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CARL SANDBURG

Poems of the Midwest

CONTAINING TWO COMPLETE VOLUMES

Chicago Poems AND Cornhuskers

INTRODUCTION BY Lloyd Lewis

CLEVELAND AND NEW YORK

THE WORLD PUBLISHING COMPANY

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Introduction

IN OCTOBER, 1912, *Poetry*, a magazine scarcely larger than a man's hand, began appearing in Chicago.

On the fourteenth of the month, Theodore Roosevelt, campaigning for President on the "Bull Moose" platform of reform in politics and business, was shot by a fanatic in Milwaukee and rushed down to Chicago (and recovery) while his followers chanted the theme song of his crusade, "He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored." The event momentarily overshadowed the eloquence with which his chief adversary, Woodrow Wilson, was preaching "The New Freedom" and hammering at the high and ancient bastions of the protective tariff. It also overshadowed, temporarily, the crusades with which Chicago, itself, was attacking long-segregated vice and demanding new bridges, new boulevards, new parks. Concepts about the privateness of property were being ruthlessly assailed.

In Chicago, as in the nation, it was a day of explosive revolt against ancient standards, ancient exploitations, ancient segregations.

The new crusade against political corruption and oppressions of workers was a gestation inside three particular men who went home from their offices at night and tried to set down, in original ways, the thoughts the city gave them day by day. One was a lawyer, Edgar Lee Masters; one was an advertising copy writer, Sherwood Anderson; one was a so-

cialist newspaper writer and trade-journal reporter, Carl Sandburg.

It was as though the three of them were shot out of the cannon, Chicago.

At her desk in the office of *Poetry*, which she was founding and editing, Harriet Monroe, a wisp of a woman, felt the turmoil, knew the change was on. In her first number she gave space to a symbol of the times, Vachel Lindsay's "General Booth Enters Heaven." She tried to give place to the Old as well as the New—Alfred Noyes, John Reed, William Butler Yeats, Witter Bynner. In her August 1913 number she published "Trees" by Joyce Kilmer. A few weeks later someone brought in a little batch of typewritten sheets of poetry, saying a man named Carl Sandburg had done them.

All her life she could remember the emotion that struck her as she read them that first time. A great conviction of "beauty and power" swept over her, and, in her March 1914 number, they appeared, leading off with "Chicago," hog butcher for the world, and followed by "Jan Kubelik," "The Harbor," "The Hammer," "At a Window," "Lost," "Who Am I?," "Momus," and "The Road and the End." But it was "Chicago" that readers talked about most—and eventually talked about it more than anything *Poetry* would ever print.

The full impact of Sandburg's revolutionary style and subject-matter would not come, however, for two years., *Poetry* only circulated among a handful of verse fans. But that autumn of 1915, after *Poetry* had published Sandburg's "Iron" and "Among the Red Guns," Alice Corbin Henderson, assistant-editor of the magazine, recommended Sandburg to Alfred Harcourt, a visiting salesman from the New York publishing house of Henry Holt and Company. Harcourt said he'd like to see the poems; in time, Mrs. Henderson took them to New York, and Harcourt, catching fire, began urging his employers to publish them.

The decision was not as simple as it now would seem, for, while Sandburg had won the Helen Haire Levinson poetry prize of \$200 in November 1914, the public was still not as ready for change in literature as in politics. Romance and prettiness still ruled. *Pollymna, the Glad Girl* was the best of best-sellers. Harold Bell Wright, Gene Stratton-Porter, W. J. Locke, Robert W. Service were what people wanted. Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* had become, in 1915, a best-seller, but it was undergoing a savage attack from classicists for its "ugliness" and "cynicism"—the assault being topped off by Joyce Kilmer's denunciation of Masters as just another "village atheist."

Nevertheless, Harcourt won his fight, and in the spring of 1916 Holt published *Chicago Poems* with, defiantly, on its jacket a blurb of praise from the embattled Masters, himself—a noble prose-poem which hailed Sandburg as an emancipator, "a comrade of great loneliness" who had "outstared Fate that thwarts" and who stood as "a friend of Death as Nature's doorman at the house of Life."

Harriet Monroe, reviewing it in *Poetry*, said the book as a whole "gives us the city (Chicago) in a masterpiece of portraiture." *The Dial*, a little later, thought Chicago's "bigness" had incited both Sandburg and Masters to excess and that Sandburg stood revealed as "a mystical mobocrat" who was "rather gross, simple-minded and sentimental" as well as a dreamer. *The Boston Transcript* deplored the poet's "ill-regulated speech that has neither verse nor prose rhythms" and disliked his "strong unpleasant imagination." Fanny Butcher in *The Chicago Tribune* battled stoutly for Sandburg; *The New York Times* declared that while the book at its best was very good and at its worst "dull and shapeless," it was "all alive, stirring, human." *The Review of Reviews* said, "He has shaped poetry that is like a statue of Rodin." Amy Lowell, leader of the Free Verse movement, pro-

nounced it "one of the most original books which the age has produced." Louis Untermeyer would later sum up the furore by telling how "the official votaries and vestrymen from the temple of the Muse raised their hands in pious horror at this open violation of their carefully enshrined sanctities." He said that among Sandburg's heresies, as listed, "brutality" was the one all his attackers agreed upon. And this, he said, was true—vividly, healthfully true, and that the Irish poet Synge had said earlier that before we could be human again "we must learn to be brutal."

Sandburg's tribute to Chicago as, for all its brawling faults, a bolder, more magnetic, more titanic force than "the soft little cities" of the nation, angered "respectable" classicists. His savage assault upon the evangelist, Billy Sunday, offended still more. Tender-minded readers and friendly critics alike were shocked when in the poem "Who Am I?" Sandburg had Truth proclaim, "I dabble in the blood and guts of the terrible."

In the excitement about Sandburg's "he-man" slugging poems, relatively small note was taken of the love poems, the tenderly phrased thoughts about death and music and moons and poppies with smoke, dust, mist and shadow across them. Little was said of "Fog," the six-line poem beginning, "The fog comes on little cat feet," which, years later, Alexander Woollcott would conclude had been reprinted in so many collections, anthologies and readers that in royalties it had certainly earned more per word than any other poem of its day and time.

Two years after *Chicago Poems* appeared, Sandburg's second book, *Cornhuskers*, was published, receiving more praise and less vituperation. *The New York Times* thought it "a melancholy book." Louis Untermeyer declared it to have "more depth and dignity" than its predecessor: "its note is

not louder but larger.... It is Swedenborg in terms of State Street."

Its tone was set by its leading poem, "Prairie," the truest and most moving picture of the midlands, a poem fit to stand beside Whitman's "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd," and rising to a soaring, searching climax in its finale, "I speak of new cities and new people. I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes. I tell you yesterday is a wind gone down, a sun dropped in the west." More readers have remembered this volume's "Cool Tombs" than its powerful, muscular, surging "Four Brothers," and "Leather Leggings," and "Prayers of Steel," which Carl Van Doren considered "a direct answer to Whitman's hope of a democratic poetry that would express a distinctively American speech."

There was, in *Cornhuskers*, great pity for the suffering, great "guffaws of disgust," as Van Doren observed, for the spurious, and, as in *Chicago Poems*, Sandburg's great gift for listening to the significant speech of the common people.

"He will not," said Van Doren, "select his language from among the tried and prosperous words of poetry, but insists upon grabbing up any or all words and harmonizing them into the shape he chooses... He strikes off sparks of a peculiar vividness and often throws off cinders of no vividness at all... and over the whole field what hot, what blue flames leap and dance."

It was of Sandburg's first two volumes as well as his later books of verse, *Smoke and Steel* (1920), *Slabs of the Sunburnt West* (1922), *Good Morning, America* (1928), and *The People, Yes* (1936), that H. L. Mencken was thinking when he said, "Nobody in American literature has ever panned in the pebbles of common speech and come up with more nuggets."

Sandburg's attention to the unwritten, non-literary, na-

rive speech of his country is also to be seen in his fairy tales written in the American vernacular, *Rootabaga Stories* (1922), *Rootabaga Pigeons* (1923), and *Potato Face* (1930). It lent music to his monumental six-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln.

But as he had enjoined his readers in an early poem to "keep away from little deaths," so has he eternally warned himself to keep away from the cheap little clichés of ordinary speech. This was true across the first thirty-six years of his life while he was roaming the land, storing up the stuff of poetry, and it has been true across his thirty years of sustained literary prominence and power since his "Hog Butcher for the World" struck its readers into anger and ecstasy.

LLOYD LEWIS

Chicago Poems

TO MY WIFE **AND PAL**
Lillian Steichen Sandburg

PREFATORY NOTE

Some of these writings were first printed in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, Chicago. Permission to reprint is by courtesy of that publication. The writer wishes to thank Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson, editors of *Poetry*, and William Marion Reedy, editor of *Reedy's Mirror*, St. Louis, whose services have heightened what values of human address herein hold good.

Chicago

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight
Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have
seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring
the farm boys.

And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is
true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill
again.

And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the
faces of women and children I have seen the marks of
wanton hunger.

And having answered so I turn once more to those who
sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer
and say to them:

Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so
proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.

Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job,
here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft
cities;

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as
a savage pitted against the wilderness,

Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking,
Planning,
Building, breaking,

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with
white teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young
man laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never
lost a battle,
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse,
and under his ribs the heart of the people,
Laughing!
Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth,
half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool
Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and
Freight Handler to the Nation.

Sketch

The shadows of the ships
Rock on the crest
In the low blue lustre
Of the tardy and the soft inrolling tide.

A long brown bar at the dip of the sky
Puts an arm of sand in the span of salt.

The lucid and endless wrinkles
Draw in, lapse and withdraw.
Wavelets crumble and white spent bubbles
Wash on the floor of the beach.

Rocking on the crest
In the low blue lustre
Are the shadows of the ships.

Masses

Among the mountains I wandered and saw blue haze and
red crag and was amazed;
On the beach where the long push under the endless tide
maneuvers, I stood silent;
Under the stars on the prairie watching the Dipper slant
over the horizon's grass, I was full of thoughts.
Great men, pageants of war and labor, soldiers and work-
ers, mothers lifting their children—these all I touched,
and felt the solemn thrill of them.
And then one day I got a true look at the Poor, millions of
the Poor, patient and toiling; more patient than crags,
tides, and stars; innumerable, patient as the darkness of
night—and all broken, humble ruins of nations.

The Walking Man of Rodin

Legs hold a torso away from the earth.
And a regular high poem of legs is here.
Powers of bone and cord raise a belly and lungs
Out of ooze and over the loam where eyes look and ears
· hear
And arms have a chance to hammer and shoot and run
motors.

 You make us
 Proud of our legs, old man.

And you left *off* the head here,
The skull found always crumbling neighbor of the ankles.

Lost

Desolate and lone
All night long on the lake
Where fog trails and mist creeps,
The whistle of a boat
Calls and cries unendingly,
Like some lost child
In tears and trouble
Hunting the harbor's breast
And the harbor's eyes.

The Harbor

Passing through huddled and ugly walls
By doorways where women
Looked from their hunger-deep eyes,
Haunted with shadows of hunger-hands,
Out from the huddled and ugly walls,
I came sudden, at the city's edge,
On a blue burst of lake,
Long lake waves breaking under the sun
On a spray-flung curve of shore;
And a fluttering storm of gulls,
Masses of great gray wings
And flying white bellies
Veering and wheeling free in the open.

Halsted Street Car

Come you, cartoonists,
Hang on a strap with me here
At seven o'clock in the morning
On a Halstead street car.

Take your pencils
And draw these faces.

Try with your pencils for these crooked faces,
That pig-sticker in one corner—his mouth-
That overall factory girl—her loose cheeks.

Find for your pencils
A way to mark your memory
Of tired empty faces.

After their night's sleep,
In the moist dawn
And cool daybreak.

Faces
Tired of wishes,
Empty of dreams.

Clark Street Bridge

Dust of the feet
And dust of the wheels,
Wagons and people going,
All day feet and wheels.

Now. . . .
. . . Only stars and mist
A lonely policeman,
Two cabaret dancers,
Stars and mist again,
No more feet or wheels,
No more dust and wagons.

Voices of dollars
And drops of blood
• • • • .
Voices of broken hearts,
. . . Voices singing, singing
. . . Silver voices, singing,
Softer than the stars,
Softer than the mist.

Passers-by

Passers-by,
Out of your many faces
Flash memories to me
Now at the day end
Away from the sidewalks
Where your shoe soles traveled
And your voices rose and blent
To form the city's afternoon roar
Hindering an old silence.

Passers-by,
I remember lean ones among you,
Throats in the clutch of a hope,
Lips written over with strivings,
Mouths that kiss only for love,
Records of great wishes slept with,
 Held long
And prayed and toiled for:

Yes,
Written on
Your mouths
And your throats
I read them
When you passed by.

They Will Say

Of my city the worst that men will ever say is this:
You took little children away from the sun and the dew,
And the glimmers that played in the grass under the great
sky,
And the reckless rain; you put them between walls
To work, broken and smothered, for bread and wages,
To eat dust in their throats and die empty-hearted
For a little handful of pay on a few Saturday nights.

Mill-Doors

You never come back.
I say good-by when I see you going in the doors,
The hopeless open doors that call and wait
And take you then for—how many cents a day?
How many cents for the sleepy eyes and fingers?

I say good-by because I know they tap your wrists,
In the dark, in the silence, day by day,
And all the blood of you drop by drop,
And you are old before you are young.
You never come back.

Subway

Down between the walls of shadow
Where the iron laws insist, -
 The hunger voices mock.

The worn wayfaring men
With the hunched and humble shoulders,
 Throw their laughter into toil.

The Shovel Man

On the street
Slung on his shoulder is a handle half way across,
Tied in a big knot on the scoop of cast iron
Are the overalls faded from sun and rain in the ditches;
Spatter of dry clay sticking yellow on his left sleeve
 And a flimsy shirt open at the throat,
 I know him for a shovel man,
 A dago working for a dollar six bits a day
And a dark-eyed woman in the old country dreams of him
 for one of the world's ready men with a pair of fresh
 lips and a kiss better than all the wild grapes that ever
 grew in Tuscany.

A Teamster's Farewell

SOBS EN ROUTE TO A PENITENTIARY

Good-by now to the streets and the clash of wheels and
locking hubs,
The sun coming on the brass buckles and harness knobs,
The muscles of the horses sliding under their heavy haunches,
Good-by now to the traffic policeman and his whistle,
The smash of the iron hoof on the stones,
All the crazy wonderful slamming roar of the street—
O God, there's noises I'm going to be hungry for.

Fish Crier

I know a Jew fish crier down on Maxwell Street with a voice
like a north wind blowing over corn stubble in January.
He dangles herring before prospective customers evincing
a joy identical with that of Pavlowa dancing.
His face is that of a man terribly glad to be selling fish, ter-
ribly glad that God made fish, and customers to whom
he may call his wares from a pushcart.

Picnic Boat

Sunday night and the park policemen tell each other it is dark as a stack of black cats on Lake Michigan.

A big picnic boat comes home to Chicago from the peach farms of Saugatuck.

Hundreds of electric bulbs break the night's darkness, a flock of red and yellow birds with wings at a stand-still.

Running along the deck railings are festoons and leaping in curves are loops of light from prow and stern to the tall smokestacks.

Over the hoarse crunch of waves at my pier comes a hoarse answer in the rhythmic oompa of the brasses playing a Polish folk-song for the home-comers.

Happiness

I asked professors who teach the meaning of life to tell me what is happiness.

And I went to famous executives who boss the work of thousands of men.

They all shook their heads and gave me a smile as though I was trying to fool with them.

And then one Sunday afternoon I wandered out along the Desplaines river.

And I saw a crowd of Hungarians under the trees with their women and children and a keg of beer and an accordion.

Muckers

Twenty men stand watching the muckers.
Stabbing the sides of the ditch
Where clay gleams yellow,
Driving the blades of their shovels
Deeper and deeper for the new gas mains,
Wiping sweat off their faces
With red bandanas.

The muckers work on . . . pausing . . . to pull
Their boots out of suckholes where they slosh.

Of the twenty looking on
Ten murmur, "O, it's a hell of a job,"
Ten others, "Jesus, I wish I had the job."

Blacklisted

Why shall I keep the old name?
What is a name anywhere anyway?
A name is a cheap thing all fathers and mothers leave each
child:
A job is a job and I want to live, so
Why does God Almighty or anybody else care whether I
take a new name to go by?

Graceland

Tomb of a millionaire,
A multi-millionaire, ladies and gentlemen,
Place of the dead where they spend every year
The usury of twenty-five thousand dollars
 For upkeep and flowers
To keep fresh the memory of the dead
The merchant prince gone to dust
Commanded in his written will
Over the signed name of his last testament
Twenty-five thousand dollars be set aside
For roses, lilacs, hydrangeas, tulips,
For perfume and color, sweetness of remembrance
Around his last long home.

(A hundred cash girls want nickels to go to the movies
to-night.

In the back stalls of a hundred saloons, women are at tables
Drinking with men or waiting for men jingling loose silver
dollars in their pockets.

In a hundred furnished rooms is a girl who sells silk or dress
goods or leather stuff for six dollars a week wages

And when she pulls on her stockings in the morning she is
reckless about God and the newspapers and the police,
the talk of her home town or the name people call her.)

The Right to Grief

TO CERTAIN POETS ABOUT TO DIE

Take your fill of intimate remorse, perfumed sorrow,
Over the dead child of a millionaire,
And the pity of Death refusing any check on the bank
Which the millionaire might order his secretary to scratch
off
And get cashed.

Very well,
You for your grief and I for mine.
Let me have a sorrow my own if I want to.

I shall cry over the dead child of a stockyards hunky.
His job is sweeping blood off the floor.
He gets a dollar seventy cents a day when he works
And it's many tubs of blood he shoves out with a broom
day by day.

Now his three year old daughter
Is in a white coffin that cost him a week's wages.
Every Saturday night he will pay the undertaker fifty cents
till the debt is wiped out.

The hunky and his wife and the kids
Cry over the pinched face almost at peace in the white box.

They remember it was scrawny and ran up high doctor bills.
They are glad it is gone for the rest of the family now will
have more to eat and wear.

Yet before the majesty of Death they cry around the coffin

And wipe their eyes with red bandanas and sob when the priest says, "God have mercy on us all."

I have a right to feel my throat choke about this.

You take your grief and I mine—see?

To-morrow there is no funeral and the hunky goes back to his job sweeping blood off the floor at a dollar seventy cents a day.

All he does all day long is keep on shoving hog blood ahead of him with a broom.

Mag

I wish to God I never saw you, Mag.

I wish you never quit your job and came along with me.

I wish we never bought a license and a white dress

For you to get married in the day we ran off to a minister

And told him we would love each other and take care of each other

Always and always long as the sun and the rain lasts anywhere.

Yes, I'm wishing now you lived somewhere away from here
And I was a bum on the bumpers a thousand miles away
dead broke.

I wish the kids had never come

And rent and coal and clothes to pay for

And a grocery man calling for cash,

Every day cash for beans and prunes.

I wish to God I never saw you, Mag.

I wish to God the kids had never come.

Onion Days

Mrs. Gabrielle Giovannitti comes along Peoria Street every morning at nine o'clock

With kindling wood piled on top of her head, her eyes looking straight ahead to find the way for her old feet.

Her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Pietro Giovannitti, whose husband was killed in a tunnel explosion through the negligence of a fellow-servant,

Works ten hours a day, sometimes twelve, picking onions for Jasper on the Bowmanville road.

She takes a street car at half-past five in the morning, Mrs. Pietro Giovannitti does,

And gets back from Jasper's with cash for her day's work, between nine and ten o'clock at night.

Last week she got eight cents a box, Mrs. Pietro Giovannitti, picking onions for Jasper,

But this week Jasper dropped the pay to six cents a box because so many women and girls were answering the ads in the *Daily News*.

Jasper belongs to an Episcopal church in Ravenswood and, on certain Sundays

He enjoys chanting the Nicene creed with his daughters on each side of him joining their voices with his.

If the preacher repeats old sermons of a Sunday, Jasper's mind wanders to his yoo-acre farm and how he can make it produce more efficiently

And sometimes he speculates on whether he could word an ad in the *Daily News* so it would bring more women and girls out to his farm and reduce operating costs.

Mrs. Pietro Giovannitti is far from desperate about life; her joy is in a child she knows will arrive to her in three months.

And now while these are the pictures for today there are
other pictures of the Giovannitti people I could give
you for to-morrow,

And how some of them go to the county agent on winter
mornings with their baskets for beans and cornmeal
and molasses.

I listen to fellows saying here's good stuff for a novel or
it might be worked up into a good play.

I say there's no dramatist living can put old Mrs. Gabrielle
Giovannitti into a play with that kindling wood piled
on top of her head coming along Peoria Street nine
o'clock in the morning.

Child of the Romans

The dago shovelman sits by the railroad track

Eating a noon meal of bread and bologna.

· A train whirls by, and men and women at tables
Alive with red roses and yellow jonquils,
Eat steaks running with brown gravy,
Strawberries and cream, eclaires and coffee.

The dago shovelman finishes the dry bread and bologna,

Washes it down with a dipper from the water-boy,

And goes back to the second half of a ten-hour day's work

Keeping the road-bed so the roses and jonquils

Shake hardly at all in the cut glass vases

Standing slender on the tables in the dining cars.

Population Drifts

New-mown hay smell and wind of the plain made her a woman whose ribs had the power of the hills in them and her hands were tough for work and there was passion for life in her womb.

She and her man crossed the ocean and the years that marked their faces saw them haggling with landlords and grocers while six children played on the stones and prowled in the garbage cans.

One child coughed its lungs away, two more have adenoids and can neither talk nor run like their mother, one is in jail, two have jobs in a box factory

And as they fold the pasteboard, they wonder what the wishing is and the wistful glory in them that flutters faintly when the glimmer of spring comes on the air or the green of summer turns brown:

They do not know it is the new-mown hay smell calling and the wind of the plain praying for them to come back and take hold of life again with tough hands and with passion.

Anna Imroth

Cross the hands over the breast here—so.

Straighten the legs a little more—so.

And call for the wagon to come and take her home.

Her mother will cry some and so will her sisters and brothers.

But all of the others got down and they are safe and this is the only one of the factory girls who wasn't lucky in making the jump when the fire broke.

It is the hand of God and the lack of fire escapes.

Cripple

Once when I saw a cripple
Gasping slowly his last days with the white plague,
Looking from hollow eyes, calling for air,
Desperately gesturing with wasted hands
In the dark and dust of a house down in a slum,
I said to myself
I would rather have been a tall sunflower
Living in a country garden
Lifting a golden-brown face to the summer,
Rain-washed and dew-misted,
Mixed with the poppies and ranking hollyhocks,
And wonderingly watching night after night
The clear silent processions of stars.

A Fence-

Now the stone house on the lake front is finished and the
workmen are beginning the fence.
The palings are made of iron bars with steel points that can
stab the life out of any man who falls on them.
As a fence, it is a masterpiece, and will shut off the rabble and
all vagabonds and hungry men and all wandering chil-
dren looking for a place to play.
Passing through the bars and over the steel points will go
nothing except Death and the Rain and To-morrow.

Mamie

Mamie beat her head against the bars of a little Indiana town
and dreamed of romance and big things off somewhere
the way the railroad trains all ran.

She could see the smoke of the engines get lost down where
the streaks of steel flashed in the sun and when the news-
papers came in on the morning mail she knew there was
a big Chicago far off, where all the trains ran.

She got tired of the barber shop boys and the post office
chatter and the church gossip and the old pieces the
band played on the Fourth of July and Decoration Day
And sobbed at her fate and beat her head against the bars
and was going to kill herself

When the thought came to her that if she was going to die
she might as well die struggling for a clutch of romance
among the streets of Chicago.

She has a job now at six dollars a week in the basement of the
Boston Store.

And even now she beats her head against the bars in the same
old way and wonders if there is a bigger place the rail-
roads run to from Chicago where maybe there is
romance
and big things
and real dreams
that never go smash.

Working Girls

The working girls in the morning are going to work—long lines of them afoot amid the downtown stores and factories, thousands with little brick-shaped lunches wrapped in newspapers under their arms.

Each morning as I move through this river of young-woman life I feel a wonder about where it is all going, so many with a peach bloom of young years on them and laughter of red lips and memories in their eyes of dances the night before and plays and walks.

Green and gray streams run side by side in a river and so here are always the others, those who have been over the way, the women who know each one the end of life's gamble for her, the meaning and the clew, the how and the why of the dances and the arms that passed around their waists and the fingers that played in their hair.

Faces go by written over: "I know it all, I know where the bloom and the laughter go and I have memories," and the feet of these move slower and they have wisdom where the others have beauty.

So the green and the gray move in the early morning on the downtown streets.

Personality

MUSINGS OF A POLICE REPORTER IN THE IDENTIFICATION BUREAU

You have loved forty women, but you have only one thumb.
You have led a hundred secret lives, but you mark only one thumb.

You go round the world and fight in a thousand wars and win all the world's honors, but when you come back home the print of the one thumb your mother gave you is the same print of thumb you had in the old home when your mother kissed you and said good-by.

Out of the whirling womb of time come millions of men and their feet crowd the earth and they cut one another's throats for room to stand and among them all are not two thumbs alike.

Somewhere is a Great God of Thumbs who can tell the inside story of this.

Cumulatives

Storms have beaten on this point of land

And ships gone to wreck here

and the passers-by remember it

with talk on the deck at night

as they near it.

Fists have beaten on the face of this old prize-fighter

And his battles have held the sporting pages

And on the street they indicate him with their

right fore-finger as one who once wore

a championship belt.

A hundred stories have been published and a thousand ru-
mored

About why this tall dark man has divorced two beautiful
young women

And married a third who resembles the first two

And they shake their heads and say, "There he
goes,"

when he passes by in sunny weather or in rain
along the city streets.

To Certain Journeymen

Undertakers, hearse drivers, grave diggers,
I speak to you as one not afraid of your business.

You handle dust going to a long country,
You know the secret behind your job is the same whether
you lower the coffin with modern, automatic machin-
ery, well-oiled and noiseless, or whether the body is
laid in by naked hands and then covered by the shovels.

Your day's work is done with laughter many days of the
year,
And you earn a living by those who say good-by today in
thin whispers.

Chamfort

There's Chamfort. He's a sample.
Locked himself in his library with a gun,
Shot off his nose and shot out his right eye.
And this Chamfort knew how to write
And thousands read his books on how to live,
But he himself didn't know
How to die by force of his own hand—see?
They found him a red pool on the carpet
Cool as an April forenoon,
Talking and talking gay maxims and grim epigrams.
Well, he wore bandages over his nose and right eye,
Drank coffee and chatted many years
With men and women who loved him
Because he laughed and daily dared Death:
"Come and take me."

Limited

I am riding on a limited express, one of the crack trains of the nation.

Hurting across the prairie into blue haze and dark air go fifteen all-steel coaches holding a thousand people.

(All the coaches shall be scrap and rust and all the men and women laughing in the diners and sleepers shall pass to ashes.)

I ask a man in the smoker where he is going and he answers: "Omaha."

The Has-Been

A stone face higher than six horses stood five thousand years gazing at the world seeming to clutch a secret.

A boy passes and throws a niggerhead that chips off the end of the nose from the stone face; he lets fly a mud ball that spatters the right eye and cheek of the old looker-on.

The boy laughs and goes whistling "ee-ee-ee ee-ee-ee." The stone face stands silent, seeming to clutch a secret.

In a Back Alley

Remembrance for a great man is this.

The newsies are pitching pennies.

And on the copper disk is the man's face.

Dead lover of boys, what do you ask for now?

A Coin

Your western heads here cast on money,
You are the two that fade away together,
Partners in the mist.

Lunging buffalo shoulder,
Lean Indian face,
We who come after where you are gone
Salute your forms on the new nickel.

You are
To us:
The past.

Runners
On the prairie:
Good-by.

Jack

Jack was a swarthy, swaggering son-of-a-gun.
He worked thirty years on the railroad, ten hours a day,
and his hands were tougher than sole leather.
He married a tough woman and they had eight children and
the woman died and the children grew up and went
away and wrote the old man every two years.
He died in the poorhouse sitting on a bench in the sun telling
reminiscences to other old men whose women were dead
and children scattered.
There was joy on his face when he died as there was joy on
his face when he lived—he was a swarthy, swaggering
son-of-a-gun.

Dynamiter

I sat with a dynamiter at supper in a German saloon eating
steak and onions.

And he laughed and told stories of his wife and children and
the cause of labor and the working class.

It was laughter of an unshakable man knowing life to be a
rich and red-blooded thing.

Yes, his laugh rang like the call of gray birds filled with a
glory of joy ramming their winged flight through a rain
storm.

His name was in many newspapers as an enemy of the nation
and few keepers of churches or schools would open
their doors to him.

Over the steak and onions not a word was said of his deep
days and nights as a dynamiter.

Only I always remember him as a lover of life, a lover of
children, a lover of all free, reckless laughter every-
where—lover of red hearts and red blood the world
over.

Ice Handler

I know an ice handler who wears a flannel shirt with pearl buttons the size of a dollar,
And he lugs a hundred-pound hunk into a saloon icebox,
helps himself to cold ham and rye bread,
Tells the bartender it's hotter than yesterday and will be
hotter yet to-morrow, by Jesus,
And is on his way with his head in the air and a hard pair
of fists.
He spends a dollar or so every Saturday night on a two hundred pound woman who washes dishes in the Hotel Morrison.
He remembers when the union was organized he broke the noses of two scabs and loosened the nuts so the wheels came off six different wagons one morning, and he came around and watched the ice melt in the street.
All he was sorry for was one of the scabs bit him on the knuckles of the right hand so they bled when he came around to the saloon to tell the boys about it.

I drank musty ale at the Illinois Athletic Club with the millionaire manufacturer of Green River butter one night
And his face had the shining light of an old-time Quaker, he spoke of a beautiful daughter, and I knew he had a peace and a happiness up his sleeve somewhere.

Then I heard Jim Kirch make a speech to the Advertising Association on the trade resources of South America.
And the way he lighted a three-for-a-nickel stogie and cocked it at an angle regardless of the manners of our best people,

I knew he had a clutch on a real happiness even though some of the reporters on his newspaper say he is the living double of Jack London's Sea Wolf.

In the mayor's office the mayor himself told me he was happy though it is a hard job to satisfy all the office-seekers and eat all the dinners he is asked to eat.

Down in Gilpin Place, near Hull House, was a man with his jaw wrapped for a bad toothache,

And he had it all over the butter millionaire, Jim Kirch and the mayor when it came to happiness.

He is a maker of accordions and guitars and not only makes them from start to finish, but plays them after he makes them.

And he had a guitar of mahogany with a walnut bottom he offered for seven dollars and a half if I wanted it,

And another just like it, only smaller, for six dollars, though he never mentioned the price till I asked him,

And he stated the price in a sorry way, as though the music and the make of an instrument count for a million times more than the price in money.

I thought he had a real soul and knew a lot about *God*.

There was light in his eyes of one who has conquered sor-

row in so far as sorrow is conquerable or worth conquering.

Anyway he is the only Chicago citizen I was jealous of that day.

He played a dance they play in some parts of Italy when the harvest of grapes is over and the wine presses are ready for work.

Two Neighbors

Faces of two eternities keep looking at me,

One is Omar Khayyam and the red stuff
wherein men forget yesterday and to-morrow
and remember only the voices and songs,
the stories, newspapers and fights of today.

One is Louis Cornaro and a slim trick
of slow, short meals across slow, short years,
letting Death open the door only in slow, short inches.

I have a neighbor who swears by Omar.

I have a neighbor who swears by Cornaro.

Both are happy.

Faces of two eternities keep looking at me.

Let them look.

Style

Style—go ahead talking about style.

You can tell where a man gets his style just
as you can tell where Pavlowa got her legs
or Ty Cobb his batting eye.

Go on talking.

Only don't take my style away.

It's my face.

Maybe no good

but anyway, my face.

I talk with it, I sing with it, I see, taste and feel with it,

I know why I want to keep it.

Kill my style

and you break Pavlowa's legs,

and you blind Ty Cobb's batting eye.

Nigger

I am the nigger.
Singer of songs,
Dancer. . .
Softer than fluff of cotton. ..
Harder than dark earth
Roads beaten in the sun
By the bare feet of slaves. . .
Foam of teeth . . . breaking crash of laughter. . .
Red love of the blood of woman,
White love of the tumbling pickaninnies. . .
Lazy love of the banjo thrum. . .
Sweated and driven for the harvest-wage,
Loud laughter with hands like hams,
Fists toughened on the handles,
Smiling the slumber dreams of old jungles,
Crazy as the sun and dew and dripping, heaving life of the
jungle,
Brooding and muttering with memories of shackles:
 I am the nigger.
 Look at me.
 I am the nigger.

To Beachey, 1912

Riding against the east,
A veering, steady shadow
Purrs the motor-call
Of the man-bird
Ready with the death-laughter
In his throat
And in his heart always
The love of the big blue beyond.

Only a man,
A far fleck of shadow on the east
Sitting at ease
With his hands on a wheel
And around him the large gray wings.
Hold him, great soft wings,
Keep and deal kindly, O wings,
With the cool, calm shadow at the wheel.

Under a Hat Rim

While the hum and the hurry
Of passing footfalls
Beat in my ear like the restless surf
Of a wind-blown sea,
A soul came to me
Out of the look on a face.

Eyes like a lake
Where a storm-wind roams
Caught me from under
The rim of a hat.

I thought of a midsea wreck
and bruised fingers clinging
to a broken state-room door.

In a Breath

TO THE WILLIAMSON BROTHERS

High noon. White sun flashes on the Michigan Avenue asphalt. Drum of hoofs and whirr of motors. Women tramping along in flimsy clothes catching play of sun-fire to their skin and eyes.

Inside the playhouse are movies from under the sea. From the heat of pavements and the dust of sidewalks, passers-by go in a breath to be witnesses of large cool sponges, large cool fishes, large cool valleys and ridges of coral spread silent in the soak of the ocean floor thousands of years.

A naked swimmer dives. A knife in his right hand shoots a streak at the throat of a shark. The tail of the shark lashes. One swing would kill the swimmer. . . Soon the knife goes into the soft underneck of the veering fish... Its mouthful of teeth, each tooth a dagger itself, set row on row, glistens when the shuddering, yawning cadaver is hauled up by the brothers of the swimmer.

Outside in the street is the murmur and singing of life in the sun—horses, motors, women tramping along in flimsy clothes, play of sun-fire in their blood.

Bath

A man saw the whole world as a grinning skull and crossbones. The rose flesh of life shriveled from all faces. Nothing counts. Everything is a fake. Dust to dust and ashes to ashes and then an old darkness and a useless silence. So he saw it all. Then he went to a Mischa Elman concert. Two hours waves of sound beat on his eardrums. Music washed something or other inside him. Music broke down and rebuilt something or other in his head and heart. He joined in five encores for the young Russian Jew with the fiddle. When he got outside his heels hit the sidewalk a new way. He was the same man in the same world as before. Only there was a singing fire and a climb of roses everlastingly over the world he looked on.

Bronzes

I

The bronze General Grant riding a bronze horse in Lincoln Park

Shrivels in the sun by day when the motor cars whirr by in long processions going somewhere to keep appointment for dinner and matinees and buying and selling

Though in the dusk and nightfall when high waves are piling

On the slabs of the promenade along the lake shore near by I have seen the general dare the combers come closer

And make to ride his bronze horse out into the hoofs and guns of the storm.

II

I cross Lincoln Park on a winter night when the snow is falling.

Lincoln in bronze stands among the white lines of snow, his bronze forehead meeting soft echoes of the newsies crying forty thousand men are dead 'along the Yser, his bronze ears listening to the mumbled roar of the city at his bronze feet.

A lithe Indian on a bronze pony, Shakespeare seated with long legs in bronze, Garibaldi in a bronze cape, they hold places in the cold, lonely snow to-night on their pedestals and so they will hold them past midnight and into the dawn.

Dunes

What do we see here in the sand dunes of the white moon
alone with our thoughts, Bill,
Alone with our dreams, Bill, soft as the women tying scarves
around their heads dancing,
Alone with a picture and a picture coming one after the
other of all the dead,
The dead more than all these grains of sand one by one piled
here in the moon,
Piled against the sky-line taking shapes like the hand of the
wind wanted,
What do we see here, Bill, outside of what the wise men
beat their heads on,
Outside of what the poets cry for and the soldiers drive on
headlong and leave their skulls in the sun for—what,
Bill?

On the Way

Little one, you have been buzzing in the books,
Flittering in the newspapers and drinking beer with lawyers
And amid the educated men of the clubs you have been getting
an earful of speech from trained tongues.

Take an earful from me once, go with me on a hike
Along sand stretches on the great inland sea here
And while the eastern breeze blows on us and the restless
surge

Of the lake waves on the breakwater breaks with an ever
fresh monotone,

Let us ask ourselves: What is truth? what do you or I know?
How much do the wisest of the world's men know about
where the massed human procession is going?

You have heard the mob laughed at?

I ask you: Is not the mob rough as the mountains are rough?
And all things human rise from the mob and relapse and
rise again as rain to the sea?

Ready to Kill

Ten minutes now I have been looking at this.
I have gone by here before and wondered about it.
This is a bronze memorial of a famous general
Riding horseback with a flag and a sword and a revolver on
him.
I want to smash the whole thing into a pile of junk to be
hauled away to the scrap yard.
I put it straight to you,
After the farmer, the miner, the shop man, the factory hand,
the fireman and the teamster,
Have all been remembered with bronze memorials,
Shaping them on the job of getting all of us
Something to eat and something to wear,
When they stack a few silhouettes
 Against the sky
 Here in the park,
And show the real huskies that are doing the work of the
world, and feeding people instead of butchering them,
Then maybe I will stand here
And look easy at this general of the army holding a flag in
the air,
And riding like hell on horseback
Ready to kill anybody that gets in his way,
Ready to run the red blood and slush the bowels of men all
over the sweet new grass of the prairie.

To a Contemporary Bunkshooter

You come along. . . tearing your shirt. . . yelling about Jesus.

Where do you get that stuff?

What do you know about Jesus?

Jesus had a way of talking soft and outside of a few bankers and higher-ups among the con men of Jerusalem everybody liked to have this Jesus around because he never made any fake passes and everything he said went and he helped the sick and gave the people hope.

You come along squirting words at us, shaking your fist and calling us all dam fools so fierce the froth slobbers over your lips. . . always blabbing we're all going to hell straight off and you know all about it.

I've read Jesus' words. I know what he said. You don't throw any scare into me. I've got your number. I know how much you know about Jesus.

He never came near clean people or dirty people but they felt cleaner because he came along. It was your crowd of bankers and business men and lawyers hired the slug-gers and murderers who put Jesus out of the running.

I say the same bunch backing you nailed the nails into the hands of this Jesus of Nazareth. He had lined up against him the same crooks and strong-arm men now lined up with you paying your way.

This Jesus was good to look at, smelled good, listened good. He threw out something fresh and beautiful from the skin of his body and the touch of his hands wherever he passed along.

You slimy bunkshooter, you put a smut on every human blossom in reach of your rotten breath belching about hell-fire and hiccupping about this Man who lived a clean life in Galilee.

When are you going to quit making the carpenters build emergency hospitals for women and girls driven crazy with wrecked nerves from your gibberish about Jesus—I put it to you again: Where do you get that stuff; what do you know about Jesus?

Go ahead and bust all the chairs you want to. Smash a whole wagon load of furniture at every performance. Turn sixty somersaults and stand on your nutty head. If it wasn't for the way you scare the women and kids I'd feel sorry for you and pass the hat.

I like to watch a good four-flusher work, but not when he starts people puking and calling for the doctors.

I like a man that's got nerve and can pull off a great original performance, but you—you're only a bughouse peddler of second-hand gospel—you're only shoving out a phoney imitation of the goods this Jesus wanted free as air and sunlight.

You tell people living in shanties Jesus is going to fix it up all right with them by giving them mansions in the skies after they're dead and the worms have eaten 'em.

You tell \$6 a week department store girls all they need is Jesus; you take a steel trust wop, dead without having lived, gray and shrunken at forty years of age, and you tell him to look at Jesus on the cross and he'll be all right.

You tell poor people they don't need any more money on pay day and even if it's fierce to be out of a job, Jesus'll

fix that up all right, all right—all they gotta do is take Jesus the way you say.

I'm telling you Jesus wouldn't stand for the stuff you're handing out. Jesus played it different. The bankers and lawyers of Jerusalem got their sluggers and murderers to go after Jesus just because Jesus wouldn't play their game. He didn't sit in with the big thieves.

I don't want a lot of gab from a bunkshooter in my religion. I won't take my religion from any man who never works except with his mouth and never cherishes any memory except the face of the woman on the American silver dollars.

I ask you to come through and show me where you're pouring out the blood of your life.

I've been to this suburb of Jerusalem they call Golgotha, where they nailed Him, and I know if the story is straight it was real blood ran from His hands and the nail-holes, and it was real blood spurted in red drops where the spear of the Roman soldier rammed in between the ribs of this Jesus of Nazareth.

Skyscraper

By day the skyscraper looms in the smoke and sun and has a soul.

Prairie and valley, streets of the city, pour people into it and they mingle among its twenty floors and are poured out again back to the streets, prairies and valleys.

It is the men and women, boys and girls so poured in and out all day that give the building a soul of dreams and thoughts and memories.

(Dumped in the sea or fixed in a desert, who would care for the building or speak its name or ask a policeman the way to it?)

Elevators slide on their cables and tubes catch letters and parcels and iron pipes carry gas and water in and sewage out.

Wires climb with secrets, carry light and carry words, and tell terrors and profits and loves—curses of men grappling plans of business and questions of women in plots of love.

Hour by hour the caissons reach down to the rock of the earth and hold the building to a turning planet.

Hour by hour the girders play as ribs and reach out and hold together the stone walls and floors.

Hour by hour the hand of the mason and the stuff of the mortar clinch the pieces and parts to the shape an architect voted.

Hour by hour the sun and the rain, the air and the rust, and the press of time running into centuries, play on the building inside and out and use it.

Men who sunk the pilings and mixed the mortar are laid in graves where the wind whistles a wild song without words

And so are men who strung the wires and fixed the pipes and tubes and those who saw it rise floor by floor.

Souls of them all are here, even the hod carrier begging at back doors hundreds of miles away and the bricklayer who went to state's prison for shooting another man while drunk.

(One man fell from a girder and broke his neck at the end of a straight plunge—he is here—his soul has gone into the stones of the building.)

On the office doors from tier to tier—hundreds of names and each name standing for a face written across with a dead child, a passionate lover, a driving ambition for a million dollar business or a lobster's ease of life.

Behind the signs on the doors they work and the walls tell nothing from room to room.

Ten-dollar-a-week stenographers take letters from corporation officers, lawyers, efficiency engineers, and tons of letters go bundled from the building to all ends of the earth.

Smiles and tears of each office girl go into the soul of the building just the same as the master-men who rule the building.

Hands of clocks turn to noon hours and each floor empties its men and women who go away and eat and come back to work.

Toward the end of the afternoon all work slackens and all jobs go slower as the people feel day closing on them.

One by one the floors are emptied... The uniformed elevator men are gone. Pails clang. . . Scrubbers work, talking foreign tongues. Broom and water and mop clean from the floors human dust and spit, and machine grime of the day.

Spelled in electric fire on the roof are words telling miles of houses and people where to buy a thing for money. The sign speaks till midnight.

Darkness on the hallways. Voices echo. Silence holds. . . Watchmen walk slow from floor to floor and try the doors. Revolvers bulge from their hip pockets.. . Steel safes stand in corners. Money is stacked in them.

A young watchman leans at a window and sees the lights of barges butting their way across a harbor, nets of red and white lanterns in a railroad yard, and a span of glooms splashed with lines of white and blurs of crosses and clusters over the sleeping city.

By night the skyscraper looms in the smoke and the stars and has a soul.

HANDFULS

Fog

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

Pool

Out of the fire
Came a man sunken
To less than cinders,
A tea-cup of ashes or so.
And I,
The gold in the house,
Writhed into a stiff pool.

Jan Kubelik

Your bow swept over a string, and a long low note quivered
to the air.

(A mother of Bohemia sobs over a new child perfect learn-
ing to suck milk.)

Your bow ran fast over all the high strings fluttering and
wild.

(All the girls in Bohemia are laughing on a Sunday afternoon
in the hills with their lovers.)

Choose

The single clenched fist lifted and ready,
Or the open asking hand held out and waiting.

Choose:

For we meet by one or the other.

Crimson

Crimson is the slow smolder of the cigar end I hold,
Gray is the ash that stiffens and covers all silent the fire.
(A great man I know is dead and while he lies in his coffin
a gone flame I sit here in cumbering shadows and smoke
and watch my thoughts come and go.)

Whitelight

Your whitelight flashes the frost to-night
Moon of the purple and silent west.
Remember me one of your lovers of dreams.

Flux

Sand of the sea runs red
Where the sunset reaches and quivers.
Sand of the sea runs yellow
Where the moon slants and wavers.

Kin

Brother, I am fire
Surging under the ocean floor.
I shall never meet you, brother—
Not for years, anyhow;
Maybe thousands of years, brother.
Then I will warm you,
Hold you close, wrap you in circles,
Use you and change you—
Maybe thousands of years, brother.

White Shoulders

Your white shoulders
I remember
And your shrug of laughter.

Low laughter
Shaken slow
From your white shoulders.

Losses

I have love
And a child,
A banjo
And shadows.
(Losses of God,
All will go
And one day
We will hold
Only the shadows.)

Troths

Yellow dust on a bumble
bee's wing,
Grey lights in a woman's
asking eyes,
Red ruins in the changing
sunset embers:
I take you and pile high
the memories.
Death will break her claws
on some I keep.

WAR POEMS
(1914-1915)

Killers

I am singing to you
Soft as a man with a dead child speaks;
Hard as a man in handcuffs,
Held where he cannot move:

Under the sun
Are sixteen million men,
Chosen for shining teeth,
Sharp eyes, hard legs
And a running of young warm blood in their wrists.

And a red juice runs on the green grass;
And a red juice soaks the dark soil.
And the sixteen million are killing . . . and killing and
killing.

I never forget them day or night:
They beat on my head for memory of them;
They pound on my heart and I cry back to them,
To their homes and women, dreams and games.

I wake in the night and smell the trenches,
And hear the low stir of sleepers in lines—
Sixteen million sleepers and pickets in the dark:
Some of them long sleepers for always,

Some of them tumbling to sleep to-morrow for always,
Fixed in the drag of the world's heartbreak,
Eating and drinking, toiling ... on a long job of killing.
Sixteen million men.

Among the Red Guns

**AFTER WAKING AT DAWN ONE MORNING
WHEN THE WIND SANG LOW
AMONG DRY LEAVES IN AN ELM**

Among the red guns,
In the hearts of soldiers
Running free blood
In the long, long campaign:
 Dreams go on.

Among the leather saddles,
In the heads of soldiers
Heavy in the wracks and kills
Of all straight fighting:
 Dreams go on.

Among the hot muzzles,
In the hands of soldiers
Brought from flesh-folds of women-
Soft amid the blood and crying—
In all your hearts and heads
Among the guns and saddles and muzzles:

 Dreams,
Dreams go on,
Out of the dead on their backs,
Broken and no use any more:
Dreams of the way and the end go on.

Iron

Guns,
Long, steel guns,
Pointed from the war ships
In the name of the war god.
Straight, shining, polished guns,
Clambered over with jackies in white blouses,
Glory of tan faces, tousled hair, white teeth,
Laughing lithe jackies in white blouses,
Sitting on the guns singing war songs, war chanties,

Shovels,
Broad, iron shovels,
Scooping out oblong vaults,
Loosening turf and leveling sod.

I ask you
To witness—
The shovel is brother to the gun.

Murmurings in a Field Hospital

[THEY PICKED HIM UP IN THE GRASS
WHERE HE HAD LAIN TWO DAYS IN THE RAIN
WITH A PIECE OF SHRAPNEL IN HIS LUNGS]

Come to me only with playthings now . . .
A picture of a singing woman with blue eyes
Standing at a fence of hollyhocks, poppies and sunflowers ...
Or an old man I remember sitting with children telling
 stories
Of days that never happened anywhere in the world ...

No more iron cold and real to handle,
Shaped for a drive straight ahead.
Bring me only beautiful useless things.
Only old home things touched at sunset in the quiet...
And at the window one day in summer
Yellow of the new crock of butter
Stood against the red of new climbing roses ...
And the world was all playthings.

Statistics

Napoleon shifted,
Restless in the old sarcophagus
And murmured to a watchguard:
"Who goes there?"
"Twenty-one million men,
Soldiers, armies, guns,
Twenty-one million
Afoot, horseback,
In the air,
Under the sea."
And Napoleon turned to his sleep:
"It is not my world answering;
It is some dreamer who knows not
The world I marched in
From Calais to Moscow."
And he slept on
In the old sarcophagus
While the aeroplanes
Droned their motors
Between Napoleon's mausoleum
And the cool night stars.

Fight

Red drips from my chin where I have been eating.
Not all the blood, nowhere near all, is wiped off my mouth.

Clots of red mess my hair
And the tiger, the buffalo, know how.
I was a killer.

Yes, I am a killer.

I come from killing.

I go to more.

I drive red joy ahead of me from killing.

Red gluts and red hungers run in the smears and juices of
my inside bones:

The child cries for a suck mother and I cry for war.

Buttons

I have been watching the war map slammed up for advertising in front of the newspaper office.

Buttons—red and yellow buttons—blue and black buttons—are shoved back and forth across the map.

A laughing young man, sunny with freckles,
Climbs a ladder, yells a joke to somebody in the crowd,
And then fixes a yellow button one inch west
And follows the yellow button with a black button one inch west.

(Ten thousand men and boys twist on their bodies in a red
soak along a river edge,
Gasping of wounds, calling for water, some rattling death
in their throats.)

Who would guess what it cost to move two buttons one
inch on the war map here in front of the newspaper
office where the freckled-faced young man is laughing
to us?

And They Obey

Smash down the cities.
Knock the walls to pieces.
Break the factories and cathedrals, warehouses and homes
Into loose piles of stone and lumber and black burnt wood:
 You are the soldiers and we command you.

Build up the cities.
Set up the walls again.
Put together once more the factories and cathedrals, ware-
 houses and homes
Into buildings for life and labor:
 You are workmen and citizens all: We command you.

Jaws

Seven nations stood with their hands on the jaws of death.
It was the first week in August, Nineteen Hundred Fourteen.
I was listening, you were listening, the whole world was
 listening,
And all of us heard a Voice murmuring:
 "I am the way and the light,
 He that believeth on me
 Shall not perish
 But shall have everlasting life."
Seven nations listening heard the Voice and answered:
 "OHell!"
The jaws of death began clicking and they go on clicking:
 "O Hell!"

Salvage

Guns on the battle lines have pounded now a year between
Brussels and Paris.

And, William Morris, when I read your old chapter on the
great arches and naves and little whimsical corners of
the Churches of Northern France—Brr-rr!

I'm glad you're a dead man, William Morris, I'm glad you're
down in the damp and mouldy, only a memory instead
of a living man—I'm glad you're gone.

You never lied to us, William Morris, you loved the shape
of those stones piled and carved for you to dream over
and wonder because workmen got joy of life into them.
Workmen in aprons singing while they hammered, and
praying, and putting their songs and prayers into the
walls and roofs, the bastions and cornerstones and gar-
goyles—all their children and kisses of women and wheat
and roses growing.

I say, William Morris, I'm glad you're gone, I'm glad you're
a dead man.

Guns on the battle lines have pounded a year now between
Brussels and Paris.

Wars

In the old wars drum of hoofs and the beat of shod feet.
In the new wars hum of motors and the tread of rubber tires.
In the wars to come silent wheels and whirr of rods not yet
dreamed out in the heads of men.

In the old wars clutches of short swords and jabs into faces
with spears.

In the new wars long range guns and smashed walls, guns
running a spit of metal and men falling in tens and
twenties.

In the wars to come new silent deaths, new silent hurlers
not yet dreamed out in the heads of men.

In the old wars kings quarreling and thousands of men
following.

In the new wars kings quarreling and millions of men fol-
lowing.

In the wars to come kings kicked under the dust and millions
of men following great causes not yet dreamed out in
the heads of men.

THE ROAD AND THE END

The Road and the End

I shall foot it
Down the roadway in the dusk,
Where shapes of hunger wander
And the fugitives of pain go by.

I shall foot it
In the silence of the morning,
See the night slur into dawn,
Hear the slow great winds arise
Where tall trees flank the way
And shoulder toward the sky.

The broken boulders by the road
Shall not commemorate my ruin.
Regret shall be the gravel under foot
I shall watch for
Slim birds swift of wing
That go where wind and ranks of thunder
Drive the wild processions of rain.

The dust of the traveled road
Shall touch my hands and face.

Choices

They offer you many things,

I a few.

Moonlight on the play of fountains at night

With water sparkling a drowsy monotone,

Bare-shouldered, smiling women and talk

And a cross-play of loves and adulteries

And a fear of death

and a remembering of regrets:

All this they offer you.

I come with:

salt and bread

a terrible job of work

and tireless war;

Come and have now:

hunger.

danger

and hate.

Graves

I dreamed one man stood against a thousand,
One man damned as a wrongheaded fool.
One year and another he walked the streets,
And a thousand shrugs and hoots
Met him in the shoulders and mouths he passed.

He died alone
And only the undertaker came to his funeral.

Flowers grow over his grave anod in the wind,
And over the graves of the thousand, too,
The flowers grow anod in the wind.

Flowers and the wind,
Flowers anod over the graves of the dead,
Petals of red, leaves of yellow, streaks of white,
Masses of purple sagging ...
I love you and your great way of forgetting.

Aztec Mask

I wanted a man's face looking into the jaws and throat of
life

With something proud on his face, so proud no smash of
the jaws,

No gulp of the throat leaves the face in the end

With anything else than the old proud look:

Even to the finish, dumped in the dust,

Lost among the used-up cinders,

This face, men would say, is a flash,

Is laid on bones taken from the ribs of the earth,

Ready for the hammers of changing, changing
years,

Ready for the sleeping, sleeping years of silence.

Ready for the dust and fire and wind.

I wanted this face and I saw it today in an Aztec mask.

A cry out of storm and dark, a red yell and a purple prayer,

A beaten shape of ashes

waiting the sunrise or night,

something or nothing

proud-mouthed,

proud-eyed gambler.

Momus

Momus is the name men give your face,
The brag of its tone, like a long low steamboat whisde
Finding a way mid mist on a shoreland,
Where gray rocks let the salt water shatter spray
 Against horizons purple, silent.

Yes, Momus,
Men have flung your face in bronze
To gaze in gargoye downward on a street-whirl of folk.
They were artists did this, shaped your sad mouth,
Gave you a tall forehead slanted with calm, broad wisdom;
All your lips to the corners and your cheeks to the high
 bones
Thrown over and through with a smile that forever wishes
 and wishes, purple, silent, fled from all the iron things
of life, evaded like a sought bandit, gone into dreams,
by God.

I wonder, Momus,
Whether shadows of the dead sit somewhere and look with
 deep laughter
On men who play in terrible earnest the old, known, solemn
 repetitions of history.
A droning monotone soft as sea laughter hovers from your
 kindliness of bronze,
You give me the human ease of a mountain peak, purple,
 silent;
Granite shoulders heaving above the earth curves,
Careless eye-witness of the spawning tides of men and
 women
Swarming always in a drift of millions to the dust of toil, the
 salt of tears,
And blood drops of undiminishing war.

To a Dead Man

Over the dead line we have called to you
To come across with a word to us,
Some beaten whisper of what happens
Where you are over the dead line
Deaf to our calls and voiceless.

The flickering shadows have not answered
Nor your lips sent a signal
Whether love talks and roses grow
And the sun breaks at morning
Splattering the sea with crimson.

The Answer

You have spoken the answer.
A child searches far sometimes
Into the red dust
 On a dark rose leaf
And so you have gone far
 For the answer is:
 Silence.

In the republic
Of the winking stars
 and spent cataclysms
Sure we are it is off there the answer is hidden and folded
 over,
Sleeping in the sun, careless whether it is Sunday or any other
 day of the week,

Knowing silence will bring all one way or another.

Have we not seen
Purple of the pansy
 out of the mulch
 and mold
 crawl
 into a dusk
 of velvet?
 blur of yellow?
Almost we thought from nowhere but it was the silence,
 the future,
 working.

Under

I

I am the undertow
Washing tides of power
Battering the pillars
Under your things of high law.

ii

I am a sleepless
Slowfaring eater,
Maker of rust and rot
In your bastioned fastenings,
Caissons deep.

III

I am the Law
Older than you
And your builders proud.

I am deaf
In all days
Whether you
Say "Yes" or "No".

I am the crumbier:
To-morrow.

A Sphinx

Close-mouthed you sat five thousand years and never let
out a whisper.

Processions came by, marchers, asking questions you answered
with grey eyes never blinking, shut lips never talking.

Not one croak of anything you know has come from your
cat crouch of ages.

I am one of those who know all you know and I keep my
questions: I know the answers you hold.

Who Am I?

My head knocks against the stars.

My feet are on the hilltops.

My finger-tips are in the valleys and shores of universal life.

Down in the sounding foam of primal things I reach my
hands and play with pebbles of destiny.

I have been to hell and back many times.

I know all about heaven, for I have talked with God.

I dabble in the blood and guts of the terrible.

I know the passionate seizure of beauty

And the marvelous rebellion of man at all signs reading
"Keep **Off.**"

My name is Truth and I am the most elusive captive in the
universe.

Our Prayer of Thanks

For the gladness here where the sun is shining at evening on
the weeds at the river,
Our prayer of thanks.

For the laughter of children who tumble barefooted and
bareheaded in the summer grass,
Our prayer of thanks.

For the sunset and the stars, the women and the white arms
that hold us,
Our prayer of thanks.

God,
If you are deaf and blind, if this is all lost to you,
God, if the dead in their coffins amid the silver handles on
the edge of town, or the reckless dead of war days
thrown unknown in pits, if these dead are forever deaf
and blind and lost,
Our prayer of thanks.

God,
The game is all your way, the secrets and the signals and the
system; and so for the break of the game and the first
play and the last.
Our prayer of thanks.

FOGS AND FIRES

At a Window

Give me hunger,
O you gods that sit and give
The world its orders.
Give me hunger, pain and want,
Shut me out with shame and failure
From your doors of gold and fame,
Give me your shabbiest, weariest hunger!

But leave me a little love,
A voice to speak to me in the day end,
A hand to touch me in the dark room
Breaking the long loneliness.
In the dusk of day-shapes
Blurring the sunset,
One little wandering, western star
Thrust out from the changing shores of shadow.
Let me go to the window,
Watch there the day-shapes of dusk
And wait and know the coming
Of a little love.

Under the Harvest Moon

Under the harvest moon,
When the soft silver
Drips shimmering
Over the garden nights,
Death, the gray mocker,
Comes and whispers to you
As a beautiful friend
Who remembers.

Under the summer roses
When the flagrant crimson
Lurks in the dusk
Of the wild red leaves,
Love, with little hands,
Comes and touches you
With a thousand memories,
And asks you
Beautiful, unanswerable questions.

The Great Hunt

I cannot tell you now;
When the wind's drive and whirl
Blow me along no longer,
And the wind's a whisper at last-
Maybe I'll tell you then-
some other time.

When the rose's flash to the sunset
Reels to the rack and the twist,
And the rose is a red bygone,
When the face I love is going
And the gate to the end shall clang,
And it's no use to beckon or say, "So long"-
Maybe I'll tell you then-
some other time.

I never knew any more beautiful than you:
I have hunted you under my thoughts,
I have broken down under the wind
And into the roses looking for you.
I shall never find any
greater than you.

Monotone

The monotone of the rain is beautiful,
And the sudden rise and slow relapse
Of the long multitudinous rain.

The sun on the hills is beautiful,
Or a captured sunset sea-flung,
Bannered with fire and gold.

A face I know is beautiful—
With fire and gold of sky and sea,
And the peace of long warm rain.

Joy

Let a joy keep you.
Reach out your hands
And take it when it runs by,
As the Apache dancer
Clutches his woman.
I have seen them
Live long and laugh loud,
Sent on singing, singing,
Smashed to the heart
Under the ribs
With a terrible love.
Joy always,
Joy everywhere—
Let joy kill you!
Keep away from the little deaths.

Shirt

I remember once I ran after you and tagged the fluttering
shirt of you in the wind.

Once many days ago I drank a glassful of something and the
picture of you shivered and slid on top of the stuff.

And again it was nobody else but you I heard in the singing
voice of a careless humming woman.

One night when I sat with chums telling stories at a bonfire
flickering red embers, in a language its own talking to
a spread of white stars:

It was you that slunk laughing
in the clumsy staggering shadows.

Broken answers of remembrance let me know you are alive
with a peering phantom face behind a doorway some-
where in the city's push and fury

Or under a pack of moss and leaves waiting in silence under
a twist of oaken arms ready as ever to run away again
when I tag the fluttering shirt of you.

Two

Memory of you is ... a blue spear of flower.

I cannot remember the name of it.

Alongside a bold dripping poppy is fire and silk.

And they cover you.

Back Yard

Shine on, O moon of summer.
Shine to the leaves of grass, catalpa and oak,
All silver under your rain to-night.

An Italian boy is sending songs to you to-night from an
accordion.

A Polish boy is out with his best girl; they marry next
month; to-night they are throwing you kisses.

An old man next door is dreaming over a sheen that sits in
a cherry tree in his back yard.

The clocks say I must go—I stay here sitting on the back
porch drinking white thoughts you rain down.

Shine on, O moon,
Shake out more and more silver changes.

I Sang

I sang to you and the moon
But only the moon remembers.
I sang
O reckless free-hearted
free-throated rythms,
Even the moon remembers them
And is kind to me.

On the Breakwater

On the breakwater in the summer dark, a man and a girl are
sitting,
She across his knee and they are looking face into face
Talking to each other without words, singing rythms in
silence to each other.

A funnel of white ranges the blue dusk from an outgoing
boat,
Playing its searchlight, puzzled, abrupt, over a streak of
green,
And two on the breakwater keep their silence, she on his
knee.

Mask

Fling your red scarf faster and faster, dancer.
It is summer and the sun loves a million green leaves, masses
of green.
Your red scarf flashes across them calling and a-calling.
The silk and flare of it is a great soprano leading a chorus
Carried along in a rouse of voices reaching for the heart of
the world.
Your toes are singing to meet the song of your arms:

Let the red scarf go swifter.
Summer and the sun command you.

Pearl Fog

Open the door now.
Go roll up the collar of your coat
To walk in the changing scarf of mist.

Tell your sins here to the pearl fog
And know for once a deepening night
Strange as the half-meanings
Alurk in a wise woman's mousey eyes.

Yes, tell your sins
And know how careless a pearl fog is
Of the laws you have broken.

Hydrangeas

Dragoons, I tell you the white hydrangeas turn rust and
go soon.
Already mid September a line of brown runs over them.
One sunset after another tracks the faces, the petals.
Waiting, they look over the fence for what way they go.

Follies

Shaken,
The blossoms of lilac,
And shattered,
The atoms of purple.
Green dip the leaves,
Darker the bark,
Longer the shadows.

Sheer lines of poplar
Shimmer with masses of silver
And down in a garden old with years
And broken walls of ruin and story,
Roses rise with red rain-memories.

May!

In the open world
The sun comes and finds your face,
Remembering all.

Nocturne in a Deserted Brickyard

Stuff of the moon
Runs on the lapping sand
Out to the longest shadows.
Under the curving willows,
And round the creep of the wave line,
Fluxions of yellow and dusk on the waters
Make a wide dreaming pansy of an old pond in the night.

Theme in Yellow

I spot the hills
With yellow balls in autumn.
I light the prairie cornfields
Orange and tawny gold clusters
And I am called pumpkins.
On the last of October
When dusk is fallen
Children join hands
And circle round me
Singing ghost songs
And love to the harvest moon;
I am a jack-o'-lantern
With terrible teeth
And the children know
I am fooling.

Between Two Hills

Between two hills
The old town stands.
The houses loom
And the roofs and trees
And the dusk and the dark,
The damp and the dew
Are there.

The prayers are said
And the people rest
For sleep is there
And the touch of dreams
Is over all.

Last Answers

I wrote a poem on the mist
And a woman asked me what I meant by it.
I had thought till then only of the beauty of the mist, how
 pearl and gray of it mix and reel,
And change the drab shanties with lighted lamps at evening
 into points of mystery quivering with color.

I answered:

The whole world was mist once long ago and some day
 it will all go back to mist,
Our skulls and lungs are more water than bone and tissue
And all poets love dust and mist because all the last answers
Go running back to dust and mist.

Window

Night from a railroad car window
Is a great, dark, soft thing
Broken across with slashes of light.

Young Sea

The sea is never still.
It pounds on the shore
Restless as a young heart,
Hunting.

The sea speaks
And only the stormy hearts
Know what it says:
It is the face
 of a rough mother speaking.

The sea is young.
One storm cleans all the hoar
And loosens the age of it.
I hear it laughing, reckless.

They love the sea,
Men who ride on it
And know they will die
Under the salt of it.

Let only the young come,
 Says the sea.
Let them kiss my face
 And hear me.
I am the last word
 And I tell
Where storms and stars come from.

Bones

Sling me under the sea.
Pack me down in the salt and wet.
No farmer's plow shall touch my bones.
No Hamlet hold my jaws and speak
How jokes are gone and empty is my mouth.
Long, green-eyed scavengers shall pick my eyes,
Purple fish play hide-and-seek,
And I shall be song of thunder, crash of sea,
Down on the floors of salt and wet.
 Sling me ... under the sea.

Pals

Take a hold now
On the silver handles here,
Six silver handles,
One for each of his old pals.

Take hold
And lift him down the stairs,
Put him on the rollers
Over the floor of the hearse.

Take him on the last haul,
To the cold straight house,
The level even house,
To the last house of all.

 The dead say nothing
 And the dead know much
 And the dead hold under their tongues
 A locked-up story.

Child Moon

The child's wonder
At the old moon
Comes back nightly.
She points her finger
To the far silent yellow thing
Shining through the branches
Filtering on the leaves a golden sand,
Crying with her little tongue, "See the moon!"
And in her bed fading to sleep
With blabblings of the moon on her little mouth.

Margaret

Many birds and the beating of wings
Make a flinging reckless hum
In the early morning at the rocks
Above the blue pool
Where the gray shadows swim lazy.

In your blue eyes, O reckless child,
I saw today many little wild wishes,
Eager as the great morning.

SHADOWS

Poems Done on a Late Night Car

I. CHICKENS

I am The Great White Way of the city:
When you ask what is my desire, I answer:
"Girls fresh as country wild flowers,
With young faces tired of the cows and barns,
Eager in their eyes as the dawn to find my mysteries,
Slender supple girls with shapely legs,
Lure in the arch of their little shoulders
And wisdom from the prairies to cry only softly at the
ashes of my mysteries."

II. USED UP

*Lines based on certain regrets that come 'with
rumination upon the painted faces of 'women on
North Clark Street, Chicago*

Roses,
Red roses,
Crushed
In the rain and wind
Like mouths of women
Beaten by the fists of
Men using them.
O little roses
And broken leaves
And petal wisps:
You that so flung your crimson
To the sun
Only yesterday.

III. HOME

Here is a thing my heart wishes the world had more of:
I heard it in the air of one night when I listened
To a mother singing softly to a child restless and angry in
the darkness.

Harrison Street Court

I heard a woman's lips
Speaking to a companion
Say these words:

"A woman what hustles
Never keeps nothin'
For all her hustlin'.
Somebody always gets
What she goes on the street for.
If it ain't a pimp
It's a bull what gets it.
I been hustlin' now
Till I ain't much good any more.
I got nothin' to show for it.
Some man got it all,
Every night's hustlin' I ever did."

It Is Much

Women of night life amid the lights
Where the line of your full, round throats
Matches in gleam the glint of your eyes
And the ring of your heart-deep laughter:
 It is much to be warm and sure of to-morrow.

Women of night life along the shadows,
Lean at your throats and skulking the walls,
Gaunt as a bitch worn to the bone,
Under the paint of your smiling faces:
 It is much to be warm and sure of to-morrow.

Trafficker

Among the shadows where two streets cross,
A woman lurks in the dark and waits
To move on when a policeman heaves in view.
Smiling a broken smile from a face
Painted over haggard bones and desperate eyes,
All night she offers passers-by what they will
Of her beauty wasted, body faded, claims gone,
And no takers.

Soiled Dove

Let us be honest; the lady was not a harlot until she married a corporation lawyer who picked her from a Ziegfeld chorus.

Before then she never took anybody's money and paid for her silk stockings out of what she earned singing and dancing.

She loved one man and he loved six women and the game was changing her looks, calling for more and more massage money and high coin for the beauty doctors.

Now she drives a long, underslung motor car all by herself, reads in the day's papers what her husband is doing to the inter-state commerce commission, requires a larger corsage from year to year, and wonders sometimes how one man is coming along with six women.

Jungheimer's

In western fields of corn and northern timber lands,
They talk about me, a saloon with a soul,
The soft red lights, the long curving bar,
The leather seats and dim corners,
Tall brass spittoons, a nigger cutting ham,
And the painting of a woman half-dressed thrown reckless
across a bed after a night of booze and riots.

Gone

Everybody loved Chick Lorimer in our town.

Far off

Everybody loved her.

So we all love a wild girl keeping a hold

On a dream she wants.

Nobody knows now where Chick Lorimer went.

Nobody knows why she packed her trunk.. a few old things

And is gone,

Gone with her little chin

Thrust ahead of her

And her soft hair blowing careless

From under a wide hat,

Dancer, singer, a laughing passionate lover.

Were there ten men or a hundred hunting Chick?

Were there five men or fifty with aching hearts?

Everybody loved Chick Lorimer.

Nobody knows where she's gone.

OTHER DAYS
1900-1910

Dreams in the Dusk

Dreams in the dusk,
Only dreams closing the day
And with the day's close going back
To the gray things, the dark things,
The far, deep things of dreamland.

Dreams, only dreams in the dusk,
Only the old remembered pictures
Of lost days when the day's loss
Wrote in tears the heart's loss.

Tears and loss and broken dreams
May find your heart at dusk.

All Day Long

All day long in fog and wind,
The waves have flung their beating crests
Against the palisades of adamant.

My boy, he went to sea, long and long ago,
Curls of brown were slipping underneath his cap,
He looked at me from blue and steely eyes;
Natty, straight and true, he stepped away,
My boy, he went to sea.

All day long in fog and wind,
The waves have flung their beating crests
Against the palisades of adamant.

Docks

Strolling along
By the teeming docks,
I watch the ships put out.
Black ships that heave and lunge
And move like mastodons
Arising from lethargic sleep.

The fathomed harbor
Calls them not nor dares
Them to a strain of action,
But outward, on and outward,
Sounding low-reverberating calls,
Shaggy in the half-lit distance,
They pass the pointed headland,
View the wide, far-lifting wilderness
And leap with cumulative speed
To test the challenge of the sea.

Plunging,
Doggedly onward plunging,
Into salt and mist and foam and sun.

Waiting

Today I will let the old boat stand
Where the sweep of the harbor tide comes in
To the pulse of a far, deep-steady sway.
And I will rest and dream and sit on the deck
 Watching the world go by
And take my pay for many hard days gone I remember.

I will choose what clouds I like
In the great white fleets that wander the blue
As I lie on my back or loaf at the rail.
And I will listen as the veering winds kiss me and fold me
And put on my brow the touch of the world's great will.

Daybreak will hear the heart of the boat beat,
Engine throb and piston play
In the quiver and leap at call of life.
To-morrow we move in the gaps and heights
On changing floors of unlevel seas
And no man shall stop us and no man follow
For ours is the quest of an unknown shore
And we are husky and lusty and shouting-gay.

From the Shore

A lone gray bird,
Dim-dipping, far-flying,
Alone in the shadows and grandeurs and tumults
Of night and the sea
And the stars and storms.

Out over the darkness it wavers and hovers,
Out into the gloom it swings and batters,
Out into the wind and the rain and the vast,
Out into the pit of a great black world,
Where fogs are at battle, sky-driven, sea-blown,
Love mist and rapture of flight,
Glories of chance and hazards of death
On its eager and palpitant wings.

Out into the deep of the great dark world,
Beyond the long borders where foam and drift
Of the Sundering waves are lost and gone
On the tides that plunge and rear and crumble.

Uplands in May

Wonder as of old things
Fresh and fair come back
Hangs over pasture and road.
Lush in the lowland grasses rise
And upland beckons to upland.
The great strong hills are humble.

Dream Girl

You will come one day in a waver of love,
Tender as dew, impetuous as rain,
The tan of the sun will be on your skin,
The purr of the breeze in your murmuring speech,
You will pose with a hill-flower grace.

You will come, with your slim, expressive arms,
A poise of the head no sculptor has caught
And nuances spoken with shoulder and neck,
Your face in a pass-and-repass of moods
As many as skies in delicate change
Of cloud and blue and flimmering sun.

Yet,
You may not come, O girl of a dream,
We may but pass as the world goes by
And take from a look of eyes into eyes,
A film of hope and a memoried day.

Plowboy

After the last red sunset glimmer,
Black on the line of a low hill rise,
Formed into moving shadows, I saw
A plowboy and two horses lined against the gray,
Plowing in the dusk the last furrow.
The turf had a gleam of brown,
And smell of soil was in the air,
And, cool and moist, a haze of April.

I shall remember you long,
Plowboy and horses against the sky in shadow.
I shall remember you and the picture
You made for me,
Turning the turf in the dusk
And haze of an April gloaming.

Broadway

I shall never forget you, Broadway
Your golden and calling lights.

I'll remember you long,
Tall-walled river of rush and play.
Hearts that know you hate you
And lips that have given you laughter
Have gone to their ashes of life and its roses,
Cursing the dreams that were lost
In the dust of your harsh and trampled stones.

Noon Hour

She sits in the dust at the walls
And makes cigars,
Bending at the bench
With fingers wage-anxious,
Changing her sweat for the day's pay.

Now the noon hour has come,
And she leans with her bare arms
On the window-sill over the river,
Leans and feels at her throat
Cool-moving things out of the free open ways:

At her throat and eyes and nostrils
The touch and the blowing cool
Of great free ways beyond the walls.

Under a Telephone Pole

I am a copper wire slung in the air,
Slim against the sun I make not even a clear line of shadow.
Night and day I keep singing—humming and thrumming:
It is love and war and money; it is the fighting and the tears,
the work and want,
Death and laughter of men and women passing through me,
carrier of your speech,
In the rain and the wet dripping, in the dawn and the shine
drying,
A copper wire.

Old Woman

The owl-car clatters along, dogged by the echo
From building and battered paving-stone;
The headlight scoffs at the mist
And fixes its yellow rays in the cold slow rain;
Against a pane I press my forehead
And drowsily look on the walls and sidewalks.

The headlight finds the way
And life is gone from the wet and the welter-
Only an old woman, bloated, disheveled and bleared,
Far-wandered waif of other days,
Huddles for sleep in a doorway,
Homeless.

'Boes

I waited today for a freight train to pass.
Cattle cars with steers butting their horns against the bars,
went by.
And a half a dozen hoboes stood on bumpers between cars.
Well, the cattle are respectable, I thought.
Every steer has its transportation paid for by the farmer
sending it to market,
While the hoboes are law-breakers in riding a railroad train
without a ticket.
It reminded me of ten days I spent in the Allegheny County
jail in Pittsburgh.
I got ten days even though I was a veteran of the Spanish-
American war.
Cooped in the same cell with me was an old man, a brick-
layer and a booze-fighter.
But it just happened he, too, was a veteran soldier, and he
had fought to preserve the Union and free the niggers.
We were three in all, the other being a Lithuanian who got
drunk on pay day at the steel works and got to fighting
a policeman;
All the clothes he had was a shirt, pants and shoes—some-
body got his hat and coat and what money he had left
over when he got drunk.

I Am the People, the Mob

I am the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass.

Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?

I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world's food and clothes.

I am the audience that witnesses history. The Napoleons come from me and the Lincolns. They die. And then I send forth more Napoleons and Lincolns.

I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand for much plowing. Terrible storms pass over me. I forget. The best of me is sucked out and wasted. I forget. Everything but Death comes to me and makes me work and give up what I have. And I forget.

Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red drops for history to remember. Then—I forget.

When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People, use the lessons of yesterday and no longer forget who robbed me last year, who played me for a fool—then there will be no speaker in all the world say the name: "The People," with any fleck of a sneer in his voice or any far-off smile of derision.

The mob—the crowd—the mass—will arrive then.

Government

The Government—I heard about the Government and I went out to find it. I said I would look closely at it when I saw it.

Then I saw a policeman dragging a drunken man to the callaboose. It was the Government in action.

I saw a ward alderman slip into an office one morning and talk with a judge. Later in the day the judge dismissed a case against a pickpocket who was a live ward worker for the alderman. Again I saw this was the Government, doing things.

I saw militiamen level their rifles at a crowd of workingmen who were trying to get other workingmen to stay away from a shop where there was a strike on. Government in action.

Everywhere I saw that Government is a thing made of men, that Government has blood and bones, it is many mouths whispering into many ears, sending telegrams, aiming rifles, writing orders, saying "yes" and "no."

Government dies as the men who form it die and are laid away in their graves and the new Government that comes after is human, made of heartbeats of blood, ambitions, lusts, and money running through it all, money paid and money taken, and money covered up and spoken of with hushed voices.

A Government is just as secret and mysterious and sensitive as any human sinner carrying a load of germs, traditions and corpuscles handed down from fathers and mothers away back.

Languages

There are no handles upon a language
Whereby men take hold of it
And mark it with signs for its remembrance.
It is a river, this language,
Once in a thousand years
Breaking a new course
Changing its way to the ocean.
It is mountain effluvia
Moving to valleys
And from nation to nation
Crossing borders and mixing.
Languages die like rivers.
Words wrapped round your tongue today
And broken to shape of thought
Between your teeth and lips speaking
Now and today
Shall be faded hieroglyphics
Ten thousand years from now.
Sing—and singing—remember
Your song dies and changes
And is not here to-morrow
Any more than the wind
Blowing ten thousand years ago.

Letters to Dead Imagists

EMILY DICKINSON:

You gave us the bumble bee who has a soul,
The everlasting traveler among the hollyhocks,
And how God plays around a back yard garden.

STEVIE CRANE:

War is kind and we never knew the kindness of war till you
came;
Nor the black riders and clashes of spear and shield out of
the sea,
Nor the mumblings and shots that rise from dreams on call.

Sheep

Thousands of sheep, soft-footed, black-nosed sheep—one
by one going up the hill and over the fence—one by one
four-footed pattering up and over—one by one wiggling
their stub tails as they take the short jump and go over—one
by one silently unless for the multitudinous drumming of
their hoofs as they move on and go over—thousands and
thousands of them in the grey haze of evening just after sun-
down—one by one slanting in a long line to pass over the hill—

I am the slow, long-legged Sleepyman and I love you sheep
in Persia, California, Argentine, Australia, or Spain—you are
the thoughts that help me when I, the Sleepyman, lay my
hands on the eyelids of the children of the world at eight
o'clock every night—you thousands and thousands of sheep
in a procession of dusk making an endless multitudinous
drumming on the hills with your hoofs.

The Red Son

I love your faces I saw the many years
I drank your milk and filled my mouth
With your home talk, slept in your house
And was one of you.

But a fire burns in my heart.
Under the ribs where pulses thud
And flitting between bones of skull
Is the push, the endless mysterious command,

Saying:
"I leave you behind—
You for the little hills and the years all alike,
You with your patient cows and old houses
Protected from the rain,
I am going away and I never come back to you;
Craggs and high rough places call me,
Great places of death
Where men go empty handed
And pass over smiling
To the star-drift on the horizon rim.
My last whisper shall be alone, unknown;
I shall go to the city and fight against it,
And make it give me passwords
Of luck and love, women worth dying for,
And money.

I go where you wist not of
Nor I nor any man nor woman.
I only know I go to storms
Grappling against things wet and naked."
There is no pity of it and no blame.
None of us is in the wrong.
After all it is only this:

You for the little hills and I go away.

The Mist

I am the mist, the impalpable mist,
Back of the thing you seek.
My arms are long,
Long as the reach of time and space.

Some toil and toil, believing,
Looking now and again on my face,
Catching a vital, olden glory.

But no one passes me,
I tangle and snare them all.
I am the cause of the Sphinx,
The voiceless, baffled, patient Sphinx.

I was at the first of things,
I will be at the last.
 I am the primal mist
 And no man passes me;
 My long impalpable arms
 Bar them all.

The Junk Man

I am glad God saw Death
And gave Death a job taking care of all who are tired of
living:

When all the wheels in a clock are worn and slow and the
connections loose
And the clock goes on ticking and telling the wrong time
from hour to hour
And people around the house joke about what a bum clock
it is,
How glad the clock is when the big Junk Man drives his
wagon
Up to the house and puts his arms around the clock and says:
"You don't belong here,
You gotta come
Along with me,"
How glad the clock is then, when it feels the arms of the
Junk Man close around it and carry it away.

Silver Nails

A man was crucified. He came to the city a stranger, was accused, and nailed to a cross. He lingered hanging. Laughed at the crowd. "The nails are iron," he said, "You are cheap. In my country when we crucify we use silver nails . . ." So he went jeering. They did not understand him at first. Later they talked about him in changed voices in the saloons, bowling alleys, and churches. It came over them every man is crucified only once in his life and the law of humanity dictates silver nails be used for the job. A statue was erected to him in a public square. Not having gathered his name when he was among them, they wrote him as John Silvernail on the statue.

Gypsy

I asked a gypsy pal
To imitate an old image
And speak old wisdom.
She drew in her chin,
Made her neck and head
The top piece of a Nile obelisk
and said:
Snatch off the gag from thy mouth, child,
And be free to keep silence.
Tell no man anything for no man listens,
Yet hold thy lips ready to speak.

Cornhuskers

TO Janet and Margaret

Acknowledgment is set forth that some things here were first printed in Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, The Chicago Daily News, and the service of the Newspaper Enterprise Association.

Prairie

I was born on the prairie and the milk of its wheat, the red
of its clover, the eyes of its women, gave me a song and
a slogan.

Here the water went down, the icebergs slid with gravel, the
gaps and the valleys hissed, and the black loam came,
and the yellow sandy loam.

Here between the sheds of the Rocky Mountains and the
Appalachians, here now a morning star fixes a fire sign
over the timber claims and cow pastures, the corn belt,
the cotton belt, the cattle ranches.

Here the gray geese go five hundred miles and back with a
wind under their wings honking the cry for a new home.
Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one more
sunrise or a sky moon of fire doubled to a river moon
of water.

The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the
night I rest easy in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart.

• • •

After the sunburn of the day
handling a pitchfork at a hayrack,
after the eggs and biscuit and coffee,
the pearl-gray haystacks
in the gloaming
are cool prayers
to the harvest hands.

In the city among the walls the overland passenger train is
choked and the pistons hiss and the wheels curse.
On the prairie the overland flits on phantom wheels and the

sky and the soil between them muffle the pistons and cheer the wheels.

• • •

I am here when the cities are gone.
I am here before the cities come.
I nourished the lonely men on horses.
I will keep the laughing men who ride iron.
I am dust of men.

The running water babbled to the deer, the cottontail, the gopher.

You came in wagons, making streets and schools,
Kin of the ax and rifle, kin of the plow and horse,
Singing *Yankee Doodle*, *Old Dan Tucker*, *Turkey in the Straw*,

You in the coonskin cap at a log house door hearing a lone wolf howl,

You at a sod house door reading the blizzards and chinooks let loose from Medicine Hat,

I am dust of your dust, as I am brother and mother
To the copper faces, the worker in flint and clay,
The singing women and their sons a thousand years ago
Marching single file the timber and the plain.

I hold the dust of these amid changing stars.

I last while old wars are fought, while peace broods mother-like,

While new wars arise and the fresh killings of young men.

I fed the boys who went to France in great dark days.

Appomattox is a beautiful word to me and so is Valley Forge and the Marne and Verdun,

I who have seen the red births and the red deaths

Of sons and daughters, I take peace or war, I say nothing and wait.

Have you seen a red sunset drip over one of my cornfields,
the shore of night stars, the wave lines of dawn up a
wheat valley?

Have you heard my threshing crews yelling in the chaff of
a strawpile and the running wheat of the wagonboards,
my cornhuskers, my harvest hands hauling crops, sing-
ing dreams of women, worlds, horizons?

• • •

Rivers cut a path on flat lands.
The mountains stand up.
The salt oceans press in
And push on the coast lines.
The sun, the wind, bring rain
And I know what the rainbow writes across
the east or west in a half-circle:
A love-letter pledge to come again.

• • •

Towns on the Soo Line,
Towns on the Big Muddy,
Laugh at each other for cubs
And tease as children.

Omaha and Kansas City, Minneapolis and St. Paul, sisters in
a house together, throwing slang, growing up.

Towns in the Ozarks, Dakota wheat towns, Wichita, Peoria,
Buffalo, sisters throwing slang, growing up.

• • •

Out of prairie-brown grass crossed with a streamer of wig-
wam smoke—out of a smoke pillar, a blue promise—out
of wild ducks woven in greens and purples—

Here I saw a city rise and say to the peoples round world:
Listen, I am strong, I know what I want.

Out of log houses and stumps—canoes stripped from tree-
sides-flatboats coaxed with an ax from the timber claims

—in the years when the red and the white men met—
the houses and streets rose.

A thousand red men cried and went away to new places
for corn and women: a million white men came and put
up skyscrapers, threw out rails and wires, feelers to the
salt sea: now the smokestacks bite the skyline with stub
teeth.

In an early year the call of a wild duck woven in greens and
purples: now the riveter's chatter, the police patrol, the
song-whistle of the steamboat.

To a man across a thousand years I offer a handshake.
I say to him: Brother, make the story short, for the stretch
of a thousand years is short.

• • •

What brothers these in the dark?
What eaves of skyscrapers against a smoke moon?
These chimneys shaking on the lumber shanties
When the coal boats plow by on the river—
The hunched shoulders of the grain elevators—
The flame sprockets of the sheet steel mills
And the men in the rolling mills with their shirts *off*
Playing their flesh arms against the twisting wrists of steel:
 what brothers these
 in the dark
 of a thousand years?

• • •

A headlight searches a snowstorm.
A funnel of white light shoots from over the pilot of the
Pioneer Limited crossing Wisconsin.

In the morning hours, in the dawn,

The sun puts out the stars of the sky
And the headlight of the Limited train.

The fireman waves his hand to a country school teacher on
a bobsled.

A boy, yellow hair, red scarf and mittens, on the bobsled,
in his lunch box a pork chop sandwich and a V of goose-
berry pie.

The horses fathom a snow to their knees.
Snow hats are on the rolling prairie hills.
The Mississippi bluffs wear snow hats.

Keep your hogs on changing corn and mashes of gram,
O farmerman.
Cram their insides till they waddle on short legs
Under the drums of bellies, hams of fat.
Kill your hogs with a knife slit under the ear.
Hack them with cleavers.
Hang them with hooks in the hind legs.

A wagonload of radishes on a summer morning.
Sprinkles of dew on the crimson-purple balls.
The farmer on the seat dangles the reins on the rumps of
dapple-gray horses.
The farmer's daughter with a basket of eggs dreams of a new
hat to wear to the county fair.

On the left- and right-hand side of the road,
Marching corn—
I saw it knee high weeks ago—now it is head high—tassels
of red silk creep at the ends of the ears.

I am the prairie, mother of men, waiting.

They are mine, the threshing crews eating beefsteak, the farmboys driving steers to the railroad cattle pens.

They are mine, the crowds of people at a Fourth of July basket picnic, listening to a lawyer read the Declaration of Independence, watching the pinwheels and Roman candles at night, the young men and women two by two hunting the bypaths and kissing bridges.

They are mine, the horses looking over a fence in the frost of late October saying good-morning to the horses hauling wagons of rutabaga to market.

They are mine, the old zigzag rail fences, the new barb wire.

• • •

The cornhuskers wear leather on their hands.

There is no let-up to the wind.

Blue bandannas are knotted at the ruddy chins.

Falltime and winter apples take on the smolder of the five-o'clock November sunset: falltime, leaves, bonfires, stubble, the old things go, and the earth is grizzled.

The land and the people hold memories, even among the anthills and the angleworms, among the toads and wood-roaches—among gravestone writings rubbed out by the rain—they keep old things that never grow old.

The frost loosens corn husks.

The sun, the rain, the wind

loosen corn husks.

The men and women are helpers.

They are all cornhuskers together.

I see them late in the western evening

in a smoke-red dust.

• • •

The phantom of a yellow rooster flaunting a scarlet comb, on top of a dung pile crying hallelujah to the streaks of daylight,

The phantom of an old hunting dog nosing in the underbrush for muskrats, barking at a ccon in a treetop at midnight, chewing a bone, chasing his tail round a corn-crib,

The phantom of an old workhorse taking the steel point of a plow across a forty-acre field in spring, hitched to a harrow in summer, hitched to a wagon among corn-shocks in fall,

These phantoms come into the talk and wonder of people on the front porch of a farmhouse late summer nights. "The shapes that are gone are here," said an old man with a cob pipe in his teeth one night in Kansas with a hot wind on the alfalfa.

• • •

Look at six eggs
In a mockingbird's nest.

Listen to six mockingbirds
Flinging follies of O-be-joyful
Over the marshes and uplands.

Look at songs
Hidden in eggs.

• • •

When the morning sun is on the trumpet-vine blossoms, sing at the kitchen pans: Shout All Over God's Heaven.

When the rain slants on the potato hills and the sun plays a silver shaft on the last shower, sing to the bush at the backyard fence: Mighty Lak a Rose.

When the icy sleet pounds on the storm windows and the house lifts to a great breath, sing for the outside hills: The Ole Sheep Done Know the Road, the Young Lambs Must Find the Way.

Spring slips back with a girl face calling always: "Any new songs for me? Any new songs?"

O prairie girl, be lonely, singing, dreaming, waiting—your lover comes—your child comes—the years creep with toes of April rain on new-turned sod.

O prairie girl, whoever leaves you only crimson poppies to talk with, whoever puts a good-by kiss on your lips and never comes back-

There is a song deep as the falltime redhaws, long as the layer of black loam we go to, the shine of the morning star over the corn belt, the wave line of dawn up a wheat valley.

• • •

O prairie mother, I am one of your boys.

I have loved the prairie as a man with a heart shot full of pain over love.

Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky moon of fire doubled to a river moon of water.

• • •

I speak of new cities and new people.

I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes.

I tell you yesterday is a wind gone down, a sun dropped in the west.

I tell you there is nothing in the world
only an ocean of to-morrows,
a sky of to-morrows.

I am a brother of the cornhuskers who say
at sundown:

To-morrow is a day.

River Roads

Let the crows go by hawking their caw and caw.
They have been swimming in midnights of coal mines some-
where.

Let 'em hawk their caw and caw,

Let the woodpecker drum and drum on a hickory stump.
He has been swimming in red and blue pools somewhere
hundreds of years

And the blue has gone to his wings and the red has gone to
his head.

Let his red head drum and drum.

Let the dark pools hold the birds in a looking-glass.

And if the pool wishes, let it shiver to the blur of many
wings, old swimmers from old places.

Let the redwing streak a line of vermillion on the green
wood lines.

And the mist along the river fix its purple in lines of a woman's
shawl on lazy shoulders.

Prairie Waters by Night

Chatter of birds two by two raises a night song joining a litany of running water—sheer waters showing the russet of old stones remembering many rains.

And the long willows drowse on the shoulders of the running water, and sleep from much music; joined songs of day-end, feathery throats and stony waters, in a choir chanting new psalms.

It is too much for the long willows when low laughter of a red moon comes down; and the willows drowse and sleep on the shoulders of the running water.

Early Moon

The baby moon, a canoe, a silver papoose canoe, sails and sails in the Indian west.

A ring of silver foxes, a mist of silver foxes, sit and sit around the Indian moon.

One yellow star for a runner, and rows of blue stars for more runners, keep a line of watchers.

O foxes, baby moon, runners, you are the panel of memory, fire-white writing to-night of the Red Man's dreams.

Who squats, legs crossed and arms folded, matching its look against the moon-face, the star-faces, of the West?

Who are the Mississippi Valley ghosts, of copper foreheads, riding wiry ponies in the night?—no bridles, love-arms on the pony necks, riding in the night a long old trail?

Why do they always come back when the silver foxes sit around die early moon, a silver papoose, in the Indian west?

Laughing Corn

There was a high majestic fooling
Day before yesterday in the yellow corn.

And day after to-morrow in the yellow corn
There will be high majestic fooling.

The ears ripen in late summer
And come on with a conquering laughter,
Come on with a high and conquering laughter.

The long-tailed blackbirds are hoarse.
One of the smaller blackbirds chitters on a stalk
And a spot of red is on its shoulder
And I never heard its name in my life.

Some of the ears are bursting.
A white juice works inside.
Cornsilk creeps in the end and dangles in the wind.
Always—I never knew it any other way—
The wind and the corn talk things over together.
And the rain and the corn and the sun and the corn
Talk things over together.

Over the road is the farmhouse.
The siding is white and a green blind is slung loose.
It will not be fixed till the corn is husked.
The farmer and his wife talk things over together.

Autumn Movement

I cried over beautiful things knowing no beautiful thing lasts.

The field of cornflower yellow is a scarf at the neck of the copper sunburned woman, the mother of the year, the taker of seeds.

The northwest wind comes and the yellow is torn full of holes, new beautiful things come in the first spit of snow on the northwest wind, and the old things go, not one lasts.

Falltime

Gold of a ripe oat straw, gold of a southwest moon,
Canada thistle blue and flimmering larkspur blue,
Tomatoes shining in the October sun with red hearts,
Shining five and six in a row on a wooden fence,
Why do you keep wishes on your faces all day long,
Wishes like women with half-forgotten lovers going to new cities?

What is there for you in the birds, the birds, the birds, crying down on the north wind in September, acres of birds spotting the air going south?

Is there something finished? And some new beginning on the way?

Illinois Farmer

Bury this old Illinois farmer with respect.

He slept the Illinois nights of his life after days of work in
Illinois cornfields.

Now he goes on a long sleep.

The wind he listened to in the cornsilk and the tassels, the
wind that combed his red beard zero mornings when the
snow lay white on the yellow ears in the bushel basket
at the corncrib,

The same wind will now blow over the place here where his
hands must dream of Illinois corn.

Hits and Runs

I remember the Chillicothe ball players grappling the Rock
Island ball players in a sixteen-inning game ended by
darkness.

And the shoulders of the Chillicothe players were a red
smoke against the sundown and the shoulders of the
Rock Island players were a yellow smoke against the
sundown.

And the umpire's voice was hoarse calling balls and strikes
and outs and the umpire's throat fought in the dust for a
song.

Village in Late Summer

Lips half-willing in a doorway.
Lips half-singing at a window.
Eyes half-dreaming in the walls.
Feet half-dancing in a kitchen.
Even the clocks half-yawn the hours
And the farmers make half-answers.

Blizzard Notes

I don't blame the kettle drums—they are hungry.
And the snare drums—I know what they want—they are
empty too.
And the harring booming bass drums—they are hungriest of
all.

• • •

The howling spears of the Northwest die down.
The lullabies of the Southwest get a chance, a mother song.
A cradle moon rides out of a torn hole in the ragbag top of
the sky.

Sunset From Omaha Hotel Window

Into the blue river hills
The red sun runners go
And the long sand changes
And to-day is a goner
And to-day is not worth haggling over.

Here in Omaha
The gloaming is bitter
As in Chicago
Or Kenosha.

The long sand changes.
To-day is a goner.
Time knocks in another brass nail.
Another yellow plunger shoots the dark.

Constellations
Wheeling over Omaha
As in Chicago
Or Kenosha.
The long sand is gone
 and all the talk is stars.
They circle in a dome over Nebraska.

Band Concert

Band concert public square Nebraska city. Flowing and circling dresses, summer-white dresses. Faces, flesh tints flung like sprays of cherry blossoms. And gigglers, God knows, gigglers, rivaling the pony whinnies of the Livery Stable Blues.

Cowboy rags and nigger rags. And boys driving sorrel horses hurl a cornfield laughter at the girls in dresses, summer-white dresses. Amid the cornet staccato and the tuba oompa, gigglers, God knows, gigglers daffy with life's razzle dazzle.

Slow good-night melodies and Home Sweet Home. And the snare drummer bookkeeper in a hardware store nods hello to the daughter of a railroad conductor—a giggler, God knows, a giggler—and the summer-white dresses filter fanwise out of the public square.

The crushed strawberries of ice cream soda places, the night wind in cottonwoods and willows, the lattice shadows of doorsteps and porches, these know more of the story.

Three Pieces on the Smoke of Autumn

Smoke of autumn is on it all.
The streamers loosen and travel.
The red west is stopped with a gray haze.
They fill the ash trees, they wrap the oaks,
They make a long-tailed rider
In the pocket of the first, the earliest evening star.

• • •

Three muskrats swim west on the Desplaines River.

There is a sheet of red ember glow on the river; it is dusk;
and the muskrats one by one go on patrol routes west.

Around each slippery padding rat, a fan of ripples; in the
silence of dusk a faint wash of ripples, the padding of
the rats going west, in a dark and shivering river gold.

(A newspaper in my pocket says the Germans pierce the
Italian line; I have letters from poets and sculptors in
Greenwich Village; I have letters from an ambulance
man in France and an I. W. W. man in Vladivostok.)

I lean on an ash and watch the lights fall, the red ember
glow, and three muskrats swim west in a fan of ripples
on a sheet of river gold.

• • •

Better the blue silence and the gray west,
The autumn mist on the river,
And not any hate and not any love,
And not anything at all of the keen and the deep:
Only the peace of a dog head on a barn floor,
And the new corn shoveled in bushels
And the pumpkins brought from the corn rows,

Umber lights of the dark,
Umber lanterns of the loam dark.

Here a dog head dreams.
Not any hate, not any love.
Not anything but dreams.
Brother of dusk and umber.

Still Life

Cool your heels on the rail of an observation car.
Let the engineer open her up for ninety miles an hour.
Take in the prairie right and left, rolling land and new hay
crops, swaths of new hay laid in the sun.
A gray village flecks by and the horses hitched in front of
the post-office never blink an eye.
A barnyard and fifteen Holstein cows, dabs of white on a
black wall map, never blink an eye.
A signalman in a tower, the outpost of Kansas City, keeps
his place at a window with the serenity of a bronze
statue on a dark night when lovers pass whispering.

Localities

Wagon Wheel Gap is a place I never saw
And Red Horse Gulch and the chutes of Cripple Creek.

Red-shirted miners picking in the sluices,
Gamblers with red neckties in the night streets,
The fly-by-night towns of Bull Frog and Skiddoo,
The night-cool limestone white of Death Valley,
The straight drop of eight hundred feet
From a shelf road in the Hasiampa Valley:
Men and places they are I never saw.

I have seen three White Horse taverns,
One in Illinois, one in Pennsylvania,
One in a timber-hid road of Wisconsin.

I bought cheese and crackers
Between sun showers in a place called White Pigeon
Nestling with a blacksmith shop, a post-office,
And a berry-crate factory, where four roads cross.

On the Pecatonica River near Freeport
I have seen boys run barefoot in the leaves
Throwing clubs at the walnut trees
In the yellow-and-gold of autumn,
And there was a brown mash dry on the inside of their
hands.

On the Cedar Fork Creek of Knox County
I know how the fingers of late October
Loosen the hazel nuts.
I know the brown eyes of half-open hulls.
I know boys named Lindquist, Swanson, Hildebrand.

I remember their cries when the nuts were ripe.
And some are in machine shops; some are in the navy;
And some are not on payrolls anywhere.
Their mothers are through waiting for them to come home.

Caboose Thoughts

It's going to come out all right—do you know?
The sun, the birds, the grass—they know.
They get along—and we'll get along.

Some days will be rainy and you will sit waiting
And the letter you wait for won't come,
And I will sit watching the sky tear off gray and gray
And the letter I wait for won't come.

There will be ac-ci-dents.
I know ac-ci-dents are coming.
Smash-ups, signals wrong, washouts, trestles rotten,
Red and yellow ac-ci-dents.
But somehow and somewhere the end of the run
The train gets put together again
And the caboose and the green tail lights
Fade down the right of way like a new white hope.

I never heard a mockingbird in Kentucky
Spilling its heart in the morning.

I never saw the snow on Chimborazo.
It's a high white Mexican hat, I hear.

I never had supper with Abe Lincoln.
Nor a dish of soup with Jim Hill.

But I've been around.
I know some of the boys here who can go a little.
I know girls good for a burst of speed any time.

I heard Williams and Walker
Before Walker died in the bughouse.

I knew a mandolin player
Working in a barber shop in an Indiana town,
And he thought he had a million dollars.

I knew a hotel girl in Des Moines.
She had eyes; I saw her and said to myself
The sun rises and the sun sets in her eyes.
I was her steady and her heart went pit-a-pat.
We took away the money for a prize waltz at a Brother-
hood dance.
She had eyes; she was safe as the bridge over the Mississippi
at Burlington; I married her.

Last summer we took the cushions going west.
Pike's Peak is a big old stone, believe me.
It's fastened down; something you can count on.

It's going to come out all right—do you know?
The sun, the birds, the grass—they know.
They get along—and we'll get along.

Mix

The mare Alix breaks the world's trotting record one day.
I see her heels flash down the dust of an Illinois race track
on a summer afternoon. I see the timekeepers put their
heads together over stopwatches, and call to the grand
stand a split second is clipped off the old world's record
and a new world's record fixed.

I see the mare Alix led away by men in undershirts and
streaked faces. Dripping Alix in foam of white on the
harness and shafts. And the men in undershirts kiss her
ears and rub her nose, and tie blankets on her, and take
her away to have the sweat sponged.

I see the grand stand jammed with prairie people yelling
themselves hoarse. Almost the grand stand and the
crowd of thousands are one pair of legs and one voice
standing up and yelling hurrah.

I see the driver of Alix and the owner smothered in a fury
of handshakes, a mob of caresses. I see the wives of the
driver and owner smothered in a crush of white sum-
mer dresses and parasols.

Hours later, at sundown, gray dew creeping on the sod and
sheds, I see Alix again:

*Dark, shining-velvet Alix,
Night-sky Alix in a gray blanket,
Led back and forth by a nigger.
Velvet and night-eyed Alix
With slim legs of steel.*

And I want to rub my nose against the nose of the mare Alix.

Potato Blossom Songs and Jigs

Rum tiddy um,
tiddy um,
tiddy um tum tum.

My knees are loose-like, my feet want to sling their selves.
I feel like tickling you under the chin—honey—and a-asking:

Why Does a Chicken Cross the Road?

When the hens are a-laying eggs, and the roosters pluck-
pluck-put-akut and you—honey—put new potatoes and
gravy on the table, and there ain't too much rain or
too little:

Say, why do I feel so gabby?

Why do I want to holler all over the place?

• • •

Do you remember I held empty hands to you
and I said all is yours
the handfuls of nothing?

I ask you for white blossoms.

I bring a concertina after sunset under the apple trees.

I bring out "The Spanish Cavalier" and "In the Gloaming,
O My Darling."

The orchard here is near and homelike.

The oats in the valley run a mile.

Between are the green and marching potato vines.

The lightning bugs go criss-cross carrying a zigzag of fire:
the potato bugs are asleep under their stiff and yellow-
striped wings: here romance stutters to the western
stars, "Excuse ... me ..."

• • •

Old foundations of rotten wood.

An old barn done-for and out of the wormholes ten-legged
roaches shook up and scared by sunlight.

So a pickax digs a long tooth with a short memory.
Fire can not eat this rubbish till it has lain in the sun.

• • •

The story lags.
The story has no connections.
The story is nothing but a lot of banjo plinka planka plunks.

The roan horse is young and will learn: the roan horse buckles
into harness and feels the foam on the collar at the end
of a haul: the roan horse points four legs to the sky and
rolls in the red clover: the roan horse has a rusty jag
of hair between the ears hanging to a white star be-
tween the eyes.

• • •

In Burlington long ago
And later again in Ashtabula
I said to myself:
I wonder how far Ophelia went with Hamlet.
What else was there Shakespeare never told?
There must have been something.
If I go bugs I want to do it like Ophelia.
There was class to the way she went out of her head.

• • •

Does a famous poet eat watermelon?
Excuse me, ask me something easy.
I have seen farmhands with their faces in fried catfish on
a Monday morning.

And the Japanese, two-legged like us,
The Japanese bring slices of watermelon into pictures.
The black seeds make oval polka dots on the pink meat.

Why do I always think of niggers and buck-and-wing danc-
ing whenever I see watermelon?

Summer mornings on the docks I walk among bushel peach
baskets piled ten feet high.

Summer mornings I smell new wood and the river wind
along with peaches.

I listen to the steamboat whistle hong-honging, hong-honging
across the town.

And once I saw a teameo straddling a street with a hayrack
load of melons.

• • •

Niggers play banjos because they want to.

The explanation is easy.

It is the same as why people pay fifty cents for tickets to a
policemen's masquerade ball or a grocers-and-butchers*
picnic with a fat man's foot race.

It is the same as why boys buy a nickel's worth of peanuts
and eat them and then buy another nickel's worth.

Newsboys shooting craps in a back alley have a fugitive
understanding of the scientific principle involved.

The jockey in a yellow satin shirt and scarlet boots, riding
a sorrel pony at the county fair, has a grasp of the
theory.

It is the same as why boys go running lickety-split
away from a school-room geography lesson >
in April when the crawfishes come out
and the young frogs are calling
and the pussywillows and the cat-tails
know something about geography themselves.

• • •

I ask you for white blossoms.

I offer you memories and people.

I offer you a fire zigzag over the green and marching vines.

I bring a concertina after supper under the home-like apple
trees.

I make up songs about things to look at:
potato blossoms in summer night mist filling the garden
with white spots;
a cavalryman's yellow silk handkerchief stuck in a flannel
pocket over the left side of the shirt, over the
ventricles of blood, over the pumps of the heart.

Bring a concertina after sunset under the apple trees.
Let romance stutter to the western stars, "Excuse ... me ..."

Loam

In the loam we sleep,
In the cool moist loam,
To the lull of years that pass
And the break of stars,

From the loam, then,
The soft warm loam,
We rise:
To shape of rose leaf,
Of face and shoulder.

We stand then,
To a whiff of life,
Lifted to the silver of the sun
Over and out of the loam
A day.

Manitoba Childe Roland

Last night a January wind was ripping at the shingles over our house and whistling a wolf song under the eaves. I sat in a leather rocker and read to a six-year-old girl the Browning poem, *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*.

And her eyes had the haze of autumn hills and it was beautiful to her and she could not understand. A man is crossing a big prairie, says the poem, and nothing happens—and he goes on and on—and it's all lonesome and empty and nobody home.

And he goes on and on—and nothing happens—and he comes on a horse's skull, dry bones of a dead horse—and you know more than ever it's all lonesome and empty and nobody home.

And the man raises a horn to his lips and blows—he fixes a proud neck and forehead toward the empty sky and the empty land—and blows one last wonder-cry.

And as the shuttling automatic memory of man clicks off its results willy-nilly and inevitable as the snick of a mouse-trap or the trajectory of a 42-centimeter projectile,

I flash to the form of a man to his hips in snow drifts of Manitoba and Minnesota—in the sled derby run from Winnipeg to Minneapolis.

He is beaten in the race the first day out of Winnipeg—the lead dog is eaten by four team mates—and the man goes

on and on—running while the other racers ride—running while the other racers sleep—

Lost in a blizzard twenty-four hours, repeating a circle of travel hour after hour—fighting the dogs who dig holes in the snow and whimper for sleep—pushing on—running and walking five hundred miles to the end of the race—almost a winner—one toe frozen, feet blistered and frost-bitten.

And I know why a thousand young men of the Northwest meet him in the finishing miles and yell cheers—I know why judges of the race call him a winner and give him a special prize even though he is a loser.

I know he kept under his shirt and around his thudding heart amid the blizzards of five hundred miles that one last wonder-cry of Childe Roland—and I told the six-year-old girl all about it.

And while the January wind was ripping at the shingles and whistling a wolf song under the eaves, her eyes had the haze of autumn hills and it was beautiful to her and she could not understand.

Wilderness

There is a wolf in me... fangs pointed for tearing gashes...
a red tongue for raw meat . . . and the hot lapping of
blood—I keep this wolf because the wilderness gave it
to me and the wilderness will not let it go.

There is a fox in me ... a silver-gray fox ... I sniff and
guess ... I pick things out of the wind and air ... I nose
in the dark night and take sleepers and eat them and
hide the feathers ... I circle and loop and double-cross.

There is a hog in me ... a snout and a belly ... a machinery
for eating and grunting ... a machinery for sleeping
satisfied in the sun—I got this too from the wilderness
and the wilderness will not let it go.

There is a fish in me ... I know I came from salt-blue water-
gates ... I scurried with shoals of herring ... I blew
waterspouts with porpoises . . . before land was . . .
before the water went down . . . before Noah . . . be-
fore the first chapter of Genesis.

There is a baboon in me ... clambering-clawed . . . dog-
faced . . . yawping a galoot's hunger . . . hairy under
the armpits . . . here are the hawk-eyed hankering men
. . . here are the blond and blue-eyed women . . . here
they hide curled asleep waiting . . . ready to snarl and
kill. .. ready to sing and give milk . . . waiting—I keep
the baboon because the wilderness says so.

There is an eagle in me and a mockingbird ... and the eagle
flies among the Rocky Mountains of my dreams and
fights among the Sierra crags of what I want . . . and

the mockingbird warbles in the early forenoon before the dew is gone, warbles in the underbrush of my Chattanooga of hope, gushes over the blue Ozark foothill of my wishes—And I got the eagle and the mockingbird from the wilderness.

O, I got a zoo, I got a menagerie, inside my ribs, under my bony head, under my red-valve heart—and I got something else: it is a man-child heart, a woman-child heart: it is a father and mother and lover: it came from God-Knows-Where: it is going to God-Knows-Where—For I am the keeper of the zoo: I say yes and no: I sing and kill and work: I am a pal of the world: I came from the wilderness.

PERSONS HALF KNOWN

Chicago Poet

I saluted a nobody.
I saw him in a looking-glass.
He smiled—so did I.
He crumpled the skin on his forehead,
 frowning—so did I.
Everything I did he did.
I said, "Hello, I know you."
And I was a liar to say so.

Ah, this looking-glass man!
Liar, fool, dreamer, play-actor,
Soldier, dusty drinker of dust—
Ah! he will go with me
Down the dark stairway
When nobody else is looking,
When everybody else is gone.

He locks his elbow in mine,
I lose all—but not him.

Fire-Logs

Nancy Hanks dreams by the fire;
Dreams, and the logs sputter,
And the yellow tongues climb.
Red lines lick their way in flickers.
Oh, sputter, logs.
 Oh, dream, Nancy.
Time now for a beautiful child.
Time now for a tall man to come.

Repetitions

They are crying salt tears
Over the beautiful beloved body
Of Inez Milholland,
Because they are glad she lived,
Because she loved open-armed,
Throwing love for a cheap thing
Belonging to everybody—
Cheap as sunlight,
And morning air.

Adelaide Crapsey

Among the bumble-bees in red-top hay, a freckled field of
brown-eyed Susans dripping yellow leaves in July,
 I read your heart in a book.
And your mouth of blue pansy—I know somewhere I have
seen it rain-shattered.

And I have seen a woman with her head flung between her
naked knees, and her head held there listening to the
sea, the great naked sea shouldering a load of salt.

And the blue pansy mouth sang to the sea:
 Mother of God, I'm so little a thing,
 Let me sing longer.
 Only a little longer.

And the sea shouldered its salt in long gray combers hauling
new shapes on the beach sand.

Memoir of a Proud Boy

He lived on the wings of storm.
The ashes are in Chihuahua.

Out of Ludlow and coal towns in Colorado
Sprang a vengeance of Slav miners, Italians, Scots, Cornish-
men, Yanks.

Killings ran under the spoken commands of this boy
With eighty men and rifles on a hogback mountain.

They killed swearing to remember
The shot and charred wives and children
In the burnt camp of Ludlow,
And Louis Tikas, the laughing Greek,
Plugged with a bullet, clubbed with a gun butt.

As a home war
It held the nation a week
And one or two million men stood together
And swore by the retribution of steel.

It was all accidental.
He lived flecking lint off coat lapels
Of men he talked with.
He kissed the miners' babies
And wrote a Denver paper
Of picket silhouettes on a mountain line.

He had no mother but Mother Jones
Crying from a jail window of Trinidad:
"All I want is room enough to stand
And shake my fist at the enemies of the human race."

Named by a grand jury as a murderer
He went to Chihuahua, forgot his old Scotch name,
Smoked cheroots with Pancho Villa
And wrote letters of Villa as a rock of the people.

How can I tell how Don Magregor went?

Three riders emptied lead into him.
He lay on the main street of an inland town.
A boy sat near all day throwing stones
To keep pigs away.

The Villa men buried him in a pit
With twenty Carranzistas.

There is drama in that point. ..
. . . the boy and the pigs.
Griffith would make a movie of it to fetch sobs.
Victor Herbert would have the drums whirr
In a weave with a high fiddle-string's single clamor.

"And the muchacho sat there all day throwing stones
To keep the pigs away," wrote Gibbons to the *Tribune*.

Somewhere in Chihuahua or Colorado
Is a leather bag of poems and short stories.

Young Bullfrogs

Jimmy Wimbledon listened a first week in June.
Ditches along prairie roads of Northern Illinois
Filled the arch of night with young bullfrog songs.
Infinite mathematical metronomic croaks rose and spoke,
Rose and sang, rose in a choir of puzzles.
They made his head ache with riddles of music.
They rested his head with beaten cadence.
Jimmy Wimbledon listened.

BUbea

(FROM TABLET WRITING, BABYLONIAN
EXCAVATIONS OF 4TH MILLENNIUM B.C.)

Bilbea, I was in Babylon on Saturday night.
I saw nothing of you anywhere.
I was at the old place and the other girls were there, but
no Bilbea.

Have you gone to another house? or city?
Why don't you write?
I was sorry. I walked home half-sick.

Tell me how it goes.
Send me some kind of a letter.
And take care of yourself.

Southern Pacific

Huntington sleeps in a house six feet long.
Huntington dreams of railroads he built and owned.
Huntington dreams of ten thousand men saying: Yes, sir.

Blithery sleeps in a house six feet long.
Blithery dreams of rails and ties he laid.
Blithery dreams of saying to Huntington: Yes, sir.

Huntington,
Blithery, sleep in houses six feet long.

Washerwoman

The washerwoman is a member of the Salvation Army.
And over the tub of suds rubbing underwear clean
She sings that Jesus will wash her sins away
And the red wrongs she has done God and man
Shall be white as driven snow.
Rubbing underwear she sings of the Last Great Washday.

Portrait of a Motor Car

It's a lean car... a long-legged dog of a car ... a gray-ghost eagle car.

The feet of it eat the dirt of a road . .. the wings of it eat the hills.

Danny the driver dreams of it when he sees women in red skirts and red sox in his sleep.

It is in Danny's life and runs in the blood of him ... a lean gray-ghost car.

Girl in a Cage

Here in a cage the dollars come down.
To the click of a tube the dollars tumble.
And out of a mouth the dollars run.

I finger the dollars,
Paper and silver,
Thousands a day.

Some days it's fun
to finger the dollars.

Some days .. .
the dollars keep on
in a sob or a whisper:
A flame of rose in the hair,
A flame of silk at the throat.

Buffalo Bill

Boy heart of Johnny Jones—aching to-day?
Aching, and Buffalo Bill in town?
Buffalo Bill and ponies, cowboys, Indians?

Some of us know
All about it, Johnny Jones.

Buffalo Bill is a slanting look of the eyes,
A slanting look under a hat on a horse.
He sits on a horse and a passing look is fixed
On Johnny Jones, you and me, barelegged,
A slanting, passing, careless look under a hat on a horse.

Go clickety-clack, O pony hoofs along the street.
Come on and slant your eyes again, O Buffalo Bill,
Give us again the ache of our boy hearts.
Fill us again with the red love of prairies, dark nights, lonely
wagons, and the crack-crack of rifles sputtering flashes
into an ambush.

Sixteen Months

On the lips of the child Janet float changing dreams.
It is a thin spiral of blue smoke,
A morning campfire at a mountain lake.

On the lips of the child Janet,
Wisps of haze on ten miles of corn,
Young light blue calls to young light gold of morning.

Child Margaret

The child Margaret begins to write numbers on a Saturday morning, the first numbers formed under her wishing child fingers.

All the numbers come well-born, shaped in figures assertive for a frieze in a child's room.

Both 1 and 7 are straightforward, military, filled with lunge and attack, erect in shoulder-straps.

The 6 and 9 salute as dancing sisters, elder and younger, and 2 is a trapeze actor swinging to handclaps.

All the numbers are well-born, only 3 has a hump on its back and 8 is knock-kneed.

The child Margaret kisses all once and gives two kisses to 3 and 8.

(Each number is a bran-new rag doll... O in the wishing fingers . . . millions of rag dolls, millions and millions of new rag dolls!!)

Singing Nigger

Your bony head, Jazbo, O dock walloper,
Those grappling hooks, those wheelbarrow handlers,
The dome and the wings of you, nigger,
The red roof and the door of you,
I know where your songs come from.
I know why God listens to your, "Walk All Over God's
Heaven."
I heard you shooting craps, "My baby's going to have a new
dress."
I heard you in the cinders, "I'm going to live anyhow until
I die."
I saw five of you with a can of beer on a summer night and
I listened to the five of you harmonizing six ways to
sing, "Way Down Yonder in the Cornfield."
I went away asking where I come from.

LEATHER LEGGINGS

Leather Leggings

They have taken the ball of earth
and made it a little thing.

They were held to the land and horses;
they were held to the little seas.

They have changed and shaped and welded;
they have broken the old tools and made
new ones; they are ranging the white
scarves of cloudland; they are bumping
the sunken bells of the Carthaginians
and Phoenicians:

they are handling
the strongest sea
as a thing to be handled.

The earth was a call that mocked;
it is belted with wires and meshed with
steel; from Pittsburgh to Vladivostok is
an iron ride on a moving house; from
Jerusalem to Tokyo is a reckoned span;
and they talk at night in the storm and
salt, the wind and the war.

They have counted the miles to the Sun
and Canopus; they have weighed a small
blue star that comes in the southeast
corner of the sky on a foretold errand.

We shall search the sea again.

We shall search the stars again.

There are no bars across the way.

There is no end to the plan and the clue,
the hunt and the thirst.

The motors are drumming, the leather leggings
and the leather coats wait:
 under the sea
 and out to the stars
 we go.

Prayers of Steel

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar.
Let me pry loose old walls.
Let me lift and loosen old foundations.

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike.
Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together.
Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.
Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue
 nights into white stars.

Always the Mob

Jesus emptied the devils of one man into forty hogs and the hogs took the edge of a high rock and dropped off and down into the sea: a mob.

The sheep on the hills of Australia, blundering four-footed in the sunset mist to the dark, they go one way, they hunt one sleep, they find one pocket of grass for all.

Karnak? Pyramids? Sphinx paws tall as a coolie? Tombs kept for kings and sacred cows? A mob.

Young roast pigs and naked dancing girls of Belshazzar, the room where a thousand sat guzzling when a hand wrote: Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin? A mob.

The honeycomb of green that won the sun as the Hanging Gardens of Nineveh, flew to its shape at the hands of a mob that followed the fingers of Nebuchadnezzar: a mob of one hand and one plan.

Stones of a circle of hills at Athens, staircases of a mountain in Peru, scattered clans of marble dragons in China: each a mob on the rim of a sunrise: hammers and wagons have them now.

Locks and gates of Panama? The Union Pacific crossing deserts and tunneling mountains? The Woolworth on land and the *Titanic* at sea? Lighthouses blinking a coast line from Labrador to Key West? Pigiron bars piled on a barge whistling in a fog off Sheboygan? A mob: hammers and wagons have them to-morrow.

The mob? A typhoon tearing loose an island from thousand-year moorings and bastions, shooting a volcanic ash with a fire tongue that licks up cities and peoples. Layers of worms eating rocks and forming loam and valley floors for potatoes, wheat, watermelons.

The mob? A jag of lightning, a geyser, a gravel mass loosening. . .

The mob ... kills or builds ... the mob is Attila or Ghengis Khan, the mob is Napoleon, Lincoln.

I am born in the mob—I die in the mob—the same goes for you—I don't care who you are.

I cross the sheets of fire in No Man's land for you, my brother—I slip a steel tooth into your throat, you my brother—I die for you and I kill you—It is a twisted and gnarled thing, a crimson wool:

One more arch of stars,
In the night of our mist,
In the night of our tears.

Jabberers

I rise out of my depths with my language.
You rise out of your depths with your language.

Two tongues from the depths,
Alike only as a yellow cat and a green parrot are alike,
Fling their staccato tantalizations
Into a wildcat jabber
Over a gossamer web of unanswerables.

The second and the third silence,
Even the hundredth silence,
Is better than no silence at all
(Maybe this is a jabber too—are we at it again, you and I?)

I rise out of my depths with my language.
You rise out of your depths with your language.

One thing there is much of; the name men call it by is time;
into this gulf our syllabic pronunciamentos empty by
the way rockets of fire curve and are gone on the night
sky; into this gulf the jabberings go as the shower at
a scissors grinder's wheel...,

Cartoon

I am making a Cartoon of a Woman. She is the People.
She is the Great Dirty Mother.
And Many Children hang on her Apron, crawl at her
Feet, snuggle at her Breasts.

To things hidden
In the cool of the night time,
In Rabelais, Whitman, Hugo,
In an oblong of moon mist.

Out from the window . . . prairielands.
Moon mist whitens a golf ground.
Whiter yet is a limestone quarry.
The crickets keep on chirring.

Switch engines of the Great Western
Sidetrack box cars, make up trains
For Weehawken, Oskaloosa, Saskatchewan;
The cattle, the coal, the corn, must go
In the night... on the prairielands.

Chuff-chuff go the pulses.
They beat in the cool of the night time.
Chuff-chuff and chuff-chuff . . .
These heartbeats travel the night a mile
And touch the moon silver at the window
And the bones of the man.
It costs nothing.

Rabelais in red boards,
Whitman in green,
Hugo in ten-cent paper covers,
Here they stand on shelves
In the cool of the night time
And the clocks.

Legends

CLOWNS DYING

Five circus clowns dying this year, morning newspapers told their lives, how each one horizontal in a last gesture of hands arranged by an undertaker, shook thousands into convulsions of laughter from behind rouge-red lips and powder-white face.

STEAMBOAT BILL

When the boilers of the *Robert E. Lee* exploded, a steamboat winner of many races on the Mississippi went to the bottom of the river and never again saw the wharves of Natchez and New Orleans.

And a legend lives on that two gamblers were blown toward the sky and during their journey laid bets on which of the two would go higher and which would be first to set foot on the turf of the earth again.

FOOT AND MOUTH PLAGUE

When the mysterious foot and mouth epidemic ravaged the cattle of Illinois, Mrs. Hector Smith wept bitterly over the government killing forty of her soft-eyed Jersey cows; through the newspapers she wept over her loss for millions of readers in the Great Northwest.

SEVENS

The lady who has had seven lawful husbands has written seven years for a famous newspaper telling how to find love and keep it: seven thousand hungry girls in the Mississippi Valley have read the instructions seven years and found neither illicit loves nor lawful husbands.

PROFITEER

I who saw ten strong young men die anonymously, I who saw ten old mothers hand over their sons to the nation anonymously, I saw ten thousand touch the sunlit silver finalities of undistinguished human glory—why do I sneeze sardonically at a bronze drinking fountain named after one who participated in the war vicariously and bought ten farms?

Clocks

Here is a face that says half-past seven the same way whether a murder or a wedding goes on, whether a funeral or a picnic crowd passes.

A tall one I know at the end of a hallway broods in shadows and is watching booze eat out the insides of the man of the house; it has seen five hopes go in five years: one woman, one child, and three dreams.

A little one carried in a leather box by an actress rides with her to hotels and is under her pillow in a sleeping-car between one-night stands.

One hoists a phiz over a railroad station; it points numbers to people a quarter-mile away who believe it when other clocks fail.

And of course . . . there are wrist watches over the pulses of airmen eager to go to France. ..

Psalm of Those Who Go Forth Before Daylight

The policeman buys shoes slow and careful; the teamster buys gloves slow and careful; they take care of their feet and hands; they live on their feet and hands.

The milkman never argues; he works alone and no one speaks to him; the city is asleep when he is on the job; he puts a bottle on six hundred porches and calls it a day's work; he climbs two hundred wooden stairways; two horses are company for him; he never argues.

The rolling-mill men and the sheet-steel men are brothers of cinders; they empty cinders out of their shoes after the day's work; they ask their wives to fix burnt holes in the knees of their trousers; their necks and ears are covered with a smut; they scour their necks and ears; they are brothers of cinders.

Horses and Men in Rain

Let us sit by a hissing steam radiator a winter's day, gray
wind pattering frozen raindrops on the window,
And let us talk about milk wagon drivers and grocery de-
livery boys.

Let us keep our feet in wool slippers and mix hot punches—
and talk about mail carriers and messenger boys slipping
along the icy sidewalks.

Let us write of olden, golden days and hunters of the Holy
Grail and men called "knights" riding horses in the
rain, in the cold frozen rain for ladies they loved.

A roustabout hunched on a coal wagon, goes by, icicles drip
on his hat rim, sheets of ice wrapping the hunks of coal,
the caravanserai a gray blur in slant of rain.

Let us nudge the steam radiator with our wool slippers and
write poems of Launcelot, the hero, and Roland, the
hero, and all the olden golden men who rode horses in
the rain.

Questionnaire

Have I told any man to be a liar for my sake?

Have I sold ice to the poor in summer and coal to the poor in winter for the sake of daughters who nursed brindle bull terriers and led with a leash their dogs clothed in plaid wool jackets?

Have I given any man an earful too much of my talk—or asked any man to take a snootful of booze on my account?

Have I put wool in my own ears when men tried to tell me what was good for me? Have I been a bum listener?

Have I taken dollars from the living and the unborn while I made speeches on the retributions that shadow the heels of the dishonest?

Have I done any good under cover? Or have I always put it in the show windows and the newspapers?

Slants at Buffalo, New York

A forefinger of stone, dreamed by a sculptor, points to the sky.

It says: This way! this way!

Four lions snore in stone at the corner of the shaft.

They too are the dream of a sculptor.

They too say: This way! this way!

The street cars swing at a curve.

The middle-class passengers witness low life.

The car windows frame low life all day in pictures.

Two Italian cellar delicatessens

sell red and green peppers.

The Florida bananas furnish a burst of yellow.

The lettuce and the cabbage give a green.

Boys play marbles in the cinders.

The boys' hands need washing.

The boys are glad; they fight among each other.

A plank bridge leaps the Lehigh Valley railroad.

Then acres of steel rails, freight cars, smoke,

And then ... the blue lake shore

. . . Erie with Norse blue eyes . . . and the white sun.

Flat Lands

Flat lands on the end of town where real estate men are crying new subdivisions,
The sunsets pour blood and fire over you hundreds and hundreds of nights, flat lands—blood and fire of sunsets thousands of years have been pouring over you.
And the stars follow the sunsets. One gold star. A shower of blue stars. Blurs of white and gray stars. Vast marching processions of stars arching over you flat lands where frogs sob this April night.
"Lots for Sale—Easy Terms" run letters painted on a board—
and the stars wheel onward, the frogs sob this April night.

Three Balls

Jabowsky's place is on side street and only the rain washes
the dusty three balls.

When I passed the window a month ago, there rested in proud
isolation:

A family bible with hasps of brass twisted off, a wooden
clock with pendulum gone,

And a porcelain crucifix with the glaze nicked where the
left elbow of Jesus is represented.

I passed to-day and they were all there, resting in proud iso-
lation, the clock and the crucifix saying no more and
no less than before, and a yellow cat sleeping in a patch
of sun alongside the family bible with the hasps off.

Only the rain washes the dusty three balls in front of Jabow-
sky's place on a side street.

Chicks

The chick in the egg picks at the shell, cracks open one oval world, and enters another oval world.

"Cheep . . . cheep . . . cheep" is the salutation of the newcomer, the emigrant, the casual at the gates of the new world.

"Cheep . . . cheep" , . . from oval to oval, sunset to sunset, star to star.

It is at the door of this house, this teeny weeny eggshell exit, it is here men say a riddle and jeer each other: who are you? where do you go from here?

(In the academies many books, at the circus many sacks of peanuts, at the club rooms many cigar butts.)

"Cheep . . . cheep" . . . from oval to oval, sunset to sunset, star to star.

Humdrum

If I had a million lives to live
and a million deaths to die
in a million humdrum worlds,
I'd like to change my name
and have a new house number to go by
each and every time I died
and started life all over again.

I wouldn't want the same name every time
and the same old house number always,
dying a million deaths,
dying one by one a million times:
—would you?
 or you?
 or you?

Joliet

On the one hand the steel works.
On the other hand the penitentiary.
Sante Fe trains and Alton trains
Between smokestacks on the west
And gray walls on the east.
And Lockport down the river.
Part of the valley is God's.
And part is man's.
The river course laid out
A thousand years ago.
The canals ten years back.

The sun on two canals and one river
Makes three stripes of silver
Or copper and gold
Or shattered sunflower leaves.
 Talons of an iceberg
 Scraped out this valley.
 Claws of an avalanche loosed here.

Knucks

In Abraham Lincoln's city,
Where they remember his lawyer's shingle,
The place where they brought him
Wrapped in battle flags,
Wrapped in the smoke of memories
From Tallahassee to the Yukon,
The place now where the shaft of his tomb
Points white against the blue prairie dome,
In Abraham Lincoln's city ... I saw knucks
In the window of Mister Fischman's second-hand store
On Second Street.

I went in and asked, "How much?"
"Thirty cents apiece," answered Mister Fischman.
And taking a box of new ones *off* a shelf
He filled anew the box in the showcase
And said incidentally, most casually
And incidentally:
"I sell a carload a month of these."

I slipped my fingers into a set of knucks,
Cast-iron knucks molded in a foundry pattern,
And there came to me a set of thoughts like these:
Mister Fischman is for Abe and the "malice to none" stuff,
And the street car strikers and the strike-beaters,
And the sluggers, gunmen, detectives, policemen,
Judges, utility heads, newspapers, priests, lawyers,
They are all for Abe and the "malice to none" stuff.

I started for the door.
"Maybe you want a lighter pair,"
Came Mister Fischman's voice.

I opened the door ... and the voice again:
"You are a funny customer."

Wrapped in battle flags,
Wrapped in the smoke of memories,
This is the place they brought him,
This is Abraham Lincoln's home town.

Testament

I give the undertakers permission to haul my body
to the graveyard and to lay away all, the head, the
feet, the hands, all: I know there is something left
over they can not put away.

Let the nanny goats and the billy goats of the shanty
people eat the clover over my grave and if any yellow
hair or any blue smoke of flowers is good enough to grow
over me let the dirty-fisted children of the shanty
people pick these flowers.

I have had my chance to live with the people who have
too much and the people who have too little and I chose
one of the two and I have told no man why.

HAUNTS

Valley Song

Your eyes and the valley are memories.
Your eyes fire and the valley a bowl.
It was here a moonrise crept over the timberline.
It was here we turned the coffee cups upside down.
And your eyes and the moon swept the valley.

I will see you again to-morrow.
I will see you again in a million years.
I will never know your dark eyes again.
These are three ghosts I keep.
These are three sumach-red dogs I run with.

All of it wraps and knots to a riddle:
I have the moon, the timberline, and you.
All three are gone—and I keep all three.

Upstairs

I too have a garret of old playthings.
I have tin soldiers with broken arms upstairs.
I have a wagon and the wheels gone upstairs.
I have guns and a drum, a jumping-jack and a magic lantern.
And dust is on them and I never look at them upstairs.
I too have a garret of old playthings.

In Tall Grass

Bees and a honeycomb in the dried head of a horse in a pasture corner—a skull in the tall grass and a buzz and a buzz of the yellow honey-hunters.

And I ask no better a winding sheet
(over the earth and under the sun.)

Let the bees go honey-hunting with yellow blur of wings in the dome of my head, in the rumbling, singing arch of my skull.

Let there be wings and yellow dust and the drone of dreams of honey—who loses and remembers?—who keeps and forgets?

In a blue sheen of moon over the bones and under the hanging honeycomb the bees come home and the bees sleep.

Monosyllabic

Let me be monosyllabic to-day, O Lord.
Yesterday I loosed a snarl of words on a fool,
on a child.

To-day, let me be monosyllabic ... a crony of old men
who wash sunlight in their fingers and
enjoy slow-pacing clocks.

Films

I have kept all, not one is thrown away, not one given to the
ragman, not one thrust in a corner with a "P-f-f."
The red ones and the blue, the long ones in stripes, and each
of the little black and white checkered ones.
Keep them: I tell my heart: keep them another year, another
ten years: they will be wanted again.
They came once, they came easy, they came like a first white
flurry of snow in late October,
Like any sudden, presumptuous, beautiful thing, and they
were cheap at the price, cheap like snow.
Here a red one and there a long one in yellow stripes,
O there shall be no ragman have these yet a year, yet ten
years.

Kreisler

Sell me a violin, mister, of old mysterious wood.
Sell me a fiddle that has kissed dark nights on the forehead
where men kiss sisters they love.
Sell me dried wood that has ached with passion clutching the
knees and arms of a storm.
Sell me horsehair and rosin that has sucked at the breasts of
the morning sun for milk.
Sell me something crushed in the heartsblood of pain readier
than ever for one more song.

The Sea Hold

The sea is large.

The sea hold on a leg of land in the Chesapeake hugs an
early sunset and a last morning star over the oyster beds
and the late clam boats of lonely men.

Five white houses on a half-mile strip of land ... five white
dice rolled from a tube.

Not so long ago ... the sea was large ...

And to-day the sea has lost nothing ... it keeps all.

I am a loon about the sea.

I make so many sea songs, I cry so many sea cries, I forget
so many sea songs and sea cries.

I am a loon about the sea.

So are five men I had a fish fry with once in a tar-paper shack
trembling in a sand storm.

The sea knows more about them than they know themselves.
They know only how the sea hugs and will not let go.

The sea is large.

The sea must know more than any of us.

Goldwing Moth

A goldwing moth is between the scissors and the ink bottle
on the desk.

Last night it flew hundreds of circles around a glass bulb
and a flame wire.

The wings are a soft gold; it is the gold of illuminated initials
in manuscripts of the medieval monks.

Loin Cloth

Body of Jesus taken down from the cross
Carved in ivory by a lover of Christ,
It is a child's handful you are here,
The breadth of a man's finger,
And this ivory loin cloth
Speaks an interspersal in the day's work,
The carver's prayer and whim
And Christ-love.

Summer Shirt Sale

The summer shirt sale of a downtown haberdasher is glorified in a show-window slang: everybody understands the language: red dots, yellow circles, blue anchors, and dove-brown hooks, these perform explosions in color: stripes and checks fight for the possession of front lines and salients: detectives, newsies, teameoes, niggers, all stop, look and listen: the shirt sale and the show window kick at the street with a noise joyous as a clog dancer: the ensemble is a challenge to the ghost who walks on paydays.

Hemlock and Cedar

Thin sheets of blue smoke among white slabs . . . near the
shingle mill . . . winter morning.
Falling of a dry leaf might be heard . . ., circular steel tears
through a log.
Slope of woodland ... brown... soft... tinge of blue such
as pansy eyes.
Farther, field fires . . . funnel of yellow smoke . . . spellings
of other yellow in corn stubble.
Bobsled on a down-hill road . . . February snow mud . . .
horses steaming ... Oscar the driver sings ragtime under
a spot of red seen a mile ... the red wool yarn of Oscar's
stocking cap is seen from the shingle mill to the ridge
of hemlock and cedar.

Medallion

The brass medallion profile of your face I keep always.
It is not jingling with loose change in my pockets.
It is not stuck up in a show place on the office wall.
I carry it in a special secret pocket in the day
And it is under my pillow at night.
The brass came from a long ways off: it was up against hell
and high water, fire and flood, before the face was put
on it.
It is the side of a head; a woman wishes; a woman waits; a
woman swears behind silent lips that the sea will bring
home what is gone.

Mammy Hums

This is the song I rested with:

The right shoulder of a strong man I leaned on.

The face of the rain that drizzled on the short neck of a canal
boat.

The eyes of a child who slept while death went over and
under.

The petals of peony pink that fluttered in a shot of wind
come and gone.

This is the song I rested with:

Head, heels, and fingers rocked to the nigger mammy hum-
ming of it, to the mile-off steamboat landing whistle of
it.

The murmurs run with bees' wings

in a late summer sun.

They go and come with white surf

slamming on a beach all day.

Get this.

And then you may sleep with a late afternoon slumber sun.

Then you may slip your head in an elbow knowing nothing-
only sleep.

If so you sleep in the house of our song,

If so you sleep under the apple trees of our song,

Then the face of sleep must be the one face you were looking
for.

Bricklayer Love

I thought of killing myself because I am only a bricklayer
and you a woman who loves the man who runs a drug
store.

I don't care like I used to; I lay bricks straighter than I used
to and I sing slower handling the trowel afternoons.

When the sun is in my eyes and the ladders are shaky and
the mortar boards go wrong, I think of you.

Ashurnatsirpal III

(FROM BABYLONIAN TABLET, 4,000 YEARS BEFORE CHRIST)

Three walls around the town of Tela when I came.
They expected everything of those walls;
Nobody in the town came out to kiss my feet.

I knocked the walls down, killed three thousand soldiers,
Took away cattle and sheep, took all the loot in sight,
And burned special captives.

Some of the soldiers—I cut off hands and feet.
Others—I cut off ears and fingers.
Some—I put out the eyes.
I made a pyramid of heads.
I strung heads on trees circling the town.

When I got through with it
There wasn't much left of the town of Tela.

Crimson Rambler

Now that a crimson rambler
begins to crawl over the house
of our two lives—

Now that a red curve
winds across the shingles—

Now that hands
washed in early sunrises
climb and spill scarlet
on a white lattice weave-

Now that a loop of blood
is written on our roof
and reaching around a chimney-

How are the two lives of this house
to keep strong hands and strong hearts?

Fire Dreams

(Written to be read aloud, if so be, Thanksgiving Day)

I remember here by the fire,
In the flickering reds and saffrons,
They came in a ramshackle tub,
Pilgrims in tall hats,
Pilgrims of iron jaws,
Drifting by weeks on beaten seas,
And the random chapters say
They were glad and sang to God.

And so
Since the iron-jawed men sat down
And said, "Thanks, O God,"
For life and soup and a little less
Than a hobo handout to-day,
Since gray winds blew gray patterns of sleet on Plymouth
Rock,
Since the iron-jawed men sang "Thanks, O God,"
You and I, O Child of the West,
Remember more than ever
November and the hunter's moon,
November and the yellow-spotted hills.

And so
In the name of the iron-jawed men
I will stand up and say yes till the finish is come and gone.
God of all broken hearts, empty hands, sleeping soldiers,
God of all star-flung beaches of night sky,
I and my love-child stand up together to-day and sing:
"Thanks, O God."

Have Me

Have me in the blue and the sun.
Have me on the open sea and the mountains.

When I go into the grass of the sea floor, I will go alone.
This is where I came from—the chlorine and the salt are
blood and bones.

It is here the nostrils rush the air to the lungs. It is here
oxygen clamors to be let in.

And here in the root grass of the sea floor I will go alone.

Love goes far. Here love ends.
Have me in the blue and the sun.

Baby Face

White Moon comes in on a baby face.
The shafts across her bed are flimmering.

Out on the land White Moon shines,
Shines and glimmers against gnarled shadows,
All silver to slow twisted shadows
Falling across the long road that runs from the house.

Keep a little of your beauty
And some of your flimmering silver
For her by the window to-night
Where you come in, White Moon.

The Year

I

A storm of white petals,
Buds throwing open baby fists
Into hands of broad flowers.

II

Red roses running upward,
Clambering to the clutches of life
Soaked in crimson.

III

Rabbles of tattered leaves
Holding golden flimsy hopes
Against the tramplings
Into the pits and gullies.

IV

Hoarfrost and silence:
Only the muffling
Of winds dark and lonesome-
Great lullabies to the long sleepers.

Drumnotes*

Days of the dead men, Danny.
Drum for the dead, drum on your
remembering heart.

Jaures, a great love-heart of France,
a slug of lead in the red valves.
Kitchener of Khartoum, tall, cold, proud,
a shark's mouthful.

Franz Josef, the old man of forty haunted
kingdoms, in a tomb with the Hapsburg
fathers, moths eating a green uniform
to tatters, worms taking all and leaving
only bones and gold buttons, bones and
iron crosses.

Jack London, Jim Riley, Verhaeren, riders to
the republic of dreams.

Days of the dead, Danny.

Drum on your remembering heart.

Moonset

Leaves of poplars pick Japanese prints against the west.
Moon sand on the canal doubles the changing pictures.

The moon's good-by ends pictures.

The west is empty. All else is empty. No moon-talk at all
now.

Only dark listening to dark.

* Copyright, Dodd, Mead & Co.

Garden Wkcless

How many feet ran with sunlight, water, and air?

What little devils shaken of laughter, cramming their little ribs with chuckles,

Fixed this lone red tulip, a woman's mouth of passion kisses, a nun's mouth of sweet thinking, here topping a straight line of green, a pillar stem?

Who hurled this bomb of red caresses?—nodding balloon-film shooting its wireless every fraction of a second these June days:

Love me before I die;

Love me— love me now.

Handfuls

Blossoms of babies
Blinking their stories
Come soft
On the dusk and the babble;
Little red gamblers,
Handfuls that slept in the dust.

Summers of rain,
Winters of drift,
Tell off the years;
And they go back
Who came soft-
Back to the sod,
To silence and dust;
Gray gamblers,
Handfuls again.

Cool Tombs

When Abraham Lincoln was shoveled into the tombs, he forgot the copperheads and the assassin ... in the dust, in the cool tombs.

And Ulysses Grant lost all thought of con men and Wall Street, cash and collateral turned ashes ... in the dust, in the cool tombs.

Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a red haw in November or a pawpaw in May, did she wonder? does she remember? ... in the dust, in the cool tombs?

Take any streetful of people buying clothes and groceries, cheering a hero or throwing confetti and blowing tin horns . . . tell me if the lovers are losers . . . tell me if any get more than the lovers ... in the dust... in the cool tombs.

SHENANDOAH

Shenandoah

In the Shenandoah Valley, one rider gray and one rider blue,
and the sun on the riders wondering.

Piled in Shenandoah, riders blue and riders gray, piled with
shovels, one and another, dust in the Shenandoah taking
them quicker than mothers take children done with
play.

The blue nobody remembers, the gray nobody remembers,
it's all old and old nowadays in the Shenandoah.

• • •

And all is young, a butter of dandelions slung on the turf,
climbing blue flowers of the wishing woodlands won-
dering: a midnight purple violet claims the sun among
old heads, among old dreams of repeating heads of a
rider blue and a rider gray in the Shenandoah.

New Feet

Empty battlefields keep their phantoms.
Grass crawls over old gun wheels
And a nodding Canada thistle flings a purple
Into the summer's southwest wind,
Wrapping a root in the rust of a bayonet,
Reaching a blossom in rust of shrapnel.

Old Osawatomie

John Brown's body under the morning stars.
Six feet of dust under the morning stars.
And a panorama of war performs itself
Over the six-foot stage of circling armies.
Room for Gettysburg, Wilderness, Chickamauga,
On a six-foot stage of dust.

Grass

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.
Shovel them under and let me work—
I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.
Shovel them under and let me work.
Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor:
What place is this?
Where are we now?

I am the grass.
Let me work.

Flanders

Flanders, the name of a place, a country of people,
Spells itself with letters, is written in books.

"Where is Flanders?" was asked one time,
Flanders known only to those who lived there
And milked cows and made cheese and spoke the home
language.

"Where is Flanders?" was asked.
And the slang adepts shot the reply: Search me.

A few thousand people milking cows, raising radishes,
On a land of salt grass and dunes, sand-swept with a sea-
breath on it:
This was Flanders, the unknown, the quiet,
The place where cows hunted lush cuds of green on low-
lands,
And the raw-boned plowmen took horses with long shanks
Out in the dawn to the sea-breath.

Flanders sat slow-spoken amid slow-swung windmills,
Slow-circling windmill arms turning north or west,
Turning to talk to the swaggering winds, the childish winds,
So Flanders sat with the heart of a kitchen girl
Washing wooden bowls in the winter sun by a window.

Gargoyle

I saw a mouth jeering. A smile of melted red iron ran over it. Its laugh was full of nails rattling. It was a child's dream of a mouth.

A fist hit the mouth: knuckles of gun-metal driven by an electric wrist and shoulder. It was a child's dream of an arm.

The fist hit the mouth over and over, again and again. The mouth bled melted iron, and laughed its laughter of nails rattling.

And I saw the more the fist pounded the more the mouth laughed. The fist is pounding and pounding, and the mouth answering.

Old Timers

I am an ancient reluctant conscript.

On the soup wagons of Xerxes I was a cleaner of pans.

On the march of Miltiades' phalanx I had a haft and head;
I had a bristling gleaming spear-handle.

Red-headed Caesar picked me for a teamster.
He said, "Go to work, you Tuscan bastard,
Rome calls for a man who can drive horses."

The units of conquest led by Charles the Twelfth,
The whirling whimsical Napoleonic columns:
They saw me one of the horseshoers.

I trimmed the feet of a white horse Bonaparte swept the
night stars with.

Lincoln said, "Get into the game; your nation takes you."
And I drove a wagon and team and I had my arm shot off
At Spottsylvania Court House.

I am an ancient reluctant conscript.

House

Two Swede families live downstairs and an Irish policeman upstairs, and an old soldier, Uncle Joe.

Two Swede boys go upstairs and see Joe. His wife is dead, his only son is dead, and his two daughters in Missouri and Texas don't want him around.

The boys and Uncle Joe crack walnuts with a hammer on the bottom of a flatiron while the January wind howls and the zero air weaves laces on the window glass.

Joe tells the Swede boys all about Chickamauga and Chattanooga, how the Union soldiers crept in rain somewhere a dark night and ran forward and killed many Rebels, took flags, held a hill, and won a victory told about in the histories in school.

Joe takes a piece of carpenter's chalk, draws lines on the floor and piles stove wood to show where six regiments were slaughtered climbing a slope.

"Here they went" and "Here they went," says Joe, and the January wind howls and the zero air weaves laces on the window glass.

The two Swede boys go downstairs with a big blur of guns, men, and hills in their heads. They eat herring and potatoes and tell the family war is a wonder and soldiers are a wonder.

One breaks out with a cry at supper: I wish we had a war now and I could be a soldier.

John Ericsson Day Memorial, 1918

Into the gulf and the pit of the dark night, the cold night, there is a man goes into the dark and the cold and when he comes back to his people he brings fire in his hands and they remember him in the years afterward as the fire bringer—they remember or forget—the man whose head kept singing to the want of his home, the want of his people.

For this man there is no name thought of—he has broken from jungles and the old oxen and the old wagons—circled the earth with ships—belted the earth with steel—swung with wings and a drumming motor in the high blue sky—shot his words on a wireless way through shattering sea storms:—out from the night and out from the jungles his head keeps singing—there is no road for him but on and on.

Against the sea bastions and the land bastions, against the great air pockets of stars and atoms, he points a finger, finds a release clutch, touches a button no man knew before.

The soldier with a smoking gun and a gas mask—the workshop man under the smokestacks and the blueprints—these two are brothers of the handshake never forgotten—for these two we give the salt tears of our eyes, the salute of red roses, the flame-won scarlet of poppies.

For the soldier who gives all, for the workshop man who gives all, for these the red bar is on the flag—the red bar is the heart's-blood of the mother who gave him, the land that gave him.

The gray foam and the great wheels of war go by and take all—and the years give mist and ashes—and our feet stand at these, the memory places of the known and the unknown, and our hands give a flame-won poppy—our hands touch the red bar of a flag for the sake of those who gave—and gave all.

Out of White Lips

Out of white lips a question: Shall seven million dead ask for their blood a little land for the living wives and children, a little land for the living brothers and sisters?

Out of white lips:—Shall they have only air that sweeps round the earth for breath of their nostrils and no footing on the dirt of the earth for their battle-drabbed, battle-soaked shoes?

Out of white lips:—Is the red in the flag the blood of a free man on a piece of land his own or is it the red of a sheep slit in the throat for mutton?

Out of white lips a white pain murmurs: Who shall have land? Him who has stood ankle deep in the blood of his comrades, in the red trenches dug in the land?

Remembered Women

For a woman's face remembered as a spot of quick light on
the flat land of dark night,

For this memory of one mouth and a forehead they go on
in the gray rain and the mud, they go on among the
boots and guns.

The horizon ahead is a thousand fang flashes, it is a row of
teeth that bite on the flanks of night, the horizon sings
of a new kill and a big kill.

The horizon behind is a wall of dark etched with a memory,
fixed with a woman's face—they fight on and on, boots
in the mud and heads in the gray rain—for the women
they hate and the women they love—for the women
they left behind, they fight on.

Memoir

Papa Joffre, the shoulders of him wide as the land of France.

We look on the shoulders filling the stage of the Chicago Auditorium.

A fat mayor has spoken much English and the mud of his speech is crossed with quicksilver hisses elusive and rapid from floor and gallery.

A neat governor speaks English and the listeners ring chimes to his clear thoughts.

Joffre speaks a few words in French; this is a voice of the long firing line that runs from the salt sea dunes of Flanders to the white spear crags of the Swiss mountains.

This is the man on whose yes and no has hung the death of battalions and brigades; this man speaks of the tricolor of his country now melted in a great resolve with the starred bunting of Lincoln and Washington.

This is the hero of the Marne, massive, irreckonable; he lets tears roll down his cheek; they trickle a wet salt off his chin onto the blue coat.

There is a play of American hands and voices equal to sea-breakers and a lift of white sun on a stony beach.

A Million Young Workmen, 1915

A million young workmen straight and strong lay stiff on
the grass and roads,
And the million are now under soil and their rotting flesh
will in the years feed roots of blood-red roses.
Yes, this million of young workmen slaughtered one another
and never saw their red hands.
And oh, it would have been a great job of killing and a new
and beautiful thing under the sun if the million knew
why they hacked and tore each other to death.
The kings are grinning, the kaiser and the czar—they are
alive riding in leather-seated motor cars, and they have
their women and roses for ease, and they eat fresh-
poached eggs for breakfast, new butter on toast, sitting
in tall water-tight houses reading the news of war.
I dreamed a million ghosts of the young workmen rose in
their shirts all soaked in crimson . . . and yelled:
God damn the grinning kings, God damn the kaiser and the
czar.

Chicago, 1915.

Smoke

I sit in a chair and read the newspapers.

Millions of men go to war, acres of them are buried, guns
and ships broken, cities burned, villages sent up in smoke,
and children where cows are killed off amid hoarse bar-
becues vanish like finger-rings of smoke in a north wind.

I sit in a chair and read the newspapers.

A Tall Man

The mouth of this man is a gaunt strong mouth.

The head of this man is a gaunt strong head.

The jaws of this man are bone of the Rocky Mountains, the
Appalachians.

The eyes of this man are chlorine of two sobbing oceans,
Foam, salt, green, wind, the changing unknown.

The neck of this man is pith of buffalo prairie, old longing
and new beckoning of corn belt or cotton belt,

Either a proud Sequoia trunk of the wilderness

Or huddling lumber of a sawmill waiting to be a roof.

Brother mystery to man and mob mystery,

Brother cryptic to lifted cryptic hands,

He is night and abyss, he is white sky of sun, he is the head
of the people.

The heart of him the red drops of the people,

The wish of him the steady gray-eagle crag-hunting flights
of the people.

Humble dust of a wheel-worn road,

Slashed sod under the iron-shining plow,

These of service in him, these and many cities, many borders,
many wrangles between Alaska and the Isthmus, be-
tween the Isthmus and the Horn, and east and west of
Omaha, and east and west of Paris, Berlin, Petrograd.

The blood in his right wrist and the blood in his left wrist
run with the right wrist wisdom of the many and the
left wrist wisdom of the many.

It is the many he knows, the gaunt strong hunger of the
many.

The Four Brothers

NOTES FOR WAR SONGS (*November, 7,9/7*)

Make war songs out of these;
Make chants that repeat and weave.
Make rhythms up to the ragtime chatter of the machine guns;
Make slow-booming psalms up to the boom of the big guns.
Make a marching song of swinging arms and swinging legs,

Going along,

Going along,

On the roads from San Antonio to Athens, from Seattle to
Bagdad—

The boys and men in winding lines of khaki, the circling
squares of bayonet points.

Cowpunchers, cornhuskers, shopmen, ready in khaki;
Ballplayers, lumberjacks, ironworkers, ready in khaki;
A million, ten million, singing, "I am ready."
This the sun looks on between two seaboards,
In the land of Lincoln, in the land of Grant and Lee.

I heard one say, "I am ready to be killed."

I heard another say, "I am ready to be killed."

O sunburned clear-eyed boys!

I stand on sidewalks and you go by with drums and guns and
bugles,

You—and the flag!

And my heart tightens, a fist of something feels my throat

When you go by,

You on the kaiser hunt, you and your faces saying, "I am
ready to be killed."

They are hunting death.
Death for the one-armed mastoid kaiser.
They are after a Hohenzollern head:
There is no manhunt of men remembered like this.

The four big brothers are out to kill.
France, Russia, Britain, America—
The four republics are sworn brothers to kill the kaiser.

Yes, this is the great man-hunt;
And the sun has never seen till now
Such a line of toothed and tusked man-killers,
In the blue of the upper sky,
In the green of the undersea,
In the red of winter dawns.
Eating to kill,
Sleeping to kill,
Asked by their mothers to kill,
Wished by four-fifths of the world to kill-
To cut the kaiser's throat,
To hack the kaiser's head,
To hang the kaiser on a high-horizon gibbet.

And is it nothing else than this?
Three times ten million men thirsting the blood
Of a half-cracked one-armed child of the German kings?
Three times ten million men asking the blood
Of a child born with his head wrong-shaped,
The blood of rotted kings in his veins?
If this were all, O God,
I would go to the far timbers
And look on the gray wolves
Tearing the throats of moose:
I would ask a wilder drunk of blood.

Look! It is four brothers in joined hands together.
The people of bleeding France,
The people of bleeding Russia,
The people of Britain, the people of America—
These are the four brothers, these are the four republics.

At first I said it in anger as one who clenches his fist in wrath
to fling his knuckles into the face of some one taunting;
Now I say calmly as one who has thought it over and over
again at night, among the mountains, by the seacombers
in storm.

I say now, by God, only fighters to-day will save the world,
nothing but fighters will keep alive the names of those
who left red prints of bleeding feet at Valley Forge in
Christmas snow.

On the cross of Jesus, the sword of Napoleon, the skull of
Shakespeare, the pen of Tom Jefferson, the ashes of
Abraham Lincoln, or any sign of the red and running
life poured out by the mothers of the world,

By the God of morning glories climbing blue the doors of
quiet homes, by the God of tall hollyhocks laughing
glad to children in peaceful valleys, by the God of new
mothers wishing peace to sit at windows nursing babies,

I swear only reckless men, ready to throw away their lives
by hunger, deprivation, desperate clinging to a single
purpose imperturbable and undaunted, men with the
primitive guts of rebellion,

Only fighters gaunt with the red brand of labor's sorrow
on their brows and labor's terrible pride in their blood,
men with souls asking danger—only these will save and
keep the four big brothers.

Good-night is the word, good-night to the kings, to the
czars,

Good-night to the kaiser.
The breakdown and the fade-away begins.
The shadow of a great broom, ready to sweep out the trash,
is here.
One finger is raised that counts the czar,
The ghost who beckoned men who come no more—
The czar gone to the winds on God's great dustpan,
The czar a pinch of nothing,
The last of the gibbering Romanoffs.

Out and good-night—
The ghosts of the summer palaces
And the ghosts of the winter palaces!
Out and out, good-night to the kings, the czars, the kaisers.

Another finger will speak,
And the kaiser, the ghost who gestures a hundred million
sleeping-waking ghosts,
The kaiser will go onto God's great dustpan—
The last of the gibbering Hohenzollerns.
Look! God pities this trash, God waits with a broom and a
dustpan,
God knows a finger will speak and count them out.

It is written in the stars;
It is spoken on the walls;
It clicks in the fire-white zigzag of the Atlantic wireless;
It mutters in the bastions of thousand-mile continents;
It sings in a whistle on the midnight winds from Walla Walla
to Mesopotamia:
Out and good-night.

The millions slow in khaki,
The millions learning *Turkey in the Straw* and *John Broum*\$*
Body,

The millions remembering windrows of dead at Gettysburg,
Chickamauga, and Spottsylvania Court House,
The millions dreaming of the morning star of Appomattox,
The millions easy and calm with guns and steel, planes and
prows:

There is a hammering, drumming hell to come.
The killing gangs are on the way.

God takes one year for a job.
God takes ten years or a million.
God knows when a doom is written.
God knows this job will be done and the words spoken:
Out and good-night.

The red tubes will run,
And the great price be paid,
And the homes empty,
And the wives wishing,
And the mothers wishing.

There is only one way now, only the way of the red tubes
and the great price.

Well...

Maybe the morning sun is a five-cent yellow balloon,
And the evening stars the joke of a God gone crazy.
Maybe the mothers of the world,
And the life that pours from their torsal folds—
Maybe it's all a lie sworn by liars,
And a God with a cackling laughter says:
"I, the Almighty God,
I have made all this,
I have made it for kaisers, czars, and kings."

Three times ten million men say: No.
Three times ten million men say:

God is a God of the People.
And the God who made the world
And fixed the morning sun,
And flung the evening stars,
And shaped the baby hands of life,
This is the God of the Four Brothers;
This is the God of bleeding France and bleeding Russia;
This is the God of the people of Britain and America.

The graves from the Irish Sea to the Caucasus peaks are ten times a million.

The stubs and stumps of arms and legs, the eyesockets empty, the cripples, ten times a million.

The crimson thumb-print of this anathema is on the door panels of a hundred million homes.

Cows gone, mothers on sick-beds, children cry a hunger and no milk comes in the noon-time or at night.

The death-yells of it all, the torn throats of men in ditches calling for water, the shadows and the hacking lungs in dugouts, the steel paws that clutch and squeeze a scarlet drain day by day—the storm of it is hell.

But look! child! the storm is blowing for a clean air.

Look! the four brothers march
And hurl their big shoulders
And swear the job shall be done.

Out of the wild finger-writing north and south, east and west, over the blood-crossed, blood-dusty ball of earth,
Out of it all a God who knows is sweeping clean,
Out of it all a God who sees and pierces through, is breaking and cleaning out an old thousand years, is making ready for a new thousand years.

The four brothers shall be five and more.

Under the chimneys of the winter time the children of the
world shall sing new songs.
Among the rocking restless cradles the mothers of the world
shall sing new sleepytime songs.

