

Alfred Tennyson, 'Ulysses' (1842)

It little profits that an idle king,
 By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
 Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
 Unequal laws unto a savage race,
 That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me. 5

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
 Life to the lees: all times I have enjoy'd
 Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
 That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
 Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades 10
 Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart
 Much have I seen and known; cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,
 Myself not least, but honour'd of them all; 15
 And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
 I am a part of all that I have met;
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
 Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades 20
 For ever and for ever when I move.
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
 As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life
 Were all too little, and of one to me 25
 Little remains: but every hour is saved
 From that eternal silence, something more,
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
 And this gray spirit yearning in desire 30
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle—
 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil 35
 This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
 A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
 Of common duties, decent not to fail 40
 In offices of tenderness, and pay
 Meet adoration to my household gods,

When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
 There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners, 45
 Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
 That ever with a frolic welcome took
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
 Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
 Old age hath yet his honour and his toil; 50
 Death closes all: but something ere the end,
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
 The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
 The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep 55
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
 Push off, and sitting well in order smite
 The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths 60
 Of all the western stars, until I die.
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
 Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho' 65
 We are not now that strength which in old days
 Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. 70

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point' (1848)

I

I stand on the mark, beside the shore
 Of the first white pilgrim's bended knee,
 Where exile changed to ancestor,
 And God was thanked for liberty.
 I have run through the night—my skin is as dark— 5
 I bend my knee down on this mark:—
 I look on the sky and the sea.

II

O, pilgrim-souls, I speak to you:
 I see you come out proud and slow
 From the land of the spirits, pale as dew, 10

And round me and round me ye go.
 O pilgrims, I have gasped and run
 All night long from the whips of one
 Who, in your names, works sin and woe.

III

And thus I thought that I would come 15
 And kneel here where ye knelt before,
 And feel your souls around me hum
 In undertone to the ocean's roar;
 And lift my black face, my black hand,
 Here, in your names, to curse this land 20
 Ye blessed in Freedom's, evermore.

IV

I am black—I am black!
 And yet God made me, they say:
 But *if* He did so, smiling, back
 He must have cast His work away 25
 Under the feet of His white creatures,
 With a look of scorn, that the dusky features
 Might be trodden again to clay.

V

And yet He has made dark things
 To be glad and merry as light: 30
 There's a little dark bird sits and sings;
 There's a dark stream ripples out of sight;
 And the dark frogs chant in the safe morass,
 And the sweetest stars are made to pass
 O'er the face of the darkest night. 35

VI

But we who are dark, we are dark!
 O God, we have no stars!
 About our souls, in care and cark,
 Our blackness shuts like prison bars:
 And crouch our souls so far behind, 40
 That never a comfort can they find
 By reaching through the prison-bars.

VII

Indeed we live beneath the sky,..
 That great smooth Hand of God, stretched out
 On all His children fatherly, 45
 To bless them from the fear and doubt,
 Which would be, if, from this low place,

All opened straight up to His face
 Into the grand eternity.

VIII

Howbeit God's sunshine and His frost, 50
 They make us hot, they make us cold,
 As if we were not black and lost;
 And the beasts and birds, in wood and wold,
 Do fear and take us for very men:—
 Could the weep-poor-will or the cat of the glen 55
 Look into my eyes and be bold?

IX

I am black, I am black!
 And, once, I laughed in girlish glee;
 For one of my colour stood in the track
 Where the drivers drove, and looked at me— 60
 And tender and full was the look he gave!
 A Slave looked so at another Slave,—
 I look at the sky and the sea.

X

And from that hour our spirits grew
 As free as if unsold, unbought: 65
 We were strong enough, since we were two,
 To conquer the world, we thought!
 The drivers drove us day by day;
 We did not mind, we went one way
 And no better a liberty sought. 70

XI

In the open ground, between the canes,
 He said 'I love you' as he passed;
 Where the shingle-roof rang sharp with the rains,
 I heard how he vowed it fast.
 While others trembled, he sate in the hut 75
 And carved me a bowl of the cocoa-nut
 Through the roar of the hurricanes.

XII

I sang his name instead of a song;
 Over and over I sang his name;
 Backward and forward I drew it along 80
 With my sweetest notes, it was still the same!
 I sang it low, that the slave-girls near
 Might never guess, from aught they could hear,
 That all the song was a name.

XIII

I look on the sky and the sea! 85
 We were two to love, and two to pray,—
 Yes, two, O God, who cried on Thee,
 Though nothing didst Thou say.
 Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun:
 And now I cry, who am but one,— 90
 Thou wilt not speak to-day!

XIV

We were black, we were black!
 We had no claim to love and bliss;
 What marvel, ours was cast to wrack?
 They wrung my cold hands out of his,— 95
 They dragged him—where? I crawled to touch
 His blood's mark in the dust—not much,
 Ye pilgrim-souls,—though plain as *this!*

XV

Wrong, followed by a greater wrong!
 Grief seemed too good for such as I: 100
 So the white men brought the shame ere long
 To stifle the sob in my throat thereby.
 They would not leave me for my dull
 Wet eyes!—it was too merciful
 To let me weep pure tears, and die. 105

XVI

I am black, I am black!
 I wore a child upon my breast—
 An amulet that hung too slack,
 And, in my unrest, could not rest:
 Thus we went moaning, child and mother, 110
 One to another, one to another,
 Until all ended for the best.

XVII

For hark! I will tell you low—low—
 I am black, you see,—
 And the babe, who lay on my bosom so, 115
 Was far too white, too white for me;
 As white as the ladies who scorned to pray
 Beside me at church but yesterday,
 Though my tears had washed a place for my knee.

XVIII

And my own child! I could not bear 120
 To look in his face, it was so white;
 I covered him up with a kerchief rare,
 I covered his face in, close and tight:
 And he moaned and struggled, as well might be,
 For the white child wanted his liberty— 125
 Ha, ha! he wanted the master's right.

XIX

He moaned and beat with his head and feet,
 His little feet that never grew;
 He struck them out, as it was meet,
 Against my heart to break it through. 130
 I might have sung like a mother—
 But I dared not sing to the white-faced child
 The only song I knew.

XX

And yet I pulled the kerchief close:
 He could not see the sun, I swear 135
 More, then, alive, than now he does
 From between the roots of the mango—where?
 I know where. Close! A child and mother
 Do wrong to look at one another,
 When one is black and one is fair. 140

XXI

Even in that single glance I had
 Of my child's face,—I tell you all,—
 I saw a look that made me mad!—
 The *master's* look, that used to fall
 On my soul like his lash..or worse!— 145
 Therefore, to save it from my curse
 I twisted it round in my shawl.

XXII

And he moaned and trembled from foot to head,
 He shivered from head to foot,—
 Till, after a time, he lay, instead, 150
 Too suddenly still and mute.
 And I felt, beside, a creeping cold—
 I dared to lift up just a fold,
 As in lifting a leaf of the mango-fruit.

XXIII

But my fruit! ha, ha!—there had been 155
 (I laugh to think on't at this hour!)
 Your fine white angels (who have seen
 God's secret nearest to His power)
 And gathered my fruit to make them wine,
 And sucked the soul of that child of mine, 160
 As the humming-bird sucks the soul of the flower.

XXIV

Ha, ha! for the trick of the angels white!
 They freed the white child's spirit so.
 I said not a word, but day and night,
 I carried the body to and fro; 165
 And it lay on my heart like a stone—as chill;
 The sun may shine out as much as he will:
 I am cold, though it happened a month ago.

XXV

From the white man's house, and the black man's hut,
 I carried the little body on; 170
 The forest's arms did round us shut,
 And silence through the trees did run!
 They asked no questions as I went,—
 They stood too high for astonishment,—
 They could see God rise on his throne. 175

XXVI

My little body, kerchiefed fast,
 I bore it on through the forest—on—
 And when I felt it was tired at last,
 I scooped a hole beneath the moon.
 Through the forest-tops the angels far, 180
 With a white fine finger in every star,
 Did point and mock at what was done.

XXVII

Yet when it was all done aright,
 Earth, 'twixt me and my baby strewed,—
 All changed to black earth,—nothing white,— 185
 A dark child in the dark,—ensued
 Some comfort, and my heart grew young;
 I sate down smiling there, and sung
 The song I told you of, for good.

XXVIII

And thus we two were reconciled, 190
 The white child and black mother, thus;
 For, as I sang it,—soft, slow and wild
 The same song, more melodious,
 Rose from the grave whereon I sate!
 It was the dead child singing that, 195
 To join the souls of both of us.

XXIX

I look on the sea and the sky!
 Where the Pilgrims' ships first anchored lay.
 The great sun rideth gloriously!
 But the Pilgrims' ghosts have slid away 200
 Through the first faint streaks of the morn!
 My face is black, but it glares a scorn
 Which they dare not meet by day.

XXX

Ah!—in their stead their hunter sons!
 Ah, ah! they are on me! they form in a ring! 205
 Keep off!—I brave you all at once!—
 I throw off your eyes like a noisome thing!
 You have killed the black eagle at nest, I think:
 Did you never stand still in your triumph, and shrink
 From the stroke of her wounded wing? 210

XXXI

(Man, drop that stone you dared to lift!—)
 I wish you who stand there seven abreast,
 Each for his own wife's joy and gift,
 A little corpse as safely at rest,
 Hid in the mangos!—Yes, but *she* 215
 May keep live babies on her knee
 And sing the song she liketh best.

XXXII

I am not mad: I am black!
 I see you staring in my face—
 I know you staring, shrinking back!.. 220
 Ye are born of the Washington race:
 And this land is the Free America—
 And this mark on my wrist, (I prove what I say)
 Ropes tied me up here to the flogging-place.

XXXIII

You think I shrieked then? Not a sound! 225
 I hung as a gourd hangs in the sun:
 I only cursed them all around,
 As softly as I might have done
 My own child after. From these sands
 Up to the mountains, lift your hands, 230
 O Slaves, and end what I began!

XXXIV

Whips, curses; these must answer those!
 For in this UNION, you have set
 Two kinds of men in adverse rows,
 Each loathing each! and all forget 235
 The seven wounds in Christ's body fair;
 While HE see gaping everywhere
 Our countless wounds that pay no debt.

XXXV

Our wounds are different. Your white men
 Are, after all, not gods indeed, 240
 Nor able to make Christ's again
 Do good with bleeding. *We* who bleed—
 (Stand off)—*we* help not in our loss,—
We are too heavy for our cross,
 And fall and crush you and your seed. 245

XXXVI

I fall, I swoon! I look at the sky.
 The clouds are breaking on my brain;
 I am floated along, as if I should die
 Of Liberty's exquisite pain—
 In the name of the white child waiting for me 250
 In the deep black death where our kisses agree,—
 White men, I leave you all curse-free
 In my broken heart's disdain!

Robert Browning, 'Two in the Campagna' (1855)

I

I wonder do you feel to-day
 As I have felt since, hand in hand,
 We sat down on the grass, to stray

In spirit better through the land,
This morn of Rome and May? 5

II

For me, I touched a thought, I know,
Has tantalized me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw
Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go 10

III

Help me to hold it! First it left
The yellowing fennel, run to seed
There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
Some old tomb's ruin: yonder weed
Took up the floating weft, 15

IV

Where one small orange cup amassed
Five beetles,—blind and green they grope
Among the honey-meal: and last,
Everywhere on the grassy slope
I traced it. Hold it fast! 20

V

The champaign with its endless fleece
Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
An everlasting wash of air—
Rome's ghost since her decease. 25

VI

Such life here, through such lengths of hours,
Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
Such letting nature have her way
While heaven looks from its towers! 30

VII

How say you? Let us, O my dove,
Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above!
How is it under our control
To love or not to love? 35

VIII

I would that you were all to me,
 You that are just so much, no more.
 Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
 Where does the fault lie? What the core
 O' the wound, since wound must be? 40

IX

I would I could adopt your will,
 See with your eyes, and set my heart
 Beating by yours, and drink my fill
 At your soul's springs,—your part my part
 In life, for good and ill. 45

X

No. I yearn upward, touch you close,
 Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
 Catch your soul's warmth,—I pluck the rose
 And love it more than tongue can speak—
 Then the good minute goes. 50

XI

Already how am I so far
 Out of that minute? Must I go
 Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,
 Onward, whenever light winds blow
 Fixed by no friendly star? 55

XII

Just when I seemed about to learn!
 Where is the thread now? Off again!
 The old trick! Only I discern—
 Infinite passion, and the pain
 Of finite hearts that yearn. 60

Christina Rossetti, 'Cousin Kate' (1862)

I was a cottage maiden
 Hardened by sun and air,
 Contented with my cottage mates,
 Not mindful I was fair.
 Why did a great lord find me out, 5
 And praise my flaxen hair?
 Why did a great lord find me out
 To fill my heart with care?

He lured me to his palace home—
 Woe's me for joy thereof— 10
 To lead a shameless shameful life,
 His plaything and his love.
 He wore me like a silken knot,
 He changed me like a glove;
 So now I moan, an unclean thing, 15
 Who might have been a dove.

O Lady Kate, my cousin Kate,
 You grew more fair than I:
 He saw you at your father's gate,
 Chose you, and cast me by. 20
 He watched your steps along the lane,
 Your work among the rye;
 He lifted you from mean estate
 To sit with him on high.

Because you were so good and pure 25
 He bound you with his ring:
 The neighbours call you good and pure,
 Call me an outcast thing.
 Even so I sit and howl in dust,
 You sit in gold and sing: 30
 Now which of us has tenderer heart?
 You had the stronger wing.

O cousin Kate, my love was true,
 Your love was writ in sand:
 If he had fooled not me but you, 35
 If you stood where I stand,
 He'd not have won me with his love
 Nor bought me with his land;
 I would have spit into his face
 And not have taken his hand. 40

Yet I've a gift you have not got,
 And seem not like to get:
 For all your clothes and wedding-ring
 I've little doubt you fret.
 My fair-haired son, my shame, my pride, 45
 Cling closer, closer yet:
 Your father would give lands for one
 To wear his coronet.