ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

Sonnet

She took the dappled partridge flecked with blood,
   And in her hand the drooping pheasant bare,
   And by his feet she held the woolly hare,
   And like a master painting where she stood,
   Looked some new goddess of an English wood.
   Nor could I find an imperfection there,
   Nor blame the wanton act that showed so fair—
   To me whatever freak¹ she plays is good.

Hers is the fairest Life that breathes with breath,
   And their still plumes and azure eyelids closed
   Made quiet Death so beautiful to see
   That Death lent grace to Life and Life to Death
   And in one image Life and Death reposed,
   To make my love an Immortality.

ca. 1830

From Maud¹

Part 1

6

* * *

5

Ah, what shall I be at fifty
   Should Nature keep me alive,

1. Prank.
1. Tennyson described this experimental long poem as a “monodrama,” in which a speaker tells his story in a sequence of short lyrics, in varying meters—a method that requires the reader to fill in the events of the
If I find the world so bitter
When I am but twenty-five?
Yet, if she were not a cheat,
If Maud were all that she seemed,
And her smile were all that I dreamed,
Then the world were not so bitter
But a smile could make it sweet.

* * *

Perhaps the smile and tender tone
Came out of her pitying womanhood,
For am I not, am I not, here alone
So many a summer since she died,
My mother, who was so gentle and good?
Living alone in an empty house,
Here half-hid in the gleaming wood,
Where I hear the dead at midday moan,
And the shrieking rush of the wainscot mouse,
And my own sad name in corners cried,
When the shiver of dancing leaves is thrown
About its echoing chambers wide,
Till a morbid hate and horror have grown
Of a world in which I have hardly mixed,
And a morbid eating lichen fixed
On a heart half turned to stone.

action on the evidence of the speaker's shifting emotional states. The speaker is a young man, living alone in
the country, whose disillusionment after his father's suicide has left him full of a bitterness that borders on
madness. He is restored to sanity and intense happiness when he discovers that Maud, the beautiful daughter
of a local landowner, accepts his love for her. Our selections focus on the stages of this love affair. In the early
sections he is fearful of love itself (“And most of all would I flee from the cruel madness of love”), and he is
suspicious that Maud is stony hearted and will make a fool of him. When she accepts his proposal, he is, at
first, deliriously exultant but, later, serene and secure. Subsequent sections of the poem (not printed here)
show how the resolution of his problems is shattered when he loses Maud after killing her brother in a duel.
Eventually he finds a fresh resolution by enlisting to fight against Russia in the Crimean War.

Tennyson called the poem “a little Hamlet, the history of a morbid, poetic soul, under the blighting influ-
ence of a recklessly speculative age.”

2. On a previous day he had encountered Maud and was surprised by her smiling at him.
I have played with her when a child;  
She remembers it now we meet.  
Ah, well, well, well, I may be beguiled  
By some coquettish deceit.  
Yet, if she were not a cheat,  
And Maud were all that she seemed,  
And her smile had all that I dreamed,  
Then the world were not so bitter  
But a smile could make it sweet.

She came to the village church,  
And sat by a pillar alone;  
An angel watching an urn  
Wept over her, carved in stone;  
And once, but once, she lifted her eyes,  
And suddenly, sweetly, strangely blushed  
To find they were met by my own;  
And suddenly, sweetly, my heart beat stronger  
And thicker, until I heard no longer  
The snowy-banded, dilettante,  
Delicate-handed priest intone;  
And thought, is it pride? and mused and sighed,  
“No surely, now it cannot be pride.”

O let the solid ground  
Not fail beneath my feet  
Before my life has found  
What some have found so sweet;  
Then let come what come may,  
What matter if I go mad,  
I shall have had my day.
2
Let the sweet heavens endure,
    Not close and darken above me
Before I am quite quite sure
    That there is one to love me;
Then let come what come may
To a life that has been so sad,
I shall have had my day.

12

1
Birds in the high Hall-garden
    When twilight was falling,
Maud, Maud, Maud, Maud,
    They were crying and calling.

2
Where was Maud? in our wood;
    And I, who else, was with her,
Gathering woodland lilies,
    Myriads blow together.

3
Birds in our wood\(^3\) sang
    Ringing through the valleys,
Maud is here, here, here
    In among the lilies.

4
I kissed her slender hand,
    She took the kiss sedately;
Maud is not seventeen,
    But she is tall and stately.

5
I to cry out on pride
    Who have won her favor!

---
3. The wood in the valley of the speaker’s small country estate. Here the “little birds” (as Tennyson called them in a note) are responding, in a sort of duet, to the caws of the rooks in the garden of Maud’s family estate.
Maud

O Maud were sure of Heaven
   If lowliness\(^4\) could save her.

   6
I know the way she went
   Home with her maiden posy,
For her feet have touched the meadows
   And left the daisies rosy.\(^5\)

   435
7
Birds in the high Hall-garden
   Were crying and calling to her,
Where is Maud, Maud, Maud?
   One is come to woo her.

   8
Look, a horse at the door,
   And little King Charley snarling,\(^6\)
Go back, my lord, across the moor,
   You are not her darling.

   440
16

   *   *   *

3
Catch not my breath, O clamorous heart,
Let not my tongue be a thrall to my eye,
For I must tell her before we part,
I must tell her, or die.\(^7\)

   570
18

1
I have led her home, my love, my only friend.
There is none like her, none.
And never yet so warmly ran my blood
And sweetly, on and on
Calming itself to the long-wished-for end.
Full to the banks, close on the promised good.

4. Meekness.
5. As Tennyson explained: “If you tread on the daisy [English variety], it turns up a rosy underside.”
6. Maud’s dog snarls at the aristocratic visitor who is the speaker’s rival for Maud’s hand.
7. He is about to propose to Maud, who will accept him.
None like her, none.
Just now the dry-tongued laurels’ pattering talk
Seemed her light foot along the garden walk,
And shook my heart to think she comes once more.
But even then I heard her close the door;
The gates of heaven are closed, and she is gone.

There is none like her, none,
Nor will be when our summers have deceased.
O, art thou sighing for Lebanon
In the long breeze that streams to thy delicious East,
Sighing for Lebanon,
Dark cedar, though thy limbs have here increased,
Upon a pastoral slope as fair,
And looking to the South and fed
With honeyed rain and delicate air,
And haunted by the starry head
Of her whose gentle will has changed my fate,
And made my life a perfumed altar-flame;
And over whom thy darkness must have spread
With such delight as theirs of old, thy great Forefathers of the thornless garden, there
Shadowing the snow-limbed Eve from whom she came?

Here will I lie, while these long branches sway,
And you fair stars that crown a happy day
Go in and out as if at merry play,
Who am no more so all forlorn
As when it seemed far better to be born
To labor and the mattock-hardened hand
Than nursed at ease and brought to understand
A sad astrology, the boundless plan
That makes you tyrants in your iron skies,

8. The vast old cedar tree in Maud’s garden, addressed in a fourteen-line question about its ancestry on Mount Lebanon in Syria and its ultimate ancestry in Eden (cf. Song of Solomon 5.15).
Maud

Innumerable, pitiless, passionless eyes,
Cold fires, yet with power to burn and brand
His nothingness into man.

But now shine on, and what care I,
Who in this stormy gulf have found a pearl
The countercharm of space and hollow sky,¹
And do accept my madness, and would die
To save from some slight shame one simple girl?—

Would die, for sullen-seeming Death may give
More life to Love than is or ever was
In our low world, where yet 'tis sweet to live.
Let no one ask me how it came to pass;
It seems that I am happy, that to me
A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass,
A purer sapphire melts into the sea.

Not die, but live a life of truest breath,
And teach true life to fight with mortal wrongs.
O, why should Love, like men in drinking songs,
Spice his fair banquet with the dust of death?²
Make answer, Maud my bliss,
Maud made my Maud by that long loving kiss,
Life of my life, wilt thou not answer this?
“The dusky strand of Death inwoven here
With dear Love’s tie, makes Love himself more dear.”

Is that enchanted moan only the swell
Of the long waves that roll in yonder bay?
And hark the clock within, the silver knell
Of twelve sweet hours that passed in bridal white,
And died to live, long as my pulses play;
But now by this my love has closed her sight
And given false death³ her hand, and stolen away

1. Something that calms his former fears of the vastness of space revealed by modern astronomy.
2. I.e., why do we try to intensify the experience of love by linking it with death?
3. Sleep.
To dreamful wastes where footless fancies dwell
Among the fragments of the golden day.
May nothing there her maiden grace affright!
Dear heart, I feel with thee the drowsy spell.

My bride to be, my evermore delight,
My own heart’s heart, my ownest own, farewell;
It is but for a little space I go.
And ye⁴ meanwhile far over moor and fell
Beaut to the noiseless music of the night!
Has our whole earth gone nearer to the glow
Of your soft splendors that you look so bright?
I have climbed nearer out of lonely hell.
Beat, happy stars, timing with things below,
Beat with my heart more blest than heart can tell,
Blest, but for some dark undercurrent woe
That seems to draw— but it shall not be so;
Let all be well, be well.

* * *

Part 2

⁴

1

O that ’twere possible
After long grief and pain
To find the arms of my true love
Round me once again!

2

When I was wont to meet her
In the silent woody places
By the home that gave me birth,
We stood tranced in long embraces
Mint with kisses sweeter sweeter
Than anything on earth.

⁴. I.e., the stars.
⁵. This excerpt was originally a separate lyric, written in 1833–34 and published in 1837. Tennyson wrote that a friend “begged me to weave a story round this poem, and so Maud came into being.” The lyric expresses the speaker’s longing for reunion with Maud, who has died by this point in the poem.
3
A shadow flits before me,
Not thou, but like to thee:
Ah Christ, that it were possible
For one short hour to see
The souls we loved, that they might tell us
What and where they be.

4
It leads me forth at evening,
It lightly winds and steals
In a cold white robe before me,
When all my spirit reels
At the shouts, the leagues of lights
And the roaring of the wheels.

* * *

In the Valley of Cauteretz

All along the valley, stream that flashes white,
Deepening thy voice with the deepening of the night,
All along the valley, where thy waters flow,
I walked with one I loved two and thirty years ago.
All along the valley, while I walked today,
The two and thirty years were a mist that rolls away;
For all along the valley, down thy rocky bed,
Thy living voice to me was as the voice of the dead,
And all along the valley, by rock and cave and tree,
The voice of the dead was a living voice to me.

1861

1. A valley in the French Pyrenees visited by Tennyson and Hallam in 1830 and revisited by Tennyson in 1861. Hallam himself had earlier described Cauteretz as a place of "waters in all shapes," including "the impetuous cataract, fraying its way" and the "little blue lake whose deep, cold waters are fed eternally from neighboring glaciers" (cf. Swinburne, The Lake of Gaube). Tennyson said of this poem: "I like the little piece as well as anything I have written."

2. Lady Tennyson's journal reports how the noisy mountain stream affected her husband: "We had noticed the deepening of the Voice in the night."
FROM IDYLLS OF THE KING

Pelleas and Etтарre

King Arthur made new knights to fill the gap
Left by the Holy Quest; and as he sat
In hall at old Caerleon, the high doors
Were softly sundered, and through these a youth,
Pelleas, and the sweet smell of the fields
Passed, and the sunshine came along with him.

“Make me thy knight, because I know, Sir King,
All that belongs to knighthood, and I love.”
Such was his cry: for having heard the King
Had let proclaim a tournament—the prize
A golden circlet and a knightly sword,
Full fain had Pelleas for his lady won
The golden circlet, for himself the sword:
And there were those who knew him near the King,
And promised for him: and Arthur made him knight.

And this new knight, Sir Pelleas of the isles—
But lately come to his inheritance,
And lord of many a barren isle was he—
Riding at noon, a day or twain before,
Across the forest called of Dean, to find
Caerleon and the King, had felt the sun
Beat like a strong knight on his helm, and reeled
Almost to falling from his horse; but saw
Near him a mound of even-sloping side,
Whereon a hundred stately beeches grew,
And here and there great hollies under them;

2. In the preceding idyll, The Holy Grail, many knights had misguidedly deserted the Round Table to seek the Holy Grail.
3. The ancient village in Monmouthshire, near Wales, where Arthur often held his court.
4. Very gladly.
5. Extensive tract in the river Wye region adjacent to Monmouthshire.
Pelleas and Ettarre

But for a mile all round was open space,
And fern and heath: and slowly Pelleas drew
To that dim day, then binding his good horse
To a tree, cast himself down; and as he lay
At random looking over the brown earth
Through that green-glooming twilight of the grove,
It seemed to Pelleas that the fern without
Burned as a living fire of emeralds,
So that his eyes were dazzled looking at it.
Then o’er it crossed the dimness of a cloud
Floating, and once the shadow of a bird
Flying, and then a fawn; and his eyes closed.
And since he loved all maidens, but no maid
In special, half-awake he whispered, “Where?
O where? I love thee, though I know thee not.
For fair thou art and pure as Guinevere,
And I will make thee with my spear and sword
As famous—O my Queen, my Guinevere,
For I will be thine Arthur when we meet.”

Suddenly wakened with a sound of talk
And laughter at the limit of the wood,
And glancing through the hoary boles, he saw,
Strange as to some old prophet might have seemed
A vision hovering on a sea of fire,
Damsels in divers colors like the cloud
Of sunset and sunrise, and all of them
On horses, and the horses richly trapped
Breast-high in that bright line of bracken stood:
And all the damsels talked confusedly,
And one was pointing this way, and one that,
Because the way was lost.

And Pelleas rose,
And loosed his horse, and led him to the light,
There she that seemed the chief among them said,

6. Covered with beautiful cloths.
“In happy time behold our pilot-star!
Youth, we are damsels-errant,7 and we ride,
Armed as ye see, to tilt against the knights
There at Caerleon, but have lost our way:
To right? to left? straight forward? back again?
Which? tell us quickly.”

Pelleas gazing thought,
“Is Guinevere herself so beautiful?”
For large her violet eyes looked, and her bloom
A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens,
And round her limbs, mature in womanhood;
And slender was her hand and small her shape;
And but for those large eyes, the haunts of scorn,
She might have seemed a toy to trifle with,
And pass and care no more. But while he gazed
The beauty of her flesh abashed the boy,
As though it were the beauty of her soul:
For as the base man, judging of the good,
Puts his own baseness in him by default
Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend
All the young beauty of his own soul to hers,
Believing her; and when she spake to him,
Stammered, and could not make her a reply.
For out of the waste islands had he come,
Where saving his own sisters he had known
Scarce any but the women of his isles,
Rough wives, that laughed and screamed against the gulls,
Makers of nets, and living from the sea.

Then with a slow smile turned the lady round
And looked upon her people; and as when
A stone is flung into some sleeping tarn.
The circle widens till it lip the marge,
Spread the slow smile through all her company.
Three knights were thereamong; and they too smiled,
Pelleas and Ettarre

Scorning him; for the lady was Ettarre,
And she was a great lady in her land.

Again she said, “O wild and of the woods,
Knowest thou not the fashion of our speech?
Or have the Heavens but given thee a fair face,
Lacking a tongue?”

“Oh damsel,” answered he,
“I woke from dreams; and coming out of gloom
Was dazzled by the sudden light; and crave
Pardon: but will ye to Caerleon? I
Go likewise: shall I lead you to the King?”

“Lead then,” she said; and through the woods they went.
And while they rode, the meaning in his eyes,
His tenderness of manner, and chaste awe,
His broken utterances and bashfulness,
Were all a burthen to her, and in her heart
She muttered, “I have lighted on a fool,
Raw, yet so stale!” But since her mind was bent
On hearing, after trumpet blown, her name
And title, “Queen of Beauty,” in the lists
Cried—and beholding him so strong, she thought
That peradventure he will fight for me,
And win the circlet: therefore flattered him,
Being so gracious, that he wellnigh deemed
His wish by hers was echoed; and her knights
And all her damsels too were gracious to him,
For she was a great lady.

And when they reached
Caerleon, ere they passed to lodging, she,
Taking his hand, “O the strong hand,” she said,
“See! look at mine! but wilt thou fight for me,
And win me this fine circlet, Pelleas,
That I may love thee?”
Then his helpless heart
Leaped, and he cried, “Ay! wilt thou if I win?”
“Ay, that will I,” she answered, and she laughed,
And straitly nipped the hand, and flung it from her;
Then glanced askew at those three knights of hers,
Till all her ladies laughed along with her.

“O happy world,” thought Pelleas, “all, meseems,
Are happy; I the happiest of them all.”
Nor slept that night for pleasure in his blood,
And green wood-ways, and eyes among the leaves;
Then being on the morrow knighted, sware
To love one only. And as he came away,
The men who met him rounded on their heels
And wondered after him, because his face
Shone like the countenance of a priest of old
Against the flame about a sacrifice
Kindled by fire from heaven: so glad was he.

Then Arthur made vast banquets, and strange knights
From the four winds came in: and each one sat,
Though served with choice from air, land, stream, and sea,
Oft in mid-banquet measuring with his eyes
His neighbor’s make and might: and Pelleas looked
Noble among the noble, for he dreamed
His lady loved him, and he knew himself
Loved of the King: and him his new-made knight
Worshipped, whose lightest whisper moved him more
Than all the ranged reasons of the world.

Then blushed and brake the morning of the jousts,
And this was called “The Tournament of Youth”:
For Arthur, loving his young knight, withheld
His older and his mightier from the lists,
That Pelleas might obtain his lady’s love,
According to her promise, and remain
Lord of the tourney. And Arthur had the jousts
Down in the flat field by the shore of Usk
Holden: the gilded parapets were crowned
With faces, and the great tower filled with eyes
Up to the summit, and the trumpets blew.
There all day long Sir Pelleas kept the field
With honor: so by that strong hand of his
The sword and golden circlet were achieved.

Then rang the shout his lady loved: the heat
Of pride and glory fired her face; her eye
Sparkled; she caught the circlet from his lance,
And there before the people crowned herself:
So for the last time she was gracious to him.

Then at Caerleon for a space—her look
Bright for all others, cloudier on her knight—
Lingered Ettarre: and seeing Pelleas droop,
Said Guinevere, “We marvel at thee much,
O damsel, wearing this unsunny face
To him who won thee glory!” And she said,
“Had ye not held your Lancelot in your bower,
My Queen, he had not won.” Whereat the Queen,
As one whose foot is bitten by an ant,
Glanced down upon her, turned and went her way.

But after, when her damsels, and herself,
And those three knights all set their faces home,
Sir Pelleas followed. She that saw him cried,
“Damsels—and yet I should be shamed to say it—
I cannot bide Sir Baby. Keep him back
Among yourselves. Would rather that we had
Some rough old knight who knew the worldly way,
Albeit grizzlier than a bear, to ride
And jest with: take him to you, keep him off,
And pamper him with papmeat, if ye will,
Old milky fables of the wolf and sheep,

8. River near Caerleon.
Such as the wholesome mothers tell their boys. 190
Nay, should ye try him with a merry one
To find his mettle, good: and if he fly us,
Small matter! let him.” This her damsels heard,
And mindful of her small and cruel hand,
They, closing round him through the journey home,
Acted her hest,⁹ and always from her side
Restrained him with all manner of device,
So that he could not come to speech with her.
And when she gained her castle, upsprang the bridge,
Down rang the grate of iron through the groove,
And he was left alone in open field.

“These be the ways of ladies,” Pelleas thought,
“To those who love them, trials of our faith.
Yea, let her prove me to the uttermost,
For loyal to the uttermost am I.” 205
So made his moan; and, darkness falling, sought
A priory not far off, there lodges, but rose
With morning every day, and, moist or dry,
Full-armed upon his charger all day long.
Sat by the walls, and no one opened to him.

And this persistence turned her scorn to wrath.
Then calling her three knights, she charged them, “Out!
And drive him from the walls.” And out they came,
But Pelleas overthrew them as they dashed
Against him one by one; and these returned,
But still he kept his watch beneath the wall.

Thereon her wrath became a hate; and once,
A week beyond, while walking on the walls
With her three knights, she pointed downward, “Look,
He haunts me—I cannot breathe—besieges me;
Down! strike him! put my hate into your strokes,
And drive him from my walls.” And down they went,
And Pelleas overthrew them one by one;

⁹. Command.
And from the tower above him cried Ettarre,
“Bind him, and bring him in.”
He heard her voice;
Then let the strong hand, which had overthrown
Her minion-knights, by those he overthrew
Be bounden straight, and so they brought him in.

Then when he came before Ettarre, the sight
Of her rich beauty made him at once glance
More bondsman in his heart than in his bonds.
Yet with good cheer he spake, “Behold me, Lady,
A prisoner, and the vassal of thy will;
And if thou keep me in thy donjon here,
Content am I so that I see thy face
But once a day: for I have sworn my vows,
And thou hast given thy promise, and I know
That all these pains are trials of my faith,
And that thyself, when thou hast seen me strained
And sifted to the utmost, wilt at length
Yield me thy love and know me for thy knight.”

Then she began to rail so bitterly,
With all her damsels, he was stricken mute;
But when she mocked his vows and the great King,
Lighted on words: “For pity of thine own self,
Peace, Lady, peace: is he not thine and mine?”
“Thou fool,” she said, “I never heard his voice
But longed to break away. Unbind him now,
And thrust him out of doors; for save he be
Fool to the midmost marrow of his bones,
He will return no more.” And those, her three,
Laughed, and unbound, and thrust him from the gate.

And after this, a week beyond, again
She called them, saying, “There he watches yet,
There like a dog before his master’s door!”

1. “Minion”: compliant and obsequious dependent of a ruler.
Kicked, he returns: do ye not hate him, ye?  
Ye know yourselves: how can ye bide at peace,  
Affronted with his fulsome innocence?  
Are ye but creatures of the board and bed,  
No men to strike? Fall on him all at once,  
And if ye slay him I reck not: if ye fail,  
Give ye the slave mine order to be bound,  
Bind him as heretofore, and bring him in:  
It may be ye shall slay him in his bonds.”

She spake; and at her will they couched their spears,  
Three against one: and Gawain2 passing by,  
Bound upon solitary adventure, saw  
Low down beneath the shadow of those towers  
A villainy, three to one: and through his heart  
The fire of honor and all noble deeds  
Flashed, and he called, “I strike upon thy side—  
The caitiffs!” “Nay,” said Pelleas, “but forbear;  
He needs no aid who doth his lady’s will.”

So Gawain, looking at the villainy done,  
Forbore, but in his heat and eagerness  
Trembled and quivered, as the dog, withheld  
A moment from the vermin that he sees  
Before him, shivers, ere he springs and kills.

And Pelleas overthrew them, one to three;  
And they rose up, and bound, and brought him in.  
Then first her anger, leaving Pelleas, burned  
Full on her knights in many an evil name  
Of craven, weakling, and thrice-beaten hound:  
“Yet, take him, ye that scarce are fit to touch,  
Far less to bind, your victor, and thrust him out,  
And let who will release him from his bonds.  
And if he comes again”—there she brake short;  
And Pelleas answered, “Lady, for indeed  
I loved you and I deemed you beautiful,
I cannot brook to see your beauty marred
Through evil spite: and if ye love me not,
I cannot bear to dream you so forsworn:
I had liefer ye were worthy of my love,
Than to be loved again of you—farewell;
And though ye kill my hope, not yet my love,
Vex not yourself: ye will not see me more.”

While thus he spake, she gazed upon the man
Of princely bearing, though in bonds, and thought,
“Why have I pushed him from me? this man loves,
If love there be: yet him I loved not. Why?
I deemed him fool? yea, so? or that in him
A something—was it nobler than myself?—
Seemed my reproach? He is not of my kind.
He could not love me, did he know me well.
Nay, let him go—and quickly.” And her knights
Laughed not, but thrust him bounden out of door.

Forth sprang Gawain, and loosed him from his bonds,
And flung them o’er the walls; and afterward,
Shaking his hands, as from a lazar’s\(^3\) rag,
“Faith of my body,” he said, “and art thou not—
Yea thou art he, whom late our Arthur made
Knight of his table; yea and he that won
The circlet? wherefore hast thou so defamed
Thy brotherhood in me and all the rest,
As let these caitiffs on thee work their will?”

And Pelleas answered, “O, their wills are hers
For whom I won the circlet; and mine, hers,
Thus to be bounden, so to see her face,
Marred though it be with spite and mockery now,
Other than when I found her in the woods;
And though she hath me bounden but in spite,
And all to flout me, when they bring me in,

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3. Leper’s.
Let me be bounden, I shall see her face; Else must I die through mine unhappiness.”

And Gawain answered kindly though in scorn, “Why, let my lady bind me if she will, And let my lady beat me if she will: But an she send her delegate to thrall These fighting hands of mine—Christ kill me then But I will slice him handless by the wrist, And let my lady sear the stump for him, Howl as he may. But hold me for your friend: Come, ye know nothing: here I pledge my troth, Yea, by the honor of the Table Round, I will be leal to thee and work thy work, And tame thy jailing princess to thine hand. Lend me thine horse and arms, and I will say That I have slain thee. She will let me in To hear the manner of thy fight and fall; Then, when I come within her counsels, then From prime to vespers will I chant thy praise As prowest knight and truest lover, more Than any have sung thee living, till she long To have thee back in lusty life again, Not to be bound, save by white bonds and warm, Dearer than freedom. Wherefore now thy horse And armor: let me go: be comforted: Give me three days to melt her fancy, and hope The third night hence will bring thee news of gold.”

Then Pelleas lent his horse and all his arms, Saving the goodly sword, his prize, and took Gawain’s, and said, “Betray me not, but help— Art thou not he whom men call light-of-love?”

4. If.
5. Loyal.
6. I.e., from dawn to sunset.
7. Bravest or noblest.
“Ay,” said Gawain, “for women be so light.”
Then bounded forward to the castle walls,
And raised a bugle hanging from his neck,
And winded it, and that so musically
That all the old echoes hidden in the wall
Rang out like hollow woods at hunting-tide.

Up ran a score of damsels to the tower;
“Avaunt,” they cried, “our lady loves thee not.”
But Gawain lifting up his vizor said,
“Gawain am I, Gawain of Arthur’s court,
And I have slain this Pelleas whom ye hate:
Behold his horse and armor. Open gates,
And I will make you merry.”

And down they ran,
Her damsels, crying to their lady, “Lo!
Pelleas is dead—he told us—he that hath
His horse and armor: will ye let him in?
He slew him! Gawain, Gawain of the court,
Sir Gawain—there he waits below the wall,
Blowing his bugle as who should say him nay.”

And so, leave given, straight on through open door
Rode Gawain, whom she greeted courteously.
“Dead, is it so?” she asked. “Ay, ay,” said he,
“And oft in dying cried upon your name.”
“Pity on him,” she answered, “a good knight,
But never let me bide one hour at peace.”
“Ay,” thought Gawain, “and you be fair enow:
But I to your dead man have given my troth,
That whom ye loathe, him will I make you love.”

So those three days, aimless about the land,
Lost in a doubt, Pelleas wandering
Waited, until the third night brought a moon
With promise of large light on woods and ways.
Hot was the night and silent; but a sound
Of Gawain ever coming, and this lay—
Which Pelleas had heard sung before the Queen,
And seen her sadden listening—vexed his heart,
And marred his rest—“A worm within the rose.” 390

“A rose, but one, none other rose had I,
A rose, one rose, and this was wondrous fair,
One rose, a rose that gladdened earth and sky,
One rose, my rose, that sweetened all mine air—
I cared not for the thorns; the thorns were there. 395

“One rose, a rose to gather by and by,
One rose, a rose, to gather and to wear,
No rose but one—what other rose had I?
One rose, my rose; a rose that will not die,—
He dies who loves it,—if the worm be there.” 400

This tender rhyme, and evermore the doubt,
“Why lingers Gawain with his golden news?”
So shook him that he could not rest, but rode
Ere midnight to her walls, and bound his horse
Hard by the gates. Wide open were the gates, 405
And no watch kept; and in through these he passed,
And heard but his own steps, and his own heart
Beating, for nothing moved but his own self,
And his own shadow. Then he crossed the court,
And spied not any light in hall or bower,
But saw the postern portal also wide
Yawning, and up a slope of garden, all
Of roses white and red, and brambles mixed
And overgrowing them, went on, and found,
Here too, all hushed below the mellow moon, 410
Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave
Came lightening downward, and so spilled itself
Among the roses, and was lost again.

8. Lyric or ballad.
Then was he ware of three pavilions reared
Above the bushes, gilden-peaked: in one,
Red after revel, droned her lurdane Knights
Slumbering, and their three squires across their feet:
In one, their malice on the placid lip
Frozen by sweet sleep, four of her damsels lay:
And in the third, the circlet of the jousts
Bound on her brow, were Gawain and Ettarre.  

Back, as a hand that pushes through the leaf
To find a nest and feels a snake, he drew:
Back, as a coward slinks from what he fears
To cope with, or a traitor proven, or hound
Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame
Creep with his shadow through the court again,
Fingering at his sword-handle until he stood
There on the castle-bridge once more, and thought,
“I will go back, and slay them where they lie.”

And so went back, and seeing them yet in sleep
Said, “Ye, that so dishallow the holy sleep,
Your sleep is death,” and drew the sword, and thought,
“What! slay a sleeping knight? the King hath bound
And sworn me to this brotherhood”; again,
“Alas that ever a knight should be so false.”
Then turned, and so returned, and groaning laid
The naked sword athwart their naked throats,
There left it, and them sleeping; and she lay,
The circlet of the tourney round her brows,
And the sword of the tourney across her throat.

And forth he passed, and mounting on his horse
Stared at her towers that, larger than themselves

9. Heavy and stupid.
1. Cf. Malory, Morte Darthur 4.23: “And then it was in the month of May, that she and sir Gawaine went out of the castle and supped in a pavilion, and there was a bed made, and there sir Gawaine and the lady Ettarre went to bed together; and in another pavilion she laid her damsels; and in the third pavilion laid part of her knights: for then she had no dread nor fear of sir Pelles. And there sir Gawaine lay with her, doing his pleasure in that pavilion, two days and two nights, against the faithful promise that he made to sir Pelles.”
In their own darkness, thronged into the moon.
Then crushed the saddle with his thighs, and clenched
His hands, and maddened with himself and moaned:

“Would they have risen against me in their blood
At the last day? I might have answered them
Even before high God. O towers so strong,
Huge, solid, would that even while I gaze
The crack of earthquake shivering to your base
Split you, and Hell burst up your harlot roofs
Bellowing, and charred you through and through within,
Black as the harlot’s heart—hollow as a skull!
Let the fierce east scream through your eyelet-holes,
And whirl the dust of harlots round and round
In dung and nettles! hiss, snake—I saw him there—
Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell. Who yells
Here in the still sweet summer night, but I—
I, the poor Pelleas whom she called her fool?
Fool, beast—he, she, or I? myself most fool;
Beast too, as lacking human wit—disgraced,
Dishonored all for trial of true love—
Love?—we be all alike: only the King
Hath made us fools and liars. O noble vows!
O great and sane and simple race of brutes
That own² no lust because they have no law!
For why should I have loved her to my shame?
I loathe her, as I loved her to my shame.
I never loved her, I but lusted for her—

Away—”
He dashed the rowel into his horse,
And bounded forth and vanished through the night.

Then she, that felt the cold touch on her throat,
Awaking knew the sword, and turned herself
To Gawain: “Liar, for thou hast not slain

2. Acknowledge.
Pelleas and Etтарре

This Pelleas! here he stood, and might have slain
Me and thyself.” And he that tells the tale
Says that her ever-veering fancy turned
To Pelleas, as the one true knight on earth,
And only lover; and through her love her life
Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain.

But he by wild and way, for half the night,
And over hard and soft, striking the sod
From out the soft, the spark from off the hard,
Rode till the star above the wakening sun,
Beside that tower where Percivale was cowled, 3
Glanced from the rosy forehead of the dawn.
For so the words were flashed into his heart
He knew not whence or wherefore: “O sweet star,
Pure on the virgin forehead of the dawn!”
And there he would have wept, but felt his eyes
Harder and drier than a fountain bed
In summer: thither came the village girls
And lingered talking, and they come no more
Till the sweet heavens have filled it from the heights
Again with living waters in the change
Of seasons: hard his eyes; harder his heart
Seemed; but so weary were his limbs, that he,
Gasping, “Of Arthur’s hall am I, but here,
Here let me rest and die,” cast himself down,
And gulfed his griefs in inmost sleep; so lay,
Till shaken by a dream, that Gawain fired
The hall of Merlin, and the morning star
Reeled in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell.

He woke, and being ware of someone nigh,
Sent hands upon him, as to tear him, crying,
“False! and I held thee pure as Guinevere.”

But Percivale stood near him and replied,
“Am I but false as Guinevere is pure?”

3. Percivale, one of the most devout of Arthur’s knights, had left the Round Table to become a monk.
Or art thou mazed with dreams? or being one
Of our free-spoken Table hast not heard
That Lancelot”—there he checked himself and paused.

Then fared it with Sir Pelleas as with one
Who gets a wound in battle, and the sword
That made it plunges through the wound again,
And pricks it deeper: and he shrank and wailed,
“Is the Queen false?” and Percivale was mute.
“Have any of our Round Table held their vows?”
And Percivale made answer not a word.
“Is the King true?” “The King!” said Percivale.
“Why then let man couple at once with wolves.
What! art thou mad?”

But Pelleas, leaping up,
Ran through the doors and vaulted on his horse
And fled: small pity upon his horse had he,
Or on himself, or any, and when he met
A cripple, one that held a hand for alms—
Hunched as he was, and like an old dwarf-elm
That turns its back on the salt blast, the boy
Paused not, but overrode him, shouting, “False,
And false with Gawain!” and so left him bruised
And battered, and fled on, and hill and wood
Went ever streaming by him till the gloom,
That follows on the turning of the world,
Darkened the common path: he twitched the reins,
And made his beast that better knew it, swerve
Now off it and now on; but when he saw
High up in heaven the hall that Merlin built,
Blackening against the dead-green stripes of even,
“Black nest of rats,” he groaned, “ye build too high.”

Not long thereafter from the city gates
Issued Sir Lancelot riding airily,
Warm with a gracious parting from the Queen,
Peace at his heart, and gazing at a star
And marveling what it was: on whom the boy,  
Across the silent seeded meadow-grass  
Borne, clashed: and Lancelot, saying, “What name hast thou  
That ridest here so blindly and so hard?”
“No name, no name,” he shouted, “a scourge am I  
To lash the treasons of the Table Round.”
“Yea, but thy name?” “I have many names,” he cried:  
“I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,  
And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast  
And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen.”
“First over me,” said Lancelot, “shalt thou pass.”
“Fight therefore,” yelled the youth, and either knight  
Drew back a space, and when they closed, at once  
The weary steed of Pelleas floundering flung  
His rider, who called out from the dark field,  
“Thou art false as Hell: slay me: I have no sword.”
Then Lancelot, “Yea, between thy lips—and sharp;  
But here will I disedge* it by thy death.”
“Slay then,” he shrieked, “my will is to be slain,”  
And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fallen,  
Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake:  
“Rise, weakling; I am Lancelot; say thy say.”
And Lancelot slowly rode his warhorse back  
To Camelot, and Sir Pelleas in brief while  
 Caught his unbroken limbs from the dark field,  
And followed to the city. It chanced that both  
Brake into hall together, worn and pale.  
There with her knights and dames was Guinevere.  
Full wonderingly she gazed on Lancelot  
So soon returned, and then on Pelleas, him  
Who had not greeted her, but cast himself  
Down on a bench, hard-breathing. “Have ye fought?”
She asked of Lancelot. “Ay, my Queen,” he said.  
“And thou hast overthrown him?” “Ay, my Queen.”
Then she, turning to Pelleas, “O young knight,  
Hath the great heart of knighthood in thee failed

4. I.e., blunt your sharp tongue.
So far thou canst not bide, unfrowardly,
A fall from him?” Then, for he answered not,
“Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen,
May help them, loose thy tongue, and let me know.”
But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce
She quailed; and he, hissing “I have no sword,”
Sprang from the door into the dark.\(^5\) The Queen
Looked hard upon her lover, he on her;
And each foresaw the dolorous day to be:
And all talk died, as in a grove all song
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;
Then a long silence came upon the hall,
And Modred\(^6\) thought, “The time is hard at hand.”

Northern Farmer\(^1\)

New Style

1

Dosn’t thou ’ear my ’erse’s\(^2\) legs, as they canters awaäy?
Proputty,\(^3\) proputty, proputty— that’s what I ’ears ’em saäy.
Proputty, proputty, proputty— Sam, thou’s an ass for thy paaäns:
Theer’s moor sense i’ one o’ ’is legs, nor in all thy braäns.

5. Malory’s version ends differently. His Pelleas is rescued from despair by a damsel of the lake who, by
enchantment, contrives a punishment for the haughty Ettarre. “So the lady Ettarre died for sorrow, and the
damsel of the lake rejoiced sir Pelles, and loved together during their lives.” Tennyson’s Pelleas, as we learn
in The Last Tournament (the idyll following Pelleas and Ettarre), is so disillusioned by the corruptions he has
discovered that he establishes a mock court of his own where his followers indulge in drunken revelry. Through
a messenger he reports to Arthur: “Tell thou the King . . . / My tower is full of harlots, like his court, / But
mine are worthier, seeing they profess / To be none other than themselves.”
6. Arthur’s nephew, who leads the forces that revolt against the king.
1. This monologue exemplifies the diversity of Tennyson’s talents. A passionate attachment to land and prop-
erty, which was portrayed sympathetically by Wordsworth in Michael, is here represented humorously. The
harsh common sense of the farmer’s attitude toward love and marriage is reinforced by his jaw-breaking north
English dialect.
This is the second of a pair of monologues in dialect. In the first, Northern Farmer: Old Style, the speaker
is a bailiff who has spent his life supervising the farmlands of a wealthy squire. In the second, the “new style”
farmer is himself an independent landowner.
2. Horse’s.
3. Property.
Woã—theer’s a craw⁴ to pluck wi’ tha, Sam: yon’s parson’s ’ouse—
Don’t thou knaw that a man mun be eãther a man or a mouse?
Time to think on it then; for thou’ll be twenty to weeãk.⁵
Proputty, proputty—woã then woã—let ma ’ear mysên⁶ speãk.

Me an’ thy muther, Sammy, ’as beãn a-talkin’ o’ thee;
Thou’s beãn talkin’ to muther, an’ she beãn a tellin’ it me.
Thou’ll not marry for munny—thou’s sweet upo’ parson’s lass—
Noã—thou’ll marry for luvv—an’ we boãth on us thinks tha an ass.

Seeãd her todaãy goã by—Saãint’s-daãy—they was ringing the bells.
She’s a beauty thou thinks—an’ soã is scoors o’ gells,⁷
Them as ’as munny an’ all—wot’s a beauty?—the flower as blaws.
But proputty, proputty sticks, an’ proputty, proputty graws.

Do’ant be stunt:⁸ taãke time; I knaws what màãkes tha sa mad.
Warn’t I craãzed fur the lasses mysên when I wur a lad?
But I knawed a Quaãker feller as often ’as towd⁹ ma this:
“Doãnt thou marry for munny, but goã wheer munny is!”

An’ I went wheer munny war; an’ thy muther coom to ’and,
Wi’ lots o’ munny laaõd by, an’ a nicetish bit o’ land.
Maãybe she warn’t a beauty:—I niver giv it a thowt—
But warn’t she as good to cuddle an’ kiss as a lass as ’ant nowt?¹¹

Parson’s lass ’ant nowt, an’ she weãnt ’a nowt² when ’e’s deãd,
Mun be a guvness,³ lad, or summut, and addle⁴ her breãd:

5. This week.
6. Myself.
7. Scores of girls.
8. Stubborn.
11. Won’t have anything.
12. Must be a governess.
Why? fur ’e’s nobbut6 a curate, an’ weänt niver get hissèn clear,
An’ ’e maäde the bed as ’e ligs on afoor ’e coomed to the shere.6

8
An’ thin ’e coomed to the parish wi’ lots o’ Varsity debt,
Stook to his taail they did, an’ ’e ’ant got shut on ’em7 yet.
An’ ’e ligs on ’is back i’ the grip,8 wi’ noan to lend ’im a shuvv,
Woorse nor a far-weltered yowe:9 fur, Sammy, ’e married fur luvv.

9
Luvv? what’s luvv? thou can luvv thy lass an’ ’er munny too,
Maakin’ em goä togither, as they’ve good right to do.
Couldn’I luvv thy muther by cause o’ ’er munny laaïd by?
Naäy—fur I luvved ’er a vast sight moor fur it: reäson why.

10
Ay an’ thy muther says thou wants to marry the lass,
Cooms of a gentleman burn:1 an’ we boäth on us think tha an ass.
Woâ then, propity, willtha?—an ass as near as mays nowt2—
Woâ then, willtha? dangtha!—the bees is as fell as owt.3

11
Breäk me a bit o’ the esh4 for his ’eäd, lad, out o’ the fence!
Gentleman burn! what’s gentleman burn? is it shillins an’ pence?
Proputty, proputty’s ivrything ’ere, an’, Sammy, I’m blest
If it isn’t the saäme oop yonder, fur them as ’as it’s the best.

12
Tis’n them as ’as munny as breäks into ’ouses an’ steäls,
Them as ’as coäts to their backs an’ taäkes their regular meäls.
Noä, but it’s them as niver knaws wheer a meäl’s to be ’ad.
Taäke my word for it, Sammy, the poor in a loomp is bad.

13
Them or thir feythers, tha sees, mun ’a beäni a laäzy lot,
Fur work mun ’a gone to the gittin’ whiniver munny was got.
To Virgil

Written at the Request of the Mantuans\(^1\) for the Nineteenth Centenary of Virgil’s Death

1
Roman Virgil, thou that singest
Ilion’s lofty temples robed in fire,
Ilion falling, Rome arising,
    wars, and filial faith, and Dido’s pyre;\(^2\)

2
Landscape-lover, lord of language
    more than he that sang the “Works and Days,”\(^3\)
All the chosen coin of fancy
    flashing out from many a golden phrase;

3
Thou that singest wheat and woodland,
    tilth and vineyard, hive and horse and herd;

5

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5. Toiled and drudged.
6. Brook.
7. I.e., father’s property ran up.
8. Bridge.
1. Inhabitants of Mantua, the city near Virgil’s birthplace.
2. The allusions in this stanza are to incidents in Virgil’s Aeneid, especially the fall of Troy (Ilion).
3. Hesiod, a Greek poet, whose Works and Days anticipated Virgil’s Georgics in its pictures of farm life.
All the charm of all the Muses
often flowering in a lonely word;

Poet of the happy Tityrus\(^4\)
piping underneath his beechen bowers;

Poet of the poet-saty\(^5\)
whom the laughing shepherd bound with flowers;

Chanter of the Pollio,\(^6\) glorying
in the blissful years again to be,
Summers of the snakeless meadow,
unlaborious earth and oarless sea;

Thou that seest Universal
Nature moved by Universal Mind;
Thou majestic in thy sadness
at the doubtful doom of human kind;

Light among the vanished ages;
star that gildest yet this phantom shore;
Golden branch\(^7\) amid the shadows,
kings and realms that pass to rise no more;

Now thy Forum roars no longer,
fallen every purple Caesar’s dome—

Though thine ocean-roll of rhythm
sound forever of Imperial Rome—

Now the Rome of slaves hath perished,
and the Rome of freemen\(^8\) holds her place,
I, from out the Northern Island
sundered once from all the human race,

\(^4\) A shepherd in Virgil’s \textit{Eclogue} 1.
\(^6\) A friend of Virgil’s who is celebrated in \textit{Eclogue} 4.
\(^7\) A golden bough enabled Aeneas to enter the world of the shades. Cf. \textit{Aeneid} 6.208ff.
\(^8\) Italy had only recently been liberated and unified.
The Dawn

10

I salute thee, Mantovano,9
I that loved thee since my day began,
Wielder of the stateliest measure
ever molded by the lips of man.

1882

“Frater Ave atque Vale”¹

Row us out from Desenzano,² to your Sirmione row!
So they rowed, and there we landed—“O venusta Sirmio!”
There to me through all the groves of olive in the summer glow,
There beneath the Roman ruin where the purple flowers grow,
Came that “Ave atque Vale” of the Poet’s hopeless woe,
Tenderest of Roman poets nineteen hundred years ago,
“Frater Ave atque Vale”—as we wandered to and fro
Gazing at the Lydian³ laughter of the Garda Lake below
Sweet Catullus’s all-but-island olive-silvery Sirmio!

1880

The Dawn

“You are but children.”
—EGYPTIAN PRIEST TO SOLON

Red of the Dawn!
Screams of a babe in the red-hot palms of a Moloch¹ of Tyre,
Man with his brotherless dinner on man in the tropical wood,

1. “Brother, hail and farewell,” a line from an elegy by the Roman poet Catullus on the death of his brother (101.10). Tennyson himself had recently lost his brother Charles.
2. A town on Lake Garda in Italy, which Tennyson visited in 1880. “Sirmione” is a beautiful peninsula jutting into the lake, on which Catullus had his summer home. Catullus’ poem in honor of the locality includes the phrase “O venusta Sirmio!” (“O lovely Sirmio!”).
3. The Etruscans, who settled near Lake Garda, were thought to be descended from the Lydians of Asia Minor.
1. A god to whom children were sacrificed as burnt offerings.
Priests in the name of the Lord passing souls through fire to the fire, Head-hunters and boats of Dahomey\(^2\) that float upon human blood!

Red of the Dawn!
Godless fury of peoples, and Christless frolic of kings, And the bolt of war dashing down upon cities and blazing farms, For Babylon was a child newborn, and Rome was a babe in arms, And London and Paris and all the rest are as yet but in leading strings.

Dawn not Day,
While scandal is mouthing a bloodless name at her cannibal feast, And rake-ruined bodies and souls go down in a common wreck, And the Press of a thousand cities is prized for it smells of the beast, Or easily violates virgin Truth for a coin or a check.

Dawn not Day!
Is it Shame, so few should have climbed from the dens in the level below, Men, with a heart and a soul, no slaves of a four-footed will? But if twenty million of summers are stored in the sunlight still, We are far from the noon of man, there is time for the race to grow.

Red of the Dawn!
Is it turning a fainter red? So be it, but when shall we lay The Ghost of the Brute that is walking and haunting us yet, and be free? In a hundred, a thousand winters? Ah, what will our children be? The men of a hundred thousand, a million summers away?

\(^2\) West African country in which the custom of human sacrifice may have persisted in the 19th century. In 1870, Tennyson reported in a conversation: “On the accession of a king in Dahomey, enough women victims were killed to float a small canoe with their blood.” In 1892, after a war, Dahomey became a French colony.