

Rupert Hughes

Selected Poems



Robert Hughes

January 31, 1872 [Lancaster, Missouri] –

September 9, 1956 [Los Angeles, California]

[He was the brother of Howard R. Hughes Sr. and uncle of billionaire Howard R. Hughes Jr. In 1921 his novel *The Old Nest* (1912), based upon his family and early life, was adapted into a movie. Its success led Hughes to move to Hollywood and join the burgeoning motion picture industry in 1923. The behind-the-scenes goings on of show business provided ample fodder for Hughes' novel *Souls for Sale* (1922), a scathing look at Hollywood scandals of the era. Hughes' greatest success in Hollywood came in 1928 when he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay for *The Patent Leather Kid*.^[7] In the 1940s he served as president of the American Writers Association, a group of anti-Communist writers.]

Gyges' ring: a dramatic monologue. New York: R. H. Russell, 1901.

Gyges' ring, and other verse. Los Angeles: House-Warven, 1949.

A Girl Who Died Unwed

Whenever a woman dies, a city dies;
She cannot perish to herself alone.
Her death a thousand destinies denies,
And countless souls unborn her loss bemoan.

More than this girl these ceremonies close away,
The frost that froze the bud forestals the seed.
And scatters in the petals of her clay
Long lineages of hope, of dream, of deed.

Her roseless lips, her once-coquettish hair,
Her yester-radiant eyes, now quenched and dulled -
Thus coffined, are themselves a coffin, where
Huge histories lie cancelled and annulled.

In her are wrapped, like pollen in those flowers -
Those wasted lilies in whose arms she fails -
How many souls, how many fruitful powers!
A host invisible her fate bewails.

In her, were latent girls with lips like rhyme,
And love whereof the world has never enough.
In her, staunch men were waiting for their time,
With strength for any but this one rebuff.

Some needed poet will go mute for life,
Lacking a siren fitted to inspire;
How he had sung, had she but been a wife,
And mothered, for his Muse, his heart's desire!

One future day, disaster will destroy
A woman, a vast army, or a state,
That had been saved had she but borne a boy
To clutch the hour just when the hour was great.

From her lean, thwarted loins there might have swarmed

Peoples increasing to the marge of doom.
Now nations, colonies in cohorts formed
March down with her to an abysmal tomb.

This death an oceanic harvest blights
In one pink rosebud plucked too soon,
As when a cosmic cataclysm smites
A fertile planet to a futile moon.

The Anonymous

Sometimes at night within a wooded park,
Like an ocean cavern fathoms deep in gloom,
Sweet scents, like hymns, from hidden flowers fume.
They make the wanderer happy, though the dark
Obscures their tint, their name, their shapely bloom.

So, in the thick-set chronicles of fame,
There hover deathless feats of souls unknown.
They linger like the fragrant smoke-wreaths blown
From liberal sacrifice. Gone face and name ;
The deeds like homeless ghosts, live on alone.

Acuity

I am so deaf that I do not hear
The roar that follows the lightning's flash.
She is so delicately keen of ear
That, when a soapbubble floats too near
The thorn of a rose, she hears it crash.

Peas and Dreams

Among the crooked roofs of old Dieppe, I heard
A voice that went a-crying something wildly sweet.
I could not see who sang, nor catch a single word
Yet ached with all the woe it trailed along the street.
Ah! - ah-ha! ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! ah-ha!
Ah! - ah-ha! ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! ah-ha!

The bard marched unbeheld, but fancy saw him plain:
A tall immortal minstrel chanting to the throng
Some old cold beauty's scorn, some high heroic pain
That made his sorrow music, grief his mastersong.
Ah! - ah-ha! ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! ah-ha!
Ah! - ah-ha! ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! ah-ha!

At last I saw the man, the weird, returned trouvere.
He was a wizened peddler, bent, goat-bearded-bah!
The burdens of his song and of his push-cart were
But green string-beans and peas; and this his formula:
Des hari - hari-hari - hari-hari - haricots verts!
Des petits, petits, petits, petits pois!

He sold his food for food ; and, spite of all hurrah,
Who's he that does not peddle round the world his ware?
Philosopher or artist, poet, pope, or shah,
Creed-monger, millionaire - - - lo, this is each man's prayer:
Who'll buy my petits, petits, petits pois?
My hari - hari-hari - hari-hari - haricots verts!

Cremation

I

At least when we are dead, let us not cumber the ground.
Our deeds, what we have dreamed, manners and motives and all
Forgot, still will be felt; mute, will forever resound.
For death stops but the press; helpless he is to recall
Our hymns, satires and songs cluttering the nooks of the earth.
Old friends, closing our eyes, cannot resign us entire;
Each child out of our loins mimics our faults from its birth; -
Such wealth holds in entail, heritage endless and dire.

II

Enough fardels we leave, yokes for posterity's neck:
Disease, lameness and guilt, appetites warped and debased ;
Foul spawn left to mature we might with ease put in check;
Dumb moths riddling the woof, we might with ease have effaced.
And, last heirloom of all, we must bequeath them our clay!
The rough shards of our life, vessels discarded and done ;
And these they must preserve lavishly shrined for decay,
Usurp with them the parks, wasting the lawns and the sun!

III

But there under the sod, under the perjurous stone,
What bleak ugly revenge earth will inflict with disgust!
What fierce usury's seized out of our overdue loan,
Till, bankrupt, we're sold back to original dust!
And, meanwhile, the rains serve not to wash but to blot.
Chill flesh from the bones withers and leaves them obscene;
And they, too, in their turn, dwindle to dust - and are not.
And thus die we two deaths ere we are sifted and clean.

IV

And think, too, of the worms loathsome at Abelard's lips;
Alas, what of the mold dank upon Heloise' brow!
The moon-eyes of Ifiez - how do they suffer eclipse!

And old Chaucer his heart, what is its honeycomb now?
The sword-hand of the king, Richard the Lion of Heart,
The snow-breast of Nell Gwynne, poor Dolly Madison's hair,
The damp forehead of Poe, gruesomer far than his art,
The babe buried last spring - picture them now if you dare!

V

'Tis nightmare if we dream, hideous to think if we wake,
And my speech of it now hateful to you and myself.
Yet thus, thus, our beloved- aye, and ourselves, we forsake
To grave-diggers for prize, ghouls for a hideous pelf!
Defend this if you can ; plead for this barbarous rite ;
Declare whether the dead find we are tender and true :
At high noon we commit what we'd not dream of at night!
The thing not to be spoken, not to be thought of-we do!

VI

What, then, is there for us? How shall we deal with our dead?
Just thus: nothing is clean, nothing is perfect but fire; -
Let flames light them their way, flames be their ultimate bed;
Let flames cleanse them of flesh ; purify all on the pyre.
The same fate let us ask ; pray that our reliques be burned.
The rose-hue of the fire like a last sunset shall glow,
And naught ugly remain - only our ashes in-urned,
Our flesh sifted in flakes, silken and pure as a snow.

VII

And these, friends will preserve, near them, or not far away,
Not thrust out in the rain, under a storm-sodden mound.
Then graveyards will be places for children to play : -
At least when we are dead, we shall not cumber the ground.

Flirtation At The Stork

She was so beautiful
I dared not look at her,
Lest my stealth be discovered
As I stared at her bosom
So boldly advertised,
Though only half revealed.
I had been presented
As one of a line of strangers.
When we went out to dinner
She sat across the table;
Our eyes met only in passing.
We never exchanged a comment,
But God! how aware I was of
Her burning, electrical radiance!
Talking to others of nothings,
I thought of no one but that woman.
At the end of the dinner
We were still only strangers ;
But she was a witch, a wise woman ;
For, as I passed her, she murmured,
“I thank you for the most exciting
Flirtation I’ve had in ages.
Were you imagining simply everything, too?”

Birth

Love in her answering body held its fiery sway.
Nine months like muses wrought within her, night and day.
Then in her womb a replica, who would not stay,
But fought the narrow door and went the selfsame way.

Quandary

I saved the fox from the hunting men,
But the fox came round to steal my hen:
The hen had preyed on the worms with glee ;
But the worms themselves would never spare me.

Was I at fault when I spared the fox?
Letting him die would have saved your flocks.
Yet sparing the chickens is death to the worms,
So I'm cruel and futile whatever the terms.

The Insomniac

He just caught the train, Mr. Jeremy Tupper,
But when he said "Porter, put these in my section,"
The Porter said, "Section? we ain't got a upper!"
Said Tupper, "Well, what in-" you know the direction.
The train was a Limited, now fairly zipping.
He couldn't get off without bursting his braces.
Perceiving poor Tupper untempted to tipping,
The Porter went on stuffing pillows in cases.

"No lower! No upper!" sighed Tupper. "The sleeper
Has no place for me. I must ride in the waker.
Since I never could sleep in a sleeper, no peeper
I'll close the whole night! That's a bet with no taker."
The day-coach that night was so packed he squeezed in with
A stertorous stranger of wake-ups and kick-ups
Who strangled and shuffled and smelled! To begin with—
He was well in his cups, not to mention his hiccups.

At home Tupper owned a fine sound-proof apartment
With every device to decoy stubborn Morpheus,
But here he was doomed to a fate which at start meant
A night with a neighbor whose nose was an Orpheus.
He tied up his legs into knot after knot.
He choked on the smoke and he winced at the clatter,
He longed for a nice billiard table or cot,
And everything possibly wrong was the matter.

He thought of his home, his luxurious downy
Where sleep at the best was a business of battle,
And now he was caught like a bottled-up Brownie
In a jounce-box of jiggle and joggle and rattle.
He wailed, "This is awful!" He groaned, "It's outrageous!"
"Expect one to sleep in a blooming distillery!"
He jawed the conductor in language umbrageous
For charging fullfare for a stocks and a pillory.

He bought a fat novel to help while the night out,
He wailed, "I can't sleep!" But he yawned when he said it.
He grumbled, "I wish they would blow that blamed light out."
And let his book fall, though he hadn't yet read it.
His collar enveloped his two double chins,
As he found himself counting uncountable sheep.
He felt that his flesh was one paper of pins,
And his feet were so cramped that they both went to sleep.

An anguish of ecstasy smothered all feeling,
A torment of bliss soaked his soul like a sponge.
His mind, on the brink of a precipice reeling,
At last toppled over and took the deep plunge
And there he remained in contortionist tangle,
And knew not a jot of what farm or what town
The train thundered through with bell, whistle and jangle,
Or if it slowed up or if it slowed down.

Oblivion drank him as blotters drink ink,
And his state was a stupor of violent coma.
Although he had paid for his passage, I think,
To call him a deadhead would be no misnomer.
And so night wore on till it wore itself out.
The sun was commendably prompt at his station.
But Tupper still slumbered nor heeded the shout
Of the brakeman announcing his own destination.

At last when the train reached the end of the line,
The Conductor tapped Tupper and said, "Extra fare!
You've passed where you paid to, through no fault of mine."
And Tupper sat up and exclaimed, "I declare! "
He gaped and he stretched as he sought his portmonnaie,
The which turned up missing to his great dismay.
He stammered, "I vow, this is certainly funny,
My neighbor has robbed me and stolen away."

He put up his watch to appease the conductor
And borrowed enough to get home to his wife;

And, when he arrived and beneath her chin chuckled her,
He chuckled with gaiety rare in his life;
“I swear I will never take sleepers again.
I’ll sit up and sleep in a snug smoker-berth. It
May be that the snooze cost me two hundred ten,
But I slept in my sleep! And ‘twas jolly well worth it!”

Snobberies

To prove one's love for the nightingale,
Must one insult the songless hen?
Can you not glorious genius hail
Without contemning common men?

Pay tribute to the "higher" arts,
But spare the useful trades.
Brushes and chisels play their parts ;
But so do saws and spades.

If architects are a tribe divine,
The carpenters unholy,
Who'll build the buildings they design?
Who'll pay them but the lowly?

The colonel can't beat off the foe
Unless he has a garrison.
The nightingale-he needs the crow,
At least for a comparison.

from Gyges' Ring

His frenzied eyes grew greater with amaze,
Beholding, not an ugly gulf split out
By Vulcan's sledge, but one vast treasure-chest
Unlocked by teasing Fortune; piles of gold,
As rich as amorous great Zeus once poured
In Danae's sweet lap to buy her love.
And next, heapt pearls-a sea of pearls! that gnawed
As soft as water-waves, its golden beach;
And tributary rivers choked with floods
Of beryls clear as crystal seas calm-soothed ;
Blue jacinths like a summer sky; and, like
Soft bubble-froth, chalcedonies, with some
Embroidered as are robes ; and piled rose-quartz
Like massive pulp of petals crusht and piled;
And, next, red-rippled sardonyx; and then
Rare opals haunted by a timid light;
And faint, fair chrysoprase; and carbuncles
That bled like sunsets poured along the west;
And calm, cool emeralds; with flashing spray
Of blinding diamonds aleap o'er all.
Next, forests fair and tall, of scented woods,
As rare as they that shade Olympos, straight
As those slim staves the venerate priests lean on.
Then slender alabasters perfume-filled;
And jars of graven gold, thick-eyed with gems,
And vases, graceful-bodied as lithe maids,
And storied o'er with big-famed wars and loves,
Yea, mined with potent spices from strange shores:
With myrtle berries, balms from Africa,
With gloomy bdellium, and breathing seeds
Of coriander, gums of stacte, wine
Bled from pomegranates out of Egypt, wines
And honeys from the richest hives and vines
That home the glassy grape, the learned bee ;

And silver boxes heavy with that oil,
That holy oil of myrrh and cinnamon
And calamus and cassia steeped with life
Of olives, which the pious, sacred Jew
Wastes on the altar of his lonely god.
And here were stacks of armor, sheaves of swords,
Fit for a deity's enharnessing;
And wonders huge whose list would wear out night.

But over all there towered, like a ship,
A horse stupendous; vaster, Ardys, far
Than the huge steed your sire bestrides in war,
That rock that proud Miletos splits upon,
Like braggart waves on silent cliffs. This horse
Was all of bronze, yet seemed to neigh and move.
But in the feigned great blanket on his back
Were doors.

 The speechless shepherd, all one stare,
With wide mouth rivalling the yawning chasm,
Stood like a statue of amaze for long;
Then woke, and when his anxious glance around
Revealed no man upon the far-spread plains,
And saw no life of man or beast upon
The sweet, soft retrogression of the hills
That lean against the sky—save one or two
Hurt sheep, hard struggling for faint, failing breath—
Then lightly he leaped upon the horse's back,
And with big struggle shoved the bronze doors back,
And entered slowly, weak of heart and knee,
Into the belly of the horse; as once
The Greeks, to trip the Troy they could not throw.

There he found naught but one dead body, bare
Of all funereal robes; as naked then
In Death's embrace, as when it first met Life's.
The ghastly thing smote sharp the trembling youth,
And drove him thence in hottest haste, and fear
That he had strayed where Death held awful sway.

But, as he fled, his backward glance was struck
By-not Death's image, but a rubied ring
That dwelt upon the finger of the dead.

The day succeeding all the shepherds met
In crowded conclave, to declare their wealth,
And take a census of the flocks and herds,
Whereon the king might justly levy tax.
To this assembly this young shepherd came,
And proudly took position on the side
Of those that were the oldest, and possessed
The largest wealth. Then, while they waited all,
And chattered, waiting for the chief to call
The crowd to order, this young shepherd talked
In easy, calm familiarity
With oldest men and richest. Absently
His fondling fingers twirled his curious ring
And bent the collet under-swift surprise
Straight seized the men around him! For the ring
Was magic, and had rapt him from their sight
As soon as he had turned the collet in.
They cried "Where is that shepherd? Has he gone?"
And stared about with vying eyes and mouths,
And pinched themselves to prove themselves in dreams,
And labored, thinking, harder than their wont.

At length, however, both amaze and fear
Ebb'd out of their old heads; and soon they fell
To interchanging slanders on the youth
Who'd left them all with such mysterious stealth.
And there he sat and heard himself maligned.
At length his self-compassion overcame
His well-fed curiosity, and then
He twirled the ruby to its usual place-
Straight all the jaws dropped in embarrassment,
Straight all the eyes fell sheepish to the ground ;
And all that they could find to say was just

To hem! and haw! and wish themselves away.
Erelong, one genius floundered happily
Upon a hope that next day would be fair,
And all the others flew in haste to that,
And clattered greedily as does a flock
Of chickens when the cock has mined a prize.

But, when the king's high treasurer beheld
The shepherd's brawny frame, how good it was,
He proffered him an office in the flower
Of all the royal armies, and the youth
Accepted. He forgot his rustic friends,—
Aye, even his pretty sweetheart, in the swift,
Loud current of the public life; and gave
Himself up to the tide of fate to bear
Him where it would.

Full soon his magic ring
And his resistless sword advanced the youth
Till he commanded all the Lydian host.
So much was he the pet of Fortune, that,
When finally the king, the old, old king,
Was-when the king had been-that is-I mean,
That when the old king-died-the royal crown
Was seized-was given to the shepherd youth-
He wed the king's young wife and---took the throne. -
Now is it not a wondrous thing, that he,
A poor young shepherd, should become a king?

But lo! the boy already sleeps. At last,
At last, has tiptoe sleep made prey of him.

Where is such beauty in the whole broad world
One half so fair as sleeping children own?
Ah, pure bright face! Ah, faultless, lovely boy!
To think that all this bliss of innocence
Is offspring of my wicked misery!
My blackness is the father of this white!

My cunning guilt, of this blind honesty!
Yet my lips, shrivelled now with rage and crime,
Once bloomed as tenderly as his do now.
My heart once homed itself upon the breast
Of my dear mother, fondly as his love
Finds home in her, that splendid criminal.
My harsh and rugged knuckles once were just
Soft dimples as are his. The gathered woe
Of my thick-furrowed brow spread no control
Across my smooth white forehead. These my eyes,
My narrow, sharp, suspicious eyes, were once
As wide with joyful confidence, as soft
With universal love, as his dear eyes.
But all the signs of innocence and bliss
Are gone forever now. For I have lived!
But he, my Ardys, has not lived at all.
O happy soul! till you have learned of life!
[Hist! nurse, come take the little boy; he sleeps.]
Yet must he learn of life, some bitter day.
Great mother of the gods! is't possible,
That he should ever learn what I have learnt?
That these soft, leafly hands should ever clutch
A murderous sword, as mine have done? that this
Sweet mother-idolizing mouth should burn
Some day with lawless passion on the lips
Of some unholy woman? that this brow,
This blameless brow, my pretty boy's white brow,
Should wrinkle with harsh guilt, and snarl with hate?—

As clear stands forth each golden circumstance
Of that far vision on my memory
As any figured painting from the brush
Of mage Bularchos lives aglow to-day.
The ill-advised old king was vaunting forth
The praises of his fine young wife to me,
And, mad with pride, must prove his praises true.
Yea, with the stubborn folly of old age,

And then your fingers, all too lazily
For my eye-hunger and to prove his pride,
Unbound the golden-broocht, fair girdle claspt
Beneath your mellow breasts, whose daintiness
Was whispered by the hiding, hinting robe.
Straightway the loosened girdle gave release
Unto the gathered peplos, woven with stars
As thick, I thought, as is this legioned sky.
Then, with a timid glance around, that showed
You none but your dark slave, with eyes against
Their upper lids to stare at you ev'n while
She bent to pour the jars of water, warm
For your dear laving, you let slip the clasp
That held your liberal peplos round you. Down
It ran along your form emergent; down,
In panic swift of twinkling wrinkles; down
It tumbled with its many stars, and sprawled,
Like chaost heaven, round your little feet.
But you, afar in dreams, you let it lie
There where it fell upon the marble floor;
And slowly stepped out of its tangled folds,
And stood forth, like a half-grown girl, before
She dons the woman's peplos, only clad
In your chiton, your graceful legs revealed
Bare to the knees.

Now, next you stoop,
Poised on one foot-the other foot uplift-
To unlace the golden sandals from your feet,
As pinkish white as any dainty babe's,
Their pretty toes all huddling on the cold
White marble, like wee lambs in winter-time.
And next you must untie the twisted cord
That held the soft chiton close round your hips;
And bent your slender body like a bow,
And bloomed from this last cloud as day from dawn ;
And flung it down, and lifted your sweet head.
Your face was flusht as rosily, beloved,
As is the East before the waking day.

But whether it were more from modesty,
Or from your struggle with the tight chiton,
I could not tell ; I only know that I
Was dazzled,-stunned,-as I felt flash on me
Your naked beauty, radiant as the moon,
More white than marble out of Thasos isle ;
More curvedly straight than any proud young tree ;
More dainty-modelled with voluptuous curves
Than any shapely vase that graces flowers;
More sinuous, too, than is a tigress sleek
That writhes in sunshine or winds through the woods,
Winds through the willows, lither than are they.

Aye, naked, naked! stood you there, the queen!
A queen in body as a queen in name,
A perfect soul enthroned in perfect flesh.
Your shape is queenly from this regal brow,
That's gleaming like a smooth white tablet where
One fain would write in golden letters fair,
As I write now with tracing fingers, "Mine,"-
Aye, in your brow and your rich cheeks you're queen;
A tyrant with your eyes' soft despotry;
A queen in this red mouth that my lips haunt,
And in the faultless oval of the chin,
That now entablatures this marble shaft,
Your reginal throat, whence sweep away these proud,
Curved shoulders down the lily arms that cling
And gleam around my blessed neck to-night.
Full royal are these snow-pure breasts, faint-tinged
At crest, whence my fair boy drew his young life.
And royalty enzones your yielding waist,
And wraps your holy loins, where got I him
That takes my crown, when I am in my tomb,
And owns my heart in partnership with you.
High majesty is in your striding feet,
Rests grand upon your thighs, beams in the brooch
Of each sweet knee, and in your sharp, straight shins,
And in your high, white insteps flexit like steel,

And in both apple-heels, and in your toes,
Like ivory upon their golden shoes.—

Aye, you are queen, from peak of soft-poised head
To tip of little foot. And you are mine,
All mine! and worthy a bloody winning.

Oh,

But, when I first looked on you, stript of robes
That, hiding almost all, still left you more
Than any ten in this fair-womaned world;
But, fallen away, disclosed such radiance
As the queens of heaven can never own.—When first
I saw your maddening nakedness, my eyes,
Like gluttons, overfed on sweets. Before
My lip could check it, there leaped out a gasp
Of startled admiration.

Keen as ear

Of hind for warning whisper of crushed leaf,
Was your ear, and my stifled outcry smote
It like a thunder-peal. A moment paused.
Then—then you ran toward our curtained nook,
And flashed, a bodied sunbeam, fleet across
The floor's reflection. Yea, ere I could twist
My screening ring's stout collet under, you
Had flung the hanging back, and caught a glimpse
Of me, before I faded from your sight
And fled in guilty terror, as from hosts
Of warriors, not as from a naked girl.
When, whipt from sight of you, I ran away,
I gave one backward glance, and saw your hand,
Your little hand, and white uplifted arm,
Descend upon the stammering king,
And smite him full and fierce upon his face,
Upon his myriad wrinkles, and his thin
And bloodless lips.

Soon after I had gained
My own near house, where I feign to all
Harsh self-contemning and despite, there came

A breathless royal runner, bade me go
At once unto my queen. I scorned to flee,
And, hoping nothing better than quick death,
Came shamefast to your room. And there you sat
Alone, enrobed in wealth of costume, pale
But terrible with fury, fingers wrapt
In tightened fingers, nostrils fiercely wide,
And mouth a-quiver, baring fitfully
The mad, white teeth that clenched your lower lip,
And flashed like frequent lightning from the sky
And one foot nervous at the floor, whereon
I fell in mute humiliation. Then
You uttered these strange words with labored calm :

“So, Gyges, you’re a spy in warless camps!
You, whom men name with honor as a man,
Now peek and tiptoe where lone women bathe?
It’s not enough to strip slain men of arms,
But you would snatch away a woman’s veil?
Ah, fearless Gyges, what is this you do?
How long have you been sneak and curtained peep?
Oh, tumbled idol of clean heroism!
Oh, fallen hero, whom I loved to love!

“Yet, though I must upbraid, I do not blame;
For he has led you where you durst not go
Alone,—even he, my husband, scorned of Death,
And left to shuffle feebly on through life.
‘Tis he I blame, and loathe, and hate, and flee,—
A ye, flee! for hear what I would say to you.

“The tottering king has shamed me in your sight,
Has made of sacred me a spectacle,
A naked spectacle, for eyes profane :
And him I will endure no longer, no!
Though Death seize on me when I fly from him.

“Now you have seen, with infamous, vile eyes,
Your queen unclothed, and you are doomed to die,

To die, bold Gyges, like a common cur-
Unless you grasp this chance I offer you.

“You know our Lydian custom, how it is
Unlike the shameless Greeks’ Here women blush
At nakedness, and deem it loathsome sin
Or hard misfortune, if men see them bare.
This cruel lot has fallen upon me,
And my wronged woman’s heart demands revenge,
And this is that revenge it claims :

“The king,
The shameless, doddering old king, has shamed
My honor. He must die. And he must die
At hands of him that gazed upon my shameD’you
hear me, Gyges? You shall slay the king!”
And when I writhed before your fierce command,D0
you remember, Nyssa ?-then you said;

“If you refuse this justice due to me,
Whom you have so dishonored-faithful slaves
Are eager for my signal, that they rush
And tear your heart to pieces at my feet.
But, Gyges, if you do this rightful deed,
And win me fair revenge, you’ll win yourself
Both life and me; and you shall be the king,
And I, your queen; for you have with your eyes’
Ambition, seen my nakedness, and they
Deserve to win the gloom of death, or me.
I, too, who leave the king forever, now,
Deserve defence and helpmate for new times;
And who so fit as he that knew my shame?

“Speak, then, and choose your choice of these two things :
Either to win a crown and me for queen
By slaying old Kandaules Myrsilos,
The grisly king, whom Death is loath to touch;
Or gain yourself a shameful, instant end
As one that cast dishonor on his queen,-
A vile death for a famous soldier! Yet

Choose you this latter, Gyges, if you are
So bold ; or rather, are so cowardly
That fear of slaying give you to be slain.”

Then, while I lay there, torn betwixt the powers
Of struggling fear and loyalty, and fear
And new ambition, you did murmur on,
With voice tuned softer than a summer-rill:

“O Gyges, I was wed to the old king,
The withered, childish king, when I knew not
The real face of life and married love.
’fo •• ; Juld the knowing all, indeed, have helped
My helpless womanly estate; for we
Wed not; no, but we are wed, and to whom
Our parents choose to chain us for all life.
I always loathed the king. His skinny hands
Seemed like an eagle’s talons, even when
He would caress me freezing at his touch.
His little eyes blazed from so deep a cave,
His toothless, hideous gums and yellow hide,
And scrawny, loose-skinned, heavy-wrinkled neck,
And laugh like hissing snake or spiteful cat,
And meagre chest, flat as a wall, and arms
And legs as bony and as crookt awry
As any stripling boy’s, his feeble frame
And slouching gait, the barking of his coughs,
His aching bones, and endless rheumatismAll,
all that makes him what he is, has been
To me, his toy, his cage-bird, one long draught
Of Acheron, one wine of Styx, without
A hope of respite till his death or mine.

“One day you came to Court, a stalwart youth
From country scenes, wide-mouthed at city ways,
And I beheld you, big of breast and strong
And straight of limb, with firm, proud mck, and lips
Full-blown and red for youthful love of youth.

And I did love you, wailing at the life
So sadly managed, that had severed us.
I moaned and cursed my lot, but clung to faith
And honor with the king; nor ever would,
By any least encouragement of look
Or gesture, lead you on to change my troth,
My starving honor, to luxurious sin.
I barred my heart's door to the prayers of love,
While honor sat within, alone and cold.
And so I lived, and so I would have lived,
Till Death quenched all the thirsting of my lips,
And closed my eyes against the sight of you,
And stopped the throbbing of my heart for you.

“But now the shameless king has cleft the bond
That honor bound on me ; and now I fling
Away reserve, proclaim my alien love,
And plot against the life of my own spouse!

“So, if, loved Gyges, you dare reach for me
Across the king's dead body, here I am!
My heart all yours; not yours from wrath alone,
But yours from love, long-smothered fire of love,
Fierce lo':e that leaps out from its ashen tomb,
And rules my heart with fiery tyranny.
Speak, Gyges! Gyges, speak! What is your choice?”

Still whined the childish king, “Haste, haste, the kiss!”
And then you dragged me to the bed and bent
Above the king; but he cried out again,
“Is not some other here? Who's there?” and I
Nigh dropped my sword. But you made answer, “No,
It is the lightning fills the room with ghosts.
A heavy storm crawls up the sky to-night.”
And then you laid your hand upon his mouth,
And whispered, me, “Strike! strike!” and yet again
“Strike! strike! or give the sword to me!” And I,
Obedient, drove deep my murderous steel
In the king's lean breast, and plunged my dastard blade

Into his throat, his arms, his loins, his side,
Aye, everywhere; but could not find his heart,
So great a panic seized on me ; while you,
Rebuking me with eyes and voice, smothered
His screams, his prayers.

Just as my groping sword
At last was poised above his heart, the king
Writhed his thin lips from your fierce clutch, and shot
Into the air a shriek that would have roused
All the earth, had not the heavens cracked
And blazed and split beneath a sudden leap
And yell and rain of thunderbolts. They drowned
His mad death-cry, but, ah! the lightning's flame
Spread out a hideous picture, searing it
Upon my tortured memory. His eyes!
His fearful, starting eyes! despair, reproach
And horror, wilder than the lightning, blazed
In his poor eyes. There, kneeling at his side,
His wife knelt, choking back his frantic plea
For pity, and his cry for help! And blood,
Blood was red upon your arms and robe,
And at your side was I, bent over, tense
With foiled endeavor, raining thick, fierce stabs
Upon the gashed and helpless wretch, my king!
And both my arms were splasht with gore! and blood!

Reached to my elbows! and the blood leaped hot
From jetting fountains of swift blood about
The king's whole body bathed in blood! in blood!
O! piteous scene! What husband now can trust
A wife again? What king can smile upon
A subject? This was your deed, your crime, yours.
You slim, sleek tigress! Cats can purr, but 'ware
Their angry claws. A dainty body oft
Can vase a hideous heart. O woman! fiend!
You, who had felt no tremor at the death
Of him you had conspired to slay-you swooned
To death's own image at the blare and flare

Of noisy thunder and mere lightning flash.
But I-I left my bloody traitor's sword
Still sticking upright in his silent heart,
And ran unto the window, and, with hands
Clotted with blood, bared my whole breast
To Heaven's King to rend with thunderbolts,
And punish my most impious, foul deed.
Yet, when the whole sky roared again, and flung
A hurtling thunder-stone almost upon
My open breast's beseeching, I returned
A coward, and I fled away, all choked
With fright of Death, and found you stretched out still
Upon the floor.

Then love of you revived,
And straight I fell to kissing of the mouth
That I had given all the good of life
To win. Soon you awoke beneath my lips,
And reached and clasped my neck, and drew me close, And
we were wed even there ; while over the world
Outside the storm flew, shouting, "Murder! Death!"
Across the heedless town. Whenever its voice
Would hush a moment breathless, all was dull,
Dead silence, save for our quick breathing, save
For ceaseless dripping, drop by drop, the drip
Of his spent blood upon the floor, till we
Were mad to hear the thunder howl again.
We soon were surfeited of passion bought
Too dear with dark guilt unforgettable.
We went to wash away the stains of blood
That blotched your beauty and my honest skin.
The cold, clear water seemed a sharp reproach,
It was so clean and pure. It shamed my soul
To sully it with the garbage of our crime.

And next you pushed me forth to tell vile lies
Unto the furious mob that raved next day.
You could invent that foolish, mammoth lie

About the king's death being suicide.
And when the mob reviled me stammering,
You could rush out, unwomanly, and cry:

“Ye Lydians, if ye will not harken him
That is your general, then harken me,
Your queen. Last night the poor king slew himself Alas
! my heart must break to think of it!-
But he was very old, and suffered much
From pangs old age is prone to; and full oft
Had vowed that he would end his pain with death.
And last night-ah! ill-fated night!-he sought
Release from anguish in the arms of death.
He used to tell me often that his crown
And I, his queen, should fall, if he should die
Without an heir, unto your general,
His favorite, brave Gyges, who has brought
So many victories back from the wars.”

For his sake, let us love each other, then;
And bury guilt and grievous self-despite,
Pluck out the wedge of mutual crimination
From our one soul, and starve this o'er-fed memory,
And hide all things that are the hideous Past's
In one dark tomb eternal ; and embrace
Above their grave.

As now I press this kiss
On your pale lips, it seals the Past away
Forever and forever.

Go within.

I'll follow soon, sweet queen.

Ah, cursed Ring!

Accuser of my bloody Past, begone!
And evil go with you, as first it came!-
How viciously it stabbed the water's breast,
When it sank in, even as my guilty sword

Plunged in the heart of old-No! no! now, hush!
The Past-is it not dead?

O bright-gemmed sky,
Glow you your fairest, never again so fair
As once you were unto the pious eyes
Of one that was a shepherd, innocent
As new-washed sheep, white stars upon the hills.

