

CAWEIN MADISON JULIUS

MYTH AND ROMANCE:
BEING A BOOK OF VERSES

Madison Cawein

**Myth and Romance:
Being a Book of Verses**

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PROEM

There is no rhyme that is half so sweet
As the song of the wind in the rippling wheat;
There is no metre that's half so fine
As the lilt of the brook under rock and vine;
And the loveliest lyric I ever heard
Was the wildwood strain of a forest bird.—
If the wind and the brook and the bird would teach
My heart their beautiful parts of speech.
And the natural art that they say these with,
My soul would sing of beauty and myth
In a rhyme and a metre that none before
Have sung in their love, or dreamed in their lore,
And the world would be richer one poet the more.

VISIONS AND VOICES

Myth and Romance

I

When I go forth to greet the glad-faced Spring,
Just at the time of opening apple-buds,
When brooks are laughing, winds are whispering,
On babbling hillsides or in warbling woods,
There is an unseen presence that eludes:—
Perhaps a Dryad, in whose tresses cling
The loamy odors of old solitudes,
Who, from her beechen doorway, calls; and leads
My soul to follow; now with dimpling words
Of leaves; and now with syllables of birds;
While here and there—is it her limbs that swing?
Or restless sunlight on the moss and weeds?

II

Or, haply, 't is a Naiad now who slips,
Like some white lily, from her fountain's glass,
While from her dripping hair and breasts and hips,
The moisture rains cool music on the grass.
Her have I heard and followed, yet, alas!
Have seen no more than the wet ray that dips
The shivered waters, wrinkling where I pass;
But, in the liquid light, where she doth hide,
I have beheld the azure of her gaze
Smiling; and, where the orbing ripple plays,
Among her minnows I have heard her lips,
Bubbling, make merry by the waterside.

III

Or now it is an Oread—whose eyes
Are constellated dusk—who stands confessed,
As naked as a flow'r; her heart's surprise,
Like morning's rose, mantling her brow and breast:

She, shrinking from my presence, all distressed
Stands for a startled moment ere she flies,
Her deep hair blowing, up the mountain crest,
Wild as a mist that trails along the dawn.
And is't her footfalls lure me? or the sound
Of airs that stir the crisp leaf on the ground?
And is't her body glimmers on yon rise?
Or dog-wood blossoms snowing on the lawn?

IV

Now't is a Satyr piping serenades
On a slim reed. Now Pan and Faun advance
Beneath green-hollowed roofs of forest glades,
Their feet gone mad with music: now, perchance,
Sylvanus sleeping, on whose leafy trance
The Nymphs stand gazing in dim ambuscades
Of sun-embodied perfume.—Myth, Romance,
Where'er I turn, reach out bewildering arms,
Compelling me to follow. Day and night
I hear their voices and behold the light
Of their divinity that still evades,
And still allures me in a thousand forms.

Genius Loci

I

What wood-god, on this water's mossy curb,
Lost in reflections of earth's loveliness,
Did I, just now, unconsciously disturb?
I, who haphazard, wandering at a guess,
Came on this spot, wherein, with gold and flame
Of buds and blooms, the season writes its name.—
Ah, me! could I have seen him ere alarm
Of my approach aroused him from his calm!
As he, part Hamadryad and, mayhap,
Part Faun, lay here; who left the shadow warm
As wildwood rose, and filled the air with balm
Of his sweet breath as with ethereal sap.

II

Does not the moss retain some vague impress,
Green dented in, of where he lay or trod?
Do not the flow'rs, so reticent, confess
With conscious looks the contact of a god?
Does not the very water garrulously
Boast the indulgence of a deity?
And, hark! in burly beech and sycamore
How all the birds proclaim it! and the leaves
Rejoice with clappings of their myriad hands!
And shall not I believe, too, and adore,
With such wide proof?—Yea, though my soul perceives
No evident presence, still it understands.

III

And for a while it moves me to lie down
Here on the spot his god-head sanctified:
Mayhap some dream he dreamed may lingert brown
And young as joy, around the forestside;
Some dream within whose heart lives no disdain
For such as I whose love is sweet and sane;
That may repeat, so none but I may hear—

As one might tell a pearl-strung rosary—
Some epic that the trees have learned to croon,
Some lyric whispered in the wild-flower's ear,
Whose murmurous lines are sung by bird and bee,
And all the insects of the night and noon.

IV

For, all around me, upon field and hill,
Enchantment lies as of mysterious flutes;
As if the music of a god's good-will
Had taken on material attributes
In blooms, like chords; and in the water-gleam,
That runs its silvery scales from stream to stream;
In sunbeam bars, up which the butterfly,
A golden note, vibrates then flutters on—
Inaudible tunes, blown on the pipes of Pan,
That have assumed a visible entity,
And drugged the air with beauty so, a Faun,
Behold, I seem, and am no more a man.

The Rain-Crow

I

Can freckled August,—drowsing warm and blonde
Beside a wheat-shock in the white-topped mead,
In her hot hair the oxeyed daisies wound,—
O bird of rain, lend aught but sleepy heed
To thee? when no plumed weed, no feather'd seed
Blows by her; and no ripple breaks the pond,
That gleams like flint between its rim of grasses,
Through which the dragonfly forever passes
Like splintered diamond.

II

Drouth weights the trees, and from the farmhouse eaves
The locust, pulse-beat of the summer day,
Throbs; and the lane, that shambles under leaves
Limp with the heat—a league of ruddy way—
Is lost in dust; and sultry scents of hay
Breathe from the panting meadows heaped with sheaves—
Now, now, O bird, what hint is there of rain,
In thirsty heaven or on burning plain,
That thy keen eye perceives?

III

But thou art right. Thou prophesiest true.
For hardly hast thou ceased thy forecasting,
When, up the western fierceness of scorched blue,
Great water-carrier winds their buckets bring
Brimming with freshness. How their dippers ring
And flash and rumble! lavishing dark dew
On corn and forestland, that, streaming wet,
Their hilly backs against the downpour set,
Like giants vague in view.

IV

The butterfly, safe under leaf and flower,
Has found a roof, knowing how true thou art;
The bumble-bee, within the last half-hour,
Has ceased to hug the honey to its heart;
While in the barnyard, under shed and cart,
Brood-hens have housed.—But I, who scorned thy power,
Barometer of the birds,—like August there,—
Beneath a beech, dripping from foot to hair,
Like some drenched truant, cower.

The Harvest Moon

I

Globed in Heav'n's tree of azure, golden mellow
As some round apple hung
High in hesperian boughs, thou hangest yellow
The branch-like mists among:
Within thy light a sunburnt youth, named Health,
Rests 'mid the tasseled shocks, the tawny stubble;
And by his side, clad on with rustic wealth
Of field and farm, beneath thy amber bubble,
A nut-brown maid, Content, sits smiling still:
While through the quiet trees,
The mossy rocks, the grassy hill,
Thy silvery spirit glides to yonder mill,
Around whose wheel the breeze
And shimmering ripples of the water play,
As, by their mother, little children may.

II

Sweet spirit of the moon, who walkest,—lifting
Exhaustless on thy arm,
A pearly vase of fire,—through the shifting
Cloud-halls of calm and storm,
Pour down thy blossoms! let me hear them come,
Pelting with noiseless light the twinkling thickets,
Making the darkness audible with the hum
Of many insect creatures, grigs and crickets:
Until it seems the elves hold revelries
By haunted stream and grove;
Or, in the night's deep peace,
The young-old presence of Earth's full increase
Seems telling thee her love,
Ere, lying down, she turns to rest, and smiles,
Hearing thy heart beat through the myriad miles.

The Old Water-Mill

Wild ridge on ridge the wooded hills arise,
Between whose breezy vistas gulfs of skies
Pilot great clouds like towering argosies,
And hawk and buzzard breast the azure breeze.
With many a foaming fall and glimmering reach
Of placid murmur, under elm and beech,
The creek goes twinkling through long glows and glooms
Of woodland quiet, popped with perfumes:
The creek, in whose clear shallows minnow-schools
Glitter or dart; and by whose deeper pools
The blue kingfishers and the herons haunt;
That, often startled from the freckled flaunt
Of blackberry-lilies—where they feed and hide—
Trail a lank flight along the forestside
With eery clangor. Here a sycamore,
Smooth, wave-uprooted, builds from shore to shore
A headlong bridge; and there, a storm-hurled oak
Lays a long dam, where sand and gravel choke
The water's lazy way. Here mistflower blurs
Its bit of heaven; there the oxeye stirs
Its gloaming hues of bronze and gold; and here,
A gray cool stain, like dawn's own atmosphere,
The dim wild-carrot lifts its crumpled crest:
And over all, at slender flight or rest,
The dragon-flies, like coruscating rays
Of lapis-lazuli and chrysoprase,
Drowsily sparkle through the summer days;
And, dewlap-deep, here from the noontide heat
The bell-hung cattle find a cool retreat:
And through the willows girdling the hill,
Now far, now near, borne as the soft winds will,
Comes the low rushing of the water-mill.
Ah, lovely to me from a little child,
How changed the place! wherein once, undefiled,
The glad communion of the sky and stream
Went with me like a presence and a dream.
Where once the brambled meads and orchardlands
Poured ripe abundance down with mellow hands
Of summer; and the birds of field and wood
Called to me in a tongue I understood;
And in the tangles of the old rail-fence
Even the insect tumult had some sense,
And every sound a happy eloquence;
And more to me than wisest books can teach,
The wind and water said; whose words did reach

My soul, addressing their magnificent speech,
Raucous and rushing, from the old mill-wheel,
That made the rolling mill-cogs snore and reel,
Like some old ogre in a fairy-tale
Nodding above his meat and mug of ale.

How memory takes me back the ways that lead—
As when a boy—through woodland and through mead!
To orchards fruited; or to fields in bloom;
Or briary fallows, like a mighty room,
Through which the winds swing censers of perfume,
And where deep blackberries spread miles of fruit;—
A splendid feast, that stayed the ploughboy's foot
When to the tasseling acres of the corn
He drove his team, fresh in the primrose morn;
And from the liberal banquet, nature lent,
Took dewy handfuls as he whistling went.—
A boy once more I stand with sunburnt feet
And watch the harvester sweep down the wheat;
Or laze with warm limbs in the unstacked straw
Nearby the thresher, whose insatiate maw
Devours the sheaves, hot drawling out its hum—
Like some great sleepy bee, above a bloom,
Made drunk with honey—while, grown big with grain,
The bulging sacks receive the golden rain.
Again I tread the valley, sweet with hay,
And hear the bob-white calling far away,
Or wood-dove cooing in the elder-brake;
Or see the sassafras bushes madly shake
As swift, a rufous instant, in the glen
The red-fox leaps and gallops to his den;
Or, standing in the violet-colored gloam,
Hear roadways sound with holiday riding home
From church, or fair, or bounteous barbecue,
Which the whole country to some village drew.

How spilled with berries were its summer hills,
And strewn with walnuts were its autumn rills—
And chestnut burs! fruit of the spring's long flowers,
When from their tops the trees seemed streaming showers
Of slender silver, cool, crepuscular,
And like a nebulous radiance shone afar.
And maples! how their sappy hearts would gush
Broad troughs of syrup, when the winter bush
Steamed with the sugar-kettle, day and night,
And all the snow was streaked with firelight.
Then it was glorious! the mill-dam's edge,
One slant of frosty crystal, laid a ledge
Of pearl across; above which, sleeted trees

Tossed arms of ice, that, clashing in the breeze,
Tinkled the ringing creek with icicles,
Thin as the peal of Elfland's Sabbath bells:
A sound that in my city dreams I hear,
That brings before me, under skies that clear,
The old mill in its winter garb of snow,
Its frozen wheel, a great hoar beard below,
And its West windows, two deep eyes aglow.

Ah, ancient mill, still do I picture o'er
Thy cobwebbed stairs and loft and grain-strewn floor;
Thy door,—like some brown, honest hand of toil,
And honorable with labor of the soil,—
Forever open; through which, on his back
The prosperous farmer bears his bursting sack.
And while the miller measures out his toll,
Again I hear, above the cogs' loud roll,—
That makes stout joist and rafter groan and sway,—
The harmless gossip of the passing day:
Good country talk, that tells how so-and-so
Has died or married; how curculio
And codling-moth have ruined half the fruit,
And blight plays mischief with the grapes to boot;
Or what the news from town; next county fair;
How well the crops are looking everywhere:
Now this, now that, on which their interests fix,
Prospects for rain or frost, and politics.
While, all around, the sweet smell of the meal
Filters, warm-pouring from the grinding wheel
Into the bin; beside which, mealy white,
The miller looms, dim in the dusty light.

Again I see the miller's home, between
The crinkling creek and hills of beechen green:
Again the miller greets me, gaunt and brown,
Who oft o'erawed me with his gray-browed frown
And rugged mien: again he tries to reach
My youthful mind with fervid scriptural speech.—
For he, of all the country-side confessed,
The most religious was and happiest;
A Methodist, and one whom faith still led,
No books except the Bible had he read—
At least so seemed it to my younger head.—
All things in earth and heav'n he'd prove by this,
Be it a fact or mere hypothesis;
For to his simple wisdom, reverent,
"The Bible says" was all of argument.—
God keep his soul! his bones were long since laid
Among the sunken gravestones in the shade

Of those black-lichened rocks, that wall around
The family burying-ground with cedars crowned;
Where bristling teasel and the brier combine
With clambering wood-rose and the wild-grape vine
To hide the stone whereon his name and dates
Neglect, with mossy hand, obliterates.

Anthem of Dawn

I

Then up the orient heights to the zenith, that balanced the crescent,—
Up and far up and over,—the heaven grew erubescant,
Vibrant with rose and with ruby from the hands of the harpist Dawn,
Smiting symphonic fire on the firmament's barbiton:
And the East was a priest who adored with offerings of gold and of
gems,
And a wonderful carpet unrolled for the inaccessible hems
Of the glistening robes of her limbs; that, lily and amethyst,
Swept glorying on and on through temples of cloud and mist.

II

Then out of the splendor and richness, that burned like a magic stone,
The torrent suffusion that deepened and dazzled and broadened and
shone,
The pomp and the pageant of color, triumphal procession of glare,
The sun, like a king in armor, breathing splendor from feet to hair,
Stood forth with majesty girdled, as a hero who towers afar
Where the bannered gates are bristling hells and the walls are roaring
war:
And broad on the back of the world, like a Cherubin's fiery blade,
The effulgent gaze of his aspect fell in glittering accolade.

III

Then billowing blue, like an ocean, rolled from the shores of morn to
even:
And the stars, like rafts, went down: and the moon, like a ghost-ship,
driven,
A feather of foam, from port to port of the cloud-built isles that dotted,
With pearl and cameo, bays of the day, her canvas webbed and rotted,
Lay lost in the gulf of heaven: while over her mixed and melted
The beautiful children of Morn, whose bodies are opal-belted;
The beautiful daughters of Dawn, who, over and under, and after
The rivered radiance, wrestled; and rainbowed heaven with laughter
Of halcyon sapphire.—O Dawn! thou visible mirth,
And hallelujah of Heaven! hosanna of Earth!

Dithyrambics

I

TEMPEST

Wrapped round of the night, as a monster is wrapped of the ocean,
Down, down through vast storeys of darkness, behold, in the tower
Of the heaven, the thunder! on stairways of cloudy commotion,
Colossal of tread, like a giant, from echoing hour to hour
Goes striding in rattling armor ...
The Nymph, at her billow-roofed dormer
Of foam; and the Sylvan—green-housed—at her window of leaves
appears;
—As a listening woman, who hears
The approach of her lover, who comes to her arms in the night;
And, loosening the loops of her locks,
With eyes full of love and delight,
From the couch of her rest in ardor and haste arises.—
The Nymph, as if breathed of the tempest, like fire surprises
The riotous bands of the rocks,
That face with a roar the shouting charge of the seas.
The Sylvan,—through troops of the trees,
Whose clamorous clans with gnarly bosoms keep hurling
Themselves on the guns of the wind,—goes wheeling and whirling.
The Nymph, of the waves' exultation upheld, her green tresses
Knotted with flowers of the hollow white foam, dives screaming;
Then bounds to the arms of the storm, who boisterously presses
Her hair and wild form to his breast that is panting and streaming.
The Sylvan,—hard-pressed by the wind, the Pan-footed air,—
On the violent backs of the hills,—
Like a flame that tosses and thrills
From peak to peak when the world of spirits is out,—
Is borne, as her rapture wills,
With glittering gesture and shout:
Now here in the darkness, now there,
From the rain-like sweep of her hair,—
Bewilderingly volleyed o'er eyes and o'er lips,—
To the lambent swell of her limbs, her breasts and her hips,
She flashes her beautiful nakedness out in the glare
Of the tempest that bears her away,—
That bears me away!
Away, over forest and foam, over tree and spray,
Far swifter than thought, far swifter than sound or than flame.

Over ocean and pine,
In arms of tumultuous shadow and shine ...
Though Sylvan and Nymph do not
Exist, and only what
Of terror and beauty I feel and I name
As parts of the storm, the awe and the rapture divine
That here in the tempest are mine,—
The two are the same, the two are forever the same.

II

CALM

Beautiful-bosomed, O night, in thy noon
Move with majesty onward! bearing, as lightly
As a singer may bear the notes of an exquisite tune,
The stars and the moon
Through the clerestories high of the heaven, the firmament's halls;
Under whose sapphirine walls,
June, hesperian June,
Robed in divinity wanders. Daily and nightly
The turquoise touch of her robe, that the violets star,
The silvery fall of her feet, that lilies are,
Fill the land with languorous light and perfume.—
Is it the melody mute of burgeoning leaf and of bloom?
The music of Nature, that silently shapes in the gloom
Immaterial hosts
Of spirits that have the flowers and leaves in their keep,
That I hear, that I hear?
Invisible ghosts,—
Who whisper in leaves and glimmer in blossoms and hover
In color and fragrance and loveliness, breathed from the deep
World-soul of the mother,
Nature;—who, over and over,
Both sweetheart and lover,
Goes singing her songs from one sweet month to the other,—
That appear, that appear?
In forest and field, on hill-land and lea,
As crystallized harmony,
Materialized melody,
An uttered essence peopling far and near
The hyaline atmosphere?...
Behold how it sprouts from the grass and blooms from flower and tree!
In waves of diaphanous moonlight and mist,
In fugue upon fugue of gold and of amethyst,
Around me, above me it spirals; now slower, now faster,

Like symphonies born of the thought of a musical master.—
—O music of Earth! O God who the music inspired!
Let me breathe of the life of thy breath!
And so be fulfilled and attired
In resurrection, triumphant o'er time and o'er death!

Hymn to Desire

I

Mother of visions, with lineaments dulcet as numbers
Breathed on the eyelids of love by music that slumbers,
Secretly, sweetly, O presence of fire and snow,
Thou comest mysterious,
In beauty imperious,
Clad on with dreams and the light of no world that we know.
Deep to my innermost soul am I shaken,
Helplessly shaken and tossed,
And of thy tyrannous yearnings so utterly taken,
My lips, unsatisfied, thirst;
Mine eyes are accurst
With longings for visions that far in the night are forsaken;
And mine ears, in listening lost,
Yearn, yearn for the note of a chord that will never awaken.

II

Like palpable music thou comest, like moonlight; and far,—
Resonant bar upon bar,—
The vibrating lyre
Of the spirit responds with melodious fire,
As thy fluttering fingers now grasp it and ardently shake,
With flame and with flake,
The chords of existence, the instrument star-sprung.
Whose frame is of clay, so wonderfully molded from mire.

III

Vested with vanquishment, come, O Desire, Desire!
Breathe in this harp of my soul the audible angel of love!
Make of my heart an Israfel burning above,
A lute for the music of God, that lips, which are mortal, but stammer!
Smite every rapturous wire
With golden delirium, rebellion and silvery clamor,
Crying—"Awake! awake!
Too long hast thou slumbered! too far from the regions of glamour,
With its mountains of magic, its fountains of Faëry, the spar-sprung,

Hast thou wandered away, O Heart!
Come, oh, come and partake
Of necromance banquets of beauty; and slake
Thy thirst in the waters of art,
That are drawn from the streams
Of love and of dreams.

IV

"Come, oh, come!
No longer shall language be dumb!
Thy vision shall grasp—
As one doth the glittering hasp
Of a dagger made splendid with gems and with gold—
The wonder and richness of life, not anguish and hate of it merely.
And out of the stark
Eternity, awful and dark,
Immensity silent and cold,—
Universe-shaking as trumpets, or thunderous metals
That cymbal; yet pensive and pearly
And soft as the rosy unfolding of petals,
Or crumbling aroma of blossoms that wither too early,—
The majestic music of Death, where he plays
On the organ of eons and days."

Music

Thou, oh, thou!
Thou of the chorded shell and golden plectrum! thou
Of the dark eyes and pale pacific brow!
Music, who by the plangent waves,
Or in the echoing night of labyrinthine caves,
Or on God's mountains, lonely as the stars,
Touchest reverberant bars
Of immemorial sorrow and amaze;—
Keeping regret and memory awake,
And all the immortal ache
Of love that leans upon the past's sweet days
In retrospection!—now, oh, now,
Interpreter and heart-physician, thou,
Who gazest on the heaven and the hell
Of life, and singest each as well,

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