Swinburne Baby, I'm With You

Swinburne baby, I'm with you.
I have done with tears and treasons
and years that burn and break
    and all that jazz.
I have done with foetid eyes that glow with the luminosity
        of decay.
(You know--they're stuck like rotted raisins
in the heads of the hollow men.)
By God--(Forgive me, I should have remembered:
On the eighth day God died.)
That's too bad; it leaves nothing to swear by.
Well, then--
By Nothing! Even old Ezra once sang for love and
                idleness

before he got hold of the Chinese
or they got hold of him
or something.
Old Ezra.
What did we ever do without him, bless his heart.
Damn. I keep forgetting. Bless his little decayed bundle
        of motor impulses.
Anyway, back to you, Swinburne baby.
When I was a kid I heard you were sensuous.
I thought they meant dirty.
So I tried to look you up.
But all I could find around the house was
      Tears idle tears I know not what and some other
                 stuff

      Like I shot an arrow into
      The boy stood
      Under the spreading some kind of tree and
      Roll on thou deep and dark blue ocean ROLL
so I gave it up.
But I found you later.
After I'd consorted with Prufrock awhile
mixing sterility and desire
under the elms.
(They had Dutch elm disease)
even the disease was expatriate.

But I found you, Swinburne baby,
and I massaged myself with your
        oh your syllables
I wallowed oh that's what they meant sensuous
        in your assonances and
oh baby
your alliterations
        oh yes
let me hear that interior rhyme again
and oh baby
I thank whatever gods there be
that you got rhythm.

They say you looked like a red haired whooping crane
and you couldn't hold your liquor
(So what. It took something stronger than liquor to do
                the Xanadu bit.)
They say sometimes when you get going good
you don't mean anything.
Well it don't mean a thing
if it ain't got that swing
and sweetie you swing.
(Listen, Keats once said young Callidore was paddling
                o'er the lake.
I mean nobody's perfect.)
Anyway, come on over tonight.
Emily will be here. She doesn't know that God died.
He's her next door neighbor.
Pete Quince is coming too
and if we can get him away from the clavier
we'll sing a couple of real songs.

Notes:

Lines **2, 3**   quoted from Swinburne
      7   refers to ''The Hollow Men'' by T. S. Eliot
      9   first line of a poem by Robert Graves
      12   part of a first line of a poem by Ezra Pound
      13, 16   refers to the translations of oriental poetry which
                may be some of Pound's best work, but which in-
                fluenced his style toward literary obscurity in
                which he places meaningless syllables in juxta-
                position like the blocks of color in abstract
                paintings

Lines 15   *Pound's style had a profound influence on poets, usually*
            to ill effect

    18   *Heart, soul, and most sympathetic and emotional ex-*
            pressions are no longer acceptable in modern poetry
            now that psychiatry has been adopted by the symbolists
            and abstractionists

    24   *Tennyson*

    25   *Longfellow*

    26   *Felicia Dorothea Hemans*

    27   *Longfellow*

    28   *Byron*

   31, 32

    33   *refers to ''The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'' by*
            T. S. Eliot and to a line from Eliot's ''Wasteland''
            --''April is the cruellest month, Breeding/ lilacs
            out of the dead land, mixing/ Memory and desire...''
            ''Desire Under The Elms'' is a play by Eugene O'Neill

   34, 35 *the diseased trees refers to the prevailing mood of*
            modern poetry, and the Dutch elm disease to the fact
            that many of these poets abandoned America to live
            abroad

    46   *a line from Swinburne's ''Garden of Proserpine''*

    47   *paraphrase of a popular song*

    49   *Swinburne was a dipsomaniac*

    50   *refers to the fact that Coleridge wrote the glorious*
            ''Kubla Khan'' while still under the influence of
            opium

   53, 54 *lines from a popular song*

    56   *first line of a poem by Keats, an instance of his*
            magnificent ear failing magnificently

   59, 60 *refers to Emily Dickinson's personal, sometimes impudent*
            approach to sacred matters -- in a refreshingly
            direct way

   61, 62 *refers to the poem arranged in the four movements of a*
            symphony, entitled 'Peter Quince at the Clavier''
            by Wallace Stevens

-- Phyllis Onstott Arone

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