## John Davidson (1857-1909)

## 7 A Ballad of Heaven

He wrought at one great work for years;	
The world passed by with lofty look:	
Sometimes his eyes were dashed with tears;	
Sometimes his lips with laughter shook.	
His wife and shild ment slathed in mere	-
His wife and child went clothed in rags,	5
And in a windy garret starved:	
He trod his measures on the flags,	
And high on heaven his music carved.	
Wistful he grew but never feared;	
For always on the midnight skies	10
His rich orchestral score appeared	
In stars and zones and galaxies.	
He thought to copy down his score:	
The moonlight was his lamp: he said,	
'Listen, my love;' but on the floor	15
His wife and child were lying dead.	
Her hollow eyes were open wide;	
He deemed she heard with special zest:	
Her death's-head infant coldly eyed	
The desert of her shrunken breast.	20
'Listen, my love: my work is done;	
I tremble as I touch the page	
To sign the sentence of the sun	
And crown the great eternal age.	
'The slow adagio begins;	25
The winding-sheets are ravelled out	
That swathe the minds of men, the sins	
That wrap their rotting souls about.	
That wrap mon rouning bours about.	

'The dead are heralded along; With silver trumps and golden drums, And flutes and oboes, keen and strong, My brave andante singing comes.	30
'Then like a python's sumptuous dress The frame of things is cast away, And out of Time's obscure distress, The thundering scherzo crashes Day.	35
<ul><li>'For three great orchestras I hope My mighty music shall be scored:</li><li>On three high hills they shall have scope With heaven's vault for a sounding-board.</li></ul>	40
<ul><li>'Sleep well, love; let your eyelids fall; Cover the child; goodnight, and if</li><li>What? Speak the traitorous end of all! Both cold and hungry cold and stiff!</li></ul>	
'But no, God means us well, I trust: Dear ones, be happy, hope is nigh: We are too young to fall to dust, And too unsatisfied to die.'	45
He lifted up against his breast The woman's body stark and wan; And to her withered bosom pressed The little skin-clad skeleton.	50
<ul> <li>'You see you are alive,' he cried. He rocked them gently to and fro.</li> <li>'No, no, my love, you have not died; Nor you, my little fellow; no.'</li> </ul>	55
Long in his arms he strained his dead And crooned an antique lullaby; Then laid them on the lowly bed, And broke down with a doleful cry.	60

'The love, the hope, the blood, the brain,

Of her and me, the budding life, And my great music—all in vain! My unscored work, my child, my wife!	
'We drop into oblivion, And nourish some suburban sod: My work, this woman, this my son, Are now no more: there is no God.	65
'The world's a dustbin; we are due, And death's cart waits: be life accurst!' He stumbled down beside the two, And clasping them, his great heart burst.	70
Straightway he stood at heaven's gate, Abashed and trembling for his sin: I trow he had not long to wait, For God came out and led him in.	75
And then there ran a radiant pair, Ruddy with haste and eager-eyed To meet him first upon the stair— His wife and child beatified.	80
They clad him in a robe of light, And gave him heavenly food to eat; Great seraphs praised him to the height, Archangels sat about his feet.	
God, smiling, took him by the hand, And led him to the brink of heaven: He saw where systems whirling stand, Where galaxies like snow are driven.	85
Dead silence reigned; a shudder ran Through space; Time furled his wearied wings; A slow adagio then began Sweetly resolving troubled things.	90
The dead were heralded along: As if with drums and trumps of flame,	

And flute and oboes keen and strong,	95
A brave andante singing came.	
Then like a python's sumptuous dress	
The frame of things was cast away,	
And out of Time's obscure distress	
The conquering scherzo thundered Day.	100
He doubted; but God said 'Even so;	
Nothing is lost that's wrought with tears:	
The music that you made below	
Is now the music of the spheres.'	
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