



C. F. MACINTYRE

Collected Poems

POEMS, CAFÉS, CATHEDRALS, AND THE BLACK BULL

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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C. F. MacIntyre

Collected Poems

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

*Edited by Brian Kim Stefans
The Text-Tech Papers*

EDITORIAL EDITION

This edition prints the complete texts of *Poems* (1936), *Cafés and Cathedrals* (1939), and *The Black Bull* (1942); every available poem from *The Brimming Cup and Potsherds* (1930); the new poems from *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (1965); and three located periodical poems. Later reprints are not duplicated. Known but unrecovered texts are recorded in the editorial note.

Carlyle Ferren MacIntyre

July 16, 1890, Des Moines, Iowa–June 30, 1967, Stuttgart, West Germany

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

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DOCUMENTARY IMAGES

MacIntyre in the photographic, book, and periodical record



C. F. MacIntyre in Paris, 1956. Archival photograph reproduced for identification and research.



*Rockwell Kent's frontispiece to *The Black Bull* (1942).*

May 12, 1917

LOS ANGELES GRAPHIC

11

Manuscript Club Poetry

At the College of Liberal Arts, U. S. C.

Edited by William Van Wyck

Apperception

Can it be true that you and I (looking at once)
(Upon the selfsame thing) see visions various?
That neither can perceive what now the other sees?
Love (poor, hatched and abused word) is attained but sweet,
Love flashed for a brief moment in our clouded lives,
And I saw suffering, passion, joys, and sacrifice,
I saw them all, but they were for me here;
While your eyes open'd but wide enough that love might seem
A playful, pleasant little chap, whose face too soon is soiled.
And it was the same we looked upon,
When I saw beauty and your eyes saw sin!

KATHLEEN RYAN.

Summer's Commis

When the buds has grown to blooms,
As the kids is shootin' marbles;
When the guys in school are all grown,
As the horse-dy warbs his warbles;
When his ketcher knock-lined mare—
Summer's in the air.

When sister's feller comes aroun'
As asks if sis would lieter drive
(As as the sun is settin' down,
As lads an' lugs is all alive);
When kin jes' commette yer hummin'
For summer is a-comin'.

When Dad gits down his las' year's
"Keltie",
As lads string up their fishin' poles;
When Ma puts up her new year's jelly,
As we all crowd the summum' holes;
Now jes' you lottle yer cool-hee—
Cause summer's nearly here.

W. B. GEISSNER.

Song

Sing a song of buried treasure,
Where none can ever reach,
Shored by some drowned sailor
On the sandy beach.

Oh, there is a treasure
Sink deep in the sea;
I was bid, they say, by a sailor free,
A sailor who was drowning.

Oh, there was a sailor,
A pirate lad—
But that was years ago—
And the ocean-folk are long since glad
That he perished there below.

Down on the bottommost, bottommost rocks
For his white bones laid in state;
Piled the spotless ivory,
They are laid out still and straight.

And about his head we fishes peep,
And at his feet as he lies in sleep,
Some wayward eels play hide and seek
In the sand.

But in his hands—his skeleton hands—
He catches the burnished gold;
And beats the rocks—the honey-comb rocks—
The rock is green with mould.

Oh, there was a sailor—
A pirate lad—
But that was long ago.
DOROTHY LILLIS WALKER.

Ad Matrem

That dream you had of me when neath
your breast
Impetuous life demanded audience,
The hopes you visioned in the night
silence.

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Heart-sung o'er little animal close
pressed:
That I should live and love in life the
beat.

Saw goodly dead, and walks in reverence,
Love chastely, be a man of no pretence,
Little for right a great God's behest—
The blinded I have staggered far apart
From the straight path you marked, tho
I have been
Swayed by caprice, careless, married the
air.

Of perfect living, begged what I could
be.
Tho I have fallen where striving was to
win—
I pray you keep that older dream of me.

CARLYLE MACINTYRE.

Invitation

Rich, golden wash of poppies bright
Mixed with the celadine,
That splashed with reds and blues in
The hungry soul to dine.

This senseless noise of mental strife
Too long has played its part;
The world's whole building up with life
Keeps tugging at the heart.

ELLEN MACKENZIE WOODSON.

Morning Dew

A-tremble with cold, humming fears,
The garden's flowers are wet with tears.
It was such a long, long night!
Such garden shadows gave them
Fright!

Though to be brave the wee things tried,
They grew afraid and fear-the cried.
The rising sun across the sea
Divined the tiny tragedy.

And with the gentle tenderness
One would a weeping child caress.
The great-heart stooped to where they
lay.

And kissed their limpid tears away.
MARYETTA LEHR.

Respite

I came upon you living in the grass,
That spread out green and deep on either
side.
Sweet-scented by the summer's softest
heat.

The sunlight made a lake that you had
found
Rippling between the shadows of dark
trees.

Far overhead the summer clouds hung
still.
If you had quickly smiled, suddenly
moved.

Or said: "How are you?" out in that still
room,
I need must have remembered other
days.

People, confusion, trains, and many
books,
And endless noises of the human voice
That starts afraid to own its silence,
Destroying very life with ceaseless
sound.

I could not have forgotten daily tasks—
Those tasks not work but pandemonium
Of intricate routine and loveless smiles.
And hurrying movement without any end.
Dear Heart, you did not even raise your
head.

Noon lengthened into afternoon, and all
Our side of the green hill grew deep in
shade.
Leaving the earth and us immortal still.

EMILY FERL.

A Sonnet for Helen

When you are old, at eve, by candle-
light,
Spinning beside the fire in your seat.

A-wondering you will my poems repeat.
"Ronsard" so famous made my beauty
bright!
Your little "virgin-maid, there nodding
might"
He awakened, drowy from the heat,
When sounds my name, though I have
(faded first)
And long before have passed into the
night.

A phantom without bones, I lie at rest
Beneath the myrtle's shade to take my
rest.
And bent and wrinkled you at home will
rest.
Regretting my lost love, your proud dis-
dain.
Accept love now, tomorrow can't re-
main:
So gather you the rose of life today.

(Translated from the French of Ronsard
by Wm. van Wyck).

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SPRING near SIXTH

"Ad Matrem" in The Graphic, May 12, 1917, the earliest located MacIntyre poem in a Los Angeles journal.

INTRODUCTION

C. F. MacIntyre, 1890–1967

C. F. MacIntyre moved from Iowa to Los Angeles, from the classrooms of USC, Occidental, and UCLA to the cafés of Europe, and from tightly made lyrics to an influential career translating Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rilke, Goethe, Corbière, and Stefan George. His poetry is at once learned and physical: bulls, tigers, insects, statues, streets, lovers, ruins, and anxious modern citizens crowd its pages. This edition restores the complete texts of *Poems* (1936), *Cafés and Cathedrals* (1939), and *The Black Bull* (1942), adds every available selection from *The Brimming Cup and Potsherds* (1930) and the new poems in *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (1965), and gathers three early or uncollected periodical poems. It also documents known poems whose texts have not yet been recovered, rather than silently treating the surviving record as complete.

Stage I | Iowa, Los Angeles, Marburg, and Occidental, 1890–1928

Carlyle Ferren MacIntyre was born in Des Moines, Iowa, on July 16, 1890. He attended Drake University from 1909 to 1911 before moving west, where the institutions and small magazines of Southern California gave his literary career its first durable setting. He studied at the University of Southern California, receiving an A.B. in 1916 and an M.A. in 1920. An early poem, “Ad Matrem,” appeared in the Los Angeles journal *The Graphic* in 1917 as part of William Van Wyck’s Manuscript Club poetry page. MacIntyre taught at Los Angeles Polytechnic High School and continued advanced study in Germany, earning a doctorate from the University of Marburg in 1923. The European training that first strengthened his academic credentials also established the linguistic range on which his later life as a translator would depend.

In 1924 MacIntyre joined the English faculty of Occidental College as an assistant professor. Ward Ritchie, who became one of California’s most

distinguished printers, later remembered him as an inspirational teacher. MacIntyre moved to the University of California at Los Angeles in 1928 in a faculty exchange described in UCLA's early departmental history, and remained on the university's English roster into the 1930s. His teaching connected poetry to immediate experience rather than to academic abstraction. Josephine Miles, one of his students, recalled that students regarded him as a very good poet and remembered the directness with which he brought literature into the classroom. This Los Angeles period also bound him to the region's fine-press world, including Ritchie and the printer Benjamin Franklin Stetler.

Stage II | UCLA, fine printing, and the first collections, 1928–1937

Harry Ward Ritchie issued MacIntyre's first collection, *The Brimming Cup and Potsherds*, in Pasadena in 1930. Only thirty-two pages long and now scarce, it announced the witty, sensuous, and formally alert manner that he would expand during the next decade. *Poems* followed from Macmillan in 1936. Its three-part architecture—"Mostly Autumnal," "Trivial Lives," and "Fragilon"—moves from seasonal and animal poems through revisionary myths to a brittle modern persona. The book's classical learning never settles into reverence: Actaeon, Ariadne, Laocoön, Narcissus, and others are handled with psychological skepticism, comedy, and sharply embodied detail. During these years poems also appeared in *Poetry*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and other national magazines.

Stage III | Guggenheim Europe, *Cafés and Cathedrals*, *The Black Bull*, and translation, 1938–1954

A John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship in poetry, awarded in 1938 for twelve months beginning August 15, gave MacIntyre time in Europe and helped produce *Cafés and Cathedrals* (1939). The collection is an eighty-eight-poem itinerary through Syracuse, Paris, Arles, Rome, Chartres, Cologne, Venice, Dresden, London, Tunis, and other places. Its sonnets set markets, monuments, performers, laborers, statues, and ruins into compact visual frames. The title's paired terms identify two centers of his imagination: the secular sociability of the café and the accumulated formal power of European art. Several poems first appeared in *Poetry* in 1938 and 1939, while "By a Patriot's Grave" and "Sincerely Not Artesian" remained outside his books.

The Black Bull appeared from James A. Decker's press in Prairie City, Illinois, in 1942 with a frontispiece by Rockwell Kent. The book is MacIntyre's largest original collection and his darkest: war, bereavement, erotic need, poverty, artistic ambition, and animal vitality collide across ninety-one poems. Institutional memories connect the satirical "Detail on a Street Corner," published earlier, with a departmental conflict involving the scholar Lily Bess Campbell; the precise relation between the poem and MacIntyre's move north has been told differently and is best treated as recollection, not settled fact. By the early 1940s he was associated with Berkeley, where his knowledge of European verse and his editorial energy helped make him, in a later University of California Press account, a kind of godfather to the Press's translation program.

Translation increasingly became MacIntyre's public vocation. His versions of Goethe's *Faust*, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rilke, Corbière, and Stefan George brought a large body of French and German poetry to English readers. The work was not merely ancillary to his poems: Symbolist compression, metrical experiment, dramatic masks, and an ear for the pressure of speech continually cross between the two practices. With Paul V. Carmody he edited *Surrealist Poetry in France* (1953), and his *French Symbolist Poetry* (1958) became a widely circulated anthology. Fulbright appointments in the postwar years returned him to Europe. He also published the occasional pieces *Judean Slumber Song* (1946), *Autumn Tithes* (1949), and *The Ballad of the Horseshoe*

Nails (1953).

Stage IV | Expatriate years, late poems, and posthumous books, 1955–1982

MacIntyre's later life was increasingly expatriate. From the mid-1950s he lived for stretches in Paris, Mexico, Germany, and France, cultivating the outsider's identity suggested by Villon, café culture, and his own poems. In Paris he met Marian Spearman, an American born in Canton, Ohio, in 1924 and raised in Akron, at the Café Select. She became his wife and later described a life of movement among Mexico, Germany, France, California, and Washington, D.C. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* is dedicated to her. MacIntyre also had a son, Ferren MacIntyre, who became an earth scientist and received his own Guggenheim Fellowship in 1971.

A stroke in 1960 shadowed MacIntyre's final years, but *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* appeared from Trident Press in 1965 with an introduction by Robert Payne and a portrait by James Callahan. The book reprinted selections from each earlier collection and added the cycles "Shun the Heaven" and "The Blue Knife," whose stripped syntax and unstable song forms register age without abandoning erotic comedy or ferocity. Payne portrayed a restless, generous, skeptical poet whose life and work resisted academic domestication. MacIntyre died in Stuttgart, West Germany, on June 30, 1967. Small posthumous gatherings followed: *MacIntyre* (1975), a five-poem fine-press booklet, and *October Songs* (1982), issued by Lawrence Clark Powell and Ward Ritchie. His reputation survives most visibly through translation, but the original poems reveal a distinctive Southern California modernist whose map always joined Los Angeles to a much larger, multilingual world.

EARLY PERIODICAL VERSE

Stage I | Los Angeles and the early lyric record, 1917–c.1920

Ad Matrem

What dream you had of me when 'neath your breast
Imperious life demanded audience,
The hopes you visioned in the night silence,
Heart-sung o'er little animal close-pressed:
That I should live and love in life the best,
Sow goodly deed, and walk in reverence,
Love chastely, be a man of no pretence,
Battle for right at a great God's behest,—
Tho blinded I have staggered far apart
From the straight path you marked, tho I have been
Swayed by caprices, careless, marred the art
Of perfect living, beggared what I could be,
Tho I have fallen where striving was to win—
I pray you keep that olden dream of me.

Publication. *The Graphic* (Los Angeles), May 12, 1917, 11, in "Manuscript Club Poetry," edited by William Van Wyck.

Night

The ever-busy weaver clouds are carding wool and spinning shrouds
To catch the dying glory of the westering sun.
Twilight is hushèd as a tomb,
The wind has ta'en her holy broom
And cleanly swept the heavenly room
Like to a serving nun.

The slim moon singeth in the sky a gentle lovely lullaby,
And soft the black sea sleepeth beneath her silver hands;
While all the golden little stars,
Those million future avatars,
Are waving red and yellow bars
In pious sarabands.

Below, the fretted world is calm, for Night hath spread her silent balm
Upon the eyes of sorrow, upon the hearts of pain.
Sweet hope hath folded up her wings,
And grief forgets to pluck her strings,
While angels with soft carollings
Wash clean the earth from stain.

Publication. Early periodical text recovered through the *Poetry* archive's author record; exact first-appearance date has not been established.

THE BRIMMING CUP AND POTSHERDS

Stage II | Eight available selections from the 1930 collection

The complete 1930 book has not been recovered. These eight poems are the selections MacIntyre reprinted in 1965.

The Brimming Cup

I do not drink in sorrow,
But in the purest joy.
Man in holy melancholy
Sits alone with grief.
Only in glorious madness
Am I the drunken boy,
Pouring green flasks of liquid sun,
And dancing like a leaf.
I leap in zenith revelry,
I spit upon my past.
My thundering heels
Strike ringing sparks from cobble-stones
Like little stars
To nick off the minutes flying fast.
Ah, I am only drunken
When joy laughs in my bones!

Publication. First published in *The Brimming Cup and Potsberds* (Pasadena: Harry Ward Ritchie, 1930); text from *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 3.

The Scissor-Grinder

The scissorman tramped into town.
Ding a dong! ding a dong!
He set his little grindstone down,
And to its music hummed a song.
Old Grandma Dumkin's scissor-shears,
He edged their blades so finely
'That she cut off her children's ears
And made them sing divinely.
And Gaffer Smither's pruning-hook
He whetted to such keenness
That Gaffer trimmed the town, and took
The shade away for meanness.

But furthermore, the butcher's knife
He rounded off so dully
That cattle now enjoy their life
And fill the milkpails fully.
Then—ding a dong! ding a dong!
I saw his red hat top the hill,
But all night long I heard his song
Played by his brother watermill.

Publication. First published in *The Brimming Cup and Potsberds* (Pasadena: Harry Ward Ritchie, 1930); text from *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 4.

Handiworks

I've an elephant in copper,
Clear from India.
No pavilion rides on top her.
Tigers, keep away!
Fierce is she and strong and flighty,
O, this dreadful pachyderm
Turned out by the Lord Almighty,
Easy as He'd hatch a worm!

Publication. First published in *The Brimming Cup and Potsberds* (Pasadena: Harry Ward Ritchie, 1930); text from *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 5.

Judean Slumber Song

Little Jesus, come to rest
On thy mother's slumber-breast.
Thy clout is fragrant, sweet with myrrh.
Sleep, my little carpenter.
'Thou hast been on journeys wild,
And of princes been reviled.
Safe at home, thou hast no care.
Sleep, my little traveller.
Baby of the holy star,
To serve thee wizards came afar;
But I can tend thee all the day
And wrap thee in thy dreams away.
In the sun thy father's plane
Shed chips o'er thee in golden rain.
I shall smooth them from thy hair.
Sleep, my little carpenter.

Publication. First published in *The Brimming Cup and Potsberds* (Pasadena: Harry Ward Ritchie, 1930); text from *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 6.

The Roof at Milan

Fairy arches filigreed,
Lace against the blue,
Spiders' handicraft—concede
Sound mathematics too!
Frost-trees here mock southern heat
And sprout forth giant flowers;
Icicles were forged and beat
For pinnacles and towers.
Saints and griffins, wolves and kings,
Horses, mermaids, bees,
Bishops, dolphins, snakes with wings,
Nightmare witcheries,
Perched and froze here. Brave they stand
Four hundred years and two,
Balanced as in God's right hand,
White on Milan's blue.

Publication. First published in *The Brimming Cup and Potsberds* (Pasadena: Harry Ward Ritchie, 1930); text from *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 7.

Love and Song

Two joys I own: the ready heart
And the reflective mind;
And thus my love is saved by art
From drifting down the wind.
When I file clean a golden rhyme,
Or lure shy love along,
I know not which is more sublime,
The bright dream or the song.

Publication. First published in *The Brimming Cup and Potsherds* (Pasadena: Harry Ward Ritchie, 1930); text from *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 8.

The Aesthetic Evader

You should have seen the man himself, to know
Just why my fingers itch to write him down;
But he is gone, as all frail spirits go,
Nor trace nor echo keeps him in the town.
And that is why I scramble high and low
For bits of him and write them safely down.
As delicately French as Notre Dame
And quizzical as any mockingbird,
He seemed to fetch his quips from sleeve or palm
And turn his cigaret's flip to a word;
But all the while he smiled at you, quite calm,
Or gazed away as if he hadn't heard.
He'd built a fragile minaret of art
And there ascended, far above the crowd,
To hug his pet ideas to his heart
And hen-like brood on them. O, he was proud
Of each slight, care-meticulated part,
And sat there, like a genie on a cloud.
Nose in the air, I used to sniff at him
With a dog's wistfulness for any sop
He didn't want himself; but he was prim
As an old maid with packages; his crop
Craved the more fertile soil; his shiny nimb
Burned frugally and didn't waste a drop!
So finally, my belly quite rebelled
At my quaint ardent hunger. And they say
His own evasions turned on him and felled
Him bluntly with the bludgeons of to-day.
Above his tower's shards I stopped and spelled:
"He starved and dwindled and was puffed away."

Publication. First published in *The Brimming Cup and Potsherds* (Pasadena: Harry Ward Ritchie, 1930); text from *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 9.

The Last Gift

I brought you my hill's tithes of scarlet
I gave
You songs that quiver
With delight.
O, let the poor gifts smile upon your hours
Like moon-bursts on a river
In the night.
I fetched you laughter, dying in a kiss;
But I have nothing more, you understand,
To give you, save
My love—and here it is,
As a child brings an apple in his hand.

Publication. First published in *The Brimming Cup and Potsherds* (Pasadena: Harry Ward Ritchie, 1930); text from *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 10.

POEMS

Stage II | The complete 1936 collection

Mostly Autumnal

Brown-Study

This is the nodding. Soon will come the sleep.
No tears and no farewells... the thing is good.
Whoso was troubled now needs no more keep
watch by the gate. The barriers have not stood.

This pod the drouth pried open the wind shakes;
the feathery V's fly towards the greener scope;
the dullest worm keeps at the loom that makes
a confident birth-caul of his silken hope.

Read time's intent, and in these calm cerecloths
let your heart rest a small eternal tick,
serenely as the still seeds, the numb moths
who know nor care not be they dead or quick.

And in these figs, each like a woman's body,
hiding the flowers, working the perfect fruit,
be sure—as of this kiss—that earth's brown-study
will fetch the answer we cannot refute.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 1.

The Sun Enters Libra

Pat with the sun's recessional, the fall;
and tiger-tawny summer slinks off in mist.
Lungs now must wrestle with the wind to fill
the shivering sponge in the contracted chest.

Copper shavings are sliced by knives of frost;
leaves are a golden litter and scarlet rags.
You may carry a cidery apple safe in your fist,
but you'll scramble the brush in vain for linnet eggs.

That thin clear wine the high heart drank of June
is out. The autumn gives his bousing guests
mulled ale, raw brandy dripped from the still of the moon,
and amber milk from the heavy persimmons' breasts.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 2.

Drouth

Regard the withered buckthorn, dead deerweed,
the rattling tambourines of lupine seed,
the motherly yucca wilting with full pods,
the moribund sagebrush mouthing earth's dry paps...

then listen for the secret thoughtful rain
down-sifting slowly, slowly, in the laps
of drowsy harvest-gods:
gods with gold faces whose breath is winnowing.

Here walks causality in its calm round,
preparing epic deeds,
even this instant trickling of ripe seeds.

How each doom-bearer, deftly, with no sound
sinks, sure as a corpse into the burial ground,
ah, slyly winking, planning resurrection.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 3.

The Unicorn

Begot on the impossible by the dream
of a fabulist, he found himself in skin
of rippling silver, hoofed of clear moonstone.

He feeds, one thinks, on amaranth and a dram
of spindrift from a sun-start. He dares scan
the navel of men's treachery and the stain

of lust hidden softly in the clothes of women.
Tales lie that bid him prop a shield or fight
(and without victory!) a lion. Fate
lets harness him no destiny nor human

urgencies. And if a virgin stirs
strange surges which an hour his proud neck tame,
his crystal gaze fronts yet the sun betimes,
his true horn lifts towards invisible stars.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 4.

Kiosk of Silver and Black

Along the narrow hill-path
nicked by the crickets' knives,
I walked in the sullen glow,
my feet on the watch for snakes
that love to lie in a bath of moon with their wives...
and my brain was loud with the sound a sick heart makes.
I heard the cattle champing
the last grudged grass of the year
and two cocks hoarse with a dream
debating if it were day.
As the lights went out in the town, the stars dropped near,
and my feet were stubborn along the narrow way.

No answer lurked in night,
for we are not of her kin.
Beasts are instructed by moon-spells
and confident wait the prime
and clarity of sun; but over my skin
prickled the bristles of a vanished time,

and I was the crickets' knives,
the caduceus of snakes,
the slow-turned cud of grass,
the cry of the cocks flung far.
Exceeding great was my joy to forget what aches
in a heart laid bare to the cool reflex of a star.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 5.

Tiger

Tiger, tiger, back and forth,
north to south and south to north,
in the jungle of your cage
wear to quietness your rage.
All your dreams are hemmed by bars
black against a world of stars;

all your deeds are safe-confined
by the bones that cup your mind.
In their pride and ruthlessness
men have conquered wilderness
but remembering, now and then,
grin to see strength in a pen,

while their private beasts run free:
hate and greed and lechery.

Tiger, tiger, what dread eye
framed your awful symmetry?
Now an iron sacrilege
binds God's freedom in a cage.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 6.

Helianthus Annuus

Perhaps the rose is overpraised. The sun
allows a chaster flower his shield's design,
the flame-rayed orb impregnate of his colour
till the gayest dancer on the wind is duller
than this elected glory on a stalk,
turning—tho the roots are wedged in rock—
true and geared to the moving of the sky
with steel precision: authentic heliotrope.

None save the smoke-eyed eagle dares address
the god. Who hankers mysteries must learn
from the oracles of this austere priestess,
trance-rapt and faithful past the swirl of space;
must silently stand watching, to discern
the god's grace shining on her humbleness,
his true gold answering from her upturned face.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 7.

Tauromachy

Gay banners biting along his spine
are tossed as he plunges.
His shoulders are bled with the broad triangular spear.
The band has played; veronicas have twirled
rich mandragora; dizzily the bull...
This is the moment for which all Spain
sits, breathless: the red instant of katharsis
when the bull, the blade and the man are suddenly one.
Thru the reluctant keyhole of the bone
thin wards have let out the integrity of the bull.

The vomiting of thick blood on yellow sand
makes a sort of national flag, you understand.
The scarlet hilt compassionately a cross
for blessing—and the steel drinks at the heart.
The kneeling of the dead is yet to come.
(One should improvise something here of the animal's eyes
which glaze as he remembers the blue skies,
the pasture grass and his little calves at home;
but, Jesus, why must one be sentimental?
Perhaps an angry death is rather sport.)
The ear is cut off and passed to the president's box;
the show is a Spanish form of dramatic art.
But you, stiff-legg'd, whom the mules draw out,
what you say now?
Was it not wise of your brother the ox
to trade his jewels for the safer plow?

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 8.

Crescendo

Green lurks in chamisal where sun yet pries
for niggard scraps of gold in autumn's dulness.
On a cold shore last summer's flotsam dries:
torn Mariposa pods,
burst yucca boles.
The mustard-breasted finches, aware of the frailness
of feathers tried by frost,
are off to the south.
The wind at night has a hollow curse in his mouth,
and the puma's out,
with murder sheathed in his soles.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 9.

Cock Crow Against the Third Season

To Harriet Monroe

We have had enough of autumn, the delayed
doom-stroke. Our nerves too-overhorne the edge.
Indian summer swoons, belied
of prophecies upon earth's opulent page.

O winds, come cleanly wing'd of raven!
Sweep the golden atomies from our eyes.
Wipe off those May-dreams of illiterate heaven
whose angels' harping breeds but perfidies.

Force us indoors. Seal window-tight our hearts
as we stretch lean shanks to the hearth and listen
to arctic-colloquies, which blot our hurts
and hopes, and read our future in that lesson,

winning from sullen brown to candour crossed
by thought's swift bird-tracks on the snow, as light
as fern-fronds on the panes... or is it- frost
on eyes where all shone azure-clear of late?

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 10.

Monologue of the Rating Morgan

In Rutherford County

Star-face Lightfoot, sired by the Fox,
champed in his paddock, pawing rocks.
He neighed and swore: By God's fetlocks,
that a round-rumped stallion of my blood
be prostitute to a sign: At Stud!

How I could gallop into a battle,
or at the plow make the trace-chains rattle...
yet here I neighbour a flock of cattle.
My name is wind, my hoofs swift flame,
my eyes are lightning, my breath is foam—
my clientele is but les femmes.

When passing geldings and fillies neigh,
“Hi there, Dad!” that's not to say,
“Big Boy, that was a race today!”

It's merely a snicker, half inside,
as people give to a brand-new bride.
Lord, is there nothing left for a horse
but a daily quota of intercourse?

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 11.

The Park

All the lanes lead, with sudden curve and angle,
astounding with green vistas and ferny dells,
thru a landscape where man's artifices mingle
paradoxes in emerald: bowers, dials,

flower clocks, mazes, with marble gods and hybrids;
and the close is stocked with squirrels, rabbits, and deer,
eloquent parrots, dry tortoises, and sly birds;
fruits ripen, exotically foiling the tricks of the year.

The lanes lead surely, and feet once in the path
come to a fountain eventually where the eye
is lured to center on life bare to the pith
and watch white waters it dares not go by.

Tall, they leap and poise, bright under the sun,
that instant when becoming attains to being:
tiptoe in crystalline quiet... and, the thing done,
seek earth, laughing, singing, and obeying.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 12.

Simple Arboreal

Trees in autumn learn to wear
a desolate new-widowed air,
or in martyrial madness strip
their round limbs to the wind's thin whip:
frozen to black congealéd veins
in the silver flesh of snow and rain,
stiff-gnarled fingers of starved hands
half-buried in forgetful sand.

Then, as if widows dried their tears,
hung fractured emeralds from their ears,
bound green samite on their breasts,
smiling to greet the hero-guest—
or rather, in mute offering
before the Pentecostal spring,
the trees stand, maiden, tips to roots,
dreaming of buds and flowers and fruits.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 13.

Iron

For Archibald MacLeish

Iron hidden in the eternal mind
had to be found and smelted and beaten to swords;
for man was weary of throwing stones and words.
As he grew civilized, he had to find
a better tool for malice. Such is man,
meekly accordant to the primal plan.

Iron lay ripe as a fruit that must be picked.
Stupid, to chip at flint when dociler stuff
will flow in easy moulds. What a joy is axe,
gleaming when a beam's to be fixed,
or better, ruddily bathed
when it crunches some swift wood-thing and leaves it stiff.

Worth more than air, sun, water, fire, is iron:
skeleton of our time. What could we do,
leaning on boneless stone that has no length?
All progress walks iron-shod
up the carpet of perfection, straight towards God.

Let us grasp iron; drink, bolster our souls with iron.
It had to be, that man might learn
rigor and railroads, so attain full strength.
Had he not found it, iron would have risen from clay:
creative phallus, hammer of destiny,
a symbol which not to worship were heresy.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 14.

Sundial

Monolith astute among posing marigolds,
gleaning the scattered kernels of the sun,
recording nothing but the bright design
that warms and gilds—

unless it be the argent lunar-largesse
or the drunken prodigal lightning-flare—else, nothing.
This cool condottiere among the burgess
stands, helmed in bronze, well-seen of marble clothing,
spits on the hourglass, eyes the town clock with loathing.

With his gnomon stiff as a dirk,
content with what he has got,
when the sun is out and the moon is dark,
he misers his memories thru cold and murk
while the starched prim blossoms starve for light, and rot.

So, I salute you, almsman best-concerned
with just what warms the cockles, the brow gilds:
egoist sedulous that the sun be turned
to you, soft-buoyed on the breasts of the marigolds.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 15.

Tree

The sun-reflecting tree, the flower distilling
the nuptial bait,
the pulpy matrix filled
with destiny are sloughage of the season.

Only when winter strips the boughs can one see
the skeleton of implicit tree:
bare limbs against sky limned,
senescent, dry, where now the sweet sap climbed.

The old philosopher without clothing
drinks the thin sun, bathes in the night rains,
commerces with the larger constellations,
or warmly snores in the gray arms of fog:
old man needing nothing,
content with winter's ruin.

Yet, in a month, juvescent, he will waken
and want the north-breasting birds, ephemeral gnats;
he will work towards a plan that makes a fruit or a nut.

Very few people then will see
the informing bones that prop a tree.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 16.

The Year Looks Over the Edge

No sound among the leaves now. The dry brush
is quiet under the frost-muffled hoofs of the Bull,
and the breasts of women asleep
droop like forgotten flesh,
unnuzzled, uncupped by hands; the urn is full,
and fog from the sea creeps grayly
up the hill-slope.

One cricket that got by heart the tune from the tomb
lost down millennia chirp-chirps and chirrs.
There is no answer. The iron-toothed gates are down,
and life's great belly does nothing to fire or tame
the sluggishness of stuff—save two choristers:
tall querulous owls in dialectic with dawn.

Sleep is an autumn-thing loved down the ages.
Come, Sleep, snore in a dream of summer.
The upraised fiat-finger of cosmos has wilted,
and the year crawls grimly up to look
over the edges
and wonder when the last comer
will enter the lists and have done,
that the world may be
smelted.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 17.

Eastern Winter

For Robert Frost

Colts in the lee of haystacks huddle: lost
orphans shivering from forelock to heel—
how arrogantly Winter in gray steel
rides the brown fallows, rings with shoes of frost
the roadways, hangs a shroud on each fence post,
and stills the waters with a silver seal.
His plainsong is the snowbird, crow, and teal,
and chimney-soughings his essential ghost.

But safely in the heart, hobbled like a mug
of cider, April mimics on green feet
glide, wrapping your thin shoulders with a rug;
a coil of golden cat, September heat
purrs in your lap...and you foretaste some sweet
similar dregs yet from Time's big stone jug.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 18.

Fictional Armistice

Winter stood, his loins girding, holding breath,
and one gazed round with a half-hope to find
some blade of fresh green, catch some bright bird-note,
some early bruited of the prime year's faith.
But the sun had no virtue in him, could not fend
earth from the chill twist of the garrote-knot.
The armistice was fictional and fond.

Onward winter stamped; the grass was hair
thinned on an old man's skull and seared and hoar;
leaves spun, confetti-thick; the heart could hear
the eternal noumenal sigh, even as juice dripped
from the last grapes kingly and futile anodyne.

The moon was a drop on winter's nose; the moon
was a pale pinched orifice for a dead girl's moan,
and a decimal point of diminishing aftermath...
the moon was a jack o' lantern ghastly draped
for nuptials in sullen chiton of silver froth
of swirled fog shaken by night from his mad dog mouth.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 19.

Prayer During Winter Solstice

You who awaken birds that sway on branches
safe in the wind's hand thru nights with no clocks,
no clocks which crawl on our nerves and ride our blood,
shake now your bright hair above the hills. Be dawn!

Take this dew from the clepsydra of roofs
as lustrals dripping. Take my heart held out
for your clear amber gaze. Keep it today;
let him ride with you as the silent wheels
of time touch softly leaves to newer green
and smite the chromium towers to a mighty praise:
you, touching in lover-wise the many-breasted
waters, gilding the dolphin-leaps, and drawing
the tear-shaped resin from splits in apple trees.

Let me be one with you on this rich day
of your return in friendliness to earth.
Let me drink gold wine of you to work my heart
towards the good pregnancy inspired in earth
by the nearer drawing of your kingly feet.

May your strong smile brood upon us, longer, longer,
that we yield honey and oil and hecatombs.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 20.

Trivial Lives

The Ladies, God Bless Them!

By dream-mirages men are run thin—
it is maggots sucking the sweet gray brain;
but women set their hearts on emphatic something
and sort much chaff to find one grain.

Their hands are slow to launch hot metal
into the liquid ball of a squirrel.
They had rather rub their cheeks on camellia petals
or brood on the horny cornea blunting a pearl.
Their delicate slippers of desire
click silver-heeled down prim brick walks;
they have more of the full moon's glow and less of fire,
and they lean to a southern wall like hollyhocks.

Nor do they soar to seek, as a hawk. When time
stoops to their patient cup, O suddenly over
the lip life brims, with a drink sufficient to tame
the thirst of the destined lover.

Centripetally they are poised in the wheel
of their world, smooth axles, jewel-set;
and tho the man—like a rim—goes far, they feel
they will somehow come as far as the wheel can get.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 22.

Eve

Lead-rimmed in the triptych's center she stands,
sinless but now, now clothing her body with sin
till, incandescent as an obsidian sun,
she glows with time's destined misery under her skin,
the juice of instructive apple wetting her hands.

Her belly's rondure rives the gates
of Death in hell. How Cain the sneaky waits
with his bashing stone!

Animals with soft eyes trail past, unnamed;
thousands of trees and herbs to be classified and tamed—
such work a helpmeet might have done.

But with our malignant future under her heart, stands stunned
our mother, munching apple... and God walks near,
taunting Satan with the dreamed revenge,
planning himself in flesh.

There she is, right at his ear,
yet broods no woman's word
(O, ignorant rib!)
to rob him of petulance; with no hand strokes,
until he purrs, the stiff hairs of his beard.
She should coddle the old Irascible as a guest.

But suddenly with previsioning fear
she clasps the apple between her apple-breasts.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 23.

Actaeon

Ovidian Puppets Drifting Down Time

A stag belled. Hounds tongued, crashing brush:
lithe leapers, with the huntsman easily after.
A glade with naveled pool... past husks, the flesh;
past flesh, pure beauty—and nymphs' dappled laughter.
The dart dropped from his hand. His feet were roots.
His eyes, dumb cups by radiance overfilled,
were blinded. Thru the innocent brain deep shoots
thrust pain he had not sought for, had not willed.

Rash chary goddess! Fiat bade horns burst
from brows where animal just now was burned.
A stag's pelt took his limbs, curled on his breast
whence redly his hounds tore what the chase earned.
This arrogance of chastity, oiled, toweled,
twitched on her mantle, stuck the crescent pin
in her hair, and went.

 All night the lost dogs howled,
moon-stricken, sniffing scraps of Actaeon-skin.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 24.

Admetus

Ovidian Puppets Drifting Down Time

O King beguiled by sick romanticism,
going to bed too briskly with a wife
this morning dead, you drift in dream's abysm,
and truth works neither in the warp nor woof

of this bright gauze automaton you feel,
cold in your arms. Not she shall peel your grapes
tomorrow in the arbor. Necrophiles
waylay her in the shadows where she gropes

in leaden sandals of your tenderness
for King Admetus. With her sacrifice
burned on her like adultery, she wanders
this side of Styx till you regain your face

and grovel it in dust, spit in your breast
in self-scorn that you took the thing she gave you.
Bawl bravely there an aeon, and at last
she being what she is may then forgive you.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 25.

Alcestis

Ovidian Puppets Drifting Down Time

You who have known the wholesome kiss of Death
because of a love not worthy to be loved,
who have crept among the stealthy blue-mouthed ghosts

gliding mistlike with no propulsive breath,
who have gazed into the judge's face and moved
the laws of nature, whom a god's strength cost

unenviable resumption of a life
that could be little thence, having not been
purgative to man's selfishness, what thin
husks shall be fed to a resurrected wife?

Lady, you like to die, I take it, but
who falls once may be innocent; who twice
goes to Death's bedroom has condoned the vice
by habit and should wear hearse-plumes on her scut.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 26.

Adonis

Ovidian Puppets Drifting Down Time

This hunt is all. Definitive signatures
are graven in his thigh by ivory styles
of the rutting boar. The boy has got the cure
for life's contingencies. Observe: he smiles.

The brisk arterial thud of systole
pumps winy lustrals for the thirsty Loves.
Sheep-herders flagrantly in Sicily
will flute this dying in smug laurel groves.

Virgins will plant him in red pots of barley,
praying to be conceived of bright boar-slayers,
and listen for the mort-note, late and early,
that they may hunt the hunter of their prayers.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 27.

Antaeus

Ovidian Puppets Drifting Down Time

Tugged by the demi-god, he rises,
a wriggling mullet, bright in the Lybian air;
nostrils stretched wide, as if he sniffed rich roses:
straw man in the hands of Zeus' heir's ire.

His legs and arms strain, straggling vines
whose tender tendrils seek the abiding prop;
but death even now seeps thru the throttled veins
that clot and dry, denied the sustaining pap.

Earth, lift your heavy breasts,
suckle your son once more before he dies...
but the brass-thewed god holds a cloud's limp skin, pressing
the last drops out for tears in the earth's eyes.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 28.

Ariadne

Ovidian Puppets Drifting Down Time

When the thin thread had strangled the man-bull
and tugged your hero from the labyrinth,
could you sit in the gynaeceum, spinning wool?
What Cretan roof could hide you? Ha, the month
under the sky and the moon, with waters swishing
by the low gunwale! You wound amaranth
for those black cunning brows and dream that kissing
might cure a traitor of his treachery.

O, the songs of sailors and the gay waves tossing!
Lady, in Naxos lurks no jeopardy.

Again a princess, couched on purple; spears
ward you; slaves at beck—but where is he

the smoothly spoken vanished? Not such spares
the useless tool. He is gone as a man goes,
sickened of honey: as erst fox conspires
against the grapes, then with full belly will gaze
at a bird... the grapes, I said? O, wains of fruit
drawn by mad Maenads while the satyrs raise
coniferous thyrsi, laughing as fears shoot
thru your torn heart (soon healed now!), as the pard
bears the plump Asian savior. Under his foot
burst flames and turn to flowers. Stars gem the sward.
Of them he makes a bride-crown. (That poor thread!)
When the bull-sticker left, the god appeared—
and that's his arm there pillowing your head.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 29.

Atalanta

Ovidian Puppets Drifting Down Time

Fleet-footed, swifter than the Boeotian mares,
spurning green divots from the fateful track,
she is doomed to run one race the more
than she can trot with laurels on her back.
A hundred panting suitors fell
behind the nimble pistons of her calves
while drop by drop retributively full
her urn brimmed with the tears of futile loves.

Let her beware of fruit, of pippins most
which slowly mellow until, golden-ripe,
they shall roll before her at the furlong post
to blunt her brilliant speed with aureate rape.
And she shall lose, beaten by that inching urge
no virgin may elude, being come at last
under the sign of that more amiable age
which sprints in perfect form, but not too fast.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 30.

Laocoön

Ovidian Puppets Drifting Down Time

Unfired
by pigeon-bowels or vulture-feathered arcs,
he smote the stout pine belly of the horse
with an ash spear, and spoke farsightedly.
And in the belly iron rattled on brass;
but from the sky antiphonal admonition
down-thundered mightily and overweighed
the soft-eared credulous.

White wave-crests crawled,
sank, rose, broke on the beach, and suddenly
were bright snakes: convolutions of swift wrath
recriminatorially looping the hierophant
and his two sons with glistening knots of muscle,
constricting, writhing in an odd quincunx
the art academies could not approve.

Joints were unhinged, veins burst, the cries were those
that churned whey in the blood of all who heard.
Blue-flashing in the sky (many declared
over the evening pulse) the virgin's eyes
dartled above the aegis-breast. No history
has got that verified, nor much less hinted
the breaking of the father's heart at the hurt
his loin-fruit took—tho melodramatists
with fanfares ruddy the stone-cracking doom
licking at Ilion as the temples fell.

But past this, gentle reader and hypocrite
suckled of falsehoods (under the reading lamp,
warm-rumped beside the heater), have you considered
how Laocoon, let down by his sea-god
after some thirty years of faithful service,

had yet that in him which made light the racking
of flesh, bore easilier his sons' death-shrieks,
and showed the unerring cornerstone of his life
in one unclouded vision that he spoke
a truth which time would gravely document?

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 31–32.

Narcissus

Ovidian Puppets Drifting Down Time

His shoulders are too plump as he lies in cress,
his chin on crossed arms, gazing in the pool.
His skin is nectarine-smooth, no hirsute peach;
the hair like golden laurel wreathed gleams, pale:
dead sun on water. Do not disturb the lad;
he holds a world in his eyes' lapis reach.

No lyre-plucking needs he, no spilled wine,
no dusty foot race. Let no nymph in rut
attempt this ripening fruit,
this soul complete
in twin halves of hermaphroditic beauty:
the perfect carved serenity,
the brows that almost meet
then spring fawn-swift apart;
the wide gaze, awed
as if from some bright shrine
an elegantly groomed god
descended, lay in the water, a floating blossom.

Do not in this arrogant prettiness
imagine a vain pettiness...
he worships wisely whose narrowed macrocosm
is tight as a dewdrop strung
from two green cress leaves on a spider's thread.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 33.

Eavesdropper in Scheria

Safe past the silver jamb, you listened, proud
of that day's catch, my regal laundress:
a man who stuck up starkly in the crowd
of waddling sailors in your merchants' island.

What wry fate fetched him, fate the unpaid pandress,
under the slight circumference of your smile
and dumped his salty body on the shore:
this stone-heaver,
frog-muscl'd leaper, epic-weaver,
bed-mate of ostracized nymphs, and sentimental
brooder about his home and his wrinkled wife?

Aye, you were pleased with him
when, primed by your papa's cellar, he bragged and bent all
tropes litotically to prop his sufferings,
and set in daily serials his life
in headlines, till the town knew nothing else.

One doubts he eyed your proffering
the wistful slim
wisp of Nausicaa, the soft berth
in a shipping business that milked Sicily
and the major drainage ports of little Asia.
Flea-bitten by the sirens' spells,
he nursed an eternal itch for tramping the sea.
Let him go, sweet treader of sheets on the river's shingle.
Better you marry the thistly
bearded Rotarian buccaneer who comes
home periodically to budget and amaze you
with gossip from Crete, with Egyptian perfumes
fresh from the British-Museum-investigated tombs,
and who does not blame you
with infidelity, or even suspect
you gnaw the empty husks of a vanished name.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 34–35.

What Darius Saw

All night the great king
paced the palace floor
and hurried forth at dawn
to see,
thru the squint-hole in the Prison door,
how Daniel was getting on.

Even to the king
the man seemed awful and tall.
The lions, lashing their thighs
and slaving, were chained to the rocky wall
by the iron in Daniel's eyes.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 36.

Potiphar's Wife

I am weary of Potiphar
and the politics
soaked in his very clothes.
I am sick of the corn
we grind and bake all day.

My mind's in a mix
and would wish—
were it not for Joseph—
I'd never been born.

I am winding
my hair
with gold,
and lapis stone
is warm in the little valley
between my breasts...

Joseph has come
and gone,
and I am alone
with a rainbow coat that I got
from my shyest of guests,

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 37.

Byzantine Mural

Commanded by that which there is no withstanding,
he was immediately in the room... and bright,
as if he were a wick; a glow not blinding
invisibly pierced and leavened the room, the cot,

the whitely startled girl whose hands were cups
about the fear of her breasts, and her mouth an O,
who was suddenly mistress of the awe that saps
the stiffening out of bones, lets the joints go.

Gently precise he spoke, this calm physician:
her body was a garden sealed, an ark
about a mystery that drank her blood

with greedy roots for the dedicated work
of bloom and fruit. But frozen to stone, she stood
graceless against gold dulled past light's compassion.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 38.

The Scapegoat

I am he who must lonely go, not of his doing,
into the desert, with all men's hands against him.
I must die for sins of which I had no pleasure,
die for the cleansing of those I do not know,
who never gave me kindness or corn, who stoned me
because I bear a name for their sweetest sin.

Prior to this decision
were whisperings in the streets and publishing
of crackling pamphlets in lubricious rubrics,
like firesticks hurled against me;
debates in council; the old women stood
long at the well and tongued their fangless gums,
rolling my name in malice, while fine girls
wrapped in leopard skins, wrapped tightly in skins
of very young leopards, danced and slit-eyed men
pursued small lecheries in the heart's dark alleys.

For these I must die, go down
the path of pleasant weeds to the gate, past apples
riperly delved in grass and brown figs split
and spilling their germins prodigally on the ground.
They have got wood in for the fires, they have cleaned the wells,
unhived the honey, trodden the grapes, and flailed
my favourite corn, forking it into the wind;
bushels flowed yellowly into the common jars,
yet I have no little measure to nuzzle for me.
The taxes are written in books, there is peace in the land;
and tho some girls went off when the army left,
there are weddings in honour, and the women bear,
unshucking gourd-seed brats to the sun's turning.
There are songs of the weavers, the hewers of handles for axes;
the shrill cry of shavings, the thumpings on copper,
are not less good than the shouts of boys that hurl
spears at the stuffed men, or of children in gutters
playing at bones with those of my cousin, the sheep.
I am going forth, and all the town is eyes
to speed me; their hands are huge with giving...
life pays them richly, and their hearts are open

charitably to load me with the plenty
of sins they would be quit of.
The curses of splenetic thin priests,
the chaunts of complacent stomach-holding fat priests,
the gnashing teeth of the more-believing sinners
who writhe on the ground,
salute me who stand, with gilded horns, with wreaths
of flowers and some dozen yards of second-rate ribbon.
I balk at the desert's edge and thru pale eyes
gaze at the sand dunes with no water-hole.

Pray for me, the roof-leaper, the thorn-rider,
for me who am gluttony, lechery incarnate,
and the nimble symbol of iniquity,
doomed to go into a place of saturate drouth—
and none shall come there to squeeze in charity
the sponge of anodyne-hyssop into my mouth.
All you that are gluttonous, lecherous,
pray for me.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 39–40.

Vatic Faces

The faces of the dead have got a wisdom
not found in auguries from guts of birds,
not found by needle-pricking after words
in a holy book.

They wear an air of *savoir faire*,
an eloquent lofty look
of cast injected from the slips of kings,
a haughty noble nose and calm disdain,

as casually as an actor a gardenia.

Aye, they are high as hawks that top a mile;
distinguished as a nation's leader's smile—
yet do not show their teeth.

They are unhurried as a man who spends
a holiday at home.

They need nor go nor come,

can make a fig at dinners, bells, and friends;
they need not shave, nor listen to the news;
and if a bore should call, need not awaken.

The faces of the dead are dignified,
smooth as a mannequin's features done in plaster.
You may lean down and look—don't be afraid:

the undertakers stitch the lids together.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 41.

Ballad of Sly Mourning

Robin Hood awoke on Whitsunday
and drew his baggy hose on muscular legs.
Maid Marian fetched a bowl of junket-whey
of deer milk and an omelet of plovers' eggs.
He took his wee penknife and bow of yew
and clothyard shafts with peacock feathers blue.

Down Watling Street he ducked the sheriff's men,
near Hughston-Stokes passed up a seven-pronged stag,
in Walmsley Dale—we still had Robin then—
he gave a dollar to a hobbly hag,
nosed by a tavern and cut Margery Broad,
then hotted down larch-pleached St. Dunstan's Road.

Robin had something eating in his breast,
something who writ this ballad never learned.
Straight as an arrow's flight, he sought his quest
and walked and looked ahead and never turned,
past Muffin's Corner to the Potters' Field,
and rubbed new salt in what had never healed.

He sate him by a grave and gazed at space.
I like to think he made a bit of prayer.
I know he wore as dolorous a face
as any outlawed ruffian could wear,
and then he sang a song
and choked and wiped his cheek and went away,

past Muffin's, up St. Dunstan's, past the Stokes,
making a circuit by the sheriff's men,
and easily thru a field to Sherwood's oaks,
took a deep breath—and was himself again.
But just where Robin went that Whitsuntide
Maid Marian never found out, tho she tried.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 42–43.

Before a City Gate

By the locked gate,
on lousy haunches and desolate,
we squat till the cock's keen matins open the gate.
We wait.

Time is not long, for we read our book
of violence, injustice and disease
neatly penned by scourge and scar on our hide—
look!

But the expurgated chapters are done in code inside
the onion skin of our brains; the inspired word
of God was whispered secretly in our hearts
and daren't be heard,
or it were an open shame to God, and mustn't
or oughtn't be heard.

We read best who are blind,
fingering with the blunt feelers of the mind,
and our ears are honed to hear
zithers evilly in the lower streets
where the doors are shut and the curtains drawn.
We read the crackling lips of the sick,
the honey of new lives dripping against the dawn
in contrapuntal balance for the dying...

Night is long, but not too long.
Soon the cock will crow, the soldiers with a song
unclink the latches, draw the bars,
just when the sun treads out the bowels of even
first magnitude stars.

Hewers of wood, water-drawers, and men
with corn bulging the patient donkeys will come,
and women carry washing to the stream.

O then, God, then
give us bright rheum in our eyes, convincing sores,

gnarled writhen bones. May we bear your good harvest
manifest, that charity rain in our cups,
as is written deep in the book in our hearts
above a signature sealed with your blood.
God, that is your bonded word. Now make it good.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 44–45.

The Spider of Twickenham

Awakening, Mr Pope, arachnoid wretch
in a night cap edged with lace, rang one to fetch
his pot of coffee, whence he sniffed the steam
while he distilled the venom of his dream
in twinned herpetetic distichs whose each coil
glistened with hard enamel, clean of oil.

Being got up at last, with canvas girt,
warmed with a rabbit's doublet'neath his shirt,
in undertaker's black, he felt so strong
he swanked a rapier eighteen inches long
and in a chaise went spanking off to Kew
or Strawberry Hill where the best scandals grew.

On a thick book at dinnertime propped high,
he roved the table with an ogre eye,
thin vulture claws, and gorged on ratafee,
lampreys, spice-cakes, and oceans of Bohea...
then, surfeited, tho Wales himself were there,
he snored like Stertorus, strapped in his chair.
Pope never laughed. He pinched a guinea till
the embossed sovereign shrieked, was choked, grew still;
yet, as a guest he tipped so Croesusly
that servants all refused their salary!
The man is brittle shards and dust now, urned
in black basalt the Elers Brothers turned;

but his slow honeyed malice trickles on
like gilded scorpions mincing down a lawn
of verdant steel-cut velvet. Mr Pope,
scanning man's manners thru the microscope
of his deformity, stabbed and conspired,
phlebotomized the praise that he desired,
was gluttled of the world... and from the world retired,

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 46–47.

Bright American Youth

What you are looking for is not in the books.
Your teachers, pompous androgynes, gentle gossips,
erect mirages of pleonastic blocks,
while the business interests multiply the warships.

You get quaint roughage: Patagonian myths,
the allegories of Spenser, the splitting of atoms,
designs for linoleum, the mating of moths,
and a muck from Marx thru Smith to the proto-Adam.

Such recipes to solve this one-piece world
are fluttered before your eyes' milky dimness;
but what you are looking for slips thru the thirled
aspiration that dies of middle-aged tameness.

Lend no ears to the flatulent epicenes,
the withered vestals. Nor April will find you lacking
when all the young men are heroes, all the girls queens.
The books have got not that for which you are looking.

Best be off to the woods, dream in the grass,
make love, or frisk the frail-croched hopes of the birds;
but leave your replicas propped at the head of the class
with a dictaphone to preserve the winged words.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 48.

Nocturne

Soddenly as a drunkard thru starlight,
earth staggers down the night;

or, earth is the pivot of the Milky Way,
a millstone grinding out another day;

or, stuff! No one admits now up or down:
along the level infinite we trundle,
fated and steady, as to town
a country woman brings her punctual bundle.
No fear! We'll be delivered at sunrise
and waken and let the real into our eyes,
still fuddled by the dream and the surmise.

No stellar disaffection
can change a compass-point our fixed direction
which is, they tell us, vaguely Vegawards.

But no astronomy outwits a bed!
Come, kiss, and no more words—

See how God strokes earth's snoring head
as if she were a dog.
God smokes and draws a line across the log
and makes a red dot where we lie a-bed.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 49.

Obituary for Jens Jorgeson

How this spider crawled on a steel-webbed sky
and caught red rivets, plunk! in his bucket.
There was never a beam too slim, too high,
but he spat on his hands and took it.

And rat-tat-tat in a Browning song,
with his thick-thewed henchmen, Stentor and Stridor,
he danged the joints, and his blows were strong,
this tight-kneed girder-rider!

Even the birds, as they climbed the clouds,
querulous, quaintly questing,
chirped: Their night-shirts should be shrouds
who choose such trees for nesting!

I've known him at home fix wistful blue
eyes on the tubular gas-trapezes
and sigh to shrink till he could do
tricks like a chimpanzee's.

O, he'd shake an Ajax fist at rain
and hurl his cud at the wombs of levin.
I like to fancy him, quit of pain,
welding the struts of heaven.

Bellerophon and Phaethon
combed cirrus-shoals for jetsam,
but Jens would drop a playful bun
on a Wall Street broker's Stetson.
Then, ho! he'd laugh till you'd think a god
played bowls with the fools of thunder;
but he died in bed, and his last abode
 over
is not earth but
 under.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 50–51.

To a Japanese Penitent

Stick your head in a basket when
your sin has got you down.
Take the gutter for any man
you meet in the town. °

Blowing remorse in a bamboo flute,
that everyone may know
you've a touch of grace, tread underfoot
yourself as you go.

Easily public condemnation
of your confessed but unnamed sin
will hasten virtue's reintegration,
sponge clean your forehead's skin.

But every day with lotuses
and red honey-plums take care
to propitiate seven goddesses
with stars in their lacquered hair!

Never take off the basket unless
you are Fujiesquely alone.
Avoid the mirror as you undress,
for your sin sticks out like a collar-bone.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 52.

The Blind Woman

To her beside the fire ear was for eye.
Her fingers in and out were snail horns
neatly stabbing and feeding yarn... and spry.

Each small word in the room dripped in tight urns
she stored to cheat the dark with: shreds of life,
weather, gossip, the crops, the platitude,
the whisper, the slow laugh.
Life gave her of its stale and still seemed good,
embased on marble with an attitude;
for so she wrought the grinding of her grist.

She draped an Iseult-robe on whoso had
a sorrow. Even a tramp might in his chest
nourish the fundamental Galahad,
she said, and she was glad.

Pale circumstance she touched with scarlet, chrome,
electric blue; soap suds were ocean foam;
a rose was heaven where angels came and went
like bees; the cheep of a sparrow in spring
was an eagle bearing safely home
Ganymede on strong-beating destined wings...
a knot in her yarn was to her an epic event.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 53.

The Convalescent

He dreams he pitches hay, chops wood,
hangs batwise from a branch,
or plucks down sky with arms flung wide—
how a dream can make one blench.

The nerves unravel, uncoil like springs
broken; his shoulders flame; the black
sleep bursts... his will is a bow unstrung.
He remembers he is sick.

Those mighty deeds he did were merely
a hand the weight of a sheet made weak
as it tried to crawl, and did too, nearly,
towards a fly on his stubbled cheek.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 54.

Charlatan Before Prophet

He has not given his deepest truth to the people.
Yesterday I thought he would die,
for he hung on the tree of life, a withering apple.
He showed but the white of an eye.

But today a nail-prick in my heel
as I drew near to his bed informed me:
The old gentleman has a spinal stiffening of steel,
is by no means infirm.

He rested, levitating over his bed,
harmoniously poised above the nothing.
Diablerie! I can prove he ought to be dead,
but he floated there, as if he'd balloons in his clothing.

A drowsy whale on softly stirring fins
hovering in the abyss, right lazily hovering;
the effortless muscles of his will made fans
of cumulus cloud-clots drifting coolly above him.

Suddenly he turned to dragon, gouged me with claws,
poured fire from his lidless eyes till I daren't blink.
I saw the navel-cord of the first cause...
the rest of the interview is emphatically blank.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 55.

Museum Piece

She dreads the nights and loathes a draft;
even the sun's gold mallet might beat soft
the brilliant enamel of her lips and eyes,
or his lewd mouth suck off the damask-dyes
from her cheeks and the fragile lobes of her coral ears,
or smudge the pallid brow of her forebears.

Better to live, safe-fenced from life,
from time's dust and the iron hand of love;
better to brood in the suave autumnal gloom
where the precieuses and the paste-faced priglets come
with gloves and Baedekers to scan her, dumb
in reverence of her entified loveliness:
faint whiffs of homage balsaming loneliness.

For frankly, save for some Tanagra figurines,
some exquisite ivory fans of immoral queens,
the Chinese birds of jade, three Theban querns,
and the incidental dust-motes on the slant
choked rays thru Venetian blinds, she is lonely and can't
(excepting always the proper custodian)
bear to behold the bifurcation of man.

Ah, virginally aloof from green-scummed bronze
gods and emperors, the fluting fauns,
the saints with orgiastic martyr-grins!
She is not for sale: this national treasure
praised in the twittering monographs: "On exposure
to the Public, every day from ten to five."

Not much else in the glass case of her life...
this beeswax piece from the Cinquecento stands,
cooped in from grief's dust and love's curious hands,
Or maybe she lives, two white-calfed footmen on guard,
in the house at Fifth and Vanderbilt Boulevard.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 56–57.

Design for a Mortuary Tile

She weighed him in ounces in a brass pan,
penciled the kitchen wall with his inches.
(He was a phoenix-heap of a man;
she sprang from preachers and scullery wenches.)

He brewed such blood in his live hot veins
could have burned her to last as a mural-saint,
but her leechy quibblings gnawed his brains
till he thinned of a glandular complaint,
clenching his fist on the common purse,
shouting wide metaphors of dung
that left her crucified in verse
which might have crowned and kept her young
as she doused her pots and made the beds;
soon the obstinate piece could scarce hoist broom
with hands of a soul chewed down to shreds.

The house grew thick as a lethal room,
and she waned, spinster of body as soul,
walked, weighed down with a shroud of lead...
till neighbours observed her caracole
that morning she found him dead in bed.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 58.

Stunted House

A low brown house under the shoulder
of a hill strong enough to ward it well:
a house with garden and dogs and cats and children,
a safe garth seeded with joy and formidable

to the thin edge of time's malice which will pry
a rift in peace and let one be carried in pine
from the tight circle, leaving something sly
in every room, dependable as pain.

A numbness takes such a house, and it grows used
to feeling cold on days of brightest sun,
to keeping a certain room just as it was
before... and none will care to sleep there soon.

The traps and trinkets are not disturbed,
as if tomorrow they might be wanted;
the order of living resumes the orb'd
compactness, as if the house had not been stunted.

A woman stands in the garden, in the gay noise,
stands and gazes with eyes that nothing see:
a milepost rooted in what was once
and is not now, but her mind wills it be.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 59.

Circus

Aerial fleas, in a canvas upside-down
bowl, centrifugally marking dizzy arcs
on radius ropes—which are incidentally insured—

swing on bull-dog teeth, kick hats from clowns,
alight among ladies whose tights are intimate bark
on mighty hips and bosoms to be endured...

while Walrus points a push ball on his snout
in the second ring, and torch-daubed faces grow white
watching a personage vomit preposterous fire.

Somewhere between the gate and the going-out
the last peanut is crunched. Off go the lights,
and men are shut of the dream that they came for.

When the elephants of illusion fade, when the snakes
of error and ignorance are charmed, grow stiff,
when the lust that licked at the lady acrobats

is sublimate, it is clear the self awakes,
stomps to square walls of time's more durable stuff
and hangs mirage in the hall, safe under his hat.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 60.

Truce

When sleep that has so still a voice
shrieked and ran down the alleyway,
strangling against the black, I heard

the slow wheel of the minutes poise
and spill its buckets, silverly
dripping the grudging clicked croaks of birds

that lighted whushing: birds that wore
seven Stygian feathers on each wing,
unblinking planet-eyes, and beaks

cruel as a Jew's scimitar.
Slow-nodding in a cozy ring,
they eyed the sagging of my cheeks,

waiting until my chin went slack.
I turned and clutched two ropes of hair
and breathed your soft cow-fragrant breath.

I cupped your left breast. Down the air,
on a mother's tip-toes, sleep came back—
and for that night I cheated Death.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 61.

Senescence

He had come this far, this far, to sit at last
gazing against the going-down of the sun
past interlocutory hills, lone, lost
in winter mist, into the waters soon

to sink in blackness: flatly embossed breasts
of undulant negro women. He had come
up dim perspiring years, in jets of haste,
thru swales of idleness, clomb to the comb

of peace where he lay, watching now the end
of the earned culmination: the snatched rest
larding endurance, copulative and
urgent to the quiescency of rust.

This far... now he dared doze, forget the panting,
lifting a dog's leg at the passed mileposts
of barren work, the emptiness of wanting,
the thin moth-eaten salutes of musty ghosts.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 62.

A Wild Duck Falls

To Rockwell Kent

Round-breasted, warmed in the feathery lap of sky
whose breed you are, O carefully moulded...

too many things and yet not quite one thing:
invisible you are not. Man has far-
reaching cruel eyes and hands of steel
to claw you down.

You, north-bound,
dreamed the safe tundra, the mating, the tight nest,
sun-pillowed, ringed with fortalice of ice,
subtle against the red eye of intrusion.

But, as you sped in arrowy squadron, quick
and scudding a continent briefly,
something other than good has willed to blunt,
unwick that hope, and a finger-twitch has done
quietus to your saga.

Fall like stone!
The arrow, straight as longitude, flies northwards,
and you live towards forever in that flight.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 63.

Rear Yard

The back of the house the rare eye sees
lets into the minor frugalities:
the well-frayed wash and pods of the cheaper peas.

Windows are blind, with paint stuck shut;
walls, blistered, sweaty, flecked with soot;
leaves in a dead fleet float in the water-butt.

Packing cases, a sack of coal,
a petrified cat that waits for dole,
and an apple tree with miser-sap in its soul.

But the hungriest tramp that ever was
knows well no good could come to pass
up this parting line in gray-scummed wire grass.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 64.

Remanded

When little girls learn how well flesh can ache
under tuition of the pundit pain,
the muscles ripened for dancing suddenly slack
and eyes are muted as an attic pane.

Then doctors gravely gazing at white beds
that should have been a girl's throne and a fort
watch the lean splintered mercury thru lids
whose flicker can stamp down a mother's heart.

The covers are kept smooth, the pillows cooled
with fragrant spirts, and half a greenhouse comes,
reminding one the So-and-soes have called.
And steps are soft, even in the lower rooms.
Hurt lurks, suspended, stabbing at the breath,
confirming mourners in their fine rehearsals—
the little girls are groomed and given a bath
and primly dressed in white, as for espousals.

But all this is beside the primal gist
and itch of time in matter. When a twig
is broken, leaves that shall not green deem best
to fold themselves in nothing or to beg
birth thru some unpruned neighbour-node; the fruits,
topazes, rubies, strung on threads of sap,
freeze tight as fairy zeroes; and the roots
call the pink-nippled buds home for a nap.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 65.

For My Sister

This for my sister who sprang of love
exceeding that which forged me: designed more coolly
as my counterpart in earth's meticulous tally.

How she throve
with her Spica eyes, auricomous hair;
danced out her April, swaying bulrush-lithe;
ran thru the mire of the world on buskins: good
as the smell of fresh-chopped hickory wood.
(And, merle and mavis be damned, but my sister was blithe!)

So, softly came she to prime, with a tended flame,
she who was christened with dream's unnameable name,
and meekly gathered what her fortune's scythe
swathed at her feet, and sang and withed
good sheaves.

She lives now, white in my mind, in a garland of leaves,
quick yet as dawn pitched up by the moon's thin horn:
a hill-top wisp not time's fell whip can tame,

the wraith of my sister who was never born.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 66.

The Too Soon Apple

Epicedia to Be Read by W. C.'s Mother

As if one sat beneath a tree and waited
the easy ripening of a chosen fruit,
dreaming the first cool crunch, the palate wetted,
the safe womb curling tight on the sleek brown freight;

as if one brooded in midsummer peace
and heard roots at the breast of the mother-ground,
watched the colour creeping at even pace,
lulled by the growing making a steady sound.

One was content to wait the time, assured
that apples fall, just to their instant's doom...
as if a sudden wind flew past and sheared
the stem before the best of the sap had come...

as if one sat beneath a tree and waited,
too puffed with hope, waited too quietly,
then wakened and looked at autumn thru eyes that hated
the careless mover that let such ill winds free.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 67.

Alternatives

Epicedia to Be Read by W. C.'s Mother

So many taller ways of dying! Sure,
had he thought it over, he'd have found a better.
With one swift flare-out for his share,
were not the hawk of the air,
with a beak, pure-gold, less bitter
than the black breast of the earth? The hawk can shred
man down to an intimate thing that only his mother
dares swear on a coroner's bill: This is my dead.

Was there no glorious other
laconic assertion he had done with living?
Wiser for the heart to pry the end
among the green waves diving;
for water is ever the time-sworn friend
of one who has well-weighed over cons and pros
and totaled all: I have done.

Rather, have cracked on the moon or on the sun
have burned, against the zenith, with gnomes-toes.

But no. On the earth flailed out, this unripe grain,
leaving a shrewder stroke than from the hissing
out of a microphone: He has hopped again
and—up to now—is missing.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 68.

The Sinecure

Epicedia to Be Read by W. C.'s Mother

Lies here one strong as thunder, Atlas-thewn,
and much we marvel that stout fellow Death,
albeit the better wrestler, could win so soon,
leaving so little for us as aftermath.
Too rash, he could find no peace; his life burned fast;
but the roof can fall, God knows, on a man by his hearth;
one can blanch like a cellar-sprout in bed, yet last
longer; nor sky and sea are less tricky than earth.

Many speak well of age, give ripeness all.
I praise prime flame, the festival, the bloom.
Better win half the race, then stumble and fall,
than to hobble down to a century-off tomb.
Ladies and you his feres, no life endures...
may you have much gauds and goods from the gods of fortune.
Our friend has got him the softest of sinecures
after the pain of a gift he did not importune.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 69.

Bringing No Laurel

Epicedia to Be Read by W. C.'s Mother

Why should a man bring laurel, glossy-leaved,
a little darker than all other green,
rippling in the wind like summer waves,
to lay as testimony he has grieved,
remind his heart that clearer days have been
before the digging these increasing graves?
I leave the branch on the tree; I bring no tears.
My heart is newly aghast at what fate gives;
I must sit stilly here until it learns
what it is heir to, what the grudging years
return of obsolete prerogatives
it had ere the firing of these votive urns.
A silent practicing to be gone thru,
a dull forecasting what in the core pertains
to its becoming—needs prod deeply here.
Mourners stare down the nose, and nothing do
save hush the thudding rumours in their veins
of what may themselves befall another year.

I bring no laurel, praising in glossy black
what I have lost here, honourably dead.
My passion has drunk the tears, deep in the eye.
O shrewd-conceived, deft-done! (Do you wish him back?)
Can one take it ill that a good friend goes ahead,
showing the proper way for a man to die?

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 70.

Behind the Eyes

Epicedia to Be Read by W. C.'s Mother

Life's slow contracting spiral line
quickens towards the zero-dot,
athwart a radius of pain;

bitten with acid, the design
leads the asserted down the not
to be which shall untense the brain.

No power can cancel or erase
the intersections made where pries
this lance into the coil of love,

marking new sorrows on the face,
but pressing, deep behind the eyes,
joys hidden in time, not spoken of.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 71.

The Slow Grief

Epicedia to Be Read by W. C.'s Mother

Raise here no monument. No rose roots feed
on this love's residue. Clean fire shall make
the final audit of this parchment deed.

Clear-headed fellow, not to falter and fade,
but swiftly as he came glide easily back,
aloof from pity, plaudit... scarcely mourned,
so wing'd the going was.

The grief will wax
with flaccid days, nights when the world is turned
on leaden axles. Steadily grief will rise,
as the tide in low salt marshes creeping,

creeping
till sorrow fills the soul and floods the eyes
with wealth too precious to be spent in weeping.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 72.

Lest the Heart in Dour Rebellion Sulk

Epicedia to Be Read by W. C.'s Mother

Not with cold-mouthed sedition, not
with hatred of the ultimate bones.
Observe more quietly this thing that got
your bread and left you stones.

Renunciation is an art
whose stern apprenticeship requires
a life-time's daily service from the heart
and the stilling of all desires.

Even doubtful then, if it fetch forth
a masterpiece. But pride will try
with arrogant chisel-strokes to make stones worth
the appraisal of love's eye.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 73.

The Increasing Friend

Epicedia to Be Read by W. C.'s Mother

Thus far she knew of death but what all know:
death is a silence, a hypodermic to pain,
the inventory of love, spring-board to peace;
death orders marble hewn, earth spaded; death
is the vacuum hungry for the last thin breath,
a prize to be won by paying the too-dear price,
a posted road down which all feet must go.

Thus far she knew of death but what all know.

But each time that he came she battened and learned
a newer lesson to stuff in her emptying heart,
and her breast became as a field too diligently turned
by the plow of time, thick-seeded for harvests of hurt.
Yet, whenever she gazed in his face, she knew him better,
until he seemed an acquaintance, even a friend
when they pledged each other.

Altho the cup was bitter,
she got a taste for dregs as she lagged to the end.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 74.

Fragilon

An Amiable Antiphony of the Antinomies

To William Y. Elliott

Acquilon, calvous and obese,
Fragilon, tenuous, moderne
yet fritillary, sat at ease
by thin shells of Sauterne.

Said Fragilon to Acquilon:
How you are rooted, fortress-fast!
While I, alas, will soon be gone,
you're of the protoplast.

But Acquilon, that man of strength,
patted with words the lustrous head
of Fragilon and coughed; at length
oracularly he said:

My lad, I'm but an epigone,
a cenotaph, a metaphor;
but you are of the noumenon
the perfume and the core.

(The curious gutter-sparrows hopped
nearer the café table, cocked
receptive heads; the coo-doves stopped
as deep-voiced Acquilon talked.)

Your innate frangibility
makes you blood-brother to the Ding-
an-sich. You're both phantasmically
marsh-lights fluttering.
Myself shall crumble, a cracked rock
of error, riven from pole to pole,
while, poised above the thunder-shock,
truth's butterflies shall sip your soul,

said Acquilon to Fragilon
and shook his hand; but even while
he grasped him, Fragilon was gone
along an exit-smile.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 76–77.

Fancy and Imagination

Lying in the green silence of the grass
thru the slow-footed afternoon of a child,
he thought of pyramids and the gods of Greece
precariously above him in the aisle
thru the oak trees to heaven. A green biwa
thrumming himself was a locust or a hop-blossom;
rank ivy up the elm wound writhing boa,
the sky became quixotically a basin.

Then, more as if he dreamed, the air leaned down,
pressed the trees on him; a squirrel brushed his cheek;
two jays swooped low with azure battle-din;
wind from a grass-blade seemed to and did speak...
and the boy was the pivot of a vasty wheel.
Space stopped. The sky was closer than his home.
Time's run-down clock made goose-flesh on him while
he knew not if he were the world, or the world were in him.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 78.

Valedictory

The mystery has failed. Do not await
sapphire across irrefutable bronze
nor melodies from airy pinnacles
of stone carved by the elves.

Hence we go drily; nor lips nor brows be wet
with aureate rain; the satyrs and the fauns
wear trimmed ears, shoes, and tweeds; the miracles
are down the trap, guarded by rustless valves.

O love—and it was love!—how have you faded
behind the dawn of an alarm clock? Have
your fingertips no strength to wash our eyes
with the bright dews of wonder?

We, the admired androgynous thing, divided,
go forth disparately and frailly heave
bleak bones at hills, whisper thru pinched pale O's,
zigzag as drunkards, knowing not where we wander.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 79.

Since the Fear Waits

Come now, my soul, at evening as you climb
the stubborn hill-path where a pale fire keeps
watch on a potless hearth,
there yet is time.

Pluck back your moment courage which now seeps
from your worn boot-heels.
One starves not wholly from the plenitude
of open-handed dearth;
rather, his coat grows large for him who shrinks.
Why, every laureled swan who thinks he thinks
shouts the broad joys of earth,
proclaims the basic good.

Sit down and take their music as your food.

Else—it is not too late—since the fear waits
behind the formidable latch, and Loneliness,
rose-manicured and sleek in her best dress,
is watching from the window,
 go down hill
and have your brandy in the warm café.

Let your lean growling belly have its fill
of wholesomeness... while it is yet today.

Then snap arthritic fingers at the Fates.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 80.

Along the Hedges

Too many leaves against the hedges now,
brown and waiting for the rotting rain.
It's no good that we gnaw
our hearts. It was and shall not be again.

I have forgotten the sycamore.
I shall never look at the moon without
the thin smile of the mind: that was your gift,
this fog of wryness that drifts
across a nocturne where two figures stand,
one either side a gully... and tho they shout
and reach gesticulate hands
and fish for melodrama with pale eyes,

they had best be off to seek for new
assurances that life with strong steps goes
on stones, serenely thru the smell of rot
where too many leaves are under the hedges now.

The stones and the rain keep faith.
We and the leaves did not.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 81.

These United States

This blob of beach Columbus found
had better been left for the gulls' playground,
to slushing waves, the wind at dawn,
to kelp and the grunnions' silver spawn;
for Johnny Doe is a sullen souse,
and Jenny the slut has erring feet;
honour's throne is a bleak outhouse,
and love with the swine gnaws acorn meat.

It's big we are and little we are
on a mud-speck sloughed from a dying star;
but such as it is, Greenbaum has got it,
has stolen, short-weighed, foreclosed on, bought it
for Rachel's bosom. This is life
in a garlicky ghetto where we stand
before the rabbi with a knife
of ultimate Shylock poised in his hand.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 82.

The Intelligentsia

Clever people have no kindliness in them;
their eyes are cool and bright as nicked scales.
If you do not praise them, they drift by you,
sniffing for louder winds to fill their sails.
They slap truth down with alligator tails.

They are unaware of the calmness of a right garden,
as if they expected a joke from stiff Scotch broom.
They fancy walking on ferns for a country tidbit,
and if you speak of your bulbs, turn gray as a tomb
and remember the drink they left in the dining room.

They glow with orgasmic zeal for Venetian blinds;
they sparkle with bits of books in electric shocks;
they will nose a lot for a nice ripe bone they can worry;
their laughter is ice in glass or iron on rocks,
and they don't like little boys strewing the floor with blocks.

Clever people affect to love one another,
and their mouths make delicate bubbles of Judas kisses;

but they are like milk whose mother has eaten ragweed,
and their peristaltic motion is serpent hisses.

Their hearts should be tacked with signs:

This dog is vicious.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 83.

“Smell Far Worse Than Weeds”

All you to whom I have given myself and given
myself to smiles that turned to the sere with autumn,
you who took my flagons clean to the bottom
yet squinted wry at my deeds with the rawk of raven,

you with whom I have quarreled for the flick of woman's
wavering eyes, who have sold me for thirty pieces,
who have not salved me when quixotic poses
left sore my rump: I have sloughed you off with common

clod-polls, have grappled me stones that are not brittle,
trees with fruit and shade or the austere outline,
boats with gull-bellied sails and foot-firm ratlines
that yield to a storm yet hold, stars whose fierce mettle

is faithful even by day to me in my cistern
where I, having given up all, crouch to consider
why should the human soul sting worse than an adder
because of an itch in a sponge which blood set festering.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 84.

Converse Odyssey

Thru fields that his eyes own, past trees
whose fruit he sucks in dream, over rivers:
thin veins of the land's life humbly washing his feet,
cool, dripping spikenard.

Past horse-breeding plains and rough kelp-fetid coasts,
brooding the home-coming, past claquer-plaudits
and proletarian jeers... for he knows deeply
how rumour drops her bastards—

There is his place at table, his side of the bed,
his children, his warm corner in the sun,

(whirlpools to be got past, chimeras breathing
flames licking the heart, windmills a man needs fight;
leopards of lechery and guileful wolves,
at the middle milepost of this mortal life;
sloughs of despond, the fields of the golden calf),

and his home calls. He bends his shoulders forwards,
girds loins, strains tight the thighs, and shutting out
remembrance, stubbornly goes onward, straight
along the path that leads away from home.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 85.

The Wound

It is little. Hell, it is nothing! I say to myself
and walk out whistling into a windy day,
climb the thin ledge of the gorge and look over the gulf
where fish-hawks dive and ouzels walk in spray.

It is nothing, of course, when over night's wall I hear
those sly thief-feet and lie to feel long fingers
prodding for what they will have. When he leaves, I fear
he lurks and I wait, foreboding, mustering anger

to crush this petty trespasser of my peace,
have it out and done with forever. But he can wait
till I'm with my friends by day; then he modestly pries
thru the laughter, and whispers: Sorry, if I come late.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 86.

Indictment of Fragilon

His prying in the absolute remains
his quite essential flaw.
One should respect his mind, conserve his reins,
contrive to keep intact the elastic veins,
nor tempt the lion's paw.

"The truth! The truth!" he shouted, and collapsed
before some Tarsene vision;
but to his breast a figment cloud he clasped
and scanned, one hopes, before his lids eclipsed,
the cynosure of his passion.

The numbers towards the infinite are myriad,
cannot, in fact, be reckoned.
And in his sums an inadvertent period
left several billion integers miscarried.
He missed by a split second!

But missed, and down a vast eternal void
hurtled to the abysmal,
cursing a tragic thirst too exactly avid,
that splattered, as if a fat fly dared invade
the window glass of decimal.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 87.

House for Three

With red geraniums in the window box
and privet bordering the sanded path,
the pair with sunlight on their rounded backs
sits in contentment, sucking the honey-pith

for which the first was made. Their children come,
the children's children kiss their wrinkled cheeks;
with song and feast days they are not alone.

Fire is a friend by night, birds hop for crumbs,
Sunday's gold and purple crown gray weeks,
and for some time three in the bed have lain

thru intimate vigils. Three dip in the soup
and sun themselves in silence on the bench.
The third is a fellow burrowing for the sap
of the heart and eating time, slow inch by inch.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 88.

Desk in a Library

This is the desk where he worked
thru nights of the soul's sweat, days when despair
tugged him backwards by the thinning hair,
looked in his face and mocked.

Saturate of his passion, the wood has warped,
turned hard, black, and clotted
with the intimate blood-colour of what he felt
as he builded dream for a life,
as he bilked life with a dream.

The pigeon-holes are cluttered
with frail things left
unfinished; records of what he hated
were palely inked, muttered;
his cries of love were bird calls in the night,
piercing a futile blackness where no one was listening.

So he fastened him to the wood, turned a hybrid thing
flowing into the veins, the grain, the knots;
the desk assumed a rapt, pontifical air.

The world has a bit of him in a book;
this desk is all of him his wife has got,
and she dusts it daily with a look
of reverence and a soft rag, but for her life
she'd not sit down in his chair:

a statue of cogitative ice broods, melting there.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 89.

What Song the Sirens

What song, bird-throated, across the waters of peril
they spin depends on the listener. Who dallies,
caught by the flesh—as nard smeared over lilies—
I shall hear bleak tones
noted by gull-picked symbols much like bones,
asserting the dominant’s percussive moral.

He with a heart whose muscles are unnerved
for tall attempt shall bend his head and weep
as the song drifts past him: torn windflowers
for him to gather and kiss but not to keep:
blooms of illusion to rot on coral floors
while he starves of a dream he has not deserved.

But one, iron-breasted, wise,
beloved of the goddess panoplied with brain,
catches the wild song, weighs it nicely, decides
it shall not monitor the ways
his thin keel furrows in the wine-dark brine.
He whistles it back in the teeth of the winds and the tides.

Publication. *Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 90.

PERIODICAL VERSE, 1938

Stage III | Uncollected poems from Poetry, 1938

By a Patriot's Grave

Here lies a great heart seeping in the soil
of her he loved more fiercely than his life:
the land his personal penance would assoil.
Here is the cornerstone for new belief
where we must back our oath: strongly to follow
a quarry not in view but which his horn
once started fleeing down fields too long fallow,
in easier days when we were not yet born.
Stark is the enterprise, the failure stern,
and wager leaves us rearward of his mark.
So, holier now the duty in this murk
whose need is martyrs bred of his stout strain.
Grip hands and dedicate him to this work:
red hecatombs before the whirlwind strewn.

Publication. *Poetry* 51, no. 5 (February 1938): 277.

Sincerely Not Artesian

Under the dry land in its sleep
the song of water glides on feet of thieves,
rises in silver, generous to slap
briskly the chines of the drouth-beaten beeves,
and with meniscus pinch the pool's baked lips:
mirror gleaming green with mirage-corn,
and chaparral where flanks rub off shrewd flies,
where the last Indian rots by the stone quern,
and on raptorial compass-arcs for flaws
wide vultures scan, or still as urns on cairns
solicitously regard the starving calves
and whet beaks sharp as a committee's greed ...
tucked coolly, safely, leaden water laughs
and gravidly seeps down the easier grade,
forcing new sap in the ferns' fossil leaves.

Publication. *Poetry* 51, no. 5 (February 1938): 278.

CAFÉS AND CATHEDRALS

Stage III | The complete 1939 collection

Four Oxen

Syracuse

With snowy flanks and swaying dewlaps, withers
slow as heavy lava levering boulders,
they pull the bright share through all winds and weathers,
and the oak yoke shines on their shimmering shoulders.

Above the broad brows toss the clicking forks,
the slender spear-horns with their onyx-gleam;
and the sleek rippling muscles make a steam
like marble-dust where mountains are at work.

All summer teems in their black nostrils' breath
with vetch and clover, and their sweat smells sweet;
they fatten the starved soil with spicy dung.

In their moist mirroring eye-balls earth is hung
below the sky's contracted azure breadth;
and the sea feels their massive basalt feet.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 1.

Westminster Abbey

With English dignity the drab facade
rises without a statue or a wreath.
The church's pride and glory are less God's
than men's who lie in ambered time beneath

the floor which is a canopy of honour
too late for life. The gold and carven screen,
the ebony Purbeck pillars and the inner
chapel of the coffined kings and queens

seem trivial beside the mighty list
of statesmen, warriors, poets, scientists
who glow a little past their lives' eclipse...
and it is said: when time proves theories wrong,
when battles fade and laws grow stale, that song
shall last a while yet on the people's lips.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 2.

The Flea Market

Clignancourt: Paris

From all the world the things that people lose
or grow past flow into this lower sieve
and straightway get a higher price, to save
them from the final junk-heap. One can choose

from royal sloughage, flotsam of the East,
trinkets the dead no longer care to own;
everything's a bargain one is pleased
to carry home and gloat upon alone

as his... and so it is a while until
he breaks it, finds a better, or unlearns
the lust for things. Then there is someone still
who wants it for a moment in his turn.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 3.

Autumn in Arles

This last weak sun is all earth has of fall,
except the ruined gold beneath the branches,
the ochre pumpkins piled by thatched sheds full
of lemon-coloured hay, and the onion-bunches'

burnt parchment, the verdigris on the pears' skins,
the yellow wax of apples, the smoke-brown hides
of raftered ham and bacon, the gleaming bins
of gilded dusty rye, dark amber hoards

of wheat, new vats of muddy Muscat wine,
bright topaz in straw hives, dull brassy piles
of sugar-beets, and the thick hanks of wan
shred flax, with the sun's sweat saved in jars of oil.

Not to mention the nuances: coniferous woods
oozing resin, stacked in all the yards,
the withered copper of the roadside weeds
and the parvenu fool's-gold of the futile gourds.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 4.

The Venus of Cirene

Rome

After these lithe cool flanks, learned from the flow
of sea-spray down grooved granite in sunlight,
the small-kneed virgin legs without the flaw
of sagging muscles, past the inviolate

and proud pear-breasts, the arms whose open candour
is all her modesty, shall lovers lack
a queenly head to flower on this slender
loveliness? No stone eyes with the look

of glacial ciphers, nose at the brow's angle,
nor harlot mouth and shallow brain-pan. Since
each man bears in his heart the indelible face

of mother-memories, first love, dark angel
whose ministering was balsam for the sense,
he set those dreams there—and they shall suffice.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 5.

Phantom Ship in Fog

Above the leaden slither, aware of the reef,
her terrier-ears trimmed to the whistling buoy,
she balances through troughs and crests of time,

bound to no harbour. Aeons are too brief
for her long tramping. No chart bids obey
this arrogance; nor rot nor tempest tames
the wayward and breast-sloping line of sheer,
the mad-raked masts, the windily pregnant sails,
grey-shadowed. Yet dawn from the eastern sill
of night can shiver her to the keel with fear,

smite her tall flag and harry her to far
oceans past Drake's prodding, beyond ills
of slime's appraising eye that buys and sells
what argosies, proud-prowed against the stars!

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 6.

Drapers' Market

Tunis

Soft Moorish arches, fiercely inlaid tiles
by doorways beyond interview: the street
of green and scarlet pillars. With wide smiles
of evil teeth, the noisy Arabs strut

through filth or sit in hulks with the red fez
above eternal coffee. Here is East,
and you are alien, homesick and confused,
pricked by the bubblings of the holy yeast

which suddenly in the muezzin's cry
swoops down from heaven and makes these fellows squat,
toward Mecca, on a bit of prayer mat,

to answer, bawling with that goaty moan...
while, silver on the mosque against the sky,
two crescents shine—and one is the new moon.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 7.

Cathedral

Chartres

As twins who in their first years look alike
and have each other's way in gait and gesture,
strive friendly and seem one, yet stand alone,

while each grows bravely what the other lacks
who has the sweeter voice or nobler posture—
though they are the same blood and the same stone:

these phoenix-towers guard the Royal Portal
where humbly the triumphant chisel carves
the legend of men yearning toward the immortal
with haggard bodies without weight or curve;

and the great windows, brimmed from the sky-wells,
splinter fierce light against the pillared awe
of this vast greyness, diapering floor and walls
with hues that men whose faith knew heaven saw.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 8.

Chrysanthemums

Covent Garden

For Majl Ewing.

These lush-fleshed flowers are not for spring nor summer;
the heat would shrivel the crisp tongues that mock
November's grey. And their seed need not ripen—

the roots will see to that. Since they are dimmer
than the year's dazzling chromos, they will make
bouquets for funerals that often happen,

pat to their season. They grow tall and stiff
for soldiers' shakos; they are soft and round
for children (who may need them underground),
and a dead dancer finds no better stuff

for slipper pompons than these nodding blooms
that love the wind. There's hardly anyone
could not ride proudly toward oblivion
if his hearse wore such fine ironic plumes.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 9.

Cologne

The stones' unweathered edges are plumb-lines
shrill in the bitter air. The towers rise
in arrowy staggered stages to the spires'

finial blossoms arrogantly, yet spare
the station's sprawled baroque, while in the lanes
about their feet the urchin-brash cafés

are loud. The tall facade is calmly broken
with circles, clover leaves and quatre-foils
nested in arches, and the flèche (like bracken
fronds in March) thrusts forth its tight-gnarled coils,

frozen in grey sandstone. Not too late,
down years six hundred Master Gerhard's thought,
chiselled with prayer, mortared with pious sweat,
stands: perfect silver under cold moonlight.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 10.

Gondoliers

Sleek cockroaches from the green slimy drains,
the black gondolas scurry through the town:
one with the intimate blood that thuds its veins,
bobbing on its throbbings, up and down.

The noisy rascals muscling the long oars
are athletes, buccaneers, musicians, guides...
yet yesterday they rowed from these stone shores
'a whiskery Doge to wed an ocean-bride,

or were suave panderers paddling ebon-hearses
on the Lagoon in moonlight: all their task,
to eye the halberd-prow and smoothly pass

what lovers (who were braves behind masks)
whispered, did, or sang in sugary verses
to ladies, frail and lovely as blown glass.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 11.

Night Markets: I. Wholesale

Les Halles: Boucherie Chevaline

These reds were better on the meadows and hills
in feathers and petals. The futuristic bones
are quite the best modern sculpture in Les Halles.

Light splashing among rifts of marrow-stone
makes white jade. Scimitars of bright blank silver
are really ribs that escaped the rosy stain

on the beautiful skinned skulls—like a saint's on a salver—
heaped there, with agate and onyx globes for eyes.
Pink froth-lungs on slate slabs, broad tubs of liver,

crimson as boron flame. The Percheron thighs
have slid toward infra. The kidneys are purple plums;
but some of these scarlets come only from aniline dyes.

Round the side of the dish spreads a garnish of carrot plumes,
striations of yellows with green leeks, half to the roofs,
cauliflowers stacked like roses on hero-tombs...
and ghosts of a thousand whinnies and thundering hoofs.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 12.

Night Markets: II. Retail

69, *Rue des Quatre Vents*

This meat, almost as lewd as cinema stars—
more nude than naked—undulant Goya-flesh
drawn with a dirty crayon, struts up stairs

and down, with little veils of fish-net mesh
revealing heavy lava-slides, drooped bags
of flabbiness, sponge-toadstool-tissue: brash

as the false lashes, elephant Maillot-legs,
the paper flowers, carmined mouths and nipples:
timed to the slimy movement of rose-slugs.

The workmen's paradise, with drunken dribbles
blurring these Eves with haze—till the hard hands
must grind out cider, even from these dried apples.

'Just wait in line!' (The gendarme.) And behind
the counter sits Madame. Here life rehearses
grimly with dying whores the more refined
triumph of the completely successful horses.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 13.

Wild Swans

Bodensee

The sound of wings alighting filled the wind
and beat grey air to feather-flakes of snow
as the great birds (with nowhere else to go)
splashed in the water, shook themselves and preened

plumage ruffled by the winter's last.
The Congo interlude was far away,
the white nocturnal flights were over-passed:
they were at home now on the Bodensee.

Safe in these inlets shored with rush and sedge,
they nest and brood and hatch quaint cygnets doomed
to live in silence to the edge of age,
singing but when their century has bloomed.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 14.

The Campanile

Pisa

As if a son, his mother's image and spit,
stood tip-toe, yearning to be off and yet
(though leaning from her) wistful and not quite
ready to leap clean to the infinite:

this tower rises above the mother-church,
white-marble-thewed—not falling—this slight lurch
is signed 'Forever'. See, he has the arches
and pillars of her calm facade, the quirk

of holding the brows high, to gaze far over
the city walls, suspicious of Genova,
the Guelf, the Saracen, the Arno. Never
needs he ask tackle, pile or cantilever,

but strains, past all of gravity (toward Rome,
umbilicus of faith—while from his rim
dropped pebbles plumb new answers through the room
of question), wry as a suspended rhyme.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 15.

Casino

Monte Carlo

With Lalique eyeballs, hypnotized by luck—
as if flesh turned to stone, and sight were all—
these tight-mouthed women, with loose scolding-locks,

but carmined nails, place bets and watch the ball's
whirling. From their faces hope and fear
are long divorced. They live in this gilt hall's

baroque (in butt-sprung skirts and moulting furs)
with sleek croupiers embalmed in evening dress.
Singed moths who can no longer fly the fire,

they dribble their remittances like dross,
but keep strict books, recording every play.
Each has a system... and millennium draws
near: when she'll break the bank and go away.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 16.

Zwinger

Nuremberg

Remember: this was long ago before
man learned the greater love; when he could break
a shin in twenty shards and pinch the core

of faith with the slight turning of a screw...
and spent vast genius in devising new
pains for justice's and Jesus's sake.

For instance, this deep cradle with sharp studs,
this windlass which could stretch a small confession;
thumb-screws and Spanish boots which by compression
and paradox gave a new breadth of mind;
pincers for long tongues, irons to heat slow blood
toward truth's boiling-point, neat baskets lined
with scarlet velvet softening a head's fall,
and the Iron Virgin whose embrace was all.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 17.

Sir Christopher Wren

After the holocaust they built the town
nearer their hearts' desire—Lord help their hearts!
But the seventy charred churches toppled down
required the sweet instruction of the arts.

Came Kit, who knew St. Peter's and could sketch
like cherub boys in heaven. Over night
new churches rose: slim pillars, round and white,
with gilded capitals and vaults to match,

tidy as barrels, with Norman arches, broad
as horse-rumps, and sleek oak in pews and choir...
till even Catholics feel the holy fire
as these bright footstools warm the feet of God.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 18.

Terrace of the Queens

Jardin du Luxembourg

The paths wind in and out and sometimes lose
themselves, like old men wandering in their speech.
Brown chestnut leaves by the west wind despatched
lie, strewn for winter-shards on dying grass

before the stony feet of long-dead queens;
but children bat spry balls and roll brisk hoops
where the marauding gamin-sparrows hop
among phlegmatic pigeons that have been

for ages on the parish. Fountains bend
weakly, as if wishing they could dry
and not be pushed at heaven. The short days draw
toward solstice slashing off the year's lag end.

And all is symbol here of dearth and death,
the end of time—except the children eating
cakes, and smiling pregnant women knitting
jackets, and the birds that live on faith.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 19.

Waiting Room

Frankfurt am Main

They come and sit and eat and drink and sleep
and wish they were at home. The right bell rings:
they pay the bill and slip
toward churning darkness, like forgotten things.

Nowhere can they rest, because the fate
in whose quick blood they intimately live
would brew green poison if the stream should stop.

Its blind compulsion prods them as they step
in this bright cul de sac, and while they wait,
they lean to the sharp minute they must leave.

How they are of myself: bone turning lime,
carrion-crying flesh, the dulling eye
abraded by the nice cogwheels of time,
bruised by rash kilometres rattling by.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 20.

Blind Musicians

Montmartre

Their music crawls down streets to meet you. ShriII
and tuneless, without colour, without shade,
it leaps against your heart as if to kill
the goodness of the day. You cannot shed

it with a shake; you must go past and look
and hear it nearer, gaze in those pale lakes
that hold the sky but let earth's brightness leak
to nothing... while their music gnaws and licks

insidiously through your coat into
your pocket—and the music means just that—
till there is little else your purse can do
but squeeze your conscience in the turned-up hat.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 21.

Rain

As if the town had not its fill of glass
in the canals where the bright malachite
reflects the palaces' facades, clear-cut
as facets—first the clean rain gave a glaze

to weathered marble, domes of time-dulled lead,
polished the humble grey stones of the streets...
then penitently the sun dumped a great load
of light, till Venice groaned on her deep struts

and lay flat on the water's golden mirror.
Now gaily people, pigeons, through the town
hurry to the Piazza and go walking

(cooing, nodding, laughing, preening, talking)
upon St. Mark's, debating which is clearer,
the old church, or this new one, upside-down.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 22.

Market

Gabe's

Who buys these piles of desolate orange-peel,
handfuls of grass, this hot pitch, old palm stalks,
withered fennel and mutilated dates,

crimson wormy peppers and these veal
pizzles thrust on spits and the small rocks
among the pebbly peas? Who is it dotes

on garlic wreathing spongy strips of tripe?
A one-eyed Jew. This lamb's head and the guts
go to the club-foot with the water-butts.
The Tyrian kidneys and hose-length wind-pipe

to that veiled woman, luscious as full moon;
while the proud bare-legg'd sheik with grape-bunch veins
grabs the calf-tassels, gives the old Renault reins
and yells down the sandy maw of the simoun.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 23.

Isle of Swans

They glide on Seine—slow barques with antique prows—
calmly as if life were eternal autumn;
and when they dive, the feathers on their bottoms
are pointed lily buds. The willow boughs

fence the green park in which they take the sun,
lolling and prinking, vain as hetaerae,
with oil and strigils—till they fold and dry,
clean as a kneeling flock of white-capped nuns.

They hide their heads beneath their wings and nap,
but suddenly wake up with one accord
and waddle on black paddle-feet to play

clouds on the water, lovers in the lap
of Leda, the proud steeds of Elsa's lord,
or a brilliant idyll waiting for Monet.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 24.

The Courtesans

Carpaccio

Vain peacock, doves less innocent than dumb,
and dogs for this dull interim of day
to be got through... and then the night will come
with torches, gondolas and viols' play.

With lace and gems (the wage of sin is gold),
velvet and all sweet gawds that please the sex,
they wait—it is this waiting makes them old
and digs the zones of Venus round their necks.

The Calza scull along the Grand Lagoon,
with striped hose, falcon feathers in their caps,
and sea-wind in their hair which very soon
deft shears will hack off in these sodden laps.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 25.

Christ's Church

Canterbury

The solemn columns, the vault's gold-bossed ribs,
lead easily to the sovereign flight of stairs
before the great stone rood that stands to rob
the congregation of the altar stars

and blazonry, Bell Harry's cloud-faced well,
the bloody Becket-stone in the Martyrdom,
the arcade canting to save the Norman wall,
the Black Prince, stiff and gilded, waiting doom...

until one wonders if there be an apse
and threads the needle's eye to the dark choir,
or lightly climbs the polished knee-worn steps

where pilgrims crawled—then lo, two more transepts,
and under the Corona's azure fire,
haughtily Roman, gleams St. Austin's Chair.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 26.

Hay Stacks

Ghent

Men sowed seed down the wind and harrowed deeply
that it might sleep, past snow
and the long nights, in March prick forth brisk green,
be combed by the warm hands of May and stand

stiffly and yellowing—when no dew dapples
what makes good hay as summer stars ride low.
They scythed it with thin hissing steel and grinned
to see fat stacks like steeples stud the land.

Cows loved it, the pigs worried it, sheep chewed
and meditated mutton, lewd-eyed goats
hoofed through the thatch: a hundred rasping tongues

took down those golden flanks that had withstood
winter... then peasants, shivering in wool coats,
under the grey earth ploughed the heavy dung.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 27.

Idyll Beside the Lower Tiber

This water-rhythm of the washerwomen
surpasses wind on wheat, the rococo ocean,
swallows' dipping, dolphins' caracole-swimming:
they work like blood in earth's systolic motion.

Bending by the brown river, up and down
with measured stichomythia of dawn
and twilight, how their backs and buttocks carve
the ultimate line beyond the sculptor's curve.

The round hard arms are brazen piston-rods,
a golden breast pops from a scarlet shirt,
a cool white knee slips past a dull green skirt,
the terra cotta faces flush sweaty-red.

They chatter and sing, assoiling the soil of life,
churning the soapy turquoise where the sky's blue
bubbles in water... in this task that love
does patiently because it will never be through.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 28.

Panorama

The fog is grey oblivion, flat graves
from which the dead stand up; the stiff and proud
Palazzo Vecchio's tower with its bell,

the burgherly Barghello, square and brave,
beside Badia's slender spire that prods
higher than its hawk, the cubicle

of San Michele's, the prone elephant
of Pitti, Croce's checker-board, the dome
of broad Lorenzo; farther and more faint,
the Carmine... and very dim, on foam,

San Miniato, high Fiesole—
but here below, the Duomo's mighty shape
leaps like a whale about to ram the ship
of Giotto's Tower that rocks on this grey sea.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 29.

Café du Luxembourg

At five the taxi-drivers, laundry girls,
students and the old woman with her papers
drop in for coffee with a shot of rum.

They drink like gourmets for a couple of coppers
and smoke until the air is dragon-swirls
and laugh until edged clamour fills the room.

They live brave words till the good hour is run,
then suddenly find their unreal selves again
and sigh as if they picked a burden up...

and through the golden doorway, one by one,
prodded by life, go home to sullen soup
(tame Spartans) in the black shroud of the rain.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 30.

The Winged Victory of Samothrace

Louvre

Deep-breasted girl, convexing against time,
brunting into the pure Hellenic wind,
ruthlessly sandalled, over dead and wounded
you lift dry laurel. Your foot-prints are tombs.

How air curls loverlike around your limbs,
presses the chiton tight against nipples and navel.
(Your eyes wear marble cataracts.) What lines
the master cut! Where lives more lovely evil?
In your stern heart beats not an ounce of love.
Your headless head dreams less of joy than woe.
Your hardness wins you Horror as a mate.

And silent careless gods sit, throned above
the abattoir you wade—gods are that way!—
where earth bleeds, mauled and manacled by might.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 31.

Waiting It Out

Limehouse

Under gay Guinness posters, flanked by mirrors
bright in thick light from chromium chandeliers,
they sit and wet their evening down with beer,
which hoists the heart and makes miasma clearer.

His hat is pulled down tight. The high cheek-bones
are close to cemetery. The dirty scarf
cannot quite throttle the thin cough that carves
shallow obituary on a stone.

Cross-lege'd, with hat and cigarette at angles
superior to death, her new life soars
soon beyond bars. His blurs

into the table's oblong grave-depth, mingling
with crazy neon lines that break and sparkle,
hissing in swirls of ever-contracting circles.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 32.

La Dame à la Licorne

Musée de Cluny

On this enchanted cobalt island lives
a lady lovelier than man has seen.
Her days are spent among the flowers and leaves
whose foison drinks of an invisible sun;

with music, monkeys, birds and perfumed wreaths,
strange fruit and gentle rabbits and a train
of little maidens, with the unicorn

who will not stay where there is any stain
of evil, and a lion (claws in sheaths)
ready for any monster ever born.

Here falls nor shadow nor excess of light,
but melody and fragrance blend the blue
island with the rose-ash sea which lets
no man sail here where no wind ever blew.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 33.

The Falcon

La Dame à la Licorne

Her life is of the senses, rarefied
by loneliness and beauty. Allegory
grows dimmer as the faith and colours fade.

She lives and gives herself to each vagary,
as with this virgin tercelet which is fed
on her gloved wrist. (The monkey's stolen a cherry.)

These ten white rabbits here must not be caught,
so Reynard watches them, as with disdain;
the lap-dog sits expectant on her train,
the lion stands up like a greedy cat,

and modestly the wistful unicorn
looks off discreetly—but his tail is high;
somewhere in this domain grows yellow corn,
and he is bound to get some by and by.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 34.

The Garland of Carnations

La Dame à la Licorne

Such fragrance is pure triumph—with primrose,
jonquil, lady's-slippers, honeysuckle,
pale violas, white pinks and violets,

the bridal orange flowers, the trellised rows
of cabbage roses—till the lion lets
his red tongue lick his chops, for his nose tickles.

From a gold bowl of red and white carnations
she winds a garland. (There is nothing else
can please her woman's-notions.)
But the sly monkey sneaks a rose and smells...

and rabbits wriggle rapture. Broken pearls
are lilies-of-the-valley. In a trance
the unicorn still lifts his bannered lance,
but his eyes close and his white beard is curled.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 35.

The Madrigal

La Dame à la Licorne

Come softly here nor break the spell
of these sweet pipes. She stands in a stiff dress,
watching her careful fingers play a lesson;
but her blood's throbbing works such tenderness
and melancholy, even the birds are still
and the bright flowers pause and poise to listen.

A handmaid pumps the bellows and her face
is discord. The sad lion bites his lips
to mute the lonely solo of his yearning;

but the calm unicorn lies down in peace,
as through his body flowing silver slips,
mingled with water-songs and the moon's turning.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 36.

The Mirror

La Dame à la Licorne

There is no peace here. The blue isle grows small,
with two dwarfed trees, as if to force the eye
to focus on the mirror where he poses:

his docile hoofs in the young lap, his tall
horn rampant proudly, as he blandly gazes
at the bright image of eternal I...

and in her weary hand
she holds the mirror; with a half-caress
the other lies upon his argent neck.

Her face is sad because she understands
the expected gestures—and her gentleness
is fleshed upon the pliant bones of tact.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 37.

The Ivory Horn

La Dame à la Licorne

Here she is woman purely, and her hair
is glowing flowing gold that asks for sun
to fetch its glory forth. Down the still air
the wished-for consummation rides, and soon

the tight suspense, with which she grasps the staff
the lion's smugly rid of, shall be loosed,
and life be woven of a richer stuff
than what this ripened girl will gladly lose.

The naughty monkey's chained, the lustful pard
is collared... and the flowers are few and pale,
as if their winsomeness and bloom were poured
into her heart that waits and shall not fail

to blossom; for she strokes the ivory horn,
fingers its convolutions—and her eyes
are wide, for the deep calls and love is born
and all her being wakens and replies.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 38.

The Azure Pavilion

La Dame à la Licorne

For Marie Osgood Aydelotte

The island broadens and the red revives
to greet this day of days.
Milady wears the hue of Love's wing-feathers.

The animals that ward her with their lives
sit, sadly guardant (their flags up always),
opening the flaps... till he pulls them together:
he whom she is waiting for. But pride
will tender nothing to him as her peer
save her rich self, hence she lays off her beads

and stands—a ruby of great price—outside
the nuptial tent on which her motto reads
in golden letters: *A mon seul désir*.

Thus risking all (as is a woman's way)
on one succinct event:
the sum and ripening of time past, the years

unrolling. He comes swiftly! Who shall say
of these gouts studding the brocaded tent
they are pure flames aspiring—or pale tears?

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 39.

Two Dogs

Pompeii

A. furious sable fellow on a chain—
‘Death to intruders! Teeth in beggars’ calves!’
(You’ll not get off. He doesn’t bite by halves,
but digs with upper jaw and grinds with chin

into the tastier muscles of the rump).
Vesonius keeps him on the fauces’s floor
of white mosaic. His especial flare
is pedlars, pilferers, parasites and pimps....

See, he was faithful unto death and past:
they found that out at last with curious plaster.
This wakeful watcher: a museum piece.

Despite his great devotion to the posts
beside the door, that day his loving master
forgot him. This is terror learning peace.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 40.

Norwegian Three-Master

Lean wave-walker leaving a wake of sea-froth,
what snow-girdled fiord conceived and wrought your
bones and buoyant flesh and the light white wing-strength
loved of the eight winds?

Hard square-bodied men, with their grandsires' hand-craft
felled, trued, shaved and cannily steamed your timbers,
launched you—candid virgin—in icy water,
sure as a whale-cub.

What strange logs are kept through the long north twilights!
Children learn the map from your sailors' postmarks,
charting Antwerp, Hong Kong, Seattle, Colon,
Rotterdam, Cape Town.

Steady, helmsman! Rich is the cargo: wheat's gold,
cotton, copper, copra... and safely hidden
tide those trembling stowaways: forty women's
hearts under hatches.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 41.

English Countryside

Through foxglove's rash magenta, blue speedwell,
flat parsley clusters, past the wild rose hedge,
drop down from Woodbury Road to the meadow's edge
and climb the stile where the sheep leave hanks of wool.
Then farther through a red and white idyll of clover,
by platitudinous poppies in blue-green wheat,
the lush bog bubbles over primordial peat
below the Giotto-gyring of querulous plover.
Timothy, saw-toothed hazel, mullen in flannel,
dour thistles, sullen nettles and lachrymose willows
grow to the brook's wild garlic, cress and mallow,
with leather burdock, sorrel, nightshade and fennel.

In this heath your feet were shy of adders—
if ever the sun had time—by the slow Teme
where trout with leopard-aurora head up stream,
and barrel-bodied Hereford heifers rub young udders
on bracken and buttercup blobs. Then to the field
of straggling hops, the glade of bald mole-hummocks
(hurdles for rabbits' leap-frog)... to the stone fold
where a reddled stiff-legs'd ewe drags her bloated stomach.
Stridulant rooks in glaucous tenement beeches,
sibilant sentinel geese above goslings, downy,
bright as iodoform, and a lion-tawny
gelding flaunting at sky his futile breeches.
Up to the ruddy scars in the grass-hide clammers
capillary sap from the red sandstone,
and strawberries, bloody maples and cherries stain
this brighter-than-Constable-green no painter remembers.
Sycamore leaves spread mighty emerald moths,
ivy loiters unhindered
around the steps of the ruined Saxon hundred-

house, and the pseudo-orchids with dottled mouths
yawn at the beans in their crisp and katydid hulls.
And now the sun bridges diagonal rain with a pair
of tea-time iris bows over Malvern Hills...
as you come to the petrol stations and homes of the poor.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 42–43.

Boul' Mich'

... and she must walk at night, though the fat years
lie shrivelling on the flagstones of the past;
but sometimes stands quite still, like an old post
on which the dogs have leaned. The edge of fear

is on her, and her soles are thin as hope.
The men go by her... old friends do not nod,
though this one did a sonnet on her hips
and that her famous portrait in the nude.

The queen of diamonds from a tattered pack,
under the street lamp, but when shadows soften
her face, a wistful white thing, looking back:
like a sick child who does not smile too often.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 44.

Temple of Castor and Pollux

Agrigentum

As if the arrogant twins could bilk the fate
that gnaws their peers' stones, teaching them be tame,
this is yet cannot be: taunt flung at time
which loves the horizontal ultimate.

Yet here where Jupiter and Hercules
show but frail trappings for such tall repute,
among the altars and the olive trees
four slender columns keep, past luck and loot,

this cornice the Ionic chisel smoothed,
the angle and a segment of the roof
marking what more was meant than ancient rough
simplicity; and here, by day unsheathed,
a carved star shines, is suddenly a flower
too high for winter's muddy boots to trample...
while by metonymy the mind's quick flare
begets from these poor fragments the whole temple.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 45.

“*Les Petites Vieilles*”

Baudelaire

... but now they ride the Metro with their bags
bulging with the market's cheaper leeks.
and withered apples (like their breasts). Their locks
drop down the vulture-necks, their heavy legs

have overflowed the slippers of thin felt:
that admirable stuff for shuffling feet.
Behind their stubbly chaps gums mumble fate,
as when cats try to save the milk that's spilled.

Dearer than memory is the evening soup.
These durable women do not think of death—
along the tunnel, like a grave, they sip

anticipatory fat-rings from the broth.
Remembering their dead men, in a breath
they wash them down with the dry bread they sop.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 46.

Retired Actress

This florid Rubens woman hides by day
in some estaminet and first at night
like a furred moth comes swimming to the light,
flings open the red door of the café.

Rich as an autumn sunset, with a spilth
of over-ripeness, posed on a gilt crook
(which props her up instead of Lloyd's or Cook's),
she sprays us with a speech of marvellous filth:

terse words one learned from adolescent fences,
reflections on our mothers and our past;
picks up somebody's bock, blows off the foam,
kills it, sits down—this archetype of wenches—
quite uninvited, sighs, and slumps at last...
as if she had been lost but has got home.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 47.

Hospital of Saint John

Bruges

Through this carved stony portal come the sick,
slowly as if they know it does no good,
halting and gazing down like men that seek
along white winter for thin bits of wood.

The sisters take them, as one tends a son,
softly into the cool and silent rooms
and lay in them the courage which the sun
makes perfect in the courtyard's dahlia blooms.

Now from the belfry manna falls for noon,
and fluttering to the chapel for their share,
the nuns read the response, on patient knees

warming the martyrs' stones. And there is none
among the sick who thinks his remedies
are lessened by the alchemy of prayer.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 48.

Holbein

Basel

The calm of his cold passion held the brush
and moved to the clear image in his eye
which took the sitter in some moment hush
and drew the face he is remembered by.

No piety nor politics disturbed
this man who could but would not feel;
no trick of life unnerved him—
he cut the victim with a slash of steel,

showed him pompous, frivolous or grave,
a roguish woman or a man of woe...
his own wife sat to him and he was brave:
he saw she suffered and he told us so.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 49.

Devi Dja

Good Friday

With stiff hieratic steps and birdlike jerks
bronze Shiva suddenly becomes girl-flesh
and dances all the folk-life: catches fish,
threshes out rice, or does the priestess's work
before the temple. Her pulse beats to gongs'
chirping, taut thrummed drums; her arms' quicksilver
ripples the moonlight over river-songs
or writhes toward serpent in a languorous shiver
from her electric heart... while her hands flit
with flame-tip fingers licking the slow tinder
in the black pit where brains are white pulp under
the slapping rhythms of her naked feet.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 50.

Tanzbar Libelle

Leipzig: Easter

Tap tap tap tap tap!
'The Donkey Serenade.' The drummer's bored.
That bubbling girl who's finally reached the top
of joy slumps on the table. A fat bard
sings in leather breeches, feathered hat;
Hans wails his heart out in the saxophone.
Gretchen with the knees is getting hot,
denies immediate thought of going home.

Emmie makes up to Loulou's manly smile,
the brown storm-trooper's heiled his right arm stiff,
the hall exhales a vile and stale beer smell,
and youth gets tough pin-feathers for the fluff
rubbed off its rear. Here blasé Bel Ami,
approached by sleek Delilah, swiftly crosses
himself and scares her off—the Lenten spree
drifts safely past the annual Easter crisis.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 51.

Night Trip Down the Seine

It flows like black basalt and takes no mark,
under the master bridges rimmed with light,
between dumb palaces along the right
and silent book-stalls on the left. In dark

eddyings around midnight two blunt cries
were stifled, and a millstone did strange work...
how the quick carp sucked at the jellied eyes
while spry eels gnawed red mouths made by the dirk.

The traveller drifted by Our Lady's Chapel
mutely, had her blessing and was gone,
trailing the barge-wakes, bobbing in the ripples,
then, crawling bravely, passed Rouen at dawn,

but tired at last and came up for a breath
where cattle waded... and the mud of earth
was motherly and gave the torso berth
and peace beyond this trivial watery death.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 52.

Poinsettia

Amalfi

Strong flower that ask not April's boon nor June's
for favours: flower aloof from summer's bees,
ephemerids, and beetles' intimacies;
conspiring with fall's equinoctial jinns

to brood your crown through snappings of white frost,
the grey rain's whips; conceiving of cold leaves
the metamorphosis, with rich sap forced
to bear when earth is quit of easier loves;

you, brunting stiffly the oak-twisting winds,
the winter's sullen sleet... O flower, remember
to ripen your double star of sabre-wounds,
that great vermilion spider across December.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 53.

Ca' d'Oro

For Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Behold what lace can do, pretending stone
slender as straw and curved: as if a flock
of white flamingoes suddenly was stunned

to stand and be by sun and weather stained...
until one thinks—not sees—the aureate flecks
that hide, deep-rifted in the matrix-rock.

The golden house, O proud, yet gazing down,
loves so its beauty in the ripple of water:
wavering, unreal, by moonlight, noon, or dawn,
that any thought of sky seems no great matter...

but one is certain that some season, bored
with its known loveliness, this house will waken,
remember whence it came—and like the birds
soar skyward, homeward, thirsting and unslaken.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 54.

Two Girls

Tanagra

We were school-friends and maidens blooming together,
dancing, singing and weaving flower-chains.
Often we went in the afternoons to gather
roses, figs or crayfish, as might chance...

we grew, played ball and raced; we bathed and marvelled
as our thin pallid limbs waxed round and flushed
(like peach flowers, dawn-hued seashells or pink marble)
within the water's mirror—and we blushed.

Then first we felt sweet shame and moaned and clung,
lest we should see again... so, fell asleep
until the moon crept up—we were so young,
our shivering bodies trembled and thirsted deeply,

stealing for warmth together in the night
till suddenly we remembered Sappho's song.
Thereafter there was nothing we dared not...

till shame is on us and the days are long.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 55.

Annunciation

Simone Martini: Uffizi

What keen-eyed hawk with fierce wings, golden-flecked,
swoops in this room which straightway blossoms light,
as if a comet burst and burned the night?
And what swift help can sweep in to protect

the blest and doomed girl who draws back in fear
before the voice whose awful visible words
could swirl the wisest virgin off her guard
into the apotheosis of fire?

Under the shock of terror and disgrace
she cannot fly or weep—like a sure knife
of pain, this angel naught can turn aside
reaches to her the leafy branch of life.
And what girl made in an eye-wink a bride
would show less sullen cat in her white face?

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 56.

Cagnes-sur-Mer

The twisted road shakes off the sea and climbs
slowly, with tall stone houses on his back,
pauses for breath and a drink in the fountain-squares,
or sets his pack down and gets out his wares
for wives who lean on ancient chiselled jambs.

He stops in sunlight where children play and patter;
squeezes himself here, flat to the mossy wall,
so thick-rumped tandem-horses can get by;
watches an old man puff past him and sputter;
then he narrows his loins and springs with a mighty will
past the castle, leaving a great blue hole in the sky;
or he just sits by the cathedral, hands in his lap,
while everybody in Cagnes is taking a nap.

But better, on moonlit spring nights when the folk
has locked itself in, he goes loitering down
(wrapped in mimosa's golden perfumed cloak)
with harlequins, harlots, tom-cats, beggars, knaves
who would rather sing than sleep. They slip from town
and dance straight out on the petal-path of the waves...

until he has got to be back on the job at dawn.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 57.

Place de la Concorde

A. heavy web hangs northward from the Seine,
greyly across the thin green fringe of park
between the Louvre and the mighty Arc,
but stops short of the frozen Madeleine.

Smack in the navel of this stony disk,
a spider squats whom these calm times keep lean,
baring the great fang of the obelisk
(sharp as the shadow of the guillotine).

The civic goddesses around this square
of peace are florid, comfortable and proud,
and almost seem to cat-nap on the sly;
but the fang waits, and we need not despair:
he shall not die of thirst. Some rosy cloud
will dump its bloody womb's weight by and by.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 58.

Fishermen's Wharf

Marseilles

Tamed sons of corsairs and Saracens, iron fellows,
harvest the sea with nets and rakes and grapples
to stock this nightly market with rose-dappled
red-snappers, coral shrimp and glaucous-yellow

algobi, conger eels, black-lacquered mussels
with orange sunset-flesh, lewd squishy squids
with sinister eyes and domed episcopal heads,
abalone: monopeds of sucking muscle;
mercurial-mucus-oysters (with halves of lemon),
wall-eyed flounders, urchins of prickly purple,
and violettes—those succulent ocean-truffles—
black-wimpled ‘nuns’ and Gothic sculpin-demons;

curled silver crescents with round gasping mouths
of gargoyled death, bronze lobsters, a vermilion
sea-star sprawled on emerald moss: a million
stiffened to sculpture by this sudden drouth.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 59.

Spring Dance of the Bedouins

Nefta

Full moon, the tom-tom and delinquent flutes,
safe past prim gendarmes. Over the blue sand
the music shreds night with its bawdy flats,
and Bedouins come shuffling to the sound.

Tandem lions and camels, devil-masks,
wizards with cotton beards leap and cavort,
and veiled little girls with jingling anklets sport
through a nimble number of pubic arabesques.

With hashish, coffee, mariahuana, kohl,
religion, rhythm and the first spring moon,
a minor orgy blooms by midnight. How

easily these natives keep the mean
without psychology... and lightly cull
the tender fig-leaves from the golden bough!

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 60.

The Carillon

Rouen

Accross the broad facade the spotlights cast
a flood revealing point-lace, filigree
(which the sun hid in the stone's common grey)
for the rich special robe of Pentecost.

Now deep-chested Saint Romain sounds the hour,
stern as Isaiah, and a benison
dripped from the cluster of the carillon
drifts on the evening city from La Tour

de Beurre. The sculptured figures are a choir
mute to the music of the sweet bronze tongues
hymning Laudamus, chaunting simple myths,
and all the townsfolk standing round the square
gaze up as if they really saw the tones
whose shining nectar falls in their open mouths.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 61.

Mad Wheatfield

Van Gogh

Above a field of summer-ripened wheat:
bright gamboge with the blessing of the sun,
where a black visible wind with angry feet
tramples the grain—and soon—

below a bruised sky, deep with threats of doom,
the ravens of remorse are evil bats
in crazy flight—just here a man will come
(an angry red-haired blind man with no hat)

to daub with stumbling, with a frenzied brush,
a pastoral past Barbizon, and sign
it with anonymous groans and suddenly crash
his brains out—see: upon the dotted line.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 62.

Bronze Mirror

Pompeii

She looked in me and always I gave back
all that she let me see: the evening hope,
the anguish of the dawn-light, the thin paths
where time walked daily. The triumphant smile
flashed on me less and less, and there were hours
when I lay, blank of light, and wanted her...
save that she feared my bright fidelity.

Time's tarnish and the dust of earth lay lightly
on me—a breath, and I was young again;
but she, of baser metal, wore and dimmed
until she could not shine, even in the sun—
especially in the sun. Then she gazed longer
in me by the small lamps that fed on shadow,
until she loved me well and smiled again—
but suddenly washed the smiles in bursts of tears
and flung me from her. I lay on my face
till the great lava took us... and we died.

Nor is this life I have the same as that,
for I am blind and no one touches me.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 63.

Promenade des Anglais

Nice

Up the broad avenue of palms, hotels,
beside the sea, the English take grave walks,
rejoicing in deep breaths and querulous talk,

the Daily Mail, the morning marmalade,
the sunlight, Downing Street's quaint miracles,
their bath, and everything that's safe and staid;

then by the blue-umbrella-shaded tables
they sit and read and smoke and have more tea,
serenely in this polyglotic Babel
bottomed upon their self-sufficiency:

women with teeth, and dismal legs in plaids,
and puny dogs with jackets in their laps;
knock-kneed girls in shorts, bright Nelson-lads,
High Anglicans in tweeds and spats and caps.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 64.

“L’Arrotino” in the Trianon Gardens

Below the rosy marble palace, through
the avenue of trees (done by Watteau),
the silken shepherds and frail ladies minced

to fluted minuets, and satyrs threw
the cones of assignation; Louis Quinze
made heyday—with his cream-puff elegance.

The lilies and white ducks were candid, cool,
and swam and bloomed toward ominous events.
Just whose ironics or malevolence
put the knife-sharpener by the Dragon Pool?

This minion from the millions, past seared lids,
was praying for revenge from a blind sky,
but honed and honed his knife (quite on the sly)
till it was edged for cutting... and it did.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 65.

Mount Etna

This is too vast—think rather: a white ox
lies in a brown field, calmly with his cud;
his body bulking grander than the rocks,
with all the heat's power sleeping in his blood.

His coat is grey at dawn, bright with noon's gold,
sunset. winds his brow with a rose-wreath.
And his wide eyes can luminously hold
the air and earth, the wine-dark sea beneath

his shiny hoofs, where waves stop, less than whorls
of hair upon his glossy shoulders. You—
see how the warm breath from his nostrils curls
in frosty plumes against the glacial blue.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 66.

Souk el Attarine

Tunis

Air reeked with frying fritters and meat-balls
in deep unholy fat, with garlic and
strange smells that hieroglyphiced Samarcand:
synecdoche of oriental spells.

Rank with iodoform and sour-tanned leather,
offal and sweat and gonorrhetic eyes,
putrescent dwarfs and cripples underfoot,
air took a whiff of barbarous barbers' lather,
gas from hot charcoal, and stale kerosene smoot,
then crawled like gangrene up the turquoise skies...

till round a corner the mimosa's bloom
exploded in the nose, and lavender
tossed him on sleepy waves of stock, fougère
and roses from the market of perfumes.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 67.

Montparnasse

She takes her coffee in sly catlike sips:
a merchant with the guild-mark on her wares,
authentic past the dinginess of years
by Lautrec's scarlet splash across her lips.

She seems to live on leisure, but her glance
with its brass scale-pan weighs you to a hair...
and through her fur's affected elegance
glitters the tinsel to be had for hire.

If you weigh scantily, suddenly her face
is sideways: a pale cameo, so cold
you'd dream that only love's sun could suffice
to warm and hold it safely (rimmed with gold).

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 68.

The Thames

Past Scotland Yard's black brick, an old French sloop
brave with the Union Jack; shovel-nosed barges
unloading coals; along the grimy margin,
slum-brats bathing; on a house-boat's poop,
a couple of 'lydies' tippling with a 'gent';
the Needle, sea gulls, coils of drying hawser,
Billingsgate (good fish, bad words), the houses
of Raleigh, the old 'Globe' and Parliament.

"Don't be vague. Drink Haig.' The Tower of London,
St. Paul's white cupola, the great Red Lion
crested the brewery, a Jew's cruiser lying
in wait for the tide by the etchers' Wapping Landing.

A freighter vomiting its bilge; St. Bride's
pastry steeple; spider-derricks lifting
red steel beams; buoys' green-mossed bellies shifting
to the sea-pulse that throbs against The Bridge.

A crack destroyer with grey evil guns,
a fire-boat with brass nozzles and scarlet pumps,
old ash-tubs (to the gunwales) for the dumps...
and Cremorne, drab behind a fleet of swans.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 69.

Madonna of the Louvre

She sits in profile, as if looking back
along a vista where all leaves are green,
smiling with roses: sits in quiet black
and white, half-mourning for what things have been

translated to the future. Yet this grey
where patience keeps her home is not so dim
but a faint westering flush has found a way
to touch her cheek because she thinks of him...

this cook for small gourmets, man about town,
farceur and fighting-cock with the white plume,
forgot his pose once and with all his art

caught this great woman—tricher than his own
mother, being every man's—to bloom
forever in the album of the heart.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 70.

The Temple of Juno

Agrigentum

With thick-trunked pollard-olives, the hill rises
to the improbable sky, and the flaked rust
of Tertiary tufa and crumpled columns rests
deeply in time (with stolen statues, friezes
and metopes)... but winter flowers fetch
the goddess homage: the crisp prickly curled
acanthus, the snake-headed aurum coiled
with quivering tongue, the dachshund-blooming vetch,
the purple iris, dear to Proserpine,
the frail alyssum's umbeled tuft of lace,
with the flat creeping lichen's gold-green lice,
and the niggardly whorl of stunted dandelion,
the fumatory's blood-pronged teeth, the green
four-rayed euphorbia, the daisies rimmed
with carmine, the snapdragons' rosy grim
and lion mouths, narcissus that has grown
more modest, lacking mirrors... and at last—
hexagonal, dawn-flushed—the asphodel
burgeons past storied glory on this hill:
brave with the beauty that the temple lost.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 71.

Detail on a Street Corner

Herculaneum

For Lily Bess Campbell.

I am Phallus, reddened in the antique mode,
rampant in limestone, set in a sunny wall
close to the traffic by the market well:
ironic rubric to make women mad.

Who looks at me shall dream and break her 'sleep,
though waking put me by. Can I not wait
for moons of drunkenness when I can slip
the stubborn wards that turn the lock of fate?

And henceforth she must praise me with a wreath
before my shrine. I am a mighty god:
who worships me is slave unto my goad;
but who denies me withers of my wrath.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 72.

The Central Nave

Cologne

In the grey silence light smites through thin shards
of rainbow glass and breaks what would be gloom,
scattering petals, brushing gold to gleam,
softening the strong lines that else were hard:

starved Gothic. Grottoes in obedient rock,
carved for eternity by passionate waves,
tremble when the organ's ocean-shock
rolls its broad tide through the five solemn naves

whose pillars mount to rib the vaulted ceiling
and farther, past its belly, drive a tangent
clean to infinity. Man is a filing
of humble iron beneath this arch's magnet.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 73.

Mobilization

Bruges: September, 1938

The poplars and pale lindens feel the fall,
the sky is zinc and yellow leaves drift down
the green canals. The market place is full
of young men edging toward some zero-dawn,

and fat dray horses pulling heavy caissons.
With broad-winged caps the Beguines pass, like swans
(swimming below upon the Lac d'Amour)

which nod and preen themselves and take the season's
last sunlight, while the belfry's tons of bronze
chime out the hours—as if time might endure.

But at the stations tears are shed and jests
forced from dumb awful hearts. The farewell words
hang on loose stems, like autumn... and the best
of life is stuck here with the nuns and birds.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 74.

La Rotonde

Montparnasse

Now crawls the later scum across the night
when the Bohemians are safe a-bed
and lovers leave and honest working-folk:
two blurry girls, a hydrocephalic head
eating at table-level, and a bright
old lady with a sleek pimp who is broke;
a venerable drunk who's lost his hat,
the waiter yawning at the bilious door,
that Swedish countess with the bulbous knees,
a fellow taking notes in exact words,

this snake-faced careful mother and her brat,
the second crop of less successful whores,
four crinkly German-Jews, a calm Chinese
with dull eyes scanning the earth-core of merd.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 75.

The Badia

Florence

Under the tower that houses these thin bells
he watched her while the service was droned out,
and she who knew he gazed looked somewhere else
(as if, of course, he were nowhere about),

never forgetting to be so devout—
especially when the priest launched forth on hell's
horrors—that her lover could not doubt
that she was bound for heaven's crystal hills.

But after mass was ended, the crowd passed
from the cold church into the lively street....
he knew and she that soon the time was full.

Red-robed, he waited (and she came at last)
to look straight in her eyes which did not fall:
while, louder than the bells, their quick hearts beat.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 76.

The Temple Inns

Fleet Street

This Templars' nest (tight labyrinth of brick
flicked with green elms) is now the breeding ground
of law—ah, brave past brunt of fire and flood
and greedy kings. This black oak hall was grand

above Elizabeth, Stratfordson and Drake;
it cherished Hooker, Blackstone, Selden, Noll,
and lessoned several princes near the blood
until they took the silk and sat on wool.

Dispassionate justice keeps its times and terms,
and law grows part and parcel of the man;
the urbanity of pattern lives informs

with the slow-tempering norm
his student days along the golden mean:
lawyers are shapen here to gentlemen.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 77.

The Old Red Camel

IT met a camel in an antique land,
with ribs like wind-carved ridges of drab sand.
Turning her louvre-nostrils toward the east,
I urged her gently, but the sad red beast
nickered or mooed or bawled in her strange tongue,
and being deaf (she was no longer young),
she let my pleas blow down oblivious air,
so we could simply not get anywhere.

Old men remembered she had been a belle
(as camels go), but since she was not well,
the young boy-camels feared—ah, worse than death—
the virginal miasma of her breath,
and she had never mated. Hence the flower
that was her treasure withered and turned sour.
She tottered and her flabby lips hung down
(curtains of malice) past her jagged brown
teeth, and beneath red mangy hanks of hair
she was Futility wrapped in despair.

When I got off, she hissed at me and spit,
and I fell straightway in a fainting fit.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 78.

Carthage

Delenda est Carthago... and the sheep
crop the tough salt-grass where the palace stood
whence Hannibal's triremes rowed off to Rome.

The Punic temples which once drank sweet blood
of children lie in shards now. The soft sleep
of Dido is unbroken. In this room

of the old convent the ninth Louis died,
peering at Calvary across this sea
(milky as Pernod's soapy emerald)
whose slack back waters scarcely feel the tides,

where black scribe-ibises stamp solemnly
cuneiform on incunabular time,
and jealous snowy herons scream to scold
the rose-flamingoes sucking this grand slime.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 79.

Sandwich-Sign

The Strand

It walks and stands and walks and stands and stands
as though it were time bound between two signs
and did not need its hands
or head: it lets the people read the lines

and is not real, save as a peg where thought
hangs visible. They like to read it, yet
suddenly it is not,
because they hurry past it and forget.

Its feet lead thoughtful mazes through the town,
but no one sees its face—
though careful persons even jot it down—
the man is living in a distant place.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 80.

Cloister Gardens

Notre Dame: Paris

Among the chestnuts' pink and white racemes
and shadows of the cloister-yard—where noise
is children—while old women knit and dream
and old men doze or nuzzle in the news;

where sunlight, pigeons and the play of water
are more than prayer—one quite forgets the church
(whose stone in this bright weather is less matter
than spirit: scissored spires above swift arches

spun of slight arabesques, the gargoyles' ambling
antennae, the thin buttresses washed white
by the quotidian rain, and the blunt towers

low against westering sun) and thinks the flowers
have coaxed a giant butterfly which trembling
clasps earth and drinks, though poised for instant flight.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 81.

Oasis

Tozeur

Past etched clay buttes, stark gravel-humps and old
channels of freak rains, and slow sand dunes
(hour-glass of the simoun), beyond dumb dun
camels, the brown tents, black sheep whose fold

is sky that sucks the humours out or chills
life to the heart's bare sinews, the last brush
fades out behind the saw-edge of the hills
where moveless time and silence with the crash

of empty thunder brood on this fierce drouth
which was good sand once till it died of thirst:
a wrinkled blind corpse-face without a mouth...

but what is this mirage thus harshly thrust
into the eyeballs: this palm-bristling isl—
startling as if Death should waken and smile?

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 82.

Vision of Puvis de Chavannes

Panthéon

Over the locked asylums of the night,
the cabarets and silent spires, the streets
where puppets strut; above the field of lights,

the bridges, mighty sewers, old chateaux,
the morgue where quiet lies beneath ice-sheets,
and the market's leeks and carrots stacked in rows;

above the beds where tired old people smooth
their faces out, to last another day:
these copulative beds—where mothers soothe
their babies, and spent hearts give up and die...

under the moon (though stone chimeras frown),
high on the sky's threshold of Notre Dame,
Saint Genevieve keeps watch above the town,
talking with someone—and the night is calm.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 83.

The Columns

Temple of Neptune: Paestum

For Robert G. Sproul.

Mortised past two millennia in place,
begging no plinths but honest mother-rock,
faithful and strong through fire, storm and shock,
they thrust like interstitial time in space.

Their work is done, in honour; roofs and walls
lie in bright shards of glory at their feet.
Wearing the massive Doric capitals
like helmets, calm above the battle's heat,

they stand in naked gold—and gazing up
the shafts through this illusive air, the eye
(noting the razor-edge of travertine)

believes they shall not fall; that having been
the peristyle of heaven so long, they prop
till doom the lapis cornice of the sky.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 84.

Reims

As if invited by an eastern khan,
one proudly walks to the deep western gate
where nodding lines of kings and clerics wait
with courtly dames: as if he were their kin.

Then through the anteroom to the great door
he moves in intercourse among this gentle
folk and buoys his heart almost to dare
approach the lady smiling by the lintel...

but suddenly awe is on him, and alone
the country-cousin stands,
fumbling his useless hat in clumsy hands—

until the king's own mother through incense
and music leads him to the audience,
though he sees nothing but the foot-worn stone.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 85.

Essential Crypt

Under the bold vault, past jagg'd spectral panes,
along the forest-aisles, by the still altar,
heavy with gilded angels, gelded priests—

go down to the grey limestone crypt whose veins
drip the eternal chemistry of older
temples rooting tight in the blotted past.

Behold the mighty loins that strain and freeze,
braced at Forever. How the thick keystones
prop the old fossil Titans' rebel-bones,
with the groins stern, with the unyielding knees.

Here is the right foundation: not on prayer
nor faith in simple hearts. You understand:
earth holds this trembling bauble in strong hands,
though frost-spires wave in the ambiguous air.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 86.

Travellers

Their feet have nowhere that they have to go,
hence all bridges (Arno, Rhine or Seine)
similar, negligible, though the eyes know
curves, the carving and the sponsor's sign.

The hands are lonely, feeling marble shafts
and railings along steps; for they have touched
no friend's hand for so long... though past them drift
myriad hands that do not matter much.

The castle, ruin and the masterpiece
fill the eyes' day; but when the hearts are come
to night, they toss in bed and dream of peace,
striving in seven-league boots toward their home.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 87.

Aqueduct of Claudius

Born of the mountain gorges, it grew tall
on the Campagna, making mighty hops:
the arched essential skeleton of wall

with a silver spinal cord along the top:
snow water from Castelli flowing down
through fever-swamps to suckle Caesar's town.

But since time put it by, this caravan
of sculptured elephants without a load,
save ghostly waters in its dusty veins,
sleeps toward oblivion. An upstart road

can break its back and lever bone from bone...
yet solemnly against the evening sky,
like thundering echoes, these black flanks of stone
are big with that which shall not wholly die.

Publication. *Cafés and Cathedrals* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 88.

THE BLACK BULL

Stage III | The complete 1942 collection

Nunc Dimittis

Go forth, my songs,
with a fierce lovelessness
that smites sky-scanners
with the joyous awe.
Leap from my heart
as starved hawks from the jess
and pierce the rabbit-skulls
with a shrewd claw.

Perhaps one wise in beauty
yet will see
the crystal bone-plan
that informs your shape
and feel the Aitic-chiseled symmetry...
pure as a young faun
sucking at a grape.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 11.

Hope Was Listening Mightily

All night speech
sweat and worked in the brain with moveless mouth,
like dumb waves striving up a silent beach,
licking at a noise they cannot reach.

The heart was a dim cry whining down the wind:
a dog that searched for a master he could not find.
(Often the one right word
is lost in the heart and cannot be heard —
or say, truth sits in the dark of the heart
and droops like a moulting bird.)

Hope was listening mightily, leaned near,
pressed a close ear
to lips that uttered nothing, clarion-clear:
a silver cipher of inaudible sound...
as if a giant king of stone should shout
a wise command, tho God knows what about:

such things as a martyr's tongue would chirp
when the hangman had pulled it out.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 13.

Maidens

Men wander down the road
and ask their way;

the blind tap querulous sticks
like long snail-eyes;

star-gazers are befuddled in the skies,
and sages are stuck fast in yesterday.

But maidens,

tho their eyes are lost in dream,
fare steadfastly and sure
and finally come -
as straight as bridges over a black stream —

unto the fated door.
 which is their home.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 14.

To Hart Crane

With shattered latitude, safe thru typhoon,
the twirled propellers thrust you destination,
acquainted with the converse side of moon,
rinsing with Cuban rum the heart's frustration.

What dawns for Hokusai. What dolphin-curves.
The engine's snoring cats. Spindrift and gulls...
while the cutwater's hard precision carves
the wake, as broad as swimming white-horned bulls.

Past the tall spider-palms and indolent sand, —
towards the maelstrom—patent in your face
one reads the port to which you are consigned
and what bright doom awaits you in that place.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 15.

Moon-Gazers

Between the earth and the moon the old men muse,
lifting their time-pale eyes to the fatuous ball,
drumming with gnarly fingers on the gate.

Come, gaffers, what's the lunar news?
Did she get her rains this fall?
Is the harvest soon or late?
Between the earth and the moon the old men wait.

But hypnotized and evermore they harken
for words that are not spoken and for feet
strangely delayed or lost, deep in the never.
And when clouds past the moon-face darken
and shadows creep like snakes along the street,
they know the Doomsters have withdrawn forever
the hope they licked once...
and it tasted sweet.

Their eyes are calloused—each a lake of moon!
 Silverly blows the hair from bald seared brows.
 Were age but wisdom, one might understand;
 but the answer hides in the dried leaves on the boughs
 and rides on the back of a wind just a mile away
 which is fetching the echo of a tune
 sung out of youth's gold throat... and long ago,
 and the answer bides
 in the thickened joints of the hands.
 The old men dream between the moon and the earth;
 but under their feet the sun god tightens the girth
 of his rose-maned steeds and flicks the silken rumps.
 O, their hoofs are shod with joyous flame
 and their snorts are a song for dawn!

Bed-time, old fellows. You must be getting on.
Can't stand all night here, shivering in the dumps.
It's the last cough,
you know, that puffs you off!

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 16–17.

In the Caul of Night

If little figures in mist capes slip past you
and vanish in the darkness with no sound,
they are not beggars and they are not whores;
they are not ghosts.

Their bodies have no form: great crystal eyes,
and hair of clear spun glass, transparent bones,
and fingers like bright icicles. They drift,
amorphous as a jellyfish. They drift
in protoplasmic silence thru the night.

You hear no laughter, for they have no voices...
the tongue, you know, is a gold horn for joy;
you hear no weeping, for they have no hearts...
it is the heart from which are pressed the tears.

So softly they flow past you, the unborn,
the orphans of a black night doomed to come,
you scarcely feel them; yet they are a part
of you—even as your fingernails and brains.
Stick out your cane sometime and trip one up.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 18.

Attis

White in a swoon, beside the bloody flint
he lies among the oak-leaves,
leaves worse than autumn-red;
foredone of the swift dithyramb of the Loves,
not soon again to flaunt
before the Genetyllides the rod
carven in the Colian's praise.

Unscraped yet by clam-shell, his gold-bloomed face
henceforth shall plumpen spongily; his flesh
never know leather or the embrace of bronze,
or the last stiff ruffle-struggle before spawns
the salmon dying in a crystal flash;
his hyacinthine curls be fillet-bound,
a capon-shrillness pierce the unthroated bass;
he shall dance beneath spring moons, unmanned, un-booned,
with silken cinctures on the nipples' bosses.

Beside the frenzied flint dropped from the fingers
unflexed: a flower of unripe seed bereft,
he lies, accursed by mute ancestral anger
and cries of unborn ghosts across time's rift.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 19.

The Hyphen

We tote our little deaths
on our backs, as snails
their shelly house, and we carry death
closely as squirrels their tails,
and intimately as our gullets' breath.

We who wave down the wind of the world
like holiday flags
carry it neatly tucked away
in our little parchment bags.

No crying in the night can soften
the last hard blow.

No virtuous deeds by day make light
the weight of this iron mace that lays us low:
this small black hyphen
of interruption between bed and coffin
is the undertaker's friend,
the colophon to end
the smudgy book of life: theme for a sermon,
the withering of condoling flowers,
the joy of heirs;
in fine, "Death is a shock!"

Begotten from greedy indigests of pride
which rotted inside,
the master-maker of spaghetti-vermin,
death is the silver bell-stroke
in a white tall tower
slipping peacefully down the wind as an air of Bach.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 20.

By a Gateway

Some gold day's end in autumn lean beside
the worn gate of a building, cracked
by Time's intrusive teeth, the nibbling moss.
Lean gently, to watch evening glide
across the eastern walls, across
the murky lower sky:
where evening opens its slow ominous eye.

Watch well but question nothing;
for evening is ironic
and will bite.
Remember, hope stood tip-toe even beside
this crumbling gate
and thought it better done to dream and wait;
remember, lean despair
crouched here and melodramatized her hair;
that love danced in to fiddle strings,
and evil slouched with mustached mutterings;
and that one, carried stiffly, brushed a shoulder
against this very stone where your head leans...

then the wind along the dusking street will be colder
and you will wonder what that shudder means.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 21.

Nightletter to a Man Lost in Mid-Ocean

My friend, you are well-dead in sluttish times.
Earth has lost her rudder and drifts toward shoals
of desperation. Shipmates stand with knives

against each other's breast. Unplotted tombs
await the dossils of these suppurate souls.
Ashore for flotsam lurk conniving knaves

who have already got your core and mine.
Honor has rotted among the guts of hope.
Shall we not mutiny and be one man
To garrote traitors with a halyard-rope?

I write you as we drift... perhaps myself
shall beat delivery of a-post too late,
and I shall glide, a-swirl in phosphor-light,
to your pelagic urn on the coral shelf.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 22.

Wind

Wind hangs upon the world
the way a hawk breasts with gray conquering wings
air that upbears him on slow foaming seas...

wind whose eternal silver bellows please
to play with dust and ships and feathery things
and toss them scudding, sails and pinions furled,
perversely to the green antipodes —

of such weird stuff is wind!

Yet I have seen, and you,
winds softer than white doves that gently flap
homecoming wings at evening... winds that hold
the summer's harvest in their craws like gold
hidden in rocky matrices...

winds that upclose like a tired coquette's fan
and nestle softly in God's golden lap.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 23.

Flute in the Fog

Mutely the white night dreams,
save for one stricken flute,
like a bird crying for a sweet thing lost.

Silently, unless the drips
of the slow mist from the leaves' tips
be music, the night slips
past. The black hours wax and die:
gone
from the golden clutches of the scorpion dawn,
like a bad debt.

The fog drips,
sullen slobber from pale-bitten lips
of old regret.

The clepsydra of night runs evilly, slowly.
The flute wails, low,
timing the drunken rowers
of a ship that creeps thru night
(a ghostly trireme over the mountain tips),
the oars
dipping
slowly.

O lost flute in the night!

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 24.

Suddenly in Autumn

The night is a sonata played on silver.
You stand before the window in the moonlight.
The wind blows the ripe grapes' smell from the vineyard.
Somewhere a bird chirps
grace-notes, and a cricket
ticks off the last few hours of the summer.

With haggard eyes, gaunt-ribbed, the slayer,
Autumn,
strides towards us... he is eating up our lives.

Suddenly you slip your smock off
and stand naked,
a silhouette cut on the silver window,
perfectly chiseled as a maenad waking,
happily minded for love-moods,
with insolent breast-tips.

From what antique cup or old frieze updigged
came you into life?

We are conquering Autumn!
Listen... those are drops of golden honey,
spilth
slowly trickling
from the heavy comb.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 25.

God Makes a Find

I saw Himself out walking by
the poorer quarters of the sky,
and His face
was calm and bland.

Suddenly He put His hand
in His pocket, pulling thence
a star that gleamed like a six-pence.

He gave it to a beggar that
sat on the curb and held his hat,
petitioning all wistfully
for crumbs of holy charity...
when God went past, that-beggar's eyes
hurled curses at Him, down the skies!

Then, in a wink, the Lord turned round,
picked up the wight from the gold ground
and like a sick lamb carried him
straight to a flock of seraphim
who had their haloes off and fed
on manna, honey, and shewbread.

And God said, "Fetch the lad a bowl!
He always was a stubborn soul
and just at dawn he ran away,
sulking and hiding out all day.

Give Lucifer some honeycomb,
for he's right-pleased to be come home."

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 26.

Dialogue in Bedlam

How is it, Ormie, you are come
to this strange joyousness?

All suddenly I heard a drum
beaten, tho I know not wherefrom;
but it called: "Ormie, Ormie! come
into the wilderness."

And you went gladly?.

Yea, I ran
thru briars and thru fen...
it seems, I am the destined man
since all the tricks of time began,
and I must work now what I can
to save the world of men.

What did the spirit bid you do?

The spirit bade me go
unto all men, as now to you
I come and say what you must do,
tho much your heart must swelter thru
along the road of woe.

But, Ormie, what's the goal of it
which I must pay with pain?
The goal, the goal is that you'll sit,
a sparrow on God's wrist and twit
your tail for the great bliss of it
and fly not forth again!

It was myself won this bright boon;
I and only I
saw the great signal from the moon
and heard this thundering golden tune
as God cried, "Ormie, come! O, soon,
my son, or I must die!"

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 27–28.

Said Thomas Hobbes

Tutorially to Lord Cavendish

These poets are an oddish fish
whose breath is but a silvery pish.

Who owns a stable noble mind
prefers the logically combined,
the tight conception well-defined.

And obviously the word's essence
permits no tropous accidents
seductive to our common sense.

The gods and devils wage no wars,
no hearts are broken by love's scars,
ladies are liker whores than flowers.

If I should strike your lordship's eye,
you'd see the grand galactic sky...
when to the sight no stars are nigh.

Beware, milord, of the ideal,
Our brains think only what nerves feel,
and only plasmic-stuff is real.

When crapulent rhymsters prate of spirit,
they mean digest-i-on and spur it
less with the Muse than liberal claret.
Came Cowley, nonetheless, t' immerse
this heretic in amber verse
in a carved Pindaric crystal hearse.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 29–30.

The Sycamore

Sonata in Hollywood

Stilly in the mystical
shadow of the sycamore,
give yourself unto the spell -
give, and go, and come no more.

Where the shadows and the stars
rise and fall on the deep breast
of the water, nothing mars
plots to slip and sink and rest.

To the image of the leaves
on the blackness of the stream,
to the little wind that grieves,
give yourself and dream your dream.

Maybe we are foundlings strayed
in an alien hopeless land;
but the birds are not afraid,
balanced in the night's vast hand.

Tho this languor that we feel
in the fragrant hush of night
is perhaps not half so real
as the stars' reflected light,
let your soul shine in your eyes
and your heart throb on your lips...
while our speech is lost in sighs
fainting where the honey drips.

Stilly in the mystical
shadow of the sycamore,
give yourself unto the spell -
give, and go, and come once more.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 31–32.

Consolation

Sonata in Hollywood

So each who gains the strained-for prize
may hold it in his hand
and watch it shrinking to the size
of a grain of sand.

But who won not shall keep the dream
of what he might have won,
safe-guarded by the seraphim
and centered in the sun.

Bright apples of Hesperides
no mortal hand shall pull,
liefer than hanks of golden fleece
that dim to common wool.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 33.

In the Fog

Sonata in Hollywood

Of water's Protean changes none
more saturates the air
with blankets of oblivion
and blindfolds of despair
than fog which inches in the mind
with points more shrewd than rain,
and wraps a silver sack to blind
the eye to what seemed plain,
and shows like X-rays to the bone
your Self in a small place -
amorphous, shivering, and alone,
with death-sweat on his face.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 34.

One Knocking at a Door

Sonata in Hollywood

He knocks, but knocks so lightly
none save the ready ear
that listens with receptive heart
can hear.

Then, diffident and silent,
he suddenly retires,
retracting the extended hand
of his desires.

Tomorrow you may pass him
but lack the eye to heed
one with a quiet competence
surpassing need.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 35.

Hawk

Sonata in Hollywood

He draws a circle on the sky
and never moves a wing.
Its center pivots where his eye
rests on a stricken thing.
His golden gaze is ominous.
Let small beasts have a care
and not affect the frivolous
when Raptor rides the air.

The glittering whirl of rapier
is not more deft than he
who swoops to brand a bit of fur
with ruddy destiny.
A feathery avalanche, a streak
of hungry lightning, charge
with fatal claw and accurate beak...
'A murderer's at large!'

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 36.

Snake

Sonata in Hollywood

This set of springs in cloisonne,
this blood and bone attired as rope,
this Gordian knot of mercury,
can slip away as slick as soap.

His daily work is arabesque,
a sibilant his battle-cry;
fearless, he takes the sun to task
with an obsidian lidless eye.

All circumstantial evidence
acquits his case as one maligned,
who never climbed an apple tree
or wasted word on womankind.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 37.

April Skies

Sonata in Hollywood

Down by the pomegranates
under April skies
she laid a charm upon me
with her honest eyes.
She told me wait for summer
and tame my blood a bit;
but my heart looked at patience
and would have none of it.

By the lake the clover
was proper green for June;
I ventured whisper in her ear
it would be summer soon.
She bade me listen reason
and teach my tongue be still,
then tripped across the clover patch
while I climbed up the hill.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 38.

White

Sonata in Hollywood

You are a snowflake on the wind,
a white dove fluttering down the sky,
a gossamer drifting thru my mind,
a silver mote that swims my eye.

You are a spray of cherry bloom,
a porcelain vase with a master's sign;
you are the white hush in a room
after the god deserts the shrine.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 39.

The Full Cup

Sonata in Hollywood

How did love come to you, like dawn
or the first sight of the sea,
or like a prayer?

Even thus it was
love came to me:
as a white pain effacing all
desires my heart had willed,
an unasked gift that left my small
cup filled.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 40.

Towards You

Sonata in Hollywood

And evermore my life runs deeper, strong
as if its current sought a distant shore.
Strange unheard things now give my heart
 their song,
white aspirations root in me, as bidden
be parcel of a hope unknown before.
My thoughts droop down like wild hawks
 that have ridden
clouds on the fringe of heaven and ask for
 rest;
my thoughts sink
towards you, as fish seek the deep;
my thoughts go to you and forget to think,
as sure of foot as one who walks in sleep.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 41.

These Still Acres

Sonata in Hollywood

The night wind takes his shoes off and steals softly
thru the dark grasses, and he scarcely breathes.
Bending his head down to evade the branches,
he warily scans to step but in the paths,
exactly in the paths that do not crunch.
Aye, he does well in going quietly
where glasses clink upon no friendly table,
where no one laughs or coughs or creaks a chair,
or says a word or rustles thru a book,
where even the clocks forget to tick—does well.

(This blustering fellow who can crack a ship
or puff down pine trees like a pile of straw,
can turn your house around or lift it clean
across the street, as by a twist of hand.)

The wind is reverent in these still acres,
rattles nor mossy windows nor grass door,
and does not whistle past the corner-stones
on which are builded these eternal houses.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 42.

House

Sonata in Hollywood

They all are gone, the footsteps and the laughter,
and I put out the fire and lock the door,
like a closed mouth, strangely aware that after
tonight a solemn dust will choke the floor
and be a cataract upon my eyes
and be a bandage that shall lint my pain.
Henceforth the dust, the silence and the flies
may have this house where I come not again,

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 43.

Silence

An unobtrusive guest, he hides
till you have time for him,
then to the hearthstone softly glides
with intimate eyes and dim,
awaiting revelation
of what you have to say -

at hint of a soliloquy
he breaks and falls away.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 44.

Sympathy

To tell your grief and halve your grief
is comforting. The heart
fronts up a bit of make-belief
for one who takes his part.

And may not the good Thespian
(who'd get his troubles rinsed),
once in the thing, outrun his plan
and leave himself convinced?

At any rate, it's comforting
and costs the sharer naught -
nay, makes him generous as a king,
white as a noble thought.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 45.

Without Benefit of Liturgy

They miss the liturgy (who love
and yearn and do not mate),
the incense and the painted glass,
the Latin Jubilate.

But mayhap in the desert
or on white peaks they spy
apocalypse in angels' script
across an instant sky!

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 46.

Now

I make a nose at yesterday,
its triumphs and its falls,
nor care to pry to-morrow
in crystal gazing-balls.
No pilgrimage, no bloody trial -
sufficient this for me:
to walk tiptoe upon the now
of my eternity.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 47.

Vigils

When joy you never tasted
and hope that had her day
are gone with passion down the night
and all the green is gray,
stay home, and thru the evenings
you shall not be alone.
There's memory in the rocking chair,
despair by the hearth-stone.
And sometimes at deep midnight
the dead of the long years
will come and bathe your lonely heart
with sacramental tears.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 48.

Pierrot de la Lune

Begotten in a morgue and nursed
by tender spigots of old kegs,
he gamined and grew fat and burst
from sucking phoenix eggs.
Protesting lewdly as he went
thru mud: his soles were all too thin,
and that his heart was never meant
to be a harp bestrummed by sin,
this phalliphor of sophistry
wove like a Tyrian his shroud
of shreds of golden blasphemy
and epigrams of thunder-cloud.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 49.

On Rainy Evenings

On rainy evenings
I will sit with you
and talk of Beethoven
and Angelo;
and the quixotic things
they used to do,
carousing
down the road of long-ago.
Oh, very eloquently
I'll explain
their high bequeathals
you must understand
I speak of them,
tho time and time again
I kiss
the slender fingers of your hand...

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 50.

Knuckles

Tt had to end so, -
for the little fauns
grew tired of propping up our hearts,
and when
they laid their burdens down,
the bleary dawns
woke us,
to rise and curse like working men.
We had our best in August
when we wound
bright garlands
to enswathe the skull of Time.
And we must crouch here now
without a sound,
gnawing our knuckles,
chilled with autumn rime.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 51.

Crisis

Crisis has a sudden face,
can trample down despair
or smite joy with a thunder-mace.
Suspense is buried there.

Hence, either you assured go on
or sink and be a stone:
either the fanfare of new dawn
or midnight's monotone.

But, having crossed this Rubicon,
you wonder with a sigh
just where the other road had gone
had you not blundered by.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 52.

Mastership

The soul's apprenticeship in clay
endures till it can draw
'twixt misery and joy midway
the line without a flaw.

Precocious fellows, there are some
adept in a few years;
but others lag and only come
through four score gates of tears,

and finally to perfection
write zero on the blue
with that free-hand precision
that Giotto's circles knew.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 53.

The Bubble

The heart's precision bade it run
punctually as a clock;
but a slight sphere of air could stun,
dismantle with a shock
impregnability no grief
pried thru, a fort no fears
could ravage. Yet a bubble brief
cheated it forty years.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 54.

Not Only

Not only from the clarion notes
and laurel branches plucked to die -
acclaim may come from voiceless throats
and the ubiquitous seeing eye.
And not for hero-hearts alone
the hemlock and the agony;
the poor win often loaves of stone
and silent lives, Gethsemane.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 55.

A Friend

So casually eye looks at eye,
it were an oddish thing
if either gave the other why
for long remembering.
A robin in a poplar tree,
a gray October rain,
cloud-rimmed Orion—these best be
things not. lost again.

But rarer than millennium,
two gazes apprehend
a bond and toward each other come,
and keep it to the end,
writing with acid to the core
the symbol that shall stand
while ocean flings his heart on shore
to sing against the sand.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 56.

The River

Pain is a hidden river which
updigs such golden sands
from the black depths as will enrich
who reaches out his hands.
Tho most will drink oblivion
while the clear, cleansing stream
flows past their souls, I have seen one
stand, with white lips, supreme,
and grip that gold and armor him
against all life might do
till he shone like the seraphim
when God goes marching thru.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 57.

Low Unholy Songs

Low unholy songs
thru the midnight steal.
Glimmering drunken throngs
of angels reel.

Your eyes in the dimness
are phosphorescent gleams,
and your tossing slimness
a barque of dreams.

Perfumes writhe in nets
from black depths and profound.
If the soul regrets,
the heart makes no sound...
low unholy songs,
green gleams in the dimness,
drunken angel throngs,
and your tossing slimness.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 58.

First Night in the Grave

Low Unholy Songs

Here is the end of company,
and the retiring heart alone
resumes its former intimacy
with earth and stone.

What a mighty eloquence
of too-late praise dropped on the grave!
the slowed mind weighed this last offense,
smiled and forgave.

The soul, remembering what she saw
before this interlude, must climb
those granite stairs where brood the awe
and hush of time..

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 59.

Heroes

Low Unholy Songs

I praise the weak protagonist
“who falls and writhes and cries,
climbs up, spits blood, and balls his fist
to strike before he dies.

But this wide-smiling paladin
whose casque has got. no dints
has some fat goddess for his kin
or is a fairy prince.

I like the high funambulist
who scorns to spread a net
and knows that what his feet have missed
his neck is bound to get.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 60.

The New Chatelaine

Low Unholy Songs

Made heir by agony to lands
she had not thought to gain,
she walks with bright keys in her hands
to be the chatelaine.

The vassals of an easy death
bend low. The patent's blurred...
but heralds read with reverent breath:
'Elected'? nay! 'Preferred'!

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 61.

In a Library

Low Unholy Songs

How the elite, aloof, concealed
by arrogance of gates,
walk gallantly the shining field:
Time's proven initiates.
Yet, turn the page of an at-home:
compliant to your mood,
Odysseus or the Dane will come
or honest Robin Hood.
Or if you wish for fairer guests
to stay with you till dawn,
there's Circe of the wine-stained breasts,
Griselda, or Mignon.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 62.

By a Trestle

Low Unholy Songs

His features, done the final throes,
had got a dignity,
as when a friend in Sunday clothes
comes past on a work day.

(As if he'd put his axe away,
doffed his heavy shoes,
and taken a place in Italy
as affluent people use.

As if he'd an inheritance
that put him at his ease
and had a palace, lazuli,
with rubies on his trees.)

A dignity that hierarchs learn
and public heroes wear
who know the audience can turn
its eyes no otherwhere.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 63.

April in Heaven

Low Unholy Songs

Bright cherubim walk slowly with drooped wings
thru the immaculate garden of God's mind,
brooding on sly forbidden happenings
bruited from earth's fragrant April wind.

Their eyes are somber, dreaming what they miss;
their lips are pouting, fain to have a kiss;
their virgin hearts are hankering after bliss.

They pace the golden paths like lions caged,
and when rebelliously they shake the bars,
a sullen trembling rocks the farthest stars -
and suddenly the Lord looks middle-aged.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 64.

Confluences

Low Unholy Songs

Two negligible slight atoms rush
and melt and cease to be
lone elements, and find the hush
of a new unity.

Two “people of importance” run
together on the path...
there’s publishing in Askelon
and whispering in Gath.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 65.

Sophistries for Forgetful Mourners

Low Unholy Songs

Husbands and lovers
whose ladies are dead,
snuggle under wool covers
and bury your head.
Your loves are below
the cool tongue of the snow;
rich soil keeps them warm
in the night and the storm.

Daughters and sons,
be cheerful. When born,
you thrive like new corn,
and you live only once.
You cannot forever
be running with flowers
in mournful endeavour
to cheer their dull hours.

Neighbors and friends,
sit long at your wine.
Laugh! How your eyes shine!
We know how all ends.
The dead cannot borrow
or visit or smutch
your pleasures with sorrow.
They don't get out much.
Ladies and doxies
with lovers in clay,
if you hanker for play,
look about and take proxies.
They come and they go,
and all cods are the same,
and no one will know,
and what's in a name?

Good fathers and mothers
whose children are dead,

dry your eyes and get others
to share your bread.
Safe in the earth,
your children want nothing,
nor kindness, nor mirth,
nor kisses, nor clothing.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 66–67.

A Funeral

Low Unholy Songs

Priests

We hustled him thru with a special mass
when his doom-stroke knelled, and he had to pass
the gates: a splendid special mass.

Family

We all kneeled low for his blessing hand.
He'd a lot of land, a lot of land.
We cringed low under that blessing hand.

Woman who washed the corpse

A fine strong man was 'e and sweet.
*E's washed wi' soap from head till feet...
an' the widied pulses of me beat!

Coffin-maker

It's as clever a job as I've seen done:
two feet four by six feet one.
Boards like them don't warp in the sun.

Horses pulling the hearse

Thank God, they don't die every day!
We can trot back home, to our oats and hay.
The wheels are sticking in the clay.

Flowers

When anyone dies, we're pulled and sold,
and we wither before the night is cold.
Perfume stuck on a dead man's mould!
Clods
They shovel us out and they shovel us back...
and it's good to be cold and still and black.
We snuggle down, no cranny or crack.

Women to the Poet

Low Unholy Songs

How all our lives
lie open like a flower:
the wistfulness,
the doubt, the ecstasy...
and in the dark our blood
flows to that hour
when the seeds ripen for eternity.
The seeds call unto you,
and our souls call
that you lean nearer, nearer;
but you look
with too-calm eyes that prod
to fathom all
and write us down as letters in a book.
Not for your kisses,
not for the swift praise
of our white bodies —
since God gave you tongue,
can you not find our music?
All our days
must our hearts stammer
what you should have sung?

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 70.

In the “Golden Lark”

Low Unholy Songs

I met a charming drunkard in
the “Golden Lark” today:
urbane, clear-eyed, white-haired, and
 thin,
with an Olympian way
of tipping from his sunny cup
immortal instants, sup. by sup.

He held between his slender hands
a radiant fragrant world
round which Time sped with singing
 sands;
and Joy stopped, pinions furled,
to watch pale mimes of sorrow pass
across the magic gazing-glass.

He drank, oblivious as a child
to all beyond his play -
or was it world-old wisdom smiled
to see life slip away?
I only know a bright flame gleamed
above his forehead as he dreamed.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 71.

The Facetious Sexton

Low Unholy Songs

A million eyeballs watch from this green plot,
scanning us clearly, as thru walls of glass,
keeping account of things that. pass,
remembering things we do and do not.
Clear lidless eyeballs peering thru the grass -

A. strange clairvoyance which eternity
grants to these curious pellets lets them see -
yes, everything. My dear man, do not turn
your nose disgustedly. Attend and learn:
this same ironic spirit that makes eyes
eternal is benevolently wise
and subtly mutes the sense with anodynes
for all small sufferings: a fine disdain
astutely keeps from death's confines
trivial mortalities that might give pain.
Tho these cold crystal eyeballs mark the fall
of those once dear, they do not weep or call
admonishment. They do not care at all.

Serenely as grease-haloes in a pot,
they float on Time...
 eyes, madam, do not rot.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 72.

Girl's Song

Low Unholy Songs

His flowers are growing
from my mouth:
He has stilled my soul
that was faint with drouth...

His branches weave
about my mind,
till I cannot see...
my faith is blind.

And his roots pierce
in my heart and grow
a shining flame
that none must know.

His leaves lean round me
to hide a thing
that is joy and shame
and suffering.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 73.

Whereon the Sea-Slug Feeds

Low Unholy Songs

Have you seen the body of one long at sea,
caressed by the lewd lips of tides: such one
as has swirled seven days out of the sun,
swirled in the green quern of chalcedony?

Were it your own beloved, you would not touch
that battered mouth whereon the sea-slug feeds.
You would stagger to a bar or tell your beads
or give it to the fire—and not say much.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 74.

The Tiger

He paces, striped with sable and green-gold,
a nervous pendulum, in a tight cage.
The northern fog enswathes him with its cold,
blunting the snarling daggers of his rage.

He flows beneath his skin, a tropic river
that has hurled bridges down and towns with towers
in a red maelstrom; and his nostrils quiver.
He dreams he crouches among champak flowers.

And when the yellow moon is full, his cries
(rasped from a rutting heart) evoke a mate
who crawls in sinuous bronze before blind eyes
and bluntly claws the iron bars of fate.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 75.

El Verdugo

I hear it dripping
slowly on the stone floor all the night...
I hear the black hounds sipping,
and their eyes are hellish-bright.
I tied her hair up fast,
turned back the ermined gown
to where the shoulders glistened white.
The slim young neck was brown.
She took her crown
off at the last
and knelt down.

I had no hankering for that stroke,
I who have helped a score
of traitors thru the easy door
that leads to mercy seat.
She seemed already near to God...
I heard the bishop as he spoke...
I saw the black judge nod.

One slow gold curl waved on. her neck.
I felt my pulse beat...
one slow gold curl waved on her neck,
and the white skin was sweet.
I saw the young blood gush and jet,
I heard the falling sword
on pavement... and my hands were wet...
and she had found the Lord.
I hear the slow drops fall
on the stony floor.
The hounds cannot drink all -
There is more yet, more.

She walked so straight nor was afraid.
I felt my temples beat.
Meekly knelt the maid -
one instant breath she prayed -
and fell before God's feet.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 76-77.

Celestial Colloquy

The man with nail-holes in his hands and feet
traipsed lonesomely along the golden street.

“What good the blood I shed? Do these red scars
redeem the evil of the whirling stars?
All death is as a thorn upon my brow;
I gave my life—yet folks be dying now.
And sin—Lord, how they love it! Might and main,
my brothers sin and sin and sin again!
Father, advise me. What can I yet do
to right the world’s course and connive with You?”

“My boy, be quiet. Your small sufferings
have altered not a whit the trend of things...
excepting, as one must, a certain part
you’ve played in the development of art.
Go to the corner set aside for saviours,
quaint chaps of futilely sublime behaviors.
You’ll find Osirus and Prometheus,
the Buddha, Lao Tzu. You can discuss
with Moses, Zoroaster, Socrates,
my spiral nebulae, my splendid fleas.
Myself can run this world, tho saving man
has no consideration in my plan.
Even now I’m busy with the new bacteria
to plague those mites who’ve overcome diphtheria.”

The man with nail-holes in his hands and feet
traipsed lonesomely along the golden street.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 78.

Pavane of Seven Peacocks

Slow where sunny grasses shine
and flowers updigged from Ophir's mine,
seven peacocks in a line...
 slow, slow, they pass.

Stately, proud in bronze and green,
lazuli and tourmaline,
opal, iris, smaragdine,
 seven peacocks pass.

Not a mort-note do they sing,
move not panache, nor stir wing;
on a solemn journeying
 slow, slow, they pass.

Argus-arrogance spread wide,
condescending in their pride
to bow this side and t'other side,
 slow, slow, they pass.

Tick of death-watch is their tread.
Gravely, as if mass were read
and the benediction said,
dancing for the golden dead,
 seven peacocks pass.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 79.

The Champion

A battered god who was not fair to meet,
he slunk in the cafe and sat by me.
Once he spurned dust for all the world to see
in the swift ground-swirl of Achilles' feet.
Bedraggled laurels, mark you, smell not sweet;
but I bedraped him with the glamour
of stadia brimmed and howling splendidly...
tho certainly his trousers were not neat.

How had time yerked him? What could he draw now
from muted plaudits or those mighty thighs
well-larded and grown slack? I fetched my purse
to overpay his mumblings; for somehow
the gods of luck had coolly shut their eyes
since he was lauded in Olympian verse.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 80.

Behind the Golden Door

You could not say just what the fellow'd got
to make him cheerful. On his dirty floor
played seven cats, and there was little more,
besides a mess of corn-meal in a pot,
a bed, and some old magazines—with not
a chair for company. But in the core
of things he had himself and shut the door
on those who'd sprinkle pity on his lot.

He shut the door, and it was gold inside,
perhaps, with chests whose treasure quite sufficed
his need, since he (grown wiser, by your leave,
than you or I) had eaten up his pride,
yet kept his honor rather too high-priced
to sell for what had made his neighbors grieve.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 81.

Sharon Ash

We all were well aware his mouth turned down
like the meniscus of the mercury;
and from his conversation, obviously
he knew the dogs had sprinkled half the town.
Our fate assumed a dull autumnal brown
where his gaunt shadow fell; but no degree
of whispered hateful notoriety
reclaimed the inner basis of his frown.

He spoke the worst about the best of us,
foretold a nasty end for everyone.
Our slight achievements flickered, piteous,
under the cumulus around his sun.
How we drew hearty lungfuls to discuss
his future when his gritty sands were run!

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 82.

Betty Brougham

Blond as May goldenrod, a dragonfly
that lights on lily-pads nor wets its feet,
she hovered, shining, where the bait was sweet,
sucked well, and vanished neatly, winking eye.
This uncaught marvel, canny, lightning-spry,
impervious to fog or wind or heat,
we said, is bound to sneak out some retreat
to lay her blessed eggs in by and by.

A prophecy on sand. So nimbly she
evaded love, lust, liquor, and the law,
that she grew withered imperceptibly,
still viewing her bought freedom as no flaw.
She had an income, and it left her free
to stuff aloofness in her spinster-craw.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 83.

Hokusai

For asseveration of the real I turn
not to your thin rice paper. There is stuff
to tickle a fancy with and good enough.
to warn a wary soul where fox-lights burn.
You ground your colors in a magic quern;
you scanned your mountain with a demon eye;
but no such clouds float over no such sky
as you would have us marvel to discern.

I mind a story: as the ship drew near
to Nippon, all the tourists with desire
hung on the rail for Fuji; but a drear
spindrift hid all. "My friends, look higher, higher!"
the captain said. "Up! where the sky is clear."
And there your vision gleamed, a hill of fire.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 84.

The Mole Emerges

He dug our cesspools for his daily bread,
and anyone who mattered in the town
would turn his eyes aside or gaze him down
when passing. If the fellow had been dead,
less deference had been paid to what he said
of thought and did not say; but all this lack
of notice was upgathered and paid back
when he brought a strange woman to his bed!

The mole emerged quite suddenly and gleamed
with infamy. The preacher called on him,
and neighbor women deemed it right to glance
severely at and after him who seemed
romantic with a light that did not dim,
altho unhallowed by God's ordinance.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 85.

Tibby the Ass

Astutely thus to flaunt against the breeze
a sovereign suit of hair, and water-proof!
To meet the rocky path with dibble-hoof
and grow stout chisel-teeth to nibble trees!
O spier of bright angels, deity's
sure mount, for Egypt bound. O, praised of them
with palms that waved you to Jerusalem...
and now the butt of the world's miseries.
I greet you, lowly ass, whose morning song
breaks the hills into echoes. You are strong
with the fast spirit that we mortals lack.
Have I not seen, deep-mirrored in your eyes,
the green of valleys and the blue of skies
when unto me the earth gleamed sullen-black?

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 86.

A Disciple of John Reed

Hermann MacDowd was quiveringly intense
and did not hide his feelings in a cave.
Dubiously as a whisker scans a shave,
he glared askance at life's malevolence,
and strove to fetch a proper recompense
by urging the coal miners to be brave..
“We workingmen must not sweat like a slavel. ’
Let your picks rust till capital relents!
I’m off to help the Russians!” He set sail
and came, en route and talking still, to France
which stuck him summarily into jail
where he got little house-guests in his panits
and dreamed fine visions (for-a dozen weeks)
of justice, bathrooms, and the Bolsheviks.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 87.

Laurels in Pawn

For T. S. Eliot

They hailed him as a poet featly fed
on Mount Parnassus. We assumed a squat
to watch his fierce pen hack the obstinate knot
of all the other poets left unsaid.
He scratched a frigid finger on his head
which suddenly proved fertile and begot
two epigrams which meant, the Lord knows what,
then sickened and climbed permanently in bed.

The labor-pangs had somehow cracked a nerve;
henceforth he drowsed in enigmatic trance
as if he pondered odes and epic meat;
but Pegasus was sulky or lacked verve
to wing the sunny pastures of romance -
a working horse must have some oats to eat.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 88.

Mlle. Lys Chamelle

"She can be as wise as we, And wiser when she wishes." —Meredith

Bright spinster bulging the omniscient brain,
we drape the honor-stool. Aghast, we mark
your comet flashing hugely thru the dark,
till the thing dies, and all is night again.
Your mental children were conceived in pain,
brave with man's speech and tongueing it full well.
Your facile pen can scratch a miracle
on parchment... while the ravens croak in vain.

Yet I have seen you wambling down the walk
with pigeon-toes, tight-kneed (as maids are wont),
your eyes bemused with Shakespeare, like a hawk
hungrily prowling where the chickies haunt...
and much I marveled that your witty talk
lacked pregnancy and foiled the christening font.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 89.

Limited Edition

The melancholy printer lit his pipe
and clicked off village items. Half-distraught
whether the stuff were worth the ink or not,
his fingers fiercely stabbed the linotype.
He pondered were it better done to wipe
the matrix clean, or print naught after naught,
a page of bubble zeroes; hence he wrought
as one who weaves a sack to catch a snipe.

Only when drunk did he turn on the press
to smear the virgin wood-pulp with the mess
of nonsense; while, lest evil demons daunt
the will to win his daily saw-dust bread,
he drank... and his eyes glittered as he said,
“I’ll print that Petrarch with the Aldine font!”

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 90.

Girl with Red Shoes

Wisp-light of love and queen of cheap hotels,
I tip my hat, remembering a thing
that pricks my breast but does not bid it sing
and soon or late slinks where oblivion dwells.
Hearts drink like desert travelers from such wells
as are digged haply near their wayfaring;
yet, when you die, in justice I must bring
a frayed gardenia... and you know what else.

Was it young April's lust or was it wine
bemused us? I can see your eyebrows lift,
that quandary were worth one brain-fire's flick.
Did you not smile: "The moment's anodyne
blesses the groveling spirit during shrift,
like myrrh dripped on a feeble altar-wick"?

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 91.

Mrs. Leffield

What sluttish tricks the whims of fate can do!
Our Mrs. Leffield had somehow a quirk
that no apprentice of the midwife's work
can lack and get her daily labor thru.
Some pamphlets had explained a thing or two,
and she was not a woman who would shirk
dissemination of good news. Her smirk
laid viscera open, like a chart to view.

With scientific terms, innocuous
as little girls, she preached the primrose path
and managed with suave gusto to discuss
how the wise virgin thwarts the aftermath.
Her tricks, I thought, are less miraculous
than her resemblance to the Wife of Bath.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 92.

Poetic Licentiousness

One likes a workman who can draw a line
and saw it clean, not wobbling here and there,
skewed off by knots. One likes the saw to bear
a bright precision straight as Euclid's sign.
Good steel it needs, filed till the edge is fine;
sharp eyes to sight the penciling, like a hair;
the nerves close-knit to muscles... and a fair
erected vision of the whole design...

But when untutored rebels who have sweat
no seven years in the hard guild of verse
run maudlin, jumbling rhythm, sense, and words
in patterns incoherently perverse,
like Bedlam's wretches, one cannot forget
the cheerful, careless droppings of the birds.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 93.

Fireside Idyl

From the black hob she raised the copper pot
and poured his demi-tasse. Her face was gold,
blessed by the fire's sheen, and showed the mold co
of joys safe-gleaned—and some she had not got.
But he (remembering Luxor, Camelot,
and siren faces visioned, not to hold)
saw only that her face was getting old,
and some unseen disaster screwed the plot.

There was but little they could do to stay
by stealth the sure oncomer. No retreat
avails the heart along the sullen way
some quirk has marked once for June-maddened feet.
Nor was it irony that made her say,
“Sugar?” ~ as if his cup could be made sweet.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 94.

Lao-Tze

He rode a buffalo into the west
and paused an hour by the frontier gate,
dictating to a guard who bade him wait
a slender volume of his very best.
His best—and only. On the palimpsest
scratched out and overwrit by time the great
cool arrogance he spake to life and fate
shines forth, of all farewells the comeliest.

“Scan wisely and do nothing!” is the sum
he chose to leave, and vanished in the waste, —°.-
stirring a little dust-whirl in the dumb
immensity that the breeze erased.
Yet his words, rising cloudlike, without haste,
brood like a dragon not yet overcome.

(Confucius said, “Lao-Tze is a dragon!” This
is a Chinese compliment.)

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 95.

Mimus Polyglottus

Meticulously premeditated rang
his strain. The minstrel of my chimney top,
drunk on a whiff of March, let music drop:
bubbles of silver, with the faintest tang
of irony, bright mirth, of grief no pang.
He clucked the hens and miaowed the cat to a stop,
a-crouch; then laughing flung the gods a sop,
straight to the clouds, to bid them mark who sang.

Buffoon in feathers, well was he aware
what listeners hated him. He preened his coat,
chirped, jug-jugged, swore, and jeered at who might dare
flute any gamut that he'd not by rote;
then vaulted with roulades high in the air,
and ruffled not a plume nor slurred a note.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 96.

Ty-Ty

Rash scrambling microcosm, busy-box
prying phenomena with pirate hands,
counting base stones and chips as golden sands,
wisely concerned with the time-eating clocks;
your thoughts are black sheep in the new-washed flocks
of spring; your wishes ring out like commands;
but round your sleep white angels wait in bands,
shutting all evil out with stalwart locks.

Your dialectic and your dialect
have got my brains in springes not to loose.
The moment flaws assailing you have wrecked
my leisure's labor and my civic views.
Your hugest misery I can soon correct
by showing you just how the black bull moos.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 97.

Lief's Ship Sails Eastward

My Vikings, pull the dripping oars inside
and wipe the salt-cakes from your walrus-beards.
The water's rotten and the bread is green.
We have sown half the world with saga-seed
and fetch strange eggs to be hatched by the bards.
Once home with our grandchildren, we shall grin

with honorable white hair and backs warm-furred,
feet by the fire, and horns of seething mead
held in the oar-scarred hands... and in our eyes
the vision of that first pine-bristling fiord
we reached and the bright ice that drove us mad
and girls like sleek white seals that gave us ease.

Patience awhile. The sea should teach us patience...
slow, slow, the waves work ever to the shore.
What tho dark strangers lord our byres and folds
and walk beside our wives and drink love-potions
thru the white nights of summer—we have share
in the brave tillage of these ocean-fields.

And we shall sing our deeds and drink and sleep,
circled by awe and what thin love age gets;
and in our sleep we'll ride a dream, our weird
as we sailed westwards, eyes stunned by the slap
of waves like wild boars; hungers ate our guts...
and hope was sweeter than a king's reward.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 98.

Variations on a Theme

I

The wind swirls down the mountains in the fall,
the rabbits make their middens in the brush,
the buckwheat burns brown holes in Autumn's pall.

The spilth of fruit lies rotting on the ground,
grass dies, and birds fly chirping toward the south.
The hills are sleeping like a weary hound.

This is the end of summer, and what good
were the vast striving and the brooded hope?
Earth bends her head and takes the hangman's hood.
Blest who comes home at evening to find
soup in the black pot and his little son,
and smokes his pipe, with nothing on his mind,

nor prods to plumb the how and if and why,
but rocks the brat to sleep and naps himself,
while calm stars keep their watch in the cold sky.

II

The grape leaves wither in the autumn wind,
mist wraps a gray caul snugly round the sun,
and old men sit and backward roll their mind.

Now evil angels go about the earth
with snares to catch unwary souls in sin,
and foeti pound against the doors of birth.
Life thrids her futile shuttle, and the Fates
sharpen bronze shears... while on their horny hands
the sextons spit and open loamy gates.
Still the wind blows, the sun climbs the drab sky;
then cold stars spell our story tersely, thus:

you are born, you suck, you suffer, and you die.

And melancholy sands slide down the throat
of Time and make no stay; and no god comes
with the iron sword of ultimate antidote.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of J. A. Decker, 1942), pp. 99–100.

Meteor Shower

They follow proud Polaris and his Wain:
ragtag gold-eyed gamin-thieves of dark:
wild fellows twirling tiptoe to their work,
ramping a million sooty leagues to wean

their thirst for speed; sprinting, tense to win
nebular plaudits; hurtling the bulwarks
that hold oblivion; flinging pinwheel sparks
(steel sprayed from emery), instant, and but one.

Ah, they are vast-thewed, prying cracks between
broad-bastioned space: wastrels too spry to lurk
in sky and let dawn's red dirk leave them wan,

dying of surfeit past their minute-mark.
Rash iron heels scraping ether-flint, they wane,
shouting at light a mad bravado—hark!

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 101.

We Sail at Dawn

Between the black warehouses, dull to dawn,
toward funnels, masts and the dock where cotton bales
bulge for pecunious looms down time, and bulls
bellow to have eventual landing done...
behind the bleak hills lurks legitimate sun.

Fog sleeps on the wharves. Gabmen, fish-mongers
smoke in the dying darkness, desperate to dock-rats.
The stowaways that escaped the three weeks' hunger
crawl from under the pier where flotsam rots
and want to ship eastward at the cheapest rates.
Gesticulate Portuguese have bought the dead,
Jews in lifeboats paddle behind the wake
to salvage refuse and the soon subdued;
the Chinamen have shrewdly bought the weak,
counting upon abbasus those that have died.

But now the sun, the song when anchors rise
to the screeching winches on the foreward deck.
The helmsman takes the orient in his eyes,
the mate shouts Anchors aweigh, and the crew Aye-ayes...
the aliens count their profits and finger their dirks.
Surf-scum, garbage drifting, and gifts to gulls.
The coffee-smell from the galley, tall sails unclewed,
the purser checking the bales and the bawling bulls,
the hatches closed, the ship in a canvas cloud
before a wind on the beam, and the harbor cleared.

Holystone the deck. Get up the paint
to revirginate the ship before the ice
thrusters growling towards the prow by Malice Point.
The cook is mending his pants by the crew's advice.
The captain commands the wind with a calm clear voice.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 102–103.

Two at Sunset

Not unripened, standing against the hill's lean
flank, in dry grass, meekly our eyes turn westwards.
Was there ever dawn and a high noon prancing,
gold on the skyway?

Blasts of breath we need, but the air swirls tightly
past mouths flaccid, whispering vain words over.
Faster, hotly groaning on out-worn axles,
speeds the sun seawards.

Was there ever spring and the green grass matted,
couching love (that gnarls in the halting veins now)
while a doe and fawn in the coiling bracken
froze as they eyed us?

Come, creep home. The sun thru the golden window
lights one spark yet, bright on the flowerless altar:
one flame more where, kneeling with slow smiles,
 wait the
children with verses.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 104.

New Year's Morning

As the hearts came from the night club into the cold,
they were aware of truth no calcium light
could print upon the brain.

Suddenly, arm in arm with something old
and durable, they were at home with night,
and by a needle-prick blood-brothers to pain.

The stars were nails clinched in the earth's black lid,
wind shaved off fresh ice, the bells were loud
to spur the dragon of a rocket-flare

which the new year bestrid:
an infant conqueror that charged the crowd
of black invincible tenants of the air.

Abruptly, as the hearts came thru the door,
they were aware of ciphers that reached, grew small
towards the convergence of the thin perspective,

and there was little for them anymore
except the ultimate of nothing at all
or the alkaline advertised as a corrective.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 105.

You Who Scorn Your Fellows

Resist the hub's pull. On the tangent
fly into ethereal space.
Or, since earth attracts you still,
search Africa for spice.

If you dare not leave your country,
you at least can go from town,
past the lowlands, past the foothills.
From the heights look down.

Not in supercilious boots
nor monocled by arrogance,
but in pity for the drones who
eat the comb of indigence.

Down the valley to the city
slink the wastrels and the weak,
glide the greedy and the gloomy,
with the sinful and the sick.

In the mountains the disdainful
eagle on the coping stone
sharpens talons, whets his beak
and screams a major tone.

Lord of air, peer of lightning,
calmly taking what he needs,
he soars to his sanctuary,
superior to his deeds.
Try it, you who scorn your fellows.
Split their skulls... the brains are nice.
Then sit, profiled on the dollar
of your silver loneliness.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 106–107.

Young People Born Too Late

O young people born too late or born too soon,
Time does not want you building in this land.
Earth has no place for you, save in her breast.

Be submonished and die. Life is insane.
No wages for you. Three-balls will not lend
a dime to hopes so foully double-crossed.

All nursed upon war's stingy paps are doomed,
thin-boned, and must by arrogant brisker youth
be crowded out. Your moment is not, nor was,

nor will be. Supernumerary, damned
by silver fists which suavely break your mouths,
receive emasculation and, grown wise,

curse with dark silence the sun's procreation.
Run away and grovel in night's garbage-heap.
Your maintenance starves our crickets and dickiebirds.

You have outstayed your time and eaten your rations.
No salvaging your lives. Resign to sleep.
Rust in the pied font of superfluous words.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 108.

Man Pretending to Be Asleep

He is there, as in the fig the hidden flower;
like beauty in a castle, safe from eyes;
a secret mouse that nibbles thru the floor
softly in the night when the cat-brain lies
asleep in the cooling ashes of the heart.
And he is yours, in utmost privacy.
Yours: a kiss nobody saw or heard:
swift poison in the goblet of connivance.

Racy in ruddy arteries, thru azure
veins less brisk, thru onyx pools of bile
swimming with lazy fins of couponed leisure,
white in the nerves as the brow of a sick child.
With his hat drawn over weasel-eyes, a gun
under each armpit, waits for you alone
the man in the front seat since the trip began...
and he will prod your ribs who read this line.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. 110.

Passing Understanding

... And when he was in bed, after his prayers,
he used to call his father (to put off
sleep), and the old man climbed the stairs and coughed:
What do you want?—while his tight heart went soft.

The child would pull the covers round his head,
lie still as still, pretend to be asleep,
withdrawing in himself like a closed bud...
while the father sat by him and leaned to slip

an arm beneath the chuckling scamp and press
his beard into the blanket, half-ashamed
to want to hug the bundle to his breast
and love him fiercely, with strange fire consumed.

Always, after scuffling, came a kiss,
and the wet lips the child put to his cheek
blinded the man like apotheosis,
made him too proud to trust himself to speak.

Publication. *The Black Bull* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1942), pp. iii.

TIGER OF TIME AND OTHER POEMS

Stage IV | The new poems of 1965

Shun the Heaven

Candid Love Song

Tenuto

With fish nets and coral
with wishes and carols
with sapphire and attar
and branches of lightning
over samphire and water
and chasms of nothing
on trestles of hope
beyond schisms of loathing
through veils of disaster
revealing the mystery,
not trustful of hap
but with chorals in spirals
with queries and quarrels
with fish nets and coral
through simooms past fissures
we clamber to cambers
and coombs of the moon...

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 35.

Dry Grotto by Halfmoon Bay

You lay on the sand by a tide-scooped pool
and the garrulous waves with scratched susurrus
were Danaides with riddled pails
filling the bay, to a futile chorus
and you were thumbing a book, perhaps
dreaming, as women are used, of love
and a garland glory might toss in your lap:
a welter of such-like make-believe

while limpets, anemones, crabs, were teeming
in the pool with lush processions of kelp,
you were a dry safe grotto blooming
with gray moss and ice-plant...
and far from help.

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 36.

The Quarrel

Each flying minute
that the clock dials
is now a dead linnet
choked by a child
as if the rats gnawed
a hole in the week
or a dark vulture cawed
hours with blood on his beak

Each instant shivers
with grit in his teeth
but he digs in and slavers
and fattens on grief
Time's sullen hunger
eats out a black cave
deeper and longer
than somebody's grave.

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 37.

Cocktail

In the areaway a dog is gnawing his bone
You lean above me in sleep
with great eyes that embrace me
and whisper: I will never let you go.
I waken—the bed is cold
fog-horns hoot from the bay.
That crunching of bone is Time
chiseled by evil teeth
Sleep. You return and say:
Even now our love is being born
Our love is being born of my despair.
...a servant brings on a brass cocktail tray
like a royal coffer a streaked purple caul
anyone can see the foetus is dead

Fish-gills on the throat
crumpled unplumed wings
fingers that grasp at nothing
but most the umbilicus with a scarlet tag
like a rag to mark a bargain
the horns hoot jubilation—
the dog has got his teeth in a strange new

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 38.

Letters to Clodia #3

Darling, you need an agent, for you've let
your value on the market slip. A wench
should keep her chin and price up, else too late
she cannot hoist them back there with a winch.

I wonder what the mothers of the daughters
are at. Are they too dumb to know a cod?
Or do the old bawds chortle when such matters
happen, vicariously: a final prod?

And past the gray-rimmed pubes! Evoé! Hoops!
How they must grin and wriggle when such fame
glows little neon roses round their naughty
daughters! But waves end in salty foam,
a few dead fish, some flotsam. So perhaps
mothers shouldn't worry—hoity toity!

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 39.

Letters to Clodia #9

What bitter accident I did not find
you when we still had something worth the
Before you gave your week-ends up to whoring
and I embezzled my old age's funds.
By now we would have tightly tucked away
a snug annuity against all storms—
perhaps a pittance, but enough to buoy
us finally shoreward, though on slender terms.
But as it is, we starve of a huge plenty,
spending our capital, and no interest breeding.
Hence our decline will be on slippery flinty
paths where even rag-pickers do small hoarding.
Really, honey, I had vastly rather—
than your round dozen—you had laid your father.

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 40.

Somber Autumn #6

You came to meet me down the evening road
you had been working all day in the vines
your face was brown
and your eyes softened and glowed
as Cygnus crept up barking
through the pines
You smelled of the ripe grapes
I drank your mouth
naming you (from the red handkerchief
about your head) 'Milady of the South'
and that was the beginning
of my grief

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 41.

Somber Autumn #10

And all this agony
was it foretold
by your first smile that day in the slow rain?
Who could have read then your face could grow
and my joy globe so ripely
to such pain?
The hidden letters of the prophecy
worked in the hyacinth curled on your flesh—
it took some time to bloom
then I could see
the Greek ai... sudden as a lightning flash

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 42.

The Blue Knife

My Mother Came in the Night

My mother came in the night she came
with her long hair flowing
her great brown eyes
soft as moon in the night she came
on the road of stars
with her long hair floating
She had the smile my heart remembered
the soft warm breasts that suckled me
her motion was music along the edge
between moon and midnight
my mother came

Oh take me away with you take me away
No my child you have mountains of sand
must crawl through the glass yet
bear and be patient
when I come next time
you can go with me

My mother went back to the night
she went
with her long hair floating
against the moon
with the motion of music
majestic and silent
I saw her enter the great black door

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 45.

Tiger of Time

Tiger of time is zebra-striped
succinctly black distinctly white
white for day and black for night
the tiger of time is justly striped
Cat after rat he sneaks on hours
and gnaws them down as a donkey flowers
as robins gulp worms after showers
or snake stalks bird, time takes the hours

Years from months from weeks from days
from hours from minutes—the instant stays
only a tick then to minute and hour
day week month and soon it's a year

Time, you've got what I want most
a slight postponement at no cost
let me stand ever a faithful ghost
by you like a horse at a hitching post
White for day and black for night
tiger of time is justly striped
ogre-zebra in black and white
time is a tiger...

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 46.

Stately Lions

Stately lions gravely walk
among the cinerarias
anemones and cyclamen. They talk
in leonine recitative or hum feral arias.
A marble Herakles who coldly slew
some ancestor or other
doesn't impress them a bit but a blue
unicorn can put them in a dither

Lions cope well with the natural
but unicorn is by essence a fabulous creature
an eerie revenant who conquers all
solid realistic bourgeoisie nature
with a glance from wide and regal eye
stamp of silver hoof, snort of scorn
whisks it away with his tail like a fly
or impales it on his ivory and convoluted horn
When lions hear that imperial neigh
tails tucked between trembling hams
goldenly they dematerialize away
with sullen and carnivorous salaams
'Lion beats Unicorn' is a stupid song
truth being the exact reverse:
exquisite irony rapiers the strong
so sniveling laureates can build a pompous hearse

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 47.

The Cantor of Port-Royal

The cantor of Port-Royal lies tonight
in state: claws clenched no music eyes
so suddenly was ended his brief flight
he left his great sonatas uncomposed
taking them off to weathers favoring song
with azure breezes in perpetuum
ripening tribute: peaches apple plums
that keep his whistle mellow his chest strong
How fragile is the symbol. Some March
of flights unflown and melodies untried
then with no warning the swift second phase
and Piaffie Bullfinch of Port-Royal died
I take a rosy feather from his breast
and give him April's earth: eternal rest

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 48.

Helvetia

Of silence an alpful
white cascades of death
giant horns helpful
developing breath
mirage of Hannibal
bronze trumpets wheezing
musical animals
elephants freezing
havoc of zero
against edelweiss
when lichens burrow
for warmth under ice

great Saint Bernards
with rum in small barrels
guard Saint Gotthard
and gnaw little girls
Lake Lemman gin binges
dead Lion in rock
Tell's apple Zeiss lenses
cuckoo the clock

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 49.

Roman Cemetery

Arles

In Alyscamps the Way of Tombs
is its most dour in gray October
God help all lovers in that gloom
when green and sap have given over
and the cold coffins hewn of stone
with the lids neatly to one side
yawn like ultimate skeleton
mocking all vanity and pride
But you tucked up your skirts stepped in
Jay down and folded on your breast
your hands with an ironic grin
as if you knew some alkahest
dissolving fear and doubt—so blind
love is you dared me and right soon
I found out what was on your mind—
we cheated death that afternoon

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 50.

Rumba

Rumba of three cockroaches
along the waxed tile floor
they are lovely as ebony varnish
and under the kitchen door

they scuttle with small dark-lanterns
candles from birthday cakes
they are hunting a sack of corn meal
to keep them for several weeks
Olé the hungry cockroaches
Viva the supper they got
if God can make three bugs happy
it's really a hell of a lot
a hell of a lot and a damned sight more
in this outhouse of a world
than he's done for his sad mud-children
since the nebulae first swirled

Make a constellation of Cockroach
announcing a brand-new start
how man shall escape damnation
and hug a meal sack to his heart

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 51.

She Is Peeling a Yellow Papaya

She is peeling a yellow papaya
Yellow-gold as her breast
with steel like a crooked sickle
I buy a slice of papaya
Lend me your knife young woman
let me cut your breasts
I want to drink from your heart
I am no baby to dandle
How my mouth is thirsty
how my throat is aching
lend me your knife young woman
I want to cut your breasts

Publication. *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), p. 52.

POSTHUMOUS RECORD

Fine-press gatherings issued after MacIntyre's death

The Laguna Verde Imprenta issued *MacIntyre: [Poems]* in 1975, a five-poem booklet, and Lawrence Clark Powell and Ward Ritchie issued the twenty-four-page *October Songs* in 1982. Complete readable copies were not available for this edition, so their contents are documented bibliographically rather than reconstructed from incomplete notices.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Texts, selection, lineation, and unavailable witnesses

The original scans, rather than any earlier reader's edition, govern the text. *Poems, Cafés and Cathedrals*, *The Black Bull*, and *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* were reread page by page from fresh high-resolution OCR witnesses. Obvious scan-edge debris and digitization notices were removed. Stanza divisions, internal speakers, italics, and clearly intentional inset lines follow the scans; narrow-page continuation wraps and source-page hanging indents do not.

Later reprints are represented once. The first eight poems in *Tiger of Time and Other Poems* identify the surviving selections from *The Brimming Cup and Potsherds*; the 1965 book also reprints poems from the three major collections, which are printed here in their earlier book contexts. The two numbered pages of "Variations on a Theme" are treated as one poem. Publication information follows every text.

The February 1938 issue of *Poetry* also contains "Revenge Is Not a Food to Be Eaten Hot," but a complete legible text was not recovered. The *Virginia Quarterly Review* index records "Apologue of the Three Vinegar-Tasters" and "To a Wave"; their complete texts likewise remain unavailable. These titles are not silently counted as absent or supplied from fragments. The posthumous books *MacIntyre* (1975) and *October Songs* (1982) are documented but not transcribed without source copies.

MacIntyre's spelling and punctuation are retained except where the scan plainly substituted one glyph for another. Drop-cap first words have been restored to normal title case, not preserved as accidental all-capital strings. Book and journal titles are italicized editorially in publication notes and bibliography entries.

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COLOPHON

Production record

This critical reader's edition was prepared for *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. It is set in EB Garamond at six by nine inches. The cover uses C. F. MacIntyre artwork created by Brian Kim Stefans and follows the standard Green/Extremes palette, full-bleed image panel, and live-lettering system.

The edition was collated from the original book and periodical scans archived with the production files. Biographical research draws on the Guggenheim Foundation record, UCLA departmental history, Josephine Miles's oral history, University of California Press history, archival finding aids, contemporary publications, and the sources listed in the bibliography.