

The Poems of
Herman Melville

Edited by Douglas Robillard

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~~Down to us come the knightly Norman fires,
And front the Templars bore.~~

~~Nothing can lift the heart of man
Like manhood in a fellow-man.
The thought of heaven's great King afar
But humbles us—too weak to scan;
But manly greatness men can span,
And feel the bonds that draw.~~

THE SWAMP ANGEL^k (1866)

There is a coal-black Angel
With a thick Afric lip,
And he dwells (like the hunted and harried)
In a swamp where the green frogs dip.
But his face is against a City
Which is over a bay of the sea,
And he breathes with a breath that is blastment,
And dooms by a far decree.

By night there is fear in the City,
Through the darkness a star soareth on;
There's a scream that screams up to the zenith,
Then the poise of a meteor lone—
Lighting far the pale fright of the faces,
And downward the coming is seen;
Then the rush, and the burst, and the havoc,
And wails and shrieks between.

It comes like the thief in the gloaming;
It comes, and none may foretell
The place of the coming—the glaring;
They live in a sleepless spell
That wizens, and withers, and whitens;
It ages the young, and the bloom
Of the maiden is ashes of roses—
The Swamp Angel broods in his gloom.

Swift is his messengers' going,
 But slowly he saps their halls,
 As if by delay deluding.
 They move from their crumbling walls
 Farther and farther away;
 But the Angel sends after and after,
 By night with the flame of his ray—
 By night with the voice of his screaming—
 Sends after them, stone by stone,
 And farther walls fall, farther portals,
 And weed follows weed through the Town.

Is this the proud City? the scorner
 Which never would yield the ground?
 Which mocked at the coal-black Angel?
 The cup of despair goes round.
 Vainly she calls upon Michael
 (The white man's seraph was he),
 For Michael has fled from his tower
 To the Angel over the sea.

Who weeps for the woeful City
 Let him weep for our guilty kind;
 Who joys at her wild despairing—
 Christ, the Forgiver, convert his mind.

~~THE BATTLE FOR THE BAY
(AUGUST, 1864)~~

~~O mystery of noble hearts,
 To whom mysterious seas have been
 In midnight watches, lonely calm and storm,
 A stern, sad discipline,
 And rooted out the false and vain,
 And chastened them to aptness for
 Devotion and the deeds of war,
 And death which smiles and cheers in spite of pain.~~