

# *The Unicorn*

a poem in four parts

by

Owen Barfield

The Unicorn  
a poem in four parts  
by Owen Barfield

Edited by J. H. & L. A. Taylor

Transcribed from materials at the Bodleian Library and the Wade Center

Bodleian catalogue:

'The Unicorn', long narrative poem, typescript, [1950s]

Shelfmark: Dep. c. 1115

Wade holdings:

OB / MS-105 / X

OB / MS-166

Barfield Press  
Oxford, England

Copyright © 2017 Owen Barfield Literary Estate  
All rights reserved.

## THE UNICORN

*The lion and the unicorn were fighting for the crown.*

*But mine horn shall be exalted like the horn of an unicorn;  
for I am anointed with fresh oil (Psalm 92)*

*And he built his sanctuary as of unicorns in the land which  
he founded for ever. (Psalm 78).*

*Hunters can catch the unicorn only by placing a young  
virgin in his haunts. No sooner does he see the damsel,  
than he runs towards her, and lies down at her feet, and  
so suffers himself to be captured by the hunters.*

*Thirteenth Century Legend.*

## I

### *The Procession*

At evening, when the Dog-Star sank  
Below the dark horizon's rim,  
Lost in the light, since Ocean drank  
The royal Globe along with him –  
At evening, as the sun went down,  
A gay procession left the Town  
And danced along the deep ravine:  
A crowd of rosy boys and girls  
With jet-black curls or golden-brown,  
In rose-red tunic and white gown;

And there were roses everywhere,  
 Bunches of roses dangling down  
 Or lonely blossoms stuck in curls.  
 Old for girls and boys they were:  
 Their merry mouth and shining eyes  
 Told how rich Fancy's foliage greened  
 And what blithe summer, safely screened,  
 Swelled in their bosoms and their loins.  
 And oft – as if their joy increased  
 Beyond a silence age enjoins 20  
 On youth – the rocks around them rang;  
 Abrupt their happy chattering ceased,  
 And loud those clear young voices sang:–

'Upon a lime-tree, leafy boughed,  
 There swelled and glowed a Turtle-dove  
 And, cooing loud, as lion proud,  
 He called and bowed and billed his love:–  
*Take all my heart, my Love! Thou art*  
*My love! Thine eyes have shamed me! Wise*  
*I grow at last: take all my heart, my love!* 30

Then I, too old to dance or sing,  
 And yet all-anxious, if I could,  
 To plumb the meaning of this thing,  
 Asked my good angel what to do;  
 And he – if I mistake not – smiled,  
 As though too well he understood,  
 And bad me 'go a pace or two  
 Along with them and ask, my child,  
 And learn!' How swiftly I obeyed,  
 Half glad, half laughing, half afraid! 40

“What for?” – the stripling echoed back  
 My words, with just that touch of scorn  
 Which youth, unspoiled, must needs betray,  
 Amazed that any man should lack  
 The truth it mastered yesterday –  
 “What for? – to fetch the Unicorn!”

Then I, a fool, ashamed to show  
 Incomprehension, answered:– “Oh,  
 I see!” with a blank look on my face,  
 Through which he instantly divined 50  
 The empty thought that lay behind:–

“A stranger here? I see, I see!”  
 And now he sobers down his pace,  
 Resigned to walk and talk with me,  
 And thus begins:– “Our little town,  
 You know, has neither towers nor walls  
 Nor moat, nor drawbridge to let down,  
 Nor sharp stockade. When evening falls,  
 No guard is set, no sentries pace,  
 To check the bordering Pigmy race. 60

We sleep secure from beasts and men,  
 Because a Lion guards the place,  
 Good custom clothes his rampant will,  
 He issues nightly from his den  
 And, like a planet, circling prowls,  
 With frightful, friendly roars and growls  
 Around our Town. All throve, until  
 A month ago his first assault  
 Showed how his instinct grew at fault.  
 One night a bullock from the herd 70

Was missing; next he sprang and slew  
 A lamb, and, last, a singing bird!  
 Last! Would it were! Oh sir, he mauled  
 A man made in God's image, too!  
 A friendly stranger, sir! The wound  
 Is healing now – but not the word  
 That rang through all the country round,  
 Warning against us. We're marooned,  
 Or like to be – cut off from kind  
 Since then: and they said we must find 80  
 A remedy. They counselled long,  
 And last they held the beast must die,  
 The Synod, yet the beast is strong  
 And we – how should we not abhor  
 The task, who ne'er drew blood before!"

"One had a small black dog – would fly,  
 Straight as an arrow, swift as thought,  
 Right as his mouth stretched to roar,  
 Deep in his great red yawning throat –  
 This seemed fantastic. Next, a man 90  
 Told (and it seemed a likelier plan)  
 How, since that frightful century  
 When, after prying men had planned  
 To split the atom and unbrace  
 The frame of Earth, all arms were banned  
 (You learnt at school, how by Decree  
 All weapons to destruction passed,  
 The latest first, the earliest last) – "

"Learnt! *I remember!*"

"Well, he said  
 That somehow, in their potting-shed, 100

Since those bad days an old Cross-bow  
Had lain – and we should use it now.

“We started, shuddered, wept, agreed.  
We found the thing. We got it freed  
From dust and rust. ’Twas time to go  
To seek the den. At first none spoke.  
We looked at one another – oh,  
But in that instant something woke,  
A voice within, that thundered *No!*  
Then too, an outer voice was heard, 110  
Silent till now, a quiet one,  
Enquiring: ‘Have you considered  
Who guards us, when the Lion’s gone?  
Who keeps the wolves and jackals down?  
Who frights the Pigmies from our town?  
O treason! O disherison!  
Tomorrow, when they broach our soil,  
What do we fight with? *Belacoil?*  
How they will march us all to school!  
How lecture us! How make us look – 120  
Ordering all our lives by rule –  
To barrack-square and statute-book  
For strength to keep our City clean!  
Oh Brothers, ere our bolt be shot  
Once and for ever, shall we not  
Consult the *Burning Babe?*’

“’Twas seen  
He counselled well. Soon, hushed before  
The Eikon the old Painter swore  
Would one day talk to Youth, on whom  
Virtue was never thrust by rod 130

Or precept – whose heart ne'er mistook  
 Fear of itself for fear of God –  
 We stood – and I had little faith.”

“The moments passed. A sigh, a breath,  
 That seemed of our own tenseness born,  
 Went shivering through the canvas worn,  
 Though no man saw it shift or shake –  
 And then – I scarce believed I woke –  
 In low, clear tones the Eikon spoke:–”

*“Slay not the Lion, fresh young folk!* 140

*Go rather, take a Unicorn*

*(But lay no bridle on his neck!)*

*And let your Unicorn abide*

*Free, on your City's counter-side:*

*So shall the twain debate the ground*

*And, furiously careering round*

*In oft-encountering antidrome,*

*Either shall other hold in check*

*From frolic ploys, and bless your home,*

*And all with joy and peace be crowned.”* 150

“It ceased – and some would fain depart,  
 But others showed we had no art  
 Of taking Unicorns! Yet, when  
 They prayed the Eikon speak again,  
 Like an old man with wandering wits  
 It faltered and its voice grew faint:  
 There were awkward pauses between bits  
 Of old law – jargon, forced and quaint –

And these are what we caught of them:–

*“His capture lieth not in prender. . .* 160



*Nec vi nec fraude. . . lies in render. . .*

*At tu, venator, virginem*

*Pro rosa solis. . .hem, . . hem, . . . .*

*At pasture may he be surprised,*

*The moon then shining. . . . . ”*

“Thus advised,

With blazoned hints from ancient books

And prayer and fancy, we devised

What seemed the fairest stratagem;

And thus all this –” he waved – “which looks

So strange to you, was organised.”

170

I would have answered: but just then

Their ardent carol swelled again

And my companion poured his own

Clear voice into that unison:–

*‘Upon a lime-tree, leafy boughed*

*There swelled and glowed a Turtle-dove*

*And, cooing loud, as lion proud,*

*He called and bowed and billed his love:–*

*Take all my heart, my Love! Thou art*

*My Love! Think eyes have shamed me! Wise*

180

*I grow at last: take all my heart, my love!’*

While thus they sang, I looked about:

Pale stars winked overhead, where green

Had changed to amethyst: the rout

Had reached the mouth of the ravine.

Here, where the valley widened out

And emerald pastures lipped a stream

Meandering, the column spread

Like water-floods. A moment sped

In which the veilly gauze of dream

190

Passed in between it and my sight –  
 Dusk deepens; the white roses gleam  
 Like moons; the flitting women seem  
 Papery, unmaterialised –  
 Warm fireflies in a lacquer night. . .

That passed. The song ceased. And I said:–

“You spoke of strategy – some plan  
 Prepared. I find none. Are you led?  
 Call you this rabble ‘organised’?  
 I see no Marshall at your head,  
 No pope, no fathering Fugleman.”

200

He turned and looked on me, surprised,  
 Then pointed, where in midst of all,  
 Now by the thinning of the throng  
 Made visible, there paced along  
 Compact and ceremonial,  
 A central knot. I saw their gait  
 More solemn, marked their mien sedate.

What robes were these appareled in?

Below bright albs of baldachin –  
 In chrome or glowing madder steeped,  
 Embroidered, gorgeous, oxlip-gold,  
 With tasselled bullions – shuffling hems  
 Of sable cassocks drily peeped.  
 If priests or bards, I could not say,  
 For round their brows bright anadems  
 Of twisted flowers and gleaming gems  
 Crowned the fantastical array.

210

The youth was silent. Love and awe  
 Sat lightly on him. Then I saw

220

How, high uplifted, Something masked  
In blossoms moved with them: I asked:—  
“Young man, my eyes are weakening,  
What bear they, thus hid up in flowers?  
What Standard? What may be that Thing,  
Whence silent streams of roses fling  
Themselves in waterfally showers?”

He raised his voice: for, while I spoke,  
The sounding chorus once more woke:—

“Why Sir, good Sir, can you not see 230

The cross – our Cross of Ebony?”

So said, he left and danced along,

Joining his comrades in mid-song,

Just as their plain-song burst apart

In the refrain’s broad harmonies,

Then turned and smiled at me, and all

The evening rang like bell-metal:—

*‘Take all my heart, my Love! Thou art*

*My Love! Think eyes have shamed me! Wise*

*I grow at last! Take all my heart, my love!’ 240*

---

## II

*The Lady*

Placid and warm, the candid moon  
Seemed hesitating in the sky  
As if dismayed to see how high  
Her floating self had mounted. Soon  
The moving standard halted too.  
The solemn, hieratic band,  
In central rigol, took their stand,  
While round them in a wider ring  
The red-robed youths all gathering  
Stood silent. Had some hovering bird                    10  
Looked down, he might have deemed there was  
A Wild Rose open on the grass  
Enormous. But at one low word  
The silent concourse broke and stirred  
And shifted, while a corridor  
Was opened up, where he, who bore  
The sober Standard all aflame  
With flowers, back towards me came  
And passed me, leaving clear my view  
Straight to the centre.

                                One stood there,                    20  
White-robed she stood. I do not care  
To seek to paint her. Strange! I knew  
Instantly, though now still she stood,  
The way she'd walked beside the Rood  
Which now had left her. Have you seen  
A girl *enceinte* – the pensive poise,

Self-gathered to a globe serene,  
 Wherein she bears her secret joys  
 About with her? Her eyes how wide?  
 How courteously preoccupied 30  
 Her answers? Thronged on every side,  
 How none the less, aloof the press,  
 Sealed in a hallowed selfishness  
 She strolls? Even so, a while before,  
 Enringed, unseen, I knew that she,  
 Pacing beside the Standard, bore  
 The ark of her virginity.

The priests with final gesture sain  
 Her shining curls, then through the lane  
 They pass, the way the Standard went 40  
 Behind me – leaving her alone,  
 It seemed that many youths had on  
 Rich cloaks. With one accord these bent  
 Forward and cast them on the ground:  
 And so they piled a little round  
 Warm island in the chilly dew.  
 Then all bowed gravely and withdrew  
 Across the field, to join the rest,  
 I following: Youth and girl and priest  
 All mingled – bard and girl and youth 50  
 Stood waiting by the pasture's edge,  
 A long line glimmering in the lewth  
 Of an old quickset boundary hedge,  
 Hushed but not mute. The whispered jest  
 Rose here and there, half-heard, but half  
 Unheard – or only to be guessed  
 From some low, happy murmured laugh

That followed it. That restless fit  
 Died slowly out of the still scene  
 And left the waking silentness 60  
 Of summer dark undoubted queen.  
 A corncrake chirred. Full three fields off  
 I heard an old sheep's quiet cough.  
 Each moment's weight began to press.  
 One pointed, while another scanned  
 The field beneath his shading hand,  
 Strown to the moonlight, broad and flat.

Inmidst, a statue with head bent,  
 White, on her little isle of gold,  
 With folded arms the lady sat. 70  
 And having rested there, they went,  
 My two eyes, travelling on beyond  
 And near the great field's farther side  
 A dear familiar sight espied,  
 A farm-horse standing by a pond.  
 I called to mind how he would look  
 If I should pass him close – how still!  
 Asleep on leg! the honest clown  
 Too dumb to think of lying down!

God pardon me! What worlds mistook 80  
 May habit-coloured senses! Hark!  
 The hedge stirred faintly in the dark  
 Behind me, rustled by a breeze,  
 A breeze that woke and floated out  
 Over the field the essences  
 Of all those roses. Swift they sped.  
 I saw the lady lift her head  
 One moment, while they passed her by,

The next, my farm-horse shivered, woke,  
 Toused up his mane like a great shout, 90  
 And stamped once. Shattered moonshine broke  
     In argent sequins off his horn.  
     Like landscape in a lightning-stroke,  
     Bright-cut in memory, sharp and shorn,  
 That moment died as it was born.  
 Before my eyes were even aware  
 Of what they saw, my hearing caught  
 A noise being poured into the hush,  
 Low, threatening, swelling, drowning thought,  
 A gobbling thunder. One mad rush, 100  
 Across the field, of streaking fleetness  
 Told how the silvery monster sought  
 The source of all this wafted sweetness!  
     We craned our necks. A straight career  
 Must pass that drowsing lady near!  
 We trembled while we watched them – Yes!  
 Coltish for all his lordliness,  
 The white gleam from the virgin's dress  
 Cracked like a shot at him. He shied,  
 Baulked at her, tripped, reared, swerved aside. 110  
 Swiftly the proud beast's prick of fright  
 Was past: nor any panic flight  
 But anger followed. He stopped short  
 Long ere he reached us, quite forgot  
 The aromatic whiff he sought  
 And turned and stood. We saw his back,  
 His flanks just quivering, in the blink  
 Of the bright moon. . . Why did I think  
 Of Aspramont and Camelot,

Of Kaye, Rinaldo, Lamorak, 120

And breathless waitings with couched lance  
 Before the apparelled pursuivants  
 Sounded to tourney? While I thought,  
 Horn down, he galloped to attack!

Was this, then, human sacrifice?

A quarter – one third – half the space  
 Was covered – then, in the last trice  
 The lady calmly raised her face.

Nay, ask me not – I was too far

To say what happened! But although 130

I could not see, I think I know:

For late one evening long ago

When driving west, where few trees are,

Too fast, I topped a gentle rise,

The sun flamed level in my eyes

Blinding – and lord! how mind, heart, will

Shouted: *For God's sake, man, stop still!*

When next I was again aware,

The Unicorn was standing by

The lady. Patient he stood there, 140

As if he hoped to catch her eye

By stillness: while his panting breath –

It must be so, he was so near –

Stirred the loose hair above her ear.

And she – she sat as still as death,

Her graceful head again bent down;

She neither spoke nor stirred. He shook

His great horned head, and made a sound

Half snort, half neigh, then pawed the ground

Most gently, as to say: Please look! 150



But when the statue would not stir,  
 He waxed impatient, desperate, bold,  
 And lumbering down on ponderous knees,  
 Flickered a flame-tongue over her  
 And chafed her with his muzzle. Cold  
 His Galatea stayed, nor moved  
 Save as those clumsy nozzlings shoved.

So it went on, till, all at once  
 Tired of evoking no response,  
 The lordly creature rose, let be 160  
 His fiery importunity  
 And trotted off. Not far away  
 He stopped again, I cannot say  
 Whether in umbrage or in scorn  
 Or which more pointed seemed – his back  
 Toward her – or towards the Zodiac  
 The index of his taper horn.

And then at last the lady rose  
 And, crossing over to his side,  
 Deliberately made much of him 170  
 Stroking his taut and glossy hide,  
 Fussing and patting – neither grudging  
 Her cheek against the wiry hair  
 Covering his withers. He stayed there,  
 But all the while he never budged,  
 Making believe he marked her not:  
 Or was this only what I thought  
 Because my sight is waxing dim?  
 I heard one sharp-eyed youth declare  
 His ears twitched while she gentled him. 180

Ye, be that as it may, no wrong

She seemed to feel, no snub or hurt  
 But, quiet as she came, ere long  
 She glided back to her old spot  
 Upon the cloaks, and spread her skirt  
 And bowed her head. He followed not  
 Only – reluctantly – turned round  
 And, planting forehooves on the ground,  
 Sat on his haunches facing her.

It seemed the moments were embalmed                    190  
 That followed next, and could not fade:  
 Both in an eldritch pause becalmed  
 Set soaked in moonshine, Beast and maid.  
 Strange Beast! Like some majestic Sphinx  
 That, couchant on the desert sands,  
 For ever motionlessly thinks  
 His circling thoughts – yet with that air  
 Of baby in his own high chair  
 Pushed up to eat, observing there,  
 Absorbed and pleased, how fostering hands                    200  
 Advance the spoon, the lately stirred –  
 Lovable, helpless and absurd!

-----

### III

#### *The Capture*

Now past the zenith, high above,  
 Plain through the starry sickle shining,  
 The wrathful patriarchal breast  
 Of Leo roamed, while up the East,

Close on the tail of him declining,  
 Virgo ascended. I well know  
 How, in old mythic maps of sky,  
 The outspread arms of that great “Y”  
 Express the Ear of Corn. Not so.  
 For me those arms are stretched in love 10  
 Towards the Lion. Far below  
 Squatted the stubborn Unicorn  
 And when my eyes passed up his horn  
 And on to heaven, travelling far,  
 They rested on the Northern Star.  
 Did something move? Once more I dreamed:  
 And lo! from that horn’s tip it seemed  
 The twisting spirals tapering  
 Discharged the thrust of his intent  
 In unseen rings intelligent, 20  
 That spreading, rose and, rising, spread,  
 Turning into Overhead –  
 Till all the Universe swung round  
 A Unicorn upon the ground;  
 Whose coronation by the stars  
 Was timeless, being time’s quintessence.  
 So spellbound in eternal presence  
 Seemed all below, around, above:  
 The trees, the air, the very stones  
 That strewed the turf: no grassblade stirred; 30  
 I saw not how this hour could pass.  
 God! Would the creature *never* move?  
 And then an unforeseen occurred  
 That changed and loosened everything;  
 For, all at once, in low, clear tones,

Softly, the lady began to sing:–

*“His hand He raised, and bade them drink*

*And eat, and they were all amazed:*

*‘What must I do? What must I think?’*

*But John leaned on His breast and gazed:–* 40

*Take all my heart, my love! Thou art*

*My Love. Thine eyes have shamed me. Wise*

*I grow at last. Take all my heart, my Love!”*

Now when the lady ceased to sing,

The glorious silvery cascade

Of horn and muscle, rippling, rose

Erect and, through its quivering nose,

It – (so if it be fair to say

“The burn” and mean Niagara) –

*Whinnied*, by way of answering. 50

Then, having edged a trifle round

To face a corner of the field,

He starts to titillate the ground

By way of walking; with his feet

He taps and dainties, back a pace

With testy tossings of his face

Next moment in his chest concealed

For coyness. Truly, if he went

The way he must, or way he meant,

I hardly know: As one who rides 60

With feeble skill, will find he goes –

Whichever way the snaffle guides –

Somehow the way his horse decides,

So, sidlings, towards their lady moves

That awkward squad of crowding hooves.

But when he came to where she was  
 Throned on her island in the grass,  
 And meekly his proud neck inclined,  
 Ah, then, indeed she lifted up  
 Her countenance, she smashed the cup 70  
 Of joy, and, through his passive eye  
 Gazing expressive, launched with power  
 Chaste lightnings of her *belamour*.

With that he yielded up the prize –  
 His puissant Horn, his Tower of Kind –  
 Surrender! No more to be said,  
 Save this, that when I come to die,  
 In my last agony, afraid,  
 God grant I may remember how  
 Demurely on that thundering brow 80  
 Those lips bestowed the accolade!

---

IV

*The Feed*

I deemed the vigil ended now,  
 Now when this kneeling Unicorn  
 Laid in her lap his humbled horn  
 And both were still. I pondered, though,  
 How she could ever move, or rise,  
 Slip out from underneath her prize  
 Yet hold it: while I wondered so,  
 Idly, once more I heard the breeze  
 Come rustling faintly through the trees

Behind us, and at once there rose, 10  
 Fresh and delightsome in the nose,  
 But startling too, a stronger scent  
 Than roses blow – A hot, cooked smell  
 Of savoury potherbs, like a bell,  
 Over the pasture wafted went.  
 The Unicorn upon his side  
 Lay all subdued and slumbersome,  
 Like one bewitched: but when he sniffed it,  
 I saw him perk his head and lift it,  
 Abrupt, exclamatory: – ‘Hm! 20  
 Provender!’ I could hear him say,  
 And he rose and sniffed the air, and tried  
 To edge away unseen, I thought,  
 But ere he broke into a trot,  
 Light as a tossed bird in the wrack,  
 The lady leaped upon his back!  
 That peerless back, which never bore  
 Rider’s nor any weight before,  
 Flinched not a jot, as he careered  
 Onward, it neither plunged nor reared, 30  
 But like a paddock-pony – one  
 Safe for a child to learn upon –  
 Carried her in across the field  
 Then gently, like a camel, kneeled  
 While she dismounted – by good chance  
 So near to me, I met her glance!  
 I met her glance! Four words! Like rain  
 It blessed away old lusts and fears,  
 With the awful weight of vanished years. . .  
 And I became a boy again. 40

The hush was lifted, and the crowd  
 Broke up in knots. In altered tone,  
 Laughing and chattering aloud,  
 Recalling scenes, comparing notes  
 And telling little anecdotes,  
 They strolled: I heard one eager voice  
 Babbling too much – it was my own!  
 So, when a group of girls and boys  
 Collected round the oaken bin  
 The monster's nose was buried in, 50  
 I joined them rather silently.  
 And, by good fortune, next to me  
 A girl was standing, who took part  
 In furnishing the feed contained  
 Within it – one that knew the art  
 From ABC to ampersand  
 And, when I asked, she took my hand  
 And told me fully: First, the base:  
 Herbs seethed in pottage, numerous kinds  
 Commingled (wherewith she explained 60  
 Virtues of petals, roots and seeds,  
 How plants the least in outward show  
 By beauty-gardeners banned as weeds,  
 Work with the highest potency):  
 Oats, for a stiffening, said she,  
 But first the corny brash receives  
 Two liberal powders: namely, leaves  
 Of *Lady's Mantle*, picked at morn,  
 Dusted with pollen of her own green flowers,  
 Dried in the sun, and then for hours 70  
 Pashed in a chalice of thin horn;

And next, *Enchanter's Nightshade*, bleached  
 And steeped and set on fire and burned  
 To carbon, when the potash leached  
 In water, fixed, and coolly urned,  
 She said the ash was shovelled hot  
 In ice-cold water on the spot,  
 And the white-gray solution, sealed  
 In Carboys, on a float low-wheeled  
 Was drawn by four black oxen, where 80  
 Deep in a narrow, rocky cleft,  
 Through blasts of damp and sunless air,  
 There ran a little mountain brook;  
 Pleistocene waterfalls had left  
 Three natural basins in a row,  
 Stepwise, and each from other took  
 The purifying overflow.  
 Last on a sun-baked rock the lye  
 Was spread through the Dog days to dry.  
 And so the whole sweet-smelling brash, 90  
 Laced with this feathery leaf and ash,  
 Was packed, and stored in a warm shed,  
 Where all those herbs' pure spirits wed  
 Before their grosser substances  
 United, "And we boiled the mess  
 And watched the creamy liquor swish  
 Smooth in an alabaster dish  
 And, cooling, curdle brittle-flat,  
 Too thin to clot, too thick to stir,  
 Like porridge in a porringer – 100  
 And only needing to be warmed  
 To loose again the smell that charmed,



The whiff the monster snorted at”.

When she had told me all, I praised  
 Their subtle lore and gave her thanks,  
 She smiled, but answered not, because  
 The Unicorn’s complacent jaws  
 Ceased champing at that moment – he  
 Seemed to have halted by mistake  
 At first, but shortly after raised 110  
 His noble front, and turned it round  
 And gave his a neck a rapid shake  
 By way of *Benedicite*:  
 Then sleeked his ears and stood his ground  
 And made no farther move. . . . A sound –  
 A sigh, a mutter, a low cheer  
 Rose like a little wind all round  
 And plainly showed the end was here.

The end was here, I need not tell  
 How on the turf we feasted well 120  
 Nor with what greedless grace all danced  
 And many kissed: how far advanced  
 The night was and the stars grew pale  
 Before they gathered up their gear;  
 Or how in azure slashed with flame  
 Dawn had apparelled half the sky  
 Before they raised their Standard high  
 And started back the way they came;  
 How, by a word, a look, a thought,  
 Untouched, the Unicorn was brought 130  
 Into their centre by a priest;  
 Or how beside the gentle beast  
 The lady walked; she rode him not.

Enough for me that I was one  
 With all that passed that summer's night.  
 So, with the rising of the sun,  
 I stopped, and watched them out of sight.  
 Long after they no more were seen,  
 I heard triumphant, skirling tunes  
 On clarionets and bambardoons, 140  
 Ringing their way up the ravine,  
 Grow fainter. Then I turned my face  
 Away – and O, for many days  
 Carried a brave warmth in my breast  
 Towards those fierce mountains in the West  
 Where lay my path. As for the rest –  
 Whether the Unicorn did act  
 As they imagined; if in fact  
 He fought the Lion round the town;  
 Whether they gained the promised crown, 150  
 Those youths and maidens, and, if so  
 Whether 'twas guarded or let go  
 By treason; if the Pigmy brook  
 Marched in the end, and wrought their will  
 To strip the roses from the Rood;  
 Or if he flouts the Lion still,  
 That Unicorn; or what occurred,  
 I cannot say: I never heard.

---