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MID-CENTURY EDITION

EDITED BY LOUIS UNTERMEYER

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THE SATURDAY REVIEW OF LITERATURE—for "At Rest in the Blast" by Marianne Moore.

Foreword

TO THE MID-CENTURY EDITION

Since the preceding edition of this work, a world war has raged and come to an end. The collapse of Germany and the defeat of Japan have been followed by an uneasy peace. Old standards have tottered; no new certitudes have been established. There has been almost unsupportable anxiety. To this confusion men, as individuals and as artists, have reacted violently. A few have expressed themselves in negatives and defeatism; the majority, however, are struggling to face themselves and the world with regenerative power. Poetry is essentially an act of belief; there are today heartening indications of a return to form and a revival of faith.

The chief aim of this collection is to express not only the national range but the rich diversity of recent American poetry. The object, in short, is to present a panorama in which outstanding figures assume logical prominence, but in which the valuable lesser personalities are not lost.

It is here that debate begins and choice is likely to be arbitrary. Never before have so many poets distinguished themselves in America; never before has even the lesser verse been on such a level of competence. Following the appearance of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* in 1912, more than one hundred magazines devoted themselves to the printing and appraisal of verse. The rapid multiplication of magazines barely suggests the amount of verse produced in the forty-eight states. Almost every major city has its Poetry Society feverishly competing for prizes; every county has its local laureate. A rough calculation indicates that, in the years covering the "renascence" of American poetry, no fewer than four thousand poets had volumes of their poetry offered for public sale. This figure does not include privately printed books or pamphlets which could not be catalogued. But, though an array of four thousand poets in any one period may be sufficiently imposing, this number gives no idea of the armies of writers who have whipped up their emotions, girded up their lines, and fought for the crucial adjective. It is safe to say that for every poet fortunate enough to emerge from the struggle with a volume or two to his credit, there were ten (the number is probably nearer fifty) who were not so victorious and had to content themselves with publication in magazines, trade journals, and the poetry corner of the local newspaper. Forty thousand poets then. But wait. It is fair to assume that there were ten times as many who chewed pencils, crumpled paper, cursed the inadequacy of the Rhyming Dictionary, and, somehow, got their lines to fit without the final gratification of seeing them in printer's type. Four hundred thousand poets plving their difficult trade with desperate hope and small chance of reward!

Selection of the fifteen or twenty "leading" poets for an anthology is not so difficult. Almost everyone will agree on the poets whose appearance is imperative in a collection of this type. It is when one goes further and attempts to suggest the flux and fecundity of the period, or presumes to indicate the shape of things to come, that differences of opinion are sure to arise. Controversy and even enmity are likely to follow. In the end every editor is driven back upon that mixture of preference, prejudice, and intuition known as personal taste—and it is only rarely that he can escape the limitations imposed by his temperament and training.

That inescapable personal factor explains the method of editing as well as the manner of selection. That a poem has appeared in various compilations is no proof that it is a good poem. Nor (in spite of those opposed to anthologies) is such publication anything against it. A good poem remains a good poem, no matter how often it is reprinted. On the other hand, it should be admitted that where there has been a choice between a much-quoted poem and one which has not been handed on from one anthologist to another, the editor has —where both poems seemed equally worthy—favored the less familiar example.

This seventh edition of *Modern American Poetry,* like its predecessors, does not pretend to be a complete history of the period. No collection, no matter how large or how inclusive, can be. Though this anthology indicates the range of contemporary native poetry, many poets have been omitted from these pages. The editor regrets the cruel stringency of space, and apologizes to those (many of them his friends) whom it was impossible to include. The table of contents, with its emphasis on the more important poets, must speak for itself. Some of the poets included have been hailed as pioneers; some have provoked controversy and have changed the direction of contemporary art; some have maintained their quiet utterance with no regard whatsoever to warring movements. Nevertheless, each has established his individuality by a unique command of his medium and a strongly pronounced personal idiom.

The biographical and critical paragraphs have not only been brought up-to-date but sharply re-examined. The volume, as before, begins with Walt Whitman, with whom modern American poetry may be said to have begun, but it now includes a larger proportion of those writers in whose poetry the present is significantly expressed.

One thing remains to be said. Although the notes as well as the number of poems selected make the editor's preference obvious, it should be added that he has attempted to make each poet's group rounded and representative. To accomplish this, not only the early but the most recent writing of the contemporaries appears here—some of it for the first time between covers. The editor is greatly indebted to most of the living poets, not only for invaluable data, but for their collaborative assistance; many of the following pages embody their choice of their own poems as well as the editor's preferences.

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MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

Preface

THE WORD "modern" is such a shifting and relative term that it escapes final definition. Yet it is generally conceded that, with the advent of Mark Twain, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman, American literature became modern as well as American. In the history of poetry the line may be drawn with some certainty. The publication of *Leaves of Grass* and the Civil War symbolized the close of one era and the beginning of another. It is with these events that the beginnings of modern American poetry may be defined.

AFTERMATH OF THE CIVIL WAR

The Civil War inspired volumes of indignant, military, religious, and patriotic verse without adding more than four or five memorable pieces to the anthologies; the conflict produced a vast quantity of poems but practically no important poetry. Its end marked the end of an epoch, political, social, and literary. The arts declined; the New England group began to disintegrate. The poets had overstrained and outsung themselves; it was a time of surrender and swan-songs. Unable to respond to the new forces of political nationalism and industrial reconstruction, the Brahmins (that famous group of intellectuals who had dominated literary America) withdrew into their libraries. Such poets as Longfellow, Bryant, Taylor, turned their eyes away from the native scene, rhapsodized endlessly about Europe, echoed the "parlor poetry" of England, or left creative writing altogether and occupied themselves with translations. "They had been borne into an era in which they had no part," writes Fred Lewis Pattee (*A History of American Literature Since 1870*), "and they contented themselves with reechoings of the old music." For them poetry ceased to be a reflection of actuality, "an extension of experience." Within a period of six years, from 1867 to 1872, there appeared Longfellow's *Divina Commedia,* C. E. Norton's *Vita Nuova,* T. W. Parsons' *Inferno,* William Cullen Bryant's *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* and Bayard Taylor's *Faust.*

Suddenly the break came. America developed a national consciousness; the West discovered itself, and the East discovered the West. Grudgingly at first, the aristocratic leaders made way for a new expression; crude, jangling, vigorously democratic. The old order was changing with a vengeance. All the preceding writers—poets like Emerson, Lowell, Longfellow, Holmes—were not only products of the New England colleges, but typically "Boston gentlemen of the early Renaissance." To them the new men must have seemed like a regiment recruited from the ranks of vulgarity. Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Bret Harte, John Hay, Joaquin Miller, Joel Chandler Harris, James Whitcomb Riley—these were men who had graduated from the farm, the frontier, the mine, the pilothouse, the printer's shop! For a while, the movement seemed of little consequence; the impact of Whitman and the Westerners was averted.

The poets of the transition, with a deliberate art, ignored the surge of a spontaneous national expression. They were even successful in holding it back. But it was gathering force.

THE "POST-MORTEM" PERIOD

The nineteenth century, up to its last quarter, had been a period of new vistas and revolts: a period of protest and iconoclasm—the era of Shelley and Byron, the prophets of "liberty, equality and fraternity." It left no immediate heirs. In England, its successors by default were the lesser Victorians. In America, the intensity of men like Emerson and Whittier gave way to the pale romanticism and polite banter of the transition, or what might be called the "post-mortem," poets. "Much of our poetry," Thoreau wrote, "has the very best manners, but no character." These interim lyrists were frankly the singers of an indefinite reaction, reminiscently digging among the bones of a long-dead past. They burrowed and borrowed, half archeologists, half artisans, impelled not so much by the need of creation as recreation. They did not write poetry, they echoed it.

From 1866 to 1880 the United States was in a chaotic and frankly materialistic condition; it was full of political scandals, panics, frauds, malfeasance in high places. The moral fiber was flabby; the country was apathetic, corrupt and contented. As in all such periods of national unconcern, the artists turned from life altogether, preoccupying themselves with the by-products of art: with method and technique, with elaborate and artificial conceits, with facile ideas rather than fundamental ideals.

Bayard Taylor, Thomas Buchanan Read, Richard Henry Stoddard, Paul Hamilton Hayne, Thomas Bailey Aldrich—all of these authors, in an effort to escape a reality they could not express and did not even wish to understand, fled to a more congenial realm of fantasy. They took the easiest routes to a prim and academic Arcadia, to a cloying and devitalized Orient, to a mildly sensuous, "reconstructed" Greece. Their verse, confessing its own defeat, was cluttered with silk divans, Astrakhans, Vesuvian Bays, burning deserts, Assyrian temples, Spanish cloths of gold. Originality was as far from their thoughts as thinking itself; they followed wherever Keats, Shelley (in his lesser lyrics) and Tennyson seemed to lead them. However, not being explorers themselves, they ventured no further than their predecessors, but remained politely in the rear, repeating dulcetly what they had learned from their greater guides—pronouncing it with little variety but with a sentimental unction. In their desperate preoccupation with lures and legends overseas, they were not, except for the accident of birth, American at all; all of them owed much more to old England than to New England.

WALT WHITMAN

Whitman, who was to influence future generations so profoundly in Europe as well as in America, had already appeared. The third edition of that stupendous volume, *Leaves of Grass,* had been printed in 1860. Almost immediately

after, the publisher failed and the book passed out of public notice. But private scrutiny was keen. In 1865 a petty official discovered that Whitman was the author of the "notorious" *Leaves of Grass* and, in spite of Whitman's sacrifice in nursing hundreds of wounded soldiers, in spite of his many past services and his present poverty, the offending poet was dismissed from his clerkship in the Department of the Interior at Washington, D. C. Other reverses followed rapidly. But Whitman, broken in health and cheated by his exploiters, lived to see not only a seventh edition of his work published in 1881, but a complete collection printed in his seventy-third year (1892) in which the twelve poems of the experimental first edition had grown to nearly four hundred.

The influence of Whitman can scarcely be overestimated. It has touched every shore of letters, quickened every current of contemporary art. And yet, as late as 1900, Barrett Wendell in his *Literary History of America* could speak of Whitman's "eccentric insolence of phrase and temper," and, perturbed by the poet's increasing vogue across the Atlantic (Whitman had been hailed by men as eminent as Swinburne, Symonds, Rossetti), he was led to write such a preposterous sentence as "In temperament and style he was an exotic member of that sterile brotherhood which eagerly greeted him abroad."

Such a judgment would be impossible today. Whitman has been acclaimed by a great and growing public. He has been hailed as prophet, as pioneer, as rebel, as fiery humanist not only in America, but in England and throughout Europe. The whole scheme of *Leaves of Grass* is inclusive rather than exclusive; its form is elemental, dynamic, free.

Nor was it only in the relatively minor matter of form that Whitman became a poetic emancipator. He led the way toward a wider aspect of democracy; he took his readers out of fusty, lamp-lit libraries into the coarse sunlight and the buoyant air. He was, as Burroughs wrote, preeminently the poet of vista; his work had the power "to open doors and windows, to let down bars rather than to put them up, to dissolve forms, to escape narrow boundaries, to plant the reader on a hill rather than in a corner." He could do this because, first of all, he believed implicitly in life—in its physical as well as its spiritual manifestations; he sought to grasp existence as a whole, not rejecting the things that, to other minds, had seemed trivial or tawdry. The cosmic and the commonplace were synonymous to him; he declared he was part of elemental, primitive things and constantly identified himself with them. He transmuted, by the intensity of his emotion, material which had been hitherto regarded as too unpoetic for poetry. His long poem "Song of Myself" is a magnificent example. Here his "barbaric yawp," sounded "over the roofs of the world," is softened, time and again, to express a lyric ecstasy and naïf wonder.

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'œuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels!

It is this large naturalism, this affection for all that is homely and of the soil, that sets Whitman apart from his fellow craftsmen as our first distinctively American poet. This blend of familiarity and grandeur, this racy but religious mysticism animates all his work. It swings with tremendous vigor through "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"; it sharpens the sturdy rhythms (and occasional rhymes) of the "Song of the Broad-Ax"; it beats sonorously through "Drum-Taps"; it whispers immortally through the "Memories of President Lincoln" (particularly that magnificent threnody "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"); it quickens the "Song of the Open Road" with what Tennyson called "the glory of going on," and lifts with a biblical solemnity "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking."

Whitman did not scorn the past; no one was quicker than he to see its wealth and glories. But most of the older flowerings belonged to their own era; they were foreign to his country—transplanted, they did not flourish on this soil. What was original with many transatlantic poets was being merely aped by facile and unoriginal bards in these States; they seemed bent on transforming poetry into a pedant's stroll through Bulfinch's *Age of Fable.* Concerned only with the myths of other and older countries, they were blind to the living legends of their own. In his "Song of the Exposition" Whitman wrote not only his own *credo,* but uttered the manifesto of the new generation—especially in these lines:

Come, Muse, migrate from Greece and Ionia,
Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts,
That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath, and Aeneas', Odysseus' wanderings,
Placard "Removed" and "To Let" on the rocks of your snowy Parnassus, . . .
For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide, untried domain awaits, demands you.

The final estimate of Whitman's work is yet to be written. Whitman's universality—and his inconsistencies—have defeated his commentators. To the craftsmen, Whitman's chief contribution was his form; hailing him as the father of the free verse movement, they placed their emphasis on his flexible sonority, his orchestral *timbre,* his tidal rhythms, his piling up of details into a symphonic structure. To the philosophers, he was the first of modern prophets; a rhapsodic mystic with a magnificently vulgar sense of democracy. To the psychologist, he was the most revealing of autobiographers; "whoever touches this book, touches a man," he wrote. To the lay reader, he was a protagonist of "the divine average"; celebrating himself—hearty, gross, noble, "sane and sensual to the core"—he celebrated humanity.

But it is Whitman's spirit, not his technique nor his subject-matter, which assures him permanence. It is the broad and resistless affirmation—Whitman's favorite term "democracy" is too special a word for it—which quickens everything he wrote and which so profoundly affected the spirit (not the letter) of subsequent writing. It is the spirit synthesized in the poem to a common prostitute: "Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you." It is the quick recognition of the commonplace, the glorification of the unnoticed in a **pismire** and a grain of sand.

What the extent of this spirit is no one has determined. It is gross and sensual and, at the same time, tender and mystical; it calls for "life coarse and rank," yet it lifts appetite beyond life and death; it is as explosive as a teamster's oath and as grave as the Psalms which influenced it. Its ecstasy, even its exhibitionism, though flushed with a raw and rowdy exuberance, is filled with a calm "mortis'd in granite." It is, possibly, a too all-embracing love which intensifies whatever it touches, an over-vigorous optimism compared to which even Browning's seems anemic. But its indiscriminate acceptance is the very core of its faith, enclosing good and evil, beauty and ugliness in the mystic's circle of complete affirmation.

EMILY DICKINSON

Contemporary with Whitman, though, as far as the records show, utterly unaware of him, that strange phenomenon, Emily Dickinson, lived and wrote her emblematic poetry. Only four of the poems now famous were published during her lifetime; she cared nothing for a public, less for publicity. It was not until forty years after her death that she was recognized as one of the most original of American poets and, in some ways, the most remarkable woman poet since Sappho. Her centenary, occurring in the same year as Christina Rossetti's, was signaled by salvos of appreciation and the inevitable comparisons with the Englishwoman born five days earlier than her Amherst contemporary. Both poets were born in 1830; both were strongly influenced by their fathers. Both were, in spite of every difference, puritan "beyond the blood." Both made "the great abnegation"—Christina because she could not face marriage, Emily because, it is assumed, the man she loved was married and she could face misery without him better than social tragedy with him. Here the personal similarities end. The poetic likenesses are more remote. True, both poets are linked by language, but even that tie cannot hold the two together long. They, themselves, would have been the first to repudiate the bond. Emily Dickinson would have been impatient with the round rhetoric of Christina Rossetti; much that the American wrote would have seemed reprehensible and, oftener than not, incomprehensible to the Englishwoman. As Christina grew older, her verse grew thinner and more repetitive; moments of vision were expanded into ever-lengthening sententiousness. After Emily weathered the crisis, her verse grew continually tighter, her divinations condensed until the few lines became telegraphic and these telegrams seemed not only self-addressed but written in code. Not that Christina lacked divination; in the magnificent "From House to Home," in several of the austere sonnets, and in some fifteen lyrics she attained sheer illumination. What is more difficult, she communicated it. At her infrequent highest, Christina Rossetti breathed a clearer, calmer air than "the nun of Amherst." Hers was a cloistral faith, secure above time and a troubling universe. Rumor to the contrary, there was nothing nun-like about Emily Dickinson. If the episodes of her childhood (*vide* the *Life and Letters*) were not sufficient to prove it, the poetry is; the freedom of her spirit manifests itself in the audacity of her images, the wild leap of her epithets, the candor which extends from irreverent mischief to

divine challenge. Sometimes elliptical, sometimes so concentrated as to be cryptic, hers is a poetry of continual surprise where metaphors turned to epigrams, epigrams to compact dramas, a poetry where playfulness and passion merged and were sublimated in pure thought.

Could anyone have failed to recognize this revelation at the outset? One supposes a few tense quatrains, a dozen syllables must have been sufficient to reveal the definiteness of her genius. "The authorities" disdained or forgot her. As late as 1914 *The New International Encyclopaedia* dismissed her life and work in ten lines, concluding "In thought her introspective lyrics are striking but are deficient in form." *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* seemed even less aware of her existence until 1926; the thirteenth edition contained only a mention, a cross-reference by way of comparison; her name did not appear in the Index. Yet her *Poems (First Series)* had appeared as early as 1890 and two subsequent collections had been published before 1896. In these volumes—as well as in *The Single Hound* (1915) and *Further Poems,* an amazing set of "newly discovered" verses published in 1929—Emily Dickinson anticipated not only her avowed disciples but a score of poets unaware of her influence. Quaintly, without propaganda, she fashioned her imagist etchings fifty years before Imagism became a slogan; her experiments in "slant" or "suspended" rhyme were far more radical than those of any exponent of assonance; her ungrammatical directness was more spontaneous than the painful dislocations of "the new primitives."

The evidence of this anticipating modernity is everywhere. Emily would have been the last to claim anything, particularly the claim of being a forerunner, yet "Death's large democratic fingers" might well have prompted E. E. Cummings. MacLeish's *"Ars Poetica"* startles us by its abstraction:

> Poetry should not mean
> But be—

and Emily, sometime in the '70s, concludes:

> Beauty is not caused,
> It is.

Hodgson tells us "God loves an idle rainbow no less than laboring seas" and that "Reason has moons, but moons not hers lie mirrored on the sea, confounding her astronomers but, Oh, delighting me." And Emily (who knows how many years earlier?) was saying:

> The rainbow never tells me
> That gust and storm are by,
> Yet she is more convincing
> Than all philosophy.

Not that she despised philosophy. On the contrary, in the midst of her cakes and puddings and ice-creams, the family breadmaker (for Emily gloried in her housewifery) would turn to consider Bishop Berkeley. Intricately but with a final clarity, she expressed herself on the paradox of discipline:

Experience is the angled road
Preferred against the mind
By paradox, the mind itself
Presuming it to lead
Quite opposite. How complicate
The discipline of man,
Compelling him to choose himself
His pre-appointed plan.

Thus, and continuously, Emily would jot down the notes for her uncoordinated autobiography. When that difficult work is synthesized, when some inspired arranger imposes an order on the more than twelve hundred poems—many of which are still unpublished—the differing versions of many of the lines and the contradictions of her various editors will be resolved. As early as 1891, one of them (Mabel Loomis Todd) wrote: "To what further rigorous pruning her verses would have been subjected had she published them herself, we cannot know. They should be regarded in many cases as merely the first strong and suggestive sketches of an artist, intended to be embodied at some time in the finished picture." Her manner of writing made it equally hazardous for her editors, some of whom erred by too much editing, some by a too literal following of spacing, punctuation and obvious mistakes. "In most of her poems, particularly the later ones, everything by way of punctuation was discarded, except numerous dashes; and all important words began with capitals."

Thus Emily Dickinson became a puzzle. Biographers supplied fresh confusions and misleading clues in a mistaken zeal for detection. As in life, the poet escaped them all. Much of her problem remains in the realm of the mysterious. She was like no other poet; her very "roughnesses" were individual. Time and again she skipped the expected rhyme, twisted the easy phrase, and put her indubitable mark on every line she wrote. Wholly underivative, her poetry was unique; her influence, negligible at first, is now incalculable.

THE AWAKENING OF THE WEST

By 1875 the public had been surfeited with sugared conceits and fine-spun delicacies. For almost twelve years, Whitman had stormed at the squeamish overrefinements of the period, but comparatively few had listened. Yet an instinctive distaste for the prevailing affectations had been growing, and when the West began to express itself in the raw accents of Mark Twain and Bret Harte, the people turned to them with enthusiasm and no little relief. Mark Twain, a frustrated prose Whitman, revealed the romantic Mississippi and the vast mid-West; Bret Harte, beginning a new American fiction in 1868, ushered in the wild humor and wilder poetry of California. It is still a question whether Bret Harte or John Hay first discovered the literary importance of Pike County narratives. Twain was positive that Hay was the pioneer; documentary evidence points to Harte. But it is indisputable that Harte developed—and even overdeveloped—the possibilities of his backgrounds, whereas Hay, after a few brilliant ballads, reverted to his early poetic ideals and turned to

the production of studied, polished, and undistinguished verse. Lacking the gusto of Mark Twain or even the native accuracy of Hay, Bret Harte perfected a terse, dramatic idiom. Less exuberant than his compeers, he became more skillful in making his situations "effective"; he popularized dialect, sharpening his outlines and intensifying the edges of his prose. Harte's was an influence that found its echo in the Hoosier stories of Edward Eggleston and made so vivid an impress on nineteenth-century literature.

To the loose swagger of the West, two other men added their diverse contributions. Edward Rowland Sill, cut short just as his work was gaining headway and strength, brought to it a gentle radicalism, a calm and cultured honesty; Joaquin Miller, rushing to the other extreme, theatricalized and exaggerated all he touched. He shouted platitudes at the top of his voice. His lines boomed with the pomposity of a brass band; floods, fires, hurricanes, extravagantly blazing sunsets, Amazonian women, the thunder of a herd of buffaloes—all were unmercifully piled upon each other. And yet, even in its most blatant *fortissimo,* Miller's poetry occasionally captured the grandeur of his surroundings, the spread of the Sierras, the lavish energy of the Western world.

Now that the leadership of letters had passed from the East, all parts of the country began to try their voices. The West continued to hold its rugged supremacy; the tradition of Harte and Hay was followed (softened and sentimentalized) by Eugene Field and James Whitcomb Riley. In the South, Irwin Russell was pioneering in negro dialect (1875), Sidney Lanier fashioned his intricate harmonies (1879), and Madison Cawein began to create his tropical and overluxuriant lyrics. A few years later the first phase of the American renascence had passed.

REACTION AND REVOLT IN THE '90S

The reaction set in at the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century. The passionate urge had spent itself, and in its place there remained nothing but imitation and gesticulation, the dumb-show of poetry. The poetasters wrote verse that was precise, scholarly, and patently echoed their literary loves. "In 1890," writes Percy H. Boynton, "the poetry-reading world was chiefly conscious of the passing of its leading singers for the last half-century. It was a period when they were recalling Emerson's 'Terminus' and Longfellow's 'Ultima Thule,' Whittier's 'A Lifetime,' Tennyson's 'Crossing the Bar,' and Browning's 'Asolando.'" . . . The poetry of this period (whether it is the fine-chiseled verse of John B. Tabb or the ornate delicacy of Richard Watson Gilder) reflects a kind of moribund resignation; it is dead because it detached itself from the actual world. But those who regarded poetry chiefly as a not too energetic indoor-exercise were not to rule unchallenged. Restlessness was in the air and revolt openly declared itself with the publication of *Songs from Vagabondia* (1894), *More Songs from Vagabondia* (1896) and *Last Songs from Vagabondia* (1900). No one could have been more surprised at the tremendous popularity of these care-free celebrations (the first of the three collections went through seven rapid editions) than the young authors, Richard

Hovey and Bliss Carman. For theirs was a revolt without a program, a headlong flight to escape—what? In the very first poem, Hovey voices their manifesto:

Off with the fetters
That chafe and restrain!
Off with the chain!
Here Art and Letters,
Music and Wine
And Myrtle and Wanda,
The winsome witches,
Blithely combine.
Here is Golconda,
Here are the Indies,
Here we are free—
Free as the wind is,
Free as the sea,
Free!

Free for what? one asks doggedly. Hovey does not answer directly, but with unflagging buoyancy, whipped up by scorn for the smug ones, he continues:

I tell you that we,
While you are smirking
And lying and shirking
Life's duty of duties,
Honest sincerity,
We are in verity
Free!
Free to rejoice
In blisses and beauties!
Free as the voice
Of the wind as it passes!
Free . . . *etc.*

Free, one concludes, to escape and dwell with Music and Wine, Myrtle and Wanda, Art and Letters. Free, in short, to follow, with a more athletic energy, the same ideals as the parlor-poets they gibed so relentlessly. But the new insurgence triumphed. It was the heartiness, the gypsy jollity, the rush of high spirits that conquered. Readers of the *Vagabondia* books were swept along by their speed faster than by their philosophy.

The enthusiastic acceptance of these new apostles of outdoor vigor was, however, not as much of an accident as it seemed. On one side (the world of art) the public was wearied by barren meditations set to tinkling music; on the other (the world of action) it was faced by a staggering growth of materialism which it feared. Hovey, Carman and their imitators offered a swift way out. But it was neither an effectual nor a permanent escape. The war with Spain, the industrial turmoil, the growth of social consciousness and new ideas of responsibility made America look for fresh valuations. Hovey began to go deeper into himself and his age; in the mid-West, William Vaughn Moody grappled with the problems of his times only to have his work cut

short by death in 1910. But these two were exceptions. In the main, it was another interval—two decades of appraisal and expectancy, of pause and preparation.

INTERIM—1890-1912

This interval of about twenty years was notable for its effort to treat the spirit of the times with a cheerful evasiveness, a humorous unconcern. Its most representative craftsmen were, with four exceptions, the writers of light verse. These four exceptions were Richard Hovey, Bliss Carman, William Vaughn Moody and Edwin Markham.

Moody's power was the greatest, although it never reached its potentialities. In "An Ode in Time of Hesitation," he protested against turning the "new-world victories into gain" and painted American idealism on an idealistic canvas. In "The Quarry" he celebrated America's part in preventing the breaking up of China by the empires of Europe, an act accomplished by John Hay, poet and diplomat. In "On a Soldier Fallen in the Philippines," a dirge wrenched from the depths of his nature, Moody cried out against our own imperialists. It was the fulfillment of this earlier poem which found its climax in the lengthy Ode, with such lines as:

> Was it for this our fathers kept the law?
> This crown shall crown their struggle and their ruth?
> Are we the eagle nation Milton saw
> Mewing its mighty youth? . . .
> . . . O ye who lead
> Take heed!
> Blindness we may forgive, but baseness we will smite.

Early in 1899, the name of Edwin Markham flashed across the land when, out of San Francisco, rose the challenge of "The Man with the Hoe." This poem, which was once ecstatically called "the battle-cry of the next thousand years" (Joaquin Miller declared it contained "the whole Yosemite—the thunder, the might, the majesty"), caught up the passion for social justice that was waiting to be intensified in poetry. Markham summed up and spiritualized the unrest that was in the air; in the figure of one man with a hoe, he drew a picture of men in the mines, men in the sweatshop, men working without joy, without hope. To social consciousness he added social conscience. In a ringing if rhetorical blank verse, Markham crystallized the expression of outrage, the heated ferment of the period.

Inspiring as these examples were, they did not generate others of their kind; the field lay fallow for more than a decade. The lull was pronounced, the gathering storm remained inaudible.

RENASCENCE—1913

Suddenly the "new" poetry burst upon the country with unexpected vigor and extraordinary variety. Moody and Markham were its immediate forerunners; Whitman its spiritual godfather. October, 1912, saw the first issue of

Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, a monthly that was to introduce the work of hitherto unknown poets, schools, and "movements." The magazine came at the very moment of the breaking of the storm. Flashes and rumblings had already been troubling the literary heavens; a few months later came the deluge! For four years the skies continued to discharge such strange and divergent phenomena as Ezra Pound's *Canzoni* and *Ripostes* (1912), Vachel Lindsay's *General William Booth Enters into Heaven* (1913), James Oppenheim's *Songs for the New Age* (1914), the first anthology of *The Imagists* (1914), *Challenge* (1914), Amy Lowell's *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* (1914), Lindsay's *The Congo and Other Poems* (1914), Robert Frost's *North of Boston* (1914), Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), John Gould Fletcher's *Irradiations* (1915), Conrad Aiken's *Turns and Movies* (1916), Edwin Arlington Robinson's *The Man Against the Sky* (1916), Carl Sandburg's *Chicago Poems* (1916). By 1917, the "new" poetry was ranked as "America's first national art"; its success was sweeping, its sales unprecedented. People who never before had read verse, turned to it and found they could not only read but relish it. They discovered that for the enjoyment of poetry it was no longer necessary to have at their elbows a dictionary of rare words and classical references; they were not required to be acquainted with Latin legendry and the minor love-affairs of the Greek divinities. Life was their glossary, not literature. The new work spoke to them in their own language. And it did more: it spoke to them of what they rarely had heard expressed; it was not only closer to their soil but nearer to their souls.

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

One reason why the new poetry achieved so sudden a success was its freedom from the traditionally stilted "poetic diction." Revolting strongly against the assumption that poetry must have a vocabulary of its own, the poets of the new era spoke in the oldest and most stirring tongue; they used a language that was the language not of the poetasters but of the people. In the tones of ordinary speech they rediscovered the strength, the dignity, the vital core of the commonplace.

Edwin Arlington Robinson had already been employing the sharp epithet, the direct and clarifying utterance which was to become part of our present technique. As early as 1897, in *The Children of the Night,* Robinson anticipated the brief characterizations and etched outlines of Masters' *Spoon River Anthology;* he stressed the psychological element with unerring artistry and sureness of touch. His sympathetic studies of men whose lives were, from a worldly standpoint, failures were a sharp reaction to the current high valuation on financial achievements, ruthless efficiency, and success at any cost. Ahead of his period, he had to wait until 1916, when a public prepared for him by the awakened interest in native poetry discovered *The Man Against the Sky* (1916) and the richness of Robinson at the same time. After that, his audience increased steadily. His Arthurian legends replaced Tennyson's, *Tristram* (1927), achieving a greater response than most successful novels. *Cavender's House* (1929), although a difficult and lengthy monologue, solidified his

position; the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry was thrice awarded to him; and there was no longer any doubt as to the importance of his contribution to American literature. Death in 1935 found him at the peak of fame.

EDGAR LEE MASTERS

Frost and Masters were the bright particular planets of 1915, although the star of the latter waned while the light of the former grew in magnitude. Yet Masters' most famous book ranks as a landmark. In it, Masters synthesized the small towns of the mid-West with a background unmistakably local and with implications that are universal. This amazing volume, in its curiosity and comprehensiveness, laid open a broad cross-section of whole communities. Beneath its surface tales and dramas, its condensation of grocery-store gossip, *Spoon River Anthology* was a great part of America in microcosm; it prepared the way for Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* and the critical fiction of small-town life.

The success of the volume was sensational. In a few months, it went into edition after edition. Perhaps most readers passed over the larger issues (Masters' revelation of the sordid cheats and hypocrisies, his arraignment of dirty politics and dirtier chicanery) intent on seeing their neighbors pitilessly exposed. Yet had Masters dwelt only on the drab disillusion of the village, had he (as he was constantly in danger of doing) overemphasized the morbid and sensual episodes, he would have left only a spectacular and poorly balanced work. But the book ascends to a definite exaltation and ends on a plane of half-victorious idealism. Indigenous to its roots, it is stark, unflinching, unforgettable.

ROBERT FROST

The same year that brought forth *Spoon River Anthology* saw the American edition of Frost's *North of Boston*. It was evident at once that the true poet of New England had arrived. Unlike his predecessors, Frost was never a poetic provincial—never parochial in the sense of America still being a literary parish of England. Frost was as native as the lonely farmhouses, the dusty blueberries, the isolated people, the dried-up brooks and mountain intervals that he described. Loving, above everything else, the beauty of the Fact, he shared, with Robinson and Masters, the determination to tell not merely the actual but the factual truth. But Frost, a less disillusioned though a more saddened poet, wore his rue and his realism with a difference. Where Robinson was definite, Frost diverged, going roundabout and, in his speculative wandering, covering a wider territory of thought. Where Masters was violent and hotly scornful, Frost was reticent and quietly sympathetic. Again where Masters, viewing the mêlée above the struggle, wrote *about* his characters, Frost was *of* his people. Where Robinson, in his more racy and reminiscent moods, often reflected New England, Frost *was* New England.

North of Boston was well described by the poet's own subtitle: "a book of people." In it one not only sees a countryside of people living out the intricate pattern of their lives, one catches them thinking out loud, one can hear the

very tones of their voices. Here we have speech so arranged and translated that the speaker is heard on the printed page; any reader will be led by the kind and color of these words into reproducing the changing accents in which they are supposed to be uttered. It is this insistence that "all poetry is the reproduction of the tones of actual speech" which gives these poems, as well as the later lyrics, a quickly communicated emotional appeal. It endows them with the deepest power of which words are capable—the power to transmit significant sounds. These sounds, let in from the vernacular, are full of a robust, creative energy; they are compacted of the blood and bones of the people they speak for.

But Frost was by no means the dark naturalist that many suspected. Behind the mask of "grimness" which many critics fastened upon him, there is a continual elfin pucker; a whimsical smile, a half-disclosed raillery glints beneath his most somber monologues. The later *New Hampshire* (1923) and *West-Running Brook* (1928) proved his "other side"; Frost's lyrics are no less personal for being philosophical. Now it is obvious how Vergilian a spirit animated a passionate Puritan; his *Collected Poems* (1930) reveals him as one of the three great pastoral poets of all time. Nor is his greatness due to his self-limited choice of material; Frost's concrete facts are symbols of spiritual values. Through his very reticence as well as through his revelations one hears much more than the voice of New England.

CARL SANDBURG

The great mid-West, that vast region of steel mills and slaughter-houses, of cornfields and prairies, of crowded cities and empty skies, spoke through Carl Sandburg. In Sandburg, industrial America found its voice: *Chicago Poems* (1916), *Cornhuskers* (1918), *Smoke and Steel* (1920) and *Good Morning, America* (1928) vibrate with the immense purring of dynamos, the rhythms of threshing arms, the gossip and laughter of construction gangs, the gigantic and tireless energy of the machine. Frankly indebted to Whitman, Sandburg's poems are less sweeping but more varied; musically his lines mark an advance. He sounds the extremes of the gamut; there are few poems in our language more violent than "To a Contemporary Bunkshooter," few lyrics as hushed and tender as "Cool Tombs."

Like Frost, Sandburg was true to *things*. But Frost was content with the inexhaustible fact and its spiritual implications; he never hoped to drain it all. Sandburg also fed on the fact, but it did not satisfy him. He had strange hungers; he hunted eagerly for the question behind, the answer beyond. The actual scene, to him, was a point of vivid and abrupt departure. Reality, far from being the earth on which he dwelt, was, for Sandburg, the ground he touched before rising; realism acted merely as a springboard from which this poet dove into a romantic mysticism. His later work, in fact, was almost too full of gnomic gestures.

When *Chicago Poems* first appeared, it was received with a disfavor ranging from hesitant patronization to the scornful jeers of the academicians. Sandburg was accused of verbal anarchy; of a failure to distinguish prose

matter from poetic material; of uncouthness, vulgarity, assaults on the English language and a score of other crimes. In the face of those who even in *Good Morning, America* (1928) still see only a coarseness and distorted veritism in Sandburg, it cannot be said too often that he is brutal only when dealing with brutal things; that his "vulgarity" springs from love of life as a whole, not from affection for a drab or decorative part of it; that his bitterest invectives are the result of a disgust of shams. The strength of his hatred is exceeded by the challenge of his love.

THE IMAGISTS AND AMY LOWELL

Sandburg established himself as the most daring user of American words—rude words ranging from the racy metaphors of the soil to the slang of the street. But long before this, the possibilities of a new vocabulary were being tested. As early as 1865, Whitman was saying, "We must have new words, new potentialities of speech—an American range of self-expression. . . . The new times, the new people need a tongue according, yes, and what is more, they will have such a tongue—will not be satisfied until it is evolved."

It is curious to think that one of the most effective agents to fulfill Whitman's prophecy and free modern poetry from an affected diction was that little band of preoccupied specialists, the Imagists. They were, for all their preciosity and occasional extravagances, liberators in the sense that their programs, pronouncements, and propaganda compelled their most dogged adversaries to acknowledge the integrity of their aims. Their restatement of old truths was one of the things which helped the new poetry out of a bog of rhetorical rubbish.

Ezra Pound was the first to gather the insurgents into a definite group. During the winter of 1913, he collected a number of poems illustrating the Imagist point of view, conceiving Imagism as a discriminating term like "lyricism," and had them printed in a volume: *Des Imagistes* (1914). A little later Pound withdrew from the clan. The rather queerly assorted group began to disintegrate, and Amy Lowell, then in England, brought some of the younger members together in three yearly anthologies (*Some Imagist Poets*) which appeared in 1915, 1916 and 1917. There were, in Miss Lowell's new grouping, three Englishmen (D. H. Lawrence, Richard Aldington, F. S. Flint), three Americans (H. D., John Gould Fletcher, Amy Lowell), and their creed, summed up in six statements,[1] was as follows:

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the *exact* word, not the merely decorative word.
2. To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods. We do not insist upon "free-verse" as the only method of writing poetry. . . . We do believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms.
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject.
4. To present an image (hence the name: "Imagist"). We are not a school of

[1] The stern injunction to "use no word which does not contribute to the presentation"—a Spartan injunction originating with Pound—was soon forgotten by Miss Lowell's "Amygists."

painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous.

5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred or indefinite.
6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is the very essence of poetry.

It does not seem possible that these six obvious and almost platitudinous principles (which, incidentally, the Imagists often neglected in their poetry) could have evoked the storm of argument, fury, and downright vilification that broke as soon as the militant Miss Lowell began to champion them. Far from being revolutionary, these principles were not new; they were not even thought so by their sponsors. The Imagists themselves realized that they were restating ideals which had fallen into desuetude, and declared, "They are the essentials of all great poetry, indeed of all great literature." And yet many conservative critics, joined by the one hundred per cent reactionaries, rushed wildly to combat these "heresies"! They forgot that, in trying to protect the future from such lawlessness as "using the exact word," from "freedom in the choice of subject," from the importance of "concentration," they were actually attacking the highest traditions of their enshrined past.

The fracas succeeded in doing more good than the work of the Imagists themselves. H. D. removed herself from controversies and took up her residence in Switzerland, perfecting her delicate and exquisitely finished designs. John Gould Fletcher, a more restless expatriate, returned to America and continued to strengthen his gift through shifting his standards; his later and richer work was in complete opposition to the early pronouncements. Miss Lowell was left to carry on the battle single-handed, to defend the theories which, in practice, she was beginning to violate brilliantly. A most energetic and unflagging experimenter, the late Miss Lowell was amazing in her versatility. She wielded a controversial cudgel with one hand and, with the other, wrote Chaucerian stanzas, polyphonic prose, monologs in New England dialect, irregular *vers libre,* conservative couplets, myths from the Peruvian, translations from the French, echoes from the Japanese, re-creations of Indian folk-lore!

The work of the Imagists was done. Its members began to develop themselves by themselves. They had helped to swell the tide of realistic and romantic naturalism—a tide of which their contribution was merely one wave, a breaker that carried its impact far inshore.

THE FREE VERSE FURORE

One of the tenets of the Imagists (the belief that the individuality of a poet may often be expressed better in free verse than in conventional forms) spread further than all the other articles of their faith. The ease of its fulfillment more than its apparent truth led hundreds who were not, in any sense, Imagist poets to adopt *vers libre* as their medium. The result was an inundation of footless—and often headless—writing; the little which was incisive and original was lost in heavy floods of merely loquacious "shredded prose." For fully six years there was produced an incalculable quantity of tiresome exhibitionism. Most

of this verse was frankly bad. But so, the defenders of *vers libre* objected, are most sonnets. The fact, however, remains that the original exponents of free verse began to look with distrust on the dubious achievements of their camp-followers. H. D.'s chiseled lines, Amy Lowell's enameled pictures, Edgar Lee Masters' brusque epitaphs remain unusual examples of their genre. Other writers gave this amorphous medium a certain definiteness: John Gould Fletcher based his symphonic effects on free sweep and cadence instead of meter; Maxwell Bodenheim forced unions of unhappy nouns and pitiless adjectives without benefit of rhyme; Alfred Kreymborg accomplished a type of staccato whimsy in which no particular beat was perceptible. But the poets themselves, partly because of the wish to change, partly to show that they were not bound by a theory, began to turn back to orthodox patterns.

Amy Lowell's last work was largely in formal verse; her later rhymes and ballads relied greatly on the steady pace of iambics. Bodenheim and Fletcher employed more symmetrical structures; Masters returned to the blank verse of his youth. H. D., who was the one perfect Imagist, the surest artisan in unrhymed cadence, achieved delicate effects in interwoven rhyme. And Kreymborg, who surpassed them all in metrical eccentricities, whose lines were so brittle and elusive that melodic comments (performed by the poet on his mandolute) were required to fill out the elisions, finally turned to the creation of straightforward sonnets and simple couplets. Only Carl Sandburg was faithful to his experiments; he remained the most consistent as well as the most colorful user of free verse. In his fidelity to the loose rhythms, whether employed for thumbnail impressions or extended apostrophes, he was practically alone.

To what can we attribute the return of the prodigal *vers libertine?* To a reversion to orthodox type? Or a revulsion from mere novelty of expression? It seems more likely that, having passed through various phases of experimentation, these poets, like all other workers, desired to crystallize their idiom in some lasting shape. The chief fault with free verse was that it yielded too easily, and what the creator enjoys is the feel of a firm medium, a half-forbidding, half-pliant form. No real artist has failed to want—and work with—"the resisting mass."

FOLK-RHYTHMS AND THE NEGRO

In a country that has not been mellowed by antiquity, that has not possessed songs for its peasantry or traditions for its singers, one cannot look for a wealth of folk-stuff. In the United States folk-poetry followed the path of the pioneer. At first these homely songs were mere adaptations and localized versions of English ballads and border minstrelsy, of which Cecil Sharp's *Folk Songs of the Appalachian Highlands* and the *Lonesome Tunes* recovered in the Kentucky mountains by Howard Brockway and Loraine Wyman are excellent examples. But a more definitely native spirit found expression in various sections of these States. In the West (during the Seventies) Bret Harte and John Hay celebrated, in their own accents, the rough miners, ranchers, steamboat pilots, the supposed descendants of the emigrants from Pike County,

Missouri. In the Middle West the desire for local color and music led to the popularity of James Whitcomb Riley's Hoosier ballads and the spirited jingles of Eugene Field. In the South the inspiration of the negro spirituals and ante bellum songs was utilized to good effect by Irwin Russell, Joel Chandler Harris and, later, by Paul Laurence Dunbar.

The Indian, a more ancient primitive, has remained as difficult to adopt poetically as he has been to assimilate ethnically. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that the white and red races are worlds apart in sentiment, philosophy, and attitude to life, many gallant attempts were made to bring the spirit of the Indian into our literature. Natalie Curtis Burlin did excellent pioneering work in *The Indians' Book;* Mary Austin, in spite of a far-fetched theory and dubious conclusions, made an extended study of the matter in *The American Rhythm;* and *The Path on the Rainbow,* edited by George W. Cronyn in 1918, proved to be the best general collection on the subject available to the public. Among the individual workers in the field, other than those mentioned, praise was given to Constance Lindsay Skinner, Alice Corbin Henderson, and Witter Bynner.

Since the days of Dunbar, the Negro had made great strides in self-expression. American music—"classical" as well as popular—benefited from the strong insistence of African drums and the syncopated shuffling of the feet of slaves. Jazz itself became glorified; the intelligentsia claimed it as their own! In sociology the Negro, through men like W. E. Burghardt DuBois, Benjamin Brawley, Walter White, turned to be his own analyst. In poetry the results were mixed and uneven. But it became apparent that the Negro was beginning to free himself, not only from a sentimentality designed to please the whites, but from an attitude which was not so much race-conscious as self-conscious. He established his identity at the same time as his poetic integrity.

Beginning in about 1922, the Negro, so long despised as a creator, became a literary fashion. Several volumes of the stirring Spirituals were followed by collections of his secular songs, "blues," "mellows," work-ballads, etc. His ante bellum chants swept over post-war America and Europe; his primitive rhythms affected the most sophisticated of modern composers. James Weldon Johnson's pioneer anthology, *American Negro Poetry* (1922), was followed by Countee Cullen's *Caroling Dusk* (1927) and C. V. Calverton's *An Anthology of American Negro Literature* (1929). Appraisal set in almost simultaneously; a dozen tomes bristling with energy and research appeared, one of them (*American Negro Folk-Songs* by Newman I. White) containing over eight hundred songs divided into thirteen groups. These imposingly annotated collections, added to the more original work, made interest assume the proportions of a Revival. The Negro himself became suddenly articulate; his novels, essays, poems—many of them of unsuspected high caliber—were published everywhere. James Weldon Johnson, after a long career as propagandist, leapt into prominence with *God's Trombones,* seven negro sermons in verse; Claude McKay expressed a stern if over-violent spirit in verse and prose; Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes and Jean Toomer ranged from dulcet lyrics to hot "blues" and savage protests. *The Poetry of the Negro* (1949), a rich collection and a definitive book of reference, was edited by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps.

Meanwhile, scholars all over America were ransacking backwood and byway. South Carolina ballads, songs of Maine lumberjacks, ballads of men who worked in the woods of Wisconsin, songs of the "shanty-boy" of Michigan and Minnesota, original and derived folk-tunes of the South, cowboy songs from the West—into every State the recorders went, hot on the trail of the vanishing folk-idiom. The poets were not far behind. The tradition of Harte and Hay was carried on by such interpreters as Harry Herbert Knibbs and Edwin Ford Piper. The Kentucky Mountain region was interpreted by Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Roy Helton. The "white South" found expression through John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, Merrill Moore and Robert Penn Warren. A group of Oregon poets—Oluf Olsen, H. L. Davis, H. M. Corning—emerged in the late 1920s. But, of all who absorbed and approximated the spirit of folk-poetry, none made more striking or more indubitably American contributions than Vachel Lindsay of Springfield, Illinois.

LINDSAY AND OPPENHEIM

Lindsay was essentially a people's poet. He did not hesitate to express himself in terms of the lowest common denominator; his fingers seemed alternately on his pen and the public pulse. Living near enough to the South to appreciate the Negroes' qualities without wishing to theatricalize them, Lindsay was tremendously influenced by the colorful suggestions, the fantastic superstitions, the revivalistic gusto, the half-savage Christianity and, above all, by the curiously syncopated music that once characterized the black man in America. In "The Congo," "John Brown" and the less extended "Simon Legree," the words roll with the solemnity of an exhortation, dance with a grotesque fervor, or snap, crackle, and leap with all the humorous rhythms of a piece of "ragtime." Lindsay caught the burly color and boisterous music of camp-meetings, minstrel shows, revival jubilees. He was an itinerant evangelist preaching the Gospel through a saxophone.

And Lindsay did more. He carried his democratic determinations further than any of his *confrères*. Dreaming of a great communal Art, he insisted that all villages should be centers of beauty, all citizens, artists. At heart a missionary even more than a minstrel, Lindsay often lost himself in his own doctrines. Worse, he frequently cheapened himself and caricatured his own gift by pandering to the vaudeville instinct, putting a noisy "punch" into everything, regardless of taste, artistry, or a sense of proportion. He was most impressive when purely fantastic (as in "The Ghosts of the Buffaloes," the shorter fancies, the series of metaphorical poems about the moon) or when a greater theme and a finer restraint unite (as in "The Eagle That Is Forgotten") to create a preaching that does not cease to be poetry.

Something of the same blend of prophet and poet was found in the work of James Oppenheim. Oppenheim, a throwback to the ancient Hebrew singers, rolled the music of the Psalms through his lines; his poetry, with its obvious reminders of Whitman, was biblical in its inflection, Oriental in its heat. It carried to the Western world the color of the East, adding the gift of prophecy to purpose. In books like *War and Laughter* and *Songs for the New Age* the

race of god-breakers and god-makers spoke with a new voice; here, with analytic intensity, the old iconoclasm and still older worship were united.

ELIOT AND HIS INFLUENCE

Two strongly opposed tendencies were noticeable for several years after 1915. The one was a use of the colloquial speech popularized by Sandburg, Lindsay, and Masters and heightened by Frost; the other was a striking departure from both the consistent conversational tone and the traditional "poetic" language to which such poets as E. A. Robinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay remained loyal. The abrupt break in idiom was brought about by T. S. Eliot, who brought it from France. Eliot, borrowing the method from Laforgue, Valéry, and Rimbaud, used the technique of the Symbolist school with such skill that he soon had a host of imitators on both sides of the Atlantic. Some were unable, some unwilling to follow Eliot's inner difficulties and despairs, but all were fascinated by his technical devices, and only a few were uninfluenced by them. The formula was, roughly, this: To reveal man in his complex relation to the universe the poet must show him not only concerned with the immensities but with the trivialities of daily life, with a sense of the past continually interrupting the present, and with swiftly contradictory moods disputing dream and action. This was, obviously, a difficult if not impossible program to achieve in any one poem or even a set of poems. It was, however, attempted and suggested by a variety of effects: by a rapid leaping from image to image with a minimum of "explanatory" metaphors; by a liberal use of discords, juxtaposing tense images and prosy statements, following lyrical passages with deliberate banalities; by the continual play of free association, in which one idea prompted a chain of others, accomplishing an emotional (or literary) progress, often gaining a new series of overtones, often sacrificing all continuity—Ezra Pound's *Cantos,* Crane's *The Bridge,* and Eliot's *The Waste Land* being the most famous examples of the mood "mixing memory and desire."

The method had its distinct advantages; it enlarged the gamut of poetic devices and permitted a greater sensitivity of expression. But it was abused by many and even its champions were aware of its limitations. "The substitution of emotional for logical sequence," wrote C. Day Lewis in *A Hope for Poetry,* "may finally be classed as one of the manifestations of the general distrust of logic and dethroning of reason brought about by the Great War." Such a poem as *The Waste Land,* though it helped shape a subtler poetic speech, made one aware of "the nervous exhaustion, the exaggerated self-consciousness, the pathetic gropings after the fragments of a shattered faith. . . . But in so doing it enlarged our conception of the field of poetic activity; as Eliot himself said, 'the essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal; it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory.'"

The earlier *Prufrock* and *Sweeney* series accomplished the purpose in an acrid light verse; Eliot's later ironies emphasized, with new bitterness, the hollowness of a life without purpose and without faith. Far from celebrating the feeble, Eliot satirized the futilitarians:

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar

Shape without form, shade without color,
Paralyzed force, gesture without motion—

But most of those so strongly influenced by Eliot—and by Eliot's influences—captured nothing except his (and Jules Laforgue's) idiom. His abrupt allusiveness, his style at once coarse and subtle, his emotional acuteness, could be imitated but not captured; his unacknowledged disciples merely parodied the trick of disassociation, the erudition without Eliot's wisdom, the gesture without (if I may misquote) emotion. The results were inevitable: sterile intellectualism at one extreme, infantile barbarism at the other.

However, to condemn an entire group because of the failures is unjust. The younger poets (1920-1930), sometimes condemned as "a lost generation," matured in a period which afforded them no security nor dignity nor any semblance of peace. Being sensitive, even over-sensitive recorders, they reflected the doubt, the very discontinuity of the times. Little wonder theirs was a "literature of nerves," little wonder their symbols were uncertain, their allusions private, and their work often obscure to the point of unintelligibility. The clearest of them maintained their individuality, though they demonstrated their limited heritage; even the more prominent acknowledged the influence of Eliot. As in England, where Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden, and C. Day Lewis were affected by Eliot's technique, though not by his philosophy, so Eliot's experiments may be traced in the work of Archibald MacLeish, Conrad Aiken, Horace Gregory, and the entire Nashville group.

THE NEW BARBARISM

The common reader, confronted by the extremely "modernist" poet, was unsure whether to claim his rights as reader, or turn altogether from what seemed a communication that communicated nothing more intelligible than the author's wish to be let alone. Robert Graves and Laura Riding in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927) summarized the situation: "The bond between the Victorian poet and his reader was at least an agreement between them of a common, though not an original, sentiment. The meaning of a poem was understood between them beforehand from the very title, and the persuasion of the word-music was intended to keep the poem vibrating in the memory long after it had been read. . . . The modernist poet does not have to issue a program declaring his intentions toward the reader or to issue an announce-

ment of tactics. . . . The important part of poetry is now not the personality of the poet as embodied in a poem, but the personality of the poem itself; that is, its quality of independence from both the reader and the poet, once the poet has separated it from his personality by making it complete—a new and self-explanatory creature."

Sometimes these "self-explanatory creatures" explained; sometimes they did not. Often they exhibited nothing more specific than self-conscious snobbery. But the best of them, oppressed by the dead hand of the past, were effective in their revolt; they destroyed that semi-comatose condition which so often attends the reading of poetry and (being a criticism of bad poetry as well as of the reader) revealed new wit, new vitality, new signals of beauty beneath the surface oddities. Thus E. E. Cummings, a lyrical poet in spite of his eccentricities, wrote: "To create is first of all to destroy. . . . There is and can be no such thing as authentic art until the *bons trucs* (whereby we are taught to see and imitate on canvas and in stone and by words this so-called world) are entirely and thoroughly and perfectly annihilated by that vast and painful process of unthinking which may result in a minute bit of purely personal feeling. Which minute bit is art."

Thus we had the phenomenon of Gertrude Stein "destroying" the English language, attempting to create a speech in which words had only tonal and abstract values, and James Joyce, in his later work, breaking up and reconstructing syllables until they resembled a colorful game of anagrams. Between a literature of obscure scholasticism and experiments in "the vast and painful process of unthinking," the younger writers evolved a phase if not a philosophy of their own. Malcolm Cowley, expressing this for them, summarized it: "We ourselves have found that most of our philosophical difficulties can be solved not by philosophy itself, but by living on, by changing one's angle of approach, and often simply by changing one's place. The war, which carried many of our generation into strange countries, had a partly intellectual, partly emotional effect that is generally disregarded. It destroyed our sense of dull security and taught us to live from day to day. It gave us a thirst for action and adventure. It presented us with violent contrasts, with very simple tragedies, and so led us back toward the old themes of love and death."

PROLETARIAN POETS AND MACLEISH

Much was written concerning an imminent proletarian school of poetry, but no one expressed in verse what such novelists as Robert Cantwell, Albert Halper, and James T. Farrell expressed in prose. *The New Masses* printed a quantity of proletarian free verse, but, of all the contributors to the group, Kenneth Fearing alone combined slang and a staccato rhetoric (not quite successfully) to satirize the cheap heroics and blatant miseries, the five-and-ten cent lives and tabloid minds of the industrial centers and a decaying system. Horace Gregory sounded the depths of social dissatisfaction with a subtlety that delighted the artists, but failed to move the masses. Langston Hughes concerned himself with the plight of the black workers. Clifford Odets seemed the most promising poet of revolt, but Odets' work was in the theater, where

Awake and Sing, Till the Day I Die, and *Waiting for Lefty* voiced the passion and poetry of the inarticulate. Lola Ridge remained the most intense as well as the most integrated of the revolutionaries, yet her work in *Firehead* and *Dance of Fire* was traditional in pattern, the peak of the latter volume being a sequence of mystical sonnets.

Much also had been expected from those who celebrated a "machine age poetry." In 1929 Hart Crane wrote, "Unless poetry can absorb the machine, i.e., *acclimatize* it as naturally and casually as trees, cattle, galleons, castles, and all other human associations of the past, then poetry has failed of its full contemporary function." This sentiment was echoed by many, but few Americans carried out the process of assimilating or "acclimatizing" the machine. Three young English poets—W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and C. Day Lewis—went further to justify Crane than any poet in this country. Crane himself almost accomplished it in *The Bridge,* but this ambitious poem failed in the end, partly because it lacked a culminating effect, partly because Crane was unable to solidify his mood and his material. MacKnight Black, hoping to communicate the spirit of Diesel engines and piston-rings in his *Machinery* and *Thrust at the Sky,* attempted unsuccessfully to unite new subject-matter and an old poetic vocabulary, merely romanticizing the mechanical objects. Others considered the wish to "express" the machine ill-advised and futile. For one thing, they maintained, the machine has been always with us without winning our affections; today it is no closer to man's emotions—and the stuff of poetry—than it was in the first days of the loom, the mill, the cotton-gin. For another, the machine has no fixed character; it changes too rapidly to become part of man's deeper experience.

It was a poet of the aristocratic tradition whose later work—particularly in *Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller's City* and in *Panic*—symbolized the impasse of the current social system and its tragic consequences. This poet who made the deepest impression since the advent of Frost and Eliot was Archibald MacLeish. MacLeish took the Symbolist manner further and broke new ground; he adapted the Eliot-Laforgue technique, as well as the form of Pound's *Cantos* and Perse's *Anabase,* and extended it. He began tentatively enough with *The Pot of Earth,* enlarged the gamut in *Streets in the Moon,* and declared himself fully in *New Found Land* and *Conquistador,* an epic in little. Adding several devices of his own—notably a skillful interior rhyme and a suspended *terza rima*—MacLeish perfected a verse which is both firm and delicate, sinewy yet supple. His unusually flexible line was used with genuine, not theatrical, eloquence in the play *Panic,* produced in 1935, a play whose power was projected in living symbols, pointing the possible revival of the poetic drama and emphasizing the importance of MacLeish's style.

THE NASHVILLE GROUP

In a preceding section mention was made of the spirit animating the new South. Apart from the short-lived Carolina local color school and the work of the previously considered Negro poets, the most important group centered about Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. It originated in a body

of teachers and students known as "The Fugitives," after their magazine which was published from April, 1922, to December, 1925. It was never explained what the fugitives were fleeing to escape, and it soon became apparent that there were differences of taste and temperament among the members. But a sense of their backgrounds, a sympathy beyond an ear for quaint localisms, bound them together. This unannounced expression of unity—a union of old dreams and new issues—was to develop into a controversy centering about Agrarianism, but it began with poetry and it was on poetry that the group maintained itself.

John Crowe Ransom was the stimulator if not the founder of the school. He guided its fortunes and, for a while, dictated (unconsciously perhaps) its program and style. That style was a curious fusion of the pedantic and the metaphysical, a fusion which even he, in his later poetry, failed to lift above a cryptic overelaboration. At his best—and no less than a dozen poems represent him at that enviable height—Ransom has a finesse and a flavor unlike any other poet; he is master of an urbane grace and a mockery which masks a teasing tenderness. His vocabulary and his highly original technique equip him to sound the depths with a light and almost nonchalant touch; there are times when he even accomplishes an integration of the sublime and the ridiculous.

Donald Davidson's style is less metaphysical and more emotional than Ransom's; his poems, particularly *The Tall Men,* reveal his concern with things rather than with abstractions. Originally influenced by Ransom and Eliot, Davidson found himself in his recreations and reveries of the War Between the States and, though he spent much of his energies teaching and reviewing, his longer poems have an almost epic breadth.

Allen Tate was the most unpredictable and belligerent of the group. Ten years younger than Ransom and five years younger than Davidson his energy was astonishing. He turned from poetry to biography, from biography to criticism, from criticism to controversy, from controversy back to poetry. Everything he did was achieved with distinction and despatch, everything except his poetry. His poetry continually called for revision—at least so it seemed to its author—and before he was forty Tate had published several versions of the same poems. Robert Penn Warren, born in 1905, the youngest of the group, is also the most fiery. Strong feeling forces itself through the simplest of his poems; pictorial verses, whose effect would ordinarily be merely visual, are surcharged with a plain-spoken force which seldom fails to communicate its excitement. Even the metaphysical conceit (a favorite device of "The Fugitives") achieves an unexpected intensity in his image-crowded lines. Merrill Moore, born in 1903, was the most fecund of the group, probably the most prolific of American poets. Before he was thirty he had composed so many sonnets—a rough calculation approximated the number at twenty thousand—that he had to resort to short-hand to get them down between his labors as instructor and psychiatrist. His poetry has both the charm and the handicap of improvisation; it suffers from its speed and the author's inability to review his errors or revise a single unfortunate phrase. But Moore's fluency results in many startling effects. Moreover, he has a particularly Southern humor—half grave, half grotesque—and he can make beauty out of banality, confronting the reader with wildness wrung from conversational small change.

The outstanding excellence of the Nashville group was its free use of the discord—juxtaposing the traditionally poetic and the common colloquial—and the establishment of a sharp-edged diction. In thought as well as technique it emphasized intelligence; it insisted on adult poetry as against the plethora of pretty, thoughtless, and immature verse written by adults. Its chief defect was a too frequent retreat into a remote classicism; with its metaphysical predilections the poetry sometimes became recondite and even incomprehensible. The stock of subjects grew low and, as John Gould Fletcher concluded in an otherwise sympathetic consideration of the school, "the 'Southern type' of poem tends to become distorted, fragmentary, obscure the more the poets speculate on the *intellectual* content as opposed to the emotional, or *sensible,* content of their subject matter." But the best of this poetry rose above its limitations and cleared a direction of its own.

RANGE AND DIVERSITY: STEVENS TO JEFFERS

After the First World War, groups divided, quarreled, and split apart; many tendencies were in the air at one time. The difficult and re-creative "process of unthinking" often degenerated into mere thoughtlessness, a tendency glorified by the "Super-realists" and the editors of *transition.* Opposed to this the "classicism" of Eliot pointed in a contrary direction. Joined to a cool scholasticism, orderliness came to offset the loose writing and looser thinking of the free verse plethora. Founded on a definite esthetic, intellectual rather than emotional, much of the new work achieved a shapeliness in which thought restrained sentiment, in which conception and perception were skillfully balanced.

Language was being tested in a dozen different directions; where one poet tightened the forms, another loosened them. A new semi-cavalier grace warred with forthright declarations. Wallace Stevens, departing from a depiction of things—actually disputing the "thinginess" of literature—perfected an orchidaceous flowering of words from words, achieving a type of witty suggestion new to the period. The euphuistic distortions of Maxwell Bodenheim and the over-luxuriant figures of E. E. Cummings grew in the same lustrum as the austere, later lyrics of Sara Teasdale and the emotional directness of Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Of the younger men Horace Gregory and James Agee contributed striking work. Widely different though their poems were they had two characteristics in common: a combination of "high seriousness" and irony, and the ability to employ images straight from contemporary life.

An unprecedented vigor of language was brought into American poetry about 1926 by Robinson Jeffers. Jeffers successfully experimented with a peculiarly long line, whose strength matched the dark power of its author's philosophy. His technique derived from Whitman's, but his attitude was the antithesis of that over-emphatic affirmer's, and his images attained a strange pessimistic splendor. "The creatures of Jeffers's imagination," wrote Horace Gregory in *The New Mythology,* "strive, love, and die within a nightmare that is becoming known as the American consciousness, which is a poetic distortion of

the American scene. They are manifestations of a civilization that seems childishly innocent and harmlessly insane." Never had the range of American verse been so extensive, and Jeffers strenuously helped to extend it.

THE NEW LYRICISTS

The lyric note was bound to be affected. It, too, fluctuated to express the shift from convention to revolt, from decision to doubt, from a fixed form to an almost dissolving line. Conrad Aiken developed a peculiarly wavering music which, if often vague and repetitive, was capable of haunting effects, both in the early lyrics and the later somber preludes. David McCord alternated easily from the meditative to the whimsically mocking. Stephen Vincent Benét and William Rose Benét, brothers in blood and balladry, plundered modernity and antiquity for their fancies; the former, taking the Civil War for a background in *John Brown's Body,* constructed a many-voiced lyric of epic proportions. John Hall Wheelock luxuriated in leaping if somewhat determined affirmations. George Dillon, a singer in water-color, composed delicately patterned interrogations. The short lyrics of Robert Frost grew consistently in strength and suggestiveness.

The work of the women ranged from the outspoken to the involved. Two distinct influences governed many of them: Emily Dickinson and Lizette Woodworth Reese. The epigrammatic condensations of the former affected an entire generation with increasing force. The firm speech and sparse imagery of the latter won many away from the lush and cloying love-songs of the type enshrined in 1842 by Rufus W. Griswold in his waxwork *Gems from American Female Poets.* Edna St. Vincent Millay, in the later sonnets no less than in the early "Renascence," deepened an already impassioned note, increasing the admiration as well as the size of her audience. Sara Teasdale intensified a simple but flexible melodic line. Genevieve Taggard and Jean Starr Untermeyer lifted the ordinary round of woman's everyday into the extraordinary and, not seldom, into the ecstatic.

Others, refining their poetry of a too thickly human passion, turned to an elliptical metaphysics. The "mechanism of sensibility" brought them back to Crashaw, Vaughan, Webster, and Donne. One caught the overtones of the late Elizabethans in the accents of Louise Bogan, Léonie Adams, Hazel Hall, Elinor Wylie, among others. Elinor Wylie acknowledged the relationship implicitly, the title of her first volume (*Nets to Catch the Wind*) being taken from a poem by Webster, the title of her last (*Angels and Earthly Creatures*) from a sermon by Donne. But these poets did not depend too much on intellectual virtuosity and involuted images; their sensibility was their own. Less prodigal (and, it may be added, less passionate) than Donne and his followers, they reflected something of his order and his fiercely conceived beauty through temperaments essentially modern and feminine. Elinor Wylie, never "confusing the spiritual and the sensual either through false fear or false reverence," began with verbal brilliance and ended by celebrating the radiance of spirit and "the pure and valiant mind." Léonie Adams, a more withdrawn metaphysician, yielded her secret only to those who were already poets, though even the unlettered could sense the music

and far-reaching implications. Tracing the swift mutability of time, and in particular these times, Louise Bogan, Marya Zaturenska, and Muriel Rukeyser outlined a poetry which was both sensuous and cerebral, intricately designed but deeply impassioned.

CRISIS AND DEPRESSION: 1929

Social as well as financial values crashed in October, 1929, but the blow did not immediately register on the poetry of the period. A few years later it became evident that a crisis had occurred in literature as well as in finance and government. The poets turned, tentatively enough, to a consideration of economic and social problems; some of them deserted poetry altogether. It is noteworthy that whereas the five years from 1913 to 1918 produced a dozen or more poets of national importance, not more than three or four new poets of any significance appeared between 1930 and 1940.

Poetry was affected by the general paralysis, unable to express the crisis except by negation. Yet, no matter what the conditions, man cannot remain inarticulate for long; there were signs that the younger poets, deeply affected by the breakdown, were grappling with the situation. It was not long before they attempted to express the universal bewilderment, doubtfully, even desperately. Theirs was a difficult task. Values were distorted, standards questioned, the traditional responses deadened. But the basic feelings, disbalanced and temporarily stunned, could not remain paralyzed.

The aftermath of the depression took the form of an increasingly critical examination of contemporary life, a frank and unflattering appraisal of men and motives. The questioning habit grew. At its best it attained the vigor of a challenge; at its worst it assumed a worn disillusion. Too often the loss of an integrating faith was reflected in a philosophy of formlessness, and complacent optimism was exchanged for complacent despair.

The style shifted to match the changing tempo, increasing speed and violence. The manner alternated from brusque to bitter; the tone was pungent rather than poignant; the attack was spasmodic, nervously staccato. The romanticized "personal attitude" was regarded with suspicion. The tensions of the false peace and the premonitions of war prompted a literature of nervous foreboding. Writers were torn by the contradictory claims of a planned economy and a planless do-nothingism. The result was a contradiction of outer form and inner confusion. Much of the poetry of the early thirties is not only the record of a vast nightmare, but an attempt to analyze it.

DIVISION IN THE THIRTIES

The decade following the crisis of 1929 revealed the growing importance of such highly idiomatic poets as William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, and Horace Gregory, as well as the promise of Kenneth Fearing, Kenneth Patchen, and Delmore Schwartz. It also disclosed two sharply divided tendencies. Division was marked in subject matter and vocabulary; it was emphasized by the writers' divergent attitudes to the reader. On the one hand, the work of

the younger poets addressed itself to the common man; influenced by the music-hall, the movies, and the radio, it attempted to be persuasive and "popular." The tone was easy-going, pseudo-jocular, masking grimness in a false gaiety. An excellent example is Harry Brown's "The Ambulant Blues," which begins:

> Went into a skyscraper, asked for love,
> They said I'd better try the floor up above,
> Thanked them politely and climbed the stair,
> But I didn't find anything but thin, thin air.
> Turned me around and went away,
> And heard them whispering, "He didn't stay."
> But there was no use in standing around
> To wait for a wound.

On the other hand, many of the youngest writers assumed a solemnly detached air and addressed themselves not to the common man but to the exceptional man, the scholar, the wit. It was no accident that the original Nashville "Fugitives" (see page 25) were teachers, and their descendants, the scattered "Neo-Fugitives" (Randall Jarrell, W. R. Moses, George Marion O'Donnell) were pupils who became professors. Their highly stylized manner was deceptive, adroitly elaborate and yet remote; sometimes it was so clever that it outwitted its subject. More often than not it was vague in its references, allusive in a pedantic way, as in W. R. Moses' "Old Triton's Wreathed Horn," which concludes:

> One x may represent commodities
> Largely diverse, so one thing be the same;
> Restraint, imposed by hunger or by will,
> Ones waves of thoughts and starlings. What's a piece,
> By part of it we represent: the tame
> Thoughts I may drop, be pennoned by the game
> Of black, bird-waves in grey, mid-winter seas.

At one extreme the writing of the thirties tended to grow polemical and flatly "proletarian." At the other extreme it became hypersensitive, obscure, and abstractly "patrician."

SYSTEMATIC CONFUSION: SURREALISM

The advance-guard experimenters of the late thirties, unlike their immediate predecessors, were uninterested in political issues, indifferent to a world of revolutionary change. They were not ignorant of war and revolution, but they were determined to evade and, if possible, to avoid the issues. Concerned almost wholly with the "need of self-expression," they became defenders of a repudiated position. Theirs was a retreat to the crumbling ivory tower, a championship of the almost forgotten "Art for Art's sake," an elaborate if topsy-turvy estheticism.

The inevitable result of the evasion of ordinary experience was a plunge into fantasy; the fear of reality was answered by surrealism. Surrealism was the "justification" of failure to deal with the actual and difficult world; it was the

ultimate escape, the denial of logic, the triumph of unmeaning. In surrealism irresponsibility was glorified; cause and effect were casually reversed; the image, liberated from all restraint, flew off into orgies of free association. In 1940 such magazines as *Diogenes* and *Experimental Review* and collections like *New Directions* devoted much of their space to examples and examinations of non-logical writing, purposeful incongruity, and "uncensored dictations from the unconscious."

Although surrealism made a point of ridiculing all formulas, it did not disdain a program of its own. The pronouncements were not troubled by consistency. A leading protagonist of surrealism, Nicolas Calas, wrote, "To *responsibility* the surrealists oppose *revelation.*" And Salvador Dali, painter and theorist, asked: "May not one succeed in systematizing confusion, and so assist the total discrediting of the world of reality?"

Such attempts to "discredit the world of reality" by "systematizing confusion" had already begun in Europe early in the twentieth century. But the effort "to reduce and finally dispose of the contradictions between dream and waking, between the 'real' and the 'unreal'" had its American protagonists. One of them, Charles Henri Ford, began a poem lightly entitled "He Cut His Finger on Eternity" with these lines:

> What grouchy war-tanks intend to shred
> or crouch the road's middle to stop my copy?
> I'll ride roughshod as an anniversary
> down the great coiled gap of your ear.

Oscar Williams, a poet of energetic if wanton metaphors, opened his poem "Mister I" with this kaleidoscopic verse:

> He climbed up the walls of the well into the forbidden nest
> And caught the ambushed bird by the scruff of its great voice:
> Meadows full of insects trundled off under a bushel of abstraction;
> Ingots of rodent drummed at his conscience armored in action.

Richard Eberhart, who never subscribed to the surrealist doctrine, surpassed many of the official adherents in triumphs of discontinuity. When he was most persuasive Eberhart was most obscure. For example:

> In prisons of established craze
> Hear the sane tread without noise
> Whose songs no iron walls will raze
> Though hearts are as of girls and boys.
>
> By the waters burning clear
> Where sheds of men are only seen,
> Accept eloquent time, and revere
> The silence of the great machine.

In spite of providing a few entertaining adventures in verbal anarchy, the surrealist movement remained a cult for the eccentric and an exhibit of the curious. Only the extremists welcomed the dissolution of form, the desirability of automatic responses, and the "law of incongruity." The voluble escapists hailed surrealism as a rebelliously esthetic adventure, a gleeful revolt against

morality, "that weakness of the brain," as Rimbaud scoffed, against reality, logic, and the bugbear of good taste. Attempting to liberate the subconscious, the surrealists went off into orgies of shapeless horrors, monstrous images, and metaphysical nightmares. Most poets, however, refused to be won over to the cult of negation, to an art which "has nothing to do with day or reason" and which was chiefly an expression of fiercely disorganized dreams.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR—AND AFTER

The generation that grew up between two world wars was nursed on anxiety. Youth was torn between a nostalgia for a comforting past and an apprehension—half fear, half hope—of a new order which it could not define. There were the combined threats of another and greater war, prolonged social struggles, and impending chaos. The emotional climate of the country was scarcely conducive to stability. The mood ranged from uneasy optimism to shrugging apathy, from false complacency to grim disillusion. When the German invasion of Poland was followed by the *Sitzkrieg,* or "phony" war, America became increasingly tense with misgivings, but fear was still masked in cynicism. Much of the poetry of the period voiced in prevailingly bitter accents a distrust of all systems, a conviction that the world was sick.

Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the war transformed the psychological anxieties into terrible realities. Confidence evaporated, faith was challenged, standards were overthrown. The temper of the 1940's was dangerous; the condition was, in every sense, critical. Writers expressed their attitudes to war in various ways. Only a few versifiers, or poets who had abandoned poetry for journalistic patrioteering, rejoiced in the war and attempted to glorify it. The most convincing contributors to *War and the Poet* (1945), edited by Richard Eberhart and Selden Rodman, and *The War Poets* (1945), edited by Oscar Williams, recognized that war was not only devastating but debasing, not only merciless but mad. "War," wrote Mark Van Doren, "could be beautiful to Homer and Shakespeare because it could be tragic. It has ceased to be that. . . . Now it is all catastrophe, with nothing to guide our measurement of its meaning. It is epidemic calamity." Such a conclusion was continually reaffirmed; it was repeated in the self-questioning and compassionate "In Distrust of Merits" by Marianne Moore, in the anger and sympathy of Karl Shapiro, the mingled pity and outrage of Randall Jarrell, the fierce pacifism of Robert Lowell, who expressed himself fearlessly as a conscientious objector, the passionate condemnations of Peter Viereck. The "poetic" record of the Second World War was a recoil from horror and a revulsion from a society so inept as to permit, within twenty-five years, two universal catastrophes aimed not against nations but against civilization.

THE POET AND HIS FUNCTION

The postwar world seethed with ferment; the writers grappled with questions not only about their complex times but about themselves. What was their relation to society? What was the purpose of their art: communication for pleasure? diagnosis? curative therapy? What, in short, was their function? A

growing concern with analysis put art on the dissecting table; never before in America had there been so much writing about writing. Typical were such volumes as *Criticism: The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment,* edited by Mark Schorer, Josephine Miles, and Gordon McKenzie; *The Armed Vision: A Study in the Methods of Literary Criticism* by Stanley Edgar Hyman; *Theory of Literature* by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren; and *Poets at Work,* a series of statements by W. H. Auden, Karl Shapiro, Donald A. Stauffer, and others. Sometimes the analysis was so persistent and so subtle that it seemed, according to Joseph Wood Krutch, "the function of the poet was merely to provide some raw material upon which the critics can fling themselves."

The poets themselves were proving that theirs was not only a craft but a medium of concentrated comprehension. Theirs was the power of one person to speak to another and share intuitions as well as experiences, to make a communication which was also a communion. A world in flux challenges the poet, but it does not defeat him. "The poet," wrote Archibald MacLeish, "with the adjustment of a phrase, with the contrast of an image, with the rhythm of a line, has fixed a focus which all the talk and all the staring of the world has been unable to fix before him. His is a labor which is at all times necessary, for without it that sense of reality which is the poet's greatest accomplishment is lost." The poet's dilemma was that he had to create order in the midst of disorder. Not always able to accomplish this, he sometimes retired into obliquity and private symbolism. Too often the harassed poet was so occupied with the deep cleavages of his time that he was heedless of his audience and careless of the ordinary man's understanding.

But there was a compensating attempt to put the broken pieces of a world together again. It was a movement away from willful obscurity, from the meandering stream of the subconscious (the poet talking to himself in public) and a pretentiousness masked as profundity. The poetry of the late 1940's began to show a return to clarity, to lucid statement paired with sensitive but intelligible suggestiveness. Among the heralds of the rediscovery of disciplined form and straightforward feeling, Elizabeth Bishop, Karl Shapiro, John Berryman, Randall Jarrell, and Peter Viereck were particularly gifted and rewarding. Their work was not only a reshaping but a reaffirmation.

This volume purports to show the pulls of both tradition and experiment, the constant play between convention and revolt. It is not claimed that every poem in this collection is a great poem. It is maintained, however, that the selection from each poet combines the force of the imagination with the feel of truth and achieves a union of the known and the unknown, the paradox of the familiar and the surprising, which is the essence and power of poetry.

L. U.

Walt Whitman

WALT (ORIGINALLY WALTER) WHITMAN was born at West Hills, near Huntington, Long Island, May 31, 1819. His mother's people were hard-working Dutch Quakers, his maternal grandfather having been a Long Island horse-breeder. On his father's side he was descended from English Puritans who had farmed American soil for a century and a half.

Whitman's father was a less successful agrarian than his ancestors and, since he was a better carpenter than farmer, the elder Whitman moved his family to the then provincial suburb of Brooklyn. Here the country child grew into the town boy, was lifted up for a moment by Lafayette when the hero revisited America, was equally fascinated by his father's wood-smelling shop and the city streets, received his first sight of the "million-footed" city which was to become his beloved Mannahatta, learned at least the rudiments of the three R's, and left school before his teens. At eleven he was already at work as an errand-boy. At twelve he became a "printer's devil." By the time he was fourteen he had learned the various fonts and began to set type in the composing-room of *The Long Island Star.* At seventeen, taking up residence in the more profitable metropolis, he was well on the road to being an itinerant printer-journalist. But New York was no Golconda for an uneducated, self-conscious youth and, after a few months, Whitman went back to Long Island, his "fish-shaped Paumanok."

There he remained until his twenty-second year, living with his numerous relations, intermittently teaching school, delivering papers, contributing "pieces" to *The Long Island Democrat.* In 1841 Whitman returned to Brooklyn and New York, writing sentimental fillers, novelettes, rhetorical and flabby verses, hack-work editorials for journals now forgotten. In 1842 he wrote a temperance tract, *Franklin Evans, or The Inebriate,* a mixture of campaign material and fourth-rate Dickens, a volume which Whitman later claimed was written for cash in three days. Blossoming out in frock coat and high hat, debonair, his beard smartly trimmed, Whitman at twenty-three was editor of *The Daily Aurora.* In the capacity of reporter-about-town, he promenaded lower Broadway, spent much time in the theaters, cultivated the opera, flirted impartially with street-corner politics and the *haut monde.* He was still Walter Whitman when, at the age of twenty-seven, he joined the *Brooklyn Eagle.*

Various biographers—Emory Holloway, in particular—have ferreted out Whitman's sketches and editorials of this period and, while there are occasional suggestions of the poet to come, most of them betray him as a fluent, even a prolific, journalist and nothing more. The style is alternately chatty and highfalutin; the ideas are undistinguished. At the end of two years, either because of his politics or his unsatisfactory articles, Whitman suddenly lost his editorial position and, with equal abruptness, received an offer from a stranger who was about to start an inde-

pendent paper in New Orleans. Thereupon he left New York early in 1848 to become a special writer on the staff of the daily *Crescent.*

Whitman's few months in the South have led to much speculation. Emory Holloway concludes that New Orleans was the background for the poet's first love-affair and implies that his inamorata was one of the *demimonde,* probably a quadroon beauty. But this is sheer guess-work, barely supported by Whitman's later poetry where the wish often substitutes for the action. This much is evident: He and his younger brother Jeff enjoyed the more languorous tempo of the Creole culture; the "Paris of America" made him less priggish; his quickened perceptions took in the whole alphabet of sights and sounds, "not missing a letter from A to Izzard." His literary style, however, had not improved and, after three months, he was dismissed from the *Crescent,* possibly because of his careless, even puerile writing.

Returning to New York, Whitman immediately plunged into editing another paper. His failures as a journalist had not yet convinced him he was mistaking his career and in his thirtieth year he was in charge of the Brooklyn *Freeman.* This free-soil journal soon shifted its political course; Whitman was not agile enough to turn with it; and in September, 1849, he withdrew, "taking his flag with him." As a free-lance, he wrote for the New York *Evening Post* and the *Advertiser,* his contributions being chiefly articles—and badly over-written ones—on music. He "took up" art, gushed about Donizetti's "Favorita," became a metropolitan Bohemian. Meanwhile, finding he could not live by the pen alone, he helped his father and brothers build houses in Brooklyn. Meanwhile, also, he began to write the book which was to be his life-work.

It was at this time that Walter Whitman, the dandified journalist, disappeared and the Walt Whitman of tradition suddenly emerged. He was, one suspects, not unconscious of the tradition and, from the outset, used every means to foster it.

Whitman was now thirty-one; an entirely different apparition from the man who, in his late twenties, frequented the more fashionable lobbies. The once trim beard, streaked with premature gray, was now worn loose and prophetic; the well-tailored coat and spruce cane were discarded in favor of rough workman's clothes, high boots, a large felt hat and a red shirt with the collar nonchalantly—or carefully—opened wide enough to show red flannel underneath. He prepared several lectures on the democracy of art and delivered one at the Brooklyn Art Union in 1851, but found lecturing too tame. He consorted with ferry-men, bus-drivers and other "powerful, uneducated persons." The legend persists that, when one of the drivers was ill, Whitman took his route and drove the omnibus, shouting passages of Shakespeare up and down Broadway Another legend—repeated by Holloway as a fact—pictures Whitman reading Epictetus to one of the boatmen and, afterwards, "cramming his own volume into the pocket of the sailor's monkey-jacket." These are Homeric gestures and one would like to believe them uncalculated. But even the most confirmed Whitman-worshiper must have his doubts. Subsequent actions add to the admirer's misgivings.

The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1855. This epochal volume made its initial appearance as a poorly printed pamphlet of twelve poems brought out anonymously and bearing, instead of a signature, a portrait of the author with one hand in his pocket, one on his hip, the characteristic open shirt and a slouch hat rakishly tilted. One of the first copies of the pamphlet was sent to Ralph Waldo

Emerson, which—considering Whitman's indebtedness in spirit if not in form—was no more than proper. Within a fortnight, Emerson, overlooking the questionable taste of the frontispiece, and with something of the master's gratification on being hailed by an unknown but fervent disciple, wrote the famous letter of July 21, 1855, in which he hailed the young writer, concluding, "I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. . . . I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire. I greet you at the beginning of a great career."

But Emerson's lavish praise (which Whitman, without waiting for permission, blazoned on the cover of his second edition) was not loud enough. Nor, was Whitman, despite the convictions contained in the lengthy prose preface, confident enough of his work; he sought to force public approval. In direct opposition to Emersonian standards and the spiritual ideals implied in his foreword, Whitman set about to cause a controversy, to inflame opinion by inflating himself. The task—considering the howls which greeted *Leaves of Grass*—was not difficult. It was—so defenders have insisted—the day of the anonymous review and "self-puffery" was not uncommon. But Whitman's offenses in this regard (and there were many of them) are inexcusable in view of the principles he professed. Two months after the first printing of *Leaves of Grass,* he caused one of a series of anonymous articles to be printed in the Brooklyn *Times* (September 29, 1855). In it—and the idiom is unmistakable—he wrote: "Very devilish to some, and very divine to some, will appear the poet of these new poems, these *Leaves of Grass:* an attempt, as they are, of a naive, masculine, affectionate, contemplative, sensual, imperious person to cast into literature not only his own grit and arrogance, but his own flesh and form, undraped, regardless of models, regardless of modesty or law." There was much more in the same self-laudatory vein, stressing Whitman's unkempt virility, his firm attachment for loungers and the "free rasping talk of men," his refusal to associate with literary people or (forgetting his lecture programs) to appear on platforms, his lusty physiology "corroborating a rugged phrenology," not even forgetting to mention the fact that he "is always dressed freshly and clean in strong clothes—neck open, shirt-collar flat and broad." Other anonymous salutations announced that the author was "a fine brute," "the most masculine of beings," "one of the roughs, large, proud, affectionate, eating, drinking and breeding."

It requires little psychology to analyze what is so obvious an over-compensation. In these anonymous tributes to himself, Whitman revealed far more than he intended. None but a blinded devotee can fail to suspect a softness beneath the bluster; a psychic impotence poorly shielded by all the talk about fine brutishness, drinking and breeding, flinging his arms right and left, "drawing men and women to his close embrace, loving the clasp of their hands, the touch of their necks and breasts." The poet protests his maleness too vociferously.

Meanwhile, the second edition of *Leaves of Grass,* containing thirty-two instead of the original twelve poems (as well as the press notices written by himself) appeared in 1856. In the third edition (1860) the number of poems leaped to one hundred and fifty-seven. Then the Civil War made all other controversies negligible.

Whitman did not go to war, although his married brother George was one of the first to enlist. Holloway implies an idealistic motive; Harvey O'Higgins charges a cowardly Narcissism. In any case, Whitman refused to join the conflict and, only

when George was reported missing, did he see at first hand what he had begun to sketch in "Drum-Taps." Finding his brother wounded in a camp on the Rappahannock, Whitman nursed him and remained in Washington, serving in the hospitals. He acted not only as wound-dresser but as good angel—"a bearded fairy godmother"—for the disabled men; he wrote their letters, brought them tobacco and ice-cream, read tales and poems, made life livelier and death easier for the sufferers. These ministrations, so freely given, gave him much in return: an intimacy with life in the raw which, for all his assertions, he had never seen so closely. No longer a spectator, he was a participant, and purgation as well as passion are manifest in the series of war-echoes, "Drum-Taps," and the uplifted "Memories of President Lincoln" with its immortal elegy "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." The end of the Civil War defined a new spirit in Whitman: the man and his poetry became one.

In 1864, through the pressure of friends, a minor clerkship in the Indian Bureau of the Interior Department was found for Whitman. But, though he was promoted, he did not hold the position long. His chief, Secretary James Harlan, once a Methodist preacher, had heard rumors of his subordinate's "immorality." Without stopping to consider the ethics of the situation, Harlan purloined Whitman's private copy of *Leaves of Grass* after closing-time, and fell afoul of the "Children of Adam" section. Nothing more was needed to prove the truth of the rumors and, without an hour's notice, Whitman was dismissed. A few friends rushed to his defense but Harlan, a sincere bigot, stuck to his resolve. William Douglas O'Connor, an Abolitionist author who was one of Whitman's staunchest admirers, issued a pamphlet not merely defending but glorifying Whitman, coining, for his title, the phrase "The Good Gray Poet"—a sobriquet which has outlasted all of O'Connor's works.

Affairs were at a low ebb. As a person, Whitman was stranded with no livelihood and little influence; as a poet he was repudiated by all but a small coterie at home and abroad. Eight years later, and seventeen years after the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (in January, 1872), Whitman complained to Dowden, who had praised him unreservedly in England, "If you write again for publication about my books . . . I think it would be proper and even essential to include the important facts (for facts they are) that the *Leaves of Grass* and their author are contemptuously ignored by the recognized literary organs here in the United States, rejected by the publishing houses, the author turned out of a government clerkship and deprived of his means of support . . . solely on account of having written the book."

Transferred to the office of the Attorney General after his dismissal, Whitman remained there until 1873 when, on the night of February twenty-second, he was struck by paralysis. Whitman's mother, lying ill in his brother George's house, was spared the news of his attack. She died the following May and Whitman somehow rallied sufficiently to be at her bedside. For months after he could not use his limbs and—let the psychoanalysts make what they will of it—it is doubtful if he ever recovered from the effect of her death. Two years later, while arranging his prose writings for publication, he confided, "I occupy myself . . . still enveloped in thoughts of my dear Mother, the most perfect and magnetic character, the rarest combination of practical, moral and spiritual, and the least selfish, of all and any I have ever known—and by me O so much the most deeply loved."

At fifty-five Whitman was almost completely incapacitated. He did not suffer the

daily agonies of Heine on his mattress grave, but confinement in Camden, where his mother had died and where his brother lived, was grueling enough. His solitude was alleviated by letters from abroad and the beginnings of recognition at home. Although he got out of doors a little, he could not walk any distance, and Edward Carpenter, John Burroughs, Richard Maurice Bucke (later one of Whitman's executors) and others made pilgrimages to his room in Mickle Street, near the railroad yards. There were intervals when his health improved sufficiently to permit small visits to New York and Boston, but by 1877, he was enfeebled and, in spite of friends, poverty-stricken. He was reduced to peddling his books from a basket in the streets of Philadelphia and Camden, and, although his brother George offered him a special place in the house he was building in Burlington, New Jersey, Whitman chose to stay where he was.

Whitman grew old with dignity and not without honor. In June, 1888, after a longer drive than usual, Whitman took cold. A new and more severe paralytic shock followed. For a time Whitman lost the power of speech. In 1890 he bought ground for his grave and planned an appropriately massive tomb. The following March he was wheeled over to Philadelphia—a move that meant much discomfort and actual suffering—to deliver a tribute to Lincoln. He was failing, but not rapidly. In 1891 a birthday dinner tendered by friends was served in his own rooms, a festive occasion, to judge from his own letter, at which Whitman drank champagne, speaking "a few words of honor and reverence for our Emerson, Bryant, Longfellow—dead—and then for Whittier and Tennyson, the boss of us all." That December Whitman contracted pneumonia "with complications" and knew he would not recover. Aided by Horace Traubel, the young Jewish Quaker who became the Boswell of his later days, he prefaced a final "deathbed edition" of *Leaves of Grass*. Death came toward the end of his seventy-third year, on March 26, 1892.

Analysis of Whitman's poetry is the more difficult because it presents a paradox—a paradox of which Whitman was not unaware. He knew his "barbaric yawp" was untranslatable, unconforming, impossible to transfix with a phrase or a theory. "I depart as air . . . If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles." The same contradictions which marked his personality are evident in his rhapsodies. *Leaves of Grass* sets out to be the manifesto of the ordinary man, "the divine average," yet it is doubtful if the ordinary man understands its rhetoric or, understanding, responds to it. No great common audience has rallied to Whitman's philosophy, no army of poets has followed his form. Few of the "powerful uneducated persons" for whom Whitman believed his book would be a "democratic Gospel" can appreciate, and fewer still can admire, his extraordinary mixture of self-adulation and impotence, abnormality and mysticism. The same contradictions which mark his personality are evident in his style. His work aims toward a simplification of speech—an American language experiment—yet its homeliness is not always racy. Sometimes it is mere flat statement, sometimes it is a grotesque combination of the colloquial and the grandiose. Sometimes, indeed, it is corrupted by linguistic bad taste and polyglot phrasing as naïvely absurd as "the tangl'd long-deferr'd éclaircissement of human life" . . . "See my cantabile—you Libertad!" "Exalté . . . the mighty earth-eidólon" . . . "These from me, O Democracy, to serve you, ma femme!" "No dainty dolce affetuoso I!"

Only Whitman's lack of ease and certainty in rhyme made him sacrifice its coun-

terpoint for the looser cadence. Nor was his form as revolutionary as it seemed. Heine's "North Sea" cycles had been composed in "free," unrhymed rhythms and the sonorous strophes of the Old Testament were Whitman's avowed model. Whitman was the first to object to the charge that his work had "the freedom of formlessness." He did not even admit its irregularity. In one of the unsigned reviews of *Leaves of Grass* he explained, "His rhythm and *uniformity* he will conceal in the roots of his verses, not to be seen of themselves, but to break forth loosely as lilacs on a bush or take shapes compact as the shapes of melons." None can deny the music in this poetry which is capable of the widest orchestral effects. It is a music accomplished in a dozen ways—by the Hebraic "balance" brought to perfection in Job and the Psalms, by the long and extraordinarily flexible line suddenly whipped taut, by repetitions at the beginnings of lines and reiterations within the lines, by following his recitatives with a soaring aria. Thus, in the midst of the elaborate piling up in "Song of Myself" there are such sheer lyrical outbursts as the passages beginning "Press close, bare-bosomed night," "Smile, O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth," "The last scud of the day holds back for me," "A child said 'What is the grass?'" . . . "No counting of syllables," wrote Anne Gilchrist, "will reveal the mechanism of this music." But the music is there, now rising in gathering choirs of brasses, now falling to the rumor of a flute.

Mass and magnitude are the result. And rightly, for mass was the material. Unlike the cameo-cutting Aldrich and the polished Stedman, both of whom belittled him, Whitman was no lapidary. His aim was not to remodel or brighten a few high facets of existence; he sought to embody a universe in the rough. For him no aspect of life was trivial; every common, superficial cover was a cavern of rich and inexhaustible depths. A leaf of grass, with its tendrils twined about the core of earth, was no less than the journey-work of the stars; the cow, "crunching with depressed head," put Phidias to shame; the roadside running blackberry, seen with the eye of vision, was "fit to adorn the parlors of heaven." Nothing was mean; nothing was rejected. Whitman had read Blake, Dante, Shakespeare, Shelley; besides knowing his Bible, he was acquainted with the sacred books of the East and their reëxpression in Emerson. His transcendentalism was not a new thing; but the fusion of identity and impersonality, the union of the ego-driven self and the impartially moving universe was newly synthesized in his rhapsodies. His aim was inclusive—the lack of exclusiveness may be Whitman's chief defect—for though he celebrated the person in all his separateness, he added "the word democratic, the word *En-masse.*" All was included in "the procreant urge of the world." Opposites merge into one: the unseen is proved by the seen; all goes onward and outward, nothing collapses. Light and dark, good and evil, body and soul do not merely emphasize but complete each other.

Whitman's insistence that the body was holy in all its manifestations caused a great deal of contemporary misunderstanding and developed into mysterious whis perings. His early commentators—Burroughs (whose estimates were dictated by Whitman), Carpenter, Bucke, Traubel—magnified his maleness, insisted too much on his normality, and generally misinterpreted him. As late as 1926 Emory Holloway made no effort to resolve the contradictions and, apart from an obscure hint or two, scarcely suggested that there was a split between Whitman's pronouncements and his nature. The split was actually a gulf. Whitman's preoccupation with the

details of clothes—he was as fastidious about the way a workman's shirt should be worn as he once was about the set of a high hat—his rôle as nurse during the Civil War, his pathetic insistence that he was the father of six children, none of which ever appeared, and his avoidance of women make it clear that this "fine brute," this "most masculine of beings," was really an invert. Whitman's brother told Traubel that "Walt never fell in love. . . . He did not seem to affect the girls," and even Edward Carpenter concluded "there can be no doubt that his intimacies with men were much more numerous than with women." Not the least of his inconsistencies is Whitman's delusion that an "adhesive" love, the love of "comrades," was the basis on which a broader democracy would be built.

Whitman's "all-inclusive love" springs not only from his own pathological eccentricities, but from an undefined Pantheism. His very eagerness to express the whole cosmos often results in a chaotic pouring forth of prophecy and claptrap. For this reason Whitman should be read, not as one reads a book of lyrics, weighing and appraising individual stanzas, but as one reads an epic, letting the movement, the swelling volume, carry the lines along. It is only in the rare instances that we stop to remark the particularities—the extraordinarily graphic description of an old-time sea-fight in "Song of Myself," or images as breath-taking as "the indolent, sinking sun, burning, expanding the air" and "The hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world" and "Out of the cradle endlessly rocking; out of the mocking bird's throat, the musical shuttle . . ."

Here, framed in firm syllables, are large convictions, strong wants. Tenderness, not pretty sentiment, rises to new heights in the Lincoln elegies, in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," in the superbly quiet "On the Beach at Night." There is, it is true, a degree of affectation here—affectation of nationalism and simplicity (referring to Six-month rather than to May, to Mannahatta rather than to New York); affectation of hybrid terms ("Me imperturbe!" "Camerado!" "I exposé," "Deliriate, thus preluding," "Allons! from all formules!" "How plenteous! how spiritual! how *résumé!*" etc.); affectations, always, of too insistent a strength. It is also true that we read Whitman in youth—as we read Swinburne—for intoxication, uncritically, contemptuous of reservations which maturity compels.

The contradictions resist complete synthesis. It is impossible to analyze Whitman's final significance to American social and cultural development; we can only record the greatness of his contribution. His windy optimism remains an emotional rather than a rational influence. His whole-heartedness, his large yea-saying, coming at a time of cautious skepticism, hesitancy and insecurity, is Whitman's gift not only to his period but to posterity.

Whitman's inconsistency, especially his paradox of democracy, continues to baffle the literary historians. In 1930, in the third volume of his monumental *Main Currents in American Thought* (the uncompleted volume entitled *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America*) the late Vernon L. Parrington concludes that Whitman is the complete embodiment of Enlightenment—"the poet and prophet of a democracy that the America of the Gilded Age was daily betraying." Yet Parrington himself, though he sees Whitman as "the most deeply religious soul that American literature knows," sees also Whitman's failure as a prophet. "The great hopes on which he [Whitman] fed have been belied by after events—so his critics say; as the great

hopes of the Enlightenment have been belied. Certainly in this welter of today, with science become the drab and slut of war and industrialism, with sterile money-slaves instead of men, Whitman's expansive hopes seem grotesque enough. Democracy may indeed be only a euphemism for the rulership of fools."

Yet the paradox must be grasped—or, at least, admitted—if one is to understand Whitman at all. Somehow the contradictions are resolved; somehow the prophet, the pamphleteer, and the poet achieve a unity if only through an intensification of the inner life: a liberal humanism. That Whitman was self-confounded is fairly obvious; he seems to have confused an ideal culture founded on quality with a merely quantitative conception of life. But his faith, romantic as it was resurgent, triumphed over his contradictions, actually imposed a sort of harmony upon them.

Thus Whitman rises above his defects. The reader forgets the lesser flaws, the lumbering failures. The illumined phrases burn clear; the pictures, once etched upon the imagination, are there to stay. Above all, the *effect* remains, an effect not reducible to phrases; a sense of released power, irresistible and benevolent, immense in affirmation. Beyond what Symonds called "delicate and evanescent moods of sensibility" is the communication of amplitudes. It expands the air.

Such poetry, whatever its lapses, has the stuff of permanence. It will persist not only because of its rebellious and compelling power, but because the poet has transcended his material. The personal contact is achieved, as Whitman knew it would be. "Who touches this book touches a man." Lascelles Abercrombie, a poet of an entirely different persuasion, said that Whitman created "out of the wealth of his experience that vividly personal figure which is surely one of the few supremely great things in modern poetry—the figure of himself." But his work was larger than the man. Whitman was not dilating his value when he claimed to contain multitudes. His book projects and creates them in a sphere nobler than our own. Employing words, he harnessed elements.

I HEAR AMERICA SINGING

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the plowboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

THE MUSE IN THE NEW WORLD

(from "Song of the Exposition")

Come, Muse, migrate from Greece and Ionia,
Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts,
That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath, and Aeneas', Odysseus' wanderings,
Placard "Removed" and "To Let" on the rocks of your snowy Parnassus,
Repeat at Jerusalem, place the notice high on Jaffa's gate and on Mount Moriah,
The same on the walls of your German, French and Spanish castles, and Italian collections,
For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide, untried domain awaits, demands you.

Responsive to our summons,
Or rather to her long-nurs'd inclination,
Join'd with an irresistible, natural gravitation,
She comes! I hear the rustling of her gown,
I scent the odor of her breath's delicious fragrance,
I mark her step divine, her curious eyes a-turning, rolling,
Upon this very scene.
I say I see, my friends, if you do not, the illustrious émigré, (having it is true in her day, although the same, changed, journey'd considerable,)
Making directly for this rendezvous, vigorously clearing a path for herself, striding through the confusion,
By thud of machinery and shrill steam-whistle undismay'd,
Bluff'd not a bit by drain-pipe, gasometers, artificial fertilizers;
Smiling and pleas'd with palpable intent to stay,
She's here, install'd amid the kitchen-ware!

RECORDERS AGES HENCE

Recorders ages hence,
Come, I will take you down underneath this impassive exterior, I will tell you what to say of me,
Publish my name and hang up my picture as that of the tenderest lover,
The friend the lover's portrait, of whom his friend his lover was fondest,
Who was not proud of his songs, but of the measureless ocean of love within him, and freely pour'd it forth,
Who often walk'd lonesome walks thinking of his dear friends, his lovers,
Who pensive away from one he lov'd often lay sleepless and dissatisfied at night,
Who knew too well the sick, sick dread lest the one he lov'd might secretly be indifferent to him,
Whose happiest days were far away through fields, in woods, on hills, he and another wandering hand in hand, they twain apart from other men,
Who oft as he saunter'd the streets curv'd with his arm the shoulder of his friend, while the arm of his friend rested upon him also.

THE COMMONPLACE

The commonplace I sing;
How cheap is health! how cheap nobility!
Abstinence, no falsehood, no gluttony, lust;
The open air I sing, freedom, toleration,
(Take here the mainest lesson—less from books—less from the schools,)
The common day and night—the common earth and waters,
Your farm—your work, trade, occupation,
The democratic wisdom underneath, like solid ground for all.

A NOISELESS PATIENT SPIDER

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself.
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them.
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

TO A COMMON PROSTITUTE

Be composed—be at ease with me—I am Walt Whitman, liberal and lusty as Nature.
Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you,
Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you and the leaves to rustle for you, do my words refuse to glisten and rustle for you.
My girl I appoint with you an appointment, and I charge you that you make preparation to be worthy to meet me,
And I charge you that you be patient and perfect till I come.

Till then I salute you with a significant look that you do not forget me.

WHEN I HEARD THE LEARN'D ASTRONOMER

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

RECONCILIATION

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world;
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin—I draw near,
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

I HEAR IT WAS CHARGED AGAINST ME

I hear it was charged against me that I sought to destroy institutions,
But really I am neither for or against institutions,
(What indeed have I in common with them? or what with the destruction of them?)
Only I will establish in the Mannahatta and in every city of these States inland and seaboard,
And in the fields and woods, and above every keel little or large that dents the water,
Without edifices or rules or trustees or any argument,
The institution of the dear love of comrades.

MANNAHATTA

I was asking for something specific and perfect for my city,
Whereupon lo! upsprang the aboriginal name.

Now I see what there is in a name, a word, liquid, sane, unruly, musical, self-sufficient,
I see that the word of my city is that word from of old,
Because I see that word nested in nests of water-bays, superb,
Rich, hemm'd thick all around with sailships and steamships, an island sixteen miles long, solid-founded,
Numberless crowded streets, high growths of iron, slender, strong, light, splendidly uprising toward clear skies,
Tides swift and ample, well-loved by me, toward sundown,
The flowing sea-currents, the little islands, larger adjoining islands, the heights, the villas,
The countless masts, the white shore-steamers, the lighters, the ferry-boats, the black sea-steamers well model'd,
The down-town streets, the jobbers' houses of business, the houses of business of the ship-merchants and money-brokers, the river-streets,
Immigrants arriving, fifteen thousand in a week,
The carts hauling goods, the manly race of drivers of horses, the brown-faced sailors,
The summer air, the bright sun shining, and the sailing clouds aloft,
The winter snows, the sleigh-bells, the broken ice in the river, passing along up or down with the flood-tide or ebb-tide,
The mechanics of the city, the masters, well-form'd, beautiful-faced, looking you straight in the eyes,
Trottoirs throng'd, vehicles, Broadway, the women, the shops and shows,

A million people—manners free and superb—open voices—hospitality—the most courageous and friendly young men,
City of hurried and sparkling waters! city of spires and masts!
City nested in bays! my city!

SONG OF MYSELF

1

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same.
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.
Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.

2

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,
I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless,
It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,
I am mad for it to be in contact with me.

The smoke of my own breath,
Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, love-root, silk-thread, crotch and vine,
My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of blood and air through my lungs,
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and dark-color'd sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn,
The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the eddies of the wind,
A few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around of arms,
The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs wag,
The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and hill-sides,
The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun.
Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the earth much?
Have you practic'd so long to learn to read?
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the specters in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

3

I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the beginning and the end,
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth or age than there is now,
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.

Urge and urge and urge,
Always the procreant urge of the world.
Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and increase, always sex,
Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life.

To elaborate is no avail, learn'd and unlearn'd feel that it is so.

Sure as the most certain sure, plumb in the uprights, well center-tied, braced in the beams,
Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical,
I and this mystery here we stand.
Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.

Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,
Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.

Showing the best and dividing it from the worst age vexes age,
Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while they discuss I am silent, and go bathe and admire myself.

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean,
Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest.

I am satisfied—I see, dance, laugh, sing;
As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through the night, and withdraws at the peep of the day with stealthy tread,
Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house with their plenty,
Shall I postpone my acceptation and realization and scream at my eyes,
That they turn from gazing after and down the road,
And forthwith cipher and show to me a cent,
Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two, and which is ahead?

4

Trippers and askers surround me,
People I meet, the effect upon me of my early life or the ward and city I live in, or the nation,
The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies, authors old and new,
My dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments, dues,
The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I love,
The sickness of one of my folks or of myself, or ill-doing or loss or lack of money, or depressions or exaltations,
Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubtful news, the fitful events;
These come to me days and nights and go from me again,
But they are not the Me myself.

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,
Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,
Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.

Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through fog with linguists and contenders,
I have no mockings or arguments, I witness and wait.

5

I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,
And you must not be abased to the other.

Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,
Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best.
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice.

✦

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed.

6

A child said, *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corner, that we may see and remark, and say *Whose?*

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.
Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves,

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them,
It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon out of their mothers' laps,
And here you are the mothers' laps.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers,
Darker than the colorless beards of old men,
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.
O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues,
And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.
I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere,
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what anyone supposed, and luckier.

7

Has anyone supposed it lucky to be born?
I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it.

I pass death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd babe, and am not contain'd between my hat and boots,
And peruse manifold objects, no two alike and every one good,
The earth good and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good.

I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,
I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself,
(They do not know how immortal, but I know.)
Every kind for itself and its own, for me mine male and female,
For me those that have been boys and that love women,
For me the man that is proud and feels how it stings to be slighted,
For me the sweet-heart and the old maid, for me mothers and the mothers of mothers,
For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed tears,
For me children and the begetters of children.

Undrape! you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded,
I see through the broadcloth and gingham whether or no,
And am around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless, and cannot be shaken away.

8

The little one sleeps in its cradle,
I lift the gauze and look a long time, and silently brush away flies with my hand.

The youngster and the red-faced girl turn aside up the bushy hill,
I peeringly view them from the top.

The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom,
I witness the corpse with its dabbled hair, I note where the pistol has fallen.

The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders,
The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor,
The snow-sleighs, clinking, shouted jokes, pelts of snow-balls,
The hurrahs for popular favorites, the fury of rous'd mobs,
The flap of the curtain'd litter, a sick man inside borne to the hospital,
The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows and fall,
The excited crowd, the policeman with his star quickly working his passage to the center of the crowd,
The impassive stones that receive and return so many echoes,
What groans of over-fed or half-starv'd who fall sunstruck or in fits,
What exclamations of women taken suddenly who hurry home and give birth to babes,
What living and buried speech is always vibrating here, what howls restrain'd by decorum,
Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made, acceptances, rejections with convex lips,
I mind them or the show or resonance of them—I come and I depart.

9

The big doors of the country barn stand open and ready,
The dried grass of the harvest-time loads the slow-drawn wagon,
The clear light plays on the brown gray and green intertinged,
The armfuls are pack'd to the sagging mow.

I am there, I help, I came stretch'd atop of the load,
I felt its soft jolts, one leg reclined on the other,
I jump from the cross-beams and seize the clover and timothy,
And roll head over heels and tangle my hair full of wisps.

10

Alone far in the wilds and mountains I hunt,
Wandering amazed at my own lightness and glee,
In the late afternoon choosing a safe spot to pass the night,
Kindling a fire and broiling the fresh-kill'd game,
Falling asleep on the gather'd leaves with my dog and gun by my side.

The Yankee clipper is under her sky-sails, she cuts the sparkle and scud,
My eyes settle the land, I bend at her prow or shout joyously from the deck.

The boatmen and clam-diggers arose early and stopt for me,
I tuck'd my trowser-ends in my boots and went and had a good time;
You should have been with us that day round the chowder-kettle.

I saw the marriage of the trapper in the open air in the far west, the bride was a red girl,
Her father and his friends sat near cross-legged and dumbly smoking, they had moccasins to their feet and large thick blankets hanging from their shoulders,
On a bank lounged the trapper, he was drest mostly in skins, his luxuriant beard and curls protected his neck, he held his bride by the hand,
She had long eyelashes, her head was bare, her coarse straight locks descended upon her voluptuous limbs and reach'd to her feet.

The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside,
I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the woodpile,
Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him limpsy and weak,
And went where he sat on a log and led him in and assured him,
And brought water and fill'd a tub for his sweated body and bruis'd feet,
And gave him a room that enter'd from my own, and gave him some coarse clean clothes,
And remember perfectly well his revolving eyes and his awkwardness,
And remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck and ankles;
He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and pass'd north,
I had him sit next me at table, my fire-lock lean'd in the corner.

11

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore.
Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;
Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.
She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,
She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window.

Which of the young men does she like the best?
Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.

Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth bather,
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.

The beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it ran from their long hair,
Little streams pass'd all over their bodies.

An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies,
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge to the sun, they do not ask who seizes fast to them,
They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bending arch,
They do not think whom they souse with spray.

14

The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,
Ya-honk he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation,
The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listening close,
Find its purpose and place up there toward the wintry sky.

The sharp-hoof'd moose of the north, the cat on the house-sill, the chickadee, the prairie-dog,
The litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her teats,
The brood of the turkey-hen and she with her half-spread wings,
I see in them and myself the same old law.

The press of my foot to the earth springs a hundred affections,
They scorn the best I can do to relate them.

I am enamour'd of growing out-doors,
Of men that live among cattle or taste of the ocean or woods,
Of the builders and steerers of ships and the wielders of axes and mauls, and the drivers of horses,
I can eat and sleep with them week in and week out.

What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me,
Me going in for my chances, spending for vast returns,
Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first that will take me,
Not asking the sky to come down to my good will,
Scattering it freely forever.

15

The pure contralto sings in the organ loft,
The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp,
The married and unmarried children ride home to their Thanksgiving dinner,
The pilot seizes the king-pin, he heaves down with a strong arm,
The mate stands braced in the whale-boat, lance and harpoon are ready,

The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,
The deacons are ordain'd with cross'd hands at the altar,
The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel,
The farmer stops by the bars as he walks on a First-day loaf and looks at the oats and rye,
The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum a confirm'd case,
(He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's bedroom;)
The jour printer with gray head and gaunt jaws works at his case,
He turns his quid of tobacco while his eyes blur with the manuscript;
The malform'd limbs are tied to the surgeon's table,
What is removed drops horribly in a pail;
The quadroon girl is sold at the auction-stand, the drunkard nods by the bar-room stove,
The machinist rolls up his sleeves, the policeman travels his beat, the gate-keeper marks who pass,
The young fellow drives the express-wagon, (I love him, though I do not know him;)
The half-breed straps on his light boots to compete in the race,
The western turkey-shooting draws old and young, some lean on their rifles, some sit on logs,
Out from the crowd steps the marksman, takes his position, levels his piece;
The groups of newly-come immigrants cover the wharf or levee,
As the woolly-pates hoe in the sugar-field, the overseer views them from his saddle,
The bugle calls in the ball-room, the gentlemen run for their partners, the dancers bow to each other,
The youth lies awake in the cedar-roof'd garret and harks to the musical rain,
The Wolverine sets traps on the creek that helps fill the Huron,
The squaw wrapt in her yellow-hemm'd cloth is offering moccasins and bead-bags for sale,
The connoisseur peers along the exhibition-gallery with half-shut eyes bent sideways,
As the deck-hands make fast the steamboat the plank is thrown for the shore-going passengers,
The young sister holds out the skein while the elder sister winds it off in a ball, and stops now and then for the knots,
The one-year wife is recovering and happy having a week ago borne her first child,
The clean-hair'd Yankee girl works with her sewing machine or in the factory or mill,
The paving-man leans on his two-handed rammer, the reporter's lead flies swiftly over the note-book, the sign-painter is lettering with blue and gold,
The canal boy trots on the tow-path, the book-keeper counts at his desk, the shoe-maker waxes his thread,
The conductor beats time for the band and all the performers follow him,
The child is baptized, the convert is making his first profession,
The regatta is spread on the bay, the race is begun, (how the white sails sparkle!)
The drover watching his drove sings out to them that would stray,
The peddler sweats with his pack on his back, (the purchaser higgling about the odd cent;)
The bride unrumples her white dress, the minute-hand of the clock moves slowly,
The opium-eater reclines with rigid head and just-open'd lips,
The prostitute draggles her shawl. her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck,

The crowd laugh at her blackguard oaths, the men jeer and wink to each other,
(Miserable! I do not laugh at your oaths nor jeer you;)
The President holding a cabinet council is surrounded by the great Secretaries,
On the piazza walk three matrons stately and friendly with twined arms,
The crew of the fish-smack pack repeated layers of halibut in the hold,
Coon-seekers go through the regions of the Red river or through those drain'd by the Tennessee, or through those of the Arkansas,
Torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chattahooche or Altamahaw,
Patriarchs sit at supper with sons and grandsons and great grandsons around them,
In walls of adobie, in canvas tents, rest hunters and trappers after their day's sport
The city sleeps and the country sleeps,
The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time,
The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young husband sleeps by his wife;
And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.

18

With music strong I come, with my cornets and my drums,
I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches for conquer'd and slain persons.

Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?
I also say it is good to fall, battles are lost in the same spirit in which they are won.

I beat and pound for the dead,
I blow through my embouchures my loudest and gayest for them.

Vivas to those who have fail'd!
And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!
And to those themselves who sank in the sea!
And to all generals that lost engagements, and all overcome heroes!
And the numberless unknown heroes equal to the greatest heroes known!

19

This is the meal equally set, this the meat for natural hunger,
It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous, I make appointments with all,
I will not have a single person slighted or left away,
The kept-woman, sponger, thief, are hereby invited,
There shall be no difference between them and the rest.

This is the press of a bashful hand, this the float and odor of hair,
This the touch of my lips to yours, this the murmur of yearning,
This the far-off depth and height reflecting my own face,
This the thoughtful merge of myself, and the outlet again.
Do you guess I have some intricate purpose?
Well I have, for the Fourth-month showers have, and the mica on the side of the rock has.

Do you take it I would astonish?
Does the daylight astonish? does the early redstart twittering through the woods?
Do I astonish more than they?

This hour I tell things in confidence,
I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you.

20

Who goes there? hankering, gross, mystical, nude;
How is it I extract strength from the beef I eat?

What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?

All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own,
Else it were time lost listening to me.

I do not snivel that snivel the world over,
That months are vacuums and the ground but wallow and filth.

Whimpering and truckling fold with powders for invalids, conformity goes to the fourth-remov'd,
I wear my hat as I please indoors or out.

Why should I pray? why should I venerate and be ceremonious?

Having pried through the strata, analyzed to a hair, counsel'd with doctors and calculated close,
I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones.

In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barleycorn less,
And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.
I know I am solid and sound,
To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.

I know I am deathless,
I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass,
I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut with a burnt stick at night.

I know I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood,
I see that the elementary laws never apologize,
(I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by, after all.)

I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,
And if each and all be aware I sit content.

One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is myself,
And whether I come to my own today or in ten thousand or ten million years,
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness I can wait.

My foothold is tenon'd and mortis'd in granite,
I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the amplitude of time.

21

I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,
The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue.
I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,
And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men.

I chant the chant of dilation or pride,
We have had ducking and deprecating about enough,
I show that size is only development.

Have you outstript the rest? are you the President?
It is a trifle, they will more than arrive there every one, and still pass on.

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,
I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.

Press close bare-bosom'd night—press close magnetic nourishing night!
Night of south winds—night of the large few stars!
Still nodding night—mad naked summer night.

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunset—earth of the mountains misty-topt!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!
Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth!
Smile, for your lover comes.

Prodigal, you have given me love—therefore I to you give love!
O unspeakable passionate love.

22

You sea! I resign myself to you also—I guess what you mean,
I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers,
I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of me,
We must have a turn together, I undress, hurry me out of sight of the land,
Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse,
Dash me with amorous wet, I can repay you.

Sea of stretch'd ground-swells,
Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths,
Sea of the brine of life and of unshovel'd yet always-ready graves,
Howler and scooper of storms, capricious and dainty sea,
I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and of all phases.

Partaker of influx and efflux I, extoller of hate and conciliation,
Extoller of amies [1] and those that sleep in each other's arms.

[1] Friends, as distinguished from lovers.

I am he attesting sympathy,
(Shall I make my list of things in the house and skip the house that supports them?)

I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also

What blurt is this about virtue and about vice?
Evil propels me and reform of evil propels me, I stand indifferent,
My gait is no fault-finder's or rejecter's gait,
I moisten the roots of all that has grown.

Did you fear some scrofula out of the unflagging pregnancy?
Did you guess the celestial laws are yet to be work'd over and rectified?

I find one side a balance and the antipodal side a balance,
Soft doctrine as steady help as stable doctrine,
Thoughts and deeds of the present our rouse and early start.

This minute that comes to me over the past decillions,
There is no better than it and now.

What behaved well in the past or behaves well today is not such a wonder,
The wonder is always and always how there can be a mean man or an infidel.

25

Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sunrise would kill me,
If I could not now and always send sun-rise out of me.

We also ascend dazzling and tremendous as the sun,
We found our own O my soul in the calm and cool of the daybreak.

My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,
With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds.

Speech is the twin of my vision, it is unequal to measure itself,
It provokes me forever, it says sarcastically,
Walt you contain enough, why don't you let it out then?

Come now I will not be tantalized, you conceive too much of articulation,
Do you not know O speech how the buds beneath you are folded?
Waiting in gloom, protected by frost,
The dirt receding before my prophetical screams,
I underlying causes to balance them at last,
My knowledge my live parts, it keeping tally with the meaning of all things,
Happiness, (which whoever hears me let him or her set out in search of this day.)

My final merit I refuse you, I refuse putting from me what I really am,
Encompass worlds, but never try to encompass me,
I crowd your sleekest and best by simply looking toward you.

Writing and talking do not prove me,
I carry the plenum of proof and every thing else in my face,
With the hush of my lips I wholly confound the skeptic.

30

All truths wait in all things,
They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,
They do not need the obstetric forceps of the surgeon,
The insignificant is as big to me as any,
(What is less or more than a touch?)

Logic and sermons never convince,
The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.

(Only what proves itself to every man and woman is so,
Only what nobody denies is so.)

A minute and a drop of me settle my brain,
I believe the soggy clods shall become lovers and lamps,
And a compend of compends is the meat of a man or woman,
And a summit and flower there is the feeling they have for each other,
And they are to branch boundlessly out of that lesson until it becomes omnific,
And until one and all shall delight us, and we them.

31

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'œuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots,
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over,
And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons,
But call any thing back again when I desire it.

In vain the speeding or shyness,
In vain the plutonic rocks send their old heat against my approach,
In vain the mastodon retreats beneath its own powder'd bones,
In vain objects stand leagues off and assume manifold shapes,
In vain the ocean settling in hollows and the great monsters lying low,
In vain the buzzard houses herself with the sky,
In vain the snake slides through the creepers and logs,
In vain the elk takes to the inner passes of the woods,
In vain the razor-bill'd auk sails far north to Labrador,
I follow quickly, I ascend to the nest in the fissure of the cliff.

32

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd,
I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,

They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

So they show their relations to me and I accept them,
They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession.

I wonder where they get those tokens,
Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them?

Myself moving forward then and now and forever,
Gathering and showing more always and with velocity,
Infinite and omnigenous, and the like of these among them,
Not too exclusive toward the reachers of my remembrancers,
Picking out here one that I love, and now go with him on brotherly terms.

A gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive to my caresses,
Head high in the forehead, wide between the ears,
Limbs glossy and supple, tail dusting the ground,
Eyes full of sparkling wickedness, ears finely cut, flexibly moving.
His nostrils dilate as my heels embrace him,
His well-built limbs tremble with pleasure as we race around and return.

I but use you a minute, then I resign you, stallion,
Why do I need your paces when I myself out-gallop them?
Even as I stand or sit passing faster than you.

35

Would you hear of an old-time sea-fight?
Would you learn who won by the light of the moon and stars?
List to the yarn, as my grandmother's father the sailor told it to me.

Our foe was no skulk in his ship I tell you, (said he,)
His was the surly English pluck, and there is no tougher or truer, and never was, and never will be;
Along the lower'd eve he came horribly raking us.

We closed with him, the yards entangled, the cannon touch'd,
My captain lash'd fast with his own hands.

We had receiv'd some eighteen pound shots under the water,
On our lower-gun-deck two large pieces had burst at the first fire, killing all around and blowing up overhead.

Fighting at sun-down, fighting at dark,
Ten o'clock at night, the full moon well up, our leaks on the gain, and five feet of water reported,
The master-at-arms loosing the prisoners confined in the afterhold to give them a chance for themselves.
The transit to and from the magazine is now stopt by the sentinels,
They see so many strange faces they do not know whom to trust.

Our frigate takes fire,
The other asks if we demand quarter?
If our colors are struck and the fighting done?

Now I laugh content, for I hear the voice of my little captain,
We have not struck, he composedly cries, *we have just begun our part of the fighting.*

Only three guns are in use,
One is directed by the captain himself against the enemy's mainmast,
Two well serv'd with grape and canister silence his musketry and clear his decks.

The tops alone second the fire of this little battery, especially the main-top,
They hold out bravely during the whole of the action.

Not a moment's cease.
The leaks gain fast on the pumps, the fire eats toward the powder-magazine.

One of the pumps has been shot away, it is generally thought we are sinking.

Serene stands the little captain,
He is not hurried, his voice is neither high nor low,
His eyes give more light to us than our battle-lanterns.

Toward twelve there in the beams of the moon they surrender to us.

36

Stretch'd and still lies the midnight,
Two great hulls motionless on the breast of the darkness,
Our vessel riddled and slowly sinking, preparations to pass to the one we have conquer'd,
The captain on the quarter-deck coldly giving his orders through a countenance white as a sheet,
Near by the corpse of the child that serv'd in the cabin,
The dead face of an old salt with long white hair and carefully curl'd whiskers,
The flames spite of all that can be done flickering aloft and below,
The husky voices of the two or three officers yet fit for duty,
Formless stacks of bodies and bodies by themselves, dabs of flesh upon the masts and spars,
Cut of cordage, dangle of rigging, slight shock of the soothe of waves,
Black and impassive guns, litter of powder-parcels, strong scent,
A few large stars overhead, silent and mournful shining,
Delicate sniffs of sea-breeze, smells of sedgy grass and fields by the shore, death-messages given in charge to survivors,
The hiss of the surgeon's knife, the gnawing teeth of his saw,
Wheeze, cluck, swash of falling blood, short wild scream, and long, dull, tapering groan,
These so, these irretrievable.

37

You laggards there on guard! look to your arms!
In at the conquer'd doors they crowd! I am possess'd!
Embody all presences outlaw'd or suffering,

See myself in prison shaped like another man,
And feel the dull intermitted pain.

For me the keepers of convicts shoulder their carbines and keep watch,
It is I let out in the morning and barr'd at night.
Not a mutineer walks handcuff'd to jail but I am handcuff'd to him and walk by his side,
(I am less the jolly one there, and more the silent one with sweat on my twitching lips.)

Not a youngster is taken for larceny but I go up too, and am tried and sentenced.

Not a cholera patient lies at the last gasp but I also lie at the last gasp,
My face is ash-color'd, my sinews gnarl, away from me people retreat.

Askers embody themselves in me and I am embodied in them,
I project my hat, sit shame-faced, and beg.

38

Enough! enough! enough!
Somehow I have been stunn'd. Stand back!
Give me a little time beyond my cuff'd head, slumbers, dreams, gaping,
I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake.

That I could forget the mockers and insults!
That I could forget the trickling tears and the blows of the bludgeons and hammers!
That I could look with a separate look on my own crucifixion and bloody crowning!

I remember now,
I resume the overstaid fraction,
The grave of rock multiplies what has been confided to it, or to any graves,
Corpses rise, gashes heal, fastenings roll from me.

I troop forth replenish'd with supreme power, one of an average unending procession,
Inland and sea-coast we go, and pass all boundary lines,
Our swift ordinances on their way over the whole earth,
The blossoms we wear in our hats the growth of thousands of years.

40

Flaunt of the sunshine I need not your bask—lie over!
You light surfaces only, I force surfaces and depths also.

Earth! you seem to look for something at my hands,
Say, old top-knot, what do you want?

Behold, I do not give lectures or a little charity,
When I give I give myself.

You there, impotent, loose in the knees,
Open your scarf'd chops till I blow grit within you

Spread your palms and lift the flaps of your pockets,
I am not to be denied, I compel, I have stores plenty and to spare,
And any thing I have I bestow.

I do not ask who you are, that is not important to me,
You can do nothing and be nothing but what I will infold you.

To cotton-field drudge or cleaner of privies I lean,
On his right cheek I put the family kiss,
And in my soul I swear I never will deny him.

To anyone dying, thither I speed and twist the knob of the door,
Turn the bed-clothes toward the foot of the bed,
Let the physician and the priest go home.

I seize the descending man and raise him with resistless will,
O despairer, here is my neck,
By God, you shall not go down! hang your whole weight upon me.

44

It is time to explain myself—let us stand up.

What is known I strip away,
I launch all men and women forward with me into the Unknown.

The clock indicates the moment—but what does eternity indicate?

We have thus far exhausted trillions of winters and summers,
There are trillions ahead, and trillions ahead of them.

Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me,
Afar down I see the huge first Nothing, I know I was even there,
I waited unseen and always, and slept through the lethargic mist,
And took my time, and took no hurt from the fetid carbon.

Long I was hugg'd close—long and long.
Immense have been the preparations for me,
Faithful and friendly the arms that have help'd me.

Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen,
For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings,
They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.

Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,
My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited it with care

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me,
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.

48

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is,
And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud,
And I or you pocketless of a dime may purchase the pick of the earth,
And to glance with an eye or show a bean in its pod confounds the learning of all times,
And there is no trade or employment but the young man following it may become a hero,
And there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel'd universe,
And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes.

And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,
For I who am curious about each am not curious about God,
(No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God and about death.)

I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass,
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign'd by God's name,
And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,
Others will punctually come for ever and ever.

49

And as to you Death, and you bitter hug of mortality, it is idle to try to alarm me.

To his work without flinching the accoucheur comes,
I see the elder-hand pressing receiving supporting,
I recline by the sills of the exquisite flexible doors,
And mark the outlet, and mark the relief and escape.
And as to you Corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me,
I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,
I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polish'd breasts of melons.

And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,
(No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.)

I hear you whispering there O stars of heaven,
O suns—O grass of graves—O perpetual transfers and promotions,
If you do not say any thing how can I say any thing?

Of the turbid pool that lies in the autumn forest,
Of the moon that descends the steeps of the soughing twilight,
Toss, sparkles of day and dusk—toss on the black stems that decay in the muck,
Toss to the moaning gibberish of the dry limbs.

I ascend from the moon, I ascend from the night,
I perceive that the ghastly glimmer is noonday sunbeams reflected,
And debouch to the steady and central from the offspring great or small.

50

There is that in me—I do not know what it is—but I know it is in me.

Wrench'd and sweaty—calm and cool then my body becomes,
I sleep—I sleep long.

I do not know it—it is without name—it is a word unsaid,
It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.

Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,
To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me.
Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my brothers and sisters.
Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it is eternal life—it is Happiness.

51

The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them,
And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

Listener up there! what have you to confide to me?
Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening,
(Talk honestly, no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer.)

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

I concentrate toward them that are nigh, I wait on the door-slab.

Who has done his day's work? who will soonest be through with his supper?
Who wishes to walk with me?

Will you speak before I am gone? will you prove already too late?

52

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my loitering.

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.
I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fiber your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD

(*Condensed*)

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.

Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune,
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,
Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,
Strong and content I travel the open road.

The earth, that is sufficient,
I do not want the constellations any nearer,
I know they are very well where they are,
I know they suffice for those who belong to them

(Still here I carry my old delicious burdens,
I carry them, men and women, I carry them with me wherever I go,
I swear it is impossible for me to get rid of them,
I am fill'd with them, and I will fill them in return.)

You road I enter upon and look around, I believe you are not all that is here,
I believe that much unseen is also here.
Here the profound lesson of reception, nor preference nor denial,
The black with his woolly head, the felon, the diseas'd, the illiterate person, are not denied;
The birth, the hasting after the physician, the beggar's tramp, the drunkard's stagger, the laughing party of mechanics,
The escaped youth, the rich person's carriage, the fop, the eloping couple,
The early market-man, the hearse, the moving of furniture into the town, the return back from the town,

They pass, I also pass, any thing passes, none can be interdicted,
None but are accepted, none but shall be dear to me.

You air that serves me with breath to speak!
You objects that call from diffusion my meanings and give them shape!
You light that wraps me and all things in delicate equable showers!
You paths worn in the irregular hollows by the roadsides!
I believe you are latent with unseen existences, you are so dear to me.

I inhale great draughts of space,
The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine.

I am larger, better than I thought,
I did not know I held so much goodness.

All seems beautiful to me,
I can repeat over to men and women, You have done such good to me I would do the same to you,
I will recruit for myself and you as I go,
I will scatter myself among men and women as I go,
I will toss a new gladness and roughness among them,
Whoever denies me it shall not trouble me,
Whoever accepts me he or she shall be blessed and shall bless me.

Allons! whoever you are come travel with me!
Traveling with me you find what never tires.

The earth never tires,
The earth is rude, silent, incomprehensible at first, Nature is rude and incomprehensible at first,
Be not discouraged, keep on, there are divine things well envelop'd,
I swear to you there are divine things more beautiful than words can tell.

Allons! we must not stop here,
However sweet these laid-up stores, however convenient this dwelling we cannot remain here,
However shelter'd this port and however calm these waters we must not anchor here,
However welcome the hospitality that surrounds us we are permitted to receive it but a little while.

Allons! the inducements shall be greater,
We will sail pathless and wild seas,
We will go where winds blow, waves dash, and the Yankee clipper speeds by under full sail.

Allons! with power, liberty, the earth, the elements,
Health, defiance, gayety, self-esteem, curiosity;
Allons! from all formules!
From your formules, O bat-eyed and materialistic priests.

Allons! through struggles and wars!
The goal that was named cannot be countermanded.

Have the past struggles succeeded?
What has succeeded? yourself? your nation? Nature?
Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.

My call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion,
He going with me must go well arm'd,
He going with me goes often with spare diet, poverty, angry enemies, desertions.

Allons! the road is before us!
It is safe—I have tried it—my own feet have tried it well—be not detain'd!
Let the paper remain on the desk unwritten, and the book on the shelf unopen'd!
Let the tools remain in the workshop! let the money remain unearn'd!
Let the school stand! mind not the cry of the teacher!
Let the preacher preach in his pulpit! let the lawyer plead in the court, and the judge expound the law.

Camerado, I give you my hand!
I give you my love more precious than money,
I give you myself before preaching or law;
Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

THE BROAD-AX

(from "Song of the Broad-Ax")

Weapon shapely, naked, wan,
Head from the mother's bowels drawn,
Wooded flesh and metal bone, limb only one and lip only one,
Gray-blue leaf by red-heat grown, helve produced from a little seed sown,
Resting the grass amid and upon,
To be lean'd and to lean on.

ON THE BEACH AT NIGHT

On the beach at night,
Stands a child with her father,
Watching the east, the autumn sky.

Up through the darkness,
While ravening clouds, the burial clouds, in black masses spreading,
Lower sullen and fast athwart and down the sky,
Amid a transparent clear belt of ether yet left in the east,
Ascends large and calm the lord-star Jupiter,
And nigh at hand, only a very little above,
Swim the delicate sisters the Pleiades.

From the beach the child holding the hand of her father,
Those burial clouds that lower victorious soon to devour all,
Watching, silently weeps.

Weep not, child,
Weep not, my darling,
With these kisses let me remove your tears,
The ravening clouds shall not long be victorious;
They shall not long possess the sky, they devour the stars only in apparition,
Jupiter shall emerge, be patient, watch again another night, the Pleiades shall emerge,
They are immortal, all those stars both silvery and golden shall shine out again,
The great stars and the little ones shall shine out again, they endure,
The vast immortal suns and the long-enduring pensive moons shall again shine.

Then dearest child mournest thou only for Jupiter?
Considerest thou alone the burial of the stars?

Something there is,
(With my lips soothing thee, adding I whisper,
I give thee the first suggestion, the problem and indirection,)
Something there is more immortal even than the stars,
(Many the burials, many the days and nights, passing away,)
Something that shall endure longer even than lustrous Jupiter,
Longer than sun or any revolving satellite,
Or the radiant sisters the Pleiades.

OUT OF THE CRADLE ENDLESSLY ROCKING

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,
Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond where the child leaving his bed wander'd alone, bareheaded, barefoot,
Down from the shower'd halo,
Up from the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting as if they were alive,
Out from the patches of briers and blackberries,
From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,
From your memories sad brother, from the fitful risings and fallings I heard,
From under that yellow half-moon late-risen and swollen as if with tears,
From those beginning notes of yearning and love there in the mist,
From the thousand responses of my heart never to cease,
From the myriad thence-arous'd words,
From the word stronger and more delicious than any,
From such as now they start the scene revisiting,
As a flock, twittering, rising, or overhead passing,
Borne hither, ere all eludes me, hurriedly,
A man, yet by these tears a little boy again,
Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,
I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter,
Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them,
A reminiscence sing.

Once Paumanok,
When the lilac-scent was in the air and Fifth-month grass was growing,
Up this seashore in some briers,
Two feather'd guests from Alabama, two together,
And their nest, and four light-green eggs spotted with brown,
And every day the he-bird to and fro near at hand,
And every day the she-bird crouch'd on her nest, silent, with bright eyes,
And every day I, a curious boy, never too close, never disturbing them,
Cautiously peering, absorbing, translating.

Shine! shine! shine!
Pour down your warmth, great sun!
While we bask, we two together,

Two together!
Winds blow south, or winds blow north,
Day come white, or night come black,
Home, or rivers and mountains from home,
Singing all time, minding no time,
While we two keep together.

Till of a sudden,
May-be kill'd, unknown to her mate,
One forenoon the she-bird crouch'd not on the nest,
Nor return'd that afternoon, nor the next,
Nor ever appear'd again.

And thenceforward all summer in the sound of the sea,
And at night under the full of the moon in calmer weather,
Over the hoarse surging of the sea,
Or flitting from brier to brier by day,
I saw, I heard at intervals the remaining one, the he-bird,
The solitary guest from Alabama.

Blow! blow! blow!
Blow up sea-winds along Paumanok's shore;
I wait and I wait till you blow my mate to me.

Yes, when the stars glisten'd,
All night long on the prong of a moss-scallop'd stake,
Down almost amid the slapping waves,
Sat the lone singer wonderful causing tears.

He call'd on his mate,
He pour'd forth the meanings which I of all men know.

Yes my brother I know,
The rest might not, but I have treasur'd every note,
For more than once dimly down to the beach gliding,
Silent, avoiding the moonbeams, blending myself with the shadows,
Recalling now the obscure shapes, the echoes, the sounds and sights after their sorts,

The white arms out in the breakers tirelessly tossing,
I, with bare feet, a child, the wind wafting my hair,
Listen'd long and long.

Listen'd to keep, to sing, now translating the notes,
Following you my brother.

Soothe! soothe! soothe!
Close on its wave soothes the wave behind,
And again another behind embracing and lapping, every one close,
But my love soothes not me, not me.
Low hangs the moon, it rose late,
It is lagging—O I think it is heavy with love, with love.

O madly the sea pushes upon the land,
With love, with love.

O night! do I not see my love fluttering out among the breakers?
What is that little black thing I see there in the white?

Loud! loud! loud!
Loud I call to you, my love!
High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves,
Surely you must know who is here, is here,
You must know who I am, my love.

Low-hanging moon!
What is that dusky spot in your brown yellow?
O it is the shape, the shape of my mate!
O moon do not keep her from me any longer.

Land! land! O land!
Whichever way I turn, O I think you could give me my mate back again if you only would,
For I am almost sure I see her dimly whichever way I look.

O rising stars!
Perhaps the one I want so much will rise, will rise with some of you.

O throat! O trembling throat!
Sound clearer through the atmosphere!
Pierce the woods, the earth,
Somewhere listening to catch you must be the one I want.

Shake out carols!
Solitary here, the night's carols!
Carols of lonesome love! death's carols!
Carols under that lagging, yellow, waning moon!
O under that moon where she droops almost down into the sea!
O reckless despairing carols.

But soft! sink low!
Soft, let me just murmur,
And do you wait a moment you husky-nois'd sea,
For somewhere I believe I heard my mate responding to me,
So faint, I must be still, be still to listen,
But not altogether still, for then she might not come immediately to me.

Hither my love!
Here I am! here!
With this just-sustain'd note I announce myself to you,
This gentle call is for you my love, for you.

Do not be decoy'd elsewhere,
That is the whistle of the wind, it is not my voice,
That is the fluttering, the fluttering of the spray,
Those are the shadows of leaves.
O darkness! O in vain!
O I am very sick and sorrowful.

O brown halo in the sky near the moon, drooping upon the sea!
O troubled reflection in the sea!
O throat! O throbbing heart!
And I singing uselessly, uselessly all the night.

O past! O happy life! O songs of joy!
In the air, in the woods, over fields,
Loved! loved! loved! loved! loved!
But my mate no more, no more with me!
We two together no more.

The aria sinking,
All else continuing, the stars shining,
The winds blowing, the notes of the bird continuous echoing,
With angry moans the fierce old mother incessantly moaning,
On the sands of Paumanok's shore gray and rustling,
The yellow half-moon enlarged, sagging down, drooping, the face of the sea almost touching,
The boy ecstatic, with his bare feet the waves, with his hair the atmosphere dallying,
The love in the heart long pent, now loose, now at last tumultuously bursting,
The aria's meaning, the ears, the soul, swiftly depositing,
The strange tears down the cheeks coursing,
The colloquy there, the trio, each uttering,
The undertone, the savage old mother incessantly crying,
To the boy's soul's questions sullenly timing, some drown'd secret hissing,
To the outsetting bard.

Demon or bird! (said the boy's soul,)
Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it really to me?
For I, that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping, now I have heard you,

Now in a moment I know what I am for, I awake,
And already a thousand singers, a thousand songs, clearer, louder and more sorrowful than yours,
A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, never to die.

O you singer solitary, singing by yourself, projecting me,
O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease perpetuating you,
Never more shall I escape, never more the reverberations,
Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be absent from me,
Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was before what there in the night,
By the sea under the yellow and sagging moon,
The messenger there arous'd, the fire, the sweet hell within,
The unknown want, the destiny of me.

O give me the clue! (it lurks in the night here somewhere,)
O if I am to have so much, let me have more!

A word then, (for I will conquer it,)
The word final, superior to all,
Subtle, sent up—what is it?—I listen;
Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-waves?
Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands?

Whereto answering, the sea,
Delaying not, hurrying not,
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before daybreak,
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,
And again death, death, death, death,
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd child's heart,
But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly all over,
Death, death, death, death, death.

Which I do not forget,
But fuse the song of my dusky demon and brother,
That he sang to me in the moonlight on Paumonok's gray beach,
With the thousand responsive songs at random,
My own songs awaked from that hour,
And with them the key, the word up from the waves,
The word of the sweetest song and all songs,
That strong and delicious word which, creeping to my feet,
(Or like some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed in sweet garments, bending aside,)
The sea whisper'd me.

FACING WEST FROM CALIFORNIA'S SHORES

Facing west from California's shores,
Inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound,
I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the house of maternity, the land of migrations, look afar,

Look off the shores of my Western sea, the circle almost circled;
For starting westward from Hindustan, from the vales of Kashmere,
From Asia, from the north, from the God, the sage, and the hero,
From the south, from the flowery peninsulas and the spice islands,
Long having wander'd since, round the earth having wander'd,
Now I face home again, very pleas'd and joyous,
(But where is what I started for so long ago?
And why is it yet unfound?)

WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOM'D[1]

1

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love.

2

O powerful western fallen star!
O shades of night—O moody, tearful night!
O great star disappear'd—O the black murk that hides the star!
O cruel hands that hold me powerless—O helpless soul of me!
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

3

In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the whitewash'd palings,
Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,
With every leaf a miracle—and from this bush in the dooryard,
With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
A sprig with its flower I break.

4

In the swamp in secluded recesses,
A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

Solitary the thrush,
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,
Sings by himself a song.

Song of the bleeding throat,
Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother I know,
If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely die.)

5

Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities,
Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately the violets peep'd from the ground, spotting the gray débris,

[1] This, one of the noblest elegies in the language, and the rhymed stanzas that follow on the same theme, are part of a group which Whitman entitled "Memories of President Lincoln."

Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes, passing the endless grass,
Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its shroud in the dark-brown fields uprisen,
Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the orchards,
Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,
Night and day journeys a coffin.

6

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
Through day and night with the great cloud darkening the land,
With the pomp of the inloop'd flags with the cities draped in black,
With the show of the States themselves as of crape-veil'd women standing,
With processions long and winding and the flambeaus of the night,
With the countless torches lit, with the silent sea of faces and the unbared heads,
With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the somber faces,
With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices rising strong and solemn,
With all the mournful voices of the dirges pour'd around the coffin,
The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs—where amid these you journey,
With the tolling tolling bells' perpetual clang,
Here, coffin that slowly passes,
I give you my sprig of lilac.

7

(Nor for you, for one alone,
Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,
For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for you O sane and sacred death.

All over bouquets of roses,
O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies,
But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes,
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
For you and the coffins all of you O death.)

8

O western orb sailing the heaven,
Now I know what you must have meant as a month since I walk'd,
As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,
As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me night after night,
As you droop'd from the sky low down as if to my side, (while the other stars all look'd on,)
As we wander'd together the solemn night, (for something I know not what kept me from sleep,)
As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west how full you were of woe,
As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze in the cool transparent night,
As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the netherward black of the night,
As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as where you sad orb,
Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.

9

Sing on there in the swamp,
O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear your call,
I hear, I come presently, I understand you,

But a moment I linger, for the lustrous star has detain'd me,
The star my departing comrade holds and detains me.

10

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love?

Sea-winds blown from east and west,
Blown from the Eastern sea and blown from the Western sea, till there on the prairies meeting,
These and with these and the breath of my chant,
I'll perfume the grave of him I love.

11

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
To adorn the burial-house of him I love?
Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes,
With the Fourth-month eve at sundown, and the gray smoke lucid and bright,
With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent, sinking sun, burning, expanding the air,
With the fresh sweet herbage under foot, and the pale green leaves of the trees prolific,
In the distance the flowing glaze, the breast of the river, with a wind-dapple here and there,
With ranging hills on the banks, with many a line against the sky, and shadows,
And the city at hand, with dwellings so dense, and stacks of chimneys,
And all the scenes of life and the workshops, and the workmen homeward returning.

12

Lo, body and soul—this land,
My own Manhattan with spires, and the sparkling and hurrying tides, and the ships,
The varied and ample land, the South and the North in the light, Ohio's shores and flashing Missouri,
And ever the far-spreading prairies cover'd with grass and corn.

Lo, the most excellent sun so calm and haughty,
The violet and purple morn with just-felt breezes,
The gentle soft-born measureless light,
The miracle spreading bathing all, the fulfill'd noon,
The coming eve delicious, the welcome night and the stars,
Over my cities shining all, enveloping man and land.

13

Sing on, sing on you gray-brown bird,
Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your chant from the bushes,
Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines.
Sing on dearest brother, warble your reedy song,
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.

O liquid and free and tender!
O wild and loose to my soul—O wondrous singer!
You only I hear—yet the star holds me, (but will soon depart,)
Yet the lilac with mastering odor holds me.

14

Now while I sat in the day and look'd forth,
In the close of the day with its light and the fields of spring, and the farmers preparing their crops,
In the large unconscious scenery of my land with its lakes and forests,
In the heavenly aerial beauty, (after the perturb'd winds and the storms,)
Under the arching heavens of the afternoon swift passing, and the voices of children and women,
The many-moving sea-tides, and I saw the ships how they sail'd,
And the summer approaching with richness, and the fields all busy with labor,
And the infinite separate houses, how they all went on, each with its meals and minutia of daily usages,
And the streets how their throbbings throbb'd, and the cities pent—lo, then and there,
Falling upon them all and among them all, enveloping me with the rest,
Appear'd the cloud, appear'd the long black trail,
And I knew death, its thought, and the sacred knowledge of death.

Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me,
And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,
And I in the middle as with companions, and as holding the hands of companions,
I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that talks not,
Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness,
To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly pines so still.

And the singer so shy to the rest receiv'd me,
The gray-brown bird I know receiv'd us comrades three,
And he sang the carol of death, and a verse for him I love.

From deep secluded recesses,
From the fragrant cedars and the ghostly pines so still,
Came the carol of the bird.

And the charm of the carol rapt me
As I held as if by their hands my comrades in the night,
And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird.

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.

Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.

Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.

From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments and feastings for thee,
And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.

The night in silence under many a star,
The ocean shore and the husky whispering wave whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee O vast and well-veil'd death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and the prairies wide
Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the teeming wharves and ways,
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee O death.

15

To the tally of my soul,
Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown bird,
With pure deliberate notes spreading filling the night.

Loud in the pines and cedars dim,
Clear in the freshness moist and the swamp-perfume,
And I with my comrades there in the night.

While my sight that was bound in my eyes unclosed,
As to long panoramas of visions.

And I saw askant the armies,
I saw as in noiseless dreams hundreds of battle-flags,
Borne through the smoke of the battles and pierc'd with missiles I saw them,
And carried hither and yon through the smoke, and torn and bloody,
And at last but a few shreds left on the staffs, (and all in silence,)
And the staffs all splinter'd and broken.

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,
I saw the débris and débris of all the slain soldiers of the war,
But I saw they were not as was thought,
They themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd not,
The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,
And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd,
And the armies that remain'd suffer'd.

16

Passing the visions, passing the night,
Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades' hands

Passing the song of the hermit bird and the tallying song of my soul,
Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying ever-altering song,
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling, flooding the night,
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and yet again bursting with joy,
Covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven,
As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,
Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,
I leave thee there in the dooryard, blooming, returning with spring.

I cease from my song for thee,
From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting the west, communing with thee,
O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night.

Yet each to keep and all, retrievements out of the night,
The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul,
With the lustrous and drooping star with the countenance full of woe,
With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the bird,
Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever to keep, for the dead I loved so well,
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands—and this for his dear sake,
Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.

O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
The arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

DIRGE FOR TWO VETERANS

The last sunbeam
Lightly falls from the finished Sabbath,
On the pavement here, and there beyond it is looking,
Down a new-made double grave,

Lo, the moon ascending,
Up from the east the silvery round moon,
Beautiful over the house-tops ghastly, phantom moon,
Immense and silent moon.

I see a sad procession,
And I hear the sound of coming full-key'd bugles,
All the channels of the city streets they're flooding,
As with voices and with tears.

I hear the great drums pounding,
And the small drums steady whirring,
And every blow of the great convulsive drums,
Strikes me through and through.

For the son is brought with the father,
(On the foremost ranks of the fierce assault they fell,
Two veterans son and father dropt together,
And the double grave awaits them).

Now nearer blow the bugles,
And the drums strike more convulsive,
And the daylight o'er the pavement quite has faded,
And the strong dead-march enwraps me.

In the eastern sky up-buoying,
The sorrowful vast phantom moves illumin'd,
('Tis some mother's large transparent face,
In heaven brighter growing).

O strong dead-march, you please me!
O moon immense with your silvery face, you soothe me!
O my soldiers twain! O my veterans passing to burial!
What I have I also give you.

The moon gives you light,
And the bugles and the drums give you music,
And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,
My heart gives you love.

COME UP FROM THE FIELDS, FATHER

Come up from the fields, father, here s a letter from our Pete,
And come to the front door, mother, here's a letter from thy dear son.

Lo, 'tis autumn,
Lo, where the trees, deeper green, yellower and redder,
Cool and sweeten Ohio's villages with leaves fluttering in the moderate wind,
Where apples ripe in the orchards hang and grapes on the trellis'd vines,
(Smell you the smell of the grapes on the vines?
Smell you the buckwheat where the bees were lately buzzing?)
Above all, lo, the sky so calm, so transparent after the rain, and with wondrous clouds,
Below too, all calm, all vital and beautiful, and the farm prospers well.

Down in the fields all prospers well,
But now from the fields come, father, come at the daughter's call,
And come to the entry, mother, to the front door come right away.

Fast as she can she hurries, something ominous, her steps trembling,
She does not tarry to smooth her hair nor adjust her cap.

Open the envelope quickly,
O this is not our son's writing, yet his name is sign'd,
O a strange hand writes for our dear son, O stricken mother's soul!
All swims before her eyes, flashes with black, she catches the main words only,
Sentences broken, *gunshot wound in the breast, cavalry skirmish, taken to hospital,*
At present low, but will soon be better.

Ah, now the single figure to me,
Amid all teeming and wealthy Ohio with all its cities and farms,
Sickly white in the face and dull in the head, very faint,
By the jamb of a door leans.

Grieve not so, dear mother (the just-grown daughter speaks through her sobs,
The little sisters huddle around speechless and dismay'd),
See, dearest mother, the letter says Pete will soon be better.

Alas, poor boy, he will never be better (nor maybe needs to be better, that brave and simple soul),
While they stand at home at the door he is dead already,
The only son is dead.

But the mother needs to be better,
She with thin form presently drest in black,
By day her meals untouch'd, then at night fitfully sleeping, often waking,
In the midnight waking, weeping, longing with one deep longing,
O that she might withdraw unnoticed, silent from life escape and withdraw,
To follow, to seek, to be with her dear dead son.

VIGIL STRANGE I KEPT ON THE FIELD ONE NIGHT

Vigil strange I kept on the field one night;
When you, my son and my comrade, dropt at my side that day,
One look I but gave which your dear eyes return'd with a look I shall never forget,
One touch of your hand to mine, O boy, reach'd up as you lay on the ground,

Then onward I sped in the battle, the even-contested battle,
Till late in the night reliev'd to the place at last again I made my way,
Found you in death so cold, dear comrade, found your body, son of responding kisses (never again on earth responding),
Bared your face in the starlight, curious the scene, cool blew the moderate night-wind,
Long there and then in vigil I stood, dimly around me the battle-field spreading,
Vigil wondrous and vigil sweet there in the fragrant silent night,
But not a tear fell, not even a long-drawn sigh, long, long I gazed,
Then on the earth partially reclining sat by your side leaning my chin in my hands,
Passing sweet hours, immortal and mystic hours with you, dearest comrade—not a tear, not a word,
Vigil of silence, love and death, vigil for you, my son and my soldier,
As onward silently stars aloft, eastward new ones upward stole,
Vigil final for you, brave boy (I could not save you, swift was your death,
I faithfully loved you and cared for you living, I think we shall surely meet again),
Till at latest lingering of the night, indeed just as the dawn appear'd,
My comrade I wrapt in his blanket, envelop'd well his form,
Folded the blanket well, tucking it carefully over head and carefully under feet,
And there and then and bathed by the rising sun, my son in his grave, in his rude-dug grave I deposited,
Ending my vigil strange with that, vigil of night and battlefield dim,
Vigil for boy of responding kisses (never again on earth responding),
Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget, how as day brighten'd,
I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in his blanket,
And buried him where he fell.

THE POET

(*From "By Blue Ontario's Shore"*)

I listened to the Phantom by Ontario's shore,
I heard the voice arising demanding bards,
By them all native and grand, by them alone can these States be fused into the compact organism of a Nation.

To hold men together by paper and seal or by compulsion is no account,
That only holds men together which aggregates all in a living principle, as the hold of the limbs of the body or the fibres of plants.

Of all races and eras these States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets, and are to have the greatest, and use them the greatest,
Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall.

(Soul of love and tongue of fire!
Eye to pierce the deepest deeps and sweep the world!
Ah, Mother, prolific and full in all besides, yet how long barren, barren?)

* * *

10

Of these States the poet is the equable man,
Not in him but off from him things are grotesque, eccentric, fail of their full returns,
Nothing out of its place is good, nothing in its place is bad,
He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportion, neither more nor less,
He is the arbiter of the diverse, he is the key,
He is the equaliser of his age and land,
He supplies what wants supplying, he checks what wants checking,
In peace out of him speaks the spirit of peace, large, rich, thrifty, building populous towns, encouraging agriculture, arts, commerce, lighting the study of man, the soul, health, immortality, government,
In war he is the best backer of the war, he fetches artillery as good as the engineer's, he can make every word he speaks draw blood,
The years straying toward infidelity he withholds by his steady faith,
He is no arguer, he is judgment (Nature accepts him absolutely),
He judges not as the judge judges but as the sun falling round a helpless thing,
As he sees the farthest he has the most faith,
His thoughts are the hymns of the praise of things,
In the dispute on God and eternity he is silent,
He sees eternity less like a play with a prologue and denouement,
He sees eternity in men and women, he does not see men and women as dreams or dots.

For the great Idea, the idea of perfect and free individuals,
For that, the bard walks in advance, leader of leaders,
The attitude of him cheers up slaves and horrifies foreign despots.
Without extinction is Liberty, without retrograde is Equality,
They live in the feelings of young men and the best women,
(Not for nothing have the indomitable heads of the earth been always ready to fall for Liberty).

11

For the great Idea,
That, O my brethren, that is the mission of poets.

Songs of stern defiance ever ready,
Songs of the rapid arming and the march,
The flag of peace quick-folded, and instead the flag we know,
Warlike flag of the great Idea.

(Angry cloth I saw there leaping!
I stand again in leaden rain your flapping folds saluting,
I sing you over all, flying beckoning through the fight—O the hard-contested fight!

The cannons ope their rosy-flashing muzzles—the hurtled balls scream,
The battle-front forms amid the smoke—the volleys pour incessant from the line,
Hark, the ringing word *Charge!*—now the tussle and the furious maddening yells,
Now the corpses tumble curl'd upon the ground,
Cold, cold in death, for precious life of you,
Angry cloth I saw there leaping.)

12

Are you he who would assume a place to teach or be a poet here in the States?
The place is august, the terms obdurate.

Who would assume to teach here may well prepare himself body and mind,
He may well survey, ponder, arm, fortify, harden, make lithe himself,
He shall surely be question'd beforehand by me with many and stern questions.

Who are you indeed who would talk or sing to America?
Have you studied out the land, its idioms and men?
Have you learn'd the physiology, phrenology, politics, geography, pride, freedom, friendship of the land? its substratums and objects?
Have you consider'd the organic compact of the first day of the first year of Independence, sign'd by the Commissioners, ratified by the States, and read by Washington at the head of the army?
Have you possess'd yourself of the Federal Constitution?
Do you see who have left all feudal processes and poems behind them, and assumed the poems and processes of Democracy?
Are you faithful to things? do you teach what the land and sea, the bodies of men, womanhood, amativeness, heroic angers, teach?
Have you sped through fleeting customs, popularities?
Can you hold your hand against all seductions, follies, whirls, fierce contentions? are you very strong? are you really of the whole People?
Are you not of some coterie? some school or mere religion?
Are you done with reviews and criticisms of life? animating now to life itself?
Have you vivified yourself from the maternity of these States?
Have you too the old ever-fresh forbearance and impartiality?
Do you hold the like love for those hardening to maturity? for the last-born? little and big? and for the errant?

What is this you bring my America?
Is it uniform with my country?
Is it not something that has been better told or done before?
Have you not imported this or the spirit of it in some ship?
Is it not a mere tale? a rhyme? a prettiness?—is the good old cause in it?
Has it not dangled long at the heels of the poets, politicians, literats, of enemies' lands?
Does it not assume that what is notoriously gone is still here?
Does it answer universal needs? will it improve manners?
Does it sound with trumpet-voice the proud victory of the Union in that secession war?
Can your performance face the open fields and the seaside?
Will it absorb into me as I absorb food, air, to appear again in my strength, gait, face?
Have real employments contributed to it? original makers, not mere amanuenses?
Does it meet modern discoveries, calibres, facts, face to face?
What does it mean to American persons, progresses, cities? Chicago, Kanada, Arkansas?
Does it see behind the apparent custodians the real custodians standing, menacing, silent, the mechanics, Manhattanese, Western men, Southerners, significant alike in their apathy and in the promptness of their love?

Does it see what finally befalls, and has always finally befallen, each temporiser, patcher, outsider, partialist, alarmist, infidel, who has ever ask'd anything of America?
What mocking and scornful negligence?
The track strew'd with the dust of skeletons,
By the roadside others disdainfully toss'd.

13

Rhymes and rhymers pass away, poems distill'd from poems pass away,
The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and leave ashes,
Admirers, importers, obedient persons, make but the soil of literature,
America justifies itself, give it time, no disguise can deceive it or conceal from it, it is impassive enough,
Only toward the likes of itself will it advance to meet them,
If its poets appear it will in due time advance to meet them, there is no fear of mistake,
(The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr'd till his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorb'd it).

He masters whose spirit masters, he tastes sweetest who results sweetest in the long run,
The blood of the brawn beloved of time is unconstraint;
In the need of songs, philosophy, an appropriate native grand-opera, shipcraft, any craft.
He or she is greatest who contributes the greatest original practical example.

Already a nonchalant breed, silently emerging, appears on the streets,
People's lips salute only doers, lovers, satisfiers, positive knowers,
There will shortly be no more priests, I say their work is done,
Death is without emergencies here, but life is perpetual emergencies here,
Are your body, days, manners, superb? After death you shall be superb,
Justice, health, self-esteem, clear the way with irresistible power;
How dare you place anything before a man?

14

Fall behind me States!
A man before all—myself, typical, before all.

Give me the pay I have served for,
Give me to sing the songs of the great Idea, take all the rest,
I have loved the earth, sun, animals, I have despised riches,
I have given alms to every one that ask'd, stood up for the stupid and crazy, devoted my income and labor to others,
Hated tyrants, argued not concerning God, had patience and indulgence toward the people, taken off my hat to nothing known or unknown,
Gone freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young, and with the mothers of families,
Read these leaves to myself in the open air, tried them by trees, stars, rivers,
Dismiss'd whatever insulted my own soul or defiled my body,
Claim'd nothing to myself which I have not carefully claim'd for others on the same terms,

Sped to the camps, and comrades found and accepted from every State,
(Upon this breast has many a dying soldier lean'd to breathe his last,
This arm, this hand, this voice, have nourish'd, rais'd, restored,
To life recalling many a prostrate form);
I am willing to wait to be understood by the growth of the taste of myself,
Rejecting none, permitting all.

(Say, O Mother, have I not to your thought been faithful?
Have I not through life kept you and yours before me?)

15

I swear I begin to see the meaning of these things,
It is not the earth, it is not America who is so great,
It is I who am great or to be great, it is You up there, or any one,
It is to walk rapidly through civilisations, governments, theories,
Through poems, pageants, shows, to form individuals.

Underneath all, individuals,
I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores individuals,
The American compact is altogether with individuals,
The only government is that which makes minute of individuals,
The whole theory of the universe is directed unerringly to one single individual—
namely to You.

(Mother! with subtle sense severe, with the naked sword in your hand,
I saw you at last refuse to treat but directly with individuals.)

16

Underneath all, Nativity,
I swear I will stand by my own nativity, pious or impious so be it;
I swear I am charm'd with nothing except nativity,
Men, women, cities, nations, are only beautiful from nativity.

Underneath all is the Expression of love for men and women,
(I swear I have seen enough of mean and impotent modes of expressing love for men and women,
After this day I take my own modes of expressing love for men and women).

I swear I will have each quality of my race in myself,
(Talk as you like, he only suits these States whose manners favor the audacity and sublime turbulence of the States).

Underneath the lessons of things, spirits, Nature, governments, ownerships, I swear I perceive other lessons,
Underneath all to me is myself, to you yourself (the same monotonous old song).

17

O I see flashing that this America is only you and me,
Its power, weapons, testimony, are you and me,
Its crimes, lies, thefts, defections, are you and me,
Its Congress is you and me, the officers, capitols, armies, ships, are you and me,
Its endless gestations of new States are you and me,

The war (that war so bloody and grim, the war I will henceforth forget), was you and me,
Natural and artificial are you and me,
Freedom, language, poems, employments, are you and me,
Past, present, future, are you and me.

I dare not shirk any part of myself,
Not any part of America good or bad,
Not to build for that which builds for mankind,
Not to balance ranks, complexions, creeds, and the sexes,
Not to justify science nor the march of equality,
Nor to feed the arrogant blood of the brawn belov'd of time.

I am for those that have never been master'd,
For men and women whose tempers have never been master'd,
For those whom laws, theories, conventions, can never master.

I am for those who walk abreast with the whole earth,
Who inaugurate one to inaugurate all.

I will not be outfaced by irrational things,
I will penetrate what it is in them that is sarcastic upon me,
I will make cities and civilisations defer to me,
This is what I have learnt from America—it is the amount, and it I teach again.

GIVE ME THE SPLENDID SILENT SUN

Give me the splendid silent sun with all his beams full-dazzling,
Give me juicy autumnal fruit ripe and red from the orchard,
Give me a field where the unmowed grass grows,
Give me an arbor, give me the trellised grape,
Give me fresh corn and wheat, give me serene-moving animals teaching content,
Give me nights perfectly quiet as on high plateaus west of the Mississippi, and I looking up at the stars,
Give me odorous at sunrise a garden of beautiful flowers where I can walk undisturbed,
Give me for marriage a sweet-breathed woman of whom I should never tire,
Give me a perfect child, give me, away aside from the noise of the world, a rural domestic life,
Give me to warble spontaneous songs recluse by myself, for my own ears only,
Give me solitude, give me Nature, give me again O Nature your primal sanities!
These demanding to have them, (tired with ceaseless excitement, and racked by the war-strife)
These to procure incessantly asking, rising in cries from my heart.
While yet incessantly asking still I adhere to my city,
Day upon day and year upon year, O city, walking your streets,
Where you hold me enchained a certain time refusing to give me up,
Yet giving to make me glutted, enriched of soul, you give me forever faces;
(O I see what I sought to escape, confronting, reversing my cries,
I see my own soul trampling down what it asked for.)

Keep your splendid silent sun,
Keep your woods, O Nature, and the quiet places by the woods,
Keep your fields of clover and timothy, and your cornfields and orchards,
Keep the blossoming buckwheat fields where the Ninth-month bees hum;
Give me faces and streets—give me these phantoms incessant and endless along the trottoirs!
Give me interminable eyes—give me women—give me comrades and lovers by the thousand!
Let me see new ones every day—let me hold new ones by the hand every day!
Give me such shows—give me the streets of Manhattan!
Give me Broadway, with the soldiers marching—give me the sound of the trumpets and drums!
(The soldiers in companies or regiments—some starting away flushed and reckless,
Some, their time up, returning with thinned ranks, young, yet very old, worn, marching, noticing nothing;)
Give me the shores and wharves heavy-fringed with black ships!
O such for me! O an intense life, full of repletion and varied!
The life of the theatre, bar-room, huge hotel, for me!
The saloon of the steamer! The crowded excursion for me! The torchlight procession!
The dense brigade bound for the war, with high-piled military wagons following;
People, endless, streaming, with strong voices, passions, pageants,
Manhattan streets with their powerful throbs, with beating drums as now,
The endless and noisy chorus, the rustle and clank of muskets (even the sight of the wounded),
Manhattan crowds, with their turbulent musical chorus!
Manhattan faces and eyes forever for me.

TO A LOCOMOTIVE IN WINTER

Thee for my recitative,
Thee in the driving storm even as now, the snow, the winter-day declining,
Thee in thy panoply, thy measur'd dual throbbing and thy beat convulsive,
Thy black cylindric body, golden brass and silvery steel,
Thy ponderous side-bars, parallel and connecting rods, gyrating, shuttling at thy sides,
Thy metrical, now swelling pant and roar, now tapering in the distance,
Thy great protruding head-light fix'd in front,
Thy long, pale, floating vapor-pennants, tinged with delicate purple,
The dense and murky clouds out-belching from thy smokestack,
Thy knitted frame, thy springs and valves, the tremulous twinkle of thy wheels,
Thy train of cars behind, obedient, merrily following,
Through gale or calm, now swift, now slack, yet steadily careering;
Type of the modern—emblem of motion and power—pulse of the continent
For once come serve the Muse and merge in verse, even as here I see thee,
With storm and buffeting gusts of wind and falling snow,
By day thy warning ringing bell to sound its notes,
By night thy silent signal lamps to swing.

Fierce-throated beauty!
Roll through my chant with all thy lawless music, thy swinging lamps at night,

Thy madly-whistled laughter, echoing, rumbling like an earthquake, rousing all,
Law of thyself complete, thine own track firmly holding,
(No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano thine,)
Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return'd,
Launch'd o'er the prairies wide, across the lakes,
To the free skies unpent and glad and strong.

THIS COMPOST

1

Something startles me where I thought I was safest,
I withdraw from the still woods I loved,
I will not go now on the pastures to walk,
I will not strip the clothes from my body to meet my lover the sea,
I will not touch my flesh to the earth as to other flesh to renew me.

O how can it be that the ground itself does not sicken?
How can you be alive you growths of spring?
How can you furnish health you blood of herbs, roots, orchards, grain?
Are they not continually putting distemper'd corpses within you?
Is not every continent work'd over and over with sour dead?

Where have you disposed of their carcasses?
Those drunkards and gluttons of so many generations?
Where have you drawn off all the foul liquid and meat?
I do not see any of it upon you to-day, or perhaps I am deceiv'd,
I will run a furrow with my plough, I will press my spade through the sod and turn it up underneath,
I am sure I shall expose some of the foul meat.

2

Behold this compost! behold it well!
Perhaps every mite has once form'd part of a sick person—yet behold!
The grass of spring covers the prairies,
The bean bursts noiselessly through the mould in the garden,
The delicate spear of the onion pierces upward,
The apple-buds cluster together on the apple-branches,
The resurrection of the wheat appears with pale visage out of its graves,
The tinge awakes over the willow-tree and the mulberry-tree,
The he-birds carol mornings and evenings while the she-birds sit on their nests,
The young of poultry break through the hatch'd eggs,
The new-born of animals appear, the calf is dropt from the cow, the colt from the mare,
Out of its little hill faithfully rise the potato's dark green leaves,
Out of its hill rises the yellow maize-stalk, the lilacs bloom in the dooryards,
The summer growth is innocent and disdainful above all those strata of sour dead.

What chemistry!
That the winds are really not infectious,
That this is no cheat, this transparent green-wash of the sea which is so amorous after me,
That it is safe to allow it to lick my naked body all over with its tongues,

That it will not endanger me with the fevers that have deposited themselves in it,
That all is clean forever and forever,
That the cool drink from the well tastes so good,
That blackberries are so flavorous and juicy,
That the fruits of the apple-orchard and the orange-orchard, that melons, grapes, peaches, plums, will none of them poison me,
That when I recline on the grass I do not catch any disease,
Though probably every spear of grass rises out of what was once a catching disease.

Now I am terrified at the Earth, it is that calm and patient,
It grows such sweet things out of such corruptions,
It turns harmless and stainless on its axis, with such endless successions of diseas'd corpses,
It distills such exquisite winds out of such infused fetor,
It renews with such unwitting looks its prodigal, annual, sumptuous crops,
It gives such divine materials to men, and accepts such leavings from them at last.

AFTER THE SUPPER AND TALK

After the supper and talk—after the day is done,
As a friend from friends his final withdrawal prolonging,
Good-bye and Good-bye with emotional lips repeating,
(So hard for his hand to release those hands—no more will they meet,
No more for communion of sorrow and joy, of old and young,
A far-stretching journey awaits him, to return no more,)
Shunning, postponing severance—seeking to ward off the last word ever so little,
E'en at the exit-door turning—charges superfluous calling back—e'en as he descends the steps,
Something to eke out a minute additional—shadows of nightfall deepening,
Farewells, messages lessening—dimmer the forthgoer's visage and form,
Soon to be lost for aye in the darkness—loth, O so loth to depart!
Garrulous to the very last.

THE LAST INVOCATION

At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerful fortress'd house,
From the clasp of the knitted locks, from the keep of the well-closed doors,
Let me be wafted.

Let me glide noiselessly forth;
With the key of softness unlock the locks—with a whisper.
Set ope the doors O soul.

Tenderly—be not impatient,
(Strong is your hold O mortal flesh.
Strong is your hold O love.)

THE UNTOLD WANT

The untold want by life and land ne'er granted,

JOY, SHIPMATE, JOY

Joy, shipmate, joy!
(Pleas'd to my soul at death I cry,)
Our life is closed, our life begins,
The long, long anchorage we leave,
The ship is clear at last, she leaps!
She swiftly courses from the shore,
Joy, shipmate, joy.

Emily Dickinson

EMILY (ELIZABETH [1]) DICKINSON was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, December 10, 1830. Her life was, except for a circumstance which has caused much speculation and a controversy among her biographers, bare of outward event. She died in the house in which she was born; after she was twenty-six she rarely left it. Her childhood had the ordinary uneventful events common to other children in Amherst which at that time was so remote that, only a few years before, her mother's dower had been brought to the town by a team of oxen. Her family was not quite like other families; it was a distillation of all that was New England, a synthesis and refinement of its reticence and high thinking. A contemporary, Samuel G. Ward, commented shrewdly, "We came to this country to think our own thoughts with nobody to hinder. We conversed with our own souls till we lost the art of communicating with other people. . . . It was awfully high but awfully lonesome. . . . If the gift of articulateness was not denied, you had Channing, Emerson, Hawthorne, a stupendous example, and many others. Mostly, it was denied, and became a family fate. This is where Emily Dickinson comes in. She was the articulate inarticulate."

Emily Dickinson's father, Edward Dickinson, was a lawyer who was nominated for the office of Lieutenant Governor (which he declined) and one of the town's most influential men. Emily adored him. In the *Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson* Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Emily's niece, quotes her as saying, "If father is asleep on the sofa the house is full." At sixteen she formed a close friendship with a girl who visited Amherst and later married her brother Austin (the "sister Sue" of *The Single Hound*) and who disputed with Lavinia the belated honor of being Emily's confidante. At seventeen Emily entered South Hadley Female Seminary, disliked it intensely, grew homesick, rebelled at the extremities of its Puritanism and, on one occasion, packed her bags and took the stage home. From eighteen to twenty-three she was, according to her first biographer, "a social creature in the highest sense."

When she was twenty-three she spent some weeks in Washington with her father who was in Congress for two terms. On the return to Amherst Emily visited in Philadelphia and met the Reverend Charles Wadsworth—a meeting which, according to one of her biographers, determined not only the course of her life but the

[1] Often given as "Norcross," which was not her middle name, but her sister Lavinia's.

character of her poetry. As late as 1929 Mme. Bianchi (Sue's daughter) wrote, "Even now, after the many slow years she has been removed from us in the body, her spirit hinders the baring of that chapter which has been so universally misunderstood." Nothing could have done more to further the misunderstanding; it provoked speculation, inspired the very gossip it purported to evade, and placed the emphasis on a puzzle rather than on the poetry.

But this was part of a posthumous wrangle from which Emily Dickinson was mercifully spared. The known facts are these: After 1856 she immured herself in the family mansion. She was rarely seen even in the house except as a figure vanishing ghostily down a corridor; she loved music, but refused to come in the parlor where it was played, and remained seated, out of view, in the hall. She developed certain idiosyncrasies: was an indefatigable letter-writer but had a congenital prejudice against addressing her notes and got others to do this for her; invariably dressed in white, but refused to be "fitted," her sister performing this task for her; sent perennial roots and cookies with cryptic lines to neighbors and even to children, and became, in short, the village oddity. She died of Bright's disease, May 15, 1886, in her fifty-sixth year.

Thus the flat physical data of the woman. The poet made her appearance only after her death. During her lifetime four of her poems had been published—through no desire of her own. She never cared to see her emotions in print; "she habitually concealed her mind, like her person, from all but a very few friends," wrote Higginson. Even more deeply than Heine she might have cried, *"Aus meinen grossen Schmerzen mach ich die kleinen Lieder"*—and these brief, almost telegraphic revelations tucked away in boxes and hidden in bureau drawers have outlasted the more pretentious writing of a century. After Emily's death her executors were amazed at the amount of material which she had left. More than twelve hundred poems were unearthed, of which many are still unpublished. "Sister Sue" had written a tribute to Emily in the town paper, but it was upon Lavinia that the burden fell. Lavinia assumed it. She knew her limitations, but she knew, or at least surmised, the greatness of which she was guardian. She called upon her friends Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Mrs. Todd began to copy the poems, and not only to copy but to edit them, for Emily usually appended a list of alternative words, and it was Mrs. Todd who had to decide which word should appear as Emily's choice. In November, 1890, the first volume of the *Poems of Emily Dickinson* appeared with an introduction by Thomas Wentworth Higginson. It has been supposed that these spontaneous illuminations, so different from the politely prepared verse of the day, fell on barren ground. The opposite is true. Though there were many scoffers and parodists, critics were not slow to see the essential quality—a Blake-like purity combined with a most un-Puritan pertness—readers responded, and six editions were printed in as many weeks. A year later *Poems of Emily Dickinson—Second Series (1891)* appeared, again edited by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. In 1893 the first *Letters of Emily Dickinson* was edited by Mrs. Todd, incorporated by Mme. Bianchi in her later volume, and revised and enlarged in 1931, the original two volumes being an invaluable mine of source material. In 1896 Mrs. Todd alone was responsible for *Poems—Third Series.*

The public taste changed; for thirty years little was heard of Emily Dickinson; her *Letters* went out of print, the publishers thought so little of them that they did not even renew the copyright. The "authorities" contained only slighting references to her or none at all. One of the encyclopedias (*The New International*) decided that her lyrics were "striking, but deficient in form"; the *Britannica,* as late as 1926, failed to mention her name except as a cross-reference, omitting her entirely in the Index.

In 1914 Mme. Bianchi prepared a further volume, *The Single Hound,* but, though the reception was cordial, it was by no means overwhelming. An occasional article appeared, showing the poet's "lack of control" or, beneath a cover of condescension, ridiculing her "hit-or-miss grammar, sterile rhythms, and appalling rhymes." A devotee here and there defended the quaint charm of her use of assonance and half-rhyming vowels. Her audience grew, but gradually. Suddenly, in 1924, Emily Dickinson became a figure of international importance. Almost forty years after her death her name became a poetic shibboleth when in one year there were published Martha Dickinson Bianchi's *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson,* the first collected *Complete Poems* (a misnomer as it turned out to be), and the first English compilation, *Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson,* edited with a penetrating preface by Conrad Aiken.

The enthusiasm attending the triple appearance was unprecedented. Martin Armstrong, the English poet, said, "Mr. Aiken calls Emily Dickinson's poetry 'perhaps the finest by a woman in the English language.' I quarrel only with his 'perhaps.'" Nor were other plaudits less vociferous. "A feminine Blake," "an epigrammatic Walt Whitman," "a New England mystic," were a few of the characterizations fastened upon her. Other appraisals sought to "interpret" her involved but seldom obscure verses in the light of the "mystery" of her life. But "The Amherst Nun" would have repudiated the amateur psychoanalyst as vigorously as she, whose verses and letters brim with mischievous fancy, would have laughed at their epithets.

In 1929 there was published another generous collection of "undiscovered" or "withheld" poems, *Further Poems of Emily Dickinson,* edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson. There were one hundred and seventy-six hitherto unpublished pieces, and their clear beauty as well as mysterious appearance, all too vaguely explained, caused something of a furore. The excitement increased in 1930, the centenary of Emily Dickinson's birth. A new volume, *Unpublished Poems by Emily Dickinson,* appeared toward the end of 1935.

Three widely differing biographies were published in the year of Emily Dickinson's centenary. The mysterious event which caused her to keep herself immured was variously detailed and disputed. *Emily Dickinson: The Human Background* (1930) by Josephine Pollitt identified the man who prompted the love poems and her proud withdrawal from the world as Edward Hunt, husband of the author, Helen Hunt (Jackson), one of Emily Dickinson's few close friends. This theory was used as the basis of a drama, *Brittle Heaven,* by Frederick J. Pohl and Vincent York (1934). A more theatrical but less literary work than this was Susan Glaspell's *Alison's House,* a play, based on the posthumous publication of the poems, which won the Pulitzer Prize for the drama in 1931. Another play, *Eastward in Eden*

by Dorothy Gardner, produced in 1947, revolved about Emily's frustrated love for Dr. Charles Wadsworth. *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson* (1930) by the poet, Genevieve Taggard, discovered a secret lover in George Gould of Amherst College, and disclosed a romance which this biographer maintains was shattered by Emily's patriarchal and harshly possessive father. MacGregor Jenkins' *Emily Dickinson: Friend and Neighbor* (1930) added nothing but confusing childhood memories. The confusion was increased by Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Emily's niece, the only daughter of her brother Austin. In *Emily Dickinson Face to Face* (1932) Mrs. Bianchi told a vague story of an abortive love affair with an anonymous married clergyman, of Emily's refusal to destroy another woman's happiness, her sudden flight home, the pursuit of her nameless lover, of a melodramatic scene in Amherst, and Emily's final abnegation.

It remained for George Frisbie Whicher to establish the facts in *This Was a Poet: Emily Dickinson* (1938). In his critical biography Whicher cut through the obscurities of speculation. He rescued Emily Dickinson from the Freudian father-complex and disposed of the incongruous lovers once and for all. In the chapter "Rowing in Eden" Whicher told the whole story of Emily Dickinson's meeting with the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, of her admiration for his preaching, and her growing infatuation with the man. His letters of spiritual counsel were translated by Emily into symbols of an agonizing and almost unbearable intimacy. She brooded upon them until she thought herself dedicated to him. Her love poems say it over and over with unalterable insistence.

For more than half a century after her death, and from time to time, hitherto unpublished poems were unearthed. In 1945 two important books were published by Millicent Todd Bingham, daughter of Mabel Loomis Todd, Emily Dickinson's first editor. One, *Ancestors' Brocades,* presented a bitterly controversial picture of the Dickinson background, an account of the poet's literary "debut" and the drama which followed it, culminating in a feud among the editors, dark recriminations, and a family law suit. The other, *Bolts of Melody,* contained more than 650 poems, many of which appeared for the first time and were ranked among the poet's richest and most characteristic work.

The two new volumes re-emphasized the compressed power of Emily Dickinson's achievement and her admirers' claim that she was among the world's original geniuses. Added to the now familiar lines the newly published poems stressed the extraordinary union of intellectual reticence and emotional flamboyance. They were a rebuke to the sprawling rhetoric of her contemporaries and a strict example to her followers. Although most of the books about Emily Dickinson are accounts of the embattled family, the poet ignored the gossip and continued to put down her tart and provocative images on the backs of newspaper clippings, on margins of newspapers, on brown paper bags and, more economically and more often, on the insides of envelopes. "My wars," she wrote, "are laid away in books."

A French translation (*Choix de Poémes,* 1945) by Felix Ansermoz-Dubois carried an introduction which called attention to the poet's intoxication with words. "She hesitated before them, filling her margins with variants, was tormented to see them ever go forth on their far missions." The seal of genius, that unmistakable insignia, is on everything she wrote. Here is that unmistakable idiom, playful yet

profound; here are the rapid ascent of images and the sudden swoop of immensities, the keen epithet that cuts to the deepest layer of consciousness, and the paradox on whose point innumerable angels dance. She is Blake one moment, Vaughan the next, then Jonathan Edwards, and herself all the time. Emotion, idea, and words are not marshaled in their usual order; they spring simultaneously, inevitably, one including the other. Here is the effect—never the affectation—of emotion and its enveloping phrase.

More fully than her biographers Emily Dickinson told the secret of her love, her first rebellious impulse, her inner denial, her resignation, her assured waiting for reunion in Eternity. There is little to add except meaningless names and irrelevant street numbers.

I took one draught of life,
I'll tell you what I paid,
Precisely an existence—
The market-price, they said.

They weighed me dust by dust,
They balanced film with film,
Then handed me my being's worth—
A single dram of Heaven.

The poetry of Emily Dickinson courts criticism and defies it. (An interesting discussion of her syntactical peculiarities, *A Study of Unusual Verb Constructions in the Poems of Emily Dickinson* by Grace B. Sherrer, may be found in the quarterly *American Literature* for March, 1935.) That her verses were sometimes erratic, half-done, and thrown off in the heat of creation is self-evident. But, in the great majority of her poems, the leap of thought is so daring, the idea so provocative, that passages which, in a smaller spirit, would be merely pretty or audacious conceits become snatches of revelation. Is it a flippancy or an anguished cry when, robbed by Life, she stands "a beggar before the door of God," and confronts Him with "Burglar, banker, father!" Is it anything less than Olympian satire when, asking God to accept "the supreme iniquity," she declares:

We apologize to Thee
For Thine own duplicity.

Beauty, Love, Justice—these were no abstractions to her, but entities, weights and measures, which the architect had failed to use perfectly. She sought the Builder not to commend but to question Him. Emily argued, upbraided, accused Creation; she recognized an angel only when she wrestled with him. Paradox was her native element.

Her gnomic imagery was tremendous in implication, and her range is far greater than a first reading reveals. Although the poet often indulged herself by retreating into a style cryptic and wayward, her tiny quatrains are lavish with huge ideas and almost overpowering figures. She speaks of music as "the silver strife"; she sees the railway train "lap the miles and lick the valleys up"; she speaks ironically of splitting the lark to find the music "bulb after bulb in silver rolled"; she pictures the thunder crumbling "like a stuff" while the lightning "skipped like mice"; she glimpses

evening as "the house-wife in the west" sweeping the sunset "with many colored brooms"; she asks "who laid the rainbow piers." Pondering on the power of words, she meditates:

> Could mortal lip divine
> The undeveloped freight
> Of a delivered syllable,
> 'Twould crumble with the weight.

Her lightest phrases bear the accent of finality. Without striving to be clever she achieves one startling epigram after another; no poet ever existed with a more aphoristic mind. "Denial is the only fact received by the denied." "At leisure is the soul that gets a staggering blow." "Renunciation is the choosing against itself." "Longing is like the seed that wrestles in the ground."

Her letters, sometimes marred with affectations, have an unpredictable way of turning about their subject; they combine the impish with the mystical; they announce tremendous things in an offhand tone of voice. Few definitions of poetry give us the sense of poetry as sharply as her informal:

"If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know it is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know this is poetry. These are the only ways I know it."

Are there no reservations? In the midst of her telegraphic concisions—all sparks and flashes—does one never miss the long line, the sustained breath? She lived in metaphor, and the terse luxuriance of her figures—the impulse to point every adjective—has had an unhappy effect on most of her admirers, an effect of pretty artifice. Worse still is her habit of acting coy among the immensities. She is overfond of playing the spoiled, "old-fashioned, naughty child"—a little girl who sits in the lap of Deity and tweaks His beard and asks God coyly to lift her over the stile, an imperious child for whose success guns should be fired at sea, for a glimpse of whom saints should run to windows and seraphs swing their snowy hats. The impulse to pirouette before the mirror of her soul has already had its result in hundreds of young "female poets" (Griswold's phrase) who, lacking their model's intensities, have succeeded only in being verbally arresting and "cute."

A critical appraisal does not have to be a condemnatory one, but it must steer a course between the early ridicule and the present unreserved adulation. The undoubted charm does not necessarily extend to errors in grammar, nor does the taut, uncanny rightness of her epithets disguise her frequent failure to differentiate between inspiration and whim. Can one, need one, applaud all the eccentricities, the familiarities, the pertnesses? Banter may be refreshing, but is archness with God always delightful? And what is one to say of that more reprehensible spinsterly failing, archness to children?

And yet it is a tough and poetry-resisting soul which does not eventually succumb to her rhetoric, irregularities and all. Her vivacity covers self-consciousness and carries off her contradictions. Her swift condensations—surpassed by no writer of any age—win the most reluctant. One gasps at the way she packs huge ideas into an explosive quatrain (a living poet has called her verse "uncombusted meteors") fascinated by an utterance so paradoxical, so seemingly naïve, so actually metaphysical. She may annoy us with her self-indulgent waywardness, but illumination is never far off;

out of a smooth, even sentimental sky, comes a crackling telegram from God and, tucked in a phrase, the "imperial thunderbolt that scalps your naked soul."

The obvious defects and quaint irregularities have been accepted; they even have a charm of their own. The brilliance of her imagery blinds us to her overfrequent coyness and the overstressed self-pity which could allow the poet to call herself "Empress of Calvary." The consistency of her imperfections is, in itself, a kind of perfection. Her personal magic—a kind of super-observation—lives in such phrases as a dog's "belated feet, like intermittent plush," a humming bird whose flight is "a route of evanescence, a resonance of emerald," an engine "neighing like Boanerges," a mushroom whose whole career "is shorter than a snake's delay," the wind "tapping like a tired man."

What else, then, matters? Whatever the provocation, all that remains is the poetry. The much-sought but still unknown inspirer of the love poems may have been Wadsworth or Gould or Hunt—or Legion—but it is not he who is immortalized in her book; it is Emily. Though there are evocations of the vanished lover, we are never made to see him, hear him, realize his being, whereas we have (in the same poems) a complete projection of Emily, her heart, soul, and housekeeping, her books, birds, and influences, her bodily postures, tricks of thought, even her way of crossing the room and reading a letter.

Denied a public, even of one, Emily perfected her imperfections in secret. Lacking the partner, she played her game with herself. Yet, when all the biographies are considered, the most successful game was the one she played on the world: a solitary recluse who had the world in her garden; an escapist who summoned infinity with the trick of a forefinger. It is doubtful if, in spite of her isolation, there was ever a less lonely woman. She who contained a universe did not need the world.

The work of deciphering and editing the Emily Dickinson manuscripts has been notoriously haphazard. There is need for a complete and scholarly edition of the poems and letters. No less should be done for a major poet who was also the greatest woman poet who ever wrote in English.

I TASTE A LIQUOR NEVER BREWED

I taste a liquor never brewed,
From tankards scooped in pearl;
Not all the vats upon the Rhine
Yield such an alcohol!

Inebriate of air am I,
And debauchee of dew,
Reeling, through endless summer days,
From inns of molten blue.

When landlords turn the drunken bee
Out of the foxglove's door,
When butterflies renounce their drams,
I shall but drink the more!

Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,
And saints to windows run,
To see the little tippler
Leaning against the sun!

A BIRD CAME DOWN THE WALK

A bird came down the walk:
He did not know I saw;
He bit an angle-worm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw.

And then he drank a dew
From a convenient grass,
And then hopped sidewise to the wall
To let a beetle pass.

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all abroad,—
They looked like frightened beads, I thought
He stirred his velvet head

Like one in danger; cautious,
I offered him a crumb,
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home

Than oars divide the ocean,
Too silver for a seam,
Or butterflies, off banks of noon,
Leap, plashless, as they swim.

ELYSIUM IS AS FAR

Elysium is as far as to
The very nearest room,
If in that room a friend await
Felicity or doom.

What fortitude the soul contains,
That it can so endure
The accent of a coming foot,
The opening of a door.

I NEVER SAW A MOOR

I never saw a moor,
I never saw the sea;
Yet know I how the heather looks,
And what a wave must be.

I never spoke with God,
Nor visited in Heaven;
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the chart were given.

I NEVER LOST AS MUCH

I never lost as much but twice,
And that was in the sod;
Twice have I stood a beggar
Before the door of God!

Angels, twice descending,
Reimbursed my store.
Burglar, banker, father,
I am poor once more!

INDIAN SUMMER

These are the days when birds come back,
A very few, a bird or two,
To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies put on
The old, old sophistries of June,—
A blue and gold mistake.

Oh, fraud that cannot cheat the bee,
Almost thy plausibility
Induces my belief,

Till ranks of seeds their witness bear,
And softly through the altered air
Hurries a timid leaf!

Oh, sacrament of summer days,
Oh, last communion in the haze,
Permit a child to join,

Thy sacred emblems to partake,
Thy consecrated bread to break,
Taste thine immortal wine!

I DIED FOR BEAUTY

I died for beauty, but was scarce
Adjusted in the tomb,
When one who died for truth was lain
In an adjoining room.

He questioned softly why I failed?
"For beauty," I replied.
"And I for truth,—the two are one;
We brethren are," he said.

And so, as kinsmen met a night,
We talked between the rooms,
Until the moss had reached our lips
And covered up our names.

THE SKY IS LOW

The sky is low, the clouds are mean,
A traveling flake of snow
Across a barn or through a rut
Debates if it will go.

A narrow wind complains all day
How someone treated him.
Nature, like us, is sometimes caught
Without her diadem.

MYSTERIES

The murmur of a bee
A witchcraft yieldeth me.
If any ask me why,
'Twere easier to die
Than tell.

The red upon the hill
Taketh away my will;
If anybody sneer,
Take care, for God is here,
That's all.

The breaking of the day
Addeth to my degree;
If any ask me how,
Artist, who drew me so,
Must tell!

I LIKE TO SEE IT LAP THE MILES

I like to see it lap the miles,
And lick the valleys up,
And stop to feed itself at tanks;
And then, prodigious, step

Around a pile of mountains,
And, supercilious, peer
In shanties by the sides of roads;
And then a quarry pare

To fit its sides, and crawl between,
Complaining all the while
In horrid, hooting stanza;
Then chase itself down hill

And neigh like Boanerges;
Then, punctual as a star,
Stop—docile and omnipotent—
At its own stable door.

THE SOUL SELECTS

The soul selects her own society,
Then shuts the door;
On her divine majority
Obtrude no more.

Unmoved, she notes the chariots pausing
At her low gate;
Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling
Upon her mat.

I've known her from an ample nation
Choose one;
Then close the valves of her attention
Like stone.

MY LIFE CLOSED TWICE BEFORE ITS CLOSE

My life closed twice before its close;
It yet remains to see
If Immortality unveil
A third event to me,

So huge, so hopeless to conceive,
As these that twice befell.
Parting is all we know of heaven,
And all we need of hell.

THE HEART ASKS PLEASURE FIRST

The heart asks pleasure first;
And then, excuse from pain;
And then, those little anodynes
That deaden suffering;

And then, to go to sleep;
And then, if it should be
The will of its Inquisitor,
The liberty to die.

I CANNOT LIVE WITH YOU

I cannot live with you.
It would be life,
And life is over there
Behind the shelf

The sexton keeps the key to,
Putting up
Our life, his porcelain,
Like a cup

Discarded of the housewife,
Quaint or broken;
A newer Sèvres pleases,
Old ones crack.

I could not die with you,
For one must wait
To shut the other's gaze down,
You could not.

And I, could I stand by
And see you freeze,
Without my right of frost,
Death's privilege?

Nor could I rise with you,
Because your face
Would put out Jesus',
That new grace

Grow plain and foreign
On my homesick eye,
Except that you, than he
Shone closer by.

They'd judge us—how?
For you served Heaven, you know,
Or sought to;
I could not,

Because you saturated sight,
And I had no more eyes
For sordid excellence
As Paradise.

And were you lost, I would be,
Though my name
Rang loudest
On the heavenly fame.

And were you saved,
And I condemned to be
Where you were not,
That self were hell to me.

So we must keep apart,
You there, I here,
With just the door ajar
That oceans are,
And prayer,
And that pale sustenance,
Despair!

OF COURSE I PRAYED

Of course I prayed—
And did God care?
He cared as much as
On the air
A bird had stamped her foot
And cried "Give me!"

My reason, life,
I had not had, but for yourself.
'Twere better charity
To leave me in the atom's tomb,
Merry and nought and gay and numb,
Than this smart misery.

THERE IS NO FRIGATE LIKE A BOOK

There is no frigate like a book
  To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers like a page
  Of prancing poetry.
This traverse may the poorest take
  Without oppress of toll;
How frugal is the chariot
  That bears a human soul!

I HAD BEEN HUNGRY ALL THE YEARS

I had been hungry all the years;
My noon had come to dine;
I, trembling, drew the table near,
And touched the curious wine.

'Twas this on tables I had seen,
When turning, hungry, lone,
I looked in windows, for the wealth
I could not hope to own.

I did not know the ample bread;
'Twas so unlike the crumb
The birds and I had often shared
In Nature's dining-room.

The plenty hurt me, 'twas so new,—
Myself felt ill and odd,
As berry of a mountain bush
Transplanted to the road.

Nor was I hungry; so I found
That hunger was a way
Of persons outside windows,
The entering takes away.

I HEARD A FLY BUZZ WHEN I DIED

I heard a fly buzz when I died;
The stillness round my form
Was like the stillness in the air
Between the heaves of storm.

The eyes beside had wrung them dry,
And breaths were gathering sure
For that last onset, when the king
Be witnessed in his power.

I willed my keepsakes, signed away
What portion of me I
Could make assignable,—and then
There interposed a fly,

With blue, uncertain, stumbling buzz,
Between the light and me;
And then the windows failed, and then
I could not see to see.

THERE'S A CERTAIN SLANT OF LIGHT

There's a certain slant of light,
On winter afternoons,
That oppresses, like the weight
Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us;
We can find no scar,
But internal difference
Where the meanings are.

None may teach it anything,
'Tis the seal, despair,—
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the air.

When it comes, the landscape listens,
Shadows hold their breath;
When it goes, 'tis like the distance
On the look of death.

I MEASURE EVERY GRIEF I MEET

I measure every grief I meet
With analytic eyes;
I wonder if it weighs like mine,
Or has an easier size.

I wonder if they bore it long,
Or did it just begin?
I could not tell the date of mine,
It feels so old a pain.

I wonder if it hurts to live,
And if they have to try,
And whether, could they choose between,
They would not rather die.

I wonder if when years have piled—
Some thousands—on the cause
Of early hurt, if such a lapse
Could give them any pause;

Or would they go on aching still
Through centuries above,
Enlightened to a larger pain
By contrast with the love.

The grieved are many, I am told;
The reason deeper lies,—
Death is but one and comes but once,
And only nails the eyes.

There's grief of want, and grief of cold,—
A sort they call "despair";
There's banishment from native eyes,
In sight of native air.

And though I may not guess the kind
Correctly, yet to me
A piercing comfort it affords
In passing Calvary,

To note the fashions of the cross,
Of those that stand alone,
Still fascinated to presume
That some are like my own.

THE BRAIN IS WIDER THAN THE SKY

The brain is wider than the sky,
For, put them side by side,

The one the other will include
With ease, and you beside.

The brain is deeper than the sea,
For, hold them, blue to blue,
The one the other will absorb,
As sponges, buckets do.

The brain is just the weight of God,
For, lift them, pound for pound,
And they will differ, if they do,
As syllable from sound.

BRING ME THE SUNSET IN A CUP

Bring me the sunset in a cup,
Reckon the morning's flagons up,
And say how many dew;
Tell me how far the morning leaps,
Tell me what time the weaver sleeps
Who spun the breadths of blue!

Write me how many notes there be
In the new robin's ecstasy
Among astonished boughs;
How many trips the tortoise makes,
How many cups the bee partakes,—
The debauchee of dews!

Also, who laid the rainbow's piers,
Also, who leads the docile spheres
By withes of supple blue?
Whose fingers string the stalactite,
Who counts the wampum of the night,
To see that none is due?

Who built this little Alban house
And shut the windows down so close
My spirit cannot see?
Who'll let me out some gala day,
With implements to fly away,
Passing pomposity?

THE TINT I CANNOT TAKE IS BEST

The tint I cannot take is best,
The color too remote
That I could show it in bazaar
A guinea at a sight—
The fine impalpable array
That swaggers on the eye
Like Cleopatra's company
Repeated in the sky—

The moments of dominion
That happen on the Soul
And leave it with a discontent
Too exquisite to tell—

The eager look on landscapes
As if they just repressed
Some secret that was pushing,
Like chariots, in the breast—

The pleading of the Summer,
That other prank of snow
That covers mystery with tulle
For fear the squirrels know—

Their graspless manners mock us,
Until the cheated eye
Shuts arrogantly in the grave,
Another way to see.

I DREADED THAT FIRST ROBIN SO

I dreaded that first robin so,
But he is mastered now,
And I'm accustomed to him grown,—
He hurts a little, though.

I thought if I could only live
Till that first shout got by,
Not all pianos in the woods
Had power to mangle me.

I dared not meet the daffodils,
For fear their yellow gown
Would pierce me with a fashion
So foreign to my own.

I wished the grass would hurry,
So when 'twas time to see,
He'd be too tall, the tallest one
Could stretch to look at me.

I could not bear the bees should come,
I wished they'd stay away
In those dim countries where they go:
What word had they for me?

They're here, though; not a creature failed,
No blossom stayed away
In gentle deference to me,
The Queen of Calvary.

Each one salutes me as he goes,
And I my childish plumes
Lift, in bereaved acknowledgment
Of their unthinking drums.

AFTER GREAT PAIN A FORMAL FEELING COMES

After great pain a formal feeling comes—
The nerves sit ceremonious like tombs;
The stiff heart questions—was it He that bore?
And yesterday—or centuries before?

The feet mechanical go round
A wooden way,
Of ground or air of Ought,
Regardless grown;
A quartz contentment like a stone.

This is the hour of lead
Remembered if outlived
As freezing persons recollect
The snow—
First chill, then stupor, then
The letting go.

A CEMETERY

This quiet Dust was Gentlemen and Ladies,
And Lads and Girls;
Was laughter and ability and sighing,
And frocks and curls.

This passive place a Summer's nimble mansion,
Where Bloom and Bees
Fulfilled their Oriental Circuit,
Then ceased like these.

AMPLE MAKE THIS BED

Ample make this bed,
Make this bed with awe;
In it wait till judgment break
Excellent and fair.
Be its mattress straight,
Be its pillow round;
Let no sunrise' yellow noise
Interrupt this ground.

ALTHOUGH I PUT AWAY HIS LIFE

Although I put away his life,
An ornament too grand
For forehead low as mine to wear,
This might have been the hand

That sowed the flowers he preferred,
Or smoothed a homely pain,
Or pushed a pebble from his path,
Or played his chosen tune

On lute the least, the latest,
But just his ear could know
That whatsoe'er delighted it
I never would let go.

The foot to bear his errand
A little boot I know
Would leap abroad like antelope
With just the grant to do.

His weariest commandment
A sweeter to obey
Than "Hide and Seek," or skip to flutes,
Or all day chase the bee.

Your servant, Sir, will weary,
The surgeon will not come,
The world will have its own to do,
The dust will vex your fame.

The cold will force your tightest door
Some February day,
But say my apron bring the sticks
To make your cottage gay,

That I may take that promise
To Paradise with me—
To teach the angels avarice
Your kiss first taught to me!

THE WORLD FEELS DUSTY

The world feels dusty
When we stop to die;
We want the dew then,
Honors taste dry.

Flags vex a dying face,
But the least fan
Stirred by a friend's hand
Cools like the rain.

Mine be the ministry
When thy thirst comes,
Dews of thyself to fetch
And holy balms.

LIGHTLY STEPPED A YELLOW STAR

Lightly stepped a yellow star
To its lofty place,
Loosed the Moon her silver hat
From her lustral face.
All of evening softly lit
As an astral hall—
"Father," I observed to Heaven,
"You are punctual!"

GO NOT TOO NEAR A HOUSE OF ROSE

Go not too near a house of rose,
The depredation of a breeze
Or inundation of a dew
Alarm its walls away;
Nor try to tie the butterfly;
Nor climb the bars of ecstasy.
In insecurity to lie
Is joy's insuring quality.

I RECKON, WHEN I COUNT AT ALL

I reckon, when I count at all,
First Poets—then the Sun—
Then Summer—then the Heaven of God—
And then the list is done.
But looking back—the first so seems
To comprehend the whole—
The others look a needless show,
So I write Poets—All.
Their summer lasts a solid year,
They can afford a sun
The East would deem extravagant,
And if the final Heaven
Be beautiful as they disclose
To those who trust in them,
It is too difficult a grace
To justify the dream.

BECAUSE THAT YOU ARE GOING

Because that you are going
And never coming back
And I, however absolute
May overlook your track

Because that breath is final,
However first it be
This instant be suspended
Above Mortality.

Significance that each has lived
The other to detect
Discovery not God himself
Could now annihilate.

Eternity, Presumption
The instant I perceive
That you, who were existence
Yourself forgot to live.

The "Life that is" will then have been
A thing I never knew,
As Paradise fictitious
Until the Realm of you.

The "Life that is to be," to me
A Residence too plain
Unless in my Redeemer's Face
I recognize your own.

Of Immortality who doubts
He may exchange with me
Curtailed by your obscuring Face
Of Everything but He.

Of Heaven and Hell I also yield
The Right to reprehend
To whoso would commute this Face
For his less priceless Friend.

If "God is Love" as he admits
We think that he must be
Because he is a "jealous God"
He tells as certainly.

If "all is possible with him"
As he besides concedes,
He will refund as finally
Our confiscated Gods.

WHAT SOFT, CHERUBIC CREATURES

What soft, cherubic creatures
  These gentlewomen are!
One would as soon assault a plush
  Or violate a star.

Such dimity convictions,
  A horror so refined
Of freckled human nature,
  Of Deity ashamed,—

It's such a common glory,
  A fisherman's degree!
Redemption, brittle lady,
  Be so ashamed of thee.

BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labor, and my leisure too,
For his civility.

We passed the school where children played,
Their lessons scarcely done;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.

We paused before a house that seemed
A swelling on the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries; but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

THE MOUNTAINS GROW UNNOTICED

The mountains grow unnoticed,
Their purple figures rise
Without attempt, exhaustion,
Assistance or applause.

In their eternal faces
The sun with broad delight
Looks long—and last—and golden
For fellowship at night.

TRUTH IS AS OLD AS GOD

Truth is as old as God,
His twin identity—
And will endure as long as He,
A co-eternity,
And perish on the day
That He is borne away
From mansion of the universe,
A lifeless Deity.

THE RETURN

Though I get home how late, how late!
So I get home, 't will compensate.
Better will be the ecstasy
That they have done expecting me,
When, night descending, dumb and dark,
They hear my unexpected knock.
Transporting must the moment be,
Brewed from decades of agony!

To think just how the fire will burn,
Just how long-cheated eyes will turn
To wonder what myself will say,
And what itself will say to me,
Beguiles the centuries of way!

SUCCESS IS COUNTED SWEETEST

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple host
Who took the flag to-day
Can tell the definition,
So clear, of victory,

As he, defeated, dying,
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Break, agonized and clear.

THE LONELY HOUSE

I know some lonely houses off the road
A robber'd like the look of,—
Wooden barred,
And windows hanging low,
Inviting to
A portico,
Where two could creep:
One hand the tools,
The other peep
To make sure all's asleep.
Old-fashioned eyes,
Not easy to surprise!

How orderly the kitchen'd look by night,
With just a clock,—
But they could gag the tick,
And mice won't bark;
And so the walls don't tell,
None will.

A pair of spectacles ajar just stir—
An almanac's aware.
Was it the mat winked,
Or a nervous star?
The moon slides down the stair
To see who's there.

There's plunder,—where?
Tankard, or spoon,
Earring, or stone,
A watch, some ancient brooch
To match the grandmamma,
Staid sleeping there.

Day rattles, too,
Stealth's slow;
The sun has got as far
As the third sycamore.
Screams chanticleer,

"Who's there?"
And echoes, trains away,
Sneer—"Where?"
While the old couple, just astir,
Fancy the sunrise left the door ajar!

PAIN HAS AN ELEMENT OF BLANK

Pain has an element of blank;
It cannot recollect
When it began, or if there were
A day when it was not.

It has no future but itself,
Its infinite realms contain
Its past, enlightened to perceive
New periods of pain.

RENUNCIATION

There came a day at summer's full
Entirely for me;
I thought that such were for the saints,
Where revelations be.

The sun, as common, went abroad,
The flowers, accustomed, blew,
As if no soul the solstice passed
That maketh all things new.

The time was scarce profaned by speech;
The symbol of a word
Was needless, as at sacrament
The wardrobe of our Lord.

Each was to each the sealed church,
Permitted to commune this time,
Lest we too awkward show
At supper of the Lamb.

The hours slid fast, as hours will,
Clutched tight by greedy hands;
So faces on two decks look back,
Bound to opposing lands.

And so, when all the time had failed,
Without external sound,
Each bound the other's crucifix,
We gave no other bond.

Sufficient troth that we shall rise—
Deposed, at length, the grave—
To that new marriage, justified
Through Calvaries of Love!

SOME KEEP THE SABBATH GOING TO CHURCH

Some keep the Sabbath going to church;
I keep it staying at home,
With a bobolink for a chorister,
And an orchard for a dome.

Some keep the Sabbath in surplice;
I just wear my wings,
And instead of tolling the bell for church,
Our little sexton sings.

God preaches,—a noted clergyman,—
And the sermon is never long;
So instead of getting to heaven at last,
I'm going all along!

PURPLE CLOVER

There is a flower that bees prefer,
And butterflies desire;
To gain the purple democrat
The humming-birds aspire.

And whatsoever insect pass,
A honey bears away
Proportioned to his several dearth
And her capacity.

Her face is rounder than the moon,
And ruddier than the gown
Of orchis in the pasture,
Or rhododendron worn.

THE BEE

Like trains of cars on tracks of plush
I hear the level bee:
A jar across the flowers goes,
Their velvet masonry

Withstands until the sweet assault
Their chivalry consumes,
While he, victorious, tilts away
To vanquish other blooms.

His feet are shod with gauze,
His helmet is of gold;
His breast, a single onyx
With chrysoprase, inlaid.

His labor is a chant,
His idleness a tune;
Oh, for a bee's experience
Of clovers and of noon!

HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

THE WIND TAPPED LIKE A TIRED MAN

The wind tapped like a tired man,
And like a host, "Come in,"
I boldly answered; entered then
My residence within

A rapid, footless guest,
To offer whom a chair
Were as impossible as hand
A sofa to the air.

No bone had he to bind him,
His speech was like the push
Of numerous humming-birds at once
From a superior bush.

His countenance a billow
His fingers, if he pass,
Let go a music, as of tunes
Blown tremulous in glass.

He visited, still flitting,
Then, like a timid man,
Again he tapped—'twas flurriedly—
And I became alone.

AT HALF-PAST THREE A SINGLE BIRD

At half-past three a single bird
Unto a silent sky
Propounded but a single term
Of cautious melody.

At half-past four, experiment
Had subjugated test,
And lo! her silver principle
Supplanted all the rest.

At half-past seven, element
Nor implement was seen,
And place was where the presence was,
Circumference between.

CALLED BACK

Just lost when I was saved!
Just felt the world go by!
Just girt me for the onset with eternity,
When breath blew back,
And on the other side
I heard recede the disappointed tide!

Therefore, as one returned, I feel,
Odd secrets of the line to tell!
Some sailor, skirting foreign shores,
Some pale reporter from the awful doors
Before the seal!

Next time, to stay!
Next time, the things to see
By ear unheard,
Unscrutinized by eye.

Next time, to tarry,
While the ages steal,—
Slow tramp the centuries,
And the cycles wheel.

Edwin Markham

EDWIN MARKHAM was born in Oregon City, Oregon, April 23, 1852, the youngest son of pioneer parents. His father died before he reached his fifth year and in 1857 he was taken by his mother to a wild valley in the Suisun Hills in central California. Here he grew to young manhood: farming, broncho-riding, laboring on a cattle ranch, educating himself in the primitive country schools. At eighteen he determined to be a teacher and entered the State Normal School at San José.

Since childhood, Markham had been writing verses of no extraordinary merit, one of his earliest pieces being a Byronic echo (*A Dream of Chaos*) full of the high-sounding fustian of the period. Several years before he uttered his famous challenge, Markham was writing poems of protest, insurrectionary in theme but conventional in effect. Suddenly, in 1899, a sense of outrage at the inequality of human struggle voiced itself in the sonorous poem, "The Man with the Hoe." Inspired by Millet's painting, Markham made the bowed, broken French peasant a symbol of the poverty-stricken toiler in all lands—his was a protest not against toil but the exploitation of labor. "The Yeoman is the landed and well-to-do farmer," says Markham, "you need shed no tears for him. But here in the Millet picture is his opposite—the Hoeman; the landless workman of the world."

The success of the poem upon its appearance in the San Francisco *Examiner* (January 15, 1899) was instantaneous. The lines appeared in every part of the globe; they were quoted and copied in every walk of life, in the literary and the labor world. The same year of its publication, it was incorporated in Markham's first volume, *The Man with the Hoe and Other Poems* (1899). Two years later, his almost equally well known poem was published. The same passion that fired Markham to champion the great common workers equipped him to write of the great Commoner in *Lincoln, and Other Poems* (1901). His later volumes are a descent, melodious but scarcely remarkable. They have the rhetoric without the resonance of the forerunners. Never reaching the heights, there are, nevertheless, moments of dignity in *The Shoes of Happiness* (1914), *The Gates of Paradise* (1920), and *New Poems: Eighty Songs at Eighty* (1932), published with a nice appropriateness on the poet's eightieth birthday. Many of the quatrains are memorable epigrams.

Markham came East in 1901 and made his home on Staten Island, New York, until death in his eighty-eighth year. His life spanned the continent; born near one ocean, he died facing the other on March 7, 1940.

OUTWITTED

He drew a circle that shut me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!

THE MAN WITH THE HOE[1]

(Written after seeing Millet's world-famous painting)

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world.
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?
Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?
Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?

Is this the Thing the Lord God made and gave
To have dominion over sea and land;
To trace the stars and search the heavens for power;
To feel the passion of Eternity?
Is this the dream He dreamed who shaped the suns
And marked their ways upon the ancient deep?
Down all the caverns of Hell to their last gulf
There is no shape more terrible than this—
More tongued with censure of the world's blind greed—
More filled with signs and portents for the soul—
More packt with danger to the universe.

What gulfs between him and the seraphim!
Slave of the wheel of labor, what to him
Are Plato and the swing of Pleiades?
What the long reaches of the peaks of song,
The rift of dawn, the reddening of the rose?
Through this dread shape the suffering ages look;
Time's tragedy is in that aching stoop;
Through this dread shape humanity betrayed,
Plundered, profaned, and disinherited,
Cries protest to the Judges of the World,
A protest that is also prophecy.

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
Is this the handiwork you give to God,
This monstrous thing distorted and soul-quenched?
How will you ever straighten up this shape;
Touch it again with immortality;
Give back the upward looking and the light;
Rebuild in it the music and the dream;
Make right the immemorial infamies,
Perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes?

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
How will the Future reckon with this man?

[1] Revised version, 1920. Copyright by Edwin Markham.

How answer his brute question in that hour
When whirlwinds of rebellion shake all shores?
How will it be with kingdoms and with kings—
With those who shaped him to the thing he is—
When this dumb terror shall rise to judge the world,
After the silence of the centuries?

THE AVENGERS

The laws are the secret avengers,
  And they rule above all lands;
They come on wool-soft sandals,
  But they strike with iron hands.

PREPAREDNESS

For all your days prepare,
  And meet them ever alike:
When you are the anvil, bear—
  When you are the hammer, strike.

LINCOLN, THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE

When the Norn Mother saw the Whirlwind Hour
Greatening and darkening as it hurried on,
She left the Heaven of Heroes and came down
To make a man to meet the mortal need.
She took the tried clay of the common road—
Clay warm yet with the genial heat of earth,
Dasht through it all a strain of prophecy;
Tempered the heap with thrill of human tears;
Then mixt a laughter with the serious stuff.
Into the shape she breathed a flame to light
That tender, tragic, ever-changing face;
And laid on him a sense of the Mystic Powers,
Moving—all husht—behind the mortal veil.
Here was a man to hold against the world,
A man to match the mountains and the sea.

The color of the ground was in him, the red earth;
The smack and tang of elemental things:
The rectitude and patience of the cliff;
The good-will of the rain that loves all leaves;
The friendly welcome of the wayside well;
The courage of the bird that dares the sea;
The gladness of the wind that shakes the corn;
The pity of the snow that hides all scars;
The secrecy of streams that make their way
Under the mountain to the rifted rock;
The tolerance and equity of light
That gives as freely to the shrinking flower
As to the great oak flaring to the wind—
To the grave's low hill as to the Matterhorn
That shoulders out the sky. Sprung from the West,
He drank the valorous youth of a new world.
The strength of virgin forests braced his mind,
The hush of spacious prairies stilled his soul.

His words were oaks in acorns; and his thoughts
Were roots that firmly gript the granite truth.

Up from log cabin to the Capitol,
One fire was on his spirit, one resolve—
To send the keen ax to the root of wrong,
Clearing a free way for the feet of God,
The eyes of conscience testing every stroke,
To make his deed the measure of a man.
He built the rail-pile as he built the State,
Pouring his splendid strength through every blow:
The grip that swung the ax in Illinois
Was on the pen that set a people free.

So came the Captain with the mighty heart.
And when the judgment thunders split the house,
Wrenching the rafters from their ancient rest,
He held the ridgepole up, and spiked again
The rafters of the Home. He held his place—
Held the long purpose like a growing tree—
Held on through blame and faltered not at praise.
And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down
As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.

Lizette Woodworth Reese

LIZETTE WOODWORTH REESE was born January 9, 1856, in Waverly, Baltimore County, Maryland, of mixed English and German stock. After receiving an education chiefly in private schools she taught English at the Western High School in Baltimore, where she lived. After many years of service, she retired in 1921. In 1923, the alumni of the High School where she had taught for a score of years, together with the teachers and pupils, presented the school with a bronze tablet inscribed with her poem, "Tears," one of the most famous sonnets written by an American.

At first glance, Miss Reese's work seems merely a continuation of the traditional strain; some of her critics decried her poetry as being English rather than American. But it was natural that her verse should sound a note which has been the dominant one in English pastoral poetry from Wordsworth to Housman. Nor was Miss Reese's inheritance alone responsible for this. The country around Baltimore, every tree and path of which Miss Reese knew intimately, was settled by the English and had the shape and color of counties like Sussex and Buckinghamshire.

Miss Reese's first book, *A Branch of May* (1887), had an undercurrent of intensity beneath its quiet contours. Few of its readers in the Nineties would have dreamed that this straightforward undidactic speech would pave the way for the direct songs of Sara Teasdale and Edna St. Vincent Millay. In a period of sugared sentiment and

lace valentine lyrics, Miss Reese's crisp lines were a generation ahead of the times and were consequently appreciated only for their pictorial if somewhat prim felicities. *A Handful of Lavender* (1891), *A Quiet Road* (1896), and *A Wayside Lute* (1909) established an artistry which, for all its seemingly old-fashioned elegance, is as spontaneous as it is skillful. Here are no verbal tricks, no false postures; here is a simple record which is, somehow, never banal. "This poetry of hers," writes Mary Colum, "will persist, not because the author was cleverer or more original than other writers, but because in some way her nerves were more subtle in response to the kinds of life and experiences that came her way."

From 1909 to 1920 there was a silence. During these ten years, Miss Reese wrote little, and published less. Suddenly her work appeared again, more concise than ever. *Spicewood* was published in 1920; *Wild Cherry* in 1923; a generous *Selected Poems* in 1926; *Little Henrietta* in 1927, the poet's seventy-second year; *A Victorian Village,* her reminiscences of a changing world, in 1929.

White April (1930) and *Pastures* (1933), published in the poet's seventy-eighth year, are as fresh as anything she wrote in her youth. The limitations are obvious, but they are the limitations which marked her from the beginning: a preoccupation with the surprise of spring, the inevitable changes of love, the unchanging heart of nature. Individual poems make romance out of the commonplace, juxtaposing the minute with the momentous, and, while the poems lack singularity, the verve is unmistakable.

These volumes, like the earlier ones, reveal the qualities which influenced a generation of women poets. In her late seventies, writing like a young girl, the poet sings of lilacs in Old York Lane, of thorn trees and blackberry rain, of Judas-blossoms and daffodils, of spring ecstasy and lost love, of a dead lady in her garden, and Mary at the manger. But there is always something personal, always something which makes the very repetitions take on a light which is fresh and clear. At least a dozen of her brief songs and lyrical sonnets have found a niche in American literature. Hers is a singing that is not dependent on a fashion.

Lizette Reese died, after a brief illness a few weeks before her eightieth birthday, December 17, 1935.

TEARS

When I consider Life and its few years—
A wisp of fog betwixt us and the sun;
A call to battle, and the battle done
Ere the last echo dies within our ears;
A rose choked in the grass; an hour of fears;
The gusts that past a darkening shore do beat;
The burst of music down an unlistening street,—
I wonder at the idleness of tears.

Ye old, old dead, and ye of yesternight,
Chieftains, and bards, and keepers of the sheep,
By every cup of sorrow that you had,
Loose me from tears, and make me see aright
How each hath back what once he stayed to weep:
Homer his sight, David his little lad!

SPICEWOOD

The spicewood burns along the gray, spent sky,
In moist unchimneyed places, in a wind,
That whips it all before, and all behind,
Into one thick, rude flame, now low, now high.
It is the first, the homeliest thing of all—
At sight of it, that lad that by it fares,
Whistles afresh his foolish, town-caught airs—
A thing so honey-colored and so tall!

It is as though the young Year, ere he pass
To the white riot of the cherry tree,
Would fain accustom us, or here, or there,
To his new sudden ways with bough and grass,
So starts with what is humble, plain to see,
And all familiar as a cup, a chair.

SPRING ECSTASY

Oh, let me run and hide,
  Let me run straight to God;
The weather is so mad with white
  From sky down to the clod!

If but one thing were so,
  Lilac, or thorn out there,
It would not be, indeed,
  So hard to bear.

The weather has gone mad with white;
  The cloud, the highway touch.
White lilac is enough;
  White thorn too much!

OWNERSHIP

Love not a loveliness too much,
For it may turn and clutch you so,
That you be less than any serf,
And at its nodding go.

Be master; otherwise you grow
Too small, too humble, like to one
Long dispossessed, who stares through tears
At his lost house across the sun.

Wild carrot in an old field here,
Or steeple choked with music there,
Possess, as part of what is yours;
Thus prove yourself the heir.

Your barony is sky and land,
From morning's start to the night's close
Bend to your need Orion's hounds,
Or the small fagot of a rose.

A PURITAN LADY

Wild Carthage held her, Rome,
  Sidon. She stared to tears
Tall, golden Helen, wearying
  Behind the Trojan spears.

Towered Antwerp knew her well;
  She wore her quiet gown
In some hushed house in Oxford grass
  Or lane in Salem town.

Humble and high in one,
  Cool, certain, different,
She lasts; scarce saint, yet half a child,
  As hard, as innocent.

What grave, long afternoons,
  What caged airs round her blown,
Stripped her of humor, left her bare
  As cloud, or wayside stone?

Made her as clear a thing,
  In this slack world as plain
As a white flower on a grave,
  Or sleet sharp at a pane?

A FLOWER OF MULLEIN

I am too near, too clear a thing for you,
A flower of mullein in a crack of wall,
The villagers half-see, or not at all;
Part of the weather, like the wind or dew.
You love to pluck the different, and find
Stuff for your joy in cloudy loveliness;
You love to fumble at a door, and guess
At some strange happening that may wait behind.
Yet life is full of tricks, and it is plain,
That men drift back to some worn field or roof,
To grip at comfort in a room, a stair;
To warm themselves at some flower down a lane:
You, too, may long, grown tired of the aloof,
For the sweet surety of the common air.

MIRACLE

Who is in love with loveliness,
  Need not shake with cold;
For he may tear a star in two,
  And frock himself in gold.

Who holds her first within his heart,
  In certain favor goes;
If his roof tumbles, he may find
  Harbor in a rose.

WILD CHERRY

Why make your lodging here in this spent lane,
Where but an old man, with his sheep each day,
Twice through the forgotten grass goes by your way,
Half sees you there, and not once looks again?
For you are of the very ribs of spring,
And should have many lovers, who have none.
In silver cloaks, in hushed troops down the sun
Should they draw near, oh, strange and lovely thing!
Beauty has no set weather, no sure place;
Her careful pageantries are here as there,
With nothing lost. And soon, some lad may start—
A strayed Mayer in this unremembered space—
At your tall white, and know you very fair,
Let all else go to roof within your heart.

OLD SAUL

I cannot think of any word
To make it plain to you,
How white a thing the hawthorn bush
That delicately blew

Within a crook of Tinges Lane;
Each May Day there it stood;
And lit a flame of loveliness
For the small neighborhood.

So fragile-white a thing it was,
I cannot make it plain.
Or the sweet fumbling of the bees,
Like the break in a rain.

Old Saul lived near. And this his life:—
To cobble for his bread;
To mourn a tall son lost at sea;
A daughter worse than dead.

And so, in place of all his lack,
He set the hawthorn-tree;
Made it his wealth, his mirth, his god,
His Zion to touch and see.

Born English he. Down Tinges Lane
His lad's years came and went,
He saw out there behind his thorn,
A hundred thorns of Kent.

At lovers slipping through the dusk,
He shook a lover's head;
Grudged them each flower. It was too white
For any but the dead.

Once on a blurred, wet, silver day,
He said to two or three:
"Folks, when I go, pluck yonder bloom,
That I may take with me."

But it was winter when he went,
The road wind-wrenched and torn;
They laid upon his coffin lid
A wreath made all of thorn.

WOMEN

Some women herd such little things—a box
Oval and glossy, in its gilt and red,
Or squares of satin, or a high, dark bed—
But when love comes, they drive to it all their flocks;
Yield up their crooks; take little; gain for fold
And pasture each a small, forgotten grave.
When they are gone, then lesser women crave
And squander their sad hoards; their shepherds' gold.

Some gather life like faggots in a wood,
And crouch its blaze, without a thought at all
Past warming their pinched selves to the last spark.
And women as a whole are swift and good,
In humor scarce, their measure being small;
They plunge and leap, yet somehow miss the dark.

SURETY

How do I know that you will come again?
I judge you by imperishable things
Like crab-trees rosy as the cloaks of kings,
That twice a year blow down the same tall lane.
I dare the silence in the house, each place
Without you, as a stalk of leaf, the wrong
The neighbors do you in their talk, the song
Beaten out of bells, and dusk, and a great space.
Nothing can tear the spring from out the year,
Or love from out the heart. Both hands have I
Filled with crab-bloom November as in May.
Is bloom to bough than you to me more dear?
Has the old trick of flowering been put by?
You will come back, you will come back and stay.

George Santayana

GEORGE SANTAYANA was born in Madrid, Spain, December 16, 1863, came to the United States at the age of nine, and was educated at Harvard, where later he became instructor of philosophy the same year he received his Ph.D. This was in 1889. From 1889 to 1912 he remained at Harvard, becoming not merely one of the most noted professors in the history of the University, but one of the most notable minds in America. In 1914, he went abroad and lived in France, England, and chiefly in Italy, where he died, September 26, 1952.

Santayana's first work was in verse, *Sonnets and Poems* (1894). It is a wise seriousness which is here proclaimed, although the idiom is as traditional as the figures are orthodox. *The Sense of Beauty* (1896), and *The Life of Reason* (1905), a study of the phases of human progress in five volumes, received far more attention than Santayana's verse. In the interval he achieved fame as a philosopher, and it was with an almost apologetic air that Santayana prefaced his collected *Poems* which, after a process of revision, appeared in 1923. "Of impassioned tenderness or Dionysiac frenzy I have nothing, nor even of that magic and pregnancy of phrase—really the creation of a fresh idiom—which marks the high lights of poetry. Even if my temperament had been naturally warmer, the fact that the English language (and I can write no other with assurance) was not my mother-tongue would of itself preclude any inspired use of it on my part; its roots do not quite reach to my center. I never drank in in childhood the homely cadences and ditties which in pure spontaneous poetry set the essential key."

Yet, as Santayana himself maintained later on, the thoughts which prompted his verses could not have been transcribed in any other form. If the prosody is worn somewhat thin, it is because the poet-philosopher chose the classic mold in the belief that the innate freedom of poets to hazard new forms does not abolish the freedom to attempt the old ones. The moralizing is personal, even the rhetoric is justified. "Here is the hand of an apprentice, but of an apprentice in a great school."

The tradition has, even in these experimental days, its defenders. One of the most persuasive of them, Robert Hillyer, writes, "In the shrewd, though perhaps too deprecatory, preface to his *Collected Poems,* George Santayana builds up the case for what is sometimes called the rhetorical style. He affirms the validity of the traditional, even the conventional, mode—not to the exclusion of more experimental patterns but as equally defensible with the newer forms. Such is his statement; his implication is clearly in favor of tradition. 'To say that what was good once is good no longer is to give too much importance to chronology. Esthetic fashions may change, losing as much beauty at one end as they gain at the other, but innate taste continues to recognize its affinities, however remote, and need never change.' His poetry shows both the virtues and the defects inherent in such standards. Some of the sonnets are among the finest in the language.

"Mr. Santayana's output in verse has not been large. Besides the sonnets and odes, he composed an epic drama, *Lucifer,* which deserves study for the frequent magnificence of its style and the intricacy of its thought. But for the common reader, the sonnets will be most easily acceptable. Many modern readers are as dogmatic in their rejection of the traditional style as professors are supposed to be in their rejection of the new. But if our ears and minds are not wholly closed to dignity and sumptuousness of phrasing, we shall not hesitate to place Mr. Santayana's sequence among the greatest in our literature."

Not even the most casual appraisal of Santayana's contribution to the period can be complete without a tribute to his prose. At seventy-two he made his début as novelist with *The Last Puritan* (1936). The quality of Santayana's thinking is heightened by his style, a style which is both firm and flexible, the gift of one of the unquestionable masters of English prose.

AS IN THE MIDST OF BATTLE THERE IS ROOM

As in the midst of battle there is room
For thoughts of love, and in foul sin for mirth;
As gossips whisper of a trinket's worth
Spied by the death-bed's flickering candle-gloom;
As in the crevices of Caesar's tomb
The sweet herbs flourish on a little earth:
So in this great disaster of our birth
We can be happy, and forget our doom.
For morning, with a ray of tenderest joy
Gilding the iron heaven, hides the truth,
And evening gently woos us to employ
Our grief in idle catches. Such is youth;
Till from that summer's trance we wake, to find
Despair before us, vanity behind.

AFTER GRAY VIGILS, SUNSHINE IN THE HEART

After gray vigils, sunshine in the heart;
After long fasting on the journey, food;
After sharp thirst, a draught of perfect good
To flood the soul, and heal her ancient smart.
Joy of my sorrow, never can we part;
Thou broodest o'er me in the haunted wood,
And with new music fill'st the solitude
By but so sweetly being what thou art.
He who hath made thee perfect, makes me blest.
O fiery minister, on mighty wings
Bear me, great love, to mine eternal rest.
Heaven it is to be at peace with things;
Come chaos now, and in a whirlwind's rings
Engulf the planets. I have seen the best.

ON THE DEATH OF A METAPHYSICIAN

Unhappy dreamer, who outwinged in flight
The pleasant region of the things I love,
And soared beyond the sunshine, and above
The golden cornfields and the dear and bright
Warmth of the hearth,—blasphemer of delight,
Was your proud bosom not at peace with Jove,
That you sought, thankless for his guarded grove,
The empty horror of abysmal night?

Ah, the thin air is cold above the moon!
I stood and saw you fall, befooled in death,
As, in your numbèd spirit's fatal swoon,
You cried you were a god, or were to be;
I heard with feeble moan your boastful breath
Bubble from depths of the Icarian sea.

THE RUSTIC AT THE PLAY

Our youth is like a rustic at the play
That cries aloud in simple-hearted fear,
Curses the villain, shudders at the fray,
And weeps before the maiden's wreathèd bier.
Yet once familiar with the changeful show,
He starts no longer at a brandished knife,
But, his heart chastened at the sight of woe,
Ponders the mirrored sorrows of his life.
So tutored too, I watch the moving art
Of all this magic and impassioned pain
That tells the story of the human heart
In a false instance, such as poets feign;
I smile, and keep within the parchment furled
That prompts the passions of this strutting world.

O WORLD, THOU CHOOSEST NOT THE BETTER PART

O world, thou choosest not the better part!
It is not wisdom to be only wise,
And on the inward vision close the eyes,
But it is wisdom to believe the heart.
Columbus found a world, and had no chart
Save one that faith deciphered in the skies;
To trust the soul's invincible surmise
Was all his science and his only art.
Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine
That lights the pathway but one step ahead
Across a void of mystery and dread.
Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine
By which alone the mortal heart is led
Unto the thinking of the thought divine.

Edwin Arlington Robinson

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON was born December 22, 1869, in the village of Head Tide, Maine. When he was still a child, the Robinson family moved to the near-by town of Gardiner, which figures in Robinson's poetry as "Tilbury Town." In 1891 he entered Harvard College, but left in 1893. A little collection of verse (*The Torrent and the Night Before*) was privately printed in 1896 and the following year much of it was incorporated with other work in *The Children of the Night* (1897), a first volume which contains some of Robinson's most quoted verse.

In New York, unable to support himself by writing, Robinson struggled against drink and other difficulties. Five years passed before *Captain Craig* (1902) was published. This narrative, recalling Browning's method, increased Robinson's audience, and his work was brought to the attention of Theodore Roosevelt (then President of the United States), who became interested in the half-starved poet trying to earn a living as a time-checker in the New York Subway. In 1904, President Roosevelt offered him a clerkship in the New York Custom House. Robinson held this position from 1905 to 1910, leaving it the same year which marked the appearance of his volume, *The Town Down the River*. Robinson's three books, up to this time, showed his clean, firmly drawn quality, but, in spite of their excellences, they seem little more than a succession of preludes for the dynamic volume that was to establish him in the first rank of American poets. *The Man Against the Sky*, in many ways Robinson's fullest and most penetrating work, appeared in 1916. This was followed by *The Three Taverns* (1920), a less arresting but equally concentrated, many voiced collection of poems.

In all these books there is manifest a searching for the light beyond illusion. But Robinson's transcendentalism is no mere emotional escape; his temper subjects the slightest phrase to critical analysis, his intuitions are supported—or scrutinized—by a vigorous intellectuality. Purely as a psychological portrait painter, Robinson has

given American literature an entire gallery of memorable figures: Richard Cory, who "glittered when he walked," gnawing his dark heart while he fluttered pulses with his apparent good fortune; Miniver Cheevy, frustrate dreamer, sighing "for what was not"; Aaron Stark, the miser with eyes "like little dollars in the dark"; the nameless mother in "The Gift of God," transmuting her mediocrity of a son into a shining demigod; Bewick Finzer, the wreck of wealth, coming for his pittance, "familiar as an old mistake, and futile as regret," Luke Havergal, Cliff Klingenhagen, Reuben Bright, Annandale, the tippling Mr. Flood—they persist in the mind more vividly than most living people. Such sympathetic illuminations reveal Robinson's sensitive power, especially in his projection of the apparent failures of life. Indeed, much of Robinson's work seems a protest, a criticism by implication, of that type of standardized success which so much of the world worships. Frustration and defeat are like an organ-point heard below the varying music of his verse; failure is almost glorified in his pages.

Technically, Robinson is as precise as he is dexterous. He is, in company with Frost, a master of the slowly diminished ending. But he is capable of cadences as rich as that which ends "The Gift of God," as pungent as the climax of "Calvary," as brilliantly fanciful as the sestet of his sonnet, "The Sheaves," as muted but sustained as the finale of "Eros Turannos" which might have been composed by a more controlled Swinburne.

There is never a false image or a blurred line in any of these verses which, while adhering to the strictest models and executed according to traditional forms, are always fresh and surprising. It is interesting to observe how the smoothness of his rhymes, playing against the hard outlines of his verse, emphasizes the epigrammatic strength of poems like "The Gift of God," that magnificent modern ballad "John Gorham," "For a Dead Lady," and "The Master," one of the finest evocations of Lincoln which is, at the same time, a bitter commentary on the commercialism of the times and the "shopman's test of age and worth."

Robinson's blank verse is scarcely less individual. It is astringent, personal, packed with the instant. In "Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford" we have the clearest and most human portrait of Shakespeare ever attempted; the lines run as fluently as good conversation, as inevitably as a perfect melody. In his reanimations of the Arthurian legends, *Merlin* (1917), *Launcelot* (1920), *Tristram* (1927), Robinson, shaming the tea-table idyls of Tennyson, has colored the tale with somber reflections of the collapse of old orders, the darkness of an age in ashes.

Avon's Harvest, which the author has called "a dime novel in verse," a study of a fear-haunted, hate-driven man, appeared in 1921. In the same year the Macmillan Company issued his *Collected Poems,* which received the Pulitzer Prize for 1921 and which was enlarged in 1929. Subsequent volumes strengthened his admirers' convictions and disproved any fears that Robinson might have "written himself out." *Roman Bartholow* (1923) is a single poem of almost two hundred pages; a dramatic and introspective narrative in blank verse. *The Man Who Died Twice* (1924), which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for that year, is likewise one long poem: a tale which is a cross between a grotesque recital and inspired metaphysics. Curiously enough, the mixture is one of Robinson's greatest triumphs; none of his portraits, either miniatures or full-length canvases, has given us a profounder insight of a

tortured soul than this of Fernando Nash, "the king who lost his crown before he had it."

Dionysus in Doubt (1925) begins and ends with a caustic arraignment of our mechanistic civilization, and is primarily a scornful and carefully premeditated condemnation of the Eighteenth Amendment, an attack which never descends to polemics or political diatribe. Robinson's ironic accents lift every phrase above the argumentative matter; the darkest of his doubts are illumined by "the salvage of a smile." Besides two other longish poems, this volume includes eighteen sonnets which again display Robinson's supremacy in the form. Time and again, he packs huge scenes into fourteen lines; if sonnets can assume the proportion of dramatic narratives, Robinson's have achieved the almost impossible feat.

Possibly the fact that Robinson had already won the Pulitzer Prize twice, possibly the increasing interest of his work may have accounted for his increased audience. Not even his most enthusiastic admirers awaited the reception accorded to *Tristram* (1927). Adopted by the most prominent book-club as its "book-of-the-month," awarded unstinted praise and the Pulitzer Prize for the third time, it outsold most "best-selling" novels. This was something of a phenomenon, for *Tristram* was not only a single poem of over forty thousand words, it was Robinson's most intricate and knotted work. But it was no mere problem in involution; Robinson, as though reacting against the charge of Puritanism, abandoned himself to a drama passionate and headlong.

Cavender's House (1929) was scarcely less esteemed. Formerly regarded as a poet's poet, the later volumes established Robinson in popular favor, no matter from what epoch he chose his theme. *Tristram* was medieval, *Cavender's House* was modern. Like *Avon's Harvest* and *Roman Bartholow,* the latter was melodrama glorified, but sharper and tenser than its predecessors. Both renewed the inevitable—and false—comparisons. Robinson's manner was likened to Browning's, his matter (particularly in the Arthurian tales) to Tennyson's. The comparison to Browning, though superficial and inaccurate, is at least comprehensible. The author of *Merlin,* like the author of *Sordello,* delights in subtly psychological portraiture, in the half-withheld inner drama, in the shift of suspensions and nuances of tension. But where Browning is forthright, Robinson is tangential; where Browning is lavish with imagery and flaring interjections, Robinson is sparse in metaphor and so economic with words that almost every phrase seems twisted and wrung of everything except its essential meaning. But the principal dissimilarity lies in their *Weltanschauung;* here they are diametrically opposed. Where Browning regards the universe compact of sweetness and light, Robinson observes a scheme whose chief components are bitterness and blight; the realm where "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world" becomes (as in the significantly entitled *The Man Against the Sky*) a place where

> He may go forward like a stoic Roman
> Where pangs and terrors in his pathway lie—
> Or, seizing the swift logic of a woman,
> Curse God and die.

Although Robinson was accused of holding consistently a negative attitude toward life, his poetry reveals a restless, uncertain, but persistent search for moral values. This quest—and questioning—of ultimates runs through his work as it ran through

an age no longer satisfied with arid skepticism. It is significant that the same year which disclosed Eliot turning to a faith beyond intellect showed Robinson driving past reason to find

. . . There must be God; or if not God, a purpose and a law.

The conclusion of his sonnet to Crabbe might well be applied to him:

Whether or not we read him, we can feel
From time to time the vigor of his name
Against us like a finger for the shame
And emptiness of what our souls reveal
In books that are as altars where we kneel
To consecrate the flicker, not the flame.

After 1928 Robinson's poetry tended to become repetitious and prolix. Writing for an income and fearing the future, he felt it incumbent upon him to write an annual volume. Each year for seven years, until the very month of his death, he planned and issued a narrative poem in which personal as well as physical fatigue was increasingly evident. *The Glory of the Nightingales* (1930) is a melancholy tragedy which suffers from dryness of thought and atrophy of emotion. *Matthias at the Door* (1931) is another gloomy study which exhibits the author's narrowing limitations—the dark, deliberate idiom spoken indiscriminately by all the characters, the lack of life in any of the *dramatis personae* who function only as disembodied intellects in a state of continually painful thought, and a sense of hopeless defeatism. *Nicodemus* (1932) attempts to revive earlier spirits, but the summoned Annandale, Ponce de Leon, and Toussaint L'Ouverture are little more than garrulous ghosts. *Talifer* (1933) is far better, the happiest and most teasing of Robinson's longer poems, an unexpected blend of wisdom and wicked irony. *Amaranth* (1934) is another nightmare narrative of deluded failures and dream-ridden mediocrities. Unfortunately the poem, for all its dramatic possibilities, is wholly without drama, and it is difficult to tell whether Robinson is sympathizing with his lost shadows or satirizing them. The theme of frustration is continued in the posthumous *King Jasper* (1935) which was introduced with a shrewd analysis of "new ways of being new" by Robert Frost; unfortunately *King Jasper* is an involved and dubious allegory.

Subsequent to 1911 Robinson lived most of his summers at Peterborough, New Hampshire, at the MacDowell Colony, of which he was the unofficial but acknowledged presiding genius. He divided his winters between New York and Boston until ill health forced him to forego travel of any sort. His last winter in Boston was full of suffering, chiefly due to a growth in the pancreas, and when he was taken to the New York Hospital he was in a pitifully weakened condition. It was impossible to operate successfully and he died there April 6, 1935.

Upon his death there were the inevitable belated tributes to an unhappy poet and a lonely man. The most eloquent of them was Robinson Jeffers' spontaneous response. "I cannot speak of E. A. Robinson's work," wrote Jeffers. "Better critics than I have praised its qualities, and will again. Let me notice instead the debt we owe him for the qualities of his life; for the dignity with which he wore his fame, for the example of his reticence and steady concentration, for the single-mindedness with which he followed his own sense of direction, unbewildered and undiverted. . . . We are

grateful that he was not what they call 'a good showman,' but gave himself to his work, not to his audience, and would have preferred complete failure to any success with the least taint of charlatanry." A biography by Hermann Hagedorn (1938), another by Emery Neff (1948), and a volume of letters (1940) explored Robinson's anxieties, but failed to analyze the reasons for his distrust and desperate loneliness.

It has been said that Robinson's pessimism alienated part of his audience. But Robinson always took pains to refute this charge, not only in his private protests—in his letters and conversations—but in his poems. He denied that life was merely a material phenomenon. In the sonnet "Credo" he implied his faith; he said it explicitly when he maintained that humanity might be unaware of its destiny and unsure of its divinity, but it could not surrender its belief: "The world is not a 'prison-house' but a kind of spiritual kindergarten, where millions of bewildered infants are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks."

EXIT

For what we owe to other days,
Before we poisoned him with praise,
May we who shrank to find him weak
Remember that he cannot speak.

For envy that we may recall,
And for our faith before the fall,
May we who are alive be slow
To tell what we shall never know.

For penance he would not confess,
And for the fateful emptiness
Of early triumph undermined,
May we now venture to be kind.

CREDO

I cannot find my way: there is no star
In all the shrouded heavens anywhere;
And there is not a whisper in the air
Of any living voice but one so far
That I can hear it only as a bar
Of lost, imperial music, played when fair
And angel fingers wove, and unaware,
Dead leaves to garlands where no roses are.

No, there is not a glimmer, nor a call,
For one that welcomes, welcomes when he fears,
The black and awful chaos of the night;
For through it all,—above, beyond it all—
I know the far-sent message of the years,
I feel the coming glory of the Light!

JAMES WETHERELL

We never half believed the stuff
They told about James Wetherell;
We always liked him well enough,
And always tried to use him well;
But now some things have come to light,
And James has vanished from our view.—
There isn't very much to write,
There isn't very much to do.

MINIVER CHEEVY

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,
  Grew lean while he assailed the seasons;
He wept that he was ever born,
  And he had reasons.

Miniver loved the days of old
  When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;
The vision of a warrior bold
  Would set him dancing.

Miniver sighed for what was not,
  And dreamed, and rested from his labors;
He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot,
  And Priam's neighbors.

Miniver mourned the ripe renown
  That made so many a name so fragrant;
He mourned Romance, now on the town,
  And Art, a vagrant.

Miniver loved the Medici,
  Albeit he had never seen one;
He would have sinned incessantly
  Could he have been one.

Miniver cursed the commonplace
  And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;
He missed the medieval grace
  Of iron clothing.

Miniver scorned the gold he sought,
  But sore annoyed was he without it;
Miniver thought, and thought, and thought,
  And thought about it.

Miniver Cheevy, born too late,
  Scratched his head and kept on thinking;
Miniver coughed, and called it fate,
  And kept on drinking.

CLIFF KLINGENHAGEN

Cliff Klingenhagen had me in to dine
With him one day; and after soup and meat,
And all the other things there were to eat,
Cliff took two glasses and filled one with wine
And one with wormwood. Then, without a sign
For me to choose at all, he took the draught
Of bitterness himself, and lightly quaffed
It off, and said the other one was mine.

And when I asked him what the deuce he meant
By doing that, he only looked at me
And grinned, and said it was a way of his.
And though I know the fellow, I have spent
Long time a-wondering when I shall be
As happy as Cliff Klingenhagen is.

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

They are all gone away,
  The House is shut and still,
There is nothing more to say.

Through broken walls and gray
  The winds blow bleak and shrill;
They are all gone away.

Nor is there one today
  To speak them good or ill:
There is nothing more to say.

Why is it then we stray
  Around that sunken sill?
They are all gone away,

And our poor fancy-play
  For them is wasted skill:
There is nothing more to say.

There is ruin and decay
  In the House on the Hill:
They are all gone away,
There is nothing more to say.

AN OLD STORY

Strange that I did not know him then,
  That friend of mine.
I did not even show him then
  One friendly sign;

But cursed him for the ways he had
  To make me see
My envy of the praise he had
  For praising me.

I would have rid the earth of him
  Once, in my pride.
I never knew the worth of him
  Until he died.

RICHARD CORY

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
  We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
  Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
  And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
  "Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—
  And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
  To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
  And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
  Went home and put a bullet through his head.

BEWICK FINZER

Time was when his half million drew
  The breath of six per cent;
But soon the worm of what-was-not
  Fed hard on his content;
And something crumbled in his brain
  When his half million went.

Time passed, and filled along with his
  The place of many more;
Time came, and hardly one of us
  Had credence to restore,
From what appeared one day, the man
  Whom we had known before.

The broken voice, the withered neck,
  The coat worn out with care,

The cleanliness of indigence,
  The brilliance of despair,
The fond imponderable dreams
  Of affluence,—all were there.

Poor Finzer, with his dreams and schemes,
  Fares hard now in the race,
With heart and eye that have a task
  When he looks in the face
Of one who might so easily
  Have been in Finzer's place.

He comes unfailing for the loan
  We give and then forget;
He comes, and probably for years
  Will he be coming yet,—
Familiar as an old mistake,
  And futile as regret.

REUBEN BRIGHT

Because he was a butcher and thereby
Did earn an honest living (and did right)
I would not have you think that Reuben Bright
Was any more a brute than you or I;
For when they told him that his wife must die,
He stared at them and shook with grief and fright,
And cried like a great baby half that night,
And made the women cry to see him cry.

And after she was dead, and he had paid
The singers and the sexton and the rest,
He packed a lot of things that she had made
Most mournfully away in an old chest
Of hers, and put some chopped-up cedar boughs
In with them, and tore down the slaughter-house.

FOR A DEAD LADY

No more with overflowing light
Shall fill the eyes that now are faded,
Nor shall another's fringe with night
Their woman-hidden world as they did.
No more shall quiver down the days
The flowing wonder of her ways,
Whereof no language may requite
The shifting and the many-shaded.

The grace, divine, definitive,
Clings only as a faint forestalling;
The laugh that love could not forgive
Is hushed, and answers to no calling;
The forehead and the little ears
Have gone where Saturn keeps the years;
The breast where roses could not live
Has done with rising and with falling.

The beauty, shattered by the laws
That have creation in their keeping,
No longer trembles at applause,
Or over children that are sleeping;
And we who delve in beauty's lore
Know all that we have known before
Of what inexorable cause
Makes Time so vicious in his reaping.

CALVARY

Friendless and faint, with martyred steps and slow,
Faint for the flesh, but for the spirit free,
Stung by the mob that came to see the show,
The Master toiled along to Calvary;
We gibed him, as he went, with houndish glee,
Till his dimmed eyes for us did overflow;

We cursed his vengeless hands thrice wretchedly,—
And this was nineteen hundred years ago.
But after nineteen hundred years the shame
Still clings, and we have not made good the loss
That outraged faith has entered in his name.
Ah, when shall come love's courage to be strong!
Tell me, O Lord—tell me, O Lord, how long
Are we to keep Christ writhing on the cross!

VICKERY'S MOUNTAIN

lue in the west the mountain stands,
And through the long twilight
'ickery sits with folded hands,
And Vickery's eyes are bright.

right, for he knows what no man else
On earth as yet may know:
'here's a golden word that he never tells,
And a gift that he will not show.

Ie dreams of honor and wealth and fame,
He smiles, and well he may;
'or to Vickery once a sick man came
Who did not go away.

The day before the day to be,
"Vickery," said the guest,
'You know as you live what's left of me—
And you shall know the rest.

'You know as you live that I have come
To what we call the end.
No doubt you have found me troublesome,
But you've also found a friend;

'For we shall give and you shall take
The gold that is in view;
The mountain there and I shall make
A golden man of you.

'And you shall leave a friend behind
Who neither frets nor feels;
And you shall move among your kind
With hundreds at your heels.

"Now this I have written here
Tells all that need be told;
So, Vickery, take the way that's clear,
And be a man of gold."

Vickery turned his eyes again
To the far mountain-side,
And wept a tear for worthy men
Defeated and defied.

Since then a crafty score of years
Have come, and they have gone;
But Vickery counts no lost arrears:
He lingers and lives on.

Blue in the west the mountain stands,
Familiar as a face,
Blue, but Vickery knows what sands
Are golden at its base.

He dreams and lives upon the day
When he shall walk with kings.
Vickery smiles—and well he may:
The life-caged linnet sings.

Vickery thinks the time will come
To go for what is his;
But hovering, unseen hands at home
Will hold him where he is.

There's a golden word that he never tells
And a gift that he will not show.
All to be given to someone else—
And Vickery shall not know.

TOO MUCH COFFEE

Together in infinite shade
They defy the invincible dawn:
The Measure that never was made,
The Line that never was drawn.

THE MASTER

(Lincoln. Supposed to have been written n long after the Civil War)

A flying word from here and there
Had sown the name at which we sneered,
But soon the name was everywhere,
To be reviled and then revered:

A presence to be loved and feared,
We cannot hide it, or deny
That we, the gentlemen who jeered,
May be forgotten by and by.

He came when days were perilous
And hearts of men were sore beguiled;
And having made his note of us,
He pondered and was reconciled.
Was ever master yet so mild
As he, and so untamable?
We doubted, even when he smiled,
Not knowing what he knew so well.

He knew that undeceiving fate
Would shame us whom he served unsought;
He knew that he must wince and wait—
The jest of those for whom he fought;
He knew devoutly what he thought
Of us and of our ridicule;
He knew that we must all be taught
Like little children in a school.

We gave a glamour to the task
That he encountered and saw through,
But little of us did he ask,
And little did we ever do.
And what appears if we review
The season when we railed and chaffed?
It is the face of one who knew
That we were learning while we laughed.

The face that in our vision feels
Again the venom that we flung,
Transfigured to the world reveals
The vigilance to which we clung.
Shrewd, hallowed, harassed, and among
The mysteries that are untold,
The face we see was never young,
Nor could it ever have been old.

For he, to whom we had applied
Our shopman's test of age and worth,
Was elemental when he died,
As he was ancient at his birth:
The saddest among kings of earth,
Bowed with a galling crown, this man
Met rancor with a cryptic mirth,
Laconic—and Olympian.

The love, the grandeur, and the fame
Are bounded by the world alone;
The calm, the smoldering, and the flame
Of awful patience were his own:
With him they are forever flown
Past all our fond self-shadowings,
Wherewith we cumber the Unknown
As with inept Icarian wings.

For we were not as other men:
'Twas ours to soar and his to see.
But we are coming down again,
And we shall come down pleasantly;
Nor shall we longer disagree
On what it is to be sublime,
But flourish in our perigee
And have one Titan at a time.

MR. FLOOD'S PARTY

Old Eben Flood, climbing alone one night
Over the hill between the town below
And the forsaken upland hermitage
That held as much as he should ever know
On earth again of home, paused warily.
The road was his with not a native near;
And Eben, having leisure, said aloud,
For no man else in Tilbury Town to hear:

"Well, Mr. Flood, we have the harvest moon
Again, and we may not have many more;
The bird is on the wing, the poet says,
And you and I have said it here before.
Drink to the bird." He raised up to the light
The jug that he had gone so far to fill,

And answered huskily: "Well, Mr. Flood,
Since you propose it, I believe I will."

Alone, as if enduring to the end
A valiant armor of scarred hopes outworn,
He stood there in the middle of the road
Like Roland's ghost winding a silent horn.
Below him, in the town among the trees,
Where friends of other days had honored him,
A phantom salutation of the dead
Rang thinly till old Eben's eyes were dim.

Then, as a mother lays her sleeping child
Down tenderly, fearing it may awake,
He set the jug down slowly at his feet
With trembling care, knowing that most things break;
And only when assured that on firm earth
It stood, as the uncertain lives of men
Assuredly did not, he paced away,
And with his hand extended paused again:

"Well, Mr. Flood, we have not met like this
In a long time; and many a change has come
To both of us, I fear, since last it was
We had a drop together. Welcome home!"
Convivially returning with himself,
Again he raised the jug up to the light;
And with an acquiescent quaver said:
"Well, Mr. Flood, if you insist, I might.

"Only a very little, Mr. Flood—
For auld lang syne. No more, sir: that will do."
So, for the time, apparently it did,
And Eben evidently thought so too;
For soon amid the silver loneliness
Of night he lifted up his voice and sang,
Secure, with only two moons listening,
Until the whole harmonious landscape rang—

"For auld lang syne." The weary throat gave out,
The last word wavered; and the song being done,
He raised again the jug regretfully
And shook his head, and was again alone.
There was not much that was ahead of him,
And there was nothing in the town below—
Where strangers would have shut the many doors
That many friends had opened long ago.

GEORGE CRABBE

Give him the darkest inch your shelf allows,
Hide him in lonely garrets, if you will,—

But his hard, human pulse is throbbing still
With the sure strength that fearless truth endows.
In spite of all fine science disavows,
Of his plain excellence and stubborn skill
There yet remains what fashion cannot kill,
Though years have thinned the laurel from his brows.

Whether or not we read him, we can feel
From time to time the vigor of his name
Against us like a finger for the shame
And emptiness of what our souls reveal
In books that are as altars where we kneel
To consecrate the flicker, not the flame.

LUKE HAVERGAL

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There where the vines cling crimson on the wall,
And in the twilight wait for what will come.
The leaves will whisper there of her, and some,
Like flying words, will strike you as they fall;
But go, and if you listen, she will call.
Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies
To rift the fiery night that's in your eyes;
But there, where western glooms are gathering,
The dark will end the dark, if anything:
God slays himself with every leaf that flies,
And hell is more than half of paradise.
No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies—
In eastern skies.

Out of a grave I come to tell you this,
Out of a grave I come to quench the kiss
That flames upon your forehead with a glow
That blinds you to the way that you must go.
Yes, there is yet one way to where she is,
Bitter, but one that faith may never miss.
Out of a grave I come to tell you this—
To tell you this.

There is the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There are the crimson leaves upon the wall.
Go, for the winds are tearing them away,—
Nor think to riddle the dead words they say,
Nor any more to feel them as they fall;
But go, and if you trust her she will call.
There is the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

JOHN GORHAM

"Tell me what you're doing over here, John Gorham,
Sighing hard and seeming to be sorry when you're not;
Make me laugh or let me go now, for long faces in the moonlight
Are a sign for me to say again a word that you forgot."—

"I'm over here to tell you what the moon already
May have said or maybe shouted ever since a year ago;
I'm over here to tell you what you are, Jane Wayland,
And to make you rather sorry, I should say, for being so."—

"Tell me what you're saying to me now, John Gorham,
Or you'll never see as much of me as ribbons any more;
I'll vanish in as many ways as I have toes and fingers,
And you'll not follow far for one where flocks have been before."—

"I'm sorry now you never saw the flocks, Jane Wayland,
But you're the one to make of them as many as you need.
And then about the vanishing: It's I who mean to vanish;
And when I'm here no longer you'll be done with me indeed."—

"That's a way to tell me what I am, John Gorham!
How am I to know myself until I make you smile?
Try to look as if the moon were making faces at you,
And a little more as if you meant to stay a little while."—

"You are what it is that over rose-blown gardens
Makes a pretty flutter for a season in the sun;
You are what it is that with a mouse, Jane Wayland,
Catches him and lets him go and eats him up for fun."—

"Sure I never took you for a mouse, John Gorham;
All you say is easy, but so far from being true,
That I wish you wouldn't ever be again the one to think so;
For it isn't cats and butterflies that I would be to you."—

"All your little animals are in one picture—
One I've had before me since a year ago tonight;
And the picture where they live will be of you, Jane Wayland,
Till you find a way to kill them or to keep them out of sight."—

"Won't you ever see me as I am, John Gorham,
Leaving out the foolishness and all I never meant?
Somewhere in me there's a woman, if you know the way to find her.
Will you like me any better if I prove it and repent?"—

"I doubt if I shall ever have the time, Jane Wayland;
And I dare say all this moonlight lying round us might as well
Fall for nothing on the shards of broken urns that are forgotten,
As on two that have no longer much of anything to tell."

HOW ANNANDALE WENT OUT

"They called it Annandale—and I was there
To flourish, to find words, and to attend:
Liar, physician, hypocrite, and friend,
I watched him; and the sight was not so fair
As one or two that I have seen elsewhere:
An apparatus not for me to mend—
A wreck, with hell between him and the end,
Remained of Annandale; and I was there.

"I knew the ruin as I knew the man;
So put the two together, if you can,
Remembering the worst you know of me.
Now view yourself as I was, on the spot,
With a slight kind of engine. Do you see?
Like this . . . You wouldn't hang me? I thought not."

THE FIELD OF GLORY

War shook the land where Levi dwelt,
And fired the dismal wrath he felt,
That such a doom was ever wrought
As his, to toil while others fought;
To toil, to dream—and still to dream,
With one day barren as another;
To consummate, as it would seem,
The dry despair of his old mother.

Far off one afternoon began
The sound of man destroying man;
And Levi, sick with nameless rage,
Condemned again his heritage,
And sighed for scars that might have come,
And would, if once he could have sundered
Those harsh, inhering claims of home
That held him while he cursed and wondered.

Another day, and then there came,
Rough, bloody, ribald, hungry, lame,
But yet themselves, to Levi's door,
Two remnants of the day before.
They laughed at him and what he sought;
They jeered him and his painful acre;
But Levi knew that they had fought,
And left their manners to their Maker.

That night, for the grim widow's ears,
With hopes that hid themselves in fears,
He told of arms, and fiery deeds,
Whereat one leaps the while he reads,
And said he'd be no more a clown,
While others drew the breath of battle.
The mother looked him up and down,
And laughed—a scant laugh with a rattle.

She told him what she found to tell,
And Levi listened, and heard well
Some admonitions of a voice
That left him no cause to rejoice.—
He sought a friend, and found the stars,
And prayed aloud that they should aid him;
But they said not a word of wars,
Or of a reason why God made him.

And who's of this or that estate
We do not wholly calculate,
When baffling shades that shift and cling
Are not without their glimmering;
When even Levi, tired of faith,
Beloved of none, forgot by many,
Dismissed as an inferior wraith,
Reborn may be as great as any.

THE CLERKS

I did not think that I should find them there
When I came back again; but there they stood,
As in the days they dreamed of when young blood
Was in their cheeks and women called them fair.
Be sure they met me with an ancient air,—
And yes, there was a shop-worn brotherhood
About them; but the men were just as good,
And just as human as they ever were.

And you that ache so much to be sublime,
And you that feed yourselves with your descent,
What comes of all your visions and your fears?
Poets and kings are but the clerks of Time,
Tiering the same dull webs of discontent
Clipping the same sad alnage of the years.

THE DARK HILLS

Dark hills at evening in the west,
Where sunset hovers like a sound
Of golden horns that sang to rest
Old bones of warriors under ground,
Far now from all the bannered ways
Where flash the legions of the sun,
You fade—as if the last of days
Were fading and all wars were done.

EROS TURANNOS

She fears him, and will always ask
What fated her to choose him;
She meets in his engaging mask
All reasons to refuse him;
But what she meets and what she fears
Are less than are the downward years,
Drawn slowly to the foamless weirs
Of age, were she to lose him.

Between a blurred sagacity
That once had power to sound him,
And Love, that will not let him be
The Judas that she found him,
Her pride assuages her almost,
As if it were alone the cost.
He sees that he will not be lost,
And waits and looks around him.

A sense of ocean and old trees
Envelops and allures him;
Tradition, touching all he sees,
Beguiles and reassures him;
And all her doubts of what he says
Are dimmed with what she knows of days—
Till even prejudice delays
And fades, and she secures him.

The falling leaf inaugurates
The reign of her confusion;
The pounding wave reverberates
The dirge of her illusion;
And home, where passion lived and died,
Becomes a place where she can hide,
While all the town and harbor-side
Vibrate with her seclusion.

We tell you, tapping on our brows,
The story as it should be,
As if the story of a house
Were told, or ever could be;
We'll have no kindly veil between
Her visions and those we have seen,—
As if we guessed what hers have been,
Or what they are or would be.

Meanwhile we do no harm; for they
That with a god have striven,
Not hearing much of what we say,
Take what the god has given;
Though like waves breaking it may be,
Or like a changed familiar tree,
Or like a stairway to the sea
Where down the blind are driven.

THE SHEAVES

Where long the shadows of the wind had rolled,
Green wheat was yielding to the change assigned;
And as by some vast magic undivined
The world was turning slowly into gold.
Like nothing that was ever bought or sold
It waited there, the body and the mind;
And with a mighty meaning of a kind
That tells the more the more it is not told.

So in a land where all days are not fair,
Fair days went on till on another day
A thousand golden sheaves were lying there,
Shining and still, but not for long to stay—
As if a thousand girls with golden hair
Might rise from where they slept and go away.

BEN JONSON ENTERTAINS A MAN FROM STRATFORD

You are a friend then, as I make it out,
Of our man Shakespeare, who alone of us
Will put an ass's head in Fairyland
As he would add a shilling to more shillings,
All most harmonious—and out of his
Miraculous inviolable increase
Fills Ilion, Rome, or any town you like
Of olden time with timeless Englishmen;
And I must wonder what you think of him—
All you down there where your small Avon flows
By Stratford, and where you're an Alderman.
Some, for a guess, would have him riding back
To be a farrier there, or say a dyer;
Or maybe one of your adept surveyors;
Or like enough the wizard of all tanners.
Not you—no fear of that; for I discern
In you a kindling of the flame that saves—
The nimble element, the true caloric;
I see it, and was told of it, moreover,
By our discriminate friend himself, no other.
Had you been one of the sad average,
As he would have it—meaning, as I take it,
The sinew and the solvent of our Island,
You'd not be buying beer for this Terpander's
Approved and estimated friend Ben Jonson;
He'd never foist it as a part of his
Contingent entertainment of a townsman
While he goes off rehearsing, as he must,
If he shall ever be the Duke of Stratford.
And my words are no shadow on your town—

Far from it; for one town's like another
As all are unlike London. Oh, he knows it—
And there's the Stratford in him; he denies it,
And there's the Shakespeare in him. So, God help him!

I tell him he needs Greek; but neither God
Nor Greek will help him. Nothing will help that man.
You see the fates have given him so much,
He must have all or perish—or look out
Of London, where he sees too many lords.
They're part of half what ails him: I suppose
There's nothing fouler down among the demons
Than what it is he feels when he remembers
The dust and sweat and ointment of his calling
With his lords looking on and laughing at him.
King as he is, he can't be king *de facto,*
And that's as well, because he wouldn't like it;
He'd frame a lower rating of men then
Than he has now; and after that would come
An abdication or an apoplexy.
He can't be king, not even king of Stratford—
Though half the world, if not the whole of it,
May crown him with a crown that fits no king
Save Lord Apollo's homesick emissary:
Not there on Avon, or on any stream
Where Naiads and their white arms are no more
Shall he find home again. It's all too bad.
But there's a comfort, for he'll have that House—
The best you ever saw; and he'll be there
Anon, as you're an Alderman. Good God!
He makes me lie awake o' nights and laugh.

And you have known him from his origin,
You tell me; and a most uncommon urchin
He must have been to the few seeing ones—
A trifle terrifying, I dare say,
Discovering a world with his man's eyes,
Quite as another lad might see some finches,
If he looked hard and had an eye for Nature.
But this one had his eyes and their foretelling,
And he had you to fare with, and what else?
He must have had a father and a mother—
In fact I've heard him say so—and a dog,
As a boy should, I venture; and the dog,
Most likely, was the only man who knew him.
A dog, for all I know, is what he needs
As much as anything right here today,
To counsel him about his disillusions,
Old aches, and parturitions of what's coming—
A dog of orders, an emeritus,
To wag his tail at him when he comes home,

And then to put his paws up on his knees
And say, "For God's sake, what's it all about?"

I don't know whether he needs a dog or not—
Or what he needs. I tell him he needs Greek;
I'll talk of rules and Aristotle with him,
And if his tongue's at home he'll say to that,
"I have your word that Aristotle knows,
And you mine that I don't know Aristotle."
He's all at odds with all the unities,
And what's yet worse it doesn't seem to matter;
He treads along through Time's old wilderness
As if the tramp of all the centuries
Had left no roads—and there are none, for him;
He doesn't see them, even with those eyes—
And that's a pity, or I say it is.
Accordingly we have him as we have him—
Going his way, the way that he goes best,
A pleasant animal with no great noise
Or nonsense anywhere to set him off—
Save only divers and inclement devils
Have made of late his heart their dwelling-place.
A flame half ready to fly out sometimes
At some annoyance may be fanned up in him,
But soon it falls, and when it falls goes out;
He knows how little room there is in there
For crude and futile animosities,
And how much for the joy of being whole,
And how much for long sorrow and old pain.
On our side there are some who may be given
To grow old wondering what he thinks of us
And some above us, who are, in his eyes,
Above himself—and that's quite right and English.
Yet here we smile, or disappoint the gods
Who made it so; the gods have always eyes
To see men scratch; and they see one down here
Who itches, manor-bitten, to the bone,
Albeit he knows himself—yes, yes, he knows—
The lord of more than England and of more
Than all the seas of England in all time
Shall ever wash. D'ye wonder that I laugh?
He sees me, and he doesn't seem to care;
And why the devil should he? I can't tell you.
I'll meet him out alone of a bright Sunday,
Trim, rather spruce, and quite the gentleman.
"What, ho, my lord!" say I. He doesn't hear me;
Wherefore I have to pause and look at him.
He's not enormous, but one looks at him.
A little on the round if you insist,
For now, God save the mark, he's growing old;
He's five and forty, and to hear him talk

These days you'd call him eighty; then you'd add
More years to that. He's old enough to be
The father of a world, and so he is.
"Ben, you're a scholar, what's the time of day?"
Says he; and there shines out of him again
An aged light that has no age or station—
The mystery that's his—a mischievous
Half-mad serenity that laughs at fame
For being won so easy, and at friends
Who laugh at him for what he wants the most,
And for his dukedom down in Warwickshire;—
By which you see we're all a little jealous. . . .
Poor Greene! I fear the color of his name
Was even as that of his ascending soul;
And he was one where there are many others—
Some scrivening to the end against their fate,
Their puppets all in ink and all to die there;
And some with hands that once would shade an eye
That scanned Euripides and Aeschylus
Will reach by this time for a pot-house mop
To slush their first and last of royalties.
Poor devils! and they all play to his hand;
For so it was in Athens and old Rome.
But that's not here or there; I've wandered off.
Greene does it, or I'm careful. Where's that boy?

Yes, he'll go back to Stratford. And we'll miss him?
Dear sir, there'll be no London here without him.
We'll all be riding, one of these fine days,
Down there to see him—and his wife won't like us;
And then we'll think of what he never said
Of women—which, if taken all in all
With what he did say, would buy many horses.
Though nowadays he's not so much for women.
"So few of them," he says, "are worth the guessing."
But there's a worm at work when he says that,
And while he says it one feels in the air
A deal of circumambient hocus-pocus.
They've had him dancing till his toes were tender,
And he can feel 'em now, come chilly rains.
There's no long cry for going into it,
However, and we don't know much about it.
But you in Stratford, like most here in London,
Have more now in the *Sonnets* than you paid for;
He's put one there with all her poison on,
To make a singing fiction of a shadow
That's in his life a fact, and always will be.
But she's no care of ours, though Time, I fear,
Will have a more reverberant ado
About her than about another one
Who seems to have decoyed him, married him,

And sent him scuttling on his way to London—
With much already learned, and more to learn,
And more to follow. Lord! how I see him now,
Pretending, maybe trying, to be like us.
Whatever he may have meant, we never had him;
He failed us, or escaped, or what you will—
And there was that about him (God knows what—
We'd flayed another had he tried it on us)
That made as many of us as had wits
More fond of all his easy distances
Than one another's noise and clap-your-shoulder.
But think you not, my friend, he'd never talk!
Talk? He was eldritch at it; and we listened—
Thereby acquiring much we knew before
About ourselves, and hitherto had held
Irrelevant, or not prime to the purpose.
And there were some, of course, and there be now,
Disordered and reduced amazedly
To resignation by the mystic seal
Of young finality the gods had laid
On everything that made him a young demon;
And one or two shot looks at him already
As he had been their executioner;
And once or twice he was, not knowing it—
Or knowing, being sorry for poor clay
And saying nothing . . . Yet, for all his engines,
You'll meet a thousand of an afternoon
Who strut and sun themselves and see around 'em
A world made out of more that has a reason
Than his, I swear, that he sees here today;
Though he may scarcely give a Fool an exit
But we mark how he sees in everything
A law that, given that we flout it once too often,
Brings fire and iron down on our naked heads.
To me it looks as if the power that made him,
For fear of giving all things to one creature,
Left out the first—faith, innocence, illusion,
Whatever 'tis that keeps us out o' Bedlam—
And thereby, for his too consuming vision,
Empowered him out of nature; though to see him,
You'd never guess what's going on inside him.
He'll break out some day like a keg of ale
With too much independent frenzy in it;
And all for cellaring what he knows won't keep,
And what he'd best forget—but that he can't.
You'll have it, and have more than I'm foretelling;
And there'll be such a roaring at the Globe
As never stunned the bleeding gladiators.
He'll have to change the color of its hair
A bit, for now he calls it Cleopatra.
Black hair would never do for Cleopatra.

But you and I are not yet two old women,
And you're a man of office. What he does
Is more to you than how it is he does it—
And that's what the Lord God has never told him.
They work together, and the Devil helps 'em;
They do it of a morning, or if not,
They do it of a night; in which event
He's peevish of a morning. He seems old;
He's not the proper stomach or the sleep—
And they're two sovran agents to conserve him
Against the fiery art that has no mercy
But what's in that prodigious grand new House.
I gather something happening in his boyhood
Fulfilled him with a boy's determination
To make all Stratford 'ware of him. Well, well,
I hope at last he'll have his joy of it,
And all his pigs and sheep and bellowing beeves,
And frogs and owls and unicorns, moreover,
Be less than hell to his attendant ears.
Oh, past a doubt we'll all go down to see him.

He may be wise. With London two days off,
Down there some wind of heaven may yet revive him,
But there's no quickening breath from anywhere
Shall make of him again the young poised faun
From Warwickshire, who'd made, it seems, already
A legend of himself before I came
To blink before the last of his first lightning.
Whatever there be, there'll be no more of that;
The coming on of his old monster Time
Has made him a still man; and he has dreams
Were fair to think on once, and all found hollow.
He knows how much of what men paint themselves
Would blister in the light of what they are;
He sees how much of what was great now shares
An eminence transformed and ordinary;
He knows too much of what the world has hushed
In others, to be loud now for himself;
He knows now at what height low enemies
May reach his heart, and high friends let him fall;
But what not even such as he may know
Bedevils him the worst: his lark may sing
At heaven's gate how he will, and for as long
As joy may listen, but *he* sees no gate,
Save one whereat the spent clay waits a little
Before the churchyard has it, and the worm.

Not long ago, late in an afternoon,
I came on him unseen down Lambeth way,
And on my life I was afear'd of him:
He gloomed and mumbled like a soul from Tophet,

His hands behind him and his head bent solemn.
"What is it now," said I, "another woman?"
That made him sorry for me, and he smiled.
"No, Ben," he mused; "it's Nothing. It's all Nothing.
We come, we go; and when we're done, we're done;
Spiders and flies—we're mostly one or t'other—
We come, we go; and when we're done, we're done."
"By God, you sing that song as if you knew it!"
Said I, by way of cheering him; "what ails ye?"
"I think I must have come down here to think,"
Says he to that, and pulls his little beard;
"Your fly will serve as well as anybody,
And what's his hour? He flies, and flies, and flies,
And in his fly's mind has a brave appearance;
And then your spider gets him in her net,
And eats him out, and hangs him up to dry.
That's Nature, the kind mother of us all.
And then your slattern housemaid swings her broom,
And where's your spider? And that's Nature, also.
It's Nature, and it's Nothing. It's all Nothing.
It's all a world where bugs and emperors
Go singularly back to the same dust,
Each in his time; and the old, ordered stars
That sang together, Ben, will sing the same
Old stave tomorrow."

When he talks like that,
There's nothing for a human man to do
But lead him to some grateful nook like this
Where we be now, and there to make him drink.
He'll drink, for love of me, and then be sick;
A sad sign always in a man of parts,
And always very ominous. The great
Should be as large in liquor as in love—
And our great friend is not so large in either:
One disaffects him, and the other fails him;
Whatso he drinks that has an antic in it,
He's wondering what's to pay in his insides;
And while his eyes are on the Cyprian
He's fribbling all the time with that damned House.
We laugh here at his thrift, but after all
It may be thrift that saves him from the devil:
God gave it, anyhow—and we'll suppose
He knew the compound of His handiwork.
Today the clouds are with him, but anon
He'll out of 'em enough to shake the tree
Of life itself and bring down fruit unheard-of—
And, throwing in the bruised and whole together,
Prepare a wine to make us drunk with wonder;
And if he live, there'll be a sunset spell

Thrown over him as over a glassed lake
That yesterday was all a black wild water.

God send he live to give us, if no more,
What now's a-rampage in him, and exhibit,
With a decent half-allegiance to the ages
An earnest of at least a casual eye
Turned once on what he owes to Gutenberg,
And to the fealty of more centuries
Than are as yet a picture in our vision.
"There's time enough—I'll do it when I'm old,
And we're immortal men," he says to that;
And then he says to me, "Ben, what's 'immortal'?
Think you by any force of ordination
It may be nothing of a sort more noisy
Than a small oblivion of component ashes
That of a dream-addicted world was once
A moving atomy much like your friend here?"
Nothing will help that man. To make him laugh
I said then he was a mad mountebank—
And by the Lord I nearer made him cry.
I could have eat an eft then, on my knees,
Tails, claws, and all of him; for I had stung
The king of men, who had no sting for me,
And I had hurt him in his memories;
And I say now, as I shall say again,
I love the man this side idolatry.
He'll do it when he's old, he says. I wonder.
He may not be so ancient as all that.
For such as he the thing that is to do
Will do itself—but there's a reckoning;
The sessions that are now too much his own,
The roiling inward of a still outside,
The churning out of all those blood-fed lines,
The nights of many schemes and little sleep,
The full brain hammered hot with too much thinking,
The vexed heart over-worn with too much aching—
This weary jangling of conjoined affairs
Made out of elements that have no end,
And all confused at once, I understand,
Is not what makes a man to live forever.
O, no, not now! He'll not be going now:
There'll be time yet for God knows what explosions
Before he goes. He'll stay awhile. Just wait:
Just wait a year or two for Cleopatra,
For she's to be a balsam and a comfort;
And that's not all a jape of mine now, either.
For granted once the old way of Apollo
Sings in a man, he may then, if he's able,
Strike unafraid whatever strings he will
Upon the last and wildest of new lyres;
Nor out of his new magic, though it hymn

The shrieks of dungeoned hell, shall he create
A madness or a gloom to shut quite out
A cleaving daylight, and a last great calm
Triumphant over shipwreck and all storms.
He might have given Aristotle creeps,
But surely would have given him his *katharsis.*
He'll not be going yet. There's too much yet
Unsung within the man. But when he goes,
I'd stake ye coin o' the realm his only care
For a phantom world he sounded and found wanting
Will be a portion here, a portion there,
Of this or that thing or some other thing
That has a patent and intrinsical
Equivalence in those egregious shillings.
And yet he knows, God help him! Tell me, now,
If ever there was anything let loose
On earth by gods or devils heretofore
Like this mad, careful, proud, indifferent Shakespeare!
Where was it, if it ever was? By heaven,
'Twas never yet in Rhodes or Pergamon—
In Thebes or Nineveh, a thing like this!
No thing like this was ever out of England;
And that he knows. I wonder if he cares.
Perhaps he does. . . . O Lord, that House in Stratford!

NEW ENGLAND

Here where the wind is always north-north-east
And children learn to walk on frozen toes,
Wonder begets an envy of all those
Who boil elsewhere with such a lyric yeast
Of love that you will hear them at a feast
Where demons would appeal for some repose,
Still clamoring where the chalice overflows
And crying wildest who have drunk the least.

Passion is here a soilure of the wits,
We're told, and Love a cross for them to bear;
Joy shivers in the corner where she knits
And Conscience always has the rocking-chair,
Cheerful as when she tortured into fits
The first cat that was ever killed by Care.

THE GIFT OF GOD

Blessed with a joy that only she
Of all alive shall ever know,
She wears a proud humility
For what it was that willed it so,—
That her degree should be so great
Among the favored of the Lord
That she may scarcely bear the weight
Of her bewildering reward.

As one apart, immune, alone,
Or featured for the shining ones,
And like to none that she has known
Of other women's other sons,—

The firm fruition of her need,
He shines anointed; and he blurs
Her vision, till it seems indeed
A sacrilege to call him hers.

She fears a little for so much
Of what is best, and hardly dares
To think of him as one to touch
With aches, indignities, and cares;
She sees him rather at the goal,
Still shining; and her dream foretells
The proper shining of a soul
Where nothing ordinary dwells.

Perchance a canvass of the town
Would find him far from flags and shouts,
And leave him only the renown
Of many smiles and many doubts;
Perchance the crude and common tongue
Would havoc strangely with his worth;
But she, with innocence unwrung,
Would read his name around the earth.

And others, knowing how this youth
Would shine, if love could make him great,
When caught and tortured for the truth
Would only writhe and hesitate;
While she, arranging for his days
What centuries could not fulfill,
Transmutes him with her faith and praise,
And has him shining where she will.

She crowns him with her gratefulness,
And says again that life is good;
And should the gift of God be less
In him than in her motherhood,
His fame, though vague, will not be small,
As upward through her dream he fares,
Half clouded with a crimson fall
Of roses thrown on marble stairs.

THE PRODIGAL SON

You are not merry, brother. Why not laugh,
As I do, and acclaim the fatted calf?
For, unless ways are changing here at home,
You might not have it if I had not come.
And were I not a thing for you and me
To execrate in anguish, you would be
As indigent a stranger to surprise,
I fear, as I was once, and as unwise.
Brother, believe as I do, it is best
For you that I'm again in the old nest—
Draggled, I grant you, but your brother still,
Full of good wine, good viands, and good will.
You will thank God, some day, that I returned,
And may be singing for what you have learned,
Some other day; and one day you may find
Yourself a little nearer to mankind.
And having hated me till you are tired,
You will begin to see, as if inspired,
It was fate's way of educating us.
Remembering then when you were venomous,
You will be glad enough that I am gone,
But you will know more of what's going on;
For you will see more of what makes it go,
And in more ways than are for you to know.
We are so different when we are dead,
That you, alive, may weep for what you said;
And I, the ghost of one you could not save,
May find you planting lentils on my grave.

THE PITY OF THE LEAVES

Vengeful across the cold November moors,
Loud with ancestral shame there came the bleak
Sad wind that shrieked, and answered with a shriek,
Reverberant through lonely corridors.
The old man heard it; and he heard, perforce,
Words out of lips that were no more to speak—
Words of the past that shook the old man's cheek
Like dead, remembered footsteps on old floors.

And then there were the leaves that plagued him so!
The brown, thin leaves that on the stones outside
Skipped with a freezing whisper. Now and then
They stopped, and stayed there—just to let him know
How dead they were; but if the old man cried,
They fluttered off like withered souls of men.

AARON STARK

Withal a meagre man was Aaron Stark—
Cursed and unkempt, shrewd, shrivelled, and morose.
A miser was he, with a miser's nose,
And eyes like little dollars in the dark.
His thin, pinched mouth was nothing but a mark;
And when he spoke there came like sullen blows
Through scattered fangs a few snarled words and close,
As if a cur were chary of its bark.

Glad for the murmur of his hard renown,
Year after year he shambled through the town—
A loveless exile moving with a staff;
And oftentimes there crept into his ears
A sound of alien pity, touched with tears—
And then (and only then) did Aaron laugh.

UNCLE ANANIAS

His words were magic and his heart was true,
  And everywhere he wandered he was blessed.
Out of all ancient men my childhood knew
  I choose him and I mark him for the best.
Of all authoritative liars, too,
  I crown him loveliest.

How fondly I remember the delight
  That always glorified him in the spring;
The joyous courage and the benedight
  Profusion of his faith in everything!

He was a good old man, and it was right
That he should have his fling.

And often, underneath the apple-trees,
When we surprised him in the summer-time,
With what superb magnificence and ease
He sinned enough to make the day sublime!
And if he liked us there about his knees,
Truly it was no crime.

All summer long we loved him for the same
Perennial inspiration of his lies;
And when the russet wealth of autumn came,
There flew but fairer visions to our eyes—
Multiple, tropical, winged with a feathery flame,
Like birds of paradise.

So to the sheltered end of many a year
He charmed the seasons out with pageantry
Wearing upon his forehead, with no fear,
The laurel of approved iniquity.
And every child who knew him, far or near,
Did love him faithfully.

KARMA

Christmas was in the air and all was well
With him, but for a few confusing flaws
In divers of God's images. Because
A friend of his would neither buy nor sell,
Was he to answer for the axe that fell?
He pondered; and the reason for it was,
Partly, a slowly freezing Santa Claus
Upon the corner, with his beard and bell.

Acknowledging an improvident surprise,
He magnified a fancy that he wished
The friend whom he had wrecked were here again.
Not sure of that, he found a compromise;
And from the fullness of his heart he fished
A dime for Jesus who had died for man.

Edgar Lee Masters

EDGAR LEE MASTERS was born at Garnett, Kansas, August 23, 1869, of Puritan and pioneering stock. When he was still a boy, the family moved to Illinois, where, after desultory schooling, he studied law in his father's office at Lewiston. For a year he practiced with his father and then went to Chicago, where he became a successful attorney. Before going to Chicago, Masters had composed a quantity of rhymed verse in traditional forms on traditional themes; by the time he was twenty-four he had written about four hundred poems, the result of wide reading and the influence of Poe, Keats, Shelley, and Swinburne.

Masters' first volume of poems, published in his twenty-ninth year, was modestly entitled (perhaps with an implied bow to Omar Khayyám) *A Book of Verses.* With even greater modesty his second volume, *The Blood of the Prophets* (1905), was signed with a pseudonym, "Dexter Wallis." For the third book, *Songs and Sonnets* (1910), Masters adopted another pseudonym composed, this time, of the names of two Elizabethan dramatists: "Webster Ford." Meanwhile, under his own name, the author had published several plays—*Maximilian* (1902), *Althea* (1907), *The Trifler* (1908), *The Leaves of the Tree* (1909), *Eileen* (1910), *The Locket* (1910)—and a set of essays, *The New Star Chamber* (1904).

Although industry is evident in the number and variety of these volumes there is little to indicate the vigor and driving honesty which propelled the succeeding work. Masters himself felt uncertain of his future, crippled by his environment. "I feel that no poet in English or American history had a harder life than mine was in the beginning at Lewiston," he wrote in his autobiography, *Across Spoon River* (1936), "among a people whose flesh and whose vibrations were better calculated to poison, to pervert, and even to kill a sensitive nature."

Masters left Lewiston for Chicago and became the partner of a famous criminal lawyer. Eight years later, his partner defaulted, professional and political enemies combined against him, and he plunged into the excited Chicago literary "movement" of 1912.

In 1914, Masters, at the suggestion of his friend, William Marion Reedy, turned from his preoccupation with classic subjects and began to draw upon the life he knew for those concise records which made him famous. Taking as his model *The Greek Anthology,* which Reedy had pressed upon him, Masters evolved *Spoon River Anthology,* that astonishing assemblage of over two hundred self-inscribed epitaphs, in which the dead of a Middle Western town are supposed to have written the truth about themselves. Through these frank revelations, many of them interrelated, the village is re-created; it lives again with all its intrigues, hypocrisies, feuds, martyrdoms and occasional exaltations. The monotony of existence in a drab township, the defeat of ideals, the struggle toward higher goals are synthesized in these crowded pages. All moods and all manner of voices are heard here—even Masters', who explains the selection of his form through "Petit, the Poet."

The success of the volume was extraordinary. With every new attack (and its frankness continued to make fresh enemies) its readers increased. It was imitated, parodied, reviled as "a piece of yellow journalism"; it was hailed as "an American

Comédie Humaine." Finally, after the storm of controversy, it has taken its place as a landmark in American literature.

With *Spoon River Anthology* Masters arrived—and left. He went back to his first rhetorical style, resurrecting many of his earlier trifles, reprinting dull echoes of Tennyson, imitations of Shelley, archaic paraphrases in the manner of Swinburne. Yet though none of Masters' subsequent volumes can be compared to his masterpiece, all of them contain passages of the same straightforwardness and the stubborn searching that intensified his best-known characterizations.

Songs and Satires (1916) includes the startling "All Life in a Life" and the gravely moving "Silence." *The Great Valley* (1917) is packed with echoes and a growing dependence on Browning. In *Toward the Gulf* (1918), the Browning influence predominates. *Starved Rock* (1919), *Domesday Book* (1920) and *The New Spoon River* (1924) are queerly assembled mixtures of good, bad, and derivative verse. These volumes prepared us for the novels which, in their mixture of sharp concept and dull writing, were as uneven as his verse. *The Fate of the Jury* (1929) is a continuation of *Domesday Book* with its mechanics suggested by *The Ring and the Book*, large in outline, feeble in detail. *Godbey* (1931) is a dramatic poem containing six thousand lines of rhymed verse with a few sharply projected ideas, an occasionally vivid scene, and literally thousands of pedestrian couplets given over to debate and diatribe. *Invisible Landscapes* (1935) contains several ambitious poems devoted to varying manifestations of Nature, but they are impressive chiefly in length. One has only to compare Masters' "Hymn to Earth" with Elinor Wylie's poem of the same title to realize the difference between clairvoyance and dullness. In 1930 Masters moved East and died in Philadelphia, March 6, 1950.

Between 1935 and 1938 Masters was more prolific than ever. In less than three years he published a long autobiography, a novel, three biographies, three books of poems—eight volumes of declining merit. One of them, *The New World* (1937), was a quasi-epic which attempted to synthesize history and philosophy, law and literature. *Poems of People* (1936) was the best of the six; it marked a return to Masters' power of characterization plus a wider range than he had ever accomplished. The manner was equally varied, alternating from the gracefully lyrical "Week-End by the Sea" to the deeply etched "Widows," which contrasts the women living in "forsakeness and listless ease" with their menial sisters.

More People (1939) again reveals Masters as a grim historian of American life, lonely and bitter, but frequently turning the minutiae of history into poetry. The prairie section where Masters was born and where he grew up is spread out in the indigenous *Illinois Poems* (1941), in which the poet demonstrates his early environment and his late nostalgia. In spite of his repetitions and rhetoric, Masters' work is a continual if irritable quest for some key to the mystery of truth and the mastery of life. And there is always that milestone, the original *Spoon River Anthology*. Masters died in 1950.

WEEK-END BY THE SEA

I

Far off the sea is gray and still as the sky,
Great waves roar to the shore like conch shells water-groined.

With a flapping coat I step, brace back as the wind drags by;
No ship as far as the seam where the sea and the sky are joined.

I am watched from the hotel, I think. Who faces the cold?
Why does he walk alone? 'Tis a bitter day.
But I trade dreams with the sea, for the sea is old,
And knows the dreams of a heart whose dreams are gray.

Two apple trees alone in the waste on a sandy ledge,
Grappled and woven together with sprouts in a blackened mesh,
They are dead almost at the roots, but nourish the sedge;
They are dead and at truce, like souls of outlived flesh.

I have startled a gull to flight. I thought him a wave:
White of his wings seemed foam, breast hued like the sand-hued roll.
When a part of the sea takes wing you would think that the grave
Of dead days might release to the heights a soul.

II

I slept as the day was ending: scarlet and gilt
Behind the Japan screen of shrubs and trees.
I awoke to the scabbard of night and the starry hilt
Of the sunken sun, to the old unease.

Sleeping, a void in my heart is awake;
Waking, there is the moon and the wind's moan.
I would I were as the sea that can break
Over the rocks, indifferent and alone.

III

I have climbed to the little burial plot of the lost
In wrecks at sea. West of me lies the town.
Below are the apple trees, pulling each other down.
Children are romping to school, ruddy from frost.

How the wind grieves around these weedy wisps,
And shakes them like a dog, sniffing from patch to patch.
I try the battered gate, lift up the latch,
And enter where the grass like a thistle lisps.

Lost at sea! Nothing thought out or planned!
What need? Thought enough in a moment that battles a wave!
What words tell more? And where is the hand to 'grave
Words that tell so much for the lost on land?

WIDOWS

For twenty years and more surviving after
Their husbands have been hidden away,
Gray, old, thin, or obese, day after day
Pillowed in luxury, waking with quavering laughter
From the drowsiness of midday food,
They sit, fingering long strands of crystals,
Reading a little in a waking mood;

Or waiting for the postman with epistles,
Or for telephones, or callers coming to tea.
Bonds, stocks, are theirs; or pensions it may be,
Since the long-dead husband, under-salaried,
Helped to subdue some barbarous isle;
Now that he lies with the half-forgotten dead,
His widow draws an honorarium,
To prop her prestige yet a little while.
The public treasury is rich, and feels
The drain but little; yet it is a sum
Which would relieve the anxious mind whose zeals
For thought and progress dread the time to come.

In the hives of all the cities, high above
The smoke and noise, where the air is pure,
Are numberless widows, comfortable and secure,
Protected by the watchman and God's love;
Saved by the Church, and by the lawyer served,
And by the actor, dancer, novelist amused.
Some practise poetry; some, who are younger nerved,
Dabble in sculpture; but all are used
To win the attention of celebrities
At dinners, or at the opera, to imbibe
The high vitality of purchased devotees.
But when not modeling, or scribbling verse,
Nor drinking tea, nor tottering forth to dine,
They sit concocting some new bribe
To life for soul relief; they count what's in their purse;
They stare at the window half asleep from wine
Or poppy juice; they wait the luncheon hour;
They visit with their maids; or they receive
The heads of research schools, the which they dower,
Or magazines, the better to achieve
A place in memory or a present power;
Or out of social bitterness they dictate
The policies of journals, and compel
Adherence to their husbands' inveterate
Violence, like souls that brood in hell.
From rents and funds, prescriptions, old mortmains
They gather with fingers brown from moldy spots
Exhaustless gold, with which they feed the veins
Of palsied privilege, and they foil the plots
Of living generations against the dying brains.

The hives of all the cities are full of these
Widows, who in a complexity of combs
Live in forsakeness and listless ease:
All is deserted about them in such homes.
Long has the rain fallen, and the snow been piled
On the man under the trees outdoors;
Even the bones in granite domiciled
Have fallen apart—but still the widow sits

By the window resting above the city's floors.
The drone, the gadfly, or the hornet flits
About her lifeless hive; and she may gasp
Beholding at times the black bees of the rites
Of dead men, drag a fallen bee or wasp
To the outdoors of rain or starry nights.
And then she shudders, knowing the time is soon
When the chauffeur of the ebon car will call
To take her from the city where the moon
Will eye the loneliness of hills; and all
Her crystal necklaces and possessions will be strewn;
And all the rentals of her lands,
And dividends will re-assume with wings
New shapes before the same insatiate hands.

And in the city there are numberless women,
Widows grown old and lame, who scrub, or wait
On entrance doors, or cook; whose lonely fate
Is part of the city's pageant, part of the human
Necessity, victims of profligate
Or unprevisioned life! They have no spoil,
No dividends, and no power of subsidy
Over the world of care and poverty;
They have but patience and a little room,
Patience and the withered hands of toil.

PETIT, THE POET

Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick,
Tick, tick, tick, like mites in a quarrel—
Faint iambics that the full breeze wakens—
But the pine tree makes a symphony thereof.
Triolets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus.
Ballades by the score with the same old thought:
The snows and the roses of yesterday are vanished;
And what is love but a rose that fades?
Life all around me here in the village:
Tragedy, comedy, valor and truth,
Courage, constancy, heroism, failure—
All in the loom, and, oh, what patterns!
Woodlands, meadows, streams and rivers—
Blind to all of it all my life long.
Triolets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus,
Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick,
Tick, tick, tick, what little iambics,
While Homer and Whitman roared in the pines!

LUCINDA MATLOCK

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester.
One time we changed partners

Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,
And then I found Davis.
We were married and lived together for seventy years,
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,
Eight of whom we lost
Ere I had reached the age of sixty.
I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick,
I made the garden, and for holiday
Rambled over the fields where sang the larks,
And by Spoon River gathering many a shell,
And many a flower and medicinal weed—
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.
At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all,
And passed to a sweet repose.
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?
Degenerate sons and daughters,
Life is too strong for you—
It takes life to love Life.

ANNE RUTLEDGE

Out of me unworthy and unknown
The vibrations of deathless music:
"With malice toward none, with charity for all."
Out of me the forgiveness of millions toward millions,
And the beneficent face of a nation
Shining with justice and truth.
I am Anne Rutledge who sleep beneath these weeds,
Beloved in life of Abraham Lincoln,
Wedded to him, not through union,
But through separation.
Bloom forever, O Republic,
From the dust of my bosom!

SILENCE

I have known the silence of the stars and of the sea,
And the silence of the city when it pauses,
And the silence of a man and a maid,
And the silence for which music alone finds the word,
And the silence of the woods before the winds of spring begin
And the silence of the sick
When their eyes roam about the room.
And I ask: For the depths
Of what use is language?
A beast of the field moans a few times
When death takes its young.
And we are voiceless in the presence of realities—
We cannot speak.

A curious boy asks an old soldier
Sitting in front of the grocery store,
"How did you lose your leg?"
And the old soldier is struck with silence,
Or his mind flies away
Because he cannot concentrate it on Gettysburg.
It comes back jocosely
And he says, "A bear bit it off."
And the boy wonders, while the old soldier
Dumbly, feebly lives over
The flashes of guns, the thunder of cannon,
The shrieks of the slain,
And himself lying on the ground,
And the hospital surgeons, the knives,
And the long days in bed.
But if he could describe it all
He would be an artist.
But if he were an artist there would be deeper wounds
Which he could not describe.

There is the silence of a great hatred,
And the silence of a great love,
And the silence of a deep peace of mind,
And the silence of an embittered friendship,
There is the silence of a spiritual crisis,
Through which your soul, exquisitely tortured,
Comes with visions not to be uttered
Into a realm of higher life.
And the silence of the gods who understand each other without speech,
There is the silence of defeat.
There is the silence of those unjustly punished;
And the silence of the dying whose hand
Suddenly grips yours.
There is the silence between father and son,
When the father cannot explain his life,
Even though he be misunderstood for it.

There is the silence that comes between husband and wife.
There is the silence of those who have failed;
And the vast silence that covers
Broken nations and vanquished leaders.
There is the silence of Lincoln,
Thinking of the poverty of his youth.
And the silence of Napoleon
After Waterloo.
And the silence of Jeanne d'Arc
Saying amid the flames, "Blessèd Jesus"—
Revealing in two words all sorrow, all hope.
And there is the silence of age,
Too full of wisdom for the tongue to utter it
In words intelligible to those who have not lived
The great range of life.

And there is the silence of the dead.
If we who are in life cannot speak
Of profound experiences,
Why do you marvel that the dead
Do not tell you of death?
Their silence shall be interpreted
As we approach them.

Stephen Crane

STEPHEN CRANE, whose literary career was one of the most meteoric in American letters, was born in Newark, New Jersey, November 1, 1871. After taking a partial course at Lafayette College, he entered journalism at sixteen and, until the time of his death, was a reporter and writer of newspaper sketches. When he died prematurely, at the age of thirty, he had ten printed volumes to his credit, two more announced for publication, and two others which were appearing serially.

Crane's most famous novel, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), was a *tour de force,* written when he was twenty-two years old. What is even more astonishing is the fact that this detailed description of blood and battlefields was written by a civilian far from the scene of conflict. *The Atlantic Monthly* pronounced it "great enough to set a new fashion in literature"; H. G. Wells, speaking of its influence in England, said Crane was "the first expression of the opening mind of a new period . . . a record of intensity beyond all precedent."

Crane's other books, although less powerful than *The Red Badge of Courage,* are scarcely less vivid. *The Open Boat* (1898) and *The Monster* (1899) are full of an intuitive wisdom and a passionate sensitivity that caused Wells to exclaim, "The man who can call these 'brilliant fragments' would reproach Rodin for not 'completing' his fragments."

At various periods in Crane's brief career, he experimented in verse, seeking to find new effects in unrhymed lines, a new acuteness of symbol and vision. The results were embodied in two volumes of unusual poetry—*The Black Riders* (1895) and *War Is Kind* (1899), lines that strangely anticipated the Imagists and the elliptical free verse that followed fifteen years later. Acidulous and biting, these concisions were unappreciated in his day; Crane's suggestive verse has not yet received its due in an age which employs its very technique. But it was forty years before Emily Dickinson won her rightful audience, and a quarter of a century passed before a publisher risked a *Complete Works of Stephen Crane.* It was not until 1930 that a *Collected Poems* appeared.

Besides novels, short stories and poems, Crane was writing, at the time of his death, descriptions of the world's great battles for *Lippincott's Magazine;* his droll *Whilomville Stories* for boys were appearing in *Harper's Monthly,* and he was beginning a series of similar stories for girls. It is more than probable that this feverish energy of production aggravated the illness that caused Crane's death. He reached his refuge in the Black Forest only to die at the journey's end, June 5, 1900.

I SAW A MAN

I saw a man pursuing the horizon;
Round and round they sped.
I was disturbed at this;
I accosted the man.
"It is futile," I said,
"You can never—"
"You lie," he cried,
And ran on.

THE WAYFARER

The wayfarer,
Perceiving the pathway to truth,
Was struck with astonishment.
It was thickly grown with weeds.
"Ha," he said,
"I see that no one has passed here
In a long time."
Later he saw that each weed
Was a singular knife.
"Well," he mumbled at last,
"Doubtless there are other roads."

HYMN

A slant of sun on dull brown walls,
A forgotten sky of bashful blue.

Toward God a mighty hymn,
A song of collisions and cries,
Rumbling wheels, hoof-beats, bells,
Welcomes, farewells, love-calls, final moans,
Voices of joy, idiocy, warning, despair,
The unknown appeals of brutes,
The chanting of flowers,
The screams of cut trees,
The senseless babble of hens and wise men—
A cluttered incoherency that says to the stars:
"O God, save us!"

THE BLADES OF GRASS

In Heaven,
Some little blades of grass
Stood before God.
"What did you do?"
Then all save one of the little blades
Began eagerly to relate
The merits of their lives.
This one stayed a small way behind,
Ashamed.

Presently, God said,
"And what did you do?"
The little blade answered, "Oh, my Lord,
Memory is bitter to me,
For, if I did good deeds,
I know not of them."
Then God, in all his splendor,
Arose from his throne.
"Oh, best little blade of grass!" he said.

THE BOOK OF WISDOM

I met a seer.
He held in his hands
The book of wisdom.
"Sir," I addressed him,
"Let me read."
"Child—" he began.
"Sir," I said,
"Think not that I am a child,
For already I know much
Of that which you hold;
Aye, much."

He smiled.
Then he opened the book
And held it before me.
Strange that I should have grown so suddenly blind.

THE CANDID MAN

Forth went the candid man
And spoke freely to the wind—
When he looked about him he was in a far strange country.

Forth went the candid man
And spoke freely to the stars—
Yellow light tore sight from his eyes.

"My good fool," said a learned bystander,
"Your operations are mad."

"You are too candid," cried the candid man.
And when his stick left the head of the learned bystander
It was two sticks.

THE HEART

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.

I said, "Is it good, friend?"
"It is bitter—bitter," he answered;
"But I like it
Because it is bitter,
And because it is my heart."

THERE WAS A MAN

There was a man with a tongue of wood
Who essayed to sing,
And in truth it was lamentable.
But there was one who heard
The clip-clapper of this tongue of wood
And knew what the man
Wished to sing,
And with that the singer was content.

A LEARNED MAN

A learned man came to me once.
He said, "I know the way—come."
And I was overjoyed at this.
Together we hastened.
Soon, too soon, were we
Where my eyes were useless,
And I knew not the ways of my feet.
I clung to the hand of my friend;
But at last he cried, "I am lost."

A YOUTH

A youth in apparel that glittered
Went to walk in a grim forest.
There he met an assassin
Attired all in garb of old days;
He, scowling through the thickets,
And dagger poised quivering,
Rushed upon the youth.
"Sir," said the latter,
"I am enchanted, believe me,
To die, thus,
In this mediæval fashion,
According to the best legends;
Ah, what joy!"
Then took he the wound, smiling,
And died, content.

James Weldon Johnson

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON was born in Jacksonville, Florida, June 17, 1871. He was educated at Atlanta University and at Columbia University, where he received his A.M. He was principal of the colored high school in Jacksonville, was admitted to the Florida bar in 1897, and in 1901 removed to New York City, where he collaborated with his brother J. Rosamond Johnson in writing for vaudeville and the light opera stage. He served seven years as United States Consul in Venezuela and Nicaragua, became secretary of the National Association for Advancement of Colored People, and occupied the chair of Creative Literature at Fisk University. His version of the libretto of *Goyescas* was produced at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1915. His death came suddenly and tragically; his automobile was struck by a railroad train near Wiscasset, Maine, June 26, 1938.

His first book of verse *Fifty Years and Other Poems* (1918) contains much that is meretricious and facile; but, half buried in the midst of clichés, there is not only the humor but the stern pathos characteristic of the Negro as singer. This quality was pronounced in *God's Trombones* (1927), Johnson's richest book of poems. The volume consists of seven Negro sermons in verse, done after the manner of the old Negro plantation sermons. In these poems the folk-stuff is used much as a composer might use folk-themes in writing a larger musical composition. "The Creation" and "Go Down, Death," in particular are large in conception; sonorous, strongly rhythmical free verse, reflecting the unctuous periods, the uninhibited imagery of the plantation preacher. They and, in a lesser degree, the other poems in *God's Trombones,* are a rambling mixture of Biblical and tropical figures, but always an artistically governed expression.

Saint Peter Relates an Incident of the Resurrection Day (privately distributed in 1930 and re-issued, with other poems, for general circulation in 1935) is a stirring expression in which irony masks a sense of outrage. Johnson was at work on the manuscript of a book when he picked up a newspaper and read that the government was sending to France a contingent of Gold Star mothers whose soldier sons were buried there, but that the Negro Gold Star mothers would not be allowed to sail on the ship with the white mothers. He threw the manuscript he was writing aside and did not take it up until he had finished the long satirical poem.

Among Johnson's other work are the novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912, republished in 1927), *Black Manhattan* (1930), the story of the Negro in New York, and the eloquent autobiography *Along this Way* (1933). He also collaborated with his brother in the two collections of American Negro Spirituals in 1925 and 1926 and edited *The Book of American Negro Poetry.*

THE CREATION

(A Negro Sermon)

And God stepped out on space,
And He looked around and said,
"I'm lonely—
I'll make me a world."

And far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled,
And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said, *"That's good!"*

Then God reached out and took the light in His hands,
And God rolled the light around in His hands,
Until He made the sun;
And He set that sun a-blazing in the heavens.
And the light that was left from making the sun
God gathered up in a shining ball
And flung against the darkness,
Spangling the night with the moon and stars.
Then down between
The darkness and the light
He hurled the world;
And God said, *"That's good!"*

Then God himself stepped down—
And the sun was on His right hand,
And the moon was on His left;
The stars were clustered about His head,
And the earth was under His feet.
And God walked, and where He trod
His footsteps hollowed the valleys out
And bulged the mountains up.

Then He stopped and looked and saw
That the earth was hot and barren.
So God stepped over to the edge of the world
And He spat out the seven seas;
He batted His eyes, and the lightnings flashed;
He clapped His hands, and the thunders rolled;
And the waters above the earth came down,
The cooling waters came down.

Then the green grass sprouted,
And the little red flowers blossomed,
The pine-tree pointed his finger to the sky,
And the oak spread out his arms;
The lakes cuddled down in the hollows of the ground,
And the rivers ran down to the sea;
And God smiled again,
And the rainbow appeared,
And curled itself around His shoulder.

Then God raised His arm and He waved His hand
Over the sea and over the land,
And He said, *"Bring forth! Bring forth!"*
And quicker than God could drop His hand,
Fishes and fowls
And beasts and birds
Swam the rivers and the seas,
Roamed the forests and the woods,
And split the air with their wings,
And God said, *"That's good!"*

Then God walked around
And God looked around
On all that He had made.
He looked at His sun,
And He looked at His moon,
And He looked at His little stars;
He looked on His world
With all its living things,
And God said, *"I'm lonely still."*

Then God sat down
On the side of a hill where He could think;
By a deep, wide river He sat down;
With His head in His hands,
God thought and thought,
Till He thought, *"I'll make me a man!"*

Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled Him down;
And there the great God Almighty,
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of His hand—
This Great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till He shaped it in His own image;
Then into it He blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

Anna Hempstead Branch

ANNA HEMPSTEAD BRANCH was born at New London, Connecticut. She was graduated from Smith College in 1897 and has devoted herself to literature and social service, mostly in New York. She died in her home September 8, 1937.

Her two chief volumes, *The Shoes That Danced* (1905) and *Rose of the Wind* (1910), reveal the lyrist, but they show a singer who is less fanciful than philosophic. A typical poem is "The Monk in the Kitchen," which is a celebration of cleanness that gives order an almost mystical nobility and recalls George Herbert.

Although nothing she has ever written has attained the popularity of her shorter works, "Nimrod" has an epic sweep, a large movement which, within the greater curve, contains moments of exalted imagery. The deeply religious feeling implicit governs the author as person no less than as poet, for Miss Branch had given a great part of her life to settlement work at Christadora House on New York's East Side. "To a Dog" is more direct than is Miss Branch's wont; "The Monk in the Kitchen" is no less straightforward, though its metaphysics make it seem less forthright.

THE MONK IN THE KITCHEN

I

Order is a lovely thing;
On disarray it lays its wing,
Teaching simplicity to sing.
It has a meek and lowly grace,
Quiet as a nun's face.
Lo—I will have thee in this place!
Tranquil well of deep delight,
All things that shine through thee appear
As stones through water, sweetly clear.
Thou clarity,
That with angelic charity
Revealest beauty where thou art,
Spread thyself like a clean pool.
Then all the things that in thee are,
Shall seem more spiritual and fair,
Reflection from serener air—
Sunken shapes of many a star
In the high heavens set afar.

II

Ye stolid, homely, visible things,
Above you all brood glorious wings
Of your deep entities, set high,
Like slow moons in a hidden sky.
But you, their likenesses, are spent
Upon another element.
Truly ye are but seemings—
The shadowy cast-off gleamings
Of bright solidities. Ye seem
Soft as water, vague as dream;
Image, cast in a shifting stream.

III

What are ye?
I know not.
Brazen pan and iron pot,
Yellow brick and gray flagstone
That my feet have trod upon—
Ye seem to me
Vessels of bright mystery
For ye do bear a shape, and so
Though ye were made by man, I know
An inner Spirit also made,
And ye his breathings have obeyed.

IV

Shape, the strong and awful Spirit,
Laid his ancient hand on you.
He waste chaos doth inherit;
He can alter and subdue.
Verily, he doth lift up
Matter, like a sacred cup.
Into deep substance he reached, and lo
Where ye were not, ye were; and so
Out of useless nothing, ye
Groaned and laughed and came to be,
And I use you, as I can,

Wonderful uses, made for man,
Iron pot and brazen pan.

V

What are ye?
I know not;
Nor what I really do
When I move and govern you.
There is no small work unto God.
He required of us greatness;
Of his least creature
A high angelic nature,
Stature superb and bright completeness.
He sets to us no humble duty.
Each act that he would have us do
Is haloed round with strangest beauty;
Terrific deeds and cosmic tasks
Of his plainest child he asks.
When I polish the brazen pan
I hear a creature laugh afar
In the gardens of a star,
And from his burning presence run
Flaming wheels of many a sun.
Whoever makes a thing more bright,
He is an angel of all light.
When I cleanse this earthen floor
My spirit leaps to see
Bright garments trailing over it,
A cleanness made by me.
Purger of all men's thoughts and ways,
With labor do I sound Thy praise,
My work is done for Thee.
Whoever makes a thing more bright,
He is an angel of all light.
Therefore let me spread abroad
The beautiful cleanness of my God.

VI

One time in the cool of dawn
Angels came and worked with me.
The air was soft with many a wing.
They laughed amid my solitude
And cast bright looks on everything.
Sweetly of me did they ask
That they might do my common task.
And all were beautiful—but one
With garments whiter than the sun
Had such a face
Of deep, remembered grace;
That when I saw I cried—"Thou art
The great Blood-Brother of my heart.
Where have I seen thee?"—And he said,
"When we were dancing round God's throne,
How often thou art there.
Beauties from thy hands have flown
Like white doves wheeling in mid-air.
Nay—thy soul remembers not?
Work on, and cleanse thy iron pot."

VII

What are we? I know not.

Amy Lowell

AMY LOWELL was born in Brookline, Massachusetts, February 9, 1874, of a long line of noted publicists and poets; the first colonist (a Percival Lowell) arrived in Newburyport in 1637. James Russell Lowell was a cousin of her grandfather; Abbott Lawrence, her mother's father, was minister to England; Percival Lowell, the astronomer who charted the conjectural canals on Mars, was a brother; and Abbott Lawrence Lowell, her other brother, was president of Harvard University.

Miss Lowell obtained her early education through private tuition and travel abroad. It was not until 1902, when she was twenty-eight years old, that she definitely determined to be a poet. For eight years she served a rigorous apprenticeship, reading the classics of all schools, studying the technique of verse. In 1910 her first poem was printed in *The Atlantic Monthly;* two years later her first book appeared.

This volume, *A Dome of Many-colored Glass* (1912), was a strangely unpromising first book. Subject and treatment were conventional; the influence of Keats and

Tennyson was evident; the tone was soft and sentimental, without a trace of personality. It was a queer prologue to the vivid *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* (1914), which marked not only an extraordinary advance but a new individuality. This second volume contained many poems written in the usual forms, a score of pictorial pieces illustrating Miss Lowell's identification with the Imagists, and, possibly most important from a technical standpoint, the first appearance in English of "polyphonic prose." Of this extremely flexible form, Miss Lowell, in an essay on John Gould Fletcher, wrote, " 'Polyphonic' means 'many-voiced,' and the form is so-called because it makes use of the 'voices' of poetry, namely: meter, *vers libre,* assonance, alliteration, rhyme and return. It employs every form of rhythm, even prose rhythm at times." By this time Miss Lowell had "captured" the Imagist movement from Ezra Pound, had reorganized it, and, by her belligerent championing of *vers libre,* freedom of choice of subject, and other seeming innovations, had made poetry a fighting word.

It was because of her experiments in form and technique that Miss Lowell first attracted attention and is still best known. But, beneath a preoccupation with theories and novelty of utterance, there was the skilled story-teller, who revivified history with creative excitement. *Men, Women and Ghosts* (1916) brims with this contagious vitality; it is richer in variety than its predecessors, swifter in movement. It is, in common with all of Miss Lowell's work, best in its portrayal of colors and sounds, of physical perceptions rather than the reactions of inner experience. She is, preeminently, the poet of the external world; her visual effects are as "hard and clear" as the most uncompromising Imagist could desire. The colors with which her works are studded seem like bits of bright enamel; every leaf and flower has a lacquered brilliance. To compensate for the lack of the spirit's warmth, Miss Lowell feverishly agitates all she touches; nothing remains quiescent. Whether she writes about a fruit shop, or a flower-garden, or a string quartet, or a Japanese print—everything flashes, leaps, startles, and burns with dynamic, almost savage, speed. Motion too often takes the place of emotion.

In *Can Grande's Castle* (1918) Miss Lowell achieves a broader line; the teller of stories, the bizarre decorator, and the experimenter finally fuse. The poems in this volume are only four in number—four polyphonic prose-poems of unusual length, extraordinarily varied in their sense of amplitude and time. *Pictures of the Floating World* (1919) which followed is, in many ways, Miss Lowell's most personal revelation. Although there are pages devoted to the merely dazzling and grotesque, most of the poems are in a quieter key.

Legends (1921) is closely related to *Can Grande's Castle;* eleven stories are placed against seven different backgrounds. The first poem must be rated among Miss Lowell's most dazzling achievements: a *tour de force* with colors as strange and metallic as the scene it pictures. The next years were devoted to her Keats researches.

Besides Miss Lowell's original poetry, she undertook many studies in foreign literatures; she made the English versions of the poems translated from the Chinese by Florence Ayscough in the vivid *Fir-Flower Tablets* (1921). She also wrote two volumes of critical essays: *Six French Poets* (1915) and *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917), valuable aids to the student of contemporary literature. Two years after its publication she acknowledged the authorship of the anonymous *A Critical Fable* (1922), a modern sequel to James Russell Lowell's *A Fable for Critics.*

Her monumental *John Keats,* an exhaustive biography and analysis of the poet in two volumes, appeared early in 1925.

For years Miss Lowell had been suffering from ill health; she had been operated upon several times, but her general condition, as well as her continual desire to work, nullified the effects of the operations. In April, 1925, her condition became worse; she was forced to cancel a projected lecture trip through England and to cease all work. She died as the result of a paralytic stroke on May 12, 1925. Her death occasioned nation-wide tributes; the very journals which had ridiculed her during her life were loud in praise: it was agreed that hers was one of the most daring and picturesque figures in contemporary literature. Like all pioneers, she was the target of scorn and hostility; but, unlike most innovators, she lived to see her experiments rise from the limbo of ridicule to a definite place in their period.

Three posthumous volumes appeared at yearly intervals immediately after her death: *What's O'Clock* (1925) which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for that year, *East Wind* (1926), and *Ballads for Sale* (1927). The first was arranged by the poet herself and includes such poems as "Meeting-House Hill" and "Lilacs" which are tart and native; the second is a set of dialect and highly overdramatized New England narratives; the third is a miscellaneous collection. Her qualities are epitomized in these three books and the fact that they show no particular advance upon the earlier "Patterns" is significant. Her brilliance, her command of the lacquered phrase and the glazed figure, her pyrotechnique which causes words to bloom and burst at the same moment as though issuing from firework flower-pots, her restless excitement provoking inanimate objects to a furious life of their own—these were characteristics recognizable from the first. In some of the new poems, the juxtaposition of the thing observed and the thing imagined ("Meeting-House Hill" is a particularly vivid example) is more than ordinarily surprising, but one is prepared for the verve and alacrity of upspringing colors, for the purposeful shifting and distortion of surfaces like the clash of planes in an agitated canvas. Perhaps the most important of the posthumous poems are the expressive and personal "Lilacs," "Evelyn Ray," a virtuoso piece in couplets, and "The Sisters," a shrewd commentary on the "queer lot of women who write poetry," particularly her "spiritual relations" Sappho, Mrs. Browning, and Emily Dickinson.

At the end of "The Sisters" the poet confesses that, in spite of her admiration for the Greek poet, the Englishwoman, and the American genius, none of the three has any word for her. They were, first of all, deeply emotional poets; Miss Lowell was not at home among the emotions. She triumphed in the visual world, in the reflection of reflections, in capturing the minute disturbances of light and movement. It has been said that, though a poet, she failed as a humanist, that she never touched deep feelings because she never knew where to look for them. This—contradicted by such poems as "Patterns," "Madonna of the Evening Flowers" and the ecstatic "In Excelsis"—is true in the sense that passion was not this poet's domain nor, except in a few instances, her concern. Color and *finesse* were her preoccupations, and her many volumes testify to a continually adroit craftsmanship.

Amy Lowell, storm-center, Imagist, strategist, poet, and personality, is shown in her vigorous many-sidedness in the comprehensive, if uncritical, biography *Amy Lowell* (1935) by S. Foster Damon.

A LADY

You are beautiful and faded,
Like an old opera tune
Played upon a harpsichord;
Or like the sun-flooded silks
Of an eighteenth-century boudoir.
In your eyes
Smolder the fallen roses of outlived minutes,
And the perfume of your soul
Is vague and suffusing,
With the pungence of sealed spice-jars.
Your half-tones delight me,
And I grow mad with gazing
At your blent colors.

My vigor is a new minted penny,
Which I cast at your feet.
Gather it up from the dust
That its sparkle may amuse you.

SOLITAIRE

When night drifts along the streets of the city,
And sifts down between the uneven roofs,
My mind begins to peek and peer.
It plays at ball in odd, blue Chinese gardens,
And shakes wrought dice-cups in Pagan temples
Amid the broken flutings of white pillars.
It dances with purple and yellow crocuses in its hair,
And its feet shine as they flutter over drenched grasses.
How light and laughing my mind is,
When all good folk have put out their bedroom candles,
And the city is still.

PATTERNS

I walk down the garden-paths,
And all the daffodils
Are blowing, and the bright blue squills.
I walk down the patterned garden-paths
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
With my powdered hair and jeweled fan,
I too am a rare
Pattern. As I wander down
The garden-paths.

My dress is richly figured,
And the train
Makes a pink and silver stain
On the gravel, and the thrift

Of the borders.
Just a plate of current fashion,
Tripping by in high-heeled, ribboned shoes.
Not a softness anywhere about me,
Only whalebone and brocade.
And I sink on a seat in the shade
Of a lime tree. For my passion
Wars against the stiff brocade.
The daffodils and squills
Flutter in the breeze
As they please.
And I weep;
For the lime-tree is in blossom
And one small flower has dropped upon my bosom.

And the plashing of waterdrops
In the marble fountain
Comes down the garden-paths.
The dripping never stops.
Underneath my stiffened gown
Is the softness of a woman bathing in a marble basin,
A basin in the midst of hedges grown
So thick, she cannot see her lover hiding,
But she guesses he is near,
And the sliding of the water
Seems the stroking of a dear
Hand upon her.
What is Summer in a fine brocaded gown!
I should like to see it lying in a heap upon the ground.
All the pink and silver crumpled up on the ground.

I would be the pink and silver as I ran along the paths,
And he would stumble after,
Bewildered by my laughter.
I should see the sun flashing from his sword-hilt and the buckles on his shoes.
I would choose
To lead him in a maze along the patterned paths,
A bright and laughing maze for my heavy-booted lover.
Till he caught me in the shade,
And the buttons of his waistcoat bruised my body as he clasped me,
Aching, melting, unafraid.
With the shadows of the leaves and the sundrops,
And the plopping of the waterdrops,
All about us in the open afternoon—
I am very like to swoon
With the weight of this brocade,
For the sun sifts through the shade.

Underneath the fallen blossom
In my bosom
Is a letter I have hid.
It was brought to me this morning by a rider from the Duke.

"Madam, we regret to inform you that Lord Hartwell
Died in action Thursday se'nnight."
As I read it in the white, morning sunlight,
The letters squirmed like snakes.
"Any answer, Madam," said my footman.
"No," I told him.
"See that the messenger takes some refreshment.
No, no answer."
And I walked into the garden,
Up and down the patterned paths,
In my stiff, correct brocade.
The blue and yellow flowers stood up proudly in the sun,
Each one.
I stood upright too,
Held rigid to the pattern
By the stiffness of my gown;
Up and down I walked,
Up and down.

In a month he would have been my husband.
In a month, here, underneath this lime,
We would have broke the pattern;
He for me, and I for him,
He as Colonel, I as Lady,
On this shady seat.
He had a whim
That sunlight carried blessing.
And I answered, "It shall be as you have said."
Now he is dead.

In Summer and in Winter I shall walk
Up and down
The patterned garden-paths
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
The squills and daffodils
Will give place to pillared roses, and to asters, and to snow.
I shall go
Up and down
In my gown.
Gorgeously arrayed,
Boned and stayed.
And the softness of my body will be guarded from embrace
By each button, hook, and lace.
For the man who should loose me is dead,
Fighting with the Duke in Flanders,
In a pattern called a war.
Christ! What are patterns for?

WIND AND SILVER

Greatly shining,
The Autumn moon floats in the thin sky;
And the fish-ponds shake their backs and flash their dragon scales
As she passes over them.

NIGHT CLOUDS

The white mares of the moon rush along the sky
Beating their golden hoofs upon the glass Heavens;
The white mares of the moon are all standing on their hind legs
Pawing at the green porcelain doors of the remote Heavens.
Fly, mares!
Strain your utmost,
Scatter the milky dust of stars,
Or the tiger sun will leap upon you and destroy you
With one lick of his vermilion tongue.

FREE FANTASIA ON JAPANESE THEMES

All the afternoon there has been a chirping of birds,
And the sun lies warm and still on the western sides of swollen branches,
There is no wind;
Even the little twigs at the ends of the branches do not move,
And the needles of the pines are solid
Bands of inarticulated blackness
Against the blue-white sky,
Still, but alert;
And my heart is still and alert,
Passive with sunshine,
Avid of adventure.

I would experience new emotions,
Submit to strange enchantments,
Bend to influences
Bizarre, exotic,
Fresh with burgeoning.
I would climb a sacred mountain
Struggle with other pilgrims up a steep path through pine-trees,
Above to the smooth, treeless slopes,
And prostrate myself before a painted shrine,
Beating my hands upon the hot earth,
Quieting my eyes upon the distant sparkle
Of the faint spring sea.

I would recline upon a balcony
In purple curving folds of silk,
And my dress should be silvered with a pattern
Of butterflies and swallows,
And the black band of my *obi*
Should flash with gold circular threads,

And glitter when I moved.
I would lean against the railing
While you sang to me of wars
Past and to come—
Sang, and played the samisen.
Perhaps I would beat a little hand drum
In time to your singing;
Perhaps I would only watch the play of light
Upon the hilt of your two swords.

I would sit in a covered boat,
Rocking slowly to the narrow waves of a river,
While above us, an arc of moving lanterns,
Curved a bridge,
A hiss of gold
Blooming out of darkness,
Rockets exploded,
And died in a soft dripping of colored stars.
We would float between the high trestles,
And drift away from other boats,
Until the rockets flared soundless,
And their falling stars hung silent in the sky,
Like wistaria clusters above the ancient entrance of a temple.

I would anything
Rather than this cold paper;
With outside, the quiet sun on the sides of burgeoning branches,
And inside, only my books.

A DECADE

When you came, you were like red wine and honey,
And the taste of you burnt my mouth with its sweetness.
Now you are like morning bread,
Smooth and pleasant.
I hardly taste you at all, for I know your savor;
But I am completely nourished.

MADONNA OF THE EVENING FLOWERS

All day long I have been working,
Now I am tired.
I call: "Where are you?"
But there is only the oak tree rustling in the wind.
The house is very quiet,
The sun shines in on your books,
On your scissors and thimble just put down,
But you are not there.

Suddenly I am lonely:
Where are you?
I go about searching.

Then I see you,
Standing under a spire of pale blue larkspur,
With a basket of roses on your arm.
You are cool, like silver,
And you smile.

I think the Canterbury bells are playing little tunes,
You tell me that the peonies need spraying,
That the columbines have overrun all bounds,
That the pyrus japonica should be cut back and rounded.
You tell me these things.
But I look at you, heart of silver,
White heart-flame of polished silver,
Burning beneath the blue steeples of the larkspur,
And I long to kneel instantly at your feet,
While all about us peal the loud, sweet *Te Deums* of the Canterbury bells.

EVELYN RAY

No decent man will cross a field
Laid down to hay, until its yield

Is cut and cocked, yet there was the track
Going in from the lane and none coming back.

But that was afterwards; before,
The field was smooth as a sea off shore

On a shimmering afternoon, waist-high
With bent, and red top, and timothy.

Lush with oat grass and tall fescue,
And the purple green of Kentucky blue;

A noble meadow, so broad each way
It took three good scythes to mow in a day.

Just where the field broke into a wood
A knotted old catalpa stood,

And in the old catalpa-tree
A cat-bird sang immoderately.

The sky above him was round and big
And its center seemed just over his twig.

The earth below him was fresh and fair,
With the sun's long fingers everywhere.

The cat-bird perched where a great leaf hung,
And the great leaf tilted, and flickered, and swung.

The cat-bird sang with a piercing glee
Up in the sun-specked catalpa-tree.

He sang so loud and he sang so long
That his ears were drowned in his own sweet song.

But the little peering leaves of grass
Shook and sundered to let them pass,

To let them pass, the men who heard
Nothing the grass said, nothing the bird.

Each man was still as a shining stone,
Each man's head was a buzzing bone

Wherein two words screeched in and out
Like a grinding saw with its turn about:

"Evelyn Ray," each stone man said,
And the words cut back and forth through his head,
And each of them wondered if he were dead.

The cat-bird sang with his head cocked up
Gazing into the sky's blue cup.

The grasses waved back into place,
The sun's long fingers stroked each face,

Each grim, cold face that saw no sun.
And the feet led the faces on and on.

They stopped beside the catalpa-tree,
Said one stone face to the other: "See!"

The other face had nothing to say,
Its lips were frozen on "Evelyn Ray."

They laid their hats in the tall green grass
Where the crickets and grasshoppers pass and pass.

They hung their coats in the crotch of a pine
And paced five feet in an even line.

They measured five paces either way,
And the saws in their heads screeched "Evelyn Ray."

The cat-bird sang so loud and clear
He heard nothing at all, there was nothing to hear.

Even the swish of long legs pushing
Through grass had ceased, there was only the hushing

Of a windless wind in the daisy tops,
And the jar stalks make when a grasshopper hops.

Every now and then a bee boomed over
The black-eyed Susans in search of clover,

And crickets shrilled as crickets do:
One—two. One—two.

The cat-bird sang with his head in the air,
And the sun's bright fingers poked here and there,

Past leaf, and branch, and needle, and cone.
But the stone men stood like men of stone.

Each man lifted a dull stone hand
And his fingers felt like weaving sand,

And his feet seemed standing on a ball
Which tossed and turned in a waterfall.

Each man heard a shot somewhere
Dropping out of the distant air.

But the screaming saws no longer said
"Evelyn Ray," for the men were dead.

✦

I often think of Evelyn Ray.
What did she do, what did she say?
Did she ever chance to pass that way?

I remember it as a lovely spot
Where a cat-bird sang. When he heard the shot,
Did he fly away? I have quite forgot.

When I went there last, he was singing again
Through a little fleeting, misty rain,
And pine-cones lay where they had lain.

This is the tale as I heard it when
I was young from a man who was threescore and ten.
A lady of clay and two stone men.

A pretty problem is here, no doubt,
If you have a fancy to work it out:
What happens to stone when clay is about?

Muse upon it as long as you will,
I think myself it will baffle your skill,
And your answer will be what mine is—nil.

But every sunny Summer's day
I am teased with the thought of Evelyn Ray,
Poor little image of painted clay.
And Heigh-o! I say.
What if there be a judgment-day?

What if all religions be true,
And Gabriel's trumpet blow for you
And blow for them—what will you do?

Evelyn Ray, will you rise alone?
Or will your lovers of dull gray stone
Pace beside you through the wan

Twilight of that bitter day
To be judged as stone and judged as clay,
And no one to say the judgment nay?

Better be nothing, Evelyn Ray,
A handful of buttercups that sway
In the wind for a children's holiday.

For earth to earth is the best we know,
Where the good blind worms push to and fro
Turning us into the seeds which grow,

And lovers and ladies are dead indeed,
Lost in the sap of a flower seed.
Is this, think you, a sorry creed?

Well, be it so, for the world is wide
And opinions jostle on every side.
What has always been hidden will always hide.

And every year when the fields are high
With oat grass, and red top, and timothy,
I know that a creed is the shell of a lie.

Peace be with you, Evelyn Ray,
And to your lovers, if so it may,
For earth made stone and earth made clay.

THE TAXI

When I go away from you
The world beats dead
Like a slackened drum.
I call out for you against the jutted stars
And shout into the ridges of the wind.
Streets coming fast,
One after the other,

Wedge you away from me,
And the lamps of the city prick my eyes
So that I can no longer see your face.
Why should I leave you,
To wound myself upon the sharp edges of the night?

IN EXCELSIS

You—you
Your shadow is sunlight on a plate of silver;
Your footsteps, the seeding-place of lilies;
Your hands moving, a chime of bells across a windless air.

The movement of your hands is the long, golden running of light from a rising sun;
It is the hopping of birds upon a garden-path.

As the perfume of jonquils, you come forth in the morning.
Young horses are not more sudden than your thought,
Your words are bees about a pear-tree,
Your fancies are the gold-and-black striped wasps buzzing among red apples.
I drink your lips,
I eat the whiteness of your hands and feet.
My mouth is open,
As a new jar I am empty and open.
Like white water are you who fill the cup of my mouth,
Like a brook of water thronged with lilies.

You are frozen as the clouds,
You are far and sweet as the high clouds.
I dare reach to you,
I dare touch the rim of your brightness.
I leap beyond the winds,
I cry and shout,
For my throat is keen as a sword
Sharpened on a hone of ivory.
My throat sings the joy of my eyes,
The rushing gladness of my love.

How has the rainbow fallen upon my heart?
How have I snared the seas to lie in my fingers
And caught the sky to be a cover for my head?
How have you come to dwell with me,
Compassing me with the four circles of your mystic lightness,
So that I say "Glory! Glory!" and bow before you
As to a shrine?

Do I tease myself that morning is morning and a day after?
Do I think the air a condescension,
The earth a politeness,
Heaven a boon deserving thanks?
So you—air—earth—heaven—

I do not thank you,
I take you,
I live.
And those things which I say in consequence
Are rubies mortised in a gate of stone.

MEETING-HOUSE HILL

I must be mad, or very tired,
When the curve of a blue bay beyond a railroad track
Is shrill and sweet to me like the sudden springing of a tune,
And the sight of a white church above thin trees in a city square
Amazes my eyes as though it were the Parthenon.
Clear, reticent, superbly final,
With the pillars of its portico refined to a cautious elegance,
It dominates the weak trees,
And the shot of its spire
Is cool and candid,
Rising into an unresisting sky.

Strange meeting-house
Pausing a moment upon a squalid hill-top.
I watch the spire sweeping the sky,
I am dizzy with the movement of the sky;
I might be watching a mast
With its royals set full
Straining before a two-reef breeze.
I might be sighting a tea-clipper,
Tacking into the blue bay,
Just back from Canton
With her hold full of green and blue porcelain
And a Chinese coolie leaning over the rail
Gazing at the white spire
With dull, sea-spent eyes.

LILACS

Lilacs,
False blue,
White,
Purple,
Color of lilac,
Your great puffs of flowers
Are everywhere in this my New England.
Among your heart-shaped leaves
Orange orioles hop like music-box birds and sing
Their little weak soft songs;
In the crooks of your branches
The bright eyes of song sparrows sitting on spotted eggs
Peer restlessly through the light and shadow
Of all Springs.

Lilacs in dooryards
Holding quiet conversations with an early moon;
Lilacs watching a deserted house
Settling sideways into the grass of an old road;
Lilacs, wind-beaten, staggering under a lopsided shock of bloom
Above a cellar dug into a hill.
You are everywhere.
You were everywhere.
You tapped the window when the preacher preached his sermon,
And ran along the road beside the boy going to school.
You stood by pasture-bars to give the cows good milking,
You persuaded the housewife that her dish-pan was of silver
And her husband an image of pure gold.
You flaunted the fragrance of your blossoms
Through the wide doors of Custom Houses—
You, and sandalwood, and tea,
Charging the noses of quill-driving clerks
When a ship was in from China.
You called to them: "Goose-quill men, goose-quill men,
May is a month for flitting,"
Until they writhed on their high stools
And wrote poetry on their letter-sheets behind the propped-up ledgers.
Paradoxical New England clerks,
Writing inventories in ledgers, reading the "Song of Solomon" at night,
So many verses before bedtime,
Because it was the Bible.
The dead fed you
Amid the slant stones of graveyards.
Pale ghosts who planted you
Came in the night time
And let their thin hair blow through your clustered stems.
You are of the green sea,
And of the stone hills which reach a long distance.
You are of elm-shaded streets with little shops where they sell kites and marbles,
You are of great parks where everyone walks and nobody is at home.
You cover the blind sides of greenhouses
And lean over the top to say a hurry-word through the glass
To your friends, the grapes, inside.

Lilacs,
False blue,
White,
Purple,
Color of lilac,
You have forgotten your Eastern origin,
The veiled women with eyes like panthers,
The swollen, aggressive turbans of jeweled Pashas.
Now you are a very decent flower,
A reticent flower,
A curiously clear-cut, candid flower,
Standing beside clean doorways,

Friendly to a house-cat and a pair of spectacles,
Making poetry out of a bit of moonlight
And a hundred or two sharp blossoms.

Maine knows you,
Has for years and years;
New Hampshire knows you,
And Massachusetts
And Vermont.
Cape Cod starts you along the beaches to Rhode Island;
Connecticut takes you from a river to the sea.
You are brighter than apples,
Sweeter than tulips,
You are the great flood of our souls
Bursting above the leaf-shapes of our hearts,
You are the smell of all Summers,
The love of wives and children,
The recollection of the gardens of little children,
You are State Houses and Charters
And the familiar treading of the foot to and fro on a road it knows.
May is lilac here in New England,
May is a thrush singing "Sun up!" on a tip-top ash-tree,
May is white clouds behind pine-trees
Puffed out and marching upon a blue sky.
May is a green as no other,
May is much sun through small leaves,
May is soft earth,
And apple-blossoms,
And windows open to a South wind.
May is a full light wind of lilac
From Canada to Narragansett Bay.

Lilacs,
False blue,
White,
Purple,
Color of lilac,
Heart-leaves of lilac all over New England,
Roots of lilac under all the soil of New England,
Lilac in me because I am New England,
Because my roots are in it,
Because my leaves are of it,
Because my flowers are for it,
Because it is my country
And I speak to it of itself
And sing of it with my own voice
Since certainly it is mine.

THE SISTERS

Taking us by and large, we're a queer lot
We women who write poetry. And when you think
How few of us there've been, it's queerer still.
I wonder what it is that makes us do it,
Singles us out to scribble down, man-wise,
The fragments of ourselves. Why are we
Already mother-creatures, double-bearing,
With matrices in body and in brain?
I rather think that there is just the reason
We are so sparse a kind of human being;
The strength of forty thousand Atlases
Is needed for our every-day concerns.
There's Sapho, now I wonder what was Sapho.
I know a single slender thing about her:
That, loving, she was like a burning birch-tree
All tall and glittering fire, and that she wrote
Like the same fire caught up to Heaven and held there
A frozen blaze before it broke and fell.
Ah, me! I wish I could have talked to Sapho,
Surprised her reticences by flinging mine
Into the wind. This tossing off of garments
Which cloud the soul is none too easy doing
With us today. But still I think with Sapho
One might accomplish it, were she in the mood
To bare her loveliness of words and tell
The reasons, as she possibly conceived them,
Of why they are so lovely. Just to know
How she came at them, just to watch
The crisp sea sunshine playing on her hair,
And listen, thinking all the while 'twas she
Who spoke and that we two were sisters
Of a strange, isolated little family.
And she is Sapho—Sapho—not Miss or Mrs.,
A leaping fire we call so for convenience.
But Mrs. Browning—who would ever think
Of such presumption as to call her "Ba."
Which draws the perfect line between sea-cliffs
And a close-shuttered room in Wimpole Street.
Sapho could fly her impulses like bright
Balloons tip-tilting to a morning air
And write about it. Mrs. Browning's heart
Was squeezed in stiff conventions. So she lay
Stretched out upon a sofa, reading Greek
And speculating, as I must suppose,
In just this way on Sapho; all the need,
The huge, imperious need of loving, crushed
Within the body she believed so sick.
And it was sick, poor lady, because words
Are merely simulacra after deeds

Have wrought a pattern; when they take the place
Of actions they breed a poisonous miasma
Which, though it leave the brain, eats up the body.
So Mrs. Browning, aloof and delicate,
Lay still upon her sofa, all her strength
Going to uphold her over-topping brain.
It seems miraculous, but she escaped
To freedom and another motherhood
Than that of poems. She was a very woman
And needed both.
If I had gone to call,
Would Wimpole Street have been the kindlier place,
Or Casa Guidi, in which to have met her?
I am a little doubtful of that meeting,
For Queen Victoria was very young and strong
And all-pervading in her apogee
At just that time. If we had stuck to poetry,
Sternly refusing to be drawn off by mesmerism
Or Roman revolutions, it might have done.
For, after all, she is another sister,
But always, I rather think, an older sister
And not herself so curious a technician
As to admit newfangled modes of writing—
"Except, of course, in Robert, and that is neither
Here nor there for Robert is a genius."
I do not like the turn this dream is taking,
Since I am very fond of Mrs. Browning
And very much indeed should like to hear her
Graciously asking me to call her "Ba."
But then the Devil of Verisimilitude
Creeps in and forces me to know she wouldn't.
Convention again, and how it chafes my nerves,
For we are such a little family
Of singing sisters, and as if I didn't know
What those years felt like tied down to the sofa.
Confound Victoria, and the slimy inhibitions
She loosed on all us Anglo-Saxon creatures!
Suppose there hadn't been a Robert Browning,
No "Sonnets from the Portuguese" would have been written.
They are the first of all her poems to be,
One might say, fertilized. For, after all,
A poet is flesh and blood as well as brain;
And Mrs. Browning, as I said before,
Was very, very woman. Well, there are two
Of us, and vastly unlike that's for certain.
Unlike at least until we tear the veils
Away which commonly gird souls. I scarcely think
Mrs. Browning would have approved the process
In spite of what had surely been relief;
For speaking souls must always want to speak
Even when bat-eyed, narrow-minded Queens

Set prudishness to keep the keys of impulse.
Then do the frowning Gods invent new banes
And make the need of sofas. But Sapho was dead
And I, and others, not yet peeped above
The edge of possibility. So that's an end
To speculating over tea-time talks
Beyond the movement of pentameters
With Mrs. Browning.

But I go dreaming on,
In love with these my spiritual relations.
I rather think I see myself walk up
A flight of wooden steps and ring a bell
And send a card in to Miss Dickinson.
Yet that's a very silly way to do.
I should have taken the dream twist-ends about
And climbed over the fence and found her deep
Engrossed in the doings of a humming-bird
Among nasturtiums. Not having expected strangers,
She might forget to think me one, and holding up
A finger say quite casually: "Take care.
Don't frighten him, he's only just begun."
"Now this," I well believe I should have thought,
"Is even better than Sapho. With Emily
You're really here, or never anywhere at all
In range of mind." Wherefore, having begun
In the strict center, we could slowly progress
To various circumferences, as we pleased.
We could, but should we? That would quite depend
On Emily. I think she'd be exacting,
Without intention possibly, and ask
A thousand tight-rope tricks of understanding.
But, bless you, I would somersault all day
If, by so doing, I might stay with her.
I hardly think that we should mention souls,
Although they might be just round the corner from us
In some half-quizzical, half-wistful metaphor.
I'm very sure that I should never seek
To turn her parables to stated fact.
Sapho would speak, I think, quite openly,
And Mrs. Browning guard a careful silence,
But Emily would set doors ajar and slam them
And love you for your speed of observation.

Strange trio of my sisters, most diverse,
And how extraordinarily unlike
Each is to me, and which way shall I go?
Sapho spent and gained; and Mrs. Browning,
After a miser girlhood, cut the strings
Which tied her money-bags and let them run;
But Emily hoarded—hoarded—only giving

Herself to cold, white paper. Starved and tortured,
She cheated her despair with games of patience
And fooled herself by winning. Frail little elf,
The lonely brain-child of a gaunt maturity,
She hung her womanhood upon a bough
And played ball with the stars—too long—too long—
The garment of herself hung on a tree,
Until at last she lost even the desire
To take it down. Whose fault? Why let us say,
To be consistent, Queen Victoria's.
But really, not to over-rate the queen,
I feel obliged to mention Martin Luther,
And behind him the long line of Church Fathers
Who draped their prurience like a dirty cloth
About the naked majesty of God.

Good-by, my sisters, all of you are great,
And all of you are marvelously strange,
And none of you has any word for me.
I cannot write like you, I cannot think
In terms of Pagan or of Christian now.
I only hope that possibly some day
Some other woman with an itch for writing
May turn to me as I have turned to you
And chat with me a brief few minutes. How
We lie, we poets! It is three good hours
I have been dreaming. Has it seemed so long
To you? And yet I thank you for the time,
Although you leave me sad and self-distrustful,
For older sisters are very sobering things.
Put on your cloaks, my dears, the motor's waiting.
No, you have not seemed strange to me, but near,
Frightfully near, and rather terrifying.
I understand you all, for in myself—
Is that presumption? Yet indeed it's true—
We are one family. And still my answer
Will not be any one of yours, I see.
Well, never mind that now. Good night! Good night!

SHOOTING THE SUN

Four horizons cozen me
To distances I dimly see.

Four paths beckon me to stray,
Each a bold and separate way.

Monday morning shows the East
Satisfying as a feast.

Tuesday I will none of it,
West alone holds benefit.

Later in the week 'tis due
North that I would hurry to.

While on other days I find
To the South content of mind.

So I start, but never rest
North or South or East or West.

Each horizon has its claim
Solace to a different aim.

Four-souled like the wind am I,
Voyaging an endless sky,
Undergoing destiny.

Robert Frost

ALTHOUGH known as the chief interpreter of New England, Robert (Lee) Frost was born in San Francisco, California, March 26, 1875. His father, born in New Hampshire, taught school, edited a paper, entered politics, and moved to San Francisco where his "copperhead" sympathy with the South led him to christen his son Robert Lee. Frost's mother, after the death of her husband, supported herself and her children by teaching school; bringing the family back East to the towns and hills where, for eight generations, his forefathers had lived and where, much later, Frost was to uphold the tradition by lecturing, accepting an "idle professorship" ("being a sort of poetic radiator") at Amherst, and buying farms in Vermont. After graduating from the high school at Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1892, Frost entered Dartmouth College, where he remained only a few months. The routine of study was too much for him and he decided to earn his living. He became a bobbin-boy in one of the mills at Lawrence. He had already begun to write poetry; a few of his verses had appeared in *The Independent*. But the strange, soil-flavored quality which even then distinguished his lines was not relished by the editors, and the very magazines to which he sent poems that today are famous rejected his verse with unanimity. For twenty years Frost continued to write his highly characteristic work in spite of the discouraging apathy, and for twenty years the poet remained completely unknown.

In 1897, two years after his marriage, Frost moved his family to Cambridge, Massachusetts, entering Harvard in a final determination to achieve culture. This time he followed the curriculum for two years, but at the end of that dry period he stopped trying to learn and started to teach. (Curiously enough, though Frost made light of and even ridiculed his scholarship, his marks in Greek and the classical studies were always exceptionally high.) For three years he followed the family tradition and taught school in New England; he also made shoes, edited a weekly

paper, and in 1900 became a farmer at Derry, New Hampshire. During the next eleven years Frost labored to wrest a living from stubborn hills with scant success. Loneliness claimed him for its own; the rocks refused to give him a living; the literary world continued to remain oblivious of his existence. Frost sought a change of environment and, after a few years' teaching at Derry and Plymouth, New Hampshire, sold his farm and, with his wife and four children, sailed for England in September, 1912.

For the first time in his life, Frost moved in a literary world. Groups merged, dissolved and separated overnight; controversy and creation were in the air. A friendship was established with the poets Abercrombie, Brooke and Gibson, a close intimacy with Edward Thomas. Here Frost wrote most of his longer narratives, took his lyrics to a publisher with few hopes, went back to the suburban town of Beaconsfield and turned to other matters. A few months later *A Boy's Will* (1913) was published and Frost was recognized at once as one of the authentic voices of modern poetry.

A Boy's Will is seemingly subjective; in spite of certain reminiscences of Browning it is no set of derivations. In *A Boy's Will* Frost is not yet completely in possession of his own idiom; but the *timbre* is recognizably his. No one but Frost could have written "Reluctance" or "The Tuft of Flowers." Wholly lyrical, this volume, lacking the concentrated emotion of his subsequent works, is a significant introduction to the following book, which became an international classic. Early in 1914, Frost leased a small place in Gloucestershire; in the spring of the same year, *North of Boston* (1914), one of the most intensely American books ever printed, was published in England. (See Preface.) This is, as he has called it, a "book of people." And it is more than that—it is a book of backgrounds as living and dramatic as the people they overshadow. Frost vivifies a stone wall, an empty cottage, a grindstone, a mountain, a forgotten wood-pile left

> To warm the frozen swamp as best it could
> With the slow, smokeless burning of decay.

North of Boston, like its successor, contains much of the finest poetry of our time. Rich in its actualities, richer in its spiritual values, every line moves with the double force of observation and implication. The very first poem in the book illustrates this power of character and symbolism. Although Frost is not arguing for anything in particular, one senses here something more than the enemies of walls. In "Mending Wall," we see two elemental and opposed forces. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," insists the seeker after causes; "Good fences make good neighbors," doggedly replies the literal-minded lover of tradition. Here, beneath the whimsical turns and pungency of expression, we have the essence of nationalism versus the internationalist: the struggle, though the poet would be the last to prod the point, between blind obedience to custom and questioning iconoclasm.

So with all of Frost's characters. Like the worn-out incompetent in "The Death of the Hired Man" (one of the finest *genre* pictures of our time), or the autobiographical country boy climbing "black branches up a snow-white trunk toward heaven" in "Birches," or the positive, tight-lipped old lady in "The Black Cottage," or the headlong but laconic Brown of "Brown's Descent," his people are always amplified through the poet's circumlocutory but precise psychology. They remain

close to their soil. Frost's monologs and dramatic idyls, written in a conversational blank verse, establish the connection between the vernacular and the language of literature; they remain rooted in realism. But Frost is never a photographic realist. "There are," he once said, "two types of realist—the one who offers a good deal of dirt with his potato to show that it is a real one; and the one who is satisfied with the potato brushed clean. I'm inclined to be the second kind. . . . To me, the thing that art does for life is to clean it, to strip it to form."

In March, 1915, Frost came back to America—to a hill outside of Franconia, New Hampshire. *North of Boston* had been reprinted in the United States and its author, who had left the country an unknown writer, returned to find himself famous. Honors were awarded to him; within ten years one university after another conferred degrees upon him who was unwilling to graduate from any of them; he became "professor in residence" at Amherst. His lectures (actually glorified philosophic speculations) were notable, although he permitted only one of them, *Education by Poetry* (1930), which Frost called "a meditative monologue," to be reduced to print.

Mountain Interval, containing some of Frost's most characteristic poems ("Birches," and "An Old Man's Winter Night" are typical), appeared in 1916. The idiom is the same as in the earlier volumes, but the notes are more varied, the lyrics intensified, the assurance is stronger. The subtle variations of the tones of speech find their sympathetic reporter here; the lines disclose delicate shades of emphasis in the way they present an entire scene by giving only a significant detail. Altogether natural, yet fanciful no less than realistic, this poetry escapes labels, "but," Frost once said, with a suspicion of a twinkle, "if I must be classified as a poet, I might be called a Synecdochist; for I prefer the synecdoche in poetry—that figure of speech in which we use a part for the whole."

New Hampshire (1923), which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the best volume of poetry published in 1923, synthesizes Frost's qualities: it combines the stark unity of *North of Boston* and the diffused geniality of *Mountain Interval.* If one thing predominates, it is a feeling of quiet classicism; the poet has lowered his voice but not the strength of his convictions. To say, as was said, that Frost gives us a poetry "without the delight of the senses, without the glow of warm feeling" is—particularly when faced with *New Hampshire*—to utter an absurdity. Frost, in spite of a superficial underemphasis, does not hesitate to declare his close affection. Such poems as "Two Look at Two," with its tremendous wave of love, "To Earthward," with its unreserved intensity, even the brilliantly condensed "Fire and Ice," with its candidly registered passion—all these brim with a physical radiance, with the very delight and pain of the senses. Nor is the fanciful by-play, the sly banter so characteristic of this poet, absent from the volume. Who but Frost could put so whimsical an accent in the farewell to an orchard entitled "Good-by and Keep Cold"; who but he could summon, with so few strokes, the frightened colt "with one forefoot on the wall, the other curled at his breast" in "The Runaway"? The very scheme of *New Hampshire* is an extended whimsicality: he offers the contents of the volume as a series of explanatory notes (and grace notes) to the title poem, which is supposed to be the book's *raison d'être.* The long poems (the "notes") rank with the narrative monologs in *North of Boston;* the "grace notes" contain not merely Frost's finest lines but some of the most haunting lyrics ever written by an American. Such a poem as "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" once in the mind of a reader

will never leave it. Had Frost written nothing but these thirty "grace notes" his place in poetry would be assured. A revised *Selected Poems* (revised in 1928 and 1935) and a rearranged *Collected Poems* (1930) which again won the Pulitzer Prize, confirmed the conclusions; the unpretentious bucolics had become contemporary classics.

It has been said that Frost's work suffers from an exclusiveness, and even his most ardent admirers would be willing to admit that his is not an indiscriminately inclusive passion like Whitman's. But Frost loves what he loves with a fierce attachment, a tenderness fixed beyond a more easily transferred regard. His devotion to the intimacies of earth is, even more than Wordsworth's, rich, almost inordinate in its fidelity; what his emotion (or his poetry) may lack in windy range, is trebly compensated for by its untroubled depths.

This is more true than ever of *West-Running Brook* (1928) which was hailed with loud—and misleading—enthusiasm. No contemporary poet received more praise than Frost, and none was more praised for the wrong attributes. As late as 1928, most of the critics were surprised that the writer identified with the long monologs in *North of Boston* should turn to lyrics, forgetting that Frost's first volume (written in the 1890's and published twenty years later) was wholly and insistently lyrical. One reviewer, echoing the false platitude concerning New England bleakness, applauded Frost's almost colorless reticence, his "preference for black and white." Another made the discovery that "where he was formerly content to limn a landscape . . . here the emphasis is primarily the poet's emotion." A more understanding consideration of Frost's poetry would have instructed the critics. They would have seen that no volumes have ever been less black and white, no poetry so delicately shaded. The so-called inhibitions disappear upon rereading. Frost's poems are only superficially reticent; actually they are profound and personal revelations. Frost has never been "content to limn a landscape." He cannot suggest a character or a countryside without informing the subject with his own philosophy, a philosophy whose bantering accents cannot hide a moral earnestness. Beyond the fact ("the dearest dream that labor knows"), beyond the tone of voice, which is—at least technically—the poet's first concern, there is that ardent and unifying emotion which is Frost's peculiar quality and his essential spirit. Nothing could prove it more fully than the title-poem with its seemingly casual but actually cosmic philosophy. Such poetry, with its genius for suggestive understatement, establishes Frost among the first of contemporary writers and places him with the very best of American poets past or present. It is not the technique nor even the thought, but the essence which finally convinces; the reader is fortified by Frost's serenity, strengthened by his strength.

West-Running Brook is a reflection and restatement of all that has gone before. The autobiographical references are a little more outspoken; Amy Lowell's assertion that "there is no poem which has San Francisco as a background nor which seems to owe its inception to the author's early life" is answered again and again by poems which are packed with the poet's youth. Thus a student will learn that the presumably "late" poem entitled "On Going Unnoticed" was written as early as 1901; the poem "Bereft" was conceived about 1893; and "Once by the Pacific" is half-humorously dated "as of about 1880"—at which time the poet was exactly six years old.

The poetry published between Frost's fiftieth and sixtieth years grew in serenity and intimacy. The lyrics became warmer and more musical, the communication more expansive. The poet still maintained his rôle of half-earnest synecdochist. He reaffirmed his conviction: "All that an artist needs is samples." This employment of the part for the whole sharpens the ruminating accents of "Tree at My Window," fastens the epigrammatic irony of "The Peaceful Shepherd," quickens the somber power of "Bereft" and "Once by the Pacific," points the teasing play of "The Bear."

A Further Range (1936) reveals the renewed play of the serious mind. It is emphasized by the self-disclosing "A Leaf-Treader" and "Desert Places" and "Two Tramps in Mud-Time," the last being one of the most persuasive poems of the period. In the later poems Frost is more than ever a "revisionist"; he uses his power to revise stereotypes of thought as well as clichés of expression. If it were not for the journalistic connotations one might add the term "humorist" to the roll-call of "classicist," "realist," and "revisionist." His style, so seemingly casual and yet so inimitable, so colloquial and so elevated, has a way of uniting opposites. It is a remarkable prestidigitation in which fact becomes fantasy, and the fancy is more convincing than the fact. Inner seriousness and outer humor continually shift their centers of gravity—and levity—until it must be plain that Frost's banter is as full of serious implications as his somber speculations, that his playfulness is even more profound than his profundity. *A Further Range* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1937.

A new and comprehensive *Collected Poems* (1939) reveals the greater scope and increasing depth of the poet's gift. Published in Frost's sixty-fifth year, much of the poetry seems younger than ever. Retaining the tart accent of his forefathers, and sometimes recording what might be called New England's heritage of chronic adversity, Frost sounds a new tenderness and humor. The combination of youthful vigor and aging wisdom is manifest in *A Witness Tree* (1942), the fourth of Frost's books to win a Pulitzer Prize; *Steeple Bush* (1947); *A Masque of Reason* (1945); and *A Masque of Mercy* (1947). The first two are collections of lyrics, some of which are as tart and tender as anything the poet ever wrote; *Steeple Bush* is particularly salted with wit and peppered with satire. The sadness of age is sounded in the later works, yet there is neither despair nor despondency. The two *Masques* are satirical variations on Biblical themes, skeptical but searching, full of sly dialectical twists and wild flashes of humor. *Complete Poems of Robert Frost,* containing all the later volumes, appeared in 1949.

To the 1939 *Collected Poems* Frost furnished a preface entitled "The Figure a Poem Makes," a piece of prose as characteristic as his poetry. In it he wrote: "A poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom. It has an outcome that, though unforeseen, was predestined from the first image of the mood. . . . No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader. For me the initial delight is in the surprise of remembering something I didn't know I knew."

It is not hard to discover the reason for Frost's popularity among those who create poetry as well as those who do not often turn to it. Readers are grateful to such a poet because they have been charmed and, at the same time, intellectually challenged. They are happy not only because they have learned something new but because they have experienced something old—the initial delight of "remembering something" they didn't know they knew.

THE PASTURE

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I shan't be gone long.—You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother. It's so young,
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I shan't be gone long.—You come too.

THE ONSET

Always the same when on a fated night
At last the gathered snow lets down as white
As may be in dark woods, and with a song
It shall not make again all winter long—
Of hissing on the yet uncovered ground—
I almost stumble looking up and round,
As one, who, overtaken by the end,
Gives up his errand and lets death descend
Upon him where he is, with nothing done
To evil, no important triumph won
More than if life had never been begun.

Yet all the precedent is on my side:
I know that winter-death has never tried
The earth but it has failed; the snow may heap
In long storms an undrifted four feet deep
As measured against maple, birch or oak,
It cannot check the Peeper's silver croak;
And I shall see the snow all go down hill
In water of a slender April rill
That flashes tail through last year's withered brake
And dead weed like a disappearing snake.
Nothing will be left white but here a birch
And there a clump of houses with a church.

THE TUFT OF FLOWERS

I went to turn the grass once after one
Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.

The dew was gone that made his blade so keen
Before I came to view the leveled scene.

I looked for him behind an isle of trees;
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.

But he had gone his way, the grass all mown,
And I must be, as he had been,—alone,

"As all must be," I said within my heart,
"Whether they work together or apart."

But as I said it, swift there passed me by
On noiseless wing a bewildered butterfly,

Seeking with memories grown dim over night
Some resting flower of yesterday's delight.

And once I marked his flight go round and round,
As where some flower lay withering on the ground.

And then he flew as far as eye could see,
And then on tremulous wing came back to me.

I thought of questions that have no reply,
And would have turned to toss the grass to dry;

But he turned first, and led my eye to look
At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook,

A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared
Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared.

I left my place to know them by their name,
Finding them butterfly-weed when I came.

The mower in the dew had loved them thus,
By leaving them to flourish, not for us,

Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him,
But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.

The butterfly and I had lit upon,
Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,

That made me hear the wakening birds around,
And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground,

And feel a spirit kindred to my own;
So that henceforth I worked no more alone;

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade;

And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

"Men work together," I told him from the heart,
"Whether they work together or apart."

RELUCTANCE

Out through the fields and the woods
And over the walls I have wended;
I have climbed the hills of view
And looked at the world, and descended;
I have come by the highway home,
And lo, it is ended.

The leaves are all dead on the ground,
Save those that the oak is keeping
To ravel them one by one
And let them go scraping and creeping
Out over the crusted snow,
When others are sleeping.

And the dead leaves lie huddled and still,
No longer blown hither and thither;
The last lone aster is gone;
The flowers of the witch-hazel wither;
The heart is still aching to seek,
But the feet question "Whither?"

Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or a season?

MENDING WALL

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper bowlders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the bowlders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"

We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple-orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
"*Why* do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down!" I could say "elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there,
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness, as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

THE COW IN APPLE-TIME

Something inspires the only cow of late
To make no more of a wall than an open gate,
And think no more of wall-builders than fools.
Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools
A cider sirup. Having tasted fruit,
She scorns a pasture withering to the root.
She runs from tree to tree where lie and sweeten
The windfalls spiked with stubble and worm-eaten.
She leaves them bitten when she has to fly.
She bellows on a knoll against the sky.
Her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry.

THE DEATH OF THE HIRED MAN

Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table
Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,
She ran on tip-toe down the darkened passage
To meet him in the doorway with the news
And put him on his guard. "Silas is back."
She pushed him outward with her through the door
And shut it after her. "Be kind," she said.

She took the market things from Warren's arms
And set them on the porch, then drew him down
To sit beside her on the wooden steps.
"When was I ever anything but kind to him?
But I'll not have the fellow back," he said.
"I told him so last haying, didn't I?
'If he left then,' I said, 'that ended it.'
What good is he? Who else will harbor him
At his age for the little he can do?
What help he is there's no depending on.
Off he goes always when I need him most.
'He thinks he ought to earn a little pay,
Enough at least to buy tobacco with,
So he won't have to beg and be beholden.'
'All right,' I say, 'I can't afford to pay
Any fixed wages, though I wish I could.'
'Someone else can.' 'Then someone else will have to.'
I shouldn't mind his bettering himself
If that was what it was. You can be certain,
When he begins like that, there's someone at him
Trying to coax him off with pocket-money,—
In haying time, when any help is scarce.
In winter he comes back to us. I'm done."

"Sh! not so loud: he'll hear you," Mary said.

"I want him to: he'll have to soon or late."

"He's worn out. He's asleep beside the stove.
When I came up from Rowe's I found him here,
Huddled against the barn-door fast asleep,
A miserable sight, and frightening, too—
You needn't smile—I didn't recognize him—
I wasn't looking for him —and he's changed.
Wait till you see."

"Where did you say he'd been?"

"He didn't say. I dragged him to the house,
And gave him tea and tried to make him smoke.
I tried to make him talk about his travels,
Nothing would do: he just kept nodding off."

"What did he say? Did he say anything?"

"But little."

"Anything? Mary, confess
He said he'd come to ditch the meadow for me."

"Warren!"

"But did he? I just want to know."

"Of course he did. What would you have him say?
Surely you wouldn't grudge the poor old man
Some humble way to save his self-respect.
He added, if you really care to know,
He meant to clear the upper pasture, too.
That sounds like something you have heard before?
Warren, I wish you could have heard the way
He jumbled everything. I stopped to look
Two or three times—he made me feel so queer—
To see if he was talking in his sleep.
He ran on Harold Wilson—you remember—
The boy you had in haying four years since.
He's finished school, and teaching in his college.
Silas declares you'll have to get him back.
He says they two will make a team for work:
Between them they will lay this farm as smooth!
The way he mixed that in with other things.
He thinks young Wilson a likely lad, though daft
On education—you know how they fought
All through July under the blazing sun,
Silas up on the cart to build the load,
Harold along beside to pitch it on."

"Yes, I took care to keep well out of earshot."

"Well, those days trouble Silas like a dream.
You wouldn't think they would. How some things linger!
Harold's young college boy's assurance piqued him.
After so many years he still keeps finding
Good arguments he sees he might have used.
I sympathize. I know just how it feels
To think of the right thing to say too late.
Harold's associated in his mind with Latin.
He asked me what I thought of Harold's saying
He studied Latin like the violin
Because he liked it—that an argument!
He said he couldn't make the boy believe
He could find water with a hazel prong—
Which showed how much good school had ever done him.
He wanted to go over that. But most of all
He thinks if he could have another chance
To teach him how to build a load of hay—"

"I know, that's Silas' one accomplishment.
He bundles every forkful in its place,
And tags and numbers it for future reference,
So he can find and easily dislodge it
In the unloading. Silas does that well.
He takes it out in bunches like birds' nests.

You never see him standing on the hay
He's trying to lift, straining to lift himself."

"He thinks if he could teach him that, he'd be
Some good perhaps to someone in the world.
He hates to see a boy the fool of books.
Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,
And nothing to look backward to with pride,
And nothing to look forward to with hope,
So now and never any different."

Part of a moon was falling down the west,
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand
Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,
As if she played unheard some tenderness
That wrought on him beside her in the night.
"Warren," she said, "he has come home to die:
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time."

"Home," he mocked gently.

"Yes, what else but home?
It all depends on what you mean by home.
Of course he's nothing to us, any more
Than was the hound that came a stranger to us
Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail."

"Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
They have to take you in."

"I should have called it
Something you somehow haven't to deserve."

Warren leaned out and took a step or two,
Picked up a little stick, and brought it back
And broke it in his hand and tossed it by.
"Silas has better claim on us, you think,
Than on his brother? Thirteen little miles
As the road winds would bring him to his door.
Silas has walked that far no doubt today.
Why didn't he go there? His brother's rich,
A somebody—director in the bank."

"He never told us that."

"We know it though."

"I think his brother ought to help, of course.
I'll see to that if there is need. He ought of right

To take him in, and might be willing to—
He may be better than appearances.
But have some pity on Silas. Do you think
If he'd had any pride in claiming kin
Or anything he looked for from his brother,
He'd keep so still about him all this time?"

"I wonder what's between them."

"I can tell you.
Silas is what he is—we wouldn't mind him—
But just the kind that kinsfolk can't abide.
He never did a thing so very bad.
He don't know why he isn't quite as good
As anyone. Worthless though he is,
He won't be made ashamed to please his brother."

"I can't think Si ever hurt anyone."

"No, but he hurt my heart the way he lay
And rolled his old head on that sharp-edged chair-back
He wouldn't let me put him on the lounge.
You must go in and see what you can do.
I made the bed up for him there tonight.
You'll be surprised at him—how much he's broken.
His working days are done; I'm sure of it."

"I'd not be in a hurry to say that."

"I haven't been. Go, look, see for yourself.
But, Warren, please remember how it is:
He's come to help you ditch the meadow.
He has a plan. You mustn't laugh at him.
He may not speak of it, and then he may.
I'll sit and see if that small sailing cloud
Will hit or miss the moon."

It hit the moon.
Then there were three there, making a dim row,
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she.

Warren returned—too soon, it seemed to her,
Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.

"Warren?" she questioned.

"Dead," was all he answered.

AFTER APPLE-PICKING

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem-end and blossom-end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

AN OLD MAN'S WINTER NIGHT

All out of doors looked darkly in at him
Through the thin frost, almost in separate stars,
That gathers on the pane in empty rooms.
What kept his eyes from giving back the gaze

Was the lamp tilted near them in his hand.
What kept him from remembering what it was
That brought him to that creaking room was age.
He stood with barrels round him—at a loss.
And having scared the cellar under him
In clomping there, he scared it once again
In clomping off; and scared the outer night,
Which has its sounds, familiar, like the roar
Of trees and crack of branches, common things,
But nothing so like beating on a box.
A light he was to no one but himself
Where now he sat, concerned with he knew what;
A quiet light, and then not even that.
He consigned to the moon, such as she was,
So late-arising, to the broken moon
As better than the sun in any case
For such a charge, his snow upon the roof,
His icicles along the wall to keep;
And slept. The log that shifted with a jolt
Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted,
And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept.
One aged man—one man—can't fill a house,
A farm, a countryside, or if he can,
It's thus he does it of a winter night.

BIRCHES

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the line of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—

Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer or winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the gro
So was I once myself a swinger of birches;
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

BROWN'S DESCENT

OR, THE WILLY-NILLY SLIDE

Brown lived at such a lofty farm
  That everyone for miles could see
His lantern when he did his chores
  In winter after half-past three.

And many must have seen him make
  His wild descent from there one night,
'Cross lots, 'cross walls, 'cross everything,
  Describing rings of lantern light.

Between the house and barn the gale
  Got him by something he had on
And blew him out on the icy crust
  That cased the world, and he was gone!

Walls were all buried, trees were few:
  He saw no stay unless he stove
A hole in somewhere with his heel.
  But though repeatedly he strove

And stamped and said things to himself,
  And sometimes something seemed to yield,
He gained no foothold, but pursued
  His journey down from field to field.

Sometimes he came with arms outspread
  Like wings revolving in the scene
Upon his longer axis, and
  With no small dignity of mien.

Faster or slower as he chanced,
  Sitting or standing as he chose,
According as he feared to risk
  His neck, or thought to spare his clothes,

He never let the lantern drop.
  And some exclaimed who saw afar
The figure he described with it,
  "I wonder what those signals are

"Brown makes at such an hour of night!
  He's celebrating something strange.
I wonder if he's sold his farm,
  Or been made Master of the Grange."

He reeled, he lurched, he bobbed, he checked;
  He fell and made the lantern rattle
(But saved the light from going out).
  So half-way down he fought the battle

Incredulous of his own bad luck.
  And then becoming reconciled
To everything, he gave it up
  And came down like a coasting child.

"Well—I—be—" that was all he said,
  As standing in the river road,
He looked back up the slippery slope
  (Two miles it was) to his abode.

Sometimes as an authority
  On motor-cars, I'm asked if I
Should say our stock was petered out,
  And this is my sincere reply:

Yankees are what they always were.
  Don't think Brown ever gave up hope
Of getting home again because
  He couldn't climb that slippery slope;

Or even thought of standing there
  Until the January thaw
Should take the polish off the crust.
  He bowed with grace to natural law,

And then went round it on his feet,
  After the manner of our stock;
Not much concerned for those to whom,
  At that particular time o'clock,

It must have looked as if the course
  He steered was really straight away
From that which he was headed for—
  Not much concerned for them, I say,

But now he snapped his eyes three times;
  Then shook his lantern, saying, "Ile's
'Bout out!" and took the long way home
  By road, a matter of several miles.

THE RUNAWAY

Once when the snow of the year was beginning to fall,
We stopped by a mountain pasture to say, "Whose colt?"
A little Morgan had one forefoot on the wall,
The other curled at his breast. He dipped his head
And snorted to us. And then he had to bolt.
We heard the miniature thunder where he fled,
And we saw him, or thought we saw him, dim and gray,
Like a shadow against the curtain of falling flakes.
"I think the little fellow's afraid of the snow.
He isn't winter-broken. It isn't play
With the little fellow at all. He's running away.
I doubt if even his mother could tell him, 'Sakes,
It's only weather.' He'd think she didn't know!
Where is his mother? He can't be out alone."
And now he comes again with a clatter of stone
And mounts the wall again with whited eyes

And all his tail that isn't hair up straight.
He shudders his coat as if to throw off flies.
"Whoever it is that leaves him out so late,
When other creatures have gone to stall and bin,
Ought to be told to come and take him in."

TO EARTHWARD

Love at the lips was touch
As sweet as I could bear;
And once that seemed too much;
I lived on air

That crossed me from sweet things,
The flow of—was it musk
From hidden grapevine springs
Down hill at dusk?

I had the swirl and ache
From sprays of honeysuckle
That when they're gathered shake
Dew on the knuckle.

I craved strong sweets, but those
Seemed strong when I was young;
The petal of the rose
It was that stung.

Now no joy but lacks salt
That is not dashed with pain
And weariness and fault;
I crave the stain

Of tears, the aftermark
Of almost too much love,
The sweet of bitter bark
And burning clove.

When stiff and sore and scarred
I take away my hand
From leaning on it hard
In grass and sand,

The hurt is not enough:
I long for weight and strength
To feel the earth as rough
To all my length.

FIRE AND ICE

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

TWO LOOK AT TWO

Love and forgetting might have carried them
A little further up the mountain side
With night so near, but not much further up.
They must have halted soon in any case
With thoughts of the path back, how rough it was
With rock and washout, and unsafe in darkness;
When they were halted by a tumbled wall
With barbed-wire binding. They stood facing this,
Spending what onward impulse they still had
In one last look the way they must not go,
On up the failing path, where, if a stone
Or earthslide moved at night, it moved itself;
No footstep moved it. "This is all," they sighed,
"Good-night to woods." But not so; there was more.
A doe from round a spruce stood looking at them
Across the wall as near the wall as they.

She saw them in their field, they her in hers.
The difficulty of seeing what stood still,
Like some up-ended bowlder split in two,
Was in her clouded eyes: they saw no fear there.
She seemed to think that two thus they were safe.
Then, as if they were something that, though strange,
She could not trouble her mind with too long,
She sighed and passed unscared along the wall.
"*This,* then, is all. What more is there to ask?"
But no, not yet. A snort to bid them wait.
A buck from round the spruce stood looking at them
Across the wall, as near the wall as they.
This was an antlered buck of lusty nostril.
Not the same doe come back into her place.
He viewed them quizzically with jerks of head,
As if to ask, "Why don't you make some motion?
Or give some sign of life? Because you can't.
I doubt if you're as living as you look."
Thus till he had them almost feeling dared
To stretch a proffering hand—and a spell-breaking.
Then he too passed unscared along the wall.
Two had seen two, whichever side you spoke from.
"This *must* be all." It was all. Still they stood,
A great wave from it going over them,
As if the earth in one unlooked-for favor
Had made them certain earth returned their love.

A SKY PAIR

CANIS MAJOR

The Great Overdog,
That heavenly beast
With a star in one eye,
Gives a leap in the East.

He dances upright
All the way to the West,
And never once drops
On his forefeet to rest.

I'm a poor Underdog;
But tonight I will bark,
With the Great Overdog
That romps through the dark.

THE PEACEFUL SHEPHERD

If heaven were to do again,
And on the pasture bars
I leaned to line the figures in
Between the dotted stars,
I should be tempted to forget,
I think, the Crown of Rule,
The Scales of Trade, the Cross of Faith,
As hardly worth renewal.

For these have governed in our lives,
And see how men have warred!
The Cross, the Crown, the Scales, may all
As well have been the Sword.

BEREFT

Where had I heard this wind before
Change like this to a deeper roar?
What would it take my standing there for,
Holding open a restive door,
Looking down hill to a frothy shore?
Summer was past and day was past.
Somber clouds on the West were massed.
Out in the porch's sagging floor
Leaves got up in a coil and hissed,
Blindly struck at my knee and missed.
Something sinister in the tone

Told me my secret must be known:
Word I was in the house alone
Somehow must have gotten abroad;
Word I was in my life alone;
Word I had no one left but God.

TREE AT MY WINDOW

Tree at my window, window tree,
My sash is lowered when night comes on;
But let there never be curtain drawn
Between you and me.

Vague dream-head lifted out of the ground,
And thing next most diffuse to cloud,
Not all your light tongues talking aloud
Could be profound.

But, tree, I have seen you taken and tossed,
And if you have seen me when I slept,
You have seen me when I was taken and swept
And all but lost.

That day she put our heads together,
Fate had her imagination about her,
Your head so much concerned with outer,
Mine with inner, weather.

WEST-RUNNING BROOK

"Fred, where is north?"
"North? North is there, my love.
The brook runs west."
"West-running Brook then call it."
(West-running Brook men call it to this day.)
"What does it think it's doing running west
When all the other country brooks flow east
To reach the ocean? It must be the brook
Can trust itself to go by contraries
The way I can with you—and you with me—
Because we're—we're—I don't know what we are.
What are we?"
"Young or new?"
"We must be something.
We've said we two. Let's change that to we three.
As you and I are married to each other,
We'll both be married to the brook. We'll build
Our bridge across it, and the bridge shall be
Our arm thrown over it asleep beside it.
Look, look, it's waving to us with a wave
To let us know it hears me."
"Why, my dear,
That wave's been standing off this jut of shore—"
(The black stream, catching on a sunken rock,
Flung backward on itself in one white wave,
And the white water rode the black forever,
Not gaining but not losing, like a bird
While feathers from the struggle of whose breast
Flecked the dark stream and flecked the darker pool
Below the point, and were at last driven wrinkled
In a white scarf against the far shore alders.)
"That wave's been standing off this jut of shore

Ever since rivers, I was going to say,
Were made in heaven. It wasn't waved to us."

"It wasn't, yet it was. If not to you
It was to me—in an annunciation."

"Oh, if you take it off to lady-land,
As 'twere the country of the Amazons
We men must see you to the confines of
And leave you there, ourselves forbid to enter,—
It is your brook! I have no more to say."

"Yes, you have, too. Go on. You thought of something."

"Speaking of contraries, see how the brook
In that white wave runs counter to itself.
It is from that in water we were from
Long, long before we were from any creature.
Here we, in our impatience of the steps,
Get back to the beginning of beginnings,
The stream of everything that runs away.
Some say existence like a Pirouot
And Pirouette, forever in one place,
Stands still and dances, but it runs away,
It seriously, sadly, runs away
To fill the abyss' void with emptiness.
It flows beside us in this water brook,
But it flows over us. It flows between us
To separate us for a panic moment.
It flows between us, over us, and *with* us.
And it is time, strength, tone, light, life and love
And even substance lapsing unsubstantial;
The universal cataract of death
That spends to nothingness—and unresisted,
Save by some strange resistance in itself,
Not just a swerving, but a throwing back,
As if regret were in it and were sacred.
It has this throwing backward on itself
So that the fall of most of it is always
Raising a little, sending up a little.
Our life runs down in sending up the clock.
The brook runs down in sending up our life.
The sun runs down in sending up the brook.
And there is something sending up the sun.
It is this backward motion toward the source,
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,
The tribute of the current to the source.
It is from this in nature we are from.
It is most us."

"Today will be the day

You said so."
"No, today will be the day
You said the brook was called West-running Brook."

"Today will be the day of what we both said."

ONCE BY THE PACIFIC

The shattered water made a misty din,
Great waves looked over others coming in,
And thought of doing something to the shore
That water never did to land before.
The clouds were low and hairy in the skies
Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes.
You could not tell, and yet it looked as if
The sand was lucky in being backed by cliff,
The cliff in being backed by continent.
It looked as if a night of dark intent
Was coming, and not only a night, an age.
Someone had better be prepared for rage.
There would be more than ocean water broken
Before God's last *Put out the light* was spoken.

THE BEAR

The bear puts both arms around the tree above her
And draws it down as if it were a lover
And its choke-cherries lips to kiss good-by,
Then lets it snap back upright in the sky.
Her next step rocks a bowlder on the wall
(She's making her cross-country in the fall.)
Her great weight creaks the barbed-wire in its staples
As she flings over and off down through the maples,
Leaving on one wire tooth a lock of hair.
Such is the uncaged progress of the bear.
The world has room to make a bear feel free;
The universe seems cramped to you and me.
Man acts more like a poor bear in a cage
That all day fights a nervous inward rage,
His mood rejecting all his mind suggests.
He paces back and forth and never rests
The toe-nail click and shuffle of his feet,
The telescope at one end of his beat,
And at the other end the microscope,
Two instruments of nearly equal hope,
And in conjunction giving quite a spread.
Or if he rests from scientific tread,
'Tis only to sit back and sway his head
Through ninety odd degrees of arc, it seems,
Between two metaphysical extremes.

He sits back on his fundamental butt
With lifted snout and eyes (if any) shut,
(He almost looks religious but he's not),
And back and forth he sways from cheek to cheek,
At one extreme agreeing with one Greek,
At the other agreeing with another Greek
Which may be thought, but only so to speak.
A baggy figure, equally pathetic
When sedentary and when peripatetic.

SAND DUNES

Sea waves are green and wet,
But up from where they die
Rise others vaster yet,
And those are brown and dry.

They are the sea made land
To come at the fisher town,
And bury in solid sand
The men she could not drown.

She may know cove and cape,
But she does not know mankind
If by any change of shape
She hopes to cut off mind.

Men left her a ship to sink;
They can leave her a hut as well,
And be but more free to think
For the one more cast-off shell.

THE LOVELY SHALL BE CHOOSERS

The Voice said, "Hurl her down!"

The Voices, "How far down?"

"Seven levels of the world."

"How much time have we?"

"Take twenty years.
She would refuse love safe with wealth and honor.
The Lovely shall be choosers, shall they?
Then let them choose!"

"Then we shall let her choose?"

"Yes, let her choose.
Take up the task beyond her choosing."

Invisible hands crowded on her shoulder
In readiness to weigh upon her.

But she stood straight still,
In broad round ear-rings, gold and jet with pearls,
And broad round suchlike brooch,
Her cheeks high colored,
Proud and the pride of friends.

The Voice asked, "You can let her choose?"

"Yes, we can let her and still triumph."

"Do it by joys. And leave her always blameless.
Be her first joy her wedding,
That though a wedding,
Is yet—well, something *they* know, he and she.
And after that her next joy
That though she grieves, her grief is secret:
Those friends know nothing of her grief to make it shameful.
Her third joy that though now they cannot help but know,
They move in pleasure too far off
To think much or much care.
Give her a child at either knee for fourth joy
To tell once and once only, for them never to forget,
How once she walked in brightness,
And make them see in the winter firelight.
But give her friends, for them she dares not tell
For their foregone incredulousness.
And be her next joy this:
Her never having deigned to tell them.
Make her among the humblest even
Seem to them less than they are.
Hopeless of being known for what she has been,
Failing of being loved for what she is,
Give her the comfort for her sixth of knowing
She fails from strangeness to a way of life
She came to from too high too late to learn.
Then send some *one* with eye to see
And wonder at her where she is
And words to wonder in her hearing how she came there.
But without time to stay and hear her story.
Be her last joy her heart's going out to this one
So that she almost speaks.

You know them—seven in all."

"Trust us," the Voices said.

THE EGG AND THE MACHINE

He gave the solid rail a hateful kick.
From far away there came an answering tick;
And then another tick. He knew the code:
His hate had roused an engine up the road.

He wished when he had had the track alone
He had attacked it with a club or stone
And bent some rail wide open like a switch
So as to wreck the engine in the ditch.
Too late, though, now to throw it down the bank;
Its click was rising to a nearer clank.
Here it came breasting like a horse in skirts.
(He stood well back for fear of scalding squirts.)
Then for a moment there was only size,
Confusion, and a roar that drowned the cries
He raised against the gods in the machine.
Then once again the sand-bank lay serene.
The traveler's eye picked up a turtle trail,
Between the dotted feet a streak of tail,
And followed it to where he made out vague,
But certain signs of buried turtle egg;
And probing with one finger not too rough,
He found suspicious sand, and sure enough
The pocket of a little turtle mine.
If there was one egg in it, there were nine,
Torpedo-like, with shell of gritty leather
All packed in sand to wait the trump together.
"You'd better not disturb me any more,"
He told the distance. "I am armed for war.
The next machine that has the power to pass
Will get this plasm in its goggle glass."

STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

A LEAF-TREADER

I have been treading on leaves all day until I am autumn-tired.
God knows all the color and form of leaves I have trodden on and mired.
Perhaps I have put forth too much strength and been too fierce from fear.
I have safely trodden under foot the leaves of another year.

All summer long they were overhead more lifted up than I;
To come to their final place in earth they had to pass me by.
All summer long I thought I heard them threatening under their breath,
And when they came it seemed with a will to carry me with them to death.

They spoke to the fugitive in my heart as if it were leaves to leaf;
They tapped at my eyelids and touched my lips with an invitation to grief.
But it was no reason I had to go because they had to go.
Now up, my knee, to keep on top of another year of snow.

LOST IN HEAVEN

The clouds, the source of rain, one stormy night
Offered an opening to the source of dew,
Which I accepted with impatient sight,
Looking for my old sky-marks in the blue.

But stars were scarce in that part of the sky,
And no two were of the same constellation—
No one was bright enough to identify.
So 'twas with not ungrateful consternation,

Seeing myself well lost once more, I sighed,
"Where, where in heaven am I? But don't tell me,"
I warned the clouds, "by opening me wide!
Let's let my heavenly lostness overwhelm me."

DESERT PLACES

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it—it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count:
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is, that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less,
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow,
With no expression—nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars—on stars void of human races.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

TWO TRAMPS IN MUD-TIME

Out of the mud two strangers came
And caught me splitting wood in the yard.
And one of them put me off my aim
By hailing cheerily "Hit them hard!"
I knew pretty well why he dropped behind
And let the other go on a way.
I knew pretty well what he had in mind:
He wanted to take my job for pay.

Good blocks of beech it was I split,
As large around as the chopping-block;
And every piece I squarely hit
Fell splinterless as a cloven rock.
The blows that a life of self-control
Spares to strike for the common good
That day, giving a loose to my soul,
I spent on the unimportant wood.

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.
You know how it is with an April day:
When the sun is out and the wind is still,
You're one month on in the middle of May.
But if you so much as dare to speak,
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,
A wind comes off a frozen peak,
And you're two months back in the middle of March.

A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight
And fronts the wind to unruffle a plume,
His song so pitched as not to excite
A single flower as yet to bloom.
It is snowing a flake: and he half knew
Winter was only playing possum.
Except in color he isn't blue,
But he wouldn't advise a thing to blossom.

The water for which we may have to look
In summertime with a witching-wand,
In every wheelrut's now a brook,
In every print of a hoof a pond.
Be glad of water, but don't forget
The lurking frost in the earth beneath
That will steal forth after the sun is set
And show on the water its crystal teeth.

The time when most I loved my task
These two must make me love it more
By coming with what they came to ask.
You'd think I never had felt before
The weight of an ax head poised aloft,
The grip on earth of outspread feet,
The life of muscles rocking soft
And smooth and moist in vernal heat.

Out of the woods two hulking tramps
(From sleeping God knows where last nigh
But not long since in the lumber camps).
They thought all chopping was theirs
right.
Men of the woods and lumber-jacks,
They judged me by their appropriate tool.
Except as a fellow handled an ax,
They had no way of knowing a fool.

Nothing on either side was said.
They knew they had but to stay their stay
And all their logic would fill my head:
As that I had no right to play
With what was another man's work for gai
My right might be love but theirs was nee
And where the two exist in twain
Theirs was the better right—agreed.

But yield who will to their separation,
My object in life is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sakes.

DEPARTMENTAL

OR, MY ANT JERRY

An ant on the table-cloth
Ran into a dormant moth
Of many times her size.
He showed not the least surprise.
His business wasn't with such.
He gave it scarcely a touch,
And was off on his duty run.
Yet if he encountered one
Of the hive's enquiry squad
Whose work is to find out God
And the nature of time and space,
He would put him onto the case.
Ants are a curious race;
One crossing with hurried tread
The body of one of their dead
Isn't given a moment's arrest—
Seems not even impressed.
But he no doubt reports to any
With whom he crosses antennae,
And they no doubt report
To the higher up at court.
Then word goes forth in Formic:
"Death's come to Jerry McCormic,
Our selfless forager Jerry.
Will the special Janizary
Whose office it is to bury
The dead of the commissary
Go bring him home to his people.
Lay him in state on a sepal.
Wrap him for shroud in a petal.
Embalm him with ichor of nettle.
This is the word of your Queen."
And presently on the scene
Appears a solemn mortician;
And taking formal position
With feelers calmly atwiddle,
Seizes the dead by the middle,
And heaving him high in air,
Carries him out of there.
No one stands round to stare.
It is nobody else's affair.

It couldn't be called ungentle.
But how thoroughly departmental.

A CONSIDERABLE SPECK

A speck that would have been beneath my sight
On any but a paper sheet so white
Set off across what I had written there,
And I had idly poised my pen in air
To stop it with a period of ink,
When something strange about it made me think
This was no dust speck by my breathing blown,
But unmistakably a living mite
With inclinations it could call its own.
It paused as with suspicion of my pen,
And then came racing wildly on again
To where my manuscript was not yet dry,
Then paused again and either drank or smelt—
With horror, for again it turned to fly.
Plainly with an intelligence I dealt.
It seemed too tiny to have room for feet,
Yet must have had a set of them complete
To express how much it didn't want to die.
It ran with terror and with cunning crept.
It faltered! I could see it hesitate—
Then in the middle of the open sheet
Cower down in desperation to accept
Whatever I accorded it of fate.
I have none of the tenderer-than-thou

Political collectivistic love
With which the modern world is being swept—
But this poor microscopic item now!
Since it was nothing I knew evil of
I let it lie there till I hope it slept.
I have a mind myself, and recognize
Mind where I meet with it in any guise.
No one can know how glad I am to find
On any sheet the least display of mind.

HAPPINESS MAKES UP IN HEIGHT FOR WHAT IT LACKS IN LENGTH

Oh stormy, stormy world,
The days you were not swirled
Around with mist and cloud,
Or wrapped as in a shroud,
And the sun's brilliant ball
Was not in part or all
Obscured from mortal view,
Were days so very few
I can but wonder whence
I get the lasting sense
Of so much warmth and light.
If my mistrust is right
It may be altogether
From one day's perfect weather
When starting clear at dawn
The day went clearly on
To finish clear at eve.
I verily believe
My fair impression may
Be all from that one day
No shadow crossed but ours,
As through the blazing flowers
We went from house to wood
For change of solitude.

COME IN

As I came to the edge of the woods,
Thrush music—hark!
Now if it was dusk outside,
Inside it was dark.

Too dark in the woods for a bird
By sleight of wing
To better its perch for the night,
Though it still could sing.

The last of the light of the sun
That had died in the west
Still lived for one song more
In a thrush's breast.

Far in the pillared dark
Thrush music went—
Almost like a call to come in
To the dark and lament.

But no, I was out for stars:
I would not come in.
I meant not even if asked;
And I hadn't been.

FROM PLANE TO PLANE

Neither of them was better than the other.
They both were hired. And though Pike had the advantage
Of having hoed and mowed for fifty years,
Dick had of being fresh and full of college.
So if they fought about equality
It was on an equality they fought.

"Your trouble is not sticking to the subject,"
Pike said with temper. And Dick longed to say,
"Your trouble is bucolic lack of logic,"
But all he did say was, "What *is* the subject?"
"It's whether these professions really work.
Now take the Doctor—"

They were giving corn
A final going over with the hoe
Before they turned from everything to hay.
The wavy upflung pennons of the corn
Were loose all round their legs—you couldn't say
How many thousand of them in an acre.
Every time Dick or Pike looked up the Doctor
With one foot on the dashboard of his buggy
Was still in sight like someone to depend on.
Nowhere but on the Bradford Interval
By the Connecticut could anyone
Have stayed in sight so long as an example.

"Taking his own sweet time as if to show
He don't mind having lost a case," Pike said,
And when he caught Dick looking once too often,
"Hoeing's too much like work for Dick," he added,
"Dick wishes he could swap jobs with the Doctor.
Let's holler and ask him if he won't prescribe
For all humanity a complete rest
From all this wagery. But what's the use
Of asking any sympathy from him.
That class of people don't know what work is—
More than they know what courage is that claim
The moral kind's as brave as facing bullets."

Dick told him to be fairer to the Doctor:
"He looks to me like going home successful,
Full of success, with that foot on the dashboard,
As a small self-conferred reward of virtue.
I get you when you hoe out to the river
Then pick your hoe up, maybe shoulder it,
And take your walk of recreation back
To curry favor with the dirt some more.
Isn't it pretty much the same idea?

You said yourself you weren't avoiding work.
You'd bet you got more work done in a day,
Or at least in a lifetime, by that method."

"I wouldn't hoe both ways for anybody!"

"And right you are. You do the way we do
In reading, don't you, Bill?—at every line-end
Pick up our eyes and carry them back idle
Across the page to where we started from.
The other way of reading, back and forth,
Known as boustrophedon was found too awkward."

Pike grunted rather grimly with misgiving
At being thus expounded to himself
And made of by a boy; then having reached
The river bank, quit work defiantly,
As if he didn't care who understood him
And started his march back again discoursing:
"A man has got to keep his extrication.
The important thing is not to get bogged down
In what he has to do to earn a living.
What's more, I hate to keep afflicting weeds.
I like to give my enemies a truce."

"Be careful how you use your influence.
If I decided to become a doctor,
You'd be to blame for furnishing the reasons."

"I thought you meant to be an Indian Chief—
You said the second coming of Tecumseh.
Remember how you envied General Sherman.
William Tecumseh Sherman. Why Tecumseh?
(He tried to imitate Dick's tone of voice.)
You wished your middle name had been Tecumseh."

"I think I'll change my mind."

"You're saying that
To bother me by siding with the Doctor.
You've got no social conscience, as they say,
Or you'd feel differently about the classes.
You can't claim you're a social visionary."

"I'm saying it to argue his idea's
The same as your idea, only more so—
And I suspect it may be more and more so
The further up the scale of work you go.
You could do worse than boost me up to see."

"It isn't just the same and some day, schoolboy,
I'll show you why it isn't—not today.

Today I want to talk about the sun.
May as expected was a disappointment,
And June was not much better, cold and rainy.
The sun then had his longest day in heaven,
But no one from the feeling would have guessed
His presence was particularly there.
He only stayed to set the summer on fire,
Then fled for fear of getting stuck in lava
In case the rocks should melt and run again.
Everyone has to keep his extrication."

"That's what the Doctor's doing, keeping his.
That's what I have to do in school, keep mine
From knowing more than I know how to think with.
You see it in yourself and in the sun.
Yet you refuse to see it in the Doctor."

"All right, let's harmonize about the Doctor.
He may be some good in a manner of speaking.
I own he does look busy when the sun
Is in the sign of Sickness in the winter
And everybody's being sick for Christmas.
Then's when his Morgan lights out throwing snowballs
Behind her at the dashboard of his pung."

"But Cygnus isn't in the Zodiac,"
Dick longed to say, but wasn't sure enough
Of his astronomy. (He'd have to take
A half course in it next year.) And besides,
Why give the controversy a relapse?

They were both bent on scuffling up
Alluvium so pure that when a blade
To their surprise rang once on stone all day
Each tried to be the first at getting in
A superstitious cry for farmers' luck—
A rivalry that made them both feel kinder.
And so to let Pike seem to have the palm
With grace and not too formal a surrender
Dick said, "You've been a lesson in work-wisdom
To work with, Bill. But you won't have my thanks.
I like to think the sun's like you in that—
Since you bring up the subject of the sun.
(This would be my interpretation of him.)
He bestows summer on us and escapes
Before our realizing what we have
To thank him for. He doesn't want our thanks.
He likes to turn his back on gratitude
And avoid being worshipped as a god.
Our worship was a thing he had too much of
In the old days in Persia and Peru.

Shall I go on, or have I said enough—
To convey my respect for your position?

"I guess so," Pike said, innocent of Milton.
"That's where I reckon Santa Claus comes in—
To be our parents' pseudonymity
In Christmas giving, so they can escape
The thanks and let him catch it as a scapegoat.
And even he, you'll notice, dodges off
Up chimney to avoid the worst of it.
We all know his address, Mt. Hecla, Iceland.
So anyone can write to him that has to,
Though they do say he doesn't open letters.
A Santa Claus was needed. And there *is* one."

"So I have heard and do in part believe,"
Dick said to old Pike, innocent of Shakespeare.

CLOSED FOR GOOD

Much as I own I owe
The passers of the past
Because their to and fro
Has cut this road to last,
I owe them more today
Because they've gone away

And come not back with steed
And chariot to chide
My slowness with their speed
And scare me to one side.
They have found other scenes
For haste and other means.

They leave the road to me
To walk in saying naught
Perhaps but to a tree
Inaudibly in thought,
"From you the road receives
A priming coat of leaves.

"And soon for lack of sun,
The prospects are in white
It will be further done,
But with a coat so light
The shape of leaves will show
Beneath the brush of snow."

And so on into winter
Till even I have ceased
To come as a foot printer,
And only some slight beast
So mousy or so foxy
Shall print there as my proxy.

How often is the case
I thus pay men a debt
For having left a place
And still do not forget
To pay them some sweet share
For having once been there.

THE GIFT OUTRIGHT

The land was ours before we were the land's.
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia;
But we were England's, still colonials,
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
Something we were withholding made us
weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of
living,
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
To the land vaguely realizing westward,
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
Such as she was, such as she would become.

CHOOSE SOMETHING LIKE A STAR

O Star (the fairest one in sight),
We grant your loftiness the right
To some obscurity of cloud—
It will not do to say of night,
Since dark is what brings out your light.
Some mystery becomes the proud.
But to be wholly taciturn
In your reserve is not allowed.
Say something to us we can learn
By heart and when alone repeat.
Say something! And it says "I burn'
But say with what degree of heat.
Talk Fahrenheit, talk Centigrade.
Use language we can comprehend.
Tell us what elements you blend.
It gives us strangely little aid,
But does tell something in the end.
And steadfast as Keats' Eremite,
Not even stooping from its sphere,
It asks a little of us here.
It asks of us a certain height,
So when at times the mob is swayed
To carry praise or blame too far,
We may choose something like a star
To stay our minds on and be staid.

Carl Sandburg

CARL (AUGUST) SANDBURG was born of Swedish stock at Galesburg, Illinois, January 6, 1878. His schooling was haphazard; at thirteen he went to work on a milk wagon. During the next six years he was, in rapid succession, porter in a barber shop, scene-shifter in a cheap theater, truck-handler in a brickyard, turner-apprentice in a pottery, dish-washer in Denver and Omaha hotels, harvest hand in Kansas wheatfields. These tasks equipped him, as no amount of learning could have done, to be the laureate of industrial America. When war with Spain was declared in 1898, Sandburg, avid for fresh adventure, enlisted in Company C, Sixth Illinois Volunteers.

On his return from the campaign in Puerto Rico, Sandburg entered Lombard College in Galesburg and, for the first time, began to think in terms of literature. After leaving college, where he had been captain of the basket-ball team as well as editor-in-chief of the college paper, Sandburg did all manner of things to earn a living. He was advertising manager for a department store and worked as district organizer for the Social-Democratic party of Wisconsin. He became salesman, pamphleteer, newspaperman.

In 1904 Sandburg published the proverbial "slender sheaf," a tiny pamphlet of twenty-two poems, uneven in quality, but strangely like the work of the mature Sandburg in feeling. What is more, these experiments anticipated the inflection of the later poems, with their spiritual kinship to Henley and Whitman; several of these early experiments (with the exception of the rhymed verses) might be placed, without seeming incongruous, in the later collections. The idiom of *Smoke and Steel* (1920) is more intensified, but it is the same idiom as that of "Milville" (1903), which begins:

Down in southern New Jersey they make glass.
By day and by night, the fires burn on in Milville and bid the sand let in the light.

Meanwhile the newspaperman was struggling to keep the poet alive. Until he was thirty-six years old Sandburg was unknown to the literary world. In 1914 a group of his poems appeared in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse;* during the same year one of the group (the now famous "Chicago") was awarded the Levinson prize of two hundred dollars. A little more than a year later his first real book was published, and Sandburg's stature was apparent to all who cared to look.

Chicago Poems (1916) is full of ferment; it seethes with loose energy. If Frost is an intellectual aristocrat, Sandburg might be termed an emotional democrat. Sandburg's speech is simple and powerful; he uses slang as freely as his predecessors used the now archaic tongue of their times. Never has the American vulgate been used with such artistry and effect. Immediately cries of protest were heard: Sandburg was coarse and brutal; his work ugly and distorted; his language unrefined, unfit for poetry. His detractors forgot that Sandburg was brutal only to condemn brutality; that beneath his toughness, he was one of the tenderest of living poets; that, when he used colloquialisms and a richly metaphorical slang, he was searching for new poetic values in "limber, lasting, fierce words"—unconsciously answering Whitman who asked, "Do you suppose the liberties and brawn of These States have to do only with delicate lady-words? With gloved gentleman-words?"

Cornhuskers (1918) is another step forward; it is as sweeping as its forerunner and more sensitive. The gain in power and restraint is evident in the very first poem, a wide-swept vision of the prairie. Here is something of the surge of a Norse saga; *Cornhuskers* is keen with a salty vigor, a sympathy for all that is splendid and terrible in Nature. But the raw violence is restrained to the point of half-withheld mysticism. There are, in this volume, dozens of those delicate perceptions of beauty that must astonish those who think that Sandburg can write only a big-fisted, roughneck sort of poetry. As Sandburg has sounded some of the most *fortissimo* notes in modern poetry, he has also breathed some of its softest phrases. "Cool Tombs," one of the most poignant lyrics of our times, moves with a low music; "Grass" whispers as quietly as the earlier "Fog" steals in on stealthy, cat feet.

Smoke and Steel (1920) is the synthesis of its predecessors. In this collection, Sandburg has fused mood, accent and image. Whether the poet evokes the spirit of a jazz-band or, having had the radiance (the "flash crimson"), prays to touch life at its other extreme, this volume is not so vociferous as it is assured. Smoke-belching chimneys are here, quarries and great bowlders of iron-ribbed rock; here are titanic visions: the dreams of men and machinery. And silence is here—the silence of sleeping tenements and sun-soaked cornfields.

Slabs of the Sunburnt West (1923) is a fresh fusing: here in quick succession are the sardonic invectives of "And So Today," the rhapsody of "The Windy City" (an amplification of the early "Chicago"), and the panoramic title-poem. Although the book's chief exhibit is the amplitude of its longer poems, there are a few brevities (such as "Upstream") which have the vigor of a jubilant cry. Sandburg is still tempted to talk at the top of his voice, to bang the table and hurl his loudest epithets into the teeth of his opponents. But often he goes to the other extreme; he is likely to leave his material soft and loose instead of solidifying his emotions. There are times when the poet seems unsure whether or not he can furnish more than a clew to the half-realized wisps of his imagination. But though his meaning may

not always be clear, there is no mistaking the power of his feeling nor the curious cadences of his music.

Good Morning, America (1928) is characteristically Sandburg at his best and worst. There are passages which are hopelessly enigmatic, passages which are only inflations of commonplace ideas. On the other hand, there are pages which are remarkable experiments in suspension, pages sensitive with a beauty delicately perceived. The thirty-eight "Tentative (First Model) Definitions of Poetry" with which the volume is prefaced are footnotes as well as prologues to his work in general, and the purely descriptive pieces are among his finest. Incidentally, the volume shows how far Sandburg has gone in critical esteem since the time when his *Chicago Poems* was openly derided, the title poem of *Good Morning, America* having been read as a Phi Beta Kappa poem at Harvard. Here, too, one is impressed by Sandburg's hatred of war; Sandburg was one of the first American poets to express the growing protests in "A.E.F." and other poems.

Besides his poetry, Sandburg has written three volumes of imaginative and, if one can conceive of such a thing, humorously mystical tales for children: *Rootabaga Stories* (1922), *Rootabaga Pigeons* (1923), and *Potato Face* (1930), the last being—so the poet and publisher insist—tales for adults of all ages. A collection of the Rootabaga stories was illustrated by Peggy Bacon in 1929. Eight years were spent traveling and studying documents for his vitalized *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (1926), and assembling material for his collection of native folk-tunes *The American Songbag* (1927), a massive and revealing folio of words, music, and accompaniments to two hundred and eighty songs, more than one hundred of them never in print until Sandburg's ear and notebook gathered them from pioneer grandmothers, work-gangs, railroad men, hoboes, convicts, cowboys, mountain people and others who sing "because they must."

At fifty-eight the biographer, folklorist, and poet were merged in *The People, Yes* (1936), a synthesis of the collector's energy and the creator's imagination. The book is a carryall of folkstuff, catch phrases, tall tales, gossip, and history. Never, except in Whitman, has the common man been so apostrophized; never has there been a greater tribute to the people's shrewd skepticism and stubborn optimism, their patience and their power. Here are "the human reserves," misled and misunderstood, bewildered and betrayed, but stronger and wiser than they know. "The Long Shadow of Lincoln," which has not previously appeared in any volume, was the Phi Beta Kappa poem at William and Mary College, Williamsburg, in 1944.

In his early sixties Sandburg published the long-awaited "sequel" to *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*. It was called *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (1939) and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the best historical work of the year. The completed biography ran to six volumes and constituted a most extensive and penetrating interpretation of Lincoln and his times.

At seventy Sandburg made a spectacular debut as a writer of fiction. His first novel, *Remembrance Rock* (1948), was a book of more than one thousand pages. It was called a saga, a panorama, a prose epic; the author confessed he hoped to weave "the mystery of the American Dream with the costly toil and bloody struggles that have gone to keep alive and carry farther than Dream." Book One starts with the Pilgrims in seventeenth-century England; Book Two occupies itself with the Revolution; Book Three takes the story westward and through the Civil War.

Essentially *Remembrance Rock* is a story of three crises in American history and the will not only to survive but to surpass. Thin in plot, thick with data, the book is an extended romance, a poet's long paean to his country.

Sandburg spent most of his life in his native Middle West, chiefly in Illinois and Michigan—his Galesburg, Illinois, birthplace became a shrine to the son of an immigrant Swedish blacksmith. In his sixties, he moved South, to a two hundred and forty acre farm in the Smokies, a place to ruminate and roam with his grandchildren. He had come a long way from the proletarian poet of the Windy City. Unable to rusticate completely, however, Sandburg made trips north, undertook sporadic forays into politics, toured the country with his guitar, and continued to discover fresh material for his ever-growing collection of Lincolniana.

TEN DEFINITIONS OF POETRY

1 Poetry is a projection across silence of cadences arranged to break that silence with definite intentions of echoes, syllables, wave lengths.
2 Poetry is the journal of a sea animal living on land, wanting to fly the air.
3 Poetry is a series of explanations of life, fading off into horizons too swift for explanations.
4 Poetry is a search for syllables to shoot at the barriers of the unknown and the unknowable.
5 Poetry is a theorem of a yellow-silk handkerchief knotted with riddles, sealed in a balloon tied to the tail of a kite flying in a white wind against a blue sky in spring.
6 Poetry is the silence and speech between a wet struggling root of a flower and a sunlit blossom of that flower.
7 Poetry is the harnessing of the paradox of earth cradling life and then entombing it.
8 Poetry is a phantom script telling how rainbows are made and why they go away.
9 Poetry is the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits.
10 Poetry is the opening and closing of a door, leaving those who look through to guess about what is seen during a moment.

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, rebuilding.
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.

FOG

The fog comes
on little cat feet.
It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

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.

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.

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.

LIMITED

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

FOUR PRELUDES ON PLAYTHINGS OF THE WIND

"The Past Is a Bucket of Ashes."

1

The woman named Tomorrow
sits with a hairpin in her teeth
and takes her time
and does her hair the way she wants it
and fastens at last the last braid and coil
and puts the hairpin where it belongs
and turns and drawls: Well, what of it?
My grandmother, Yesterday, is gone.
What of it? Let the dead be dead.

2

The doors were cedar
and the panel strips of gold
and the girls were golden girls
and the panels read and the girls chanted:
We are the greatest city,
and the greatest nation:
nothing like us ever was.

The doors are twisted on broken hinges,
Sheets of rain swish through on the wind
where the golden girls ran and the panels read:
We are the greatest city,
the greatest nation,
nothing like us ever was.

3

It has happened before.
Strong men put up a city and got
a nation together,
And paid singers to sing and women
to warble: We are the greatest city,
the greatest nation,
nothing like us ever was.

And while the singers sang
and the strong men listened
and paid the singers well,
there were rats and lizards who listened
. . . and the only listeners left now
. . . are . . . the rats . . . and the lizards.
And there are black crows
crying, "Caw, caw,"
bringing mud and sticks
building a nest
over the words carved
on the doors where the panels were cedar
and the strips on the panels were gold
and the golden girls came singing:
We are the greatest city,
the greatest nation:
nothing like us ever was.

The only singers now are crows crying, "Caw, caw,"
And the sheets of rain whine in the wind and doorways.
And the only listeners now are . . . the rats . . . and the lizards.

4

The feet of the rats
scribble on the doorsills;
the hieroglyphs of the rat footprints
chatter the pedigrees of the rats
and babble of the blood
and gabble of the breed
of the grandfathers and the great-grandfathers
of the rats.

And the wind shifts
and the dust on a doorsill shifts
and even the writing of the rat footprints
tells us nothing, nothing at all

about the greatest city, the greatest nation
where the strong men listened
and the women warbled: Nothing like us ever was.

A. E. F.

There will be a rusty gun on the wall, sweetheart,
The rifle grooves curling with flakes of rust.
A spider will make a silver string nest in the darkest, warmest corner of it.
The trigger and the range-finder, they too will be rusty.
And no hands will polish the gun, and it will hang on the wall.
Forefingers and thumbs will point absently and casually toward it.
It will be spoken among half-forgotten, wished-to-be-forgotten things.
They will tell the spider: Go on, you're doing good work.

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.

JAZZ FANTASIA

Drum on your drums, batter on your banjos, sob on the long cool winding saxophones. Go to it, O jazzmen.

Sling your knuckles on the bottoms of the happy tin pans, let your trombones ooze, and go husha-husha-hush with the slippery sandpaper.

Moan like an autumn wind high in the lonesome treetops, moan soft like you wanted somebody terrible, cry like a racing car slipping away from a motorcycle-cop, bang-bang! you jazzmen, bang altogether drums, traps, banjos, horns, tin cans—make two people fight on the top of a stairway and scratch each other's eyes in a clinch tumbling down the stairs.

Can the rough stuff . . . Now a Mississippi steamboat pushes up the night river with a hoo-hoo-hoo-oo . . . and the green lanterns calling to the high soft stars . . . a red moon rides on the humps of the low river hills. . . . Go to it, O jazzmen.

BLUE ISLAND INTERSECTION

Six street-ends come together here.
They feed people and wagons into the center.

In and out all day horses with thoughts of nose-bags,
Men with shovels, women with baskets and baby buggies.
Six ends of streets and no sleep for them all day.
The people and wagons come and go, out and in.
Triangles of banks and drug stores watch.
The policemen whistle, the trolley cars bump:
Wheels, wheels, feet, feet, all day.

In the false dawn where the chickens blink
And the east shakes a lazy baby toe at tomorrow,
And the east fixes a pink half-eye this way,
In the time when only one milk wagon crosses
These three streets, these six street-ends
It is the sleep time and they rest.
The triangle banks and drug stores rest.
The policeman is gone, his star and gun sleep.
The owl car blutters along in a sleep-walk.

FROM "SMOKE AND STEEL"

Smoke of the fields in spring is one,
Smoke of the leaves in autumn another.
Smoke of a steel-mill roof or a battleship funnel,
They all go up in a line with a smokestack,
Or they twist . . . in the slow twist . . . of the wind.

If the north wind comes they run to the south.
If the west wind comes they run to the east.
By this sign
all smokes
know each other.
Smoke of the fields in spring and leaves in autumn,
Smoke of the finished steel, chilled and blue,
By the oath of work they swear: "I know you."

Hunted and hissed from the center
Deep down long ago when God made us over,
Deep down are the cinders we came from—
You and I and our heads of smoke.

✦

Some of the smokes God dropped on the job
Cross on the sky and count our years
And sing in the secrets of our numbers;
Sing their dawns and sing their evenings,
Sing an old log-fire song:
You may put the damper up,
You may put the damper down,
The smoke goes up the chimney just the same.

Smoke of a city sunset skyline,
Smoke of a country dusk horizon—
They cross on the sky and count our years.

✦

Smoke of a brick-red dust
Winds on a spiral
Out of the stacks
For a hidden and glimpsing moon.
This, said the bar-iron shed to the blooming mill,
This is the slang of coal and steel.
The day-gang hands it to the night-gang,
The night-gang hands it back.

Stammer at the slang of this—
Let us understand half of it.
In the rolling mills and sheet mills,
In the harr and boom of the blast fires,
The smoke changes its shadow
And men change their shadow;
A nigger, a wop, a bohunk changes.

A bar of steel—it is only
Smoke at the heart of it, smoke and the blood of a man.
A runner of fire ran in it, ran out, ran somewhere else,
And left smoke and the blood of a man
And the finished steel, chilled and blue.

So fire runs in, runs out, runs somewhere else again,
And the bar of steel is a gun, a wheel, a nail, a shovel,
A rudder under the sea, a steering-gear in the sky;
And always dark in the heart and through it,
Smoke and the blood of a man.
Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Gary, they make their steel with men.

In the blood of men and the ink of chimneys
The smoke nights write their oaths:
Smoke into steel and blood into steel;
Homestead, Braddock, Birmingham, they make their steel with men.
Smoke and blood is the mix of steel. . . .

LOSERS

If I should pass the tomb of Jonah
I would stop there and sit for a while;
Because I was swallowed one time deep in the dark
And came out alive after all.

If I pass the burial spot of Nero
I shall say to the wind, "Well, well!"—

I who have fiddled in a world on fire,
I who have done so many stunts not worth the doing.

I am looking for the grave of Sinbad too.
I want to shake his ghost-hand and say,
"Neither of us died very early, did we?"

And the last sleeping-place of Nebuchadnezzar—
When I arrive there I shall tell the wind:
"You ate grass; I have eaten crow—
Who is better off now or next year?"

Jack Cade, John Brown, Jesse James,
There too I could sit down and stop for a while.
I think I could tell their headstones:
"God, let me remember all good losers."

I could ask people to throw ashes on their heads
In the name of that sergeant at Belleau Woods,
Walking into the drumfires, calling his men,
"Come on, you . . . Do you want to live forever?"

WIND SONG

Long ago I learned how to sleep,
In an old apple orchard where the wind swept by counting its money and throwing it away,
In a wind-gaunt orchard where the limbs forked out and listened or never listened at all,
In a passel of trees where the branches trapped the wind into whistling, "Who, who are you?"
I slept with my head in an elbow on a summer afternoon and there I took a sleep lesson.
There I went away saying: I know why they sleep, I know how they trap the tricky winds.
Long ago I learned how to listen to the singing wind and how to forget and how to hear the deep whine,
Slapping and lapsing under the day blue and the night stars:
Who, who are you?

Who can ever forget
listening to the wind go by
counting its money
and throwing it away?

PRIMER LESSON

Look out how you use proud words.
When you let proud words go, it is not easy to call them back.
They wear long boots, hard boots; they walk off proud; they can't hear you calling—
Look out how you use proud words.

BROKEN-FACE GARGOYLES

All I can give you is broken-face gargoyles.
It is too early to sing and dance at funerals,
Though I can whisper to you I am looking for an undertaker humming a lullaby and throwing his feet in a swift and mystic buck-and-wing, now you see it and now you don't.

Fish to swim a pool in your garden flashing a speckled silver,
A basket of wine-saps filling your room with flame-dark for your eyes and the tang of valley orchards for your nose,
Such a beautiful pail of fish, such a beautiful peck of apples, I cannot bring you now.
It is too early and I am not footloose yet.

I shall come in the night when I come with a hammer and saw.
I shall come near your window, where you look out when your eyes open in the morning,
And there I shall slam together bird-houses and bird-baths for wing-loose wrens and hummers to live in, birds with yellow wing tips to blur and buzz soft all summer.

So I shall make little fool homes with doors, always open doors for all and each to run away when they want to.
I shall come just like that even though now it is early and I am not yet footloose,
Even though I am still looking for an undertaker with a raw, wind-bitten face and a dance in his feet.
I make a date with you (put it down) for six o'clock in the evening a thousand years from now.

All I can give you now is broken-face gargoyles.
All I can give you now is a double gorilla head with two fish mouths and four eagle eyes hooked on a street wall, spouting water and looking two ways to the ends of the street for the new people, the young strangers, coming, coming, always coming.

It is early.
I shall yet be footloose.

FLASH CRIMSON

I shall cry God to give me a broken foot.

I shall ask for a scar and a slashed nose.

I shall take the last and the worst.

I shall be eaten by gray creepers in a bunkhouse where no runners of the sun come and no dogs live.

And yet—of all "and yets" this is the bronze strongest—

I shall keep one thing better than all else; there is the blue steel of a great star of early evening in it; it lives longer than a broken foot or any scar.

The broken foot goes to a hole dug with a shovel or the bone of a nose may whiten on a hilltop—and yet—"and yet"—

There is one crimson pinch of ashes left after all; and none of the shifting winds that whip the grass and none of the pounding rains that beat the dust know how to touch or find the flash of this crimson.

I cry to God to give me a broken foot, a scar, or a lousy death.

I who have seen the flash of this crimson, I ask God for the last and worst.

EARLY LYNCHING

Two Christs were at Golgotha.
One took the vinegar, another looked on.
One was on the cross, another in the mob.
One had the nails in his hands, another the stiff fingers holding a hammer driving nails.
There were many more Christs at Golgotha, many more thief pals, many many more in the mob howling the Judean equivalent of "Kill Him! Kill Him!"
The Christ they killed, the Christ they didn't kill, those were the two at Golgotha.

Pity, pity, the bones of these broken ankles.
Pity, pity, the slimp of these broken wrists
The mother's arms are strong to the last.
She holds him and counts the heart drips.

The smell of the slums was on him,
Wrongs of the slums lit his eyes.
Songs of the slums wove in his voice
The haters of the slums hated his slum heart.

The leaves of a mountain tree,
Leaves with a spinning star shook in them,
Rocks with a song of water, water, over them,
Hawks with an eye for death any time, any time,
The smell and the sway of these were on his sleeves, were in his nostrils, his words.

The slum man they killed, the mountain man lives on.

PRECIOUS MOMENTS

Bright vocabularies are transient as rainbows.
Speech requires blood and air to make it.
Before the word comes off the end of the tongue,
While the diaphragms of flesh negotiate the word,
In the moment of doom when the word forms
It is born, alive, registering an imprint—

Afterward it is a mummy, a dry fact, done and gone,
The warning holds yet: Speak now or forever hold your peace.
Ecce homo had meanings: Behold the man! Look at him!
Dying he lives and speaks!

MOIST MOON PEOPLE

The moon is able to command the valley tonight.
The green mist shall go a-roaming, the white river shall go a-roaming.
Yet the moon shall be commanding, the moon shall take a high stand on the sky.

When the cats crept up the gullies,
And the goats fed at the rim a-laughing,
When the spiders swept their rooms in the burr oaks,
And the katydids first searched for this year's accordions,
And the crickets began a-looking for last year's concertinas—

I was there, I saw that hour, I know God had grand intentions about it.
If not, why did the moon command the valley, the green mist and white river go a-roaming, and the moon by itself take so high a stand on the sky?

If God and I alone saw it, the show was worth putting on,
Yet I remember others were there, Amos and Priscilla, Axel and Hulda, Hank and Jo, Big Charley and Little Morningstar.
They were all there; the clock ticks spoke with castanet clicks.

BUNDLES

I have thought of beaches, fields,
Tears, laughter.

I have thought of homes put up—
And blown away.

I have thought of meetings and for
Every meeting a good-by.

I have thought of stars going alone,
Orioles in pairs, sunsets in blundering
Wistful deaths.

I have wanted to let go and cross over
To a next star, a last star.

I have asked to be left a few tears
And some laughter.

UPSTREAM

The strong men keep coming on,
They go down shot, hanged, sick, broken,

They live on fighting, singing, lucky as plungers.
The strong mothers pulling them on . . .
The strong mothers pulling them from a dark sea, a great prairie, a long mountain.
Call hallelujah, call amen, call deep thanks.
The strong men keep coming on.

SUNSETS

There are sunsets who whisper a good-by.
It is a short dusk and a way for stars.
Prairie and sea rim they go level and even,
And the sleep is easy.

There are sunsets who dance good-by.
They fling scarves half to the arc,
To the arc then and over the arc.
Ribbons at the ears, sashes at the hips,
Dancing, dancing good-by. And here sleep
Tosses a little with dreams.

ELEPHANTS ARE DIFFERENT TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Wilson and Pilcer and Snack stood before the zoo elephant.

Wilson said, "What is its name? Is it from Asia or Africa? Who feeds it? Is it a he or a she? How old is it? Do they have twins? How much does it cost to feed? How much does it weigh? If it dies how much will another one cost? If it dies what will they use the bones, the fat, and the hide for? What use is it besides to look at?"

Pilcer didn't have any questions; he was murmuring to himself, "It's a house by itself, walls and windows, the ears came from tall cornfields, by God; the architect of those legs was a workman, by God; he stands like a bridge out across deep water; the face is sad and the eyes are kind; I know elephants are good to babies."

Snack looked up and down and at last said to himself, "He's a tough son-of-a-gun outside and I'll bet he's got a strong heart, I'll bet he's strong as a copper-riveted boiler inside."

They didn't put up any arguments.
They didn't throw anything in each other's faces.
Three men saw the elephant three ways
And let it go at that.
They didn't spoil a sunny Sunday afternoon;
"Sunday comes only once a week," they told each other.

FOR YOU

The peace of great doors be for you.
Wait at the knobs, at the panel oblongs;
Wait for the great hinges.

The peace of great churches be for you,
Where the players of loft pipe-organs
Practice old lovely fragments, alone.

The peace of great books be for you,
Stains of pressed clover leaves on pages,
Bleach of the light of years held in leather.

The peace of great prairies be for you.
Listen among windplayers in cornfields,
The wind learning over its oldest music.

The peace of great seas be for you.
Wait on a hook of land, a rock footing
For you, wait in the salt wash.

The peace of great mountains be for you,
The sleep and the eyesight of eagles,
Sheet mist shadows and the long look acros

The peace of great hearts be for you,
Valves of the blood of the sun,
Pumps of the strongest wants we cry.

The peace of great silhouettes be for you,
Shadow dancers alive in your blood now,
Alive and crying, "Let us out, let us out."

ıe peace of great changes be for you.
hispers, oh beginners in the hills.
ımble, oh cubs—tomorrow belongs to you.

ıe peace of great loves be for you.
in, soak these roots; wind, shatter the dry
·ot.
rs of sunlight, grips of the earth; hug these.

The peace of great ghosts be for you,
Phantoms of night-gray eyes, ready to go
To the fog-star dumps, to the fire-white
doors.

Yes, the peace of great phantoms be for you,
Phantom iron men, mothers of bronze,
Keepers of the lean clean breeds.

THEY HAVE YARNS

(from "The People, Yes")

They have yarns
Of a skyscraper so tall they had to put hinges
On the two top stories so to let the moon go by,
Of one corn crop in Missouri when the roots
Went so deep and drew off so much water
The Mississippi riverbed that year was dry,
Of pancakes so thin they had only one side,
Of "a fog so thick we shingled the barn and six feet out on the fog,"
Of Pecos Pete straddling a cyclone in Texas and riding it to the west coast where "it rained out under him,"
Of the man who drove a swarm of bees across the Rocky Mountains and the Desert "and didn't lose a bee,"
Of a mountain railroad curve where the engineer in his cab can touch the caboose and spit in the conductor's eye,
Of the boy who climbed a cornstalk growing so fast he would have starved to death if they hadn't shot biscuits up to him,
Of the old man's whiskers: "When the wind was with him his whiskers arrived a day before he did,"
Of the hen laying a square egg and cackling, "Ouch!" and of hens laying eggs with the dates printed on them,
Of the ship captain's shadow: it froze to the deck one cold winter night,
Of mutineers on that same ship put to chipping rust with rubber hammers,
Of the sheep counter who was fast and accurate: "I just count their feet and divide by four,"
Of the man so tall he must climb a ladder to shave himself,
Of the runt so teeny-weeny it takes two men and a boy to see him,
Of mosquitoes: one can kill a dog, two of them a man,
Of a cyclone that sucked cookstoves out of the kitchen, up the chimney flue, and on to the next town,
Of the same cyclone picking up wagon-tracks in Nebraska and dropping them over in the Dakotas,
Of the hook-and-eye snake unlocking itself into forty pieces, each piece two inches long, then in nine seconds flat snapping itself together again,
Of the watch swallowed by the cow—when they butchered her a year later the watch was running and had the correct time,
Of horned snakes, hoop snakes that roll themselves where they want to go, and rattlesnakes carrying bells instead of rattles on their tails,
Of the herd of cattle in California getting lost in a giant redwood tree that had hollowed out,

Of the man who killed a snake by putting its tail in its mouth so it swallowed itself,
Of railroad trains whizzing along so fast they reach the station before the whistle,
Of pigs so thin the farmer had to tie knots in their tails to keep them from crawling through the cracks in their pens,
Of Paul Bunyan's big blue ox, Babe, measuring between the eyes forty-two ax-handles and a plug of Star tobacco exactly,
Of John Henry's hammer and the curve of its swing and his singing of it as "a rainbow round my shoulder."

"Do tell!"
"I want to know!"
"You don't say so!"
"For the land's sake!"
"Gosh all fish-hooks!"
"Tell me some more.
I don't believe a word you say
but I love to listen
to your sweet harmonica
to your chin-music.
Your fish stories hang together
when they're just a pack of lies:
you ought to have a leather medal:
you ought to have a statue
carved of butter: you deserve
a large bouquet of turnips."

"Yessir," the traveler drawled,
"Away out there in the petrified forest
everything goes on the same as usual.
The petrified birds sit in their petrified nests
and hatch their petrified young from petrified eggs."

A high pressure salesman jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge and was saved by a policeman. But it didn't take him long to sell the idea to the policeman. So together they jumped off the bridge.

One of the oil men in heaven started a rumor of a gusher down in hell. All the other oil men left in a hurry for hell. As he gets to thinking about the rumor he had started he says to himself there might be something in it after all. So he leaves for hell in a hurry.

"The number 42 will win this raffle, that's my number." And when he won they asked him whether he guessed the number or had a system. He said he had a system, "I took up the old family album and there on page 7 was my grandfather and grandmother both on page 7. I said to myself this is easy for 7 times 7 is the number that will win and 7 times 7 is 42."

Once a shipwrecked sailor caught hold of a stateroom door and floated for hours till friendly hands from out of the darkness threw him a rope. And he called across the night, "What country is this?" and hearing voices answer, "New Jersey," he took a fresh hold on the floating stateroom door and called back half-wearily, "I guess I'll float a little farther."

An Ohio man bundled up the tin roof of a summer kitchen and sent it to a motor car maker with a complaint of his car not giving service. In three weeks a new car arrived for him and a letter: "We regret delay in shipment but your car was received in a very bad order."

A Dakota cousin of this Ohio man sent six years of tin can accumulations to the same works, asking them to overhaul his car. Two weeks later came a rebuilt car, five old tin cans, and a letter: "We are also forwarding you five parts not necessary in our new model."

Thus fantasies heard at filling stations in the midwest. Another relates to a Missouri mule who took aim with his heels at an automobile rattling by. The car turned a somersault, lit next a fence, ran right along through a cornfield till it came to a gate, moved onto the road and went on its way as though nothing had happened. The mule heehawed with desolation, "What's the use?"

Another tells of a farmer and his family stalled on a railroad crossing, how they jumped out in time to see a limited express knock it into flinders, the farmer calling, "Well, I always did say that car was no shucks in a real pinch."

When the Masonic Temple in Chicago was the tallest building in the United States west of New York, two men who would cheat the eyes out of you if you gave 'em a chance, took an Iowa farmer to the top of the building and asked him, "How is this for high?" They told him that for $25 they would go down in the basement and turn the building around on its turn-table for him while he stood on the roof and saw how this seventh wonder of the world worked. He handed them $25. They went. He waited. They never came back.

This is told in Chicago as a folk tale, the same as the legend of Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicking over the barn lamp that started the Chicago fire, when the Georgia visitor, Robert Toombs, telegraphed an Atlanta crony, "Chicago is on fire, the whole city burning down, God be praised!"

Nor is the prize sleeper Rip Van Winkle and his scolding wife forgotten, nor the headless horseman scooting through Sleepy Hollow

Nor the sunken treasure-ships in coves and harbors, the hideouts of gold and silver sought by Coronado, nor the Flying Dutchman rounding the Cape doomed to nevermore pound his ear nor ever again take a snooze for himself

Nor the sailor's caretaker Mother Carey seeing to it that every seafaring man in the afterworld has a seabird to bring him news of ships and women, an albatross for the admiral, a gull for the deckhand

Nor the sailor with a sweetheart in every port of the world, nor the ships that set out with flying colors and all the promises you could ask, the ships never heard of again

Nor Jim Liverpool, the riverman who could jump across any river and back without touching land he was that quick on his feet

Nor Mike Fink along the Ohio and the Mississippi, half wild horse and half cockeyed alligator, the rest of him snags and snapping turtle. "I can out-run, out-jump, out-shoot, out-brag, out-drink, and out-fight, rough and tumble, no holts barred, any man on both sides of the river from Pittsburgh to New Orleans and back again to St. Louis. My trigger finger itches and I want to go redhot. War, famine and bloodshed puts flesh on my bones, and hardship's my daily bread."

Nor the man so lean he threw no shadow: six rattlesnakes struck at him at one time and every one missed him.

THE PEOPLE WILL LIVE ON

(from "The People, Yes")

The people will live on.
The learning and blundering people will live on.
They will be tricked and sold and again sold
And go back to the nourishing earth for rootholds,
The people so peculiar in renewal and comeback,
You can't laugh off their capacity to take it.
The mammoth rests between his cyclonic dramas.

The people so often sleepy, weary, enigmatic,
is a vast huddle with many units saying:
"I earn my living.
I make enough to get by
and it takes all my time.
If I had more time
I could do more for myself
and maybe for others.
I could read and study
and talk things over
and find out about things.
It takes time.
I wish I had the time."

The people is a tragic and comic two-face:
hero and hoodlum: phantom and gorilla twisting to moan with a gargoyle mouth: "They
buy me and sell me . . . it's a game . . .
sometime I'll break loose . . ."

Once having marched
Over the margins of animal necessity,
Over the grim line of sheer subsistence
Then man came
To the deeper rituals of his bones,
To the lights lighter than any bones,
To the time for thinking things over,
To the dance, the song, the story,
Or the hours given over to dreaming,
Once having so marched.

Between the finite limitations of the five senses
and the endless yearnings of man for the beyond
the people hold to the humdrum bidding of work and food
while reaching out when it comes their way
for lights beyond the prison of the five senses,
for keepsakes lasting beyond any hunger or death.
This reaching is alive.
The panderers and liars have violated and smutted it.
Yet this reaching is alive yet
for lights and keepsakes.

The people know the salt of the sea
and the strength of the winds
lashing the corners of the earth.
The people take the earth
as a tomb of rest and a cradle of hope.
Who else speaks for the Family of Man?
They are in tune and step
with constellations of universal law.

The people is a polychrome,
a spectrum and a prism
held in a moving monolith,
a console organ of changing themes,
a clavilux of color poems
wherein the sea offers fog
and the fog moves off in rain
and the labrador sunset shortens
to a nocturne of clear stars
serene over the shot spray
of northern lights.

The steel mill sky is alive.
The fire breaks white and zigzag
shot on a gun-metal gloaming.
Man is a long time coming.
Man will yet win.
Brother may yet line up with brother:

This old anvil laughs at many broken hammers.
There are men who can't be bought.
The fireborn are at home in fire.
The stars make no noise.
You can't hinder the wind from blowing.
Time is a great teacher.
Who can live without hope?

In the darkness with a great bundle of grief
the people march.
In the night, and overhead a shovel of stars for
keeps, the people march:
"Where to? what next?"

THE FIREBORN ARE AT HOME IN FIRE

Luck is a star.
Money is a plaything.
Time is a storyteller.
The sky goes high, big.
The sky goes wide and blue.
And the fireborn—they go far—
being at home in fire.

Can you compose yourself
The same as a bright bandanna,
A bandanna folded blue and cool,
Whatever the high howling,
The accents of blam blam?
Can I, can John Smith, John Doe,
Whatever the awful accents,
Whatever the Horst Wessels hiss,
Whatever books be burnt and crisp,
Whatever hangmen bring their hemp,
Whatever horsemen sweep the sunsets,
Whatever hidden hovering candle
Sways as a wafer of light?

Can you compose yourself
The same as a bright bandanna,
A bandanna folded blue and cool?
Can I, too, drop deep down
In a pool of cool remembers,
In a float of fine smoke blue,
In a keeping of one pale moon,
Weaving our wrath in a pattern
Woven of wrath gone down,
Crossing our scarlet zigzags
With pools of cool blue,
With floats of smoke blue?

Can you, can I, compose ourselves
In wraps of personal cool blue,
In sheets of personal smoke blue?
Bach did it, Johann Sebastian.
So did the one and only John Milton.
And the old slave Epictetus
And the other slave Spartacus
And Brother Francis of Assisi.
So did General George Washington
On a horse, in a saddle,
On a boat, in heavy snow,
In a loose cape overcoat
And snow on his shoulders.
So did John Adams, Jackson, Jefferson.

So did Lincoln on a cavalry horse
At the Chancellorsville review
  With the platoons right, platoons left,
In a wind nearly blowing the words away
  Asking the next man on a horse:
"What's going to become of all these
  Boys when the war is over?"
The shape of your shadow
Comes from you—and you only?
Your personal fixed decisions
Out of you—and your mouth only?
  Your No, your Yes, your own?

Bronze old-timers belong here.
Yes, they might be saying:
  Shade the flame
Back to final points
Of all sun and fog
In the moving frame
Of your personal eyes.
Then stand to the points.
Let hunger and hell come.
Or ashes and shame poured
On your personal head.
Let death shake its bones.
The teaching goes back far:
  Compose yourself.

THE LONG SHADOW OF LINCOLN

(*A Litany*)

We can succeed only by concert. . . . The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves. . . . *December 1, 1862. The President's Message to Congress.*

Be sad, be cool, be kind,
Remembering those now dream-dust
Hallowed in the ruts and gullies,
Solemn bones under the smooth blue sea,
Faces war-blown in a falling rain.

Be a brother, if so can be,
To those beyond battle fatigue
Each in his own corner of earth
Or forty fathoms undersea
Beyond all boom of guns,
Beyond any bong of a great bell,
Each with a bosom and number,
Each with a pack of secrets,

Each with a personal dream and doorway,
And over them now the long endless winds
With the low healing song of time,
The hush and sleep murmur of time.
Make your wit a guard and cover.
Sing low, sing high, sing wide.
Let your laughter come free
Remembering looking toward peace:
"We must disenthrall ourselves."

Be a brother, if so can be,
To those thrown forward
For taking hard-won lines,
For holding hard-won points
And their reward so-so.
Little they care to talk about,
Their pay held in a mute calm,
High-spot memories going unspoken;
What they did being past words,
What they took being hard won.
Be sad, be kind, be cool.
Weep if you must,
And weep, open and shameless,
Before these altars.

There are wounds past words.
There are cripples less broken
Than many who walk whole.
There are dead youths
With wrists of silence
Who keep a vast music
Under their shut lips;
What they did being past words;
Their dreams, like their deaths,
Beyond any smooth and easy telling;
Having given till no more to give.

There is dust alive
With dreams of the Republic,
With dreams of the family of man
Flung wide on a shrinking globe;
With old timetables,
Old maps, old guideposts
Torn into shreds,
Shot into tatters,
Burnt in a fire wind,
Lost in the shambles,
Faded in rubble and ashes.

There is dust alive.
Out of a granite tomb,
Out of a bronze sarcophagus,

Loose from the stone and copper
Steps a white-smoke ghost,
Lifting an authoritative hand
In the name of dreams worth dying for,
In the name of men whose dust breathes
Of those dreams so worth dying for;
What they did being past words,
Beyond all smooth and easy telling.

Be sad, be kind, be cool,
Remembering, under God, a dream-dust
Hallowed in the ruts and gullies,
Solemn bones under the smooth blue sea,
Faces war-blown in a falling rain.

Sing low, sing high, sing wide.
Make your wit a guard and cover.
Let your laughter come free,
Like a help and a brace of comfort.

The earth laughs, the sun laughs
Over every wise harvest of man,
Over man looking toward peace
By the light of the hard old teaching:
"We must disenthrall ourselves."

BETWEEN WORLDS

And he said to himself
in a sunken morning moon
between two pines,
between lost gold and lingering green:

I believe I will count up my worlds.
There seem to me to be three.
There is a world I came from which is Number One.
There is a world I am in now, which is Number Two.
There is a world I go to next, which is Number Three.

There was the seed pouch, the place I lay dark in, nursed and shaped in a warm, red, wet cuddling place; if I tugged at a latchstring or doubled a dimpled fist or twitched a leg or a foot, only the Mother knew.

There is the place I am in now, where I look back and look ahead, and dream and wonder.

There is the next place—

And he took a look out of a window
at a sunken morning moon
between two pines,
between lost gold and lingering green.

Vachel Lindsay

(Nicholas) Vachel Lindsay was born in Springfield, Illinois, November 10, 1879. His home for many years was next door to the executive mansion of the State of Illinois; from the window where Lindsay did most of his writing, he saw governors come and go, including the martyred John P. Altgeld, whom he has celebrated in one of his finest poems. He graduated from the Springfield High School, attended Hiram College (1897-1900), studied at the Art Institute at Chicago (1900-3) and at the New York School of Art (1904). After two years of lecturing and settlement work, he took the first of his long tramps, walking through Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas, preaching "the gospel of beauty," and formulating his unique plans for a communal art. During the following five years, Lindsay made several of these trips, traveling as a combination missionary and minstrel. Like a true revivalist, he attempted to wake a response to beauty, distributing a little pamphlet entitled "Rhymes to Be Traded for Bread."

Lindsay began to create more poetry to reach the public—all of his verse was written in his rôle of apostle. He was, primarily, a rhyming John the Baptist singing to convert the heathen, to stimulate and encourage the half-hearted dreams that hide and are smothered in sordid villages and townships. But the great audiences he was endeavoring to reach did not hear him, even though his collection *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven* (1913) struck many a loud and racy note.

Lindsay broadened his effects, developed the chant, and, the following year, published his *The Congo and Other Poems* (1914), an infectious blend of rhyme, religion, and rag-time. In the title-poem and, in a lesser degree, the three companion chants, Lindsay struck his most powerful—and most popular—vein. When intoned in Lindsay's resonant baritone, it gave people that primitive joy in syncopated sound that is at the very base of song. In these experiments in breaking down the barriers between poetry and music, Lindsay (obviously infected by the echolalia of Poe's "Bells") tried to create what he called a "Higher Vaudeville" imagination, carrying the form back to the old Greek precedent where every line was half-spoken, half-sung. Gestures and stage directions, even chanted responses, were added.

Lindsay's innovation succeeded at once. The novelty, the speed, the clatter, forced the attention of people who had never paid the slightest heed to the poet's quieter verses. Men heard the *sounds* of hurtling America in these lines even when they were deaf to its spirit. They failed to see that, beneath the noise of "The Kallyope Yell" and "The Santa Fé Trail," Lindsay was partly an admirer, partly an ironical critic of the shrieking energy of these states. By his effort to win the enemy over, Lindsay had persuaded the proverbially tired business man to listen at last. But, in overstressing the vaudeville features, there arose the danger of Lindsay the poet being lost in Lindsay the entertainer. The sympathetic celebration of Negro spirits and psychology (seen at their best in "The Congo," "John Brown" and "Simon Legree") degenerated into the crude buffooneries of "The Daniel Jazz" and "The Blacksmith's Serenade." The three bracketed poems, and a few others, are certain of a place in the history of American poetry.

Lindsay's earnestness, keyed up by an exuberant fancy, saved him. *The Chinese*

Nightingale (1917) begins with the most whimsical extended rhymes Lindsay ever devised. This title-poem, with its air of free improvisation, is his finest piece of sheer texture. And if the subsequent *The Golden Whales of California* (1920) is less distinctive, it is principally because the author had written too much and too speedily to be self-critical. It is his peculiar appraisal of loveliness, the rollicking high spirits joined to a stubborn evangelism, that makes Lindsay so representative a product of his environment.

Collected Poems (1923) is a complete and almost cruel exhibit of Lindsay's best and worst. Inflated stanzas alternate with some of the most charming children's poetry of the times; the set of fanciful Moon Poems would be enough to keep Lindsay's name alive. That Lindsay had lost whatever faculty of self-appraisal he may have possessed is evidenced by page after page of crudities; verses are propelled by nothing more than physical energy whipping up a trivial idea. What mars so much of this writing is Lindsay's attempt to give every wisp of fancy a cosmic or at least a national significance. Thus that intoxicating chant "The Ghosts of the Buffaloes" appears in the later edition with an unfortunate appendage, an irrelevant hortatory appeal beginning, "Would I might rouse the Lincoln in you all!" But, in spite of the fact that the poet suffered from a complex of undiscriminating patriotism, a curious hero-worship which makes him link Woodrow Wilson with Socrates, his very catholicity was representative of a great part of his country. Johnny Appleseed and John L. Sullivan, Daniel Boone and William Jennings Bryan, Andrew Jackson and P. T. Barnum—such figures were the symbols of his motley America. They were not merely heroes but demi-gods. They typified the incongruous blend of high idealism and childish fantasy, of beauty and ballyhoo which made America resemble (to Lindsay) a County Fair—

> every soul resident
> In the earth's one circus tent.

It was a combination that made the United States "the golden dream" created by pioneers and baseball players, Presidents and movie-queens. Nuances of thought or expression were forgotten; exuberance, uncontrolled by taste or reason, triumphed. *Going-to-the-Sun* (1923), *Going-to-the-Stars* (1926), and *The Candle in the Cabin* (1927), illustrated with Lindsay's characteristic and flowery drawings, contain some charming and almost girlish verses, but followed each other in too rapid succession and betray Lindsay's uncritical loquacity. His prose is far better than the later verse. *The Litany of Washington Street* (1929), described as "a kind of Washington's birthday, Lincoln's birthday, Whitman's birthday, Jefferson's birthday book," is a set of Fourth of July orations on an idealized Main Street stretching from Connecticut to Calcutta.

Much of Lindsay will die; he will not live as either a prophet or a politician. But the vitality which impels the best of his galloping meters will persist; his innocent wildness of imagination, outlasting his naïve programs, will charm even those to whom his declamations are no longer a novelty. His gospel is no less original for being preached through a saxophone.

Besides his original poetry, Lindsay had embodied his experiences and meditations on the road in two prose volumes, *A Handy Guide for Beggars* (1916) and *Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty* (1914), as well as an enthusiastic study

of the "silent drama," *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915). A curious document, half rhapsody, half visionary novel, entitled *The Golden Book of Springfield,* appeared in 1920.

Lindsay traded on his surplus energy. Some of it went into private games, such as the establishment of each individual's "personal hieroglyphics," some into grandiose but futile schemes, most into lecturing. For more than twenty years he ranged the country, exciting his audiences and exhausting himself. After fifty the strain was too much for him. He collapsed at the beginning of his fifty-third year just as he should have been turning to the larger works he had so often discussed with friends. The fear of poverty overcame him; his exuberance vanished; he was plagued with self-doubt. He felt that he was being neglected, even persecuted; he convinced himself he was a failure. The high-spirited "broncho that would not be broken" was broken at last. He committed suicide on the night of December 5, 1931.

THE CONGO

(A Study of the Negro Race)

I. Their Basic Savagery

Fat black bucks in a wine-barrel room,
Barrel-house kings, with feet unstable,
Sagged and reeled and pounded on the table, *A deep rolling bass.*
Pounded on the table,
Beat an empty barrel with the handle of a broom,
Hard as they were able,
Boom, boom, Boom,
With a silk umbrella and the handle of a broom,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, Boom.

Then I had religion, Then I had a vision.
I could not turn from their revel in derision.
Then I saw the Congo, creeping through the black, *More deliberate. Solemnly chanted.*
Cutting through the jungle with a golden track.

Then along that riverbank
A thousand miles
Tattooed cannibals danced in files;
Then I heard the boom of the blood-lust song
And a thigh-bone beating on a tin-pan gong.
And "Blood" screamed the whistles and the fifes of the warriors, *A rapidly piling climax of speed and racket.*
"Blood" screamed the skull-faced, lean witch-doctors,
"Whirl ye the deadly voo-doo rattle,
Harry the uplands,
Steal all the cattle,
Rattle-rattle, rattle-rattle,
Bing!
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, Boom,"
A roaring, epic, rag-time tune *With a philosophic pause.*
From the mouth of the Congo
To the Mountains of the Moon.

Death is an Elephant,
Torch-eyed and horrible,
Foam-flanked and terrible.
BOOM, steal the pygmies,
BOOM, kill the Arabs,
BOOM, kill the white men,
Hoo, Hoo, Hoo.
Listen to the yell of Leopold's ghost
Burning in Hell for his hand-maimed host.
Hear how the demons chuckle and yell
Cutting his hands off, down in Hell.
Listen to the creepy proclamation,
Blown through the lairs of the forest-nation,
Blown past the white-ants' hill of clay,
Blown past the marsh where the butterflies play:—
"Be careful what you do,
Or Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo,
And all of the other
Gods of the Congo,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you."

Shrilly and with a heavily accented meter.

Like the wind in the chimney.

All the o sounds very golden. Heavy accents very heavy. Light accents very light. Last line whispered.

II. THEIR IRREPRESSIBLE HIGH SPIRITS

Wild crap-shooters with a whoop and a call
Danced the juba in their gambling-hall
And laughed fit to kill, and shook the town,
And guyed the policemen and laughed them down
With a boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM. . . .
THEN I SAW THE CONGO, CREEPING THROUGH THE BLACK,
CUTTING THROUGH THE JUNGLE WITH A GOLDEN TRACK.
A negro fairyland swung into view,
A minstrel river
Where dreams come true.
The ebony palace soared on high
Through the blossoming trees to the evening sky,
The inlaid porches and casements shone
With gold and ivory and elephant-bone.
And the black crowd laughed till their sides were sore
At the baboon butler in the agate door,
And the well-known tunes of the parrot band
That trilled on the bushes of that magic land.
A troupe of skull-faced witch-men came
Through the agate doorway in suits of flame,
Yes, long-tailed coats with a gold-leaf crust
And hats that were covered with diamond-dust.
And the crowd in the court gave a whoop and a call
And danced the juba from wall to wall.
But the witch-men suddenly stilled the throng
With a stern cold glare, and a stern old song:—
"Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you." . . .

Rather shrill and high.

Read exactly as in first section.

Lay emphasis on the delicate ideas. Keep as light-footed as possible.

With pomposity.

With a great deliberation and ghostliness.

Just then from the doorway, as fat as shotes,
Came the cake-walk princes in their long red coats,
Shoes with a patent leather shine,
And tall silk hats that were red as wine.
And they pranced with their butterfly partners there,
Coal-black maidens with pearls in their hair,
Knee-skirts trimmed with the jessamine sweet,
And bells on their ankles and little black feet.
And the couples railed at the chant and the frown
Of the witch-men lean, and laughed them down.
(O rare was the revel, and well worth while
That made those glowering witch-men smile).

With overwhelming assurance, good cheer, and pomp.

With growing speed and sharply marked dance-rhythm.

The cake-walk royalty then began
To walk for a cake that was tall as a man
To the tune of "Boomlay, boomlay, Boom,"
While the witch-men laughed, with a sinister air,
And sang with the scalawags prancing there:—
"Walk with care, walk with care,
Or Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo,
And all of the other
Gods of the Congo,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you.
Beware, beware, walk with care,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, boom.
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, boom,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, boom,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay,
Boom."
O rare was the revel, and well worth while
That made those glowering witch-men smile.

With a touch of negro dialect, and as rapidly as possible toward the end.

Slow philosophic calm.

III. The Hope of Their Religion

A good old negro in the slums of the town
Preached at a sister for her velvet gown.
Howled at a brother for his low-down ways,
His prowling, guzzling, sneak-thief days.
Beat on the Bible till he wore it out,
Starting the jubilee revival shout.
And some had visions, as they stood on chairs,
And sang of Jacob, and the golden stairs.
And they all repented, a thousand strong,
From their stupor and savagery and sin and wrong
And slammed their hymn books till they shook the room
With "Glory, glory, glory,"
And "Boom, boom, Boom."
THEN I SAW THE CONGO, CREEPING THROUGH THE BLACK,
CUTTING THROUGH THE JUNGLE WITH A GOLDEN TRACK.
And the gray sky opened like a new-rent veil
And showed the Apostles with their coats of mail.
In bright white steel they were seated round

Heavy bass. With a literal imitation of camp-meeting racket, and trance.

Exactly as in the first section.

And their fire-eyes watched where the Congo wound.
And the twelve Apostles, from their thrones on high,
Thrilled all the forest with their heavenly cry:—
"Mumbo-Jumbo will die in the jungle;
Never again will he hoo-doo you,
Never again will he hoo-doo you."

Sung to the tune of "Hark, ten thousand harps and voices."

Then along that river, a thousand miles
The vine-snared trees fell down in files.
Pioneer angels cleared the way
For a Congo paradise, for babes at play,
For sacred capitals, for temples clean.
Gone were the skull-faced witch-men lean.
There, where the wild ghost-gods had wailed
A million boats of the angels sailed
With oars of silver, and prows of blue
And silken pennants that the sun shone through.
'Twas a land transfigured, 'twas a new creation.
Oh, a singing wind swept the negro nation
And on through the backwoods clearing flew:—
"Mumbo-Jumbo is dead in the jungle.
Never again will he hoo-doo you.
Never again will he hoo-doo you."

With growing deliberation and joy.

In a rather high key—as delicately as possible.

To the tune of "Hark, ten thousand harps and voices."

Redeemed were the forests, the beasts and the men,
And only the vulture dared again
By the far, lone mountains of the moon
To cry, in the silence, the Congo tune:—
"Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you,
Mumbo . . . Jumbo . . . will . . . hoo-doo . . . you."

Dying off into a penetrating, terrified whisper.

TO A GOLDEN-HAIRED GIRL IN A LOUISIANA TOWN

You are a sunrise,
If a star should rise instead of the sun.
You are a moonrise,
If a star should come in the place of the moon.
You are the Spring,
If a face should bloom instead of an apple-bough.
You are my love,
If your heart is as kind
As your young eyes now.

GENERAL WILLIAM BOOTH ENTERS INTO HEAVEN

(To be sung to the tune of "The Blood of the Lamb" with indicated instruments)

I

(*Bass drum beaten loudly.*)
Booth led boldly with his big bass drum—
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
The Saints smiled gravely and they said: "He's come."

(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
Walking lepers followed, rank on rank,
Lurching bravos from the ditches dank,
Drabs from the alleyways and drug fiends pale—
Minds still passion-ridden, soul-powers frail:—
Vermin-eaten saints with moldy breath,
Unwashed legions with the ways of Death—
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

(*Banjos.*)
Every slum had sent its half-a-score
The round world over. (Booth had groaned for more.)
Every banner that the wide world flies
Bloomed with glory and transcendent dyes.
Big-voiced lasses made their banjos bang,
Tranced, fanatical they shrieked and sang:—
"Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?"
Hallelujah! It was queer to see
Bull-necked convicts with that land make free.
Loons with trumpets blowed a blare, blare, blare
On, on upward thro' the golden air!
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

II

(*Bass drum slower and softer.*)
Booth died blind and still by faith he trod,
Eyes still dazzled by the ways of God.
Booth led boldly, and he looked the chief,
Eagle countenance in sharp relief,
Beard a-flying, air of high command
Unabated in that holy land.

(*Sweet flute music.*)
Jesus came from out the court-house door,
Stretched his hands above the passing poor.
Booth saw not, but led his queer ones there
Round and round the mighty court-house square.
Yet in an instant all that blear review
Marched on spotless, clad in raiment new.
The lame were straightened, withered limbs uncurled
And blind eyes opened on a new, sweet world.

(*Bass drum louder.*)
Drabs and vixens in a flash made whole!
Gone was the weasel-head, the snout, the jowl!
Sages and sibyls now, and athletes clean,
Rulers of empires, and of forests green!

(*Grand chorus of all instruments. Tambourines to the foreground.*)
The hosts were sandaled, and their wings were fire!
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
But their noise played havoc with the angel-choir.

(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
Oh, shout Salvation! It was good to see
Kings and Princes by the Lamb set free.
The banjos rattled and the tambourines
Jing-jing-jingled in the hands of Queens.

(*Reverently sung, no instruments.*)
And when Booth halted by the curb for prayer
He saw his Master thro' the flag-filled air.
Christ came gently with a robe and crown
For Booth the soldier, while the throng knelt down.
He saw King Jesus. They were face to face,
And he knelt a-weeping in that holy place.
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

THE EAGLE THAT IS FORGOTTEN

(*John P. Altgeld. Born December 30, 1847; died March 12, 1902*)

Sleep softly . . . eagle forgotten . . . under the stone.
Time has its way with you there, and the clay has its own.
"We have buried him now," thought your foes, and in secret rejoiced.
They made a brave show of their mourning, their hatred unvoiced,
They had snarled at you, barked at you, foamed at you, day after day,
Now you were ended. They praised you, . . . and laid you away.

The others that mourned you in silence and terror and truth,
The widow bereft of her pittance, the boy without youth,
The mocked and the scorned and the wounded, the lame and the poor
That should have remembered forever, . . . remember no more.

Where are those lovers of yours, on what name do they call
The lost, that in armies wept over your funeral pall?
They call on the names of a hundred high-valiant ones,
A hundred white eagles have risen, the sons of your sons,
The zeal in their wings is a zeal that your dreaming began
The valor that wore out your soul in the service of man.

Sleep softly, . . . eagle forgotten, . . . under the stone,
Time has its way with you there, and the clay has its own.
Sleep on, O brave-hearted, O wise man, that kindled the flame—
To live in mankind is far more than to live in a name,
To live in mankind, far, far more . . . than to live in a name.

THE GHOSTS OF THE BUFFALOES

Last night at black midnight I woke with a cry,
The windows were shaking, there was thunder on high,
The floor was atremble, the door was ajar,
White fires, crimson fires, shone from afar.

I rushed to the dooryard. The city was gone.
My home was a hut without orchard or lawn.
It was mud-smear and logs near a whispering stream,
Nothing else built by man could I see in my dream . . .

Then . . .
Ghost-kings came headlong, row upon row,
Gods of the Indians, torches aglow.
They mounted the bear and the elk and the deer,
And eagles gigantic, aged and sere,
They rode long-horn cattle, they cried "A-la-la."
They lifted the knife, the bow, and the spear,
They lifted ghost-torches from dead fires below,
The midnight made grand with the cry "A-la-la."
The midnight made grand with a red-god charge,
A red-god show,
A red-god show,
"A-la-la, a-la-la, a-la-la, a-la-la."

With bodies like bronze, and terrible eyes
Came the rank and the file, with catamount cries,
Gibbering, yipping, with hollow-skull clacks,
Riding white bronchos with skeleton backs,
Scalp-hunters, beaded and spangled and bad,
Naked and lustful and foaming and mad,
Flashing primeval demoniac scorn,
Blood-thirst and pomp amid darkness reborn,
Power and glory that sleep in the grass
While the winds and the snows and the great rains pass.
They crossed the gray river, thousands abreast,
They rode out in infinite lines to the west,
Tide upon tide of strange fury and foam,
Spirits and wraiths, the blue was their home,
The sky was their goal where the star-flags are furled,
And on past those far golden splendors they whirled.
They burned to dim meteors, lost in the deep,
And I turned in dazed wonder, thinking of sleep.

And the wind crept by
Alone, unkempt, unsatisfied,
The wind cried and cried—
Muttered of massacres long past,
Buffaloes in shambles vast . . .
An owl said, "Hark, what is a-wing?"
I heard a cricket caroling,
I heard a cricket caroling,
I heard a cricket caroling.

Then . . .
Snuffing the lightning that crashed from on high
Rose royal old buffaloes, row upon row.
The lords of the prairie came galloping by.

And I cried in my heart "A-la-la, a-la-la.
A red-god show,
A red-god show,
A-la-la, a-la-la, a-la-la."
Buffaloes, buffaloes, thousands abreast,
A scourge and amazement, they swept to the west.
With black bobbing noses, with red rolling tongues,
Coughing forth steam from their leather-wrapped lungs,
Cows with their calves, bulls big and vain,
Goring the laggards, shaking the mane,
Stamping flint feet, flashing moon eyes,
Pompous and owlish, shaggy and wise.

Like sea-cliffs and caves resounded their ranks
With shoulders like waves, and undulant flanks.
Tide upon tide of strange fury and foam,
Spirits and wraiths, the blue was their home,
The sky was their goal where the star-flags are furled,
And on past those far golden splendors they whirled.
They burned to dim meteors, lost in the deep,
And I turned in dazed wonder, thinking of sleep.

I heard a cricket's cymbals play,
A scarecrow lightly flapped his rags,
And a pan that hung by his shoulder rang,
Rattled and thumped in a listless way,
And now the wind in the chimney sang,
The wind in the chimney,
The wind in the chimney,
The wind in the chimney,
Seemed to say:—
"Dream, boy, dream,
If you anywise can.
To dream is the work
Of beast or man.
Life is the west-going dream-storm's breath,
Life is a dream, the sigh of the skies,
The breath of the stars, that nod on their pillows
With their golden hair mussed over their eyes."
The locust played on his musical wing,
Sang to his mate of love's delight.
I heard the whippoorwill's soft fret.
I heard a cricket caroling,
I heard a cricket caroling,
I heard a cricket say: "Good-night, good-night,
Good-night, good-night, . . . good-night."

THE TRAVELER

The moon's a devil jester
Who makes himself too free.

The rascal is not always
Where he appears to be.
Sometimes he is in my heart—
Sometimes he is in the sea;
Then tides are in my heart,
And tides are in the sea.

O traveler, abiding not
Where he pretends to be!

A NEGRO SERMON:—SIMON LEGREE

Legree's big house was white and green.
His cotton-fields were the best to be seen.
He had strong horses and opulent cattle,
And bloodhounds bold, with chains that would rattle.
His garret was full of curious things:
Books of magic, bags of gold,
And rabbits' feet on long twine strings,
But he went down to the Devil.

Legree, he sported a brass-buttoned coat,
A snake-skin necktie, a blood-red shirt.
Legree, he had a beard like a goat,
And a thick hairy neck, and eyes like dirt.
His puffed-out cheeks were fish-belly white,
He had great long teeth, and an appetite.
He ate raw meat, 'most every meal,
And rolled his eyes till the cat would squeal.
His fist was an enormous size
To mash poor niggers that told him lies:
He was surely a witch-man in disguise.
But he went down to the Devil.

He wore hip-boots, and would wade all day
To capture his slaves that had fled away.
But he went down to the Devil.
He beat poor Uncle Tom to death
Who prayed for Legree with his last breath.
Then Uncle Tom to Eva flew,
To the high sanctoriums bright and new;
And Simon Legree stared up beneath,
And cracked his heels, and ground his teeth:
And went down to the Devil.
He crossed the yard in the storm and gloom;
He went into his grand front room.
He said, "I killed him, and I don't care."
He kicked a hound, he gave a swear;
He tightened his belt, he took a lamp,
Went down cellar to the webs and damp.

There in the middle of the moldy floor
He heaved up a slab; he found a door—
And went down to the Devil.

His lamp blew out, but his eyes burned bright.
Simon Legree stepped down all night—
Down, down to the Devil.
Simon Legree he reached the place,
He saw one half of the human race,
He saw the Devil on a wide green throne,
Gnawing the meat from a big ham-bone,
And he said to Mister Devil:
"I see that you have much to eat—
A red ham-bone is surely sweet.
I see that you have lion's feet;
I see your frame is fat and fine,
I see you drink your poison wine—
Blood and burning turpentine."

And the Devil said to Simon Legree:
"I like your style, so wicked and free.
Come sit and share my throne with me,
And let us bark and revel."
And there they sit and gnash their teeth,
And each one wears a hop-vine wreath.
They are matching pennies and shooting craps,
They are playing poker and taking naps.
And old Legree is fat and fine:
He eats the fire, he drinks the wine—
Blood and burning turpentine—
Down, down with the Devil;
Down, down with the Devil;
Down, down with the Devil.

JOHN BROWN

(To be sung by a leader and chorus, the leader singing the body of the poem, while the chorus interrupts with the question)

I've been to Palestine.
What did you see in Palestine?
I saw the ark of Noah—
It was made of pitch and pine.
I saw old Father Noah
Asleep beneath his vine.
I saw Shem, Ham and Japhet
Standing in a line.
I saw the tower of Babel
In the gorgeous sunrise shine—
By a weeping willow tree
Beside the Dead Sea.

I've been to Palestine.
What did you see in Palestine?
I saw abominations
And Gadarene swine.
I saw the sinful Canaanites
Upon the shewbread dine,
And spoil the temple vessels
And drink the temple wine.
I saw Lot's wife, a pillar of salt
Standing in the brine—
By a weeping willow tree
Beside the Dead Sea.

I've been to Palestine.
What did you see in Palestine?
Cedars on Mount Lebanon,
Gold in Ophir's mine,

And a wicked generation
Seeking for a sign,
And Baal's howling worshipers
Their god with leaves entwine.
And . . .
I saw the war-horse ramping
And shake his forelock fine—
By a weeping willow tree
Beside the Dead Sea.

I've been to Palestine.
What did you see in Palestine?
Old John Brown.
Old John Brown.
I saw his gracious wife
Dressed in a homespun gown.
I saw his seven sons
Before his feet bow down.
And he marched with his seven sons,
His wagons and goods and guns,
To his campfire by the sea,
By the waves of Galilee.

I've been to Palestine.
What did you see in Palestine?
I saw the harp and psalt'ry
Played for Old John Brown.
I heard the ram's horn blow,
Blow for Old John Brown.
I saw the Bulls of Bashan—
They cheered for Old John Brown.
I saw the big Behemoth—
He cheered for Old John Brown.
I saw the big Leviathan—
He cheered for Old John Brown.
I saw the Angel Gabriel
Great power to him assign.
I saw him fight the Canaanites
And set God's Israel free.
I saw him when the war was done
In his rustic chair recline—
By his campfire by the sea
By the waves of Galilee.

I've been to Palestine.
What did you see in Palestine?
Old John Brown.
Old John Brown.
And there he sits
To judge the world.
His hunting-dogs
At his feet are curled.
His eyes half-closed,
But John Brown sees
The ends of the earth,
The Day of Doom.
And his shot-gun lies
Across his knees—
Old John Brown,
Old John Brown.

THE DOVE OF NEW SNOW

I give you a house of snow,
I give you the flag of the wind above it,
I give you snow-bushes
In a long row,
I give you a snow-dove,
And ask you
To love it.

The snow-dove flies in
At the snow-house window,
He is a ghost
And he casts no shadow.
His cry is the cry of love
From the meadow,
The meadow of snow where he walked in a glow,
The glittering, angelic meadow.

THE FLOWER-FED BUFFALOES

The flower-fed buffaloes of the spring
In the days of long ago,
Ranged where the locomotives sing
And the prairie flowers lie low;
The tossing, blooming, perfumed grass
Is swept away by wheat,
Wheels and wheels and wheels spin by
In the spring that still is sweet.
But the flower-fed buffaloes of the spring
Left us long ago.
They gore no more, they bellow no more,
They trundle around the hills no more:—
With the Blackfeet lying low,
With the Pawnees lying low.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN WALKS AT MIDNIGHT

(In Springfield, Illinois)

It is portentous, and a thing of state
That here at midnight, in our little town
A mourning figure walks, and will not rest,
Near the old court-house pacing up and down,

Or by his homestead, or in shadowed yards
He lingers where his children used to play,
Or through the market, on the well-worn stones
He stalks until the dawn-stars burn away.

A bronzed, lank man! His suit of ancient black,
A famous high top-hat and plain worn shawl
Make him the quaint great figure that men love,
The prairie-lawyer, master of us all.

He cannot sleep upon his hillside now.
He is among us:—as in times before!
And we who toss and lie awake for long,
Breathe deep, and start, to see him pass the door.

His head is bowed. He thinks of men and kings.
Yea, when the sick world cries, how can he sleep?
Too many peasants fight, they know not why;
Too many homesteads in black terror weep.

The sins of all the war-lords burn his heart.
He sees the dreadnaughts scouring every main.
He carries on his shawl-wrapped shoulders now
The bitterness, the folly and the pain.

He cannot rest until a spirit-dawn
Shall come;—the shining hope of Europe free:
A league of sober folk, the workers' earth,
Bringing long peace to Cornland, Alp and Sea.

It breaks his heart that kings must murder still,
That all his hours of travail here for men
Seem yet in vain. And who will bring white peace
That he may sleep upon his hill again?

WHEN LINCOLN CAME TO SPRINGFIELD

When Lincoln came to Springfield,
In the ancient days,
Queer were the streets and sketchy,
And he was in a maze.

Leaving log cabins behind him
For the mud streets of this place,
Sorrow for Anne Rutledge
Burned in his face.

He threw his muddy saddle bags
On Joshua Speed's floor,

He took off his old hat,
  He looked around the store.

He shook his long hair
  On his bison-head,
He sat down on the counter,
  "Speed, I've moved," he said.

NANCY HANKS, MOTHER OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"Out of the eater came forth meat; and out of the strong came forth sweetness." Judges 14: 14

A sweet girl graduate, lean as a fawn,
The very whimsy of time,
Read her class upon Commencement Day—
A trembling filigree rhyme.
The pansy that blooms on the window sill,
Blooms in exactly the proper place;
And she nodded just like a pansy there,
And her poem was all about bowers and showers,
Sugary streamlet and mossy rill,
All about daisies on dale and hill—
And she was the mother of Buffalo Bill.

Another girl, a cloud-drift sort,
Dreamlit, moonlit, marble-white,
Light-footed saint on the pilgrim shore,
The best since New England fairies began,
Was the mother of Barnum, the circus man.

A girl from Missouri, snippy and vain,
As frothy a miss as any you know,
A wren, a toy, a pink silk bow,
The belle of the choir, she drove insane
Missouri deacons and all the sleek,
Her utter tomfoolery made men weak,
Till they could not stand and they could not speak.
Oh, queen of fifteen and sixteen,
Missouri sweetened beneath her reign—
And she was the mother of bad Mark Twain.

Not always are lions born of lions,
Roosevelt sprang from a palace of lace;
On the other hand is the dizzy truth:
Not always is beauty born of beauty.
Some treasures wait in a hidden place.
All over the world were thousands of belles.
In far-off eighteen hundred and nine,
Girls of fifteen, girls of twenty,
Their mammas dressed them up a-plenty—
Each garter was bright, each stocking fine,
But for all their innocent devices,
Their cheeks of fruit and their eyes of wine,
And each voluptuous design,
And all soft glories that we trace
In Europe's palaces of lace,
A girl who slept in dust and sorrow,
Nancy Hanks, in a lost cabin,
Nancy Hanks had the loveliest face!

WILD CATS

Here, as it were, in the heart of roaring Rome,
Here as far as men may get from the soil,
Here where political lords
Are proud of oil,
Oil in their skins,
Oil in their robber wells,
Where money and stone and orations are combined,
Here in Washington, D. C.,
Here where sins are refined and over-refined,
Here where they ape the very walls of Rome,
The temples and pillars of Imperial Rome,
We think of the time the wild cats kept awake
Our little camp, and filled our hearts with fright,
When porcupine and bear-cub stirred the brake,
And the friendliest wind seemed cold and impolite.
We think of our terror through the camp-fire night,
Of how we hoped to kiss the earth aright,

In spite of fear, and hoped not all in vain,
Of how we hoped for wild days, clean with power,
Of how we sought the fine log-cabin hour,
Of how we thought to rule
By leading men to a lone log-cabin school.
We think of our pioneer American pride,
Our high defiance that has not yet died,
Here, as it were, in the heart of roaring Rome,
In Washington, D. C.
Where they ape the very walls of Rome.

THE APPLE-BARREL OF JOHNNY APPLESEED

On the mountain peak, called "Going-To-The-Sun,"
I saw gray Johnny Appleseed at prayer
Just as the sunset made the old earth fair.
Then darkness came; in an instant, like great smoke,
The sun fell down as though its great hoops broke
And dark rich apples, poured from the dim flame
Where the sun set, came rolling toward the peak,
A storm of fruit, a mighty cider-reek,
The perfume of the orchards of the world,
From apple-shadows: red and russet domes
That turned to clouds of glory and strange homes
Above the mountain tops for cloud-born souls:—
Reproofs for men who build the world like moles,
Models for men, if they would build the world
As Johnny Appleseed would have it done—
Praying, and reading the books of Swedenborg
On the mountain top called "Going-To-The-Sun."

THE VOYAGE

What is my mast? A pen.
What are my sails? Ten crescent moons.
What is my sea? A bottle of ink.
Where do I go? To heaven again.
What do I eat? The amaranth flower,
While the winds through the jungles think old tunes.
I eat that flower with ivory spoons
While the winds through the jungles play old tunes;
The songs the angels used to sing
When heaven was not old autumn, but spring—
The bold, old songs of heaven and spring.

THE CHINESE NIGHTINGALE

(A Song in Chinese Tapestries)

"How, how," he said. "Friend Chang," I said,
"San Francisco sleeps as the dead—

Ended license, lust and play:
Why do you iron the night away?
Your big clock speaks with a deadly sound,
With a tick and a wail till dawn comes round,
While the monster shadows glower and creep,
What can be better for man than sleep?"

"I will tell you a secret," Chang replied;
"My breast with vision is satisfied,
And I see green trees and fluttering wings,
And my deathless bird from Shanghai sings."
Then he lit five firecrackers in a pan,
"Pop, pop," said the firecrackers, "cra-cra-crack."
He lit a joss stick long and black.
Then the proud gray joss in the corner stirred;
On his wrist appeared a gray small bird,
And this was the song of the gray small bird:
"Where is the princess, loved forever,
Who made Chang first of the kings of men?"

And the joss in the corner stirred again;
And the carved dog, curled in his arms, awoke,
Barked forth a smoke-cloud that whirled and broke.
It piled in a maze round the ironing-place,
And there on the snowy table wide
Stood a Chinese lady of high degree,
With a scornful, witching, tea-rose face. . . .
Yet she put away all form and pride,
And laid her glimmering veil aside
With a childlike smile for Chang and me.

The walls fell back, night was aflower,
The table gleamed in a moonlit bower,
While Chang, with a countenance carved of stone,
Ironed and ironed, all alone.
And thus she sang to the busy man Chang:
"Have you forgotten . . .
Deep in the ages, long, long ago,
I was your sweetheart, there on the sand—
Storm-worn beach of the Chinese land?
We sold our grain in the peacock town—
Built on the edge of the sea-sands brown—
Built on the edge of the sea-sands brown. . . .
When all the world was drinking blood
From the skulls of men and bulls
And all the world had swords and clubs of stone,
We drank our tea in China beneath the sacred spice-trees,
And heard the curled waves of the harbor moan.
And this gray bird, in Love's first spring,
With a bright-bronze breast and a bronze-brown wing,
Captured the world with his caroling.

Do you remember, ages after,
At last the world we were born to own?
You were the heir of the yellow throne—
The world was the field of the Chinese man
And we were the pride of the Sons of Han?
We copied deep books and we carved in jade,
And wove blue silks in the mulberry shade. . . ."

"I remember, I remember
That Spring came on forever,
That Spring came on forever,"
Said the Chinese nightingale.

My heart was filled with marvel and dream,
Though I saw the western street-lamps gleam,
Though dawn was bringing the western day,
Though Chang was a laundryman ironing away. . .
Mingled there with the streets and alleys,
The railroad-yard and the clock-tower bright,
Demon clouds crossed ancient valleys;
Across wide lotus-ponds of light
I marked a giant firefly's flight.

And the lady, rosy-red,
Flourished her fan, her shimmering fan,
Stretched her hand toward Chang, and said:
"Do you remember,
Ages after,
Our palace of heart-red stone?
Do you remember
The little doll-faced children
With their lanterns full of moon-fire,
That came from all the empire
Honoring the throne?—
The loveliest fête and carnival
Our world had ever known?
The sages sat about us
With their heads bowed in their beards,
With proper meditation on the sight.
Confucius was not born;
We lived in those great days
Confucius later said were lived aright. . . .
And this gray bird, on that day of spring,
With a bright-bronze breast and a bronze-brown wing,
Captured the world with his caroling.
Late at night his tune was spent.
Peasants,
Sages,
Children,
Homeward went,
And then the bronze bird sang for you and me.

We walked alone. Our hearts were high and free.
I had a silvery name, I had a silvery name,
I had a silvery name—do you remember
The name you cried beside the tumbling sea?"

Chang turned not to the lady slim—
He bent to his work, ironing away;
But she was arch, and knowing and glowing,
For the bird on his shoulder spoke for him.

"Darling . . . darling . . . darling . . . darling . . ."
Said the Chinese nightingale.

The great gray joss on the rustic shelf,
Rakish and shrewd, with his collar awry,
Sang impolitely, as though by himself,
Drowning with his bellowing the nightingale's cry:
"Back through a hundred, hundred years
Hear the waves as they climb the piers,
Hear the howl of the silver seas,
Hear the thunder.
Hear the gongs of holy China
How the waves and tunes combine
In a rhythmic clashing wonder,
Incantation old and fine:
'Dragons, dragons, Chinese dragons,
Red firecrackers, and green firecrackers
And dragons, dragons, Chinese dragons.'"

Then the lady, rosy-red,
Turned to her lover Chang and said:
"Dare you forget that turquoise dawn
When we stood in our mist-hung velvet lawn,
And worked a spell this great joss taught
Till a God of the Dragons was charmed and caught?
From the flag high over our palace home
He flew to our feet in rainbow-foam—
A king of beauty and tempest and thunder
Panting to tear our sorrows asunder.
A dragon of fair adventure and wonder.
We mounted the back of that royal slave
With thoughts of desire that were noble and grave.
We swam down the shore to the dragon-mountains,
We whirled to the peaks and the fiery fountains.
To our secret ivory house we were borne.
We looked down the wonderful wind-filled regions
Where the dragons darted in glimmering legions.
Right by my breast the nightingale sang;
The old rhymes rang in the sunlit mist
That we this hour regain—
Song-fire for the brain.

When my hands and my hair and my feet you kissed,
When you cried for your heart's new pain,
What was my name in the dragon-mist,
In the rings of the rainbowed rain?"

"Sorrow and love, glory and love,"
Sang the Chinese nightingale,
"Sorrow and love, glory and love,"
Said the Chinese nightingale.

And now the joss broke in with his song:
"Dying ember, bird of Chang,
Soul of Chang, do you remember?—
Ere you returned to the shining harbor
There were pirates by ten thousand
Descended on the town
In vessels mountain-high and red and brown,
Moon-ships that climbed the storms and cut the skies.
On their prows were painted terrible bright eyes.
But I was then a wizard and a scholar and a priest;
I stood upon the sand;
With lifted hand I looked upon them
And sunk their vessels with my wizard eyes,
And the stately lacquer-gate made safe again.
Deep, deep below the bay, the seaweed and the spray,
Embalmed in amber every pirate lies,
Embalmed in amber every pirate lies."

Then this did the noble lady say:
"Bird, do you dream of our home-coming day
When you flew like a courier on before
From the dragon-peak to our palace-door,
And we drove the steed in your singing path—
The ramping dragon of laughter and wrath:
And found our city all aglow,
And knighted this joss that decked it so?
There were golden fishes in the purple river
And silver fishes and rainbow fishes.
There were golden junks in the laughing river,
And silver junks and rainbow junks:
There were golden lilies by the bay and river,
And silver lilies and tiger-lilies,
And tinkling wind-bells in the gardens of the town
By the black-lacquer gate
Where walked in state
The kind king Chang
And his sweetheart mate. . . .
With his flag-born dragon
And his crown of pearl . . . and . . . jade,
And his nightingale reigning in the mulberry shade,
And sailors and soldiers on the sea-sands brown,
And priests who bowed them down to your song—

By the city called Han, the peacock town,
By the city called Han, the nightingale town,
The nightingale town."

Then sang the bird, so strangely gay,
Fluttering, fluttering, ghostly and gray,
A vague, unraveling, final tune,
Like a long unwinding silk cocoon;
Sang as though for the soul of him
Who ironed away in that bower dim:—
"I have forgotten
Your dragons great,
Merry and mad and friendly and bold.
Dim is your proud lost palace-gate.
I vaguely know
There were heroes of old,
Troubles more than the heart could hold,
There were wolves in the woods
Yet lambs in the fold,
Nests in the top of the almond tree. . . .
The evergreen tree . . . and the mulberry tree.
Life and hurry and joy forgotten,
Years and years I but half-remember . . .
Man is a torch, then ashes soon,
May and June, then dead December,
Dead December, then again June.
Who shall end my dream's confusion?
Life is a loom, weaving illusion. . . .
I remember, I remember
There were ghostly veils and laces. . . .
In the shadowy bowery places. . . .
With lovers' ardent faces
Bending to one another,
Speaking each his part.
They infinitely echo
In the red cave of my heart.
'Sweetheart, sweetheart, sweetheart,'
They said to one another.
They spoke, I think, of perils past.
They spoke, I think, of peace at last
One thing I remember:
Spring came on forever,
Spring came on forever,"
Said the Chinese nightingale.

Melville Cane

MELVILLE CANE was born April 15, 1879, at Plattsburg, New York. He was educated at Columbia Grammar School, received his A.B. at Columbia in 1900, LL.B. in 1903. At Columbia he was editor-in-chief of the Literary Monthly; he wrote the lyrics of the Varsity operetta, the music of which was supplied by John Erskine. While still in college he contributed light verse to *Puck*, *Judge*, and the more sedate *Century* and was a reporter on the *New York Evening Post*. Upon graduation he engaged in the practice of law, specializing in the law of copyright and the theater.

After an interval of twenty years, he resumed writing and turned to a wholly unforeseen expression. *January Garden* (1926) is the antithesis of the light verse of Cane's youth; it is sensitive and unequivocally serious. Most of the volume is in a free verse whose contours are shaped by introspection. A somber cast may have accounted for the sparse enthusiasm with which it was received, but it is more difficult to account for failure to recognize the delicacy of the pictorial effects.

Cane's *Behind Dark Spaces* (1930) is less impressionistic, but what it loses in suggestion it gains in sharpness. Mixing "pure" and "suspended" rhyme, his tone-color has grown richer; concentrating on instead of writing around the object, he has developed power without resorting to force. *Poems, New and Selected* (1938) and the aptly named *A Wider Arc* (1947) emphasize Cane's nimble virtuosity and grace.

SNOW TOWARD EVENING

Suddenly the sky turned gray,
The day,
Which had been bitter and chill,
Grew soft and still.
Quietly
From some invisible blossoming tree
Millions of petals cool and white
Drifted and blew,
Lifted and flew,
Fell with the falling night.

TREE IN DECEMBER

Frost has sealed
The still December field.
Over fern and furrow,
Over the quickening
Within each meadowy acre,
Frost, invisibly thorough,
Spreads its thickening
Stiffening lacquer.

Above the field, beneath a sky
Heavy with snow stirring to fly,
A tree stands alone,
Bare of fruit, leaves gone
Bleak as stone.

Once, on a similar glazed
Field, on a similar tree,
Dead as the eye could see,
The first man, dazed
In the first December, grimly gazed,
Never having seen
The miracle of recurring green,
The shining spectacle of rebirth
Rising out of frozen earth.

Snow fell and all about
Covered earth, and him with doubt.
More chill grew the air
And his mute despair.

Leaves that April had uncurled
Now were blown dust in the world,
Apples mellowing sweet and sound
Now were icy rot in the ground;
Roses August sunned in bloom
Now were less than lost perfume.

Had he seen the final hour
Of fruit and leaf and flower?
Had the last bird taken wing,
Nevermore to sing?
Never to fly in the light of another spring?

The man trembled with cold, with dread,
Thinking of all things dead
And his own earthen bed.

Trembling, he grew aware
Of a new quiet in the air;
Snow had ceased;
A ray came faintly through;
The wavering slit of blue
Vaguely increased.

Trembling, the first man gazed
At the glazed
And glittering tree,
Dead as the eye could see.

Whence came the sight
To read the sign aright?
The hint,—
The glad intimation, flashing:
"Wintry rains
Are blood in the veins;
Under snows and binding sleets
Locked roots live, a heart still beats"?

From what impalpable breath
Issued the faith,
The inner cry: "This is not death"?

DAWN HAS YET TO RIPPLE IN

What is this that I have heard?
Scurrying rat or stirring bird?
Scratching in the wall of sleep?
Twitching on the eaves of sleep?
I can hear it working close
Through a space along the house,
Through a space obscure and thin.
Night is swiftly running out,
Dawn has yet to ripple in,
Dawn has yet to clear the doubt,
Rat within or bird without.

HYMN TO NIGHT

Now it grows dark.
Red goes
Out of the rose;
Out of the lawn
Green's withdrawn;
Each buttercup now yields
Its gold from blurring fields;
Larkspur and sky surrender
Blue wonder.

We were dark within, we relied
For our strength on the nourishing sun;
Now it is under and gone.
Now, as the light grows duller,
We, who had flourished on color,
Stand, in the ever-deepening shade,
Bereft, dismayed.

We were dark within, it was death
We saw, we had never seen
Within the dark, we had never known
The spark, the vital breath.
If only we had known
That black is neither loss nor lack
But holds the essential seed
Of mortal hope and need!

Now sheltering dusk,
Shepherd of color and light for dawns unending,
Tends the holy task.

Praise be to black, the benign,
No longer malign,
Prolonger of days!
Praise the preserver of shine,
The keeper of blaze!

Praise Night,
Forever praise
Savior Night,
Who surely stays
The arm of time,
Who guards the flame,
Who hoards the light.

Praised be the Night.

Wallace Stevens

WALLACE STEVENS was born in Reading, Pennsylvania, October 2, 1879. A student at Harvard University and New York Law School, he was admitted to the Bar in 1904 and engaged in the general practice of law in New York City. In 1916 he became associated with the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, of which he became vice-president in 1934. He died suddenly, after an operation, August 2, 1955.

A poet of peculiar reticence, he kept himself from book publication for a long and rigorous time. Although many of his poems appeared as early as 1913, he was so self-critical that he refused to publish a volume until 1923 when the first edition of *Harmonium* appeared. The most casual reading of this volume discloses that Stevens is a stylist of unusual delicacy. Even the least sympathetic reader must be struck by the poet's hypersensitive and ingenious imagination. It is a curiously ambiguous world which Stevens paints: a world of merging half-lights, of finicking shadows, of disembodied emotions. Even this last word is an exaggeration, for emotion itself seems absent from the clear and often fiercely colored segments of the poet's designs.

Considered as a painter, Stevens is one of the most original impressionists of the times. He is fond of little blocks of color, verbal mosaics in which syllables are used as pigments. Little related to any human struggle, the content of *Harmonium* progresses toward a sort of "absolute" poetry which, depending on tone rather than on passion, aims to flower in an air of pure estheticism. His very titles—which deliberately add to the reader's confusion by having little or no connection with most of the poems—betray this quality: "Hymn from a Watermelon Pavilion," "The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage," "Frogs Eat Butterflies, Snakes Eat Frogs, Hogs Eat Snakes, Men Eat Hogs." Such poems have much for the eye, something for the ear, but little for that central hunger which is at the core of all the senses.

> Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan in caftan
> Of tan with henna hackles, halt!

Thus Stevens begins his "Bantam in Pine-Woods" and his pleasure in playing with sounds must be evident to the most perplexed reader. Like Williams, to whose *Collected Poems* Stevens furnished an introduction, Stevens is interested in things chiefly from their "unreal" aspect. He is, nevertheless, romantic. A romantic poet nowadays, says Stevens, "happens to be one who still dwells in an ivory tower, but who insists that life there would be intolerable except for the fact that one has, from the top, such an exceptional view of the public dump and the advertising signs. . . . He is the hermit who dwells alone with the sun and moon, and insists on taking a rotten newspaper." That is why Stevens can write of "The Worms at Heaven's Gate" with no disrespect to Shakespeare, make a study in esthetics of the contents of a cab, and entitle a poem on death ("the finale of seem") "The Emperor of Ice-Cream."

"Sunday Morning" and "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" are blends of disintegrated fantasy and fictitious reality. These poems are highly selective in choice of allusions,

inner harmonies, and special luxuriance of sound. They burst into strange bloom; they foliate in a region where the esthetic impulse encroaches on the reasoning intellect. "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" and "Domination of Black" have a delicacy of design which suggests the Chinese; "Peter Quince at the Clavier" and the exquisite "To the One of Fictive Music" (Stevens' most obviously musical moment) reveal a distinction which places "this auditor of insects, this lutanist of fleas" as one who has perfected a kind of poetry which is a remarkable, if strangely hermetic, art.

After a twelve years' silence Stevens published *Ideas of Order* (1935) in a limited edition. The format of the book and its private publication emphasizes the limitation as well as the elegance of the contents. Here, as in *Harmonium,* Stevens seldom writes poetry about the *Ding an sich,* but almost always about the overtones which the thing creates in his mind. Here the candid surface breaks into cryptic epigrams, and the scenes are recorded in a deft but elusive phrase. Often enough a poem refuses to yield its meaning, but "Academic Discourse at Havana" and "The Idea of Order at Key West" surrender themselves in an almost pure music.

The Man with the Blue Guitar (1937), with a bow to Picasso, places its emphasis on man as artist and on the complicated relations between art and life. It is a far cry from the delight in luxuriance for its own sake which Stevens once called "the essential gaudiness of poetry." There is little mischievous playing with the sound of words, as in the much-quoted line (from "The Emperor of Ice-Cream") which had the "roller of big cigars" whip

> In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.

There is, instead, an increasing concern with the problem of a society in chaos and the difficult "idea of order." Stevens has sacrified some of the barbaric piling up of effects; his work is no longer a pageant of colors, sounds, and smells. The riotousness has been replaced by a grave awareness of the plight of man. Without losing the wit and delicacy of what Allen Tate has characterized as "floating images," Stevens has gained compassion. A new preoccupation with man's bewilderment and despair strengthens Stevens' later work.

Parts of A World (1942) and *Transport to Summer* (1947) enlarge Stevens' position as a poet. The esthete has become an essayist, although he remains poet-philosopher of "the ultimate elegance." A section in "Esthetique Du Mal" begins:

> The greatest poverty is not to live
> In a physical world, to feel that one's desire
> Is too difficult to tell from despair. Perhaps,
> After death, the non-physical people, in paradise,
> Itself non-physical, may, by chance, observe
> The green corn gleaming and experience
> The minor of what we feel.

As always there is opulence, a sensory delight, in everything which Stevens touches. The opening of the early "Sunday Morning" has the flat but brilliant colors of a Matisse, especially one of that master's odalisque series. The later poetry is no less lush even when it is less spectacular. In "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes.

It is apparent that Stevens concerns himself more and more with "the beauty of innuendoes" than with "the beauty of inflections"; his lines, sliding from one dissolving metaphor to another, are built on ambiguities that fall into indefinite and shifting designs. Much of his later writing is devoted to poems about poetry and the poetic process. *Three Academic Pieces* (1948) is almost wholly concerned with the subject of metaphor, to the multiple meanings seen by the imagination, and the profuse ingenuities which permit the artist to escape the limitations of ordinary existence. In an essay, *From Poe to Valéry* (1948) T. S. Eliot wrote: "There is, first, the doctrine, elicited from Poe by Baudelaire, which I have already quoted: 'A poem should have nothing in view but itself'; second the notion that the composition of a poem should be as conscious and deliberate as possible, that the poet should observe himself in the act of composition—and this, in a mind as sceptical as Valéry's, leads to the conclusion, so paradoxically inconsistent with the other, that the act of composition is more interesting than the poem which results from it." Much of this is true of Stevens. But Stevens would maintain that the poet's role is to lead men out of their sordid world into the world of the imagination, "the supreme fiction," that escape is not evasion but entrance into a wider and richer sphere than the "violent order" which is our disorder. If Stevens is preoccupied with man's insecurity in a disrupted world and a yearning "to move in the direction of fact as we want it to be," he still mingles willful luxuriance and mocking obscurity with an extravagance which is controlled by taste and pointed with wit.

Critics differed widely concerning Stevens' importance as philosopher, designer, and creator. Some commentators maintained that Stevens was obsessed with nuances, superficial shades of color, infinitesimal gradations. Others declared that Stevens had added new dimensions to American poetry. "Stevens' poetry," wrote Morton Dauwen Zabel, "is distinguished by a mastery of two qualities in which he remains largely unrivalled among his contemporaries—the richness of its imagery and the sustained authority of his rhetoric. . . . No recent poet has surpassed the effects of verbal luxuriance in his works; they describe an inexhaustible festival of the senses." "More than for almost any other contemporary American poet," argued Theodore Spencer, "words have for Stevens a magic; they are means for incantation." Comparing Stevens to Spenser, Milton, and Shakespeare, Delmore Schwartz concluded "Confronted by the need of conclusion or summary, one is impressed by how much more there is always to say about Stevens. No matter with what aspect one begins, one has a sense of inexhaustible richness of significance and connection."

In spite of the growing chorus of praise there were many who continued to object that Stevens' poetry was without drama and, though characters were occasionally introduced, without human beings. Yet Stevens had the last word with the conviction that a work of art is primarily a work of art, a moment arrested out of chaos, and that "Poetry is the subject of the poem."

ANECDOTE OF THE JAR

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

PETER QUINCE AT THE CLAVIER

I

Just as my fingers on these keys
Make music, so the self-same sounds
On my spirit make a music, too.

Music is feeling, then, not sound;
And thus it is that what I feel,
Here in this room, desiring you,

Thinking of your blue-shadowed silk,
Is music. It is like the strain
Waked in the elders by Susanna:

Of a green evening, clear and warm,
She bathed in her still garden, while
The red-eyed elders, watching, felt

The basses of their beings throb
In witching chords, and their thin blood
Pulse pizzicati of Hosanna.

II

In the green water, clear and warm,
Susanna lay,
She searched
The touch of springs,
And found
Concealed imaginings.
She sighed,
For so much melody.

Upon the bank, she stood
In the cool
Of spent emotions.
She felt, among the leaves,
The dew
Of old devotions.

She walked upon the grass,
Still quavering.
The winds were like her maids
On timid feet,
Fetching her woven scarves,
Yet wavering.

A breath upon her hand
Muted the night.
She turned—
A cymbal crashed,
And roaring horns.

III

Soon, with a noise like tambourines,
Came her attendant Byzantines.

They wondered why Susanna cried
Against the elders by her side;

And as they whispered, the refrain
Was like a willow swept by rain.

Anon, their lamps' uplifted flame
Revealed Susanna and her shame.

And then, the simpering Byzantines
Fled, with a noise like tambourines.

IV

auty is momentary in the mind—
e fitful tracing of a portal;
t in the flesh it is immortal.

e body dies; the body's beauty lives.
evenings die, in their green going,
wave, interminably flowing.
gardens die, their meek breath scenting
The cowl of Winter, done repenting.
So maidens die, to the auroral
Celebration of a maiden's choral.

Susanna's music touched the bawdy strings
Of those white elders; but, escaping,
Left only Death's ironic scraping.
Now, in its immortality, it plays
On the clear viol of her memory,
And makes a constant sacrament of praise

TO THE ONE OF FICTIVE MUSIC

Sister and mother and diviner love,
And of the sisterhood of the living dead
Most near, most clear, and of the clearest bloom,
And of the fragrant mothers the most dear
And queen, and of diviner love the day
And flame and summer and sweet fire, no thread
Of cloudy silver sprinkles in your gown
Its venom of renown, and on your head
No crown is simpler than the simple hair.

Now, of the music summoned by the birth
That separates us from the wind and sea,
Yet leaves us in them, until earth becomes,
By being so much of the things we are,
Gross effigy and simulacrum, none
Gives motion to perfection more serene
Than yours, out of our imperfections wrought,
Most rare, or ever of more kindred air
In the laborious weaving that you wear.

For so retentive of themselves are men
That music is intensest which proclaims
The near, the clear, and vaunts the clearest bloom,
And of all vigils musing the obscure,
That apprehends the most which sees and names,
As in your name, an image that is sure,
Among the arrant spices of the sun,
O bough and bush and scented vine, in whom
We give ourselves our likest issuance.

Yet not too like, yet not so like to be
Too near, too clear, saving a little to endow
Our feigning with the strange unlike, whence springs
The difference that heavenly pity brings.
For this, musician, in your girdle fixed
Bear other perfumes. On your pale head wear
A band entwining, set with fatal stones.
Unreal, give back to us what once you gave:
The imagination that we spurned and crave.

SUNDAY MORNING

I

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
As a calm darkens among water-lights.
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
Seem things in some procession of the dead,
Winding across wide water, without sound.
The day is like wide water, without sound,
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
Over the seas, to silent Palestine,
Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

II

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or e
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of hea
Divinity must live within herself:
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
All pleasures and all pains, remembering
The bough of summer and the winter branch.
These are the measures destined for her soul.

III

Jove in the clouds had his inhuman birth.
No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave
Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind.
He moved among us, as a muttering king,
Magnificent, would move among his hinds,
Until our blood, commingling, virginal,
With heaven, brought such requital to desire
The very hinds discerned it, in a star.
Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
The blood of paradise? And shall the earth
Seem all of paradise that we shall know?
The sky will be much friendlier then than now,
A part of labor and a part of pain,
And next in glory to enduring love,
Not this dividing and indifferent blue.

IV

She says, "I am content when wakened birds,
Before they fly, test the reality
Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;
But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields
Return no more, where, then, is paradise?"
There is not any haunt of prophecy,
Nor any old chimera of the grave,
Neither the golden underground, nor isle
Melodious, where spirits gat them home,
Nor visionary south, nor cloudy palm
Remote on heaven's hill, that has endured
As April's green endures; or will endure
Like her remembrance of awakened birds,
Or her desire for June and evening, tipped
By the consummation of the swallow's wings.

V

She says, "But in contentment I still feel
The need of some imperishable bliss."
Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfilment to our dreams
And our desires. Although she strews the leaves
Of sure obliteration on our paths,
The path sick sorrow took, the many paths
Where triumph rang its brassy phrase, or love
Whispered a little out of tenderness,
She makes the willow shiver in the sun
For maidens who were wont to sit and gaze
Upon the grass, relinquished to their feet.
She causes boys to pile new plums and pear
On disregarded plate. The maidens taste
And stray impassioned in the littering leaves

VI

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores
That never touch with inarticulate pang?
Why set the pear upon those river-banks
Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?
Alas, that they should wear our colors there,
The silken weavings of our afternoons,
And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!
Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
Within whose burning bosom we devise
Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.

VII

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
Not as a god, but as a god might be,
Naked among them, like a savage source.
Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
The windy lake wherein their lord delights,
The trees, like serafim, and echoing hills,
That choir among themselves long afterward.
They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
Of men that perish and of summer morn.
And whence they came and whither they shall
The dew upon their feet shall manifest.

VIII

She hears, upon that water without sound,
A voice that cries, "The tomb in Palestine
Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay."
We live in an old chaos of the sun,
Or old dependency of day and night,
Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
Of that wide water, inescapable.
Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
And, in the isolation of the sky,
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
Downward to darkness, on extended wings.

DOMINATION OF BLACK

At night, by the fire,
The colors of the bushes
And of the fallen leaves,
Repeating themselves,
Turned in the room,
Like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind.
Yes: but the color of the heavy hemlocks
Came striding.
And I remembered the cry of the peacocks.

The colors of their tails
Were like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind,
In the twilight wind.

They swept over the room,
Just as they flew from the boughs of the hemlocks
Down to the ground.
I heard them cry—the peacocks.
Was it a cry against the twilight
Or against the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind,
Turning as the flames
Turned in the fire,
Turning as the tails of the peacocks
Turned in the loud fire,
Loud as the hemlocks
Full of the cry of the peacocks?
Or was it a cry against the hemlocks?

Out of the window,
I saw how the planets gathered
Like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind.
I saw how the night came,
Came striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks.
I felt afraid.
And I remembered the cry of the peacocks.

SEA SURFACE FULL OF CLOUDS

I

In that November off Tehuantepec,
The slopping of the sea grew still one night
And in the morning summer hued the deck

And made one think of rosy chocolate
And gilt umbrellas. Paradisal green
Gave suavity to the perplexed machine

Of ocean, which like limpid water lay.
Who, then, in that ambrosial latitude
Out of the light evolved the moving blooms,

Who, then, evolved the sea-blooms from the clouds
Diffusing balm in that Pacific calm?
C'était mon enfant, mon bijou, mon âme.

The sea-clouds whitened far below the calm
And moved, as blooms move, in the swimming green
And in its watery radiance, while the hue

Of heaven in an antique reflection rolled
Round those flotillas. And sometimes the sea
Poured brilliant iris on the glistening blue.

II

In that November off Tehuantepec
The slopping of the sea grew still one night.
At breakfast jelly yellow streaked the deck

And made one think of chop-house chocolate
And sham umbrellas. And a sham-like green
Capped summer-seeming on the tense machine

Of ocean, which in sinister flatness lay.
Who, then, beheld the rising of the clouds
That strode submerged in that malevolent sheen,

Who saw the mortal massives of the blooms
Of water moving on the water-floor?
C'était mon frère du ciel, ma vie, mon or.

The gongs rang loudly as the windy blooms
Hoo-hooed it in the darkened ocean-blooms.
The gongs grew still. And then blue heaven spread

Its crystalline pendentives on the sea
And the macabre of the water-glooms.
In an enormous undulation fled.

III

In that November off Tehuantepec,
The slopping of the sea grew still one night,
And a pale silver patterned on the deck

Made one think of porcelain chocolate
And pied umbrellas. An uncertain green,
Piano-polished, held the tranced machine

Of ocean, as a prelude holds and holds.
Who, seeing silver petals of white blooms
Unfolding in the water, feeling sure

Of the milk within the saltiest spurge, heard, then,
The sea unfolding in the sunken clouds?
Oh! C'était mon extase et mon amour.

So deeply sunken were they that the shrouds,
The shrouding shadows, made the petals black
Until the rolling heaven made them blue,

A blue beyond the rainy hyacinth,
And smiting the crevasses of the leaves
Deluged the ocean with a sapphire hue.

IV

In that November off Tehuantepec
The night-long slopping of the sea grew still.
A mallow morning dozed upon the deck

And made one think of musky chocolate
And frail umbrellas. A too-fluent green
Suggested malice in the dry machine

Of ocean, pondering dank stratagem.
Who then beheld the figures of the clouds,
Like blooms secluded in the thick marine?

Like blooms? Like damasks that were shaken off
From the loosed girdles in the spangling must.
C'était ma foi, la nonchalance divine.

The nakedness would rise and suddenly turn
Salt masks of beard and mouths of bellowing,
Would— But more suddenly the heaven rolled

Its bluest sea-clouds in the thinking green
And the nakedness became the broadest blooms,
Mile-mallows that a mallow sun cajoled.

V

In that November off Tehuantepec
Night stilled the slopping of the sea. The day
Came, bowing and voluble, upon the deck,

Good clown. . . . One thought of Chinese chocolate
And large umbrellas. And a motley green
Followed the drift of the obese machine

Of ocean, perfected in indolence.
What pistache one, ingenious and droll,
Beheld the sovereign clouds as jugglery

And the sea as turquoise-turbaned Sambo, neat
At tossing saucers—cloudy-conjuring sea?
C'était mon esprit batard, l'ignominie.

The sovereign clouds came clustering. The conch
Of loyal conjuration trumped. The wind
Of green blooms turning crisped the motley hue

To clearing opalescence. Then the sea
And heaven rolled as one and from the two
Came fresh transfigurings of freshest blue.

ANNUAL GAIETY

In the morning in the blue snow
The catholic sun, its majesty,
Pinks and pinks the ice-hard melanchole.

Wherefore those prayers to the moon?
Or is it that alligators lie
Along the edges of your eye
Basking in desert Florida?

Père Guzz, in heaven, thumb your lyre
And chant the January fire
And joy of snow and snow.

HOMUNCULUS ET LA BELLE ETOILE

In the sea, Biscayne, there prinks
The young emerald, evening star,
Good light for drunkards, poets, widows,
And ladies soon to be married.

By this light the salty fishes
Arch in the sea like tree-branches,
Going in many directions
Up and down.

This light conducts
The thoughts of drunkards, the feelings
Of widows and trembling ladies,
The movements of fishes.

How pleasant an existence it is
That this emerald charms philosophers,
Until they become thoughtlessly willing
To bathe their hearts in later moonlight,

Knowing that they can bring back thought
In the night that is still to be silent,
Reflecting this thing and that,
Before they sleep!

It is better that, as scholars,
They should think hard in the dark cuffs
Of voluminous cloaks,
And shave their heads and bodies.

It might well be that their mistress
Is no gaunt fugitive phantom.
She might, after all, be a wanton,
Abundantly beautiful, eager,

Fecund,
From whose being by starlight, on sea-coast,
The innermost good of their seeking
Might come in the simplest of speech.

It is a good light, then, for those
That know the ultimate Plato,
Tranquilizing with this jewel
The torments of confusion.

TWO FIGURES IN DENSE VIOLET LIGHT

I had as lief be embraced by the porter at the hotel
As to get no more from the moonlight
Than your moist hand.

Be the voice of night and Florida in my ear.
Use dusky words and dusky images.
Darken your speech.

Speak, even, as if I did not hear you speaking,
But spoke for you perfectly in my thoughts,
Conceiving words,

As the night conceives the sea-sounds in silence,
And out of their droning sibilants makes
A serenade.

Say, puerile, that the buzzards crouch on the ridge-pole
And sleep with one eye watching the stars fall
Below Key West.

Say that the palms are clear in a total blue,
Are clear and are obscure; that it is night;
That the moon shines.

GALLANT CHATEAU

Is it bad to have come here
And to have found the bed empty?

One might have found tragic hair,
Bitter eyes, hands hostile and cold.

There might have been a light on a book
Lighting a pitiless verse or two.

There might have been the immense solitude
Of the wind upon the curtains.

Pitiless verse? A few words tuned
And tuned and tuned and tuned.

It is good. The bed is empty,
The curtains are stiff and prim and still.

THE IDEA OF ORDER AT KEY WEST

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
The water never formed to mind or voice,
Like a body wholly body, fluttering
Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
That was not ours although we understood,
Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

The sea was not a mask. No more was she.
The song and water were not medleyed sound,
Even if what she sang was what she heard,
Since what she sang she uttered word by word.
It may be that in all her phrases stirred
The grinding water and the gasping wind;
But it was she and not the sea we heard.

For she was the maker of the song she sang.
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
It was the spirit that we sought and knew
That we should ask this often as she sang.

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
That rose, or even colored by many waves;
If it was only the outer voice of sky
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
However clear, it would have been deep air,
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
Repeated in a summer without end
And sound alone. But it was more than that,
More even than her voice, and ours, among
The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
Of sky and sea.

It was her voice that made
The sky acutest at its vanishing.
She measured to the hour its solitude.
She was the single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was maker. Then we,
As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,
Why, when the singing ended and we turned
Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
As the night descended, tilting in the air,
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

BOUQUET OF BELLE SCAVOIR

It is she alone that matters.
She made it. It is easy to say
The figures of speech, as why she chose
This dark, particular rose.

Everything in it is herself.
Yet the freshness of the leaves, the burn
Of the colors, are tinsel changes,
Out of the changes of both light and dew.

How often had he walked
Beneath summer and the sky
To receive her shadow into his mind . . .
Miserable that it was not she.

The sky is too blue, the earth too wide.
The thought of her takes her away
The form of her in something else
Is not enough.

The reflection of her here, and then there,
Is another shadow, another evasion,

Another denial. If she is everywhere,
She is nowhere, to him.

But this she has made. If it is
Another image, it is one she has made.
It is she that he wants, to look at directly,
Someone before him to see and to know.

ASIDES ON THE OBOE

The prologues are over. It is question, now,
Of final belief. So, say that final belief
Must be in a fiction. It is time to choose.

That obsolete fiction of the wide river in
An empty land; the gods that Boucher killed;
And the metal heroes that time granulates—
The philosophers' man alone still walks in dew,
Still by the sea-side mutters milky lines
Concerning an immaculate imagery.
If you say on the hautboy man is not enough
Can never stand as god, is ever wrong
In the end, however naked, tall, there is still
The impossible possible philosophers' man,
The man who has had the time to think enough,
The central man, the human globe, responsive
As a mirror with a voice, the man of glass,
Who in a million diamonds sums us up.

2

He is the transparence of the place in which
He is, and in his poems we find peace.
He sets this peddler's pie and cries in summer,
The glass man, cold and numbered, dewily cries,
"Thou art not August unless I make thee so."
Clandestine steps upon imagined stairs
Climb through the night, because his cuckoos call.

One year, death and war prevented the jasmine scent
And the jasmine islands were bloody martyrdoms.
How was it then with the central man? Did we
Find peace? We found the sum of men. We found,
If we found the central evil, the central good.
We buried the fallen without jasmine crowns.
There was nothing he did not suffer, no; nor we.

It was not as if the jasmine ever returned.
But we and the diamond globe at last were one.
We had always been partly one. It was as we came
To see him, that we were wholly one, as we heard
Him chanting for those buried in their blood,
In the forests that had been jasmine, that we knew
The glass man, without external reference.

THE GLASS OF WATER

That the glass would melt in heat,
That the water would freeze in cold,
Shows that this object is merely a state,
One of many, between two poles. So,
In the metaphysical, there are these poles.

Here in the centre stands the glass. Light
Is the lion that comes down to drink. There
And in that state, the glass is a pool.
Ruddy are his eyes and ruddy are his claws
When light comes down to wet his frothy jaws

And in the water winding weeds move round.
And there and in another state—the refractions,
The *metaphysica,* the plastic parts of poems
Crash in the mind— But, fat Jocundus, worrying
About what stands here in the centre, not in the glass,

But in the centre of our lives, this time, this day,
It is a state, this spring among the politicians
Playing cards. In a village of the indigenes,
One would have still to discover. Among the dogs and dung,
One would continue to contend with one's ideas.

THE SENSE OF THE SLEIGHT-OF-HAND MAN

One's grand flights, one's Sunday baths,
One's tootings at the weddings of the soul
Occur as they occur. So bluish clouds
Occurred above the empty house and the leaves
Of the rhododendrons rattled their gold,
As if someone lived there. Such floods of white
Came bursting from the clouds. So the wind
Threw its contorted strength around the sky.

Could you have said the bluejay suddenly
Would swoop to earth? It is a wheel, the rays
Around the sun. The wheel survives the myths.
The fire eye in the clouds survives the gods.

To think of a dove with an eye of grenadine
And pines that are cornets, so it occurs,
And a little island full of geese and stars:
It may be that the ignorant man, alone,
Has any chance to mate his life with life
That is the sensual, pearly spouse, the life
That is fluent in even the wintriest bronze.

THE MOTIVE FOR METAPHOR

You like it under the trees in autumn,
Because everything is half dead.
The wind moves like a cripple among the leaves
And repeats words without meaning.

In the same way, you were happy in spring,
With the half colors of quarter-things,
The slightly brighter sky, the melting clouds,
The single bird, the obscure moon—

The obscure moon lighting an obscure world
Of things that would never be quite expressed,
Where you yourself were never quite yourself
And did not want nor have to be,

Desiring the exhilarations of changes:
The motive for metaphor, shrinking from
The weight of primary noon,
The A B C of being,

The ruddy temper, the hammer
Of red and blue, the hard sound—
Steel against intimation—the sharp flash,
The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X.

William Carlos Williams

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS was born September 17, 1883, in Rutherford, New Jersey, where he has lived and practiced medicine ever since. His father, William George Williams, was born in Birmingham, England; his father's mother's name was, curiously enough, Emily Dickinson. His mother, Raquel Ellen Rose Hoheb, was born in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. Her mother, a Basque named Meline Hurrard, was born in Martinique; her father, Solomon Hoheb, of Dutch-Spanish-Jewish descent, was born in St. Thomas. This liberal mixture of bloods made Williams a complete melting-pot in himself; there are those who claim that the mingled strains fused logically into some of the most definitely American writing of the period.

Williams was educated at Horace Mann High School, New York, at Château de Lancy, near Geneva, Switzerland, and at the University of Pennsylvania, from which he graduated in medicine in 1906. There followed two years of interneship in New York and a year of graduate study in pediatrics in Leipzig. In his twenty-third year he published the traditionally imitative first volume, *Poems* (1909), which was followed by *The Tempers* (1913), published in London and bearing the influence of Pound and his fellow-imagists. *Al Que Quiere* (1917) strikes a more de-

cisive experimental note; from the mocking directions for a funeral which Williams has entitled "Tract" to the extended suite called "January Morning" Williams achieves a purposeful distortion which intensifies his objects in sharp detail. *Kora in Hell* (1921) and *Sour Grapes* (1922) pay increasing attention to the "pure" value of physical things. *Spring and All* (1923) was followed by *The Descent of Winter* in which Williams alternated between exact description and an attempt to record the wavering outlines of the unconscious. At one moment Williams declared he was "sick of rime," but, almost immediately after, he concluded: "And we thought to escape rime / by imitation of the senseless / unarrangement of wild things—the stupidest rime of all." Those who have been quick to accuse Williams of disorganization have not examined the strong color and delicate movement of such poems as "Metric Figure," "Dawn," "Queen-Ann's-Lace," "Daisy," and the remarkable "Poem" beginning "By the road to the contagious hospital."

When the first *Collected Poems* appeared in 1934 Wallace Stevens wrote in the Preface: "The man has spent his life in rejecting the accepted sense of things. His passion for the anti-poetic is a blood passion and not a passion for the ink-pot. Something of the unreal is necessary to fecundate the real; something of the sentimental is necessary to fecundate the anti-poetic. . . . One might run through these pages and point out how often the essential poetry is the result of the conjunction of the unreal and the real, the sentimental and the anti-poetic, the constant interaction of two opposites." A few years later, in "A Note on Poetry," Williams replied to those who had attacked his poems for being bare in outline and violent in idiom. "The American writer," Williams began, "uses a language . . . which has been modified by time and the accidents of place to acquire a character differing greatly from that of present-day English. For the appreciation of American poetry it is necessary that the reader accept this language difference from the beginning."

The Complete Collected Poems: 1906-1938 reveals with what increasing strength Williams has developed in the idiom of the United States. Although his lines rarely descend to slang, they are full of the conversational speech of the country; they express the brusque nervous tension, the vigor and rhetoric of American life. Even when they are purposely unadorned and non-melodic they intensify some common object with pointed detail and confident, if clipped, emotion. "Emotion," says Williams, "clusters about common things, the pathetic often stimulates the imagination to new patterns—but the job of the poet is to use language effectively, his own language, the only language which is to him authentic. In my own work it has always sufficed that the object of my attention be presented without further comment." Actually Williams' gamut is much greater than he implies. With characteristic growth he freed himself from Pound and the pretty escapism of the Imagists; some of the richest and most individualized free verse of the period can be found in "Flowers by the Sea," "The Poor," "The Yachts," and "These." Again and again Williams proves that everything in the world is the poet's material, and that the most tawdry objects have their use and beauty "if the imagination can lighten them."

The scope and quality of his work justify Williams' theory. His poems have grown simpler and more austere; his compositions are stricter in form; the colors are flat but fresh. This is evident even in the thirty-page pamphlet, *The Broken Span* (1941), which ranges from the early objective poetry of sheer sensation to a deep concern with the ordinary aspects of everyday life.

Williams' attempts to intensify the fact and give fresh perspectives to the word (and to the world) are given new emphasis in *Paterson: Book One* (1946) and *Paterson: Book Two* (1948). As in Eliot's *The Waste Land,* Williams paints a picture of life in disintegration and brings it into focus by his juxtaposition of the exquisite and the crass. He continues to insist on the object not only as a visual thing but as a symbol. The early imagist-objectivist joins with the pioneering observer: "No ideas but in things." Sensitive without being sensuous, the thoughtful commentator and the lyric improviser present everything with sharp and usually unadorned immediacy. *The Clouds, Aigeltinger, Russia, and Other Verse* (1948) was published in the year in which Williams received an award from the Academy of Arts and Letters for the vivid, native quality of his work.

Several prose works, notably the essays *In the American Grain* (1925), and the novels *A Voyage to Pagany* (1928), *White Mule* (1937), and *In the Money* (1940), mingle history and reappraisal, reportorial accuracy and creative imagination.

METRIC FIGURE

There is a bird in the poplars—
It is the sun!
The leaves are little yellow fish
Swimming in the river;
The bird skims above them—
Day is on his wings.
Phoenix!
It is he that is making
The great gleam among the poplars.
It is his singing
Outshines the noise
Of leaves clashing in the wind.

LOVE SONG

Sweep the house clean,
hang fresh curtains
in the windows
put on a new dress
and come with me!

The elm is scattering
its little loaves
of sweet smells
from a white sky!

Who shall hear of us
in the time to come?
Let him say there was
a burst of fragrance
from black branches.

DAWN

Ecstatic bird songs pound
the hollow vastness of the sky
with metallic clinkings—
beating color up into it
at a far edge,—beating it, beating it
with rising, triumphant ardor,—
stirring it into warmth,
quickening in it a spreading change,—
bursting wildly against it as
dividing the horizon, a heavy sun
lifts himself—is lifted—
bit by bit above the edge
of things,—runs free at last
out into the open—! lumbering
glorified in full release upward—
songs cease.

POEM

By the road to the contagious hospital,
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast—cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields,
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen,

patches of standing water,
the scattering of tall trees.

All along the road the reddish,
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of brushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines—

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish,
dazed spring approaches—

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind—

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wild-carrot leaf.

One by one objects are defined—
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf,

But now the stark dignity of
entrance— Still, the profound change
has come upon them; rooted, they
grip down and begin to awaken.

JANUARY

Again I reply to the triple winds
running chromatic fifths of derision
outside my window:
Play louder.
You will not succeed. I am
bound more to my sentences
the more you batter at me
to follow you.
And the wind,
as before, fingers perfectly
its derisive music.

QUEEN-ANN'S-LACE

Her body is not so white as
anemone petals nor so smooth—nor
so remote a thing. It is a field
of the wild carrot taking
the field by force; the grass
does not raise above it.
Here is no question of whiteness,
white as can be, with a purple mole
at the center of each flower.
Each flower is a hand's span
of her whiteness. Wherever
his hand has lain there is
a tiny purple blemish. Each part

is a blossom under his touch
to which the fibers of her being
stem one by one, each to its end,
until the whole field is a
white desire, empty, a single stem,
a cluster, flower by flower,
a pious wish to whiteness gone over—
or nothing.

DAISY

The dayseye hugging the earth
in August, ha! Spring is
gone down in purple,
weeds stand high in the corn,
the rainbeaten furrow
is clotted with sorrel
and crabgrass, the
branch is black under
the heavy mass of the leaves—
The sun is upon a
slender green stem
ribbed lengthwise.
He lies on his back—
it is a woman also—
he regards his former
majesty and
round the yellow center,
split and creviced and done into
minute flowerheads, he sends out
his twenty rays—a little
and the wind is among them
to grow cool there!

One turns the thing over
in his hand and looks
at it from the rear: brownedged,
green and pointed scales
armor his yellow.
But turn and turn,
the crisp petals remain
brief, translucent, greenfastened,
barely touching at the edges:
blades of limpid seashell.

ON GAY WALLPAPER

The green-blue ground
is ruled with silver lines
to say the sun is shining

And on this mural sea
of grass or dreams lie flowers
or baskets of desires

Heaven knows what they are
between cerulean shapes
laid regularly round

Mat roses and tridentate
leaves of gold
threes, threes and threes

Three roses and three stems
the basket floating
standing in the horns of blue

Repeated to the ceiling
to the windows
where the day

Blows in
the scalloped curtains to
the sound of rain.

TRACT

I will teach you my townspeople
how to perform a funeral—
for you have it over a troop
of artists—
unless one should scour the world—
you have the ground sense necessary.

See! the hearse leads.
I begin with a design for a hearse.
For Christ's sake not black—
nor white either—and not polished!
Let it be weathered—like a farm wagon—
with gilt wheels (this could be
applied fresh at small expense)
or no wheels at all:
a rough dray to drag over the ground.

Knock the glass out!
My God—glass, my townspeople!
For what purpose? Is it for the dead
to look out or for us to see
how well he is housed or to see
the flowers or the lack of them—
or what?
To keep the rain and snow from him?
He will have a heavier rain soon:
pebbles and dirt and what not.
Let there be no glass—
and no upholstery! phew!
and no little brass rollers
and small easy wheels on the bottom—
my townspeople what are you thinking of!

A rough plain hearse then
with gilt wheels and no top at all.
On this the coffin lies
by its own weight.

No wreaths please—
especially no hot-house flowers.
Some common memento is better,
something he prized and is known by:
his old clothes—a few books perhaps—
God knows what! You realize
how we are about these things,
my townspeople—
something will be found—anything—
even flowers if he had come to that.
So much for the hearse.

For heaven's sake though see to the driver!
Take off the silk hat! In fact
that's no place at all for him
up there unceremoniously
dragging our friend out to his own dignity!
Bring him down—bring him down!
Low and inconspicuous! I'd not have him ride
on the wagon at all—damn him—

the undertaker's understrapper!
Let him hold the reins
and walk at the side
and inconspicuously too!

Then briefly as to yourselves:
Walk behind—as they do in France,
seventh class, or if you ride
Hell take curtains! Go with some show
of inconvenience; sit openly—
to the weather as to grief.
Or do you think you can shut grief in?
What—from us? We who have perhaps
nothing to lose? Share with us
share with us—it will be money
in your pockets.
Go now
I think you are ready.

SMELL

Oh strong ridged and deeply hollowed
nose of mine! what will you not be smelling?
What tactless asses we are, you and I, boney nose,
always indiscriminate, always unashamed,
and now it is the souring flowers of the bedraggled
poplars: a festering pulp on the wet earth
beneath them. With what deep thirst
we quicken our desires
to that rank odor of a passing springtime!
Can you not be decent? Can you not reserve your ardors
for something less unlovely? What girl will care
for us, do you think, if we continue in these ways?
Must you taste everything? Must you know everything?
Must you have a part in everything?

A GOODNIGHT

Go to sleep—though of course you will not—
to tideless waves thundering slantwise against
strong embankments, rattle and swish of spray
dashed thirty feet high, caught by the lake wind,
scattered and strewn broadcast in over the steady
car rails! Sleep, sleep! Gulls' cries in a wind-gust
broken by the wind; calculating wings set above
the field of waves breaking.
Go to sleep to the lunge between foam-crests,
refuse churned in the recoil. Food! Food!
Offal! Offal! that holds them in the air, wave-white
for the one purpose, feather upon feather, the wild

chill in their eyes, the hoarseness in their voices—
sleep, sleep . . .

Gentlefooted crowds are treading out your lullaby.
Their arms nudge, they brush shoulders,
hitch this way, then that, mass and surge at the crossings—
lullaby, lullaby! The wild-fowl police whistles,
the enraged roar of the traffic, machine shrieks:
it is all to put you to sleep,
to soften your limbs in relaxed postures,
and that your head slip sidewise, and your hair loosen
and fall over your eyes and over your mouth,
brushing your lips wistfully that you may dream,
sleep and dream—

A black fungus springs out about lonely church doors—
sleep, sleep. The Night, coming down upon
the wet boulevard, would start you awake with his
message, to have in at your window. Pay no
heed to him. He storms at your sill with
cooings, with gesticulations, curses!
You will not let him in. He would keep you from sleeping.
He would have you sit under your desk lamp
brooding, pondering; he would have you
slide out the drawer, take up the ornamented dagger
and handle it. It is late, it is nineteen-nineteen—
go to sleep, his cries are a lullaby;
his jabbering is a sleep-well-my-baby; he is
a crackbrained messenger.

The maid waking you in the morning
when you are up and dressing,
the rustle of your clothes as you raise them—
it is the same tune.
At table the cold, greenish, split grapefruit, its juice
on the tongue, the clink of the spoon in
your coffee, the toast odors say it over and over.

The open street-door lets in the breath of
the morning wind from over the lake.
The bus coming to a halt grinds from its sullen brakes—
lullaby, lullaby. The crackle of a newspaper,
the movement of the troubled coat beside you—
sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep . . .
It is the sting of snow, the burning liquor of
the moonlight, the rush of rain in the gutters packed
with dead leaves: go to sleep, go to sleep.
And the night passes—and never passes—

THE RED WHEELBARROW

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

FLOWERS BY THE SEA

When over the flowery, sharp pasture's
edge, unseen, the salt ocean

lifts its form—chicory and daisies
tide, released, seem hardly flowers alone

but color and the movement—or the shape
perhaps—of restlessness, whereas

the sea is circled and sways
peacefully upon its plantlike stem

THE POOR

It's the anarchy of poverty
delights me, the old
yellow wooden house indented
among the new brick tenements

Or a cast iron balcony
with panels showing oak branches
in full leaf. It fits
the dress of the children

reflecting every stage and
custom of necessity—
Chimneys, roofs, fences of
wood and metal in an unfenced

age and enclosing next to
nothing at all: the old man
in a sweater and soft black
hat who sweeps the sidewalk—

his own ten feet of it—
in a wind that fitfully
turning his corner has
overwhelmed the entire city

THESE

are the desolate, dark weeks
when nature in its barrenness
equals the stupidity of man.

The year plunges into night
and the heart plunges
lower than night

to an empty, windswept place
without sun, stars or moon
but a peculiar light as of thought

that spins a dark fire—
whirling upon itself until,
in the cold, it kindles

to make a man aware of nothing
that he knows, not loneliness
itself— Not a ghost but

would be embraced—emptiness,
despair— (They
whine and whistle) among

the flashes and booms of war;
houses of whose rooms
the cold is greater than can be thought,

the people gone that we loved,
the beds lying empty, the couches
damp, the chairs unused—

Hide it away somewhere
out of the mind, let it get roots
and grow, unrelated to jealous

ears and eyes—for itself.
In this mine they come to dig—all.
'S this the counterfoil to sweetest

music? The source of poetry that
seeing the clock stopped, says,
The clock has stopped

hat ticked yesterday so well?
and hears the sound of lakewater
splashing—that is now stone.

ILLEGITIMATE THINGS

Water still flows—
The thrush still sings

though in
the skirts of the sky

at the bottom of
the distance

huddle . . .
. . . echoing cannon!

Whose silence revives
valley after

valley to peace
as poems still conserve

the language
of old ecstasies.

THE YACHTS

contend in a sea which the land partly encloses
shielding them from the too heavy blows
of an ungoverned ocean which when it chooses

tortures the biggest hulls, the best man knows
to pit against its beating, and sinks them pitilessly.
Mothlike in mists, scintillant in the minute

brilliance of cloudless days, with broad bellying sails
they glide to the wind tossing green water
from their sharp prows while over them the crew crawls

ant-like, solicitously grooming them, releasing,
making fast as they turn, lean far over and having
caught the wind again, side by side, head for the mark.

In a well guarded arena of open water surrounded by
lesser and greater craft which, sycophant, lumbering
and flittering follow them, they appear youthful, rare

as the light of a happy eye, live with the grace
of all that in the mind is fleckless, free and
naturally to be desired. Now the sea which holds them

is moody, lapping their glossy sides, as if feeling
for some slightest flaw but fails completely.
Today no race. Then the wind comes again. The yachts

move, jockeying for a start, the signal is set and they
are off. Now the waves strike at them but they are too
well made, they slip through, though they take in canvas.

Arms with hands grasping seek to clutch at the prows.
Bodies thrown recklessly in the way are cut aside.
It is a sea of faces about them in agony, in despair

until the horror of the race dawns staggering the mind,
the whole sea become an entanglement of watery bodies
lost to the world bearing what they cannot hold. Broken,

beaten, desolate, reaching from the dead to be taken up
they cry out, failing, failing! their cries rising
in waves still as the skillful yachts pass over.

THE YELLOW SEASON

The black, long-tailed
one then, unexpectedly, another
glide easily on a curtain
of yellow leaves, upward—

The season wakens! loveliness
chirping and barking stands
among the branches, its
narrow-clawed toes and furry
hands moving in the leaves—

Round white eyes dotted with
jet live still, alert—in
all gentleness! unabated
beyond the crackle
of death's stinking certainty.

Sara Teasdale

SARA TEASDALE was born August 8, 1884, in St. Louis, Missouri, and educated there. After leaving school she traveled in Europe and the Near East. She was fascinated and frightened by the poet Vachel Lindsay who courted her with overwhelming exuberance. In 1914 she married Ernst Filsinger and, two years later, moved with him to New York. But she was essentially the solitary spirit pictured in her poem on page 287, and the marriage was not successful. After her divorce, she lived in seclusion, and ill health emphasized her unhappiness. She was found drowned in the bath of her New York apartment, January 28, 1933.

Her first book was a slight volume, *Sonnets to Duse* (1907), which gave little promise of the lyricism to follow. *Helen of Troy and Other Poems* (1911) contains hints of that delicate craftsmanship which this poet brought to such finesse. The six opening monologues are written in a blank verse as musical as many of her lyrics. At times her quatrains suffer from too conscious a cleverness; the dexterity with which Miss Teasdale turns a phrase or twists her last line is frequently too obtrusive to be unreservedly enjoyable. Moreover, they seem written in a mood of predetermined and too picturesque romance, the mood of languishing roses, silken balconies, moonlight on guitars, and abstract kisses for unreal Colins.

Rivers to the Sea (1915) emphasizes a new skill and a greater restraint. The volume contains at least a dozen unforgettable snatches, lyrics in which the words

imagery, almost bare of ornament, these poems have the touch of folk-song. Theirs is an artlessness that is something more than art.

Love Songs (1917) is a collection of Miss Teasdale's previous melodies for the *viola d'amore* together with several in which the turns are no longer obviously unexpected. Maturity is evident in the poet's rejection of many of her facile stanzas and her choice of firmer material.

Flame and Shadow (1920; revised edition, published in England, in 1924) is the ripest of her books. Here the emotion is fuller and deeper; an almost mystic radiance plays from these verses. Technically, also, this volume marks Miss Teasdale's greatest advance. The words are chosen with a keener sense of their actual as well as their musical values; the rhythms are more subtle and varied; the line moves with a greater naturalness. Beneath the symbolism of poems like "Water-Lilies," "The Long Hill," and "Let It Be Forgotten," one is conscious of a finer artistry, a more flexible speech that is all the lovelier for its slight (and logical) irregularities.

After *Flame and Shadow* Miss Teasdale's theme became somewhat autumnal. Though never funereal, the songs are preoccupied with the coming of age, the gathering of night, the mutability of things. *Dark of the Moon* (1926) is more thoughtful than any other previous verse. It is, as the title indicates, even more somber. If the movement is slower it is a no less delicate music that moves under the surface rhythms. "Wisdom," "The Solitary," "The Flight" may not be the most popular poems that Miss Teasdale has written, but they must be numbered among her best. Hers is a disillusion without cynicism; her proud acceptance of life's darker aspects adds new dignity to the old lyricism.

Strange Victory (1933) is Sara Teasdale's posthumous memorial to a world she never quite despised yet never wholly trusted. The poems are sad yet not sentimental. Though death overshadows the book there is never the querulous cry of frustration nor the melodrama of dying. As in the later lyrics the lines are direct, the emotion unwhipped; the beauty is in the restraint, the careful selection, the compression into the essential spirit, into a last serenity. It is an irony that as her admirers grew less voluble her work increased in value.

Besides her own books, Miss Teasdale had compiled an anthology, *The Answering Voice* (1917), comprising one hundred love lyrics by women, and a collection for children, *Rainbow Gold* (1922).

NIGHT SONG AT AMALFI

I asked the heaven of stars
  What I should give my love—
It answered me with silence,
  Silence above.

I asked the darkened sea
  Down where the fishermen go—
It answered me with silence,
  Silence below.

Oh, I could give him weeping,
  Or I could give him song—
But how can I give silence
  My whole life long?

SPRING NIGHT

The park is filled with night and fog,
  The veils are drawn about the world,
The drowsy lights along the paths
  Are dim and pearled.

Gold and gleaming the empty streets,
  Gold and gleaming the misty lake,
The mirrored lights like sunken swords,
  Glimmer and shake.

Oh, is it not enough to be
Here with this beauty over me?
My throat should ache with praise, and I
Should kneel in joy beneath the sky.
O beauty, are you not enough?
Why am I crying after love
With youth, a singing voice, and eyes
To take earth's wonder with surprise?
Why have I put off my pride,
Why am I unsatisfied,—
I, for whom the pensive night
Binds her cloudy hair with light,—
I, for whom all beauty burns
Like incense in a million urns?
O beauty, are you not enough?
Why am I crying after love?

I SHALL NOT CARE

When I am dead and over me bright April
Shakes out her rain-drenched hair,
Though you should lean above me broken-hearted,
I shall not care.

I shall have peace, as leafy trees are peaceful
When rain bends down the bough;
And I shall be more silent and cold-hearted
Than you are now.

THE LONG HILL

I must have passed the crest a while ago
And now I am going down—
Strange to have crossed the crest and not to know,
But the brambles were always catching the hem of my gown.

All the morning I thought how proud I should be
To stand there straight as a queen,
Wrapped in the wind and the sun with the world under me—
But the air was dull, there was little I could have seen.

It was nearly level along the beaten track
And the brambles caught in my gown—
But it's no use now to think of turning back,
The rest of the way will be only going down.

WATER-LILIES

If you have forgotten water-lilies floating
On a dark lake among mountains in the afternoon shade,
If you have forgotten their wet, sleepy fragrance,
Then you can return and not be afraid.

But if you remember, then turn away forever
To the plains and the prairies where pools are far apart,
There you will not come at dusk on closing water-lilies,
And the shadow of mountains will not fall on your heart.

LET IT BE FORGOTTEN

Let it be forgotten, as a flower is forgotten,
  Forgotten as a fire that once was singing gold,
Let it be forgotten for ever and ever,
  Time is a kind friend, he will make us old.

If anyone asks, say it was forgotten
  Long and long ago,
As a flower, as a fire, as a hushed footfall
  In a long-forgotten snow.

WISDOM

It was a night of early spring,
  The winter-sleep was scarcely broken;
Around us shadows and the wind
  Listened for what was never spoken.

Though half a score of years are gone,
  Spring comes as sharply now as then—
But if we had it all to do
  It would be done the same again.

It was a spring that never came;
  But we have lived enough to know
That what we never have, remains;
  It is the things we have that go.

THE SOLITARY

My heart has grown rich with the passing of years,
  I have less need now than when I was young
To share myself with every comer,
  Or shape my thoughts into words with my tongue.

It is one to me that they come or go
  If I have myself and the drive of my will,
And strength to climb on a summer night
  And watch the stars swarm over the hill.

Let them think I love them more than I do,
  Let them think I care, though I go alone,
If it lifts their pride, what is it to me,
  Who am self-complete as a flower or a stone?

THE CRYSTAL GAZER

I shall gather myself into myself again,
  I shall take my scattered selves and make them one,
I shall fuse them into a polished crystal ball
  Where I can see the moon and the flashing sun.

I shall sit like a sibyl, hour after hour intent,
Watching the future come and the present go—
And the little shifting pictures of people rushing
In tiny self-importance to and fro.

APPRAISAL

Never think she loves him wholly,
Never believe her love is blind,
All his faults are locked securely
In a closet of her mind;
All his indecisions folded
Like old flags that time has faded,
Limp and streaked with rain,
And his cautiousness like garments
Frayed and thin, with many a stain—
Let them be, oh, let them be,
There is treasure to outweigh them,
His proud will that sharply stirred,
Climbs as surely as the tide,
Senses strained too taut to sleep,
Gentleness to beast and bird,
Humor flickering hushed and wide
As the moon on moving water,
And a tenderness too deep
To be gathered in a word.

ON THE SOUTH DOWNS

Over the downs there were birds flying,
Far off glittered the sea,
And toward the north the weald of Sussex
Lay like a kingdom under me.

I was happier than the larks
That nest on the downs and sing to the sky—
Over the downs the birds flying
Were not so happy as I.

It was not you, though you were near,
Though you were good to hear and see;
It was not earth, it was not heaven,
It was myself that sang in me.

AUGUST NIGHT

On a midsummer night, on a night that was eerie with stars,
In a wood too deep for a single star to look through,
You led down a path whose turnings you knew in the darkness,
But the scent of the dew-dripping cedars was all that I knew.

I drank of the darkness, I was fed with the honey of fragrance,
I was glad of my life, the drawing of breath was sweet;
I heard your voice, you said, "Look down, see the glow-worm!"
It was there before me, a small star white at my feet.

We watched while it brightened as though it were breathed on and burning,
This tiny creature moving over earth's floor—
"'*L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle,*'"
You said, and no more.

EFFIGY OF A NUN

(*Sixteenth Century*)

Infinite gentleness, infinite irony
Are in this face with fast-sealed eyes,
And round this mouth that learned in loneliness
How useless their wisdom is to the wise.

In her nun's habit carved, patiently, lovingly,
By one who knew the ways of womankind,
This woman's face still keeps, in its cold wistful calm,
All of the subtle pride of her mind.

These long patrician hands, clasping the crucifix,
Show she had weighed the world, her will was set;
These pale curved lips of hers, holding their hidden smile
Once having made their choice, knew no regret.

She was of those who hoard their own thoughts carefully,
Feeling them far too dear to give away,
Content to look at life with the high, insolent
Air of an audience watching a play.

If she was curious, if she was passionate
She must have told herself that love was great,
But that the lacking it might be as great a thing
If she held fast to it, challenging fate.

She who so loved herself and her own warring thoughts,
Watching their humorous, tragic rebound,
In her thick habit's fold, sleeping, sleeping,
Is she amused at dreams she has found?

Infinite tenderness, infinite irony
Are hidden forever in her closed eyes,
Who must have learned too well in her long loneliness
How empty wisdom is, even to the wise.

THE FLIGHT

We are two eagles
Flying together,
Under the heavens,
Over the mountains,
Stretched on the wind.
Sunlight heartens us,
Blind snow baffles us,
Clouds wheel after us,
Raveled and thinned.

We are like eagles;
But when Death harries us,
Human and humbled
When one of us goes,
Let the other follow—
Let the flight be ended,
Let the fire blacken,
Let the book close.

Elizabeth Madox Roberts

ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS was born in 1885, at Perryville, near Springfield, Kentucky, and attended the University of Chicago, where she received her Ph.B. in 1921. Except when obliged to travel for health or warmth, she lived in the Salt River country of Kentucky, twenty-eight miles from Harrodsburg, old Fort Harrod, the first settlement in the state. Suffering from anemia she died March 13, 1941.

As an undergraduate she won the local Fiske Prize with a group of poems which later appeared in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. An amplification of these verses appeared as *Under the Tree* (1922) and critics were quick to recognize the unusually fresh accents in this first volume. *Under the Tree* spoke directly to the young, for it was written, not so much for children, but as a sensitive child might write. The observation is precise, the reflections are candidly clear, the humor delicate, never simpering or archly beribboned. Here is a simplicity which is straightforward without being shrill or mincing. The verse is graceful where grace commands the gesture, but Miss Roberts' unforced *naïveté* allows her to be gauche whenever awkwardness is natural.

After this volume Miss Roberts returned to her native state, and spent much of her time studying the archaic English speech still spoken in the remote parts of Kentucky. "Orpheus," although written later than her first book, is a highly interesting use of her early idiom, localizing as well as vitalizing the old myth. "Stranger" is more definitely indigenous; it has something of the flavor of the *Lonesome Tunes* collected by Howard Brockway and Loraine Wyman. Concerning this poem, Miss Roberts writes, "In these verses I have used material from the old ballads—or suggestions from them, material which may be found abundantly in Kentucky, together with modern syncopation and a refrain designed to call up banjo notes." "A Ballet Song of Mary," which won the John Reed Memorial Prize in *Poetry* (1928), is an "artificial" piece—using the adjective in the best sense—founded on ancient archaic words and uses. Here, as in her prose, Miss Roberts writes with an ear always tuned to local phrase and feeling.

In 1925 Miss Roberts turned to the prose for which she has been so widely celebrated. *The Time of Man* (1926), one of the most moving novels of the period, is an epic of the Appalachians in which every chapter has the effect of a poem. *My Heart and My Flesh* (1927), a darker and more difficult exploration, discloses less local and more universal regions of the spirit. *Jingling in the Wind* (1928) is a less successful experiment, a light farce which tries but fails to be a satire on industrial civilization. All three are characterized by a lyrical charm and an inscrutability which set Miss Roberts apart from the competent writers of easy fiction.

The Great Meadow (1930) is an exploration of the material uncovered in her first novel. Placed in the Kentucky meadow-lands against the heroic backgrounds of early American history, it is a pioneering panorama. Native to the least grass-blade, it is much more than a narrative of the soil; it is a widening saga of the men and women who imposed themselves and their pattern on the unshaped wilderness. Thus *The Great Meadow* acts both as the preparation for and the rich completion of *The Time of Man*. A novel *He Sent Forth a Raven* (1935) combines her early

individual diction with the later restrained mysticism, a combination that is curiously lilting and intense.

THE SKY

I saw a shadow on the ground
And heard a bluejay going by;
A shadow went across the ground,
And I looked up and saw the sky.

It hung up on the poplar tree,
But while I looked it did not stay;
It gave a tiny sort of jerk
And moved a little bit away.

And farther on and farther on
It moved and never seemed to stop.
I think it must be tied with chains
And something pulls it from the top.

It never has come down again,
And every time I look to see,
The sky is always slipping back
And getting far away from me.

CHRISTMAS MORNING

f Bethlehem were here today,
)r this were very long ago,
There wouldn't be a winter time
Nor any cold or snow.

'd run out through the garden gate,
And down along the pasture walk;
And off beside the cattle barns
'd hear a kind of gentle talk.

'd move the heavy iron chain
And pull away the wooden pin;
'd push the door a little bit
And tiptoe very softly in.

The pigeons and the yellow hens
And all the cows would stand away;
Their eyes would open wide to see
A lady in the manger hay,
If this were very long ago
And Bethlehem were here today.

And Mother held my hand and smiled—
I mean the lady would—and she
Would take the woolly blankets off
Her little boy so I could see.

His shut-up eyes would be asleep,
And he would look just like our John,
And he would be all crumpled too,
And have a pinkish color on.

I'd watch his breath go in and out.
His little clothes would all be white.
I'd slip my finger in his hand
To feel how he could hold it tight.

And she would smile and say, "Take care,"
The mother, Mary, would, "Take care";
And I would kiss his little hand
And touch his hair.

While Mary put the blankets back
The gentle talk would soon begin.
And when I'd tiptoe softly out
I'd meet the wise men going in.

ORPHEUS

He could sing sweetly on a string.
He'd make the music curve around;
He'd make it tremble through the woods
And all the trees would leave the ground.

The tunes would walk on steps of air,
For in his hand a wire would sing;
The songs would fly like wild quick geese-
He could play sweetly on a string.

✦

If Orpheus would come today,
Our trees would lean far out to hear,
And they would stretch limb after limb;
Then the ellum trees would leave the groun
And the sycamores would follow him.

And the poplar tree and the locust tree
And the coffeeberry tree would come
And all the rows of osage thorns,
And then the little twisted plum.

He'd lead them off across the hill.
They'd flow like water toward his feet.
He'd walk through fields and turn in roads;
He'd bring them down our street.

And he'd go by the blacksmith shop,
And one would say, "Now who are these?—
I wonder who that fellow is,
And where he's going with the trees!"

"To the sawmill, likely," one would say,
"Oh, yes, the sawmill, I should think."
And then he'd cut the horse's hoof
And hammers would go *clink* and *clink*.

✦

He could play sweetly on a wire.
And he would lean down near his lyre
To hear its songs unfold and wind,
And it would reach up toward his ear
To hear the music in his mind.

And when the road turned by the kiln,
Then Orpheus would happen to see
The little plum and the sycamore
And the poplar tree and the chinaberry tree,

And all the rows of osage thorns—
When he happened once to look—
He'd see them coming after him . . .
Three birches, and he'd see the oak.

And he would lead them back again.
He'd bring each one to its own ground.
He'd bring each to its growing-place
And set them back with sound and sound.

He'd fit them in with whispered chords,
And tap them down with humming words

STRANGER

When Polly lived back in the old deep woods,
Sing, sing, sing and howdy, howdy-o!
Nobody ever went by her door,
Tum a-tum tum and danky, danky-o!

Valentine worked all day in the brush,
He grubbed out stumps and he chopped with his ax,
He chopped a clear road up out of the branch;
Their wheels made all the tracks.

And all they could see out doors were the trees,
And all the night they could hear the wolves go;
But one cold time when the dark came on
A man's voice said, "Hello, there, hello!"

He stood away by the black oak tree
When they opened the door in the halfway light;
He stood away by the buttonwood stump,
And Valentine said, "Won't you stay all night?"

He sat by the fire and warmed his bones.
He had something hidden down deep in a sack,
And Polly watched close while she baked her pones;
He felt of it once when she turned her back—
Polly had a fear of his sack.

Nobody lived this way or there,
And the night came down and the woods came dark,
A thin man sat by the fire that night,
And the cabin pane was one red spark.

He took the something out of his sack,
When the candle dimmed and the logs fell low,
It was something dark, as Polly could see,
Sing, sing, sing and howdy, howdy-o!

He held it up against his chest,
And the logs came bright with a fresh new glow,
And it was a fiddle that was on his breast,
Tum tum-a tum and danky, danky-o!

He played one tune and one tune more;
He played five tunes all in a long row.
The logs never heard any songs before.
Sing, sing, sing and howdy, howdy-o!

The tunes lay down like drowsy cats;
They tumbled over rocks where the waterfalls go;
They twinkled in the sun like little June gnats;
Tum a-tum tum and danky dee-o!

The stumps stood back in Valentine's mind;
The wolves went back so Polly couldn't see;
She forgot how they howled and forgot how they whined.
Tum tum a-tum and danky-dee!

The tunes flew by like wild quick geese,
Sing, sing, sing and howdy howdy-o!
And Polly said, "That's a right good piece."
Tum tum tum and danky danky-o!
Tum a-tum tum and danky dee-o!

A BALLET SONG OF MARY

Her smock was of the holland fine,
Skinkled with colors three;
Her shawl was of the velvet blue,
The Queen of Galilee.

Her hair was yellow like the wax,
Like the silken floss fine-spun;
The girdle for her golden cloak
Was all in gold bedone.

She sat her down in her own bower place
And dressed herself her hair.
Her gold kemb in her braid she laid,
And a sound fell on the door.

He came within her own bower room
"Hail, Mary, hail!" says he;
"A goodly grace is on your head,
For the Lord is now with thee."

She folded down her little white hands
When Gabriel spoke again.
She set her shawl, the corners right,
For ceremony then.

"And the God will overshadow thee
And bring a holy sweven.
Fear not, fear not," then Gabriel said,
"It's the God of the good high heaven.

"And what must be born it will heal the sick;
It will make a goodly lear;
It will fettle men for christentie
And to keep holy gear."

Then up then rose this little maid
When Gabriel's word was said,
And out of the bower she ran in haste,
And out of the hall she is sped.

She is running far to Zachary's house—
"Is this the way?" says she.

"A little maid in haste," they said,
"Has gone to the hills of Judee."

And what will be born it will ope their eyes;
It will hearten men in their stear;
It will fettle men for christentie
And to have holy gear.

It will scourge with a thong when those make gain
Where a humble man should be;
It will cast the witches from out of his saule
And drown them into the sea.

It will give men drink from the horn of the wind,
And give men meat from the song of a bird;
Their cloak they will get from the sheen of the grass,
And a roof from a singin' word.

And when they come to the Brig o' Dread,
And they cry, "I fall! I'm afear!"
It will close their eyes and give them sleep
To heal them outen their lonesome cheer,
When they come to the Brig o' Dread.

WOODCOCK OF THE IVORY BEAK

Bough of the plane tree, where is the clear-beaked bird
That was promised? When I walked here, now, I heard
A swift cry in my own voice lifted in laughter—absurd
Mock at a crow—crying under the glee-wrung word,
Saying, "Where?" Saying, "When?" Saying, "Will it be? Here?
The woodcock of the ivory bill? Will it be? Where?"

Old winds that blew deep chaos down through the valley,
Moan-haunted, sob-tossèd, shudder and shackle, rout and rally,
Where? Did you toss a feather and bend plume a cold May early
Morning, when the ivory bill shone, song lifted, pearly
Clear on the rose-stippled, blue-shadowed trunk of the plane tree?
Oh, woodcock of the ivory beak, I came here to see . . .

Elinor Wylie

ELINOR (HOYT) WYLIE was born September 7, 1885, in Somerville, New Jersey, but she was, as she often protested, of pure Pennsylvania stock. The family was a literary one and it was soon evident that Elinor, the first born, was a prodigy. The facts of her life, if not the inner conflicts and personal sufferings, have been recorded by Nancy Hoyt, her younger sister, in *Elinor Wylie: The Portrait of an Unknown Woman* (1935), and, though the biography might have been fuller and franker without diminishing the poet's stature, it is invaluable source material. On both sides Elinor Wylie traced her ancestry back through old American families. A grandfather was Governor of Pennsylvania; her father, at the age of thirty-six, was Assistant Attorney-General under McKinley, later Solicitor General during Theodore Roosevelt's administration.

Elinor Hoyt's youth was spent in Washington, D. C. At eighteen she attended a life-class at the Corcoran Museum of Art, composing poems in secret, and wavering between painting and writing as a possible career. Shortly after her "coming-

out party" there was a youthful romance and, disappointed because it was inconclusive, Elinor "rushed off and, without the knowledge of her parents, became engaged to a nice-looking and well-born young suitor with a bad temper," Philip Hichborn, son of an admiral. A son was born of the union, but the marriage was an unhappy one. Three years after, when scarcely twenty-four, she eloped with Horace Wylie, unable to obtain a divorce, disrupting the social circles in which she had conducted herself so primly. Elinor and Horace Wylie lived in England, where they were married some years later, until the World War forced them to return to America. It was in England that her first work was published, a tiny book of forty-three pages entitled *Incidental Numbers* (1912), privately printed and unsigned. It is a tentative collection and Elinor was so sensitive about its "incredible immaturity" that she pleaded with the few who knew of its existence never to refer to it until after her death. But she had no reason to be ashamed of it. ("I think the juvenilia superior to the rest," she wrote to the editor many years later.) Much of it is manifestly immature, since most of it was written in her early twenties and the rest was the product of her teens. Yet her characteristic touch—the firm thought matched by the firmly molded line—is already suggested, especially in such poems as "The Knight Fallen on Evil Days," anticipating the later beautifully knit sonnets, and "Pegasus Lost," a strangely ironic fantasy written at seventeen.

She returned to America in the summer of 1916, and lived in Boston and in Mount Desert, Maine. Her poems began to appear in the magazines; she moved to Washington, where she met various friends of her brother Henry, including William Rose Benét. In 1921 her first "real" volume, *Nets to Catch the Wind,* appeared. Three years later she was a famous person, the author of two volumes of poems and an extraordinary first novel (*Jennifer Lorn*), married to William Rose Benét, and part of the literary life of New York.

Nets to Catch the Wind impresses immediately because of its brilliance. The brilliance is one which, at first, seems to sparkle without burning. In several of the poems the author achieves a frigid ecstasy; emotion is not absent from her lines, but too frequently it seems a passion frozen at its source. It is the brilliance of moonlight coruscating on a plain of ice. But if Mrs. Wylie seldom allows her verses to grow agitated, she never permits them to remain dull. As a technician, she is always admirable; in "August" the sense of heat is conveyed by tropic luxuriance and contrast; in "The Eagle and the Mole" she lifts didacticism to a proud level. Her auditory effects are scarcely less remarkable; never has snow-silence been so remarkably projected as in "Velvet Shoes," perhaps the whitest poem ever written.

Black Armour (1923) exhibits Mrs. Wylie's keenness against a mellower background. The beauty evoked in this volume no longer has "the hard heart of a child." The intellect has grown more fiery, the mood has grown warmer, and the craftsmanship is more dazzling than ever. This devotee of severe elegance has perfected an accent which is clipped and patrician; she varies the perfect modulation with rhymes that are delightfully acrid and unique departures which never fail of success. Mrs. Wylie, it is evident from the very titles of her volumes, had read the metaphysicians; Donne, Webster, and Eliot found a voice in her lines. She felt

> "behind a carnal mesh,
> The clean bones crying in the flesh."

Possibly the most obvious and arresting feature of her work is the variety of her gifts. She reached from the nimble dexterity of a rondo like "Peregrine" to the introspective poignance of "Self Portrait," from the fanciful "Escape" to the grave mockery of "Let No Charitable Hope." But a greater unfoldment was to come.

Trivial Breath (1928) is the work of a poet in transition. At times the craftsman is uppermost; at times the creative genius. A preoccupation with her material obscures the half-uttered wisdom. Many of the verses, steeped in literature, pay homage to the letter; a smaller number, less absorbed in shaping an immaculate phrase, do reverence to the spirit. Mrs. Wylie recognized the danger of her own exquisiteness, of a style where elegance was too often a richly embroidered cloak draped upon a neat triviality. In "Minotaur" she admonished herself:

> Go study to disdain
> The frail, the overfine
> That tapers to a line
> Knotted about the brain.

:r distrust of the "overfine" deepened; she became more influenced by the fiery of Shelley; her prose grew less mannered and more searching; her poetry attained a new richness. While in England during the summer of 1928 she wrote, with almost breathless haste but with calm certainty, the verses which compose her posthumous volume. In the autumn she returned to America; suffering from high blood pressure and partial paralysis, she began to arrange her final work. The day before she died she decided on the order of the poems, affixed the motto from Donne, and got the manuscript ready for the printer. She died December 16, 1928.

Angels and Earthly Creatures (1929) is the sublimation of all her gifts. Here are the cunningly poised and polished syllables, here are the old concerns with freezing silvers, frail china, and pearly monotones, but here is a quality which lifts them high above themselves. Still indebted to the Jacobean metaphysicians, the poet transcends her influences and develops a highly personal mysticism. To say that her emotion is governed and disciplined is not to say that *Angels and Earthly Creatures* suffers from a lack of emotion. On the contrary, the sequence of nineteen sonnets has the spontaneity of a passionate improvisation, of something close to abandonment. The other poems share this intensity. "This Corruptible" is both visionary and philosophic; "O Virtuous Light" deals with that piercing clarity, the intuition which disturbs the senses, threatens reason and, "begotten of itself," unreconciled to ordinary experience, is "not a light by which to live." The other poems are scarcely less uplifted, finding their summit in "Hymn to Earth," which is possibly the deepest of her poems and one which is certain to endure. It was, as it happened, a clear premonition; it remains a noble valedictory. She could go no further. She had perfected her technique; without discarding her idiom, her spirit reached toward a final expression. She had attained the stature of a great poet.

A sumptuous *Collected Poems of Elinor Wylie* was published in 1932, containing, with the exception of the booklet issued in England, her four books of poems as well as a section of forty-eight poems hitherto uncollected. Some of the posthumous verse had never seen print; others published in magazines—notably "Golden Bough" and "The Pebble"—may be ranked among the poet's ripest utterances. "The Pebble"

is significant not only as a fine piece of craftsmanship but as a revealing bit of spiritual autobiography.

Though more mannered than her verse, her prose was scarcely less accomplished. *Jennifer Lorn* (1923), subtitled "A Sedate Extravaganza," *The Venetian Glass Nephew* (1925), and *The Orphan Angel* (1926) adroitly juggle a harlequin style, even when it is least appropriate to the matter. *Mr. Hodge and Mr. Hazard* is a somewhat more serious and ironic allegory. Differing widely from each other in plot, ranging from macabre artifice to an apocryphal legend of Shelley *redivivus* in America, the manipulation of these novels is always deft and the iridescent phrasing is the product of an unusually "jeweled" brain. An omnibus volume *Collected Prose of Elinor Wylie* (1933) includes the four novels besides ten uncollected short stories and essays introduced by William Rose Benét in the section "Fugitive Prose." Although one must admire the fine-spun filigree of *Jennifer Lorn* and the delicate diablerie of *The Venetian Glass Nephew,* even the height of her prose cannot match the peaks attained by such poems as "This Corruptible," "Hymn to Earth" and "O Virtuous Light."

For it was as a poet that Elinor Wylie was most at home in the world, and it is as a poet that she will be remembered. Whether she spins a web of words to catch an elusive whimsicality, or satirizes herself, or plunges from the fragmentary to the profound, every line bears her authentic stamp. The intellectual versatility is eventually reenforced by spiritual strength, insuring permanence to work which "preserves a shape utterly its own."

THE EAGLE AND THE MOLE

Avoid the reeking herd,
Shun the polluted flock,
Live like that stoic bird,
The eagle of the rock.

The huddled warmth of crowds
Begets and fosters hate;
He keeps, above the clouds,
His cliff inviolate.

When flocks are folded warm,
And herds to shelter run,
He sails above the storm,
He stares into the sun.

If in the eagle's track
Your sinews cannot leap,
Avoid the lathered pack,
Turn from the steaming sheep.

If you would keep your soul
From spotted sight or sound,
Live like the velvet mole;
Go burrow underground.

And there hold intercourse
With roots of trees and stones,
With rivers at their source,
And disembodied bones.

THE KNIGHT FALLEN ON EVIL DAYS

God send the Devil is a gentleman,
Else had I none amongst mine enemies!
O what uncouth and cruel times are these
In which the unlettered Boor and Artisan,
The snarling Priest and smirking Lawyer can
Spit filthy enmity at whom they please—
At one, returned from spilling overseas
The Princely blood of foes Olympian.

Apothecaries curse me, who of late
Was cursed by Kings for slaughtering French lords!
Friendless and loverless is my estate,
Yet God be praised that Hell at least affords
An adversary worthy of my hate,
With whom the Angels deigned to measure swords!

PEGASUS LOST

And there I found a gray and ancient ass,
With dull glazed stare, and stubborn wrinkled smile,
Sardonic, mocking my wide-eyed amaze.
A clumsy hulking form in that white place
At odds with the small stable, cleanly, Greek,
The marble manger and the golden oats.
With loathing hands I felt the ass's side,
Solidly real and hairy to the touch.
Then knew I that I dreamed not, but saw truth;
And knowing, wished I still might hope I dreamed.
The door stood wide, I went into the air.
The day was blue and filled with rushing wind,
A day to ride high in the heavens and taste
The glory of the gods who tread the stars.
Up in the mighty purity I saw
A flashing shape that gladly sprang aloft—
My little Pegasus, like a far white bird
Seeking sun-regions, never to return.
Silently then I turned my steps about,
Entered the stable, saddled the slow ass;
Then on its back I journeyed dustily
Between sun-wilted hedgerows into town.

MADMAN'S SONG

Better to see your cheek grown hollow,
Better to see your temple worn,
Than to forget to follow, follow,
After the sound of a silver horn.

Better to bind your brow with willow
And follow, follow until you die,
Than to sleep with your head on a golden pillow,
Nor lift it up when the hunt goes by.

Better to see your cheek grown sallow
And your hair grown gray, so soon, so soon,
Than to forget to hallo, hallo,
After the milk-white hounds of the moon.

SANCTUARY

This is the bricklayer; hear the thud
Of his heavy load dumped down on stone.
His lustrous bricks are brighter than blood,
His smoking mortar whiter than bone.

Set each sharp-edged, fire-bitten brick
Straight by the plumb-line's shivering length;
Make my marvelous wall so thick
Dead nor living may shake its strength.

Full as a crystal cup with drink
Is my cell with dreams, and quiet, and cool. . . .
Stop, old man! You must leave a chink;
How can I breathe? *You can't, you fool!*

VELVET SHOES

Let us walk in the white snow
  In a soundless space;
With footsteps quiet and slow,
  At a tranquil pace,
  Under veils of white lace.

I shall go shod in silk,
  And you in wool,
White as a white cow's milk,
  More beautiful
  Than the breast of a gull.

We shall walk through the still town
  In a windless peace;
We shall step upon white down,
  Upon silver fleece,
  Upon softer than these.

We shall walk in velvet shoes:
  Wherever we go
Silence will fall like dews
  On white silence below.
  We shall walk in the snow.

ESCAPE

When foxes eat the last gold grape,
And the last white antelope is killed,
I shall stop fighting and escape
Into a little house I'll build.

But first I'll shrink to fairy size,
With a whisper no one understands,
Making blind moons of all your eyes,
And muddy roads of all your hands.

And you may grope for me in vain
In hollows under the mangrove root,
Or where, in apple-scented rain,
The silver wasp-nests hang like fruit.

GOLDEN BOUGH

These lovely groves of fountain-trees that shake
  A burning spray against autumnal cool,
Descend again in molten drops to make
  The rutted path a river and a pool.

They rise in silence, fall in quietude,
  Lie still as looking-glass to every sense;
Only their lion-color in the wood
  Roars to miraculous heat and turbulence.

AUGUST

Why should this Negro insolently stride
Down the red noonday on such noiseless feet?
Piled in his barrow, tawnier than wheat,
Lie heaps of smoldering daisies, somber-eyed,
Their copper petals shriveled up with pride,
Hot with a superfluity of heat,
Like a great brazier borne along the street
By captive leopards, black and burning pied.

Are there no water-lilies, smooth as cream,
With long stems dripping crystal? Are there none
Like those white lilies, luminous and cool,
Plucked from some hemlock-darkened northern stream
By fair-haired swimmers, diving where the sun
Scarce warms the surface of the deepest pool?

PURITAN SONNET

Down to the Puritan marrow of my bones
There's something in this richness that I hate.
I love the look, austere, immaculate,
Of landscapes drawn in pearly monotones.
There's something in my very blood that owns
Bare hills, cold silver on a sky of slate,
A thread of water, churned to milky spate
Streaming through slanted pastures fenced with stones.

I love those skies, thin blue or snowy gray,
Those fields sparse-planted, rendering meager sheaves;
That spring, briefer than apple-blossom's breath,
Summer, so much too beautiful to stay,
Swift autumn, like a bonfire of leaves,
And sleepy winter, like the sleep of death.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

My body is weary to death of my mischievous brain;
I am weary forever and ever of being brave;
Therefore I crouch on my knees while the cool white rain
Curves the clover over my head like a wave.

The stem and the frosty seed of the grass are ripe;
I have devoured their strength; I have drunk them deep;
And the dandelion is gall in a thin green pipe,
But the clover is honey and sun and the smell of sleep.

LET NO CHARITABLE HOPE

Now let no charitable hope
Confuse my mind with images
Of eagle and of antelope;
I am in nature none of these.

I was, being human, born alone;
I am, being woman, hard beset;
I live by squeezing from a stone
The little nourishment I get.

In masks outrageous and austere
The years go by in single file;
But none has merited my fear,
And none has quite escaped my smile.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

I lack the braver mind
That dares to find
The lover friend, and kind.

I fear him to the bone;
I lie alone
By the beloved one,

And, breathless for suspense,
Erect defense
Against love's violence

Whose silences portend
A bloody end
For lover never friend.

But, in default of faith,
In futile breath,
I dream no ill of Death.

"DESOLATION IS A DELICATE THING"

Sorrow lay upon my breast more heavily than winter clay
Lying ponderable upon the unmoving bosom of the dead;
Yet it was dissolved like a thin snowfall; it was softly withered away;
Presently like a single drop of dew it had trembled and fled.

This sorrow, which seemed heavier than a shovelful of loam,
Was gone like water, like a web of delicate frost;
It was silent and vanishing like smoke; it was scattered like foam;
Though my mind should desire to preserve it, nevertheless it is lost.

This sorrow was not like sorrow; it was shining and brief;
Even as I waked and was aware of its going, it was past and gone;
It was not earth; it was no more than a light leaf,
Or a snowflake in spring, which perishes upon stone.

This sorrow was small and vulnerable and short-lived;
It was neither earth nor stone; it was silver snow
Fallen from heaven, perhaps; it has not survived
An hour of the sun; it is sad it should be so.

This sorrow, which I believed a gravestone over my heart,
Is gone like a cloud; it eluded me as I woke;
Its crystal dust is suddenly broken and blown apart;
It was not my heart; it was this poor sorrow alone which broke.

PETER AND JOHN

Twelve good friends
Walked under the leaves
Binding the ends
Of the barley sheaves.

Peter and John
Lay down to sleep
Pillowed upon
A haymaker's heap.

John and Peter
Lay down to dream.
The air was sweeter
Than honey and cream.

Peter was bred
In the salty cold.
His hair was red
And his eyes were gold.

John had a mouth
Like a wing bent down.
His brow was smooth
And his eyes were brown.

Peter to slumber
Sank like a stone,
Of all their number
The bravest one.

John more slowly
Composed himself,
Young and holy

John as he slept
Cried out in grief,
Turned and wept
On the golden leaf:

"Peter, Peter,
Stretch me your hand
Across the glitter
Of the harvest land!

"Peter, Peter,
Give me a sign!
This was a bitter
Dream of mine,—

"Bitter as aloes
It parched my tongue.
Upon the gallows
My life was hung.

"Sharp it seemed
As a bloody sword.
Peter, I dreamed
I was Christ the Lord!"

Peter turned
To holy Saint John:
His body burned
In the falling sun.

In the falling sun
He burned like flame:
"John, Saint John,

"My bones were hung
On an elder tree;
Bells were rung
Over Galilee.

"A silver penny
Sealed each of my eyes.
Many and many
A cock crew thrice."

When Peter's word
Was spoken and done,
"Were you Christ the Lord
In your dream?" said John.

"No," said the other,
"That I was not.
I was our brother
Iscariot."

FULL MOON

My bands of silk and miniver
Momently grew heavier;
The black gauze was beggarly thin;
The ermine muffled mouth and chin;
I could not suck the moonlight in.

Harlequin in lozenges
Of love and hate, I walked in these
Striped and ragged rigmaroles;
Along the pavement my footsoles
Trod warily on living coals.

Shouldering the thoughts I loathed,
In their corrupt disguises clothed,
Mortality I could not tear
From my ribs, to leave them bare
Ivory in silver air.

There I walked and there I raged;
The spiritual savage caged
Within my skeleton, raged afresh
To feel, behind a carnal mesh,
The clean bones crying in the flesh.

EPITAPH

For this she starred her eyes with salt
And scooped her temples thin,
Until her face shone pure of fault
From the forehead to the chin.

In coldest crucible of pain
Her shrinking flesh was fired
And smoothed into a finer grain
To make it more desired.

Pain left her lips more clear than glass;
It colored and cooled her hand.
She lay a field of scented grass
Yielded as pasture land.

For this her loveliness was curved
And carved as silver is:
For this she was brave: but she deserved
A better grave than this.

BIRTHDAY SONNET

Take home Thy prodigal child, O Lord of Hosts!
Protect the sacred from the secular danger;
Advise her, that Thou never needst avenge her;
Marry her mind neither to man's nor ghost's
Nor holier domination's, if the costs
Of such commingling should transport or change her;
Defend her from familiar and stranger,
And earth's and air's contagions and rusts.

Instruct her strictly to preserve Thy gift
And alter not its grain in atom sort;
Angels may wed her to their ultimate hurt
And men embrace a specter in a shift
So that no drop of the pure spirit fall
Into the dust: defend Thy prodigal.

O VIRTUOUS LIGHT

A private madness has prevailed
Over the pure and valiant mind;
The instrument of reason failed
And the star-gazing eyes struck blind.

Sudden excess of light has wrought
Confusion in the secret place
Where the slow miracles of thought
Take shape through patience into grace.

Mysterious as steel and flint
The birth of this destructive spark
Whose inward growth has power to print
Strange suns upon the natural dark.

O break the walls of sense in half
And make the spirit fugitive!
This light begotten of itself
Is not a light by which to live!

The fire of farthing tallow dips
Dispels the menace of the skies
So it illuminate the lips
And enter the discerning eyes.

O virtuous light, if thou be man's
Or matter of the meteor stone,
Prevail against this radiance
Which is engendered of its own!

THE PEBBLE

If any have a stone to shy,
Let him be David and not I;
The lovely shepherd, brave and vain,
Who has a maggot in the brain,
Which, since the brain is bold and pliant,
Takes the proportions of a giant.
Alas, my legendary fate!
Who sometimes rage, but never hate.
Long, long before the pebble flieth
I see a virtue in Goliath;
Yea, in the Philistine his face,
A touching majesty and grace;
Then like the lights of evening shine
The features of the Philistine
Until my spirit faints to see
The beauty of my enemy.
If any have a stone to fling
Let him be a shepherd-king,
Who is himself so beautiful
He may detest the gross and dull
With holy rage and heavenly pride
To make a pebble sanctified
And feather its course with wings of scorn.
But, from the day that I was born
Until like corn I bow to the sickle,
I am in hatred false and fickle.
I am most cruel to anyone
Who hates me with devotion;
I will not freeze, I will not burn;
I make his heart a poor return
For all the passion that he spends
In swearing we shall never be friends;
For all the pains his passion spent
In hatred I am impotent;
The sad perversity of my mind
Sees in him my kin and kind.
Alas, my shameful heritage,
False in hate and fickle in rage!
Alas, to lack the power to loathe!
I like them each; I love them both;
Philistine and shepherd-king
They strike the pebble from my sling;
My heart grows cold, my spirit grows faint;
Behold, a hero and a saint
Where appeared, a moment since,
A giant and a heathen prince;
And I am bound and given over
To be no better than a lover,
Alas, who strove as a holy rebel!
They have broke my sling and stole my pebble:
If any have a stone to throw
It is not I, ever or now.

SONNET FROM "ONE PERSON"

I hereby swear that to uphold your house
I would lay my bones in quick destroying lime
Or turn my flesh to timber for all time;
Cut down my womanhood; lop off the boughs

Of that perpetual ecstasy that grows
From the heart's core; condemn it as a crime
If it be broader than a beam, or climb
Above the stature that your roof allows.

I am not the hearthstone nor the cornerstone
Within this noble fabric you have builded;
Not by my beauty was its cornice gilded;
Not on my courage were its arches thrown:
My lord, adjudge my strength, and set me where
I bear a little more than I can bear.

THIS CORRUPTIBLE

The Body, long oppressed
And pierced, then prayed for rest
(Being but apprenticed to the other Powers);
And kneeling in that place
Implored the thrust of grace
Which makes the dust lie level with the flowers.

Then did that fellowship
Of three, the Body strip;
Beheld his wounds, and none among them mortal;
The Mind severe and cool;
The Heart still half a fool;
The fine-spun Soul, a beam of sun can startle.

These three, a thousand years
Had made adventurers
Amid all villainies the earth can offer,
Applied them to resolve
From the universal gulph
What pangs the poor material flesh may suffer.

"This is a pretty pass;
To hear the growing grass
Complain; the clay cry out to be translated;
Will not this grosser stuff
Receive reward enough
If stabled after laboring, and baited?"

Thus spoke the Mind in scorn.
The Heart, which had outworn
The Body, and was weary of its fashion,
Preferring to be dressed
In skin of bird or beast,
Replied more softly, in a feigned compassion.

"Anatomy most strange
Crying to chop and change;

Inferior copy of a higher image;
While I, the noble guest,
Sick of your second-best
Sigh for embroidered archangelic plumage:

"For shame, thou fustian cloak!"
And then the Spirit spoke;
Within the void it swung securely tethered
By strings composed of cloud;
It spoke both low and loud
Above a storm no lesser star had weathered.

"O lodging for the night!
O house of my delight!
O lovely hovel builded for my pleasure!
Dear tenement of clay
Endure another day
As coffin sweetly fitted to my measure.

"Take Heart and call to Mind
Although we are unkind;
Although we steal your shelter, strength, and clothing;
'Tis you who shall escape
In some enchanting shape
Or be dissolved to elemental nothing.

"You, the unlucky slave,
Are the lily on the grave;
The wave that runs above the bones a-whitening;
You are the new-mown grass;
And the wheaten bread of the Mass;
And the fabric of the rain, and the lightning.

"If one of us elect
To leave the poor suspect
Imperfect bosom of the earth our parent;
And from the world avert
The Spirit of the Heart
Upon a further and essential errand;

"His chain he cannot slough
Nor cast his substance off;
He bears himself upon his flying shoulder;
The Heart, infirm and dull;
The Mind, in any skull;
Are captive still, and wearier and colder.

" 'Tis you who are the ghost,
Disintegrated, lost;
The burden shed; the dead who need not bear it;
O grain of God in power,
Endure another hour!
It is but for an hour," said the Spirit.

HYMN TO EARTH

Farewell, incomparable element,
Whence man arose, where he shall not return;
And hail, imperfect urn
Of his last ashes, and his firstborn fruit;
Farewell, the long pursuit,
And all the adventures of his discontent;
The voyages which sent
His heart averse from home:
Metal of clay, permit him that he come
To thy slow-burning fire as to a hearth;
Accept him as a particle of earth.

Fire, being divided from the other three,
It lives removed, or secret at the core;
Most subtle of the four,
When air flies not, nor water flows,
It disembodied goes,
Being light, elixir of the first decree,
More volatile than he;
With strength and power to pass
Through space, where never his least atom was:
He has no part in it, save as his eyes
Have drawn its emanation from the skies.

A wingless creature heavier than air,
He is rejected of its quintessence;
Coming and going hence,
In the twin minutes of his birth and death,
He may inhale as breath,
As breath relinquish heaven's atmosphere,
Yet in it have no share,
Nor can survive therein
Where its outer edge is filtered pure and thin:
It doth but lend its crystal to his lungs
For his early crying, and his final songs.

The element of water has denied
Its child; it is no more his element;
It never will relent;
Its silver harvests are more sparsely given
Than the rewards of heaven,
And he shall drink cold comfort at its side:
The water is too wide:
The seamew and the gull
Feather a nest made soft and pitiful
Upon its foam; he has not any part
In the long swell of sorrow at its heart.

Hail and farewell, beloved element,
Whence he departed, and his parent once;
See where thy spirit runs
Which for so long hath had the moon to wife;
Shall this support his life
Until the arches of the waves be bent
And grow shallow and spent?
Wisely it cast him forth
With his dead weight of burdens nothing worth,
Leaving him, for the universal years,
A little seawater to make his tears.

Hail, element of earth, receive thy own,
And cherish, at thy charitable breast,
This man, this mongrel beast:
He plows the sand, and, at his hardest need,
He sows himself for seed;
He plows the furrow, and in this lies down
Before the corn is grown;
Between the apple bloom
And the ripe apple is sufficient room
In time, and matter, to consume his love
And make him parcel of a cypress grove.

Receive him as thy lover for an hour
Who will not weary, by a longer stay,
The kind embrace of clay;
Even within thine arms he is dispersed
To nothing, as at first;
The air flings downward from its four-quartered tower
Him whom the flames devour;
At the full tide, at the flood,
The sea is mingled with his salty blood:
The traveler dust, although the dust be vile,
Sleeps as thy lover for a little while.

Ezra Pound

ONE of the most controversial figures of the period and unquestionably the most belligerent expatriate of his generation, Ezra (Loomis) Pound was born at Hailey, Idaho, October 30, 1885. A precocious reader, he entered the University of Pennsylvania at the age of fifteen. At sixteen, unbeknown to the faculty, he began studying comparative literature; before he was seventeen (in 1902) he enrolled as special student "to avoid irrelevant subjects." He continued the process at Hamilton College (1903-5) and from 1905 to 1907 was "Instructor with professorial functions" at the University of Pennsylvania. His next move brought him to Crawfordsville,

Indiana—" 'the Athens of the West,' a town with literary traditions, Lew Wallace having died there." Pound was dismissed from Wabash College after four months—"all accusations," he says, "having been ultimately refuted save that of being 'the Latin Quarter type.' "

Though a born educator, actually burning to teach, Pound was compelled to seek less academic circles. In 1908 he landed in Gibraltar with eighty dollars and lived on the interest for some time. The same year found him for the first time in Italy, which was to become his future home. *A Lume Spento* (1908) was printed in Venice. A few months later he was established in London, where he lived until 1920. Convinced of the aridity of England, he crossed over to Paris, from which, after four years, he moved to Rapallo, Italy, where he lived until the Second World War.

Shortly after Pound's arrival in London he published *Personae* (1909), a work which, though small, contains some of his most arresting verse.

Although the young American was a total stranger to the English literary world, his book made a definite impression on critics of all shades and tastes. Edward Thomas, one of the most cautious appraisers, wrote, "The beauty of it is the beauty of passion, sincerity and intensity, not of beautiful words and images and suggestions. . . . The thought dominates the words and is greater than they are." Another critic (Scott James) placed the chief emphasis on Pound's metrical innovations, saying, "At first the whole thing may seem to be mere madness and rhetoric, a vain exhibition of force and passion without beauty. But as we read on, these curious meters seem to have a law and order of their own."

Exultations (1909) was printed in the autumn of the same year that saw the appearance of *Personae*. It was received with even greater cordiality; a new force and freedom were manifest in such poems as "Sestina: Altaforte," "Ballad of the Goodly Fere," and the stark "Ballad for Gloom." Both books were republished in a single volume, with other poems, as *Personae,* in 1926.

In these books there is evident Pound's erudition—a familiarity with medieval literature, Provençal singers, Troubadour ballads—an erudition which, later, was to degenerate into pedantry. Too often Pound seemed to become theory-logged, to sink himself in an intellectual Sargasso Sea, to be more the archeologist than the artist. *Canzoni* (1911) and *Ripostes* (1912) contain much that is sharp and living; they also contain the germs of desiccation and decay. Pound began to scatter his talents; to start movements which he quickly discarded for new ones; to spend himself in poetic propaganda for the Vorticists and others; to give more and more time to translation (*The Sonnets of Guido Cavalcanti* appeared in 1912) and arrangements from the Chinese (*Cathay,* paraphrased from the notes of Ernest Fenollosa, was issued in 1915); to lay the chief stress on technique, shades of color, verbal *nuances.* The result was a lassitude of the creative faculties, an impoverishment of emotion. In the later books, Pound seemed to suffer from a decadence which appraises the values in life chiefly as esthetic values.

Lustra appeared in 1916. In this collection, as in the preceding volumes, Pound struggled with his influences; accents of Swinburne, Browning, Lionel Johnson, and Yeats mingled with those of the Provençal poets. From his immediate predecessors Pound learned the value of "verse as speech" while, as Eliot has pointed out, from the more antiquarian studies Pound was learning the importance of "speech as

song." It was not until *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) and the *Cantos* that Pound integrated his own inflection, form, and philosophy.

The *Cantos,* as yet unfinished, are often considered Pound's chief work. The poem (for the *Cantos* are parts of a loosely connected major opus) was planned to comprise one hundred "chapters." *Cantos I-XVI* appeared in 1925; *Cantos XVII-XXVII* in 1928; *A Draft of XXX Cantos* in 1930; *Eleven New Cantos: XXXI-XLI* in 1935; *The Fifth Decad of Cantos: XLII-LI* in 1937; *Cantos LII-LXXI* in 1940. *The Pisan Cantos* (so called because they were composed when Pound was imprisoned near Pisa in May, 1945) were not published until 1948, when they were awarded the Bollingen Prize. Only a scholar versed in many cultures could follow the many languages and multiple accents, the obscure allusions and private digressions, the broken narratives interrupted by tag-ends of gossip, jokes, imprecations, scraps of learning, and Pound's obsession that he is the only clear thinker in a muddled world. Yet the scheme of the *Cantos* is reasoned, even formal; Pound attempted to write a Human Comedy in several dimensions and a multitude of voices. He intended the work to be broadly fugual, with subject, response, and countersubject, using the repetitions of history as recurrent themes. As the *Cantos* progressed, the author grew increasingly pedantic and petulant. The early precisions disappeared and were followed by pretentiousness and disruptive hysteria. Pound maintained he was writing "an epic poem on many levels," but he achieved only an accumulating flux of Greek myths, Chinese ideograms, preoccupations with money, medieval usury, and local history. Hitherto Pound gave the reader to understand his work had the architecture of a Bach fugue, but, as the work enlarged, he referred to it as a *Commedia.* We were told that the Greek, Renaissance, and First World War episodes are the *Inferno;* the history of money and banking form the *Purgatorio;* the climactic finale (still unwritten) will represent the *Paradiso.* We were also gravely informed that, whereas most English verse is written in iambic meter, the *Cantos* have a great number of feet which are trochaic, dactylic, anapestic, and spondaic, and this is "nothing less than a revolution in English versification, a new basis for the writing of poetry."

Critical opinion of the *Cantos* was sharply divided. To most readers the work was a masterpiece of obfuscation, a jig-saw puzzle with the important pieces missing. "About the poems," wrote Edward Fitzgerald, "there hangs a dismal mist of unresolved confusion. Through that mist we can see fact, but fact historically stated, enlivened in no way by either a creative or a critical process." Some found it a garble of literature and nothing else, composed of scraps from newspapers, oddments from documents difficult of access, and the minor classics, all piled upon each other without an original idea or an experience outside of print. To others it was a modern Gospel. "One of the three great works of poetry of our time," wrote Allan Tate. Ford Madox Ford's enthusiasm was even less guarded. "The first words you have to say about the *Cantos,*" said Ford, "is: Their extraordinary beauty . . . They form an unparalleled history of a world seen from those shores which are the home of our civilization." John Crowe Ransom's estimate was more temperate. He concluded, "Mr. Pound, in his capacity of guide to literature, never wearies of telling us about the troubadour songs of Provence, which he reveres. He lays down the law that, the further the poem goes from its original character of song, the more dubious is its estate. But what if we apply that canon to the *Cantos?* The result

is that we find ourselves sometimes admiring in Mr. Pound's poetry an effect of brilliance and nearly always missing the effect of poetry."

Whatever differences arose concerning the finality of Pound's performance, none could dispute the power of his influence. The accent of the *Cantos* can be traced through Eliot's *The Waste Land,* Hart Crane's *The Bridge,* and MacLeish's longer poems, particularly his *Conquistador.* Moreover, any attempt to do justice to Pound must take account of the chronology of his work in relation to others. He invented the term "Imagism" and organized the Imagist school long before the ensuing period of exploitation. He published *Cathay* in 1915, and rendered *Certain Noble Plays of Japan from the Fenollosa Manuscripts,* anticipating the flood of Chinese and Japanese translations that, soon after, inundated the country. He "placed" Tagore as literary artist, not as messiah, and saw the Bengalese poet become a cult. He fought for the musician George Antheil; wrote a study of Gaudier Brzeska, when that sculptor was unknown; created a controversy by his Provençal paraphrases, expanded his Italian studies into *The Poems of Guido Cavalcanti.*

Besides his poetry Pound wrote, translated, and edited more than fourteen volumes of prose, the most characteristic being *A B C of Reading* (1934), an exposition of a critical method; *Make it New* (1935), which is a deceptive title since all but one of the essays appeared in *Pavannes and Divisions* (1918) and *Instigations* (1920). In his argumentative introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* Yeats maintained that, although Ezra Pound had more style than any contemporary poet, his style was constantly broken and "twisted into nothing by its direct opposite: nervous obsession, nightmare, stammering confusion." Conceding Pound's influence, Yeats concluded that Pound was "a brilliant improvisator translating at sight from an unknown Greek masterpiece." The "confusion" grew into madness.

During the Second World War Pound, who had made his home in Italy, became an active supporter of Fascism. Beginning in 1941 he broadcast diatribes against the American system, attacks on Roosevelt, anti-Semitic slurs—all of which were indicated in the later *Cantos*—and acted as a paid propagandist who, twice a week, gave aid and comfort to the enemy and counseled fascist officials in operations against the United States. The inspired *enfant terrible* had become the public traitor. In May, 1945, he was taken prisoner and indicted for treason; the indictment charged nineteen overt acts. Brought to Washington, Pound escaped trial when four psychiatrists testified that the poet was of unsound mind; one of them diagnosed Pound as a "paranoid psychopathic personality." After a court hearing on February 14, 1946, Pound was committed to St. Elizabeth's Hospital as an insane person.

As a poet, Pound is too special, too arrogant and erudite, to achieve popularity. All too frequently the reader is left, as F. O. Matthiessen wrote, "dazzled by the surface texture of the language, but with the sensation that it was hardly saying anything." As a political thinker Pound was not only ineffectual but absurd; as a person he was intermittently unbalanced. But his literary importance should not be belittled. He was a pioneer in new forms, a champion of new poets. He fought complacency wherever he encountered it; he experimented in a speech which he made his own and transmitted to others. The feeling of isolation, the sense of being an expatriate self-separated from his audience, may explain Pound's eccentrici-

ties and obsessions, his bitter blasts and irresponsible nose-thumbings, his crackpot theories of economics, and his treasonable activities. There remains the gifted translator, the poet, the maker, who was also the creative critic and one of the great originators of his day.

SALUTATION

O Generation of the thoroughly smug
and thoroughly uncomfortable,
I have seen fishermen picnicking in the sun,
I have seen them with untidy families,
I have seen their smiles full of teeth
and heard ungainly laughter.
And I am happier than you are,
And they were happier than I am;
And the fish swim in the lake
and do not even own clothing.

THE GARDEN

En robe de parade.
SAMAIN

Like a skein of loose silk blown against a wall
She walks by the railing of a path in Kensington Gardens,
And she is dying piece-meal
of a sort of emotional anaemia.

And round about there is a rabble
Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor.
They shall inherit the earth.

In her is the end of breeding.
Her boredom is exquisite and excessive.
She would like some one to speak to her,
And is almost afraid that I
will commit that indiscretion.

SESTINA: ALTAFORTE

Loquitur: En *Bertrans de Born.*
Dante Alighieri put this man in hell for that he was a stirrer up of strife. Eccovi! Judge ye!
Have I dug him up again?
The scene is at his castle, Altaforte. "Papiols" is his jongleur.
"The Leopard," the device of Richard Cœur de Lion.

Damn it all! all this our South stinks peace.
You whoreson dog, Papiols, come! Let's to music!

I have no life save when the swords clash.
But ah! when I see the standards gold, vair, purple, opposing
And the broad fields beneath them turn crimson,
Then howl I my heart nigh mad with rejoicing.

In hot summer have I great rejoicing
When the tempests kill the earth's foul peace,
And the lightnings from black heav'n flash crimson,
And the fierce thunders roar me their music
And the winds shriek through the clouds mad, opposing,
And through all the riven skies God's swords clash.

Hell grant soon we hear again the swords clash!
And the shrill neighs of destriers in battle rejoicing,
Spiked breast to spiked breast opposing!
Better one hour's stour than a year's peace
With fat boards, bawds, wine and frail music!
Bah! there's no wine like the blood's crimson!

And I love to see the sun rise blood-crimson.
And I watch his spears through the dark clash
And it fills all my heart with rejoicing
And pries wide my mouth with fast music
When I see him so scorn and defy peace,
His lone might 'gainst all darkness opposing.

The man who fears war and squats opposing
My words for stour, hath no blood of crimson
But is fit only to rot in womanish peace
Far from where worth's won and the swords clash
For the death of such sluts I go rejoicing;
Yea, I fill all the air with my music.

Papiols, Papiols, to the music!
There's no sound like to swords swords opposing,
No cry like the battle's rejoicing
When our elbows and swords drip the crimson
And our charges 'gainst "The Leopard's" rush clash.
May God damn for ever all who cry "Peace!"

And let the music of the swords make them crimson!
Hell grant soon we hear again the swords clash!
Hell blot black for alway the thought "Peace"!

THE RIVER-MERCHANT'S WIFE: A LETTER

(*After Rihaku*)

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.

You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
Forever and forever and forever.
Why should I climb the lookout?

At sixteen you departed,
You went into far Ku-to-yen, by the river of swirling eddies,
And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.
You dragged your feet when you went out.
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,
Too deep to clear them away!
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden;
They hurt me. I grow older.
If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand,
And I will come out to meet you
As far as Cho-fu-sa.

AN IMMORALITY

Sing we for love and idleness,
Naught else is worth the having.
Though I have been in many a land,
There is naught else in living.

And I would rather have my sweet,
Though rose-leaves die of grieving,

Than do high deeds in Hungary
To pass all men's believing.

A VIRGINAL

No, no! Go from me. I have left her lately.
I will not spoil my sheath with lesser brightness,

For my surrounding air has a new lightness;
Slight are her arms, yet they have bound me straitly
And left me cloaked as with a gauze of ether;
As with sweet leaves; as with a subtle clearness.
Oh, I have picked up magic in her nearness
To sheathe me half in half the things that sheathe her.

No, no! Go from me. I have still the flavor,
Soft as spring wind that's come from birchen bowers.
Green come the shoots, aye April in the branches,
As winter's wound with her sleight hand she staunches,
Hath of the trees a likeness of the savor:
As white their bark, so white this lady's hours.

BALLAD FOR GLOOM

For God, our God is a gallant foe
That playeth behind the veil.

I have loved my God as a child at heart
That seeketh deep bosoms for rest,
I have loved my God as a maid to man—
But lo, this thing is best:

To love your God as a gallant foe that plays behind the veil;
To meet your God as the night winds meet beyond Arcturus' pale.

I have played with God for a woman,
I have staked with my God for truth,
I have lost to my God as a man, clear-eyed—
His dice be not of ruth.

For I am made as a naked blade,
But hear ye this thing in sooth:

Who loseth to God as man to man
Shall win at the turn of the game.
I have drawn my blade where the lightnings meet
But the ending is the same:
Who loseth to God as the sword blades lose
Shall win at the end of the game.

For God, our God is a gallant foe that playeth behind the veil.
Whom God deigns not to overthrow hath need of triple mail.

GREEK EPIGRAM

Day and night are never weary,
Nor yet is God of creating

For day and night their torch-bearers
The aube and the crepuscule.

So, when I weary of praising the dawn and the sunset,
Let me be no more counted among the immortals;
But number me amid the wearying ones,
Let me be a man as the herd,
And as the slave that is given in barter.

BALLAD OF THE GOODLY FERE[1]

(Simon Zelotes speaketh it somewhile after the Crucifixion)

Ha' we lost the goodliest fere o' all
For the priests and the gallows tree?
Aye, lover he was of brawny men,
O' ships and the open sea.

When they came wi' a host to take Our Man
His smile was good to see,
"First let these go!" quo' our Goodly Fere,
"Or I'll see ye damned," says he.

Aye, he sent us out through the crossed high spears,
And the scorn of his laugh rang free,
"Why took ye not me when I walked about
Alone in the town?" says he.

Oh we drank his "Hale" in the good red wine
When we last made company,
No capon priest was the Goodly Fere
But a man o' men was he.

I ha' seen him drive a hundred men
Wi' a bundle o' cords swung free,
When they took the high and holy house
For their pawn and treasury.

They'll no get him a' in a book I think
Though they write it cunningly;
No mouse of the scrolls was the Goodly Fere
But aye loved the open sea.

If they think they ha' snared our Goodly Fere
They are fools to the last degree.
"I'll go to the feast," quo' our Goodly Fere,
"Though I go to the gallows tree."

"Ye ha' seen me heal the lame and the blind,
And wake the dead," says he,
"Ye shall see one thing to master all:
'Tis how a brave man dies on the tree."

A son of God was the Goodly Fere
That bade us his brothers be.
I ha' seen him cow a thousand men.
I ha' seen him upon the tree.

He cried no cry when they drave the nails
And the blood gushed hot and free,
The hounds of the crimson sky gave tongue
But never a cry cried he.

I ha' seen him cow a thousand men
On the hills o' Galilee,
They whined as he walked out calm between,
Wi' his eyes like the gray o' the sea.

Like the sea that brooks no voyaging
With the winds unleashed and free,
Like the sea that he cowed at Gennesaret
Wi' twey words spoke' suddenly.

A master of men was the Goodly Fere,
A mate of the wind and sea,
If they think they ha' slain our Goodly Fere
They are fools eternally.

[1] Fere = Mate, Companion.

I ha' seen him eat o' the honey-comb
Sin' they nailed him to the tree.

A GIRL

The tree has entered my hands,
The sap has ascended my arms,
The tree has grown in my breast
Downward,
The branches grow out of me, like arms.

Tree you are,
Moss you are,
You are violets with wind above them.
A child—so high—you are;
And all this is folly to the world.

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

DANCE FIGURE

(*For the Marriage in Cana of Galilee*)

Dark eyed,
O woman of my dreams,
Ivory sandaled,
There is none like thee among the dancers,
None with swift feet.

I have not found thee in the tents,
In the broken darkness.
I have not found thee at the well-head
Among the women with pitchers.
Thine arms are as a young sapling under the bark;
Thy face as a river with lights.

White as an almond are thy shoulders;
As new almonds stripped from the husk.
They guard thee not with eunuchs;
Not with bars of copper.

Gilt turquoise and silver are in the place of thy rest.
A brown robe with threads of gold woven in patterns hast thou gathered about thee,
O Nathat-Ikanaie, "Tree-at-the-river."

As a rillet among the sedge are thy hands upon me;
Thy fingers a frosted stream.

Thy maidens are white like pebbles;
Their music about thee!

There is none like thee among the dancers;
None with swift feet.

ΔΩΡΙΑ

Be in me as the eternal moods
of the bleak wind, and not
As transient things are—
gayety of flowers.

Have me in the strong loneliness
of sunless cliffs
And of gray waters.
Let the gods speak softly of us
In days hereafter,
the shadowy flowers of Orcus
Remember thee.

SILET

When I behold how black, immortal ink
Drips from my deathless pen—ah, well-away!
Why should we stop at all for what I think?
There is enough in what I chance to say.

It is enough that we once came together;
What is the use of setting it to rime?
When it is autumn do we get spring weather,
Or gather may of harsh northwindish time?

It is enough that we once came together;
What if the wind have turned against the rain?
It is enough that we once came together;
Time has seen this, and will not turn again.

And who are we, who know that last intent,
To plague tomorrow with a testament!

PORTRAIT D'UNE FEMME

Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea,
London has swept about you this score years
And bright ships left you this or that in fee:
Ideas, old gossip, oddments of all things,
Strange spars of knowledge and dimmed wares of price.
Great minds have sought you—lacking someone else.
You have been second always. Tragical?
No. You preferred it to the usual thing:
One dull man, dulling and uxorious,
One average mind—with one thought less, each year.
Oh, you are patient. I have seen you sit
Hours, where something might have floated up.
And now you pay one. Yes, you richly pay.
You are a person of some interest, one comes to you
And takes strange gain away:
Trophies fished up; some curious suggestion;
Fact that leads nowhere; and a tale for two,
Pregnant with mandrakes, or with something else
That might prove useful and yet never proves,
That never fits a corner or shows use,

Or finds its hour upon the loom of days:
The tarnished, gaudy, wonderful old work;
Idols, and ambergris and rare inlays.
These are your riches, your great store; and yet
For all this sea-hoard of deciduous things,
Strange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff:
In the slow float of differing light and deep,
No! there is nothing! In the whole and all,
Nothing that's quite your own.
Yet this is you.

THE RETURN

See, they return; ah see the tentative
Movements, and the slow feet,
The trouble in the pace and the
uncertain
Wavering!

See, they return, one, and by one,
With fear, as half-awakened;
As if the snow should hesitate
And murmur in the wind,
and half turn back;
These were the "Wing'd-with-Awe,"
Inviolable.

Gods of the wingèd shoe!
With them the silver hounds,
sniffing the trace of air!

Haie! Haie!
These were the swift to harry;
These were the keen-scented;
These were the souls of blood.

Slow on the leash,
pallid the leash-men!

ENVOI

Go, dumb-born book,
Tell her that sang me once that song of
Lawes:
Hadst thou but song
As thou hast subjects known,
Then were there cause in thee that should
condone
Even my faults that heavy upon me lie,
And build her glories their longevity.

Tell her that sheds
Such treasure in the air,
Recking naught else but that her graces give
Life to the moment,
I would bid them live
As roses might, in magic amber laid,
Red overwrought with orange and all made
One substance and one color
Braving time.

Tell her that goes
With song upon her lips
But sings not out the song, nor knows
The maker of it, some other mouth,
May be as fair as hers,
Might, in new ages, gain her worshipers,
When our two dusts with Waller's shall be
laid,
Siftings on siftings in oblivion,
Till change hath broken down
All things save Beauty alone.

THE REST

O helpless few in my country,
O remnant enslaved!

Artists broken against her,
Astray, lost in the villages,
Mistrusted, spoken-against,

Lovers of beauty, starved,
Thwarted with systems,
Helpless against the control;

You who cannot wear yourselves out
By persisting to successes,
You who can only speak,
Who cannot steel yourselves into reiteration;

You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:
Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

ITÉ

Go, my songs, seek your praise from the young and from the intolerant,
Move among the lovers of perfection alone.
Seek ever to stand in the hard Sophoclean light
And take your wounds from it gladly.

CANTO I

And then went down to the ship,
Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and
We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,
Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also
Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward
Bore us out onward with bellying canvas,
Circe's this craft, the trim-coifed goddess.
Then sat we amidships, wind jamming the tiller,
Thus with stretched sail, we went over sea till day's end.
Sun to his slumber, shadows o'er all the ocean,
Came we then to the bounds of deepest water,
To the Kimmerian lands, and peopled cities
Covered with close-webbed mist, unpierced ever
With glitter of sun-ray
Nor with stars stretched, nor looking back from heaven
Swartest night stretched over wretched men there.
The ocean flowing backward, came we then to the place
Aforesaid by Circe.
Here did they rites, Perimedes and Eurylochus,
And drawing sword from my hip
I dug the ell-square pitkin;
Poured we libations unto each the dead,
First mead and then sweet wine, water mixed with white flour.
Then prayed I many a prayer to the sickly death's-heads;
As set in Ithaca, sterile bulls of the best
For sacrifice, heaping the pyre with goods,
A sheep to Tiresias only, black and a bell-sheep.
Dark blood flowed in the fosse,
Souls out of Erebus, cadaverous dead, of brides
Of youths and of the old who had borne much;
Souls stained with recent tears, girls tender,
Men many, mauled with bronze lance heads,
Battle spoil, bearing yet dreary arms,
These many crowded about me; with shouting,
Pallor upon me, cried to my men for more beasts;
Slaughtered the herds, sheep slain of bronze;

Poured ointment, cried to the gods,
To Pluto the strong, and praised Proserpine;
Unsheathed the narrow sword,
I sat to keep off the impetuous impotent dead,
Till I should hear Tiresias.
But first Elpenor came, our friend Elpenor,
Unburied, cast on the wide earth,
Limbs that we left in the house of Circe,
Unwept, unwrapped in sepulcher, since toils urged other.
Pitiful spirit. And I cried in hurried speech:
"Elpenor, how art thou come to this dark coast?
"Cam'st thou afoot, outstripping seamen?"
And he in heavy speech:
"Ill fate and abundant wine. I slept in Circe's ingle.
"Going down the long ladder unguarded,
"I fell against the buttress,
"Shattered the nape-nerve, the soul sought Avernus.
"But thou, O King, I bid remember me, unwept, unburied,
"Heap up mine arms, be tomb by sea-board, and inscribed:
"'*A man of no fortune and with a name to come.*'
"And set my oar up, that I swung mid fellows."

And Anticlea came, whom I beat off, and then Tiresias Theban,
Holding his golden wand, knew me, and spoke first:
"A second time? why? man of ill star,
"Facing the sunless dead and this joyless region?
"Stand from the fosse, leave me my bloody bever
"For soothsay."
And I stepped back,
And he strong with the blood, said then: "Odysseus
"Shalt return through spiteful Neptune, over dark seas,
"Lose all companions." And then Anticlea came.
Lie quiet Divus. I mean that is Andreas Divus,
In officina Wecheli, 1538, out of Homer.
And he sailed, by Sirens and thence outward and away
And unto Circe.
Venerandam,
In the Cretan's phrase, with the golden crown, Aphrodite,
Cypri munimenta sortita est, mirthful, oricalchi, with golden
Girdles and breast bands, thou with dark eyelids
Bearing the golden bough of Argicida.

Louis Untermeyer

LOUIS UNTERMEYER was born October 1, 1885, in New York City, where he lived, except for brief intervals, until 1923. His schooling was fitful and erratic; he liked to boast that he was the least educated writer in America. He attended the De Witt Clinton High School, but his failure to comprehend the essentials of geom-

etry prevented him from graduating. In youth his one ambition was to be a composer. At sixteen he appeared as a semi-professional pianist; at seventeen he entered his father's jewelry manufacturing establishment. For nearly twenty years he commuted to Newark, New Jersey, being advanced from designer to factory manager and vice-president. In 1923 he retired and, after two years of study abroad, returned to America to devote himself entirely to literature. In 1928 he achieved a lifelong desire, acquiring a farm, a trout-stream, and half a mountain of sugar-maples in the Adirondacks. There he remained until the Second World War brought him back to his native New York, where he wrote pamphlets and radio shows for the government. His lectures before and after 1942 took him into every state of the Union except South Dakota. He conducted occasional seminars at various universities where he was "poet in residence."

It is difficult for the present compiler to consider this writer as severely as he deserves, the editor not having attained toward the poet that Olympian detachment which is the goal of criticism. However, it is evident that his work is divided into four kinds; his poetry, his parodies, his translations, and his prose. His initial volume of verse, *First Love* (1911), was a sequence of some seventy lyrics in which the influences of Heine and Housman were not only obvious but crippling. It was with *Challenge* (1914) that the author first declared himself with any sort of integrity. Although the ghost of Henley haunts many of these pages, poems like "Prayer" and "Caliban in the Coal Mines" show "a fresh and lyrical sympathy with the modern world. His vision" (thus *The Boston Transcript*) "is a social vision, his spirit a passionately energized command of the forces of justice." *These Times* (1917), *The New Adam* (1920), and *Roast Leviathan* (1923) were a mixture of insights and influences. The American critics found them too exuberant, but the English reviewers praised them, especially the last. "On every subject he treats," wrote Edwin Muir, "he gives opulent measure, an opulence within the reach of nobody in contemporary verse but himself." *Burning Bush* (1928) and *Food and Drink* (1932) were quieter but surer in tone; several poems, notably "Food and Drink" and "Last Words Before Winter," masked serious, even solemn, emotions in a light manner.

Four volumes of his parodies were combined in *Collected Parodies* (1926), which the author, with great self-restraint, refrained from calling "Parodies Regained." His interests in German backgrounds and literature were manifested in *Poems of Heinrich Heine* (1917); a translation of Ernst Toller's *Masse Mensch,* produced by the Theatre Guild in 1923; and *Blue Rhine—Black Forest* (1930), an informal guide and day-book. His translations from Heine were revised and amplified to form the second volume of an analytical biography, *Heinrich Heine: Paradox and Poet* (1937), which was hailed with gratifying superlatives.

Beginning with an adaptation of Gottfried Keller's Swiss stories (published under the title *The Fat of the Cat*) the author alternately wrote volumes of prose and poetry. The best of his fiction, he insists, is *Moses* (1928), miscalled a novel. Actually the work is a combination of historical reconstruction and poetic fantasia. Other fictional work included *The Donkey of God* (1932), written for a young audience, which won the Italian Enit Award in 1934 for the best recent book on Italy written in any language by a non-Italian, and *The Last Pirate* (1934), in

which the author presumed to do for Gilbert and Sullivan what the Lambs had done for Shakespeare.

A book of essays, *The New Era in American Poetry* (1919), was amplified and shaped into a more balanced set of twenty subdivided chapters as *American Poetry Since 1900* (1923). The critical anthologies *Modern American Poetry* and *Modern British Poetry* were revised and enlarged several times since their original publication in 1919 and 1920, and used as textbooks in the universities. A companion volume, *American Poetry from the Beginning to Whitman* (1931), attempted a comprehensive and drastic reappraisal of native poetry from 1620 to 1880.

Besides these critical compilations the editor prepared several anthologies with a minimum of prefatory or interpretive matter: *The Book of Living Verse* (1932), the widest in scope, ranging from the thirteenth century to the twentieth; *Yesterday and Today* (1927), a comparative collection of the present and the immediate past; *This Singing World* (1923), a selection of modern verse for a not too elderly audience; *This Singing World for Younger Readers* (1926); *Rainbow in the Sky* (1935); and *Stars to Steer By* (1941). These volumes were widely adopted in high schools and colleges, as was *The Forms of Poetry* (1926), a "pocket dictionary of verse."

New Songs for New Voices (1928), a collaboration with David and Clara Mannes, wedded modern music to modern poetry and gave the editor the opportunity to make his first (and last) public appearance as composer. *Poetry: Its Appreciation and Enjoyment* (1934), written with Carter Davidson, is a cross between a treatise and a textbook. *Selected Poems and Parodies* (1935), assembles the best of Untermeyer's serious poems. "This volume," said William Rose Benét handsomely, "entitles him to occupy the place of a Heine in America." His standing as critic was enhanced by *Play in Poetry* (1937), a set of commentaries delivered as lectures on the Henry Ward Beecher Foundation at Amherst. *From Another World* (1939) is not so much an autobiography as a set of autobiographical reminiscences which give a direct picture of a period.

Before he was sixty, Untermeyer had written, compiled, and edited more than fifty volumes of prose and verse. The 1288-page *A Treasury of Great Poems* (1942) was followed by *A Treasury of Laughter* (1946), *The New England Poets* (1948), *The Love Poems of Robert Herrick and John Donne* (1948), and *The Inner Sanctum Walt Whitman* (1949). He also acted as associate editor of several magazines, wrote the articles on modern American poetry for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* and served a term with the Office of War Information and Editions for the Armed Services.

PRAYER

God, though this life is but a wraith,
  Although we know not what we use,
Although we grope with little faith,
  Give me the heart to fight—and lose.

Ever insurgent let me be,
  Make me more daring than devout;
From sleek contentment keep me free,
  And fill me with a buoyant doubt.

Open my eyes to visions girt
  With beauty, and with wonder lit—
But let me always see the dirt,
  And all that spawn and die in it.

Open my ears to music; let
  Me thrill with Spring's first flutes and drums—
But never let me dare forget
  The bitter ballads of the slums.

From compromise and things half-done,
  Keep me, with stern and stubborn pride.
And when, at last, the fight is won,
  God, keep me still unsatisfied.

CALIBAN IN THE COAL MINES

God, we don't like to complain;
  We know that the mine is no lark.
But—there's the pools from the rain;
  But—there's the cold and the dark.

God, You don't know what it is—
  You, in Your well-lighted sky—
Watching the meteors whizz;
  Warm, with a sun always by.

God, if You had but the moon
  Stuck in Your cap for a lamp,
Even You'd tire of it soon,
  Down in the dark and the damp.

Nothing but blackness above
  And nothing that moves but the cars. . . .
God, if You wish for our love,
  Fling us a handful of stars!

THE DARK CHAMBER

The brain forgets, but the blood will remember.
  There, when the play of sense is over,
The last, low spark in the darkest chamber
  Will hold all there is of love and lover.

The war of words, the life-long quarrel
  Of self against self will resolve into nothing;
Less than the chain of berry-red coral
  Crying against the dead black of her clothing.

What has the brain that it hopes to last longer?
  The blood will take from forgotten violence,
The groping, the break of her voice in anger.
  There will be left only color and silence.

These will remain, these will go searching
  Your veins for life when the flame of life smolders:
The night that you two saw the mountains marching
  Up against dawn with the stars on their shoulders—

The jetting poplars' arrested fountains
  As you drew her under them, easing her pain—
The notes, not the words, of a half-finished sentence—
  The music, the silence. . . . These will remain.

LONG FEUD

Where, without bloodshed, can there be
A more relentless enmity
Than the long feud fought silently

Between man and the growing grass.
Man's the aggressor, for he has
Weapons to humble and harass

The impudent spears that charge upon
His sacred privacy of lawn.
He mows them down, and they are gone

Only to lie in wait, although
He builds above and digs below
Where never a root would dare to go.

His are the triumphs till the day
There's no more grass to cut away
And, weary of labor, weary of play,
Having exhausted every whim,
He stretches out each conquering limb.
And then the small grass covers him.

FOOD AND DRINK

Why has our poetry eschewed
The rapture and response of food?
What hymns are sung, what prayers are said
For home-made miracles of bread?
Since what we love has always found
Expression in enduring sound,
Music and verse should be competing
To match the transient joy of eating.
There should be present in our songs
As many tastes as there are tongues;
There should be humbly celebrated
One passion that is never sated.

Let us begin it with the first
Distinction of a conscious thirst
When the collusion of the vine
Uplifted water into wine.
Let us give thanks before we turn
To other things of less concern
For all the poetry of the table:
Clams that parade their silent fable;
Lobsters that have a rock for stable;
Red-faced tomatoes ample as
A countryman's full-bosomed lass;
Plain-spoken turnips; honest beets;
The carnal gusto of red meats;
The wood-fire pungence of smoked ham;
The insipidity of lamb;
Young veal that's smooth as natural silk;
The lavish motherliness of milk;
Sweet-sour carp, beloved by Jews;
Pot luck simplicity of stews;
Crabs, juiciest of Nature's jokes;
The deep reserve of artichokes;
Mushrooms, whose taste is texture, loath
To tell of their mysterious growth;
Quick, mealy comfort glowing in
A baked potato's crackled skin;
The morning promise, hailed by man,
Of bacon crisping in the pan;
The sage compound of *Hasenpfeffer*
With dumplings born of flour and zephyr;
Anchovies glorified in oil;
Spinach whose spirit is the soil;
Corn that is roasted in the ash;
The eternal compromise of hash;
The slow-gold nectar maples yield;
Pale honey tasting of the field
Where every clover is Hymettus;
The cooling sanity of lettuce,
And every other herbal green
Whose touch is calm, whose heart is clean;
Succulent bean-sprouts; bamboo-shoots;
The sapid catalogue of fruits:
Plebeian apple; caustic grape;
Quinces that have no gift for shape;
Dull plums that mind their own affairs;
Incurably bland and blunted pears;
Fantastic passion-fruit; frank lemons
With acid tongues as sharp as women's;
Exotic loquats; sly persimmons;
White currants; amber-fleshed sultanas
(Miniature and sweetened mannas);
Expansive peaches; suave bananas;
Oranges ripening in crates;
Tight-bodied figs; sun-wrinkled dates;
Melons that have their own vagaries;
The bright astringency of berries;
Pepper, whose satire stings and cuts;
The pointless persiflage of nuts;
Sauces of complex mysteries;
Proverbial parsnips; muscular cheese;
Innocent eggs that scorn disguises;
Languid molasses; burning spices
In kitchen-oracles to Isis;
Thick sauerkraut's fat-bellied savor;
Anything with a chocolate flavor;
Deep generosity of pies;
Rich puddings bursting to surprise;
The smug monotony of rice;
Raisins that doze in cinnamon buns;
Kentucky biscuits, Scottish scones;
Venison steaks that smack of cloisters;
Goose-liver for the soul that roisters;
Reticent prawn; Lucullan oysters;
Sausages, fragrant link on link. . . .

The vast ambrosias of drink:
Tea, that domestic mandarin;
Bucolic cider; loose-lipped gin;
Coffee, extract of common sense,
Purgative of the night's pretense;
Cocoa's prim nursery; the male

Companionship of crusty ale;
Cognac as oily as a ferret;
The faintly iron thrust of claret;
Episcopal port, aged and austere;
Rebellious must of grape; the clear,
Bluff confraternity of beer—

All these are good, all are a part
Of man's imperative needs that start
Not in the palate but the heart.
Thus fat and fiber, root and leaf,
Become quick fuel and slow grief.
These, through the chemistry of blood,
Sustain his hungering manhood,
Fulfilling passion, ripening pain;
Steel in his bone, fire at his brain.
So, until man abjures the meats
Terrestrial, and impermanence sweets,
Growing beyond the thing he eats,
Let us be thankful for the good
Beauty and benison of food;
Let us join chiming vowel with vowel
To rhapsodize fish, flesh and fowl;
And let us thank God in our songs
There are as many tastes as tongues!

LAST WORDS BEFORE WINTER

All my sheep
Gather in a heap,
For I spy the woolly, woolly wolf.

Farewell, my flocks,
Farewell. But let me find you
Safe in your stall and barn and box
With your winter's tale behind you.

Farewell, my cattle (both).
I leave you just as loath
As though you were a hundred head,
Instead
Of two-and-a-half.
(Two cows and a calf.)

Farewell, my apple-trees;
You have learned what it is to freeze,
With the drift on your knees.
But, oh, beware
Those first kind days, the snare
Of the too promising air,
The cost
Of over-sudden trust—
And then the killing frost.

Farewell, beloved acres;
I leave you in the hands
Of one whose earliest enterprise was lands:
Your Maker's.

Yard, hutch, and house, farewell.
It is for you to tell
How you withstood the great white wolf, whose fell
Is softer than a lambkin's, but whose breath
Is death.
Farewell, hoof, claw, and wing,
Finned, furred, and feathered thing,
Till Spring—

All my sheep
Gather in a heap,
For I spy the woolly, woolly wolf.

MOTHER GOOSE UP-TO-DATE

JOHN MASEFIELD

Relates the Story of Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son

Thomas, the vagrant piper's son,
Was fourteen when he took to fun;
He was the sixth of a bewilderin'
Family of eleven children.
Mary, the first of all the lot,
Was married to a drunken sot;
And Clement, second on the list,
Fell off the roof and was never missed.
Susan and little Goldilocks
Were carried off by the chicken-pox;
And Franky went—though I can't recall
Whatever happened to him at all.
Thomas was next—and he's still alive,
The only one of them all to thrive.
The rest just petered out somehow—
At least, nobody hears of them now.

Now Tom, as I said when I'd begun,
Was fourteen when he took to fun.
Wine was the stuff he loved to swim in;
He lied, and fought, and went with women.
He scattered oaths, as one flings bounties,
The dirtiest dog in seven counties.

One morning when the sun was high
And larks were cleaving the blue sky,
Singing as though their hearts would break
With April's keen and happy ache,
Thomas went walking, rather warm,

Beside old Gaffer Hubbard's farm.
He saw that wintry days were over
And bees were out among the clover.
Earth stretched its legs out in the sun;
Now that the spring was well begun,
Heaven itself grew bland and fat.
So Thomas loafed a while and spat,
And thought about his many follies—
Yonder the gang was tipping trollies.
The sight made Tom's red blood run quicker
Than whiskey, beer or any liquor.
"By cripes," he said, "that's what I need;
'Twill make a man of me indeed.
Why should I be a roaring slob
When there's Salvation in a job!"
He started up—when lo, behind him,
As though it sought to maim and blind him,
A savage pig sprang straight against him.
At first Tom kicked and fought and fenced him,
And then he fell. But as they rolled
Tom took a tight and desperate hold
And thought the bloody fight was over.
"Here is one pig that's *not* in clover—
Tonight I'll have you in my cupboard!"
Who should come up but Gaffer Hubbard.
"Leggo that pig."
"What for?" says Tom.
"It's mine, you lousy, thieving bum."
"It ain't."
"It is."
"Clear out!"
"We'll see."
"I'll fix 'ee!"
"Better let me be."

With that the farmer turned again
And called out half a dozen men.
Up they came running. "Here," said he,
"Here is a pig belongs to me—
But ye can have it all for eating
If ye will give this tramp a beating."
"Hurroo!" they shouted in high feather,
And jumped on Thomas all together.
So the pig was eat, and Tom was beat;
And Tom went roaring down the street!

WALTER DE LA MARE

Tells the Listener About Jack and Jill

Up to the top of the haunted turf
They climbed on the moonlit hill.

Not a leaf rustled in the underbrush;
The listening air was still,

And only the noise of the water pail
As it struck on a jutting stone,
Clattered and jarred against the silence
As the two trod on alone.

Up to the moonlit peak they went;
And, though not a word would they say,
Their thoughts outnumbered a poet's love-songs
In the first green weeks of May.

The stealthy shadows crept closer;
They clutched at the hem of Jill's gown;
And there at the very top she stumbled,
And Jack came shuddering down.

Their cries rang out against the stillness,
Pitiful and high and thin.
And the echoes edged back still further
As the silence gathered them in.

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

Exhorts Little Boy Blue

From that last acre on oblivion's heap
Come, lad tricked out in bold and trumpery blue;
Come, blow your idle horn, and send the few
Notes with no name against the night. Here sheep
Trample the fetid meadow; here cows creep,
Raising their eyes wherever one or two
Crushing the corn, pause to admire the view;
Come, doubtful dreamer, spurn ignoble sleep.

I tell you this, Boy Blue, lift up your horn
Against the world's deliberate apathy,
Or what we held so dear will be the scorn
Of casual rats and roaches; life will be
A town not worth the taking, a spent call.
Grimly I tell you this. And this is all.

ARCHIBALD MAC LEISH

Suspends the Five Little Pigs

. . . So
Went this little pig from the mainland to the market:
Autumn it was: and a salt wind flowing:

And the rotten grain left on the stalk for no harvest:
And the going rough: the bread wormy· the smoke turned sour:
And the towns a jungle of dogs let loose in a rubble of garbage:

And this little pig stayed home: and this one devoured
Roast upon roast of beef and drank the milk of the aloe:
Rinsing his mouth with the melons: drowsing

In a grove of clean sun interwoven with swallows:
And the earth kind to the bone with rain's fragrance:
And the moon stroking the breast and the hand grown callous:

And this little pig had none—not for love nor the paying—
Dust in his corded throat: and the knife above it:
And the quick slit under the jaw: and he took it bravely:

And this little pig—the littlest and the loveliest—
Gallic in breed to the impudent turn of his tail
Cried, "Oui! Oui! Oui!" all the way home . . .
. . . and the hovering
Gale from the . . .
north . . .
the sun-bright names . . .
Gone from the page . . .
and the blazing . . .
lives
Hazy . . .
the days passing . . .
the faces
Blurred or erased . . .
and the five . . .
the hunted five
A word . . .
a child's rhyme . . .
in that country. . . .

EDGAR A. GUEST

Syndicates the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe

It takes a heap o' children to make a home that's true,
And home can be a palace grand, or just a plain, old shoe;
But if it has a mother dear, and a good old dad or two,
Why, that's the sort of good old home for good old me and you.

Of all the institutions this side the Vale o' Rest
Howe'er it be, it seems to me a good old mother's best;
And fathers are a blessing, too, they give the place a tone;
In fact each child should try and have some parents of its own.

The food can be quite simple; just a sop of milk and bread
Are plenty when the kiddies know it's time to go to bed.
And every little sleepy-head will dream about the day
When he can go to work because a Man's Work is his Play.

And, oh, how sweet his life will seem, with nought to make him cross;
And he will never watch the clock and always mind the boss.
And when he thinks (as may occur), this thought will please him best:
That ninety million think the same—including *Eddie Guest.*

John Gould Fletcher

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER was born at Little Rock, Arkansas, January 3, 1886. He was educated at Harvard (1903-7) and, after spending several years in Massachusetts, moved to England, where he lived for fifteen years. In 1933 he returned to America, to the family home in Little Rock.

In 1913 Fletcher published five books of poems which he has referred to as "his literary wild oats," five small collections of experimental and faintly interesting verse. In 1914, shortly after the publication of his *Fire and Wine* (one of the early quintet), Fletcher joined the Imagists. With H. D. and Amy Lowell he became one of the leaders of this interesting movement and his contributions were among the outstanding features of the three anthologies which furnish so illuminating a record of the esthetics of the period. Coincident with the first appearance of *Some Imagist Poets,* Fletcher discarded his previous style and emerged as a decidedly less conservative and far more arresting poet with *Irradiations—Sand and Spray* (1915). This volume is full of an extraordinary fancy; imagination riots through it, though it is sometimes a bloodless and bodiless imagination. It is crowded—even overcrowded—with shifting subtleties; a brilliant, haphazard series of improvisations.

In the following book, *Goblins and Pagodas* (1916), Fletcher carries his unrelated harmonies much further. Color dominates him; the ambitious set of eleven "color symphonies" is an elaborate design in which tone and thought are summoned by color-associations, sometimes closely related, sometimes far-fetched. "It contains," says Conrad Aiken in his appreciative chapter on Fletcher in *Scepticisms,* "little of the emotion which relates to the daily life of men and women. . . . It is a sort of absolute poetry, a poetry of detached waver and brilliance, a beautiful flowering of language alone—a parthenogenesis, as if language were fertilized by itself rather than by thought or feeling. Remove the magic of phrase and sound and there is nothing left: no thread of continuity, no thought, no story, no emotion. But the magic of phrase and sound is powerful, and it takes one into a fantastic world."

In 1917 Fletcher again began to change in spirit as well as style. Emotion declared itself with surprising candor. After having appeared in the three Imagist anthologies, he sought for depths rather than surfaces; his "Lincoln" accomplished a closer relation to humanity. A moving mysticism speaks from *The Tree of Life* (1918); the more obviously native *Granite and Breakers* (1921) and *Parables* (1925) contain a prophetic note new to this poet. Though less arresting than the ones by which he is best known, the later poems reach depths which the preceding verses never attained. Although the unconscious often dictates Fletcher's fantasies, a calm music dominates them. A grave, subdued lyricism moves through *The Black Rock* (1928) and *Branches of Adam* (1926), in which the philosophy is akin to Nietzsche's while the motto might well be Blake's "How is it we have walked through fire, and yet are not consumed?" Never a popular poet, Fletcher gains—and suffers—from his original and fluctuating power. He is the poet held in a state of flux.

XXIV Elegies (1935) is a work which took Fletcher twenty years to write; the poems, one for each hour of the twenty-four, having been composed between 1914 and 1934. The dignified tone and depth of feeling are communicated throughout.

There are, as there would be in a work of this character, many tedious passages, and an American poet in the twentieth century might have spared himself an elegy on "Tristan in Brittany" and an "Elegy on Tintern Abbey." He atones for these lapses by an inflection which uses the grand manner but restrains the rhetoric. *South Star* (1941) combines experience and legend; much of it is regional in theme. *The Burning Mountain* (1946) contains twenty-four long poems, odes, and symphonies. *Life Is My Song* is Fletcher's autobiography as far as 1937; his *Selected Poems* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1939. Fletcher died by drowning on May 10, 1950.

Fletcher ranks high as a translator from the French; he made the English versions of *The Dance over Fire and Water* (by Elie Faure) in 1926 and *The Reveries of a Solitary* (by J. J. Rousseau) in 1927. *The Two Frontiers* (1930) is prophetic historical essay regarding the parallels and contrasts of America and Russia.

FROM "IRRADIATIONS"

I

Over the roof-tops race the shadows of clouds;
Like horses the shadows of clouds charge down the street.

Whirlpools of purple and gold,
Winds from the mountains of cinnabar,
Lacquered mandarin moments, palanquins swaying and balancing
Amid vermilion pavilions, against the jade balustrades,
Glint of the glittering wings of dragon-flies in the light:
Silver filaments, golden flakes settling downwards,
Rippling, quivering flutters, repulse and surrender,
The sun broidered upon the rain,
The rain rustling with the sun.

Over the roof-tops race the shadows of clouds;
Like horses the shadows of clouds charge down the street.

II

Flickering of incessant rain
On flashing pavements:
Sudden scurry of umbrellas:
Bending, recurved blossoms of the storm.

The winds come clanging and clattering
From long white highroads whipping in ribbons up summits:
They strew upon the city gusty wafts of apple-blossom,
And the rustling of innumerable translucent leaves.

Uneven tinkling, the lazy rain
Dripping from the eaves.

III

The trees, like great jade elephants,
Chained, stamp and shake 'neath the gadflies of the breeze;
The trees lunge and plunge, unruly elephants:
The clouds are their crimson howdah-canopies,

The sunlight glints like the golden robe of a Shah.
Would I were tossed on the wrinkled backs of those trees.

IV

O seeded grass, you army of little men
Crawling up the long slope with quivering, quick blades of steel:
You who storm millions of graves, tiny green tentacles of Earth,
Interlace yourselves tightly over my heart,
And do not let me go:
For I would lie here forever and watch with one eye
The pilgrimaging ants in your dull, savage jungles,
The while with the other I see the stiff lines of the slope
Break in mid-air, a wave surprisingly arrested,—
And above them, wavering, dancing, bodiless, colorless, unreal,
The long thin lazy fingers of the heat.

V

The morning is clean and blue and the wind blows up the clouds:
Now my thoughts gathered from afar
Once again in their patched armor, with rusty plumes and blunted swords,
Move out to war.

Smoking our morning pipes we shall ride two and two
Through the woods,
For our old cause keeps us together,
And our hatred is so precious not death or defeat can break it.

God willing, we shall this day meet that old enemy
Who has given us so many a good beating.
Thank God we have a cause worth fighting for,
And a cause worth losing and a good song to sing.

GREEN SYMPHONY

I

The glittering leaves of the rhododendrons
Balance and vibrate in the cool air;
While in the sky above them
White clouds chase each other.

Like scampering rabbits,
Flashes of sunlight sweep the lawn;
They fling in passing
Patterns of shadow,
Golden and green.

With long cascades of laughter,
The mating birds dart and swoop to the turf:
'Mid their mad trillings
Glints the gay sun behind the trees.

Down there are deep blue lakes:
Orange blossom droops in the water.
In the tower of the winds
All the bells are set adrift:
Jingling
For the dawn.

Thin fluttering streamers
Of breeze lash through the swaying boughs,
Palely expectant
The earth receives the slanting rain.

The glittering leaves of the rhododendron
Are shaken like blue-green blades of grass,
Flickering, cracking, falling:
Splintering in a million fragments.

The wind runs laughing up the slope
Stripping off handfuls of wet green leaves,
To fling in people's faces.
Wallowing on the daisy-powdered turf,
Clutching at the sunlight,
Cavorting in the shadow.

Like baroque pearls,
Like cloudy emeralds,
The clouds and the trees clash together;
Whirling and swirling,
In the tumult
Of the spring,
And the wind.

II

The trees splash the sky with their fingers,
A restless green rout of stars.

With whirling movement
They swing their boughs
About their stems:
Planes on planes of light and shadow
Pass among them,
Opening fanlike to fall.

The trees are like a sea;
Tossing,
Trembling,
Roaring,
Wallowing,
Darting their long green flickering fronds up at the sky,
Spotted with white blossom-spray.

The trees are roofs:
Hollow caverns of cool blue shadow,
Solemn arches
In the afternoons.
The whole vast horizon
In terrace beyond terrace,
Pinnacle above pinnacle,
Lifts to the sky
Serrated ranks of green on green.

They caress the roofs with their fingers,
They sprawl about the river to look into it;
Up the hill they come
Gesticulating challenge:
They cower together
In dark valleys;
They yearn out over the fields.

Enameled domes
Tumble upon the grass,
Crashing in ruin,
Quiet at last.

The trees lash the sky with their leaves,
Uneasily shaking their dark green manes.

III

Far let the voices of the mad wild birds be calling me,
I will abide in this forest of pines.

When the wind blows
Battling through the forest,
I hear it distantly,
The crash of a perpetual sea.

When the rain falls,
I watch the silver spears slanting downwards
From pale river-pools of sky,
Enclosed in dark fronds.

When the sun shines,
I weave together distant branches till they enclose mighty circles,
I sway to the movement of hooded summits,
I swim leisurely in deep blue seas of air.

I hug the smooth bark of stately red pillars
And with cones carefully scattered
I mark the progression of dark dial-shadows
Flung diagonally downwards through the afternoon.

This turf is not like turf:
It is a smooth dry carpet of velvet,
Embroidered with brown patterns of needles and cones.
These trees are not like trees:
They are innumerable feathery pagoda-umbrellas,
Stiffly ungracious to the wind,
Teetering on red-lacquered stems.

In the evening I listen to the winds' lisping,
While the conflagrations of the sunset flicker and clash behind me,
Flamboyant crenellations of glory amid the charred ebony boles.

In the night the fiery nightingales
Shall clash and trill through the silence:
Like the voices of mermaids crying
From the sea.

Long ago has the moon whelmed this uncompleted temple.
Stars swim like gold fish far above the black arches.

Far let the timid feet of dawn fly to catch me:
I will abide in this forest of pines:
For I have unveiled naked beauty,
And the things that she whispered to me in the darkness,
Are buried deep in my heart.

Now let the black tops of the pine-trees break like a spent wave,
Against the gray sky:
These are tombs and temples and altars sun-kindled for me.

LONDON NIGHTFALL

I saw the shapes that stood upon the clouds:
And they were tiger-breasted, shot with light,
And all of them, lifting long trumpets together,
Blew over the city, for the night to come.
Down in the street, we floundered in the mud;
Above, in endless files, gold angels came
And stood upon the clouds, and blew their horns
For night.

Like a wet petal crumpled,
Twilight fell soddenly on the weary city;
The 'buses lurched and groaned,
The shops put up their doors.

But skywards, far aloft,
The angels, vanishing, waved broad plumes of gold,
Summoning spirits from a thousand hills
To pour the thick night out upon the earth.

THE SKATERS

Black swallows swooping or gliding
In a flurry of entangled loops and curves;
The skaters skim over the frozen river.
And the grinding click of their skates as they impinge upon the surface,
Is like the brushing together of thin wing-tips of silver.

LINCOLN

I

Like a gaunt, scraggly pine
Which lifts its head above the mournful sandhills;
And patiently, through dull years of bitter silence,
Untended and uncared for, begins to grow.

Ungainly, laboring, huge,
The wind of the north has twisted and gnarled its branches;
Yet in the heat of midsummer days, when thunder-clouds ring the horizon,
A nation of men shall rest beneath its shade.

And it shall protect them all,
Hold everyone safe there, watching aloof in silence;
Until at last one mad stray bolt from the zenith
Shall strike it in an instant down to earth.

II

There was a darkness in this man; an immense and hollow darkness,
Of which we may not speak, nor share with him, nor enter;
A darkness through which strong roots stretched downwards into the earth
Towards old things;
Towards the herdman-kings who walked the earth and spoke with God,
Towards the wanderers who sought for they knew not what, and found their goal at last;
Towards the men who waited, only waited patiently when all seemed lost,
Many bitter winters of defeat;
Down to the granite of patience
These roots swept, knotted fibrous roots, prying, piercing, seeking,
And drew from the living rock and the living waters about it
The red sap to carry upwards to the sun.

Not proud, but humble,
Only to serve and pass on, to endure to the end through service;
For the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and all that bring not forth good fruit
Shall be cut down on the day to come and cast into the fire.

III

There is silence abroad in the land today,
And in the hearts of men, a deep and anxious silence;
And, because we are still at last, those bronze lips slowly open,
Those hollow and weary eyes take on a gleam of light.

Slowly a patient, firm-syllabled voice cuts through the endless silence
Like laboring oxen that drag a plow through the chaos of rude clay-fields:
"I went forward as the light goes forward in early spring,
But there were also many things which I left behind.

"Tombs that were quiet;
One, of a mother, whose brief light went out in the darkness,
One, of a loved one, the snow on whose grave is long falling,
One, only of a child, but it was mine.

"Have you forgot your graves? Go, question them in anguish,
Listen long to their unstirred lips. From your hostages to silence,
Learn there is no life without death, no dawn without sun-setting,
No victory but to Him who has given all."

IV

The clamor of cannon dies down, the furnace-mouth of the battle is silent.
The midwinter sun dips and descends, the earth takes on afresh its bright colors.
But he whom we mocked and obeyed not, he whom we scorned and mistrusted,
He has descended, like a god, to his rest.

Over the uproar of cities,
Over the million intricate threads of life wavering and crossing,
In the midst of problems we know not, tangling, perplexing, ensnaring,
Rises one white tomb alone.
Beam over it, stars.
Wrap it round, stripes—stripes red for the pain that he bore for you—
Enfold it forever, O flag, rent, soiled, but repaired through your anguish;
Long as you keep him there safe, the nations shall bow to your law.

Strew over him flowers:
Blue forget-me-nots from the north, and the bright pink arbutus
From the east, and from the west rich orange blossoms,
But from the heart of the land take the passion-flower;

Rayed, violet, dim,
With the nails that pierced, the cross that he bore and the circlet,
And beside it there lay also one lonely snow-white magnolia,
Bitter for remembrance of the healing which has passed.

A REBEL

Tie a bandage over his eyes,
And at his feet
Let rifles drearily patter
Their death-prayers of defeat.

Throw a blanket over his body,
It need no longer stir;
Truth will but stand the stronger
For all who died for her.

Now he has broken through
To his own secret place;
Which, if we dared to do,
We would have no power left to look on that dead face.

BEFORE OLYMPUS

Across the sky run streaks of white light, aching;
Across the earth the chattering grass is sprawling;
Across the sea roll troubled gleams awaking,
Across the steeps dark broken shapes are crawling.

We have been scourged with youth, a rod in pickle
To cut the hide from our own hearts. We know
The tree of life is also cursed. We heed
The silent laughter of gray gods of time.

We do not seek the lithe and brittle music
Of swords and flame. We have no more desire
For glory or contempt. The moment flies
Past us, and shouting carries its echo on.

The clank of wheels and pumps, the screech of levers
No longer now afflicts our inmost bearing;
The old wise nightingales have longer ears,
They sing the blooming of wild immortelles.

And through the desolation of great cities
As in a madhouse we go peering where
Black butterflies flit about a carcass. Words
Gallop about the sky. The earth broods like a stone.

Heaven is a blank news-sheet fixed and trembling
Between the knees of God. The grass runs crawling.
The waves of the sea their laughter are dissembling,
But who will reap them when our scythes are falling?

ADVENT

I have no more gold;
I spent it all on foolish songs,
Gold I cannot give to you.

Incense, too, I burned
To the great idols of this world;
I must come with empty hands.

Myrrh I lost
In that darker sepulcher
Where another Christ
Died for man in vain.—

I can only give myself,
I have nothing left but this.
Naked I wait, naked I fall
Into Your Hands, Your Hands.

THE BIRTH OF LUCIFER

Helpless is God in struggling with that star
  Which in derision makes His light less dim;
The evening bids the morning from afar
  To rise and conquer Him;

After nine hours of night the sun, expiring,
  Breaks the dark vessel that it fills; and then
Erect against the noon it stands, desiring
  This transience, making us both Gods and men:

Life seeks again its dark and secret places,
  Where under the sunset's leveled sword, it keeps
Its rest until rekindled in new faces,
  Old worlds awake from their too dreamless sleep.

A NEW HEAVEN

We have our hopes and fears that flout us,
We have our illusions, changeless through the years;
We have our dreams of rest after long struggle,
After our toil is finished, folded hands.
But for those who have fallen in battle,
What Heaven can there be?

Heaven is full of those who can remember
The ebbing-out of life that slowly lingered
At the dark doors of pain;
Heaven is full of those who dropped their burden
At last through weariness;
But these the War has taken
Remember naught but their own exultant youth
Filling their hearts with unaccomplished dreams:
The trumpet-call—then the swift searing darkness
Stilling the proud sad song.

How will these enter in
Our old dull Heaven?
Where we seek only to drowse at ease, unthinking,
Since we are safe at last.
Safe? For these souls who faced a thousand dangers,
And found sly Death that robbed them of their chance,
Ere it befell?
Safe—can a Heaven which is safe and painless,
Ever be Heaven to them?

Somewhere amid the clouds there is the home of thunder;
Thunder is naught to them,
It is a ball, a heavy plaything
They may kick hither and thither with their feet.
Lightning is but a toy—the flaming stars
Are endless camp-fire lights;
And for the silence of eternity,
They too on out-post duty, often heard it speak.

We have the dreams of our fat lives that lead us
To waste our lives;
We have the false hope we are serving others
When it is but ourselves we serve;
Yet these who have never lived, and whose sole service
Was but to die too soon,
Perhaps somewhere are making a new Heaven
Filled with the divine despair and joy this dead earth never knew.

AD MAJOREM HOMINIS GLORIAM

In the summit of my head
Pride and wrath their pain have shed;

In my heart's fierce furnace-fire
Knowledge struggles with desire:

At the bottom of my heart,
Love and pity sleep apart.

Wherefore should my hells be high,
And my heavens below my eye?

Why should I, who earthfixed dwell,
Sink to heaven, rise to hell?

THE LOFTY HOUSE

Go not into the lofty house;
Nor pass the pillared portico that, tall,
Looks over all;
Unless you wish to rouse
The dead. They will be ready when you call.
Thin hands will touch worn chair-backs and sad eyes
Look on you long without the least surprise.
Go not into the lofty house, at Spring or Fall.
For ghosts are happiest left
About their own affairs;
Why should you trouble these, so long bereft
Of all but loss, with loss that is not theirs?
Go not into the house, I say;
Let the pale pillars still untroubled rear
Their light against the moons that shifting, play
Against the pediment. Let windows peer
Or remain blank, close-shuttered. Let the mouse
Gnaw the old trunks in the dark attic stored
For God's sake do not go into the house,
Unless you share a past still undeplored.

William Rose Benét

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT was born at Fort Hamilton, New York Harbor, February 2, 1886. He was educated at Albany Academy and graduated from Yale in 1907. After various experiences as freelance writer, publisher's reader, magazine editor, and second lieutenant in the U. S. Air Service, Benét became Associate Editor of the New York Post's *Literary Review* in 1920. He resigned in 1924 to become one of the founders and editors of *The Saturday Review of Literature.*

The outstanding feature of Benét's verse is its extraordinary versatility; an Oriental imagination runs through his pages. Like the title-poem of his first volume, *Merchants from Cathay* (1913), Benét's volumes vibrate with a vigorous music; they are full of the sonorous stuff that one rolls out crossing wintry fields or tramping a road alone. But Benét's charm is not confined to the lift and swing of rollicking choruses. *The Falconer of God* (1914), *The Great White Wall* (1916) and *The Burglar of the Zodiac* (1918) contain decorations bold as they are brilliant; they ring with a strange and spicy music evoked from seemingly casual words. His scope is wide, although he is most at home in fancies which glow with a half-lurid, half-humorous reflection of the grotesque. There are times indeed when Benét seems to be forcing his ingenuity. The poet frequently lets his fantastic Pegasus run away with him, and what started out to be a gallop among the stars ends in a scraping of shins on the pavement. But he is saved by an acrobatic dexterity even when his energy betrays him. *Perpetual Light* (1919), a memorial to his first wife, is, naturally, a more subdued collection.

Moons of Grandeur (1920) represents an appreciable development of Benét's whimsical gift; a combination of Eastern phantasy and Western vigor. Even more arresting are those poems which appeared subsequent to this volume. A firmer line, a cooler condensation may be found in *Man Possessed* (1927), a selection of the best of the previous volumes with many new poems. "Whale" is a particularly brilliant example; "The Horse Thief" is one of the most fanciful and one of the most popular of American ballads; "Jesse James" rocks with high spirits and the true balladist's gusto; "Inscription for a Mirror in a Deserted Dwelling," written during the life of his second wife, Elinor Wylie, reflects the poet who wrote it and the poet to whom it was written, while "Sagacity" is a tribute to her memory. *Golden Fleece* (1935) is a more critical selection of Benét's poems with the addition of several new verses. *The Stairway to Surprise* (1947) discloses the enthusiasms of one who is often too high-spirited to be critical. Besides his verse, Benét is the author of two novels and several tales for children, and the editor (with Henry Seidel Canby and John Drinkwater) of *Twentieth Century Poetry* (1929). *The Dust Which Is God* (1941) is a portrait in which the autobiographical element is lightly disguised. It was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1942. Benét died May 4, 1950.

MERCHANTS FROM CATHAY

How that They came.

Their heels slapped their bumping mules; their fat chaps glowed.
Glory unto Mary, each seemed to wear a crown!
Like sunset their robes were on the wide, white road:
So we saw those mad merchants come dusting into town!

Of their Beasts,

Two paunchy beasts they rode on and two they drove before.
May the Saints all help us, the tiger-stripes they had!
And the panniers upon them swelled full of stuffs and ore!
The square buzzed and jostled at a sight so mad.

And their Boast,

They bawled in their beards, and their turbans they wried.
They stopped by the stalls with curvetting and clatter.
As bronze as the bracken their necks and faces dyed—
And a stave they sat singing, to tell us of the matter.

With its Burthen

"For your silks, to Sugarmago! For your dyes, to Isfahan!
Weird fruits from the Isle o' Lamaree.
But for magic merchandise,
For treasure-trove and spice,
Here's a catch and a carol to the great, grand Chan,
The King of all the Kings across the sea!

And Chorus.

"Here's a catch and a carol to the great, grand Chan;
For we won through the deserts to his sunset barbican;
And the mountains of his palace no Titan's reach may span
Where he wields his seignorie!

A first Stave Fearsome,

"Red-as-blood skins of panthers, so bright against the sun
On the walls of the halls where his pillared state is set
They daze with a blaze no man may look upon.
And with conduits of beverage those floors run wet.

And a second Right hard To stomach

"His wives stiff with riches, they sit before him there.
Bird and beast at his feast make song and clapping cheer.
And jugglers and enchanters, all walking on the air,
Make fall eclipse and thunder—make moons and suns appear!

And a third, Which is a Laughable Thing.

"Once the Chan, by his enemies sore-prest, and sorely spent,
Lay, so they say, in a thicket 'neath a tree
Where the howl of an owl vexed his foes from their intent:
Then that fowl for a holy bird of reverence made he!

We gape to Hear them end,

"A catch and a carol to the great, grand Chan!
Pastmasters of disasters, our desert caravan
Won through all peril to his sunset barbican,
Where he wields his seignorie!
And crowns he gave us! We end where we began:
A catch and a carol to the great, grand Chan!
The King of all the Kings across the sea!"

And are in Terror,

Those mad, antic Merchants! . . . Their stripèd beasts did beat
The market-square suddenly with hooves of beaten gold!
The ground yawned gaping and flamed beneath our feet!
They plunged to Pits Abysmal with their wealth untold!

And dread it is Devil's Work!

And some say the Chan himself in anger dealt the stroke—
For sharing of his secrets with silly, common folk:
But Holy, Blessed Mary, preserve us as you may
Lest once more those mad Merchants come chanting from Cathay!

NIGHT

Let the night keep
What the night takes,
Sighs buried deep,
Ancient heart-aches,
Groans of the lover,
Tears of the lost;

Let day discover not
All the night cost!

Let the night keep
Love's burning bliss,
Drowned in deep sleep
Whisper and kiss,

Thoughts like white flowers
In hedges of May;
Let such deep hours not
Fade with the day!

Monarch is night
Of all eldest things,
Pain and affright,
Rapturous wings;
Night the crown, night the sword
Lifted to smite.
Kneel to your overlord,
Children of night!

THE FAWN IN THE SNOW

The brown-dappled fawn
Bereft of the doe
Shivers in blue shadow
Of the glaring snow,

His whole world bright
As a jewel, and hard,
Diamond white,
Turquoise barred.

The trees are black,
Their needles gold,
Their boughs crack
In the keen cold.

The brown-dappled fawn
Bereft of the doe
Trembles and shudders
At the bright snow.

The air whets
The warm throat,
The frost frets
At the smooth coat.

Brown agate eyes
Opened round
Agonize
At the cold ground,

At the cold heaven
Enameled pale,
At the earth shriven
By the snowy gale,

At magic glitter
Burning to blind,
At beauty bitter
As an almond rind.

Fawn, fawn,
Seek for your south,
For kind dawn
With her cool mouth,

For green sod
With gold and blue
Dappled, as God
Has dappled you, . . .

The shivering fawn
Paws at the snow.
South and dawn
Lie below;

Richness and mirth,
Dearth forgiven,
A happy earth,
A warm heaven.

The sleet streams;
The snow flies;
The fawn dreams
With wide brown eyes.

WHALE

Rain, with a silver flail;
Sun, with a golden ball;
Ocean, wherein the whale
Swims minnow-small;

I heard the whale rejoice
And cynic sharks attend;
He cried with a purple voice,
"The Lord is my Friend!"

"With flanged and battering tail,
With huge and dark baleen,
He said, 'Let there be Whale
In the Cold and Green!'

"He gave me a water-spout,
A side like a harbor wall;
The Lord from cloud looked out
And planned it all.

With glittering crown atilt
He leaned on a glittering rail;
He said, 'Where Sky is spilt,
Let there be Whale.'

"Tier upon tier of wings
Blushed and blanched and bowed;
Phalanxed fiery things
Cried in the cloud;

"Million-eyed was the mirk
At the plan not understood;
But the Lord looked on His work
And saw it was good.

"He gave me marvelous girth
For the curve of back and breast,
And a tiny eye of mirth
To hide His jest.

"He made me a floating hill,
A plunging deep-sea mine.
This was the Lord's will;
The Lord is Divine.

"I magnify His name
In earthquake and eclipse,
In weltering molten flame
And wrecks of ships,

"In waves that lick the moon;
I, the plow of the sea!
I am the Lord's boon;
The Lord made me!"

The sharks barked from beneath,
As the whale rollicked and roared,
"Yes, and our grinning teeth,
Was it not the Lord?"

Then questions pattered like hail
From fishes large and small.
"The Lord is mighty," said Whale,
"The Lord made all!

"His is a mammoth jest
Life may never betray;
He has laid it up in His breast
Till Judgment Day;

"But high when combers foam
And tower their last of all,
My power shall haul you home
Through Heaven wall.

"A trumpet then in the gates,
To the ramps a thundering drum,
I shall lead you where He waits
For His Whale to come.

"Where His cloudy seat is placed
On high in an empty dome,
I shall trail the Ocean abased
In chains of foam,

"Unwieldy, squattering dread.
Where the blazing cohorts stand
At last I shall lift my head
As it feels His hand.

"Then wings with a million eyes
Before mine eyes shall quail:
'Look you, all Paradise,
I was His Whale!' "

I heard the Whale rejoice,
As he splayed the waves to a fan:
"And the Lord shall say with His Voice,
'Leviathan!'

"The Lord shall say with His Tongue,
'Now let all Heaven give hail
To my Jest when I was young,
To my very Whale.' "

Then the Whale careered in the Sea,
He floundered with flailing tail;
Flourished and rollicked he,
"Aha! Mine Empery!
For the Lord said, 'Let Whale Be!'
And there Was Whale!"

THE HORSE THIEF

There he moved, cropping the grass at the purple canyon's lip.
His mane was mixed with the moonlight that silvered his snow-white side,
For the moon sailed out of a cloud with the wake of a spectral ship.
I crouched and I crawled on my belly, my lariat coil looped wide.

Dimly and dark the mesas broke on the starry sky.
A pall covered every color of their gorgeous glory at noon.
I smelt the yucca and mesquite, and stifled my heart's quick cry,
And wormed and crawled on my belly to where he moved against the moon!

Some Moorish barb was that mustang's sire. His lines were beyond all wonder.
From the prick of his ears to the flow of his tail he ached in my throat and eyes.
Steel and velvet grace! As the prophet says, God had "clothed his neck with thunder."
Oh, marvelous with the drifting cloud he drifted across the skies!

And then I was near at hand—crouched, and balanced, and cast the coil;
And the moon was smothered in cloud, and the rope through my hands with a rip!
But somehow I gripped and clung, with the blood in my brain a-boil,—
With a turn round the rugged tree-stump there on the purple canyon's lip.

Right into the stars he reared aloft, his red eye rolling and raging.
He whirled and sunfished and lashed, and rocked the earth to thunder and flame.
He squealed like a regular devil horse. I was haggard and spent and aging—
Roped clean, but almost storming clear, his fury too fierce to tame.

And I cursed myself for a tenderfoot moon-dazzled to play the part,
But I was doubly desperate then, with the posse pulled out from town,
Or I'd never have tried it. I only knew I must get a mount and a start.
The filly had snapped her foreleg short. I had had to shoot her down.

So there he struggled and strangled, and I snubbed him around the tree.
Nearer, a little nearer—hoofs planted, and lolling tongue—
Till a sudden slack pitched me backward. He reared right on top of me.
Mother of God—that moment! He missed me . . . and up I swung.

Somehow, gone daft completely and clawing a bunch of his mane,
As he stumbled and tripped in the lariat, there I was—up and astride
And cursing for seven counties! And the mustang? *Just insane!*
Crack-bang! went the rope; we cannoned off the tree—then—gods, that ride!

A rocket—that's all, a rocket! I dug with my teeth and nails.
Why, we never hit even the high spots (though I hardly remember things),
But I heard a monstrous booming like a thunder of flapping sails
When he spread—well, *call* me a liar!—when he spread those wings, those wings!

So white that my eyes were blinded, thick-feathered and wide unfurled,
They beat the air into billows. We sailed, and the earth was gone.
Canyon and desert and mesa withered below, with the world.
And then I knew that mustang; for I—was Bellerophon!

Yes, glad as the Greek, and mounted on a horse of the elder gods,
With never a magic bridle or a fountain-mirror nigh!
My chaps and spurs and holster must have looked it? What's the odds?
I'd a leg over lightning and thunder, careering across the sky!

And forever streaming before me, fanning my forehead cool,
Flowed a mane of molten silver; and just before my thighs
(As I gripped his velvet-muscled ribs, while I cursed myself for a fool),
The steady pulse of those pinions—their wonderful fall and rise!

The bandanna I bought in Bowie blew loose and whipped from my neck.
My shirt was stuck to my shoulders and ribboning out behind.
The stars were dancing, wheeling and glancing, dipping with smirk and beck.
The clouds were flowing, dusking and glowing. We rode a roaring wind.

We soared through the silver starlight to knock at the planets' gates.
New shimmering constellations came whirling into our ken.
Red stars and green and golden swung out of the void that waits
For man's great last adventure. The Signs took shape—and then

I knew the lines of that Centaur the moment I saw him come!
The musical box of the heavens all round us rolled to a tune
That tinkled and chimed and trilled with silver sounds that struck you dumb,
As if some archangel were grinding out the music of the moon.

Melody-drunk on the Milky Way, as we swept and soared hilarious,
Full in our pathway, sudden he stood—the Centaur of the Stars,
Flashing from head and hoofs and breast! I knew him for Sagittarius.
He reared, and bent and drew his bow. He crouched as a boxer spars.

Flung back on his haunches, weird he loomed—then leapt—and the dim void lightened.
Old White Wings shied and swerved aside, and fled from the splendor-shod.
Through a flashing welter of worlds we charged. I knew why my horse was frightened.
He *had* two faces—a dog's and a man's—that Babylonian god!

Also, he followed us real as fear. Ping! went an arrow past.
My broncho buck-jumped, humping high. We plunged . . . I guess that's all!
I lay on the purple canyon's lip, when I opened my eyes at last—
Stiff and sore and my head like a drum, but I broke no bones in the fall.

So you know—and now you may string me up. Such was the way you caught me.
Thank you for letting me tell it straight, though you never could greatly care.
For I took a horse that wasn't mine! . . . But there's one the heavens brought me,
And I'll hang right happy, because I know he is waiting for me up there.

From creamy muzzle to cannon-bone, by God, he's a peerless wonder!
He is steel and velvet and furnace-fire, and death's supremest prize,
And never again shall be roped on earth that neck that is "clothed with thunder. . . ."
String me up, Dave! Go dig my grave! *I rode him across the skies!*

BRAZEN TONGUE

Quick in spite I said unkind
Words that should have struck me blind.
Flatly on my eardrums rung
The raucous echoes of my tongue.

Burnished bees in an iron hive
Seemed my wits, and scarce alive
I sat with elbows on my knees
Sick with silence like disease.

Slowly through the solid floor
I sank, till there was nothing more
Than a grease-spot of me there
Shadowed by the upright chair.

O last night I lay awake
Parrying darkness for your sake,
Like an armory glittered bright
The lilied hours of our delight!

O this morning I intended
All the virtues this has ended,
Golden as a new-coined planet!
Now I wither into granite.

Tongue, you are a tongue of fire,
Shriveling like a white-hot wire,
Blackening like a dragon's breath
Flower-fluttering fields with death.

Tongue, you are a tongue of brass
In the jawbone of an ass,
Slaying what was most divine,—
Not the reeking Philistine.

So, she dug me from my quarry;
Came and said that she was sorry;
Sprinkled me with words like myrrh;
So I sat and stared at her;

And so I climb the burning mountain
And sit beside the lava fountain,
And, white with ashes, wonder why
In the devil I am I.

JESSE JAMES

(*A Design in Red and Yellow for a Nickel Library*)

Jesse James was a two-gun man,
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
Strong-arm chief of an outlaw clan,
(*From Kansas to Illinois!*)
He twirled an old Colt forty-five;
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
They never took Jesse James alive.
(*Roll, Missouri, roll!*)

Jesse James was King of the Wes';
(*Cataracts in the Missouri!*)
He'd a di'mon' heart in his lef' breas';
(*Brown Missouri rolls!*)
He'd a fire in his heart no hurt could stifle;
(*Thunder, Missouri!*)
Lion eyes an' a Winchester rifle.
(*Missouri, roll down!*)

Jesse James rode a pinto hawse;
Come at night to a water-cawse;
Tetched with the rowel that pinto's flank;
She sprung the torrent from bank to bank.

Jesse rode through a sleepin' town;
Looked the moonlit street both up an' down;

Crack-crack-crack, the street ran flames
An' a great voice cried, "I'm Jesse James!"

Hawse an' afoot they're after Jess!
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
Spurrin' an' spurrin'—but he's gone Wes'.
(*Brown Missouri rolls!*)
He was ten foot tall when he stood in his boots;
(*Lightnin' like the Missouri!*)
More'n a match fer sich galoots.
(*Roll, Missouri, roll!*)

Jesse James rode outa the sage;
Roun' the rocks come the swayin' stage;
Straddlin' the road a giant stan's
An' a great voice bellers, "Throw up yer han's!"

Jesse raked in the di'mon' rings,
The big gold watches an' the yuther things;
Jesse divvied 'em then an' thar
With a cryin' child had lost her mar.

They're creepin'; they're crawlin'; they're stalkin' Jess;
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
They's a rumor he's gone much further Wes';
(*Roll, Missouri, roll!*)
They's word of a cayuse hitched to the bars
(*Ruddy clouds on Missouri!*)
Of a golden sunset that busts into stars.
(*Missouri, roll down!*)

Jesse James rode hell fer leather;
He was a hawse an' a man together;
In a cave in a mountain high up in air
He lived with a rattlesnake, a wolf, an' a bear.

Jesse's heart was as sof' as a woman;
Fer guts an' stren'th he was sooper-human;
He could put six shots through a woodpecker's eye
And take in one swaller a gallon o' rye.

They sought him here an' they sought him there,
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
But he strides by night through the ways of the air;
(*Brown Missouri rolls!*)
They say he was took an' they say he is dead,
(*Thunder, Missouri!*)
But he ain't—he's a sunset overhead!
(*Missouri down to the sea!*)

Jesse James was a Hercules.
When he went through the woods he tore up the trees.
When he went on the plains he smoked the groun'
An' the hull lan' shuddered fer miles aroun'.

Jesse James wore a red bandanner
That waved on the breeze like the Star Spangled Banner;
In seven states he cut up dadoes.
He's gone with the buffler an' the desperadoes.

Yes, Jesse James was a two-gun man
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
The same as when this song began;
(*From Kansas to Illinois!*)
An' when you see a sunset bust into flames
(*Lightnin' like the Missouri!*)
Or a thunderstorm blaze—that's Jesse James!
(*Hear that Missouri roll!*)

ETERNAL MASCULINE

Neither will I put myself forward as others may do,
Neither, if you wish me to flatter, will I flatter you;
I will look at you grimly, and so you will know I am true.

Neither when all do agree and lout low and salute,
And you are beguiled by the tree and devout for the fruit,
Will I seem to be aught but the following eyes of a brute.

I will stand to one side and sip of my hellebore wine,
I will snarl and deride the antics and airs of the swine;
You will glance in your pride, but I will deny you a sign.

I will squint at the moon and be peaceful because I am dead,
I will whistle a tune and be glad of the harshness I said.
O you will come soon, when the stars are a mist overhead!

You will come, with eyes fierce; you will act a defiant surprise.
Quick lightings will pierce to our hearts from the pain in our eyes,
Standing strained and averse, with the trembling of love that defies.

And then I will know, by the heartbreaking turn of your head,
My madness brought low in a hell that is spared to the dead.
The upas will grow from the poisonous words that I said;

From under its shade out to where like a statue you stand,
Without wish to evade, I will reach, I will cry with my hand,
With my spirit dismayed, with my eyes and my mouth full of sand. . . .

INSCRIPTION FOR A MIRROR IN A DESERTED DWELLING

Set silver cone to tulip flame!
The mantel mirror floats with night
Reflecting still green watery light.
The sconces glimmer. If she came
Like silence through the shadowy wall
Where walls are wading in the moon
The dark would tremble back to June.
So faintly now the moonbeams fall,
So soft this silence, that the verge
Of speech is reached. Remote and pale
As through some faint viridian veil
The lovely lineaments emerge,
The clearly amber eyes, the tint
Of pearl and faintest rose, the hair

To lacquered light, a silken snare
Of devious bronze, the tiny dint
With which her maker mocked the years
Beneath her lip imprinting praise.
Dim flower of desecrating days,
The old reflection, strange with tears,
Is gazing out upon the gloom,
Is widening eyes to find the light
In reminiscence, in the night
Of this foregone, forgotten room.

And you, the watcher, with your eyes
As wide as hers in dark distress,
Who never knew her loveliness
But guess through glass her shadowy guise,
For you around the glass I trace
This secret writing, that will burn
Like witch-fire should her shade return
To haunt you with that wistful face.
At least no gesturing figures pass;
Here is no tragic immanence
Of all the scenes of small events
That pantomimed before the glass.
No bliss, no passion, no despair,
No other actor lingers now;
The moonlight on a lifted brow
Is all,—the eyes so wide aware
Of clouds that pass with stars, and suns,
Of mystery that pales the cheek,
Of all the heart could never speak,
Of joy and pain so vivid once,
That ceased with music and the lights,
Dimming to darkness and repose. . . .
Lean then and kiss that ghostly rose
That was her face, this night of nights,—
And know the vision fled indeed,
The mirror's surface smooth and cold,
The words unbreathed, the tale untold,
The past unpiteous to your need!

SAGACITY

We knew so much; when her beautiful eyes could lighten,
Her beautiful laughter follow our phrase;
Or the gaze go hard with pain, the lips tighten,
On the bitterer days.
Oh, ours was all knowing then, all generous displaying.
Such wisdom we had to show!
And now there is merely silence, silence, silence saying
All we did not know.

Jean Starr Untermeyer

JEAN STARR was born at Zanesville, Ohio, May 13, 1886, and educated at the Putnam Seminary in the city of her birth. At sixteen she came to New York City, pursuing special studies at Columbia and married Louis Untermeyer in 1907. Except for sojourns abroad, she lived in New York.

Growing Pains (1918) is a thin book of thirty-four poems, the result of eight years' slow and critical creation. This highly selective process did much to bring the volume up to an unusual level; a severity of standards maintains the poet on an austere plane. Acutely self-analytical, there is a stern, uncompromising relentlessness toward her introspections. A sharp color sense, a surprising whimsicality, a translation of the ordinary in terms of the unexplored illumine such poems as "Sinfonia Domestica" and the much-quoted "Autumn," a celebration of domesticity which might be described as a housekeeper's paean. In the last named Mrs. Untermeyer

has reproduced her early environment with bright pungency; "Verhaeren's Flemish *genre* pictures are no better," writes Amy Lowell. Several of her purely pictorial poems establish a swift kinship between the most romantic and most prosaic objects. "High Tide," in one extended metaphor, turns the mere fact of a physical law into an arresting fancy. *Dreams Out of Darkness* (1921) is a ripening of this author's power with a richer musical undercurrent. An increase of melody is manifest on every page, possibly most striking in the unrhymed lyrics. Amy Lowell declared, "This is the very heart of a woman, naked and serious, beautiful and unashamed."

Her training as a musician (she made her début as a *Liedersinger* in Vienna and London in 1924) added to her equipment as translator of the "official" life of *Franz Schubert* by Oscar Bie in 1928. *Steep Ascent* (1927) marks a spiritual as well as poetic climax. The dominant note, as might have been foreseen, is ethical, but there is no reliance on mere religiosity. "What is most remarkable about Jean Starr Untermeyer," wrote Edmund Wilson, "is the peculiar shading and force of her style. I believe that hers is classically Hebraic. She has always seemed to me one of the few writers who have successfuly preserved in a modern language something of the authentic austerity of Jewish literature."

The poems in *Winged Child* (1936) have a new serenity, even a sly humor; they do not proceed, as did many of the others, from struggle, but from assurance. The early *vers libriste* gives way to the later formalist, even the "dissonant" rhymes of "Dew on a Dusty Heart" being cast in a sonnet. *Love and Need* (1940) assembles the four preceding volumes with the addition of twenty-one deeply thoughtful poems.

After the publication of her collected poems, Mrs. Untermeyer spent much of her time on a translation of Hermann Broch's *The Death of Virgil* (1945), a work which combines the novel and lyric poetry, history, philosophy, and stream-of-consciousness. Stephan Zweig said that the book, beyond the life and death of a poet, "reflects the problems of all ages."

HIGH TIDE

I edged back against the night.
The sea growled assault on the wave-bitten shore.
And the breakers,
Like young and impatient hounds,
Sprang with rough joy on the shrinking sand.
Sprang—but were drawn back slowly
With a long, relentless pull,
Whimpering, into the dark.

Then I saw who held them captive;
And I saw how they were bound
With a broad and quivering leash of light,
Held by the moon,
As, calm and unsmiling,
She walked the deep fields of the sky.

AUTUMN

(To My Mother)

How memory cuts away the years,
And how clean the picture comes
Of autumn days, brisk and busy;
Charged with keen sunshine.
And you, stirred with activity,
The spirit of those energetic days.

There was our back-yard,
So plain and stripped of green,
With even the weeds carefully pulled away
From the crooked red bricks that made the walk,
And the earth on either side so black.

Autumn and dead leaves burning in the sharp air.
And winter comforts coming in like a pageant.
I shall not forget them:—
Great jars pompous with the raw green of pickles,
Standing in a solemn row across the back of the porch,
Exhaling the pungent dill;
And in the very center of the yard,
You, tending the great catsup kettle of gleaming copper,
Where fat, red tomatoes bobbed up and down
Like jolly monks in a drunken dance.
And there were bland banks of cabbages that came by the wagon-load,
Soon to be cut into delicate ribbons
Only to be crushed by the heavy, wooden stompers.
Such feathery whiteness—to come to kraut!
And after, there were grapes that hid their brightness under a gray dust,
Then gushed thrilling, purple blood over the fire;
And enameled crab-apples that tricked with their fragrance
But were bitter to taste.
And there were spicy plums and ill-shaped quinces,
And long string beans floating in pans of clear water
Like slim, green fishes.
And there was fish itself,
Salted, silver herring from the city. . . .

And you moved among these mysteries,
Absorbed and smiling and sure;
Stirring, tasting, measuring,
With the precision of a ritual.
I like to think of you in your years of power—
You, now so shaken and so powerless—
High priestess of your home.

SINFONIA DOMESTICA

When the white wave of a glory that is hardly I
  Breaks through my mind and washes it clean,
I know at last the meaning of my ecstasy,
  And know at last my wish and what it can mean.

To have sped out of life that night—to have vanished
  Not as a vision, but as something touched, yet grown
Radiant as the moonlight, circling my naked shoulder;
  Wrapped in a dream of beauty, longed for, but never known.

For how with our daily converse, even the sweet sharing
  Of thoughts, of food, of home, of common life,
How shall I be that glory, that last desire
  For which men struggle? Is Romance in a wife?

Must I bend a heart that is bowed to breaking
  With a frustration, inevitable and slow,
And bank my flame to a low hearth fire, believing
  You will come for warmth and life to its tempered glow?

Shall I mold my hope anew, to one of service,
  And tell my uneasy soul, "Behold, this is good"?
And meet you (if we do meet), even at Heaven's threshold,
  With ewer and basin, with clothing and with food?

COUNTRY OF NO LACK

A lilac ribbon is unbound,
A band of gradual rose untied,
And lo, the glowing book of day
Is opened on the mountainside.

What curves salute, what colors sound
From this so-rich-illumined scroll,
For whose perusal one need pay
Only a just delight as toll.

The brook's clean silver set in stones
Is balanced by the silver sheen
Of clean-stripped logs, which in a field
Seem floating down a river of green.

Furze are not flowers, but the tones
Of sunlight that a bird has sung,
And broken purples but the yield
Of hoarded twilights, meadow-flung.

Against a heaven's faithful blue,
A fadeless forest lifts its pines,
From shadows deepening into black
A slim and shadowy road inclines.

Upon the printed air, how true
Stand lizard, lake and leaf, page-still.
Here in the country of no lack,
What care can move, what grief can chill?

DEW ON A DUSTY HEART

If come into this world again I must
And take unto myself another form,
Oh, let it be unblemished by a mist
Of imperfections or the line infirm.
And let it shapen to a secret wish
Untouched, untinctured, even by a dram
Of earthiness; nor let the fretted wash
Of passion fray the fine-immaculate dream.

Oh, let me come back as a melody
New as the air it takes, no taint of ill
To halt such lovely flying as birds do
Going from infinite nought to infinite all.
Giving to dusty hearts that lag at even
The dewy rest they dream of and call heaven.

FALSE ENCHANTMENT

Crossing there under the trees with leaden pace,
Set upon those whom Saturn has in pawn,
Reading a book and brooding with shut face
Now on a Sunday near the croquet lawn,
The woman set apart and doubly lost
Walks in her legend, which is hanging down
About her stately limbs like a heavy gown—
A fabled figure from a page embossed.

She reads the word and she has lived the life.
Isolde was less desolate than she,
Mourned by the shepherd with his lonely fife,
Fulfilled in death with Tristan by the sea.
She does not hear the mallet strike the ball,
Nor how the motor-car frets at the gate;
Weighing her irksome years against her fate
She waits with impatient heart a certain call.

And since she cannot die, it must be love
Will come to tear her from this memory-mesh,
And find the elements she is fashioned of,
Permit her to evaporate from the flesh
Desire that balks at change. The moon at crescent
Is younger than herself, though casual eye
Sees her stream-linear as a plane on sky.
How shall she be un-mythed into the present?

Her will that argues to accept her lot
Is outdebated by her clamoring blood
That will not check its race, or cool, or clot,
Or shelter in a pool its heedless flood.
Her will says: "Let me rest awhile and keep
This body in chaste readiness for death."
The blood with each revolving of the breath
Cries: "Who will come to kiss me from this sleep?"

H. D.

HILDA DOOLITTLE was born September 10, 1886, at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. When she was still a child, her father became Director of the Flower Observatory and the family moved to a suburb in the outskirts of Philadelphia. Hilda Doolittle attended a private school in West Philadelphia; entered Bryn Mawr College in 1904; and went abroad, for what was intended to be a short sojourn, in 1911. After a visit to Italy and France she came to London, joined Ezra Pound, and helped to organize the Imagists. She married one of the original group, Richard Aldington,

the English poet and novelist, whom she later divorced. Her work (signed "H. D.") began to appear in a few magazines and its unusual quality was recognized at once. Remaining for a while in London, she became one of the leaders of the movement, creating through a chiseled verse her flawless evocations of Greek poetry and sculpture. In 1920 she made a long-deferred visit to America, settling on the Californian coast, returning the following year to England. Since 1921 H. D. has lived in London and in a small town in Switzerland on the shore of Lake Geneva.

Her first collection, *Sea Garden,* appeared in 1916; an interval of five years elapsed before the publication of her second volume, *Hymen,* which was printed simultaneously in England and America in 1921. These volumes showed H. D. as the most important of her group. She was the only one who steadfastly held to the letter as well as the spirit of its *credo.* She was, in fact, the only true Imagist. Her poems are like a set of Tanagra figurines. Here, at first glance, the effect is chilling—beauty seems held in a frozen gesture. But it is in this very fixation of light, color and emotion that she achieves intensity. What at first seemed static becomes fluent; the arrested moment glows with a quivering tension.

Observe the poem entitled "Heat." Here, in the fewest possible words, is something beyond the description of heat—here is the effect of it. In these lines one feels the weight and solidity of a midsummer afternoon. So in "The Islands" a propulsion of feeling hurries forward the syllables balancing on light and dark vowels, and what might have been only a list of antique names becomes an outcry. Her efforts to draw the contemporary world are less happy. H. D. is best in her reflections of clear-cut loveliness in a quietly pagan world; in most of her moods, she seems less a modern writer than an inspired anachronism.

Heliodora and Other Poems appeared in 1924. So much had already been written concerning the form of H. D.'s poetry that it was no longer necessary to expatiate on the unique features of her metric. Even those least impressed by the program of the Imagists readily conceded her exquisite if oversubtle flavor, the stripped purity of her line, the precision of her epithets. But the most apparent feature of *Heliodora* —even more noticeable than its beauties of form—is its intensity. A freely declared passion radiates from lines which are at once ecstatic and austere. Even the most casual reading must convince one that this poet is not, as she first seemed to us, a Greek statue faintly flushed with life, a delightful but detached relic of another world. This is a woman responsive to color and pain, aroused by loveliness, shocked by betrayal, affected by all those manifestations which are too old to be timely, too fresh to be "antique."

Practically all of H. D.'s previous volumes were assembled in *Collected Poems* (1925) which contains not only her original work but the spirited translations from the Odyssey and her flexible expansions of fragmentary phrases of Sappho. A play, *Hippolytus Temporizes,* appeared in 1927. In the later works it is interesting to trace the tightening of form, the approximation of more regular structure, even the introduction of half-candid, half-concealed rhyme.

Red Roses for Bronze (1932) stresses the note of personal emotion, the emotion of love once requited but now unreturned. The poetry is more weighted than before, less dependent on decorations. *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944), *Tribute to the*

Angels (1945), and *The Flowering of the Rod* (1946) form a war trilogy. The idiom, especially in the last, is clipped, colloquial, and sharply effective.

H. D.'s prose is somewhat more derivative, bearing overtones of Gertrude Stein, but it rises above its influences. *Palimpsest* (1926) and *Hedylus* (1928) embody a poet's prose, the former a triptych of interrelated tragedies, actual and intuitive.

OREAD

Whirl up, sea—
Whirl your pointed pines.
Splash your great pines
On our rocks.
Hurl your green over us—
Cover us with your pools of fir.

PEAR TREE

Silver dust
lifted from the earth,
higher than my arms reach,
you have mounted.
O silver,
higher than my arms reach
you front us with great mass;
no flower ever opened
so staunch a white leaf,
no flower ever parted silver
from such rare silver;
O white pear,
your flower-tufts,
thick on the branch,
bring summer and ripe fruits
in their purple hearts.

HEAT

O wind, rend open the heat,
cut apart the heat,
rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop
through this thick air—
fruit cannot fall into heat
that presses up and blunts
the points of pears
and rounds the grapes.

Cut through the heat—
plow through it,
turning it on either side
of your path.

ORCHARD

I saw the first pear
as it fell—
the honey-seeking, golden-banded,
the yellow swarm,
was not more fleet than I,
(spare us from loveliness!)
and I fell prostrate,
crying:
you have flayed us with your blossoms,
spare us the beauty
of fruit-trees!

The honey-seeking
paused not;
the air thundered their song,
and I alone was prostrate.

O rough-hewn
god of the orchard,
I bring you an offering—
do you, alone unbeautiful,
son of the god,
spare us from loveliness:

these fallen hazel-nuts,
stripped late of their green sheaths,
grapes, red-purple,
their berries
dripping with wine;
pomegranates already broken,
and shrunken figs,
and quinces untouched,
I bring you as offering.

SONG

You are as gold
as the half-ripe grain
that merges to gold again,
as white as the white rain
that beats through
the half-opened flowers
of the great flower tufts
thick on the black limbs
of an Illyrian apple bough.
Can honey distill such fragrance
as your bright hair—
for your face is as fair as rain;
yet as rain that lies clear
on white honey-comb
lends radiance to the white wax,
so your hair on your brow
casts light for a shadow.

FROM "LET ZEUS RECORD"

Stars wheel in purple, yours is not so rare
as Hesperus, nor yet so great a star
as bright Aldebaran or Sirius,
nor yet the stained and brilliant one of War;

stars turn in purple, glorious to the sight;
yours is not gracious as the Pleiads are,
nor as Orion's sapphires, luminous;

yet disenchanted, cold, imperious face,
when all the others, blighted, reel and fall,
your star, steel-set, keeps lone and frigid tryst
to freighted ships baffled in wind and blast.

LAIS

Let her who walks in Paphos
take the glass,
let Paphos take the mirror
and the work of frosted fruit,
gold apples set
with silver apple-leaf,
white leaf of silver
wrought with vein of gilt.

Let Paphos lift the mirror;
let her look
into the polished center of the disk.
Let Paphos take the mirror:
did she press
flowerlet of flame-flower
to the lustrous white
of the white forehead?
Did the dark veins beat
a deeper purple
than the wine-deep tint
of the dark flower?

Did she deck black hair,
one evening, with the winter-white

flower of the winter-berry?
Did she look (reft of her lover)
at a face gone white
under the chaplet
of white virgin-breath?

Lais, exultant, tyrannizing Greece,
Lais who kept her lovers in the porch,
lover on lover waiting
(but to creep
where the robe brushed the threshold
where still sleeps Lais),
so she creeps, Lais,
to lay her mirror at the feet
of her who reigns in Paphos.

Lais has left her mirror,
for she sees no longer in its depth
the Lais' self
that laughed exultant,
tyrannizing Greece.

Lais has left her mirror,
for she weeps no longer,
finding in its depth
a face, but other
than dark flame and white
feature of perfect marble.

Lais has left her mirror
(so one wrote)
to her who reigns in Paphos;
Lais who laughed a tyrant over Greece,
Lais who turned the lovers from the porch,
that swarm for whom now
Lais has no use;
Lais is now no lover of the glass,
seeing no more the face as once it was,
wishing to see that face and finding this.

FROM "HALCYON"

("Bird—loved of sea-men")

I'm not here,
everything's vague, blurred everywhere,
then you are blown
into a room;

the sea comes where a carpet
laid red and purple,
and where the edge showed marble
there is sea-weed;

sedge breaks the wall
where the couch stands,
the hands of strange people,
twisting tassel and fringe

of rich cloth, become clear;
I understand the people,
they aren't hateful but dear;
over all

a shrill wind, clear sky;
O why, why, why
am I fretful, insecure,
why am I vague, unsure

until you are blown,
unexpected, small, quaint, unnoticeable,
a gray gull
into a room.

SONGS FROM CYPRUS

I

Gather for festival
bright weed and purple shell;
make on the holy sand
pattern as one might make
who tread with rose-red heel
a measure
pleasureful;

such as those songs we made
in rose and myrtle shade
where rose and myrtle fell
(shell-petal or rose-shell)
on just such holy sand;
ah, the song
musical;

give me white rose and red;
find me in citron glade
citron of precious weight,
spread gold before her feet,
ah, weave the citron flower;
hail, goddess
beautiful.

II

Where is the nightingale,
in what myrrh-wood and dim?
ah, let the night come black,
for we would conjure back
all that enchanted him,
all that enchanted him.

Where is the bird of fire?
in what packed hedge of rose?
in what roofed ledge of flower?
no other creature knows
what magic lurks within,
what magic lurks within.

Bird, bird, bird, bird, we cry,
hear, pity us in pain;
hearts break in the sunlight,
hearts break in daylight rain,
only night heals again,
only night heals again.

HOLY SATYR

Most holy Satyr,
like a goat,
with horns and hooves
to match thy coat
of russet brown,
I make leaf-circlets
and a crown of honey-flowers
for thy throat;
where the amber petals
drip to ivory,
I cut and slip
each stiffened petal
in the rift
of carven petal;
honey horn
has wed the bright
virgin petal of the white
flower cluster: lip to lip
let them whisper,
let them lilt, quivering.

Most holy Satyr,
like a goat,
hear this our song,
accept our leaves,
love-offering,
return our hymn,
like echo fling
a sweet song,
answering note for note.

THE ISLANDS

I

What are the islands to me,
what is Greece,
what is Rhodes, Samos, Chios,
what is Paros facing west,
what is Crete?

What is Samothrace,
rising like a ship,
what is Imbros rending the storm-waves
with its breast?

What is Naxos, Paros, Milos,
what the circle about Lycia,
what the Cyclades'
white necklace?

What is Greece—
Sparta, rising like a rock,
Thebes, Athens,
what is Corinth?

What is Euboia
with its island violets,
what is Euboia, spread with grass,
set with swift shoals,
what is Crete?

What are the islands to me,
what is Greece?

II

What can love of land give to me
that you have not—
what do the tall Spartans know,
and gentler Attic folk?

What has Sparta and her women
more than this?

What are the islands to me
if you are lost—
what is Naxos, Tinos, Andros,

and Delos, the clasp
of the white necklace?

III

What can love of land give to me
that you have not,
what can love of strife break in me
that you have not?

Though Sparta enter Athens,
Thebes wrack Sparta,
each changes as water,
salt, rising to wreak terror
and falling back.

IV

"What has love of land given to you
that I have not?"

I have questioned Tyrians
where they sat
on the black ships,
weighted with rich stuffs;
I have asked the Greeks
from the white ships,
and Greeks from ships whose hulks
lay on the wet sand, scarlet
with great beaks.
I have asked bright Tyrians
and tall Greeks—
"what has love of land given you?"
And they answered—"peace."

V

But Beauty is set apart,
beauty is cast by the sea,
a barren rock,
beauty is set about
with wrecks of ships,
upon our coast, death keeps
the shallows—death waits
clutching toward us
from the deeps.

Beauty is set apart;
the winds that slash its beach,
swirl the coarse sand
upward toward the rocks.

Beauty is set apart
from the islands
and from Greece.

VI

In my garden
the winds have beaten
the ripe lilies;
in my garden, the salt
has wilted the first flakes
of young narcissus,
and the lesser hyacinth,
and the salt has crept
under the leaves of the white hyacinth.

In my garden,
even the wind-flowers lie flat,
broken by the wind at last.

VII

What are the islands to me
if you are lost,
what is Paros to me
if your eyes draw back,
what is Milos
if you take fright of beauty,
terrible, tortuous, isolated,
a barren rock?

What is Rhodes, Crete,
what is Paros facing west,
what, white Imbros?

What are the islands to me
if you hesitate,
what is Greece if you draw back
from the terror
and cold splendor of song
and its bleak sacrifice?

HELEN

All Greece hates
the still eyes in the white face,
the luster as of olives
where she stands,
and the white hands.

All Greece reviles
the wan face when she smiles,
hating it deeper still
when it grows wan and white,
remembering past enchantments
and past ills.

Greece sees unmoved,
God's daughter, born of love,

the beauty of cool feet
and slenderest knees,
could love indeed the maid,
only if she were laid,
white ash amid funereal cypresses.

LETHE

Nor skin nor hide nor fleece
Shall cover you,
Nor curtain of crimson nor fine
Shelter of cedar-wood be over you,
Nor the fir-tree
Nor the pine.

Nor sight of whin nor gorse
Nor river-yew,
Nor fragrance of flowering bush,
Nor wailing of reed-bird to waken you.
Nor of linnet
Nor of thrush.

Nor word nor touch nor sight
Of lover, you
Shall long through the night but for this:
The roll of the full tide to cover you
Without question,
Without kiss.

John Hall Wheelock

JOHN HALL WHEELOCK was born at Far Rockaway, Long Island, in 1886. He was graduated from Harvard, finished his studies at the Universities of Gottingen and Berlin, 1908-10, and, as a publisher, lived in New York.

Wheelock's first book is, in many respects, his best. *The Human Fantasy* (1911) sings with the voice of youth—youth vibrantly, even vociferously, in love with existence. Rhapsodic and obviously influenced by Whitman and Henley, these lines beat bravely; headlong ecstasy rises from pages whose refrain is "Splendid it is to live and glorious to die." *The Beloved Adventure* (1912) is less powerful, but scarcely less passionate. Lyric after lyric moves by its athletic affirmation.

Wheelock's subsequent volumes are less individualized. *Love and Liberation* (1913) and *Dust and Light* (1919) are long dilutions of the earlier strain. The music is still here, but most of the vigor has gone. Wheelock has allowed himself to be exploited by his own fluency and the result is lyrical monotony. Yet vast stretches of two hundred and thirty unvaried love-songs cannot bury a dozen vivid poems which lie, half-concealed, in a waste of verbiage.

The Black Panther (1922) furnishes additional proof that though Wheelock's star may have waned it did not die. In this volume the poet's gift assumes greater dignity; the flashing athleticism has matured into a steady fervor. With the exception of a few innocuous songs, there is revealed a graver music than Wheelock has accomplished. In the longer poems, most effectively in "Earth," he expresses the paradox of conflict and consent: the philosophy of the single Consciousness which reconciles terror and tenderness, murder and laughter, dawn and destruction—"Life, the dreadful, the magnificent."

The Bright Doom (1927), the smallest of Wheelock's volumes, is full of his best and worst. No poem is bad; no poem is quite good enough. The total effect is of desperate sincerity lost in foggy generalities, genuine poetry floundering in a wash of rhetoric. The early verse, less notable in idea, is more persuasive in image, more winning as music.

SUNDAY EVENING IN THE COMMON

Look—on the topmost branches of the world
The blossoms of the myriad stars are thick;
Over the huddled rows of stone and brick,
A few, sad wisps of empty smoke are curled
Like ghosts, languid and sick.

One breathless moment now the city's moaning
Fades, and the endless streets seem vague and dim;
There is no sound around the whole world's rim,
Save in the distance a small band is droning
Some desolate old hymn.

Van Wyck, how often have we been together
When this same moment made all mysteries clear;
—The infinite stars that brood above us here,
And the gray city in the soft June weather,
So tawdry and so dear!

TRIUMPH OF LOVE

I shake my hair in the wind of morning
For the joy within me that knows no bounds,
I echo backward the vibrant beauty
Wherewith heaven's hollow lute resounds.

I shed my song on the feet of all men,
On the feet of all shed out like wine,
On the whole and the hurt I shed my bounty,
The beauty within me that is not mine.

Turn not away from my song, nor scorn me,
Who bear the secret that holds the sky
And the stars together, but know within me
There speaks another more wise than I.

Nor spurn me here from your heart, to hate me!
Yet hate me here if you will—not so
Myself you hate, but the Love within me
That loves you, whether you would or no.

Here love returns with love to the lover,
And beauty unto the heart thereof,
And hatred unto the heart of the hater,
Whether he would or no, with love!

NIRVANA

Sleep on, I lie at heaven's high oriels,
  Over the stars that murmur as they go
  Lighting your lattice-window far below;
And every star some of the glory spells
  Whereof I know.

I have forgotten you long, long ago,
  Like the sweet silver singing of thin bells
Vanished, or music fading faint and low.
  Sleep on, I lie at heaven's high oriels,
Who loved you so.

LOVE AND LIBERATION

Lift your arms to the stars
And give an immortal shout;
Not all the veils of darkness
Can put your beauty out!

You are armed with love, with love,
Nor all the powers of Fate
Can touch you with a spear,
Nor all the hands of hate.

What of good and evil,
Hell and Heaven above—
Trample them with love!
Ride over them with love!

EARTH

Grasshopper, your fairy song
And my poem alike belong
To the dark and silent earth
From which all poetry has birth.
All we say and all we sing
Is but as the murmuring
Of that drowsy heart of hers
When from her deep dream she stirs:
If we sorrow, or rejoice,
You and I are but her voice.

Deftly does the dust express
In mind her hidden loveliness,
And from her cool silence stream
The cricket's cry and Dante's dream;
For the earth that breeds the trees
Breeds cities too, and symphonies.
Equally her beauty flows
Into a savior, or a rose—
Looks down in dream, and from above
Smiles at herself in Jesus' love.
Christ's love and Homer's art
Are but the workings of her heart;
Through Leonardo's hand she seeks
Herself, and through Beethoven speaks
In holy thunderings around
The awful message of the ground.

The serene and humble mold
Does in herself all selves enfold—
Kingdoms, destinies, and creeds,
Great dreams, and dauntless deeds,
Science that metes the firmament,
The high, inflexible intent
Of one for many sacrificed—
Plato's brain, the heart of Christ;
All love, all legend, and all lore
Are in the dust forevermore.

Even as the growing grass,
Up from the soil religions pass,
And the field that bears the rye
Bears parables and prophecy.
Out of the earth the poem grows
Like the lily, or the rose;
And all man is, or yet may be,
Is but herself in agony
Toiling up the steep ascent
Toward the complete accomplishment
When all dust shall be, the whole
Universe, one conscious soul.
Yea, the quiet and cool sod
Bears in her breast the dream of God.

If you would know what earth is, scan
The intricate, proud heart of man,
Which is the earth articulate,
And learn how holy and how great,
How limitless and how profound
Is the nature of the ground—
How without terror or demur
We may entrust ourselves to her
When we are wearied out and lay
Our faces in the common clay.

For she is pity, she is love,
All wisdom, she, all thoughts that move
About her everlasting breast
Till she gathers them to rest:
All tenderness of all the ages,
Seraphic secrets of the sages,

Vision and hope of all the seers,
All prayer, all anguish, and all tears
Are but the dust that from her dream
Awakes, and knows herself supreme—
Are but earth, when she reveals
All that her secret heart conceals
Down in the dark and silent loam,
Which is ourselves, asleep, at home.
Yea, and this, my poem, too,
Is part of her as dust and dew,
Wherein herself she doth declare
Through my lips, and say her prayer.

THIS QUIET DUST

Here in my curving hands I cup
This quiet dust; I lift it up.
Here is the mother of all thought;
Of this the shining heavens are wrought,
The laughing lips, the feet that rove,
The face, the body, that you love:
Mere dust, no more, yet nothing less,
And this has suffered consciousness,
Passion, and terror, this again
Shall suffer passion, death, and pain.

For, as all flesh must die, so all,
Now dust, shall live. 'Tis natural;
Yet hardly do I understand—
Here in the hollow of my hand
A bit of God Himself I keep,
Between two vigils fallen asleep.

Roy Helton

ROY (ADDISON) HELTON was born at Washington, D. C., in 1886 and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1908. He studied art—and found he was color-blind. He spent two years at inventions—and found he had no business sense. After a few more experiments he became a schoolmaster in West Philadelphia and at the Penn Charter School in Germantown.

Helton's first volume, *Youth's Pilgrimage* (1915), is a strange, mystical affair, full of vague symbolism and purple patches. *Outcasts in Beulah Land* (1918) is entirely different in theme and treatment. This is a much starker verse, direct and sharp in its effect. Helton became intimately connected with primitive backgrounds, spending a great part of his time in the mountains of South Carolina and Kentucky. His later verse in *Lonesome Water* (1930) shows the influence of this intimacy. Its spirit creeps into his fanciful prose, *The Early Adventures of Peacham Grew* (1925), a story which unites quaintness and tragedy in a delicate chronicle of boyhood. Strangeness of another sort fills *Nitchie Tilley* (1934), a later novel.

"Old Christmas Morning" is a Kentucky Mountain dialogue in which Helton has introduced an element rare in modern verse. Told with the directness of an old ballad, this drama of the night twelve days after the universally celebrated Christmas unfolds a ghost story in which the surprise is heightened by the skillful suspensions. "Lonesome Water" is a direct communication in the vernacular. Asked to furnish a glossary, Helton wrote: "I have tried to use only the common and most general mountain words, despising that preciosity of folk-talk dug out and patched together which is now a fashion. . . . *Sang:* a universal Southernmountain word for Gin Seng wherever the weed is grown or picked. *Trace:* a trail or footpath. *Pretties:* any sort of toy or decoration. *Uses:* lives."

OLD CHRISTMAS MORNING

(A Kentucky Mountain Ballad)

"Where are you coming from, Lomey Carter,
So airly over the snow?
And what's them pretties you got in your hand,
And where you aiming to go?

"Step in, Honey: Old Christmas morning
I ain't got nothing much;
Maybe a bite of sweetness and corn bread,
A little ham meat and such.

"But come in, Honey! Sally Anne Barton's
Hungering after your face.
Wait till I light my candle up:
Set down! There's your old place.

"Now where you been so airly this morning?"

"Graveyard, Sally Anne.
Up by the trace in the salt lick meadows
Where Taulbe kilt my man."

"Taulbe ain't to home this morning . . .
I can't scratch up a light:
Dampness gets on the heads of the matches;
But I'll blow up the embers bright."

"Needn't trouble. I won't be stopping:
Going a long ways still."

"You didn't see nothing, Lomey Carter,
Up on the graveyard hill?"

"What should I see there, Sally Anne Barton?"

"Well, sperits do walk last night."

"There were an elder bush a-blooming
While the moon still give some light."

"Yes, elder bushes, they bloom, Old Christmas,
And critters kneel down in their straw.
Anything else up in the graveyard?"

"One thing more I saw:
I saw my man with his head all bleeding
Where Taulbe's shot went through."

"What did he say?"

"He stooped and kissed me."

"What did he say to you?"

"Said, Lord Jesus forguv your Taulbe;
But he told me another word;
He said it soft when he stooped and kissed me.
That were the last I heard."

"Taulbe ain't to home this morning."

"I know that, Sally Anne,
For I kilt him, coming down through the meadow
Where Taulbe kilt my man.

"I met him upon the meadow trace
When the moon were fainting fast,
And I had my dead man's rifle gun
And kilt him as he come past."

"But I heard two shots."

" 'Twas his was second:
He shot me 'fore he died:
You'll find us at daybreak, Sally Anne Barton:
I'm laying there dead at his side."

LONESOME WATER

Drank lonesome water:
Warn't but a tad then
Up in a laurel thick
Digging for sang;
Came on a place where
The stones were hollow,
Something below them
Tinkled and rang.

Dug whar I heard it
Drippling below me:
Should a knowed better,
Should a been wise;
Leant down and drank it,
Clutching and gripping
The over hung cliv
With the ferns in my eyes.

Tasted of heart leaf
And that smells the sweetest,
Pawpaw and spice bush
And wild brier rose;
Must a been counting
The heels of the spruce pines,
And neighboring round
Whar angelica grows.

I'd drunk lonesome water,
I knowed in a minute:
Never larnt nothing
From then till today:
Nothing worth larning
Nothing worth knowing,
I'm bound to the hills
And I can't get away.

Mean sort of dried up old
Ground-hoggy fellow,
Laying out cold here
Watching the sky;
Pore as a hipporwill,
Bent like a grass blade;
Counting up stars
Till they count too high.

I know whar the gray foxes
Uses up yander:
Know what will cure you
Of tisic and chills,
But I never been way from here,
Never got going;
I've drunk lonesome water.
I'm bound to the hills.

Marianne Moore

MARIANNE MOORE was born in St. Louis, Missouri, November 15, 1887. She received her B.A. from Bryn Mawr College in 1909; taught stenography at the United States Indian school at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, from 1911 to 1915; was an assistant in the Hudson Park Branch of the New York Public Library, and editor of *The Dial* from 1925 to its demise in 1929.

It was not until 1921 that a few of her friends "pirated" her work; without her coöperation, *Poems* was published in that year by *The Egoist Press*. Three years later she received the Dial Award of two thousand dollars for "distinguished service to American letters." *Observations* (1924), including the early poems as well as some new ones, appeared at the same time.

Miss Moore's work is frankly puzzling, not only to the disinterested reader, but to the student of modern poetry. Although her early verses present no difficulties, her more characteristic lines seem to erect a barrier of jagged clauses, barbed quotations and suspicious barriers between herself and her audience. It has been said that Miss Moore's writing is "objectivist," and the title, *Observations,* suggests that she has, as she herself has said, "an exaggerated tendency to visualize." Her versification is equally strange. Lacking music and verbal sensuousness, its origins seem to be prose. Moreover, she makes a pattern not by flexible measures, but by strict syllables. The results are often rigid and tend to dryness. But she is so sensitive "a literalist of the imagination" and her prosody is so unique that she has expanded the gamut of poetry.

Selected Poems (1935), with a laudatory introduction by T. S. Eliot, and *What Are Years?* (1941) emphasize the distinction of Miss Moore's talents. Mathematically precise, many of the poems are problems which the author poses but never fails to solve, a kind of witty and ironic geometry. Largely concerned with oddities, queer animals, inanimate rococo objects, and disjointed phrases, her poems are triumphs of sensibility—"imaginary gardens with real toads in them." Their fastidiousness is sometimes a fault. "Lacking resonance, belonging to an outlook that has to break things into small pieces to see them," wrote Clement Greenberg, "Miss Moore makes only esthetic discriminations; otherwise everything seems to exist on the same single plane. It is a kind of esthetic pantheism." But Greenberg, conceding that Miss Moore's poetry delights even when it irritates, concludes that her exact quality "is that of felicity in the purest and most difficult sense." Variations on trivial themes are embellished with baroque structures and heightened with curiously embedded quotations. Her images are unforgettable. The lizard is a "nervous naked sword on little feet"; the elephant is "black earth preceded by a tendril"; the snake has "hypodermic teeth"; the pangolin is an armored animal whose overlapping scales have "spruce-cone regularity," he is a "near artichoke," a "night miniature artist-engineer."

Regarding the charge that she makes too frequent use of quotations, Miss Moore appended "A Note on the Notes" to *What Are Years?,* stating that in everything she has written since the early *Observations* there are lines "in which the chief in-

terest is borrowed, and since I have not been able to outgrow this hybrid method of composition, acknowledgments seem only honest." Like Eliot, Miss Moore has made the borrowings her own, although, unlike Eliot, she scrupulously puts her quotations between inverted commas. Paradoxically enough, no poet owes more to more sources than Miss Moore, and yet no author is more original.

Nevertheless (1944) is a book of only fourteen pages containing six poems. As before, the odd structures are outstanding, as are the rhyming of accented with unaccented syllables, and the wry "nature poems." But even more noticeable is the increase in warmth and human sympathy; "In Distrust of Merits" was hailed by many as the most eloquent and most compassionate poem of the Second World War. At her best, in her quaintly angled reflections, Miss Moore presents a kind of analyzed memory, a mind precise and persuasive.

A TALISMAN

Under a splintered mast,
torn from the ship and cast
near her hull,

a stumbling shepherd found,
embedded in the ground,
a sea-gull

of lapis lazuli,
a scarab of the sea,
with wings spread—

curling its coral feet,
parting its beak to greet
men long dead.

THAT HARP YOU PLAY SO WELL

O David, if I had
Your power, I should be glad—
In harping, with the sling,
In patient reasoning!

Blake, Homer, Job, and you,
Have made old wine-skins new.
Your energies have wrought
Stout continents of thought.

But, David, if the heart
Be brass, what boots the art
Of exorcising wrong,
Of harping to a song?

The scepter and the ring
And every royal thing
Will fail. Grief's lustiness
Must cure the harp's distress.

TO A STEAM ROLLER

The illustration
is nothing to you without the application.
You lack half wit. You crush all the particles down
into close conformity, and then walk back and forth on them.

Sparkling chips of rock
are crushed down to the level of the parent block.
Were not "impersonal judgment in esthetic
matters, a metaphysical impossibility," you

might fairly achieve
it. As for butterflies, I can hardly conceive
of one's attending upon you; but to question
the congruence of the complement is vain, if it exists.

ENGLAND

with its baby rivers and little towns, each with its abbey or its cathedral;
  with voices—one voice perhaps, echoing through the transept—the
criterion of suitability and convenience: and Italy with its equal
  shores—contriving an epicureanism from which the grossness has been

extracted: and Greece with its goats and its gourds, the nest of modified illusions:
  and France, the "chrysalis of the nocturnal butterfly" in
whose products, mystery of construction diverts one from what was originally one's
  object—substance at the core: and the East with its snails, its emotional

shorthand and jade cockroaches, its rock crystal and its imperturbability,
  all of museum quality: and America where there
is the little old ramshackle victoria in the south, where cigars are smoked on the
  street in the north; where there are no proof readers, no silkworms, no digressions;

the wild man's land; grass-less, links-less, language-less country—in which letters
    are written
  not in Spanish, not in Greek, not in Latin, not in shorthand,
but in plain American which cats and dogs can read! The letter "a" in psalm and
    calm when
  pronounced with the sound of "a" in candle, is very noticeable but

why should continents of misapprehension have to be accounted for by the
  fact? Does it follow that because there are poisonous toadstools
which resemble mushrooms, both are dangerous? In the case of mettlesomeness
    which may be
  mistaken for appetite, of heat which may appear to be haste, no con-

clusions may be drawn. To have misapprehended the matter, is to have confessed
  that one has not looked far enough. The sublimated wisdom
of China, Egyptian discernment, the cataclysmic torrent of emotion compressed
  in the verbs of the Hebrew language, the books of the man who is able

to say, "I envy nobody but him and him only, who catches more fish than
  I do,"—the flower and fruit of all that noted superi-
ority—should one not have stumbled upon it in America, must one imagine
  that it is not there? It has never been confined to one locality.

THE FISH

Wade
through black jade
  Of the crow-blue mussel shells, one
    keeps
    adjusting the ash heaps;
  opening and shutting itself like

an
injured fan.

The barnacles which encrust the
side
of the wave, cannot hide
there for the submerged shafts of the

sun,
split like spun
glass, move themselves with spotlight swift-
ness
into the crevices—
in and out, illuminating

the
turquoise sea
of bodies. The water drives a
wedge
of iron through the iron edge
of the cliff, whereupon the stars,

pink
rice grains, ink
bespattered jelly-fish, crabs like
green
lilies and submarine
toadstools, slide each on the other.

All
external
marks of abuse are present on
this
defiant edifice—
all the physical features of

ac-
cident—lack
of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns
and
hatchet strokes, these things stand
out on it; the chasm side is

dead.
Repeated
evidence has proved that it can
live
on what cannot revive
its youth. The sea grows old in it.

POETRY

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle. Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in it, after all, a place for the genuine.

Hands that can grasp, eyes
that can dilate, hair that can rise
if it must, these things are important not because a

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are
useful. When they become so derivative as to become unintelligible,
the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
do not admire what
we cannot understand: the bat
holding on upside down or in quest of something to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under
a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that feels a flea, the base-
ball fan, the statistician—
nor is it valid
to discriminate against 'business documents and

school-books'; all these phenomena are important. One must make a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry,
nor till the poets among us can be
'literalists of
the imagination'—above
insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, shall we have
it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,
the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness and
that which is on the other hand
genuine, then you are interested in poetry.

WHAT ARE YEARS?

What is our innocence,
what is our guilt? All are
naked, none is safe. And whence
is courage: the unanswered question,
the resolute doubt—
dumbly calling, deafly listening—that
in misfortune, even death,
encourages others
and in its defeat, stirs

the soul to be strong? He
sees deep and is glad, who
accedes to mortality
and in his imprisonment, rises
upon himself as
the sea in a chasm, struggling to be
free and unable to be,

in its surrendering
finds its continuing.

So he who strongly feels,
behaves. The very bird,
grown taller as he sings, steels
his form straight up. Though he is captive,
his mighty singing
says, satisfaction is a lowly
thing, how pure a thing is joy.
This is mortality,
this is eternity.

THE MIND IS AN ENCHANTING THING

is an enchanted thing
like the glaze on a
katydid-wing
subdivided by sun
till the nettings are legion.
Like Gieseking playing Scarlatti;

like the apteryx-awl
as a beak, or the
kiwi's rain-shawl
of haired feathers, the mind
feeling its way as though blind,
walks along with its eyes on the ground.

It has memory's ear
that can hear without
having to hear.
Like the gyroscope's fall,
truly unequivocal
because trued by regnant certainty,

it is a power of
strong enchantment. It
is like the dove-
neck animated by
sun; it is memory's eye;
it's conscientious inconsistency.

It tears off the veil; tears
the temptation, the
mist the heart wears,
from its eyes,—if the heart
has a face; it takes apart
dejection. It's fire in the dove-neck's

iridescence; in the
inconsistencies
of Scarlatti.

Unconfusion submits
its confusion to proof; it's
not a Herod's oath that cannot change.

IN DISTRUST OF MERITS

Strengthened to live, strengthened to die for
medals and positioned victories?
They're fighting, fighting, fighting the blind
man who thinks he sees,—
who cannot see that the enslaver is
enslaved; the hater, harmed. O shining O
firm star, O tumultuous
ocean lashed till small things go
as they will, the mountainous
wave makes us who look, know

depth. Lost at sea before they fought! O
star of David, star of Bethlehem,
O black imperial lion
of the Lord—emblem
of a risen world—be joined at last, be
joined. There is hate's crown beneath which all is
death; there's love's without which none
is king; the blessed deeds bless
the halo. As contagion
of sickness makes sickness,

contagion of trust can make trust. They're
fighting in deserts and caves, one by
one, in battalions and squadrons;
they're fighting that I
may yet recover from the disease, *my*
self; some have it lightly, some will die. "Man's
wolf to man?" And we devour
ourselves? The enemy could not
have made a greater breach in our
defenses. One pilot-

ing a blind man can escape him, but
Job disheartened by false comfort knew,
that nothing is so defeating
as a blind man who
can see. O alive who are dead, who are
proud not to see, O small dust of the earth
that walks so arrogantly,
trust begets power and faith is
an affectionate thing. We
vow, we make this promise

to the fighting—it's a promise—"We'll
never hate black, white, red, yellow, Jew,

Gentile, Untouchable." We are
not competent to
make our vows. With set jaw they are fighting,
fighting, fighting,—some we love whom we know,
some we love but know not—that
hearts may feel and not be numb.
It cures me; or am I what
I can't believe in? Some

in snow, some on crags, some in quicksands,
little by little, much by much, they
are fighting fighting fighting that where
there was death there may
be life. "When a man is prey to anger,
he is moved by outside things; when he holds
his ground in patience patience
patience, that is action or
beauty," the soldier's defense
and hardest armor for

the fight. The world's an orphan's home. Shall
we never have peace without sorrow?
without pleas of the dying for
help that won't come? O
quiet form upon the dust, I cannot
look and yet I must. If these great patient
dyings—all these agonies
and woundbearings and blood shed—
can teach us how to live, these
dyings were not wasted.

Hate-hardened heart, O heart of iron,
iron is iron till it is rust.
There never was a war that was
not inward; I must
fight till I have conquered in myself what
causes war, but I would not believe it.
I inwardly did nothing.
O Iscariotlike crime!
Beauty is everlasting
and dust is for a time.

AT REST IN THE BLAST

Like a bulwark against fate,
By the thrust of the blast
Lead-saluted;
Saluted by lead?
As though flying
Old Glory full mast.

Pent by power that holds it fast—
A paradox. . . . Hard-pressed,
You take the blame
And are inviolate—
Down-cast but not cast

Down. Some would bind by promises,
But not the tempest-tossed—
Borne by the might
Of the storm to a height,
From destruction—
At rest in the blast.

Robinson Jeffers

ROBINSON JEFFERS' condensed autobiography runs as follows: "Born in Pittsburgh in 1887; my parents carried me about Europe a good deal. Of the first visit I remember three things—a pocketful of snails loosed on the walls of a kindergarten in Zurich, paintings of Keats and Shelley hanging side by side somewhere in London, and Arthur's Seat, the hill about Edinburgh. When I was fifteen I was brought home. Next year my family moved to California and I graduated at eighteen from Occidental College, Los Angeles. After that, desultory years at the University of Southern California, University of Zurich, Medical School in Los Angeles, University of Washington, but with faint interest. I wasn't deeply interested in anything but poetry. I married Una Call Kuster in 1913. We were going to England in the autumn of 1914. But the August news turned us to this village of Carmel instead; and when the stagecoach topped the hill from Monterey, and we looked down through pines and sea-fogs on Carmel Bay, it was evident that we had come without knowing it to our inevitable place." There, on the ocean's edge, Jeffers has lived ever since, identifying himself with the Californian rocks and headlands.

Flagons and Apples (1912) was Jeffers' undistinguished first volume; it was followed by *Californians* (1916), a scarcely more original book. In 1925 *Tamar and Other Poems* was brought out by a small printer and caused an overnight sensation. It was reprinted the following year, with the addition of new work, as *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems* (1926). This, it was evident at once, was masculine poetry, stark, even terrible in its intensities. Whatever defects this verse has—and it must be confessed that Jeffers piles on his catastrophes with little humor and less restraint—there is no denying its elemental power. He combines two almost contrary types of strength: the impetuous American and the stoic Greek.

The Women at Point Sur (1927) shows how easily Jeffers can swing the long line, how suddenly his phrases soar from the tawdry into the terrible, how boldly he can lift a language which, in the hands of most poets, would be nothing more than wild rhetoric.

Cawdor (1928) again reveals Jeffers turning away from gentle themes to almost unbearable ones. The long poem is a continuation of the bewilderment announced

in the preceding volumes. Jeffers himself says, "I think of *Cawdor* as making a third with *Tamar* and *The Women at Point Sur;* but as if in *Tamar* human affairs had been seen looking westward against the ocean; in *Point Sur* looking upward, minimized to ridicule against the stars; in *Cawdor* looking eastward, against the earth, reclaiming a little dignity from that association. . . . Where not only generations but races drizzle away so fast, one wonders the more urgently what it is for, and whether this beautiful earth is amused or sorry at the procession of her possessors." There are also a number of shorter poems, not actually subversive but, continues Jeffers, "the mere common sense of our predicament as passionate bits of earth and water." . . . The setting of *Cawdor* is monstrous, the symbols excessive, the speech of his characters unreal; yet the backgrounds are not much more tragic than Jeffers' own weird Carmel coast and his people move in an atmosphere larger if more forbidding than reality. As in his other work, exaggerations of lust and violence outdo each other; but these, which in a lesser man would be absurd, are compelling because of the sheer force behind them and the malefic universe they imply.

This force is not only inherent in Jeffers' extraordinary language, but in his demonic search for ultimates. He disdains the illusions by which man makes life endurable: love, nature, the mind—these are all self-destructive and useless. Quiet is empty denial and peace a forlorn hope. Death seems the one freedom, "the huge gift," but annihilation itself, he realizes, is impossible. There is left only despair—and this is the cry beneath Jeffers' strength. The longing for oblivion explains his wild dreams, bloodshot landscapes, inhuman crimes, incests, brutalities, nightmare-struggles where life "drinks her defeat and devours her famine for food."

Thus he celebrates "the charm of the dark," enlarges on passions turned inward and men "all matted in one mesh"; he sings a frustrated *Dies Irae* to unresponding Nothingness. Therefore the things he loves best are rocks, black cypresses, depths of ocean, granite mountains—things that have their being without ambition, without hope, without consciousness.

But negation alone cannot explain the poet's dark persuasiveness. To Jeffers consciousness is the great curse of mankind; unconsciousness is the desirable state of nature. That man can never know such unconsciousness is what compels Jeffers' anguish and dictates his most impassioned lines. Impassioned they are, whatever one may think of the philosophy that prompts them, and an examination of Jeffers' utterance discloses a strange phenomenon: This poet preaches the gospel of Nothingness with an exuberant liveliness. He mourns, with inconsistent vigor, "the broken balance, the hopeless prostration of the earth under men's hands." His Jesus (in *Dear Judas*) is only an extension of the fanatically possessive Barclay (in *The Women at Point Sur*); even mystical passion becomes a high-pitched turbulence and love a last despair.

Thus Jeffers is in danger of emotional abandonment. His dramas are too often conditioned not by the exigencies of the situation nor by the demands of his characters, but by Jeffers' inverted violences. The chaos is self-generated; the didacticism no less didactic for being nullifying and uncontrolled; the imagination is too often disturbed by intellectual hysteria.

Dear Judas (1929) is composed of two long and a few short poems, the two longer ones bearing a relation to each other in the contrasted aspects of love, the shorter ones condensing Jeffers' philosophy into some of his finest moments. Like

his other work, *Dear Judas* exhibits Jeffers projecting blind and bewildering Nature, misconceiving man as a "spectral episode." Here again is energy threshing in meaninglessness; here is force in need of a faith.

Thurso's Landing (1932) consists of one long poem and several highly characteristic shorter ones. The title-poem must rank among Jeffers' most important creations—a poem in which sheer power and eloquence triumph above black and unrelieved melodrama. Here again the *dramatis personae* are nakedly symbols of tortured humanity, "all compelled, all unhappy, all helpless." The idea dominating the book is the *idée fixe* which runs through all of Jeffers' volumes: Life is horrible. Love, as we practice it, is inverted and incestuous; not one self-adoring man in a million expresses outward-going passion. Death is the beautiful capricious savior, "the gay child with the gypsy eyes." Civilization is a transient sickness. Were the world free of this botch of humanity, this walking disease of consciousness, it would be a cleaner place, one in which the noble, impersonal elements would be at home. In a few thousand years this may well happen, and life will no longer be a torture for the living. Meanwhile our nature, "ignoble in its quiet times, mean in its pleasures, slavish in the mass" can, in its stricken moments, occasionally "shine terribly against the dark magnificence of things." Meanwhile we can learn from hawks and headlands; we can learn to bear; we can endure. Sometimes the philosophy is implicit in the action of Jeffers' characters; sometimes it is explicit, and the poet steps out of the drama to say:

> . . . No life
> Ought to be thought important in the weave of the world, whatever it may show of courage or endured pain.
> It owns no other manner of shining but to bear pain; for pleasure is too little, our inhuman God is too great, thought is too lost.

The shorter poems in *Give Your Heart to the Hawks* (1934) and *Solstice* (1935), like those in the preceding volumes, are Jeffers at his most characteristic; condensation forces his pessimism into a rhythm that is both long and compact, like a tightly coiled spring. Several of the finest appeared in the 1927 issue of *A Miscellany of American Poetry* and were added to the popular edition of *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems,* brought out by The Modern Library in 1935. This excellent reprint also contains an introduction by the author which is a valuable piece of self-appraisal, especially in its estimate of "originality." "It seemed to me," says Jeffers, "that Mallarmé and his followers, renouncing intelligibility in order to concentrate the music of poetry, had turned off the road into a narrowing lane. Their successors could only make further renunciations; ideas had gone, now meter had gone, imagery would have to go; then recognizable emotions would have to go; perhaps at last even words might have to go or give up their meaning, nothing be left but musical syllables. Every advance required the elimination of some aspect of reality, and what could it profit me to know the direction of modern poetry if I did not like the direction? It was too much like putting out your eyes to cultivate the sense of hearing, or cutting off the right hand to develop the left. These austerities were not for me; originality by amputation was too painful for me."

Three years after distressing himself about "originality" Jeffers began to write *Tamar,* the work which was one of the most original of his generation. Superficially, because of his loose musical line, Jeffers seems to resemble Whitman, but his spirit

is the very opposite of that rude yea-sayer's. Where Whitman lifts himself in all-embracing affirmations, Jeffers loses himself in all-inclusive negations.

Such Counsels You Gave to Me and Other Poems (1937) repeats all the notes of Jeffers' previous work, but it contains a new attempt at clarification. Man is still "a spectral episode" and "humanity is needless"; but, even in an inhuman and valueless universe, man inconsistently, stupidly, seeks for values. *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (1938), a book of 620 pages, reveals this self-contradiction on a large scale; *Be Angry at the Sun* (1941) half conceals it in a fiercely restrained bitterness. There is, first of all, the glorification of tragedy, of the struggle toward self-realization and the "ennobling" power of pain. And there is the insistence that all struggle is useless, that all values are inconsequential in a universe which flees "the contagion of consciousness that infects this corner of space." Joy leads to destruction, and terror is the reward of truth.

The Double Axe and Other Poems (1948) is Jeffers' most vehemently self-defeating work. In a prose preface Jeffers insists that he does not hate mankind, that he presents a philosophic attitude "which might be called Inhumanist . . . the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of transhuman magnificence." But his poems—and in particular the 114-page title poem—reiterate that this planet is encumbered with a destructive creature who is not only irresponsible but irrelevant, a peeled ape teetering on his back legs, an absurd and temporary intrusion. "The human race is bound to defile," argues Jeffers. "Whatever is public—land, thoughts, or women—is dull, dirty and debauched." Yet, though mankind ought to be scrapped, "ground like fish-meal for soil-food," there still remains "the endless inhuman beauty of things—and endurance, endurance, death's nobler cousin, endurance." The day will come, Jeffers contends, when the earth will scratch itself and rub off humanity, and then the world will blossom with passionless stars, sunset rocks, and uncontaminated grass, the pure and impersonal "beauty of things which is the face of God," although there will be none to recognize it. Meanwhile, through the medium of talking corpses and monstrous disembodied hates, Jeffers piles horror upon horror, rape on incest, fire and flood on all-consuming disgust.

One must, somehow, separate the idea and its expression, remembering that the poem transcends the experience and the personality that prompted it. Between Jeffers the philosopher and Jeffers the poet there is a significant dichotomy. The philosophy is negative, repetitious, dismal. The poetry, even when bitterest, is positive as any creative expression must be. It is varied in movement and color; it vibrates with a reckless fecundity; it is continually breaking through its own pattern to dangerous and unfathomed depths. This is not a work to be enjoyed without sacrificing that sense of ease dear to the casual reader; it is doubtful if, in the common sense, it can be "enjoyed" at all. But here is a full-throated poetry, remarkable in sheer drive and harrowing drama, a poetry we may never love but which we cannot forget.

COMPENSATION

Solitude that unmakes me one of men
In snow-white hands brings singular recompense,
Evening me with kindlier natures when
On the needled pinewood the cold dews condense

About the hour of Rigel fallen from heaven
In wintertime, or when the long night tides
Sigh blindly from the sand-dune backward driven,
Or when on stormwings of the northwind rides
The foamscud with the cormorants, or when passes
A horse or dog with brown affectionate eyes,
Or autumn frosts are pricked by earliest grasses,
Or whirring from her covert a quail flies.
Why, even in humanity, beauty and good
Show from the mountainside of solitude.

AGE IN PROSPECT

Praise youth's hot blood if you will, I think that happiness
Rather consists in having lived clear through
Youth and hot blood, on to the wintrier hemisphere
Where one has time to wait and to remember.

Youth and hot blood are beautiful, so is peacefulness.
Youth had some islands in it, but age is indeed
An island and a peak; age has infirmities,
Not few, but youth is all one fever.

To look around and to love in his appearances,
Though a little calmly, the universal God's
Beauty is better I think than to lip eagerly
The mother's breast or another woman's.

And there is no possession more sure than memory's;
But if I reach that gray island, that peak,
My hope is still to possess with eyes the homeliness
Of ancient loves, ocean and mountains,

And meditate the sea-mouth of mortality
And the fountain six feet down with a quieter thirst
Than now I feel for old age; a creature progressively
Thirsty for life will be for death too.

ANTE MORTEM

It is likely enough that lions and scorpions
Guard the end; life never was bonded to be endurable nor the act of dying
Unpainful; the brain burning too often
Earns, though it held itself detached from the object, often a burnt age.
No matter, I shall not shorten it by hand.
Incapable of body or unmoved of brain is no evil, one always went envying
The quietness of stones. But if the striped blossom
Insanity spread lewd splendors and lightning terrors at the end of the forest;
Or intolerable pain work its known miracle,
Exile the monarch soul, set a sick monkey in the office . . . remember me
Entire and balanced when I was younger,
And could lift stones. and comprehend in the praises the cruelties of life.

POST MORTEM

Happy people die whole, they are all dissolved in a moment, they have had what they wanted,
No hard gifts; the unhappy
Linger a space, but pain is a thing that is glad to be forgotten; but one who has given
His heart to a cause or a country,
His ghost may spaniel it a while, disconsolate to watch it. I was wondering how long the spirit
That sheds this verse will remain
When the nostrils are nipped, when the brain rots in its vault or bubbles in the violence of fire
To be ash in metal. I was thinking
Some stalks of the wood whose roots I married to the earth of this place will stand five centuries;
I held the roots in my hand,
The stems of the trees between two fingers; how many remote generations of women
Will drink joy from men's loins,
And dragged from between the thighs of what mothers will giggle at my ghost when it curses the axmen,
Gray impotent voice on the sea-wind,
When the last trunk falls? The women's abundance will have built roofs over all this foreland;
Will have buried the rock foundations
I laid here: the women's exuberance will canker and fail in its time and like clouds the houses
Unframe, the granite of the prime
Stand from the heaps: come storm and wash clean: the plaster is all run to the sea and the steel
All rusted; the foreland resumes
The form we loved when we saw it. Though one at the end of the age and far off from this place
Should meet my presence in a poem,
The ghost would not care but be here, long sunset shadow in the seams of the granite, and forgotten
The flesh, a spirit for the stone.

NOON

The pure air trembles, O pitiless God,
The air aches with flame on these gaunt rocks
Over the flat sea's face, the forest
Shakes in gales of piercing light.

But the altars are behind and higher
Where the great hills raise naked heads,
Pale antagonists in the reverberance
Of the pure air and the pitiless God.

On the domed skull of every hill
Who stand blazing with spread vans,
The arms uplifted, the eyes in ecstasy?

What wine has the God drunk, to sing
Violently in heaven, what wine his worshipers
Whose silence blazes? The light that is over
Light, the terror of noon, the eyes
That the eagles die at, have thrown down
Me and my pride, here I lie naked
In a hollow of the shadowless rocks,
Full of the God, having drunk fire.

CLOUDS OF EVENING

Enormous cloud-mountains that form over Point Lobos and into the sunset,
Figures of fire on the walls of tonight's storm,
Foam of gold in gorges of fire, and the great file of warrior angels:
Dreams gathering in the curdled brain of the earth—
The sky the brain-vault—on the threshold of sleep: poor earth, you, like your children
By inordinate desires tortured, make dreams?
Storms more enormous, wars nobler, more toppling mountains, more jeweled waters, more free
Fires on impossible headlands . . . as a poor girl
Wishing her lover taller and more desirous, and herself maned with gold,
Dreams the world right, in the cold bed, about dawn.
Dreams are beautiful; the slaves of form are beautiful also; I have grown to believe
A stone is a better pillow than many visions.

TO THE STONE-CUTTERS

Stone-cutters fighting time with marble, you foredefeated
Challengers of oblivion,
Eat cynical earnings, knowing rock splits, records fall down,
The square-limbed Roman letters
Scale in the thaws, wear in the rain. The poet as well
Builds his monument mockingly;
For man will be blotted out, the blithe earth die, the brave sun
Die blind, his heart blackening:
Yet stones have stood for a thousand years, and pained thoughts found
The honey of peace in old poems.

GALE IN APRIL

Intense and terrible beauty, how has our race with the frail naked nerves,
So little a craft swum down from its far launching?
Why now, only because the northwest blows and the headed grass billows,
Great seas jagging the west and on the granite

Blanching, the vessel is brimmed, this dancing play of the world is too much passion.
A gale in April so overfilling the spirit,
Though his ribs were thick as the earth's, arches of mountain, how shall one dare to live,
Though his blood were like the earth's rivers and his flesh iron,
How shall one dare to live? One is born strong, how do the weak endure it?
The strong lean upon death as on a rock,
After eighty years there is shelter and the naked nerves shall be covered with deep quietness.
O beauty of things, go on, go on, O torture
Of intense joy, I have lasted out my time, I have thanked God and finished,
Roots of millennial trees fold me in the darkness,
Northwest winds shake their tops, not to the root, not to the root, I have passed
From beauty to the other beauty, peace, the night splendor.

APOLOGY FOR BAD DREAMS

I

In the purple light, heavy with redwood, the slopes drop seaward,
Headlong convexities of forest, drawn in together to the steep ravine. Below, on the sea-cliff,
A lonely clearing; a little field of corn by the streamside; a roof under spared trees. Then the ocean
Like a great stone someone has cut to a sharp edge and polished to shining. Beyond it, the fountain
And furnace of incredible light flowing up from the sunk sun. In the little clearing a woman
Was punishing a horse; she had tied the halter to a sapling at the edge of the wood; but when the great whip
Clung to the flanks the creature kicked so hard she feared he would snap the halter; she called from the house
The young man her son; who fetched a chain tie-rope, they working together
Noosed the small rusty links round the horse's tongue
And tied him by the swollen tongue to the tree.
Seen from this height they are shrunk to insect size,
Out of all human relation. You cannot distinguish
The blood dripping from where the chain is fastened,
The beast shuddering; but the thrust neck and the legs
Far apart. You can see the whip fall on the flanks. . . .
The gesture of the arm. You cannot see the face of the woman.
The enormous light beats up out of the west across the cloud-bars of the trade-wind. The ocean
Darkens, the high clouds brighten, the hills darken together. Unbridled and unbelievable beauty
Covers the evening world . . . not covers, grows apparent out of it, as Venus down there grows out
From the lit sky. What said the prophet? "I create good: and I create evil: I am the Lord."

II

This coast crying out for tragedy like all beautiful places,
(The quiet ones ask for quieter suffering; but here the granite cliff the gaunt cypresses' crown
Demands what victim? The dykes of red lava and black what Titan? The hills like pointed flames
Beyond Soberanes, the terrible peaks of the bare hills under the sun, what immolation?)
This coast crying out for tragedy like all beautiful places: and like the passionate spirit of humanity
Pain for its bread: God's, many victims', the painful deaths, the horrible transfigurements: I said in my heart,
"Better invent than suffer: imagine victims
Lest your own flesh be chosen the agonist, or you
Martyr some creature to the beauty of the place." And I said,
"Burn sacrifices once a year to magic
Horror away from the house, this little house here
You have built over the ocean with your own hands
Beside the standing bowlders: for what are we,
The beast that walks upright, with speaking lips
And little hair, to think we should always be fed,
Sheltered, intact, and self-controlled? We sooner more liable
Than the other animals. Pain and terror, the insanities of desire; not accidents, but essential,
And crowd up from the core." I imagined victims for those wolves, I made the phantoms to follow.
They have hunted the phantoms and missed the house. It is not good to forget over what gulfs the spirit
Of the beauty of humanity, the petal of a lost flower blown seaward by the night-wind, floats to its quietness.

III

Bowlders blunted like an old bear's teeth break up from the headland; below them
All the soil is thick with shells, the tide-rock feasts of a dead people.
Here the granite flanks are scarred with ancient fire, the ghosts of the tribe
Crouch in the nights beside the ghost of a fire, they try to remember the sunlight,
Light has died out of their skies. These have paid something for the future
Luck of the country, while we living keep old griefs in memory: though God's
Envy is not a likely fountain of ruin, to forget evil calls down
Sudden reminders from the cloud: remembered deaths be our redeemers;
Imagined victims our salvation: white as the half moon at midnight
Someone flamelike passed me, saying, "I am Tamar Cauldwell, I have my desire,"
Then the voice of the sea returned, when she had gone by, the stars to their towers.
. . . Beautiful country, burn again, Point Pinos down to the Sur Rivers
Burn as before with bitter wonders, land and ocean and the Carmel water.

IV

He brays humanity in a mortar to bring the savor
From the bruised root: a man having bad dreams, who invents victims, is only the ape of that God.
He washes it out with tears and many waters, calcines it with fire in the red crucible,

Deforms it, makes it horrible to itself: the spirit flies out and stands naked, he sees the spirit.
He takes it in the naked ecstasy; it breaks in his hand, the atom is broken, the power that massed it
Cries to the power that moves the stars, "I have come home to myself, behold me.
I bruised myself in the flint mortar and burnt me
In the red shell, I tortured myself, I flew forth,
Stood naked of myself and broke me in fragments,
And here am I moving the stars that are me."
I have seen these ways of God: I know of no reason
For fire and change and torture and the old returnings.
He being sufficient might be still. I think they admit no reason; they are the ways of my love.
Unmeasured power, incredible passion, enormous craft: no thought apparent but burns darkly
Smothered with its own smoke in the human brain-vault: no thought outside: a certain measure in phenomena:
The fountains of the boiling stars, the flowers on the foreland, the ever-returning roses of dawn.

PROMISE OF PEACE

The heads of strong old age are beautiful
Beyond all grace of youth. They have strange quiet,
Integrity, health, soundness, to the full
They've dealt with life and been attempered by it.
A young man must not sleep; his years are war
Civil and foreign but the former's worse;
But the old can breathe in safety now that they are
Forgetting what youth meant, the being perverse,
Running the fool's gauntlet and being cut
By the whips of the five senses. As for me,
If I should wish to live long it were but
To trade those fevers for tranquillity,
Thinking though that's entire and sweet in the grave
How shall the dead taste the deep treasure they have?

BIRTH-DUES

Joy is a trick in the air; pleasure is merely contemptible, the dangled
Carrot the ass follows to market or precipice;
But limitary pain—the rock under the tower and the hewn coping
That takes thunder at the head of the turret—
Terrible and real. Therefore a mindless dervish carving himself
With knives will seem to have conquered the world.

The world's God is treacherous and full of unreason; a torturer, but also
The only foundation and the only fountain.
Who fights him eats his own flesh and perishes of hunger; who hides in the grave
To escape him is dead; who enters the Indian
Recession to escape him is dead; who falls in love with the God is washed clean
Of death desired and of death dreaded.

He has joy, but joy is a trick in the air; and pleasure, but pleasure is contemptible;
And peace; and is based on solider than pain.
He has broken boundaries a little and that will estrange him; he is monstrous, but not
To the measure of the God. . . . But I having told you—
However I suppose that few in the world have energy to hear effectively—
Have paid my birth-dues; am quits with the people.

SUMMER HOLIDAY

When the sun shouts and people abound
One thinks there were the ages of stone and the age of bronze
And the iron age; iron the unstable metal;
Steel made of iron, unstable as his mother; the towered-up cities
Will be stains of rust on mounds of plaster.
Roots will not pierce the heaps for a time, kind rains will cure them,
Then nothing will remain of the iron age
And all these people but a thigh-bone or so, a poem
Stuck in the world's thought, splinters of glass
In the rubbish dumps, a concrete dam far off in the mountain. . . .

CREDO

My friend from Asia has powers and magic, he plucks a blue leaf from the young blue-gum
And gazing upon it, gathering and quieting
The God in his mind, creates an ocean more real than the ocean, the salt, the actual
Appalling presence, the power of the waters.
He believes that nothing is real except as we make it.
I humbler have found in my blood
Bred west of Caucasus a harder mysticism.
Multitude stands in my mind but I think that the ocean in the bone vault is only
The bone vault's ocean: out there is the ocean's;
The water is the water, the cliff is the rock, come shocks and flashes of reality. The mind
Passes, the eye closes, the spirit is a passage;
The beauty of things was born before eyes and sufficient to itself; the heart-breaking beauty
Will remain when there is no heart to break for it.

PELICANS

Four pelicans went over the house,
Sculled their worn oars over the courtyard: I saw that ungainliness
Magnifies the idea of strength.
A lifting gale of sea-gulls followed them; slim yachts of the element,
Natural growths of the sky, no wonder
Light wings to leave sea; but those grave weights toil, and are powerful,
And the wings torn with old storms remember
The cone that the oldest redwood dropped from, the tilting of continents,

The dinosaur's day, the lift of new sea-lines.
The omnisecular spirit keeps the old with the new also.
Nothing at all has suffered erasure.
There is life not of our time. He calls ungainly bodies
As beautiful as the grace of horses.
He is weary of nothing; he watches air-planes; he watches pelicans.

LOVE THE WILD SWAN

"I hate my verses, every line, every word,
Oh pale and brittle pencils ever to try
One grass-blade's curve, or the throat of one bird
That clings to twig, ruffled against white sky.
Oh cracked and twilight mirrors ever to catch
One color, one glinting flash, of the splendor of things.
Unlucky hunter, Oh bullets of wax,
The lion beauty, the wild-swan wings, the storm of the wings."
—This wild swan of a world is no hunter's game.
Better bullets than yours would miss the white breast,
Better mirrors than yours would crack in the flame.
Does it matter whether you hate your . . . self? At least
Love your eyes that can see, your mind that can
Hear the music, the thunder of the wings. Love the wild swan.

NIGHT

The ebb slips from the rock, the sunken
Tide-rocks lift streaming shoulders
Out of the slack, the slow west
Sombering its torch; a ship's light
Shows faintly, far out,
Over the weight of the prone ocean
On the low cloud.

Over the dark mountain, over the dark pinewood,
Down the long dark valley along the shrunken river,
Returns the splendor without rays, the shining shadow,
Peace-bringer, the matrix of all shining and quieter of shining.
Where the shore widens on the bay she opens dark wings
And the ocean accepts her glory. O soul worshipful of her
You, like the ocean, have grave depths where she dwells always,
And the film of waves above that takes the sun takes also
Her, with more love. The sun-lovers have a blond favorite,
A father of lights and noises, wars, weeping and laughter,
Hot labor, lust and delight and the other blemishes.
    Quietness
Flows from her deeper fountain; and he will die; and she is immortal.

Far off from here the slender
Flocks of the mountain forest

Move among stems like towers
Of the old redwoods to the stream,
No twig crackling; dip shy
Wild muzzles into the mountain water
Among the dark ferns.

O passionately at peace you being secure will pardon
The blasphemies of glowworms, the lamp in my tower, the fretfulness
Of cities, the crescents of the planets, the pride of the stars.
This August night in a rift of cloud Antares reddens,
The great one, the ancient torch, a lord among lost children,
The earth's orbit doubled would not girdle his greatness, one fire
Globed, out of grasp of the mind enormous; but to you
O Night
What? Not a spark? What flicker of a spark in the faint far glimmer
Of a lost fire dying in the desert, dim coals of a sand-pit the Bedouins
Wandered from at dawn. . . . Ah singing prayer to what gulfs tempted
Suddenly are you more lost? To us the near-hand mountain
Be a measure of height, the tide-worn cliff at the sea-gate a measure of continuance.

The tide, moving the night's
Vastness with lonely voices,
Turns, the deep dark-shining
Pacific leans on the land,
Feeling his cold strength
To the outmost margins: you Night will resume
The stars in your time.

O passionately at peace when will that tide draw shoreward,
Truly the spouting fountains of light, Antares, Arcturus,
Tire of their flow, they sing one song but they think silence.
The striding winter-giant Orion shines, and dreams darkness.
And life, the flicker of men and moths and the wolf on the hill,
Though furious for continuance, passionately feeding, passionately
Remaking itself upon its mates, remembers deep inward
The calm mother, the quietness of the womb and the egg,
The primal and the latter silences: dear Night it is memory
Prophesies, prophecy that remembers, the charm of the dark.
And I and my people, we are willing to love the four-score years
Heartily; but as a sailor loves the sea, when the helm is for harbor.

Have men's minds changed,
Or the rock hidden in the deep of the waters of the soul
Broken the surface? A few centuries
Gone by, was none dared not to people
The darkness beyond the stars with harps and habitations.
But now, dear is the truth. Life is grown sweeter and lonelier,
And death is no evil.

SHINE, PERISHING REPUBLIC

While this America settles in the mold of its vulgarity, heavily thickening to empire,
And protest, only a bubble in the molten mass, pops and sighs out, and the mass hardens,

I sadly smiling remember that the flower fades to make fruit, the fruit rots to make earth.
Out of the mother; and through the spring exultances, ripeness and decadence; and home to the mother.

You making haste, haste on decay: not blameworthy; life is good, be it stubbornly long or suddenly
A mortal splendor: meteors are not needed less than mountains: shine, perishing republic.

But for my children, I would have them keep their distance from the thickening center; corruption
Never has been compulsory, when the cities lie at the monster's feet there are left the mountains.

And boys, be in nothing so moderate as in love of man, a clever servant, insufferable master.
There is the trap that catches noblest spirits, that caught—they say—God, when he walked on earth.

DIVINELY SUPERFLUOUS BEAUTY

The storm-dances of gulls, the barking game of seals,
Over and under the ocean . . .
Divinely superfluous beauty
Rules the games, presides over destinies, makes trees grow
And hills tower, waves fall.
The incredible beauty of joy
Stars with fire the joining of lips, O let our loves too
Be joined, there is not a maiden
Burns and thirsts for love
More than my blood for you, by the shore of seals while the wings
Weave like a web in the air
Divinely superfluous beauty.

HURT HAWKS

The broken pillar of the wing jags from the clotted shoulder,
The wing trails like a banner in defeat,
No more to use the sky forever but live with famine
And pain a few days: cat nor coyote
Will shorten the week of waiting for death, there is game without talons.

He stands under the oak-bush and waits
The lame feet of salvation; at night he remembers freedom

And flies in a dream, the dawns ruin it.
He is strong and pain is worse to the strong, incapacity is worse.
The curs of the day come and torment him
At distance, no one but death the redeemer will humble that head,
The intrepid readiness, the terrible eyes.
The wild God of the world is sometimes merciful to those
That ask mercy, not often to the arrogant.
You do not know him, you communal people, or you have forgotten him;
Intemperate and savage, the hawk remembers him;
Beautiful and wild, the hawks, and men that are dying remember him.

✦

I'd sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk; but the great redtail
Had nothing left but unable misery
From the bone too shattered for mending, the wing that trailed under his talons when he moved.
We had fed him six weeks, I gave him freedom,
He wandered over the foreland hill and returned in the evening, asking for death,
Not like a beggar, still eyed with the old
Implacable arrogance. I gave him the lead gift in the twilight.
What fell was relaxed,
Owl-downy, soft feminine feathers; but what
Soared: the fierce rush: the night-herons by the flooded river cried fear at its rising
Before it was quite unsheathed from reality.

PRESCRIPTION OF PAINFUL ENDS

Lucretius felt the change of the world in his time, the great republic coming to the height
Whence no way leads but downward, Plato in his time watched Athens
Dance the down path. The future is ever a misted landscape, no man foreknows it, but at cyclical turns
There is a change felt in the rhythm of events: as when an exhausted horse
Falters and recovers, then the rhythm of the running hoofbeats is altered, he will run miles yet,
But he must fall: we have felt it again in our own lifetime, slip, shift and speed-up
In the gallop of the world, and now suspect that, come peace or war, the progress of America and Europe
Becomes a long process of deterioration—starred with famous Byzantiums and Alexandrias,
Surely,—but downward. One desires at such times
To gather the insights of the age summit against future loss, against the narrowing mind and the tyrants,
The pedants, the mystagogues, the swarms of barbarians: time-conscious poems, poems for treasuries: Lucretius
Sings his great theory of natural origins and of wise conduct; Plato smiling carves dreams, bright cells
Of incorruptible wax to hive the Greek honey.

Our own time, much greater
and far less fortunate

Has acids for honey and for fine dreams
The immense vulgarities of misapplied science and decaying Christianity: therefore one christens each poem, in dutiful
Hope of burning off at least the top crust of the time's uncleanness, from the acid bottles.

MAY-JUNE, 1940

Foreseen for so many years: these evils, this monstrous violence, these massive agonies: no easier to bear.
We saw them with slow stone strides approach, everyone saw them; we closed our eyes against them, we looked
And they had come nearer. We ate and drank and slept, they came nearer. Sometimes we laughed, they were nearer. Now
They are here. And now a blind man foresees what follows them: degradation, famine, recovery and so forth, and the
Epidemic manias: but not enough death to serve us, not enough death. It would be better for men
To be few and live far apart, where none could infect another; then slowly the sanity of field and mountain
And the cold ocean and glittering stars might enter their minds.

Another dream, another dream.
We shall have to accept certain limitations
In future, and abandon some humane dreams; only hard-minded, sleepless and realist, can ride this rock-slide
To new fields down the dark mountain; and we shall have to perceive that these insanities are normal;
We shall have to perceive that battle is a burning flower or like a huge music, and the dive-bomber's screaming orgasm
As beautiful as other passions; and that death and life are not serious alternatives. One has known all these things
For many years: there is greater and darker to know
In the next hundred.

And why do you cry, my dear, why do you cry?
It is all in the whirling circles of time.
If millions are born millions must die,
If England goes down and Germany up
The stronger dog will still be on top,
All in the turning of time.
If civilization goes down, that
Would be an event to contemplate.
It will not be in our time, alas, my dear,
It will not be in our time.

THE INQUISITORS

Coming around a corner of the dark trail . . . what was wrong with the valley?
Azevedo checked his horse and sat staring: it was all changed. It was occupied.
There were three hills
Where none had been: and firelight flickered red on their knees between them: if
they were hills:
They were more like Red Indians around a camp-fire grave and dark, mountain-
high, hams on heels
Squating around a little fire of hundred-foot logs. Azevedo remembers he felt an
ice-brook
Glide on his spine; he slipped down from the saddle and hid
In the brush by the trail, above the black redwood forest. There was the Little Sur
South Fork,
Its forest valley; the man had come in at nightfall over Bowcher's Gap, and a high
moon hunted
Through running clouds. He heard the rumble of a voice, heavy not loud, saying,
"I gathered some,
You can inspect them." One of the hills moved a huge hand
And poured its contents on a table-topped rock that stood in the firelight; men
and women fell out;
Some crawled and some lay quiet; the hills leaned to eye them. One said: "It seems
hardly possible
Such fragile creatures could be so noxious." Another answered,
"True, but we've seen. But it is only recently they have the power." The third
answered, "That bomb?"
"Oh," he said, "—and the rest." He reached across and picked up one of the mites
from the rock, and held it
Close to his eyes, and very carefully with finger and thumbnail peeled it: by chance
a young female
With long black hair: it was too helpless even to scream. He held it by one white
leg and stared at it:
"I can see nothing strange: only so fragile." The third hill answered, "We suppose
it is something
Inside the head." Then the other split the skull with his thumbnail, squinting his
eyes and peering, and said,
"A drop of marrow. How could that spoil the earth?" "Nevertheless," he answered,
"They have that bomb. The blasts and the fires are nothing: freckles on the earth:
the emanations
Might set the whole planet into a tricky fever
And destroy much." "Themselves," he answered. "Let them. Why not?" "No," he
answered, "life."

Azevedo
Still watched in horror, and all three of the hills
Picked little animals from the rock, peeled them and cracked them, or toasted them
On the red coals, or split their bodies from the crotch upward
To stare inside. They said, "It remains a mystery. However," they said,
"It is not likely they can destroy all life: the planet is capacious. Life would surely
grow up again

From grubs in the soil, on the newt and toad level, and be beautiful again. And again perhaps break its legs
On its own cleverness: who can forecast the future?" The speaker yawned, and with his flat hand
Brushed the rock clean; the three slowly stood up,
Taller than Pico Blanco into the sky, their Indian-beaked heads in the moon-cloud,
And trampled their watchfire out and went away southward, stepping across the Ventana mountains.

ORIGINAL SIN

The man-brained and man-handed ground-ape, physically
The most repulsive of all hot-blooded animals
Up to that time of the world: they had dug a pitfall
And caught a mammoth, but how could their sticks and stones
Reach the life in that hide? They danced around the pit, shrieking
With ape excitement, flinging sharp flints in vain, and the stench of their bodies
Stained the white air of dawn; but presently one of them
Remembered the yellow dancer, wood-eating fire
That guards the cave-mouth: he ran and fetched him, and others
Gathered sticks at the wood's edge; they made a blaze
And pushed it into the pit, and they fed it high, around the mired sides
Of their huge prey. They watched the long hairy trunk
Waver over the stifle-trumpeting pain,
And they were happy.

Meanwhile the intense color and nobility of sunrise,
Rose and gold and amber, flowed up the sky. Wet rocks were shining, a little wind
Stirred the leaves of the forest and the marsh flag-flowers; the soft valley between the low hills
Became as beautiful as the sky; while in its midst, hour after hour, the happy hunters
Roasted their living meat slowly to death.

These are the people.
This is the human dawn. As for me, I would rather
Be a worm in a wild apple than a son of man.
But we are what we are, and we might remember
Not to hate any person, for all are vicious;
And not to be astonished at any evil, all are deserved;
And not fear death; it is the only way to be cleansed.

T. S. Eliot

THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT was born in St. Louis, Missouri, September 26, 1888. He received his A.B. at Harvard, 1909, and his A.M., 1910. Subsequently, he studied at the Sorbonne and at Merton College, Oxford. In 1914 he settled in London where he became a teacher, lecturer, editor, and publisher. In 1927 he

became a naturalized British subject and declared that he was "Anglo-Catholic in religion, royalist in politics, and classicist in literature."

Prufrock appeared in England in 1917. An American edition, including a number of other verses, was published under the title *Poems* in 1920. It was hailed, reviled, applauded, misunderstood, and imitated. There were indeed many imitators, particularly in England, where the younger men, rebounding from the affected simplicity of the Georgians, seized upon Eliot's disillusioned subtleties as a new gospel. Most of them patterned their lines upon the now famous "Sweeney" model, and by 1922 Eliot was one of the most discussed and disputed of living American poets. This early work reveals two sharply differentiated idioms. The more arresting inflection is in the impressionistic sets of quatrains that compose "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," "The Hippopotamus," "Burbank with a Baedeker." It is a witty if recondite inflection which is heard beneath the muffled allusions; the edged lines crackle with observations as shrewd as "the snarled and yelping seas," "this oval O cropped out with teeth," "laughter tinkling among the teacups," "the damp souls of housemaids." Occasionally Eliot's wit takes on a darker intensity; speaking of Donne's struggle to transcend the senses, he writes:

> He knew the anguish of the marrow,
> The ague of the skeleton;
> No contact possible of flesh
> Allayed the fever of the bone.

But there is another phase of Eliot, one that is disclosed in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the "Portrait of a Lady," and "La Figlia Che Piange," in which picture, philosophy, and music are surprisingly blended. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," written while Eliot was still at Harvard, is a minor masterpiece; nothing in recent poetry (if we forget Laforgue and the other French poets to whom Eliot is manifestly indebted), nothing in English since the seventeenth century metaphysicals, has communicated so great a sense of ambiguous hurt and general frustration.

First and last Eliot represents a revolt from the "cheerfulness, optimism, and hopefulness" of the nineteenth century; his work is an implicit declaration that poetry must not only "be found *through* suffering, but can find its material only *in* suffering." Beauty itself is suspect in the modern world; Eliot insists that the poet should "be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory." In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" Eliot shows the boredom and the horror, if not the glory, in contemporary society. The prematurely old Prufrock is a dilettante, culture-ridden and world-weary, aloof and disillusioned. He is inhibited by his own distorted memory and his confused desires; he recognizes passion, but he cannot rise to it. His isolation is emphasized by the strange opening simile ("when the evening is spread out against the sky like a patient etherized upon the table") with its mood of sick helplessness, and by the introductory lines from Dante's *Inferno:* "If I thought my answer were to one who ever could return to the world, this flame should shake no more; but since, if what I hear be true, none ever did return alive from this depth, without fear of infamy I answer thee." F. O. Matthiessen points out that the inscription from the *Inferno* underlines the closed circle of Prufrock's frightened loneliness. "Prufrock

can give utterance in soliloquy to his debate with himself only because he knows no one will overhear him. The point of calling this poem a 'Love Song' lies in the irony that it will never be sung."

More important than Eliot's philosophy is his technique. It is a fascinating mixture of statement and suggestion, of passion and wit, of fact and symbol: the first extended use in English of the Symbolist method. The method, as Edmund Wilson showed in his valuable study *Axel's Castle,* is the result of an anti-scientific, romantic escapism; it consists chiefly in approximating the "indefiniteness of music," mingling "the grand and prosaic manners," and, generally, avoiding plain statements in favor of intimations. Instead of seeking the "jewel-like phrase" with its finality of definition, the Symbolists attempt to communicate "states of feeling." Eliot carries the method further by communicating—or at least registering—states of feeling that are complicated and highly personal. To achieve this he employs a complex verse, combining trivial and tawdry pictures with traditionally poetic subject-matter, linking the banalities of conversation to rich rhetoric, and interrupting the present with flash-backs of the past. This method, not unfamiliar to students of the films, makes for a nervous disintegration. The rapid and, seemingly, unrelated images, the discordant metaphors achieve an emotional response at the expense of a logical progression. But logic is not the objective. The reader is carried on by the rapidity of suggestions, by the swiftly accumulating ideas and echoes, chiefly by the play of cultural associations.

The contrast of the beautiful past with the repulsive present, the degradation of everything which enlarges the spirit, is given full scope in Eliot's *The Waste Land. The Waste Land* (1922) is Eliot's attempt to sound his recurring theme—the disillusion-frustration motif—on a major scale. The publication of this forty-page poem caused an outburst so violent and prolonged that the echoes of the controversy hung in the air for several years. On the one hand it was dismissed as "an impudent hoax," "filthy bedlam raving"; on the other it was exalted as "the greatest document of our day, showing the starvation of our entire civilization." *The Waste Land* is neither "erudite gibberish" nor is it "a great work, with one triumph after another." It is, in essence, a set of mangled, difficult, and (in spite of the arbitrary program of unification) separate failures and solitary successes. If its pages are splintered with broken phrases and distorted pictures, one must remember that Eliot is attempting to portray disintegration itself. Its dependence on associations in other literature makes it seem like an anthology of assimilations; its jumble of quotations (without inverted commas) from thirty-one sources gives the entire structure the look of a piece of literary carpentry; its allusiveness frantically attempts to connect the favorite myths of all time. It does, however, present a double picture: the cross-section of a tortured mind and the image of an arid world. Its sense of sterility, its refusal to face the growing complexity of the age was so significant—and so appealing to the escapists—that it became a term which characterized a period and added a new dimension to the language of poetry.

Eliot's influence was felt on both sides of the Atlantic. The younger poets repudiated his inverted romanticism masked as classicism, and his pessimism which scarcely troubled to conceal the death-wish, but they were fascinated by his technique. They scorned Eliot's withdrawal into Anglo-Catholicism, but they admired —and imitated—his power of suggestion. In England W. H. Auden, Stephen

Spender, and C. Day Lewis acknowledged his influence; in America his poetry affected the work of Conrad Aiken, Archibald MacLeish, and Horace Gregory, among others.

In his turn, Eliot was strongly influenced by his "ancestors" in France. Reviewing Peter Quennell's, *Baudelaire and the Symbolists* in 1930 he referred to Arthur Symons' *Symbolist Movement in Literature,* saying, "I myself owe Mr. Symons a great debt. But for having read his book I should not, in the year 1908, have heard of Laforgue and Rimbaud; I should probably not have begun to read Verlaine; and but for reading Verlaine, I should not have heard of Corbière. So the Symons book is one of those which have affected the course of my life." But, as Edmund Wilson points out, though Eliot's main theme (the inferiority of the present to the past) is found in Laforgue and the other Romantics, though the idea of juxtaposing many literatures and a medley of idioms was suggested by Ezra Pound, "yet Eliot manages to be more effective precisely where he might be expected to be least original—he succeeds in conveying his meanings, in communicating his emotions, in spite of all his learning or mysterious allusions, and whether we understand them or not. . . . He has been able to lend even to the rhythms, to the words themselves, of his great predecessors a new music and a new meaning." His borrowings are a proof of Eliot's retreat to the safety of literature; scholars have been surprised (and sometimes a little pained) to find many of Eliot's phrases not only in the minor Elizabethans, but (as Elizabeth Jackson discovered) in so curious a modern writer as Conan Doyle. The very "mottoes" or epigraphs are intended not only to comment upon the poems which they introduce, but to amplify their suggestiveness. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is prefaced by a quotation from Dante emphasizing the repressed Prufrock's ultra-fastidious and detached spirit; "Burbank with a Baedeker" is set off by the preceding jumble of phrases from Shakespeare, Browning, and Henry James referring to Venice; the quotation "Mistah Kurtz—he dead" from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* intensifies the sense of loss and emptiness rising from the lines which follow—as F. O. Matthiessen remarks, it "epitomizes in a sentence the very tone of blasphemous hopelessness which issues from 'The Hollow Men.'"

In "The Hollow Men," which emphasizes the barrenness of *The Waste Land,* Eliot reached a dead end of doubt. "The Hollow Men" pictures a world exhausted —"shape without form, shade without color, paralyzed force, gesture without motion." Men gather on stony soil in a "valley of dying stars." They lean together, lacking initiative. They are without vision; they grope without thought. The confusion is intensified by the juxtaposition of a distorted nursery rhyme and a fragment from the Lord's Prayer. The finale completes the despair. Civilization, having lost its ideals and religion, has reached an impasse; man cannot even die heroically. The world ends not with a bang, but with a whimper.

After "The Hollow Men" Eliot, finding he could proceed no further with doubt, turned to faith. *Ash Wednesday* (1930), *The Rock: a Pageant Play* (1934), and *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) express a hopefulness which Eliot's earlier poems repudiated. *The Family Reunion* (1939) is a drama in verse, the theme of which is the persistent sense of sin; the setting is contemporary, although the Eumenides appear in person. Eliot accepts the Christian religion and, beneath the austerity of the later work, sounds a compassion which is genuine and moving. Critics were

particularly enthusiastic concerning *Ash Wednesday,* which begins in desperation, rises on hope, and rests in peaceful resignation. Here, said Edwin Muir, Eliot passes "from a historical conception of society to a religious one, or rather to that society within society in which he sees man's sole hope of salvation. A church is the only kind of institution in which the individual can hold communion not only with the living (the ideal of the Socialist and the Communist), but with the dead as well; and so membership of a church was perfectly consonant with Eliot's view of life and his development as a poet. *Ash Wednesday* is one of the most moving poems he has written, and perhaps the most perfect."

Murder in the Cathedral (1935), a dramatization of the murder of Thomas Becket in 1170, was written for production at the Canterbury Festival in 1935. The language is lucid, the action straightforward, and the poetry almost wholly free of the obliquity and harsh juxtaposition with which Eliot shocked an epoch out of its exhausted sentiments and offered new symbols for a new generation. Instead of a confusion of private references and literary allusions the verse has a simple unity, and the choruses are not only skillfully balanced but impassioned. The play was successfully produced in New York by the Federal Theater Project in 1938 and became a contemporary classic.

Collected Poems: 1907-1935 appeared in 1936. It comprehensively reveals Eliot struggling through his nightmares of vulgarity, crying aloud in an endless cactus land, and finally reaching his spiritual haven. Again the critics were divided. "Reading Eliot's new poems," wrote Malcolm Cowley, "was like excavating buried cities at the ends of the Syrian desert; they were full of imposing temples and perfectly proportioned statues of the gods; but there was nothing in the streets that breathed." Others suggested that Eliot, an American living in England, wrote like a man without a country and his poetry was a sublimation of the expatriate's sense of rootlessness. But most commentators accepted Eliot as a cultural phenomenon who was a constant challenge. His challenge, it was generally agreed, was to a civilization that had lost spiritual significance and had devoted itself to material standards and mechanical escapes. As he wrote in *The Rock:*

> And the wind shall say: "Here were decent godless people:
> Their only monument the asphalt road
> And a thousand lost golf balls."

"He despairs with humility and reverence," wrote Marjorie Brace. "He hopes without optimism; he seeks beyond hope and despair: a position alien to a time intricately dominated by the lure of power." After *Ash Wednesday* Eliot made the religious note the chief element of his poetry.

Eliot's later theme of pain and penitence, remorse and redemption, reaches its highest expression in *Four Quartets* (1943). The title prompted several reviewers to compare the work with Beethoven's later quartets in intention as well as execution. Beethoven fashioned a music to reach beyond music; Eliot planned a poetry to stretch the mind beyond the reasoning brain—"the hint half guessed, the gift half understood." In the third section ("The Dry Salvages") Eliot says explicitly:

> For most of us there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time,
> The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight.

> . . . or music heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
> While the music lasts.

Each section of *Four Quartets* bears a title which is the name of a place associated with Eliot's experiences, and each stresses Eliot's main preoccupations: the sense of time and the sense of poetry. The style is both simpler and subtler than anything the author had previously written. The language ranges from conversational and flatly prosaic statements to rapt and mystical rhetoric. The allusions are remote, but not nearly as complex as those in *The Waste Land,* where, in the concluding eight lines, Eliot telescoped quotations from half a dozen languages, from sources as familiar as Mother Goose and as recondite as the Upanishad. Structurally *Four Quartets* is intricate with closely interwoven themes and variations. It unfolds design within design. Some of the patterns are fairly obvious: the manipulation of four-part harmonies; the mixed symbols of the four seasons and the four elements; the dexterous alternation of slow unrhymed monologues and rapidly rhymed lyrics. Seldom has a poet used repetition more skillfully. The refrain of time present and time past ("both perhaps present in time future"), the conflict between time and timelessness, is accompanied by a set of meditations on the difficulty of communication. Eliot complains of the twenty years between two wars largely wasted, "trying to learn to use words, and every attempt / Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure / Because one has only learnt to get the better of words / For the thing one no longer has to say." Therefore "the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings" is a struggle to recover "what has been lost and found and lost again"; each poem is a fresh uncertainty, "a raid on the inarticulate / With shabby equipment always deteriorating / In the general mess of imprecision of feeling."

Eliot's counterpoint of personal experience and private speculation is not easy to follow. Only the erudite reader will be able to thread his way through a montage of Milton, Dante, St. John of the Cross, the Bhagavad-Gita, and Eliot's own symbols. Nevertheless, the reader will find it hard to resist the emotional impact of *Four Quartets,* its burden of suffering and expiation, its grave beauty, and the music carrying the dominant idea of "dying into life."

In November, 1948, Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize "for his work as a trail-blazing pioneer of modern poetry." He had already received the British Order of Merit. At sixty, Eliot was the most discussed of living poets. Ten full-length books were devoted to him; one of his commentators listed 263 critical studies, including theses, magazine articles, pamphlets, chapters, and volumes of appraisal—a number that was greatly increased after Eliot won the Nobel Prize. Malcolm Cowley remarked that "the poet's rather slender production . . . sometimes seems to be buried under an accumulated mass of glosses and explications." "One can understand why he has been the center of so many violent controversies," wrote David Daiches, "when one adds the innovations both in technique and attitude which his poetry introduced, the aggressive anti-romanticism of his theory and the strange romantic elements in his practice, his combination of political conservatism and literary avant-gardism." The best of the comparative and critical studies of the poet's work are *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* (1935) by F. O. Matthiessen; *T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands* (1948) by B. Rajan; *T. S.*

Eliot: A Selected Critique (1948) by Leonard Unger; and *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry* (1949) by Elizabeth Drew.

Eliot's leadership in esthetic criticism has been debated, but he has established his place in several volumes, notably in *Selected Essays: 1917-1932. The Use of Poetry* (1933) was followed by *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (1934) and *Elizabethan Essays* (1934). Eliot abandoned the questioning attitude of his early work and assumed a position so conservative as to seem reactionary. Many of his admirers were alarmed by the lectures given at the University of Virginia and those collected in *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1940). Pointing out the destructive element in Eliot's Puritan conscience which, convinced of guilt, strives desperately toward Catholicism, Stephen Spender wrote, "It is in fact an Old Testament doctrine suited to intense nationalism and racial self-sufficiency." Horace Gregory, in a review written in 1936, anticipated Spender: "It is toward this danger that Eliot has been moving for the past five years, a danger which may at last obscure the values of his poetry and leave him, at the end of a career, an isolated symbol of post-war sensibility." Eliot was again attacked for *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1949). It was charged that Eliot wrote in the roles of scientist and anthropologist without defining his terms. His philosophy was considered dogmatic and dubious; his conclusions were challenged; even his disciples questioned his pessimism: "Our own period is one of decline. The standards of culture are lower than they were fifty years ago. . . . I see no reason why the decay of culture should not proceed much further, and why we may not even anticipate a period, of some duration, of which it is possible to say that it will have *no* culture."

No one, however, questioned the poet's sensibility. Unlike Eliot's stiff and somewhat pontifical prose, the poetry is difficult but exciting. Eliot's theory, carried out in his practice, calls for unusual compression and ellipsis, a condensation so great that many moods and multiple allusions are expressed simultaneously. If the method demands intense concentration on the part of the reader, it rewards him with rich suggestiveness. The poet's progress from disgust through doubt to belief—from time to eternity, "at the still point of the turning world"—is registered in a poetry of the greatest seriousness and the highest integrity. If, like the prose, the poetry seems to be conditioned by a plethora of literary references and, because of its ambiguities, sometimes seems to lead the reader two ways at once, it stands not only as a significant document of its day but as a small body of troubled, often puzzling, but always poignant eloquence.

THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,

The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question. . . .
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl,
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

✦

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? . . .

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

✦

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,

Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
    Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
    That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
    "That is not it at all,
    That is not what I meant, at all."

✦

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old. . . . I grow old. . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

THE WASTE LAND

"NAM Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σιβυλλα τί θέλεις; *respondebat illa:* ἀποθανεῖν θέλω."

For Ezra Pound
il miglior fabbro

I. THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

April is the cruellest month, breeding,
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu,
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?

"You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
"They called me the hyacinth girl."
—Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,

Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Öd' und leer das Meer.

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,
Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)
Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,
The lady of situations.
Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,
And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
One must be so careful these days.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: "Stetson!
"You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
"Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
"Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
"You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!"

II. A GAME OF CHESS

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,

Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window, these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad light a carvèd dolphin swam.
Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
"Jug Jug" to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

"My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
"Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
"What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
"I never know what you are thinking. Think."

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

"What is that noise?"
The wind under the door.
"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
Nothing again nothing.
"Do
"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
"Nothing?"
I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?"
But
O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—
It's so elegant
So intelligent
"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"
"I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
"With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
"What shall we ever do?"

The hot water at ten.
And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said—
I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.
Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.
Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said,
Others can pick and choose if you can't.
But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.
You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.
(And her only thirty-one.)
I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.
(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)
The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same.
You *are* a proper fool, I said.
Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,
What you get married for if you don't want children?
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,
And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot—
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

III. THE FIRE SERMON

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.
By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .

Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.
A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.
White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.
But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
Et O ces voix d' enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd.
Tereu

Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter noon
Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants
C.i.f. London: documents at sight,
Asked me in demotic French
To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
I too awaited the expected guest.
He the young man carbuncular, arrives,

A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronising kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . .

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
"Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

"This music crept by me upon the waters"
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
O City city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.
The barges wash
Drifting logs
Down Greenwich reach
Past the Isle of Dogs.
Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

Elizabeth and Leicester
Beating oars
The stern was formed
A gilded shell
Red and gold
The brisk swell
Rippled both shores
Southwest wind
Carried down stream
The peal of bells
White towers
Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

"Trams and dusty trees.
Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."

"My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised 'a new start.'
I made no comment. What should I resent?"

"On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing."
la la

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest

burning

IV. DEATH BY WATER

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.
A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.
Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

V. WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain
There is not even solitude in the mountains
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
From doors of mudcracked houses
If there were water
And no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock
If there were the sound of water only
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But sound of water over a rock
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you?

What is that sound high in the air
Murmur of maternal lamentation

Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
It has no windows, and the door swings,
Dry bones can harm no one.
Only a cock stood on the rooftree
Co co rico co co rico
In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
Bringing rain

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder
DA
Datta: what have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms
DA
Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus

DA
Damyata: The boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
To controlling hands
I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s' ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d' Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih

NOTES BY T. S. ELIOT ON "THE WASTE LAND"

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge). Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest of the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean *The Golden Bough;* I have used especially the two volumes *Adonis, Attis, Osiris.* Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies.

I. THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

Line 20. Cf. Ezekiel II, 1.

23. Cf. Ecclesiastes XII, v.

31. V. Tristan und Isolde, I, verses 5-8.

42. Id. III, verse 24.

46. I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V. The Phoenician Sailor and the Merchant appear later; also the "crowds of people," and Death by Water is executed in Part IV. The Man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself.

60. Cf. Baudelaire:

"Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,
"Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant."

63. Cf. Inferno III, 55-57:

"si lunga tratta
di gente, ch'io non avrei mai creduto
che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta."

64. Cf. Inferno IV, 25-27:

"Quivi, secondo che per ascoltare,
"non avea pianto, ma' che di sospiri,
"che l'aura eterna facevan tremare."

68. A phenomenon which I have often noticed.

74. Cf. the Dirge in Webster's *White Devil.*

76. V. Baudelaire, Preface to *Fleurs du Mal.*

II. A GAME OF CHESS

77. Cf. *Antony and Cleopatra,* II, ii, l. 190.

92. Laquearia. V. *Aeneid,* I, 726:
dependent lychni laquearibus aureis incensi, et noctem flammis funalia vincunt.

98. Sylvan scene. V. Milton, *Paradise Lost,* IV, 140.

99. V. Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* VI, Philomela.

100. Cf. Part III, l. 204.

115. Cf. Part III, l. 195.

118. Cf. Webster: "Is the wind in that door still?"

126. Cf. Part I, l. 37, 48.

138. Cf. the game of chess in Middleton's *Women beware Women.*

III. THE FIRE SERMON

176. V. Spenser, *Prothalamion.*

192. Cf. *The Tempest,* I, ii.

196. Cf. Marvell, *To His Coy Mistress.*

197. Cf. Day, *Parliament of Bees:*

"When of the sudden, listening, you shall hear,
"A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring
"Actaeon to Diana in the spring,
"Where all shall see her naked skin . . ."

199. I do not know the origin of the ballad from which these lines are taken: t was reported to me from Sydney, Australia.

202. V. Verlaine, *Parsifal.*

210. The currants were quoted at a price "carriage and insurance free to London"; and the Bill of Lading etc. were to be handed to the buyer upon payment of he sight draft.

218. Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character," is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees,* in fact, is the substance of he poem. The whole passage from Ovid is of great anthropological interest:

'. . . Cum Iunone iocos et maior vestra profecto est
Quam, quae contingit maribus,' dixisse, 'voluptas.'
Illa negat; placuit quae sit sententia docti
Quaerere Tiresiae: venus huic erat utraque nota.

Nam duo magnorum viridi coeuntia silva
Corpora serpentum baculi violaverat ictu
Deque viro factus, mirabile, femina septem
Egerat autumnos; octavo rursus eosdem
Videt et 'est vestrae si tanta potentia plagae,'
Dixit 'ut auctoris sortem in contraria mutet,
Nunc quoque vos feriam!' percussis anguibus isdem
Forma prior rediit genetivaque venit imago.
Arbiter hic igitur sumptus de lite iocosa
Dicta Iovis firmat; gravius Saturnia iusto
Nec pro materia fertur doluisse suique
Iudicis aeterna damnavit lumina nocte,
At pater omnipotens (neque enim licet inrita cuiquam
Facta dei fecisse deo) pro lumine adempto
Scire futura dedit poenamque levavit honore.

221. This may not appear as exact as Sappho's lines, but I had in mind the "longshore" or "dory" fisherman, who returns at nightfall.

253. V. Goldsmith, the song of *The Vicar of Wakefield.*

257. V. *The Tempest,* as above.

264. The interior of St. Magnus Martyr is to my mind one of the finest among Wren's interiors. See *The Proposed Demolition of Nineteen City Churches:* (P. S. King & Son, Ltd.).

266. The Song of the (three) Thames-daughters begins here. From line 292 to 306 inclusive they speak in turn. V. *Gotterdammerung* III, 1: the Rhine-daughters.

279. V. Froude, *Elizabeth,* Vol. I, ch. iv, letter of De Quadra to Philip of Spain: "In the afternoon we were in a barge, watching the games on the river. (The queen) was alone with Lord Robert and myself on the poop, when they began to talk nonsense, and went so far that Lord Robert at last said, as I was on the spot there was no reason why they should not be married if the queen pleased.

293. Cf. *Purgatorio,* V, 133:

"Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia;
"Siena mi fe', disfecemi Maremma."

307. V. St. Augustine's *Confessions:* "to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears."

308. The complete text of the Buddha's Fire Sermon (which corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount) from which these words are taken, will be found translated in the late Henry Clarke Warren's *Buddhism in Translation* (Harvard Oriental Series). Mr. Warren was one of the great pioneers of Buddhist studies in the Occident.

309. From St. Augustine's *Confessions* again. The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident.

V. WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

In the first part of Part V three themes are employed: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous (see Miss Weston's book) and the present decay of eastern Europe.

357. This is *Turdus aonalaschkae pallasii,* the hermit-thrush which I have heard in Quebec County. Chapman says (*Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America*) "it is most at home in secluded woodland and thickety retreats. . . . Its notes are

not remarkable for variety or volume, but in purity and sweetness of tone and exquisite modulation they are unequalled." Its "water-dripping song" is justly celebrated.

360. The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton's): it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was *one more member* than could actually be counted.

366-76. Cf. Hermann Hesse, *Blick ins Chaos:* "Schon ist halb Europa, schon ist zumindest der halbe Osten Europas auf dem Wege zum Chaos, fährt betrunken im heiligen Wahn am Abgrund entlang und singt dazu, singt betrunken und hymnisch wie Dmitri Karamasoff sang. Ueber diese Lieder lacht der Burger beleidigt, der Heilige und Seher hört sie mit Tränen."

401. "Datta, dayadhvam, damyata" (Give, sympathize, control). The fable of the meaning of the Thunder is found in the *Brihadaranyaka—Upanishad,* 5, 1. A translation is found in Deussen's *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda,* p. 489.

407. Cf. Webster, *The White Devil,* V, vi:

> ". . . they'll remarry
> Ere the worm pierce your winding-sheet, ere the spider
> Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs."

411. Cf. *Inferno,* XXXIII, 46:

> "ed io sentii chiavar l'uscio di sotto
> all'orribile torre."

Also F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality,* p. 346. "My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it. . . . In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul."

424. V. Weston: *From Ritual to Romance;* chapter on the Fisher King.

427. V. *Purgatorio,* XXVI, 148.

> "'Ara vos prec per aquella valor
> 'que vos guida al som le l'escalina,
> 'sovegna vos a temps de ma dolor.'
> Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina."

428. V. *Pervigilium Veneris.* Cf. Philomela in Parts II and III.

429. V. Gerard de Nerval, Sonnet *El Desdichado.*

431. V. Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy.*

433. Shantih. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. "The Peace which passeth understanding" is our equivalent to this word.

THE HOLLOW MEN

Mistah Kurtz—he dead.
A penny for the Old Guy.

I

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar

Shape without form, shade without color,
Paralyzed force, gesture without motion:

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us—if at all—not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

II

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In death's dream kingdom
These do not appear:
There, the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are
In the wind's singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star.

Let me be no nearer
In death's dream kingdom
Let me also wear
Such deliberate disguises
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves
No nearer—

Not that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom

III

This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.

Is it like this
In death's other kingdom
Waking alone
At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.

IV

The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men.

V

Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow
Life is very long

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

JOURNEY OF THE MAGI

"A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter."
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

ASH-WEDNESDAY

I

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things
(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
Why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign?

Because I do not hope to know again
The infirm glory of the positive hour
Because I do not think
Because I know I shall not know
The one veritable transitory power
Because I cannot drink
There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is nothing again

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are and
I renounce the blessèd face
And renounce the voice

Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice

And pray to God to have mercy upon us
And I pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain
Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be done again,
May the judgment not be too heavy upon us

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly
But merely vans to beat the air
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still.

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death
Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

II

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree
In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety

On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained
In the hollow round of my skull. And God said
Shall these bones live? shall these
Bones live? And that which had been contained
In the bones (which were already dry) said chirping:
Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honors the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness. And I who am here dissembled
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd.
It is this which recovers
My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions
Which the leopards reject. The Lady is withdrawn
In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown.
Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetfulness.
There is no life in them. As I am forgotten
And would be forgotten, so I would forget
Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose. And God said
Prophesy to the wind, to the wind only, for only
The wind will listen. And the bones sang chirping
With the burden of the grasshopper, saying

Lady of silences
Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposeful
The single Rose
Is now the Garden
Where all loves end
Terminate torment
Of love unsatisfied
The greater torment
Of love satisfied
End of the endless
Journey to no end
Conclusion of all that
Is inconclusible
Speech without word and
Word of no speech
Grace to the Mother
For the Garden
Where all love ends.

Under a juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered and shining
We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other,
Under a tree in the cool of the day, with the blessing of sand,
Forgetting themselves and each other, united
In the quiet of the desert. This is the land which ye
Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity
Matters. This is the land. We have our inheritance.

III

At the first turning of the second stair
I turned and saw below
The same shape twisted on the banister
Under the vapor in the fetid air
Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
The deceitful face of hope and of despair.

At the second turning of the second stair
I left them twisting, turning below;
There were no more faces and the stair was dark,
Damp, jaggèd, like an old man's mouth drivelling, beyond repair,
Or the toothed gullet of an agèd shark.

At the first turning of the third stair
Was a slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit
And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene
The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair;
Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind over the third stair,
Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and despair
Climbing the third stair.

Lord, I am not worthy
Lord, I am not worthy

but speak the word only.

IV

Who walked between the violet and the violet
Who walked between
The various ranks of varied green
Going in white and blue, in Mary's color,
Talking of trivial things
In ignorance and in knowledge of eternal dolour
Who moved among the others as they walked,
Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh the springs

Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand
In blue of larkspur, blue of Mary's color,
Sovegna vos

Here are the years that walk between, bearing
Away the fiddles and the flutes, restoring
One who moves in the time between sleep and waking, wearing

White light folded, sheathed about her, folded.
The new years walk, restoring
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem
The time. Redeem

The unread vision in the higher dream
While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse.

The silent sister veiled in white and blue
Between the yews, behind the garden god,
Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and sighed but spoke no word

But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down
Redeem the time, redeem the dream
The token of the word unheard, unspoken

Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew

And after this our exile

v

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the center of the silent Word.

O my people, what have I done unto thee.

Where shall the word be found, where will the word
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence,
Not on the sea or on the islands, not
On the mainland, in the desert or the rain land,
For those who walk in darkness
Both in the day time and in the night time
The right time and the right place are not here
No place of grace for those who avoid the face
No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny the voice

Will the veiled sister pray for
Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee,
Those who are torn on the horn between season and season, time and time, between
Hour and hour, word and word, power and power, those who wait
In darkness? Will the veiled sister pray
For children at the gate
Who will not go away and cannot pray:
Pray for those who chose and oppose

O my people, what have I done unto thee.

Will the veiled sister between the slender
Yew trees pray for those who offend her
And are terrified and cannot surrender
And affirm before the world and deny between the rocks
In the last desert between the last blue rocks

The desert in the garden the garden in the desert
Of drouth, spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed.

O my people.

VI

Although I do not hope to turn again
Although I do not hope
Although I do not hope to turn

Wavering between the profit and the loss
In this brief transit where the dreams cross
The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying
(Bless me father) though I do not wish to wish these things
From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings
And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell
Quickens to recover
The cry of quail and the whirling plover
And the blind eye creates
The empty forms between the ivory gates
And smell renews the salt savor of the sandy earth

This is the time of tension between dying and birth
The place of solitude where three dreams cross
Between blue rocks
But when the voices shaken from the yew-tree drift away
Let the other yew be shaken and reply.

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother,
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

BURNT NORTON

(*From "Four Quartets"*)

I

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.

If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.
But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know.
Other echoes
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
Round the corner. Through the first gate,
Into our first world, shall we follow
The deception of the thrush? Into our first world.
There they were, dignified, invisible,
Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,
In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,
And the bird called, in response to
The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,
And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
Had the look of flowers that are looked at.
There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting.
So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
To look down into the drained pool.
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.
Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

I

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
Clot the bedded axle-tree.
The trilling wire in the blood
Sings below inveterate scars
And reconciles forgotten wars.

The dance along the artery
The circulation of the lymph
Are figured in the drift of stars
Ascend to summer in the tree
We move above the moving tree
In light upon the figured leaf
And hear upon the sodden floor
Below, the boarhound and the boar
Pursue their pattern as before
But reconciled among the stars.

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where.
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.

The inner freedom from the practical desire,
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
Without elimination, both a new world
And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
The resolution of its partial horror.
Yet the enchainment of past and future
Woven in the weakness of the changing body,
Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
Which flesh cannot endure.

Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness.
To be conscious is not to be in time
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
Be remembered; involved with past and future.
Only through time time is conquered.

III

Here is a place of disaffection
Time before and time after
In a dim light: neither daylight
Investing form with lucid stillness
Turning shadow into transient beauty
With slow rotation suggesting permanence
Nor darkness to purify the soul
Emptying the sensual with deprivation
Cleansing affection from the temporal.
Neither plenitude nor vacancy. Only a flicker

Over the strained time-ridden faces
Distracted from distraction by distraction
Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
Tumid apathy with no concentration
Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
That blows before and after time,
Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
Time before and time after.
Eructation of unhealthy souls
Into the faded air, the torpid
Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of London,
Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney,
Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate. Not here
Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.

Descend lower, descend only
Into the world of perpetual solitude,
World not world, but that which is not world
Internal darkness, deprivation
And destitution of all property,
Desiccation of the world of sense,
Evacuation of the world of fancy,
Inoperancy of the world of spirit;
This is the one way, and the other
Is the same, not in movement
But abstention from movement; while the world moves
In appetency, on its metalled ways
Of time past and time future.

IV

Time and the bell have buried the day,
The black cloud carries the sun away.
Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
Clutch and cling?
Chill
Fingers of yew be curled
Down on us? After the kingfisher's wing
Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is sti
At the still point of the turning world.

V

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.
Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
Not that only, but the co-existence,
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there

Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now. Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place
Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
Always assail them. The Word in the desert
Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.
The detail of the pattern is movement,
As in the figure of the ten stairs.
Desire itself is movement
Not in itself desirable;
Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement,
Timeless, and undesiring
Except in the aspect of time
Caught in the form of limitation
Between un-being and being.
Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
Even while the dust moves
There rises the hidden laughter
Of children in the foliage
Quick now, here, now, always—
Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after.

John Crowe Ransom

JOHN CROWE RANSOM was born in Pulaski, Tennessee, April 30, 1888, of Scotch-Irish descent. Pulaski, so Ransom states, is otherwise distinguished as being the County Seat of Giles County, the deathplace of Sam Davis, the Confederate martyr, and of the Ku Klux Klan. (Ransom's own great-uncle took part in the foundation of the latter.) Ransom, the son of a local minister, was educated in his own state and abroad: he received his B.A. at Vanderbilt University in 1909, his B.A. at Oxford in 1913. At the latter he was Rhodes Scholar from Tennessee, taking the "Greats" (classical) course. He taught at Vanderbilt from 1914 until 1937; he then transferred to Kenyon College, Ohio, where he founded *The Kenyon Review.* He was the chief instigator and one of the founders of *The Fugitive,* that experimental journal which did much to disprove Mencken's contention that the South was a vast "Sahara of the Beaux Arts." Although Ransom is realistically aware that the past is past, he cannot help yearning for a vanished richness, for an agrarianism that cannot be and a culture that never was.

Poems About God appeared in 1919, a raw first book with a tang of bitter humor. Here was no southern gentleman's proverbial courtliness, no unctuous and mincing

gallantry; here was a bristling acerbity blurted in a strong if uncertain utterance. The lines range from the roughly powerful (reminding one of a coarser Robert Frost) to the surprisingly banal. During the five-year interval between *Poems About God* and his next volume, Ransom's poetry underwent an almost complete change. Little of the crudeness remains in *Chills and Fever,* by all odds the most distinguished volume of poetry published in 1924. Ransom, it was evident, reacted from the callow simplicities and the tradition of Wonder in words of one syllable; his verse is definitely for mature minds willing not only to allow a mature poet his mixed modes but willing to follow them. It is, at first glance, a curiously involved speech which Ransom uses to clothe his semi-whimsical, semi-ironic philosophy. But beneath his precise circumlocutions one is made aware of an extraordinarily sensitive lyricist. What adds zest to his verses is the mocking gravity of his speech—a gravity which is sometimes exaggerated to the verge of parody, if a philosopher can achieve that dubious art.

Ransom strikes his note with a sureness that is almost defiant. He is witty, but his wit is strengthened by passion; he turns from dialectical fencing to sudden emotion. Surprise is his forte; he can weave patterns that are, at one time, fanciful and learned. His account of a small boy's walk in deep woods ("First Travels of Max") is as fine a macabre piece as anything achieved by Amy Lowell. He can draw portraits of dream-lost mediocrities as sympathetically as Robinson, "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son" being a second cousin to "Miniver Cheevy" and "Bewick Finzer." He can sound the mordant brasses in "Captain Carpenter," the muted violins in "Here Lies a Lady" and the prophetic trumpets in "Spiel of the Three Mountebanks" with equal precision. "Parting Without a Sequel" is memorable in its combination of emotion and mockery. "Piazza Piece" is, perhaps, the most characteristic of these poems; in a sonnet balanced as a lyric Ransom has revitalized—and localized—the old theme of Death and the Lady.

Such music, half soothing, half stinging, is new in our poetry; the modulations are strange, the cadences charming in their slight irregularities. Ransom knows how to employ the unresolved suspension; he delights in pairing such slant rhymes as "drunkard-conquered," "little-scuttle," "ready-study." But it is not merely the free use of dissonance and assonance which distinguishes his poems; it is what he does with these properties. "Antique Harvesters" breathes the very quixotic spirit of the old South and the Southron's devotion to that spirit; "Lady Lost" is a perfect harmonizing of teasing and tenderness; "Janet Waking" uncannily mingles sympathy and mock pathos.

Two Gentlemen in Bonds (1927) has the fresh combination of cavalier grace and surprising savagery uttered in a precise softness of speech. But the surprise is not only occasioned by his tempo which is both nervous and drawling. As Mark Van Doren wrote, "He has been at pains to salt his rhymes and pepper his diction with fresh, realistic words; he has wrenched his cadences to fit his wayward thought; he has written with an original and almost acid gayety."

Yet, for all of Ransom's variety, in spite of his ability to play equally well in the spangles of harlequin and the graver habit of *Kapellmeister,* this Southerner will never be a popular poet. His is too elegant a speech to meet with general favor; his vocabulary is meticulous to the point of being overelaborate, his utterance is often so finical as to seem pedantic. The fact that a great part of this particularity is

not affectation, but a scholar's gentle mockery, will not save him from the disapproval or the neglect of the public which dreads polysyllabic poets. Nor can one blame the common reader. Several of Ransom's poems lose themselves in ellipses and remote allusions, a few are so rarefied as to be unintelligible without footnotes and a chart of cross-references. His later work is both a growth and a departure. Such poems as "Prelude to an Evening," with its overtones of domestic worry, and "Painting: a Head" are a far cry from the philosophic-fanciful tone of "Here Lies a Lady." In this more difficult poetry Ransom seems to be hesitating between a veiled romanticism and an almost abstract intellectuality.

Nevertheless, even in a facile, overproductive age, there can be no doubt that these crisp narratives and teasing lyrics will find their niche. It will be neither a mean nor a long neglected one. Ransom has developed a new tone without straining for novelty; he has become an influence without becoming oracular. If the chief characteristic of Ransom's verse is irony, as Cleanth Brooks has pointed out, "it remains an instrument—it never becomes a mere attitude adopted by the poet for its own sake."

The combination of elegance and honesty which distinguishes Ransom's verse is even more striking in his prose. It characterizes *God without Thunder* (1930), which Ransom called an unorthodox defense of orthodoxy; his contribution to the agrarian symposium in *I'll Take My Stand* (1930); *The World's Body* (1938), a collection of animated literary studies, and *The New Criticism* (1941), an analytical examination of the critical theories of I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, Yvor Winters, and William Empson. *Selected Poems* (1945) contains forty of Ransom's best poems.

BELLS FOR JOHN WHITESIDE'S DAUGHTER

There was such speed in her little body,
And such lightness in her footfall,
It is no wonder that her brown study
Astonishes us all.

Her wars were bruited in our high window.
We looked among orchard trees and beyond,
Where she took arms against her shadow,
Or harried unto the pond

The lazy geese, like a snow cloud
Dripping their snow on the green grass,
Tricking and stopping, sleepy and proud,
Who cried in goose, Alas,

For the tireless heart within the little
Lady with rod that made them rise
From their noon apple-dreams, and scuttle
Goose-fashion under the skies!

But now go the bells, and we are ready;
In one house we are sternly stopped
To say we are vexed at her brown study,
Lying so primly propped.

LADY LOST

This morning, there flew up the lane
A timid lady-bird to our bird-bath
And eyed her image dolefully as death;
This afternoon, knocked on our windowpane
To be let in from the rain.

And when I caught her eye
She looked aside, but at the clapping thunder
And sight of the whole earth blazing up like tinder
Looked in on us again most miserably,
Indeed as if she would cry.

So I will go out into the park and say,
"Who has lost a delicate brown-eyed lady
In the West End Section? Or has anybody
Injured some fine woman in some dark way,
Last night or yesterday?

"Let the owner come and claim possession,
No questions will be asked. But stroke her gently
With loving words, and she will evidently
Resume her full soft-haired white-breasted fashion,
And her right home and her right passion."

BLUE GIRLS

Twirling your blue skirts, traveling the sward
Under the towers of your seminary,
Go listen to your teachers old and contrary
Without believing a word.

Tie the white fillets then about your lustrous hair
And think no more of what will come to pass
Than bluebirds that go walking on the grass
And chattering on the air.

Practice your beauty, blue girls, before it fail;
And I will cry with my loud lips and publish
Beauty which all our power shall never establish,
It is so frail.

For I could tell you a story which is true:
I know a lady with a terrible tongue,
Blear eyes fallen from blue,
All her perfections tarnished—and yet it is not long
Since she was lovelier than any of you.

HERE LIES A LADY

Here lies a lady of beauty and high degree.
Of chills and fever she died, of fever and chills,
The delight of her husband, her aunts, an infant of three,
And of medicos marveling sweetly on her ills.

For either she burned, and her confident eyes would blaze,
And her fingers fly in a manner to puzzle their heads—
What was she making? Why, nothing; she sat in a maze
Of old scraps of laces, snipped into curious shreds—

Or this would pass, and the light of her fire decline
Till she lay discouraged and cold as a thin stalk white and blown,
And would not open her eyes, to kisses, to wine.
The sixth of these states was her last; the cold settled down.

Sweet ladies, long may ye bloom, and toughly I hope ye may thole,
But was she not lucky? In flowers and lace and mourning,
In love and great honor we bade God rest her soul
After six little spaces of chill, and six of burning.

JANET WAKING

Beautifully Janet slept
Till it was deeply morning. She woke then
And thought about her dainty-feathered hen,
To see how it had kept.

One kiss she gave her mother,
Only a small one gave she to her daddy
Who would have kissed each curl of his shining baby;
No kiss at all for her brother.

"Old Chucky, Old Chucky!" she cried,
Running on little pink feet upon the grass
To Chucky's house, and listening. But alas,
Her Chucky had died.

It was a transmogrifying bee
Came droning down on Chucky's old bald head
And sat and put the poison. It scarcely bled,
But how exceedingly

And purply did the knot
Swell with the venom and communicate
Its rigor! Now the poor comb stood up straight
But Chucky did not.

So there was Janet
Kneeling on the wet grass, crying her brown hen

(Translated far beyond the daughters of men)
To rise and walk upon it.

And weeping fast as she had breath
Janet implored us, "Wake her from her sleep!"
And would not be instructed in how deep
Was the forgetful kingdom of death.

SPIEL OF THE THREE MOUNTEBANKS

THE SWARTHY ONE—

Villagers who gather round,
This is Fides, my lean hound.
Bring your bristled village curs
To try his fang and tooth, sweet sirs:
He will rend them, he is savage,
Thinking nothing but to ravage,
Nor with cudgel, fire, rope,
May ye control my misanthrope;
He would tear the moon in the sky
And fly at Heaven, could he fly.
And for his ravening without cease
I have had of him no peace.
Only once I bared the knife
To quit my devil of his life,
But listen, how I heard him say,
"Think you I shall die today?
Since your mother cursed and died,
I am keeping at your side,
We are firmly knit together,
Two ends tugging at one tether,
And you shall see when I shall die
That you are mortal even as I."
Bring your stoutest-hearted curs
If ye would risk him, gentle sirs.

THE THICK ONE—

Countrymen, here's a noble frame,
Humphrey is my elephant's name.
When my father's back was bent
Under steep impediment,
Humphrey came to my possession,
With patient strength for all his passion.
Have ye a mountain to remove?
It is Humphrey's dearest love.
Pile his burden to the skies,
Loose a pestilence of flies,
Foot him in the quick morass
Where no laden beast can pass:
He will staunch his weariless back
And march unswerving on the track.
Have ye seen a back so wide,
Such impenetrable hide?
Nor think ye by this Humphrey hill
Prince Hamlet bare his fardels ill?
Myself I like it not for us
To wear beneath an incubus;
I take offense, but in no rage
May I dispose my heritage;
Though in good time the vast and tough
Shall sink and totter soon enough.
So pile your population up:
They are a drop in Humphrey's cup;
Add all your curses to his pack
To make one straw for Humphrey's back.

THE PALE ONE—

If ye remark how poor I am,
Come, citizens, behold my lamb!
Have ye a lion, ounce, or scourge,
Or any beast of dainty gorge?
Agnus lays his tender youth
Between the very enemy's mouth,
And though he sniff his delicate meat,
He may not bruise that flesh nor eat,
He may not rend him limb from limb,
If Agnus do but bleat on him.
Fierce was my youth, but like a dream
I saw a temple, and a stream,
And where I knelt and washed my sore
This infant lamb stood on the shore,
He mounted with me from the river.
And still he cries, as brave as ever,
"Lay me down by the lion's side
To match my frailty with his pride;
Fain would I welter in my blood
To teach these lions true lionhood."
So daily Agnus would be slain
But daily is denied again,
And still the hungry lions range
While Agnus waits upon a change;

Only the coursing lions die
And in their deserts mortify.
So bring us lion, leopard, bear,
To try of Agnus without fear,
And ye less gentle than I am,
Come, be instructed of my Lamb.

FIRST TRAVELS OF MAX

As hath been, lo, these many generations,
The best of the Van Vroomans was the youngest;
And even he, in a chevroned sailor's blouse
And tawny curls far from subdued to the cap,
Had slapped old Katie and betaken himself
From games for children. That was because they told
Him never, never to set a wicked foot
Into Fool's Forest, where the devil dwelt.

"Become Saint Michael's sword!" said Max to the stick,
And to the stone, "Be a brand-new revolver!"
Then Max was glad that he had armed so wisely,
As darker grew the wood, and shrill with silence.
All good fairies were helpless here; at night
Whipped in an inch of their lives; weeping, forbidden
To play with strange scared truant little boys
Who didn't belong there. Snakes were allowed there
And lizards and adders—people of age and evil
That lay on their bellies and whispered—no bird nor rabbit.
There were more rotten trees than there were sound ones;
In that wood, timber was degenerate
And rotted almost faster than it grew.
There were no flowers nor apples; too much age.
The only innocent thing in there was Max,
And even he had cursed his little sisters.

The little black tarn rose up almost in his face—
It was as black and sudden as the pit
The Adversary digs in the bowels of earth;
Bubbles were on it, breath of the black beast
(Formed like a spider, white bag for entrails)
Who took that sort of blackness to inhabit
And dangle after bad men in Fool's Forest.
"Must they be bad?" said casuistical Max.
"Mightn't a good boy who stopped saying his prayers
Be allowed to slip into the spider's fingers?"
Max raised his sword—but what can swords do
Against the Prince of the Dark? Max sheathed his point
And crept around the pool.

In the middle of the wood was a Red Witch.
Max half expected her. He never expected
To find a witch's house so dirty and foolish,
A witch with a wide bosom yellow as butter,
Or a witch combing so many obscene things

From her black hair into her scarlet lap.
He never believed there would attempt to sing
The one that taught the rats to squeal and Bashan's
Bull to bellow.

"Littlest and last Van Vrooman, do you come too?"
She knew him, it appeared, would know him better,
The scarlet hulk of hell with a fat bosom,
Pirouetting at the bottom of the forest.
Certainly Max had come, but he was going,
Unequal contests never being commanded
On young knights only armed in innocency.
"When I am a grown man I will come here
And cut your head off!" That was very well;
Not a true heart beating in Christendom
Could have said more, but that for the present would do.
Max went straight home; and nothing chilled him more
Than the company kept him by the witch's laugh
And the witch's song, and the creeping of his flesh.

Max is more firmly domiciliated.
A great house is Van Vrooman, a green slope
South to the sun do the great ones inhabit
And a few children play on the lawn with the nurse.
Max has returned to his play, and you may find him,
His famous curls unsmoothed, if you will call
Where the Van Vroomans live, the tribe Van Vrooman
Live there, at least, when any are at home.

ANTIQUE HARVESTERS

(*Scene: Of the Mississippi the bank sinister, and of the Ohio the bank sinister*)

Tawny are the leaves turned, but they still hold.
It is the harvest; what shall this land produce?
A meager hill of kernels, a runnel of juice.
Declension looks from our land, it is old.
Therefore let us assemble, dry, gray, spare,
And mild as yellow air.

"I hear the creak of a raven's funeral wing."
The young men would be joying in the song
Of passionate birds; their memories are not long.
What is it thus rehearsed in sable? "Nothing."
Trust not but the old endure, and shall be older
Than the scornful beholder.

We pluck the spindling ears and gather the corn.
One spot has special yield? "On this spot stood
Heroes and drenched it with their only blood."
And talk meets talk, as echoes from the horn

Of the hunter—echoes are the old men's arts
Ample are the chambers of their hearts.

Here come the hunters, keepers of a rite.
The horn, the hounds, the lank mares coursing by
Under quaint archetypes of chivalry;
And the fox, lovely ritualist, in flight
Offering his unearthly ghost to quarry;
And the fields, themselves to harry.

Resume, harvesters. The treasure is full bronze
Which you will garner for the Lady, and the moon
Could tinge it no yellower than does this noon;
But the gray will quench it shortly—the fields, men, stones.
Pluck fast, dreamers; prove as you rumble slowly
Not less than men, not wholly.

Bare the arm too, dainty youths, bend the knees
Under bronze burdens. And by an autumn tone
As by a gray, as by a green, you will have known
Your famous Lady's image; for so have these.
And if one say that easily will your hands
More prosper in other lands,

Angry as wasp-music be your cry then:
"Forsake the Proud Lady, of the heart of fire,
The look of snow, to the praise of a dwindled choir,
Song of degenerate specters that were men?
The sons of the fathers shall keep her, worthy of
What these have done in love."

True, it is said of our Lady, she ageth.
But see, if you peep shrewdly, she hath not stooped;
Take no thought of her servitors that have drooped,
For we are nothing; and if one talk of death—
Why, the ribs of the earth subsist frail as a breath
If but God wearieth.

PIAZZA PIECE

—I am a gentleman in a dustcoat trying
To make you hear. Your ears are soft and small
And listen to an old man not at all;
They want the young men's whispering and sighing.
But see the roses on your trellis dying
And hear the spectral singing of the moon—
For I must have my lovely lady soon.
I am a gentleman in a dustcoat trying.

—I am a lady young in beauty waiting
Until my truelove comes, and then we kiss.
But what gray man among the vines is this

Whose words are dry and faint as in a dream?
Back from my trellis, sir, before I scream!
I am a lady young in beauty waiting.

CAPTAIN CARPENTER

Captain Carpenter rose up in his prime
Put on his pistols and went riding out
But had got wellnigh nowhere at that time
Till he fell in with ladies in a rout.

It was a pretty lady and all her train
That played with him so sweetly but before
An hour she'd taken a sword with all her main
And twined him of his nose for evermore.

Captain Carpenter mounted up one day
And rode straightway into a stranger rogue
That looked unchristian but be that as it may
The Captain did not wait upon prologue.

But drew upon him out of his great heart
The other swung against him with a club
And cracked his two legs at the shinny part
And let him roll and stick like any tub.

Captain Carpenter rode many a time
From male and female took he sundry harms
He met the wife of Satan crying "I'm
The she-wolf bids you shall bear no more arms."

Their strokes and counters whistled in the wind
I wish he had delivered half his blows
But where she should have made off like a hind
The bitch bit off his arms at the elbows.

And Captain Carpenter parted with his ears
To a black devil that used him in this wise
O jesus ere his threescore and ten years
Another had plucked out his sweet blue eyes.

Captain Carpenter got up on his roan
And sallied from the gate in hell's despite
I heard him asking in the grimmest tone
If any enemy yet there was to fight?

"To any adversary it is fame
If he risk to be wounded by my tongue
Or burnt in two beneath my red heart's flame
Such are the perils he is cast among.

"But if he can he has a pretty choice
From an anatomy with little to lose
Whether he cut my tongue and take my voice
Or whether it be my round red heart he choose."

It was the neatest knave that ever was seen
Stepping in perfume from his lady's bower
Who at this word put in his merry mien
And fell on Captain Carpenter like a tower.

I would not knock old fellows in the dust
But there lay Captain Carpenter on his back
His weapons were the old heart in his bust
And a blade shook between rotten teeth alack.

The rogue in scarlet and gray soon knew his mind
He wished to get his trophy and depart;
With gentle apology and touch refined
He pierced him and produced the Captain's heart.

God's mercy rest on Captain Carpenter now
I thought him Sirs an honest gentleman
Citizen husband soldier and scholar enow
Let jangling kites eat of him if they can.

But God's deep curses follow after those
That shore him of his goodly nose and ears
His legs and strong arms at the two elbows
And eyes that had not watered seventy years.

The curse of hell upon the sleek upstart
Who got the Captain finally on his back
And took the red red vitals of his heart
And made the kites to whet their beaks clack clack.

OLD MAN PONDERED

Three times he crossed our way where with me went
One who is fair and gentle, and it was strange,
But not once glancing did his vision range
Wayward on me, or my most innocent,
But strictly watched his own predicament.
How are old spirits so dead? His eye seemed true
As mine, he walked by it, it was as blue,
How came it monstered in its fixed intent?

But I will venture how. In his long years
Close-watched and dangerous, many a bright-barbed hate
Burning had smote against the optic gate
To enter and destroy. But the quick gears

Blinked shut the aperture. Else those grim leers
Had won to the inner chamber where sat Hope
To spin and pray, and made her misanthrope,
And bled her courage with a thousand spears.

Thus hate and scorn. And he must guard as well
Against alluring love, whose mild engine
Was perilous too for the lone sitter-in,
So hard consented to her little cell;
The tenderest looks vainly upon him fell,
Of dearest company, lest one light arrow
Be sharpened with a most immortal sorrow.
So had he kept his mansion shut of hell.

Firm and upright he walked for one so old,
Thrice-pondered; and I dare not prophesy
What age must bring me; for I look round bold
And seek my enemies out; and leave untold
The sideway watery dog's-glances I
Send fawning on you, thinking you will not scold.

PARTING, WITHOUT A SEQUEL

She has finished and sealed the letter
At last, which he so richly has deserved,
With characters venomous and hatefully curved,
And nothing could be better.

But even as she gave it,
Saying to the blue-capped functioner of doom,
"Into his hands," she hoped the leering groom
Might somewhere lose and leave it.

Then all the blood
Forsook the face. She was too pale for tears,
Observing the ruin of her younger years.
She went and stood

Under her father's vaunting oak
Who kept his peace in wind and sun, and glistened
Stoical in the rain; to whom she listened
If he spoke.

And now the agitation of the rain
Rasped his sere leaves, and he talked low and gentle,
Reproaching the wan daughter by the lintel;
Ceasing, and beginning again.

Away went the messenger's bicycle,
His serpent's track went up the hill forever.
And all the time she stood there hot as fever
And cold as any icicle.

PRELUDE TO AN EVENING

Do not enforce the tired wolf
Dragging his infected wound homeward
To sit tonight with the warm children
Naming the pretty kings of France.

The images of the invaded mind
Being as monsters in the dreams
Of your most brief enchanted headful,
Suppose a miracle of confusion:

That dreamed and undreamt become each other
And mix the night and day of your mind;
And it does not matter your twice crying
From mouth unbeautied against the pillow

To avert the gun of the same old soldier;
For cry, cock-crow, or the iron bell
Can crack the sleep-sense of outrage,
Annihilate phantoms who were nothing.

But now, by our perverse supposal,
There is a drift of fog on your mornings;
You in your peignoir, dainty at your orange cup,
Feel poising round the sunny room

Invisible evil, deprived and bold.
All day the clock will metronome
Your gallant fear; the needles clicking,
The heels detonating the stair's cavern.

Freshening the water in the blue bowls
For the buckberries, with not all your love,
You shall be listening for the low wind,
The warning sibilance of pines.

You like a waning moon, and I accusing
Our too banded Eumenides,
While you pronounce Noes wanderingly
And smooth the heads of the hungry children.

PAINTING: A HEAD

By dark severance the apparition head
Smiles from the air a capital on no
Column or a Platonic perhaps head
On a canvas sky depending from nothing;

Stirs up an old illusion of grandeur
By tickling the instinct of heads to be
Absolute and to try decapitation
And to play truant from the body bush;

But too happy and beautiful for those sorts
Of head (homekeeping heads are happiest)
Discovers maybe thirty unwidowed years
Of not dishonoring the faithful stem;

Is nameless and has authored for the evil
Historian headhunters neither book
Nor state and is therefore distinct from tart
Heads with crowns and guilty gallery heads;

So that the extravagant device of art
Unhousing by abstraction this once head
Was capital irony by a loving hand
That knew the no treason of a head like this;

Makes repentance in an unlovely head
For vinegar disparagement of flesh
Till, the hurt flesh recusing, the hard egg
Is shrunken to its own deathlike surface;

And an image thus: the body bears the head
(So hardly one they terribly are two)
Feeds and obeys and unto please what end?
Not to the glory of tyrant head but to

The increase of body. Beauty is of body.
The flesh contouring shallowly on a head
Is a rock-garden needing body's love
And best bodiness to colorify

The big blue birds sitting and sea-shell flats
And caves and on the iron acropolis
To spread the hyacinthine hair and rear
The olive garden for the nightingales.

Conrad Aiken

CONRAD (POTTER) AIKEN was born at Savannah, Georgia, August 5, 1889. He attended Harvard, was chosen class poet during his senior year, received his A.B. in 1912, traveled extensively for three years, and since then devoted all his time to literature, living at South Yarmouth, Massachusetts, until 1921. In that year he moved his family to England; a few years later he bought a house on the Sussex coast at Rye. After a brief return to America in 1928 Aiken alternated between England and Massachusetts, finally settling in the latter.

The outstanding feature of Aiken's work is its rapid adaptability and its slow growth. His first volume, *Earth Triumphant and Other Tales in Verse* (1914), is the Keats tradition crossed, paraphrased, and vulgarized by Masefield. *Turns and Movies* (1916) is a complete change; Masefield is exchanged for Masters. But in the less conspicuous half of this book Aiken begins to speak with his true voice. Here he is the natural musician, playing with new rhythms, haunting cadences. *The Jig of Forslin* (1916) is an elaboration of his method. In this volume Aiken goes back to the narrative—or rather, to a series of loosely connected stories—and, reënforced by studies in analytical psychology, explores "the process of vicarious wish fulfillment by which civilized man enriches his circumscribed life."

Nocturne of Remembered Spring (1917), *The Charnel Rose* (1918) and *The House of Dust* (1920) are packed with a tired but often beautiful music. Even though it is enlivened by injections of T. S. Eliot's conversational idiom, the effect is frequently misty and monotonous. Rain seems to fall persistently through these volumes; dust blows down the street; the shadows blur; everything dissolves in a wash of boredom and forgetfulness. Even the poignance seems on the point of falling asleep, and the lyrics sound like echoes heard in a dream.

Often Aiken loses himself in this watery welter of language. In trying to create a closer *liaison* between poetry and music, he places so much importance on the rise and fall of syllables that his very excess of melody defeats his purpose. His verse, thus, gains greatly on the sensuous side, but loses, in its murmuring indefiniteness, that vitality of speech which is the very blood of poetry. It is a subaqueous music, strangely like the magic of Debussy.

This weakening overinsistence on sound does not prevent Aiken from attaining many exquisite effects. Primarily, a lyric poet, he condenses an emotion in a few lines; some of his best moments are these "lapses" into tune. The music of the "Morning Song from 'Senlin'" (in *The Charnel Rose*) is rich with subtleties of rhythm. But it is much more than a lyrical movement. Beneath the flow and flexibility of these lines there is a summoning of the immensities that loom behind the casual moments of everyday.

Punch: The Immortal Liar (1921) is an almost complete *volte face*. After it seemed established that Aiken's gift was limited to the twitching of overrefined nerves, to a too ready response to gloomy subconsciousness, the poet strikes out toward a naked directness. Brilliant though the first half of this work is, it is the second part which burns steadily. Here Punch, stripped of his mask of bragga-

docio, is revealed as the solitary, frustrated dreamer; a pitiful puppet floundering in a net he cannot see; jerked and gesticulating without knowledge of the strings which direct him—a symbol, in short, of man as marionette. This second part of *Punch* contains not only Aiken's most delicate exposition of the inhibited soul, but some of the finest lyrics he has produced.

Priapus and the Pool (1922) is preponderantly lyrical, containing twenty-five songs, several of which are as skillful as those of any contemporary American singer. The succeeding volume, *The Pilgrimage of Festus* (1923), returns to the symphonic form; beneath its imaginative outlines it is an extended essay in epistemology. Festus is the lineal descendant of Aiken's own Senlin and a not distant relative of Ibsen's Peer Gynt. A revised and enlarged edition of *Priapus and the Pool* appeared in 1925.

Aiken, the keenest critic of his own poetry, has been quick to see its limitations as well as its potentialities. In a self-analysis in which he confessed that his verse has groped continually toward symphonic arrangement, Aiken wrote, "Here I give myself away as being in quest of a sort of absolute poetry, a poetry in which the intention is not so much to arouse an emotion, or to persuade of a reality, as to employ such emotion or sense of reality (tangentially struck) with the same cool detachment with which a composer employs notes or chords."

Here we are at the heart of the contradiction: the paradox that, though Aiken is undoubtedly one of the most musical of living poets, he is one of the least popular. An audience that prefers its emotion outright, that craves a palpable reality, resents (or, worse, ignores) the nuance "tangentially struck." The emphasis on overtone and implication creates, too often, an obscure pantomime; it is, as Aiken himself was quick to see, "a prestidigitation in which the juggler's bottles or balls are a little too apt, unfortunately, to be altogether invisible." What is even more obvious, an audience is quick to sense the performer's uncertainty. This—until the most recent work—has been Aiken's undoing. He has fancied himself as a symphonist when he was, preeminently, a lyricist, albeit a lyricist neither pure nor simple. More than any contemporary, except T. S. Eliot, who seems to have learned several tricks in dissonance from Aiken, he has evolved a subtly subjective poetry which flows as smoothly, as surprisingly, as the stream of the subconscious. He has given formlessness a form, has brought tortured self-analysis to a pitch of pure poetry, and (whether in the suspensions of the famous "Morning Song from 'Senlin'" or the more certain modulations of "Tetélestai") he has registered an immediacy of anguish. Aiken's growth in tonal surety must be evident to all but the tone-deaf. "The Road" is more than a compelling dream picture; in it Aiken contradicts his own credo and participates in the struggle of humanity. "At a Concert of Music" and "Annihilation" bring the earlier modulations to a perfect cadence.

Aiken's musical advance is cumulatively established by the *Selected Poems* (1929), which won the Pulitzer Prize for that year, *John Deth and Other Poems* (1930), and *Landscape West of Eden* (1933). All these deal with sets of symbols and dream pictures in a limbo of fantasy. *John Deth* is one of the most curious poems Aiken has written, and the lyrics which follow it ("Annihilation," "The Quarrel," "At a

The music of such meditative lyrics is pitched lower in the somber "preludes" which began preoccupying Aiken before 1930 and of which he has written a hundred or more. Sixty-three of these were published in *Preludes for Memnon* (1931) and, though Memnon typified the sun, these poems seem chiefly addressed to darkness. The mood is disconsolate, the tone languorous to lugubrious. Most of the book suggests that abstract and "absolute" poetry to which Aiken has so often tuned his muted instruments, yet several of the individual poems ("This is not you?" "So, in the evening to the simple cloister," "But how it came from earth," "One star fell and another as we walked") are rich in movement and emotional intensity.

Time in the Rock (1936), which was sub-titled "Preludes to Definition," was received more cordially than *And in the Human Heart* (1940), a sequence of forty-three sonnets, which was faintly praised for its fluency and loudly damned for its shopworn rhetoric. Reviewing *And in the Human Heart* as a piece of outworn incantation, an attempt to trade "in rhetorical magic," Randall Jarrell wrote in *The New Republic,* "He is in love with a few dozen words, and their permutations and combinations have assumed for him a weight and urgency that would be quite incomprehensible to his readers, if it were not for the fact that most of these terms are the traditional magic-making words of English romantic poetry. . . . To him, now, the world exists as a thesaurus from which to derive the glittering and immaculate counters that arrange themselves, almost automatically, into a poem. Any similarity between the poems and reality is purely coincidental." But two weeks later Malcolm Cowley replied in the same journal, "Mr. Jarrell fails to discuss Mr. Aiken's real methods. He does not mention his subtly varied repetitions; and above all he does not say anything about the music of Mr. Aiken's verse." *Brownstone Eclogues* (1942) emphasizes and extends that music. *The Kid* (1947) is a set of rhymed metaphors on the American dream, a small-scale effort at large-scale myth-making.

Besides his poetry, Aiken has written some extraordinarily sensitive criticism. *Scepticisms* (1919) is a provocative and valuable set of studies. His anthologies—*Modern American Poets* (1922) and *American Poetry, 1671-1928*—suffer from Aiken's predilection for experimental and abstract verse, but are far superior to the ordinary compilation. He edited the first *Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson* which appeared in England in 1924. In that year his prose began to attract attention. *Bring! Bring!* (1925) and *Costumes by Eros* (1928) are collections of introspective short stories in a successful if not altogether new genre. *Blue Voyage* (1927) is less influenced, a novel closely woven and strangely unresolved. *Great Circle* (1933) is a tense study in psychopathological maladjustment, a theme which Aiken employs with skill and extraordinary effect. *King Coffin* (1935), a novel, is a brilliant study of a paranoiac and his "perfect" crime. *Conversation* (1940) is a story of domestic crisis, lighter in texture than most of Aiken's other work.

BREAD AND MUSIC

Music I heard with you was more than music,
And bread I broke with you was more than bread;
Now that I am without you, all is desolate;
All that was once so beautiful is dead.

Your hands once touched this table and this silver,
And I have seen your fingers hold this glass.
These things do not remember you, belovèd,
And yet your touch upon them will not pass.

For it was in my heart you moved among them,
And blessed them with your hands and with your eyes;
And in my heart they will remember always,—
They knew you once, O beautiful and wise.

MIRACLES

Twilight is spacious, near things in it seem far,
And distant things seem near.
Now in the green west hangs a yellow star.
And now across old waters you may hear
The profound gloom of bells among still trees,
Like a rolling of huge bowlders beneath seas.

Silent as thought in evening contemplation
Weaves the bat under the gathering stars.
Silent as dew, we seek new incarnation,
Meditate new avatars.
In a clear dusk like this
Mary climbed up the hill to seek her son,
To lower him down from the cross, and kiss
The mauve wounds, every one.

Men with wings
In the dusk walked softly after her.
She did not see them, but may have felt
The winnowed air around her stir;
She did not see them, but may have known
Why her son's body was light as a little stone.
She may have guessed that other hands were there
Moving the watchful air.

Now, unless persuaded by searching music
Which suddenly opens the portals of the mind,
We guess no angels,
And are contented to be blind.
Let us blow silver horns in the twilight,
And lift our hearts to the yellow star in the green,
To find perhaps, if, while the dew is rising,
Clear things may not be seen.

MORNING SONG FROM "SENLIN"

It is morning, Senlin says, and in the morning
When the light drips through the shutters like the dew,

I arise, I face the sunrise,
And do the things my fathers learned to do.
Stars in the purple dusk above the rooftops
Pale in a saffron mist and seem to die,
And I myself on a swiftly tilting planet
Stand before a glass and tie my tie.

Vine-leaves tap my window,
Dew-drops sing to the garden stones,
The robin chirps in the chinaberry tree
Repeating three clear tones.

It is morning. I stand by the mirror
And tie my tie once more.
While waves far off in a pale rose twilight
Crash on a white sand shore.
I stand by a mirror and comb my hair:
How small and white my face!—
The green earth tilts through a sphere of air
And bathes in a flame of space.
There are houses hanging above the stars
And stars hung under a sea . . .
And a sun far off in a shell of silence
Dapples my walls for me. . . .

It is morning, Senlin says, and in the morning
Should I not pause in the light to remember God?
Upright and firm I stand on a star unstable,
He is immense and lonely as a cloud.
I will dedicate this moment before my mirror
To him alone, for him I will comb my hair.
Accept these humble offerings, clouds of silence!
I will think of you as I descend the stair.

Vine-leaves tap my window,
The snail-track shines on the stones;
Dew-drops flash from the chinaberry tree
Repeating two clear tones.

It is morning, I awake from a bed of silence,
Shining I rise from the starless waters of sleep.
The walls are about me still as in the evening,
I am the same, and the same name still I keep.
The earth revolves with me, yet makes no motion.
The stars pale silently in a coral sky.
In a whistling void I stand before my mirror,
Unconcerned, and tie my tie.

There are horses neighing on far-off hills
Tossing their long white manes,
And mountains flash in the rose-white dusk,
Their shoulders black with rains. . . .

It is morning, I stand by the mirror
And surprise my soul once more;
The blue air rushes above my ceiling,
There are suns beneath my floor. . . .

. . . It is morning, Senlin says, I ascend from darkness
And depart on the winds of space for I know not where;
My watch is wound, a key is in my pocket,
And the sky is darkened as I descend the stair.
There are shadows across the windows, clouds in heaven,
And a god among the stars; and I will go
Thinking of him as I might think of daybreak
And humming a tune I know. . . .

Vine-leaves tap at the window,
Dew-drops sing to the garden stones,
The robin chirps in the chinaberry tree
Repeating three clear tones.

THE ROOM

Through that window—all else being extinct
Except itself and me—I saw the struggle
Of darkness against darkness. Within the room
It turned and turned, dived downward. Then I saw
How order might—if chaos wished—become:
And saw the darkness crush upon itself,
Contracting powerfully; it was as if
It killed itself, slowly: and with much pain.
Pain. The scene was pain, and nothing but pain.
What else, when chaos draws all forces inward
To shape a single leaf? . . .
For the leaf came
Alone and shining in the empty room;
After a while the twig shot downward from it;
And from the twig a bough; and then the trunk,
Massive and coarse; and last the one black root.
The black root cracked the walls. Boughs burst the window:
The great tree took possession.
Tree of trees!
Remember (when time comes) how chaos died
To shape the shining leaf. Then turn, have courage,
Wrap arms and roots together, be convulsed
With grief, and bring back chaos out of shape.
I will be watching then as I watch now.
I will praise darkness now, but then the leaf.

THE PUPPET DREAMS

(from "Punch: The Immortal Liar")

Sheba, now let down your hair,
And play upon it with your hands,
While girls from Tal and Mozambique
Parade before in sarabands,—

Play him songs inaudible
With white hands braceleted and slim,
Or shake your hair and let it fall
And softly darken him.

Cling to him, while cymbals far
Are sweetly smitten in the dusk,
And maenads, under a haughty star,
Break the white rose for its musk:

Cling to him, and with your lips
Feed his heart on crumbs of fire
That shall, perpetually, delight
But never slay desire!

✦

Open a window on the world
With all its sorrow, and then
When he has heard that sound a space,
Close it fast again. . . .

Sweet will it be, lapped round with ease
And music-troubled air,
To hear for a moment on the wind
A sound of far despair:

And then, to turn to lights again,
And fingers soft on strings,
While Sheba slips her bracelets off
And spreads her arms and sings. . . .

Sweet will it be, to hear far off
That gusty sound of pain,
And to remember, far away,
A world of death and rain:

And then, to close the window fast,
And laugh, and clap soft hands,
While girls from Tal and Mozambique
Parade in sarabands. . . .

Close now the window! Close it well!
That slow lament of pain
Was but the dissonance that makes
Dull music sweet again.

✦

There is a fountain in a wood
Where wavering lies a moon:
It plays to the slowly falling leaves
A sleepy tune.

. . . The peach-trees lean upon a wall
Of gold and ivory:
The peacock spreads his tail, the leaves
Fall silently. . . .

There, amid silken sounds and wine
And music idly broken,
The drowsy god observes his world
With no word spoken.

Arcturus, rise! Orion, fall! . . .
The white-winged stars obey. . . .
Or else he greets his Fellow-God;
And there, in the dusk, they play

A game of chess with stars for pawns
And a silver moon for queen:
Immeasurable as clouds, above
A chess-board world they lean

And thrust their hands amid their beards,
And utter words profound
That shake the star-swung firmament
With a fateful sound! . . .

. . . The peach-trees lean upon a wall
Of gold and ivory;
The peacock spreads his tail; the leaves
Fall silently. . . .

PORTRAIT OF A GIRL

This is the shape of the leaf, and this of the flower,
And this the pale bole of the tree
Which watches its bough in a pool of unwavering water
In a land we never shall see.

The thrush on the bough is silent, the dew falls softly,
In the evening is hardly a sound. . . .
And the three beautiful pilgrims who come here together
Touch lightly the dust of the ground.

Touch it with feet that trouble the dust but as wings do,
Come shyly together, are still,
Like dancers who wait in a pause of the music, for music
The exquisite silence to fill . . .

This is the thought of the first, and this of the second,
And this the grave thought of the third:
"Linger we thus for a moment, palely expectant,
And silence will end, and the bird

"Sing the pure phrase, sweet phrase, clear phrase in the twilight
To fill the blue bell of the world;
And we, who on music so leaflike have drifted together,
Leaflike apart shall be whirled

"Into what but the beauty of silence, silence forever? . . ."
. . . This is the shape of the tree,
And the flower and the leaf, and the three pale beautiful pilgrims:
This is what you are to me.

AND IN THE HANGING GARDENS—

And in the hanging gardens there is rain
From midnight until one, striking the leaves
And bells of flowers, and stroking boles of planes,
And drawing slow arpeggios over pools
And stretching strings of sound from eaves to ferns.
The princess reads. The knave of diamonds sleeps.
The king is drunk, and flings a golden goblet
Down from the turret window (curtained with rain)
Into the lilacs.
And at one o'clock
The vulcan under the garden wakes and beats
The gong upon his anvil. Then the rain
Ceases, but gently ceases, dripping still,
And sound of falling water fills the dark
As leaves grow bold and upright, and as eaves
Part with water. The princess turns the page
Beside the candle, and between two braids
Of golden hair. And reads: "From there I went
Northward a journey of four days, and came
To a wild village in the hills, where none
Was living save the vulture and the rat
And one old man who laughed but could not speak.
The roofs were fallen in, the well grown over
With weed. And it was here my father died.

Then eight days further, bearing slightly west,
The cold wind blowing sand against our faces,
The food tasting of sand. And as we stood
By the dry rock that marks the highest point
My brother said: 'Not too late is it yet
To turn, remembering home.' And we were silent
Thinking of home." The princess shuts her eyes
And feels the tears forming beneath her eyelids
And opens them, and tears fall on the page.
The knave of diamonds in the darkened room
Throws off his covers, sleeps, and snores again.
The king goes slowly down the turret stairs
To find the goblet.

And at two o'clock
The vulcan in his smithy underground
Under the hanging gardens, where the drip
Of rain among the clematis and ivy
Still falls from sipping flower to purple flower
Smites twice his anvil, and the murmur comes
Among the roots and vines. The princess reads:
"As I am sick, and cannot write you more,
And have not long to live, I give this letter
To him, my brother, who will bear it south
And tell you how I died. Ask how it was,
There in the northern desert, where the grass
Was withered, and the horses, all but one,
Perished . . ." The princess drops her golden head
Upon the page between her two white arms
And golden braids. The knave of diamonds wakes
And at his window in the darkened room
Watches the lilacs tossing, where the king
Seeks for the goblet.

And at three o'clock
The moon inflames the lilac heads, and thrice
The vulcan, in his root-bound smithy, clangs
His anvil; and the sounds creep softly up
Among the vines and walls. The moon is round,
Round as a shield above the turret top.
The princess blows her candle out, and weeps
In the pale room, where scent of lilacs comes,
Weeping, with hands across her eyelids, thinking
Of withered grass, withered by sandy wind.
The knave of diamonds, in his darkened room,
Holds in his hands a key, and softly steps
Along the corridor, and slides the key
Into the door that guards her. Meanwhile, slowly,
The king, with raindrops on his beard and hands,
And dripping sleeves, climbs up the turret stairs,
Holding the goblet upright in one hand;
And pauses on the midmost step to taste
One drop of wine wherewith wild rain has mixed.

THE ROAD

Three then came forward out of darkness, one
An old man bearded, his old eyes red with weeping,
A peasant, with hard hands. "Come now," he said,
"And see the Road, for which our people die.
Twelve miles of road we've made, a little only,
Westward winding. Of human blood and stone
We build; and in a thousand years will come
Beyond the hills to sea."
I went with them,
Taking a lantern, which upon their faces
Showed years and grief; and in a time we came
To the wild road which wound among wild hills
Westward; and so along this road we stopped,
Silent, thinking of all the dead men there
Compounded with sad clay. Slowly we moved:
For they were old and weak, had given all
Their life to build this twelve poor miles of road,
Muddy, under the rain. And in my hand,
Turning the lantern here or there, I saw
Deep holes of water where the raindrop splashed,
And rainfilled footprints in the grass, and heaps
Of broken stone, and rusted spades and picks,
And helves of axes. And the old man spoke,
Holding my wrist: "Three hundred years it took
To build these miles of road: three hundred years;
And human lives unnumbered. But the day
Will come when it is done." Then spoke another,
One not so old, but old, whose face was wrinkled:
"And when it comes, our people will all sing
For joy, passing from east to west, or west
To east, returning, with the light behind them;
All meeting in the road and singing there."
And the third said: "The road will be their life;
A heritage of blood. Grief will be in it,
And beauty out of grief. And I can see
How all the women's faces will be bright.
In that time, laughing, they will remember us.
Blow out your lantern now, for day is coming."

My lantern blown out, in a little while
We climbed in long light up a hill, where climbed
The dwindling road, and ended in a field.
Peasants were working in the field, bowed down
With unrewarded work and grief and years
Of pain. And as we passed them, one man fell
Into a furrow that was bright with water
And gave a cry that was half cry, half song—
"The road . . . the road . . . the road . . ." And all then fell

Upon their knees and sang.
We four passed on
Over the hills, to westward. . . . Then I felt
How tears ran down my face, tears without end,
And knew that all my life henceforth was weeping,
Weeping, thinking of human grief, and human
Endeavor fruitless in a world of pain.
And when I held my hands up they were old;
I knew my face would not be young again.

ANNIHILATION

While the blue noon above us arches
And the poplar sheds disconsolate leaves,
Tell me again why love bewitches
And what love gives.

Is it the trembling finger that traces
The eyebrow's curve, the curve ot the cheek?
The mouth that quivers, while the hand caresses,
But cannot speak?

No, not these, not in these is hidden
The secret, more than in other things:
Not only the touch of a hand can gladden
Till the blood sings.

It is the leaf that falls between us,
The bell that murmurs, the shadows that move,
The autumnal sunlight that fades upon us,
These things are love.

It is the "No, let us sit here longer,"
The "Wait till tomorrow," the "Once I knew"—
These trifles, said as you touch my finger
And the clock strikes two.

The world is intricate, and we are nothing.
It is the complex world of grass,
The twig on the path, a look of loathing,
Feelings that pass—

These are the secret; and I could hate you
When, as I lean for another kiss,
I see in your eyes that I do not meet you,
And that love is this.

Rock meeting rock can know love better
Than eyes that stare or lips that touch.
All that we know in love is bitter,
And it is not much.

THE QUARREL

Suddenly, after the quarrel, while we waited,
Disheartened, silent, with downcast looks, nor stirred
Eyelid nor finger, hopeless both, yet hoping
Against all hope to unsay the sundering word:

While all the room's stillness deepened, deepened about us,
And each of us crept his thought's way to discover
How, with as little sound as the fall of a leaf,
The shadow had fallen, and lover quarreled with lover;

And while, in the quiet, I marveled—alas, alas—
At your deep beauty, your tragic beauty, torn
As the pale flower is torn by the wanton sparrow—
This beauty, pitied and loved, and now forsworn;

It was then, when the instant darkened to its darkest,—
When faith was lost with hope, and the rain conspired
To strike its gray arpeggios against our heartstrings,—
When love no longer dared, and scarcely desired:

It was then that suddenly, in the neighbor's room,
The music started: that brave quartette of strings
Breaking out of the stillness, as out of our stillness,
Like the indomitable heart of life that sings

When all is lost; and startled from our sorrow,
Tranced from our grief by that diviner grief,
We raised remembering eyes, each looked at other,
Blinded with tears of joy; and another leaf

Fell silently as that first; and in the instant
The shadow had gone, our quarrel became absurd;
And we rose, to the angelic voices of the music,
And I touched your hand, and we kissed, without a word.

AT A CONCERT OF MUSIC

Be still, while the music rises about us: the deep enchantment
  Towers, like a forest of singing leaves and birds,
Built for an instant by the heart's troubled beating,
  Beyond all power of words.

And while you are silent, listening, I escape you,
  And I run, by a secret path, through that bright wood
To another time, forgotten, and another woman,
  And another mood.

Then, too, the music's pure algebra of enchantment
  Wrought all about us a bird-voice-haunted grove.

Then, too, I escaped, as now, to an earlier moment
And a brighter love.

Alas! Can I never have peace in the shining instant?
The hard bright crystal of being, in time and space?
Must I always touch, in the moment, a remembered moment,
A remembered face?

Absolve me: I would adore you, had I the secret,
With all this music's power, for yourself alone:
I would try to answer, in the world's chaotic symphony,
Your one clear tone:

But alas, alas, being everything you are nothing;
The history of all my life is in your face;
And all I can grasp is an earlier, more haunted moment,
And a happier place.

TETÉLESTAI

I

How shall we praise the magnificence of the dead,
The great man humbled, the haughty brought to dust?
Is there a horn we should not blow as proudly
For the meanest of us all, who creeps his days,
Guarding his heart from blows, to die obscurely?
I am no king, have laid no kingdoms waste,
Taken no princes captive, led no triumphs
Of weeping women through long walls of trumpets;
Say rather, I am no one, or an atom;
Say rather, two great gods, in a vault of starlight,
Play ponderingly at chess, and at the game's end
One of the pieces, shaken, falls to the floor
And runs to the darkest corner; and that piece
Forgotten there, left motionless, is I. . . .
Say that I have no name, no gifts, no power,
Am only one of millions, mostly silent;
One who came with eyes and hands and a heart,
Looked on beauty, and loved it, and left it.
Say that the fates of time and space obscured me,
Led me a thousand ways to pain, bemused me,
Wrapped me in ugliness; and like great spiders
Dispatched me at their leisure. . . . Well, what then?
Should I not hear, as I lie down in dust,
The horns of glory blowing above my burial?

II

Morning and evening opened and closed above me:
Houses were built above me; trees let fall
Yellowing leaves upon me, hands of ghosts;
Rain has showered its arrows of silver upon me

Seeking my heart; winds have roared and tossed me;
Music in long blue waves of sound has borne me
A helpless weed to shores of unthought silence;
Time, above me, within me, crashed its gongs
Of terrible warning, sifting the dust of death;
And here I lie. Blow now your horns of glory
Harshly over my flesh, you trees, you waters!
You stars and suns, Canopus, Deneb, Rigel,
Let me, as I lie down, here in this dust,
Hear, far off, your whispered salutation!
Roar now above my decaying flesh, you winds,
Whirl out your earth-scents over this body, tell me
Of ferns and stagnant pools, wild roses, hillsides!
Anoint me, rain, let crash your silver arrows
On this hard flesh! I am the one who named you,
I lived in you, and now I die in you.
I your son, your daughter, treader of music,
Lie, broken, conquered. . . . Let me not fall in silence.

III

I, the restless one; the circler of circles;
Herdsman and roper of stars, who could not capture
The secret of self; I who was tyrant to weaklings,
Striker of children; destroyer of women; corrupter
Of innocent dreamers, and laugher at beauty; I,
Too easily brought to tears and weakness by music,
Baffled and broken by love, the helpless beholder
Of the war in my heart, of desire with desire, the struggle
Of hatred with love, terror with hunger; I
Who laughed without knowing the cause of my laughter, who grew
Without wishing to grow, a servant to my own body;
Loved without reason the laughter and flesh of a woman,
Enduring such torments to find her! I who at last
Grow weaker, struggle more feebly, relent in my purpose,
Choose for my triumph an easier end, look backward
At earlier conquests; or, caught in the web, cry out
In a sudden and empty despair, "Tetélestai!"
Pity me, now! I, who was arrogant, beg you!
Tell me, as I lie down, that I was courageous.
Blow horns of victory now, as I reel and am vanquished.
Shatter the sky with trumpets above my grave.

IV

. . . Look! this flesh how it crumbles to dust and is blown!
These bones, how they grind in the granite of frost and are nothing!
This skull, how it yawns for a flicker of time in the darkness,
Yet laughs not and sees not! It is crushed by a hammer of sunlight,
And the hands are destroyed. . . . Press down through the leaves of the jasmine,
Dig through the interlaced roots—nevermore will you find me;
I was no better than dust, yet you cannot replace me. . . .
Take the soft dust in your hand—does it stir: does it sing?

Has it lips and a heart? Does it open its eyes to the sun?
Does it run, does it dream, does it burn with a secret, or tremble
In terror of death? Or ache with tremendous decisions? . . .
Listen! . . . It says: "I lean by the river. The willows
Are yellowed with bud. White clouds roar up from the south
And darken the ripples; but they cannot darken my heart,
Nor the face like a star in my heart! . . . Rain falls on the water
And pelts it, and rings it with silver. The willow trees glisten,
The sparrow chirps under the eaves; but the face in my heart
Is a secret of music. . . . I wait in the rain and am silent."
Listen again! . . . It says: "I have worked, I am tired,
The pencil dulls in my hand; I see through the window
Walls upon walls of windows with faces behind them,
Smoke floating up to the sky, an ascension of sea-gulls.
I am tired. I have struggled in vain, my decision was fruitless,
Why then do I wait? with darkness, so easy, at hand! . . .
But tomorrow, perhaps. . . . I will wait and endure till tomorrow!" . . .
Or again: "It is dark. The decision is made. I am vanquished
By terror of life. The walls mount slowly about me
In coldness. I had not the courage. I was forsaken.
I cried out, was answered by silence . . . Tetélestai! . . ."

V

Hear how it babbles!—Blow the dust out of your hand,
With its voices and visions, tread on it, forget it, turn homeward
With dreams in your brain. . . . This, then, is the humble, the nameless,—
The lover, the husband and father, the struggler with shadows,
The one who went down under shoutings of chaos, the weakling
Who cried his "forsaken!" like Christ on the darkening hilltop! . . .
This, then, is the one who implores, as he dwindles to silence,
A fanfare of glory. . . . And which of us dares to deny him?

WHEN THE TREE BARES

When the tree bares, the music of it changes:
Hard and keen is the sound, long and mournful;
Pale are the poplar boughs in the evening light
Above my house, against a slate-cold cloud.
When the house ages and the tenants leave it,
Crickets sing in the tall grass by the threshold;
Spider, by the cold mantel, hangs his web.
Here, in a hundred years from that clear season
When first I came here, bearing lights and music,
To this old ghostly house my ghost will come,—
Pause in the half-light, turn by the poplar, glide
Above tall grasses through the broken door.
Who will say that he saw—or the dusk deceived him—
A mist with hands of mist blow down from the tree
And open the door and enter and close it after?
Who will say that he saw, as midnight struck
Its tremulous golden twelve, a light in the window,

And first heard music, as of an old piano,
Music remote, as if it came from the earth,
Far down; and then, in the quiet, eager voices?
". . . Houses grow old and die, houses have ghosts.
Once in a hundred years we return, old house,
And live once more." . . . And then the ancient answer,
In a voice not human, but more like the creak of boards
Or a rattle of panes in the wind—"Not as the owner,
But as a guest you come, to fires not lit
By hands of yours. . . . Through these long-silent chambers
Move slowly, turn, return, and bring once more
Your lights and music. It will be good to talk."

ONE STAR FELL AND ANOTHER

One star fell and another as we walked.
Lifting his hand toward the west, he said—
—How prodigal that sky is of its stars!
They fall and fall, and still the sky is sky.
Two more have gone, but heaven is heaven still.

Then let us not be precious of our thought,
Nor of our words, nor hoard them up as though
We thought our minds a heaven which might change
And lose its virtue when the word had fallen.
Let us be prodigal, as heaven is;
Lose what we lose, and give what we may give,—
Ourselves are still the same. Lost you a planet—?
Is Saturn gone? Then let him take his rings
Into the Limbo of forgotten things.

O little foplings of the pride of mind,
Who wrap the phrase in lavender, and keep it
In order to display it: and you, who save our loves
As if we had not worlds of love enough—!

Let us be reckless of our words and worlds,
And spend them freely as the tree his leaves;
And give them where the giving is most blest.
What should we save them for,—a night of frost? . .
All lost for nothing, and ourselves a ghost.

BUT HOW IT CAME FROM EARTH

But how it came from earth this little white
this waxen edge this that is sharp and white
this that is mortal and bright the petals bent
and all so curved as if for lovers meant
and why the earth unfolded in this shape
as coldly as words from the warm mouth escape

Or what it is that made the blood so speak
or what it was it wanted that made this
breath of curled air this hyacinth this word
this that is deeply seen profoundly heard
miracle of quick device
from fire and ice

Or why the snail puts out a horn to see
or the brave heart puts up a hand to take
or why the mind, as if to agonize,
will close, a century ahead, its eyes—
a hundred years put on the clock
its own mortality to mock—

Christ come, Confucius come, and tell us why
the mind delights before its death to die
embracing nothing as a lover might
in a terrific ecstasy of night—
and tell us why the hyacinth is sprung
from the world's dull tongue.

Did death so dream of life, is this its dream?
Does the rock think of flowers in its sleep?
Then words and flowers are only thoughts of stone
unconscious of the joy it thinks upon;
and we ourselves are only the rock's words
stammered in a dark dream of men and birds.

PRELUDE VI

This is not you? These phrases are not you?
That pomegranate of verses was not you?
The green bright leaf not you, nor the gold fruit
Burning amongst the leaves,—hot fruit of gold,—
Nor bird, nor bough, nor bole, nor heaven's blue? . .
Alas, dear woman, I have sung in vain.

Let me dishevel then once more the leaves
Of Cupid's bright thesaurus, and there find
The word of words, the crimson seed of seeds,
The aureate sound of sounds; and out of this
Conceive once more your beauty, and in terms
Your feminine keen eye will not disdain.

For this is you: on April page it is,
Again on June, and once more on December;
On August page I find it twice; and March
Chronicles it in footnote; and July
Asserts it roundly. Thus, from page to page,
I find you many times in many terms.

It is a snowflake, which is like a star,
And melts upon the hand; it is a cobweb,
Shot with silver, that from the golden lip
Of April's dandelion hangs to the grass;
It is a raindrop,—of tremendous worth,—
Which slides the whole length of a lilac leaf. . . .

This is not you? These symbols are not you?
Not snowflake, cobweb, raindrop? . . . Woman, woman,
You are too literal, too strict with me.
What would you have? Some simple copper coin—
I love you, you are lovely, I adore you?
Or (better still) dumb silence, and a look?

No, no, this will not do; I am not one
For whom these silences are sovereign;
The pauses in the music are not music,
Although they make the music what it is.
Therefore I thumb once more the god's thesaurus,
For phrase and praise, and find it all for you.

It is a star which might be thought a snowflake,
Lost in a twinkling; it is a dandelion
Shrouded with silver brightness; it is a leaf
Which lets the raindrop go, but keeps its light. . . .
It is the purple veining in the white
That makes the pure throat of the iris pure. . . .

Yet you would have me say your hair is Helen's,—
Your gait angelic; while I turn from these
To the vast pages of that manuscript
On which the stars are stars, the world a world;
And there I find you written down, between
Arcturus and a primrose and the sea.

CLOISTER

So, in the evening, to the simple cloister:
This place of boughs, where sounds of water, softly,
Lap on the stones. And this is what you are:
Here, in this dusty room, to which you climb
By four steep flights of stairs. The door is closed:
The furies of the city howl behind you:
The last bell plunges rock-like to the sea:
The horns of taxis wail in vain. You come
Once more, at evening, to this simple cloister;
Hushed by the quiet walls, you stand at peace.

What ferns of thought are these, the cool and green,
Dripping with moisture, that festoon these walls?
What water-lights are these, whose pallid rings
Dance with the leaves, or speckle the pale stones?

What spring is this, that bubbles the cold sand,
Urging the sluggish grains of white and gold? . . .
Peace. The delicious silence throngs with ghosts
Of wingèd sound and shadow. These are you.

Now in the evening, in the simple cloister,
You stand and wait; you stand and listen, waiting
For wingèd sounds, and wingèd silences,
And long-remembered shadows. Here the rock
Lets down its vine of many-colored flowers:
Waiting for you, or waiting for the lizard
To move his lifted claw, or shift his eye
Quick as a jewel. Here the lizard waits
For the slow snake to slide among cold leaves.
And, on the bough that arches the deep pool,
Lapped in a sound of water, the brown thrush
Waits, too, and listens, till his silence makes
Silence as deep as song. And time becomes
A timeless crystal, an eternity,
In which the gone and coming are at peace.

What bird is this, whose silence fills the trees
With rich delight? What leaves and boughs are these,
What lizard, and what snake? . . . The bird is gone:
And while you wait, another comes and goes,—
Another and another; yet your eye,
Although it has not moved, can scarcely say
If birds have come and gone,—so quick, so brief,—
Or if the thrush who waits there is the same. . . .
The snake and lizard change, yet are the same:
The flowers, many-colored, on the vine,
Open and close their multitude of stars,—
Yet are the same. . . . And all these things are you.

Thus, in the evening, in the simple cloister,
Eternity adds ring to ring, the darker
Beyond the brighter; and your silence fills
With such a world of worlds,—so still, so deep,—
As never voice could speak, whether it were
The ocean's or the bird's. The night comes on:
You wait and listen, in the darkened room,
To all these ghosts of change. And they are you.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY was born February 22, 1892, in Rockland, Maine. After a childhood spent in her native State, she attended Vassar College, from which she was graduated in 1917. Coming to New York, she supported herself by writing short stories under various pseudonyms (*Distressing Dialogues,* 1924, published under the name of "Nancy Boyd"), translating songs, acting with the Provincetown Players in the capacity of playwright and performer. After her marriage to Eugen Boissevain, she moved to a farm in the Berkshires, which she left only to travel and deliver occasional readings. She died there October 19, 1950.

Her first long poem, "Renascence," was the outstanding feature of *The Lyric Year* (1912), an anthology which revealed many new names. "Renascence" was written when Miss Millay was scarcely nineteen; it remains one of the most remarkable poems of this generation. Beginning like a casual rhyme, it proceeds to a set of climaxes. It is as if a child had, in the midst of ingenuousness, uttered some terrific truth.

Renascence, Miss Millay's first volume, was published in 1917. The small collection enlarges the tone of the title poem; here is a hunger for beauty so intense that no delight can appease it. Such poems as "God's World" and a few of the unnamed sonnets, capturing the breathless awe of "Renascence" in a smaller compass, vibrate with the emotion of romantic and rebellious youth.

A Few Figs from Thistles (originally published in 1920 and revised several times since then), although one of Miss Millay's most popular collections, is her least commendable performance. In many of the self-conscious flippancies, Miss Millay has exchanged her poetic birthright for a mess of cleverness. These heel-and-toe exercises made the poet seem to suffer, it was maliciously said, from fallen archness.

Second April (1921) is a return to the triumph of her first book. In spite of certain lapses in which the poet seems to have adopted a fixed simper, *Second April* expresses that passion for identification with all of life which few poets in her generation have surpassed; she has made ecstasy articulate and almost tangible. A new note, new at least for this singer, creeps into the lyrics, the note of gravity; here is dignity, almost an austerity, of emotion.

Three plays were published in 1921: *Two Slatterns and a King,* "a moral interlude" in adroit couplets, *The Lamp and the Bell,* a five-act drama which is a strange composite of native speech and Shakespearean echoes, and *Aria Da Capo,* a one-act play which, for all its brevity, is a profound satire on war and war-makers. A juvenile effort, *The Princess Marries the Page,* was exhumed from undergraduate days and published in 1932.

The Harp-Weaver and Other Poems (1924) wears its author's heart on its sleeve. But here Miss Millay begins to wear her heart with a difference. Rarely is she narcissistic or consciously arch; she speaks with a disillusion that contains more than a tinge of bitterness. Love, she announces, sometimes with a wry wistfulness, sometimes with a proud scorn, is not enough. If, she tells us, it is hard never to attain one's desires, it is even more painful to have them fulfilled. The title-poem, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1922, barely saves itself from sentimentality. But the twenty-two sonnets which comprise Part Four of this book are

not only representative of Miss Millay's best, but are among the finest modern examples of the form.

The Buck in the Snow and Other Poems (1928) is pitched in the key of loss. The heel-and-toe insouciance has disappeared; a new and more somber poet emerges from these pages. The happy vibrations of her early work have lengthened to a music that no longer celebrates eager dawn or headlong day but is tuned to the beginning of evening. Never has Miss Millay plucked so insistently on the autumnal string; never has she been so preoccupied with the water darkening, with the ceaseless "action of waves and the action of sorrow," with the lonely self, and the going down of "the sun that will not rise again." Her metaphysics of passion remain personal; she is still too much in love with lost love, with the shards of the broken pot, with the memory of a world forgotten, with the spirit of persecution, and the minutiae of unrelinquishing mortal mind. The mood is rarely anything but subjective and self-perturbed.

Exception, however, must be made in the case of a small part of the volume, especially the group which brings the book to its ascending close. The seven sonnets in *The Buck in the Snow* overcome the limitations of the poet as well as the limitations of the form. In "Sonnet to Gath" she has fashioned an irony far removed from impertinence; in "On Hearing a Symphony of Beethoven" she achieves the impossible, writing that rarest of things, a successful poem on a symphony, and holding, in fourteen lines, the music, the orchestra, the audience, and the triumphant catharsis which is Beethoven. Rising above its almost fatal first line, it turns inversions and generalities into a victory over rhetoric.

Fatal Interview (1931), a set of fifty-two love sonnets, was hailed with superlatives. Reviewers strained to outcry each other by comparing the sequence to Mrs. Browning's, Rossetti's, Sidney's, Petrarch's, Shakespeare's, mostly in Miss Millay's favor. Only a few voices registered a minority opinion. Theodore Morrison objected that "the sonnets give the air of being manufactured, of being wondrously clever, an extraordinary simulation rather than the true substance of poetry," and a reviewer in the *London Times* flatly asserted that "the sequence as a whole is rather verbally than truly impassioned. . . . We admire the rhetoric but find little real feeling to which to respond. It is always at the pitch of romantic extravagance."

Wine from These Grapes (1934) betrays, in spite of its author's craftsmanship, the same reliance on rhetoric which marred *Fatal Interview*. Here, too, the emotion is often inflated, the poem stretched beyond its capacity. There is, moreover, a certain magisterial utterance heard in the books published after 1924, which is suspiciously portentous. *Wine from These Grapes* is, technically, Miss Millay's most uncertain volume; philosophically, it is her most mature one. Here the poet turns from prettiness and the pangs of love, and concerns herself with the bewildered and self-torturing human spirit.

Conversation at Midnight (1937) is Miss Millay's outstanding failure. In the preceding work, the poet had usually spoken in character; she had alternately used the voice of the precocious, subtle child and the mind of the experienced, disillusioned woman. Now she determined to express herself like a man—like seven men. The result is a set of discussions prosy and pretentious. Miss Millay fails to make her men talk with conviction, for she creates neither real controversy nor actual character. She is not a thinker, though she tries hard to be one; she is

upon clichés of thought as well as stereotypes of expression. The confusion is increased by the queer mixture of idioms; at one moment Miss Millay makes her dialecticians discourse in her favorite Elizabethan accent, the next moment she has them imitate Ogden Nash.

Huntsman, What Quarry? (1939) is an effort to return to the personal lyricism in which Miss Millay is most at home: the anatomy of love and defiance of age, a preoccupation which is candid if not self-critical. A few of the poems deal with subjects outside herself, but most of them dramatize a self which still hesitates to discard youth and accept maturity. Even her admirers were cautious in their praise; one of them, Gilbert Maxwell, wrote, "It seems regrettable that she has found in all these years no antidote for her animal fear of death and no substitute for that religious realization so perfectly projected in 'Renascence'." "What complicates its expression," wrote Louise Bogan, "is the influence of the hampering and sometimes destructive role of unofficial feminine laureate which Miss Millay has had to play for so long."

It was as laureate and political commentator, rather than as poet, that Miss Millay wrote *Make Bright the Arrows* (1940). The feeling which prompted the verse was intense, the outrage against the dictators and aggressors was deep and direct, but the reviewers could not help deprecating the facile couplets and journalistic carelessness. As Babette Deutsch wrote, "The subtitle of this thin collection ('1940 Notebook') might disarm the critic, but the fact that Miss Millay has permitted these verse commentaries on current history to appear between boards indicates that she believes in their permanent validity. This belief one must regretfully decline to share." *The Murder of Lidice* (1942) commemorates the Czechoslovak terror without invoking a corresponding emotion in the reader.

The legendary Miss Millay, the feminine Byron of the early 1920s, worshiped by her imitators, has not yet received final appraisal. One estimate rates her importance as high as her undoubted popularity; another deprecates her self-concern and concludes that she expresses "a twentieth century romantic temperament in a nineteenth century romantic vehicle." Critics of the future will be quick to discern the exaggeration, unevenness, and variety of Miss Millay's gifts, they will not fail to find, beyond the literary aptitude, the notes of authority.

RENASCENCE

All I could see from where I stood
Was three long mountains and a wood;
I turned and looked another way,
And saw three islands in a bay.
So with my eyes I traced the line
Of the horizon, thin and fine,
Straight around till I was come
Back to where I'd started from;
And all I saw from where I stood
Was three long mountains and a wood.
Over these things I could not see;
These were the things that bounded me;
And I could touch them with my hand,
Almost, I thought, from where I stand.

And all at once things seemed so small
My breath came short, and scarce at all.
But, sure, the sky is big, I said,
Miles and miles above my head;
So here upon my back I'll lie
And look my fill into the sky.
And so I looked, and, after all,
The sky was not so very tall.
The sky, I said, must somewhere stop,
And—sure enough!—I see the top!
The sky, I thought, is not so grand;
I 'most could touch it with my hand!
And, reaching up my hand to try,
I screamed to feel it touch the sky.

I screamed, and—lo!—Infinity
Came down and settled over me;

Forced back my scream into my chest,
Bent back my arm upon my breast,
And, pressing of the Undefined
The definition on my mind,
Held up before my eyes a glass
Through which my shrinking sight did pass
Until it seemed I must behold
Immensity made manifold;
Whispered to me a word whose sound
Deafened the air for worlds around,
And brought unmuffled to my ears
The gossiping of friendly spheres,
The creaking of the tented sky,
The ticking of Eternity.

I saw and heard, and knew at last
The How and Why of all things, past,
And present, and forevermore.
The universe, cleft to the core,
Lay open to my probing sense
That, sickening, I would fain pluck thence
But could not,—nay! But needs must suck
At the great wound, and could not pluck
My lips away till I had drawn
All venom out.—Ah, fearful pawn!
For my omniscience I paid toll
In infinite remorse of soul.
All sin was of my sinning, all
Atoning mine, and mine the gall
Of all regret. Mine was the weight
Of every brooded wrong, the hate
That stood behind each envious thrust,
Mine every greed, mine every lust.
And all the while for every grief,
Each suffering, I craved relief
With individual desire,—
Craved all in vain! And felt fierce fire
About a thousand people crawl;
Perished with each,—then mourned for all!
A man was starving in Capri;
He moved his eyes and looked at me;
I felt his gaze, I heard his moan,
And knew his hunger as my own.
I saw at sea a great fog-bank
Between two ships that struck and sank;
A thousand screams the heavens smote;
And every scream tore through my throat;
No hurt I did not feel, no death
That was not mine; mine each last breath
That, crying, met an answering cry
From the compassion that was I.
All suffering mine, and mine its rod;
Mine, pity like the pity of God.
Ah, awful weight! Infinity
Pressed down upon the finite me!
My anguished spirit, like a bird,
Beating against my lips I heard;
Yet lay the weight so close about
There was no room for it without.
And so beneath the weight lay I
And suffered death, but could not die.

Long had I lain thus, craving death,
When quietly the earth beneath
Gave way, and inch by inch, so great
At last had grown the crushing weight,
Into the earth I sank till I
Full six feet under ground did lie,
And sank no more,—there is no weight
Can follow here, however great.
From off my breast I felt it roll,
And as it went my tortured soul
Burst forth and fled in such a gust
That all about me swirled the dust.

Deep in the earth I rested now;
Cool is its hand upon the brow
And soft its breast beneath the head
Of one who is so gladly dead.
And all at once, and over all,
The pitying rain began to fall.
I lay and heard each pattering hoof
Upon my lowly, thatchèd roof.
And seemed to love the sound far more
Than ever I had done before.
For rain it hath a friendly sound
To one who's six feet underground;
And scarce the friendly voice or face:
A grave is such a quiet place.

The rain, I said, is kind to come
And speak to me in my new home.
I would I were alive again
To kiss the fingers of the rain,
To drink into my eyes the shine
Of every slanting silver line,
To catch the freshened, fragrant breeze
From drenched and dripping apple-tree
For soon the shower will be done,
And then the broad face of the sun
Will laugh above the rain-soaked earth
Until the world with answering mirth

Shakes joyously, and each round drop
Rolls, twinkling, from its grass-blade top.
How can I bear it; buried here,
While overhead the sky grows clear
And blue again after the storm?
O, multi-colored, multiform,
Beloved beauty over me,
That I shall never, never see
Again! Spring-silver, autumn-gold,
That I shall never more behold!
Sleeping your myriad magics through,
Close-sepulchered away from you!
O God, I cried, give me new birth,
And put me back upon the earth!
Upset each cloud's gigantic gourd
And let the heavy rain, down-poured
In one big torrent, set me free,
Washing my grave away from me!

I ceased; and, through the breathless hush
That answered me, the far-off rush
Of herald wings came whispering
Like music down the vibrant string
Of my ascending prayer, and—crash!
Before the wild wind's whistling lash
The startled storm-clouds reared on high
And plunged in terror down the sky,
And the big rain in one black wave
Fell from the sky and struck my grave.

I know not how such things can be,
I only know there came to me
A fragrance such as never clings
To aught save happy living things;
A sound as of some joyous elf
Singing sweet songs to please himself,
And, through and over everything,
A sense of glad awakening.
The grass, a tip-toe at my ear,
Whispering to me I could hear;
I felt the rain's cool finger-tips
Brushed tenderly across my lips,
Laid gently on my sealèd sight,
And all at once the heavy night
Fell from my eyes and I could see,—
A drenched and dripping apple-tree,
A last long line of silver rain,
A sky grown clear and blue again.
And as I looked a quickening gust
Of wind blew up to me and thrust
Into my face a miracle
Of orchard-breath, and with the smell,—
I know not how such things can be!—
I breathed my soul back into me.

Ah! Up then from the ground sprang I
And hailed the earth with such a cry
As is not heard save from a man
Who has been dead and lives again.
About the trees my arms I wound;
Like one gone mad I hugged the ground;
I raised my quivering arms on high;
I laughed and laughed into the sky,
Till at my throat a strangling sob
Caught fiercely, and a great heart-throb
Sent instant tears into my eyes;
O God, I cried, no dark disguise
Can e'er hereafter hide from me
Thy radiant identity!
Thou canst not move across the grass
But my quick eyes will see Thee pass,
Nor speak, however silently,
But my hushed voice will answer Thee.
I know the path that tells Thy way
Through the cool eve of every day;
God, I can push the grass apart
And lay my finger on Thy heart!

The world stands out on either side
No wider than the heart is wide;
Above the world is stretched the sky,—
No higher than the soul is high.
The heart can push the sea and land
Farther away on either hand;
The soul can split the sky in two,
And let the face of God shine through.
But East and West will pinch the heart
That cannot keep them pushed apart;
And he whose soul is flat—the sky
Will cave in on him by and by.

THE PEAR TREE

In this squalid, dirty dooryard,
  Where the chickens scratch and run,
White, incredible, the pear tree
  Stands apart and takes the sun,

Mindful of the eyes upon it,
  Vain of its new holiness,
Like the waste-man's little daughter
  In her first communion dress.

GOD'S WORLD

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough!
Thy winds, thy wide gray skies!
Thy mists that roll and rise!
Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag
And all but cry with color! That gaunt crag
To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!
World, world, I cannot get thee close enough!

Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew I this;
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart. Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year.
My soul is all but out of me,—let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

WILD SWANS

I looked in my heart while the wild swans went over;—
And what did I see I had not seen before?
Only a question less or a question more;
Nothing to match the flight of wild birds flying.
Tiresome heart, forever living and dying!
House without air! I leave you and lock your door!
Wild swans, come over the town, come over
The town again, trailing your legs and crying!

THE POET AND HIS BOOK

Down, you mongrel, Death!
Back into your kennel!
I have stolen breath
In a stalk of fennel!
You shall scratch and you shall whine
Many a night, and you shall worry
Many a bone, before you bury
One sweet bone of mine!

When shall I be dead?
When my flesh is withered,
And above my head
Yellow pollen gathered
All the empty afternoon?
When sweet lovers pause and wonder
Who am I that lie thereunder,
Hidden from the moon?

This my personal death?—
That my lungs be failing
To inhale the breath
Others are exhaling?
This my subtle spirit's end?—
Ah, when the thawed winter splashes
Over these chance dust and ashes,
Weep not me, my friend!

Me, by no means dead
In that hour, but surely
When this book, unread,
Rots to earth obscurely,
And no more to any breast,
Close against the clamorous swelling
Of the thing there is no telling,
Are these pages pressed!

When this book is mold,
And a book of many
Waiting to be sold
For a casual penny,
In a little open case,
In a street unclean and cluttered,

Where a heavy mud is spattered
From the passing drays,

Stranger, pause and look;
From the dust of ages
Lift this little book,
Turn the tattered pages,
Read me, do not let me die!
Search the fading letters, finding
Steadfast in the broken binding
All that once was I!

When these veins are weeds,
When these hollowed sockets
Watch the rooty seeds
Bursting down like rockets,
And surmise the spring again,
Or, remote in that black cupboard,
Watch the pink worms writhing upward
At the smell of rain,

Boys and girls that lie
Whispering in the hedges,
Do not let me die,
Mix me in your pledges;
Boys and girls that slowly walk
In the woods, and weep, and quarrel,
Staring past the pink wild laurel,
Mix me with your talk.

Do not let me die!
Farmers at your raking,
When the sun is high,
While the hay is making,
When, along the stubble strewn,
Withering on their stalks uneaten,
Strawberries turn dark and sweeten
In the lapse of noon;

Shepherds on the hills,
In the pastures, drowsing
To the tinkling bells
Of the brown sheep browsing;
Sailors crying through the storm;
Scholars at your study; hunters
Lost amid the whirling winter's
Whiteness uniform;

Men that long for sleep;
Men that wake and revel;—
If an old song leap
To your senses' level
At such moments, may it be
Sometimes, though a moment only,
Some forgotten, quaint and homely
Vehicle of me!

Women at your toil,
Women at your leisure
Till the kettle boil,
Snatch of me your pleasure,
Where the broom-straw marks the leaf;
Women quiet with your weeping
Lest you wake a workman sleeping,
Mix me with your grief!

Boys and girls that steal
From the shocking laughter
Of the old, to kneel
By a dripping rafter
Under the discolored eaves,
Out of trunks with hingeless covers
Lifting tales of saint and lovers,
Travelers, goblins, thieves,

Suns that shine by night,
Mountains made from valleys,—
Bear me to the light,
Flat upon your bellies
By the webby window lie,
Where the little flies are crawling,—
Read me, margin me with scrawling,
Do not let me die!

Sexton, ply your trade!
In a shower of gravel
Stamp upon your spade!
Many a rose shall ravel,
Many a metal wreath shall rust
In the rain, and I go singing
Through the lots where you are flinging
Yellow clay on dust!

SPRING

To what purpose, April, do you return again?
Beauty is not enough.
You can no longer quiet me with the redness
Of little leaves opening stickily.
I know what I know.
The sun is hot on my neck as I observe
The spikes of the crocus.
The smell of the earth is good.
It is apparent that there is no death.
But what does that signify?
Not only under ground are the brains of men
Eaten by maggots.

Life in itself
Is nothing,
An empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs,
It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,
April
Comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing
flowers.

PASSER MORTUUS EST

Death devours all lovely things;
Lesbia with her sparrow
Shares the darkness,—presently
Every bed is narrow.

Unremembered as old rain
Dries the sheer libation,
And the little petulant hand
Is an annotation.

After all, my erstwhile dear,
My no longer cherished,
Need we say it was not love,
Now that love has perished?

WHAT LIPS MY LIPS HAVE KISSED

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
Under my head till morning; but the rain
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh
Upon the glass and listen for reply;
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain
For unremembered lads that not again
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.

Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:
I cannot say what loves have come and gone;
I only know that summer sang in me
A little while, that in me sings no more.

PITY ME NOT

Pity me not because the light of day
At close of day no longer walks the sky;
Pity me not for beauties passed away
From field and thicket as the year goes by;
Pity me not the waning of the moon,
Nor that the ebbing tide goes out to sea,
Nor that a man's desire is hushed so soon,
And you no longer look with love on me.

This have I known always: love is no more
Than the wide blossom which the wind assails;
Than the great tide that treads the shifting shore,
Strewing fresh wreckage gathered in the gales.
Pity me that the heart is slow to learn
What the swift mind beholds at every turn.

DEPARTURE

It's little I care what path I take,
And where it leads it's little I care;
But out of this house, lest my heart break,
I must go, and off somewhere.

It's little I know what's in my heart,
What's in my mind it's little I know,
But there's that in me must up and start,
And it's little I care where my feet go.

I wish I could walk for a day and a night,
And find me at dawn in a desolate place
With never the rut of a road in sight,
Nor the roof of a house, nor the eyes of a face.

I wish I could walk till my blood should spout,
And drop me, never to stir again,
On a shore that is wide, for the tide is out,
And the weedy rocks are bare to the rain.

But dump or dock, where the path I take
Brings up, it's little enough I care;
And it's little I'd mind the fuss they'll make,
Huddled dead in a ditch somewhere.

"Is something the matter, dear," she said,
"That you sit at your work so silently?"
"No, mother, no, 'twas a knot in my thread.
There goes the kettle, I'll make the tea."

I SHALL GO BACK

I shall go back again to the bleak shore
And build a little shanty on the sand
In such a way that the extremest band
Of brittle seaweed will escape my door
But by a yard or two, and nevermore
Shall I return to take you by the hand;
I shall be gone to what I understand
And happier than I ever was before.

The love that stood a moment in your eyes,
The words that lay a moment on your tongue,
Are one with all that in a moment dies,
A little under-said and over-sung;
But I shall find the sullen rocks and skies
Unchanged from what they were when I was young.

ELEGY

Let them bury your big eyes
In the secret earth securely,
Your thin fingers, and your fair,
Soft, indefinite-colored hair,—
All of these in some way, surely,
From the secret earth shall rise.
Not for these I sit and stare,
Broken and bereft completely;
Your young flesh that sat so neatly
On your little bones will sweetly
Blossom in the air.

But your voice,—never the rushing
Of a river underground,
Not the rising of the wind
In the trees before the rain,

Not the woodcock's watery call,
Not the note the white-throat utters,
Not the feet of children pushing
Yellow leaves along the gutters
In the blue and bitter fall,
Shall content my musing mind
For the beauty of that sound
That in no new way at all
Ever will be heard again.

Sweetly through the sappy stalk
Of the vigorous weed,
Holding all it held before,
Cherished by the faithful sun,
On and on eternally
Shall your altered fluid run,
Bud and bloom and go to seed;
But your singing days are done;
But the music of your talk
Never shall the chemistry
Of the secret earth restore.
All your lovely words are spoken.
Once the ivory box is broken,
Beats the golden bird no more.

JUSTICE DENIED IN MASSACHUSETTS[1]

Let us abandon then our gardens and go home
And sit in the sitting-room.
Shall the larkspur blossom or the corn grow under this cloud?
Sour to the fruitful seed
Is the cold earth under this cloud,
Fostering quack and weed, we have marched upon but cannot conquer;
We have bent the blades of our hoes against the stalks of them.

Let us go home, and sit in the sitting-room.
Not in our day
Shall the cloud go over and the sun rise as before,
Beneficent upon us
Out of the glittering bay,
And the warm winds be blown inward from the sea
Moving the blades of corn
With a peaceful sound.
Forlorn, forlorn,
Stands the blue hay-rack by the empty mow.
And the petals drop to the ground,
Leaving the tree unfruited.
The sun that warmed our stooping backs and withered the weed uprooted—
We shall not feel it again.
We shall die in darkness, and be buried in the rain.

What from the splendid dead
We have inherited—
Furrows sweet to the grain, and the weed subdued—
See now the slug and the mildew plunder.
Evil does overwhelm
The larkspur and the corn;
We have seen them go under.

Let us sit here, sit still,
Here in the sitting-room until we die;
At the step of Death on the walk, rise and go;

[1] Written after the final decision in the Sacco-Vanzetti case.

Leaving to our children's children this beautiful doorway,
And this elm,
And a blighted earth to till
With a broken hoe.

EUCLID ALONE HAS LOOKED ON BEAUTY BARE

Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare.
Let all who prate of Beauty hold their peace,
And lay them prone upon the earth and cease
To ponder on themselves, the while they stare
At nothing, intricately drawn nowhere
In shapes of shifting lineage; let geese
Gabble and hiss, but heroes seek release
From dusty bondage into luminous air.

O blinding hour, O holy, terrible day,
When first the shaft into his vision shone
Of light anatomized! Euclid alone
Has looked on Beauty bare. Fortunate they
Who, though once only and then but far away,
Have heard her massive sandal set on stone.

ON HEARING A SYMPHONY OF BEETHOVEN

Sweet sounds, oh, beautiful music, do not cease!
Reject me not into the world again.
With you alone is excellence and peace,
Mankind made plausible, his purpose plain.
Enchanted in your air benign and shrewd,
With limbs a-sprawl and empty faces pale,
The spiteful and the stingy and the rude
Sleep like the scullions in the fairy-tale.
This moment is the best the world can give:
The tranquil blossom on the tortured stem.
Reject me not, sweet sounds! oh, let me live,
Till Doom espy my towers and scatter them,
A city spell-bound under the aging sun.
Music my rampart, and my only one.

SONNET TO GATH

Country of hunchbacks!—where the strong, straight spine
Jeered at by crooked children, makes his way
Through by-streets at the kindest hour of day,
Till he deplore his stature, and incline
To measure manhood with a gibbous line;
Till out of loneliness, being flawed with clay,
He stoop into his neighbor's house and say,
"Your roof is low for me—the fault is mine."

Dust in an urn long since, dispersed and dead
Is great Apollo; and the happier he;
Since who amongst you all would lift a head
At a god's radiance on the mean door-tree,
Saving to run and hide your dates and bread,
And cluck your children in about your knee?

THE CAMEO

Forever over now, forever, forever gone
That day. Clear and diminished like a scene
Carven in cameo, the lighthouse, and the cove between
The sandy cliffs, and the boat drawn up on the beach;
And the long skirt of a lady innocent and young,
Her hand resting on her bosom, her head hung;
And the figure of a man in earnest speech.

Clear and diminished like a scene cut in cameo
The lighthouse, and the boat on the beach, and the two shapes
Of the woman and the man; lost like the lost day
Are the words that passed, and the pain,—discarded, cut away
From the stone, as from the memory the heat of the tears escapes.

O troubled forms, O early love unfortunate and hard,
Time has estranged you into a jewel cold and pure;
From the action of the waves and from the action of sorrow forever secure,
White against a ruddy cliff you stand, chalcedony on sard.

OH, SLEEP FOREVER IN THE LATMIAN CAVE

Oh, sleep forever in the Latmian cave,
Mortal Endymion, darling of the Moon!
Her silver garments by the senseless wave
Shouldered and dropped and on the shingle strewn,
Her fluttering hand against her forehead pressed,
Her scattered looks that trouble all the sky,
Her rapid footsteps running down the west—
Of all her altered state, oblivious lie!
Whom earthen you, by deathless lips adored,
Wild-eyed and stammering to the grasses thrust,
And deep into her crystal body poured
The hot and sorrowful sweetness of the dust:
Whereof she wanders mad, being all unfit
For mortal love, that might not die of it.

SEE WHERE CAPELLA WITH HER GOLDEN KIDS

See where Capella with her golden kids
Grazes the slope between the east and north?
Thus when the builders of the pyramids
Flung down their tools at nightfall and poured forth

Homeward to supper and a poor man's bed,
Shortening the road with friendly jest and slur,
The risen She-Goat showing blue and red
Climbed the clear dusk, and three stars followed her.
Safe in their linen and their spices lie
The kings of Egypt; even as long ago
Under these constellations, with long eye
And scented limbs they slept, and feared no foe.
Their will was law; their will was not to die.
And so they had their way; or nearly so.

THE RETURN

Earth does not understand her child,
  Who from the loud gregarious town
Returns, depleted and defiled,
  To the still woods, to fling him down.

Earth cannot count the sons she bore:
  The wounded lynx, the wounded man
Come trailing blood unto her door;
  She shelters both as best she can.

But she is early up and out,
  To trim the year or strip its bones;
She has no time to stand about
  Talking of him in undertones

Who has no aim but to forget,
  Be left in peace, be lying thus
For days, for years, for centuries yet,
  Unshaven and anonymous;

Who, marked for failure, dulled by grief
  Has traded in his wife and friend
For this warm ledge, this alder leaf:
  Comfort that does not comprehend.

Archibald MacLeish

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH was born in Glencoe, northern Illinois, May 7, 1892. The son of a Scotch merchant and a Connecticut clergyman's daughter, he spent his boyhood on the lake shore, was educated in the public schools of his native town, a Connecticut preparatory school, Yale University, and Harvard Law School. He served in the Field Artillery in France during the War, became a lawyer in Boston and gave up the practice of law for literature, living in the Berkshires during the summer and in Paris during the winter. After his return to America, he spent most of the year in New York, where he became one of the editors of *Fortune*.

MacLeish's first volume, *Tower of Ivory* (1917), gave few hints of the original talent that was revealed in *The Happy Marriage* (1924), *The Pot of Earth* (1925) and the curious *Nobodaddy* (1925). There are influences apparent in all of these. *The Happy Marriage* owes not a little to Conrad Aiken and E. A. Robinson; *The Pot of Earth* relies on T. S. Eliot's structure as well as his free use of dissonance and peculiar juxtapositions. But MacLeish has something to say which is quite his own, something about man's uncertain place in the Unknown and, in these volumes, he is learning how to say it.

In *Streets in the Moon* (1926) the complete poet emerges. Here his subject-matter,

conceived in amplitude, conveys an unusual "sense of infinity." But it is his idiom even more than his theme which makes MacLeish an important modern poet. He can, by the skillful use of repetition, achieve new effects in harmony, he can prompt a new beat in even so old a form as the sonnet, *vide* "The End of the World." "Ars Poetica" is more than an extension of poetic language; beneath its successful experiments in timing, interior rhyme and suspension, it says a number of pointed and profound things which have nothing to do with timeliness and changing tastes. The tone of these verses may be as new as this generation; the spirit which moves beneath them is as old as the sung phrase and the unspoken word.

The Hamlet of A. MacLeish (1928) is clearer in pattern and suppler in power than any of his other long poems. Its blemishes are those of confirmed modernity. Speaking of its author, Conrad Aiken says, "He is a kind of slave of tradition, with the difference that the traditions which enslave him are contemporary ones." MacLeish has not completely thrown off the influence of Eliot and various modern French poets, but his conceptions are so much his own that no one could mistake the originality of his design. In *The Hamlet of A. MacLeish,* the poet has plunged deeper into himself. The half-conscious breaks through; remote associations, shifting allusions, disordered griefs, phantasms, fag-ends of memories float up. By overtone and undercurrent, the reader is led to identify himself—as the author has done—with the eternal Hamlet, that conglomeration of lover, poet, procrastinator, ranter, doer, and doubter.

New Found Land (1930) contains only fourteen poems, yet some of MacLeish's richest verses are in this small book. The mood is elegiac, but the melancholy is provocative rather than lulling. The perceptions are unusually keen, the images highly charged, and the tone throughout is not only uplifted but noble. Some of MacLeish's critics made much of his nostalgia for the past, forgetting that no poet (no person, in fact) is free of it, and what distinguishes the poet is not his subject-matter but the way in which he employs his material. No one could question the distinction of "You, Andrew Marvell," that beautiful and uncanny exercise in suspension, one of the finest poems of the period, "Immortal Autumn," with its classical overtones, "Epistle to be Left in the Earth," and others. In these poems—as in "Memorial Rain," which says more about War than any poetry since Owen's and Sassoon's—the style is elliptical but the figures are concrete; without strain or exaggeration MacLeish uses ordinary language to suggest extraordinary sensations and abstractions. Here, too, MacLeish is shown to be one of the most resourceful technicians of an experimental age; he employs all the approved forms and invents several of his own; extends the gamut of rhyme through dissonance and consonance to half-rhyme ("thin-continues," "sun-running," "dish-official," "star-harbor," etc.), rhyming consonants and unrhyming vowels ("lake-like," "vine-vane," "west-waste," etc.), and concealed internal rhyme.

Conquistador (1932) employs these effects on a wider scale for a larger purpose. Certain reviewers referred to the poem as being "loosely ductile" and "unrhymed." *Conquistador* happens to be highly formal, the form being nothing "looser" than terza rima. The rhyming trios, however, are unorthodox since MacLeish varies full rhyme with assonance ("market-carpenter-arsenal," "things-wind-insolent," etc.) and suspension. But it is not only in technique that *Conquistador* displays the poet's maturity; in accent and spirit it is a rich fulfillment of MacLeish's gifts. Richness of

color, extension of musical devices, and a mastery of the long breath combine to produce the most accomplished saga-poem of the generation. Founded on Bernal Diaz's *True History of the Conquest of New Spain* and influenced by the accent of Pound's *Cantos,* especially Canto I, the narrative proceeds from one vivid detail to another. Sometimes the tale is disrupted as the aged narrator confuses time and events; yet even here the poem gains in movement, like the swift progression of a dream. Everything contributes to the vitality of this movement, most of all MacLeish's vocabulary. *Conquistador,* in spite of being cast in the key of reminiscence, is a record of life in action; and this parade of fighting and feasting, of blood, song, and quick surrenders is tuned to words that live and leap no less actively. No modern writer has used the device of Anglo-Saxon alliteration so well as MacLeish; we have to go back to *The Seafarer* to find narration so stripped in phrase, so speeded. The poem as a whole is a triumph in sonority and sustained power. It was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1933.

Poems 1924-1933 contains several new poems besides the best of those previously published, further experiments in stylistic subtlety. *Panic* (1935) is a play in flexible verse, which caused no little controversy when it was produced in New York. Neither the reactionaries nor the revolutionists were cheered by it, for MacLeish refused to join either camp, but none could dispute the eloquence of the mass choruses, the drive behind the dissolving scenes, and the universality of the passion which marked *Panic* as a significant revival of the poetic drama.

Public Speech (1936) includes twenty poems, about half of which are (as the title implies) tracts for the times. The poet has come a long way from the time when he announced that

> A poem should not mean
> But be.

Public Speech is definitely a poetry of meanings, even of convictions. No longer a modern Hamlet seeking to escape his situation, MacLeish participates in the problems of the present; he now declares that men are "brothers by life lived and are hurt for it." His style gathers strength. The delicacy is supported by dignity; the movement is vigorous without snapping its biceps. "Speech to a Crowd" and "The Reconciliation" are widely separated in subject matter but are united by a tone which is colloquial yet allusive.

Two verse plays for radio prove that MacLeish the poet is not only a wiser person than MacLeish the theorist, but a much more stimulating writer. *The Fall of the City* (1937) is a drama primarily for the ear rather than for the eye. The action takes place in the central plaza of a great city. Portents are in the air; a dead woman appears and prophesies. She tells them, not knowing what the words mean, that masterless men will take a master. The crowd is puzzled and fearful. A messenger appears warning the city that a ruthless conqueror is upon them. Orators, priests, and generals harangue the crowd, increasing uncertainty and inaction. Finally the conqueror appears; he comes out of the shadows and takes command. His visor opens, and the Announcer tells the listeners that there is no one in the armor; the metal is only a shell, absolutely empty; "the push of a stiff pole at the nipple would topple it." But the people lie on the ground. They do not or

will not see. They shout as though they had won a victory; masterless men have found a master. The city falls.

The effectiveness of *The Fall of the City* is increased by the poet's recognition of the resources of radio and his employment of the Announcer as a combination of Greek Chorus and casual commentator. *Air Raid* (1938) is a worthy successor to the first poetry play written for the radio-spoken word. *The Fall of the City* is an allegory in terms of action; *Air Raid* is a prolonged action in terms of the morning headlines. MacLeish's favorite device, the employment of almost unbearable tension, is used here to remarkable effect.

In 1937 MacLeish collaborated with Ernest Hemingway, Lillian Hellman, and Joris Ivens on the film *The Spanish Earth*. During the year 1938 he was custodian of the Nieman Collection of Journalism at Harvard. In 1939 he was appointed Librarian of Congress. His work continued to increase in social consciousness. *Land of the Free* (1938) combines pictures and verse in a way that is experimental and dialectical: photographs of farmers, share-croppers, migrants, and other underprivileged Americans appear on the right-hand pages, while on the opposite pages MacLeish has furnished a text that is a cross between a running poem and a "sound track."

In 1941 MacLeish simultaneously published two volumes of essays: *A Time to Speak*, the burden of which is the importance of the poet's role in a world of social change, and *The American Cause*, which is an eloquent statement of the case for democracy. Except for the title poem, *Actfive and Other Poems* (1948) consists chiefly of small verses which are plaintive yet poignant. Several, however, such as "The Learned Men," are as warm and winning as any of MacLeish's shorter lyrics. In 1949 MacLeish was appointed Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard.

In spite of his achievements in technique, it is neither the novel form nor the phrase-making which distinguishes MacLeish. It is the discipline which he imposes on the flow of suggestions, on the very chaos of the unconscious, it is the rapid—and sometimes too immediate—employment of material almost too fluent to fix, which has made him one of the most debated poets of the period.

ARS POETICA

A poem should be palpable and mute
As a globed fruit

Dumb
As old medallions to the thumb

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—

A poem should be wordless
As the flight of birds

✦

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs

Leaving, as the moon releases
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
Memory by memory the mind—

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs

✦

A poem should be equal to:
Not true

For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a maple leaf

For love
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—

A poem should not mean
But be.

PROLOGUE

These alternate nights and days, these seasons
Somehow fail to convince me. It seems
I have the sense of infinity!

(In your dreams, O crew of Columbus,
O listeners over the sea
For the surf that breaks upon Nothing—)

Once I was waked by nightingales in the garden.
I thought, What time is it? I thought,
Time—Is it Time still?—Now is it Time?

(Tell me your dreams, O sailors:
Tell me, in sleep did you climb
The tall masts, and before you—)

At night the stillness of old trees
Is a leaning over, and the inertness
Of hills is a kind of waiting.

(In sleep, in a dream, did you see
The world's end? Did the water
Break—and no shore— Did you see?)

Strange faces come through the streets to me
Like messengers: and I have been warned
By the moving slowly of hands at a window.

O, I have the sense of infinity—
But the world, sailors, is round.
They say there is no end to it.

IN MY THIRTIETH YEAR

And I have come upon this place
By lost ways, by a nod, by words,
By faces, by the old man's face
At Morlaix lifted to the birds,

By hands upon the tablecloth
At Aldebori's, by the thin
Child's hands that opened to the moth
And let the flutter of the moonlight in,

By hands, by voices, by the voice
Of Mrs. Husman on the stair,
By Margaret's "If we had the choice
To choose or not—" through her thick hair,

By voices, by the creak and fall
Of footsteps on the upper floor,
By silence waiting in the hall
Between the door-bell and the door,

By words, by voices, a lost way—
And here above the chimney stack
The unknown constellations sway—
And by what way shall I go back?

MEMORIAL RAIN

Ambassador Puser the ambassador
Reminds himself in French, felicitous tongue,
What these (young men no longer) lie here for
In rows that once, and somewhere else, were young—

All night in Brussels the wind had tugged at my door:
I had heard the wind at my door and the trees strung
Taut, and to me who had never been before
In that country it was a strange wind blowing

Steadily, stiffening the walls, the floor,
The roof of my room. I had not slept for knowing
He too, dead, was a stranger in that land
And felt beneath the earth in the wind's flowing
A tightening of roots and would not understand,
Remembering lake winds in Illinois,
That strange wind. I had felt his bones in the sand
Listening.

—Reflects that these enjoy
Their country's gratitude, that deep repose,
That peace no pain can break, no hurt destroy,
That rest, that sleep—

At Ghent the wind rose.
There was a smell of rain and a heavy drag
Of wind in the hedges but not as the wind blows
Over fresh water when the waves lag
Foaming and the willows huddle and it will rain:
I felt him waiting.

—Indicates the flag
Which (may he say) enisles in Flanders' plain
This little field these happy, happy dead
Have made America—

In the ripe grain
The wind coiled glistening, darted, fled,
Dragging its heavy body: at Waereghem
The wind coiled in the grass above his head:
Waiting—listening—

—Dedicates to them
This earth their bones have hallowed, this last gift
A grateful country—

Under the dry grass stem
The words are blurred, are thickened, the words sift
Confused by the rasp of the wind, by the thin grating
Of ants under the grass, the minute shift
And tumble of dusty sand separating
From dusty sand. The roots of the grass strain,
Tighten, the earth is rigid, waits—he is waiting—

And suddenly, and all at once, the rain!

The people scatter, they run into houses, the wind
Is trampled under the rain, shakes free, is again
Trampled. The rain gathers, running in thinned
Spurts of water that ravel in the dry sand
Seeping into the sand under the grass roots, seeping
Between cracked boards to the bones of a clenched hand:
The earth relaxes, loosens; he is sleeping,
He rests, he is quiet, he sleeps in a strange land.

WEATHER

The northeast wind was the wind off the lake
Blowing the oak leaves pale side out like
Aspen: blowing the sound of the surf far
Inland over the fences: blowing for
Miles over smell of earth the alien
Lake smell.
The southwest wind was thunder on
Afternoon: you saw the wind first in the vine
Over the side porch and the weather vane
Whirled on the barn and the doors slammed all together.
After the rain in the grass we used to gather
Wind-fallen cold white apples.
The west
Wind was the August wind, the wind over waste
Valleys over the waterless plains where still
Were skulls of buffalo, where in the sand stale
Dung lay of wild cattle. The west wind blew
Day after day as the winds on the plains blow
Burning the grass, turning the leaves brown, filling
Noon with the bronze of cicadas, far out falling
Dark on the colorless water, the lake where not
Waves were nor movement.
The north wind was at night
When no leaves and the husk on the oak stirs
Only nor birds then. The north wind was stars
Over the whole sky and snow in the ways
And snow on the sand where in summer the water was . . .
North here is the sea and westward the sea
And south the Tyrrhenian sea where the hills saw
Once the long oars and the helmsman. But here to me
The winds blow as always they blew in my
Country,
the winds blow out of Illinois,
Out of Missouri, out of Michigan. I know
The northeast wind: I know how the trees look—
The northeast wind is the wind over the lake
Blowing the oak leaves pale side out. . . .

IMMORTAL AUTUMN

I speak this poem now with grave and level voice
In praise of autumn of the far-horn-winding fall
I praise the flower-barren fields the clouds the tall
Unanswering branches where the wind makes sullen noise

I praise the fall it is the human season now
No more the foreign sun does meddle at our earth
Enforce the green and thaw the frozen soil to birth
Nor winter yet weigh all with silence the pine bough

But now in autumn with the black and outcast crows
Share we the spacious world the whispering year is gone
There is more room to live now the once secret dawn
Comes late by daylight and the dark unguarded goes

Between the mutinous brave burning of the leaves
And winter's covering of our hearts with his deep snow
We are alone there are no evening birds we know
The naked moon the tame stars circle at our eaves

It is the human season on this sterile air
Do words outcarry breath the sound goes on and on
I hear a dead man's cry from autumn long since gone

I cry to you beyond this bitter air.

YOU, ANDREW MARVELL

And here face down beneath the sun
And here upon earth's noonward height
To feel the always coming on
The always rising of the night

To feel creep up the curving east
The earthy chill of dusk and slow
Upon those under lands the vast
And ever-climbing shadow grow

And strange at Ecbatan the trees
Take leaf by leaf the evening strange
The flooding dark about their knees
The mountains over Persia change

And now at Kermanshah the gate
Dark empty and the withered grass
And through the twilight now the late
Few travelers in the westward pass

And Baghdad darken and the bridge
Across the silent river gone

And through Arabia the edge
Of evening widen and steal on

And deepen on Palmyra's street
The wheel rut in the ruined stone
And Lebanon fade out and Crete
High through the clouds and overblown

And over Sicily the air
Still flashing with the landward gulls
And loom and slowly disappear
The sails above the shadowy hulls

And Spain go under and the shore
Of Africa the gilded sand
And evening vanish and no more
The low pale light across that land

Nor now the long light on the sea—

And here face downward in the sun
To feel how swift how secretly
The shadow of the night comes on . . .

THE END OF THE WORLD

Quite unexpectedly as Vasserot
The armless ambidextrian was lighting
A match between his great and second toe
And Ralph the lion was engaged in biting
The neck of Madame Sossman while the drum
Pointed, and Teeny was about to cough
In waltz-time swinging Jocko by the thumb—
Quite unexpectedly the top blew off:

And there, there overhead, there, there, hung over
Those thousands of white faces, those dazed eyes,
There in the starless dark, the poise, the hover,
There with vast wings across the canceled skies,
There in the sudden blackness, the black pall
Of nothing, nothing, nothing—nothing at all.

THE TOO-LATE BORN

We too, we too, descending once again
The hills of our own land, we too have heard
Far off— Ah, que ce cor a longue haleine—
The horn of Roland in the passages of Spain,
The first, the second blast, the failing third,
And with the third turned back and climbed once more
The steep road southward, and heard faint the sound
Of swords, of horses, the disastrous war,
And crossed the dark defile at last, and found
At Roncevaux upon the darkening plain
The dead against the dead and on the silent ground
The silent slain—

EPISTLE TO BE LEFT IN THE EARTH

. . . It is colder now
there are many stars
we are drifting
North by the Great Bear
the leaves are falling
The water is stone in the scooped rocks
to southward
Red sun gray air
the crows are
Slow on their crooked wings
the jays have left us
Long since we passed the flares of Orion
Each man believes in his heart he will die
Many have written last thoughts and last letters
None know if our deaths are now or forever
None know if this wandering earth will be found

We lie down and the snow covers our garments
I pray you
you (if any open this writing)
Make in your mouths the words that were our names
I will tell you all we have learned
I will tell you everything
The earth is round
there are springs under the orchards
The loam cuts with a blunt knife
beware of

Elms in thunder
the lights in the sky are stars
We think they do not see
we think also
The trees do not know nor the leaves of the grasses
hear us
The birds too are ignorant
Do not listen
Do not stand at dark in the open windows
We before you have heard this
they are voices
They are not words at all but the wind rising
Also none among us has seen God
(. . . We have thought often
The flaws of sun in the late and driving weather
Pointed to one tree but it was not so)
As for the nights I warn you the nights are dangerous
The wind changes at night and the dreams come

It is very cold
there are strange stars near Arcturus

Voices are crying an unknown name in the sky

BURYING GROUND BY THE TIES

(from "Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller's City")

Ayee! Ai! This is heavy earth on our shoulders:
There were none of us born to be buried in this earth:
Niggers we were Portuguese Magyars Polacks:

We were born to another look of the sky certainly:
Now we lie here in the river pastures:
We lie in the mowings under the thick turf:

We hear the earth and the all-day rasp of the grasshoppers:
It was we laid the steel on this land from ocean to ocean:
It was we (if you know) put the U. P. through the passes

Bringing her down into Laramie full load
Eighteen mile on the granite anticlinal
Forty-three foot to the mile and the grade holding:

It was we did it: hunkies of our kind:
It was we dug the caved-in holes for the cold water:
It was we built the gully spurs and the freight sidings:

Who would do it but we and the Irishmen bossing us?
It was all foreign-born men there were in this country:
It was Scotsmen Englishmen Chinese Squareheads Austrians . . .

Ayee! but there's weight to the earth under it:
Not for this did we come out—to be lying here
Nameless under the ties in the clay cuts:

There's nothing good in the world but the rich will buy it:
Everything sticks to the grease of a gold note—
Even a continent—even a new sky!

Do not pity us much for the strange grass over us:
We laid the steel to the stone stock of these mountains:
The place of our graves is marked by the telegraph poles!

It was not to lie in the bottoms we came out
And the trains going over us here in the dry hollows . . .

PANIC

(*from "Panic"*)

AN OLD MAN

Slowly the thing comes.
There are many signs: there are furnaces
Dead now that were burning
Thirty years in a town—
Never dark: there are foundries—
Fires drawn: trestles
Silent. The swifts nest in
Stacks that for generations
Flowed smoke. The patience of
Hawks is over the cities:
They circle in clean light where the
Smoke last year frightened them.

A WOMAN

The gears turn: twitter: are
Still now. The sound dies.
From the east with the sun's rising
Daily are fewer whistles:
Many mornings listening
One less or two.

A YOUNG MAN

The thing comes pursuing us
Creeping as death creeps in an
Old man: as sleep comes:
Leaving on one hill—
On the stand—the stalks silver—
Corn rotted in ear:
Leaving on land nearest us
Wagons abandoned: milk cows
Slaughtered for no sickness:
Rigs rusting at pit-heads:
Pumps frozen: switches
Green with the rain: the oil
Thickened: scale in boilers—
Good gear all of it:
Sound metal: faultless:
Idle now: never manned.

A GIRL

Men in the dusk—and they stand there
Letting the girls go by with the
Sweet scent: silent:
Leaning heavily: bent to the
Painted signs on the fences—
They that in other times
Calling after us climbed by the
Steep stair for the sight of a
Girl's knee delighting her.

A MAN

From what ill and what enemy
Armless shall we defend the
Evening—the night hours?

A MAN

No eyes of ours have
Ever knowing beheld it.
It comes not with the bells
Arousing towns: racing with
Smoke—with the wind's haste—
The tallest houses toppled.

A MAN

Comes not from the hospitals—
Odor of scattered lime—
Night burials climbing the
Empty streets by the markets.

A MAN

Not with the shot: with the barking of
Dogs before color of dawn—
The whistle over the lawn—the
Running footfalls stumbling.

A WOMAN

Nevertheless it comes.
Men die: houses
Fall among kitchen flowers.
Families scatter. Children
Wander the roads building of
Broken boxes shelter.
A land of great wealth and the
Old hungry: the young
Starving—but not with hunger.
None have beheld this enemy.
What arms can defend the
Evening—the night hours—
When fear: faceless: devours us?

A WOMAN

Blight—not on the grain!
Drouth—not in the springs!
Rot—not from the rain!

A MAN

What shadow hidden or
Unseen hand in our midst
Ceaselessly touches our faces?

FINAL CHORUS

(*from "Panic"*)

AN OLD WOMAN (*exultantly*)

Bellies bitter with drinking the
Weak tears do you fear the
Fall of the walls and the sky
High over you shining there?

A MAN (*exultantly*)

Mouths bitter with hate and the
Aching of tears have you tasted the
New water that springs in the
Hollow of thirst in your fingers?

A MAN (*exultantly*)

Eyes blind with the sleet and the
Freezing of night have you seen how the
Wind's in the rising East and the
Mountains of morning increasing?

A WOMAN

The roof's fallen! The sun
Stands on the sky with his wonder.

A WOMAN

The wind—the wind's in the house!

A WOMAN

The walls open arousing us!

A MAN

Wildly as swollen river the
Dark will of the world
Flooded on rock rushes
Raving—bearing the brush down:
Breaking from ancient banks.
Cities are buried. The man
Drowns in his door who opposes it.

VOICES

Follow!

Give!

Go with the
Rushing of time in us!

Make of the
Silence of fate a trumpet!
Make of the time a drum!

March!

Shout!

A MAN

Run with the
Marching men: with the thunder of
Thousand heels on the earth—
Making of mortal burden a
Banner to shout and to break in the
Blazing of sunlight and shaken there!

VOICES

Take it!

Be taken!

The trumpet of
Time in our ears and the brazen and
Breaking shout of our days!

MANY VOICES

Man's fate is a drum!

THE RECONCILIATION

Time like the repetitions of a child's piano
Brings me the room again the shallow lamp the love
The night the silence the slow bell the echoed answer.

By no thing here or lacking can the eyes discover
The hundred winter evenings that have gone between
Nor know for sure the night is this and not that other.

The room is here the lamp is here: the mirror's leaning
Searches the same deep shadow where her knees were caught:
All these are here within the room as I have seen them.

Time has restored them all as in that rainy autumn:
Even the echoes of that night return to this—
All as they were when first the earthy evening brought them.

Between this night and that there is no human distance:
There is no space an arm could not out-reach by much—
And yet the stars most far apart are not more distant.

Between my hand that touched and her soft breast that touches
The irremediable past as steep as tone:
Wider than water: like all land and ocean stretches:

We touch and by that touching farness are alone.

SPEECH TO A CROWD

Tell me, my patient friends—awaiters of messages—
From what other shore: from what stranger:
Whence was the word to come? Who was to lesson you?

Listeners under a child's crib in a manger—
Listeners once by the oracles: now by the transoms—
Whom are you waiting for? Who do you think will explain?

Listeners thousands of years and still no answer—
Writers at night to Miss Lonely-Hearts: awkward spellers—
Open your eyes! There is only earth and the man!

There is only you: there is no one else on the telephone:
No one else is on the air to whisper:
No one else but you will push the bell.

No one knows if you don't: neither ships
Nor landing-fields decode the dark between:
You have your eyes and what your eyes see *is*.

The earth you see is really the earth you are seeing:
The sun is truly excellent: truly warm:
Women are beautiful as you have seen them—

Their breasts (believe it) like cooing of doves in a portico:
They bear at their breasts tenderness softly. Look at them!
Look at yourselves. You are strong. You are well formed.

Look at the world—the world you never took!
It is really true you may live in the world heedlessly:
Why do you wait to read it in a book then?

Write it yourselves! Write to yourselves if you need to!
Tell yourselves there is sun and the sun will rise:
Tell yourselves the earth has food to feed you:—

Let the dead men say that men must die!
Who better than you can know what death is?
How can a bone or a broken body surmise it?

Let the dead shriek with their whispering breath:
Laugh at them! Say the murdered gods may wake
But we who work have end of work together:

Tell yourselves the earth is yours to take!

Waiting for messages out of the dark you were poor.
The world was always yours: you will not take it.

LAND OF THE FREE

(Conclusion of the Sound Track)

We wonder whether the dream of American liberty
Was two hundred years of pine and hardwood
And three generations of the grass

And the generations are up: the years over

We don't know

It was two hundred years from the smell of the tidewater
Up through the Piedmont: on through the piney woods:
Till we came out
With our led calves and our lean women
In the oak openings of Illinois

It was three generations from the oak trees—
From the islands of elm and the islands of oak in the prairie—
Till we heeled out with our plows and our steel harrows
On the grass-drowned reef bones of the Plains

"Four score and seven years" said the Orator

We remember it differently: we remember it
Kansas: Illinois: Ohio: Connecticut.
We remember it Council Bluffs: St. Louis:
Wills Creek: the Cumberland: Shenandoah—

The long harangues of the grass in the wind are our histories

We tell our freedom backward by the land
We tell our past by the gravestones and the apple trees

We wonder whether the great American dream
Was the singing of locusts out of the grass to the west and the
West is behind us now:
The west wind's away from us:

We wonder if the liberty is done:
The dreaming is finished

We can't say

We aren't sure

Of if there's something different men can dream
Or if there's something different men can mean by
Liberty

Or if there's liberty a man can mean that's
Men: not land

We wonder

We don't know

We're asking

THE FALL OF THE CITY

A Verse Play for Radio

VOICE OF THE STUDIO DIRECTOR (*orotund and professional*)

Ladies and gentlemen:
This broadcast comes to you from the city
Listeners over the curving air have heard
From furthest-off frontiers of foreign hours—
Mountain Time: Ocean Time: of the islands:
Of waters after the islands—some of them waking
Where noon here is the night there: some
Where noon is the first few stars they see or the last one.

For three days the world has watched this city—
Not for the common occasions of brutal crime
Or the usual violence of one sort or another
Or coronations of kings or popular festivals:
No: for stranger and disturbing reasons—
The resurrection from death and the tomb of a dead woman.

Each day for three days there has come
To the door of her tomb at noon a woman buried!

The terror that stands at the shoulder of our time
Touches the cheek with this: the flesh winces.
There have been other omens in other cities
But never of this sort and never so credible.

In a time like ours seemings and portents signify.
Ours is a generation when dogs howl and the
Skin crawls on the skull with its beast's foreboding.
All men now alive with us have feared.
We have smelled the wind in the street that changes weather.
We have seen the familiar room grow unfamiliar:
The order of numbers alter: the expectation
Cheat the expectant eye. The appearance defaults with us.

Here in this city the wall of the time cracks.

We take you now to the great square of this city. . . .

(*The shuffle and hum of a vast patient crowd gradually rises: swells: fills the background.*)

VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER (*matter-of-fact*)

We are here on the central plaza.
We are well off to the eastward edge.
There is a kind of terrace over the crowd here.
It is precisely four minutes to twelve.
The crowd is enormous: there might be ten thousand:
There might be more: the whole square is faces.
Opposite over the roofs are the mountains.
It is quite clear: there are birds circling.
We think they are kites by the look: they are very high. . . .

The tomb is off to the right somewhere—
We can't see for the great crowd.
Close to us here are the cabinet ministers:
They stand on a raised platform with awnings.
The farmers' wives are squatting on the stones:
Their children have fallen asleep on their shoulders.
The heat is harsh: the light dazzles like metal.
It dazes the air as the clang of a gong does. . . .

News travels in this nation:
There are people here from away off—
Horse-raisers out of the country with brooks in it:
Herders of cattle from up where the snow stays—
The kind that cook for themselves mostly:
They look at the girls with their eyes hard
And a hard grin and their teeth showing. . . .

It is one minute to twelve now:
There is still no sign: they are still waiting:
No one doubts that she will come:

No one doubts that she will speak too:
Three times she has not spoken.

(*The murmur of the crowd changes—not louder but more intense: higher.*)

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER (*low but with increasing excitement*)

Now it is twelve: now they are rising:
Now the whole plaza is rising:
Fathers are lifting their small children:
The plumed fans on the platform are motionless. . . .

There is no sound but the shuffle of shoe leather . . .

Now even the shoes are still. . . .

We can hear the hawks: it is quiet as that now. . . .

It is strange to see such throngs so silent. . . .

Nothing yet: nothing has happened. . . .

Wait! There's a stir here to the right of us:
They're turning their heads: the crowd turns:
The cabinet ministers lean from their balcony:
There's no sound: only the turning. . . .

(*A woman's voice comes over the silence of the crowd: it is a weak voice but penetrating: it speaks slowly and as though with difficulty.*)

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD WOMAN

First the waters rose with no wind. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER (*whispering*)

Listen: that is she! She's speaking!

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD WOMAN

Then the stones of the temple kindled
Without flame or tinder of maize-leaves. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER (*whispering*)

They see her beyond us: the crowd sees her. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD WOMAN

Then there were cries in the night haze:
Words in a once-heard tongue: the air
Rustling above us as at dawn with herons.

Now it is I who must bring fear:
I who am four days dead: the tears
Still unshed for me—all of them: I
For whom a child still calls at nightfall.

Death is young in me to fear!
My dress is kept still in the press in my bedchamber:
No one has broken the dish of the dead woman.

Nevertheless I must speak painfully:
I am to stand here in the sun and speak:

(*There is a pause. Then her voice comes again loud, mechanical, speaking as by rote.*)

The city of masterless men
Will take a master.
There will be shouting then:
Blood after!

(*The crowd stirs. Her voice goes on weak and slow as before.*)

Do not ask what it means: I do not know:
Only sorrow and no hope for it.

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

She has gone. . . . No, they are still looking.

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD WOMAN

It is hard to return from the time past. I have come
In the dream we must learn to dream where the crumbling of
Time like the ash from a burnt string has
Stopped for me. For you the thread still burns:
You take the feathery ash upon your fingers.
You bring yourselves from the time past as it pleases you.

It is hard to return to the old nearness . . .

Harder to go again. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

She is gone.
We know because the crowd is closing.
All we can see is the crowd closing.
We hear the releasing of held breath—
The weight shifting: the lifting of shoe leather.
The stillness is broken as surface of water is broken—
The sound circling from in outward.

(*The murmur of the crowd rises.*)

Small wonder they feel fear.
Before the murders of the famous kings—
Before imperial cities burned and fell—
The dead were said to show themselves and speak.

When dead men came disaster came. Presentiments
That let the living on their beds sleep on
Woke dead men out of death and gave them voices.
All ancient men in every nation knew this.

A Voice over the Crowd

Masterless men . . .

A Voice over the Crowd

When shall it be . . .

A Voice over the Crowd

Masterless men
Will take a master . . .

A Voice over the Crowd

What has she said to us . . .

A Voice over the Crowd

When shall it be . . .

A Voice over the Crowd

Masterless men
Will take a master.
Blood after . . .

A Voice over the Crowd

What has she said to us . . .

Voices Together

Blood after!

(*The voices run together into the excited roar of the crowd. The Announcer's voice is loud over it.*)

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

They are milling around us like cattle that smell death.
The whole square is whirling and turning and shouting.
One of the ministers raises his arms on the platform.
No one is listening: now they are sounding drums:
Trying to quiet them likely: No! No!
Something is happening: there in the far corner:
A runner: a messenger: staggering: people are helping him:
People are calling: he comes through the crowd: they are quieter
Only those on the far edge are still shouting:
Listen! He's here by the ministers now! He is speaking. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE MESSENGER

There has come the conqueror!
I am to tell you.
I have raced over sea land:
I have run over cane land:
I have climbed over cone land.
It was laid on my shoulders
By shall and by shan't
That standing by day
And staying by night
Were not for my lot
Till I came to the sight of you.
Now I have come.

Be warned of this conqueror!
This one is dangerous!
Word has out-oared him.
East over sea-cross has
All taken—
Every country.
No men are free there.
Ears overhear them.
Their words are their murderers.
Judged before judgment
Tried after trial
They die as do animals:—
Offer their throats
As the goat to her slaughterer.
Terror has taught them this!

Now he is here!

He was violent in his vessel:
He was steering in her stern:
He was watching in her waist:
He was peering in her prow:

And he dragged her up
Nine lengths
Till her keel lodged
On this nation.

Now he is here
Waylaying and night-lying.
If they hide before dark
He comes before sunup.
Where hunger is eaten
There he sits down:
Where fear sleeps
There he arises.

I tell you beware of him!
All doors are dangers.
The warders of wealth
Will admit him by stealth.
The lovers of men
Will invite him as friend.
The drinkers of blood
Will drum him in suddenly.
Hope will unlatch to him:
Hopelessness open.

I say and say truly
To all men in honesty
Such is this conqueror!
Shame is his people.
Lickers of spittle
Their lives are unspeakable:
Their dying indecent.

Be well warned!
He comes to you slightly
Slanting and sprinting
Hinting and shadowing:
Sly is his hiding:—
A hard lot:
A late rider:

Watch! I have said to you!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

They are leading him out: his legs give:
Now he is gone in the crowd: they are silent:
No one has spoken since his speaking:

They stand still circling the ministers.
No one has spoken or called out:—
There is no stir at all nor movement:

Even the farthest have stood patiently:
They wait trusting the old men:
They wait faithfully trusting the answer.
Now the huddle on the platform opens:
A minister turns to them raising his two arms. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE ORATOR

Freemen of this nation!
The persuasion of your wills against your wisdom is not dreamed of.
We offer themes for your consideration.

What is the surest defender of liberty?
Is it not liberty?
A free people resists by freedom:
Not locks! Not blockhouses!

The future is a mirror where the past
Marches to meet itself. Go armed toward arms!
Peaceful toward peace! Free and with music toward freedom!
Face tomorrow with knives and tomorrow's a knife-blade.
Murder your foe and your foe will be murder!—
Even your friends suspected of false-speaking:
Hands on the door at night and the floor boards squeaking.

Those who win by the spear are the spear-toters.
And what do they win? Spears! What else is there?
If their hands let go they have nothing to hold by.
They are no more free than a paralytic propped against a tree is.

With the armored man the arm is upheld by the weapon:
The man is worn by the knife.

Once depend on iron for your freedom and your
Freedom's iron!
Once overcome your resisters with force and your
Force will resist you!—
You will never be free of force.
Never of arms unarmed
Will the father return home:
The lover to her loved:
The mature man to his fruit orchard
Walking at peace in that beauty—
The years of his trees to assure him.
Force is a greater enemy than this conqueror—
A treacherous weapon.

Nevertheless my friends there *is* a weapon!
Weakness conquers!

Against chainlessness who breaks?
Against wall-lessness who vaults?
Against forcelessness who forces?

Against the feather of the thistle
Is blunted sharpest metal.
No edge cuts seed-fluff.

This conqueror unresisted
Will conquer no longer: a posturer
Beating his blows upon burdocks—
Shifting his guard against shadows.
Snickers will sound among road-menders:
Titters be stifled by laundresses·
Coarse guffaws among chambermaids.
Reddened with rage he will roar.
He will sweat in his uniform foolishly.
He will disappear: no one hear of him!

There *is* a weapon, my friends
Scorn conquers!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER (*the Orator's voice unintelligible under it*)

I wish you could all see this as we do—
The whole plaza full of these people—
Their colorful garments—the harsh sunlight—
The water-sellers swinging enormous gourds—
The orator there on the stone platform—
The temple behind him: the high pyramid—
The hawks overhead in the sky teetering
Slow to the windward swift to the down-wind—
The houses blind with the blank sun on them. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE ORATOR

There is a weapon.
Reason and truth are that weapon.

Let this conqueror come!
Show him no hindrance!
Suffer his flag and his drum!
Words . . . win!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

There's the shout now. he's done:
He's climbing down. a great speech.
They're all smiling and pressing around him:
The women are squatting in full sunlight:
They're opening packages: bread we'd say by the look—
Yes: bread: bread wrapped between corn leaves:
They're squatting to eat: they're quite contented and happy:
Women are calling their men from the sunny stones:
There are flutes sounding away off:

We can't see for the shifting and moving—
Yes: there are flutes in the cool shadow:
Children are dancing in intricate figures.

(*A drum and flute are heard under the voice.*)

Even a few old men are dancing.
You'd say they'd never feared to see them dancing.
A great speech! really great!
Men forget these truths in passion:
They oppose the oppressors with blind blows:
They make of their towns tombs: of their roofs burials:
They build memorial ruins to liberty:
But liberty is not built from ruins:
Only in peace is the work excellent. . . .

That's odd! The music has stopped. There's something—
It's a man there on the far side: he's pointing:
He seems to be pointing back through the farthest street:
The people are twisting and rising: bread in their fists. . . .
We can't see what it is. . . . Wait! . . . it's a messenger.
It must be a messenger. Yes. It's a message—another.
Here he is at the turn of the street trotting:
His neck's back at the nape: he looks tired:
He winds through the crowd,with his mouth open: laboring:
People are offering water: he pushes away from them:
Now he has come to the stone steps: to the ministers:
Stand by: we're edging in. . . .

(*There are sounds of people close by: coughs: murmurs. The Announcer's voice is lowered.*)

Listen: he's leaning on the stone: he's speaking.

THE VOICE OF THE MESSENGER

There has come . . . the Conqueror. . . .

I am to tell you . . .

I have run over corn land:
I have climbed over cone land:
I have crossed over mountains. . . .

It was laid on my shoulders
By shall and by shan't
That standing by day
And staying by night
Were not for my lot
Till I came to the sight of you. . . .

Now I have come.

I bear word:
Beware of this conqueror!

The fame of his story
Like flame in the winter-grass
Widens before him.
Beached on our shore
With the dawn over shoulder
The lawns were still cold
When he came to the sheep meadows:—
Sun could not keep with him
So was he forward.
Fame is his sword.

No man opposing him
Still grows his glory.
He needs neither foeman nor
Thickset of blows to
Gather his victories—
Nor a foe's match
To earn him his battles.

He brings his own enemy!

He baggages with him
His closet antagonist—
His private opposer.
He's setting him up
At every road corner—
A figure of horror
With blood for his color:
Fist for his hand:
Reek where he stands:
Hate for his heat:
Sneers for his mouth:
Clouts for his clothes:
Oaths if he speak:—
And he's knocking him down
In every town square
Till hair's on his blade
And blood's all about
Like dust in a drouth
And the people are shouting
Flowers him flinging
Music him singing
And bringing him gold
And holding his heels
And feeling his thighs
Till their eyes start
And their hearts swell
And they're telling his praises
Like lays of the heroes
And chiefs of antiquity.

Such are his victories!
So does he come:
So he approaches. . . .

(*A whisper rustles through the crowd.*)

No man to conquer
Yet as a conqueror
Marches he forward. . . .

(*The whisper is louder.*)

Stands in your mountains. . . .

(*A murmur of voices.*)

Soon to descend on you!

(*A swelling roar.*)

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

That touched them! That frightened them!
Some of them point to the east hills:
Some of them mock at the ministers: 'Freedom!'
'Freedom for what? To die in a rat trap?'
They're frantic with anger and plain fear.
They're sold out they say. You can hear them.
'Down with the government! Down with the orators!
'Down with liberal learned minds!
'Down with the mouths and the loose tongues in them!
'Down with the lazy lot! They've sold us!
'We're sold out! Talking has done for us!' . . .
They're boiling around us like mullet that smell shark.
We can't move for the mob: they're crazy with terror. . .

A LOUD VOICE (*distant*)

God-lovers!
Think of your gods!

Earth-masters!
Taste your disasters!

Men!
Remember!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

There's a voice over the crowd somewhere.
They hear it: they're quieting down. . . . It's the priests!
We see them now: it's the priests on the pyramid!
There might be ten of them: black with their hair tangled.
The smoke of their fire is flat in the quick wind:

They stand in the thick of the smoke by the stone of the victims:
Their knives catch in the steep sun: they are shouting:
Listen!—

VOICES OF THE PRIESTS

Turn to your gods rememberers!

A SINGLE VOICE

Let the world be saved by surrendering the world:
Not otherwise shall it be saved.

VOICES OF THE PRIESTS

Turn to your gods rememberers!

A SINGLE VOICE

Let evil be overcome by the coming over of evil:
Your hearts shall be elsewhere.

VOICES OF THE PRIESTS

Turn to your gods rememberers!

VOICES OF THE PRIESTS (*antiphonally*)

Turn to your gods!
The conqueror cannot take you!

Turn to your gods!
The narrow dark will keep you!

Turn to your gods!
In god's house is no breaking!

Turn to your gods!
In god's silences sleep is!

Lay up your will with the gods!
Stones cannot still you!

Lay up your mind with the gods!
Blade cannot blind you!

Lay up your heart with the gods!
Danger departs from you!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

It's a wonderful thing to see this crowd responding.
Even the simplest citizens feel the emotion.
There's hardly a sound now in the square. It's wonderful:
Really impressive: the priests there on the pyramid:
The smoke blowing: the bright sun: the faces—

A SINGLE VOICE

In the day of confusion of reason when all is delusion:
In the day of the tyrants of tongues when the truth is for hire:
In the day of deceit when ends meet:
Turn to your gods!
In the day of division of nations when hope is derision:
In the day of the supping of hate when the soul is corrupted:
In the day of despair when the heart's bare:
Turn to your gods!

(*A slow drum beat.*)

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

A kind of dance is beginning: a serpent of people:
A current of people coiling and curling through people:
A circling of people through people like water through water. . . .

CHANTING VOICES (*to the drums*)

Out of the stir of the sun
Out of the shout of the thunder
Out of the hush of the star . . .
Withdraw the heart.

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER (*the chant and drums under*)

A very young girl is leading them:
They have torn the shawl from her bare breast:
They are giving her flowers: her mouth laughs:
Her eyes are not laughing. . . .

CHANTING VOICES

Leave now the lovely air
To the sword and the sword-wearer—
Leave to the marksman the mark—
Withdraw the heart.

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER (*the chant and drums louder*)

She's coming . . . the drums pound . . . the crowd
Shrieks . . . she's reaching the temple . . . she's climbing it. . . .
Others are following: five: ten . . .
Hundreds are following . . . crowding the stairway. . . .
She's almost there . . . her flowers have fallen . . .
She looks back . . . the priests are surrounding her. . . .

(*The drums suddenly stop: there is an instant's silence: then an angry shout from the crowd.*)

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

Wait! Wait! Something has happened!
One of the ministers: one of the oldest:
The general: the one in the feathered coat:—
He's driving them down with the staff of a banner:
He's climbed after them driving them down:
There's shouting and yelling enough but they're going:
He's telling them off too: you can hear him—

A DEEP VOICE (*chatter of the crowd under it*)

Men! Old men! Listen!
Twist your necks on your nape bones!
The knife will wait in the fist for you.
There is a time for everything—
Time to be thinking of heaven:
Time of your own skins!

Cock your eyes to the windward!

Do you see smoke on those mountains?
The smoke is the smoke of towns.
And who makes it? The conqueror!
And where will he march now? Onward!
The heel of the future descends on you!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

He has them now: even the priests have seen it:
They're all looking away here to the east.
There's smoke too: filling the valleys: like thunderheads! . . .

THE VOICE OF THE GENERAL

You are foolish old men.

You ought to be flogged for your foolishness.

Your grandfathers died to be free
And you—you juggle with freedom!
Do you think you're free by a law
Like the falling of apples in autumn?

You thought you were safe in your liberties!
You thought you could always quibble!
You can't! You take my word for it.
Freedom's the rarest bird!
You risk your neck to snare it—
It's gone while your eyeballs stare!

Those who'd lodge with a tyrant
Thinking to feed at his fire
And leave him again when they're fed are
Plain fools or were bred to it—
Brood of the servile races
Born with the hang-dog face. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

They're all pointing and pushing together:
The women are shouldering baskets: bread: children. . . .
They smell smoke in the air: they smell terror. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE GENERAL (*louder over the increasing sound*)

There's nothing in this world worse—
Empty belly or purse or the
Pitiful hunger of children—
Than doing the Strong Man's will!

The free will fight for their freedom.
They're free men first. They feed
Meager or fat but as free men.
Everything else comes after—
Food: roof: craft—
Even the sky and the light of it!

(*The voices of the crowd rise to a tumult of sounds—drums: shouts: cries.*)

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

The sun is yellow with smoke . . . the town's burning. . . .
The war's at the broken bridge. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE GENERAL (*shouting*)

You! Are you free? Will you fight?

There are still inches for fighting!

There is still a niche in the streets!

You can stand on the stairs and meet him!

You can hold in the dark of a hall!

You can die!

—or your children will crawl for it!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER (*over the tumult*)

They won't listen. They're shouting and screaming and circling.
The square is full of deserters with more coming.
Every street from the bridge is full of deserters.
They're rolling in with the smoke blowing behind them.
The plaza's choked with the smoke and the struggling of stragglers.
They're climbing the platform: driving the ministers: shouting—
One speaks and another:

THE VOICES OF CITIZENS

The city is doomed!
There's no holding it!

Let the conqueror have it! It's his!

The age is his! It's his century!

Our institutions are obsolete.
He marches a mile while we sit in a meeting.

Opinions and talk!
Deliberative walks beneath the ivy and the creepers!

The age demands a made-up mind.
The conqueror's mind is decided on everything.

His doubt comes after the deed or never.

He knows what he wants for his want's what he knows.
He's gone before they say he's going.
He's come before you've barred your house.

He's one man: we are but thousands!

Who can defend us from one man?

Bury your arms! Break your standards!

Give him the town while the town stands!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

They're throwing their arms away: their bows are in bonfires.
The plaza is littered with torn plumes: spear-handles. . . .

THE VOICES OF CITIZENS

Masterless men! . . .

Masterless men
Must take a master! . . .

Order must master us! . . .

Freedom's for fools:
Force is the certainty!

Freedom has eaten our strength and corrupted our virtues!

Men must be ruled!

Fools must be mastered!

Rigor and fast
Will restore us our dignity!

Chains will be liberty!

THE VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER

The last defenders are coming: they whirl from the streets like
Wild leaves on a wind: the square scatters them.

Now they are fewer—ten together or five:
They come with their heads turned: their eyes back.

Now there are none. The street's empty—in shadow.
The crowd is retreating—watching the empty street:
The shouts die.

The voices are silent.

They're watching. . . .

They stand in the slant of the sunlight silent and watching.
The silence after the drums echoes the drum beat.

Now there's a sound. They see him. They must see him!
They're shading their eyes from the sun: there's a rustle of whispering:
We can't see for the glare of it. . . . Yes! . . . Yes! . . .
He's there in the end of the street in the shadow. We see him!
He looks huge—a head taller than anyone:
Broad as a brass door: a hard hero:

Heavy of heel on the brick: clanking with metal:
The helm closed on his head: the eyeholes hollow.

He's coming! . . .
He's clear of the shadow! . . .
The sun takes him.

They cover their faces with fingers. They cower before him.
They fall: they sprawl on the stone. He's alone where he's walking.
He marches with rattle of metal. He tramples his shadow.
He mounts by the pyramid—stamps on the stairway—turns—
His arm rises—his visor is opening. . . .

(*There is an instant's breathless silence: then the voice of the Announcer low—almost a whisper.*)

There's no one! . . .
There's no one at all! . . .
No one! . . .
The helmet is hollow!
The metal is empty! The armor is empty! I tell you
There's no one at all there: there's only the metal:
The barrel of metal: the bundle of armor. It's empty!

The push of a stiff pole at the nipple would topple it.

They don't see! They lie on the paving. They lie in the
Burnt spears: the ashes of arrows. They lie there . . .
They don't see or they won't see. They are silent. . . .

The people invent their oppressors: they wish to believe in them.
They wish to be free of their freedom: released from their liberty:—
The long labor of liberty ended!
They lie there!

(*There is a whisper of sound. The Announcer's voice is louder.*)

Look! It's his arm! It is rising! His arm's rising!
They're watching his arm as it rises. They stir. They cry.
They cry out. They are shouting. They're shouting with happiness.
Listen! They're shouting like troops in a victory. Listen—
'The city of masterless men has found a master!'
You'd say it was they were the conquerors: they that had conquered.

A Roar of Voices

The city of masterless men has found a master!
The city has fallen!
The city has fallen!

The Voice of the Announcer (*flat*)

The city has fallen. . . .

THE LEARNED MEN

Whose minds like horse or ox,
Dispassionate in the stall,
Grow great in girth and wax
Beyond the animal,

While mine, like country hog,
Grows leaner as I age,
Chivvied by flea and dog,
Baited by love and rage.

If mind by God was meant
To grow and gain in girth,
Swelling in sweet content,
I cease, I have no worth:

But if it was God's will
That mind, no wish refused,
Should waste by wanting still
By God I am well used[1]

Elizabeth J. Coatsworth

ELIZABETH J. COATSWORTH was born in 1893 in Buffalo, New York. After extended travels she returned to America, where she divided her time between a cottage in Maine and an old house overlooking the harbor of Hingham, Massachusetts. She married Henry Beston, author of *Outermost House* and other books, in 1929.

Miss Coatsworth made her début with *Fox Footprints* (1921), a group of images and studies in the Oriental mood. *Atlas and Beyond* (1924) is a far more original piece of work. Although it, too, finds its subjects overseas, there is nothing of the ordinary travel-book flavor in any poem.

Compass Rose (1929) has, as the title suggests, something of that mixture of accuracy and fancy, of explicit direction and charming vagueness characteristic of the old animated maps. As a rhyming explorer, Miss Coatsworth must be numbered among the more observant mariners. She is one for whom the fact is but the beginning of the story; to observation she adds imagination, and so brings home an unusually colorful report. Not that her level is always serene; Miss Coatsworth frequently announces a theme of prime significance, but fails to develop it. When the poet is least ambitious she is most successful. She sounds the mysteriously macabre in "A Lady Comes to an Inn," the muffled heroic in "Daniel Webster's Horses." In the animal poems—"The Old Mare," "On a Night of Snow," and others—she skillfully mingles humor, pathos, and a faint satire. *Country Poems* (1942) accentuates her small subtleties and large simplicities.

Miss Coatsworth is equally successful as a writer for young people—*The Cat Who Went to Heaven* (1930), *Away Goes Sally* (1934), *Houseboat Summer* (1942)—and as a devoted New England chronicler in *Maine Ways* (1947).

THE OLD MARE

Gray despair
Was on the old mare,
Grass turned bitter,
Sky a-glare,
And gnats like thoughts,
And thoughts like gnats,
Everywhere.

Her underlip
Hung pendulous wide,
Her ears twitched back,
Her dusty hide
Heaved with her heavy breathing
And her eyes rolled ominously
To one side.

The mule colt lay
In trampled grass,
Slick-tailed, long-eared,
Bespeaking the ass
Carried so long in her body,
Born in travail and sweat—
Alien, alas.

But staggering
To unsteady feet
The mule colt fumbles
An unknown teat;
And the old mare relaxes and sighs,
Finding any motherhood
Most sweet.

DANIEL WEBSTER'S HORSES

If when the wind blows
Rattling the trees,
Clicking like skeletons'
Elbows and knees,

You hear along the road
Three horses pass—
Do not go near the dark
Cold window-glass.

If when the first snow lies
Whiter than bones
You see the mark of hoofs
Cut to the stones,

Hoofs of three horses
Going abreast—
Turn about, turn about,
A closed door is best!

Upright in the earth
Under the sod
They buried three horses
Bridled and shod,

Daniel Webster's horses—
He said as he grew old,
"Flesh, I loved riding,
Shall I not love it, cold?

"Shall I not love to ride
Bone astride bone,
When the cold wind blows
And snow covers stone?

"Bury them on their feet
With bridle and bit.
They were fine horses—
See their shoes fit."

THE CIRCUS-POSTERED BARN

When Dobbin and Robin, unharnessed from the plow,
Stamp smoking to their stalls,
They pass beneath white horses with long manes
Shining upon the walls,
White horses airily leaping through great hoops
Along applauding tracks
Or carrying princesses in rosy tights
Upon their backs.

And Daisy, Madge and Buttercup
Raise their soft eyes,
Where through the darkness of the web-hung stable
Hippopotami arise,
Shaking the water from their enormous shoulders
Floundering in savage mud,
Showing those muzzles huge enough to ponder
An epic cud.

And Tom beside a rat-hole in the boarding
Meets the still stare
Of eyes fiercer than his eyes and a large lithe body
Above him there—
Despondent grow the inmates of the barnyard;
Not one achieves
The super-powers of those super-mammals
Beneath the eaves!

ON A NIGHT OF SNOW

Cat, if you go outdoors you must walk in the snow.
You will come back with little white shoes on your feet,
Little white slippers of snow that have heels of sleet.
Stay by the fire, my Cat. Lie still, do not go.
See how the flames are leaping and hissing low,
I will bring you a saucer of milk like a marguerite,
So white and so smooth, so spherical and so sweet—
Stay with me, Cat. Out-doors the wild winds blow.

Out-doors the wild winds blow, Mistress, and dark is the night.
Strange voices cry in the trees, intoning strange lore,
And more than cats move, lit by our eyes' green light,
On silent feet where the meadow grasses hang hoar—
Mistress, there are portents abroad of magic and might,
And things that are yet to be done. Open the door!

A LADY COMES TO AN INN

Three strange men came to the inn,
One was a black man pocked and thin,
One was brown with a silver knife,
And one brought with him a beautiful wife.

That lovely woman had hair as pale
As French champagne or finest ale,
That lovely woman was long and slim
As a young white birch or a maple limb.

Her face was like cream, her mouth was a rose,
What language she spoke nobody knows,
But sometimes she'd scream like a cockatoo
And swear wonderful oaths that nobody knew.

Her great silk skirts like a silver bell
Down to her little bronze slippers fell,
And her low-cut gown showed a dove on its nest
In blue tattooing across her breast.

Nobody learned the lady's name
Nor the marvelous land from which they came,
But no one in all the countryside
Has forgotten those men and that beautiful bride.

Mark Van Doren

MARK VAN DOREN was born at Hope, Illinois, June 13, 1894, and was educated at the University of Illinois and at Columbia. He taught English at Columbia, and became literary editor of *The Nation.* Since 1920 he has lived in New York except for the part of the year that he spends on his farm in Cornwall, Connecticut.

Besides his verses, he has published four volumes of criticism. *Henry David Thoreau, A Critical Study* (1916) and *The Poetry of John Dryden* (1920) are the best of his analytical appraisals. He took upon himself the huge labor of editing *An Anthology of World Poetry* (1928), which assembles the world's best poetry in the best English versions, and compiled *American Poets 1630-1930* (1932) and *The Oxford Book of American Prose* (1932). A novel called *The Transients* (1935) succeeded only in puzzling most of its readers.

Spring Thunder and Other Poems appeared in 1924. A glance through its pages reveals that Van Doren has been influenced by Robert Frost. He, too, writes of homely bucolic things: of water wheels which need mending, a mountain house in December, the coming of alfalfa, river snow, and dry meadows. His emotion, like Frost's, is restrained. But if neither his subjects nor his point of view is particularly individualized, his mellowness is his own, and the spirit which moves beneath the contours of his verse personifies even the simplest of his quatrains.

Now the Sky (1928) reveals Van Doren as a more metaphysical poet. He is still concerned with ferns, dark barns, deserted hollows, but he grows more and more preoccupied with "the crumbling away of former bright edges of courage and causeless decay." *Jonathan Gentry* (1933) is an impressive chronicle of five generations, interspersed with lyrics. It is a narrative poem which just misses being a great work, chiefly because of its author's unrestrained facility.

A Winter Diary (1935) is Van Doren's richest volume, even though the book represents an alternation of tradition and technical experiment. The title poem is a splendidly sustained narrative-soliloquy; it is almost twelve hundred lines long, yet there is not a forced or flat couplet. For sympathetic landscape and portrait painting there has been nothing like it in American poetry since Whittier's "Snow Bound."

The Last Look and Other Poems (1937), a scattering of sketches and fantasies undertaken lightly and sometimes superficially, was followed by *Collected Poems: 1922-1938,* which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. *Shakespeare* (1939) combined a scholar's research and a poet's imagination in a persuasive study.

Nearing fifty, Van Doren became more prolific than ever. *The Mayfield Deer* (1941) attempts to create an American mythology, but fails to clarify, or even communicate, the confusing story of a backwoods tragedy. *The Seven Sleepers* (1944) is a volume of alternately tart, tender, and sententious lyrics. *The Careless Clock* (1947) consists of poems about children, poems which are perceptive and often complex and anything but conventional. *New Poems* (1948) are delicate and consciously restrained, a highly personal mixture of the metaphysical and the ironic. Van Doren's influences are dissimilar, his tone varies, but his manner is altogether his own. Within his self-imposed limitations, he suggests large horizons; he convinces the reader when he says:

America's great gods live down the lane;
Or up the next block blend their bulk with stone;
Or stand upon the ploughed fields in the rain;
Or watch a mountain cabin left alone.

FORMER BARN LOT

Once there was a fence here,
And the grass came and tried—
Leaning from the pasture—
To get inside.

But colt feet trampled it,
Turning it brown;
Until the farmer moved
And the fence fell down;

Then any bird saw,
Under the wire,
Grass nibbling inward
Like green fire.

IMMORTAL

ıe last thin acre of stalks that stood
Was never the end of the wheat.
ways something fled to the wood
As if the field had feet.

front of the sickle something rose—
Mouse, or weasel, or hare;
e struck and struck, but our worst blows
Dangled in the air.

othing could touch the little soul
Of the grain. It ran to cover,
nd nobody knew in what warm hole
It slept till the winter was over,

nd early seeds lay cold in the ground.
Then—but nobody saw—
burrowed back with never a sound,
And awoke the thaw.

THE PULSE

One thing is sure
When most are not:
That there is cold,
That there is hot,

That winter stars
Are swollen blue
And that bright summer
Bulges too—

Getting the same
Black sky with child;
And both are big,
And both are wild.

There is no error
In the frost;
With warmth away
No warmth is lost;

Waves are coming
Of a time
That has been written
In slow rhyme:

Hot and cold,
And cold and hot—
All things may fail,
But this one not.

Though hate and love
And mercy cease,
Under the rippling
Vapor-fleece

Of earth goes warmth
Pursuing cold
And neither is young
And neither is old.

THE DISTANT RUNNERS

Six great horses of Spain, set free after his death by De Soto's men, ran West and restored to America the wild race lost there some thousands of years ago
—A legend.

Ferdinand De Soto lies
Soft again in river mud.
Birds again, as on the day
Of his descending, rise and go
Straightly West, and do not know
Of feet beneath that faintly thud.

If I were there in other time,
Between the proper sky and stream;
If I were there and saw the six
Abandoned manes, and ran along,
I could sing the fetlock song
That now is chilled within a dream.

Ferdinand De Soto, sleeping
In the river, never heard
Four-and-twenty Spanish hooves
Fling off their iron and cut the green,
Leaving circles new and clean
While overhead the wing-tips whirred.

Neither I nor any walker
By the Mississippi now
Can see the dozen nostrils open
Half in pain for death of men—
But half in gladness, neighing then
As loud as loping would allow.

On they rippled, tail and back,
A prairie day, and swallows knew
A dark, uneven current there.
But not a sound came up the wind,
And toward the night their shadow thinned
Before the black that flooded through.

If I were there to bend and look,
The sky would know them as they sped
And turn to see. But I am here,
And they are far, and time is old.
Within my dream the grass is cold;
The legs are locked; the sky is dead.

THE ESCAPE

Going from us at last,
He gave himself forever
Unto the mudded nest,
Unto the dog and the beaver.

Sick of the way we stood,
He pondered upon flying,
Or envied the triple thud
Of horses' hooves; whose neighing

Came to him sweeter than talk,
Whereof he too was tired.
No silences now he broke,
No emptiness explored.

Going from us, he never
Sent one syllable home.
We called him wild; but the plover
Watched him, and was tame.

THE WHISPERER

Be extra careful by this door,
No least, least sound, she said.
It is my brother Oliver's,
And he would strike you dead.

Come on. It is the top step now,
And carpet all the way.
But wide enough for only one,
Unless you carry me.

I love your face as hot as this.
Put me down, though, and creep.
My father! He would strangle you,
I think, like any sheep.

Now take me up again, again;
We're at the landing post.
You hear her saying Hush, and Hush?
It is my mother's ghost.

She would have loved you, loving me.
She had a voice as fine—
I love you more for such a kiss,
And here is mine, is mine.

And one for her—O, quick, the door!
I cannot bear it so.
The vestibule, and out—for now
Who passes that would know?

Here we could stand all night and let
Strange people smile and stare.
But you must go, and I must lie
Alone up there, up there.

Remember? But I understand.
More with a kiss is said.
And do not mind it if I cry,
Passing my mother's bed.

E. E. Cummings

E(DWARD) E(STLIN) CUMMINGS was born October 14, 1894, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The son of Edward Cummings, who taught English at Harvard and preached in Edward Everett Hale's famous church in Boston, Cummings was educated at Harvard, took his B.A. in 1915 and his M.A. in 1916. During the first World War he served with the Ambulance Corps, and, because of an error of the military censor's, he was thrown into a detention camp for three months—an experience which formed the basis of his novel *The Enormous Room* (1922). After 1920 he lived in Paris where he secured recognition as painter and draftsman as well as a writer. Returning to America, he became a leader of the avantgarde; his versatility emphasized his eminence as irreconcilable experimenter.

From the beginning Cummings seemed to be preoccupied with typographical disarrangements. This is a pity, for much of his work suffers because of the distortions; that part of it which succeeds is often successful in spite of, and not because of, its form. Cummings is incapable of self-criticism; in middle age he resolutely continued the verve and brashness of adolescence.

His early books, *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923), *&* (1925), and *XLI Poems* (1925), are mixtures of extreme modernism, archaism, and stylistic affectations. Cummings' emotions, unlike the look of his eccentric pages, are not at all bizarre; often they are actually banal. A constant challenger, Cummings knows how to provoke the reader. Prompted by the French calligraphists, he arrests the attention by breaking up his sentences, even his words, with astonishing transpositions and elisions, with punctuation that interrupts and distorts the line, and a dozen other devices. Sometimes the disruptions are highly successful; sometimes they merely conceal an inflated sentimentality.

No Thanks (1935), privately printed, intensified Cummings' essential incongruities, his stretched irresponsibilities, and his paradox of traditional subject matter in ultra-modern treatment. The attention-getting devices were carried further than ever; stereotyped images were tricked out with parentheses, and interpolated commas wedged themselves irrelevantly into faintly protesting words. Allen Tate was one of those who insisted that Cummings had replaced "the old poetic conventions with equally limited conventions of his own."

But the critic must be wary in his eagerness to dispose of Cummings. Let the critic deride the poet as a sentimentalist, and he is faced by "Poem, or Beauty Hurts Mr. Vinal," one of the period's most savage thrusts against sentimental versifying. Let him dismiss Cummings as a cheapjack, and he is confronted with pieces as purely lyrical as "Somewhere I have never travelled," "Since feeling is first," "O sweet spontaneous earth."

Cummings' early work was reassembled in *Collected Poems* (1938). *Fifty Poems* (1941) was followed by *1 × 1* (1944). The work published in his fiftieth year shows no perceptible advance over the poems published in his early thirties. There is the same combination of persuasive phrases and precious rhetoric, of charm and wit. But the charm is marred by a determinedly scrambled syntax which, attempt-

ing to establish an individual language, only registers a prolonged caprice; and the wit is strained through a tricky cleverness which, intended to arrest the eye, merely irritates it. Robbed of typographical oddities, reduced to essential statements, most of this verse is not so spectacular as it first appears. It plays a set of vague changes on the untroubled repetition of favorite words ("love," "life," "roses," "spring") and pits them against the power of the troublesome intelligence. Thus Cummings' celebration of physical existence and his attacks on a machine-driven world and its "culture" often fall into the "poetic" attitude which he scorns.

Yet, if Cummings is undistinguished as a thinker, he is always surprising as a creative craftsman. He is simultaneously the skillful draftsman, the leg-pulling clown, the sensitive commentator and the ornery boy. The nose-thumbing satirist is continually interrupted by the singer of brazenly tender lyrics. A modern of the moderns, he displays a seventeenth century obsession with desire and death; part Cavalier, part metaphysician, he is a shrewd manipulator of language, and his style —gracefully erotic or downright indecent—is strictly his own. It is a likely irony that Cummings will finally be appraised not as a typographical eccentric or as a startling exhibitionist, but as a thinly disguised and wholly unashamed romantic poet.

WHEN GOD LETS MY BODY BE

when god lets my body be

From each brave eye shall sprout a tree
fruit that dangles therefrom

the purpled world will dance upon
Between my lips which did sing

a rose shall beget the spring
that maidens whom passion wastes

will lay between their little breasts
My strong fingers beneath the snow

into strenuous birds shall go
my love walking in the grass

their wings will touch with her face
and all the while shall my heart be

With the bulge and nuzzle of the sea

SUNSET

stinging
gold swarms
upon the spires
silver
chants the litanies the
great bells are ringing with rose
the lewd fat bells
and a tall

wind
is dragging
the
sea

with

dream

-S

IMPRESSION—IV

the hours rise up putting off stars and it is
dawn
into the street of the sky light walks scattering poems

on earth a candle is
extinguished the city
wakes
with a song upon her
mouth having death in her eyes

and it is dawn
the world
goes forth to murder dreams. . . .

i see in the street where strong
men are digging bread
and i see the brutal faces of
people contented hideous hopeless cruel happy

and it is day,

in the mirror
i see a frail
man
dreaming
dreams
dreams in the mirror

and it
is dusk on earth

a candle is lighted
and it is dark.
the people are in their houses
the frail man is in his bed
the city

sleeps with death upon her mouth having a song in her eyes
the hours descend,
putting on stars. . . .

in the street of the sky night walks scattering poems

LA GUERRE

I

the bigness of cannon
is skillful,

but i have seen
death's clever enormous voice
which hides in a fragility
of poppies. . . .

i say that sometimes
on these long talkative animals
are laid fists of huger silence

I have seen all the silence
filled with vivid noiseless boys

at Roupy
i have seen
between barrages,

the night utter ripe unspeaking girls.

II

O sweet spontaneous
earth how often have
the
doting

fingers of
prurient philosophers pinched
and
poked
thee
, has the naughty thumb
of science prodded
thy
beauty , how
often have the religions taken
thee upon their scraggy knees
squeezing and

buffeting thee that thou mightest conceive
gods
(but
true
to the incomparable
couch of death thy
rhythmic
lover

thou answerest

them only with
spring)

CHANSON INNOCENT

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame baloonman

whistles far and wee
and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old baloonman whistles
far and wee

and bettyandisbel come dancing
from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it's
spring

and
the
goat-footed

baloonman whistles
far
and
wee

ALWAYS BEFORE YOUR VOICE

Always before your voice my soul
half-beautiful and wholly droll
is as some smooth and awkward foal,
whereof young moons begin
the newness of his skin,

so of my stupid sincere youth
the exquisite failure uncouth
discovers a trembling and smooth
Unstrength, against the strong
silences of your song;

or as a single lamb whose sheen
of full unsheared fleece is mean
beside its lovelier friends, between
your thoughts more white than wool
My thought is sorrowful;

but my heart smote in trembling thirds
of anguish quivers to your words,
As to a flight of thirty birds
shakes with a thickening fright
the sudden fooled light.

it is the autumn of a year:
When the thin air is stooped with fear,
across the harvest whitely peer
empty of surprise
death's faultless eyes

(whose hand my folded soul shall know
while on faint hills do frailly go
The peaceful terrors of the snow,
and before your dead face
which sleeps, a dream shall pass)

and these my days their sounds and flowers
Fall in a pride of petaled hours,
like flowers at the feet of mowers
whose bodies strong with love
through meadows hugely move.

et what am i that such and such
ıysteries very simply touch
ıe, whose heart-wholeness overmuch
.xpects of your hair pale,
terror musical?

'hile in an earthless hour my fond
ɔul seriously yearns beyond
ıis fern of sunset frond on frond
pening in a rare
lowness of gloried air. . . .

'he flute of morning stilled in noon—
oon the implacable bassoon—
ow Twilight seeks the thrill of moon,
'ashed with a wild and thin
espair of violin.

SONG

'hy fingers make early flowers of
ll things.

thy hair mostly the hours love:
a smoothness which
sings, saying
(though love be a day)
do not fear, we will go amaying.

thy whitest feet crisply are straying.
Always
thy moist eyes are at kisses playing,
whose strangeness much
says; singing
(though love be a day)
for which girl art thou flowers bringing?

To be thy lips is a sweet thing
and small.
Death, thee i call rich beyond wishing
if this thou catch,
else missing.
(though love be a day
and life be nothing, it shall not stop kissing)

PORTRAIT VIII

Buffalo Bill's
defunct
who used to
ride a watersmooth-silver
stallion
and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlıkethat
Jesus
he was a handsome man
and what i want to know is
how do you like your blueeyed boy
Mister Death

SONNET

a wind has blown the rain away and blown
the sky away and all the leaves away,
and the trees stand. I think i too have known
autumn too long

(and what have you to say,
wind wind wind—did you love somebody
and have you the petal of somewhere in your heart
pinched from dumb summer?
O crazy daddy
of death dance cruelly for us and start

the last leaf whirling in the final brain
of air!) Let us as we have seen see
doom's integration . . . a wind has blown the rain

away and the leaves and the sky and the
trees stand:
the trees stand. The trees,
suddenly wait against the moon's face.

THIS IS THE GARDEN

this is the garden: colors come and go,
frail azures fluttering from night's outer wing,
strong silent greens serenely lingering,
absolute lights like baths of golden snow.
This is the garden: pursèd lips do blow
upon cool flutes within wide glooms, and sing
(of harps celestial to the quivering string)
invisible faces hauntingly and slow.

This is the garden. Time shall surely reap,
and on Death's blade lie many a flower curled,
in other lands where other songs be sung;
yet stand They here enraptured, as among
the slow deep trees perpetual of sleep
some silver-fingered fountain steals the world.

POEM, OR BEAUTY HURTS MR. VINAL

take it from me kiddo
believe me
my country, 'tis of

you, land of the Cluett
Shirt Boston Garter and Spearmint
Girl With The Wrigley Eyes(of you
land of the Arrow Ide
and Earl &
Wilson
Collars)of you i
sing: land of Abraham Lincoln and Lydia E. Pinkham,
land above all of Just Add Hot Water And Serve—
from every B.V.D.

let freedom ring

amen. i do however protest, anent the un
-spontaneous and otherwise scented merde which
greets one(Everywhere Why)as divine poesy per
that and this radically defunct periodical. i would

suggest that certain ideas gestures
rhymes, like Gillette Razor Blades

having been used and reused
to the mystical moment of dullness, emphatically are
Not To Be Resharpened. (Case in point

if we are to believe these gently O sweetly
melancholy trillers amid the thrillers
these crepuscular violinists among my and your
skyscrapers—Helen & Cleopatra were Just Too Lovely,
The Snail's On The Thorn enter Morn and God's
In His andsoforth

do you get me?)according
to such supposedly indigenous
throstles Art is O World O Life
a formula: example, Turn Your Shirttails Into
Drawers and If It Isn't An Eastman It Isn't A
Kodak therefore my friends let
us now sing each and all fortissimo A-
mer
i

ca, I
love,
You. And there're a
hun-dred-mil-lion-oth-ers, like
all of you successfully if
delicately gelded(or spaded)
gentlemen(and ladies)—pretty

littleliverpill-
hearted-Nujolneeding-There's-A-Reason
americans(who tensetendoned and with
upward vacant eyes, painfully
perpetually crouched, quivering, upon the
sternly allotted sandpile
—how silently
emit a tiny violetflavored nuisance: Odor?

ono.
comes out like a ribbon lies flat on the brush

ITEM

this man is o so
Waiter
this; woman is

please shut that
the pout And affectionate leer
interminable pyramidal, napkins
(this man is oh so tired of this

a door opens by itself
woman.) they so to speak were in

Love once?
now
her mouth opens too far
and: she attacks her Lobster without
feet mingle under the
mercy.
(exit the hors d'oeuvres)

SINCE FEELING IS FIRST

since feeling is first
who pays any attention
to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you;

wholly to be a fool
while Spring is in the world

my blood approves,
and kisses are a better fate
than wisdom
lady i swear by all flowers. Don't cry
—the best gesture of my brain is less than
your eyelids' flutter which says

we are for each other: then
laugh, leaning back in my arms
for life's not a paragraph

And death i think is no parenthesis

SOMEWHERE I HAVE NEVER TRAVELLED

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond
any experience, your eyes have their silence:
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will unclose me
though i have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skilfully, mysteriously) her first rose

or if your wish be to close me, i and
my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,
as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility: whose texture
compels me with the color of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands

IF THERE ARE ANY HEAVENS

if there are any heavens my mother will(all by herself)have
one. It will not be a pansy heaven nor
a fragile heaven of lilies-of-the-valley but
it will be a heaven of blackred roses

my father will be(deep like a rose
tall like a rose)

standing near my

(swaying over her
silent)
with eyes which are really petals and see

nothing with the face of a poet really which
is a flower and not a face with
hands
which whisper
This is my beloved my

(suddenly in sunlight
he will bow,

& the whole garden will bow)

Genevieve Taggard

GENEVIEVE TAGGARD was born November 28, 1894, on an apple farm at Waitsburg, Washington. At the age of two she was taken by her parents to Hawaii, where she remained, with one brief interval, for the next eighteen years. She attended the University of California, edited the college literary magazine, and graduated in 1919. Two years later, in New York, with a group of other poets, she helped found *The Measure,* that journal of poetry which was particularly hospitable to the modern lyric. She taught at Bennington College, in Vermont, beginning in 1931 and, beginning in 1935, at Sarah Lawrence College. She died November 8, 1948.

Her first volume, *For Eager Lovers,* was published in 1922. In spite of the banal title, Miss Taggard's lines are unaffected and her general statements have almost personal definiteness. It is always a sensitive artist speaking through such melodies as "The Enamel Girl," and "With Child." *Hawaiian Hilltop,* a leaflet of poems about her childhood in the tropics, was published in 1923. It proved that Miss Taggard was at her best in the more extended lyric; such a poem as "Solar Myth" is more vivid, more richly delineated than most of her shorter melodies.

Words for the Chisel (1926) is notable for the long narrative "Poppy Juice" which opens the volume. Two years later Miss Taggard made a selection from her previously published volumes and, after ten years' work, retained exactly twenty-eight poems for *Travelling Standing Still* (1928). The title is more appropriate than the one immediately preceding it in date of publication, for Miss Taggard's manner is far from stony. Such poems as "With Child" and "Dilemma of the Elm" proceed from experiences which are common and yet freshly observed.

Not Mine to Finish (1934) is as undetermined as its title. It is a curious mixture, or, rather, a contradiction of moods, styles, and effects. Such a poem as "Try Tropic" is both sensuous and scrupulous; many of the other verses are either careless or shrill. The poet seems unhappily split, shifting, as Louise Bogan wrote, "between the high romantic desire to be struck dead by delight and the high revolutionary ambition to write songs for the people." *Calling Western Union* (1936), another interim book, was followed by a representative *Collected Poems: 1918-1938.* Later volumes were *Long View* (1942) and *Slow Music* (1946).

In 1936 Miss Taggard became greatly interested in the problem of writing for music; such modern American composers as Aaron Copland and Roy Harris had collaborated with her. *Circumference,* a collection exhibiting "varieties of metaphysical verse" from Donne to E. E. Cummings, was edited by Miss Taggard and published in a distinguished format in 1930. She was also author of *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson* (1930), a sensitive if somewhat too fanciful combination of biography and speculation.

WITH CHILD

Now I am slow and placid, fond of sun,
Like a sleek beast, or a worn one:
No slim and languid girl—not glad
With the windy trip I once had,
But velvet-footed, musing of my own,
Torpid, mellow, stupid as a stone.

You cleft me with your beauty's pulse, and now
Your pulse has taken body. Care not how
The old grace goes, how heavy I am grown,
Big with this loneliness, how you alone
Ponder our love. Touch my feet and feel
How earth tingles, teeming at my heel!
Earth's urge, not mine—my little death, not hers;
And the pure beauty yearns and stirs.
It does not heed our ecstasies, it turns
With secrets of its own, its own concerns,
Toward a windy world of its own, toward stark
And solitary places. In the dark,
Defiant even now, it tugs and moans
To be untangled from these mother's bones.

THE ENAMEL GIRL

Fearful of beauty, I always went
Timidly indifferent:

Dainty, hesitant, taking in
Just what was tiniest and thin;

Careful not to care
For burning beauty in blue air;

Wanting what my hand could touch—
That not too much;

Looking not to left or right
On a honey-silent night;

Fond of arts and trinkets, if
Imperishable and stiff.

They never played me false, nor fell
Into fine dust. They lasted well.

They lasted till you came, and then
When you went, sufficed again.

But for you, they had been quite
All I needed for my sight.

You faded. I never knew
How to unfold as flowers do,

Or how to nourish anything
To make it grow. I wound a wing

With one caress; with one kiss
Break most fragile ecstasies . . .

Now terror touches me when I
Dream I am touching a butterfly.

SOLAR MYTH

(Maui, the dutiful son and great hero, yields to his mother's entreaty and adjusts the center of the universe to her convenience. The days are too short for drying tapa. He is persuaded to slow down the speed of the spider-sun with a lasso of sisal rope.)

The golden spider of the sky
Leaped from the crater's rim;
And all the winds of morning rose
And spread, and followed him.

The circle of the day swept out,
His vast and splendid path;
The purple sea spumed in the west
His humid evening bath.

Thrice twenty mighty legs he had,
And over earth there passed
Shadows daily whipping by,
Faster, faster, fast . . .

For daily did he wax more swift,
And daily did he run
The span of heaven to the sea,
A lusty, rebel sun.

Then Maui's mother came to him
With weight of household woes:
"I cannot get my tapa dry
Before the daylight goes.

"Mornings I rise and spread with care
My tapa on the grass;
Evenings I gather it again,
A damp and sodden mass."

Then Maui rose and climbed at night
The mountain. Dim and deep
Within the crater's bowl he saw
The sprawling sun asleep.

He looped his ropes, the mighty man,
He whirled his sisal cords;
They whistled like a hurricane
And cut the air like swords.

Up sprang the spider. Maui hurled
His lasso after him.
The spider fled. Great Maui stood
Firm on the mountain-rim.

The spider dipped and swerved and pulled
But struggle as he might,
Around one-half his whirl of legs
The sisal ropes cut tight.

He broke them off, the mighty man,
He dropped them in the sea,
Where there had once been sixty legs
There now were thirty-three.

Maui counted them, and took
The pathway home; and came
Back to his mother, brooding,—strode
Like a lost man, and lame.

The tarnished spider of the sky
Limped slowly over heaven,
And with his going mourned and moaned
The missing twenty-seven.

On with a hollow voice he mourned,
Poured out his hollow woe;
Over each day the sound of him
Bellowing, went below.

Maui saw the gulls swarm up
And scream and settle on
The carcass of the limping thing
That once had been the sun.

But still he thought at length to have
His mother satisfied.
"Can't you put back his legs again
Now all my tapa's dried?"

"The days are long and dull," she said,
"I loved to see them skim." . . .
Wearily the old sun shook
The black birds off of him.

DOOMSDAY MORNING

Deaf to God, who calls and walks
Until the earth aches with his tread
Summoning the sulky dead,
We'll wedge and stiffen under rocks
Or be mistaken for a stone,
And signal as children do, "Lie low,"
Wait and wait for God to go.

The risen will think we slumber on
Like slug-a-beds. When they have gone
Trouped up before the Judgment Throne
We in the vacant earth, alone,—
Abandoned by ambitious souls,
And deaf to God, who calls and walks
Like an engine overhead
Driving the disheveled dead,—
We will rise and crack the ground,
Tear the roots and heave the rocks,
And billow the surface where God walks,
And God will listen to the sound
And know that lovers are below
Working havoc, till they creep
Together, from their sundered sleep.

Then end, world! Let your final darkness fall!
And God may call . . . and call . . . and call.

TRY TROPIC

On the Properties of Nature for Healing an Illness

Try tropic for your balm,
Try storm,
And after storm, calm.
Try snow of heaven, heavy, soft, and slow,
Brilliant and warm.
Nothing will help, and nothing do much harm.

Drink iron from rare springs; follow the sun;
Go far
To get the beam of some medicinal star;
Or in your anguish run
The gauntlet of all zones to an ultimate one.
Fever and chill
Punish you still,
Earth has no zone to work against your ill.

Burn in the jeweled desert with the toad.
Catch lace
In evening mist across your haunted face;
Or walk in upper air the slanted road.
It will not lift that load;
Nor will large seas undo your subtle ill.

Nothing can cure and nothing kill
What ails your eyes, what cuts your pulse in two,
And not kill you.

DILEMMA OF THE ELM

In summer elms are made for me.
I walk ignoring them and they
Ignore my walking in a way
I like in any elegant tree.

Fountain of the elm is shape
For something I have felt and said. . . .
In winter to hear the lonely scrape
Of rooty branches overhead

Should make me only half believe
An elm had ever a frond of green—
Faced by the absence of a leaf
Forget the fair elms I have seen.

(A wiry fountain, black upon
The little landscape, pale-blue with snow—
Elm of my summer, obscurely gone
To leave me another elm to know.)

Instead, I paint it with my thought,
Not knowing, hardly, that I do;
The elm comes back I had forgot
I see it green, absurdly new,

Grotesquely growing in the snow.
In winter an elm's a double tree;
In winter all elms trouble me.

But in summer elms are made for me.
I can ignore the way they grow.

LONG VIEW

Never heard happier laughter.
Where did you hear it?
Somewhere in the future.
Very far in the future?
Oh no. It was natural. It sounded
Just like our own, American, sweet and easy.
People were talking together. They sat on the ground.
It was summer.
And the old told stories of struggle.
The young listened. I overheard
Our own story, retold. They looked up at the stars
Hearing the serious words. Someone sang.
They loved us who had passed away.
They forgot all our errors. Our names were mixed. The story was long.
The young people danced. They brought down
New boughs for the flame. They said, Go on with the story now.
What happened next?
For us there was silence
Something like pain or tears. But they took us with them.
Their laughter was peace. I never heard happier.
Their children large and beautiful. Like us, but new-born.
This was in the mountains of the west.
They were resting. They knew each other well.
The trees and rivers are on the map, but the time
Is not yet. I listened again. Their talk was ours
With many favorite words. I heard us all speaking.
But they spoke of better things, soberly. They were wise
And learned. They sang not only of us.
They remembered thousands, and many countries, far away.
One poet who sat there with them began to talk of the future.
Then they were silent again. And they looked at the sky.
And then in the light of the stars they banked their fire as we do,
Scuffing the ground, and said goodnight.
This poem I bring back to you
Knowing that you wonder often, that you want
Word of these people.

Robert Hillyer

ROBERT (SILLIMAN) HILLYER was born in East Orange, New Jersey, June 3, 1895. He attended Kent School and Harvard College. After graduating from the latter, he was an ambulance driver with the French army from 1917 to 1919, was at Copenhagen as Fellow of the American-Scandinavian foundation in 1921, and since that time has been Assistant Professor of English at Trinity College and Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard. He retired from teaching in 1944.

Hillyer's first book was as innocuous as its title, *Sonnets and Other Lyrics* (1917), following which came six volumes of varying merit. Hillyer's seventh, entitled with an appropriateness suspiciously like a pun *The Seventh Hill* (1928), is one of his best. On the surface the verse seems to lack that sense of discovery which distinguishes poetry from versification. But this is only because Hillyer's technique and idiom are traditional. Possibly because there is nothing local in his subject-matter or treatment, Hillyer's work found more favor in England than in America. *The Halt in the Garden* (1925) had a foreword by Arthur Machen and elicited high praise from Middleton Murry. Though the contours of this poetry are delicate to the point of elegance, the spirit upholding them has a sustaining strength. "Prothalamion," which is the peak of the volume, is typical. Upon a theme which has done duty since the beginning of art, in a form which is uncompromisingly classical. Hillyer has constructed twenty-six stanzas, not one of which falls below a high seriousness.

The Collected Verse of Robert Hillyer (1933) confirms the praise of those critics who found Hillyer's poetry conventional in form but "colored by something from within." It received the Pulitzer Prize in 1934, and the award drew attention to the longer poems as well as to the shorter lyrics. One of his most recent works, "Variations on a Theme," reveals (as Hillyer wrote of Santayana) "dignity and sumptuousness of phrasing" and sureness of technique. In the version printed here, the last section (the recapitulation) has been omitted.

A Letter to Robert Frost and Others (1937) contains the best writing and thinking that Hillyer has done. The measures are disciplined, even "classical," the rhymes are precise, the couplets are as polished as Pope's. But the tone is the tone of the twentieth century with its abrupt address and its edged disposals of current shibboleths and frauds. *Pattern of a Day* (1940) is a further advance, a book of unpretentious but pointed connections. Hillyer's idiom is not startling, but he wears it with a difference. His is a deceptively quiet voice; beneath its suavity he says things which are quick and keen and far from soothing. Such a poem as "The Assassination" is skilfully modulated and dramatically surprising. The limitations of Hillyer's work are implicit in his training, in his deliberate cultivation of tradition. But the best of his work avoids argument and surpasses fashion. *Poems for Music* (1947) contains the seventy best lyrics written by Hillyer during thirty years.

AS ONE WHO BEARS BENEATH HIS NEIGHBOR'S ROOF

As one who bears beneath his neighbor's roof
Some thrust that staggers his unready wit
And brooding through the night on such reproof
Too late conceives the apt reply to it,
So all our life is but an afterthought,
A puzzle solved long past the time of need,
And tardy wisdom that one failure bought
Finds no occasion to be used in deed.

Fate harries us; we answer not a word,
Or answering too late, we waste our breath;
Not even a belated quip is heard
From those who bore the final taunt of death;

And thus the Jester parries all retort:
His jest eternal, and our lives so short.

PASTORAL

So soft in the hemlock wood
The phoenix sang his lullaby,
Shepherds drowsed where they stood,
Slumber felled each passerby,
And lovers at their first caress
Slept in virgin loneliness.

Not for mortal eye to see
Naked life arise from embers;
Only the dark hemlock tree
Evergreen itself, remembers
How the Word came into being,
No man hearing, no man seeing.

From the taut bow of sleep
Shoots the phoenix toward the day,
Shepherds wake and call their sheep,
Wanderers go on their way.
Unaware how death went by,
Lovers under the hemlocks lie.

PROTHALAMION

(Second Section)

The hills turn hugely in their sleep
With sound of grinding rock and soil
While down their granite shoulders leap
The waterbrooks in white turmoil.
The vigil of Good Friday done,
Our second spring ascends the height;
The earth turns southward toward the sun,
And trees which guard the pascal door,
In leaf once more,
Once more are murmurous with strange delight.

For now is the world's Eastertide,
And born that they may die again
Arise from death the gods who died.
Osiris, slender as young grain,
Comes back to Isis; the shy lad
Adonis wakens by the stream;
And Jesus, innocently clad
In samite, walks beneath the trees,
Half ill-at-ease
That Judas and the Cross were but a dream.

And thou art she whom I have seen
Always, but never understood,
In broken shrines festooned with green,
In twilight chapels of the wood;
Or on the hills a shepherdess
Walked with the sun full on her face,
And though her body and her dress
Appareled her in meek disguise,
I dropped my eyes,
For still I knew the goddess by her pace.

I know thee now in morning light
Though thou art wrought of flesh and blood,
And though the mother of the night
Resumes at dawn her maidenhood;
And though love severed with his knife
The girdle of the million years
And yielded to importunate life
The toll she asks of those who still
Would journey, till
They pass her known and visible frontiers.

The children from beyond the sun
Come bounding down the hillside grass,
And in the joyous rout is one
Who smiles and will not let us pass.
He stands, the fairest of them all,
And in his loveliness I trace
Thy loveliness. His light footfall
Bends not the grass he treads upon;
But he is gone
Before my eyes have feasted on his face.

Let him go back beyond the air;
This spring is ours, it is not his;
Those eager lips would take their share
Of love's yet undiminished kiss.
Fairer than he, as young, as gay,
As much a child, forget all things,
All but this transitory day
Of love, all things but love, and give
Thy fugitive
Delights to me who fly but with thy wings.

In undulant desire we merge,
On tides of light we sport and rest;
We swerve up from the deeper surge
To hover on the trembling crest
Of joy, and when the wave has passed,
Then smooth is the wing to the abyss

Of quietness, where with a last
Eye-darkening smile, we say farewell
Until the spell
Shall be renewed. Forget all things but this.

No grass-blade bends, no shadow stirs;
Love mounted high, slumber is deep;
Deep is the spring beneath the firs,
A sweet and lonely place for sleep.
And waking, we shall cool our flesh
In depths so clear they seem as air;
Twofold in beauty, thou refresh
Thy body in that water, bright
With muted light,
And brighter still for thy reflection there.

While I along the bank shall find
The flowers that opened with the day
Still dew-drenched, and with these entwined
New fronds of fern or darker bay.
Or pausing in a shaft of sun
That strikes across the mottled glade
Watch thee too long, beloved one,
Watch thee with eyes grown big with tears
Because the years
Suddenly spoke and made my heart afraid.

Giver of immortality—
That was thy name within the shrine—
The Mighty Mother, Star of the Sea,
All syllables of love were thine
To wear as lesser women wear
The garlands of their fragile spring;
Why then within my heart this fear
Of time? why then amid the shout
Of life, this doubt
That clouds the new sun like an outspread wing?

We must not to a foe like time
Yield up our present. Take my hand
And up the morning we shall climb
Until the wooded valley land
Lies all beneath us in the drowse
Of love's meridial aftermath;
The trellis of entwining boughs
Trembles in the great joy of green,
But does not screen
The comfortable glimpse of homeward path.

We will not to our ancient foe
Yield all this happiness; it lies
Shielded from sickle and from snow
And all the menace of the skies.
At night I shall watch over thee,
The future safe beneath thy breast,
And after autumn there shall be
Dayspring, when for each other's sake
We shall awake
And follow Love beyond the unknown west.

NIGHT PIECE

There is always the sound of falling water here;
By day, blended with birdsong and windy leaves,
By night, the only sound, steady and clear
Through the darkness and half-heard through sleepers' dreams.
Here in the mottled shadow of glades, the deer,
Unstartled, waits until the walker is near,
Then with a silent bound, without effort is gone,
While the sound of falling water goes on and on.

Those are not stars reflected in the lake,
They are shadows of stars that were there aeons ago;
When you walk by these waters at night, you must forsake
All you have known of time; you are timeless, alone,
The mystery almost revealed, like the breath you take
In the summer dawn before the world is awake,
Or the last breath, when the spirit beyond recalling
Goes forth to the sound of water for ever falling.

Swift as deer, half-thoughts in the summer mind
Flash with their hints of happiness and are gone;
In the dark waters of ourselves we find

No stars but shadows of stars which memory lost.
Dark are the waters under the bridge we crossed,
And the sound of their falling knows neither end nor start.
Frail are your stars, deep are your waters, mind;
And the sound of falling water troubles my heart.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

I

You walk up a deep roadbed to a hilltop,
The trees are splintered and the sun is gray,
Shells rip the cheese-cloth air, and curling gas
That smells of death, out of the lungs of death
Breathes, it is like the sap of slaughtered poplars
Rancid with spring, it is like the breath of old men
Who have been dead a long time but still breathe.
Shell by shell you note the approaching range,
Methodical,—no doubt after a graph
Devised by the professors in Berlin,
And thus defeated by its own precision.
A scattered fire might, by a random chance,
Drape you like garlands on a broken tree,
But this! it is to laugh. You need not wince
Or fling yourself face down in mud until—
Well, until then! By God, they broke the rules;
That nearly got you. You must telegraph
Berlin and file complaints with the professors.
Euclid was wrong. The parallels have met.
But you're all right, stop jabbering the Lord's Prayer,
Since it was answered, and go on with Mozart,
G-minor Symphony, the second movement.
And now with Mozart playing in your skull
Tread daintily among the rats and shell-holes,
Pick your way up the hill between the fragments
Of men and horses, let the blue gas curl.
Listen, that pizzicato on the 'cellos.
Lovelier always with the increasing beauty
Of spring, which to an adolescent rapture
Yields not one half its glories, saving all
For those whose spring finds winter in their hearts.
Plucked strings are louder, if you listen for them,
Than shells exploding, and dead suns are brighter
Than Very lights or fear. Death is no rampart
From which, methodical, the fusillades
Of hidden foes come nearer and yet nearer
Until you gauge their range and duck. It is
Not as you think it, not dead breath of poplars;
It is a chance that after sundry warnings
Plotted methodically by distant science,
The shell will miss you, and you will arrive
Up on the hillcrest after lonely walking,

The sun grown splendid for the sunset glory
Hanging above a land ruined but quiet,
And friends whose voices waken you from nightmare,
Singing amid your tangled strands of Mozart:
"The Armistice! We have signed the truce with Death!"

II

"What! you were in the war! I'd never guess it
Reading your books. What a strange man you are.
Think of dear Brooke and Seeger and Joyce Kilmer,—
Of course, they all met heroes' deaths,—but still
How can experiences so profound
Have failed to leave one comma on your verses?"
"Bird droppings, madam, are not punctuation,
However fair the bird, you do but join
The illimitable clamor of bad causes
Which deafen poetry. I must confess
Though born an Anglo-Catholic, I am
Lazy but not a skeptic, and although
Romantically I take the side of kings
I am no Royalist, and neither am I
Enamored of Moscow, for within her streets
I find not even so faint a trace of verse
As metric crowsfeet in the bloodstained snow.
These causes! You will find ten thousand of them
If you read Gibbon. The damned things are dead.
Search Shakspere and prepare for me a list
Of his outpourings on the Spanish menace
With rhetoric reserved for the Armada."
"But first, Shakspere was not aboard that flagship
Of Effingham's; and second, you're not Shakspere."
"True! True, and thirdly, there is a landscape
Where green Connecticut shrouds Massachusetts
In haze on haze on hills falling away,
Like lovely lies obscuring ugly fact.
I fear—to use geography as figure—
I am Connecticut. I face the ocean,
Yet of its turmoils hear but far-off surf;
I face the mountains yet climb never to them;
I face the mills of booming Massachusetts
Yet do not sweat nor jingle coin in pocket;
I face New York and let her lights be distant,
As seasonable shifts on pine and oak
Show the sun changing after winter solstice.
I listen always in my mind to music
That sings away my worries and the world."

III

However much you love your wife, your child,
Time will divide you, and however much
You love yourself, time will divide you also
Into the many parts you have forgotten.
It is triumphant that the mortal man

Remembering so many deaths, can still
Sing in the twilight and take heart at dawn
And lift his cup and say: You, my beloved.
Surely beyond that moment's apprehension,
Beyond his conscious thought, beyond the depths
Of his unconscious where the false Messiahs
Bungle amid the delicate corals, and blow
Foul-smelling bubbles to the surface world
And signal with dream-cables: Watch my breath!
Surely beyond thought and all pseudo-science
Of the mind's last profundities, where Faith
Alone is Sea King, surely the soul dwells,
Timeless, immortal, alert to songs of earth
And knowing that when he says: You, my beloved,
Echoes start out and ring the golden spheres
To meet in perfect circles beyond space
And there to find again the voice they sprang from.
This is good physics, you who disbelieve
Acknowledge that your voice has also started
Motion throughout the Universe, and never
Though you should chase it through Paolo's whirlwind
Shall you catch up with it. You'd eat your words
But cannot, while throughout resounding space
The syllables of love clap laughing hands.
Whatever starts in time cannot be stopped.
Wherefore lift up your hearts all you that love
Gravely as well as passionately; wherefore
Take heed, you wastrels of the sacred word.
For time bequeaths her patience to eternity
Wherein so many ages beyond counting
Have poured what seemed immense and what was lost
In immensity and found in new dimensions.
However much you love your wife, your child,
Time will divide you, and beyond division
Eternity echoes: "You, you my beloved."

THE ASSASSINATION

"Do you not find something very strange
About him?" asked the First Fate.
"Very strange indeed," answered the Second Fate,
"He is immune to change."
"Yes, he is always young," complained the First Fate
"He never heeds us," said the Second,
"I, for example, have often called and beckoned."
"We must kill him while he sleeps."
"He does not sleep."
"Then we must make him weep."
"He does not weep."
"Or laugh?"
"Only at his own epitaph,—
Half tears and laughter half."

"Then how to death, that worst fate,
To doom him?" said the First Fate.
"Oh, he's a clever one, as we've long reckoned,"
Answered the Second.
"But we can cope
With such a fellow, can we not,
What?"
"Could we not, say with a falling girder,
Carelessly cause an unintended murder?"
"Why not?"
"He's dead. Who said we could not cope
With this young fool. What was his name?"
"His name?"
"Of course that's not within our scope,
But just the same . . ."
"Hope was his name."
"How funny, Hope."

A LETTER TO ROBERT FROST

Our friendship, Robert, firm through twenty years,
Dares not commend these couplets to your ears:
How celebrate a thing so rich and strange—
Two poets whose affection does not change;
Immune to all the perils Nature sends,
World war and revolution and kind friends.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall; [1]
Your apples and my pines knew none at all,
But grow together in that ghostly lot
Where your Vermont meets my Connecticut.
Ours is a startling friendship, because art,
Mother of quarrels who tears friends apart,
Has bound us ever closer, mind and heart.

Before the War, among those days that seem
Bathed in the slanting afterglow of dream,
Were happy autumn hours when you and I
Walked down that street still bright in memory.
I was a boy apprenticed to my rhymes,
Your fame already rose above our times,
Your shadow walking tall, my shorter gait,—
Both taller now, the difference as great.

Of wisdom I learned much, an artist's creed
Of work the flower, and worldly fame the weed;
I have forgotten phrases; it remains
As part of me, it courses in my veins.
From many conversations I remember
One on a windy day in late November.
The sly recluse of Amherst in those times
Moved me, in spite of questionable rhymes.
We talked of women poets, nothing else,

[1] See page 185.

From Sappho to our friend at Sevenels.[2]
"Miss Dickinson is best!" You shook your head.
"Perhaps a genius, but mad," you said.
Alas for Emily, alas for me,
That now I go much further than agree:
Once irresistible, now merely coy,
Her whims, her verbal airs and graces cloy.
Taste changes. Candid Louis Untermeyer
Consigns his past editions to the fire;
His new anthology, refined and thrifty,
Builds up some poets and dismisses fifty.
And every poet spared, as is but human,
Remarks upon his critical acumen.

Ah, could we know what vogue will be tomorrow,
What plumes of Paradise our pens could borrow!

Yet not alone among the modern names
Does Fashion choose; she rummages in Fame's.
One poet to be praised—and sometimes read—
She chooses, and the rest are safely dead.
One must be sacrificed if one is praised,
As Crashaw mounts, Shelley must be abased.
With what astonishment we witnessed Donne,
A poet we have always counted on,
Whisked from his niche among the second shelves
And placed with Chaucer, Shakespeare,—and ourselves!
While Blake departs, abandoned by the vogue,
To Beulah-land, where Reason is the rogue;
And Hopkins, fashion's choice to follow Donne,
Rattling his rusty iambs, climbs the sun.

Blest be thy name, O Vogue, that canst embalm
A minor poet with a potted palm;
Make me immortal in thy exegesis,—
Or failing that, at least a Doctor's thesis.

Yet, Robert, through the charlatans who swarm
Like blowing gnats before the social storm,
The stout immortals stand in this our time,
With manners, morals, metres,—even rhyme.
Not every age can triumph over death
In the bright train of Queen Elizabeth,
And our ingenious and cynic age
Has not quite lost the better heritage.
Take Robert Bridges, laureate forever,
Calm as the sea and flowing as a river,
Who knew his source and end, but also knew
The homely country he meandered through.
Who, when we thought his broadening current spent,
Flung high that sun-capped wave, his testament,
The Testament of Beauty. Of the few
Titles he gave his poems, all are true.

[2] "Sevenels," Brookline, Massachusetts: the home of Amy Lowell.

And Robinson, what other age but this
Has bred so classic an antithesis:
Mild in his manner, mocking in his eye,
Bold in appraisal, and in statement shy,
He knew all men,—the Man against the Sky.
And urbane Santayana, who alone
Among philosophers still seeks their Stone;
Whose irony, in golden prose alloyed
With doubt, yet yields not to the acid Freud;
Who after years of rightful fame defrauded,
Wrote one bad book at last,[3]—and all applauded.

If gold get rusty, what shall iron do?
If poets, prophets, critics, are untrue
Why blame the statesmen, who in turn reflect
On dusty mirrors the uncircumspect?
When poets laugh at metres, with applause,
Why punish citizens who laugh at laws?
All follies regimented are akin—
Free verse and Bolshevism and bad gin.
Surely a subtle spring, in flow or drought,
Waters one age or burns another out.
When worlds go mad, all things go mad together,
Nations, philosophers, the arts, the weather.

Beholding war, Nature, who brooks no rival
In blind destruction, threatens Man's survival.
While underground he plants his dynamite,
She answers with an earthquake overnight.
While from ingenious wings his bombs rain down,
She rips the clouds apart and cities drown.
Machine guns clatter, but her ticking worm
Of death bombards his armies with a germ.
Nor can the propaganda of slow doubt
That one by one puts all faith's candles out
Find Nature unprepared; her insect ranks
For Man's destructive unbelief give thanks.
The ant, the termite, and their brotherhood
Wait busily, as all good soviets should,
To crack his concrete and to gnaw his wood,
And after war and storm have done their worst,
To view the last man, as they viewed the first.

From such dark thoughts only Dark Ages come;
I see not yet the end of Christendom;—
And if an end? In cloistered minds like yours
The classic wisdom of the past endures;
The ancient learning from the ancient guilt
Survives, and from slim chances worlds are built.
Black-armored barons, after Rome declined,
Warred on each other and on soul and mind;
Yet while they slept, cell after lonely cell,
Nearsighted eyes bent to the pliant quill.

[3] Santayana's *The Last Puritan*.

The barons' mail adorns Park Avenue,
Quite spurious;—the words remain as true
As when, frail thread amid a mad sword-dance,
They led men to the sunlit Renaissance.
The things that make outlive the things that mar,
Rome and Byzantium crashed,—but here we are;
And even the dark spectre of dark ages
Calls forth old warriors who shame our sages:
Which would you choose, to put it in a word,—
To die with Arthur? or to live with Ford?

Men are as cells within a mighty brain
Swept with one thought of happiness or pain;
Thus when the Thinker gazed beyond all time
Egypt and China blossomed at their prime,
Both worshipers of beauty and of peace
That mood resolved. He meditated Greece,
Whose culture, wedded to the arts of war,
Brought beauty forth and slew the thing it bore.
Less fortunate we who brought forth the machine
And dare not slay it, lest the truth be seen
That we, now helplessly identified
With the machine, would perish if it died.
We watch each other, our fates intertwined:
It feeds us canned goods and we feed it mind;
It kills us and then calls us from the grave
With new machines, lest it should lack a slave.
In war, where no one wins but the machine,
I pondered as I brought the wounded in:
Of these three choices—death, deformity,
Or patched for war again, who would not die?
And now the final triumph: the star actor
In "Steel: a Tragedy," makes God a tractor.
Yet let us still believe, in thinking deeper,
These are but twitchings of a troubled Sleeper
In whom the nightmare rages, and who can
Tomorrow dream the incredible—a Man.

Why, Robert, look! it's after midnight. Always
At this hour I hear stirrings in the hallways.
You would not mind. If I recall aright
You and Miss Lowell would converse all night,
Seldom agreeing, always the best friends,
That poetry can shape to different ends;
Myself, too sleepy then as now, would run
To catch the last car back at half-past one.
Heigh-ho, I've seen worse things than morbid youth
Inscribes in his dark diary. The truth
Remains that my few perfect moments seem
Eternal, and the bad ones but a dream.
Like Johnson's friend, I woo philosophy,
But cheerfulness breaks in in spite of me.
So does the spirit sift a life away

Into its best, preparing for the day
When, from its golden nucleus, shall rise
That happy part attuned to happier skies.

But happier skies? That phrase is fustian stuff,—
This green Connecticut is good enough;
My shining acres and the house I built,
All mine, all earned, all mortgaged to the hilt.
If I may make some changes here and there
When halos play on my unhallowed hair,
New England winters well might be curtailed—
In May it snowed, and in July it hailed.
Rosebugs should all be banished, and with those
The people who see rosebugs on the rose.
And yet I shrink from this celestial boom,
Lest, with improvements, also I assume
Responsibility for things in bloom.
I might forget wax flowers of huckleberry,
I might leave out the fragrance of wild cherry;
In short, I am content to leave to God
The natural world. O that our statesmen would!

And so good night with lullaby, my friend,
Republics fall and even letters end,
And Horace at one elbow sings of home
Far more eternal than the hills of Rome;—
Caesar, in fact, must marvel, looking down,
To find an Ethiope in his Gallic crown.
And Gibbon, at my other elbow, gives
Wry testimony of what dies, what lives,—
A secret not to be imparted, but
Known to Vermont and to Connecticut:
New as tomorrow's dawn, old as the Nile,
In Nefertiti's tears and Shakespeare's smile,
And all so simple in an age of guile;
For Horace on his acres has no fears,
His empire grows through twenty hundred years.

Good night, I take unconscionable time
A-dying, but in rhymeless years a rhyme
Bids one converse beyond the crack of dawn,—
It now has cracked, and dew is on the lawn.
Since I write oftener than you, I vow
Another letter twenty years from now.

Louise Bogan

LOUISE BOGAN was born in Livermore Falls, Maine, August 11, 1897, and was educated in country schools through New England and at the Girls' Latin School in Boston. Except for a year in Vienna and another in Santa Fé, she has lived in New York. A penetrating critic, much of her work has appeared in *The New Yorker.*

Body of This Death (1923) is one of the most brilliant first books of the period. The accent is not new; we have already heard it more crisply in Elinor Wylie's precise syllables. But if Miss Bogan lacks her forerunner's dazzling craftsmanship, she achieves effects not unworthy of her subtlety. There are less than thirty poems in her volume and only two of them cover more than a page. Yet every stanza gives evidence of a mind which is as sensitized as the eye is sharp, an intellect which, for all its burden of thought, expresses itself best in the lyric. The longer blank verse is only moderately interesting compared with such a vivid screen as "Decoration" or so cool and chiseled a piece as "Statue and Birds." Few of her contemporaries have surpassed the finesse of these—few indeed have equaled it—while the bright contempt of "Women" and the frozen imagery in "Medusa" seem destined for more than contemporary applause.

Dark Summer (1929) emphasizes the impression made by her first volume. The technique, no longer so scintillating, is simpler; the accents, deep, bell-like, vesperal, are more her own. The metaphysical note has strengthened, the beat of measured blood has become more pronounced. *The Sleeping Fury* (1937) is a still greater refinement of her gifts. Sometimes her spare definiteness reminds one of the later Yeats; sometimes the slow pace is too gravely retarded. But, with scarcely an exception, mood and measure are joined in strict accuracy. *Poems and New Poems* (1941) is a selection of Miss Bogan's best verses with several added examples of her keen compactness. Again and again, she lets flash before us the vision that sees "through, not with, the eye."

MEDUSA

I had come to the house, in a cave of trees,
Facing a sheer sky.
Everything moved,—a bell hung ready to strike,
Sun and reflection wheeled by.

When the bare eyes were before me
And the hissing hair,
Held up at a window, seen through a door.
The stiff bald eyes, the serpents on the forehead
Formed in the air.

This is a dead scene forever now.
Nothing will ever stir.
The end will never brighten it more than this,
Nor the rain blur.

The water will always fall, and will not fall,
And the tipped bell make no sound.
The grass will always be growing for hay
Deep on the ground.

And I shall stand here like a shadow
Under the great balanced day,
My eyes on the yellow dust that was lifting in the wind,
And does not drift away.

WOMEN

Women have no wilderness in them,
They are provident instead,
Content in the tight hot cell of their hearts
To eat dusty bread.

They do not see cattle cropping red winter grass,
They do not hear
Snow water going down under culverts
Shallow and clear.

They wait, when they should turn to journeys,
They stiffen, when they should bend.
They use against themselves that benevolence
To which no man is friend.

They cannot think of so many crops to a field
Or of clean wood cleft by an ax.
Their love is an eager meaninglessness
Too tense, or too lax.

They hear in every whisper that speaks to them
A shout and a cry.
As like as not, when they take life over their door-sills
They should let it go by.

DECORATION

A macaw preens upon a branch outspread
With jewelry of seed. He's deaf and mute.
The sky behind him splits like gorgeous fruit
And claw-like leaves clutch light till it has bled.
The raw diagonal bounty of his wings
Scrapes on the eye color too chafed. He beats
A flattered tail out against gauzy heats;
He has the frustrate look of cheated kings.
And all the simple evening passes by:
A gillyflower spans its little height
And lovers with their mouths press out their grief.
The bird fans wide his striped regality
Prismatic, while against a sky breath-white
A crystal tree lets fall a crystal leaf.

STATUE AND BIRDS

Here, in the withered arbor, like the arrested wind,
Straight sides, carven knees,
Stands the statue, with hands flung out in alarm
Or remonstrances.

Over the lintel sway the woven bracts of the vine
In a pattern of angles.
The quill of the fountain falters, woods rake on the sky
Their brusque tangles.

The birds walk by slowly, circling the marble girl,
The golden quails,
The pheasants closed up in their arrowy wings,
Dragging their sharp tails.

The inquietudes of the sap and of the blood are spent.
What is forsaken will rest.
But her heel is lifted,—she would flee,—the whistle of the birds
Fails on her breast.

THE ALCHEMIST

I burned my life that I might find
A passion wholly of the mind,
Thought divorced from eye and bone,
Ecstasy come to breath alone.
I broke my life to seek relief
From the flawed light of love and grief.

With mounting beat the utter fire
Charred existence and desire.
It died low, ceased its sudden thresh.
I had found unmysterious flesh—
Not the mind's avid substance—still
Passionate beyond the will.

SIMPLE AUTUMNAL

The measured blood beats out the year's delay.
The tearless eyes and heart forbidden grief,
Watch the burned, restless, but abiding leaf,
The brighter branches arming the bright day.

The cone, the curving fruit should fall away,
The vine-stem crumble, ripe grain know its sheaf.
Bonded to time, fires should have done, be brief,
But, serfs to sleep, they glitter and they stay.

Because not last nor first, grief in its prime
Wakes in the day, and knows of life's intent.
Anguish would break the seal set over time
And bring the baskets where the bough is bent.

Full seasons come, yet filled trees keep the sky,
And never scent the ground where they will lie.

CASSANDRA

To me, one silly task is like another.
I bare the shambling tricks of lust and pride.
This flesh will never give a child its mother,—
Song, like a wing, tears through my breast, my side,
And madness chooses out my voice again,
Again. I am the chosen no hand saves:
The shrieking heaven lifted over men,
Not the dumb earth, wherein they set their graves.

COME, BREAK WITH TIME

Come, break with time,
You who were lorded
By a clock's chime
So ill afforded.
If time is allayed
Be not afraid.

I shall break, if I will.
Break, since you must.
Time has its fill,
Sated with dust.
Long the clock's hand
Burned like a brand.

Take the rocks' speed
And earth's heavy measure.
Let buried seed
Drain out time's pleasure,
Take time's decrees.
Come, cruel ease.

THE DREAM

O God, in the dream the terrible horse began
To paw at the air, and make for me with his blows.
Fear kept for thirty-five years poured through his mane,
And retribution equally old, or nearly, breathed through his nose.

Coward complete, I lay and wept on the ground
When some strong creature appeared, and leapt for the rein.
Another woman, as I lay half in a swound
Leapt in the air, and clutched at the leather and chain.

Give him, she said, something of yours as a charm.
Throw him, she said, some poor thing you alone claim.
No, no, I cried, he hates me; he's out for harm,
And whether I yield or not, it is all the same.

But, like a lion in a legend, when I flung the glove
Pulled from my sweating, my cold right hand,
The terrible beast, that no one may understand,
Came to my side, and put down his head in love.

David McCord

DAVID (THOMPSON WATSON) MC CORD was born in New York City, November 15, 1897. His ancestry is Colonial, "brick end." He looks with some pride on his maternal forebears, particularly on Dr. John Morgan, First Surgeon-General, under Washington, of the Revolutionary Army, and discoverer of pus, though, as he says, "I don't see how anybody could have missed it." He has lived at both extremes of the continent; he went to private schools on Long Island and public schools in Oregon. He entered Harvard in 1917; went to Plattsburg, where he was Second Lieutenant in the Field Artillery; returned to college, where he specialized in physics and mathematics, planning to be an engineer, and graduated from Harvard in 1921, taking an A.M. in literature the following year.

After graduating he traveled extensively and worked at different occupations, the most important being his critical reviews, musical and dramatic, under H. T. Parker, for *The Boston Transcript.* This determined McCord's career as a writer. After his thirtieth year he alternated with ease and growing distinction between prose and poetry, between poetry and verse. *Oddly Enough* (1926) is a volume of characteristic essays. *Oxford Nearly Visited* (1929) and *Bay Window Ballads* (1935) are dexterous light verse which (especially in "Sonnets to Baedeker") attempt to graft American freedom on English form. *Floodgate* (1927) is composed of serious poetry, as is *The Crows* (1934), a far more important volume.

With *The Crows* a writer of delicate verse and distinguished prose emerges definitely as a poet. Perhaps McCord's outstanding "difference" is his blending of two tones: he not only combines but fuses light verse and pronounced poetry. Themes which another might develop into portentous effects are nimbly varied and played with a supple hand.

What Cheer (1945), an anthology of American and British light verse, was republished as *The Pocket Book of Humorous Verse. About Boston* (1948) communicates the sights, sounds, flavors, and inflections of that city.

THE CROWS

I

This morning, when I heard the crows
Blaming the rows
Of city houses, blaming the noise,
I knew no boys
Were chasing them from field to tree to field,
Or that the sentry, his sharp eye peeled
For danger from the farm,
Had spread wings and alarm,
And the whole flock, suddenly mutinous,
Gone flying over us.
There was no field nor acre
Which the proud city-maker
Had not dug to houses, set in stone,

Or scraped to the brown bone.
There was no traffic here
For crows this time of year
If not in summer when geranium pots
Flower the standard lots.
It must have been the spring that drew them by.
Lying in bed I didn't see them fly
In querulous talk
Above the sparrowed walk:
I only heard them cawing as you hear
Them in the longbow of the year,
When the dead chestnut breaks upon the hill,
And the dark woods come darker still
Because the light is younger where it shows
The clearest meadow and the blackest crows.

II

They were not come to stay.
Crows never caw that way,
Trailing the sound behind them as if scare
Pursued them down the altitudes of air,
Except to say once more:
March is outside the door
Flaming some old desire
As man turns uneasily from his fire
March in the sky, least in the ground, that is·
The city is not his
Who looks for blades on brick
And the cold dead to quick.
On heavy wing
they cleared us
in a file
Of wise old ministers who never smile.
Perhaps we seemed to them
Another theorem
Of parallels and planes
For corbel brains.
Perhaps they saw in smoke
The substituting oak,
And the last windward knoll
In calculus of coal.
We were the writhen horn
Above the wasting corn,
We were the western pass
To the deep eastern grass;
Perhaps they said:
the landfall of great seas,
Or to be feared, or to be tried as trees.
Lying in bed, I didn't hear it all:
They had to wake me through a city wall
With still the same cool critical catarrh
That I have heard afar

In greening wood or yellowing grain,
And knew that I should die just not to hear again.

III

Whatever it meant, they never came to rest.
Their going (as I guessed)
Had more the text of migratory souls
Than wings for other springs
and other goals.
We were too much a fact or too unreal
To break the steel,
The bullet-heart, that drove
Home to the meadow and the maple grove.
I might have tried to strip the cloudy dawn
From the right sky to see where they had gone,
As one will follow geese
Disturbing the mind's peace;
But I preferred the lack
Of their long day flown slowly into night
And the last crow blinding from my sight,
Black into black.
It was enough that I should hear by name
Mention of the spring before it came;
Rumor, which is all a city has
Of the seed's own grievance to be grass.
March, April, goes . . .
I heard the crows
Who less than man or bird
Beg the impending word.
I saw the raven head,
Questioning
(from my bed)
Searching horizons still
Over the dusty sill,
Leaving between two thoughts one consolate sign
Of what, too, once was mine.

Stephen Vincent Benét

STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT, the younger brother of William Rose Benét, was born at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in July, 1898. He was educated in various parts of the country, and graduated from Yale in 1919.

At seventeen he published a small book containing six dramatic portraits, *Five Men and Pompey* (1915), a remarkable set of monologues which, in spite of distinct traces of Browning and Kipling, was little short of astounding, coming from a schoolboy. In Benét's next volume, *Young Adventure* (1918), published before he was twenty, one hears something more than the speech of an infant prodigy; the precocious facility has developed into a keen and individual vigor. *Heavens and*

Earth (1920) charts a greater imaginative sweep. Like his brother, the younger Benét is at his best in the decoratively grotesque; his fancy exults in running the scales between the whimsically bizarre and the lightly diabolic.

For a while Stephen Benét was too prolific to be self-critical. He published several novels (the best of which are *Jean Huguenot* and *Spanish Bayonet*), collaborated on two plays which flickered a few nights in New York, and, unconsciously perhaps, began imitating his contemporaries. *King David,* published in book form a few months after it won *The Nation's* poetry prize for 1923, is less Benét than usual; it seems unjust that a least half the prize for this poem was not awarded to Vachel Lindsay. *Tiger Joy* (1925) betrays haste; the poet allows his rhymes to dictate and often to blur the course of his imagery. But though *Tiger Joy* is padded out with negligible verse, it contains "The Golden Corpse," a splendid octave of sonnets, "The Mountain Whippoorwill" and "The Ballad of William Sycamore," two vigorous and thoroughly American ballads.

Stephen Benét's faculty for ballad-making stood him in good stead when he came to reconstruct the Civil War period in *John Brown's Body* (1928). With this work, the author, hitherto known only to a small circle, leaped into instant popularity. Within a few months, the book had reached more than one hundred thousand people, and Benét had proved that a long narrative poem if skillfully blended could hold attention as easily as a novel. It was awarded the Pulitzer Prize the year following its publication.

The weakness of *John Brown's Body* is in the treatment. Although his canvas is epical, the author sacrifices the unity of the epic by abruptly changing meters, by a cinematographic switching from one character to another, by interluding his narrative with lyrics, ballads, elegies, and even prose. Nor, in this intermingling, has he perfected a style of his own; the long cadences of Sandburg and the jingling beat of Lindsay occur throughout. It is, frankly, a work of assimilation rather than creation. Yet its virtues compensate for its defects. The historical events have been more powerfully projected by others, the battle-pictures are inferior to the fictional episodes—the forgotten George Parsons Lathrop has done better in "Keenan's Charge" —but the composite is so new, the issues so impartially treated, that the struggle takes on a vitality barely suggested by orthodox histories. Benét's achievement of showing the war through its impact on a large number of *dramatis personae*—of Jake Diefer, who sees the war in terms of his Pennsylvania farmland, of Spade, the runaway slave, of Breckenridge, the Tennessee mountaineer, of Connecticut-born Jack Ellyat—is no small triumph. If Benét sacrifices unity, he gains speed, sudden interest and the nervous contrasts which are continually stimulating. If no single passage contains that unanalyzable but unmistakable quality which permeates great poetry, the originality of the work, the vigor of its portraits, the interpolated lyrics, and the unflagging pace reveal an unusually rich talent.

Burning City (1936) is a strangely mixed collection; hortatory prophecies, nimble whimsicalities, and impassioned lyrics reveal a candor and conviction, but little sense of integration. The long "Litany for Dictatorships" is the most dramatic of the larger poems; it rises above the indebtedness to MacLeish and that poet's suspended conjunctions and characteristically dangling participles. The best of Benét's verse, however, is neither forensic nor inflated; it is nimbly lyrical and dexterously

macabre. The nightmares of metropolitan life in the machine age are most effective; they combine whimsical mischief and genuine horror.

Thirteen O'Clock (1937) is an assembly of Benét's best short stories. Among other fantasies, it contains "The Devil and Daniel Webster," which has become a classic in its own time, and which has been made into a play, an opera (with music by Douglas Moore), and a moving picture, the last having been retitled *All That Money Can Buy*. The vein of tall tales and pseudo-folklore was continued in *Johnny Pye and the Fool-Killer* (1938).

Suffering from a heart ailment, Benét died March 13, 1943. Two volumes were published after his untimely death: *Western Star* (1943), part of an unfinished long narrative poem, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and *The Last Circle* (1946), written during the last years of his life.

RAIN AFTER A VAUDEVILLE SHOW

The last pose flickered, failed. The screen's dead white
Glared in a sudden flooding of harsh light
Stabbing the eyes; and as I stumbled out
The curtains rose. A fat girl with a pout
And legs like hams, began to sing "His Mother."
Gusts of bad air rose in a choking smother;
Smoke, the wet steam of clothes, the stench of plush,
Powder, cheap perfume, mingled in a rush.
I stepped into the lobby—and stood still,
Struck dumb by sudden beauty, body and will.
Cleanness and rapture—excellence made plain—
The storming, thrashing arrows of the rain!
Pouring and dripping on the roofs and rods,
Smelling of woods and hills and fresh-turned sods,
Black on the sidewalks, gray in the far sky,
Crashing on thirsty panes, on gutters dry,
Hurrying the crowd to shelter, making fair
The streets, the houses, and the heat-soaked air,—
Merciful, holy, charging, sweeping, flashing,
It smote the soul with a most iron clashing!
Like dragons' eyes the street-lamps suddenly gleamed,
Yellow and round and dim-low globes of flame.
And, scarce-perceived, the clouds' tall banners streamed.
Out of the petty wars, the daily shame,
Beauty strove suddenly, and rose, and flowered. . . .
I gripped my coat and plunged where awnings lowered.
Made one with hissing blackness, caught, embraced,
By splendor and by striving and swift haste—
Spring coming in with thunderings and strife—
I stamped the ground in the strong joy of life!

WINGED MAN

The moon, a sweeping scimitar, dipped in the stormy straits,
The dawn, a crimson cataract, burst through the eastern gates,

The cliffs were robed in scarlet, the sands were cinnabar,
Where first two men spread wings for flight and dared the hawk afar.

There stands the cunning workman, the crafty, past all praise,
The man who chained the Minotaur, the man who built the Maze.
His young son is beside him and the boy's face is a light,
A light of dawn and wonder and of valor infinite.

Their great vans beat the cloven air, like eagles they mount up,
Motes in the wine of morning, specks in a crystal cup,
And lest his wings should melt apace old Daedalus flies low,
But Icarus beats up, beats up, he goes where lightnings go.

He cares no more for warnings, he rushes through the sky,
Braving the crags of ether, daring the gods on high,
Black 'gainst the crimson sunset, gold over cloudy snows,
With all Adventure in his heart the first winged man arose.

Dropping gold, dropping gold, where the mists of morning rolled,
On he kept his way undaunted, though his breaths were stabs of cold,
Through the mystery of dawning that no mortal may behold.

Now he shouts, now he sings in the rapture of his wings,
And his great heart burns intenser with the strength of his desire,
As he circles like a swallow, wheeling, flaming, gyre on gyre.

Gazing straight at the sun, half his pilgrimage is done,
And he staggers for a moment, hurries on, reels backward, swerves
In a rain of scattered feathers as he falls in broken curves.

Icarus, Icarus, though the end is piteous,
Yet forever, yea forever, we shall see thee rising thus,
See the first supernal glory, not the ruin hideous.

You were Man, you who ran farther than our eyes can scan,
Man absurd, gigantic, eager for impossible Romance,
Overthrowing all Hell's legions with one warped and broken lance.

On the highest steeps of Space he will have his dwelling-place
In those far, terrific regions where the cold comes down like Death
Gleams the red glint of his pinions, smokes the vapor of his breath.

Floating downward, very clear, still the echoes reach the ear
Of a little tune he whistles and a little song he sings,
Mounting, mounting still. triumphant, on his torn and broken wings!

THE BALLAD OF WILLIAM SYCAMORE

(*1790-1871*)

My father, he was a mountaineer,
His fist was a knotty hammer;
He was quick on his feet as a running dee
And he spoke with a Yankee stammer.

My mother, she was merry and brave,
And so she came to her labor,
With a tall green fir for her doctor grave
And a stream for her comforting neighbo

And some are wrapped in the linen fine,
And some like a godling's scion;
But I was cradled on twigs of pine
In the skin of a mountain lion.

And some remember a white, starched lap
And a ewer with silver handles;
But I remember a coonskin cap
And the smell of bayberry candles.

The cabin logs, with the bark still rough,
And my mother who laughed at trifles,
And the tall, lank visitors, brown as snuff,
With their long, straight squirrel-rifles.

I can hear them dance, like a foggy song,
Through the deepest one of my slumbers,
The fiddle squeaking the boots along
And my father calling the numbers.

The quick feet shaking the puncheon-floor,
The fiddle squeaking and squealing,
Till the dried herbs rattled above the door
And the dust went up to the ceiling.

There are children lucky from dawn till dusk,
But never a child so lucky!
For I cut my teeth on "Money Musk"
In the Bloody Ground of Kentucky!

When I grew tall as the Indian corn,
My father had little to lend me,
But he gave me his great, old powder-horn
And his woodsman's skill to befriend me.

With a leather shirt to cover my back,
And a redskin nose to unravel
Each forest sign, I carried my pack
As far as a scout could travel.

Till I lost my boyhood and found my wife,
A girl like a Salem clipper!
A woman straight as a hunting-knife
With eyes as bright as the Dipper!

We cleared our camp where the buffalo feed,
Unheard-of streams were our flagons;
And I sowed my sons like apple-seed
On the trail of the Western wagons.

They were right, tight boys, never sulky or slow,
A fruitful, a goodly muster.
The eldest died at the Alamo.
The youngest fell with Custer.

The letter that told it burned my hand.
Yet we smiled and said, "So be it!"
But I could not live when they fenced the land,
For it broke my heart to see it.

I saddled a red, unbroken colt
And rode him into the day there;
And he threw me down like a thunderbolt
And rolled on me as I lay there.

The hunter's whistle hummed in my ear
As the city-men tried to move me,
And I died in my boots like a pioneer
With the whole wide sky above me.

Now I lie in the heart of the fat, black soil,
Like the seed of a prairie-thistle;
It has washed my bones with honey and oil
And picked them clean as a whistle.

And my youth returns, like the rains of Spring,
And my sons, like the wild-geese flying;
And I lie and hear the meadow-lark sing
And have much content in my dying.

Go play with the towns you have built of blocks
The towns where you would have bound me!
I sleep in my earth like a tired fox,
And my buffalo have found me.

LOVE CAME BY FROM THE RIVERSMOKE

(from "John Brown's Body")

Love came by from the riversmoke,
When the leaves were fresh on the tree,
But I cut my heart on the blackjack oak
Before they fell on me.

The leaves are green in the early spring,
They are brown as linsey now,
I did not ask for a wedding-ring
From the wind in the bending bough.

Fall lightly, lightly, leaves of the wild,
  Fall lightly on my care,
I am not the first to go with child
  Because of the blowing air.

I am not the first nor yet the last
  To watch a goosefeather sky,
And wonder what will come of the blast
  And the name to call it by.

Snow down, snow down, you whitefeather bird,
  Snow down, you winter storm,
Where the good girls sleep with a gospel word
  To keep their honor warm.

The good girls sleep in their modesty,
  The bad girls sleep in their shame
But I must sleep in a hollow tree
  Till my child can have a name.

I will not ask for the wheel and thread
  To spin the labor plain,
Or the scissors hidden under the bed
  To cut the bearing-pain.

I will not ask for the prayer in church
  Or the preacher saying the prayer,
But I will ask the shivering birch
  To hold its arms in the air.

Cold and cold and cold again,
  Cold in the blackjack limb,
The winds in the sky for his sponsor-men
  And a bird to christen him.

Now listen to me, you Tennessee corn,
  And listen to my word,
This is the first child ever born
  That was christened by a bird.

He's going to act like a hound let loose
  When he comes from the blackjack tree,
And he's going to walk in proud shoes
  All over Tennessee.

I'll feed him milk out of my own breast
  And call him Whistling Jack.
And his dad'll bring him a partridge nest,
  As soon as his dad comes back.

SONG OF THE RIDERS

(from "John Brown's Body")

The years ride out from the world like couriers gone to a throne
That is too far for treaty, or, as it may be, too proud;
The years marked with a star, the years that are skin and bone.
The years ride into the night like envoys sent to a cloud.

Perhaps they dismount at last, by some iron ring in the skies,
Dismount and tie their stallions and walk with an armored tread
Where an outlaw queen of the air receives strange embassies
Under a tree of wisdom between the quick and the dead.

Perhaps they are merely gone, as the white foam flies from the bit,
But the sparkling noise of their riding is ever in our ears.—
The men who came to the maze without foreknowledge of it,
The losers and the finders, under the riding years.

They pass, and the finders lose, the losers find for a space.
There are love and hate and delusion and all the tricks of the maze.
There are always losers and finders. There is no abiding place
And the years are unreturning. But, here and there, there were days.

Days when the sun so shone that the statue gave its cry
And a bird shook wings or a woman walked with a certain mirth,
When the staff struck out a spring from the leaves that had long been dry,
And the plow as before moved on from the hilltop, but its share had opened the earth.

So the bird is caught for an instant, and so the bird escapes.
The years are not halted by it. The losers and finders wait.
The years move on toward the sunset, the tall far-trafficking shapes,
Each with a bag of news to lay at a ghostly gate.

Riders shaking the heart with the hoofs that will not cease,
Will you never lie stretched in marble, the hands crossed over the breast,
Some with hounds at your feet to show that you passed in peace,
And some with your feet on lions? It is time that you were at rest.

1935

All night they marched, the infantrymen under pack,
But the hands gripping the rifles were naked bone
And the hollow pits of the eyes stared, vacant and black,
When the moonlight shone.

The gas mask lay like a blot on the empty chest,
The slanting helmets were spattered with rust and mold,
But they burrowed the hill for the machine-gun nest
As they had of old.

And the guns rolled, and the tanks, but there was no sound,
Never the gasp or rustle of living men
Where the skeletons strung their wire on disputed ground. . . .
I knew them, then.

"It is seventeen years," I cried. "You must come no more.
We know your names. We know that you are the dead.
Must you march forever from France and the last, blind war?"
"Fool! From the next!" they said.

NIGHTMARE NUMBER THREE

We had expected everything but revolt
And I kind of wonder myself when they started thinking—
But there's no dice in that now.
I've heard fellows say
They must have planned it for years and maybe they did.
Looking back, you can find little incidents here and there,
Like the concrete-mixer in Jersey eating the wop
Or the roto press that printed "Fiddle-dee-dee!"

In a three-color process all over Senator Sloop,
Just as he was making a speech. The thing about that
Was, how could it walk upstairs? But it *was* upstairs,
Clicking and mumbling in the Senate Chamber.
They had to knock out the wall to take it away
And the wrecking-crew said it grinned.
It was only the best
Machines, of course, the superhuman machines,
The ones we'd built to be better than flesh and bone,
But the cars were in it, of course. . . .
and they hunted us
Like rabbits through the cramped streets on that Bloody Monday,
The Madison Avenue busses leading the charge.
The busses were pretty bad—but I'll not forget
The smash of glass when the Duesenberg left the show-room
And pinned three brokers to the Racquet Club steps,
Or the long howl of the horns when they saw the men run,
When they saw them looking for holes in the solid ground . . .

I guess they were tired of being ridden in,
And stopped and started by pygmies for silly ends,
Of wrapping cheap cigarettes and bad chocolate bars,
Collecting nickels and waving platinum hair,
And letting six million people live in a town.
I guess it was that. I guess they got tired of us
And the whole smell of human hands.
But it was a shock
To climb sixteen flights of stairs to Art Zuckow's office
(Nobody took the elevators twice)
And find him strangled to death in a nest of telephones,
The octopus-tendrils waving over his head,
And a sort of quiet humming filling the air . . .
Do they eat? . . . There was red . . . But I did not stop to look.
And it's lonely, here on the roof.
For a while I thought
That window-cleaner would make it, and keep me company.
But they got him with his own hoist at the sixteenth floor
And dragged him in with a squeal.
You see, they cooperate. Well, we taught them that,
And it's fair enough, I suppose. You see, we built them.
We taught them to think for themselves.
It was bound to come. You can see it was bound to come.
And it won't be so bad, in the country. I hate to think
Of the reapers, running wild in the Kansas fields,
And the transport planes like hawks on a chickenyard,
But the horses might help. We might make a deal with the horses.
At least you've more chance, out there.
And they need us too.
They're bound to realize that when they once calm down.

They'll need oil and spare parts and adjustments and tuning up.
Slaves? Well, in a way, you know, we were slaves before.
There won't be so much real difference—honest there won't.
(I wish I hadn't looked into that beauty-parlor
And seen what was happening there.
But those are female machines and a bit high-strung.)
Oh, we'll settle down. We'll arrange it. We'll compromise.
It wouldn't make sense to wipe out the whole human race.
Why, I bet if I went to my old Plymouth now
(Of course, you'd have to do it the tactful way)
And said, "Look here! Who got you the swell French horn?"
He wouldn't turn me over to those police cars.
At least I don't *think* he would.
Oh, it's going to be jake.
There won't be so much real difference—honest, there won't—
And I'd go down in a minute and take my chance—
I'm a good American and I always liked them—
Except for one small detail that bothers me
And that's the food proposition. Because you see,
The concrete-mixer may have made a mistake,
And it looks like just high spirits.
But, if it's got so they like the flavor . . . well

Horace Gregory

HORACE GREGORY was born April 10, 1898, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, of English, Irish, and German descent. He attended the Milwaukee School of Fine Arts and, after a year of study under a tutor, went to the German English Academy, and then to the University of Wisconsin, from which he graduated in 1923. Then came six years of free lance writing, chiefly book-reviewing, in New York, where he married Marya Zaturenska, the poet. He has been on the English faculty at Sarah Lawrence College since 1933.

Gregory at first was entirely under the spell of the classics; after reading Byron, he turned to Landor, Pope, and Dryden. At college his interests became completely Latinized, and, though he dropped his classicism after seeing the tenements and poverty-ridden alleys of the sodden Chelsea section of Whitman's "glorious Mannahatta," enough persisted so that he translated *The Poems of Catullus* (1931), rendering them, however, in the American idiom. There was a "first" book of traditional lyrics which Gregory destroyed upon his arrival in New York; a few years later he published *Chelsea Rooming House.*

Chelsea Rooming House (1930) is a half-detached, half-indignant work; a set of monologues dramatizing the lives of those crowded into the slums of New York's lower west side. Its observation is keen to the point of penetration; its sense of sympathy is surpassed only by the faintly restrained sense of outrage. There is no doubt about Gregory's social sentiments nor his political preferences, but he does not resort to polemics or propaganda. He persuades the reader by the integrity of

his poetry. *No Retreat* (1933) is a more lyrical collection. "Poems for My Daughter" and "Good Friday" owe something to T. S. Eliot's juxtaposition of the classic-rhetorical and the sharply colloquial, but the basic tone is Gregory's, and "Valediction to My Contemporaries" is both biographically and esthetically authentic.

Chorus for Survival (1935) is the most frankly personal of Gregory's volumes. The intense self-participation is declared in the eloquent "Prologue," which is a sort of Prothalamion-1935 Model, with its nervous music. It lifts itself vividly in "Ask no return," nostalgically in the poems recalling the poet's youth by the Great Lakes, symbolically in the section in which Emerson points an American panorama, gravely in the concluding lines "For you, my son." Some may object to a certain obscurity of utterance, a confusion of image and effect. But such obscurity (where it exists) is not willful. Nor does it proceed from a desire to overcompensate for a paucity of the imagination. The figures follow so rapidly that the poet's mind leaps from one to the other, taking the ellipses in his stride, and the reader is sometimes unable to take the leap with him.

Poems: 1930-1940 (1941) is a selection from Gregory's other volumes with the addition of a new group of poems. The book is not a mere assembly of verses for various occasions, but a set of recurrent themes with clarifying key poems. Few of the poems can be read as straight narratives, for they indulge in a freedom of form and effect; they employ the montage of cinema, the interrupting voice of the radio, the summons of the quick-changing telephone dial. Like Eliot, Gregory is fond of the dissonant chord and the unresolved suspense; like Hart Crane, he crowds image upon image to increase sensation and suggest new perspectives. But he does not share Eliot's disillusions or Crane's disorganization. There is constant control as well as positive belief in Gregory's poetry; his faith is a social faith. Plain statement and elliptical suggestion are employed to create characters and dramas of quiet violence. The intensity disturbs continuity, but (the poet might well insist) so does modern life; the tone is appropriately tough and complex and strictly contemporary. Gregory's "M'Phail," like Eliot's "Prufrock" and Robinson's "Miniver Cheevy," is a symbol of the lost man, the failure who escapes from the actual world into a dream-world of feeble excitement and false grandeur. The later poems round out the earlier verse and give it a growing design; they reflect the forces of the past focussed upon the present.

Besides his poetry, Gregory has written *Pilgrim of the Apocalypse* (1933), an important critical study of D. H. Lawrence, his symbols and his significance.

THEY FOUND HIM SITTING IN A CHAIR

They found him sitting in a chair:
continual and rigid ease
poured downward through his lips and heart,
entered the lungs and spread until
paralysis possessed his knees.

The evanescent liquid still
bubbling overflows the glass
and no one heard the telephone

ringing while friends and strangers pass.
(Call taxis, wake the coroner,
police; the young ex-millionaire
is dead.) Examine unpaid bills,
insurance blanks and checks unfold
from refuse in a right-hand drawer
to read before the body's cold,

Lifelike, resembling what we were,
erect, alert the sun-tanned head:
polo or golf this afternoon?
And night, the country club or bar?

—drink down to end all poverty,
two millions gone,
and stir no more.

Because I know his kind too well,
his face is mine, and the release
of energy that spent his blood
is no certificate of peace,
but like a first shot heard in war.

And not for him, nor you, nor me
that safe oblivion, that cure
to make our lives intact: immure
old debts and keep old friends.

Even in death, my lips the same
whisper at midnight through the door
and through storm-breaking hemisphere,
rise at that hour and hear my name.

POEMS FOR MY DAUGHTER

Tell her I love
she will remember me
always, for she
is of my tissues made;
she will remember
these streets where the moon's shade
falls and my shadow mingles
with shadows sprung
from a midnight tree.
Tell her I love that I
am neither in earth nor sky,
stone nor cloud,
but only this
walled garden she knows well
and which her body is.

Her eyes alone shall make
me blossom for her sake;
contained within her, all
my days shall flower or die,
birthday or funeral
concealed where no man's eye
finds me unless she says:
He is my flesh and I
am what he was.

VALEDICTION TO MY CONTEMPORARIES

The return after ten years New York, Chicago, Madison

Entrain airport New York Chicago west
piercing the sunset's terminal where day
breaks midnight into stars before the dawn
Superior Lake Erie Michigan:
seawind but no saltsea in this lake spray
clear eyes and nostrils: drink our health: the sand
our shores.

Stop signals home again!

Awake at morning, spring coiled in the body
and at the narrow window slit in stone,
skylight and sun.

Tilt the horizon down,
ride windward through Wisconsin miles of corn,
grazing the shallow valley and long plains.

O Alma Mater on the hill! What green hills, Cicero,
vanish, return. What stone embankments of hope, desire,
what little almost islands Sirmio
anchored within us rest, flower in sleep, Catullus,
welcomed home.

II

The University of Wisconsin: 1919

Here was the campus of our hearts, my friends,
Plato's green-treed republic of the air:
see what miraculous fruit its branches bear,
oceans of maple spray, green harbored, flowing
against the sky: and from these shores Greek towers . . .

See how the white dome trembles in the sun,
dissolves at noon three thousand years away
where the antique nightingale engraved in bronze
still sways unheard forever, now entwined
within the steel crescendos of the mind.

III

The indecisive peace after war which lasted until 1929

Those who return, return to empty halls,
the crystal image in the sky, pellucid
limbs that fade in shadows on these walls:

This peace was ours: the slow guns still resounding
peace: *drive homeward angels from Versailles*
in limousines sunk under no man's land.
Run the machine guns through the arras—dead?
Not dead but much alive.
How shall we find
the bodies of those unslain, exiled from war
but now returned, furloughs of exile signed
from all green ports on earth?
The birth certificate of love
declared obscene: Faith of no faith, Our Father,
do not destroy this faithlessness to friend
or enemy, lest we perish to no end.

IV

Alternate speeches: individual lovers walking in the shadow of Lucretius

Measure the atoms of our souls, O Roman
death's astronomer Lucretius.
Spires of light ascend
discarnate memories: the four years spanned
by the quick, sinewy shadow of his hand:

(And in this shadow where she stood,
flight in her hair!
the limbs reveal undress that virgins wear
to meet the bridegroom on the wedding stair,
do not unsay her testament, O love:

"Live for this hour and we who die today
kiss lips that bloom forever underground."
And did you call me by his name who died
naked, Parian attitudes of death
entwined your limbs and his: kiss and restore
his body's heat in mine, this earth his grave:
sleepless, his blood drives home
niagaras in our veins)

—O Mors Aeterna,
lean from the fiery ramparts of world's end,
time's end and love's last image scrolled
in quicksilver across the mind—descend
voice of a million tongues, your elegies
(some say that suicide usurped his blood)
resound no more. . . .

Mount stairways to the sun!
We have survived your heritage, these years
consuming time toward death too swift for tears.

V

The valediction

The course of empire westward to Cathay
rides in the east: the circle breaks in fire:
these charred remains of what we were expire,
(O incandescent speed!) the hands, lips, eyes
anonymous. Rise atque vale, rise:
another generation shall disown
these years in darkness each to four winds blown
(the deeds are obsolete as Helen's war) . . .

Good-by, Il Penseroso of our spring,
forgive our ashes and destroy the urn:
unwind the clock, empty the seasons down
rivers of memory—do not return!

ASK NO RETURN

Ask no return for love that's given
embracing mistress, wife or friend,
ask no return:
on this deep earth or in pale heaven,
awake and spend
hands, lips and eyes in love,
in darkness burn,
the limbs entwined until the soul ascend.

Ask no return of seasons gone:
the fire of autumn and the first hour of spring,
the short bough blossoming
through city windows when night's done,
when fears adjourn
backward in memory where all loves end
in self again, again the inward tree
growing against the heart
and no heart free.
From love that sleeps behind each eye
in double symmetry
ask no return,
even in enmity, look! I shall take your hand;
nor can our limbs disjoin in separate ways again,
walking, even at night on foreign land
through houses open to the wind, through cold and rain,
waking alive, meet, kiss and understand.

FOR YOU, MY SON

For you, my son,
I write of what we were:

Under cool skies, Wisconsin's April weather:
The lilac fragrance on our lips and hair,

Field and the lake where memories restore
Westward the wave to India, the passage
Chartered through night
and the returning dawn
Over the mast-head, spars:
New York,
Green Castle Gardens at thy side:
Brooklyn, the Battery, wide-breasted Whitman there,
Hand to the shoulder of the pioneer:
O many-footed echoing Manhattan,
Thy ships at harbor swaying with the tide.
Break here the lilac bough in April's weather,
Gather, foregather
in the pale mist of Juneau's city,
And in the valley, dry Menomenee
(Where forests were, clay-banked the silver river:
The trail in memory across the plain)

Turn where the earth's plowed under,
There at the root, the lilac flowering
In tombs that open when remembered spring
Comes home again beneath the pine roof-tree.

And did you hear the voices
Out of sand beach, lake waves?
The sound of water
Leaping in the dark:
remember shadowy limbs in darkness joined,
Pacing the forest to the inland sea.

Know what we were:
Our father's father
Ex-Dubliner, the tired eyes, bright laughter
Where the cold heart concealed disaster:

"How many times before we fall,
We fail:
I am a tall man, handsome for my years,

Erect three score, the six foot two and three hands taller
Mounting to steer the horses beggars ride.
And over Michigan the space too small
For any man my size:
Ex-patriarch, astronomer, engineer
From the black-green growing turf where I was born
The black-bird army wheeling close through cloud

(breaking the sky through sunlight, rain
until the violet, long archaic twilight
empties its shadow over hills again)

Building my bridges to oblivion,
Even here, across the lake, across the sea.
See the cold island where I was born,
Peace where there is no peace,
always the blind
Violent war behind each blinded eye,
And darling Emmett dead, the cause in blood
Against gray walls.
Priest over priest,
Walking in prayer to soothe the dead,
Over each friend betraying friend,
The dark stain spreading is a blood-clot in the mind.
Wherever I go now and even here
(Seeing sky break in spring new hemisphere)
There is no rest for me in the new land."

Know what we were; this is the hour
White-haired millionaire
Starts from the dream:
"The banks are broken, Gas has fallen;
Consolidated Ice and Frigidaire
Dropped down Chicago River;
River swimming with rats, the poor:
No virgin safe tonight, pack up your girls,
Call the militia, ride
Down blackened streets in hell
Machine-gun fire until the pickets fall.
Pity the poor, but not the undeserving poor,
The right arm raised in blood,
Whose hand is bleeding at my door,
The million strong
Army at my door and the lock sprung."

Turn here, my son
(No longer turn to what we were)
Build in the sunlight with strong men,
Beyond our barricade:
For even I remember the old war
And death in peace:
The neon sign 'Success' across our foreheads.

(Under the earth, shaken, as I am trembling now:
The small room where the body moves alone:
sleepless I saw the dream;
I saw my head upon the pillow
and the blood)

the naked bed, the folding chair
Voiceless we smile; we are not violent.

And this is fear, fear,
The empty heart and the closed lung.

The broken song:
My classmates a republic of old men,

Yet even here, my hand to you, my son.

We shall be envious: O bitter eyes
Inward to see the dead,
those dead, our dead,
The bitter dying where the old world is dead.

I tell you love returns
Changing the hour:
break here the lilac bough,
Scatter the ashes in the tomb before the slow
Wind gathers into storm.
Over the cities and the yellowing plain
In bitter drought:
wait for new rain, welcome the men
Who shall survive, outface despair,
Terror and hate
to build new fire
At an empty hearth,
Burn doubt and fear.

As the map changes, through the cold sky,
Lean from the cockpit, read
The flower of prairie grass in seed
(Though here is war
my hand points where the body
Leaps its dead, the million poor,
Steel-staved and broken
and no grave shall hold them
Either in stone or sea; nor urn nor sand,
Skyline of city walls, their monument,
And on this field, lockstep in millions joined,
New world in fire opens where they stand.)

Wake to the song,
Only the young
shall outlive this dark hour
And night down streets the body walks alone;
Then up the stair; your portrait is my mirror;
Your features mine, and yours the quick, bright hair,
Read here my testament
when I am done,
This book is yours, the page uncut
Farewell, my brother
Comrade, son.

THE POSTMAN'S BELL IS ANSWERED EVERYWHERE

God and the devil in these letters,
stored in tin trunks, tossed in wastebaskets,
or ticketed away in office files:
love, hate, and business, mimeograph sheets, circulars,
bills of lading, official communiqués,
accounts rendered. Even the anonymous letter says,
Do not forget.

And in that long list, Dean Swift to Stella,
Walpole to Hannah More, Carlyle to Jane—
and what were Caesar's "Gallic Wars" other than letters
of credit for future empire?
Do not forget me.
I shall wear laurels to face the world;
you shall remember the head in bronze,
profile on coin.

As the bell rings, here is the morning paper and more letters
the post date 10 P.M. "It is an effort
for me to write; I have grown older.
I have two daughters and a son, and business prospers,
but my hair is white; why can't we meet for lunch?
It has been a long time since we met;
I doubt if you would know me if you glanced quickly
at my overcoat and hat, and saw them vanish
in a crowded street. . . ."

Do not forget. . . . "Oh, you must not forget
you held me in your arms while the small room
trembled in darkness; do you recall the slender, violet
light between the trees next morning through the park?
Since I'm a woman, how can I unlearn
the arts of love within a single hour,
how can I close my eyes before a mirror,
believe I am not wanted, that hands, lips, breast
are merely deeper shadows behind the door
where all is dark? . . ."

Or, "Forgive me if I intrude; the dream I had
last night was of your face; it was a child's face,
wreathed with the sun's hair, or pale in moonlight,
more of a child than woman; it followed me
wherever I looked, pierced everything I saw,
proved that you could not leave me, that I am always
at your side. . . ."

Or, "I alone am responsible for my own death." Or,
"I am White, Christian, Unmarried, 21." Or, "I am happy

to accept your invitation." Or, "Remember that evening at the
Savoy-Plaza?" Or, "It was I who saw the fall of France."

As letters are put aside, another bell
rings in another day; it is, perhaps, not too late to remember
the words that leave us naked in their sight,
the warning,
"You have not forgotten me;
these lines were written by an unseen hand
twelve hours ago. Do not reply at this address; these are the last
words I shall write."

THIS IS THE PLACE TO WAIT

(from "The Passion of M'Phail")

When you are caught breathless in an empty station
and silence tells you that the train is gone,
as though it were something for which
you alone were not prepared
and yet was here and could not be denied;
when you whisper, Why was I late, what have I done?,
you know the waiting hour is at your side.

If the time becomes your own, you need not fear it;
if you can tell yourself the hour is not
the thing that takes you when you sit
staring through clinic waiting-room white walls
into the blank blue northern sky
frozen a quarter-mile above the street,
and you are held there by your veins and nerves
spreading and grasping as a grapevine curves
through the arms and back of
an enamelled iron riverside park seat,
you need not think, Why must I wait
until the doctors say:

"We have come to lock you up.
It's the psychology of things that has got you down;
if you complain, we shall take care of you
until you know at last you can't escape.
Is your dream
the dream of a child kept after school,
made to write a hundred times
what three times seven means,
while in your sleep, before you get the answer,
the blackness fills and swells with pictures
of Technicolor inkstain butterflies?
Is that ink blot a tiger
in a bonfire? Are these the spines
of ancient caterpillars?
Is this the shadow of a wildwood, leaping deer?

Is that what you see, or what you think you see?
Then we can tell you what you are,
what you can do, and what you ought to be,
as though your life were written down in court,
your name the last word on a questionnaire.
There is nothing private that we do not know;
you can't deny these figures on a chart
that follow you no matter where you go.
Each zero is an open, sleepless eye
piercing the hidden chambers of the heart,
and if you fail, or if you kill yourself,
we shall know why."

It is when the waiting forces you to stop
in stillness that you wish would not return
that you say, I am not the same as other men;
I must live to wake beyond the fears of hope
into an hour that does not quite arrive. . . .

And in that quiet, lost in space, almost remember
the difficult, newborn creature you once were,
in love with all the wonders of the world,
seeing a girl step, white and glittering as a fountain,
into cool evening air,
knowing you could not touch her,
or dare to still the floating, flawless motion
of that pale dress above its glancing knees,
brief as the sight of sun on Easter morning
dancing its joy of earth and spring and heaven
over the sleeping bodies of men in cities
and between the branches of the tallest trees.

It is then you tell yourself,
Everything I live for is not quite lost.
Even if you've waited someplace far too long,
if you can't call it peace, you call it rest;
if you can't call it luck, you call it fate;
you then know that when anything goes wrong,
perhaps it also happened in the past.

You light a cigarette, you carefully
blow out the match.

You know again you have to wait.

HOMAGE TO CIRCE

Lady, the glass you lift has sleep's bright fever in it,
Amber and floating peace within a place
Where he who drinks cannot expect to hear
The throbbing of the skies, the watchful flight
Of wings above his head, nor guide sea-traffic
Through a crowded street.
Lion, dog, or swine,
He is a cheerful patient,
Ready to give till he has nothing left to take—
It is the fever that inspires his rosy look.

Lady, you have that rosy look,
Lips shaped as though about to speak, to sing;
Is the fever hot or cold? Do eyelids close forever
In the depths of the fever,
And through the sky-borne arches do sea-bells ring?
Whose are those delicate arms that reach to hold us
Through plate-glass halls where glittering in mid-air
The body rests, and each revolving mirror
Reflects a sleeping mongrel at his ease?
Is this the place of miraculous hotels,
The forest feast embracing us with branches,
Where all the rosiest ladies turn to trees?

Lady, your precious glass cannot tell time,
But is of an hour that is forever gone;
Even for your sake its light will not return,
Nor farewells spoken with a gliding smile—
Lady, our journey has outstepped your spell,
We have destinations beyond your kind distractions:
We have passed, are passing
To the sober shores of hell;
It is cold among the waters of the dead,
A less feverish province than the animal kingdom
That is always at your side.
We have found no haven,
And our long night has just begun,
Yet over Hades something opens like a sky;
Perhaps in darkness we are closer to the sun—
There is no misfortune as we wave "Good-bye."

Hart Crane

HAROLD HART CRANE was born in Garrettsville, Ohio, July 21, 1899. From the beginning his life was unhappy. In youth his parents quarreled and separated; he sided with his mother, regarded his father as his enemy, and considered him-

self doomed by the "curse of sundered parentage." He never finished high school; he left home but was unable to find a place for himself. Sporadically he tried to earn a living. He was employed in a print shop; wrote copy in advertising offices; packed candy in his father's warehouse; worked briefly as a riveter in a Lake Erie ship-yard, a reporter on the *Cleveland Plain Dealer,* and manager of a tea-room. But it was impossible for him to stabilize himself. He began to live recklessly, love indiscriminately, and drink violently. He traveled to Europe and Mexico, hounding himself wherever he went with a sense of guilt and (as though in compensation) a mania of persecution. His genius did not go unrecognized, but he fought the very friends who appreciated him most. He had periods of great fecundity when his felicity with words was dazzling, but these times were followed by periods of agonizing sterility, neurotic behavior, and self-destructiveness. Emotional instability was increased by economic insecurity and sexual irregularity. He became a chronic alcoholic, purposely blunting his sensibilities, driving himself to disintegration. The death-wish was fulfilled in his thirty-third year. Having temporarily escaped his problem in Mexico, he could not face returning to an America which meant a return to responsibility. He jumped from a north-bound steamer in the Gulf of Mexico, April 28, 1932. The body was never recovered.

Crane's first poem was printed when he was seventeen; his first book, *White Buildings* (1926) appeared almost ten years later. Its verbal ingenuity was at once apparent; even those who found the book bizarre were forced to acknowledge its startling imagery and power of phrase. Much of it was roundly rhetorical, but it was rhetoric of a new order. It was influenced by Rimbaud, Poe, Eliot, and Wallace Stevens—experimenters in tonal allusiveness and the color value of words—but Crane often transcended his ingenuities. The very first lines of the book were illumining:

> As silent as a mirror is believed
> Realities plunge in silence by . . .

This, wrote Waldo Frank, was "a superb expression of chaos, and of the poet's need to integrate this chaos within the active mirror of self." The realities "plunge by" accompanied by such flashes of vision as "The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward Paradise," "where the cedar leaf divides the sky," "in sapphire arenas of the hills" and (writing of the sea) "this great wink of eternity." Alternating between delineation and complete departure from representation, the verse approximates and sometimes attains an "absolute" poetry, a poetry which lives on its own music, a music in which meaning is often incidental.

One of the sources of this verbal "absolutism" was not realized until some years after Crane's death. Recently, however, there was recovered the manuscript of an uneducated, poverty-stricken, and completely unknown poet, Samuel Greenberg. Greenberg had died in 1916, at the age of twenty-three, destitute and tubercular on Wards Island, New York. Through a friend, Crane saw Greenberg's notebooks; he was immediately excited by the elastic phraseology, the strange and often unintelligible eruption of words. He was enthralled by the uncontrolled rush of effects, particularly fascinated by the sea and flower images; he copied out many of the verses. Crane's preoccupation with sea and flowers may well date from that time; fragments of Greenberg's lines are paralleled and reconstructed in several of Crane's poems, notably in "Emblems of Conduct" and "Voyages II."

Although Crane did not object to being called an "absolutist," he was quick to defend himself from the charge of obscurity. The often-quoted letter to Harriet Monroe goes to considerable length to justify his odd syntax, his grammatical audacities, his complex and elliptical symbols. Admitting that he preferred suggestion to statement, he pushed suggestibility to the limit of communication. He believed that there was a "logic of metaphor" which antedated "our so-called pure logic, and which is the genetic basis of all speech." He cited a phrase from "Voyages II" as an example of his method, a composite of direct forcefulness and indirect allusion.

When I speak of "adagios of islands," the reference is to the motion of the boat through islands clustered thickly, the rhythm of the motion, etc. And it seems a much more direct and creative statement than any more "logical" employment of words such as "coasting slowly through the islands," besides ushering in a whole world of music.

In his mid-twenties Crane was groping toward a unifying theme, but it eluded him; more than most poets, he needed unity as well as economic security. In 1926 he found both: a centralizing idea and a philanthropist, the art patron Otto H. Kahn, who made it possible for him to create his largest work. *The Bridge* (1930) is a set of disparate poems united by national figures, legends, early history, modern inventions—all interwoven to express the "Myth of America." It was, in more ways than one, an answer to *The Waste Land;* for Crane, fascinated by Eliot's technique, fought Eliot's philosophy. "After this perfection of death," Crane wrote, "nothing is possible but a motion of some kind." It is significant that Crane turned to Eliot's opposites; the visions, the very mottoes, of *The Bridge* are those of Blake, The Book of Job, Emily Dickinson, and Walt Whitman. Strangeness of color and surprise of contrasts are still dominating principles, but a discipline which Crane never achieved in actual life controls singularity; a finer rhetoric, severe and mystical, plays about the central object.

The central theme, as Crane wrote in a letter to Otto Kahn, is an "organic panorama, showing the continuous and living evidence of the past in the inmost vital substance of the present." Although Crane was defeated by the problem of form, and his long poem lacks final integration, some of the individual sections are among the most eloquent poems of the period. Of "Van Winkle" Crane wrote:

The protagonist has left the room with its harbor sounds, and is walking to the subway. The rhythm is quickened; it is a transition between sleep and the imminent tasks of the day. Space is filled with the music of a hand organ and fresh sunlight, and one has the impression of the whole continent—from Atlantic to Pacific—freshly arisen and moving. The walk to the subway arouses reminiscences of childhood, also the "childhood" of the continental conquest, viz., the Conquistadores, Priscilla, Capt. John Smith, etc. These parallelisms unite in the figure of Rip Van Winkle (indigenous "Muse of Memory"), who finally becomes identified with the protagonist, and who boards the subway with the reader. He becomes the "guardian angel" of the journey into the past.

Concerning "The River," which, "past the din and slogans of the year," will take its place among the richest and most kaleidoscopic of contemporary poems, Crane declared:

The subway is simply a figurative, psychological "vehicle" for transporting the reader to the Middle West. He lands on the railroad tracks in the company of several tramps in the twilight. The extravagance of the first twenty-three lines of this section is an intentional burlesque on the cultural confusion of the present—a great conglomeration of noises analogous to the strident impression of a fast express rushing by. The rhythm is jazz. Thenceforward the rhythm settles down to a steady pedestrian gait, like that of wanderers plodding along. My tramps are psychological vehicles, also. Their wanderings, as you will notice, carry the reader into interior after interior, all of it funneled by the Mississippi. They are the left-overs of the pioneers in at least this respect—that abstractly their wanderings carry the reader through certain experiences roughly parallel to that of the traders, adventurers, Boone and others. I think I have caught some of the essential spirit of the Great Valley here, and in the process have approached the primal world of the Indian, which emerges with a full orchestra in the succeeding "Dance."

The river of steel, which begins in jagged syncopation and develops into gravely measured quatrains, turns into the "Father of Waters." It carries the poet to the primal American myth, with Pocahontas as the traditional nature-symbol representing the body of the continent. As Crane put it, describing the section called "The Dance":

Here one is on the pure mythical and smoky soil at last! Not only do I describe the conflict between the two races in this dance—I also become identified with the Indian and his world before it is over, which is the only method possible of ever really possessing the Indian and his world as a cultural factor. . . . Pocahontas (the continent) is the common basis of our meeting, she survives the extinction of the Indian, who finally, after being assumed into the elements of nature (as he understood them) persists only as a kind of "eye" in the sky, or as a star that hangs between day and night—"the twilight's dim perpetual throne."

"The Tunnel" and "Cape Hatteras" come close to realizing Crane's dream of accustoming poetry to images from contemporary life, of "acclimatizing" the machine with its "nasal whine of power." Crane spoke of "The Tunnel" as "the encroachment of machinery on humanity; a kind of purgatory in relation to the open sky"; "Cape Hatteras" was to be "a kind of ode to Whitman." In short Crane was attempting to write "an epic of the modern consciousness." In this attempt he failed; he packed every page with excesses of sound and sense, knowing no line could ever contain all he wanted to crowd into it.

But if *The Bridge* fails as a panoramic unit, it succeeds magnificently in many of its parts. Even its failures are failures of excess, of eagerness, sensationalism, and hysteria, but not impoverishment. Often it accomplishes the paradox of being both suggestive and factual; one moment it is flashy to the point of absurdity, the next moment it is brilliantly exact. *The Collected Poems of Hart Crane,* with an informative if somewhat rapt preface by Waldo Frank, was published posthumously in 1933. It includes a set of hitherto unpublished poems which are more representational than most of his other work. Crane was particularly fond of the Key West poems; he stressed their "happy impersonality."

Critics are still divided in their estimates of Crane. There are many who believe he hypnotized himself with drink and verbal intoxication. There are those who consider *The Bridge* his greatest accomplishment. And there are those who believe

the early short poems, such as "Voyages" and "Praise for an Urn" his best. Speaking of the latter, Allen Tate wrote in his memoir, "Although his later development gave us a poetry that the period would be much the less rich for not having, he never again had such perfect mastery of his subject. And I think this was because he never afterwards knew precisely what his subject was. . . . Crane was the archetype of the modern American poet whose fundamental mistake lay in thinking that an irrational surrender of the intellect to the will would be the basis of a new mentality." Personal restlessness developed into tragic rootlessness.

Philip Horton's *Hart Crane: The Life of an American Poet* (1937) is devoted not only to the facts but to the critical and esthetic theories which compelled Crane. Candid without being sensational, sympathetic but not uncritical, it is a model of what a biography should be. Brom Weber's biographical study appeared later, in 1948.

REPOSE OF RIVERS

The willows carried a slow sound,
A sarabande the wind mowed on the mead.
I could never remember
That seething, steady leveling of the marshes
Till age had brought me to the sea.

Flags, weeds. And remembrance of steep alcoves
Where cypresses shared the noon's
Tyranny; they drew me into hades almost.
And mammoth turtles climbing sulphur dreams
Yielded, while sun-silt rippled them
Asunder . . .

How much I would have bartered! the black gorge
And all the singular nestings in the hills
Where beavers learn stitch and tooth.
The pond I entered once and quickly fled—
I remember now its singing willow rim.

And finally, in that memory all things nurse;
After the city that I finally passed
With scalding unguents spread and smoking darts
The monsoon cut across the delta
At gulf gates . . . There, beyond the dykes

I heard wind flaking sapphire, like this summer,
And willows could not hold more steady sound.

TO BROOKLYN BRIDGE

(Prelude to "The Bridge")

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
Over the chained bay waters Liberty—

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
As apparitional as sails that cross
Some page of figures to be filed away;
—Till elevators drop us from our day . . .

I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene
Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
Foretold to other eyes on the same screen;

And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—
Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft
A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,
Tilting there momently, shrill shirt ballooning,
A jest falls from the speechless caravan.

Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,
A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn . . .
Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.

And obscure as that heaven of the Jews,
Thy guerdon . . . Accolade thou dost bestow
Of anonymity time cannot raise:
Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,—

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
Beading thy path—condense eternity:
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
The City's fiery parcels all undone,
Already snow submerges an iron year . . .

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

VOYAGES: II

—And yet this great wink of eternity,
Of rimless floods, unfettered leewardings,

Samite sheeted and processioned where
Her undinal vast belly moonward bends,
Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love;

Take this Sea, whose diapason knells
On scrolls of silver snowy sentences,
The sceptered terror of whose sessions rends
As her demeanors motion well or ill,
All but the pieties of lovers' hands.

And onward, as bells off San Salvador
Salute the crocus lusters of the stars,
In these poinsettia meadows of her tides,—
Adagios of islands, O my Prodigal,
Complete the dark confessions her veins spell.

Mark how her turning shoulders wind the hours,
And hasten while her penniless rich palms
Pass superscription of bent foam and wave,—
Hasten, while they are true,—sleep, death, desire,
Close round one instant in one floating flower.

Bind us in time, O seasons clear, and awe.
O minstrel galleons of Carib fire,
Bequeath us to no earthly shore until
Is answered in the vortex of our grave
The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.

VOYAGES: VI

Where icy and bright dungeons lift
Of swimmers their lost morning eyes,
And ocean rivers, churning, shift
Green borders under stranger skies,

Steadily as a shell secretes
Its beating leagues of monotone,
Or as many waters trough the sun's
Red kelson past the cape's wet stone;

O rivers mingling toward the sky
And harbor of the phoenix' breast—
My eyes pressed black against the prow,
—Thy derelict and blinded guest

Waiting, afire, what name, unspoke,
I cannot claim: let thy waves rear
More savage than the death of kings,
Some splintered garland for the seer.

Beyond siroccos harvesting
The solstice thunders, crept away,

Like a cliff swinging or a sail
Flung into April's inmost day—

Creation's blithe and petaled word
To the lounged goddess when she rose
Conceding dialogue with eyes
That smile unsearchable repose—

Still fervid convenant, Belle Isle,
—Unfolded floating dais before
Which rainbows twine continual hair—
Belle Isle, white echo of the oar!

The imaged word, it is, that holds
Hushed willows anchored in its glow.
It is the unbetrayable reply
Whose accent no farewell can know.

PRAISE FOR AN URN

It was a kind and northern face
That mingled in such exile guise
The everlasting eyes of Pierrot
And, of Gargantua, the laughter.

His thoughts, delivered to me
From the white coverlet and pillow,
I see now, were inheritances—
Delicate riders of the storm.

The slant moon on the slanting hill
Once moved us toward presentiments
Of what the dead keep, living still,
And such assessments of the soul
As, perched in the crematory lobby,
The insistent clock commented on,
Touching as well upon our praise
Of glories proper to the time.

Still, having in mind gold hair,
I cannot see that broken brow
And miss the dry sound of bees
Stretching across a lucid space.

Scatter these well-meant idioms
Into the smoky spring that fills
The suburbs, where they will be lost.
They are no trophies of the sun.

VAN WINKLE

(from "The Bridge")

Macadam, gun-gray as the tunny's belt,
Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate:
Listen! the miles a hurdy-gurdy grinds—
Down gold arpeggios mile on mile unwinds.

Times earlier, when you hurried off to school,
—It is the same hour though a later day—
You walked with Pizarro in a copybook,
And Cortes rode up, reining tautly in—
Firmly as coffee grips the taste,—and away!

There was Priscilla's cheek close in the wind,
And Captain Smith, all beard and certainty,

And Rip Van Winkle, bowing by the way,—
"Is this Sleepy Hollow, friend—?" And he—

And Rip forgot the office hours,
and he forgot the pay;
Van Winkle sweeps a tenement
down town on Avenue A,—

The grind-organ says . . . Remember, remember
The cinder pile at the end of the backyard
Where we stoned the family of young
Garter snakes under . . . And the monoplanes
We launched—with paper wings and twisted
Rubber bands. . . . Recall—
the rapid tongues
That flittered from under the ash heap day
After day whenever your stick discovered
Some sunning inch of unsuspecting fiber—
It flashed back at your thrust, as clean as fire.

And Rip was slowly made aware
that he, Van Winkle, was not here
Nor there. He woke and swore he'd seen Broadway
a Catskill daisy chain in May—

So memory, that strikes a rhyme out of a box,
Or splits a random smell of flowers through glass—
Is it the whip stripped from the lilac tree
One day in spring my father took to me,
Or is it the Sabbatical, unconscious smile
My mother almost brought me once from church
And once only, as I recall—?

It flickered through the snow screen, blindly
It forsook her at the doorway; it was gone
Before I had left the window. It
Did not return with the kiss in the hall.

Macadam, gun-gray as the tunny's belt,
Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate .
Keep hold of that nickel for car-change, Rip,—
Have you got your paper—?
And hurry along, Van Winkle—it's getting late!

THE RIVER

(*from "The Bridge"*)

Stick your patent name on a signboard
brother—all over—going west—young man
Tintex—Japalac—Certain-teed Overalls ads
and lands sakes! under the new playbill ripped
in the guaranteed corner—see Bert Williams what?

Minstrels when you steal a chicken just
save me the wing, for if it isn't
Erie it ain't for miles around a
Mazda—and the telegraphic night coming on Thomas

a Ediford—and whistling down the tracks
a headlight rushing with the sound—can you
imagine—while an EXPRESS makes time like
SCIENCE—COMMERCE and the HOLYGHOST
RADIO ROARS IN EVERY HOME WE HAVE THE NORTHPOLE
WALLSTREET AND VIRGINBIRTH WITHOUT STONES OR
WIRES OR EVEN RUNning brooks connecting ears
and no more sermons windows flashing roar
Breathtaking—as you like it . . . eh?

So the 20th Century—so
whizzed the Limited—roared by and left
three men, still hungry on the tracks, ploddingly
watching the tail lights wizen and converge, slipping gimleted and neatly out of sight.
The last bear, shot drinking in the Dakotas,
Loped under wires that span the mountain stream.
Keen instruments, strung to a vast precision
Bind town to town and dream to ticking dream.
But some men take their liquor slow—and count
—Though they'll confess no rosary nor clue—
The river's minute by the far brook's year.
Under a world of whistles, wires and steam
Caboose-like they go ruminating through
Ohio, Indiana—blind baggage—
To Cheyenne tagging . . . Maybe Kalamazoo.

Time's renderings, time's blendings they construe
As final reckonings of fire and snow;
Strange bird-wit, like the elemental gist
Of unwalled winds they offer, singing low
My Old Kentucky Home and *Casey Jones,*
Some Sunny Day. I heard a road-gang chanting so.
And afterwards, who had a colt's eyes—one said,
"Jesus! Oh I remember watermelon days!" And sped
High in a cloud of merriment, recalled
"—And when my Aunt Sally Simpson smiled," he drawled—
"It was almost Louisiana, long ago."

"There's no place like Booneville though, Buddy,"
One said, excising a last burr from his vest,
"—For early trouting." Then peering in the can,
"—But I kept on the tracks." Possessed, resigned,
He trod the fire down pensively and grinned,
Spreading dry shingles of a beard. . . .

Behind
My father's cannery works I used to see

Rail-squatters ranged in nomad raillery,
The ancient men—wifeless or runaway
Hobo-trekkers that forever search
An empire wilderness of freight and rails.
Each seemed a child, like me, on a loose perch,
Holding to childhood like some termless play.
John, Jake, or Charley, hopping the slow freight
—Memphis to Tallahassee—riding the rods,
Blind fists of nothing, humpty-dumpty clods.

Yet they touch something like a key perhaps.
From pole to pole across the hills, the states
—They know a body under the wide rain;
Youngsters with eyes like fjords, old reprobates
With racetrack jargon,—dotting immensity
They lurk across her, knowing her yonder breast
Snow-silvered, sumac-stained or smoky blue,
Is past the valley-sleepers, south or west.
—As I have trod the rumorous midnights, too.

And past the circuit of the lamp's thin flame
(O Nights that brought me to her body bare!)
Have dreamed beyond the print that bound her name.
Trains sounding the long blizzards out—I heard
Wail into distances I knew were hers.
Papooses crying on the wind's long mane
Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain,
—Dead echoes! But I knew her body there,
Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark,
And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair.

Under the Ozarks, domed by Iron Mountain,
The old gods of the rain lie wrapped in pools
Where eyeless fish curvet a sunken fountain
And re-descend with corn from querulous crows.
Such pilferings make up their timeless eatage,
Propitiate them for their timber torn
By iron, iron—always the iron dealt cleavage!
They doze now, below axe and powder horn.

And Pullman breakfasters glide glistening steel
From tunnel into field—iron strides the dew—
Straddles the hill, a dance of wheel on wheel.
You have a half-hour's wait at Siskiyou,
Or stay the night and take the next train through.
Southward, near Cairo passing, you can see
The Ohio merging,—borne down Tennessee;
And if it's summer and the sun's in dusk
Maybe the breeze will lift the River's musk
—As though the waters breathed that you might know
Memphis Johnny, Steamboat Bill, Missouri Joe.
Oh, lean from the window, if the train slows down,

As though you touched hands with some ancient clown,
—A little while gaze absently below
And hum *Deep River* with them while they go.

Yes, turn again and sniff once more—look see,
O Sheriff, Brakeman and Authority—
Hitch up your pants and crunch another quid,
For you, too, feed the River timelessly.
And few evade full measure of their fate;
Always they smile out eerily what they seem.
I could believe he joked at heaven's gate—
Dan Midland—jolted from the cold brake-beam.

Down, down—born pioneers in time's despite,
Grimed tributaries to an ancient flow—
They win no frontier by their wayward plight,
But drift in stillness, as from Jordan's brow.

You will not hear it as the sea; even stone
Is not more hushed by gravity . . . But slow,
As loth to take more tribute—sliding prone
Like one whose eyes were buried long ago

The River, spreading, flows—and spends your dream.
What are you, lost within this tideless spell?
You are your father's father, and the stream—
A liquid theme that floating niggers swell.

Damp tonnage and alluvial march of days—
Nights turbid, vascular with silted shale
And roots surrendered down of moraine clays:
The Mississippi drinks the farthest dale.

O quarrying passion, undertowed sunlight!
The basalt surface drags a jungle grace
Ochreous and lynx-barred in lengthening might;
Patience! and you shall reach the biding place!

Over De Soto's bones the freighted floors
Throb past the City storied of three thrones.
Down two more turns the Mississippi pours
(Anon tall ironsides up from salt lagoons)

And flows within itself, heaps itself free.
All fades but one thin skyline 'round . . . Ahead
No embrace opens but the stinging sea;
The River lifts itself from its long bed,

Poised wholly on its dream, a mustard glow,
Tortured with history, its one will—flow!
—The Passion spreads in wide tongues, choked and slow,
Meeting the Gulf, hosannas silently below.

THE DANCE

(from "The Bridge")

The swift red flesh, a winter king—
Who squired the glacier woman down the sky?
She ran the neighing canyons all the spring;
She spouted arms; she rose with maize—to die.

And in the autumn drouth, whose burnished hands
With mineral wariness found out the stone
Where prayers, forgotten, streamed the mesa sands?
He holds the twilight's dim, perpetual throne.

Mythical brows we saw retiring—loth,
Disturbed and destined, into denser green.
Greeting they sped us, on the arrow's oath:
Now lie incorrigibly what years between. . . .

There was a bed of leaves, and broken play;
There was a veil upon you, Pocahontas, bride—
O Princess whose brown lap was virgin May;
And bridal flanks and eyes hid tawny pride.

I left the village for dogwood. By the canoe
Tugging below the mill-race, I could see
Your hair's keen crescent running, and the blue
First moth of evening take wing stealthily.

What laughing chains the water wove and threw!
I learned to catch the trout's moon whisper; I
Drifted how many hours I never knew,
But, watching, saw that fleet young crescent die,—

And one star, swinging, take its place, alone,
Cupped in the larches of the mountain pass—
Until, immortally, it bled into the dawn.
I left my sleek boat nibbling margin grass. . . .

I took the portage climb, then chose
A further valley-shed; I could not stop.
Feet nozzled watery webs of upper flows;
One white veil gusted from the very top.

O Appalachian Spring! I gained the ledge;
Steep, inaccessible smile that eastward bends
And northward reaches in that violet wedge
Of Adirondacks!—wisped of azure wands,

Over how many bluffs, tarns, streams I sped!
—And knew myself within some boding shade:

Grey tepees tufting the blue knolls ahead,
Smoke swirling through the yellow chestnut glade. . . .

A distant cloud, a thunder-bud—it grew,
That blanket of the skies: the padded foot
Within,—I hear it; 'til its rhythm drew,
—Siphoned the black pool from the heart's hot root!

A cyclone threshes in the turbine crest,
Swooping in eagle feathers down your back;
Know, Maquokeeta, greeting; know death's best;
—Fall, Sachem, strictly as the tamarack!

A birch kneels. All her whistling fingers fly.
The oak grove circles in a crash of leaves;
The long moan of a dance is in the sky.
Dance, Maquokeeta: Pocahontas grieves. . . .

And every tendon scurries toward the twangs
Of lightning deltaed down your saber hair.
Now snaps the flint in every tooth; red fangs
And splay tongues thinly busy the blue air. . . .

Dance, Maquokeeta! snake that lives before,
That casts his pelt, and lives beyond! Sprout, horn!
Spark, tooth! Medicine-man, relent, restore—
Lie to us—dance us back the tribal morn!

Spears and assemblies: black drums thrusting on—
O yelling battlements,—I, too, was liege
To rainbows currying each pulsant bone:
Surpassed the circumstance, danced out the siege!

And buzzard-circleted, screamed from the stake;
I could not pick the arrows from my side.
Wrapped in that fire, I saw more escorts wake—
Flickering, sprint up the hill, groins like a tide.

I heard the hush of lava wrestling your arms,
And stag teeth foam about the raven throat;
Flame cataracts of heaven in seething swarms
Fed down your anklets to the sunset's moat.

Oh, like the lizard in the furious noon,
That drops his legs and colors in the sun,
—And laughs, pure serpent, Time itself, and moon
Of his own fate, I saw thy change begun!

And saw thee dive to kiss that destiny
Like one white meteor, sacrosanct and blent

At last with all that's consummate and free
There, where the first and last gods keep thy tent.

* * *

Thewed of the levin, thunder-shod and lean,
Lo, through what infinite seasons dost thou gaze—
Across what bivouacs of thine angered slain,
And see'st thy bride immortal in the maize!

Totem and fire-gall, slumbering pyramid—
Though other calendars now stack the sky,
Thy freedom is her largesse, Prince, and hid
On paths thou knewest best to claim her by.

High unto Labrador the sun strikes free
Her speechless dream of snow, and stirred again,
She is the torrent and the singing tree;
And she is virgin to the last of men. . . .

West, west and south! winds over Cumberland
And winds across the llano grass resume
Her hair's warm sibilance. Her breasts are fanned—
O stream by slope and vineyard—into bloom!

And when the caribou slant down for salt
Do arrows thirst and leap? Do antlers shine
Alert, star-triggered in the listening vault
Of dusk?—And are her perfect brows to thine?

We danced, O Brave, we danced beyond their farms,
In cobalt desert closures made our vows . . .
Now is the strong prayer folded in thine arms,
The serpent with the eagle in the boughs.

POWER: CAPE HATTERAS

(from "The Bridge")

The nasal whine of power whips a new universe . . .
Where spouting pillars spoor the evening sky,
Under the looming stacks of the gigantic power house
Stars prick the eyes with sharp ammoniac proverbs,
New verities, new inklings in the velvet hummed
Of dynamos where hearing's leash is strummed . . .
Power's script,—wound, bobbin-bound, refined—
Is stropped to the slap of belts on booming spools, spurred
Into the bulging bouillon, harnessed jelly of the stars.
Towards what? The forked crash of split thunder parts
Our hearing momentwise; but fast in whirling armatures,
As bright as frogs' eyes, giggling in the girth
Of steely gizzards—axle-bound, confined
In coiled precision, bunched in mutual glee
The bearings glint—O murmurless and shined
In oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy!

Stars scribble on our eyes the frosty sagas,
The gleaming cantos of unvanquished space. . . .
O sinewy silver biplane, nudging the wind's withers!
There, from Kill Devils Hill at Kitty Hawk
Two brothers in their twinship left the dune;
Warping the gale, the Wright windwrestles veered
Capeward, then blading the wind's flank, banked and spun
What ciphers risen from prophetic script,
What marathons new-set between the stars!
The soul, by naphtha fledged into new reaches
Already knows the closer clasp of Mars,—
New latitudes, unknotting, soon give place
To what fierce schedules, rife of doom apace!

Behold the dragon's covey—amphibian, ubiquitous
To hedge the seaboard, wrap the headland, ride
The blue's unfeathered districts unto aether. . . .
While Iliads glimmer through eyes raised in pride
Hell's belt springs wider—into heaven's plumed side.
O bright circumferences, heights employed to fly
War's fiery kennel masked in downy offings,—
This tournament of space, the threshed and chiseled height,
Is baited by marauding circles, bludgeon flail
Of rancorous grenades whose screaming petals carve us
The wounds we wrap with theorems sharp as hail!

Wheeled swiftly, wings emerge from larval-silver hangars.
Taut motors surge, space-gnawing, into flight;
Through sparkling visibility, outspread, unsleeping
Wings clip the last peripheries of light. . . .
Tellurian wind-sleuths on dawn patrol,
Each plane a hurtling javelin of winged ordnance,
Bristle the heights above a screeching gale to hover;
Surely no eye that Sunward Escadrille can cover!
There, meaningful, fledged as the Pleiades
With razor sheen they zoom each rapid helix!
Up-chartered choristers of their own speeding
They, cavalcade on escapade, shear Cumulus—
Lay siege and hurdle Cirrus down the skies!
While Cetus-like, O thou Dirigible, enormous Lounger
Of pendulous auroral beaches,—satellited wide
By convoy planes, moonferrets that rejoin thee
On fleeing balconies as thou dost glide,
—Hast splintered space!

THE TUNNEL

(*from "The Bridge"*)

To find the Western path
Right thro' the Gates of Wrath
—BLAKE.

Performances, assortments, résumés—
Up Times Square to Columbus Circle lights

Channel the congresses, nightly sessions,
Refractions of the thousand theaters, faces—
Mysterious kitchens . . . You shall search them all.
Some day by heart you'll learn each famous sight
And watch the curtain lift in hell's despite;
You'll find the garden in the third act dead,
Finger your knees—and wish yourself in bed
With tabloid crime-sheets perched in easy sight.

Then let you reach your hat
and go.
As usual, let you—also
walking down—exclaim
to twelve upward leaving
a subscription praise
for what time slays . . .

Or can't you quite make up your mind to ride;
A walk is better underneath the L for a brisk
Ten blocks or so before? But you find yourself
Preparing penguin flexions of the arms—
As usual you will meet the scuttle yawn:
The subway yawns the quickest promise home.

Be minimum then, to swim the hiving swarms
Out of the Square, the Circle burning bright—
Avoid the glass doors gyring at your right,
Where boxed alone a second, eyes take fright
—Quite unprepared rush naked back to light:
And down beside the turnstile press the coin
Into the slot. The gongs already rattle.

And so
of cities you bespeak
subways, rivered under streets
and rivers . . . In the car
the overtone of motion
underground, the monotone
of motion is the sound
of other faces, also underground—

"Let's have a pencil Jimmy—living now
at Floral Park
Flatbush—on the fourth of July—
like a pigeon's muddy dream—potatoes
to dig in the field—travlin' the town too—
night after night—the Culver line—the
girls all shaping up—it used to be—"

Our tongues recant like beaten weather vanes.
This answer lives like verdigris, like hair

Beyond extinction, surcease of the bone;
And repetition freezes—"What
what do you want? getting weak on the links?
fandaddle daddy don't ask for change—IS THIS
FOURTEENTH? it's half-past six she said—if
you don't like my gate why did you
swing on it, why *didja*
swing on it
anyhow—"

And somehow anyhow swing—

The phonographs of hades in the brain
Are tunnels that re-wind themselves, and love
A burnt match skating in a urinal—
Somewhere above Fourteenth TAKE THE EXPRESS
To brush some new presentiment of pain—

"But I want service in this office SERVICE
I said—after
the show she cried a little afterwards but—"

Whose head is swinging from the swollen strap?
Whose body smokes along the bitten rails,
Bursts from a smoldering bundle far behind
In back forks of the chasms of the brain—
Puffs from a riven stump far out behind
In interborough fissures of the mind . . . ?

And why do I often meet your visage here,
Your eyes like agate lanterns—on and on
Below the toothpaste and the dandruff ads?
—And did their riding eyes right through your side,
And did their eyes like unwashed platters ride?
And Death, aloft—gigantically down
Probing through you toward me, O Evermore!
And when they dragged your retching flesh,
Your trembling hands that night through Baltimore—
That last night on the ballot rounds, did you,
Shaking—did you deny the ticket, Poe?

For Gravesend Manor change at Chambers Street.
The platform hurries along to a dead stop.
The intent escalator lifts a serenade
Stilly
Of shoes, umbrellas, each eye attending its shoe, then
Bolting outright somewhere above where streets
Burst suddenly in rain . . . The gongs recur:
Elbows and levers, guard and hissing door.
Thunder is galvothermic here below . . . The car

Wheels off. The train rounds, bending to a scream,
Taking the final level for the dive
Under the river—

And somewhat emptier than before,
Demented, for a hitching second, humps; then
Lets go . . . Towards corners of the floor
Newspapers wing, revolve and wing.
Blank windows gargle signals through the roar.

And does the Daemon take you home, also,
Wop washerwoman, with the bandaged hair?
After the corridors are swept, the cuspidors—
The gaunt sky-barracks cleanly now, and bare,
O Genoese, do you bring mother-eyes and hands
Back home to children and to golden hair?

Daemon, demurring and eventful yawn!
Whose hideous laughter is the bellows mirth
—Or the muffled slaughter of a day in birth—
O cruelly to inoculate the brinking dawn
With antennae toward worlds that spark and sink—
To spoon us out more liquid than the dim
Locution of the eldest star, and pack
The conscience naveled in the plunging wind,
Umbilical to call—and straightway die!
O caught like pennies beneath soot and steam,
Kiss of our agony thou gatherest;
Condensed, thou takest all—shrill ganglia
Impassioned with some song we fail to keep.

And yet, like Lazarus, to feel the slope,
The sod and billow breaking—lifting ground,
—A sound of waters bending astride the sky
Unceasing with some word that will not die!

✦

A tugboat, wheezing wreaths of steam,
Lunged past, with one galvanic blare stove up the river.
I counted the echoes assembling, one after one,
Searching, thumbing the midnight on the piers.
Lights, coasting left the oily tympanum of waters;
The blackness somewhere gouged glass on a sky.

And this thy harbor, O my City, I have driven under,
Tossed from the coil of ticking towers . . . Tomorrow,
And to be . . . Here by the River that is East—
Here at the waters' edge the hands drop memory;
Shadowless in that abyss they unaccounting lie.
How far away the star has pooled the sea—
Or shall the hands be drawn away, to die?

Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest,
O Hand of Fire
gatherest—

ROYAL PALM

Green rustlings, more-than-regal charities
Drift coolly from that tower of whispered light.
Amid the noontide's blazed asperities
I watched the sun's most gracious anchorite

Climb up as by communings, year on year
Uneaten of the earth or aught earth holds,
And the gray trunk, that's elephantine, rear
Its frondings sighing in aetherial folds.

Forever fruitless, and beyond that yield
Of sweat the jungle presses with hot love
And tendril till our deathward breath is sealed—
It grazes the horizons, launched above

Mortality—ascending emerald-bright,
A fountain at salute, a crown in view—
Unshackled, casual of its azured height,
As though it soared suchwise through heaven too.

THE AIR PLANT

(*Grand Cayman, W. I.*)

This tuft that thrives on saline nothingness,
Inverted octopus with heavenward arms
Thrust parching from a palm-bole hard by the cove—
A bird almost—of almost bird alarms,

Is pulmonary to the wind that jars
Its tentacles, horrific in their lurch.
The lizard's throat, held bloated for a fly,
Balloons but warily from this throbbing perch.

The needles and hacksaws of cactus bleed
A milk of earth when stricken off the stalk;
But this—defenseless, thornless, sheds no blood,
Scarce shadow even—but the air's thin talk.

Angelic Dynamo! Ventriloquist of the Blue!
While beachward creeps the shark-swept Spanish Main.
By what conjunctions do the winds appoint
Its apotheosis, at last—the hurricane!

THE HURRICANE

Lo, Lord, Thou ridest!
Lord, Lord, Thy swifting heart

Naught stayeth, naught now bideth
But's smithereened apart!

Ay! Scripture flee'th stone!
Milk-bright, Thy chisel wind

Rescindeth flesh from bone
To quivering whittlings thinned—

Swept—whistling straw! Battered,
Lord, e'en boulders now out-leap

Rock sockets, levin-lathered!
Nor, Lord, may worm out-deep

Thy drum's gambade, its plunge abscond!
Lord God, while summits crashing

Whip sea-kelp screaming on blond
Sky-seethe, high heaven dashing—

Thou ridest to the door, Lord!
Thou bidest wall nor floor, Lord!

Allen Tate

ALLEN TATE (whose full name, not often admitted, is John Orley Allen Tate) was born November 19, 1899, in Winchester, Clark County, Kentucky, and was educated in public and private schools in Louisville, Nashville, and Washington, D. C., and after some tergiversation was graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1922. Immediately thereafter, he engaged in free-lance literary criticism for which he is as well known as for his poetry. He was one of the founders, in 1922, of *The Fugitive,* sharing that distinction with John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, and a few others. An avowed believer in sectionalism, his critical acumen runs parallel to his predilections in *Stonewall Jackson: The Good Soldier* (1928) and *Jefferson Davis: His Rise and Fall* (1929). Both biographies are skillfully constructed mosaics of fact and interpretation. His reviews and essays are among the most brilliant and provocative of his generation.

Mr. Pope and Other Poems (1928) reveals a mind that is critical and complex. His Ignis Fatuus, as acknowledged in Tate's Epilogue, has a "fierce latinity," and the adjective gives us an inkling of the paradox at the heart of his verse. Here Donne wrestles with Vergil; an essentially Gothic foundation shoots up into baroque efflores-

cences; the cultural tradition battles with vulgar aggressiveness. This clash between classicism and modernity—sublimated by Tate's transposition of romantic South and realistic North—strains to achieve a kind of harassed unity in *Mr. Pope and Other Poems*. A finesse of satire and a dissection of emotion combine to place most of the volume in the literature of wit, but poems like "Death of Little Boys" and "Ode to the Confederate Dead" are compact with feeling and so escape the category.

The more mature *Poems: 1928-1931* (1932) owes less to the intellectualist's conflict. Structure is still preëminent, but the poet emphasizes form without being a slave to it. Tate himself has said his method consists in playing the rôle of a hawk, "gradually circling round the subject, threatening it, filling it with suspense, and finally accomplishing its demise without ever quite using the ultimate violence upon it." The method has the disadvantages inherent in its aim. The reader waiting for forthright ideas expressed in the key of conversation, however heightened and intensified, will wait in vain. Tate is not concerned with the impulse that extends from Wordsworth to Frost, supplying "the charm of novelty to things of everyday"; he cannot flourish a finality or bring an emotion simply to the surface. In his circumlocutory, or circumambient, manner he is likely to leave the climax unsolved; the reader is not always certain that, in Tate's hawk-like swoop, the final capture is accomplished—not even in such poems as "Mother and Son" and "The Mediterranean," eloquent though they are.

Circulating "about" his subject, the poet gains a perspective, but loses a definiteness, even, at times, a direction which the reader is likely to require. The lines frequently suffer from excessive subjectivity, from a critical introspection at war with the lyric impulse. Thus Tate rewrites his poems so often that the original edge is sometimes lost. "His art," writes John Gould Fletcher, "is that of the lapidary, polishing and repolishing his work till it, literally, in many cases, has no life left." Although this is an exaggeration, it is true that such a fine poem as "Ode to the Confederate Dead" has been so much revised that where the new version gains in allusiveness, it loses in speed and directness. The new conclusion, however, is clearly superior, and it is the latest version which is given here.

After two years spent abroad on a Guggenheim Fellowship award, Tate returned to teach, edit, and create. *Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas* (1936), *Reason in Madness* (1941), and *On the Limits of Poetry* (1948) are provocative examinations in prose. A severely pruned *Selected Poems* (1937) was followed by *Poems: 1922-1947*, partly old, partly new, a compact, tense, and definitive collection which received its just reward of praise.

ODE TO THE CONFEDERATE DEAD

Row after row with strict impunity
The headstones yield their names to the element,
The wind whirrs without recollection;
In the riven troughs the splayed leaves
Pile up, of nature the casual sacrament
To the seasonal eternity of death,
Then driven by the fierce scrutiny
Of heaven to their business in the vast breath,
They sough the rumor of mortality.

Autumn is desolation in the plot
Of a thousand acres, where these memories grow
From the inexhaustible bodies that are not
Dead, but feed the grass row after rich row:
Remember now the autumns that have gone—
Ambitious November with the humors of the year,
With a particular zeal for every slab,
Staining the uncomfortable angels that rot
On the slabs, a wing chipped here, an arm there:
The brute curiosity of an angel's stare
Turns you like them to stone,
Transforms the heaving air,
Till plunged to a heavier world below
You shift your sea-space blindly,
Heaving, turning like the blind crab.

Dazed by the wind, only the wind
The leaves flying, plunge

You know who have waited by the wall
The twilit certainty of an animal;
Those midnight restitutions of the blood
You know—the immitigable pines, the smoky frieze
Of the sky, the sudden call; you know the rage—
The cold pool left by the mounting flood—
The rage of Zeno and Parmenides.
You who have waited for the angry resolution
Of those desires that should be yours tomorrow,
You know the unimportant shrift of death
And praise the vision
And praise the arrogant circumstance
Of those who fall
Rank upon rank, hurried beyond decision—
Here by the sagging gate, stopped by the wall.

Seeing, seeing only the leaves
Flying, plunge and expire

Turn your eyes to the immoderate past
Turn to the inscrutable infantry rising
Demons out of the earth—they will not last.
Stonewall, Stonewall—and the sunken fields of hemp,
Shiloh, Antietam, Malvern Hill, Bull Run.
Lost in that orient of the thick and fast
You will curse the setting sun.

Cursing only the leaves crying
Like an old man in a storm

You hear the shout—the crazy hemlocks point
With troubled fingers to the silence which
Smothers you, a mummy, in time. The hound bitch

Toothless and dying, in a musty cellar
Hears the wind only.
Now that the salt of their blood
Stiffens the saltier oblivion of the sea,
Seals the malignant purity of the flood,
What shall we, who count our days and bow
Our heads with a commemorial woe,
In the ribboned coats of grim felicity,
What shall we say of the bones, unclean—
Their verdurous anonymity will grow—
The ragged arms, the ragged heads and eyes
Lost in these acres of the insane green?
The gray lean spiders come; they come and go;
In a tangle of willows without light
The singular screech-owl's bright
Invisible lyric seeds the mind
With the furious murmur of their chivalry.

We shall say only, the leaves
Flying, plunge and expire

We shall say only, the leaves whispering
In the improbable mist of nightfall
That flies on multiple wing:
Night is the beginning and the end,
And in between the ends of distraction
Waits mute speculation, the patient curse
That stones the eyes, or like the jaguar leaps
For his own image in a jungle pool, his victim.

What shall we say who have knowledge
Carried to the heart? Shall we take the act
To the grave? Shall we, more hopeful, set up the grave
In the house? The ravenous grave?

Leave now
The turnstile and the old stone wall:
The gentle serpent, green in the mulberry bush,
Riots with his tongue through the hush—
Sentinel of the grave who counts us all!

MR. POPE

When Alexander Pope strolled in the city
Strict was the glint of pearl and gold sedans.
Ladies leaned out, more out of fear than pity;
For Pope's tight back was rather a goat's than man's.

One often thinks the urn should have more bones
Than skeletons provide for speedy dust;
The urn gets hollow, cobwebs brittle as stones
Weave to the funeral shell a frivolous rust.

And he who dribbled couplets like the snake
Coiled to a lithe precision in the sun,
Is missing. The jar is empty; you may break
It only to find that Mr. Pope is gone.

What requisitions of a verity
Prompted the wit and rage between his teeth
One cannot say: around a crooked tree
A moral climbs whose name should be a wreath.

DEATH OF LITTLE BOYS

When little boys grow patient at last, weary,
Surrender their eyes immeasurably to the night,
The event will rage terrific as the sea;
Their bodies fill a crumbling room with light.

Then you will touch at the bedside, torn in two,
Gold curls now deftly intricate with gray
As the windowpane extends a fear to you
From one peeled aster drenched with the wind all day.

And over his chest the covers, in an ultimate dream,
Will mount to the teeth, ascend the eyes, press back
The locks—while round his sturdy belly gleam
The suspended breaths, white spars above the wreck:

Till all the guests, come in to look, turn down
Their palms; and delirium assails the cliff
Of Norway where you ponder, and your little town
Reels like a sailor drunk in his rotten skiff. . . .

The bleak sunshine shrieks its chipped music then
Out to the milkweed amid the fields of wheat.
There is a calm for you where men and women
Unroll the chill precision of moving feet.

MOTHER AND SON

Now all day long the man who is not dead
Hastens the dark with inattentive eyes,
The lady of the white hand, of the erect head
Stares at the cover, leans for the son's replies
At last to her importunate womanhood—
That hand of death laid on the living bed;
Such is the fierce compositor of blood.

She waits; he lies upon the bed of sin
Where greed, avarice, anger writhed and slept
Till to their silence they were gathered in;
There, fallen with time, his tall and wicked kin

Once fired the passions that were never kept
In the permanent heart, and there his mother lay
To bear him on the impenetrable day.

Because of this she cannot will her hand
Up to the bed nor break the manacle
Her exile sets upon her harsh command
That he should say the time is beautiful,
Transfigured with her own devouring light:
The sick man craves the impalpable night.

Loosed betwixt eye and lid, the swimming beams
Of memory, that school of cuttlefish
Rise to the air, plunge to the cold streams.
Rising and plunging the half-forgotten wish
To tear his heart out in some slow disgrace
And freeze the hue of terror to her face.

Hate, misery and fear beat off his heart
To the dry fury of the woman's mind;
The son prone in his autumn, moves apart
A seed blown upon a returning wind:
O child, be vigilant till towards the South
On the flowered wall all the sweet afternoon
That reach of sun, swift as the cottonmouth
Strikes at the black crucifix on her breast
Where the cold dusk comes suddenly to rest—
Mortality will speak the victor soon!

The dreary flies lazy and casual
Stick to the ceiling, buzz along the wall—
O heart, the spider shuffles from the mold
Weaving between the pinks and grapes his pall.
The bright wallpaper imperishably old
Uncurls and flutters; it will never fall.

THE CROSS

There is a place that some men know,
I cannot see the whole of it,
Nor how men come there. Long ago
Flame burst out of a secret pit
Crushing the world with such a light
The day sky fell to moonless black,
The kingly sun to hateful night
For those, once seeing, turning back:
For love so hates mortality,
Which is the providence of life,
She will not let it blessèd be
But curses it with mortal strife.

Until beside the blinding rood
Within that world-destroying pit
—Like young wolves that have tasted blood
Of death, men taste no more of it:
So blind in so severe a place
(All life before in the black grave)
The last alternatives they face
Of life, without the life to save,
Being from all salvation weaned—
A stag charged both at heel and head:
Who would come back is turned a fiend
Instructed by the fiery dead.

THE MEDITERRANEAN

Quem das finem, rex magne, dolorum?

Where we went in the boat was a long bay
A sling-shot wide walled in by towering stone—
Peaked margin of antiquity's delay,
And we went there out of time's monotone:

Where we went in the black hull no light moved
But a gull white-winged along the feckless wave;
The breeze unseen but fierce as a body loved,
That boat drove onward like a willing slave.

Where we went in the small ship the seaweed
Parted and gave to us the murmuring shore
And we made feast and in our secret need
Devoured the very plates Aeneas bore:

Where derelict you see through the low twilight
The green coast that you thunder-tossed would win,
Drop sail, and hastening to drink all night
Eat dish and bowl—to take that sweet land in!

Where we feasted and caroused on the sandless
Pebbles, affecting our day of piracy,
What prophecy of eaten plates could landless
Wanderers fulfill by the ancient sea?

We for that time might taste the famous age
Eternal here yet hidden from our eyes
When lust of power undid its stuffless rage;
They, in a wineskin, bore earth's paradise.

—Let us lie down once more by the breathing side
Of ocean, where our live forefathers sleep
As if the Known Sea still were a month wide—
Atlantis howls but is no longer steep!

What country shall we conquer, what fair land
Unman our conquest and locate our blood?
We've cracked the hemispheres with careless hand!
Now, from the Gates of Hercules we flood

Westward, westward till the barbarous brine
Whelms us to the tired world where tasseling corn,
Fat beans, grapes sweeter than muscadine
Rot on the vine: in that land were we born.

Léonie Adams

LÉONIE ADAMS was born in Brooklyn, New York, December 9, 1899. After a public school preparation she became a member of the class of 1922 at Barnard College, supported herself in New York in various capacities for five years, was awarded a "traveling fellowship" by the Guggenheim Foundation, and went abroad for two years in 1928. After her return she taught at various eastern universities.

At Barnard she wrote her first published poems "in secret." While still an undergraduate, her remarkable "April Mortality" was printed in *The New Republic,* but, although this would have been sufficient stimulus for most young authors to rush into print, Miss Adams remained more reticent than ever and rarely submitted any of her verse for publication.

It was only through the persuasion of two or three friends that her volume, *Those Not Elect* (1925), was made ready for the press. The author's evasion of "realism" is apparent in all of her poetry. The poems themselves are of two sorts: the younger and simpler verses, full of a shy ecstasy, and the later, more metaphysical expres-

sions of a rare and not lightly communicated wonder. Without imitating the Elizabethans, Miss Adams has caught something of the quality of Webster and Vaughan. But whatever her style, whether she is direct as in "Home-Coming" or more difficult as in "The Horn," her sensitivity makes even the obscure passages a succession of inevitable images. Few poets have fixed the changing aspects of earth and sky, the fluid seasons, the constant variability of light with such natural certainty. Her most candid descriptions take on an unearthly and intensified air; even her statement of a landscape, or the performance of a tragedy, or "the pointed grass" drinking the light "till light brimmed even," or the old cheating of the sun is translated in lines both pure and suggestive. One may sometimes mistake her meaning; there is no mistaking the beauty of her imagination which lifts emotion, holding it, as it were, in suspense. There is not a line in her first book which is without distinction.

The same is true of *High Falcon* (1929). This is abstract poetry in the highest sense; the word is more than a word; the letter is uplifted by pure spirit. The lyrical line, carried on wave after wave of music, transcends personality. The ecstasy, however, is no less ecstatic for being disembodied; every phrase carries its import of intensities, of vistas larger than the scene, of meaning beyond meaning. It is a rarefied atmosphere which Miss Adams breathes and only a height-loving reader can venture with her into that fine air. "Twilit Revelation," "Bell Tower," "Sundown," "Country Summer" are a few of the poems in which the heart "extracts the spirit of the temporal." Neither sense nor the senses can wholly interpret this poetry, but every figure and accent compel us with authority. What, at first glance, seems obscurely metaphysical is resolved into a spiritual clarity that approaches clairvoyance. Here, we are in the presence of greatness; here matter is sanctified, "dipped in a gold stain."

"The Mount" synthesizes Miss Adams' qualities. One of her finest poems, it creates a new symbol of time; the sense of continuity is expressed through an image which is a little remote but quickly recognizable, holding a nice balance between the strange and the familiar. As Miss Adams wrote, "It seems to me to bear a special relation to most of the other verses in *High Falcon;* with respect to some it repeats what they have essentially to say with greater decision; and, with respect to others, expresses a resolution of much that is in them at loose ends."

Her utterance is unique, but it is no posture of "difference," no straining singularity. On the contrary, this is verse of the most reticent dignity, in which nothing, not even the mystical note, is overstressed. Herein lies Miss Adams' danger—or rather the danger to her imitators, for, since she is obviously "a poet's poet," imitated she will be. The surface pattern is easy enough to master: the withdrawn loveliness, the muted music, the faint Elizabethanism; but, lacking her rapt and actually reverent touch, the result would be only an echo of delicate diction. Miss Adams would undoubtedly gain a wider audience were she to mix a little more flesh with her spirit, but she would lose that virginal radiance which rises from springs more profound than those of the too nimbly gushing heart.

APRIL MORTALITY

Rebellion shook an ancient dust,
  And bones bleached dry of rottenness
Said: Heart, be bitter still, nor trust
  The earth, the sky, in their bright dress.

Heart, heart, dost thou not break to know
  This anguish thou wilt bear alone?
We sang of it an age ago,
  And traced it dimly upon stone.

With all the drifting race of men
  Thou also art begot to mourn
That she is crucified again,
  The lonely Beauty yet unborn.

And if thou dreamest to have won
  Some touch of her in permanence,
'Tis the old cheating of the sun,
  The intricate lovely play of sense.

Be bitter still, remember how
  Four petals, when a little breath
Of wind made stir the pear-tree bough,
  Blew delicately down to death.

HOME-COMING

When I stepped homeward to my hill
  Dusk went before with quiet tread;
The bare laced branches of the trees
  Were as a mist about its head.

Upon its leaf-brown breast, the rocks
  Like great gray sheep lay silent-wise;
Between the birch trees' gleaming arms
  The faint stars trembled in the skies.

The white brook met me half-way up
  And laughed as one that knew me well,
To whose more clear than crystal voice
  The frost had joined a crystal spell.

The skies lay like pale-watered deep.
  Dusk ran before me to its strand
And cloudily leaned forth to touch
  The moon's slow wonder with her hand.

THOUGHT'S END

I watched the hills drink the last color of light,
All shapes grow bright and wane on the pale air.
Till down the traitorous east there came the night,
And swept the circle of my seeing bare.
Its intimate beauty like a wanton's veil
Tore from the void as from an empty face.
I felt at being's rim all being fail,
And my one body pitted against space.

O heart more frightened than a wild bird's wings,
Beating at green, now is no fiery mark
Left on the quiet nothingness of things.
Be self no more against the flooding dark:
There thousandwise sown in that cloudy blot
Stars that are worlds look out and see you not.

DEATH AND THE LADY

Their bargain told again

Death to the Lady said
While she to dancing-measures still
Would move, while beauties on her lay,
Simply as dews the buds do fill,
Death said: "Stay!
Tell me, Lady,
If in your breast the lively breath
May flicker for a little space,
What ransom will you give to death,
Lady?" he said.
"O not one joy, O not one grace,
And what is your will to my will?
I can outwit parched fancies still."
To Death said the Lady.

Death to that Lady said,
When blood went numb and wearily,
"In innocency dear breath you drew,
And marrow and bloom you rendered me,"
She said: "True."
"How now, Lady?"
"My heart sucked up its sweet at will,
Whose scent when substance' sweet is past,
Is lovely still, is lovely still,
Death," she said.
"For bones' reprieve the dreams go last:
Soon, soon your flowery show did part,
But preciously I cull the heart,"
Death said to the Lady.

Death to that Lady said:
"Is then not all our bargain done?
Or why do you beckon me so fast
To chaffer for a skeleton
Flesh must cast,
Ghostly Lady?"
"For, Death, that I would have you drain
From my dead heart the blood that stands
So chilly in the withered vein.
And, Death," she said,

"Give my due bones into your hands."
"Beauties I claim at morning-prime,
But the lack-luster in good time,"
Death said to the Lady.

TWILIT REVELATION

This hour was set the time for heaven's descent
Come drooping toward us on the heavy air,
The sky, that's heaven's seat above us bent,
Blue faint as violet-ash, you near me there
In nether space so drenched in goblin blue,
I could touch Hesperus as soon as you.

Now I perceive you lapt in singling light,
Washed by that blue which sucks whole planets in,
And hung like those top jewels of the night,
A mournful gold too high for love to win.
And you, poor brief, poor melting star, you seem
Half sunk, and half to brighten in that stream.

And these rich-bodied hours of our delight
Show like a moth-wing's substance when the fall
Of confine-loosing, blue unending night
Extracts the spirit of this temporal.
So space can pierce the crevice wide between
Fast hearts, skies deep-descended intervene.

GHOSTLY TREE

O beech, unbind your yellow leaf, for deep
The honeyed time lies sleeping, and lead shade
Seals up the eyelids of its golden sleep.
Long are your flutes, chimes, little bells at rest,
And here is only the cold scream of the fox,
Only the hunter following on the hound,
And your quaint-plumagèd,
The bird that your green happy boughs lapped round,
Bends south its soft bright breast.

Before the winter and the terror break,
Scatter the leaf that broadened with the rose,
Not for a tempest, but a sigh to take.
Four nights to exorcise the thing that stood,
Bound by these frail which dangle at your branch,
They ran a frosty dagger to its heart,
And it, wan substance,
No more remembered it might cry, or start,
Or stain a point with blood.

THE HORN

In coming to the feast I found
A venerable silver-throated horn,
Which were I brave enough to sound,
Then all as from that moment born
Would breathe the honey of this clime,
And three times merry in their time,
Would praise the virtue of that horn.

The mist is risen like thin breath,
The young leaves of the ground smell chill,
So faintly are they strewn on death,
The road I came down a west hill.
But none can name as I can name
A little golden-bright thing flame,
Since bones have caught their marrow chill.

And in a thicket passed me by,
In the black brush a running hare,
Having a specter in his eye,
That sped in darkness to the snare;
And who but I can know in pride,
The heart set beating in the side
Has but the wisdom of a hare?

THE RIVER IN THE MEADOWS

Crystal parting the meads,
A boat drifted up it like a swan,
Tranquil, lovely, its bright front to the waters,
A slow swan is gone.

Full waters, O flowing silver,
Pure, level with the clover,
It will stain drowning a star,
With the moon it will brim over.

Running through lands dewy and shorn,
Cattle stoop at its brink,
And every fawny-colored throat
Will sway its bells and drink.

I saw a boat sailing the river
With a tranced gait; it seemed
Loosed by a spell from its moorings,
Or a thing the helmsman dreamed.

They said it would carry no traveler,
But the vessel would go down,
If a heart were heavy-winged,
Or the bosom it dwelt in, stone.

COUNTRY SUMMER

Now the rich cherry whose sleek wood
And top with silver petals traced,
Like a strict box its gems encased,
Has spilt from out that cunning lid,
All in an innocent green round,
Those melting rubies which it hid;
With moss ripe-strawberry-encrusted,
So birds get half, and minds lapse merry
To taste that deep-red lark's-bite berry,
And blackcap-bloom is yellow-dusted.

The wren that thieved it in the eaves
A trailer of the rose could catch
To her poor droopy sloven thatch,
And side by side with the wren's brood,—
O lovely time of beggars' luck—
Opens the quaint and hairy bud.
And full and golden is the yield
Of cows that never have to house.

But all night nibble under boughs,
Or cool their sides in the moist field.

Into the rooms flow meadow airs,
The warm farm-baking smell blows round;
Inside and out and sky and ground
Are much the same; the wishing star,
Hesperus, kind and early-born,
Is risen only finger-far.
All stars stand close in summer air,
And tremble, and look mild as amber;
When wicks are lighted in the chamber
You might say stars were settling there.

Now straightening from the flowery hay,
Down the still light the mowers look;
Or turn, because their dreaming shook,
And they waked half to other days,
When left alone in yellow-stubble,
The rusty-coated mare would graze.
Yet thick the lazy dreams are born;
Another thought can come to mind,
But like the shivering of the wind,
Morning and evening in the corn.

THE MOUNT

"No, I have tempered haste,"
The joyous traveler said,
"The steed has passed me now
Whose hurrying hooves I fled.
My specter rides thereon,
I learned what mount he has,
Upon what summers fed;
And wept to know again,
Beneath the saddle swung,
Treasure for whose great theft
This breast was wrung.
His bridle bells sang out,
I could not tell their chime,
So brilliantly he rings,
But called his name as Time.
His bin was morning light,
Those straws which gild his bee
Are of the fallen West.
Although green lands consume
Beneath their burning tread,
In everlasting bright
His hooves have rest."

THIS MEASURE

This measure was a measure to my mind,
Still musical through the unlikely hush.
The cold goes wide as doors, and in will come
Those notes of May set ringing through the brush,
Where every voice by natural law is dumb.

How many seasons I have watched the boughs,
That first are happy-tongued and happy-leaved,
Then bleed, as though an autumn were the last,
While that great life was with them undeceived,
Which all a wintering world seals home more fast.

Now visibly indeed I am assailed,
Yet I seem come clap on my very thing;
And now I learn I only asked as much:
It was in blooming weeks I lacked a spring
Rooted and blowing beyond sense or touch.

BELL TOWER

I have seen, O desolate one, the voice has its tower
The voice also, builded at secret cost,
Its temple of precious tissue; not silent then,
Forever. Casting silence in your hour.

There marble boys are leant from the light throat,
Thick locks that hang with dew, and eyes dew-lashed,
Dazzled with morning,—angels of the wind,
With ear a-point for the enchanted note.

And these at length shall tip the hanging bell,
And first the sound must gather in deep bronze,
Till, rarer than ice, purer than a bubble of gold,
It fill the sky to beat on an airy shell.

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Bleak the February light
On the dark threshold spread,
The frost stood thick against the lock,
The clock for the great cold stopped dead,
When old wits idle with their luck
Lay singing in the bed,
That heard, while white frost span by night,
A pigeon happy with its bread.

And sang: I wakened to a sound
Which the streams make at thaw,
And pity on the shape I found
Inside a looking-glass with light.
For looking on my heart I saw,
A time before the break of day,
And looking won to second-sight,
And cast my character away.

The fields lie bound beneath the sky,
The hedge-top and the furrow freeze,
And still old plow-wheels sigh,
As sweet as bones which stretch from sleep,
And sooner than their sound is by,
Will come a noise of yellow bees
When the hay is nodding deep,
And some wise throat that laughs for ease.

Till there was a soft voice which spoke:
Hush, for every sound you tell
Is out of an old horn I blew.
I have come down to see who woke
On earth's cold brink when night was through.
No wilder chance befell,
Than the starry breath I drew.
I am Gabriel.

SUNDOWN

This is the time lean woods shall spend
A steeped-up twilight, and the pale evening drink,
And the perilous roe, the leaper to the west brink,
Trembling and bright, to the caverned cloud descend.

Now shall you see pent oak gone gusty and frantic,
Stooped with dry weeping, ruinously unloosing
The sparse disheveled leaf, or reared and tossing
A dreary scarecrow bough in funeral antic.

Aye, tatter you and rend,
Oak heart, to your profession mourning, not obscure
The outcome, not crepuscular, on the deep floor,
Sable and gold match lusters and contend.

And rags of shrouding will not muffle the slain.
This is the immortal extinction, the priceless wound
Not to be staunched; the live gold leaks beyond,
And matter's sanctified, dipped in a gold stain.

NIGHT-PIECE

The moon above the milky field
Gleaning moves her one slant light,
The wind weeps from the cloud:
Then, weeping wind, unshroud
Pale Cassiopeia, blow
The true-swung pole-lamp bright.
To this room a midnight's come
Which speaks but with the beating clock,
While on glistening paws the mouse
Creeps night-master of the house.
Rust shall eat away the lock,
The door sag from the garner hoard,
And the sleeper lie unsphered.
Time's wheel frets on his finger still,
He bends no more his weight with time's.
He wept as long as wind,
And sleeps with an indifferent will.
Not airs, not climes unclose, behind
The lashes' scarcely faltering jet,
Which star he sees since Hesper set.

LULLABY

Hush, lullay,
Your treasures all
Encrust with rust.
Your trinket pleasures
Fall
To dust.
Beneath the sapphire arch
Upon the grassy floor
Is nothing more
To hold,
And play is over old.
Your eyes
In sleepy fever gleam,
Your lids droop
To their dream.
You wander late alone,
The flesh frets on the bone,
Your love fails
In your breast.
Here is the pillow.
Rest.

Langston Hughes

LANGSTON HUGHES was born February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri. He was brought up in cities in the Middle West, graduated from Central High School in Cleveland, and at eighteen became a teacher of English in Mexico, where he lived for a year and a half. He spent a year at Columbia University and some time as a worker on the high seas. Hughes' next move was a foreign hegira to Paris in midwinter with seven dollars in his pocket. He stayed in France ten months, worked his way through Italy and Spain, and returned to New York with twenty-five cents. Working as a busboy in Washington, he was discovered by Vachel Lindsay, who read several of his poems to a fashionable audience in the very hotel in which Hughes carried trays of dishes.

The Weary Blues, Hughes' first volume, appeared in January, 1926. One of the poems had already won first prize in a contest conducted by *Opportunity,* a magazine which did great service in fostering creative work by Negroes. Hughes' poetry appearing at the same time as Countee Cullen's justified those who claimed we were witnessing a revival of Negro art. The Negroes themselves began to prove the quality of their inheritance. Johnson's *The Book of American Negro Poetry* appeared, three collections of American Negro spirituals disclosed the melodic fertility of the black singers, and various collections of "blues" revealed how greatly contemporary American composers were indebted to the complicated rhythms of the dark musicians. Hughes was the first to express the spirit of these blues in words. In his note

to his second volume, *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927), he writes, "The *Blues,* unlike the *Spirituals,* have a strict poetic pattern: one long line repeated and a third line to rhyme with the first two. Sometimes the second line in repetition is slightly changed and sometimes, but very seldom, it is omitted. The mood of the *Blues* is almost always despondency, but when they are sung people laugh."

Although at least half of Hughes' work centers about the blues, much of his poetry is grim in an essentially urban manner. His portraits of Negro workmen (as evidenced in the remarkable "Brass Spittoons" with its similarity in symbols to Anna Hempstead Branch's "The Monk in the Kitchen") are more memorable than those produced by any of his compatriots. Beneath the physical struggle one senses the more suffering spirit. *Dear Lovely Death* (1931), enlarged Hughes gamut, but *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942) and *Fields of Wonder* (1947) retreat into his old idiom. With Arna Bontemps, Hughes compiled *The Poetry of the Negro* (1949).

HOMESICK BLUES

De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air.
De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air.
Ever' time de trains pass
I wants to go somewhere.

I went down to de station;
Ma heart was in ma mouth.
Went down to de station;
Heart was in ma mouth.
Lookin' for a box car
To roll me to de South.

Homesick blues, Lawd,
'S a terrible thing to have.
Homesick blues is
A terrible thing to have.
To keep from cryin'
I opens ma mouth an' laughs.

BRASS SPITTOONS

Clean the spittoons, boy.
    Detroit,
    Chicago,
    Atlantic City,
    Palm Beach.
Clean the spittoons.
The steam in hotel kitchens,
And the smoke in hotel lobbies,
And the slime in hotel spittoons:
Part of my life.
    Hey, boy!
    A nickel,
    A dime,
    A dollar,
Two dollars a day.
    Hey, boy!
    A nickel,
    A dime,
    A dollar,
    Two dollars
Buys shoes for the baby.
House rent to pay.
Church on Sunday.
    My God!

Babies and church
and women and Sunday
all mixed up with dimes and
dollars and clean spittoons
and house rent to pay.
    Hey, boy!

A bright bowl of brass is beautiful to the
    Lord.
Bright polished brass like the cymbals
Of King David's dancers,
Like the wine cups of Solomon.
    Hey, boy!
A clean spittoon on the altar of the Lord.
A clean bright spittoon all newly polished,—
At least I can offer that.
    Com'mere, boy!

SATURDAY NIGHT

Play it once.
O, play it some more.
Charlie is a gambler
An' Sadie is a whore.
  A glass o' whiskey
  An' a glass o' gin:
  Strut, Mr. Charlie,
  Till de dawn comes in.
Pawn yo' gold watch
An' diamond ring.
Git a quart o' licker.
Let's shake dat thing!
  Skee-de-dad! De-dad!
  Doo-doo-doo!
  Won't be nothin' left
  When de worms git through.
  An' you's a long time
  Dead
  When you is
  Dead, too.
So beat dat drum, boy!
Shout dat song:
Shake 'em up an' shake 'em up
All night long.
  Hey! Hey!
  Ho . . . Hum!
  Do it, Mr. Charlie,
  Till de red dawn come.

JAZZ BAND IN A PARISIAN CABARET

Play that thing,
Jazz band!
Play it for the lords and ladies,
For the dukes and counts,
For the whores and gigolos,
For the American millionaires,
And the schoolteachers
Out for a spree.
Play it,
Jazz band!
You know that tune
That laughs and cries at the same time.
You know it.
  May I?
  Mais oui.
  Mein Gott!
  Parece una rumba.
Play it, jazz band!
You've got seven languages to speak in
And then some,
Even if you do come from Georgia.
  Can I go home wid yuh, sweetie?
  Sure.

DRUM

Bear in mind
That death is a drum
Beating for ever
Till the last worms come
To answer its call,
Till the last stars fall,
Until the last atom
Is no atom at all,
Until time is lost
And there is no air
And space itself
Is nothing nowhere.
Death is a drum,
A signal drum,
Calling all life
To Come! Come!
Come!

FLORIDA ROAD WORKERS

I'm makin' a road
For the cars
To fly by on.
Makin' a road
Through the palmetto thicket
For light and civilization
To travel on.

Makin' a road
For the rich old white men
To sweep over in their big cars
And leave me standin' here.

Sure,
A road helps all of us!
White folks ride—
And I get to see 'em ride.
I ain't never seen nobody
Ride so fine before.
Hey buddy!
Look at me.
I'm making a road!

Kenneth Fearing

KENNETH FEARING was born in Chicago in 1902 and was graduated from the University of Wisconsin. After graduation, he worked in many capacities; he became a salesman, a millhand, a newspaper reporter, and a free-lance writer. In 1939 he taught poetry technique at the League of American Writers.

His first book of poems, *Angel Arms* (1929), flashes before the reader a set of close-ups of the contemporary scene in which "hatred and pity are exactly mixed." *Poems* (1935) and *Dead Reckoning* (1938) mark a further advance in swiftly paced and provocative verse. Fearing is not unaware of the provocation. In an introduction to his *Collected Poems* (1940) he says: "The idea underlying my poetry, as well as anything I write, is that it must be exciting." Fearing knows what he is about; if it does nothing else, his poetry excites. Its fault is a self-imposed restriction of tone; Fearing has purposely discarded "the entire bag of conventions and codes usually associated with poetry." While this is commendable (if possible), it forces upon the poet a limitation even more severe than the traditional demands. Worse, it makes for a prescribed attitude and a sense of final flatness. To save his work from monotony, Fearing ranges widely for his material; charwomen, gangsters, presidents of the Browning Writing League, Harry from the warehouse, Myrtle from the Five and Dime, checkers at the morgue, coupon-clippers, high-diving queens, fifth columnists, big business executives, and crystal-gazers are exposed against the modern setting. The idiom which Fearing uses is savagely appropriate: it is the glaring script of neon lights, the language of locked hotel rooms and casual death, the brusque statement of headlines, the jargon of advertising patter, the slang of the streets, chatter of pent-houses and hospitals, dialectics in the boiler-room, patois of mortgages and the movies. Fearing satirizes big business by his wry employment of metropolitan images and ironically twisted slogans. "Portrait" is a minor masterpiece of composite delineation; it is a bitter cartoon, but a broadly humorous and recognizable picture. "American Rhapsody (4)," far from comic, is as poignant as it is shrewd.

If this poetry does not achieve emphasis as poetry, it gains tension by its very pitch and tempo. Fearing is at his worst when he attempts the mystical-oracular; he loses himself and his reader in a blur of mumbled implications and vague, unfinished gestures. He is at his best in his characters and caricatures, in his ominous pictures of the depression, in the sense of spiritual estrangement, in the maladjusted terrors and the doomed suspense of a speeded-up civilization. The varied elements are brought to a climax in "Readings, Forecasts, Personal Guidance," a poem which combines vision and hard anguish.

Afternoon of a Pawnbroker (1944) and *Stranger at Coney Island* (1948) mix anger and irony. They pile up montages of casual horror, of a nightmare world populated by victims of incurable neuroses. The individual is helpless, lost in a chaos of the commonplace, but the poetry is continually exciting.

The tension of Fearing's poetry is carried over into such novels of suspense as *The Hospital, Dagger of the Mind,* and *The Big Clock.*

THE PEOPLE VS. THE PEOPLE

I have never seen him, this invisible member of the panel, this thirteenth juror, but I have certain clues;
I know, after so many years of practice, though I cannot prove I know;
It is enough to say, I know that I know.

He is five feet nine or ten, with piercing, bright, triumphant eyes;
He needs glasses, which he will not wear, and he is almost certainly stone deaf.
(Cf. Blair vs. Gregg, which he utterly ruined.)
He is the juror forever looking out of the window, secretly smiling, when you make your telling point.
The one who is wide awake when you think he is asleep. The man who naps with his eyes wide open.
Those same triumphant eyes.
He is the man who knows. And knows that he knows.

His hair is meager and he wears wash ties, but these are not important points.
He likes the legal atmosphere, that is plain, because he is always there.
It is the decent, the orderly procedure that he likes.
He is the juror who arrived first, though you thought he was late; the one who failed to return from lunch, though you had not noticed.
Let me put it like this: He is the cause of your vague uneasiness when you glance about and see that the other twelve are all right.

I would know him if I were to see him, I could swear to his identity, if I actually saw him once;
I nearly overheard him, when I was for the defense: "They never indict anyone unless they are guilty";
And when I was the State: "A poor man (or a rich man) doesn't stand a chance."
Always, before the trial's end, he wants to know if the sergeant knew the moon was full on that particular night.

And none of this matters, except I am convinced he is the unseen juror bribed, bought, and planted by The People,
An enemy of reason and precedent, a friend of illogic,
Something, I now know, that I know that I really know—

And he or anyone else is welcome to my Blackstone, or my crowded shelves of standard books,
In exchange for the monumental works I am convinced he has been writing through the years:
"The Rules of Hearsay"; "The Laws of Rumor";
"An Omnibus Guide to Chance and Superstition," by One Who Knows.

PORTRAIT

The clear brown eyes, kindly and alert, with 12-20 vision, give confident regard
to the passing world through R. K. Lampert & Company lenses framed in gold;
His soul, however, is all his own;
Arndt Brothers necktie and hat (with feather) supply a touch of youth.

With his soul his own, he drives, drives, chats and drives,
The first and second bicuspids, lower right, replaced by bridge-work, while two
incisors have porcelain crowns;

(Render unto Federal, state and city Caesar, but not unto time;
Render nothing unto time until Amalgamated Death serves final notice, in proper
form;

The vault is ready;
The will has been drawn by Clagget, Clagget, Clagget & Brown;
The policies are adequate, Confidential's best, reimbursing for disability, partial or
complete, with double indemnity should the end be a pure and simple accident)

Nothing unto time,
Nothing unto change, nothing unto fate,
Nothing unto you, and nothing unto me, or to any other known or unknown party
or parties, living or deceased;

But Mercury shoes, with special arch supports, take much of the wear and tear;
On the course, a custombuilt driver corrects a tendency to slice;
Love's ravages have been repaired (it was a textbook case) by Drs. Schultz, Lightner,
Mannheim, and Goode,

While all of it is enclosed in excellent tweed, with Mr. Baumer's personal attention
to the shoulders and the waist;
And all of it now roving, chatting amiably through space in a Plymouth 6,
With his soul (his own) at peace, soothed by Walter Lippmann, and sustained by
Haig & Haig.

AMERICAN RHAPSODY (4)

First you bite your fingernails. And then you comb your hair again. And then you
wait. And wait.
(They say, you know, that first you lie. And then you steal, they say. And then,
they say, you kill.)

Then the doorbell rings. Then Peg drops in. And Bill. And Jane. And Doc.
And first you talk, and smoke, and hear the news and have a drink. Then you
walk down the stairs.
And you dine, then, and go to a show after that, perhaps, and after that a night
spot, and after that come home again, and climb the stairs again, and again go
to bed.

But first Peg argues, and Doc replies. First you dance the same dance and you drink
the same drink you always drank before.
And the piano builds a roof of notes above the world.

And the trumpet weaves a dome of music through space. And the drum makes a ceiling over space and time and night.
And then the table-wit. And then the check. Then home again to bed.
But first, the stairs.

And do you now, baby, as you climb the stairs, do you still feel as you felt back there?
Do you feel again as you felt this morning? And the night before? And then the night before that?

(They say, you know, that first you hear voices. And then you have visions, they say. Then, they say, you kick and scream and rave.)

Or do you feel: What is one more night in a lifetime of nights?
What is one more death, or friendship, or divorce out of two, or three? Or four? Or five?
One more face among so many, many faces, one more life among so many million lives?

But first, baby, as you climb and count the stairs (and they total the same) did you, sometime or somewhere, have a different idea?
Is this, baby, what you were born to feel, and do, and be?

READINGS, FORECASTS, PERSONAL GUIDANCE

It is not—I swear it by every fiery omen to be seen these nights in every quarter of the heavens, I affirm it by all the monstrous portents of the earth and of the sea—
It is not that my belief in the true and mystic science is shaken, nor that I have lost faith in the magic of the cards, or in the augury of dreams, or in the great and good divinity of the stars.
No, I know still whose science fits the promise to the inquirer's need, invariably, for a change: Mine. My science foretells the wished-for journey, the business adjustment, the handsome stranger. (Each of these is considered a decided change.)
And I know whose skill weighs matrimony, risks a flyer in steel or wheat against the vagaries of the moon.
(Planet of dreams, of mothers and of children, goddess of sailors and of all adventurers, forgive the liberty. But a man must eat.) My skill,
Mine, and the cunning and the patience. (Two dollars for the horoscope in brief and five for a twelve months' forecast in detail.)

No, it is this: The wonders that I have seen with my own eyes.

It is this: That still these people know, as I do not, that what has never been on earth before may still well come to pass,
That always, always there are new and brighter things beneath the sun,
That surely, in bargain basements or in walk-up flats, it must be so that still from time to time they hear wild angel voices speak.

It is this: That I have known them for what they are,
Seen thievery written plainly in their planets, found greed and murder and worse in their birth dates and their numbers, guilt etched in every line of every palm;

But still a light burns through the eyes they turn to me, a need more moving than the damned and dirty dollars (which I must take) that form the pattern of their larger hopes and deeper fears.

And it comes to this: That always I feel another hand, not mine, has drawn and turned the card to find some incredible ace,
Always another word I did not write appears in the spirit parchment prepared by me,
Always another face I do not know shows in the dream, the crystal globe, or the flame.

And finally, this: Corrupt, in a world bankrupt and corrupt, what have I got to do with these miracles?
If they want miracles, let them consult someone else.
Would they, in extremity, ask them of a physician? Or expect them, in desperation, of an attorney? Or of a priest? Or of a poet?

Nevertheless, a man must eat.
Mrs. Raeburn is expected at five. She will communicate with a number of friends and relatives long deceased.

Marya Zaturenska

MARYA ZATURENSKA was born in September, 1902, in Kiev, Russia. Her father came here after the Russo-Japanese War but had difficulty bringing over his wife and two children. The child Marya was eight years old when she came to the United States, and conditions were such that at thirteen she had to leave school and find work. Since she had no training of any kind, she had to accept all sorts of odd jobs in factories and department stores. Starting to write poetry in her early teens, she attended night high school, secured several scholarships, attended the University of Wisconsin, and qualified as a librarian. In 1925 she married the poet Horace Gregory.

Marya Zaturenska's earliest verse was readily accepted by the magazines, but the poet's critical instinct prevented exploitation as an infant prodigy. Her insights, fresh and vivid, are apparent in *Threshold and Hearth* (1934). Fluid though this writing is, it is never facile; it moves with a power which is highly imaginative but always restrained. The restraint is so characteristic that it misled the critics. Even when *Cold Morning Sky* (1937) won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry the reviewers spoke of her precisions as "detached," "abstract," and "removed from the immediate world." In spite of its distinction, her work was so little known that her name was not even listed in the 1940 edition of Millett's comprehensive *Contemporary American Authors.*

The Listening Landscape (1941) is the very best of her verse, richest in feeling, ripest in expression. In common with the preceding volumes it is deceptive in its smoothness; beneath the calm exterior there is a prevailing and penetrative glow. Here the quick communication and sure craft go hand in hand. "Interview in

Midsummer" is an uncanny trance-like monolog, but what is unsaid is envisioned in any woman's universe; "The White Dress" is an extraordinary evocation, the growth of a symbol from haunting beauty to horrible possession; "The Lovers" is, in skillful repetitions and contrapuntal images, one of the most musical love-poems of our time. Even the "classical" poems, such as the "Head of Medusa," bring full life to mythological figures, not only reanimating a legend but creating a new and complex character.

There is in this poetry a combination which no contemporary has quite achieved: a fusion of definite picture and indefinite symbolism, of word-music and parable. Experience is transmuted, resolved, and transcended; "The Daisy" is only one example of subtlety resolved into simplicity. The lyrical impulse is extended in individualized images and personal landscapes; it searches but it never forgets to sing. If the tone is sometimes faraway, it is because this poet is occupied with a sense of timelessness.

Hers is an art of vivid condensation, of wide allusions in compact phrases: "the swan-feathered snow," "the heart's best weather," "the grass blade's thin precision," "the lip-red poppy scenting earth with sleep," "the intricate unholiness of pain." Superficially these lyrics may seem to be pastoral-historical—the tradition of Marvell, Waller, and Clare—but the synthesis is as remarkable as it is new: a combination of shining observation and shadowed allegory. In spirit as well as substance this verse has a form of its own, a shape delicate and pure. *The Golden Mirror* (1944) is a continuation of her half-musing half-singing lines which have the contours of a dream brought vividly to life.

THE DAISY

Having so rich a treasury, so fine a hoard
Of beauty water-bright before my eyes,
I plucked the daisy only, simple and white
In its fringed frock and brooch of innocent gold.

So is all equilibrium restored:
I leave the noontide wealth of richer bloom
To the destroyer, the impatient ravisher,
The intemperate bee, the immoderate bird.

Of all this beauty felt and seen and heard
I can be frugal and devout and plain,
Deprived so long of light and air and grass,
The shyest flower is sweetest to uncover.

How poor I was: and yet no richer lover
Discovered joy so deep in earth and water;
And in the air that fades from blue to pearl,
And in a flower white-frocked like my small daughter.

THE LOVERS

My glittering sky, high, clear, profound,
Be thou my Alps. I'll be thy summer.

I'll be thy summer and the ground
Where all thy garlands, all thy honors found
In the sky's mirror, fire and dew contend,
Which shall excel, which shall transcend.

Be thou my mountain heights, I'll be the plain,
Warm, simple, sweet, complaisant to the rain,
Complaisant to the rain and wind, the common day.
I'll be the daisy field where happy children play,
Where happy children play, where the world's voice is heard
In a tree, in the grass, in the storm, in a bird.

Be thou the diamond water-crisp, and I the fire
Rosy and quick within the ruby's flame,
Within the ruby's flame inscribe my name
Sensitive on the spirit's delicate wire,
Send occult messages no human tongue can say.
Be thou the night, I'll be the day.

I'll be the day, so fresh, so morning bright,
And thy youth's dawning and the fields of light,
The fields of light that change dark to bright.
Thou my tranquillity, I thy delight,
Thou the thin light of opals on my wrist
And I the evening tinted heaven brooding amethyst.

Be thou the waterbrook and I the hart
Drinking in coolness from rain moistened heat,
Drinking in coolness where the willows part,
And where the willows part, two diverse shadows meet.
Be thou the sheltered pool, and I the busy street
And we the shades that one another greet.

Change then forever, be forever the same,
Who have one road, one destiny, one name,
One destiny, one name, jewel, dew, fire (never the same),
The mountain and the river, city and plain.
Separate, distinct, divided, parted, meeting ever
What the eye loses, let the heart recover.

THE WHITE DRESS

Imperceptively the world became haunted by her white dress.
Walking in forest or garden, he would start to see,
Her flying form; sudden, swift, brief as a caress
The flash of her white dress against a darkening tree.

And with forced unconcern, withheld desire, and pain
He beheld her at night; and when sleepless in his bed,
Her light footfalls seemed loud as cymbals; deep as his disdain,
Her whiteness entered his heart, flowed through from feet to head.

Or it was her face at a window, her swift knock at the door,
Then she appeared in her white dress, her face as white as her gown;
Like snow in midsummer she came and left the rich day poor;
And the sun chilled and grew higher, remote, and the moon slipped down

So the years passed; more fierce in pursuit her image grew;
She became the dream abjured, the ill uncured, the deed undone,
The life one never lived, the answer one never knew,
Till the white shadow swayed the moon, stayed the expiring sun,

Until at his life's end, the shadow of the white face, the white dress
Became his inmost thought, his private wound, the word unspoken,
All that he cherished in failure, all that had failed his success;
She became the crystal orb, half-seen, untouched, unbroken.

There on his death bed, kneeling at the bed's foot, he trembling saw,
The image of the Mother-Goddess, enormous, archaic, cruel,
Overpowering the universe, creating her own inexorable law,
Molded of stone, but her fire and ice flooded the room like a pool.

And she was the shadow in the white dress, no longer slight and flying,
But solid as death. Her cold, firm, downward look,
Brought close to the dissolving mind the marvellous act of dying,
And on her lap, the clasped, closed, iron book.

HEAD OF MEDUSA

How long she waited for her executioner!
She who froze life to stone, whose hissing hair
Once grew as waved and flowing as the sea,
Ash-damp and dreadful now. The fabulous mystery, the shame,
Forever in that cave where man nor beast came

Came and returned to life; so great the curse
Of the invulnerable enemy whose eyes immerse
Medusa's soul in this foul universe,
Turns her warm body passionate, fleshed with fire,
Into this loathsome thing no men desire.

Cast in the final loneliness she must lie
Knowing that all who look on her will die
(The savage sorrow frozen in her sigh)
Even as she meets the look of fear and hate.
Their blood dries and their flesh must expiate.

But now her Perseus comes, foe or deliverer?
Bringing the welcome end. For whom her serpents stir
Brute force and animal terror, the soul's tormentor
Subside; low-water calm, slow, unperceptively
Comes he who sets her free.

And now the end nears. Through steelpoint warm blood
Shall flow in purification. Her world made clean and good,
Through pain the Immortal's hatred is withstood.
Even now in the gold shield
One faces her, his life-blood uncongealed,

Prepares for the quick stroke that sets her free
From the cold terror in all eyes that see.
Even now the slayer's hand displays the mystery
That once vainglorious and guilty head,
Emptied of all its sorrow and its dread!

WOMAN AT THE PIANO

Rippling in the ocean of that darkening room,
The music poured from the thin hands, widening, gathering
The floods of descending night; flying from the keys
The sound of memory, then the woman singing
Vibrant and full, the resonant echoes scattered
Into a stranger's language, into a foreign country.

The rococo clock on the mantel strikes out its chimes
The night wind sighing through the open windows,
Sends in its signals, wishes, memories.
The withdrawn room grows immense with hallucination
Clear woman's voice, long fingers whitely straying
Over the speaking keys do you hear the answer?
Will the male voice answer? see stirring through the walls
Behind the rustling curtains in the declining light
How another voice still silent seems to tremble.

Patience is all. Unloved, unlovable, lonely,
It sits on the neglected sofa, watches the fingers
Draw out the significant music, hears the finale
Shatter the torpor of the dying room.
Now the trees through open windows aspire and flame
Now there are footsteps, echoes, reveries
Now two voices sound in the room where only one
Wove intricate sweetness from the simple keys.
Two voices ring in the dawn, the morning enters.

THE TEMPEST

As in a Watteau fete of rose and silver blue,
The intense colors lift the dreamy world
Into a sharper vision than it knew,
The graceful figures vast in miniature.

And deepens overhead the dainty, sweeping azure.

So in the cold and limpid morning air,
When but a hint of sun was felt, we breathed the storm

Companioned by June light. It tinged the warm,
Half-sleeping flowers. Unseen, but everywhere
We felt the tempest's uncreated form,

Gathering its might, its bright and nervous flare.

See how its silver hand disturbs the clouds
And the soul's solitude in anger wakes
The waving revery of grass, and whispering shakes
The airy heavens into the drifting lakes,

While rain falls gently from the savage eyes.

And silken-sharp the dazzling thunder falls
Upon the startled land. The rising, falling dart
Sudden and piercing on the summer's heart;
And while from tree to tree the voice of fire calls

The unleashed tempest shakes the garden walls.

Ogden Nash

OGDEN NASH was born August 19, 1902, in Rye, New York, of a distinguished and seemingly ubiquitous family. He claims to have had ten thousand cousins in North Carolina; his great-great-grandfather was Revolutionary Governor of the state, and the latter's brother, General Francis Nash, gave his name to Nashville, Tennessee. Ogden Nash spent a year at St. George's School in Rhode Island, where, he says, he lost his entire nervous system carving lamb for a table of fourteen-year-olds. He entered Harvard in the class of 1924, but left after one year.

To continue his biography in his own words: "Came to New York to make my fortune as a bond salesman; in two years I sold one bond—to my godmother. However, I saw a lot of good movies. Next went to work writing car cards. After two years of that I landed in the advertising department of Doubleday. That was 1925, and I doubledayed until 1931." After 1931, Nash engaged in a succession of varied activities: he was on the staff of *The New Yorker;* became associated with two publishing firms; married and lived in Baltimore; had two daughters and moved to Hollywood, where he wrote—or rewrote—scenarios.

Nash's liveliest effects are in *Free Wheeling* (1931), *The Bad Parent's Garden of Verse* (1936), and *I'm a Stranger Here Myself* (1938), but all his volumes are characterized by rollicking spirits, easy satire, and a slightly insane manner. The style is bantering, deceptively haphazard, but the end is often a kind of social criticism. For most readers, however, Nash's charm lies in his irresponsible absurdities, in the impudent rhymes which do not quite rhyme, in his way of giving a new twist to an old subject. He can be surprisingly shrewd and nonsensical at the same time; his technique is unique, a completely new form of verse.

The Face Is Familiar (1940) contains two hundred eighty poems selected from

Nash's six preceding volumes. *Good Intentions* (1942) and *Versus* (1949), characterized by its faintly bellicose title, are notable attacks on pride and prejudice and people who "in a French eatery discover they can talk like Sacha Guitry." His is inevitably The Golden Trashery of Ogden Nashery.

THE RHINOCEROS

The rhino is a homely beast,
For human eyes he's not a feast,
But you and I will never know
Why nature chose to make him so.
Farewell, farewell, you old rhinoceros,
I'll stare at something less prepoceros!

ADVENTURES OF ISABEL

Isabel met an enormous bear;
Isabel, Isabel, didn't care.
The bear was hungry, the bear was ravenous,
The bear's big mouth was cruel and cavernous.
The bear said, Isabel, glad to meet you,
How do, Isabel, now I'll eat you!
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry;
Isabel didn't scream or scurry.
She washed her hands and she straightened her hair up,
Then Isabel quietly ate the bear up.

Once on a night as black as pitch
Isabel met a wicked old witch.
The witch's face was cross and wrinkled,
The witch's gums with teeth were sprinkled.
Ho, ho, Isabel! the old witch crowed,
I'll turn you into an ugly toad!
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry;
Isabel didn't scream or scurry.
She showed no rage and she showed no rancor,
But she turned the witch into milk and drank her.

Isabel met a hideous giant,
Isabel continued self-reliant.
The giant was hairy, the giant was horrid,
He had one eye in the middle of his forehead.
Good morning, Isabel, the giant said,
I'll grind your bones to make my bread.
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry;
Isabel didn't scream or scurry.
She nibbled the zwieback that she always fed off,
And when it was gone, she cut the giant's head off.

Isabel met a troublesome doctor,
He punched and poked till he really shocked her.

The doctor's talk was of coughs and chills,
And the doctor's satchel bulged with pills.
The doctor said unto Isabel,
Swallow this, it will make you well.
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry;
Isabel didn't scream or scurry.
She took those pills from the pill-concoctor,
And Isabel calmly cured the doctor.

GOLLY, HOW TRUTH WILL OUT!

How does a person get to be a capable liar?
That is something that I respectfully inquiar,
Because I don't believe a person will ever set the world on fire
Unless they are a capable lire.
Some wise man said that words were given to us to conceal our thoughts,
But if a person has nothing but truthful words why their thoughts haven't even the protection of a pair of panties or shoughts,
And a naked thought is ineffectual as well as improper,
And hasn't a chance in the presence of a glib chinchilla-clad whopper.
One of the greatest abilities a person can have, I guess,
Is the ability to say Yes when they mean No and No when they mean Yes.
Oh to be Machiavellian, oh to be unscrupulous, oh, to be glib!
Oh to be ever prepared with a plausible fib!
Because then a dinner engagement or a contract or a treaty is no longer a fetter,
Because liars can just logically lie their way out of it if they don't like it or if one comes along that they like better;
And do you think their conscience prickles?
No, it tickles.
And please believe that I mean every one of these lines as I am writing them
Because once there was a small boy who was sent to the drugstore to buy some bitter stuff to put on his nails to keep him from biting them,
And in his humiliation he tried to lie to the clerk
And it didn't work,
Because he said My mother sent me to buy some bitter stuff for a friend of mine's nails that bites them, and the clerk smiled wisely and said I wonder who that friend could be,
And the small boy broke down and said Me,
And it was me, or at least I was him,
And all my subsequent attempts at subterfuge have been equally grim,
And that is why I admire a suave prevarication because I prevaricate so awkwardly and gauchely,
And that is why I can never amount to anything politically or socially.

SONG TO BE SUNG BY THE FATHER OF INFANT FEMALE CHILDREN

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky;
Contrariwise, my blood runs cold
When little boys go by.

For little boys as little boys,
No special hate I carry,
But now and then they grow to men,
And when they do, they marry.
No matter how they tarry,
Eventually they marry.
And, swine among the pearls,
They marry little girls.

Oh, somewhere, somewhere, an infant plays,
With parents who feed and clothe him.
Their lips are sticky with pride and praise,
But I have begun to loathe him.
Yes, I loathe with a loathing shameless
This child who to me is nameless.
This bachelor child in his carriage
Gives never a thought to marriage,
But a person can hardly say knife
Before he will hunt him a wife.

I never see an infant (male),
A-sleeping in the sun,
Without I turn a trifle pale
And think, is he the one?
Oh, first he'll want to crop his curls,
And then he'll want a pony,
And then he'll think of pretty girls
And holy matrimony.
He'll put away his pony,
And sigh for matrimony.
A cat without a mouse
Is he without a spouse.

Oh, somewhere he bubbles, bubbles of milk,
And quietly sucks his thumbs;
His cheeks are roses painted on silk,
And his teeth are tucked in his gums.
But alas, the teeth will begin to grow,
And the bubbles will cease to bubble;
Given a score of years or so,
The roses will turn to stubble.
He'll sell a bond, or he'll write a book,
And his eyes will get that acquisitive look,
And raging and ravenous for the kill,
He'll boldly ask for the hand of Jill.
This infant whose middle
Is diapered still
Will want to marry
My daughter Jill.

Oh sweet be his slumber and moist his middle!
My dreams, I fear, are infanticiddle.
A fig for embryo Lohengrins!

I'll open all of his safety pins,
I'll pepper his powder and salt his bottle,
And give him readings from Aristotle,
Sand for his spinach I'll gladly bring,
And tabasco sauce for his teething ring,
And an elegant, elegant alligator
To play with in his perambulator.
Then perhaps he'll struggle through fire and water
To marry somebody *else's* daughter!

THE EVENING OUT

You have your hat and coat on and she says she will be right down,
And you hope so because it is getting late and you are dining on the other side of town,
And you are pretty sure she can't take long,
Because when you left her she already looked as neat and snappy as a Cole Porter song,
So you stand around thinking of various things and wondering why good rye costs more than Scotch.
And after a while you begin to look at your watch,
And so goes ten minutes, and then fifteen minutes, and then half an hour,
And you listen for the sound of water running because you suspect she may have gone back for a bath or a shower,
Or maybe she is taking a nap,
Or possibly getting up a subscription for the benefit of the children of the mouse that she said mean things about last night but she is now sorry got caught in a trap,
Or maybe she decided her hair was a mess and is now shampooing it,
But whatever she is up to, she is a long time doing it,
And finally she comes down and says she is sorry she couldn't find the right lipstick, that's why she was so slow,
And you look at her and she looks marvelous but not a bit more marvelous than she did when you left her forty-five minutes ago,
And you tell her she looks ravishing and she says No, she is a sight,
And you reflect that you are now an hour late, but at any rate she is now groomed for the rest of the night,
So you get to your destination and there's the ladies dressing room and before you know it she's in it,
But she says she'll be back in a minute,
And so she is, but not to tarry,
No, only to ask you for her bag, which she has forgotten she had asked you to carry,
So you linger in the lobby
And wish you had a nice portable hobby,
And you try to pass the time seeing how much you can remember of the poetry you learned in school, both good verse and bad verse,
And eventually she re-appears just about as you have decided she was in the middle of *Anthony Adverse,*

And she doesn't apologize, but glances at you as if you were Bluebeard or Scrooge,
And says why didn't you tell her she had on too much rouge?
And you look to see what new tint she has acquired,
And she looks just the same as she did before she retired,
So you dine, and reach the theater in time for the third act, and then go somewhere to dance and sup,
And she says she looks like a scarecrow, she has to go straighten up,
So then you don't see her for quite a long time,
But at last you see her for a moment when she comes out to ask if you will lend her a dime,
The moral of all which is that you will have just as much of her company and still save considerable on cover charges and beverages and grub
If instead of taking her out on the town, you settle her in a nice comfortable dressing room and then go off and spend the evening at the Club.

THE SEVEN SPIRITUAL AGES OF MRS. MARMADUKE MOORE

Mrs. Marmaduke Moore, at the age of ten
(Her name was Jemima Jevons then),
Was the quaintest of little country maids.
Her pigtails slapped on her shoulderblades;
She fed the chickens, and told the truth
And could spit like a boy through a broken tooth.
She could climb a tree to the topmost perch,
And she used to pray in the Methodist church.

At the age of twenty her heart was pure,
And she caught the fancy of Mr. Moore.
He broke his troth (to a girl named Alice),
And carried her off to his city palace,
Where she soon forgot her childhood piety
And joined in the orgies of high society.
Her voice grew English, or, say, Australian,
And she studied to be an Episcopalian.

At thirty our lives are still before us,
But Mr. Moore had a friend in the chorus.
Connubial bliss was overthrown
And Mrs. Moore now slumbered alone.
Hers was a nature that craved affection;
She gave herself up to introspection;
Then, finding theosophy rather dry,
Found peace in the sweet Bahai and Bahai.

Forty! and still an abandoned wife.
She felt old urges stirring to life.
She dipped her locks in a bowl of henna
And booked a passage through to Vienna.

She paid a professor a huge emolument
To demonstrate what his ponderous volume meant.
Returning, she preached to the unemployed
The gospel according to St. Freud.

Fifty! she haunted museums and galleries,
And pleased young men by augmenting their salaries.
Oh, it shouldn't occur, but it does occur,
That poets are made by fools like her.
Her salon was full of frangipani,
Roumanian, Russian and Hindustani,
And she conquered par as well as bogey
By reading a book and going Yogi.

Sixty! and time was on her hands—
Maybe remorse and maybe glands.
She felt a need for a free confession
To publish each youthful indiscretion,
And before she was gathered to her mothers,
To compare her sinlets with those of others,
Mrs. Moore gave a joyous whoop,
And immersed herself in the Oxford group.

That is the story of Mrs. Moore,
As far as it goes. But of this I'm sure—
When seventy stares her in the face
She'll have found some other state of grace.
Mohammed may be her Lord and master,
Or Zeus, or Mithros, or Zoroaster.
For when a lady is badly sexed
God knows what God is coming next.

THE PURIST

I give you now Professor Twist,
A conscientious scientist.
Trustees exclaimed, "He never bungles!"
And sent him off to distant jungles.
Camped on a tropic riverside,
One day he missed his loving bride.
She had, the guide informed him later,
Been eaten by an alligator.
Professor Twist could not but smile.
"You mean," he said, "a crocodile."

Countee Cullen

COUNTEE CULLEN was born in New York City, May 30, 1903. He was educated in the New York schools and at New York University, and was graduated with the class of 1925. A year later he received his M.A. at Harvard (1926).

Color (1925) and *Copper Sun* (1927) suffer not only from the poet's influences but from his own juvenilia. There is, however, no gainsaying his gift of epigram and the neatness of his execution. Lacking the deep racial quality of Langston Hughes, Cullen's is a more literary accomplishment. If his verse is not as black as it might be painted, it is bold in concept and metaphor. "Heritage," which, in spite of reminiscences of Ralph Hodgson and Edna Millay, marks the peak of his first volume, still stands as one of the finest poems produced by an American Negro; it ranks with the best by James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes.

The Ballad of the Brown Girl (1927) appeared in the same year as his comprehensive anthology of Negro verse, *Caroling Dusk*, in which Cullen showed unexpected editorial acumen. *The Black Christ* (1930) suffers from the double handicap of formula in style and formula in feeling. Its program is ambitious and promises force; but here is no fire, only fluency. The poet seems to be victimized by his own epithets, and these lack surprise or conviction.

The Medea and Other Poems (1935) puts the Euripidean tragedy into powerful prose although the choruses were in verse. It was set to music by Virgil Thompson. *My Lives and How I Lost Them* (1942) is a whimsical fantasy in which the author "collaborates" with a cat. Cullen's most representative work dealt with pain and oppression, with defeat and desperate courage. He selected the best of his poems, *On These I Stand* (1947), shortly before his death, January 8, 1946.

SIMON THE CYRENIAN SPEAKS

He never spoke a word to me,
And yet He called my name.
He never gave a sign to see,
And yet I knew and came.

At first I said, "I will not bear
His cross upon my back—
He only seeks to place it there
Because my skin is black."

But He was dying for a dream,
And He was very meek;
And in His eyes there shone a gleam
Men journey far to seek.

It was Himself my pity bought;
I did for Christ alone
What all of Rome could not have wrought
With bruise of lash or stone.

THREE EPITAPHS

For My Grandmother
This lovely flower fell to seed.
Work gently, sun and rain—
She held it as her dying creed
That she would grow again.

For a Virgin Lady
For forty years I shunned the lust
Inherent in my clay:
Death only was so amorous
I let him have his way.

A Lady I Know
She thinks that even up in heaven
Her class lies late and snores,
While poor black cherubs rise at seven
To do celestial chores.

HERITAGE

What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?

So I lie, who all day long
Want no sound except the song
Sung by wild barbaric birds
Goading massive jungle herds,
Juggernauts of flesh that pass
Trampling tall defiant grass
Where young forest lovers lie,
Plighting troth beneath the sky.
So I lie, who always hear,
Though I cram against my ear
Both my thumbs and keep them there,
Great drums throbbing through the air.
So I lie, whose fount of pride,
Dear distress, and joy allied,
Is my somber flesh and skin,
With the dark blood dammed within
Like great pulsing tides of wine
That, I fear, must burst the fine
Channels of the chafing net
Where they surge and foam and fret.

Africa? A book one thumbs
Listlessly, till slumber comes.
Unremembered are her bats
Circling through the night, her cats
Crouching in the river reeds,
Stalking gentle flesh that feeds
By the river brink; no more
Does the bugle-throated roar
Cry that monarch claws have leapt
From the scabbards where they slept.
Silver snakes that once a year
Doff the lovely coats you wear,
Seek no covert in your fear
Lest a mortal eye should see;
What's your nakedness to me?
Here no leprous flowers rear
Fierce corollas in the air;
Here no bodies sleek and wet,
Dripping mingled rain and sweat,
Tread the savage measures of
Jungle boys and girls in love.

What is last year's snow to me,
Last year's anything? The tree
Budding yearly must forget
How its past arose or set—
Bough and blossom, flower, fruit,
Even what shy bird with mute
Wonder at her travail there,
Meekly labored in its hair.
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?

So I lie, who find no peace
Night or day, no slight release
From the unremittent beat
Made by cruel padded feet
Walking through my body's street.
Up and down they go, and back,
Treading out a jungle track.
So I lie, who never quite
Safely sleep from rain at night—
I can never rest at all
When the rain begins to fall;
Like a soul gone mad with pain
I must match its weird refrain;

Ever must I twist and squirm,
Writhing like a baited worm,
While its primal measures drip
Through my body, crying, "Strip!
Doff this new exuberance.
Come and dance the Lover's Dance!"
In an old remembered way
Rain works on me night and day.

Quaint, outlandish heathen gods
Black men fashion out of rods,
Clay and brittle bits of stone,
In a likeness of their own,
My conversion came high-priced;
I belong to Jesus Christ,
Preacher of humility;
Heathen gods are naught to me.
Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
So I make an idle boast;
Jesus of the twice-turned cheek,
Lamb of God, although I speak
With my mouth thus, in my heart
Do I play a double part.
Even at Thy glowing altar
Must my heart grow sick and falter
Wishing He I served were black,
Thinking then it would not lack
Precedent of pain to guide it,
Let who would or might deride it;
Surely then this flesh would know
Yours had borne a kindred woe.
Lord, I fashion dark gods, too,
Daring even to give You
Dark despairing features where,
Crowned with dark rebellious hair,
Patience wavers just so much as
Mortal grief compels, while touches
Quick and hot, of anger, rise
To smitten cheek and weary eyes.
Lord, forgive me if my need
Sometimes shapes a human creed.

All day long and all night through,
One thing only must I do:
Quench my pride and cool my blood,
Lest I perish in the flood.
Lest a hidden ember set
Timber that I thought was wet
Burning like the dryest flax,
Melting like the merest wax,
Lest the grave restore its dead.
Not yet has my heart or head
In the least way realized
They and I are civilized.

Merrill Moore

MERRILL MOORE was born in Columbia, Tennessee, September 11, 1903. Although he served an interneship in Boston and practices there, his backgrounds are entirely Southern: his father, John Trotwood Moore, the historian, was from Alabama; his mother from Missouri. He was educated in Nashville, received his B.A. at Vanderbilt University in 1924, his M.D. in 1928, and he was one of the group which made *The Fugitive* so provocative a periodical.

His work is vividly modern and it seems, at first glance, a paradox that this experimental poet has chosen the most classic form as his medium. Typography and tradition notwithstanding, *The Noise That Time Makes* (1929) is composed entirely of sonnets—and it is an open secret that Merrill Moore at the age of twenty-five had composed no less than nine thousand such sonnets. Nor is it a fiction that Moore learned shorthand in order to get more of his fourteen-liners done between classroom and laboratory. It should be said that neither Wyatt nor Philip Sidney would have sponsored had they even recognized Moore's employment of the key with which Shakespeare is supposed to have unlocked his heart. *The Noise That Time Makes* bears the first fruits of what might be considered a new hybrid: the American sonnet.

The characterization is not far-fetched, for Moore's cis-Atlantic accent, the native syncopated speed—so different from English and Italian tempi—the abrupt approach and swift abandonment are not only occasioned by local backgrounds but are the very essence of these poems. As a sonneteer in the strict sense, Moore commits every known heresy and invents several new ones. His rhyme-schemes seem as haphazard as they are numerous—the rhymes themselves are suspiciously unorthodox. His lines, instead of conforming to a precise meter, stretch themselves flexibly as their author throws in four or five extra syllables with prodigal nonchalance. His stanzas, instead of splitting neatly into customary octave and sestet, divide themselves anywhere with what seems sheer perversity. But there is nothing arbitrary about these "American sonnets." The innovations are essentially reasonable, and the reasons for them are quite simple. Merrill Moore's sonnets are, in some ways, the most spontaneous ever written in America, and their "naturalness" is reflected in their structure. The rhythms are based on the rise and fall of the breath rather than on the beat of the metronome. It is not scansion but stress which determines the line-length.

The charm of such poetry is the continual freshness which gives it the quality of improvisation. This is, likewise, a danger; for when Moore, seated before his instrument, lets his fingers wander as they list, his spontaneous playing extends itself into a fluency which is neither a virtue nor virtuosity. But the best of his lines reveal the serious eye and sensitive touch. "What if small birds are peppering the sky," "allowing fish-like thoughts to escape in thin streams trickling through the mind," "birds' indeclinable twitter"—the sonnets are full of such swift exactitudes. Suiting their pace to subjects limited only by a seemingly unlimited imagination, scarcely two of these poems are alike in shape or theme. "Shot Who? Jim Lane!" is as realistic as it is sectional; "Warning to One" is a tribute etched with acid; "How She Resolved to Act" is intuitive as it is whimsical; "The Book of How" quietly mingles the casual and the colossal.

Six Sides to a Man (1935), like its predecessor, presents no sequence but, with kaleidoscopic changes, a set of unrelated patterns. It is as if a flood of quickly igniting thoughts were impelled by recollections, sights, sounds, smells, the look and feel of words, with all their complex associations. These associations, intuitions, and memories both help and hinder each other, and in the clash the poem appears. This paradox of creation and conflict, this order out of chaos, is common to every poet; in Moore's case the process is somewhat more self-revealing. The factor that frequently deranges his aim is probably that his intuitions and unconscious associations are not in league with and often even opposed to his conscious intention.

M (1938), as the title indicates, actually includes one thousand poems, one thousand autobiographical sonnets. Using the sonnet as a focusing lens, the greatest mass production poet of his age directs the camera-eye, and presents a multitude of allusions, fantasies, case histories, brilliant pictures, and psychological shadows.

This, obviously, is not a poetry of perfection but of casual disassociation. It attains diverse and sometimes dazzling effects rather than integrated finish. It pushes its way through experience and dreams; it cannot stop to correct errors in taste and proportion. But Moore's mind is expansive, almost explosive—at thirty-seven he had published only a small part of the 50,000 sonnets he had written.

Incredibly energetic, Merrill Moore derives from no one, a multiple and bewildering phenomenon.

OLD MEN AND OLD WOMEN GOING HOME ON THE STREET CAR

Carrying their packages of groceries in particular
With books under their arms that maybe they will read
And possibly understand, old women lead
Their weaker selves up to the front of the car.

And old men who for thirty years have sat at desks
Survey them harmlessly.
They regard each other
As forgotten sister looks at forgotten brother
On their way between two easily remembered tasks
And that is positively all there is to it.

But it was not that way thirty years ago!
Before desks and counters had tired their backs and feet,

When life for them was a bowl of odorous fruit
That they might take their pick of, then turn and go,
Saying, "This tastes so good!" or, "This smells so sweet!"

IT IS WINTER, I KNOW

What if small birds are peppering the sky,
Scudding south with the clouds to an ultimate tip on lands
Where they may peck worms and slugs from moist sands
Rather muddily mixed with salt?
Or if wind dashes by
Insufferably filled with birds' indeclinable twitter
Not deigning to toy with the oak-twigs that it passes
And treading but lightly on all the delicate grasses
Under trees where crickets are silent, where mad leaves flutter?

It is winter, I know, there are too many Nays now confronting
The obdurate soul that would trick itself into believing
That buds are still ripe, that cells are all ready for cleaving;
It can only be winter, winter alone, when blunting
Winds rush over the ice, scattering leaves from their weeds
To rattle the sycamore tree's dry-shriveled seeds.

SHOT WHO? JIM LANE!

When he was shot he toppled to the ground
As if the toughened posts that were his thighs
Had felt that all that held them up were lies,
Weak lies, that suddenly someone had found

Out all that was true about them.
It did not seem
Like the crashing of a stalwart forest oak
But like a frail staff that a sharp wind broke
Or something insubstantial in a dream.

I never thought Jim Lane would fall like that.

He'd sworn that bullets must be gold to find him;
That when they came toward him he made them mind him
By means he knew,
just as a barn-yard cat
Can keep a pack of leaping dogs at bay
By concentrating and looking a certain way.

WARNING TO ONE

Death is the strongest of all living things
And when it happens do not look in the eyes
For a dead fire or a lack-luster there,
But listen for the words that fall from lips
Or do not fall. Silence is not death;
It merely means that the one who is conserving breath
Is not concerned with tattle and small quips.

Watch the quick fingers and the way they move
During unguarded moments—words of love
And love's caresses may be cold as ice
And cold the glitter of engagement rings;
Death is the sword that hangs on a single hair,
And that thin tenuous hair is no more than love
And yours is the silly head it hangs above.

HOW SHE RESOLVED TO ACT

"I shall be careful to say nothing at all
About myself or what I know of him
Or the vaguest thought I have—no matter how dim,
Tonight if it so happen that he call."

And not ten minutes later the door-bell rang
And into the hall he stepped as he always did
With a face and a bearing that quite poorly hid
His brain that burned and his heart that fairly sang
And his tongue that wanted to be rid of the truth.

As well as she could, for she was very loath
To signify how she felt, she kept very still,
But soon her heart cracked loud as a coffee mill
And her brain swung like a comet in the dark
And her tongue raced like a squirrel in the park.

PANDORA AND THE MOON

Minds awake in bodies that were asleep
Caused the winged troubles to be born
That made Pandora one time feel forlorn,
Because, in spite of the box, she could not keep
Her troubles there, the worrisome animalcules
Fluttered out never to be regained,
For every method of evil especially trained
And subject neither to God's nor the devil's rules.

What shall she do? Nothing; sit and ponder;
Watch the dying leaves drop from the tree
Until they all are gone and she may see
The same moon then that used to make her wonder
At the unbelievable stories she sits and reads.
And if she succeeds in that then she succeeds.

VILLAGE NOON: MID-DAY BELLS

When both hands of the town clock stood at twelve
Eve ceased spinning, Adam ceased to delve.
A lusty cockerel crowed that noon had come,
The shadows stood beneath the trees and some
Were motionless a moment—then the people
Busied themselves for food, and in the steeple
Ubiquitous pigeons roucoulayed and slept
Above the watch the dogs below them kept
For nothing—or a dust cloud down the road
That might mean feet or might mean wheels or not.

Then as the noon sun with its ardor glowed
On man and beast and field and dwelling place
The hands moved past noon to another spot
And Time moved on a little way in Space.

UNKNOWN MAN IN THE MORGUE

Tortured body, lie at rest alone
Finally on the long and merciless
Slab of now cool lava-molten stone.
And wait our mutual and final guess
At your identity, nameless, homeless one.

No suburb avenue, no numbered house
We know for you; no date of birth nor death
Are yours, though somewhere visitors may carouse
In a forgotten room where once you lived,
Fathered, soned and brothered, lovered, wived.
But here you come unfollowed to this place,
With an anonymous grimace on your face
In death, whose last name and whose last address
Will now be yours in your last loneliness.

THE BOOK OF HOW

After the stars were all hung separately out
For mortal eyes to see that care to look
The one who did it sat down and wrote a book
On how he did it.
It took him about
As long to write the book as to do the deed
But he said, "It's things like this we mostly need."
And the angels approved but the devils screamed with laughte.
For they knew exactly what would follow after.

For somehow he managed entirely to omit
The most important facts in accomplishing it,

Where he got the ladder to reach the stars
And how he lighted them, especially Mars,

And what he hung them on when he got them there
Eternally distant and luminous in the air.

AND TO THE YOUNG MEN

And to the young men awaiting their sacrifice
You brought water in an invisible pail
And promised them the plans would surely fail
That were written against them, recorded in the stars.
And you brought straw and padded the cold bars
Of the prison beds whereon the young men lay,
And sung to some at night and fanned by day
Those who were fevering into paradise.

But even then you did not do enough.
For you remember a boy, the silent one?
With a silent eye, who scarcely loved the sun,
And felt too keenly the winter wind's dry sough?
Well, you should have brought him cresses from a far stream
Over which nymphs and under which naiads dream.

Robert Penn Warren

ROBERT PENN WARREN was born in Kentucky in 1905. His education was widely scattered: he received his B.A. at Vanderbilt University and his M.A. at the University of California. He attended Yale Graduate School for a time and, in 1929, New College, Oxford. He was the youngest of *The Fugitive* group, sharing their sectional differences, though less pronouncedly local than most. Upon his return to America he began teaching, first at Vanderbilt, later in Louisiana State University and Minnesota, besides conducting conferences in writing at the universities of Montana and Colorado. With Cleanth Brooks, Jr., he became one of the managing editors of *The Southern Review.*

John Brown (1929) is a biography in prose, differing radically in tone and treatment from Benét's *John Brown's Body*. Warren's poetry is more certain; it has iron beneath its grace. Intellectual in its origins, Warren's verse remains closer to the earth than the work of his confrères; fertile in strong images, its strength no less than its fecundity rises from Kentucky soil. The critical mind is always at work here, but not so insistently as to inhibit the creative imagination. In his early twenties, Warren had already accomplished a fusion: in his lime-tinctured phrases, form and feeling are one.

Thirty-six Poems (1935) and *Eleven Poems on the Same Theme* (1942) unite depth of feeling and delicacy of perception. The best of both volumes, with new verses, appeared in *Selected Poems* (1944). Intensity is the note which ties together Warren's subtlety and spontaneity. "The Ballad of Billie Potts," for example, has an old theme: the return of the prodigal son who, unrecognized by his parents, is murdered by them. The legend has been often told; but Warren, placing it in Kentucky, creates a new poem which is outspokenly native and universally horrifying. One of Warren's novels, *All the King's Men*, "strung with the bitter tendons of the stone," was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1947.

PONDY WOODS

The buzzards over Pondy Woods
Achieve the blue tense altitudes,
Black figments that the woods release,
Obscenity in form and grace,
Drifting high through the pure sunshine
Till the sun in gold decline.

Big Jim Todd was a slick blackbuck
Laying low in the mud and muck
Of Pondy Woods when the sun went down
In gold, and the buzzards tilted down
A windless vortex to the black-gum trees
To sit along the quiet boughs,
Devout and swollen, at their ease.

By the buzzard roost Big Jim Todd
Listened for hoofs on the corduroy road
Or for the foul and sucking sound
A man's foot makes on the marshy ground.
Past midnight, when the moccasin
Slipped from the log and, trailing in
Its obscured waters, broke
The dark algae, one lean bird spoke.

"Nigger, you went this afternoon
For your Saturday spree at the Blue Goose saloon,
So you've got on your Sunday clothes,
On your big splay feet got patent-leather shoes.
But a buzzard can smell the thing you've done;
The posse will get you—run, nigger, run—
There's a fellow behind you with a big shot-gun.

Nigger, nigger, you'll sweat cold sweat
In your patent-leather shoes and Sunday clothes
When down your track the steeljacket goes
Mean and whimpering over the wheat.

"Nigger, your breed ain't metaphysical."
The buzzard coughed. His words fell
In the darkness, mystic and ambrosial.
"But we maintain our ancient rite,
Eat gods by day and prophesy by night.
We swing against the sky and wait;
You seize the hour, more passionate
Than strong, and strive with time to die—
With Time, the beaked tribe's astute ally.

"The Jew-boy died. The Syrian vulture swung
Remotely above the cross whereon he hung
From dinner-time to supper-time, and all
The people gathered there watched him until
The lean brown chest no longer stirred,
Then idly watched the slow majestic bird
That in the last sun above the twilit hill
Gleamed for a moment at the height and slid
Down the hot wind and in the darkness hid.
Nigger, regard the circumstance of breath:
'Non omnis moriar,' the poet saith."

Pedantic, the bird clacked its gray beak,
With a Tennessee accent to the classic phrase;
Jim understood, and was about to speak,
But the buzzard drooped one wing and filmed the eyes.

At dawn unto the Sabbath wheat he came,
That gave to the dew its faithless yellow flame
From kindly loam in recollection of
The fires that in the brutal rock once strove.
To the ripe wheat fields he came at dawn.
Northward the printed smoke stood quiet above
The distant cabins of Squiggtown.
A train's far whistle blew and drifted away
Coldly; lucid and thin the morning lay
Along the farms, and here no sound
Touched the sweet earth miraculously stilled.
Then down the damp and sudden wood there belled
The musical white-throated hound.

In Pondy Woods in the August drouth
Lurks fever and the cottonmouth.
And buzzards over Pondy Woods
Achieve the blue tense altitudes.

Drifting high in the pure sunshine
Till the sun in gold decline;
Then golden and hieratic through
The night their eyes burn two by two.

PRO SUA VITA

Nine months I waited in the dark beneath
Her tired heart for this precious breath,

And month by month since I left her breast
Her breath and blood I have given in waste,

Till now at length some peace she has got
That her breath and blood in me have not.

In the strictured nights of glimmering snow
The blood drives quick though breath is slow,

And through the August afternoon
Flees the breath faintly but too soon.

So blood is lost to the brutal gardens
Where the iron petal of dark frost hardens,

And breath, when the storm-black trees bowed under,
Waited the fanged astounding thunder.

Shall I say to my father then
Among the belted best of men:

"Fellow, you tupped her years ago
That tonight my boots might crunch the snow.

"And, woman, you show your son to wait
Till the breath and distraught blood abate;

"As my father began the tale of waste
When the sullen head slept on your breast,

"So the rigid hills had been forgot
In darkness, if God had wasted not."

LETTER OF A MOTHER

Under the green lamp-light her letter there
Lies among cluttered papers, rusted pens,
Books and handkerchiefs, tobacco tins.
Shuffle of feet ascends the darkened stair.

The son, defined upon the superscription,
Inherits now his cubicled domain,
And reads. Indeed, should he possess again
The loneliness of time's slow mitigation?

Or spell the name, which is himself, and say:
"By now this woman's milk is out of me.
I have a debt of flesh, assuredly,
Which score the mintage of the breath might pay. . . .

"A certain weight of cunning flesh devised
So hunger is bred in the bitter bone
To cleave about his precious skeleton
Held mortmain of her womb and merchandised

"Unto the dark: a subtile engine, propped
In the sutured head beneath the coronal seam,
Whose illegal prodigality of dream
In shaking the escheat heart is quick estopped.

"Such is the substance of this legacy:
A fragile vision fed of acrid blood,
Whose sweet process may bloom in gratitude
For the worthier gift of her mortality."

But still the flesh cries out unto the black
Void, across the plains insistently
Where rivers wash their wastage to the sea. . . .
The mother flesh that cannot summon back

The tired child it would again possess
As shall a womb more tender than her own
That builds not tissue or the little bone,
But dissolves them to itself in weariness.

HISTORY AMONG THE ROCKS

(from "Kentucky Mountain Farm")

There are many ways to die
Here among the rocks in any weather:
Wind, down the eastern gap, will lie
Level along the snow, beating the cedar,
And lull the drowsy head that it blows over
To startle a crystalline, cold dream forever.

The hound's black paw will print the grass in May,
And sycamores rise down a dark ravine,
Where a creek in flood, sucking the rock and clay,
Will tumble the sycamore, the laurel, away.

And white as the splintered sycamore, would go
Tumbling and turning, hushed in the end,
With hair afloat in waters that gently bend
To ocean where the blind tides flow.

Under the shadow of ripe wheat,
By flat limestone, will coil the copperhead,
Fanged as the sunlight, hearing the reaper's feet.
But there are other ways, the lean men said:
In these autumn orchards once young men lay dead—
Gray coats, blue coats. Young men on the mountainside
Clambered, fought. Heels muddied the rocky spring.
Their reason is hard to guess, remembering
Blood on their black mustaches in moonlight,
Cold musket-barrels glittering with frost.
Their reason is hard to guess and a long time past;
The apple falls, falling in the quiet night.

LETTER FROM A COWARD TO A HERO

What did the day bring?
The sharp fragment,
The shard,
The promise half-meant,
The impaired thing,
At dusk the hard word,
Good action by good will marred . . .
All
In the trampled stall:

I think you deserved better;
Therefore I am writing you this letter.

The scenes of childhood were splendid,
And the light that there attended,
But is rescinded:
The cedar,
The lichened rocks,
The thicket where I saw the fox,
And where I swam, the river.
These things are hard
To reconstruct:
The word
Is memory's gelded usufruct.
But piety is simple,
And should be ample.

Though late at night we have talked,
I cannot see what ways your feet in childhood walked.
In what purlieus was courage early caulked?

Guns blaze in autumn and
The quail falls and

Empires collide with a bang
That shakes the pictures where they hang
And democracy shows signs of dry rot
And Dives has and Lazarus not
And the time is out of joint:
But a good pointer holds the point
And is not gun-shy;
But I
Am gun-shy.

Though young, I do not like loud noise:
The sudden backfire,
The catcall of boys,
Drums beating for
The big war,
Or clocks that tick at night, and will not stop.
If you ever lose your compass and map
Or a mouse gets in the wall,
For sleep try love or veronal,
Though some prefer, I know, philology.
Does the airman scream in the flaming trajectory?

You have been strong in love and hate.
Disaster owns less speed than you have got,
But he will cut across the back lot
To lurk and lie in wait.
Admired of children, gathered for their games,
Disaster, like the dandelion, blooms,
And the delicate film is fanned
To seed the shaven lawn.
Rarely, you've been unmanned;
I have not seen your courage put to pawn.

At the blind hour of unaided grief,
Of addition and subtraction,
Of compromise,
Of the smoky lecher, the thief,
Of regretted action,
At the hour to close the eyes,
At the hour when lights go out in the houses . . .
Then wind rouses
The kildees from their sodden ground:
Their commentary is part of the wind's sound.
What is that other sound,
Surf or distant cannonade?
You are what you are without our aid.
No doubt, when corridors are dumb
And the bed is made,
It is your custom to recline,
Clutching between the forefinger and thumb
Honor, for death shy valentine

THE OWL

Here was the sound of water falling only,
Which is not sound but silence musical
Tumbling forever down the gorge's wall.
Like late milkweed that blooms beside the lonely
And sunlit stone, peace bloomed all afternoon.
Where time is not is peace; and here the shadow,
That crept to him across the Western meadow
And climbed the hill to mark the dropping sun,
Seemed held a space, washed downward by the water
Whose music flowed against the flow of time.
It could not be. Dark fell along the stream,
And like a child grown suddenly afraid,
With shaking knees, hands bloody on the stone,
Toward the upland gleaming fields he fled.
Light burned against their rim, was quickly gone.

Later he would remember this, and start.
And once or twice again his tough old heart
Knew sickness that the rabbit's heart must know,
When star by star the great wings float,
And down the moonlit track below
Their mortal silken shadow sweeps the snow.
O scaled bent claw, infatuate deep throat!

LETTER TO A FRIEND

Our eyes have viewed the burnished vineyards where
No leaf falls, and the grape, unripening, ripes.
It was a dream without fruition as
Without our terror. We have seen it;

And seen the ever-rounding vaulty-structured
Ocean moveless, and the mortised keel
Unmoving o'er the sunlit lichened wave.
That voyage, then each to each we said, had rendered

Courage superfluous, hope a burden.
But living still, we live by them, and only
Thus, or thus, stuttering, eke them out,
Our huddled alms to crammed Necessity.

Fears rise, old wranglers out of sleep, and go:
The caterpillar knows its leaf, the mole
Its hummock, who has known his heart, or knows
The trigger of this action, set and sprung?

In this, the time of toads' engendering,
I write to you, to you unfrighted yet
Before the blunt experiment of Time.
Your triumph is not commensurate with stone.

AUBADE FOR HOPE

Dawn: and foot on the cold stair treading or
Thump of wood on the unswept hearth-stone is
Comment on the margin of consciousness,
A dirty thumb-smear by the printed page.

Thumb-smear: nay other, for the blessed light
Acclaimèd thus, as a ducal progress by
The scared cur, wakes them who wallowed in
The unaimed faceless appetite of dream.

All night the ice sought out the rotten bough:
In sleep they heard. And now they stir, as east
Beyond the formal gleam of landscape sun
Has struck the senatorial hooded hill.

Light; the groaning stair; the match aflame;
The negro woman's hand, horned gray with cold,
That lit the wood; a child's eyes sullen
In the August street . . . I name some things that shall,

As voices speaking from a farther room,
Muffled, bespeak us yet for time and hope:
For Hope that like a blockhead grandam ever
Above the ash and spittle croaks and leans.

BEARDED OAKS

The oaks, how subtle and marine,
Bearded, and all the layered light
Above them swims; and thus the scene,
Recessed, awaits the positive night.

So, waiting, we in the grass now lie
Beneath the languorous tread of light:
The grasses, kelp-like, satisfy
The nameless motions of the air.

Upon the floor of light, and time,
Unmurmuring, of polyp made,
We rest; we are, as light withdraws,
Twin atolls on a shelf of shade.

Ages to our construction went,
Dim architecture, hour by hour:
And violence, forgot now, lent
The present stillness all its power.

The storm of noon above us rolled,
Of light the fury, furious gold,
The long drag troubling us, the depth:
Dark is unrocking, unrippling, still

Passion and slaughter, ruth, decay
Descend, minutely whispering down,
Silted through swaying streams, to lay
Foundation for our voicelessness.

All our debate is voiceless here,
As all our rage, the rage of stone;
If hope is hopeless, then fearless fear,
And history is thus undone.

Our feet once wrought the hollow street
With echo when the lamps were dead
At windows; once our headlight glare
Disturbed the doe that, leaping, fled.

I do not love you less that now
The caged heart makes iron stroke,
Or less that all that light once gave
The graduate dark should now revoke.

We live in time so little time
And we learn all so painfully,
That we may spare this hour's term
To practice for eternity

THE BALLAD OF BILLIE POTTS

Big Billie Potts was big and stout
In the land between the rivers.
His shoulders were wide and his gut stuck out
Like a croker of nubbins and his holler and shout
Made the bob-cat shiver and the black-jack leaves shake
In the section between the rivers.
He would slap you on your back and laugh.

Big Billie had a wife, she was dark and little
In the land between the rivers,
And clever with her wheel and clever with her kettle,
But she never said a word and when she sat
By the fire her eyes worked slow and narrow like a cat
In the land between the rivers.
Nobody knew what was in her head.

They had a big boy with fuzz on his chin
So tall he ducked the door when he came in,
A clabber-headed bastard with snot in his nose
And big red wrists hanging out of his clothes
And a whicker when he laughed where his father had a beller
In the section between the rivers.
They called him Little Billie.
He was their darling.

(It is not hard to see the land, what it was.
Low hills and oak. The fetid bottoms where
The slough uncoiled and in the tangled cane,
Where no sun comes, the muskrat's astute face
Was lifted to the yammering jay; then dropped.
Some cabin where the shag-bark stood and the
Magnificent tulip-tree; both now are gone.
But the land is there, and as you top a rise,
Beyond you all the landscape steams and simmers
—The hills, now gutted, red, cane-brake and black-jack yet.
The oak leaf steams under the powerful sun.
"Mister, is this the right road to Paducah?"
The red face, seamed and gutted like the hill,
Slow under time, and with the innocent savagery
Of Time, the bleared eyes rolling, answers from
Your dream: "They names hit so, but I ain't bin.")

Big Billie was the kind who laughed but could spy
The place for a ferry where folks would come by.
He built an inn and folks bound West
Hitched their horses there to take their rest
And grease the gall and grease the belly
And jaw and spit under the trees
In the section between the rivers.

Big Billie said: "Git down, friend, and take yore ease!"
He would slap you on your back and set you at his table.

(Leaning and slow, you see them move
In massive passion colder than any love:
Their lips move but you do not hear the words
Nor trodden twig nor fluted irony of birds
Nor hear the rustle of the heart
That, heave and settle, gasp and start,
Heaves like a fish in the ribs' dark basket borne
West from the great water's depth whence it was torn.
Their names are like the leaves, but are forgot
—The slush and swill of the world's great pot
That foamed at the range's lip, and spilled
Like quicksilver across green baize, the unfulfilled
Disparate glitter, gleam, wild symptom, seed
Flung in the long wind: silent, proceed
Past meadow, salt-lick, and the lyric swale;
Enter the arbor, shadow of trees, fade, fail.)

Big Billie was sharp at swap and trade
And could smell the nest where the egg was laid,
He could read and cipher and they called him squire
In the land between the rivers.
And he added up his money while he sat by the fire
And sat in the shade while folks sweated and strove,
For he was the one who fatted and throve
In the section between the rivers.
"Thank you kindly, sir," Big Billie would say
When the man in the black coat paid him at streak of day
And swung to the saddle and was ready to go
And rode away and didn't know
That he was already as good as dead,
For at midnight the message had been sent ahead:
"Man in black coat, riding bay mare with star."

(There was a beginning but you cannot see it.
There will be an end but you cannot see it.
They will not turn their faces to you though you call,
Who pace a logic merciless as light,
Whose law is their long shadow on the grass,
Sun at the back; pace, pass,
And passing nod in that glacial delirium
While the tight sky shudders like a drum
And speculation rasps its idiot nails
Across the dry slate where you did the sum.

The answer is in the back of the book but the page is gone.
And grandma told you to tell the truth but she is dead.
And heedless, their hairy faces fixed
Beyond your call or question now, they move
Under the infatuate weight of their wisdom,

Precious but for the preciousness of their burden,
Sainted and sad and sage as the hairy ass, who bear
History like bound faggots, with stiff knees;
And breathe the immaculate climate where
The lucent leaf is lifted, lank beard fingered, by no breeze,
Rapt in the fabulous complacency of fresco, vase, or frieze.)

Little Billie was full of piss and vinegar
And full of sap as a maple tree
And full of tricks as a lop-eared pup,
So one night when the runner didn't show up,
Big Billie called Little and said, "Saddle up,"
And nodded toward the man was taking his sup
With his belt unlatched and his feet to the fire.
Big Billie said, "Give Amos a try,
Fer this feller takes the South Fork and Amos'll be nigher
Than Baldy or Buster, and Amos is sly
And slick as a varmint, and I don't deny
I lak bizness with Amos fer he's one you kin trust
In the section between the rivers,
And hit looks lak they's mighty few.
Amos will split up fair and square."

Little Billie had something in his clabber-head
In addition to snot, and he reckoned he knew
How to skin a cat or add two and two.
So long before the sky got red
Over the land between the rivers,
He hobbled his horse back in the swamp
And squatted on his hams in the morning dew and damp
And scratched his stomach and grinned to think
How his Pap would be proud and his Mammy glad
To know what a thriving boy they had
In the section between the rivers.
He always was a good boy to his darling Mammy.

(Think of yourself riding away from the dawn,
Think of yourself and the unnamed ones who had gone
Before, riding, who rode away from *goodbye, goodbye,*
And toward *hello,* toward Time's unwinking eye;
And like the cicada had left, at cross-roads or square,
The old shell of self, thin, ghostly, translucent, light as air;
At dawn riding into the curtain of unwhispering green,
Away from the vigils and voices into the green
World, land of the innocent bough, land of the leaf.
Think of your face green in the submarine light of the leaf.

Or think of yourself crouched at the swamp-edge,
Dawn-silence past last owl-hoot and not yet at day-verge
First bird-stir, titmouse, or drowsy warbler not yet.
You touch the grass in the dark and your hand is wet.

Then light: and you wait for the stranger's hoofs on the soft trace,
And under the green leaf's translucence the light bathes your face.

Think of yourself at dawn: Which are you? What?)

Little Billie heard hoofs on the soft grass,
But he squatted and let the rider pass,
For he didn't want to waste good lead and powder
Just to make the slough-fish and swamp-buzzards prouder
In the land between the rivers.
But he saw the feller's face and thanked his luck
It was the one Pap said was fit to pluck.
So he got on his horse and cantered up the trace.
Called, "Hi thar!" and the stranger watched him coming,
And sat his mare with a smile on his face,
Just watching Little Billie and smiling and humming
In the section between the rivers.
Little Billie rode up and the stranger said,
"Why, bless my heart, if it ain't Little Billie!"

"Good mornen," said Billie, and said, "My Pap
Found somethen you left and knowed you'd be missen,
And he ain't wanten nuthen not proper his'n."
But the stranger didn't do a thing but smile and listen
Polite as could be to what Billie said.
But he must have had eyes in the side of his head
As they rode along beside the slough
In the land between the rivers,
Or known what Billie was out to do,
For when Billie said, "Mister, I've brung hit to you,"
And reached his hand for it down in his britches,
The stranger just reached his own hand, too.

"Boom!" Billie's gun said, and the derringer, "Bang!"
"Oh, I'm shot!" Billie howled and grabbed his shoulder.
"Nor bad," said the stranger, "for you're born to hang,
But I'll save some rope 'fore you're a minute older
If you don't high-tail to your honest Pap
In the section between the rivers."
Oh, Billie didn't tarry and Billie didn't linger,
For Billie didn't trust the stranger's finger
And didn't admire the stranger's face
And didn't like the climate of the place,
So he turned and high-tailed up the trace,
With blood on his shirt and snot in his nose
And pee in his pants for he'd wet his clothes,
And the stranger just sits and admires how he goes,
And says, "Why, that boy would do right well back on the Bardstown track!"

"You fool!" said his Pap, but his Mammy cried
To see the place where the gore-blood dried

Round the little hole in her darling's hide.
She wiped his nose and patted his head,
But Pappy barred the door and Pappy said,
"That bastard has maybe got some friends
In the section between the rivers,
And you can't say how sich bizness ends
And a man ain't sure he kin trust his neighbors,
Fer thar's mortal spite fer him sweats and labors
Even here between the rivers."
He didn't ask Little how he felt,
But said, "Two hundred in gold's in my money belt,
And take the roan and the brand-new saddle
And stop yore blubberen and skeedaddle,
And the next time you try and pull a trick
Fer God's sake don't talk but do hit quick."
So Little Billie took his leave
And left his Mammy there to grieve
And left his Pappy in Old Kaintuck
And headed West to try his luck
And left the land between the rivers,
For it was Roll, Missouri,
It was Roll, roll, Missouri.
And he was gone nigh ten long year
And never sent word to give his Pappy cheer
Nor wet pen in ink for his Mammy dear.
For Little Billie never was much of a hand with a pen-staff.

(There is always another country and always another place.
There is always another name and another face.
And the name and the face are you, and you
The name and the face, and the stream you gaze into
Will show the adoring face, show the lips that lift to you
As you lean with the implacable thirst of self,
As you lean to the image which is yourself,
To set the lip to lip, fix eye on bulging eye,
To drink not of the stream but of your deep identity,
But water is water and it flows,
Under the image on the water the water coils and goes
And its own beginning and its end only the water knows.

There are many countries and the rivers in them
—Cumberland, Tennessee, Ohio, Colorado, Pecos, Little Big Horn,
And Roll, Missouri, roll.
But there is only water in them.

And in the new country and in the new place
The eyes of the new friend will reflect the new face
And his mouth will speak to frame
The syllables of the new name
And the name is you and is the agitation of the air
And is the wind and the wind runs and the wind is everywhere.

The name and the face are you.
The name and the face are always new
And they are you.
Are new.

For they have been dipped in the healing flood.
For they have been dipped in the redeeming blood.
For they have been dipped in Time
And Time is only beginnings
Time is only and always beginnings
And is the redemption of our crime
And is our Saviour's priceless blood.

For Time is always the new place,
And no-place.
For Time is always the new name and the new face,
And no-name and no-face.

For time is motion
For Time is innocence
For Time is West.)

Oh, who is coming along the trace,
Whistling along in the late sunshine,
With a big black hat above his big red face
And a long black coat that swings so fine?
Oh, who is riding along the trace
Back to the land between the rivers,
With a big black beard growing down to his guts
And silver mountings on his pistol-butts
And a belt as broad as a saddle-girth
And a look in his eyes like he owned the earth?
And meets a man riding up the trace
And looks right sharp and scans his face
And says, "Durn if'n hit ain't Joe Drew!"
"I reckin hit's me," says Joe and gives a spit,
"But whupped if'n I figger how you knows hit,
Fer if'n I'm Joe, then who air you?"
And the man with the black beard says: "Why, I'm Little Billie!"
And Joe Drew says: "Wal, I'll be whupped."

"Be whupped," Joe said, "and whar you goen?"
"Oh, I'm just visiten back whar I done my growen
In the section between the rivers,
Fer I bin out West and taken my share
And I reckin my luck helt out fer fair,
So I done come home," Little Billie said,
"To see my folks if'n they ain't dead."
"Ain't dead," Joe answered, and shook his head,
"But that's the best a man kin say,
Fer hit looked lak when you went away
You taken West yore Pappy's luck
And maybe now you kin bring hit back
To the section between the rivers."

Little Billie laughed and jingled his pockets and said: "Ain't nuthen wrong with my luck."

And said: "Wal, I'll be gitten on home,
But after yore supper why don't you come
And we'll open a jug and you tell me the news
In the section between the rivers.
But not too early fer hit's my aim
To git me some fun 'fore they know my name,
And tease 'em and fun 'em, fer you never guessed
I was Little Billie what went out West."
And Joe Drew said: "Durn if'n you always wuzn't a hand to git yore fun."

(Over the plain, over mountain and river, drawn,
Wanderer with slit-eyes adjusted to distance,
Drawn out of distance, drawn from the great plateau
Where the sky heeled in the unsagging wind and the cheek burned,
Who stood beneath the white peak that glimmered like a dream,
And spat, and it was morning and it was morning.
You lay among the wild plums and the killdees cried.
You lay in the thicket under the new leaves and the killdees cried,
For you all luck, for all the astuteness of your heart,
And would not stop and would not stop
And the clock ticked all night long in the furnished room
And would not stop
And the *El*-train passed on the quarters with a whish like a terrible broom
And would not stop
And there is always the sound of breathing in the next room
And it will not stop
And the waitress says, "Will that be all, sir, will that be all?"
And will not stop
And the valet says, "Will that be all, sir, will that be all?"
And will not stop
For nothing is ever all and nothing is ever all,
For all your experience and your expertness of human vices and of valor
At the hour when the ways are darkened.

Though your luck held and the market was always satisfactory,
Though the letter always came and your lovers were always true,
Though you always received the respect due to your position,
Though your hand never failed of its cunning and your glands always thoroughly knew their business,
Though your conscience was easy and you were assured of your innocence,
You became gradually aware that something was missing from the picture,
And upon closer inspection exclaimed: "Why, I'm not in it at all!"
Which was perfectly true.

Therefore you tried to remember when you had last had whatever it was you had lost,
But it was a long time back.
And you decided to retrace your steps from that point,
But it was a long way back.
It was, nevertheless, absolutely essential to make the effort,

And since you had never been a man to be deterred by difficult circumstances,
You came back.
For there is no place like home.)

He joked them and he teased them and he had his fun
And they never guessed that he was the one
Had been Mammy's darling and Pappy's joy
When he was a great big whickering boy
In the land between the rivers,
And he jingled his pockets and he took his sop
And patted his belly which was full nigh to pop
And wiped the buttermilk out of his beard
And took his belch and up and reared
Back from the table and cocked his chair
And said: "Old man, ain't you got any fresh drinken water, this here ain't fresher'n a hoss puddle?"
And the old woman said: "Pappy, why don't you take the young gentleman down to the spring so he kin git hit good and fresh?"
And the old woman gave the old man a straight look.
She gave him the bucket but it was not empty but it was not water.

Oh, the stars are shining and the meadow is bright
But under the trees is dark and night
In the land between the rivers.
Oh, on the trace the fireflies spark
But under the trees is night and dark,
And way off yonder is the whippoorwill
And the owl off yonder hoots on the hill
But under the trees is dark and still
In the section between the rivers.
And the leaves hang down in the dark of the trees
And there is the spring in the dark of the trees
And there is the spring as black as ink
And one star in it caught through a chink
Of the leaves that hang down in the dark of the trees,
And the star is there but it does not wink.
And Little Billie gets down on his knees
And props his hands in the same old place
To sup the water at his ease;
And the star is gone but there is his face.
"Just help yoreself," Big Billie said;
Then set the hatchet in his head.
They went through his pockets and they buried him in the dark of the trees.
"I figgered he was a ripe 'un," the old man said.
"Yeah, but you wouldn't done nuthen hadn't bin fer me," the old woman said.

(The reflection is shadowy and the form not clear,
For the hour is late, is late, and scarcely a glimmer comes here
Under the leaf, the bough, in its innocence dark;
And under your straining face you can scarcely mark
The darkling gleam of your face little less than the water dark.

But perhaps what you lost was lost in the pool long ago
When childlike you lost it and then in your innocence rose to go

After kneeling, as now, with your thirst beneath the leaves:
And years it lies here and dreams in the depth and grieves,
More faithful than mother or father in the light or dark of the leaves.

But after, after the irrefutable modes and marches,
After waters that never quench the thirst in the throat that parches,
After the sleep that sieves the long day's dubieties
And the cricket's corrosive wisdom under the trees,
After the rumor of wind and the bright anonymities,

You come, weary of greetings and the new friend's smile,
Weary in art of the stranger, worn with your wanderer's wile,
Weary of innocence and the husks of Time,
Prodigal, back to the homeland of no-Time,
To ask forgiveness and the patrimony of your crime;

And kneel in the untutored night as to demand
What gift—oh, father, father—from that dissevering hand?)

"And whar's Little Billie?" Joe Drew said.
"Air you crazy," said Big, "and plum outa yore head,
Fer you knows he went West nigh ten long year?"
"Went West," Joe said, "but I seen him here
In the section between the rivers,
Riden up the trace as big as you please
With a long black coat comen down to his knees
And a big black beard comen down to his guts
And silver mountens on his pistol-butts
And he said out West how he done struck
It rich and wuz bringen you back yore luck."
"I shore-God could use some luck," Big Billie said,
But his woman wet her lips and craned her head
And said: "Come riden with a big black beard, you say?"
And Joe: "Oh, hit wuz Billie as big as day."
And the old man's eyes bugged out of a sudden and he croaked like a sick bullfrog and said: "Come riden with a long black coat?"

Oh, the night is still and the grease-lamp low
And the old man's breath comes wheeze and slow.
Oh, the blue flame sucks on the old rag wick
And the old woman's breath comes sharp and quick,
And there isn't a sound under the roof
But her breath's hiss and his breath's puff,
And there isn't a sound outside the door
As they hearken but cannot hear any more
The creak of the saddle or the plop of the hoof,
For a long time now Joe Drew's been gone
And left them sitting there alone
While the dark outside gets big and still,
For the owl doesn't hoot off there on the hill
Any more and is quiet, and the whippoorwill
Is quiet in the dark of the trees and still
In the land between the rivers.

And so they sit and breathe and wait
And breathe while the night gets big and late,
And neither of them gives move or stir
And she won't look at him and he won't look at her.
He doesn't look at her but he says: "Git me the spade."

She grabbled with her hands and he dug with the spade
Where the leaves let down the dark and shade
In the land between the rivers.
She grabbled like a dog in the hole they made,
But stopped of a sudden and then she said,
"I kin put my hand on his face."
They light up a pine-knot and lean at the place
Where the man in the black coat slumbers and lies
With trash in his beard and dirt on his face;
And the torch-flame shines in his wide-open eyes.
Down the old man leans with the flickering flame
And moves his lips, says: "Tell me his name."
"Ain't Billie, ain't Billie," the old woman cries,
"Oh, hit ain't my Billie, fer he wuz little
And helt to my skirt while I stirred the kittle
And called me Mammy and hugged me tight
And come in the house when hit fell night."
But the old man leans down with the flickering flame
And croaks: "But tell me his name."
"Oh, he ain't got none, fer he just come riden
From some fer place whar he'd bin biden,
And ain't got a name and never had none,
But Billie, my Billie, he had one,
And hit wuz Billie, hit wuz his name."
But the old man croaked: "Tell me his name."
"Oh, he ain't got none and hit's all the same,
But Billie had one, and he wuz little
And offen his chin I would wipe the spittle
And wiped the drool and kissed him thar
And counted his toes and kissed him whar
The little black mark wuz under his tit,
Shaped lak a clover under his left tit,
With a shape fer luck and I'd kiss hit—"
And the old man blinks in the pine-knot flare
And his mouth comes open like a fish for air,
Then he says right low, "I had nigh fergot."
"Oh, I kissed him on his little luck-spot
And I kissed and he'd laff as lak as not—"
The old man said: "Git his shirt open."
The old woman opened the shirt and there was the birthmark under the left tit.
It was shaped for luck.

(The bee knows, and the eel's cold ganglia burn,
And the sad head lifting to the long return,
Through brumal deeps, in the great unsolsticed coil,

Carries its knowledge, navigator without star,
And under the stars, pure in its clamorous toil,
The goose hoots north where the starlit marshes are.
The salmon heaves at the fall, and, wanderer, you
Heave at the great fall of Time, and gorgeous, gleam
In the powerful arc, and anger and outrage like dew,
In your plunge, fling, and plunge to the thunderous stream:
Back to the silence, back to the pool, back
To the high pool, motionless, and the unmurmuring dream.
And you, wanderer, back,
Brother to pinion and the pious fin that cleave
Their innocence of air and the disinfectant flood
And wing and welter and weave
The long compulsion and the circuit hope
Back,
And bear through that limitless and devouring fluidity
The itch and humble promise which is home.
And you, wanderer, back,
For the beginning is death and the end may be life,
For the beginning was definition and the end may be definition,
And our innocence needs, perhaps, new definition,
And the wick needs the flame
But the flame needs the wick.
And the father waits for the son.
The hour is late,
The scene familiar even in shadow,
The transaction brief,
And you, wanderer, back,
After the striving and the wind's word,
To kneel
Here in the evening empty of wind or bird,
To kneel in the sacramental silence of evening
At the feet of the old man
Who is evil and ignorant and old,
To kneel
With the little black mark under your heart,
Which is your name,
Which is shaped for luck,
Which is your luck.)

James Agee

JAMES AGEE was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, November 27, 1909. Although his early schooling was in Franklin County, Tennessee, the center of "The Fugitives," Agee did not enter Vanderbilt and never came under the influence of the Nashville group. Instead he came north, attended Exeter for three years and spent four years at Harvard. Subsequently he came to New York, where he worked on *Fortune*, where his chief "namable" interests were "music, words, the present, the future, and 'documentary' movies," and contributed to *The Nation*.

His first book, *Permit Me Voyage* (1934), with a foreword by Archibald MacLeish, was published in Agee's twenty-fifth year. It is an unusual book, remarkable in its vigor and its unevenness. The defects are obvious. The long "Dedication" is interesting as an exposé of the young poet's admirations, naive in tone and almost comic in its incongruities. "Epithalamium" is an undergraduate's solemn exercise in the grand manner; the long and turgid "Ann Garner," written while Agee was still at school, is an unfortunate attempt to combine the subject matter of Robinson Jeffers with the tone and background of Robert Frost. But these failures, once dismissed, cannot obscure the originality of Agee's poetry. The title-poem alone proves the firmness and sentiency of his work; the title, taken from a poem by Hart Crane, suggests an indebtedness as well as sensitivity, but Agee makes the lines authentically his own.

The title-poem, the opening group of lyrics, and the twenty-five sonnets are the book's real reason for being. All of them are interesting and many are admirable; they show a dexterous balance of passion and restraint, of novelty and authority. Most of them are classical in tone, Elizabethan rather than experimental, declaring the influence of Donne and Shakespeare with an infusion of Hopkins. The lyrics suffer from occasional constriction; the images are almost too spare, the phrasing too tight. But they are rarely without charm, a charm that does not hesitate to employ humor and a purposeful awkwardness. The poems written after publication of *Permit Me Voyage* (three examples of the more recent work are here reprinted) emphasize the emotional tensity half hidden by the tart grace. Although the work does not, as yet, achieve an indisputable importance, it reveals a clear control, a personal vocabulary and, as Archibald MacLeish concludes, "the one poetic gift which no amount of application can purchase and which no amount of ingenuity can fake—a delicate and perceptive ear."

LYRICS

No doubt left. Enough deceiving.
Now I know you do not love.
Now you know I do not love.
Now we know we do not love.
No more doubt. No more deceiving.

Yet there is pity in us for each other
And better times are almost fresh as true.
The dog returns. And the man to his mother.
And tides. And you to me. And I to you.
And we are cowardly kind the cruelest way,
Feeling the cliff unmorsel from our heels
And knowing balance gone, we smile, and stay
A little, whirling our arms like desperate wheels.

✦

Not met and marred with the year's whole turn of grief,
But easily on the mercy of the morning
Fell this still folded leaf:

Small that never Summer spread
Demented on the dusty heat;
And sweet that never Fall
Wrung sere and tarnished red;
Safe now that never knew
Stunning Winter's bitter blue
It fell fair in the fair season:

Therefore with reason
Dress all in cheer and lightly put away
With music and glad will
This little child that cheated the long day
Of the long day's ill:
Who knows this breathing joy, heavy on us all,
Never, never, never.

I loitered weeping with my bride for gladness
Her walking side against and both embracing
Through the brash brightening rain that now the season changes
White on the fallen air that now my fallen
the fallen girl her grave effaces.

SONNETS

I

So it begins. Adam is in his earth
Tempted, and fallen, and his doom made sure,
O, in the very instant of his birth:
Whose deathly nature must all things endure.
The hungers of his flesh, and mind, and heart,
That governed him when he was in the womb,
These ravenings multiply in every part:
And shall release him only to the tomb.
Meantime he works the earth, and builds up nations,
And trades, and wars, and learns, and worships chance,
And looks to God, and weaves the generations
Which shall his many hungerings advance
When he is sunken dead among his sins.
Adam is in this earth. So it begins.

II

Our doom is in our being. We began
In hunger eager more than ache of hell:
And in that hunger became each a man
Ravened with hunger death alone may spell:
And in that hunger live, as lived the dead,
Who sought, as now we seek, in the same ways,
Nobly, and hatefully, what angel's-bread
Might ever stand us out these short few days.

So is this race in this wild hour confounded:
And though you rectify the big distress,
And kill all outward wrong where wrong abounded,
Your hunger cannot make this hunger less
Which breeds all wrath and right, and shall not die
In earth, and finds some hope upon the sky.

XIX

Those former loves wherein our lives have run
Seeing them shining, following them far,
Were but a hot deflection of the sun,
The operation of a migrant star.
In that wrong time when still a shape of earth
Severed us far and stood our sight between,
Those loves were effigies of love whose worth
Was all our wandering nothing to have seen:
So toward those steep projections on our sky
We toiled though partners to their falsity
Who faintly in that falseness could descry
What now stands forth too marvelous to see:
Who one time loved in them the truth concealed:
And now must leave them in the truth revealed.

XX

Now stands our love on that still verge of day
Where darkness loiters leaf to leaf releasing
Lone tree to silvering tree: then slopes away
Before the morning's deep-drawn strength increasing
Till the sweet land lies burnished in the dawn:
But sleeping still: nor stirs a thread of grass:
Large on the low hill and the spangled lawn
The pureleaved air dwells passionless as glass:
So stands our love new found and unaroused,
Appareled in all peace and innocence,
In all lost shadows of love past still drowsed
Against foreknowledge of such immanence
As now, with earth outshone and earth's wide air,
Shows each to other as this morning fair.

PERMIT ME VOYAGE

Take these who will as may be: I
Am careless now of what they fail:
My heart and mind discharted lie
And surely as the nervèd nail

Appoints all quarters on the north
So now it designates him forth
My sovereign God my princely soul
Whereon my flesh is priestly stole:

Whenceforth shall my heart and mind
To God through soul entirely bow,
Therein such strong increase to find
In truth as is my fate to know:

Small though that be great God I know
I know in this gigantic day
What God is ruined and I know
How labors with Godhead this day:

How from the porches of our sky
The crested glory is declined:
And hear with that translated cry
The stridden soul is overshined:

And how this world of wildness through
True poets shall walk who herald you:
Of whom God grant me of your grace
To be, that shall preserve this race.

Permit me voyage, Love, into your hands.

SONG WITH WORDS

When Eve first saw the glistering day
  Watch by the wan world side
She learned her worst and down she lay
  In the streaming land and cried.

When Adam saw the mastering night
  First board the wan world's lifted breast
He climbed his bride with all his might
  And sank to tenderest rest.

And night took both and day brought high
The children that must likewise die:

And all our grief and every joy
To time's deep end shall time destroy:

And weave us one and wave us under
Where is neither faith nor wonder.

TWO SONGS ON THE ECONOMY OF ABUNDANCE

Temperance Note: and Weather Prophecy

  Watch well The Poor in this late hour
  Before the wretched wonder stop:
  Who march among a thundershower
  And never touch a drop.

Red Sea

  How long this way: that everywhere
  We make our march the water stands
  Apart and all our wine is air
  And all our ease the emptied sands?

IN HEAVY MIND

In heavy mind I strayed the field
The chilly damp and devious air
The restiveness the rags of snow
The mulled and matted blackness where

The summer overthroned with leaves
Had shown its cloudy loveliest
And I had lain along the shade
In tears that fully undistressed

Me among men upon the earth
In flowering sky of every doubt
But only so much natural joy
Might flare the flesh, thaw the wick out:

But now was logy with the weight of brain,
Flat in the eyes and of my love most low,
Hate toward, and clambering thought, and
  failure sure,
And life a lean long while, the starving slow:

When, not to see, some previous bird
Made whistling from a bramble tree:
And all my will was not enough
To hold the heavens out of me.

RAPID TRANSIT

Squealing under city stone
  The millions on the millions run,
Every one a life alone,
  Every one a soul undone:

There all the poisons of the heart
  Branch and abound like whirling brooks,
And there through every useless art
  Like spoiled meats on a butcher's hooks

Pour forth upon their frightful kind
  The faces of each ruined child:
The wrecked demeanors of the mind
  That now is tamed, and once was wild.

Kenneth Patchen

KENNETH PATCHEN was born December 13, 1911, in Niles, Ohio. When he was four his parents (Scotch-French-English) moved to near-by Warren, where he was raised and attended high school. At seventeen Patchen went to work with his father's crew in the steel-mills; most of his relatives worked either in the mills of the Mahoning Valley or in the coal mines of Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Out of work and briefly "schooled" at Alexander Meiklejohn's Experimental College, University of Wisconsin, Patchen spent several years drifting from one end of the country to the other, working at anything that came to hand. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1936.

His first volume, *Before the Brave* (1936), was crammed with revolutionary fervor and technical experiment. Unfortunately its ardor was overinsistently strained and too often its oratory was a crescendo of screams. It was succeeded by a richer and far more genuinely startling volume, *First Will & Testament* (1939), which included about one hundred poems, three surrealistic dramas, and the beginning of a projected epic planned to fill several volumes. *First Will & Testament* is sensational in its tempo, amazing in its gusto, and unique in its uncanny combination of delicacy and disorganization. The tone is savage disillusionment, but not apathy; it is rebellious and ribald, indignant and desperate, but clean-cut even in its fury.

Much of Patchen's work is conceived in the limbo of nightmare, in a world where the humor is worse than the horror. Frenzy rules here; phantasmagoria triumphs in slapstick satire, casual killings, and sinister obscenity. But there is more to Patchen than his power to evoke ugliness, violence, and nonchalant treachery. Only a poet of unusual sensibility could have fashioned the nuances of "In Memory of Kathleen," "Do the Dead Know What Time It Is?", "The Deer and the Snake," and the cold terror of "Street Corner College."

At thirty-eight, Patchen was the author of fourteen volumes of prose and verse and unclassifiable combinations of both. *The Journal of Albion Moonlight* (1941), *Memoirs of a Shy Pornographer* (1945), and *Sleepers Awake* (1946) are many-voiced novels, diaries, and "amusements" in a technique comparable to the polyphony of James Joyce. Paul Rosenfeld praised Patchen's "exploitation of the vernacular"; Henry Miller hailed Patchen as an unmistakable genius; Robert Penn Warren declared that *The Dark Kingdom* (1942) proved he was not only a poet but a seer. Other volumes were similarly arresting, especially *Cloth of the Tempest* (1943), *To Say If You Love Someone* (1948), and *Red Wine and Yellow Hair* (1949).

IN MEMORY OF KATHLEEN

How pitiful is her sleep.
Now her clear breath is still.
There is nothing falling tonight,
Bird or man,
As dear as she;
Nowhere that she should go

Without me. None but my calling.
Nothing but the cold cry of the snow.

How lonely does she seem.
I, who have no heaven,
Defenseless, without lands,
Must try a dream
Of the seven
Lost stars and how they put their hands
Upon her eyes that she might ever know
Nothing worse than the cold cry of snow.

DO THE DEAD KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS?

The old guy put down his beer.
Son, he said,
(and a girl came over to the table where we were:
asked us by Jack Christ to buy her a drink.)
Son, I am going to tell you something
The like of which nobody ever was told.
(and the girl said, I've got nothing on tonight;
how about you and me going to your place?)
I am going to tell you the story of my mother's
Meeting with God.
(and I whispered to the girl: I don't have a room,
but maybe . . .)
She walked up to where the top of the world is
And He came right up to her and said
So at last you've come home.
(but maybe what?
I thought I'd like to stay here and talk to you.)
My mother started to cry and God
Put His arms around her.
(about what?
Oh, just talk . . . we'll find something.)
She said it was like a fog coming over her face
And light was everywhere and a soft voice saying
You can stop crying now.
(what can we talk about that will take all night?
and I said that I didn't know.)
You can stop crying now.

THE DEER AND THE SNAKE

The deer is humble, lovely as God made her
I watch her eyes and think of wonder owned

These strange priests enter the cathedral of woods
And seven Marys clean their hands to woo her

Foot lifted, dagger-sharp—her ears
Poised to their points like a leaf's head.

But the snake strikes, in a velvet arc
Of murderous speed—assassin beautiful

As mountain water at which a fawn drank.
Stand there, forever, while the poison works

While I stand counting the arms of your Cross
Thinking that many Christs could hang there, crying.

STREET CORNER COLLEGE

Next year the grave grass will cover us.
We stand now, and laugh;
Watching the girls go by;
Betting on slow horses; drinking cheap gin.
We have nothing to do; nowhere to go; nobody.

Last year was a year ago; nothing more.
We weren't younger then; nor older now.

We manage to have the look that young men have;
We feel nothing behind our faces, one way or other.

We shall probably not be quite dead when we die.
We were never anything all the way; not even soldiers.

We are the insulted, brother, the desolate boys.
Sleepwalkers in a dark and terrible land,
Where solitude is a dirty knife at our throats.
Cold stars watch us, chum,
Cold stars and the whores.

LIKE A MOURNINGLESS CHILD

The rescuing gate is wide
On villages that drift through the sun.
I do not listen to sleep anymore.
Cows pasture on stalks of green hours
And a haze of joyous deer drinks eternity.
Bells make blue robes for the wind to wear.
Summer whistles for his dogs of tree and flower.
The old faith plays jacks with idiots on church lawns.
I am so close to good. I have no need to see God.

WE GO OUT TOGETHER

We go out together into the staring town
And buy cheese and bread and little jugs with flowered labels.

Everywhere is a tent where we put on our whirling show.

A great deal has been said of the handless serpents
Which war has set loose in the gay milk of our heads

But because you braid your hair and taste like honey of heaven
We go together into town and buy wine and yellow candles.

FROM MY HIGH LOVE

From my high love I look at that poor world there;
I know that murder is the first prince in that tribe.

The towering sucking terror . . .
Schoolboys over whom the retching crows sing.
There is no lack of hell in that mad nest.
Gray horns hoot dismally in skeleton paws . . .

There is a little inn in the valley.
I wet my finger and put it to the wind;
Death whistles at his pitiless fun.

On the inn wall I tack our two hearts;
Let not the bullet go through one before the other.

Elizabeth Bishop

ELIZABETH BISHOP was born February 8, 1911, in Worcester, Massachusetts. Brought up in New England and Nova Scotia, she was graduated from Vassar College and has traveled widely. For some time she spent part of each year in Key West, which may account for the peculiar quality of her images which combine New England severity with tropical floridity. In 1946 she received the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship for a book of poems, *North & South*, although most of the poems were written before 1942.

At first glance Miss Bishop appears to be a painter, an impressionist who, with a line here, a stroke there, evokes a continual play of substance and shadow. But the visual effects are largely intellectual, and Miss Bishop is seen to be both a colorist and a wit whose adroitness recalls the subtlety of Marianne Moore. Irony lurks behind many of the images, but they do not depend on technique and intellect only. Even the most abstract figures are alive with emotion. "The Imaginary Iceberg," "The Man-Moth," "The Fish," a miniature Moby Dick, and others are half-satirical,

half-sympathetic disposals which combine unusually careful observation and a vividly alert imagination. Miss Bishop's work scintillates with such lines as "The palm trees clatter in the stiff breeze like the bills of the pelicans" and "the storm roaming the sky uneasily like a dog looking for a place to sleep in." Almost without exception the poems are as bold as they are skillful; they register a complete personality.

THE FISH

I caught a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in a corner of his mouth.
He didn't fight.
He hadn't fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wall-paper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wall-paper:
shapes like full-blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen
—the frightening gills
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly—
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.
I looked into his eyes
which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,
the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched isinglass.
They shifted a little, but not
to return my stare.
—It was more like the tipping
of an object toward the light.
I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,
and then I saw
that from his lower lip
—if you could call it a lip—
grim, wet, and weapon-like,
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,
with all their five big hooks
grown firmly in his mouth.
A green line, frayed at the end
where he broke it, two heavier lines,
and a fine black thread
still crimped from the strain and snap
when it broke and he got away.
Like medals with their ribbons
frayed and wavering,
a five-haired beard of wisdom
trailing from his aching jaw.
I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine
to the bailer rusted orange,
the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels—until everything
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
And I let the fish go.

THE IMAGINARY ICEBERG

We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship,
Although it meant the end of travel.
Although it stood stock still like cloudy rock
And all the sea were moving marble.
We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship;
We'd rather own this breathing plain of snow
Though the ship's sails were laid upon the sea
As the snow lies undissolved upon the water.
O solemn, floating field,
Are you aware an iceberg takes repose
With you, and when it wakes may pasture on your snows?

This is a scene a sailor'd give his eyes for.
The ship's ignored. The iceberg rises
And sinks again; its glassy pinnacles
Correct elliptics in the sky.
This is a scene where he who treads the boards
Is artlessly rhetorical. The curtain
Is light enough to rise on finest ropes
That airy twists of snow provide.
The wits of these white peaks
Spar with the sun. Its weight the iceberg dares
Upon a shifting stage and stands and stares.

This iceberg cuts its facets from within.
Like jewelry from a grave
It saves itself perpetually and adorns
Only itself, perhaps the snows
Which so surprise us lying on the sea.
Goodbye, we say, goodbye, the ship steers off
Where waves give in to one another's waves
And clouds run in a warmer sky.
Icebergs behoove the soul
(Both being self-made from elements least visible)
To see them so: fleshed, fair, erected indivisible.

THE MAN-MOTH[1]

Here, above,
cracks in the buildings are filled with battered moonlight.
The whole shadow of Man is only as big as his hat.
It lies at his feet like a circle for a doll to stand on,
and he makes an inverted pin, the point magnetized to the moon.
He does not see the moon; he observes only her vast properties,
feeling the queer light on his hands, neither warm nor cold,
of a temperature impossible to record in thermometers.

But when the Man-Moth
pays his rare, although occasional, visits to the surface,
the moon looks rather different to him. He emerges
from an opening under the edge of one of the sidewalks
and nervously begins to scale the faces of buildings.
He thinks the moon is a small hole at the top of the sky,
proving the sky quite useless for protection.
He trembles, but must investigate as high as he can climb.

Up the façades,
his shadow dragging like a photographer's cloth behind him,
he climbs fearfully, thinking that this time he will manage
to push his small head through that round clean opening
and be forced through, as from a tube, in black scrolls on the light.
(Man, standing below him, has no such illusions.)
But what the Man-Moth fears most he must do, although
he fails, of course, and falls back scared but unhurt.

Then he returns
to the pale subways of cement he calls his home. He flits,
he flutters, and cannot get aboard the silent trains
fast enough to suit him. The doors close swiftly.
The Man-Moth always seats himself facing the wrong way
and the train starts at once at its full, terrible speed,
without a shift in gears or a gradation of any sort.
He cannot tell the rate at which he travels backwards.

Each night he must
be carried through artificial tunnels and dream recurrent dreams.
Just as the ties recur beneath his train, these underlie
his rushing brain. He does not dare look out the window,
for the third rail, the unbroken draught of poison,
runs there beside him. He regards it as disease
he has inherited susceptibility to. He has to keep
his hands in pockets, as others must wear mufflers.

[1] Newspaper misprint for "mammoth."

If you catch him,
hold up a flashlight to his eye. It's all dark pupil,
an entire night itself, whose haired horizon tightens
as he stares back, and closes up the eye. Then from the lids
one tear, his only possession, like the bee's sting, slips.
Slyly he palms it, and if you're not paying attention
he'll swallow it. However, if you watch, he'll hand it over,
cool as from underground springs and pure enough to drink.

LITTLE EXERCISE

Think of the storm roaming the sky uneasily
like a dog looking for a place to sleep in,
listen to it growling.

Think how they must look now, the mangrove keys
lying out there unresponsive to the lightning
in dark, coarse-fibred families,

where occasionally a heron may undo his head,
shake up his feathers, make an uncertain comment
when the surrounding water shines.

Think of the boulevard and the little palm trees
all stuck in rows, suddenly revealed
as fistfuls of limp fish-skeletons.

It is raining there. The boulevard
and its broken sidewalks with weeds in every crack,
are relieved to be wet, the sea to be freshened.

Now the storm goes away again in a series
of small, badly lit battle-scenes,
each in "Another part of the field."

Think of someone sleeping in the bottom of a row-boat
tied to a mangrove root or the pile of a bridge;
think of him as uninjured, barely disturbed.

Delmore Schwartz

DELMORE SCHWARTZ was born December 8, 1913, in Brooklyn, New York. Most of his education was spent in studying philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, New York University, and Harvard; he became a teacher and began his pedagogical career as Instructor in English Composition at Harvard University. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in his twenty-sixth year.

Schwartz had already published in the more advanced monthlies and the critical quarterlies, but his first volume came as something of a sensation. *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* (1938) combined a versatility and technical surety which

occasioned a spontaneous salvo of enthusiasm from critics not usually given to superlatives. Allen Tate wrote that Schwartz's poetic style was "the only genuine innovation since Pound and Eliot came upon the scene twenty-five years ago." F. O. Matthiessen spoke of his "fertility of invention, his energy and ambitious resourcefulness."

In Dreams Begin Responsibilities is made up of a short story, a long philosophical poem ("Coriolanus and his Mother: The Dream of One Performance"), a play in prose and verse, and two groups which the author modestly called "Poems of Experiment and Imitation." The long poem is an eloquent and searching effort; the lyrics are almost continuously successful. Here Schwartz moves among the complexities of his material with extraordinary ease. In verse that is both intellectual and musical he presents a rounded portrait of a young man shaken by the war between brute fact and bewildering fantasy, between intellect and emotion. No young poet, perhaps no poet of the period, has so skilfully registered the threat of change and the cruelty of time. Schwartz's poems are variations on the leading theme:

> Time is the school in which we learn,
> Time is the fire in which we burn.

And again:

> We cannot stand still: Time is dying;
> We are dying: Time is farewell!

The original idiom, the personal gesture which is unmistakable, commands with increased certainty *Shenandoah* (1941), a play in which the speaker-chorus addresses the audience in verse while the characters in the drama discuss the action in prose. *Shenandoah* is a fusion of allegory, philosophy, and autobiographical overtones, although the action is almost entirely fictive. Once more the central motif is the conflict between time and the individual; the lines beginning "Let us consider where the great men are" present a condensed cultural background of the period. They are, moreover, an impressionistic statement of a poet growing up in the 1930s, studying modern literature, and emerging from his influences. Here again is natural eloquence without the support of induced rhetoric.

Genesis (1943) is the genesis of a human being, a work in which Schwartz's desperate concern with time is crossed by the ego's struggle to maintain its unique selfhood. This motif was already sounded in "Coriolanus and his Mother"; in *Genesis* the poet tries to track down the multiple and remote causes which determine any event in a life. The way in which the story unfolds is novel. The narrative is in prose, but the commentary (a chorus which "explains" the things remembered) is in verse. Thus, when the boy reads *Tarzan of the Apes,* Darwin and Huxley are summoned as two of the cultural "divinities" which have caused such a book as *Tarzan* to be written. Thus theology and the mythology of our times are curiously but logically interwoven.

The Imitation of Life (1943), a volume of critical essays, was followed by another book of prose, *The World Is a Wedding* (1948), a collection of witty, sometimes angry, and always sensitive short stories.

FOR RHODA

Calmly we walk through this April's day,
Metropolitan poetry here and there,
In the park sit pauper and *rentier,*
The screaming children, the motor car
Fugitive about us, running away,
Between the worker and the millionaire.
Number provides all distances,
It is Nineteen Thirty-Seven now,
Many great dears are taken away,
What will become of you and me
(This is the school in which we learn . . .)
Besides the photo and the memory?
(. . . that time is the fire in which we burn.)

(This is the school in which we learn . . .)
What is the self amid this blaze?
What am I now that I was then
Which I shall suffer and act again,
The theodicy I wrote in my high school days
Restored all life from infancy,
The children shouting are bright as they run
(This is the school in which they learn . . .)
Ravished entirely in their passing play!
(. . . that time is the fire in which they burn.)

Avid its rush, that reeling blaze!
Where is my father and Eleanor?
Not where are they now, dead seven years,
But what they were then?
No more? No more?
From Nineteen-Fourteen to the present day,
Bert Spira and Rhoda consume, consume
Not where they are now (where are they now?)
But what they were then, both beautiful;
Each minute bursts in the burning room,
The great globe reels in the solar fire,
Spinning the trivial and unique away.
(How all things flash! How all things flare!)
What am I now that I was then?
May memory restore again and again
The smallest color of the smallest day:
Time is the school in which we learn,
Time is the fire in which we burn.

TIRED AND UNHAPPY, YOU THINK OF HOUSES

Tired and unhappy, you think of houses
Soft-carpeted and warm in the December evening,
While snow's white pieces fall past the window,
And the orange firelight leaps.

A young girl sings
That song of Gluck where Orpheus pleads with Death;
Her elders watch, nodding their happiness
To see time fresh again in her self-conscious eyes:
The servants bring the coffee, the children retire,
Elder and younger yawn and go to bed,
The coals fade and glow, rose and ashen,
It is time to shake yourself! and break this
Banal dream, and turn your head
Where the underground is charged, where the weight
Of the lean buildings is seen,
Where close in the subway rush, anonymous
In the audience, well-dressed or mean,
So many surround you, ringing your fate,
Caught in an anger exact as a machine!

FOR THE ONE WHO WOULD TAKE MAN'S LIFE IN HIS HANDS

Tiger Christ unsheathed his sword,
Threw it down, became a lamb.
Swift spat upon the species, but
Took two women to his heart.
Samson who was strong as death
Paid his strength to kiss a slut.
Othello that stiff warrior
Was broken by a woman's heart.
Troy burned for a sea-tax, also for
Possession of a charming whore.
What do all examples show?
What must the finished murderer know?

You cannot sit on bayonets,
Nor can you eat among the dead.
When all are killed, you are alone,
A vacuum comes where hate has fed.
Murder's fruit is silent stone,
The gun increases poverty.
With what do these examples shine?
The soldier turned to girls and wine.
Love is the tact of every good,
The only warmth, the only peace.

"What have I said?" asked Socrates,
"Affirmed extremes, cried yes and no,
Taken all parts, denied myself,
Praised the caress, extolled the blow,
Soldier and lover quite deranged
Until their motions are exchanged.
—What do all examples show?
What can any actor know?
The contradiction in every act,
The infinite task of the human heart."

IN THE NAKED BED, IN PLATO'S CAVE

In the naked bed, in Plato's cave,
Reflected headlights slowly slid the wall,
Carpenters hammered under the shaded window,
Wind troubled the window curtains all night long,
A fleet of trucks strained uphill, grinding,
Their freights covered, as usual.
The ceiling lightened again, the slanting diagram
Slid slowly forth.
Hearing the milkman's chop,
His striving up the stair, the bottle's chink,
I rose from bed, lit a cigarette,
And walked to the window. The stony street
Displayed the stillness in which buildings stand,
The street-lamp's vigil and the horse's patience.
The winter sky's pure capital
Turned me back to bed with exhausted eyes.

Strangeness grew in the motionless air. The loose
Film grayed. Shaking wagons, hooves' waterfalls,
Sounded far off, increasing, louder and nearer.
A car coughed, starting. Morning, softly
Melting the air, lifted the half-covered chair
From underseas, kindled the looking-glass,
Distinguished the dresser and the white wall.
The bird called tentatively, whistled, called,
Bubbled and whistled, so! Perplexed, still wet
With sleep, affectionate, hungry and cold. So, so,
O son of man, the ignorant night, the travail
Of early morning, the mystery of beginning
Again and again,
While Time is unforgiven.

LET US CONSIDER WHERE THE GREAT MEN ARE

(from "Shenandoah")

Let us consider where the great men are
Who will obsess the child when he can read:
Joyce teaches in Trieste in a Berlitz school,
Learns to pronounce the puns in *Finnegan's Wake*—
Eliot works in a bank, and there he learns
The profit and the loss,
the death of cities—
Pound howls at him, finds what expatriates
Can find,
culture in chaos all through time,
Like a Picasso show.
Rilke endures
Of silence and of solitude the unheard music
In empty castles which great knights have left

(Like Beethoven, hewing in memory
The ineffable forests of the last quartets)—
Trotzky in exile, too, in London walks
With Lenin, hears him speak exile's half-truth:
"Look: that's *their* Westminster there," as if
The father's features were the son's whole soul—
Yeats too, like Rilke, on old lords' estates,
Seeks for the permanent amid the loss,
Daily and desperate, of love, of friends,
Of every thought with which his age began—
Kafka in Prague works in an office, learns
How bureaucratic Life,
how far off God,
A white-collar class theology—
Perse is in Asia as a diplomat,
Finding the violent energy with which
Civilization creates itself and moves—
Yet with these images he cannot see
The moral apathy after the Munich Pact,
The unnatural silence on the Maginot Line,
Yet he cannot foresee the Fall of France—
Mann too, in Davos-Platz, finds in the sick
The triumph of the artist and the intellect—
All over Europe these exiles find in art
What exile is: art becomes exile too,
A secret and a code studied in secret,
Declaring the agony of modern life:
This child will learn of life from these great men,
He will participate in their solitude,
And maybe in the end, on such a night
As this, return to the starting-point, his name,
Showing himself as such, among his friends.

Muriel Rukeyser

MURIEL RUKEYSER was born in New York City, December 15, 1913. She began her education in Ethical Culture and Fieldston School, entered Vassar with the class of 1934, left college after two years, and attended summer sessions at Columbia for two years more. In 1932 she became literary editor of *The Student Review* and a member of committees investigating Negro and labor problems; she was arrested during the second Scottsboro trial in Alabama. She worked her way through the ground-course at Roosevelt Aviation School, but was not allowed to pilot a plane as her parents refused to sign a contract permitting a minor to fly. It was at this time that she wrote her first important long poem, "Theory of Flight," which became the title-poem of her first volume. Work in statistics took her in 1936 to England, from where a London magazine sent her to report the People's Olympics in Barcelona, which were to open on the day the Spanish Civil War began. In 1941 she joined the staff of the monthly *Decision*.

Theory of Flight (1935) is startling without being theatrical, intense yet governed, alternating between autobiography and impersonality. This poet not only uses the material of modern life, but uses it without self-consciousness. For her the trucks rumbling along the city streets are a more native, a more natural, prelude to day than the lark at heaven's gate; the airplane is a more legitimate if more ominous symbol of man's longing for freedom than fluttering Psyches, butterflies, and picturesquely released doves. Her images, dramatic and often militant, are appropriate to one born in a period of national struggle and economic warfare. The very poignance of her dialogues—"Effort at Speech Between Two People" was written when she was a sophomore—reveals the tension and terror of the contemporary world.

U. S. I (1938) is an assimilation of influence and an effort at difficult integration. Echoes can be recognized—chiefly reminders of Hart Crane and W. H. Auden—but the poet's own voice comes through with conviction if not always with clarity. Intentness and originality progress further in *A Turning Wind* (1939); written between her twenty-third and twenty-fifth years, the book indicates continuing growth and complexity. The power of the communication is perceived even before it is understood; the meaning, sometimes muffled by the very rush of words, declares itself in the shifting tempi, the abrupt change of mood and action, the hurtling emotion in runaway fever.

Continuing the series of "Lives" sketched in the preceding volume, Miss Rukeyser turned to John Brown as a symbol of the American past and a manifesto for her generation. The motto of *The Soul and Body of John Brown* (1940) is from Joel: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision." It is a quotation which has a terrible choice of meanings, for the chapter from which it is taken is a prologue to the Day of Judgment—and it is our day which will be judged, judged by our own multitudes "in the valley of decision." The symbolism is emphasized with the entry of another Hebrew prophet, Ezekiel; for Ezekiel, thundering about the doom of nations, foretold the end of slavery and foreshadowed a spiritual resurrection. Joel . . . Ezekiel . . . John Brown . . . Miss Rukeyser synthesizes their apocalyptic visions, repudiates the self-willed doom of the appeasers and defeatists, and, feeling the line of the past, urges more freedom. She calls valiantly for reawakened life. The cry is to the spirit of Joel-John Brown-Ezekiel: "Threaten us alive!" Imposing 1940 upon 1859, the poem becomes a chorale in contrasts. The prophetic voices, echoed in the buzz of guitar (a truer symbol of American song than the traditional lute or classic lyre) call for more life: "in all the harm, calling . . . challenging this hatred—

> a wish to be again
> threatened alive, in agonies of decision,
> part of our nation, of a fanatic sun.

Beast in View (1944) and *The Green Wave* (1948) display Miss Rukeyser's fertility and fluency. Sometimes the writing is so fluid, the music so insistent, that it almost washes out the meaning. Her imagery is equally profuse; the images, largely romantic, flower into so many other figures that the effect is often less forceful than hypnotic. But unity is achieved by the strength of her social protest and the power of her mystical faith. An interpretive biography, *Willard Gibbs* (1942), was not only a passionate but penetrating study of the scientist.

CEILING UNLIMITED

The cattle-trains edge along the river, bringing morning on a white vibration
breaking the darkness split with beast-cries: a milk-wagon proceeds
down the street leaving the cold bottles: the Mack truck pushes
around the corner, tires hissing on the washed asphalt. A clear sky
growing candid and later bright.
Ceiling unlimited. Visibility unlimited.

They stir on the pillows, her leg moving, her face swung windowward
vacant with sleep still, modeled with light's coming; his dark head
among the softness of her arm and breast, nuzzled in dreams,
mumbling the old words, hardly roused. They return to silence.
At the airport, the floodlights are snapped off.

Turning, he says, "Tell me how's the sky this morning?" "Fair," she answers,
"no clouds from where I lie; bluer and bluer." "And later and later—
god, for some sleep into some noon, instead of all these mornings
with my mouth going stiff behind the cowling and wind brushing
away from me and my teeth freezing against the wind."
Light gales from the northwest: tomorrow, rain.

The street is long, with a sprinkling of ashcans; panhandlers
begin to forage among banana-peels and cardboard boxes.
She moves to the window, tall and dark before a brightening sky,
full with her six months' pregnancy molded in ripeness.
Stands, watching the sky's blankness.

Very soon: "How I love to see you when I wake," he says.
"How the child's meaning in you is my life's growing."
She faces him, hands brought to her belly's level, offering,
wordless, looking upon him. She carries his desire well.
Sun rises: 6:38 A.M. Sun sets. . . .

"Flying is what makes you strange to me, dark as Asia,
almost removed from my world even in your closenesses:
that you should be familiar with those intricacies
and a hero in mysteries which all the world has wanted."
Wind velocity changing from 19 to 30.

"No, that's wrong," and he laughs, "no personal hero's left
to make a legend. Those centuries have gone. If I fly,
why, I know that countries are not map-colored, that seas
belong to no one, that war's a pock-marking on Europe:"
The Weather Bureau's forecast, effective until noon.

"Your friends sleep with strange women desperately,
drink liquor and sleep heavily to forget those skies.
You fly all day and come home truly returning
to me who know only land. And we will have this child."
New York to Boston: Scattered to broken clouds.

"The child will have a hard time to be an American,"
he says slowly, "fathered by a man whose country is air,
who believes there are no heroes to withstand
wind, or a loose bolt, or a tank empty of gas."
To Washington: Broken clouds becoming overcast.

"It will be a brave child," she answers, smiling.
"We will show planes to it, and the bums in the street.
You will teach it to fly, and I will love it
very much." He thinks of his job, dressing.
Strong west northwest winds above 1000 feet.

He thinks how many men have wanted flight.
He ties his tie, looking into his face.
Finishes breakfast, hurrying to be gone,
crossing the river to the airport and his place.
To Cleveland: Broken clouds to overcast.

She does not imagine how the propeller turns
in a blinding speed, swinging the plane through space;
she never sees the cowling rattle and slip
forward and forward against the grim blades' grinding.
Cruising speed 1700 R.P.M.

Slipping, a failing desire; slipping like death
insidious against the propeller, until the blades shake,
bitten by steel, jagged against steel, broken,
and his face angry and raked by death, staring.
Strong west northwest or west winds above 2000 feet.

She watches the clock as his return time hurries,
the schedule ticking off, eating the short minutes.
She watches evening advance; she knows the child's stirring.
She knows night. She knows he will not come.
Ceiling unlimited. Visibility unlimited.

EFFORT AT SPEECH BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE

Speak to me. Take my hand. What are you now?
I will tell you all. I will conceal nothing.
When I was three, a little child read a story about a rabbit
who died, in the story, and I crawled under a chair:
a pink rabbit: it was my birthday, and a candle
burnt a sore spot on my finger, and I was told to be happy.

Oh, grow to know me. I am not happy. I will be open:
Now I am thinking of white sails against a sky like music,
like glad horns blowing, and birds tilting, and an arm about me.
There was one I loved, who wanted to live, sailing.

Speak to me. Take my hand. What are you now?
When I was nine, I was fruitily sentimental,
fluid: and my widowed aunt played Chopin,

and I bent my head on the painted woodwork, and wept.
I want now to be close to you. I would
link the minutes of my days close, somehow, to your days.

I am not happy. I will be open.
I have liked lamps in evening corners, and quiet poems.
There has been fear in my life. Sometimes I speculate
On what a tragedy his life was, really.

Take my hand. Fist my mind in your hand. What are you now?
When I was fourteen, I had dreams of suicide,
and I stood at a steep window, at sunset, hoping toward death:
if the light had not melted clouds and plains to beauty,
if light had not transformed that day, I would have leapt.
I am unhappy. I am lonely. Speak to me.

I will be open. I think he never loved me:
he loved the bright beaches, the little lips of foam
that ride small waves, he loved the veer of gulls:
he said with a gay mouth: I love you. Grow to know me.

What are you now? If we could touch one another,
if these our separate entities could come to grips,
clenched like a Chinese puzzle . . . yesterday
I stood in a crowded street that was live with people,
and no one spoke a word, and the morning shone.
Everyone silent, moving. . . . Take my hand. Speak to me.

THE SOUL AND BODY OF JOHN BROWN

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!
—JOEL, IV, 14

His life is in the body of the living.
When they hanged him the first time, his image leaped
into the blackened air. His grave was the floating faces
of the crowd, and he refused them in release,
rose open-eyed to autumn, a fanatic
beacon of fierceness leaping to meet them there,
match the white prophets of the storm,
the streaming meteors of the war.

Dreaming Ezekiel, threaten me alive!

Voices: Why don't you rip up that guitar?
Or must we listen to those blistering strings?

The trial of heroes follows their execution. The striding
wind of western nations carried new rain, new lightning,
destroyed in magnificence with noon shining straight down,
Swaying the fiery pines.—He wanted freedom. Could not himself be free
until more grace reached a corroded world. Our guilt his own.
Under the cloak of the century drops the trap—
There in October's fruition-fire, three
tall images of himself: one as he stood on the ground,

one as he stood on sudden air, and one
standing to our fatal topmost hills
faded through dying altitudes, and low
through faces living under the dregs of the air,
deprived childhood and thwarted youth and change:
fantastic sweetness gone to rags
and incorruptible anger blurred by age.

Compel the steps of lovers, watch them lie silvery
attractive in naked embrace over the brilliant gorge,
and open them to love: enlarge their welcome
to sharp-faced countrysides, vicious familiar windows
where lopped-off worlds say *I am promise,* holding
the stopgap slogans of a thin season offering only
the false initials, blind address, dummy name—
enemies who reply in smiles, mild slavers, moderate whores
—There is a gorge to remember, where the soldiers came
in a terrible answer of lechery after death.
—He said at last, with a living perfect look,
"I designed to have done the same thing again
on a larger scale." Sleepless, he sees his tree
grow in the land, a wish to leap these mountains.
They are not mountains, but men and women sleeping.

O my scene! my mother!
America who offers many births.

Over the tiers of barriers, compel the steps of armies
who will arrive with horizon sharpness rising
in quick embrace toward the people who greet them, love
faltering in our hills among the symptoms of ice,
small lights of the shifting winter, the rapid snow-blue stars.
—This must be done by armies. Nothing is free.—He knows
direct attacks, refuses to speak again,
"If I tell them the truth,
they will say I speak in symbols."

White landscapes emphasize his nakedness
reflected in counties of naked who shiver and stare at fires,
their backs to the face that unrolls new worlds around them.
—They go down the valleys. They shamble in the streets.
Blind to the sun-storming image echoed in their eyes.
—They dread the surface of their victim life,
lying helpless and savage in shade parks,
asking the towers only what beggars dare:
food, fire, water, and air.

Spring: the great hieroglyph: the mighty, whose first hour
collects the winter invalids, whose cloudless
pastures train swarms of mutable apple-trees
to blond delusions of light, the touch of whiter
more memorable breasts each evening, the resistant

male shoulders riding under sold terrible eyes.
The soldier-face persists, the victorious head
kissing those breasts asks for more miracles—
Untarnished hair! Set them free! "Without the snap of a gun—"
More failures—but the season is a garden after sickness;
Then the song begins,
"The clearing of the sky
brings fulness to heroes—
Call Death out of the city
and ring the summer in."

Whether they sleep alone. Whether they understand darkness
of mine or tunnel or store. Whether they lay branches
with Western skill to entice their visions out of fire.
Whether she lie awake, whether he walk in guilt
down silenced corridors, leaving no fingerprints.
Whether he weaken searching for power in pamphlets,
or shut out every fantasy but the fragile eyelid to
commemorate delight . . .
They believe in their dreams.

They more and more, secretly, tell their dreams.
They listen oftener for certain words, look deeper
in faces for features of one remembered image.
They almost forget the face. They cannot miss the look.
It waits until faces have gathered darkness,
and country guitars a wide and subtle music.
It rouses love. It has mastered its origin:
Death was its method. It will surpass its
furious birth when it is known again.

Dreaming Ezekiel, threaten me alive!

Greengrown with the sun on it. All the living summer.
They tell their dreams on the cool hill reclining,
after a twilight daytime painting machines on the sky,
the spite of tractors and the toothless cannon.
—The cities of horror are down. These are called born,
and Hungry Hill's to them a plain again.
—They stand in the factory, deal out identical
gestures of reaching—cathedral-color-rose
resumes the bricks as the walls go leaning—bend
away from the windows, blank in bellwavering air,
reach out, mechanical cat's-claw reaping sky.

I know your face, deepdrowned
prophet, and seablown eyes.

Darkflowing peoples. A tall tree, prophet, fallen,
your arms in their flesh laid on the mountains, all
your branches in the scattered valleys down.
Your boughs lie broken in channels of the land,

dim anniversaries written on many clouds.
—There is no partial help. Lost in the face of a child,
lost in the factory repetitions, lost
on the steel plateaus, in a ghost distorted.
—Calling More Life. In all the harm calling.
Pointing disaster of death and lifting up the bone,
heroic drug and the intoxication gone.

I see your mouth calling
before the words arrive.

The strings repeat it, buzz of guitars, a streamy
summernoon song, the whitelight of the meaning
filling American valleys. More life, saying: this rich,
this hatred, this Hallelloo—risk it upon yourselves.
—Free all the dangers of promise, clear the image
of freedom for the body of the world.—
After the tree is fallen and has become the land,
when the hand in the earth declined rises and touches air,
after the walls go down and all the faces turn,
the diamond shoals of eyes demanding life
deep in the prophet eyes, a wish to be again
threatened alive, in agonies of decision
part of our nation of our fanatic sun.

A LEG IN A PLASTER CAST

When at last he was well enough to take the sun
he leaned on the nearest railing and summed up his sins,
criminal weaknesses, deeds done and undone.
He knew he was healing. He guessed he was sane.

The convalescent gleam upon his skin,
with his supported leg and an unknown
recovery approaching let him block out pain.
The world promised recovery from his veins.

People said, "Sin"; in the park everyone
mentioned one miracle: "We must all be reborn."
Across an accidental past the horns
blasted through stone and barriers of sense

and the sound of a plaster cast knocking on stone.
He recognized the sound of fearful airmen
returning, forerunners, and he could not run.
He knew they were not flying home alone.

He stood in a down-torn town of men and women
whose wasted days poured on their heads as rain,
as sin, as fire—too lame, too late to turn,
for there, the air, everywhere full of planes.

THE MEETING

One o'clock in the letter-box
very black and I will go home early.
Now I have put off my dancing-dress
and over a sheet of distance write my love.
I walk in the city with my pride of theme
while the lean girls at their betrayal smiling
dance, do their sea-green dance, and laugh in dancing.
And all the stars fade out of my sky.

Early in the morning on a windy ocean.
My sleep opens upon your face to kiss and find
and take diversion of the meeting waters,
the flameless sky of peace, blue-sided white air.
I leave you as the trivial birds careen
in separation, a dream of easy parting.
I see you through a door. The door sails away,
and all the ships move into the real sea.

Let that far day arrive, that evening stain!
Down the alleys of the night I trail a cloak;
field-dusk and mountain-dusk and final darkness—
each absence brings me nearer to that night
when I stone-still in desire standing
shall see the masked body of love enter the garden
to reach the night-burning, the perpetual fountain.
And all the birds fly out of my scene.

MADBOY'S SONG

Fly down, Death : Call me :
I have become a lost name.

One I loved, she put me away,
Fly down, Death;
Myself renounced myself that day,
Fly down, Death.

My eyes in whom she looked so deep
Long ago flowed away,
My hands which slept on her asleep
Withered away,
My living voice I meant to keep,
Faded and gray.

Fly down, Death : Call me :
I have become a lost name.

Evening closes in whispers,
Dark words buried in flame.
My love, my mother, my sister,
I know there is no blame;

But you have your living voice,
Speak my forgotten name.

Fly down, Death : Call me :
I have become a lost name.

Don't come for me in a car
To drive me through the town;
Don't rise up out of the water,
Once is enough to drown;
Only drop out of the sky,
For I am fallen down.

Fly down, Death.

HOLY FAMILY

A long road and a village.
A bloody road and a village.
A road away from war.
Born, born, we know how it goes.

A man and woman riding.
Riding, the new-born child.
White sky, clever and wild.
Born, born, we know how it goes.

A child rides into the forest
on its mother's arms.
The air screams the alarms.
Born, born, we know how it goes.

The wheel goes back.
How is it with the child?
How is it with the world?
Born, born, we know how it goes.

Never look at the child.
Give it to bloody ground.
By this dream we are bound.
Born, born, we know how it goes.

Riding between these hills,
woman and man alone
enter the battle-line.
Born, born, we know how it goes.

They childless disappear
among the fighting men.
Two thousand years until they come again.
Born, born, we know how it goes.

AJANTA

(The title refers to the caves of that name in India, on whose walls appear the great frescoes, with their religious analogy between space and the space of the body, and their acceptance of reality which may be filled with creation.)

Came in my full youth to the midnight cave
nerves ringing; and this thing I did alone.
Wanting my fulness and not a field of war,
for the world considered annihilation, a star
called Wormwood rose and flickered, shattering
bent light over the dead boiling up in the ground,
the biting yellow of their corrupted lives
streaming to war, denying all our words.
Nothing was left among the tainted weather
but world-walking and the shadowless Ajanta.
Hallucination and the metal laugh
in clouds, and the mountain-spectre riding storm.
Nothing was certain but a moment of peace,
a hollow behind the unbreakable waterfall.
All the way to the cave, the teeming forms of death,
and death, the price of the body, cheap as air.
I blessed my heart on the expiation journey
for it had never been unable to suffer:
when I met the man whose face looked like the future,
when I met the whore with the dying red hair,
the child myself who is my murderer.
So came I between heaven and my grave
past the serene smile of the *voyeur,* to
this cave where the myth enters the heart again.

II. THE CAVE

Space to the mind, the painted cave of dream.
This is not a womb, nothing but good emerges:
this is a stage, neither unreal nor real
where the walls are the world, the rocks and palaces
stand on a borderland of blossoming ground.
If you stretch your hand, you touch the slope of the world
reaching in interlaced gods, animals, and men.
There is no background. The figures hold their peace
in a web of movement. There is no frustration,
every gesture is taken, everything yields connections.
The heavy sensual shoulders, the thighs, the blood-born flesh
and earth turning into color, rocks into their crystals,
water to sound, fire to form; life flickers
uncounted into the supple arms of love.
The space of these walls is the body's living space;
tear open your ribs and breathe the color of time
where nothing leads away, the world comes forward
in flaming sequences. Pillars and prisms. Riders
and horses and the figures of consciousness,
red cow grows long, goes running through the world.

Flung into movement in carnal purity,
these bodies are sealed—warm lip and crystal hand
in a jungle of light. Color-sheeted, seductive
foreboding eyelid lowered on the long eye,
fluid and vulnerable. The spaces of the body
are suddenly limitless, and riding flesh
shapes constellations over the golden breast,
confusion of scents and illuminated touch—
monster touch, the throat printed with brightness,
wide outlined gesture where the bodies ride.
Bells, and the spirit flashing. The religious bells,
bronze under the sunlight like beasts ringing,
bronze in the closed air, the memory of walls,
great sensual shoulders in the web of time.

III. LES TENDRESSES BESTIALES

A procession of caresses alters the ancient sky
until new constellations are the body shining:
There's the Hand to steer by, there the horizon Breast,
and the Great Stars kindling the fluid hill.
All the rooms open into magical boxes,
nothing is tilted, everything flickers
sexual and exquisite.
The panther with its throat along my arm
turns black and flows away.
Deep in all streets passes a faceless whore
and the checkered men are whispering one word.
The face I know becomes the night-black rose.
The sharp face is now an electric fan
and says one word to me.
The dice and the alcohol and the destruction
have drunk themselves and cast.
Broken bottle of loss, and the glass
turned bloody into the face.
Now the scene comes forward, very clear.
Dream-singing, airborne, surrenders the recalled,
the gesture arrives riding over the breast,
singing, singing, tender atrocity,
the silver derelict wearing fur and claws.
Oh love, I stood under the apple branch,
I saw the whipped bay and the small dark islands,
and night sailing the river and the foghorn's word.
My life said to you: I want to love you well.
The wheel goes back and I shall live again,
but the wave turns, my birth arrives and spills
over my breast the world bearing my grave,
and your eyes open in earth. You touched my life.
My life reaches the skin, moves under your smile,
and your shoulders and your throat and your face and your thighs flash.

I am haunted by interrupted acts,
introspective as a leper, enchanted

by a repulsive clew,
a gross and fugitive movement of the limbs.
Is this the love that shook the lights to flame?
Sheeted avenues thrash in the wind,
torn streets, the savage parks.
I am plunged deep. Must find the midnight cave.

IV. BLACK BLOOD

A habit leading to murder, smoky laughter
hated at first, but necessary later.
Alteration of motives. To stamp in terror
around the deserted harbor, down the hill
until the woman laced into a harp
screams and screams and the great clock strikes,
swinging its giant figures past the face.
The Floating Man rides on the ragged sunset
asking and asking. Do not say, Which loved?
Which was beloved? Only, Who most enjoyed?
Armored ghost of rage, screaming and powerless.
Only find me and touch my blood again.
Find me. A girl runs down the street
singing Take me, yelling Take me Take
Hang me from the clapper of a bell
and you as hangman ring it sweet tonight,
for nothing clean in me is more than cloud
unless you call it.—As I ran I heard
a black voice beating among all that blood:
"Try to live as if there were a God."

V. THE BROKEN WORLD

Came to Ajanta cave, the painted space of the breast,
the real world where everything is complete,
there are no shadows, the forms of incompleteness.
The great cloak blows in the light, rider and horse arrive,
the shoulders turn and every gift is made.
No shadows fall. There is no source of distortion.
In our world, a tree casts the shadow of a woman,
a man the shadow of a phallus, a hand raised
the shadow of the whip.
Here everything is itself,
here all may stand on summer earth.
Brightness has overtaken every light,
and every myth netted itself in flesh.
New origins, and peace given entire
and the spirit alive.
In the shadowless cave
the naked arm is raised.
Animals arrive,
interlaced, and gods
interlaced, and men
flame-woven.
I stand and am complete.

Crawls from the door,
black at my two feet
the shadow of the world.
World, not yet one,
enters the heart again.
The naked world, and the old noise of tears,
the fear, the expiation and the love,
a world of the shadowed and alone.
The journey, and the struggles of the moon.

Karl Shapiro

KARL (JAY) SHAPIRO was born November 10, 1913, in Baltimore, Maryland. He attended the University of Virginia and Johns Hopkins University. In March, 1941, he was inducted into the Army and, during the Second World War, served as a sergeant overseas. From 1942 until 1945, he was stationed in the South Pacific; his first two books were put together while he was there and published without the author's assistance.

Person, Place and Thing (1942) was hailed as one of the most startling first books of the period. Shapiro's brusque and sometimes tortured irony was matched by a sensitivity which, though understanding, was never sentimental. Mark Van Doren praised his "acute sense of form and a wit that never fails"; Selden Rodman acclaimed him as "a true spokesman of our generation." Such poems as "The Dome of Sunday," "Travelogue for Exiles," and "The Twins," are the work of a man deeply concerned with the dilemmas of his day but who writes about them neither as a sociologist nor an evangelist. His hatred of injustice and resentment against the traditional "romantic" attitude matured into *V-Letter and Other Poems* (1944), which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. It was evident that Shapiro had not wholly outgrown his influences, chiefly Eliot and Auden—there is even an echo of Swinburne in the rhythm and excessive alliteration of the following lines from "The Gun":

> We have wounded the wind with a wire and stung in the sky
> A white hole that is small and unseen as the bite of the asp.

But "The Leg," "The Puritan," "Elegy for a Dead Soldier," and other poems of the war marked Shapiro's progress and established his own sharp idiom. Writing continually in conflict, he avoided the temptation of becoming a "war poet." In his introduction to *V-Letter,* he wrote that "the most resounding slogans ring dead after a few years. We learn that war is an affection of the human spirit. . . . In the totality of striving and suffering we come to see the great configuration abstractly, with oneself at the center reduced in size but not in meaning, like a V-letter. . . . I tried to write freely, one day as a Christian, the next as a Jew, the next as a soldier who sees the gigantic slapstick of modern war. Certainly our contemporary man should feel divested of the stark attitudes of the last generation, the stance of the political intellectual, the proletarian, the expert, the salesman, the world-traveler, the pundit-poet."

Essay on Rime (1945) is a threefold examination of the confusion in modern poetry: the confusion in prosody, the confusion in language, and the confusion in belief. The unknowing reader might think this work of more than two thousand decasyllabic lines to be the labor of a dusty academician amassing data for his Ph.D.; actually it was written by a soldier thousands of miles away from any library. Possibly because of that isolation, it is a more living commentary than any carefully footnoted appraisal. "This book," wrote F. O. Matthiessen, "may well be the most remarkable contribution to American art yet to have come out of the war. . . . What makes the result such exciting reading is that here we have no formal estimate; we have rather the direct statement of what a poet really knows and believes." A genuinely critical work, it is also a sketchy one; it is not without its own confusions, personal prejudices, and occasional didacticisms. But it is spontaneous, full of debatable ideas and contradictions, a provocative *tour de force*.

Shapiro's preoccupation with the poet's function and his fondness for the didactic note lead to dubious results in the title poem of *Trial of a Poet and Other Poems* (1947). More troubled than in the *Essay on Rime,* the writer comes to the conclusion that the poet is always at odds with his times, a troubled but critical onlooker, a natural and even dangerous nonconformer. The short lyrics in this volume, many of them autobiographical, range from the emotionally tender to the coldly satirical. Although Shapiro tends to deride the intellectual, his own work is intellectually rich and wide in range.

THE LEG

Among the iodoform, in twilight-sleep,
What have I lost? he first inquires,
Peers in the middle distance where a pain,
Ghost of a nurse, hastily moves, and day,
Her blinding presence pressing in his eyes
And now his ears. They are handling him
With rubber hands. He wants to get up.

One day beside some flowers near his nose
He will be thinking, *When will I look at it?*
And pain, still in the middle distance, will reply
At what? and he will know it's gone,
O where! and begin to tremble and cry.
He will begin to cry as a child cries
Whose puppy is mangled under a screaming wheel.

Later, as if deliberately, his fingers
Begin to explore the stump. He learns a shape
That is comfortable and tucked in like a sock.
This has a sense of humor, this can despise
The finest surgical limb, the dignity of limping,
The nonsense of wheel-chairs. Now he smiles to the wall:
The amputation becomes an acquisition.

For the leg is wondering where he is (all is not lost)
And surely he has a duty to the leg;

He is its injury, the leg is his orphan,
He must cultivate the mind of the leg,
Pray for the part that is missing, pray for peace
In the image of man, pray, pray for its safety,
And after a little it will die quietly.

The body, what is it, Father, but a sign
To love the force that grows us, to give back
What in Thy palm is senselessness and mud?
Knead, knead the substance of our understanding
Which must be beautiful in flesh to walk,
That if Thou take me angrily in hand
And hurl me to the shark, I shall not die!

THE PURITAN

In tender May when the sweet laugh of Christ
Sounds in the fields, and bitter sorrows die,
Death wanes and lovers kiss and everything
Made perfect dances in the earth and sky,
Then near the Maypole where the children sing
A shadow falls, the hand and the hoarse cry
Of one whom winter more than well sufficed.

He is the Puritan under whose tall hat
Evil is nested like an ugly toad,
And in his eye he holds the basilisk,
And in his weathered hand the knotted goad;
Brimstone is on his tongue, for he will risk
Hellfire to pleasure; sin is his abode,
A barn and Bible his best habitat.

He dwells in evil; beauty of the day,
Or drifting snows of spring or flowers wet
Or touch of woman's hand are not for him;
The flesh of pleasure which he must forget
Walks in his sleep, awakens him more grim;
Deeper he falls into the Devil's debt,
And harder must he rant and harder pray.

Till every stone that manifests a pose
Beckons him lewdly, binds him to the stake
Where the cold fires of suspicion burn,
And he would gladly die for his name's sake
And call it righteous; tortures he would learn
To teach that flesh must sting and bones must ache
And hell claim all that happiness bestows.

His is the heresy of gloom, to all
That's grace a sin, to God a stumbling-block,
And to himself damnation. Year by year
He sees the hypocrisy of nature mock

His steadfastness, and in old age his fear
Of beauty strikes him dead, becomes a rock
Fixed like a gargoyle on a cathedral wall.

TRAVELOGUE FOR EXILES

Look and remember. Look upon this sky;
Look deep and deep into the sea-clean air,
The unconfined, the terminus of prayer.
Speak now and speak into the hallowed dome.
What do you hear? What does the sky reply?
The heavens are taken: this is not your home.

Look and remember. Look upon this sea;
Look down and down into the tireless tide.
What of a life below, a life inside,
A tomb, a cradle in the curly foam?
The waves arise; sea-wind and sea agree
The waters are taken: this is not your home.

Look and remember. Look upon this land,
Far, far across the factories and the grass.
Surely, there, surely, they will let you pass.
Speak then and ask the forest and the loam.
What do you hear? What does the land command?
The earth is taken: this is not your home.

THE TWINS

Likeness has made them animal and shy.
See how they turn their full gaze left and right,
Seeking the other, yet not moving close;
Nothing in their relationship is gross,
But soft, conspicuous, like giraffes. And why
Do they not speak except by sudden sight?

Sisters kiss freely and unsubtle friends
Wrestle like lovers; brothers loudly laugh:
These in a dreamier bondage dare not touch.
Each is the other's soul and hears too much
The heartbeat of the other; each apprehends
The sad duality and the imperfect half.

The one lay sick, the other wandered free,
But like a child to a small plot confined
Walked a short way and dumbly reappeared.
Is it not all-in-all of what they feared,
The single death, the obvious destiny
That maims the miracle their will designed?

For they go emptily from face to face,
Keeping the instinctive partnership of birth

A ponderous marriage and a sacred name;
Theirs is the pride of shouldering each the same
The old indignity of Esau's race
And Dromio's denouement of tragic mirth.

THE DOME OF SUNDAY

With focus sharp as Flemish-painted face
In film of varnish brightly fixed
And through a polished hand-lens deeply seen,
Sunday at noon through hyaline thin air
Sees down the street,
And in the camera of my eye depicts
Row-houses and row-lives:
Glass after glass, door after door the same,
Face after face the same, the same,
The brutal visibility the same;

As if one life emerging from one house
Would pause, a single image caught between
Two facing mirrors where vision multiplies
Beyond perspective,
A silent clatter in the high-speed eye
Spinning out photo-circulars of sight.

I see slip to the curb the long machines
Out of whose warm and windowed rooms pirouette
Shellacked with silk and light
The hard legs of our women.
Our women are one woman, dressed in black.
The carmine printed mouth
And cheeks as soft as muslin-glass belong
Outright to one dark dressy man
Merely a swagger at her curvy side.

This is their visit to themselves:
All day from porch to porch they weave
A nonsense pattern through the even glare,
Stealing in surfaces
Cold vulgar glances at themselves.

And high up in the heated room all day
I wait behind the plate glass pane for one,
Hot as a voyeur for a glimpse of one,
The vision to blot out this woman's sheen;
All day my sight records expensively
Row-houses and row-lives.

But nothing happens; no diagonal
With melting shadow falls across the curb:
Neither the blinded negress lurching through fatigue,
Nor exiles bleeding from their pores,
Nor that bright bomb slipped lightly from its rack
To splinter every silvered glass and crystal prism,
Witch-bowl and perfume bottle
And billion candle-power dressing-bulb,
No direct hit to smash the shatter-proof
And lodge at last the quivering needle
Clean in the eye of one who stands transfixed
In fascination of her brightness.

OCTOBER I

That season when the leaf deserts the bole
And half-dead see-saws through the October air
Falling face-downward on the walks to print
The decalcomania of its little soul—
Hardly has the milkman's sleepy horse
On wooden shoes echoed across the blocks,
When with its back jaws open like a dredge
The van comes lumbering up the curb to someone's door and knocks.

And four black genii muscular and shy
Holding their shy caps enter the first room

Where someone hurriedly surrenders up
The thickset chair, the mirror half awry,
Then to their burdens stoop without a sound.
One with his bare hands rends apart the bed,
One stuffs the china-barrel with stale print,
To bear the sofa toward the door with dark funereal tread.

The corner lamp, the safety eye of night,
Enveloped in the sun blinks and goes blind
And soon the early risers pick their way
Through kitchenware and pillows bolt upright.
The bureau on the sidewalk with bare back
And wrinkling veneer is most disgraced,
The sketch of Paris suffers in the wind,
Only the bike, its nose against the wall, does not show haste.

Two hours—the movers mop their neck and look
Filing through dust and echoes back and forth.
The halls are hollow and all the floors are cleared
Bare to the last board, to the most secret nook;
But on the street a small chaos survives
That slowly now the leviathan ingests,
And schoolboys and stenographers stare at
The truck, the house, the husband in his hat who stands and rests.

He turns with miserable expectant face
And for the last time enters. On the wall
A picture-stain spreads from the nail-hole down.
Each object live and dead has left its trace.
He leaves his key; but as he quickly goes
This question comes behind: Did someone die?
Is someone rich or poor, better or worse?
What shall uproot a house and bring this care into his eye?

POET

Il arrive que l'esprit demande la poesie

Left leg flung out, head cocked to the right,
Tweed coat or army uniform, with book,
Beautiful eyes, who is this walking down?
Who, glancing at the pane of glass looks sharp
And thinks it is not he—as when a poet
Comes swiftly on some half-forgotten poem
And loosely holds the page, steady of mind,
Thinking it is not his?

And when will *you* exist?—Oh, it is I,
Incredibly skinny, stooped, and neat as pie,
Ignorant as dirt, erotic as an ape,
Dreamy as puberty—with dirty hair!

Into the room like kangaroo he bounds,
Ears flopping like the most expensive hound's;
His chin received all questions as he bows
Mouthing a green bon-bon.

Has no more memory than rubber. Stands
Waist-deep in heavy mud of thought and broods
At his own wetness. When he would get out,
To his surprise he lifts in air a phrase
As whole and clean and silvery as a fish.
Which jumps and dangles on his damned hooked grin,
But like a name-card on a man's lapel
Calls him a conscious fool.

And childlike he remembers all his life
And cannily constructs it, fact by fact,
As boys paste postage stamps in careful books,
Denoting pence and legends and profiles,
Nothing more valuable.—And like a thief,
His eyes glassed over and concealed with guilt,
Fondles his secrets like a case of tools,
And waits in empty doors.

By men despised for knowing what he is,
And by himself. But he exists for women.
As dolls to girls, as perfect wives to men,
So he to women. And to himself a thing,
All ages, epicene, without a trade.
To girls and wives always alive and fated;
To men and scholars always dead like Greek
And always mistranslated.

Towards exile and towards shame he lures himself,
Tongue winding on his arm, and thinks like Eve
By biting apple will become most wise.
Sentio ergo sum: he feels his way
And words themselves stand up for him like Braille
And punch and perforate his parchment ear.
All language falls like Chinese on his soul,
Image of song unsounded.

This is the coward's coward that in his dreams
Sees shapes of pain grow tall. Awake at night
He peers at sounds and stumbles at a breeze.
And none holds life less dear. For as a youth
Who by some accident observes his love
Naked and in some natural ugly act,
He turns with loathing and with flaming hands,
Seared and betrayed by sight.

He is the business man, on beauty trades,
Dealer in arts and thoughts who, like the Jew,

Shall rise from slums and hated dialects
A tower of bitterness. Shall be always strange,
Hunted and then sought after. Shall be sat
Like an ambassador from another race
At tables rich with music. He shall eat flowers,
Chew honey and spit out gall. They shall all smile
And love and pity him.

His death shall be by drowning. In that hour
When the last bubble of pure heaven's air
Hovers within his throat, safe on his bed,
A small eternal figurehead in terror,
He shall cry out and clutch his days of straw
Before the blackest wave. Lastly, his tomb
Shall list and founder in the troughs of grass.
And none shall speak his name.

John Berryman

JOHN BERRYMAN was born October 25, 1914, in McAlester, Oklahoma, although his family was not southwestern, but northern and southern. He was educated in various states, chiefly in Connecticut and New York, as well as at Clare College, Cambridge. He taught at Harvard and Princeton.

His first important publication, "Twenty Poems," was in the first series of *Five Young American Poets* (1940), which was followed by a pamphlet, *Poems* (1942). His work was labeled (or libeled) "cerebral," and, although he employed rhyme easily, the rhythms were jagged and often broken. *The Dispossessed* (1948), a full-length volume, reveals a larger and more matured poet. The pitch is low, restrained and even resigned, somber and speculative. But Berryman's brooding is deep and his sensibility is rare. "Winter Landscape" is a perfect transcript of the mood as well as the quality of a Brueghel painting. "Parting as Descent" is a brief but brilliant record of an anguished moment; the joy of "Canto Amor" reproves the critics who implied that Berryman was preoccupied with pain. "The Statue" and "The Ball Poem" move characteristically on several levels; Gerard Previn Meyer writes that "they deal with the universal personal feeling of aloneness and its concomitant need for all-one-ness."

Besides his poetry, Berryman has published much criticism, has edited a *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound,* and has written a biography of Stephen Crane which is comprehensive and critical.

WINTER LANDSCAPE

The three men coming down the winter hill
In brown, with tall poles and a pack of hounds
At heel, through the arrangement of the trees,

Past the five figures at the burning straw,
Returning cold and silent to their town,

Returning to the drifted snow, the rink
Lively with children, to the older men,
The long companions they can never reach,
The blue light, men with ladders, by the church
The sledge and shadow in the twilit street,

Are not aware that in the sandy time
To come, the evil waste of history
Outstretched, they will be seen upon the brow
Of that same hill: when all their company
Will have been irrecoverably lost,

These men, this particular three in brown
Witnessed by birds will keep the scene and say
By their configuration with the trees,
The small bridge, the red houses and the fire,
What place, what time, what morning occasion

Sent them into the wood, a pack of hounds
At heel and the tall poles upon their shoulders,
Thence to return as now we see them and
Ankle-deep in snow down the winter hill
Descend, while three birds watch and the fourth flies.

PARTING AS DESCENT

The sun rushed up the sky; the taxi flew;
There was a kind of fever on the clock
That morning. We arrived at Waterloo
With time to spare and couldn't find my track.

The bitter coffee in a small café
Gave us our conversation. When the train
Began to move, I saw you turn away
And vanish, and the vessels in my brain

Burst, the train roared, the other travellers
In flames leapt, burning on the tilted air
Che si cruccia, I heard the devils curse
And shriek with joy in that place beyond prayer.

THE BALL POEM

What is the boy now, who has lost his ball,
What what is he to do? I saw it go
Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then
Merrily over—there it is in the water!
No use to say "O there are other balls":

An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy
As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down
All his young days into the harbour where
His ball went. I would not intrude on him,
A dime, another ball, is worthless. Now
He senses first his responsibility
In a world of possessions. People will take balls,
Balls will be lost always, little boy,
And no one buys a ball back. Money is external.
He is learning, far behind his desperate eyes,
The epistemology of loss, how to stand up.
Knowing what every man must one day know
And most know many days, how to stand up.
And gradually light returns to the street,
A whistle blows, the ball is out of sight,
Soon part of me will explore the deep and dark
Floor of the harbour. I am everywhere,
I suffer and move, my mind and my heart move
With all that move me, under the water
Or whistling, I am not a little boy.

CANTO AMOR

Dream in a dream the heavy soul somewhere
struck suddenly & dark down to its knees.
A griffin sighs off in the orphic air.

If (Unknown Majesty) I not confess
praise for the rack the rock the live sailor
under the blue sea,—yet I may You bless

always for hér, in fear & joy for hér
whose gesture summons ever when I grieve
me back and is my mage and minister.

—Muses, whose worship I may never leave
but for this pensive woman, now I dare,
teach me her praise! with her my praise receive.—

Three years already of the round world's war
had rolled by stoned & disappointed eyes
when she and I came where we were made for.

Pale as a star lost in returning skies,
more beautiful than midnight stars more frail
she moved towards me like chords, a sacrifice;

entombed in body trembling through the veil
arm upon arm, learning our ancient wound,
we see our one soul heal, recovering pale.

Then priestly sanction, then the drop of sound.
Quickly part to the cavern ever warm
deep from the march, body to body bound,

descend (my soul) out of dismantling storm
into the darkness where the world is made.
Come back to the bright air. Love is multiform.

Heartmating hesitating unafraid
although incredulous, she seemed to fill
the lilac shadow with light wherein she played,

whom sorry childhood had made sit quite still,
an orphan silence, unregarded sheen,
listening for any small soft note, not hopeful:

caricature: as once a maiden Queen,
flowering power comeliness kindness grace,
shattered her mirror, wept, would not be seen.

These pities moved. Also above her face
serious or flushed, swayed her fire-gold
not earthly hair, now moonless to unlace,

resistless flame, now in a sun more cold
great shells to whorl about each secret ear,
mysterious histories, strange shores, unfold.

New musics! One the music that we hear
this is the music which the masters make
out of their minds, profound solemn & clear.

And then the other music, in whose sake
all men perceive a gladness but we are drawn
less for that joy than utterly to take

our trial, naked in the music's vision,
the flowing ceremony of trouble and light,
all Loves becoming, none to rest upon.

Such Mozart made,—an ear so delicate
he fainted at a trumpet-call, a child
so delicate. So merciful that sight,

so stern, we follow rapt who ran awild.

Marriage is the second music, and thereof
we hear what we can bear, faithful & mild.

Therefore the streaming torches in the grove
through dark or bright, swiftly & now more
near
cherish a festival of anxious love.

Dance for this music, Mistress to music dear,
more, that full storm through the disordered
wood
ravens at midnight of my thirtieth year

and only the trial of our music should
still this irresolute air, only your voice
spelling the tempest may compel our good:

Sing then beyond my song: whirl & rejoice!

Randall Jarrell

RANDALL JARRELL was born May 6, 1914, in Nashville, Tennessee, spent his childhood in California, and, after that, lived in Arizona, Texas, and Tennessee. Educated at Vanderbilt University, he made his living by teaching English at Kenyon College, the University of Texas, Sarah Lawrence, and the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina. He also taught at the Salzburg Seminar in American Civilization, and for one year was literary editor of *The Nation,* in which his lively if astringent reviews appeared. In 1942 he enlisted in the Air Force, flew for a while, was "washed out" and spent most of the war as CNT (Celestial Navigation Trainer) operator at a field in Arizona, where he trained B-29 crews.

Blood for a Stranger (1942) is a first book in which the acerb critic is controlled by the sensitive poet. Jarrell alternates suave measures with brusque rhythms and achieves a wry music, a checked melodiousness, without straining for effect. This unforced intensity grows steadily in *Little Friend, Little Friend* (1945) and *Losses* (1948). The poems vibrate with an emotion which is tender and tragic, full of unsentimental pity which can smoulder with bitter outrage. An unusual intelligence is always in command, lucid, swift, witty, energetic, and vividly suggestive.

Whatever Jarrell touches is given a precise impact. John Crowe Ransom wrote that Jarrell had "an angel's velocity and range with language"; the late Theodore Spencer said that his "energy, satiric bitterness, and weight prove him to be one of the most interesting poets of his generation." Such poems as "A Camp in the Prussian Forest," "Pilots, Man Your Planes," "Burning the Letters," and "Jews at Haifa," are almost more than the reader can take at first glance; there is such intensity, so much sympathy with suffering innocence and so much persuasive pity that the heart is moved long before the mind can appreciate the poet's skill. In quite a different vein, "A Country Life" is a model of speculative but earnest simplicity. None

of the younger writers, and only a few of the older poets, have surpassed Jarrell in sensitivity and instinctive wisdom.

A CAMP IN THE PRUSSIAN FOREST

I walk beside the prisoners to the road.
Load on puffed load,
Their corpses, stacked like sodden wood,
Lie barred or galled with blood

By the charred warehouse. No one comes today
In the old way
To knock the fillings from their teeth;
The dark, coned, common wreath

Is plaited for their grave—a kind of grief.
The living leaf
Clings to the planted profitable
Pine if it is able;

The boughs sigh, mile on green, calm, breathing mile,
From this dead file
The planners ruled for them . . . One year
They sent a million here:

Here men were drunk like water, burnt like wood.
The fat of good
And evil, the breast's star of hope
Were rendered into soap.

I paint the star I sawed from yellow pine—
And plant the sign
In soil that does not yet refuse
Its usual Jews

Their first asylum. But the white, dwarfed star—
This dead white star—
Hides nothing, pays for nothing; smoke
Fouls it, a yellow joke,

The needles of the wreath are chalked with ash,
A filmy trash
Litters the black woods with the death
Of men; and one last breath

Curls from the monstrous chimney . . . I laugh aloud
Again and again;
The star laughs from its rotting shroud
Of flesh. O star of men!

PILOTS, MAN YOUR PLANES

(A Jill is a Japanese torpedo-plane.)

Dawn; and the jew's-harp's sawing seesaw song
Plucks at the starlight where the planes are folded
At the lee of their blank, wind-whipped, hunting road—
A road in air, the road to nowhere
Turreted and bucketed with guns, long undermined
With the thousand necessary deaths that breathe
Like fire beside a thousand men, who sleep
Hunched in the punk of Death: slow, dreaming sparks
That burrow through the block-long, light-split gloom
Of their great hangar underground and oversea
Into the great tanks, dark forever; past the steam
Of turbines, laundries—under rockets,
Bakeries, war-heads, the steel watch-like fish,
To the hull's last plates and atmosphere:
The sea sways with the dazed, blind, groping sway
Of the raw soul drugged with sleep, the chancy life
Troubling with dreams its wars, its own earned sea
That stretches year on year, death after death,
And hemisphere on blind black hemisphere
Into the stubborn corners of its earth.

Here in the poor, bleak, guessing haze of dawn
The giant's jew's-harp screeches its two notes
Over and over, over and over; from the roar
Of the fighters waved into the blazing clouds
The lookout lifts his scrubbed tetanic stare
Into the East of light, the empty day.
But on the tubes the raiders oscillate
A mile in every nine or thirteen seconds
To the target's first premonitory bursts;
To the boy with a ball of coffee in his stomach,
Snapping the great light buckles on his groin,
Shifting his raft's hot-water-bottle weight
As he breasts the currents of the bellowing deck
And, locked at last into the bubble, Hope,
Is borne along the foaming windy road
To the air where he alone is still
Above the world's cold, absent, searching roll.

The carrier meshed in its white whirling wake,
The gray ship sparkling from the blue-black sea,
The little carrier—erupts in flak,
One hammering, hysterical, tremendous fire.
Flickering through flashes, the stained rolling clouds,
The air jarred like water tilted in a bowl,
The red wriggling tracers—colonies
Whose instant life annexes the whole sky—

Hunt out the one end they have being for,
Are metamorphosed into one pure smear
Of flame, and die
In the maniacal convulsive spin
Of the raider with a wing snapped off, the plane
Trailing its flaming kite's-tail to the wave.
A miss's near, near bloom, a hill of foam,
Is bulged skyward, crashes back; crest after crest
Patterns the ships' cat's-cradle wakes, the racing
Swells that hiss outward from a plane's quenched flame:
There is traced in the thousand meetings of the grave
Of matter and of matter, man and man,
The print of the running feet upon the waves . . .
The Jill threads her long, blind, unbearable
Way into fire (the waves lick past her, her whole sky
Is tracer and the dirt of flak, the fire
Flung from the muzzles riddling sea and sky),
Comes on, comes on, comes on; and the fighter flames to her
Through his own flak, the hammering guns
Stitch one long line along his wing, his gear
Falls, his dive staggers as his tracer strikes,
And he breaks off and somersaults into the sea.
Under the canopy's dark strangling green,
The darkening canopy, he struggles free
To float into the choking white, to breathe—
His huge leg floating and immovable,
His goggles blackened with his own bright blood—
On the yellow raft, to see his carrier
Still firing, but itself a fire, its planes
Flung up like matches from the stern's white burst.
Now rockets arch above the deck's great blaze,
Shells break from it, trail after trail; its steel
Melts in steam into the sea, its tanks explode
In one last overwhelming sound; and silently
The ship, a flame, sinks home into the sea.
The pilot holds his striped head patiently
Up out of the dancing smother of the sea
And weeps with hatred, longing, agony—
The sea rises and settles; and the ship is gone.

The planes fly off looking for a carrier,
Destroyers curve in their long hunting arcs
Through the dead of the carrier: the dazed, vomiting,
Oil-blackened and fire-blistered, saved or dying men
Cling with cramped shaking fingers to the lines
Lowered from their old life: the pilot,
Drugged in a blanket, straining up to gulp
From the mug that scrapes like chalk against his mouth,
Knows, knows at last; he yawns the chattering yawn
Of effort and anguish, of hurt hating helplessness—
Yawns sobbingly, his head falls back, he sleeps.

THE DEATH OF THE BALL TURRET GUNNER

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

BURNING THE LETTERS

(The wife of a pilot killed in the Pacific is speaking several years after his death. She was once a Christian, a Protestant.)

Here in my head, the home that is left for you,
You have not changed; the flames rise from the sea
And the sea changes: the carrier, torn in two,
Sinks to its planes—the corpses of the carrier
Are strewn like ashes on the star-reflecting sea;
Are gathered, sewn with weights, are sunk.
The gatherers disperse.
Here to my hands
From the sea's dark, incalculable calm,
The unchanging circle of the universe,
The letters float: the set yellowing face
Looks home to me, a child's at last,
From the cut-out paper; and the licked
Lips part in their last questioning smile.
The poor labored answers, still unanswering;
The faded questions—questioning so much,
I thought then—questioning so little;
Grew younger, younger, as my eyes grew old,
As that dreamed-out and wept-for wife,
Your last unchanging country, changed
Out of your own rejecting life—a part
Of accusation and of loss, a child's eternally—
Into my troubled separate being.

A child has her own faith, a child's.
In its savage figures—worn down, now, to death—
Men's one life issues, neither out of earth
Nor from the sea, the last dissolving sea,
But out of death: by man came death
And his Life wells from death, the death of Man.
The hunting flesh, the broken blood
Glimmer within the tombs of earth, the food
Of the lives that burrow under the hunting wings
Of the light, of the darkness: dancing, dancing,
The flames grasp flesh with their last searching grace—
Grasp as the lives have grasped: the hunted
Pull down the hunter for his unused life
Parted into the blood, the dark, veined bread

Later than all law. The child shudders, aging:
The peering savior, stooping to her clutch,
His talons cramped with his own bartered flesh,
Pales, flickers, and flares out. In the darkness—darker
With the haunting after-images of light—
The dying God, the eaten Life
Are the nightmare I awaken from to night.

(The flames dance over life. The mourning slaves
In their dark secrecy, come burying
The slave bound in another's flesh, the slave
Freed once, forever, by another's flesh:
The Light flames, flushing the passive face
With its eternal life.)
The lives are fed
Into the darkness of their victory;
The ships sink, forgotten; and the sea
Blazes to darkness: the unsearchable
Death of the lives lies dark upon the life
That, bought by death, the loved and tortured lives,
Stares westward, passive, to the blackening sea.
In the tables of the dead, in the unopened almanac,
The head, charred, featureless—the unknown mean—
Is thrust from the waters like a flame, is torn
From its last being with the bestial cry
Of its pure agony. O death of all my life,
Because of you, because of you, I have not died,
By your death I have lived.
The sea is empty.
As I am empty, stirring the charred and answered
Questions about your home, your wife, your cat
That stayed at home with me—that died at home
Gray with the years that gleam above you there
In the great green grave where you are young
And unaccepting still. Bound in your death,
I choose between myself and you, between your life
And my own life: it is finished.

Here in my head
There is room for your black body in its shroud,
The dog-tags welded to your breastbone, and the flame
That winds above your death and my own life
And the world of my life. The letters and the face
That stir still, sometimes, with your fiery breath—
Take them, O grave! Great grave of all my years,
The unliving universe in which all life is lost,
Make yours the memory of that accepting
And accepted life whose fragments I cast here.

JEWS AT HAIFA

The freighter, gay with rust,
Coasts to a bare wharf of the harbor.
From the funnel's shade (the arbor
Of gourds from which the prophet, without trust,
Watched his old enemies,
The beings of this earth) I scrutinize

The hundreds at the rail
Lapped in the blue blaze of this sea
Who stare till their looks fail
At the earth that they are promised; silently
See the sand-bagged machine-guns,
The red-kneed soldiers blinking in the sun.

A machine-gun away
Are men with our faces: we are torn
With the live blaze of day—
Till we feel shifting, wrenched apart, the worn
Named stones of our last knowledge:
That all men wish our death. Here on the edge

Of the graves of Europe
We believe: truly, we are not dead;
It seems to us that hope
Is possible—that even mercy is permitted
To men on this earth,
To Jews on this earth. . . . But at Cyprus, the red earth,

The huts, the trembling wire
That wreathes us, are to us familiar
As death. All night, the fires
Float their sparks up to the yellow stars;
From the steel, stilted tower
The light sweeps over us. We whisper: "Ours."

Ours; and the stones slide home.
There is no hope; "in all this world
There is no other wisdom
Than ours: we have understood the world,"
We think; but hope, in dread
Search for one doubt, and whisper: "Truly, we are not dead."

A COUNTRY LIFE

A bird that I don't know,
Hunched on his light-pole like a scarecrow,
Looks sideways out into the wheat
The wind waves under the waves of heat.

The field is yellow as egg-bread dough
Except where (just as though they'd let
It live for looks) a locust billows
In leaf-green and shade-violet,
A standing mercy.
The bird calls twice, "*Red* clay, *red* clay";
Or else he's saying, "Directly, directly."
If someone came by I could ask,
Around here all of them must know—
And why they live so and die so—
Or why, for once, the lagging heron
Flaps from the little creek's parched cresses
Across the harsh-grassed, gullied meadow
To the black, rowed evergreens below.

They know and they don't know.
To ask, a man must be a stranger—
And asking, much more answering, is dangerous;
Asked about it, who would not repent
Of all he ever did and never meant,
And think a life and its distresses,
Its random, clutched-for, homefelt blisses,
The circumstances of an accident?
The farthest farmer in a field,
A gaunt plant grown, for seed, by farmers,
Has felt a longing, lorn urbanity
Jailed in his breast; and, just as I,
Has grunted, in his old perplexity,
A standing plea.

From the tar of the blazing square
The eyes shift, in their taciturn
And unavowing, unavailing sorrow.
Yet the intonation of a name confesses
Some secrets that they never meant
To let out to a soul; and what words would not dim
The bowed and weathered heads above the denim
Or the once-too-often-washed wash dresses?

They are subdued to their own element.
One day
The red, clay face
Is lowered to the naked clay;
After some words, the body is forsaken. . . .
The shadows lengthen, and a dreaming hope
Breathes, from the vague mound, *Life;*
From the grove under the spire
Stars shine, and a wandering light
Is kindled for the mourner, man.
The angel kneeling with the wreath
Sees, in the moonlight, graves.

HOPE

The spirit killeth, but the letter giveth life.

The week is dealt out like a hand
That children pick up card by card.
One keeps getting the same hand.
One keeps getting the same card.

But twice a day—except on Saturday—
But every day—except on Sunday—
The wheel stops, there is a catch in Time:
With a hiss of soles, a rattle of tin,
My own gray Daemon pauses on the stair,
My own bald Fortune lifts me by the hair.

Woe's me! Woe's me! In Folly's mailbox
Still laughs the postcard, Hope:
Your uncle in Australia
Has died and you are Pope.
For many a soul has entertained
A Mailman unawares—
And as you cry, "Impossible,"
A step is on the stairs.

One keeps getting the same dream
Delayed, marked Postage Due,
The bill that one has paid
Delayed, marked Payment Due,

Twice a day, in a rotting mailbox,
The white grubs are new:
And Faith once more is mine
Faithfully, but Charity
Writes hopefully about a new
Asylum—but Hope is as good as new.

Woe's me! Woe's me! In Folly's mailbox
Still laughs the postcard, Hope:
Your uncle in Australia
Has died and you are Pope.
For many a soul has entertained
A Mailman unawares—
And as you cry, "Impossible,"
A step is on the stairs.

THE REFUGEES

In the shabby train no seat is vacant.
The child in the ripped mask
Sits undisturbed in the waste
Of the smashed compartment. But how shall I escape?

These had lives like mine. What was it they possessed
That they were willing to trade for this?

There is blood, dried now, along the mask
Of the child who yesterday possessed
A country welcomer than this.
Did he? All night into the waste
The train moves silently, the vacant
Breath rises, vanishes—Escape, escape!

One pays, for this freedom, all that one possessed;
Here all the purses are vacant.
Sleep; and the emptying hearts escape
Even their own wish—turn back to this
Nothing that hides, with its calm cancelling mask,
The days and the faces: the world they waste.

What else are the lives but a journey to the vacant
Satisfaction of death? And the mask
They wear tonight through their waste
Is death's rehearsal. *For I too shall escape,*
We read in the faces; and what is there we possessed
That we were unwilling to trade for this?

Peter Viereck

PETER VIERECK was born August 5, 1916, in New York City. He attended Horace Mann School and, at twenty-one, was graduated *summa cum laude* from Harvard, where he was Phi Beta Kappa, and won prizes for his prose and verse. During 1937-38 he was a Fellow at Christ Church, Oxford, and, a few years later, was awarded the M.A. and Ph.D. in history from Harvard. During the Second World War he served overseas in the African and Italian campaigns and, later, taught at the "G. I. University" at Florence. After receiving his honorable discharge in 1945, he returned to Harvard, where he was Instructor in Literature and German. He became Assistant Professor at Smith and Associate Professor at Mount Holyoke.

Viereck's first book was not a book of poems but a book of political essays: *Metapolitics: From the Romantics to Hitler* (1941). Written at twenty-five, this brilliant analysis of the cultural backgrounds of fascism was translated into several languages. Viereck's astonishing range of manner and material was enlarged in *Terror and Decorum* (1948), a book of energetic and, at times, exuberant poems. Whatever Viereck touches takes on freshness and excitement. He writes about the Dawn Horse and the function of the poet with an equal mixture of gravity and mockery. He puts the scrawled phrase "Kilroy was here" into rhyme with adventurous daring and epic spirit. He is amusing and arousing in the same breath. He is an experimenter who rarely yields to the speciously spectacular, a writer who respects tradition without being submerged by it, a genuine wit who is, at the same

time, a poet of emotional power. *Terror and Decorum* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1949.

Most of all, Viereck marks a return to poetry not only as a resurgence of form but as an act of faith. He revolts against the fashionable "private message" which has become a trick, a carefully cultivated obliquity. "Some Lines in Three Parts" illustrates Viereck's combination of subtlety and clarity. At first reading there seems to be a confusion of images, but the imagery resolves logically and wittily from the troubled ego of the owl, symbol of professorial knowledge, into the philomel, the poet's singing nightingale. Essentially communicative, Viereck's cleverness is paralleled by undisguised feeling and a pervasive sense of beauty.

KILROY

[Editor's note: An example of an unfaked epic spirit emerging from the war was the expression "Kilroy was here," scribbled everywhere by American soldiers and implying that nothing was too adventurous or remote.]

Also Ulysses once—that other war.
(Is it because we find his scrawl
Today on every privy door
That we forget his ancient role?)
Also was there—he did it for the wages—
When a Cathay-drunk Genoese set sail.
Whenever "longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,"
Kilroy is there;
he tells The Miller's Tale.

At times he seems a paranoic king
Who stamps his crest on walls and says "My Own!"
But in the end he fades like a lost tune,
Tossed here and there, whom all the breezes sing.
"Kilroy was here"; these words sound manly gay,
Haughty yet tired with long marching.
He is Orestes—guilty of what crime?—
For whom the Furies still are searching;
When they arrive, they find their prey
(Leaving his name to mock them) went away.
Sometimes he does not flee from them in time:
"Kilroy was—"
with his blood a dying man
Wrote half the phrase out in Bataan.

Kilroy, beware. "HOME" is the final trap
That lurks for you in many a wily shape:
In pipe-and-slippers plus a Loyal Hound
Or fooling around, just fooling around.
Kind to the old (their warm Penelope)
But fierce to boys,
thus "home" becomes that sea,

Horribly disguised, where you were always drowned—
(How could suburban Crete condone
The yarns you would have V-mailed from the sun?)—
And folksy fishes sip Icarian tea.

One stab of hopeless wings imprinted your
Exultant Kilroy-signature
Upon sheer sky for all the world to stare:
"I was there! I was there! I was there!"

God is like Kilroy. He, too, sees it all;
That's how He knows of every sparrow's fall;
That's why we prayed each time the tightropes cracked
On which our loveliest clowns contrived their act.
The G. I. Faustus who was
everywhere
Strolled home again. "What was it like outside?"
Asked Can't, with his good neighbors Ought and But
And pale Perhaps and grave-eyed Better Not;
For "Kilroy" means: the world is very wide.
He was there, he was there, he was there!

And in the suburbs Can't sat down and cried.

VALE FROM CARTHAGE

(Spring, 1944)

I, now at Carthage. He, shot dead at Rome.
Shipmates last May. "And what if one of us,"
I asked last May, in fun, in gentleness,
"Wears doom, like dungarees, and doesn't know?"
He laughed, "Not see Times Square again?" The foam,
Feathering across that deck a year ago,
Swept those five words—like seeds—beyond the seas
Into his future. There they grew like trees;
And as he passed them there next spring, they laid
Upon his road of fire their sudden shade.
Though he had always scraped his mess-kit pure
And scrubbed redeemingly his barracks floor,
Though all his buttons glowed their ritual-hymn
Like cloudless moons to intercede for him,
No furlough fluttered from the sky. He will
Not see Times Square—he will not see—he will
Not see Times
change; at Carthage (while my friend,
Living those words at Rome, screamed in the end)
I saw an ancient Roman's tomb and read
"Vale" in stone. Here two wars mix their dead:
Roman, my shipmate's dream walks hand in hand
With yours tonight ("New York again" and "Rome"),

Like widowed sisters bearing water home
On tired heads through hot Tunisian sand
In good cool urns, and says, "I understand."
Roman, you'll see your Forum Square no more;
What's left but this to say of any war?

LOVE SONG TO EOHIPPUS

(Dictionary definition "EOHIPPUS, Greek for dawn-horse, small graceful prehistoric ancestor of modern equine family, size of rabbit; had four toes, no hoofs.")

Dance, dance in this museum case,
Ballet-star of our mammal race,
Attar and avatar of grace.

Sweet Eohippus, "dawn horse" in
That golden Attic tongue which now
Like you and Helen is extinct,
Like Cheshire cat of fading grin,
Like Carthage and like Villon's snow,
With death and beauty gently linked.

Yet all are deathless in their fashion:
You live in science, they in song,
You in museums, she in Homer.
She cannot help but live while passion
Still lives; your dancing lives as long
As grace; "extinct" is a misnomer.

Because sly Darwin liked the Fit
And Mendel, good gray monk, sowed peas,
Dame Evolution said benignly,
"My child, get bigger," and you did;
"Look here, those silly toes must cease!",
And you grew hoofs and frisked equinely.

When you were dodging dinosaurs
So recklessly, they were gigantic;
But look how Nature turns the tables:
Now they, who scared you with their roars,
Have changed to lizards, wee and frantic,
And you're immense and live in stables.

Ballet-star of our mammal race,
Last lingering of earth's first grace,
Dance on in this museum case.

BLINDMAN'S BUFF

Night-watchmen think of dawn and things auroral.
Clerks wistful for Bermudas think of coral.
The poet in New York still thinks of laurel.

(But lovers think of death and touch each other
As if to prove that love is still alive.)

The Martian space-crew, in an Earthward dive,
Think of their sweet unearthly earth Up There,
Where darling monsters romp in airless air.
(Two lovers think of death and touch each other,
Fearing that day when only one's alive.)

We think of cash, but cash does not arrive.
We think of fun, but fate will not connive.
We never mention death. Do we survive?
(The lovers think of death and touch each other
To live their love while love is yet alive.)

Prize-winners are so avid when they strive;
They race so far; they pile their toys so high.
Only a cad would trip them. Yet they die.
(The lovers think of death and touch each other;
Of all who live, these are the most alive.)

When all the lemming-realists contrive
To swim—where to?—in life's enticing tide,
Only a fool would stop and wait outside.
(The lovers stop and wait and touch each other.
Who twinly think of death are twice alive.)

Plump creatures smack their lips and think they thrive;
The hibernating bear, but half alive,
Dreams of free honey in a stingless hive.
He thinks of life at every lifeless breath.
(The lovers think of death.)

POET

"Toute forme créée, même par l'homme, est immortelle. Car la forme est indépendante de la matière, et ce ne sont pas les molecules qui constituent la forme."

(*Baudelaire: Mon Cœur Mis à Nu*)

The night he died, earth's images all came
To gloat in liberation round his tomb.
Now vengeful colors, stones, and faces dare
To argue with his metaphor;
And stars his fancy painted on the skies
Drop down like swords
to pierce his too wide eyes.

Words that begged favor at his court in vain—
Lush adverbs, senile rhymes in tattered gowns—
Send notes to certain exiled nouns
And mutter openly against his reign.
While rouged clichés hang out red lights again.

Hoarse refugees report from far-flung towns
That exclamation-marks are running wild
And prowling half-truths carried off a child.

But he lives on in Form, and Form shall shatter
This tuneless mutiny of Matter.
His bones are dead; his voice is horribly strong
Those famed vibrations of life's dancing dust,
Whose thrice-named pangs are "birth" and "death" and "lust,"
Are but the split iambics of his song.
Scansion of flesh in endless ebb and flow,
Mere grace-notes of that living thousand-year
Tyrannic metronome whose every gear
Is some shy craftsman buried long ago.
What terror crowns the sweetness of all song?

What hardness leaps at us from each soft tune
And hammers us to shapes we never planned?
This was a different dying from our own.
Call every wizard in the land—
Bell, book, and test tube; let the dark be rife
With every exorcism we command.
In vain. This death is stronger than our life.

In vain we drive stakes through such a haunter
Or woo with spiced applaudings such a heart.
His news of April do but mock our Winter
Like maps of heaven breathed on window-frost
By cruel clowns in codes whose key is lost.
Yet some sereneness in our rage has guessed
That we are being blessed and blessed and blessed
When least we know it and when coldest art
Seems hostile,
useless,
or apart.

Not worms, not worms in such a skull
But rhythms, rhythms writhe and sting and crawl.
He sings the seasons round, from bud to snow.
And all things are because he willed them so.

SOME LINES IN THREE PARTS

I

One tawny paw is all it takes to squash
This owl who nests in brows his grounded stare.
What ailed me from the arsenals of shape
To rent so armorless a pilgrim's cape?
And who am "I"? Were I all soul, I'd smash
Through this poor pelt—through, out, no matter where,
Just to wrench free one instant. Or else I'd hoot
With hideous ululations—*"let me out!"*—

Straight up at Such as cooped me here:
"How did you get me into such a scrape?"

II

But "I" being less than soul, of dustier plume:
If I escape, it is myself I lose.
Great hooting flapping ruffled ego, close
Your hopeless wings again and bless aloud—
Seeing only song flits through—this slandered home,
This sweet snug roost built from such stinking trash.
Sing out its theme (there never was but one),
Throw back your head and sing it all again,
Sing the bewildered honor of the flesh.
I say the honor of our flesh is love.
I say no soul, no god could love as we—
A forepaw stalking us from every cloud—
Who loved while sentenced to mortality.
Never to be won by shields, love fell
O only to the wholly vulnerable.

III

What hubbub rocks the nest? What panic-freighted
Invasion—when he tried to sing—dilated
The big eyes of my blinking, hooting fowl?
A cartilaginous, most rheumatic squeak
Portends (half mocks) the change; the wrenched bones creak;
Unself descends, invoked or uninvited;
Self ousts itself, consumed and consummated;
An inward-facing mask is what must break.
The magic feverish fun of chirping, all
That professorial squints and squawks indicted,
Is here—descends, descends—till wisdom, hoarse
From bawling beauty out, at last adores,
Possessed by metamorphosis so strong.
Then, with a final flutter, philomel—
How mud-splashed, what a mangy miracle!—
Writhes out of owl and stands with drooping wing.
Just stands there. Moulted, naked, two-thirds dead.
From shock and pain (and dread of holy dread)
Suddenly vomiting.
Look away quick; you are watching the birth of song.

Robert Lowell

ROBERT (TRAILL SPENCE) LOWELL was born March 1, 1917 in Boston, Massachusetts. He attended St. Mark's School, Harvard, and Kenyon, where he taught briefly, and Louisiana State University. In 1943 he twice attempted to enlist but he was rejected. When he was drafted he refused to serve on the grounds that the

country was out of danger and that the indiscriminate bombing of civilians was unprincipled and unbridled murder. As a conscientious objector, he served five months in a federal prison.

Like James Russell Lowell, his great-grandfather's brother, and Amy Lowell, a distant cousin, Robert Lowell was a consistent nonconformer. His first slender book, *Land of Unlikeness* (1944), showed a Puritan Lowell in revolt. Many of Lowell's poems were not only exciting but exasperated—angry love letters to New England. *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946), which contained some pages from the earlier volume, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. In 1947, before Lowell was thirty, the poet won two other signal honors: he was given a Guggenheim Fellowship and a grant of $1000 by the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

It is immediately apparent that Robert Lowell's poetry does not make for easy reading; the images are so congested, the allusions so complex that the uninitiated reader is likely to be confused. But it is also apparent that this is a poetry of deep passion and fierce tension; the impact is violent, the intensity of a traditional Protestant turned Catholic. Beneath the surface formalism of the verse, there is a deep protest against what New England has become, against the commercialism of the age and degeneration of the community.

The poets were especially loud in praise of Lowell's vibrancy and inventiveness. John Berryman wrote: "Robert Lowell seems to me the most powerful poet who has appeared in England or America for some years, master of a freedom in the Catholic subject without peer since Hopkins." Peter Viereck added: "But our true religious poets, like Hopkins, are Catholic out of love for God and not out of hate for godlessness; their faith is a salvation and not a suicide. Once Lowell resolves, one way or another, this paradox which makes too many of his poems Janus-faced and implausible, he may become the great American poet of the 1950's, for he seems the best qualified to restore to our literature its sense of the tragic and the lofty."

It was generally granted that Lowell's method was elliptical, but there was no escaping the moral purpose of his work. His is a tortured outcry against the corruption of the times; a grim need to find a faith in a world torn between frivolity and failure. If there is uncertainty in the writing there is no softness or insincerity. Technically Lowell is remarkably resourceful; he combines classic form and daring experiment. Obeying a logic of its own, Lowell's verse is unpredictable; the quickly accumulating images, the sudden transitions, the fierce rhetoric recall Hart Crane as well as the baroque metaphysicians of the seventeenth century. But Lowell's poetry could have been written nowhere but in New England, and at no other time than now.

THE HOLY INNOCENTS

Listen, the hay-bells tinkle as the cart
Wavers on rubber tires along the tar
And cindered ice below the burlap mill
And ale-wife run. The oxen drool and start
In wonder at the fenders of a car
And blunder hugely up St. Peter's hill.

These are the undefiled by woman—their
Sorrow is not the sorrow of this world:
King Herod shrieking vengeance at the curled
Up knees of Jesus choking in the air,

A king of speechless clods and infants. Still
The world out-Herods Herod; and the year,
The nineteen-hundred forty-fifth of grace,
Lumbers with losses up the clinkered hill
Of our purgation; and the oxen near
The worn foundations of their resting place,
The holy manger where their bed is corn
And holly torn for Christmas. If they die,
As Jesus, in the harness, who will mourn?
Lamb of the shepherds, Child, how still you lie.

COLLOQUY IN BLACK ROCK

Here the jack-hammer jabs into the ocean;
My heart, you race and stagger and demand
More blood-gangs for your nigger-brass percussions,
Till I, the stunned machine of your devotion,
Clanging upon this cymbal of a hand,
Am rattled screw and footloose. All discussions

End in the mud-flat detritus of death.
My heart, beat faster, faster. In Black Mud
Hungarian workmen give their blood
For the martyre Stephen, who was stoned to death.

Black Mud, a name to conjure with: O mud
For watermelons gutted to the crust,
Mud for the mole-tide harbor, mud for mouse,
Mud for the armored Diesel fishing tubs that thud
A year and a day to wind and tide; the dust
Is on this skipping heart that shakes my house,

House of our Savior who was hanged till death.
My heart, beat faster, faster. In Black Mud
Stephen the martyre was broken down to blood:
Our ransom is the rubble of his death.

Christ walks on the black water. In Black Mud
Darts the kingfisher. On Corpus Christi, heart,
Over the drum-beat of St. Stephen's choir
I hear him, *Stupor Mundi,* and the mud
Flies from his hunching wings and beak—my heart,
The blue kingfisher dives on you in fire.

AS A PLANE TREE BY THE WATER

Darkness has called to darkness, and disgrace
Elbows about our windows in this planned
Babel of Boston where our money talks
And multiplies the darkness of a land
Of preparation where the Virgin walks
And roses spiral her enamelled face
Or fall to splinters on unwatered streets.
Our Lady of Babylon, go by, go by,
I was once the apple of your eye;
Flies, flies are on the plane tree, on the streets.

The flies, the flies, the flies of Babylon
Buzz in my ear-drums while the devil's long
Dirge of the people detonates the hour
For floating cities where his golden tongue
Enchants the masons of the Babel Tower
To raise tomorrow's city to the sun
That never sets upon these hell-fire streets
Of Boston, where the sunlight is a sword
Striking at the withholder of the Lord:
Flies, flies are on the plane tree, on the streets.

Flies strike the miraculous waters of the iced
Atlantic and the eyes of Bernadette
Who saw Our Lady standing in the cave
At Massabielle, saw her so squarely that
Her vision put out reason's eyes. The grave
Is open-mouthed and swallowed up in Christ.
O walls of Jericho! And all the streets
To our Atlantic wall are singing: "Sing,
Sing for the resurrection of the King."
Flies, flies are on the plane tree, on the streets.

THE DEATH OF THE SHERIFF

"forsitan et Priami fuerint quae fata, requiras?"

Noli Me Tangere

We park and stare. A full sky of the stars
Wheels from the pumpkin setting of the moon
And sparks the windows of the yellow farm
Where the red-flannelled madmen look through bars
At windmills thrashing snowflakes by an arm
Of that Atlantic. Soon
The undertaker who collects antiques
Will let his motor idle at the door
And set his pine-box on the parlor floor.
Our homicidal sheriff howled for weeks;

We kiss. The State had reasons: on the whole,
It acted out of kindness when it locked
Its servant in this place and had him watched
Until an ordered darkness left his soul
A *tabula rasa;* when the Angel knocked
The sheriff laid his notched
Revolver on the table for the guest.
Night draws us closer in its bearskin wrap
And our loved sightless smother feels the tap
Of the blind stars descending to the west

To lay the Devil in the pit our hands
Are draining like a windmill. Who'll atone
For the unsearchable quicksilver heart
Where spiders stare their eyes out at their own
Spitting and knotted likeness? We must start:
Our aunt, his mother, stands
Singing *O Rock of Ages,* as the light
Wanderers show a man with a white cane
Who comes to take the coffin in his wain,
The thirsty Dipper on the arc of night.

WHERE THE RAINBOW ENDS

I saw the sky descending, black and white,
Not blue, on Boston where the winters wore
The skulls to jack-o'-lanterns on the slates,
And Hunger's skin-and-bone retrievers tore
The chickadee and shrike. The thorn tree waits
Its victim and tonight
The worms will eat the deadwood to the foot
Of Ararat: the scythers, Time and Death,
Helmed locusts, move upon the tree of breath;
The wild ingrafted olive and the root

Are withered, and a winter drifts to where
The Pepperpot, ironic rainbow, spans
Charles River and its scales of scorched-earth miles
I saw my city in the Scales, the pans
Of judgment rising and descending. Piles
Of dead leaves char the air—
And I am a red arrow on this graph
Of Revelations. Every dove is sold.
The Chapel's sharp-shinned eagle shifts its hold
On serpent-Time, the rainbow's epitaph.

In Boston serpents whistle at the cold.
The victim climbs the altar steps and sings:
"Hosannah to the lion, lamb, and beast
Who fans the furnace-face of IS with wings:
I breathe the ether of my marriage feast."

At the high altar, gold
And a fair cloth. I kneel and the wings beat
My cheek. What can the dove of Jesus give
You now but wisdom, exile? Stand and live,
The dove has brought an olive branch to eat.

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