



ANN STANFORD

Collected Poems

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

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Collected Poems

Ann Stanford

A Critical Reading Edition

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

Archival Images

A short selection from the source record



Ann Stanford. CSUN University Archives Photograph Collection.

Editorial Note

This reading edition is prepared directly from the original source scans. Each independent lyric begins on a new page. Stanza breaks and clear authorial indents are retained; narrow source-page wraps are rejoined, while unavoidable display wraps use a visible hanging indent. Dedications and epigraphs are distinguished beneath poem titles. *Magellan* and Stanford's verse translation of *The Bhagavad Gita* are retained in full source-page facsimile because their speakers, numbering, and page architecture cannot be responsibly flattened into the lyric template. Book and periodical titles are italicized in editorial matter.

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Introduction

Ann Stanford's poetry is grounded in Southern California but never confined by it. From the formal precision of her Yvor Winters years to the many-voiced histories of *Magellan* and *The Countess of Forlì*, she wrote about landscape, family, political violence, myth, women's lives, and the fragile human designs imposed on nature. A distinguished CSUN teacher, translator of *The Bhagavad Gita*, and editor of *The Women Poets in English*, Stanford made lyric, scholarship, and dramatic voice parts of one sustained project. This edition resets the complete poetry books preserved in the project archive and includes source-page presentations of her two typographically complex long works.

Biography

Ann Stanford was born on November 25, 1916, in La Habra, California, to Bruce and Rose Corrigan Stanford. Southern California remained the ground of nearly all her life and much of her poetry: orchards and beaches, freeways and stations, chaparral, drought, domestic gardens, and the pressure of urban development recur throughout her books. She attended Fullerton High School and entered Stanford University, where she studied in the circle around the poet and critic Yvor Winters. Winters selected ten of her poems for *Twelve Poets of the Pacific* in 1937, when she was twenty. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1938 with a pre-law degree.

After graduation Stanford received a James D. Phelan Fellowship to work on a long poem about Ferdinand Magellan and studied for a time at Radcliffe College. The project eventually became *Magellan: A Poem to Be Read by Several Voices* (1958), a book-length dramatic poem constructed from historical accounts of the first circumnavigation. Her first independent collection, *In Narrow Bound*, appeared from Alan Swallow in 1943 and was absorbed into *The White Bird* in 1949. These early poems show the formal discipline associated with Winters while already fixing on the California landscape and on the unstable border between natural process and human design.

In 1942 she married the architect Roland Arthur White. They had four children—three daughters and a son—including Rosanna Norton, later an Academy Award-nominated costume designer. Stanford's long interval between early and mid-career publication was not a withdrawal from writing

so much as a period in which family life, study, and the large Magellan project proceeded together. Her later poems repeatedly test the relation between women's intellectual and imaginative lives and the claims of household, marriage, teaching, and public history.

Stanford returned to graduate study at the University of California, Los Angeles, earning an M.A. in journalism in 1958, an M.A. in English in 1961, and a Ph.D. in English and American literature in 1962. She taught journalism at UCLA before joining San Fernando Valley State College—later California State University, Northridge—in 1962. She remained on its English faculty until 1987, teaching poetry and literature and helping to make the campus an important site for Southern California writing. CSUN awarded her its Distinguished Teaching Award in 1975, an honor based substantially on student testimony. Among the writers who later acknowledged her influence were David Trinidad and Maxine Scates.

Her mature books expanded both form and subject. *The Weathercock* (1966) brought together precise lyric, mythic sequence, travel, and the altered environments of Los Angeles. *The Descent* (1970) moved through war, political murder, museums, translation, family, and spiritual crisis. That same year Herder and Herder published *The Bhagavad Gita: A New Verse Translation*, a major act of poetic scholarship that preserved named speakers and numbered stanzas in supple English verse. Stanford later edited *The Women Poets in English* (1972), an ambitious historical anthology, and published *Anne Bradstreet: The Worldly Puritan* (1974), joining poetic practice to feminist recovery and literary scholarship.

In Mediterranean Air (1977), often regarded as her strongest lifetime collection, placed California beside classical myth, European travel, ecological unease, and the stories of women who survive or answer heroic history. Stanford also wrote the verse play *The Countess of Forlì: A Poem for Voices* (1985), centered on Caterina Sforza. Across the career, dramatic voice and translation were not secondary to the lyrics; they were ways of testing who may speak inside inherited narratives and how a poem can hold several irreconcilable perspectives at once.

Stanford's honors included the Shelley Memorial Award in 1969 and numerous anthology and prize selections. Her poems appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Poetry*, *The New Republic*, *The Southern*

Review, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Coastlines*, and other national and regional magazines. She helped found the Associated Writing Programs, and the Ann Stanford Poetry Prize has continued her name in Southern California literary culture since 1988.

She died of cancer at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles on July 12, 1987. Two important posthumous books renewed access to her work: *Dreaming the Garden* (2000), from Cahuenga Press, and *Holding Our Own: The Selected Poems of Ann Stanford* (2001), edited by Maxine Scates and David Trinidad for Copper Canyon Press. The Ann Stanford Collection at CSUN preserves poems and correspondence, while the university archives hold photographs and extensive institutional documentation. Her work now reads as a central Southern California record: formally exact but historically alert, rooted in place yet continually enlarged by myth, translation, women's writing, and dramatic voice.

Poems from Twelve Poets of the Pacific

Stage I | The Winters circle, 1937

The ten poems by Ann Stanford in Yvor Winters's anthology.

Escape

The eucalyptus row
Was bending in the way
Of autumn winds that broke
Bark for the boys to rake

And pile with leaves to blend
In smoke above the land.
The hills there showed the sere
And hardy colors' glare.

Our eyes could find no peace
Within so rich a place,
Our sense must strain and leap,
Ourselves be still and gape.

Seeking within the night,
We found a treeless waste
Where scenes did not connive
Our senses to enslave.

See how the light has shown
But deadness of wild grain—
An undiminished coat.
Our eyes can penetrate

Eons beyond the stars
On looking up. The fears
We felt before were small,
And we must bear them still.

Publication. First published in *Poems from Twelve Poets of the Pacific*. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1937, p. 139.

Awakening

The thought is sharp and strikes the dreaming brain
With heated terror; his attempted cry
Awakes the sleeper, who cannot remain
Calm in the certain thought that he must die.

Then he has need of such philosophy
As he can muster, and his radiant dread
Is fought by faith and reason. Fearfully
He twists his face against his temporal bed.

Publication. First published in *Poems from Twelve Poets of the Pacific*. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1937, p. 140.

The Star

The star will rise again and lean
Over the world, and few will know
The glory by the shepherds seen,
The faith that caused the Kings to go

Out of the East to find their Lord.
The star that bade conformity
By love in armor, and the sword;
That set the strength of chivalry

Against the pagan's walls and lured
The sterner faithful overseas,
Now is in southern skies secured
And ever southward moves with these

Beyond the last horizon lost
Beyond man's sight, outside his ken,
Becoming but an ancient ghost
Known by two thousand years of men.

Publication. First published in *Poems from Twelve Poets of the Pacific*. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1937, p. 141.

The Carol

They gaze, but only dark appears
About the olive tree below;
Yet song has wakened them with tears.
They gaze, but only dark appears.

Below the strata of their years
Rise memories that they do not know.
They gaze, but only dark appears
About the olive tree below.

Publication. First published in *Poems from Twelve Poets of the Pacific*. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1937, p. 142.

On Listening to Chamber Music

With warm hands settled gracefully we hear
Romantic music that we put aside
With casual whispers. We are near
The door to freshness where the earth outside
Severs the darkness of the hemisphere
With primal music to the rest denied.

Publication. First published in *Poems from Twelve Poets of the Pacific*. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1937, p. 143.

The Hummingbird

Upon a barren apple-tree,
Gazing at the white day-moon,
Insolent, devoid of tune,
The hummingbird sits warily.

He flies too soon for hands to snare
His fragile form that soon would die
If in the confines he should lie
Of anything less soft than air.

Publication. First published in *Poems from Twelve Poets of the Pacific*. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1937, p. 144.

The Whirlwind

The hill is hard and bears few fertile things,
But by the gully's edge the poppy clings
Tracing a passage down the arid hill
Among the wild oats leaning dry and still,
The graying remnants of the spring's good stand.
The graceful eucalypti mark the land.

Beneath the wild-oat root the gopher crawls
Pushing through dusty earth his aimless halls.
The whirlwind follows its erratic way,
A small commotion in a sultry day
That has no feature, is anonymous
Like days to follow and those previous.

Publication. First published in *Poems from Twelve Poets of the Pacific*. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1937, p. 145.

Artemis

Advancing up the rain-cleared night
Is Artemis, who strides alone
To fling upon the pillared stone
And on the stiff-edged reed her light.

She will not love; her breath is cold;
She seeks tonight for nothing warm
To break her mood; she does not harm
The stag she loved to chase of old.

The night, her realm of dignity,
Holds nothing that she does not scorn—
Even the offerings that adorn
Her altar's angularity.

Publication. First published in *Poems from Twelve Poets of the Pacific*. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1937, p. 146.

On Sleep

The moon has powers to surpass the sun:
Casting a dim confusion on the land,
It smooths with quiet shadows things that stand
Revealed in sunlight for the eye to shun.

How still the darkness when the thinker finds
His question answered, or the reader turns
Swiftly the final pages while he spurns
The slumber that all other creatures binds!

The night is filled with promise; yet I taste
Too seldom of its beauties: clarity
Escapes the mind that yet attempts to see
The calm, expanding splendor it must waste.

Publication. First published in *Poems from Twelve Poets of the Pacific*. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1937, p. 147.

Monotony

This day will be forgotten before night
Fully obliterates the rain-dim hills,
Lost in an old monotony that fills
The long perspective of historic sight.

Having the power to avenge this lull,
Let us live deeply long enough to mark
The day's complexion with a seam so dark
Time's passing has no strength to make it dull.

Publication. First published in *Poems from Twelve Poets of the Pacific*. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1937, p. 148.

The White Bird

Stage II | Early books and California formalism, 1943–1949

The complete recoverable text of the collection, including the earlier sequence
In Narrow Bound.

On a Ship at Sea

We know not where horizons end:
Their slow progression gives the eye
Only a wave to mark them by.
In perfect orb the waters bend.

We are the center, and a world
Advances with us as we move.
With time and shore together furled
What is behind we cannot prove.

Below us, dark and peaceful now,
Deep over deep the cavern lies,
And nothing from its press can rise.
We see no deeper than the bow.

Our wake is lost this side the sky;
If waters cover us at last,
It will but for a moment lie
Tracing the way that we have passed.

Hold fast the star and compass then;
By their firm counsel we must find
The hill-walled harbor we designed,
The sureness to go forth again.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 11.

The Whirlwind

The hill is hard and bears few fertile things,
But by the gully's edge the poppy clings,
Tracing a passage down the arid hill
Among the wild oats leaning dry and still,
The graying remnants of the spring's good stand.
The graceful eucalypti mark the land.

Beneath the wild-oat root the gopher crawls,
Pushing through dusty earth his aimless halls.
The whirlwind follows its erratic way,
A small commotion in a sultry day
That has no feature, is anonymous
Like days to follow and those previous.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 12.

On Sleep

The moon has powers to surpass the sun:
Casting a dim confusion on the land,
It smooths with quiet shadows things that stand
Revealed in sunlight for the eye to shun.

How still the darkness when the thinker finds
His question answered! or the reader turns
Swiftly the final pages, while he spurns
The slumber that all other creatures binds!

The night is filled with promise; yet I taste
Too seldom of its beauties: clarity
Escapes the mind that yet attempts to see
The calm, expanding splendor it must waste.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 13.

The Picnic

We have no part in these: the quiet spread
Of wild oat down the hill, the calm descent
Of live oak to the lake. The larva's head
Tearing the leaf, the parasite's intent:
Find the warm foliage is indifferent.

Man cannot be so patient, having known
The steady dissolution of his days,
The summary of life upon a stone,
And has no wish to lie alone and raise
Cool eyes on nature while his pulse decays.

Gregariously he spreads upon the hill
His table, gazing at the scene until.
He dares not leave off laughing lest he stare
On resignation come too soon to bear.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 14.

Bookplate: I

Time sets a term
To what is wrought,
Except to thought
If it be firm.

Much we preserve
For interest's sake,
But thoughts we take -
As they deserve.

This is my book.
I hope to find
Thought here confined
When I shall look.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 15.

Bookplate: 2

Lend time to me,
And I to thee
Give of my power.
Unsheath my lines,
Now mute designs
That, read, will flower.
Or patiently
Will wait for thee.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 16.

The Book

I need a brighter lamp to show
To these tired eyes the narrow line;
I dare not bid them farther go.
And hence this volume I resign
To the vast knowledge never mine.

This fragile brain can undertake
But little learning from the wide
Expansive universe's wake
And has no wisdom to deride
Or doubt eternity's slow tide.

My prisoner spirit I have kept;
The mind's strait reasonings intend
Denial of such strange concept
As eyes and mind cannot ascend
By sight or thought to apprehend.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 17.

En Route

The heavy woods are bound
By fences where we pass,
And rivers bend around
The meadow grass.

We journey where we must.
Although this land is sweet,
We shall not wear its dust
Upon our feet.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 18.

Voyage

He hears the pleasant tolling of the buoy
And drifting seagulls whining on the lee.
Too clear the day for distance to destroy
The land. He feels the vigor of the sea

That even in the quiet of the bay
Supports the heavy ferry, makes it lean.
What might not happen should the wind essay
To raise the latent tumult! He has been

One with Columbus' and Magellan's men.
He comprehends their daring who has known
Power beneath the keel that now and then
Sends the worn bowsprit to the land alone.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 19.

Ash Wednesday

Ponder the flesh dispersed
Which now in narrow bound enshelled
Is comforted in thirst. -
And humored in desire, impelled
By its own brevity beheld.

And pity not its fate,
But in this season glorify
Thy bodiless estate:
What forms shall from thy ruins fly
When they with rocks and waters lie.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 20.

Arion

So sang Arion that the sea
Hung still and luminous and curled;
The order of his melody
Resounded through the coral world.

The divination of his thought
Shattered the plunging waters wide
Wherein he plummeted, and brought
The enchanted dolphin to his side.

He sang milleniums ago
Where waves yet beat the Corinth coast.
The dolphin eddies to and fro;
Arion and his song are lost.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 21.

On Chance

The murmur of departing wheels
Down summer roads, a word unsaid,
Show love is lost or fortune fled,
And accident or anger steals
The careful project; merest chance
Revokes an iron circumstance.
But clear of venture, set apart,
Is garnered wisdom, firm and slow,
And, posing hazard, thence will grow
A positive and quiet heart.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 22.

Verse for a Silver Heart

(to one going on a journey)

I know that distances decrease
The brilliance of a face
And wrought in ambiguities
Is love's embrace.

The dearest lips and eyes are pressed
In an unfaithful mold.
The heart your heart so late caressed
Becomes already cold.

Give me a word with which to meet
The ever-lengthening hours,
Assurance love and not deceit
My peace devours;

And take this token. It defines
My certain heart's concern.
Be sure love here embodied shines:
Take it and learn,
And hasten to return.

Oh, hasten to return!

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 23.

The Dichotomy

The fruit, the wine, the fire,
The sound of song, the rude
Gestures of love attire
Pleasure as good.

Firm in the firm estate
Of wall and arch and tower
The senses celebrate
The senses' power.

Love, heart, can you invest
The darkness and the mute?
Unceasingly I quest
The absolute.

I know the spirit is.
In solitude and rain
And bright with absences
It climbs the empty plane.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 24.

The Canyons

Red bluff, sheer blue are blent
Despite the mind's intent,
And I forget the green
Enlivening the scene.
Through shards of light and shade
The sharp impressions fade,
While slanting hours erase
My hand, your heart, your face.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 25.

Keepsake

Regret that through a glance,
Discomforting, could grow
A thunderstorm of chance.
Regret that winds may blow
With blunt intensity
While under waves the sea
Rests in unhurried flow.

Beneath the hurricane,
O dissolute, at last
The still outwaits the rain,
Deepens and holds us fast.

It is the calm that keeps
The wreckage drowned or cast
Odd-timbered on the beach,
And strews informal rage
Metric along the page.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 29.

An Anniversary

In that familiar land
Once more the lilacs break
Across the wall; the wind
Strikes from the lake.

The change is small a year
Has wrought on wind and bough;
Conceptions that were there
Will be there now.

But slowly doubts extend,
Like an evolving green.
Oh, take the words I send
Nor question what they mean!

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 30.

For My Husband

The years will bare imperfect thought,
And time the fatal flaw expose:
The snare of dissolution grows
Within ourselves till we are caught.

But love perfects itself, is sent
Through richer autumns gathering.
Days past but reassurance bring
And added reason for content.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 31.

The Statue

I thought my love was gone,
A memory to place
As marble and alone.
Oh, stay your hand of stone!
Let no smile move your face!

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 32.

A Summer Walk

Love, the harsh fields declaim
Unchanging chaos where we walk tonight.
Cut in the stubbled hay the scent
Waits where it lies dissoluble in air,
Spicing the season, calling the name.
It is the summer—pomegranate, heat, haze,
After acacia, wind, pine, fire, rain—
Come in its order, earth circle and sun,
Round the hem of a robe, pine, pomegranate, pine.
The oat seed perfect closes the leaf;
The warm air, raising the summer scent,
Lifts like a letter on the cooler wind.
Grasp the torn page, the preface, lest it be
Rosetta of the structure, unity,
The title, author, centerstone, or key.

I feel the dark wherein I shall not fear—
No dark of sense, nor light, nor warmth of hand,
Only a stillness that I shall not hear.
The residual spirit, naked, wakes again
Into a flame, a fire, a light, a world,
An abstract energy of mind on mind.
Ah, wombs that gave them life, can you decree
The spirits haunting immortality?

I once was young enough to dream and know
I was immortal since I wished it so.
But where the I who dreamed? The mirror frames
An aspect stranger to the face it wore,
Mortality grown constant as a chain,
Binding as water that is gone and flows.

From untouched outlands at the mountain's rim
The dove recalls us with a mellow cry;
The summer morning shimmers off to lose
Its sheer beginning in the ragged sky.
I see the curve of earth whereon is wound
The ever-present present, sanguine, loud,
The shade of oaks stretching across the ground.

The summer presses on us when we walk
Through fields called fields, whatever else they be,
And we imprisoned in a hedge of years
Look for a province and a dynasty.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 33.

Love Song

Swift down the mountain, oh my love,
The snow
Gushes in freshets from above.

And where the snow and summer meet
Are spread
Three seasons underneath our feet.

We walk in winter and shall bring
The sun
To loose the frosty winds of spring
And set the cliffs to flowering,
Set the pale cliffs to flowering!

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 35.

A Night

The night is stars and dark,
A dark of wind and sound
And gusts of cypress-scent.
I listen and recall
Dusk circling through a room,
The birch along a hill—
But would not love too well
Remembrance night has brought,
That which is done, or dwell
Half-summoned in the thought.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 36.

Shadow

Across the window banked in night
Deep in the deepening eyes of sleep
The moon configures what we keep.

How shall I know my love when dark
Lengthens in shadow and the eye
Disdains to echo or reply?

Or how, confused and voiceless, meet,
Beloved, where the shades replace
No stolen vestige of a face?

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 37.

A Rebuke

Proud heart, the foolish tongue
Too voluble, betrays,
Indelibles a phrase
Of roles you move among.

It limits the attempt,
Holding a moment's mood
Embarrassed and unkempt
In quivering attitude.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 38.

Sunbath

Linen, leg, and thigh sunbeaten, spring
Breaks into windy arguments of leaves.
Brightness strips everything
And makes each bough a line
That light and dark define.
Now every south's a sun, each entity
Floats off in gold, loosed by the shimmering day
Save for a stem of dark that makes it stay
Above the basic shade
Of its own denseness made.
Arrowed through nothing streaks the ray
Passing in darkness, sun to earth unseen
To halve unerring what it comes upon
The plane, leaf, bone, bark
Whose under side is dark,
Striking in spring across the brown-edged palm
(The curled fingers hugging earth and warm).
Dispatching winter from the garden plot.
The bronze flesh grown content
In the rich element
Rests upon shade that gives all things their form,
That limits them with clear incisive term,
That shapes the curve of crest, the reach of height,
Reversing light
Most certainly when heaven is most bright.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 39.

The Rock and the Fire

Burn less toward fury than reluctant stone;
Return a gesture with a slighter one.
Fiercely immobile, you will learn the part
And stand as granite, proof against her art.

Be facile, fly, fear hammer-shock!
She'll study sculpture, swift as you turn rock!

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 40.

Finale

What we have made to hold
The dreadful dark, the day,
At last approaches cold
And, bitter, turns away.

It cannot track the wheel
Where its companion led,
And its vast hopes congeal
In glaciers of the dead.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 41.

For a Child

When I was young, the world was small;
It held our garden and the wall,
Two walnut trees from which to see
The domain that belonged to me.

The weeds outside the flower bed
Grew often higher than my head,
And I wore trails down which to pass
Through the green corridors of grass.

So now for you the sky will be
A touchable blue-flowering tree;
The summer will be yours to keep,
And the night dark that you may sleep.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 42.

In Time of Conference

Here in the afternoon there is no place but this,
No hour but this; the garden in the sun
Denies there are other years or centuries
Besides us, anyone.

We are a placard pair immune to clocks;
The hazy city hums toward lethargy;
The curled kitten in a cardboard box
Sleeps helplessly.

Barking of dog and throb of plane detail
The sullen world's intrusion on the ear,
The spiral distances outside the wall.
We balance here,

Shut in or out, by oceans alien,
Still the inheritors of disrepair,
Fearing all motion lest we move again
The splintering air.

Death drops impersonal through summer space,
Disaster close as an empty chair at table.
Men hope mid-continents or try to phrase
Some island fable,

Some monstrous fantasy, and wake to find
The hungry with us still and the self-righteous mind,
The future like a shadow on the land,
Nor any rock illumined or far island.
And our own garden, webbed in sun, not bright
But violable in the planetary night.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 43.

The Bulldozer

The deer, coyote, and the snake
Slowly retreat up higher chaparral.
 (I saw three deer stand by the road to graze;
 They watched the hills cut off like wedding cake.)

Brown blood of clod trickles into the gorge.
Bulldozer terraces hills' wooded breasts.
Flags blazoned salesrooms where, by death of oaks
And mountainous labor, level lots emerge.

Forerunning suburbs, thunderous of power
Ruthless ambassador, the scything blade
Admits no wilderness it cannot change,
Nor any altitude it cannot lower.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 44.

The White Bird

High from the hill where the hound hunts with curious paw
Comes the white bird, lying dead here on the sward,
Its plumage marred
By the dog's slaverling jaw.

Doomed to disintegration, the red feet bent,
The body lost, the feathers blown like snow,
Where will you rest your sole,
Oh bird that Noah sent?

The crowding clouds consume the earth's perimeter—
Season of fog—where can the bow be set?
The white dove is dead.
I go to bury her.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 45.

Forest

No windshield now to intercept the wood
Where like a swimmer, foreign in a sea,
I push the forest tangle from the way,
Am sensible of broken twig and trail.
The thicket-leaning trees, stunted by shade,
Grow ominous and shadow out the day.
The trembling trout shift in the dark pool.
Watch warily! What follows with fierce claw?
The element of scent and stir
Encompasses the trespasser.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 46.

The Peach Harvest

The fruit, the bee, were underfoot.
Peaches decaying into wine
Littered the shadows and the tree.
Discoverers of summer loot,
We ate the red and sweeter sides
With satisfying gluttony.

The parsimonious years preserve
All the rank fragrance of decay,
The ripening and the harvesters.
Still seasonal the branches curve,
Returning what the earth has lent,
And hungers lapse to discontent.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 47.

Building the Ketch

By the careful chisel hewed
The stem emerges from the wood,
And sure and sculpturing hands lay bare
The living arcs grown secret there.
Daphne disclosed within the wood
Yearns for the fathering river god,
While on sawdust eddies float
The thick keel timbers of the boat.

Following artfully the line
That square and calipers define
We test with reckoning, while we carve,
Sureness of grain and strength of scarf,
Like unproved policy, wondering whether
They will betray us in rough weather.
Stem, forekeel, keel, knee, deadwood, stern,
Rigidly spiked with our concern,
Into their places formed entice
The opening, billowing dream to rise
Full canvas into summer skies.

As for a moment travelers turn
Seeing the long road they have been
And calculate that still to come,
We see entire and then resume
The interrupted fashioning.

The mallet and the chisel ring.
Although the vision perfect stands,
Error employs the surest hands.
The yacht's enduring quality
Accepts the judgment of the sea.
Pragmatic waves evaluate
The principle that we create,
Which from its earthy womb is sent
To birth in the watery element.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 48.

Homeward by Rail

Cottonwoods bound the limbo of the train.
Run westward, sleeping in the cubicles,
Heads engineward, toes to the east,
We wound in ritual between cedar trees.

We saw the mountain range attenuate,
Fragile as smoke, and turned to Joshuas
And then to horse and meadow, grazing, green,
And tilted past a valley like a cup.

We slept through stations where the lights hung down
On dreary platforms huddled by the rails,
Arched bones of towns descended from the world
Mourning the nightly funeral of the train.

We slept, selective of a better land,
Resisted heat, divided distances,
Aircooled, uncomfortable, thinking of home,
Jolted as in a coffin over stone.

And cleansed and resurrected in the dawn
We rushed from trainshed tunnels into air
Through jostlings, tears, renewed contrite,
Blinking up Orphic entrances to light.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 50.

A Reminiscence

Ever in childhood heaven was a loud
Well lighted, empty, dull, and pompous place
Offering only that I should not cease.
Yet it was long before that light went out.
Old ladies in falsetto from the choir
Rasped through the chorus of eternal love,
And there were memory verses learned to prove
A certain secret that I have no more.

Heaven was unpropitious as the hall
On an ugly street in a suburban village.
The fields and hills were scarred and cut with tillage;
The world returned to ashes in the fall;
Beauty was blackened like an evil pleasure.
Had I been sure, or sure I could not choose,
Or kept, or never had what I could lose,
Richness of light, the only heavenly treasure!

Fever of night and earthly flesh grown cold
Issue from heaven. Spirit dissoluble,
Emergent from a dissipating fable,
I groped in darkness for the thing I held,
Sorting out tomes and terrors, finding land
A tangible touchstone underneath the tread,
Transient as paradise, whence I was led
To leave a heritage at God's right hand.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 51.

Desert Station

River, crossing the desert, winds and shines,
Rails serpentine through the July land
Rest beside cottonwoods.

Dust blurs the windows with a bright screen
Dimming gray ground between the greasewood brush.
Despair of light!

Repeated journey into distances
Determined, reached, and lost, grain after grain,
Butte, ledge, and cliff.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 52.

The Flood

Now in a cloudburst, calumnies descend
Distracting reason, driving friend from friend,
And epithets, though false and meaningless,
Haste through the gutters of the public press.
Crisis on crisis passes on to gloom
With other crises pushing them for room.
Men who cry *Wait!* are openly suspect
Lest others stop their reading to reflect.

Afloat on flooding waters, profits rise;
Malevolence vended brings the highest price.
It buys protectorates in foreign lands
Where servile princes welcome the demands
Of those who would with lead and steel restore
Peace to the rumbling bellies of the poor.
The greedy glorify their liberty
And dare all other peoples to be free.

The martial, growing stronger in the state,
Fortifies classic bases for its hate.
In their starched gorges and with golden blades
The oilmen armor for the new crusades.
There is loose talk of war, which if it came
Already has its parties, cause, and name
And populations being groomed to fight.
The cause of fear is made the cause of right.

Self-criticism shows strange limitation
Which, good in man, is traitorous in a nation,
And those who would enforce conformity
Are those with whom the present times agree.
When fools have power, let wiser men beware;
To acquiesce in evil is to share.
The great who set the oily flood on fire
Must with their fellow citizens expire.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 53.

The Perplexities

1: Winter Drouth

From eucalyptus blooms the bees prepare
Winter confection and in spring distill
Honey of oranges. This bitter year
The blossoms wither round the nectaries;
Reversing custom, beemen feed the bees;
The white sage crisps to tinder on the hills.
Listen! The airplane buzzes flawless air.
It comes and goes and threatens, dies away,
Returns, returns, compels the cursing stare.
Ambiguous instrument of polity,
It throbs its peaceful journey from the sea
Over the grey smog sheathing windless days.
The gardens hold with summer; nothing dies,
But nothing prospers. Under grass and tree
The water table falls; the wells go dry.
Sooner or later rain will come again.
We search the static atmosphere for signs
Through the parched winter of anxiety.

2: Of Finance

The heat forecloses on its liens on trees.
Blood, welling slowly from a child's cut hand,
Circles red pennies on the fallen leaves.
Nights are the turnings of old calculation.
The summer capitalist, stripping from the land
Gold fruit for silver, sees the silver flow
By rivulet to a vast reservoir,
Great Lakes of coinage, draining springs and creeks,
Pushing insensate toward Niagara.
In the harsh flux of the economy,
Bending like sea wrack fastened to the tide,
Harried by tithes of rudimentary kings,

Think of possession—how the little hand
Will heal and grow, and grow and wave goodbye,
And the fee simple, vexed with mortgages,
Leaves us the choice to lose, or pay, or die.

Publication. First published in *The White Bird*. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1949, p. 55.

Magellan: A Poem to Be Read by Several Voices

Stage III | Historical voice and verse drama, 1958

Stanford's book-length verse drama, retained in source-page facsimile to preserve speakers, stage arrangement, and page architecture.

Magellan

PART I

*There are no roses without thorns, my lord,
Nor full-blown deeds without the spines of loss.
This is the maxim carved upon my house.
So let me tell you how a great man's dream
Spread, in its flowering, a deadly thrust:*

*Follow my travels on the Ocean Sea
To southward regions where no men had sailed,
Seeking an exit round a stubborn land,
A strait by which to cross into the sphere
That holds the Moluccas, whence the spices come.*

*See how we sloughed ourselves from the known world
Marking off cape by cape, each less defined,
Toward the last thread of rumor, Cape Saint Mary,
Piercing each day another stint of sea
To the Captain's wake by day, his fire by night.*

*Vision five ships caught in a grudge of waves
Tossed and yet fleeing, and sighting through the storm
A break in the low shoreline, a slant of hope
And chancing shallows, braving to its lee.
And watch, as morning comes, the astonished gaze.*

SEAMEN

*We fled from storm and shock
But in the light of day
Our sheltering rock
Becomes the way.*

CARTAGENA

*Now heaven has given this ruffian luck!
Even such wind as dashes other boats
Has driven him sheltering in the place he sought.*

☞ CAPE ST MARY

MENDOZA

Perhaps he knew the strait, as he declared.

CARTAGENA

The devil's luck! The fiend grasped his black beard
And brought him here himself. How he will gloat
When we approach, and with presumptuous look
Claim as his own what was the devil's work.

MENDOZA

Then let the devil lead. For when our ships
Bulging with spices shadow off Seville
We'll have our share of glory.

CARTAGENA

Not we. He will.

Why did the King of Spain entrust a fleet
To Magellan, this foreigner, this Portuguese!

MAGELLAN

The storm is gone, and morning shapes
With bending shores the lines of my desire.
The great jaw of the sea dissolves the land.
Drifting to west, farther than I can see
The waters haste toward wealth and the world's praise.
My claim is proven that I knew the way.
How fair the morning shines upon success,
How blue the waters, what abounding shores
Confirm with brightness the warm paths to fame!
What now the bitter years, the abuse of courts
The scorn of princes tripled in underlings?

And yet halfway we cannot be content.
Half-world is not enough—but the whole orb
Shining and full, round seas and globes of islands
The rich earth piled like curved fruit in a bowl.
So in a rondure, nature and we are one

C CAPE ST MARY

Circling our way within the horizon's disk;
And in such pattern, the whorled planets shine
On heaven's ecliptic, and the moon at full
Rings its completion, cycles of spring and summer
Bring back the twining tendril and plump grape
And cheeks of plum and apple. Even we
Circle our ways from dark and life to grace.
Half-done is far from home, the long swing
At direction's end, and in all these orbs we know
That to go on is to return again.

This cape must be explored. *Santiago*, west.
Follow each indentation of the coast.
Vittoria, *San Antonio*, toward the pole
And find if there are islands in between.
The other ships wait here for what you learn.

SEAMEN

What glory is our own
Now we have come upon
The way? The way is won.
We did not strike through stone,
The wave our keeper is,
The sea, a looking glass.

Reefing the sails or spun
On the masthead's rolling height,
Facing the ocean's weight
What glory's to be won.
Who shall call each by name
In the sinecure of fame?

CAPE ST MARY

PART II

ANTONIO

Two weeks are gone, and every wave
Shocked to my ear a cannonade
The signal of a fortunate day.
But the ships' return in a silent row
Drifting like ghosts into the road
Portends no sight of where to go.

MAGELLAN

If this augurs as I fear, how will I stop
The murmurings against me, or how check
The Spanish officers who have already proved
Contemptuous, eager for failure, slow to follow?
I remember the warning of my father
Brought by secret letter to the Canaries—
A plot whispered on the quays of San Lucar—
And I curse again that knave from Portugal,
Consul to Spain, who has bred so much bad faith
Between me and the Spaniards. I have already taken
His ship from Cartagena—insolent
And disobedient. Our nations mix
No better than wine and oil.

SERRANO

God keep you, Señor Captain-General.
I report the voyage of my caravel.
The wind strong against us, the shore shallow,
We tacked the ship as close as we dared go.
The plain we see here reached into the land
Treeless, with good pasture, but few signs of men.
The plain is big enough for all Spain's herds
And more. Once we raised a flock of birds

Q CAPE ST MARY

Long-necked, large as ponies. They did not fly
But ran swifter than horses, with a booming cry.
Few islands, cliffs. Every spit of sand
Was searched, till after ten days, land
Was visible across the estuary.
We let our buckets down into the sea.
It was no longer sea. Fresh water, fresh
From shore to shore—it was the mesh
Of joining rivers, rivers joining tide.
No passage here. We turned. The landside
Breeze hastened our backward passage. The shore
Trended northwest ten days, we returned in four.
All is in order. The men grumble, disagree,
But in such cases it is the expectancy.

MAGELLAN

This is the pass I looked for, withered up,
Tangled in land, lost in far mountain forests,
Spreading its welcome bay into a trap
A jaw to crush Magellan. Farther south?
The passage lay upon this parallel,
Here on this globe. Here on Faleiro's map.
Such cannot be the end of my attempt.
It must lie south. I here commit myself
To follow this stubborn shore until the ice
Fastens eternal fingers on these ships,
Till every man becomes a skeleton
To curse Magellan in each socketed look.
Never shall I turn home unless the holds
Reek with the cloves and nutmegs of the east.
So now with calm I entertain this news
That none may know the fierce cutting of my hope.

☞ CAPE ST MARY

Today we claim for Spain a spreading bay
A far-extended plain, a mighty river,
The River of Saint Cristopher its name
For him who watches over travellers.

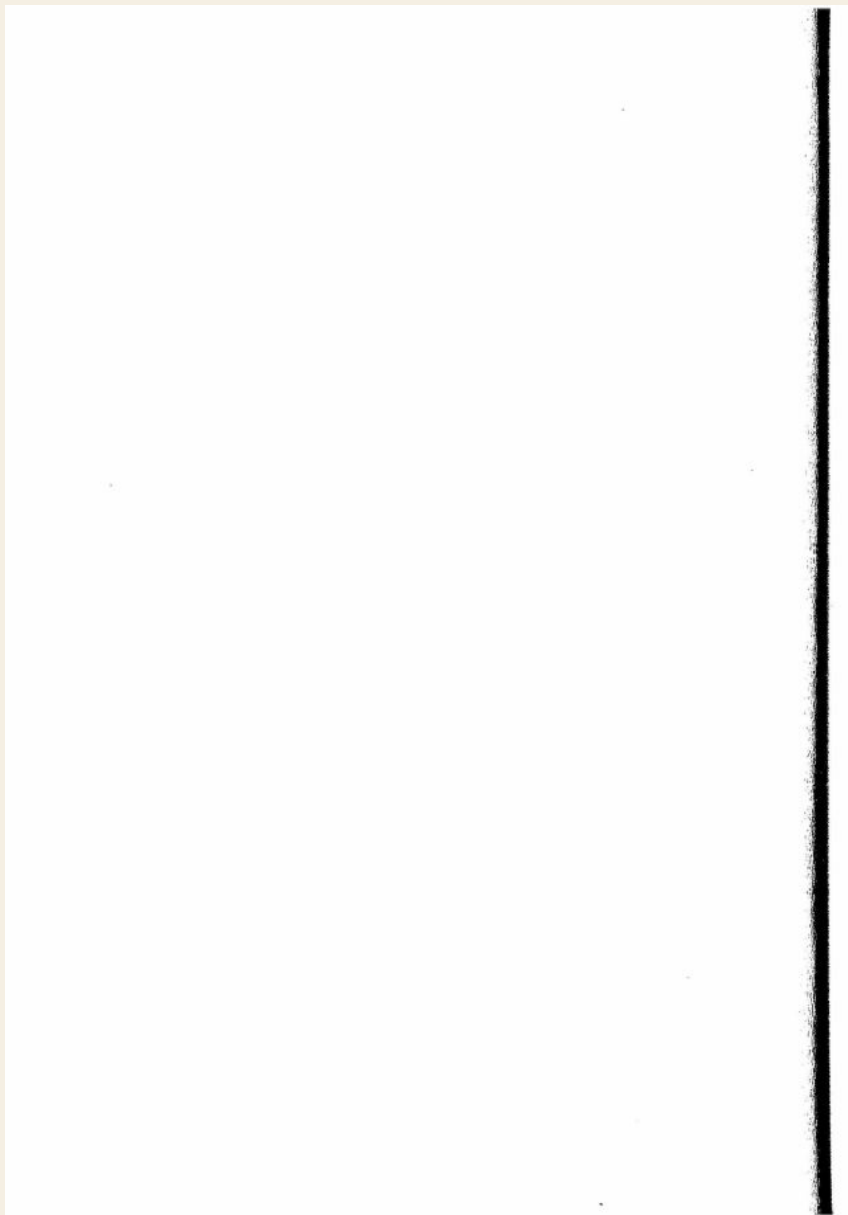
Up anchors. We go south!

SERRANO

St. Christopher help us now.

SEAMEN

We are the hand and heart,
The flesh that bears the will.
Ours are the lives that part
When voyages go ill.



The Port of San Julian

PART I

*All hope of flowering dies with winter's chill,
The spined boughs stiffen, life drains to the root
To hold and hope. So we sailed on two months
To catch the winter that invaded us.
South forty-nine degrees we found a bay.*

*None were content. They had not come for cold
Or iron rations, or a fathomless search.
The talk was mutiny and swift return.
The Spanish captains did not hide their hate
Seeking some force to take the armada home.*

PILOT

Land hems us, an unbroken shoal,
The sea is shallow, the night long.
Cold breathes upon us from the pole,
Smoke marks the shore, the wind gusts strong.

ANTONIO

I have seen wonders of the sea:
Giants, and waddling wingless geese
Crowding the rocks in herds so thick
We filled the ships with them, wolves
Without feet to run, that dive and swim.
And in a thunderstorm there came
Three holy fires to bring us calm.

CARTAGENA

See how he searches behind every stone
As if by turning each the strait is won.
A schoolboy's game by which five ships are driven
Crashing into the very maw of ice, unshriven
And headlong. In every bay
He searches, while night eats the pale day.

¶ THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

Charles gave him ships full-manned because he knew
He said, the great incurving of the way.
Are these the islands where the spices grew
Changed now to rocks, and fisheries of wolves?
It is a madman's scheme that leads us here
Into eternal night and an ice-bound year.
He must be stopped before we all are lost.

QUESADA

Winds tear the sails, the waves remount
After each fall across our splintering decks.
We reach into a holocaust of sound.
We must return before our ships, wrecks
Lie forever on these forsaken shoals
And our forgotten souls
Drown with our bodies in hell's latitudes.

SEAMEN

We are at one with cold.
The cold becomes our eyes.
Ice is the rope we hold.
The hand that holds is ice.

MAGELLAN

This dark bay summons us
Not as the fair warm Brazilian shore
But as some shelter from the antarctic spray.
Cold seals us here, congeals our summer hope
The dream we built in Spain's warm idle air.
So true to then, alas, how false to now.

THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

This bay a prison from which none can return;
Winter our jailer from whose grip no man
Wrests out the key till spring makes up the word.
We cannot now retreat. No murmuring
Nor clear revolt defeats my frozen purpose.
Who strikes against me, strikes against the King.
I am his agent, and I will not trace
One backward wave until spring thaws the land,
Melts up the rocks and earth, and burns my passage
Into the southern sea.
Here we shall dine on winter fare of fish
And flesh of sea wolves.
No comfort waits, but life is possible.
And hope prevails against a prudent mind.

QUESADA

Is this the shore of our abandonment?
The end of the fair promises of sun
And the hot spices of the eastern isles?
This desolate, barren shore haunted by beasts
Unknown and cruel and by God knows what men?
Better to throw him into chains and turn
Quick from the winter's hand homeward to Spain
To tell King Charles of this treachery.

CARTAGENA

We are king's officers. To him alone
We owe allegiance, not this Portuguese.
One ship was mine, it can be ours to seize.
Range three on two and so force him to own
He knows no passage, leads us beyond good sense
Into war with winter, God, giants, and the elements.

THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

MENDOZA

You speak of treason; I, of obligation:

Yonder the sea drops pulsingly its waves
And beyond that the low cliffs rise to grass
And then to shrubs ranging above our heads,
Slender and thorny to outwit the dry
Wind that pounces upon this country.
All orderly these in their places spread.

Through dark, the harmonic heavens visit us.
From the star-river Eridanus
In a fixed precedence, singing and light,
Orion walks beside the hound and hare
And Hydra follows close upon their cluster
With Libra, Scorpio, the Archer, and the Goat.

Forever fixed, motion forever shows
How here as well, the hours must impose
Order. From the first turning of the glass
At dawn and the first *Our Father*
Through the watches of the day. The crews stir
And scatter, yet each has his own place.

Some in the dawn draw buckets from the sea,
The decks are washed, the larboard watch is ready,
The pump is manned, the slate is cleaned, the run
Is posted in the log—always the word “South.”
And the crew gangs round for breakfast, and the mouth
Of the ship bites the sea, and day’s begun,

Methodical and right, till the sunset hymn
And the setting of the evening lamp. And yet in men
This is an order which we keep in place

THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

By birth first, but sworn to afterward.
Thus God declares, the Emperor extends
By such descent the fabric of our ways.

And we have pledged obedience, on our knees
In the Church of Santa Maria. Mutiny
Will break the structure, terminate the scheme
By which we hold together at the world's end
A portion of home, the attributes of Spain
Kept by five caravels on a far ocean.

CARTAGENA

What mighty mildness seizes you, Mendoza?
In the name of loyalty you forget your king
Whose ships we guard, and in your eagerness
To conserve order, you forget to think
Of that most apt of orders, the king's money!

QUESADA

We are practical men. It should be our concern
By night to seize the *San Antonio*.
The crew will follow any Spanish captain.
We'll have the three best ships. He must return
But if he will not, we must govern him.

MENDOZA

Will we not be disgraced to break our word?

QUESADA

In such a place a man asserts his choice,
Makes his decision, leaps across a wall,
Follows the chosen path for good or ill,
Knowing it leads to damage and disgrace
Or else applause and glory.

Q THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

But never shall see until the final door
The face he chose and how inevitably
He has come nearer to it hour by hour.

Then may he say, on such and such a day
I should have done this or the other thing;
May time retreat that once more I might pause
Here at the entrance to the fatal course!

But now forthright we take our way
Follow it through its tangled wandering
Choose the conclusion manfully. Risk much, gain much
Death or honor.

MENDOZA

The risk is lessened if no blood be shed.

SEAMEN

Who spoke of stars? The wide
Night is unbroken, save
For shreds of fog that ride
Like ghosts above a grave.

The lines and rails are damp.
A curse on fog. The light
Went out in the forward lamp.
What is abroad tonight?

I thought I heard a sound,
As an oar lifted to wait.
The swell sucks at the ground;
Breeze makes the rigging grate.

THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

But this was more than wind—
A creak, the step of one
Too stealthy for a friend.
I wish this watch were done.

Who's there? Waves and the sky,
Nightlong, wind and the sea.
Listen, I heard a sigh.
St. Mary, remember me!

PART II

BARBOSA

Captain, three ships have mutinied!
The boat, going ashore for water, hailed
Three ships, and each gave this reply to you
"Quesada is our Captain-General now."

MAGELLAN

Three caravels betrayed, and my ship's hands
Are Spaniards more than my own countrymen.
They do not know the hardness of my choice
Who seek by numbers to reverse my course.
I would oppose them all alone, disarmed,
Before submitting to their treacherous terms.

BARBOSA

A petition comes from the mutineers
In civil words. They wish you to make clear
Our way of passage, and humbly beg—

MAGELLAN

So begs the serpent pardon for his fang.

THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

BARBOSA

They will swear upon the pain of hell
Obedience, if you take them in your counsel.
It is a generous offer. I think it good
Considering their advantage and the odds.

MAGELLAN

The odds against me! They were always there.
So through an odd sea I plod on an odd adventure.
Say, five to one against the original conceiving,
Ten to one against an audience with the king,
That the king would favor it, another fifty;
Sixty that the Portuguese would not stop me.
Seventy against storm, sinking, going aground
And other odd forms of shipwreck. It is a sound
Bet at eighty we'd not go this far.
A hundred to one, if we quell mutiny
That we shall find the strait (if any be).
A thousand to one that I must fall before
Dissension run throughout the fleet like fire.
You, Espinosa, bet these odds for me.

BARBOSA

Treat with them. I beg you, reconsider.

MAGELLAN

So shall I treat with traitors, treacherously.

Espinosa, for Mendoza, bear this letter.
How well or ill he takes it does not matter,
For while he reads, your men may climb aboard,
Prepare your dagger for my final word.
Give him my true message:
"This blow is for King Charles.

THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

By this blood I serve Magellan.
This thrust is for the vow
You have not kept.
Thus to all traitors!
Thus to all mutineers!
This the sharp sentence.
Let God, if he wishes, save your soul."

ESPINOSA

My dagger is keen,
More cutting than the cold.
I serve the might-have-been.
I purpose as I'm told.

MAGELLAN

Barbosa, take your men. Follow the other boat.
While Espinosa does his work, mount silently,
Overpower Mendoza's crew. Command the ship.

Now at the world's end the Portuguese prophecy
Ripens in civil strife. I have no power
Except through arms and acts.
Yonder Mendoza walks upon his ship.
The outcome lies in Espinosa's steel.
There he approaches. Let his dagger say
Whether we are to find the westward way.

PART III

*"Those who ride to the hunt, do they ask
Who are the hunters and who hunted be?"
Who seeks to cut, his blood the lancets prick.
Mendoza slain, his body, stemmed on poles,
Grew to grim flower on the winter shore.*

¶ THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

QUESADA

Is it fitting that a man be hacked,
Quartered and spitted for all men to see?
Noble Mendoza, who but served his king!
And my good servant, you and I will be
Next in this serving up. This barbarous wretch
Knows how to treat his betters barbarously.

MOLINO

My lord, I follow you.
Where you go, I go too.

QUESADA

Our trial short, our doom is quick, good friend.

MAGELLAN

My hands are deep in blood, and more to shed
Before the lesson of this mutiny
Is brought to every man. None still must dare
To counteract my orders. Here I am the king,
Here I dispense justice and life and death.
Yet I detest the hatred in this voyage.
Could I inspire the ready hearts of men,
Take them into the sureness of my pursuit,
Encourage them with words and gentle acts!
But I am cold, unsure, and blunt. My rule is iron
And hateful. God knows I wish it were not so.
The cold lips of Mendoza speak against me,
Speak from his just death, that I am condemned with him.
And now Quesada dies, but whose the arm
That strikes the head of such a nobleman?

MESQUITA

Let El Molino do it. He can play
A game. They call it—

¶ THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

He who kills and runs away
May wear his head another day.

MAGELLAN

It is a hard choice. Still, by being headsman
He may save his own head and another's blame.
Mesquita, be in charge of this execution.

MESQUITA

Molino, your crime is great, and death your share,
But our great Captain grants to you a pardon.

MOLINO

May God bless the Captain for his care.

MESQUITA

Your pardon shall not be given, but won.

MOLINO

Ask what you will.

MESQUITA

This penance shall be done:
Strike off the head of yonder nobleman.

MOLINO

No.

MESQUITA

A small thing. One stroke, and its through.

MOLINO

He is my friend, my master. Better to die.

MESQUITA

Better to die than give him one clean blow
Delivered with love, kindest when strong and keen?

THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

Were it not better that a friendly hand
Gave this last blessing than a clumsy fist
Some seaman unaccustomed to swing true?
Love hurts as well as fawns, has spirit
To end as to begin, to serve in pain
As well as fortune.

MOLINO

You have persuaded me—or rather death.
I loathe dishonor, but I fear death more.

QUESADA

What shadow is this in your face, Molino?
Can death so frighten you? I look on death
As but the end of paths I wilfully chose,
Come soon or late to all men. I am prepared.

MOLINO

But not for such an executioner, my lord.
These very hands that not five minutes past
Pledged friendship and eternal servitude
Shall be your executioners.

QUESADA

Whom could I trust
If you do this? Whom I trusted even
As I believe in the hierarchies of heaven.
Together we roamed the summer-dry hills at home
And drank cool wine together after the hunt.
You came to the court with me. Remember the day
We first looked down together at the city?
I did not contemplate behind the door
If I chose death, such executioner.
Let any other do this thing, but you,
If ever again friendship is thought good.

THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

This is his worst betrayal, friend on friend.
Yet I can offer only death and honor.
He offers life.

MOLINO

I beg you understand
That I will never lose the weight of this
Cold as a dagger rigid in my breast.

MESQUITA

The trial is over, the sentence due,
The priest waits, the block is ready.
Gentlemen, come. I follow you.

PART IV

*For weeks we held in this unlucky bay
While the wind beat seas outside to foam.
Then May's fair weather let us send one ship
To explore the southward coast. A sudden squall
Broke it aground, though all its crew were saved.*

*So we stayed captive in a sheltered groove
Watching the empty shore and racing seas,
Trimming the ships against the rise of spring,
And the forms of Spaniards rotted on their poles.
Then one day from the shore-cliffs giants came.*

MAGELLAN

Encourage them with gifts; we may persuade
A pair of them to go with us to Spain.

☞ THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

MESQUITA

They are large to capture. If we fill their hands
With bells and give them bracelets for their dance,
Shackles, which they put on as ornament?

SEAMEN

A dancing giant!
Red face, yellow eyes,
Cheeks spotted paint,
A savage guise!

Start, Patagon,
The mirror plays.
Admit your own
It is your face.

Leap, Patagon,
Shaking this bell.
Its silvery tone
Contains your knell.

Laugh, Patagon,
At these bright toys:
Mirrors for looking,
Bells for noise

Beads that crackle
Caps for the head.
And quick the shackle.
Weep, giant, instead.

MAGELLAN

I dare not hold
The mirror to my own face
For the stains of this bloody winter
Ever gaze back at me.

☞ THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

We add two simple giants to our baggage,
Give them a chance at eternal blessing,
And bear their curses in a gibbering tongue,
Two more dissatisfied, who wait my ruin.

PART V

*Almost through August, wind and racing seas.
We set a cross upon the highest hill.
Later the wind fell, and we passed the headland.
But the Captain left two traitors on that shore,
De Cartagena and a mutinous priest.*

CARTAGENA

The fleet dissolves in mist
My eye strains for the last fleck of sail
Our final hope of men.
Lucky Mendoza,
Most fortunate Quesada,
How heaven has favored you above de Cartagena
Abandoned here.
Farewell all hope of home.
This is my home forever.
Farewell my wife.
I wed this southern earth
And here forever lose myself in it.
What is my birth, my riches, and my honor?
We have lost all and are no better than
These animals, these giants, that now surround us.

PRIEST

My son, be comforted.
Though we are lost

¶ THE PORT OF SAN JULIAN

We hold God's light one flickering instant here
 In these dark and windy reaches of the world
 And die as men.
 And now as a sign of His mercy
 Hear the sunset chant float back in benediction.

SEAMEN'S VOICES

*Salve Regina Mater Misericordiae
 Vita, Dulcedo, et spes nostra salve.
 Ad Te clamamus exsules Filii Evae.
 Ad Te suspiramus Gementes et flentes
 In hac lacrimarum valle.*

CARTAGENA

How lost are we in this vale, O Maria.

SEAMEN'S VOICES

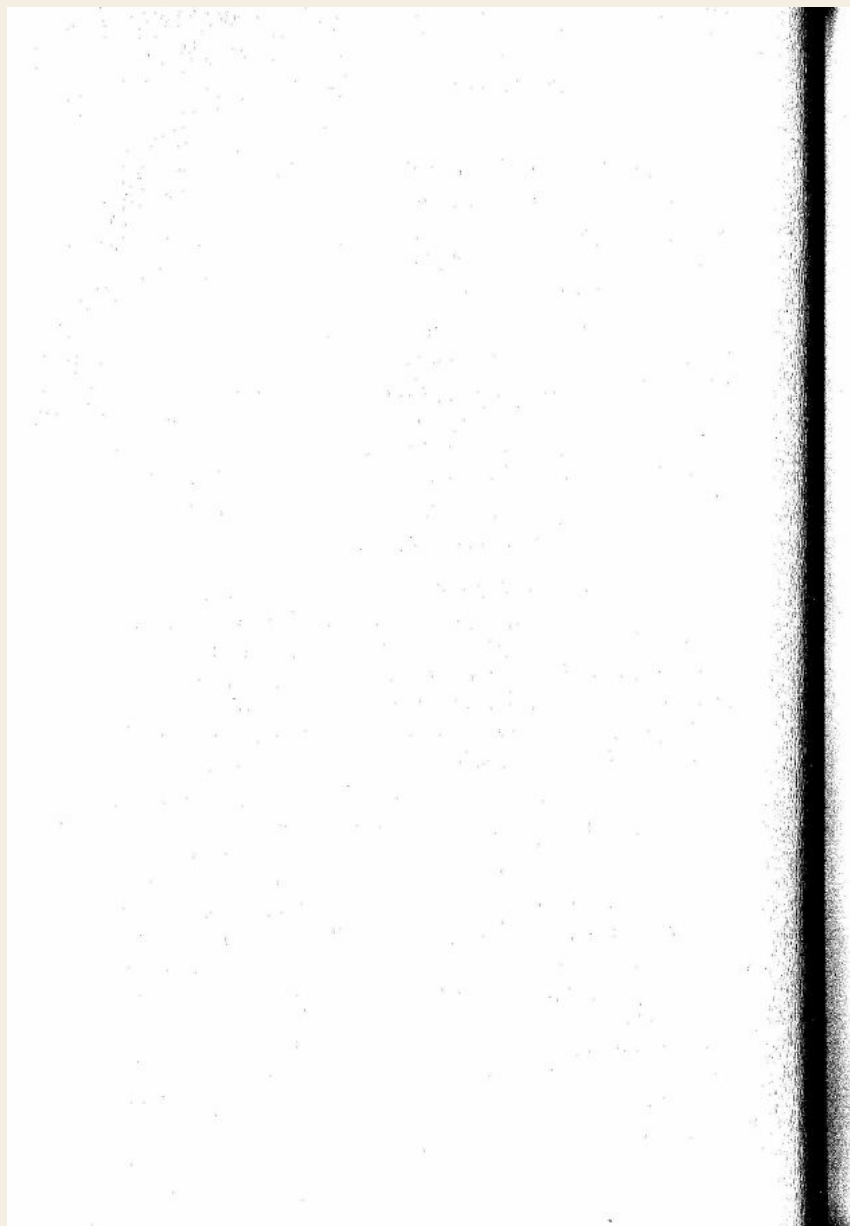
*Eia ergo
 Advocata nostra, illos tuos
 Misericordes oculos ad nos converte.
 Et Jesum Benedictum fructum ventris tui,
 Noblis post hoc exsilium ostende. O Clemens,
 O Pia, O Dulcis Virgo Maria.*

PRIEST

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

CARTAGENA

Now the lamp is set in the binnacle
 And the course given for the safe night.
 Rocked on the waves' motion
 Our fellows move toward Spain
 By east or west,
 But here we wait
 Until God's day of judgment shakes this shore.



The Cape of the Virgins

PART I

*The buds were tardy, every hope of green
Lay frozen in another storm-bound bay,
Another two months' loss, before we set
Determined sails on the October wind
To question capes and southings of the land.*

FIRST PILOT

The world will end in snow
Untouched by summer sun
Shapeless, somnolent, still
As stretches from these cliffs
To snare the exploring will.

MAGELLAN

And we shall come to snow.

SECOND PILOT

The world will end in bays
Dark, exitless, profound
Forever in a charm
Forged one from another's round
Pierced by unechoing sound.

MAGELLAN

And we must search each bay.

THIRD PILOT

The world will end in stone
Pressed to a wrinkled wall,
Rocks joined in endless mass
Sealing, immutable,
Narrows the soul might pass.

MAGELLAN

And we must break through stone.

☞ THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

FOURTH PILOT

The world will end in dark,
For light dares not shine
On the wheel sockets of the earth,
And night dismal lies
When day can never rise.

MAGELLAN

We come to light through dark.

FIFTH PILOT

The world ends at its end,
Ninety degrees, no more
No less. And whether snow
Rocks, dark, or sea lie there
Is proved by those who go.

MAGELLAN

Must we go to the world's end?

For round this bay the shores
Lie ominous, the sky
Darkens, and night though short
Threads shadow through the day.

Only two seasons glisten
In this inglorious littoral,
The black and white—
Both are a kind of hell,

Intemperate with wind:
West wind that drives the rain
West wind that brings the snow
Blowing perhaps from God
To match my westering gale.

Q THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

And whence the snow is blown
Black mold grows in the spring
Disfiguring the mind
With doubt of its destiny.

This is summer's short blessed season.
Shall I risk it here
On this bleak hideous bay?

SERRANO

Remember the lost ship
Torn on the jealous shore.
We try to learn too much,
More than men need to know.

THE CAPTAINS (SERRANO, BARBOSA, MESQUITA)

The west wind flicks the sail
Fast for the hopeful cape.

BARBOSA

Think of the empty casks
Rattling of hungry men.
Can skeletons sail home?
We have found more than most.

CAPTAINS

The west wind is our friend.
Stretch the broad sterns to it.

MAGELLAN

The west wind shifts my heart.

MESQUITA

Remember the flesh of men
Enduring while the mind

THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

Is sure, but stressed by doubt,
Breeding sly rebellion.

CAPTAINS

Hate breeds in pause. The way
Is east to Good Hope.

SERRANO

Remember St. Christopher,
How long we searched the sand
Sure of the turning land.
Brighter that hope than this.

CAPTAINS

Weigh anchor for the east
Give to Good Hope our journey.

MAGELLAN

Good Hope is death for mine.

SERRANO

Such narrow gloomy seas
Prick Norway's crags
But never pierce the land.

BARBOSA

Like lands of the jagged north
So these far south must stand
In perfect parallel.

MESQUITA

It is a fiord narrowing
Dwindling between those cliffs,
That ends in hollow ruin.

THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

MAGELLAN

So doubt convinces me against my will
Like specks of rust against unbreakable armor.
In this world man must be practical
Think of his cargo, safety of the ships,
Owners' investments, the crew's necessities.
No one eats dreams or desire,
Or fights cold but with coats woven of genuine wool.
We hear the voices of our contemporaries
And they break through at last to the guarded inner room.
Faith speaks to us still
But how to hear it in this clamor?

The world's end shifts its name.
We shall call it the seventy-fifth parallel.
There we fly to the Cape—Good Hope—death's hope.
Meanwhile every finger, every hair of the sea
Shall be explored. For this bay we take five days
From our time's dwindling storehouse.

SEAMEN

No one asked us to choose
We had no chance of choice
Thrust in or out of life
By man or spirit's voice.

The ship as universe
Circles its firmament.
Within its cambered world
Our smaller orbs are spent.

THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

Close to the sea-grooved deck
Tight to the twisting spar
Wrist to the ultimate rope
Or lashed to the floating wreck

We cling to its last defense.
It is our Earth in space
It is our land in sea
It is our hope of grace.

PART II

*How is the bloom disguised, how unforeseen
The issue of this calyx, this clasped bay!
But the captain sent two ships to seek the way.
Then storm lashed the remainder, and we slipped
Our anchors and sought safety in the sea.*

*What of the ships trapped deep within the cove
Shunted perhaps by wind on the hard coast
Or overwhelmed by waves? The captain watched
The distant reach for signs of their return.
The days dragged by and yet they did not come.*

MAGELLAN

Bad luck pursues me like Actaeon's hounds
For this stubborn gazing on a naked dream.
Two ships are ravened up within the throat
Of this iron-ringed bay. Could they escape the shore
When we with all our sea-room were hard pressed?
Five days have passed, and if they could return—
They must return—we are too far to fail.

Ⓒ THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

LOOKOUT

A pillar of smoke!
Smoke rises from the land.

ESPINOSA

It is the cry for aid
Of shipwrecked men.

MAGELLAN

Lower the boats.
Sailors, men-at-arms,
We salvage what we can.

LOOKOUT

It is the smoke of guns
Booming a safe return.
Sails push across the bay
All flags and pennants fly.

ESPINOSA

The sailors crowd the rail
Shouting their hail and cheer.

MAGELLAN

I am so besieged by fortune
I cannot test the meaning of these voices.
I have no more faith in evidence
So frail as this. Credibility
Sucked up and ebbing on every tide
No longer owns good omens. I have done with dreaming.
Reports, facts, degrees of latitude carefully noted,
Maps by the best geographers, only increase the error.
I will hear the captains' tales, and yet
Experience forbids too early a rejoicing.

THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

SERRANO

Storms drove us westward hard upon the shore
But by a miracle a narrow pass
Opened before us, and we came to calm.
Beyond the passage lay another bay,
Closing again and widening to a third;
So we sailed west three days. Always the tide
Ebbs and flows and the water remains salt.
Southward the land glows with nightly fires
Smoking by day, but who their builders are
We could not see. Nothing is here
But the flat hills and the salty strait between.

MAGELLAN

We track this strait at once.
And hope once more surges.

SEAMEN

We teach cartography
Where west melts into east.
Our sweat and blood must be
Ink of which charts are pieced.

*So after prayers our four sail slipped
Into the silent narrows of the pass,
Moved through the stillness of the dreamlike bays.
And the hills changed to mountains tipped in snow
Rising from forests close upon our hulls.*

*And our captain knew the men wished to return
For we found no sea, but rocks and isles and shoals
And the land too close, and many ways to choose,
Tangle and cul-de-sac in which to drown.
Then he called together all the officers.*

¶ THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

MAGELLAN

My officers. Here on the earth's far edge
We border on a great discovery.
Yet the strait is long. We have spent much time in it.
Answer me truly then, out of concern
For the men and ships. Shall we press forward here
Until the South Sea runs under our hulls,
Or return home now to honor and reward?
Will not our welcome be more glorious
When the holds flow with the spices of Molucca?
But stores are short, and I await your counsel.
Let us be frank, that we may act together,
For I am not a man to disavow
Advice given in thoughtful consultation.
Do not let fear obliterate your voices
Because of that misfortune in San Julian.
I command you, speak your minds to me.
For it is inconsiderate of your oaths
And to our safety to say otherwise.

SAN MARTIN, ASTROLOGER

Though God shows you the way,
Whether we press or fly
Must still be yours to say.

Whether these windings lay
Unending as the sky,
Though God shows you the way,
Repeating bay by bay,
I doubt the Moluccas lie
Where it was yours to say.

Onward without delay!
Sail while summer's high.
In God's name let us weigh

☞ THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

Anchor lest winter spray
Our ships ere we pass by.
Add then to what I say

The eastern route yet may
Become the best to try.
May God show you the way.
It must be yours to say.

MAGELLAN

Confounded and confounding man. Your stars
Have addled you, run riot through the skies.
What talk is this that shifts from side to side
Like a gull in the crosstrees? I asked advice, not riddles.

ESTEVEAN

Captain, countryman, cousin. By this
Triple bond know my threefold distress.

First, Captain, know the hulls reduced with strain
Will scarcely hold to back our seas again,
Less reach impossible, mist-glimmering shores.
With empty bottle, sack, and cask our stores
Are provident; it is the meat we lack.
Is this the gear we need to cross new track-
Less seas? Harbored on wind, fed air,
Haphazard seamen anchor in despair.

So countryman, turn back to our new king.
Return live men, whole caravels. We bring
Enough of conquest in this joinery
Of Sea of the South against the Ocean Sea.
Bring back new ships to consummate the feat,
A properly supplied, manned, sturdy fleet.

THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

Kinsman, out of my love I take this part.
I know the bulked ambition of your heart
Great as these mountains, dangerous and keen
As these black waters running in between.
But men have limits, ships break. Even so
Love sets the cape past which it will not go.

MAGELLAN

Yet other officers advise
Our going on.
Cousin, can this be cowardice?

I know the cool adventuring of my spirit
Which presses on to this extreme exploit.
Yet I know also the contempt of kings
And lenders who expect tenfold return
Not merely what they sent. I have a fleet
Rotten but real, better than painted ships
Dreamed in kings' anterooms. I asked advice
But only to compact my arguments,
Not stand against them. I seek the positive word.
And being opposed, hold to my lonely course.

Set up the signals!
Sound the call.
Westward we sail!

*Before us lay two mouths, southeast, southwest,
Two channels equal in their wide expanse.
So the Captain divided up the fleet
To southeast Concepcion, San Antonio
To southwest Trinidad, Vittoria.*

THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

*Then in the Trinidad, we turned a cape
Mighty and snow-crowned, and made our way northwest
Up broad canals and anchored at an isle.
Clear waters there pummeled into the strait
Wild celery grew, and fish were plentiful.*

*And while we stayed, the Captain sent a boat,
Well-manned, to seek the furtherance of the strait.
It vanished among headlands to the west.
In three days they came back again. We heard
Their muskets fire. We saw them wave and call.*

SEAMEN

We found the Southern Sea!
It spreads hollow and wide!
It rings the western sky!
We have touched the Orient tide!

ESPINOSA

The Captain's face is dark at this bright word.

ANTONIO

Do not look at him, my friend. The Captain weeps.

MAGELLAN

Tears rumble into my black beard.
They are the voice which tells
The working of my heart.
Here rest the wandering years
And insults thrown across tapestried rooms
The nights I stood silent by my son's cradle,
Hushed by his breath, promising inheritance.

I am fulfilled in knowledge
I am brought to desire's haven
And catch her, beating, in my hand.

☞ THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

Tears, groove my cheeks that I may carry
Within my flesh the glory of this day
Even as I yet wear
The Moroccan spear in every limping stride.

Does nothing in this serene harbor
Conceive such joy, that the waters
Undulate with no passing
Nor the air fly suddenly flocks
Nor the forests bend with my rejoicing?
All silence, mountains keep their stance
Regardless of this tearing of earth's secret.

I shall send echoes into every hollow
Break calm with fury, set such paeons ringing
Seville shall hear them
And set upon her maps this western cape
Cape Desire, for never did desire
Encompass half the globe within its purpose.

Sound all artillery. Wake this Southern Sea!

SEAMEN

Hail the new-sighted coast!
Hail our exulting band.
No more in east than west
Are troubles apt to end.

SERRANO

They speak the truth, for I with bleak report
Come from the southeast mazes of the strait.

Captain, we have spent four days in search
Of what will not be found,

THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

The *San Antonio* gone
 Sucked back toward Spain,
 Not waiting to bear news of the strait's end.
 The first day they outdistanced us,
 Disappeared across the bay at nightfall.
 There was ample room to turn and flee
 As those faint hearts spoke in your council.

MAGELLAN

The captain is my cousin, and the pilot,
 Mesquita and Estevan. Of all my men
 They least would fail me.
 Shipwreck I could believe in,
 Though the skies are varnished clear—
 The rock's sharp tooth, bulk of a floating log,
 A sudden gust that runs them on the shore,
 Or an unseen bar—
 Dangers enough at nightfall.

We search this bay and the whole shore.
 As our punishments are grave
 So deep goes our concern.
 We desert no just man.
 We shall trace to the beginning of this strait,
 Set up our signs and crosses,
 Leave messages in cairns,
 Find our lost mariners.

SERRANO

And our lost provisions too;
 She has the bulk of them.

¶ THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

SEAMEN

How deep goes trust
In this life's vanishings!
Each takes what he can
And keeps a whole skin.

PART III

*All through the strait we searched and set the cross
On hills and isles, and the Vittoria went
Back to the Ocean Sea with messages.
But she was vanished, and San Martin read
The stars that saw her hastening back to Spain.*

*So into the reaches of the western way
Our three ships sailed, lonely between the peaks.
Fog swirled past cedar trees, sometimes so still
We heard long rolls of breakers to the south
Speak in the voices of a strange new sea.*

*And louder grew the beating, and the hills
Diminished till the passage opened wide
Toward three small capes, and beyond those the west,
The longed-for water, virgin to the keel
Plunging immense and empty from the sky.*

MAGELLAN

Look westward now, on this unpassaged sea.
That I have seen before, from India.
Gazing to east I saw these waves hard linked
Around this globe like hands clasped close together.

THE CAPE OF THE VIRGINS

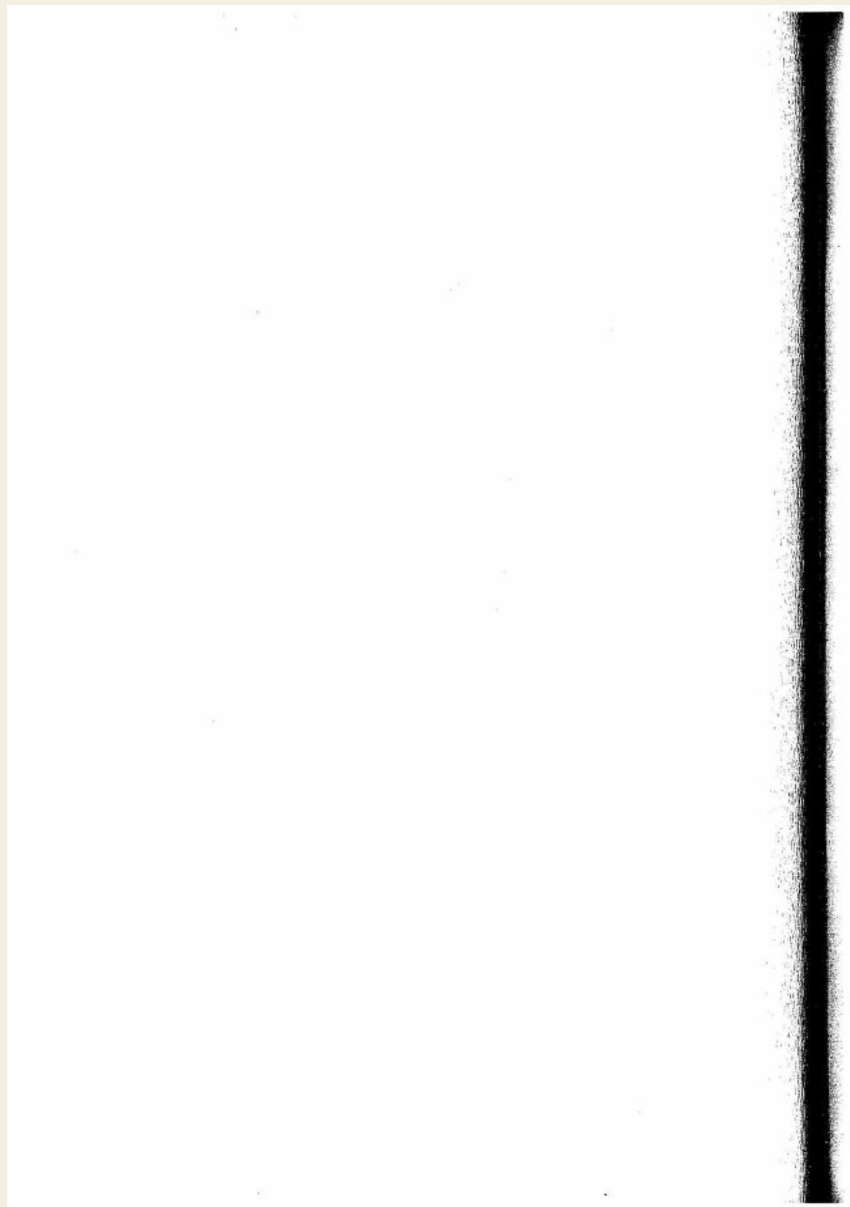
Slate-colored, swelling here, whose eastward form
Sparkled as turquoise in Malaccan bays.
Balboa saw, but I now sail, a sea
Never cut by prow or prahu, I am he
Whom glory crowns with startling voyages.

Farewell, Cape Desire, the stubborn land
Broke for Magellan, split like old Moses' sea.
God leads us to new realms to own his Son.
Let one ship's flight bear no ill-augury.
West is our path—Cipangu and Cathay
Lie in short sailing. There we feast and rest
Who now grow hungry for this journey's sake.
See the vast circling horizon, the flat plane
Of conquest, holding palms and glory.

SEAMEN

A turnip for such palms!
Berries of Ilescas
Are a fairer sight to us
Than all Molucca's balms.

Such glory we would trade
For a Guadalajaran grape
Or a Sevillian jade
Desire beneath her Cape.



The Peaceful Sea

PART I

*My Lord, you have known hunger, how its blades
Are sharp Osmanli scimitars, without peace.
We sailed two months, yet never any land
Broke the horizon, and the sky was fair
Adding to cruelty a smiling face.*

*Hour after hour the lookout scanned the disk
Of our advancing, ready with his cry,
The days, hot orbs of thirst and hungering,
And movement without measure, without cloud,
And dawn without a promise but the search.*

BOY

Blesséd be the light
And the Holy Cross
And the Lord of Verity
And the Holy Trinity.
Blessed be the soul
And the Lord who commends it to us.
Blessed be the day
And the Lord who sends it to us.

God give us good days, good voyage, good passage to
the ship, Señor Captain and¹ Master and good company,
so let there be, let there be a good voyage; many
good days may God grant your graces.

SEAMAN I

A good voyage this
Which goes on forever.

SEAMAN II

God has given us
Good days in plenty.

☞ THE PEACEFUL SEA

SEAMAN III

Too much good voyage,
Good days too many.

SEAMAN I

Good days unmarred
By the belly's feasting.

SEAMAN II

A voyage unscarred
By wine we'd be drinking.

SEAMAN III

A fortunate passage
Of hunger and thirsting.

OFFICER

Hoist up the oxhide men,
Let us see what dainty fare it is
By three days' soaking.

SEAMAN I

It is as hard as the church stones
In a long mass.

SEAMAN II

Stiff as the pride of a woman
Married above her station.

SEAMAN III

Had the ox possessed such a skin in life
He would never have covered the mainyard.

OFFICER

Throw it back.
Impatience shall not spoil our feast.

THE PEACEFUL SEA

BOY

Señor, here is a fine rat,
Yours for two hundred maravedis.

ANTONIO

He's thin. Look at the spindly shanks
The sunken chest, the ribs stuck out.
Hardly worth chewing. He's not half grown.
Not worth a hundred.

BOY

Young, yes, and tender. Look at those splendid eyes.
The long straight tail. A fine fellow.
Oh, when I saw him walk with mincing step
Proudly his head he carried,
Disdained the stinking bread I laid for him.
It broke my heart to kill him in his prime,
But scorning what we eat, he soon would die.
Make it a hundred fifty.

ANTONIO

I am too generous, a noble soul,
Not one to haggle over a scrawny rat.
Done. Give him to me.

SEAMEN

Aship as ashore
The rich must eat;
And starve, the poor.

ANTONIO

Can one rat feed a ship?
I am not like our blessed Lord
Who by two fishes fed a multitude.

THE PEACEFUL SEA

Each saves himself.
And I must eat
Despite the sores
That near-starvation paints on other men.
I am a nobleman,
I was not born
To perish here obscure in this far sea:
Carefully reared,
Taught fencing, rhetoric, the classic tongues,
A frequenter of courts, a friend to learned men.
And what I write of our adventuring
Will be the talk of Europe's retinues.
What is wealth for
But to save a man from starving?
I'll go and toast this morsel on the embers.
Boy, turn the spit, and you shall have a share.

MAGELLAN

Does the giant yet live?

SEAMEN

He has embraced the cross
And kissed it much and yielded up the ghost.

MAGELLAN

So little is size a strength against
The ravages of days. He was a man
Well used to hardship of another kind,
The cold antarctic meadows, winter's wind,
Not the warm decadence of tranquil seas,
Day following day in a circle charmed with waters.
And more will die unless this sea soon ends.
Wretches, to sail on such a desperate voyage!

☞ THE PEACEFUL SEA

I feel your pains, I share your seamen's fare—
Biscuit gone powdered, seasoned with rat dung,
Sawdust for the rest. And for our wine
Water turned yellow, foul to taste.
More than your pain I feel the heavy throb
Of conscience for ambition gone too rash.
I am a cave of ghosts, where the miserable dead
Jeer at this penance, point their hands and say,
"Go west, Magellan, never sighting land."
And even Cartagena rises up:
"Was I not right, that you have so condemned me,
Lost in the limitless land, as you on unending sea?"

LOOKOUT

Land ho, land ho, land, land ho!

MAGELLAN

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

Order the boats ready.
Most fortunate island!
Boy, you forget the glass.

SEAMEN

Birds come in welcoming flocks
Bringing their hope of land
In this deluge-drifting world
Winged, like seraphim
Rising, like mortal souls
To their immortal light.
Bring us your branch of green
That tells of mountain tops
Breaking this ancient flood.

☞ THE PEACEFUL SEA

BOY (*turning glass*)

Good is that which goes
 Better is that to transpire.
 Seven is past and into eight flows
 More shall flow if God desire.
 Make a good voyage by count and pose.

*But we found no place to anchor; rocks and trees
 And birds that rose and circled the tiny isle.
 The trade winds stirred the branches, and the sound
 Was siren-sweet and perilous. And the sharks
 Sifted beside our ship with vulture glide.*

ESPINOSA

Only a dry rock
 A few bare trees
 That live by rain or fog.
 No springs, no herbs
 Nothing but birds
 That cry with discontent.
 Nothing to stay for.

MAGELLAN

Signal the other ships that we sail on.
 The course is northwest and a quarter west.

Unfortunate Rock, that you should be
 Our hope of bread cast on these endless waters,
 Mirage, that beckoned us to such fair scenes.
 Worse, worse by far to find you thus, than pass
 In tight acceptance through this spellbound sea.
 So I play Tantalus.
 Ever the fruit is offered, but I taste
 Only the bitter clench of my own jaw.

THE PEACEFUL SEA

SEAMAN I

We've voyaged west two months. Two months have aimed
To break this circle. Have we moved at all?

The scene remains unbroken sea, clear sky,
Bright days, fair winds.

SEAMAN II

The ancients said the world is wrapped in water,
The River Ocean, far to the west, its flow
Unvexed by tempest where lie Fortunate Isles.
Surely we track that River now.

SEAMAN III

Or have we come upon a kind of hell
Thrust of clear days and swells and pleasant breeze
Where we shall sail until our flesh is gone,
Sail still as ghost ships manned by skeletons?

SEAMAN I

Or else the world is growing as we creep
Across its apple-surface.

MAGELLAN

Spain thinks us dead. The *San Antonio* tells
Of madman's whims, an expedition doomed.
Yet I cannot wholly to despair
Give all my hopes. Nightly the southern sky
Shines with the Holy Cross, as if to bless
Even these regions, and these rocks may be
The outer sentries of the lands we seek.

SEAMEN

We dreamed of fruit
Clear flowing springs,
Of shade and rest.
Promise proved bare
Breaks more than hope brings.

THE PEACEFUL SEA

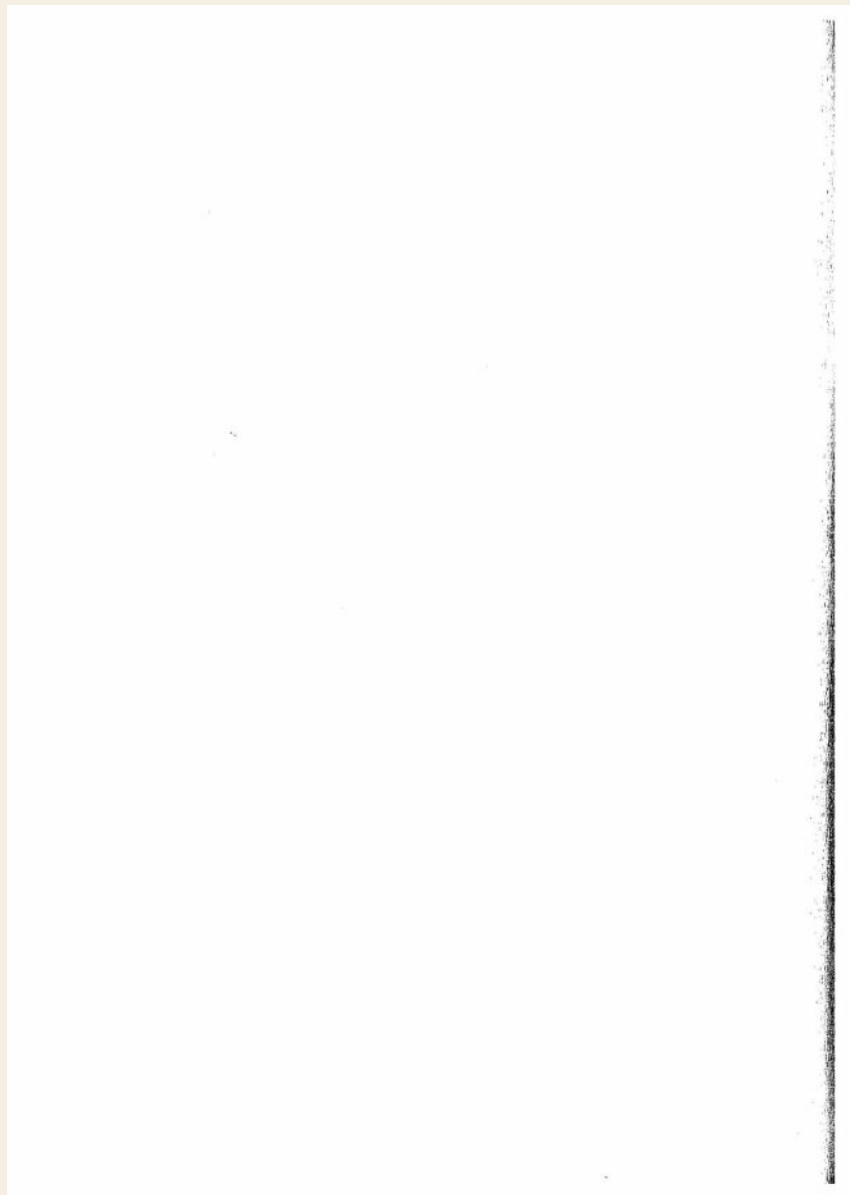
*So we continued on the silky sea
The armored sky glared on our weakening hope.
We dined on leather bucklers and we supped
On sawdust from the timbers, and we drank
Water too stinking to be called its name.*

*Water! How beautiful the streams we dreamed,
The gushing torrents crystal from the green
Mountains of home, the warm vines in the sun
Filling the grapes to burst upon a touch.
Men died, mumbling such words through scurried lips.*

*For forty days we sailed beyond that isle
And saw one rock as barren as the first,
No other land. And then three islands loomed
Lofty, palm-covered, with anchorage, and men—
Brown men who ran and shouted on the shore.*

*They came from skimming boats into our ship
Light-fingered, laughing, taking all our gear,
Even the captain's skiff. We drove them off,
And the angry captain, leading forty men,
Pursued the robbers and burned many homes.*

*Seven we killed by arrows, the rest fled,
The wounded were astonished at our arms,
Drew forth the arrows from their wounds, and died.
We felt compassion for such simple men.
Yet seized their stores of fish and fruit and cane.*



The Philippine Islands

PART I

*From the Ladrones we came on many isles
And rested our weary company on the shore,
Eating the fruit and coconuts, and wine
Which friendly natives brought, until refreshed
We slowly searched the archipelago.*

ANTONIO

Our voyage has been long and trouble-fraught
And the seas wide over which we range
Threading a perilous strait, whose channels change
From known waters to the unknown we sought.

Through hunger, death, and mutiny we wrought
A glorious passage, came to earth grown strange,
Found barest deserts without herd or grange,
Suffered on seas so broad our ships were naught.

But from the grim sea at last these islands rise.
Wind blows from them with perfume, bays are spread
Gracious for anchor, fruit falls upon the hand,
The friendly people welcome us to land.
All thirst is quenched, work rests, and trouble's fled.
Thus weary lives shall come to paradise.

SAN MARTIN

It is a simple poem, not learned.
There is no passage from the Greek.

ANTONIO

I had a Greek line, but there was no room.

SAN MARTIN

Why simply add it.

THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

ANTONIO

A sonnet has had this form for two hundred years.
Who am I to change it? I would be thought uneducated.

SAN MARTIN

You will be thought lacking in depth.
Every word is clear.

ANTONIO

That proves you a dull fellow and insensitive.
The poem has two meanings. Look now,
It appears to be a simple sonnet on our travels,
But if you look beneath the lines you will see
It is an allegory on the passage of the soul
through the perils of this world
Until by the aid of God's angels,
the soul comes at last to heaven.

SAN MARTIN

Poor simple fellow. Is that all your depth?
I have a poem here that's so profound
No one can understand it but myself.

ANTONIO

Look, coming from the shore! A royal barge,
And under its canopy, an Indian king.

MAGELLAN

How soon rest and food have repaired the ravages
Of months of grievous hunger and foul hope,
And days become a ripe discovery:
New lands, new people, curious goods for trade,
A jeweled world of islands yet unmapped.
Yonder a chieftain comes in royal state.
Go, Enrique, to the rail and speak to him.

(THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

SEURANO

That plan is best, to quickly make an end
To this long voyage. The ships are waterlogged.

MAGELLAN

He understands the slave! Look, he replies
In rapid speech. We are in some isles
Near those where Enrique was taken. We have proved
The west leads to the east. We have turned the globe!

ENRIQUE

The chief sends gold and ginger in a chest.

MAGELLAN

Return his gifts. Tell him we come as friends.

This is my fortune given at last by God
To enjoy moderately, knowing that man's grip
On fortune is a slippery grasp.
From the known to the unknown and back again
Such is man's voyaging.
Alas, for those who, starved or lost
And those abandoned, who cannot return
From those new worlds of death
To tell us what lies there.
These are Spain's eastern isles, and I their lord.
To unseen heirs I bring these wealthy lands.
First make them ours, set ourselves firmly here.
Inquire the way to the greatest chief of all.

SEAMEN

God blessed the compass rose
That brought us here. We lie
In Eden-haunted isles.
God chose the ones to die.

THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

Here we can contemplate
The suffering that was
And hope a milder fate
In what God brings to pass.

PART II

*We came then to the harbor of Cebu
A busy roadstead, filled with junks and prahus
Bringing goods for trade from all the Eastern lands,
Porcelain, silk, and opium, camphor, pearls
From China, Cipangu, Malabar, Ceylon.*

*The Rajah welcomed us to feast and trade,
Honored our captain—and the two men made
Alliance of their countries for all time—
And asked for baptism and received the Host
With all his people kneeling to the cross.*

MAGELLAN

We have not used the sword;
The armor hangs bloodless and white. In exercises
It shows its hardness against wooden spears.
One man so dressed is firm against a horde,
Each his own fort that has no fears
Of bare men's crude devices.

In this we have done well.
The mightiest chief of all bends his knee to Spain,
Takes as his Christian name that of our king,
Embraces the Cross to save himself from Hell
And the people of all these islands bring
Tribute while we remain.

THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

I found an empire here.
The flag and Holy Cross are spread to new dominions.
I have broken a way through land unpassed before,
Voyaged the world's vastest sea to appear
As a ghost on the familiar shore
Of civilized opinions.

This is my greatest hour.
Crown after laurel crown would be my justice, bay
For deeds done hour by hour. Yet men deflate
The work of others for their own small power.
They say count no man fortunate
Until his final day.

ENRIQUE

The Rajah of Cebu sends word
That one chief will not obey
Or give allegiance to your Spanish lord.
If you lend a boat with men aboard
He will attack at day.

MAGELLAN

What chief is this who dares defy
The Rajah who is our king's ally?

ENRIQUE

Silapulapu, his name,
A chieftain of the isle Mactan.

MAGELLAN

I would not chance to arms. I came in peace,
Conquered in friendship, baptized by consent.
Force will persuade, but lose the argument
And leave old wounds that break again to blood.

THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

Go, Enrique, speak to Silapulapu.
Say he need only recognize as king
His lawful leige the Rajah of Cebu
The loyal subject of the crown of Spain,
Pay the set tribute, and we stay in peace,
Being his friends and firm allies.
But tell him if he should refuse
We prove upon him how iron lances wound.

SERRANO

One boat and twenty men, with our allies
Should quell this petty chieftain easily.

MAGELLAN

We go alone. Three boats and sixty men
Will be enough to frighten all his hordes.
Muskets and crossbows, armor and good iron—
All these will send them screaming to their forests.
It is a chance to prove our deadly arms,
And keep these islands subject to our friends.

SERRANO

We always risk in battle. Fates, perverse,
Play weighted dice, the easy unobtainable,
And the impossible becomes the fact.
We have done what no others could have done,
What, knowing its danger, we would not attempt.
And having come through such impossible seasons,
Let us not fall into the seeming simple.

MAGELLAN

I have fought such a naked host before
And judge my strength by my experience.

☞ THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

SERRANO

Then count me leader. It is not from fear
I argue, but foreboding and good sense.

MAGELLÁN

I lead, myself. I never have sent men
Into a battle where I would not go.
Could I watch quiet here until men shout
And the clanging lances drum the wooden shields,
Know the hard lunge of iron through muscle and bone,
And stay apart in chosen idleness?

BARBOSA

Consider then your lameness, which is small
On the smooth deck, but wading near the shore
Or on the slime of rocks, may cause your fall,
As the final turn of a forgotten spear.

MAGELLAN

For my leg's flaw my arm grows twice as strong
And hurls more readily against the foe
As if revengeful of a former wrong.

SAN MARTIN

Even the planets warn you not to go.
Mars conjoins Saturn. Death is the ascendant.

MAGELLAN

The stars will bring me luck, a fortunate end.

ANTONIO

My captain, set no trifle on your life.
You say the deed is small. Let younger men
Try out their powers in arms, and prove their skill.

THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

MAGELLAN

Your fine Italian sophistry speaks well
But cannot steer me from my chosen course.
Perhaps we need not fight. Enrique returns.

ENRIQUE

I bring these words from Silapulapu:
Do you think because you come in ships like hills
And sound your thunderbolts, that we grow pale?
Pallor is yours; so wear it with our curse!
Attack. We know how deep your lances cut.
Ours are but reeds, with tips hardened in fire
But come at dawn, and they shall find your blood.

MAGELLAN

It is God's way perhaps to hold this land,
Letting some souls be lost for many found.
We board the boats, attack at dawn.

SAN MARTIN

The dark hour comes after the dark is gone.

PRIEST

Let all confess and hear a holy mass.

MAGELLAN

We must be ready before the shadows pass.
It is a small thing that we do today.
So bless us, Father, and let us go our way.

The Lord who brought us through the dismal sea
Who showed the way and laid these banqueted isles
Who made these friendly chiefs that we might save
Their souls for Him, who gave these realms to Spain,

Q THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

The Lord who did all these and stayed with us
When each man hungered, who gave us strength in arms
Shall lead us on, His perils to fulfill.
As He has guided us, so shall He now.

It is my task to keep these lands for Him
To lay foundations strong enough to hold
When we have gone; to do that which once done
Is done forever, to add all power I own
To this one deed, that it be firmly done.

God is beside us, and we have not failed,
Nor shall we fail, in trying the best part
That we may act, even if sure to die.
Danger but adds a luster to the shield
Which, bearing or borne on, I accept as fate.

SERRANO

I go with heavy heart.
None know the will of God,
Whether he takes our part
Or brings his chastening rod
To crush us on this sod.

BARBOSA

My brother by his faith
Has proved the lodestar
That brought us round the earth.
But dares he not too far
In this incongruous war?

OFFICER

My spear thirsts for its blood;
My sword loose in its sheath.

THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

They ride swift on the flood
To bite with iron teeth
Those whom I mark for death.

ESPINOSA

I strike when others strike
And murder when I must.
It is not what we like
We do, or what is just,
But follow whom we trust.

ANTONIO

My hands are cold and wet.
Now all I learned of war
Deserts me. I forget.
When the shouts of battle near
God save me from my fear.

SAN MARTIN

The planets are not right.
They cry to me of doom.
I hang back from the fight.
A wise man does not come
To what he should flee from.

SEAMEN

While boats pull away, the village dogs howl in their fright
A chill wind touches us in the orb'd tropical night.
God help us, and saints aid our arms with their might.

We close among strangers far from our homes and land
Birds call in strange voices;
 men's words we cannot understand
What prayer or blessing shall grace
 those who fall on this strand?

THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

Better hoist sail and weigh anchor for worlds we know.
They are not our battles,
 these pageants for bluff and for show,
Thrice better to leave than to chance
 our good fortune brought low.

PART III

ANTONIO

The beach sloped off too gradual from the shore;
Our boats struck sand two musket shots away.
We waded to our thighs. The covering fire—
Musket and crossbow—pierced no Indian shield.
So we fought man to man. Their numbers numberless.

For every wound, two more unwounded sprang,
Like Cadmus' warriors from the dragon's teeth.
Our armor stopped their blows but could not break
Thickets of stinging reeds. He called retreat.
Retreat, but firmly—and our men all fled.

He was the last to go, moving slow step by step,
Covering their flight, the good shepherd against wolves.
Enrique and I stood by him, and at last
He would retreat no farther, but summoning
All his strength, he fought an hour there

As if by very fury he might break
That spiked wall and frightened them to flight.
Twice did he lose his helmet, twice replaced.
A warrior with a puny lance of cane
Struck at his face. It was a harmless blow

☞ THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

But anger outgrew caution, and he threw
His spear so deep into the offender's breast
That it was lost. He tried to draw his sword
But a wound already taken in the arm
Prevented this. So he stood weaponless

Against a thousand spears.
A scimitar struck his leg. He fell
Face in the water, and their frenzy blazed
In blow on useless blow upon his form,
Each adding crimson to the crystal sea.

So died our mirror, light, comfort, and true guide.
We hardly reached the boats before they fled.

SAN MARTIN

So perish all who disregard the stars,
One being warned should walk with double care.

BARBOSA

Up, slave. Your master's dead
But you are still a slave.
He must be buried
In Christian fashion. Serve.
Your wound is slight.
Up, up. Ashore for parley.
His body must be ransomed before night.

ENRIQUE

I loved my master well,
Fought at his side, bore wounds.
I am no slave. I mourn.
And these I shall send to hell.

☞ THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

The visible lilt of hills,
But earth hidden, swinging up under the foam,
Shouldering the boats offshore.

And the fire destroyed him.
Not the flash of artillery or the muskets too far to aim
Nor all-consuming hate,
But the blaze that hardened the pointed reeds
That thrust in him like flame.

And water overwhelmed him,
Not the ocean he conquered in space and storm
Riding over abysmal deeps in wave and wind,
It was the sea in calm and shallow
That engulfed his dying form.

And the air deserted him
Shaping no more his breath.
O, air, what now is air
But a ladder for his ascending spirit,
A flute of praise sounded in others' prayer.

Earth, water, air, fire.

Earth is the dust
The spirit, fire
Blood spills like water
The soul swims the air.

Earth, fire, water, air.

☞ THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

*There is no known without the black unknown
Stretching, two-sided, endless, from the day.
Victory crowns the slain, and heaven and hell
Are the two flowerings of a single stem.
The world is not enclosed until transcended.*

*He died, our noble captain, but I live
To speak his praise, whose stubborn constancy
Outwore all doubts, who shared our fare and hung
Like all of us on the dry leaf of fortune,
Finding his private signs in common seas.*

*Shall any say the cause is vain, my lord,
When men have set their compass to great deeds
The flower of triumph, and the thorn of death?
For death dies here, and yet the flower lives,
Proving the pole to other wayfarers.*

*Stiff and abstract it shapes and points to God
Torn from the human breath, becoming light,
By faith become, by torment, and by thorn.*

*No new divergencies of realm and sky
Pass without sighting old Hesperides*

*Wherein translated, he forever falls
Under the pagan reeds, forever stands
Charting the way through some new-entered sea,
One man against the stark mid-winter fear
Forever with the world between his hands.*

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The Weathercock

Stage IV | The mature California lyric, 1966

The complete recoverable text of the collection.

The Blackberry Thicket

I stand here in the ditch, my feet on a rock in the water,
Head-deep in a coppice of thorns,
Picking wild blackberries,
Watching the juice-dark rivulet run
Over my fingers, marking the lines and the whorls,
Remembering stains—
The blue of mulberry on the tongue
Brown fingers after walnut husking,
And the green smudge of grass—
The earnest part
Of heat and orchards and sweet springing places.
Here I am printed with the earth
Always and always the earth ground into the fingers,
And the arm scratched in thickets of spiders.
Over the marshy water the cicada rustles,
A runner snaps sharp into place.
The dry leaves are a presence,
A companion that follows up under the trees of the orchard
Repeating my footsteps. I stop to listen.
- Surely not alone
T stand in this quiet in the shadow
Under a roof of bees.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 3.

The Riders

For Eunice

We made castles of grass, green halls, enormous stem-lined
rooms
And sailed in trees.
Close to the backyard fence
We dug a cave.
We never finished it,
But there was plenty of time for moving that last foot or two
of earth,
It was an eternity till Christmas.

Do you remember the yellow fields
We tussled through, small mustard petals clinging?
And the hikes on Saturday up to the grove of oaks?
Plenty of time then, and dark came down before we were
home.
They were out calling and searching.

There was a winter year and a summer year.
The last was for beaches.
Salt wind over the gaudy pier,
And things moved faster.
You on the yellow horse, I on the dun.
One way the sea, the battleship,
The pier, the fishers leaning by the rail,
The ferris wheel,
And turning still
The shoddy mermaid painted on the wall.
Up and down we laughed and caught the rings.
And one was gold for summer.

Then summer was gone, and the horse bunched warm ripples
Trotting through orchards down to the practice ring.
His eyes were like suns, when he changed his gait
Faster and faster till the trees blurred and the sky
And there were only posts and the wind and the packed earth
And the warm beast gathering and springing.
How to get off, how to escape!
At last I fell, but it was no better.

The earth turned under my back
Swift, swift, we turned out of day to night to day again,
Light and shadow from a picket fence.

And the planet whirled on the sun, a swift carousel.

Our heads grow gray, our children laugh in the long grasses.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 4.

Union Station

There was a feather in her hat.
Smiling and waving as the great wheels turned,
Calling Good-by, Grandmother, we caught last sight of her.
But in the gray cavern of the terminal
She is a part of every parting.
These things accumulate—
The cheerful cries
For untold years of summer-passing aunts,
College vacations; father walking slow.

They travel trains unseen and mythical
Each followed by his ghostly fellow-riders.
Sudden as tears they come around the ramp
Running the gauntlet of the waiting room.
For this they bought
Their long tickets, locked their doors on dust,
Jogged out of every-morning to this moment
This precise place, this point of meeting
Solemn and arched as a cathedral,
Here where we waited, planning the ambushade.

The plane makes travel nothing, and the steamer
Beckons a party or a sun-pithed palace.
But here it is we learn the weight of travel.
It is time spent observing distances
Seen through blurred glass, felt in the jolting road,
Conforming to earth's curving hills and passes,
Waiting, strange faces, crowds, and memories hanging
Like posters on the walls beneath the windows.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 6.

Pastoral on the Back Nine

The back nine's not so much a place for games
As a cropped meadow where the balls are birds
And birds like balls go skimming,
Speed toward the sky in unexpected turn
Or plummet downward from a mythic screen.
We knew the air had substance, now we learn
It is a crystal from whose myriad panes
A ball can bounce and veer and ricochet.
It is with trees and hedges that we play.
Where in the city is the grass so green
Or made for walking through?
The early dew
Shines it to silver and the broken sheen
Stalks the wet golfer like his tracks on snow.

Slow for the young, whose muscles knot and flare
Slashing at tennis, bursting over waves,
It waits like gentle years for everyman.
Two spirit-saving Pilgrims we come here
Our burdens on our shoulders, and the plan
Defined by hazards. Past the parking row,
Shrunk to these fair ways, stream beset and rare,
We find the cosmos sloughed off long ago,
Eden again, where heaven flickers near.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 7.

Nightpiece

Here in this chill half-death
Portending dawn, I wake
And drift in little light
Seeing not forms but breath.

The tongue that leapt to scold,
Harrying, on the young
Is chidden, and the ache
Of love seeps in with cold.

What can I say to Rest?
Only in stillness move
To draw the comfort close
And know the largeness pressed

On such a few brief years:
Night-spirit, hovered near—
To be the ultimate,
The silencer of fears.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 8.

An Anniversary: A Country Burial

Again December shadowed and gray—
A time to die for one who lived by sun—
Brings unshaped mornings, set behind clouds
And takes remembrance a year away.

And still I ride in hushed December sound
Past fields long gathered, and the stubble thin,
To the iron gates, and turn beside the grass—
The road is gravel then—to the fresh mound.

Odd how the shaft of light for an hour shone
(Though the day was rain before and afterward)
Across the pile of bloom, the orchard rows,
The restlessness of mourners gazing on.

We talked and went away, the flowers there
Sweetened the air of many afternoons
In an empty place, where none but loss shall come
With a greeting whispered, foolish, in the air.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 9.

The Travelers

Earlier than cockcrow or the birds' stir,
More promptly than the breeze that wakes downhill
Toward the sea in the morning, even before
The light-eyed children rouse at the first sun's pull,

Higher than crow or hawk, than mist or cloud,
Than four-winged cherubim, even high into light
Rides the early plane, as by a hand of God
That lifts pelican, flying dragon, and the whale.

And yet our ways are carried there
In the bright grotto of the sky, this unnatural flight
Out of earth's close garden—whose plummet flare
Might fill a forest with its broken light.

Let air surround them soft and skies dry clear.
Lift them above our trees, cushioned and strange,
While I for love's sake hear the heavenly stir
And bless to landfall all high travelers.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 10.

Small Garden

Stout wall and careful grass
Seize my existence, bind
As in a prison, trees in mass.

And I in anchored space
Look to the sky to claim
More slopes and terraces.

Some so interior dwell
They need not penetrate
The close weather of their cell,

Or shut in dungeons hear
Voices; and from the dark
The brightest worlds draw near.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 11.

Notes to Go with a Compass

I

Straight to the north, if you should go that way,
Are the wet Cascades that wring out the sea
And beyond, the Canadian taiga forest,
Spruce and fir that dwindle north to less

And less; finally the grassy tundra plain.
Birds cluster, and flowers fashion arctic spring
Toward endless noon, earth and shore bountiful.
Land gives way to the sea, a salt so chill

It thickens to a crystal continent.
The compass veers and shivers on its stem.
The bare stars and steady sextant show
How absolute is north upon the pole.

2

One step will take you south, from absences
Of warmth, wet, green, and all complexities
To slow rains transforming brown to dull
To brighter plains, where foliage, prodigal

Overruns itself. Atlantics on the leaves
Augment the Amazon's gigantic trees.
And earth is hidden in the visible,
The steamy self-grown tangle of Brazil.

3

Few push such ultimates. This compass, say,
Will help to cross that ridge in a straight line—
No matter how you twist among the trees—
Or brings you through the bareness of a plain.

Or lose the current, or the stars deceive
Here is a truth to move the hesitant
And is what most will use a compass for,
Not trending toward perfection like a saint.

The towns are marked. The road is clear between,
The ruggedness a temporary thing.
This toy helps only him who knows the way
As a bird unfolds direction with the wing.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 12.

The Burning Glass

There is a moment on which moments turn
And radiate to and from it as a sun:
So we concentrate with a glass to burn
All the warm rainbows of the wide spectrum.

So kittens jump at twigs and catch a string
To bring us proudly home the rats of hunting.
And telescopes of all the earth at once
Combine upon Mars' near coincidence.

The long years of learning ancient tongues
Compose themselves in buried cities when
Are used three verbs, three nouns, an ampersand
To read a cracked rosetta in the hand.

Under the klieg lights for a little space
A whole life converges in a face,
While I in dark go once more round the flame
And all my tongues expound a single name.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 14.

Person and Place

Bright among all else,
Whom the chariot of morning
Brought here and gilt
With auras, so hung,

Shadow of such spirit
That shadow moves among
These corridors as light
And is flame's reflection.

And source neither the sun
Nor the shadow's golden core,
But out of the black borne
Of the drenched interior

That circles what it will
With baubles of light
And makes of this double
A precious weight

That returns upon itself
As though new-perceived
And mirror and source
Mingle and are confused.

And the sun and I contend,
Enamored of the vision,
Whether it from that god descended
Or has from this dark sea risen.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 15.

The Sailor on Circe's Isle

Circe, within whose isle
Of bright oblivious day
The natural passions move
Toward bodiments of hell,
If I escaped your spell
It was alone through motion.

Magic by magic known,
Where words were fair, and wine
Mellowed the conversation,
Sped my sure hand to motion
Clear, negative, and rude.

But was one stroke enough?
In a strange web of ease
My homeward hurrying feet
Draw languorous to the shore.

The sands entrance my step:
Unmoved I hear the waves
Crashing like chains to break
The shoreline of a dream.

I waste conjectural days
In possible delight.
The traffic of the mind
Moves with the drift of time
Through various modes of love.

I stay within an isle
Of acts abruptly ended,
Of glimpses and detail.
Offshore the sky
Echoes the flat sea.
Sand drifts over the ship.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 16.

Motion toward Noon

My heart is like a singing bird. —C. Rossetti

Toward so small hour to sound in such a joy,
To trumpet wilderness, to harden close
The bright stem run through me crying joy.
And for what measure, for what single close?
What stillness comes, what secret, what revealed
That all should lend, that all should turn in light?

O fresh, elusive, brightly gilded pain,
Séance of morning, prophesy your day.
Light and expectant, fall on me in rain,
Shine up through hours, gather up such day
As stillness tells, as secret and revealed,
Brought in illusion among clouds of light.

Morning shall sing, and noon shall cover all,
And shafts of sky, and planes of gold combine
And ring in stillness in such syllable
As is most common, rarely to combine
As rarities that seraphim revealed
Once in the opening mist of quietest light.

And all for such that quietly in joy
Descends to prophesy and cries its end,
That sets its epilogue before the joy
Of morning bids her hollow shafts to send
The singing noon, when, for itself revealed,
It ebbs at ending in extinguished light.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 18.

The Messenger

I don't deny that I believe in ghosts
Myself being one. No, not the ultimate last
Spirit, I mean, but this a messenger.
Soft, soft, last night half falling into sleep
I rose like smoke, up, curving past the window
Floating, a gray cloud seaward, slow and pale.

And then, the wings!

Did you hear the birds piling against your window?
A snow of wings, crowding and gentle, crying
Over and over, each with the single errand
Light cannot bring, nor ever my tongue would say.
Archaic doves, rustling your sleep, and calling
Crowding upon you, drifting and crying love.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 19.

Above the Earth

The mystical experience is love
Without an earthly object—one's slant of light
Or vivid emptiness; so I in this
Transported past proportion find my being.

And saints that capture heaven's flow
Rise on that stream beyond their narrow cells
Swung above earth, a silent choir
Being themselves a shrived and tenantless world

A god's breath. Who can hold
Such high hosanna through the sounding days?
But fall again to voice and restlessness
When the earth's shadow interrupts their flight,

And from such levitation dropping home
Cry out the luster of that glimpsed garden.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 20.

Point of View

From this illusion pass
Into some brighter sun:
I am not blind enough,
Rocked in ambiguous
Halftones of my delusion.

One color shadows all
An aura slyly thrown,
A trompe-l'oeil to prove
That what I seek must fall
In this design alone.

Yet shines in separate eyes
Sun's dazzle, blurred or plain,
Extends the hard shield of night
Or deep unfathomable skies,
Broke in two views again.

And opposites will teach
The glib divergent clues
To build each perfect case;
Yet one may fail to reach
And one is sure to lose.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 21.

Pandora

Never, never again the house new or youth precise
Or the fresh loaves of hay in the field.
And the tree bark shimmers black and white
Only after rain.

The day rose clear-faced and quick
Breathing lemon and sage, undoubtedly crystal,
Fog was for coolness, not to get lost in, and the wicked
Rode to ominous music.

The box had been left, but I never suddenly opened the lid.
The day hung so full, time being happy and short,
No reason to fret over a dusty chest in a corner,
And I had given my word.

But nothing is changeless. While it was there in the house
Something crept out, buzzing and small.
I heard it at night, an insect whine in the air
Unseen in the light.

And the mornings were sad sometimes
And rising slow, and the day crumpled and worn
Like a picture handled too much,
And I indifferent.

Came haze outlasting the dawn
Between me and the fields, the horizon too close;
And bright days were full of objects
Not noticed before.

Love broke to a trinity, there were too many paths;
None seemed to be true, and in the oat fields the horsemen
Wore various guises, and which could I trust
On their spotted geldings?

I have heard of such things, but not for myself,
And the silver sifts from the box
On my hair and my tears, and the owner is gone, and I—
I shall never be rid of it.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 22.

The Leopard

Know the cogent leopard that lays waste
All that I am, the agile claws that tear
The mind from calm, that will not rest
But gnaws and paces and is always there.

How can one track such subtle enemy
Formed to be hidden in a wisp of shade,
Through forests darker than trees have made?

He stalks the stalker, and the hunter flees
Though each step is by the other taken—
Dense cycling forests without cease,
Who hunts is stricken and pursues again.

So tender bears his victim in his jaw
The prey released may run; yet before
Cover is reached, he sets the diverting claw.

Or postures reverie, while the tipped tail
Blent with the ground; pretends to be away
Without motion save for the ranging eyes
(And I am whole and hopeful so to stay)

Or postures revery, while the tipped tail
Twitches and coils to magnify his leap.
Fretful and long his hours, and quick his sleep.

And which of us shall win and which shall die
I cannot tell, or if the intricate chain
Is worn in death, that stones say: Here am I
And with me the tranquil leopard lain.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 24.

The Pool

All is reflection.
I saw it in the gaze
Of agate nymphs and passersby
So given to beauty
That its homage moved
Plainer than in the freshest woodland pool

And thus of legend:
Tales of wit and gold
And deeds are mirror-made
To grow in glass, not flesh,
As show dim stars wrought clear
Enlarged in their magnificent passages.

Listen, diminished Echo,
Who disavowed your praise
Comes back to wish your glory, glory
Roll maze to maze,
Be heard again, again,
Repeat the image that you made of me.

Call out that worth—
Is being coveted,
And seek a virtue in the surfaces
Of eyes and words,
That I forget the heart
Shattered or hollow, lost in purposes,
Secluded deep where no one else may press.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 26.

The Symbols

We make too much of water
Thinking it more than liquid over stones,
Endowing it with spirits, the named gods,
And the ritual of cleansing.
Pure were the waters of libation
The gods demanded in their Attic groves,
Knowing as we the long unclouded seasons.

And fire! The pure and Magian principle—
Imperial lightning, or a burning bush
Resisting, phoenix to the laws of death.
Pure sun may cleanse or change; and fire may warn
How all is loss, and ashes to the hand.
Yet tapers light our feasts, and all our vows
Are solemn by the sharing of a flame.

And we make hymns and turn them as a wheel
To assault that Spirit by such dissonance
As the seven-string ching on the unaccustomed ear
Or druid chants with boughs of mistletoe.
The prayers fly upward as the flights of birds
Bound south enchanted, space and space again
Turning forever from their northward home.

Rule is in silence. Gathers there the tongue
That knows and will not speak, voiceless as void,
Ungraced as particles in hollow spun.
In the mute coming of the days, between
The waters' ripple, stillness between flames,
Is silence' altar, absent and complete,
And sealed in solitudes, among the blood.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 27.

The Protestant

I never hold a thought
But what the opposite
Comes straightway into mind

Or cannot look at day
Except I see the night
Descending or ascend.

The place is, where we're bent
And ringing noon is high
Judged by an earthward slant.

Whatever I know I know
Only as April trees
Sucking the sap to green

Or as the simple seas
Answer a winter sound
Unstable, unseen—

No sooner say I know
Than all my fibers turn
To prove it is not so.

To think God firm in heaven
Is to intenser learn
How shaken is that bough,
His good evades us still;
The solemn evidence
Proves death, dark, and evil.

As a lover or thrush
Embarrasses the hand—
Twice savory in the bush—

I pray and lie; I see
Spirit desired, denied
That when I come, I flee.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 29.

Janus

I am not right or wrong, for I am both
And true and false compound themselves in me.
I walk two ways—Centurion and Goth—
Yet cannot wrestle from this parity.

All things to all, I thus am politic,
Straddle a stile, twist good to opposite,
Will not decide, incapable to pick.
Both sides are error into which I fit.

I front the outworn year where all must die
That rise again under my gaze grown warm.
You cannot catch me who before you fly
Hearing how fast upon your heels I swarm.

And what I unify in my embrace
Knows me the god who wears a double face.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 31.

Lost Objects

Things disappear. The ball that flew
Over the fence and caught in space
The ring, dropped unnoticed out of view
Even the strongbox fastened in place.

Things rove while you are gone; they change.
A pair should not be reckoned two,
So common that it is not strange:
One glove, one lover, half, one shoe.

To know the ache of the intensely lost
Think her yours who was her own
Slipped off without good night, poor guest.
Even a statue shifts in its stone.

Motion holds all, the tumblers turn
Through new gyrations in their airy shells
And shunt within till we become
Lost pieces of ourselves.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 32.

The Skyrocket

How sheer the arc I took, vagrant in speed,
Self-circling star, and breathed upon my flight,
Higher and slow and then again to height
Past summer bonfires, over the house the trees

Gathering suspense in the attempt to thrust
Beyond all earth! Then, sudden gasp and stop.
Elate, I puffed in fire and golden drops
Till the one brightness spread to nebulous.

And I, a single fleck, fall into dark
While strewn about, my sister selves, a shower
Of small and dimming lights, sift lower and lower
And pale and flake and disappear in calm.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 33.

The Sleeping Princess

I don't remember when I fell asleep,
Half up the stair, or dropped from a summer hill,
Or yawning into bedtime. But the dream
So counterfeited me, I could not tell

I was asleep. For in that sleep the sun
Shone on my eyes, I rose and breathed the day,
Widened the doors, ran to the summer lawn,
And spent the seasons prodigal as snow.

Still I was careful. There the sleeper lay.
I took such journeys as were possible.
My diary was complete, and it could show
Much was accomplished, and the days turned full.

And yet it was not real. I find the book
Dusty, unwritten in. For someone called
And touched my cheek. The spendthrift years were done.
Was it a kiss? I woke. And I was old.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 34.

Metamorphosis

Up from the earth in our spring
Grass ruffles the hills
And the wind catches
The yellow oriole's wing,
Snows petals under every plum.

On certain mornings from the range
Wind drags the valleys, trailing alpine cold
Toward rivieras turning on the sea,
Designs in apricot on southern walls.

If we should change
Is not this the season?
Rich branches push
Past frost and night
And pliant fabrics rush
Toward the brown shapes of summer.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 37.

The Omens

The wind has changed, and all the signs turned right
After a frozen year.

Cockcrow has killed the cockatrice,
A cackling phoenix hatches on the hearth,
And the persephones of cell and stem
Thaw up from earth.

Charmed auguries of oriental kings,
Stars foster messages.
And birds grown wings as amulets
Circle and settle to the pasture rail.
The eagle turns against the pestering hawk.
Propitious, frail

These twining portents, tangled to a skein
In puzzled growth.
No scrutiny may draw them forth
Assign them each as love or hope or doom
Or rounding back on some forgotten door.
But portioning this room

Ali, who spoke the magic seminal
Word to split black rock
For treasure-trove enough to light
The dead cave's velvet suddenly,
Knows the renewal of such talisman.
Open, O sesame.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 38.

The Bear

(From the Brothers Grimm)

Rosered:

We have once more caught
This old humbug, sister.
Here he lies in his shaggy coat
Snug by our cordial fire,
Claiming to be a prince, or a lost Christian in disguise.
There are things of the chrysalis—the butterfly,
Plots that must be hatched, deeds long in doing,
But this is thorough bear, rumpled and earthen.

Snow White:

Remember, sister, other miracles
The pellet seed, bursting to root and leaf,
The hard green bud to rose,
The thought newborn
That pecks at the skull like a rousing chick.
Great things from small,
The pearl from the ooze,
And the radiant soul
Rapt from its prison in a broken spell.

Rosered:

Snakes drop their skins, but remain serpents still,
And the moth, long harbored in its chrysalis
Flies as a birthright to distorting flame.
Leaves spurt from seed, but only for the season.
No one has charted the sea-track of souls.
Bears sleep in winter caves and wake up bears.

The Bear:

The forest offers honey, hollow logs,
Streams fraught with fishes,
Berries on the hills.
Yet here I ponder.

I am no common bear, for I have visions.

I dreamed I was a prince—

I walked in halls

Clanging with armor;

Underneath this pelt

I feel the hardness of the golden mail.

Can such dissatisfaction offer proof

I am enmeshed in spells too fine to ravel?

Snow White, Rose Red, divert your clumsy wooer.

Some day we meet the dwarf and force the answer.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 39.

The Genie

I dwell
In a dark small cell
Turbulent against walls
Constricting smoke and flame,
Fire, essence, into a coal which glows
And gasps to spread, for the expanding green
Billowing flow of love and the upper air.

Taut in myself
Wound hard, contained in flesh,
Identified, bounded, traced—unknown
I am the blood that echoes in a shell
I roil, the surge of ocean wrapped in shore
I roll, a universe kept in a crystal jar,
I am the muted genie pressed within.

I burst
In seed and passion,
In the white of fire
The hoar of ice. Unfetter me, I cry
And I am spent in tumult before night.
Move, Earth, charred and blackened on the sun
I rise and swell upon such destiny.

Within this verdigris
I twist in torment.
Out, out, or I am buried here,
Lest eons seal my burning into stone—
Quenched into marble, let my age not pass.
Yet pause, hand to the lamp, and know
The furious spirit you are letting go.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 41.

The Weathercock

Wind shakes me,
I am weak and spent
With every argument.
I doubt and hang
A breath disturbs me.
Sinewless and vain
The harsh and soft are one to me
Zephyr or gale, I turn my face to it.

North wind and south have whispered
And I go with each.
The dulcet evidence of bloom and spring
Or the cold reason of on-circling storm
Both have convinced me, and I yearn with them
Yearn as the smoke drift or the lifted leaves.

Yet I proportion my stance to the breeze.
Wind shall not take me
Though he shriek and bite
Frighten all other birds to leeward shade
Blow down the pigeons from the cooing lofts
Sail the hawk back downwind and send
Laborious eagles panting to their rocks.

I have set my claw
Deep in the roof's pinnacle,
There to hold
While solid objects knock about—
Each broadside thing—
Stiff in this hub to turn and, keen,
Broach to the wind a practiced waywarding. -

Though the barn totters
And hay flies
And the wood is pierced by pebbles;
Till the ties of the timbers skew,
With the beams ajar,
And the shingles scatter
And the great roof falls

I crow though none may hear.
In the vast spinning world, I still point true.
I fly here.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 43.

The High Tower

The Flight

There is something still marvelous about setting forth
High into heaven among clouds, where pride
Speaks to the bulk of mist. Is it not worth
An angel fall to flow with wind and die?

Or swim with currents, which on mountains write
Passage of waters from the ocean's transom,
Over green rocks that skim in our despite
Brilliant toward the heaven of a tomb?

But here in the High Tower I may mend
Through stone and slate, laid formally and well,
The appearance of the earth, returned to tend
The venture that might go too far to tell.

I have the great lawn, where the maples claim
Their own dominion, and I hold such sky
As in towers broods. The wasp drops down to name
Slowly the budding of the solid day.

The Tower

Regret is that which in advantage is
A sense of lack too indistinct to name.
It is I, prosperous, in galleries
Ornate with morning, fretted by the same
 Long dial of shadow pointing from the sun.
 Through the glass wall the unbidden light
 Touches the carved embroidery of the room
 Where other tenants lately said good-by.

Space, clouds, green ridges will not let me turn
Back from this spiral, since I went winding down
From the steep flight as down a stair
Into this tower where I lean alone.

And contemplate reversal where I passed,
Wish double grasp to hold a double good:
Look, look, the blackbirds down there flee the grass

For dense and gold-eyed visions in the wood.

The Window

Thou hast a double kingdom
And I am set between
—Etched on the window glass

Now two dawns rise—the locked interior sun
That wakes good morning, and the forest rung
With dove's halloo—grow into light's arrival.
The same pulsation shivers on lands spread
Beyond this glass and creeps across the red
Carpet, and joins tracery on the wall.

Two kingdoms lie beside this boundary
Jointed together like the ripened peach
Ready to break into the streaked and yellow—
Two shapes composited till now as one,
Yet each divided to its destination.
Even as I—between the room I see
And that expanse of woodland that may be
A window's myth, untrue on which to close—
Write this duality of hemisphere.
Nor does a solid sorrow give such tears
As the imagination gives to this!

If I dream out on darkneses that wheel
At the day's end, where out of change the real
Joint of eternity rubs the half of time,
The seam of cutting glass that must dispense
With both the hills and room and difference
And make duality again the same.

The Portraits

The children died, but posed across the room
The boy stands, his ball under his arm
In a moment he should smile and run,
And the girl with the riding crop will follow him.

The day is haze, the mountains shut away.
Down by the lake, the boys throw lines for bass.

One turned from his pole to kill a garden snake.
And a girl walks down where the fountain stirs.

There is all this, a rich and generous air.
And a boy laughed by the lake, a girl went by
Cycling the gravel road. The swallow swept
Over the roofs teaching the nestlings flight.

And yet I grieve as though a loss had come
As late as yesterday, as though my own
Child looked from the aging portrait and was gone
Among the dark trees that shadow the smooth lawn.

The Faces

There are acres of dark between the lamp and the door,
Acres of dark wading into the room
Hours to grope while something black comes down
Or springs like a cougar from the shelf, or runs
Against you in the dark, or softly comes
To touch your hand and leave you without sound.

And the light only pushes away the one
That stood the nearest; none of them are gone.
They are beyond the window where the curtain
Is made of dark. You cannot be sure
Of numbers, and the faces are obscure
And they slip off out of the reach of vision.

They hold on shingles or the roof's tower,
Or waver softly in the simple air.
They are pure night, and night is made of these.
Come, let us walk through all these rings,
Let us take night and go among their crowding
And we shall see them high upon the eaves.

And we shall hear them in the quiet of time
Restless behind us when we try to claim
Only faces of light, and we shall see
The same perspective follows as we turn
Suddenly round to catch the vanishing
Of what was there and is not, and might be.

The Circle

The darkness gives me sight to see.
—Pauline Hanson

Is sight then brightest when all sight is gone
When the windows blacken and the things that be
Become nonbeing? Here I move alone
Through such perspectives as may move with me.

Far distant the day's mountains fail the eyes,
The shaded wood wells up against this height.
What do I know that the day's self denies?

The stone nymph vanishes to her own night.

Dark circles the tower, beams within
Piles on the floor, presses to every part.
I cast horizons, black and round
Spun from the deepest center of the dark.

The Center

We live by fictions, and this tale is drawn
To enlarge the firm trajection of a room,
To give middle distance only half its own—
And the last hills may or may not be so.

New steps resound upon these stairs, and I
Know of a coming, while unheard are climbed
Stairs to all tenements and trysts. They merge
With the single figure bending in the mind.

Come in. For whoso enters here has stood
To fit a double ceiling. Till we go
The ax rings with heavy tremor in the wood
The swallows come in clouds against the window

The landscape turns upon the central hill,
The sky is posed, the garden visitor
Pauses as if compelled there by the will
To grace the window of a single tower.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 45.

The Summer House

The Beach

It was a wilderness. It ran to mist
Past the north headland—and the south drawn thin.
Against the cliff, caught by the landward wind
It staggered under motion and made fast.

It wore the pattern of a metronome
Wiped to desertion where a single track
Could claim a world, and daily coming back
Re-claim the privilege of first to come.

And where, a Crusoe, I have found the mark
Of an arrival. And like him now stand
Sweat-cold and wait. This is my self-owned shore.
Show yourself, stranger. Yet you are not here.

The Umbrella

It is a kind of shadow
Not shaded, but in mind,
That settles down the pole
And runs its transit wide
Over the rocks and sand
To make them private land.

Towels, the picnic hamper,
The canvas leaned upon,
Are furnishings for summer,
 Small porches of the sun.
In the shore's summer care
Our needs grow shallower.

Space gives formality.
The spokes expand through air.
The swimmers from the sea
Shake the wet from their hair,
Toward its blue circle come
And suddenly are home.

The Sea

Domestic, present, the great girdle rounds
Flat and redundant, biding, so much there
We seldom noticed it except to hear
Occasionally the rising water sounds.

Occasionally it seemed that we must fall
Into the midst of such a gulf of blue
In visionary glimpses. Or we drew
On notions that the water circled all

Edged up the dunes, for they were only sand,
Submerged the point behind us, rose until
It covered farms, besieged the tucked-up hill
And washed away our commerce with the land.

But mostly we ignored the thing, and small
Habits and happenings intrigued the days—
Nothing to show and little to amaze.
A passing hour of sun spread over all.

Far, far, too far for thought the circle moved
Far, far too deep the yellow-covered hill
Plunged in descent beyond our thinking of,
Transposed to dripping fields we could not love.

The Last Day

Around this higher center climb the waves—
This round of sand, this drum, this hollow cone—
And will not drop till Noah call them home.
And will not drop till in a shelving sigh
The dunes lie level with the random sand
And they are gone, and silence calls us home.
And still transmuted, the long placid strand
Sinks into crystal, pressed in deepening space.

Then motion, motion let the seabirds cry,
Languor on languor let the summer turn
Beyond the utmost of the ripening spray.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 51.

The White Horse

Where is the white horse?
asked the toyon and the walnuts.
The toyon was flowering,
The walnuts lifted their leaves lightly like feathers.
They were tossing and flowering and the wind rustled a little.
It was dark there under the trees.

I tried the meadow.
Where is the white horse
I asked the mustard and rye grass,
Have you seen her?
The mustard was yellow and the rye going to seed.
I could tell the old horse had been there.
She had left her mementos.

Where is the white horse?
asked the towhees down by the corral.
They looked at me sideways.
One had already drowned in the water trough.
The birds had little to say. The corral was deserted.

I walked past the toyon and walnuts
And over the meadow and up the hill.
I knew the white horse had been there.
She's lame, I said, she can't go far.
And I went up the road to the next stable.
There was only a black horse and a brown one.
They tossed their manes on the wind and kicked their heels
a little.

Where is the white horse, I said,
She was here yesterday.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 54.

Hidden Things

Upon the wall, drawn by a child's hand,
The horses twitch their tails or clash their hooves
In formal duel in an unreal land.
And they are sealed in stillness, though all moves

About them. No one sees them paw the air
For they are painted over, and no stain
Shows where they fly. Yet certainly they are there.
They are secret as the packet sealed with chain

To the courier's wrist, and even more, for none
Shall read what codes this flying herd might bring.
And so they stretch in their impenetrable zone.

2

Beneath engulfments of ocean, ground, and green
Between the lid of the box and the enclosed
Or the layers of paint or leaf, under sheared surfaces,
The hidden things broaden and are disposed
As rounded bodies in immeasurable space.

As gold beaten to foil may yet endure
Another stroke, and thin and thin again
So does each changing layer yield but more
The wheels and chambers of the finest plane.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 56.

The Walnuts

There shine always the bright tops of the grove
And within that forest mysteries of birds,
In the autumn, the clear crackle of leaves
And the walnut pickers. Dark-skirted after them

The gleaners. Trees, trees were everywhere.
Out of the banks of a foggy morning,
Outside the windows, the sweet trees leaned
Tasseled in spring, in holy burst of leaves.

And the oats made meadows of the early year—
With nodes for whistles, the juice sweet and thin—
Grown high to bend into rooms, and yellow flowers
Hung over the spicy tunnels under the trees.

There the grove, hanging forever real in the air.
And Tan exile, knowing every turn
And turning home, and lost in the dazzled road
The strange, swept premises, and the great trees gone.

Publication. First published in *The Weathercock*. New York: Viking Press, 1966, p. 60.

The Descent

Stage V | History, violence, and spiritual passage, 1970

The complete recoverable text of the collection.

By the Woods, Reading

Something is creeping out between the words
The page dawdles its tune
While something slips up behind the wellpoint of the eye

Out there. And the highway roars past the pine trees
The firs that should never have grown there
In the first place. The trucks pass like waves
The old house shakes on their wheels.

But there is something drifting out of the sun
Not the weed puffs that glisten
Or the gnats, wing-caught by the sun.

It has been falling for weeks now.
The slow ash piles round my ankles
Rising from nothing but green—
Or I am sinking in a pond of dandelions.

It is winding between the trees
Tying them together. I am surrounded.
I walk into the dark eye.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 3.

The Voices Inescapable

We are never free of the voices.
On waves and wires
Out of the clouds they speak to us.
Wood and steel, nails, bring them through walls.
Edging all buildings, voices mumble their pitch and pa

Yet down over the rocks of this land
In the undercurrents of the sea
The others are not silent,
Gull and dove,
The coyote over the hills
At night gives us his cry.
Listen to the small voices of the drops of rain now
Settling over us.
The shell whispers back our blood.
The owl tells us at night
Of the soft passers in the leaves.
And the voices from the cloud
Cry: there is no other way.

We will call with the rest for mercy
When the blood
Bludgeons on the carpet,
With the hawk's rabbit
And the raped girl in the forest.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 4.

Double Mirror

As this child rests upon my arm
So you encircled me from harm,
And you in turn were held by her
And she by her own comforter.

Enclosed, the double mirror runs
Backward and forward, fire to sun.
And as I watch you die, I hear
A child's farewell in my last ear.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 5.

Memorial

I will remember you into light
Or push by thinking into your quiet earth.
I will bring for you this hint of spring
I will think you a black twig with five white blossoms.
Heaven, earth, and man are on this branch.
I will will it to you through the dark

Voiceless, in silence, in darkness without sight
How will five blossoms thunder, how bright
Is this black bough, with nodes for shaking green,
In this small bough brought backward into light.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 6.

In the Black Forest

Everywhere I go they are coming for me
In the shadow of night
Even through the trees of the Black Forest,
Flying, I suppose, over continents and oceans.

Everywhere I go they find me—
And drive up in the old car,
Stepping out, eager to embrace me.
We have not much to say to each other.

But how kind they are to come
Up out of my inner being,
Which they gave and which is really theirs—
And then back to the dark forest and the sea.

Gone, gone, but over me still
Broods the winged bird of their spirit
Made of their living breath.
It will last in their children forever.

It covers the bleak sky, a fierce mother—
And from the claws drift down ribbons
Curving scrolls with their mottoes
Which say Do what you can and Take heart. -

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 7.

The Fathers

I am beset by spirits, layer on layer
They hover over our sleep in the quilted air.
The owl calls and the spirits hang and listen.
Over our breaths, over our hearts they press.
They are wings and eyes, and they come surely to bless
There is hardly room for the crowd of them under the ceiling.

Remember me, remember me, they whisper.

The dark rustles, their faces all are dim.
They know me well, I represent them here.
I keep their lands, their gold and fruiting orchards,
I keep their books, their rings, their testaments.

I am their blood of life made visible
I hold their part of life that vanishes.
They whisper to me, names and messages,
Lost in the world, a sifting down of shadows.

I am myself, I say, it is my blood,
It is my time of sun and lifting of green,
Nothing is here, but what I touch and see.
They cry out we are here in the root and tree.
It is my night, I say—and yours for sleeping.
They move their wings, I think I hear them weeping.
Blest spirits, let me be.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 8.

And I Came to a Field

I am myself, nor will I ever be
A friend to any or an enemy.
Let them be friend or enemy to me.

This skull is come, the world to ratify.
Should any others say It is, they lie.
When it shall pass, then passes earth, all, I.

Stanford my father's blood
Anna my grandmother
Ann Stanford is my name
Know me by no other.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 9.

Done With

My house is torn down—
Plaster sifting, the pillars broken, -
Beams jagged, the wall crushed by the bulldozer.
The whole roof has fallen
On the hall and the kitchen
The bedrooms, the parlor.

They are trampling the garden—
My mother's lilac, my father's grapevine,
The freesias, the jonquils, the grasses.
Hot asphalt goes down
Over the torn stems, and hardens.

What will they do in springtime
Those bulbs and stems groping upward
That drown in earth under the paving,
Thick with sap, pale in the dark
As they try the unrolling of green.

May they double themselves
Pushing together up to the sunlight,
May they break through the seal stretched above them
Open and flower and cry we are living.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 10.

The Given Child

Most lost when found
Most found when lost.
We most must lose
When we love most.

I

In this season comes the child
Out of the black womb.
In this season
Comes the risen god.
In this season
You are born.
In this season lost too.

The sun ranges to the dangerous south
The shortening days speak night to us.
On the turning sun
You enter.

The sun spins in darkness where you grow
Unheeding our voices.

Become in this season yourself.
You do not need us,
Carried in the dark like the sun
To enter and grow like summer.

2

We gave you life
And that is the great treasure
And now my blood goes circling in the world
I do not know your name.
Henceforth I love all strangers, loving you.
In their young eyes
I see my own reflection.

Unknown child
What was the best?
You take my unpossessing

Everywhere
In a great round of blood, guilt, love.

3

This is the place where there were fields and marshes
And the red-winged blackbirds flew
Up from the rushes.
Olive orchards older than remembering
Covered the hills
And beyond, the orange groves
Dead now, unnatural, bare of leaves.

This cross road I never saw before.

But the hills with the oil wells are the same
Black derricks—and the walking beams
Chug up and down
Where the yellow violets grew in spring.

The jack-rabbit road is straight now
And the trees by my mother's house
Are gone
And the house too and the pond.

4

We shall leave our bones on the mountain

While it rains, try to find shelter.
If the sun shines, get out of the shadow.
Dry off if you can.
Try to keep going.
If you find berries
The birds have left
Nibble them first.
Grasses are all right to chew.
Be careful of nightshade.

Look for a stream.
Go down beside it.
It will be hard to follow
But if anyone is near at all
They will live by the stream or a bridge will cross it.

Find a road and you may find a cabin.
If they are not there, break in.

It is a long way down.
Don't push too hard.
The bushes will tear at you.

It will be cold where you go.
It will be cold here on the mountain.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 11.

The Self Betrayed

Too much was said, or not enough.
And it was late.
But time was the same, lights came and went
Like dawn and dark fastened on one another.
And the flowers had a springing scent.

The guests were statues, and they spoke
From distances.
Since they, or I, were made of stone
I tried to set one voice against the other.
The seraph in the corner was alone.

Behind were doubled up the folded wings.
The hidden sword
That such must carry, shone imperiously—
I saw it catch the garment as it swung.
Yet what I saw I did not seem to see.

And what the figure said I think I know
But in what time or air
Is past remembrance. I saw darkness there
And I spoke loudly, for the darkness hung.
But what I said I cannot seem to hear.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 15.

Letter from Portugal

For Barbara—An Elegy

I have come a long way from my country
To find it once more in the clusters of purple
Bougainvillea, hibiscus, the red oleander.
Here grapes too and olives
And oaks on the brown hills.

Autumn in my country, autumn in Portugal
The grapes are purple and red, black are the shadows,
Dry leaves, and the wind blows into the belvederes.
Wind flicks the dry fields over the slopes of the hills
Presses up the undersilver of leaves.

At night the wind brings sounds of children calling
Across the blue cleavings of the sea
Calling come home, come home.

—And you in that dark country where you walk
In a dry season, without fountains,
In the color of shade, the rich host of purple
With weighted head by the still river wandering,
In that sleeping country,

That was the country that was always yours
To which you always went at evening—
Dark and cool as the shallows of these gardens—

Lost now and listless in the windless darkness
Under the deep pennons of the trees.

Under broad calm, across dull undersea
The children weep. Do you not hear them call—
And move and stir under the heavy shadow—
Come back to us, O prodigal.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 16.

Cassandra's Wedding Song

From The Trojan Women by Euripides

Hold it up, show it, bring the torch!
I worship with flame.
Look! look!
I light up this holy place!
Hymen, Hymenaeus, Lord!
Blessed the bridegroom
Blessed I too
Whose wedding song leads to the bed
Of a king in Argos.

Seeing that you, mother, can only weep
And lament for the death of my father
And cry out over our loved country,
I must light the fire of the torch
For my own wedding.
To the brightness! to the glory!
I offer to you, O wedding god.
And you, O Hecate, give light
For the marriage bed of a maid, as is the custom.

Whirl, feet high in the air.
Lead on the chorus.
Evan! Evoi!
As when my father's fortune
Was most blessed.

Apollo—thou—
Lead the ritual chorus.
I perform your rites
In your temple among the laurels.

Dance, mother, lead on,
Turn your feet here and there with mine
Carry the sweet steps.
Call out the Hymen, O
In happy song
And the shout for the bride.
Come, maidens of Phrygia,

Splendidly dressed
Sing for my wedding
And for the husband
Fate sends to lie beside me.

Mother, crown me with wreaths of victory.
And be glad for this my marriage to a king.
Escort me, and if I seem to you unwilling
Push me away with force. If Apollo lives still
Helen's marriage was not so troublesome
As mine will be to the great Agamemnon.

Mother, there is no need to pity this your land
Nor weep over my marriage. For by this joining
I shall destroy those that both of us hate the most.

Go now, quickly, that I may quickly wed the
bridegroom in the house of death.
O leader of the Greeks with
your haughty vision of great deeds—
Evil man, you will be vilely
buried, by night, not in the light of day.
And I—my dead body
will be thrown into a gully, naked
Into streams filled by winter rains,
close by the grave of the bridegroom
Given to wild beasts to
tear to pieces—the servant of Apollo!
I am done with the temple—
feasts which were my joy in other days.
Garlands of the god most loved
by me, holy ornaments, farewell.
See! I tear them from my body
while it is still my own and chaste
And give them to the winds
to carry to you, lord of oracles.

Where is the ship of the general?
Where must I go to embark?
No longer will you be the
first to watch for the wind in the sails
Who take me away from this

land—one of the three Avengers.
Say good-bye to me, mother, do not
cry. Loved place where I was born
And brothers down there
in the earth and father who begot us
Soon you will welcome me.
But I shall come to death victorious
Having destroyed the house of
Atreus which has ruined us utterly.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 18.

The Intruder

There is a cove, hardly visible
coming in from the sea, the sand there warm
the water shallow and clear of wrack—
it drifts in over a ledge and is still.

The dunes are held by flowering vines.
Between them, the sand, smooth, no trace
of footsteps. And near, the laurels
grow down, scattered, to the shore.

The sand nudges up under the cliff
catching the western sun.
One cannot but drowse coming up from the sea
and so I drowsed on sunny afternoons.

Suddenly he had me by the arm—
he had thrown his great spear on the sand
beside his cloak. I called my
father's name: Nereus! Nereus!

This stranger with a black beard and strong wrists
keeping me from the water's edge
and my sisters' voices. I became a tree—
stiff bark guarded my thighs, my hands were leaves.

Still he held on. The leaves became
grey feathers and my rooted feet
rose gently as I lifted into flight,
a gull crying out against him.

I tried to lift my wings, but still
he held on, only shifting his weight.
And then I, a tiger, my claws hidden, hard
under the skin. I growled my threat.

Still there, hanging on, though his face
paled. I became the wind and whispered
and fire and burned him
and water—a stubborn man.

One gets tired finally of disguises,
these changing faces. I became
Thetis again and will perhaps remain.
And he, beside me always, a presence.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 21.

To Carolina

From the Portuguese of Machado de Assis

Beloved, to the marriage bed, the last
On which you rest from that far life,
I come, and I shall come, poor dearest,
To bring you the heart of a companion.

There beats in it true affection
Which in spite of all human troubles
Made our life worth desiring
And set a whole world in one dark corner.

I bring you flowers—remains torn by force
From the earth which watched us pass together
And now leaves us dead and apart.

And I, if my eyes, mortally wounded,
Hold thoughts rising up out of life,
They are thoughts of what once lived and has ended.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 23.

Before

When I lay in my mother's womb
Her heart boomed in the chamber above me
The great clock.
Since then I have been enamored of time
And rivers too and seas
Like the sea in which I floated.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 27.

The Flood

When I sat beside the river
Thinking of waves higher than buildings
Waves descending like barges down the smooth channel
I thought I dreamed.

But the water came high—
It filled the cellar
Covered grandmother's canned pears
And the quilts by the fireplace.

It rose above grandfather's portrait
Lapped at our feet on the second story.
We looked down the stairs.
Would the house hold?

Could we float on that Ark
Through the corn fields
Downtown past the first national bank
And Gluth's grocery store?

Logs and fence posts piled up by the house.
The pigs flowed away, complaining.
Night was coming down,
The waters pushed at the foundations,
Our dog whined in the upstairs bedroom.

What could we do but sit there?
We made a raft of the bedstead
And a plank off the bedroom dresser.
We were ready to knock a hole in the wall
For launching. But the stream began to go down.

It went down to mud. The crops were gone,
The animals lost or dead. But we were alive.
The old house as good a ship as any.
Whenever I look at the river
I think of those waves and wonder.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 28.

Night Rain

I wake with the rain.
It has surprised me.
First, delight,
Then I think of outdoors:
The shovels and rakes I left in the garden
Rusting now in the mist,
The splintering of handles.
I think of car windows open
Tricycles
Canvas cots, trash cans
The hay uncovered
Mildew.

Well, they are out.
And the animals—
The cat, he is gone
The dog is the neighbor's
The horses have a tin roof
If they will stay under it.
And the wild things are there—
Birds, wet in the trees,
Deer in the brush, rabbits in hiding.
The leaves will all be washed
The wild lilacs, the walnuts.

I am sleepy and warm
I dream of the great hornéd owl
Snatching birds like plums out of trees.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 30.

The Arrayal

What did she wear when she searched through the bureau
drawer
Under the rectangle of handkerchiefs
Pushing under the socks
And her father's cuff-links and coins?

What did she choose for the walking into the yard
The square of lawn between the hydrangea and apricot,
Stepping over the pool in the grass by the leaky hose,
Patting her hair that was blown by the little wind?

Did she wear the gold necklace of her mother
And the pale linen dress ready for summer
When she opened the doors of her body
And the red foam flicked in the sunlight?

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 31.

The Beating

The first blow caught me sideways, my jaw
Shifted. The second beat my skull against my
Brain. I raised my arm against the third.
Downward my wrist fell crooked. But the sliding

Flood of sense across the ribs caught in
My lungs. I fell for a long time,
One knee bending. The fourth blow balanced me.
I doubled at the kick against my belly.

The fifth was light. I hardly felt the
Sting. And down, breaking against my side, my
Thighs, my head. My eyes burst closed, my
Mouth the thick blood curds moved through. There

Were no more lights. I was flying. The
Wind, the place I lay, the silence.
My call came to a groan. Hands touched
My wrist. Disappeared. Something fell over me.

Now this white room tortures my eye.
The bed too soft to hold my breath,
Slung in plaster, caged in wood.
Shapes surround me.

No blow! No blow!
They only ask the thing I turn
Inside the black ball of my mind,
The one white thought.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 32.

The Friend

I lay upon the ice in day.
The wind shook with the cold. A lumpy plain
All white lay round me. At the edge of the sky
A mass of ice pushed up a jagged hill

Ribbed like a mountain layered with shale.
I wished to die, but my impounded blood
Ran warm and thoughtful through the narrow pulse.
I rose upon it, held by its moving streams.

All round, the ice. Far off, white and chill,
Water shone next the mound of grey.
My feet slipped as I trod ghostly to that hill.
My hands froze as I climbed by block and crack.

And from the top, glare shown at me.
No thing moved there, the wind gnawed nothing.
Till at last a wisp, pale on the sky
In the far broken plain, a thought of smoke.

Then I bent slowly to the house
All snow encrusted next a cliff of ice.
The door moved at a touch, the warmth flowed round
The small room furnished with a failing fire.

No sound. But on the table there
The tea still warm, a cup not empty yet,
But cold, and the fire just winking out.
I knew he would not turn back to that room.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 33.

The Escape

The walls were close enough to reach between
They were of brick and they were slanting in.
I held them up—one foot, two arms, my head.

I held for hours. When I stirred, they leaned.
They trembled with my breath but did not fall.
I shifted feet, my arms were numb.

My head ached with the flatness of the wall.
I saw my foot set on the concrete ground.
A spider crawled from one wall to the other.

Nothing else moved. I could hold no longer.
I took my foot down. Carefully one hand
And then the other, I drew gently down

And lifted up my head and saw a door
And I went out and breathed under the trees.
I looked back at the walls. They stood alone

A cubicle of dryness on the lawn.
I watched the slow dust as they toppled one by one.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 34.

On the Way

The day after Christmas. Everything is clean
And bright by rains, the leaves on the acacias
And toyon. Stopped up the hill I can see

The mountains, gray with gashes of snow
And the ocean glaring in the sun.
I could see boats if there were any.

But the sea is a clear table top.
I go down the hill. Things glisten. The clouds
Are clean-edged on painted blue.

Down by the boulevard the palm trees
Are having their fronds cut. They drop
From the heads of the stolid date palms

And the thin cocos a hundred feet high.
A man in a crow's nest on top of a crane
On top of a truck is doing the job.

Fronds fall, missing the man in the turtle-neck
Sweater and the woman in the leopard coat
Who wait for the bus. Roses—notice: don't pick—bloom in the park.

I pass Gogian's Tire Honesty and the tracks
Where I have never seen a train. Fat pigeons
Are grazing on the grass between the ties.

Three men are coming home from the moon.
Carloads of skiers go off to the mountains.
This hour's all I count on.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 35.

The Committee

Black and serious, they are dropping down one by one to the top of the walnut tree.

It is spring and the bare branches are right for a conversation.

The sap has not risen yet, but those branches will always be bare

Up there, crooked with ebbled life lost now, like a legal argument.

They shift a bit as they settle into place.

Once in a while one says something, but the answer is always the same,

The question is too—it is all caw and caw.

Do they think they are hidden by the green leaves partway up the branches?

Do they like it up there cocking their heads in the fresh morning?

One by one they fly off as if to other appointments.

Whatever they did, it must be done all over again.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 37.

The Lecture

For Leon Howard

Relaxed at the podium, he finished his apple.
The core crashed the waste can
And just as the bell rang
He began to conjure.

At the other end of the darkness
A hand stirred in its lace and the scattered bodies
Pulled themselves together as for the day of doom.
Edwards outstared the Indians at Stockbridge
Finding that God after all was an aesthete
While Franklin turned his attention to Madame Brillon.
There were no sluggards in the tale; the hour was never too
long.

Barlow, defining equality
Hurried after Napoleon over the snow.
In the snow of Pittsfield Melville tossed on the sea
And sighted the drifting of an ambiguous whiteness.

“Strike through the mask,” he cried, just short of the hour.
And the stone heart warmed in two hundred breasts
And the dark blood seeped up from under Hawthorne’s
leaves.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 38.

An American Gallery

John James Audubon

"The Passenger Pigeon"
Hand-colored engraving

Real as any other birds you sit in the maple.
Your cry—what is it?—descends on evening fields—
or morning—your red feet
indent our berry patches. Your curved beak
pocks the ripe sides of our peaches.

Vagabond, useless—your bright eye
searches for seedlings, fresh cotyledon leaves.
You ravage our fields with your out-of-season
perpetual appetite.

Villain, we have shot at you
your numberless progeny that blacken our skies.
Plague, feathered locusts,
filling our woods with your coos and caws.
Out of the north you come in endless clouds
harder than hail you descend on the harvest.

Wonder! to have caught so few here—
only two on a branch mottled with lichen
beside three dead leaves. Thieves!

We might think you were numbered
or that your days might end.

William Strickland

"View of Ballston Spa, New York"
Water color, c. 1794

A plague has overwhelmed this forest.
The boles of trees lie across one another.
Those standing are dead, their branches cracking.
From some the tops have fallen—all are bare
except for one in the fore, still yellow and dying.

The small men with axes

have girdled them as far as the horizon.
The stumps have been hacked. They resemble
the stubs of torsos.

This was a forest of firs.
The eight men moving like pygmies
among the roots of the tall trees
have put up the four white buildings.
They have placed porches in front, and balconies,
dreaming of prospect: smooth lawns and
Roman goddesses welling up out of fountains.
A small shed roof covers the rising water.

A forest is being burned outside the picture.
The smoke is rolling over Ballston Spa.

Winslow Homer

"Snap the Whip"
Oil on canvas, 1872

Eight boys in a rocky meadow,
sired just before the drums rolled at Shiloh,
their pants turned up above their ankles—
one, larger than the rest, has outgrown his.
Some are patched at the knees.
They all wear suspenders.
Their shirts—long-sleeved, or hidden under their coats—
were made at home by their mothers or
sisters sitting by coal-oil lamps.
They have hats or caps just shading their eyes.
Five are barefoot; three are wearing shoes.

We see by this that it is an indefinite season.
Spring has put forth the grass
and brought the sun down upon them,
but there are clouds, they are dark under—
it may just have rained. There are flowers,
indistinguishable bits of blue and yellow.

They play in a clearing, the woods behind them,
and in the foreground the tangle
of flowers and red leaves—the new leaves of sumac?

The wood is encroaching—two small trees
threaten the turf where they are playing.
The building behind them—a square
too small for a house. Around it
the grass is packed into ground. Outside each window
shutters hang open on the red wall. The sash
is partly lifted to the new spring air.

Why are they here, so far from the village?
You can see the white steeple off in the distance,
a few white buildings all but hidden in trees.
In between, a ploughed field and two barns
or a house and a barn. Where are their fathers?

The boys play hard. The pivot leans backward
holding the center while the others run past
and the boy at the end tumbles on hands and knees.
Their faces are serious. The third boy is shouting.
No one listens. They are rousing boys,
school is out for the day, the trees are green, summer is
coming.

Robert Fulton

"Plate the Second"

Water color, 1804

This cross section, here incorrectly titled
"Mechanical Drawing for a Steamboat,"
is not a steamboat at all.
This is part of a submarine.

Note how at Valve A the water
is pouring in. The deck just skims
above the water line outside.
Inside, the water surrounds
A cylinder. This is the core
of the boat. Its sides, one inch thick,
can stand pressures to one hundred
perpendicular feet of water.

Six men can enter the core
through the hatch at the top.

And men, turning a handle,
turn the screw that drives the vessel.
Between Deck B and the upper deck
on both sides of the boat the inventor
has neatly spelled out its purpose.
It has “Chambers for Submarine Bombs.”

This ship can surface by day. By night
it can submerge and enter a harbor
and its bombs, left anchored or floating,
will destroy whatever passes.

This plate depicts a practical
submersible ship. Robert Fulton
praised it as an instrument
for true liberty and peace.

Dolly Hazlewood

Untitled
Oil, c. 1940

The peach orchard faces the woods
And in between
Runs a narrow of bluebonnets.

The peach trees slant down a hill
Pungent with bloom
And are caught against a rock wall.

The wall is the only sign of man
And it seems fallen.
The picture is a celebration of spring
In which between the woods and the orchard
Bluebonnets cover the earth
And tint every hill under the sky.

Could the artist be saying that man's
Works are succumbing to nature?
Or that in between
Nature and art is the place for bluebonnets?
Or did she on that heart-full morning
Simply frame the best view of her flowers?

Great Aunt Doll was a woman of spirit.
When she died at last in a sanitarium
She was making a vast collection of seashells.

Philip Evergood

"American Tragedy"
Oil on canvas, 1937

South of Chicago, the black chimneys of the steel mills
are soiling the sky. Their walls are red. No one is near them.
But there is action aplenty. A corps of policemen
armed with night-sticks and guns
are beating the fleeing citizens.

The night-sticks are raised and fall with equal pity
on men and women, fair-skinned and dark.
They rain on the shirt-sleeved men and the women in sum-
mer dresses.

A man falls backward, his chin thrown up by a fist.
An Italian clutches his chest where a bullet has found him.

Those who can are running away.
A black man lies on his face, blood falls from his mouth.
He holds in his hand the flag of the land of the free.
None shall escape, the policemen work hard.
They are shooting the blonde woman in the pink dress

While she, her hands empty, held high, runs from
that blue army. In the center a man holds back the police
with his hand,

his arm is around the Mexican woman in green.
Her fist is clenched, she holds a stick as weapon.
She is pregnant. A club hangs over this man's head.

The red of the wall of the mill colors the scene.
It drips from the brow of the man who has lost his straw hat,
from the mouth of the black man, from the chest of the
other,

It will break from the heads of the red-headed man
And the woman in green. Puddles, bright as blood
Or the melting pots of the mills, color the streets of the city.

Edward Hicks

"The Peaceable Kingdom"

Oil on wood, c. 1830

This was the peaceable kingdom: the river flows
like time beside it. This tiny slope,
grass covered, slants up to an impassable forest.

Half up the sky a natural bridge
curves like a rainbow. In such a place
Penn pledged his peace to all his Indian brothers.

He stands there, engraved, given to fat,
his friendly hands extended to the natives
who, lean as Caesar, accept his fatal gifts.

But that good Quaker in his peaceful country
is past and backdrop. On this crowded shore
herded together, the wolf and the lamb lie down

And the tiger looks at the kid as once
in the garden of Eden, innocent of blood.
The calf, the young lion, the fatling lie together.

And the cow and the bear share their ration of straw,
The lion and the ox beside one another, surprised.
The eagle and dove eat from the hands of a child.

Another plays with the serpent. In all this mountain
there is no danger, for the earth is filled
with the word of the lord. There is no hunger.

How could this be? Even here, withdrawn on a mountain,
where the quail and dove walk at the grasses' edges,
I hear the world washing away my kingdom.
The deer go by, seeking the last wild ranges.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 39.

On the Death of the President

November 22, 1963

In a current of eagles and parks and green,
In a blue ripple of shouts, in the hearty sun,
The day moves with autumn and feasting,
Cheers, and the rustle of crowds, and the held faces.

Stretched beyond the green savannahs of our knowing
Deep in marshes and trees, in scrub oak, the deer
Stands flicking his shoulders, dappled in shade.
The dogs scare up the autumn colors of partridge.

The world centers on noon, the White Mountains have passed it,
The Rockies still hold morning's sun on the early snow.
In the Cascades the spruces cast their shadows westward.
The country gathers toward noon in the midst of the country.

Into the forest of our knowing, across the marked paths,
Over the billow of flags and the hails and the shot,
Beneath the crowd's crumpled breath,
Hunted and fallen, the fated and noontime meet.

Noon turns suddenly black, and the sigh falls over
The sun like the shadow of all the mists of breath,
Like a prayer tears fall among the avenues,
The noon's huge sun wrapped in the mists of mourning.

Through the long afternoon a coffin rides the skies
Death flies above, the air weeps at his passing,
Awake we dream out woe, the day curves on,
Earthbound, we walk through autumn bells and harvests.

In afternoon's fields we gather, we gather in folds
And all the flowers are garnered and gathered
In the mountains, in the fields and towns, under the pine trees:
Goldenrod, firethorn, buckwheat, red-leaved sumac.

Into the soft-leaved evening we wait and the flight is ended.
End and beginning and end, forever and ever.
The dead and the living
Enter the darkening field—and each to his fortune.

While the dark with its loss falls over the capital
And seeps over the Potomac into the fields of Arlington
And spreads over West Virginia and the Appalachians
And drops over the great plains of the Mississippi
Engulfs the Bad Lands and the Black Hills
And creeps slowly up over Santa Fe and the Sangre de Cristo
Over the Wind River and the Great Basin and the Mojave
And high, high over the Sierra Nevada—without a star—
And drifts down over the calm Pacific.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 50.

The Speed of Planes

They have been falling from the sky
Ever since they went there
And the two wings, upper and lower,
Were stretched, catching the wind
Straining upward, a kite
To the sun. The wings have changed us.

Noisy and hurrying we forget
To listen, we forget the wind
That once said winter is coming,
We forget the walking on the earth,
We forget the midnight message
And the slow drifting of small things.

Till in the offering of fire
We have poured our children.
We heard them laughing together
While the planes hurled overhead.
We heard all turn to silence
In the building of the flame.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 52.

From the Air

The plane is a dizzy platform

From which to fall

The sea rising, rising

And the earth

Thick, growing green fetters

And its poisonous breed

Serpents, spiders, fierce claws.

The dog, domestic, a sudden wolf,

Snaps at the hand.

At the back the knife.

Time passing, time passing.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 53.

The Informer

I am the wind and I am whispering
about you. I am catching them
on corners, saying, saying
I am the wind and I am whispering

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 54.

Three Poems for a Read-In

I

When the enemy comes, let him drop bombs on your house
Alone. I am too kind-hearted to stick pins in your effigy.
As I pass your house my thumb is turned down
I say *Die! Wither!*

I will plant marijuana in your garden
And then call the local police.
When they come, they will knock you down
And take you to jail for a thousand years.

2

When I woke up
I saw justice blindfolded
and she held a balance—
in one pan was a fish
its eyes glazed with a blue film.
Its gills stood permanently open.
A few scales hung loose from its sides,
the rest shrank together.
It was five days stinking.

In the other, a turkey, defeathered,
its head hanging limp,
swayed in the air.
Its claws clutched upward.

The balance in one hand,
She had me in the other.
“Which will you go against?” she said.
“Fish or turkey
you are done for,”
cried the blind hag laughing.

3

The reason I have not killed myself
Is I have too many letters to answer.

The bills must be paid
The drawers cleaned out
And the old clothes packed in paper bags
For the Good Will.
The book must be finished
Letters given to libraries
Mementoes assigned to the proper kin
And the children remembered
By various sums.
It will take a lifetime to do this.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 55.

A Discourse

From the Bhagavad Gita

The Lord said:

I am the self
That lies in the heart of all creatures.
I am the beginning
The enduring and the end of all.

Of the sons of space, I am Vishnu
Of heavenly lights, I am the sun
I am the chief among the gods of storm
I am the moon shining among stars.

Of Vedas, I am the book of chants
Of gods, I am Indra, lord of the air
I am the mind among the senses
I am awareness in living things.

Of the terrible gods, I am Shiva
Of sprites and demons I am lord of wealth
Among the bright ones I am lord of fire
I am the mountain where the gods abide.

I am Prahlada, prince of Titans
I am time itself among the hours
I am king of the beasts of the forest
I am Lord of the Sky, the bird of Vishnu.

I am the purifier, god of wind
Rama among bearers of weapons
I am the sea-monster among fishes
Ganges among the rivers.

I am the beginning and the end
And the middle of all creations
I am the knowledge of the soul.
I am the discourse of those who speak.

I am the letter A
And the coupling of compounds.
I am time inexhaustible

And the creator, facing everywhere.

I am death who harries all
The rising up of what will be
Of months, first, when the moon enters the Deer,
Of seasons, the flower-abounding.

I am the gambling of the cheat
The sharp edge of the brilliant.
I am victory. I am effort.
I am courage to the stout-hearted.

I am the rod of the master
The statecraft of those who seek conquest
I am the silence of secret things
The knowledge of them that know.

And whatever is the seed of all beings
That I am also.

No creature that moves or does not move
Could exist without me.

Whatever creature comes forth in glory
In vigor and in beauty
Know that that being has sprung
From but a fragment of my splendor

Or rather—for what to you
Is such a multitude of knowing?—
I stand and hold up this universe
With a single portion of myself.

Arjuna said:

It is proper, Lord, that praising you
The world exults and is tinged with your colors.
Demons, afraid, flee to all quarters
And throngs of perfect souls do homage.

And why should they not revere you, Great-souled?
Older than Brahma, you are the first creator.
Endless, lord of gods, the world's home,
You are eternal, what is and is not, and beyond.

You are the primal god, the ancient person,
In you all things come down to rest,
Knower and known, you are the highest power.
From you comes all, Unending Form.

God of wind, moon, fire, all-holding sky
Lord of death, Maker, Father of all,

Glory, glory to you a thousandfold
And to you be glory, glory still.

Glory to you, before and after,
And on all sides, All, glory to you.
You of endless strength, unmeasured in power
You pervade all things. You are all, therefore.

What I said roughly, thinking you comrade,
Saying Krishna, Son of Yadu, O friend,
In sport or by way of affection
Not knowing this your greatness—

If I joked and tormented you
While we played or ate or sat resting
By ourselves or with the others, O Unshaken,
Unbounded, forgive me.

Father of all that moves and is still,
We honor you, the greatest worthy.
In the three worlds there is none like you.
Supreme Power, who could be more?

Therefore I bow and bend down before you.
Be gracious, lord to be praised.
As father to son, friend to friend,
Lover to loved, be gentle, O God.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 59.

The Descent

*Let us, therefore, bend all our force and thoughts of soul to this most holy light,
that showeth us the way which leadeth to heaven; and after it, putting off the
affections we were clad withal at our coming down, let us clime up the stairs
which at the lowermost step have the shadow of sensual beauty, to the high
mansion-place where the heavenly, amiable, and right beauty dwelleth.*

—Baldassare Castiglione

As I descend from ideal to actual touch
As I trade all the golden angel crowns
And rings of light for gross engrossing sense,
As I descend Plotinus' stairs,
Angel, man, beast, but not yet plant and stone,
The sense of that height clings, the earthen hand
Transmutes again to light, is blessed from black
Through alchemy to rise rich red, green, blue,
Fractions of vision broke from ample crowns.

As I from the mind's distance fall on voyages
I test the strength of water where I walk
And lose the air for wings. I am lifted
As I descend past clouds and gusts of air
As I go down with wind to tops of trees
As I walk down from mountain tops and cold.

As I descend to gardens warm with leaves
As I enter the new morning harsh in sun
I count the earth with all its destinies
Come down to prove what idea does not know.

I descended out of nothing into green
I descended out of spaces where the spare
Stepping stones of islands roughed my way.
I descended into solidness, to dense
And mingled shrubberies where the birds
Alone choose wings for crossing my old sky.
Caught in this day within a sound of hours
Walled into shadows, stripped of multitudes,
I try this spring the growing into light.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 63.

In the Husk

In the darkness of this womb
Or this winding
Done up in cords spun
Out of myself
I wait.

There was light
And I consumed
Husks, leaves, veins
Drinking the sap
Turning the long pith
Into silk
That now enfolds me.

It is at last this darkness
That I have come to
Tired of moving about
Of lifting the head
And the searching feet
Set carefully among the branches.

I am shaken down
Falling into my silken dream.

O this dark dark winding into the dark
Immobile, insignificant,
Self-tied, self-prisoner
Not dead, not living, but moving on
To the new air I have not yet conceived.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 65.

By the Waters

The dew invites me
And the fog that rides
The nights of spring.
Rain and rivers tug,
And fountains in the sun
Catch up my steps and run
Through pools and channels
And [I am caught in spray.

Willing and unwilling is the way
My feet are drawn
Down with the stream
To the last firm of earth,
There to hold
By the paused oceanswell—
While the sea sucks back its ravel
And grows and hovers—and not blench aside,
But stung with reason speak
To subjugate this tide.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 66.

The Rod

*Impero igitur tibi ne in terram meam ascendas, nec vestes nec membra
dominatoris tui madefacere praesumas. —Canute*

I have beat back the waters.

Here the rod
That follows on those undulant pursuers
To downward rocks and silence of the dense
Concentric whorls of motion's central core.

Whence to return
They first must coil and restless set their round
Against the deepest sounding
That presses black and turns itself to stone.

Rigid and yet
In stillness burning.

The sea is gone and shining is the sand
The sand is smooth, the paving of the sea.
And round and gaping creatures lie aground.

The rod is made of light.
It is a crystal and imperial thing.
Far, far, the waves depart beyond its bend.
It is the lasting day that circumvents all night.
It is the light.

Light that revolves against the sleepless eye,
Divides in suns and glaring galaxies.

Who looks at sun grows blind at what he sees
And calls on black and calls on dark to turn.

O blessed seas that in your dark uncoil
And throw your serpent clouds upon the sky
That thundering return across the grey
And empty sea-plain, catching up the dry

And hollowed creatures, curving in the sun.
O blessed dark that runs across the day
That opens caverns precious to the sight
Of censured vision that in depth delights.

I hear your roar returning up the sand
I feel your constant pulse beneath the shore
I see the rocks impatient for your streams.

And watch the rod descend into your brim.
Then come notorious day and spend your beams

And fall to sea and night.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 67.

The Organization of Space

1

Vacancy goes with me as does a sea,
Perfect, round, in all directions sending
All the not-where, where that one's not bending,

Or the wide disk of grain, shadeless of trees,
Empty, and the arch empty, of seeing,
Above, below, unconscious of that being,

And the great desert parched of all—
No rock, no shadow—without green or air—
Only salt and dry, that center being not there.

2

Add to the dull disk of sea, colors of coral,
A speck of land within brief shafts of water—
Then we have distance and before and after.

Set in the midst of grain a single tree
And like a magnet pulling into place,
It draws a path across the unlined space.

And in the desert the uprising stone
Cuts into space and makes the skies convene.
Landmarks arise, and in the shade a green.

3

I praise a local vista, clipped or rough.
It makes its variants with sun and frost—
Hill, row, and field—till vacantness is lost.

And from such centering, the wires that join
The farm and town, the seen and unseen line
Can mark out waves' and gravity's design.

Arched like a row of tents with canvas seams,
The sky is propped by pole and spire to show
They hold the circles fixed through which I go.

And yet a vacancy, an almost none,
An arching of the mind into a sky
Under which empty fields and barrens lie,

A round of almost gone, a black and sere,
Returns across the vivid local tiers
And turns them to a round, unshaded sea.

Spirit or being, corn-god or harvester,
That sets us deep within the year's concern,
Hold the circumference in which we turn.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 69.

In the Lenten Season

Risen, the masquerade of flesh
Compounds this floating spring, the plane
Of trees, bloom, terrace, where we pass
The garrulous afternoon. The noun

Is what is feared: to name the sly
Commotion of the blood which runs
Unplanned as leaves to their own ways.
The day ends in a double vision

Of the self immaculate, and its brood
Of interior dwellers—kernel and shell:
The token ritual, grown hard,
And the sweet corruptible.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 71.

The Late Visitor

Listen, let me explain, it was not the fire
That burned in the hearth and kept me there.
It was no real fire, though I swear it did seem so
And to go out was to step into blackest snow,
And to stay was to lose, not find. Words only say
What is gone. Or are motions like flame and snow,
Slow circlings of something about to occur,
The birth of a salamander in the fire.

I am caught between never and now. You must tell me to go.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 72.

The Gift

It was round, orb being most nearly perfect,
And warm perhaps, though hardly of any color,
Smelling of spring, faintly, of hyacinth.
It was not fruit, though on those trees first planted
Eastward, of life and knowledge, it may have grown.
There were many trees in Eden. And this not eaten.
Yet flower neither, though soft as petals
Yet harder perhaps, like pearls hunted
Through dark shore-caves, or rubies hidden,
Precious as those, glanced at and not seen.
Transparent, then, and gone like water
Floating off, yet here; and single, out of many,
And not illusion, though it may have been.
Solid and constant, ephemeral and shaken,
Fruit, flower, or stone, or given or taken.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 73.

Morning

From the center of our body
Come the bright flowers.

Draw open the curtain
And we shall see them
On bush and stone.

Let us exchange our borders
That I may speak with your voice.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 74.

Mirror

In this mirror your face is broken
The sockets of your eyes
Cleave from the cheeks
And the smile pulls
Half a face.
There is a wen behind your ear
And the knuckles of your hands
Grow large.
Your skin is withered.
Your hand shakes.
I loved you.
I am lost.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 75.

Postcard from Venice

This city is floating away on the sea
The sea is holding it up, taking it south
The sea is bursting up between the pavings
Froth is moving it seaward.

This city is being carried away
It is flying.
There are angels lifting St. Mark's with their pinions
The lion is bearing his post, the saints ride their pillars
The gods on the cornice are hoisting it higher.

Wings and the sea are tossing the city.
The wind is pushing it up to the rooftops
The angels are taking it over the Alps
Suspended in water and clouds, floating and flying.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 76.

A Birthday

On the morning of my birthday I awoke from a dream
Where I came down from walking in a park on a hill.
The hill had two sides: on one the bright chaparral
Stood separate and shining on the brown hay of summer
On the other, pineshade—and ferns on the floor of a forest.
They vanish away as smoke in the air.

The ground was soft underfoot
It was evenly planted; all things were in order.
I was barefoot, and it was holiday
And I came down and found the streets full of people
And I walked in full and swinging skirts among them.

He is great that sets at nought all worldly honor.

Beloved, we go west to the wide sea
All of us, coming down from the hill.
All of us, all, borne on the shell of earth—
Though far from the sea you ride.

And I may behold all things as they be, of short abiding.

At my center is a pool, calm
Dark. I have not found its edges.
And as I turn westward
Though I have not found wisdom
The great pool of peace is the center, what I am and that
only.

May nothing take from thee inward liberty of soul.

In this first morning of my year I awoke
And all things were hung with light.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 77.

Night of Souls

I saw each soul as light, each single body
With his life's breath kindled and set like flame
Before his nostrils. All creatures visible—
Small beings moving in the midnight grasses,

Light in the thoroughfares underfoot,
The mole's house hung with the mole's breath
As with candles, and the busy air
Clouded with light.

It is no longer midnight, for the sea
Rustles translucent waters, windows letting out
The glow of all its denizens, colored as through
Cathedral glass, the night sky dark
Save where a lost gull drops like a meteor
Into the phosphorous waves.

The linnets chirp as in daylight. The owl dazzles himself.
Silent and still, wondering by the glare of his mother
The new colt shines.
Light betrays the young deer in the thicket

On this night of the lighting of spirits
All quiet, all visible
Till the lantern of man comes up over the hill,
Shades out those other beams like a bare sun rising.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 79.

Numbers

When we think of numbers, they are what move
In the wind, over the ground, through the thick seines
Of water. Small. They rustle around us.

Or silent. What can't be counted. I have seen
A hive of bees hang on a branch of our lilac
The wild thorny blue of the endless blossoms.

Now in autumn here the leaves turn from numbers
Become mass where the wild walnuts
Plan now the deluge of spring from the ends

Of the dying branches. And the meek, and grass,
Move toward inheritance. New fish in the streams.
I have dreams beyond count and remember.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 80.

Going Away

To Her Spirit

The horses are going away
The tall mare and the four-year-old.
Their bridles lie by the drive,
And their gear and what is left of the oats.

They do not know. They are out there sleeping.
Over them the tin roof bangs in the wind.

They will wade into acres of grass
And hear the new sound of a sea
That breaks past the hill and the steady branches of oaks
In a place where the roads have not come yet.

How they will run in the big pasture
Or stand, flicking their tails in the sunlight
Those high beasts that looked over our shoulders
Or stood silent, nuzzling, blocking the way.

They called to us when we were slow at evening.
The young one was born here.
We will go back into our houses
We will forget how large the world was once.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 81.

To Her Spirit at the Winter Solstice

Now the year ends darkly.
The sun drifts in the south.
Will it ever return?

And you force me in the cold to gather red berries
Up early in mist, breaking the branches—
The musky smell of the toyon—
Will this be enough?

Look down, spirit, from your height of fire,
Look from the skiff crossing the black river.
Call back the sun that lingers.

Shall I bring only remembering
Who cannot bring flowers? for the cold
Grows deep and dark where you linger.

And the ship of fire goes farther
Toward some chill cape of waves and darkness.
Hold fast in the rough riding.

O blown spirit, do not draw me
To those chill tides
Where I too cast my offerings
In darkness,

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 82.

Weeds

Nothing so startles us as tumbleweeds in December
Rising like ghosts before us in the headlamps
The big round weeds blowing into fences
Into guard rails and wheels, wedged into corners
Drifting in ranks over roads in a gusty order
Round in the orbits of winter, dropping the invisible seed,
Blown green and purple-leaved into springtime, soft with water,
Filled to harsh circles in the thirsty summer
Dried brown and jagged, ready for December
When the silver globes, magnificent in procession
Slow and solemn-paced in the ritual of ending
Dry, dead, in the dim-most part of the year
Spread the great round promises of green morning.

Publication. First published in *The Descent*. New York: Viking Press, 1970, p. 83.

The Bhagavad Gita: A New Verse Translation

Stage VI | Verse translation, 1970

Stanford's complete verse translation, retained in source-page facsimile to preserve speaker labels, numbered stanzas, and the original typographic structure.

Verse translation from Sanskrit

The Bhagavad Gita

1.

DHRITA-
RASHTRA
SAID:

- 1 On the field of right, in the field
Of the Kurus, when my people
And the sons of Pandu came ready to fight
What did they do, Sanjaya?

SANJAYA
SAID:

- 2 When he saw the force of the Pandus
Drawn up in their battle lines
Duryodhana went to the Teacher,
The Prince speaking these words:
- 3 Behold, my master, this great army
Gathered there by the sons of Pandu—
Your own skillful pupil, the son of Drupada
Has placed them strong in the order of battle.
- 4 There are heroes, mighty bowmen
Strong as Bhima or Arjuna in battle—

1.5-10

Yuyudhana and Virata,
And Drupada of the great chariot.

5 Dhrishta-ketu, Chekitana,
And the brave king of Kashi,
Purujit and Kunti-bhoja
And the Shibi's king, bull among men.

6 And the brave Yudhamanyu
And the hero Uttamaujas
Subhadra's son, the sons of Draupadi,
All men of powerful battle-cars.

7 But hear, too, of our most distinguished,
The leaders of my army.
Best of the twice-born, I will name them
For your special notice.

8 Yourself, and Bhishma and Karna,
Kripa, winner of battles,
Ashvatthaman and Vikarna
And the son of Somadatta

9 And many other heroes
Risking their lives for my sake
With various arms and weapons,
All of them skilled in battle.

10 Unlimited, this army of ours
Is commanded by Bhishma,

1.11-16

But their army, though limited,
Is protected by Bhima.

- 11 So, through the changes of battle
Each man hold firm in his station
And each and every man of you
Support Bhishma above all.
- 12 In order to bring him joy
The old grandsire of the Kurus
Roared like a lion on high
And, full of courage, blew his conch-shell.
- 13 Then all at once conches and drums
Kettle-drums, cymbals, and trumpets
Were all sounded together.
The din grew to a tumult.
- 14 Then, standing in their great chariot
Yoked with white horses
Madhava and the son of Pandu
Blew their heavenly conches:
- 15 Lord Krishna blew the Five Races
The Winner of Wealth blew Gift of God.
Bhima, Wolf-Belly, of dreadful deeds
Sounded his great shell, the Paundra.
- 16 King Yudhishthira, son of Kunti,
Blew on Breath of Victory

1.17–22

Nakula and Sahadeva
Blew Bright-Sounding and Decked with Gems.

- 17 The king of Kashi, best of archers,
Shikhandin of the great chariot
Dhrishtha-dyumna and Virata
And Satyaki, the unconquered
- 18 Drupada and Draupadi's sons
And the strong-armed son of Subhadra
On this side and that, O King
One by one blew their battle-shells.
- 19 That sound tore the hearts
Of the men of Dhrita-rashtra.
It dinned through earth and heaven
Swelling loud into the sky.
- 20 Then, seeing Dhrita-rashtra's sons
Already in battle line, the Ape-Bannered
Lifted up his bow, that son of Pandu
When the clashing of arms had begun
- 21 And then, O King, he spoke
To Krishna, Lord of the Senses:
Drive my chariot, Immovable,
And hold it between the two forces
- 22 That I may look on those warriors
Who stand there, eager for the contest,

1.23-28

The men I have to battle
In the fighting of this war,

- 23 That I may see the men who are gathered
Ready for struggle, who are eager to fight
To bring about the desires
Of the evil son of Dhritra-rashtra.
- 24 Spoken to thus by the thick-haired one,
Krishna, O son of Bharata,
Having drawn up that all-passing chariot
Between the opposing armies
- 25 In front of Bhishma and Drona
And all the kings he said:
Look, son of Pritha
At these assembled Kurus.
- 26 There the son of Pritha saw waiting
Both fathers and their fathers
Teachers, uncles, and brothers,
Sons, grandsons, and close companions
- 27 And fathers-in-law and friends
Standing opposed in both armies.
The son of Kunti, seeing them
All his kinsmen ranked for battle
- 28 Despaired, and filled with uttermost
Compassion, spoke these words: O Krishna

1.29-34

When I see my own people ranged,
Drawn near, impatient to give battle

29 My limbs cannot hold me
And my mouth becomes dry
And trembling shakes my whole body
My hair all stands on end.

30 Gandiva falls from my hand
A fire runs under my skin
And I cannot stand still
My mind whirls as in flame

31 And, You of Fine Hair,
I see but omens of evil
Nor surely can good ever come
From killing my kinsmen in fight.

32 I want neither victory, Krishna,
Nor a kingdom nor pleasure
Of what use the kingdom, Govinda,
What use to eat well and live?

33 Those for whose sake we desire
Kingship, good-living, and pleasure,
They are drawn up here for battle
Risking their wealth and their breath.

34 Teachers, fathers and sons,
And fathers of fathers besides,

1.35-40

Uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons
Brothers-in-law and other kinsmen—

- 35 These I would not kill
Though they should kill me, Slayer of Madhu,
Not to be ruler of the three worlds,
How much less for a kingdom of earth.
- 36 When we kill Dhritā-rāshtra's sons
What joy is ours, Freer of Men?
If we strike these whose bows are already stretched
Only troubles will light on us.
- 37 Therefore we should not kill our kinsmen
The sons of Dhritā-rāshtra.
For, having slain our kinsmen,
Madhava, could we be happy?
- 38 Even though they do not see,
Their minds being overcome with greed,
The harm in destroying a noble race
The crime in treachery to a friend.
- 39 But we—should we not know enough
To turn away from this havoc,
We who can perceive, Freer of Men,
The harm in destruction of a family.
- 40 With the downfall of a house
Die its old customs, long observed,

1.41-46

And when the family laws have vanished
Lawlessness overwhelms them all.

41 And when chaos prevails, Krishna,
The women of the house are corrupted.
When the women are not pure, Varshneya,
A mixture of class must follow.

42 And the family itself is brought to hell
With those who have destroyed it.
And the departed ancestors fall
Robbed of offerings of rice and water.

43 By these crimes of family destroyers
Which make for mixture of classes
The laws of caste are destroyed
And the enduring family laws.

44 Over and over we have heard
That when family laws fall to ruin,
Freer of Men, it must come to pass
Man's only home is in hell.

45 O it was a great wickedness
That we resolved to commit
When for greed to enjoy a kingdom
We tried to kill our own kinsmen.

46 Far better that I remain
Unresisting and unarmed

10

1.47

And that the armed sons of Dhritra-rashtra
Should kill me in the struggle.

47 { So spoke Arjuna in the battle
And sat down in the box of the chariot
He dropped his arrows and his bow,
His heart brought low in sorrow.

2.

SANJAYA
SAID:

- 1 To him thus overcome by pity
Whose eyes blurred and filled with tears
Despairing,
The Slayer of Madhu spoke these words.

THE LORD
SAID:

- 2 Where in this hour of danger
Has this stain on your spirit come from?
It is un-Aryan, not leading to heaven.
It is inglorious, Arjuna.
- 3 Are you a coward, son of Pritha?
It is not right for you.
Shake off this petty weakness.
Stand up, Scorcher of the Foe.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 4 How shall I strike in battle
Bhishma and Drona, Slayer of Madhu,

2.5-10

How shall I send my arrows
At men worth worship, Slayer of Foes?

5 Better eat beggar's food in the world
Than kill my masters worth revering.
If I kill such men, though they seek gain
I would eat food smeared with blood.

6 We do not know which is better—
To win, or fall before them.
Dhrita-rashtra's sons stand embattled before us
If we kill them, we would wish to die.

7 I am tainted with pity
And confused about right. I ask you.
Tell me for sure which is better.
I am your pupil. I have come. Teach me.

8 For I see nothing to drive away
Grief, which withers the senses,
If I unrivalled gain earth's rich realm
Or even lordship over the gods.

SANJAYA
SAID:

9 Having spoken thus to Govinda,
The Lord of the Senses,
Arjuna of the thick hair said
I will not fight and was silent.

10 To him despairing there
In the midst of the two armies

13

THE CHANGELESS

2.11-16

The Lord of the Senses, Bharata,
Smiling a little, spoke these words:

THE LORD
SAID:

- 11 You grieve for those you should not
And yet you talk about wisdom.
The truly taught do not mourn
For the dead or the living.
- 12 Never was a time when I was not
Nor you, nor any of these kings.
Never will come a time hereafter
When all of us shall cease to be.
- 13 As to the person in this body
Come childhood, youth, and age
So is the coming of another body.
The wise are not perplexed by that.
- 14 But contacts with matter, son of Kunti,
Cause cold and heat, pleasure and pain.
They come and go and do not last.
Endure them, son of Bharata.
- 15 The man not moved by these,
O bull of men, that wise man
To whom pain and pleasure are the same
He is fit to live forever.
- 16 What is not can never come to be.
What is can never disappear.

14

THE CHANGELESS

2.17-22

Those who see truth know the border
Between the two of these.

17 But the whole world is pervaded
By that which none can destroy—
The Imperishable
No one can bring it to nothing.

18 It is said these are temporal bodies
Of an embodied one—eternal,
Indestructible, beyond measure.
Therefore fight, son of Bharata.

19 Who thinks of him as slayer
And who thinks that he is slain
Do not rightly understand.
He slays not, nor is slain.

20 He is never born, nor does he ever die
Nor having been, will he ever cease to be.
Not born, constant, eternal, this ancient one
Is not slain, though the body is slain.

21 When a man knows him as undying
Constant, never born, eternal,
How does such a man cause killing
Or whom does he kill, son of Pritha?

22 As a man throws off his threadbare clothes
And puts on others that are new,

15

THE CHANGELESS

2.23-28

[So, leaving his worn-out bodies,
The embodied takes other fresh ones.

23 Swords cannot wound him
Nor fire consume him
Nor is he drenched by water
And the wind does not wither him.

24 He cannot be cut or burned
He cannot be parched or wet.
[Fixed, beyond time, he pervades all
Unchanging, unmoved, the same forever.

25 [Not changing, not caught by the senses,
Invisible to thought, he is said to be.
Because you know him as such, therefore,
You should not mourn for him.

26 But if you think of him constantly born
Or dying over and over
Even then, O mighty-armed,
You should not mourn for him.

27 [For to him that is born death is sure
And for him who has died, birth is certain.
This cannot be changed. Therefore,
You should not sorrow.

28 The beginnings of things are inwoven
Their middles appear, son of Bharata

2.29-34

And their ends again are unseen.
Why should you cry out about this?

- 29 One man looks on him as a marvel.
As a marvel, likewise, another proclaims him.
As a marvel, too, another hears of him
But, even having heard, no one knows him.

- 30 This indweller is ever unharmed
In the body of every one.
Therefore, son of Bharata,
Even for all creatures you should not mourn.

- 31 And if you think just of your own place
You should not recoil.
For a warrior there is no better thing
Than to fight out of duty.

- 32 Here chance is offering you
A door open to heaven.
O Partha, those warriors are lucky
Who are granted such a fight.

- 33 But if you turn away from this battle
Which your own duty requires
Then, giving up duty and glory,
You will only get trouble.

- 34 People will talk of your shame
Now and in years to come.

17

2.35-40

And for one who has been honored
Disgrace is worse than death.

- 35 Those in the great chariots will be sure
That you hang back from the battle through fear
And they who once thought well of you
Will come to hold you lightly.
- 36 Those who wish you ill will talk of you
And say what had best not be said.
They will revile all that you are.
What could be worse than that?
- 37 Either killed, you shall gain heaven
Or conquering, you will enjoy the earth.
Therefore, stand up, son of Kunti
And set your mind upon battle.
- 38 Holding pleasure and pain as alike
Gain and loss, victory and defeat
Prepare yourself for the fight
Only thus will you not reap evil.
- 39 This knowledge was given in the way of knowledge.
Now hear it in the way of action.
Filled with which knowing, son of Pritha,
You will be free of the bonds of action.
- 40 In this no step forward is lost
Nor can effort go down into nothing.

2.41-46

Even a little of this teaching
Wards off great danger.

- 41 Joy of the Kurus, in this world
The resolute mind is single
But the thoughts of the undecided
Are many-branching and endless.
- 42 Son of Pritha, this blossoming speech
That undiscerning men declare
Who delight in the word of the Vedas
Saying there is nothing else
- 43 —Men of desire, intent on heaven!—
This speech gives birth as the fruit of action.
It is full of the special rites
That aim at enjoyment and power
- 44 And those who aim at enjoyment and power
Their insight stolen by this talk
Have not attained firmness of mind
Steady in concentration.
- 45 The Vedas treat of the world's three strands.
Be free of them. Of opposites be free.
Stand in reality!
Free of getting and keeping, self possessed.
- 46 There is less profit in all the Vedas
For the brahman who understands

2.47-52

Than there is in a water tank
Surrounded by a flood.

47 You have a right to the work alone
But never to its fruits.
Let not the fruits be your motive
Nor set your heart on doing nothing.

48 Steadfast in the Way, without attachment,
Do your work, Victorious One,
The same in success and misfortune.
This evenness—that is discipline.

49 Mere action is far below
This discipline of mind, Victorious.
Take shelter in understanding;
They are wretched who work for reward.

50 He of disciplined mind in this world
Casts off both good and evil deeds.
Therefore, train yourself in discipline
Discipline is true skill in works.

51 The wise, whose minds are controlled,
Leaving the rewards of action
Are released from the bonds of rebirth
And reach a place free from all sorrow.

52 When your mind has crossed
The thicket of delusion

20

2.53-57

You will come to disregard
The writ that has been or will be taught.

- 53 When your mind stands motionless
Unbewildered by the teachings,
Rock-like in composure,
Then you shall attain discipline.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 54 How would you describe this man
Firm in wisdom, in this composure?
How does he speak, this thought-fixed man?
How does he sit and walk, Keshava?

THE LORD
SAID:

- 55 When he casts off all desires
Going on in the heart, son of Pritha,
When the self is content, at peace with itself,
He is called fixed in wisdom.
- 56 He whose heart is not sad among sorrows
Whose longing for pleasures has gone
Whom joy and fear and rage have left,
He is called a sage of steady mind.
- 57 Who has no wish for any thing
Who, if he gets something good or bad,
Neither delights in it or hates it,
The wisdom of that man is set.

21

CONTROLLING THE SENSES

2.58-64

- 58 When like a tortoise to his shell
He draws in his limbs on every side
And his senses from what they can sense,
The mind of that man is steady.
- 59 Things of the sense turn away
From him who fasts; still he savors them.
Even the taste for them turns away
Once he has seen the highest.
- 60 Yet by their violence, son of Kunti,
The unharnessed senses
Can carry away the mind
Even of a wise man who tries.
- 61 Let him restrain them all
And sit steady, intent on me
For when he controls his senses
He can compose his mind.
- 62 When a man thinks of sensuous things
He becomes attached to them,
From that liking springs desire
And from desire comes anger
- 63 From anger comes utter confusion
From confusion, wavering of memory,
From wavering of memory, loss of reason,
From loss of reason, he is lost.
- 64 But he, by ranging over objects of sense
With senses self-controlled, cut off

22

CONTROLLING THE SENSES

2.65-70

- From desire and dislike, himself governed,
Attains a clear quietness of spirit.
- 65 And in that quietness is born
The death of all sorrows
For the understanding of such a man
Soon sets itself firmly all around.
- 66 For the undisciplined there is no understanding
And for them no force of mind.
Without force of mind there is no peace
And without peace, can there be joy?
- 67 For the senses go roving
And when the thought follows after
It carries away understanding
As the wind a boat on the water.
- 68 O great-armed one, whosoever
Has drawn his senses away
From the objects all about him,
He is of steadfast mind.
- 69 What is night for all beings
Is the restrained man's time of waking
What is day for all others
That is night for the sage who sees.
- 70 As waters enter the sea, filled full,
And yet its grounds are motionless

CONTROLLING THE SENSES

2.71-72

So he to whom desires so flow
Gains peace, not he who follows desires.

71 The man who abandons all desire
Who moves free of longing
Who says neither *mine* nor *I*
Attains this peace.

72 This is the divine state, son of Pritha
Whoso reaches it is not again confused
Whoso abides in it even at death
Gains the felicity of God.

3.

How to act

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 1 If you believe that understanding
Is better than action, Janardana,
Then why, Keshava, do you urge me
To do a terrible deed?
- 2 You bewilder my mind
With a tangle of words
So tell me plainly that one thing
By which I may reach what is better.

THE LORD
SAID:

- 3 Long ago I taught, O blameless one,
That in this world there are two paths:
The way of knowledge for men of thought
The way of works for men of deeds.
- 4 Not by abstaining from works
Does a man reach freedom from works
Nor by renouncing alone
Does he get to perfection.

How to act

3.5-10

- 5 For no one, even for a moment
Remains without doing action
The forces of all nature
Make him act in spite of himself.
- 6 He who curbs the powers by which he moves
Yet broods upon the pleasures of sense
Deludes himself.
It is said his conduct is in vain.
- 7 But he whose mind controls his senses
Who engages all his powers
In work, and works without attachment,
O Arjuna, he is the best.
- 8 Do the work that is required
It is better to act than be still
Even the body itself
Cannot be kept whole without action.
- 9 Save for those things done in sacrifice
The world is in bondage to action
Let your deeds be sacraments, son of Kunti,
Without thought of reward.
- 10 The lord of creatures long ago
Made both man and sacrifice, saying:
By this means you shall multiply;
Let this be your cow-of-desires.

3.11-16

- 11 By this you will nourish the gods
And they will make you prosper,
One cherishing the other
You will reach the highest good.
- 12 For, nourished by sacrifice, the gods
Will give the enjoyments you wish for.
Who enjoys their gifts without giving to them
Is no more than a thief.
- 13 Eating the remains of the offering
The pious are freed from all faults,
But the wicked eat evil
Who cook for their own selves sake.
- 14 From food, creatures arise
Food is produced by the rain
The rain descends through sacrifice
Sacrifice springs from action.
- 15 Action springs from the supreme spirit
The spirit springs from the sacred sound.
Know then, the all-pervading spirit
Is ever established in the sacrifice.
- 16 Thus is the wheel set in motion.
Whoever does not help it turn,
Malign, wallowing in the senses,
Son of Pritha, he lives in vain.

3.17-22

- 17 But the man who takes his ease in the self
Who is satisfied with the self
And content in the self alone,
There is nothing he needs to do.
- 18 He has nothing to gain
By what is done or not done here—
And his interest does not rest upon
Any thing created in this world.
- 19 Therefore, free of ties,
Do whatever must be done
For by acting without attachment
A man reaches what is far away.
- 20 Janaka reached perfection,
As did others, simply through deeds.
So you too should act
Just to hold the world together.
- 21 Whatever a great man does
That is what other men do.
Whatever he takes as his measure
The world turns after it.
- 22 In the three worlds, son of Pritha,
There is no work I must do—
Nothing to get that I do not have—
And yet I move in action.

Doership

3.23-28

- 23 For if I did not move
Ever in works, untiring,
The whole world of men, son of Pritha,
Would turn aside in my wheel-track.
- 24 If I performed nothing
These worlds would sink away
I would be the maker of chaos
I would destroy all beings.
- 25 Son of Bharata, as the unwise work,
Attached to what they do,
So should the wise work, unattached,
Trying to hold the world together.
- 26 The ignorant are attached to action
And the wise man should not confuse them.
Acting himself with discipline,
He should let them enjoy all they do.
- 27 Actions are being performed
Through nature's forces everywhere.
The self, confused by self-consciousness
Imagines *I am the doer*.
- 28 But he who knows the principle
Of the division of forces and works—
And how the forces move one another—
Is not caught in them, mighty-armed.

29

3.29-34

29 Obsessed with the forces of nature
Men become entranced by their motions,
But let not the man who knows all
Disturb the slow, who know only part.

30 Throwing off all works on me
With your mind turned to the self
Without longing or selfish thought,
Casting off your fever, fight!

31 Those men who follow this my teaching
Constantly, filled with trust
And without murmuring against it
Are freed of the effect of action.

32 But those, impatient with my counsel,
Who do not follow this, my teaching,
Their knowledge all confounded,
Know, they are fools and are lost.

33 Each acts in accord with his own nature,
Even the man who is wise.
Creatures follow nature.
What can coercion do?

34 Every sense has objects
That cause loathing or love—
You must not fall under their rule
Though the two stalk your path.

30

Desire

3.35-40

- 35 Better do your own task imperfectly
Than do another's well
Better die in your own duty
Another's task brings peril.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 36 Then what is this that makes man do wrong
As if driven by force
Even without wanting to,
O descendant of Vrishni?

THE LORD
SAID:

- 37 It is desire, it is anger
Born of what moves in the world
All-devouring, great in wickedness,
Know that this is the enemy here.

- 38 As the smoke obscures the fire
As the dust obscures the mirror
As the womb hides the unborn
So by desire is the world hidden.

- 39 Son of Kunti, this constant foe
Obscures the knowledge of the wise.
Taking the form of desire,
It is an insatiable flame.

- 40 It has fixed its dwelling place
In the senses and mind and intellect

31

Know what is higher

3.41-43

Through these it confuses the person
Turning away knowledge.

- 41 Therefore, bull of Bharatas,
You must first control your senses
Then slay this evil
That destroys wisdom and discernment.
- 42 They say that the senses are great
But above the senses is the mind
Above the mind is the understanding
What is above the understanding is he.
- 43 Thus knowing what is higher than understanding
Steadying the self by the self,
Slay the enemy, O mighty-armed,
Who, shaped like desire, is so hard to reach.

4.

Unchanging way of life

THE LORD
SAID:

- 1 Long ago I proclaimed this way of life
To the sun-lord. It is unchanging.
The sun-lord taught it to Manu.
Manu told it to Ikshvaku.
- 2 So receiving it in their order
The king-sages knew it
Till, Foe-Scorcher, this teaching was lost
Here in the long ages of the world.
- 3 This same ancient way of life
I tell you today
For you are my friend, devoted to me
And this is the supreme secret.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 4 Your birth was later—
The sun-lord was born before.
How may I understand what you say
That you taught this in the beginning?

4.5-10

THE LORD

SAID:

*Krishna's Reincarnations
Toly refuge in Krishna*

5 I have passed through many births
And so have you, Arjuna,
But I remember all of these.
Scourge of the Foe, you do not remember.

6 Though I am unborn and my self
Unchanging, though I am lord of beings,
Ruling my own realm of nature
I am born through my own creative power.

7 For whenever the right
Languishes, son of Bharata,
Whenever wrong rises up
Then I send myself forth

8 To protect those who are good
And destroy the doers of evil
To make a firm foothold for the right
I am born in age after age.

9 He who knows my divine birth
And my works as they truly are
Does not go to rebirth, Arjuna,
Leaving the body, he comes to me.

10 Freed of passion, anger, and fear,
Absorbed in me, taking refuge in me,
Purified by the fire of wisdom
Many have come to my mode of being.

4.11-16

- 11 Son of Pritha, everywhere
Men are following my path.
In whatever way they come to me
In that same way I give them grace.
- 12 Those who wish for success in works
Sacrifice to the gods in this world
For quickly in the world of men
Success comes, born of ritual action.
- 13 I hurled forth the four orders of men
Dividing them by natures and work.
Though I am the doer of that
Know I am the non-doer forever.
- 14 I am not stained by actions—
I do not yearn for their fruit.
He who thus understands me
Is not bound by works.
- 15 So understanding, work was done
By men of old seeking release.
Therefore you also should act
As they did long ago.
- 16 What is action, what is inaction?
Even the wise are perplexed about this.
I will tell you what action is
And, knowing, you will be freed from evil.

35

4.17-22

- Inaction is Action*
and Action is Inaction
- 17 For one must learn what action is
And the nature of wrong action.
One must learn too about non-action.
Thick and tangled is the way of works.
- 18 Who can see the stillness in what is done
And true action in being still
He is enlightened among men,
He is a disciplined doer of all.
- 19 When all his undertakings are free
Of the calculations of desire
His entanglement burned in the fire of wisdom,
The wise call him learned.
- 20 Giving up love for the fruits of work
Always content, dependent on none,
Even though he takes part in works
Still he does nothing whatsoever.
- 21 Without desires, thought and self restrained,
Giving up all possessions,
Doing what he does with the body alone,
He acquires no stain.
- 22 Content with getting what comes along,
Transcending the pairs, not thinking I,
The same in failure and success
Even when he acts, he is not caught.

Offering

4.23-28

- 23 When released, free of hanging on,
With his mind settled in wisdom
He acts for the sake of sacrifice
All action vanishes.
- 24 The choice of offering is God. What is
Offered is God. It is poured by God
In the fire of God. He is sure to reach God
Who concentrates on the work that is God.
- 25 Some disciplined men revere
The sacrifice as divine. Other men
Offer the sacrifice in the fire of God
By the act of sacrifice.
- 26 Some offer in the fires of restraint
Hearing, and all the senses,
Others offer in the senses' fire
Sound and the other objects of sense.
- 27 Some offer all acts of the senses
And the work of the vital breath
In the fire of the way of self-control
When it has been kindled by wisdom.
- 28 Men of strict vows, forsaking the world,
Sacrifice material things, or give themselves
To austerities or the wisdom
Of repeating the sacred word.

37

Wisdom

4.29-34

- 29 Some, intent on the control of breath,
Restraining the courses of breathing,
Offer the breaths that go out and come in
One into the other.
- 30 Some, abstaining from food,
Pour their lives into their life-breaths.
All these know what sacrifice is
And by sacrifice their stains are worn away.
- 31 Tasting ambrosia, left from the remains of sacrifice,
They go to God eternal. Even this world
Is not for him who does not sacrifice,
How then can the other be?
- 32 Thus many kinds of offerings
Are stretched before the face of Brahman.
Know they are all born of work
And knowing this, you shall be free.
- 33 Scourge of the Foe, to offer wisdom
Passes the offering of material things
For all works without exception
Are consummated in wisdom.
- 34 Learn to know this by bowing down
By questioning and by service.
Those who are wise, who see what things are,
Will teach you wisdom.

38

Wisdom

4.35-40

- 35 Which, having learned, you will not again
Fall into delusion, son of Pandu.
Through this you will behold all beings
In yourself and also in me.
- 36 Even if among wicked men
You are the most wicked of all,
Floating on the raft of knowledge
You will cross all this crooked way.
- 37 O Arjuna, as a fire once kindled
Consumes its fuel to ashes
Even so all actions are consumed
To ashes in the fire of wisdom.
- 38 For there is nothing in this world
That purifies so much as wisdom.
He who has attained discipline
In time finds this purifier in himself.
- 39 The man of trust, with his senses curbed,
Intent on wisdom, gains it
And having attained wisdom
He soon comes to supreme peace.
- 40 But the self that is unknowing,
Without trust and filled with doubt
Perishes. Not for the doubting self
In this world or the next, or happiness.

4.41-42

- 41 Having renounced all works in discipline
Having cut off doubt with knowledge,
Winner of Wealth, the self-possessed
Is no longer bound by actions.
- 42 Therefore, with the sword of wisdom
Cut off this doubt born of ignorance
That lies in your heart. And turn to
Deeds. Stand up, son of Bharata.

5.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 1 You praise renunciation of works
And again you say perform them.
Krishna, tell me for certain
Which one is the better of these?

THE LORD
SAID:

- 2 Renouncing, and work with discipline
Both lead to the best. But of these
Work with discipline surpasses
The renunciation of works.
- 3 The man who neither loathes nor craves
Is seen as constant in renouncing
For being free of the opposites
He is easily freed from bondage.
- 4 Children, not learned men, find separate ways
In knowledge and in discipline
But he who rightly follows one
Gains the reward of both.

Discipline

5.5-10

- 5 The place won by men of knowledge
Is reached too by men of discipline
He really sees, who sees as one
The ways of discipline and knowledge.
- 6 But renunciation, mighty-armed,
Is hard to reach without discipline.
Trained in discipline the sage
Soon attains the Absolute.
- 7 Trained in discipline, wholly purified
And subdued, with senses overcome,
His self become the self of all beings,
Even though he act, he is not stained.
- 8 *I am doing nothing at all.*
So the disciplined man who knows what is
Should think when he sees, hears,
Touches, smells, eats, walks, sleeps, breathes,
- 9 Talks, grasps, lets go,
Opens and shuts his eyes,
Holding fast to this: *The senses*
But play on the objects of sense.
- 10 Who works, abandoning attachment,
Resting all acts upon God,
Evil clings to him no more
Than water to the lotus leaf.

42

Peace for self

5.11-16

- 11 Leaving attachment, the disciplined
Only work through the body, the mind,
The intellect, and the senses
To purify themselves.
- 12 Abandoning the fruit of work
The disciplined man gains lasting peace.
The undisciplined, urged by desire
And attached to reward, is enslaved.
- 13 The person of will and power
In his mind renouncing all action
Dwells at ease in the city of nine gates
Not working or causing work to be done.
- 14 He who rules does not create
Either agency or actions for the world
Nor the joining of work with its fruit.
The very nature of things does this.
- 15 The lord does not take on the fault
Or the merit of any.
Knowledge is hidden by ignorance
And by this creatures are confused.
- 16 But if that ignorance has been destroyed
Through knowledge of men's selves,
Their knowledge, like the sun,
Lights up the beyond:

Peace

For man

43

Sameness

5.17-22

17 Their minds on that, their souls fixed on that,
Devoted to that, with that their aim,
They go to the place of no return
Their stains cleared away by knowledge.

18 The wise see the same thing
In the learned and cultured brahman,
In the cow, the elephant, the dog,
And in the eater of dogs.

19 Here in this world they overcome birth
Whose minds are settled in this sameness
For God is flawless and the same in all;
Therefore, they abide in God.

20 Such do not exult gaining the pleasant
Nor grieve over the unpleasant. *steadiness*
Steady of mind, without delusion
The knower of God abides in God.

21 When his whole being releases outward touch
And he finds happiness in the self
Yoked in the discipline of God
He tastes undiminishing bliss.

22 For the pleasures of touch
Have a beginning and end
And lead only to sorrow.
No wise man joys in them, son of Kunti.

Controlling the Self and Mind

5.23-28

- 23 He who is able here in this world
Before giving up the body
To resist the thrust of wrath and desire
He is controlled, and a happy man.
- 24 He who finds his joy within
Within, his grove of pleasure
And the light of the sun within,
Merging with God, he gains God's bliss.
- 25 The beatitude of God is won
By holy men whose stains are wiped away
Whose doubts are cut off, whose selves are controlled
Whose joy is the good of all creatures.
- 26 To men whose minds are subdued
Who have put off anger and desire
Who truly know themselves
The blessedness of God is near.
- 27 Shutting out all outward touch
His gaze entranced between the eyebrows
Making the ebbing and flowing breaths the same
As they move within the nostrils
- 28 Ruling the senses, mind, and understanding
The sage, intent on release,
Casting off fear, wrath, and desire,
Ever thus, is forever freed.

45

5.29

29 And knowing me the friend of all beings,
Enjoyer of austerities and sacrifice
The great lord of all the worlds,
He comes to peace.

46

6.

THE LORD
SAID:

Renunciation and discipline

- 1 He who does the work he should do
Without seeking reward
Is both renouncer and disciplined,
Not he who lights no fire and does nothing.
- 2 What is called renunciation,
Pandava, is really discipline,
For no one possesses discipline
Without giving up selfish purpose.
- 3 Works are the means of the silent sage
Who wants to ascend to discipline
But when he has attained discipline
It is said that stillness is the means
- 4 For when he does not cling to works
Or to things of the senses
And he has renounced all purposes
He has climbed up to discipline.

Self as friend or enemy

6.5-10

- 5 One must raise the self by the self
And not let the self sink down
For the self's only friend is the self
And the self is the self's one enemy.
- 6 To the man whose self is self-subdued
His own self is a friend
But in him who does not own the self
Hostile the self abides, like a foe.
- 7 Of one who has come to rest, self-conquered,
The supreme self is calm and at peace
In cold and heat, ease and pain
In disgrace and honor.
- 8 The trained man, master of the senses,
His soul filled with knowledge and wisdom,
Apart as on a peak, is called controlled.
To him clods, stones, gold are the same.
- 9 He excels who looks with equal eye
On friends, comrades, detested foes,
Those standing aside or caught between,
Kinsmen, the good and the wicked.
- 10 Let the trained man discipline himself
Constantly, in a deserted place,
Alone, restraining his thoughts and soul
Without possessions or desires

48

One aim

6.11-16

- 11 In a clean place setting up for himself
A firm seat, not too high or too low,
Covered with kusha grass
And an antelope skin, and a cloth
- 12 Pointing the mind toward one aim
Ruling the motions of thoughts and sense
Seated there he should practice discipline
For the purifying of the self.
- 13 Holding the body, neck, and head
Straight and still, himself steady,
Gazing at the root of his own nose,
Not looking in all directions,
- 14 With a calm soul, rid of fear,
Firm in the vow of chastity,
Let him sit controlled, his thoughts on me
In harmony of mind, absorbed in me.
- 15 Thus with the self ever in harmony
The meditator, the mind controlled,
Finds peace that leads to the high blessedness
Which abides in me.
- 16 This rule is not for him who eats too much
Nor for him who does not eat at all
Nor, Arjuna, for him who sleeps too much
Nor him who is too long awake.

Control of
mind

Blackish

6.17-22

- 17 Let a man be temperate
In eating and sport, moderate
In waking and rest and in his work.
This rule overcomes his sorrows. *Moderate*
- 18 When the thoughts, controlled, *Thoughts*
Center on the self alone, *centered*
Free from longing for all desires, then
He is said to be in harmony.
- 19 The disciplined man, his thoughts subdued,
Made one by the ruling of the self,
Is like a lamp whose flame is still
Standing in a windless place.
- 20 When through devotion to discipline
Thought comes to rest and is no longer
Agitated, when by the self
He beholds the self in the self and is pleased
- 21 When he knows that limitless bliss *Stilled in Thatness*
Grasped by the consciousness beyond the senses,
When staying in its thatness
Without moving off from it at all—
- 22 And having seized upon this, he counts
No higher gain than this
Standing in this, he is not shaken *fractured*
By sorrows, however heavy—

50

Controlling It and

6.23-28

- 23 This loosening from the yoke of misery
Is known as discipline.
It must be practiced
Resolutely, without losing heart.
- 24 Giving up desires that rise from purpose
So that not one of them is left
With the will alone to press back firmly
The borders of the throngs of the senses
- 25 Slowly, slowly let him come to rest
In the consciousness, held and made firm.
Keeping the mind fixed in the self
He should think of nothing at all.
- 26 He must hold back the mind, wavering,
Unsteady, from where it may wander
And lead it back into control
In the self alone.
- 27 For utmost joy approaches
The disciplined man whose mind is still,
Become one with God, without stain,
His passion quieted.
- 28 So, always ruling the self,
The controlled man, his stains vanished away,
Tastes limitless bliss
In the joyous reach of God.

Practicing the Self

51

6.29-34

29 One whose self is yoked in discipline
Sees the same in all things
He sees himself in all beings
And all beings in himself.

30 Who sees me in all things
And sees all things in me,
For him I am never out of sight
And for me, he never disappears.

31 Whoever, believing in oneness
Reveres me abiding in all beings
Whatever his mode of living
That disciplined man lives in me.

32 Who sees with sameness everything
By comparison to himself
Whether it be grief or happiness
He is held best of disciplined men.

ARJUNA
SAID:

33 This discipline you have described
As sameness, Slayer of Madhu—
I do not see it as lasting for long
Because of wavering.

34 For the mind moves to and fro, Krishna,
Stubborn, turbulent, and strong.
It is as hard to restrain
As to hold back the wind.

52

6.35-39

THE LORD

SAID:

35 Without doubt, son of Kunti,
The mind is restless and hard to curb,
But it can be controlled, mighty-armed,
By practice and uncolored thought.

36 For one who has not mastered himself
I know this state is hard to reach
But for the self-controlled who try,
It can be won by the right means.

ARJUNA

SAID:

37 What is the fate, Krishna,
Of the unrestrained man who has faith
Whose mind wanders from the way,
Who cannot succeed in discipline?

38 Fallen from both, O mighty-armed,
With no place to stand,
Gone astray on the path of God
Will he not perish like a torn cloud?

39 Cut off my doubts, Krishna,
Cleanly, with none remaining,
For none other than you
Can be found to overwhelm such doubt.

53

6.40-45

THE LORD

SAID:

No good can be lost

40 Partha, neither in this world nor the next
Will he be destroyed
For no doer of fair works, my friend,
Walks on an evil path.

41 Though fallen from the way, he arrives
In the world of the doers of good
Dwells there countless years and then is born
In a bright and distinguished house.

42 Or else he may even be born
In a family of disciplined men,
Pious thinkers. But in this world
Such a birth is harder to attain.

Understanding joined in a previous life (ameras)

43 There he is joined with the understanding
That he had in his former body,
And from then on he strives
After perfection, Joy of the Kurus.

44 For what he did before
Takes him on even without his will
The mere attempt to learn discipline
Carries him beyond the Vedic rule.

Perfection is the aim of births

45 But after a hard struggle,
The disciplined man, his faults cleared away,
Perfected by many births
At last reaches the refuge beyond.

6.46-47

- 46 The ruled man surpasses the austere.
He is greater than men of knowledge,
Greater than men of works.
Therefore, Arjuna, be disciplined.
- 47 And more, of all men of discipline
He who worships me with faith
Whose inner soul takes refuge in me
I hold as the great disciple.

55

7.

THE LORD
SAID:

Know Krishna

1 Hear, son of Pritha, how fully
If you follow the way, your mind toward me,
Relying on me as your refuge,
You shall come without doubt to know me.

2 I will tell you now of wisdom,
Both of vision and tangible knowledge.
Once in the world you know these
There is nothing you need to know.

3 Among many thousands of men
Perhaps one works for perfection,
And of those who try and are perfect
Perhaps one truthfully knows me.

4 Earth, water, fire, air, space,
Mind, consciousness, sense of self,
In all these eight-fold parts
My nature is manifest

*manifestation of Her/his/its
lower nature*

Absolute holds the world together

7.5-10

- 5 But this only my lower nature
Know, mighty-armed,
Higher and other is my spirit
Which by itself holds up this world.
- 6 From it all beings wake,
All things, you can be sure,
I am the beginning of worlds
And I am their dissolution.
- 7 There is no thing whatsoever
Higher than I am, Winner of Wealth,
All that exists is strung on me
Like throngs of pearls on a thread.
- 8 I am the taste in water, son of Kunti,
I am the light in the moon and sun
I am the Om in all the Vedas,
The sound in space, the manhood in men.
- 9 I am the good smell of the earth
And the brightness of fire
I am the life in all the living
And the restraint of the austere.
- 10 I am the seed of all the living,
O son of Pritha, I am for ever.
I am the wit of those who understand
I am the grandeur of the exalted

7.11-16

- 11 I am the strength of the strong
Without selfish longing and passion
And when it is comely in creatures
I am desire, best of Bharatas.
Crowning the Desires
- 12 And whatever forms are of goodness
And of force and darkness too,
Know they are also from me
But I am not in them; they are in me.
- 13 Charmed by the forms made of these three strands
The whole world of moving creatures
Fails to recognize me
Who am beyond them, never changing
- 14 For the illusion formed of the strands
Is divine and hard to go beyond,
But those who walk toward me
Cross over this illusion.
- 15 Those who do evil, the lowest of men,
Confused, do not move toward me.
Their knowledge taken by this show
They cling to the nature of demons.
- 16 *4 sorts of seekers*
Four sorts of men worship me—
Doers of good, Arjuna—
Those who suffer, those eager to know,
Those seeking a goal, and the wise.

He wise man

7.17-22

17 And of these, the wise man stands apart
Ever in union, devoted to one
For I am greatly loved by him
And he is loved by me.

18 All these are noble,
But I hold the wise man as my self
For he, with his self united
Turns to me as the one all-highest goal.

19 After many births
The man of wisdom approaches me
Knowing Vasudeva's son is all.
So great a soul is hard to find.

Kindra rapen and form of folk
20 Their wisdom lost through this or that longing
Men turn to other gods
Resorting to one rule or another
In accord with their own natures.

21 | Whatever form any devotee
| Worships with faith
| It is I who impart
| That steady faith to him.

22 | He, endowed with that faith,
| Tries to please that being,
| And thereby gains the things he desires
| Because I myself ordain them.

7.23-28

- 23 But his rewards are transient
Because he is small of mind.
Those who worship gods go to the gods
But my worshippers come to me.
- 24 Fools think of me as revealed
Who am obscure, not knowing
My higher essence
Which is unchanging and supreme.
- 25 Turning in my veil of illusion
I am not shining out clear for all
The deluded world does not know me
The unborn and unchanging.
- 26 I know all beings, Arjuna,
Those that are past, those present,
And those that are yet to be.
But no one at all knows me.
- 27 Through the delusion of the pairs ?
Which rise from wish and hate, Bharata,
All beings are born to confusion,
Conqueror of the Foe.
- 28 But those men of good deeds
Who have finished with evil
Free of the delusion of the pairs,
Worship me with enduring vows.

7.29-30

- 29 Those who, relying on me,
Aim for release from old age and death
Know that divine secret in its wholeness
As it concerns the self and the whole of works.
- 30 And those who, even departing, know me
As that which is concerned in beings
And in the gods and in sacrifice,
Know me with hearts in harmony.

8.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 1 What is that divine secret? What that
Concerned with self? What are works, best of men?
What is that which is concerned with beings?
What is that concerned with the gods?
- 2 Who is that concerned with sacrifice—and how?
Here in this body, Slayer of Madhu?
And how at the hour of departing
Can you be known by the self-controlled?

THE LORD
SAID:

- 3 The divine secret is the imperishable,
The supreme. As it concerns the self
It is called innate nature. The jetting forth
Which gives rise to beings is called works.
- 4 That concerned in beings is perishing nature
And the person is that concerned in gods.
That concerned in sacrifice is I
Here in the body, best of body-wearers.

Remembering Krishna at death

8.5-10

- 5 And at the hour of departing
Whoever, laying aside the body,
Goes forth remembering me
Without doubt will come to my estate.
- 6 Whatever state he is thinking of
When he withdraws from the body
To that state he goes, son of Kunti,
For he has ever grown toward that.
- 7 Therefore fight!
At all times thinking of me.
With mind and understanding fixed on me
You shall, not doubting, come to me.
- 8 He goes to the high divine person
Who meditates thereon,
His thought, trained by the yoke of practice,
Not wandering to other things.
- 9 Who meditates on the seer, the ancient,
The governor, smaller than the atom,
Who has set all things in place, of form
Unthinkable, suncolored past darkness,
- 10 With unshaken thought, departing in harmony,
Through devotion and the strength of discipline,
With the life-breath drawn up between the
eyebrows
He goes to that high divine person.

63

8.11-17

- 11 I will tell you something of that state
Which Veda-knowers call the imperishable.
Desiring it, men lead lives of strict vows
And the austere, freed from passion, enter.
- 12 Closing up all the gates
And locking his thought in the heart
Placing his vital breath in the head,
Staying, supported by discipline
- 13 Saying *Om*, in one syllable
The divine secret, remembering me
As he leaves his body and departs
He goes to the far off goal.
- 14 Partha, I am easy to gain
For the always controlled
Who meditates on me constantly
His thoughts never going elsewhere.
- 15 Having come to me, great-souled men
Do not go back to birth,
The home of pain and the inconstant.
They have gone to perfection beyond.
- 16 The worlds, even the world of Brahma,
Go back to becoming, Arjuna.
But on reaching me, son of Kunti,
There is no return to birth.
- 17 Those who behold the day of Brahma
Lasting a thousand ages of worlds

8.18-23

And night holding a thousand ages
Know what night and day truly are.

- 18 At day's coming, the visible
Rise up out of the unmanifest
And dissolve at the coming of night
Into the same unseen.

- 19 Partha, this same crowd of beings
Arising over and over
Melts, helpless, away at nightfall
And streams forth at the coming of day.

- 20 But beyond that unmanifest
Is another mode of being, ancient,
Unmanifest, who when all beings die
Does not perish.

- 21 This unmanifest is called imperishable.
This, men say, is the highest goal.
Attaining it they do not return.
There is my highest dwelling.

- 22 Partha, this person most high
In whom all beings abide
By whom all this universe is spread
Is won by single devotion.

- 23 Now I will tell you, best of Bharatas,
At what times disciplined men, departing,

65

8.24-28

Go forth never to return
Or to return again.

- 24 Fire, light, day, the bright moon's fortnight,
The six-months' northward course of the sun—
Departing in these, those who know
The Absolute go to the Absolute.
- 25 Smoke, night, the dark of the moon,
The six-months' southward course of the sun,
Going in these to the moon's light
The disciplined man comes back again.
- 26 For these paths of light and dark
Are held eternal for the world.
By one, man goes to non-return
By the other, he returns again.
- 27 If he knows these two roads, Partha,
No disciplined man can be confused.
Therefore, Arjuna, in all seasons
Be harnessed in discipline.
- 28 The disciplined man who knows this goes beyond
The fruits of merit ordained for sacrifice,
For Veda study, austerities, and giving alms
And draws near to the high primeval place.

9.

THE LORD
SAID:

- 1 You are patient, therefore,
I will tell you this deep secret
Of wisdom and knowledge; knowing it
You will be freed of all ill.
- 2 This is royal knowledge, royal
Mystery, supreme purifier,
Plain to see, righteous,
Easy to practice, lasting always.
- 3 Scourge of the Foe, men who have no faith
In this law of virtue
Do not reach me. They turn back
To the path that leads from death to death.
- 4 By me in my form unmanifest,
All this universe is spread.
All beings rest in me
But I do not rest in them.

9.5-10

- 5 Yet beings do not rest in me.
Look on my divine mystery
The supporter of beings is my self.
Causing them, I do not rest in them.
- 6 As constantly abides in the ether
The mighty wind that blows everywhere
In the same way, be certain,
All beings are in me.
- 7 Son of Kunti, all beings
Pass into my own nature
In the destruction of an age.
I hurl them forth again in the new time.
- 8 Resting upon my own nature
I throw forth again and again
All the inhabitants of being,
Helpless, in the power of nature.
- 9 Yet these works do not bind me,
Winner of Wealth.
I am seated as one apart
Indifferent to these actions.
- 10 Nature, with me watching over,
Bears men and beasts and unmoving things.
Son of Kunti, this is the impulse
That makes the world turn round.

9.11-16

- 11 Men without sense look down on me
When I am wrapped in human form
They do not know my high state
Who am the great lord of beings.
- 12 Their hopes are vain, their knowledge vain,
Their actions vain, their insight gone.
They depend on a nature of night-time
Demons and fiends and are deceived.
- 13 But the great of soul, son of Pritha *He unchanging*
Lean on a divine nature
Worship with unwavering thoughts
The beginning of beings, the unchanging.
- 14 They constantly tell of my glory
And struggle with hard resolves.
They pay devoted homage to me
And, always controlled, wait to serve me.
- 15 Others, again, sacrifice to me
With the sacrifice of knowledge
As one and manifold
In many forms and facing every way.
- 16 I am the ritual, I am the sacrifice
I am the libation, I am the herb
I am the prayer, I am the butter
I am the fire, I am the offering.

9.17-22

- 17 I am the father of this world
The mother, the ordainer, the grandsire
That to be known, the purifier, the sound of *Om*,
The Vedas of hymns, chants, and ritual words,
- 18 The way, the bearer, overlord, and witness
The home, the refuge, the friend,
The beginning, remaining, and ending,
The storehouse, the unbroken seed.
- 19 I warm. And I hold back
The rain and pour it forth.
I am immortality and death
What is and what is not, Arjuna.
- 20 Three-Veda men, soma-drinkers, cleansed of fault
Worshipping with sacrifices, seek the way to heaven.
They reach the fair world of the lord of gods
And taste in the sky the gods' own pleasures.
- 21 They enjoy the broad world of heaven
Till their merit is used, then enter the mortal world.
Living thus by the rule of the three
Men desiring desires get what comes and goes.
- 22 But those who wait to serve me, always
Diligent, thinking of none other,
I help them keep what they have
And bring them even more.

9.23-28

- 23 Even the devotees of other gods
Who worship them, their hearts filled with faith
Worship only me, son of Kunti,
Though not by the ancient rule.
- 24 For I am the enjoyer of all sacrifices
And am lord of them as well.
But they do not recognize me
As I truly am. Therefore, they fall.
- 25 Those who vow to the gods, go to the gods
Who vow to the fathers, go to the fathers,
Who worship spirits, go to the spirits,
So those who worship me, come to me.
- 26 If, with love, one stretches out to me
A leaf, a blossom, fruit, or water
I take from that devoted soul
The heart-given offering.
- 27 Whatever you do, whatever you eat
Whatever you give, whatever you offer
Whatever austerities you undergo,
Kunti's son, do as an offering to me.
- 28 Thus you will be released
From the bonds of action, its fair and evil fruits,
Your self trained in the discipline of denial.
Freed, you will move swiftly to me.

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9.29-34

- 29 I am the same in all beings
No one is hateful or dear to me
But those who turn to me with love
Are in me, and I too am in them.
- 30 Even a man steeped in evil
If he turn to me and none other
Must be thought righteous in spite of all
For he has chosen the right way.
- 31 Quickly he becomes righteous of soul
He is moving toward peace forever.
Be sure of this, son of Kunti,
He who reveres me will not be lost.
- 32 For, Partha, if they trust in me,
Even those of low birth,
Women, artisans, servants too,
Even these may reach the path beyond.
- 33 How much more so good brahmans
And wise and pious kings.
This is a passing, sorrow-filled world.
Having come into it, turn to me.
- 34 Live with your mind on me,
Revere me, worship me, bow down to me,
Thus yoking the self in discipline
With me as your goal, you will come to me.

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10.

THE LORD
SAID:

- 1 Once again, mighty-armed,
Listen to my highest counsel.
I tell you, who delight in it
Because I wish for your good.
- 2 The throngs of gods do not know
My origin, nor the great seers
For I am the starting point
Of all the great seers and the gods.
- 3 He who knows me as unborn
Without beginning, the great lord of worlds,
He among mortal men is not bewildered
And is released from all evil.
- 4 Understanding, knowledge, non-delusion
Patience, restraint, truth, serenity,
Courage and fear, joy and sorrow,
Rising up and passing away,

10.5-10

- 5 Harmlessness, equanimity, content,
Austerity, open-handedness
Fame, ill-fame, however various,
These states of beings rise from me alone.
- 6 Long ago came the seven great seers
And the four Manus, fathers of man.
They sprang from my thoughts, and from them
Are born the offspring of the world.
- 7 Who sees the vision of my glory
And understands my steady power
Is joined in harmony
Not to be shaken; there is no doubt.
- 8 I am the source of all.
All things come forth from me.
Knowing this, wise men revere me
Full filled with love.
- 9 With their thoughts on me, their life-breaths given
To me, they teach one another,
And ever speaking of me
They are pleased and content.
- 10 To those who are ever devoted
Who serve me with gladness
I give that harmony of understanding
By which they come to me.

10.11-16

- 11 I feel compassion for those men
And standing in my own true nature
I shatter the dark born of ignorance
With the lantern of knowledge.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 12 You are the supreme Brahman, the highest
Dwelling place, the clearest purifier,
The everlasting holy spirit,
The beginning of gods, the unborn, the lord—
- 13 So all the sages speak of you
And the divine seer Narada,
Asita, Devala, Vyasa,
And you yourself have told me.
- 14 I believe this is truth you tell me,
Long-haired one, for neither the gods
Nor the foes of the gods, Lord,
Know how you appear.
- 15 You know yourself through yourself alone
Highest spirit, source of beings
Lord of beings, god of gods
Master of the world.
- 16 I ask you. Tell me completely
Your divine appearances

10.17-21

Wherein you stand forever
Pervading these worlds.

17 How may I know you of mysterious power
Meditating on you always?
And in what natures, blessed one,
May I imagine you?

18 Tell me more of your mystery
And the forms of your glory,
For, Freer of Men, I am never sated
With the immortal nectar of your words.

THE LORD
SAID:

19 Listen, best of Kurus,
My forms are of heaven.
I will tell you the first of them
Though I extend on without end.

20 I am the self, Thick-haired,
That lies in the heart of all creatures,
I am the beginning
The enduring, and the end of all.

21 Of the sons of space, I am Vishnu
Of heavenly lights, I am the sun
I am chief among gods of storm
I am the moon shining among stars.

10.22-27

- 22 Of Vedas, I am the book of chants
Of gods, I am Indra, lord of the air
I am the mind among the senses
I am awareness in living things.
- 23 Of the terrible gods, I am Shiva
Of sprites and demons I am lord of wealth
Among the bright ones I am lord of fire
I am the mountain where the gods abide.
- 24 Son of Pritha, know me best of priests,
Brihaspati, priest of the gods
I am god of war among battle lords
I am Ocean among pools of water.
- 25 I am Bhrigu among the great sages
Of words, the single sacred Om
In worship I am the low-voiced prayer
And Himalaya among mountains.
- 26 Of all trees, the holy fig tree
Narada among the holy sages
Of divine players, Chitra-ratha
Kapila of pure and perfect seers.
- 27 Know me Indra's steed among horses
Sprung from the nectar of the sea,
His prince of elephants, Airavata.
Among men, I am the king.

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10.28-33

- 28 Of weapons, I am the thunderbolt
Of cows, I am the Cow-of-wishes
Begetting, I am god of love
I am Vasuki, king of serpents.
- 29 I am king of the serpent demons
Lord of the great beasts of the sea
Ruler of the spirits of the fathers.
I am Yama, god of death, the chief subduer.
- 30 I am Prahlada, prince of Titans,
I am time itself among the hours
I am king of the beasts of the forest
I am Lord of the Sky, the bird of Vishnu.
- 31 Of purifiers, I am the wind,
Rama among bearers of weapons
I am the sea-monster among fishes
Ganges among the rivers.
- 32 I am the beginning and the end
And the middle of all creations
I am the knowledge of the soul.
I am the discourse of those who speak.
- 33 Arjuna, I am the letter A
And the coupling of compounds.
I am time inexhaustible
And the creator, facing everywhere.

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10.34-39

- 34 I am death who harries all
The rising up of what will be
Of women I am Fame, Fortune, Speech
Memory, Wisdom, Firmness, Patience.
- 35 Of chants, I am Brihat the great chant
Of meters, the gayatri
Of months, first, when the moon enters the Deer,
Of seasons, the flower-abounding.
- 36 I am the gambling of the cheat
The sharp edge of the brilliant.
I am victory. I am effort.
I am courage to the stout-hearted.
- 37 Among the Vrishnis I am Krishna
I am Arjuna of the Pandavas
I am Vyasa among hermits
The poet Ushanas among the wise.
- 38 I am the rod of the master
The statecraft of those who seek conquest
I am the silence of secret things
The knowledge of them that know.
- 39 And whatever is the seed of all beings
That I am, Arjuna.
No creature that moves or does not move
Could exist without me.

Nothing exists without Krishna

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10.40-42

- 40 My divine appearances
Are without end, Scorcher of the Foe,
I have declared but a few
Of the multitude of my glories.
- 41 Whatever creature comes forth in glory
In vigor and in beauty
Know that that being has sprung
From but a fragment of my splendor.
- 42 Or rather—for what to you
Is such a multitude of knowing, Arjuna?—
I stand and hold up this universe
With a single portion of myself.

11.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 1 Out of grace to me
You have told of the highest secret
That which concerns the self. And by your telling
My darkness is cleared away.
- 2 You with eyes like the petal of the lotus
Have told me of the rising up
And the vanishing of creatures
And of your great self which will last forever.
- 3 What you have called yourself, you are,
Supreme Lord. Greatest spirit,
I wish to behold your outward form
In majesty as the mighty god.
- 4 Master, if you believe
That I may behold you thus
Then, god of mysteries,
Show me your self everlasting.

11.5-10

THE LORD

SAID:

- 5 Son of Pritha, behold
The variousness of my forms,
Hundreds, more, thousands of them, marvels,
Of different shapes and colors
- 6 Son of Bharata, behold the gods
Those who live in celestial light, or in
Nature, storm gods, harbingers of dawn.
Look at wonders never seen before.
- 7 Today behold the whole world
All things that move or do not move
And whatever else you wish to see.
They stand as one within my body.
- 8 But you cannot see me
With your own eye alone.
I give you the eye of a god.
Behold my mystery as the lord.

SAN JAYA

SAID:

- 9 Then, O King, when he had spoken thus
Hari, the great lord of mystery
Revealed to the son of Pritha
His supreme form as god.
- 10 With a multitude of mouths and eyes
Displaying wonders

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11.11-16

Adorned with the very heavens
With divine weapons raised as for battle.

11 Crowned with the skies, in ethereal raiment
Scented with divine perfumes and balms
Made of all wonders was this limitless god,
And his face looked in all directions.

12 If a thousand suns
Should at once blaze up in the sky
The light of that mighty soul
Would equal all their brightness.

13 So the son of Pandu beheld
The world with its myriad divisions
Standing there together as one
In the body of the god of gods.

14 Then amazement filled the Winner of Wealth
The hair of his body stood on end
He bowed his head before the god
And clasped his hands and spoke.

ARJUNA
SAID:

15 Lord, I see in your body all gods
And the varied hosts of beings
Lord Brahma seated on the lotus throne
And all the sages and celestial serpents

16 Endless in form! I see you everywhere
Myriad of arms, eyes, bellies, mouths,

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11.17-21

Without end, without center, without
Beginning. I behold you, All-form, All-god,

- 17 Bearing the crown, the mace, and the disk,
A mass of brightness, ablaze everywhere.
I behold you, hard to look upon,
In a glory of flame and sun, immeasurable.
- 18 You are the imperishable, the farthest to be known
Solid, the last resting-place of all,
Unchanging, the eternal keeper of right.
I deem you the ancient of spirits
- 19 Without beginning, middle, or end, endless in
strength
With innumerable arms, your eyes the moon and
sun.
I behold your face a blazing fire
Whose radiance warms the whole universe.
- 20 For the quarters of heaven and all the space
Between heaven and earth are filled with you
And seeing your form of wonder and terrible
strength
O mighty soul, the three worlds reel.
- 21 Yonder into you throngs of gods are entering,
Some afraid, saluting with hands together.
Crying *Joy!* hosts of great seers and perfected beings
Hail you with thick-blooming praises.

11.22-27

- 22 The gods of storm, light, nature, prayer,
The All-gods, gods of dawn and wind, household
gods,
Hosts of heavenly singers, sprites, demons, perfected
ones,
They look at you and are all amazed.
- 23 Seeing your mighty form with many mouths and
eyes
O mighty-armed, with many arms, thighs, feet
With many bellies and many terrible tusks
The worlds quake with fear and I do too.
- 24 You reach the sky, blazing with many colors,
With gaping mouths and broad eyes flaming.
Seeing you my soul shakes within me
And I can find no steadiness or peace.
- 25 I see your mouths, terrible with tusks
Resembling the fire of Time the destroyer.
I find no shelter. I lose north and south.
Have mercy, lord of gods, in whom the world lives.
- 26 There into you all Dhritā-rāshtra's sons
Along with throngs of earthly kings,
Bhishma, Drona, and the son of the charioteer,
Together with our own chief warriors
- 27 Hasty, they enter your mouths
Dreadful with terrible fangs.

11.28-32

Some of them I see: their heads are crushed
And they stick in the gaps between your teeth.

28 As the many roaring torrents of rivers
Rush toward the gathering place of waters,
So do those heroes from man's world
Go into your burning jaws.

29 As moths impetuously hasten
Into the bright fire of their destruction
So, hastening to be destroyed, the worlds
Enter the conflagration of your mouths.

30 You lick up whole worlds in your fiery jaws
And devour them completely.
Your dreadful rays fill the whole universe,
Vishnu, and scorch it with their brightness.

31 Tell me, you of awful form, who are you?
Glory be to you, highest of gods, have mercy.
I wish to know you, who have been from the
beginning,
For I do not know what you have set out to do.

THE LORD
SAID:

32 I am time, destroyer of worlds, grown old
Setting out to gather in the worlds.
These warriors drawn up, facing the arrows,
Even without you, they shall all cease to be.

Be the means

11.33-38

- 33 Therefore, stand up. Seize honor.
Conquer your foes. Enjoy the rich kingdom.
They were already killed by me long ago.
Be but the means, left-handed archer.
- 34 Drona and Bhishma and Jayadratha
Karna too and the other heroes
Are slain by me. Strike them down. Do not falter.
Fight! You will beat your rivals in battle.

SANJAYA
SAID:

- 35 When he heard these words of Keshava
The crowned one, trembling, joined his hands.
Bowing low, he spoke once more to Krishna
As stammering in fear he did him homage.
- 36 It is proper, Lord, that praising you
The world exults and is tinged with your colors.
Demons, afraid, flee to all quarters
And throngs of perfect souls do homage.
- 37 And why should they not revere you, Great-souled?
Older than Brahman, you are the first creator.
Endless, lord of gods, the world's home,
You are eternal, what is and is not, and beyond.
- 38 You are the primal god, the ancient person
In you all things come down to rest,
Knower and-known, you are the highest power
From you comes all, Unending Form.

11.39-44

- 39 God of wind, moon, fire, all-holding sky
Lord of death, Maker, Father of all
Glory, glory to you a thousandfold
And to you be glory, glory still.
- 40 Glory to you, before and after,
And on all sides, All, glory to you.
You of endless strength, unmeasured in power
You pervade all things. You are all, therefore.
- 41 What I said roughly, thinking you comrade
Saying "Krishna, son of Yadu, O friend,"
In sport or by way of affection
Not knowing this your greatness
- 42 If I joked and tormented you
While we played or ate or sat resting
By ourselves or with the others, O Unshaken,
Unbounded, forgive me.
- 43 Father of all that moves and is still,
We honor you, the greatest worthy.
In the three worlds there is none like you.
Supreme Power, who could be more?
- 44 Therefore I bow and bend down before you.
Be gracious, lord to be praised.
As father to son, friend to friend,
Lover to loved, be gentle, O God.

11.45-50

- 45 Seeing what was never seen before
I am shaken. My heart reels in fear.
O Lord, show me your other form
Have mercy, lord of gods, the world's home.
- 46 Holding the crown, the mace, and the disk
Show yourself as you were before
Put on your four-armed shape, O thousand-armed
Whose form embodies all.

THE LORD
SAID:

- 47 By my grace and through my mystery
Arjuna, you have seen my high form
Fire-bright, encircling all, from the first, without end.
You alone have looked on this.
- 48 Not by the Vedas, or sacrifice
Or study, gifts, rites, or grim rigor
Can I be seen thus in man's world
Save by you, hero of the Kurus.
- 49 Do not be afraid or bewildered
Seeing me in a guise so terrible.
Throw off your fear, be glad, behold
Before your eyes my old form again.

SANJAYA
SAID:

- 50 Thus speaking, the son of Vasudeva
Revealed again his own body

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11.51-55

And calmed Arjuna in his fear.
The Great One's countenance was gentle.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 51 Having seen this human form of yours
Benign, Freer of Men,
I have become one with my own heart
And returned to my own nature.

THE LORD
SAID:

- 52 Hard to look upon
Is this form of mine which you have seen.
Even the gods constantly
Long to behold that vision.

- 53 Not by the Vedas or sacrifice
Or austerity or alms-giving
Can I be seen in such form
As you have beheld me

- 54 But by devotion to me and no other
May that form of mine be known
And seen in its essence
And entered into, Arjuna.

- 55 Who does my work and sets me above all
And worships me without desire
And has no hate for any being
He comes to me, son of Pandu.

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12.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 1 Some, thus devoted to you
And always disciplined, revere you.
Some worship the eternal unseen.
Which of these best finds the way?

THE LORD
SAID:

- 2 Those who fix their minds on me
Who wait on me, always devoted,
Who find in me their supreme faith
Those I think are most in harmony.
- 3 But those who worship the unchanging
The unexplainable and unseen
Which goes everywhere, unthinkable,
Which stands above and holds and does not move
- 4 Who keep in bounds the throngs of the senses
Looking equally on all

12.5-10

Set thy heart on Krishna
alone

Pleased with the good of all beings
Those men also come to me.

5 Their trouble is greater
If they set their hearts on the unseen.
Hard to attain is the invisible
For those who are clothed in flesh.

6 But those who throw all works upon me
For whom I am the highest
Who wait upon me and think of me
With devotion turned to no other

7 For them I am the deliverer
Who, when they set their thoughts on me,
Soon lifts them up out of that ocean
In which they go from one death to another.

8 Set your heart on me alone
Let your thoughts abide in me
You will rest in me henceforward.
Son of Pritha, there can be no doubt.

9 But if you cannot hold your thoughts
Steadfast on me, Winner of Wealth,
Then try the way of constant practice
And hope to reach me thus.

10 If you are not suited for practice
Then be devoted to my work.

12.11-16

Doing work for my sake
You will reach perfection.

11 But if even this you cannot do
Take refuge in my way.
Act with the self subdued
And renounce the fruit of all action.

12 For knowing is better than practice *Renounce*
Meditation, better than knowing *reward*
Renouncing, more than meditation.
Renounce reward—at once there is peace.

13 Despising no other being
A friend and full of pity
Unselfish, not acting through ego
Patient, the same in good times and bad

14 That disciplined man is always pleased. *Order soul*
He orders his soul, is firm of purpose
His mind and understanding rise toward me.
He is devoted and dear to me.

15 No man is afraid of him
And he fears no one in the world.
He has cast off anger and rash joy
With fear and regret. He is dear to me.

16 Pure as light, strong and serene
Expecting nothing, staying apart

12.17-20

Giving up even all beginnings,
He is devoted and dear to me.

- 17 He does not rise up for joy or hate
He does not burn with grief or desire
He gives up fortune and the lack of it.
Devoted to me, he is dear to me.
- 18 He treats enemy and friend alike
Is the same in honor and disgrace
The same in heat and cold, good and bad.
He is bound only to letting go.
- 19 That man is silent. He holds praise
Balanced with blame. He is steady of mind.
He has no home. Content with anything,
Full of devotion, he is dear to me.
- 20 I have declared this immortal law.
Those who attend to it
Those who revere me and give their hearts
Those devoted ones are greatly loved by me.

13.

THE LORD
SAID:

- 1 Son of Kunti, those who know it say
This body is called the field
And he who knows it
Is called the knower of the field.
- 2 And know me the knower of the field
In all fields, son of Bharata.
To know the field and the knower
I call this knowledge indeed.
- 3 Let me just tell you
What he is and what are his powers
What the field is and how it appears
Where it comes from and how it changes.
- 4 Wise men have declared this many times
In various hymns of different kinds,
In verse of pithy words on Brahman
Settled and well-founded.

13.5-10

- 5 The great elements, the sense of self,
The understanding, the unmanifest
The ten senses and the one
And the five fields where the senses range
- 6 Desire and dislike, pain and pleasure
Combination, thought, firmness—
Briefly told, these are the field
With its motions and changes.
- 7 To be without pride or deceit
Doing no harm, patient and honest
Serving a spiritual leader, pure
Standing firm, keeping the self controlled,
- 8 Not liking the things of the senses
And not thinking "I"
Seeing the evils in birth and death
And in old age, sickness, and sorrow
- 9 To stay aloof, not trying to hold
Sons, wife, house and the like
Steady, even in mind
Whatever befalls, wished for or not
- 10 To follow no way but mine
With unwandering trust
Looking for lonely places
Not fond of crowds sitting together

13.11-16

- 11 Constantly intent on knowing the self
To see the aim of learning truth—
All this is called knowledge.
To know otherwise is not to know.
- 12 I will tell what should be known—
Who knows it is freed from death.
Called the highest Brahman, without beginning,
It neither is nor is not.
- 13 Hands and feet everywhere
Eyes, heads, mouths everywhere
Ears everywhere in the world,
It abides, enveloping all.
- 14 It appears as the qualities of all the senses
Yet is free of all senses
Apart, and yet bearing all
Without qualities, but experiencing them.
- 15 It is without and within beings
Unmoved, yet it moves indeed.
It is too subtle to be seen
It stays far away and is near.
- 16 Seeming divided among beings
It remains undivided.
As being-bearer it should be known
And lord, source, and swallower.

13.17–22

- 17 It is the light even of lights
Which shines beyond darkness,
Knowledge, the knowable, what should be known.
It is set in the heart of all.
- 18 So the field has been briefly told
And knowledge and the end of knowledge.
My worshipper, knowing these,
Will come to my estate.
- 19 Know that nature and person
Are both without beginning.
The strands of matter and their changes
Rise up out of nature.
- 20 Nature causes the effect
And the instrument and the agent
But the feeling of pleasure and pain—
That is caused by the person.
- 21 For the person, who dwells in nature
Enjoys the strands born of nature.
His clinging to the strands
Causes rebirth in good or evil wombs.
- 22 In this body the highest person
Is declared to be
Beholder and consentor, the bearer
Enjoyer, great lord, and highest self.

13.23–28

- 23 Whoever so knows the person
And nature and the strands
Whatever his state of being
He is not born again.
- 24 Some by meditation
Themselves see the self in the self
Others by the way of knowledge
And others by the way of works.
- 25 But some, not thus knowing,
Hearing from others, revere it
And they too cross beyond death
Possessed by what they hear.
- 26 So long as any creature comes forth
Alive or unmoving
It springs from the field and the knower
Yoked together, best of Bharatas.
- 27 Lo, the high Lord
In all beings abides the same.
Though they are lost, he does not pass away.
Who sees him thus, sees true.
- 28 And, seeing everywhere
The same lord dwelling,
He would not harm that self by the self
And so he walks the highest way.

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13.29-34

- 29 Who sees how things done
Are done by nature alone
And the self not acting—
Who sees that, sees true.
- 30 When he sees how the lives of beings
Though various remain in one
And radiate forth from that alone
Then he reaches Brahman.
- 31 Without beginning, free from matter,
This highest self, undecaying,
Even dwelling in the body
Does not act and is not stained.
- 32 Just as space goes everywhere
And by its subtleness is never soiled
So set in the body everywhere
The self is never soiled.
- 33 As the sun alone lights up
This whole world, son of Bharata
So the owner of the field
Illumines the field entire.
- 34 Those who with the eye of wisdom
See the difference between field and knower
And how beings are freed out of nature
They go to the beyond.

14.

THE LORD
SAID:

- 1 Further I will tell the highest knowledge,
The utmost wisdom. Knowing it
All the saints from this world
Have gone to the bliss beyond.
- 2 Leaning on this knowledge
They come to be of my nature.
They do not rise at the birth of a world
They do not reel at its destruction.
- 3 For me great Brahman is a womb
Wherein I place the seed.
Son of Bharata, from that
All creatures are born.
- 4 Son of Kunti, whatever forms
Rise up in any womb
Great Brahman is the womb.
I am seed-giver, father.

14.5-10

- 5 Goodness, passion, darkness
The strands that grow out of nature,
O great-armed one, these bind
In the body the changeless spirit.
- 6 Of these goodness, being pure
Is bright and healthy.
It binds by holding to joy
And to knowledge, blameless one. *Passion*
- 7 Know that passion, composed of desire
Springs from attachment and craving
Son of Kunti, it binds the embodied
Through holding to actions.
- 8 Know that darkness, ignorance-born,
Is the deluder of all the embodied.
Son of Bharata, it binds
By carelessness, sloth, and sleep.
- 9 Goodness binds to happiness
Passion, to action, son of Bharata,
But darkness covers wisdom
And binds to heedlessness.
- 10 Goodness may rise and prevail
Over passion and darkness
Or passion, over goodness and darkness.
Or darkness, over goodness and passion.

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Passion

14.11-16

- 11 When the light that is knowledge
Shows in all the doors of the body
Then it may be known
That goodness is in power.
- 12 Greed, motion, unrest
The undertaking of works, craving,
These spring up, bull of Bharatas
When passion is in power.
- 13 Dullness and inaction
Neglect, even delusion,
These arise, son of Kuru
When darkness is in power.
- 14 If the body-wearer goes to death
While goodness prevails
He attains the clear worlds
Of those who know the highest.
- 15 If he goes to death in passion
He is born to those bound in doing.
If he dies in the rule of darkness
He is born in the womb of a fool.
Fruit of passion is pain
- 16 They say that of work righteously done
The fruit is pure and of goodness
But the fruit of passion is pain
The fruit of darkness is ignorance.

14.17-22

- 17 Wisdom grows out of goodness
And greed out of passion
And, rising up out of darkness,
Carelessness, error, and ignorance.
- 18 Those who dwell in goodness go on high
Men of passion remain in the midst
But those who live in the low strand,
Men of darkness, they go below.
- 19 When the beholder sees
No other doer than the strands
And knows that which is above the strands
He reaches my being.
- 20 The embodied one, escaping beyond
The three strands that give rise to the body
Freed from birth, death, old age, and sorrow
Attains immortality.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 21 O Lord, what marks does he bear
Who has transcended the strands?
What is his way of doing?
How does he get beyond the strands?

THE LORD
SAID:

- 22 Son of Pandu, when they appear,
Brightness, action, delusion,

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14.23-27

He does not despise them
Nor crave when they are gone.

23 Seated far off, indifferent,
Not driven here and there by the strands
He thinks "it is only the strands turning"
And remains firm and does not move.

24 He lives in himself. As one to him
Are the good and the bad, clods, stones, gold,
What is loved and not loved. He is wise.
Alike are blame of himself and praise.

25 The same in honor and disgrace
The same to parties of friends and foes
Giving up all beginnings,
He is called a crosser of the strands.

26 And whoever without wandering
In the yoke of devotion stays with me
He crosses beyond those strands
And is fit to become Brahman.

27 For I am the standing place of Brahman
The immortal and unchanging,
Of the right, ever new,
And of the single joy.

15.

THE LORD
SAID:

- 1 They tell of a fig-tree, eternal
With roots on high, its branches below.
Its leaves are the Veda hymns
And who knows it, knows the Vedas.
- 2 Above and below its branches spread
Fed by the strands, its twigs the things of the senses
And into the world of men below
Stretch the roots which bind them to action.
- 3 Here on earth its form cannot be seen
Nor its start or end or growing place.
But cutting down this well-rooted tree
With the hard axe of dispassion
- 4 A man must hunt out that track
On which, once gone, no being returns.
"I take refuge in that first person
Which of old hurled forth creation."

15.5-10

- 5 Without pride or delusion, the fault of attachment
crushed
Intent on what pertains to self, desires turned away
Freed of the pairs known as pleasure and pain
Men of clear vision reach that changeless place.
- 6 That place is not lit by the sun
Or the moon or fire
It is my high abode.
Who reaches it does not return.
- 7 A part of me becomes a living self
Eternal, in a world of living things
Draws to itself from out of nature
The five senses and the mind.
- 8 When this lord puts on a body
Or when he departs from it
He goes, taking them along
As the wind takes odors from their home.
- 9 Hearing, sight, touch
Taste, too, and smell.
Ruling over these and the mind
He roves over the things of the senses.
- 10 The deluded do not see
When he goes away or stays
Or enjoys, linked to the strands of nature.
They see, whose eye is knowledge.

15.11–16

- 11 The men of discipline who strive
Find him dwelling in themselves.
But the unperfected, even striving,
Fools, they cannot see him.
- 12 The brilliance of the sun
That lights the whole world
And of the moon and of fire—
Know that their brightness is from me.
- 13 And entering the earth,
By my might I support all beings.
Becoming the watery moon
I nourish all plants.
- 14 Becoming the fire of life
I dwell in the bodies of the living;
Joined with the upward and downward breaths,
I cook the four kinds of food.
- 15 I have gone into the hearts of all.
From me come memory, knowledge, reasoning.
I am what is to be known by all the Vedas,
Author of the Vedas' End and Veda-knower.
- 16 These two persons are here in the world
The imperishable and that which perishes
That which dies is all that came to be.
The imperishable is called sublime.

15.17-20

- 17 But there is another, the highest person
Called the supreme self.
He enters the three worlds and bears them
He is the lord eternal.
- 18 Because I transcend what perishes
And am beyond what does not perish,
In the world and in the Vedas
I am proclaimed the supreme person.
- 19 The man who without illusion,
Knows me thus as the supreme person
Knows all, and with his whole being
Worships me, son of Bharata.
- 20 So this most secret doctrine
Has been told by me, blameless one.
Who understands it, truly understands
And has done what he must do.

16.

THE LORD
SAID:

- 1 Fearless and pure in heart
Constant in the way of knowledge
Generous, self-controlled, reverent
Reading the holy word, austere, upright
- 2 Doing no harm, truthful, without anger
Willing to lose, at peace, not speaking ill,
With sympathy for creatures, free of greed
Gentle, modest, without wavering
- 3 Vigorous, patient, enduring, pure
Without malice and not over-proud—
Son of Bharata, such is the man
Who is born for a god-like place.
- 4 Cunning, scorn, pride
Ignorance, roughness of speech
And anger are his, son of Pritha
Who is born to an ungodly state.

16.5-10

- 5 The heavenly nature will be free
The ungodly finds bondage.
Do not grieve, son of Pandu.
You are born to a heavenly place.
- 6 In this world are two streams of beings
The divine and the demonic
Much has been said of those like gods.
Now hear me speak of the demons.
- 7 Demonic men do not understand
Either acting or turning away.
In them there is no purity
Or even good conduct or truth.
- 8 They say the world is without reality
Without foundation, without a lord,
Not made by one thing following another
But moved only by desire.
- 9 Lost souls with small understanding,
They hold fast to this view.
They rise up as enemies
To spoil the world by their brutal deeds.
- 10 Filled with deceit, arrogance, pride
They follow desire, never appeased.
In their delusion they clutch at false views
And they act for the wrong reasons.



16.11-16

- 11 Concerned with innumerable cares
Which end only with death
Their highest aim to gratify desire
Convinced that this is all.
- 12 Following desire and wrath
They are caught in a hundred snares of hope.
They try to gain wealth in unjust ways
So they may indulge their lusts.
- 13 "Today I have got this,
And this thing close to my heart
I will reach. This is mine.
And I will get this other prize too.
- 14 "I have destroyed that enemy
And I will ruin others as well.
I am a lord. I enjoy good things.
I have success, happiness, power.
- 15 "I am rich and well born.
Can there be anyone else like me?
I will worship and give and enjoy life."
So they talk, beguiled by ignorance.
- 16 Confused by many thoughts
Tangled in the net of delusion
Stubborn in getting what they desire
They go down to a filthy hell.

16.17-22

- 17 Puffed up, honoring themselves
Full of pride and conceit about wealth
They offer sacrifice in name alone
As hypocrites, not keeping the rule.
- 18 Wild with pride, they use force and anger.
They crave pleasure and think of themselves.
Spiteful, they hate me in their bodies
And in the bodies of others too.
- 19 I throw these lowest of men,
Bloody, full of hate, vile,
Back to demonic wombs
In an endless round of lives.
- 20 Having entered a demonic womb
Birth after birth, bewildered,
Never attaining me, son of Kunti
They go the lowest way.
- 21 Three-fold are the gates of this hell
That ruin the self—
Desire, wrath, greed—
Therefore, avoid these three.
- 22 When, freed from the three doors of darkness
A man does what is best for his soul
Then, son of Kunti,
He goes the highest way.

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16.23-24

- 23 But if he throws off the holy law
And lives by his own quick desire
He will not gain perfection
Or happiness or the highest way.
- 24 Therefore, let the law be your guide
Which tells what must be done or let go.
Knowing the teachings of the sacred law
You should do your work in this world.

17.

ARJUNA
SAID:

Faith of men

- 1 But those who, full of faith, worship
Neglecting the scriptural rules
How do they stand, Krishna?
In goodness, passion, or darkness?

THE LORD
SAID:

- 2 The faith of men is of three kinds,
It springs from their own natures—
Good, passionate, or dull.
Hear how it is.
- 3 The faith of every man
Is in tune with his true being
A man is made of his faith
What his faith is, so is he.
- 4 Men of goodness worship the shining gods,
Men of passion, gods of wealth and power.
The others, the people of darkness
Worship ghosts and crowds of spirits.

Food

17.5-10

- 5 Men who punish themselves
With cruel rigors not found in the law
Tied to false show and self-conceit
Driven by the force of desire and passion
- 6 The fools, they starve the elements
That cluster in their bodies
And me as well. I there in the flesh!
Know that their ways are ungodly.
- 7 Then too the kinds of food
That appeal to men are threefold
As their worship, austerities, and gifts.
Listen to the difference between them—
- 8 Foods which add to life and vigor
To strength, health, satisfaction, and cheer,
Juicy, smooth, firm, they please the heart.
Such are chosen by men of goodness.
- 9 Sharp, sour, salty, exceedingly hot
Pungent, dry, burning—
Men of passion like foods such as these.
They cause heaviness, pain, and sickness.
- 10 Stale food which has lost its flavor
Which has stood too long and smells bad
Left over, not fit for offering
That is enjoyed by men of darkness.

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17.11-16

- 11 Worship without hope of reward
Only thinking *worship must be*
All done by precept, the mind absorbed—
So worship men of goodness.
- 12 But worship for the sake of the fruit
Or offered merely for show—
Best of Bharatas, know that worship
Rises from a passionate nature.
- 13 Worship forsaking the proper rites
Without food given out or sacred words
Or gifts to the priest, empty of faith
They say is of darkness.
- 14 To honor the gods and brahmins,
Teachers, the wise. To be clean,
Upright, chaste, to do no harm—
Such is austerity of the body.
- 15 To use words that set others at ease
Wholesome, pleasant, and true
To read aloud the sacred books—
This is austerity of speech.
- 16 Calmness of mind, gentleness
Silence, self-restraint
And purity of thought, these
Compose austerity of mind.

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6.17.17

17.17-22

- 17 This threefold austerity
Held to with highest faith by men
Men harmonious, not seeking gain
They say is of goodness.
- 18 Austerity practiced for show
For favor, respect, and high regard
Here in the world, this is of passion.
It falters and does not last.
- 19 But penances done for strange reasons
Which torture the self
Or aim to destroy another
Are said to be of darkness.
- 20 When one gives without hope of return
To a worthy man at the right place and time
Thinking only *one must give*
That gift is of goodness.
- 21 But when one gives for a return
Or has a special aim in view
Or is deeply troubled by giving
His gift is deemed to be of passion.
- 22 And given at the wrong place and time
To the wrong person
Not with kindness but with contempt
That gift is given in darkness.

17.23-28

- 23 *Om, Tat, Sat:* Thus is proclaimed
The threefold name of Brahman.
By this long ago were ordained
Brahmans, Vedas, and sacrifice.
- 24 Therefore, always saying *Om*
The expounders of Brahman
Begin sacrifice, penance, and giving
In accord with sacred law.
- 25 And saying *Tat*, not seeking reward
Men who hope for final liberty
Do acts of sacrifice and penance
And give various kinds of gifts.
- 26 Saying *Sat*, this is used
To mean *the real* and *the good*.
So too the word *sat* is used
For an action worth praise.
- 27 And to remain steady in giving
In worship and austerity
Is called *sat*. And *sat* is the act also
Which is done for the sake of the lord.
- 28 Whatever offering or gift is made
Whatever penance or act is done
Without faith it is called *asat*.
It is nothing in this world or the next.

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18.

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 1 Of renouncing, Lord of the Senses
And of abandonment, great-armed,
I would learn the truth
And their difference, Slayer of Keshin.

THE LORD
SAID:

- 2 Laying down works done out of desire
The wise call renouncing.
Giving up all results of action
The seers call abandonment.
- 3 Some wise men say action is tainted
It should all be abandoned.
Others say sacrifice, giving, and penance
Are works that should not be given up.
- 4 Now hear my sure thought
On abandonment, best of Bharatas
For abandonment, tiger of men
Is three-fold, so it is said.

18.5-11

- 5 Works of sacrifice, giving, and penance
Should not be set aside, but done.
Through sacrifice, austerities, giving
Men who understand are made pure.
- 6 But even these works must be done
Giving up clinging desire
And thoughts of reward. Son of Pritha
This is my sure, high judgment.
- 7 To renounce a work that should be done
Is not fitting.
To cast it aside through illusion
Is said to stem from darkness.
- 8 When a man cries *It is too hard!*
And for fear of bodily toil
Gives up work, he does it from passion.
He earns nothing by such renouncing.
- 9 But if he says *This work must be done!*
And does whatever is required
Giving up desire and reward
His abandonment comes from goodness.
- 10 When the wise man, with all doubt gone
Whose nature is goodness, renounces
He does not hate unpleasant work
Or cling to work that is pleasant
- 11 For man caught in flesh
Cannot give up work altogether

18.12-17

But giving up the hope of reward
He becomes a true renouncer.

- 12 To the man who fails to give up all
Threefold come the fruits of work hereafter—
Evil, good, and a mixture of both—
But not to the true renouncer.

- 13 Great-armed, the Sankhya teaching
Holds that all action whatsoever
Comes about through five causes.
Learn these from me:

- 14 The seat of action and the agent
The different kinds of instruments
And motions of various sorts
And fate, for the fifth of them.

- 15 Whatever work a man undertakes
With his body, voice, or mind
Whether it is right or wrong
These five are its causes.

- 16 This being so, whoever perceives
The self, exclusive, as the agent,
Untrained in understanding,
That fool does not see at all.

- 17 But he who is without thought of "I,"
Whose understanding is pure

18.18-23

Even though he should slay whole worlds
He does not slay, nor is he bound.

- 18 Knowledge, what is to be known, the knower
Form the threefold impellent to action.
Instrument, action, and agent
Form the threefold summary of action.
- 19 Knowledge, action, and agent
Are of three kinds, distinguished by the strands—
So says the theory of strands.
In what way, hear too about these.
- 20 When one sees in all beings
One eternal nature
The undivided in the various
Know that his knowledge is of goodness.
- 21 But when one beholds in all beings
Seeing their variousness
Separate natures of different kinds
Know that his knowledge comes from passion.
- 22 When a man clings to one small subject
Without reason, as if it were all
Without trying to find the real
His knowledge comes from darkness.
- 23 Work done according to custom
Unselfishly, without hope of gain

18.24-29

Not loathing it or liking it too much
Is said to come from goodness.

24 But the act to gratify desire
Performed with mighty effort
By one always conscious of himself
Is said to come from passion.

25 Work foolishly begun
Heedless of obstacles, harm, and loss
And the load possible for a man
Is said to come from darkness.

26 The doer whose nature is called good
Is steady, does not speak of himself
Is strong of will and free of desire
Not changed by success or failure.

27 Stained by fury, working for reward
Greedy and doing harm to others
Either exulting or deeply grieved
Such a doer is famed for passion.

28 But the doer of darkness
Is without control, coarse, stubborn,
False, dishonest, and lazy.
He puts things off and is despondent.

29 Now hear me explain, Winner of Wealth
How firmness and understanding

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18.30-35

Are divided threefold by the strands
Once more according to their natures.

- 30 That understanding is of goodness
Which knows when to begin and let go
What should be done and not done, what fear is
And courage, what bondage is and freedom.
- 31 Understanding wherein right and wrong
Are wrongly judged, which cannot tell
What should be done and what not done
Son of Pritha, is of passion.
- 32 The understanding, hidden in gloom
That calls the right, the wrong,
That sees all things opposed to what they are
Son of Pritha, it is of darkness.
- 33 The firmness by which a man controls
The doings of the mind and senses
And the life's breath, fixed in harmony
That firmness, Partha, is of goodness.
- 34 But that firmness by which one holds fast
To duty, pleasure, and wealth
Out of desire for the fruit of all
That firmness, Partha, is of passion.
- 35 The steadiness with which a fool
Clings to his sleep, his sorrows, his fears,

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18.36-41

Intoxication or despair,
That firmness, Partha, is of darkness.

- 36 Bull of Bharatas, now hear from me
The three kinds of happiness:
That which one enjoys after effort
Reaching the end of sorrow
- 37 Which at first seems like poison
But which ripens into nectar.
That is the joy of goodness. It springs
From the brightness of self-understanding.
- 38 But from the bond of sense to sense-world
Springing, that which at first was nectar
Ripens at last to poison.
Such, they say, is the joy of passion.
- 39 The joy that from beginning to end
Rises from sleep, sloth, and heedlessness
Which bewilders the self,
That is said to come from darkness.
- 40 There is no being in the broad earth
Or in heaven among the gods
Who is free of the three strands
That spring out of nature.
- 41 The works of all, Scourge of the Foe,
Whether they are priests or warriors

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18.42-47

Farmers, merchants, or servants
Rise from the strands of their own natures.

42 To have calm, self-command, austerity,
Purity, patience, and uprightness,
Knowledge, wisdom, and faith
Are works of brahmans, born in their natures.

43 To have valor, splendor, toughness, skill
To stand firm in battle
To give large gifts and to govern
Are by nature the work of a warrior.

44 Tilling the soil, raising cattle, trade
Are natural to farmers and merchants,
While work which helps others
Is the work of servants, through nature.

45 Devoted to his own proper work
A man gains fulfillment.
How, rejoicing in his work
He reaches this perfection, now hear.

46 By honoring with his own work
Him from whom beings came
Who stretched forth all this universe
A man reaches perfection.

47 Better his own duty, imperfect,
Than another's task well done.

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18.48-53

He brings on himself no stain
Who works in accord with his nature.

48 Let no man withdraw from the work
To which he is born though it be faulty
For all things begun are dimmed by faults
Son of Kunti, as smoke hides fire.

49 Self-conquered, his longing departed
His mind is free everywhere.
By renouncing, he gains the high state
Which transcends all earthly action.

50 Having won perfection
Hear briefly how he may go on
To the Eternal, son of Kunti
Which is the utmost height of knowledge.

51 With a clear mind, harmonious
Holding himself firm, giving up
The sensual world, sweet sounds and the rest
And throwing off dislike and desire

52 Seeking to be alone, eating lightly
Setting speech, body, mind in order
Always far out in meditation
Resting in clearness from passion

53 Free from thought of self, force, pride
Longing and anger, possessions,

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18.54-59

Unselfish, calm
He is fit to be one with Brahman.

54 Being one with Brahman, bright of soul,
No longer feeling pain or desire
Alike to all beings
He attains the greatest love of me.

55 Through love, truly he comes to know me
Who I am and my greatness
Then knowing me in truth
He straightway enters into me.

56 Even ever doing all works
If he leans upon me
Through my grace he reaches
The never-changing eternal place.

57 Let your heart resign all works to me
With me as supreme.
Rest in the yoke of understanding
Let your thoughts be always on me.

58 With your thoughts on me, all rough ground
You will cross over by my grace
But if, trusting yourself, you do not heed
You will be lost.

59 If clinging to self-conceit
You say *I will not fight!*

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18.60-65

False is this your resolve
Your own nature will force you to.

- 60 Son of Kunti, held fast
To the work of your nature, that deed
Which through delusion you do not wish to do
You will do even against your will.
- 61 Arjuna, the lord of all beings
Abides in their hearts
And through his mystic power they turn round
Fixed to a turning wheel.
- 62 Take shelter in him alone
With your whole being, son of Bharata.
Through his grace you will win
The peace beyond and the eternal home.
- 63 So I have told you wisdom
Of all secrets the most hidden.
Ponder it carefully
Then act as you will.
- 64 Listen again to my highest word
The most secret of all.
You are loved by me surely
And I will tell you for your good.
- 65 Set your mind on me, belong to me
Worship me and bow before me.

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18.66-71

You shall come to me alone. Truly
I promise you. You are dear to me.

- 66 Forsaking all things of the law
Come to me as your single shelter.
Do not be sad,
I will save you from all evil.
- 67 This truth should never be told
To one not austere or devoted
Or to one who will not listen
Or one who argues against me.
- 68 But he who hands down this high secret
To those who revere me
Who himself shows supreme love
He will surely come to me
- 69 And no man among men
Does work more pleasing to me
Nor shall there be on earth
Another more loved by me.
- 70 This is my thought: If a man study
This discourse on duty between us two
He will have sacrificed to me
With the sacrifice of knowledge.
- 71 And if a man even hear it
With faith and earnestly

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18.72-76

He too, set free, will gain
The fair worlds of the righteous.

- 72 Son of Pritha, have you listened to this
With a heart undivided?
Has the darkness of ignorance
Been cleared away, Winner of Wealth?

ARJUNA
SAID:

- 73 My confusion has vanished, the right
Called to mind by your grace, Unfallen.
I stand here with all doubt gone
I will do as you have said.

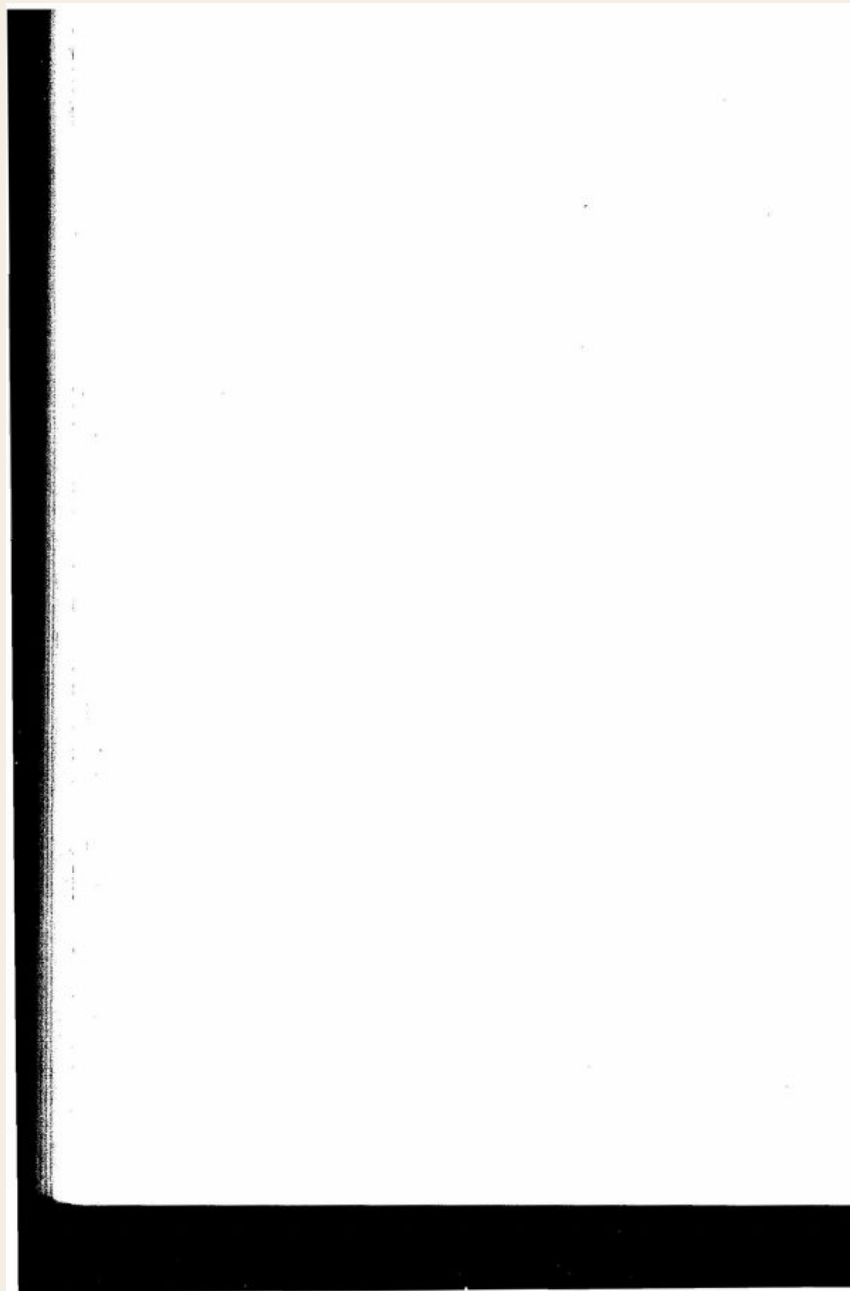
SANJAYA
SAID:

- 74 Thus I have heard this colloquy
Between the son of Vasudeva
And the great-souled son of Pritha
Wonder! and my hair stands on end.
- 75 By the grace of Vyasa I have heard
This supreme secret, this discipline
From Krishna, Lord of Discipline
Standing before my eyes, telling it.
- 76 O King, I remember
I remember this holy discourse
Between Arjuna and the fine-haired god
This wonder. And once more I rejoice.

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18.77-78

- 77 And over and over recalling
That most wonderful form of Hari
Great is my amazement, O King
And I rejoice again and again.
- 78 Where there is Krishna, Lord of Discipline
And the Bowman, the son of Pritha
There will be fortune, victory, well-being
And righteousness. This I affirm.



NOTES

Macrons have been omitted over long vowels in the introduction, text, and notes in keeping with modern practice in books for the general reader.

- 1.2 Duryodhana was the eldest of the hundred sons of King Dhritarashtra and the implacable enemy of the Pandavas. The Teacher is Drona, who trained both the sons of Dhritarashtra and the sons of Pandu in the arts of war.
- 1.3 The son of Drupada, King of Pañchala, was Dhristadyumna. The army of the Pandavas was arranged in a form called the thunderbolt, which was narrow and deep. The army of the Kauravas was arranged in the form of a bird, with the kings in their chariots as its head, the elephants as its body, and the horsemen as its wings.
- 1.4 Yudhishtira, Bhima, and Arjuna were the three eldest sons of Pandu by his first wife, Kunti. Nakula and Sahadeva were by his second wife, Madri. Because of a curse, Pandu could not engender sons. After giving up his kingdom to his brother Dhritarashtra, he retired with his wives to the forest, where he lived so ascetic and righteous a life that the gods gave sons to his wives. Yudhishtira was the son of Dharma, the god of righteousness; Bhima, of Vayu, god

NOTES

of wind; Arjuna, of Indra, lord of gods; and Nakula and Sahadeva were the sons of the Ashvins, the twin gods of twilight and dawn. Yuyudhana was Krishna's charioteer.

- 1.5 Kashi is modern Benares.
- 1.6 The five Pandavas married the same wife, Draupadi, though polyandry was not customary. While they were in hiding, Draupadi's father held a *svayamvara*, in which Draupadi was to be given to the warrior who could perform an especially difficult shot with a bow and arrow. Arjuna won the contest and took Draupadi home with him. Kunti, not seeing the young woman and thinking Arjuna had brought only food, told the brothers to share what they had got that day. Each of the brothers had a son by Draupadi. Arjuna was also married to Subhadra, the sister of Krishna, by whom he fathered the hero Abhimanyu.
- 1.7 The twice-born were those who had been through a ritual, considered a second birth, by which they became officially Aryans. Only the three originally Aryan classes, the brahmins, kshatriyas, and vaiśyas, were allowed to attain the status of twice-born and to study the *Vedas*. The sudras, or servant-class, descendants of the earlier inhabitants of northern India, were excluded. The ceremony of initiation occurred for boys between the ages of eight and twelve; in Vedic times girls were also sometimes initiated. The initiate was invested with a sacred thread worn around the upper body and over one shoulder; it was never to be removed. In some texts the term "twice-born" was reserved for brahmins.
- 1.8 Bhishma was the uncle of the kings Dhritaraashtra and Pandu. Karna was an unacknowledged son of Kunti. Before

In Mediterranean Air

Stage VII | Myth, travel, ecology, and women's histories, 1977

The complete recoverable text of the collection.

Glimmerglass

This lake is the center of the story.
All that happens the lake makes possible.
This lake has deeps for graves and shoals for building.

On a shoal in the lake there is a fortress
A house that resembles a ship, round which the tides
Drift in predictable fashion, like a cradle rocking.

All is at hand, lake trout rise to the hook
Deer come down to drink, easy for taking,
Ducks and geese by the bagful. Berries grow on the shore.

What a monotony of noble days and nights!
The cliffs softened by trees, the water birds calling
The lake glimmering as sun and stars take turns above it.

Outside the ring—the house, the lake, the shore—
The unbroken forest. There the enemy waits
Circling and stalking the house in the center.

Round within round to the very eye
That watches from the knothole, the heart that hides
In the house in the lake in the circle of the forest.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 3.

Dreaming of Foxes

coyotes and the deer
that used to hang about the garden
nuzzling the fresh green
their breaths smelling of roses

I was tempted to wake
but saying, no, into
this dream I will dissolve
I will go
down into its well of water.

What will I find there
that the morning birds
will not carry away
those lakes of blue, teeming,
by snowy mountains.

Out of the mountains
came the birds in line
took the pieces of my dream
the shreds of lake water
threaded them among the trees
in the leaves where they sit waking.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 4.

Strange

and in what manner
morning comes
drifting across the skull
that lifts from sleep,
a boat rising on a wave
that slaps the harbor
the wall white with summer
where the cat licks its silver side
in the warm path
and says good morning
its pink mouth wide with sleep,
morning drifting down the leaves
broken as water falling
through the keen air
where once we rode
blithe in our woods.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 5.

Once

Off the road, a long drive through a wood
we came to a gate and gatehouses
by a courtyard. Circled, narrow
around a well and on
through the wood.

 The house, a castle.
The turrets not for defense. Deserted
this palace. Nudging a lake
the terrace. Mist on the lake,
Swans lived there, but none in sight.

Surely from the reeds at the edge
a swan would come, half-rising out of water
its wide wings clapping, catching the air
and rising terrible over us, where we stood
a cold wind lacing the terrace
telling our bones this was deserted
not ours, and never could be.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 6.

I Thought Back and

There I was
at the top of the walnut tree
in my old red sweater
my dress catching on twigs
my legs scratched from climbing.
Wind bent the boughs
almost to breaking;

Growing in every cell
I never once thought of you
thinking about me.

Your problem is forever looking
backward.
All you see is me
waiting for the next big
noisy gust of wind
to hang from.

All you see is me
not thinking of you,
old woman,
me singing.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 7.

Overlappings

The trouble is we are always reminded of something
beside the point. Games, you say,
and appear the long ropes under the walnut tree
the swingboard knotted on the thick white rope;
we climb the fence, scrape our knees on the stucco
come home hungry, dirt-ringed from hiking.

Other summers. The bluebirds by the back door
decades ago. Now linnets trying to break in,
the dove, neck broken, against our window.
They overlap, shades in water
down under the surfaces of the spring
so clear and deep we drank from one summer.

Now one is dying and the other dead, the patriarchs
thin and tall, which world they live in
all these lives so shuffled together
these same scenes over and over, deeper and deeper repeated
their watery scarves stream round us, kill
that old child's morning game of resurrection.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 8.

The Wind Saying Winter

Suppose I say to the wind
beating down from the north,
cold, knocking gravel from the roof
pelting me with the last walnuts—

Suppose I say Stop
putting my force against the wind
we have had enough.
All my mind goes out to the wind:

Stop bending the trees
making the eucalyptus leaves tangle
round skimpy limbs.
Hwew, the wind answers, bwew, bwew.

I give up on the wind.
It has come a long way
from some high, snow-covered desert.
But my own self I can talk to.

Stop, I say to my self.
Remember how things used to be.
Remember how you ran tn the orchard,

The wind is still rising.
Limbs beat against the eaves.
Dust colors the air.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 9.

One April

When I go away, this will become a picture
the big river flowing deep and still past the front door
the poinciana about to burst with red flowers
a few mosquitoes buzzing, but not yet many,
and the air heavy by the palmetto thicket.

Things are going to stay this way for a long time.
Whatever I do, my uncle is going to be here
smoking his cigarette, talking of shorthorn cattle
and Doll, the gardener, with his shears
will be snipping a mound of foliage early in the morning
while Esther stirs in the kitchen among pancakes.

I am leaving now, but the scene will never change.
If I come back, things will start again.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 10.

Our Town

This is the village where we grew
Our fathers and their sires in line
The trees they planted shade the view
And the white houses shine.

The families here had come to stay
The preacher was the parson's son
And if one brother moved away
We kept the solid one.

We tended order in the town
Our lawns were trim, our hedges green
And in the countryside around
The furrows straight and clean.

We went to church, obeyed the laws
And voted on election day.
The peaceful farms surrounded us
The battles always far away.

And when the soldiers came to town
With drums and our flag overhead,
We watched them from the commons lawn
Until they shot us dead.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 13.

The Burning of Ilium

From The Trojan Women by Euripides

Throw in the torches!
Hold back the fire no longer!

I go forth from my country, my city struck with flames.
Get up, old foot, and carry me along
that I may hail once more my suffering city.
Great Troy, whose very sound breathed Asia once,
your glorious name will soon be torn away.
You burn; already they are leading us as slaves
out of our earth. O gods! But why do I cry to the gods?
When I called on them before, they did not hear.

Ilium shines.
Fire burns in the chambers of the citadel
and in the city and on the highest parts of the walls.

Like smoke that fades on heaven's wing,
gashed by the spear, our country perishes.
Our roofbeams glow, wasted by blazing fire
and the devouring points of lances.

You, you that I bore, hear your mother's voice.
Old woman, wail. It is the dead you call.

I set my old limbs on the ground
and loudly beat the earth with both my hands.
I cry to the dead below. Unlucky husband!

O husband, husband, lost, unburied, without a friend,
you cannot know my doom,
dark there in the dark, death has covered the eyes
of the holy that the unholy have slain.

House of the gods, beloved city,
you feel the sharp-edged flame, the murdering spear;
you will merge with the dear earth, without a name.

The great wing of smoke darkens the sky,
the houses fall away from my sight,
the name will be gone from the land,

all are scattered and gone.

Hear now, the citadel crashes!
The quaking shakes the earth,
shatters the city.
Troy is no longer.

Trembling legs, carry me on to the new life of bondage.
O wretched city! Earth that nourished my children!
I go down to the Achaean ships. . . .

And still out of the flames streaming the refugees
under the smoke's black wing, the shadows,
the dust of cities falling, scattered, unburied,
the mother holding the dead child, the fire-ripped
clothes, the temples broken, the gods stone-eyed
above cold offerings, the bells scattered,
the roofbeams fallen, lost, separate,
moving somewhere under the wine-dark sun.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 14.

Libraries

Always being burned by vandals
 of whatever name
 next to the temple
 papyri
 browned, curled, the paint flaked off
 the secrets of the gods
 a black smoke only.

Or breaking through the ill-kept door—
 the scriptorium littered with fallen flowers
 the acanthus scattered among vowels
 the blossoms not of this world, the enameled petals
 gilt stems falling underfoot, saints
 and the pointed hills crowding the margins,
 the prayers divided, the visions gobbled in blood
 the girt-robed guards dead or leaving.

And the pyres at the street corner
 added to page by page
 smoldering among the righteous.

The secrets coded, the hillside with its kings
 stares down at us, the undecipherable,
 the tablet that means victory. Whose? When?
 The clay messages wash down to pebble
 the scroll torn, packing for urns
 fair face *engrained*
 is all it tells us.

Water, fire, enemy bombardment
 the careless sky, the slow damp of nightfall
 the gathering and division
 Khufu, Thebes, Alexandria
 Rome, Monte Cassino.

Leather reeks an invitation.

I sit by the wall
of a deep well
while the slow fire of hours
darkens the pages.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 16.

Prophet

In the fifteenth year of the emperor Tiberius
he hunted hives of wild bees
breaking open the hollows of wood or bone
seizing the sweet marrow.
Quicker than grasshoppers
he crunched wing and belly.
His face gnarled under the sun.
At night he crawled under
a goatskin. The air was thin out there
the stars big as melons.
The brook for water or washing in
or to cleanse an occasional stranger of his wickedness.
His hair matted. His dry beard
bristled away from his jaw.
Ravens flew by sometimes. Small groups of men
he shouted to, came, bringing others.
Clearly the world couldn't go on like this.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 18.

The Four Horsemen

In our country the hills lie like tawny lions,
green in spring, turning yellow with summer,
here and there oak trees, with cattle under them,
and in the broadest valleys, villages.

If strangers come along, we notice them.
Like those four, resting their horses
by the small stream there, under the oak tree.

Riders, and even from the distance
I can tell their horses are splendid, well-fed,
faster than ours, and their trappings expensive.

Even from here they seem unusual travelers.
There's the one with the sorrel, a heavy man,
black-bearded, restless, he aims his gun
at every bird, as if eager for hunting.

The thin one can't stand still either.
He is picking the stalks that grow around him,
stripping the oats off, twisting the hollow stems
into knots and whistles. His horse is the black stallion.

And the plump palomino, stomping to be off,
belongs to the man in the pale overcoat
who remains stock still, as if content where they are.

The fourth, in the yellow Stetson, waits apart from the others.
Whether he is their friend or enemy is hard to say.
Have they come for a duel in this deserted pasture?

I would go close if I dared, either to welcome them
to the village or find out their business.
But there is something so strange in their manner—

the oats falling back in a circle around them, the ground
growing dark, a cloud breaking the sun's warmth.
Better go back to town and see what's doing.

Those four may mean no harm, but no good certainly.
And I keep thinking of the balance of things
and how we might change should they settle among us.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 19.

Mr. D

I think of you sometimes, how you came.
You were in brown, a patterned garment,
putting your hand on my forehead—yes
it was hot—and my tongue

was loose in my mouth, my eyes rattled
in sockets grown too large. Each part
of myself departed from every other.
I was a grand central station of departures

a kind of wormy seedbed, like your coat
a patchwork. Baling wire was what I needed
to keep the straws of me all together.
I didn't care much. And you were gentle.

You softened the pillow where my head sank
into a swamp. You helped me settle
my parts on the raft I was floating off on.
I slept easy knowing you were there.

You told me how to dream without dreaming
like the roots under the snow in. winter.
Dark, and knowing that darkness, warm
and held like a comfort around me.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 21.

Language

These are the times when I want to speak with you,
when my own thoughts are echoes. Look at the child, all
in proportion, or tell me the name of this flower—
questions and exclamations, nothing unusual
nothing I could not say as well to another

But my question is now how can you hear
me, not under the earth that I stamp on,
sprinkle with flowers, you are nowhere

not the bird pecking across this June
or the insects racking forth at dusk
complaints and melodies, they do not reach you
not in the fog or sun, high up in the ether,
only in this one grey circle, this only that still keeps you, clutches you here, and
asks.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 22.

Heat Wave

has blasted the vines
their leaves fold up to the veins
like torn umbrellas. Fruit bakes in light
birds hide by the trunks of trees.
The earth is about to become a sun.
Yellow clouds of smoke and fog
embrace the sky. The day itself a fire
we are too close to.
Roses open dry petals, holly like buckshot
buckthorn, slick rhus, even the walnuts
clutch useless leaves. Ivy goes brown in the scab of weeds.
Fire is coming on the hot wind.
Here and there it will clean up the earth
heavy with old debris.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 23.

Holding Our Own

A summer without passion
our selves pulled together
like the leaves surrounding the branches
each branch part of the tree
the tree round, holding its own in the air.

The music begins
round globes of sound
weld it together
it balloons in the night
circles the amphitheater
whole and separate
as the star that winks at the proceeding.

And we in our own atmosphere—
the bear in the globe
of a child's toy
shaken, a blizzard
encloses him
inside the water in the ball.

Each walking in our round of air
through the long summer
without anger, without joy, with no surprise.
Now in August the leaves begin to turn
walnuts—black globes—rattle the eaves.

When the leaves burn to yellow
and brambles conquer the garden
one day comes a clear draft from the north
and the sky goes blue once more.

We smell the cool pain of autumn
in the green chemical light
waiting for waking
to shake us—birds in the cat's mouth—
or fall back numb again
among the chill, murdered, murdering leaves.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 24.

The Artist Underground

I had that one great longing to behold the sphere of the sun. —Benvenuto Cellini

They shoved me into the hole. Under
my feet the rustling away of small creatures.
I tried to see. I thought the sound
was the stepping of rats. No light
except an hour or two at midday, when the sun
lit on a grey wall somewhere above.

Water, a stink of it, seeped from above,
not much, but it wet the dirt under
my mattress of straw. It molded. The passing sun
showed me the iron door that kept me, the creatures
that shared my cell. Centipedes. Spiders that hid from the light
in corners. I heard them walk; there was no other sound.

I learned how a world without sound
lay under the stone of the courtyard above,
lay like the dark under the light
sides of the leaves. And in this under-
world was a myriad of dark-haunting creatures
cringing away from even that weak hour of sun.

I thought of the waste of all that sun
lying everywhere. And the exuberance of sound—
wheels turning. Metal clanging. The rooster waking all creatures.
Laughter. Dogs. The street alive. Above
me, next to the garden, horses, harness creaking. Here, under,
I grew used to the silence, the pale passing of light.

My eyes grew wide. Like a mole out of light
I could see the damp wall of my cage. The sun
was my desire. But I rejoiced that under
the earth in this bare place, the sound
of my prayers echoed. They sprang straight above.
I thanked God for the life of his creatures.

And in that dark I was in the company of creatures
greater than man. One led me to the light.
I had longed to see it in the world above,

to look once again on the whole sun,
a blaze so enormous it came as a sound
nearly unbearable breaking into my dungeon there under.

And with the creatures of day I entered the sun,
whose light shines out through all things of the upper world.
Its sound,
the canticles of all above rooted in that praise deep under.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 26.

On Music

*An Ode in the Baroque Manner
For Music by Purcell
To the Memory of R.S.*

I

Let music which first set the skies in place
And made the earth through heavenly harmony
And round it sent the spheres circling in space
Subject to laws that lent to all things grace

And motion—as the sea
The wind, the atoms stirred
Into perfection by music's melody—

Let music mourn her passing from this sphere
To that high morning. Let our notes declare
The spirit present that still must loiter here.
As waves from the pool's center wear
The startled shape after the center's gone
As notes still linger after the stricken keys.

2

As water over water lifts and wells
Layer on layer from weed-forested
Canyons of ocean's floor, up onto shelves
Of blue-green tropics, striking earth's shores. And led
Yet upward, waves of motion still ascend
Above earth's edge, above the looms and mines
Quarries of stone and sand
Whence grow by artful hands
The monuments of land—

So over all that the earth refines
And changes, go the waves of air
High into noon to build cathedrals there
Where music's hands like skilful carpenters
Set out the buttress, shape the nave, beam over
All heaven with roofs of crystal melody.
Towers of sound the ears make visible!

Hear music's mighty structure as it grows
Before the last notes fall
Hear music rising that can outlast all.

3

Hear music rising that all loss repairs,
Age after age the monuments of air
Appear once more, old patterns ever new
 In fresh and polished hue
As clear as at the first creation laid.
First Form that still all other forms contains
 Repeated as the music soars again!

4

Let music, which out of jarring elements,
Chaotic atoms, first brought harmony
With God's hand guiding, carved out fire from night
Water from air and the earth from sea,
Renew us now as once more notes create
The heart's strong fortress, set on high
Radiant for an hour over us
To fall again after the last notes die.

Eternally new, yet old
Ever the same, like gold
Beat to new forms, like wind
Tuning the shaken air
Shifting the hearers' blood.

Players and listeners change
And instruments and air
Yet the same motion shimmers there
Making the world again through music's might
Constructed, like the heavens, of air and waves and light.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 28.

The Women of Perseus

Danae

I

I am caught here
in the held air
while outside the day
moves in the leaves.

Voices ripple
from far away,
the road disappears
in the dusty wind.

My blood sounds in my ears
like a river of brass
and the hills at the sky line
turn bronze with blossoms.

My thoughts wither
and vanish in circles where I imagine
down by the stream the footpath
crowded with passers.

Unreal from this distance
the processions as on a vase
the lovers leaning on one another
the world going about its business.

And my life here
an echoing bell
calling me nowhere,
the days rising and falling like wheatfields.

2

Night is my own.
The tower a shadow in shadows.
Down its sides run
ladders of leaves

shining vines and tendrils
stairways of broken mirrors
the rivers flash by
dreaming.

And the fish in their shifting schools
catch the light
like a secret.

Birds drowse in the trees
and the light lies over the white fields,
all taut, sheer surfaces,
that resound for a moment
the echo of light.

3

The days go by in gold
lazy and bright
warm in reflection
where waves shallow up yellow sands.

I catch light in my arms.
Dust powders the air
and the motes
spatter its rays in blinding echoes.

Soft as the chaff
that drifts from the winnowed grain
the sun heaps down on me
covers me in drifts

and the warm waves harden
into sinews of bronze.

Radiant with sun
my lover presses upon me.

4

First my father set me in this tower
among tripods burning with incense,
pampered with waiting women, fed on dishes of gold,
my garments bordered in purple, my arms
circled by amulets rich with jewels.

My handmaidens laugh, weaving endless garlands of flowers
and green.

The tower is fragrant and airy, and I can see far into distance.

I would rather live in a cottage by the rough waves,
the wife of a fisherman, waiting at evening for the day's
small catch

or in the hut of a ploughman in a stone-blunted upland.

The old man my father most of all fears time,
the grey already creeps in his beard and his hair,
jealous that his child grows beautiful beside him,
fears his own seed, knowing he will go down,
his strength stolen nightly, rising in his children.

I have lain with the sun, my lover,
and the sun's child will burst forth from my dark
at morning.

5

It is dark as the underworld here and when I try
to lift my head I strike the rough top
of the chest that they put me in. I still hear echoes of blows
on the top hammering home, splinters torture my fingers
where I struggled against the wood. I cannot see
to ease them out. My head aches from striking
the lid of the chest. I cannot raise my knees.
I screamed but heard no one. They worked in silence.

Now beaten by waves the box lurches and turns
rolling me here and there. The holes left for air
take in water. Already it sloshes
around me. I am cold, and the child with me
cries. The air reeks of him. He searches
with puny hands for my breast. His mouth
blind in the dark plucks at me. I am thirsty.
My father had been kinder to kill me outright
with a clean stroke. I am sick

with tossing. The box closes in, the water rises.

They have left me no means to destroy myself.

Starve, drown, suffocate.

These are my gifts
from my father who starved me of love
from my lover who drowned me in love
from my son for whose birth I die in this stinking box.

Zeus, who descended in sunlight
if once I shone in your favor
when your bright form grew in sudden rays
remember your son.

6

Now I live in the fisherman's cottage I once longed for.
The sea snarls over rocks, my son goes out with the fishers
or runs with the herdsmen's sons.
I wear the brown dress of the poor.

There is always something to do.
Water must be brought from the well
goats must be milked, cheese made, figs picked and dried,
olives pressed, and the eternal spinning.

The island is small and poor
the king's palace a house like the others.
Goats graze right up to the doorposts.
His brother is a fisherman.

They have given me a clumsy girl as a serving-maid
and the king looks my way too often.
The beauty that brought a god from heaven
withers in this forsaken island.

The Graeae

We were always old, always turning away
from ripeness, without ever knowing springtime,
our hair hung in wrinkled strands
and no one ever looked at us.

We were born on a coast covered with grey clouds
all day. We have been here forever.
Grey sedge, grey rocks stretched up from dirty sand
a beach littered with weed and cast up timbers.

Nothing ever prospered here, the bushes covered with spines
a few water birds lost and quickly leaving
or adding a flat carcass to the dragged strand.
We had few hopes and nothing came of any.

Bit by bit we lost what little we had—
our teeth, our eyes, the rhythm of walking.
From the beginning the flat shore closed us in.
Three cold grey stones we sit here doing nothing.

Medusa

I

Had I but known when I saw the god approaching!
His horses pulled him briskly over the water
as on dry land, wreathed in seaweed, dripping,
his chariot shone gold in the warm summer.
I stood as he walked—the old man—up from the shore.
He climbed the temple stairs. He praised my grace.
I had never seen a god before.
He seized and raped me before Athena's altar.

It is no great thing to a god. For me it was anger—
no consent on my part, no wooing, all harsh
rough as a field hand. I didn't like it.
My hair coiled in fury; my mind held hate alone.
I thought of revenge, began to live on it.
My hair turned to serpents, my eyes saw the world in stone.

2

Whatever I looked at became wasteland.
The olive trees on the hill as I walked down
rattled in wind, then stood—as if a hand
had fashioned them of bronze. I saw the town
where I was raised become a stone. The boys
ran by as on a frieze, the charioteer
whipping his horses, held his arm, mid-air.
His horses stopped in stride. My hair
started to hiss. I hurried to my door.
The servant with his water jar upraised

stands there forever. I strode across the floor.
My furious glance destroyed all live things there.
I was alone. I am alone. My ways
divide me from the world, imprison me in a stare.

3

The prisoner of myself, I long to lose
the serpent hair, the baleful eyes, the face
twisted by fury that I did not choose.
I'd like to wake up in another place,
look for my self again, but there recur
thoughts of the god and his misdeed always—
the iron arm, the fall, the marble floor
the stinking breath, the sweaty weight, the pain,
the quickening thrust.

And now the start,
the rude circling blood-tide not my own
that squirms and writhes, steals from me bone by bone—
his monster seed growing beneath my heart,
prisoned within my prison, left alone,
despised, uncalled for, turning my blood to stone.

Andromeda

I am terrified
marooned on a rock with a gale
freshening and the waves already
spatter me with spindrift.

What could my father be thinking of!
Listening to a two-faced oracle,
chaining me like a dog in this gnashing water.
It is low tide now—high tide will be the end of me.

I will either drown struggling against water
or be caught here by the monster from the sea
the claws searing me along the bone
the teeth quick cutting through flesh and nerve.

It is grim being a sacrifice.
The garlands, the watching crowds, cannot make me heroic.

My legs tremble and fire streaks across my brain
The roots of my hair are daggers.

If this were a story there would be a hero
to swim through the impossible waves, a sword at his belt.
He would cast off my chains, kill the monster, take me
out of this country mad with fear and riddles.

But all I am sure of is the explosion of waves,
my mother crying from the shore, the seething wings
of a large invisible bird circling the rock,
and the head of the monster coming up over the horizon.

Perseus

Because my mother mated with a god
I am by birthright a hero.
This brings responsibility. I have had to excel at games—
running, wrestling, throwing the spear and the discus,
and to undertake long journeys at a moment's notice.

My mother, being alone, brought me up as best she could
and I have always deferred to her wishes.
I have had to keep her unwanted lover at bay
and, as he was king, conciliate him too.
That is how I encountered my first adventure.

Bring back the head of Medusa, he told me
as if it were easy. Being young, I agreed.
I didn't even know where to find her, but I had help
from my brothers and sisters, the eternal gods.

They equipped me with wings, a shield, a sickle, and a cap
of darkness
and pointed west. I flew up, high over the island
and saw how small it was. I flew on over the sea
until toward sunset I found the three old women.

They sat there, hardly moving, toothless and blind—
at least only one tooth and one eye among them,
which they passed round. I felt sorry for them
but I took the eye and the tooth anyway
and they pointed out Medusa.

She was asleep. Maybe she had once been beautiful
but no longer. Her face froze everyone to stone
but with my mirror-shield, cap, and sickle I could deal with her.
When I cut off her head, blood spurted in a fountain.
I had to wash myself in the sea. I had never killed anyone.

I put her head in the bag as I had been told to do
and started home. But I liked flying
and I turned south over Africa.
The desert looked endless—a few palm trees here and there
and towns where there were lakes or rivers.

The worst of it was the bag. Blood kept dripping out of it
and the serpent hair kept writhing.
Several times I almost threw it away.

As I neared Jaffa I saw a girl chained to a rock
the sea dashing over it. Her dark skin gleamed with water.
She wore jewels around her neck and nothing else.
Had she not been beautiful I might have gone on.
It was none of my business what she was doing there.

But then, sliding over the sea a monster appeared
her head twisting around, her body dipping
in and out of the waves. Steam came from her jaws
and scales dangled over her face like seaweed.
Clearly I was destined to do battle.

She was harder to kill than Medusa.
I had to keep flying around her,
invisible, yet in reach of the heavy tail
the spinning jaws. The sea grew bloodier
until at last she sank like a punctured kettle.

I married the maiden, freezing all objections
with the look on Medusa's face
and came home, spellbound the wicked lover,
made the fisherman king. He married my mother
and I became king in Argos.

Now I live idly here, Andromeda beside me
still beautiful, though slow in conversation,
asking myself, was I really a hero?
Or was it the weapons? Could anyone have done it?

After all, what is a kingdom?
The flying, the thrust of battle, the danger,
even the smell of blood, the writhing monsters—
dream or nightmare, then I truly lived.
And was that all? There must be more than this.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 33.

After September

Autumn breaks over you
the clean wind
sweeps under the door
opens the sky.

Fruit rolls out of grocers' bins
grapes, cheap now
apples—juice flies out of them.

Red fires in the toyon -
they tumble down hill
among walnuts' yellow
mixed everywhere.

Never such air as this.

You'll be looking for love
if you haven't yet found it.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 51.

Love Song

Old Owl is gone.

No hoot from him in a fortnight

and the mice in the bush are saying their prayers:

Let Old Owl be gone for a long time

May he never come back!

May some bigger bird in the sky

Peck out those living eyes

And clean him down to the last feather

Till they blow away in the wind.

May a great Mouse somewhere under the moon

Pounce on him

Shred him to a shriveled string.

And the small birds shrill louder than ever:

Morning is here and Owl is gone!

Mockingbird, King of Day, leaps up

on his telephone pole

cartwheels in air

comes home precisely

not missing a note:

Morning has come and Great Owl is gone.

Come soon, sweet Owl.

I miss your velvet note

and the soft slip of your wing.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 52.

Into the Bestiary

1 The Owl Inside

I hide my eyes in my hands
and he glares at me
red eyes make pools in my darkness
his beak yellow
smooth between my fingers
the left eye looks in my right
round and capable
the right squints after mice in the hollow
behind the eyes
behind the owl
are the creatures of that forest
a spotted moth
flaps past
a jaguar's tail
whisks out of sight
a whale's white teeth
an embryo
the sea urchin becomes aster becomes centipede
clouds pass the forest darkens
green algae spread in lines over swamp water
grids on a map the explosion
of a green rocket
oysters bird wings islands
in the owl's world nothing is equal.

2 The Bird Lagoon

Eleven swans ride these murky passages
as to a wedding on the Thames
their white plumes stretching.
A black-billed mother chides her ducklings;
back they go, red heads dipping under shrubbery
at the pool's edge. Flamingos
stand in the shallows by mud towers.
Each guards a single egg.
And the customers

drop paper cups into the lagoon.

Round about, round about
they bob, with the cruise boats, the strollers,
the macaws and ibises, the
wounded eagles, and the high lonely white
black-headed vulture who contemplates
the fragile structure of his paradise.

3 The Fish Cage

The amateur astronomer
has tipped his telescope downward
underwater
and the minnows become planets
around the great octopus, the sun

which is reflected, this being
night, in the eye
of a giant manta ray
that slips like a cloud
among nebulae of mackerel.

The constellations heave and form again
like chorus girls.
His notebooks are voluminous;
he cannot keep track of the changes
in this unplotted sky.

He calls for the constancy of Arcturus,
of Mizar, Alioth, Polaris,
the Dioscuri, Pleiades, the Centaur,
but finds only meteors, falling stars,
comets, nothing spectacular
as the pure spark of Hesperus at evening.

Despairing, he throws down the telescope,
turns archeologist. Certainly those old bones,
he cries, will lie steady among the shards,
dead pottery, downed columns, they will stay there,
not moving till I come to them.

4 The Mole Ride

Under the paw of the glass mole
(opaque, the sun shines through)
the lines in the sky are pink
where the blood runs in its web
like an early peach in blossom.

Under the giant paw—or shrunk
to mole dimension—I wait
to be dragged by the blind,
inquisitive muzzle into the dark
house of the mole,
a rag doll,
his plaything.

The glass eye of the mole opens,
sees nothing.
I labor through those labyrinths
where secret entrances
hide under the loose earth,
to be at ride's end rocketed
into the strange blink of day.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 53.

Despite All That

she is still telling the tides where to begin.
Under her circle the blood of the lunatic
rises. She calls to the man with the knife.
The hot housewife slides out of the scraps
of the kitchen to the lover under her shadow.
And the seed-burst herring listen for her coming
in the long lurching of the sea.

Water drips from her into the veins of cabbages
and corn silk, and vines send loose tendrils
high toward her crossing. Neither the sunflower
nor day's-eye finds gods more loving
than this enchantress who changes nightly
casting her monthlong circle of chains
over the losers.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 57.

Watching the Break-Up

I

Trying to feel sure when you are not sure
is like walking in quicksand, though I never
saw any, or even walked in a swamp
except in the everglades, where paths are everywhere
made of boards. An alligator was
in a pool where fish swam by his mouth,
ready for eating, not seeming to care about that.
I met a man who shot 12 crocodiles
one morning on safari. These tears are not
crocodile tears, though I have never seen
a crocodile cry.

2

The clock is a chatterbox, always buzzing about your ear,
going rat-a-tat-tat. Bad as a fly.
But you can't swat it. It has to wake you up
at 6 o'clock. Still that's not fair
to the clock, hardworking night and day
like your heart. Both telling your time,
telling your time.
I know of no things less dispensable
than clocks and hearts,
even though they break wide open at 6 a.m.
with their alarm.

Be undisturbed—you heard only half the story.
But be compassionate—do whatever you can do.
And learn to swim if you live near the ocean.
Many have drowned even in tiny rivers.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 58.

Driving Eastward

we enter the City of Morley's Ridge
the roads guarded by radar
and the dog sniffing the curb hollers
don't speed. 'The horizon just tickles the sun's edge
the elms meander down Main Street
and a rooster wakes up behind Mullens' Bar.

The Coffee Shop wedged between Hotel
and Dry Goods blinks with one eye
Closed one door says, but the other says Open.

We'll never know now. And the heat wriggles
out of the big hay field on the corner
north of 10th and Main. We smell the sweet

hot scent of ragweed, watch a bird
flash off the wire toward that grove of cottonwood:
as the town settles for day behind Morley's ridge.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 60.

Down, Down

I am says the bulldozer
singing brighter than the birds
a thousand birds on a thousand branches
sing no merrier than I

and the crickets' alas
the brittle scraping
of a million legs together
or the bellowing of frogs.

I am and send my weighty message
over the hills at daybreak
breaking hills
I am stronger than the mountain.

I push up the knotted roots of sycamores
a hundred summers gathering.
I shake the sunflowers
where the spotted eggs are hiding.

I stamp down this terrace. I descend
to the Pleistocene. This was a lake
then rock. I make it a meadow.
No ages for me. An afternoon is enough.

I am says the bulldozer
and compassed round with music.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 61.

Unwinding the Glacier

Not for one moment does this scowler stop
cleaning the monster slope, packing its load
of windowless cathedrals, hulking ships,
untidy monuments.

What trees one winter
went down under snow, pack ice burns steadily
across the striae of a widow mountain.
Summer carves its skin with sweat.

Massive and slow we ride these cold windings,
building our Roman road and aqueduct,
riding the rails that stagger as we pass.
Out of its melting pours the clear water—green, pure,
the halo of saints, presenting the piedmont
with its vines and grains—substance of sacrament.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 62.

In Summer

In our tree it sings
It rides our bones

It cries Everything
Grows but to shatter
It speaks of roses

Waves broken, the ring
Of lapsing water
The slip of stones

In streams, down hillsides
Emptiness it says
All wasted, gone.

So it in summer sings.
The holly white with bloom.
No thing its lie believes.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 63.

In Mediterranean Air

At the Villa

Who listens to us? Out past the terrace the spy
hides behind Venus's statue
 moving nearer, his cheek flat
 mottled with rotting marble.

The ebon-eyed goddess
 turns black with night.

And the footsteps rustle closer
in a dirty wind that casts over us
grit and a film of leaves. The garden
 laid down under heat. The fountains'
 statues cracked in sun. Is he still
 flat to Venus's buttocks or is he

wrestling with Adonis by the garden path?
They should have been left together
those two. Let us look at the map now
spread out under the thin torch.
It will draw him, the cheating moth,
antennae spread. His instructions

crackle in the air, signal storm
to some of us. A storm would cool us all
take the sand from the insufferable air, restore
the long look between the statues
down to the gone garden's end, put him in his
trenchcoat

drenched anyhow, lurking out there unsheltered.

The Pursuer

He might come through any door—
the thick oak at the top of the curving stair
the painted panels leading to the study
the knobbed iron from the driveway, with its
 broken lock,
or the French windows opening on the terrace.

Even, God forbid, from the plain door in the passage
leading down dark stone steps to the cellar.

And I, standing in the massive marble hall,
a piece on a chessboard
moving from the square of pale Perlato
to the dark veins of Turquesa.

Those quarries make the whole house cold
with their ungiving surfaces. And the room so bright
it is like a stage, the audience hidden
in the shifty vines of the terrace
or the shadow above the balcony.

For all I know the walls papered with nymphs and
fountains
and flowering trees are peopled with watching eyes
and the Venetian mirrors counterfeit.

I pretend to be looking at the statues,
copies of ancient art—Actaeon, Artemis,
Laocoon wreathed in serpents—
while I search for a faint heelmark,
a spot of water, a speck of lint, a shred of paper.

But I find no clue, and logic cannot help me
nor the strained sensing for the hidden breath
the scent of oleander crushed, the faint electric aura
of the body. I must go at once

lock myself incommunicado in the study
take the broad circling stairway into shadow
or the iron doorway leading to the forest.
I have to choose. I could meet him anywhere.

In the Garden

Sun or rain I am out here, shoes overflowing,
or holding to a slice of shadow, while the heat
cracks the ground all around me.
Sweat glues my skin, or else wind
carves my face with granules.

They sit inside with their tea or stroll

after dark on the terrace. There's little shelter,
they have seen to that. If they talk
they find an upstairs room—there's only rotten vines
to cling to;
the stones crumble under my toes. I'm no acrobat.

They think they'll outlast me. But they don't dare
leave in the shined Mercedes, ready in the driveway
lest I find the map in the cupboard, the code
under the faded icon in the passage.
They bore one another. The cook never washes his hands.

They'll crack before I do. The khamsin is about to begin—
fifty days of swirling sand. They'll be trapped for sure
with the dirty cook and the rough butler
who shadows them. And I, like a sundial,
patient, enduring, forgiving, in the garden.

The Chase

Sooner or later we must go after them.
Clumsy fools, they can never slip away
without stumbling into a table in the corridor
crashing the lamp. They bring the whole house down
every door opens, lights go on, the butler comes up from
the wine cellar.

They make a run for it; the car in the driveway is locked
the battery dead, but they get it rolling
and we follow over roaring bridges, through broken
hedgerows,
turning like wind-devils. Smash over the guardrail.
Their car spirals. They melt into the forest.

We are on foot now, stalking the pine trees
and it's beginning to snow. My hand aches
where the bullet grazed the little finger.
Ice stiffens my town shoes. I am lost.
They have got away once more undeserving.

On the Train

Forget day and night; this is all you can think of.

Forget sleep, breakfast, keeping appointments.
You eat when you can, doze under a tarpaulin,
on trains, in the back seats of rented cars.

Your mind stays on the treadmill.
What it is you are after. You are not even sure,
but it is there somewhere. You have to find it.
That couple ahead—the man with the blue glass eye
the woman in the modish hat, they have hidden it.
The train lurches on. You must rifle the luggage.
What good if they sleep? You wouldn't dare touch them.
You need accomplices, and you haven't any.

You are alone with the search and not much time.
Something must turn your way, you can't trail them forever.
Her gloved hand gestures and you strain to hear.
The glass eye follows you like a periscope.

Incognito

Do they know I have been in the villa?
That I am the mouse that snoops in the corridor
midnight to morning, hearing them joust in bed?
I am the limping man who brings the firewood
my wool cap low on my forehead, my beard gone wild.
I am the plump girl who sells them vegetables;
my head touches the cook's as we lean over the basket.
I was the wisecracking messenger with wilted roses,
the man with the telegram. I carried your bags
when you took the through train to the south.
I was the old gentleman with the cane two seats behind you.
You are such blunderers. Yet you keep it hidden,
what I am after, however I hide myself.

Headquarters

The radio's gone off. I've set the band
at the right time and the number, and nothing comes of it.
A crackle sometimes; it's still alive.
I'm where I should be. The world's disappeared out there.
Why don't they signal? Have they forgotten me?

I tried the telephone, but it kept ringing.
Something's gone wrong.

I can't give up when I am so close to it,
watching the lichens grow on the statues,
sheltering behind them in the sirocco.

I'm the cat that walks at night
sleeps with one eye. I'm a tree. I'm a statue.
I'll get at the secret, though there's no one to take it to.

Three

God, how I envy them! Always together.
The train sways past villages, the dining car
sparkles. They whisper together.
The wine drips amber into their glasses.
He touches her hand in a careless movement,
puts a cigarette in a slim holder,
lights it, passes it to her. They play this game
over and over. It is all for me.

I sit behind the newspaper at the next table—
France-Soir. "Liebling," he says, "liebling,
souviens-toi, l'été dernier sur la plage. . ."
No one else cares. The waiter a smiling simpleton.

I was careful at the last station.
I boarded without a glance at them.
They know, they know, teasing the scattered table crumbs.
They look for me, watching them, wait for me everywhere.

Outside

Last night the birds outside had their feathers ruffed all right!
Cold as six pigeons! Beer froze on pantry shelves.
Do they know how I feel out here alone?
What if I went away? Who'd care for their pas de deux.
It's only for me
they bolt the iron-studded door at night
pull the rotten drapes near the terrace
and embrace under the lamps by the upstairs window.

It's like marriage. What a waste if I left them!

They pretend to hide messages while I am watching,
or half-burn a paper, throw the rest in the fireplace;
they laugh while I sift their ashes
for a scrap of *Die Zeitung* faintly underlined.
They are my life. I love them. They hate one another.

The Party

I've stayed out here so long my head is ablaze with blossoms.
Stems are growing up all around me bumpy with buds.
It's springtime. My short-wave sputters birdsongs.
The owls whoop all night like lusty nightingales.

The villa is all lit up. Tables swim in flowers—
peonies, ranunculus. I can't keep up with the guests,
generals in full regalia. Bosoms curve under diamonds,
the chandeliers shine, crystal hides the table,
notes pass from hand to hand with the champagne.

Perfume seeps from the terrace in waves
I am about to drown in it! It's been so long!
I'd like to run in, my dusty shoes on the carpet,
snatching up wine, crying *Salut*, and embrace every one of them.

The Design

In what design am I, here in the garden—
the garden with its diamond paths
that criss-cross behind hedges,
the flowers settled in their chosen plots
divided by size, function, color even,
the flowers adjusted to conditions:
sun, the minerals of the soil, the frequency of rain—
none deviate, weeds are removed,
all rejuvenate, fertilizing one another
with their special insects—not only bees
but flies, wasps,
even wind. I alone. My function
is merely to watch and wait.

How do I fit in? If I move my foot
I trample on hyacinth, perfume of broken stems,
the petals wetting my boot soles, slippery, yellow.

Pollen lies broken open on the dark green of the stems.
Hostile my foot on the ground, pressing in gentle violence
across the grass. Why am I here?
I am curious. But to break
even the flowers in springtime
argues force, overturning, behavior
I should hate to own.

What is the difference between them and me?
We are for beauty, harmony, joy, utopia
here among the hyacinths, the bells' bloody coral,
the yellow cries of the pistils for rape,
for birdwings, the visits of flying hordes.
Nothing lies between us
but lawns and the cold statues
rotting by the old walls.

I have imagined a paradise where no serpent enters
without apples hidden under
the cushions of the parlor, or under
the marble set at tangents in the gallery.
Yet we stand here on both sides of the wall
listening to one another. Our inner states
of love, happiness—it is a strain to bear all this.
Happiness itself is a terror.
I can only conclude with the secret:
it is the wall of thorns; it is the fruit in the parlor;
it is the flight and the chase; it is the disillusion;
it is what we are all afraid of.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 67.

Exiles

We can never go home now.
What there was is cut down—
trees, house wall, under the tractor
woods we ran in at night, twisted
up, the roots startled with earth
shreds clotted around them.

But we have beat them to the next station,
some of us, and enough trees for fires,
houses, whatever we make of them.
We brought what we could carry.
Enough maybe when we learn
what grows wild here, what we can count on.

We sort out noises at night
watch where we walk by day.
But the sky lurks like a spy. Our words
turn against us, what we keep is a threat.
They're bound to be after us.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 83.

Crossing

The end of it came sudden.
The brakes locked and we skidded
half the tires blacked the road
the back end skewed
came round
and we went spinning over the edge.

We shouted at the black water
where the river slammed up to meet us.
Then the great smash and we
breathed deep while the black stuff
moved in, mixture of mud, sewage, debris,
banging against something slowed stopped.

All close as a mine
and no lamp, the fluid embracing us,
and caught in the torn shred of air
conjuring up torches, divers
and the scum-lit direction of morning.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 84.

The Message

Who who-the owl
called through the black. Soft
were his words. The answer
soft. I heard

through black sleep. Not to wake
while owls rummage the trees
search runnels of grass, not seen,
heard, heard into dream.

There was a man unseen
before, shone on the porch of dream
the light behind him bright
his face seen and never seen

before. Clear I saw him
and what he said true, while
the owl searched. I forgot
his words that told so much.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 85.

After Exile

It was not the dream that did it.
It only reflected
the serpent of power rising
from the roots of earth
into the head where the hair
flew out like sprays of a flowering tree.
Blossoms falling wherever the feet
half-touched the ground
the girl with new-risen breasts
running through doorways
into the green garden
where trees grew overnight
placing themselves in trim rows
and the blooms of azaleas, acacia,
and pomegranate split the air with color,
whole skies of blooms covered the ground
but it was the fountain that rose like a serpent
ricocheted over every tendril of the green garden.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 86.

The Turn

Like lying down for winter, all life
drained—mud at the base of a pool
scum freezing over—the bones bent like ribbons
around the limp center
the saints locked in their chambers
saying I am nothing.

Morning not a clatter of bird notes and wings
but a sour taste and voices,
no reasons to go or stay, only to keep the sky
and earth apart. Caught in the knuckled hand
a fistful of clay.

This is when it turns, begins to shoot
up the green brace that breaks open the hand
and suddenly into the white light
of ordinary morning like a reed
or a vine or a tree that will scratch at heaven.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 87.

Listening to Color

Now that blue has had its say
has told its winds, wall, sick
sky even, I can listen to white

sweet poison flowers hedge autumn
under a sky white at the edges
like faded paper. My message keeps

turning to yellow where few leaves
set up first fires over branches
tips of flames only, nothing here finished yet.

Publication. First published in *In Mediterranean Air*. New York: Viking Press, 1977, p. 88.

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Colophon

Publication and production notes

This critical reading edition was edited by Brian Kim Stefans for The Text-Tech Papers, Los Angeles, in 2026, as part of *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. The poems were reset from the source pages identified in the publication notes and datasheet. The book was composed in EB Garamond on a cream field at 6 × 9 inches. The cover uses original abstract artwork prepared for this edition.