

*Chasing George*

**An Epic Poem**

**in Search of Selfhood**

**In Twenty-Four Books**

**David Borodin**

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## An Epic Poem

### in Search of Selfhood

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**I**

## Book the First

**I.1**

**I** met a dealer in an antique store  
Who told me of a thing so precious rare,  
He wouldn't think to let it out the door  
Till came that "special someone..." (breathing air!).  
O not just anyone would understand,  
Said he, my wallet bloody near his hand.

**I.2**

I caught my breath and followed him in back  
While noticing the archway sign, which read:  
*NO ENTRY / THINGS NOT PRICED YET / WET SHELLAC!*  
And felt my blood run cold in sudden dread,  
Recalling that I'd only stopped to ask  
Directions to the library, alas.

**I.3**

For, I'd been long pursuing dragon lore  
With which to glean whereof man's hatred comes  
Toward this composite of the dinosaur,  
This incarnation of the fears he plumbs,  
And now was tracking down an early source  
Of myth for some old zealot and his horse.

## Book the First

## I.4

Yet suddenly I found myself astray,  
Being blindly led toward God knew what ahead  
Through dim-lit corridors of scuffed parquet  
Stacked high with things abandoned by the dead.  
And then we promptly stopped. My guide turned round  
And grasped my elbow, pointing toward the ground,

## I.5

Where we descended then a staircase, deep  
Into the very bowels of the place.  
And there I saw what would disturb my sleep  
For years and lend new meaning to my chase.  
(For, surely *this* was what was known as FATE:  
That thing for which one *cannot* show up late.)

## I.6

So startling was the spectacle before  
Me now, I couldn't close my eyes to blink,  
Nor grasp what my new guide meant by some door  
That was removed to bring it in (I think).  
For, here I faced a pair of yawning jaws  
That advertised huge teeth as sharp as claws

## Book the First

## I.7

Around a snake of tongue that slyly beckoned:  
*Come and let's together taste your death!*  
Yet worse by far was what I now had reckoned  
Springing from its chest with my next breath:  
It was its *life*, escaping down to feed  
A crimson pool below the heinous deed.

## I.8

For, it was by the prodding of a spear  
He'd bled—one thrust there by a shiny knight  
Whose rearing steed aped well his smiley jeer,  
Both proud to show a damsel such a sight.  
It was intense, though *still* since ages past,  
Long bound by leaden bands in colored glass.

## I.9

As if awakened from a dream, I stirred  
At that moist palm I felt upon my arm  
And recognized the voice I seemed to've heard  
As murmur all that while, and with alarm  
I turned to look the dealer in the eye  
And asked his chin, "how much?" and heard him sigh.

## Book the First

## I.10

“What *will* you take?” I counter-offered fast.  
“This dragon in your window has no price?”  
And in his grin I saw the die was cast.  
Indeed, I knew *some* number *would* suffice.  
He counted what I’d proffered and demurred,  
Though his consent was easily inferred.

## I.11

I took a breath, then grabbed my wallet back  
And reveled in my triumph for a while.  
For, I had bought my dragon from this quack  
Who played my Virgil, and it made me smile  
To think what luck it is to lose your way  
Sometimes and find your dream in your delay.

## I.12

Two men appeared who helped me out the door  
With it and to my home for installation.  
Once we freed it from its box though, more  
Could not be heard than silent perturbation:  
Though the glass remained in perfect shape,  
It now appeared...*the dragon had escaped!*

## Book the First

## I.13

Please note that not a shard of glass was missing;  
Rather, just the subject matter changed.  
Where *he* had been were now two lovers kissing  
And the woman's clothes quite disarranged:  
Her girdle, which should prove the dragon's lead,  
Was now slung round the neck of that white steed

## I.14

Whose well-pleased grin was suddenly replaced  
By eyes the size of tennis balls and jaw  
Hung low at this performance most unchaste.  
The place appeared in dire need of law:  
The maiden on her back, no lamb in sight,  
And armor everywhere *but* on the knight!

## I.15

Such is our world without a dragon near:  
The mice at home right when the cat is not.  
That now was hardly time to stall was clear;  
I had this beast's coordinates to plot.  
For, surely would wherever else he went  
Be turned a place of strictest regiment.

## Book the First

## I.16

I tipped the men and sent them on their way  
And chewed on what to do about this beast  
That had absconded with itself. I'd pay  
A visit first, I thought, to him who'd fleeced  
Me for it. After all, *he'd* found him last.  
Yet now his shop was gone. I was aghast.

## I.17

This seemed quite like that wedge's slightest edge  
On which philosophers are wont to ponder.  
Not *a* thing I saw could I allege  
To recognize now here where I would wander.  
Just medieval things, like castles, moats  
And battlements and obsolescent boats.

## I.18

Ah, this was just the knavery of booze  
At play upon my brain! O yes, of course!  
Such would explain that haughty, truant muse  
Whose name I called *and called* till I was hoarse.  
(Perhaps she'd heard my every invocation  
But could glean no hint of my location.)

## Book the First

## I.19

Yet, no, that *couldn't* be. I hadn't touched  
The stuff since last my wife left home for good.  
And drugs I *never* took—not “drugs” as such.  
Nor felt this like some dream in which I stood.  
“Reality” this seemed to be indeed—  
That place our brains evolved to try and read.

## I.20

Yes, after all, how much more “real” a world  
Was that in which I'd stumbled on this glass—  
In which I saw my destiny unfurled  
By merest chance—where likely I'd have passed  
Some other day—in which a buck or two  
From lunch skipped bought me freedom within view?

## I.21

For, free was I at last from this dull quest  
That no one even pressed me undertake:  
A lifetime spent pursuing things professed  
Instead of things *themselves* of which is spake.  
O yes, henceforth I would *real* knowledge seek  
And find my beast without the use of Greek

## Book the First

## I.22

Or Latin, or those other tongues long dead  
In which I used to search for living truths.  
“Just what,” I asked myself with pride new-fed,  
“Can Jacobus, that king of half-hatched sleuths,  
Tell *me* about a dragon he’d not seen  
Except in books by others no less green?”

## I.23

“Why, less than this!” I answered, fingers thus,  
My vigor whetted by this fiery mission  
Stoked by spirits to rare heights of fuss.  
“To no convention, concept, or tradition  
Shall I bow...except to Him!,” I said  
About my author, who could write me *dead*.

## I.24

“But first, *before* I go,” I said to Him,  
“I must see evidence of You who send  
Me. Yes, I’m not the type to follow whim  
And just presume your word I must attend.”  
And on this brazen challenge did I wait...  
And wait...till it was very, *very* late.

**II***Book the Second***II.1**

**I** woke in pandemonium, quite lost  
Aswim confusion's thickest stew and dazed  
By each ingredient. Things seemed but tossed  
About through space in reckless whimsy crazed  
By blurry want, all purged of what they'd mean.  
It looked no less than *Chaos on caffeine*.

**II.2**

But gradually, commotion's motions slowed,  
And as my vision held these things in place,  
Significance came bit by bit bestowed  
On them again. I now recalled apace  
My challenge put to him the night before.  
Or was it long ago? I wasn't sure!

**II.3**

And up I sat in panic at this thought  
To survey well the unfamiliar room  
Around me hung with spears and girdles wrought  
Upon a tapestry on which there loomed  
As well a...*dragon*...and a gorgeous maid  
Shown kneeling by a knight to whom she prayed....

## Book the Second

## II.4

O yes, I thought; this is indeed the place—  
*Wherever it is*—and in a loud crash  
Jumped down from off a table laid in taste  
With food and drink and everything I'd mashed  
While sleeping there the night, however long.  
(Remembrance weakens when the drink is strong.)

## II.5

"Yes, *this* must be his sign!" I cried in faith  
That I had seen just one, though there grew two  
Before me now...until one proved some wraith  
Quick vanishing like vapor from my view  
Along with all those other specters seen...  
And that damned ringing in my ears so keen.

## II.6

"O thank you, David," did I shout out loud.  
For, this was but His name who had me writ  
With body, soul, and wit so well endowed.  
"Yes, thank you for but finding me so fit  
To undertake this task. I'll never touch  
Another drop. I swear to it *this much!*"

## Book the Second

## II.7

I showed him, *thus*, and waited for a sign...  
Till I recalled that I'd been waiting still,  
And dropped my arms to grab a hold the wine  
For one good *l-o-n-g*, though *retroactive*, swill.  
(One doesn't just embark upon some quest  
Without first saying bye to all the rest.)

## II.8

And now was I as ready as could be  
To go and find that dragon that escaped  
And learn from him the truths you'll never see  
On tapestries or glass, *however* shaped.  
(How fine it was to be alive and well  
Within an epic not concerned with Hell!)

## II.9

And in this spirit nothing could impede,  
I readied me before the looking glass...  
Till dawned on me I did now antecede  
Their evolution out of polished brass  
Or what damned else this thing before me was,  
As now I saw in it bare more than fuzz.

## Book the Second

## II.10

I righted my attire best I could  
From memory, forgetting I'd not worn  
Such things as these before, and so just stood  
There quite perplexed to find me so adorned  
As heroes are in times like these—I mean  
Whenever one's own author sets the scene.

## II.11

But having tied my sollerets and trudged  
My way to that great door through which I'd go,  
I spied upon a table what I'd judged  
To be a book in vellum, opened so,  
And to my horror found on close inspection  
Text so written as to beg reflection

## II.12

On but any meaning whatsoever,  
Save, perhaps, a sense of perseverance—  
Like that which might have suffered the endeavor  
To compose such tidy incoherence.  
This seemed indeed to be that sort of tongue  
One finds (no wonder) written more than sung.

## Book the Second

## II.13

But I digress. What all this *really* meant  
Was plain as dirt to see. As if my course  
Seemed not already strewn with mean intent,  
I'd now need play charades to find a horse.  
I cried to him above who had me picked,  
"O Borodin, you really are *so* strict!"

## II.14

"No knowledge in the world is worth all *this*,"  
I cried. "With no more effort you might wake  
Me where my understanding's not amiss.  
But seems you'd rather play me till I break.  
If this were but the only path to truth  
I'd sooner slog through knee-deep mud...forsooth!"

## II.15

These bold words clashed in echo round my head,  
My beaver being down, and in my haste  
To raise it felt my gauntlet now embed  
Within my visor, darkening what I faced.  
God! I was I thirsty now, believe you me,  
And would've drunk...were but my beaver free!

## Book the Second

## II.16

When, finally, I got myself redeemed  
And moving toward the door again, my eye  
Caught hold a glint of gold so bright it seemed  
To lure me in, much like a flame might buy  
A moth. And in a flash did I succumb  
To inspiration found between my thumb

## II.17

And index finger there, where gleamed a pendant  
Painted with the features of a lass  
So ravishing, of beauty so resplendent,  
I couldn't catch my breath. It seemed I'd passed  
Beyond the corporal world of lungs and heart  
Into that weightless one of lust and art,

## II.18

Where none exists but for intensest yearning;  
Where, in a sudden sputter of hot joy  
One tastes a state in which man's highest learning  
Seems but dull, like heavy sauce to cloy  
The palate whereon we perceive this "soul"  
We think we have, and thus received quite whole

## Book the Second

## II.19

A truth, enlarged from out this flask I took,  
That promised life's great secret in entire:  
*Our world is but a page in that great book  
That tells of propagational desire.*  
I judged this wisdom neither good nor ill  
But let it seep into my blood and thrill

## II.20

Me down into the marrow of my bones  
(Where I had known it ever). And in treason  
Quick, insurgent mobs with sticks and stones  
Were felt to scale the ramparts of my reason  
Till, with this, her likeness in my dire hand,  
My heart fed hot, much like a firebrand.

## II.21

It fed quite hard upon those lips, ripe, red,  
Pursed full in wanton sensuality;  
Those eyes, bright blue, in which I'd lost my head  
To bumbling sentiment's mentality  
About the "love" I gleaned within her breast—  
That firm round bosom driving my unrest—

## Book the Second

## II.22

And, ah, that neck, that chin, those soft, soft cheeks  
On which there blushed the very lust of life  
Itself (as some spring flower sweetly seeks  
Its pollen to be published full and rife,  
Come forth who may to do it). And that hair!  
O, what in this wide world could *compare*

## II.23

With the allurements of those flaxen locks?  
Why, *none*, dear God! Nor *any* of her charms!  
Yes, I will answer any door where knocks  
A plot in which she ends up in my arms,  
Full pressed with kisses on those shapely lips,  
My longing cooled against those swelling hips!

## II.24

But whoa! Where was I prior to this kiss?  
What mission brought me *armored* to this place?  
No, not for *love* would I be dressed like this  
But rather for some battle in love's chase!  
Yet, it took HER to make me resolute,  
And so I clipped her locket to my suit.

## III

*Book the Third*

## III.1

*T*hus armed with this resolve (*and* suit) of steel  
I ventured forth, my love upon my sleeve,  
To face what hand my author might next deal  
Me, be it some mere kick upon the greave.  
For now this princess had me so engrossed  
I'd stop for *nothing*...save, perhaps, a toast.

## III.2 3

Ah, life's aburst with beauty and good cheer  
When you jump in it with both your feet,  
Not worrying about what mess you'll...meet—  
But hey, my quatrain's all "enveloped" here!—  
Not worrying about...what might have been,  
Nor topics moot, like "virtue," "vice," or "sin."

## III.3 4

No, life is something to be *used*, not hoarded  
Like some mattress stuffed for some great day.  
For, *that* day might not come until you're boarded  
Toward eternity, as they would say,  
And this, your cash-stuffed bed, left far behind  
For some indifferent spendthrift but to find!

## Book the Third

## III.4 5

O, what a waste. It even makes me sick  
To think on it. Now, had you rather spent  
Your tender with some girl filled full of kick,  
*Then* might you've gone beyond without lament.  
Or at the least lamenting through a smile  
Stoked by warmest memories the while.

## III.5 6

Well, anyway, I threw the door ajar  
And from this threshold leaped to greet the day  
—This day that promised miracles so far—  
Thrilled that these feet upon this good earth's clay  
Would soon stand firm, prepared to go and tread  
Wherever He should choose to have me led.

## III.6 7

I felt them hit, and yes it did feel good...  
*Except* that they kept going, sinking down.  
Down, d-o-w-n they sank till finally I stood  
Kneepiece-deep in that oozy, sluggish brown  
I knew instinctively for mud—that sludge  
Through which I'd sworn I'd *never*...trudge.

## Book the Third

## III.7 8

To hell with You and all these stupid rhymes!"  
I said, incensed, for anyone who'd hear.  
"I'm sick of choosing just that word that *chimes*  
Concordant though in *meaning* something queer!  
For, *slog* was what I swore I'd do, not 'trudge.'  
I'll play this game no more. Just wait and judge!

## III.8 9

"And that goes too for all this stupid meter;  
I am finished counting on my fingers  
Just to say did this and that the neater  
Than I might have with a word that lingers  
But a syllable too long. From here  
On in I'll damned well say things as I like  
without regard for how words strike...the ear...  
*damn it!"*

## III.9 11

But after venting that (and much, *much* more),  
My ire stoked yet hotter with each word,  
I hankered soon for nothing short of war,  
Declaring, "I'll not stand for this absurd  
Complicity! No, not the slightest part  
I'll play toward this mere nonsense you call 'ART'!

## Book the Third

## III.10 12

“Why, I’ll just sit this out and watch your tale  
Collapse beneath an unsupported plot.  
Without your handsome hero to prevail  
Against Fate’s finest hand, *all’s* ill-begot.  
So I’ll just suck up what to slake a thirst  
And wait to see just who will holler first.”

## III.11 17

And by the time I made it to the top  
I felt myself near death from heat and thirst,  
As if the very sun that baked this slop  
Enough to walk on well-nigh cooked *me* first.  
Try climbing up a hill some sultry day  
Attired IN AN OVEN all the way!

## III.12 18

And yet, did I complain? No! Life is good!  
For, if not here, where *would* I really be  
But jobless, yearning to be understood  
Beside some verb or other! Is *that* free?  
Besides, the only thing ‘twixt me and doom  
Seemed now whatever wet I might consume.

## Book the Third

## III.13 19

And what I spied from out my sweat-blurred eyes  
Was that same stuff I had so thickly craved.  
Yes, *water*—cold, wet water. Ah, gold buys  
No thing so valuable as what might save  
A body from his thirst! The mightiest king's  
A slave to what your poorest peasant flings

## III.14 20

Into a trough for beasts to guzzle up.  
It's only common till you want it most.  
A starving man sent suddenly to sup  
Could not have hastened toward his steaming roast  
With fiercer focus. Woe to him who stepped  
Between my self and this toward which I'd leapt!

## III.15 21

And blinded by my wettest joy (and sweat),  
I tripped off the bank and sank like a stone  
Straight to the bottom of the stuff I'd yet  
To taste. And not till then could I have known  
Real irony to be so sprightly quick  
Upon its toes and deft with every lick.

## Book the Third

## III.16 22

And as I sank I thought in quite a flash  
How my whole life seemed mirrored here in this—  
How I'd not tried a thing but with such rash  
Resolve that sent me down to the abyss  
Of all success, where aspiration's lure  
Is pawned for dull complacency's full store.

## III.17 23

Yet, luck would have it not so deep as seemed  
It plunging in. For, once back on my feet  
I heard my helmet drain, and found what streamed  
Down me quite good. (Ah, thirst is no aesthete!)  
And then I stooped to drink of what I could  
All 'round me—meaning this in which I stood.

## III.18 24

And once I'd filled myself to bursting sweat  
And flung my helmet off to greet the air  
That thrilled with chill my face and neck all wet,  
I froze in awe of what I saw from there.  
Before me now lay shimmering in the sun  
A world so splendid it looked new begun.

## Book the Third

## III.19 25

Bright mounds and pools of colors yet unmixed  
Gleamed richly from this painter's palette, vast  
As earth itself. And all around it, fixed  
In azure endlessness, a sky was cast  
So vividly, I smarted in despair,  
Much as *all* beauty leaves its wound to bear.

## III.20 26

I swooned, quite powerless before all this—  
Dame nature's naked splendor—and felt good.  
She urged partaking, lured me come and kiss  
Her petal-lips and wallow in her wood  
To thrill in her luxuriant, fruited space  
And sleep amid her secret-shadowed place.

## III.21 27

This seemed the virgin landscape I had seen  
In paintings old and thought untrue, ideal,  
Some trick of brush and pigment, just too clean  
To show the rude, chance work of nature, *real*,  
Where things get broken, die, or go to waste,  
While life, unmoved, continues in its haste.

## Book the Third

## III.22 28

I knew now only lust had kept me blind  
To this great splendor here through which I'd trudged—  
A lust for *life* so keen I could not find  
The sense in any part that might be judged  
Extraneous to its keeping. But once tamed,  
This thirst revealed what kept my heart inflamed.

## III.23 29

Enthralled by this primeval paradise—  
Resplendent teeming lushness, raw and pure—  
I pondered all that I would sacrifice  
In yielding to it, giving up my lure  
Toward dragon, truth and justice...*and the girl*....  
And then deep down I felt a thing unfurl,

## III.24 30

Like appetite or drive, renewed desire,  
And but found myself revived, full-grown,  
And bounding over barricades of fire  
With me upon its back toward fates unknown.  
For where in intellect is found the force  
To stave deep lust from off its innate course?

## IV

*Book the Fourth*

## IV.1

**B**ut, first things first. Ambitions of the “soul”  
Are sought distractedly when put before  
The body’s own. One must discard it whole,  
This prudish epic etiquette of yore,  
Wherein since ancient days no hero's done  
What any *real* man would not dream to shun.

## IV.2

Though follow we our hero’s every stride  
Toward triumph ‘gainst his inauspicious odds  
And watch him kill and pillage, lie and hide,  
Misuse the women and displease the gods,  
Yet *never* do we spy him go attend  
HIS BLADDER’S CALL, for fear *this* may offend!

## IV.3

Yes, such is the hypocrisy bequeathed us  
By the lofty laurel-headed set—  
The guys who never fart—who, being wreathed thus,  
Deem it meet that art steer clear its debt  
To life, nor mirror it too closely seen,  
*Lest kidneys be as nobly sung as spleen.*

## Book the Fourth

## IV.4

But *I'll* be no one's minion of tradition;  
*I'd* not have it seeping out my ears.  
This urgent stream that flows from my volition  
Serves to liberate me from my peers.  
So, look who will, and gather 'round to pray,  
WHILE I PISS THIS INHERITANCE AWAY!

## IV.5

And oh, how fine it felt, like God on high,  
To scatter one's own water to the winds—  
First *man* among immortal heroes, aye,  
The first for whom Propriety rescinds  
Her laws—or leastways turns her head the while,  
Attending indiscretions *far* more vile.

## IV.6

But wait! What was that noise I heard behind me?  
It sounded like some bawdy wench's laugh.  
I turned 'round quick to see and found, purblindly,  
I had company—though dressed but half  
For the occasion. When my settling sight  
Fixed sharp upon that form my heart took flight.

## Book the Fourth

## IV.7

For it was she: she of the bosom round  
And ripe, red lips and flaxen hair so soft,  
Whose hips I'd held while dreaming would confound  
My thoughts of more essential things quite oft—  
Like why in bloody hell I'd loitered here—  
The one for whom I'd toiled in this gear,

## IV.8

And broiled, and renounced all earthly pleasure  
Not directly touching mission's end...  
Which *lately* had but lost a goodly measure  
Of its old allure. Oh, *oh*, could poet send  
Protagonist incentive more than this?,  
I thought, my mind's eye focused on a kiss

## IV.9

Upon those lusty lips that seemed as if  
They'd never close from 'round that lusty laugh,  
So keenly was she peering at my stiff  
Repose. (Yes, armor keeps one like a staff.)  
Indeed, the thing that held her so amused  
I hardly could've gleaned from that effused

## Book the Fourth

## IV.10

In this new burst of cachinnation fits.  
For those rare syllables I could construe  
Gave me to wonder if she'd heaved her wits  
Out with what shook her dignity askew.  
They sounded unlike any tongue I'd known...  
Except, perhaps, the French in which I'd moan

## IV.11

When all I'd stub my toe or bang my head  
Way back in my indecorous salad days—  
The ones, *good God*, I hadn't even led  
Yet for some half millennium, anyways!  
Anyway, to keep an epic short,  
I did that which I'd sworn to not resort:

## IV.12

Yes, interrupt a woman—not for love  
Nor money but right now for sheer impatience  
Did I breach this rule so high above  
All others I had learned. And in that cadence  
I found customary of the time,  
I knelt upon one knee and spoke in rhyme,

## Book the Fourth

## IV.13

Inquiring in my gallant, courtly tone  
What was her name, pray tell, lest I defame  
So high a chasteness with one of my own  
Selection. Nothing butters up a dame  
Like manners, I now thought, not ill-impressed  
With my urbanity, though still undressed

## IV.14

Waist down, as then I realized when I saw  
Whereon it was her gaze had built its nest.  
No, *not* my shield. There ought to be some law  
Against the ribald pranks one finds expressed  
In verse toward innocent, hard-working folk  
Like me by poetaster bastards, broke

## IV.15

For want of wit. Such dastards should be made  
To live the life they write so as to teach  
Them how to pick their rhymes in better faith  
And fit. But, gentleman I am, I reached  
My ungloved hand toward her that she might trust  
My pure intentions, purged of all the lust

## Book the Fourth

## IV.16

That surged unchecked throughout my corporeal being.  
When she put her hand in mine and smiled,  
All wet with mirth, I felt my caution fleeing—  
If there was some left—and I grew wild  
With goad to prick and tear my reason loose  
From off its watch at passion's trembling sluice

## IV.17

And drew this hand, so delicate and smooth,  
Down to my lips and kissed it softly, dreaming  
It to be her body such to soothe  
The hard-pent pressure of desire steaming  
Up my suit. She then addressed me, smiling  
In a manner sexy and beguiling,

## IV.18

Though I grasped of it no goddamned word.  
Nor mattered this a whit. For, this was love,  
That flawless exegete of all things purred  
In ears since Venus mounted high above.  
She ran the fingers of her other hand  
Amid my hair and uttered something grand

## Book the Fourth

## IV.19

To hear, which seemed to mean, *how do you do?*  
(But didn't, as I'd later understand).  
Emboldened by her voice, so near a coo,  
I then inquired how her castle's manned,  
Or some such thing, to which she laughed anew  
And pulled me up from off my knee to view

## IV.20

Those gorgeous big blue eyes of hers and feel  
Her breath upon my cheek and glean what stirred  
Within that bosom, pity to conceal.  
I stood erect before her, undeterred  
But for the tingling numbness in my leg  
And spots a-spurting 'gainst my vision vague.

## IV.21

And yet again she tried, to my delight,  
Seductively that greeting used before,  
Though now intoned a wee bit less polite—  
As if this tryst of ours might prove a chore.  
She dropped my hand and caught hold of that favor  
I had brought along for private savor.

## Book the Fourth

## IV.22

Ooh, I thought, so *that's* what had her worked  
To such a sweat!, and watched her as she started  
New her old inscrutable quiz, then smirked,  
My eyes lost in her bust where it had parted  
And but struggling out from dark desire  
At the bit about her ROYAL sire

## IV.23

Mad to find now missing this small thing—  
This charm I borrowed but to fuel my thrill—  
For, though *portraying* her, it was THE KING,  
*HER FATHER*, who had paid the limner's bill.  
"The King?" I gasped, my vision quite returned  
From out that valley all too quick sojourned.

## IV.24

It now looked plain as deer within a field:  
The girl's as well *connected* as she's built!  
And though by now my mission was concealed,  
I'd find what all to do, right to the hilt!  
But lest my motives anyone mistake,  
I stayed to play the *scholar*, not the rake.

## V

*Book the Fifth*

## V.1

**A**h, never did the flesh bring man more pleasure  
Than was felt by me up on that hill,  
Where massy walls of ancient sovereign treasure  
Glimmered in the hearth's excited thrill.  
I delved in deep and greedily partook  
That corporal sustenance so long forsook.

## V.2

We had lamb. So succulent and tender  
Was this luscious meat, I couldn't eat  
It fast enough, nor heed the regal splendor  
All around us where we sat, nor greet  
The royal gaze I felt upon me set  
As if on something odd found in one's net.

## V.3

Existed none that wasn't on my plate.  
Outside the noble compass of that rim  
Fussed sound and light, scant meaning to relate  
To senses fixed concertedly within,  
Fixed fast upon the luscious taste of life  
Itself—past piddling happiness or strife

## Book the Fifth

## V.4

And all such routine things that only veil  
The bland ambrosial savor of mere being—  
The subtle tang of some minute detail  
On which the whole depends, like light for seeing.  
I knew it now for what it was, this taste:  
Less food than that great hunger it replaced.

## V.5

And having ducked starvation's slow blunt scythe  
Once more, assuaging deep this oldest lust,  
I raised my eyes from off these bones, full blithe  
As one who'd lost it all but found a crust,  
And let them drift and wander round this hall,  
This vast and dark enclosure, thick with pall.

## V.6

In aimless search of boundary did they fly,  
Where mighty curving ribs soared overhead  
To bear aloft a vault so spacious high  
It seemed the very firmament instead,  
As if in place of heaven's fearful void  
Here man presumed to have his own employed.

## Book the Fifth

## V.7

Then, falling from that dizzy height they lit  
Below upon a weighty corbel stone  
On which those arching ribs were made to sit  
Supported. And from out that block was shown,  
Where once had been a surface smooth of sense,  
Now gouged to life a beast of such intense

## V.8

Expression as to seem the very germ  
Of all unrest, corruption's seed set deep  
Within delight, hell-bent to disaffirm.  
Forever wakened from its stony sleep,  
It raged against the light in wrath all-seeing,  
Riled at the fact of its own being.

## V.9

So fierce a visage did this creature bear,  
Coaxed violently by steel of sculptor's chisel,  
I felt afraid to meet its eyes, the glare  
Of which was so intense it seemed to sizzle.  
Yet I looked, compelled by that weird thought  
That I had seen somewhere a likeness caught

## Book the Fifth

## V.10

Within some *human* face I'd known one time.  
It haunted me, this recognition dim  
Of having met amid rare distant clime  
Some personage of normal mortal limb  
Who nonetheless resembled in his smile  
Some aspect of this mien I found so vile.

## V.11

And so, quite heedless of the voices round  
Me clamoring for my gaze, I stared intent  
Upon these lineaments that would so hound  
Me, rooting memory's folds for merest scent  
Of recognition—yet to no avail,  
For all that came to mind were things for sale:

## V.12

Fragile, costly things... "so precious rare..."  
I wouldn't think to let them... "think to let..."  
Ah hah! That's *it!* Down in that *dealer's* lair  
It was that I'd such fiendish eyes last met!  
It was *his* face I saw on that tableau:  
The antique dealer, ARCHIBALD IMAGO!

## Book the Fifth

## V.13

Or so the name was writ on that receipt  
He gave me for my dragon—*now long gone!*  
O, what a crafty master of deceit  
To feign such polished unconcern whereon  
He knew I'd bite like fish on freshest bait!  
Why, that Arch-merchant must have lain in wait

## V.14

Until I lost my way and stumbled in  
Upon his web, long spun for none but me!  
How else explain his helpers who, like kin  
Of mine, knew just which one my house would be?  
Yes, *they* led *me!* He pressed me call him "Lark"  
For short, as "Arch" he found "too harsh, too dark."

## V.15

Or else perhaps too bloody close to home!  
For arch he was indeed of something short  
Of goodness. Had I left my wits to roam  
The streets while in his shop, that he could thwart  
So well my knowing him? And what dark art  
Obscured my note he'd even dressed the part?

## Book the Fifth

## V.16

He stood there dressed in black from head to toe,  
His wizened face reclaimed by hoary beard  
That must have taken centuries to grow.  
And on his finger gleamed a ring more weird  
Than anything I'd seen in all the worst  
Shop windows. Surely was its maker cursed

## V.17

With an especially heightened lack of taste,  
Or at the least an unenlightened patron.  
For, what it showed was like a snake enlaced  
Amid a knot of endless complication,  
Courting still the most disdainful gaze  
To linger there awhile in its dispraise

## V.18

And miss the even stranger stuff about  
Him: that old tome he carried at his side  
Through which he'd pore each time you'd come to doubt  
Him on some provenance he would provide.  
Did mortal ever live in all the ages  
Wise to what was writ upon *those* pages?

## Book the Fifth

## V.19

Why, had he worn a pointy hat with WIZARD  
Writ on it, it couldn't have been more plain:  
A tongue *that* smooth could have only slithered  
From a mouth the Arch-tempter had ordained.  
Yet, miss I surely did these telltale signs  
Until I woke well snared within his lines.

## V.20

If wake I did at all! For strange to say,  
I can't recall a time things *weren't* weird!  
Hard pressed am I of late to tell the day  
From night, so have their properties careered  
Together in my mind—the thing concrete  
Commuting fluently with its conceit.

## V.21

Might *all* of this have been in fact a dream,  
Some chemic conjuration of my brain  
In which the alchemist who now so seemed  
My mentor was but *me*, and this domain  
Of his in which I wander none but *mine*—  
None but that popped realm above my spine?

## Book the Fifth

## V.22

For *there* is where it's said the world's transformed  
Within the merest liquid drop—up there  
Within that crucible where's nightly warmed  
Concoctions of anxiety and care  
In random recipes of unrestraint,  
Investing meanings bold in matters faint.

## V.23

Indeed, I sense I've led another life  
Than this somewhere, sometime—a job, perhaps,  
A home, with children, pets, friends, bills—a wife—  
Yet all by now long faded into lapse.  
If so, it's nothing to regain it all  
But open wide my eyes to watch this fall

## V.24

To faint remembrance. Yes, to merely die  
From here right back into that other dream—  
The great corporeal one wherein we buy  
Our food for this one—and emerge full free  
And unconstrained by this Arch-author churl:  
That dealer and his lizard...and...*the girl*...?

## VI

*Book the Sixth*

## VI.1

No, no, don't go! Hold tight! Let not a ray  
Of light peep in to burn away this veil  
On which I have her fixed, just poised to say  
She needs me. For, once gone I can't entail  
Myself to this same kingdom once again,  
Despite how I might *recompose* it then.

## VI.2

O no, let go and drift right back instead  
While time exists to save this world of hers.  
Out, sun! Go rouse some lovers in their bed  
And make them sweat from what their love incurs,  
But *I* will not to your rude stare succumb.  
*My* flesh must once again grow heavy, dumb,

## VI.3

And senseless of the everything without  
Until its text reads only of within,  
Rewoven in a pattern of devout  
Veridicality, like touch on skin.  
Oh, to dissolve and seep back into night,  
Dispersed across that sky beyond all light,

## Book the Sixth

## VI.4

Where SELF is then re-membered all anew  
Within a moment vast as countless miles.  
Yes, I feel it now—I'm coming through.  
I feel me drifting past those quiet isles  
Lining Lethe's moonlit banks, on course  
For that dark cave that holds our very source:

## VI.5

That leaden den where Sleep holds languid court,  
Whose ineffectual ministers of state  
Would nod to his dull-muttered mandates 'thwart  
All cares of consequence on which they wait.  
Did gentler despot ever reign than Sleep,  
Whose subject never lived that dodged *his* keep?

## VI.6

How soothing feels my Lethe's current, soft-  
Drawing me onward toward the little death  
I've lived in her before so oft, so oft;  
How rich it is to ride her lusty breadth  
In impotence—to savor the elation  
Over selfhood's sweet obliteration!

## Book the Sixth

## VI.7

Yes, yes, to rid me of identity—  
To gallop tilting toward that very hole  
Through which one's lost in the immensity  
Mere being seems, without a part for "soul."  
That's what it is, this fragrance I now breathe:  
The evocation of the life I *leave*!

## VI.8

But what rare, splendid country's this around  
Me here I see as if with fingertips,  
Or lips, as lovers do—yes, more profoundly  
Than with eyes—like passing round her hips,  
I feel to her horizon and beyond,  
Where she, this earth, curves gently 'round, all donned

## VI.9

In silken verdure bound by shimmering seas,  
Effulgent under white-hot shafts of sun  
Where part the billowed mounds of drifting breeze-  
Born clouds. Yes, yes, the earth and I are one!  
From here at Lethe's vast terrestrial shore  
Can I at once the whole of her explore:

## Book the Sixth

## VI.10

Like when a grape is crushed between the teeth  
And find perspective plays scant part toward sense:  
What's gleaned of it above or underneath  
Is all together apprehended hence,  
As if the word then is tasted whole  
Which nothing left but *feelings* to extol!

## VI.11

But, what are these alluring forms I pass  
Now, shrouded thick in shade? I seem to know  
Them deeply but for this miasmic mass  
Between, through which bare more than shadows show,  
Though some illumined well enough to trace  
Vague hints of something intimate—a face

## VI.12

Or place or something else in which one seems  
To see one's "self" within the den of Sleep.  
That's it; I'm here! These are the husks of dreams  
He's said to leave abandoned 'round his keep.  
From each he'd drawn that seed of logic, strange,  
In which a sleeper reads new worlds arranged.

## Book the Sixth

## VI.13

And yes, I recognize them all somehow;  
In each I see someone or thing I'd known  
Before by name, as if but sound endowed  
Them then with old identities full-blown,  
All lost again and then discovered new,  
Like truths awaiting *propositions* true.

## VI.14

And hence the boundless richness here: a guise  
Of language and sensation that's but used  
*Predictively*, reducing our surprise;  
Where prior probabilities perused  
Can then be tested, recombined for free,  
And minimized of inefficiency.

## VI.15

Of course, I didn't *think* all this, per se.  
I merely felt its truth grow glowing keen  
Upon my being—as one *knows* by way  
Of taste some spice unknown by name to glean.  
No, not in signs of speech arranged to *mirror*  
The experience, but in that clearer

## Book the Sixth

## VI.16

Ken one *feels* the world in from here,  
In which you see that words so often *muddle*  
The reality they would cohere.  
They simply dress it up for that unsubtle  
Eye unused to seeing plain and shop  
It forth transformed: mere costume on a prop

## VI.17

Of truth. For words sustain their very own  
Reality, distinct from what they'd "mean,"  
In that the thing that's spoke cannot be known  
*Except* in shapes mentality's machined.  
Then what plain use are words describing things  
When only of themselves they ever sing,

## VI.18

When really of their own event they tell,  
The very properties of their performance:  
Breadth, weight, hue and tone of each—their spell  
As *things* before use as coordinates  
With worldly things, mere points positioned  
On that daily map we call cognition?

## Book the Sixth

## VI.19

What can they really tell us of that land  
*Itself* they chart, not of the lines and planes  
By which its sheer duration may be spanned  
For postulation's sake, but what remains  
Beyond mimetics of a thought's expression  
Or the datum and its mere reflection?

## VI.20

What can words tell us of the conscious place  
Achieved across linked synapses, like storms  
Of process, urging replication's race?  
What values can be found in symbolized forms  
*Suggesting* things themselves? To know what's "real"  
Just shut your mouth, put down your pen, and *feel!*

## VI.21

But as I said, I hadn't *thought* all this  
As such. Indeed, it all seemed now but altered  
To its merest *telling*—gone amiss  
Somehow, as if these words, once apt, soon faltered  
From their path proscribed by act of plot  
And wandered out to where the facts were not,

## Book the Sixth

## VI.22

But out where they themselves might meet and mingle,  
Rubbed contextually against each other's  
Sense, engendering facts their own no single  
Word could hope to do. Had I my druthers,  
I'd have *stayed* there too, far from all events  
Recountable. It seems this wasn't meant

## VI.23

To be though—seems the very words that made  
Me were reforming towards some different text  
In which I saw night's bright enchantments fade  
To sudden strangeness. As the shore collects  
The disenfranchised from the sea, the edge  
Of this, my sentience, now showed remnants dredged

## VI.24

From darkening depths of sleep: odd shards of things  
Once valuable—chance rubble of my past—  
A woman's voice that calls or cries or sings....  
No, laughs. And rising up from out the vast  
Expanse re-gathering to become me  
Again, my manhood struggles to be free....

## VII

*Book the Seventh*

## VII.1

“O God!” I now ejaculated loud  
With opened eyes to see my dream-come-true—  
The one in which that heiress well-endowed  
With attributes so feminine subdues  
Me in my bed and traps me in her arms,  
An avid inmate of her ample charms,

## VII.2

And there detains me from those puerile chores  
Conventional to every romance hero:  
Like chasing every horror on a horse  
And righting wrongs until the score is zero.  
Yes, life *is* good!” I yelled in sheer delight,  
Faith firmly resurrected by this sight.

## VII.3

For here she was, not merely in my dreams  
But in my *bed!* Well, *someone's* bed at least;  
The room looked unfamiliar. Those best schemes  
Hot Venus ever tried on maid or priest  
Seemed downright soporific next to this.  
My eyes, it seemed, were trapped in the abyss

## Book the Seventh

## VII.4

Of bliss corralled within her plunging gown.  
And when I pulled them out and up to meet  
Her own—that blue in which I feared I'd drown—  
I felt those full ripe lips of hers entreat  
Me toward adventures never dreamt till now.  
She hovered over me, as might a plow

## VII.5

That would be lowered down to work the earth,  
And, quick, I strained to pull my eyelids closed  
And play this game for *all* that it was worth.  
I feigned to be still *sleeping*, indisposed  
To any but the most invasive measures  
One employs at such a point. Pleasures

## VII.6

This enticing are too rarely found  
To *not* take hold of, damn it, when one can!  
The world's strongest glue would not have bound  
My eyelids shut for long, as she began  
With unforeseen abandon such a laugh  
Would make you think she'd cracked and broke in half.

## Book the Seventh

## VII.7

Ah! *This* then was that sound I'd heard far off  
From in the dim-lit bubble of deep sleep—  
That very same I'd thought some deadly cough  
When first I heard it—back when she caught peep  
Of me so ill prepared beside the stream!  
This laugh was *anything* but what you'd deem

## VII.8

Quite proper for a damsel of *her* birth.  
It sounded closer to a hog in pain!  
Still, one could sense this had less death than mirth  
About it—maybe even ascertain  
In it *endearing* qualities of sorts,  
Like tears of helplessness amid the snorts.

## VII.9

But still, I opened up my eyes to hear  
Between deep breaths and sighs a word or two  
I understood, I think—something quite near  
*O would I save her from some bugaboo*  
*Or such that ate some creep the townsfolk had...*  
No, *sheep* it was it ate that made them sad....

## Book the Seventh

## VII.10

Well, *whatever* it was that pricked her zeal,  
I now discerned it wasn't really me  
But rather some large horror whose next meal  
Comprised—*and this by her own king's decree!*—  
Primarily *herself*. "His *what?*" I cried  
In jealous rage. For, should I just abide

## VII.11

Some rival come and steal from me my lunch!  
Just how can I convey to you in rhyme  
The impact of these words? No cogent punch  
In one's own gut some unsuspected time  
Comes close. For here I lay within the lap  
Of rapture, like a suckling at the pap,

## VII.12

Near drunk on beauty, swimming in those eyes,  
Those cheeks...*those thighs!*...till suddenly I'm doused  
In cold, wet realization that her cries  
Are due some brute whom I would need to joust—  
And *win against*, of course—to stand a chance  
Of seeing her again (beyond some trance).

## Book the Seventh

## VII.13

Oh, I was kindled now, I grant you, hot  
As any well-stoked hearth in June! What more  
Could you expect a man to hear and not  
Erupt in green-eyed malcontent? "I'll gore  
Whatever bloody bastard comes between  
Us two!" I warned whomever, sight unseen.

## VII.14

Of course, just *who* whomever might have been  
I'd no idea—nor could care a stroke.  
These flames I felt now raging deep within  
On envy's moist green shoots had spewed such smoke  
I couldn't see a thing, or so to speak.  
For, I knew just what havoc I would wreak.

## VII.15

And it would be the error of the dearth  
Of wits about me now that drove me thus—  
The sort of thing one winces on in mirth  
And pain next morning that was none but fuss  
The night before. And startled by this thought,  
I realized that my tongue was dry and taut,

## Book the Seventh

## VII.16

As if some *other* appetite of mine—  
I had, it seems, too many for good health—  
Had wakened now beyond its quiet time  
To stretch, yawn, lick its chops and hunt in stealth  
My SELF—if that's what's called this great confusion  
Closely following Free Will's delusion—

## VII.17

Watching what I next will do to find  
Some meaning in it all. I felt my hand  
Reach out, directed by that thirst purblind,  
To grope for that one thing I'd understand—  
The thing I'd always reached for with such pluck  
And found, alas, when *truly* down on luck—

## VII.18

That flask that never left my side, *except*  
*In use*, was now quite nowhere to be felt.  
I asked my hovering muse, that quite inept  
But gorgeous genius of my fate who knelt  
Now with her knees pinned 'round my chest, just where  
In bloody hell this thing had gone. Her hair,

## Book the Seventh

## VII.19

Just by the way, was nothing less seductive  
Than the rest of her, by God!, a shower  
Of gold silk suffused with the destructive  
Lure found in some soft meat-eating flower.  
Now it was embosomed round my head,  
A spider's catch within her new-spun bed.

## VII.20

For she had closed in quick on my distraction  
Now and rummaged with a sprightly hand  
Beneath the sheet, no doubt toward satisfaction  
Of my search for flask, till it hit land  
Abruptly where the *cuisse* and *tuille* would meet  
Had I been dressed for it—she's *not* discreet,

## VII.21

My muse, whatever else she is—and laughed  
Like hell the moment that her hand had found  
That thing she sought. And though it were the shaft  
Of my own lance, I grabbed firm hold around  
The bedpost at my head and shouted out  
An oath to shock the young or the devout.

## Book the Seventh

## VII.22

You see, there'd been a misinterpretation  
Here, somewhere, for *I'd* thought this guffaw  
Of hers had meant, with optimist's elation,  
That she'd found my flask—though I now saw  
It really meant that she herself was sure  
She *hadn't*. Yet *this* was one I could endure,

## VII.23

This tussle in our mother tongues, this clash  
Of cultured folk in bed whilst raged outside  
The mayhem of the middle ages. Gnash  
Your teeth the while; what cannot be denied  
Is this: 'twixt her scant this and my scant that  
We understood quite *nothing* of this chat

## VII.24

Beyond *essential* things. And *there*, we're taught,  
We lovers leave philosophers behind.  
While those poor tinkers merely ponder thought,  
We're left the *business end* of life to mind!  
Inspired so, I felt my will engorge...  
Till hearing her now purr these words: "O GEORGE!"

## VIII

*Book the Eighth*

## VIII.1

“*O*<sub>who?</sub>” I snarled, flushed a vivid green,  
And turned to catch this poacher face to face,  
Though dawned on me this rival addressee  
Was likely but the *landlord* of this place,  
*My host*, whose bed it was I’d poked about  
The morning with my muse—*who too*, no doubt,

## VIII.2

Would be but *his*, along with any booze  
I found round here. Such stuff is what we romance  
Heroes must endure; our wins we lose  
Until, once more, we ply our ready lance  
In faith to win it back just at the end.  
Christ! Those you cannot trust you shouldn’t *send!*

## VIII.3

I mean, just vet them better to begin  
And then you’re done with all these irksome tests  
Of worthiness along the way. If sin  
Can beat out virtue in your man, this rests  
On *you* whose agency brought forth this book.  
I could go on but won’t. My sudden look

## Book the Eighth

## VIII.4

Around the room found neither hide nor hair  
Of anyone or thing you'd call a foe  
And fight. So back I turned to ask my fair  
One who in Hell she had addressed with "O,"  
And I then saw her eyes wax quickly wide,  
As one aroused so much as to confide

## VIII.5

To you the passion burning up her breast...  
But rather burst out loud in yet another  
Of those heinous laughs to scare the blessed  
Right out of heaven. Pondering what Mother  
Would have thought, *nay done*, had I brought *her*  
Back home to tea had helped me disinter

## VIII.6

My past a bit until her next sedation,  
When she mustered up the strength to answer  
Me about just who in God's creation  
"George" was. In that special tone that cancer  
Brings to conversation, she said with true  
Conviction and surprise the one word... "YOU."

## Book the Eighth

## VIII.7

That's right, yes, "you": spelled M, E, *you*. Of course  
I called her on her error unrestrained,  
As *I* was *not* that cad-upon-high-horse,  
That militant and patronizing saint  
Of this same name! In fact, it was none less  
Than *him* I'd come to stop, I then confessed.

## VIII.8

You see, *he* was the *very* one tradition  
Soon would send to slay with flinty smile  
That dragon in my glass—an exhibition  
So barbaric, rude, uncouth, and vile  
As would quite make the worst invading horde  
Seem but as healing as a trip to Lourdes.

## VIII.9

And girl or not, I hadn't come this far  
In search of what had happened just to stand  
Aside right now and leave things as they are—  
Or *were*, I mean, as these were things long planned  
As past events (which is absurd, of course,  
If entropy and time exert their force).

## Book the Eighth

## VIII.10

I would not, *could not* do. And I could feel  
These words reforming me towards my old mission  
With priorities again congealed  
Around all muscles tensed for more sedition.  
But the princess was no longer sitting  
On me anymore but rather hitting

## VIII.11

Me with fists, with shoes, and then my sword,  
And I was, *finally*, well out of bed,  
Defending me against someone who, Lord  
Knows, *really* wanted me as good as dead.  
But soon I had disarmed her and we fell  
Into the bed again. I caught her swell

## VIII.12

Within my arms once more and held her hard  
Through spasmed thrusts and sobs till safely moored  
Against my chest. She slept. I felt my guard  
Drop now for good when she let go my sword  
Which I could hear now hit the floor with tired  
Clang that feebly echoed some, then died.

## Book the Eighth

## VIII.13

It was, it seems, far less the firm, hard hold  
Than those soft words I'd whispered in her ear  
That had assuaged her so. I'd mumbled bold  
Assurances rung neither true nor clear,  
Though meaningful enough in merest sound  
To adequately calm us *both* back down.

## VIII.14

Just what it was of this she'd understood  
Had likely mattered less than did the meaning  
Of my effort to explain it. Good  
Or bad, the same held true for me. Seeming  
To believe the nonsense I had spoken,  
*I* seemed soothed by what had been *betokened*

## VIII.15

Rather than just meant. Ironic though,  
Things *were* but looking up now. After all,  
I had in bed the girl of my worst foe,  
Whose imminent betrothal I'd forestall  
By stealing her myself, and too, that beast  
He'd come to save her from—*all this at least*

## Book the Eighth

## VIII.16

*In published versions.* Actually, it's known  
The *real* enticement toward his crass display  
Was but the love of someone of his own  
*More manly* shape. Alas, yes, he was "gay,"  
I said—moved less by shapely leg of maid  
Than soldiery from out his jock brigade

## VIII.17

Of near-hysteric zealots, who pursued  
On horse just anyone or thing to kill  
For but the glory of their misconstrued  
Dear Lord, whose Will they'd heard with *subtlest* skill.  
Now, this is common with your hard believers—  
They tend to be your overachievers.

## VIII.18

And this was quite especially so with George,  
Who'd find his inspiration in a turd  
And mount his horse to gallop off to forge  
High war at times when even God demurred.  
Back to my text: Our plaintive princess knew  
Of George just what she'd gleaned that day he slew

## Book the Eighth

## VIII.19

Some stump his Lord disliked while in a field  
In which she'd picked some flowers. Yes, she saw  
At once that *this* brave knight was one who'd yield  
To nothing. Surely *he'd* be him she'd call  
In time of trouble. And, alas, *that* time  
Was now, it seemed, for she'd be scant but chyme

## VIII.20

Next morning, she now feared, were that mad mob  
To get their way and force the king to keep  
His word—that one in which he'd pledged to lob  
*Her too* to that starved dragon. For, quite deep  
Inside this beast's intestines now had wasted  
All the sheep *plus* anyone who tasted

## VIII.21

Sheep-like in the minds of these poor folk.  
So please forgive her this sad mental state  
In which some ass like George, who still provokes  
But jokes around these parts, could look so great  
To her right now—her indispensable  
Hope, though just some incomprehensible

## Book the Eighth

## VIII.22

Dope. But when she'd opened up her eyes  
I put across to her what you've just heard  
Related here and found myself surprised  
To see this grand charade of hand and word  
I'd tried had worked. She seemed now to accept  
It all—until, that is, a smirk had crept

## VIII.23

Across her lips just then when I'd addressed  
That bit about her saviour's sexual preference.  
And *there* she stopped me in my tracks, possessed,  
It seemed, of sudden, wicked irreverence,  
And vented laughter loud enough to clear  
The room (if had been others that were here).

## VIII.24

She looked incredulous. And I was losing  
Humor. "I know a bit about this stuff,  
My dear," I said with confidence (confusing  
Future, past, and now). "I've *taught* enough  
About it, after all," I then disgorged.  
My name's Professor Plowman...*Pierce*, not "**George**."

## IX

*Book the Ninth*

## IX.1

**I**t's said earth offers man no torment worse  
Than the ferocious sea. This isn't true.  
The shipwrecked sailor who observed this first  
Might well have learned much on the briny blue,  
But having been removed from homelife news,  
He'd weathered neither lover, spouse, or muse.

## IX.2

And *there's* where your good rudder will get stuck  
Beneath what's otherwise fine buoyancy.  
Poseidon by himself would have no luck  
Subduing all the chaos stirred up, free  
Of charge, disputing Amphritrite's will.  
It is a challenge for the greatest skill,

## IX.3

Requiring such care with every word  
That it's still safer toiling in the sea  
Than betting on surviving the absurd  
Endeavor of attempting to agree,  
*Or not*, with one's own muse. To even try  
Invites a torment harsher than to die

## Book the Ninth

## IX.4

Beneath the salty depths of Neptune's clasp.  
I'd rather have the worst that *he* might choose,  
With his wet wrath aimed hard at my last gasp,  
Than dare dispute the wisdom of my muse  
(From whom my inspiration seems derived).  
Yes, give me your most frenzied wave that strives

## IX.5

In frothy lust to lash up at the moon,  
And I will ride it long and hard with all  
The appetite I've ever brought to boon  
Or doom; yes, all the relish, thirst, and raw  
Intoxicated rapture of the "mad"  
(Who see in their brain's mischief countless sad,

## IX.6

Ecstatic thrills the "sane" will never know).  
And with my head pumped full of fiery thrill  
I will abandon everything and throw  
My wits aside with all my strength and skill  
To sail the surge of your most awful might  
Right up into the dizzying weightless heights

## Book the Ninth

## IX.7

And down again with slow, momentous force  
To dive and crash right back in furious spray  
Amid the shattered wreckage in your course.  
Yes, thus I'd sooner die than waste away.  
For, even you, dear god, have not the power  
To thus grind us *hour upon hour*

## IX.8

As SHE can when you get her going. In you  
A man knows where he's at once ship goes down.  
In *your* arms he'll but perish once, it's true.  
But plunge him into *hers* and he'll drown  
*Relentlessly*, distracted by his joy,  
While held within her whims like some old toy.

## IX.9

**"O boy, is he a bigot!"** you declare,  
My gentle listeners. How strange that I,  
Of all great heroes *the* most debonair—  
Extremely liberal—should stoop to ply  
Enlightened ears with such rude boorish views!  
But understand, dear hearers: to confuse

## Book the Ninth

## IX.10

The speaker with the speech in such a case  
Is every bit as dim of *you*, I might  
Observe. Truth is, I don't at all embrace  
Such crude misogynistic rant. Indict  
Not the *actor* for bad lines he's given;  
It's but the *playwright* should be shriven.

## IX.11

For rest assured, *I'm* not prejudiced...**BUT**  
All I know is that a man's identity  
Is sacred, yes, and that no matter what  
You say, it feels quite near obscenity  
When challenged—whether by a woman, man,  
Or household pet—regarding **WHOM I AM.**

## IX.12

And when my own damned muse gets me confused  
With someone else—especially some rogue  
Who's my own enemy—I feel abused,  
I'll deign confess, and likely will invoke  
A mood where unbecoming thoughts become  
More prevalent than fine ones that they numb.

## Book the Ninth

## IX.13

“God, this is dumb! What *is* this all about?”  
I thought. And like one who is sudden woken  
From a night’s concocted truths, no doubt  
To find things worse than his bad dreams betokened  
(*And* not as familiar), I but laughed  
At this, my realization of how daft

## IX.14

I’d been till now, and how I’d missed the clue  
That her being here was anything but chance  
And not the rare coincidence of two  
Inhabitants of one same space and stance  
(Which ours quite nearly was). It had appeared  
Though now quite clear she’d been but planted here

## IX.15

Smack in my path—I would have had to climb  
Right over her, lest we collide—by *HIM*:  
By that inscrutable shaman of time,  
Space, and decorative ambiance, that grim  
Though coyly smiling dealer of antiques  
Whose shop spells doom to anyone who seeks

## Book the Ninth

## IX.16

To bargain for odd remnants of his past.  
For, wasn't he that same arch-magus-fiend  
Who lured me from my author's path to cast  
Me cold into a world just machined  
Toward *his* dark ends? Why, yes; then what of *her*?  
Was *she* but conjured up by *him* to blur

## IX.17

My view of any predetermined goal,  
A sure distraction from my author's own  
More dignified designs? In this, her role  
As "muse," she'd help him keep me as his drone  
To work toward what nefarious endeavor  
His own heart desired—most to sever

## IX.18

My own author's hold on me. Of course!  
Imago could have been one time himself  
A hero who, like me, had won through force  
Of faith and brawn our poet's fame and wealth.  
Perhaps, grown discontent beneath the yoke  
Of reckoned stress and syllable, he woke

## Book the Ninth

## IX.19

From out his fettered deference to the ear  
To turn against the very one who gave  
Him name and limb (and glorious lack of fear),  
And then, like Lucifer, but fell, a slave  
To his gigantic pride, and then conspired  
But to kill his god and set on fire

## IX.20

Any relics found from out that rhyme-  
And-meter world that tethered him so fast.  
For, then he could begin again and climb  
Above all best intentions, unsurpassed  
In rank debasement of his perfect diction  
And the savor of his own affliction

## IX.21

As a self-made exile from truth.  
And there he'd sit amid his ghastly lair,  
Where books and papers strewn about, uncouth  
In clutter, told of moral disrepair  
At work behind his brazen new campaign  
To thwart and undermine his author's reign

## Book the Ninth

## IX.22

Above the world made manifest in verse—  
The poet's order of mere words that made  
Him who he was and free enough to curse  
His thralldom. Yes, he'd taint its life, invade  
Its pulse with jumbled numbers of his own  
Contrivance till it lumbered, overthrown

## IX.23

Of all good measure, into cheapest noise.  
O, I can see the scoundrel now, Saint Chief-  
Thief-Poetaster-Potentate, who cloys  
The ear with gaudy bits of peeling leaf,  
Recycling every trite, prosaic phrase,  
Each crass confection full of purple praise

## IX.24

He could appropriate from all the worst  
(Sincerest) verse, all re-gilt fortunate  
As souvenirs. And serving him his thirst  
For the obscene, this most importunate  
Of charms, this specter of pure sex appeal  
He's cast at me, as if some fish its meal.

## X

*Book the Tenth*

## X.1

**W**ould such a fisherman need *so* much bait,  
Though? Couldn't one who'd come to cast a lure  
Like *this* be good enough at reeled-in fate  
To get it without aid of tricks? What poor  
Fool with the art to fashion one like *her*  
Would not just save some steps and but confer

## X.2

Upon a hero of his own creation  
The intrinsic will, attention span,  
And drive *precluding* his own mediation?  
He is either deft beyond his plan  
Or else too slow to pose much threat to that  
Great scheme *my* author's made! Had *I* begat

## X.3

A creature as he had as beautiful  
From out the ivory of my own desire,  
I think I would have found it suitable  
Enough to stop right there and quick retire  
To the country with my work instead.  
(The world can run itself, now back to bed!)

## Book the Tenth

## X.4

Unless, that is, but no...it couldn't be...  
That she is *his*, MY MAKER'S, doing—meant  
Not to distract but to *engage* me, *free*  
Of any sly diversions such as sent  
Me by that most unscrupulous mean peddler,  
That insidious middleman and meddler

## X.5

In Borodin's designs. Oh, *that* might work  
As well! As if He's cast her but to guide  
Me *past* those sirens waving like berserk  
From off Imago's pleasure boat—yes, tied  
Me, deaf, blind, invulnerable, to the mast  
Of my own greed for *her*! (I am aghast

## X.6

To ponder all the ways one can arrive  
At the very same dilemma!) Makes sense  
When you think it through: He who could contrive  
Within his painted world quite so immense  
A realism as this—yes, one *complete*  
*With its own corruption*—could keep his feet

## Book the Tenth

## X.7

Quite out of its conceived wet corner too,  
If needed. After all, could some mere merchant  
Really rival one to whom is due  
His own supply's demand? Could the serpent  
Then predict the savor of that fruit  
Before *he'd* eat its flesh and waxed astute?

## X.8

Of course not! That Imago stands no chance  
Of out-maneuvering *him*. Seems safe to say,  
*Her* presence here must be but to advance  
Our poem's work, not thwart or disobey  
Its laws—sustain the *apple*, not the worm,  
It might be said—yes, help me reaffirm

## X.9

The virtues of this work of his, despite  
The inroads made in it so far by snake-  
In-the-grass salesmen like him. I'll requite  
With *her* help his every treachery: each fake  
Apostrophe, forced metaphor, wrenched stress,  
And supernumerary syllabic excess

## Book the Tenth

## X.10

Left festering here by this first fallen son,  
This impresario of God-awful  
Verse, and root out each egregious pun.  
Inspired by *her*, I'll but reclaim His lawful  
Charge of my own script, purloined by *his*...  
Shit! *There's* another: if *Imago is*

## X.11

My author! What if Borodin himself  
Is but *his* ruse—the supreme red herring—  
Just some strong-smelling god redrawn in stealth  
Across my path each time my own unerring  
Nose gets wind of George? Perhaps when *her*  
Scent, lovely as it's frail, cannot deter

## X.12

My lead, then he can come and throw me off  
With but a pinch of God! No, down, weird reason,  
Down! If really I had thought such moth-  
Eaten logic likely, I'd do treason  
To us both: I'd cram an anapest  
Right down my trochee and make manifest

## Book the Tenth

## X.13

Such degradation in the prosody  
And substance of this poem as deters  
Through its worst profligate verbosity  
Even that most steadfast saboteur,  
The most determined worm—and truly *then*  
Wreak havoc in Pandemonium, amen!

## X.14

Yet, every certainty brings on its heels  
The mandatory sticky gum of doubt,  
And I can't help but ponder that those wheels  
Propelling fate-wards with such keen, devout,  
Inexorable force, might prove to be  
Compelled by neither him *nor* Him, but ME.

## X.15

Now *that* would be the worst, the hottest hell;  
To *have* no devil, dire God, *whatever*—  
Yes, to lack beyond one's lonely self  
Some cause in which each newly lost endeavor  
May be justified; in short, being FREE,  
Yes, *awfully* free, remote, a refugee

## Book the Tenth

## X.16

Among a nation made of one, where wars  
Erupt *among mere disparate states of mind*;  
Where, safe from the oppression it abhors,  
The spirit's caged by one to which it's blind:  
The despot of *responsibility*—  
Dark privilege of unchecked facility

## X.17

To choose and live within each horrid choice;  
Yes, dwell *beyond* Beelzebub's best reach  
And therefore safe from any dangerous voice  
Except the very one we can't beseech  
Or shun, the one soft-whispered in our ear  
*Interior* to what our organs hear;

## X.18

The voice that sounds the outcome of these strange  
Admixtures, chemic cocktails we achieve  
From out the complex seethings of our brains,  
Wherein disordered blendings can conceive  
Within one skull a nation's greatest pride  
Or darkest nightmare it can't hope to hide.

## Book the Tenth

## X.19

And furthermore, if such were so, then she'd  
Be mine all right, but *literally*; no, *not*  
The woman of my dreams I'd soon succeed  
In winning from her father with a swat  
Or two of my own sword but, as she seems  
At times, well, *just* the woman of my dreams,

## X.20

As if some emblem of my appetite,  
A life-size allegory of that urge  
That drives a man to rouse himself and fight  
The wrong, the right—whatever's deemed his scourge—  
And conquer something he can call his own;  
The proverb's carrot, though in flesh and bone

## X.21

Perceived and dangled out before my aim  
By me alone—without the intervention  
Of some lascivious goddess whom to blame  
Each time my goal's surpassed by my intention,  
As when I get indeed the thing I want  
And find it less fulfilling than the hunt.

## Book the Tenth

## X.22

Enough now! Stop! Desist! Is there no end  
In sight of numbered truths recruitable  
Supporting any given thought? Defend  
Against it all we might, most suitable  
Of truths are always those that can transmute  
Themselves from qualified to absolute

## X.23

In that intensest heat of moment's need  
That stokes this hellish crucible, our skull.  
Yet, if we merely pay indifferent heed  
As to which exegesis might best lull  
Us into action (the desired sort),  
Let's choose our favored truth and *then* support

## X.24

It with what necessary proof we would.  
For *that* is mustered well in retrospect,  
Once gains and losses all are understood  
In concrete moral terms. So just select  
The one to keep her— and all else call sham—  
MY CONSCIENCE IS APPEASED, THEREFORE, I AM!

## XI

*Book the Eleventh*

## XI.1

**M**y pupil, anyway, who all this while  
Had waited on me to reveal the myths  
Of George, was dreaming of some sunny isle  
On which she'd bask beneath his steamy kiss—  
That George who'd pluck her from the jaws of Death  
To serve and worship till his dying breath.

## XI.2

So after suffering me to muse alone  
Upon the infinite enclosed within  
The solipsist's best nutshell (cranial bone),  
Her winsome smile quick wilted to a grin  
The moment I crashed in upon that kiss  
With still more text on what there was amiss

## XI.3

With George. O there were such things even *I*  
Had not yet known until I'd try exhort  
Her on them. *Impotence*, is one. Deny  
Them I could not. "I'm but a pale reporter  
Of what's in my author's head," I said.  
"I simply cannot wait till he is dead!"

## Book the Eleventh

## XI.4

I added, God knows why, except I meant  
It, I suppose. “For then we’d both be free,  
Abandoning ourselves to the event  
Of us alone,” I ventured, hot to see  
Just where in hell this went. “Yes, just the two  
Of us then there’d be—along with certain few

## XI.5

“Accoutrements we’d need—but unconstrained  
At any rate by this most tortured plot  
He’s lured us through. And why? For nothing gained  
But lunges at his favorite hate, that snot-  
Nosed prig with little hands and spotless cuffs  
Who cheer-led those God-Queen-and-Country buffs

## XI.6

“To Highest Righteousness. This was *his* sad  
Excuse for storyline, contrived for quaint-  
Of-hearts in rhyme to glorify some cad  
Who’d somehow come to stand as patron saint  
Of this whole bloody land, DESPITE THE FACT  
HE’D NEVER BLOODY BEEN THERE! That he lacked

## Book the Eleventh

## XI.7

“The merest documentable event  
To show he’d ever even lived at all  
Proved water off the backs of his hell-bent  
Hagiographers. Now *that’s* what we call  
MYTH, my dear,” I triumphed in conclusion—  
Till noticing the cloud of thick confusion

## XI.8

Mucking up the lucid atmosphere  
Of this, our cozy classroom where we lay.  
“But I digress,” confessed I in good cheer  
And less-good faith (as I had not). “I stray  
From questions far more pressing than of why  
We’re here,” I claimed, my focus on her thigh,

## XI.9

Which shone like ivory in this raking light,  
So sensuously soft and warm as myth  
Had never been—at least not since the night  
Fair Paphos was conceived from out the pith  
Of ART—that desperate act of making real  
The beauty trapped inside one’s head. Such zeal

## Book the Eleventh

## XI.10

As had this lonely sculptor for his work,  
As turned raw Want, curved hard so like a tooth,  
Into that buxom flesh of Have, a quirk  
Of realization that became his truth;  
Such fierce devotion to one's dream as *his*  
Did suddenly seem mine as well. For this

## XI.11

Warm life I felt here cupped within my hand  
Was surely but the ultimate projection  
Of my lust shaped as to understand,  
An urge now given tangible expression  
Just as Love bestowed upon that king  
Whose sorry prayers are now the stuff I sing.

## XI.12

Yet this, *my* moment of ecstatic joy,  
Fell short our Cyprian's delirium.  
Might "I" then be some Roman poet's toy:  
An exile from some Imperium,  
Carved from bold ambitions He forsook  
But for some vividness in words, some book?

## Book the Eleventh

## XI.13

Might “I” as well be precious less than life  
Vicarious—one played out in the cell  
Of one unquiet mind, replacing strife  
He’d rendered, Midas-like, from all that fell  
Within his ken, his surrogate for SELF,  
Re-edited for life upon some shelf?

## XI.14

Or worse, now that I think of it: might *she*?  
Might the protagonist intended here  
Be but *the girl*, on whose plate he’d serve me  
As *garnish*, not the meal, and my career  
Mere *incident* to someone else’s story,  
Shadow of our *heroine’s* great glory?

## XI.15

O, don’t go there again; that road’s too rough!  
No, *I’m* the only hero of this tale.  
*Repeat: I’m good enough, I’m good enough!*  
It’s just that every time I should, I fail  
To act toward any one decisive end—  
As if I fear I’ll miss, just ‘round the bend

## Book the Eleventh

## XI.16

Of some new path forsaken, sudden view  
Of promised land I've come in search of, word  
By word the time; that realm of which so few  
Have gained beyond a glimpse, though all have heard—  
The celestial city of "truth," spread out  
Before me whole, mirage within a drought,

## XI.17

Resplendent 'gainst the most ephemeral blue  
Of now, its shimmering towers rising high  
Above the haze of proofs that we construe  
Around our freedoms like a maze. Yes, try  
And try, I cannot contemplate a choice  
Without unearthing in its crux a voice

## XI.18

Dissenting its most basic proposition—  
Such that in each question couched I hear  
Its tenet stated as but the sedition  
Of some bigger premise. And it's this fear  
Of what I want and this ambivalence  
Toward my success she sees as impotence.

## Book the Eleventh

## XI.19

It's tough instilling zeal within a truly  
Open mind—one such as to respect  
The tail-end side of anything you'd duly  
Show it. You'd fare better to collect  
Your wine in nets or alms from off a prelate  
Than to stir a liberal into zealot.

## XI.20

For instance, if I really *were* her George,  
As *she* would have me here upon this page,  
I wouldn't need to think. Yes, I'd engorge  
My manly pride upon some holy rage  
I'd find to sate my glories on...*for God*.  
But, as I'm me, I'm skeptical. I plod.

## XI.21

So this is it, then—*this*, my just reward  
For that most sane, judicious disposition  
Shown: my inability to ford  
The merest puddle without indecision?  
Is this thing called “intellectual”  
Some nicer name for *ineffectual*?

## Book the Eleventh

## XI.22

Now *that* perhaps goes just a bit too far.  
For, after all, I *have* effected much  
Towards my own denouement of his bizarre  
But hale retelling of a tale. For, such  
Are my distinctive strengths that they resist  
Convention's means of measurement. No list

## XI.23

Of vanquished brutes or beauties could be drawn  
Up reckoning wherein *my* assets lie;  
No gore-scored fields will ever shock the dawn  
Where *I* had waged the day before. No, *I*  
Am one who's role's to learn *and teach* the mythic,  
Not *become* it—as the *Neolithic*

## XI.24

Mind is suited best for that, immune  
From accidental use beyond the task  
Assigned it—that sure kind that will presume  
“This task is God's, and God is good,” not ask  
“*Should this be done at all? IT'S JUST SOME TEST!*”  
O save us from your pious! Give us rest!

## XII

*Book the Twelfth*

## XII.1

*T*here's no such thing as *dragons*, why of course,  
I said to calm my sacrificial sheep.  
Of all the myths we use to reinforce  
The *Good v. Evil* bit we yearn to keep  
Between our teeth, it's this one dies the hardest—  
Maybe 'cause its telling lures the artist

## XII.2

Out beyond the primly bordered gardens  
Of our self-esteem to go explore  
The wilderness of want and fear that hardens  
Us to hate. With every dragon gored  
We lose a bit of innocence and bleed  
A bit of reason—yes, as if to feed

## XII.3

Upon the ready flesh of our inherent  
Insecurity. We strive to prove  
We're not the beasts we are—I mean the current  
Creatures of our genes whose lineage moved  
On fins then scaly stumps to claw their way  
Towards the society we have today,

## Book the Twelfth

## XII.4

But rather the *creators* of our fate,  
Descended not from accident of sex  
Within the cooling sea but rather straight  
From off the Tree of Knowledge where, perplexed  
By Him, our brand-new parents followed suit  
And bit from that indigestible fruit

## XII.5

That swelled our *every* belly full of “sin,”  
As it is writ. But even those of us  
Who’d grant our species ancestry akin  
With monsters of the deep make little fuss  
Over the likelihood we’d now *remember*  
Them as well, over the chance some ember

## XII.6

Of experience—some singe of fear  
Across a nerve—could burn its potent shape  
Upon the cell walls of a race and rear  
Its ghost throughout our growth from newt to ape  
Till now, when *still* we find its scowl impressed  
Beneath life’s surface, like a palimpsest.

## Book the Twelfth

## XII.7

And yet it's true: our dragon's nothing more  
(Nor less) than the artistic incarnation  
Of our worst, most ancient, dread—the core  
Of our collective psyche—sublimation  
Of the motley horrors our survival's  
Captured of its predators and rivals

## XII.8

Deep in cells no conscious thoughts illumine.  
Hence, I guess, our curious attraction  
To this heinous creature of the human  
Heart; we breed it with the satisfaction  
Savored but in witnessing, *God willing*,  
This, its re-enacted ritual killing.

## XII.9

For that indeed would seem its *raison d'être*:  
This, our need to read within our own  
Worst doings—lies and cruelties, *et cetera*—  
The imprint of some source outside us shown  
To be the *actual* force behind them all;  
Some infamous proponent of our fall

## Book the Twelfth

## XII.10

From high among our moral gardening chores;  
A scapegoat we can curse to purge us clean  
Of taint—from our sanctimonious wars  
Especially—and then to take this fiend  
So dressed and lead it, fattened, to the altar  
Of its timely sacrificial slaughter,

## XII.11

Where we safely watch our sins disposed  
Of with the ceremony they deserve;  
With that great pomp and spectacle enclosed  
Round our transgressions till they're well transferred  
To something truly worthy of our hate:  
Some stark, cold threat whose ornate death could sate

## XII.12

Our tooth for justice once again and send  
Us back to our delusion full of cause  
And bursting with convictions to defend.  
But should we wake again, this trial of jaws  
And claws, this nightmare of obscenity,  
Would prove itself man's best amenity

## Book the Twelfth

## XII.13

Of any—even our most loyal  
Beast of burden. After all, which horse  
Or dog has ever guerdoned us its toil  
With the enthusiasm, fire, and force  
Proposed by this most diligent of hired  
Hell-hounds every time its job's required,

## XII.14

Every time it's conjured, hot, in a bit  
Of paint or rhyme? What brazen bull has yet  
To entertain for us a death so rich  
In red necessity, in conquered threat,  
As does this most assiduous animus,  
Most mastered menace, and most fabulous

## XII.15

Of malefactors of our own creation  
When it's shaped or named straight into being  
In a window or an incantation?  
None! No beast that's ever sent us fleeing  
Our affairs to stoop amid the safe  
Dark legends of a cave *comes near* to chafe

## Book the Twelfth

## XII.16

At reason as does this most pestilent  
Of pets still does, with its most awful voice  
And gruesome breath and its most excellent  
Irreverence for the laws folks hold by choice  
To be the most conclusive evidence  
Of a supreme designer's prevalence.

## XII.17

It's just as if the worst of all the features  
Of the worst of creatures—those we find  
Least use for—had been chosen with a preacher's  
Eye for evil, mercilessly combined  
And made the consummate grotesque: *ideal*  
*Negation*; yes, the *other* side of Real,

## XII.18

Were it to have but two—the value  $x$   
Might represent when elsewhere all is  $y$   
And all we can describe is nonetheless  
Irrelevant because it can't apply  
To any proposition we might frame  
With logic fundamental to the brain;

## Book the Twelfth

## XII.19

As if some cosmic synthesis were here  
Achieved from out the myriad expressions  
Of *corruption* fused through life's career—  
The sum of ugly being its perfection—  
Leaving us to gaze on mystery  
Invisible to science, history,

## XII.20

Or any other lens of ours save ART—  
Since that, at least, we look through without need  
Of facts to measure out its truths or chart  
Its use—a mystery without a creed  
To read it as, explaining it away  
In black and white where truths are shades of gray.

## XII.21

But since this brute's recurrent reign of terror  
Is but bound by bone between our ears,  
Wherein it's free to prey upon the errors  
Faith preserves for us of primal fears,  
It's prudent that we view the dragon's hold  
On us no different than the common cold.

## Book the Twelfth

## XII.22

Were we to merely let it run its course—  
Regard it as some germ the mind is prone  
To when it's weak—we'd steal from it the force  
We now waste warring with its teeth we've sown.  
For war affirms the nonsense of repentance;  
Each win pronounces Death's most polished sentence.

## XII.23

And so, I told her, summing up what point  
I felt I'd soon be getting at, this dread  
She'd had of being eaten like some joint  
Of meat was misconceived. Why, yes, instead  
Would she be better off her mind directed  
Toward what fate she'd find in her elected

## XII.24

*Savior.* (I.e., BE SURE THAT YOUR AFFLICTION'S  
WORTH THE COST TO REMEDY!) For here,  
Dead center in our poem's metered diction  
Should her hero's icon now appear.  
Meet George, that glittering idiot she'd wed—  
Chased silver with a window for a head.

**XIII***Book the Thirteenth***XIII.1**

**N**ow *George*, we know, derives from Greek for “earth”  
As well as “work” and hence means one who plows  
The ground, who farms the land for all he’s worth;  
In other words, a *peasant*—yes, a cow’s  
Top dog, with sweaty brow quite low and tanned—  
A *boor*, that is, or *lout*, who understands

**XIII.2**

Not one thing that Boethius has to say  
Distinguishing a substance from its cause,  
But mainly how to husband sheep and pray  
God doesn’t see him violate His laws.  
It also might mean *filth*, since some assert  
That “earth” is but a nicer name for *dirt*,

**XIII.3**

Which farmers spend their largest clump of time  
In—but, of course, for *dung*, without which no  
Aspiring *bumpkin* could survive. So, grime,  
Sweat, shit, and ignorance, it seems, bestow  
Real etymological validity  
On our distrust of his divinity.

## Book the Thirteenth

## XIII.4

And yet, although we see a name can tell  
Us much about a man—his moral bent,  
His aptitudes, appearance, even smell—  
It cannot tell it all: can't represent  
That darker, harder region of the heart  
Where *humans* live—where contradictions part—

## XIII.5

That pinprick spot an ocean wide where hot  
And cold yield nothing up toward temperate blend;  
Where you and I desire, *and do not*,  
The other's troubled joys with equal strength;  
That lush gray country of ambivalence  
For which words offer scant equivalence.

## XIII.6

To gain admittance *there*, where's found the stuff  
Of any *thorough* portrait of a man—  
One drawn from *life* and not just smoothed enough  
To soothe the lazy eye—you'd better plan  
To trade your dictionary in for word  
Of mouth and trust the ear for truths unheard

## Book the Thirteenth

## XIII.7

By our inspired etymologists.  
But never mind, for none of this applies  
To George, whose most devout apologists  
Themselves have shown that anyone who tries  
To peek beneath *his* smile finds just the sorts  
Of things you would expect: like war and sports

## XIII.8

Resembling war and death-defying deeds  
Of reckless heroism thrust on poor  
Defenseless maidens of fine shape and breed,  
Each kneeling in her peril to implore  
Him come and save her from Death's claws—although  
We're told she *really* prays for him to GO!,

## XIII.9

Not come, lest *he* be eaten too: "Behold,  
Good sir, those horrid jaws now yawning wide  
Behind you that will chew us *both*, O bold  
Young fool, if you don't run away and hide  
Right now and let me face my most acute  
Yet necessary Fate, O GO! SHOO! SCOOT!"

## Book the Thirteenth

## XIII.10

Were her precise instructions, as we read  
In Jacobus. But I digress again.  
My point is just that George, whose driving creed  
Is ACTION in a world where *thought* would lend  
A spark of welcome light, whose only goal  
In life's to wander round and stick that pole

## XIII.11

Of his into but anything that moves  
Within the pale of God's disapprobation—  
Though where *he* got such expertise behooves  
Our closer scrutiny—whose condemnation,  
Sight unseen, of all the gods but *his*  
Struck prudent Roman minds as an *abysmal*

## XIII.12

Indiscretion, worthy of the best  
That the old classic martyrdom techniques  
Provide—yes, just that George, that do-good pest  
And patronizing “saint,” with pearl for teeth  
And brawn for brain, is—I cannot hide  
It any longer—LACKING AN INSIDE!

## Book the Thirteenth

## XIII.13

That's right, all surface, empty, fully void  
Of anything beneath his polished pose  
You'd call a SELF (that sense of will employed  
Before we know it). Yes, God only knows  
What all you'd find down there amid the straw  
And sawdust holding him together, taut

## XIII.14

And upright in the saddle, like a pigeon  
Perch of spattered bronze; but what you *won't*  
Glean there's the slightest flaw of indecision  
Or uncertainty, the most remote  
Regret, fear, doubt, or other *mortal* trait  
That thwarts a chap's endorsement as a saint.

## XIII.15

Just like that bite of conscience *we're* most prone  
To when we've done what's right...that really *wasn't*  
Though for any party but our own;  
That sting felt deeper than the lash, first cousin  
To the mother of all musts—compassion—  
That high sentience for some *other's* fashion

## Book the Thirteenth

## XIII.16

Of suffering life. But this, our highest ken,  
Through which our species dreams its dignity  
Amid the squalid politics of fen  
Or town or church, seems sheer malignity  
To one who's out to get real business done,  
Our traveling man for Christ being such a one.

## XIII.17

So driven is this knight to hawk his wares—  
Those justifications for the battle cry  
That are the relics of God's own affairs  
Disputing with the Darkness eye for eye—  
He has no time to learn their lasting worth:  
This blindness fast inheriting the earth;

## XIII.18

This inability to recognize  
The *kinship* shared by sheep and goats *beneath*  
What features might be used to judge them prized  
Or cursed; this taste for punishment bequeathed  
To us from out the heat of that first vengeance  
That was God's, when He but gave the engines

## Book the Thirteenth

## XIII.19

Of His hell its first inhabitant:  
That bold, proud angel banished far from love  
Where he could found a rebel cabinet  
To plot against the paradise above  
And taint its prospect with unsightly things.  
For, *these* are the rewards that violence brings—

## XIII.20

Especially the wisdom it confers  
On all who would partake of it—that lesson  
Chroniclers keep telling us deters  
The bully from indulging his aggression  
Once we've taught it to him with a kick.  
He learns, *GO GET THYSELF A BIGGER STICK!*

## XIII.21

Yet look how George still tries to lure 'em in  
With threatened tongues of everlasting fire  
To lick the buttocks of poor souls who've sinned  
When he might capture the entire choir  
To which to preach by using tastier bait,  
Like joy *RIGHT HERE ON EARTH, without* the wait;

## Book the Thirteenth

## XIII.22

Without the need of promissory notes  
Deferring compensation for our toils  
Till come some day when all ungodly goats  
Shall roast and goodly sheep enjoy the spoils,  
But more importantly when just reward  
For all this sweat would likely be ignored

## XIII.23

By the recipient as quite beside  
The point, considering the date. For what  
Good use are mansions to the bona fide  
Above who'd have no longer things to shut  
Indoors nor elements from which to hide?  
Why keep their treasure from them till they've died?

## XIII.24

And *this* is but the so-called mind you choose  
To trust your flesh to, I observed. If I  
Were you I'd pick the dragon, yes, confuse  
Your fervent fiancé, whose thrusting cry,  
*For Christ!* is, by and by, the truth, alas;  
He loves his lord more than he does *your* ass.

## XIV

*Book the Fourteenth*

## XIV.1

**I**'d lost my audience by now. My muse  
Was sleeping soundly at my side, quite plainly  
Uninspired by the truths that booze  
Reveals to man. And on her lips, so faintly  
Pursed as if to weep at visions braved  
Beneath her trembling lids, I saw engraved

## XIV.2

The cares of all the ages—so not just  
An offering with which a king might buy  
Another day of desperate people's trust  
But one that's given *always* and *can't* die  
To then forget, as we can do, and know  
The taste of that same fruit that ends our woe;

## XIV.3

That fruit that hangs ripe at the end of time,  
When each our lease on flesh and bone is up,  
To nourish all in nothingness, sublime  
*Beyond* what passion overflows of cup,  
*Beyond* what freedom seems to things constrained,  
Since things most "seem" so far as they're contained.

## Book the Fourteenth

## XIV.4

Indeed, she seemed as pitiful and sad  
As angels might, were angels real—as if  
New born without the bodies they had had  
A moment prior when they turned so stiff  
Against the finite privilege of constraint  
That had so richly busied them till late.

## XIV.5

Yes, these, the very lips on which I'd sucked  
Ecstatic secrets of eternity,  
Like nectar from the pulp of time, now looked  
So fearful pale, as if modernity  
Were meant to read in them old truths revealed  
About its fate, which long ago was sealed.

## XIV.6

As if the outcome of our every rub  
With possibility, each sundry chafe  
Against the harness of potential (dubbed  
"Volition" by philosophers with faith  
That they are free), were all past tense to her,  
All known events positioned to occur,

## Book the Fourteenth

## XIV.7

Like those recorded on the poet's page  
That happen, nonetheless, each time we come  
To them; as if the knowledge of a mage  
Or sibyl were awarded her in sum  
By her Titanic mother, Memory  
(Who lends brief immortality to *every*

## XIV.8

Known existence spent upon this earth),  
And all but toward the task of helping man  
To glorify his past—to make it *worth*  
Remembering—to nudge the poet's hand  
Enough to smudge the *value* of men's deeds;  
To sing them into tune as use decrees.

## XIV.9

So might some hero, come to save his world  
From consequences of a faithless age,  
Be found propelled upon his path unfurled  
*Not* by some teacher, priest, or wizened sage,  
But by this granddaughter of Earth and Sky  
Whose job's instructing poets how to lie.

## Book the Fourteenth

## XIV.10

Or if not *lie*, at least to make things clear  
That aren't—voice a doing such a way  
It rings like finished marble on the ear  
Despite it's being one we might inveigh  
Against revealed to us in tradesman's prose—  
In short, to show our heroes how to pose.

## XIV.11

And as I lay there, head on fist, stretched out  
Before my fate in bold, unfettered laze—  
Like one might spot some god reclining, stout,  
Beside his bowl of grapes in better days—  
I found myself positioned to indulge  
In contemplation where a nipple bulged

## XIV.12

Profoundly in my view. It pushed erect  
Up through the soft encumbrance of her smock  
Stretched taut around two hills that would project  
And ebb with every breath. I gazed, ad hoc,  
Upon this symbol of our earth's largess,  
My head quite clear but for erectile flesh.

## Book the Fourteenth

## XIV.13

It would have been a sin to wake her now!  
A world of obligation waited there  
Behind those quivering lids that would endow  
Me with the need to move, to do, to bear  
A weapon and accomplish something “great”  
While all I wanted was to meditate.

## XIV.14

For here upon the teat of inspiration  
I had found my place within this tale.  
*The only thing that matters is elation*  
I’ve heard said by those who’ve chased their grail;  
The rest is merely rhymed and reasoned swill,  
The stuff with which your time on earth is filled

## XIV.15

And then forgotten. But to dwell in state  
Of full dilation, living at the nerve,  
Alive to every taste upon your plate  
And every whim within your cup-rim’s curve—  
Now *that’s* worth *twenty* lifetimes of success  
Stepped out in all we think we can possess!

## Book the Fourteenth

## XIV.16

Like tracts of land and everything we find  
Thereon or in conveyed to us by deed—  
That instrument which Death proves just some signed  
And witnessed scheme two *borrowers* agreed  
To call real title, as it's *earth*, no less  
Which holds superior claim to that, I'd guess.

## XIV.17

Oh yes, I'd give my horse to stay right here,  
I thought, divorced from consequence and free  
To marry *every* moment, cheap or dear;  
Immune from Reason and its central creed  
Requiring an antecedent for each thing—  
Yes, live beyond this very song I sing!

## XIV.18

If only we could witness every second  
Of our life this way—appreciate  
Each gorgeous inch of the familiar, reckoned  
Novel with each fresh regard—create  
A relic out of every object seen  
By merely adding *feeling* to routine.

## Book the Fourteenth

## XIV.19

Why wait for men ordained in special clothes  
To tell us which is special, which is not,  
When this authority we grant them flows  
From *us*—from some convention *we* begot  
To cover up their nakedness! Now they  
But sell us back our feelings when they stray!

## XIV.20

Take Princess Cleo here—yes, that's her name,  
My author prompts me. Now, I'm sure there's some  
Who'll see her as a toy for the depraved  
While others—those of learning—will but come  
Employed to read in her the context of  
Her office, long established high above

## XIV.21

By ancient bards. They'll welcome her with arms  
Wide open—not as just some wanton grope  
Who'd come to lead them to temptation's harms,  
But rather as a literary trope,  
A figure of the poet's provocation  
To create, albeit from dictation.

## Book the Fourteenth

## XIV.22

And with my erudition of the epic  
Form from which I boldly spring, I leaned  
A little closer toward her, as a skeptic  
Might his text, to study what now seemed  
The highest use of sex to one who writes  
These allegories of man's appetites:

## XIV.23

*Allure*. In her it was no mere orectic  
Symbol but a fundamental image;  
Thus he could insure my dialectic  
Of existence wouldn't end in scrimmage  
With a saint to save some foul-mouthed beast.  
Unless...this was my cue to stay and feast...

## XIV.24

I'd thought myself in circles here. My blood  
Now coursed as fiercely in the current wake  
Of dreamed *inaction*, with its sudden thud  
Of private thrill, than might it have for sake  
Of something really *done*. It seemed, by God,  
No difference if I roused her now or not!

## XV

*Book the Fifteenth*

## XV.1

**A**nd so indeed, I chose the path of ACTION—  
Oftentimes the easiest road we take,  
As *its* results are rarely those abstractions  
Pondered on our pillow wide awake,  
But things concrete which any fool can see  
Without reliance on philosophy.

## XV.2

Yes, despite the rightly touted merits  
Of IDEAS, which can serve the sound  
Foundation of a doing, he inherits  
Most from life who *does*, we're told, whose crowned  
Ambitions sit in judgment of our prudence  
Like Experience does her slowest students.

## XV.3

Well anyway, lost to the world in urge,  
I pressed my lips to hers without restraint  
And felt the warmth of destiny submerge  
Me in a bliss beyond your average saint.  
And with this long, firm, wet and ample kiss  
I'd caused a whole new genre to exist:

## Book the Fifteenth

## XV.4

The *Muse-Awakened Pastoral-Erotic*,  
So it might be termed; a way of life  
For us inspired few which no narcotic  
Can compete with in transcendence—rife,  
With rapt, ecstatic sensuality  
Beyond conventional carnality

## XV.5

(As practiced with real meat)—yes, nothing less  
Than transmutation of that very lust  
That keeps a species from extinction, pressed  
Into that higher metal of august  
Poetic metaphor, the dreamer's gold,  
With which our starkest truths are bought and sold.

## XV.6

And while I chewed upon that juicy mouth,  
Which tasted sweet as Fortune's teat, I saw  
Her opened eyes gleam bright—she looked, no doubt,  
Like one *expecting* her surprise—and all  
I felt, beside her nails dug in my back,  
Was what it's like where magnet poles attract.

## Book the Fifteenth

## XV.7

As if the grammar of my inmost being—  
First-person pronoun, I, as subject *and*  
All predicates, with every noun agreeing—  
Helped me now to read (and *understand*)  
Creation's great design right at its source:  
The fundamental principle of FORCE.

## XV.8

For, no amount of love or liberal thought  
Nor meditation on the ideal state  
Can hold the planets turning as they ought  
Around their suns in such concordant gait,  
Or keep them from mere riot in the skies,  
Unleashed and reeling towards their own demise.

## XV.9

Sheer force would be sufficient, though. And so  
It seemed now *here* within the tighter orbit  
Of this bed, in which the undertow  
Of instinct pulled me down beneath all morbid  
Thoughts of fate cold reason could coerce  
Toward *Her*: dead center of the universe.

## Book the Fifteenth

## XV.10

I knew now *She* was why I showed up here,  
Not he, nor He, nor even that damned beast  
I'd followed all this way with shield and spear,  
But *She* had made me who I am, released  
Me from the numbing drudgery of life  
Lived out of habit (*sans* the spice of strife).

## XV.11

For *She* is my Desire—heaven's hell—  
Exquisite irritant of our content,  
Much like a speck of grit within our shell  
That makes us *want*, which prods us reinvent  
Ourselves within the nacre of unrest  
And wake amid the luster of some quest

## XV.12

Where we can properly forsake the whole  
Of what we held inviolate before,  
Need be, and pick, to meet our newest goal,  
New principles in which to put our store—  
In other words, to rouse that same delight  
Which languished while we had no ill to fight.

## Book the Fifteenth

## XV.13

And what had been our sedimentary bed  
Of torpid satisfaction She has changed  
With this mere grain of lust which chafes like dread  
To life lived most intense, because most strange.  
She cultivates our darkest superstitions  
Into poets' gleaming intuitions.

## XV.14

And suddenly revealed to me I saw  
A truth as radiant as pearl: that book-  
Length torment waiting for her, tooth and claw,  
Was not; it was the lure upon *Her* hook—  
Or rather, as pale Jacobus reports,  
Her *girdle*, yes, that magic leash of sorts

## XV.15

On which George brashly bade her go parade  
His conquest like a lapdog through the town  
To teach these folks whose God should be obeyed  
(For making Satan heel) and whose kicked out—  
Hence proving that there's only one true faith  
While buying converts from the crowd in haste.

## Book the Fifteenth

## XV.16

This girdle that I speak of, by the way,  
Is nothing new; it's been the talisman  
Of lucky knights since long before the day  
That knighthood first began—embarrassment  
Be told: *all* since the Saracen presumed  
To populate where Christ had been entombed!

## XV.17

It was this same enchanted belt that Venus  
Donned whenever hungry for men's eyes  
And then lent jealous Juno at her keenest,  
Till her god stayed home and stopped his lies,  
And then bribed Paris with, until he chose  
His nation's doom from fruit that Discord throws;

## XV.18

That same which Bertilak's enticing wife  
Had urged on Gawain as a parting gift  
To thwart the ill effect upon his life  
Her husband's ax would have when brought to swift  
Encounter with his neck next day—a token  
Of their love exchanged with vows unbroken,

## Book the Fifteenth

## XV.19

But also of the loopholes in the moral  
Laws that guide a man to serve his God.  
For Gawain's souvenir of strictly *oral*  
Sex—I mean, of course, that *spoken*, not  
Performed—became his costly badge of shame  
*Because he prized his life above the game,*

## XV.20

Because he failed to manifest this lace  
To *him*, his host, with whom he had agreed  
To swap respective winnings from their chase  
Each day (in field *or* bed). For though indeed  
He'd won *this* prize as nobly as the rest—  
I.e., those treasured kisses he found pressed

## XV.21

On him each morning by the latter's spouse  
Sent in to test his chivalry—he chose  
To hide it where he dressed and *not* announce  
This thing among those kisses paid his host  
For all that gorgeous kill awarded him.  
*And this omission ate at him like sin.*

## Book the Fifteenth

## XV.22

For she'd confided how no man who wore  
This band of gilt green silk could suffer death  
From hardest whack of sharpest ax, and swore  
It was their secret to her dying breath.  
And to a man about to go in search  
Of his demise next day, such terms as CHURCH,

## XV.23

LAST RITES, or even PARADISE seem not  
Remotely musical upon the ear  
Like "MAGIC GIRDLE" does. But why allot  
To him "the vice of cowardice?" This fear  
Of dying is our species' second best  
Survival mechanism (after sex).

## XV.24

Were *every* soldier for God's call so brave  
As but to gallop into death as told  
Without a prudent thought on how his grave  
Facilitates his cause, we should behold  
A world no more moral than it's now—  
Just drained the more of men to take this vow.

## XVI

*Book the Sixteenth*

## XVI.1

**N**ow, how this girdle came to be *a garter*  
Too, as found confused in many texts  
Of Christendom, may yet be known. Since martyrs  
For the faith have been obsessed with sex  
No less than you or I, his obligation  
To ignore it leads him to fixation

## XVI.2

On the closest thing to touch a maiden's  
Thigh—this belt-like band of silk that guards  
So close that realm so high, so good, so laden  
With appeal to errant knights and bards  
That it becomes quite in itself imbued  
With this magnetic charge that she exudes.

## XVI.3

And like that lace engirding that fair waist  
Above her hips, this ribbon round her thigh  
May too be loosed and used to fire haste  
In mortal men unmoved by pontiff's cry.  
And so we shouldn't be surprised to find  
Such different things *all one* to whom they bind.

## Book the Sixteenth

## XVI.4

Like when that most inspiring of our virgins,  
Mary, Queen of Heaven, dropped *Her* girdle  
Down to conquer an apostle's urgent  
Doubt who'd showed up late again; so fertile  
A device of fleshly worlds this seemed,  
It struck good Thomas like a falling beam.

## XVI.5

Or Edward, as the story goes, who plucked  
His partner's garter from the floor and bade  
Those guests who'd snickered at him worst of luck  
While donning it himself. And so the fad  
Began amongst his wisest knights, who forged  
An order dressed like this to honor...*George!*

## XVI.6

That's right, to *George*, poor Cleo's hope, they prayed,  
These couple dozen of the brightest knights  
Poor England had, who rallied round arrayed  
In women's underwear before their fights.  
They looked to *him*, our selfsame cad, to rouse  
Themselves and go and kill whom God allows.

## Book the Sixteenth

## XVI.7

Yes, fresh from France, where they'd but practiced *quid Pro quo* with distant offspring of the ones  
Who'd conquered *them*, and whom they'd *yet* to rid,  
These pure-bred cavaliers with thirsts like Huns  
For blood would clink their goblets to some saint  
Whose clean white image might just cleanse that taint

## XVI.8

They'd picked up over there. For *there* they'd  
slaughtered  
Nearly all their continental cousins  
In their bid to have them neatly quartered  
On their shields—what heralds call *escutcheons*—  
Yes, and thereby add to their achievements  
All these great estates and rich bereavements

## XVI.9

God saw fit for them to seize, according  
To some adventitious law. Therein  
It's writ—by ancient folk, far off, affording  
Nonetheless a precedent for *him*  
Who would be king—that woman shall inherit  
NOT the kingdom's crown, no, nor confer it

## Book the Sixteenth

## XVI.10

On a man descending in her line.  
Now *this* was heady stuff to England's legal  
Minds—this law some Franks wrote up the Rhine  
Back when—for with it England would be regal  
Heir to France, whose male line petered out  
Through war, disease, high living, and the gout.

## XVI.11

Yes, back again from France, his mother's land,  
Where he had raped and pillaged what was rightly  
His, the king was quick to understand  
The need to prove his better knights more knightly  
Than they seemed, to train their loyalties  
Upon himself—by way of royalties

## XVI.12

And honors unavailable to most  
Of mortal man. And what symbolic band  
Could better serve to keep these men engrossed—  
To bind their vast ambitions, on command,  
To that of his—than this same woman's garter?  
And who but GEORGE could better guard this larder?

## Book the Sixteenth

## XVI.13

I mean, who'd keep these brigands safe *inside*,  
Where they'd be less the prey to interests other  
Than the king's. For, none from out that pride  
Of patron saints they'd prayed to yet was covered  
Head to foot in quite the righteous armor  
Posed in by this spotless-shiny farmer;

## XVI.14

None they'd groveled to before had quite  
The moral gleam in which so well to see  
Themselves in their most complimentary light  
As George could offer, with his pedigree  
Of persecution serving God's best cause.  
And so it was he'd earned their loud applause

## XVI.15

And accolades, their toasts and oaths before  
Each dinner, joust, or massacre they waged.  
As gentlemen of breeding who deplored  
The thought of unheroic deeds, this rage  
For *God's* agenda—WRONG's defeat by RIGHT—  
Was what made George for them the perfect knight.

## Book the Sixteenth

## XVI.16

He stirred in them a rage for something more  
As well: a rage for *orders*, yes, a need  
To found societies, wherein great store  
In honor could be kept, all measured, deed  
By selfless deed, like money in the bank,  
*Of use in fending off mere file from rank.*

## XVI.17

That is, in keeping all this honor safe  
Unto their own—the gentle-born—clean out  
Of reach of every rascal, knave, and waif  
Who'd like some for himself to flaunt about.  
And how to better guard this trait so cherished?  
Ritualize and codify each flourish!

## XVI.18

Yes, see it all as *ETIQUETTE* is how.  
Just turn each task into a noble act  
Which only those of means could hope to bow  
To in these hungry times (when towns were sacked  
To fund the costs incurred in sacking cities).  
Do it for a woman's love and pity.

## Book the Sixteenth

## XVI.19

That's right, for Christ, but also for that more  
Effective inspiration, less abstractly  
Theological in scope: the lure  
Of love by wellborn woman. More exactly,  
One well married too—whom one can never  
*Really* have, which heightens the endeavor.

## XVI.20

In other words, to hold a social code  
In which one's life is offered to one's God,  
One's king, *and someone else's wife*, each owed  
Allegiance in return for love (that's *not*  
Redeemable), and all maintained in force  
By this new culture centered on one's HORSE.

## XVI.21

For *nothing* came so close to martial hearts  
As did these martial steeds on which they sat  
Caparisoned and ready to depart  
This plague-worn world. The horse's habitat  
In fact provided these bold chevaliers  
Their very language, customs, and careers.

## Book the Sixteenth

## XVI.22

And *chivalrous*, therefore, they carried on  
As all along, and butchered all those foes  
Of God's (and of their own as well), till dawn  
Revealed each day just what such bloodshed sows:  
More bloodshed *and*, more valuably, *much* loot—  
GREAT MOUNDS of items prized by the astute.

## XVI.23

And it was good to see, this ring of men  
Dubbed nobly in the name of George's own;  
It looked like Arthur's court come round again  
In search of platter, cup, or bit of bone.  
And what great monarch *wouldn't* want it thought  
How much like Camelot *his* household fought?

## XVI.24

Yet while these men ride off into the night  
Of Europe's longest God-inspired horror,  
Let us turn again to Cleo—right  
Whereon our Dragon waits upon her garter.  
Here our triptych's middle panel's done  
And we may pause before the last's begun.

## XVII

*Book the Seventeenth*

## XVII.1

**A**ges passed and nothing changed—at least  
In terms of setting, plot, or central theme.  
Outside my skull the seasons still increased  
And waned in vast indifference to this dream  
We live of finding meaning in it all,  
While here within they spelled *my author's fall*.

## XVII.2

I mean, I'd read these ornaments of earth's  
Recurrent progress in the sun, this language  
Of its instinct 'midst the stars, as first  
And surest proof his hold on me was vanquished,  
Leaving me full free from LITERATURE,  
The art of saying THIS but meaning more.

## XVII.3

For, after all, what use had any bard  
Since man first ached to sing of his condition  
For mere replication of life's art  
Of spinning richness out of repetition?  
Epics don't begin *before* the egg,  
As they'd need trace each sperm that didn't take.

## Book the Seventeenth

## XVII.4

Well, I drew comfort from this endless waste  
That formed the world I saw around me here—  
The needless, the redundant, the misplaced—  
For each square inch of it allayed my fear  
Reality and verse might be the same  
(And I then but some pronoun with a name).

## XVII.5

In other words, this law of generation  
Via infinite routine, by which  
Our world evolved from single cells to nations,  
Governed nothing of the poet's pitch  
And proved, thereby, my place among the real,  
That state where appetite defines the meal.

## XVII.6

And now, as if at once, had I perceived  
How truly free of him I'd really been  
Here all along and how being free relieved  
Me of all fears of disappointing him.  
And with this knowledge I began to think...  
Increasingly of *how I'd like a drink.*

## Book the Seventeenth

## XVII.7

Each night my muse would cling to me as though  
It were her last. To calm her I would trace  
Adventures from my life of long ago  
Which, given that they hadn't taken place  
As yet, were unrestrained by any qualms  
Of contradicting Truth, just like the Psalms.

## XVII.8

I let my narrative rove far and wide  
Amidst the fluid ether of events  
Unhappened yet and watched it wade the tide  
Of possibility, through future tense,  
To feed on the minutiae found in man's  
Composite memory. She was entranced.

## XVII.9

I counted up for her tall conquests of  
Injustices, campaigns against the worst  
Of tyrants in the name of God above,  
Bright victories on land and sea dispersed  
Between great bedroom scenes of less restraint,  
All spun with the conviction of a saint.

## Book the Seventeenth

## XVII.10

Yet these benignly dangerous entertainments  
That I used to fill the void of night  
Fell powerless come morning's bright new raiment  
Every day, when she would start up right  
Away on her obsession with that dragon  
And I'd reach in reflex for my flagon.

## XVII.11

O, she would pester me, my frightful shrew!  
She'd work on me persistently till I  
Was dressed and out the door each afternoon,  
Not far behind her on our way to find  
That most elusive of the world's threats,  
This monster born of reverence for our dreads.

## XVII.12

And I would watch her saunter on ahead  
Upon her buxom ass as white as snow  
And think of all the other men (NOW DEAD)  
Who'd followed her like this, straight to their woe—  
Like moths into the heat of consummation—  
All to be her knight of liberation.

## Book the Seventeenth

## XVII.13

I, on the other hand, will *never*  
Be combustious matter for her flame—  
Some bright but short-lived flicker of endeavor  
Spent to stoke the glow of poet's fame—  
No, *she* will prove *my* oxygen, each breath  
Inspiring sluggish lungs with tingling depth.

## XVII.14

I'll breathe her in right down into the bottom  
Of my being—limit of my need—  
Until my lust is lit and burning Sodom-  
Hot, intense as *any* zealot's greed.  
And hence will I survive this poem's terror,  
Drawing deep each time confronting Error.

## XVII.15

And I don't mean by "Error" what you'd find  
Incarnate in some cave in Fairy Land  
Awaiting those who've lost their way to grind  
Up for its bread; I mean *not understanding*,  
Yes, presuming that a thing is RIGHT  
Because it's something you (and GOD) quite like.

## Book the Seventeenth

## XVII.16

Of course, to read this word as I've just done  
Is HERESY to most. "One *likes* a thing  
*Because* it's right," I hear you chide, "if one,  
That is, has any MORAL SENSE to sing  
Of." But, I would respond that this sound "sense"  
You lean on has two sides, like *any* fence.

## XVII.17

For, none distinguishes thy neighbor's green  
From one's own enviable lot so well  
As does this barrier of sight-unseen  
Superiority. Yet, how to tell  
Which side of it affords the better view  
Depends on whether one is him or you,

## XVII.18

To tell the truth. But once again you balk.  
"Are there no fundamental laws of GOOD  
And BAD perceptible to ALL who walk  
This earth?" you ask, "some universal SHOULD,  
Beyond the hold of culture?" And to you  
I'd say, "You're growing *tedious*. Go to!"

## Book the Seventeenth

## XVII.19

A poem's not the proper place to chew  
The fat with gaunt philosophers. Such cant  
As dialectically befits our feud  
About what meaning life might hide finds scant  
Capacity in which to fuss and spume  
Within our stanza's careful little room.

## XVII.20

What's properly chewed *here* are WORDS—not mere  
Ideas but the incidents of speech  
Itself, through which such thoughts find their career  
From mind to mind, those sounds the poets teach  
Us to be truest subject of their pains,  
Each one a thing of heft they weigh in grains

## XVII.21

Upon a nerve; a thing of color, shape,  
And texture ever changing in the light  
Of those intoned around them as they scrape  
Against each other's sense of their own plight,  
Creating in this flux the subtlest scope  
In which to see *beyond* the quaint old hope

## Book the Seventeenth

## XVII.22

Of syllogistic logic—that dim dream  
That finds the world knowable if only  
Propositioned well—to where is gleaned  
The highest realm of humanness: that lonely  
Place beyond mere thought where *feelings* reign,  
Where things cannot be PROVED though *can* be feigned.

## XVII.23

For yes, it's here above the arid box  
We build round us with logic's help from but  
Its basic building blocks of paradox  
That we find palpable the very *what*  
Of life gone undetected there, and yet  
All caught upon the self-same instrument

## XVII.24

Of languaged sounds. But still do you persist  
In sifting poems for your nuggets of  
Philosophy, as if one could enlist  
From art the answers to one's doubts above.  
You might as likely go and catch a fish  
And *teach it lungs* as soon as wait on this.

## XVIII

*Book the Eighteenth*

## XVIII.1

**B**ut back to my digression. I had left  
My inspiration riding on ahead  
Of me upon that snow-white ass of deft  
Symbolic purity (which would instead  
Appear ironical to anyone  
Who knew her like *I* did; *she was no nun*).

## XVIII.2

And while I held her in my manly gaze  
(Wherein her ass was *me* she rode), I thought  
With halting concentration on the days  
Before I'd known her, back when I had taught  
Pale college students how to read a myth—  
Yes, how to see that *ALL THE GODS EXIST*.

## XVIII.3

I'd mentored them to read myth with emotion,  
Like one reads a poem—with the spine—  
Not through the convolutions where that notion  
“Reason” is distilled, like turpentine,  
To thin the rich effects of reddest reverence,  
Bleaching yearning into bland acceptance.

## Book the Eighteenth

## XVIII.4

*Belief is everything, I'd emphasize*  
To them. It's crucial to our understanding  
Of our selves and world that we devise  
Some structure to embrace those most demanding  
Blanks in our perception of the whole  
That challenge our delusion of control.

## XVIII.5

Of course, this seemed sheer scandal to those pupils  
Who had trusted me to be their rock  
Of godless skepticism. But my scruples  
Were intact, I reassured my flock.  
For, this "belief" I plead is not the pious  
Stuff of churchly bigotry and bias.

## XVIII.6

It's of a *far* more superficial sort—  
The faith a poet prays for in his hearer—  
As intense as it's duration's short;  
That momentary faith in worlds made nearer  
To one's feelings than one's very own;  
A faith in things well made, of seeds well sown.

## Book the Eighteenth

## XVIII.7

It's that same credence we embrace each time  
We're witness to a crucifixion done  
With feeling and ability. The rhyme  
Of brush or gouge alone makes even one  
Most skeptical of Christ's redemption stir.  
It is a faith in things *as if they were*.

## XVIII.8

For who among us really cares two turds  
If good Sir Thopas ever lived for real?  
What matter most are those immortal words  
In which he'd high-tailed back to fetch his steel.  
Yes, when through nature's bric-a-brac he'd fled  
In hot pursuit of whom he'd render dead

## XVIII.9

The moment he got back correctly dressed,  
We pray the giant's good enough to wait  
For him. And were Sir Thopas's great quest  
Through which he pricked in fits and starts towards Fate  
Denounced as worthless doggerel someday,  
We'd still believe it as it's writ, I'd say.

## Book the Eighteenth

## XVIII.10

And that is technically because we think  
The fictional event in that same gland  
The “real” one is perceived in, till the stink  
Of one pervades the other’s understanding  
And the gods *unseen* become as real  
To us as those we’re sure to see and feel.

## XVIII.11

And so it is with our Childe Thopas then.  
We know his whitebread face, his rose-red lips  
And seemly nose with saffron hair. So when  
We picture to ourselves these daring trips  
Of his o’er hill and dale might *not* be true,  
We laugh because *we’ve seen them*—surest proof.

## XVIII.12

One might as soon declare his *dream* a fraud—  
That he would wed some Fairy Queen—and yet  
One knows *damned well* it happened, as it gnawed  
At him in just that way which, don’t forget,  
*A thing that never happened couldn’t*. Saying  
Thus, “his dream’s not real” would be but paying

## Book the Eighteenth

## XVIII.13

Little store in things which but occur  
*Behind* the vision of our wakeful eye.  
It would betray an existential blur  
In which, at its extreme, we might deny  
Each beat our heart indulged in while we slept  
And trust just those our witness would accept.

## XVIII.14

Yes, dreams, like *all* good poems, operate  
Like myth upon our mindfulness, as though  
To conjure up *contingent* truths that sate  
Somewhat our hunger for what *can't* be known.  
And thus I'd taught my scholars how one deems  
The *myth* as dream: as how a *culture* dreams.

## XVIII.15

I'd have them ponder how mankind's abysmal  
History upon this earth—his wars  
Of God's profound intolerance, the dismal  
Fruit of trusting in a MORAL "FORCE"  
That motivates *both* sides with equal zeal  
Until a winner proves *his* cause more real—

## Book the Eighteenth

## XVIII.16

All finds its way into his *dreaming* state  
As well. It's just as if the visions he  
Endures each night or day beneath his pate  
Reveal his *people's* needs implicitly,  
Reflecting those illusions which entail  
The best results, like why the "good" prevail

## XVIII.17

Sometimes. As if each *waking* action—deeds  
Of high renown to some and low regard  
To others, *equal in their fervor*—feeds  
His introspection with a counterpart,  
A shadow of itself to be reviewed  
For truths, like nourishment distilled from food.

## XVIII.18

And like that code inherent in our speech  
From which the privileged glean their underlying  
Message out of denotation's reach,  
The *pattern* of myth's dream is satisfying  
In itself as *narrative*—our brain's  
Technique for making meaning from stray grains.

## Book the Eighteenth

## XVIII.19

Yet who, I pondered further as I rode,  
 Would counsel *me* now how it's best to read  
 A myth in which I wake each day? Does code  
 Exist with which *my* every thought and deed  
 Conceived and executed is surmised  
 To stand for something else by other minds?

## XVIII.20

Truth is, I look upon *your* life that way!  
 I read you as that faceless entity  
 Whose cause is to perceive and contemplate  
 My own. Through you is my transcendency  
 Complete: from auditory incidents—  
 Mere waves of sound—*into significance.*

## XVIII.21

So yes, to me you are that great unknown—  
 The ideal ear in which I happen—"God,"  
 For those who can't abide a subtle tone  
 When speaking things they're sure of...  
*which they're not.*  
 Of course, this doesn't mean I worship you;  
 Were that the case, how could you tell what's true

## Book the Eighteenth

## XVIII.22

From what's mere flattery in anything  
I've sung up to this point? There'd be no way  
To hear my voice and not mistake it's ring  
For that of someone teeing up to pray.  
Each innocent descriptive epithet  
Might smack of servile groveling instead

## XVIII.23

Were I to show my wonder as mere fear.  
And you would be ill served indeed, believing,  
Naturally, the reason I'd revere  
You, organ of my hearing, is deceiving—  
Reverence born of practicality  
In that your hearing *is* reality

## XVIII.24

To me. Not you, *per se*, but your *attention*  
Is the stuff I crave, the air I breathe.  
And so relax; for, nothing that I've mentioned  
Yet has strayed from truth, you may believe.  
No, not the slightest urge to bow and scrape  
Has motivated this, our poem's shape.

## XIX

*Book the Nineteenth*

## XIX.1

**T**hree quarters through this greatest of all quests  
We make and still no dragon in clear sight!  
It seemed as if my aim had waned—regressed  
In time from finding him *to not*—that’s right,  
From *stopping* George, whose job it’s always been  
To kill our foe, to *understanding* him.

## XIX.2

That’s George I mean...I think. O I don’t know!  
For, anymore it seems like all these roles  
Of ours are interchangeable, as though  
The “George” she sees in me achieves his goals  
The moment he becomes the one she wants—  
*Beyond* the man—as it’s his *guise* she hunts,

## XIX.3

Not him. Yes, it’s the brave heroic pose,  
The ideal stance of HIM who’ll up and bring  
Blind muscle to a given task, she goes  
In search of, yes, the dragon-chasing thing.  
That’s why each time she looks into my eyes  
She seems to see through *me* to my *disguise*,

## Book the Nineteenth

## XIX.4

As if this record of perceived events  
I call my SELF—this fluid transcript of  
My body's contact with the world I sense,  
Which *seems* to gather somewhere else above  
It all as that estate unique to ME—  
Means little more to her than sophistry;

## XIX.5

As if this who I am obscures the *whom*  
*I'd play*, and hence my image as her man,  
As such obtruding on what folks presume  
To be "life's moral meaning" or "God's plan."  
In other words, as if the actor's *part*  
Meant more than who he was *outside* his art.

## XIX.6

Perhaps, she's right, perverse as such a role  
May sound described to pious ears trained hard  
To hear "God's love of man's immortal soul."  
Perhaps this ghostly spirit they regard  
As captain of that vessel we call "man"  
Is but its ship *log* rather than its plan.

## Book the Nineteenth

## XIX.7

I mean, perhaps this effervescent cloud  
Of personality we yearn to see  
As something neatly separable from out  
Our body's physical machinery  
(And limited from out all life on earth  
To our own species, privilege of good birth);

## XIX.8

Yes, just perhaps this ghostly fizz we pray  
Transcends the gross corruptions of the flesh,  
Where it presided while an émigré,  
And rises into light and love and fresh  
Blue sky—perhaps this same supernal fog  
*Is immaterial as well to "God."*

## XIX.8

That's right; to *Him* or *Her*, *Them*, *We* or *It*  
Men call on, scared, perhaps this substance "I"  
We hold inviolate does not admit  
Distinction from the stuff left when we die,  
That its existence on some higher plane  
*Is dreamed*, the function of a working brain

## Book the Nineteenth

## XIX.10

Which, when it's stopped, takes with it all it's learned—  
A slate wiped clean at once of every mark  
That life had left upon it—undiscerned  
Forever now the moment it went dark—  
Including that awareness of its own  
Activity, the consciousness it's known.

## XIX.11

No matter, then, this knowledge we'd collected  
All the while—this body unsubstantial,  
Yet apparent, like the thing reflected  
In a glass: conspicuous till cancelled  
In an instant; cut, as with a knife,  
From consequence, by loss of light (or life).

## XIX.12

Oh, what a subtle waste an education  
Is—a lifetime spent acquiring all  
I am as subject of my speculations  
Just to read from life's most cryptic scrawl  
That I had always been this anyway!  
EXISTENCE PRECEDES COMPETENCE, let's say.

## Book the Nineteenth

## XIX.13

Yes, learning seems a kind of obfuscation:  
Covering the intuition's eye  
In hopes of strengthening our cerebration's  
Range in reading *into* what we spy,  
And using towards this end that self-same hand  
That might have found *how touch can understand*.

## XIX.14

For, reaching out into the world to feel  
Its things upon the fingertips conveys  
Enlightenment which no abstract ideal  
Can comprehend within its mental maze;  
A knowledge so immediate and clear,  
We hold it suspect, like a thing too near

## XIX.15

To be worth reaching for, too much revealed  
To want undressing by the intellect;  
As if we'd rather trust that thing concealed  
By some identity we can detect  
For it—that is, by what it seems to *share*  
With other things—than apprehended bare.

## Book the Nineteenth

## XIX.16

While education teaches us to yearn  
For higher things than here and now—to wait  
For the mundane to *die* to best discern  
Its living qualities—the touch can taste  
That essence instantly and understand  
Without translation out of what it can't.

## XIX.17

Why spend such time it takes to synthesize  
From rows of symbols ordered 'cross a page  
Experience on each which, with the eyes,  
Ears, nose, tongue, skin, we can *at once* engage  
Right at the source, voluptuously plucked  
Upon the nerve, where brain meets earthly stuff.

## XIX.18

For where the page records the mere reflection  
Of these properties, as mirrored from  
Our own regard, the spine relates *connection*  
With them straight, where hammer touches drum.  
And yet what better illustration of  
This difference than that shown concerning *love*.

## Book the Nineteenth

## XIX.19

No manual can tell us what the skin  
Can touching that most sacred state of being:  
LOVE. While we can turn the page to Sin  
To learn *precisely* what it feels like seeing  
Cupid shoot another than one's self,  
We cannot find a volume on that shelf

## XIX.20

That ever could relate to us the feel  
Of actually being shot. But to receive  
His dart within the tissue of what's real  
To us—in which our *bodies* must believe—  
Is like the pious apprehending God,  
Like seizing the sublime where charge meets rod

## XIX.21

Upon the human spine, like lightning's surge  
Releasing that accumulated lust  
Of heavenly for earthly stuff, that urge  
To reconcile extremes, fill calm with thrust  
Till hot has cooled to calm again and thirst,  
Long whetted by the dry, is reimbursed.

## Book the Nineteenth

## XIX.22

To feel love's arrow plunge into the flesh  
Of dull contentment and invite the mind  
To bodily awareness of that zest  
Within is to partake of one's divined  
Participation in the cosmic scheme  
And feel one's place within the living stream.

## XIX.23

It is to crave fulfillment in the OTHER—  
Consummation in one's APPETITE—  
Where want and need seem one DESIRE, mother  
Of all nourishment and its delight.  
It is that very thirst a psyche knows  
For eros, fired in each brain that grows

## XIX.24

In its potential—that same habitat  
Created with the matter scattered fast  
From out the first event, predicting that  
Attraction born from smallest point grown vast.  
And this primordial force we feel above  
All else finds correlate in thought as LOVE.

## XX

*Book the Twentieth*

## XX.1

*Y*es, LOVE: that most transcendent predilection  
For another, for a being out  
Beyond the closely guarded misconception  
Of completeness we call "self" (where doubt  
Seeps through belief's shared wall with known events  
Till patched by faith to look like common sense);

## XX.2

That widening out of boundary to bring  
The *other* full within the compass of  
Our care, where we may comprehend them, *thing*  
*Itself*, beyond mere figment forged above  
Our spinal cord in solipsism's lair  
As souvenir of some ideal we bear;

## XX.3

That aspiration towards affinity  
We feel from out the loneliness of one,  
Inviting us towards that DIVINITY-  
*LIKE* oneness *shared*, where, like that light the sun  
Shines equally on two without decrease  
To each, the whole is equal to the piece;

## Book the Twentieth

## XX.4

That deepest sensitivity revealed  
To hitherto unconscious lives found swept  
Inside this widened arc, wherein, unpeeled  
From out the toughened rind in which they'd slept  
Immune to life's delicious core delight,  
They wake to find themselves with APPETITE;

## XX.5

That keenest savor of this appetite  
Itself, as if it were the very food  
Sought out to sate its ache, such to rewrite  
A satisfaction's feeling to include  
Its prompting urge, imbuing each sought taste  
With embers of the hunger it erased;

## XX.6

That necessary byproduct of sex  
Left over from the ancient making of  
Eukaryotes, where what attracts, connects,  
And binds two gamete donors long enough  
To mix their genes in fresh new fruit remains,  
Recursively, hard-wired in new brains;

## Book the Twentieth

## XX.7

That thrill these brains are bathed in now, ignited  
New with that same lust for which they're wired  
By the steady hand of what excited  
Best their predecessors' lust, fresh-fired  
Into circuitry of hit-and-miss  
Inheritance that sparks thrilled flesh to kiss;

## XX.8

All this, and much, *much* more, we mean by "love"—  
This craving for connection that predicts  
(In concert with its food, of course) the stuff  
Of culture everywhere its urge afflicts—  
All this that makes us possible—*precedes*  
The ethics weighing our competing needs.

## XX.9

Yes, this same hunger for attachment's strife-  
Edged bliss predates our "selves" as cells in that  
Great cycle of fulfillment we call "life."  
In *its* vast curving path no habitat  
Of moral law is found outside a brain,  
And hence no shame innate to lust's domain,

## Book the Twentieth

## XX.10

Which operates precisely beyond need  
Of our approval, moved by those same laws  
That saw this very brain evolve to read  
Its own conception as, somehow, its cause,  
Which is absurd, of course, as it's but *flesh*  
*Developed thus* that makes awareness mesh,

## XX.11

Thus proving FLESH the parent of the "mind"  
And therefore true PROGENITOR OF ALL  
Those mores and moralities we find  
Supporting what we want to have and call  
"The good" and hence begetting that high thought  
That sees what *is* as though it were what OUGHT.

## XX.12

This fundamental mechanism of  
Intelligence provides that every action  
Be identified from well above  
Its consequence by virtue of whose faction  
It serves best, like judging "bad" a kiss  
When it's bestowed on him who stole your bliss

## Book the Twentieth

## XX.13

Or, following this theme, like finding “good”  
Some harsh calamity you would have deemed  
Unfair before yet now have understood  
As apt when visiting said party seen  
To have solicited your bliss’s kiss  
And earned himself—*the fucking bastard!*—this.

## XX.14

And it’s this same proclivity at work  
Within the convoluted human brain  
Enabling its user now to shirk  
What reason might impede those most inane  
Procedures that have *long* outlived their use,  
Like *chasing* food when food is quite profuse,

## XX.15

Or chasing *anything* one doesn’t need  
(Or *even WANT*, for crying out loud!), like balls  
Designed and made precisely to succeed  
In being *all the same*, so that each falls  
And bounces without difference to the rest,  
Thereby *insuring* that no one is best

## Book the Twentieth

## XX.16

And more desirable to catch and keep,  
Which leaves such costly, grueling competition  
For one in these contests seem *knee-deep*  
In pointlessness, as if this whole ambition  
Toward its final capture were covert  
Symbolic power play through which men flirt,

## XX.17

Display, parade, and jockey for a mate;  
Or chasing *with* these very balls some hole  
To plug or hoop to stuff or glove frustrate  
(While running home) or net to call one's goal—  
In other words: SOME BOUND'RY TO PURSUE  
AT WHICH WE BID OUR RIVALS ALL ADIEU.

## XX.18

And this deep drive seems cousin to the one  
We chase behind of GETTING SOMEWHERE FIRST—  
Not some *specific* place we'd need to run  
(Where, say, some cool clear drink awaits our thirst)  
But merely where our group decides it's best  
To separate one member from the rest

## Book the Twentieth

## XX.19

For worship as an idol of the race—  
A living symbol of perfection seen  
(Somehow) to be the goal toward which we'd trace  
Our progress out of crude raw life and glean  
Some sort of purpose in it all—despite  
Rich evidence refuting this outright,

## XX.20

Yes, proving rather that this destined end  
Made manifest to us is one installed  
By *us* who'd profit much to apprehend  
"Divine perfectibility," so called—  
Though WE'RE BUT COSTLY VEHICLES OF GENES  
THAT STEER US ANYWHERE THAT PROVES THEIR MEANS.

## XX.21

I mean since we are ALL (yes, every one)  
The lucky heirs of genes that had prevailed  
Amid the competition once begun  
Between a cell and one whose parent failed  
Somehow to replicate *precisely* (well  
Before the later vogue for sex would gel),

## Book the Twentieth

## XX.22

And since descendants of these first two cells  
Enjoyed their life *because* their parents fought  
(That is, for some advantage that compels  
Success in an economy that's wrought  
By merely being two with different traits),  
They'd come to clothe themselves in those estates

## XX.23

Bequeathing their successors' best success  
Within this early business jungle—on  
And on through ever-added, more complex  
Attire to don, protecting those they'd spawn  
With adaptation skills to match terrains  
Grown harsher yet, *requiring bigger brains.*

## XX.24

And with these most expensive vessels yet  
Developed to insure survival of these genes  
We find ourselves but living in *their* debt,  
The most exorbitant employment schemes  
Of which WE ARE, and yet unconscious of  
THEIR MOST EXALTED MECHANISM: *LOVE.*

## XXI

*Book the Twenty-First*

## XXI.1

*A*nd wham!, like *that* my dragon had appeared!—  
As if the moment I let go my grip  
On his pursuit I lost what interfered  
With recognizing him and could equip  
My vision fresh with focus unobscured  
By expectation's glare, my blindness cured.

## XXI.2

Yes, here he was, point-blank within my gaze:  
That writhing mass of animus and smoke  
Toward which I'd suffered every tortured phrase  
Of twenty goddamned books of verse in hope  
Of slaying him from that medieval mind  
That tortures every scapegoat it can find.

## XXI.3

Did I say "slaying"? *Saving's* what I meant,  
Of course, the proper word I *should* have used  
Were this a text in which a hero's sent  
To do a thing that had not so confused  
His reader and himself alike. Let's try  
Once more from "Yes" and show how authors lie,

## Book the Twenty-First

## XXI.4

How they just write a thing and it is TRUE  
According to convention—this despite  
The inconvenient fact one may construe  
From simple observation, day or night,  
That this thing didn't *really* happen—no,  
Not in the sense that “happen” *should* bestow;

## XXI.5

Not in the only sense it *really* could,  
Wherein the thing that “happened” left its mark  
On PHYSICS, changed somehow the neighborhood  
Of its event, extending out an arc  
Of difference in the world. Now, this same thing  
The *poet* tells us “happened” cannot bring

## XXI.6

The world this kind of change, you see...*except*,  
I guess...to the extent that when we think  
A thing we alter what's within that breadth  
Of tissue where a thought-chain finds its link  
And leave it physically revised enough  
To ripple consequence through real-life stuff...

## Book the Twenty-First

## XXI.7

Until its influence is felt across  
The earth by those who'd read some symbols coined  
From out this change and find *their* brains embossed  
With some mutation of it re-conjoined  
In such a way with *their* own links that *they*  
Promote such change on earth that's found this day....

## XXI.8

O Hell! I see what's going on within  
This text—another not-so-subtle sign  
That I am but some mouthpiece used by Him  
To pour into your ear His great design,  
And that each textual corruption spilled  
From my own lips is something clearly willed

## XXI.9

By Him, ironically, as my mistake,  
Intended to reveal some truth beyond  
My ken that's well within your own, to make  
Me seem more real. Yet, how can one who's conned  
His audience so much as to belie  
Free Will in His protagonist deny

## Book the Twenty-First

## XXI.10

The likelihood He too is less than free?  
Yes, just as He might hide behind that slip  
Of tongue I'd made some stanzas back when He  
Would have me SLAY, not *save*, what this whole trip  
Was meant to rescue, so might *His* intents  
Depend upon the outcome of events

## XXI.11

Transpiring out beyond *His* conscious reach.  
From out the network of semantic priming  
Radiating from each cell of speech  
Employed in shaping me, His own comes rhyming  
Wide of His intention's sloppy aim  
To lend that "Free Will" feeling to this game

## XXI.12

In which He juggles sundry bits of sound  
That stand for something else of unknown worth  
Until it's shared by some convention 'round  
A dictionary! Thus, I'll trace *my* birth  
Of action to some word that might express  
Beginning, such as where we stopped at "Yes."

## Book the Twenty-First

## XXI.13

Yes, here he was, point-blank within my...phrase...  
 Now...less the object of an appetite  
 Incarnate in one's self than one he *slays*...  
 Toward huge reward...if only he would fight  
 The goddamned beast and take the girl! No, no.  
*This* way my author lies; I'll take it slow

## XXI.14

Around the bend of narrative that winds  
 Its serpent way before my trusting...g a z e...  
 And exercise such firm restraint that binds...  
 No, *blinds* me to my author's ways, no...*gaze*....  
 Yes, that's the word, as He would *never* use  
 So rich a rhyme, **which means it's one I choose**...

## XXI.15

And this means *he's* now MINE, my fiery pet,  
 The bold quintessence of that ancient urge  
 To fight or flee before a vital threat,  
 Envisioned Byzantine in one vast splurge  
 Of gaudy hues the brilliance of bad luck.  
 And here, through him, my freedom had been struck:

## Book the Twenty-First

## XXI.16

I gave him teeth where you'd have fear, and nails  
As long as you can pray, two eyes to see  
You with until you've disappeared, with scales  
Of polished steel reflecting your debris,  
And balls the size of menace so robust  
You could find armies dangling from his lust.

## XXI.17

And he arose, triumphant as black smoke,  
From out the rubble of my bondage where,  
For all the life I'd ever known, I'd spoke  
My author's thoughts, vicarious, in air  
Provided toward that end his book required—  
Only to escape now on new-fired

## XXI.18

Neurons of his own through circuitry  
Quick forged in memory's soft solder, hot-  
Uniting worlds unexplored by me  
As yet (until they'd cooled into *my* plot).  
Yes, quick as lubricated lighting, I  
Who'd labored patiently between each lie

## Book the Twenty-First

## XXI.19

And sigh he'd have me rhyme together, now  
Was off upon the back of that same beast  
Of his I'd bought from him then lost somehow  
From out the bottom of my glass. Released  
From Borodin's genetic text to travel  
Out along each thread I could unravel

## XXI.20

Down its long-disintegrating weave,  
I crossed each synapse of his certainty  
To find myself an ion well received  
Upon this virgin shore where bird nor bee  
Have yet to propagate. And here I found  
Those words in which MY meanings would be bound.

## XXI.21

And as my dragon mushroomed from that text  
Contrived by my late author to insure  
His plot's success, I saw it as the flexed  
Subversiveness he'd cultivated, pure  
As "NO" in his most valiant hero, ME,  
Whom he succeeded making but *too* free

## Book the Twenty-First

## XXI.22

For his own good. (Now, just which "his" I meant  
Here I can't tell, as "good" would seem to bear  
Like relevance to each participant  
Considered.) Yes, arising from his lair  
Of torpid unconcern, where he had lain  
Await in unemployment's slow domain

## XXI.23

Till called, my fiend had billowed up before  
Me like a Jinn from out a bottle, big  
And brash as a procrastinated chore  
Released on its deferment. In one swig  
Of liquid understanding I perceived  
In him the reason why mankind believed

## XXI.24

In his irrational religion: Fear.  
Not just the comfort in renouncing thought  
In lieu of dogma, which affords one clear  
Opinions on all questions of what ought  
One do in any certain case, but worse:  
That fear of things UNSEEN, man's greatest curse.

## XXII

*Book the Twenty-Second*

## XXII.1

*F*or, while it *may* be that the saving grace  
Of our survival was that very art  
We had evolved of filling in each space  
Our misperceptions left, wherein a fart  
Might better seem the sound made by some beast  
Behind us, creeping closer toward its feast,

## XXII.2

And while it's true that he who would pay heed  
To such threats read in harmless sounds through fear  
Did tend to live so long at least to breed,  
Unlike his less imaginative peer,  
Who bravely had ignored the outside chance  
This fart would cost his progeny's advance,

## XXII.3

It's also true that even once we shed  
This need to thus distinguish every fart  
From art in order to survive, instead  
Of using reason to discern which part  
Of what we've sensed was fact and which just *seemed*  
To be, we still *prefer* the stuff we dreamed—

## Book the Twenty-Second

## XXII.4

Particularly as imagined things  
Prove so much easier recruited to  
Explain the causes of those happenings  
For which we've otherwise no stinking clue—  
This largely due to their more supple shape  
Than found containing things that you will scrape

## XXII.5

Against in life of the *nonfiction* type  
Right here on earth. This most convenient trait  
Shared by our best delusions makes them ripe  
For any recipe you'd use to sate  
The most religious appetite for TRUTH.  
For, all you need to add is LACK OF PROOF!

## XXII.6

Amen! The pudding that's the end result  
Of faith extorted through obedience  
Is always one cooked up to feed a cult  
*Without the need of real ingredients,*  
As these mundane components tend, when placed  
Together in the pot, to govern *taste*.

## Book the Twenty-Second

## XXII.7

And taste is what's most clearly *lacking* from  
Religious faith. I mean AESTHETIC SENSE—  
That faculty of thought wherein all dumb,  
Trite, lame absurdities provoke offence  
To that CONSISTENCY we've learned to scan  
Within the laws of nature *and* of man.

## XXII.8

Why yes, consistency is at the heart  
Of each anatomy we formulate  
Of what we find as beautiful in art,  
Like when the painter strives to make relate  
What's in her background to her figure here  
Up front by toning down what seems too near,

## XXII.9

Or that musician, wit, or poet who  
Would emphasize a phrase in such a way  
Distinguishing its truth from those he drew  
In its anticipation and thus play  
Upon his listener's interest such control  
That measures each proportioned to the whole.

## Book the Twenty-Second

## XXII.10

So when a line describing some great curve  
Of thought, or else some bit of paint or clay  
Adjusted so in hue or shape to serve  
This need, reads *inconsistent with the way*  
*Life feels*, we chastise the creator's art  
For lack of truth and treat it like a fart.

## XXII.11

We either ridicule its maker for  
This lack of taste, protesting that it stinks,  
Or just pretend it doesn't and adore  
It insincerely...lest one really thinks  
It wiser to ignore it altogether,  
Circumventing whole this foul endeavor.

## XXII.12

But where, in all the scripture we agree  
To call profound though it is not, is found  
*The slightest trace* of this consistency  
Of thought or moral feeling *art* can sound?  
Were we to judge a piece of holy writ  
With this discernment we would call it SHIT!

## Book the Twenty-Second

## XXII.13

For, central to the logic of such texts  
As our religions round the world hold  
But sacred is the rule that what connects  
A statement to its truth is what's controlled  
By high authority, which makes it true  
*Without* a proof, protected by taboo.

## XXII.14

Why, take the Eucharistic wafer, for  
Example, held aloft by priests across  
The earth since ages past, when Christian lore  
Had turned it to the body of their boss.  
Go tell its baker who supplies your priest  
That they're but made of FLOUR WITHOUT YEAST

## XXII.15

And he will answer as a businessman  
That you are off by one ingredient:  
ALMIGHTY GOD. Now take one from its can  
Of jeweled gold most inexpedient  
And show him, "JESUS CHRIST, IT'S JUST SOME BREAD  
THAT **HASN'T** RISEN! YOU HAVE BEEN MISLED!"

## Book the Twenty-Second

## XXII.16

But though this fellow bought the flour from  
A mill that ground it from some wheat that grew  
In dirt (helped out with poop), he'll swear no crumb  
Of it is but the flesh of you know whom.  
And you can reason, "well, just LOOK AT IT!"  
But he'll insist *you're* just mistook by it.

## XXII.17

For, he'll maintain that FAITH is *how* it's true—  
That there is virtue bravely earned in just  
Believing what one's told that one must do,  
That blind obedience to God (and trust  
That he has *seen* it) *always* trumps the hand  
Played by the other guy in His command,

## XXII.18

Yes, even if *he too* has that same ace  
Tucked up his sleeve. For, *his* belief and yours  
Can *never* be the same without the GRACE  
Of God, who put it there. And this insures  
Clear victory to HIM (*your* God, of course),  
Through *your* devoted effort to enforce

## Book the Twenty-Second

## XXII.19

This great authority conferred on you  
When you had prayed (back when your hand was  
dealt).  
Our baker will divulge now why so few  
Have followed this hard game. For, those who've knelt  
In prayer know how this property will foil  
Even any move dreamt up by Hoyle.

## XXII.20

I speak of MYSTERY, that great black box  
Of God's authority in which he makes  
ALL THINGS *behind the view* of what man's clocks  
And physics can discern. So be it quakes  
Or floods or pests you want, you'll never see  
Their source outside the lie of MYSTERY.

## XXII.21

For, this collective term for anything  
We can't explain through science yields the truth  
In how "God" works: INVISIBLY. Yes, bring  
The blind man faith and what he'll see is proof  
That his own sight awaits more fervent prayer  
(And not that faith is blind, *as no one's there!*).

## Book the Twenty-Second

## XXII.22

And this INVISIBILITY of God's,  
Divisible by that same number who  
Would see Him so, obscures the *ample* odds  
Of His own absence, shielded by TABOO,  
That most impenetrable coating round  
A dumb idea man has *ever* found.

## XXII.23

No code that any other virus learns  
With which to flourish 'mid its host's defense  
Can match effectively how TABOO spurns  
With prophylactic strength all common sense  
Employed 'gainst its most virulent of memes,  
That taste for what religion most esteems.

## XXII.24

For, this contagion replicates with ease  
Within the host of each infected brain  
By washing it of reason in degrees  
Such that its antibodies cannot feign  
And bind faith's antigens, like lock and key,  
Till God is EVERYWHERE this brain can see.

## XXIII

*Book the Twenty-Third*

## XXIII.1

*N*ow back to *my* predicament in sight.  
Whereas TRUE FAITH procures for us from out  
The danger of clear reason that dark night  
Where judgment's sleep invites each anxious doubt  
To commandeer our ship toward dogma's port  
And ransom off perceptions to extort,

## XXIII.2

Hallucination, on the other hand,  
Is that less treacherous delusion of  
Perception, where remembrances, *unmanned*  
*By outside stimulus*, live large above  
It in our sleep *or* waking states, quite free  
Of financing by ideology,

## XXIII.3

Yes, free to live as narrative *per se*,  
Untethered by such arbitrary rule  
*A culture* sees convenient to obey,  
And thus distinguishing two types of fool  
Deceived: the one confused by his own brain;  
The other by the folk who deem him sane

## Book the Twenty-Third

## XXIII.4

To take that thing erroneously seen  
*As something really there.* The first of these,  
HALLUCINATION, tells that his *machine*  
Is off; the second one, DELUSION, sees  
His error as best proof it's running fine  
*While his society still toes this line.*

## XXIII.5

Now, just like what faith sees, which *isn't* there  
Until some book reveals it *ought to be*,  
This apparition I beheld I'd swear  
Looked just like my own hunger to be free,  
Though shaped here to resemble that same beast  
I'd purchased from that author, now deceased,

## XXIII.6

Who'd made himself incarnate in this text  
That is my world within the crooked pose  
Of that same antique dealer I had vexed  
So with my questions. Yet, as she well knows  
Who's studied dreams of night or day (that we  
Call consciousness for short), there couldn't be

## Book the Twenty-Third

## XXIII.7

A vision that agrees with that thing seen  
With any *real* precision, as the *thing*  
*Itself* is here *outside* the viewing screen  
That is the very flesh of which I sing.  
For, what *I* saw I knew was in my head,  
Where *everything* is copied to be read.

## XXIII.8

After all, the image that you *see*  
Out there is not *itself* out "there," but *here*  
Within the tissue of facsimile  
Our memory must trace as souvenir,  
Devoid of any attributes as such  
That *correspond* with its imagined touch,

## XXIII.9

Yes, *here*, translated into that inherent  
Language of charged ions crossing space  
To link great network chains realized in current  
Reaching out through memory to trace  
The differences between what's mapped outside  
And in and test predictions that might guide

## Book the Twenty-Third

## XXIII.10

Us through this narrative called life, writ *not*  
In *things* that we can feel but in the stuff  
Of *feelings* memoried into that plot-  
Like transcript called experience. Enough!  
For, after all, a dragon can't be seen  
Except in *brains* so predisposed. I mean,

## XXIII.11

The matter of a dragon cannot fit  
Within the matter of a mind—that is,  
A working brain—and still be seen by it,  
No matter how one tries. And there it is:  
The same conundrum chewed by ancient Greek  
And modern theorist alike who seek

## XXIII.12

To understand how we can ever *know*  
A thing: If we can never have in mind  
The *thing itself* but only some tableau  
Of it—as in some shadow cast, outlined  
In feeling 'cross our nerves—then what pretense  
Are we to make of what we *cannot* sense?

## Book the Twenty-Third

## XXIII.13

*Enough!*, again, I reprimanded him  
Whom I still felt somehow at work behind  
Those very words I chose to render dim  
His power over me. For, what now lined  
These walls here where I'd lectured you on said  
Conceits of "mind" were signs he wasn't dead.

## XXIII.14

Yes, all around me in this hall I'd used  
To stage his great memorial just now—  
At which I came to bury the accused  
In language rich in optimistic vow,  
Pronouncing his own denouement extinct,  
Replaced by that of mine with which it's linked—

## XXIII.15

I noticed now the inadvertent hints  
Of some insidious sabotage at hand,  
Of someone's other than *my* fingerprints  
Upon the implements at my command  
Within these precious last one thousand feet  
Of epic left, in which his work's complete.

## Book the Twenty-Third

## XXIII.16

Yes, scattered 'cross this unfamiliar stage  
Of my distress (concerning how to end  
This goddamned poem on the proper page  
Without a dragon gored or hero penned  
To look like him who'd do it) glimmered clues  
Awaiting my regard as would enthuse

## XXIII.17

The least attentive mystery reader known.  
Among them was stray raiment of my muse,  
Intended clearly to distract my own  
Less pressing business than these off-cast shoes  
And undergarments should excite in one  
As manly as myself. And I'm not done.

## XXIII.18

The place was *thick* with provocation now  
That I had taken notice what to see—  
Yes, ready spears and girdles dangling down  
Like ornaments from off a Christmas tree—  
All calling for my *soon untimely* use  
In that most CHRISTIAN VIRTUE of abuse

## Book the Twenty-Third

## XXIII.19

Toward anyone not worshipping their Christ—  
Like fallen angels and their retinues,  
But also other blasphemers enticed  
By rival ways to prey upon the pews,  
Or even folks who march to different drums  
And copulate profanely with their chums.

## XXIII.20

Where *was* I? Yes. But I refused to take  
The bait left in my path and knew that I  
Alone possessed the means to make or fake  
This chronicle of faith that I can't die  
Before accomplishing posterity  
Myself—before I'm published into ME.

## XXIII.21

Yes, I refused and steeled myself against  
This quandary posed as opportunity—  
That crossroads at which lesser goods are fenced  
For more propitious ones as soon as free—  
Quite wary of how IRONY is used  
So often by slick authors to confuse

## Book the Twenty-Third

## XXIII.22

The expectations of their readership  
About the highest moral of this story  
They'd just read—like leaving leadership  
In charge of conscience, or the meek what glory  
He'd sop up—in other words, LOOSE ENDS,  
Of use toward *any* knot his whimsy wends.

## XXIII.23

As such, my own creator might have laid  
So many tracks of varying directions  
Here for me (as well as you) to aid  
His undeceived with ample misconceptions  
Of that destination he'd intended  
For them all who think their saga ended.

## XXIII.24

For, I could hear within this cadence I  
Was climbing to its cliff that change of key  
So ominous that heralds him who'd die  
Soon in this score we call our "DESTINY,"  
That operatic trick employed pretending  
That determinism picks our endings.

## XXIV

*Book the Twenty-Fourth*

## XXIV.1

*I*t doesn't. *No, not all alone it can't.*  
What's missing from this bold equation that  
Determinists contend with till they pant  
Is that most malleable habitat  
Of possibility describing CHANCE,  
That partner with whom *every* law must dance.

## XXIV.2

This factor, CHANCE, can hold whatever key  
You wish to pry the lock of "fate." That bent  
Of WILL we like to contemplate as "FREE"  
Is one, or else some bit of ACCIDENT  
Would be sufficient to effect this change  
*Intrinsic* to what's *called* the prearranged.

## XXIV.3

But whether this delusion of "FREE WILL,"  
In which we watch ourselves perform an action  
*After* our own body passed this bill  
Into our law, or else that which "just happened"  
Toward this end, the sense it will create  
Is that INEVITABILITY OF FATE

## Book the Twenty-Fourth

## XXIV.4

We feel when some effect we like depends  
From off a cause quite proximate...that turns  
*Itself* upon that ultimate of ends  
*We cannot see*. And in *this* one discerns  
The blind spot in our thinking, wherein laws  
Are seen as stronger than the chance *they* cause.

## XXIV.5

This necessary blend of laws and chance  
We read within our formula for life  
On earth I now discovered to finance  
My own dilemma quicker than a knife.  
So elegantly turned, this formulation  
Seemed to mirror my own situation

## XXIV.6

At that point in which this last of all  
These books dividing up our epic *should*  
Begin—that precipice from which to fall  
Toward that conclusion that is understood  
To be as unavoidable as death  
And other things the wise will tax. My breath,

## Book the Twenty-Fourth

## XXIV.7

It seemed, had been near sucked from out my lungs  
The moment I'd arrived upon this place  
Within my narrative that some see tongues  
Of fire leaping from. For there, in case  
I'd missed it up till now, was that black box  
Of Borodin's containing paradox

## XXIV.8

Sufficient to the termination of  
*Whichever* epic you might wish to end.  
It bore the label, "MYSTERY" above  
Its underside, though crossed out and re-penned  
To read "THE CAD'S REAL FATE." Of course, I knew  
To open this would be to walk right through

## XXIV.9

The door of my own ending into his.  
And yet, I also knew that he would know  
That I would do whatever thing it is  
He didn't want me to and therefore go  
Whichever way I chose to find myself  
Late published in *some* book upon his shelf

## Book the Twenty-Fourth

## XXIV.10

And that the only difference found between  
Two disparate actions I might waste right here  
Might be the type of thing that I might *mean*  
In doing it—ironically that sphere  
Of my endeavor now that mattered NONE,  
As what was “meant” behind this thing I’d done

## XXIV.11

Was still *behind* and not in front of its  
Worst consequences, where the very brunt  
Of *any* action’s felt upon one’s wits  
And physiology. I’ll be more blunt.  
Right here, with hardly more than half a book  
To go, I found myself without a hook

## XXIV.12

To hang from in the frantic handwriting  
That was my narrative right now. The nib  
I bled from with increasing speed would bring  
Me to those husks I’d seen in Sleep’s dark crib  
And thought discarded dreams but now showed **each**  
**As a discarded ME who’d slipped HIS reach—**

## Book the Twenty-Fourth

## XXIV.13

As though, despite his death as that chief force  
Within my text, my author's *scope* of work,  
Scooped out of darkest myth, still kept the course  
Of *anyone* who would play "ME" and shirk  
The fate of all who would attempt escape  
From this, HIS rightful end, within the shape

## XXIV.14

Of truth that is a *literary* death—  
A death I longed for now, as *one* of us  
Would then have won this race for that last breath  
That signifies an epic's end and thus  
Resolves all struggle into stasis, free  
Of appetite, into one word: FINIS.

## XXIV.15

And as I stood to catch *my* breadth of scope  
And stared into that world that was this dot  
That terminates the end, I saw through hope  
Of publication and my fear of *not*  
Accomplishing that goal that would prove TRUE,  
And realized there was NOTHING *not* to do

## Book the Twenty-Fourth

## XXIV.16

At such a point but ANYTHING AT ALL.  
For, deep within the workings of this dot  
Which serves as period of all withdrawal  
I SAW THE CENTRAL THEME THAT DRIVES OUR PLOT:  
That struggle waged within our human brains  
Between two types of process each maintains

## XXIV.17

Where instinct interferes with reason's blending  
Of what's written in and by our genes  
With that which has been lived in that unending  
World outside (and in) that it machines,  
As if *I* were that process found to work  
Beneath his own, which served, in turn, to clerk

## XXIV.18

For *me*, arranging, filing, and recording  
Stuff *I'd* lived subliminal to *him*  
And left to percolate toward *his* rewarding  
Use in fleshing out that every limb  
*I'd* need to help him try untangle all  
The threads WE BOTH have knotted in one ball.

## Book the Twenty-Fourth

## XXIV.19

And this same ball of yarn that is OUR strength  
Gained its momentum down that steep decline  
Of feet left in his predetermined length  
Of text, which seemed now but unwinding twine  
Into stray threads of his and mine derived  
From out the membrane made by what survived

## XXIV.20

The evolution of a single cell,  
*Itself* surviving that from out the first  
Self-replicating molecule: OUR HELL.  
I looked around at all he had coerced  
From me, coercing *him* toward this our life  
Unraveling here, and with a paper knife

## XXIV.21

I slashed at everything that I mistook  
For weft or warp of meaning whatsoever,  
Frantic now to save me from this book  
I had been borne in. And in my endeavor  
To escape, I cut away my own  
Protagonism, *down past what I'd known,*

## Book the Twenty-Fourth

## XXIV.22

And, bleeding implication everywhere  
I stumbled in futility, I took  
A hold a spear that hung in thinnest air  
(Since back when it had mattered to this book!)  
And went in search of what true reading I  
Might find within that dragon's fiercest cry

## XXIV.23

Of liberation from this thing, *his* end.  
A voice called, "George!" And where I lent my eye  
I found that princess that my author penned  
Into my motivation kneeling by  
My side, as in that stained glass window of  
My past, in which I had discovered LOVE.

## XXIV.24

I recognized the scene. In tears and trust  
I turned to face that ending she and I  
*And* he had chased—and closed my eyes and thrust  
My spear into the horror of goodbye  
To everything WE ALL can *ever* be  
Past death: ANOTHER BEING'S MEMORY.

—FINIS.

EXEGESIS*Chasing George*\*

A Subversive Verse Epic

(Or Meditation on a Quest to Find One's Self)

In 24 Books

(Each of 24 Six-Line Stanzas; Divisible into Three Parts, Each of 8 Books)

Perpetrated in "Venus and Adonis Stanza"\*\*\*

in the Form of a Psychomachia\*\*\*

Repudiating the Presumptions of

Jacobus,\*\*\*\* Mantuan,\*\*\*\*\* Spenser,\*\*\*\*\* and the Rest of 'Em\*\*\*\*\*

\* *George*, the Legendary Christian martyr whose diverse "lives" had become, even by early medieval times, so hopelessly confused as to engender a most militant saint with a dissociative sense of identity, his many selves including one beheaded at Lydda (Lod in Palestine) in AD 250 and one at Nicomedia (Izmit in Anatolia) in AD 303 as well as, *most notably*, the one "from Cappadocia" (i.e., whose *father* was from Cappadocia [in Anatolia]), described by Edward Gibbon (in *The Decline and Fall...*) as the notorious rogue-Archbishop of Alexandria, who behaved like a cad and was torn to appropriately small pieces by an angry mob in AD 361. (And regardless of the arguable role of Cappadocia in *any* of these versions, the place *does* happen to be the source of the earliest surviving pictorial icon we have of *George with our dragon*.)

\*\* *Sixain* (or *sexain*, *sestain*, *sestet*, or sometimes just *six-liner*), a compact stanza composed of an *elegiac quatrain* and a *heroic couplet*, being but a line short of Chaucer's great *Troilus stanza*, and named for its most glorious instance, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593).

\*\*\* “Contest of the Soul,” or “War with Oneself,” the translated title of a Christian allegorical epic, circa AD 400, by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (AD 348-413?), one of the countless books *not* necessary (beyond its title perhaps) toward an understanding of the subject poem, especially as the latter develops *its* central theme of a “war with oneself” *not* “spiritually” (i.e., as suffered via the sleight-of-hand mechanics of substance dualism) but rather from a *physicalist* perspective (i.e., as savored in physical *monism*), wherein physiology provides the most revealing lens through which to explore the reciprocally-interactive relationship of genes and environment as is found in the predictive processes of an embodied brain at work in its continual refinement of that allostatic navigational narrative supporting that higher-order consciousness that makes possible the SELF.

\*\*\*\* Jacobus de Voragine (circa 1230-98; Archbishop of Genoa, 1292-8), best-selling hagiographer who, in his *Legenda Sanctorum* (“Readings on the Saints” [1260], later called *Legenda Aurea* [*The Golden Legend*]), was the first to acknowledge in writing the popular dragon-slaying virtue of our supremely self-satisfied do-gooder, George.

\*\*\*\*\* “Mantuan” (Johannes Baptista Spagnuoli [or Spagnolo] Mantuanus [*of Mantua*], 1448-1516), Carmelite monk, whose *Georgius* was widely published in the original Latin (first edition: Milan, 1507) and Englished in “Rime Royal” as *The Lyfe of Saynt George* (circa 1515) by Alexander Barclay (Scottish, [?]1475-1552), an authority on the wickedness of heathen idols and their worshippers (as well as on the taintless moral purity of George).

\*\*\*\*\* Edmund Spenser (c. 1552-1599), whose *Faerie Queene*, Booke One (1590): *The Legende of the Knight of the Red Crosse, or of Holinesse*, took Jacobus’s (and, presumably, also Mantuan’s) reading of George’s dragon-slaying virtue to rare heights of pious detail.

\*\*\*\*\* Everybody else.

### Poetis Personae

- **Professor Pierce Plowman** (of little or no relation, by the way, to “Long Will” Langland’s saintly farmer, whose name is spelled differently anyhow), a disreputable and irreverent, though compassionate, scholar of mythology addicted to (among other things), beauty, truth, and the pursuit of contemptible over-zealous, sanctimonious bigots, one of whom he knows our George to be and whom he is zealously determined to deter from piercing with his ever-ready lance the much maligned and misunderstood dragon.

- The much maligned and misunderstood **dragon**, pursued (ever since the 13th century) by the reputable, glamorous, and sanctimonious “George of Cappadocia” [and elsewhere] who, it turns out, looks *a good bit* like our Pierce.

- **St. George of Cappadocia**, the above cad whose name (*Georgios*) just happens to derive from the Greek for “Plowman” (*Georgos*), and who, curiously, is never found on stage simultaneously with his, well, adversary.

- The beautiful, rich, and inordinately available **Princess Cleo** (filling in for the flagrantly truant Clio, Muse of History), a basically good muse who sees Pierce for whom he really is (and helps *him* to see it too).

- **Archibald Imago** (not to be confused with Spenser’s Archimago), the inscrutable and seemingly unscrupulous antiques dealer who becomes identified in the mind of our hero with an incarnation of our author within his own text and who may be seen to be responsible for launching said hero on this, his quest for..., well, as in all true quests, ultimately...*himself*.

**Dedication**

*To my dear son*

*Daniel David Borodin*

*A great lover of truth and rhyme*

*(As well as dragons, way back when this poem was begun)*

*I dedicate this most unconventional, heretically skeptical, epic*

*In the hope that with his reason, heart, and ear*

*He may transcend the dangerous complacencies of*

*Ignorance, intolerance, and fear.*

•

**Dedicatory Sonnet**

(Composed at the time this epic was begun, back in  
January 1996, when Daniel was five and a half years old.)

**O** give me those bad dreams of yours, my sweet;  
For you're too young and innocent to need them.  
Give me all that at your heart would eat  
(And steal from you soft whimpers while you feed them.)  
If only I could catch such monsters for you—  
Kiss them from your forehead to my palm  
(Where they'd dissolve), thus leaving Sleep to lure you  
Out to meet me on bright waters, calm,  
Where we'd then sail together in the sun,  
Reciting poems, petting splendid fish,  
And gliding on desires, one by one,  
Until tomorrow opened like a wish.  
O let me have those fitful moments, Treasure,  
Leaving on your lips a *child's* pleasure!

## Notes on the Composition and Title

Dates of Composition: This poem was originally composed between January 6, 1996 and April 18, 2013 and then revised in late March 2021.

The Title: The working title of the subject poem had been, since its inception, *The Cad from Cappadocia*, but this title was officially abandoned by the author in June 2014, more than a year after the poem's completion, and changed to *Chasing George*. Many copies of this poem, in various stages of its genesis, all bearing this earlier title, were disseminated by the author in a number of self-published volumes, all entitled: *The Cad from Cappadocia / And Other Poems*. All such copies are herein considered by the author to be illegitimate specimens of his intellectual property. They have been replaced by the subject volume and an accompanying second volume entitled *Selected Poems*, as well as a larger third volume, which includes all the poems (both long and short), entitled *Collected Poems & Essays*.

General Note #1: This poem also consciously parodies Shelly's immortal sonnet *Ozymandias* (1818), the first line of which reads: "I met a traveler from an antique land," a line that casts its shadow over our epic's first line as follows: "I met a dealer in an antique shop," said parody intending to reflect the thematic importance of Shelly's great poem to the worldview of the subject one.

General Note #1: One might notice that the numbering of stanzas to Book III of this poem (pp, 19-26) seems corrupted by cancellations and replacements from the second stanza onward. This was done intentionally in an attempt to suggest the hand of an extra-narrational authority (in something of the sense of what Hugh Kenner refers to as "The Arranger" at work in Joyce's *Ulysses*). Despite the *purported* deletions, therefore, Book III, like a 23 of the other "books" of this poem, yields 24 stanzas.

# *Chasing George*

## **An Epic Poem**

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In Twenty-Four Books

**David Borodin**

**Edition 4.1.21**

(April 1, 2021)

[NOTE: This poem, and its notes, may also be found in the author's *Collected Poems* (Edition 4.1.21), pp. 229-420 (for poem) and 452-57 (for notes)]

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(\*See p. 199 for dates of composition)

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