A. C. Swinburne (1837-1909)

3 A Ballad of Burdens

The burden of fair women. Vain delight,	
And love self-slain in some sweet shameful way,	
And sorrowful old age that comes by night	
As a thief comes that no heart by day,	
And change that finds fair cheeks and leaves them grey,	5
And weariness that keeps awake for hire,	
And grief that says what pleasure used to say;	
This is the end of every man's desire.	
The burden of bought kisses. This is sore,	
A burden without fruit in childbearing;	10
Between the nightfall and the dawn threescore,	
Threescore between the dawn and evening.	
The shuddering in thy lips, the shuddering	
In thy sad eyelids tremulous like fire,	
Makes love seem shameful and a wretched thing.	15
This is the end of every man's desire.	
The burden of sweet speeches. Nay, kneel down,	
Cover thy head, and weep; for verily	
These market-men that buy thy white and brown	
In the last days shall take no thought for thee.	20
In the last days like earth thy face shall be,	
Yea, like sea-marsh made thick with brine and mire,	
Sad with sick leavings of the sterile sea.	
This is the end of every man's desire.	
The burden of long living. Thou shalt fear	25
Waking, and sleeping mourn upon thy bed;	
And say at night 'Would God the day were here,'	
And say at dawn 'Would God the day were dead.'	

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Where in short breaths the doubtful days respire,
And time's turned glass lets through the sighing sands;
This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of much gladness. Life and lust
Forsake thee, and the face of thy delight;
And underfoot the heavy hour strews dust,
And overhead strange weathers burn and bite;
And where the red was, lo the bloodless white,
And where truth was, the likeness of a liar,
And where day was, the likeness of the night;
This is the end of every man's desire.

L'ENVOY

Princes, and ye whom pleasure quickeneth,

Heed well this rhyme before your pleasure tire;

For life is sweet, but after life is death.

This is the end of every man's desire.

1866

(From *Poetical Works*. The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne. Ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise. Vol. 1. London: William Heinemann, 1925)