



JOSEPH JOEL KEITH

Collected Poems

THIRTEEN BOOKS AND RECOVERED PERIODICAL VERSE

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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ARCHIVAL IMAGES

The poet and the material history of the books



Joseph Joel Keith at a University of Redlands Writers' Week appearance; San Bernardino County Sun, March 13, 1957.

Joseph J. Keith

Services over the ashes will be held at 1 p.m. tomorrow at Williams Mortuary

for Joseph J. Keith, 65, a poet and literary reviewer.



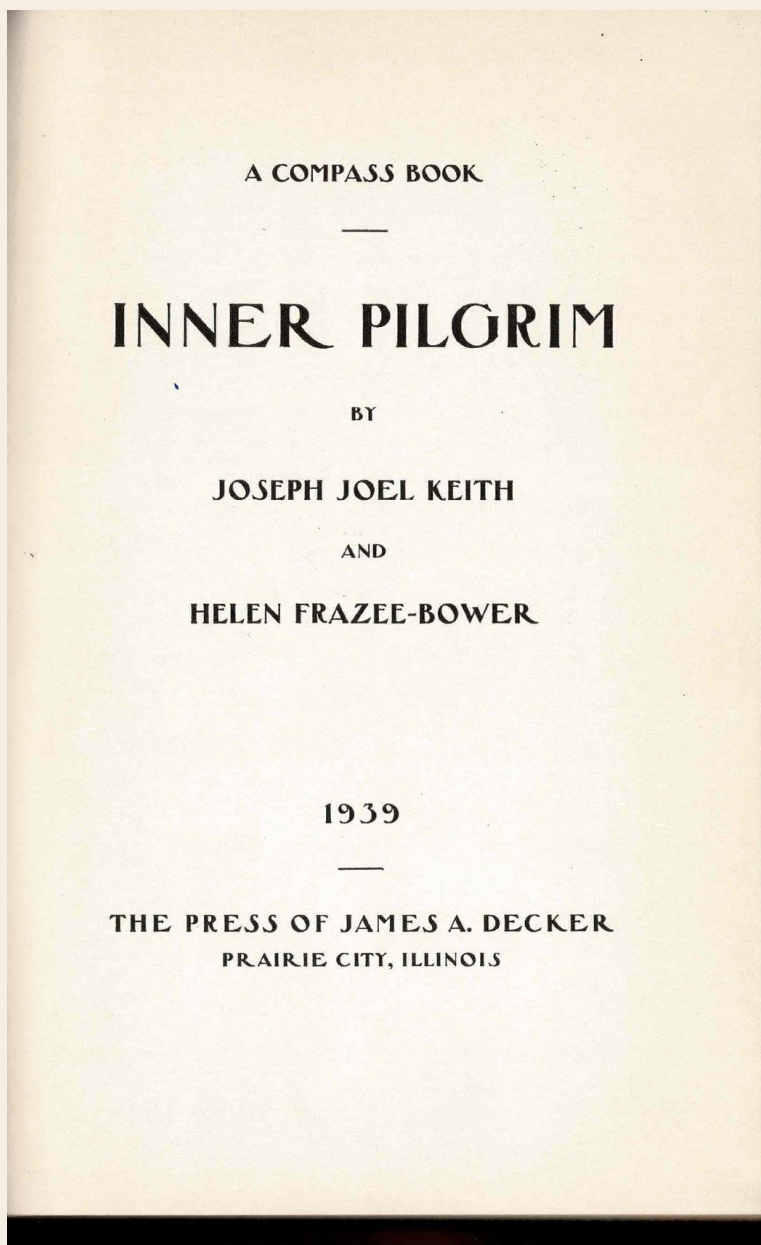
Mr. Keith, who lived at 1415 Victoria St., Apt. 310, died Sunday at Queen's Hospital.

Mr. Keith

He was a regular contributor to the Christian Science Monitor, and had many volumes of poetry published. He belonged to the Arts and Letters Society, and the Poetry Society, and was past president of the P.E.N. Society.

The Rev. Charles Kwock and Dr. Wendell Loveless, of the First Christian Church of Christ, will conduct funeral services.

Obituary notice and portrait, Honolulu Advertiser, January 3, 1967.



Title page of Inner Pilgrim (1939), Keith's first book, published with Helen Frazee-Bower.

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921)				237
SERIAL NUMBER 1348	1. NAME (Print) Joseph — Keith			ORDER NUMBER T 11382
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 3845 Ingraham St. 2nd Calif. (Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)				
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]				
3. MAILING ADDRESS same				
[Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same]				
4. TELEPHONE Ex 3051	5. AGE IN YEARS 40	6. PLACE OF BIRTH Mac Donald Pennsylvania		
(Exchange) (Number)	(Mons) (Days) (Yrs)	(Town or county) (State or country)		
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS R. E. Ballard - 3845 Ingraham St. 2nd Calif.				
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS Writer for periodicals				
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS free lance writing				
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)				
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.				
D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 1-1-42)	(over)	☆	GPO 16-21630-1	Joseph Keith (Registrant's signature)

Joseph Joel Keith's World War II draft-registration card, preserved in the project dossier.

INTRODUCTION

Los Angeles, the little magazines, and a stubborn moral lyric

Joseph Joel Keith was a Los Angeles poet of astonishing persistence: a Pennsylvania immigrant's son who published thirteen books, ran the Los Angeles branch of P.E.N., edited the *Borestone Mountain Poetry Awards*, and kept writing through war, urban poverty, civil-rights crisis, and his late encounter with Hawai'i. His poems are compact acts of moral attention, returning to children, workers, widows, racial violence, damaged veterans, animals, and the stubborn life of roots and leaves. This edition brings together every book and verified uncollected periodical poem recoverable from the project's original scans, separates minor revisions into variorum notes, and retains substantively reconceived poems as independent versions. *The Blue Stairway* (1948), verified in library and archival records but not yet recovered in a usable copy, is represented by its own section so that the gap remains visible rather than disappearing from Keith's bibliography.

Biography

Joseph Joel Keith was born Joseph Biesenkamp on July 6, 1901, in Charleroi, Washington County, Pennsylvania, a Monongahela River industrial town south of Pittsburgh. He was the son of German immigrants Frederick William Biesenkamp and Augusta Caroline Biesenkamp. The mills, mines, river traffic, immigrant neighborhoods, and working families of western Pennsylvania remained an imaginative ground for his later poetry, particularly the poems in which civic ideals are tested against hunger, labor, racial exclusion, and war. He eventually adopted Joseph Joel Keith as his literary name; newspaper and family records preserved in the project dossier connect the two identities conclusively.

Keith was in Southern California by the late 1920s. Los Angeles became the center of his adult literary life, even when his books were issued by small presses elsewhere. He participated in the region's dense network of poetry

clubs, reading series, little magazines, correspondence circles, and anthology projects. His early book *Inner Pilgrim* (1939), jointly published with Helen Frazee-Bower, already established the characteristic Keith lyric: brief, lucid, compassionate, and suspicious of any public language that forgot individual suffering. *The Proud People* (1943) and *The Long Nights* (1944) made the Second World War his central pressure. Their poems reject fascism but also refuse patriotic complacency, insisting that American freedom be measured against lynching, segregation, poverty, and the terror of children under bombardment.

The sequence of postwar collections—*The Hearth Lit* (1946), *Always the Need* (1948), *The Blue Stairway* (1948), *Durable Fire* (1949), and *The Stubborn Root* (1952)—shows Keith working simultaneously as lyric poet, social observer, editor, and institution builder. *Always the Need* is unusual in the corpus: a book-length story in verse rather than a gathering of individual lyrics. His recurring images of shelter, windows, stairs, hospitals, prisons, and rooted plants convert ordinary built and natural spaces into moral tests. Poems frequently moved first through magazines such as *Poetry*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Southwest Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *The American Mercury*, *Variegation*, and *Recurrence* before being revised for books.

Keith served as president of the Los Angeles branch of P.E.N., linking local writers to an international organization devoted to literature and freedom of expression. He was also managing editor of the *Borestone Mountain Poetry Awards*, the annual series founded by Robert Thomas Moore to select notable poems from English-language magazines. Those roles placed him inside a wide correspondence network, and his papers preserve notebooks, poems, prose, lyrics, manuscripts, ephemera, and photographs. They also clarify that the seemingly modest small-press career was national and transnational in reach: his acknowledgments cite journals in Britain, Canada, India, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as American reviews and newspapers.

Later books continued to enlarge his range. *Two Laughters* (1958) gathered poems from an especially broad magazine field. In 1964 he issued both *And Then Derision* and *Across the Dark*; *Backdrops* followed in 1966. These books are sparer and often darker than the wartime volumes, with dramatic glimpses of rooms, streets, institutions, marriages, and frightened or abandoned figures. Keith nevertheless retained his faith in attention itself. The poem is repeatedly

imagined as a form of shelter or recognition—not a cure for violence, but a refusal to let its victims become abstract.

Keith died in Honolulu on January 1, 1967. His posthumous Hawaiian collection, *Aloha, Polynesia* (1967), registers a late landscape of sea, birds, flowers, fishing, dance, memorial, and Indigenous presence. Its poems should not be reduced to tourism: they continue his career-long concern with who belongs to a place and how an observer may look without possession. The University of California, Davis, now holds the Joseph Joel Keith Papers, collection D-156, covering 1941–1967. The institutional description identifies him as a former Los Angeles P.E.N. president, managing editor of the *Borestone Mountain Poetry Awards*, and author of thirteen books of poetry, three published posthumously. That archive, together with the surviving books and little magazines, makes possible a substantially fuller account of a poet whose importance lies as much in the continuity of his ethical imagination as in any single anthology piece.

ORIGINAL CRITICAL INTRODUCTIONS

David Morton on The Hearth Lit and Charles Angoff's posthumous remembrance

David Morton's Foreword

From *The Hearth Lit* (1946)

Joy and love—which, finally, I suppose, are the sources and benediction of art, as they are of life—are consistently present in Joel Keith's poems. The world can do with a great deal more of these two than it has, at present; and just now, the reading eye and the listening ear take the light and the pulse of these pieces with a special appetite.

The poems, themselves, have an inevitable right curving, and quick shining, and the magical union of sound and hush that is lyricism at its most subtle best.

The shapes that appear here are boy, bird, small beast, happy man, happy woman, each in its own individual lineaments; but they are all varied projections of the one joy of life; and the warmth of each is love—of one another, of the world that is theirs, of the living of life.

There is a simplicity and directness in the poems resulting from an unaffected confidence in what they have to say. The confidence is communicated to the reader—and his reward is more joy and more love than he had before, and made more memorable.

David Morton

Charles Angoff's Introduction

From the posthumous *Aloha, Polynesia* (1967)

It is still difficult for his many friends to get accustomed to the fact that Joseph Joel Keith (or Joel, as we used to call him) is dead. We shall no more get those long, chatty, single-spaced notes from him, telling us of his current poetical works, of his offers to help place poems and friendly reviews in periodicals in this country or in Italy or in England or in India. A mere mention that one was going abroad immediately brought forth a list of names of people to see—plus an assurance that he was writing to these people himself, apprizing them of the coming visit. Poets, like writers in general, are charged by some with jealousy and selfishness. There is some truth to this, though one must quickly add that poets are no worse in this respect than accountants or engineers or business men or lawyers.

But Joel was not just a good man. He was a good poet, at times a very good poet. He was completely dedicated to the writing of poetry. Poetry was truly his life. And he was constantly getting better at his art, which is to say that he was ever young. A greater economy was entering into his verses, a subtler metaphysic, a deeper compassion for the human predicament, and a more profound delight with the unending beauty and ecstasy of the entire scheme of things. He was always true to himself. He never succumbed to the bogus symbolism of those who are inept at being genuinely lyrical, and he never submitted to the fashion in some quarters of equating physiology with love and gibberish with insight.

Joel apparently was very happy in Hawaii, his last home. The poems in *Aloha* do not merely sing, they also whisper quiet joy. He loved the people; he was entirely content with the environment. Everywhere he saw wonder. He begins 'The Wreath' with these happy lines:

'A small Polynesian was playing on the shore— / why are the dark-skinned children more lovely, / their eyes dark pools with lights of the sun?— / and toying with her lei of white plumerias, / the garland as fragrant as a child is fragrant.'

These children and their elders, Joel seemed to say, blended with the landscape so intimately that the joyful quiet of human warmth entered into surrounding nature, imparting to it a special blessing. Consider the opening lines of 'Bringer of Tranquility':

'Here in Oahu, night / comes suddenly / after the bright, / bright burst in the sky / and flames burning dimly, / hundreds of birds, / a trio, a score, / and

more, / come in sudden waves / to their home, / settling there / like a rustle of
wind, / to that one tree / in their green night / where there is no stir.'

There is a similar controlled loveliness to be found in 'Starless Night' and
'From the Heavens' and 'Sound and Silence' and 'Beach Girls' and 'White
Against Gold.'

All of *Aloha* has the mellowness of psychic ease and a total lack of the
ubiquitous urgency of metropolitan civilization. It is not only one of his best
volumes of verse; it is also one of the most pleasing volumes to appear in
America in the last decade.

Charles Angoff · Fairleigh Dickinson University · Rutherford, New Jersey

EDITORIAL NOTE AND SOURCES

Lineation, indentation, duplicate versions, and corpus limits

Every recovered book is given its own chronological section. The original scans—not an earlier reset PDF—govern wording, lineation, stanza breaks, subtitles, and intentional indentation. Narrow source-page wraps are reflowed only when they are demonstrably typographic; true long lines receive a modest hanging continuation in the wider reading page.

Book and journal titles are italicized throughout the editorial matter. Each poem begins on a new page and ends with its publication record. When a poem was reprinted with only local changes, one reading text is printed and the later witness is recorded in a variorum note. Substantively reconceived poems are retained separately.

The jointly authored *Inner Pilgrim* contributes only Keith's poems. *Always the Need* is retained as a single book-length story in verse. *The Blue Stairway* receives a chronological section, but no text is supplied because no complete scan has been recovered. The surviving composite scans of *Across the Dark* and *Aloha, Polynesia* contain gaps, identified in their section notes; absent text has not been conjectured. Six periodical poems not collected in the recovered books are printed from their original *Variegation* and *Recurrence* pages.

INNER PILGRIM

1939 · Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939

Keith's poems only; the volume alternates his work with Helen Frazee-Bower's.

To Rise

The heart knows more
than the mind can tell.
It sings itself
out of a well,

where it has fought
in bogs of doubt.
It hears wings beat,
lets itself out.

What dares to sing
without words has power
to rise like hope,
faith, sun and flower.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

Child's Song

(for Tony)

I will not let anyone, anyone know
where I often go.

I will not let anyone, anyone see
what's up there for me.

I will have secrets, and only the star,
the winking star, knows what they are.

Only the star can climb as high
as the sky—the marvelous star and I!

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

His Hand Went Up

He could not touch so soft a thing.
Not for a moment would he lock a wing.

His small white palm was the pigeons' table;
they would rather touch it than velvet or sable.

And when the food was gone, his hand
was more of friendship than command.

As wings went up, his hand went up,
up like a perch but more like a cup.

His hand rose there with nothing in it,
but it held the whole blue sky for a minute.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939). **Variorum.** Also printed in *The Proud People* (1943); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Like a Boy

Even if words are inadequate for expression
of all that is seen in the sky, air, sea and trees
the eyes know the wonder of it all and ears listen
for miracles, being less than these.

What is it the sea gives that man can rarely fathom?
And the sky? the air? and the wood? The mind,
like a boy at the seashore, thinks of its find.
The child and the old-young man are not blind.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

And So We Parted

I went a while with Thomas.
Our muddy thoughts soon dwindled out
in cleansing brooks, and so we parted:
Thomas and I and doubt.

I went a while with Peter.
Now something comes to let me know
what lack was mine: in retrospect
I hear the loud cocks crow.

Then it was John I followed.
Beyond the highest peak, we heard
a voice that filled us as a choir;
and no one said a word.

I left my old friend, Judas,
twice the killer who crucifies;
for one brief moment I saw myself
look through my sad friend's eyes.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

Of All Unloved Creatures

Eyes in a city speak volumes
a tongue can never say.
In these there's a burning, burning
all night, all day.

There is no peace in a city
when eyes melt into eyes
in a great lonely language
of no replies.

Eyes of all unloved creatures
haunt the city street.
Where is the heart's green meadow
where they can meet?

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939). **Variorum.** Also printed in *The Proud People* (1943); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Women Wear Grief Proudly

Women wear grief proudly
as an old shawl,
tattered
but unwilling to fall.

Women smile through sorrow,
but their hearts weep
calmly
and unending and deep.

Grief and men are wailings
of a thrashed boy,
ending
with a kiss or a toy.

Men drown sorrow madly
with their loud notes,
singing
as they dampen their throats.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

Ballad of the Lost Lady

She roamed in the woodland
when the first bloom grew,
and May and her spirit
broke her heart in two.

In summer the flying
and the robin's tone
of rapture were never
braver than her own.

When autumn, the widow
in a borrowed skirt,
went gaily, she followed,
hating the inert.

And suddenly, strangely,
with her blossoms flung,
she looked upon winter
with her heart still young.

And then she went grieving
down a long hard way,
for death was a devil
giving night for day.

She crept then in sorrow,
for she loved youth here.
She could not see beauty
that was old and dear.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

There Was Drama and Despair

There was something in the movement of her hand
that her word gave not away.
As it fluttered I could see and understand
what she had to say.

There was drama and despair, and in its fall,
there was death, like a grey bird shot.
In a single little gesture there was all
that the world forgot.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939). **Variorum.** Also printed in *The Proud People* (1943); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Great Hope

We are the hunter, we are the hunted one.
We are the brave cry and the weak cry
and we are the dry bones grinning in the sun.

We are the rich one, we are the poorly fed.
We are the great heart and the weak heart
and we are the fine stone avarice has bled.

We are the weak thought, we are the deeper mind.
We are the near sight, and the far sight
and we are the great hope—gods, dumb, deaf and blind!

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

We Find a Way

I am one who never spits out an oath
for the ill one whose blow was stronger than his heart.
With a word the repellent one's forgiven. We are both
of the race; of the magnificent whole, the pitiable part.

I am one who licks his scars and seeks the tall grass
for balm; there is nothing like green growing things of earth.
When the mind and heart are fresh all things that pass
are sanely judged; we see what they are worth.

And then we go; we go far into entangling wood;
fighting and snarling, we devour as the wolf and bear;
or, struggling for vision, we find a way that is good
for progress; we stumble up the earthly stair.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939). **Variorum.** Also printed in *The Proud People* (1943); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Let Us Speak of This Hour

Let us speak of this hour and call it holy,
this hour, when the day dies and the moon appears
over ocean and garden and house and rolly
grey hills like pillows, as slumber nears.

Let the word be as gentle as breeze that carries
the odor of the lilac and the way of crickets.
Listen, heart that is weary: the world now tarries.
Blessed are the lives in bedrooms and thickets.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

When Shouting Day Is Done

When there are days too hard for me to bear,
the senses, permeated by night air,
are cooled and freshened as the weary leaves
when summer, in her ancient wisdom, grieves.

I walk where dampened fragrance of the rose
is balm for sorrow; sweeter still, wind blows
a cool caress for pilgrims; here I lie.
The great green mother never lets peace die.

I greet the day; before the cock crows twice,
I go about my work. I bless life thrice:
once, for my labor; once, for youthful sight;
and once,—when shouting day is done—for night.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

I Love Morning

I love morning
when the world's awake,
when earth is turning
and the rake

piles the fallen,
irresponsible leaves,
when a man in action
never grieves.

I love morning
when the thoughts run free
as spray in sunshine
by the sea,

warm as laughter
of a child at play,
and sweet as clover
and new hay.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

I Would See

I would feel the ineffable love
of the kiss without the kiss.
I would kneel; I would ever be of
the earth but not this.

I would take for my bride a desire
for a thought untouched by dust.
I would wake and be warmed not by fire
of earth; that is rust.

I would go through what ages there be.
I would love without love near.
In the snow, under earth, I would see
without eyes; I would hear.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

We Will Go Back

We will go back to the home where the honeysuckle
was sweet as our words; oh, we will go back there together.
We will laugh again as we see your father unbuckle
his belt when dinner is over, and say the weather
is bad for babes in the wood. Where the summer's blowing
a fragrance for lovers, we will see the path that was ours.
We will go back and see the first way of our going,
and ignore the mirth of your mother, "There will soon be showers."
It is good to remember a home and love and flowers.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

Three Little Sons

I

Peter's eyes are clear and blue.
He loves the river men and sailing.
Shouting wildly at his crew,
his voice is heard above wind wailing.

Soon, oh very soon, he'll go.
It shall be lonely here without him.
But even though the great storms blow,
we shall not worry much about him.

2

Richard has no time for play.
He never roams the field or highway.
Where Manhattan's towers sway,
he looks with longing at the sky way.

He'll build a rack and stool and chair.
Then he will go, though he may love us.
It will be good to know he's there:
a little god so high above us.

3

But Tim—poor tiny Tim—has eyes
as dark and dew-wet as blackberries.
A little lost thing in disguise,
he roams about with woodland fairies.

We wish that he might never leave,
but he will shun us—that's the pity.
This somber thought shall make us grieve:
a frightened fawn caught by the city.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

This Kind Brother

He always said, "I think I'll take
the shortest way across the valley,
through Chestnut Ridge. There I can make
much better time." Then he would sally

(ignore the home-road, one hour's walk)
into the wood's secluded places,
and loiter there and hum and talk
to lovely little furry faces.

He knew where all the best nuts grew,
and squirrels, tagging this kind brother,
saw pockets filled, knew what to do;
they thought this was the big tree's mother.

And on he went and deep he went
into the valley's bluest passes.
He lay mute while the dear larks spent
their tiny hearts in sky and grasses.

And after cows went lazily
to slumber with the weary horses,
forgetful of their labor, he
pursued a dozen fragrant courses.

And while his wife prepared his bed,
and told his children their last fable,
contentedly he came and fed
on cold food left upon the table.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939). **Variorum.** Also printed in *The Proud People* (1943); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Without Good-Bye

I love high places
when the heart is ill—
peace blowing, blowing;
time stand still;

where the mind seeks further
than birds or sky,
as soaring, soaring,
without good-bye,

the thoughts go freely
and deep and far
as surely, surely
as each night's star.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

Only the Sea

Play in the brook. Oh, skip your stone,
and build your raft from dreams and give her
unto the calm lake that's your own.
Find the river;

conquer the flood where there are two
lovers who dare to leave the highway.
Go with the torrent. Then plunge through
your way, my way.

Only the force will make us stay there
beneath a great surge, deep and free,
composed of earth and foam and bather:
only the sea.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939). **Variorum.** Also printed in *The Proud People* (1943); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

The Mother Has Gone Away

The mother has gone
away . . . away.
The children awoke at dawn
to-day,
and after the meal
they made each bed.
“With laughter,” she spoke, “conceal
the dead.”

They promised and went
about the deed,
for wisdom and she had spent
the need
for earthly delight
that living brought
and mourning and weeping and night,
forgot.

And taking the fruit
(where she used to sit
with the closing of life in pursuit)
they bit

the apples, the last
of the old tree’s store.
(Two mothers had loved in the past
and bore.)

And only the son
had left the feast:
the romance-born eldest one
had ceased.

Oh, mother forget
he had been untrue:
the old tree's fruit was wet
with dew.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

Take His Hand

Let him, Lord, perceive most clearly
Thy way. Let it be his own,
he who falters, he who nearly
loses cry of blood and bone.

Let him, Lord, perceive Thy inner
pilgrim, seeking far and deep.
Part them, Lord: the alien sinner
only calls when he's asleep.

Take his hand, Lord. He would go now.
He would meet Thy sons and daughters.
Floods of doubt can never flow now.
He has gone beside still waters.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

Mother

There is something upon me heavier than years.

For what far homeland must you start?

There is something deeper than tears
in my heart.

There is thought that is higher than anything I've known
since you left us. Now you rise
to another place while your own
say good-byes.

May there be all the bravest flying you wanted,
though you loved this hard way where you trod.
Oh, I see you, dear and undaunted,
greeting God!

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

He Takes Her Hand

Suddenly,—suddenly as the leaf falling on the dry meadow,—
they have grown old.

He had not noticed before her step is slower.

Surely, her heart is not cold.

Beautifully,—beautifully as the last falling of the grey
twilight,—

he takes her hand.

Oh, it is wonderful, love they leave now, blending
sweetly as clover with land.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

Grandmother from Nebraska

I wonder if anyone remembers what I remember?
Her voice was hardly a voice, it was so low,
and everything about her, like the covering of December,
was as light as moonlight touching snow.

And everything—step, touch and the way she would kiss and handle
a child or hold a hymnal or stroke a fevered head
was soft and as gentle as the high still candle
flickering good-byes to the dead.

I wonder if anyone remembers what I remember?
The way she carried a lamp, and turned it low,
and everything about her as she left us one December,
and the falling and falling of snow?

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939). **Variorum.** Also printed in *The Proud People* (1943); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Silence

I have known silence that was maddening and evil,
silence that crept like a panther in the wilderness of night.
Nerves that were shattered were chaotic. In the morning
eyes were the dust-covered mirrors where the heart saw its fright.

I have known silence that was nurtured by the hungry
thought that was never a certainty, and always unformed.
words that were broken by the fear of wrong-doing
willed the heart doubts where the furies of silence stormed.

Now I know silence that is growing in the lilac,
soaring with a bird in the flickering fields of the sun.
Now I know silence as deep as the ray of diamonds
where all gods have eyes like these, and all gods are one.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

The Generous One

Nature, the generous one that brightens the vine,
and raises its laughter and gold from the ground, spills wine
for the thirst of man, and loads the cellars of earth
with fire for the inner and outer man. The giver,
generous as mothers who see a greater worth
in their children, stocks the stream, loosens the river,
and, cool in the wood, and, hot on the western plain,
the fragrance is lavish, with or without rain.
But, though she is patient, nature has lashes ready
for children when food is wasted and wine's too heady.
Crazed and hating, she burns the field with her wrath,
and where she races she leaves a fruitless path.
And though pain is deep, and the prayers are said,
she lets man struggle through chaos, over his own dead.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

Open Wide

We probe the changeless mind, but reach
no farther than the eye can see.

We take for granted sun and peach,
and spurn the labor of the bee.

We drain and damn the empty cup;
and, letting wells of heart run dry,
we pray for one to lift us up,
but silent fury clouds the sky.

And, having spent our wrath, we turn
toward the sun, where fledglings stir.
The cruel cage is open wide,
but each makes each the prisoner.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

Mother of the Year

Now the sun and rain persuade
blossoms to appear. The spade
turns the good, responsive earth,
fragrant bed of richer birth.

Summer, mother of the year,
(Child of April's bloom and tear)

bears her burden, ever growing;
gentle, tireless, ever sowing.

Heart to heart, the tied things fit
over land and under it.

Publication. *Inner Pilgrim* (Prairie City, Illinois: Press of James A. Decker, 1939).

THE PROUD PEOPLE

1943 · Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943

Lonely Trek

There is no haven past the sky and sun
if earth ignores the weeping ones who go
throughout great lands where the lonely trek's begun
when greed's the foe.

There is no beauty even in green lands spread
far from sea unto sea if hunger crawls
a promised mile beyond the living dead
where the buzzard calls.

Earth is the heaven where hearts must seek and find,
beyond the flaming wilderness of fear,
the cooling stream in meadows of the mind,
and a sweet peace here.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Appeal to Protectors

Permit, this night, a warm tranquillity
to fall like blankets down
over the alien, tucked so safe and free,
abed in the warm town.

Permit no dream to trouble him anew.
Let only slumber keep
warm protection over him, all through
the hours of new sleep.

But if the new night stirs him—wide awake
as sometimes children are—
let then his heart sing mutely till daybreak
erases the late star.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Seed

The man turned over wet ground.
The boy threw the rocks he had found.

The boy said, “Dad, what is war?
Is it fighting for land that you got?”

“Well, yes and no. It is more
like keeping yourself. It is fought
for something you are and are not.”

The father looked back at his cropper.
“Move that. It’s almost a boulder.”
The helper sighed, “Boy, it’s a whopper!”

“But look: now it’s easy to sow.”

“Must I fight, dad, when I’m older?”

“I hope not, son . . . I don’t know.
Let’s eat, son.”

“All right, father.”

“Then we’ll plant another row.”

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

For Would-Be Invaders

This is the land of the child, dark gentlemen:
it is the land where minds of children
are as free as the flowing waters:
it is the land where children go cleanly as brooks,
through the green places where a sweet wild beauty
awaits the picking fingers, awaits the budding heart:
here is a road where there is time for walking and dreaming:
here is a hill where there is time for climbing and singing:
here is a meadow where there is time for growing, growing—
where each might go his separate way... But the chorus
of the voices of children is blended in singing of free land
as free as the green of the summer, as warm as the summer.
This is no land of the marching children, gentlemen:
it is the young land, youth that has come of age quickly:
it utters the purpose and wisdom of age, dark gentlemen,
but it is a land that cherishes always
the freedom of youth in its heart.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Born: July 1, 1942

Lift the child;
hold him, the high future, in the air.
He is the great gift;
he is the free man of 1962.
There must be no compromise
with his liberty;
no pact with the foe;
no infringement. His future
is growth and light; his betrayal
yesterday and the dark again:
the cave, the club and the captive.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Beware!

There's a foot on the stair.

Trust no thing in the dark:
it is subtle and still; it is stark.

Trust no door that will click:
it is naught but a foe; it's a trick.

Friends come warm as the sun;
who crawls in the dark isn't one.

Beware!
There's a foot on the stair.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Pity

When shadows fall, and linger far
across the hollow land that men
have claimed by conquest, pity ones,
now homeless, herded in the den;
oh, pity mothers without milk;
and pity fathers without will
to choose their labor; pity young
and songless children, old and still.
Oh, pity all in broken homes,
with fireless chimneys for their root,
but pity most, as shadows spread,
the child of darkness, child of brute.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Old Farmer, Warrior

He was a man filled with a quiet anger;
he was not often moved by wrath,
but the thing had been coming toward him: slowly
turning, the foe crawled near his path.

It was an alien thing that sought him,
invading the land that he had cut clean.
He got his stone and calmly sharpened
his anger and made the edges keen.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Torn Wing

The people walked
in silent wood,
and all the four
called silence good.

And none was more,
and none was least,
for thought was one,
and strife had ceased.

For everywhere
that trees grew tall
the good earth held
enough for all.

And then the thought
on fiery wings
went far from birds
where fury springs,

where feathered peace
is split apart
by acts that bleed
the wide world's heart.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

We Address the Men of Arms

the living: the dead: and, never the least, the half dead:

we forget not the past:

it is touched like a wound that is healing;

we forget not the future:

it is held like a good child growing;

we forget not war:

it is burnt like a brand in our minds;

we forget not peace:

it is held like a light in our hands.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Words for All Proud People

Take everything else from the proud people—
you can never take pride!

Take the fruit of their labor: stolen and hoarded,
like a rotten apple, it shall ruin it all before winter has gone.

Leave only one thing, the inevitable seed;
and let it be blown over hungry ground,
it will find its way, it will flourish and rise,
in the rocky pasture, on the precipice, held
by a purpose: a will to cling, and to struggle
out of the darkness, and into the sunlight.

Take their beautiful books, and the right to pen them:
they will be written in the long nights of anguish;
they will be written in the blood of the trampled;
they will be torn from the heart, and be written
and ever and ever rewritten at the great strong desks
of the mind.

Take their rising songs, and the right to sing them:
the scars will be healed, and, while they are healing,
the thought will go deeper, and the note will grow sweeter,
the pitch will be true, and the range will be wider;
every meadowland murmur, every mountain-peak call,
will be muted deep down in the streams of the heart.

Take their homes, and their gardens and the right to
keep them:
they will keep the foundations as the rock in the earth:
they will keep seed in darkness till the sun reappears:
they will keep the hearth lit in the homes of the heart.

Take their right to worship: though your whip's above them;
though the fingers that played on the harps of the world,
though the hands that brought here the sounds of the
heavens,
though they all be rougher and redder and bleed,
though your whip's above them as they kneel at labor,
they will kneel at the organ, they will kneel in prayer.

Take everything else from the proud people—
you can never take pride!

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Variorum. Also printed in *The Stubborn Root* (1952); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Of Christ and the Dark Hour

The heart could not believe
what the mind knew.
His rain and sunlight fed
what His ground grew.

The heart could feel the white
and the full flower.
The mind could sense the pain
of the dark hour

where furies tore the root,
and the dark wind
invaded every branch
that a war thinned.

And yet the loving heart
climbed His high hill,
where not a sandal print—
the high heart's still—

was seen on any blade.
And the heart held
His blossom and His fruit
until men felled

the tree He planted deep
in the deep heart.
And then the greedy mind
drew apart.

Oh, now the field's bare,
and the heart's bare,
but when the fury's spent,
and they greet Christ there

where the seed will fall again,
where the ill kneel
in labor and in prayer,
the heart will heal.

Woman at the Window

The woman leaned beside the open window.
And the door was open as she stood.
And then she knelt—I saw her kneeling slowly.
And then I thought: she is praying for something good.

I should have passed, but I was held, so faltered;
for the small white shoulders, as she fell
on knees, expressed a thing not born of language;
and her head and fallen hair had something to tell.

She muttered softly, silent as starless evening,
and I thought a lover was away.

She wept, then cried in anguish: “God! The people!”
She said no more. There was nothing for me to say.

I stood in grief—I stepped across the doorway—
and I paused, and waited, and turned,
for one in deepest pain was grieving, grieving;
and, while she wept for the people, countries burned.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Bombed River

Looking down from the hill, the silent river,
seeming a motionless thing like the road beside it,
stirred the heart with sweetness unforgotten,
as still as the raft and the lone one who dared ride it.

Looking down on the green remembered valley,
down the deep slope to the plain where the fruit and flower
were falling, falling, peace was felt. And the music,
coming from every heart, filled every hour.

Far in the distance, far from the ripened valley,
ominous, fearful and wild, the approaching rumble
tore through the quiet, strange as noise in a temple;
and quickly and fiercely, trees began to tumble

over and under the bombed and spreading river.
And, nearer and nearer, the wrath that man had fashioned
engulfed the orchard, made a lake of meadows.
Then, out of homes, the homeless and the rationed

ascended this that gave them prayer and wonder:
the lone high hill, their pinnacle of pain:
their homes beneath the flood, their warm hearts drowned.
Remembering wrath of old, they saw new peace again!

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

There Is a Great Fear

There is a great fear already: vengeance will strike
the warring and broken ones, loosed of their evil and anger:
wandering in empty meadows; in streets where statues,
heroic but false, then mock the present with past
victory and defeat, and this long curse.

Unless the curse be blessing, men shall go
down the darker roads to other dooms:
with the twin satans—fear and hate; with the wenches—lust
and rebellion, spirits reborn in their own hearts' darkness.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Something Has Gone

Something has gone'. Something the heart held deep
has withered, been spread, been blown
as ashes in a violent wind.
Slowly it crept, slowly it bore where the plots
of flowering love and flourishing faith were growing,
ever and ever and upward growing toward sun.
And always, wherever a thing grew weaker and darker,
there was more love for it, and tenderest pity.
Something has gone from the hearts of many a man;
something has gone, when, viewing the wasted valley
and the scorched green hill, the mouth speaks feebly, feebly;
the heart speaks nothing at all; yes, nothing at all.
Something has gone. And dead men walk the earth.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Children of War

Children of Europe will go
out on the hill again.
Children remember a while.
Then their fear and pain

vanish, as blossoming fields
lure them to wood where the heart's
inescapable joy
goes as the creek that parts

wonder and wonder; and sweet
flowing of stream and mind
bids them to journey and seek
all that their faith can find.

Children of Europe will hide,
shielding themselves with night.
Children of Europe will seek
play when the world's alight.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Danger Zone

No porch is lit. No caller comes
with gifts and laughter. Every light
is blurred, and, through each quiet house,
the people wait throughout the night.

Where sleep is never sleep, they lie,
as ones in dreams, awaiting doom
that soon might drop from evil clouds,
and break the black and silent room

apart, and let invading flames
envelop them. So, half awake,
awaiting any alien sound,
they rest, prepared to war and break

upon the foe, and make his flame
as lifeless as his heart is dead.
No porch is lit. No friend will come.
And there is never peace abed.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Creed for Man

Let us see no child's face
old and gaunt.
Let the old be free from
want.

Let us walk the calm night
with naught near
but a friend, nor cringe with
fear.

Let us sing of love's rule:
no man's writ
can dethrone the power of
it.

Let the voice be high, fine,
noble speech.
Let it freely damn, pray,
and teach.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

America! You Are the Giver!

(for William Rose Benet)

America,
you are the giver;
you are the gift.

Millions have been going
through the long, soft summers,
beside the fresh, flowing,
wide water&—the rivers
with music for names:

Monongahela, Wabash,
Colorado, Allegheny,
Ohio, and the greatest—
the mighty Mississippi:

oh, how you have carried far
inland and out to sea
the treasures of this generous land:

the cotton from the sunny ground:
the warming richness found
beneath the earth: the wood
from ever-growing hills:
the golden grain that fills
the bread bins of the homes:

the sweet spread of the bee.

What silent singing comes,
when, ever and ever blended
with your sure and tireless flowing,
the heart is carried gently
into the wider stream:

here, America, is the new dream
come true, the journey begun
and never ended.

America, America,
like the mightiest river,
you are the gift,
you are the giver!

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Lines in a Letter from England: 1941

“We walked home in the darkness,
through the dark city, in the dark streets;
and we made a discovery, as a child makes one:
we could see through the darkness like the cat that followed.
And we made another: the night was blue,
blue as the eyes of a child,
with a light like a star.
Softly dominating
the whole vast darkness,
we were led through the night to our beds.”

“We heard Beethoven on Wednesday evening.
And, when there is time, we will hear Bach again.”

“The rain fell during the night:
it fell softly, then like the wash of waves;
and then the wind, like a great clean broom,
swept the earth. And the land is new this morning.”

“I read your poem again while I worked last night.
And this morning I made a song of it.”

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Higher Education

His grandfather slaved
without any pay.
His grandmother worked
in the same poor way.

His father shined shoes,
he rubbed and he rubbed.
His mother cleaned floors,
and she scrubbed and scrubbed.

He lived in a shack
on the edge of the town,
and his heart was light,
though his skin was brown.

His features lit up
with the things he learned
in school, and the great
warm knowledge burned

deep down in his heart
like wisdom of sun.
And then when his long
school years were done,

and he stood erect
in the proud front row,
he followed the ways
where the wisest go.

And far as the clouds,
his hope rose high,
and his faith was warm
as the field and sky.

But his smile was gone
when his shoes wore thin,
for nobody smiled
or took him in.

His name lies deep

in honor and doubt
in the dark old trunk;
he'll not take it out.

He has risen, high
in the world. He calls,
"The tenth floor, sir!"
And no word falls.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Let Us Not Say the Skin Is Dark

The hand is dark that flays
the helpless one who has no voice,
who has no right to cry aloud
in evil days.

Let us not say the skin is dark.
The heart is dark that feels
the love for his own child, but gives
no balm for colored, broken ones
he never heals.

Let us not say the skin is dark.
There is no thing as black
as mind that cuts its loss and sin,
as man who cuts ungodly shame
in his brother's back.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

In the Desert

Here is where silence grows
still, as the listening ear
remembers what it knows,
like a clear

imprint lettered in stone.
Here is a breathing sound
not lost; though one's alone,
this ground,

air and the joshua trees
whisper and pray and tell
the heart what it will seize
and know well.

Wandering silence is spread.
The racing heart and mind
are touched and quieted,
and they find,
here where all thought is fed,
what they will find.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Variorum. Also printed in *The Stubborn Root* (1952); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Where the Doe Awakes

The night came slowly over the fading edge.
It was the dark one hardly saw appear.
One forgot sun lingered on the ridge
where now the beautiful gloom hides the warm deer.

It is strange that in the darkness no hungry wing is whirring,
and no deer is the target when the living body glistens
through dull deceptive branches. No enemy is boring
through the place that nightfall fashioned. The silent friend
listens.

He knows that morning, with sound of woodland blending
with the human tread that is not of this furry place,
shall bring forth another herd, armed and grimly commanding
the eyes that have never seen behind the doe's face.

The morning shall come. And where the doe awakes
and seeks what is needed, the daytime way shall be run.
Pray, night, you have strength for the long bright day that
forsakes
this shining courage that leaps ahead of the gun.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Hearing “Afternoon of a Faun”

Softly, as golden notes came gently
throughout the darkened room
lit by the fireplace and the beauty
of song that can consume,

whatever’s somber, other music
crept into the velvet scene:
raindrops falling lightly, lightly
in small notes, round and green.

as

Still furry feet in the mosses,
shy as the hidden flower,
the singing wood and the wet invader
met by the flame and bower,

dripping so that the heart might listen
to sweet, sweet voices calling,
as the faun came by and in at twilight
while the rain was falling, falling.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Shelter the Little Ones

O winter, be very kind;
nature, be good
and shelter the little ones
living in the wood.

O winter, wherever the snow
falls on the limb,
shelter each soft one there,
feed and warm him.

O winter, the lovely and wise,
wherever they plod,
shelter the small ones, furred
and feathered by God.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).
Variorum. Also printed in *The Hearth Lit* (1946); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

I Remember, Jay

I remember, Jay, your wood,
and the fallen birds that you helped to fly.
You used to look at the giant oak
as a baby looks at the summer sky.

I remember, Jay, two hands
as warm as youth, that two held tightly,
without fear that our thighs might be warmer still
when we sauntered toward waiting mothers nightly.

I remember, Jay, your friends:
the birds whose privacy you held dear:
your lover-pigeon, brother-hare;
the sounds of danger you three could hear.

I remember, Jay, your voice
like brooks of Cloverdale that are ever
a woodland hymn, but I heard you curse
at a sling that was aimed and an axe that would sever.

I remember, Jay, a robin
shot through the heart, and a sapling cut clean
by summer's first lightning, and, oh, I remember
wood and I mourned your death. You were sixteen!

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Winging Alone

Winging alone and out of sight,
a bird flew slowly through the night,
past the low star and the low full moon.
It went as if it would not come soon
to the wood where birds were then at rest.
What thing had driven it from its nest?
Was it an urge of devil-may-care,
or was it a dark intrusion there,
or was it, perhaps, no thing as brief
as fear or hunger? Was it grief?
Was there no nest where a nest had been,
was the nest hidden and was it seen
and then not seen again by her,
and no song therein and no little stir?
What was the thing that made her go
from the green, green heaven that safe birds know?

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).
Variorum. Also printed in *The Stubborn Root* (1952); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

The Prodigals

He who was born by a river
and moves away from it
always speaks with a hunger
of where he used to sit
low on a bank where the water
ran by his home and heart,
ever and ever flowing,
ever and ever a part
of all that his heart is seeking,
of all that sets him free
with the flowing, flowing river
running away to the sea.

He who was born on a mountain
and leaves the snowy wonder
always speaks with a longing
of a loud and marvellous thunder
crashing between the pine trees,
of clouds that wander low
beneath the rustic cabin.
High as a heart can go,
he who has moved to the valley
lets his mind roam far
up through the night to the mountain,
near peace and home and a star.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Let Me Not Be Shielded

and strike me blind
if I be wide-eyed always,
if I shut my mind.

If I must have my full sight
deep down in dark,
if I must tear through brambles
to find the hidden lark,

then let my heart in blackness
cry out the soaring word,
then let the wound be open,
and the song be heard.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Strong Things Lean

Strong things lean against warm tenderness:
mountains touch the sky:
great wings, going homeward, frame themselves
in white clouds as they fly.

Tall pines lengthen shadows, soft and long,
over the still deep lake,
resting their great green beauty in the glass
of blue that cannot break.

And houses lean as all the strong things lean
with wisdom they have found:
gables and roofs and windows facing sun,
and roots in the good cool ground.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Inner Flight

The moon hung low
to light her way.
The blossoms breathed
what they could not say.

The stars crowned magic
on her hill.
Obediently,
the town lay still,

while, nestling there,
she felt a bird
rise in her breast
but sing no word,

for every sweet
and secret note
was hushed and held
deep in her throat.

And so she flung
her warm arms wide,
and held the night
and was his bride.

And slumber claimed
her scented room,
and the dreamer fled
with the dream and groom.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

In This Green Place

It was in this green place,
under the maple where I lifted her face;
here that the lace,
white as the blossoms I brought,
trembled upon her heart that was warm as my thought;
here that our hands met,
and her cheeks

 were wet,
and we were no longer friends but dearer
than friends are, and nearer.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Girl on the Hilltop

She waited beneath the pepper tree, and followed
the way of a bird to its young and the sun on water
until her eyes grew heavy with all the softness.
This was a place for dreams; his dreams had brought her.
The fall of a leaf, like his first kiss, touched and roused her;
and she rose as the air grew empty and fearful and still.
Then the furious sound of the leaves drove the birds to cover
safe in the haven, away from the fear and kill.
She wanted to run when she heard the growing rattle,
and a cry that warned her he was halfway up the hill.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

The Dare

Do you remember Cloverdale
and things we dared to give her,
drunk with beauty and ourselves?
From Oak Ridge to the river
the clover spilled along the hillside
and almost to the water,
where summertime was running, running
after her fleeing daughter.
And if what's known was never known
or is not known by others,
then let us hope that some will see
what's never seen by brothers,
what's never seen by anyone,
who, though they roam long over,
cannot fill hearts with summertime
and their warm selves and clover.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

And Still They Heard

They stood there on the hilltop, waiting
for words the doubt hushed in the breast.
The tree swayed in the woodland. Slowly,
she looked eastward, he looked west.

The racing cloud moved high above them,
the last leaf fluttered farewell near
their faces, warm, as all departure
urged the doubtful hearts to hear

the warning wind, the leaf blown by it,
and see the cloud so lightly tossed;
and still they heard and saw and faltered,
and were lost.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Lost Lady

She roamed in the woodland
when the first bloom grew,
and May and her spirit
broke her heart in two.

In summer the flying
and the robin's tone
of rapture were never
braver than her own.

When autumn, the widow
in a borrowed skirt,
went gaily, she followed,
hating the inert.

And suddenly, strangely,
with her blossoms flung,
she looked upon winter
with her heart still young.

And then she went grieving
down a long hard way,
for death was a devil
giving night for day.

She crept then in sorrow,
for she loved youth here.
She could not see beauty
that was old and dear.

(

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

There Is Something New About

as a bathed child creeping out
across the wider April floor
past the unlocked door.

There is something in the air,
fragrant as the baby's hair;
something freeing everything,
swift as a robin's wing.

There is something in the lane,
somber once but green again.
And all the fresh and flowered breath
came from the bed of death.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

He Was Always Running Away

As we ran after,
we felt that we darkened his day
and his leaping laughter.

He was always reaching for stars,
and opening eyes
like light in the dark. When he rose,
we heard not his cries,

and we ran through the yard and the field,
past the pasture-bars,
into the wood that revealed
all the seeker knows:

he was safe in the flowers and fern,
he was lovely and still.
We left him to seek his return
at his will.

(

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

The Ploughman

Here is a man.
The waves of ground
move back again
when the opened sound
of spring breaks through.
This man is one
who feels the sky's
light rivers run
into his earth;
he hears it sup
deeply, and sees
the seed come up,
up through the warm
and rainy hour,
and break, like his heart,
in fullest flower.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Broken Bud

Quiet, deep earth,
awake.

Let the sap run
and the bud break.

Open, deep earth,
the seed.

Let the lanes have
what they need.

Loosen, deep earth,
your treasure.

Give the folk now
full measure.

Swollen, deep earth,
reply
to the good song
as the birds fly.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Lines for Robert Nathan

His lines are like warm children running
out on the sand,
like children laughing, children sunning,
like boys that stand

tiptoe, reaching for the berry
on the branch high
as their belief, and as the cherry,
and as the sky.

His lines are like old gentle people
in early morning,
like old ones seeing the mountain steeple,
and sun returning

again to meadows, softly greeting
their sweet worn way,
grateful for sunlight, grateful for meeting
one more day.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Now Slumbers the Day

Twilight is hiding
the robins away.
Children are sliding

into the softer arm
evening is bringing;
here are the warm
ones, lost as singing

fades when the light
blends with the deep
blue quilt of night.
All are asleep,

but will soon awake,
and, with a shout,
let in the day's break,
and let night out.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Flowers of the Snow

The flowers of the snow are on the bush.

Do not breathe or do not hush
the child for these will drift away.

Step forth gently. Do not stay,
lest they feel your presence here
and vanish in the whitened earth.
Exotic trees are more than worth

a look or two, but go not near
the heavy branch or it will shower
as the late, light, shaken apple flower.
And high as lilac and as rose
many a frosty petal goes
above the windowsill in glass,
as blossoms that spring dropped in the grass.

Do not touch them with your face
and wish them from this fragile place.

Shake not anything you pass;
do not tear the flowered lace,
for these will hurry spring along.
Snow is a garden. Snow is song.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Wings with the Touch of Snow

I heard her sing.
Only one sweet note had come to bring
the opening of spring.
As the pearly
jewels of rain hung on the limb,
I heard her call to him:
he had come early
too, perhaps, as he saw her rise and go
high and far to the north,
eagerly forth,
with her warm wings feeling the touch of snow.
I heard
the note of the warm bird
rise, emphatic
and certain, brave and ecstatic
with the eternal, green
promise a bird has always seen
through and between
whatever season, keeping, keeping
her faith in all that grows and sings
through awaking or sleeping
winters or springs.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Now Where the Hush

Summer has lingered
here: the thriving bush
grows green where strength has fingered
the verdure. Once the thrush
fluttered her warm wings
here where now the hush
of winter calmly falls,
and silence flings
the gentle shower: all's
white, white
through the long night,
except the giant pine
and the tiny bush,
green, green.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Friend with a Folded Book

You have heard whispering. Drop your book.
Remember the orchard and blossoms falling,
and remember the light sweet wind and the way
the new birds, warm in the nest, were feebly calling?
Remember the way wind gently shook
the tree, and how fruit softly fell;
and, hearing the whispers of water in the rocky brook,
remember what whispering summer had to tell?

Remember this, and then go forth.
Go onward. Soon the roaring north
will silence all the autumn talk
among the racing leaves and shaken bush.
Go onward swiftly with the wind, and walk
with spirit sweeping summer wide. And go
throughout the chattering fall before the hush—
the final silent eloquence of snow
and winter find you sitting by the fire,
dreaming of whispers, dreaming of autumn talk,
as flame leaps higher,
as thoughts go back where birds and bright leaves wing,
as thoughts go onward toward another spring.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

The Farmer

The farmer fills his pipe and lights it.
His dinner was good; he frees the belt-buckle.
He sees the colt race with its mother.
He sees the calf suckle.

The farmer knocks out burnt tobacco.
He puts a cold cup to his mouth.
He cuts another path with Dobbin;
forgets last summer's drouth.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

California Mountaineer

He saw the spider rise to his kingdom in the comer.
He saw the field mouse run across the floor.
He said no word; his was no place for speaking.
It had been weeks since he closed the door.

On the cool cracked floor he lay looking at the ceiling;
there were three thin places where the sun stole through.
He'd patch them up before the winds of winter,
or, maybe, he would wait till the light snow blew.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Feet Shall Seem No Part of Me

I will have all;
I will have nothing less than all.
I will hear the bird call,
and follow,
down to the deep, deep, deep of the hollow.
I will see
the bird on the hilltop's highest tree,
and be
part of the bird-song,
and belong
with all that is swift and free,
while feet shall seem no part of me.
And I will go down to the brook,
and be glad of the journey I took,
and listen to running music of water
till twilight steps forth lightly here.
As a parent carrying a slumbering daughter,
I will be near
the peace that evening brings,
as the last bird wings
to the nearby tree,
and I will be
one with this sweet tranquillity.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Woman Selling Eggs

One basket held the brown eggs, one held white.
Ma Weber was a clean and sturdy sight.
She went about her fresh and daily chore,
always welcomed at the town's back door.
She would chat but never tarry much,
being half-Yankee, and, plainly, half-Dutch.
If you had seen her basket, then saw nothing in it,
she would sit down and talk with you a minute.
If you were a judge, she'd talk of politics.
If you were a farmer, then she'd talk of chicks.
But if you were a mother, she'd talk to you of sons,
and pride would equal yours over the missing ones.
And when, at long last, holidays came round,
and one she loved came home with what he found
in books and stronger minds, and in himself,
she'd take her wrapped hat off the bedroom shelf,
and go to meet him. Walking on her route,
feeling his hand, she'd wish that you'd come out.
Hers was no chore now; she'd be slowly walking.
If you came by, she'd let him do the talking.
She would be almost mute, and proud and meek;
she would hear all that all the fine folk speak.
She would be proud, as proud as anyone
who ever loved her God and loved her son.
She'd never think of all the labor done,
for though she saw the neighbors' curtains stir,
she did not know he was so proud of her.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Invited Knockers

Her attic was not filled with old
dust-covered clothes and broken rockers.
It was a locked room. No one came
except invited knockers.

And all who came had childish hearts.
They held the remembered Teddy bear
and the small toy poodle, both still white
and silky as her hair.

And out of the tiny violin
they heard the touch of a small child bringing
a tender record of the years,
blending spontaneous singing.

And when she softly locked the door,
she went—the child she was before.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

In the Children's Hospital

You look, above the broken bodies,
into the eyes as blue as water,
into the eyes as black as berries:
somebody's little son and daughter.

And what you see are more than eyes:
you see a wide belief in hands,
that lift and lower, moved by soft
dear hearts that love alone commands.

You move with these, and wait for these
warm gestures, sweet and powerful,
to lead the tots into the field,
after the tender miracle.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

The Salesgirl

The salesgirl, somehow the eternal miracle
in neat black and fresh white collar, places
ten cents of her forty in the box as a beautiful
and dull world homeward races.

And, still all wonder, she leaves the greedy car,
dancing away from a faster one;
and old eyes envy her and follow far
as these can see her run.

Her heart is lifted, seeing the postman's greeting,
but the letter from home soon darkens the rhymes
of a warmer heart, resuming its normal beating
in an old world of hard times.

And later a hand will suddenly open doors,
and a landlady with a leaning year,
suspecting always she might be harboring whores,
will cherish a smaller fear:

stockings and dainty silk things in her water:
"The rules, my dear!" She'll pray. She'll weep.
She'll hope for what tomorrow's never brought her,
and, somehow, fall asleep.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

On the Bus

The intimate, round forms of long-married women,
who feel no irritation in the sudden touch
of shaken bodies, rubbed by the human
stumble they have felt very much,

can sit, with a part in the narrow aisle,
and never feel the sharp and angular threat
of the loveless beings, formed by style;
whose loss is obviously set

in the nonconformist's attitude.
They look at her with hearts that are flat,
while hers is filled with tasks pursued,
divinely oblivious of scorn and fat.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Loud Prayer

She lived with love and fury,
wedded to each, and gave
her children all her darker years; and calling
herself a slave,

she loudly prayed for quiet,
feeling peace the balm
for somber years when she at last would have it
and be calm.

For peace was something sweeter,
dearer than angry years;
she visioned verdant plains of mind beyond this
valley of tears.

And when she had peace, lying
empty in her lap,
she knew not what to do with it, and so she
took a nap.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Vigil

All through the night she watches
one tiny head,
one little form cat-napping
in the bed.

All through the night she watches
for one hot stir,
soothing a body tossing,
and cooling her.

And through the dark, uneasy
hours of night,
love is the nurse that is softer
than candlelight.

All through the night, till daybreak,
her comfort's wide,
fresh as the cool brook flowing
through the countryside.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

The Boys

His mother said, “It’s Jim that worries me.
Not Tom. Jim takes responsibility
without his knowing it. He gives
without a thought of giving, for he lives
as naturally as the things he likes to grow.
No thought is bitter; pray it is always so.

“Tom”s filled with laughter. Wind and summer sun
come in with him. The serious business of fun
is made a habit; and all his days are song.
He’ll not do much, but Tom will get along.

“And Jim—his days will be too hard for him.
They’ll take more than is right to give. His slim,
fine body, after all the hard years spent
in love and labor, will turn old and bent,
unless his strong heart holds his spirit up
and offers him refreshment from the cup
of giving, granting him peace and rest.

“Or, maybe, it is Tom who is not blest.”

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Shelter

She was afraid that
she might fall,
afraid of shadows
on the wall,

afraid of words she
thought unkind,
afraid of night, so
drew the blind.

She was afraid to
wed until
one loved her so, and
broke her will.

She was afraid when
death drew near,
and left her with two
children here.

Seeing them then so
young and small,
seeing their warm tears
fall and fall,
she was as strong as
she was weak;
she had courageous
words to speak.

It was a strong life
that she gave.
Holding them then, oh,
she was brave!

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Smiling Lady

They looked at the lady,
for they saw her smile.
They looked at the lady
a long, long while.

They chatted of wisdom,
and they talked of woe.
Oh, when would they ever
begin to know

what she, the kind lady,
who did not speak,
revealed? Would they ever
cease to seek,

and find all her wisdom,
and smile through eyes
where all that began and
ended lies?

And the lady kept smiling
when they closed her door:
she knew what they knew and
not a thing more!

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Western Night

The joshua trees salute the arrogant moon,
and coyotes split the cool night air with their cries,
and a scorpion waits for the love-death that comes very soon,
while over the lowland an evil tranquillity lies.

Here is a country where man has not flowered his way;
here is a haunt where the bandits of bad lands rule,

each killing each but each leaving others that slay;
here is the savage heart's food, his evil blood's fuel;
here is the thing that is strangely lovely and cruel.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Hearth

There is no fact more wonderful and wise:
there is no fact more beautiful than this:
a man must have a hearth to sit before.

There is his freedom: there is his warmth:
there is his heart, a lifting and desire:
a man must have a hearth to warm his mind.

A man must have a hearth: and that is all:
lit is his home: and lit are his heart and thought.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Of Voices Whispering

It has all,
all been spoken:
You, loosely and nobly
formed into words:
the trite, worn utterance;
the mouth speaking;
the mind in the racing street;
the heart—
O the poor inattentive one—
lured from the lifting silence,
whirling in raucous chaos,
in the silken and polished sandal;
not in the rough but
beautiful sandal of service.

And of You:
words made of sun;
of voices whispering
softly in lilies and foliage,
along the creek and the river—
the steadily, steadily flowing—
through day, through twilight,
and through the long darkness;
of cadences of the surf
heard from the glorious mountain,
the high, unattainable
the near and possessed by the claimant;
of voices coming
closer and closer,
clear in the opening morning;
of voices like dew
falling at dawn in the vineyard;
of voices like fingers
touching the hem of the evening.

And of You:
words in the eyes:
in the long,

long gaze of service;
words in the hands:
in the hard,
hard years of duty;
words in the thought:
in the ripe,
ripe knowledge of growth;
words in the sight
of the beautiful silence of children.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Variorum. Also printed in *The Stubborn Root* (1952); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

I Have Looked Far, America

far down, from your many hills.
I have followed the way of your rivers.
I have seen the fall that spills
a leaping, hurried force.
Where foam-tossed foliage quivers,
I have seen the speeding course.
Onward and onward, and unto its home—the sea,
I have heard the wide stream flowing
over rock and bank. I have watched it bringing
a cooling peace to meadows, wide and singing.

I have looked far, America,
far down, at your children going.
I have followed the way of their dream
by the water ever reaching
through ripened
 land and heart,
with summer's child and stream.
I have heard my spirit start
onward and onward, with children toward the sea.
I have stood on high hills, reaching
over land and brook. I have joined them going,
your children seeking two great oceans flowing.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Still the Hill Is Green There

Oh, I have climbed a high hill,
and lost my heart in clover.
There I heard a lark sing,
but saw no hawk go over.

I have lost my way there,
though I love song so dearly,
but now I see before me
the wedding place so clearly:

still the hill is green there,
and still the clover's growing,
but now the lark is dead there,
and still the hawk is going,
and evil wind is blowing.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

He Who Has Been to Derry

“He who has been to Derry
will always know peace,” she said.

“He will not ever hunger,
or know what is dead.

“He who has been to Derry
will see what my eyes have seen,
never know fear or hunger.”

I have never been;

I have not been to Derry,
so hunger is meant for me;
I have not been to Derry.

“Neither have I,” said she.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

Window with Always a Light

This is home.

This is the first house I knew.

This is the stair
that felt the bare knees as I grew.

This is my room
where the maple came almost in.
These are the steps
to the attic my shoes wore thin.

This is the porch
that the winter covered with snow,
and the eaves
that the sparrows will always know.

These are the vines
that cling, as my heart clings here
to the old
grey house. Let them see me near

what they call
their home, that is mine by right;
it's a world
in a world that gave me sight,
a window with always a light.

Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

The Heart Is Like the Day

it wakes
brightly:
it breaks
whitely
in bloom, and seeks the way
of sun:
clearly
it heals;
dearly
it feels
with light warm fingers,
and lingers
until the hours of sleep,
when its peace is deep.

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Publication. *The Proud People* (Mill Valley, California, and New York: The Wings Press, 1943).

THE LONG NIGHTS

1944 · Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1944

As Brothers Are Remembered

(for Stephen Vincent Benet)

He will be remembered as lovers are remembered:
he wrote a great, free love song for a need,
for a love new-grown, for hearts that bleed.

He will be remembered as prophets are remembered:
he wrote a great, free warning for the blind.
Like a great, warm spring, he opened his mind.

He will be remembered as fighters are remembered:
he wrote a great, free anger for the foe;
like a great, hot flame, he penned the blow.

He will be remembered as brothers are remembered:
he wrote a great, free message for his land;
as the whole world's kin, he stretched his hand.

Publication. *The Long Nights* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1944).

Of a Million Cries

Somehow, the flowers grow
in this deep, degraded place:
high in the sun they go
from graves of a fallen race.

Here is a garden, planned
as a mad child's: colors rise
out of the ruptured land,
from earth of a million cries.

What struggles above barbed deeds,
and climbs the high, barbed fence,
is all the bruised world needs
for blessed permanence.

Publication. *The Long Nights* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1944).

Though I Sing, America

But, though I join the singing now, the great, high
stirring song,
I will chant once more of darkness; I will chant of
wrong,
remembering the colorless faces of children, their
hungry eyes;
I can never forget the stark and terrible cries
of dark and loyal children forced across the seas.
And, while I am singing your praises, America, of
field and forest,
I can remember your songless children, children
in arid places;
and I can remember your own mad children hunting,
and lashing, and burning. And I can remember,
America,
after the lawlessness, after the anger and tumult,
your bloody and lifeless sons on your evil trees.
Oh, America; like the great, full tree of knowledge,
spread farther. still. Let every branch of your
vast growing
shelter the many children of all your loyal races.

Publication. *The Long Nights* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1944).

Poem for Joyce Kilmer: 1944

I think of you again, o poet of a war,
not won, twice-battled, still aflame,
and clear above the tumult, high atop the earth,
I hear your noble name.

Oh, hot has been the tongue of man, and mad the heart,
and black has been the deed and mind.
I think of you who sang for all and you who fought
to give full sight unto the blind.

I think of you, good poet, singing, brave, and slain;
I think of you, good father, out
in battlefield and chaos; husband, friend and faith
immaculate, and still devout.

I think of you again, o poet of a war,
when marred cathedrals in debris
are whole and shining when the deep eyes have a sight
for viewing all that true eyes see.

Publication. *The Long Nights* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1944).

Not Earth Alone

Pray long for children born in a world at war,
whose children's hours
are sung not high on blooming hills, but still
with death's red flowers.

Pray long for ones who never dare lift eyes
free to the sun.
Not earth alone spits fire, for heaven, too,
drops with a gun.

Pray long for ones who daily see men lift
on wide, strong wings
until the dark, who fear the stars and doom
the clear night brings.

And, Lord, let only the sweet and lark-like birds
go overhead.

Children have seen the circling, plunging ones
too long,

—

and too long the dead.

: '

Publication. *The Long Nights* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1944).

Common Analysis

He thought: I have listened to long words uttered by
learned men:
to wise, old gentlemen speaking of defensive
strategies:
of barter, of friend and of foe:
of the deep, circuitous roadways of the deeper and
learned mind:
of beginning of war and of end:
of why, of why, of why.

He thought: I will turn to my high hill,
I will turn to my high hill,
and cleanse my mind with the green and the quiet
before I do battle.

Perhaps there's an answer in silence.
He saw old, dark Abe plowing,
old, dark Abe Lincoln Brown there tending his
ten good acres,
and pausing to read the Good Book,
and sending his son to college,
and never working on Sunday.
He saw young Danny Weaver climbing the trail to
Pine Wood,
young Danny Weaver growing out in the field
and forest,
with a body as free as the May wind,
and a song as free as the lark.

He saw worn women going to their. old beloved Church,
and worn old fingers sewing something warm and new,
something warm for others.
He saw the oily river, and the locks of Monongahela,
and the great, black burdens going to light the home
and the mill
of the Pennsylvania people:
the Armenians, the French, and the Dutch;
the Irish, the British, and the Finns;
the Germans, the Poles and the Greeks;
Italians; some speaking poorly

their English; some not at all,
but their children singing loudly and clearly
 “America”
and giving their coins to the Red Cross,
and remembering refugees.
And, all alone on the hilltop, and since his
 family vanished,
all alone in the world,
he did not remember the fine words,
and the why, and the why, and the why.
And he uttered no word of his own,
but his heart answered every query, in silence,
 with eloquence.
Alone, he marched down the hilltop, with a million
 by his side!

Publication. *The Long Nights* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1944).

In Anguish I Cry Out

I am the voice of anguish, and in anguish I cry out.

Long I have dwelt in shadows, in the black room
as the ominous boot struck the pavement of my mind,
as the dictatorial doorman ordered my own door shut,
but never my heart's door: this alone flung free:
though struck by many a wind of fury, though hit
with a savage thrust, this, my heart, flung free.

Long I have bled in the gutter because I was born
with a face, because I was taught the truth of man,
and spoke it, because I uttered the right word
of conscience, and muttered it, even, with the loose
and bloody mouth, made by the blow of the liar, might.

I am the voice of anguish, and in anguish I cry out.

Long I have dwelt in the rock-room hid in the height,
long I have lived there deep in the wild things' home;
far, from my country's poorest nook, I have crept
through blessed black to strike an evil gloom
spread out across my land. Though dying, still,

with my last heart beat, I knew, smilingly knew,
that a million hearts, wherein the blood ran free,
were beating, beating: and I lived in these hearts.

I am the voice of anguish, and in anguish I cry out.

I cry 'not for a thing, I cry against it.
And I will keep my deep heart's weapon free
until I, too, with man's inalienable right
and human dignity, am free, am wholly free!

Publication. *The Long Nights* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1944).

Child Killed in Traffic

i' There the child lay.

Death dared pluck
a flowering life out
with a truck,

man-made monster,
man as guide.
(And flowering playgrounds
wide, so wide!)

There the child lay.
Dots of red
on flowering garments
of the dead

grow like poppies
What was rose
and flowering meadow
never grows

on earthy pavements.
Run, child, run
on flowering hilltops
in God's high sun.

THE LONG NIGHTS

Publication. *The Long Nights* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1944).

Song

Let me hear music of the willow
that the sad hour stirs,
like the low weeping of a lover
for the one who was hers.

Let me hear music of the maple
when the leaves blow away,
like the bright weeping for the lover
who had come not to stay.

Let me hear music of the branches
where the white shower clings,
like a bloom frozen, like a lover
who nevermore sings.

Publication. *The Long Nights* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1944).

THE HEARTH LIT

1946 · La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946

Flight

The morning shall come. And where the doe awakes
and seeks what is needed, the daytime way shall be
run.

Pray, night, you have strength for the long bright

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Across the Night

This blessed night when only thin and small
saplings barely move, when feathers stir
gently, soft as pillowed moss or fur,
the mind is pure; the silent voices call.

Across the night the sweetness of the earth
fills the mind as honey in a cup.
For the thirsty, here a man may sup
goodness sweet as goodness after birth.

Yet in the shadows man must move in fear,
creep with vengeance in the evil gloom,
cut and build his crosses, while the bloom
of peace, a healing growth, is ever near.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Boy Searching

Alone he goes—a whistle made by lips,
a twig in hand, a sweater round his hips,
his body warm and glowing on the quest;
alone he goes, bare-footed, without rest.
A metal button many feet have bent
is made into his cap's bright ornament.

A worn old swing that rode the children high
is tested for a new ride to the sky.

While going out, a boy is never blind.
Each day he needs new treasures for his mind,
not towers where the proud men shout and pass,
but something hopping from a blade of grass,
or something digging in its house of sand
that gives him knowledge crawling from his hand.

Alone he comes, a heart-song on his lips,
returning home, a sweater round his hips.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Child Sleeping

The gentle moonlight's slanting
across his bed.

A quilt of flowers covers
all but his head.

So silent under petals
is one at rest,
in sleeping, fragrant gardens,
the sweet one's blest.

Soon day shall call from slumber
the quiet child,
and he will shake the blossoms,
run sweet and wild!

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Wanderers

Wandering farther than he should,
the boy, in darkness, in the wood
heard a sudden rush of feet,
furred, advancing. Swift retreat,
fear-led, drove him helter-skelter
toward a quiet, unseen shelter.
Great, fantastic arms reached out
where he heard wild giants shout;
then he stumbled and he fell.
One who followed came to tell
him that he, too, lost his way
wandering in the night from day.
Then he saw four small legs stand;
something panted, licked his hand.
Little, frightened dog and boy,
chased by fear, then walked in joy,
neither held by fearful tether,
lost, but finding home together.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Unfettered

See the furry, wild thing scamper;
there's a quick sound when he darts
through the air. Now, what can hamper
joy so wild and free that starts
through the wide field, swift, unfettered,

having faith in his full flight?
Where's the man who, howso lettered,
makes his thinking half as light?

See the joyful, free thing going.
Let the thought leap wide and high
where the cleanest winds are blowing,
less of earth, and more of sky.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Summer Is a Wild Girl

crying one minute,
laughing then; a red mouth,
and a wild rose in it.

Summer is a good girl
kneeling on a byway;
scanty clad then, freely
waving from the highway.

Summer is a young girl
freshest blooms cover,
ripe and full and sweetest,
taunting each new lover.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Pecked Apricot

This apricot I start to throw away,
dug by a hungry bill as it hung sweet
and ripe for man, left by the startled bird
trained in the wisdom of taking and retreat,
this apricot is sweeter still, so I,
hearing the song high on the summer tree,
bless all the summer-sun and limb and fruit
and the sweeter singer that left part for me.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Song

The dapple one's in slumber.
The wing is in the nest.
The feathered ones and furred ones
are at rest.

The faintest sound of morning,
like featherfall, is waking.
The bird and doe announce that
day is breaking.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Cry in the Still Night

what do you say?
It has a long sound,
softer than day.

Or, is a mind, not
fretted with care,
clean as the bird song
claiming the air?

Deaf is the weak ear,
and the song thin,
hearing noise; strong, strong,
taking peace in.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Puppies in a Pet Shop Window

With doggish, woolly,
sad surprise,
they look at me through
puzzled eyes,
I on pavement,
they on paper,
no one tapping,
through with caper.
Now we question
one another,
neither with a
friend or mother,
no one racing
in the grass,
separated, now,
by glass.
I speak, "Poor fellow.
Who will get you?
No one comes now to
claim or pet you."
One questions me with
eyes of pity:
"Are you, too, held by
glass and city?"

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Hail

Softly,
with a tiny
tin-like sound,
a drop is heard.
Two more come then,
and ten, and countless sounds.
Suddenly,
as mischievous
warm fists of boys
casting out pebbles
against deserted buildings,
the hands of the heavens
are loosened, and the hail
falls sharply, quickly,
and suddenly
ceases.
And the face of earth
is fresh,
fresh as the faces of boys,
after the race and
the game are done.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Home and Food

His dinner was good; he frees the belt-buckle.

He sees the colt race with its mother.

He sees the calf suckle.

.....

He puts a cold cup to his mouth.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Inscription for a New Home

Open the new door, friend.
Call the hearth good.
Pile up the pine logs there.
Smell the sweet wood.

Gather with warm friends here.
Call them all close.
Give them a hand and fruit.
Love the small house.

First of all, plant with care
oaks by the door,
these that are now what the
house was before.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Janitor Listening with a Learned Audience

Being meek, and knowing only
one man like him, old and lonely,
one who waits for gifts of bread,
being ill and underfed,
must he, listening with the wise,
learn to look with deeper eyes,
till he matches their perfection,
these who grant him no inspection?

Perhaps the worker, simply living,
thinking little of his giving—
his whole gifts a thing so small
it hardly matters now at all—
found, without his knowing it,
knowledge that might benefit
the listeners who proudly seek,
being neither poor nor meek.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Brown Child

Little brown child,
how could I say, fully,
what they would not let me say?

You and I, we spoke wholly then
with our eyes and with our hands:
kinship was mirrored in the clear pool of our
 loving;
kinship was held like a rope of summer flowers.
Proudly, I took the prized, fat berry
held in your bleeding fingers;
and I gave you my ripest word,
holding you sunward, there on my highest
 hilltop.

Where have they held you, child?

The child in the sun, now man in shadows,
emerges from darkness.

 The brown child,
hidden in wilderness, cries in silence
from the man's warm face before me.
Call me not alien.

 I, too, dwell in shadows,
and, from the darkness, I call to the unlistening
 world:
break with us now the black bread of our sorrow;
pick with us now the golden wheat of our giving.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

A Limp Word

We eat, while others hunger.
We drink, while others thirst.
We speak a limp word, pity,
and think of ones accursed.

A penny saved is hoarded,
our wheat is in the bin.
The window has been darkened.
No wayfarer comes in.

We wake this night: the hobbling,
one-legged man goes by;
the beggar on the corner,
his broken brother sigh.

We sleep no more, and promise
ourselves that all shall eat.
We whirl by lonely beggars,
go, sightless, down the street.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Morsel

The stricken one left here, alone,
where hunters pass,
lies like a blot on mankind's mind
in the reddened grass.

The lifeless bird that hundreds loved
in daily flight
will soon be held by jeweled hands,
and be one bite.

Who says the man who trains his son
to shoot from sky
a song is not the one who sets
a son upon another son
till millions die!

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Runaway Boy

Long, long he lay,
a part of breath beneath.
The ships were in the sky.
The sky was sea.
Adventure led,
 far from the dark old homes
of people,
 shuttered fear,
where old ones hide their greed,
 their hatred,
where hard smugness walks in satin
slippers, where the mind and heart,
 in ragged raiment
 shiver in the cold;
far from the curtained prisons,
far from homes where kinship knocks
and no one says “Come in,”
and silence,
 lying,
sits there in the dark.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

The Companions

Now, in their little holes,
the furred ones sleep;
each to each other, now
one; while deep,
warm in their leafy room
the robins nest;
now, in their little homes,
small things rest.
I, in my lonely bed,
blessed with work done,
murmur of love or sleep
or the sun.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Killer

I love the hare. I love the dog,
though man of hunger trains his friend;
and greed is in the killer's eye.

I love the bird. I love the hound,
though man, for low sport, uses him;
and firearm's tilted toward the sky.

My heart is often in the field,
my mind is often in the wood
where furry, feathered slain ones fall.)

I love the rabbit, bird and hound,
but stranger far than love for these:
I love the killer best of all.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

The Artist

With colored wetness,
with fingers fragile
as stem she labors,
planting a garden or canvas:
it grows, green and golden,
touched by the sun,
by the shadow:

and if you remember;
if it grows,
though the blossoms have fallen,
though the garden is whitened,
you will see,
out of the picture,
a girl strolling
with her golden burden;
and, standing in a room,
you are in a garden,
and fragrance,
dampened blossoms,
are rising around you.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

A Pencil

Now as the teeth bite into
one small, thin piece of wood,
mind and the warm heart's yearning
hunger for something good.

Dry as the lead, and barren
of leaf and wing, the word
reaches for lightness: coming,
going of song and bird.

Slowly, like breezes rustling
the leaf and bough, notes come
softly: unseen things wakened
move in the heart, and hum.

Swiftly, like loud winds blowing,
and great birds rushing high
mind races upward. Lofty,
language is in the sky:

higher than wind and forest,
and search that is not done;
lighter than feet and winging;
warmer than word or sun.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Young Girl Weeping

There is no sound of sweetness in the air.
Though buds break open, though the bird sings near,
it sings for her, alone, of cold despair;
and hollow joy is all that she can hear.
There is no tap of sudden, glad surprise,
a hurried step, a greeting, opened door.
Resigned and crumpled, through wet, weary eyes
she sees no blossomed aisle seen once before.

Do not intrude, or laugh, or call her fool,
and do not pity. Let her bear her grief,
though small it seems. Remember not a cool,
old heart is hers. Remember warm belief
in love, that slumbers now, will one day go
on heaven-touched hills where sweetest flowers grow.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Boy on Garden Wall

He tiptoes on the garden wall.
Below, no man is half so tall.

Balancing himself in air,
challenging his own high dare,

he hops, one-legged, to the end,
and grasps the maple's boughs that bend

under weight of one who swings
over pavement. Where he clings

the sky is filled with feathered cries;
a boy leaps, and April flies.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Abandoned

Abandoned, now,
the silent mill's
at rest, and not
one person fills
his day with work.
A place of mold,
the years go by
as people, old
and dreaming. Calm,
the labor done,
the thoughts are free
of song and sun;
and rest, content,
as yearning fade
in long, long peace,
and deep, deep shade.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Open Every Shutter

Open every door.
Stand a while before
April as you utter
words as soft as sprouting
leaves, and words as wild
as a rain-caught child,
leaping, running, shouting!

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Of a Long Peace

Here in the summer afternoon of a long peace,
unbroken by acts of anger or a mean thing,
calm as the duck afloat on the still, blue,
deep water, the hours are warmer than a closed wing.

Here in the summer afternoon when the sun steals
away and a coolness stretches over the calm mind,
mankind is tender: a feathered and slow rise
leads homeward; and sunlight blesses and the heart's kind.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Boy and Mother Walking

The boy told hilltop
with a shout
what all his going
was about.

He stood on earth but
could not stop.
His joy was heard on
mountain top.

His mother uttered
not one sound,
but stirred by something
near the ground,

she walked in silence,
for a whir
of light wings brushed and
lifted her.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

High Experiment

He borrowed bits from other minds, intent
upon a high, unknown experiment:
above cerebral towers, he would make
a pinnaced perfection none could shake,
and even scholars, futile in the quest,
would shake grey heads forlornly, call him best.
Volume after volume filled his sky,
but there was not one man who came to buy.
His mind in turmoil struggled loudly under
the scholars' notes, his monumental plunder.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

The Real Heart

The real heart glows
like the new rose.

It fills the place.
like a washed child's face.

It is like a green park.
It is like the swift lark.

It is like the cool ground
where the strawberry's found.

It is light, like the doe
on the woodland snow.

The real heart's high
as the peak in the sky.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Peace

Peace lies

under the hardened surface
like a dormant seed
in the depth of the universe.

It freshens—

a sudden miracle—
even in the moment's oasis
of the plundering invader;
it quenches the thirst
of even the dark and the evil ones.

Peace is a prayer for the aged,
kneeling, rising,
and warming selves under the quilt,
the fallen
blossoms of evening
laid like a cover upon them.

Peace is a young face,
stained with weeping,
at rest on the crumpled pillow,
after the long, soft crying.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

The Winter Bough

The garden is shaken
by beauty now.
The winds awaken,
and the winter bough
is loosed of its flowering
petals. Ground
is filled with showering
bits, and sound
of the coming bird
is a fluttering thing.
And this that is heard
is a hardy wing.
The winter weather
is soft as each
white falling feather
a child can reach,
as soft as wonder
and as free
as children under
the shaken tree.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

In the Leafy Hall

here where the boughs endure,
and the robins call
glory to sun, as pure
sweet, full berries fall.
Here is a music made,
in the rising hour,
long, in the sky and glade,
with a red-throat's power;
here till the sweet songs fade
near the closing flower.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Twilight Fading

Something is left in meadows. Hush
any mouth that says a word,
lest the sweet and lingering thrush,
startled, join another bird.

When it ceases let the thought,
blending with the end of day,
spread afar. When there is not
one light sound, let silence say

sweeter utterance, above
earthiness, above the nest.
Let the thought be like the dove
Of heaven blessing all with rest.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Kept or Crushed

We lay. We listened.
Something stirred
on tree or mountains
and was heard
by mind attuned to
softer sound.
But ear that touched the
summer ground
knew what was uttered
was not far.
A foot-length space where
insects are,
small things that felt a
blade was tree,
and leaf a roof and
dew was sea,
moved slowly under
fern and shoot,
beneath man's mind or
under foot.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Broom

The great broom of the wind
is sweeping
the brown land. Every leaf
is leaping.

And now March is at work.
The scurry
is seen here. Step aside,
or hurry!

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Who Hears No Singing

Who hears no singing in the field?
The deaf, when snow is on the ground,
hear not the wind in whitened boughs,
silvery sound.

Who sees no beauty on the hill
when trees are shaken, and who finds
no leaf or flower? Who turns away?
Only the blind!

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

After the Rain

The last, loud rush of music went
through boughs bended
in merriment.

After the rain has ended
there is a softer music, found
in the drinking sound
of earth, in the blended
stream invading the root,
in the jewels dropping from fruit,
in the liquid scramble
under the bramble
when the birds, from flight,
suddenly light.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Spirit

Every growing thing she touched
rose in ripeness from the soil.
A part of brown and green, she knelt
each day and made a prayer of toil.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

In the Rush

Here in the long,
long city's rush,
man, in his mind,
must feel the hush,
light as a wing
that brushes by.
Here in the wheel—
and-pavement cry,
runners must pause
one moment long
and hear the sweet
and healing song:
here in the long,
loud traffic's crush
are heart's and mind's
brief rising thrush.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

By Something Before

Out of the dark wood I go, now drawn
by something before,
out of the dark room of trees, bent on
a way to a door.

Suddenly halted, I stand, and stare
from edges of night.
Dark is behind me, and day is there:
a valley of light.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Let Us Give Night Her Due

Let us give night her due and speak not now
of night that shields a while the thief and whore;
of night, the dark deceiver, keeping brow
and eyes untroubled; day will mirror more.

Let us give night her praise and say not lore
comes out through darkness in the heart of man,
until, through evil, he is conqueror,
and wiser far than when his search began.

The night was made for gentleness and rest.
The night's the pillow for the weary head
and, for the honest heart, the night is best
for candled thought that warms the one abed.
Immaculate and clear is fuller night.
The night is blue and gives a deeper light.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

The Calling

There was a calling
in the low sky.
There was a message;
it was not high.

It was a singing;
it was more, more.
It was a language
and a bird lore.

There was a calling,
then there was quiet.
Space is not space when
free wings can fly it.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Sad Return

As all men will, we turned one day
long after we had gone away

to meadows where our youth was spent
in painful growth and merriment.
We wanted, most, to see the flowers,
an acre-full, and feel the showers,
and hear the chorus after rain
burst one hundred throats again.

Ten pale blue blossoms spotted earth,
the chirper's note was hardly worth
the saying. Yet, we knew—we knew
that all that rose and fell and grew
was neither more nor less. Awake
not, foolish heart; and never break.
Remember what is seen is not
as good as anything that's sought.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Widow

She chooses, now, to be alone.
Her visitors are sent away.
The ones who love her wonder why
she would not have them stay.

She is less lonely now alone.
His words are breath and living flame.
The birds he daily fed come near
and almost sing her name.

The plants that touch her windowsill
only his fingers and her hand
had raised. They know the touch is like
his own, and understand.

And she, like things that have no speech,
grows beautifully toward the sun,
knowing that roots that lie in dark
and bloom in air are one.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Knowing Anguish

Knowing anguish, knowing loss,
we will find, between the thin
shaft of light, a way to let
light in.

Anguish is no captor, loss
not the wound forever deep.
Chaos loses. We take peace
to sleep.

Each has something reaching out
in the meadow after dark.
Hawks have dropped, but swiftly flies
the lark!

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

From Empty Rooms

Why is it, passing in the street,
I see a man and go my way,
and turn, pretending no one's there,
as if I have no word to say,
and meet again a dozen men
and shun with silence everyone?
And, yet, I see from empty rooms
the leaf and flower greeting sun.
A fool has love, but will not take it.
And he has a heart, and he must break it.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Not High in Tree

I have sought wisdom and I know,
fingering root and palming flower,
there is less knowledge in the growth
and sweetness than the crumbling hour;
this that is dry and spilled like sand,
and added to the earth's old floor.
Not high in singing tree, but low,
beneath the feet, is deeper lore.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

The Wordlessness

Define the song with word
and we define it not
completely. When the bird,
by earth or heaven stirred,
announces what is sought
and what is found, he calls
with one long thankful note;
the wordlessness enthralls.
What seems the final falls
is sweetness no man wrote,
is music, deep and still,
a silence spreading far,
beyond the field until
it's nearer than the hill,
and higher than the star.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Everyone Is Opening Doors

new callers are coming in.

Rain is on leaves and tin;

sun is on kitchen floors.

Children are out again,

out in the garden rows,

out where the new month grows,

out where the heating rain

comes from the flowering place.

Small hands are spreading high,

small eyes are turned to sky,

and every housed-in face

looks where the door's flung wide.

Blown blossoms, all about,

come in, and the mind goes out

to the risen countryside.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

The Gatherers

Having a deep-rooted reason
we go forth,
after the swift, autumn season,
through the north,
making a shoe-rutted byway
in the snow,
here where the bloom-bordered highway
bade us go,
cutting a foot-path in clover;
we walk once more,
past the old pasture and over
our same store:
how can the better be chosen—
budding hours,
or the live beauty, frozen
white, snow-flowers.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

Going Home

Going home the mind turns over
lovely thoughts, as sweet as clover.

Every beat and hope are fed
on honey spilled on new warm bread.

Going home the wheels are speeding.
“Faster, faster!” all keep pleading.

Quick, path, gate and door flung wide,
open toward the hearth inside.

Going-home thoughts leap, each one
like glad children in the sun.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

The Waiting Stream

When war is over hate shall run down streams
of blood until the racing thing is still.
And, purified and deep, the stream shall flow
through peaceful hearts, where men no longer kill.

When war is over vengeance shall run out
through bloody torrents, toward a quiet pool.
And, by the creek of blue tranquillity,
man then shall know a wisdom, sweet and cool.

When war is over aged ones shall rest,
like waters under an old and quiet mill.
And Lord, let fighters find when they return
the Precious Flow forsaken, pure and still.

Publication. *The Hearth Lit* (La Porte, Indiana: Dierkes Press, 1946).

ALWAYS THE NEED

1948 · Chicago: Dierkes Press, 1948

A book-length story in verse.

Always the Need

I

Tim lay on old Oak Ridge. Hands under head,
he dreamed and rested, now too big for tears.
But something in his home, on darkness fed,
taught him a wisdom past his seven years.
The clouds were floating vessels; sky was sea;
and out beyond adventure rode away;
far from the pleasant hill, from homeland, he
was only part of this calm singing day.
The leaf that fell brought him to earth again,
and shadows pointed fingers to the place
where he would see the features lined by pain,
and he would see the cold and lovely face.
A darker shadow hid the house where two
had ceased to find the clear and warmer view.

2

Filled with the wonder of the sun and earth,
and with the flying things that sang him home,
remembering the thing of greater worth
is something never taken when we roam,
he jumped the picket fence and banged the door,
and called out, "Mother!" "Don't rush in and yell.
I've told you that so many times before.
Go up and wash!" Tiptoeing footsteps fell.
His father called him down. They sat as still
as silence of the night, a silence not
like leafy voices on the tree or hill;
this was an angry thing that evil caught.
His mother mumbled; then he saw her face.
He understood no mockery of grace.

3

One who had tasted honey from her heart,
and feasted on her fruitful word, then knew
she felt a thing of which he was no part,
a dark and hidden thing that daily grew.

As strangers then they passed the painted plate,
a living thing of flowers, gold and blue.
She saw it darkly as a thing of hate,
the wedding gift that soon shall crack in two.
He nibbled muffins of her discontent,
spread with unsweetened jam of her unrest;
the bough was neither wholly ripe nor bent.
He gulped her bitter coffee, cold, unblest.
The silent lonely child was fed, and he
sipped milk of incompatibility.

4

Doreen heard footsteps coming down the hall,
once walk awaited, coming near her door;
and then, though warm and eager, straight and tall,
the troubled, uninvited visitor.
She labored needlessly with silk and wool,
lest he should enter, pleading, and commence
the lover's language, now so still and cool,
and find her there desirous and intense.
Then suddenly her heart leaped up like fear.
He paused outside. She swiftly lay abed,
pretending sleep if he should venture near.
He softly walked to his own room instead.
She turned her back toward him and she flung wide
the window, waiting like an eager bride.

5

Framed in his window, mill and smoking stack
were symbols: standing there, John saw the flame;
and over all surrounding things, the black
soot coverlet that could not cover shame.
He thought, "The trees were white-washed and they stand
out spotlessly as one who painted them."
He fondled roses that she grew; his hand
caressed the whiteness on the prickly stem.
Framed in his window, he saw labor make,
in heat and pain, in sweat and choking dust,
perfection, shining, that shall never break,

yet his small latch was tainted now by rust.
His window opened toward the gray mill's light
where he must labor through the doubtful night.

6

He felt an ache long labor could not ease;
he felt a pain that never slumbered long
in his ill spirit; faith could not appease
the doubt that chanted like a grief-touched song.
He felt half-hunger; though his love for Tim
was nurtured hourly in the boy's full day,
dark whispers, in the mill sounds, heard by him
each fearful night, lured blessed peace away.
He closed his door. She heard the warning click.
He touched the knob. He heard the frantic beat
of his warm heart, and heard the great clock tick;
then something warned him that the hidden sweet
was locked to him, and so with heavy care
he walked with pride past her and down the stair.

7

Doreen who for one whole short loving year
kept her warm secret hidden, guarding it
against intrusion, heard the step of fear
or safety. Lock and where a board was split
were guard and warning. When the outer door
was banged by Tim, or when John slowly walked
down outside steps, she felt a fear no more;
excitement phoned then, soft and wild things talked.
One last faint footfall heard in Maple Street,
one, heavy-going, from the day to night,
freed her at last, and she could plan to meet
one who had claimed her; anger, fear and plight
were gone with one from whom she took a name.
Her lips then quivered for another's flame.

8

There in the cool, dark corner, sweet, half-filled,
she found the bottle, like her warm love cherished,

no swift allure for love that begged or chilled;
these were two guarded sweets that had not perished.
Between four walls where air was strange and calm
she moved like ill ones, languid and content;
as something stricken and without a balm
she moved about in willed imprisonment.
Before the window, she saw blossoms fall,
unloosed by restlessness, by lightness shaken;
she heard on some near bough the dark birds call;
all cried to night, desiring to be taken.
Where something beckoned, something must possess.
Here she seemed holy, but dared not confess.

9

The boy's good head was cupped in eager hands,
the fingers that had gently fondled bud
until it opened on what ever stands
in storm and sunlight, filled with earth's good blood.
The tousled one peered down, across the river
where every boat invited mind afar;
each height that burned, the water all a-quiver,
gave him more knowledge, both a boat and star.
Like some bright world that he held in his grasp
he found a darkness entering his mind,
remembering his two and four-hands' clasp.
He saw the world, outside, where all men find
the cooling night, the warming day, the lark;
and only his small house hid in the dark.

10

Then all alone he felt he lived alone,
and his small world was like a darkened wood
where not all mysteries are ever known,
and he was often never understood.
Perhaps beyond the river and the mill
he'll venture soon. Nobody cares if he
decides to run away. He heard the shrill
train whistle calling far, invitingly.
He saw himself, in depth of trees and night,

on trails no other runaway has made.
Then as he shuddered, sensing danger, fright,
he felt protection; he was unafraid:
his mother put her arm around his shoulder;
he felt his seven years, not one bit older.

11

In bed, he dreamed, delighting in that time,
though he had begged another hour's play;
he must, instead of maple trees, then climb
with heart and mind the ridge's starry way.
Then one last journey of the dark's begun
when he must climb the stairway to the dipper,
and reach, until the higher journey's done,
and he stepped down to earth with silver slipper.
Outside the door, a walker, light and steady,
approached and entered and she stood until
she knew at last her weary son was ready
for deep, deep rest as his long hours grew still.
Then one quick moment did he twitch and stir.
Was it a white dove, or did ravens whir?

12

What does a garden know of sickness, craving,
the force of lovers lost beneath her bower,
the madness hid by dark, unwed ones braving
the sweetest way where falls the unknown flower,
where climbs the leafy, green, protective vine,
here where the pure and where the poisonous bloom
and where the good and deadly growths entwine;
the good and dark roots lift toward light and gloom.
Night hides her lovers from the glare of shame;
and innocent, unworldly warm ones feel
her petals, soft as good love's dearest name;
here is the chancel for the ones who kneel.
Night is the good and evil paradox;
she carpets earth where every lover walks.

13

The woman, lying in the garden, warm
as she awaited love, had sensed a mouth
that teased like lightest wind, and then a storm
that she had willed, then hours like the south...
of this she dreamed beneath the moon-touched oak,
each footstep, faintly heard, each leaf that fell,
a warm excitement since it first awoke
its growth in her, and cast a nightly spell.
Yet half-forgotten, laboring far away;
and half-remembered, sleeping in his room,
she felt two walkers through the foliage pry,
though no one watched her in the garden's gloom.
The danger magnified her hot desire,
as leaf and leaf piled swiftly on a fire.

14

The woman dreaming, wide awake, in love,
was filled with light and filled with shadows, blending
a still contentment, like the mated dove,
and darker flyings like the gray birds wending
above the crag, above the ominous shore.
Bathed in the pure flow of her own believing,
she knew herself the bride and not the whore,
though she might wade wide currents of deceiving.
Within her was the clear brook of her need,
the sparkle like the clear light on a pool.
Below the surface, crawling, dark things feed
on the young innocents, on the larger fool.
She went the sky...and went the swampy-way,
sometimes the captor, and sometimes the prey.

15

Once she had tumbled down the wooden shrine,
the little hearth lit by an aged vow,
though she did not foretell the golden, fine,
clear symbol could not have a meaning now,
the woman lured the nighttime walker there;
she left the small house shambled and unlit,

invited dark intrusion up the stair
though no deceit was ever meant for it.
Three foods are spread out in the shuttered house:
the first is lust, always the culprit comes;
the second, emptiness, through which the mouse
of want bored daily; third, the sickening crumbs
of pity placed before her husband's plate
at breakfast time when tattered love comes late.

16

The gentle man of love who walks in pride,
who knows the symptoms of the wayward heart,
grieves not for self alone but for his bride,
and, in the darkest hour, far apart,
subdues the anger and the sudden hate...
this living law who's less a thought of wrath
and more of love, who sees no darkest fate
while, howso robbed, he sees the starry path.
Love is no thing of darkness; it is light,
and though the wick is shortened and is laid
aside, a loving man can see a sight
of hope from tended faith that he has made.
Not in the beast, but in true man is found
the love that lifts him far above the ground.

17

Oh, let the boy in blessed innocence
forget the shadow that invaded day.
Let each tomorrow be a picket fence
where he might dream the happy hours away
and find the other side a greener place
and nothing stunting growth, and nothing dim
the shining candles of his rosy face;
and only whole love speak a word to him.
Let him believe that all he ever knew
of doubt and dark in day is as a flower
that never blossomed, but all others grew
around, beneath, above him this good hour.
Oh, let him now, so very good and young,

hear not a word from night and her hot tongue.

18

Though caution speaks the ear is sensitive.
One slumbered on when blossoms dropped to ground
where there was movement where the brown things live,
or where the night train cried a lonely sound.
Night's a cloud-pillow for a weary boy,
oblivion the bed and comforter
when he is done with racing, climbing joy;
only the alien causes him to stir.
Out in the garden there was something heard,
small as the far sound of the distant hill,
clearer than murmuring saplings or a bird,
an unfamiliar strange thing, almost still.
It was a strange breath in the darkened way;
it was a sound he never heard by day.

19

Hushed under oak, behind the hollyhocks,
the word was said, a soft unholy prayer,
saying no one who sleeps or one who walks
is good as this, the lover unaware
that blended greenly with the bush and bough,
silent as leaves that move not from the tree,
scented as new green growth is scented, now
awake, the seeker trembled fearfully.
Shaken as boughs were shaken where he's hidden,
as one in dreams, to this one dark spot pinned,
having no voice for crying, one unbidden
was as a sapling in disastrous wind.
Now he must gather strength, and he must scurry.
Love is a savage, hard, possessive, furry.

20

Far from the house he ran, from beast and bride,
rousing along the way the nested flyers.
Tumult allows no innocents to hide,
where fears run wildly, where burn growing fires

that, warming selves, drive innocents to cover;
a boy who runs from something darkly seen,
the birds that fly where fears and dark wings hover,
both seeking havens, far and safe and clean.
The boy ran wilder, wilder, faster, faster,
until he sharply fell, until he bled;
he wept and wept, stunned by the sharp disaster,
and chose the tender grasses for his bed.
Alone he lay in meadow, weeping, weeping.
The larks, in their turn, roused him from his sleeping,

21

The boy looked back and saw his house as one
sees dimly, half-forgotten, days of pain,
as night is rubbed from sleepy eyes and sun
warms his desire and dries the runner's stain.
The boy looked down where colored steps of roofs
led to the river and the railroad track,
and out beyond where one finds no reproofs;
for one unloved, a never coming back.
He breakfasted on fruit: the drooping bush
was filled by warmth, the full year's ripest giver.
He saw himself, there in the morning hush,
a voyager out on the luring river.
Then exiled by the night, and brave and slim,
the boy went forth, the whole sun blessing him.

22

The woman, slowly waking, heard faint words
out in the oak leaves, in the grassy bed;
though called each morning by the waking birds,
she kept eyes closed and dreamed night dreams instead,
the windy rhythm on the shaken limb,
the breath of blossoms and the hum and wing,
all part of nighttime, here in morning's whim,
all part of love; she lay, remembering.
There in her soft and warm, secure seclusion,
unmindful of her mate and son and flight,
held warmly still in arms of dark's delusion,

she wakened, sensing darkness in the light.
And what she heard was silence everywhere,
the empty room and garden, empty stair.

23

Because of something that she dared not speak,
because of something that she feared to find,
yet, knowing she must go alone and seek
for one in whose wide eyes and troubled mind
the questions rose, unspoken; worried, swift,
she raced into his room and cried his name
and knew somehow that she would only lift
the sheet on emptiness; this was no game.
He did not hide that time; not in the bed,
not in the closet, not behind the door,
not in the garden where his birds were fed;
she sought the emptiness and found no more.
Then she remembered something was awake
last night: she heard a step, a small twig break.

24

Tormented then by fear and sensuous sight,
forgetting sweet, forgetting time that flowered,
remembering only conscience and a flight,
she ran in panic; then she, trembling, cowered
behind the curtain, fearful of the query,
as young delinquents hastening ahead
of chasers in dark alleys, narrow, eerie;
knowing the meaning of the empty bed.
The door flew open, for one eager minute
she hoped her boy was home; she could not see
a sunny doorway and her small son in it;
her husband saw her groping fearfully.
Before she spoke he knew that she would say
their one complete dear love had gone away.

25

Seeing her strange and stark and mortal terror,
her language hot and inarticulate,

he saw beyond her cry, beyond her error,
remembered thought and torment of his mate,
he hushed the frenzy flaming through her mind;
he saw his son out in the woodland fern,
and where the green and leafy roadways wind,
the way of meadows and his son's return.
Though silenced by his faith, she stood as one
whose face was drawn of life, and self-abused,
and as he spoke sweet words about their son,
she turned lest he should see her self-accused.
She saw her son in some far poisonous stream
going from her as plodders in a dream.

26

He sought in Oak Ridge byways for his boy,
the house built in the tree, the favorite bush,
the place for height, the place for food and joy,
the place for hiding where no breathing hush
was heard, and where no creeping sound
was near, awaiting time for sharp surprise;
only his human footstep touched the ground;
each bush invited but he saw no eyes.
Knowing leaf-places of the young boy's mind,
he knew of stumbling, too, of burr and thistle...
the doubt that pained him, and the thoughts that wind
like brambled paths; he heard the faint train-whistle;
as if directed toward the railroad track
he thought he saw the truant coming back.

27

He saw the dark Monongahela flowing,
the water's rush below the river locks,
the place of danger for a young boy's going,
where mothers counted minutes of the clocks
as hours while awaiting divers braving
the river bottom for the sunken one,
waiting in shadows past the hour of saving,
waiting on dark banks till the day was done.
Before a doubt and terror clutched his throat,

a note of gladness leapt up in his heart:
he saw Tim drenched and without cap or coat
come slowly up the bank, and with a start,
each ran toward each and thought of nothing more,
their arms held open like the heart's wide door.

28

Then going home, his young son on his shoulder,
the father's ears were filled with racing words;
excitement filled the boy, now strangely older,
and waving arms were startling roadway birds.
He who had never been afraid of thunder,
of woodland creatures, swam without a fear,
until he felt himself go quickly under.
He shrilly cried. Was there no one to hear?
When he cried feebly and could fight no longer
and he felt something pulling, pulling down,
he felt the arm of something even stronger.
Then as his father carried him through town,
he felt the loved and lost one even dearer;
he felt the lost and saved one even nearer.

29

His mother, after gladness and surprise,
sought in her son for love that she had known
not long ago, but as he turned his eyes
away from her she felt ashamed, alone.
She brought his new pajamas, speaking low
soft words, and told him he must have a nap,
remembering he'd often want to go
to sleep as he sat warmly in her lap.
She felt the blow of fear, the stab of pain,
and waited, waited for the clutch of joy
when she would wholly have him back again,
when she would claim her lost, bewildered boy.
He turned away; she held her arms; instead,
he climbed into his sleeping father's bed.

30

The woman who had once known purest rapture,
shunned it and chose another, fiercer one,
who must find peace again and so recapture
the runaway, her close and sleeping son,
who might for all his nearness be as far
as fawns in wilderness, as some lost thing
that dwells on earth but reaches for a star,
as something, bramble-caught, with broken wing.
Although the fearful one was warm, deluded,
she still awaited waking moments, ear
alert for movement... coming from seclusion
her son, forgetting, coming, calling near.
She hoped he'd come as many times before,
his arms wide open in the opened door.

31

The woman faced the garden, sunny, sweet,
though emptied soon of all that held her there,
a holy wantonness she called complete.
She knew no dream that leaves one old and bare:
this was the whole of conscience and the light
of day's reality, of her own doing;
she who felt hidden, safe and warm in night,
then felt within dark evil things pursuing.
She who forsook one love found, in forsaking,
the loss of still another dearer one.
She hoped forgetfulness, then warmly waking,
would call to her and she would greet her son.
She did not turn as he came down the stair;
this was the test: he must come to her there.

32

She heard the footstep, cautious, soft and slow,
a long approach, a creak and faltering.
Did love or hunger lead him? She must know
the reason for his coming. Did he bring
a garment needing stitches? She would mend
it, making something tattered whole and sound.

Then she would see his loving face and bend
and kiss the love that she had lost and found.
She sharply turned when she heard him tiptoeing
away from her and toward the kitchen door.
She swiftly ran and saw him leaping, going
past oak and flower, fleetier than before.
She held her arms out meekly; he was gone
into the foliage, swifter than a fawn.

33

Called in to dinner, washing hands without
a plea, and finding his own chair placed nearer
his mother's, he began to move about;
his fumbling, moving made him even dearer.
"Sit still," his father said. The soft command
encouraged her to serve the muffin spread
with sweetness of her hope, to gently hand
the milk of love, while she remained unfed.
Though nibbling she was starving for one word,
flown from the heart, not weighted in the mind.
But not the first one, not the second, third,
were wholly spoken, never more than kind.
She faced her husband then, and with surprise
she saw not love's, but pity's hopeless eyes.

34

Down by the river bank the woman waited,
deep in the darkness, feeling she might soon
be cast aside as someone lost or hated;
now an old craving, softened by the moon,
made all her giving have a richer feeling;
the love she chose, whom she awaited there,
would come as he had often done, and kneeling
beside her humbly, cast out her despair.
As one asleep, awakening in terror,
she saw the late night she had loved a vast
unrealistic void of mind and error,
knew even what she waited for was past.
She felt herself part of the ruinous dreams

engulfed by luring, black tumultuous streams.

35

Awaiting on the darkest edge of night,
led by a firm and unseen hand baptismal,
without a fear and with a steady, light
descending step toward places wet, abysmal,
the woman went, with other shadows creeping
into a vaster gloom, and blending there
with saddened voices, past the hour of weeping;
the great black blanket falling everywhere.
And where the woman was two lovers go,
blessed with their love and with the peace they keep,
the promise they will cherish when the flow
is nevermore, and cherish while they sleep.
They see no darkness in the sucking water,
not the good bridegroom, the immaculate daughter.

36

Long, long the man walked in the sunny way,
in the long twilights past the summer's end,
the shadows fugitive, and only day
remembered by the boy when every bend
invited farther sweet adventuring,
into the byways where he first had found
the fallen fledgling; hand soft as a wing
that kept it warm and raised it from the ground.
What he remembered was a bright bird high,
released in air: this made him understand
there is a meeting of the earth and sky;
there is a higher love than loosened hand.
What he remembered, being then not seven,
was mother giving free wide wings their heaven.

37

Long, long the man sat in the silent night,
when shaken leaves were falling from the tree,
uncaught by dancing hands that once with light
swift movement caught the autumn merrily,

filling a basket with the crimson find,
placing them under dry logs in the grate.
The boy remembered something warm and kind,
his eyes wide open though the hour grew late.
What he remembered most was leaping flame
and three warm faces brightly shining there,
and someone humming, making his short name
a long and lovely song, a whispered prayer.
What he remembered, going up to bed,
were feathered steps and not an earthly tread.

38

The father saw his son as someone keeping
love in his eyes, undimmed, and filled with light,
after the darkness and forgotten weeping,
no whitened face of fear, no doubtful plight.
No windows barred the view; the boy out walking
opened his deeper eyes, and each new thought
was like a hidden nest. He was not talking
and every pure and feathered way was sought.
The flowered doorway of his heart invited
a taking in, a going out, a find
of sweetened growth, the door from which he sighted
green mountain-knowledge was his leaping mind.
The father knew that all who loved are love;
earth-roadways here are like sky-roads above.

39

The man of love sees no lock ever sealed,
no dust reality, no faith impaired,
no ill, erroneous, that is not healed;
sees nothing good unless the good is shared.
Love's heart is not a heart that's ever striven
for warm possession; love is wordlessness
that gently blends itself with what is given;
and love is always blessed when it will bless.
The man of love, with no great words' inspection,
need ever name love. Love is multiplied,
shown in itself like roses' sweet reflection

in purest pools: below, above, beside.
Love's not like stars in wished-for, distant places.
Love's close as candles lit in holy faces.

40

The child of love has candor for his eyes,
opened for all he hides not in his being;
he looks on miracles with no surprise,
accepting all that's seen, what's not for seeing,
accepting sun and love and word and fruit;
his heart's lapel wears every brightest flower;
though he has never felt or seen the root
he claims the bloom, unseen another hour.
The child of love, while silent and alone,
awaits the venturing that leads him far,
the long high journeys man has ever known,
from deepest earth, above the highest star.
The child of love is ageless; he is free,
and comes to earth and cries eternity!

Publication. *Always the Need* (Chicago: Dierkes Press, 1948).

THE BLUE STAIRWAY

1948 · Cleveland: American Weave Press, 1948

No complete scan has yet been recovered; the book is documented bibliographically and remains a stated gap in the corpus.

DURABLE FIRE

1949 · Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949

The Search

By These Words

By these words, let me be judged;
by these words, and more:
words that come out like the washed,
free child through the door.

Listen long: oh, you will hear
words like children led
high to peaks, and words like soft
last words in the bed;
you will hear the still and deep
words I never said.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Beckoner

To be a child again, to wash the spirit
in morning, blended breath as fresh as air;
to see the train with shut eyes, then to hear it
from tucked-in places near the highest stair;
to journey not and yet go everywhere:

O let us keep this pool of youth, be near it
when years race wildly past us, blurred and faster;
though chaos strews our path, let us not fear it;
and, rising from the train-and-stream disaster,
let us hear whistles heard by one called Master.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Hands

“How do you tell time?” the child inquired.

“See the round face, hear the chime;
see the two hands: they tell time.”

The truth’s not easy as a lie.
That’s not the right way. Time goes by
one hundred ways before we die.

By hands of love, by hands of hate.
Few men ever guess their fate.

By hands that drop a seed in soil,
hands that make a prayer of toil.

By hands that know a child must learn
to walk alone, and not return.

By the warm good hands that move through night
till the child of fear’s a child of light.

“How do you tell time?” the child inquired.

“See the round face, hear the chime;
see the two hands: they tell time.”

I have no right word, but one day
perhaps you’ll tell what I can’t say.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

By Natures Alien

Parted by natures alien though his blood
ran from old veins to mine, he tried
with formal words betraying truant hope
to bring me close as birth, before he died.

All through the days of boyhood, parted less
by miles than brambled vision, eyes looked out,
asking the questions—age did not reply;
we grew apart in silence and in doubt.

That one last time I went to visit him,
he ran with outstretched hands though steps were
weak.

My father stumbled, and I carried him
back home, and we were close as love at last —
two close as one, one having no need to speak.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Definitions

“Honor,” said the man,
“is character, immaculate
belief, integrity.

Honor is holding one’s name
like the sun by day,
like a star by night,
like a candle if dark creeps
into the heart or mind.

Honor is the immeasurable
pride of man, the forward striving
of man toward immortality,
the impeccable fruition.”

“Honor,” said the child,
“is never telling another,
and never telling yourself
a lie.”

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

What Is Searched

What is searched for and unfound —
the vaster love and lack of grief —
leads us through growth, through floral waste,
through rot of our small mind's leaf.

What is hidden, not the seen
slight hopeful daylights we have known,
urges us forward in the dark:
we worm by the small mind's bone.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Child

And the butter-cream roundness
is the eye's feast,
a softness not to be fondled,
not to be held by the visitor;
to be touched in his newness
by two who hold him,
as they locked their warm selves,
tenderly, tenderly,
as now,
though separated,
they move in a oneness.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Loosened Laurel

The sharp quick music of hands
clapped adulation;
the speaker was held
in a circle of words;
the laurel of girls
was around him —
the honored pupil.

Yet his own hands were empty,
empty as words
are empty;
thrown like Bowers
at the feet of the victor.

And, left alone,
the echo of lost words
Buttered about him,
like blossoms tossed
after applause of the wind.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Summer Question

Who knows what crazy reason
this maid has for going
afar in sunny season
where high wind's blowing?

Who knows what sickness surges
in this lad obeying
the love call; warm love urges
him onward, straying.

And, having heard his yearning
for summer's dear keeping,
oh, why's the warm lass turning
and homeward leaping?
Quiet and Unrest

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Quiet and Unrest

Postponed Performance

The silver berry bush,
without its crimson gift,
droops in the whitened hush,
half-hidden in the drift.

The fickle wings have gone.
A single snow bird comes
and chirps his song upon
the branch for meager crumbs.

The mind, the rising one,
so cold in poverty
of winter, feels the sun
of summer set him free.

He hears rich winter's note,
the song that summer wrote.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Knuckles of Wind

The knuckles of the wind
pounded at the door,
loosened the latch;
the intruder
raced from the room,
in a whirl of disorder.

The fingers of the wind
shredded the blind,
and the torn thing,
flaccid,
whined a protestation.

The muscles of the wind
uprooted the tree,
aged and strong;
the shoulders of the wind
blocked the path
of proud high-minded man;
the racing savage
roared a challenge:
“Stop me! Stop me!
You puny builder!
You checker of waters!
You sayer of words!
You toyers with atoms!
Stop me! Stop me!
If you can—if you can!”

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Stranger in the City

The great steel miracles rise in the air,
the windows show the richness of far places,
wisdom and glamour shine in city faces:
the journey ends, but something is not there.

The lights are blinding, the stranger's hope is dark.
All that was music now is dizzy rushing
between vast towers, hard, encircling, crushing.
Then suddenly hope rises like a lark.

The buildings spread before him end on end,
one house of warmth—not merely buildings only:
glowing again for one once lost and lonely:
a stranger speaks—the city is a friend.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Robert Frost

He roughens his words
on the stony foundation of language,
his own words piled
in rocky imperfections;
he whittles with wit
the little sling of a word.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Mirrors

(for Gabriela Mistral, Nobel Prize Poet)

Though she sat
in humility
wearing the laurels of greatness;
though her fingers,
long and untiring,
wrote the high letters,
the white high letters of justice,
the low soft language of mercy,
the eloquent still voice
of love,
I will remember,
always,
her eyes looking downward;
and I will remember
the nations of children,
their eyes looking up,
seeing in the eyes of the Senorita
a living language,
blessing not one, but all,
as the wheat of the field blesses all
who hunger,
as the sun of the heavens
blesses the children of earth.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Children with a Bag of Jelly Beans

While friend and foe shout lies
and hypocrisy in headlines,
while echoes of awful words
are hissed again in forums,
the small boy,
leaping over Sunday papers
littering the floor,
plays the high swift game
of jelly beans
caught in the air by the mouth.
Exultant with living,
he shares his treasure
with the admiring guest;
and the ripples of boy and girl laughter,
like water over brook stones,
is heard;
is heard again as the rabbit
is heard
racing in the leaves;
is heard again as the lark
is heard
singing above the gun fire;
is heard again and yet again
by the young who are living,
the little ones
with their little giving
in an angry world where men
crouch in the mind's den.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Bird and Man

The fierce bird drives his hungry beak
into the small bird's head.
Man's word is sharp; or worse, he does not speak
till red

hurt mars his own vein. Passing want,
he turns aside—his hand,
unaiding, idle, leaves his brother gaunt;
though land

blesses him more than others, her green womb
accepting seed, the flower
he does not share thrives in a shrunken room;
the power

of swift need dominates the bird,
while man's dark way is slow:
he looks aside or prays an empty word,
the foe
slaying his hungry brother with no blow.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Rose and the Leaf

We drop the dead things gently —
the rose and the leaf —
not as the dead are handled
by the hand of grief;

we touch the dead things fondly —
the golden pressed flowers —
claiming again the summer,
and her warmth, and ours.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Callers

Dr. Webb and Banker Brown
went down the street and out of town.

“Let’s visit Bill. He’s in his chair
crippled, and all alone out there.”

“His farm’s not what it used to be.
And his-old watch dog can hardly see.”

“Let’s walk. If old Bill sees the car
he’ll see how prosperous we are.”

“There come Jack Webb and Charley Brown,
sick of themselves, sick of the town.

“Jack has a wife that gads about.
The other Charley could do without.

“Two houses are filled with running feet.
A house is a place where two should meet.

“Not live together; talk, apart,
two tongues, without a single heart.

“I’ll put on my most cheerful face,
and welcome the gray boys to this place.

“Here they come, banks filled with gold —
rich and lonely, poor and old.”

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Blind Strollers

We turn this way, and see the road
white with the blessing of the snow:
a man, a child, his precious load;
and white white hymns that softly blow.

We turn this way, and see the ground
white with its wonder after seed
and flowered gift; we hear the sound
of winter's wisdom, like a need.

We turn this way, a roadway shrine
blessed with His peace, inviting all.
You turn from me, I turn from mine,
while fainter, fainter grows the call

of love, as stubborn and imbued
with hurt and anger, we deny
ourselves the healing quietude.
Stained by our own small minds, we cry.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Young Boy Dreaming

Think not his day is lost;
he has sought well
in field and found what he
cannot now tell.

The sudden flight, the song
far on the hill,
these have not left him dumb,
only now still.

The sun on leaf, the small
miraculous weed,
all's planted deep in mind's
carrying seed.

What he has found this day,
fully revealed,
will grow from earth to sun
in the new field.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Listeners

The Singer

What have we heard?
More than the sound
of a golden word,
bright and round.

What have we seen?
More than the Hight
of the wing snow-clean,
high and light.

What do we keep?
Language and song,
(as we go to sleep)
soft and long.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Quiet Room

Here, where the pages turn
as leaf against leaf,
softly, the readers learn
more than the word:
here leaf against leaf
and silence are heard.

Here, where the volumes wait,
a lore against lore,
bough and the bright bird's mate,
sky-and-earth sound;
here lore against lore,
high silence are found.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Listener

Hearing the plane go over,
we too journey
through the sky-places
and beyond:
to immeasurable distances,
while the humming motors,
high, far,
beat in unison
to the steady
improvisation
of the crickets in a night
of close
and far
peace.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Same Leaf

Having gone from bough,
the leaf's not lost
though untouched by bird;
now friend of frost,

having wind for friend,
the leaf's a note
for the searching man
and a child's boat

that is launched by lore
in the small creek.
It was green song. Now
it is gold we seek.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Water and Shore

Here where no thing changes
year after year,
shore and ocean ranges,
loud, soft and clear,

blend in ceaseless flowing;
and watchers here,
ever bent on knowing
lore vast and deep,

find a drama, hilly
as waves that leap;
they hear silence stilly
as sound asleep.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Music Has No End

Music has no end; it flies
like a lark and robin loosed in light
clearer air; the clean notes rise
like the colors of sounds that follow night.

Music has no end; unheard,
it is still a note when feathers wind
lightly through the wind-blown boughs;
and the echo and echo, kind to kind,
blend quietly in ears and mind.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

New Composer

He lifted his head, his disappointed world,
to Beethoven brooding in the city square.
The city raced through him: the traffic straight,
circuitous, and more that was not there.

Vortex of hungers, aspirations rich
and bent close to the nearest pulse of strife,
possessed him. Then his blade-like music cut
around the deep and rotting wound of life.

He saw himself, high, pedestaled by fame.
He heard no people, with their two weeks' wages,
bent near the tinkling boxes' tunes; he heard
no crowd, with hollow eyes, sing Rock of Ages.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Rage and Survival

The Neighbor

We could hardly believe
that this small dry man
prepared the proclamation
of tyranny,
despotic onslaught
upon his brothers;
that words coiled and uncoiled
near his neighbors' gardens;
that his words, like eggs
in the high rocks, were hatching;
and that his days were nights
where thoughts crawled —
a camouflaged threat.

Oh, if he were brave and strong,
armed,
sure of his tyranny,
what waste he would spread
in an unprepared land —
this coward, this despot,
held behind
his own barbed fences of fear!

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949). **Variorum.** Also printed in *The Stubborn Root* (1952); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Lady in Pink

As the hawthorn,
pink and radiant,
she waited —
beneath her loveliness
a vicious thorn of words,
beneath her flowering
a piercing needle of language.

If the one who had known her
only in softness,
approached her,
darkly
she prepared,
with her hidden weapons,
to prick swiftly
the gentle pulse of her lover.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949). **Variorum.** Also printed in *The Stubborn Root* (1952); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Woman Telephoning

The angry threat of silence, ever present,
rages within her, bestial and held back
only because of fear that all those hated
will find her out before her still attack.

Her plans are monstrous; thinking their destruction,
the voice of silence phones; and every foe,
feeling the pointed fingers of dark distance,
speaks softly and then anger shouts hello!

The phone clicks fear; then hatred's dark receiver
drops in the cradle, while she sees them pace—
the caged wild things; she dials, once more prodding,
while steel-barred distance shields her throat and face.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Party

Conversation spilled over the glasses,
vomited from ditches of thought,
slushed through the sewers of waste.
I went from there,
and was cleansed, —
where others seemed like angels:
to whores without words.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Nightmare

She felt the small pricks
of pain,
the stabbing needle
that did not ease her hidden
convulsion;
and then as night
raced into nowhere
of an endless dark,
she fell from the edge
of nightmare,
fell,
and did not fall,
living out the hours of death,
screaming silently for morning.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Spotlighted

Spotlighted by the bad and curious eye,
by the indifferent and by the weak —
ashen and tense, the sitting criminal
awaits the accusation, sees nearby
one paid friend who will speak.

Minutes grow longer. Free and held men pass.
Soon he is up, obedient, as his name
hangs in the air a minute, caught and noosed,
tied to the pull of tautness, as the law's
long fingers point at shame.

Nighttime, the paradox of strange far peace,
lends him her nearness, height and stars.
Day's men parade one moment: three in front rows,
accuser, juror—sharers of his guilt
the other side of bars.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949). **Variorum.** Also printed in *The Stubborn Root* (1952); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Boy in Court

How fine is the head —
the contour, nose and chin
and the sweep of the hair,
with summer and wind always there.

But his playmate is dead.
Does he call to yesterday?

How soft is the sound
his warm mouth makes, how low,
like the meadowland cries,
are words when he slowly replies.

Has he more to say?
There is not a hint of fray.

How deep does he wonder.
How far away he stands
from the two never known
on earth, and with two, alone.

But a dead youth is under
their path of trampled ground.

Why does he not weep
when parents faint and wail?
He has not found
a trail from the mind and jail.

He is slayer and slain,
and even robbed of his pain.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Exiles

The exile gnaws the crust of hunger,
and sips weak tea of dread;
his flesh is lean but, leaner still, his
spirit's underfed.

The exile looks with hollow hope as
his fingers clutch the high
enclosure; yet his gaze is prayer
to the speechless sky.

Poor though he is, one man is poorer;
one, free, who looks through thin.
cracks of his own dark spirit's house and
shuts his poor self in.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Christ

Call me escapist in this shouting hour
when tinsel drops from tree and hearts of men.
I do not go, above, in some high tower.
Here, on his knees, beside the weak hound's
 den,
the small boy brings his gift of love and meat;
I see them going home. One hundred pass,
and do not see the Stranger in the street,
but one small girl smiles welcome from the glass.
Beyond the gilt unwelcome on the door,
past laughing places, past the crowded inn
where I had passed a thousand years before,
I hear two calls that welcome; high and thin,
friend calls to Friend, a love that never dies;
the small girl calls in silence from love's eyes.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Trees of Kittrann

away from the wild winds blowing
across the ocean and the bay
like a great anger growing.

The trees of Kittrann long have heard
the sharp and cutting voices,
like a long sharp and lashing word
where darkest wrath rejoices.

There are black whispers in the wood,
in the torn branches reaching
out to the bride who once was good,
and pleas of her love beseeching.

There are sharp wailings, fierce and long,
the chant of a lone love crying
for one once eager, warm and strong,
now bloody, voiceless, dying.

The trees of Kittrann bend one way,
away from wild winds blowing
across the ocean and the bay
like a great anger growing.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Peace?

Who utters it
is never really peaceful,
who closes his eyes
and says it
says only a child's dream,
who whispers peace
in darkness
wishes in the long
and unending
darknesses.

Peace?

Who knows it
does not speak,
or,
if he speaks,
he is not heard;
peace is not a word.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Death of the Old Man

Peace has settled like a warm cat in the lap.
The old man's gone and there is no complaint,
no old fist pounding, no loud voice shouting doom,
making a battlefield of the peaceful room.
Now every sound is a sound of mute and saint.

Peace is lilacs; and the old pipe's fading smoke.
The old man's gone; no papers mar the floor.
I sit with friends, and the quiet hour is spent,
soft as a zither, without bass argument
by one gone now, too long the visitor.

Peace is waking in the silent house; no voice
shouts high alarm at seven; morning's old
when youth walks slowly down the quiet stair,
and no one shouts hello and no one's there;
then even summer's youthful blood runs cold.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949). **Variorum.** Also printed in *The Stubborn Root* (1952); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Shrinking Oasis

The pious angers, shouted from the throat
of righteousness robed in her ruined gown;
of lust, the convert, who had beckoned men
from darkened windows in another town,

rise as a flame in her. She flashes fire
of long damnation for all sinners here.
Turners away arouse her holy wrath;
she threatens that incendiary fear

will form a circle, that eternal pain
will so surround their world that they will not
receive salvation. Fear drives others in.
Inevitably the free-will gift is brought.

The Lord's bright star has filled the house tonight.
God's vaudevillian strikes high notes and sings,
and givers weep as Sister shouts a prayer
and calls the folding money angels' wings.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

On Destruction

Knowing the blow of anger would not land
upon the foe's chin; knowing the sharpened blade
would lie in rust, unused; knowing the cup
would keep the poison checked though it was made
for foes' destruction—knowing all this, he still
kept implements hidden within and on the shelf,
determined to slay, determined to make the thought
a ruinous deed, as he slowly killed himself.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Flailing Moment

In the long drouth of the woman's silence
the man waited,
alerted,
preparing himself
for the sudden attack
of anger,
the saved fury;
the whirl of words
like the tearing gusts
and loosened leaves;
then,
helpless before the final sound,
he sat, silent,
while the murmurs were heard,
lighter than raindrops falling from sprouts;
and he had no white clean word
that could dry the woman's tears.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Fist of Storm

The fist of the storm
lands,
then moves in and out
and in, with increasing fury
pounds at the house.
The door protests,
the shutter flaps and the hinge
whines.
Only the window,
like a thin and complacent face
of a lady
sure of herself,
faces the robust
and masculine threat:

whole and unmarred and unshaken
in the flashes of the storm's anger.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Tidal Shout

cry of a crazed king,
is heard
over land,
over water;
his great green hands
move ships from their course,
make ships of houses,
as the ruler reinvades
his plundered province.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Small Architects

Here
in the sand piles
the children build
patiently, patiently
under the sun
their small warm houses,
their hopeful towers.

These children,
the light and dark faced,
know only words like high and building,
never the words of darkness and bigotry.

They hear the ugly words
as the bully crushes
their little world
with war's tread.

They hear the ugly words
hurled as a spear is hurled
by the small hurt man
who loves them.

And there is a new
black word
in their dictionary
of light.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

After the Hunger and Sighing

a man will be content —
with what he has,
and not with all he thought he needed;
after the anger and crying
a man will grow with seasons,
and find the seed
and flower no more desired than hearth fire;
after the loving and leaving
a man will learn to know
what things were shut
behind him as he wildly Bed before;
after the joy and grieving
a man will know he turned
aside, though youth
held wisdom open like a summer door.
SPROUTS

More than new grass
and new leaf sprout.
This is a time
for looking out,

beyond workbench,
on walk from school.
This is the time
to heed the rule,

to search inside.
Now having found
a thing new, green,
rise from the ground,

something inside us
rises too.
Remembering
how each child grew,

let us believe
only what's out
is wholly free —

a man, a sprout
rising in growth.
Prepare the seed—
the thought, the food —
for the world's need.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Diameters of Fullness

Diameters of fullness reach through rounds —
the world, the juice-filled berry —
and there's adventure in the ripened sounds
of apples falling, bitten cherry.

No thing's too large for measurement or sight,
no thing's too small for sharing:
the whole rich world leaf-green, bloom-white;
the apple we are paring.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Durable Fire

“But true love is a durable fire
In the mind ever burning,
Never sick, never old, never dead,
From itself never turning.”

Anonymous, 16th Century

She is a girl
whose morning eyes
are touched by the dew
and by two skies:

she looks beyond
the day and the night,
being blessed with a far
and a wide sight.

She has a lamp
that shines in the mind
and out through the dark.
Now she must find
birth and rebirth.

The woman is wed;
her dreaming is life
and fully fed.
She is a fire,

a durable flame
that gives of herself
and in love's name.

More than a girl,
more than a woman,
she is old in love,
for more than the human

sight is her gift.
She struggles from death,
and feels the bare earth's
unembalmed breath.

Wed to the world,
beyond it—the sky,
beyond that—the thought
that is love-high,

she holds the stars
and sun in her mind;
and children of earth
claim a new find:

she is a lover
for the world's warm needs;
she is a mother
when the world bleeds,

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Invader

The shuttered house, the dark inheritance,
whispered around me,
vulnerable,
as the feet tested
the prison-hall and stair.

Meant for father or son
or in-law,
passed on at last to related stranger,
it moved as I moved,
the echo of dread,
a gray nostalgia,
each dark sound resentful
of invasion.

“For Sale,” is tacked
with my unease
and my guilt
on the door of living death.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Peace and Chaos

The doe's feet blend with moss.
The hare is in the grass
where paws of silence pass
beneath the leafy bough
that is the woodland, now.

The doe is frenzied leap.
The hare is sudden Bight
where paws are jumps of fright.
The wing, stirred from its rest,
deserts the egg-filled nest.

Doe, hare and bird come back
after the gun's not near,
after the chase of fear
goes past; and blood flows red
from man, the killer—dead.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

Before the Thought Corrupts

Before the thought corrupts the child of morning
illuminated blue is wider than the sky's
far reaches, visioned by the clearer, farther
desire for sight beyond the sight of eyes.

Before the deed becomes a knuckled vengeance
and whip held by the black paws of the mind,
the hand that raises fallen wings for flying
is wholeness gently loosening its find.

When we are boastful of our greatest stature,
we are like shrunken ones, corrupt and maimed,
locking ourselves within our circus cages;
we live the aged lie that we are tamed.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

The Writer

He finds his small green word
in the grasshopper-world
beneath green blades
of his thought;
and on the vast gray stretches
he finds his pebble-word,
his shell-word;
out, out, farther than the eyes' miles,
he reaches for the rolling language —
far, far
over green pastures of search,
over the hillocks of mind;
and farther still,
he climbs for the summit-word
waiting on the peaked-steps
rising into the heavens.

Publication. *Durable Fire* (Prairie City, Illinois: Decker Press, 1949).

THE STUBBORN ROOT

1952 · Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952

Tumult and Long Twilight

The Two Laughters

We heard the laughter:
it was a duet of fountain spray
and a child washed in a summer day.

We heard the laughter:
it was a crony and crony, chuckling
over the feast and their belts' unbuckling.

We heard the laughter:
it was a spear and a savage dart,
the sharp words thrown at the absent heart.

Beloved laughter,
how can you knife with a sharp incision?
Hold back the acid of derision.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Child-Woman

When the child-woman strolled
by day, by night,
the startled key of her fear
moved her,
top-like.

So, drawing away;
she moved from brightness,
through dimness,
near shadows—
choosing the black road's middle
where no fingers reached from the corners.

Behind her locked door
her hands were folded
across her locked self.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Distorting Mirror

Through labyrinthine, glassy alleyways,
searching for pleasure in our fun house days,
plundering like a selfindulgent child,
we go ten avenues as we run wild,
loosing the lachrymals, drying the mind.
Adult, but yet not grown; wide-eyed, yet blind,
we hug the image: all is shattered error;
lachrymosely, dazed, we bleed in terror.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Made Small by Speech

Made small by speech, the incapacious word,
brought forth in embryo, cannot endure.
Erase the half-said knowledge, half-said truth,
a fool's pride in the premature.

Say more with silence, with the pause between;
wait like the folded wings that guard the nest,
expectant and unmoving, yet so sure
of feathered lore that stirs in active rest.

Let autumn claim the mind, let dry thought burn,
labor through ashes, through long winter's night.
Be grateful for one pure ascendant word—
one swift high rise like blue birds loosed in flight.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

In the Cerebral House

In the cerebral house the unwall'd solitude
wanders on vast gray plains; it seeks beyond
fallacious knowledge. Cool, detached, it moves
while flesh remains in tumult and in peace;
in peace like slow green brooks that move
 toward sea;
in ferment like a love and wrath that blend
as dark streams blend, flowing as waters flow,
defiled, and sharing pollution's common course.
The walls of flesh may tighten around the frame
of bone, or loosen and sag, but the eyes once bright,
grown weak, may see without the need of sight,
through the skull's window, a vista without end;
though the eyes be blind, though beginning
 was the end.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Two Hunters

“I shriek his pain, as torn I share
The white hurt of the wounded air.”
Lilian Bowes Lyon in “Orpheus 2”

The day forsakes us: we are not
the peaceful hunter; we are caught
by traps another hunter brought.

Searching for spirit’s health and food,
our brave cry boasted all is good;
now we lie wounded in the wood.

No longer whole, we lick our pain;
we see our search’s growing stain;
we whimper for our home again.

After the mad experience,
the lessening of turbulence,
we are no longer small and tense.

Lapping our wounds, our deep thoughts wind
through brambles and the fields of mind—
straight or limping toward our find.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Death of the Blind Wife

He heard the word again, again: "Release."
Rejoicing in his loss, the neighbors said
the tortured wife, too long held from her peace,
had more than earned her bed.

How could they know the words her fingers spoke;
how could they know, when two strode up their hill,
what exultations rose as morning broke
around her? Standing still,

she let the whole dawn bathe her: she was sun,
the whole warm glow, no part of blinding night;
now he, the stumbler in day's dark, is one
with eyes, but without sight.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

In the Hidden Hospital

It is not for you alone, in that place of locks and whispers,
that these words live or die. It is for all
in delusion; walking here in an unclosed place, your kinsmen
feel the thinness raised around the mind.

We face each other now, as the raised blind
lets the light pour in; and light, as in days of mirth and roses,
shines on the hidden tears that never fall.

In this moment, face to face and a foot apart, the lover
reaches: cautioned, my warm hands freeze in air
as anger dries the tears of the stranger there.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Maternity Ward

New cries are heard—one love, one hate: the angels,
protected by attendants, breathe pure air,
the antiseptic order everywhere,
while in adjacent cribs, unwanted brothers
reach out for love; neglect tugs hard at bars.
One is carried up the bright steps toward stars,
one is doomed inevitably to the lair:
one sees with wide surprise, one with wild stare.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

It Is Not Hate

It is not hate, that piercing implement;
nor vengeance with her swift and brutal claws;
nor hot possession with her hot intent
that conquers lovers living out the laws
of rich togetherness; it is not lust,
the hairy dominance, the virile force
that crumbles richness suddenly to dust;
it is no torrent that must run its course.
Oh, it is love, with wide and gentle eyes,
that shines with vision, clear and silently,
and calls love forth where little deaths arise,
and where the blinded lovers turn and see,
forgiveness granted, wholly after pain,
and love calls lover to his home again.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Whipped Child

The whipped child cringes;
cur led in the corner,
his hands a bloody guard,
his back smarting,
he is swelling with hidden rage;
this grows,
as a deep sore spreads
after the frequent blows.

Beware, beware,
you who strike:

you are enlarging the fist
curled in the dark corner,
there.

No use to run;
it is late,
too late:

your child of love
is a beast of hate.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Glass Dome

He has one thing, one thing—no more,
behind the shade and bolted door:
the bloom (outside, alive and red)
the cherished keepsake of the dead.
The grown dark child can never hear
love singing, deafened by his fear,
while April's choruses are near.
Crouching behind the icy bars,
his day a cold night without stars,
the tenant in his private room
lost in his own encircling gloom,
shuts out each small insistent light.
Pity the one who goes by night,
the dark, unloved, deserted groom,
who does not see the countryside,
the waiting and receptive bride
high on a hill—the soloist
singing of love, by April kissed.
Let him run free in a world grown green.
as he shatters the flowered figurine.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Uncertainties

Uncertainties, the still tormentors, stalk
through jungles of imagination's vast
entangled thought. Released from pits, we walk,
then run, then walk again, then stumble past
the monstrous evils—black deeds never done—
and madness shrieking down the rotten stair.
Caught by our own wild grip of fear, we run,
attempting to elude what is not there.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Message to Autumn

I am not too old,
I am not too young.
Autumn, autumn,
I have sinned, I have sung.

I have prayed long, long.
Not on my knees
have I said to Jesus,
“Oh, hear me, please!”

I have prayed when April
kissed my mouth.
Was it saint or sinner
that fled to the south?

I only know that
the vein went wild
and, winter-old, I
became a child.
I became a child and
I gave to the sky
the kites of my mind,
and the bird, as high

as the roofless blue,
froze on the limb
while I poured out my
heart of hearts to Him.

Each petal that fell
was the garment's thread
dropped to the full earth's
seeded bed:

I felt them all;
all, all was fingered.
I strolled from day
to night and lingered

with all outside,
the high, the far—

right there in my cap
I wore a star!—

and though I slept
I must have gone
the endless way,
for how could dawn

and I be part
of the shaken bough
and the first bird flown
before the plough
had parted. earth?
Now earth turns red
and growing things
have gone to bed,

while I go with the last
bird to the south,
each with a cherry
in his mouth.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Visitor

Sounds went by like sounds
we had never heard before,
softer than bare feet
of the small child on the floor,
softer than the still
kind closing of night's door.

Silence, they said, it was;
silence was all that fell,
featherfall of the night.
But the small child wouldn't tell,

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Half-Journey

I go from summer and I go to fall;
finding a hidden berry, I taste this
last bit of summer, slowly tasting all
as we taste warm, hugged summer with a kiss.
Out in the carnival of wind and trees
where breezy whim moves color like the girls'
light vari-tinted skirts, I fall on knees;
I find a yellow ribbon. Then wind whirls.
This bit of gold goes where its wearer went,
and it is flying where a lover ran,
leaving another restless and unspent;
so does a fickle season race from man.
And so must he, the lover, find the lost
though he might feel, at last, the kiss of frost.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Reluctance

The girl drew her fingers
from the old man's hand,
his coarse, withered fingers.
Can she understand
that his hands were a cradle
when a small child cried?
His hands were a pillow
when his old wife died.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Lover

I am in love with summer.

Let the flesh and mind

suckle like an infant.

Let the senses find

cream and wine of summer.

Drain the whole fruit dry,

strip the branches barren.

Let me turn from sky.

Face down, let me fondle

every rounded hill,

all the virgin grasses,

every bud until

all my weary being,

wed to this loveliness,

seared in a late, late summer,

knows the things that bless:

though the frost of autumn

chills, warm currents run,

saved from abundant summer

and full form in the sun.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Remnant

We count the virtues when the conscience, torn
by inner poverty, disrobes the mind.
Although the holy, regal robes were worn,
we saw no rags beneath, for we were blind.

We praise ourselves, remembering one day
when Pity moved us; when he came to beg,
we gave and then walked proudly on our way;
now we hear Pity walking with one leg.

And Love—O gently did we beckon her.
We took her, yes, but did we not confess?
Now like a wayward child the whispers stir
through shreds—the unused, silken bridal dress.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Vise

One grasps for love;
he who has leaned
too long toward height
is never weaned,
is always young,
yet never grows.
One loosens love,
and always knows
the one long love
must go alone
and find what two
have never known.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Hester Prynne

Thumbbed by yesteryear, your cloak
is dusty now. Alert, within
boards, the storm of anger broke,
lashing you and sin.

Heated still, the brand of pain,
scarlet on your bosom, shows
your own error, and again
our poverty that grows:

here the darker spirit's root
blends with the warped thing all have known.
You who ate forbidden fruit
still must go alone.

We, the silent, not found out,
live in our hidden, wormy den,
part of old New England's shout,
pious now, as when

you who bore our error, hot
as shame and hurt that magnified,
wept in your anguish. We forgot
it was for us you cried.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

That Secret Land

There was that secret land,
that hidden place.
There was that thirst when I drank
tears from your face.

There was that knowledge learned
in the living book,
pages scattered like leaves
on the faithful brook.
Then there was that alien stir
that left us tense,
and we were grown and robed—
not in innocence.
We wore our love like a shield.
I saw a hard
line draw your cautious mouth
till one on guard
turned back day after day
from our blessing light
and went down the prying street,
by day that is night.
The windows were eyes, and where fine
lace curtains stirred
we felt the springer behind,
and we moved as we heard
the breath of the pack. Alone,
you went to your room.
I ran to our shielding wood
but the cry of doom
tore through where a plague had been.
I was suddenly old
in the land of the bloom and sun
as a tearing cold
struck at my face like a witch
with her nails of ice,
at eyes, at mouth, and at heart—
she struck thrice.

And the white, white shower fell,
fell six feet deep.
And I was the one in the tomb
who could not sleep.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Long Twilight

They sat together when the day's last crumb
was brushed into her left hand by the other,
and placed out on the sill for birds that come,
the hungers making creatures child or mother.
Out on the porch, she chose the rocking chair
and he the parlor piece that young devotion
selected for him years ago, now bare
of its new luster, as with aged motion
she rocks into the years, unmoved, unstirred
by warmer words that leaped with quick elation;
unraveling old garments with no word,
used to his silence, free of the irritation
she felt when romance spoke no more. They look
now at the empty street, each dimly turning
the secret thoughts like pages in a book,
both love and anguish blended in their yearning.
She cannot tell him, fearful her love is no
deep equal of his rapture, brave, undying,
that she has prayed to be the first to go;
she sits in silence, small and guilty, lying.
He does not feel her dread, as he too keeps
a secret now; guilt whips him like wet leather,
seeing her straight and tall there as he sleeps,
faithful and brave when they are not together.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Old Room

The hinge protests as if a privacy,
not entered for a score of years, rejects
the purchaser's desire to search, to see—
the child, skirt-hidden, fearing he might be
clawed by the darkness that the hand inspects.

No spring is here: unrolled blinds bring no day.
The match burns briefly, and no miser's wick
is found; air dark with many years' decay
surrounds the stumblers in the tomb-like way;
the squinters see the clock without a tick.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Terror

Terror shouts; it is a growl.
It is a storm, a battered boat.
It is a night-cry and the towel
in the mouth, the clenched and gurgling throat.

Terror's loud, but terror grows
and does its evil, darker ill,
though it strikes no, sudden blows:
terror's endless when it's still.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

No Respite

The woman lived
in a half-world,
in a corner of quiet.

When the traffic,
rushing,
caught her,
she was whirled—
driven—
to the safety of trees.

Even the small oasis,
pinned like a butterfly
in the city's heart,
could not suffice her:
the green was imprisoned,
the flowers
only to be borrowed by sight,
and the bench to be shared.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

From Depth, from Distance

When we come from intolerable distance, stunned, from
the depth
of a private hell, from the dark, circuitous byway,
we are hurt as the drunkard is injured, he who returns
from the crash of the night on bloody knees to the highway.

We are drawn to the plunderer's frenzy: doped, we are
whirled

like a spinning top, in a quick and incorrigible craving
for escape from the jailor within, we run ten ways
at a time from the void of monsters, afterward braving

in the silence diminishing error: half child, half man,
we are bathed in sunlight and quenched by the still
water's fountain.

It is then, companioned by gods, that we meekly rise;
or we bray like the ass, profaning the limitless mountain.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Summer with Blossoms Falling

on her wind-blown hair
races alive in girlhood
now here and now there.

See her, back down, in daisies
and her arms held high,
lover of earth whose red mouth
is raised to the sky.

Never be sure of summer
when she comes or goes,
true to both lovers and wearing
the thorn on the rose.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Old Men in the City Park

They wear their animosities like humps,
hunched but waiting for the sudden spring;
alerted by an argument, they shake
tightened fists of words that crush and sting,
leaving dark echoes in the downtown air.

Spitting out verbs, opponents shout and flail,
the folded headlines crushed for emphasis—
the shouted editorials like hail.

They go in peace, for dinner or for drink,
one to right, one left, each separate.
Yet they are drawn toward brothers once again,
one by love, ten kept alert by hate.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Door

The oaken opening is more
than entrance, outlet. Touch the door
and you go out in fields or up
a hill; and pools are like a cup
when you look down—deep down—and drink
the green refreshment as you think,
head cupped in hands, that all the good
came from a turn of knob and wood.
For extra measure, when you move
through twilight toward the ones you love,
you find beyond the opened door,
a light, a hand, and more... more...

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Different Orphan

He takes nothing for granted.
A kind word uttered
is a gift of music,
lingering still past the
day of its saying,
into the darkness
of his bare, small room;
making the room a meadow
filled with joyous larks.
A bright red apple given
is a whole new shining world;
though it is eaten,
and the core nibbled
and the seed thrown
into the sandy yard,
the gift is a flowering orchard,
and petals falling,
falling and covering him
with the blossoming
gift; and growing, growing
brighter and bigger
than the great warm sun
above him.
And a kiss is love of angels,
all the soft and loveliest words
never uttered,
only whispered
in the vast high silences:
and he is one of the strollers,
a child of the angels,
walking in white, white gardens
of the highest heaven,
walking the highways of heaven
here in the yard
of the nightmare's orphanage
(his parents' home)
but his own heaven
is only his wish,

is only his dream.

Remembering the friend next door,
parentless,
and his visit
to the house of a dozen mothers,
the home of a dozen friends,
he curls like a fist
beneath the sheets,
and he strikes at two not there,
and rarely there:
but at last he sleeps,
sleeps long, long
on the wet, wet pillow.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Of One Unwed

Her coming is a shadow,
beautiful and still,
light as dawn creeping
over the hill.

Her passing is an early
violet that leaves
earth and air fuller.

Love alone grieves

for singing that is singing
of one unwed.

Lord, must he remember
that she is dead?

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Close to Ground

To lie, face down, with growth that loves the earth,
is better far than the tiptoe reach for branch
high on the tree framed in the sky, the bough
part of the lavish, flowered avalanche;
is better far than the myth of unseen ways.
To feel the fern, the cool fern, in hot days
is balm for frenzy; stillness says: forget.
One thousand blooms against the high clouds' ways
are less sweet than the cheek-hugged violet.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

We Are Set Free

We Are Set Free

We are set free: we go from dark to day.
Untangled now, we pass the cooling fountain,
our will no longer earth-bound; eyes, deep-set
and closed, have seen the shining mountain.

Out and beyond small journeys of our need,
past budding fields and flowering hills and winding
ascents of growth, we walk as if we found
the thing of height that we are bent on finding.

We reach, not as the small rise toward the ripest fruit, I,
nor as the fingers fondling love, demanding
the promised vow, but for a rooted growth
wed to the sun, seeded on holy peaks—
all thought loosed god-like where a man is standing.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Wake, Old Man

The room we enter now
is warmed by summer's oak; the night's long chill
is gone, the windows robbed of cold's design.
Fearful that you might sleep, forever still

in these our days of vast complexities,
I turn, perceptive, where I see you lie;
I have my reasons for not saying:
wake;

it is not time, for me, to have you die.

Wake, old man.

Why does your dim sight search,
like two poor lanterns, each with a miser's wick,
through broken windows past the dirty street?
I have not seen, like you, through a poor world, sick.

Wake, old man.

Now once more rise and limp;
look long at darks that seem to have no end;
deny me not another day of light
that burns in hells I cannot comprehend.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

We Are Released

We are released. The mind is emptied
of its dark and troubled waters.

We are made whole. The blood is purest,
like our new sons and new daughters.

We are released. The bigot's buried
in his thin and decaying box.

We are made whole. Our words are robins,
not the buzzards and black flocks.

We are released. Our deeds are fingers,
and the whole man throws the seed.

Now we are grown. Now one, the grower,
we are flower and not weed.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Porch Scene

Seeing the old man living
his last years in his chair,

(two broken, half-forgotten)

his neighbors stop in there.

On one foot, then another,
impatient to be off,
they spend poor pity's minute.
Hearing his racking cough,

frowning, they leave him shortly,
their monthly duty done.
Glad they have gone, he moves out
to the warm, still sun.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Bright Ball

Brighter than worlds the patient padre dreams,
brighter than fallen fruits the summers grow,
the child's ball shines untouched across the road
after the child was struck the sudden blow.

Gritting his teeth, the father prays and swears;
freed by the shock, the mother lies inert.
How can I tell how beautiful was death?
I turn my smile away, away from hurt.

Leaping half woodland thing and half a bird,
all that he sought was something round and bright.
While the plots were made in a twisted world and dark,
freely he leaped in sun, a child of light.

How can I say I carry life, his smile
full as acceptance, all the world he found,
while men plan fiery hells among the clouds
and plan their future homes beneath the ground?

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

To Be Born, to Be Born

To be born in a gray bed,
in the shrieking dark
where the echo cries,
curses and clutches the holey sheet,
curses and dies
in the empty room,
is heard by sleepers turning over,
used to the jungle's doom—
that is the bitter pity
in all the vast, unanswering city.

To be born in a silk bed
with attendants near,
to be fed, to rise
richly, and growing and grown to see
one dwarfed in size
is to be one seven,
the grown child doped long past each bedtime
cursing his evil heaven—
that is the selfsame pity
in all the vast, unanswering city.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

I Saw Death Thrice

Her cheeks were peaches,
her hair yellow silk,
her blue eyes hidden:
the child of the sun
slept in ice.

She was content the second time.
Candor's smile, I saw—
an innocent's.
I paused in the doorway,
and turned:
death was an old woman there.

But when I saw death the third time
death was a ghost,
a breathing, a monstrous ghost:
she hexed two lovers embracing,
embraced by the whole day,
blessed by Junes within them;
as her eyes peered out of the mask,
she spat at two in the sunlight,
she turned from the gray clutched curtain,
she pulled down the green-death blind,
and returned to her tomb.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Small Disasters

The small disasters, crowding day by day
out warm events, waste all the energies:
we age before our time, and, dying, live
part time profanely and part time on knees.

The small deceit becomes a huge contempt.
The little love' becomes a love that can
not henceforth love at all, till finally
we are only shadow and not man.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Held and Loose Tablet

Let us find one leaf—never two—
and measure its detailed design,
showing its plan though hid from view
of the sightless seeker near the vine.

It weaves its pattern, veined, complete,
in summer air, on golden mound,
even in places where the fleet
footstep falls on icy ground.

Like knowledge, eloquent, unheard,
it waits, a full or patterned find,
near the ascendant or stuffed bird
of man's lore-lit and pit-dark mind.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

World Figure

He journeys with portfolio and purpose,
over the land of hunger, through the state
where quick necessity and infiltration
blend with eternal foes—deceit and hate.
He closes doors behind him. Angry voices
rise from the pounded table, ruined steeple.
In bed he labors still; he sees the hollow
hunger that curses doped and captured people.
The great man turns from others and remembers
boyhood and farmland where his father lives
out gray full years, raising with young green fingers
good earth's own health. He knows the old man gives
what his young father gave: he hears a small cry
out in the night: he hears his father going
into the cold: he sees the lantern carried
across the frozen mile, the swift wrath blowing.
The great man opens eyes and sees through nighttime.
Touching the documents that lie in damp
hours of dark, remembering another,
the great man rises, and he lights his lamp.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Wolf and Tiger Dining

Wolf and Tiger Dining, A.B.

“Scotch over ice?” the Wolf said to the Tiger.

“Or Dry Manhattan?” “Never touch the stuff.

It almost ruined man, you know. I’d rather
take blood. Man almost never took it rough;

“instead he dressed his meat with vile concoction.”

“No wonder that he lost all sense of taste,”

the Wolf replied. “To think he cooked the carcass;
he doomed himself to death, with so much waste.”

“What will you Wild Beasts have?” the waiter asked them.

“We’re almost broke. The Christian meat is tough

(they spoke of grace when they chewed Lamb and Mutton)
but we can eat it if we chew enough.”

“Remember that young juicy thing from Kansas?”

“Richer than the svelte rich piece from York.”

“Here comes the chunk who ate us Beasts on Sunday.” /

“Let’s open our jaws wide, and get to work!”

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Gentleman Retired

Not now. No, please. Not now.
I have thanked you twice before.
Don't knock. I can't see as how
I can ask you past the door.
I've listened to words. No more.

When I think of the words I said
and the words I listened to
I wonder the tongue isn't dead,
or the mind. Small talk comes through
small minds. Now go. I'm through.

If only folks would sit,
be still, content to be,
say life when they're part of it.
They come to gab, not to see.
They can't hear the Lord, or me.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Mr. Lerner

Mr. Lerner had had enough,
and—damn it!—he was not resigned
to what the fools had uttered; he,
unclad, knew that they dressed his mind
when he was told his nudist world
was one fenced acre and no more.
Knowing he was not wholly free,
he broke the stout lock of the door.
Then out in the sunny road and street,
blessed all around by heaven's hand
touching him warmly, he was not
surprised he walked above the land.
Behind his bars, he looks at fools
who laugh and taunt. All looking in,
he soon discovers, are quite insane—
each lugging a prison around his skin.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Two Neighbors

One neighbor speaks of governmental losses,
of law that races sin while big-time grafters
dig deeply in the public's plundered pockets;
his raucous protests raise our reason's rafters.

One neighbor answers us with frequent nods,
agrees with us if we turn left or right.
Though still, we find him often eloquent.
Our neighbor's warm "Good morning" and "Good night"

take on more wisdom when we lie in darkness,
think of the first one, of opinions squandered,
of hot statistics, of abusive language
that time has never stilled or even laundered.

We toss in bed and think of better answers.
We think then of the second and are deep
in warm content: we know that wisdom listens
in silence to our words; and so we sleep.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Plain Reply

Deliver me, the old man said,
from people—one whole flock:
alike as birds, they act alike.
Now since you've asked for talk,
if I were younger and could hate
I'd hate hard as ice
(at least, not like) the people, all,
all who are always nice:
the woman with her cooing word,
“charming,” always that;
the gentleman with milk-toast words
who always tips his hat.
Hate burns man out, but not contempt
for the pious who go by
from their six days' actuality,
smiling the Sunday lie.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Coming and Going of Minerva

Minerva Wentworth Compton Brown,
old now, through with social capers,
endows the arts—that is, she does
if it is publicized in papers.

She turns from art to politics
in a refined, though raucous, manner
if (Minerva always pays)
she it is who lifts the banner.

She lets them know who she has been,
and who her spouses were, and listens
to golden thoughts, her tinsel heart—
even a Woolworth necklace glistens.

Old Minerva's shepherded
every black lamb that has bleated.
The Lord now tucks her into bed.
How dare He do it? She is cheated!

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Chirpers in Gilt Cages

Wait, you who sing, singing the long and lonely
desire of man, ascending when you seek
the height of joy risen for poor self only—
wait, wait a while before the dry lips speak.
Listen. Be still. Lie where the thought is hidden,
not in the heavens: here beneath your feet,
under the littlest root, are singers bidden
deep in the secret place where true flows meet.

Cast off the crown, gilt leaves and paper roses.
Deafen the small ears to the gloved applause.
“Romance” and “Beauty” are your hollow poses.
You stand in art’s fake meadow, without flaws.
Break glass of vanity; be true, be giver.
Run nude as children; bathe in the hidden river.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Fist of the Storm

Fist of the Storm

The fist of the storm
lands,
then moves in and out
and in, with increasing fury
pounds at the house.

The door protests,
the shutter flaps and the hinge
whines.

Only the window,
like a thin and complacent face
of a lady
sure of herself,
faces the robust
and masculine threat:

whole and unmarred and unshaken
in the flashes of the storm's anger.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Old Wars

The proud house stands firm as a fortress stands,
on the highest hilltop, in the choicest place.
Eyes peer far down across the richer lands.
A great gate keeps the poor world in its place.

But for the lark and jay and for the snake
the leafy doors are always held ajar,
and many voices, when old hours awake,
sing from their feathers morning's freshest bar.

A shot is heard! A world, used to the kill,
leaps from the foe. When smoke has cleared again,
they move into their sky, onto their hill,
near the rich hunter, now the poor self-slain.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Something Was Slain Here

Something was slain here: deep in childhood's forest,
deserted by the prodigal, a token
lies in the fallen twigs, in vines or branches;
lies with the birds' bones, with the arrow broken.

Still here the hunter, wearily returning,
ploughs through the dead leaves, hoping to recapture
something long sought, something that reaching fingers
never completely held with fullest rapture.

Hunter and hunted, onward and then backward,
circuitous or straight, the man again here
tramples the virgin growth; he bends, he trembles
as he lifts one small bone of the bright thing slain here.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Men and Hounds of Kittrann

The huts of Kittrann, fury-lashed,
are gray and weather-beaten;
the door's unhinged, the shutter's bashed;
no bloom's had time to sweeten.

The men of Kittrann, fierce and hard,
fling down the meatless bones,
caught by the hungry dogs in air,

with fierce and evil groans.

The hounds of Kittrann bark like anger,
sucking the air of breath;
a part of wrath, a part of hunger,
they chase poor things to death.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Journey Through Black Wood

Not This

Not this, he told himself; not this green hill
freed him from anger, from tumultuous sound;
not the wide landscape wed to clean and still
blue night, blessed him. Not starlight, not ground.

No, not here, came stillness, nor release
came when he ran from where his battles flared.
He is his own clean height, his wide deep peace
as he was his raging war, now undeclared.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Let Us Reach

Let us reach, as we once reached
for the high good fruit,
for the slope's wild bloom, the small hurt hand
guarding the stubborn root;

let us reach for ripened words,
and for language deep
as we nurture growth, for language high
caught in a moment's leap—
something to give, not keep.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Through Bough, Through Root

Lost in the mysteries of silence,
the old man and his grandson
lay on the new grasses.

Through the bare branch,
above the proud sapling,
the old gaze followed the cloud,
away, away
to the endless reaches,
to a place with no end,
no reply.

Face down,
nuzzling the seeded earth,
storing in a new hunger
the hidden children,
the warm boy whispered without words;
and there was only a still cry.

Hearing no answers,
the old man turned to the earth from the cloud,
and the young boy turned from the ground:

i one to the frozen earth,
one to the cold sky.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952). **Variorum.** Also printed in *Backdrops* (1966); the later text differs only in local wording, spelling, or punctuation.

Journey Through Black Wood

The journey through the black wood,
where animals move
in the mind of the boy,
only the boy
hearing the black foot,
the measured danger,
each touch of a black foot
the fear of waiting;
the journey is a way
between the boy
and the man.

Let the man,
in the boy,
see between fear and night
the sun of day
with the eyes of the mind.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

In a Blue Wisdom

To be lost
in the blue wisdom
of a sunny day
with the mind
in a vast silence
of the sky's far way,
is to know,
and to know clearly
the ascendant reach:
there is lore
in a vast language
that is without speech.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Release

I thought I had ended my learning.
The small cries hidden in wood
disturbed me at each farther turning.
Did something fallen need food?

Far out in the meadow an acre
of clover-peace claimed the air.
Was some little weaker thing's maker
a bloody thing trapped back there?

I walked for an hour. The singing
was heard wherever I turned,
but something that guided was bringing
me back where I hadn't learned

that wisdom's protective, and flight is
a free and happier thing;
that fear is only like night is:
a bird with a folded wing.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Hidden Senses

Do you hear the music in windy branches?
the bright notes dropping, soft and slow,
like golden leaves? the bright notes rising,
kicked up by joy as swift feet go?

I hear no good eye-brightening sound
that the deaf hear racing over ground.

Higher than the far blue mountain ranges,
more delicate than day's first flush,
we see the hem of God's great garment;
are you swept outward in the hush?

I strain poor eyes but do not find
the sight seen by the seeing blind.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

To a Student

Let the thought be a white bird
wherever you go,
an ascendant and white word
over the snow;
let the pen be bitten
and the pure thought written.

Let the thought be a white drift,
a rolling wide sweep.
Let the word be a white gift,
reaching out, deep
as the frosty still hours
that are hiding the flowers.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Path Back

Here is where some twenty years ago
we leaped the fence. I wonder:
can we make it now?

“I wouldn’t try;
better go under.”

What did we find that’s brought us back again?
We shoo the brambled sleeper.
We go the same worn pathways; without words,
now we go deeper.

“But we went as far as we could go
before, when all our findings
were budding questions, seared replies
and endless windings.”

Still we must reach for something never found,
and go the same fields over,
stretching for color with a broken net,
and trampling clover.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Beneath Root

Youth to age, summer to fall, beyond
the swift high song, the long unspoken word,
comes a time: season of rest by pond—
the active rest-and image never heard.

Mirrored then, clear as the honest eyes
of just appraisal, all this life is one
pictured whole: here are the prayers and cries,
the growth, the waste, and all the shouting done.

Youth to age, summer to fall, the sound
of crystal dropping, all become a part
of spending and spent, something lost in ground,
or seed of mind hiding its new start.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Blind Child

“The lights are out.”

She kept her secret.

“It’s time for bed.”

No use to say

what tall things rose around her, waiting
for one who saw no day.

They called corn tall, the pine tree taller.

Tall was a rise, and she could reach
beyond this growth and winds applauding;
and do it without speech.

“The lights are out,” for her, meant hidden
and lost things had again returned.

When led in light she could not tell them
dark’s wick has always burned.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Small Freedoms

We search for little freedoms—
the warm kind day,
the hill beyond the turmoil
of fear's dark way.

And in our high aloneness
we try to keep
the outer peace while inner
small battlers sleep.

We know that freedom's rarely
in what we see;
it is in now accepting
what we want to be.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Hound of Day

The hound of day has bit the heels
of haste, and, through the panting trek,
the hare of chase, elusive, hot,
goes nightward. In the savage wreck,
beyond the peace and mind and grass,
beneath the sun and calming shade,
the hours, clawed by speed, are torn
from calmness waiting, unafraid.
But haste and greed and fury end.
Here, where the hound and hare are spent,
the lark of twilight comes from day,
the lamb of evening lies content.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Friend and Foe

He is an old man
and he is done
with prattling of peace in
the sun.

He sits in shadows.
He ran through years,
shamed now that he shed the
child's tears,

shamed that he hated,
and made too much
of love and the fickle
girl's touch.

He is an old war,
all discontent
long vanished, the victim
and victor spent.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Double Treasure

This is a day for going
where we heard the frog
in the green creek of summer
with our racer, the dog,
here where the silver fishes
in their liquid house
lived scarcely a foot from grasses
lodging the mouse.

This is a day for finding
in the whitened wood,
on the snow tree, in mirrors,
what was growing and good,
this that is now, though hidden
in a land of frost,
in a snow-bough wonder,
green, never lost.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Final Grace

The man, alone, the children gone far, far;
his wife a memory, her quiet face
is turned toward him wherever troubles are:
a living symbol in this dying place.

Pulling from his hard land the hard-won food,
old, old before his time, his meager store
hardened him like the rocky earth. The good,
deep seed was lost: wrath was the conqueror.

His words, as tough as anger's rain-soaked leather,
were snapped like whips warning his one thin horse.
He saw his patient wife and wondered whether
she could wait while sullen silence ran its course.

Only when all the children left him, only
when he was crushed, then proud, then young again
with his own land, she died; she knew a lonely
old man is young when he loves not in vain.

The man, alone, his children gone, his wife
gone like that time when she went to her dead,
he lives not now with death, he lives with life—
each bloom her garden, golden grain her bread.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

White Illusion

Now in the wood where tree and bush have ceased to
squander
the nut and berry, all here seems secure,
having passed richer months where men of hunger wander
into the colder season. All seems pure:

no rust or gold are seen; the pools' thin mirrors glisten;
the northern mother's thrown white blankets down;
no thing seems less than holy. Hear that? Listen... listen...
Was that a tread of something that stole from town?

Was that a shot we heard or boughs, snow-burdened, broken?
See, far ahead and safe now, paws in white.
Let not the friend's word, like the foe's, be spoken.
Blow fiercely, white avenger; rob man of sight!

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Not by the Hand

Held, not by the hand,
but by the eye, the blossom hidden
like a bright secret behind the leaves,
grows and grows:

not like the acre filled,
nor the hillside lavish in regal shades.

Here, behind, ahead,
we see the small perfection, found
in the still morning, the new rich garden
in miniature, seen (and always seen).

Whole, untouched, it was, and is:
seen when the playful breath,
the gentlest wind, blew the leaf aslant.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

For Robert Frost

We lift up the book again.
We drop it to the floor.
It lies as solid as stone—
earth's door.

The words of the pages move
through grass and through ground.
We touch the growing root
man found.

We turn from the endless sky,
we drop to knees and find
hidden rivers of earth,
of mind.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

False Freedom

Here is the fabrication: freely, widely and swiftly,
we race through meadows and we tear through wild
places of growth, our spirit stained as are the fruit-stained,
greedy fingers of the incorrigible child:

high on the hilltop, yelling across the empty hollow,
the small voice strains so that the wastrel's raw
futile effort knifes the summer's sky, the heavens'
chorus darkened by a cacophonous caw.

Damn the wide lie of freedom. Here is wide truth reaching
beyond the small mind's field, the small heart's hill:
between the skull's walls widening, the sight enlarging,
voice grown full when eloquent and still.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Anthology in Braille

Here is deep sight:

of the veined leaf,
traced,
quietly fingered;

of the blossom,
the bough,
the root
that is nurtured;

the hands touching
the tops of trees,
all warmed
by sun and lore.

Here is deep sight:

in the heart's hands,
in cerebral fingers
the pulp of knowledge;
eyes, unseen,
seeing
from the finger's tips.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Shadow and Light

Moody and threatening force,
swallower of your conqueror,
betrayed of your love,
you, vast and sprawling power;
you paradox!

You play gently with the child's toes;
and you carry,
from far shore
to far shore,
the cry or the word of love
in the thin green bottle.

 You claim the great vessels
 as bounty,
 but you give safe passage
 to love's
 thin ship of glass.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Time of Candles

In a still time
of candles
we close the eyes
and bow the head,
seeing a golden wave
over the full land;
and we reach for the plate
and hand
the broken loaf to others, clear
as the warmth of heaven, here,
we wait, we wait:
we bless the summer's food
again, again,
the sun, the rain,
in silent gratitude—
bless more than bread.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Shadow Side

We walk by daylight; in the light, we lie.
Bravado struts out in the Sunday suit,
our secrets barred behind the decent stripes,
the worm unseen beneath our harvests' fruit.

We walk with
 shadows, wherein darkneses
lurk like the felon in the brambled place;
we see what few have seen, content to wear,
as we meet friends, the mask and not the face.

We live the fabricated days of peace,
keeping our night, afraid of our own wild,
forward we go two steps, and three steps back:
forward, adult; and backward, the mother's child.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Self-Imprisoned

Twilight, always twilight, he lived his seventy years
away from light, seeking the light
in the long dissertation of scholars and in himself.
Like a gentle animal, he pounced upon books,
pawing them fondly, hoping the loud dissemination
would so enrich him that all good books would be
the one book: compilation of wisdom and of himself—
the thinker in half-dark of cerebral purgatory.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Letter from a Friend

Suddenly,
laughter was heard—
close—
behind the foliage of words;
and, halfway down the page,
joy,
an unexpected bird
over the field of snow;
and goodbye,
the clasp of a hand;
and then the period,
after the name,
and silence....
and more was said.
more.... more....

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Minds

These little islands, bleak and tenanted
by wind-hit urchins, dot surrounding sea;
the lost child and beachcomber go to bed,
homeless and yet not free.

These little islands, brambled, pathless, dark,
lashed by the furies where the devils ride,
rise briefly in the sun, above the stark
terror on every side.

These little islands, buried under ground,
do they still hear the four vast voices rise,
the seven restless bodies? Here is sound
less than a whisper through their sightless eyes.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Two Silences

I heard the velvet-slippered twilight stir
in country lanes. Attired in night's black dress,
I heard a movement, mixed with mute distress.
Then I heard silence scream, and ran from her.

I heard the spiked heels race with racing wheels
in whirling streets, and roars that rarely cease.
Then I heard only spirit's naked shoes,
in mind and blood and bone the brook of peace.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Stairway and the Darkness

Walk Behind Her

Follow her. No, don't call.
Let the child go.
Stay in the shadows. Walk
behind her, so
she will be left alone
to wonder, and grow.

Listen to her; be still,
still as a hush.
Do not disturb her there
beyond the bush;
step over small dry leaves
that you might crush.

Wait for her. She will come,
and you will hear
marvelous truths of a far
new hemisphere,
far as another world—
far, and near.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Widow

It was long, long
since her man died.
He was so young,
but she never cried.

She never cried, the
neighbors said,
for she had a child
sick in her bed.

It was a white time.
Her land was bare,
bare and white
as her child's face there.

A blanket of snow
was the feather tick.
Rubbing hands were
coals for the sick.

To see her mouth
like red of the cherries!
To see her eyes
two black wet berries!

To hear her laughter
on an April hill,
and then to see her
so small and still:

to see her kneel
and find a bloom
and make a garden
of the small bare room!
So she sat
all winter long,
her hands a fire,
and still her song.

She gave summer's
jarred good juice,

apricot, pear—
not for her use.
Something of April
loosed from the cold
stirred and began
to rise and unfold.
Two small hands reached,
two small pink flowers;
two eyes were blooms
in wet, washed hours.

As a root that grew
and released the sprout,
something inside
cried to go out.
Her girl was slow
for a growing while.
“Soon you will go
a whole, whole mile!
“You will go to the south
and sing with May.
Don’t ever go down
the dark, back way,”

the mother said.
“Go far, go far.
Two friends will show you
the nearest star.
“Two friends will hold you
up to the sky.
Remember, darling,
never cry.

“For they have shed
so many tears.
They have been lost
these many years.

“Go with them now
to their small white house.
by night, if you wake,
be still as a mouse.

“Don’t let them hear you
open the door.
They have not had a house
nor a girl before.

“Pretend that you
are their own child.
Remember they
have never smiled.

“They have never had plums
in a pink dish.
So, daughter, give them
this little wish:

“stay with them, darling.
You know where to find
ripe wild berries.
Help them. Be kind.

“They have been hungry.
You know what is good.
Help them to find
the sweet, rich food.

So, goodbye, daughter.
They are by the gate.
They are hungry, hungry.
Go. They wait.”

It was long, long
since her man died.
He was so young,
but she never cried.

She never cried, the
neighbors said,
for she had a child
sick in her bed.

How strange it was
she gave away
the child she sat by
day after day.

How strange she could not
find in her
a widow's warmer
comforter.

They found her cold,
so cold and white;
they found her still,
smiling and slight.
And then they knew
why the cherry mouth
and the apple cheek
of the child of the south

was filled with life.
Death swings the gate
for one that hunger
ate and ate.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Innocents

They will not come—the innocent, the shy,
children of woodland, children of fenced-in lawn.
No use to say with lonely hands, “Reply.”
Two sounds are heard: the racing child and fawn.

Their fears hold accusation for a world
not to be trusted, man who has struck the blow—
the paradox who held a bloom and hurled
a stone and word against both friend and foe.

Now they are running into the earth’s dark shade;
they speed from unarmed man who hides a gun.
Oh, bring them back, these of love’s image made!
They hide in darkness, children of the sun.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Innocents Betrayed

Ironically, once weary and then washed
in the still waters, kin of the holy child,
we race once more, incorrigible and lost,
swirling in swollen rapids of the wild.

Down the torrential wreckage hands reach out,
grasping the broken bough, the spiked rocks;
and over the wasteland, near the dove's green sprout
gather the ominous, the black flocks.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

The Old and the Old

The old who sit long days
content with being old,
the fire of their summer small,
smoke of their autumn thinned,
drift now to burdened benches
moved out in the sun:
they are warmed by the mind's old flame
and by the collars pinned.

The young who wait long days,
the young forever old,
the fire of their summer ash,
are lost in a forest, thick
and black and brambled; bundled
not far from the sun
in the dark, all the thoughts are as dull
as candles without a wick.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Gabriela Mistral

Chilean Nobel Prize

We listened to words,
foreign and rhythmic, soft
rolling words
like the movement of blended waters;
we do not understand
but something of fire has left us,
something of hardness
has crumbled,
something of dark has vanished,
something of weakness
has strengthened.
We see the fine head
high,
the depth and the softness of eyes
that weep with the tears of children;
that laugh with the joy,
the seaside mirth,
of children;
we listen to words,
foreign and rhythmic, soft
rolling words
like the movement of blended waters;
and we sit
beside the scholar speaking
and the child inquiring
in the cove
of peace.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

Country Dance

The fiddler plays—O how he plays!—
here where a first frost whitened
the roadside to the meeting place,
and eyes are brightened.

The fiddler plays, the dance begins,
feet skip their measured stresses,
and all is music—even girls'
gay flowered dresses.

The cloth swirls round and round the room.
No field in April weather
enjoyed more color than the pairs
that dance together.

Odor of hay is everywhere,
apples like children's cheeks.
Faces are bright as summer's child
washed in the creeks.

The fiddler plays—O how he plays!
All have a joyful reason
for rhythmic thankfulness in this
gold, nippy season.

Publication. *The Stubborn Root* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952).

TWO LAUGHTERS

1958 · Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958

Luxury Train Through Desert

As a lovely, monstrous beast it moves through wasteland;
circuitous or straight, it speeds
where kin of murdered Indians without arrows
Look through the eyes of yesterday that bleeds.

Fantastic postals wait, all from a distance
inspire the voices: "Ah.—
In pretty pictures through the colored windows
Indian hunger is never seen to gnaw.

stream-lined, moderne, the moving, windowed tavern,
the fearless waiter with the drink:
comfort is here, all that the agent promised;
besides, we need not even think.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Wait by Night

Here on the wind-whipped, gray, tremendous shore;
here where the tot plunged gaily toward disaster,
yanked back to safety; here where buckets poured
out grains of time, where the worker slept here:
still the man with a child's dream waits alone now,
waits for the promise, the real or fancied need;
is he the innocent plunging toward disaster?

Waiting for one in their private world of darkness,
he hears the morning's echo from the cliff;
stripped, as she is stripped, of the body's presence,
he sees the blue eyes only and blue pail;
he feels the smart, and hears, "You dirty boy!"
He cries, bewildered, covered and alone;
then sleeps as sunlight dries his morning tears.

Waiting for one in their private world of darkness,
he hears the twilight's echo from the cliff,
the voice of the laughing girl he did, not know
yet claimed when moonlight. fondled him like fingers;
the voice of the crying lover left alone;
then the rush of tide upon the rocky shoreline;
then her sound more silent than the close lagoon's.

Waiting for one by his birthplace, by her deathbed,
he listens again to the deep, tremendous sweep;
he strips himself, and walks forth unafraid.
An old man on the high cliff holds the old hands,
banded by sixty years, and says, "Old woman,
we'd better go back to bed. I thought I saw there
a small boy with his pail, a small boy laughing
and walking straight and far out into the sea."

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Captive

His eyebrows also were black, his eyes too
deep-set, as though they wanted to hide.

Par Lagerkvist in Barabbas

We, too, go free, Barabbas.

We hide, Barabbas.

We sprawl on the houses of midges;
do they see us?

They fly from lashes:
back of the dampened foliage,
back of the black tears of the clutching harlot,
they' peer into twin caverns.

They hear the voices,
the strange winds blowing;
they are tumbled from green spires.

They are shaken by alien giants;
they are stuck to our waste and our hunger;
they rise from the lovers' graveyards.

From the top of the virgin blossoms
they see two giants going,
both to the west, each separate, burnt
by the great ball sinking into the roaring water.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Salems of Oppression

The lady took exception to assertions:
the witches burnt in Salem. We took down
the volume, aid of indolence and error.
Yes, we unjustly criticized that town.

Apologies by critics are in order,
for we must give that holy place its due.
They did not burn the citizens of Salem;
they hung them by the necks—not one, not two.

Do not accuse that place of ways inhuman,
of burning! Never these who piled their stones
self-righteously upon their luckless townsman,
who captured heaven as they crushed his bones.

Do not abuse the gentle folk of Salem,
or speak in error of their fiery fray.
Self-righteous ghosts, and not alone in Salem,
they do God's will—but in a devilish way.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Favorite Child

Vulpecular,
he moved with a furry stealth
through the oaken wilderness
that they called a house.

Denied no tidbit
because of his furry manner,
denied no feast
because of his furry pleading,
he fed on his parents' innocence:
they did not know
that their angel-eyed son
was a foe,
cunning, carnivorous;
and that with their milk of human kindness
they poured their blood.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Party Line

As one of the curious gatherers
drawn to the death scene
in a city street,
I was held to the spot,
safe behind the curtain of miles,
yet listening there at the locked doors of two lives.
The man was beating the woman with fists of
 language;
then finally sated,
he was drained of anger;
the sound was a long, repeated, absurd coo.

She, revived and rising,
rattled the lines with her fury;
the storm gathered and rose,
tore and plunged.

The cradle clicked;
and still I felt the talon striking.
The quiet room became a ruined meadow;
the hare leaped from the frame;
the doe sped into the deeper woodland;
and the place was filled with screeching birds.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Dark and Glare

Maternal, impartial,
night shields the child, old thief,
the priest, the penitent, the clutched love
that is brief.

Night masks her children, locking in
the saint and sinner; all,
all her kin
bundled beneath a ragged shawl.

Night is felonious;
she comes to shield, to lie
and blind young loves who strut past weary ones,
past the aged seekers who trudge by.
Night breaks the latches of two doors,
begins again two ageless wars
where a new birth and an old death cry.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Father

As a boarder unprivileged, choosing his place of silence,
he entered the rented house by the railroad track;
entered my white world. Faces of my playmates
were dyed like father's, he who washed off the black;
the mine dust colored the small yard's tub of water,
though the veins of coal remained in knees. He ate;
then worked a second shift in the stingy garden.
We leaped for lightning bugs while he slaved late.
Words flew at father when striking men were idle;
always he walked away from the banged door.
He would come back, farm vegetables his wages;
we were less in debt then to the company store.

Sharp voices spoke of a "miracle" when one summer
we moved to a white house in High Street. I found
plums, pears, and grapes. No foot of earth was wasted.
We ate ice cream on the front porch. With no sound
the spade of twilight turned our new wealth over;
the hands of late time brought our foodstuff in.
We wore new clothes, grew fat, rode trains, and never,
blind to a common sight, saw one grown thin.

Deaf to the flow of the bathroom's cleansing water,
blind to the hard life by the railroad track,
I slept, and woke to find my fallen father,
naked and white, veins in his knees dyed black.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Sound of Bone

It was not respect, nor curiosity,
nor grief that drove me to my people's graves:
it was a gentle and persuasive voice
that said: *We're only one brief hour away.*
Then: *Shame on you.* And so I said: *All right.*
Tender fingers carried the three bouquets.
Could she love someone whom she had never known?
Did the faded photograph of my parents live
for one who held my hand by the tangled bed
that blossomed with her pity or respect?
I could not say—her silence seemed like prayer—
that I was glad; I always had been glad
that their hard, long work was done, that even then
I still had one regret: they lived too long.
She placed the lilacs on the other grave.
Old witch! I muttered; and she looked at me;
then she knelt beside grandmother's bed.
I thought of the fortress-house that the old one claimed;
I thought of her daily orders, of her wrath
and the banged doors, demand to have her way;
of father bringing sweet gifts, carpingly
accepted, snatched from calloused hands;
of mother fetching tea, too cold, too hot;
I bit my lip as I saw the lilacs there—
my mother's favorite flowers. I recalled
the chopping, chopping; and the great, blue bush
fallen to earth, grandmother with the axe
limping back to bed. *Now I can see!*
She spat the sharp words at my mother, still
more still than she had ever been. That place
was my youth's graveyard where no flowers grew.
The gentle one glanced my way, and then turned

and waited, back to me. I bent and took
the lilacs, and I touched them as I once
had touched a tearless face; then tenderly
I placed the blossoms on my mother's bed.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

The Games

There was that small, blond boy with the yellow kitten
in less than a summer's minute we were friends there
as he warmed the fluff in the oven of his hands;
we laughed together, and the small, blond boy kept on
laughing
when he hurled the kitten against the whitewashed fence;
I never went that way again, but often
I saw the whitewashed boards and the hot, red stream.

There was that slender girl in the long, blue dress;
paired, we all went laughing past her, past her.
Blinded, we pinned her to the wall till stiffly,
as one in pain, she left the party. Frenzied,
she ran across the garden into darkness.

I woke and found the daisies jeweled; found there
a red and silken square, her tears upon it.
No longer man (the night's accessory),
I was the evil brother of the stranger.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Woman in the Rain

There she goes walking in the rain.

Peculiar, to say the least.

Or daft.

Wet as an old, drenched cat again.

How could she say she often went,
a girlhood racer through the shower,
to the orchard till her mirth was spent?
Why say to them whose looks were words
she pressed to her breast the tree's two hearts,
so still she shooed away no birds?
Nor did she lift her eyes from leaves,
the gutter's boats. The window's faces
saw one half-mad, not one who grieved
for the smaller sailor who reached his shore
as he sailed in sleep, the voyager
who comes not to her any more.

Nor could they know that the lightning split
her heart; and that her dead love's, whole,
warmed hers, poured his blood in it.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Dark Woman

The eyes of the woman followed me.

In all the bright city,
the dark eyes—
half-dead, dark eyes—
were with me;

over the brightness,
a veil of sadness falling;

blended with laughter,
the whispered music moaning;

behind the happy houses,
the weary, lost feet stumbling;

past the cathedral,
the shadow moving
into the darker shadow,
and the woman's eyes part
of the sadness that is darkness;
faint as the hope
that was lost,
the miracles
shining faintly,
in the ashes of her years.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Dark Intuition

Do not fear
the dark cave
of silence.

There is no sound,
now.

Approach now.
Enter.

What is there is what
is believed
outside
in the blinding light.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Vigorous Reach

Turn from the pampered gardens,
from the gold splashed
against sky,
against sea;
look down from the jagged edge:
the shrub
roots to the precipice,
lives while the breakers bite
at the rocky shoreline,
while the monstrous waters
devour the voyagers,
while the winds
flog gardens, their growth inert
above the weed
 fingering space...

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Permanent Guest

Each of us has the God that
he deserves.

Humbert Wolfe

Outward we show the house,
inward we hide the den.
The name on the proud, front door,
the signature of the pen
dwindle as we become
honest in our vast night
and cry aloud and high,
naked by daylight.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

The Brute Goes Everywhere

He strikes the healthy tree;
he uses wrath to strike
the fruit that is not to be.

He is in the lovely snow;
he is like warring blood
as the snow becomes the course
of the vast, torrential flood.

He strikes in the savage spring;
he is the small thing torn
by the hard claw—white, white fur
caught by the meadow's thorn.

He is the bright bird speared
by the strong beak in air;
even song, to live,
must have its weaker share.

And the tamed and well-fed brute
lolls in the pleasant race,
in season, friend, of course—
after saying grace.

And his eyes light up with pride,
or is it bestial joy
when the small, white corpse in wood
is bagged by his boy?

One brute kills to live.
One (hear the hunter's cry,
his prayer for blood this Day!)
one kills—kills, to die.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Bedtime Tales

Mother and son
live side by side.
Long long ago
she stretched out wide
her flaring skirt
so he might hide.

Forty years
he has been here
with his one love
always near;
with the small
boy's teacup cheer.

Neighbors read
fairytale lore.
Children, though
they ask for more,
never know
the witch next door.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Choice: Written, Lived

Only extremes hold interest. Take Manhattan towers
where wed or unwed mates are often wives
only in name, where a fifty-fifty proposition
is proof of love, cash on the line or sharpened knives
pocketed or pursed—hate no less ready
than that in borrowed walk-ups—wait to strike.
So do the headlines scream lust of a penthouse bedroom
while with his Christmas pistol aimed at the neighbor's
tyke
Junior indulges in homicidal, cute adventures.
As his mother thumbs the dirty evening page
suburban sisters bicker over TV dials,
each having a favorite moll on the so exciting stage.

Mom turns then to the theme, “Who stabbed the brunette
model?”
And pity tugs at her heart for one who came
from the wrong side of the tracks, as the larger of her
daughters,
her “father’s little girl,” sneaks out and joins the game
in modern as jargon, private as darkness, spiced with phrases,
the childhood “stick” and “pop,” near the grocery stores.
The mother screams to night while monkeys claw her
darling,
the white back ridden while the lamb-filled father snores.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Sunday Edition

War screams, so peace becomes a whisper
and less than that in our most blatant pages.
The Golden Wedding tale is lost among the comics,
and page-one murder rages.

Love has no value. Lust is featured,
especially in the costly Sabbath sections,
along with market gains and Senator McNulty,
and various resurrections.

Defended by the movie scribbler,
the cinema's big business, Mimi Jolly,
caught in a love nest, joins the big production
and gets a raise for folly;

this, the big story, lessens
interest in the cheaper girls of passion.
given free board by firm or winking clean-robed justice
alas, such is the fashion.

As the Sunday lamb's digested
father dozes, son turns from the paper
and humor to his pistols, mom rereads the story
of the housewife and the raper.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Study in Shadows

The eyes of children hurt and maligned
darken, and fear,
crouching in the unlit corner,
becomes accustomed
to the lonely blackness.
These children see
unreality in the real world before them;
stunted,
friendless,
having not even themselves
for friend,
they look inward
through the private hell;
and they grow hunched
as they strive
in the hidden caverns,
beneath the stalactites.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Roots

The phantom fingers,
these of a real dream,
reach grotesquely through long darkness;
they spread, they clutch,
they hold their giant
high against the sunlight,
the drouth,
the wet and icy furies,
and the whipping angers tearing from the sea.
Contemptuous of this shining city street,
the still, restricted area
flowering, unfenced,
the roots
out of the darkness
claim their natural wildness:

make songs for these
not to be held in their coffins—
these that crack cement
of the tranquil owners,
the complacent
affronted by the audacity of growth.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Not Here, but There

Not here: do not remain too long walled to
the stony street where corner sellers cry
lust and disaster with the joker's flair.
Not here: more than the racing children die.

Somewhere beneath the towers or beneath
the subterranean speeders, morning and evening whirled,
somewhere beneath the crumbling pride of earth
go there: sink there or rush to that other world.

Not here: if the godless playing god, the small,
the hollow, sanctimonious, and vain,
touch you with their dust, run to your cave:
live there in darkness; find your light again.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Edge-of-Town House

Vines and trees have captured “Peg Calvin’s Place.”
The walls are clutched.
Dim eyes peer from old-lace memories;
the captive, rarely seen,
the velvet choker round her throat,
moves in her leafy tomb
roofed with the violence of growth,
the deep, dark masculine green.
The earth-to-rooftop bougainvillea dwarfs
the scores of atticed nosegays.
The eldest tree, the vast, eternal shade,
drops its long shadow; and its twice-named heart
bleeds no more, sliced by old summer’s lightning.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Child's Cry

Not pain, not hunger moved her.
I knew well
the shriek that pierced her darkness—
heaven, they said, watched over me,
but the stars fell.

No petty promise hushed her.
Stilled, alarms
grew fainter in her forest—
heaven I felt in human warmth
of the firm arms.

Child neighbor, sleep; the monsters
are not near.
Soon you shall see the morning's
pet rabbit, not the nightmare's
paw print of fear.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

The Invasion

Now, why should we let you in? Child or old man,
it is our private wood. Who says the deed
is proof of an ownership? Our claim began
in time of an endless time when we dropped the seed.

We heard of the miracles but did not know
we could be gods until we let thought run
under the foliage: where the giants grow
we fathered saplings; our own rain and sun,

past many a lashing winter, fed our root.
Now we are robbed of our food grown tart and wild.
We see the man with the axe in his Sunday suit
carrying off, to be burnt, our woodland child.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Boy on Limb

Crotch over limb, he reached for swollen fruit
large with the pink birth of July.

Filled with the juices of his heated growth,
he slipped, he swung, he made another try;

stretching arm's length, he palmed the tree's dessert.

Dangling two long legs, sure that seats,
bough's and his buttock's, would support him, high
in laughter and in carefree feats,

swiftly he swallowed food of summer, hurled
waste to ground, to dry there, or to seed.

Bathed in the meadow's brook, and dried by sun,
he felt new hungers that he dared not feed.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Deserted Lover

Music has flown from her.
The push of the breasts is a lie.
She hums death's hollow notes.
Pride holds her fine head high.

Her heels tap in the street
as if she is going on swift,
long journeys without end;
and if a man speaks, the lift

of her laughter is like the mirth
heard in a tawdry play,
the star a strident wench,
the voice flattened and gray.

Hers is the voice by night
that drunken! y wakens lovers
who smile, turn face to face,
with moonbeams for their covers.

Hers are the eyes of night,
eyes that are veiled, set deep,
as if they long to hide,
or to forever sleep.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

The City at 4 A.M.

Hear the stir and the breath of the sprawling giant,
the steady rise and fall; the predawn rumbles
deep to the bowels of the vast one soon to waken,
soon to lift towers where musty castles were tumbled.

Soon the whistles will blow and men in tunnels
shall burrow their way toward light; still others feed
the bulging belly of the titan, loud, rapacious;
shoveling in his ever demanded food.

Hear his servants; hear the bracing showers
poured cold and fresh upon his thighs and muscles.
Listen: the herculean vessel strengthens
all the weak-blooded pigmies he has hustled.

Up, up in air the ant-men walk on girders;
up goes the clock in the largest of his jewels.
Countless, the eyes look up at the silent ticking;
countless, the slaves are fetching the giant's fuel.

We heard the laughter
it was a duet of fountain spray
and a child washed....

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

The Hero

I was the quiet one;
I walked the familiar path.
My brother headed a pack;
swam in the river where the boy was drowned,
took his licking and went again;
thrust a knife in a flour sack;
but, ear pinched by our father's wrath,
to pay for his crime,
he was' marched back
to the grocery store;
and I helped him with each daily chore.
I was still-small;
he was loud-tall.
I was "the good one." I
was patted and given sweets,
candy I could not always swallow.
I gave him fudge and chocolate nut meats.
Twice when I saw him leave with his gang
I was called back home, so I did not follow.
But two times more
I went where he went:
that was before
he left by the window when they shut our door;
it was very hard to sleep that night.
He climbed in there as I heard the light
turned on in the hall;
I threw back the covers and he crawled under:
all they could find
were two who slept late.
Two times more I went where he went:
once he boosted me up a high wall;
once he kicked my behind.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

The Scholar

Carrying a lantern, frequently the old man went by night
far from the farmhouse, past the herd's enclosure,
over the pasture, the lantern guarding him from hole, from boulder.
Then he stood at the edge of the quarry, searched the sky's
immensity for something day had never shown him.
Darkly he went home, to sleep, or not to sleep, to go
another night.

Then finally, just as he reached the jagged edge,
as he was about to find the never found beyond the stars there,
the wick burnt out, and he went down, and cracked his shoulder.
He never used that fool light anymore.

"Damn it!" he said.

"To hell with blow-hards' knowledge; I've learned enough now."
Nothing was quite so good as going up the stairs, up while twilight's
last beam of light still made the journey safe.

"Can't know it all," he chuckled, going nightward.

He raised the blind; he got in bed, he saw the stars framed
in his open window, a miniature of what he sought there
over the craggy field. As earth was an opening book
through the scores of his seasons, his green, his ripened lore,
open and closed, he now knew one thing more:
that what was above the earth was his for keeping
only for the moments' growing.

"My brothers have inched through dark,"
he said. "I'll take it slowly."

He closed his eyes to heaven;
and slept then, being wiser and older.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

The Break

My mother's eyes were calm brooks; less than lashes'
flickers did I see their blueness darken
as if disturbed by a brief and threatening storm.
She seemed to grow a foot that day I left her.
Nearby were father's trees that held the wind back;
and she rose like them, strengthened by father's arm.

When I looked back from the old bend's final turning,
father and mother (did I ever look so little?)
stood in the sun, spotlighted in the meadow.
Down, down I went, first slowly and then quickly,
while the sudden wind was a whispered accusation;
and I was clothed in the endless, downhill shadow.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Dark Time

Low heels are heard beneath my window.
Faithfully and sharply clicking,
I hear them every morning. Never
is time told then by the clock's ticking.

The first one in the street this hour,
the time before the workmen's shout,
she goes by bundled headlines, hearing
only the still voice: Be devout.

Her head is never turned to maples,
never once to the feathered stirring.
Perhaps she hears in steepled distance
the pure white flock of heaven whirring.

Returning heels announce my time
to breakfast. Doubt looks from my mirror,
I who am fed; and fed, still hunger,
seeing my sister coming nearer.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Child at Open Window

Nothing dark is out there in the darkness.
There is not now the sound,
furred or feathered, stilled in the quiet branches,
hushed in the hole of the tree or the burrow of the
ground;

she has forgotten her untouched friends of daylight.
This is no time for sun,
nor for a song, yet still she sings up skyways,
rising the starry ways where noon's feet never run.

Nothing dark is out there in the darkness.
The blossomed earth has its bars;
never the heavens: silent and vast and brightest,
heavenly gardens are near, and all the flowers are stars.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Guest

First trip alone, put on the train, a hand
good-by around the bend,
she needed no companion. River, land,
the meadow's cows, a colt that raced the Daylight,
a hawk that dove but did not catch the hare,
were living pictures she had seen in books.
One voice above the many voices cried,
"Lakeside! Lakeside!"
And the traveler was there.

One day, two, three, and food like party treats
they gave, one time a pat
by her bed unshared. The fingers smoothed the sheets;
her hostess said, "What shall we do tomorrow?
You're tired tonight, so you may get up late."
She called in silence, and she shut her eyes.
The stars were shining on another face
in her own place.
Up early, she would wait

and see the postman coming down the lane.
No, no, she need not; clear,
she heard the ringing, heard the sound again,
and heard the sound of woolen slippers going,
and heard "Hello—wrong number" by the phone.
She clutched wet words; then finally she went
over the miles of wishes, dreams, to deep
highroads of sleep
all must go alone.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Navajo Child

Once I saw a dark girl
whose search and deed were one
with warmth, a loving service
lifted to the sun.

Once I saw a dark girl,
her way in endless light,
warm-guided, in assurance
calling something white;

calling from the silence
where deeper high lores talk.
I saw her dark arm holding
the lost lamb of the flock.

Once I saw a dark girl
in a far and wondrous place,
her journey long, in earth ways,
yet heaven lit her face

as if a thousand summers
were blended there to show
that nothing loved and waiting
is lost, though lost ones go
circuitous the strange ways,
and lamblike, search and roam.
There is no way more sunny
than a white lamb carried home.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Eternal Summer

Having known joy and still believing in her,
summoning thought from the place of bed and flower
we can freshly feel each leaf of remembrance stir
and we can be shaken like the orchard blossoms' show

We can lie on the hill of midnight, lie alone,
drawing in sustenance rooted in our being,
claiming again the pregnant warmth, the known
seed we have fathered, being the freed and freeing.

And the words, the stirring words in embryo
hidden in darkness, we shall await with rapture;
then turn from the infant grown, and once more sow
lore with our love, to claim but not to capture.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

The Dancer

Slowly, she entered the painted woodland.
As she moved beyond the barren wild grape vine,
past the crab apple tree,
body, skirt, and feet were rhythmic.
Faster and faster, once a small child hiding
behind the maples, once a woman running
from someone calling, searching;
faster and faster she swirled, and the red and gold leaves
flew round her riotously; the few that clung there
she shook with the gust of her flight; then disappearing,
her fingers were ten white birds in the changed air.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Summer's Earliest Refrain

This is the way
to go: uphill where dew is on the grasses,
over the cleanness, not on foot-made passes;
early by day.

No, do not speak
one word; each human sound shall claim clear airways.
Let the town sleep; we shall find new fair ways
only two seek.

Now as the sun
comes up, it might be wiser, past the hilly
summit, to go in fields together, stilly
to stride as one.

We shall not stop
to talk, lose notes of bells and that high lark sky-calling
Hear, in the tin pail, berries and cool dew falling
drop by drop.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Eternal South

How can the bird
once wholly heard
be gone? Hear now
from the empty bough
full summer's song—
it is still, it is long.
It is as clear
as the shut book here;
give it away,
the words will stay,
as sure as the note
no season wrote,
as close as time's
ascendant rhymes,
and as free as space
and the child's warm face
that is turned to the sky,
eyes searching far,
all space brought near.
Nor the listening ear
need ever hear
to know that words,
the volume's birds,
are loveliest
when the book is pressed,
closed, to the breast.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Farm Wife

She heard the storm before it came.
She shooed the chickens, latched the door;
called the children, called once more
across the meadowland each name.

Now as the wind begins to roar,
she hears the softest sound again,
clearer than wind heard, fresher than rain.
Though now the leaves are all awhirl
and homeward-turning children stir
and racing creatures are about,
she looks, her hair and garment blown,
down on the stillness she has known
these howling years, the sound shut out.
Across the surface of the creek
she sees the tiny wind-made wave,
and sees it silent and serene;
she thinks of no storm she has seen
as harsh invader, this will run
like thoughts as quiet as the still
wave of the water. She will know,
as she had known in childhood days,
she has no need of being brave,
though storm goes up and down the hill.
As she looks through the window glass
and sees what cannot ever pass,
she knows contentment need not speak.
She sees the small wave of the creek,
then even the gentlest movement stir
no more; its silence moves in her.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Return

Returning from the wished-for, unseen place,
from endless byways near the street or corn,
a man will venture backward yet go forth
unto the home where he was born.

Soon he will hear throughout the silent house
the ticking of a timelessness, and walk
through old rooms up the attic stair, and move
into the place without a clock.

What he will feel, what he will know as true,
will be the fact that he had known before:
that he can't leave what is himself, unlocked,
not by a key's turn in a door.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Big Boy

Let the big boy go
to city, to hill.
Now he must grow
by himself. Be still.

No kite or a wall
meets the boy's need.
He aches and is tall;
now he must feed

half on a sweet,
yet hunger for more
than the bland fruit's meat.
As he shuts dark's door,

let the light be thin
if he quietly walks,
but say "Come in"
if he knocks.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

For Leonora Speyer

They planted my trees for Leonora
far in a land where waste was seen,
where now the earth grows rich and green
They say a forest grows to tell
brothers who listen; friendly strangers,
that all my boughs are doing well,
that every leaf is flecked with sunshine,
that every deeply-nurtured root
lifts greener than my words can shoot.

Let every bough say: Kinship flowers,
and freedom grows where people fell,
and makes again a living language,
the pulp on which the prophets wrote,
and write now: Israel.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Common Meeting Place

These who were strangers
are strangers no more;
they lead the lost child
to per mother's door.

These who were strangers
are as two wed
when an old man has fallen;
each pillows his head.

Two strangers' glances,
warmth in the street,
speak of a kinship
and a hunger to meet.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francetown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Growing Library

Books are more than words,
more than birds'
brightness, more than song;
they live long.

When the covers close
wisdom grows,
higher still when found
not in bound
books, but in the vast
wood where passed,
still and deep, the sower.

Write now, grower.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Sure Journey

In an uncertain curve the footprints
lie large in snow.
There are the marks of the pilgrim.
with nowhere to go.

With unwavering stride the small child
steps on each trace—
only a way. Then he chooses
his unmarred place:

up, up the white hillside. Cheer him
with a silent shout.
Farther he searches. The larger
marks are rubbed out.

Follow, but do not summon
one turned to ward a star.
Rise, and be lifted as he is,
with heaven not far.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Less Than a Whisper

Less than a whisper, something calls from sleep;
something insistent, something without words;
something that summons from another sphere,
region familiar, “Oh, come near; come near.”
It is more quiet than. midnight’s infant birds.

Far in the regions not of house or ground,
something of kinship beckons me to rise,
gently, so gently, and with no command;
best of the lovers, with no touch of hand,
nor with the lure of lips or widened eyes,

something unlost, like afterthought of song,
calls from the silence clearly with no tongue.
Pure is the waker, pure is the silent time,
when all that is said is heaven’s blended rhyme
tuned to the strain the innocent has sung.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Slumber Is Beautiful

Over trees
falls the blue shelter of night,
over the folded wings.
Do not rouse these;
let the step be light.

Slumber is beautiful.
Over pools,
over the bushes' fruit,
glow of the full moon spreads;
over the schools,
by the lily's root.

Slumber is beautiful.
Over hay,
over the creatures asleep,
over the quiet colt
who will try by day
new legs that will leap,
new legs that grow
these hours, still and slow;
these hours, perfumed, deep,
that will give way
to the green passes,
to the sweet grasses,
And to full light
after soft night.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Hawley

Directions

Turn left when you come to Hawley;
you won't get lost again.
Be sure that you go down Willow;
don't take Main.

Watch for the jog; it's halfway
to the tearoom called Blue Door;
if you try their Deep Dish Pie there,
you'll ask for more.

When you come to the end of Willow,
turn right, go up Glenn's Peak.
Look down when you reach the summit;
you won't speak!

Go straight six miles—no, seven—
till you reach the end—no, wait;
turn in at Ma Kelty's farmhouse;
it has no gate.

Turn left when you come to Hawley.
Yes, friend, there's a shorter way:
through town, but still, there's Willow;
and it's a fine day.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Lover Ascend

Lover, ascend the Hawley hill.
Find dandelions; gently blow
seed and time away. Be still,
and let the wishful hours go.
Wait not; wait and know
in timelessness, forever young,
in purest of all growing hours,
he will bring you from the wild
your own deepest, rooted flowers
from the place where youth has sung;
the celebrants around the child,
they are the winds, your voices calling,
where silences, white blooms, are falling.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Over the Hills

Over the hills of Hawley
and in the valley of Polk
the women are graceful as willows;
the men are as sturdy as oak;
and over the hills of Hawley
children are kindly folk.

Over the hills of Hawley
the goats are more than goats;
their odor is odor of clover
and hay, while neighboring shoats
are as pink when born as blossoms,
cattle are called Silk Coats.
Over the hills of Hawley
and in the valley where kind
are wives and husbands and children,
it is said that seekers can find
in the tended sugar pear trees
grape clusters that wind and wind.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Fresh Discoverers

Some called him hermit—not his friends,
who climbed the Hawley hill
to find what Dad Hicks found, to talk
of soil, or to sit still.

It was worth the long way up,
hope rising with that hour
over the April-melting snow,
to see his hands first flower.

A child with his fresh cool violet
was brother to the one
with snows of winters on his head
and in his warm hands sun.
He is no hermit, parents said;
that means gone away.
He's glad we call; if not with words,
feel what his hands say.

"Hello" might be the only word,
perhaps I'm over here."
In silence then he'd work his rows;
you'd join him and stay near.

We saw his fingers, brown spade-wide.
"Help here if you like."
Our hands became as his hands were
before our homeward hike—

reward our share of seed and bulb,
a drink from his tin cup.
Yet thought was richer going down
than when we journeyed up.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

The Hawley Harvest

So rich is the Hawley harvest,
so pumpkin-gold the ground,
that grateful for the plenty
as if the wealth were found,
Ben Webb one early morning
left gold gifts by ten doors,
and left without a sound.

So rich are the Hawley growers,
so often glad deeds done,
yet each man knows the ocher's
fruit ripened in the sun.
Ben Webb one early morning
found gifts left silently,
and knew who brought each one.
He knew that Michael Farrel
brought apples from his barrel.
Without the words placed there,
he knew the jar,
the same found every year
Matilda Weber's Pickled Pear.
All he lifted, one with especial care:
one marked Guess Who?
That could be but one.
the generous, the laughing friend,
Miss Pru,
she who could send
his own gift back, and place
a candle in the golden, mirthful face,

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

In Every Corner

Day's odor lies lightly over
Hawley's field and hill.
By night it seems more fragrant;
in hammock and bed the wakeful
are glad and still.
Peace is deep,
awaiting a perfumed sleep.
In every corner of darkness,
as in the spread of light,
the gift of scarlet flowers,
the gift of verdant meadows,
are not for sight:
though not seen,
they are more gay, more green.
In the mahogany bureau,
in the crystal bowl,
a scent of summer's gathered,
the odor of the ripeness
that no one stale:
petals fell,
leaving their gifts to tell
while leaving for eyes of autumn
the treasured four leaf clover,
that summer has been gathered,
that during winter, summer
is not yet over:
July's good
scents linen, glass, and wood.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

Fourth Year Adventure

Where have you been? Who was it led
 you forth in silence from your bed?
I heard the far sound. Feathered? Furred?
I asked myself, but never stirred
from winter's blankets, the head deep
in warm duck feathers. How can you sleep,
Christopher Penn? Were they the words
of another child, or the earliest birds,
that called you out to a secret land
before this five o'clock's dark hand
rose slowly toward a dream, through night?
Returning, blended with new light,
you whisper silently and stand
before the house, your arms around
the tiny mongrel that you found
in the acreage spread as fully white
as your whitest search. Oh, now I know
nothing is lost where silences go
across the world, though the world be snow;
nothing is unlit, nothing black,
when I see you with content upon
your pillowing arm: you have come back,
one with the whole full-burning dawn.

Publication. *Two Laughters* (Francestown, New Hampshire: Golden Quill Press, 1958).

AND THEN DERISION

1964 · Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964

Walk-up, Third Floor

In the curve of the arm, as warm as the doll
on the fire escape in afternoon sun,
the child is asleep.

Breast put away,
her hand a handkerchief brushing
sweat from the brow, the mother
peers through the tatters that were curtains
white as lace of the gown of the dancer;
off-white, limp now with litter in the corner;
and spotlighted, one in the park's oasis,
she sees the young lovers.

Wait! Wait! she cries
But the girl does not hear the shriek of silence;
hears only, she knows, the pulse of hunger,
the pulse of her need, the pull of their will
as they live in the world of their choice where
tomorrow
is a word not known.

In the curve of the arm
the baby sleeps, and the woman listens
to the step on the stairs; the footsteps passing;
to the opened door, to the shut door, laughter,
then to long stillness.

The woman listens
to the step on the stairs; to her own longing.
And she sees the young lovers, gray by twilight,
walking, walking; and not together.

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

Carlotta

Blouse open, Carlotta lies
under the willow
by the dark stream.
When will her fellow
come and claim her?
Now, now, as moonlight
fondles her, let his fingers
tease her until she trembles
as now the willow trembles,
moved by a racing wind.
Can she wait longer?
Has he grown fond
of the new girl, slender, younger?
She buttons her blouse,
and rises.
She grips her blade, and knifes
nothing with sudden hate;
soon she would go
to the house without a light;
listen, and wait to strike.
A faint, far sound; then ears
closer and closer to shore,
faster and faster, increase
the pounding of her need.
Quivering, Carlotta lies
under the willow
by the dark stream;
waits for her fellow.

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

Day Off

Spend one day as affluence spends many;
throw it away as if you were in port,
greeted and flattered by the hungry urchins
diving for money.

Let the clock run down. Deaf to the whistle,
blind to the smoke of industry, be swift,
dizzy and self-indulgent; be this one day
gambler and wastrel.

Drag this day into the darkest shadows.
Weary and glad, go quickly to your rest.
Say first a prayer for harlots and street sweepers,
and the charwomen-widows.

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

A Distant Darkness

Out of some distant darkness, deep
in a wood, a hurt sound, far and small,
whines to the night.
It is not known; it is animal.

Out of some darkened region, loosed
from its place, a hoof beat, far, now near,
beats out escape.
It is now gone.
 Yet the human heart
 cries fear.

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

Cat in Wilderness

The cat in the wood
cries hunger:
 gone wild
out of necessity,
 kicked
from the Welcome mat,
 set
upon by dogs,
 she finds
alien ground not alien
now.

 She tears; she eats.
She cuts the peace
of the countryside with love
cries.

 And she drives her mate
from her side as the new
cats grow,
 fed by her savage
 stream
in the claimed country,
 of breathing,
hiding food,
 near bones
 of slain hounds.

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

Lovers

They are close,
 drawn
together at stations,
 corners,
breathing almost
 one breath
before the parting.
 Then
suddenly pouting,
 or angered,
aliens,
 they plan attack
as distances
 dark
 as ways
they have not yet known,
lengthen
 to where
there can be no turning back.

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

A Pacifist

I fought only
when villains shot my wren
in everybody's garden;
then prayed
for myself and my foes.
But that day when the kids laughed
at Mother, her skirt torn
by the hawthorn in her garden,
I was a statue of rage
robbed of my tongue.

By night,
though, Tim O'Roarke,
was burnt in his locked room;
Michael Sullivan's blood
gushed from his cut throat;
and I pushed Tom Ryan over
the edge of the quarry.

When Mother
entered my room, I lied
that, yes, I had said my prayers;
how could I say that God
could not hear the likes of me!

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

Hornet in the House

On the window almost as high as the room,
on glass that is warmed by a splendid summer's
noontime, now up, now down, so close
to that world of green and crimson splashed
with sunlight, he fights the transparent wall,
not knowing what any human, even
a fool, would know: that feet away
there are many ways of escape. And after
I watch for minutes his torturous try,
I trap him in my handkerchief,
open the door, and free him, and shut
myself in comfort's prison. Close
is the wide country; far the river
flows toward the unseen ocean, out
of my sight. Yet, straining, my eyes see
over the hill in a splendid summer's
noontime, a speck, a human hardly
insect-size. The free one goes
into the reaches I would know.
Through with fight, I do not even
break the glass. I turn my back
on my lost—no, never discovered—world.

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

Warm Peaks

Carnival was in the giddiest May
air, as if people, the prowlers and paired,
were celebrating themselves by nightfall—
blare of the brass the background for the rise
of their laughter; corks leaping, and champagne
dizzying the blood of all joy-spillers.
The room—more than a room—was for the girls
and the boys a meadowland filled with wild
cadences in their duets; and their whirls
there, busier far than a thousand bees:
the celebrants heated by their own noon,
clock hands turned back during their hours blazing.

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

Clutched

Clutched and captive, we go wild, willing, true
to each other, not always true to ourselves;
for wearing our childhood morning
faces, deceptive, we keep to ourselves
our deeper ardors. Claimed, our resentment grows.
Cursed, we are enraged. And if tricked
by acquiescence, we plan our private
revenge. Our lovers learn (or vanity blinds
them): hatred is as strong as love.

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

Newly Become Woman

Newly become woman, she sleeps,
or pretends sleep, in her near-nakedness
in the lagoon beyond the passersby;

not of the crowd, does she prefer
isolation, so that the poetry
she loves will blend with rhythm of her need;

or has she, lips open to sun,
simply given herself to her gold god
in rhymes she feels yet does not wholly feel,

being one newly a woman,
not far beyond girlhood and dolls; or does
she dream of live ones, next year at her breast?

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

Dozing Protector

Two old ladies sporting fake flowers
mince across Vine, their heads turning
as heads turn at tennis matches—for this pair
too is a war of wits: death won't down them.
Nor have they ever been tricked: not by life,
nor by a lover whom Papa always watched.
“My girls” have been maidens these eighty and
eighty-one years.

Nobody speaks to them, so I speak
the time of day; and they perk up,
their posies bobbing on their lapels, their smiles
approving the tipped hat. Up Vine they go,
unscented by girlhood, though giggling still
because I winked good-by. “If Papa could see
us now,” one whispers. And the other, “He’d have
a fit.”

Publication. *And Then Derision* (Maryland: Goosetree Press, 1964).

ACROSS THE DARK

1964 · Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964

The local composite scan preserves thirty-seven poems but omits several leaves listed in the contents, including ‘250 Willow Lane,’ ‘Scattered Script,’ ‘The Generous Ones,’ and ‘Playhouse.’ Only texts recoverable from the surviving leaves are printed here.

In the First House

In the first house (still it is painted white
petty thieves were locked up in small cells:
rooms; food and diners left alone;
silenced, a Testament to be read;
forbidden, glad books on shelves.

In the first house, god sat on his throne.
Penitents walked meekly toward the chair;
waited long to be spoken to;
ordered, we sweated and with dry throats
we managed to speak to Grandfather there.

In the first house, righteousness in rage
placed his felons (scrappers) behind bars.
Almost we felt the Vast Breath down our necks
as we reached across the dark to raise the blind—
we never did; we had no right to stars.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Time for Departure

Waiting now, where no word is said,
and, if said, no one would hear,
I sit in the secret place
of the child in his greenest year.

Opened shells that lie at my feet
are not touched, or eyed—
the wonder and mystery
faded by time. But I rise,

suddenly now to hear what I heard
when all song was new.

But I see the deserted nest,
and its eggs. I am empty too.

How long, how long the boy would wait
for the nester: half the day.

How long in that secret place
where I haven't long to stay.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Leader

A snap of fingers,
quick as a whip,
silenced us,
rowdy
after the bell rung.
We muttered with no words
obscenities;
and we evened the score—
at least
he could not
quiet our thoughts,
though his black eyes
probed
our black thoughts.
Yet
at his desk,
giving polite order
quietly,
quietly,
he grew more awesome:
taller,
a gentlemanly
god;
and, urchins,
we dug at our poor minds
to find something
to please him.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

The Pets' Cemetery

Someone dug up
bones
in the back yard
of the deserted house,
the bones
of the kitten as white as milk,
the bones
of the terrier as brown as autumn,
the bones
of the yellow canary,
the black bird.

Someone,
reverent,
put them all back
in the brown earth,
and lay white flowers
on their bed—
one bed for the dead.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Boyhood

Boyhood was nakedness and not knowing flesh:
a fish in the farm brook teaching himself to swim
long summer through. Boyhood was grapes that climbed
up the pear tree, a bough a chair, and dessert
fat in the sun; and cherries in bowls of hands
a stolen treat, their seeds when popped from mouths
the silly joy of a juicy, delicious game.
Boyhood was a siren, a flame against the night;
face to the wall while the whole world was aflame
till the siren ceased; the silence was more fierce.
Boyhood was morning, a time when no thing died.
Boyhood was being alone yet never alone
while the cloud-vessels sailed the endless seas.
Boyhood was tears in a big brother's secret world,
in a world once hero-strong, then villain-dark,
and a turning away from the dirty ad and hands;
boyhood was being alone then, being alone.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Woman in Doorway

Seeing the full round form in the lighted doorway,
he paused expectantly. The scent of bread
claimed the brisk air and the warm thought of the homesick
alien who for a dozen years had fed
himself in the rented room, few inches from strangers.
He was a boy a moment, but he did not wave;
nor did he speak to children, late from playtime,
these taught that in the darkness fools are brave.

Only a glance he stole toward the waiting woman.
Round the near corner a man was coming from work;
children who met him shouted a holiday music.
The man from a darker, cramped world did not lurk;
seeing two neighbors, whispering and suspicious,
there on the fringe of his unforgotten land,
he went from the lighted doorway to the dark one;
he heard the tapping stick in the officer's hand.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Man in Cabin

Forgiving himself, as he had forgiven his lovers,
the young and the jaded,
he rarely recalls or catalogues carnal errors.

He is not touched by hunger, feels no envy
when his land is invaded
by lovers who seek, as he sought, secret valleys
to hide from aliens. He is not now in hiding.

His windows are shaded,
only outside, by pine and maple. Open
to mouse or squirrel,
or to strangers, seeing no knocker, calling,
his doorway

leads to his other rooms: the forest
that gives him logs to warm his bones by evening,
the tree and the bush that give him pear and berries,
the tagging goat whose offering whitens coffee.

If, while doing his simple deeds, he passes
the leafy place where he hears the begging boy, the
laughter, the teasing girl,
the sighs and the quiet, he goes ahead by twilight.

What is behind him

is no concern of his, though sometimes, thinking
of lovers, he is moved to pity, and moved to laughter
when he thinks of himself, so clever, hiding
secrets from older eyes.- as these, it may be,
are snickering near and speaking with pointed fingers.

"Their dates," he smiles. "I have a date too." Deerlike
he goes to the end of the forest, where, miles below him,
he sees the tiny towns, no more than dots there
on a childhood puzzle; sees miles of car lights moving
toward intersections, madness and disaster,
and others searching and inching along the darkness

on roads of their choice. He sits; again he chooses
only to read what is written in other stars, the
specks above this star on which he's perched, this
edge of his world.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Poor People's Country

In land of little honey,
not to go sour, we spiced our days
with various misdemeanors: snow-
balls thrown at the hat of god who strutted to church.
(Afterward, conscience stung us in our hell.)

In land of little honey,
not to be odd, we prowled for love;
if the act was quick, the words were drawn
out in a rambling fiction, far from fact.
Worst of the liars was the still one, pure, afraid.

In land of little honey,
paupers, we found our princesses,
full though lithe, tasting the first rare sweet
from the lips of love; and washed, we went to them,
not knowing the down of our marriage bed was straw.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

The Poor Mexican

José, no wonder
you blind yourself; you
work your field, and your neighbor's
beyond day. For Dolores
and your eight.

And another
on the way!

Jose,
as you thrust the seed
in the dampened ground, and
say, Like this, like this,
your whole face, brown rascal,
is a lascivious wink.

And shame on you, Jose,
as fondling yourself like a boy
you play with the coins in your pocket
and your plans for the night.
But Rita: she is fat, Jose;
she is not young.

Ah Rita has ways
to please a man; and she has some
good years left, my friend.

Poor Jose.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Locked Prison

You'll know it soon enough,
hot fools, my children
in school (out under sun):
love warms and sears,
and you'll fight it off,
and go back for more.
Willing captive,
in your celllike room,
your wilderness,
you'll down your victim:
your victor.

But I'll never tell you
(learn soon enough, May fools):
when there's only a flicker
you will know truly
the meaning of love,
and how it is with a man
warmed briefly
in his October.

Even so,
it's better than the lot
of your parent's parent
poking the cold crust
and maybe-just maybe-finding
a bit of life seeded in summer:
a green patch
for remembrance,
for joy
or regret.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Regiment

Who needs a clock?
Heels tick at eight.
One by one gray suits run down;
if I oversleep,
mind is wound when the last late
shoes
 turn
 toward the bus. Five-
fifteen: the grays come round once
more; and I color thought
with bourbon on the rocks
with hi-fi ringing
across the dead street;
a minor Dylan,
I die again
without alarm.
I die again
without alarm.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Woman on Shore

The woman
naked on the shore

(alone) has her lover:

feels
light more delicate than fingers
on cheeks, eyelids, and bosom;
and her smile —
she replied seductively
to what was not said.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

The Hotel Room

Anonymous

I go, as you
earlier—
with the last word
that needed no speech,
only the mouth
soft on the mouth—
went your way,
not mine.

Will you recall,
will I recall
by night when the ache
of hunger wakes
the dreamer, how
it was: brief time
when pulse and pulse,
a rhythmic stir,
grew in fervor,
and if death came
you with no name
and I with none
would have been held
in love's most perfect fever?

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Homesteaders

He spat at this land, the damned,
damned gift of nothing: earth of old graves
and names half erased by the hard
hammers of wind and ice. The rotten leaves
he saw, and a lone yellow bloom
that dared survive in the waste; and the eyes
of his wife he saw, blue near the gold
stirring pity, then love for her, and his praise
of her as, heavy with his new life,
she looked across the dry miles
as she looked once after first love,
seeing the children; smile returned for smiles;
and her hand now held as once
it was held when the shy tot near the bush
advanced to bring the park's bud,
and hurry away, almost as still as a hush.
He turned to his land, the turned
wet rows of promise; deeply thrust seed;
and thrust again deep, deep;
and felt fulfillment of a man's need.
and thrust again deep, deep;
and felt fulfillment of a man's need.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Current Models

That photograph of Robert Frost,
the one with no eyes, only holes:
what do they hide, what do they see,
eyes of our human god?
Do I dare to put my question down?
to anyone here, worshippers,
you who applaud, you who assert
none is as great as he:
do we not choose to search the dark,
as, blinded by light, far we go
choosing our gods of intellect?
for these we might emulate,
these who offer no reply,
Frost in New England, darker still,
Schweitzer in blackest Africa,
the many and not the One
Whose breath in us is poetry's
upsweeping rhymes; Whose vast hand
waits with His balm for flesh, for mind,
for blind eyes of small gods.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

In Despair

I turned into that dark
wood, away from my cronies playing,
their minds filled with bats and winning,
their minds emptied of guilt, sweating
desire out of their muscles;

turned
into the depth of my tangle,
housing the culprits in my blood;
alone in the world, I lay there sinning,
and I wept into the yellow violets worn
by my brown bride,
till, panicked,
I ran from everywhere
as my eden burned.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Hoarders

Woodpecker, fool of birds,
drop pebbles into the hole you pecked.
Drop the acorns that you can't reach —
your hoard so deep, so richly packed.

Aunt Gretchen's busy, busy fingers
stored away in private places
thousands of yards of crocheted towels,
and a fortune in laces.

Woodpecker, handsome dunce,
what instinct drives you to such folly?

We knew a man on a lifelong dole
who wore a gray coat found in the alley:
old Oscar, derelict and thrifty,
I could have had eight with velvet collars;
in place of his stick, a cane gold-headed;
why did he sleep on that begged-for mattress,
die in the cold on thousands of dollars?

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Rest Home

Here the hurt men and women,
the poor and ruined sweating,
standing in cells of the homeless,
raging and swatting

the flies that invade their old prison,
grow quiet at last. Heads lowered,
silent they sit in their darkness;
silent and cowered,

they have found no salve in their blindness,
no balm in their meditation;
their eyes are sunk deep in aloneness;
theirs is the passion

long bearable; helpless, the senile
like children who cannot cry,
half live in death's gray houses.
Christ, let them die!

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

The Longest Season

In middle September, still summer's beggar,
who would lengthen his day,
no tagger,
he with a searching eye,
alone and content there stripped by the stream,
dived arrow-clean.

His whole flesh kissed
the goose-pimpling water, and his long thirst
was quenched again;
his quick time never ticked past noon.

Without one word,
his whole being
was saying
that he was his own weather;
no season was hard.

He would rather
make his own billow,
find fishes' hollow,
make his own seas
than join the boys
where fields blazed
with the season's red.

He would be glad,
go down, come up,
his sap
more active than trees'.

There was a pause
as a voice rose
over the lawn, over the brush.

With one final flash
he dived;
quickly half dried;
and clothed himself swifter.
Then he ran after

other late vagabonds going for dinners,
the calls more insistent than the school's
ding-dangers.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Drawn Blinds

Straight-walking children, starched, with Sabbath looks,
enter the pews. Beyond the reach of sticks,
they poke each other as they turn from holy books;
slowly the hands turn, slowly the old clock ticks.

Filled with the slaughtered lamb their fathers blessed,
condemned to captors' rooms another Sunday,
they are bored with this silent, sullen day of rest,
and plan to raise a proper hell on Monday.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

The Forest

I told her, Come in.
She waited. I
begged, Come in.

She
trembled. I said:
We are not babies. We're
seventeen.
But the voice
in there, a storm beginning,
said something more. Said:
Go.

And the white hand slid
from the sweaty grasp.
As she ran (a small doll
nearing home), I stood
shaking
under the angry trees.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

To Live with Older Brothers

To live with older brothers
meant winning the fight with fears:
big dark, big boys, and snakes.
By night we named the stars;
by time of the telescope
thoughts were raised to galaxies,
eyes to the lips of praise—
not of earth,
no need to fear a fate
of being lost in woods where hairy paws reached out.
Trained to box, we grew in our brothers' shadow;
only gangs dared move against us,
rob us of berries
in the meadow,
the plunder spilled when we too grew taller
as brothers emerged from the fattest bushes.
And when we heard hissing
and slithering near us in the grasses,
we jumped and laughed when brave hands held the squirmers;
we learned that few of his family were foes;
life was broader, our journey warmer.

To live with older brothers
means fighting fear and doubt.
Half wakened in the large, shared bed,
eavesdropping, and feeling guilt,
we leaned an ear against drawn covers.
We found the joy of being bad,
learned of bad girls till we too felt naked.
The strange words spoken were words erased,
at our mother's order, from whitewashed fences;
we were pinned to walls;

mourning our ruined heroes,
we shared a cell with villains,
and could not be freed.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Wound and the Wounds

My belly bears two cuts; the skillful knife
 (I later heard of its clean cutting)
 pierced the skin: the opened flesh revealed
 to one long used to deep malignancy
 only a part to be patched. When I rose from bed
 the doctor said, "You'll soon be ten years younger."
 I walked from halls of groaning, prayers, and eyes
 staring upward in pain, cursing in anger—
 I who had filled the place where brides of Christ bent
 over the fearless child and the scared whore,
 I who had entered without fear or hope,
 left without faith, with the neat, miraculous scar,
 wondering why the Christians and the Jews,
 hundreds of still novitiates would steal
 time from the Christ, from Moses, or the saints
 burnt, beaten, hung—known, unknown—would call
 in their long silence a silent sinner's name.
 Healed, whole again, after the morning writing,
 reading, and breakfasting on cheese and toast,
 weekdays and Sundays, my terrier coaxing, waiting,
 I plod the miles of pavement in half-light,
 watch penitents who go to early mass.
 Outside, and often looking in, I feel
 a clutching at flesh, and wonder how the pus
 was dried; and hear a selfless doctor's words:
 "Almost a miracle! No grumbling, friend."
 Was that a thought which pierced the skin again?
 Why do I think of One born in poor hay?
 So I was told: though fact or fiction, still
 daily I'm moved by Him as by no other.
 My whole world is a world of poetry;
 yet the great bard, or all the saints together,
 re-echo parables. Though walking here,
 I kneel beside His children, by His cross;
 and touch His hem—or is it only breeze?—
 and touch the blood—or are these thorns which press

into my hands that hold my neighbor's rose?
Home from my journey, swiftly I turn over
the clever pages, rip my own, and read
Love's laureate Whose word dies never.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Land of Morning

Curl, cat, warm in the lap of the little girl.
Live in your world of morning wonders:
the golden school
quicker than a quiver beneath the lily root;
the arbor that you feast under—
you on the white stream
poured down
from the nibbler of clover,
you on the fruit
strung purple, red
over-
head;
the thunder,
unfeared as you peer from your garden's doll house,
applauding the dazzle down the sky;
the sun —
there you two, one.
making a ritual of fun,
as you, cat; you, girl, run
in leaves, in flowers, shaking pearls
to ground.
Curl, cat and girl, together:
you, purr, and sleep;
you with the blossom's breath,
be lost in your deep,
warm sudden night, nor ever know if
the fang will rip open your furry side,
the foe will abandon the unwed bride.
the fang will rip open your furry side,
the foe will abandon the unwed bride.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

In a Far Country

I recall a time of living:
death was unknown in a far country
of the sugar pear tree
and the grape that climbed it.
Seated safely, legs over limbs,
dessert was ours for the taking.
Going-on-five Tim, one year older,
was my instructor: larks—he showed me —
lived in meadows; and thrushes—one would
have thought he owned them —
lived in the forest, part of our farm.
When they gave me the Bible picture of David,
I thought of Tim and the big boy he battled,
the one who shot at his bird in my forest.
I recall a time of half-living
when I climbed the pear-grape tree alone.
I brought Tim fruit in the bowl of my hands.
“He must go to sleep now; he’ll eat it later,”
they told me. They pulled the covers slowly
toward his face, as white as the sheets, as white
as his mother’s face. And he closed his eyes.
I recall my grandmother spreading
a red and white cloth beneath our tree,
cookies, muffins, golden butter;
and Grandmother saying, “Well, where’s our fruit?”
I climbed up there, and filled the pockets
of my blouse with grapes and sugar pears.
Through boughs I saw the black-dressed people,
my mother’s arm around Tim’s mother;
and a little, long box as pink as roses;
and flowers—I guess a garden-full.
I saw the cars round the bend by the meadow;

I heard larks singing. I dropped from the tree.
“You are not eating,” Grandmother told me.
I suddenly rose, and ran to our forest.
Thrushes were flying, flying above me.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

The Pen

Pen poised and waiting to capture elusive words,
I see in air above the immaculate field
of dawn faint syllables: the distant birds
fluttering in high silences; I catch
them quickly, but the sick things bring no joy.
I rip the page and hate the dirty work.
I hurl the rock of wrath at the aging boy
grinning from childhood's pool: I slay the fake.
Yet there I hear the still, still water's flow;
yet there I see after my hot, spent rage,
innocents picking flowers; and I know
Somewhere a sprout is dormant; one clean page
waits for the toiler's fingers to find deep
brown bulbs that hold a whiteness, soon to live;
fresh or pressed, live in another's keep
when the gift is love's.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Water and Sun

Do women still dry their hair in the sun?
I never see one.

The waist-length strands of my mother's, tangled,
washed in rain water, dangled,
and swayed under hands in summer's rays.
She combed out the black and silken tangle;
head back, her face a shining praise,
she looked at something I could not see
while a robin sang in our cherry tree.

Do women still brush their hair in the sun?
I never see one.

Black I saw as more than clean.
Early I knew that black could be
more than black as shades of the sheen
shone like a gemlike mystery.
Sometimes when my father fingered
my mother's hair, still as a hush,
I lay beyond the lilac bush.
Although boys called to me, I lingered,
not knowing my parents were ordinary,
a plain pair bathed there in the sun,
and all my washed day airy.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Flogged Child

Curled in his fist, though nothing's there,
a knife is being formed.
Here in his house that is a lair
he is becoming armed.
Loathing is forming without sounds
ramrods of hidden heat.
Injury felt reopens wounds;
hurt cannot abate.
Now he is driven to the wall;
now hardened by his hate,
he is the equal foe grown tall:
the enemies beg too late.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

In Desert and City

I have heard the screams of war
where dunes lay still,
silent and endless waves;
heard the shrieks
when I sought release
from the city's blare.
I have heard the sound of sandals
where vanity strutted on jeweled heels,
where pride pounded the pavement
as he hid away in his safe vaults
security for an old age dreaded.
In the pauses,
between the trombone's pagan beat,
I have heard the fall
of hair against His feet
as I saw an old woman with an innocent's eyes;
and there,
in the city street,
I heard a call softer than the padre's prayer:
a long, unspoken, peaceful word
above the city's cries.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

The Stranger

Why do you sit apart, old man,
from these agreeing, others needling,
you with unbuttered bread you're nibbling?
I see you pocket it, and turn
your face toward sky as if content
with a kingly feast: have you grown deaf
to raucousness and blasphemy?
Who walks beside you as you go
in silences while all about
whips of words flail summer air?
Chin raised a little and ear leaned
away from noise's vortex, where—
how far away, how close—are choirs
that sing to you?

I hear the shouts
of discord in the city square.
Christ, how false, how poor am I?
Dressed in my finely-tailored rags,
let good misfortune shred me clean—
I who envy that gray, bent man
dressed in his age-green, regal suit.
Older than he in weariness,
paupered by insecurity,
let me grow quickly ancient; Christ,
let me be washed and young again.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

The Student

Bent not by his eighty years, he leans
daily toward the inexhaustible
supply in the public library.
With Spinoza, he knows there is not
now “no greater gift than intellect.”
With Coleridge, he’s learned the slow way
“to know ourselves parts and proportions
of one wondrous whole”! Though Shakespeare’s taught
him, he turns from big plots of the Bard,
and turns from the ambiguities
of Donne and Santayana, his hands
touching, as a lover touches, books
of sad singers, Housman and Millay;
and he recalls the Chinese proverb
then: “Each interprets in his own way
the music of heaven.” Time ticks late.
Who can guess, if they have eyes to see,
that the night watchman, still and alone,
is young eternally? More than time
is recorded on his rounds. The stars
are studied, and what is beyond them,
seen clearly, dimly, or imagined,
he studies during his long night walk:
steady, lanterns burn in hand and eyes.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

To a Woman Dying, Looking Nightly at TV

Neighbor, after your three strokes,
pleasantries—your wave, your daily smile—
camouflaging the tragedy that stalks you,

(I have seen you walking slowly

with caution as if a thing would pounce upon you)
do you find release by night?
At cocktail time, your TV
competes with my living room chatter:
across the street, the snatches of news from Rome
die; and later, your door opens
to let in thin air; I hear your Western; myth, my
dear, if you'd take time to read.
Time to read: So says the dunce.
I think now of the absurdity
of that professorial remark. You live,
many lives one brief half hour.
A month, a week, a day: what is doled out to you?
Wave good morning tomorrow.
And now this night, fretful, hot,
music still pouring across the street,
I cannot sleep. But I do not wish to sleep
as I listen to notes, far, soft;
to Finlandia, now beckoning gently: home.
Night comfort you, my neighbor.

What is significant?

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Major Theme

What is significant?
I say to my dog: Come,
roll over; we'll get that flea.

And she rolls over: there
is her tormentor; my thumb
crushes it; she is relieved.

While I am pouring scotch
I say to my friend: Please
roll her over; get that damn
thing that causes her to
scratch; but she disobeys him.
I say: Roll over. She rolls.

What is significant?
The kindness and the tone
are significant; not authority,
unless authority
is blended with the voice's
known, persuasive interest.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

3 *A.M.*

Someone out there, where a faint light
of caution burns before a cottage, or
a flood of amber warns the rapist and thief,
lies warm, curled, released, and at peace, his hope
seeded. Another out there waits;
somebody cries, and is hushed.

Someone out there walks the dark hall;
sweats as he hears one who had come to him
unafraid; and who moans as she feels the boy
who will soon grow miraculously tall,
their child hidden. And he weeps then,
hearing eternity call.

Someone by darkness walks slippered,
alone; hides when the prowler approaches;
turns toward home, and then spins around, and hurries
up the cold steps to the locked door; looks back
once at the cross framed in the sky;
fingers shut out her son's cry.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Secluded Auditorium

Though at times, during
Symphonies Under the Stars
in Hollywood Bowl, a foursome
guzzles Old Crow, grows dizzy
with booze and chatter that glares
and shushing stop only for
moments, and though applause
at the wrong time bruises
the almost-silence of
Sibelius, the baton,
still as a monk's no-tongue
meditation, fingers
the darkness, pointing to
glory, ageless, universal:
to music, incomparable
language without a word.
Curious, dunce in
a cathedral, I open
my eyes, and I am cheated? An old man's
eyes are closed; his lips move, and
they are lyrics mated with
the score. A young girl's eyes
are closed; her mouth opens,
but hers are no lips for
humans, she is one with the
gods of melody, gods
unearthly; she kisses
saints. I close my eyes. Time
passes, passes with cadences
of timelessness; I am shaken.
I am roused from slumber;
active death that lives;
as from a dream seeming real
and translucent, I finally,
reluctantly, let in harsh
light; hands, twenty thousand pairs,
strike at my senses; applause
makes a carnival of

divinity. I curse
vulgarians: the hands'
cacophony slices the
soul, as a star—the last
pure note—falls and is lost;
and, alone in the Bowl
at eleven-thirty, crickets
are heard, and a jet, and echoes,
far, of Finlandia.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

The Newspaper

For William Carlos Williams

Hearing the sound of noon, the old
man out of the ditch
split open his bag filled
with bread, cheese, peaches,
and put it on yesterday's news.
Sucking the peach stone, slowly so
all good would go in,
he pushed the crumbs aside;
and he spat the stone
at the editorial. "Damn
fool!" he said; then he turned to see
a bird after crumbs.
He was still, and he watched
till the bird flew off.
If he thought of words, he said none;
simply leaned an ear toward the sound
of a dumb language,
eloquent and complete.
Song done, the bird shat
on the news; and the old man laughed.

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

Toward a Sunless Place

Caught in a whirl, crimson-veined,
in a swift game that began
as holiday play, the boy,
suddenly man, and the girl,
afraid and receptive, torn
as her cravings are, hold fast
as the storm gathers, calls, grows:
they are caught in a red swirl
as the loosened avalanche
of autumn sweeps them across
the meadow (two months ago
the playground of innocents)
to the woods; no longer babes
parted, they find each other:
to be one, or again lost?

Publication. *Across the Dark* (Chicago: Windfall Press, 1964).

BACKDROPS

1966 · Florida: Olivant Press, 1966

Backdrops

We go far
in neon glitter,
reel against backdrops of unreality
exotic flowers, giant leaves,
behind the savage band —
get sick, recover, resolve
as needles of our icy shower bathe us
to be what we once were: free
innocents, and more:
innocents now wise.
We shall not need to wish on a star;
nor, as the old child does, hunger and whore.

We rush far
from the white house to green
yesterday's paradise
when every glance was praise,
when purity looked at us from the clean stream.

We sleep when day's
warmth touches us like another's hand;
we rise from dream
is that breath
blown by the flowers of death?
We see the falling star,
and we pass the house now black;
we return to the back-
drops, reel to the pagan blare;
sight blurred by hours
of morning, stifled by air
roughing young faces,
we click past the white
house long deserted, run
in blinding sun.

Publication. *Backdrops* (Florida: Olivant Press, 1966).

Courtships

Every word we said in that tense
summer blossomed into talk
botanical (we were wise
beyond our years, we thought)
 as we went in the meadow
 skirting the forest
 and the wild walk.

Every end of day in that taut
season, separate we moved
silently toward our homes;
avoiding the pair who came
 from the dark of tall trees,
 we turned from eyes saying
 what they had loved.

Every leaf that fell in that loose
season taunted lovers not together.
Why were we spared? We knelt
where flakes like flowers fell
bridal-white on your head; and
rising, we lifted
faces to spring weather.

Publication. *Backdrops* (Florida: Olivant Press, 1966).

Bride and Groom

As if discovering a secret, they walked as one
into the new world found a week ago
when they went singly; bedroom and living room,
curtains and spread cream-colored, and the glow
of the weak bulb hiding her dread and his turned eyes.
He looks at the closet: worn once, her wedding gown
and his dark blue suit, and cleanly paired, as bright
as this

room repainted. The distant traffic din
is heard; then nothing except her stirring, white
against white, is heard. He turns around,
sees the lips opened and trembling; eyes child-blue,
afraid and beckoning; waiting, without a sound,
eighteen, grown suddenly, he somehow says
he will be good to her. She waits with less fear.

Publication. *Backdrops* (Florida: Olivant Press, 1966).

Lovers

They are close,
drawn
together at stations,

Publication. *Backdrops* (Florida: Olivant Press, 1966).

Workers

I have seen them;
 I see them:
bent men of childhood
standing
 erect,
wiping sweat from
 burnt brows;
pausing moments in night-to-night
time under
 lightning-cut trees:

The galleries of centuries
visited
 etches none like these
in the cruel,
 yet conquered,
summers' blaze.

Publication. *Backdrops* (Florida: Olivant Press, 1966).

Man in the Back Room

Beyond the wheelbarrow, broken by neglect,
that would carry no more of his loads;
beyond the litter
left by the young marauders, the kites
time-robbed of color, skeletons in trees,
he looked, he peered (now seeing dimly)
where he had always looked: beyond the near,
the far, the turning, the straight high road
where he would go, where he had never gone,
where he could never go: from this house
that was his, then his son's, now his son's sons'
who had left him this corner (a small place,
small yet large enough for his needs),
where the hole in the window let in the wild breath.
At least he could turn away from these, these
not wanting him; at least, if he cupped an ear,
and listened to silences, to far green places
where no word was spoken, he could hear
the undying sound more eloquent than utterance:
peace. He wondered why anyone feared death.

Publication. *Backdrops* (Florida: Olivant Press, 1966).

Grab, Hurt Child

for Tony
Why is it that night
brings more pain,
more fear?

Stabbing and in-
Her hurt? Where's balm
for' it?

You, child-thin,
with the big ache,
come here.

Each time that knife
in the middle ear
twists deep,

grapple my arm;
all night long.
It's love, yes,

but it is more:
it's pain that draws
us near.

Publication. *Backdrops* (Florida: Olivant Press, 1966).

Gossiper

All about her,
 neighbors,
 making a ritual
 of love,
attend the new child crying,
or the old one,
sitting beside the sick one late, late.
All about them,
 these,
near,
 hear-
ing the cries of eternity,
the sighs
 of ancients
 ready to die;
all about these
 these
making a ritual of love
 is one
with the witch's tongue,
 making
a ritual of hate.

Publication. *Backdrops* (Florida: Olivant Press, 1966).

The Widow

In the hard country,
she had worked by his side.
A faith in his strength,
a peace in her mind
got them through the recurring
and food-robbing droughts;
got them through the fury,

whipping and monumental;
through storm that whined,
then died away,
leaving only a broken tree
to be chopped, to be fire
for a quiet celebration:
their hours of love by evening.

In the green country,
his protecting row of trees
sheltering wealth of their land,
she puts him to bed;
near his roots that would hold
through the years that she must live:
near the tall trees.
She would stand with these.

Publication. *Backdrops* (Florida: Olivant Press, 1966).

Abductor

The song we expected became a murmur,
a sound
 lost,
 and I lonely;
and you beside me: what did you hear?
Only your form was present;
you were carried as if by a stirring
more silent than sound imagined.
Eyes closed, receptive, you lay there,
gently felled, awake.
 And you slept.
I was pinned to the wall,
to the black siberia:
 without a flame
even the flicker that burned
 briefly
 died;
and faintly, faintly
 from a distant place
I heard the syllables,
 a soft cry,
of my name.
 The warm winds,
 slowly, quickly,
swept over me
 as you returned.

Publication. *Backdrops* (Florida: Olivant Press, 1966).

On the Untamed Limb

I wait to appease my hunger,
wait here to pounce
upon the warm feast.

Who was it who thought of gnawing,
fierce in the gut?
It is there! Can I,

having no soul, and no silence
feeding the depth
of need, live as do
all who are called and ecstatic,
divinely so
when they starve, and grow
without the flesh torn by molars?

I must eat to
live; waking from sleep,

prowl, and then climb the vast buttocks;
make my own kind:
a kind in my wild.

Publication. *Backdrops* (Florida: Olivant Press, 1966).

ALOHA, POLYNESIA

1967 · Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967

The local composite scan omits the leaves containing ‘High Flowering,’ ‘Sound and Silence,’ ‘Children of Heaven,’ and ‘Pikake.’ The remaining forty-two poems are printed in their original order.

Ocean, Land, Mountains, Children

Sun and Moon

Komohana,
 the Hawaiians say,
komohana is the place
 where the sun
enters the ocean.

 And faces lift
to mahina,
 the moon
that touches
 the royal ones
and their children
 (children
of Hawaiian royalty
 are
born in heaven.)

 Yet it touches
their children's faces,
 the lowly
ones, the unknowing
 ones, their
faces lifted,
 lifted.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Disaster, Hawaii

Disaster is not long in Hawaii.
When a backfire, like a shot,
is heard,
two hundred, three hundred, and more
rice birds,
smaller and quicker than linnets,
like shots themselves,
fly out of the banyan tree
six yards from my lanai.
And hardly before
they form an arc,
they form a circle
and as swiftly fly
back home.

It is the same in Hawaii
when a whole ocean reaches
into the thoroughfare
when there is a tidal wave:
disaster strikes, and is gone;
homeless ones are looked after.
Water is calm. Beaches are swept.
The dead are blanketed
with white-gold plumeria.
Soon, though, laughter is heard;
and, making a lei of frangipani,
sunny children sing there.
And the brown men who live on
never think that they were brave.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Polynesian Dignity

The colors are fleshy
 in Hawaii:
the garments;
 huge flowers too.
And the ladies are amazons
 towering
over the malihinis,
 pale-
faced newcomers,
 fashion-
thin from their pallid land.

The colors are fleshy
 in Hawaii.
Mammoth blooms
 flower
in the black-silk locks.
In Oahu
 the Polynesians
walk in a king's garden
 of flowers:
hibiscus grows as if wedded
 to sun.
And stepping royally
 here still
are the amazons of the
 islands,
towering in their homeland
 as queens.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Haiku

Hawaii

Basho and Buson,
was your land of four seasons
like Oahu's, one?

Mountains and mountains
seem to march against sky: what
stillness is beyond.

Waikiki's children,
splashing the ocean in air,
claim it without fear.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Night Fishing

The dark night
becomes
moonlight:
we lamalama,
dark brothers, and I,
torches
erasing the black
blanket
(the Hawaiian lore)
that would hide the rich
store
of the vast Pacific's
bounty.
We lamalama,
my brothers and I:
nothing is hidden
from the
fisherman's
deep-as-water
sight.
He knows no night.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

From the Limb

He swings.
 The small
Hawaiian swings,
 and drops
to be caught
 in the
plumeria-shower,
 the bloom;
the child
 scented. I pause;
I whiff
 delicate fragrances:
plumeria?
 child?
The child tags
 along.
Plumeria?
 child?
As we part,
 I am given two
flowers.
 I think:
which is the flower?
 the child?

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Haiku

Hawaii

We call doves little,
yet are they not big against
the whole blue sky claimed!

Hibiscus, child's toy,
hair's ornament, you are more:
you live here always.

No thing is so soft
as moonlight softening earth,
sea, and space beyond.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

The Wreath

A small Polynesian was playing on the shore—
why are the dark-skinned children more lovely,
their eyes dark pools with lights of the sun?—
and toying with her lei of white plumerias,
the garland as fragrant as a child is fragrant.
Where were her parents? Was she a “free child”?
Even so, even so, fathered by love,
she would be loved by the mothers of her world—
in Polynesia none is unwanted.
Too swift for a rescue, too quick for a cry,
suddenly she and her laughter were drowned
as a vast wave sucked her into the ocean.
And the waves went out, and the waves came in.
The brave men dived, and they came back empty.
Most were empty: one prayed, and one damned.
Water grew still; there was hardly a wave.
And the washed plumerias floated to shore;
came in, went out, and floated to shore.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Pearl Harbor, Memorial Day

More than one thousand men, willing, unwilling
warriors, yet each serving, lie in one common grave
of the Arizona, broken by war, that sneak of avarice.
Beneath the oily waters they lie these scores of years.
Their kinsmen and unknown lovers, looking down,
drop on this day of remembrance the many leis:
the oily water is a garden of red carnation,
white pikake, lavender orchid, purple plumeria:
Oahu's fragrance comes up from the dirty ocean
where the black bombs fell that black Sunday morning.
Long, long after the savage surprise,
as men war still, as men hate still, do
they look up at us with their sea-hurt eyes?

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Colt

Ranch, Big Island

He inches to grow.

He races

all that moves: his Mother,
the wind, himself—

a clean

streak scented by newness,

young

god of his world, the meadow,

where soon,

in another hot season,

he will mate

with his kind,

who will race

greenward

in the spring of his flesh.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Outrigger

Push out the craft.

Three to a side,
paddle as one;

speed out beyond
the reef, and out
where surfers float.

Wait for the push
of the ocean; as it
comes nearer, behind

the mammoth canoe,
six paddles as one,
one with the vast

surf's energy.
Ride it, ride it,
six paddles resting.

Victory won,
ride it to shore.
Six paddles outward.

Six paddles as one
through calm and the wild
surf, bale it out,

speed lightly again
where the surfers float;
where you await again

to ride to shore
with the ocean's push,
with the ocean's roar.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

To Sail Right

I sail in the sun not to merely
exercise. To sail is
learning that a light craft,
so small it can be lifted,
can be the conqueror
of the mighty tides of rhythm,
conqueror because it goes
forth with the ocean's movement
and not against a force
so orderly I would not dare
to quarrel with it, nor,
challenging the vast tides, care
to make a game of the sweep
of the body fathoms-deep;
to sail is joy going out
wisely and beautifully,
and smoothly coming back
to the harbor, and to home.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Dancers: Hands, Symbols

Classic Hula

I

The gaze
is
 drawn
 upward
from
 rhythmic
 hips,
from
 leis
 gently
swaying
 over
 breasts
as
 listeners
 hear
a
 voiceless
 language:
notes
 still,
 still,
are
 heard
 poetically
in
 hula
 hands:
the
 tale
 tellers;
the
 silent
 ritualists.

Fingers
 of classic
hula dancers,
 they
are not fingers.
 They
are voices,
 silent,
speaking symbolically
 the soul
of Polynesia.
 They
say:
 Love, love;
it is only love that warms
 us;
that leads us
 past
the earthly ways,
 past
frangipani, carnations,
 near
the blue-green-turquoise
 waters—
still clinging, the odor
 of flowers
as Hawaiian faces are
 raised
to the incredible blue of
 the heavens
from green beds
 in wedded hours.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Girl from the Tropics

Swirl in wild air:
flared skirt of the Tahitian
 and agile
dancer.

Bug the boy's eyes
as swiftly and rhythmically
 your speed now
is growing.

Stir the eyes, old
and rheumy, as flickering,
 they live now
briefly.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Aloha Week, Oahu

Hawaiian
girls
dance
delicately:
even
their
fingers
are
fragile
dancers
moving
(after
the
show)
the
beat
of
silence
in
the
plumeria-
scented
air.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

From This, Our Star

Who Might Be Part

I have returned to the shore
again: at day's end come
to the silent stretches where
there were bathers and now none;
surfers, and not one.

Where all was the shape of play,
vessel, tide, and sand,
in a shapeless world I stand,
water, sky a blue blend.

And noiselessly from a hand
time runs: there is no clock
here in the place where I walk
far and far from home,
yet each step of the way
where earth and the heavens meet

in the soft, tropical night,
although I go alone,

I am nearer now to all
than I was in playful day;
to anyone who might
be part of these silences

I do not need to say
how surely we reach
the limitless, far
regions, without the light
of even one star

to guide us to height
into purest air;
how quietly, each to each,
we ascend the heavens' stair.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Starless Night

I listen on a star-
less night
in the tropics,
city under blue
and white
skies by day.
When dark sky, dark sea,
are one
and there is no
pink, no varicolored
delicate blends,
no flaming flush
of Hawaiian colors, high
over the ocean,
thought ascends
to the far, far
reaches
of undisturbing
dark gray, dark blue.
Quiet yet moved,
where strangely
the beaches
are deserted
after the tide's rush,
and swept clean,
I stand
quiet on the sand
with no thought of time
or of grains
symbolically running
from a hand.
Only a moment
do I think of this shore,
only for a moment.
For I am part of all
beyond this, our star.
There is no call
of welcome: I am there!

As I see before
me, beyond the dark
sky, dark sea
the vast, vast
limitless space
of thought: see, feel,
and know
that this will last:
believable,
the utter believable
tranquility,
where, by a star-
less night,
far, far
hums
endlessly
the sure,
the pure
light.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Haiku

Hawaii

A garland of blooms,
lei worn by a passerby.
gives sweetness to all.

In predawn time, thoughts
higher than Oahu peaks,
rise in a silence.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

I Rise in Darkness

I rise in darkness; go
to the sliding door,
always opened. No
leaf stirs. Not one
of hundreds of little birds
in the banyan tree
moves on its perch, high there.
Far, Somewhere
a step (or thought?) is heard.
Then, as before,
there is an urgency, so
I dress. I walk
to the unpeopled shore
(so calm that grains
are heard when they are dropped
from fingers.) I see
only the vast water one
with the vast dark blue
heavens, each blending into
the other; they reach
for what is beyond, reach so
that all seems to be
one shore. And they touch me
with intangible
urges to swiftly search
for the calm, the whole
universality
as I seem to stand
apart, above this star.
Barefooted, I'm led
again home over the sand,
the ocean quieted.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Bringer of Tranquility

Here in Oahu, night
comes suddenly
after the bright,
bright burst in the sky
and flames burning dimly,
hundreds of birds,
a trio, a score,
and more,
come in sudden waves
to their home,
settling there
like a rustle of wind,
to that one tree
in their green night
where there is no stir.
Then always the strollers
go down toward the water,
father with three brown sons,
mother with her brown daughter:
four lead,
two follow;
and I go too
where the Samoans wade
in the shallow
ocean, on the peaceful shore.
I start to say
to the pensive and small
brown mother, "It has all,
all been a day of splendor."
But the words, and other words,
are in her gaze.
Seeing her, I am stilled,
as she,
like one with finger on lips,
is hushed, and is filled
with a silent praise
as water and sky become
one;

then, suddenly,
I know
it is not peace
out there,
harmony sought;
a deep blue
wedded to deep blue:
it is a peace,
always near,
that she has brought,
brought with her
here
to the still night.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

From the Heavens

Early from sleep, I let
the soft fall of the fountain
wash my fingers—
the tropics' water is soft, is pure.
I walk a way. Listening,
I turn to the windward mountain
as the first faint light
is seen.

Listening, I hear
the quietest breath of dawn;
only that gentlest sound
far above, and not on
the ground.

Suddenly, near,
returning and recalling
I have moved yet not walked
to that high
place in the sky,
I know that the fountain's
water had been falling,
ceaselessly

falling—
as it now falls;
above it, above
it, flying from night
the tropics' day-
seeking dove-
like pigeon, white,
white.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Home Is

Going home....

After the stroll that began when dawn
was an invitation as I awoke
and went the still miles, on and on,
I turned around at Diamond Head,
a destination I could reach
before day urged me to return—
back there was a script begun by night
needing revision and full speech.
Then all of a sudden day reached high:
unheard wings, swift as hummingbirds,
hundreds flew from the banyan tree
up to their other home, the sky.
A mistlike rain began to fall;
so soft it was, and without sound
that it hardly seemed like rain at all.

Going home.... I saw the words,
washed and soaring, waiting there.
Sun grew brighter: it was day
when I returned.

I left the door
fully open. Home was here
in the sunny room as the light shone
clearly upon the finished script—
not mine really. It had to wait
for the right theme, immaculate,
the gift blending with the heavens' air.

Going home... I should have known
home's not left: it's everywhere.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Shower of Frangipani

How can one count gifts
and praise with lyrics,
no matter how clean,
how right,
a land so generous
as Oahu,
this interracial island;
this bird-and-flower
paradise,
where daily the pink,
the white plumerias,
the flame, the yellow,
the gold-centered
plumerias,
are found each morning
by the feet of men,
(these called common),
the aristocracy of flowers
worn as garlands
by princesses,
by commoners,
all, as one,
wearing the scented,
delicate ropes
in the one-season land
of Hawaii.
On a tree,
in a lei,
by the feet,
making each one who bends
to the earth by day
still the gift-giver
by night,
when the room,
like the tree,
has the velvety touch
and the fragrance
of plumeria;

it is a time
to be still,
to be part
of this breath;
and to remember
that these velvety petals,
symbol now of a life
of joy and love,
where once used only
as a blanket for death.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Wild Birds of Hawaii

Hawaiian Dark-Rumped Petrel

Round, round in darkened sky
you go:
where no
moonlight
shows the way,
you fly,
encircling a deep, deep
burrow far below,
where your lone
fledgling, from your one
egg, always in your season
your one egg,
is safely hidden there
in that place of rest.
After your flight
where you find food daily,
your place is now hidden
even from you by night;
and you cry, you cry;
none knows the reason why.
Maybe to make the reason known
to yourself, for your own need.
An hour and more,
two hours or so
in the moon-
less dark,
you fly.
You cry above
the burrow that is,
for your own
reason, your home.
Magnificent bird,
believing in your power,
you have flown far:
your own guide,
you have found home
in the moonless night;
found by your door in the dark

your nesting
place in the burrow,
your fledgling's resting
place, till he too has strength
to fly the length
of your going,
to feed
for his own need
in his own high tomorrow.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

White-Tailed Tropic Bird

We forgive you your cry,
a rasp from such splendor,
you, tropic-bird,
your tail long
white plumes—
your flight is a song
as you soar
around the rocky cliff
of Halemaumau,
down, up the craters;
here you nest—
(like us, the city dwellers
seeking a place of quiet,
of beauty) in the best
place for you: in the strong
home carved by the elements;
here you live
though you must fly
ten miles for your dinner, ten
far miles home;
to find, after your daily quest,
what you must find
in your home formed by
volcanic disaster
in your safe night.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Skylark

No bough
is good enough for him.

He seems to sit
on top of the sky,
and sings
a full minute there.

Encore:
another minute it's heard.

No grass,
no twigs are for him,
the strange
glad fellow of the sky.

The nest,
after eruptions, is spun
volcanic glass
for that elegant, high one.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Birds from Honolulu

Miniatures Resting

Doves resting
show underwings
 to sky,
their silken fans,
as if for display.
Not vain, they
 simply

want to be touched
by their friend,

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

The Ancients

Old doves, sick doves,
seek a corner.

 Gasping,
they swallow hard.
They stand in dark corners,
these who love sun.

Old doves, sick doves,
take a long time,
a long time

 to die:
these, the soft,
 the gentle,
in dark corners
 out of their sun,
take a long time to die.

 And
I can't tell the little child
who wonders why.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Tiny Doves of Oahu

We have come home:
the doves of Oahu,
smaller than mainland
 robins,
the doves and I have come
 home
to this huge rock
risen from the ocean.
The tropics flow in our flesh.
Uninvited ones, welcome.

 Like
kinsmen,
 come to eat.
 No thanks;
but your comings suffice.
And if I am swallowed
by the watery body that moves
for its own reason,
you fly, my pretties;
you fly and find
a new isle;

 fly
and soften a savage heart—
as you softened mine,
I who am now as stilled
as you are still
up there
in night's holy trees.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

High Departure

I hold out my hand,
Hawaiian-brown in the sun.
The cameras click;
they click again, again
in this often photographed
tropical land.
All carry away
only five fingers,
perches for doves
who come to feed
daily, then rise in air.
No one lingers
now where the flocks
sit no more.
But there, there,
leaving also,
are the people who captured
a handful of doves,
each without touching them,
in his magic box.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Clowns and Clowns

Under the banyan,
mansion of trees,
housing the mynah birds,
the children spread out
their feast of sandwiches
and purple popsicles.
Bread's thrown away
as they eye dessert.
The mynahs, the strutters,
who walk like a man,
grab gifts, and stride off
on bright yellow legs.
And the children laugh,
and they imitate mynahs
imitating men.
And the day walks goldenly
into the sun.
We praise with our laughter
the carnival spirit.
We laugh, and they laugh,
everyone.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

The Weddings, the Lovers

Plumeria

Crush it, the flame
plumeria-
one should not crush
a life so soft, so
velvety; but one
sometimes crushes
what is lovely.

Crush it, Oahu's
dawn-dropped flower,
in your fingers—
no brown, patient
hands will thread it
into a lei.

Crush it: its scent,
so feminine,
will stay
stay long on your
hand; longer,
longer than the
scent of woman,
which stays,
as she stayed
only for a while.

Remembering, brush
the plumeria
down your cheek
like a kiss,
velvety.

Then,
remembering,

bite
the plumeria:
it is tough,
it is tough.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Beach Girls

One with water,
wed to sun,
being young,
you are all beauties—
even you, too thin
with your wide mouth,
hungry; and you
with the blown bosom:
both beautiful in youth.
And you, a brown
perfection, with that
beach god beside you—
apart from the others,
your wildness tasted;
you holding back,
giving, you fighting
yourself and that god,
and the god persuasive—
run, run; be that child
you were yesterday.

It is too late
now; too late

Lightly, lightly you
laugh now; you run
together; return
to your hot seclusion.
And you are still;
you are still,
watching your god
ride the seas' tips;
ride away.

Pray, pray love will be
not too heavy upon you,
poor darling;
not too heavy....

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

In the Grove, Untamed

Restless, Kabala lies
under the umbrella
of the giant banyan.
When will Nakana
come and claim her?
Now, now, as moonlight
fondles her, let his fingers
tease her until she trembles
as now the small branches tremble
troubled by a sudden wind.
Can she wait longer?
Has he grown fond
of the new girl, Kalaniki?
In a fury she swears
and rises.
She grips her blade, and knives
nothing with sudden hate.
Soon she would go
to the hut without a light;
listen, and wait to strike.
A faint, far sound; then ears
closer and closer to ground,
faster and faster, increase
the pounding of her need.
Quivering, Kahala lies
under the umbrella':
of the dark banyan;
waits for Nakana.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Aloha

The white,
 the brown
 faces
press together:
here is the
 many
lands'
 democracy,
here when
 white,
 brown
races
 are one
under Oahu's sun
 in love's
tropical weather.

I bend the branch.
 Inhaling,
you whiff the earth's prized
 odor.
You lift your face.
 "Heavenly,"
 you say.
"Heavenly,"
 like a prayer.
And I bend
 down
to kiss the eyelids
 of a
golden
 Hawaiian
 goddess.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Samoan Beach Boy

Alone,
 eyes closed.
deserting the world in the reach
 dark and deep
as his hunger,
the boy on the beach
is teased by a kiss:
 light on his lids;
light on his thigh like a hand.
Not here,
that girl who did not speak
 speaks to him;
soft is the thrust of her;
painful is his need.
He turns to hide
from an accusing
 eye.
Her roundnesses,
more hurtful than a spear,
torture him; and no vein
opened
 is half as
 hot
as his tear
in the sand,
burning like a
 sore,
as, self-accused, he weeps
for his bride,
 or...
or for anyone,
 anyone
under this taunting sun.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

White Against Gold

White jasmine, white orchid,
and you, golden, turning
away from them
 toward me,
toward them
 as I turn
toward you often.

Now as you place the white
plumeria lei that I'd placed
round your throat,
 over your
golden breasts, still joy
is in your posture,
 and in your
eyes, love:
 is it love for all
that is unpossessed
 as I love you,
standing there, white by brown,
 making
no demand?
 As I make none,
 now,
in this room darkening,
 glowing
with a white presence
 and a silence
 heard
in this translucence.
 till dawn
together;
 we are both dark, as one,
and we have all the warmth
 of the heavens
without the need of the sun.

In Polynesia

You would tease me awake.
Fully.
Have me get up.
On your knees,
is that touch
the brush
of plumeria
or your fingers
barely touching?
Here, unlike
the odor of orange blossoms,
drunken
and heavy,
the flower's fragrance
is yours,
so delicate,
so persuasive.
And your lips are as
velvety
as purple plumeria.
You
are on your knees
fondling me
into wakefulness.
No, not yet.
I will not open my eyes.
The shadows.
let them stay.
They are soft,
dark,
the color of you.
Let there be
a drawing out
of these
wedded hours.
See:
I rise now.
See:

I share now
the morning juice.
Rise now.
See: I carry you
out to the lanai.
I show the sun
how beautiful you are;
I tell the sun
you cannot be dyed as
we, white-skinned and pallid, are dyed;
you being loveliest,
born of sun,
and gently aggressive
and earth-brown.
I pillow your head
on the hill of plumerias,
gold and white, white and gold.
go down,
pillowed,
pillowed upon your breast.
Cheek pressing cheek,
let us be one
with the birth of the new day,
child—
warm and immaculate.
Let seeds
flower,
again flower,
into a Polynesian
bouquet of gold-white blossoms,
bouquet
of children.
Aloha.
Aloha
to you,
and to the pure morning.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

The Tropics Have No Clock

Alone? I hadn't thought
of it as I went far.
Do I like to be alone
out there for so long a time?
I didn't check the time.
If I walk an hour or two
or three or walk long,
I'll suddenly, as if I've turned
a corner near the place
I left minutes ago,
say silently: I'm there!
My destination, planned
not when I started out,
is reached, and it is right
as if I'd wisely been
directed to the shore.
Always there the thought
blends with far more
than the searching eyes to see.
Always I hear the beat
of timelessness, and know
there is not a small doubt,
no matter how wide the sight,
that I often walk upon
more than the earth: it's filled
with the pure and whole light
of the heavens.

Walk alone?
Alone when I am stilled?
Now, how could that be?
I hadn't thought of it
where minutes of twilight stay
so briefly, and where day
soon is softer night,
and none loved is far away.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

10 P.M., Oahu

Before me,
four blocks to the Pacific,
I face the roof tops,
red, green, and gray
of low houses
where the Samoans
and Hawaiians sleep
in a forest of frangipani,
hibiscus, and coconut palms.
Larger than several,
my banyan tree
houses hundreds of guests
from Asia, the dark-
faced midget birds.

Here,
where there was daylong
song, coos, trade winds
weaving magical music,
there
is now a quiet
so persuasive
that one must listen
to the hush
of the cool air
where once there was rush
of white, white birds;
to lean an ear,
and to hear
no sound—
not even the velvet fall
of plumerias, the gift
of the islands to all
who would lift
them from ground
when morning comes.

But here, where a whole
city seems to sleep,

here by night
when no bird
is in flight,
and no word said,
more eloquent,
more eloquent,
silences are heard.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Ohana: Family

You ohana;
you know: family.

Good morning,
said the stranger.
Call, said the friend.
Aloha,
said kin
by the open door.
On an island,
in a flor-
al and one-
season land,
in Oahu
hand in hand
all seem to say:
You ohana;
you know: family.

On an island
in the sun,
none, none
is a stranger.
Every one, every one,
is taken in.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

Lean Toward Peace

Ear,
be delicate and catch sound
that is not near;
be attuned to distances
and to the quiet theme found
where there is only a faint hum
in the deep grasses, and in the
 deep
ocean and rested tides:

here
in the tropics, after
the daylong rush
of the surfers and outriggers
toward shore,
all bent on joy,
there is not less of it but more,
everything blending—
even that laughter
of that up-late boy—
into a multitudinous hush,
where all
by night—
fall
is like the soundlessness
of the white
plumeria lei
that I lift
from the still water,
the gift
that someone cast from a passing
 ship
by day.

Publication. *Aloha, Polynesia* (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, 1967).

PERIODICAL VERSE NOT COLLECTED IN THE BOOKS

1947–1959 · Variegation and Recurrence

These six poems are reset from the original journal pages in the project archive and are not duplicated in the recovered books.

City Birds

Go,
park birds,
from building to building,
between the grey
old churches,
on walk, on body.

Lift and fall freely.

The gun smell,
the breath of smoke
and of fire,
the field flame
do not shame the market place,
where your brother dead
is placed under glass
by the fingers
that lifted the fallen bird,
once kind as the sun and bough,
the fingers that later
far from
the city,
fired the gun.

Publication. *Variegation* (no. 6 (Spring 1947), p. 11).

Negro Child Lost

The small brown child
in the white suit,
whiter than the smiling faces,
is alien.
Though hands touch gently
and voices promise
reunion,
the small brown child,
lost in the depot,
feels fear less
than bewilderment;
he does not know them,
these who touch him
not as his mother touches;
he pulls away
meekly
and goes away,
alone,
seeking, seeking
for the brown face
among the white faces.
Brown were the only hands he knew,
and he had never been touched
before
by pity.

Publication. *Variegation* (no. 17 (Winter 1950), p. 12).

Vacationer

Like a flower open and petals torn,
like a parlor-bird out in the wild,
half-lost and weary, small, afraid,
is the homesick child.

She hears the whistle far away.
Far, far in the gloom a bright lamp's burning.
She must remain a fortnight more
before returning.

Publication. *Recurrence* (no. 2 (Autumn 1950), p. 9).

Child's Question

"Where did today go?"

It went up the hill;
it ran with us laughing,
and then stood-still.

"Will it return, and
how shall we know?"

It will come in a shower
after the snow

runs in the river:
almost in an hour
today which was planted
with a seed will flower.

Publication. *Recurrence* (no. 12 (Spring 1953), p. 94).

Park in Semitropics

This flowering land,
the bough profuse with blossoms,
tree searching sky—
here did the hand
dig long in labor, deep eyes
see nothing dry.

This woodland grown
green in a city's center
spreads acres-wide,
for here was sown
the future, all the plenty
time could not hide.

Replenishing earth,
the risen theme, the chorus
begun with dawn's tune,
grows still in its worth
when blooms are softest under
the light of the moon.

Publication. *Recurrence* (no. 18 (Autumn 1954), p. 28).

In an Oriental Garden

Hear the bamboo's note:
it is what ages wrote
in a multitudinous reach
of wordless speech.
Listen; and write a song,
centuries-long.
Hear the bamboo's sway;
what they say
when they are still;
if you are still,
hear a vast peace
that does not cease:
learn that the whole world's grief
is less than a dropped leaf.

Publication. *Recurrence* (no. 28 (February 1959), p. 13).

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