

Chasing George

An Epic Poem

in Search of Selfhood

In Twenty-Four Books

David Borodin

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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

Thus 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

But, 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

Ah, 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*_{who?}” 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

It'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

Would 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

My 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**

Now *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

And 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

Now, 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

Ages 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

But 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 transcendence
 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

Three 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 *s l a y s*...
 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

In Search of Selfhood

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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