



MYRON BROOMELL

Collected Poems

FOUR BOOKS OF TIME, CITY, HISTORY, AND THEOLOGY

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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Myron Broomell

Collected Poems

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

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

EDITORIAL EDITION

This edition resets the poetry from the original book and periodical scans. Lineation, stanza divisions, italics, internal headings, and clearly intentional indents have been checked against those witnesses. Source-page hanging indents are not reproduced.

Myron Broomell

1906–1970

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

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Fort Lewis faculty catalog, 1948-49, documenting Broomell's degrees, graduate study, and appointment as Associate Professor of History.

INTRODUCTION

Myron Broomell, 1906–1970

Myron Broomell brought a historian's reach and a satirist's pressure to mid-century American verse. Born into a Swedenborgian minister's family, educated in Colorado, and later a teacher in Ohio, Los Angeles, and Durango, he wrote tightly made poems in which theology, bureaucracy, war, illness, marriage, and the American West repeatedly collide. His four books—published between 1947 and 1964—form a coherent, witty, severe body of work rescued here from a scattered periodical and small-press record.

Stage I | Boston, Colorado, and the first poems, 1906–1940

Myron Henry Broomell was born on 27 February 1906 in the Boston or Roxbury area. His father, Clyde Washburn Broomell, was a minister of the Swedenborgian New Church; his mother, Grace Ethelwyn Browne Broomell, was a Smith College graduate, New England Conservatory musician, teacher, clubwoman, and suffrage supporter. Broomell earned B.A. and M.A. degrees at the University of Colorado and undertook further study at the University of California and Ohio State University. A strong but still unverified record lead places his marriage to Jeanne CoBourn in Alameda County in 1928. His first located national poem, "Summary," appeared in *Poetry* in October 1930.

Stage II | Teaching, wartime writing, and Los Angeles, 1941–1948

Contemporary contributor notes place Broomell at Urbana Junior College in Ohio, teaching history, Latin, and Greek. His poems appeared in *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, *New Mexico Quarterly*, and other magazines, often using classical and theological vocabulary to test the moral abstractions of wartime life. By 1944 he was in California and by 1946–47 in Los Angeles. Alan Swallow published *The Time by Dialing* in 1947 and *The City Built on Sand* in 1948. The second book is an extended, sharply ambivalent Los Angeles poem: derricks, palms, cars, speculative wealth, erotic risk, civic aspiration, and atmospheric beauty occupy the same unstable ground.

Stage III | Fort Lewis, Durango, and the Prairie Press books, 1948–1970

Fort Lewis records place Broomell on the history faculty by 1947–48; by 1951 he also worked at Durango radio station KIUP. He remained connected to national and small-press poetry networks while living far from the coastal centers. *The Outdoor Labyrinth* appeared in Durango in 1961, and Carroll Coleman's Prairie Press issued *In the Iron Temple* in 1964. Their long sequences widen the earlier books' concerns into historical fable, religious satire, disease, art, property, and western geography. Broomell died in Durango in December 1970. Secondary sources disagree between 6 and 16 December, and no contemporaneous civil record or obituary has yet resolved the day.

PERIODICAL POEMS, 1943–1946

Poems not collected in Broomell's four books

Bric-a-Brac

The terra cotta fawn regards his rear.
One day he will grow up and be a deer.
In creamy white upon the mantelpiece,
Still is he statue but his time is near.

So delicate the neck; so art-conceived.
You would not think those sinews shall have grieved.
Perhaps not quite tomorrow, yet next year,
When youth has ceased and manhood been believed.

Indeed from that cold fabric the hot horn
Will lock in death and all the forest mourn.

Publication. First published in *New Mexico Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1943).

Before the General Hospital at Midnight

Past this of steel and stone and light
The marble of the eye takes flight
Where stars extended like a fan
Receive the homeless soul of man.

Publication. First published in *New Mexico Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1945).

The Cincture of Chastity

My lord and master went upon crusade.
I am the kind of faithful wife he made,
Who in my dungeon that I wear with me
Am all that bars compel a wife to be.

My flesh is loyal and I keep his trust.
The lock is stout until the iron rust.
I'm to commend, whom never man assails—
A value kept, and proved by worldly scales.

But what my lord no doubt an hour forgot,
Was how the heart may stain, the flesh may rot,
The tender touch be frayed when fancy frays—
Confined in iron and by pure dispraise.

Publication. First published in *New Mexico Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4 (1945).

Phases of Dominion

I

Older than I am and subject to as inflexible laws—
Henrein has formed a code of treasonous faith.
Goals are his object; to achieve them without pause,
He treats his wife as sacred, all else as a wraith.

Which does not bar displeasure, nor the tone
Of I loom vaster than thou—as indeed I am.
And Henrein achieves his objects, but alone—
As most men know, and do not give a damn.

2

One kind of big shot dwells in glassy rooms,
And stays a while past five, and is preoccupied with Problems, and is much alive
When Persons More Than He approve or knock.

His name is Earl or Ed; he hopes to be
Mr. E. Johnson to the rank and file—
Who have no knowledge of this tiny spree
Contrived of magnanimity and bile.

3

Late in the autumn as the evening darkened,
I sat alone with the boss, and our thoughts were turned
Toward hopes of grandeur, whither his hope hearkened
And mine did not, foreknowing I was spurned.

“Look!” said this monster, gazing at the pane,
“See how this Friday gathers war and might”—
While I replied I saw a chance of gain
If day were busy and succeeded night.

4

The boss seemed to grow smaller as the years passed.
I could remember when he towered above me,
But that was a long time back and the climate was other.
Sometimes it seemed like having, what I had never had, brother;
Sometimes almost as if fortune were beginning to love me,
When I saw how surely no man is likely to last.

5

Beside the draped equestrian ease
Of scholarship or art or love,
Crude power looks naked. Its thick knees
Lift and its muscles bulge and shove.

But power in its paneled room,
Its rich skin blending with the wood,
Breathes as infallible as doom,
Smoother than any force for good.

6

That man is the true expert who declines
Undue dismay at the sad turn of much,
Denies himself rich dishes and fine wines,
And knows his business by the sense of touch.

Spare in dark blue and seated at his desk,
Which could seat twenty but is his alone,
His fancy plays away from the grotesque
And sighs tonically to his telephone.

But sighs in basso profundo, and men jump:
He knows such arts as triumph amid trade.
Figures that loom so large in the one lump
Exist a myriad where his name was made.

7

The chairman of the finance committee,
The president of the corporation,
A couple of men who frisked a city
And a salesman who sold a gullible nation,

The legal might of an organization,
And a labor czar who never had pity,
A board of directors rich and witty,
Met to damn the Administration.

The river was high and the flood kept mounting,
The rain kept falling, the sales fell off.
The dividends were not worth the counting,
And all good men were content to scoff.

Some knew not where the swag was hidden
Or who had carried away the kale,
But all at the meeting were properly bidden,
And one of the fat ones told a tale

Of insidious forces in highest places
And plots to change the A.W.O.L.—
A piggish delight stole over their faces,
To think their kind kept watch so well.

Publication. First published in *New Mexico Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4 (1945).

The Civilian in Wartime

I

When Whatshername as she undressed
Said I am giving you it seems
A real strip-tease and I impressed
Said That's okay I'll have nice dreams

We both had reached the nadir of
What I knew well to be desire
Though she had thought was married love—
As Mrs. Stopes might best require

But since her husband absent spent
The quintessence of her few years,
Myself rejuvenate unbent
Her fire beneath my iron tears.

2

"Queue up for cigarettes," the commissar
Imperative, and straightway all the drove
Rushed thence alert and plunged into the sea.

3

Past shame and not interested in emotion
The relict of the prince consumed her days
In a shabby villa beside the fashionable ocean
And received attention sometimes but without praise

As of 1920 but now in the peine Europe
An incredible number surviving live to starve
Standing silent at the jubilant stirrup
Who are too hungry to share the roast we carve

Or the beans and bread or the mash of hashed lentils
We too know how it feels to want the best
Malebrouck riding in the hiked rentals
Dead Oswald frozen in his fancied West

Publication. First published in *New Mexico Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1946).

The Exemption

My grandfather, slightly wounded in the hand,
Said later he could boast at least he shed
His blood for country, and he died esteemed
In civil life after two other wars;

While as for me, I was too young at first,
And then too much a family man to serve,
And so came scatheless out of forty years
When death was busy with many a hind and king.

Whom should I thank, or what; or how for this
Remain at ease before the eyes of such
As wondered why no mercy let them die?

Publication. First published in *New Mexico Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1946).

THE TIME BY DIALING (1947)

Formal poems of time, work, memory, theology, and war

The Time by Dialing

To her who says that at the tone
The time will be what now has flown
(And in the twinkling of an eye
They hear her who cannot reply
But listen dumb as through the wire
There comes the voice that counts for hire
And cares as little as the time
That ticks away from chime to chime)
We do not matter who depend
On minutes to define our end,

But were that voice responsive still
As one might bend by wish or will
(And through the instrument devised
By the half-deaf whose name is prized
The man turned master might command
Time to behave by sleight-of-hand
And she be suddenly in love
With whom she is oblivious of)—
Yet were there underneath and known
The water eating out the stone.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Temporalities

In the mountains the houses neither age nor die.
The paint, the wood, are neither new nor old.
White is not brilliant against winter sky
Nor moss-green loud against a tree in gold.
Nor are they shabby, either, where wind washes
The bone-dry clapboards and the flaking sashes.

As I came around the corner of one such,
Suddenly that was where there is no time.
It had tough grass in the dooryard, but not much,
And one thin vine that would not die nor climb.
With a slight breathing I could outlive the brave
Or say Hi! to my grandsire forty years in his grave.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

For a Septennial Anniversary

They say that by the seventh year
The substance of a man has changed,
And other flesh than once was here
On other bone is now arranged;

That not a fleck of matter clings
To its same fellow, and the cells
That once were I have taken wings,
And all is new that in me dwells.

So am I neither, at this last,
The body beating like a drum,
Nor the same blood that crowded fast
Upon the heart when night was come;

Nor yet the labyrinthine brain,
Perceiving, then, how you were love,
And love was only you again,
And was too close for thinking of.

Thus now transmuted, what am I?
And since this body knew you not,
How does its yearning still comply
With the unaltered shape of thought?

And how, since all our yesterdays
Were in a year it never knew,
Does it in contemplation blaze
With the indwelling flame of you?

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

From under the Airway

Under the smoke that roofs it from heavenly eyes,
Full of lost souls and the famine of self-pity,
Full of young men and the streets of enterprise,
Lies the great city.

Far from these fields sun-bright on the wide plain
Of the land-ocean rolling green and still,
The towers of art and value that pall sustain,
White shafts in a somber hill.

Air-borne, the earth-bound, silver-winged thither,
Catching the last rays yet in the shadowing sky,
Wither and vanish, darkly homing whither
I know not why.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Banquet

Quiet against the sunset as though now
One lived indeed in the last days of the world,
The enamored watcher's dangerous hope of safety
Sat in a tempest of stillness and pure dream.
The crowded room discreetly and softly pearly
With amber globes to ward the gathering dark
Grew empty of all except the perfect illusion.
Beyond the windows tall and wide behind her
The remnant of day died in a calm profusion
Of colored light without one central spark;
Like a green terrace at the edge of nothing
Remotely lay the interjacent fields.

Counting, rejecting one by one the words
That would not fit and never could suffice,
He noted well, as if to know forever,
The eloquent hand, the glamorous device
Of hair cascading to the arrogant shoulder,
And how the eyes, wiser because much older,
Said (what was true), *Now we go on together,*
I the same image, you the same beholder,
And you remembering while I forget.

The night was quiet afterward; the days
As quiet, too, moved soundlessly and fast
Where all that happened had been long ordained.
Memory burning was a kind of praise,
A beacon lighted for a victory gained
Over a moment not designed to last
Except in purely hypothetical ways.
The splendor lingered; only the dark was feigned.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Sonnet

Still hold me close; all is not over yet;
There are three words that have not yet been said:
The formula a man should not omit,
The sanction that a woman must have had.
Say, if you will, *You're swell*, or, *That was perfect*,
Or, *This could last forever without surfeit*;
Still is the spell not cast, the curse averted,
Without *I love you* spoken gentle-hearted.

Then if you say, *I did this in a dream*,
Or I, *Not mine the doing, the undoing*,
You can not make it other than the same,
Nor I deny it so lightly by that showing:
If once the words bind fast what random plans,
The shrine may fall—the consecration stands.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

We Must Write Often

Little by little everything fades out—
First the expression of the vivid face,
And then the light that lay behind the eyes.
The mouth, its contours, longer resist doubt,
But then are gone, and only in their place
Something not memory, that them belies.
Afterward all that keeps the image quick
Is the vague trait of carriage through a room—
The way the body leaned, the carmine stick
Lifted against the lips, the one perfume
Was stippled there and there, and then the shoulder
Leaned to the cloak. In those days one was bolder—
Eye being bright with love and little sleep,
The occasion tense, the moment snatched from fate,
The face a flower arranged that might not keep,
The errand urgent and the danger great:
And always there was wine still in the glass,
And kisses not yet tried, and other drink;
And sometimes war excited every heart.
Now it fades out: the flavor of the brass,
The sound of scent, the feeling when you think,
The color of the body's conscious art.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Dream

A strange weather that made the night too warm
For so late an hour of the year or so late an hour,
Followed the track followed by the great storm.
In moonlight, in the field, I saw a flower.

Night should not show, nor autumn, nor the moon,
The hand a blossom nor the feet a way
To pluck, to wander, and conceal so soon,
Suddenly it was cloudy, cold, and day.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

After Harvest

Since at some time the fleshly sensations fade,
The kiss is gone before its lasting message.
The humble body, when the load is weighed,
Is soon unyoked. Meanwhile the heart pays pesage.
The toll was heavy—for the grain was much,
The wain laborious and not quickly come by;
The weigher balanced with a clumsy touch,
The chafferer was new and bargained dumbly.
And since the business rankles, the man frets
Still when the beast is stalled, the grain unladen;
He mumbles prices and laments the weevil.
But sleep at length is restful; he forgets.
So I keep only of a once live maiden
A faint impression of contemptible evil.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Of Judgment

I would not call you light; you are not that,
Who weigh too heavy in the scale of shame;
Nor empty, who held much to shudder at
After one learned to call it by its name;
Nor can I call you vicious, to whom vice
Was virtue's fellow—a bird and another bird
Heard chirp in twilight by an ear not nice.
There ought to be some quainter, juster word.
There ought to be some touch of pity in it,
Some true admission of how fair you seemed
In the irrevocable, age-long minute
Before you grew so wholly disesteemed.
It should confess, this word I do not find,
How hungry you once found me, and how blind.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Pleaders

When we are come to judgment, you and I,
The one to answer for a fault unconscious,
The other for still summoning what is by;
When you have offered the plea unpretentious,
And I have claimed my specious constancy
And set it up against your simple caption
That makes an ordinary jape of me
For raveling an elaborate corruption:
In that hard cause, whose trial might consume
Time out of mind and not be well decided,
I shall appeal to nuance and perfume;
You will recite *It could not be avoided*.
Pleading in different tongues, each will aver
Betrayal by an erring interpreter.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

In Store

The rendezvous you think you will not keep
Is not with death nor ruin. These you know
May any day surprise you in your sleep,
Or startle the wide eye with a tableau.
Nor do you think forever to avoid
The traveler age, with whom we all fall in—
With whose society Cato was not annoyed,
And whose approval Paris could not win.
The meeting that you reckon to escape
Is less condign than any one of these;
Yet it might give them odds on its strange shape
And the swift way that it could banish ease:
I mean the encounter, dread as with an elf,
When one day you shall turn and see yourself.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Reminiscence

In a bar in a city whose name I forget
(It lay beyond a river of jet)
On a night unmerciful long ago,
I met a man you wouldn't know.
I didn't know him and he didn't know me;
So I could talk and so could he.
A few clichés and a burst of speech
Revealed us brothers each to each.

I say I don't remember the town,
But I know the wind was coming down
From around a mountain or off a plain
In a way I hope it doesn't again.
Before the besom of the wind
The chaff was flying; the grain was binned.
Twisting and drifting from curb to curb,
The chaff was noun for a stranger's verb.

The drink no less than the allegory
Warmed the too inconspicuous story
That kept the veins of memory warm.
The words competed with the storm.
The wind went past and the wind went round
With an instructive shrieking sound,
And the voice that spoke by grace of mind
Rehearsed the demon that works behind.

The circumstances, the special facts,
The pattern of the days and acts,
The parting of the culprit's hair,
The shape of the scars she made one wear,
The way the wounds were dealt, the way
They multiplied by night and day—
These, as Cicero says, I pass over
As matters varied from lover to lover;

Suffice it now—for an audience
In love with brevity, propense
To the essential image mirroring
The absolute and the unvarying—

To put the truth derivable
From an excursion into hell
In words said then and somewhat poignant yet:
The bad women are the hardest to forget.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

An Antinomy

The heart being dead, the mind must carry on.
It is as if the shed skin of the snake
Should keep its motion and be still alive,
Possessing form and semblance—but were gone
The dangerous colors and the eyes awake,
And the slow coils that sudden death contrive,

But if the mind have ceased to body forth
The motions of the heart in copious Form—
When words have failed, and only time is kind:
What image then shall capture the true worth
Of that imprisoned, self-consuming storm,
The aimless lightnings and the thunder blind?

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Of Providence

For sleeping dogs we ventured to disturb,
For cooler weather promised after rain,
For squealing brakes and giggles from the curb,
For unguents advertised as good for pain,

For checks from home expected some time soon,
For pleasure hoped from seeing former cronies,
For jests whose harmlessness would none impugn,
For confidence in creeds and ceremonies,

For love supposed to last beyond the day,
For penny banks we meant to fill at last,
For postcards due from friends who were away,
For times we said the worst was surely past,

For summer days and planning to return,
For girls we never thought we'd have to marry,
For lessons taught us that we've still to learn—
We thank our luck: they taught us to be wary.

But for all fates that overtook good men,
For gains thereby and losses made the best of,
For beasts encountered in the lonely glen,
For omens flown too fast to make a test of,

For foreign wars, and noiseless wars at home,
For crack-ups that the doctors could not save,
For seas with neither wind nor wave nor foam—
Thanks for these too: they taught us to be brave.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Coat

The forefeet with which we kick and call it striking,
Or tie catgut knots inside the tiny matchbox,
Or play Beethoven or something of Pasternak's,
Define us as persons to whom others take a liking;
Gregarious, human, not unclumsy with leagues,
Subject to tiresomely various fatigues.

Fitly surviving, the furless variation
Warmed himself with his brain, that doubtful privilege.
Fire, skins, and the responsibilities of villeinage
Institutionalized what conveniently seemed the nation.
Those who shivered as the wind came off the moor
Were only dreamers or the very poor.

But which first disappeared—the lack of mind,
Or that so comforting coat of the animal kind?

Now and again the fur we had when young
Appears sporadic on a thought or tongue.

“Dear Hairy,” wrote the humorist, and threw
His readers into gales of the not-quite-true.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Reminiscence of Childhood

There was a comet. We couldn't make head or tail of it.
It streaked the sky in plenty—oh, plenty—of time.
There were too many columnists and no prophets
To set us straight the year the comet came.

Then, you could never tell anybody anything.
People were shrewd. They knew it was propaganda.
The baby's fever was normal; it came from teething.
The poor baby grew up with a lame leg and a

Perpetual furrow vertical between the eyebrows
On reaching manhood—if that was what it reached.
Each family had herbs hung up in its own house:
For thrift, thistle; for poison, the stone of a peach.
Its own lore was more than enough for each.

We had our own lore and a comet too,
Standing next door beyond the oak and elm.
A new blight had just begun to chew
The leaves yellow. They fell in a dead calm.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

On Slumber in the West

Lest I should hear the eagle scream,
I laid me down to sleep and dream,
And while I slumbered those awoke
Who cried no truce with sleeping folk.

Plunder they eyed in portions three—
For one the land, for one the sea,
For one the treasures underground:
While I slept on and heard no sound.

But after all my sleep was done
The eagle screamed from sun to sun.
The world interminably wide
Disclosed no room where I might hide.

February, 1939

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

A Professor of History

If I should suddenly break down
And tell my classes what I think,
I should be living on the town,
And much too poor to take to drink.

If in the midst of the events
That signalized the reign of James,
I should depart from the past tense,
People would call me funny names.

If in the hour that fills the sky
And lowers over England's isle,
I should betray what I live by,
Chaos would reign, and no man smile.

December, 1940

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Entry in My Journal

We live, indeed, from day to day
On news from Europe, and to hear
What move is Russia's, and what play
From Munich realigns the year;
Encouraging, by auspices
Remotely taken, the dear hope
That some obscure event in Fez
Discerning little of the cause
That makes one basket of the scales
Rise in despite of the known laws,
And sink when the brief impulse fails.

We live like hounds alert in hall
To morsels from the master's board,
Lifting expectant muzzles all
For the flung fragments of the sword.

December 25, 1940

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Precaution

Where there is any light, it is phosphorescence.
The bulbs that burn from current over a wire,
The uncanny tubes of shivering incandescence,
Are now put out lest they draw hostile fire.

And yet the moon betraying lake and river,
The ocean of trees, the city spread like a fan,
Returns the light set free by the Lightgiver.
Where there is darkness it is made by man.

April, 1941

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Item in the Paper

The man in the flat across the street
Has killed himself, the coroner says.
He kept hearing marching feet,
Roar of tanks, the drone of planes,
The rattle of machine-gun fire,
Explosions shattering a thousand panes,
And afterward the sudden silences.
There went through his head as he lay trying to sleep
A procession of pictures from picture magazines—
The dive-bomber sloping for the downward sweep,
The destroyer with decks awash, the bursting ship,
The ruined city, the cannon under screens,
The torpedo's track and the shell's trajectory
Outlined in foam or smoke like the mark of a whip,
The families huddled in the vaulted refectory
Because self-preservation is a basic desire.

He also heard and saw from day to day
Over the air and in the cold black print
The words the commentators found to say—
The charge, the exhortation, and the hint,
The formula to wish the world away.
On these he would have fed if they were food,
But that grew madness that had been a mood,
And some solution seemed the thing to find.
This preyed upon his mind.

Average people are much more stable.
They only bicker at the dinner table.

May, 1941

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

On My Shoulders

The mouse with blood-red teeth that gnaws
My spirit intermittently
In disregard of the good laws
That wish me spiritually free
Was not originally born
My bane nor my compatriot
But hither migrant and forlorn
Some while was mendicant till glut
Of opportunity and meat
Exalted him to be my doom,
A special trouble and discrete,
A death shut up in a small room.

I think it all began the day
They took the other book away
And put before me the black book
In which I was a fool to look,
That tells of east and west and skies
Falling before an empire dies.
When I had looked, I could not read.
The page had come alive indeed.

September, 1941

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Friday, Last Lecture

We have tried to sum up the various forces at work
In the period after the peace, the epoch of anger.
We have seen pacts formed, and pacts that were not sub-
Statesmen succumbing to an ethical languor, [scribed;
And amateurs who stood at one side and jibed;
And, at first in the background, the figure with the bludg-
The helmeted man who carried the helpful dirk, [eon,
The small ambitious who muffled himself in dudgeon,
And the silent person whom conscience did not irk.

From our vantage point of knowing how all ended
We have viewed the gestures that faith and charity made
With detachment suited to the clearer vision
That comes from looking on a naked blade;
And we have felt justified in our derision,
Seeing what troubles followed, seeing that storm
Arose in a quarter where the sun descended
Behind clouds even then beginning to form.
We of some shrewdness would have known what wind impended.

It remains, then, to formulate the laws
By which the subject of study shall own our science.
No more, now that the truth is discerned,
Are we to be troubled by that stubborn defiance
The world displayed the day before we learned.
Before the bell rings, then: before the final
Examination, which will cover both fact and cause:
We might touch briefly on God (were it not too banal),
Or devote a word to the neighbor (if we knew who he was).

September, 1941

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Death of the Body

The rhinoceros charging, when it meets the lead,
Seems not exactly as though being killed.
It skids and nose-dives, bounces and rolls dead—
More like a car wrecked than beast bullet-filled.
For a moment its four legs were in the air—
Thick, like wheels upward; tough with miles of wear.

Not so the stiff giraffe, who buckles, falling,
Like a kicked clothes-rack; like a brittle grove
Snapped by the wrong wind when the smoke was crawling.
The yellow angles crack and do not move.
The ungainly grace folds up like a pocket-knife
When the tall giraffe crumples without life.

Man is two-footed. Dead he falls and lies
With sky in his face or mud under his eyes.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

U.S. 41

Tonight the under-going sun
Makes a dusk that counts as one
Thin hour before the actual dark.
Southward the directions run.

By berm and line as through a groove,
Certain as pure fate we move,
Whose stopping-place can none predict,
None our latest error prove.

The highway sudden as a fist
Leans ahead and fades in mist;
Pelts us with yellow globes from gray
Azure and lead amethyst.

November, 1941

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

International Date Line

Beyond our west, mid-oceaned with the sun,
Our own lost yesterday has hours to run,
While eastward, slowly over darkness winning,
Long hours ago tomorrow was beginning.

December, 1941

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Defection

My friend, who was my pupil once,
Has turned against the noise of guns.
He hears them threatening all fronts
And goes to join the Peaceful Ones,
Who bid the righteous ground his arms
Because no good can come of Force,
And for the wicked deck the charms
Of Grace to ogle his remorse.
He is my pupil now no more
To whom I did not teach in time
The story of the easy whore
Whom no one thanked who paid her crime,
But when she made her favors free,
None was so spat upon as she.

Pupil no more, but still my friend—
Because I think he leans to ill,
I ask of him the will to spend
A thought on ends for which men kill.
For first in Abel and in Cain
The deed had happened, before Rome
Saw thunder gathering in Spain
To pour forth Hannibal at home.
Death was as ancient as the hand
Of king on scepter, sire on son.
It has been dealt in every land
Where good or bad has lost or won.
No man but houses in his blood
The slain assailant clutching mud.

Of old it was the people's creed
That in a battle fought for ground,
For home, for honor, for the seed
Of great dominion; for the sound
Of the true faith on heathen lips,
For credit in a woman's sight—
God favored one man's host or ships,
And one was wrong and one was right.
But now no longer. It is said

A sacredness investing peace
Incriminating alike the dead,
The slayers, and the warning geese
Who saved a careless Capitol
Crept up upon by the fierce Gaul.

It was that same hill at whose edge
Tarpeia, drawing from the spring,
Saw Sabine gold and took the pledge
That meant a bracelet and a ring.
To her, a single-minded girl
Intent upon the simplest good,
Not dreaming Sabine men would hurl
Their shields to crush her where she stood;
Not knowing whether, in some year
When Roman friend and Sabine foe
Alike had passed beyond the fear
A living nation needs to know,
It might not matter which of them
Died for Tarpeia's fancied gem.

But it could matter. Time has seen
The evil legion turned aside
By Vercingetorix or mean
Bushmen defending each his bride;
Has seen the legion, evil still,
Bear health and order among men
Noble, no doubt, and of good will,
Who fought in vain for swamp and fen;
And all that ever came of death
Tilling its human acreage,
Was only all we breathe with breath,
Or infants have for heritage.
The world, if it was built at all,
Stands on the depths to which men fall.

Before you bow to worship flesh
As martyr if the blood is shed,
Observe, my friend, the subtle mesh
In which men catch men not yet dead.
Mark the constricting cords of hate,

The ropes of privilege and pride,
The threads of lying, the irate
Thongs that indifference has tied.
Before you call death worse than life,
In whose long struggle many die,
Look if there be not in that strife
A hand too few, too pure an eye—
Which seeing only its dear peace,
Requires the warfare for it cease.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Common Denominator

Nothing stays white and nothing black.
The fair page, the painted stack—
Grime grays one and sun the other.
Vice and virtue age together.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Vows

After the impulsive serenade,
The self-derision.
After the decision is made,
The indecision—

As a man who flings himself from a high cliff
Into empty air
Has then a free moment to spend wondering if
People will care.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

How Was the Show?

In the movie I just saw
Lechery was matched with Law,
But was punished for her sins.
Evil never, never wins.

She was more seductive than
Innocence, who got the Man.
You could see, in brief arrests,
Sin's demarked and hungry breasts.

Sometimes, when she looked her lust,
She evoked a sort of trust.
That was part of the dire scheme.
Honor moved as in a dream.

Then you saw the plot resolved.
Dazzled Man was disinvolved
By a stratagem of Good.
God prevailed in Hollywood.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The God Errant

In the detective story, the hero, or at least the central figure,
Who is immortal, though often in danger of death,
Is invited, sometimes, by women, both sinful and virtuous.
He always fades out, however, undetainable as breath.

The immortal is not to be trammled by home won to (even heaven),
Nor are we to behold him enjoying what comes easily to hand.
Mere clay would envy him Danaé, but not understand.

What we are told, in full, is the hard part: it stretches the muscles
Of the mind admiring his hazards overcome;
Displays the champion, and through him we unravel
Every puzzle but one, but are not given the sum:

We are left in the dark still as to whence he is immortal,
And why his history shows him never at rest—
In no chaste bed pillowed ever, nor long on a wicked breast.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Kenilworth Stairway

Sweet in new sense and taste with tongue conspiring
And unpredictable monuments of lust,
The fertile skill contriving its own death
Penetrates farther than its easy faring.
Beyond the last directions it can trust
It drives its exploration and wants breath.

The sensual curve that nightliness describes
And is described by flesh avoiding spirit
Returns upon itself at a lower level,
Becomes the matter of occasional jibes
At appetites not adequate nor near it,
And is becoming regular and evil.

Irony contemplates and is not pleased,
However devious grows the plain device
Coined once to keep touch warm and tangle supple.
The body perhaps not, and the mind not eased,
The surrogate for love and primary choice
Tosses the covers of the married couple. . .

And oh, what phantoms not limited in number
Preclude the onset of a genuine slumber. . .

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Tristan in Brittany

None of this was destined to go well.
There was always the practical thought that duty lay
Where the mores fixed it; that one should not live for the day
Only, but pattern his life to steer clear of hell.
There was always the voice of conscience, and minor ties,
And amenities whose effect was dulcificatory,
Such as the small dinner, the exchange in the conservatory,
One's husband's friends, one's wife's amusing replies.

It is odd how closely the facts approximate
The course of fiction, as still sometimes purveyed
In monthly instalments (She decides she will not leave him—
She really loved him once, and it isn't too late).—
No need to say that either was afraid:
But Love is blind—it is easy to deceive him.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Virtues

To the chaste woman men are a sea of faces.
She looks at none of them. She never knows
Which of the many watch her as she goes.

The unchaste man sees women as a sea,
And every wave a gulf to draw him down.
He tosses chartless in the burning sun;
Under the meaningless stars he dies of thirst,
Or drinks the salty water and goes mad.

The chaste man and the unchaste woman wed
May sleep together naked in one bed
And blend such lives as fate decrees for each—
Whom she might lure, if he could only teach.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

A Lease Surrendered

You need not tell me now
Why the brave vow
Faltered before its term
And held not firm.

Of old I know your tale.
Of small avail
Are the familiar vows
In a strange house.

I know as well as you
(I lived there, too)
What shadow fills the halls
When the night falls.

I know the quiet breath,
Not unlike death,
That moves from room to room
In the long gloom.

I know the empty space,
And the grave face
Of silence without bound,
And the still sound.

Indeed, what time I dwelled
There, I too felled
Foemen in number known
To me alone.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Madman

Firkins agreed with the court that he was mad.
He insisted on filing an objection, though,
To the trivial grounds on which it found him so.
How was it crazy to go about unclad
When he had shed his body long ago?
His real dementia, which no one knew he had,
Was a queer impression of feeling cold in snow.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Cabinet with Mirror

Here where my unguents, pills, and salves
Are stacked on sanitary shelves,
My day, divided in two halves,
Brings face to face my naked selves.

One is the shaved, proficient one
That goes forth dressed to rule the world.
The other, home when that is done,
Enters a bathroom tiled and pearled.

The one looks in, the other out.
The doses ready in their place
Allay the itching skin of doubt.
And in this bowl I wash my face.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Marriage, or the Gist of Swedenborg

The masks that pass for you and me
Are not the souls of accuracy.
They often seem to represent
A virtuous or good intent;
Whereas we know our motives are
Simpler than that and worse by far:
To bend each other to our wills,
And come off master though it kills.

And yet these masks from day to day
Present an unctuous, noble play,
With, “By your leave,” or, “How doth speed
Your most ill health? your heart’s best need?”
Or, “Nay, my lord, I’ll do my task,”
Or, “Pray, good lady, what dost ask?”

So each two persons in his self
Conceals, and dodges like an elf
From berry-bush to poison-tree:
I for my grandeur, you for me.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Fabric

In quick coupés and fast sedans
The special movement that is man's
Explores a city day and night
And wears the black macadam bright,
While month by month beneath the tread
Of engines rolling overhead,
A million metal trifles le
And are inlaid beyond the eye—
Except it be cast gutterward
And idle there with the absurd.

Then in that oily stone behold
Mosaic set like teeth with gold—
The cotterpin, the nut, the nail,
The bottlecap, the bucket-bail,
The bolt, the washer, the unknown
And shapeless morsel dropped or thrown,
Flung off, discarded, kicked at, caught—
And pounded down without a thought—
All such lost things as now are found
Embedded in a granite ground.

The pavement beaten by the wheels
Of haste and circumstance conceals
The integral small parts cast off
By the machines of strife and love.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Ab Urbe Condita

The ants with wings are temporarily lifted
Above their plane. I am told they seek new homes.
Many a man as unaccountably gifted
Excites an admiration while he roams:

Then where he pauses, lights; and there is built
Turmoil, the city of our toil and guilt.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

The Dimensions

The crane, the craneway and the ground,
The car, the rising hook it carries,
Together definitely bound
A space where only empty air is;

Through which expanse, by any course
However devious or twisted,
The object swung by mortal force
May travel light and unresisted.

There point and line and plane compound
A curve as various as sound.

If through the three dimensions borne
The humble or dread steel may pass
And deviate at will to scorn
Collisions desperate as glass,

What journeys might the soul not fly—
Or the unbounded, longing eye?

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Still Life

Coiled in the sunlight blistering the plaza,
Penned in a box of wood and window-glass,
The carnival python sleeps; its posture has the
Repose attributable to a snake of brass.

Its skin, colored like the leaf-carpet under oaks,
Glistens where flies crawl on it undisturbed.
The barker alternately invites the crowd and smokes,
Proprietor of the ribbons by which the serpent is curbed.

The glass feels solid to the snake.
He does not know the glass will break.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

Lines for Ponce de Leon

I.

How shall we love, who in our minds recall
When flesh was God but all the leaves must fall?
For we look back and yearn upon the young,
While they are deaf to any golden tongue.

The young shall never see in the gray hair,
Contemporaneous, what times were there.

Ageless at forty, as at eighty fade
The virgin kiss and the approaching spade,
The lovers of their past in thought behold
Each ravished hope bestowing happy gold—

There glows the youth unscrupulously strong,
And the cool maid his burning length along.

Then, when in retrospect or in their dreams
The old grow young, the young grow real as day,
Almost the moment its exemplar seems;
But now they lack the will and want the way.

Knowing so well what it was like to live,
They still would have what now no death can give.

II.

Since in the shapes of memory no love
Survives except as touching mind and heart,
Because the member in its human glove
Lasts but a moment and forgets the part;

Or since the man whose appetite was sound
Hungers no more when death by famine nears;
And the lost music of the constant round
Ceases when ocean dances in his ears;

Or, lastly, since, from war by time withdrawn,
The peaceful soldier dotes on noble foes,
Counting what generals crimsoned a green lawn
To make him wear the medal history knows;

And all the wounds are weary only when
The maggot still in raw flesh weaves and thrives,
But those who live are the surviving men,
And the hurt brain feels normal all their lives:

Therefore, my love, and you who for me fought,
Forget the cost—for thus I prove it nought.

Yet once suppose the past came sudden back—
The bed in the bright garret now resumed
Its stolen burden, and the jungle track
Teemed as before with all the strong and doomed:

Might those young ghosts their violent hours unfold,
Still could I not, who even then was old.

III.

In former days when man would sleep with woman,
Memorable forever was the intoxication thereof—
The boy's imagination learning to be human,
The man's wishes at home with the body of love.

As we grow older every story seems
To become a legend. There are many that we know,
And all useful in the interpretation of dreams.
The hunchback stranger, the lantern in the falling snow,
The destinable aisles of the forest—all now conspire
As if toward refuge, when no more the warm
Hope of good health shall stand to us as fire,
Nor the body as shelter in the natural storm.

Now you will say to yourself, "Quick, quick! Find the answer
Before the clock changes, the shadow sweeping
Over the meadow is gone like a wicked dancer,
Or an old man bent double with recollection
Is found wandering in the market, snuffling and weeping."

But there is no answer; only your own reflection.

Publication. First collected in *The Time by Dialing* (Alan Swallow, 1947).

THE CITY BUILT ON SAND (1948)

Broomell's long poem of Los Angeles

The City Built on Sand

I

In the walled garden behind the movie star's
 The poet and the peasant both sat down,
 And one was poor—no villa and no cars—
 While one was rich and able and a clown.
 The evening mist sank through the acacia trees,
 As visible as it was deadly cool,
 Past the band leader's stucco box of ease
 And the prima donna's hillside swimming pool.

Now not far distant lay the gunmetal sea,
 Against whose wall a continent's drift stops—
 Never so still as is authority,
 Nor to reflect the rainless mountain-tops.
 There they billed drinks and clucked like comrade birds,
 Each passing happy in his want of words.

2

In The Waterfront Cafe, in Seaman's-Rest,
 In Longshoreman's Haven and The Sailor's Dive,
 It is ten of the clock, and Sally has undressed
 To speak of joy to boy and man alive;
 Now from the background, with fingers alert as triggers,
 The dick comes forward; the stumblebums from their holes
 Edge out to drink with the stool and the harbor niggers.
 On Saturday night the men recover their souls.

For far at sea with salt upon her sides
 The ugly *Primrose* wallows full of coal;
 The stormy *Snatch* brings fish in with the tides,
 And the depreciable battlewagons roll.
 Scarce was this coast by Richard Dana known,
 Mine host had claimed it for his gain and own.

3

They have a legend of their countryside,
 Plush, as macadam is—but oxen pull
 The old cart still with muscle beneath hide,

And of that thinking the good tale is full:
How to plantations destined to pay well
Came the explorers, bank accounts and all;
The orange there exploded in the bell
Of moss-green leaf; it bloomed in the hot fall

And made a spring of autumn. Thus the tale,
Lovely for tourists to be guided by.
Let no historian drop from his count of days
The dying realtor holding, in last gaze,
White through the haze that fills the sunny vale,
The wintry mountain bodiless in sky.

4

Beyond the office of the mental healer,
At the point where the bus discharges its fares,
I entered the establishment of the real-estate dealer
To discuss a property now in the hands of heirs.
Across the boulevard the Chinese herb doctor's
Neat white house with its plate-glass window offered
A cold analysis of health and its proctors,
Internal baths and the nostrums of the nine sages:

In the front room, of course, Hygeia, coffered
In a carved chest, to be read while the patients wait.
But houses, the third need of man through the ages,
Were the first errand, and the dealer in real estate
Came in smiling, suspicious and full of greed
To exploit fully a gullible plain need.

5

In the dead noontide when the fog had lifted,
The doors being closed, the gears being all in mesh,
I ran for the bus. The driver had once shifted,
But for a moment we were of one flesh.
Because my garb was fine and his was not,
Because I smiled though panting as I ran,
He let me in and we forsook that spot—
I as a fare and he a kind of Pan.

They drive their people like a flock of sheep,

Abuse the general, murmur at the odd,
Only cry out, perhaps, at home in sleep,
And may, or they may not, believe in God;
But never had I trouble with one such,
For they were quiet and had traveled much.

6

Old men and females, landladies and cranks,
Bums, saints, and zanies; travelers by air,
Enjoy on benches without giving thanks
The rank banana leaves of Pershing Square.
At the grassiest end there stands a cast-iron shell
Marked “Beethoven”—head bent in thought, or patience.
Below the forefront of the Ritz hotel
The ground slopes gently toward the comfort stations.

From here to Forest Lawn or to Skid Row
Is no great distance. Pensioner sits by pariah.
Under all this, moving the earth below,
Progress designs a needed parking area.
Upon the surface of the cumbered ground
No space remains, and more must still be found.

7

Their husband and father recently dead, the pair
Came down an aisle in Langley’s dressed in black,
Followed by Aunt Duessa—silver hair
And formed for service in a servant’s lack:
Constance the daughter, titian-blonde and young,
Elizabeth the mother firm in guile—
For both sought husbands in a common tongue
And made a contest of the diamond aisle.

So drawing humbly to one side I stood
In my frayed suit respectful, wise, and proud,
Whose grandsires fought the redskin in the wood,
And now was old and in some sort allowed;
Yet never saw in all the years before
So fine a widow vend so fair a whore.

8

Denmark the ward-chief, tough and foreign-born,
Potent as lye when he was in his prime,
Now wearing straw for derby, and at morn
Chanting quick death by sex in mongrel rhyme,
Rose, bathed, and donned two-hundred-dollar clothes,
Ate, and strolled down to Cadillac at curb,
The perfect type whom a Bruce Bliven loathes,
Or any master of the caustic verb.

All along Wilshire where the spurious taste
Shops and has cocktails lest the truth intrude,
And store-fronts raised with an indecent haste
Stand jade and purple, chaste and purely crude,
Denmark sped east to Vernon toward the sun,
And all the lights turned green as he drove on.

9

What men call traffic but is scarcely that—
Rather, the age, engaged in shift and dash—
Bears the elation of the blunt or flat
On cushioned wheels and to their final crash.
Elbow to fender squeezed as through a sieve,
The tunnel-bounden jostle for a place,
With here the young, impetuous, who live,
Enhoppered with the drab, who want a face.

Through the dark poison of the traveled hole,
Where drafts of motion swirl from side to side,
Noisy as rats in whom there breathes a soul,
The passengers of haste and frenzy ride:
Each on his wheel intent, with two bright eyes
Ablaze before him as to light the skies.

10

The clergyman, the rich man, and the teacher,
Each sacred and as dazed as if by drink—
Sin's, poverty's, and ignorance's creature—
Are never told what people really think.
Unto God's vicar businessmen confess

Never their gain, but only how they fail.
The millionaire is sheltered from address,
And pedagogues avoid the county jail.

One time I saw, as Venus doused her lamp,
Some trolleys crawling through a foggy night.
The first was crammed with many a pushing scamp
And folk close-packed; the others traveled light.
So to the chancel, bank, or special class,
Bright empty cars, the unenlightened pass.

11

The madness of our sins descends from heaven,
In lonely pride of evil lest we dwell.
Though grandly sinned, we cannot quite come even,
And in our raging, fear at least for hell.
Displayed against a sky the signs illumine
Which blaze for trade or droop their lids for war;
Our brightest crimes desire as well an omen
To reassure whom God has destined for.

“They come to me hat in hand, the captains of industry,
Seeking salvation,” the lying prelate said—
Impressing none, and none less than his vestry.
Yet there were some who dared not to be dead.
Within the hour, filing from the cathedral,
They smelled smoke, and the ground shook a little.

12

Eastward it seems as though a way escaped—
Across the desert in the winter months,
Where even lately all our fates were shaped,
And Captain Donner led his people once—
Or to the mountains, where the miner drills
A hole toward heaven, escaping. Who does not know
The oil-black ribbon through the yellow hills,
On which the red and silver busses go?

Stories are told of pioneers gone home,
Of venturers called by what they vanished from—
Unstable men, eddying back like foam.

But in their place the lemming others come.
White houses strewn, scatters of lights by night,
The centrifugal city is itself in flight.

13

Of dispossession, here as farther east,
The government takes notice in its sums,
Telling how many feed upon the least,
And who is housed whenever winter comes.
Shed, tent, or box for hovel hearth and home,
Bed on the bank and bathtub in the stream—
The married soldiers cease to fight or roam,
And fight the city of their evil dream.

I sit in my patio with the water plashing
Regardless of the drought that stops the mills.
The hourly plane goes over, spread and flashing,
Bound for its grave among the graveless hills.
I love my home, as any man may do,
And need not travel, being of the few.

14

Out here, where souls from Iowa and death
Are camped upon a plain of sand and sun,
Drawing by sufferance an extra breath
Before they file to heaven every one;
Out here where cult and culture and collodion
Jostle like beasts lowing before the axe,
Where mayor and sheriff play a vast melodion,
And the fashionable communist pays his income tax;

It is thought useful tourists should arrive,
Pickets breathe gas, and old men age for pay,
Cameras catch the emptiest face alive,
And gray fog drift from the polluted bay,
Sky-writers name the film that marks the week,
And Negroes love by El Sereno creek.

15

Under the cobwebs dusting the gray willows,
Hemmed from the sun and from the hate of man,

Thomas Calhoun McGregor clutched the pillows
Cone-shaped and umber, tipped with rose and tan.
Beneath his onset, shedding crimson slacks,
The limbs of a panther or a girl named Rose
Divided twice. The beast that has two backs
Appeared in those jungles where it never snows.

No sound accompanied the flowing water
Of the stream welling improbably from its source.
Thomas McGregor's son or only daughter
Inspires no envy, grows without remorse,
Chalks I on piers where motors pass above,
And in good season dies, or learns to love.

16

In another city, far as space can lie
And lie in the same world, yet not so far
That it looks up at any different sky
Or may not watch on one immortal star—
Sirius faithful to Orion's track,
Polaris for an age the seaman's pole—
I left a lady where the brave turn back
And spent a generation with my soul.

Do not believe, dear maiden, I would not
Have haled you thence to Tophet or the Throne:
Far as I wandered, if my flesh forgot,
My recollection kept you for its own;
But much too late and but in dream I see
The destination formed of you and me.

17

Two strangers met within a public park,
Among their fellow-humans and the flowers.
They fell on speech, but it was growing dark
And no one was allowed there after hours.

For when the sun goes down the rift commences:
The lecher and the footpad and the avenger
Creep to the labor of their tasks and chances.
Talk is forgotten. Every man's a stranger.

Always, like peace, the crowd comes back tomorrow,
When night, like war, is many hours off.
No grass too hard, no bench too scarce or narrow,
You see them talk and hear each other laugh—
Young men with girls, children with apes enraptured,
As if one cage held a whole kindred captured.

18

To exorcise an evil, we revisit
The place the crime occurred. There we behold
A way of penance open. And what is it?
A thing to flee from, fled by being told:
Then to the justice of the formal law
We straight repair, and to exalt our sin
We gaze upon the prison with false awe,
Appeal for entrance, and are taken in;

Some by contrivance or becoming great,
Willing a harbor out of waves alone,
Have beached their ships and made or scared the state.
Others, from too much care how reads the stone,
Leave Beverly Hills and go to fight in Spain—
Or drift a few blocks north from Sixth and Main.

19

Upon damnation's verge as here we stand,
All as defendants in Superior Court,
Since one took up a firearm in his hand,
Or turned to thieving for his quick resort;
By the barred windows looking on the well
In the tall building to our plight devoted,
Leisurely burning from within in hell,
Or dreaming up what scripture might be quoted;

We peer as down a canyon toward the sky,
Cleft bright between two walls like parted thumbs.
Below and outward past the chasm lie
The gray and brown cracked meadows of the slums.
Inward to conscience, or to man without,
Each leans with longing or with never a doubt.

20

Where come by couples those who love in cars,
Inviting Cupid, parenthood, or plagues,
Or bandit-rapists underneath the stars,
I climbed a barren hill on my two legs.
There, spread below me like a smoky floor,
Lay the rich county, derricks, fanes, and palms.
Too bright a streak, the ocean marked the shore,
And the whole world came seeking health and alms.

The sun fell down to westward; past the gray
Impossible wall of mist that blocked the east,
I knew what mountains stood—but it was day,
And they were sleeping, like a hidden beast.
The chill sun dropped below and out of sight.
Forth from its ocean sources poured the night.

21

The loneliest part of the city is where most
People are moving, but elsewhither bound—
Milling, as patient for the tram, or ground
Out of the press of traffic, toward the coast
Or inland, nightly, seldomer delayed
Than storms of winter or the thunderhead;
As many and restless as the numerous dead,
They thread the city in their dense parade.

Not unaccompanied, not with these, I walk
Through time immune and in your person praised,
O Sprite—who briefly toward my ashes raised
A mortal spirit to abound with talk.
Though I went downward to the hopeless grave,
There would be something some of me should save.

Dear love not I, and never to me bound,
But mine (as lights along a foreign coast
Belong to the mariner when he needs them most,
And save him for the village and the ground;
Who through the rain hears first the heaving dead
Thud upon sand and then the roar delayed;
He watches the headland, glad that he has prayed,

And counts a map of guidance in his head:

Or as the meadows lying unappraised,
Half-starred with flowers, where sleepers seem to walk)—
It is of such possession that I talk
As the dead have, whom preachers have not raised,
But even while they think some soul to save,
Themselves shut out, scratch vainly at his grave.

22

I lay in the same city with the Gaekwar of Baroda,
Who happened to be stopping there, though even less lonely
than I.
He bore the beautiful name of prince, as in the
Frenchman's coda,
But he was a moneyed man as well, with whom a Ford
might vie.

Many indeed with the Gaekwar strove
To outrepute him in treasure trove,
Though few had so much gold as he.

Yet how much more men vied with me!

Whenever I earned a copper cent,
Straight to my creditors it went,
And if I got a silver dime,
It made the price of victuals climb.
I had a wish, I tossed a nickel—
It fell on edge and soon was fickle.
I shoveled gravel from a trench;
A hundred others warmed the bench.
If I had held a steady job,
You could have heard a million sob.

In Orient lands the men join hands and engage in
tiger hunts.
I slept in the same city as an Indian rajah once.
He stayed at a costly hostelry and appeared in native
dress.

When reporters asked, “Do you like it here?” he
pontificated, “Yes.”

Publication. First published as *The City Built on Sand* (Alan Swallow, 1948).

PERIODICAL POEMS, 1949

Later uncollected verse from New Mexico Quarterly

Decorum

The Armenian woman who is my wife's good friend
Acts frightened when I come into the room,
As if I might be a Turk, or a demon, or the Last End
Personified in a house-jacket to prove her doom.

Yet every night on the other side of the wall
That divides our tenements, but not in all,
So that some sound and intimacy is carried,
We hear the low voices of men to whom she is not married.

Publication. First published in *New Mexico Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1949).

Choice

Side by side
 in the same room,
Alike burn,
 alike bloom
Two flowers,
 and I see
Them there
 and they me.

Neither bears
 in its heart
Its own fire
 nor one of art,
But that which I
 behold there
And burn by
 in the same air.

Publication. First published in *New Mexico Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1949).

THE OUTDOOR LABYRINTH

(1961)

Long sequences and later lyrics

The History of Abraham Mousehold

I. The Baptism

The painted babe was walking down the street
In Rawlins, Wyoming, 1923.
As I drove by with wheels beneath my feet,
She gazed on Father's Cad, and so at me.
Well, I was rich in those days; I had wings
Assigned me by inheritance of birth.
In towns like Rawlins, where petroleum springs,
The dust is not far distant from the earth.

Musing on seventeen at forty-five,
I would not say that women are the whole.
The painted babe in Rawlins, or the soul,
May equally engage the mind alive.
Yet howso we toy with Royce or close with James,
There are philosophies with other names.

II. The Revelations

I.

God spoke to me one night on the Great Plains.
I slept wrapped up in blankets with a snake.
My dream had words, as real as if awake,
While Satan stretched beside me to keep warm.
The stars were bright because the night was cold,
And in my dream God spoke as follows:

“Shake
The rattler from your bed, Abram Mousehold,
And I will tell you whence he got his form.

“I made the world a sphere that it might roll,
Impelled by time, force, fire, and true persuasions,
Filled with my creatures—highest, on the whole,
Man, who would most mismanage his occasions.
Under it all I spread a valid hell
To catch my errors, innocent or fell.
Such was my dream. I thought I dreamed it well.

“Now, of such fruits as too much tasted kill,

I told my favorites they should never eat.
Yet soon they broke my law of their own will,
And I, thus baffled of my hope and skill,
Stripped me the serpent of his fame and feet.
Shake him asunder from you, Abram: greet
Morning unstung, cold, safe, and all alone.”

Out of my dream I woke and found I lay
Perilous near to death, though I was young.
I leaped as in great passion, and I flung
The warming serpent from me a great space;
Turned, cursed, looked round as if to see a face,
And seeing none, lay down again till day.

2.

The great revelation, clothed in precious stones,
Did not come unto me until past my prime.
Meanwhile I crept, one-celled, through mother slime,
Growing my brain, my hands, my brittle bones.

I scarcely thought I was the darling of
Biotic science, such as men employ
To trace the amoeba whence it was a boy
And suddenly waxed strong and flouted Love.

The vision? Well—I was above twoscore,
When through a murk the mountains seldom wear
I saw three stars descending to their work:
The Pole Star pale, the pointers of the Bear.

3.

Abracadabra, formula and faith,
Comparative religions nice to know,
Slogans of Buddha, memoirs of a wraith
Called Jesus, Christ, and murdered long ago—

The murder judicial, the fulfillment plain
Because the prophets spoke in certain words—
All these, I venture, enter a man’s brain
And flap the dead air there like kitchened birds.

I caught one such in the renowned midwinter,

Who had come in beneath the open eaves.
Go, Bird—I said—whence no winged fowl should enter,
And wait afar the spring and the new leaves.

III. The Diaspora

Secret, to back doors of suburban houses
The lovers of chaste wives by night repair.
They, whom so late a guilty love arouses,
Warming to hate, at last receive them there—
Hating their youth, their children and their spouses,
The daily round, the dry, oppressive air.
The lover, smelling (as a kitten mouses),
Suddenly fears, and finds he does not dare.

I lived in Boston, Dallas, and New York,
Some while in Cleveland; Portland kept me poor;
I helped St. Louis go each day to work;
Denver received me rich; Saint Paul, a boor.
Do you not think I know what homes serve pork
To the wayfaring Brooklynite, or lure
John, the abstainer, with a fragrant cork
Pulled from a bottle dusty and obscure?

I in my time have fished where Yampa flows,
Or heard the floods perturb Scioto's doves;
Seen how La Plata swells with distant snows,
And plucked the driftwood Mississippi sloughs;
Plied the slow Charles with amorous blade adoze;
Astonished Thames with my silk hat and gloves:
How like the wanderer, who counts in droves
The homes he never had and therefore loves!

Shouldst thou become the father of a race
(The Lord God said to Abram), who will die?
Watch on thy glory but a little space,
And thou wilt see it, even as do I.

Wealthy as Abraham, with any face
I turned to it, my mind beheld the sky.

IV. The Castle

Here on this mountain of my earthly wealth,

Its shaved lawns sloping to the river seen
Three leagues away in serpenthood and stealth;
Where many a palace matched with mine were mean,
And I have years, and somewhat of my health;

Now in this moment of my transitory
Dominion over men and power to harm;
Shaped by the public who admire my story;
Drinking the afternoon in golden charm;

Possessed, indeed, of a true substantial glory
Because where I walked the land sprang up with deeds—
Steel, stone, and copper, porcelain roads to ease,
Motion from incandescence, planet-seeds
Chasing each other in wire trajectories
Whence sound came forth and esthetes told their beads;

Baron of handwork, marquis of mill and mine,
Archduke of turmoil, more than feudal lord,
I nod among my branches and entwine
My roots about the sources of my hoard.

I and King Midas, moving by design,
Change all and are not changed, recant, survive,
Are legends edifying to the good,
Grow old and wrinkle, propagate and wive:
The courtly bards who hymned us understood
It takes all kinds to be so much alive.

But of the libraries I had meant to found—
Those, too, in good time; for in my testament
Such riches wait when I am in the ground
As the whole world shall kiss me for, and spent,
Shall stretch my death out to the last tiptoe of sound.

Publication. First collected in *The Outdoor Labyrinth* (Durango, Colorado, 1961).

Ten Staves for the Conversion of Argentina

1.

Now we go south whom liberals assail
To join the spigs at their imperial game
In single file the martyrs build a name
Low in the north the Dipper wets his tail

Born of desire and masterful intent
Bereaved of England as its king was old
We sowed the seacoast corpse-wise and the cold
Mountains of famine braved and were not spent

That now in conclave and unmoved of death
We all those years forget and are the brain
Examining the lens with high disdain
Its children crawl the bloody lobes of breath

2.

I looked on Russia and its plains were vast
Its tsar unmoved its people strong and brave
I saw what dialectic could not save
And all the motions stemming from the past

I heard where Churchill intervened in Greece
I saw the marshal say this town is mine
The mules came down with the same loads of wine
And much largesse was destined to decrease

Precept by precept offices of state
Laid down the laws of commerce and of dearth
Methought the sprite of Grotius walked the earth
And scribes were heard in columns of debate

3.

The policy of Britain does not die
Though Britons do and die or not in vain
The black flies cluster on the lids of Spain
As busied with devoirs as you or I

Argent as water of the inland sea
A stainless navy's scrapen hulls deploy

Doom is a trifle progress is a toy
Stupider men have work for you and me

Washing an empire to its nails and bone
And almost catching soul before it fled
We made a science of the crowned dead
Kings who were set in habit and in stone

4.

Behold Tibet which in its lofty plain
Has sparse dry grass and priests and little air
The panting visitor arriving there
Makes no such voyage saving to his gain

A trade goes on in embassies and shops
The mob shouts Peace the prince resents a jibe
The world's a paddock twice could circumscribe
The former Bear looks over mountain-tops

Blown from the East the immemorial wind
Lifts the slight sand and blots the dingy sun
One war was once and two wars twice are won
And there are problems smoldering in Ind

5.

God whom in California's stuccoed churches
The market-vendor and the liquor-merchant
Seek as good business for their need is urgent
And the earth heaves and the sprawled metropolis lurches

Dear Lord respected for your love of peace
And of good will between unwilling men
When once you shake the Hearst domain again
Do not omit its maker let him cease

With which same prayer the desperate journalist
Hat back eyes pink and fingers stumbling keys
Staccatoed hope beyond the seven seas
And went home early in the August mist

6.

A Syrian camel legging out his task

Passed by a tent where officers were seated
Him no proud soldier noticed cursed or greeted
And he had neither paused to grunt nor ask

But in the desert sheeted as in white
The thirstless flesh was sinewy and stank
Rifles were clicking and a London bank
Offered a stock of oil to last the night

To bring which legend from its Persian caves
Expatriate engineers grew old abroad
The patriot cartels labored at their fraud
And all good girls enlisted in the Waves

7.

In conference with men and Molotov
It matters most but how the die is cast
Other details are trivial as the past
And something triumphs if the meet comes off

Yet where as Christians shall a folk repair
Lovers of property fond of human rights
The bourgeois sees in his small fire of nights
A spectacle of soviets grinning there

And the live coals transforming oak and fir
In geometric checkerboards of hell
Glow as his wife comes in the clock to spell
She is his wife and truth has slept with her

8.

Each to his mode the statesmen pipe and play
And when a meal is ended smoke and sit
And one finds time for what should pass as wit
Another is preternaturally gay

More is required than these are masters of
Through all outdoors the maladjusted sob
The cassock will not help you in a mob
And conquered nations nothing count in love

Yea while the council redistributes bribes
Now with their kinky hair and poisoned spears

Their lips aflap their chests with welts like ears
Down from the mountains creep the Uncivilized Tribes

9.

If sun be love and goodness be its heat
And wisdom as its light illumines men
The snake Equator has no rocky den
But stretches straight a circle most complete

All round the world the sun itself pursuing
Through jungle steam through bare Andean frost
Imagined trace by trackless billows tossed
Latitude none all longitudes renewing

Endless and round and perfect as the soul
The epigraph of evil and its sign
Its ritual tumbles men who cross the Line
So pride a nation lying next the Pole

10.

Fellows in crime and equally endowed
With larger vaunt and smaller greeds and skills
To judge how well the politician kills
How ill the artist or how much the crowd

The sentiment of country turns its vice
Factitious teeth to which no stain can cling
Smile in the land where any man was king
The giant feeds but at the dentist's price

The rain begins and will not mind the sun
The clouds of twice obscure the fire of once
Except a few whom truth now first confronts
War makes a liar out of everyone

Publication. First collected in *The Outdoor Labyrinth* (Durango, Colorado, 1961).

*A Voyage to the Rocky
Mountains*

A State of Nature

Toward sunset in the country of the Ute,
In the broad valley made by a slight stream descending
From volcanic dikes in the north to the Navajo desert—
Before me, olive-green scrub oak on a low mesa;
Beyond, at a great distance, the violet mountains.

Before my time, in face of the same landscape
Stood the primitive hunter, the man without bomb or college.

Publication. First collected in *The Outdoor Labyrinth* (Durango, Colorado, 1961).

Landscape

Out of the window flying, the glass mind
Flaps for a moment over the tan marsh,
Straightens its course and heads as if to find
A destination where the copse is harsh
Along the swell of the first bench above
The greenish river, marked by taller sedge.
It flies, a thought, to seek the place of love,
Which sank long since below the daylight's edge.

Were it but large and black of wing and strong,
The mind would soar past trivial slopes and hills
To the blue hollow night already fills
Between the crags of Deadmouth and the long
Jagged upheaval of Sir Mordred's Spine.
These mountains baffle the geologer,
For they were formed expressly to be mine
By the unlawful bubbling of pure fire.

Publication. First collected in *The Outdoor Labyrinth* (Durango, Colorado, 1961).

Of Novel Disseizin

No place in mountains, either, can be home.
Life-long you might remain there, but in spring
The avalanche comes down, leaving a ring
Of rocks around the ruin, a square hole
With green grass in it summers afterward.

Or build your cabin in a safer spot,
A cave externalized to match the bear's,
And of thick timbers cut in the near wood
With quiet labor: die, and the logs rot
Season by season in the heatless air.

The pig with quills, the rodent of the rocks,
The flower Calypso and the August grass,
Are the true people. Man is the wrong kind,
Belonging elsewhere with the shell and weed.
The fishy ocean weeps to drag him home.

Publication. First collected in *The Outdoor Labyrinth* (Durango, Colorado, 1961).

The Prank

Among these mountains dwell the elves of old,
And in their caverns gnomes as well do dwell.
Tales of their shape and line I once was told,
But was made swear that I would never tell.

There went three picnickers to share a lunch
Of wine air-warm and chicken choice and cold.
Within the hills they heard the saplings crunch
And the rocks slide; some little pebbles rolled

Quietly from the gravel bank upright
Behind them where they sat beside a stream.
The two men stared, with each his guilt in sight;
The only woman fetched a soundless scream.

Impending from athwart both north and south
Hung the bent cliffs, improper to misdeem.
The three stood hidden from the canyon-mouth,
And mutually clear as in a dream.

Publication. First published in *New Mexico Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1949); collected in *The Outdoor Labyrinth* (1961).

The Painted Backdrop

The highest mountains are not free of snow
Before late summer, though the lower slopes
Are long since bare; they bore green grass and dried

Into the kind of yellow mountainside
Where painters pin their astigmatic hopes—
As if a squint eye could attain the shape
God set before it, steeper than escape.

They say behind those fastnesses of stone
The elk and deer run riot, or the sheep
Startles the lion and the bear from sleep

Only to foot it on the crags alone;
While in and out among cascaded rocks
The coney hides in his magician's box

Of hollow color. There the eye explores
His very being he sits poised and tense,
Denying the shrewd primacy of sense.

The water tumbles to the valley-floors
From drifts turned dusty in the summer wind.
(The truth is thus, alike dim-originated.)

Publication. First collected in *The Outdoor Labyrinth* (Durango, Colorado, 1961).

Directions

To reach our house you take a crummy bus
In a small village where white shirts are few.
You ride an hour with Indians or us
Or any else who ride along with you.

Where you alight there is no town or store;
No one will meet you; you can look away
Ten miles at night, a hundred miles by day.
Here no one worries much about a war,

Since by the time an enemy appeared
Across the desert or our alpine east,
Most of the rest of all men would have ceased
To need our succor. For our local fyrd

We have ourselves, our fatalistic friends,
Our visitors from elsewhere, and the hills.
In the spring season every river fills
With the cold water June in Utah sends,

Or bare Wyoming. Come by Jackson Hole;
Fish with the current, cast a skillful fly
Against the wind and in the future's eye,
Feed well and pamper your immortal soul.

We have a house here and a yard and field,
A forest and a patch of mountain peak,
Blankets, a fire, a highway you may seek
To find the quaint or what has lain concealed.

Bring your own meat. We feed ourselves alone
On the sweet berry and the fossil bone.

Publication. First collected in *The Outdoor Labyrinth* (Durango, Colorado, 1961).

A Letter to the Czar

I write from farthest Thule. It is the hour
When the clock strikes. The snow begins to gather
On the short mountains native to this land.
In my heart is no question, Little Father.

I learned of kingdoms when my mind was young.
With other schoolboys hating George the Third,
I sensed dominion when I joined the church.
I know you own your subjects with a word.

We are not cold to all the people's cause
In this far quarter. I have seen a man
Helping a friend and an unwelcome stranger,
Not so commanded. Yet we want a plan,

Your envoy tells us. Here, then, is your answer.
When any of us hereabouts despises
Neighbor or foe, he knows a way to say so.
But near your person, Sir, he has no sponsor.

We are all of us mountaineers, and in each valley
A separate rule prevails. We wish it so,
And when snow falls we winter with the snow.

Publication. First collected in *The Outdoor Labyrinth* (Durango, Colorado, 1961).

Bible Story

Noah, in one sense father of us all,
Invented spring, the rainbow, and the rain,
Hope, navies, zoos, obedience and pain,
Artisanship, and the sublime machine.
Seeing a dove bring back a sprig of green,
He said, "I see the fruit trees growing tall."

Shem, Ham, and Japheth, Noah's noted sons,
Founded the races into which divide
Man, as we know him, and his chosen bride.
God planned all this, or so the story runs.

We drift, a race, asleep in Noah's ark.
Under us mountains stab the liquid dark.

Publication. First collected in *The Outdoor Labyrinth* (Durango, Colorado, 1961).

IN THE IRON TEMPLE (1964)

The mature sequence published by Prairie Press

I

The Nebraskan in California

Upon a shore of quiet,
Where country beds with town,
Where any coin is fiat,
The farthing or the crown,

With enemies and neighbors
Alike remote, forgot,
Retiring from my labors,
I settle down to rot;

I build my house, and in it
Acquire and count and tend
The pleasures of a minute
To please my latter end.

For chairs of Chinese wicker
And rugs of Indian wool
And walls of redwood thicker
Than glass by the basketful,

Wrought iron in the sconce
And brass upon the hearth,
Assuage me for the nonce
And bind me to the earth,

While jade of several shades,
In the sea-tempered light,
Branches and gleams and fades
And disappears in night;

Floors smooth with work and wealth
Bear up what time I have:
A soul, perhaps, to save,
And its immortal health.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Umbrella

Segmented scope on ribs of airy steel,
Collapsible circle and web-footed wheel,
Funereal fabric spreading like the wing
Of rotary bat sanguineous of sting,

Despised invention when you guard the state,
But instrument of drought, man's surrogate
For canvasback's slick feather, muskrat's fur,
Or worm's protection in the chestnut bur,

Companion of my thoughts, and handy shroud
To carry folded through the living crowd,
Sublime device to mark the prudent man
Who dares such storms as never once began—

Come, and with me walk through the rainy day.
The rain falls cold on docks a world away.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Tumbril

Under my windows through the public square,
Through place or plaza, common, city park,
Goes the thronged wagon; and the devil may care,
But these are bound for everlasting dark.

The politician in a state too great,
The hangman's apprentice who did not miss his calling,
The torturer who ceased his art too late,
The scientist who erred; their heads are falling.

The archfiend and the fiends who made him chief,
And each subservient fiend who did their work,
Are guilty and must die. All who passed by
Where stood the temple of the fiends' belief
And left them at their vespers in the murk,
Repent now and require an eye for an Eye.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

For My Sweet

Upon the day the nitrogen chain,
Kindling at once in all men's brain,
Achieves the perfect poem and
The good society, unplanned,

Where should you like to be, my dear?
Out in the patio with me, here?
Or shall we go indoors to greet
That last, unseasonable heat?

I ask—since then, if you are by,
Much more than double only I
Must chime, as by the fire curled,
We sit to see the end of the world.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

A Burning Star

Planets of newer days, beware,
And wandering comets, do not stare:
At this small point of astral space
Once breathed the somewhat human race.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Zone Number

The Zone Number has come to stay.
It was tried during World War I; it did not take hold,
But now the Post Office is really sold
On the merits of the Zone Number, and it has come to stay.
Likewise, I think, with the Atomic Age.
You remember they used to talk about how terrible the next war would be?
Well, it was, too, in a sense—but after World War III
There is going to be neither birth, death, nor age.

And yet only a few of the atoms will be destroyed.
The vast—oh, by far—majority will remain
Unsplit, unbothered; as always, exempt from pain,
Ennobled by combination into such forms as the sea
Spawns from its cool depths, aiming toward the land—
Crawling toward beachheads millenniums away,
But destinably human, potentially good and gray
As ever Whitman, Marx, or Sigmund Freud.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

Irene, or Peace

She said she wanted to say farewell to debauchery,
So I said, Okay, get up and say farewell.
But her statement was signed with a signature that was a forgery,
For I met her later ensconced in state in hell:
She had married well; she had married a hellish noble;
She was Countess C., and had given him three sons.
I visited them once in Laguna; her shape was supple
As she moved among her guests and the sound of guns.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Brand

The unscrupulous woman, adverting to her youth,
The saga of past willingness,
Mused on and on in the foggy peninsular dusk;
To whom I listening from clinical motives only
Was yet as one consumed by the memory of past jealousies.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Climate of Hell

The fog is fog, not rain or dew.
On Sunday it is foggy, too.
In June the foggy mornings last
Until the afternoon is past.
The morning dawns between the hour
Of noon and what the bats devour.

Poor futile bats that on this strip of coast
Starve and grow lean whose insects drought hath lost!
The sun, a silver-bronze as round
As lens punched out of the profound,
Suggests its face, and the striped mist
Whitens the cedars where we kissed
It may have been an age ago,
But none shall know; no, none shall know.

Dear daily sun, by whose obscure demand
Oceans keep faith, adulteries are planned,

Men without women slay and steal,
Make God an image, drink and reel,
Dishonor sire, disown the truth,
Labor their beasts with greed nor ruth,
And in all covetousness pray
Their flesh be fed each seventh day—

Dear sun, in what remote and treeless hills
Your influence is felt, and warms and kills!

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

II

The Oyster

Lying, as does my kind, upon the floor
Of the great sea where it is not too deep,
And seeming not to breathe nor even sleep,
Though many do on the adjacent shore,
I sometimes wonder, as the current flows
Above my bed and chilly toward the land,
To what an end was spread this grainy sand
Where I lie buried half and feed on ooze.

I am myself the center of my world;
Yet over me there moves, the whole beside,
A watery heaven. Twice a day the tide
Laps at the coast whose folk are warm and pearled.
I scarcely know (I cannot count too well)
How many pearls are pangs inside my shell.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Bear

I never knew until
I met him in the wood,
That there could be one still,
Or I have hardihood
Who felt so much alarm,
To yell so that he ran—
I with my tiny arm—
He more than match for man.

Yet I have a savage friend
Who found this creature's brother
Walking on the fresh snow
Away from cover,
And when the two met thus,
My friend looked all about,
And without any fuss,
Nor any doubt,

Seized a good heavy rock
And hurled it at the bear,
Whose forehead received the shock
And he crumpled there.

My friend is a savage. I
Could emit only a cry.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Fate of Good Deeds

Whenas the sun, impassive, sets,
The elephant, who nought forgets,
Must sit him down in Afric wood,
Or else in Indian junglehood,
And feel the tear his cheek that wets
The while he ponders truth and good.

Would I were like such a great beast,
To make philosophy my feast:
I would observe both ill and well,
And all my simple virtues tell.
What I have quite forgotten, least
Should trouble me, until in hell.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

Why I Did Not Cure the World's Evil

The worm has already hatched when you catch the moth,
And so it is with gentlemen of the cloth.
Had sin not happened, there would be no work
For saints to prove or clergymen to shirk—
For saints to prove or clergymen to shirk—
Who prove nor shirk because I do not try.

So much for logic. Since analogy
Is virtue's thwart and wisdom's parody,
Let me go catch that snake and his dark fruit,
And so be striking at the very root.
Where there is nothing between truth and death,
It pays to act, I think the psalmist saith.

But when I looked about me for a snake,
I could not find one beckoning to take.
All were in holes, or so it seemed, and much
Courage was needed to reach down and touch.
There was poison there, and a continuing mystery.

Naughty, naughty disturbs the laws of history.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Gospel

Cats, be it known, may die of wounds or poison,
Distemper, age, the press of city traffic,
Fighting their kind, or drowning (while but babes),
Emasculation by the jealous male,
Or pure starvation. When your cat is sick,
Go to the patient veterinary surgeon,
Demand a potion. He will give you straight
A bottle labeled, "Cat: three times a day
A dropperful." Be wary, lest when trust
Of all good science bids you hold him down
To taste his nostrum, your black dying beast
Scratch with his claws those hands, the loving Master's.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

Hoc Est Proprium

If, before I die,
All the things I try
Should result in good—

I be understood,
Schemes of mine be used,
Loves of truth be fused
In a common whole,
Man confess a soul—

Then would not I claim
Credit for my name?

Hence these may not happen—
All, as am I, misshapen.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

Monosyllables

What I have had has come too late,
And what I have not got I hate,
While men who win what I do not
Flout me with what I have not got.

I see the rich grow strong and great
While poor men whom they cheat but wait,
And yet I hear the poor win praise
That they are full of works and days.

For me, I am not rich nor poor,
Nor sage nor dolt nor knight nor boor:
I keep as best I can my state
Of nought too much and all too late.

But who shall say I am not wrong
To make a snarl of hate my song?
‘The strong may best the weak, but fate
Bids weak men love, if they can hate.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

III

Father Galen's Florilege, or a Symposium of Diseases

Science

The Bargain

Costly as granite's pale facade
And knowledgeable as is God,
In office chaste awaits our tryst
The famous dermatologist,
Whose patients neither die nor lure
Him forth by night nor show a cure,
And who will not, while he treats me,
Abate his mercenarity.

Graduate of such schools as man
Establishes who nobly can,
And versed in science, which is not
Averse to blowing cold and hot,
The learned doctor dressed in starch,
Mincing and pasty-faced and arch,
Will peer at poison under skin
And call his subterfuges in,

Which run as follows: 'Eczema
Disturbed condition of a part
Which might be brain or soul or heart.
Likewise with dermatitis, which
May prompt no sense, yet much may itch.
Finally, rot, the bane of flesh,
Sets in where sun nor rain is fresh."
For these, my payment to the sage
Will buy him food and keep his age.
I, the sick poet, starved and old,
Find out what words will fetch in gold.

Intellect

The Compatibles

A pry and utterly chaste affair

Between a man whose type of wit
Annoys a woman who gets in his hair
(And much good may they get of it)

And her, thus briefly characterized,
Takes place, as it were, on the cerebral cortex
Of both. They sit in chairs devised
By a harsh carpenter, and approach a vortex

Of windless whirling blowing down the world.
(Faster and faster, faster, faster—stop!
Lest Plato spin, or Hymen blow his top.)
It is time now to count up the books and desks,
Unshelve the journals, and unwall the sheep's
Framed contributions to a biped's masks.
These halls should give us the most holy creeps.

What class in English ever shall unvail
The emperor Thought, whose stab is past repair?
Look, look—the spring! It is of all outdoors.
Marbled and warmer, the not distant skies
Weep like a pair of academic eyes,
And shower on the scholar and his chores.
He writes a piece for Dr. Blank's Review,
And is no man—nor, neither, dear, are you.

Specialization

Sonnet: The Stolen Will

The private papers of Esau Oriflame,
Late Bumpkin Professor of Sex in the U. of Dreams,
Fill six steel cabinets. These his heirs annex.

The world is sometimes not the world it seems,
For on going over the contents, file by file,
His heirs discover the bulk consists of matter
Remote from his profession. The mind resists
The picture given: a tough soul, hard to flatter:

In one folder, letters from grateful students;
But he gave his time—his ten thousand leisure hours—
To something other. A seizure of imprudence

Compelled him to stocks; on these he spent his powers:

No money, mind you—but every quotation clipped
As a monk might hoard his ineffable manuscript.

Freedom

The Lesson

I wished to pick the fruit while green
Which theretofore I had not seen,
And bitter was its pulp, indeed,
But pick the fruit I surely did.

The seeds were soft, the flesh was hard;
I chewed the rind my teeth had scarred
As though it might be food for me
With all the world my enemy.

Hog-wild in the suggestive orchard,
My mouth rejoiced, my belly tortured,
Set in a primaveral scene,
I tasted juice as sour as sin.

The trees no longer grow so high
To hang their fruit against the sky;
Yet now it is beyond my reach
Unless I pick it from the ditch.

I neither stretch nor do I stoop.
My appetite is eaten up.

Senility

The Old Gardener in Prison

A Story from Boccaccio

I live in a high cell alone,
With one small window in the stone.
It needs no bars, it is so high,
And here I stay until I die.

All round about me gardens lie
I may not till though I may eye,

While that I have I may not own,
For else my manliness were known.

When I was young, to this I came
Which has no future and no name.
Now gray and veined as the oak,
I cry not out who never spoke.

One morning as the sun awoke,
I lay awake. An ancient joke
Kept running through my head like flame,
For now I had become the same.

Green are the lawns the sisters keep
Below the tower where I sleep,
And crystal streams, I fancy, flow
Among the flowers far below;

Yet from the sky I see the snow
Sparkle toward winter. Now I go
Six steps along my wall—so deep
My space—and when I turn I weep.

Backsliding

Robert of Sicily

To fall asleep in a church is no great matter,
Save when the spheres intend a revolution.

But to awake; to find the bronze doors closed,
Each jumbled scene and panel facing out;
All blank within, cold, high, too heavy to swing;
To escape at last by a small door fit for priests,
The self divested of its crusted robes;
Show a bare knuckle where the signet was,
And through the city beg and be denied;
Do penance, cringe, accept the usurping angel,
And so return, finally, to the lost throne:

A royal matter, shameful to be known.

Humanity

Morrison Wood at the Keyboard

The things that horrify me most
I will set down as simple fact,
Portraying Satan and his host
Engaging in the naked act,

Defying Suessenguth to say
I have not been around as he,
Or Boyce, who knows the interplay
Of century on century,

Because I see, which way I turn,
The universals taking form,
Like brothel customers who burn
Perfect as snowflakes in a storm

Before my eye hexagonal,
As if to say, "Catch us who can!"—
The famous in the casual,
Where all are lost, and each is man.

Such dreadful deeds as mind dreams up
I will keep by me, page on page,
Till Asia lap my labors up,
An incident of the wrong age—

Myself devoted to the truth
As seen by me, and in my youth.

Demagogy

The Reformer

Last night a civic meeting claimed my time,
And a young bride, a sociologist's wife,
Split hairs of conflict, breast and thigh for knife.
I was enchanted, old as yet I am.

Behind her shape upon the platform moving,
There moved the age, tooth buried in fat vein.
The underdog was up, and out for gain,

While here this carcass, ripe and fit for loving.

Squirming uneasy on the wooden seats,
I thought of Bryan, Christ, and Luther loud.
A wave of heat surged forward from the crowd:
In the days of the tyrant the fishers spread their nets.

Impiety

The Giants

The summer is wet, but warm as always, steams
In the rich fields. The mold thrives in the city,
In the cellars of houses, where the stones bear up the beams.
The nights glisten, and like tears shed of pity,
On the whole length of Broad Street falls the unharmed rain:
On the State Capitol Building; on the Asylum for Insane.
Over a small area, on paving-brick or clod,
The rain of heaven descends to us from God;
While man, who differs in this from other cattle,
That he thinks or reasons, and implements will with hands,
Brings down on his head a rain at Bikini Atoll
Enough to drench a multitude of lands.

Immortality

Epitaph for a Professor of Sanskrit

Ryder is dead, and therefore happy,
Having his life completed, spent
Neither in boozing at the nappy
Nor fumbling for a vast intent,
But well on letters, and in lore
His like will not provide us more.

For—lest you may not this have guessed—
The time is short, the world is small,
Where Ryder, by oblivion blessed,
Need not observe its end at all.

Not Cherniss, for his classroom's north,
Shall summon sleeping Ryder forth.

Art

The Chinese Print

The wood is deep green, but beyond,
Two butterflies above a pond
Gather the sunlight from the mist
That is the water's only frond.

To the pond's edge, in rain or fair,
The drowned general's men repair,
To see if yet perchance he floats
Who—moons have gone—was sunken there.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

IV

The Lightning

As we passed northward along the oiled ribbon leading
out of Gallup,

There was lightning over some mountains to the west.

They were dark, black-blue, in color,

And on their crests one could distinguish a bristle of
good-sized trees,

Coniferous and long-lived,

Which denied the suspicion of no water.

“Those are the Lukachukai Mountains,” said the bus driver.

“There are bear there; they are really wild country.”

“What kind of bear?” I asked, fishing in the pocket of
my coat for a match-folder.

“Black bear,” he said, “and brown, too. I’m going up there
some day and get one.”

We skirled along through the desert, and it began to
grow dark.

We passed Indians driving their wagons,

And then a procession of cars with streamers commemorating

A three-day Lions’ convention in Pueblo, Colorado.

“Some of those boys better turn on their lights,” said the
driver. “I haven’t got any patience with guys who
won’t put on their lights after sundown.”

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

Of Emperors

If you walk up the railroad tracks where they climb out of the valley onto the mesa
rimming it toward the east,

You come under a cliff formed of a peculiar conglomerate,
 tilted slightly northwest after the fashion of sedimentary rocks.

None of this has undergone fire, but it is metamorphic if only because here the pebbles
of the Deluge

Have remained to satisfy the curiosity of modern man.

When they built the railroad here, they leveled the loose earth out sideways toward the
valley

Into a sort of bench where a few false-mallow grow orange in the June sunlight,

And the section crew from Farmington comes sometimes to replace ties that have grown
rotten

Since they were laid down in the time of the Emperor Francis Joseph.

Their lunch boxes are of black metal.

Viewed endwise, they are seen to be formed on the arch principle

Made popular by the Emperor Titus.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

An Unwritten Essay of Montaigne: Whether of the Two, Methuselah or Tithonus Lived to Be the Older

Ir ac means full of years, but one lives on
And is no longer young but cannot die—
Is it unkind of him to view the sky
At morning pink, and not to love the dawn?

We have such knowledge from our sources as
Appears to prove the Hebrew lacked a scant
Century of reaching a millennium. Rant
Makes the Greek immortal, with what a corpse has.

I suppose women are of such stuff as youth
Thinks vital, middle age finds useful, or
Old men can smile on—granddaughter or bore.
Tithonus and Methuselah died happy, that's the truth—

For who would be a senile lover? I
Suffer the stone; Methuselah circumcised
Is known for nothing but his years. If prized,
Tithonus had them, but he wished to die.

All-kind Jehovah—that is, Zeus—consented
The boon be granted. Well, I call that wisdom.
(You cannot be a god and split the prism,
For the light shines in the colors it is tinted.)

Who cares how old two ancient worthies got?
I do; and yet one day I shall be not.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Secretary

After my slave's sad death, quite premature,
I read his diary, which he kept concealed
Beneath the straw that served him for a bed
In the marble cell behind the kitchen pantry.

Why I should feel an interest I knew not,
But something in the man had moved my kindness.
I read his script: an educated Greek,
Bound to my service through a war's misfortune.

Here he set down his thoughts. I passed them over,
Looking for matter touching on myself.
Which finally I found: *My lord*, he wrote,
Was fully clothed today in his right mind,

For when I spoke to him of pressing letters,
He said, Again: since now I have no heart for it.
Into the atrium, when it seldom rains
I like to go and watch the pool refill
That Faber and his helper rimmed with stone
To catch a downpour from the sloping roofs,

So fashioned to run inward, like the mind
When it has been proconsul—now no more
Tasting provincial pleasures, but at home
Resting, and feeding much on what it won.

At evening when the sun came down those slopes
Once dreadful with barbarian spears but now
Quiet with orderly trees, and the palace walls
Began to cool and supper was brought in,
I thought of home and duty far away.

Now I have both, and neither is the same.
But a few leagues beyond the City walls
The farmer riots; I have heard a din
Of beggars at my window; the stones quiver
With orders from the Emperor, a god,

Though not till after death so in the old days.
If he would be a god in life, then I

Have served him to his downfall. O my master,
I had a slave die lately, who was versed

In literate composition. He lay dying,
And wrote upon a slate, *My lord is just,*
Obdurate, lazy, and too full of years.
Breakfast his favorite meal, he sickens nightly.

To what end should I send to Cappadocia,
My lord, when all is words and sloth at home?

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

V

The Message

I have my text ready here in my pocket
And I will detain you for only twenty minutes,
Men are as grass. The future of the world
Is gloomy, but faith will cure it. Trust in experts.

The wages of sin are not high enough. Refrain.
I do not walk with God, but people have.
Believe, therefore,

Ye (it says here).

When I was walking with my father in the garden
As a small child, I often thought
I should like to be a clergyman.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Mathematic

If a rabbit were running forty miles per hour,
And his front end arrived at its destination
One second before his hind end,
The rabbit would be fifty-eight feet eight inches long.

If a snowstorm in the mountains obscures
Vision at one mile, so that nothing
Appears of the familiar jagged horizon,
Then if the snowflakes are one foot apart
It must take the square of five thousand two hundred eighty of them
to blot out a square foot of landscape.

But we do not know this; we only accept it.

Our calculation has ignored the dimension of each snowflake.

Even the numeral system is a figment
Of someone's seeing there were bad times coming.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Quiet Conflict

"Latin is a hard language." The Professor of Sanskrit
 Delivered himself of this dictum, as I recall,
 While we were having coffee in the Varsity Restaurant.
 He was fond of saying things like that,
 Summing up the experience of a lifetime in a phrase
 Which he would then stick to through thick or thin,
 Like an ant rescuing its egg amid general demolition.
 When the President of the University was quoted as saying
 That he had no sympathy for the underdog,
 "That remark," said the Professor, "was unfilial."
 "He is a perfect fool," he once said of a colleague,
 Supporting his pronouncement with citations of authority
 As to the proper meaning of the word perfect,
 The significance of the term fool, and the inner nature of the copula.
 Stuff like that never made him popular.
 He was a confirmed pedestrian. When he crossed a street while reading a book
 The cars which were even then coming into vogue
 Would honk at him in disgust, or worse.
 He never minded; he only hated their guts for it.
 Once he suggested I change a translation of Catullus that I had made:
 He said it was not vulgar enough in the punch line,
 Where he maintained a monosyllable was needed.
 When I got to thinking about it afterwards
 I threw the whole damn thing in the furnace.
 Despite his status as Chairman of the Department,
 He had no subordinates and occupied no office.
 The former he lacked because after all who takes Sanskrit,
 And the latter because he would not sign for a key to it
 So long as the printed form used for that purpose
 Implied he might abscond without paying twenty cents
 To the University Bursar.
 Each morning he opened his mail in front of us in the classroom,
 Dropping such items as three-pound Catalogues
 Into the clean empty metal wastebasket.
 "Bong!" it would say, as there went another piece of heavy printed matter.
 He would then turn and write something on the blackboard,
 After which he used to remove his raincoat.
 Once when I pointed out a sandhi-change that he had managed to overlook

He rewarded me with the statement that I had a fine mind,
Stipulating that God alone knew whether I would make any use of it.
He was entirely right on that point.
He dropped dead in his classroom, of a heart attack, about 1937;
As I was waiting for a streetcar in Columbus.
Latin is a hard language, because not only are the verbs conjugated
But also the words denote concepts fallen into disuse
Since the elder Decius ceased to fling himself into a pit
That yawned suddenly between him and his comrades
And the ever-present envious bitter enemy.

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On Being Too Busy to Attend One's Twenty-Fifth Class Reunion

Some in the sun, some in the grimy sea,
Some from natural causes, unlike me,
Would not be back in any case to drink
A toast to days before they learned to think,

While some who have not stirred far from the spot
Will surely be there, while some such will not,
And others, scattered over Terra's face,
May yet return, a few, to view the place

Whence they set out on being well equipped
With higher learning or its parascript.
Unfortunate I, who cannot quite come home
To pseudo-Athens or its captor Rome.

Well, in my absence, let me then declare
That which I found in it that appeared fair—
The snow, the grass, the odd and parching mountains,
The vanities and wishes young as fountains,

The beautiful stone, the mud in every alley,
The Nineteenth Century still able to rally—
Whether in chapel or in classroom thoughts
Offered to faces like a row of noughts;

And the undertone—always the undertone—
That the classics were dying. We fought on alone,
I and the professor of both Latin and Greek;
Accepted science, turned the other cheek.
You would not guess how many tragic years
I held an image in my heart, of tears
Shed for a marble statue flouted while
Crude engineers contrived a faster mile,

Or bartering merchants, screaming as they sold,
Cheated themselves and bit their leaden gold.
The picture shuddered and I shrank from it,
Nor could have praised it for its truth and wit.

But I was wrong, despite my good professor.
Latin not wasted, nor my mind the lesser
For poring on it, I was well advised
To think of Caesar and the works he prized.

Aqueducts bring me water from the hills;
Bridges upbear me while my office fills;
I have Justinian in my head at once
With Coke and Blackstone and the party fronts:

In every client Gaius Gracchus sprouts,
Or his assassin. I have seen the routs
Where Orosius elbows with Thucydides.
Men often ask me questions such as these:

Whose is the body when the head is severed?
Where was Achilles when the tortoise quivered?
Why do the Goths come down all over the place?
When is the future of the human race?

I remember he used to say, "As Horace said. . ."

Now [am rich, though taxed, and he is dead.

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VI

The Woman

Twenty or thirty feet below the summit
Of the peak we were climbing, which has no name on the maps,
I acquired misgivings, perfect in their timing,
Such as befall, I suppose, a number of chaps.

No great distance remained, but I became
All of a sudden solicitous and paternal,
And I called my son back from the steps of the last cliff.
He was higher than I, but I looked up and saw the infernal,
With black rock splitting a hundred ways to an if.

Far below, a flyspeck in the valley,
I could see the old car I had forced to its last gasp,
Waiting where she was making a fire for us
When we came down without heaven in our grasp.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

Beyond the Alps Lies Hannibal

Whenas I liked to eat and ate,
Before I learned a temperate state,
I saw ice cream upon a plate
Of Haviland or simple earthen
As mountains pink or peach or white
Or chocolate, even, as in night
There dwells a race whom God to burthen
Of that same color did create;

While now, lest I should lap them down,
The mountains cold above the town
In the unflinching winter moon
Are piled like sherbets in a dream—
To whose unmelted folds repairing,
The glutton mind, unseemly faring,
Shivers in deserts of ice cream
Tumbled by what untrammeled spoon:

Yet, elevate above their bases
As lofty thoughts above rude faces,
They stand so central to the races
As might a human purpose or
Love triumphing in men who grieved
Or yet, and scarce to be conceived,
A common horror born of war.
They stand orderly in their places,

Almost as if some rule were meant
Of appetite and government.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

The Last Picnic

Sunday, September. Therefore let us go,
During the leaves and shortly before snow,
Away and up, testing the pearl-blue haze.
Now there will not be many more free days.

Autumn, traditionally red and gold,
In this high region sometimes seems to hold
Gauzy surprises in its bag of tricks:
Transparent aspen, twinkling on white sticks,

Lets sunlight through its ribands, yellow juice
Generously poured out for the soul's use.
Oak, here a bush too stout to be torn up,
Blushes from brown to ruby, a dry cup

Not glass nor china, but an earthen ware
Smooth without polish. After dark, the air
Turns both to olive, glistening in the moon:
The aspens gray; the peaks beyond look down,
Becoming silver where their sands were tan.

Let us eat supper, with a fire for man.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

A Pilgrimage to Ice Lake

The Departure from the Seacoast

I believe in God the Father,
And in the Holy Ghost,
And in the murals of Puvis de Chavannes
And the pursuit of the Grail by Abbey.

I believe in the books at home
And that I shall some day own them—
Both the bound volumes of *The Living Age*
And the signed copy of *The Culprit Fay*.

I believe in the Boston & Albany,
The swan boats and Allen and Greenough.
“Latin and Greek and mathematics
Are the only true education.”

I believe in President Seelye,
With his hair so much like George Washington’s.

A Journey through the Middle West

The descent into Cincinnati is like the descent into hell.
There are successive terraces
Murky in the failing light, yet each
In its own way burning.
Coalpiles and furnaces, great heaps
Of industrial trash, long sidings
Full of freight cars from the north:
The whole complex pouring itself,
Like passion, into a muddy river.

Yet also the up-country: sections of virgin forest
With thick trees—the oak, three feet thick
With a hollow center—the walnut,
So high, high as the elm—the locust,
Fragrant and dirty on the sour lawn—
The trumpet vine, the Virginia creeper,
The poison ivy.
The poison ivy grows upward against nature:
If it has a stump, good; or a fence-post, good;

Or if nothing at all, it will still climb.
I have seen them mount on their own stalks,
Two or three feet up, involving their origin
As habit and envy do, the springs of virtue.

Entrance into the Deserts of Colorado

The thinner the grass, the greener when it grows—
The quicker gone, the sorrier to hold
The dust together when the wind blows.

The sunrise is not the same when it comes up
From nothing over nothing, and goes down
Similar to itself on a dun ground.

Billows of land, vaster as the plains wester,
All of one color, simulate a sea
No longer moving. Which of them is chaster?

All mothers teem with life, the whale or the great spider.

A Glimpse of the Foothills from Far Off

When thunderheads usurp the sky
And sail across it as they do,
The undersides of them are blue
With a metallic blackish hue—
As on some lizards, when they die.
Compared to these, the faint gray curves
Of earth, unlevel near its end,
Seem interstitial between blend
Of darkening heaven and taut nerves.

So much the more, as the eye catches
An intimation there, it watches.

The Years Exploring the Canyons

Rock.

Rock and water.

Rock, water, and a million years.

Ice, forest, wind, sun. Water and time.

Rodents and people. Earthworms, but not many.

Ants. The ant lion. The decay of matter.
The lichen, ranging from gray-green to orange,
Canary-yellow, ruddy on dark rock,
Black in its age or death—the covering lichen,
On which man sits on rock and feels it give.

Who has not picnicked in the best of valleys?
There all seems formed to set him free from home:
The light falls softly through its chosen alleys;
Trouble is gone, and all that made him roam.

In winter the snow is softer than the eider,
And never cold, for cold is in the heart.
Air scarcely stirs it. It welcomes the outsider
As if appointed. They need never part.

The Objective

Timber-line lakes or higher are both cold
And pure, for reasons not to prove the soul
Or its dispirit, but because the air
Is thin and heat escapes through it and off,
Returning slowly, while the water feeds
But little vegetation, and where man
Sullies it seldom with his arts or flesh.

They lie in shallow basins since no more
Great height remains not now beneath them, nor
Are the few peaks about them more than toys
Fit to be scrambled up by racing boys—
Unless a cliff should crumble in the hand,
As it cracks daily when sun strikes the land.

Except for fragile rock there were no lake;
For either ice, in motion long ago,
Thrust out and dropped a dam to hold the tide,
Or falling rubbish from the infant tops
Of loftier summits than these humps of ours
Rolled over drifts undried from year to year
And built an outwork. Then the frost withdrew.

Come up, if it be your pleasure, the faint trail
That starts in trees and ends where the lungs fail.

Staff, wallet, cape, a mule's neck hung with a bell,
Are good provision; more I cannot tell.
What fire, what food—that is a man's problem.
He undertakes the Chimaera. He must be solemn.

Publication. First collected in *In the Iron Temple* (Prairie Press, 1964).

EDITORIAL NOTE

Textual method and recovered witnesses

Each book is presented as its own chronological section. Repeated poems are printed once when later publication involved only punctuation or minor wording; the publication note records the later witness. Entirely reconceived texts would be retained separately. Book and journal titles are italicized throughout. A recovery register in the production files records additional periodical titles for which no verifiable full-text witness was available; those titles have not been silently reconstructed from indexes or snippets.

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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 unlettered artwork created by Brian Kim Stefans and the standard Green/Extremes palette; its title remains live in the PDF.

The poems were reconstructed from original scans rather than from earlier reader PDFs. The complete source files, geometry-aware transcriptions, research dossier, cover art, and production script are retained with the edition.