# APPENDIX B: VICTORIANS ON VICTORIANS

Poets have always written tributes to their fellow poets; the Victorians are not unusual in this regard, except perhaps in that their penchant for elegy may have led them to write more such tributes than is typical. The elegies for other poets to be found elsewhere in this anthology include some of the finest and most moving works of Victorian verse: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Felicia Hemans," a response to "Stanzas on the Death of Felicia Hemans," by Letitia Landon (about whom Barrett Browning would later write yet another elegy, "L. E. L.'s Last Question"); Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis," on Arthur Hugh Clough; Christina Rossetti's "Birchington Church-Yard," on her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti; Lord Alfred Douglas's "The Dead Poet," on Oscar Wilde; and Thomas Hardy's "A Singer Asleep," on Algernon Charles Swinburne.

Not all the poems below take the form of elegy, however. Robert Buchanan's "Dr. B," on Robert Browning, is really a critical appraisal of Browning's poetry, written in lively verse. Browning's own "To Edward FitzGerald" is a poem of rage and scorn. But they all offer insight into the networks of relationship and influence among the poets of the period.

## ON THOMAS HOOD (1799–1845)

### ELIZA COOK (1812–1889)[1]

*Poor Hood*
Written at Kensal Green Cemetery[2]

What gorgeous cenotaphs° arise, *grave monuments*
  Of Parian° shrine and granite vault; *marble*
With blazoned claims on purer skies[3]
  That shut out earthly flaw and fault!

Who lies below yon splendid tomb
  That stretches out so broad and tall?
The worms will surely ne'er exhume° *unearth*
  A sleeper locked within such wall.

And see, that other stately pile° *structure*
  Of chiselled glory—staring out;
Come, Sexton,[4] leave your work awhile,
  And tell us what we ask about.

So! one belongs to him who held
  A score of trained and tortured steeds;[5]
Great Circus Hero—unexcelled,
  On what strange stuff Ambition feeds!

The other guards the last repose
  Of one who shone by juggling craft.[6]
Methinks when such a Temple rose
  How Esculapius[7] must have *laughed*.

1 *Eliza Cook* As both a poet and an activist on behalf of women and the poor, Cook appreciated Hood's poems of the 1840s. She published this tribute to him in the weekly magazine she edited, *Eliza Cook's Journal*, and it was later appended to collections of Hood's poetry. In response to her poem, a suitably impressive marker, paid for by public subscription, was placed on Hood's grave in 1854.

2 *Kensal Green Cemetery* A large, landscaped cemetery in west London that boasts a number of impressive tombs and mausoleums, along with humbler graves.

3 *With blazoned … skies* With inscriptions proclaiming that the deceased is worthy of heaven (*purer skies*).

4 *Sexton* Traditionally, a church official responsible for digging graves; here, a caretaker of the cemetery.

5 *him who … steeds* Andrew Ducrow (1793–1842), a horse-trainer and circus performer, has a particularly elaborate monument in the cemetery, which was originally painted in vibrant colors.

6 *juggling craft* Crafty deception or cheating. The tomb is that of John St. John Long (1798–1834), a quack doctor who claimed to have discovered a method of curing tuberculosis—the disease that killed Hood (and Long himself). Although Long's remedy was a sham, some of his former patients arranged to build a tall monument for him in Kensal Green.

7 *Esculapius* Greek god of medicine; *Temple* Monument; *Methinks* It seems to me.

And see that tomb beneath yon tree!—
But, Sexton, tell us where to find
The grave of him we came to see;—
Is it not here, or are we blind?

We mean Poor Hood's—the man who made
That Song about the "Bridge of Sighs";[1]
—You know the Song, well, leave your spade,
And please to show us where *he* lies.

What! there! without a single mark—
Without a stone—without a line—
Does watchfire Genius leave no spark
To note its ashes as divine?[2]

Must strangers come to woo his shade,[3]
Scanning rare beauties as they pass;
And when they pause where *he* is laid,
Stop at a trodden mound of grass?

And is it thus? Well, we suppose,
England is far too poor to spare
A slab of white where Truth might write
The title of her Poet Heir.[4]

Let us adorn our city walks
With senate form and soldier-chief—
Carve toga-folds and laurel stalks,—[5]
Let marble shine in robe and leaf.

But Hood; "poor Hood!"—the Poet fool[6]
Who sung of Women's woes and wrongs,
Who taught his Master's Golden Rule—[7]
Give *him* no statue for his *songs*!

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1 *That song … Sighs* See title note to Hood's ★"The Bridge of Sighs" (1844).

2 *Does watchfire … divine?* Does the genius that keeps watch within a person while alive leave no spark of its fire when it has burned out, as a sign that it was divinely inspired?

3 *woo his shade* Pay tribute to his ghost.

4 *title … Heir* Hood earned the title "Heir to Truth" because his late poems spoke candidly of the condition of the urban poor.

5 *With senate form … stalks* A politician (senate form) would be depicted in a public statue wearing the ancient Roman toga, while a military commander (soldier-chief) would be shown crowned with laurel leaves, the Roman sign of victory.

6 *fool* Jester; before writing his poems focusing on the poor (and especially on impoverished women) in the 1840s, Hood was best known for his comic verse.

7 *his Master's Golden Rule* As proclaimed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

Give him the dust beneath his head,
Give him a grave—a grave alone—
In Life he dearly° won his bread;— *at great cost*
In Death he was not worth a stone.

Perhaps we rightly think that he
Who flung God's light round lowly things,
Can soar above in Memory's love,
Supported by his own, strong wings.

Our Shakspeare can be only met
Within a narrow Playhouse Porch;[1]
So, Hood, thy spirit need not fret;
But hold its own immortal torch.

"Poor Hood!" for whom a people wreathes
The heart-born flowers that never die.
"Poor Hood!" for whom a requiem[2] breathes
In every human Toil-wrung sigh.

Let the Horse-tamer's bed be known
By the rich mausoleum-shrine;
Give the bold Quack his charnel° throne— *funerary*
Their works were worthier far than thine.

And let thy Soul serenely sleep
While pilgrims stand as I have stood;
To worship at a nameless heap,
And fondly, sadly say, "Poor Hood!"
—1852

1 *Our Shakespeare … Porch* The place to encounter Shakespeare truly is not at his tomb but in the theater.

2 *requiem* Musical composition for the dead.

## ON WILLIAM BARNES (1801–1886)

### THOMAS HARDY (1840–1928)

### *The Last Signal*

A Memory of William Barnes[1]

Silently I footed by an uphill road
That led from my abode to a spot yew-boughed;[2]
Yellowly the sun sloped low down to westward,
And dark was the east with cloud.

Then, amid the shadow of that livid[3] sad east,
Where the light was least, and a gate stood wide,
Something flashed the fire of the sun that was facing it,
Like a brief blaze on that side.

Looking hard and harder I knew what it meant—
The sudden shine sent from the livid east scene;
It meant the west mirrored by the coffin of my friend there,
Turning to the road from his green,° *yard*

To take his last journey forth—he who in his prime
Trudged so many a time from that gate athwart° the land! *across*
Thus a farewell to me he signalled on his grave-way,
As with a wave of his hand.

—1917

## ON ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING (1806–1861)

### DORA GREENWELL (1821–1882)

### *To Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 1851*

I lose myself within thy mind—from room
To goodly room thou leadest me, and still
Dost show me of thy glory more, until
My soul like Sheba's Queen faints, overcome,

1 *A Memory of William Barnes* Barnes was Hardy's longtime friend and neighbor; the two shared an interest in preserving the rural dialect of their native Dorset.

2 *yew-boughed* The yew tree is associated with mourning.

3 *livid* Dark purple-gray.

And all my spirit dies within me, numb,[1]
Sucked in by thine, a larger star, at will;
And hasting like thy bee, my hive to fill,
I "swoon for very joy" amid thy bloom;[2]
Till—not like that poor bird (as poets feign)
That tried against the Lutanist's her skill,
Crowding her thick precipitate notes, until
Her weak heart brake above the contest vain—[3]
Did not thy strength a nobler thought instil,
I feel as if I ne'er could sing again!

**—1851 (published 1867)**

## *To Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 1861*

I praised thee not while living; what to thee
Was praise of mine? I mourned thee not when dead;
I only loved thee,—love thee! oh thou fled
Fair spirit, free at last where all are free,
I only love thee, bless thee, that to me
For ever thou hast made the rose more red,
More sweet each word by olden singers said
In sadness, or by children in their glee;
Once, only once in life I heard thee speak,
Once, only once I kissed thee on the cheek,
And met thy kiss and blessing; scarce I knew
Thy smile, I only loved thee, only grew
Through wealth, through strength of thine, less poor, less weak;
Oh what hath death with souls like thine to do?

**—1861 (published 1867)**

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1 *like Sheba's Queen … numb* The biblical Queen of Sheba, having heard of King Solomon's wisdom and wealth, came to witness it for herself; she was so impressed that "there was no more spirit in her" (1 Kings 10:5).

2 *like thy bee … bloom* See Barrett Browning's "A Dead Rose" (1846), where the speaker, addressing the rose, says, "The bee that once did suck thee / And build thy perfumed ambers up his hive, / And swoon in thee for joy, till scarce alive,— / If passing now,—would blindly overlook thee" (lines 21–24).

3 *that poor bird … vain* According to a Renaissance tradition (itself based loosely on a classical one), the nightingale once entered into a musical contest with a lute-player (lutanist), which continued until the bird died from the labor; *brake* Broke; *precipitate* Hurried, impetuous. Line 11 recalls Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Nightingale" (1798): "'Tis the merry nightingale / That crowds and hurries and precipitates / With fast thick warble his delicious notes" (lines 43–45).

## DINAH MULOCK CRAIK (1826–1887)

### *To Elizabeth Barrett Browning on her Later Sonnets*[1]

I know not if the cycle of strange years
  Will ever bring thy human face to me,
Sister!—I say this, not as of thy peers,
  But like as those who their own grief can see
In the large mirror of another's tears.

Comforter! many a time thy soul's white feet
  Stole on the silent darkness where I lay
With voice of distant singing—solemn sweet—
  "Be of good cheer, I too have trod that way";
And I rose up and walked in strength complete.

Oft, as amidst the furnace of fierce woe
  My own will lit,[2] I writhing stood, yet calm,
I saw thee moving near me, meek and low,
  Not speaking,—only chaunting the one psalm,
"God's love suffices when all world-loves go."

Year after year have I, in passion strong,
  Clung to thy garments when my soul was faint,—
Touching thee, all unseen amid the throng;[3]
  But now, thou risest to joy's heaven—my saint!
And I look up—and cannot hear thy song.[4]

Or hearing, understand not; save° as those *except*
  Who from without list to the bridegroom-strain[5]
They might have sung—but that the dull gates close—
  And so they smile a blessing through their pain,
Then, turning, lie and sleep among the snows.

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1 *To … Later Sonnets* Although this poem bears the date 1856 in later collections of Craik's work, it was first published in *The Athenaeum* in 1851. Craik was a successful novelist as well as a poet.

2 *lit* Meaning both "alit" (landed) and "caught fire."

3 *Clung to thy … throng* The gospels tell the story of a woman who was healed when she touched the hem of Jesus' garment as he passed through a crowd (Mark 5:25–34).

4 *joy's heaven … song* Unlike many of her earlier sonnets, which often deal with grief, Barrett Browning's sequence ★*Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) tells of happy, fulfilled love.

5 *from without … bridegroom-strain* Listen to the marriage song from outside. This stanza and the next allude to the parable told by Jesus in Matthew 25:1–13, in which ten maidens wait for the Bridegroom (Christ); five wisely bring enough oil for their lamps, and so are able to accompany him to the wedding feast, while the other five miss his coming and are shut out.

So, go thou in, saint—sister—comforter!
Of this, thy house of joy, heaven keep the doors!
And sometimes through the music and the stir
Set thy lamp shining from the upper floors,
That we without may say—"Bless God—and her!"
—1851

## BESSIE RAYNER PARKES (1829–1925)[1]

### *To Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

I was a child when first I read your books,
And loved you dearly, so far as I could see
Your obvious meanings, your more subtle depths
Being then (as still, perhaps,) a mystery.
I had no awe of you, so much does love,
In simple daring, all shy fears transcend;
And when they told me, "You shall travel south,"
I chiefly thought, "In Florence dwells my friend!"[2]
In those first days I seldom heard your name,
You seemed in my strange fancy° all my own, *fantasy*
Or else as if you were some saint in Heaven
Whose image took my bookcase for a throne.
As time went on, your words flew far and wide,
I heard them quoted, critically scanned° *analyzed*
With grave intentness, learned, half mournfully,
That you were *a great Poet in the land*,
So far, so far from me, who loved you so,
And never might one human blessing claim;
Yet oh! how I rejoiced that you were great,
And all my heart exulted in your fame;
A woman's fame, and *yours*! I use no words
Of any careful beauty, being plain
As earnestness, and quiet as that Truth
Which shrinks from any flattering speech with pain.
Indeed, I should not dare—but that this love,
Long nursed, demands expression, and alone
Seeks by love's dear strength—to approach near you
In words so weak and poor beside your own.
—1852

1 *Bessie Rayner Parkes* Parkes was an important advocate for women's rights and women's writing. Her tribute to Barrett Browning comes near the end of her 1852 *Poems*, her first published book.

2 *In Florence dwells my friend* Barrett Browning had moved to Florence in 1847.

## EMILY DICKINSON (1830–1886)

### *I think I was Enchanted*[1]

I think I was enchanted
When first a somber Girl –
I read that Foreign Lady –
The Dark – felt beautiful –

And whether it was noon at night –
Or only Heaven – at Noon –
For very Lunacy of Light
I had not power to tell –

The Bees – became as Butterflies –
The Butterflies – as Swans –
Approached – and spurned the narrow Grass –
And just the meanest° Tunes *humblest*

That Nature murmured to herself
To keep herself in Cheer –
I took for Giants – practising
Titanic° Opera – *colossal*

The Days – to Mighty Metres stepped –
The Homeliest – adorned
As if unto a Jubilee
'Twere suddenly confirmed –

I could not have defined the change –
Conversion of the Mind
Like Sanctifying in the Soul –
Is witnessed – not explained –

'Twas a Divine Insanity –
The Danger to be Sane
Should I again experience –[2]
'Tis Antidote to turn –

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1 *I think I was Enchanted* This is probably the finest of three tributes to Barrett Browning that Dickinson wrote at different moments in her life. It was only posthumously that Dickinson was recognized as one of America's greatest poets, and like most of her poems this one was first published in the twentieth century.

2 *The Danger … experience* If I should ever again experience the dangerous state of sanity.

To Tomes° of solid Witchcraft – *books*
Magicians be asleep –
But Magic – hath an Element
Like Deity – to keep –
**—1935 (written c. 1863)**

## ON CAROLINE NORTON (1808–1877)

## FRANCES KEMBLE (1809–1893)[1]

### *To Mrs. Norton*[2]

I never shall forget thee—'tis a word
Thou oft must hear, for surely there be none
On whom thy wondrous eyes have ever shone
But for a moment, or who e'er have heard
Thy voice's deep impassioned melody,
Can lose the memory of that look or tone.
But, not as these, do I say unto thee,
I never shall forget thee:—in thine eyes,
Whose light, like sunshine, makes the world rejoice,
A stream of sad and solemn splendour lies;
And there is sorrow in thy gentle voice.
Thou art not like the scenes in which I found thee,
Thou art not like the beings that surround thee;
To me thou art a dream of hope and fear;
Yet why of fear?—oh sure!° the Power that lent *surely*
Such gifts, to make thee fair, and excellent,
Still watches one whom it has deigned° to bless *condescended*
With such a dower[3] of grace and loveliness;
Over the dangerous waves 'twill surely steer
The richly freighted bark,° through storm and blast,° *ship / wind*
And guide it safely to the port at last.
Such is my prayer; 'tis warm as ever fell
From off my lips: accept it, and farewell!
And though in this strange world where first I met thee,
We meet no more—I never shall forget thee.
**—1844**

1 *Frances Kemble* Frances Kemble (often called "Fanny" by her contemporaries) came from a family of famous actors and first made her name on the stage. She went on to become a well-known poet, memoirist, and abolitionist.

2 *To Mrs. Norton* This poem was first published as "To Mrs. ———" in 1844, some years after Norton's separation from her husband had caused a scandal, and shortly after the death of her youngest son.

3 *dower* Dowry, endowment.

## ON EDWARD FITZGERALD (1809–1883)

## ROBERT BROWNING (1812–1889)

### *To Edward FitzGerald*[1]

I chanced upon a new book yesterday:
I opened it, and, where my finger lay
'Twixt page and uncut page,[2] these words I read
—Some six or seven at most—and learned thereby
That you, FitzGerald, whom by ear and eye
She never knew, "thanked God my wife was dead."

Ay, dead! and were yourself alive, good Fitz,
How to return you thanks would task° my wits: *strain*
Kicking you seems the common lot of curs—[3]
While more appropriate greeting lends you grace:
Surely to spit there glorifies your face—
Spitting from lips once sanctified by Hers.
—1889

1 *To Edward FitzGerald* In a private letter to a friend in 1861, FitzGerald wrote, "Mrs Browning's Death is rather a relief to me, I must say: no more Aurora Leighs, thank God! A woman of real Genius, I know: but what is the upshot of it all?" (The reference is to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 1856 verse novel, *Aurora Leigh*.) Unfortunately, the passage was included in a posthumous edition of FitzGerald's *Letters and Literary Remains* (1889), where the aged Robert Browning happened upon it. Outraged, Browning wrote these lines and sent them to *The Athenaeum*, where they were published a few days later. The editor of FitzGerald's letters responded with an apology. For a very different response to FitzGerald and his writing, see Alfred Tennyson's ★"To E. FitzGerald" (1885).

2 *uncut page* For centuries books were produced by printing multiple pages of text onto a large sheet of paper, which would then be folded and sewn together with others. This left every page still attached at the edge to another page; it was up to the purchaser of the book to cut them apart.

3 *lot of curs* Fate of dogs.

## MATHILDE BLIND (1841–1896)

### *On Reading the "Rubáiyát" of Omar Khayyám*[1]

In a Kentish Rose Garden[2]

Beside a Dial in the leafy close,[3]
Where every bush was burning with the Rose,
With million roses falling flake by flake
Upon the lawn in fading summer snows:

I read the Persian Poet's rhyme of old,
Each thought a ruby in a ring of gold—
Old thoughts so young, that, after all these years,
They're writ on every rose-leaf yet unrolled.

You may not know the secret tongue aright
The Sunbeams on their rosy tablets write;
Only a poet may perchance translate
Those ruby-tinted hieroglyphs of light.[4]
—1895

1 *On Reading the "Rubáiyát" of Omar Khayyám* The immense popularity of FitzGerald's ✶*Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1859) led to many imitations and parodies, as well as tributes such as this one. Blind adopts the poem's rhyme scheme and characteristically erratic capitalization; she also puns, in lines 6 and 12, on the Persian word *rubái*, meaning a four-line poem, of which *rubáiyát* is the plural. FitzGerald's translation/adaptation was published anonymously, and Blind's tribute resembles others in focusing explicitly on Omar Khayyám, to whom the original Persian verses are attributed; but hers is notable in also alluding, in line 11, to FitzGerald's creative role as translator.

2 *In a Kentish Rose Garden* Much of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* is set in a garden of roses; Kent is in southeastern England.

3 *close* Enclosed garden; *Dial* Sundial.

4 *hieroglyphs of light* The roses are described as arcane symbols (hieroglyphs) inscribed by the sun.

## ON ALFRED TENNYSON (1809–1892)[1]

### COSMO MONKHOUSE (1840–1901)

*Recollections of Alfred Tennyson*[2]
A Day Dream (1869)

I had a holiday down by the sea,
And I said to the Present "Away with thee,"
And suffered° the tide of Memory *allowed*
To wash me away from Place and Time.
And many a morn, as I lay afloat,
I smoked and dreamed in my little boat,
Of fields of barley and of rye
That either side the river lie
That ever flows to Camelot.[3]
For I was full of the golden rhyme
Of Tennyson, the Laureate.

And oft, as I lay at my length, afloat,
Faces I never had seen before
(But I knew them well though they knew not me),
Sweet faces came and peeped over the boat,
Madeline, Adeline, Eleänore,[4]
And often at eve, when the light was wan,° *dim*
Afar I heard the gathering glee
Of the jubilant voice of the Dying Swan;[5]
For little had I to do with time,
And my soul was steeped° in the golden rhyme *bathed*
Of Tennyson, the Laureate.

And once my slow keel gently grazed
A loamy marge,[6] and I arose
And passed into a little close[7]

1 *On Alfred Tennyson* For other tributes to Tennyson, see Arthur Hallam's ★"To A.T." (1830) and William McGonagall's ★"Death and Burial of Lord Tennyson" (1892).

2 *Recollections of Alfred Tennyson* This poem as a whole adopts roughly the shape and pattern of Tennyson's "Recollections of the Arabian Nights" (1830). But the subtitle alludes to Tennyson's "The Day-Dream" (1842), and each stanza imitates or refers to at least one other poem of Tennyson's, concentrating on his earlier works. Tennyson served as Poet Laureate from 1850 until his death in 1892.

3 *Of fields of barley … Camelot* See the opening stanza of Tennyson's ★"The Lady of Shalott" (1832).

4 *Madeline, Adeline, Eleänore* Eponymous heroines of early Tennyson poems.

5 *jubilant … Swan* Echoing Tennyson's ★"The Dying Swan" (1830), line 28.

6 *loamy marge* Riverbank of light soil; *keel* Central timber at the bottom of a boat.

7 *close* Enclosed garden or other outdoor area.

Where on a blooming bank there lay
The fainting form of Fatima,
Stung to the soul with sharp desire,
And when her face I gently raised
Her breath was on my cheek as fire,—
(Beside me lay, uncut, the *Times*,[1]
For I chewed the cud of the golden rhymes
Of Tennyson, the Laureate).

Not long, for suddenly the breath
Failed, and she slid from my lax° clasp, *loose*
And quick night came and quenched the day
In her bright orbs.° I wondered, while *eyes*
She gave her life up with a smile
And cry of "Antony"; and death,
Clothed in the semblance° of an asp, *likeness*
Writhed from her robe and slunk away.[2]
Ay me, it was a pleasant time
When I was borne upon the rhyme
Of Tennyson, the Laureate.

Behind, a sweet voice whispered, "Look!"
I turning soon beheld a maid,° *young woman*
Her hair in many a chestnut braid,
And at her feet a noisy Brook.
"You will be welcome, sir," she said,
And led the way to a near Mill,
With mignonette upon the sill
Of a neat window o'er my head.[3]
Alas, that it should end, this time,
When I breathed the breath of the golden rhyme
Of Tennyson, the Laureate.

We entered in. The room was foul—
A vinous fume[4] hung in the air;
Knee by knee, and cheek by jowl,

1 *Beside me … Times* The speaker is so entranced in his daydream inspired by Tennyson's ★"Fatima" (1832) that he has not even cut the pages of his newspaper in order to be able to read it.

2 *She gave her life … slunk away* Tennyson's "A Dream of Fair Women" (1832) includes an encounter with Cleopatra (lines 125–76), lover of the Roman general Mark Antony, who ended her life by holding an asp (a venomous snake) to her breast.

3 *Behind, a sweet voice … o'er my head* The first half of the stanza alludes to Tennyson's "The Brook" (1855), especially lines 67–73, while the second half recalls "The Miller's Daughter" (1832); *mignonette* A sweet-smelling plant (compare "The Miller's Daughter," line 83).

4 *vinous fume* Smell of wine.

Two topers old were bibbing[1] there.
I knew the place, I knew the men,
I knew it was the House of Sin;—
But cried "Where hast thou brought me then?"
She answered with a toothless grin.
Oblivious of the feet of Time,
I flowed on with the golden rhyme
Of Tennyson, the Laureate.

When suddenly there rose a din,
And in there strode a Red-Cross Knight,
With armour bright, and visage° sad, *face*
Who, with a clean sweep of his sword,
Swept flask and flagon° from the board,° *bottle / table*
And cried "My name is Galahad";[2]
And out into the darkness dim,
And through the world I followed him.
For I was free from the trammels° of Time, *shackles*
And lived in the spacious world of rhyme
Of Tennyson, the Laureate.

And after many a day we came
Where, on a tall cliff firmly set,
A Palace rose up like a flame,
As fairylike and delicate,
Built of a stone that hath no name.
"I surely know, or I forget,"
I said, "Sir Knight, but truly this
Of Art, I think, the Palace is."[3]
I sang this to the silver chime
That rings for ever through the rhyme
Of Tennyson, the Laureate.

"Not Art, but Arthur," cried the Knight,
And soon in a great hall we found
The blameless King, and Table Round,
Engirt° with knights,—a goodly sight. *circled*
Then cried the King, and smote the oak,

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1 *Two topers … bibbing* Two old drunks were drinking (the imagery of this stanza is drawn from Tennyson's "The Vision of Sin" [1842]); *cheek by jowl* Close together (a jowl is a cheek or neck).

2 *Galahad* Tennyson first wrote about the purest of King Arthur's knights in "Sir Galahad" (1842) before including him in various of the *Idylls of the King*, notably ★"The Holy Grail" (1869). The first line of this stanza recalls Oscar Wilde's ★"Impression du Matin" (1881), line 9; Wilde's poem in turn recalls Tennyson's ★*In Memoriam* (1850), both in phrasing and in stanza form.

3 *Of Art … Palace is* Referring to Tennyson's ★"The Palace of Art" (1832).

"Love, Truth, and Beauty, one, but three,
This is the Artist's Trinity!"
And lo, 'twas Tennyson who spoke.
For this shall be through endless time
The burden[1] of the golden rhyme
Of Tennyson, our Laureate.
—1890

## W.S. BLUNT (1840–1922)

### *Alfred Tennyson*

Tears, idle tears! Ah, who shall bid us weep,
Now that thy lyre,[2] O prophet, is unstrung?
What voice shall rouse the dull world from its sleep
And lead its requiem[3] as when Grief was young,
And thou in thy rapt youth, Time's bards among,[4]
Captured our ears, and we looked up and heard
Spring's sweetest music on thy mourning tongue
And knew thee for Pain's paradisal bird.
We are alone without thee in our tears,
Alone in our mute chantings. Vows are vain
To tell thee how we loved thee in those years
Nor dream to look upon thy like[5] again.
We know not how to weep without thy aid,
Since all that tears would tell thyself hast said.
—1914 (written c. 1892)

1 *burden* Meaning both the refrain and the principal message. The imagery of this final stanza recalls the Arthurian stories of *Idylls of the King* but does not allude to one particular idyll.

2 *lyre* Stringed instrument on which poets traditionally accompanied their recitations; *Tears, idle tears* Tennyson's ★"Tears, Idle Tears" appears within his long poem *The Princess* (1847).

3 *requiem* Musical composition for the dead. Throughout the poem Blunt alludes to Tennyson's skill as an elegist, with particular reference to his book-length elegy ★*In Memoriam* (1850).

4 *Time's bards among* Among the great poets of all time; *rapt* Enraptured, absorbed in thought or inspiration.

5 *thy like* Your equal; compare Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "[He] was a man, take him for all in all, / I shall not look upon his like again" (1.2.187–88).

## ANDREW LANG (1844–1912)

### *On the Death of Lord Tennyson*

Silence! "The best" (he said) "are silent now,"
That younger bearer of the laurel bough,
Who with his Thyrsis, kindred souls divine,
Harps only for Sicilian Proserpine:[1]
For Arnold died, and Browning died, and he
The oldest, wisest, greatest of the three—[2]
Dies, and what voice shall dirge° for him today? *sing mournfully*
For the Muse went with him the darkling way,[3]
And left us mute! … Peace!° who shall rhyme or rave? *hush*
The violet blooms not on the new-made grave,
And not in this first blankness of regret
Are eyes of men who mourn their Master wet.
New grief is dumb:[4] himself through many a year
Withheld the meed° of his melodious tear *gift*
While Hallam slept.[5] But no! the moment flies!
And rapid rhymers, when the Poet dies,
Wail punctual, and prompt, and unafraid,
In copious instant ditties° ready made. *little songs*
Oh, peace! Ye do but make our loss more deep,
Who wail above his unawaking sleep.

—1892

1 *Silence! … Proserpine* Matthew Arnold's ★"Thyrsis" (1866), an elegy for his friend and fellow poet Arthur Hugh Clough, makes reference to Proserpine, the Roman goddess of the dead, who was born in Sicily. In his earlier ★"Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" (1855), Arnold writes that "The best are silent now" (line 114). The laurel is associated with poetic accomplishment.

2 *For Arnold … the three* The grouping of Matthew Arnold (1822–88), Robert Browning (1812–89), and Tennyson (1809–92) as the three pre-eminent Victorian poets was traditional in the decades after their deaths.

3 *the darkling way* (On) the darkened path.

4 *dumb* The idea that those overwhelmed by recent grief are silent, as well as the phrasing of lines 11–13, recall Elizabeth Barrett Browning's ★"Grief" (1844).

5 *himself … Hallam slept* Tennyson did not publish ★*In Memoriam*, his elegy for his friend Arthur Hallam, until 1850, seventeen years after Hallam's death. Line 14 recalls John Milton's "Lycidas" (1638): "Without the meed of some melodious tear" (line 14).

## ON ROBERT BROWNING (1812–1889)

### WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR (1775–1864)[1]

*To Robert Browning*

There is delight in singing, though none hear
Beside the singer; and there is delight
In praising, though the praiser sit alone
And see the praised far off him, far above.
Shakspeare is not our poet, but the world's,
Therefore on him no speech! and brief for thee,
Browning! Since Chaucer was alive and hale,[2]
No man hath walked along our roads with step
So active, so inquiring eye, or tongue
So varied in discourse. But warmer climes° *climates*
Give brighter plumage, stronger wing: the breeze
Of Alpine highths thou playest with, borne on
Beyond Sorrento and Amalfi,[3] where
The Siren[4] waits thee, singing song for song.
—1845

### ROBERT BUCHANAN (1841–1901)[5]

*Dr. B*
(On re-reading a collection of poems)

Confound your croakers° and drug concoctors! *physicians*
I've sent them packing at last, you see!
I'm in the hands of the best of doctors,
Dear cheery and chirpy Doctor B.!

1 *Walter Savage Landor* A well-respected essayist and poet, Landor befriended Robert Browning around 1840, when Browning was still struggling to win an appreciative audience. Browning in turn helped care for the aged Landor in Italy, where he spent his final years. This poem appeared in *The Morning Chronicle* in 1845, the year Browning published his important collection *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*.

2 *hale* Healthy; the poet Geoffrey Chaucer died in 1400.

3 *Sorrento and Amalfi* Towns in southern Italy that Browning visited in the 1840s, having traveled south of the Alps (*Alpine highths*) to reach them.

4 *Siren* In classical mythology, a female creature who lured sailors with her beautiful singing. The sirens, according to tradition, made their home along the southwest coast of Italy or the facing coast of Sicily.

5 *Robert Buchanan* Though a prolific poet, novelist, and dramatist, Buchanan is best remembered today for a single essay, ★"The Fleshly School of Poetry" (1871), his notoriously harsh review of the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne. This poem, though, shows a different side of Buchanan, as he critically but appreciatively evaluates Browning's poetry and its famous optimism.

None of your moping, methodistic,[1]
Long-faced ravens who frighten a man!
No, ever with treatment optimistic
To rouse the sick, is the Doctor's plan!

In he comes to you, smiling brightly,
Feels your pulse for the mere form's sake,[2]
Bustles about the sick-room lightly,
Gives you no beastly drugs to take,

But blithely clapping you on the shoulder,
"Better?" he cries, "Why, you're nearly well!"
And then you hear, with a heart grown bolder,
The last good story he has to tell!

And, mind you, his learning is prodigious,
He has Latin and Greek at his finger ends,
And with all his knowledge he's still religious,
And counts no sceptic among his friends.

God's in his Heaven, and willy-nilly° *necessarily*
All things come right in the end, he shows—[3]
The rouge on the ladies of Piccadilly[4]
Is God's, as much as the blush of the rose!

And as for the wail of the whole world's sorrow,
Well, men may weep, but the thrushes sing!
If you're sick today, there'll be jinks° tomorrow, *merrymaking*
And life, on the whole, is a pleasant thing!

When out of spirits you're sadly lying,
All dismal talk he puts bravely by:° *aside*
"God's in his Heaven," you hear him crying,—
"All's right with Creation, from star to sty!"

Full of world's wisdom and life's variety,
Always alive and alert is he,
His patients move in the best society,
And Duchesses swear by Doctor B.!

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1 *methodistic* Pious or serious.

2 *for the mere form's sake* As a mere formality.

3 *God's … he shows* See Browning's drama *Pippa Passes* (1841): "God's in his heaven— / All's right with the world!" (1.227–28). It is worth noting that these lines are spoken by Pippa, the young heroine of the play, and thus do not necessarily represent Browning's own view of life.

4 *Piccadilly* Area in central London with many sex workers.

A bit too chirpy, to some folk's thinking?
Well, there are moods that he hardly suits!—
Once, last summer, when I felt sinking,
I feared his voice and the creak of his boots!

If he has a fault which there's no denying,
'Tis proneness to argue and prove his case,—
When under the Shadow a man is lying,
Such boisterous comfort seems out of place;

'Tis little solace, when one is going
Into the long eternal Night,
To hear a voice, like a bugle blowing,
Cry, "Glory to God, for the world's all right!"

I longed, I own,° for a voice less cheery, *admit*
A style less strident,° a tone less free,° *shrill / lively*
For one who'd bend by my bedside dreary
And hush his wisdom, and weep with me!

But bless your heart, when my health grew better,
I gladdened the old boy's face to see;
And still I consider myself the debtor
Of dear old chirpy Doctor B.!
—1899

## ON MATTHEW ARNOLD (1822–1888)

## VICTOR PLARR (1863–1929)

### *On a Reading of Matthew Arnold*

Arnold is dead, and everyone forgets
His gracious doctrine, his hellenic creed,
His faith in light and sweetness.[1] 'Tis indeed
So easy to repudiate our debts
Of heart and brain! When what one most regrets
Is stint° of love, and ease, and wealth, who need *scarcity*
Go wail for culture? 'Tis a colourless weed
Which no one in his table nosegay° sets. *bouquet*

1 *His gracious doctrine … sweetness* In his treatise *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Arnold deplores the absence in British Victorian society of the "sweetness and light" of culture (which he also calls "Hellenism," from his perception that those qualities existed in abundance in ancient Greece).

Yet, great Oxonian,[1] it were meet° and fit *appropriate*
Could we but halt upon our daily stage
Of petty duty, dull mechanic task,
To meditate° thy theme and hear thee ask, *reflect on*
"Is conduct all? Are grace, and light, and wit,
Not chiefly good in this Bœotian[2] age?"

—1896

## ON CHRISTINA ROSSETTI (1830–1894)

### DORA GREENWELL (1821–1882)

#### *To Christina Rossetti*

Thou hast filled me a golden cup
With a drink divine that glows,
With the bloom that is flowing up
From the heart of the folded rose.
The grapes in their amber glow,
And the strength of the blood-red wine,
All mingle and change and flow
In this golden cup of thine,
With the scent of the curling vine,
With the balm[3] of the rose's breath,
For the voice of love is thine,
And thine is the Song of Death!

—1876

### MICHAEL FIELD (KATHARINE BRADLEY [1846–1914] AND EDITH COOPER [1862–1913])

#### *To Christina Rossetti*

Lady, we would° behold thee moving bright *wish to*
As Beatrice or Matilda[4] 'mid the trees,
Alas! thy moan was as a moan for ease
And passage through cool shadows to the night:
Fleeing from love, hadst thou not poet's right
To slip into the universe? The seas

1 *Oxonian* Graduate of Oxford University, where Arnold studied.

2 *Bœotian* The inhabitants of the ancient Greek district of Boeotia were proverbial for their stupidity.

3 *balm* Fragrant, soothing influence.

4 *Beatrice or Matilda* In Dante's *Divine Comedy* (c. 1308–21), Matilda guides Dante through the final portion of Purgatory, including the Garden of Eden; Beatrice, who provided the original inspiration for his journey at the beginning of the poem, then guides him into Paradise.

Are fathomless[1] to rivers drowned in these,
And sorrow is secure in leafy light.[2]
Ah, had this secret touched thee, in a tomb
Thou hadst not[3] buried thy enchanting self,
As happy Syrinx murmuring with the wind,
Or Daphne,[4] thrilled through all her mystic bloom,
From safe recess as genius or as elf,[5]
Thou hadst breathed joy in earth and in thy kind.[6]
—1896

## ON JAMES THOMSON (1834–1882)

## PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON (1850–1887)

### *To James Thomson, Author of "The City of Dreadful Night"*

I.

Brother, and fellow-citizen with me
Of this great city whose tremendous gloom
Weighed on thee with the heaviness of doom,—
I walk its ways today, and seem to see
Thy saddest eyes; again with thee to be
As on that day when, in this very room,
Thine eyes and ours who watched thee saw Death loom,[7]
A mighty monarch, strong to set thee free.

Still, still the same, this "City of Dreadful Night,"—
Still does it hear a sound of lamentation,
As of a conquered, broken-hearted nation;
Still glowers the Sphinx,[8] and breaks us with her might
Of unresponsive front.° There is no light; *face*
There is no hope; God, there is no salvation.

1 *fathomless* Too deep to be sounded or measured; *these* at the end of the line refers to *seas* in the previous line.

2 *And sorrow … light* A sorrowing person will be undisturbed in the shady recess of a forest.

3 *hadst not* Would not have.

4 *Syrinx … Daphne* In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1st century CE), two nymphs who fled from the unwanted advances of gods; both nymphs were transformed into plants (a reed and a laurel tree, respectively). Field treats such transformation as a liberating choice, although in Ovid it is presented as a desperate last resort.

5 *as genius or as elf* As a local deity or a spirit.

6 *thy kind* Humankind.

7 *in this … Death loom* The dying Thomson had to be carried from Marston's rooms, where he had been visiting.

8 *Sphinx* See section 20 of ★"The City of Dreadful Night" (1874), in which a sphinx (a half-human and half-lion creature) gazes impassively while everything around it crumbles; *glowers* Stares.

2.

No tears of mine shall fall upon thy face;
Whatever City thou hast gained, at last,
Better it is than that where thy feet passed
So many times, such weary nights and days.
Those journeying feet knew all its inmost ways;
Where shapes and shadows of dread things were cast,
There moved thy soul, profoundly dark and vast,
There did thy voice its hymn of anguish raise.

Thou wouldst have left[1] that City of great Night,
Yet travelled its dark mazes, all in vain;
But one way leads from it, which found aright,
Who goes by it may not return again.
There didst thou grope thy way, through thy long pain;
Hast thou, outside, found any world of light?
—1883

## AMY LEVY (1861–1889)

### *To a Dead Poet*[2]

I knew not if to laugh or weep;
They sat and talked of you—
"'Twas here he sat; 'twas this he said!
'Twas that he used to do.

"Here is the book wherein he read,
The room wherein he dwelt;
And he" (they said) "was such a man,
Such things he thought and felt."

I sat and sat, I did not stir;
They talked and talked away.
I was as mute as any stone,
I had no word to say.

They talked and talked; like to a stone
My heart grew in my breast—

1 *wouldst have left* Wished to leave.

2 *To a Dead Poet* In 1883 Levy published a sensitive essay on Thomson, whom she had never met but with whom she sympathized, titled "James Thomson: A Minor Poet." The following year this poem, which clearly refers to Thomson, appeared in her collection *A Minor Poet and Other Poems*; the title-poem of the same collection features a Thomson-like speaker.

I, who had never seen your face
Perhaps I knew you best.
—1884

## ON ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE (1837–1909)

## THOMAS HARDY (1840–1928)

### *A Singer Asleep*

1
In this fair niche[1] above the unslumbering sea,
That sentrys up and down[2] all night, all day,
From cove to promontory, from ness° to bay, *headland*
The Fates have fitly bidden that he should be
Pillowed eternally.

2
—It was as though a garland of red roses
Had fallen about the hood of some smug nun
When irresponsibly dropped as from the sun,
In fulth of numbers freaked with musical closes,[3]
Upon Victoria's formal middle time
His leaves of rhythm and rhyme.

3
O that far morning of a summer day
When, down a terraced street whose pavements lay
Glassing° the sunshine into my bent eyes, *reflecting*
I walked and read with a quick glad surprise
New words, in classic guise,—[4]

4
The passionate pages of his earlier years,
Fraught with hot sighs, sad laughters, kisses, tears;
Fresh-fluted notes, yet from a minstrel° who *musician*
Blew them not naïvely, but as one who knew
Full well why thus he blew.

1 *niche* Sheltered place. Swinburne is buried in a churchyard in the village of Bonchurch on the Isle of Wight, overlooking the sea; images of the sea figure prominently in Swinburne's poetry.

2 *sentrys up and down* Marches back and forth, like a sentry keeping guard.

3 *In fulth … closes* In abundance of verses varied with musical cadences.

4 *New … guise* Although the forms of Swinburne's poems were traditional, their content was anything but.

5
I still can hear the brabble[1] and the roar
At those thy tunes, O still one, now passed through
That fitful fire of tongues then entered new!
Their power is spent like spindrift° on this shore; *sea spray*
Thine swells yet more and more.

6
—His singing-mistress verily° was no other *truly*
Than she the Lesbian, she the music-mother
Of all the tribe that feel in melodies;
Who leapt, love-anguished, from the Leucadian steep[2]
Into the rambling world-encircling deep
Which hides her where none sees.

7
And one can hold in thought that nightly here
His phantom may draw down to the water's brim,
And hers come up to meet it, as a dim
Lone shine upon the heaving hydrosphere,° *ocean*
And mariners wonder as they traverse° near, *pass*
Unknowing of her and him.

8
One dreams him sighing to her spectral° form: *ghostly*
"O teacher, where lies hid thy burning line;
Where are those songs, O poetess divine
Whose very orts are love incarnadine?"[3]
And her smile back: "Disciple true and warm,
Sufficient now are thine." …

9
So here, beneath the waking constellations,
Where the waves peal their everlasting strains,
And their dull subterrene reverberations[4]
Shake him when storms make mountains of their plains—

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1 *brabble* Fuss, outcry. Reviewers objected loudly to Swinburne's first collection, *Poems and Ballads* (1866)—the *passionate pages of his earlier years*.

2 *the Lesbian … Leucadian steep* The ancient Greek poet Sappho (c. 600 BCE), whom Swinburne considered the greatest of all poets, was born on the island of Lesbos; according to tradition, she took her own life by jumping from a cliff on the island of Leucadia.

3 *Whose very … incarnadine* Whose mere scraps are love embodied. Most of Sappho's poems survive only in broken fragments, which are here compared to the leftovers from a meal; incarnadine means "flesh-colored," but in this line it suggests "incarnate," a word with which it shares a root.

4 *subterrene reverberations* Vibrations traveling underground; *strains* Sounds; *peal* Ring out.

Him once their peer in sad improvisations,
And deft as wind to cleave° their frothy manes— *cut across*
I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines
Upon the capes and chines.[1]
—1910

## ON AMY LEVY (1861–1889)[2]

## THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH (1836–1907)

### *Broken Music*

A note
All out of tune in this world's instrument.
—Amy Levy, "A Minor Poet"

I know not in what fashion she was made,
Nor what her voice was, when she used to speak,
Nor if the silken lashes threw a shade
On wan° or rosy cheek. *pale*

I picture her with sorrowful vague eyes
Illumed° with such strange gleams of inner light *illuminated*
As linger in the drift of London skies
Ere twilight turns to night.

I know not; I conjecture. 'Twas a girl
That with her own most gentle desperate hand
From out God's mystic setting plucked life's pearl—
'Tis hard to understand.

So precious life is! Even to the old
The hours are as a miser's coins, and she—
Within her hands lay youth's unminted gold
And all felicity.° *happiness*

The winged impetuous spirit, the white flame
That was her soul once, whither has it flown?
Above her brow gray lichens[3] blot her name
Upon the carven stone.

1 *chines* Ravines cut by streams descending to the ocean (a word particularly associated with the Isle of Wight).

2 *On Amy Levy* These two poems—the first by an American writer who never met Levy, the second by a friend of hers from London—reflect the wave of interest and sympathy that followed the news of Levy's suicide in 1889.

3 *lichens* Moss-like growths.

This is her Book of Verses—wren-like notes,
Shy franknesses, blind gropings, haunting fears;
At times across the chords abruptly floats
A mist of passionate tears.

A fragile lyre[1] too tensely keyed and strung,
A broken music, weirdly incomplete:
Here a proud mind, self-baffled° and self-stung, *thwarted*
Lies coiled in dark defeat.
—1890

## EUGENE LEE-HAMILTON (1845–1907)

### *Fumes of Charcoal*[2]
September, 1889

1
Death has no shape more stealthy.—There you sit,
With all unchanged around you, in your chair,
Watching the wavy tremor of the air
Above the little brazier[3] you have lit.

While death begins to amorously flit
In silent circles round you, till he dare
Touch with his lips, and, crouching o'er you there,
Kiss you all black, and freeze you bit by bit.

Yet she could walk upon the bracing heath,[4]
When steams the dew beneath the morning sun,
And draw the freshness of the mountain's breath:

Were charcoal fumes more sweet as, one by one,
Life's lights went out, beneath that kiss of Death,
And, turning black, the life-blood ceased to run?

2
If some new Dante in the shades below,
While crossing that wan° wood, where the self-slain, *gloomy*

1 *lyre* Stringed instrument traditionally associated with poetry.
2 *Fumes of Charcoal* On 9 September 1889, Levy killed herself in her room in her parents' house by inhaling carbon monoxide from burning charcoal.
3 *brazier* Metal tray for burning charcoal to heat a room.
4 *bracing heath* Strength-giving field of heather.

Changed into conscious trees, soothe their dull pain
By sighs and plaints,° as tears can never flow,[1] *laments*

Should hear an English voice, like west wind low,
Come from the latest tree, and letting strain
His ear against its trunk, should hear quite plain
The soul's heart tick within, though faint and slow:

Then let him ask: "O Amy, in the land
Of the sweet light and of the sweet live air,
Did you ne'er sit beside a friend's wheeled bed,[2]

"That you could thus destroy, at Hell's command,
All that he envied you, and choke the fair
Young flame of life, to dwell with the wan° dead?" *pale*

—1894

1 *If some new Dante … flow* In Dante's *Inferno*, the souls of those who have died by suicide are consigned to the seventh circle of hell, where they are trapped forever in dead trees. As he passes through the forest of suicides, Dante hears the trees moaning and stops to talk with some of them. Lee-Hamilton was a noted translator of Dante.

2 *a friend's wheeled bed* Lee-Hamilton was confined to bed by illness at the time that Levy knew him.