

CAMBRIDGE POETS — 1900-1913

An Anthology

This anthology chosen by Aelfrida Tillyard and published in 1913, contains nine examples of Aleister Crowley's earliest poetry. The poems as they appear in order in the anthology are:

In Neville's Court, Trinity College
The Goad
The Rosicrucian
Song
In Memoriam, A.J.B.
The Challenge
Two Hymns on The Feast of the Nativity
The Palace of the World
Perdurabo

IN NEVILLE'S COURT, TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

I THINK the souls of many men are here
 Among these cloisters, underneath the spire
 That the moon silvers with magnetic fire ;
But not a moon-ray is it, that so clear
Shines on the pavement, for a voice of fear
 It hath, unless it be the breeze that mocks
 My ear, and waves his old majestic locks
About his head. There fell upon my ear :

“ O soul contemplative of distant things,
 Who hast a poet's heart, even if thy pen
 Be dry and barren, who dost hold Love dear,
Speed forth this message on the fiery wings
 Of stinging song to all the race of men :
 That they have hope ; for we are happy here.”

The Goad

*αν υγρον αμπταιην
αιθερα πορσω γαιας Ελλανιας
αστερας εσπερους
οιον, οιον αλγος επαθον, φιλαι*

EURIPIDES.

Amsterdam, December 23rd, 1897.

Let me pass out beyond the city gate.
All day I loitered in the little streets
Of black worn houses tottering, like the fate
That hangs above my head even now, and meets
Prayer and defiance as not hearing it.
They lean, these old black streets! a little sky
Peeps through the gap, the rough stone path is lit
Just for a little by the sun, and I
Watch his red face pass over, fade away
To other streets, and other passengers,
See him take pleasure where the heathen pray,
See him relieve the hunter of his furs,
All the wide world awaiting him, all folk
Glad at his coming, only I must weep :
Rise he or sink, my weary eyes invoke
Only the respite of a little sleep ;
Sleep, just a little space of sleep, to rest
The fevered head and cool the aching eyes ;
Sleep for a space, to fall upon the breast
Of the dear God, that He may sympathise.
Long has the day drawn out ; a bitter frost
Sparkles along the streets ; the shipping heaves
With the slow murmur of the sea, half lost
In the last rustle of forgotten leaves.
Over the bridges pass the throngs ; the sound,
Deep and insistent, penetrates the mist—
I hear it not ; I contemplate the wound
Stabbed in the flanks of my dear silver Christ.

He hangs in anguish there ; the crown of thorns
Pierces that palest brow ; the nails drip blood ;
There is the wound ; no Mary by Him mourns,
There is no John beside the cruel wood.
I am alone to kiss the silver lips ;
I rend my clothing for the temple veil ;
My heart's black night must act the sun's eclipse ;
My groans must play the earthquake, till I quail
At my own dark imagining. And now
The wind is bitterer : the air breeds snow ;
I put my Christ away ; I turn my brow
Towards the south stedfastly ; my feet must go
Some journey of despair. I dare not turn
To meet the sun ; I will not follow him :
Better to pass where sand and sulphur burn,
And days are hazed with heat, and nights are dim
With some malarial poison. Better lie
Far and forgotten on some desert isle,
Where I may watch the silent ships go by,
And let them share my burden for awhile.
Let me pass out beyond the city gate
Where I may wander by the water still,
And see the faint few stars immaculate
Watch their own beauty in its depth, and chill
Their own desire within its icy stream.
Let me move on with vacant eyes, as one
Lost in the labyrinth of some ill dream,
Move and move on, and never see the sun
Lap all the mist with orange and red gold,
Throw some lank windmill into iron shade,
And stir the chill canal with manifold
Rays of clear morning ; never grow afraid
When he dips down beyond the far fiat land,
Know never more the day and night apart,
Know not where frost has laid his iron hand
Save only that it fastens on my heart ;
Save only that it grips with icy fire
These veins no fire of hell could satiate ;
Save only that it quenches this desire.
Let me pass out beyond the city gate.

The Rosicrucian

I see the centuries wax and wane.
I know their mystery of pain,
 The secrets of the living fire,
The key of life : I live : I reign :
 For I am master of desire.

Silent, I pass amid the folk
Caught in its mesh, slaves to its yoke.
 Silent, unknown, I work and will
Redemption, godhead's master-stroke,
 And breaking of the wands of ill.

No man hath seen beneath my brows
Eternity's exultant house.
 No man hath noted in my brain
The knowledge of my mystic spouse.
 I wait the centuries wax and wane.

Poor, in the kingdom of strong gold,
My power is swift and uncontrolled.
 Simple, amid the maze of lies ;
A child, among the cruel old,
 I plot their stealthy destinies.

So patient, in the breathless strife ;
So silent, under scourge and knife ;
 So tranquil, in the surge of things ;
I bring them from the well of Life,
 Love, from celestial water-springs !

From the shrill fountain-head of God
I draw out water with the rod
 Made luminous with light of power.
I seal each æon's period,
 And wait the moment and the hours.

Aloof, alone, unloved, I stand
With love and worship in my hand.
I commune with the Gods: I wait
Their summons, and I fire the brand
I speak their Word: and there is Fate.

I know no happiness, no pain,
No swift emotion, no disdain,
No pits: but the boundless light
Of the Eternal Love, unslain,
Flows through me to redeem the night.

Mine is a sad slow life: but I,
I would not gain release, and die
A moment ere my task be done.
To falter now were treachery—
I should not dare to greet the sun!

Yet, in one hour I dare not hope,
The mighty gate of Life May ope,
And call me upwards to unite
(Even my soul within the scope)
With That Unutterable Light.

Steady of purpose, girt with Truth,
I pass, in my eternal youth,
And watch the centuries wax and wane:
Untouched by Time's corroding tooth,
Silent, immortal, unprofane!

My empire changes not with time.
Men's kingdoms caldent as a rime
Move me as waves that rise and fall.
They are the parts, that crash or climb;
I only comprehend the All.

I sit, as God must sit: I reign.
Redemption from the threads of pain
I weave, until the veil be drawn.
I burn the chaff, I glean the grain;
In silence I await the dawn.

Song

To sea! To sea! The ship is trim;
The breezes bend the sails.
They chant the necromantic hymn,
Arouse Arabian tales!

To sea! Before us leap the waves;
The wild white combers follow.
Invoke, ye melancholy slaves,
The morning of Apollo!

There's phosphorescence in the wake,
And starlight o'er the prow;
One comet, like an angry snake,
Lifts up its hooded brow.

The black grows grey toward the East:
A hint of silver glows.
Gods gather to the mystic feast
On interlunar snows.

The moon is up full-orbed: she glides
Striking a snaky ray
Across the black resounding tides,
The sepulchre of day.

The moon is up: upon the prow
We stand and watch the moon.
A star is lusted on your brow;
Your lips begin a tune,

A long, low tune of love that swells
Little by little, and lights
The overarching miracles
Of love's desire, and Night's.

It swells, it rolls to triumph-song
Through luminous black skies;

Thrills into silence sharp and strong,
Assumes its peace, and dies.

There is the night: it covers close
The lilies folded fair
Of all your beauty, and the rose
Half hidden in your hair.

There is the night: unseen I stand
And look to seaward still:
We would not look upon the land
Again, had I my will.

The ship is trim: to sea! to sea!
Take life in either hand,
Crush out its wind for you and me,
And drink, and understand!

IN MEMORIAM A. J. B.

The life (by angels' touch divinely lifted
From our dim space-bounds to a vaster sphere),
The spirit, through the vision of clouds rifted,
Soars quick and clear.

Even so, the mists that roll o'er earth are riven,
The spirit flashes forth from mortal sight,
And, flaming through the viewless space, is given
A robe of light.

As when the conqueror Christ burst forth of prison,
And triumph woke the thunder of the spheres,
So brake the soul, as newly re-arisen
Beyond the years.

Far above Space and Time, that earth environ
With bands and bars we strive against in vain,
Far o'er the world, and all its triple iron
And brazen chain,

Far from the change that men call life fled higher
Into the world immutable of sleep,
We see our loved one, and vain eyes desire
In vain to weep.

Woeful our gaze, if on lone Earth descendent,
To view the absence of yon flame afar—
Yet in the Heavens, anew, divine, resplendent,
Behold a star!

One light the less, that steady flamed and even
Amid the dusk of Earth's uncertain shore;
One light the less, but in Jehovah's Heaven
One star the more!

THE CHALLENGE

Now your grave eyes are filled with tears ;
Your hands are trembling in my own ;
The slow voice falls upon my ears,
An undulating monotone.
Your lips are gathered up to mine:
Your bosom heaves with fearful breath;
Your scent is keen as floral wine,
Inviting me, and love, to death.
You, whom I kept, a sacred shrine,
Will fling the portals to the day;
Where shone the moon the sun shall shine,
Silver in scarlet melt away.
There is a yet a pang: they give me this
Who can ; and you who could have failed ?
Is it too late to extend the kiss ?
Too late the goddess be unveiled ?
O but the generous flower that gives
Her kisses to violent sun,
Yet none the less in ardour lives
An hour, and then her day is done.
Back from my lips, back from my breast !
I hold you as I always will,
You unprofaned and uncaressed,
Silent, majestic, and still.
Back! for I love you. Even yet
Do you not see my deepest fire
Burn through the veils and coverings set
By fatuous phantoms of desire ?
Back! O I love you evermore.
But, be our bed the bridal sky!
I love you, love you. Hither, shore
Of far unstained eternity!
There we will rest. Beware! Beware!
For I am young, and you are fair.
Nay! I am old in this, you know!
Ah! heat of God! I love you so!

FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

THE cool December breezes
 Appease the glowing sun.
The agonies and eases
 Of all the year are done :—
When eastward through the lampless night
There shone a strange and splendid light.

The noise of pomp and battle
 Of Israel died away.
Amid the lowing cattle
 The Holy Mother lay,
While at Her breast the Child Divine
Drank in the starry milk and wine.

Three magians Chaldean
 Have bowed their royal knees
Before the Galilean,
 The GOD of stars and seas,
And tasted all the fervent grace
That shone from Mary's maiden face.

FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

THE Virgin lies at Bethlehem
 (Bring gold and frankincense and myrrh!)
The root of David shoots a stem.
 (O HOLY SPIRIT, shadow Her!)

She lies alone amid the kine.
 (Bring gold and frankincense and myrrh!)
The straw is fragrant as with wine.
 (O HOLY SPIRIT, shadow her!)

There are three Kings upon the road.
 (Bring gold and frankincense and myrrh!)
She hath thrice blest the Name of GOD.
 (O HOLY SPIRIT, shadow her!)

There stands her star above the sky.

(Bring gold and frankincense and myrrh!)

She hath thrice blest the TRINITY.

(O HOLY SPIRIT, shadow her!)

Her joyful ardour hath sufficed.

(Bring gold and frankincense and myrrh!)

She is delivered of the CHRIST.

(The angels come to worship Her!) *Amen*

The Palace of the World

The fragrant gateways of the dawn
Teem with the scent of flowers.
The mother, Midnight, has withdrawn
Her slumberous kissing hours :
Day springs, with footsteps as a fawn,
Into her rosy bowers.

The pale and holy maiden horn
In highest heaven is set.
My forehead, bathed in her forlorn
Light, with her lips is met ;
My lips, that murmur in the morn,
With lustrous dew are wet.

My prayer is mighty with my will ;
My purpose as a sword
Flames through the adamant, to fill
The gardens of the Lord
With music, that the air be still,
Dumb to its mighty chord.

I stand above the tides of time
And elemental strife ;
My figure stands above, sublime,
Shadowing the Key of Life,
And the passion of my mighty rime
Divides me as a knife.

For secret symbols on my brow,
And secret thoughts within,
Compel eternity to Now,
Draw the Infinite within.
Light is extended. I and Thou
Are as they had not been.

So on my head the light is one,
Unity manifest ;

A star more splended than the sun
Burns for my crownéd crest ;
Burns, as the murmuring orison
Of waters in the west.

What angel from the silver gate
Flames to my fierier face ?
What angel, as I contemplate
The unsubstantial space,
Move with my lips the laws of Fate
That bind earth's carapace ?

No angel, but the very light
And fire and spirit of Her,
Unmitigated, eremite,
The unmanifested myrrh,
Ocean, and night that is not night,
The mother-mediator.

O sacred spirit of the Gods !
O triple tongue ! Descend,
Lapping the answering flame that nods,
Kissing the brows that bend,
Uniting all earth's periods
To one exalted end !

Still on the mystic Tree of Life
My soul is crucified :
Still strikes the sacrificial knife
Where lurks some serpent-eyed
Fear, passion, or man's deadly wife
Desire, the suicide !

Before me dwells the Holy One
Anointed Beauty's King;
Behind me, mightier than the Sun,
To whom the cherubs sing,
A strong archangel, known of none,
Comes crowned and conquering.

An angel stands on my right hand
With strength of ocean's wrath;
Upon my left the fiery brand,
Charioted fire smites forth:
Four great archangels to withstand
The furies of the path.

Flames on my front the fiery star,
About me and around.
Pillared, the sacred sun, afar,
Six symphonies of sound;
Flames, as the Gods themselves that are;
Flames, in the abyss profound.

The spread arms drop like thunder! So
Rings out the lordlier cry,
Vibrating through the streams that flow
In ether to the sky,
The moving archipelago,
Stars in their seigneury.

Thine be the kingdom! Thine the power!
The glory triply thine!
Thine, through Eternity's swift hour
Eternity, thy shrine
Yea, by the holy lotus-flower,
Even mine!

Perdurabo

Exile from humankind! The snow's fresh flakes
Are warmer than men's hearts. My mind is wrought
Into dark shapes of solitary thought
That loves and sympathises, but awakes
No answering love or pity. What a pang
Hath this strange solitude to aggravate
The self-abasement and the blows of Fate!
No snake of hell that so severe a fang!

I am not lower than all men—I feel
Too keenly. Yet my place is not above,
Though I have this—unalterable Love
In every fibre. I am crucified
Apart on a long burning crag of steel,
Tortured, cast out; and yet—I shall abide