

The Poet's Sweven

That tragic glade – those waving limbs in breeze –
And breathing gales, whistled from welkin-source...
How might I speak what gloom of ancient dreams
Did rest upon that vision of a corpse

In landscape all abandoned – every soul,
The farmer, smith, and soldier, lord and man
Departed, letting vines and thorns to grow,
Leaving wild weeds to riot on the land –

Except to tell how bade I by her form,
That lifeless bride, the wife that was to be,
Half-clothed on grass, whom beauty did adorn,
A piteous beauty, which should shortly flee

Like shade unto the dark gates. Blood and bile
Are rivers that flow 'fore the door of death,
And stain the heels of all those souls who file
Like captives down to realm of dismal rest:

A horrid bile and wrath, a thunderhead –
The shrieking of a shadow-world of winds –
A delicate pity, raging of the dead –
The blood-smear'd lass – the clamor, woe, and sin!

All-Father sat, his seat perched on the clouds;
All purple shone the dusk; his gesture showed
In wilderness a mournful, muffled crowd,
A mass of wights who smote their breasts with blows

And wept in multitudes, and sank to knees;
And I did weep, and mingled with the blood
Upon bride's skin my tears of ceaseless grief,
Cool tears which sparkled 'neath the waning sun,

Until in dark I looked on high again
At once with comet's flash, which showed to me
The great god's gaze turn from the throng of men
Far towards a cave whence poured a thrashing stream

Amid dark green hills, 'midst the moss-green rocks –
Cold flow called Sokkvabekk, cockled by drafts
And torn by stones – and from that cavern talked
Meek throats of children: Sounds borne by the blasts

Of air the cavern breathed – young murmurings,
An infant laughter, sealed by earthy tomb
No longer – calm to every heart did bring,
And turned all eyes upon that river's spume,

Above which, from the dark, a goddess came,
Her feet wading the flood; and with a cup
Flashing with living light like golden flame
She bore that sacred frothing water up;

And to me strode, amid the wights and gloom,
And said then: "Not forever, not for aye" –
And bade my mouth that liquid life consume,
That in a dreamful stupor might I lie

To let old wisdom enter in my head
From whisp'ring voices of the cavern's lips...
The cup is drunk, I sink among the dead –
But toward the cloud-ways gold this vision lifts.