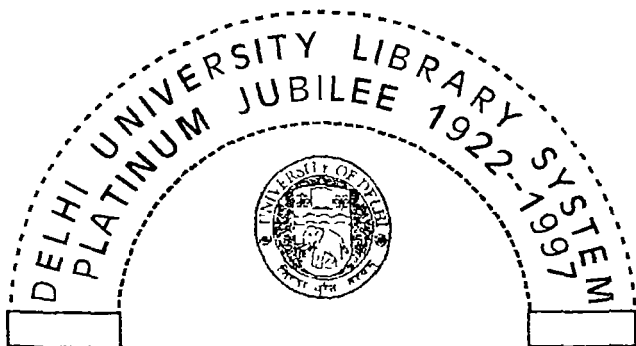




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Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see
The wingèd Psyche with awakened eyes?

KEATS

THE LAMP

By

RICHARD CHURCH

LONDON

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TO
DENIS SAURAT
*In Friendship,
and for what he represents.*

PROLOGUE

Let me be simple; let my music
Capture a child's imagination.
A difficult thought is not a thing
A blackbird or a god will sing.
Some have heard both. Let them in judgment
Stand up, and give an ear to this
Agony from the tree of bliss.

PART I

So that a story shall not be forgotten,
 Poets from age to age have told it afresh.
 It is the tale of Eros and of Psyche,
 The winged god and the woman loved, the rash
 Importunity of reckless passion,
 The lamp usurping faith, the mystery
 Unveiled, the anger of a god, the flight,
 The soul of man weeping through the night.

So that a story should not be forgotten,
 Apuleius took it from the air,
 Drifting thistledown wafted through time
 From Plato's garden. Since the African
 Turned the tale to confute a sceptical age,
 Why should not I with like intention frame
 The legend afresh, though Bridges, Pater, Morris
 Told it so recently, to symbolize
 Wisdom, a tree standing in the sun?

Here is reason enough; another age
 Of disbelief, with empires of the mind
 Tumbling into dust; with burning of books;
 And in the débris of a broken world
 The soul of man weeping through the night.

Deep in the heart of ravished France, below
 The southern forest-edge of Fontainebleau,
 A tributary of the river Seine
 Companions a canal. Enclosed, a plain
 Of richly watered cornland lies, remote
 As a medieval house behind its moat;
 Villages scattered here and there between
 Canal and river, pin the cloak of green.
 This is a land of poplars, pollard willows,
 Miles of willow and poplar; white cloud-billows
 Sail overhead, and barges on the stream
 Float higher than the meadows; float and dream,
 And sound a horn like Roland's at each bend.
 Time has no beginning there, no end.
 Green days, green nights commingle, each to each
 Mirrored in waters, ever out of reach.
 Nobody moves, except the folk who drift
 Half maritime, half gypsy, with a lift
 Of husky voices and a warning horn
 Aboard the barges, waking a forlorn
 Lost echo from that non-existent past
 Which lies in human memory, the vast
 And never-has-been reservoir of longing
 For other worlds, with winged glories thronging
 To comfort us, and by angelic mirth
 Lift from our hearts the burden of this earth.

Below the level of the waters stood a farmhouse,
 Three-sided, round a courtyard formerly for cattle,
 But now a garden. Arches of roses, beds of zinnias,
 The white-starred, scented jasmine with its leaves indented;
 And, set by bleached distempered walls, flaming sunflowers
 Suckling great humble-bees and innumerable smaller
 Creatures of wing and sting and shrill trumpet. Surely
 This artfully arrayed profusion of colour and perfume
 Marked the close labour and indulgent delight of a woman?
 To guard the single-storeyed range of ancient buildings,
 On the fourth and open side were hand-wrought railings
 And double gates, baroque iron-work, with scrollings
 And fleurs-de-lys: all this open side over-shadowed
 By a giant acacia that through the June month showered confetti
 Over the lane to the hamlet, over the roofs and the forecourt,
 Filling the rooms through the open windows with fragile petals,
 Half transparent, half perfumed, like wings of butterflies
 Smutched and wind-beaten.

How quiet and forgotten this corner
 Of France, not far from the capital, gracious and cynical Paris:
 Not far, but dropped out of time, entranced by the horn sounding
 At the curve of the waters, where the breeze touched the aspens
 and poplars
 And set invisible seas lipping invisible beaches.

This was the country where Corot painted, watching the willows
 Day after day in the summer haze, while the dragonflies
 Darted about his easel, stabbing his vision
 With blue bolts of light.

In a village along the canal
Approaching Nemours, for centuries name-town of the Dauphins
Of France, who held that shadow dukedom, lived the English
Musician, the crippled Delius, like Corot also enchanted
By the water-mood, and the quiet, green hamadryad
Spirit of place.

Here, removed from the world, from fraying
Ambition, Montaigne might have built his tower shrewdly;
Or Voltaire, trowel in hand, with a mistress to label his seed-beds,
Could have finished his days, and put pen to his eightieth
volume

Here as in Ferney

Here, as much removed from the modern
World of letters and wit as they from that of times vanished,
Lived the Professor, ten years retired from his Faculty
But not from the Greeks, their science, their art, their religion,
Their profuse confusion of mysteries, the dark grove of Eleusis
With its hint of Calvary and the stone rolled away from the
sepulchre;

Or Delphi, where maybe the Holy Ghost was engendered
In the spirit of Light, and reason's penetrating symbol,
The word of the prophet, the word of the poet, that was in the
beginning.

These were the matters that in his retreat he continued to ponder,
Believing still that out of myth he might discover
The fulcrum that balances faith and experience, spirit and body.
Half absent from this world he spent his days in study,
Contented, with his wife and one remaining daughter,
To fortify his dwindling years and blend their seasons
With annotations from the Weeping and Laughing Philosophers

4

The old Professor had reduced his life
 To an habitual routine, a way
 To simplify the round of night and day.
 He left the job of living to his wife
 And daughter, as the poet Villiers de l'Isle
 Once left it to his servants. He seldom went
 Beyond the courtyard gate, and was content
 To let the world go by, for woe or weal.

He liked to take his after-luncheon slumber
 Beneath the mulberry tree beside the well;
 Coffee, cognac, and books set on a tray,
 Round which the frogs forgathered without number,
 To croak, from Aristophanes, a spell
 That always worked, because he knew the play.

5

Madam, his wife, was gentle. Since 1740,
 When her son disappeared, her reason had wavered.
 She knew he was a prisoner in Germany
 With all his regiment. That was enough
 To keep her faith in human nature firm.
 She knew he would come back. She knew that France
 Would rise again, and that the miracle
 Of holy living would repeat itself
 And make the Church triumphant. But her hair
 Went white, and day by day she failed to grasp

The trivial realities of servitude
Imposed by the invader. The hand shook
That sought to shield her household from contagion,
The smaller degradations, hour by hour,
That sap the character in slavery.
She tried to hedge her scholar-husband's life
And island him with comfort. But she failed,
Just as a mother bird would fail whose nest
Swings on a bough above a flooding river
And dips from time to time as the waters shake
The tree; dips, grows bedraggled, but is still
Secure.

So this scholar's home in France,
Seeming, in captivity, so changeless,
Suffered as the jackboot months trod over it,
And only pride concealed the dying habits,
The daily symbols of a way of life
That has made France the chatelaine of Europe,
And kept the Roman spirit of the hearth
Alive through the Dark Ages, surviving wars
Of kings and demagogues.

But now, one woman,
One wife and mother, could not take so much
Upon her heart and mind, and trembling hands.
She had to delegate to her last daughter
This major burden, while sometimes she turned
To the inaction of anxiety,
That privacy of grief which a French mother
Shrinks into when her son's captivity
Serves as a shameful substitute for death.

6

Maybe the tale of treachery
 Will never be told.
 For when an evil is over
 And anger grows old,
 Some instinct, some shamefaced
 Disapproval, will urge
 To a burning of records.

Facts crumble, and merge
 Like a castle of sand when incoming
 Tides advance,
 Flood over the shore, expunging
 The print of man's chance
 Or long-planned chaffer and traffic.

So the story of France
 In the years of her over-ripeness,
 When the harpies fed
 On the Republic, the medlar
 Rotten, bled
 By the teeth of the traitor.

7

France waited, watching the desecration creep
 Through Europe, saw nations tumbled over the steep
 Precipice of slavery. But nothing was done
 To break through the self-torture. One by one
 She put the sharp-tongued omens to her breast
 Like Cleopatra's asp. Then came the rest;

· The bolt drawn from within; despair and shame;
The waste of strength apportioning the blame;
The ancient factions waiting for this chance
To murder France for love of vanished France.

8

Such cross-grained politics disturbed
None of that household by the river.
The old Professor's wife and daughter
Fostered a receding legend
That once he had lifted his absorbed
And childlike mind, to hear of Dreyfus,
And register such indignation
That from the Sorbonne to Grenoble
A hundred Faculties were shaken.
No spring was brought by that one swallow.
The scholar to his books returned
And found his ancient world more real
Than those hot feuds that raged in Paris.
Enough for him that Troy once burned.
He was more concerned to follow
The intrigue Odysseus contrived,
Than to double-cross some fellow
In the academic world.
Maybe that was why he thrived,
For nobody feared him, none reviled
Him or his work; he lived molested
By no man; all revered and trusted
Such innocence. So he grew old,

Successful in his unsuccess,
Master of a ghostly kingdom
Where no rival strove to press
A claim, or to dispute the harvest.

So absolute was this example,
That neither wife nor daughters ventured
To criticize his way of life;
At least, so long as they were near him,
Under a roof-tree raised in Athens
Rather than twentieth-century Paris.
But when the elder daughters married,
They learned the necessity of strife,
And the ambition born of worries
Over persons and position.
Both these women took the fever
Which all suffer from unknowing,
And thus were lost to him for ever.

Now, grass-widowed, they were lodging
Near by, in the crowded hotel
Of the riverside town, their children
Safely with them. The eldest daughter
Knew her husband was a prisoner.
The other husband was more skilful.
A practised Deputy and Lawyer,
He had the technique to ingratiate
Himself, and distil some counsel
In the ear of the invader.
This kept him detained in Paris
With occasional trips to Vichy,
A modern Mercury whose missions

Had a certain classical cast
His father-in-law would not have lost
Had his interests been wider,
With mild craving for possessions.

9

One golden morning,
In the second summer of slavery,
The orchard grasses
Slipped their burden of dewdrops
As the Daughter waded
Through their waves of green-seed
And riming blade.
A blackbird sang in a poplar ;
A yaffle darted
From apple to plum-tree, derisive
And raucous, startling
Marie, who shivered, then laughing,
Resumed her plunging
Gait through the grass, her basket
Poised on her hip.
A silver net of moisture
Weighed on her hair
And webbed her cheeks and forearms.
Once she looked ruefully
At her drenched legs, and slippers
Bedraggled with dew.
Filtered from tree to tree,
The level sunshine

In frosty fingers of light
Touched single things;
A stalk of cow-parsley, a brittle
Mistletoe sprig
Surviving from druid's winter;
An eglantine
Swinging with thorns concealed
In a flush of petals.

Because of these things in the sunshine
Marie sang.
She sang to herself, not aloud
As in a free country
Where nothing is feared, no neighbour,
No treacherous stone,
No wall, or waft of air.
But her song was joyous,
Drawn like a beaker of water
From a deep well
Untouched by the dust of events
And the heat of the day.
She sang as she walked; her basket
Riding the measure,
A boat on the waves of her pleasure,
Rolled on her hip
In time with the tune on her lip.
She sang to herself,
Her dark eyes touching the sun-touched
Mistletoe, rose-bush,
Mop-headed grass, umbrella
Of curd, almond-scented.

Her feet left a dew-bruised printing
Out of the courtyard
Straight from the door to the orchard
In the pantiled wall.

Loudly the birds, softly the girl
Sang that morning in France
As though the dawn were truly
Miraculous, free
In the childhood of time.
From a barge approaching a bend
In the waist-high waterway,
The horn of Roland sounded
Its throaty, long
Tremulous cry of bewilderment,
Lonely and lost.

20

Lonely and lost! That was the voice of France;
A widow's voice, her beauty heightened by grief.
The woman in the orchard may, perchance,
Pausing to shift her basket, for a brief
Moment knowing she would need her breath
Against a morning's labour by the water,
She may have felt that intimation of death
Clutch at her heart. Was she not a daughter
Of France? Maybe she felt the joy of morning,
The thousand recognitions of sun and earth,

Stabbed suddenly by this note of warning,
Frosted in the moment of their birth.
Fingers of light from apple-patterned skies
Touched her bent head, but failed to touch her eyes.

22

Light lost, and song dying
Of shame for its own happiness,
Marie left the orchard lattice
Of sunbeams, shadows, and leafy shapes.
Canal curve, and tall poplars
Curving in a cliff of green,
Held, almost hidden, a stone hut
Half roofed, half open to the sky.
Within, a washing pool, surrounded
By a narrow ledge where women knelt
To beat and blanch their loads of linen.
Here with her basket Marie came
To find herself alone. A fern
Of hart's-tongue gleamed by the stone lintel,
Rich with moisture, bedded in moss.
A frog leaped, and the pool chuckled,
Throwing green streaks of underwater
Lustre up the walls in ripples.
Drip, drip, from beneath the ledge
Where the stone was tongued by the lipping water
Restless from impulse far away,
Some tidal urge that gave it motion
Long belated and quite forgotten.

The walls were fustianed with damp,
Soft blotches of green and amber moss
Veiled in a bloom of mistiness.
The water looked drier than the stone,
For it was smooth, and deep, and bright.
It shone like an eye lit with suspicion.
Above all this the poplars loomed,
Conspiring too, perpetual whisperers,
Nudging and rustling though no winds blew.
The barge from which the horn had sounded
Passed while the girl paused in the doorway.
She watched the prow dispel the mirror ;
Saw the reflected world shattered
Into a welter of tossing colours.
The chugging engine beat its drum
Muffled by its monotony.
There was no other sound. The helmsman
Crouched with his arm drooped over the tiller.
Near him a grey-green faceless figure
Sat on a tub, nursing a rifle.
Neither looked up to greet the woman.
Something oppressed them both, it seemed,
Blinded them to the passing pageant
Of France.

Marie turned her head :
But had she been a block of granite
Time-vestured like the mossy walls,
Helmsman and guard could not have shown
Less curiosity. Behind
The barge, the drumbeat of the engine,
The seeming-sounding ripple of the wake

Shaking the iris blades by the bank,
There faded the echo of Roland's horn;
Roland's horn with fading echo
Sadder than any new-born sorrow.

12

With song, and with the memory of song
Quenched in her heart and on her lip,
She followed the foreboding cry along
The bank of the canal.
She saw the barge beneath the wide bridge dip,
And for a moment fall
Out of existence, then rise again
Into the mesh of sunlight between
The double poplar-screen.
The two men also disappeared
And re-emerged. She felt a spasm of pain
Assail her: all she had feared
For France, since the invader came,
Suddenly gathered to coherent shape
As though the shadow of that arch could frame
Living disaster, and make of it a tale
Whose allegory no one might escape
Until all human values fail.

13

Slowly the barge rounded the further bend,
Winding its horn again. The engine throbbed,
Diminishing with the wavelets on the water.

The broken mirror gradually regained
Its calm, reflective face, though trembling still,
So that the double of the poplars shook
In watery syncopation against rustling leaves.
But soon even this small drama smoothed away,
And left the world a counterfeit of peace.

24

The young Frenchwoman turned, and left the towpath,
Intending to bestir herself for time lost
In dreaming sadly after singing gladly.
But as she looked toward the covered pool,
Fear touched her, warning her to wait.

Such intimations in a happy land
Mean little, maybe; but in a land enslaved
By a cold and mad invader, they become
The Maquis of the mind, the messengers
That tap the midnight window, the corner-voice
That disappears upon a word, the hand
Seen on the silent closing of a door.
Marie looked before she moved, and saw
Or thought she saw, a man's shadow leap
The gloomy entrance to the covered pool.
Her fear-drugged mind accepted this illusion.
'Take care!' she cried. It was her instinct speaking,
The instinct of a people in captivity
Given an individual voice as danger
Flickered here, there, a marsh-fire over death.

As she cried, she heard footsteps behind her,
The tread of jackboots turning from the bridge,
Crunching on gravel, muffling over grass,
Treading toward her down the towpath under
The poplars, where the ink-blue dragonflies
Still held their traffic, though the world was changed.

She dared not cry again. She waited, watched;
Watched for the shadow, craving not to see it;
Seeing the Germans, though she loathed to look.

15

First, the Captain stopped
Halfway over the bridge,
To lean above the ledge.
The yellow iris looped
Along the towpath edge
Recalled another scene
Of waters nearer home.
A wafted scent of lime
Added to the burden.
Desperate, and alone,
He saw a northern garden
Whose long grass by the lake
In melancholy green
Almost overpowered
The beds where dahlias
Drooped stalkily, yet flowered.

Day-dreaming, he saw
The sister whom he loved
Pause by a clump of laurel
To cough. He saw her drop
Her scissors, and clutch the air,
Believing he was there.
Those moments which he lived
In double-reality,
The world behind the eye,
Filled him with dread. The drip
Of moisture from the arch
To the canal below,
Might be her life-blood falling.
In this fusion of two worlds
He thought he heard her calling.
What mirage the mind builds
On the hunger of the soul!
Summoning his will
To banish the cruel dream,
He stood on the bridge, but still
In the iris blades beneath
He heard the scythe of death.
'Leutnant!' he cried, 'Who 's there?'
The youth in boots and belt
Could not understand.
He stared, but neither felt
Nor saw. Hastily he put
A heavy, nervous hand
To his revolver butt.
But then he laughed, seeing
A woman on the bank,

Half invisible
Beneath the poplar-trees.
The Captain saw him wink,
Heard his throaty chuckle.
The morning sun shone clear
On badge, belt and buckle,
And the relief from fear.

16

She waited while the officers approached.
Leaf-shadows flickered up their uniforms.
A blackbird shrieked across the path, his coat
And armour bright as theirs. The young Leutnant,
Pretending that he held a catapult,
Raised arms and hands, and with a clucking tongue
Sent the imaginary pebble flying.

She saw the boyish gesture. A half-smile,
Bitter and bewildered, touched her mouth
And for one second broke the white lips' tension.
Instantly she was a mask again,
Her eyes in shadow watching the shadows rushing
Over the men and breaking behind them in shapes
Of dancing dustmotes.

The Captain saluted.
Behind his arm she saw the fern-fringed doorway
Darken again with that presage from some hidden
Form that moved. She prayed for strength to avert
Her eyes, and instantly a second prayer
—While the saluting German arm came down—

Followed the first, that the averted gaze
Might be stopped before it should be seen.
Dreading to look, yet dreading to look away,
She played for time by letting her basket slip.
'Hup!' the younger jackboot cried, pretending
To catch it for her. But she did not smile.
Gravely she looked at him, and bowed her head.
A moment's pause, before the Captain spoke
Shyly, yet gruffly, with a commanding glance
At his subordinate.

'Mademoiselle!

An English plane is down. It was returning
From its night errand, death-dealing over Germany.
Four of the crew were killed. The wounded man
Is in our doctors' care. That leaves another
Still to be found. He may be wounded too,
And will not travel far, unless the people
Hide him. I hope they will not, for their own sakes.
You know the penalty. Persuade your neighbours
To take no hand in this, for their own sakes;
And for their children's too.'

She saw his eyes
Clouded with fear. Of what was he afraid?

17

Or was it her fear reflected there,
The frozen world in which she lived?
Though spring might break from the ground, and song
From her lips, the colour and sound were cold,

The flowers rooted in the soil of France,
The song in a Frenchwoman's heart.

She looked back through the orchard, saw
The bruised grass where she had walked
Singing through the flowers. Or was it
Another self, a second self,
A creature of a former time
Sweet with sanity, whose hours
Made music of the moments, adding
Day unto day, year unto year?

Who then was this, facing the Germans,
Standing before these mirrors of fear
And praying to herself, commanding
Herself, lest she should glance again
At the place where she had seen the shadow,
And in that glance betray the shadow
And him she believed behind it, watching?

18

Fighting the horror of this question, she stood before them
Defenceless, her eyes evasive, curtained with the fear of fear,
Which is the last approach to the dark citadel
Of self, where our resources against fate are locked,
So that, until the day, we never know our strength.
The German officers watched a young woman standing
Behind her basket, her hands tight-clasped, the knuckles white.
They watched her white face too, the indrawn bloodless lips.

The Captain, hardly from his recent daydream drawn,
Saw a laurel bush beside her; heard her cough.
So swift was the illusion that he almost stooped
To the flower-scissors which he had heard drop on the towpath.

Towpath? No, that was wrong. It was on German grass,
Not this French, mossy gravel. He compelled himself
To put the anxious agony of love away,
Cursing the very chance that two women could be dark-haired,
Pale of face, and so appealing in simplicity.
He saw the bush of laurel fade. His Leutnant stood
Beside her, more solicitous than need be.
A quick spasm of anger shook the Commandant.
'Carry the basket for her,' he said. 'She is unwell.'

29

At first, her reason did not take the words,
For she was looking past the covered pool,
To wonder what had brought her father out.
He stood within the doorway in the wall,
Knee-deep in orchard grass, darkened by trees.
But she saw his hand clasping his white beard.
That was his token of anxiety,
Denoting a return, but temporary,
To the world around him, people and affairs
Of the living moment. He had heard something,
A matter that would interrupt his studies?
What would it be; something to give substance
To the shadow that she dared not look for now?

But with that realization the words came home
More fateful by delay. She felt the life
Flood back into her eyes, but warily,
For nothing must be shown. Her face was flushed,
And seeking to hide it, she stooped, seized the basket,
Pretending to ignore the horrible courtesy
Of these invaders. But how could she prevent
What was a German officer's command?

20

The young Lieutenant too had flushed.
Resentment and obedience
Fought in his eyes. Obedience won,
Aided by that self-interest,
Which flourishing on servility,
Grows subtle and original,
And ape of true intelligence.
He thought his Commandant had shown
Some amorous interest in the woman:
Therefore he 'd serve it, though it meant
This insult to his uniform.
One day, the foot that trod him now
Would slip or stumble on the road
Grown so crooked in the Service.
One would be waiting and remembering.

Such a man as this half-hearted
Dreamer and priggish reader of books
Would never master the new Machine.
Yes, one would wait; one would remember.

Meanwhile, lest the heavens should fall,
And the Reich itself be shaken—
Obedience! He snatched up the basket.

22

Maybe, Judas marching to the Garden
Among the soldiers, found the way no longer
Than these few metres measured to the Frenchwoman.
She felt the moments cease, she watched them harden
Into the shape of treachery, time the traitor,
And time the overseer of her action.
How could she cheat this tyrant, change the minutes
To hours, and stretch those hours ever longer
Until a century should intervene
To separate the poplar-shadowed bank
From that stone doorway shadowed now by death?

She knew her agony must not be seen;
But somehow time must be arrested.

‘Father!’

Her heart cried out in silence to the old man
Who peered, seeking her, under the apple-trees.
But then she saw that by him stood another.
It was the lawyer’s wife.

The moments shrank
More cold, more swift. A little cup could hold them,
Time’s distillate, a draught of treachery.
She saw her sister grasp that cup, and drink.

She followed the jackboots ;
 A woman walking to sacrifice,
 Head bent, with eyes downcast.
 The air clung cold about her,
 And weighed upon the grass.
 Slowly, and with ceremony,
 Pace by numbered pace,
 The solemn boy-lieutenant
 Trod the flowers, trod
 The dew-laced pathway, trod
 The road of wrath to come.
 She knew she could do nothing.
 But straining past that knowledge
 Her nerves and will united,
 Dangerously groping
 Past poor human power.
 Prevent! Prevent! Prevent!
 The jackboots on the gravel
 Both omen were, and warning,
 Drawing to decision.

Another moment now,
 And the shadow hidden
 Innocently within,
 As a soul inhabits
 Closer in the body
 When reason's light is doused ;
 One half-moment now,
 Two more jackboot paces,

And the shadow-thrower
Would be seen, and captured.

One more pace—but suddenly
Pride rebelled! The jackboots
Stopped, turned, looked past her,
Threw the basket down
At the moss-green threshold,
And with a boy's contempt
Marched back to the towpath
Where the Captain waited
Already half-forgetting
An incident so small.

23

Stooping to her burden once again
She did not see the illusion for the third
Time, nor its ominous substance, a bird
Wing-spread above its shadow, and less plain,
Which glided from the covered pool, and seemed
To swim with under-water strokes on air,
Making for some invisible landing, where
Gods traffic in the terrors men have dreamed.

Disturbed, maybe, by footsteps at the portal,
The white owl woke, and fled its human shrine
To find some place more fittingly immortal,
Where, with pinions closed again, it might
Stand sentinel by wisdom; half divine,
Half monstrous symbol of the realm of night.

PART II

WISDOM, a tree standing in the sun,
 Must throw its shadow. Wisdom,
 A white owl on the wrist of God
 Spreading her wings to bring judgment,
 Must have some dark forerunner.

Before the gate that boding stood,
 And Marie saw her sister waiting,
 Grey-faced and anguished, tapping
 The crumbled brickwork of the step
 With an impatient foot. 'Marie!'
 She whispered. It was a mother's voice,
 Close and protective. 'Be quick! Quick!'

But Marie had a greater burden;
 The presence by the pool, the watchers
 By the bank. She felt the drag
 Behind her, unsubstantial, strong.
 Each foot now was manacled,
 Trod grass leaden with dew
 And barred with metal beams of sunshine.
 She dared not look back, she dared not look
 Before her, to wonder what had happened,
 What was toward. She heard her father
 Speak in his hesitant voice, its tone
 Flattened in the trance of thought.

He called her too. 'Marie,' again
Crept through the orchard, a warning word
Of fear: Marie, a woman's name,
The universal name, God's mother,
The name upon the hearth, the name
Upon the altar; earth and heaven;
The name, at last, of sacrifice.

2

Approaching, she set down her basket,
And instantly saw her sister's eyes take fire
With cunning and suspicion, instantly smothered.
'The Commandant and his Lieutenant came.
I do not care to work in there alone
While they are near.'

She felt the disbelief
Torture her sister's mind. It was the doubt
Whose poison lay upon the soil of France,
To touch whoever trod there, lime the wings
Of love, if that winged god should come to France
Under such omens, calling forlornly, seeking
The human soul, Psyche, emblem of faith.

3

Through the open door in the wall
Sunlight poured, a golden traffic
Of mote and wing.

It set a halo, a holy ring
Of spiritual fire
About the old man's hair.
From this nimbus of chance light
His eyes looked out, troubled, bewildered,
Searching here, searching there
Beyond the reach of human sight.
He listened, but he did not hear
His elder daughter pleading,
Her voice narrow with passion, thin
From a throat gripped by fingers of fear.

‘Go into the house,’ he said. ‘Go in,
And let me talk with Marie.’

‘But if you talk with Marie,
What then? She too is obstinate
And will never understand. Marie!
It is always Marie! She is free
To come and go as she will,
Not imprisoned like me
And my sister, in motherhood.
Oh Father—this will drive me mad!’
She was not wicked, standing in the sun,
Whipped by the rods of light.
Bowed with fear, impersonally sad,
A mother of French children, she pleaded
Vaguely, as a mortal pleads to God,
Beyond the decent bounds of wrong and right.

'Father, they are offering you freedom,
And safety for us all: a position for you,
Recognizing your age, and what you are.
This is a tribute to your long life's work.
It means protection for your family,
And safety for the children. Father, it is for them!'

She turned her back on her younger, childless sister,
And touched her father where he stood by the wall
Blocking the traffic of bees, that swerved to pass him,
Light from the hive, and heavily returning.

4

He put her hand from his arm
Sadly, and shook his head.
A defaulter from the swarm
Following the daughter's hand,
Paused to rest on his sleeve,
Dragging its panniers, red
With the burden of gathered gold.
'I do not understand,'
At last the scholar said.
'Can freedom be bought or sold?'
He watched the bee take wing,
Stumbling first, then assured
And lost in the loud procession.

Then, turning inward to himself, he pondered;
'There was another meaning to this word

In those young days of Hellas, when Phthia
Was still obscure in Thessaly, the unknown
Village where the seed of wisdom woke,
To spread and flower in Athens, Syracuse,
Tarentum and Cyrene, filling the world
With fragrance that touched the imagination of man
And made him defy the gods. That fragrance was freedom.
Is this the flower that you offer me?’

All summer answered him.
The laughter of the sun,
The apple blossom;
The voice of another France,
Rameau’s cuckoo, twice
In happy mockery
Shouting from afar;
A breath of southern air
Plucking at the poplars
With a music of harps.
Laughter shook the orchard,
And a million petals
Fluttered down, touched
The professor’s beard:
Apple blossom petals,
Pink, and honey-fingered,
Clung about the pedant
Prosing in the orchard.

As they passed through the gate in the garden wall,
Marie paused in the doorway, lingered
There, basket again on her hip,

Awaiting that whisper of chance
Which the hopeful heart for ever has overheard.

She saw two figures walking away
Along the waterside, stage-high
On the path beneath the poplar trees.

The air came sweet again to eye and lip.
Earth, with its own fidelities,
The promise of night, the promise of day,
Sealed them with a sudden, single cry,
An owl's voice for authority.

5

Father and daughters entered the kitchen, to find the lawyer
Leaning over the mother's chair. She sat at the table,
Her hands on the table, staring at nothing, listening to nothing,
Yet hearing enough of his tale to be shaken, to be tortured and
broken
With doubts, and a painful thrusting of hope out of old despair.
'Now *you* must speak!' they heard him whisper, as he
straightened and turned
To greet them. They could not see to his soul, for the light
from the window
Set marbled on his spectacles, made them a mirror
Reflecting conjecture, distrust, fear. His broad face shone
With sweat. 'Tell him he must accept!' said the traitor's voice.

Yvonne, the white-haired serving-woman from the village,
Set down a steaming jug, and stood grimacing at it.
'Coffee!' she whispered, and all the irony of France
Lay on her dry, cracked lips. The notary took the jug,
Filled a cup, tasted, turned abruptly to Yvonne,
And chuckled. A conspirator's laugh shook him, shook
The hand that held the cup, the coffee in the cup,
Shook the web of light mirrored from the liquid,
Making it leap about the ceiling. 'Mother of God!
But this *is* coffee!' He nudged the old woman under her ribs,
But she felt nothing through her armoury of black,
The boned dress of the Catholic peasant. She stared in distaste
And spoke, emphatically not addressing herself to him.
'If one is vigilant, there are ways of getting a little.'
Contempt and hatred overlay the irony.
Then, with a gesture of finality, she wiped
Her hands on her coarse apron, as though soiled with blood.

The traitor dropped his bluff pretence of shared conspiracy.
'Take care!' he said, 'Take care; or it's trouble for us all.'
He drank the coffee. Then with it shining on his lips,
He turned to the old matriarch, to urge her again,
When Yvonne interrupted. She spoke to the lawyer's wife,
Accusation veiled because here was one of the family.
'You are in Montigny. Is it true they are taking the metal,
Robbing the kitchens there? But everything is true of them!'
With this, she began to unhook from the wall the copper sauce-
pans.

Golden sunshine in the kitchen lost its warmth,
Lacking these familiar and sovereign reflectors.

'How should I notice these things while my children are in danger?

Oh, the gross materialism of the world!

France deserves this ignominy. Since the Revolution

Her people have prized nothing but wealth, and worldly comfort.'

The young mother could say no more. She turned in anger, A gesture that accused the whole of guilty France.

Yvonne, close and obstinate, meanwhile gathered her treasure,

Tramping in and out, carrying it away from the kitchen

Piece by piece. 'Take care to hang something else on the hooks,'

Said the tempter, 'or they 'll ask you what you 've taken away!'

'I can look after my own,' she retorted. 'See to your affairs!'

But he understood the peasant, and chuckled with cunning approval,

Then gave himself again to the more important matter,

Wooing by rhetoric where his wife had failed by fear.

6

'Father, distinguished and revered,

Head of our family, a king

In the country of the mind,

It is an honourable thing

The Marshal offers you to-day.

In that knowledge, need you have feared

The venom critics always find

Whenever mortals do or say

Something decisive, definite?

All your life you have stood alone
Above the factions and the cliques,
Respected as a man who seeks
Truth's solitary, sacred light.
You have made the Greek world your **own**.
Now, by this God-given chance
You can unite that world to France.
Since for us the war is over,
We must be jealous for the fame
Of France. We have much to recover.
Our culture, scholarship, and art
Are tainted with political shame.
You, in retirement, had no part
In that disaster. France will learn
New self-respect from your return.

You think you are too old; the Marshal
Is not too old to guide the State
Between the occupying Power
And' our once dangerous Allies.
You likewise must comply with Fate
And in our universities
Serve France at this eleventh hour.'

7

'He means a Rectorship is offered you!'
The angry woman broke through the oration.
'Under the present Government, this brings
Protection from the Germans. You must accept!
Father, you must think of our children's safety.'

The old man looked at her. 'I wish I knew
How to believe in your proposed oblation.
But dare the god of love with fragile wings
Touch the barbarian?' Gabrielle wept,
Cursing the simpleton, meek and uncrafty.

8

The conflict turned to stone;
Tension and strain
Like the Laocoon
Which for two thousand years
Has held all human fears
In sculpture made plain.

So now the chisel-blade
Of circumstance
Carved the frozen air,
Fixed the terror there
In a graven dance
Of timelessness made.

9

Marie, standing apart from the others, saw
With trouble-quicken'd eye,
Pinions beating at the window-pane.
They fluttered through the bounds of natural law,
Half dormant still, kissing her dormant mind,

Waking it to see that god of love
Invoked by her father. Then, on earth again,
She watched a butterfly
Whose wings still damp with sleep
Shivered in the sun.

Light, with shadow instantly behind,
The real and the fantasy,
Closed on each other in her memory,
Two images marrying to one,
Their strange fertility to prove.

She watched the wide-winged fire
Veer in the spiritual storm
Beating between the old man and his wife,
The image of all purified desire,
The god of love, the frail fritillary.
She heard it prompting them to speech,
Whispering some flowerlike word to try
The constancy and faith of each to each,
A code to understanding built through life,
With joy nested in grief to keep it warm,
And years beneath an uneventful sky,
Secret and gradual, in sweet content,
Making their hearts more rich the more they spent.

Every one was waiting for that word.
The old Professor stood within the doorway,
Still saintly with his nimbus from the sun.
His hair and beard, from some unseen caress,
Stirred in the light with little flames of silver.

Furthest from him, sitting in the shadow,
He saw his wife.

‘What do you say, mother?’

He spoke in sadness, but with certainty.

The sounds of morning intervened. A cuckoo
Shouting in the orchard; a bourdon-bee
Cornered in a cranny, angrily buzzing;
Ducks arguing their way between two ponds;
And still, from time to time, that Roland’s horn
Mourning round the curves of the canal:
These recognizable, while, half withdrawn
And falling granted by the human ear,
The overtone of water, air, and earth
Whirling with silent music round the sun.

She smoothed her apron with her troubled hands,
Swayed forward, blindly stared upon the ground,
Then answered him, but did not lift her head.
‘Our son is in their power.’

Gabrielle wept,
Stricken with grief and fear. ‘And my son too,
And Antoinette’s, and all the sons of France.’

20

So, throughout that day
The storm of sorrow,
Deep and primeval mother-love,
Rolled in, to break upon the gentle heart
With strength more vast than anger.

There he stood alone,
Obdurate, rocklike, simple,
Epitome of human thought and will
Dangerously beaten at.

A long life spent among the passions
Of gods and heroes in the fabulous world,
Hellas and Rome set in the poets' cool
And shining crystal of words,
Was now assailed with close and terrible waves,
Currents and tides confused,
Dragging him down
Into the cauldron of uncertainty.

22

Night came with no decision.
All day had conflict raged,
Making that house a miniature of France.
Anger, cunning, deceit,
Instinct grown treacherous,
Simple faith at war with simple fear,
The subtle whisperings
Of terror, the secret voice
Of duty, all contorted in the war
Within a war, a people
Broken in defeat.

Then, toward dusk, with the household gathered again
In the darkening room, the old Professor relented,
Promised to go with his daughter Gabrielle
Into Montigny, for Antoinette to plead.

Marie watched them to the courtyard gate;
The fumbling with the latch beneath the pool
Of shadow settled round the giant acacia.
The breeze had dropped, but still some petals fell
Slowly, seeming suspended in the air,
Each one a lantern of the evening light.
She saw her father bowed under his burden,
Cruelly used by circumstance too heavy,
And too late. The menace of the shadow
Suddenly closed over the bent figure
In that moment pausing at the gate.

He was a stranger to her: strangers too
Were Gabrielle, and the notary, her husband,
The friend of Vichy, the man of unknown creed,
Or none, maybe. Marie stood alone,
Watching them diminish down the road
Toward the bridge so lately desecrated
By the tread of jackboots crossing the canal.

12

Marie stood alone, watching
The last of daylight fall and fail
Behind the poplar grove.

She could not return at once to the searching
Eyes. She saw the night sky fill
With stars. The planet of love,

The mother of the winged god
Who flies invisible by night,
Shone over the low hill.

Slowly Aphrodite, naked
Beauty in a crescent of light,
Tremulous, fragile, pale,

Ventured on her journey, pricking
Lightly over the poisoned sky
Of prostituted France.

Dove-breasted vapours followed, waking
Echoes of rainbow, rising high
Before the queen's advance.

The scholar's daughter could recognize
The immortal wanton, the superb
Giver and taker of love.

From Venus, by habitual ways
She looked for the son, with his arrow and barb
Beyond the poplar grove.

By many a path of childhood seeking
Its familiar symbol and myth
Learned at her father's knee,

She returned to the image of Eros waking,
Ranging the night-world, as a moth
Velvet with secrecy.

So sharp the present indecision,
The conflict between love and shame,
That her mind stood

Midway between event and vision,
Confusing power, form and name
Of human and of god.

23

With that, she too set out for Montigny,
Crossing the bridge in the light of the risen moon:
Crossing, but returning to the parapet
To look along the canal, whose waters lay
Leaden, silent. Suddenly a fish
Leaped, and changed the lead to quicksilver
That lumbered, broke from waves to wavelets
Faster and faster, tipped with chilly fire,
Then overlapped to lead again, and closed
To a smooth heaviness beneath the moon.
Interpreting this incident by means
Of the heart's logic, the reason beyond reason,
She knew herself commanded once again,
Summoned to service. Fearfully, she turned
Back over the bridge, and down by the canal,
Treading the path those fatal men had taken
When day was clean and she had dared to sing.

The trees conspired above her, whispering
In the still night. They glittered in the moon

And shook their little armour, throwing gleams
Of steel across the mirror of the water :
Darkness beneath them, black and absolute,
Broken only by the moonlit stone
Roofing the pool. For the second time that day
She ventured toward it. A nightingale began
To sing in a low branch. She paused close by
The throbbing little body, felt the heat
And passion of that high, lingering cry,
Then the break into a glut of sorrow,
The sound of grief turned to an inward tumult
Surging in the caverns of the heart.
Across the water, sorrow answered sorrow.
Another and another broke restraint
Until the poplar grove beyond the bridge
Was one mad music over the woman creeping
Toward the myth that held the honour of France.

Misled by imagination, she saw the airman
Lurking there, wing-wounded, from a world
Still free, still master of its fate, choosing
Its own, to succour them, to bring the torch
Of glory, for their eyes to follow it
Through this morass of shame and slavery.
The torch! The golden wings! The attributes
Of Eros, lifelong, close, familiar symbols
To the old pedant's daughter. Now the fallen
Airman and god, the actual, the myth,
Fused in the furnace of terror, fed day by day
And night by night with an increasing fear,

A gradual intensity, consuming
All barriers between the separate worlds
Which man inhabits, with sanity for passport.

Hymned by nightingales, she trod the grove
Toward the altar where freedom lay in peril.
She saw the moonlight shining there, an opal
Of cold fire in the shadow under the trees.
She knew that she must worship there, she knew
That she must minister to freedom there,
Offering herself to save the soul of France.

14

The Commandant returned alone,
No Prussian bully in the moonshine.
He was transformed, his head drooping,
Bared to the night. His hands were locked
Behind his back, the nervous fingers
Working together, intertwined.

From time to time he stopped, turned round,
Waited, muttering, then resumed
His way, still with the mind's burden
Poised upon those clutching fingers,
Its bulk upon the bent back.

The weariness of love dragged him
To the Baltic boundary of Europe,
Abusing his muscles with hundreds of miles
In imagination's journey.

His body ached in breast and bone,
Halted, protesting its fatigue.
But that will beyond the will
Whipped it on again, with cords
Knotted in anxiety.

Mind is the torturer of man,
Withdrawing him from pleasure, the full
Satisfaction of the flesh,
Changing the instant lust
To hesitant, fine-drawn
And long-delayed desires
That often reach beyond the grave.

Mind is the maker of promises,
Setting a mortgage upon death
With thought, and golden recollection.

Mind is the maker of love;
Through disappointment, sacrifice,
A thousand cruel uncertainties,
Working on this mother flesh,
This warm immediate earth,
Begetting a child with wing and barb,
The ever-unaccountable
Boy-god, powerful and elusive.

The Commandant returned alone.
 But he was not alone.
 A company of recollection
 Surrounded him with chattering silence,
 Snatches of unheard music,
 The music shared at home in Hanover
 In that great house upon the plains,
 Remote among unchanging forests.

He saw the lakes gold-fringed with sand,
 The wild-fowl rising under the sky,
 Tiny and desolate beneath the clouds
 Gathered at evening with pompous banners,
 Or, at winter daybreak, piling
 Eastward, to overwhelm the sun.

He prayed to that great solitude,
 His birthright, deep within his bones.
 But prayer was inarticulate,
 Shaped by instinct, deeper than conscience.
 Conscience indeed! Conscience alone
 Had driven him to this, the trade
 Hereditary, unquestioned till now.
 His father and his father's father,
 Huntsmen and fighters, holding their land
 And serfs under Valhalla's gods:
 The chase, the trips to Italy,
 Office under the Emperors,
 Marriage and hospitality,

Arrogant life and arrogant death,
The family, the rule of Caste :
These were his inheritance.
Why then this fear of his own kind,
The loneliness amid the triumph
And swagger of the victorious bully ?
For he liked none of this, the outcome
Of his ancestral way of life.
He had seen the trampling of the corn,
The snatching of the widow's vineyard,
The collusion of the professional soldier
With the rigger of markets, the nimble-witted
Financier, creature of one faith,
The faith of gold, and getting gold,
With its cold priesthood of power!

He had seen the new doctrine seize
Upon the throat of Germany,
Strangling the voice of Goethe
And the song of the medieval folk
At the Christmas cradle of God.

Fear of this arrogant ignoramus
Born in the servility between
Two unnecessary wars ;
The brute irregularly fed,
Starved in infancy, debauched
In adolescence, cheated in manhood ;
This brute now in the neighbour's house

To pillage and defile the signs
Of freedom, and the beauty of freedom,
Sweet privacy, and the still small voice
Of individual dignity :
Fear of the weapon in its maw,
The bludgeon of the scientists ;
Fear of the cold efficiency,
The index, the office, the torture chamber,
The knock upon the door by night,
The long memory of revenge,
The judge cringing before the jailer,
The rape of truth, and beauty bleeding :
Fear of all this, fear, fear
By day, by night, poisoning food,
Poisoning thought, poisoning love.

The Commandant returned alone,
A changeling still, child of his house
But a stranger there, and in the world.
He heard the foreign murmur of air
In the French poplars by the canal.
The unfamiliar water gleamed
Suspiciously toward the moon.
He saw a white owl rise above
The bridge, and drop into the shadow
Detectively, seeking its prey.
The warm breath of the fragrant night
Shuddered behind it ; a tiny feather
Floated, where the hunter had touched
A twig ; floated, too light to fall,
Yet, for lack of purpose, falling.

The owl smoothly disappeared
Somewhere under the shining roof
Above the pool where he had seen
The illusion, the figure of his sister,
His twin, the other half of life,
The meaning of all things, the only
Understanding in this world
To which he was misborn, a Prussian
Soldier, with the body and brain
Of a man of contemplation.

16

Hear the fugue of fate,
Theme after theme.
Unwitting, we state
In life or in dream
Theme after theme:
Then learning by rote
Our part in the scheme,
We hear the fugue of fate
And float on the stream,
Each mortal a note
Adding theme after theme
To the flood in full spate,
The fugue of fate.

The young Lieutenant, reared from boyhood in such courses,
 Followed his superior, whom he despised
 As a man of books, and dubious loyalty to the Reich;
 An oldtime aristocrat, not one of the New Order.

He walked upon the field-side of the poplar-trunks
 Along a mossy ledge, the rim's-edge of the canal
 Banked over the swollen roots, then dropping to the level
 Of orchard, corn-patch, meres, and stretches of marshy waste.

He moved like a conspirator. He was a conspirator,
 Reared in an atmosphere of garish melodrama,
 Cut off from the sweet sanity of Europe's faith.
 A wasted generation in the history of man
 Shrank into the shadows of the trees of France
 Where Sisley once had painted, and Delius heard the cuckoo
 Open in spring, heard the same music as that which to-night
 Poured out upon the dogma-deafened and brutal ears
 Of this be-medalled barbarian, so clever and cunning.
 More clever than moonlight, more cunning than the crescent
 Fire from Venus in her quarter of the summer heaven,
 The fox in grey-green uniform, from tree to tree
 Glided unseen, unseeable, a shade in shadow,
 Stealthy, persistent, forever watching as he went.

He watched the unsuspecting figure of his Captain
 Who, though he paused from time to time, looked back, prepared
 To call but did not call, was really unexpectant,
 Thinking the young blood off on some youthful indiscretion
 In the back streets of Nemours, returned like a dog to its vomit.

A dangerous dog! Perversely trained to the savage hunt
And misrule of the pack, member of a million
Booted and buttoned in evil, groomed in the habit of hatred,
Snarling as one, barking in unison, biting together.

But now he followed, working alone, steadily followed,
Flitting from trunk to trunk, avoiding the patches of moonlight
Which filtered here and there through the deep tunnel of shade.

Returned to the place where that morning he had been degraded
Before the pretty Frenchwoman, he felt cold anger return
Almost deliciously, fixing and focusing suspicion.
He pressed the more intently forward, but skilled and silent
Still, deadly now, waiting for the expected to happen.
Suddenly a white owl, its meditation broken
By his approach on the landward side of the poplars,
Widened its wings, a ghost arm-spread, shaking its shroud
In his face. Startled, he caught his indrawn breath in a cry,
Mastering by rule this symptom of fear. He saw the bird
Glide before him, hardly moving the air with its motionless
wings.

He saw it veer, sink below the bank, disappear
Beneath the slab of moonlight roofing the washing-pool.

With the instinct of the hunter coming to the kill, he stopped,
Waited. A moment passed, marked by the pulsing birdsong
And the venomous beat of blood in his body. He waited, eager
But patient, assured now of a quicker way to promotion.
He saw the Frenchwoman come from the bridge; he saw the
Captain

Greet her on the towpath, by the little footway to the pool.

He noted every gesture of his destined victims ;
How the Captain pointed to the pool ; how the woman
Responded nervously, shaking her head, seeming to urge him
Away from this place, because of something she would conceal.

18

Confronted with gentleness, a voice subdued
To the leaves' whisper, and almost overborne
By the loud nightingales along the water,
Marie stared at the officer. His hand
Flashed through a shaft of moonlight to his head.
He might be warding off a visible threat,
A blow, a sword-thrust, a mass of falling rock !
Here was no harsh, authoritative invader.
He spoke as though in supplication, humbly,
Reverently, with his hand before his eyes.

'This is the second time ! Twice in one day
To see her here ! I heard the scissors fall
This morning. And now the light has caught your hair
In some familiar way that startled me.
I saw you turn your head when you heard me coming,
And it was she, her movement, not a stranger's !
Do you come to warn me ?'

Then, ashamed
Of this play with phantoms, he tried to reassume
The posture of authority. How pitiful
It seemed to the quick wits of the Frenchwoman.
She heard him warn her of the curfew order ;

But the admonitory voice still trembled,
Shaken with some disturbance from the deep,
The individual soul behind the mask.
Recognizing his failure, he compromised
Half-way between this duty, and the dream
That poured the wild realities of love
Over his moulded, military mind,
Like perfume over granite. He tried to cover
That moment's self-betrayal by pretence
Of kindness, but in this second posture he failed.
The kindness was sincere. The woman before him,
Unknown proxy for an absent love,
Called up that mystery of tenderness
Which love can never disguise, nor turn aside.
Within that personal light she stood revealed.

How often we intend to cheat, but do not!
Cold resolutions of the political mind
Sharpened upon the steel of principle,
Again and again are blunted by the heart.

Marie looked at the hated uniform,
But saw the man behind it. She bowed her head,
Seeking to veil the pity in her eyes.
'You must go back,' he said, 'before the patrol
From Montigny meets the water-guard
Here upon the bridge. The English airman
Being still at large, the penalties are doubled.
Quickly now!' He raised his arm and pointed
Down the bank, beyond the washing-pool

To the path through the orchard. The heavy moonlight
lay
Bright yet sombre on the bridal trees
That stood, each isolated, drenched in perfume,
Waiting the consummation. The nightingales
Sang in one rapturous choir the prelude of love.

‘Look!’ he said, ‘a white owl in the roof!
There, in the old stone hut covering the pool.
I’ll come with you, and we can find his nest.’

29

Terror is illusion ; fear
Makes each hour a year,
Peoples desert lands
With murderous hands.
Terror too is cunning,
Sets the lapwing running,
Makes the cringing lion
Seem the king of beasts.
Fear created Zion
And man’s holy feasts.
Terror is the shadow thrown
Where courage like a tree has grown.
Fear is the dark and haunted grove
Through the holy woods of love.
Fear and terror loom behind
Faith’s candle shining in the mind.

Instantly, terror-driven,
 Fearless in fear,
 Marie responded, found herself pleading,
 Disguising her purpose, but instantly pleading.

Turning her back on the hiding-place
 Where the fugitive lurked,
 She appealed to the Commandant, craving permission
 To go to Montigny, turning permission

Cleverly to something
 Personal, close,
 A compact in friendship, given and taken,
 Sentimentally given, cleverly taken.

Pitying his illusion,
 Unaware of her own,
 Believing it right thus to use friendship,
 Yet scorning herself for this pitying friendship.

'I must go with you,' he said,
 'For you may meet the patrol.
 Come, we will follow them now,
 Your father and sister. The other?
 Ah yes, I know him, the lawyer
 Who does the liaison work
 With the new officials from Vichy.
 He may help to save you from trouble.

And your father, will he accept
The offer so skilfully fished for
By your brisk young brother-by-marriage?’

From behind this cynical cloak
Glancing furtively, shyly,
He saw the likeness still;
The pallor, the brown hair,
The eyes half-clouded with thought.
He saw his sister’s trick
Of under-lip indrawn
And teeth just touching its ripeness.
Once more the blood to his head
Flooded, and beat there madly.
He was insane with love
As all are insane with love
Who crave to give and cannot,
Who long to possess and dare not,
Because of the ever-elusive,
As all are insane with love
On the rack of absence, with time
To wind the winch of anguish
Through faith too tightly drawn.

22

Marie watched him, her terror and fear
Surprised and eased, but doubting still
This change of impulse in her foe.

Studying him as he stood near,
She saw the malady of will

Behind his eyes beat to and fro
Like gulls blown wildly in the wake
Of one of those mad storms that blow
Worldwide, then suddenly pause and break.

She saw subside the maddened wings
Behind his eyes, and in that lull
She too found calmness, smooth and deep,
Such as resolution brings,
Authoritative and beautiful.

Let dread of self-betrayal sleep,
She thought, he did not read my face
And see the startled horror leap
As he pointed to that hiding-place.

23

Quietly, the shadow began to glide
Behind them as they walked toward the bridge.
The moon made sword-blades of the glittering sedge.
Both moved within a prison, side by side,
Its jailer he who followed, evil-eyed,
Its bars the moonbeams to the water's edge,
The moon-medallions a prison-badge
To mark two victims more for homicide.

The boyish murderer was now content
To let them cross the bridge. He had not missed
The woman's dreadful effort to dissuade
The Captain from his bird-lover's intent
To leave the path and seek the white owl's nest
Where Eros, the young airman, might be laid.

PART III

ROUND Montigny in a sickle curve
 The river flowed, dividing meadow and wood,
 Hardly approachable through beds of reed
 Where lazy pools of half-returning waters
 Still trembled in their hiding-place of rushes,
 Shaken by the thunder of the weir.

The weir! It was an army forever passing,
 Changing its uproar as the seasons fed
 Or stinted it; changing but never ceasing,
 Sometimes shaking earth with triumphant tread;
 Shrinking through the droughts of autumn, lower
 Than the whine of midges over the drying mud.
 But through the years this water-music echoed
 The equally eternal and various
 Moods of humanity. So now it voiced
 The soul of man weeping through the night.

Antoinette, the eldest daughter,
 Ravaged with uncertainty,
 Pleaded next. Her sunken eyes,
 Wounded creatures crouched in a cave,
 Needed no other eloquence.
 Too weak to add to their appeal,

She stood before her father, hungry
In grief, insatiable for news
That never came. She lived on silence
And slowly starved; flesh and blood,
Spirit and mind in the low fever
Of uncertainty, with the concealed
Delirium whirling in her brain,
Visions of indignity,
Sickness, misery and torture,
She saw her husband, but she dared not
See him, for fear of what she saw;
Somewhere, through terrifying vagueness,
In a prison-camp in Germany.

The small hotel, crowded with women
Herding their children out of Paris,
Offered no privacy. The daughters
Led their father through the garden,
A sloping lawn to the river-edge
By a landing-stage walled in laurels,
And a boat-house beneath a giant
Syringa bush pallid with blossom.

3

Half-way across the water meadows to the town,
Marie and the Commandant met the patrol.
They were challenged, he gave the countersign, and spoke
fiercely
In the harsh military fashion. Heel-clicking,

Salutes, guttural throat-noises, eyes averted,
And the patrol was gone. The officer and the captive
Were man and woman again. They too resumed **their way**,
Silent, but apprehensive of the world's opinion,
He of his fellow soldiers', she of the village folk's.

A red-pelted hare, mad belatedly in maytime,
Sat in a patch of moonlight at the end of a tree-tunnel,
Through whose darkness the incongruous couple approached
Montigny.

Suddenly the long-eared fantasist began to dance,
Drumming the dusty road with its scut, then leaping high
In the air, beating with its forepaws, as though helpless with
laughter.

Little spirals of dust like sacrificial smoke
Rose round its antics at the altar of insanity.
The silent night was filled with an illusion of sound,
Invisible choirs of mockery marking the beat of the dance
In which this zany of March derided the daffodil pods.

Alarmed by the advancing tread the dancer fled,
And the road was empty again, the spirals of dust subsided.
The only traffic now was the swift and myriad odours
Rushing to meet the newcomers; the smell of river water
At night, an ancient smell from lost, pre-human ages;
The near and warmer rapture of the apple orchards;
The comfortable stench of farm-yards; the tang of a fox;
The night-dew on young nettles: none distinguishable
To senses dulled with trouble, but in a rich confusion
Pouring over their mortal faculties an immortal
Reminder of healing.

Neither man nor woman spoke
Of these intangible evidences, nor of the matter
Close at their hearts, the responsibility of vision,
Realities created in the mind alone,
Mountainous burdens of duty and the mad conscience
That will not rest in the weight of this world, but must build
Others, more directly held in fief from God.

Walking side by side, sleeve touching sleeve in the moonlight,
They came to Montigny in silence, the sound of the weir
Gradually swelling, sleepy, but ominous and watchful.
A halt at the gate of the garden. Then the Commandant spoke.
His voice was indistinct, half lost in the roar of the weir
And that louder clamour among the boulders of the mind
Where thought's Niagara falls and foams, from birth to death.

4

See the bridge across the chasm,
A frail gossamer of speech
To carry over the abysm
All the sustenance and treasure
That the soul of man must measure
From the ever-out-of-reach.

By this less than silken thread
Thinner than the spider weaves,
Both the living and the dead
Cross where primal chaos tumbles,
And the ancient horror rumbles
Under the triumph man achieves.

So very little, yet so much
That from father unto son,
Above the menace men may touch
In community of spirit,
And across the gulf inherit
All the human race has won.

5

'Do you understand? I am powerless to protect you;
As helpless as you are! Unless you keep curfew,
All of you suffer, your father and mother,
Even your sisters and their young children.
Germany rules; the world must obey her.
There is no way out, but by willing submission.'

He spoke swiftly, stumbling after the words
As though to recall them, change them for others
More true to intention. But the effort failed.
He wanted to tell her of that distant garden,
The sister he loved and had left to die
By the orphaned lake where the sand and laurels
Year-long stretched in funereal mood.

Deeper even than this reminiscence,
There clamoured for words the half-unconscious
Acceptance of mystery, faint recognition
Of this likeness that deluged his heart with terror
Haunting the susceptible gothic mind
With echoes and shadows from worlds half guessed at,

Mighty with power to undermine
The Teutonic Reich, as the Catacombs
Once bored under Rome, and brought it down.

Challenged by this, the lifelong divided
Baltic lordling and dreamer of dreams
Struggled in vain to tell this Frenchwoman
Of substitute love, of the soul's proxy,
Passion devoid of desire to possess,
Humility touching on worship, and burning
Lamps at an inward, invisible shrine.

'Persuade your father to work with us,' he said
Returning to the gate. He raised his hand,
About to salute, but glancing to right and left
Furtively, despairingly, he touched her sleeve,
And trembled as he touched. Marie could see
The sinking moonlight gleaming in his eyes,
Robbing them of authority. The face
Was haunted, it already belonged to death.
She saw a stranger to this living world
Of harsh brutality and rule by force.
Here was a shadow in the gentle realm
Of all things lost, where recollection resigns
In tenderness, compassion, and regret.

Moved by pity which she dared not grant,
Marie turned aside. He saw her lips
Attempt to speak, but fail. Then the familiar
Indrawing of the underlip again
Disturbed him. She felt the hand upon her sleeve
Clasp, then fall away, leaving her arm

As though some wild thing had alighted **there**
Panting with terror, but resuming flight,
Its claw-mark on the flesh a seal of fear.

At that moment another patrol passed.
Its leader flashed a torch, but seeing the **Captain**
Thus occupied, he marched his men away.

This interruption called the wandering spirit
Down to captivity. The French woman
And German officer watched the frontiers **rise**
Between them. He spoke again, more **urgently**;
'Remember! You must stay here for the **night**:
Not risk a second journey after curfew.'
More he dared not say. His tortured **spirit**
Shone lurid on his words, a sunset gleam
On storm-clouds. He saluted, and was **gone**.

6

Directed to the garden, Marie stood
On the lawn's edge. For evil or for good,
She knew what lay before her, all the **spent**
Stale pleadings, the conventional argument
Frozen and formal, the reproach implied
By sisters mad with fear, and a lawyer who lied.
The mist from off the river touched her skin
With fingers of foreboding. She heard the thin
Wing-music of midges prophesying June.
She heard, but did not hear, the sleepy tune
Lagging behind the tumbling of the weir.

All sounds now came belated to her ear,
Debarred by thought. For an eternity
Of moments, no evidence of ear or eye
Entered the sanctuary where she prayed
In wordless agony, that process made
By all religious rituals to be
The union, the crowning mystery.
For body, mind and soul are fused, are wrought
Into a universe by the act of thought,
Which instantly annihilates the three
Divergent aspects of the trinity;
Puts heaven, earth and hell within the span
Of nature's changeling, individual man.
Thought, when supreme, is greater than its sum.
Its mathematics, as occasions come,
Work in dimensions and through forces blown
Cloudlike from those oceans still unknown
Whose storms we hear far off, whose tides control
The shore-borne traffic of the human soul.

A sound of weeping by the river bank
Broke the spell. Marie's vision sank
Into the neighbourhood of the April night.
Her eyes resumed their blind and normal sight,
Her ears were deafened once again with hearing.
She heard the music of the river veering
Around its monotone, to a rhythm controlled
From some unearthly world, so calm, so old
That all mad harmonies of joy and rage
Were lost in the level counterpoint of age.

The odour of the moving water crept
Into the summer perfumes where they slept
Above the sleeping flowers. It salted earth
With recollections of that dim pre-birth
Which lingers through our childhood, and maybe
Gives to old age its last humility.

The moon was drawing westward. Silver shone
The weir, firm and smooth, a polished bone,
A wall of water motionless as rock.
It stood within a seething, writhing shock
Of serpents, on whose fanged and venomous madness
The sleep-inducing moonlight looked with sadness,
And tried, but tried in vain, to veil the sight
With half-transparencies of broken light,
A lullaby made visible, a pale
Fabric coloured out of music's scale.

It was her sister Antoinette who wept.
Crossing the lawn and gravel, Marie stepped
Down to the landing-stage. Each sodden plank
Was plucked by little ripples that lipped the dank
Underside, which moss and green-slime cloaked,
Where bull-frogs in their mating concourse croaked.

A pleasure-boat was moored there; in it seated
A woman, *bent and utterly defeated*.
Gently, as though bewildered, the small craft
Nudged and rubbed and creaked against the raft

Where the Professor and his escort stood
Beneath a willow canopy, a hood
That curtained them in newly-broken gold.

Marie looked at them. Her mind went cold
With misery. She saw in that small group
The last abandonment of human hope.
The figure in the boat, dear Antoinette
The well-beloved, the soul without regret,
The gay of heart who lived and reigned a queen,
Taught by the gods at birth to be serene;
Dear Antoinette, bowed down, weeping alone,
Lost in a universe no more her own!
Overwhelming wordless eloquence
Stronger than Gabrielle's angry arguments
Flowed from the very posture of such grief.
Marie knew there could be no relief
From this. Her father, who had found a way
To keep all importunity at bay,
Each plea through politics or family,
Could not look on and see a spirit die;
Dear uncomplaining Antoinette, the brave,
Always more rich in love the more she gave.

7

Marie approached no further. Stepping aside,
She waited in the shadow of the laurels,
Defeated. She watched the moon grow large and touch
The western woods, heroic as it sank.

She saw her father so, a lonely figure
Ennobled by his selfless resignation,
This sacrifice for his own honour
For one who would not plead with him to **do it**,
But sat alone, fighting her lost battle
And dying inwardly from wounds of grief.

No birds sang near the river: only the weir
Raving as a witless madman raves
Sunk in unremembered trouble. The moon
Went down, and darkness filtered through the stars.
The whole world now was shadow. Light withdrew
Behind its hood of petal, flesh and stone.
And glimmered there, setting the shapes of things
To mark an earth not totally destroyed.

The old man left his daughter and her husband,
And leaning over the boat, touched Antoinette.
All were ghost-figures in a world of ghosts,
Groping for more than they could understand.
'My dear,' he said; and Marie heard his voice
Broken in the darkness, feeling blindly
Toward her soul. 'I will accept the offer;
On the condition that parole be given
To bring your husband home.'

Marie shrank
Further into the darkness under the laurels,
Step by step retreating upon herself
Into a solitude made absolute
By this surrender. She dared not look again.
She dared not think, for fear she might accuse

Her father of the sin that was no sin,
The worst ill deed of all, that done with knowledge,
Godlike detachment, for another's sake.
With senses sharpened in this trance of thought,
She heard the waters open to a roar
Like brass proclaiming this new dispensation,
This change of dynasty. The gentle night
Went down before the tumult in her mind,
Dragging the universe. Then all subsided
And left the stars and flowers at their stations,
And her amid them, born a second time,
Inheriting this kingdom. Resolute,
Crowned with her new authority, she moved
Disguised through the tree-shadows. Reaching the house,
She mingled with the guests, and still compelled
By this new light, the lamp within her mind,
She borrowed from the inn some bread and wine,
A towel to roll them in, and a small basket
In which to offer this dangerous sacrament
Beside the pool, for her the shrine of Eros,
Where she believed the English airman hid.

8

Quick! Quick!
Count the beat
Of marching feet.
Add the sum
As they come,
Of tyranny's arithmetic.

Tramp! Tramp!
All as one,
Freedom gone.
On they roll,
Death's patrol,
To crush the rebel, douse the lamp.

Thud! Thud!
Smash the door,
Tread the floor.
Man or mouse
Shall have no house
Now that public Moloch's god!

Out! Out!
Privacy
Is a lie,
Reason
Treason.
Learn the slogan, learn the shout!

Crush! Crush!
Tame the wild,
Train the child.
Let the mother
Sing another
Lullaby than 'Hush! Hush!'

Boom! Boom!
Let no diet
Of sweet quiet

Feed the mind
Of mankind.
Individual, hear your doom!

Quick! Quick!
Louder beat
The stamping feet.
Add the sum
As they come,
Of the mob's arithmetic!

9

Biting his finger-nails to the quick, the Lieutenant stands
Eaten within by trained, strengthened, perverted passion,
Waiting by the bridge, stamping up and down,
Up and down on foreign ground to maintain his courage.

Triumph to-night has dulled the familiar, anxious gnawing.
He sees a new security within his grasp;
Promotion, a step nearer the Leader, a chance to destroy
This dangerous individual, the Commandant,
Whom he hates without knowing he hates, for causes beyond
his ken.

Waiting by the bridge, he sees the moon go down.
The poplar trees draw close together, almost moved
From whispering to outcry, a murmur of open rebellion.
He sees their shapes outlined against the western sky
Where bronze halations tremble, after the moon has dropped.

The air begins to shift. The night's conspiracy
Adds nothing unto nothing. Some of the brightened stars
Grow dull again, resume their fire, then disappear.
The trees are now in open cry, their voices shrill
And rapid. Then the agitation falls away,
And raindrops, with their little velvet footsteps, run
Along the leaves, the grass, the waters, silent on the dust.

The shower passes; and a planet reappears.
The Lieutenant, from his shelter under the arch of the bridge,
Comes up to the road again. He sees the hour grows late.
The Town Patrol and the River Patrol are due to return,
But he hears nothing except the aftermath of the shower,
The last drops sliding from leaf to leaf, down to the earth.
Frogs in the brackish dykes on the landward side of the banks
Again take up their croaking, creaking like cracked leather;
And somewhere in the marsh a muffled nightjar drums.
These, the multitudinous, the tread of night,
The myriad-footed army of freedom, the hosts of summer
Moving against the total mastery of ice
And uniform of winter, these are all he hears
Patiently advancing against his perverted youth.
Fear chills him again. He curses the noisy silence,
The soft, caressing atmosphere of decadent France.

Bring what I understand, he prays to his brittle god,
Bring soldiers drilled to the word of command, with eyes
directed
To duty. But after the wordless, mindless prayer, instinct,
Since boyhood overtrained, breaks from its restraint

And rages, with tusks to earth, in the forest of his soul,
Rooting for luscious pain, lusting for taste of blood.
Stamping his feet upon the bridge, he treads the world,
Sagittarius the stag, savagely tossing his antlers.

10

Nothing is said
With the tread, tread
Of the feet.
Heel and toe,
Machines in a row,
Shining complete,
Polished and neat.
Silence has fled,
Beating instead
In the tread, tread
Of the feet.

No human word.
Only the guard,
Ten men as one.
The nightingale's gone;
The mouse and frog
Seek earth, seek bog.
Stars, one by one,
Shrink inward and shun
An earth feigning dead
To the tread, tread
Of the guard.

The something less than god upon the bridge
 Heard the patrols approaching. Rage and fear
 Subsided as authority drew near.
 Once more the confidence of privilege
 Calmed him. He preened his uniform, and fingered
 His lips, to make them firm and adamant.
 Here to his grasp was all that he could want.
 But still within his soul the terror lingered.
 They neared, and met. The formal words were said,
 No incident reported. After this
 The officer should salute them, and dismiss
 Each to resume its clockwork beat. Instead
 He took six men, as one would take a tool,
 And set his hidden trap behind the pool.

The Commandant returned to his Headquarters
 And sat in solitude. He tried to work,
 Sorting the day's accumulation of forms.
 The church clock struck eleven. One by one
 The aged, half-broken mouthings of the bell
 Rolled over the town and echoed from the river.
 He counted each of them, and heard it float
 Like memory away, the recollection
 Of time itself, with every private treasure

Hoarded from the past against the harsh
And too-insistent horrors of to-day.
He saw the plains of Poland, the roads of France
Blocked with civilians under the German bombers.

The imagination of the thinking man
Fled from this, to seek a sanctuary
In earlier scenes; the garden in the North
With Christmas snows untrodden. He saw the room,
Threadbare, yet rich with vanished generations,
And lying amid a confusion of books—his sister.
She was reading aloud. He cared not what she said:
The voice was enough, hesitant with thought
And habit of solitude. He heard her pause
To cough, regain her breath, ignoring, the break
With a grave dignity that struck to his heart.
How gracious the lamplight on her hair! Disease
Could not impair that beauty. He saw it now,
A thousand miles away. He saw the hollow
Under her throat, the blood-pulse in its shadow
After the struggle for breath. 'Now let me read,'
He cried. So close, so vivid was the illusion,
That he cried the words aloud, and broke the trance.

But the agony remained, the craving to stand
Protecting her, driving death away,
Holding her to life with tenderesses
Infinite and sleepless. But now the wolves
Ranged unopposed, approaching from the forest,

Curdling the snow. He felt them drawing near
Across the park, to prowling about the house,
Their eyes glinting coldly under the moon.

So, crossing and re-crossing between two worlds,
He lost command of both. He could not work,
He could not dream. The torture of indecision
Drove him, still on the edge of fantasy,
To seek the place where he had seen her standing
Dew-bathed, restored to health and life and laughter,
With a basket on her hip in the dappled light
Amid a flight of petals by the pool.
But now she stood in danger. He must hurry,
And stand between her and the wolves of death.

13

Waiting now! The earth is waiting
After the moon has gone.
The rhythm of the night alone
Bears what fate is contemplating,
The unknowable, but known.

Over our clarity of thought
Broods God's shapeless cloud.
Through all action willed and wrought
By confusion of our blood,
Shines the starlight mind of God.

Opposite, and thus completing
All our pain and joy,
Stands the enigmatic boy,

Blindfold, yet by vision meting
Decision through the arrows fleeting
From his dangerous toy.

After the moonshine and the shower,
Cooled with starlight, damp
With the rain's close, fragrant power,
Earth is waiting. And love's lover
Comes, her faith her faithless lamp.

14

Night was luminous with rain. Each drop,
Shrinking to pear-shape from the humid cloud,
Carried some faint reflection from the stars,
A tiny moon to them; or shone as pearl
With powdery light caught from the Milky Way.
By number, not by strength, they lit the earth,
And Marie trod the road from Montigny
Guided by a myriad of lamps.

They made a music too, a music of mirrors,
Discords of light resolving instantly
Into the steady unison of rain,
A voice, a touch, calling and caressing,
Urgent as the mission in her heart.
Beside the road she saw another fire
Colder than the rain, the little lanterns
Lighted by glow-worms at the shrine of love.

The fear that lurks in all brave resolution
Had frozen every thought. Her mind was **fixed**
Toward one purpose, only half-divined.
In this strange but universal trance
The world's great deeds are done by man or beast,
Under the authority of instinct
When gods or monsters seize the reins of thought
And drive us as they will, beyond our power,
Blinding us, that we may reach the goal.

As Marie approached the shrine, old earth **responded**
With ampler offerings to love's ritual.
The perfume of the honey-blossom deepened
Through the distribution of the rain:
Belated daffodils, faint for the underworld,
Half-distinguishable odours of death,
Enriched love's body with their ghostliness.
The grasses and the moss, the insignificant
Flowers that the bee pretends to pass
But turns to, and finds in them its greatest **treasure**,
All these combined to offer their oblation,
Humble, but all-pervasive. Marie walked
Already robed and priested to love's shrine,
Unconscious of the sanctity which night
Had put upon her; the glow-worm lamps,
With dew for a dalmatic. In her arms
She carried bread and wine, the universal
Symbol of love, and of love's sacrifice.

The Commandant first reached the pool. He stopped
 Beneath the trees, and watched the gleams that dropped
 Heavily from the leaves and broke across
 The path, loud on the stone, silent on the moss.

Some swift intelligence between his two
 Divided selves, now told him what to do.
 He stood behind a judas-tree, to wait
 For what might come. He did not hesitate,
 Or question this deceptive certainty
 Born of heart-sickness for a northern sky
 Where love lay bleeding. He could see the stone
 But dimly now. Although the moon was gone,
 The stone gleamed faintly, for the air was light
 After the rain had made the stars more bright
 And burnished every surface till there shone
 A star-bright replica from leaf and stone.

He heard her footstep on the bridge. He heard
 The dampness as she turned into the furred
 And mossy path between the dripping bushes
 And the canal-bank blurred with water-rushes.
 He heard her come: suddenly the night
 Showed where she walked through a diffusion of light
 Caught from the microscopic lustres thrown
 Across the watery air like star-dust blown.
 He saw her unprotected. He saw her lost
 And unaware, this other self, this ghost
 Approaching him, familiar yet strange,
 Forever close, forever out of range.

Then seeing him, she stopped before the pool.
Silence fell about her. Only the cool
Drip, drip, dropping from leaf to moss.
He tried to speak to her. He moved across
The portal, breaking through the dripping cordon
To touch her hand, and take the sacred burden,
The basket with the bread and wine. They stood
Facing each other above the holy food.

‘You knew I should come back?’ she said. ‘I knew,’
He answered, gravely. ‘Because I have known you
Since life began.’ She could not understand,
But let him take her once more by the hand,
And watched him set the basket down behind
The corner-stone, for the lost god to find,
The god in any winged disguise, by chance
A white owl, or an airman down in France.

‘My father has agreed,’ she said. ‘I heard
Them in the garden. . . .’ But suddenly a word
Shoots from the darkness: then the triggers click.
He leaps in front of her, ‘Come quick! Quick!’
And seizes her, and tries to make her run.
But on all sides they face a levelled gun.

Action is ever present. Action is now,
The storm beneath which love and thought must bow.
Silence again. Then the Lieutenant’s shout—
And Eros stands revealed beyond all doubt.

Now all things are changing, earth
 Destroys itself in a new birth.
 Mountains, as was prophesied,
 Vanish, and the seas have dried.
 Corn is withered, and no green
 Leaf upon the tree is seen.
 Silent, lifeless in light's glare
 The moon-scape of the world lies bare.

Time runs down, and as it ceases,
 Star-denuded space releases
 All that has been, all that is,
 All our future histories.
 In this break of logic's chain
 Cause and effect no more remain
 Dictators of our destiny.

The mathematics of the sky
 Lose their cog-wheeled potency,
 And incalculable slumber
 Seals the eye of godlike Number;
 Godlike, but not yet the son
 Of the shell-borne beauty blown
 Out of spindrift, out of foam
 To the soul of man, her home.

Now the moment comes for all
 Religions' final festival;

The trial, the torture, the last breath
Of God in man, the deathless death;
The sojourn in the sepulchre;
The miracle of bones that stir
Within the cerecloth; the great stone
Rolled back, and one who walks alone
Still faithful through this dark and damp
Solstice of life, bearing a lamp.

27

The empty shrine is ready to receive
Love's last illusion, love's last offering.
Here is the cause why death shall have no sting
For such as these two victims, who achieve
No material victory, yet live
Beyond their folly and loss of everything.
Wisdom, the white owl, has taken wing.
Pray that the executioner be brief.

Pray, but even as the ambush bites,
Forget to pity them, for they have found
The lover whom they sought, the self made whole,
The god unseen through all life's anguished nights.
Now someone moves across the blood-stained ground.
'Tis Psyche, lamp in hand, the immortal soul.

BOOKS BY RICHARD CHURCH

Poetry.

THE FLOOD OF LIFE	1917
HURRICANE	1919
PHILIP	1923
THE PORTRAIT OF THE ABBOT	1926
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THE SAMPLER	1942

Essays:

MARY SHELLEY	1928
CALLING FOR A SPADE	1939
EIGHT FOR IMMORTALITY	1941
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BRITISH AUTHORS	1943
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A SQUIRREL CALLED RUFUS	1941
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