

American Poetry, 1922: A Miscellany

[Pg i]

1922

A MISCELLANY



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A FOREWORD

When the first Miscellany of American Poetry appeared in 1920, innumerable were the questions asked by both readers and reviewers of publishers and contributors alike. The modest note on the jacket appeared to satisfy no one. The volume purported to have no editor, yet a collection without an editor was pronounced preposterous. It was obviously not the organ of a school, yet it did not seem to have been compiled to exploit any particular phase of American life; neither Nature, Love, Patriotism, Propaganda, nor Philosophy could be acclaimed as its reason for being, and it was certainly not intended, as has been so frequent of late, to bring a cheerful absence of mind to the world-weary during an unoccupied ten minutes. Again, it was exclusive not inclusive, since its object was, evidently, not the meritorious if impossible one of attempting to be a compendium of present-day American verse.

But the publisher's note had stated one thing quite clearly, that the Miscellany was to be a biennial. Two years have passed, and with the second volume it has seemed best to state at once the reasons which actuated its contributors to join in such [Pg iv]a venture.

In the first place, the plan of the *Miscellany* is frankly imitative. For some years now there has been published in England an anthology entitled Georgian Poetry. The Miscellany is intended to be an American companion to that publication. The dissimilarities of temperament, range and choice of subjects are manifest, but the outstanding difference is this: *Georgian Poetry* has an editor, and the poems it contains may be taken as that editor's reaction to the poetry of the day. The *Miscellany*, on the other hand, has no editor; it is no one person's choice which forms it; it is not an attempt to throw into relief any particular group or stress any particular tendency. It does disclose the most recent work of certain representative figures in contemporary American literature. The poets who appear here have come together by mutual accord and, although they may invite others to join them in subsequent volumes as circumstance dictates, each one stands (as all newcomers also must stand) as the exponent of fresh and strikingly diverse qualities in our native poetry. It is as if a dozen unacademic painters, separated by temperament and distance, were to arrange to have an exhibition every two years of their latest work. They would not pretend that they were the only painters worthy of a public showing; they would maintain that their work was, generally speaking, most interesting to one another. Their gallery would necessarily be limited; but it would be flexible [Pg v] enough to admit, with every fresh exhibit, three or

four new members who had achieved an importance and an idiom of their own. This is just what the original contributors to the *Miscellany* have done.

The newcomers—H. D., Alfred Kreymborg, and Edna St. Vincent Millay—have taken their places with the same absence of judge or jury that marks any "society of independents." There is no hanging committee; no organizer of "position." Two years ago the alphabet determined the arrangement; this time seniority has been the sole arbiter of precedence. Furthermore—and this can not be too often repeated—there has been no editor. To be painstakingly precise, each contributor has been his own editor. As such, he has chosen his own selections and determined the order in which they are to be printed, but he has had no authority over either the choice or grouping of his fellow exhibitors' contributions. To one of the members has been delegated the merely mechanical labors of assembling, proof-reading, and seeing the volume through the press. The absence of E. A. Robinson from this year's *Miscellany* is a source of regret not only to all the contributors but to the poet himself. Mr. Robinson has written nothing since his *Collected Poems* with the exception of a long poem—a volume in itself—but he hopes to appear in any subsequent collection.

It should be added that this is not a haphazard anthology of picked-over poetry. The poems that follow are new. They are new not only in the sense [Pg vi] that (with two exceptions) they cannot be found in book form, but most of them have never previously been published. Certain of the selections have appeared in recent magazines and these are reprinted by permission of *The Century*, *The Yale Review*, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, *The New Republic*, *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *The Bookman*, *The Freeman*, *Broom*, *The Dial*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Farm and Fireside*, *The Measure*, and *The Literary Review*. Vachel Lindsay's "I Know All This When Gipsy Fiddles Cry" is a revised version of the poem of that name which was printed in *The Enchanted Years*. [Pg vii]

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What had you done
If I had been a boy
It was not chastity that made me cold

CONRAD AIKEN

[Seven Twilights](#) 171

The ragged pilgrim on the road to nowhere
Now by the wall of the ancient town
When the tree bares, the music of it changes [Pg x]
"This is the hour," she says, "of transmutation"
Now the great wheel of darkness and low clouds
Heaven, you say, will be a field in April
In the long silence of the sea

[Tet  lestai](#) 184

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

[Eight Sonnets](#) 193

When you, that at this moment are to me
What's this of death, from you who never will die
I know I am but summer to your heart
Here is a wound that never will heal, I know
What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why
Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare
Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!
Say what you will, and scratch my heart to find

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[Pg 2]

AMY LOWELL

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, [Pg 4] 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 sandal-wood, 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, [Pg 5] 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 every one 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. [Pg 6] 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, [Pg 7] 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.

[Pg 8]

TWENTY-FOUR HOKKU ON A MODERN THEME

I
Again the larkspur, Heavenly blue in my garden. They, at least, unchanged.

II
How have I hurt you? You look at me with pale eyes, But these are my tears.

III
Morning and evening— Yet for us once long ago Was no division.

IV
I hear many words. Set an hour when I may come Or remain silent.

V
In the ghostly dawn I write new words for your ears— Even now you sleep. [Pg 9]

VI
This then is morning. Have you no comfort for me Cold-colored flowers?

VII
My eyes are weary Following you everywhere. Short, oh short, the days!

VIII
When the flower falls The leaf is no more cherished. Every day I fear.

IX
Even when you smile Sorrow is behind your eyes. Pity me, therefore.

X
Laugh—it is nothing. To others you may seem gay, I watch with grieved eyes. [Pg 10]

XI
Take it, this white rose. Stems of roses do not bleed; Your fingers are safe.

XII
As a river-wind Hurling clouds at a bright moon, So am I to you.

XIII
Watching the iris, The faint and fragile petals— How am I worthy?

XIV
Down a red river I drift in a broken skiff. Are you then so brave?

XV
Night lies beside me Chaste and cold as a sharp sword. It and I alone.

XVI

Last night it rained. Now, in the desolate dawn, Crying of blue jays. [Pg 11]

XVII

Foolish so to grieve, Autumn has its colored leaves— But before they turn?

XVIII

Afterwards I think: Poppies bloom when it thunders. Is this not enough?

XIX

Love is a game—yes? I think it is a drowning: Black willows and stars.

XX

When the aster fades The creeper flaunts in crimson. Always another!

XXI

Turning from the page, Blind with a night of labor, I hear morning crows.

XXII

A cloud of lilies, Or else you walk before me. Who could see clearly? [Pg 12]

XXIII

Sweet smell of wet flowers Over an evening garden. Your portrait, perhaps?

XXIV

Staying in my room, I thought of the new Spring leaves. That day was happy. [Pg 13]

THE SWANS

The swans float and float Along the moat Around the Bishop's garden, And the white clouds push Across a blue sky
With edges that seem to draw in and harden.

Two slim men of white bronze Beat each with a hammer on the end of a rod The hours of God. Striking a bell, They do
it well. And the echoes jump, and tinkle, and swell In the Cathedral's carved stone polygons.

The swans float About the moat, And another swan sits still in the air Above the old inn. He gazes into the street And
swims the cold and the heat, He has always been there, At least so say the cobbles in the square. They listen to the beat
Of the hammered bell, And think of the feet Which beat upon their tops; But what they think they do not tell. [Pg 14]
And the swans who float Up and down the moat Gobble the bread the Bishop feeds them. The slim bronze men beat the
hour again, But only the gargoyles up in the hard blue air heed them.

When the Bishop says a prayer, And the choir sing "Amen," The hammers break in on them there: Clang! Clang!
Beware! Beware! The carved swan looks down at the passing men, And the cobbles wink: "An hour has gone again."
But the people kneeling before the Bishop's chair Forget the passing over the cobbles in the square.

An hour of day and an hour of night, And the clouds float away in a red-splashed light. The sun, quotha? or white,
white Smoke with fire all alight.

An old roof crashing on a Bishop's tomb, Swarms of men with a thirst for room, And the footsteps blur to a shower,
shower, shower, Of men passing—passing—every hour, With arms of power, and legs of power, And power in their
strong, hard minds. No need then For the slim bronze men Who beat God's hours: Prime, Tierce, None. [Pg 15] Who
wants to hear? No one. We will melt them, and mold them, And make them a stem For a banner gorged with blood, For
a blue-mouthed torch. So the men rush like clouds, They strike their iron edges on the Bishop's chair And fling down
the lanterns by the tower stair. They rip the Bishop out of his tomb And break the mitre off of his head. "See," say they,
"the man is dead; He cannot shiver or sing. We'll toss for his ring."

The cobbles see this all along the street Coming—coming—on countless feet. And the clockmen mark the hours as they
go. But slow—slow— The swans float In the Bishop's moat. And the inn swan Sits on and on, Staring before him with
cold glass eyes. Only the Bishop walks serene, Pleased with his church, pleased with his house, Pleased with the sound
of the hammered bell, Beating his doom. Saying "Boom! Boom! Room! Room!" He is old, and kind, and deaf, and
blind, And very, very pleased with his charming moat And the swans which float. [Pg 16]

PRIME

Your voice is like bells over roofs at dawn
When a bird flies And the sky changes to a fresher color.

Speak, speak, Beloved. Say little things
For my ears to catch And run with them to my heart. [Pg 17]

VESPERS

Last night, at sunset, The foxgloves were like tall altar candles. Could I have lifted you to the roof of the greenhouse, my Dear, I should have understood their burning. [Pg 18]

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 thoughts, 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, [Pg 19] 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. [Pg 20]

LA RONDE DU DIABLE

"Here we go round the ivy-bush," And that's a tune we all dance to. Little poet people snatching ivy, Trying to prevent one another from snatching ivy. If you get a leaf, there's another for me; Look at the bush. But I want your leaf, Brother, and you mine, Therefore, of course, we push.

"Here we go round the laurel-tree." Do we want laurels for ourselves most, Or most that no one else shall have any? We cannot stop to discuss the question. We cannot stop to plait them into crowns Or notice whether they become us. We scarcely see the laurel-tree, The crowd about us is all we see, And there's no room in it for you and me. Therefore, Sisters, it's my belief We've none of us very much chance at a leaf.

"Here we go round the barberry-bush." It's a bitter, blood-red fruit at best, Which puckers the mouth and burns the heart. To tell the truth, only one or two Want the berries enough to strive For more than he has, more than she. An acid berry for you and me. [Pg 21] Abundance of berries for all who will eat, But an aching meat. That's poetry. And who wants to swallow a mouthful of sorrow? The world is old and our century Must be well along, and we've no time to waste. Make haste, Brothers and Sisters, push With might and main round the ivy-bush, Struggle and pull at the laurel-tree, And leave the barberries be For poor lost lunatics like me, Who set them so high They overtop the sun in the sky. Does it matter at all that we don't know why? [Pg 22]

ROBERT FROST

[Pg 24]

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 know that for destruction ice Is also great, And would suffice. [Pg 26]

THE GRINDSTONE

Having a wheel and four legs of its own Has never availed the cumbersome grindstone To get it anywhere that I can see. These hands have helped it go and even race; Not all the motion, though, they ever lent, Not all the miles it may have thought it went, Have got it one step from the starting place. It stands beside the same old apple tree. The shadow of the apple tree is thin Upon it now; its feet are fast in snow. All other farm machinery's gone in, And some of it on no more legs and wheel Than the grindstone can boast to stand or go. (I'm thinking chiefly of the wheelbarrow.) For months it hasn't known the taste of steel, Washed down with rusty water in a tin. But standing outdoors, hungry, in the cold, Except in towns, at night, is not a sin. And, anyway, its standing in the yard Under a ruinous live apple tree Has nothing any more to do with me, Except that I remember how of old, One summer day, all day I drove it hard, And some one mounted on it rode it hard, And he and I between us ground a blade.

I gave it the preliminary spin, [Pg 27] And poured on water (tears it might have been); And when it almost gayly jumped and flowed, A Father-Time-like man got on and rode, Armed with a scythe and spectacles that glowed. He turned on will-power to increase the load And slow me down—and I abruptly slowed, Like coming to a sudden railroad station. I changed from hand to hand in desperation.

I wondered what machine of ages gone This represented an improvement on. For all I knew it may have sharpened spears And arrowheads itself. Much use for years Had gradually worn it an oblate Spheroid that kicked and struggled in its gait, Appearing to return me hate for hate. (But I forgive it now as easily As any other boyhood enemy Whose pride has failed to get him anywhere.) I wondered who it was the man thought ground— The one who held the wheel back or the one Who gave his life to keep it going round? I wondered if he really thought it fair For him to have the say when we were done. Such were the bitter thoughts to which I turned.

Not for myself was I so much concerned. Oh, no!—although, of course, I could have found A better way to pass the afternoon Than grinding discord out of a grindstone, [Pg 28] And beating insects at their gritty tune. Nor was I for the man so much concerned. Once when the grindstone almost jumped its bearing It looked as if he might be badly thrown And wounded on his blade. So far from caring, I laughed inside, and only cranked the faster, (It ran as if it wasn't greased but glued); I welcomed any moderate disaster That might be calculated to postpone What evidently nothing could conclude.

The thing that made me more and more afraid Was that we'd ground it sharp and hadn't known, And now were only wasting precious blade. And when he raised it dripping once and tried The creepy edge of it with wary touch, And viewed it over his glasses funny-eyed, Only disinterestedly to decide It needed a turn more, I could have cried Wasn't there danger of a turn too much? Mightn't we make it worse instead of better? I was for leaving something to the whetter. What if it wasn't all it should be? I'd Be satisfied if he'd be satisfied. [Pg 29]

THE WITCH OF COÖS

Circa 1922

I staid the night for shelter at a farm Behind the mountain, with a mother and son, Two old-believers. They did all the talking.

The Mother Folks think a witch who has familiar spirits She *could* call up to pass a winter evening, But *won't*, should be

burned at the stake or something. Summoning spirits isn't "Button, button, Who's got the button?" I'd have you understand.

The Son Mother can make a common table rear And kick with two legs like an army mule.

The Mother And when I've done it, what good have I done? Rather than tip a table for you, let me Tell you what Ralle the Sioux Control once told me. He said the dead had souls, but when I asked him [Pg 30] How that could be—I thought the dead were souls, He broke my trance. Don't that make you suspicious That there's something the dead are keeping back? Yes, there's something the dead are keeping back.

The Son You wouldn't want to tell him what we have Up attic, mother?

The Mother Bones—a skeleton.

The Son But the headboard of mother's bed is pushed Against the attic door: the door is nailed. It's harmless. Mother hears it in the night Halting perplexed behind the barrier Of door and headboard. Where it wants to get Is back into the cellar where it came from.

The Mother We'll never let them, will we, son? We'll never!

The Son It left the cellar forty years ago And carried itself like a pile of dishes Up one flight from the cellar to the kitchen, Another from the kitchen to the bedroom, [Pg 31] Another from the bedroom to the attic, Right past both father and mother, and neither stopped it. Father had gone upstairs; mother was downstairs. I was a baby: I don't know where I was.

The Mother The only fault my husband found with me— I went to sleep before I went to bed, Especially in winter when the bed Might just as well be ice and the clothes snow. The night the bones came up the cellar-stairs Toffile had gone to bed alone and left me, But left an open door to cool the room off So as to sort of turn me out of it. I was just coming to myself enough To wonder where the cold was coming from, When I heard Toffile upstairs in the bedroom And thought I heard him downstairs in the cellar. The board we had laid down to walk dry-shod on When there was water in the cellar in spring Struck the hard cellar bottom. And then some one Began the stairs, two footsteps for each step, The way a man with one leg and a crutch, Or little child, comes up. It wasn't Toffile: It wasn't any one who could be there. The bulkhead double-doors were double-locked [Pg 32] And swollen tight and buried under snow. The cellar windows were banked up with sawdust And swollen tight and buried under snow. It was the bones. I knew them—and good reason. My first impulse was to get to the knob And hold the door. But the bones didn't try The door; they halted helpless on the landing, Waiting for things to happen in their favor. The faintest restless rustling ran all through them. I never could have done the thing I did If the wish hadn't been too strong in me To see how they were mounted for this walk. I had a vision of them put together Not like a man, but like a chandelier. So suddenly I flung the door wide on him. A moment he stood balancing with emotion, And all but lost himself. (A tongue of fire Flashed out and licked along his upper teeth. Smoke rolled inside the sockets of his eyes.) Then he came at me with one hand outstretched, The way he did in life once; but this time I struck the hand off brittle on the floor, And fell back from him on the floor myself. The finger-pieces slid in all directions. (Where did I see one of those pieces lately? [Pg 33] Hand me my button-box—it must be there.) I sat up on the floor and shouted, "Toffile, It's coming up to you." It had its choice Of the door to the cellar or the hall. It took the hall door for the novelty, And set off briskly for so slow a thing, Still going every which way in the joints, though, So that it looked like lightning or a scribble, From the slap I had just now given its hand. I listened till it almost climbed the stairs From the hall to the only finished bedroom, Before I got up to do anything; Then ran and shouted, "Shut the bedroom door, Toffile, for my sake!" "Company," he said, "Don't make me get up; I'm too warm in bed." So lying forward weakly on the handrail I pushed myself upstairs, and in the light (The kitchen had been dark) I had to own I could see nothing. "Toffile, I don't see it. It's with us in the room, though. It's the bones." "What bones?" "The cellar bones—out of the grave."

That made him throw his bare legs out of bed And sit up by me and take hold of me. [Pg 34] I wanted to put out the light and see If I could see it, or else mow the room, With our arms at the level of our knees, And bring the chalk-pile down. "I'll tell you what— It's looking for another door to try. The uncommonly deep snow has made him think Of his old song, *The Wild Colonial Boy*, He always used to sing along the tote-road. He's after an open door to get out-doors. Let's trap him with an open door up attic." Toffile agreed to that, and sure enough, Almost the moment he was given an opening, The steps began to climb the attic stairs. I heard them. Toffile didn't seem to hear them. "Quick!" I slammed to the door and held the knob. "Toffile, get nails." I made him nail the door shut, And push the headboard of the bed against it.

Then we asked was there anything Up attic that we'd ever want again. The attic was less to us than the cellar. If the bones liked the attic, let them like it, Let them *stay* in the attic. When they sometimes Come down the stairs at night and stand perplexed [Pg 35] Behind the door and headboard of the bed, Brushing their chalky skull with chalky fingers, With sounds like the dry rattling of a shutter, That's what I sit up in the dark to say— To no one any more since Toffile died. Let them stay in the attic since they went there. I promised Toffile to be cruel to them For helping them be cruel once to him.

The Son We think they had a grave down in the cellar.

The Mother We know they had a grave down in the cellar.

The Son We never could find out whose bones they were.

The Mother Yes, we could too, son. Tell the truth for once. They were a man's his father killed for me. I mean a man he killed instead of me. The least I could do was to help dig their grave. We were about it one night in the cellar. Son knows the story: but 'twas not for him To tell the truth, suppose the time had come. Son looks surprised to see me end a lie We'd kept up all these years between ourselves So as to have it ready for outsiders. But to-night I don't care enough to lie— [Pg 36] I don't remember why I ever cared. Toffile, if he were here, I don't believe Could tell you why he ever cared himself....

She hadn't found the finger-bone she wanted Among the buttons poured out in her lap.

I verified the name next morning: Toffile; The rural letter-box said Toffile Lajway. [Pg 37]

A BROOK IN THE CITY

The farm house lingers, though averse to square With the new city street it has to wear A number in. But what about the brook That held the house as in an elbow-crook? I ask as one who knew the brook, its strength And impulse, having dipped a finger-length And made it leap my knuckle, having tossed A flower to try its currents where they crossed. The meadow grass could be cemented down From growing under pavements of a town; The apple trees be sent to hearth-stone flame. Is water wood to serve a brook the same? How else dispose of an immortal force No longer needed? Staunch it at its source With cinder loads dumped down? The brook was thrown Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone In fetid darkness still to live and run— And all for nothing it had ever done Except forget to go in fear perhaps. No one would know except for ancient maps That such a brook ran water. But I wonder If, from its being kept forever under, These thoughts may not have risen that so keep This new-built city from both work and sleep. [Pg 38]

DESIGN

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white, On a white heal-all, holding up a moth Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth— Assorted characters of death and blight Mixed ready to begin the morning right, Like the ingredients of a witches' broth — A snow-drop spider, a flower like froth, And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white, The wayside blue and innocent heal-all? What brought the kindred spider to that height, Then steered the white moth thither in the night? What but design of darkness to appal?— If design govern in a thing so small. [Pg 39]

[Pg 41]

CARL SANDBURG

AND SO TO-DAY

And so to-day—they lay him away— the boy nobody knows the name of— the buck private—the unknown soldier—the doughboy who dug under and died when they told him to—that's him.

Down Pennsylvania Avenue to-day the riders go, men and boys riding horses, roses in their teeth, stems of roses, rose leaf stalks, rose dark leaves—the line of the green ends in a red rose flash.

Skeleton men and boys riding skeleton horses, the rib bones shine, the rib bones curve, shine with savage, elegant curves—a jawbone runs with a long white slant, a skull dome runs with a long white arch, bone triangles click and rattle, elbows, ankles, white line slants—shining in the sun, past the White House, past the Treasury Building, Army and Navy Buildings, on to the mystic white Capitol Dome—so they go down Pennsylvania Avenue to-day, skeleton men and boys riding skeleton horses, stems of roses in their teeth, rose dark leaves at their white jaw slants— [Pg 42] and a horse laugh question nickers and whinnies, moans with a whistle out of horse head teeth: why? who? where?

("The big fish—eat the little fish— the little fish—eat the shrimps— and the shrimps—eat mud,"— said a cadaverous man—with a black umbrella— spotted with white polka dots—with a missing ear—with a missing foot and arms—with a missing sheath of muscles singing to the silver sashes of the sun.)

And so to-day—they lay him away— the boy nobody knows the name of— the buck private—the unknown soldier—the doughboy who dug under and died when they told him to—that's him.

If he picked himself and said, "I am ready to die," if he gave his name and said, "My country, take me," then the baskets of roses to-day are for the Boy, the flowers, the songs, the steamboat whistles, the proclamations of the honorable orators, they are all for the Boy—that's him.

If the government of the Republic picked him saying, "You are wanted, your country takes you"— if the Republic put a stethoscope to his heart and looked at his teeth and tested his eyes and said, "You are a citizen of the Republic and a sound [Pg 43] animal in all parts and functions—the Republic takes you"— then to-day the baskets of flowers are all for the Republic, the roses, the songs, the steamboat whistles, the proclamations of the honorable orators— they are all for the Republic.

And so to-day—they lay him away— and an understanding goes—his long sleep shall be under arms and arches near the Capitol Dome— there is an authorization—he shall have tomb companions— the martyred presidents of the Republic— the buck private—the unknown soldier—that's him.

The man who was war commander of the armies of the Republic rides down Pennsylvania Avenue— The man who is peace commander of the armies of the Republic rides down Pennsylvania Avenue— for the sake of the Boy, for the sake of the Republic.

(And the hoofs of the skeleton horses all drum soft on the asphalt footing— so soft is the drumming, so soft the roll call of the grinning sergeants calling the roll call— so soft is it all—a camera man murmurs, "Moonshine.")

[Pg 44] Look—who salutes the coffin— lays a wreath of remembrance on the box where a buck private sleeps a clean dry sleep at last— look—it is the highest ranking general of the officers of the armies of the Republic.

(Among pigeon corners of the Congressional Library—they file documents quietly, casually, all in a day's work—this human document, the buck private nobody knows the name of—they file away in granite and steel—with music and roses, salutes, proclamations of the honorable orators.)

Across the country, between two ocean shore lines, where cities cling to rail and water routes, there people and horses stop in their foot tracks, cars and wagons stop in their wheel tracks— faces at street crossings shine with a silence of eggs laid in a row on a pantry shelf— among the ways and paths of the flow of the Republic faces come to a standstill, sixty clockticks count— in the name of the Boy, in the name of the Republic.

(A million faces a thousand miles from Pennsylvania Avenue stay frozen with a look, a clocktick, a moment— skeleton riders on skeleton horses—the nickering high horse laugh, the whinny and the howl up Pennsylvania Avenue: who? why? where?)

(So people far from the asphalt footing of Pennsylvania Avenue look, wonder, mumble—the riding white-jaw phantoms ride hi-eeee, hi-eeee, hi-yi, hi-yi, hi-eeee—the proclamations of the honorable orators mix with the top-sergeants whistling the roll call.)

[Pg 45] If when the clockticks counted sixty, when the heartbeats of the Republic came to a stop for a minute, if the Boy had happened to sit up, happening to sit up as Lazarus sat up, in the story, then the first shivering language to drip off his mouth might have come as, "Thank God," or "Am I dreaming?" or "What the hell" or "When do we eat?" or "Kill

em, kill 'em, the..." or "Was that ... a rat ... ran over my face?" or "For Christ's sake, gimme water, gimme water," or "Blub blub, bloo bloo...." or any bubbles of shell shock gibberish from the gashes of No Man's Land.

Maybe some buddy knows, some sister, mother, sweetheart, maybe some girl who sat with him once when a two-horn silver moon [Pg 46] slid on the peak of a house-roof gable, and promises lived in the air of the night, when the air was filled with promises, when any little slip-shoe lovey could pick a promise out of the air.

"Feed it to 'em, they lap it up, bull ... bull ... bull," Said a movie news reel camera man, Said a Washington newspaper correspondent, Said a baggage handler lugging a trunk, Said a two-a-day vaudeville juggler, Said a hanky-pank selling jumping-jacks. "Hokum—they lap it up," said the bunch.

And a tall scar-face ball player, Played out as a ball player, Made a speech of his own for the hero boy, Sent an earful of his own to the dead buck private: "It's all safe now, buddy, Safe when you say yes, Safe for the yes-men."

He was a tall scar-face battler With his face in a newspaper Reading want ads, reading jokes, Reading love, murder, politics, Jumping from jokes back to the want ads, Reading the want ads first and last, [Pg 47] The letters of the word JOB, "J-O-B," Burnt like a shot of bootleg booze In the bones of his head— In the wish of his scar-face eyes.

The honorable orators, Always the honorable orators, Buttoning the buttons on their prinz alberts, Pronouncing the syllables "sac-ri-fice," Juggling those bitter salt-soaked syllables— Do they ever gag with hot ashes in their mouths? Do their tongues ever shrivel with a pain of fire Across those simple syllables "sac-ri-fice"?

(There was one orator people far off saw. He had on a gunnysack shirt over his bones, And he lifted an elbow socket over his head, And he lifted a skinny signal finger. And he had nothing to say, nothing easy— He mentioned ten million men, mentioned them as having gone west, mentioned them as shoving up the daisies. We could write it all on a postage stamp, what he said. He said it and quit and faded away, A gunnysack shirt on his bones.)

Stars of the night sky, did you see that phantom fadeout, did you see those phantom riders, [Pg 48] skeleton riders on skeleton horses, stems of roses in their teeth, rose leaves red on white-jaw slants, grinning along on Pennsylvania Avenue, the top-sergeants calling roll calls— did their horses nicker a horse laugh? did the ghosts of the boney battalions move out and on, up the Potomac, over on the Ohio and out to the Mississippi, the Missouri, the Red River, and down to the Rio Grande, and on to the Yazoo, over to the Chattahoochee and up to the Rappahannock? did you see 'em, stars of the night sky?

And so to-day—they lay him away— the boy nobody knows the name of— they lay him away in granite and steel— with music and roses—under a flag— under a sky of promises. [Pg 49]

CALIFORNIA CITY LANDSCAPE

On a mountain-side the real estate agents Put up signs marking the city lots to be sold there. A man whose father and mother were Irish Ran a goat farm half-way down the mountain; He drove a covered wagon years ago, Understood how to handle a rifle, Shot grouse, buffalo, Indians, in a single year, And now was raising goats around a shanty. Down at the foot of the mountain Two Japanese families had flower farms. A man and woman were in rows of sweet peas Picking the pink and white flowers To put in baskets and take to the Los Angeles market. They were clean as what they handled There in the morning sun, the big people and the baby-faces. Across the road, high on another mountain, Stood a house saying, "I am it," a commanding house. There was the home of a motion picture director Famous for lavish whore-house interiors, Clothes ransacked from the latest designs for women In the combats of "male against female." The mountain, the scenery, the layout of the landscape, And the peace of the morning sun as it happened, [Pg 50] The miles of houses pocketed in the valley beyond— It was all worth looking at, worth wondering about, How long it might last, how young it might be. [Pg 51]

UPSTREAM

The strong men keep coming on. They go down shot, hanged, sick, broken. They live on, fighting, singing, lucky as plungers.

The strong men ... they keep coming 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. [Pg 52]

WINDFLOWER LEAF

This flower is repeated out of old winds, out of old times.

The wind repeats these, it must have these, over and over again.

Oh, windflowers so fresh, Oh, beautiful leaves, here now again.

The domes over fall to pieces. The stones under fall to pieces. Rain and ice wreck the works. The wind keeps, the windflowers keep, the leaves last, The wind young and strong lets these last longer than stones. [Pg 53]

[Pg 54]

[Pg 55]

VACHEL LINDSAY

IN PRAISE OF JOHNNY APPLESEED[1]

(Born 1775. Died 1847)

[1] The best account of John Chapman's career, under the name "Johnny Appleseed," is to be found in *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, November, 1871.

I. Over the Appalachian Barricade

To be read like old leaves on the elm tree of Time.

Sifting soft winds with sentence and rhyme.

In the days of President Washington, The glory of the nations, Dust and ashes, Snow and sleet, And hay and oats and wheat, Blew west, Crossed the Appalachians, Found the glades of rotting leaves, the soft deer-pastures, The farms of the far-off future In the forest. Colts jumped the fence, Snorting, ramping, snapping, sniffing, With gastronomic calculations, Crossed the Appalachians, The east walls of our citadel, And turned to gold-horned unicorns, Feasting in the dim, volunteer farms of the forest. Stripedest, kickingest kittens escaped, Caterwauling "Yankee Doodle Dandy," [Pg 56] Renounced their poor relations, Crossed the Appalachians, And turned to tiny tigers In the humorous forest. Chickens escaped From farmyard congregations, Crossed the Appalachians, And turned to amber trumpets On the ramparts of our Hoosiers' nest and citadel, Millennial heralds Of the foggy mazy forest. Pigs broke loose, scrambled west, Scorned their loathsome stations, Crossed the Appalachians, Turned to roaming, foaming wild boars Of the forest. The smallest, blindest puppies toddled west While their eyes were coming open, And, with misty observations, Crossed the Appalachians, Barked, barked, barked At the glow-worms and the marsh lights and the lightning-bugs, And turned to ravening wolves Of the forest. Crazy parrots and canaries flew west, Drunk on May-time revelations, Crossed the Appalachians, And turned to delirious, flower-dressed fairies Of the lazy forest. [Pg 57] Haughtiest swans and peacocks swept west, And, despite soft derivations, Crossed the Appalachians, And turned to blazing warrior souls Of the forest, Singing the ways Of the Ancient of Days. And the "Old Continentals In their ragged regimentals," With bard's imaginations, Crossed the Appalachians. And A boy Blew west And with prayers and incantations, And with "Yankee Doodle Dandy," Crossed the Appalachians, And was "young John Chapman," Then "Johnny Appleseed, Johnny Appleseed," Chief of the fastnesses, dappled and vast, In a pack on his back, In a deer-hide sack, The beautiful orchards of the past, The ghosts of all the forests and the groves— In that pack on his back, In that talisman sack, To-morrow's peaches, pears and cherries, To-morrow's grapes and red raspberries, Seeds and tree souls, precious things, [Pg 58] Feathered with microscopic wings, All the outdoors the child heart knows, And the apple, green, red, and white, Sun of his day and his night— The apple allied to the thorn, Child of the rose. Porches untrod of forest houses

All before him, all day long, "Yankee Doodle" his marching song; And the evening breeze Joined his psalms of praise
As he sang the ways Of the Ancient of Days.

Leaving behind august Virginia, Proud Massachusetts, and proud Maine, Planting the trees that would march and train
On, in his name to the great Pacific, Like Birnam wood to Dunsinane, Johnny Appleseed swept on, Every shackle
gone, Loving every sloshy brake, Loving every skunk and snake, Loving every leathery weed, Johnny Appleseed,
Johnny Appleseed, Master and ruler of the unicorn-ramping forest, The tiger-mewing forest, The rooster-trumpeting,
boar-foaming, wolf-ravening forest, The spirit-haunted, fairy-enchanted forest, [Pg 59] Stupendous and endless,
Searching its perilous ways In the name of the Ancient of Days.

II. The Indians Worship Him, but He hurries on

Painted kings in the midst of the clearing Heard him asking his friends the eagles To guard each planted seed and
seedling. Then he was a god, to the red man's dreaming; Then the chiefs brought treasures grotesque and fair,—
Magical trinkets and pipes and guns, Beads and furs from their medicine-lair,— Stuck holy feathers in his hair, Hailed
him with austere delight. The orchard god was their guest through the night.

While the late snow blew from bleak Lake Erie, Scourging rock and river and reed, All night long they made great
medicine For Jonathan Chapman, Johnny Appleseed, Johnny Appleseed; And as though his heart were a wind-blown
wheat-sheaf, [Pg 60] As though his heart were a new-built nest, As though their heaven house were his breast, In swept
the snow-birds singing glory. And I hear his bird heart beat its story, Hear yet how the ghost of the forest shivers, Hear
yet the cry of the gray, old orchards, Dim and decaying by the rivers, And the timid wings of the bird-ghosts beating,
And the ghosts of the tom-toms beating, beating.

While you read, hear the hoof-beats of deer in the snow.

And see, by their track, bleeding footprints we know.

But he left their wigwams and their love. By the hour of dawn he was proud and stark, Kissed the Indian babes with a
sigh, Went forth to live on roots and bark, Sleep in the trees, while the years howled by—

Calling the catamounts by name, And buffalo bulls no hand could tame, Slaying never a living creature, Joining the
birds in every game, With the gorgeous turkey gobblers mocking, With the lean-necked eagles boxing and shouting;
Sticking their feathers in his hair,— Turkey feathers, Eagle feathers,— Trading hearts with all beasts and weathers He
swept on, winged and wonder-crested, Bare-armed, barefooted, and bare-breasted. [Pg 61]

While you read, see conventions of deer go by.

The bucks toss their horns, the fuzzy fawns fly.

The maples, shedding their spinning seeds, Called to his appleseeds in the ground, Vast chestnut-trees, with their
butterfly nations, Called to his seeds without a sound. And the chipmunk turned a "summer-set," And the foxes danced
the Virginia reel; Hawthorne and crab-thorn bent, rain-wet, And dropped their flowers in his night-black hair; And the
soft fawns stopped for his perorations; And his black eyes shone through the forest-gleam, And he plunged young
hands into new-turned earth, And prayed dear orchard boughs into birth; And he ran with the rabbit and slept with the
stream. And he ran with the rabbit and slept with the stream. And so for us he made great medicine, And so for us he
made great medicine, In the days of President Washington.

III. Johnny Appleseed's Old Age

To be read like faint hoof-beats of fawns long gone

From respectable pasture, and park and lawn,

And heartbeats of fawns that are coming again

When the forest, once more, is the master of men.

Long, long after, When settlers put up beam and rafter, They asked of the birds: "Who gave this fruit? Who watched
this fence till the seeds took root? Who gave these boughs?" They asked the sky, And there was no reply. But the robin
might have said, "To the farthest West he has followed the sun, [Pg 62] His life and his empire just begun."

Self-scourged, like a monk, with a throne for wages, Stripped like the iron-souled Hindu sages, Draped like a statue, in

strings like a scarecrow, His helmet-hat an old tin pan, But worn in the love of the heart of man, More sane than the helm of Tamerlane, Hairy Ainu, wild man of Borneo, Robinson Crusoe—Johnny Appleseed; And the robin might have said, "Sowing, he goes to the far, new West, With the apple, the sun of his burning breast— The apple allied to the thorn, Child of the rose."

Washington buried in Virginia, Jackson buried in Tennessee, Young Lincoln, brooding in Illinois, And Johnny Appleseed, priestly and free, Knotted and gnarled, past seventy years, Still planted on in the woods alone. Ohio and young Indiana— These were his wide altar-stone, Where still he burnt out flesh and bone. [Pg 63] Twenty days ahead of the Indian, twenty years ahead of the white man, At last the Indian overtook him, at last the Indian hurried past him; At last the white man overtook him, at last the white man hurried past him; At last his own trees overtook him, at last his own trees hurried past him. Many cats were tame again, Many ponies tame again, Many pigs were tame again, Many canaries tame again; And the real frontier was his sun-burnt breast.

From the fiery core of that apple, the earth, Sprang apple-amaranths divine. Love's orchards climbed to the heavens of the West, And snowed the earthly sod with flowers. Farm hands from the terraces of the blest Danced on the mists with their ladies fine; And Johnny Appleseed laughed with his dreams, And swam once more the ice-cold streams. And the doves of the spirit swept through the hours, With doom-calls, love-calls, death-calls, dream-calls; And Johnny Appleseed, all that year, Lifted his hands to the farm-filled sky, To the apple-harvesters busy on high; And so once more his youth began, And so for us he made great medicine— Johnny Appleseed, medicine-man. [Pg 64] Then The sun was his turned-up broken barrel, Out of which his juicy apples rolled, Down the repeated terraces, Thumping across the gold, An angel in each apple that touched the forest mold, A ballot-box in each apple, A state capital in each apple, Great high schools, great colleges, All America in each apple, Each red, rich, round, and bouncing moon That touched the forest mold. Like scrolls and rolled-up flags of silk, He saw the fruits unfold, And all our expectations in one wild-flower-written dream, Confusion and death sweetness, and a thicket of crab-thorns, Heart of a hundred midnights, heart of the merciful morns. Heaven's boughs bent down with their alchemy, Perfumed airs, and thoughts of wonder. And the dew on the grass and his own cold tears Were one in brooding mystery, Though death's loud thunder came upon him, Though death's loud thunder struck him down— The boughs and the proud thoughts swept through the thunder, Till he saw our wide nation, each State a flower, Each petal a park for holy feet, [Pg 65] With wild fawns merry on every street, With wild fawns merry on every street, The vista of ten thousand years, flower-lighted and complete.

Hear the lazy weeds murmuring, bays and rivers whispering, From Michigan to Texas, California to Maine; Listen to the eagles, screaming, calling, "Johnny Appleseed, Johnny Appleseed," There by the doors of old Fort Wayne.

In the four-poster bed Johnny Appleseed built, Autumn rains were the curtains, autumn leaves were the quilt. He laid him down sweetly, and slept through the night, Like a bump on a log, like a stone washed white, There by the doors of old Fort Wayne. [Pg 66]

I KNOW ALL THIS WHEN GIPSY FIDDLES CRY

Oh, gipsies, proud and stiff-necked and perverse, Saying: "We tell the fortunes of the nations, And revel in the deep palm of the world. The head-line is the road we choose for trade. The love-line is the lane wherein we camp. The life-line is the road we wander on. Mount Venus, Jupiter, and all the rest Are finger-tips of ranges clasping round And holding up the Romany's wide sky."

Oh, gipsies, proud and stiff-necked and perverse, Saying: "We will swap horses till the doom, And mend the pots and kettles of mankind, And lend our sons to big-time vaudeville, Or to the race-track, or the learned world. But India's Brahma waits within their breasts. They will return to us with gipsy grins, And chatter Romany, and shake their curls And hug the dirtiest babies in the camp. They will return to the moving pillar of smoke, The whitest toothed, the merriest laughers known, The blackest haired of all the tribes of men. What trap can hold such cats? The Romany Has crossed such delicate palms with lead or gold, Wheedling in sun and rain, through perilous years, All coins now look alike. The palm is all. [Pg 67] Our greasy pack of cards is still the book Most read of men. The heart's librarians, We tell all lovers what they want to know. So, out of the famed Chicago Library, Out of the great Chicago orchestras, Out of the skyscraper, the Fine Arts Building, Our sons will come with fiddles and with loot, Dressed, as of old, like turkey-cocks and zebras, Like tiger-lilies and chameleons, Go west with us to California, Telling the fortunes of the bleeding world, And kiss the sunset, ere their day is done."

Oh, gipsies, proud and stiff-necked and perverse, Picking the brains and pockets of mankind, You will go westward for one-half hour yet. You will turn eastward in a little while. You will go back, as men turn to Kentucky, Land of their

fathers, dark and bloody ground. When all the Jews go home to Syria, When Chinese cooks go back to Canton, China, When Japanese photographers return With their black cameras to Tokio, And Irish patriots to Donegal, And Scotch accountants back to Edinburgh, You will go back to India, whence you came. When you have reached the borders of your quest, Homesick at last, by many a devious way, Winding the wonderlands circuitous, By foot and horse will trace the long way back! [Pg 68] Fiddling for ocean liners, while the dance Sweeps through the decks, your brown tribes all will go! Those east-bound ships will hear your long farewell On fiddle, piccolo, and flute and timbrel. I know all this, when gipsy fiddles cry.

That hour of their homesickness, I myself Will turn, will say farewell to Illinois, To old Kentucky and Virginia, And go with them to India, whence they came. For they have heard a singing from the Ganges, And cries of orioles,—from the temple caves,— And Bengal's oldest, humblest villages. They smell the supper smokes of Amritsar. Green monkeys cry in Sanskrit to their souls From lofty bamboo trees of hot Madras. They think of towns to ease their feverish eyes, And make them stand and meditate forever, Domes of astonishment, to heal the mind. I know all this, when gipsy fiddles cry.

What music will be blended with the wind When gipsy fiddlers, nearing that old land, Bring tunes from all the world to Brahma's house? Passing the Indus, winding poisonous forests, Blowing soft flutes at scandalous temple girls, Filling the highways with their magpie loot, What brass from my Chicago will they heap, What gems from Walla Walla, Omaha, [Pg 69] Will they pile near the Bodhi Tree, and laugh? They will dance near such temples as best suit them, Though they will not quite enter, or adore, Looking on roofs, as poets look on lilies, Looking at towers, as boys at forest vines, That leap to tree-tops through the dizzy air. I know all this, when gipsy fiddles cry.

And with the gipsies there will be a king And a thousand desperadoes just his style, With all their rags dyed in the blood of roses, Splashed with the blood of angels, and of demons. And he will boss them with an awful voice. And with a red whip he will beat his wife. He will be wicked on that sacred shore, And rattle cruel spurs against the rocks, And shake Calcutta's walls with circus bugles. He will kill Brahmins there, in Kali's name, And please the thugs, and blood-drunk of the earth. I know all this, when gipsy fiddles cry.

Oh, sweating thieves, and hard-boiled scalawags, That still will boast your pride until the doom, Smashing every caste rule of the world, Reaching at last your Hindu goal to smash The caste rules of old India, and shout: "Down with the Brahmins, let the Romany reign."

When gipsy girls look deep within my hand They always speak so tenderly and say That I am one of those star-crossed to wed [Pg 70] A princess in a forest fairy-tale. So there will be a tender gipsy princess, My Juliet, shining through this clan. And I would sing you of her beauty now. And I will fight with knives the gipsy man Who tries to steal her wild young heart away. And I will kiss her in the waterfalls, And at the rainbow's end, and in the incense That curls about the feet of sleeping gods, And sing with her in canebrakes and in rice fields, In Romany, eternal Romany. We will sow secret herbs, and plant old roses, And fumble through dark, snaky palaces, Stable our ponies in the Taj Mahal, And sleep out-doors ourselves. In her strange fairy mill-wheel eyes will wait All windings and unwindings of the highways, From India, across America,— All windings and unwindings of my fancy, All windings and unwindings of all souls, All windings and unwindings of the heavens. I know all this, when gipsy fiddles cry.

We gipsies, proud and stiff-necked and perverse, Standing upon the white Himalayas, Will think of far divine Yosemite. We will heal Hindu hermits there with oil Brought from California's tall sequoias. And we will be like gods that heap the thunders, [Pg 71] And start young redwood trees on Time's own mountains. We will swap horses with the rising moon, And mend that funny skillet called Orion, Color the stars like San Francisco's street-lights, And paint our sign and signature on high In planets like a bed of crimson pansies; While a million fiddles shake all listening hearts, Crying good fortune to the Universe, Whispering adventure to the Ganges waves, And to the spirits, and all winds and gods. Till mighty Brahma puts his golden palm Within the gipsy king's great striped tent, And asks his fortune told by that great love-line That winds across his palm in splendid flame.

Only the hearthstone of old India Will end the endless march of gipsy feet. I will go back to India with them When they go back to India whence they came. I know all this, when gipsy fiddles cry. [Pg 72]

JAMES OPPENHEIM

HEBREWS

I come of a mighty race.... I come of a very mighty race.... Adam was a mighty man, and Noah a captain of the moving waters, Moses was a stern and splendid king, yea, so was Moses.... Give me more songs like David's to shake my throat to the pit of the belly, And let me roll in the Isaiah thunder....

Ho! the mightiest of our young men was born under a star in the midwinter.... His name is written on the sun and it is frosted on the moon.... Earth breathes him like an eternal spring: he is a second sky over the Earth.

Mighty race! mighty race!—my flesh, my flesh Is a cup of song, Is a well in Asia.... I go about with a dark heart where the Ages sit in a divine thunder.... My blood is cymbal-clashed and the anklets of the dancers tinkle there.... [Pg 76]
Harp and psaltery, harp and psaltery make drunk my spirit.... I am of the terrible people, I am of the strange Hebrews.... Amongst the swarms fixed like the rooted stars, my folk is a streaming Comet, Comet of the Asian tiger-darkness, The Wanderer of Eternity, the eternal Wandering Jew....

Ho! we have turned against the mightiest of our young men And in that denial we have taken on the Christ, And the two thieves beside the Christ, And the Magdalen at the feet of the Christ, And the Judas with thirty silver pieces selling the Christ,— And our twenty centuries in Europe have the shape of a Cross On which we have hung in disaster and glory....

Mighty race! mighty race!—my flesh, my flesh Is a cup of song, Is a well in Asia. [Pg 77]

[Pg 78]

ALFRED KREYMBORG

[Pg 79]

ADAGIO: A DUET

(For J. S. and L. U.)

Should you lay ear to these lines— you will not catch a distant drum of hoofs, cavalcade of Arabians, passionate horde bearing down, destroying your citadel— but maybe you'll hear— should you just listen at the right place, hold it tenaciously, give your full blood to the effort— maybe you'll note the start of a single step, always persistently faint, wavering in its movement between coming and going, never quite arriving, never quite passing— and tell me which it is, you or I that you greet, searching a mutual being— and whether two aren't closer for the labor of an ear? [Pg 80]

DIE KÜCHE

She lets the hydrant water run: He fancies lonely, banal, bald-headed mountains, affected by the daily caress of the tropical sun, weeping tears the length of brooks down their faces and flanks. She lets the hydrant water run: He hearkens Father Sebastian cooking and spreading homely themes over an inept-looking clavier confounding the wits of his children and all men's children down to the last generation. He marvels at the paradox, drums his head with the tattoo: how can a thing as small as he shape and maintain an art out of himself universal enough to carry her daily vigil to crystallised immortality? She lets the hydrant water run. [Pg 81]

RAIN

It's all very well for you suddenly to withdraw and say, I'll come again, but what of the bruises you've left, what of the green and the blue, the yellow, purple and violet?— don't you be telling us, I'm innocent of these, irresponsible of happenings— didn't we see you steal next to her, tenderly, with your silver mist about you to hide your blandishment?— now, what of what followed, eh?— we saw you hover close, caress her, open her pore-cups, make a cross of her, quickly penetrate her— she opening to you, engulfing you, every limb of her, bud of her, pore of her?— don't call these

things, kisses— mouth-kisses, hand-kisses, elbow, knee and toe, and let it go at that— [Pg 82] disappear and promise what you'll never perform: we've known you to slink away until drought-time, drooping-time, withering-time: we've caught you crawling off into winter-time, try to cover what you've done with a long white scarf— your own frozen tears (likely phrase!) and lilt your, I'll be back in spring! Next spring, and you know it, she won't be the same, though she may look the same to you from where you are, and invite you down again! [Pg 83]

PEASANT

It's the mixture of peasantry makes him so slow. He waggles his head before he speaks, like a cow before she crops. He bends to the habit of dragging his feet up under him, like a measuring-worm: some of his forefathers, stooped over books, ruled short straight lines under two rows of figures to keep their thin savings from sifting to the floor. Should you strike him with a question, he will blink twice or thrice and roll his head about, like an owl in the pin-pricks of a dawn he cannot see. There is mighty little flesh about his bones, there is no gusto in his stride: he seems to wait [Pg 84] for the blow on the buttocks that will drive him another step forward— step forward to what? There is no land, no house, no barn, he has ever owned; he sits uncomfortable on chairs you might invite him to: if you did, he'd keep his hat in hand against the moment when some silent pause for which he hearkens with his ear to one side bids him move on— move on where? It doesn't matter. He has learned to shrug his shoulders, so he'll shrug his shoulders now: caterpillars do it when they're halted by a stick. Is there a sky overhead?— a hope worth flying to?— birds may know about it, but it's birds that birds descend from. [Pg 85]

BUBBLES

You had best be very cautious how you say, I love you. If you accent the I, she has an opening for, who are you to strut on ahead and hint there aren't others, aren't, weren't and won't be? Blurt out the love, she has suspicion for, so?— why not hitherto?— what brings you bragging now?— and what'll it be hereafter? Defer to the you, she has certitude for, me? thanks, lad!— but why argue about it?— or fancy I'm lonesome?— do I look as though you had to? And having determined how you'll say it, you had next best ascertain whom it is that you say it to. [Pg 86] That you're sure she's the one, that there'll never be another, never was one before. And having determined whom and having learned how, when you bring these together, inform the far of the intimate— like a bubble on a pond, emerging from below, round wonderment completed by the first sight of the sky— what good will it do, if she shouldn't, I love you?— a bubble's but a bubble once, a bubble grows to die. [Pg 87]

DIRGE

Death alone has sympathy for weariness: understanding of the ways of mathematics: of the struggle against giving up what was given: the plus one minus one of nitrogen for oxygen: and the unequal odds, you a cell against the universe, a breath or two against all time: Death alone takes what is left without protest, criticism or a demand for more than one can give who can give no more than was given: doesn't even ask, but accepts it as it is, without examination, valuation, or comparison. [Pg 88]

COLOPHON

(For W. W.)

The Occident and the Orient, posterior and posterior, sitting tight, holding fast the culture dumped by them on to primitive America, Atlantic to Pacific, were monumental colophons a disorderly country fellow, vulgar Long Islander. not overfond of the stench choking native respiration, poked down off the shelf with the aid of some mere blades of grass; and deliberately climbing up, brazenly usurping one end of the new America, now waves his spears aloft and shouts down valleys, across plains, over mountains, into heights: Come, what man of you dares climb the other? [Pg 89]

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. [Pg 92]

PLACES

I
Twilight
(*Tucson*)

Aloof as aged kings, Wearing like them the purple, The mountains ring the mesa Crowned with a dusky light; Many a time I watched That coming-on of darkness Till stars burned through the heavens Intolerably bright.

It was not long I lived there, But I became a woman Under those vehement stars, For it was there I heard For the first time my spirit Forging an iron rule for me, As though with slow cold hammers Beating out word by word:

"Take love when love is given, But never think to find it A sure escape from sorrow Or a complete repose; [Pg 93]
Only yourself can heal you, Only yourself can lead you Up the hard road to heaven That ends where no one knows." [Pg 94]

II
Full Moon
(*Santa Barbara*)

I listened, there was not a sound to hear In the great rain of moonlight pouring down, The eucalyptus trees were carved in silver, And a light mist of silver lulled the town.

I saw far off the gray Pacific bearing A broad white disk of flame, And on the garden-walk a snail beside me Tracing in crystal the slow way he came. [Pg 95]

III
Winter Sun
(*Lenox*)

There was a bush with scarlet berries, And there were hemlocks heaped with snow, With a sound like surf on long sea-beaches They took the wind and let it go.

The hills were shining in their samite, Fold after fold they flowed away; "Let come what may," your eyes were saying, "At least we two have had to-day." [Pg 96]

IV
Evening
(*Nahant*)

There was an evening when the sky was clear, Ineffably translucent in its blue; The tide was falling, and the sea withdrew In hushed and happy music from the sheer Shadowy granite of the cliffs; and fear Of what life may be, and what death can do, Fell from us like steel armor, and we knew The beauty of the Law that holds us here.

It was as though we saw the Secret Will, It was as though we floated and were free; In the south-west a planet shone serenely, And the high moon, most reticent and queenly, Seeing the earth had darkened and grown still, Misted with light the meadows of the sea. [Pg 97]

WORDS FOR AN OLD AIR

Your heart is bound tightly, let Beauty beware; It is not hers to set Free from the snare.
Tell her a bleeding hand Bound it and tied it; Tell her the knot will stand Though she deride it.
One who withheld so long All that you yearned to take, Has made a snare too strong For Beauty's self to break. [Pg 98]

THOSE WHO LOVE

Those who love the most Do not talk of their love; Francesca, Guenevere, Dierdre, Iseult, Heloise In the fragrant gardens of heaven Are silent, or speak, if at all, Of fragile, inconsequent things.
And a woman I used to know Who loved one man from her youth, Against the strength of the fates Fighting in lonely pride, Never spoke of this thing, But hearing his name by chance, A light would pass over her face. [Pg 99]

TWO SONGS FOR SOLITUDE

I
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. [Pg 100]
II
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? [Pg 101]

[Pg 102]
[Pg 103]

LOUIS UNTERMAYER

MONOLOG FROM A MATTRESS

Heinrich Heine ætat 56, loquitur:
Can that be you, *la mouche*? Wait till I lift This palsied eye-lid and make sure... Ah, true. Come in, dear fly, and pardon my delay In thus existing; I can promise you Next time you come you'll find no dying poet— Without sufficient spleen to see me through, The joke becomes too tedious a jest. I am afraid my mind is dull to-day; I have that—something— heavier on my chest And then, you see, I've been exchanging thoughts With Doctor Franz. He talked of Kant and Hegel As though he'd nursed them both through whooping cough And, as he left, he let his finger shake Too playfully, as though to say, "Now off With that long face—you've years and years to live." I think he thinks so. But, for Heaven's sake, Don't credit it—and never tell Mathilde. Poor dear, she has enough to bear already....

This was a month! During my lonely weeks One person actually climbed the stairs To seek a cripple. It was Berlioz— But Berlioz always was original. [Pg 104] Meissner was also here; he caught me unawares, Scribbling to my old mother. "What!" he cried, "Is the old lady of the *Dammthor* still alive? And do you write her still?" "Each month or so." "And is she not unhappy then, to find How wretched you must be?" "How can she know? You see," I laughed, "she thinks I am as well As when she saw me last. She is too blind To read the papers—some one else must tell What's in my letters, merely signed by me. Thus she is happy. For the rest— That any son should be as sick as I, No mother could believe." *Ja*, so it goes.

Come here, my lotus-flower. It is best I drop the mask to-day; the half-cracked shield Of mockery calls for younger hands to wield. Laugh—or I'll hug it closer to my breast. So ... I can be as mawkish as I choose And give my thoughts an airing, let them loose For one last rambling stroll before—Now look! Why tears? You never heard me say "the end." Before ... before I clap them in a book And so get rid of them once and for all. This is their holiday—we'll let them run — Some have escaped already. There goes one ... What, I have often mused, did Goethe mean? So many years ago at Weimar, Goethe said [Pg 105] "Heine has all the poet's gifts but love." Good God! But that is all I ever had. More than enough! So much of love to give That no one gave me any in return. And so I flashed and snapped in my own fires Until I stood, with nothing left to burn, A twisted trunk, in chilly isolation. *Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam*—you recall? I was that Northern tree and, in the South, Amalia... So I turned to scornful cries, Hot iron songs to save the rest of me; Plunging the brand in my own misery. Crouching behind my pointed wall of words, Ramparts I built of moons and loreleys, Enchanted roses, sphinxes, love-sick birds, Giants, dead lads who left their graves to dance, Fairies and phoenixes and friendly gods— A curious frieze, half Renaissance, half Greek, Behind which, in revulsion of romance, I lay and laughed—and wept—till I was weak. Words were my shelter, words my one escape, Words were my weapons against everything. Was I not once the son of Revolution? Give me the lyre, I said, and let me sing My song of battle: Words like flaming stars Shot down with power to burn the palaces; Words like bright javelins to fly with fierce Hate of the oily Philistines and glide Through all the seven heavens till they pierce The pious hypocrites who dare to creep [Pg 106] Into the Holy Places. "Then," I cried, "I am a fire to rend and roar and leap; I am all joy and song, all sword and flame!" Ha—you observe me passionate. I aim To curb these wild emotions lest they soar Or drive against my will. (So I have said These many years—and still they are not tame.) Scraps of a song keep rumbling in my head ... Listen—you never heard me sing before.

When a false world betrays your trust And stamps upon your fire, When what seemed blood is only rust, Take up the lyre!

How quickly the heroic mood Responds to its own ringing; The scornful heart, the angry blood Leap upward, singing!

Ah, that was how it used to be. But now, *Du schöner Todesengel*, it is odd How more than calm I am. Franz said it shows Power of religion, and it does, perhaps— Religion or morphine or poultices—God knows. I sometimes have a sentimental lapse And long for saviours and a physical God. When health is all used up, when money goes, When courage cracks and leaves a shattered will, Then Christianity begins. For a sick Jew, It is a very good religion ... Still, [Pg 107] I fear that I will die as I have lived, A long-nosed heathen playing with his scars, A pagan killed by weltschmerz ... I remember, Once when I stood with Hegel at a window, I, being full of bubbling youth and coffee, Spoke in symbolic tropes about the stars. Something I said about "those high Abodes of all the blest" provoked his temper. "Abodes? The stars?" He froze me with a sneer, "A light eruption on the firmament." "But," cried romantic I, "is there no sphere Where virtue is rewarded when we die?" And Hegel mocked, "A very pleasant whim. So you demand a bonus since you spent One lifetime and refrained from poisoning Your testy grandmother!" ... How much of him Remains in me—even when I am caught In dreams of death and immortality.

To be eternal—what a brilliant thought! It must have been conceived and coddled first By some old shopkeeper in Nuremberg, His slippers warm, his children amply nursed, Who, with his lighted meerschaum in his hand, His nightcap on his head, one summer night Sat drowsing at his door. And mused, how grand If all of this could last beyond a doubt — [Pg 108] This placid moon, this plump *gemüthlichkeit*; Pipe, breath and summer never going out— To vegetate through all eternity ... But no such everlastingness for me! God, if he can, keep me from such a blight.

Death, it is but the long, cool night, And Life's a dull and sultry day. It darkens; I grow sleepy; I am weary of the light.

Over my bed a strange tree gleams And there a nightingale is loud. She sings of love, love only ... I hear it, even in dreams.

My Mouche, the other day as I lay here, Slightly propped up upon this mattress-grave In which I've been interred these few eight years, I saw a dog, a little pampered slave, Running about and barking. I would have given Heaven could I have been that dog; to thrive Like him, so senseless—and so much alive! And once I called myself a blithe Hellene,

Who am too much in love with life to live. (The shrug is pure Hebraic) ... For what I've been, A lenient Lord will tax me—and forgive. *Dieu me pardonnera—c'est son metier.* But this is jesting. There are other scandals [Pg 109] You haven't heard ... Can it be dusk so soon? Or is this deeper darkness ...? Is that you, Mother? How did you come? Where are the candles?... *Over my bed a strange tree gleams*—half filled With stars and birds whose white notes glimmer through Its seven branches now that all is stilled. What? Friday night again and all my songs Forgotten? Wait ... I still can sing—*Sh'ma Yisroel Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echod* ... Mouche—Mathilde!... [Pg 110]

WATERS OF BABYLON

What presses about us here in the evening
As you open a window and stare at a stone-gray sky,
And the streets give back the jangle of meaningless movement
That is tired of life and almost too tired to die.

Night comes on, and even the night is wounded;
There, on its breast, it carries a curved, white scar.
What will you find out there that is not torn and anguished?
Can God be less distressed than the least of His creatures are?

Below are the blatant lights in a huddled squalor;
Above are futile fires in freezing space.
What can they give that you should look to them for compassion
Though you bare your heart and lift an imploring face?

They have seen, by countless waters and windows,
The women of your race facing a stony sky;
They have heard, for thousands of years, the voices of women [Pg 111]
Asking them: "Why ...?"

Let the night be; it has neither knowledge nor pity.
One thing alone can hope to answer your fear;
It is that which struggles and blinds us and burns between us....
Let the night be. Close the window, beloved.... Come here. [Pg 112]

THE FLAMING CIRCLE

Though for fifteen years you have chaffed me across the table,
Slept in my arms and fingered my plunging heart,
I scarcely know you; we have not known each other.
For all the fierce and casual contacts, something keeps us apart.

Are you struggling, perhaps, in a world that I see only dimly,
Except as it sweeps toward the star on which I stand alone?
Are we swung like two planets, compelled in our separate orbits,
Yet held in a flaming circle far greater than our own?

Last night we were single, a radiant core of completion,
Surrounded by flames that embraced us but left no burns,
To-day we are only ourselves; we have plans and pretensions;
We move in dividing streets with our small and different concerns. [Pg 113]

Merging and rending, we wait for the miracle. Meanwhile
The fire runs deeper, consuming these selves in its growth.
Can this be the mystical marriage—this clash and communion;
This pain of possession that frees and encircles us both?
[Pg 114]

PORTRAIT OF A MACHINE

What nudity is beautiful as this Obedient monster purring at its toil;
These naked iron muscles dripping oil
And the sure-fingered rods that never miss. This long and shining flank of metal is
Magic that greasy labor cannot spoil; While this vast engine that could rend the soil
Conceals its fury with a gentle hiss.

It does not vent its loathing, does not turn
Upon its makers with destroying hate. It bears a deeper malice; lives to earn
Its master's bread and laughs to see this great Lord of the earth, who rules but cannot learn,
Become the slave of what his slaves create. [Pg 115]

ROAST LEVIATHAN

"*Old Jews!*" Well, David, aren't we? What news is that to make you see so red,
To swear and almost tear your beard in

half? Jeered at? Well, let them laugh. You can laugh longer when you're dead.

What? Are you still too blind to see? Have you forgot your Midrash!... They were right, The little *goyim*, with their angry stones. You should be buried in the desert out of sight And not a dog should howl miscarried moans Over your foul bones....

Have you forgotten what is promised us, Because of stinking days and rotting nights? Eternal feasting, drinking, blazing lights With endless leisure, periods of play! Supernal pleasures, myriads of gay Discussions, great debates with prophet-kings! And rings of riddling scholars all surrounding God who sits in the very middle, expounding The Torah.... Now your dull eyes glisten! Listen:

It is the final Day. [Pg 116] A blast of Gabriel's horn has torn away The last haze from our eyes, and we can see Past the three hundred skies and gaze upon The Ineffable Name engraved deep in the sun. Now one by one, the pious and the just Are seated by us, radiantly risen From their dull prison in the dust. And then the festival begins! A sudden music spins great webs of sound Spanning the ground, the stars and their companions; While from the cliffs and cañons of blue air, Prayers of all colors, cries of exultation Rise into choruses of singing gold. And at the height of this bright consecration, The whole Creation's rolled before us. The seven burning heavens unfold.... We see the first (the only one we know) Dispersed and, shining through, The other six declining: Those that hold The stars and moons, together with all those Containing rain and fire and sullen weather; Cellars of dew-fall higher than the brim; Huge arsenals with centuries of snows; Infinite rows of storms and swarms of seraphim....

Divided now are winds and waters. Sea and land, Tohu and Bohu, light and darkness, stand Upright on either hand. And down this terrible aisle, [Pg 117] While heaven's ranges roar aghast, Pours a vast file of strange and hidden things: Forbidden monsters, crocodiles with wings And perfumed flesh that sings and glows With more fresh colors than the rainbow knows.... The *reēm*, those great beasts with eighteen horns, Who mate but once in seventy years and die In their own tears which flow ten stadia high. The *shamir*, made by God on the sixth morn, No longer than a grain of barley corn But stronger than the bull of Bashan and so hard It cuts through diamonds. Meshed and starred With precious stones, there struts the shattering *ziz* Whose groans are wrinkled thunder.... For thrice three hundred years the full parade Files past, a cavalcade of fear and wonder. And then the vast aisle clears.

Now comes our constantly increased reward. The Lord commands that monstrous beast, Leviathan, to be our feast. What cheers ascend from horde on ravenous horde! One hears the towering creature rend the seas, Frustrated, cowering, and his pleas ignored. In vain his great, belated tears are poured— For this he was created, kept and nursed. Cries burst from all the millions that attend: "*Ascend, Leviathan, it is the end! We hunger and we thirst! Ascend!*" ...

Observe him first, my friend. [Pg 118] *God's deathless plaything rolls an eye Five hundred thousand cubits high. The smallest scale upon his tail Could hide six dolphins and a whale. His nostrils breathe—and on the spot The churning waves turn seething hot. If he be hungry, one huge fin Drives seven thousand fishes in; And when he drinks what he may need, The rivers of the earth recede. Yet he is more than huge and strong— Twelve brilliant colors play along His sides until, compared to him, The naked, burning sun seems dim. New scintillating rays extend Through endless singing space and rise Into an ecstasy that cries: "Ascend, Leviathan, ascend!"*

God now commands the multi-colored bands Of angels to intrude and slay the beast That His good sons may have a feast of food. But as they come, Leviathan sneezes twice ... And, numb with sudden pangs, each arm hangs slack. Black terror seizes them; blood freezes into ice And every angel flees from the attack! God, with a look that spells eternal law, Compels them back. But, though they fight and smite him tail and jaw, [Pg 119] Nothing avails; upon his scales their swords Break like frayed cords or, like a blade of straw, Bend towards the hilt and wilt like faded grass. Defeat and fresh retreat.... But once again God's murmurs pass among them and they mass With firmer steps upon the crowded plain. Vast clouds of spears and stones rise from the ground; But every dart flies past and rocks rebound To the disheartened angels falling around.

A pause. The angel host withdraws With empty boasts throughout its sullen files. Suddenly God smiles.... On the walls of heaven a tumble of light is caught. Low thunder rumbles like an afterthought; And God's slow laughter calls: "Behemot!"

Behemot, sweating blood, Uses for his daily food All the fodder, flesh and juice That twelve tall mountains can produce.

Jordan, flooded to the brim, Is a single gulp to him; Two great streams from Paradise Cool his lips and scarce suffice.

When he shifts from side to side [Pg 120] Earthquakes gape and open wide; When a nightmare makes him snore, All the

dead volcanoes roar.

In the space between each toe, Kingdoms rise and saviours go; Epochs fall and causes die In the lifting of his eye.

Wars and justice, love and death, These are but his wasted breath; Chews a planet for his cud— Behemot sweating blood.

Roused from his unconcern, Behemot burns with anger. Dripping sleep and languor from his heavy haunches, He turns from deep disdain and launches Himself upon the thickening air, And, with weird cries of sickening despair, Flies at Leviathan. None can surmise the struggle that ensues— The eyes lose sight of it and words refuse To tell the story in its gory might. Night passes after night, And still the fight continues, still the sparks Fly from the iron sinews,... till the marks Of fire and belching thunder fill the dark And, almost torn asunder, one falls stark, Hammering upon the other!... What clamor now is born, what crashings rise! [Pg 121] Hot lightnings lash the skies and frightening cries Clash with the hymns of saints and seraphim. The bloody limbs thrash through a ruddy dusk, Till one great tusk of Behemot has gored Leviathan, restored to his full strength, Who, dealing fiercer blows in those last throes, Closes on reeling Behemot at length— Piercing him with steel-pointed claws, Straight through the jaws to his disjointed head. And both lie dead.

Then come the angels! With hoists and levers, joists and poles, With knives and cleavers, ropes and saws, Down the long slopes to the gaping maws, The angels hasten; hacking and carving, So nought will be lacking for the starving Chosen of God, who in frozen wonderment Realize now what the terrible thunder meant. How their mouths water while they are looking At miles of slaughter and sniffing the cooking! Whiffs of delectable fragrance swim by; Spice-laden vagrants that float and entice, Tickling the throat and brimming the eye. Ah! what rejoicing and crackling and roasting! Ah! How the boys sing as, cackling and boasting, The angels' old wives and their nervous assistants Run in to serve us....

And while we are toasting [Pg 122] The Fairest of All, they call from the distance The rare ones of Time, they share our enjoyment; Their only employment to bear jars of wine And shine like the stars in a circle of glory. Here sways Rebekah accompanied by Zilpah; Miriam plays to the singing of Bilhah; Hagar has tales for us, Judith her story; Esther exhales bright romances and musk. There, in the dusky light, Salome dances. Sara and Rachel and Leah and Ruth, Fairer than ever and all in their youth, Come at our call and go by our leave. And, from her bower of beauty, walks Eve While, with the voice of a flower, she sings Of Eden, young earth and the birth of all things....

Peace without end. Peace will descend on us, discord will cease; And we, now so wretched, will lie stretched out Free of old doubt, on our cushions of ease. And, like a gold canopy over our bed, The skin of Leviathan, tail-tip to head, Soon will be spread till it covers the skies. Light will still rise from it; millions of bright Facets of brilliance, shaming the white Glass of the moon, inflaming the night.

So Time shall pass and rest and pass again, Burn with an endless zest and then return, [Pg 123] Walk at our side and tide us to new joys; God's voice to guide us, beauty as our staff. Thus shall Life be when Death has disappeared....

Jeered at? Well, let them laugh. [Pg 125]

[Pg 127]

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER

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 more power left to look on that dead face. [Pg 128]

THE ROCK

This rock, too, was a word; A word of flame and force when that which hurled The stars into their places in the night First stirred.

And, in the summer's heat, Lay not your hand on it, for while the iron hours beat Gray anvils in the sky, it glows again With unfulfilled desire.

Touch it not; let it stand Ragged, forlorn, still looking at the land; The dry blue chaos of mountains in the distance, The slender blades of grass it shelters are Its own dark thoughts of what is near and far. Your thoughts are yours, too; naked let them stand. [Pg 129]

BLUE WATER

Sea-violins are playing on the sands; Curved bows of blue and white are flying over the pebbles, See them attack the chords—dark basses, glinting trebles. Dimly and faint they croon, blue violins. "Suffer without regret," they seem to cry, "Though dark your suffering is, it may be music, Waves of blue heat that wash midsummer sky; Sea-violins that play along the sands." [Pg 130]

PRAYERS FOR WIND

Let the winds come, And bury our feet in the sands of seven deserts; Let strong breezes rise, Washing our ears with the far-off sounds of the foam. Let there be between our faces Green turf and a branch or two of back-tossed trees; Set firmly over questioning hearts The deep unquenchable answer of the wind. [Pg 131]

IMPROMPTU

My mind is a puddle in the street reflecting green Sirius; In thick dark groves trees huddle lifting their branches like beckoning hands. We eat the grain, the grain is death, all goes back to the earth's dark mass, All but a song which moves across the plain like the wind's deep-muttering breath. Bowed down upon the earth, man sets his plants and watches for the seed, Though he be part of the tragic pageant of the sky, no heaven will aid his mortal need. I find flame in the dust, a word once uttered that will stir again, And a wine-cup reflecting Sirius in the water held in my hands. [Pg 132]

CHINESE POET AMONG BARBARIANS

The rain drives, drives endlessly, Heavy threads of rain; The wind beats at the shutters, The surf drums on the shore; Drunken telegraph poles lean sideways; Dank summer cottages gloom hopelessly; Bleak factory-chimneys are etched on the filmy distance, Tepid with rain. It seems I have lived for a hundred years Among these things; And it is useless for me now to make complaint against them. For I know I shall never escape from this dull barbarian country, Where there is none now left to lift a cool jade winecup, Or share with me a single human thought. [Pg 133]

SNOWY MOUNTAINS

Higher and still more high, Palaces made for cloud, Above the dingy city-roofs Blue-white like angels with broad wings, Pillars of the sky at rest The mountains from the great plateau Uprise.

But the world heeds them not; They have been here now for too long a time. The world makes war on them, Tunnels their granite cliffs, Splits down their shining sides, Plasters their cliffs with soap-advertisements, Destroys the lonely fragments of their peace.

Vaster and still more vast, Peak after peak, pile after pile, Wilderness still untamed, To which the future is as was the

past, Barrier spread by Gods, Sunning their shining foreheads, Barrier broken down by those who do not need The joy of time-resisting storm-worn stone, The mountains swing along The south horizon of the sky; Welcoming with wide floors of blue-green ice The mists that dance and drive before the sun. [Pg 134]

THE FUTURE

After ten thousand centuries have gone, Man will ascend the last long pass to know That all the summits which he saw at dawn Are buried deep in everlasting snow.

Below him endless gloomy valleys, chill, Will wreathe and whirl with fighting cloud, driven by the wind's fierce breath; But on the summit, wind and cloud are still:— Only the sunlight, and death.

And staggering up to the brink of the gulf man will look down And painfully strive with weak sight to explore The silent gulfs below which the long shadows drown; Through every one of these he passed before.

Then since he has no further heights to climb, And naught to witness he has come this endless way, On the wind-bitten ice cap he will wait for the last of time, [Pg 135] And watch the crimson sunrays fading of the world's latest day:

And blazing stars will burst upon him there, Dumb in the midnight of his hope and pain, Speeding no answer back to his last prayer, And, if akin to him, akin in vain. [Pg 136]

UPON THE HILL

A hundred miles of landscape spread before me like a fan; Hills behind naked hills, bronze light of evening on them shed; How many thousand ages have these summits spied on man? How many thousand times shall I look on them ere this fire in me is dead? [Pg 137]

THE ENDURING

If the autumn ended Ere the birds flew southward, If in the cold with weary throats They vainly strove to sing, Winter would be eternal; Leaf and bush and blossom Would never once more riot In the spring.

If remembrance ended When life and love are gathered, If the world were not living Long after one is gone, Song would not ring, nor sorrow Stand at the door in evening; Life would vanish and slacken, Men would be changed to stone.

But there will be autumn's bounty Dropping upon our weariness, There will be hopes unspoken And joys to haunt us still; There will be dawn and sunset Though we have cast the world away, And the leaves dancing Over the hill. [Pg 138]

[Pg 140]

JEAN STARR UNTERMEYER

OLD MAN

When an old man walks with lowered head And eyes that do not seem to see, I wonder does he ponder on The worm he was or is to be.

Or has he turned his gaze within, Lost to his own vicinity; Erecting in a doubtful dream Frail bridges to Infinity. [Pg 142]

TONE PICTURE

(Malipiero: *Impressioni Dal Vero*)

Across the hot square, where the barbaric sun Pours coarse laughter on the crowds, Trumpets throw their loud nooses
From corner to corner. Elephants, whose indifferent backs Heave with red lambrequins, Tigers with golden muzzles,
Negresses, greased and turbaned in green and yellow, Weave and interweave in the merciless glare of noon. The sun
flicks here and there like a throned tyrant, Snapping his whip. From amber platters, the smells ascend Of overripe
peaches mingled with dust and heated oils. Pages in purple run madly about, Rolling their eyes and grinning with huge,
frightened mouths.

And from a high window—a square of black velvet— A haughty figure stands back in the shadow, Aloof and silent. [Pg
143]

THEY SAY—

They say I have a constant heart, who know Not anything of how it turns and yields First here, first there; nor how in
separate fields It runs to reap and then remains to sow; How, with quick worship, it will bend and glow Before a line of
song, an antique vase, Evening at sea; or in a well-loved face Seek and find all that Beauty can bestow.

Yet they do well who name it with a name, For all its rash surrenders call it true. Though many lamps be lit, yet flame is
flame; The sun can show the way, a candle too. The tribute to each fragment is the same Service to all of Beauty—and
her due. [Pg 144]

RESCUE

Wind and wave and the swinging rope Were calling me last night; None to save and little hope, No inner light.

Each snarling lash of the stormy sea Curled like a hungry tongue. One desperate splash—and no use to me The noose
that swung!

Death reached out three crooked claws To still my clamoring pain. I wheeled about, and Life's gray jaws Grinned once
again.

To sea I gazed, and then I turned Stricken toward the shore, Praying half-crazed to a moon that burned Above your
door.

And at your door, you discovered me; And at your heart, I sobbed ... And if there be more of eternity Let me be robbed.
[Pg 145]

Let me be clipped of that heritage And burned for ages through; Freed and stripped of my fear and rage— But not of
you. [Pg 146]

MATER IN EXTREMIS

I stand between them and the outer winds, But I am a crumbling wall. They told me they could bear the blast alone,
They told me: that was all. But I must wedge myself between Them and the first snowfall.

Riddled am I by onslaughts and attacks I thought I could forestall; I reared and braced myself to shelter them Before I
heard them call. I cry them, God, a better shield! I am about to fall. [Pg 147]

SELF-REJECTED

Plow not nor plant this arid mound. Here is no sap for seed, No ferment for your need— Ungrateful ground!

No sun can warm this spot God has forgot; No rain can penetrate Its barren slate.

Demonic winds blow last year's stubble From its hard slope. Go, leave the hopeless without hope; Spare your trouble.
[Pg 149]

[Pg 151]

H. D.

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, [Pg 152] return our hymn; like echo fling a sweet song, answering note for note. [Pg 153]

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? [Pg 154] 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) [Pg 155] *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.* [Pg 156]

HELIODORA

He and I sought together, over the spattered table, rhymes and flowers, gifts for a name.

He said, among others, I will bring (and the phrase was just and good, but not as good as mine) "the narcissus that loves the rain."

We strove for a name, while the light of the lamps burnt thin and the outer dawn came in, a ghost, the last at the feast or the first, to sit within with the two that remained to quibble in flowers and verse over a girl's name.

He said, "the rain loving," I said, "the narcissus, drunk, drunk with the rain."

Yet I had lost [Pg 157] for he said, "the rose, the lover's gift, is loved of love," he said it, "loved of love;" I waited, even as he spoke, to see the room filled with a light, as when in winter the embers catch in a wind when a room is dank: so it would be filled, I thought, our room with a light when he said (and he said it first) "the rose, the lover's delight, is loved of love," but the light was the same.

Then he caught, seeing the fire in my eyes, my fire, my fever, perhaps, for he leaned with the purple wine stained in his sleeve, and said this: "Did you ever think a girl's mouth caught in a kiss is a lily that laughs?"

I had not. [Pg 158] I saw it now as men must see it forever afterwards; no poet could write again, "the red-lily, a girl's laugh caught in a kiss;" it was his to pour in the vat from which all poets dip and quaff, for poets are brothers in this.

So I saw the fire in his eyes, it was almost my fire (he was younger) I saw the face so white; my heart beat, it was almost my phrase, I said, "surprise the muses, take them by surprise; it is late, rather it is dawn-rise, those ladies sleep, the nine, our own king's mistresses."

A name to rhyme, flowers to bring to a name, what was one girl faint and shy, with eyes like the myrtle (I said: "her underlids are rather like myrtle"), to vie with the nine?

Let him take the name, [Pg 159] he had the rhymes, "the rose, loved of love," "the lily, a mouth that laughs," he had the gift, "the scented crocus, the purple hyacinth," what was one girl to the nine?

He said: "I will make her a wreath;" he said: "I will write it thus: *I will bring you the lily that laughs, I will twine with soft narcissus, the myrtle, sweet crocus, white violet, the purple hyacinth and, last, the rose, loved of love, that these may drip on your hair the less soft flowers, may mingle sweet with the sweet of Heliodora's locks, myrrh-curved.*"

(He wrote myrrh-curved, I think, the first.)

I said: "they sleep, the nine," when he shouted swift and passionate: "*that* for the nine! [Pg 160] Above the mountains the sun is about to wake, *and to-day white violets shine beside white lilies adrift on the mountain side; to-day the narcissus opens that loves the rain.*"

I watched him to the door, catching his robe as the wine-bowl crashed to the floor, spilling a few wet lees (ah, his purple hyacinth!); I saw him out of the door, I thought: there will never be a poet, in all the centuries after this, who will dare write, after my friend's verse, "a girl's mouth is a lily kissed." [Pg 161]

TOWARD THE PIRÆUS

Slay with your eyes, Greek, men over the face of the earth, slay with your eyes, the host, puny, passionless, weak.

Break, as the ranks of steel broke of the Persian host: craven, we hated them then: now we would count them Gods beside these, spawn of the earth.

Grant us your mantle, Greek; grant us but one to fright (as your eyes) with a sword, men, craven and weak, grant us but one to strike one blow for you, passionate Greek. [Pg 162]

I

You would have broken my wings, but the very fact that you knew I had wings, set some seal on my bitter heart, my heart broke and fluttered and sang.

You would have snared me, and scattered the strands of my nest; but the very fact that you saw, sheltered me, claimed me, set me apart from the rest.

Of men—of *men* made you a god, and me, claimed me, set me apart and the song in my breast, yours, yours forever—if I escape your evil heart. [Pg 163]

II

I loved you: men have writ and women have said they loved, but as the Pythoness stands by the altar, intense and may not move;

till the fumes pass over; and may not falter nor break, till the priest has caught the words that mar or make a deme or a ravaged town;

so I, though my knees tremble, my heart break, must note the rumbling, heed only the shuddering down in the fissure beneath the rock of the temple floor;

must wait and watch and may not turn nor move, nor break from my trance to speak so slight, so sweet, so simple a word as love. [Pg 164]

III

What had you done had you been true, I can not think, I may not know.

What could we do were I not wise, what play invent, what joy devise?

What could we do if you were great? (Yet were you lost, who were there, then, to circumvent the tricks of men?)

What can we do, for curious lies have filled your heart, and in my eyes sorrow has writ that I am wise. [Pg 165]

IV

If I had been a boy, I would have worshiped your grace, I would have flung my worship before your feet, I would have followed apart, glad, rent with an ecstasy to watch you turn your great head, set on the throat, thick, dark with its sinews, burned and wrought like the olive stalk, and the noble chin and the throat.

I would have stood, and watched and watched and burned, and when in the night, from the many hosts, your slaves, and warriors and serving men you had turned to the purple couch and the flame of the woman, tall like cypress tree that flames sudden and swift and free as with crackle of golden resin and cones and the locks flung free [Pg 166] like the cypress limbs, bound, caught and shaken and loosed, bound, caught and riven and bound and loosened again, as in rain of a kingly storm or wind full from a desert plain.

So, when you had risen from all the lethargy of love and its heat, you would have summoned me, me alone, and found my hands, beyond all the hands in the world, cold, cold, cold, intolerably cold and sweet. [Pg 167]

V

It was not chastity that made me cold nor fear, only I knew that you, like myself, were sick of the puny race that crawls and quibbles and lips of love and love and lovers and love's deceit.

It was not chastity that made me wild but fear that my weapon, tempered in different heat, was over-matched by yours, and your hand skilled to yield death-blows, might break.

With the slightest turn—no ill-will meant— my own lesser, yet still somewhat fine-wrought fiery-tempered, delicate, over-passionate steel. [Pg 168]

[Pg 170]

CONRAD AIKEN

SEVEN TWILIGHTS

I

The ragged pilgrim, on the road to nowhere, Waits at the granite milestone. It grows dark. Willows lean by the water. Pleas of water Cry through the trees. And on the boles and boughs Green water-lights make rings, already paling. Leaves speak everywhere. The willow leaves Silverly stir on the breath of moving water, Birch-leaves, beyond them, twinkle, and there on the hill, And the hills beyond again, and the highest hill, Serrated pines, in the dusk, grow almost black. By the eighth milestone on the road to nowhere He drops his sack, and lights once more the pipe There often lighted. In the dusk-sharpened sky A pair of night-hawks windily sweep, or fall, Booming, toward the trees. Thus had it been Last year, and the year before, and many years: Ever the same. "Thus turns the human track Backward upon itself, I stand once more By this small stream..." Now the rich sound of leaves, Turning in air to sway their heavy boughs, Burns in his heart, sings in his veins, as spring Flowers in veins of trees; bringing such peace [Pg 172] As

comes to seamen when they dream of seas. "O trees! exquisite dancers in gray twilight! Witches! fairies! elves! who wait for the moon To thrust her golden horn, like a golden snail, Above that mountain—arch your green benediction Once more over my heart. Muffle the sound of bells, Mournfully human, that cries from the darkening valley; Close, with your leaves, about the sound of water: Take me among your hearts as you take the mist Among your boughs!" ... Now by the granite milestone, On the ancient human road that winds to nowhere, The pilgrim listens, as the night air brings The murmured echo, perpetual, from the gorge Of barren rock far down the valley. Now, Though twilight here, it may be starlight there; Mist makes elfin lakes in the hollow fields; The dark wood stands in the mist like a somber island With one red star above it.... "This I should see, Should I go on, follow the falling road,— This I have often seen.... But I shall stay Here, where the ancient milestone, like a watchman, Lifts up its figure eight, its one gray knowledge, Into the twilight; as a watchman lifts A lantern, which he does not know is out." [Pg 173]

II

Now by the wall of the ancient town I lean Myself, like ancient wall and dust and sky, And the purple dusk, grown old, grown old in heart. Shadows of clouds flow inward from the sea. The mottled fields grow dark. The golden wall Grows gray again, turns stone again, the tower, No longer kindled, darkens against a cloud. Old is the world, old as the world am I; The cries of sheep rise upward from the fields, Forlorn and strange; and wake an ancient echo In fields my heart has known, but has not seen. "These fields"—an unknown voice beyond the wall Murmurs—"were once the province of the sea. Where now the sheep graze, mermaids were at play, Sea-horses galloped, and the great jeweled tortoise Walked slowly, looking upward at the waves, Bearing upon his back a thousand barnacles, A white acropolis ..." The ancient tower Sends out, above the houses and the trees, And the wide fields below the ancient walls, A measured phrase of bells. And in the silence I hear a woman's voice make answer then: "Well, they are green, although no ship can sail them.... Sky-larks rest in the grass, and start up singing Before the girl who stoops to pick sea-poppies. [Pg 174] Spiny, the poppies are, and oh how yellow! And the brown clay is runneled by the rain...." A moment since, the sheep that crop the grass Had long blue shadows, and the grass-tips sparkled: Now all grows old.... O voices strangely speaking, Voices of man and woman, voices of bells, Diversely making comment on our time Which flows and bears us with it into dusk, Repeat the things you say! Repeat them slowly Upon this air, make them an incantation For ancient tower, old wall, the purple twilight, This dust, and me. But all I hear is silence, And something that may be leaves or may be sea. [Pg 175]

III

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, Cricket sings 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, [Pg 176] In a voice not human, but more like creak of boards Or 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." [Pg 177]

IV

"This is the hour," she said, "of transmutation: It is the eucharist of the evening, changing All things to beauty. Now the ancient river, That all day under the arch was polished jade, Becomes the ghost of a river, thinly gleaming Under a silver cloud.... It is not water: It is that azure stream in which the stars Bathe at the daybreak, and become immortal...." "And the moon," said I—not thus to be outdone— "What of the moon? Over the dusty plane-trees Which crouch in the dusk above their feeble lanterns, Each coldly lighted by his tiny faith; The moon, the waxen moon, now almost full, Creeps whitely up.... Westward the waves of cloud, Vermilion, crimson, violet, stream on the air, Shatter to golden flakes in the icy green Translucency of twilight.... And the moon Drinks up their light, and as they fade or darken, Brightens.... O monstrous miracle of the twilight, That one should live because the others die!" "Strange too," she answered, "that upon this azure Pale-gleaming ghostly stream, impalpable— So faint, so fine that scarcely it bears up The petals that the lantern strews upon it,— These great black barges float like apparitions, [Pg 178] Loom in the silver of it, beat upon it, Moving upon it as dragons move on air." "Thus always," then I answered,—looking never Toward her face, so beautiful and strange It grew, with feeding on the evening light,— "The gross is given, by inscrutable God, Power to beat wide wings upon the subtle. Thus we ourselves, so fleshly, fallible, mortal, Stand here, for all our foolishness, transfigured: Hung over nothing in an arch of light While one more evening like a wave of silence Gathers the stars together and goes out." [Pg 179]

V

Now the great wheel of darkness and low clouds Whirs and whirls in the heavens with dipping rim; Against the ice-white wall of light in the west Skeleton trees bow down in a stream of air. Leaves, black leaves and smoke, are blown on the wind; Mount upward past my window; swoop again; In a sharp silence, loudly, loudly falls The first cold drop, striking a shriveled leaf.... Doom and dusk for the earth! Upward I reach To draw chill curtains and shut out the dark, Pausing an instant, with uplifted hand, To watch, between black ruined portals of cloud, One star,—the tottering portals fall and crush it. Here are a thousand books! here is the wisdom Alembicked out of dust, or out of nothing; Choose now the weightiest word, most golden page, Most somberly musicked line; hold up these lanterns,— These paltry lanterns, wisdoms, philosophies,— Above your eyes, against this wall of darkness; And you'll see—what? One hanging strand of cobweb, A window-sill a half-inch deep in dust ... Speak out, old wise-men! Now, if ever, we need you. Cry loudly, lift shrill voices like magicians [Pg 180] Against this baleful dusk, this wail of rain.... But you are nothing! Your pages turn to water Under my fingers: cold, cold and gleaming, Arrowy in the darkness, rippling, dripping— All things are rain.... Myself, this lighted room, What are we but a murmurous pool of rain?... The slow arpeggios of it, liquid, sibilant, Thrill and thrill in the dark. World-deep I lie Under a sky of rain. Thus lies the sea-shell Under the rustling twilight of the sea; No gods remember it, no understanding Cleaves the long darkness with a sword of light. [Pg 181]

VI

Heaven, you say, will be a field in April, A friendly field, a long green wave of earth, With one domed cloud above it. There you'll lie In noon's delight, with bees to flash above you, Drown amid buttercups that blaze in the wind, Forgetting all save beauty. There you'll see With sun-filled eyes your one great dome of cloud Adding fantastic towers and spires of light, Ascending, like a ghost, to melt in the blue. Heaven enough, in truth, if you were there! Could I be with you I would choose your noon, Drown amid buttercups, laugh with the intimate grass, Dream there forever.... But, being older, sadder, Having not you, nor aught save thought of you, It is not spring I'll choose, but fading summer; Not noon I'll choose, but the charmed hour of dusk. Poppies? A few! And a moon almost as red.... But most I'll choose that subtler dusk that comes Into the mind—into the heart, you say— When, as we look bewildered at lovely things, Striving to give their loveliness a name, They are forgotten; and other things, remembered, Flower in the heart with the fragrance we call grief. [Pg 182]

VII

In the long silence of the sea, the seaman Strikes twice his bell of bronze. The short note wavers And loses itself in the blue realm of water. One sea-gull, paired with a shadow, wheels, wheels; Circles the lonely ship by wave and trough; Lets down his feet, strikes at the breaking water, Draws up his golden feet, beats wings, and rises Over the mast.... Light from a crimson cloud Crimsons the sluggishly creeping foams of waves; The seaman, poised in the bow, rises and falls As the deep forefoot finds a way through waves; And there below him, steadily gazing westward, Facing the wind, the sunset, the long cloud, The goddess of the ship, proud figurehead, Smiles inscrutably, plunges to crying waters, Emerges streaming, gleaming, with jewels falling Fierily from carved wings and golden breasts; Steadily glides a moment, then swoops again. Carved by the hand of man, grieved by the wind; Worn by the tumult of all the tragic seas, Yet smiling still, unchanging, smiling still Inscrutably, with calm eyes and golden brow— What is it that she sees and follows always, Beyond the molten and ruined west, beyond The light-rimmed sea, the sky itself? What secret [Pg 183] Gives wisdom to her purpose? Now the cloud In final conflagration pales and crumbles Into the darkening waters. Now the stars Burn softly through the dusk. The seaman strikes His small lost bell again, watching the west As she below him watches.... O pale goddess Whom not the darkness, even, or rain or storm, Changes; whose great wings are bright with foam, Whose breasts are cold as the sea, whose eyes forever Inscrutably take that light whereon they look — Speak to us! Make us certain, as you are, That somewhere, beyond wave and wave and wave, That dreamed-of harbor lies which we would find. [Pg 184]

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 lips and hands and a heart, Looked on beauty, and loved it, and then 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 [Pg 185] 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. [Pg 186]

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 laughter 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, "Tétélestai!" 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. [Pg 187]

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 [Pg 188] 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 sparrows chirp 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 seagulls. I am tired. I have struggled in vain, my decision was fruitless, Why then do I wait? with darkness, so easy, at hand!... But to-morrow, perhaps.... I will wait and endure till to-morrow!..." 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.... Tétélestai!..." [Pg 189]

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! [Pg 190]

[Pg 192]

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

EIGHT SONNETS

I

When you, that at this moment are to me Dearer than words on paper, shall depart, And be no more the warder of my heart, Whereof again myself shall hold the key; And be no more, what now you seem to be, The sun, from which all excellencies start In a round nimbus, nor a broken dart Of moonlight, even, splintered on the sea;

I shall remember only of this hour— And weep somewhat, as now you see me weep— The pathos of your love, that, like a flower, Fearful of death yet amorous of sleep, Droops for a moment and beholds, dismayed, The wind whereon its petals shall be laid. [Pg 194]

II

What's this of death, from you who never will die? Think you the wrist that fashioned you in clay, The thumb that set the hollow just that way In your full throat and lidded the long eye So roundly from the forehead, will let lie Broken, forgotten, under foot some day Your unimpeachable body, and so slay The work he most had been remembered by?

I tell you this: whatever of dust to dust Goes down, whatever of ashes may return To its essential self in its own season, Loveliness such as yours will not be lost, But, cast in bronze upon his very urn, Make known him Master, and for what good reason. [Pg 195]

III

I know I am but summer to your heart, And not the full four seasons of the year; And you must welcome from another part Such noble moods as are not mine, my dear. No gracious weight of golden fruits to sell Have I, nor any wise and wintry thing; And I have loved you all too long and well To carry still the high sweet breast of spring.

Wherefore I say: O love, as summer goes, I must be gone, steal forth with silent drums, That you may hail anew the bird and rose When I come back to you, as summer comes. Else will you seek, at some not distant time, Even your summer in another clime. [Pg 196]

IV

Here is a wound that never will heal, I know, Being wrought not of a dearness and a death But of a love turned ashes and the breath Gone out of beauty; never again will grow The grass on that scarred acre, though I sow Young seed there yearly and the sky bequeath Its friendly weathers down, far underneath Shall be such bitterness of an old woe.

That April should be shattered by a gust, That August should be leveled by a rain, I can endure, and that the lifted dust Of man should settle to the earth again; But that a dream can die, will be a thrust Between my ribs forever of hot pain. [Pg 197]

V

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 to-night, 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. [Pg 198]

VI

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. [Pg 199]

VII

Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word! Give back my book and take my kiss instead. Was it my enemy or my friend I heard?— "What a big book for such a little head!" Come, I will show you now my newest hat, And you may watch me purse my mouth and prink. Oh, I shall love you still and all of that. I never again shall tell you what I think.

I shall be sweet and crafty, soft and sly; You will not catch me reading any more; I shall be called a wife to pattern by; And some day when you knock and push the door, Some sane day, not too bright and not too stormy, I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me. [Pg 200]

VIII

Say what you will, and scratch my heart to find The roots of last year's roses in my breast; I am as surely riper in my mind As if the fruit stood in the stalls confessed. Laugh at the unshed leaf, say what you will, Call me in all things what I was before, A flutterer in the wind, a woman still; I tell you I am what I was and more.

My branches weigh me down, frost cleans the air, My sky is black with small birds bearing south; Say what you will, confuse me with fine care, Put by my word as but an April truth,— Autumn is no less on me that a rose Hugs the brown bough and sighs before it goes. [Pg 201]

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