



WILLIAM MACKAY CALDWELL

Pan's Reeds

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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Pan's Reeds

William Mackay Caldwell

A Critical Reading Edition

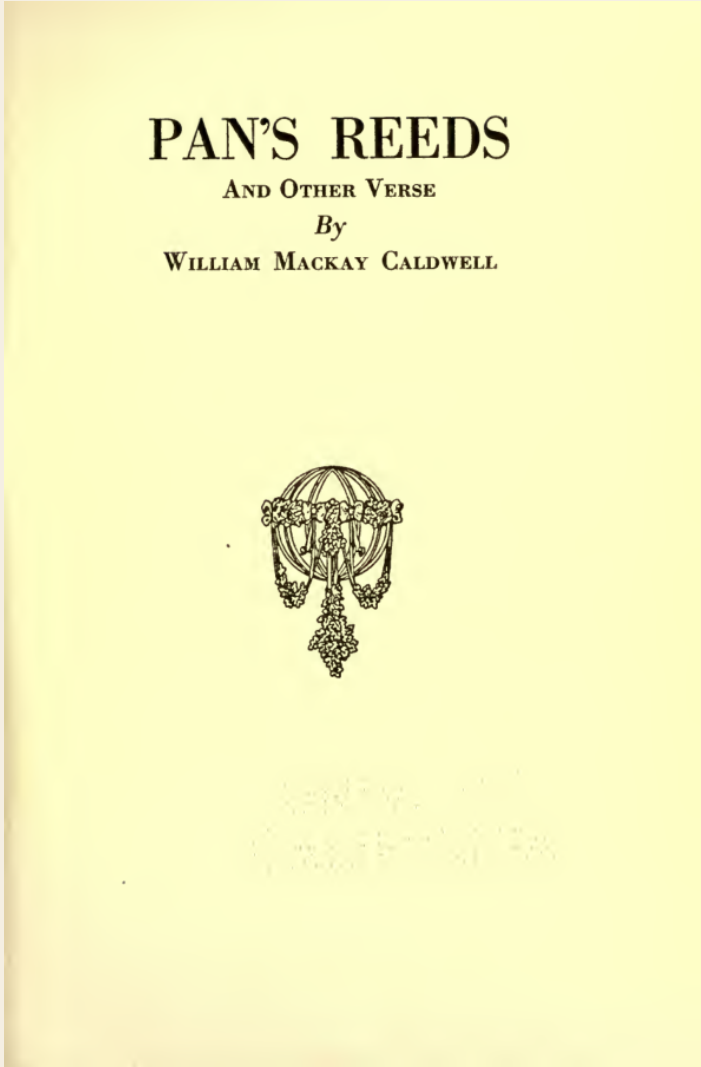
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Archival Images

A short selection from the source record



Title page or opening source witness for Pan's Reeds.

Editorial Note

This is a reset reading edition, not a facsimile. The text was transcribed from the source pages in the local archive and collated against available embedded text. Physical page wraps were rejoined only when the source showed that they were typographic continuations; stanza breaks, meaningful indentation, epigraphs, subtitles, speakers, and section headings were retained. Obvious scanning debris was removed without silently modernizing diction, spelling, or punctuation. Each poem or complete sequence ends with a source note in the established Green-volume form.

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Introduction

William Mackay Caldwell left one substantial book, and it is stranger and more varied than its pastoral title suggests. *Pan's Reeds* moves among sonnets, ballads, prayers, French and Latin titles, desert scenes, Japanese-themed lyrics, Christian imagery, and love poems, all issued from Los Angeles in 1915. Reliable facts about Caldwell's life remain scarce, so the edition does not build a personality out of guesswork. It lets the book supply the record: a formally ambitious Southern California volume whose old-world literary vocabulary repeatedly opens onto desert light and local landscape.

Biography

William Mackay Caldwell is securely identified as the author of *Pan's Reeds and Other Verse*, published in Los Angeles in 1915. Exact-name catalog records confirm the attribution and title, but no independently verified birth record, death record, obituary, or institutional archive has yet been linked to him.

The book itself is a substantial documentary record. It gathers sonnets, ballads, odes, dirges, prayers, and lyrics with French, Latin, Japanese, Christian, Southwestern, and romantic frames. Titles such as "The Prayer of Walpi," "Night of the Painted Sands," and "The Herd-Boy of Lacuna" place imagined and observed landscapes beside inherited European forms.

Because the name is not distinctive enough to support a safe identification from directories alone, this edition leaves Caldwell's dates open. Future research should concentrate on the Los Angeles imprint, copyright entry, city directories around 1915, and any dedicatory or ownership evidence in surviving copies. The absence of a conventional biography should not obscure the scale and formal range of the book he left.

Pan's Reeds

Stage 1 | 1915

The complete recoverable poetry text of the 1915 collection, reset from the source pages.

Pan's Reeds

Pan has fallen now. Across the sky
Two nestward doves, touched with the afterglow;
A rush-grown stream breaking its melody
To play around a nymph's soft limbs: and lo!
Where the myrrh-meadows amaranthine lie,
Pan with his reeds, his jolly cheeks a-blow.

Mellow the hills. A disc of golden frost,
The slow moon mounting through a coronal
Of olives, now in amber clouds is lost,
Now breaks to draw a circled interval
About an oak, against whose gnarled trunk mossed
Leans Pan, cross-legged, imperturbable.

Pan, with his satyr hooves and pointed ears,
His weazened face, and wicked little eye,
Eld with the evil of a thousand years—
Ah me! so soon as his soft threnody
She lists, forgot will be her wild, shy fears
In the sweet strains he plays so leisurely.

Hark to their throbbing! how their silver melts
In little pearl-drops as a moist flow'r drips
Its fulness on a pool in tiny belts
Of crystal, till the wood-dove hears, and sips—
Ah, cease your liquid strains, bad Pan, or else
Her fluttering heart will be upon your lips!

Clear shine the skies, starry with dots of gold
That cluster round him, an enraptured crowd
Of listeners: faint across the silvery wold
A shadow flits, gauzed in the night's thin shroud—
And the old moon, who saw the World unfold,
Hides his kind face behind a passing cloud.

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 17.

An Old Church

UNDER the China-trees' soft shade
An old church is, whose crumbling walls

Are rotted where the ivy crawls
Like tapestry of faded jade.

And there, before its doors ajar.

I rest and list the sad refrain

By kind, dead fingers played again.
Than Tosti's Vorei sadder far.

A low wind soughs, and where I stand
The autumn leaves fall one by one

In gold and pink and vermillion,
Like snowflakes on a lonely land.

And one by one the dead leaves fall,
And in my heart is winter's drear;
The shedding trees are not more bare,
The wind more lone a vesperal.

A cowed Brother slowly walks
Within the doors, and kneels in prayer;
But in his heart there is no tear,

For with the God he loves he talks

While filtering through a painted pane
Like amethyst upon the aisle,

Where I and one once knelt awhile,
The last light throws its jeweled stain.

And from mine eyes drop, one by one,
The hot, wet tears like falling leaves:
The very twilight with me grieves,

In gathering mistral sets the sun.

And no pearl beads the wint'ry sky,
For each pearl is a jeweled tear,
And every tear a crystal prayer—

All counted on my rosary.

The cowed Brother, satiate,
Solemnly rising from his knees,
Goes out beneath the China-trees
And enters through the convent gate.

The organ keys, with sough and swing,
Sob unplayed Vorei to my ear—

And in the vacant aisle I hear

The flutter of a passing wing!

Again the wind makes mornful tune—
And just above the leafless trees,
Wrapped in filmy, shiv'ring fleece,
Like a poor goatherd slinks the moon.

An old church is, whose crumbling walls
Beneath the China-trees, (all white
And tapestried in ghostly light),
Are rotted where the ivy crawls.

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 21.

Sonnet

LIKE as a pearl or crystal prayer, is wrought,
Jewel of craven sorrow, from a soul
A tear, when touched by running tides is stole
Some jetsam from the further shores of Thought,
And round the pier of memory is caught
The flotsam washed up by the dark grey roll
Of recollection, many a mocking ghoul
Of things desired and prayed and come to naught!
... fell gloaming hours, when drear remembrance knells
The void to wound with horrid brazen gong...
And yet for those who list a music wells
Tuneful with hope from e'en those sightless hells,—
Like a bird's round of liquid, lovely song
Telling of starbright night from darksome dells.

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 24.

Ballad of the Christian Gentlemen

TEN score Christian gentlemen,

Riding with sword and lance;

The Lion-and-lillies flanking

The civilized ordinance;

And a sandaled Fray, and a great Cross,

Leading the long advance.

Ten score Christian gentlemen

Bearing the Word of God

Over the fiery deserts

Where never had Christian trod,

With the Wine of the Chalice on every brow,

And the sign of the Cross on each sword.

Ten score Christian gentlemen—

A Bishop had blessed their zeal,

Sealing the lilly-name of Christ

On lips that were visored in steel!

And their cry as they rode to the paynim
abode

Was, “Christ! and the Church’s weal!”

Ten score Christian gentlemen

Suddenly ceased that cry,

For as Merlin had walked before them,

Or each had Don Quixote’s eye,

Roof, and spire, and minaret

Flared out in gold on the sky!

Ten score Christian gentlemen

Stared in a golden trance,

And this one thought of a lady of rank,

And that of a castle in France—
Then the visors snapped: “Are you ready,
fair sirs?
So!—lances in lead—advance!”
Four score Christian gentlemen,
Sword-arms weary and red,
Riding in gold-piled saddles—
And the long, long line of the Dead!—
And a sandaled Fray with the gentle
Crucifix on ahead.

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 25.

Amor Sabinum

LO! now the brazen hands of morning lift
The valley mists! Below, the spires of Rome.
Above, as argosies, in sweet spendthrift
The sailing clouds breaking with creamy foam
Across a sea of lapis-lazuli:
Climbing and twisting through the winery loam,
White in the sapphire veining of the sky,
The old Valerian viaduct mounts upward to the eye
Through meads with laurel coronals entwined:
And where rug-like the myrtle floweret
Are lain, their edge with faint laburnum lined,
The trippings of bare feet their incense fret
As the brown peasants Salian measures tread,
Scattering petal-clouds; and sweeter yet
Than vervaine carpet through the valley spread,
Ripe lips on laughing lips with the merry grape
stained red.
Ah me! a score of centuries are fled
Since Horace drained his homely amphore
Of Sabine vintage! (Are the Dead so dead?)
Methinks that still a weary, tear-dimmed eye
Strains from the icy Euxine o'er the mere,
As Ovid, exiled, labours to descry
The wild-thymed Sabine meads,—the sparkling air,—
Damon in idlesse loosing the strands of Lyce's hair.

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 27.

Prayer

MAN of the wondrous Birth, whom
Heaven's star.
Was need to write thy coming in the sky,
Be thou my judge, lest This of which am I
Slay me as slew it thine own avatar.
And if thy feet are shod in fiery brass,
And thou are robed in sheet of whitest flame,
And in thy presence angel legions pass
With eyes averted, and thy dreadful Name
Is sealed—yet art thou not that human same
That dared the priests the ravenous stones to hurl
At her who neither matron was, nor girl?
And took on lips of clay the kiss of shame?
And with thy weary, human eyes rained tears
For those thy murderers in Gesthemane?...
(What hope of mercy in our man-made years!)
Man of the wondrous Birth, my jury be!

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 29.

Thou—Within

Ode

THOU—THE WITHIN ME,
Human and God,
The fullness of whose treasury
Is on me showered
Rich as is rain-kissed vineyard, utterly
To THEE I turn in prayer.
(Ah, well beloved of me
Who built your altar there,
The symphony of her had lit the stars in Christ's own hair!

Fragrant with flower,
THOU whom the feeble priests call "Soul"—
THOU are not that insensate bower
Of their deaf God beyond control!
Not there
We found YOU in the silver of an hour
That YOU made grow
Into a garden where
A living stream through Dian's meads has flow.

And it was THOU who, when the new-horned moon
Came peeping like a timid little fellow
Across the perfect hour of our noon,
And in the east we saw the skies grow yellow
As the gold stars lift their voices—ah, too soon
They sang the orison of waking Day!—
Chorded THY music from our twi-stringed souls—
(That were such gentle, happy virelai
From flow'r-fretted angels' citherns and citholes,
How could They make such threnody to slay!)

* * * * *

What time I drew
Her hyacinth within me
In one long-breathed rhapsody
And knew
Her audibly,

THOU, God she built WITHIN,
Loved our Love:
But when a little Day would make it Sin
That of our Love we strove,
Break the sweet melody rather than
Its cadences be unshrove.

Yet THOU, O God whose altar she built HERE—
Thy fulgence wilt outlive the lampless Throne,
As angels' eyes at night linger upon
A sea to drive the clouds of unlit Fear.
Still with me One,
YOU'LL make the flowers grow
Over the grove of neither moon nor sun,
So that their song for me shall say to her,
"I love you so!"

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 30.

Sonnet: Creation

WHITE, first... white!... indescribably pure white
Flooding and blending all... from Nothing wrought...
Shadow:... (and that is Birth, and that is Art!)
Lo! the alternate Doors of Day and Night
Flung wide the null of ether to invite,
Which, travailing to Dawn the gold t'impart.
A barrier burst from out its swollen heart,
Bending in prisms three of virgin light;
Till through the Doors heraldic rode the Sun,
Impaling in an estoiled field—a-whirl
Rioting the prismatic crystal of
The Rainbow... lo! singing Earth's orison
In flower-borning at its arched throat—GIRL!
(And that is Birth, and Art; and that is Love!)

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 33.

The Empty Room

I HAD asked her to wait; the fire was there,
Feeble and groping about the hearth;
Wanted but time for the flame to flare
From the coals, all live but smothered with earth.
So I nursed the flicker for all its worth—
Nursed it into a little glow—
Till the logs were crackling with merry mirth:
Then I rose from my knees, and turned... and lo!
The room was empty of all save dearth!

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 34.

Une Rose De L'hier Soir

(Villanelle)

POOR rose, wilt and bare!
Where now is your flow'r
That she wore in her hair?
You were blown then, and fair,
And you grew in her bower,
Poor rose, wilt and bare!
In her gold you did fare:—

Did that scent you devour
That she wore in her hair?

And her cheek you were near—

Did it steal all your dower,
Poor rose, wilt and bare?

So she cast you out here,
Now your fragrance is o'er
That she wore in her hair!

(Is that rain? or a tear?)
Well, you lived for an hour,
Poor rose, wilt and bare,
That she wore in her hair!

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 35.

Sabine Nocturne

Sonnet

QUIETEST hour. In the di-toned light
The weary vintagers wend homeward; high

A mower with his scythe, against the sky
Climbs the faint hills before arising night.

Far down the valley twinkling panes invite
To cottage cheer: about, soft rushes sigh
As some shy maid telling her rosary,

Her pulsing secret love to set aright.

Hark! faint from bellfry in the lowlands toll
Sad trental for some hamlet father's soul,
Or tear-voiced masses for some new-born mite

Gone where, like tracery of needle-hole
In the rare broidery of a Cardinal's stole,
The Evening Star is pricked in lacey white.

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 37.

The Prayer of Walpi

Chaunt

THE camp fire made, the horses fed,
A rock of basalt, turreted,
We saw against the sky.

The silence of the evening air
Was rended by a long-wailed prayer,
Like to a Muezzin's cry.

In silhouette upon the edge
Of an overhanging tier of ledge
That cut the dome like bars,

A figure stretched its arms in chaunt,
Eerie, attenuated, gaunt,
To its brothers, the gold stars.

Over the saffron skyline came,
Wrapped in a sheet of silver flame,
The first edge of the moon.

Along the Milky Way the light
Blazed like a city street at night,
White with the heat of June.

Up from the ledge, monotonous,
Nor eager, nor in fearful stress,
Mounted the long-breathed prayer

As the healing Archer his Arrow aims
Most like, it mounted in thin flames
Through the hot, electric air.

Then like a thrown hand-ball, higher
The moon went free, and a belt of fire
Stood all about its rim,

Till it bulged sheer out from the circled field
Like the center stud of a rounded shield,
And hung right over him.

It penciled the scaur as in white chalk;
The drooped corn wilt on the parched stalk,
The gaunt kine, blear and blind;
And we saw that the land was dead with drouth—
When suddenly some clouds ran south
After a feathered wind.
And still the solemn monotone
Went on, and on, and on, and on;
The moon fell from the sky:
The stars began to run about:
We sought the camp, and worn out
In fitful sleep closed eye.
Each hour we heard the faint prayer spoke;
And when the heart of night was broke
We stood beneath again.
The pray-er on the ledge was gone—
But the golden feet of early dawn
Were wetted with the rain.

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 38.

La Sainte Vierge D'Avilion

(O DEAR, were I not of common clay,
Long since my drifting argosy
To Avilion had found its way.)

In yonder flower-pavilion
Awaits me fairest of all Queens
Of faery-footed Avilion.

Her cheek with vervaine dusk-wind kissed,
Her tresses all about her free,
A drifting nocturne of gold mist.

Across the mere her gold is sent
Star-eyed: (an onyx chorister
Herseems, so star-like is her scent.)

And ever and anon her call
Is waft to me in villenage,
As notes from dulcet virginal.

It may not be: the mere us part,
Where I am mortal-tossed, God wot!

But holden in her rosy palm,
Lo! is the crystal of my heart!

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 42.

Japanese Love Song

O VAPORY moon of Fujisan!

O moon on the evening sea!

Soft as the glow from a moor'd sampan,

Or gold on a heron's wing—

Rise up, rise up and my lover bring

Over the waters to me!

O vapory moon of Fujisan!

O moon on the evening sea!

O beautiful star with golden eyes!

O star with the amber mouth!

Shine where my sailor-lover lies:

Lest his sanpan lose its way

Shine out, shine out through the night, where play

The winds of the odorous south—

Beautiful star with the golden eyes!

O star with the amber mouth!

O silvery cloud with fleecy sail!

O cloud with the ebon hull!

Wondrous big and wondrous frail—

O cloud that my lover brings!

Sail on, sail on, your beautiful wings

Outspread like a homing gull!

Silvery cloud with the fleecy sail!

O cloud with the ebon hull!

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 43.

Uno Aspectu in Amor Incidere

Woodland Sonnet

SURELY I valued as a lush-rose bloom
My shy nymphhood, nor dreamed it made to spill
Like a torn flow'r with tassels loosed, until
Pan's lips fell fiercely on mine in the gloom,
And I a god's soft voice then listened, "Whom
Love's shrines are lighted for yields not to ill!" —
... nothing... a falling star... is this tendril
I, woven in the warp of Venus' loom?
And all is wonderous changed. The timid girth
Bound by the heavens' seems a little womb
To've born the throbbing beauty of the earth—
(Say, barren lush-rose, dost thou think it worth
Thy timid petals on the meadow strewn,
This god-like knowledge, this more wide re-birth?;

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 45.

The Street Called Sorrow-Love

Dirge

HIDING its face from the sapphire morn;
Darkling and damp;
Dingy: malodorous; unshorn

Of last night's garbage; its paint still on,
But blotched and drab in the murky lamp:
Afraid of the day above;

This is the grave of the thing still-born—
The street called Sorrow-Love.

A curtain raises; a face peers out,
Ghastly as Doom,

Wearing the scarlet that last night's rout
Over the wine with flirt and flout

Made seem like the rose' soft bloom;
Now like the ashen mask of

A nightmare blinks in the fetid gloom
Of the street called Sorrow-Love.

Faint in the distance the city's roar:
Louder than Hell
In this horrible silence, more awful far
Than a sudden oath, or a banged-to door,
Or the crash of a brazen bell,
Are the steps from above—
Down the stairs—as you slink—pleasure o'er—
From the street called Sorrow-Love,

And this is the thing that hurts most sore—
Rotten and dead

As a weed in a cave on a sunless shore
Is your SELF as you grope from the dismal maw
Of the place where your revel is sped,
And the day, without glove,
Holds to your eyes what you've comraded

In the street called Sorrow-Love.

And why does the alley bear that name?

Listen and know:

A woman's Love is her daylight fame,

But you and I, to our lasting shame,

Have built it this street below

The Heavens above—

So, gentlemen, on with our merry game

In the street called Sorrow-Love!

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 46.

Rosa Mystica

I THOUGHT this land unfragrant,
unprofitable, and bare,

Until one day I found a little
flower growing there
All ripe and sweet, with scarlet,
dewy petal-lips apart—
And then straightway I made the land
a present of my heart.

The sands seemed never-ending,
and the cactus drear and bleak,
And a grey coyóte was howling
like a damned soul from a peak,
And the food-packs on my saddle
were just about as bare—
When all at once I found the
little flower growing there!

And suddenly the desert
changed all its awful face;
I saw the cactus waving
their arms like things of grace,
And the grey coyóte was singing
a very pleasing hymn,
And I smelled the stars in heaven
as the night came creeping in.

And the fragrance was as attar;
and when the moon rose up
I toasted it in nectar
in my rusted coffee-cup;
Then the gold stars sang together,
and my soul filled with their Art,
For the little flower I found out there
is known as “OPEN HEART.”

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 49.

Le Douleur du Trouvere

Ballade

WHEN this old World was young, the King
Upon his blazoned dais,
His court would gather round and sing
Ballades and rondelais:

Ah me! the joyaunce of those days

Of chivalry and song,
Of brave devoir, and courtly ways,

When this old World was young!

When this old World was young, a maid
Would bid her lover fare

An errant forth, and with his blade
Fetch guerdon for her hair.

No talk of golden dower was there,
Nor Love upon it hung,

The proofs of Love were DO and DARE,
When this old World was young!

When this old World was young, a knight
Would down some byeroad chance

In keeping of his knightly plight,
And break a gallant lance;

And Monarchs for a lady's glance,
Or gauntlet lightly flung,

Would stake their scepters, a l'outrance,
When this old World was young!

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 51.

L'envol

Ah well, the World is somewhat sere,
And words sound different on the tongue;
Kings called me (sings the sad trouvère)
“Cousin,” when this old World was young!

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 52.

The Herd-Boy of Laguna

SHELL-ROSE against moss-mellowed grey
Dies in the sky the hot last light;
Blood-purple bursts the heart of day
Into the star-rimmed bowl of night;
And where the feathered corn grows white
A goatherd-boy must vigil keep;
A nightingale in mischief-spite
Mocks, "Herd-boy, close your eyes and sleep!"
Clear shine the stars: the girdled scour
Two herons circle: sleepy and slow,
Like trickle from a silver jar
A stream breaks on some stones: and lo!
Where weave the willows to and fro,
With brown-earth olla in her hands,
Before the goatherd's eyes drooped low
The Mirage-girl inviting stands!

Hard by the corn a gaunt coyédte,
The water dripping from his jaw;

Adown the cañon's shadowed throat
A puma stealths on velvet paw.

No use, poor goats, to leap and ba-a-a!
Nor nightingale to cry and whirl!

They've gone to where romances are,
The herd-boy and the Mirage-girl.

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 53.

La Demoiselle de Mons

Chanson

THERE was a girl of Mons
Who a gold locket wore;
It lies upon her bones.

Dull gold on white: more fair
It was not, I have read,
Than the gold hair of her

That blew across the wall
Hard by the castle keep,
Where rest the Seneschal.

A high knight was her wooer—
(The Seneschal him wist),—
And eke a troubadour.

The troubadour her kist—

The watching Seneschal

Drew bolt on them—nor missed!

There was a girl of Mons—

(God's bane upon its stones!)—

Who a gold locket wore:

It lies upon her bones.

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 55.

Sonnet

Japan: Winter

THE iris flow'r is o'er: the cherry flown:
The petal-white Sumida crystal-massed
With ice now: where the maple's soul has passed
From aureate life to listless russet, (blown
Like dropped notes in a careless monotone
Dirged by each swirling gust to winter's blast
Addressed as streams to swell the ocean's vast,
A golgotha of leaves, the earth is strewn.
But where the kindlier billows beat the shore,
Bringing their secret from the dread Below,—
Tossing their spendthrift garden in the air,
A thread of gold the grey sun catches, raw
Falls on the fluted rocks a tress... and lo!
Some unknown weed blossoms to flower there!

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 57.

Night of the Painted Sands

OH, well beloved, beside me rest;
The evening shadows draw anigh,
The arowp's song is of his nest,
Like prayer-sticks, in the fire-sky
The sun's last beams are lit—and smell
The gold stars in the desert air!
Ai-ah! the night-breeze loves to dwell
In the nopals woven in your hair—
O, lover! my lover!
Who wove those blood-red flowers there?

See! now the sunset in the west
Goes flaming in a scarlet whorl;
Soon by the Twilight-boy caressed
Will sleep the Heliotis-girl;
Soon o'er the vineyard slow above,
Through amber clouds the moon will climb—
Your lips are as a winepress, love,
Ah, crush the grape that is on mine!

O, lover! my lover!
I'm drunk upon their scarlet wine!
Lo! in the west the red fire dies,
And rose and gold to saffron wane;
Blue-black the sacred mesa lies,
And all is stilly as yon crane
One-legged its chrome-streaked back upon.
Lie still, beloved, till I have guessed—
(Your eyes are like the spots upon
The sacred antani's breast!)—

O, lover! my lover!
What other girls these arms have pressed?
Along the trail the beetles sleep
Each on the other's brittle wings,

While through the drooping cornfields creep—
Where the wiu-e his night-song sings—
The grey dusk-shadows, drear and thin,
Swift as a wolf-pack from their lair—
Hold me, beloved, and hide me in
The raven tassels of your hair!
O, lover! my lover!
I want to hide my heart-beats there!

How hot the yune is! let's rise
And seek the roof, and watch the night,
And bathe us in the curling skies
Painted in coal and silver-white—
Alas! the pearl-stars cluster lower,
The White Coyote is on his Throne
By the sacred silence of this hour
Tell me, has such Love as our own,

O, lover! my lover!
In any other sky been known?

Lo! now the starry lights grow wan;
The Dawn-youth's skyline path grows red;
Johan-ai's hand your shoulder on
Is lain to say the night is dead.
High o'er the red-stone cliffs above
The Ripener lifts his golden jar—
Give me your lips once more, beloved,
How parched and tired and bruised they are!
O, lover! my lover!
Rise up! there wanes the Morning Star!

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 58.

Sonnet: Beauty

BEAUTY is amaranth: the sapphirine
Wind no tare blows upon the virgin sward:
The carefree billow wears no glaring fraud
T'enhance the opal of its hyaline.
What paints the rose? A web of silver sheen
Hides the tree-rot. Shining above, pearl-starred,
More sweet to Jesus than the spikenard
The tears of shame shed by the Magdalene.
Earth, Heaven, Sea—only by man create,
The Ugly lives: God kens no record of
Pain, Woe, Fright, Death, Hypocrisy, or Hate,—
We fashioned those like as a sweaty glove
To hide the hand. Strip it, and roseate,
See the clean palm of Beauty, Truth, and Love!

Publication. First published in *Pan's Reeds*. Los Angeles, 1915, p. 61.

Stella Amoris

A Legend of the Starry Vales of Arcady

In a dear country where the rivers run
Far from the cities' tumult and despite
Through honeyed mazes rich in flow'r-delight
Wherein might Dian's virgin veil be spun,—
As Phæton's car drove down the horizon.
And Io wreathed his moon-horned head in night,
A goatherd lad, his lonely watch begun,
Gazed in the fire of a star and saw its crystal heart grow bright.

And o'er his head the rosy flame burned close,
Himward lured from the golden orchestra.
As, rich as oriolèd aria,
From his young throat a lovely song arose,—
A liquid lyric, silvery as goes
A bird's quick round of starbright opera:
And as an oracle its answer shows,
Grew in the constellation's heart the Stella Mystica!

And she, in garland virgin blossomry
Loosed by the gold zone of her satellite,
Her breasts as stirred pond-lillies, flower-light,
Glowing like flesh-warmed pearls:—drew near on shy,
Trepidant feet, ready the meads to fly...
... nearer... a rose of flame their mouths ignite
In Venus' chalice... Sweet, the donary
Of love on gods' lips came and went in the spired [grail] that night!

And all night in that amaranthine dell,
With flowers below, and orbèd worlds above,
My goatherd and the mystic Star of Love
Made merriment with them that therein dwell,—
And teased the scolding squirrel in their cell,
And played each flower was their treasure-trove,
And dabbled toes among the asphodel,
And stole the rose's wine, and frolic'd through the lovely grove.

Until the shy and early-startled fawn
Threw up their heads and smelled the coming day,

And sought the sored for the pasture way,
Who on the tree bark rubbed their velvet horn,
And stretched their lordly limbs,—until with dawn
Began the wild wood-dove their virelai,
And in the skies the onyx lights grew wan...
Then shy as a disrobed girl the star-nymph fled from the boy away.

And after her a little spell he ran:—
Then flung him down among the meadow-sweet;
And wept, and cursed,—and break them with his feet:—
And when the sun its westward course began,
Arose, and like a young barbarian
Upon his naked chest with clenched fists beat:—
And 'twixt his tears and curses through the span
Of day his goats drove o'er the meads, nor stopped to let them eat.

Till, as the ev'n gathered, he drew near
A merry city hung with gay festoon,
And watched it frolic like a mad buffoon;
And o'er the headlands to a bay did peer,
And saw strange ships go by with tarry gear
And gaudy sails; and list the sailor's croon,
Until the sun's last thread like burnished spear
Waved through the sea-gate, and in gold began to full the moon.

Then marked a temple with a marble stair,
Set in a grove above the hyaline
Still bay: and toward a small lamp's ruby shine
Saw a hushed throng draw nigh in evening prayer.—
Maidens with fruit, and youths with spoil of spear,
Who lay their gifts before a hidden shrine:—
And wondered all night long what dripped in there,
Nor knew the priestly secret of the flow'ring corn and vine:

'Till strolling on the fretted sands, he saw
The sea in oily phosphorescence rise
To lay in pools violet-deep as eyes
Of woman on the cave-indented shore.
Winnowed with opal fringes from the maw
Of hued anemones:—ah me! more wise
He had not peered to see the lupanar
Where, love deflowered, a falling star was mirrored in that guise!

For there are those who say on mortal eyes
That pierce the stars' white chastity too plain.
In frosted wrath, or luminous love, is lain
The heraldry of earthly sacrifice,—
Labeling such the children of the skies,
To whom all fleshly happiness is vain:—
E'en as a Christ who for his fellows dies,
Or God, or Goth, each stargazer somehow this world has slain,—

Dear children of a flower pregnancy
Enciente with Merlin's mythopœic wand,
Sired with every cloudlet's tressy strand,
Seeing with good old Don Quixote's eye
A dragon in each tiercel circling high,
A palace in each byre, dwell in a land
Of poppy-built castles girdled by
A rosary of romances in orbital saraband.

And ne'er again the star's chrysallis may
My goatherd have in nocturn dalliance:
So with the dawn he roused him from his trance,—
Nor cared that wicked gnomes his flock made fey
And drove them o'er the mountains far away,—
But when the sun the mist pierced with its lance,
Arose, and gat him where the rock-beat spray
Dashed its white crest, and in its mane his soul rode from durance.

And as for those who sneer at verity,
And at the moon's white mystery cry "mew!"
And scientifically explain the dew,
And say that in each child is born the lie,
At faeries gibe, and think love venery,—
They are not half so wise as those who knew,
When sleeping off his last debauchery
To garland old Silenus from whose drouth creation grew.

So, some good god had tearful ruth, and brought
The boy's drowned body from the heartless foam
On to the sands, and bade the warm sun comb
The frosted brine from out the curls, and caught
In flower chalices the pearlery wrought
Upon his lids in crystals of a poem,

And flung them on th'empyric vales, that fraught
With threaded tears of love for stars be lit the heavenly dome.

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

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Bibliography

Selected primary and secondary sources

Book and periodical titles are italicized throughout.

Works by the Author

Caldwell, William Mackay. *Pan's Reeds and Other Verse*. Los Angeles, 1915.

Works About the Author

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Colophon

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