

Sonnets, and Sonnets on English Dramatic Poets (1590-1650) eBook

Sonnets, and Sonnets on English Dramatic Poets (1590-1650) by Algernon Swinburne

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Contents

Sonnets, and Sonnets on English Dramatic Poets (1590-1650) eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Page 1.....	5
Page 2.....	6
Page 3.....	8
Page 4.....	10
Page 5.....	12
Page 6.....	14
Page 7.....	16
Page 8.....	18
Page 9.....	20
Page 10.....	22
Page 11.....	24
Page 12.....	26
Page 13.....	28
Page 14.....	30
Page 15.....	32



Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
SONNETS:		1
SONNETS ON ENGLISH		1
DRAMATIC POETS		
SONNETS		2
AFTER SUNSET		2
I		2
II		2
III		3
A STUDY FROM MEMORY		3
TO DR. JOHN BROWN		3
TO WILLIAM BELL SCOTT		3
A DEATH ON EASTER DAY		4
ON THE DEATHS OF THOMAS		4
CARLYLE AND GEORGE ELIOT		
AFTER LOOKING INTO CARLYLE'S		4
REMINISCENCES		
I		4
II		4
A LAST LOOK		5
DICKENS		5
ON LAMB'S SPECIMENS OF		5
DRAMATIC POETS		
I		5
II		5
TO JOHN NICHOL		6
I		6
II		6
DYSTHANATOS		6
EUONYMOS		7
		7
BISMARCK AT CANOSSA		7
QUIA NOMINOR LEO		7
I		7
II		8
THE CHANNEL TUNNEL		8
SIR WILLIAM GOMM		8
I		8
II		9
SONNETS		9



ENGLISH DRAMATIC POETS	9
I	9
II	9
III	9
IV	10
V	10
VI	10
VII	10
VIII	11
IX	11
X	11
XI	12
XII	12
XIII	12
XIV	13
XV	13
XVI	13
XVII	13
XVIII	14
XIX	14
I	14
XX	14
II	14
XXI	15
EPILOGUE	15



Page 1

SONNETS:

- Hope and fear 227
- after sunset* 228
- A Study from memory* 230
- to Dr. John Brown* 231
- to William Bell Scott* 232
- A death on Easter day* 233
- on the deaths of Thomas Carlyle and George Eliot* 234
- after looking into CARLYLE'S reminiscences* 235
- A last Look* 237
- Dickens* 238
- on lamb's specimens of dramatic poets* 239
- to John Nichol* 241
- DYSTHANATOS 243
- EUONYMOS 244
- on the Russian persecution of the Jews* 245
- Bismarck at Canossa* 246
- QUIA NOMINOR Leo 247
- the Channel Tunnel* 249
- sir William Gomm* 250

SONNETS ON ENGLISH DRAMATIC POETS

1590-1650

I. Christopher Marlowe	297
II. William Shakespeare	298
III. Ben Jonson	299
IV. Beaumont and Fletcher	300
V. Philip Massinger	301
VI. John Ford	302
VII. John Webster	303
VIII. Thomas Decker	304
IX. Thomas Middleton	305
X. Thomas Heywood	306
XI. George Chapman	307
XII. John Marston	308
XIII. John Day	309
XIV. James Shirley	310



Page 2

XV. The Tribe of Benjamin	311	
XVI. Anonymous Plays: “Arden of Feversham”		312
XVII. Anonymous Plays	313	
XVIII. Anonymous Plays	314	
XIX. The Many	315	
XX. The Many	316	
XXI. Epilogue	317	

SONNETS

HOPE AND FEAR

Beneath the shadow of dawn's aerial cope,
 With eyes enkindled as the sun's own sphere,
 Hope from the front of youth in godlike cheer
 Looks Godward, past the shades where blind men grope
 Round the dark door that prayers nor dreams can ope,
 And makes for joy the very darkness dear
 That gives her wide wings play; nor dreams that fear
 At noon may rise and pierce the heart of hope.
 Then, when the soul leaves off to dream and yearn,
 May truth first purge her eyesight to discern
 What once being known leaves time no power to appal;
 Till youth at last, ere yet youth be not, learn
 The kind wise word that falls from years that fall—
 “Hope thou not much, and fear thou not at all.”

AFTER SUNSET

“Si quis piorum Manibus locus.”

I

Straight from the sun's grave in the deep clear west
 A sweet strong wind blows, glad of life: and I,
 Under the soft keen stardawn whence the sky
 Takes life renewed, and all night's godlike breast
 Palpitates, gradually revealed at rest



By growth and change of ardours felt on high,
Make onward, till the last flame fall and die
And all the world by night's broad hand lie blest.
Haply, meseems, as from that edge of death,
Whereon the day lies dark, a brightening breath
Blows more of benediction than the morn,
So from the graves whereon grief gazing saith
That half our heart of life there lies forlorn
May light or breath at least of hope be born.

II

The wind was soft before the sunset fled:
Now, while the cloud-enshrouded corpse of day
Is lowered along a red funereal way
Down to the dark that knows not white from red,
A clear sheer breeze against the night makes head,
Serene, but sure of life as ere a ray
Springs, or the dusk of dawn knows red from grey,
Being as a soul that knows not quick from dead.
From far beyond the sunset, far above,
Full toward the starry soundless east it blows
Bright as a child's breath breathing on a rose,
Smooth to the sense as plume of any dove;
Till more and more as darkness grows and glows
Silence and night seem likest life and love.



Page 3

III

If light of life outlive the set of sun
That men call death and end of all things, then
How should not that which life held best for men
And proved most precious, though it seem undone
By force of death and woful victory won,
Be first and surest of revival, when
Death shall bow down to life arisen again?
So shall the soul seen be the self-same one
That looked and spake with even such lips and eyes
As love shall doubt not then to recognise,
And all bright thoughts and smiles of all time past
Revive, transfigured, but in spirit and sense
None other than we knew, for evidence
That love's last mortal word was not his last.

A STUDY FROM MEMORY

If that be yet a living soul which here
Seemed brighter for the growth of numbered springs
And clothed by Time and Pain with goodlier things
Each year it saw fulfilled a fresh fleet year,
Death can have changed not aught that made it dear;
Half humorous goodness, grave-eyed mirth on wings
Bright-balanced, blither-voiced than quiring strings;
Most radiant patience, crowned with conquering cheer;
A spirit inviolable that smiled and sang
By might of nature and heroic need
More sweet and strong than loftiest dream or deed;
A song that shone, a light whence music rang
High as the sunniest heights of kindest thought;
All these must be, or all she was be nought.

TO DR. JOHN BROWN

Beyond the north wind lay the land of old
Where men dwelt blithe and blameless, clothed and fed
With joy's bright raiment and with love's sweet bread,
The whitest flock of earth's maternal fold.
None there might wear about his brows enrolled



A light of lovelier fame than rings your head,
Whose lovesome love of children and the dead
All men give thanks for: I far off behold
A dear dead hand that links us, and a light
The blithest and benigntest of the night,
The night of death's sweet sleep, wherein may be
A star to show your spirit in present sight
Some happier island in the Elysian sea
Where Rab may lick the hand of Marjorie.

March 1882.

TO WILLIAM BELL SCOTT

The larks are loud above our leagues of whin
Now the sun's perfume fills their glorious gold
With odour like the colour: all the wold
Is only light and song and wind wherein
These twain are blent in one with shining din.
And now your gift, a giver's kingly-souled,
Dear old fast friend whose honours grow not old,
Bids memory's note as loud and sweet begin.
Though all but we from life be now gone forth
Of that bright household in our joyous north
Where I, scarce clear of boyhood just at end,
First met your hand; yet under life's clear dome,
Now seventy strenuous years have crowned my friend,
Shines no less bright his full-sheaved harvest-home.



Page 4

April 20, 1882.

A DEATH ON EASTER DAY

The strong spring sun rejoicingly may rise,
Rise and make revel, as of old men said,
Like dancing hearts of lovers newly wed:
A light more bright than ever bathed the skies
Departs for all time out of all men's eyes.
The crowns that girt last night a living head
Shine only now, though deathless, on the dead:
Art that mocks death, and Song that never dies.
Albeit the bright sweet mothlike wings be furled,
Hope sees, past all division and defection,
And higher than swims the mist of human breath,
The soul most radiant once in all the world
Requicken'd to regenerate resurrection
Out of the likeness of the shadow of death.

April 1882.

ON THE DEATHS OF THOMAS CARLYLE AND GEORGE ELIOT

Two souls diverse out of our human sight
Pass, followed one with love and each with wonder:
The stormy sophist with his mouth of thunder,
Clothed with loud words and mantled in the might
Of darkness and magnificence of night;
And one whose eye could smite the night in sunder,
Searching if light or no light were thereunder,
And found in love of loving-kindness light.
Duty divine and Thought with eyes of fire
Still following Righteousness with deep desire
Shone sole and stern before her and above,
Sure stars and sole to steer by; but more sweet
Shone lower the loveliest lamp for earthly feet,
The light of little children, and their love.



AFTER LOOKING INTO CARLYLE'S REMINISCENCES

I

Three men lived yet when this dead man was young
Whose names and words endure for ever: one
Whose eyes grew dim with straining toward the sun,
And his wings weakened, and his angel's tongue
Lost half the sweetest song was ever sung,
But like the strain half uttered earth hears none,
Nor shall man hear till all men's songs are done:
One whose clear spirit like an eagle hung
Between the mountains hallowed by his love
And the sky stainless as his soul above:
And one the sweetest heart that ever spake
The brightest words wherein sweet wisdom smiled.
These deathless names by this dead snake defiled
Bid memory spit upon him for their sake.

II

Sweet heart, forgive me for thine own sweet sake,
Whose kind blithe soul such seas of sorrow swam,
And for my love's sake, powerless as I am
For love to praise thee, or like thee to make
Music of mirth where hearts less pure would break,
Less pure than thine, our life-unspotted Lamb.
Things hatefullest thou hadst not heart



Page 5

to damn,
Nor wouldst have set thine heel on this dead snake.
Let worms consume its memory with its tongue,
The fang that stabbed fair Truth, the lip that stung
Men's memories uncorroded with its breath.
Forgive me, that with bitter words like his
I mix the gentlest English name that is,
The tenderest held of all that know not death.

A LAST LOOK

Sick of self-love, Malvolio, like an owl
That hoots the sun risen where starlight sank,
With German garters crossed athwart thy frank
Stout Scottish legs, men watched thee snarl and scowl,
And boys responsive with reverberate howl
Shrilled, hearing how to thee the springtime stank
And as thine own soul all the world smelt rank
And as thine own thoughts Liberty seemed foul.
Now, for all ill thoughts nursed and ill words given
Not all condemned, not utterly forgiven,
Son of the storm and darkness, pass in peace.
Peace upon earth thou knewest not: now, being dead,
Rest, with nor curse nor blessing on thine head,
Where high-strung hate and strenuous envy cease.

DICKENS

Chief in thy generation born of men
Whom English praise acclaimed as English-born,
With eyes that matched the worldwide eyes of morn
For gleam of tears or laughter, tenderest then
When thoughts of children warmed their light, or when
Reverence of age with love and labour worn,
Or godlike pity fired with godlike scorn,
Shot through them flame that winged thy swift live pen:
Where stars and suns that we behold not burn,
Higher even than here, though highest was here thy place,
Love sees thy spirit laugh and speak and shine
With Shakespeare and the soft bright soul of Sterne



And Fielding's kindest might and Goldsmith's grace;
Scarce one more loved or worthier love than thine.

ON LAMB'S SPECIMENS OF DRAMATIC POETS

I

If all the flowers of all the fields on earth
By wonder-working summer were made one,
Its fragrance were not sweeter in the sun,
Its treasure-house of leaves were not more worth
Than those wherefrom thy light of musing mirth
Shone, till each leaf whereon thy pen would run
Breathed life, and all its breath was benison.
Beloved beyond all names of English birth,
More dear than mightier memories; gentlest name
That ever clothed itself with flower-sweet fame,
Or linked itself with loftiest names of old
By right and might of loving; I, that am
Less than the least of those within thy fold,
Give only thanks for them to thee, Charles Lamb.

II



Page 6

So many a year had borne its own bright bees
And slain them since thy honey-bees were hived,
John Day, in cells of flower-sweet verse contrived
So well with craft of moulding melodies,
Thy soul perchance in amaranth fields at ease
Thought not to hear the sound on earth revived
Of summer music from the spring derived
When thy song sucked the flower of flowering trees.
But thine was not the chance of every day:
Time, after many a darkling hour, grew sunny,
And light between the clouds ere sunset swam,
Laughing, and kissed their darkness all away,
When, touched and tasted and approved, thy honey
Took subtler sweetness from the lips of Lamb.

TO JOHN NICHOL

I

Friend of the dead, and friend of all my days
Even since they cast off boyhood, I salute
The song saluting friends whose songs are mute
With full burnt-offerings of clear-spirited praise.
That since our old young years our several ways
Have led through fields diverse of flower and fruit,
Yet no cross wind has once relaxed the root
We set long since beneath the sundawn's rays,
The root of trust whence towered the trusty tree,
Friendship—this only and duly might impel
My song to salutation of your own;
More even than praise of one unseen of me
And loved—the starry spirit of Dobell,
To mine by light and music only known.

II

But more than this what moves me most of all
To leave not all unworded and unsped
The whole heart's greeting of my thanks unsaid
Scarce needs this sign, that from my tongue should fall
His name whom sorrow and reverent love recall,



The sign to friends on earth of that dear head
Alive, which now long since untimely dead
The wan grey waters covered for a pall.
Their trustless reaches dense with tangling stems
Took never life more taintless of rebuke,
More pure and perfect, more serene and kind,
Than when those clear eyes closed beneath the Thames,
And made the now more hallowed name of Luke
Memorial to us of morning left behind.

May 1881.

DYSTHANATOS

Ad generem Cereris sine caede et vulnere pauci Descendunt reges, aut sicca morte tyranni.

By no dry death another king goes down
The way of kings. Yet may no free man's voice,
For stern compassion and deep awe, rejoice
That one sign more is given against the crown,
That one more head those dark red waters drown
Which rise round thrones whose trembling equipoise
Is propped on sand and bloodshed and such toys
As human hearts that shrink at human frown.
The name writ red on Polish earth, the star
That was to outshine our England's in the far
East heaven of empire—where is one that saith
Proud words now, prophesying of this White Czar?
“In bloodless pangs few kings yield up their breath,
Few tyrants perish by no violent death.”



Page 7

March 14, 1881.

EUONYMOS

[Greek: eu men he timen edidou nikephoros alke ek nikes onom' esche phobou kear aien athiktos.]

A year ago red wrath and keen despair
Spake, and the sole word from their darkness sent
Laid low the lord not all omnipotent
Who stood most like a god of all that were
As gods for pride of power, till fire and air
Made earth of all his godhead. Lightning rent
The heart of empire's lurid firmament,
And laid the mortal core of manhood bare.
But when the calm crowned head that all revere
For valour higher than that which casts out fear,
Since fear came near it never, comes near death,
Blind murder covers before it, knowing that here
No braver soul drew bright and queenly breath
Since England wept upon Elizabeth.

March 8, 1882.

ON THE RUSSIAN PERSECUTION OF THE JEWS

O son of man, by lying tongues adored,
By slaughterous hands of slaves with feet red-shod
In carnage deep as ever Christian trod
Profaned with prayer and sacrifice abhorred
And incense from the trembling tyrant's horde,
Brute worshippers or wielders of the rod,
Most murderous even of all that call thee God,
Most treacherous even that ever called thee Lord;
Face loved of little children long ago,
Head hated of the priests and rulers then,
If thou see this, or hear these hounds of thine
Run ravening as the Gadarean swine,
Say, was not this thy Passion, to foreknow
In death's worst hour the works of Christian men?

January 23, 1882.



BISMARCK AT CANOSSA

Not all disgraced, in that Italian town,
The imperial German cowered beneath thine hand,
Alone indeed imperial Hildebrand,
And felt thy foot and Rome's, and felt her frown
And thine, more strong and sovereign than his crown,
Though iron forged its blood-encrusted band.
But now the princely wielder of his land,
For hatred's sake toward freedom, so bows down,
No strength is in the foot to spurn: its tread
Can bruise not now the proud submitted head:
But how much more abased, much lower brought low,
And more intolerably humiliated,
The neck submissive of the prosperous foe,
Than his whom scorn saw shuddering in the snow!

December 31, 1881.

QUIA NOMINOR LEO

I



Page 8

What part is left thee, lion? Ravenous beast,
Which hadst the world for pasture, and for scope
And compass of thine homicidal hope
The kingdom of the spirit of man, the feast
Of souls subdued from west to sunless east,
From blackening north to bloodred south aslope,
All servile; earth for footcloth of the pope,
And heaven for chancel-ceiling of the priest;
Thou that hadst earth by right of rack and rod,
Thou that hadst Rome because thy name was God,
And by thy creed's gift heaven wherein to dwell;
Heaven laughs with all his light and might above
That earth has cast thee out of faith and love;
Thy part is but the hollow dream of hell.

II

The light of life has faded from thy cause,
High priest of heaven and hell and purgatory:
Thy lips are loud with strains of oldworld story,
But the red prey was rent out of thy paws
Long since: and they that dying brake down thy laws
Have with the fires of death-enkindled glory
Put out the flame that faltered on thy hoary
High altars, waning with the world's applause.
This Italy was Dante's: Bruno died
Here: Campanella, too sublime for pride,
Endured thy God's worst here, and hence went home.
And what art thou, that time's full tide should shrink
For thy sake downward? What art thou, to think
Thy God shall give thee back for birthright Rome?

January 1882.

THE CHANNEL TUNNEL

Not for less love, all glorious France, to thee,
"Sweet enemy" called in days long since at end,
Now found and hailed of England sweeter friend,
Bright sister of our freedom now, being free;
Not for less love or faith in friendship we
Whose love burnt ever toward thee reprehend



The vile vain greed whose porsy dreams portend
Between our shores suppression of the sea.
Not by dull toil of blind mechanic art
Shall these be linked for no man's force to part
Nor length of years and changes to divide,
But union only of trust and loving heart
And perfect faith in freedom strong to abide
And spirit at one with spirit on either side.

April 3, 1882.

SIR WILLIAM GOMM

I

At threescore years and five aroused anew
To rule in India, forth a soldier went
On whose bright-fronted youth fierce war had spent
Its iron stress of storm, till glory grew
Full as the red sun waned on Waterloo.
Landing, he met the word from England sent
Which bade him yield up rule: and he, content,
Resigned it, as a mightier warrior's due;
And wrote as one rejoicing to record
That "from the first" his royal heart was lord
Of its own pride or pain; that thought was none
Therein save this, that in her perilous strait
England, whose womb brings forth her sons so great,
Should choose to serve her first her mightiest son.



Page 9

II

Glory beyond all flight of warlike fame
Go with the warrior's memory who preferred
To praise of men whereby men's hearts are stirred,
And acclamation of his own proud name
With blare of trumpet-blasts and sound and flame
Of pageant honour, and the titular word
That only wins men worship of the herd,
His country's sovereign good; who overcame
Pride, wrath, and hope of all high chance on earth,
For this land's love that gave his great heart birth.
O nursling of the sea-winds and the sea,
Immortal England, goddess ocean-born,
What shall thy children fear, what strengths not scorn,
While children of such mould are born to thee?

SONNETS

ON

ENGLISH DRAMATIC POETS

(1590-1650)

I

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

Crowned, girdled, garbed and shod with light and fire,
Son first-born of the morning, sovereign star!
Soul nearest ours of all, that wert most far,
Most far off in the abysm of time, thy lyre
Hung highest above the dawn-enkindled quire
Where all ye sang together, all that are,
And all the starry songs behind thy car
Rang sequence, all our souls acclaim thee sire.

"If all the pens that ever poets held
Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,"
And as with rush of hurtling chariots



The flight of all their spirits were impelled
Toward one great end, thy glory—nay, not then,
Not yet might'st thou be praised enough of men.

II

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Not if men's tongues and angels' all in one
Spake, might the word be said that might speak Thee.
Streams, winds, woods, flowers, fields, mountains, yea, the sea,
What power is in them all to praise the sun?
His praise is this,—he can be praised of none.
Man, woman, child, praise God for him; but he
Exults not to be worshipped, but to be.
He is; and, being, beholds his work well done.
All joy, all glory, all sorrow, all strength, all mirth,
Are his: without him, day were night on earth.
Time knows not his from time's own period.
All lutes, all harps, all viols, all flutes, all lyres,
Fall dumb before him ere one string suspire.
All stars are angels; but the sun is God.

III

BEN JONSON

Broad-based, broad-fronted, bounteous, multiform,
With many a valley impleached with ivy and vine,
Wherein the springs of all the streams run wine,
And many a crag full-faced against the storm,
The mountain where thy Muse's feet made warm
Those lawns that revelled with her dance divine
Shines yet with fire as it was wont to shine
From tossing torches round the dance aswarm.



Page 10

Nor less, high-stationed on the grey grave heights,
High-thoughted seers with heaven's heart-kindling lights
Hold converse: and the herd of meaner things
Knows or by fiery scourge or fiery shaft
When wrath on thy broad brows has risen, and laughed
Darkening thy soul with shadow of thunderous wings.

IV

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

An hour ere sudden sunset fired the west,
Arose two stars upon the pale deep east.
The hall of heaven was clear for night's high feast,
Yet was not yet day's fiery heart at rest.
Love leapt up from his mother's burning breast
To see those warm twin lights, as day decreased,
Wax wider, till when all the sun had ceased
As suns they shone from evening's kindled crest.
Across them and between, a quickening fire,
Flamed Venus, laughing with appeased desire.
Their dawn, scarce lovelier for the gleam of tears,
Filled half the hollow shell 'twixt heaven and earth
With sound like moonlight, mingling moan and mirth,
Which rings and glitters down the darkling years.

V

PHILIP MASSINGER

Clouds here and there arisen an hour past noon
Chequered our English heaven with lengthening bars
And shadow and sound of wheel-winged thunder-cars
Assembling strength to put forth tempest soon,
When the clear still warm concord of thy tune
Rose under skies unscared by reddening Mars
Yet, like a sound of silver speech of stars,
With full mild flame as of the mellowing moon.
Grave and great-hearted Massinger, thy face
High melancholy lights with loftier grace
Than gilds the brows of revel: sad and wise,
The spirit of thought that moved thy deeper song,



Sorrow serene in soft calm scorn of wrong,
Speaks patience yet from thy majestic eyes.

VI

JOHN FORD

Hew hard the marble from the mountain's heart
Where hardest night holds fast in iron gloom
Gems brighter than an April dawn in bloom,
That his Memnonian likeness thence may start
Revealed, whose hand with high funereal art
Carved night, and chiselled shadow: be the tomb
That speaks him famous graven with signs of doom
Intrenched inevitably in lines athwart,
As on some thunder-blasted Titan's brow
His record of rebellion. Not the day
Shall strike forth music from so stern a chord,
Touching this marble: darkness, none knows how,
And stars impenetrable of midnight, may.
So looms the likeness of thy soul, John Ford.

VII

JOHN WEBSTER



Page 11

Thunder: the flesh quails, and the soul bows down.
Night: east, west, south, and northward, very night.
Star upon struggling star strives into sight,
Star after shuddering star the deep storms drown.
The very throne of night, her very crown,
A man lays hand on, and usurps her right.
Song from the highest of heaven's imperious height
Shoots, as a fire to smite some towering town.
Rage, anguish, harrowing fear, heart-crazing crime,
Make monstrous all the murderous face of Time
Shown in the spheral orbit of a glass
Revolving. Earth cries out from all her graves.
Frail, on frail rafts, across wide-wallowing waves,
Shapes here and there of child and mother pass.

VIII

THOMAS DECKER

Out of the depths of darkling life where sin
Laughs piteously that sorrow should not know
Her own ill name, nor woe be counted woe;
Where hate and craft and lust make drearier din
Than sounds through dreams that grief holds revel in;
What charm of joy-bells ringing, streams that flow,
Winds that blow healing in each note they blow,
Is this that the outer darkness hears begin?

O sweetest heart of all thy time save one,
Star seen for love's sake nearest to the sun,
Hung lamplike o'er a dense and doleful city,
Not Shakespeare's very spirit, howe'er more great,
Than thine toward man was more compassionate,
Nor gave Christ praise from lips more sweet with pity.

IX

THOMAS MIDDLETON

A wild moon riding high from cloud to cloud,
That sees and sees not, glimmering far beneath,
Hell's children revel along the shuddering heath



With dirge-like mirth and raiment like a shroud:
A worse fair face than witchcraft's, passion-proud,
 With brows blood-flecked behind their bridal wreath
 And lips that bade the assassin's sword find sheath
Deep in the heart whereto love's heart was vowed:
A game of close contentious crafts and creeds
 Played till white England bring black Spain to shame:
A son's bright sword and brighter soul, whose deeds
 High conscience lights for mother's love and fame:
Pure gipsy flowers, and poisonous courtly weeds:
 Such tokens and such trophies crown thy name.

X

THOMAS HEYWOOD

Tom, if they loved thee best who called thee Tom,
 What else may all men call thee, seeing thus bright
 Even yet the laughing and the weeping light
That still thy kind old eyes are kindled from?
Small care was thine to assail and overcome
 Time and his child Oblivion: yet of right
 Thy name has part with names of lordlier might
For English love and homely sense of home,
Whose fragrance keeps thy small sweet bayleaf young



Page 12

And gives it place aloft among thy peers
Whence many a wreath once higher strong Time has hurled:
And this thy praise is sweet on Shakespeare's tongue—
"O good old man, how well in thee appears
The constant service of the antique world!"

XI

GEORGE CHAPMAN

High priest of Homer, not elect in vain,
Deep trumpets blow before thee, shawms behind
Mix music with the rolling wheels that wind
Slow through the labouring triumph of thy train:
Fierce history, molten in thy forging brain,
Takes form and fire and fashion from thy mind,
Tormented and transmuted out of kind:
But howsoe'er thou shift thy strenuous strain,
Like Tailor^[1] smooth, like Fisher^[2] swollen, and now
Grim Yarrington^[3] scarce bloodier marked than thou,
Then bluff as Mayne's^[4] or broad-mouthed Barry's^[5] glee;
Proud still with hoar predominance of brow
And beard like foam swept off the broad blown sea,
Where'er thou go, men's reverence goes with thee.

[1] Author of *The Hog hath lost his Pearl*.

[2] Author of *Fuimus Troes, or the True Trojans*.

[3] Author of *Two Tragedies in One*.

[4] Author of *The City Match*.

[5] Author of *Ram-Alley, or Merry Tricks*.

XII

JOHN MARSTON



The bitterness of death and bitterer scorn
Breathes from the broad-leafed aloe-plant whence thou
Wast fain to gather for thy bended brow
A chaplet by no gentler forehead worn.
Grief deep as hell, wrath hardly to be borne,
Ploughed up thy soul till round the furrowing plough
The strange black soil foamed, as a black beaked prow
Bids night-black waves foam where its track has torn.
Too faint the phrase for thee that only saith
Scorn bitterer than the bitterness of death
Pervades the sullen splendour of thy soul,
Where hate and pain make war on force and fraud
And all the strengths of tyrants; whence unflawed
It keeps this noble heart of hatred whole.

XIII

JOHN DAY

Day was a full-blown flower in heaven, alive
With murmuring joy of bees and birds aswarm,
When in the skies of song yet flushed and warm
With music where all passion seems to strive
For utterance, all things bright and fierce to drive
Struggling along the splendour of the storm,
Day for an hour put off his fiery form,
And golden murmurs from a golden hive
Across the strong bright summer wind were heard,
And laughter soft as smiles from girls at play
And loud from lips of boys brow-bound with May
Our mightiest age let fall its gentlest word,
When Song, in semblance of a sweet small bird,
Lit fluttering on the light swift hand of Day.



Page 13

XIV

JAMES SHIRLEY

The dusk of day's decline was hard on dark
When evening trembled round thy glowworm lamp
That shone across her shades and dewy damp
A small clear beacon whose benignant spark
Was gracious yet for loiterers' eyes to mark,
Though changed the watchword of our English camp
Since the outposts rang round Marlowe's lion ramp,
When thy steed's pace went ambling round Hyde Park.

And in the thickening twilight under thee
Walks Davenant, pensive in the paths where he,
The blithest throat that ever carolled love
In music made of morning's merriest heart,
Glad Suckling, stumbled from his seat above
And reeled on slippery roads of alien art.

XV

THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN

Sons born of many a loyal Muse to Ben,
All true-begotten, warm with wine or ale,
Bright from the broad light of its presence, hail!
Prince Randolph, nighest his throne of all his men,
Being highest in spirit and heart who hailed him then
King, nor might other spread so blithe a sail:
Cartwright, a soul pent in with narrower pale,
Praised of thy sire for manful might of pen:
Marmion, whose verse keeps alway keen and fine
The perfume of their Apollonian wine
Who shared with that stout sire of all and thee
The exuberant chalice of his echoing shrine:
Is not your praise writ broad in gold which he
Inscribed, that all who praise his name should see?

XVI

ANONYMOUS PLAYS:



“ARDEN OF FEVERSHAM”

Mother whose womb brought forth our man of men,
Mother of Shakespeare, whom all time acclaims
Queen therefore, sovereign queen of English dames,
Throned higher than sat thy sonless empress then,
Was it thy son's young passion-guided pen
Which drew, reflected from encircling flames,
A figure marked by the earlier of thy names
Wife, and from all her wedded kinswomen
Marked by the sign of murderess? Pale and great,
Great in her grief and sin, but in her death
And anguish of her penitential breath
Greater than all her sin or sin-born fate,
She stands, the holocaust of dark desire,
Clothed round with song for ever as with fire.

XVII

ANONYMOUS PLAYS

Ye too, dim watchfires of some darkling hour,
Whose fame forlorn time saves not nor proclaims
For ever, but forgetfulness defames
And darkness and the shadow of death devour,
Lift up ye too your light, put forth your power,
Let the far twilight feel your soft small flames
And smile, albeit night name not even their names,
Ghost by ghost passing, flower blown down on flower:



Page 14

That sweet-tongued shadow, like a star's that passed
Singing, and light was from its darkness cast

To paint the face of Painting fair with praise:[1]
And that wherein forefigured smiles the pure
Fraternal face of Wordsworth's Elidure
Between two child-faced masks of merrier days.[2]

[1] *Doctor Dodypol.*

[2] *Nobody and Somebody.*

XVIII

ANONYMOUS PLAYS

More yet and more, and yet we mark not all:
The Warning fain to bid fair women heed
Its hard brief note of deadly doom and deed:[1]
The verse that strewed too thick with flowers the hall
Whence Nero watched his fiery festival:[2]
That iron page wherein men's eyes who read
See, bruised and marred between two babes that bleed,
A mad red-handed husband's martyr fall:[3]
The scene which crossed and streaked with mirth the strife
Of Henry with his sons and witchlike wife:[4]
And that sweet pageant of the kindly fiend,
Who, seeing three friends in spirit and heart made one,
Crowned with good hap the true-love wiles he screened
In the pleached lanes of pleasant Edmonton.[5]

[1] *A Warning for Fair Women.*

[2] *The Tragedy of Nero.*

[3] *A Yorkshire Tragedy.*

[4] *Look about you.*

[5] *The Merry Devil of Edmonton.*



XIX

THE MANY

I

Greene, garlanded with February's few flowers,
Ere March came in with Marlowe's rapturous rage:
Peele, from whose hand the sweet white locks of age
Took the mild chaplet woven of honoured hours:
Nash, laughing hard: Lodge, flushed from lyric bowers:
And Lilly, a goldfinch in a twisted cage
Fed by some gay great lady's pettish page
Till short sweet songs gush clear like short spring showers:
Kid, whose grim sport still gambolled over graves:
And Chettle, in whose fresh funereal verse
Weeps Marian yet on Robin's wildwood hearse:
Cooke, whose light boat of song one soft breath saves,
Sighed from a maiden's amorous mouth averse:
Live likewise ye: Time takes not you for slaves.

XX

THE MANY

II

Haughton, whose mirth gave woman all her will:
Field, bright and loud with laughing flower and bird
And keen alternate notes of laud and gird:
Barnes, darkening once with Borgia's deeds the quill
Which tuned the passion of Parthenophil:
Blithe burly Porter, broad and bold of word:
Wilkins, a voice with strenuous pity stirred:
Turk Mason: Brewer, whose tongue drops honey still:
Rough Rowley, handling song with Esau's hand:
Light Nabbes: lean Sharpham, rank and raw by turns,
But fragrant with a forethought once of Burns:
Soft Davenport, sad-robed, but blithe and bland:
Brome, gipsy-led across the woodland ferns:
Praise be with all, and place among our band.



Page 15

XXI

EPILOGUE

Our mother, which wast twice, as history saith,
Found first among the nations: once, when she
Who bore thine ensign saw the God in thee
Smite Spain, and bring forth Shakespeare: once, when death
Shrank, and Rome's bloodhounds cowered, at Milton's breath:
More than thy place, then first among the free
More than that sovereign lordship of the sea
Bequeathed to Cromwell from Elizabeth,
More than thy fiery guiding-star, which Drake
Hailed, and the deep saw lit again for Blake,
More than all deeds wrought of thy strong right hand,
This praise keeps most thy fame's memorial strong
That thou wast head of all these streams of song,
And time bows down to thee as Shakespeare's land.