

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.

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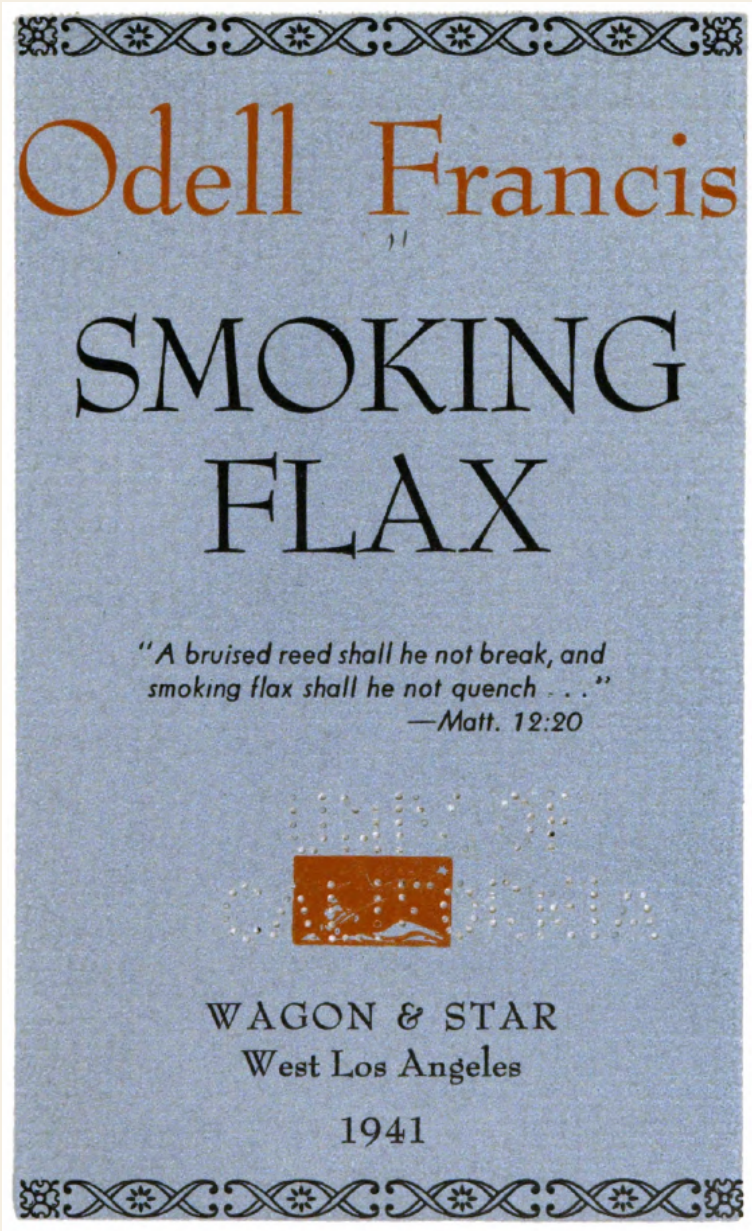
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ARCHIVAL IMAGES

Book, performance, radio, editorial work, business, and reception



Title page of *Smoking Flax* (Wagon & Star, 1941), the complete base witness for this edition.

Poetry And Music Club To Meet—

The Poetry and Music Club will present a program at 2 p. m. Wednesday in the new Exposition Hall on the fifth floor of the May Company. The first session will be followed by voluntary self-expression. Mrs. John A. Balsley, the president, will present L. E. Behrman, honorary vice-president, who will extend greetings. Artists of the afternoon will include Miss And Knowles, concert pianist of New York City; Mrs. Odell Francis, dramatic soprano; Frederick Vroom, who will speak on Shakespeare's philosophy. The public

A 1930 Poetry and Music Club notice identifying Mrs. Odell Francis as a dramatic soprano.

Charming Radio Program Given By Doris Bateman

Before an appreciative audience of poets and friends, at the studios of KFVD, Los Angeles, last afternoon, Mrs. Doris I. Bateman of Manhattan Beach broadcast several of her most representative poems. Among them were types ranging from juvenile and popular magazine types to free verse and experimental poetry.

Mrs. Bateman, who has had many of her poems published in juvenile general, and poetry magazines, besides others heard over the Radio Poets' Club, is very versatile in range of style, as was successfully shown in her Friday program.

The broadcast was at the invitation and under the direction of Vernon Dunham, who conducts the Poets' Club at 2:15 over KFVD five days a week. Mr. Dunham is the editor of the magazine *Aerial* in which several of Mrs. Bateman's poems appear.

Following the broadcast, an informal studio party was held. Among the guests were the well known radio poets, Odell Francis, Sara DuBois, Flora Stuart, Mary Vaughan and Robert Allen Marshall. Their poems also may be found in *Aerial*, copies of which are kept in the South Bay public libraries.

A 1937 report naming Francis among Southern California's recognizable radio poets in the KFVD and Ariel circle.

Bright Mosaic

POEMS • POET PERSONALS • BOOKS
Compiled by Dion O'Donnell and Odell Francis
Editors of PATH OF BEAUTY, The International Poetry Pa-

In submitting poems for use in this column please accompany with a self-addressed and stamped envelope. Two monthly prize awards are made, one for the poem receiving the most public response, another for the best letter about poetry. In general, BRIGHT MOSAIC is published December for the preceding month; are printed on the second Friday of the month.

DOWN DEEP

This thing I know—
All joys, at length,
Reach roots down deep
To I'm, for strength!
—Virginia Scott Miner.

We found this gem of thought in May-June THE LANTERN, which is a particularly fine issue, edited and published by C. B. McAlister, of Brooklyn, New York.

TELL ME, LIFE!

Life, you say thing.
Life, you say thing.
Now you're cradling,
Now entombing,
Life, you something,
Life, you nothing.
When you add some
When you take from
Do you rue it,
When you do it?
—Edith Heitland.

There are moments when we all question Life as Edith Heitland has in her poem. Perhaps Virginia Scott Miner's "Down Deep" will give us Life's answer.

Contemplation of birds and trees, Nature's exhibition of just what the variety of line and color of which life is a variable, will, once firmly in mind, be a lifetime thing except reference.

MEADOW LARK

Laughter and love pour through
your throat
And all the liquid overflow
heens spilling into waiting space—
I catch each drop, as note on note
See, the intimate glow
Within me, and this secret face
Of ecstasy is mine with you—
I am parched earth—your song the
dew!
—Beatrice Irwin.

Isn't we glad we have poets to interpret the moods of trees for us?

VIGNETTE

The Birch is a bride, this year,
In a white dress, going to church,
With a green lace veil thrown over
her hair,
Seeing the Birch a bride, this
June,
Wind and Sun gave her silver,
—Dorothy Seibel.

And now just we forget in our

YOUNG BEAUTY

The stolen tassels of the co
turn dark with its maturit
Can Beauty in itself adorn
And fully grasp Eternity?
—J. E. Ell

Like the Japanese, Gr
Guthrie sees a friend in
each bird's creature:

TO A SPARROW

Welcome, small bird,
At window ledge
Lures you at last
From your dull hedge,
We should be friends:
Your dress is gray,
Your sharp eyes lit
With yesterday,
And neither has
A throat that sings.
But ah! you shame me—
You have wings.
—Grace F. Guthrie

James Neil North, ed
Schubert, has added a
Sixty verse form in the Cl
to the practice of poets.
By Mrs. Hutton won first
Mr. North's recent contest

LUXURIES

Dew
On grass
Is like song
Down a quiet
Hour,
—Anne Phillips Hal

Perhaps Francis Smythe
Beach finds the answer
question of Life in ships a
sea.

Don't trim your sails
In every breeze that blow
But set your sails
To the wind God knows,
For should a storm
With suddenness descend
Furrow will form
The course your ship will
Take you to know

The 1938 Bright Mosaic notice naming Francis and Dion O'Donnell as editors of Path of Beauty.

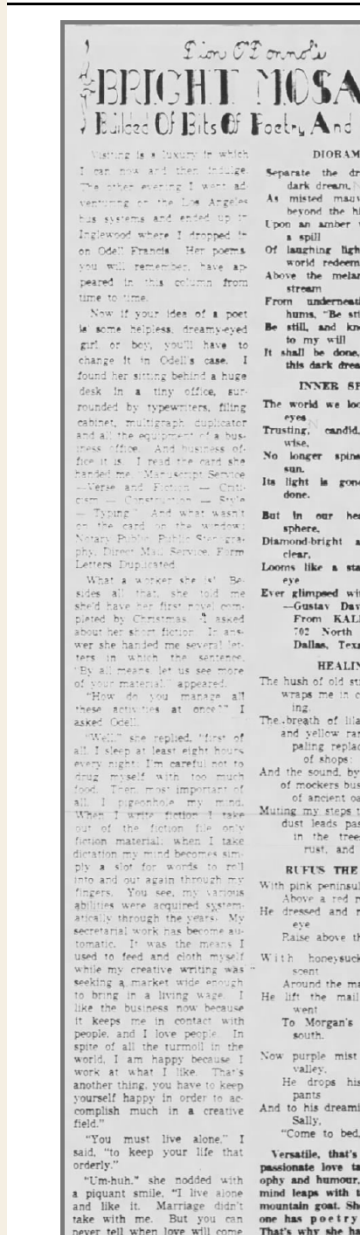
SERVICE FOR POETS

Odell Francis, one of most competent writers of acquaintance, is now offering at reasonable rates, what may be truly labeled, "Manuscript Service."

A writer, producing stories, poems and articles that are widely published, she offers without hokum or humbug criticism of fiction and verse. Her experience as a newspaper woman and magazine editor assures an honest evaluation of your work, for construction and style, with an eye to market needs.

If your stories or poems are completed and in need of typing, Miss Francis has a staff of assistants who will prepare the manuscript for the editor under her expert guidance. Her office is at 211 East Queen

Francis's manuscript service at 211 East Queen Street, Inglewood, offering criticism, market advice, and typing in 1940.



Dion O'Donnell's December 1940 workplace profile, the principal surviving first-person account of Francis.

Lines of Beauty

SMOKING FLAX, by Odell Francis; **WHEN THE WIND BLOW** by Emma Putnam Bancroft; both published by Wagon and Star Press, West Los Angeles; \$1.50 and \$2.

Two books of slight and graceful lyrics in handsome format come from the Wagon and Star Press. Slight—and so is a flower. Odell Francis is deft in the use of contrast and of the surprise ending and is capable of a delicate music. Emma Bancroft's work suggests frequently a word she uses in one of her titles "gossamer." These volumes don't say very much, but the

The Oakland Tribune notice of March 1, 1942, praising Francis's contrast, surprise endings, and delicate music.

INTRODUCTION

Song, work, small presses, and survival

Odell Francis moved between song, radio, newspaper columns, poetry clubs, editorial work, and the small office where secretarial labor financed her writing. A dramatic soprano in the Los Angeles Poetry and Music Club by 1930, she was publishing verse by 1933, winning club prizes, teaching prosody, and helping Dion O'Donnol run the magazine *Path of Beauty* before Wagon & Star issued *Smoking Flax* in 1941. Her poems can be witty about desire, marriage, and the roles assigned to women, then turn sharply toward machinery, aerial bombing, militarism, and Shanghai under assault. Their music is often delicate; their endings are not. This edition resets all forty-three poems in *Smoking Flax* and eleven newspaper poems not collected there. It follows the book's order and stanza structure, rejoins narrow-page hanging wraps, records four earlier newspaper appearances without duplicating their texts, and preserves mistaken printed bylines in the publication notes. The surviving evidence probably identifies the poet as Frances Odell Francis, but her birth, family, education, spouse, death, and later life remain unproved.

BIOGRAPHY

A life reconstructed from performances, newspapers, interviews, publications, and negative evidence

A name with a missing life record

Odell Francis's public career can be reconstructed in unusual detail between 1930 and 1942, but the ordinary anchors of a biography remain missing. No securely identified birth certificate, census household, school record, marriage document, divorce file, death certificate, obituary, burial record, or formal portrait has been located. Contemporary newspapers identify her as a woman, a singer, poet, editor, teacher, and business owner in the Los Angeles area. Three California voter-registration indexes—1932, 1938, and 1940—list a Mrs Frances Odell Francis in Los Angeles. The exact name, place, and sequence make that legal identity strongly probable, but the full register pages were not accessible and no independent vital record closes the chain. This edition therefore uses the literary name Odell Francis and describes Frances Odell Francis as probable rather than certain.

The forms of address in the newspapers supply a partial private history. A 1930 announcement calls her Mrs. Odell Francis. A 1940 business notice calls her Miss Francis, and in a longer interview that December she said, “Marriage didn’t take with me,” adding that she lived alone and liked it. These statements establish an earlier marriage at the level of her own testimony, but they do not name a spouse, date the union, prove a divorce, or identify children. Poems about wives, mothers, lovers, and estranged couples become more resonant beside that testimony, yet their speakers cannot be treated as direct documentary confession.

Several tempting identities have been rejected. A male Air Force warrant officer named Odell Francis died near Cleburne, Texas, in 1953; he is not the poet. A much later Newport Beach name and Social Security results for unrelated people also fail the required combination of gender, place, age, and career. A 1936 directory note for “O Francis” at 1022 South Oxford Avenue in

Los Angeles remains only probable. It may become useful if the voter-register pages reveal the same address, but an initial and common surname are not enough on their own.

The dramatic soprano

Francis first enters the securely dated record through music rather than print. Notices in February and March 1930 connect her with the Poetry and Music Club, a Los Angeles organization founded in 1926 by Ella Bacon Balsley to cultivate members' talents through performance, discussion, and contests. On March 17 the *Los Angeles Evening Citizen News* announced Mrs. Odell Francis as a dramatic soprano. Two days later the *Los Angeles Times* listed her on a program at the May Company Exposition Hall alongside concert pianist Andree Knowles, actor Frederick Vroom, impresario L. E. Behymer, and a speaker discussing Shakespeare and philosophy. The billing implies an accomplished public voice, although no conservatory, vocal teacher, degree, or repertory has been identified.

The musical record matters because Francis's poetry remained designed for the ear. Rhyme, refrain, internal echo, short stanzas, and emphatic cadence organize much of *Smoking Flax*. In 1938 she gave a club discussion titled "Euphony and Cacophony of Poetry," making explicit the concern with agreeable and abrasive sound that readers can hear throughout the book. Her career did not move simply from singer to poet; performance, recitation, broadcast, and print occupied the same civic arts world.

First poems and Los Angeles literary networks

The earliest located poem is "Tranquillity," published in the *Los Angeles Times* on January 22, 1933 under the mistaken byline "O'Dell Francis." Its filigree leaves, dripping water, golden fish, dragonfly, and mossy banks create a restorative enclosure, while the closing stanzas name nature as an anodyne whose psalm enters the spirit. The poem already joins visual delicacy to recovery, a pairing that becomes central to the 1941 book.

Francis's visibility increased sharply in 1937 and 1938. The Poetry and Music Club awarded her contest recognition in June 1937 and again in June 1938, when she received a small cash prize in sonnet or lyric divisions. Club notices place her among a women-rich network that included Edytho Skaer, Jessie

Allen Siple, Elizabeth Gorlick, Winifred Burton Paul, Grace Jennings Peabody, Corinne Arthur, and Eva Ashley Parslow. These civic clubs, newspaper columns, homes, bookstores, and broadcast studios formed an important literary infrastructure outside universities and nationally branded magazines.

Radio extended that infrastructure. Byron Dunham conducted a weekday poets' program on station KFVD and edited the magazine *Ariel*. A June 1937 report describes Francis among the well-known "radio poets" present at a studio gathering associated with Dunham. The notice does not preserve a script, broadcast date, or recording of her own work, so it cannot establish exactly what she read. It does establish that she was recognizable within Southern California's broadcast-poetry community, where vocal presence and print reputation reinforced each other.

Dion O'Donnol, *Path of Beauty*, and collaborative editing

By 1938 Francis was working closely with Dion O'Donnol, the literary name of Arthur Francis Faulconer. O'Donnol founded Wagon & Star and edited *Path of Beauty: The International Poetry Paper*. Newspaper headers in June name O'Donnol and Francis as editors and as the compilers of "Bright Mosaic," a weekly feature in the *West Los Angeles Independent*. The surviving columns mix poems, news of poets, publications, and editorial promotion. Francis was therefore not only a contributor but one of the people selecting, arranging, and circulating other writers' work.

With O'Donnol and Eugene Phillips she also compiled *Winged Cargoes*, a slender 1938 anthology drawn from the first six months of *Path of Beauty*. A notice in the *Oakland Tribune* on August 14 named all three compilers, praised the poems as fine in quality, and said they shared the love of beauty suggested by the parent magazine's title. A complete copy has not been recovered, and Francis's exact editorial tenure on the magazine remains uncertain, but the contemporary evidence makes her collaboration substantive: weekly compilation, anthology selection, editorial credit, business promotion, and ultimately publication of her own book by O'Donnol's press.

This work belongs to a regional system often missed by literary histories. Small presses and poetry papers could serve at once as editorial workshop, social network, advertising platform, reading series, and market. Francis's place

in that system helps explain both her productivity and the uneven survival of her archive. The newspaper record preserves public traces; the magazine files, correspondence, contracts, and office papers that might explain the collaboration have not yet been located.

Newspaper poems and the political weather

At least fifteen Francis poems appeared in Los Angeles-area newspapers between 1933 and 1940. Eleven are not in *Smoking Flax*: “Tranquillity,” “Disillusionment,” “After the Storm,” “To a Floor Lamp,” “Night Message,” “Warning,” “Oh for a Talisman!,” “Definition,” “Defiling Wings,” “Begin the Lockstep of Peace,” and “In the Maw of the Beast.” Four others—“Ah Woman,” “Love Is a Peddler,” “Civilization,” and “Healing”—later entered the book. The 1938 *Daily News* group moves between satire, courtship, memory, philosophical epigram, and formal experiment. The later *West Los Angeles Independent* poems enlarge the political range of her work.

“Defiling Wings” turns the aircraft from an emblem of flight into a bearer of bombs and “hidden death.” “Begin the Lockstep of Peace” attacks the martial drumbeat that can drug sane people into organized killing; its deliberately ugly images of emptied brains, swill water, decoy pits, and “mule-men” oppose regimentation to beauty and independent thought. “In the Maw of the Beast” addresses Shanghai as a cosmopolitan Circe whose cafés, dance salons, polyglot pleasures, and jeweled surfaces are being devoured by war and greed. These poems do not prove a party affiliation, but they establish a consistent opposition to militarism, mechanized violence, and imperial destruction before the United States entered the Second World War.

Francis’s political attention should not be separated from her poems about gender and work. “Civilization” imagines human beings weaving the net that later traps them. “Oh, Machine Man” asks tightly wound minds and satyric souls to redirect technical power toward justice and healing. The poems distinguish machines that extend humane labor from systems that turn people into mechanisms—a distinction sharpened by Francis’s own daily dependence on typewriters, dictation, filing, and duplication equipment.

The Inglewood office and a writer's working life

By August 1940 Francis had converted literary experience into a business. A notice in the *West Los Angeles Independent* advertised a manuscript service at 211 East Queen Street in Inglewood. It offered candid criticism of fiction and verse, attention to construction and style, market-oriented advice, and typing by assistants. The item credited Miss Francis as an experienced newspaper woman and magazine editor. The office joined several kinds of labor usually separated in author biographies: composition, editing, instruction, secretarial work, mechanical preparation, and the practical brokerage required to send writing into the marketplace.

O'Donnol's long profile of December 6, 1940 is the richest surviving account by someone who knew her. He described Francis behind a large desk in a tiny office crowded by typewriters, a filing cabinet, and duplicating equipment. She said that years of systematic secretarial work had fed and clothed her while she sought a market broad enough for creative writing to pay a living wage. She could dictate fiction and handle office processes almost automatically. Far from presenting business as the enemy of art, she said she enjoyed its contact with people and believed that happiness helped creative accomplishment.

The profile also records projects that have disappeared. Francis displayed encouraging editorial letters concerning short fiction and expected to finish her first novel by Christmas. She had compiled a compact, inexpensive correspondence course in verse writing. No title, manuscript, lesson sheet, prospectus, enrollment list, copyright registration, or verified story publication has been recovered. Their absence makes the interview doubly valuable: it documents ambitions and forms of professional writing that her surviving poetry book alone would never reveal.

Francis told O'Donnol that she lived alone, liked the arrangement, and regarded her unsuccessful marriage without self-pity. She remained open to love and described herself as riding lightly on life, ready for the next event. Because O'Donnol was a collaborator and soon her publisher, the profile is promotional as well as intimate. Even so, its physical details and direct statements give the clearest view of Francis at work: disciplined, socially engaged, commercially practical, and unwilling to accept the stereotype of the helpless dreamer-poet.

Smoking Flax

Wagon & Star published *Smoking Flax* in West Los Angeles in 1941. The title page gives the press address as 1823 Sawtelle Boulevard; that is not evidence of Francis's residence. The copyright page states "First Printing." The book contains forty-three poems on pages 11 through 53, one poem per page, with no named internal divisions. Its biblical title alludes to Matthew's bruised reed and smoking flax, an image of threatened life that will not be extinguished. References to Laodicea, prayer, miracle, God, altars, and psalters show wide biblical literacy, but no evidence identifies Francis with a particular denomination.

The collection repeatedly moves through injury rather than around it. "From This Pain" imagines poetry budding from anguish. "Scar Tissue," "Recovery," "Healing," and "Unvanquished" make survival an altered texture, not a restoration of innocence. Love is a peddler, a mirror, a barrier, a wage, a tangle of jewels, and a discipline in letting go. "Ah Woman!," "Prop Woman," "Modern Mother's Prayer," "Ever Eve," "Mr. and Mrs.," "Wailing Wall," and "We Are the Weepers" test the roles assigned to women without resolving them into a single program. Desire can be comic, engulfing, bruising, maternal, or self-correcting.

Color and motion are among Francis's strongest resources: malachite peaks, mauve tulle, amber light, cerise mysteries, indigo sleep, the blue curve of water, the purple pool of dreams. Nature is rarely static decoration. Wind taps a citadel, snow pipes a fantasia, ocean light dissolves the self, and old streets wrap the speaker in blue veiling. These sensuous surfaces coexist with abrupt reversals. An adorned floor lamp blocks the light it should provide; modern sophistication collapses under a mother's gaze; civilization's patient weaving becomes entrapment. A 1942 reviewer's praise of contrast, surprise endings, and "delicate music" accurately names the collection's preferred devices.

The book is also evidence of Francis's editorial control. Its compact typography allows complete lyrics to stand as individual encounters, while the sequence moves from immediate pain through sexual and social roles, mechanized modernity, spiritual travel, and renewed perspective. This edition preserves that order. Four poems have earlier newspaper witnesses; their prior dates and venues are recorded at the book texts rather than reproduced as duplicate versions because no substantive verbal variants were located.

Reception, disappearance, and the archive

The *Oakland Tribune* reviewed *Smoking Flax* on March 1, 1942 beside Emma Putnam Bancroft's *When Wind Blows*, another Wagon & Star title. The notice called both books "slight and graceful" without using slightness as dismissal, praised their handsome format, and singled out Francis's contrast, surprise endings, and delicate music. It also gave the price as \$1.50. Apart from O'Donnol's promotional profile and the earlier *Winged Cargoes* notice, no national review, obituary assessment, academic essay, or sustained later criticism has been located.

An inherited project note once attributed a comment on Francis and O'Donnol to Alan Swallow's "A Review of Some Current Poetry" in *New Mexico Quarterly* 14.4 (1944). The complete five-page article was downloaded, OCRed, and checked. It does not mention Francis, *Smoking Flax*, O'Donnol, or Wagon & Star. It remains in the research folder as a negative audit witness and is not used as reception evidence.

No event after the 1942 review has been securely attached to the poet. That silence may reflect remarriage and a surname change, migration, illness, withdrawal from publication, lost small-press records, or simply the failures of digitization; the evidence does not choose among them. Searches of exact names, institutional catalogs, HathiTrust, Internet Archive, public web indexes, newspaper references, and renewal tables did not establish a later life. Future research should begin with the full voter pages, then trace their addresses through directories and the 1930 and 1940 censuses before searching marriage, divorce, death, probate, Social Security, or cemetery records.

The survival pattern is itself part of Francis's history. One complete book scan, fifteen poem clippings, club notices, advertisements, two brief reviews, and one collaborator's profile preserve a substantial career while leaving the woman's origins and ending unknown. The recovered record shows a poet whose literary work depended on performance, women's clubs, radio, newspapers, small presses, secretarial labor, teaching, and friendship. Treating those structures as central rather than incidental restores both Francis and the culture in which her poems moved.

EDITORIAL NOTE AND SOURCES

Scope, witnesses, and the limits of the recovered corpus

This is a reset critical reading edition, not a facsimile. It includes the complete forty-three-poem text of *Smoking Flax* in original order and eleven located newspaper poems not collected there. Each poem begins on a new page. The book's stanza structure, capitalization, punctuation, and meaningful indentation are retained. Narrow-page hanging wraps and divided words have been rejoined, obvious spacing damage has been removed, and unusual source spellings are preserved and noted. Publication apparatus follows every poem.

Four poems in the book appeared earlier in newspapers: "Ah Woman," "Love Is a Peddler," "Civilization," and "Healing." No substantive verbal variants were established, so the newspaper texts are documented at their book appearances instead of being duplicated. Mistaken bylines—O'Dell Francis for "Tranquillity" and Odell Frances for "Defiling Wings"—remain visible in the notes. The newspaper section is chronological.

The source book is a complete HathiTrust scan designated public domain. Relevant official renewal tables were downloaded and searched for the periodical contributions; no Francis match was located. Copies of the complete scan, all newspaper clipping PDFs, enhanced transcription witnesses, renewal tables, online snapshot, research dossier, and negative audit material are retained in the poet folder.

SMOKING FLAX

The complete 1941 Wagon & Star collection, in original order

From This Pain

If upon this hour of anguish
Poetry buds a crimson flower,
I shall neither weep nor languish
 For my plundered tower.
I recall the legend-story . . .
Lilies bloomed on Aaron's rod,
Giving of their toilless glory,
 As a sign from God.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (Wagon & Star, 1941), 11.

Mirrors

Curving up from velvet,
Petal throat and face,
Like a lotus lily
In an ebony vase.
Ripe her mouth from kissing,
Parted still for sighs;
Hunger in the glowing
Of her amber eyes.
“You are now a woman,”
Plainly mirror said,
Approving Paula’s auburn
Sophisticated head.

Mother’s eyes reduced her
As she crossed the floor
To a little girl
In a pinafore.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 12.

April Anagrams

A is for anemone,
 wearing her turned-up hat;
P begins a pansy, tender
 aristocrat;
R brings in ranunculus
 with bright frivolity;
I stands tall in iris,
 nodding graciously;
L lulls me with lilac,
 but only on my cravat!

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 13. The printed “L lulls” is reset with normal word spacing.

Fury of Youth

Life laid a cooling spray upon her cheeks
As ankle-deep she stood in veils of sea;
Her hungry gaze reached out to distant peaks
Of malachite that promised mystery.
“Oh Life,” she cried, “carry me far on hills
Of foaming, swirling fury. Let me sink
In coils of weed until my breathing stills.
Pour out a briny cup for me to drink.
These feeble breakers plucking at my knees;
This dream-inducing warmth of sun that stains
My teen-age flesh to bronze cannot appease
The greed for living in my swollen veins.
My eager tongue would taste some agony,
Oh Life, before an hour passes me!”

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 14.

Minors

May I not see the tipping
Of poplars in the breeze
And miss the willow's dripping
In lilac evening haze.

Let me not drink perfume
In jonquil's yellow cup
And turn from scentless plume
Of bougainvillia drape.

Oh may I not hear only
The flicker's morning call,
But know the low and lonely
Cry of a widowed quail.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 15.

How Long?

Too long this tardy chrysalis
 Is bringing me to birth,
Confining in a web of flesh
 My eager soul to earth!
Too long my love is but a tongue
 Of flame within a globe . . .
Blow flame! Lick up! Burn flight for me
 From this defeating robe.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 16. The source's narrow hanging wrap in line seven is rejoined.

Query

Willow, with wind in your hair,
 Thrumming
Muted tunes on your lyre;
 Crooning
Medleys of song as you dip
 Vining
Limbs in the lake's emerald lap,
Why do they say you weep?

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 17.

Prop Woman

Evening sets a purple screen
Around the mountain, and floods
With silver light the darkened scene,
Tipping the sage with orchid buds.

She crumples a crimson chiffon cover
Upon the earth's far space
While the tardy moon, her foppish lover,
Scours with clouds his golden face.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 18.

Come With a Saraband

Evening flows above the hills

Trailing ivory gauze;

Wanting her in fuschia veils

I have no applause.

Milk-white is her spindrift hair

Pinned with platinum;

Fingers cupping vestal fire

For my delirium.

Longing for a saraband

I hear her litany . . .

Virgin, breathe a jasmine wind

To cool the soul of me.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 19. The source spelling “fuschia” is retained.

Ah Woman!

I am a pool
within whose depths
is satin cool.
I am for quaffing
joy-filled drams
to start your laughing.
You may preen
reflected in
my mirror-sheen,
until you think
that I am you
while you sink—sink—

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 20. Earlier appearance: “Ah Woman,” *Daily News*, April 25, 1938.

Refuge of Lies

Her body is puffed with gluttonous feeding
On cake and meat and wine;
Her eyes austere from constant heeding
To toe her thoughts to the moral line.

Smiling is lost to the pallid crescent
That curves above a flabby chin;
Her lifted nostril knows putrescent
People live in open sin.

She drinks a brew of self-delusion
Since Obadiah's kind decease;
A brew of lies that forms occlusion
For righteousness and bitter peace.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 21.

Less of Sophistry

Boasting brain of man
Used to deep chicane
Cannot shape his span
Of life in as true design
As, tracing on my window screen,
This senseless ivy vine.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 22.

Maturity

Reaching man requires
Mauve tulle entwined
In eucalyptus spires
To lift his mind;
Ears tuned to spiral fluting
In curfew hours
And wind's warm lullaby luting
Through white moon-flowers.

Dull to "aum" of silence
Over carved dunes,
Walled in sullen defiance
Of jasmine Junes,
He is more than old,
He is dead
If his soul can only hold
Beer and bread.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 23.

Observations

Fleet road-runner, earth-bound,
Nesting in cactus thorns—
Never her joyous mirth sound—
Dusty air adorns.

Is it her old brown dress,
Worn with meager wings,
Or her wariness
That she never sings?

Tanager in frills,
Wings to lift him high,
Sends his flute-like trills
Laughing down the sky.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 24.

Oh, Machine Man

Streamline the heart for laughter
Men with your harnessed hour;
Delve the white reservoir
For healing power.

Cut through the wide blue void
To peer the pits of craters,
Robots with tight-wound minds
And the souls of satyrs.

Form thought into tone and rhythm,
Pattern in brick and dust,
Cry through leagues of ether
“Be just! Be just!”

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 25.

Civilization

Pygmies with dream-burnished eyes,
plaiting, knotting, entwining,
weaving—weaving a net,
the mesh no larger than
a hand can push through . . .

Decades, eras, aeons and the pygmies
sit weaving, interlacing, intertwining . . .

Pygmies with terror-glazed eyes
struggling in a net,
reaching vain hands through the mesh
to the wind's free blowing
and the high stars!

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 26. Earlier appearance: *Daily News*, August 25, 1938.

Brave Dreams

Brave dreams of the young!
Pep talks to sell him life
So that his blood will beat a rhumba rhythm
over a painted mouth
and the curve of a hip.

His eyes will flame
at the feel of baby tendrils
coiling on his forefinger . . .

Brave dreams for his young
until, bent and weary-etched of face,
he sees one more fear-sodden soul
added to the millions of the mob.

And still he has the slender consolation
of a beer,
 a rose,
 a star.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 27.

Proverb

Blithely he watched the myrtle of love
Tree in his waking heart.
Wreathing the leaves on his amber hair,
He saw white petals part.

With perfume from the foliage pulp
He laved his bouyant brain
And crushed the berries in his mouth
To feed his love again.

At last the tree had ceased to grow;
The scent had lost its thrill
And on his tongue the berry taste
Only made him ill.

He flung the aromatic fruit
In handfuls far and wide.
A seed caught in another heart
And lured it to his side.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 28. The source spelling “bouyant” is retained.

To Walk My Dream

Now that hands and wills and the lash
have given me a semblance of maturity,
help me, Oh God, to learn obedience.
Help me to strip from my soul
the drab garmets of shame
and fear which the little creeds
of men have dressed me in.
I will reclothe this me
in a silken cocoon of silence,
until it has grown muscled thought
to stand against the horde
of petty dictators;
until it has found its birthright:
the privilege to walk its own dream.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 29. The source spellings “Oh” and “garmets” are retained; the final narrow wrap is rejoined.

Scar Tissue

Her face: a mask of darkened lashes,
Eyebrows plucked to a thin curved line;
(Feverish eyes like onyx glitter)
Her cheeks the dead white of hickory ashes;
Vermilion lips, distorted, bitter,
As if on her tongue was the taste of brine.
Electric, enamelled, tweezered and varnished;
Moulded in velvet the color of brass;
Starved to a bony, slithering slenderness.
(The bands on her wrist were still untarnished).
Then I heard a note of exquisite tenderness
In her mothering croon to a tiny lass.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 30.

Love Is a Peddler

Love is chiming at my door,
Hush, my heart, we'll not be in;
He has the same old wares to sell:
A taffy curl, a dimpled chin.
No, no, be still, there's nothing free,
Perhaps his kisses would be nice—
“We'll measure, weigh, and bargain long?”
Well, heart, you'll have to pay the price!

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 31. Earlier appearance: *Daily News*, May 16, 1938.

Recovery

As twilight sets an early candle in
the darkened sky you bring me quiet hope.
With threads of trust you teach me how to spin
the fabric of a tranquil envelope.
Your gentle going leaves no ravelled edge
of discontent. My faith requires no thong
of promise you will come again to fledge
each dusk with wings; to loose my fettered song.
The rainbow afterglow of you redeems
our parting from the anguish of goodbye.
You waft a lullaby of rose-leaf dreams
around the bed of faith on which I lie;
as tenderly the sun prolongs his stay
to sprinkle rose leaves on the couch of day.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 32. Narrow hanging wraps are rejoined.

You Gave Me Jewels

Tiny carved green pins
Of jealousy and rage;
A rope of crystal tears,
This was my wifely wage . . .
Pain in ruby drops
After a night of flasks
And on my wrists a chain
Of weary, weary tasks.

And multi-colored trinkets
Of complimentary lies . . .
But then, you gave me sapphires
For Baby's infant eyes.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 33.

Modern Mother's Prayer

Supply him, Lord, with ample nerve to sin,
Lest chained desire make thought too frail and thin
To reach beyond his door, and he become
A robot mincing to the creedal din.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 34.

Laodicea

Rhododendron, white
upon the blue rondure of sky,
like a bride
secure on her wedding night.

Rhododendron, chaste
in the passion of sunrise,
like a wife
untouched by the glow of life.

Rhododendron, still white
on the curve of night.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 35.

Go Wind

In the curl of a calla lily
 I see your cheek
And my yearning dreams wait stilly
 For you to speak.
From the gold-brown face of a pansy
 Your eyes look up
And again I taste tears of tansy
 On your mouth's red cup.
Softly tap on her citadel,
 O wing-shoed wind;
With my kiss make her know "farewell"
 A word to rescind.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 36.

Forty Love

Lush with lyric living,
In gown of red and gold,
Her hair entwined with asters,
Autumn's benignly bold.

At the peak of life's crescendo,
Pungent, bronze and mellow,
October bows circean
Strains upon his cello.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 37.

Reflections

I smirked back from the mirror of me
Until, in boredom, I wanted me slain,
Like the sparrow darting viciously
At his shadow on the window pane.
So I turned to give a glance at you . . .
For an hour I lost satiety—
And then, at last looking back, I knew
Your face had filled the mirror of me.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 38.

Mr. and Mrs.

In a circle of foxfire
She threaded her nest;
On a dogwood young Cardinal
Burnished his crest.

With a gleam in her eye
She reminded, “Cheer, cheer!”
And wise Cardinal murmured,
“My dear, Oh my dear.”

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 39.

Wailing Wall

“These twain shall be one flesh.”
I know I heard him speak those words.
And yet, there is no merging!
This wall between, I thresh
With fingers, vain as pecking birds.
My eager blood is surging
Up to meet his call,
Only to break on joy unmet;
Only to know this verging
On love’s tiptoeing all.
Am I to learn that I am set
Beneath the star-eyes’ winking
Alone to grow the wings I need,
Alone to shape a living creed
Out of my hermit thinking?

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 40. Narrow hanging wraps are rejoined.

We Are the Weepers

Slabs of wan light rafter
the weird, vaporous sky.
Combined, weary sigh
of a million sleepers
thickens the midnight air
of the city street.
Acrid loneliness is in my throat,
drained of laughter.
Minutes ago my enraptured feet
patterned the lace of singing strings
on a gleaming floor . . .
We are the weepers
who wear the winding-sheet
of early morning chill
beneath our satin things.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 41. A local snapshot of the PoetryExplorer transcription is retained as a secondary witness.

Miracle

An hour and an hour
And this passionate flare
Is a tender finger
Of lazuli fire.
A day and a day
Leaves my fury of flame
Curling blue on my brain—
Philosopheme!

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 42.

Ever Eve

Somnus poured his poppy brew
A spoon, a cup, a purple stream—
To ease my waking ache for you.

His wife, with greater wisdom, spun
A silk cocoon to make us one
In the living silence of a dream.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 43.

Gray Walls of Peace

A prodigality of love was mine
When standing tiptoe on the hill's green crest,
The wings of hope unbent by any test
Greater than weariness at vespertine.

Where on the valley road was my love lost?
How stealthily my hope's proud wings have failed!
I will turn back and these worn feet outpace
The seeping languor that is age's cost.
I were a fool, indeed, to stay thus jailed
Behind gray walls with songless, bitter peace.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 44.

To the Land of Nebulae

Yonder is the purple pool of sleep,
 Shrinking, shrinking,
While a slow hour wafts me,
Weaving through the sapphire field's white sheep.
Under me, my temple's ruined heap,
 Sinking, sinking,
While a slow hour drifts me
Over broken founts, my fallen altar,
Over candle ends, a mildewed psalter.
 Sailing, sailing
High above, it shafts me
On a column that surmounts habitual
Narrow peace of measured ritual . . .
 Trailing, trailing
Vapour, slow hour sifts me
Through spindrift to the purple pool of sleep.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 45. Narrow hanging wraps are rejoined.

Choose One Dream

Spirit of me, enough of wanderlust!
Select one dream to ride and it will grow
The wings of seraphim and overflow
Your boundaries of brick and patterned dust.
Fondle a dream with wings and it will thrust
You over vapour hills like mounded snow
On high Olympus where immortals go
To join the company of the august.

Give up your dancing dreams with only feet
To run the gay sad earth, when one has wings
To carry you along the ether street
Of red and mauve to heaven's openings
And down star-tapered vistas to the Seat
Of nephilim beside their healing springs.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 46.

Dance of the Snow

Whirling in fairy fantasia
White notes drift from the moon,
Piping earth euthanasia,
Feathery snow-flake boon.

Fluted down our ether lane,
Rhythm of star-dew afloat—
Even my elecampane
Catches the song in her throat.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 47.

Ocean Beyondness

Some haloed wraith am I
adrift on molten silver;
trapped in amber filigree
spilled by the wanton sun.
Wearing your evening nimbus,
knowing your high
white beyondness, O Ocean,
need I remember to remember
“Streets of Gold”?

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 48.

Blue Motion

Rhythm of blue curves
rising, breaking,
like a symphonic motif
repeating,
making rondures of blue ether
on my cheek,
on my heart.
And rhythm of peace
like the indigo curve
of evening,
of sleep.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 49.

Again to Learn

Learn, my heart,
to gather your flame
into a lidded urn;
to let it glow evenly
for other souls to warm by.

Content yourself, my heart,
that worship belongs to deity;
laughter only belongs to men,
and laughter that is full and rich
is enough.

Tones of laughter like petals
falling back on the flame
in your urn.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 50. Narrow hanging wraps are rejoined.

Healing

The hush of old streets at dusk
wraps me in cool blue veiling.
The breath of lilac and musk
and yellow rambler on the paling
replaces the smell of shops;
and the sound, by lyric fluting
of mockers, busy in the tops
of ancient oaks. Muting
my steps the cushioned dust
leads past old homes in the trees,
rich with rust,
and memories.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 51. Earlier appearance with O'Donnol's profile, *West Los Angeles Independent*, December 6, 1940.

Unvanquished

I am content to wait;
to dream of vanished days;
to roll upon my tongue
the bitter taste of frustration;
to watch the last burning ruby
in the ashes of my joy-of-life . . .

Yes, content to sit—
at last, time to sit and think;
to let the miracle of vision
leap past the lace of ocean waves
to far rippled malachite;
and dive into cerise mysteries
of sunset and then creep back
up the cerulean sky
which I am told will part
at the rap of me,
released from this—
this that sits and waits.

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 52. Narrow hanging wraps are rejoined.

Diorama

Separate the drapes of this dark dream,
As misted mauve that parts beyond the hill
Upon an amber view and lets a spill
Of laughing light the dreary world redeem.
Above the melancholy hill a stream
From underneath the altar hums, "Be still,
Be still, and know according to my will
It shall be done, be done to this dark dream."

Publication. *Smoking Flax* (1941), 53.

NEWSPAPER POEMS

Eleven located poems not collected in the 1941 book

Tranquillity

Filigree awning of shimmering leaves;
Water's rhythmic dripping;
Mossy velvet banks; a pool
That nimble bugs are skipping.

Golden fish through shadow lace,
Diving, darting, playing;
Dragon fly on a lily leaf,
Napping, dreaming, swaying.

Thank God for Nature's anodyne
Around my body creeping;
The restful measure of her psalm
Into my spirit seeping!

Publication. *Los Angeles Times*, January 22, 1933, 78. Printed under the mistaken byline O'Dell Francis.

Disillusionment

Custom gave me Life,
Corsetted and frilled,
As a nineteenth century wife.

Now, unbustled and unstayed,
Life, in her nakedness,
Is beautifully made!

Publication. *Daily News*, February 25, 1938, 25.

After the Storm

O Rose, your frills are rumpled,
Speckled with tears and crumpled!

Reaching your lips to be kissed
By rowdying rain you have missed
The jewel your budded sister
Obtained before he kissed her.

Publication. *Daily News*, March 3, 1938, 10.

To a Floor Lamp

Your gaudy dress is cumbersome with beads
And tinsel braid. Your crimson underskirt
Barely conceals your meager bones. You flirt,
You have no care for my dim-sighted needs.

Coquettishly you stand, a wheedling vamp,
Content that outward finery subvert
The light that I intend to be a lamp!

Publication. *Daily News*, April 16, 1938, 10.

Night Message

That night was a tapestry, vivid and rare,
And into my memory I pieced it,
Unfolding it now with immeasurable care—
I find mistrust has defaced it.
Little doubts like moths
That nibble woolen cloths!

I will send it to you in time for repair,
Before my doubts have effaced it.

Publication. *Daily News*, June 2, 1938, 25.

Warning

Marie, curve up your lips!
And shun those later yearning sighs.
Of no effect are witty quips
Unless you curve your lips.
Granting the spell of swaying hips
In fitted skirts, I warn, be wise,
Marie, curve up your lips
And shun those later yearning sighs.

Publication. *Daily News*, June 17, 1938, 12.

Oh for a Talisman!

Cut the ruby cords of desire
That bind my feet to ways
Too narrow. Wind is thrumming his lyre,
I'll dance to the tune he plays.

Tonight a broken amber bead
Lies on the hillock's breast;
It may be the talisman I need
To break this spell of unrest.

So bring the moon from rounded slopes—
It lies like a half-blown balloon.
But wait! I need these ruby ropes,
I'm crying again for the moon!

Publication. *Daily News*, July 7, 1938, 22.

Definition

Life is a tingle of bursting seeds;
Life is a bungle of noisy creeds;
And maybe a mangle of warring greeds!

Some live to ladle a brew too strong;
Some live to dawdle the whole day long;
But I live to fiddle a spiral song!

Publication. *Daily News*, July 21, 1938, 8.

Defiling Wings

Wings were meant to soar
In cerulean space,
Or drift through cool auroras
For the soul's grace.

What fiend has made them bear
Bombs to throw,
Spherules of hidden death?
On men below?

Publication. *West Los Angeles Independent*, November 11, 1938, 4. Printed under the mistaken byline Odell Frances.

Begin the Lockstep of Peace

Need the drumming tread of marching feet,
Quickening tranquil breath,
Be so cunning in its drugging beat
To lure sane men to death?

Squeeze your wakened brains of old race-rhythm,
Like swill-water from a sponge.
What if in doing you make a schism
So wide mule-men will plunge

Like voo-dooed swine in food-strewn decoy pits?
One half of men will soak
Their emptied brains in beauty that refits
Them for high hours beneath an oak.

Publication. *West Los Angeles Independent*, June 23, 1939, 4.

In the Maw of the Beast

Oh Shanghai, Circe of the East,
Your Babel song is ended.
No more your Babylonian feast
Will lure the wanton-handed.

Now your sequined Paris gown
Will drag the muddy Whangpoo,
Bathing your feet, deformed and brown.
Vainly your lips will long to
Sip red wine in sidewalk cafes.
Within your dance salon
No more will your almond-lidded gaze
Search for a blue-eyed man.

Sandals tracing polyglot measures
In the sheen of a black glass floor,
My Shanghai, of cosmopolitan pleasures,
With your blue-black scented hair.

Fangs of the ten-horned beast of greed
Have pierced your rhinestone way,
Leaving it to wind and tide.
Oh amber-fleshed, full-fed and gay,
Soon you'll be as dead to desire
As Nineveh and Tyre!

Publication. *West Los Angeles Independent*, October 27, 1939, 4.

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WORKS ABOUT ODELL FRANCIS

Contemporary notices, profiles, reviews, identity indexes, and research audits

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Program notice. *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1930. Lists Francis as dramatic soprano at May Company Exposition Hall.

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Radio-poets notice. *Daily Breeze*, June 28, 1937. Places Francis in the KFVD / Byron Dunham / *Ariel* network.

“Winged Cargoes.” *Oakland Tribune*, August 14, 1938. Favorable notice naming Francis as co-compiler.

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Stefans, Brian Kim. *Odell Francis: Exhaustive Biography, Bibliography, and Research Dossier*. Extremes 1, August 22, 2026.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Open sources, discovery routes, and preserved negative evidence

HathiTrust scan of Smoking Flax

Complete public-domain scan used as the base witness for the forty-three book poems.

PoetryExplorer: “We Are the Weepers”

A secondary online transcription checked against the book; the local HTML snapshot is retained.

University of New Mexico: Alan Swallow review

Complete article preserved to disprove an inherited attribution; it does not discuss Francis.

NYPL Copyright Renewal Data

Officially derived renewal tables searched for Francis’s 1933–40 periodical contributions; copies of all relevant years are retained.

HathiTrust Catalog search

Entry point for additional catalog and full-view searches under the literary name.

Internet Archive search

No additional creator or exact-title book match was located during the August 2026 audit.

WorldCat search

Library-catalog discovery route for future copies of *Winged Cargoes*, *Path of Beauty*, or unrecorded works.

TEXTUAL AND RIGHTS NOTE

What was reset, what remains unrecovered, and how status was checked

The book texts were checked against the complete HathiTrust page images of *Smoking Flax*, printed pages 11–53. The 1941 sequence and one-poem-per-page rhythm are preserved. Wrapping caused by the original narrow measure—including divided words and short hanging continuations—was regularized without changing intentional stanza divisions. Source spellings such as “fuschia,” “bouyant,” and “garmets” remain visible and are called out in the apparatus rather than silently modernized.

The eleven uncollected poems were transcribed from clipping images of the *Los Angeles Times*, *Daily News*, and *West Los Angeles Independent*. Image-only PDFs were rendered, enlarged, enhanced, OCRed in multiple modes, and then checked visually. Four additional clipping texts overlap the book and are treated as publication history. Newspaper names, dates, page numbers, and printed byline errors are recorded poem by poem.

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COLOPHON

Production record

This edition of *Smoking Flax and Other Poems* by Odell Francis was edited by Brian Kim Stefans and produced in Los Angeles in 2026 for *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*.

The page is six by nine inches. All interior pages use the series cream stock color. The text is set in EB Garamond, with mirrored margins, live typography, linked contents, PDF bookmarks, and publication apparatus following every work.

The cover resets the existing Francis collage into the Julia Boynton Green series structure; both the inherited artwork and the finished Green-format cover are preserved in the project's complete cover archive. All source scans, downloaded pages, research documents, renewal tables, transcription files, production code, and visual quality checks are retained in the poet folder.