wastes of Spring to burst
Make me cry out, and kneel.
The next I see I hail;
The third has sweet appeal;
The fourth wins lesser wonder,
And soon my raptures fail;
I tread the sweetlings under
And trample a purple town with heel accurst.
The earliest star swung down on an unseen wire
Above a sunset makes my senses choir.
The next I watch for, stirred
As if an altar bell had tinkled.
My soul is thrilled by the third;
But when the sky's abloom,
With a snow of far worlds sprinkled
I turn to my lamplit room,
And draw the curtain against the sacred fire.

Sometimes by someone's sudden sorrow wrenched,
My heart as by a taloned hand is clenched.
A war's first soldier slain,
A first platoon destroyed,
And I'm shot through with pain.
My shuddering members bleed.
But soon, with horror cloyed,
I skip the news I read
Of armies, navies, cities, blood-bedrenched.
A child afraid, alone, a hungry child,

Starts in my soul a sorrow fierce and wild.
But soon my pity rests;
My human kindness dries,
As the milk in the shrivelled breasts
Of brood-bereft old mothers
Who watch with tear-drained eyes
The starving babes of others.
To pleasanter thoughts I've turned, and smiled!
Perhaps God, too (too often prayed to, hailed and hymned)
Finds His all-seeing eyes by tears bedimmed,
Finds his whole heaven too narrow,
Eternity too brief,
To grant each fallen sparrow,
Each human woe, His grief.
All-Wise, He cannot grant
All prayers. His time's too scant.
By infinite ills is His cup overbrimmed?

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Misgivings

The peach trees,
At the least breath
Of the least breeze,
Yield as to Death,
And part with their petals
All.

The stark thistles
Keep their nettles
Though the North whistles
And flowers are killed.
And with driven snows
The air is filled,
And woeful crows
Call.

To the moth's wing,
The least touch
Of the least thing
Is overmuch,
And scatters its golden
Dust

Hate in the heart
Clings like an olden
Rust-riven dart.
But the least deceit
Of a cherished lover
Embitters a sweet
It can never recover—
Trust.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Seduction

Her lips stammer, "No!"
Her Joins clamor, "Yes!"
Her feet long to go;
Her hands to caress
Her brain counsels flight;
Her blood pleads, "Be tender!"
Her pride bids her, "Fight!"
Desire sighs, "Surrender!"
Cold wisdom cries, "Shame!"
Hot youth laughs, "What of it?"
"You're fuel. Be flame!"
"Try love and you'll love it."
Her brain warns, "One kiss
"And your life is defiled.
"Long woe for brief bliss
"Awaits you, poor child.
"Forbear, or you're trapt, you're
"A slave to all fear.
"A brief while of rapture
"Means hell for a year."
Her fate is all cruel.
She's caught in that mesh,
That ultimate duel
Between soul and flesh.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Forget and Be Forgiven

A woman who had sinned luxuriously, repenting,
Besought forgiveness by her bedside where she knelt.
A sudden angel stood there, saying, "God hath dealt
In mercy with you, and, His righteous wrath relenting,
Hath sent me, messenger of grace, to say, 'Your debt
Is cancelled. I forgive the moment you forget.'"
The sinner gasped with joy. Then something caught her throat
As her remembering glance fell on the bed. She pined,
"Oh, grant some other penance, howsoever dread!
Can I forget how in his arms I seemed to float
On clouds of bliss with summer lightnings thrilled and warmed?
How glad he was, and grateful! And how wondrous sweet
It was to sin! Never before had I felt quite complete,
Or great, or grand until that passion blazed and stormed.
I can and do repent. My weakness I can hate.
But now I need to find in shame some saving pride.
Redeem myself, remembering!"
The angel sighed.
"God speaks not twice. But He—
and hell—
can wait.
Your sin's unshriven while it charms. Forget
Or be of God forgot!"
The angel's waiting yet.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Calendar

In those delicious days we spent together
The hurried calendar would shed its leaves
Like apple blossoms which a windy weather
Of every petal every stem bereaves.
Now we're apart, and letters to and fro
Rather rekindle longing than assuage.
As thistles grip their spears through storm and snow,
It clings a month to every daily page.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Perverseness

Voluminously silent is the night:

But I am mad for song, and toil, and light.
The day breaks forth like pealing mouths of bells:
And finds me homesick after dreamland fells.
The smooth long hills flow out upon the sky,
Back from the steeps my spirits ebb and die.

On opportunity my plans are drawn:

When chance looms big-my
lazy spirits yawn!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Time

Petal by petal,
The red rose dies.
Moment by moment,
The glad hour flies.
Star after star,
And the night is crowned.
Dawn-glow, sunrise,
And the stars are drowned
Planet by planet,
Night's lost in the sea.
Aeon on aeon
In eternity.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Anonymous

Sometimes at night within a wooded park,
Like an ocean cavern fathoms deep in gloom,
Sweet scents, like hymns, from hidden flowers fume.
They make the wanderer happy, though the dark
Obscures their tint, their name, their shapely bloom.
So, in the thick-set chronicles of fame,
There hover deathless feats of souls unknown.
They linger like the fragrant smoke-wreaths blown
From liberal sacrifice. Gone face and name;
The deeds like homeless ghosts, live on alone.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Contentment

Outside, was snow-tormented midnight gloom;
But it was summer in the little room
Where I alone was more than mortal merry,
Content as any cricket on a sunny
Stone in June, with never a least regret.
For I was nibbling buttered biscuits gilt with honey,
And sipping molten gold of olden sherry,
And reading “Aucassin and Nicolette.”
They loved immortal well. And once he called
Her “Sweeter than sack posset.” So enthralled
Was she that she cut off her glorious hair
And cast it in his cell that he might wear
It in his breast. Love-martyrs, they; but I—
I read of them with a rich luxurious sigh.
There’s nothing soothes my soul like tales of woe,
Of sweet old, sad old loves of long ago.

Publication. *Gyges’ Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Telephone

Your voice the tantalizing telephone
Brings to me eerily, so far, so near!
Your lips seem murmurous at my very ear;
And yet we are apart, afar, alone.
It seems my arms might almost now be thrown
About your very waist, O more than dear!
And yet-How
fate will frustrate every cheer!—
A fiend might slay you, and your dying moan
Would find me helpless. All the fierce desire
You could assuage is made the more to smart
By your sweet words along the living wire.
Your voice can speed like lightning mile on mile;
And yet you cannot feel my throbbing heart;
I cannot kiss your eyes, or see your smile.
So might two lovers, severed by all space,
Cry greetings each to each from star to star;
Or you in heaven greet me there in hell.
And death may leave us even as now we are.
In interstellar voids, how shall we trace
Each other's fleshless souls? how kiss, embrace?
How love us without arms, eyes, breasts, or face?
We should by worse than tantalism be teased
Eternal yearnings eternally unappeased.
It that be heaven, hell is the pleasanter place.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Your Eyes

What color can I call your occult eyes
So tender in their laughter, yet so wise?
The orbs of other folk are blue or black
Or brown or grey or hazel; but I lack
A word to fit your pupils sibylline,
Unlike all other eyes I've ever seen.
The diamond-cutter cleaves the crystal stone
And splits its white to every color known.
He fashions it in facets, and they teem
With rainbows pouring forth a glowing stream
Of radiance, all the icy hardness gone,
As after rain a dream-light lingers on.
Your eyes were diamonds if a diamond
Could understand, and laugh, and pray, respond
To tears with tears, and answer love with love.
The hawk has eyes less keen; less soft the dove.
Their color must be every color known.
The sentinels of your own soul alone.
It matters not what colors they may be,
If but those eyes
Be not too wise
To look with laughter, pity, and love on me.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Hydrangeas

Hydrangeas, holding out their lanterns,
Their creamy Chinese lanterns,
Lean out above the waters,
The hushed and sleepy waters,
As if the moon's own daughters
Gazed where her white sedan turns
To bid the East good-bye.
Westward the starry caravan turns,
The gleaming caravan turns,
And without haste, on high
Plods the wide waste on high;
And plods the echoed sky
On the little lowly pond.
The twilight's mystic talisman turns
To bliss the pain of man; turns
(As with a wizard's wand,
An all-endearing wand)
Toward home the vagabond,
And leaves the fold complete.
Hydrangeas, lift aloft your lanterns,
Those dreamy, moody lanterns
The musing waves repeat
As mirrored moons; repeat
As flowers of fire-oh,
sweet
This night! heart-breaking sweet
If only you were here tonight
My lonely soul to light
With love's eternal lanterns!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Jean Summerlin

O name like maple syrup to the tongue,
Aeolian to the ear!
No sweeter name was ever said or sung,
Or pleasanter to hear.
And she that owned it, gracing it and graced,
Had a voice of equal honey.
Her heart was high, and she was elfin-faced,
Her midnight eyes were sunny.
I never knew her by that music-name;
Yet vivid fancy sees
The little girl she was, when summer came,
Climb in the cherry trees,
And sit there singing like a lyric bird.
Or, else, all day she weaves
Romances sweet and intricate, unheard
Save by the gentle leaves.
Jean Summerlin! Jean Summerlin's no more!

And yet I can't regret her:

That was the name my little mother wore
Before my father met her.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Acuity

I am so deaf that I do not hear
The roar that follows the lightning's flash.
She is so delicately keen of ear
That, when a soapbubble floats too near
The thorn of a rose, she hears it crash.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Maple-Sugaring

Oh, we went maple-sugaring,
All by some golden hap,
Where wounded trees were jewelling
Their beads of pearly sap.
We peered the dryer places out,
And skipped the young abysses,
Where last year's leaves lay all about
As thick as next year's kisses.
You seemed a moving maple tree,
Yet fairer, sweeter, lither.
Ah, you were bodied Spring to me,
As nypish, gayer, blither!
The cordial farmer smiled to see
The love that aureoled us;
Yet neither eye nor ear had we
For aught he may have told us.
I proffered you a pewter spoon
In syrup dipt and laved,
Which, when your lip but touched, so soon
'Twas golden all, and graved.
Then home we turned in earned content,
Yet often paused to kiss
Wherever the trees concealment lent.
Your very glance was bliss.
Oh, we went maple-sugaring,
All by some golden chance!
And the maple trees like bridesmaids waved
Long life to our romance.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Then, Now, and Again

Spring is the most beautiful of all the seasons;
But Summer is even more beautiful to behold.
Summer is most beautiful of all the seasons;
But Autumn is even more beautiful in red and gold.
Autumn is most beautiful of all the seasons;
But Winter is even more beautiful in white, ice-cold.
Winter is most beautiful of all the seasons;
But Spring is even more beautiful a thousand-fold.
Each of the circling seasons is most beautiful of all
In memory, hope, the immediate moment's thrall.
Everything is most beautiful that comes, and goes, and comes again.
Now is ever more poignant, ever more beautiful than Then.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Lilacs

The last time I saw lilacs
They were aglow with rain;
They made the shower fragrant;
It made them glow again.
But now the dark air's sullen.
Of you each cluster sighs;
And when I breathe their incense
They're rain-wet-from
my eyes.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Need of Frost

Almost alone among all the familiar flowers,
Lilacs languish in Californian bowers.
They say that's because they need a shock of cold
To make their luminous clusters unclench and unfold.
Are we not all like lilacs? Each human being
Hoards his true self with a miser's unyielding unfreeing.
Fear and a flogging withheld, we recoil from our duty;
Terror and heartbreak must wake us and break us to beauty.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

A Woodshed in Texas

The whitewashed woodshed in the backyard weeds,
Hideously shabby in the glare of noon,
Now fronts the all-enamelling moon,
And gains eerie grandeur in the plenilune.
It seems a tiny temple as it stands and pleads
With the sky; and the night sky hears, and heeds,
Garbs it with beauty though it vanish soon.
It lifts up now a prayerful face,
And is forgiven, and filled with grace.
So treasures hidden in the high noon-light
Are seen and true-valued only at night.
Shadows reveal what is lost in clarity;
Justice is sun-sharp; but night is charity.
Night is poetry; day is history.
Truth is truest when touched with mystery.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Peas and Beans

Among the crooked roofs of old Dieppe, I heard
A voice that went a-crying something wildly sweet.
I could not see who sang, nor catch a single word
Yet ached with all the woe it trailed along the street.
Ah!—
ah-ha! ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! ah-ha!
Ah!—
ah-ha! ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! ah-ha!
The bard marched unbeheld, but fancy saw him plain:
A tall immortal minstrel chanting to the throng
Some old cold beauty's scorn, some high heroic pain
That made his sorrow music, grief his mastersong.
Ah!—
ah-ha! ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! ah-ha!
Ah!—
ah-ha! ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! ah-ha!
At last I saw the man, the weird, returned *trouvere*.
He was a wizened peddler, bent, goat-bearded—bah!
The burdens of his song and of his push-cart were
But green string-beans and peas; and this his formula:
Des hari—hari-hari—hari-hari—haricots verts!
Des petits, petits, petits, petits pois!
He sold his food for food; and, spite of all hurrah,
Who's he that does not peddle round the world his ware?
Philosopher or artist, poet, pope, or shah,
Creed-monger, millionaire—lo, this is each man's prayer:
Who'll buy my petits, petits, petits pois?
My hari—hari-hari—hari-hari—haricots verts!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Dawn on the Webs

The wren from her nightlong nest
Rises and preens her wings;
Her mate from his throbbing breast
Lifts up his head and sings.
Beneath him a spider descends
The frailest of silver strings;
Another darkles and mends
A whorl of platinum rings.
The sun with his level blades
Scythes the wet grass, and flings
Jewels on webs like brocades
Fit for the shoulders of kings.
In a glistening gossamer tent
The dome-spider spins and clings.
His crystalline cupola swings,
A nebulous firmament
With planets of dew besprent—
Most delicate thing of things!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Confusion

The song of a bird, in a trellis unseen,
Was lost in a perfume of fragrance so keen
That my fancy could hardly find room
To make the fantastical choice
Between
A bird that had learned how to bloom
And a rosebud given a voice.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Relentless Love

Love can sanctify, they say,
Any thing;
Any deed of work or play;
What we sing;
All the art of cunning care;
Every thought;
What we dream or hope or dare,
Would or ought.
Love annuls, transmutes, transcends
Rights of friends,
Claims of kindred, law, and state,
Dues of hate.
Knowledge, wisdom, truth and duties
Yield to beauty's
Royal privilege and dower;
Fruit to flower,
Use to grace, and class to gender,
Strong to slender.
All that's mighty must surrender
To the tender
Fierce and passionate desire
Of the fire
For the victim that it chooses,
Burns, abuses,
Sears, destroys; and where it flashes
Leaves but ashes.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Infidelity?

If I love you today
I love you today.
Do not say
In December,
“You loved me in May.
Remember?
You are false,
You’re a liar.”
Take the rose
When it glows—
Is it a liar
When the briar
Alone stands out stark
Discolored and dark?
Is the noon
A traitor
If later
All too soon
It is night?
And is June
False to September?
Is the fire
To the ember?
Nay, tomorrow’s
Sorrows
Are tomorrow’s
Sorrows.

They’re its own
Alone.
This is now,
That is then.
If we love us today
Let us say
It is gay,
It is sweet,
It’s complete.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Rose That Bleeds

My heart is a full red rose,
Asway on the tree of life.
For you and you only it glows.
Enjoy it, but spare the knife.
To save it from chill December,
The warmth of your heart it needs;
So cherish it, love; but remember!
If you bruise it, it bleeds.
Pass by, and spare my pain—
Nay, pluck me without rue.
Better to die in vain
Than not to die for you.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Lonely Sentinel

As I walked my lonely post
In the rainy midnight air,
Something moved like a ghost,
And I challenged, "Halt! Who's there?"
No reply it gave; but drew still nigher.
Taking aim, I cried, "Halt! or I fire!"
Then the ghost paused on the line,
And 't was your voice answered mine:
"Can't you see
That it's me?"
And I sighed: "It's true,
It's you!
But how can it be that you're so near?
You're a thousand, thousand miles from here."
You answered: "Soldier mine,
When love's your whole existence,
There's neither time nor distance.
But, as the farthest star
Will find you wherever you are
With its beams,
So true love will find love that's true;
And you will find me, and I will find you
In our dreams."

Then you linked your arm in mine
And you walked my post with me,
And the rain was like a wine.
And the silence, melody.
All the loneliness was loveliness,
The bitter wind a soft caress.
And now, with you beside me like a ghost,
On battlefield or lonely post,
No matter, darling, where or when,
I'll never be alone again.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Lorelei

High in the huge cathedral of the storm,
She sits and chants above the wave-worn stones,
Her body white as ice, her heart as warm;
Beneath her spurning feet love-madmen's bones.
About her whips a swirl of wind-wrung hair,
As smoke round a marble shrine it hovereth.
"Oh welcome any fate before a witch so fair!
Enough that such voice summon even to death."

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

God Bless Your Home!

In the old-fashioned house,
with the horse-hair furniture
And the album of plush,
filled with faded daguerreotypes,
You will find on the wall,
In a sample-work scrawl,
“GOD BLESS OUR HOME.”
Rather foolish it seems
in its home-spun sentiment,
And you smile at the skill
of the fingers that fashioned it;
Yet it hangs in the air,

A perpetual prayer:

“GOD BLESS OUR HOME.”
Oh, the soul’s deepest wounds
are the plain, old platitudes,
And the wish to go home
was the first out of Paradise.
You, whoever you are,
Have dear ones near or far,
GOD BLESS YOUR HOME!
GOD BLESS OUR HOME!

Publication. *Gyges’ Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

II. SONNETS

From Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse (1949)

Invocation

“Whan that Aprille with his shoures swete”-
Ah, Geoffrey Chaucer, still your voice is clear!
As lush and tuneful as a bird’s to hear,
When first a bird’s voice sounds the first retreat
To winter’s white-mailed phalanx in defeat.
Now that the rime-enriched Victorian year
Has drained its amber summer, lost its sere
Autumnal harvest for the barren sleet
Of wintry wailing-oh,
if you could sing
Us back our birthright, quick-recurrent spring!
Renew that optimism of a bird,
That simplest grief and cheeriest humor heard
Since first, glad April poet, your art wrung
New rimes and music from our new-sweet tongue.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Spring

OYEz! OYEz! a girl has run away!
She's truanting from Winter's convent-halls;
Stampeding all the world with fieldward calls,
And breeding mischief in the general clay.
She romps along the lanes and mimics May;
The savor of her blown, soft hair enthalls
The air. The snows melt where her footprint falls
On greening meads whose startled flowers betray
The coaxing tune her fleet vagary hums,
The leaves look out to watch her where she comes,
And pell-mell brooks break jail to scamper after;
And hill-homed cattle frisk that she is near.
She teases even the towns with fetching laughter.
Oyez! who's seen the Tomboy of the Year?

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

In Summertime

The while the brazen sun offends the sky,
She frets in heavy mockery of sleep,
And feels for him in dreams, as billows creep
And clutch to reach a seashell dull and dry.

So he, in town, would fain put business by:

Her face is all the books his mind can keep;
And plans are webs wherethrough her fingers sweep.
The far-off witch weaves every thought awry.
But with the evening dawns their real day,
For twilight steals about her like a plea,
And brings her lover speeding to her side
With fond demandings that are not denied.
And summer moonshine builds a new Cathay,
Wherein they dream beside a summer sea.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Greta

Greta! beautiful my sister, dead!
Was it yesterday, or years ago you died?
For grief comes back with the rush of a sudden tide,
Fresh tears, as if my eyes had never bled.
I keep again my vigil by your bed,
Seeing you suffer again, as when you sighed,
“Now am I going to die?” I smiled and lied.
You knew—forgave—held up your glorious head.
Against the hideous word my throat was clenched
My heart denied a fate my love disdains.
Your wit, your courage are in earth immured;
The flame of your gleaming voice in dust is quenched.
Though like a shackled rebel I fight my chains
The intolerable truth must be endured.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

For Decoration Day

But do we truly mourn our soldier dead,
Or understand at all their precious fame—
We that were born too late to feel the flame
That leapt from lowly hearts, and grew, disspread,
And, like a pillar of fire, our armies led?
Or you that knew them—do the long years tame
The memory-anguish? Are they more than name?
Oh, let no stinted grief profane their bed!
Let tears bedew each wreath that decks the lawn
Of every grave! and raise a solemn prayer
That their battalioned souls be joined to fare
Dim roads, beyond the trumpets of the dawn,
Yet perfumed, somehow, by our flowers that heap
The peaceful barracks where their bodies sleep.

1898-1899

And now the long, long lines of the Nation's graves
Grow longer; and the venerate slopes reveal
The fresh spring turf gashed thick with
tombs to seal
Away another army of our braves.
So hang black garlands from the architraves
Of all the capitals. The dying peal
Of bugles wails their final Taps. So kneel
And give the dead the due their virtue craves.
Thank God, the olden sinew still is bred;
The milk of American mothers still is sweet;
The sword of Seventy-six is sharp and bright;
The Flag still floats unblotted with defeat!
But ah, the blood that keeps its ripples red,
The starry lives that keep its field alight;
The pangs of women and the tears they've bled!

The Lord enlarge our spirits till we feel
The greatness of these spirits upward fled.
A kind of genius it has been that fed
Them strength to be, above all passions, lea!
They put aside the velvet for the steel,
Left love, and hope, and ease at home; and sped

To the wilderness of war and every dread.
Their blood is mortar for our commonweal;
Their deeds its decoration and its boast.
So mix with dirges, triumph, smiles, with tears.
Make sorrow perfect with exultant pride—
Our vanished armies have not truly died;
They march today before the heavenly host;
And history's veterans raise a storm of cheers,
As the Yankee troops—with glory armed and shod—
In Grand Review swing past the throne of God.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Prayer for Rain

Lo, Father, how thine earth is devastate,
Thy far-spread greenlands yellowing with the heat,
While skies gleam on in mockery or deceit,
And helpless man can only hope and wait.
Now shall this piteous ruin be his fate?
Shall all the ploughing and the seeds of spring,
And all the summer's fruitward hastening,
Meet, at their fiery goal, a curse, and hate?
Look in the million anxious eyes that cling
Upon the heaven, whence suns unpitying beat,
Whence laugh the unveiled stars no longer sweet;
Then hide the garish moon in clouds, and fling
Athwart the day wide banners black with rain!
Yea, grant thine earth the bounty of thy rain!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Rose on Her Green Divan

A rose that languished on her green divan,
An agony of beauty, lone and high,
Leaned down to watch her harem-sisters die
Where summer's torches up the trellis ran
As through a pyre Sardanapalian.
No speech have flowers; yet this rose seemed to cry;
"If God be not a wanton Pasha, why-
"Why does His hate end all His love began?"
The Garden Genius answered: "Nay, my pretty,
"There is no grace in merely tolling years.
"Let those who must endure too long despair.
"For brevity wins, even for beauty, pity-
"Pity that pearls the draught of death with tears.
"Oh, rather than linger plain, pass briefly fair."

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

III. ELEGIES

From Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse (1949)

Autumn's Earliest Red

First note of crimson in the trees
That sends the first bird throbbing South;
First hectic flush of fell disease;
First touch of rouge on a weary mouth;
First scarlet letter; rust of grief;
First shoddy poppy in the sheaf;
First velvet shred of funeral glory;
First warning sigh: Memento mori!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

To Amelia

Torn from the showering tree
This delicate spray
Of apple blossoms bright with rain
Upon your grave. O dead too soon, I lay;
And turn again to life
With nameless pain.
This bridal choir of white-robed flowers will die
Not knowing fruitage. They are fit to lie
Upon your grave; for what are they, in truth,
But pure white maidens dying in their youth?

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

At Kensico

The sun hangs huge behind the graveyard,
The night will be black and cold.
The white tombs wait there, stark and lonesome
Against the western gold.
Pitiful monuments of heartbreak,
Granite words of surrender.
Milestones of retreat along the pathway
Into the heavenly splendor.
My sister Greta lies out alone there,
A mourning, marble above her;
But what could be said with chisels
To witness how we love her?
Her love was wonderful with fervor,
Strange gifts she had for sorrow,
And sympathy that from another
The very ache could borrow.
Her beauty was superb and tawny,
And tall she was and haunting;
In music was her art, her being,
And her voice like an angel's chaunting.
The olden solaces they utter
Seem mockery and lying,
Mere subterfuges for forgetting
How much she suffered, dying.
For life was unfair, disloyal and cruel;
But death was bitterer yet.
Her pain is still, but so is her rapture;
All joy is all regret.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Cremation

At least when we are dead, let us not cumber the ground.
Our deeds, what we have dreamed, manners and motives and all
Forgot, still will be felt; mute, will forever resound.
For death stops but the press; helpless he is to recall
Our hymns, satires and songs cluttering the nooks of the earth.
Old friends, closing our eyes, cannot resign us entire;
Each child out of our loins mimics our faults from its birth;—
Such wealth holds in entail, heritage endless and dire.
Enough fardels we leave, yokes for posterity's neck:
Disease, lameness and guilt, appetites warped and debased;
Foul spawn left to mature we might with ease put in check;
Dumb moths riddling the woof, we might with ease have effaced.
And, last heirloom of all, we must bequeath them our clay!
The rough shards of our life, vessels discarded and done;
And these they must preserve lavishly shrined for decay,
Usurp with them the parks, wasting the lawns and the sun!
But there under the sod, under the perjurous stone,
What bleak ugly revenge earth will inflict with disgust!
What fierce usury's seized out of our overdue loan,
Till, bankrupt, we're sold back to original dust!
And, meanwhile, the rains serve not to wash but to blot.
Chill flesh from the bones withers and leaves them obscene;
And they, too, in their turn, dwindle to dust—and are not.
And thus die we two deaths ere we are sifted and clean.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

IV. FREE VERSE

From Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse (1949)

Free Verse

I lacked the skill; I lacked the time
To shape these moods to form and rhyme.
“Heard songs,” they say, “are sweet;
But unheard songs are sweeter.”
So pray, assuming these moods are meet
For record, imagine the rhyme and the meter.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Hands and the Eyes

The eager Hands
Built for their beloved Eyes
A garden.
The tireless Hands
Lifted rocks away,
Tore briars out,
Established grass,
Coaxed vines to climb,
Established roses.
The bruised Hands
Spread a smooth couch
Beneath a shadowy tree,
And led a lyric stream along
To make a shimmering music.
Then the contented Eyes,
Seeing it all and beautiful all,
Drew down their lids
And slept,
Dreaming of other gardens.
Made by other Hands.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Autumn Leaves

The air is full of autumn leaves,
The lawn's aswirl with autumn leaves,
My Pekingese in autumn leaves,
Himself the hue of autumn leaves,
Kicks up a cloud of autumn leaves.
The streets are thick with autumn leaves
And soldiers, home on autumn leaves.
Sad joy we take in autumn leaves,
For winter comes when autumn leaves.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

New York Bay

There was a broad lagoon of burning color
Beneath was the city
Entombed in twilight;
Roofs, domes, spires, chimneys forming the serrate horizon,
A memorial gloom of purple against the florid sky.
And then the bay!
Overrun with craft,...
lumbering schooners; still sloops like great night moths; plodding ferries;
 raucous, breathing tugs; returning pleasure-boats freighted with wearied and
 pleasureless human-kind; long, low steamers....: an ocean liner forging like a
 Moorish giant slowly through the crowd.
And the waters of the bay!
Scooped in little cups of motley color,
Fretting here and there
And very solemn with the business of the tides.
And then at the outer edge of all this color fete—
Fronting to the East,
Enamelled in purple haze,
With arm uplift and torch just blooming into starry flame—
Liberty!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

At Club Twenty-One

You, who sit next to me at the next table,
I do not know who you are, nor you who I am.
I dare not attempt to start a flirtation,
For the man you are with is bigger than I am—
And far younger, and handsome, and no doubt in love with you.
And you perhaps are in love with him, or affianced.
You may be married to him or to some other person.
So I look at you only by stealth.
If that's an offence to you, why are you so dressed-up?—
Unless to invite and demand the approval of strangers?
So I steal glances at you when you are not looking,
And neither is he. And I find you most comely,
Your brow, your fine profile, your nose so well carven,
Your hair and your eyes, your neat under-chin and throat-line,
The slope, the half-moon of your uplifted bosom,
Your laughter, low murmurs, and eloquent silence.
So far as I know, you are all unaware of
My existence. I am something non-existent,
One whom you will never see again, a nothing.
And yet—
doesn't the idol owe something
To the worshipper?—
beauty to the beholder
Who passes and pays his tithe of tribute?
Have you the right to let that fellow
Have a monopoly merely because he's
In love with you, or you with him maybe?
In a way I love you better than he can
For I do not know you, nor know your shortcomings.
And so, when you look so lovelily at him,
What do you do to me?
Aren't you untrue to me?

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Flirtation at the Stork

She was so beautiful
I dared not look at her,
Lest my stealth be discovered
As I stared at her bosom
So boldly advertised,
Though only half revealed.
I had been presented
As one of a line of strangers.
When we went out to dinner
She sat across the table;
Our eyes met only in passing.
We never exchanged a comment,
But God! how aware I was of
Her burning, electrical radiance!
Talking to others of nothings,
I thought of no one but that woman.
At the end of the dinner
We were still only strangers;
But she was a witch, a wise woman;
For, as I passed her, she murmured,
“I thank you for the most exciting
Flirtation I’ve had in ages.
Were you imagining simply everything, too?”

Publication. *Gyges’ Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Broken Pitcher

I am the pitcher that was broken at the well.
Often I'd gone there on the arm of my woman.
Long would I loiter while the fountain whispered,
And the gossips whispered, and the girls giggled.
Other pitchers, scatheless, linger in the cupboards.
The potter or the purchaser found them too precious
To risk rough usage, so they are well-guarded.
The stay-at-homes! Their glaze is unbroken.
But I envy them not. It is I that they envy.
For they've never been to the well. I've travelled!
It is better to die having lived than to live without living.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Dissonances

My love has no craft in set speech;
My passion's impatient of grammar.
It's a matter of matter—
not manner
That my heart of your heart entreats.
Your hand can speak tomes in a pressure;
A glance give me ecstatic pleasure.
Better a passion that lacks the nice verbs
Than indifference masked in fine words.
My courtship may crudely exalt
Your charms; and my rhymes may be false;
But you are my baby,
My queen, my fayre lad ye,
The theme of my rhyme,
O sweetheart o'mine!
I love every tooth in your head
However I set it on edge.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

V. QUATRAINS

From Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse (1949)

Birth

Love in her answering body held its fiery sway.
Nine months like muses wrought within her, night and day.
Then in her womb a replica, who would not stay,
But fought the narrow door and went the selfsame way.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Sandal's Shadow

With foot upraised to crush a writhing worm,
It pleased my whim to spare the tiny vandal.
O God, let me a little longer squirm
Beneath the shadow of Thine awful sandal.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Reciprocity

Lord, didst Thou love a world of mine
As much as I love this of Thine,
I would not take Thy life away,
But let Thee live forever and aye.
Yet that would mean abolishing birth
To keep from overcrowding Earth;
And so my way I'll meekly plod,
And say, "Thank God I am not God!"

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

In the Fall

Birds like leaves blown by the wind
Thrid the trees autumn-thinned.
Leaves like birds, swooping low,
Twirl and skirl in red-gold snow.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Quandary

I saved the fox from the hunting men,

But the fox came round to steal my hen:

The hen had preyed on the worms with glee;
But the worms themselves would never spare me.
Was I at fault when I spared the fox?
Letting him die would have saved your flocks.
Yet sparing the chickens is death to the worms,
So I'm cruel and futile whatever the terms.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

VI. IN DIALECT

From Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse (1949)

The Happiest Man in I-O-Way

Jes' down the road a piece, 'ith dust so deep
It teched the bay mare's fetlocks; an' the sun
So b'ilin' hot, the peewees dassn't peep...
Seemed like midsummer 'fore the spring's begun!
An' me plumb beat an' good-for-no thin'—like,
An' awful lonesome fer a sight o' you...
I come to that big locus' by the pike,
An' she was all in bloom, an' trembly, too,
With breezes like drug-store perfumery.
I stood up in my sturrups, with my head
So deep in flowers they almost smothered me.
I kind o' liked to think that I was dead...
An' if I bed 'a' died like that to-day,
I'd 'a' be'n the happiest man in I-o-way.
For whut's the uset o' goin' on like this?
Your pa not 'lowin' me around the place!
Well, fust I knowed, I'd give them blooms a kiss;
They tasted like Good-Night on your white face.
I reached my arms out wide, an' hugged 'em—say,
I dreamp' your little heart was hammerin' me!
I broke this branch off for a love-bo'quet;
'F I'd be'n a giant, I'd 'a' plucked the tree!
The blooms is kind o' dusty from the road,
But you won't mind. And, as the feller said,
“When this you see remember me”—
I knowed
Another poem; but I've lost my head
From seein' you! 'Bout all that I kin say
Is—

“I’m the happiest man in I-o-way.”

Well, comin’ ‘long the road I seen your ma
Drive by to town—
she didn’t speak to me!
An’ in the farthest field I seen your pa
At his spring-plowin’, like I’d ought to be.
But, knowin’ you’d be here all by yourself,
I hed to come—
for now’s our livin’ chance!
Take off yer aporn, leave things on the shelf—
Our preacher needs what the feller calls “romance.”
Ain’t got no red-wheeled buggy; but the mare
Will carry double, like we’ve trained her to.
Jes’ put a locus’-blossom in your hair
An’ let’s ride straight to heaven—
me an’ you!
I’ll build y’ a little house, an’ folks ‘n say:
“There lives the happiest pair in I-o-way.”

Publication. *Gyges’ Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Crackerbarrel Sage

He never drank the rich folks' wine
Nor et the food they bit at;
But he chawed his plug terbacker fine,
And he hit jest whut he spit at.
He proved the Senate wa'n't no use,
The Gov'ment was a fizzle.
He'd swat the stove with a jawful of juice
And Gosh! How it would sizzle!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Snow That Didn't

Poppa said the paper said
That it'd snow las' night.
I got my sled out of the shed
And slicked the runners bright.
I love it when the sky unloads,
And hides outdoors so deep
That just to walk on walks or roads
Feels like your feet's asleep.
All night I dreamt of birds of snow
That floated like they flew.
But it didn't snow. The dark clouds, though,
Looked like they wanted to.
Yes'day Pop said, "The papers say,
It's goin' to snow tonight."
Today he says, "The papers they
Are nearly never right."

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

VII. TRANSLATIONS

From Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse (1949)

The Flight to Rome

A Sonnet by Edmond Rostand

(NOTE:

The original airship was Pegasus. Never was poet more securely mounted on him than was Edmond Rostand when he wrote a perfect tribute to the aviator Lieutenant Jean Conneau, who flew under the plane-name of Andre Beaumont. Happening to be in Paris in 1911 at the time when he made his flight to Rome and seeing the sonnet in a newspaper, I have wrought at its translation, off and on, ever since. Rostand takes for his theme the emotions of the then Pope at witnessing his first aeroplane; and he draws from it lofty conclusions.)

Sublime the triumph and the uplifting thrill;
The Eternal City with young April there;
The holy Captive hurrying from his prayer,
To watch the Wing o'erswoop each Roman hill.
Sublime the moment when across the sill
The old Pope leans, through time and space to stare
At that far bird which is a man in air,
And wafts his blessing on the ethereal skill.
O purest attar of a deed sublime!
Never before did benediction climb.
Always before it lapsed upon its mark.
With "Dust to Dust" priests would our pride deny,
But he has soared so well, this ashen spark,
That who would bless him, needs must search the sky.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Adverse Review

(From Piron)

A certain critic damns me,
Calls me “a minor light.”
Coming from such a critic
It is a minor slight.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Irish Lament

(Versified from Lady Gregory's literal translation)

Sure, there's nothing I know of, under the sky at all,
That has a kind word for us-nobody's
friends with the Gael,
Excepting the sea that waits till we answer its call;
Excepting the wind that hurries the Irishman's sail
When his prow points out and away from his home and his dears.
And, faith, there's good cause why the both of them's good to the Gael;
For who else now is after feeding the sea with such tears?
And who else so gives back the wandering wind its wail?

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Transports

(From Sully-Prudhomme's Les Berceaux)

The long tide tilts each dull old boat
Asleep and nodding at the dock,
Of little cradles they take no note
Which tender-handed mothers rock.
But time brings round the Day of Good Byes,
For it's women's fate to weep and endure,
While curious men attempt the skies,
And follow wherever horizons lure.
Yet the mighty ships on that morning tide
When they flee away from the dwindling land
Will feel the clutch of a mother's hand
And the soul of a far-off cradle-side.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Dewy Rose

(Adapted from Ronsard)

When you are old, at candle-lighting time you'll be
Close-huddled to the fire; and as you sew and sew,
You'll pause at some remembered verse of long ago,
And murmur, "Ronsard, wrote that rhyme in praise of me!"
And even the maid who comes to take away your tea
Will start, though half asleep, and gasp, "And did you know
That famous poet, Ronsard, and was he your beau?
Lord bless you, ma'am, it means your immortality!"
But I'll be then a boneless phantom buried deep,
Beneath the lilacs lying, in the last long sleep,
And you a cowering crone by embers turning gray,
Barely recalling your cold pride and my old sorrows.
Nay, let us take love now! I dread the far to-morrows.
Come, pluck the rose, the dewy rose of life today!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Fragrant Foppery

(Adapted from Martial, VI, 55: Malo quam bene olere nil olere.)

You lavish a fortune on perfumes,
Your clothes have an exquisite smell;
Your shaving soaps, lotions, and linens
Are reeking with costly Chanel.
With incense you sprinkle the street;
But your flavors my nostrils appal;
For, though I might smell just as sweet,
I'd much rather not smell at all.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

VIII. PATRIOTISMS

From Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse (1949)

Our Sacred Debt to Greece

Arise, America! Deliver Greece
From vaster droves of slaves than Xerxes drave!
By might of right preserve a noble peace
Now! lest the cradle of freedom prove its grave.
As once some god some hero would enfold
In mist to save him from a fate funest,
Let Greece in this black hour behold
A. rescuing giant looming in the West.
If—in the fabled fields of asphodel—
The ancient Greeks still roam—and dream—and know,
Their drowsy Hades must have seemed a Hell
For four-and-twenty centuries of woe.
So long their lofty glories have been crushed,
Their splendor, and their tender arts, their bravery;
Philosophers and orators all hushed;
Democracy's inventors gyved in slavery.
But never was their doom more dark, more deep
Their danger, than today. Now worse than Persian
Hordes, with equal hate of freedom, creep
Upon them in a stealthy tide's incursion.
Now, as of old, each greedy, greasy traitor
Offers the land to whoso offers bribes,
Gives hidden aid to an alien dictator,
And opens the gate to the North's barbaric tribes.
At lone Thermopylae, Leonidas
Was sold by Ephialtes to the Mede;
He showed the pathway through the secret pass,
And watched the trapped and hapless heroes bleed.

So now the Grecian spies that Russia buys

Play Ephialtes to the Kremlin's treachery,
The while the ruthless Georgian, Stalin, tries
To outdo Xerxes with more brutal butchery.
Beyond the Pillars dim of Hercules,
There lay the Lost Atlantis Plato feigned;
Beyond that land and farther, wilder seas,
Long lay America unknown, unchained.
Out here our nation in our wilderness,
Conceived in liberty, has kindled fires
On templed hills; and blended races bless
Our freedoms fought for, loved by sons and sires.
Prometheus stole from heaven the sacred flame
That we inherited from Greece. Can we stand by
And watch her perish, while the Russians tame
That wild free soul? Can we watch freedom die?
Had not Miltiades long, long ago
Won Marathon, Themistocles not braved
At Salamis a thousand ships, we'd know
Nothing of that brave dream they dreamed and saved.
Now the sweet lamp of liberty they lighted
Is all but quenched in dust, and doomed to perish,
Unless we haste to snatch it from benighted
Sophists and serfs who spit on all we cherish.
They who care naught for liberty abroad
Their own at home will soon and meanly lose.
Their peace is lethargy. They, like the bawd,
A parasite's precarious comfort choose.

Arise America, daughter of Greece,
Drive from the holy ground the obscene threat;
Defend from Slavic thieves the golden fleece,
And pay in part the immemorial debt.
America—O Freedom's best-blest child,
Greece was your Mother. Can you fail to love her?
Or look on while her altars are defiled,
And not put forth or shield or spear above her?
In our land, Liberty lifts, like a star,
The torch the Greeks first held above the foam.
Let us let no one quench that fire afar
Lest our own traitors quench it here at home.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Forever United States

What our great-great-grandfathers'
great-great-grandfathers
sought
for,
When they sailed from the Old World and founded the New,
Was Freedom! Freedom!
What our great-great-grandfathers'
great-grandfathers
brought for
The soul of the Colonies feeble and few,
Was Freedom! Freedom!
What our great-great-grandfathers'
grandfathers wrought for
The nation that gathered and grew;
What our grandfathers' grandfathers taught for
The wisdom their big hearts foreknew;
What our grandfathers caught for
The star-spangled banner they flew;
What our fathers fought for
'Neath the Red, White and Blue,
Was Freedom! Freedom!
In the United States, the forever United States of America.
Let us make sure that it thrives;
Let us guard it with our lives,
As we must, as we will, as we ought, for
Our children and our grandchildren
And our great-grandchildren's
great-grandchildren's
great-grand-
children.
Freedom! Freedom
In the United States, the forever United States,
The forever and ever United States of America!
AMEN!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

IX. FRIVOLITIES

From Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse (1949)

The Loathed One

My perfect hate is Percival Skeat,
He is so g. d. good and sweet.
He's all that I abominate.
He's generous, considerate,
Unselfish, tactful, kind of wit.
He knows things; taste is exquisite.
He visits sickbeds, friends in jail,
Sends flowers on birthdays, answers mail.
He always wears the proper clothes,
Does everything that my soul loathes.
He says nice things behind one's back.
He never makes a dirty crack.
No vicious gossip he expands.
He keeps your secrets, understands.
There is no smile upon his face
When even his friends are in disgrace.
He does not grin or smirk or gloat
When some dear pal has missed the boat.
Of lending-money he has no lack.
He never expects to get it back.
So my bete noir is white. God wot,
And he has everything I haven't got;
Exposes me for what I am
And makes me feel a fraud, a sham.
How people stand him, I can't see.
He shows them up, especially me.
So my pet hate is Percival Skeat.
When I see him coming, I cross the street
For fear he'll say some generous thing

And leave me gasping, floundering.
It's Percy's virtues that I hate;
They make me feel so second-rate.
It's people's faults that make us love 'em;
They lift us up so high above 'em.
Perfection's the unpardonable wrong;
It puts us down where we belong.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Insomniac

He just caught the train, Mr. Jeremy Tupper,
But when he said "Poner, put these in my section,"
The Poner said, "Section? we ain't got a upper!"
Said Tupper, "Well, what in—"
you know the direction.
The train was a Limited, now fairly zipping.
He couldn't get off without bursting his braces.
Perceiving poor Tupper untempted to tipping,
The Poner went on stuffing pillows in cases.
"No lower! No upper!" sighed Tupper. "The sleeper
Has no place for me. I must ride in the waker.
Since I never could sleep in a sleeper, no peeper
I'll close the whole night! That's a bet with no taker."
The day-coach that night was so packed he squeezed in with
A stertorous stranger of wake-ups and kick-ups
Who strangled and shuffled and smelled! To begin with—
He was well in his cups, not to mention his hiccups.
At home Tupper owned a fine sound-proof apartment
With every device to decoy stubborn Morpheus,
But here he was doomed to a fate which at start meant
A night with a neighbor whose nose was an Orpheus.
He tied up his legs into knot after knot.
He choked on the smoke and he winced at the clatter,
He longed for a nice billiard table or cot,
And everything possibly wrong was the matter.
He thought of his home, his luxurious downy
Where sleep at the best was a business of battle,
And now he was caught like a bottled-up Brownie
In a jounce-box of jiggle and joggle and rattle.
He wailed, "This is awful!" He groaned, "It's outrageous!"
"Expect one to sleep in a blooming distillery!"
He jawed the conductor in language umbrageous
For charging full fare for a stocks and a pillory.

He bought a fat novel to help while the night out,
He wailed, "I can't sleep!" But he yawned when he said it.
He grumbled, "I wish they would blow that blamed light out."
And let his book fall, though he hadn't yet read it.

His collar enveloped his two double chins,
As he found himself counting uncountable sheep.
He felt that his flesh was one paper of pins,
And his feet were so cramped that they both went to sleep.
An anguish of ecstasy smothered all feeling,
A torment of bliss soaked his soul like a sponge.
His mind, on the brink of a precipice reeling,
At last toppled over and took the deep plunge
And there he remained in contortionist tangle,
And knew not a jot of what farm or what town
The train thundered through with bell, whistle and jangle,
Or if it slowed up or if it slowed down.
Oblivion drank him as blotters drink ink,
And his state was a stupor of violent coma.
Although he had paid for his passage, I think,
To call him a deadhead would be no misnomer.
And so night wore on till it wore itself out.
The sun was commendably prompt at his station.
But Tupper still slumbered nor heeded the shout
Of the brakeman announcing his own destination.
At last when the train reached the end of the line,
The Conductor tapped Tupper and said, "Extra fare!
You've passed where you paid to, through no fault of mine."
And Tupper sat up and exclaimed, "I declare!"
He gaped and he stretched as he sought his portmonnaie,
The which turned up missing to his great dismay.
He stammered, "I vow, this is certainly funny,
My neighbor has robbed me and stolen away."

He put up his watch to appease the conductor
And borrowed enough to get home to his wife;
And, when he arrived and beneath her chin chucked her,
He chuckled with gaiety rare in his life;
"I swear I will never take sleepers again.
I'll sit up and sleep in a snug smoker-berth. It
May be that the snooze cost me two hundred ten,
But I slept in my sleep! And 'twas jolly well worth it!"

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Snobberies

To prove one's love for the nightingale,
Must one insult the songless hen?
Can you not glorious genius hail
Without condemning common men?
Pay tribute to the "higher" arts,
But spare the useful trades.
Brushes and chisels play their parts;
But so do saws and spades.
If architects are a tribe divine,
The carpenters unholy,
Who'll build the buildings they design?
Who'll pay them but the lowly?
The colonel can't beat off the foe
Unless he has a garrison.
The nightingale—he needs the crow,
At least for a comparison.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Dilemma in a Dining Car

The diningcar conductor's conduct
Disgusted all the passengers.
He was more crabbed than a cynic
In a drama of old Massinger's.

The waiters and the hapless patrons
Were eager for requitals;
But I—I sensed a secret sorrow
A-gnawing at his vitals.

I cried, "O diningcar conductor,
Pray tell me now what ails you.
Is't doubt of making both ends meet,
Or guilty conscience that assails you?"

His sad eyes filled with sudden tears,
He almost sobbed: "O God forbid
That both ends meet! I have a wife
At either end—at least I did—

"End of my route, I mean. The Eastern wife,
She greets me when I make Chicago.
She'll never leave; nor will her Ma—
Who is, of course, my mother-in-law—go.

"But the beauty at the other end—
I mean, of course, Los Angleuss—
I cannot but suspicion her—
So much doth fate entangle us!

"The moment that my train pulls out—
The neighbors tell me with derision—
She turns for solace to a villain
Who handles props in television.

"I find, kind sir, my lot distressing:
I cannot lose the wife I'm done with;
The one I'd keep—she keeps me guessing
Who else she's out and having fun with.

“Ah life!—’tis not all beer and skittles.

My heart’s too heavy to make light of
The sight of patrons gobbling victuals
That I can barely bear the sight of.”

The moral seems to be: Don’t quarrel
With quarrellers; but rise superior.
They’re suffering wights in cruel plights,
Cursed with the complex called Inferior.

Publication. *Gyges’ Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Because

I ask you “Why?”
And your reply
Is just “Because!”
And then you pause
And try to look
An entire book!

Publication. *Gyges’ Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Conceit

I have my pride,
A silly pride,
I know no real Why for it.
I can't defend it;
Nor can I end it.
All I can do is die for it.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Our English Tongue

(A Study in Irregular Verbs)

Of all queer things you'll ever see,
You must agree
(At least, I never saw
A soul who disagraw.
Not one that I have seen
Has disagreeen),
These hypnotizers surely take
The cake.
I once at one of those queer shows
Was hypnotose.
What he bade do, I did;
Where he bade go, I gid;
If he said "Flee!" I quickly fled;
If "See!", I sed;
If "Run!" I ran; if "Pun!" (base man!)
I pan.
He drilled and drilled me as he would,
Till I was drould
To suit him-till
I heard
When he said "Hear!" and feard
When he bade "Fear!" and fell at "Fall!"
And cell at "Call!"
What he bade take or make, I took
Or mook.
When he bade "Eat!" to sawdust treated
I meekly ate.
Codliver oil I drank
And vinegar; and thank
Them honeyed wine. Why, when he told
Me "Yell!" I yold!
If "Sit!" I sat! if "Fit!" or "Quit!" I fat
Or quat!

If his command were "Write!" I wrote,
If "Bite!" I bote.
And, since I did obey
When he said "Lie!" and lay;
Had he said "Die!" it's very plain,
I would have dain.
But since the man permission gave,
I lave.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Tomorrow

Tomorrow's the day
When our good deeds are done.
Tomorrow's the day.
When our battles are won,
When we make sacrifices
And cut out our vices.
Tomorrow's the day
When we get back our health.
Tomorrow's the day
When we wallow in wealth.
When we're wise, and we're pure
And of something we're sure.
Tomorrow's the day
When we make no mistakes.
Tomorrow's the day
When we heal our heartaches.
Our foe-folk surrender.
Our fat spots grow slender.
There are only two faults
With tomorrow's ho-hums.
There's no key to its vaults.
The damned day never comes.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

I Beg You to Bant

Don't you get fat, Phyllis,
Don't you do that!
Live on a crust, Phyllis,
Starve if you must, Phyllis,
But let us trust, Phyllis,
You won't get fat.
Oh, don't do that!
Once you were trim, Phyllis,
Art's paradigm.
Finer than fine, Phyllis,
Each gracile line, Phyllis
Limned you divine, Phyllis.
Now your clothes-brim!
Oh, please keep slim!
Automobiles, Phyllis,-
Shun their appeals.
Miles you must march, Phyllis;
Quite eschew starch, Phyllis;
And though you parch, Phyllis,
Don't drink at meals.
Be like the eels.
Chins in a throng, Phyllis?
Back like a gong?
Gown like a tent, Phyllis?—
Never consent, Phyllis!
Lengthen your Lent, Phyllis.
Oh, don't go wrong
On Ong-bong-pwong.

Wait not for weight, Phyllis,
Then it's too late.
Dumbells acquire, Phyllis;
Massage, perspire, Phyllis;
Shun sweets like fire, Phyllis.
Fight off your fate,
Carry no freight.
You're getting plump, Phyllis,
Just see that hump!

Five pounds misplaced, Phyllis,
And you're disgraced, Phyllis.
Leisure makes waist, Phyllis.
Don't be a gump.
Pummel and thump.
It's hard, I grant, Phyllis,
But your time's scant,
Soon stays won't stay, Phyllis,
You'll wear a bay- (Phyllis!)
Window each way, Phyllis,
Waddle and pant—
Brace up and bant!
Better a slat, Phyllis,
Than a flesh-vat,
Would you look trussed, Phyllis?
You just must frust- (Phyllis)
Rate hips and bust, Phyllis.
For God's sake, reduce!
Oh, what's the use!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

An Idyl of the Kitchen

When Polly presides at the stove,
Fleet Cupids flit there in a drove;
But when her art takes
To divine buckwheat cakes,
I swear she's fit Hebe for Jove!
Now she that sets others aflame
Is flushed with a glow of the same;
But ah, and alas!
That this comes to pass,
That only stove ardor's to blame.
As she bends, like a witch at a kettle,
The blood roves her flesh in high fettle;
And her velvet skin glows
Like a strange, molten rose,
And her cheeks have the feel of a petal.
With freckles they're dearly besprent,
As if wind and sun were intent
On baking wee cakes,
For their own selfish sakes,
Where ruddy and rosy are blent.
And Polly's own hair has the tinting
Of syrup where sunlight goes glinting;
But the taste of her kiss
Were far sweeter, iwis,
Though she featly evades all my hinting.
Ah, Polly, you mischievous sweet, you!
Nor dryads nor fine cits could beat you;
And while my greed takes
Innumerable cakes,
I vow I'd more willingly eat you!

When Polly presides at the stove,
Young Loves gather round in a drove;
But devil a bit

Of a good comes of it:

Their burnt wings but flatter
And sweeten her batter!
It's wiser to flee-qui
peut, sauve!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Hidden Hand

Her tiny hand within its dainty glove—
Ah, me! it is a sonnet-full of love.
Her thumb is not so large as my least finger;
Her palm is much too little for a child.
Upon its curves my lips are fain to linger;
Its infantile perfections drive me wild.

(LATER)

And now at last! in my own hand I fold it.
Ye gods! how does the straining leather hold it?

I study it and hardly check my chuckles:

I learn its secrets with a cynic's calm;
The fingers reach but to the second knuckles;
It buttons in the middle of her palm!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Romance Below Stairs

Barney was a footman; Bridget was a housemaid:
 Her slim feet made no more noise than a little, frightened mouse made,
 That scuttered swiftly by,
 And sent her skirts as high
 As showed how shapely shapely ankles can be when they try.
 Over the heads of the two of them a red-haired Cupid hovered
 With a four-leaf clover in his hand to keep them undiscovered.
 A bit of a brogue had Barney,
 He'd filed his tongue on the Blarney;
 And Bridget's accent was like zephyrs loafing round Killarney.
 He kissed her on the stairway; he kissed her in the hall;
 He kissed her under her tilty nose and paid her cheeks a call.
 Her mistress said she was "neat,"
 But Barney said she was "shweet,"
 And swore the very thought of her, faith, took him off his feet.
 Now, when they had an evening off, they took it both together;
 And if the outer season matched their own sweet inner weather,
 They flew to Cinthral Park,
 And chose a binch in the dark;
 And there they'd spark and spoon awhile, and then they'd spoon and spark.
 Young princes woo young princesses in no more royal bowers,
 Nor in pools of shade more sheltered from the moon with trees and flowers.
 The snobs may prink and fidget,

But Cupid's no man's idiot:

He smiles no more on a king and queen than he smiles on a Barney and Bridget.

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

X. PORTRAITS

From Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse (1949)

Cain

Out of my way! nor try
To stop me where I fly!
For I am Cain
Fleeing in vain
From a brother slain.
Red drops bedew him
There where I slew him.
Earth hath opened her lips
To drink his blood where it drips.
Earth hath called to the Lord,
And He-with
a voice like a sword-
“Where is thy brother” hath cried.
“I know not,” I answered. And lied.
And dared demand, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”
God answered, “Blood thou’st sown, of shame be reaper.
The earth that thou hast stained with crime infernal
Shall never yield to thee again
Save weeds and thorns, remorse and pain.
Go forth to vagabondage, vile, eternal!”
Out of my way, I say!
I am Cain!
I have slain my brother,
Broken the heart of my mother.
And now on my brow is branded the stain
Of the murderer, murderer, Cain.
God favored my brother before me
An envious wrath overbore me.
I scoffed at him, threatened, and smote.

I found my hot hands at his throat.
 I was frenzied to tear and to rend him,
 To throttle, to beat and to end him.
 He fell with a thud and a moan,
 And suddenly-I
 was alone!

And my brother grew cold where he lay,
 And my brother once more was but clay,
 Like an urn whence the flowers are scattered,
 Like an urn that is emptied and shattered.
 Out of my way, nor try
 To stop me where I fly;
 For I am the Inventor of Crime,
 I the Discoverer of Death.
 Now, over the sons of time,
 A great shadow hovereth.
 For now the first man has hated another;
 Now the first mother

Has wept for a son:

History has begun
 Her red scroll—
 Let the world roll!
 Out of my way, I say,
 Or tell me where
 Night is most deep.
 Show me a lair
 Where I can creep
 To drown from my ears
 My mother's cries,
 To hide from my eyes
 My father's tears.
 When I crept in the wild beast's den
 The hyena slunk out with mad laughter,
 The viper flashed to her fen,
 And when I would follow after
 She slithered and left me alone—
 She feared my poison more than her own!
 The rivers did reject me,

The grave would not protect me.
I climbed up the loftiest hill
And over the precipice hurled
Unharméd, my flesh. I lay all still
And a vulture that swooped at me whirled
Back with mad clatter of wings.
Where I go no bird sings!
I am hated and feared of all things.
I dare not seek my own mother;
For I am defiled
With the blood of her child.
I have slain my brother,
I have slain my brother,
I have slain my brother!
How could I know
That one rash blow
Would lay my brother low?
For Abel was the first to die,
And I the first that ever slew.
O death! What art thou? Whence? And Why?
And with the soul what dost thou do?
How can my mother bear her hopeless pain?
She cries for both her sons, and cries in vain.
Yet, mother, weep more for me
Than for Abel, my brother; for he
Lies asleep on your breast, while I
Cannot sleep, cannot rest, cannot die!
O Abel, stay not dead
But live,
And forgive,
Or slay me in your stead—
Abel!—
Abel!—
Abel!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

The Hero and the Hulk

A Little Epic About John Paul Jones

There is a fitting place, a fitting time

For everything on earth except despair.

It is far less a weakness than a crime

To whimper, "This is all that I can bear!

"This is as far as I can hope to climb!

"I can no more! I'm helpless in the snare!"

In proof whereof attend this headlong rhyme,

This history of one who dared to dare,

Who built from little deeds one deed sublime,

Defied misfortune and bade fate, Beware!

Proudly on all the girdling seas our sturdy war-swans cruise,

Their glory known from zone to zone; no vessel dares refuse

To dip her ensign to our flag; no scornful port debars

The ever-enduring thirteen stripes; the ever-increasing stars.

Un-think a hundred seventy years—

how changed are craft and

creed!

There was no storied navy then; no nation, only a need;

A cry of "Liberty or Death"; a rush of minute men;

Embattled rabbles; fishing smacks—our Eagle was a wren.

A yellow flag with a rattle-snake that warned, "Don't tread on me,"

Was hoisted to the Alfred's peak, and fluttered to be free.

Now, what hand durst upraise it first, that bold defy to fate?—

The hand of John Paul, alias Jones, a Scot of twenty-eight.

Two years of battle brought our cause some triumph, more disgrace;

Often they ran, always returned, those fathers of our race.

And then the final flag was dreamed: starred blue, stripes white and red;

July the Fourth of 'Seventy-seven, it leaped to the high masthead.

Whose hands hauled on the halyards first? Twice-honored be his bones!

For once more Fame must needs proclaim the simple name of Jones.

But no mere color-sergeant, he; the flag that he unfurled,

His sword upheld on bloody decks before a wondering world.

He'd begged Ben Franklin for a boat, it little mattered what;

A makeshift crew; of guns, a few; some powder and some shot.

"Poor Richard" bought a rotten hulk, the stranded Duc de Duras,

Worm-winnowed, old East Indiaman,

condemned, not worth a hurrah.
Stubby of mast and squat of sail, snubby of stern and bow,
Too high in the poop and the fo'c'sle too—but it must serve, somehow;
For Paul Jones simply had to fight; he was so blind a bigot,
He caulked the seams and patched the sails, and called the thing a frigate.
He learned to love it for the hopes that bloomed on every spar,
For Franklin's sake he gave the scow the name, Bonhomme Richard.
He drummed up then such reckless men as cared to risk his tub.
Some Yankees recently exchanged, still lank from prison grub:
Some Irish lads were there, of course; likewise some French marines;
Some Portuguese, some swart Malays, some boys still in their teens;
Some mal-contented English, too. And with this motley gang
He hurried forth into the North, to conquer or to hang.
To make success impossible, his consort, The Alliance,
Was captained by Pierre Landais, who bade all codes defiance.
He was not insubordinate, he was no common bad man;
But cad, and coward, trickster, traitor, epauletted madman.

And yet they circled Britain's coast, from Wight to Hebrides,
And scoured, as they were Yankee lakes, "His Majesty's high seas."
They first showed Freedom's infant flag to foreign knaves and navies,
And gave Paul Jones a name as grim as was his brother
Davey's.

'Tis off Flamboro' Head;
The waves are streaked with red,
The West is like a bed
Of living coals.
Behind old Scarboro' town,
The sun is coming down,
Like a banner of renown
On beaten souls.
Twilight is tender-sweet,
And crowds are out to greet
The Baltic merchant fleet
Of forty sail.
But cheers are changed to groans
For there comes John Paul Jones!
The skippers' marrow bones
Begin to quail.
The brand-new frigate, Serapis, with Pearson for commander,

Sails boldly forth with out-spread wings, as sails the dauntless gander
To shield the helpless fluttering geese entrusted to his keeping,
When through the dark and waving grass a fox comes softly creeping.
Him Jones and Landais could have made a captive with his convoy,
Had Landais done his duty then and not played Satan's envoy.
But Jones was left to fight alone, and prove himself the master
Of stalwart foe, and false ally, and every dreamed disaster.

His ship a tub, his crew all scrub, their clay a sodden mire,
Till drilled by Jones and filled by Jones with his own quenchless fire.
No harder fighter ever fought in all the years of story;
This is a song of his best fight, itself a song, a glory.
As gloaming gently shrouds the sea, the call to quarters sounds;
There is a race for every place, the "powder-monkey" bounds
To magazines with wetted screens; the gun-crews stand aback
With matches lighted, cannon primed, and round shot in the rack.
Against the slippery blood to flow, the decks are strewn with sand;
The cutlasses and pikes are passed; the fighting tops are manned;
Jackets and shoes are off, both men and decks are stripped;
The grapnels swing from every yard; the surgeons wait, equipped.
Upon the quarterdeck is Jones the fight-lust in his eyes;
Impatient at the hurrying dusk, the tarrying breeze that sighs,
"I was not meant for moods like these, why must I speed your sail?"
But sharp across the sleepy waves there comes the threatening hail:
"What ship is that?" But Jones moves on, as if he could not hear.
Again the call, "What ship is that?" His black hull edges near.
Once more the challenge; now Jones calls, "I do not understand."
And so creeps up until the foe is looming close to hand.
Now Pearson shrieks, "What ship is that? Answer, or I will fire!"
And, as his boat swings broadside on, Jones softly answers,
"Fire!"
Then every Yankee cannon speaks with all the might of powder.
Instantly comes the foe's reply, like echo, only louder.

For Pearson's ship is built for war, with all her cannon new;
Twenty 18s and twenty 9s and ten 6-pounders, too.
Jones has six 18s, twenty 9s, and fourteen 12s, no more.
And at the first, two 18s burst, and daub the deck with gore.
They almost blow the ship apart; the shaken crews decline
To serve the other four 18s, and there they loaf in line.
And thus before the fray is on, Jones' strength is cut to half

His foeman's power. Yet in that hour, he still gives fate the laugh.
And now the Richard drifts ahead, the Serapis hangs back,
Her score of 18s bark and bite in happy hunting pack,
While the Richard's splintered timbers split, and men drop right and left,
And Jones replies as best he can, of all big guns bereft.
Six ports are battered into one; they've swept the lower deck,
Till only quivering stanchions stand, and waves sprawl through the wreck.
Here English guns rake empty space; but six or eight marines
Remain to guard the powder-boys from guns to magazines.
The smoke rolls up in smothering clouds with sudden whorls of red;
Jones back his topsails; and his foe unwitting glides ahead.
Jones rams his bow then in her side, but finds no chance to board;
And drifts with jib across her stern, and rests awhile, ungored.
A silence falls; for neither ship can bring to bear a gun.
In Pearson's eyes Jones' ship is prize, already made and won.
The old black hull with naked ribs is leaking like a basket,
And the closing question is so pat, he almost hates to ask it:
"Well, have you struck?" The answer's pluck is a rocket to the night,
For Jones replies with fire-lit eyes, "I've not begun to fight!"
They called him pirate and he shows a pirate's scorn of rules,
He goes ahead where angels dread and stand aside for fools.

Of humor dense, with common sense uncommon ill equipt,
Of wit so slow he does not know when he is soundly whipt;
More lacking yet in etiquette—
to Pearson's most polite
"You've
struck—
eh, what?"
the
uncanny
Scot shouts,
"Haven't begun to fight!"
And now upheaves the harvest-moon—to such a harvest home!
The blood from oozing scuppers drips and stains the silvered foam.
Through riddled sails the dappling light shines down on moaning wretches
Who strive in vain to rise again; while here and there outstretches
Some idle form, once quick and warm, once brave as other souls,
That moves not now, save as the bow dips, or the old boat rolls.
When Jones is ready to resume, he puts his helm a-starboard,

And hopes to take a place to rake, by swinging off to larboard.
But Pearson sets his topsails back, shivers his aftersails,
And wears around upon his heel. And yet the neat trick fails;
For Jones, though forced to pass ahead, swings sharp across his bow.
As Pearson's jib fouls his mizzen shrouds, Jones cries, "I have him now!"
With his own deft hand he helps to lash the spar to the Richard's rigging,
And their spare anchor gives no rancor into his own ship digging;
For he makes it fast, and so at last, in a new hope-haven harbored,
With grim death-grip he holds that ship with starboard bound to starboard.
As groggy boxers seek to clinch, and lean upon the foe
To gain renewing rest and breath, and block the finish-blow,
So Richard leans on Serapis, while Pearson, wildly blundering,
Plies saw and axe, musket and pike, with every battery thundering.

The gun-deck hearties are so close their ramrods whack together,
And gay retorts through the touching ports are bandied in high feather.
More solemn is the repartee the cannon mouths exchange,
With tongues of fire and iron words uttered at point-blank range.
Soon Jones' 12-pounders all are wrecked, and all the 9s but two,
With one small brace of guns in place, what could an angel do?
But now elastic hope rebounds; he sees his consort coming.
Pierre Landais joins in the fray, with broadsides blithely drumming.
But—God in Heaven!—what does it mean? his every round shot falls
Upon Paul Jones' own ragged ship, despite his frenzied calls.
The secret signals mark the boat, mistake is out of reason—
Have British seamen seized the ship? Or is it hideous treason?
As panic fills the Yankee crew, from double dangers shrinking,
The wild-eyed surgeon hurries up and cries, "Sir, we are sinking!
"Five feet of water in the well, a heavy list to larboard—"
Jones simply answers, "Lend a hand, we'll get this gun to starboard."
He adds demurely, "Doctor, surely, after we've stood this slaughter,
You would not like to have me strike to a little bit of water?"
He tugs and strains like a common tar, he loads, he fires, belays,
Until against o'erweening power, a third 9-pounder plays.
The British find a place to board; but Jones, the omnipresent,
Stands there alone, and smiles and says, "Come on we'll make it pleasant."
They think he has a host concealed, and do not dare the try.
He is a host within himself, himself his best ally.

But still to test and prove his best, fate hunts a thousand ways.
The creeping sea gains on the pumps, the ship is all ablaze.

And now with fear the carpenter goes mad and runs amuck.
He clamors, "Quarter,
for we sink! Give quarter, we have
struck!"
He darts to drag the colors down, and every hope annul,
But with one smash of his pistol butt, Jones cracks his craven skull.
And next the raving man-at-arms sets all the prisoners free,
Crying, "We sink, go save yourselves; no further chance have we!"
Three hundred British sailors swarm from every Yankee hatch,
Outnumbering far the worn-out crew—But still fate finds her match
In the Yankee wit and the Yankee grit of youthful Richard Dale,
Who cries, "Both ships are sinking now, and every hand must bale!"
He herds the Britons to the pumps and makes them spend their might
To keep the Yankee ship afloat and let the Yankees fight!
However she croak, fate loves a joke, and never saw a prettier,
Nor saw she sail, than Richard Dale, a braver man or wittier.
The British captain's feeling bored, his triumph is so slow;
He asks in pet, "Have you struck yet?" Jones answers, "Damn you, no!"
At each rebuff he grows more tough; from every gun they wreck.
He sends new men to the fighting-tops, new soldiers to the deck.
He focuses his little 9s on Pearson's tallest mast,
Until in ruin dire and wide he brings it down at last.
Meanwhile, for all the gore below, aloft there's a merrier hell;
On yard and spar, as squirrels war, the sailors fight pell-mell.

From stay and top, the dead men drop, the living slash and shoot
Till all the British rigging's clear, the mainmast's gone to boot.
Now from the tackle our muskets crackle till almost every foe
Is maimed or done, or for shelter run to the covered deck below.
While British gunners work beneath and riddle Richard's hull,
Again the traitorous consort swoops like a dark, ill-omened gull.
Jones shouts, "In God's name, man, forbear!" but makes his prayer in vain,
For Landais rakes the Richard's decks and routs the men unslain.
Pierre Landais has gone his way, past help to friend or foe.
His motives pass our human ken—this only may we know:
His broadside clave the waterline and dealt the fatal scar.
He found success where Pearson failed. He sank Bonhomme Richard!
Jones feels the final dip of the decks, the ultimate disaster,
But swears he'll capture his captor yet, and fights on, harder, faster,
Till baffled fate admits checkmate, tired out with inventing harm,

And chuckling Middie Fanning crawls far out on the main yardarm.
A bucket of hand grenades he holds and a little lighted taper;
And sits and scatters the grim bonbons on the deck of the "Old
Sea-Raper."

At last he lands one right in a hatch with powder charges spread,
And these explode like the mighty load of a blasted thunderhead.
With thirty men to atoms blown, with sailors and sails aflame,
Brave Pearson alone on his quarterdeck decides to conclude the game.
He totters aft and tears his flag from the standard where he nailed it,
For British luck and British pluck and British skill had failed it.

Jones waves his pike, and shouts, "They strike!" But fortune still is jealous.
The other Britons, loth to yield, for further fight are zealous.
In the moment frail, again Dick Dale is swift in wit and action;
He leaps aboard the Serapis and quells the hothead faction,
While Pearson as a prisoner through tattered rigging scrambles,
And his good sword hands to Jones, who stands a gentleman in shambles.
But the fight, though won, is not yet done; at every step lurks danger.
With half a crew, there's much to do to shift his flag to the stranger.
Six hundred surly prisoners three hundred men must cower;
And quench the fires that are making pyres of both ships, stern and bow.
The maimed and dying on all sides lying tired hands must strive to save.
Prayers must be said as the hundred dead are sent to their deep green grave.
Before the thousand tasks are done, the moon gives place to the dawn.
A fairer prize in a fairer fight, sun never smiled upon.
But late that day, in the level ray, Poor Richard with all sails set
Sunders the foam for a glorious home in the port of appeased regret.
She took with her the Stars and Stripes, the first that ever flew.
The living wept to watch them sink; said Jones, "What could
I do?"

"I could not send my dead below without a flag above them."
And so they died, a people's pride. Let memory ever love them!

Here is an end to my song.
If it has seemed overlong,
Think how much longer the fight
Seemed on that grisly night.
Be not afraid to heed;
They did not fear to bleed.
They so unflinchingly fought,
That of their travail they wrought

A people, a dream, and a nation,
Liberty's home and salvation.
Pearson made war like a hero,
Serving his royal Nero;
Jones like a saint of the sea,
Anguished to make men free.
With that divine desire
He was a soul of fire.
Freedom did so imbue him,
Naught was impossible to him.
Yet was his valor vain;
Yet shall his pride be pain;
Rue shall invade his laurel,
If, in some future quarrel,

We shall forget his moral:

Better a rotten ship
And a ripe-heart captain who
Has the snapping-turtle grip,
And can train and thrill a crew,
Than all that myriads can do.
Where two brave fighters meet,
But one is bound to beat.
The man who ends on top
Is the second man to stop.

'Twas true since the world awoke.
'Twill be while this old globe rolls.
Misfortune tires and fate surrenders
The homely crowns and the deathless splendors
To those untiring souls
Who will not wear the yoke,
Who rise against rebuff
And will not cry, Enough!
The fight is never hopeless till you quit it,
Nor lost till you are dead, or you admit it.
A fitting time there is, a place somewhere
For everything on earth except despair.
SWING HIGH, OLD GLORY!

Publication. *Gyges' Ring, and Other Verse* (Murray & Gee, 1949).

Gyges' Ring

A Monologue

Note. The story is a development, and reconciliation of two brief allusions in Plato and Herodotos. It details the strange and devious ways whereby the lowly shepherd Gyges won his sovereign's wife and throne away. After a long reign, Gyges handed his sceptre down to his son, Ardys, whom I have introduced here as a child.

So, little Ardys boy, the sea of sleep
Will only splash and drench you, and not drown
Your wee, tired body and your great, wide eyes?
And you would have me spin you wonder-tales
To coax the drowsy tide inshore. Well, boy,
What story would you hear? One full of wars,
My big, brave hero? No? Of gods come down
To earth to take the shape of swans or bulls
Or eagles or—but they are old to you?
I know some nimble tales of fauns and nymphs
And dryads and such curious folk as haunt
The cool mid-forest nooks; for all the brooks
And oaks are but the homes of pretty girls,
As gracile, beautiful, and splendid-haired
As your own mother. [Oh, accursed fair!]
You're pouting, "None can be so fine as she"?
As, well, it's true, [too true!] my sweetling boy;
Yet they are fair, though not so fair as she.
They live within, and love, their trees and brooks,
As you must love our gorgeous palace home.
[Ah, heartless fate! if home were but my hut,
My poor, thatched, bloodless shepherd's cot again!]
And where the crimpling water's shimmering.
It's but the breeze upon the naiad's hair;
And all the gurgled crooning of the stream
Is but her gossip with the mother earth.
And, in the grove, the dark, the swaying leaves
Are but the tresses of-no
more of them?
Shall I tell how a boy, once on a time,
Climbed heaven, and drove the chariot of the sun

[Or how a shepherd leaped upon a throne],
And almost burnt the world to crisp, before-
Your nurse tells that old story? And she says

That little folk should learn to keep their hands
And wishes off big playthings? Huh! That's true.

[And rustics well might root ambition out;
It is a weed too rank for lowly fields.]

I've some tall tales of hunters, breathless, taut
Upon the heels of beasts that sometimes turn
And rend!—

But they would haunt your dreams? Well, then,
I'll tell of fearless sailors shoving prow
Across the greenfloored seas, where never sails,
Before their day, had fluttered like white birds,
Past nameless monsters, Tritons, jolly and green,
Beneath Night's star-sieved roof, through Day's wide door,
Down ever-marching white-plumed waves that lift
And sink and sprawl, and lift, and fall, and lift.
Down endless leagues of sleepless waves they pushed,
Unto the very ocean-river's edge
That rims the earthen world like this my ring.

[Oh, hateful golden circle! how it clasps
My finger! How it clasps my guilty soul!
The life that splashed upon it from his wounds
Seems fountained in that leering ruby, seems
To spit red accusations at my eyes!

It is a hideous blood-blotch petrified!]

Well, what of bold sea-traders, child? Still no!

Then where is balm to seal your glaring eyes?

What tale can lure you, Ardys, unawares

Into the ambushd stratagem of sleep?

Poor lamb that stands outside the night-lockt fold

And bleats his shepherd here to let him in!

[Ah, Rhea! if I were but shepherd now,
Again and never had known this other life!]

Mayhap a little song would win you sleep,

This old one that my mother sang to me,

When I, like you, my Ardys, was a child.

Scamper off home to the fold, little sheep,

The long day is over, the clover is chill,
And the sneaking old wolf he comes down from the hill
All still-until-

He has found him a lost little lambkin to kill
Ere he sleep.

But now all the lambs of the fold are enrolled
In slumber o'erspread and tuckt-in like a sheet.

Yet where is my pet?-hush

! hark for his bleat!—

Ah, his sweet little feet,

They have lost their way and are out of the fold,
In the cold!

But forth in the night the old shepherd will leap,
And hunt where the hillside is sudden and steep,
And search where the thickets are dark and are deep
Till his pet, he has met,

And has carried him home in his arms to the sheep,
Fast asleep.

[My childhood! Mother of the gods! where is
Such blessedness as childish ignorance
Of what the elder world may think and do?

'Tis possible to be too rich, too wise;

'Tis easy for a man to know too much.

Yet still he wakes, sweet lamp unto my night.

Will slumber never—

[Pan! if I should tell

The boy mine own dark life, perchance 'twould soothe

His sleeplessness. I will! Mayhap 'twill balm

Mine own ache, just to loose the secret pang

Upon the air.]

Hark! Ardys, now I've found

The tale of tales to suit you, one your nurse

Has never told you, one I have not told,

The tale of a youth your father knew, who rose,
Through strange adventures, from a shepherd's cot
To the throne of a king, and royal wealth, and power.

In earlier [aye, and better] years, he used
To lead his flocks across the hills outspread
And billowy like the surge of Neptune's mead;

And his long huddled line of snowy sheep
Stretched like the sinuous foam that stripes the waves.
And sweeter was their footsteps' pattering
Than any rush of ocean on the rocks
[Or howl of loyal mob, or servile cheers];
And sweeter was their trembling bleat to him
Than cry of birds careening over the sea
[Or honeyed murmur of the golden court].
He knew the dawn's unfolding glory then,
A stranger to the midnight's lamps and stars.
He loved the barefoot country girls, whose eyes
Outsparkled any jewels here at Court,
Whose hair was fairer than all tapestries,
Whose words came more from heart and less from brain.
But one, above the rest, he loved, who came
And put away the syrinx from his lips
And lifted there her sweeter-music'd mouth.
And dearer was her body to his arms
Than lambs that had been worried by a wolf.
They two had vowed with kiss-sealed vows full oft,
That, when his paltry flock had grown as big
As half his master's, then they'd lock their hands
Before the god that blesses marriages,
And thenceforth turn their separated lives
Into one channel for all time.
But once,
When he sat on a knoll's green cap, and piped,
Encircled by his snow-drift flock that fed
As mindless of his music as the crowd

At market is of blustering speakers-swift
As lightning dashes down the sky's stairway,
And loud and deep as thunder's following yell,
And shivering as is its crashing blow;
So swift, so loud and deep, so shivering,
Ran toppling panic and the ruin vast
Of thunder subterrene, invisible.
The rivers leaped their beds, the mountains smote,
Like these my palms, together; and the earth
Was ript asunder like a storm-torn sail,

Yes, rent and gasht with cleavage as of swords!
[Aye, cloven—as was Kandaules' flesh by me!]
And louder was the grinding, smashing din
Than when our Lydian swords were clamorous
Upon the rattling shields of Smyrna's host.
It seemed the world would fly piece-meal to heaven,
And crush the little stars with rooted hills!
Then fell the shepherd flat and prayed the gods
To hold the bursten earth together. But,
Ere half the prayer was over, all the rout
Had fled and died beyond the far-off hills;
And golden silence held the world again;
Again the blue eyes of the sky smiled down,
Like a mother's gaze on frightened children's tears.
The shepherd rose, as dizzy as one drunk,
And when his circling stare swept round the fields,
It found his master's flock all mad with fear,
And flying like snow-flakc-s that skim the ground.
But his own little sheep fled not; for they
Lay dead or dying, maimed and crushed with stones
The earthquake had released, had shoved, had hurled!
Upon his tender, helpless sheep.

My child,
Thus fortune ever cringes, like a lord,
Before a kingly wealth, and tramples down

The pauper's meagre store; and, heartless, now
Had slain nigh all the shepherd's few, and spared
The master's hundreds.

Then, grown sick at soul
With grief, the maddened shepherd ran headlong
To fling his luckless life into a gorge
Whose gaping jaws the earthquake opened wide
Right in the meadow's level midst. He hung
A moment at its edge [Why did I pause?]
Better to know his chosen grave, when, lo!
His frenzied eyes grew greater with amaze,
Beholding, not an ugly gulf split out
By Vulcan's sledge, but one vast treasure-chest
Unlockt by teasing Fortune; piles of gold,

As rich as amorous great Zeus once poured
In Danae's sweet lap to buy her love.
And next, heapt pearls-a
sea of pearls! that gnawed
As soft as water-waves, its golden beach;
And tributary rivers choked with floods
Of beryls clear as crystal seas calm-soothed;
Blue jacinths like a summer sky; and, like
Soft bubble-froth, chalcedonies, with some
Embroidered as are robes; and piled rose-quartz
Like massive pulp of petals crusht and piled;
And, next, red-rippled sardonyx; and then
Rare opals haunted by a timid light;
And faint, fair chrysoprase; and carbuncles
That bled like sunsets poured along the west;
And calm, cool emeralds; with flashing spray
Of blinding diamonds aleap o'er all.
Next, forests fair and tall, of scented woods,
As rare as they that shade Olympos, straight
As those slim staves the venerate priests lean on.
Then slender alabasters perfume-filled;
And jars of graven gold, thick-eyed with gems,
And vases, graceful-bodied as lithe maids,

And storied o'er with big-famed wars and loves,
Yea, mined with potent spices from strange shores:
With myrtle berries, balms from Africa,
With gloomy bdellium, and breathing seeds
Of coriander, gums of stacte, wine
Bled from pomegranates out of Egypt, wines
And honeys from the richest hives and vines
That home the glassy grape, the learned bee;
And silver boxes heavy with that oil,
That holy oil of myrrh and cinnamon
And calamus and cassia steeped with life
Of olives, which the pious, sacred Jew
Wastes on the altar of his lonely god.
And here were stacks of armor, sheaves of swords,
Fit for a deity's enharnessing;
And wonders huge whose list would wear out night.

But over all there towered, like a ship,
A horse stupendous; vaster, Ardys, far
Than the huge steed your sire bestrides in war,
That rock that proud Miletos splits upon,
Like braggart waves on silent cliffs. This horse
Was all of bronze, yet seemed to neigh and move.
But in the feigned great blanket on his back
Were doors.

The speechless shepherd, ali one stare,
With wide mouth rivalling the yawning chasm,
Stood like a statue of amaze for long;
Then woke, and when his anxious glance around
Revealed no man upon the far-spread plains,
And saw no life of man or beast upon
The sweet, soft retrogression of the hills
That lean against the sky—save one or two
Hurt sheep, hard struggling for faint, failing breath—
Then lightly he leaped upon the horse's back,
And with big struggle shoved the bronze doors back,

And entered slowly, weak of heart and knee,
Into the belly of the horse; as once
The Greeks, to trip the Troy they could not throw.
There he found naught but one dead body, bare
Of all funereal robes; as naked then
In Death's embrace, as when it first met Life's.
The ghastly thing smote sharp the trembling youth,
And drove him thence in hottest haste, and fear
That he had strayed where Death held awful sway.
But, as he fled, his backward glance was struck
By-not

Death's image, but a rubied ring
That dwelt upon the finger of the dead.
Emboldened by desire, he turned again,
And, quaking, stripped the man of even his ring,
And clambered down to bathe him in his sea
Of gems; to feed his eyes upon the gold,
And feed his long-starved ears upon its sweet
And soothing, care-dispelling music.
Now,

As he was laving him in ecstasy,
There rose a sudden rumbling dire and deep.
The Earth did shake herself again; the walls
Of his great treasury began to yearn
Together, and the shepherd scrambled out
In wild confusion, bringing naught away
Of all that splendor, but the ring, a sword
He'd girded to his civil side in sport,
And one large handful of the rarest gems,
Which he had pocketed within a fold
Of his poor, tattered rags.
Thus fled his wealth;
And, when he clambered out to air, alas!
Just as his latter heel fell on the sod,
The gorge snapped shut again, as wolfish jaws
Meet in a lamb's soft flesh.

Ah, then, ah, then,
The shepherd raved! He railed upon his lot
And flung his blazing sword and gems away,
Even as a child that has grown petulant-
Like Ardys, sometimes when he has forgot
The honor due our elder will and love.
So pouted now that shepherd in his woe.
Nor did his after digging down
Disclose the swallowed treasure. Gladly then
He stooped to gather up the scattered gems,
And gird the sword discarded to his thigh,
And brood upon the ruby in the ring.
The day succeeding all the shepherds met
In crowded conclave, to declare their wealth,
And take a census of the flocks and herds,
Whereon the king might justly levy tax.
To this assembly this young shepherd came,
And proudly took position on the side
Of those that were the oldest, and possessed
The largest wealth. Then, while they waited all,
And chattered, waiting for the chief to call
The crowd to order, this young shepherd talked
In easy, calm familiarity

With oldest men and richest. Absently
His fondling fingers twirled his curious ring
And bent the collet under—swift surprise
Straight seized the men around him! For the ring
Was magic, and had rapt him from their sight
As soon as he had turned the collet in.
They cried “Where is that shepherd? Has he gone?”
And stared about with vying eyes and mouths,
And pinched themselves to prove themselves in dreams,
And labored, thinking, harder than their wont.

At length, however, both amaze and fear
Ebbd out of their old heads; and soon they fell
To interchanging slanders on the youth
Who’d left them all with such mysterious stealth.
And there he sat and heard himself maligned.
At length his self-compassion overcame
His well-fed curiosity, and then
He twirled the ruby to its usual place—
Straight all the jaws dropped in embarrassment,
Straight all the eyes fell sheepish to the ground;
And all that they could find to say was just
To hem! and haw! and wish themselves away.
Ere long, one genius floundered happily
Upon a hope that next day would be fair,
And all the others flew in haste to that,
And clattered greedily as does a flock
Of chickens when the cock has mined a prize.
But soon they called the council, and each man
That owned a flock or herd, stood forth and told
His wealth before the scribes, who wrote it down.
When it was our young shepherd’s turn, he told
The fate that fell on his poor sheep, and then
What luck had blessed him, so that, with his ring
And with the handful of his precious gems,
He was as rich as any farmer there.
Him, then, they chose to take the census to
The king’s high treasurer.
And forth he went.
You, Ardys, who have spent your little years

In this great city, cannot understand
The strangeness of its busy life to one
Who comes here from the country; but to him,
Fresh from still lanes and rolling hills and plains
Stretcht to a sky that spread above unmarred

Of anything but trees and knolls-to
him

The massy buildings and the temples huge
That shut out well-nigh all the heaven; the streets
Aswirl with wagons, roaring chariots,
And swarming thousands of rich-costumed men
And jewelled women-these
astound, confound

And stupefy the rustic, till he melts
Into one gape, one stare. It is to him
Another and a different world.

So he,

Our shepherd, all so pompous for his wealth
And office in his rural world, grew soon
As humble as the poorest slave that jeered
As he passed by. The very boys that yelled
Coarse wit upon his heels, seemed wiser far,
And older, than himself, unto himself.
But, when the king's high treasurer beheld
The shepherd's brawny frame, how good it was,
He proffered him an office in the flower
Of all the royal armies, and the youth
Accepted. He forgot his rustic friends,-
Aye, even his pretty sweetheart, in the swift,
Loud current of the public life; and gave
Himself up to the tide of fate to bear
Him where it would.

Full soon his magic ring
And his resistless sword advanced the youth
Till he commanded all the Lydian host.
So much was he the pet of Fortune, that,
When finally the king, the old, old king,
Was—when the king had been—that is—I mean,
That when the old king—died—the royal crown

Was seized—was given to the shepherd youth—
He wed the king's young wife and—took the throne.—
Now is it not a wondrous thing, that he,
A poor young shepherd, should become a king?

But lo! the boy already sleeps. At last,
At last, has tiptoe sleep made prey of him.
Where is such beauty in the whole broad world
One half so fair as sleeping children own?
Ah, pure bright face! Ah, faultless, lovely boy!
To think that all this bliss of innocence
Is offspring of my wicked misery!
My blackness is the father of this white!
My cunning guilt, of this blind honesty!
Yet my lips, shrivelled now with rage and crime,
Once bloomed as tenderly as his do now.
My heart once homed itself upon the breast
Of my dear mother, fondly as his love
Finds home in her, that splendid criminal.
My harsh and rugged knuckles once were just
Soft dimples as are his. The gathered woe
Of my thick-furrowed brow spread no control
Across my smooth white forehead. These my eyes,
My narrow, sharp, suspicious eyes, were once
As wide with joyful confidence, as soft
With universal love, as his dear eyes.
But all the signs of innocence and bliss
Are gone forever now. For I have lived!
But he, my Ardys, has not lived at all.
O happy soul! till you have learned of life!
[Hist! nurse, come take the little boy; he sleeps.]
Yet must he learn of life, some bitter day.
Great mother of the gods! is't possible,
That he should ever learn what I have learnt?
That these soft, leafly hands should ever clutch
A murderous sword, as mine have done? that this
Sweet mother-idolizing mouth should burn
Some day with lawless passion on the lips
Of some unholy woman? that this brow,
This blameless brow, my pretty boy's white brow,

Should wrinkle with harsh guilt, and snarl with hate?—

Ah, Kybele! sweet, potent Kybele!
O mother of the world, our Kybele!
Grant my sweet boy either to live in peace,
Or die ere manhood's war-time stain his soul.
Great mother-goddess, hear a father's prayer!
My soul cries louder for thy pity now
Than cymbal-clashing Korybantes shriek.
My heart bleeds more beneath its anxious fear
Than do their pious bodies gashed with knives.
Hear me, O mountain-mother!
Kybele!—

[But hither strolls the partner in my crimes;
How like a goddess she proceeds! How fair
She is! How loving, and how loved by me!
Yea, spite of all her past, how loved of me!]
Come, Nyssa, O my beauty! lo! I puff
Away the lamp's faint life; its sickly strife
But hurts and dims the gentle, silent blaze
Of stars that crowd, like eyes, to gaze at you,
Your beauty, and at me, my love—for that
Is not more great than this my passion, vast
As all the drowning ocean of sweet space
That floods our breasts, and breaks upon far reefs
Of eminent sharp stars.
And gloomy, too,
My love is, as the midnight-sea unsailed
Of any moon. For, sweet, men die for love;
But who, save me, has murdered for his love?
Yet I have bathed these hands up to their wrists
In hot, swift blood for just my love of you,
That these same red-stained hands might clasp your waist
And know the silken softness of your hair.
Sit here across my knees, and rest your breast
Against my swelling heart to hold it back;
And lay your perfect head, as, long ago,
You usedst, on my shoulder. Lean far back,
And put away your veil of jealous hair,
That yonder stars may feast their gaze upon

The fairest curve of throat the earth can vaunt,
And lay their rays, like fingers, lovingly
Upon this undulant ivory bosom of yours.
O love, rare love, your flesh is softer far
Than fleeces of young lambs were, when I roamed
The hills, a tattered shepherd, and lay down,
Worn out at night, before my fold's barred gates.
But then there was no face of you, my queen,
Upon my lonely pillow; nor could dreams,
My loudest-bragging dreams, imagine you.
And then the meadows opened, and I left
The quiet telling of my sheep, and came
With staring eyes to Court; and, with my sword
And with my magic ring, and with the voice
Of vague ambitions loud within me, ploughed
A crescent path, through battles numberless,
Up to the chief command, and to his love—
His love!—ah, foolish old Kandaules—hush!
I must not name his name for fear his shade
Rise summoned up. Yet he, the toothless king,
The snow-haired, aspen-headed king, must be
As proud of you, as any eager boy
Is proud of his first armor. Well he might
Take pride in you, you peerless marvel-mine!
But often Pride plays suicide, they say.
So he-do
you remember?-he must show
The perfect-bodied wife his crown and wealth
Had bought from vending parents,-he
must show
Her youth and beauty, all, to willing me!
Must brush each smallest cloud away, and let
His moon blaze naked forth, pure, blinding-bright.

As clear stands forth each golden circumstance
Of that far vision on my memory
As any figured painting from the brush
Of mage Bularchos lives aglow to-day.
The ill-advised old king was vaunting forth
The praises of his fine young wife to me,

And, mad with pride, must prove his praises true.
Yea, with the stubborn folly of old age,
Must drag me, half-afraid, yet all athirst,
To see his marble moon at beauty's full.
We hid behind big-folded tapestries,
The chuckling king, and staring I, to gloat
On your unrobed perfection!
Soon you came
To take your bath, and, while the girl, your slave,
Ran fetching towels, perfumes, soaps and oils,
I watched you strip off gracious draperies
As one might strip the petals off a rose.
You seemed to muse upon some girlish dream
Of sunny days before they made you wed
The wrinkled king; of days when you could plan
Bright wedlock with some hero young and strong
And proud and brave, and good to look upon;
Of times when you had never dreamt, aghast,
That coming days would chain your youth and joy
Close by the shrivelled side and withered heart
Of that old man, to be his helpless toy.
You had not dreamed such fate, but now we know
That worse things come in life than nightmares feign.
What, love? You say it was of me-of
me!—
That you were thinking then? and wishing Fate
Had granted you not him, but me?—Me!
I'll smother you with kisses for that speech!

Well, there that night you stood and dreamed of me;
Whilst I, concealed, must stand and gaze at you,
And I recall each moment of that dear
Disrobing.
First, your tarrying fingers loosed
The buckle points that kept the mist-like fleece
Of your ampechone around your throat;
And down it slipped, as if reluctant, slow
To leave embracing your sweet shoulders, love.
Its clutching, watery downfall bared to me
The sapling roundness of your ivory arms.

And then your fingers, all too lazily
For my eye-hunger and to prove his pride,
Unbound the golden-brooch, fair girdle claspt
Beneath your mellow breasts, whose daintiness
Was whispered by the hiding, hinting robe.
Straightway the loosened girdle gave release
Unto the gathered peplos, woven with stars
As thick, I thought, as is this legioned sky.
Then, with a timid glance around, that showed
You none but your dark slave, with eyes against
Their upper lids to stare at you ev'n while
She bent to pour the jars of water, warm
For your dear laving, you let slip the clasp
That held your liberal peplos round you. Down
It ran along your form emergent; down,
In panic swift of twinkling wrinkles; down
It tumbled with its many stars, and sprawled,
Like chaotic heaven, round your little feet.
But you, afar in dreams, you let it lie
There where it fell upon the marble floor;
And slowly stepped out of its tangled folds,
And stood forth, like a half-grown girl, before
She dons the woman's peplos, only clad
In your chiton, your graceful legs revealed
Bare to the knees.

Now, next you stoop,
Poised on one foot-the
other foot uplift-
To unlace the golden sandals from your feet,
As pinkish white as any dainty babe's,
Their pretty toes all huddling on the cold
White marble, like wee lambs in winter-time.
And next you must untie the twisted cord
That held the soft chiton close round your hips;
And bent your slender body like a bow,
And bloomed from this last cloud as day from dawn;
And flung it down, and lifted your sweet head.
Your face was flushed as rosily, beloved,
As is the East before the waking day.

But whether it were more from modesty,
Or from your struggle with the tight chiton,
I could not tell; I only know that I
Was dazzled,-stunned,-as
I felt flash on me
Your naked beauty, radiant as the moon,
More white than marble out of Thasos isle;
More curvedly straight than any proud young tree;
More dainty-modelled with voluptuous curves
Than any shapely vase that graces flowers;
More sinuous, too, than is a tigress sleek
That writhes in sunshine or winds through the woods,
Winds through the willows, lither than are they.
Aye, naked, naked! stood you there, the queen!
A queen in body as a queen in name,
A perfect soul enthroned in perfect flesh.
Your shape is queenly from this regal brow,
That's gleaming like a smooth white tablet where
One fain would write in golden letters fair,
As I write now with tracing fingers, "Mine,"-
Aye, in your brow and your rich cheeks you're queen;
A tyrant with your eyes' soft despotry;

A queen in this red mouth that my lips haunt,
And in the faultless oval of the chin,
That now entablatures this marble shaft,
Your reginal throat, whence sweep away these proud,
Curved shoulders down the lily arms that cling
And gleam around my blessed neck to-night.
Full royal are these snow-pure breasts, faint-tinged
At crest, whence my fair boy drew his young life.
And royalty enzones your yielding waist,
And wraps your holy loins, where got I him
That takes my crown, when I am in my tomb,
And owns my heart in partnership with you.
High majesty is in your striding feet,
Rests grand upon your thighs, beams in the brooch
Of each sweet knee, and in your sharp, straight shins,
And in your high, white insteps flexed like steel,
And in both apple-heels, and in your toes,

Like ivory upon their golden shoes.—
Aye, you are queen, from peak of soft-poised head
To tip of little foot. And you are mine,
All mine! and worthy a bloody winning.
Oh,
But, when I first looked on you, stript of robes
That, hiding almost all, still left you more
Than any ten in this fair-womaned world;
But, fallen away, disclosed such radiance
As the queens of heaven can never own.— When first
I saw your maddening nakedness, my eyes,
Like gluttons, overfed on sweets. Before
My lip could check it, there leaped out a gasp
Of startled admiration.
Keen as ear
Of hind for warning whisper of crusht leaf,
Was your ear, and my stifled outcry smote
It like a thunder-peal. A moment paused.
Then—then you ran toward our curtained nook,

And flashed, a bodied sunbeam, fleet across
The floor's reflection. Yea, ere I could twist
My screening ring's stout collet under, you
Had flung the hanging back, and caught a glimpse
Of me, before I faded from your sight
And fled in guilty terror, as from hosts
Of warriors, not as from a naked girl.
When, whipt from sight of you, I ran away,
I gave one backward glance, and saw your hand,
Your little hand, and white uplifted arm,
Descend upon the stammering king,
And smite him full and fierce upon his face,
Upon his myriad wrinkles, and his thin
And bloodless lips.
Soon after I had gained
My own near house, where I fell prey to all
Harsh self-contemning and despite, there came
A breathless royal runner, bade me go
At once unto my queen. I scorned to flee,
And, hoping nothing better than quick death,

Came shamefast to your room. And there you sat
 Alone, enrobed in wealth of costume, pale
 But terrible with fury, fingers wrapt
 In tightened fingers, nostrils fiercely wide,
 And mouth a-quiver, baring fitfully
 The mad, white teeth that clenched your lower lip,
 And flashed like frequent lightning from the sky-
 And one foot nervous at the floor, whereon
 I fell in mute humiliation. Then
 You uttered these strange words with labored calm:
 “So, Gyges, you’re a spy in warless camps!
 You, whom men name with honor as a man,
 Now peek and tiptoe where lone women bathe?
 It’s not enough to strip slain men of arms,
 But you would snatch away a woman’s veil?

Ah, fearless Gyges, what is this you do?
 How long have you been sneak and curtained peep?
 Oh, tumbled idol of clean heroism!
 Oh, fallen hero, whom I loved to love!
 “Yet, though I must upbraid, I do not blame;
 For he has led you where you durst not go
 Alone,—even he, my husband, scorned of Death,
 And left to shuffle feebly on through life.
 ‘Tis he I blame, and loathe, and hate, and flee,-
 A ye, flee! for hear what I would say to you.
 “The tottering king has shamed me in your sight,
 Has made of sacred me a spectacle,

A naked spectacle, for eyes profane:

And him I will endure no longer, no!
Though Death seize on me when I fly from him.
“Now you have seen, with infamous, vile eyes,
Your queen unclothed, and you are doomed to die,
To die, bold Gyges, like a common cur-
Unless you grasp this chance I offer you.
“You know our Lydian custom, how it is
Unlike the shameless Greeks’. Here women blush
At nakedness, and deem it loathsome sin
Or hard misfortune, if men see them bare.
This cruel lot has fallen upon me,
And my wronged woman’s heart demands revenge,

And this is that revenge it claims:

“The king,
The shameless, doddering old king, has shamed
My honor. He must die. And he must die
At hands of him that gazed upon my shame-
D’you hear me, Gyges? You shall slay the king!”
And when I writhed before your fierce command,-
Do you remember, Nyssa?-then
you said;

“If you refuse this justice due to me,
Whom you have so dishonored-faithful
slaves
Are eager for my signal, that they rush
And tear your heart to pieces at my feet.
But, Gyges, if you do this rightful deed,
And win me fair revenge, you’ll win yourself
Both life and me; and you shall be the king,
And I, your queen; for you have with your eyes’
Ambition, seen my nakedness, and they
Deserve to win the gloom of death, or me.
I, too, who leave the king forever, now,
Deserve defence and helpmate for new times;
And who so fit as he that knew my shame?
“Speak, then, and choose your choice of these two things:
Either to win a crown and me for queen
By slaying old Kandaules Myrsilos,

The grisly king, whom Death is loath to touch;
 Or gain yourself a shameful, instant end
 As one that cast dishonor on his queen,-
 A vile death for a famous soldier! Yet
 Choose you this latter, Gyges, if you are
 So bold; or rather, are so cowardly
 That fear of slaying give you to be slain.”
 Then, while I lay there, torn betwixt the powers
 Of struggling fear and loyalty, and fear
 And new ambition, you did murmur on,

With voice tuned softer than a summer-rill:

“O Gyges, I was wed to the old king,
 The withered, childish king, when I knew not
 The real face of life and married love.
 Nor would the knowing all, indeed, have helped
 My helpless womanly estate; for we
 Wed not; no, but we are wed, and to whom
 Our parents choose to chain us for all life.

I always loathed the king. His skinny hands
 Seemed like an eagle’s talons, even when
 He would caress me freezing at his touch.
 His little eyes blazed from so deep a cave,
 His toothless, hideous gums and yellow hide,
 And scrawny, loose-skinned, heavy-wrinkled neck,
 And laugh like hissing snake or spiteful cat,
 And meagre chest, flat as a wall, and arms
 And legs as bony and as crookt awry
 As any stripling boy’s, his feeble frame
 And slouching gait, the barking of his coughs,
 His aching bones, and endless rheumatism-
 All, all that makes him what he is, has been
 To me, his toy, his cage-bird, one long draught
 Of Acheron, one wine of Styx, without
 A hope of respite till his death or mine.
 “One day you came to Court, a stalwart youth
 From country scenes, wide-mouthed at city ways,
 And I beheld you, big of breast and strong
 And straight of limb, with firm, proud mck, and lips

Full-blown and red for youthful love of youth.
And I did love you, wailing at the life
So sadly managed, that had severed us.
I moaned and cursed my lot, but clung to faith
And honor with the king; nor ever would,
By any least encouragement of look
Or gesture, lead you on to change my troth,
My starving honor, to luxurious sin.
I barred my heart's door to the prayers of love,
While honor sat within, alone and cold.
And so I lived, and so I would have lived,
Till Death quenched all the thirsting of my lips,
And closed my eyes against the sight of you,
And stopped the throbbing of my heart for you.

"But now the shameless king has cleft the bond
That honor bound on me; and now I fling
Away reserve, proclaim my alien love,
And plot against the life of my own spouse!
"So, if, loved Gyges, you dare reach for me
Across the king's dead body, here I am!
My heart all yours; not yours from wrath alone,
But yours from love, long-smothered fire of love,
Fierce love that leaps out from its ashen tomb,
And rules my heart with fiery tyranny.
Speak, Gyges! Gyges, speak! What is your choice?"
Thus did you speak, beloved, till all my zeal
Burst forth in flames. I, too, had smothered love
Beneath dull embers of cold loyalty.
And so I cried out truth at last, and sprang
To seize you in my raptured arms. But you—

You thrust me back and said:

"When you have slain
The king, yours am I; not before."
Naught could
I do, but promise you, and feed desire
On hope. Then pondered we a crafty plan,
And separated, lest the king should come,
And, finding us together, fear some plot.

But, when, in gradual tide, the black night-sea
Had softly claimed the wide-spread fens of heaven,
I slunk into the palace,-like
a thief!

Nay, like the sneaking murderer I was;
Not like the honest, fearless Gyges I
Had always been before. And then you came
With tiptoe stealth, and reached for my limp hand,
And led me half-asleep in revery
Unto his door, and whispered low,
“Fate smiles!
He is asleep. Come, follow me.”

And then
You opened the door and entered noisily,
While I stole in behind you, in your vast,
Black shadow, since the lamp stood near the door.
Your unsuspecting, doting husband turned
Upon his bed and smiled to welcome you,
And said, “Is’t you, my Nyssa?” And you said,
“’Tis I,“-with
not a tremor in your voice,
Though I shook as with twenty agues. Then
The old king whined, “Forgive me, love, and heal
My wounded lips with one sweet kiss.” And you
Did answer, “As you will”; and signaled me
To quench the light. But, when I did, the king
Cried out,
“Who quenched the light?”
And you replied,
“It was the wind. It raves to-night, as Death
Rode on its wings. I need not light the lamp
Again; the lightning is so bright.” Nor was
There any quiver in your speech, though I
Could hardly hold my sword for shivering.
Still whined the childish king, “Haste, haste, the kiss!”
And then you dragged me to the bed and bent
Above the king; but he cried out again,
“Is not some other here? Who’s there?” and I
Nigh dropped my sword. But you made answer, “No,

It is the lightning fills the room with ghosts.
A heavy storm crawls up the sky to-night.”
And then you laid your hand upon his mouth,
And whispered, me, “Strike! strike!” and yet again
“Strike! strike! or give the sword to me!” And I,
Obedient, drove deep my murderous steel
In the king’s lean breast, and plunged my dastard blade
Into his throat, his arms, his loins, his side,
Aye, everywhere; but could not find his heart,

So great a panic seized on me; while you,
Rebuking me with eyes and voice, smothered
His screams, his prayers.
Just as my groping sword
At last was poised above his heart, the king
Writhed his thin lips from your fierce clutch, and shot
Into the air a shriek that would have roused
All the earth, had not the heavens cracked
And blazed and split beneath a sudden leap
And yell and rain of thunderbolts. They drowned
His mad death-cry, but, ah! the lightning’s flame
Spread out a hideous picture, searing it
Upon my tortured memory. His eyes!
His fearful, starting eyes! despair, reproach
And horror, wilder than the lightning, blazed
In his poor eyes. There, kneeling at his side,
His wife knelt, choking back his frantic plea
For pity, and his cry for help! And blood,
Blood was red upon your arms and robe,
And at your side was I, bent over, tense
With foiled endeavor, raining thick, fierce stabs
Upon the gashed and helpless wretch, my king!
And both my arms were splasht with gore! and blood
Reached to my elbows! and the blood leaped hot
From jetting fountains of swift blood about
The king’s whole body bathed in blood! in blood!
O! piteous scene! What husband now can trust
A wife again? What king can smile upon
A subject? This was your deed, your crime, yours.
You slim, sleek tigress! Cats can purr, but ‘ware

Their angry claws. A dainty body oft
Can vase a hideous heart. O woman! fiend!
You, who had felt no tremor at the death
Of him you had conspired to slay—you swooned
To death's own image at the blare and flare

Of noisy thunder and mere lightning flash.
But I-I
left my bloody traitor's sword
Still sticking upright in his silent heart,
And ran unto the window, and, with hands
Clotted with blood, bared my whole breast
To Heaven's King to rend with thunderbolts,
And punish my most impious, foul deed.
Yet, when the whole sky roared again, and flung
A hurtling thunder-stone almost upon
My open breast's beseeching, I returned
A coward, and I fled away, all choked
With fright of Death, and found you stretched out still
Upon the floor.
Then love of you revived,
And straight I fell to kissing of the mouth
That I had given all the good of life
To win. Soon you awoke beneath my lips,
And reached and clasped my neck, and drew me close,-
And we were wed even there; while over the world
Outside the storm flew, shouting, "Murder! Death!"
Across the heedless town. Whenever its voice
Would hush a moment breathless, all was dull,
Dead silence, save for our quick breathing, save
For ceaseless dripping, drop by drop, the drip
Of his spent blood upon the floor, till we
Were mad to hear the thunder howl again.
We soon were surfeited of passion bought
Too dear with dark guilt unforgettable.
We went to wash away the stains of blood
That blotched your beauty and my honest skin.
The cold, clear water seemed a sharp reproach,
It was so clean and pure. It shamed my soul
To sully it with the garbage of our crime.

We washed our hands and bodies clean of blood;
But what can cleanse our souls of the foul taint?

What soaps can scour our memories of guilt?
What water can ever cleanse stained memory?
O woman! woman! tender, shapely queen!
Fine Nyssa! what is this that you have done?
The guilt's not mine; but his who made me look
On your curst nakedness; and yours, who made
Me choice of death or murder, dragged me on
To slay my king, whom I had ever loved
And revered as does befit a slave.
And next you pushed me forth to tell vile lies
Unto the furious mob that raved next day.
You could invent that foolish, mammoth lie
About the king's death being suicide.
And when the mob reviled me stammering,

You could rush out, unwomanly, and cry:

“Ye Lydians, if ye will not harken him
That is your general, then harken me,
Your queen. Last night the poor king slew himself—
Alas! my heart must break to think of it!—
But he was very old, and suffered much
From pangs old age is prone to; and full oft
Had vowed that he would end his pain with death.
And last night—ah! ill-fated night!—he sought
Release from anguish in the arms of death.
He used to tell me often that his crown
And I, his queen, should fall, if he should die
Without an heir, unto your general,
His favorite, brave Gyges, who has brought
So many victories back from the wars.”
At this, the mob jeered even you, and cried
That murder had been done; and many reached
Fanatic swords at me, who would have braved
Their myriad strength with lesser fear than I
Had felt before the single, helpless king.
But you cried out above their muttering,

That growled united like an angry sea
That mumbles some long reef; and you could shout:
“I claim this privilege, rebellious slaves,
To ask the judgment of the Grecian god
That knows all things, and tells but truth, and holds
His throne at Delphi over-sea. If he,
Apollo, do not straight add his great word
To what I tell you, and confer the crown,
And me, on Gyges, then it is your right
To tear us both to pieces. Is’t agreed?”
Thereat the crowd, reluctantly appeased,
Granted your prayer, and straggled slowly home.
Ah, you’re acute at trickery, and quick
With artful lies, my Nyssa. It was keen
Of you to bribe the greedy oracle
To give to us your murdered husband’s crown.
I feel much pride in you, my wife and queen,
My queen in lust, in murder, theft and lies
And bribery, and calm, unwearying
Hypocrisy; sextuply crowned a queen.
But I, your mere apprentice, awkward, crude,
At murder, artless in adultery,
And lame at lies, and short-breath’d hypocrite,
I am not fit to throne your Majesty.
So, pray unclasp your arms from round my neck,
And rise, pray, from my wearied knees; your weight
Grows tiresome.
If your heart, so scholarly
In all the guilts, were half as heavy as is
Your body, then you could in some way feel
How leaden is my own sick soul. You seem
Never aweary of blood-purchased robes.
But I, I hate my crown and all it means.
I’d gladly trade the throne for my poor crook
And my poor woolen robe unstained with blood.
Yet, this is greatness! this is wealth! this power!
This is the life that poor folk pray at; this,
The station men aspire to, conspire for;
Yea, sweat and bleed and slay and die to gain!

And I have topped the peak supreme of life!
"As rich as Gyges," grows a proverb now.
Here is all wealth, all grandeur, happiness.
All happiness is here; no woe is here;
No heavy guilt, no mad regret, no pain.
Not any longing for impossibles.
Not any sorrow troubles wealth and might;
Not any anguish finds us here on high.-
Ah, gods! that I were on the lowly plain
Again.

I wonder when my time will come
To meet the fate of tiresome husbands; when
You'll find some other youth to murder me
In my bed, as we two slew him in his.
You are so clever with your trickeries!
Your innocent, wide eyes are so profound!
Ah, well, Death will not find me loath to die;
I never could grow used to city ways.
What! tears and sobs from you, so cool at death?
You too hated life? They married you,
A merest maid, to wrinkled age? and you
Have had more than your share of griefs?
Mayhap
It's true. It seems all mortals live in woe.
I wonder if my innocent, wee boy,
My Ardys, ever will taste such grief as we.

Poor lambkin! If he knew that his kind sire
And his fair mother have been murder-stained!
For his sake, let us love each other, then;
And bury guilt and grievous self-despite,
Pluck out the wedge of mutual crimination
From our one soul, and starve this o'er-fed memory,
And hide all things that are the hideous Past's
In one dark tomb eternal; and embrace
Above their grave.
As now I press this kiss
On your pale lips, it seals the Past away
Forever and forever.
Go within.

I'll follow soon, sweet queen.
Ah, cursed Ring!
Accuser of my bloody Past, begone!
And evil go with you, as first it came!—
How viciously it stabbed the water's breast,
When it sank in, even as my guilty sword
Plunged in the heart of old-No!
no! now, hush!
The Past-is it not dead?
O bright-gemmed sky,
Glow you your fairest, never again so fair
As once you were unto the pious eyes
Of one that was a shepherd, innocent
As new-washed sheep, white stars upon the hills.

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