STORM AND BATTLE

(FROM EREBOTHREUS)

Let us lift up the strength of our hearts in song,
And our souls to the height of the darkling day.
If the wind in our eyes blow blood for spray,
Be the spirit that breathes in us life more strong,
Though the prow reel round and the helm point wrong,
And sharp reefs whiten the shoreward way.

For the steersman time sits hidden astern,
With dark hand plying the rudder of doom,
And the surf-smoke under it flies like fume
As the blast shears off and the oar-blades churn
The foam of our lives that to death return,
Blown back as they break to the gulfing gloom.

What cloud upon heaven is arisen, what shadow,
what sound,
From the world beyond earth, from the night underground,
That scatters from wings unbeholden the weight of its darkness around?
For the sense of my spirit is broken, and blinded its eye,
As the soul of a sick man ready to die,
With fear of the hour that is on me, with dread if an end be not nigh.

O Earth, O Gods of the land, have ye heart now to see and to hear
What slays with terror mine eyesight and seals mine ear?
O fountains of streams everlasting, are all ye not shrunk up and withered for fear?

Lo, night is arisen on the noon, and her hounds are in quest by day,
And the world is fulfilled of the noise of them crying for their prey,
And the sun’s self stricken in heaven, and cast out of his course as a blind man astray.

From east to west of the south sea-line
Glitters the lightning of spears that shine;
As a storm-cloud swolen that comes up from the skirts of the sea,
By the wind for helmsman to shoreward ferried,
So black behind them the live storm serried
Shakes earth with the tramp of its foot, and the terror to be.
Shall the sea give death whom the land gave birth?
O Earth, fair mother, O sweet live Earth,
Hide us again in thy womb from the waves of it, help us or hide.
As a sword is the heart of the God thy brother,
But thine as the heart of a new-made mother,
To deliver thy sons from his ravin, and rage of his tide.

O strong north wind, the pilot of cloud and rain,
For the gift we gave thee what gift hast thou given us again?
O God dark-winged, deep-throated, a terror to forth-faring ships by night,
What bride-song is this that is blown on the blast of thy breath?
A gift but of grief to thy kinsmen, a song but of death,
For the bride’s folk weeping, and woe for her father, who finds thee against him in fight.

Turn back from us, turn thy battle, take heed of our cry,
Let thy dread breath sound, and the waters of war be dry;
Let thy strong wrath shatter the strength of our foemen, the sword of their strength and the shield;
As vapours in heaven, or as waves or the wrecks of ships,
So break thou the ranks of their spears with the breath of thy lip,
Till their corpses have covered and clothed as with raiment the face of the sword-ploughed field.

O son of the rose-red morning, O God twin-born with the day,
O wind with the young sun waking, and winged for the same wide way,
Give up not the house of thy kin to the host thou hast marshalled from northward for prey.

From the cold of thy cradle in Thrace, from the mists of the fountains of night,
From the bride-bed of dawn whence day leaps laughing, on fire for his flight,
Come down with their doom in thine hand on the ships thou hast brought up against us to fight.

For now not in word but in deed is the harvest of spears begun,
And its clamour outbellows the thunder, its lightning outlightens the sun.
From the springs of the morn'ing it thunders and lightens across and afar
To the wave where the moonset ends and the fall of the last low star.
With a trampling of drenched red hoofs and an earthquake of men that meet,
Strong war sets hand to the scythe, and the furrows take fire from his feet.
Earth groans from her great rent heart, and the hollows of rocks are afraid,
And the mountains are moved, and the valleys as waves in a storm-wind swayed.
From the roots of the hills to the plain's dim verge and the dark loud shore,
Air shudders with shrill spears crossing, and hurtling of wheels that roar.
As the grinding of teeth in the jaws of a lion that foam as they gnash
Is the shriek of the axles that loosen, the shock of th' poies that crash.
The dense manes darken and glitter, the mouths of the mad steeds champ,
Their heads flash blind through the battle, and death's foot rings in their tramp.
For a fourfold host upon earth and in heaven is arrayed for the fight,
Clouds ruining in thunder and armies encountering as clouds in the night.
Mine ears are amazed with the terror of trumpets, with darkness mine eyes,
At the sound of the sea's host charging that deafens the roar of the sky's.
White frontlet is dashed upon frontlet, and horse against horse reels hurled,
And the gorge of the gulfs of the battle is wide for the spoil of the world.

And the meadows are cumbered with shipwreck of chariots that founder on land,
And the horsemen are broken with breach as of breakers, and scattered as sand.
Through the roar and recoil of the charges that mingle their cries and confound,
Like fire are the notes of the trumpets that flash through the darkness of sound.
As the swing of the sea churned yellow that sways with the wind as it swells
Is the lift and relapse of the wave of the chargers that clash with their bells;
And the clang of the sharp shrill brass through the burst of the wave as it shocks
Rings clean as the clear wind’s cry through the roar of the surge on the rocks:
And the heads of the steeds in their headgear of war, and their corsleted breasts,
Gleam broad as the brows of the billows that brighten the storm with their crests,
Gleam dread as their bosoms that heave to the shipwrecking wind as they rise,
Filled full of the terror and thunder of water, that slays as it dies.
So dire is the glare of their foreheads, so fearful the fire of their breath,
And the light of their eyeballs enkindled so bright with the lightnings of death;
And the foam of their mouths as the sea's when the jaws of its gulf are as graves,
And the ridge of their necks as the wind-shaken mane on the ridges of waves:
And their fetlocks afire as they rear drip thick with a dewfall of blood.
As the lips of the rearing breaker with froth of the manslaying flood.
And the whole plain reels and resounds as the fields of the sea by night.
When the stroke of the wind falls darkling, and death is the seafarer's light.

But thou, fair beauty of heaven, dear face of the day nigh dead,
What horror hath hidden thy glory, what hand hath muffled thine head?
O sun, with what song shall we call thee, or ward off thy wrath by what name,
With what prayer shall we seek to thee, soothe with what incense, assuage with what gift,
If thy light be such only as lightens to deathward the seaman adrift
With the fire of his house for a beacon, that foemen have wasted with flame?
Arise now, lift up thy light; give ear to us, put forth thine hand,
Reach toward us thy torch of deliverance, a lamp for the night of the land.
Thine eye is the light of the living, no lamp for the dead;
O, lift up the light of thine eye on the dark of our dread.
Who hath blinded thee? who hath prevailed on thee?
who hath ensnared?
Who hath broken thy bow, and the shafts for thy battle prepared?
Have they found out a fetter to bind thee, a chain for thine arm that was bared?
Be the name of thy conqueror set forth, and the might of thy master declared.
O God, fair God of the morning, O glory of day,
What ails thee to cast from thy forehead its garland away?
To pluck from thy temples their chaplet enwreathed of the light,
And bind on the brows of thy godhead a frontlet of night?
THOU hast loosened the necks of thine horses, and
goaded their flanks with affright,
To the race of a course that we know not on ways that
are hid from our sight.
As a wind through the darkness the wheels of their
chariot are whirled,
And the light of its passage is night on the face of
the world.
And there falls from the wings of thy glory no help
from on high,
But a shadow that smites us with fear and desire of
thine eye.
For our hearts are as reeds that a wind on the water
bows down and goes by,
To behold not thy comfort in heaven that hath left us,
untimely to die.