To George Sand

A Desire

Thou large-brained woman and large-hearted man,
Self-called George Sand! whose soul, amid the lions
Of thy tumultuous senses, moans defiance
And answers roar for roar, as spirits can:
I would some mild miraculous thunder ran
Above the applauded circus, in appliance
Of thine own nobler nature’s strength and science,
Drawing two pinions, white as wings of swan,
From thy strong shoulders, to amaze the place
With holier light! that thou to woman’s claim
And man’s, mightst join beside the angel’s grace
Of a pure genius sanctified from blame,
Till child and maiden pressed to thine embrace
To kiss upon thy lips a stainless fame.

1844

To George Sand

A Recognition

True genius, but true woman! dost deny
The woman’s nature with a manly scorn,
And break away the gauds and armlets worn
By weaker women in captivity?
Ah, vain denial! that revolted cry
Is sobbed in by a woman’s voice forlorn,
Thy woman’s hair, my sister, all unshorn
Floats back dishevelled strength in agony,
Disproving thy man’s name: and while before
The world thou burnest in a poet-fire,
We see thy woman-heart beat evermore
Through the large flame. Beat purer, heart, and higher,
Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore
Where unincarnate spirits purely aspire!

1844

A Year’s Spinning

He listened at the porch that day,
To hear the wheel go on, and on;
And then it stopped, ran back away,
   While through the door he brought the sun:
   But now my spinning is all done.

He sat beside me, with an oath
   That love ne’er ended, once begun;
   I smiled—believing for us both,
   What was the truth for only one:
   And now my spinning is all done.

My mother cursed me that I heard
   A young man’s wooing as I spun:
   Thanks, cruel mother, for that word—
   For I have, since, a harder known!
   And now my spinning is all done.

I thought—O God!—my first-born’s cry
   Both voices to mine ear would drown:
   I listened in mine agony—
   It was the silence made me groan!
   And now my spinning is all done.

Bury me ’twixt my mother’s grave,
   (Who cursed me on her death-bed lone)
   And my dead baby’s (God it save!)
   Who, not to bless me, would not moan.
   And now my spinning is all done.

A stone upon my heart and head,
   But no name written on the stone!
   Sweet neighbours, whisper low instead,
   “This sinner was a loving one—
   And now her spinning is all done.”

And let the door ajar remain,
   In case he should pass by anon;
   And leave the wheel out very plain,—
   That he, when passing in the sun,
   May see the spinning is all done.
What was he doing, the great god Pan,¹
Down in the reeds by the river?
Spreading ruin and scattering ban,²
Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,
And breaking the golden lilies afloat
With the dragon-fly on the river.

He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,
From the deep cool bed of the river:
The limpid water turbidly ran,
And the broken lilies a-dying lay,
And the dragon-fly had fled away,
Ere he brought it out of the river.

High on the shore sat the great god Pan
While turbidly flowed the river;
And hacked and hewed as a great god can,
With his hard bleak steel at the patient reed,
Till there was not a sign of the leaf indeed
To prove it fresh from the river.

He cut it short, did the great god Pan,
(How tall it stood in the river!) Then drew the pith,³ like the heart of a man,
Steadily from the outside ring,
And notched the poor dry empty thing
In holes, as he sat by the river.

“This is the way,” laughed the great god Pan
(Laughed while he sat by the river),
“The only way, since gods began
To make sweet music, they could succeed.”
Then, dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,
He blew in power by the river.

Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!
Piercing sweet by the river!
Blinding sweet, O great god Pan!
The sun on the hill forgot to die,

¹ God of woods, fields, and flocks, having a human body with goat’s legs, horns, and ears. According to legend, a nymph, Syrinx, when escaping from Pan’s pursuit of her, was metamorphosed into a reed in a stream. One version of the legend (the one used here) has Pan making this single reed into a shepherd’s pipe, in shape like a flute. In another version, he makes a pipe out of seven reeds in a row, an invention named in honor of the nymph.
² Curses, malediction.
³ Central tissue.
And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly
   Came back to dream on the river.

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,
   To laugh as he sits by the river,
Making a poet out of a man:

The true gods sigh for the cost and pain,—
For the reed which grows nevermore again
   As a reed with the reeds in the river.