THE POETRY OF LONDON

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Approved.

W. Lindblad
London, thou art of townes A per se.
Sovereign of cities, semeliest in sight,
Of high renoun, riches, and royaltie;
Of lordis, barons, and many goodly knyght;
Of most delectable lusty ladies bright;
Of famous prelatis in habitis clericall;
Of merchauntis full of substaunce and myght:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

from William Dunbar's "To the City of London"
Preface

This selection of poems is the result of a project undertaken at the behest of and under the gentle guidance of William E. Lindblad, Professor of English Literature at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. Professor Lindblad, also the director of the Ball State University London Center for the 1972-1973 academic year, was seeking to enhance the individual student's experience in a course in British literature to be taken by students during a ten-week sojourn in London (the course being aimed primarily at students not working toward completion of a major or minor course of studies in English). The most direct means by which to achieve this goal, Dr. Lindblad believed, was to provide the student with literature which had its setting in London, or which was intimately concerned with the life in London. This is the avowed purpose of this little tome. Unfortunately, the auguries were not favorable, at this time, for a complete compilation and publication of the Literature of London. No heart could be found within the sacrificed beast. Originally Dr. Lindblad and I planned a volume that was to include poetry, drama, and fiction. The poems, plays, and stories were to be correlated with a map of London, and perhaps with pictures of frequently mentioned places. Furthermore, this volume was to be supplemented by a number of novels closely married to the city of London and its suburbs. I have remained true to these goals only in my attempts to arrange the poems herein included into walking or bicycling tours keyed to the map on page i. In addition, I have appended a bibliography of a few more poems, as well as a number of plays, short stories, and novels
which might be used in this specific sort of approach to British literature. The bibliography is not intended to be exhaustive.\footnote{1} The student is urged to explore London, the good and the bad, as he explores the poetry, confessedly both good and bad, included in this anthology.

Indeed, it is demanded of the student that he explore the good and the bad of the poetry contained in this book. With or without the aid of an instructor, the student must carefully examine whatever poetry he reads (Perrine's \textit{Sound and Sense} is a very useful book for this purpose, especially for the beginning reader. And a number of other poetry handbooks exist.) Unfortunately, the student too often reads a poem and states that he 'thinks' (supply instead 'feels') the poem means thus and so (this quite often having little to do with what the poet was trying to convey through his poem). The poet arranges his verbal contraption, as Auden calls it, to do-say-mean-be a particular thing in a particular fashion. It is the duty of the student to read the poem in the most complete way. He must be aware of connotative and denotative meanings of words; he must understand, or attempt to understand, the suggestive undercurrents of rhythm and meter; he must be able to comprehend and appreciate the use of metaphor, simile, irony, hyperbole, understatement, paradox, and other poetic devices. (Again, the interested student is urged to seek out a copy of Perrine's \textit{Sound and Sense}, \textit{A Handbook for the Study of Poetry} by Lynn Altenbernd and Leslie Lewis, or Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman's \textit{Handbook to Literature}.)

I have not undertaken to provide possible topics for discussion and/or writing. If the instructor involved cannot come up with stimulating questions by himself, only the good student will survive anyway. The good student will not need 'study questions' regardless of whether...
or not he is under the guidance of an instructor, good or bad. And anyone, in this age of indolence, who desires to tackle the study of poetry under his own power is more than likely one of the good ones.

Stephen Guy
Ball State University
1972
We begin our poetical tour of London at the colorful and crowded center of that city--Piccadilly Circus. The first poem was written by a young poet after his first visit to the city that was to be his home for many years.

**Piccadilly**

Beautiful tragical faces!
Ye that were whole, and are so sunken;
And, 0 ye vile, ye that might have been loved,
That are so sodden and drunken,
Who hath forgotten you?

O wistful, fragile faces, few out of many!
The crass, the coarse, the brazen,
God knows I cannot pity them, perhaps, as I should do;
But oh, ye delicate, wistful faces,
Who hath forgo ten you?

--Ezra Pound

**At Piccadilly Circus**

I wander through a crowd of women,
Whose hair and teeth are false,
Whose lips and cheeks have artificial colours,
Whose dress is artificial silk and velvet,
Whose talk is mainly lies.

And I remember
How once I dreamed of Truth:
It was a fair green tree,
Growing in an open grassy place
Beside cool flowing water . . .

They have cut down the tree.
Its sap dried up long ago.
Perhaps some fragment of it still remains
Embedded in an ugly garish building.

But most of it is turn'd to poisonous dust,
Blown through the stifling streets of slums.

--Vivian De Sola Pinto
On our first jaunt through London town we'll be setting off on Regent Street through Portland Place and alongside Regents Park and on to Hampstead Heath. (see map, p. i)

Primrose Hill

Wild heart in me that frets and grieves,
Imprisoned here against your will . . .
Sad heart that dreams of rainbow wings . . .
See! I have found some golden things!
The poplar trees on Primrose Hill
With all their shining play of leaves . . .
And London like a silver bride,
That will not put her veil aside!

Proud London like a painted queen,
Whose crown is heavy on her head . . .
City of sorrow and desire,
Under a sky of opal fire,
Amber and amethyst and red . . .
And how divine the day has been!
For every dawn God builds again
This world of beauty and of pain . . .

Wild heart that hungers for delight,
Imprisoned here against your will;
Sad heart, so eager to be gay!
Loving earth's lovely things . . . the play
Of wind and leaves on Primrose Hill . . .
Or London dreaming of the night . . .
Adventurous heart, on beauty bent,
That only Heaven could quite content!

—Olive Custance

Poem on Hampstead Heath

The angry future like a winter builds
Storms in the trees and branches in the fields.
The voices threaten in the thickening stream
And thunders frowning in the summer's dream
Shake down the doves like snow,
Turn the quick hourglass low.

The past as heavy as the patterned hand
Moulding the landscape, opens and is stained;
The memory mocks us in its painted cage
And simian gestures on a rural stage
Bidding time's jest begin,
Summon our yokel grin.
Oh leave the dancers and their antic hour,
Prophets with crystals, mirrors of the fair;
The growing present like a tree prepares
These newly branching roots, this storm of leaves, repairs
Gently, oh falling mould,
The loss of what is born, the lapse of what is old.

--Louis Adeane

The Ballad of Hampstead Heath

From Heaven's Gate to Hampstead Heath
Young Bacchus and his crew
Came tumbling down, and o'er the town
Their bursting trumpets blew.

The silver night was wildly bright,
And madly shone the moon
To hear a song so clear and strong,
With such a lovely tune.

From London's houses, huts and flats,
Came busmen, snobs, and Earls,
And ugly men in bowler hats
With charming little girls.

Sir Moses came with eyes of flame,
Judd, who is like a bloater,
The brave Lord Mayor in coach and pair,
King Edward, in his motor.

Far in a rosy mist withdrawn
The God and all his crew,
Silenus pulled by nymphs, a faun,
A satyr drenched in dew,

Smiled as they wept those shining tears
Only Immortals know,
Whose feet are set among the stars,
Above the shifting snow.

And one spake out into the night,
Before they left for ever,
"Rejoice, rejoice!" and his great voice
Rolled like a splendid river.

He spake in Greek, which Britons speak
Seldom, and circumspectly;
But Mr. Judd, that man of mud,
Translated it correctly.

And when they heard that happy word,
Policemen leapt and ambled:
The busmen pranced, the maidens danced,
The men in bowlers gambolled.
A wistful Echo stayed behind
To join the mortal dances,
But Mr. Judd, with words unkind,
Rejected her advances,

And passing down through London Town
She stopped, for all was lonely,
Attracted by a big brass plate
Inscribed: FOR MEMBERS ONLY.

And so she went to Parliament,
But those ungainly men
Woke up from sleep, and turned about,
And fell asleep again.

--James Elroy Flecker

Our next journey begins as we leave Piccadilly on Piccadilly Road, following it to Kensington Road and on south to Kensington, Kew Gardens, and Richmond Park. And, of course, we must return through Chelsea.

from London Sonnets: VI: Who Calls the English Cold?

Who calls the English cold? Eros is
Everywhere: lying on Hyde Park's summer lawn
The couples of young London touch; beyond
The bole of every tree there peeps the faun.

Canes tap on the gravelled walk, old ladies
Pass close by, skiffs skim the Serpentine
Yet there is only mouth on mouth
And a quickening as arms entwine.

Alone the visitor keeps the bench, having
Briskly walked nowhere; head back and eyes aslant
He regards the guttering day and hears the
Words of love as Hyde Park orators' rant.

Seizing his cane or skiff, louring at the faun,
He strides the swelling lawn up to the road above
Where his orator proclaims
Universal love.

--Carl Bode

Meditation At Kew

Alas! for all the pretty women who marry dull men,
Go into the suburbs and never come out again,
Who lose their pretty faces, and dimm their pretty eyes,
Because no one has skill or courage to organize.
What do these pretty women suffer when they marry?
They bear a boy who is like Uncle Harry,
A girl, who is like Aunt Eliza, and not new,
These old, dull races must breed true.

I would enclose a common in the sun,
And let the young wives out to laugh and run;
I would steal their dull clothes and go away,
And leave the pretty naked things to play.

Then I would make a contract with hard Fate
That they see all the men in the world and choose a mate,
And I would summon all the pipers in the town
That they dance with Love at a feast, and dance him down.

From the gay unions of choice
We'd have a race of splendid beauty, and of thrilling voice.
The World whips frank, gay love with rods,
But frankly, gayly shall we get the gods.

--Anna Wickham

On The Way To Kew

On the way to Kew,
By the river old and gray,
Where in the Long Ago
We laughed and loitered so,
I met a ghost to-day,
A ghost that told of you--
A ghost of low replies
And sweet inscrutable eyes,
Coming up from Richmond
As you used to do.

By the river old and gray,
The enchanted Long Ago
Murmured and smiled anew.
On the way to Kew,
March had the laugh of May,
The bare boughs looked aglow,
And old, immortal words
Sang in my breast like birds,
Coming up from Richmond
As I used with you.

With the life of Long Ago
Lived my thought of you.
By the river old and gray
Flowing his appointed way
As I watched I knew
What is so good to know--
Not in vain, not in vain,
Shall I look for you again,
Coming up from Richmond
On the way to Kew.

--William Ernest Henley
The Barrel-Organ

There's a barrel-organ caroling across a golden street
   In the City as the sun sinks low;
And the music's not immortal; but the world has made it sweet
   And fulfilled it with the sunset glow;
And it pulses through the pleasures of the City and the pain
   That surround the singing organ like a large eternal light;
And they've given it a glory and a part to play again
   In the Symphony that rules the day and night.
And now it's marching onward through the realms of old romance,
   And trolling out a fond familiar tune,
And now it's roaring cannon down to fight the King of France,
   And now it's prattling softly to the moon.
And all around the organ there's a sea without a shore
   Of human joys and wonders and regrets;
To remember and to recompense the music evermore
   For what the cold machinery forgets . . .

Yes; as the music changes,
   Like a prismatic glass,
It takes the light and ranges
   Through all the moods that pass:
Dissects the common carnival
   Of passions and regrets,
And gives the world a glimpse of all
   The colors it forgets.

And there La Traviata sighs
   Another sadder song;
And there Il Trovatore cries
   A tale of deeper wrong;
And bolder knights to battle go
   With sword and shield and lance,
Than ever here on earth below
   Have whirled into--a dance!--

Go down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;
   Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)
And you shall wander hand in hand with Love in summer's wonderland;
   Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)
The cherry-trees are seas of bloom and soft perfume and sweet perfume,
   The cherry-trees are seas of bloom (and oh, so near to London!)
And there they say, when dawn is high and all the world's a blaze of sky
   The cuckoo, though, he's very shy, will sing a song for London.
The nightingale is rather rare and yet they say you'll hear him there
   At Kew, at Kew in lilac-time (and oh, so near to London!)
The linnet and the thrush, too, and after dark the long halloo
   And golden-eyed tu-whit, tu-whoo of owls that ogle London.

For Noah hardly knew a bird of any kind that isn't heard
   At Kew, at Kew in lilac-time (and oh, so near to London!)
And when the rose begins to pout and all the chestnut spires are out
   You'll hear the rest without a doubt, all chorusing for London:--
Come down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;
Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)
And you shall wander hand in hand with Love in summer's wonderland;
Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)

And then the troubadour begins to thrill the golden street,
In the City as the sun sinks low;
And in all the gaudy busses there are scores of weary feet
Marking time, sweet time, with a dull mechanic beat,
And a thousand hearts are plunging to a love they'll never meet,
Through the meadows of the sunset, through the poppies and the wheat,
In the land where the dead dreams go.

Verdi, Verdi, when you wrote Il Trovatore did you dream
Of the City when the sun sinks low,
Of the organ and the monkey and the many-colored stream
On the Piccadilly pavement, of the myriad eyes that seem
To be listened for a moment with a wild Italian gleam
As A che la morte parodies the world's eternal theme
And pulses with the sunset-glow?

There's a thief, perhaps, that listens with a face of frozen stone
In the City as the sun sinks low;
There's a portly man of business with a balance of his own,
There's a clerk and there's a butcher of a soft reposeful tone,
And they're all of them returning to the heavens they have known;
They are crammed and jammed in busses and--they're each of them alone
In the land where the dead dreams go.

There's a laborer that listens to the voices of the dead
In the City as the sun sinks low;
And his hand begins to tremble and his face is rather red
As he sees a loafer watching him and--there he turns his head
And stares into the sunset where his April love is fled,
For he hears her softly singing and his lonely soul is led
Through the land where the dead dreams go . . .

There's a barrel-organ caroling across a golden street
In the City as the sun sinks low;
Though the music's only Verdi there's a world to make it sweet
Just as yonder yellow sunset where the earth and heaven meet
Mellows all the sooty City! Hark, a hundred thousand feet
Are marching on to glory through the poppies and the wheat
In the land where the dead dreams go.

So it's Jeremiah, Jeremiah,
What have you to say
When you meet the garland girls
Tripping on their way?

All around my gala hat
I wear a wreath of roses
(A long and lonely year it is
I've waited for the May!)
If anyone should ask you,
The reason why I wear it is--
My own love, my true love, is coming home today.

And it's buy a bunch of violets for the lady
(\textit{It's lilac-time in London; it's lilac-time in London!})
Buy a bunch of violets for the lady;
While the sky burns blue above:

On the other side the street you'll find it shady
(\textit{It's lilac-time in London; it's lilac-time in London!})
But buy a bunch of violets for the lady,
And tell her she's your own true love.

There's a barrel-organ caroling across a golden street
In the City as the sun sinks glittering and slow;
And the music's not immortal; but the world has made it sweet
And enriched it with the harmonies that make a song complete
In the deeper heavens of music where the night and morning meet,
As it dies into the sunset glow;
And it pulses through the pleasures of the City and the pain
That surround the singing organ like a large eternal light,
And they've given it a glory and a part to play again
In the Symphony that rules the day and night.

And there, as the music changes,
The song runs round again;
Once more it turns and ranges
Through all its joy and pain;
Dissects the common carnival
Of passions and regrets;
And the wheeling world remembers all
The wheeling song forgets.

Once more \textit{La Traviata} sighs
Another sadder song;
Once more \textit{Il Trovatore} cries
A tale of deeper wrong;
Once more the knights to battle go
With sword and shield and lance
Till once, once more, the shattered foe
Has whirled into--a dance!

\textbf{Come down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;}
\textbf{Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)}
\textbf{And you shall wander hand in hand with Love in summer's wonderland,}
\textbf{Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)}
\textit{---Alfred Noyes}
The Garden

En robe de parade.
Samain

Like a skein of loose silk blown against a wall
She walks by the railing of a path in Kensington Gardens,
And she is dying piece-meal
of a sort of emotional anaemia.

And round about there is a rabble
Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor.
They shall inherit the earth.

In her is the end of breeding.
Her boredom is exquisite and excessive.
She would like some one to speak to her,
And is almost afraid that I
will commit that indiscretion.

--Ezra Pound

Now we direct our footsteps toward Bloomsbury, Russell Square,
and the British Museum. Shaftesbury Avenue stretches out before us.

Bloomsbury

For me, for me, these old retreats
Amid the world of London streets!
My eye is pleased with all it meets
In Bloomsbury.

I know how prim is Bedford Park,
At Highgate oft I've heard the lark,
Not these can lure me from my ark
In Bloomsbury.

I know how green is Peckham Rye,
And Syd'nham, flashing in the sky,
But did I dwell there I should sigh
For Bloomsbury.

I know where Maida Vale receives
The night dews on her summer leaves,
Not less my settled spirit cleaves
To Bloomsbury.

Some love the Chelsea river gales,
And the slow barges' ruddy sails,
And these I'll woo when glamour fails
In Bloomsbury.
Enough for me in yonder square
To see the perky sparrows pair,
Or long laburnum gild the air
In Bloomsbury.

Enough for me in midnight skies
To see the moons of London rise,
And weave their silver fantasies
In Bloomsbury.

Oh, mine in snows and summer heats,
These good old Tory brick-built streets!
My eye is pleased with all it meets
In Bloomsbury.

---Wilfred Whitten

Homage to the British Museum

There is a supreme God in the ethnological section;
A hollow toad shape, faced with a blank shield.
He needs his belly to include the Pantheon,
Which is inserted through a hole behind.
At the navel, at the points formally stressed, at the organs of sense,
Lice glue themselves, dolls, local deities,
His smooth wood creeps with all the creeds of the world.

Attending there let us absorb the cultures of nations
And dissolve into our judgment all their codes.
Then, being clogged with a natural hesitation
(People are continually asking one the way out),
Let us stand here and admit that we have no road.
Being everything, let us admit that is to be something
Or give ourselves the benefit of the doubt;
Let us offer our pinch of dust to this God,
And grant his reign over the entire building.

---William Empson

On a Fly-leaf of a Book of Old Plays

At Cato's Head in Russell Street
These leaves she sat a-stitching;
I fancy she was trim and neat,
Blue-eyed and quite bewitching.

Before her on the street below,
All powder, ruffs, and laces,
There strutted idle London beaux
To ogle pretty faces;

While, filling many a Sedan chair
With monstrous hoop and feather,
In paint and powder London's fair
Went trooping past together.
Swift, Addison, and Pope, mayhap
They sauntered slowly past her,
Or printer's boy, with gown and cap,
For Steele, went trotting faster.

For beau nor wit has she a look;
Nor lord nor lady minding,
She bent her head above this book,
Attentive to her binding.

And one stray thread of golden hair,
Caught on her nimble fingers,
Was stitched within this volume, where
Until to-day it lingers.

Past and forgotten, beaux and fair,
Wigs, powder, all outdated;
A queer antique, the Sedan chair,
Pope, stiff and antiquated.

Yet as I turn these odd old plays,
This single stray lock finding,
I'm back in those forgotten days,
And watch her at her binding.

--Walter Learned

The British Museum Reading Room

Under the hive-like dome the stooping haunted readers
Go up and down the alleys, tap the cells of knowledge--
Honey and wax, the accumulation of years--
Some on commission, some for the love of learning,
Some because they have nothing better to do
Or because they hope these walls of books will deaden
The drumming of the demon in their ears.

Cranks, hacks, poverty-stricken scholars,
In pince-nez, period hats or romantic beards
And cherishing their hobby or their doom.
Some are too much alive and some are asleep
Hanging like bats in a world of inverted values,
Folded up in themselves in a world which is safe and silent:
This is the British Museum Reading Room.

Out on the steps in the sun the pigeons are courting,
Puffing their ruffs and sweeping their tails or taking
A sun-baths at their ease
And under the totem poles--the ancient terror--
Between the enormous fluted Ionic columns
There seeps from heavily jowled or hawk-like foreign faces
The guttural sorrow of the refugees.

--Louis MacNeice
At the British Museum

I turn the page and read:
"I dream of silent verses where the rhyme
Glides noiseless as an oar."

The heavy musty air, the black desks,
The bent heads and the rustling noises
In the great dome
Vanish . . .

And
The sun hangs in the coablt-blue sky,
The boat drifts over the lake shallows,
The fishes skim like umber shades through the
undulating weeds,
The oleanders drop their rosy petals on the lawns,
And the swallows dive and swirl and whistle
Above the cleft battlements of Can Grande's castle . . . .

--Richard Aldington

And now, once more, we face the south and proceed down Piccadilly
to St. James's Street, then along the Mall and down past St. James's
Park to Westminster Abbey.

St. James's Street

St. James's Street, or classic fame,
For Fashion still is seen there:
St. James's street? I know the name,
I almost think I've been there!
Why, that's where Sacharissa sigh'd
When Waller read his ditty;
Where Byron lived, and Gibbon died,
And Alvanley was witty.

A famous Street! To yonder Park
Young Churchill stole in class-time:
Come, gaze on fifty men of mark,
And then recall the past time.
The plats at White's, the play at Crock's,
The bumpers to Miss Gunning;
The bonhomis of Charley Fox,
And Selwyn's ghastly funning.

The dear old Street of clubs and cribs,
As north and south it stretches,
Still seems to smack of Rolliad squibs,
And Gillray's fiercer sketches;
The quaint old dress, the grand old style,
The mots, the racy stories;
The wine, the dice, the wit, the bile--
The wit of Whigs and Tories.
At dusk, when I am strolling there,
Dim forms will rise around me;
Lepel flits past me in her chair,
And Congreve's airs astound me!
And once Nell Gwynne, a frail young Sprite,
Look'd kindly when I met her;
I shook my head, perhaps—but quite
Forgot to quite forget her.

The Street is still a lively tomb
For rich, and gay, and clever;
The crops of dandies bud and bloom,
And die as fast as ever.
Now gilded youth loves cutty pipes,
And slang that's rather scaring;
It can't approach its prototypes
In taste, or tone, or bearing.

In Brummell's day of buckle shoe,
Lawn cravats, and roll collars,
They'd fight, and woo, and bet—and lose,
Like gentlemen and scholars:
I'm glad young men should go the pace,
I half forgive Old Rapid;
These louts disgrace their name and race—
So vicious and so vapid!

Worse times may come. Bon ton, indeed,
Will then be quite forgotten,
And all we much revere will speed
From ripe to worse than rotten:
Let grass then sprout between yon stones,
And owls then roost at Boodles',
For Echo will hurl back the tones
Of screaming Yankee Doodles.

I love the haunts of old Cockaigne,
Where wit and wealth were squandered;
The halls that tell of hoop and train,
Where grace and rank have wander'd;
Those halls where ladies fair and leal
First ventured to adore me!
Something of that old love I feel
For this old Street before me.

--F. Locker Lampson
A Shot in the Park

This poem is based upon an incident recorded in the memoirs of an Edwardian hostess, Mrs. Hwfa Williams, whose husband's given name is pronounced Hoofer.

In the light beneath the leafage
In the afternoon in May
In the Park and near the Row
Gracefully from Hwfa
Mrs. Hwfa Williams turned away,
Saying 'Hwfa, I must go,
I expect a mob for tea;
Such fun, but I must fly--
You dine, I think, with me?
Till then, my dear, good-bye!'

Mrs. Hwfa Williams
Twirled and furled her parasol,
Lightly stepped into her carriage,
Thinking it was all such fun--
Life, and May, and marriage.

Such a pretty moment--
How were they to figure
Fate in ambush, taking aim,
Finger on the trigger?

Later in a tea-gown talking
Over twinkling tea-things on a tray
(Hwfa in the Park still walking)
She was heard to say:

'When my husband and I gave it out
We should move to Great Cumberland Place
My sister-in-law gave a shriek--
"My dears, you'll be lost without a trace!"
And she said it with such a grimace!

"It's so utterly out of the world!
So fearfully wide of the mark!
A Robinson Crusoe existence will pall
On that unexplored side of the Park--
Not a soul will be likely to call!"

Disparaging all one adores,
Relations are such a disgrace;
They, as bluebottles buzz,
They deplore what one is and one does--
But they call at Great Cumberland Place!'
At home the tea-time tittle-tattle; in the Mall
Two different orbits about to intersect.
That a poor clerk and Mr. Hwfa Williams
Should there converge nobody could expect
And only a clairvoyant could foretell.

Gravely conferring with a crony, Hwfa
On one side saunters; on the other glares
A young man, seemingly a loafer,
Whose small brain, infinitely busier than theirs,
Has been inflamed by Post Office affairs.

He sends the telegrams that other people write;
From overwork a breakdown now impends;
Abrupt, elliptic phrases day and night he sends,
Recurring in his fevered brain all day
To be reiterated in his brain all night.

Now all's confused, things are not what they seem,
He stands bemused, as if he had been drinking;
Life is a cryptic, an intolerable dream--
RETURN TONIGHT AUNT HENRIETTA SINKING:
CONGRATULATIONS DEAR FROM ALL AT CHEAM.

GLOXINIA WILTING ORDER PINK GERANIUM:
TEN THOUSAND OFFERED SILLY NOT TO SELL;
Telegraphese tattoos upon his eardrums,
Like red-hot tintaoks drives into his cranium
The public syntax of his private hell--
THANK YOU BOTH ENCHANTED:
OIL CONCESSION GRANTED:
HOPE ARRIVE NUNEATON TEN TO EIGHT:
ARRIVING SEVEN MABEL STOP:
DON'T SELL REFECTORARY TABLE STOP:
CAT OUT OF BAG YOUR TELEGRAM TOO LATE.

Suddenly he sees two frock-coats passing,
Two top-hats tilted in a tête-à-tête--
These are to blame! Revenge upon the senders
Of countless telegrams! He feels the uprush
Of a delayed explosive charge of hate.

He draws and points a pistol, then he shoots.
'Ouch!' cries Hwfa. Something has distressed him.
He stumbles, mutters 'Somebody has shot me!'
He falls. Blood falls upon his patent-leather boots,
And cries go up, 'A murderer! Arrest him!'

In the light beneath the leafage
Late that afternoon in May,
In the Mall and on the ground
Mr. Hwfa Williams lay,
Happily not dead, but wounded.
'How do you feel?' they asked.
'Injured,' he said, 'and quite astounded.'

Mr. Hwfa Williams
Was attended by a Dr. Fletcher,
And vexed, but bravely bland,
Was carried home upon a stretcher;
And
On Mr. Hwfa Williams' forehead
Mrs. Hwfa Williams laid a
Ministering angel's hand.
Later 'Hwfa', Mrs. Hwfa Williams said,
'Do you prefer the sofa to your bed?'

'My dear, I don't mind where I lie;
What does it signify
When not a living soul can tell me why,
About to cross St. James's Park
I'm picked on like a sitting pheasant
By, so they tell me, a demented clerk,
A truant from the G.P.O., Mount Pleasant?
Too many wires, they say, had turned his brain--
But why he turned on me--no, that they can't explain.'

'Good morning, have you heard the news?
You'll be amazed!' 'Well, what?'
'I nearly fainted when I read
That Hwfa Williams has been shot.'

'My dear, your coffee's getting cold--'
'Well, does it matter in the least?'
All over London in the morning
Breakfast was a headline feast.

'Now here is what the paper says:
A dastardly assault . . . the crime
Seems without motive . . . an arrest was made . . .
Alleged . . . admitted . . . passing at the time . . .
A grudge . . . dispatch of telegrams . . .
Pistol discarded, lying in the mud . . .
Enquiries made at Mr. Williams' home . . .
Life not in danger . . . shock and loss of blood.

No one is safe, it seems, these days:
To stroll across St. James's Park
Is to receive a bullet in the leg
From some unhinged, ferocious clerk:

A little learning, as our fathers knew,
Is certainly a dangerous thing;
The lower orders have been spoilt,
And now they mean to have their fling;
But though the world's upside down
And England hastening to decay,
Ring for the carriage; we'll enquire
How Hwfa Williams is today.

'Crikey!' said the butler, Crichton,
'Blocking up the blooming street
All these callers keep on calling--
No one thinks of my poor feet!

All the toffs with all their questions,
Leaving cards you can't refuse;
These reporters, nosy parkers,
Proper sharks they are for news.

I was not engaged to answer
Bells that jangle all the time,
These enquiries well might drive a
Better man than me to crime:

How's your master? Is he better?
Is his life in danger still?
Is it true a gang attacked him?
Do you think they shot to kill?

Can you tell us why they did it?
Anarchists? A Fenian plot?
More of this and I'll go barmy,
Like the lad that fired the shot.'

Carriage after carriage crowding,
Kind enquirers choke the street:
How is Mr. Hwfa Williams?
'No one thinks of MY POOR FEET!'

'And so,' said Mrs. Hwfa Williams,
Telling the story after years had passed,
'It seemed that half of London came to call.
Fruit, game and flowers came crowding thick and fast,

Cards like confetti rained into the hall--
Such a great fuss, poor Hwfa was aghast
Yet pleased, I think, at such extreme concern,
More pleased than our old butler with it all--
Poor Crichton hardly knew which way to turn.

The street was jammed, the knocker and the bell
Clamoured together like two fiends in hell--
And where was Crichton? Nobody could tell!
At twelve o'clock my maid rushed in and said
"Oh, ma'am, he's drinking quarts of brandy neat--
Crichton's gone mad! I'll see to the front door!
Not mad but drunk I found him: Bursting into song
With Home Sweet Home, he lurched and hit the floor.

Abject when sober, Crichton said his feet
Had driven him off his head, nor had he known
That Hwfa's best old brandy was so strong . . .
Hwfa forgave him, he had been with us so long.

He stayed for years . . . Poor man, his race is run . . .
I also soon shall hear the sunset gun--
But in between times life has been such fun!
--William Plomer

In Westminster Abbey

Let me take this other glove off
As the vox humana swells,
And the beauteous fields of Eden
Bask beneath the Abbey bells.
Here, where England's statesmen lie,
Listen to a lady's cry.

Gracious Lord, oh bomb the Germans.
Spare their women for Thy Sake,
And if that is not too easy
We will pardon Thy Mistake.
But, gracious Lord, whate'er shall be,
Don't let anyone bomb me.

Keep our Empire undismembered
Guide our Forces by Thy Hand,
Galant blacks from far Jamaica,
Honduras and Togoland;
Protect them Lord in all their fights,
And, even more, protect the whites.

Think of what our Nation stands for,
Books from Boots' and country lanes,
Free speech, free passes, class distinction,
Democracy and proper drains.
Lord, put beneath Thy special care
One-eighty-nine Cadogan Square.

Although dear Lord I am a sinner,
I have done no major crime;
Now I'll come to Evening Service
Whensoever I have the time.
So, Lord, reserve for me a crown,
And do not let my shares go down.

I will labour for Thy Kingdom,
Help our lads to win the war,
Send white feathers to the cowards
Join the Women's Army Corps,
Then wash the Steps around Thy Throne
In the Eternal Safety Zone.

Now I feel a little better,
What a treat to hear Thy Word,
Where the bones of leading statesmen,
Have so often been interr'd.
And now, dear Lord, I cannot wait
Because I have a luncheon date.

--John Betjeman

Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1803

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This city now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

--William Wordsworth

The Sleepers

As I walked down the waterside
This silent morning, wet and dark;
Before the cocks in farmyards crowed,
Before the dogs began to bark;
Before the hour of five was struck
By old Westminster's mighty clock:

As I walked down the waterside
This morning, in the cold damp air,
I saw a hundred women and men
Huddled in rags and sleeping there:
These people have no work, thought I,
And long before their time they die.

That moment, on the waterside,
A lighted car came at a bound;
I looked inside, and saw a score
Of pale and weary men that frowned;
Each man sat in a huddled heap,
Carried to work while fast asleep.
Ten cars rushed down the waterside,
Like lighted coffins in the dark;
With twenty dead men in each car,
That must be brought alive by work;
These people work too hard, thought I,
And long before their time they die.

—W. H. Davies

Once again we leave Piccadilly Circus, this time taking a path
eastward past Trafalgar Square, Charing Cross, and Covent Garden. As
we proceed along the Strand till it becomes Fleet Street we pass
Chancery Lane and The Temple. Finally we arrive at St. Paul's. From
there we continue our exploration of East London--Cheapside, East Cheap,
Aldgate, London Bridge and the Tower. The first poem included in this
section makes the trip for us, beginning over in Westminster and ending
in Billingsgate.

London Lackpenny

In London there I was bent,
I saw myself where truth should be attaint,
Fast to Westminster ward I went
To a man of law, to make my complaint.
I said 'For Mary's love, that holy saint,
Have pity on the poor, that would proceed;
I would give silver, but my purse is faint;
For lack of money I may not speed.'

As I thrast throughout the throng
Among them all, my hood was gone.
Nathless I let not long
To Kings Bench till I come;
Before a judge I kneeled anon;
I prayed him for God's sake he would take heed.
Full ruefully to him I gan make my moan,
For lack of money I may not speed.

Beneath him sat clerks, a great rout;
Fast they writen by one assent.
There stood up one and cried round about
'Richard, Robert, and John of Kent.'
I wist not wele what he meant,
For he cried so thick there indeed.
There were strong thieves shamed and shent,
But they that lacked money might not speed.
Unto the Common Pleas I yode thoo
Where sat one with a silken hood.
I did him reverence as me ought to do.
I told him my case as well as I could
And said 'All my goods by norward and by sorward
I am defrauded with great falsehed.'
He would not give me a mum of his mouth.
For lack of money I may not speed.

Then I went me unto the Rollis
Before the clerks of the Chauncerie.
There were many quí tollis,
But I heard no man speak of me.
Before them I kneeled upon my knee,
Showed them mine evidence and they began to read;
They said truer things might there never be;
But for lack of money I may not speed.

In Westminster Hall I found one
Went in a long gown of ray.
I crouched, I kneeled before him anon.
For Mary's love, of help I gan him pray.
As he had be wroth, he voided away
Backward, his hand he gan me bid.
'I wot not what thou meanest', gan he say.
'Lay down silver, or here thou may not speed.'

In all Westminster Hall I could find never a one
That for me would do, though I should die.
Without the doors, where Flemings grete woon,
Upon me fast they gan to cry.
And said, 'Master, what will ye open or buy,
Fine felt hats, spectacles for to read
Of this gay gear'; a great cause why
For lack of money I might not speed.

Then to Westminster Gate I went
When the sun was at high prime.
Cooks to me, they took good intent,
Called me near, for to dine,
And proffered me good bread, ale, and wine;
A fair cloth they began to spread,
Ribs of beef both fat and fine.
But for lack of money I might not speed.

Into London I gan me to hie.
Of all the land it beareth the prize.
'Hot peascods', one gan cry.
'Strawberry ripe, and cherry in the ryse.'
One bad me come near and buy some spice;
Pepper and saffron they gan me bede,
Clove, grains, and flour of rice.
For lack of money I might not speed.
Then into Cheap I gan me drawn
Where I saw stand much people.
One bad me come near, and buy fine cloth of lawn,
Paris thread, cotton, and umple.
I said thereupon I could not skyle,
I am not wont thereto indeed.
One bad me buy an heure, my head to hele.
For lack of money I might not speed.

Then went I forth by London Stone
Throughout all Canwyke Street.
Drapers to me they called anon;
Great cheap of crotches, they gan me hete.
Then come there one, and cried 'Hot sheep's feet!'
'Rishes fair and green!' another gan to greet.
Both melwell and mackerel I gan meet,
But for lack of money I might not speed.

Then I hied me into East Cheap,
One cried ribs of beef and many a pie,
Pewter pots they clattered in a heap;
There was harp, pipe, and sawtry:
'Yea, by cock!' 'Nay, by cock!' some began to cry;
Some sangen of Jenken and Julian, to get themselves mede;
Full fain I would had of that minstrelsie,
But for lack of money I could not speed.

Into Cornhill anon I yode,
Where is much stolne gear among;
I saw where hange mine own hood
That I had lost in Westminster among the throng.
Then I beheld it with looks full long,
I kenned it as well as I did my creed;
To buy mine own hood again me thought it wrong,
But for lack of money I might not speed.

Then came the taverner and took me by the sleeve
And said 'Sir, a pint of wine would you assay?'
'Sir', quod I, 'it may not grieve,
For a penny may do no more than it may.'
I drank a pint, and therefore gan pay.
Sore a-hungred away I yede,
For well London Lackpenny for once and aye.
For lack of money I may not speed.

Then I hied me to Billingsgate.
One cried 'Wag, wag you hence!'
I prayed a barge man for God's sake
That they would spare me mine expense.
He said 'Rise up, man, and get thee hence!
What winist thou I will do on thee my almes deed,
Here scapeth no man beneath two pence.'
For lack of money I might not speed.
Then I conveyed me into Kent,
For of the Law would I meddle no more
Because no man to me would take intent;
I dight me to the plough, even as I did before.
Jesus save London, that in Bethlehem was bore,
And every true man of law God graunt him soul's mede;
And they that be other, God their state restore;
For he that lacketh money, with them he shall not speed.

---Anonymous

Fool that I was: my heart was sore,
Yea, sick for the myriad wounded men,
The maim'd in the war: I had grief for each one:
And I came in the gay September sun
To the open smile of Trafalgar Square;
Where many a lad with a limb fordone
Loll'd by the lion-guarded column
That holdeth Nelson statued thereon
Upright in the air.

The Parliament towers and the Abbey towers,
The white Horseguards and grey Whitehall,
He looketh on all,
Past Somerset House and the river's bend
To the pillar'd dome of St. Paul,
That slumbers confessing God's solemn blessing
On England's glory, to keep it ours--
While children true her prowess renew
And throng from the ends of the earth to defend
Freedom and honour--till Earth shall end.

The gentle unjealous Shakespeare, I trow,
In his country tomb of peaceful fame,
Must feel exiled from life and glow
If he think of this man with his warrior claim,
Who looketh o'er London as if 'twere his own,
As he standeth in stone, aloft and alone,
Sailing the sky with one arm and one eye.

---Robert Bridges
from *London Sonnets*: XV: Covent Garden Market

By God I hate to grow old.
Resignation, pushcart philosophy,
White dry film, geraniums drowned in tea;
Each hair lost or greyed turns me cold,
Lines scored on my face do not need to bleed;
Beyond the Covent Gardener hawking fruit,
Black apples, melons, berries, turned to suit
The epicure, who feeds on maggots as the maggots feed.
Carl Bode

The Mind’s Liberty

The mind, with its own eyes and ears,
May for these others have no care;
No matter where this body is,
The mind is free to go elsewhere.
My mind can be a sailor, when
This body’s still confined to land;
And turn these mortals into trees,
That walk in Fleet Street or the Strand.

So, when I’m passing Charing Cross,
Where porters work both night and day,
I oftentimes hear sweet Malpas Brook,
That flows thrice fifty miles away.
And when I’m passing near St. Paul’s,
I see, beyond the dome and crowd,
Twm Barlum, that green pap in Gwent,
With its dark nipple in a cloud.
—W. H. Davies

By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross

To William Watson

Sombre and rich, the skies;
Great glooms, and starry plains.
Gently the night wind sighs;
Else a vast silence reigns.

The splendid silence clings
Around me; and around
The saddest of all kings
Crowned, and again discrowned.

Comely and calm, he rides
Hard by his own Whitehall:
Only the night wind glides:
No crowds, nor rebels, brawl.
Gone, too, his Court: and yet,
The stars his courtiers are:
Stars in their stations set;
And every wandering star.

Alone he rides, alone,
The fair and fatal king:
Dark night is all his own,
That strange and solemn thing.

Which are more full of fate:
The stars; or those sad eyes?
Which are more still and great:
Those brows; or the dark skies?

Although his whole heart yearn
In passionate tragedy:
Never was face so stern
With sweet austerity.

Vanquished in life, his death
By beauty made amends:
The passing of his breath
Won his defeated ends.

Brief life, and hapless? Nay:
Through death, life grew sublime.
Speak after sentence? Yea:
And to the end of time.

Armoured he rides, his head
Bare to the stars of doom:
He triumphs now, the dead,
Beholding London's gloom.

Our wearier spirit faints,
Vexed in the world's employ:
His soul was of the saints;
And art to him was joy.

King, tried in fires of woe!
Men hunger for thy grace:
And through the night I go,
Loving thy mournful face.

Yet, when the city sleeps;
When all the cries are still:
The stars and heavenly deeps
Work our a perfect will.

--Lionel Pigot Johnson
London Voluntaries

III

Scherzando

Down through the ancient Strand
The spirit of October, mild and boon
And sauntering, takes his way
This golden end of afternoon,
As though the corn stood yellow in all the land,
And the ripe apples dropped to the harvest-moon.
Lo! the round sun, half-down the western slope—
Seen as along an unglazed telescope—
Lingers and lools, loth to be done with day:
Gifting the long, lean, lanky street
And its abounding confluences of being
With aspects generous and bland;
Making a thousand harnesses to shine
As with new ore from some enchanted mine,
And every horse's coat so full of sheen
He looks new-tailored, and every 'bus feels clean,
And never a hansom but is worth the feeing;
And every jeweller within the pale
Offers a real Arabian Night for sale;
And even the roar
Of the strong streams of toil, that pause and pour
Eastward and westward, sounds suffused—
Seems as it were bemused
And blurred, and like the speech
Of lazy seas on a lotus-haunted beach—
With this enchanted lustrousness,
This mellow magic, that (as a man's caress
Brings back to some faded face, beloved before,
A heavenly shadow of the grace it wore
Ere the poor eyes were minded to beseech)
Old things transfigures, and you hail and bless
Their looks of long-lapsed loveliness once more:
Till Clement's, angular and cold and staid,
Gleams forth in glamour's very stuffs arrayed;
And Bride's, her aery, unsubstantial charm
Through flight on flight of springing, soaring stone
Crown flushed and warm,
Laughs into life full-mooded and fresh-blown;
And the high majesty of Paul's
Uplifts a voice of living light, and calls—
Calls to his millions to behold and see
How goodly this his London Town can be!

For earth and sky and air
Are golden everywhere,
And golden with a gold so suave and fine
The looking on it lifts the heart like wine.
Trafalgar Square
(The fountains volleying golden glaze)
Shines like an angel-market. High aloft
Over his couchant Lions, in a haze
Shimmering and bland and soft,
A dust of chrysoprase,
Our Sailor takes the golden gaze
Of the saluting sun, and flames superb,
As once he flamed it on his ocean round.
The dingy dreariness of the picture-place,
Turned very nearly bright,
Takes on a luminous transiency of grace,
And shows no more a scandal to the ground.
The very blind man pottering on the kerb,
Among the posies and the ostrich feathers
And the rude voices touched with all the weathers
Of the long, varying year,
Shares in the universal alms of light.
The windows, with their fleeting, flickering fires,
The height and spread of frontage shining sheer,
The quiring signs, the rejoicing roofs and spires--
'Tis El Dorado--El Dorado plain,
The Golden City! And when a girl goes by,
Look! as she turns her glancing head,
A call of gold is floated from her ear!
Golden, all golden! In a golden glory,
Long-lapsing down a golden coasted sky,
The day, not dies but, seems
Dispersed in wafts and drifts of gold, and shed
Upon a past of golden song and story
And memories of gold and golden dreams.

IV

Largo e mesto

Out of the poisonous East,
Over a continent of blight,
Like a maleficent Influence released
From the most squalid cellaring of hell,
The Wind-Fiend, the abominable--
The Hangman Wind that tortures temper and light--
Comes slouching, sullen and obscene,
Hard on the skirts of the embittered night;
And in a cloud unclean
Of excremental humours, roused to strife
By the operation of some ruinous change,
Wherever his evil mandate run and range,
Into a dire intensity of life,
A craftsman at his bench, he settles down
To the grim job of throttling London Town.

So, by a jealous lightlessness beset
That might have oppressed the dragons of old time
Crunching and groping in the abysmal slime,
A cave of cut-throat thoughts and villainous dreams,
Hag-rid and crying with cold and dirt and wet,
The afflicted City, prone from mark to mark
In shameful occultation, seems
A nightmare labyrinthine, dim and drifting,
With wavering gulfs and antic heights, and shifting,
Rent in the stuff of a material dark,
Wherein the lamplight, scattered and sick and pale,
Shows like the leper's living blotch of bale:
Uncoiling monstrous into street on street
Paven with perils, teeming with mischance,
Where man and beast go blindfold and in dread,
Working with oaths and threats and faltering feet
Somewhither in the hideousness ahead;
Working through wicked airs and deadly dews
That make the laden robber grin askance
At the good places in his black romance,
And the poor, loitering harlot rather choose
Go pinched and pined to bed
Than lurk and shiver and curse her wretched way
From arch to arch, scouting some threepenny prey.

Forgot his dawns and far-flushed afterglows,
His green garlands and windy eyots forgot,
The old Father-River flows,
His watchfires cores of menace in the gloom,
As he came oozing from the Pit, and bore,
Sunk in his filthily transfigured sides,
Shoals of dishonoured dead to tumble and rot
In the squalor of the universal shore:
His voices sounding through the gruesome air
As from the Ferry where the Boat of Doom
With her blaspheming cargo reels and rides:
The while his children, the brave ships,
No more adventurous and fair,
Nor tripping it light of heel as home-bound brides,
But infamously enchanted,
Huddle together in the foul eclipse,
Or feel their course by inches desperately,
As through a tangle of alleys murder-haunted,
From sinister reach to reach out--out--to sea.

And Death the while--
Death with his well-worn, lean, professional smile,
Death in his threadbare working trim--
Comes to your bedside, unannounced and bland,
And with expert, inevitable hand
Feels at your windpipe, fingers you in the lung,
Or flicks the clot well into the labouring heart:
Thus signifying unto old and young,
However hard of mouth or wild of whim,
'Tis time--'tis time by his ancient watch--to part
From books and women and talk and drink and art.
And you go humbly after him
To a mean suburban lodging: on the way
To what or where
Not Death, who is old and very wise, can say:
And you--how should you care
So long as, unreclaimed of hell,
To Wind-Fiend, the insufferable,
Thus vicious and thus patient, sits him down
To the black job of burking London Town?
--William Ernest Henley

Song

Closes and courts and lanes
   Devious, clustered thick,
The thoroughfare, mains and drains,
   People and mortar and brick,
Wood, metal, machinery, brains,
   Pen and composing-stick:
     Fleet Street, but exquisite flame
       In the nebula once ere day and night
   Began their travail, or earth became,
     And all was passionate light.

Networks of wire overland,
   Conduits under the sea,
Aerial message from strand to strand
   By lightning that travels free,
Hither in haste to hand
   Tidings of destiny:
     These tingling nerves of the world's affairs
       Deliver remorseless, rendering still
   The fall of empires, the price of shares,
     The record of good and ill.

Tidal the traffic goes
   Citywards out of the town:
Townwards the evening ebb o'erflows
   This highway of old renown,
When the fog-woven curtains close,
   And the urban night comes down,
   Where souls are split and intellects spent
     O'er news vociferant near and far,
   From Hesperus hard to the Orient,
     From dawn to the evening star.

This is the royal refrain
   That burdens the boom and the thud
Of omnibus, mobus, wain,
   And the hoofs on the beaten mud,
From the Griffin at Chancery Lane
   To the portal of old King Lud--
Fleet Street, diligent night and day,
   Of news the mart and the burnished hearth,
Seven hundred paces of narrow way,
   A notable bit of the earth.
--John Davidson
Fleet Street

I never see the newsboys run
   Amid the whirling street,
With swift untiring feet,
To cry the latest venture done,
   But I expect one day to hear
Them cry the crack of doom
And risings from the tomb,
With great Archangel Michael near;
And see them running through the Fleet
   As messengers of God,
With Heaven's tidings shod
About their brave unwearyed feet.
--Shane Leslie

A Song of Fleet Street

Fleet Street! Fleet Street! Fleet Street in the morning,
   With the old sun laughing out behind the dome of Paul's,
Heavy wains a-driving, merry winds a-striving,
   White clouds and blue sky above the smoke-stained walls.

Fleet Street! Fleet Street! Fleet Street in the noontide,
   East and west the streets packed close, and roaring like the sea;
With laughter and with sobbing we feel the world's heart throbbing,
   And know what is throbbing is the heart of you and me.

Fleet Street! Fleet Street! Fleet Street in the evening,
   Darkness set with golden lamps down Ludgate Hill a-row:
Oh! hark the voice o' th' city that breaks our hearts with pity,
   That crazes us with shame and wrath, and makes us love her so.

Fleet Street! Fleet Street! morning, noon, and starlight,
   Through the never-ceasing roar come the great chimes clear and slow;
"Good are life and laughter, though we look before and after,
   And good to love the race of men a little ere we go."
--Alice Werner
Symphony in Yellow

An omnibus across the bridge
Crawls like a yellow butterfly,
And, here and there, a passer-by
Shows like a little restless midge.

Big barges full of yellow hay
Are moved against the shadowy wharf,
And, like a yellow silken scarf,
The thick fog hangs along the quay.

The yellow leaves begin to fade
And flutter from the Temple elms,
And at my feet the pale green Thames
Lies like a rod of rippled jade.

--Oscar Wilde

Impression Du Matin

The Thames nocturne of blue and gold
Changed to a Harmony in grey:
A barge with ochre-coloured hay
Dropt from the wharf: and chill and cold

The yellow fog came creeping down
The bridges, till the houses' walls
Seemed changed to shadows and St. Paul's
Loomed like a bubble o'er the town.

Then suddenly arose the clang
Of waking life; the streets were stirred
With country waggons: and a bird
Flew to the glistening roofs and sang.

But one pale women all alone,
The daylight kissing her wan hair,
Loitered beneath the gas lamps' flare,
With lips of flame and heart of stone.

--Oscar Wilde

London Snow

When men were all asleep the snow came flying,
In large white flakes falling on the city brown,
Stealthily and perpetually settling and loosely lying,
Hushing the latest traffic of the drowsy town;
Deadening, muffling, stifling its murmurs failing;
Lazily and incessantly floating down and down;
Silently sifting and veiling road, roof and railing;
Hiding difference, making unevenness even,
Into angles and crevices softly drifting and sailing.
All night it fell, and when full inches seven
It lay in the depth of its uncompacted lightness,
The clouds blew off from a high and frosty heaven;
And all woke earlier for the unaccustomed brightness
Of the winter dawning, the strange unheavenly glare:
The eye marvelled—marvelled at the dazzling whiteness;
The ear hearkened to the stillness of the solemn air;
No sound of wheel rumbling nor of foot falling,
And the busy morning cries came thin and spare.

Then boys I heard, as they went to school, calling,
They gathered up the crystal manna to freeze
Their tongues with tasting, their hands with snowballing;
Or rioted in a drift, plunging up to the knees;
Or peering up from under the white-mossed wonder,
"O look at the trees!" they cried, "O look at the trees!"
With lessened load a few carts creak and blunder,
Following along the white deserted way,
A country company long dispersed asunder:
When now already the sun, in pale display
Standing by Paul's high dome, spread forth below
His sparkling beams, and awoke the stir of the day.
   For now doors open, and war is waged with the snow;
And trains of sombre men, past tale of number,
Tread long brown paths, as toward their toil they go:
   But even for them awhile no cares encumber
Their minds diverted; the daily word is unspoken,
The daily thoughts of labour and sorrow slumber
At the sight of the beauty that greets them, for the charm they
have broken.

   --Robert Bridges

Of London Bridge, and the Stupendous Sight, and Structure Thereof

When Neptune from his billows London spied,
Brought proudly thither by a high spring-tide,
As through a floating wood he steer'd along,
And dancing castles cluster'd in a throng;
When he beheld a mighty bridge give law
Unto his surges, and their fury awe,
When such a shelf of cataracts did roar,
As if the Thames with Nile had chang'd her shore,
When he such massy walls, such tow'rs did eye,
Such posts, such irons upon his back to lie,
When such vast arches he observ'd, that might
Nineteen Rialtos make for depth and height,
When the Cerulean God these things survey'd,
He shook his trident, and astonish'd said,
Let the whole Earth now all her wonders count.
This Bridge of Wonders is the paramount.

   --James Howell
This final selection of poems includes two types of poems—those which have London as their general setting and those which wander about all over the city. The poems in this section and throughout the anthology have come from lyric poets, academic poets, imagist poets, metaphysical poets, Georgian poets, Romantic poets, and, admittedly, bad poets in some cases. Biographical data has not been provided because it too often gets in the way of a proper examination of the poem itself. A good poem will stand erect regardless of when it was written or by whom it was written. And a bad poem will trip and stumble until it falls flat on its face—bloodied nose and all—even if the most eminent poet has created it.

Holy Thursday
(from Songs of Innocence)

'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
The children walking two & two in red & blue & green.
Grey-headed beadles walked before with wands as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames' waters flow.

O what a multitude they seemed, these flowers of London town!
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own.
The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,
Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song,
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among.
Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor;
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door.
—William Blake

Holy Thursday
(from Songs of Experience)

Is this a holy thing to see
In a rich and fruitful land
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurious hand?
Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor;
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine,
And their fields are bleak and bare,
And their ways are filled with thorns.
It is eternal winter there.

For where'er the sun does shine,
And where'er the rain does fall,
Babe can never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appall.

--William Blake

London Spring

Morning, and streaks of heavenly blue,
On the wet asphalt gleaming lie . . . .
Through Town without your overcoat
You go and look long at the sky.

When soft the gentle breezes blow,
When stirs the first warm breath of Spring,
For verses new, new melodies,
I know that you are hungering.

You wish above the earth to soar,
Lightly transported overhead . . . .
Brother, these words are mine no more,
For with the autumn all are dead.

But if, my brother, in the night
With sweat and tears bedrenched you wake--
Beating your head against the wall--
And feel your heart will surely break,

If memory is filled with pain,
And every thought new torment brings,
And if the clock with dismal sound
Like passing bell sonorous sings,

If in delirious wakefulness
One road incessantly you tread,
Know that this night of Spring I too
Lie sleepless here upon my bed.

And when at last in fitful sleep
The shadowed road of grief you take,
Remember, I am with you still,
Know that I watch, and that I wake.

--Antoni Slonimski (translated from the Polish by Frances Notley)
To Mr. E. G.

Even as lame things thirst their perfection, so
The slimy rimes bred in our vale below,
Bearing with them much of my love and hart,
Fly unto that Parnassus, where thou art.
There thou orseest London: Here I have beene,
By staying in London, too much overseene.
Now pleasures dearth our City doth posses,
Our Theaters are fill'd with emptines;
As lanoke and thin is every street and way
As a woman deliver'd yesterday,
Nothing whereat to laugh my spleen espyes
But bearbaitings or Law exercise.
Therefore I'le leave it, and in the Country strife
Pleasure, now fled from London, to retive.
Do thou so too: and full not like a Bee
Thy thighs with honf, but as plenteously
As Russian Marchants, thy selfes whole vessell load,
And then at Winter retaile it here abroad.
Blesse us with Suffolks sweets; and as it is
Thy garden, make thy hive and warehouse this.
---John Donne

London Night

The sky above London
Last night over my house shone with two kinds of being
And poised between the external and the symbol
I saw Christ's imagined resurrection
Arrayed behind the real September moonlight.

My heart loved and was still,
And to the verge of Heaven so near I stood
That all my lifetime was made less than a moment
For no such Now comes ever with the years' flight.
Not in the grave where we laid our love shall we find him;
The adored one for whom the moonlight was a shroud
Has laid aside the raiment of clouds on the roofs of the houses
Elsewhere and far He died, but here, oh at heart, He rises!
---Kathleen Raine

London, 1802

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forefeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

--William Wordsworth

The Fields from Islington to Marybone

The fields from Islington to Marybone,
To Primrose Hill and Saint John's Wood,
Were builded over with pillars of gold,
And there Jerusalem's pillars stood.

Her little ones ran on the fields,
The Lamb of God among them seen,
And fair Jerusalem his bride,
Among the little meadows green.

Pancras and Kentish Town repose
Among her golden pillars high,
Among her golden arches which
Shine upon the starry sky.

The Jew's Harp house and the Green Man,
The ponds where boys to bathe delight,
The fields of cows by Willan's Farm,
Shine in Jerusalem's pleasant sight.

She walks upon our meadows green,
The Lamb of God walks by her side,
And every English child is seen
Children of Jesus and his Bride . . .

--William Blake

from "Prothalamion": viii

At length they all to merry London came,
To merry London, my most kindly nurse,
That to me gave this life's first native source:
Though from another place I take my name,
An house of auncient fame.
There when they came, whereas those bricky towers,
The which on Thames' broad aged back do ride,
Where now the studious lawyers have their bowers
There whilom wont the Templar Knights to bide,
Till they decayed through pride:
Next whereunto there stands a stately place,
Where oft I gained gifts and godly grace
Of that great Lord, which therein wont to dwell,
Whose want too well now feels my friendless case:
But, ah, here fits not well
Old woes but joys to tell
Against the bridal day, which is not long:
   Sweet Thames run softly, till I end my song.
   --Edmund Spenser

London

London, my beautiful,
It is not the sunset
Nor the pale green sky
Shimmering through the curtain
Of the silver birch,
Nor the quietness;
It is not the hopping
Of the little birds
Upon the lawn,
Nor the darkness
Stealing over all things
That moves me.

But as the moon creeps slowly
Over the tree-tops
Among the stars,
I think of her
And the glow her passing
Sheds on men.

London, my beautiful,
I will climb
Into the branches
To the moonlit tree-tops,
That my blood may be cooled
By the wind.
   --F. S. Flint

London Despair

This endless gray-roofed city, and each heart--
Each with its problems, urgent and apart--
And hearts unborn that wait to come again,
Each to its problems, urgent, and such pain.

Why cannot all of us together--why?--
Achieve the one simplicity: to die?
   --Frances Cornford
A Refusal to Mourn the Death, By Fire, of a Child in London

Never until the mankind making
Bird beast and flower
Fathering and all humbling darkness
Tells with silence the last light breaking
And the still hour
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness

And I must enter again the round
Zion of the water bead
And the synagogue of the ear of corn
Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
Or sow my salt seed
In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn

The majesty and burning of the child's death.
I shall not murder
The mankind of her going with a grave truth
Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
With any further
Elegy of innocence and youth.

Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
Robed in the long friends,
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
Secret by the unmourning water
Of the riding Thames.
After the first death, there is no other.

--Dylan Thomas

November Blue

O heavenly color, London town
Has blurred it from her skies;
And, hooded in an earthly brown,
Unheaven'd the city lies.
No longer, standard-like, this hue
Above the broad road flies;
Nor does the narrow street the blue
Wear, slender pennon-wise.

But when the gold and silver lamps
Color the London dew,
And, misted by the winter damps,
The shops shine bright, anew--
Blue comes to earth, it walks the street,
It dyes the wide air through;
A mimic sky about their feet
The throng go crowned with blue.

--Alice Meynell
from London Sonnets: III: The City Considered as a Tulip Tree

On the smooth steep escalator, four storeys'
Rise or fall, see the nimble people run;
From tube to tube their hats or skirts are blown
Their filaments stream undone

And yet such strands will seldom tangle; eyes
Avoid eyes and fix upon a moving stair
That takes them to the tulip beds strict yet
Supple in the English air.

A purple almost black, an honest pink,
Globed yellow cupped with its own aquamarine;
Bed after parted bed. The escalators
Stop now steeped in decent green.

--Carl Bode

Poem from London, 1941

The fading whistles outline our broken city
Against the dead chart and distant zodiac,
Against the decaying roads, empty and perilous,
That join our exile with the land we seek.
Kissed onward by the pistol, we all are exile,

Expatriate, wandering in the illusive streets
Of faked identity, which swing towards a past
That is no Indies regained by circuitous sea routes.

The bridges are down, the visas are invalid;
We cannot turn on our tracks away from fate.
I stand at the 'phone and listen in to death,
And dare not stuff my ears and ring off hate.

Yet I behold an angel like a falcon
Bearing a speaking flame across the dark
To sing in the dumb streets of cretin children
For the silly hearts that cannot even break.

And under the windows of a drunken pub
A man sits, listening, like a wind-squat tree,
Unnamed, his face a map of paper, his bone hands
Moulding from the burning voice a phoenix day.

--George Woodcock
Portrait D'Une Femme

Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea,
London has swept about you this score years
And bright ships left you this or that in fee:
Ideas, old gossip, oddments of all things,
Strange spars of knowledge and dimmed wares of price.
Great minds have sought you—lacking someone else.
You have been second always. Tragical?
No. You preferred it to the usual thing:
One dull man, dulling and uxorious,
One average mind—with one thought less, each year.
Oh, you are patient. I have seen you sit
Hours, where something might have floated up.
And now you pay one. Yes, you richly pay.
You are a person of some interest, one comes to you
And takes strange gain away:
Trophies fished up; some curious suggestion;
Fact that leads nowhere; and a tale or two,
Pregnant with mandrakes, or with something else
That might prove useful and yet never proves,
That never fits a corner or shows use,
Or finds its hour upon the loom of days:
The tarnished, gaudy, wonderful old work;
Idols and ambergris and rare inlays,
These are your riches, your great store; and yet
For all this sea-hoard of deciduous things,
Strange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff:
In the slow float of differing light and deep,
No! there is nothing! In the whole and all,
Nothing that’s quite your own.
Yet this is you.
--Ezra Pound

London Nightfall

I saw the shapes that stood upon the clouds:
And they were tiger-breasted, shot with light,
And all of them, lifting long trumpets together,
Blew over the city, for the night to come.
Down in the street, we floundered in the mud;
Above, in endless files, gold angels came
And stood upon the clouds, and blew their horns
For night.

Like a wet petal crumpled,
Twilight fell soddenly on the weary city;
The 'buses lurched and groaned,
The shops put up their doors.

But skywards, far aloft,
The angels, vanishing, waved broad plumes of gold,
Summoning spirits from a thousand hills
To pour the thick night out upon the earth.
--John Gould Fletcher
London Squares

To-night this city seems delirious. The air is fevered, hot and heavy—yet each street, each tortuous lane and slumbering stone-bound square smells of the open woods, so wild and sweet. Through the dim spaces, where each town-bred tree sweeps out, mysterious and tall and still, the country's passionate spirit—old and free—flings off the fetters of the calm and chill.

There in the garden, fauns leap out and sing—chant those strange sun-born songs from far away! With joyous ecstasy in this new spring, they cast the coats and top-hats of the day.

There by the railings, where the women pace with painted faces, passionless and dead, out of the dark Pan shows his leering face, mocks their large hats and faces painted red. Then as they walk away, he mocks their lives, racking each wearied soul with lost desires, and, cruelty more subtle, he contrives with aching memories of love's first fires to tune their hearts up to a different key. So, when they sleep, the withered years unfold, again, as children round a mother's knee they listen to their future as foretold, a future rich and innocent and gay.

Then wake up to the agony of day!
—Osbert Sitwell

Lines to a Dictator

London shall perish—arch and spire and wall. Thus you decreed. Her courts and gardens must be ravaged, and the insolent towers that thrust against your glory. Hovel and palace—all shall sway, shall tremble, till before the gust of your derisive laughter they shall fall, and hope grow cold and pride be ground to dust that once was sovereign and imperial.

So yesterday you spoke who had not known that cities can be built by more than hands, that spirit ramparts have more strength than stone. Now fearful you look out toward Dover sands and cry, amazed, 'The towers are overthrown, the walls have crumbled—but the city stands!'
—Mary Sinton Leitch
London Interior

Autumn is in the air,
The children are playing everywhere.

One dare not open this old door too wide;
It is so dark inside.
The hall smells of dust;
A narrow squirt of sunlight enters high,
Cold, yellow.
The floor creaks, and I hear a sigh,
Rise in the gloom and die.

Through the hall, far away,
I just can see
The dingy garden with its wall and tree.
A yellow cat is sitting on the wall
Blinking, toward the leaves that fall.
And now I hear a woman call
Some child from play.

Then all is still. Time must go
Ticking slow, glooming slow.

The evening will turn grey.
It is sad in London after two.
All, all the afternoon
What can old men, old women do?

It is sad in London when the gloom
Thickens, like wool,
In the corners of the room;
The sky is shot with steel,
Shot with blue.

The bells ring the slow time;
The chairs creak, the hours climb;
The sunlight lays a streak upon the floor.

---Harold Monro

London Excursion Station

We descend
Into a wall of green.
Straggling shapes;
Afterwards none are seen.

I find myself
Alone.
I look back:
The city has grown.
One grey wall
Windowed, unlit.
Heavily, night
Crushes the face of it.

I go on.
My memories freeze
Like birds' cry
In hollow trees.

I go on.
Up and outright
To the hostility
Of night.

--John Gould Fletcher

The Heap of Rags

One night when I went down
Thames' side, in London Town,
A heap of rags saw I,
And sat me down close by.
That thing could shout and bawl,
But showed no face at all;
When any steamer passed
And blew a loud shrill blast,
That heap of rags would sit
And make a sound like it;
When struck the clock's deep bell,
It made those peals as well.
When winds did moan around,
It mocked them with that sound.
When all was quiet, it
Fell into a strange fit;
Would sigh, and moan and roar,
It laughed, and blessed, and swore.
Yet that poor thing, I know,
Had neither friend nor foe;
Its blessing or its curse
Made no one better or worse.
I left it in that place--
The thing that showed no face.
Was it a man that had
Suffered till he went mad?
So many showers and not
One rainbow in the lot;
Too many bitter fears
To make a pearl from tears?

--W. H. Davies
The Lover to the Thames of London, to Favour his Lady Passing Thereon

Thou stately stream that with the swelling tide
'Gainst London walls incessantly dost beat,
Thou Thames, I say, where barge and boat doth ride,
And snow-white swans do fish for needful meat,

When so my Love, of force or pleasure, shall
Flit on thy flood as custom is to do,
Seek not with dread her courage to appal,
But calm thy tide, and smoothly let it go,
As she may joy, arrived to siker shore,
To pass the pleasant stream she did before.

To welter up and surge in wrathful wise,
As did the flood where Helle drenched was
Would but procure defame of thee to rise.
Wherefore let all such ruthless rigour pass,
So wish I that thou mayst with bending side
Have power for aye in wonted gulf to glide.

--George Turberville

from The Prelude: Book VII. Residence in London

Rise up, thou monstrous anthill on the plain
Of a too busy world! Before me flow,
Thou endless stream of men and moving things!
Thy everyday appearance, as it strikes--
With wonder heightened, or sublimed by awe--
On strangers, of all ages; the quick dance
Of colors, lights, and forms; the deafening din;
The comers and the goers face to face,
Face after face; the string of dazzling wares,
Shop after shop, with symbols, blazoned names,
And all the tradesman's honors overhead:
Here, fronts of houses, like a title page,
With letters huge inscribed from top to toe,
Stationed above the door, like guardian saints;
There, allegoric shapes, female or male,
Or physiognomies of real men,
Land warriors, kings, or admirals of the sea,
Boyle, Shakespeare, Newton, or the attractive head
Of some quack doctor, famous in his day.

--William Wordsworth

Walking in London

Walking between the ruined walls
Where the stone falls and the dust blows
With the wind from the black desert
Of mankind we do not see
Or do not want to see
I drift with a brown leaf
Whirled by the unseen storm about me,
Leaf in a green world that falls.
Long before autumn because the time
Is a dry season of withered hearts
Without love, without the beating and ecstatic rain.

And in my pockets are poems rustling
Like the solitary dry leaf, and a little sand
From last year's beaches, and my eyes
See the images of the real and the unreal city
Floating over the river, remembered
Like the picture we cannot forget
Of the haughty sneering cavalier,
Or the outstretched arms of the crucified man.

--Wrey Gardiner

London, 1941

Half masonry, half pain; her head
From which the plaster breaks away
Like flesh from the rough bone, is turned
Upon a neck of stones; her eyes
Are lidless windows of smashed glass,
Each star-shaped pupil
Giving upon a vault so vast
How can the head contain it?

The raw smoke
Is inter-wreathing through the jaggedness
Of her sky-broken panes, and mirror'd
Fires dance like madmen on the splinters.

All else is stillness save the dancing splinters
And the slow inter-wreathing of the smoke.

Her breasts are crumbling brick where the black ivy
Had clung like a fantastic child for succour
And now hangs draggled with long peels of paper,
Fire-crisp, fire-faded awnings of limp paper,
Repeating still their ghosted leaf and lily.

Grass for her cold skins' hair, the grass of cities
Wilted and swaying on her plaster brow
From winds that sweep along the streets of cities:

Across a world of sudden fear and firelight
She looms erect, the great stones at her throat,
Her rusted ribs like railings round her heart;
A figure of dry wounds--of winter wounds--
O mother of wounds; half masonry, half pain.

--Mervyn Peake
London

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind's forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackning Church appalls;
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born Infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

--William Blake

Annus Mirabilis (1902)

Daylight was down, and up the cool
Bare heaven the moon, o'er roof elm,
Daughter of dusk most wonderful,
Went mounting to her realm:
And night was only half begun
Round Edwardes Square in Kensington.

A Sabbath-calm possessed her face,
An even glow her bosom filled;
High in her solitary place
The huntress-heart was stilled:
With bow and arrows all laid down
She stood and looked on London town.

Nay, how can sight of us give rest
To that far-travelled heart, or draw
The musings of that tranquil breast?
I thought--and gazing, saw
Far up above me, high, oh, high,
From south to north a heron fly!

Oh, swiftly answered! yonder flew
The wings of freedom and of hope!
Little of London town he knew,
The far horizon was his scope.
High up he sails, and sees beneath
The glimmering ponds of Hampstead Heath,
Hendon, and farther out afield
Low water-means are in his ken,
And lonely pools by Harrow Weald,
And solitudes unloved of men,
Where he his fisher's spear dips down:
Little he knows of London town.

So small, with all its miles of sin,
Is London to the grey-winged bird;
A cuckoo called at Lincoln's Inn
Last April; in Soho was heard
The missel-thrush with throat of glee
And nightingales at Battersea.

--Laurence Housman

Poverty in London

By numbers here from shame or censure free,
All crimes are safe, but hated poverty.
This, only this, the rigid law pursues,
This, only this, provokes the snarling muse.
The sober trader at a tatter'd cloak
Wakes from his dream, and labours for a joke;
With brisker air the silken courtiers gaze,
And turn the varied taunt a thousand ways.
Of all the griefs that harass the distress'd,
Sure the most bitter is a scornful jest;
Fate never wounds more deep the gen'rous heart
Than when a blockhead's insult points the dart.

Has heaven reserv'd, in pity to the poor,
No pathless waste, or undiscover'd shore;
No secret island in the boundless main?
No peaceful desert yet unclaim'd by Spain?
Quick let us rise, the happy seats explore,
And bear oppression's insolence no more.
This mournful truth is ev'ry where confess'd,
Slow rises worth, by poverty depress'd:
But here more slow, where all are slaves to gold,
Where looks are merchandise, and smiles are sold;
Where won by bribes, by flatteries implor'd,
The groom retails the favours of his lord...

--Samuel Johnson

To the City of London

London, thou art of townes A per se.
Sovereign of cities, semeliest in sight,
Of high renown, riches, and royaltie;
Of lordis, barons, and many goodly knyght;
Of most delectable lusty ladies bright;
Of famous prelatis in habitis clerical;
Of merchantauntis full of substaunce and myght:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.
Gladdith anon, thou lusty Troy Novaunt,
Citie that some tyme cleped was New Troy,
In all the erth, imperiaall as thou stant,
Prynoesse of townes, of pleasure, and of joy,
A richer restith under no Christen roy;
For manly power, with craftis naturall,
Fourmeth none fairer sith the flode of Noy:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

Gemme of all joy, jasper of jocunditie,
Most myghty carbuncle of vertue and valour;
Strong Troy in vigour and in strenuytie;
Of royall cities rose and geraflour;
Empresse of townes, exalt in honour;
In beawtie beryng the crone imperiaall;
Sweete paradise precelling in pleasure:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

Above all ryvers thy Ryver hath renowne,
Whose beryall stremys, pleaentaunt and preclare,
Under thy lusty wallys renneth down,
Where many a swanne doth swymme with wyngis fare;
Where many a barge doth saile, and row with are,
Where many a ship doth rest with toppe-royall.
O! towme of townes, patrone and not-compare:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

Upon thy lusty Brigge of pylers white
Been mercham~tts full royall to behold;
Upon thy streitis goth many a semely knyght
In velvet gowaes and cheynes of fyne gold.
By Julys Cesar thy Tour founded of old
May be the hous of Mars victoryall,
Whbs artillary with tongue may not be told:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

Strong be thy wallis that about the standis;
Wise be the people that within the dwellis;
Fresh is thy ryver with his lusty strandis;
Blith be thy chirches, wele sownyng be thy bellis;
Riche be thy merchamts in substance that excellis
Fair be thy wives, right lovesom, white and small;
Clere be thy virgyns, lusty under kellis:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

Thy famous Maire, by pryncely governaunce,
With swerd of justice the rulith prudently
No Lord of Parys, Venyce, or Floraunce
In dignytie or honoure goeth to hym nye.
He is exempler, loode-ster, and guye;
Principall patrone and roose orygynalle,
Above all Maires as maister moost worthy:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

--William Dunbar
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