



Words

Poetic Settings of Felix
Mendelssohn's

Songs Without Words

Adam Cole

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Songs Without Words

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BALLET MUSIC FOR THE DANCE ACCOMPANIST

Words: Poetic Settings of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*

Adam Cole

Nuncici Press

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Dedicated to Bill Crane, Music Lover Extraordinaire

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INTRODUCTION

Please don't judge my poetry from these words. They are not poems. They are song lyrics.

Poems are meant to be whole entities; they sing themselves. Good lyrics, on the other hand, are in some sense dependent on music to complete them. If lyrics are too poetically crafted, they make the music unnecessary and the result isn't usually a very satisfying marriage. When songwriters do set actual poems, they choose them very carefully, and it takes enormous skill to highlight the merits of the words without diminishing them. A good lyric may appear overly simple, awkward, even stupid by itself. Such compositions prove themselves good lyrics when they fit nicely under a melody, when they are singable, when they add meaning to the rise and fall of a melody

Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* were enormously popular from the middle of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century, when the music that was everywhere was the music that people played on the piano. By the time I was beginning to study music, they were beginning to fall from grace. Young conservatory students were not playing them, and theory teachers had found more interesting pieces to use for study. Listeners had so many choices that the underrated *Songs* could not compete.

Therefore, I was familiar with the concept of these songs, but not with the songs themselves. I wondered why such famous works by a first-rate composer should fall so fast from the repertory. As I examined a few of them, I realized that these pieces would not appeal to many pianists. Despite their difficulty, they do not specifically take advantage of the piano's strengths. It takes a highly skilled pianist to play many of them, and a brilliant one to play them correctly. They have been damned with faint praise over the years as evidence of Mendelssohn's skill at writing charming, melancholy, perfectly balanced tunes that lack profundity but are eminently crafted.

Many famous composers have taken poems both great and unknown and set them to music. To my knowledge, very few poets had ever taken a piece of music and written words for it. This is understandable. A good instrumental melody does not *need* words. In some cases, melodies written for instruments are unsingable. They do not exist within reasonable ranges for a singer, do not provide opportunities to breathe, nor are they lacking in intrinsic meaning.

Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, however, do have melodies that stay within a (very talented) singer's range. They do provide breathing spaces. The melodies are always clearly heard in the piano and creatively accompanied.

I decided to write words to these songs about 10 years ago. I had several goals in mind: First, as a way of practicing my poetic craft within a strange set of constraints. Writing a poem when the meter has been set for you requires a lot of flexibility, and the poetic cadence of these songs is not regular the way many poems are. In addition, the music suggests a certain mood which lent itself to faux-romantic, even sentimental writing. While serious poets are not allowed to write pretend Wordsworth and Byron poems except as parody or pastiche, I had free reign in this assignment to use such language because it served the goal of creating an appropriate lyric. I had carte blanche to use unforgivably pretentious words like "tis" and "naught" and to write poems about beasts and maidens.

Second, I desired to learn something about music. Mendelssohn's *Songs* are theoretically perfect examples of certain kinds of melodic structure with phrases, counter-phrases, extensions, delayed cadences and the like. It was great fun to set words to these patterns and then remove the template to see what they looked like in language. Again, most of the songs did not generate regular lines of iambic pentameter but instead resulted in something like free verse akin to Walt Whitman. Generally I doubt I could have come up with the forms that these songs took had I not used music to generate them.

Last, I thought the songs needed words. Not necessarily *my* words, but something to focus them. I wanted to create lyrics that would sit well in a singer's voice, which would, when set upon the wave of Mendelssohn's melodies, suggest a deeper meaning than either my words or his melodies could do by themselves. It occurred to me that, should I succeed, singers would have a chance to perform songs that, up to now, were only available for pianists. I could, in fact, expand the repertory of romantic song! And how many people can say they partnered with Felix Mendelssohn?

In a couple of instances I have taken liberties. I have very occasionally set lyrics to a part of the accompaniment rather than the melody. I have made decisions about when to use hyphenated words over groups of notes, when to omit phrases so that the piano can offer a dramatic counterpoint, and when to assume that a piece would be sung more quickly or slowly than the tempo indication would suggest.

For the first seven books I used the suggested titles of the pieces as launching points for my subject matter. In the last book those titles were not available and I took it upon myself to use the melodies to write words that were more poetic than lyrical. My edition of the songs contained only one of the extra songs, the "Gondelleid" in A, and so I set it as well.

It was great fun to write these, and over the ten years I worked on them, I watched my own poetic ideas change and grow. In most cases I would have no idea what the song would be about until I was halfway through it. Sometimes I would find myself surprised by the story that emerged, a story that I would not have imagined on my own. In a couple of songs I got bored and went outside the bounds of proper romantic poetry, even daring to make something silly. Above all, I decided that the only rules were that the pieces work as songs, and that I conform to the notes and rhythms that Mendelssohn wrote.

If you enjoy these, please let me know. If you decide to perform them, please drop me a line! If you are reading them now, please remember to experience them not as poems, but as lyrics, preferably with your favorite performer playing them in the background.

Yours truly,

Adam Cole

www.mymusicfriend.net

Book 1 (Op. 19b)

No. 1

The Wistful Farmer

Upon a hill a farmer sits and sighs to ease his yearning

Across the vale he gives his cry, "Ya ha! (Ya ha!)"

The rain-clouds are returning hither

To shade his fallen eye.

He loves a lass, a tanner's girl, who daily walks the grasses

She takes no notice of his cry, "Ya ha! (Ya ha!)"

And heedlessly she passes by him

To chase the summer sky.

"Gentle maiden, my own, I am yours for a song.

Can you hear? In my heart I am singing!"

But every day she goes her way skipping merrily to vanish in the grass.

He sighs, "Ah me!"

Upon a shaded meadow lane, a merry lark is singing

But no cry is heard upon the hill

The maiden no more returning.

Alas, no cry is heard upon the hill

The farmer waits, he lies there still in endless dreaming

The empty grasses sigh.

No. 2

Children of the Moon

The hands on the clock move so achingly slowly

Ever, ever nearing their goal.

The moon, shining brightly, is whispering to me.

See how it beckons! See how it beckons!

Carefully watching its children

All the children of the hour

The late-watching children,

the children of the hour.

"Gather 'round me all my dear ones.

Watch, the time is growing nearer.

Gather around me!"

The promise of love is the promise of moonlight,

Ever, ever holding us so.

The courtship of moonlight is sweeter than roses,

The promise of spring, ever drenched by its glow

The promise of springtime

The end of our sorrow is coming near to us,

At last to be free of our pain, to be free of our pain.

Surely the hour of our love is coming soon.

Return to us, mother, return to your children!

To your children!

No. 3

The King of the Hunt

In Breitung Am Main, there lived a great king
Whose might bubbled forth in a fountain
And every morning, he'd call from this throne
"To your mounts, my wards!"
And all of his courtiers would bicker and moan
For they'd sooner be sleeping, or riding alone
Than to ride with the King of the Hunt,
Those courtiers in Breitung Am Main!

True, he was a knight, and a valorous man
A ruler well-loved in his country
But he hunted incessantly, rainfall or shine
"To your mounts, my wards!"
Never pausing to rest, nor pausing to dine
"Til all of his men would sicken and pine
For the death of the King of the Hunt.
They longed for the death of their king!

One day came a lad from afar
Who had heard of a monstrous beast.
Its teeth were like daggers, he said
Each one was a handspan at least.
"And there's not a man here that could conquer that beast.

No, I've heard of a hundred brave hunters that died
at the teeth of that murderous beast!"

Said the king, "To your mounts, I must answer the call,
For my blood is a torrent of longing,
And I'm surely the man to make the beast fall
Yes, I'll lay the beast down, before God and this hall,
Or I'll never return to my kingdom at all.
To your mounts! To your mounts!"
Thus spoke the King of the Hunt!

Well, the king and his men rode fiercely in search of the beast.
But no tracks could they find, no sign of his trail in the least.
And the king, in his rage, broke off from his men, "I will FIND him!"
How could he have known
the beast was but a tale made up
by his men to be rid of the king
for good?

No. 4

Love Approaching

My love is high upon the greeny grasses
And dwelling near, she stirs my sense
And here stand I to greet the angel walking
O praise the day that brings us hence.

Such palpitation, endless agitation
My heart is querying in anticipation
Childish demanding, past understanding
Wither the place my love will be standing.
Dear heart, be still. We wait with tender yearning
'Til she is there upon the hill!

No. 5

The Deed

I have no soul, I cannot die

The moon is silent, a pitiless torment

It knows my deed and so do I

And still it speaks in intimate moments

My sweetheart is calling, "Awaken, no slumber

"Awaken, no slumber for thee."

The stars hear my cries

So gently they twinkle and shine

The Lord hears my prayer

And offers green pastures to lie

The moon waits and so do I

When I was young, a helpless child

My mother held me in hours of sorrow

Whate'er my deed, my childish wrong

She soothed my aching and sang of tomorrow

My sweetheart is crying, "Remember, my darling

"Remember, my darling, my own."

A weary face has come to call.

Words - 20

"Arise, the hour is nigh."

Its ghostly hand compels me to
regard the silent sky.

"You we do enjoin for your redemption:

If you would sleep, then answer truly

What have you done to earn your sentence?

What have you do to so embitter

The god of sleep? What is your trespass?

What have you done? What have you done?"

Mercy! Mercy! I have greatly

Sinned, my God, I have done wrong!

My love was lain in a secreted glade

To hide the stain of my murderous blade.

"Rest, now, my child,

the moonlight will keep you tonight.

Your sleep has been bought.

Tomorrow, you walk in the light."

There will be time for earthly punishment;

I will answer to heaven tomorrow

Trusting the stars, the all merciful ones

I sleep in their infinite glow.

No. 6

The Old Gondolier

My song is dead, my time is near

My oar is growing slow

The maids I loved in younger days

Are but memories washed by the river

The gentle ebb and flow

My youth has gone away

I know not where, I know not where

My heartbeat lingers on

To fill the silent air

Gentle maiden, gentle maiden

Where have you gone, your love awaits you?

Far from the river, far from the river

You have gone, but your image is shining bright.

Not long before I sleep.

Not long before I sleep.

Book 2 (Op. 30)

No. 1

The night is calm and generous.

It longs my ache to soften

before the dawn with lips of ruby red

can wake my beloved

Before the dawn wakes my beloved.

Within these halls my solace lies,

within that breast now swelling

in a dream of love so tenuous

it shakes my beloved

A fragile dream shakes my beloved.

There are dark shadows here

But my love, have no fear,

for the wind cannot blow,

nor the dark shadows go

where the love that enfolds us,

sacred, which holds us,

keeps ever near by this bed.

Sleep, my love, no shadows dread,

no thought of evil can confound us.

It is the love that surrounds us

Swelling around us

No shadows fear,
they cannot harm us.

The night is over.

Shadows vanish

The night is ended.

Within these walls she wakes,

Gentle dawn wakes my beloved.

No. 2

Along the dark and dreary path
the mud is disturbed by the coursing of dagger hooves.
The thunderous hoofbeats sound from a distance
Far from the image of the figure waiting silently upon them.

Against the night the rider pushes on,
though he curses with every twist and turn.
He gasps with weary breath as his thoughts fly
Far to the image of the figure waiting silently upon him.

His coat is the color of scarlet
with tidings of battles upon it.
His boots are encrusted and sodden
with echoes of journeys upon them.
Far, though his courser swift
flies o'er each rill and rift
Fast flies the rider though his burden weighs upon him.

Across the muddied, furrowed field,
the priest struggles vainly to settle his restless heart.
A doleful ringing sounds from a distance
Far to the figure waiting silently upon her bed of silver.

His coat is the color of scarlet
with tidings of battles upon it.

His boots are encrusted and sodden
with echoes of journeys upon them.
Far, though his courser swift
flies o'er each rill and rift
Fast flies the rider though his burden weighs upon him.

Across a lorn unfurrowed field,
the mud is disturbed by the coursing of staggered hooves.
Now slows the rider,
But his heartbeat refuses to slow
For his bride now is there
For this he has ridden so swift.
"Now the bridegroom is here."
The priest gushes forth with relief at the sight of the
two reunited at last. All the past is behind.
"My children. Let us gather down by the stream.
Not a moment to waste, I've another at eight!"

No. 3

Now is the hour for our consolation
Gone are the thoughts of jealousy and strife
We are resolved, our trespasses forgiven
We hear the call that stirs our hearts to life.
Come, take my hand, for all that has befallen
Let's take a pledge, as our hearts do now entwine
I to yours and yours to mine.
Let's raise our glasses, a toast for those in passing,
here for the two that journey side by side
Health to the man!
Cheers for the bride!
God bless the day
that bitterness has died!

No. 4

Ophelia's Song

My true love loves only me so we circle and truss

We dance among the rushes in the mire upon the river

The roots of the weeping willow are playing for us

The moon's a violin and every heart is filled with light

To see my love with me tonight and every heart is filled with

Light every candle for me

My love, my very loved one is floating at sea

My love, he sails at sea

My love made me many promises sacred and rare

He promised for to wed me by the banks upon the river

He told me that I should keep myself honest for him

Oh, hear the rushes' grin! Their secret thoughts they keep in trust.

They know my love comes here tonight. Surely he must! Surely he

Must be returning for me

My love, my very loved one returns from the sea

My love, he comes for me.

Oh surely today

Words - 30

He comes, he comes
With kisses of fire
like those that kindled
my heart's desire
And now my heart
is a fun'ral pyre
because he has told me
seven times seven times
nothing to him,
he cares nothing for time,
he cares nothing for time
he cares not for time

my love cares not for time
is merely an attack
he cannot take it back
nor would he if he could
he has been understood
my love is understood
like shadows in the wood

My love's making fairy faces, he capers and grins
O love, you must come to me and be true as you were
and be true to your word; oh you made me a promise,

The promise of love, of inviolate

Love is a stranger to you

My love, you told me I must be honest for you.

No more. 'This maiden lies.

She lies beneath the true promise-giver

She sinks below the promising river.

She sinks, she sinks. 'The kiss of a deeper

love rushes in.

Do I even now float above?

Even river-water's love

cuddles me with deeper lies;

This is how Ophelia dies.

This is how Ophelia dies

No. 5

Often when I'm wandering
Over and under the hill and rill
I pass away by shadows till the
Daylight pares them down to rumors.

I passed by a miller's brook
And the remnants of a mill long banished
From its use of grinding till the
Tide had worn it down to rumors.

By the stream as I passed
In the brook's frenzied fall
Thought I heard a voice entreating me,
"You are not the first to have wandered and
Passed away, passed away.

"There was once a man who came
By my banks to talk to me
Every morning he would stand here
Speaking of the miller's daughter."

As she murmured I grew listless
And despaired to hear the tale.
"Good man I can grant you solace too.
Sit you down at my feet.

I will grant elusive sleep."

Then I thought that I would weep.

No. 6

On a dim, bare bridge that over the water does hang,
Reflected in the water
Lies a wreath that from the merciless heat of the sun
Slowly loses what solace it gave to passers by.

For the day grows short, though the sun is high,
and the blackbird sings her sorrow.
For she sings of the gondolier's daughter
Fair, the fairest that ever was seen,
How she fell from that terrible height to waters low.

For her life grew short, as the starlight danced,
even as she balanced gaily,
Vainly tried to recover a falling star
Then into the water she fell
Never reaching the beckoning hands that reached for her.

Waves chant her song.
The night grows long.

Book 3 (Op. 38)

No. 1

The Evening Star

The ev'ning star appears to waver
As she dances in the pond
I walk along the banks and wonder
How does she greet ev'ry dawn?
She ushers in the dark behind her
As she traipses ever onward
She glides past the cranes
Who float by and shamelessly ignore her.
She moves past the swans
Who see in her a rival evermore.

How does the ev'ning star now follow
Ever after where I stray
Contented to keep her distance
Though she guides me on the way to my home.
She cannot be lost, though tossed by a ripple in the water
Where someone has dropped a stone.

It plummets to her heart submerged
She rises on a wave unmoved.
How can she let him fall
So far from her embrace
Oh cruel the evening star

Wish not upon her face.

See how she comes to rest upon the surface

As the pond is slowly stilled

She rests upon the hearts of dreamers

Who lie beneath unheard

She will not heed. They lie 'neath the waves.

She dances on their watery graves.

She pays no heed to the lap of loss

And the loves she might have saved

Lie penniless beneath her jewel.

How came the ev'ning star so cruel?

No. 2

Weary shadows creep through the vines beside a prison wall
As the sun declines and falls out of sight to all who therein dwell
Nothing less than darkness complete their desperate hopes can quell
But as surely as the last follows first the darkness comes to all

'Tis a long weary road they tread
That look for the land of hope
'Tis a dark and weary company
That suffer as they wander

'Tis a long and a weary road
Woe is he who must walk that mile
'Tis a long and weary while
Til sun will shine

and he will find that shadow moved far away as sun peeks over wall
To alight that burdened mask on the brow, that heavy pain they call
not home nor place of refuge but their distraction over all.

'Tis a long weary road they tread
That look for the land of hope
Aye and merry is the man who from that road may brush his footsteps
Aye and merry is the man who from that road may take his leave

no more to grieve upon his lost happiness,

the shadow of his care and his rest,
no more to tread the wicked path
of a hope that he forever keeps before him,
no more to tread the darkest path
but instead to rest forever in forgetfulness

Weary man, forego all your pain
Forget to tread this path once again,
this path once again which cares not for you,
forego all thoughts of hope, o weary man.

No. 3

Play, o poet's harp
And greet the dawn with your ring
Now balanced on Apollo's knee
His nimble fingers through your strings
Bring out a tune. O poet's harp
We gather near to hear effulgent song
With ev'ry heart strummed hard upon
We tarry long to hear his jub'lant song.

We know too well the poet's spell
We tremble near. Silence drear
May come to steal upon
Our hearts so burden-bound
We come to solace sweet
Through ev'ry pearled sound

Play. O far away is care and strife
And every day
Our pallid life grows bright til it pellucid glows
Well do we stay
Until the night covers all
And makes our eyelids fall.

Then we dream of light.
The fairies gather and call.

"Look, but shade your eyes!

Allow your ears to receive

Sweet Apollo's fire.

Beware the poet who with music is wise.

O tender sound and florid word

Together come and be heard

To fuel the beauty of the poet's harp."

Through velvet joys, o dulcet tone

We heed thy voice, the poet who

Alone can breathe thy breath for thee

And set thee free, O poet's harp!

No. 4

The amber warmth descending through nearly shuttered pane
beguiles me now with roses just past my sleeping eyelids
They blink in startled answer to the sun so brightly beaming,
beguiles my eyes with roses that have no scent nor blossom,
December yet concealing them beneath a bed of silver.

I know that they but dormant lie
beneath their bed, and so do I
for warmer skies do hide,
so the buds remain inside.

So hope does set the mantle with reason to be joyful
in spite of what has passed
We greet the spring with confidence and show ourselves at last,
Our winter gone at last.

No. 5

When will the endless footfalls I hear
beguile our ears no longer?
They trip along the pathway, and drear
are most of the echoes that linger.
Not one bears the sound of a hurried approach.
Not one could be found to carry the weight
of tidings which spoken, set here before us,
words which spoken faithfully
could ease our pain and set us free;
an oath to free the ghost of a hunger,
of a hunger of a ghost,
the hunger and the ghost.

The empty drip of rain on the pane
converting the summer to twilight
makes easy now the waiting
of those whom the day has forsaken.
For who can grow cold when cold is ever near,
And who can claim sadness but joy can never cheer,
and who strikes upon the chime that's never struck
The Hour is upon us, always upon us,
ever the minutes go, never the hands, though,
never the hands of the clock which stands watching,
those hands which have ever been stuck.
Hands which unfettered could help us awaken.

The ghostly pall of liquid moon now drips on the table like water
The one who comes might shatter not just our bonds but his own.
He swore to set us free
But vanished now is he.
He swore to give us rest
He promised heaven's rest
He promised he'd return
Where has our master flown?
We wait upon your pleasure, your servants ever tethered
to your compassionate word!

No. 6

Duet

SHE: When all my whispering years from behind me have told the last of their tale

HE: Then I will lead you down and down, so to uncover that undiscovered vale

SHE: I follow now as I tremble beside you; your ways are awful, but kind

HE: Do not despair, for I'll not leave thee friendless to face the coming time.

SHE: We gently descending

HE: Make not a sound now

SHE: Float ever downward to sleep

HE: Fear not its promise as you follow, never to harm you but keep you til you wake.

SHE: I know all my sorrows will vanish when housed in the grip of its terrible endless caress.

Oh, tell me my sleeping so will be fast.

HE and SHE: No fear there, nor pain, nor loss, nor sadness, only the waiting of the blessed.

Thy/ My name is peace, and thy/ my purpose is known to all who rest.

HE: Come, now, my bride, your courtier calls you, I to escort.

SHE: I come, I come, lead on, lead on

HE: I to escort, come now my bride

SHE: Take me there

HE: Walk by my side. Do not despair

SHE: Now rest my care.

Book 4 (Op. 53)

No. 1

Red, amber and ochre,
bands seen in the waning,
vanishing light that marks the passage of the sun's majesty;
I nearby attending,
now also consoling,
I am the bridesmaid to the oncoming night.

Gull's reverie flowing, flowing by
"Lord, why have you made me soar so high,
now ever to place me in this barrow,
I once built for soaring now am forced to farrow earthbound.
It seems like such a narrow bond
compared to cloud and sky beyond,
Oh I was built for soaring, Ah!"
I, too as a witness
must ask of thee also
why, made for soaring should be held on the sand?

Sun's majesty fading, fading fast,
Light, solace and comfort gone at last,
I here as a witness to its dying,
must ask the oppressive night which binds it to the horizon,
must all which soars be brought so low,
must all above return below,
to walk instead of soaring, Ah!

I follow the path, now,
wings I once did brandish,
herewith must vanish by the sun's doused fire,
deep in the ocean where I lay my desire.
Night buries all protests, it heeds not my cries.
Now I face shoreward where my darkness surely lies.
No sense in this weeping, no time for that now.
I breast the darkness where I take my solemn vow.
To my fate I bow, I bow.

No.2

Where are they gone
My feet no more
The solid ground discern nor any mound
no solid ground
I hover sound
upon the iridescence of the air
without a noise
I could float on
And never would a trace be found of me
Light as the sky
Thin as a cloud
That slowly dissipates by and by.
And never would I more desire to step upon the
earthly solid places again.

Below the water like crystal glitters and glistens.
I know this dream, this cloudy vision
is no matter to rest upon
For I know that never should you guest in ether
Where the solid earth will harbor none.
The wicked hide in lightness,
float on iv'ry when they should sink below
And even clouds that cover rougher weather
Cannot lessen the blow, nor the rain's slow earth drowning flow

But even so,
Light as the air
I cannot help but float through fear and doubt
Though in the end
it will have out
For now I wander weightless as a cloud
Nothing can slow my pace, my endless race through skies of blue,
my lovely flight through the day.
No more desire I to be hither earthbound.
No more to suffer in a heavy descent.
"Til I die, to earth goodbye.
Until I die, to earth goodbye.

No. 3

We who you see, who trace our years in ages
Who saw the world made ruins ere the Nile was but a trickle
Do now stand and sing your fate which lies before us
For all you care to do is but a stitch upon our knitting
Just the afterthought of fate you have no earthly way to know
You cannot save yourself. Your actions are all writ upon the wall.

Doomed by your pride, your ev'ry move betrays you.
No witches' curse can raise you nor our sorry song deliver
From awful decree, from the terrible things that befall you,
No witches' curse can doom you more, the tread of footfalls on the floor
Your fate will overtake you now, your fate will over all objections
You may raise come down upon you and will end your days.

We hear the answer before the question is asked,
Before the words are formed, before the thought's congealed.

Now strikes the hour upon the clock whose devil hands
None can restrain, no sister's spell nor iron bands
But hope remains to thee dear thane, take heed and ye may live again,
Take heed and ye may live again to walk another mile.
None who live can change their fate but some decide to set it straight
And mend their ways before the sun can set upon their days
Each breath a chance. Waste not the hour which passes by.
Heed! Fly!

No. 4

Who can come nigh to the breath of the willow
As it sighs in the wreckage of twilight
None can but I so acquainted with emptiness.
I am consumed with the lay of soul sorrow.

As I live there is nothing but broken stems,
Withered leaves to shade me
Night is a worthier counselor
See, she comes to cloak my hollow frame.

We are the same, both myself and the willow.
See, we bend with the weight of our burdens.
She with her branches strives vainly to right herself
And I with all that I know of tomorrow
Wish to sing in the face of soul sorrow.

No. 5

Volkslied

"And are ye Thomas Morrow, with the mark of the plow on your forehead?
I bring to you a greeting from the maid who resides on the hill: She loves thee."
"O does she at her spinning wheel abide the while as she promised?"
"She swears she'll make a russet cloak to keep thee warm in the winter."
"And when a soldier I must depart I'll don my cloak to shelter my heart.
And she will see me riding and will know who I am by the color.
I'll be the soldier boy in russet. Ah, and far away in foreign lands,
The cold and rain will cause no pain for Thomas Morrow."

She tended to her spinning wheel, but ever dreamed of tomorrow
And as he donned his russet cloak her vision tempered her sorrow;
For he'd return not long from today, and he would keep his word and take her away.
Now Thomas is a soldier. She will wait by her wheel til he calls her.
He promised he would not forget her. Ah, the days they fly, the years wear on
And still the maid upon the hill who spun him out a russet cloak
Has seen nor heard no sign nor signal. And she spins and yet grows weary,
But her heart still beats within her and she measures out her thread for tomorrow.

No. 6

Nothing below him, he soars on a swelling of wingspan
Borne by the insubstantial current he is lost in distance
Only to circle and beating his wings to sustain him
Seemingly vaults himself upon an open sky

Would that I could join in the dance of wing and wind.
I could soar, I could soar, were I not to ground so tethered
Like an angel, I, and the bird on the wing
We would fly, we would wander on the trails that leave no trace.

Hear, he answers, for he has discovered my longing.
"Fly, fly," he calls to me, and I would gladly answer him
But not from below him, as I would ascend to the highest
Surveyance. "I hear you, I hear and long to dance!"

I would take my step into blue expectant sky.
I would fly as though I were no heavier than ribbon.
He would catch my eye. We would glide, we would soar.
And no mortar mother earth would pull me low.

So below him my eyes swivel up to regard what
Language of wing and sinew I can fathom from my vantage
Not to reduce him, but only to gather the one dream
I have which remains, just a flight of human thought.

Hear his song now, he is singing.

Hear his song as he describing

A horizon that is very much

Farther away than my own.

Open to the ever-changing sky

Why am I ever constrained below? (Oh.)

Oh, see how he glides, growing smaller as he descends

Towards the horizon, lost in the cloud bank

Only to rise again gaining on heaven with every beat of his wings.

Book 5 (Op. 62)

No. 1

May breeze that moves the branches, gently kisses,
Lilting, and in your slumber barely felt
Turning, you dream of distant soft embraces
The tapered fingers brushing down your furrowed forehead
And reassuring you that all will soon be well.

It has been years since you were so assured
But in the dream caresses come like raindrops,
Susurrus of the senses, a drawing deeper
Than you remember, a glowing ember falling gently, soundly
Upon your lips to keep them silent, silent.

Sighing you turn toward an open window
Longing to feel the breath upon your brow
Somehow you cannot unhinge
Your glassy dream-drunk vision-
Ever-weary eye to open it,
Nor drift away deeper into oblivious
Wine-dark oceans.
Ah! So rest content within her sigh.

No. 2

Oh venerable father, you cannot leave me now
So poor and despondent with nothing to redeem me
Oh, unhappy daughter, the apple of your eye!

How am I to manage collateral damage?
How to be deprived of even basic compensation
How to be deprived of any reason to survive?

No, you must, remaining, bear up with my complaining;
No fortune you proffer, no offer will I garner
Oh, think on your dearest now made wretched and ungainly
Because mainly you have left me all alone without a cent!
And now I somehow must manage in the face of ill intent

Oh, ungrateful father, hear my weeping,
I cry aloud to you, no manner of sleeping
Even unto creeping deep into your grave

Ah-ha, no you will not escape
Ah-ha, no you will not escape!
Ah-ha-ha-ha the drip of your flesh and blood reaping

Do not leave me barren unmannered
At least have the decency, father, oh do...
Heavy sorrow most unkind, ungrateful father,

At least have the courtesy, daddy, oh, do

Lend me a couple of dollars, oh, daddy, oh!

Just one or two dollars, just 'til my allowance kicks in.

This is the last time, I promise,

It's the last time, the last time, oh, daddy!

No. 3

Now slow advance the steps of the departed

A line of ghostly mourners

So still their breasts, no breath, nary a cry

Silence falls from far distant corners

From streets where once one saw many a man

Striving ever towards the daylight

There now walk only those who have renounced

Any claim to life and to sunlight.

The twilight throng

Now is advancing on

It is a sign, sign of the days

Days which have come, days which have gone

It is a measure of the march whose tune

Nobody dares to name or longs to hear.

Now see, they reach the last wearying steps.

The procession now is turning.

The council of the dead now will depart

'Til another soul is lost,

Lost to hope and joy, lost to yearning.

No. 4

With ardent thanks I welcome thee,
The morning light that now surrounds me
In wealth of warmth, in praise of day
The morning glory is the brightest ray.

It is the miracle that goes unseen
On every sad and weary acre
But every schoolchild knows the grateful rose
Will smile and bend before its maker

And so I pray that I thereto
Not be confounded for good or evil
When day comes streaming in
But start my life again
With ev'ry grace bestowed upon me.
No, I will greet the day
With the love of a child at play
The more to praise him,
The more to praise my Lord who made the morning.
Let us pray.

No. 5

Tell me why weep ye Gondolieri?
Are your paddles still for the night?
Do the waters whisper the secret
Lament of the gondola's flight?

Dipping deeply into the darkness
Of the green Venetian canal
All your paddles soon will drip teardrops
Among the reflection of light.

Ever the skies of Venice are star-crossed
Ever the torches of Venice are bright
E'en now, e'en now, church bells chime.

Though the songs of Venice are lapped in whispers
Against the cadence of time
Waves upon waves do now tenderly wash
O'er hull and keel, o'er stern and bow

What now, what now? Church bells chime.

Still the Gondolieri push gently onward
Bearing what time will allow.

No. 6

When the little whippoorwill is calling on
The buds upon the birch that gently waver in the blossoms
Eagerly the sap is swimming towards the dawn
And sliding down the branches is the possum.

The dew is dripping off the flowered
Leaves, and skipping through the sheaves
A nascent squirrel seeks
A nut to stuff his cheeks

A mouse has lost its way,
But keeps its fear at bay
For the day has yet to offer up
The finest of its gifts

The pleasure of a treasure
Under every leaf it lifts
'Neath every leaf that shifts
Now slow, now swift
The rain begins to fall,
Begins to press into the earth.

When the stormy birth has passed and once again
The sun is beating on the iridescent greening branches,
The poor besodden whippoorwill again takes flight,

Then does alight upon the highest vantage
Where a branch protrudes above the splendor
Of the manifested glory spoken for.

It's Spring, it's Spring, and all who sing
Are blessed to ring astounded cries of joy
That cold cannot destroy!

Book 6 (Op. 67)

No. 1

Silver blue and azure lily rushes gaily sway
As the day wanders and meanders along the water path.
I ease myself in meditation on the melted spray
It is so fine, frozen contemplation, a gently thawing bath
That leads me further on
To memory's folded dawn.

Oh, meditation never brings the peace that I am seeking
'Til every drop in ev'ry brook has sounded with its weeping
And ev'ry drop describes the skies and every drop reveals your eyes
So azure like the river that wends its way along
Swelling like a song!

Silver bells are ringing gaily from the steeple-down.
Do the young ever know the hour? Do any of us heed
When the sound issues us its warning
Life is like the river going
None can say what current flowing
We are lost in,
We are lost indeed.

No. 2

Now standing so stern upon the marble stair
Master of this house, lord of everything before me
You humbly survey, and trembling there do wonder
Wither came my command of all you see
Why has this been given me?

Once in a dream I was young, I was green
As a leaf just borne from a linden sapling
Then I believed that whatever I saw I could
Take if I were fit for grappling.

She then appeared and I was smitten
Thought all was fate, that had been written,
She joined with me to live within my trust
She, only for me, could there be a sweeter justice?

I proffered my suit but trembling there
She told me she'd have none of the riches
Not a coin would she take from me
And I, deeply wounded, then did vow
She before me would repent and would bow
She'd be mine or she'd be no one's betrothed
She then did dare to refuse even when I did order
My beloved hung from yon linden bough.
She was not given then or now.

No. 3

Rest ye weary homeward pilgrim
Thou hast travelled far to sleep
Rest ye from these fruitless searches
All these dreams are yours to keep.
Lay you down to somber sleep.
Contemplation has escaped you
As you travelled far and hither
All your searching was for nothing
All your arrows in your quiver
Still you beg your time to heed you
Ask each hoary host to feed you
Wither now
Goest thou?
Rest ye weary homeward trav'ler
Disappointed ye may be
Have ye come so far for nothing?
Is your faithful heart still pure
Are ye with despair entreating
Is your heart still beating, beating
Searching for the hope that once made it so sure?

No. 4

What has my world to do with all of these
Shuttles and thimbles and needles and thread?
A thread that, cut by harsh Atropos
Would signal the end of my life?
A life that is cut from all semblance of pain
Measuring fabrics again and again
Simple to think of my life as a shuttle
A muddling instrument, insignificant
Never wandering, yet meandering
While I sit here endlessly spinning, spinning
Even while my spool is thinning.

They say my eyes are bright, they say I've a
Shimmer the moon would be envious of.
But what is my shimmer when I in my darkness
Never revealing the source of my spark
Lest I am discovered here spinning my solace
Cannot, nay, dare not appear to the sun
Keeping my counsel from everyone
What is a maiden to do now I know
The appointment of destiny has forsaken me
None desiring me, none acquiring me
No, naught to uncover but spinning, spinning
Only with needlework sinning.

Though sewn by threads invisible
To my spinning wheel I am not truly confined
My mind can go wandering hither and yonder
Over the derry and even beyond
Permission denied me, yet still I am far away
Dreaming of some illegitimate holiday
I plot with every stitch I make
And weave out a way to escape from this trap
A ransom note in tapestry
With all of my virtues spread out on my lap.

No. 5

Here on my hill, nothing is moving
Here where I wandered, where I used to race
Now all is still, nary a whisper
Only the larks have returned to this place.
But like these birds I am drawn to remember
The flights of my fancy my heart recalls
When all these fields were more suited for greener things
Lost in the meaner things are all my reveries
Lost in the desolate echoes of calls
I will be gone, wander no longer
Nothing remembered can linger here
Only these birds, so unencumbered
By memory's burden can tarry in fields where, once merry,
My singing rang louder and clearer.

No. 6

Sleep baby, now close your eyes
Parting is brief as the stars in the skies
Twinkle and glitter so far from our sphere
Dream of a brighter world oh so far from here

As you sleep, baby, rest in your bed
All good things are alive in your head
When you dream, you make real all the wonders
That we, older than thee, have forgotten.

Dreams of love and of magic to vanquish
The tragic which we who have grown now must bear.
All things immortal are there to be thought on.

Sleep, baby, and when you wake
I will endeavor all good things to take
Out from the land of the dreaming. No tears will you shed
For on window-panes streaming, the rain will not fall
And I by my power will watch and protect you
From minute to hour, so now heed the call
Of the song of the sand that is lolling so gently on thee.

Book 7 (Op. 85)

No. 1

Lost in the pool

Ripples spreading outward to the shoreline

Gaze, gaze ye man

Gaze ye long, for anything your eyes can recognize

The water remains

So very much the same when you have left here

Soon all returns

To the whispered calm of death.

Your breath will feather the unperturbed,

The smooth, the reverie of the water

Think ye, think upon ripples past

Now faded and becalmed.

Now greet the dawn.

Now life is gone.

Brief, all too brief

Fickle as the ripples on the surface

But in the echoes of the moment

When the stone is impacted there

We dare to live

And we live who dare.

No. 2

Father, father, stay a moment
Do not take the forest path
Many dangers may befall you
I would have you stay awhile
Rest with me and stay awhile.

I was told when I was but a
Baby that a day would come
When you would leave by forest gate and
Forest road to come no more
No more

And now you take your coat in hand
Your rumpled coat in hand
And stand at door.

Father, father, do not leave me
For this life is but a song
Just a rumor spoken softly
But a fable whispered loudly
Though a child be listening closely there.

Oh breathe another breath,
Another step from death.

No. 3

When all the paper tigers roar into tears
Little children cry in terror of their mothers
Arms which are longer than the daylight appear
To make a frilly tear roll down a fragile sleeve made of ochre
And more o' the folk are indeed in deed and in word they are most clear
delirium.

Here are the boxes full of long and of short
Little children telling tales of paper tigers
No one believes their crazy yarns told of light
And of the shadows long and shadows
Shortly here we will meet them
And so we repeat them indeed in deed and in word they are most clear
delirium.

Mysterium the mind of illness
A step or two from darkness
A step or two is all these children
Took before they were ridden to bed
Swiftly hidden away by day
No one to see, no one to hear
No one is near

No wonder everything which wonder became
Now plays a shadow show anew and the same

Resurgent lie on high returns to show itself

As a leery, a vague and mysteri-

Assuming all of a horror's shapes in many guises

He surmises this is all just deliri-

A man in deliri a mysteri a supposed

Night mare from a vivid fever.

No. 4

Gone, but never far from anywhere
A glow, a shimmer in the winter
A hint of snow to comfort in the dark and drear
A candle made of crystal, never fear for it is here
As soon as it is gone.

Now your memory is left for comfort.
The image in my eyes I dare not squander.
And though I wander far, a sense of where you are remains,
The wonder of a snowy winter passing.

It was a year or seven since I saw your face
Your grace and beauty are an ember
A fading spark which melody can feed
With memory at need
And now I, trying to remember you,
Have sent this ode along.

Hear my song, my own,
And in the distant places that you dwell,
So far away, you'll hear.
Like the shimmer in the winter.

No. 5

Yet at a distance there

One sees the dust

Obscuring the horizon, the footsteps of his stallion

He is returning now

So long away

On this auspicious evening with all of us expecting.

And say, what tales have you to tell

Ye gallant that has fared so well

In distant lands where none but the Virgin can protect you?

What tales have you to share with us

Who have remained behind to wonder

Even as you wander, at all the deeds that you have dared?

We hear your horses' step

We see your visage now,

So nobly framed in sunlight and in shadow

Oh tell how you have prospered

While all of us who lingered here

So jealously give up our ear

To learn what life can offer

The one who braves the borders
And we who have been timid here
May hearken now to higher orders.

No. 6

Across the wide and waving hills I wander far and near
A voyager with tales to spin for any who would hear
I've many a journey under my belly, many a story ready for telling
Now I will sing of my journeying to those of ye who want to know

A diadem from Samarkand I saw and took for plunder
The mountains of the Caucasus are wondrous tall and free
I've waited on kings and wooed many women
High bred and low from Brussels to Sic'ly
Never to stay, not for a day, before the call,
The call would come and whisper to me.
O wanderlust I hear your cry. It pulls me far away.

I've played the part of ev'ry roving minstrel, rogue and cur
I've acted as hero, saving the maiden
From a distress most dire and pernicious
Always to leave before a grateful father offers me his daughter.

For I must roam. There is no home
For such a wanderer whose curse is trawling to and fro
Yes, always somewhere further on to travel, and so

Unraveling the knot that is my pathway through this world
Unfurled like ev'ry banner in the lands that I have been
I wave and brave my next scene

Book 8 (Op. 102)

No. 1

A nod there is in dance
In movement interchanging
Exchanging of vows though the words are never said
A marriage of true selves
Like elven promise-making
The true and deceptive are intertwined
Instead of coming close
They do maintain exact degrees
Of kind to kind
And who are we that gambol so,
In game of cap and ball,
As each to each meander so
I take a step, you take a step
My hand extends and yours retreats
And all is ordered and exact
A perfect wording manifest
In bodied conversation
All is said and done
How we have agreed to agree on this alone
But even in the little steps
I see a promise of regret
Decisions have been set
You and I have met our peace
Rejoice in this, be not afraid
When plans of mice and men are made

Only dancing remains
So dance with me my only
And we endure as well
For to talk will surely lead to Hell
To give voice to what our movements spell,
While the dance carries us on and on forever and ever amen.

No. 2

Sing to the little child that stretches out before us
Sing to the vision of the years still to be
Never was man or woman born to know tomorrow
Nothing is promised though the promise we see
Sing though the sky be clouded through
And your thoughts bedevil you
For the spirits they are merciless in whispering
But hold fast to what you see in cradle just before you
Send all the speculation far, far away

For time is no one's friend but
Brings everything to ruin
Or to apotheosis on its journey forward
So best to regard the babe who sleeping is a comfort
And a reminder that despite all our woes
Life wends its serpent ways
Through dulcet and dusky days and
None see the ending, nor can
Even guess what any baby knows.

No. 3¹

Tarantella

Dance of the spiderbite poison removing

Will you tell a

Terrible tale of a tyrant and fool?

Once a poor young fellow from far away followed his fancy

Fevering to ferret fortune or

Furrow a field so he

Made his path through fjords and forest

Til he came to a town

By the name of Fagree

Where he made it his business to anger the constable and in a

Wink of an eye he was

Staring upwards

Into the eyes of a sinister baron

Who declared him

Ready to swing for a frivolous thing.

"Do not set me

High in the gallows" the fellow implored him

"I have heard you have a daughter

¹ This was a first attempt at Words 8, 3, originally discarded because of length and mood. Now I've decided I like it.

Sad and disconsolate
I can heal her in a fortnight
If you leave her with me
Then by dint and degree
Of a marvelous lotionlike potion her
Ills will be well. Now I
Usually sell it but
You, my lord, are greatly deserving, your
Daughter so lovely
All I ask is
Seventy minutes alone with her now.

The maiden regarded the lad with a dubious eye
For she'd often been lauded by many a man
Well he said not a word but he started to
Shake like one possessed
And when she laughed
He confessed
"I know no cure but I am sure
If the lady would make such a fit right in
Front of her father
We'd both be committed for sure."

No. 3a²

Skill in rapidity triple validity blazoning lines of staccato in amber
Black upon paper worn devilish taper torn loss in preventing the final decay
So slow in capture
Meddlesome music preventing the rapture
The consequence of
Many a night masquerading and meddling
Meanwhile in this tarantella
A Hell
A surprise every eye is abandoning
Nightly I play
Til the notes go away
Til the notes reappear before leaving me
Vanishing grieving me
Here and repeating their
Insolent bleating a tempo is beating a jolly gallant with confection as cadence
Now is a turnaround lost in a sequence and found on the arc of a sibilant rant.

Adaptive measures
Balancing now on the end of a feather
By fingertips con-
Nected like vines to the neck of the melody
Litany psychotic cant and
So facile

² This was a second attempt at this song, and includes words for every note in the melody.

Leaping the notes like the steps to a castle
Then falling
In the act of the call
In the following borrowing balance to dance up on top of the
Melody helter and skelter the sentiments
Gather like dust underneath the umbrella
Children who wait in the shade of a dated modality
Inverted valley of song
Now the
Moments are trickling winding a way
And the
Skill of the player is rapidly fading the cost of parading his terrible talent
Invalid invertebrate almost confederate
There is little left
Not that the
Stuff before
Could have been seen as deft
A few more heartbeat gestures
Digits complaining, the music is circling
Round like a hawk in inevitability
Drops and soars.

No. 4

All know the tale, although the cause is still uncertain
What madness did come over him to make him stay
She surely loved the spectre of a wandering rover
Or the man she thought he was from day to day
Time filled the hours, but little good did come of silence
Each did suspect and then accuse with thought of violence
And when the blow came down, when fell the awful hand
None could the blow undo, put off, or understand.

Some things once broke can never be put back together
These things are fragile as the hours
A love we claim not really ours
And we and they exhaust our powers,
Futile, furtive hearts no more can take the shape they were
For once lost, never can be regained a single tear.

Here ends the tale, although the remnants of its madness
Echo and fade along a corridor of lifeless sadness.

No. 5

Joyous is this weary world
Tangled in the flag unfurled
Showing tear and terror in a temperamental torrent
Wherefore does this thought oblige
Any fool who'd compromise
Common sense for true rendition
Steady as she goes
Steady as she goes

Running up the flagpole never hurts in early morning
Only when the bitter Jolly Roger flies in warning
Hitting on a furtive flying fanfare is confusing

Living too is jointly rough
Therefore be of sterner stuff
Tie your wits about you with a cord
Or find accord among your tying
And your slurring ones
Always take things as they come
Do not beat on bitter drum or play your fife too loudly
Life affords no music to such noisy fools as those.

And what fools we mortals be who strut about
So proudly make a humble bow
Linger never, worship now

Any fool can see the earth is flat and therein lies the problem

Choose your riddles one by one, keep steady as she goes.

No. 6

We to conclude this rich array of lyric
Married to elder once wordless leider
Now take a bow not out of any thought
But gratitude to muses who have smiled on this endeavor
Long is the tune of time's memorial manifest and
Short is the life that anyone can claim
We can but speak our name and hope we have been heard

But with the help of other lonely trav'lers
We may betroth lovely song and word.
We feel the steps of giants as they wander and it
Falls upon us to seek what they have sought
Learn what they have learned, what they have bought
Earn so our time spent may be worth redeeming
Spend what time remains in the days to come
What is a phrase, a melody, a song
When life is seconds long?

Boat Song (Posthumous)

We two, twin gods, the muse and her mirage
Made captive by the water flowing like such music you envision
One stares above, the other peers below
Conjoined like some strange Gemini who long for speech, each to each,
What shall we say? What separates the images
Is one the true form and does it know its own?
Is image life? Is water time?
Miming upon the surface of the brook
We seem to look with blinded eyes
As death has silenced a rhyme
Cry, muse upon the water and be sounded
Write, muse beneath the air and make no sound.

About the Author

[Adam Cole](#) knew he wanted to write books almost as soon as he began reading them. His early attempts at age 8 were encouraging, and by age 16 he had completed 200 pages of his first epic. However, he soon found he had many things to learn, and it would not be until 1999 that his first full-length novel, [The Myth of Magic](#), would come out. His first collection of poetry, [Hofstadter's Grandchildren, Metawritings On Gödel, Escher, Bach](#), followed soon after.

Since then, Adam has published in many journals and websites including *Genre*, *The Tipton Review*, and *Opus*. He serves on the editorial board of *The Feldenkrais Journal* and has contributed a number of articles to that periodical.

Adam is also a composer. His orchestral piece, [Themes Off A Variation](#), a tribute to Robert Schumann, is archived at the Schumann House in Zwickau, Germany. To hear Adam's music, or to read more of his work, please visit www.mymusicfriend.net and subscribe to receive a monthly newsletter, Arfing Startist