## Thomas Hood (1799-1845)

## 14 Pompey's Ghost

A Pathetic Ballad
'Skins may differ, but affection

Dwells in white and black the same.' — Cowper.

'Twas twelve o'clock, not twelve at night,	
But twelve o'clock at noon;	
Because the sun was shining bright,	
And not the silver moon.	
A proper time for friends to call,	5
Or Pots, or Penny Post;	
When, lo! as Phœbe sat at work,	
She saw her Pompey's Ghost!	
Now when a female has a call	
From people, that are dead;	10
Like Paris ladies, she receives	
Her visitors in bed.	
But Pompey's Spirit could not come	
Like spirits that are white,	
Because he was a Blackamoor,	15
And wouldn't show at night!	
But of all unexpected things	
That happen to us here,	
The most unpleasant is a rise	
In what is very dear.	20
So Phœbe screamed an awful scream,	
To prove the seaman's text:	
That after black appearances,	
White squalls will follow next.	
'Oh, Phœbe, dear! oh, Phœbe, dear!	25
Don't go to scream or faint;	
You think because I'm black I am	
The Devil, but I ain't!	
Behind the heels of Lady Lambe	

I walked whilst I had breath;	30
But that is past, and I am now	
A-walking after Death!	
'No, murder, though, I come to tell	
By base and bloody crime;	
So Phœbe, dear, put off your fits	35
Till some more fitting time:	
No Crowner, like a boatswain's mate,	
My body need attack,	
With his round dozen to find out	
Why I have died so black.	40
'One Sunday, shortly after tea,	
My skin began to burn	
As if I had in my inside	
A heater, like the urn.	
Delirious in the night I grew,	45
And as I lay in bed,	
They say I gather'd all the wool	
You see upon my head.	
'His Lordship for his doctor sent,	
My treatment to begin —	50
I wish that he had call'd him out,	
Before he call'd him in!	
For though to physic he was bred,	
And pass'd at Surgeons' Hall,	
To make his post a sinecure,	55
He never cured at all!	
'The Doctor look'd about my breast,	
And then about my back,	
And then he shook his head and said,	
"Your case looks very black."	60
And first he sent me hot cayenne,	
And then gamboge to swallow, —	
But still my Fever would not turn	
To Scarlet or to Yellow!	
'With madder and with turmeric	65

He made his next attack; But neither he nor all his drugs Could stop my dying black. At last I got so sick of life, And sick of being dosed, One Monday morning I gave up My physic and the ghost!	70
'Oh, Phœbe, dear, what pain it was To sever every tie! You know black beetles feel as much As giants when they die — And if there is a bridal bed, Or bride of little worth, It's lying in a bed of mould, Along with Mother Earth.	75 80
'Alas; some happy, happy day, In church I hoped to stand, And like a muff of sable skin Receive your lily hand; But sternly with that piebald match My fate untimely clashes — For now, like Pompe-double-i, I'm sleeping in my ashes!	85
'And now farewell! a last farewell! I'm wanted down below, And have but time enough to add One word before I go — In mourning crape and bombazine Ne'er spend your precious pelf — Don't go in black for me, — for I Can do it for myself.	90 95
'Henceforth within my grave I rest, But Death, who there inherits, Allowed my spirit leave to come, You seemed so out of spirits: But do not sigh, and do not cry, By grief too much engross'd,—	100

Nor, for a ghost of colour, turn The colour of a ghost!

'Again farewell, my Phœbe dear!

Once more a last adieu!

For I must make myself as scarce

As swans of sable hue.'

From black to gray, from gray to nought,

The Shape began to fade, —

And, like an egg, though not so white, The Ghost was newly laid!

1840

(From *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hood.* Ed. with Notes by Walter Jerrold. Oxford UP, 1911)