



YDA HILLIS ADDIS

Collected Poems

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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Collected Poems

Yda Hillis Addis

A Critical Reading Edition

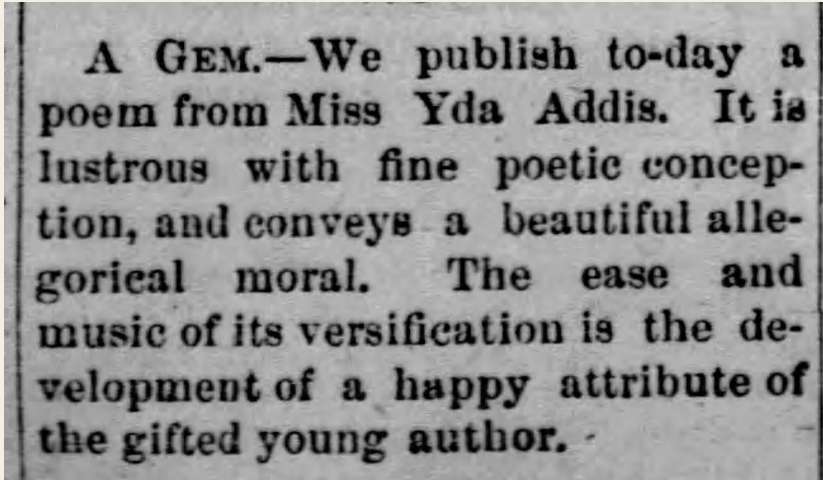
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The Text-Tech Papers

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

Archival Images

A short selection from the source record



The original Los Angeles Express printing of "Transformed," 28 January 1874.

Editorial Note

The newspaper poems are reset from original page images saved with the project, not from modern summaries. Each begins on a new page and carries its first-publication note. The surviving modern transcription of “Death Chimes” supplies only six of twelve stanzas; the omission is marked rather than silently invented. “Alvarado of Madrid” is reset from *The Californian* scan. Newspaper column wraps are rejoined only when the page clearly shows continuation.

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Introduction

Yda Hillis Addis was still a Los Angeles schoolgirl when her poems began appearing in the city's newspapers in 1874. They are ambitious, melancholy, formally alert pieces full of bells, ghosts, transformations, paintings, storms, and women testing the limits placed around them. Addis would go on to travel in Mexico, translate and reshape oral narratives, write Gothic fiction and California history, survive a disastrous public marriage, and apparently begin a second life under another name. This edition gathers the verse that can presently be recovered from original newspaper and magazine pages, including the long "Alvarado of Madrid," and restores the opening chapter of one of Southern California's most remarkable writing lives.

Biography

Yda Hillis Addis was born in Leavenworth, Kansas, on 3 October 1857 to photographer Alfred Shea Addis and Sarah Hillis Short Addis. Her childhood included travel in northern Mexico, where she learned Spanish and encountered the communities, legends, and landscapes that later shaped her journalism, translations, folklore, and fiction.

The family reached Southern California through San Pedro in 1873 and settled in Los Angeles. Addis entered the newly opened Los Angeles High School and became one of its first seven graduates in 1875. While still a student she participated in the Los Angeles Lyceum and literary clubs and published repeatedly in the *Los Angeles Express* and *Los Angeles Herald*. Nine poems from 1874 are presently identified, including "Transformed," "Silent Cities," "Two Scenes," the prize-winning "Death Chimes," and "The New Galatea." "Alvarado of Madrid" followed in *The Californian* in 1881, when Addis was still documented in Los Angeles.

After teaching in Tustin and Los Angeles, Addis expanded into travel writing, journalism, folklore, translation, and fiction. Her work appeared in *The Argonaut*, *The Californian*, *Overland Monthly*, and newspapers. She is now especially remembered for an early English-language version of the La Llorona story and for Gothic tales such as "A Human Tigress." Her writing both preserves Mexican narratives and reflects the unequal ethnographic habits of nineteenth-century Anglo publishing.

In the late 1880s Addis gathered material for a regional history of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura Counties. She married lawyer and politician Charles A. Storke in 1890; the marriage collapsed into divorce, litigation, imprisonment, and institutionalization amid claims that older accounts too readily repeated as neutral fact. Her 1891 county history was her only separately published book. For decades she was said to have escaped an asylum and disappeared around 1901. Documentary research summarized by Ashley C. Short instead makes a persuasive case that she lived as Adelayda Hillis Jackson and died in a San Antonio state hospital in June 1941, though the identification should still be described as a scholarly conclusion rather than an uncontested fact.

Los Angeles Newspaper Poems

The teenage Los Angeles poems | 1874

The currently recoverable poems Addis published while a student in Los Angeles during 1874.

Transformed

I had a friend; and ere I left his side,
He gave a pearly casket, fair to see;
And said: "From worldly eyes its contents hide,
And they shall be an endless joy to thee."

"But never lift its beauteous, glitt'ring lid,
To lay within it any foreign thing;
For then its treasures surely will be hid,
And bitter—bitter sorrow to thee bring."

Thro' many weary days of gloomy light,
I wandered from the home where dwelt my friend;
But his last gift o'er cast a lustre bright
Upon all things—and this did never end.

Until I roamed unto a distant shore,
Where shone a golden sand beneath the tide;
And 'midst the shells that decked its beaches o'er,
A wondrous, glowing jewel I espied.

Its crimson ray rejoiced my weary eyes,
And eager to possess, I wildly cried—
"My casket merits well such noble prize!
I'll grasp, and in it, deep, this jewel hide."

I stooped, and lifted up the glist'ning gem,
Unmindful of a pleading, warning voice;
And on a purple spread, with jewelled hem,
Enshrined the precious jewel of my choice.

There, day by day, I watched its beauteous gleam,
Nor favored with a glance another stone,
But laughed and tossed them to a babbling stream,
Until remained my Koh-i-noor alone.

At last, I went one stormy day, to see—
And found—a pebble in my ruby's stead!
My own dazed eyes had caused the light so free!
And all my dreams of splendor straight were dead.

Publication. First published in the Los Angeles newspaper press, 28 Jan. 1874; transcribed from the archived page image.

Silent Cities

Silent Cities! Are ye silent?
No! for through each dreary street
Echo ghostly, mournful foot-falls,
Never made by mortal feet.
Thro' your casements, zephyr-wafted,
Echo sweetly vibrant chords;
On your ramparts, in the moonlight,
Glitter shad'wy, spectral swords.

And from out a distant belfry,
Sounding on the evening air,
Chimes of almost heav'nly sweetness
Seem to tell the hour of prayer.
While a choir of mellow voices,
And an organ's notes of praise,
Swell an anthem of rejoicing,
Sweet in every thankful phrase.

While the great moon, rising slowly,
High above a distant hill,
Shines upon the mystic ocean,
With its waters never still;
And the ships, in graceful groupings,
Out upon the peaceful bay,
Rock upon the swelling billows,
Bright with phosphorescent play.

Silent Cities! Still—not silent—
Where is found your happy strand?
In the Oriental countries—
Or some blest Utopian land?
No!'tis Memory brings the semblance
Of the happy days now gone;
But the sweet, sad vision passeth—
Leaving me alone—alone!

Silent ye may be to others;
But to me no harp can thrill
Half the tuneful notes of rapture
That your slightest murmurs fill.

And no spot can e'er be dreary,
And no breath can e'er be cold,
While such glorious panorama
Recollections can unfold.

Publication. First published in the Los Angeles newspaper press, 10 Feb. 1874; transcribed from the archived page image.

As the Leaf

Thro' the forests, low winds sighing,
Seem like wand'ring spirits trying
To give vent to some weird grief;
And the fading sunlight lingers,
Tinting, as with magic fingers,
Traces of these mystic singers
 On each leaf.

Like the bright glow of the wildwood,
Fades the vivid flush of childhood;
Then come cares without relief:
But we hope, as each new sorrow
Comes, that we may haply borrow
Respite, on the Autumn morrow,
 Like a leaf.

Like the leaves that here are gleaming,
Is the life from strong hearts streaming—
Shining out in bold relief;
For, like leaves from off their branches,
Out of cities, deserts, trenches,
Every moment some soil launches—
 Falling leaf!

Slowly, too, our lives are fading;
First in dimly traced shading—
Then in veinings—bright but brief,—
Till the dim life lights up wholly,
And the new light drifts in slowly,
Gilding on each plant so lowly
 Many a leaf.

Like the leaves are we succeeded:
If we fall, we are not needed.
God affords us this belief:
Tho' we fall, our dust will nourish
Other leaves to live and flourish,
And our memories they'll cherish—
 Each new leaf.

By our Savior's calm direction,
In the day of resurrection,
Out of earth shall every leaf
Be uplifted into Heaven—
Never more be tempest-driven—
In His crown a place be given—
 Every leaf.

Publication. First published in the Los Angeles newspaper press, 18 Apr. 1874; transcribed from the archived page image.

A Picture

Do you remember ever
A spring day, long ago,
When you and I came slowly—
Across the fields, you know?

Do you remember ever
Our pleasant talk that day,—
And how, because of pleasure,
Seemed short the long, slow way?

How sweet unto our senses
Appeared the perfumed air!
How radiantly peaceful
Were all the meadows there!

The golden grain was tossing
Breast high beside the road;
Where stalwart reapers garnered
The harvest they had sewed.

The sky was clear as water
Save where, as white as foam,
A few stray, fleecy cloudlets
Were drifting o'er its dome.

I know we crossed a brooklet;
Its waters danced and sang,
And from the turf beside it
A tall white bird upsprang.

We sang sweet "Annie Laurie,"
And all along the way,
The reapers passed, and listened
Unto the strain so gay.

I see it all so clearly—
The sloping banks, the hill;
I hear the sweet sounds breaking
Upon the evening still.

But now the grain is garnered—
The grass has faded brown;

And we, who rode there gaily,
Have also sterner grown.

Our golden grain is garnered;
But ah! a deadly blight
Has fallen down upon it,
And day is turned to night.

Of all our by-gone pleasures,
Nothing remains, beside
The ever precious mem'ry
Of that sweet Spring-time ride.

Publication. First published in the Los Angeles newspaper press, 30 May 1874; transcribed from the archived page image.

Clouds

Clouds are floating over yonder—
Tiny, fleecy clouds, and white:
And against the sky's pure azure,
Beautiful they seem, and bright.

O, I wonder if those tiny,
Pretty cloudlets ever form
Murky messengers of evil—
Such as herald in a storm?

Can it be such lovely vapors
Cherish tempest and unrest?
Why, they seem like downy plumage,
Torn from a cygnet's breast.

Clouds are gath'ring over yonder—
Gone is all their sheen of pearl:
And around their leaden edges,
Brassy banners they unfurl.

Now across the dark'ning heavens
Scudding drifts of terror fly:
And, in lieu of gentle zephyrs,
Moan hoarse winds, and sob, and sigh.

Only see! from out the cloud-bank
Darts a jagged, flashing spear:
'Tis the weapon of the storm-king,
And a hurricane is near.

Clouds are thick in inky blackness,
Vailing all of Heaven's light.
But a few short hours since mid-day,
And the world is dark as night.

Lightnings glare, and thunders shiver:
Howls the wind, and drifts the rain;
O, I fear that I shall never
See the blessed calm again!

But the bitt' rest pain is, knowing
That the dainty cloudlets fair—
Those I gazed upon so fondly—
Brought the tempest in the air.

Publication. First published in the Los Angeles newspaper press, 9 June 1874; transcribed from the archived page image.

Two Scenes

Gaily singeth Spanish Lola,
Standing in the old zaguan,
Where the brilliant tropic blossoms
Fall her cool retreat upon.

Lustrous, silky, thick and ebon,
Hang her braids of sweeping hair;
Scarlet blossoms of granada
Twined among its meshes there.

Dreamy Lola looks and listens,
Pauses in her low refrain;
But she hears no nearing footfall,
And the song begins again.

Rustling are the palms above her,
Drowsy is the hum of bees;
Lola waits to meet her lover
'Mid such lulling sounds as these.

Eighteen Summers knoweth Lola,
And not one of them can tell
When her heart beat not in gladness
At the coming of Manuel.

Tall and brown is Manuelito,
Strong and brave in pride of youth,
And Lolita trusteth wholly
In his vows of love and truth.

Dusky hair and scarlet blossom,
Olive cheek and throat of pearl,
Song of love and note of swallow,
Slanting sun on form of girl.

II

This the scene within the patio,
Turn we now where, far away,
Cruel on the dusty prairie
Shines the scorching sun to-day.

Clouds of dust rise thick and stifling
On the quiv'ring Summer air;
Shout of rider, neigh of palfrey
Mingle with the sound of prayer.

Here the lurking, wild Apache
Fell, with arrow keen and true,
On a band of weary trav'lers,
Worn and armless, brave—but few.

And the savage gains the battle,
Pushing on with demon yell;
Twang of bow, and target's rattle,
Like a band of fiends from hell.

There, beside the trampled road-side,
Pierced with arrows thro' the breast;
Damp his brow with clinging death-dew,
White the lips that Lola pressed.

Poor Manuel lies sorely wounded,
Wounded, truly, unto death;
For his eye is fixed and glaring—
Short and broken comes his breath.

Fierce the warriors strive around him,
But he heedeth not their cries,
“Angel madre! Santa Mio!”
“Lola!” murmurs he, and dies.

All in vain, O waiting Lola!
Is thy watch for poor Manuel;
You shall meet, but sooner or later
None on earth may dare to tell.

Put away the scarlet blossoms,
Don the robes of grief and loss,
Only this remains, Dolores;
'Tis the blessed Savior's cross.

Publication. First published in the Los Angeles newspaper press, 14 June 1874; transcribed from the archived page image.

Death Chimes

Tolling out in solemn grandeur
From the church across the way,
Chimes of death are ever ringing—
Slowly, sadly, day by day.

As the church makes sign of mourning—
Mourning for her cherished dead—
All the death-chimes seem like anguished
Wailings of the souls just fled.

Six stanzas not yet recoverable from the available image

Hark! another chime is sounding,
Who is this so lowly laid?
Lovely though in death's wan slumber—
She was once a blithesome maid.

On the bosom still and breathless,
Interlaced her fingers fair;
And the marble brow is shaded
By soft, clustering, clinging hair.

Tolling, tolling, ever tolling,
Death of good and death of bad;
Each by some one is lamented,
Each chime tells a story sad.

But it truly matters little
When or where our lives depart;
For whene'er it be, a death-chime
Tolleth from some loving heart.

Publication. First published in the *Los Angeles Express*, 2 Nov. 1874. The original contains twelve stanzas. Six are transcribed here from a modern excerpt; the remaining six are visible only in a low-resolution full-page photograph and await verification from the original issue or a higher-resolution microfilm scan.

The Princess Story

O, I am a queen and my fair domain
 Is an island far out in the sea.
I have treasures there that are rich and rare,
 But their value is little to me;
For all of their worth is as mouldering earth
 Compared with a chain of pearl
That was stolen away on a luckless day
 By a trusted, faithless girl.
O, I loved her well, tho' I would not tell
 Of my love to the standers-by;
For I hate the heart that can act a part,
 And its every feeling cry.
I was called of late by affairs of state
 To the mainland o'er the sea,
And the chain of pearl to this faithless girl
 I gave to conserve for me.
My pinnacle bold, with its prow of gold,
 Sped fast o'er the sunlit sea;
Then early and late the affairs of state
 Were carefully judged by me.
At last—at last—was the labor past,
 Then gladly and fast sailed we
Over dimpling waves, above ocean caves,
 To the kingdom in the sea.
When we anchored there in the harbor fair
 And I passed to my home again,
My steward old in a passion told
 Of the theft of the pearlen chain.
How the treach'rous maid till the even staid
 In the lofty treasure tower;
How at close of day she had gone away
 With the necklace and her dower.
When the boat halfway was across the bay,
 Had arisen a mighty storm,

And their tho'ts of chase gave speedily place
To wonder and alarm.

Then a fisher, come from his mainland home,
Had brought them the tale of the wreck
And the death of one who was swept alone
From the slippery, reeling deck.

It was plain in view of his cottage, tho'
He was powerless to save.
He had seen the lost one wildly tossed
On the crest of a monster wave,

As she raised a cry to the leaden sky
And struggled to rise again;
From her neck, afar in the lightning's glare
Shone the clasp of the stolen chain.

Ere the morning's dawn the storm was gone,
And the water was still and clear;
So he cast his boat on the bay afloat
And passed the breakers near—

And an impulse, born of a hope forlorn,
Turned his eyes to the depths beneath;
And he saw a face, full of wondrous grace,
That had scarcely a mark of death—

All her golden hair was entangled there
In the ocean's gaudy weed—
For the chain was fast o'er a coral cast,
And it fastened her down like lead.

As the water swelled, on the body held
In the close embrace of death,
The pendant ball would arise and fall
As if by a peaceful breath.

Still she lieth deep, 'neath the waves asleep;
For all earthly grave would never hold
A treacherous friend who could condescend
To sacrifice love for gold.

O, the sea is green and my jewels' sheen
I have left in its quiet rest,
They are rich and rare, but I cannot wear
What hath lain on a corpse's breast.

Publication. First published in the Los Angeles newspaper press, 18 Dec. 1874; transcribed from the archived page image.

The New Galatea

Stands a statue in my garden,
Tall, and cast in noble mould;
Calm despair, unspoken sorrow
Stamps the features wan and cold.

Never twines a brilliant creeper
'Round the marble at its base,
Ne'er alights a fluttering songster
Near its icy, woeful face.

Never falls the golden sunlight
There with touch that seemeth warm,
Never hangs a flowery garland
On the white, extended arm.

Ever falls a chilling shadow
From it on the haunted air,
And a curse seems hanging darkly
O'er the figure cold and fair.

We have read, in ancient fable,
Of a statue life-endowed;
Just the opposite, the story
Of this woman's form, so proud.

Slowly grew the transformation;
Well, it was a mournful task,
Hiding all her noble feelings
'Neath a stony, changeless mask.

Then the slender, nimble fingers
Took a strange, unknown repose;
And the tongue, anon so fluent,
Idly rested, slowly froze.

Thus went on the transformation,
Every day a greater part;
And the change was quite accomplished,
Then was stilled the beating heart.

Then we took her to the garden,
Placed her where the ardent sun,

With his golden warmth and glory,
Might undo what grief had done.

But his rays are all refracted,
And the bending figure stands,
Turning eastward sightless eyeballs,
Stretching southward lifeless hands.

Publication. First published in the Los Angeles newspaper press, 22 Dec. 1874; transcribed from the archived page image.

Later Periodical Verse

The later Los Angeles-period poem | 1881

A later narrative poem published while Addis was still documented in Los Angeles.

Alvarado of Madrid

Adriano Alvarado, through whose veins there coursed the strain
Of a blood as blue and haughty as the royal line of Spain,
Was a devotee of music, though a courtier he, and young,
And his madrigals were sweetest that the Spanish maidens sung.
All that made the life of Madrid for companions of his age
Was to Alvarado only an interpolated page
In the book of life he pondered—only one brief interlude
In the drama of existence. All the sweet solicitude
Of his fairest country-women, all the shine of liquid eyes
Lifted up to his in wondering, half-expectant, soft surprise,
Laughed he down with slightest pity, holding no regret nor ruth,
In the waywardness of genius and the light caprice of youth.
He would turn from wildest revels, he would slight the gayest bands,
To pursue some strain of music wrought by simple peasant hands.
In the day of Alvarado there was not in all the land
Any native-born composer of the church's music grand;
And the holy dignitaries trembled with a wrathful shame
For the genius so perverted from the church's need and fame.
But his kindred and the people of the city held him dear,
Since no vices, only follies, marked his brave and bright career.
And his dearest foe might bluster to impeach his life in vain,
Since he held his spotless honor dearer than the crown of Spain,
Till upon his restless spirit fell a thought with evil rife,
Sapping all the happy promise from his else so fruitful life.
Whether elemental forces stirred with potent sensuousness,
Or some current unsuspected of the Moorish blood laid stress
On his fine, poetic nature, none could hazard, none divine;
But a madness seized upon him, madder than the craze of wine:
To revive the Inca worship of a far south-western clime,
Where the sun, the day-god mighty, should resume a sway sublime,
Adriano bowed: not lightly, with the fervor of a day,
But with vehemence and passion. He, with none to say him nay,
Built a great barbaric altar, faced to greet the rising sun,
Decked with every costly splendor that his ample wealth had won;
And he bent, when morning's banners fluttered redly in the east,
By the fane in humble worship, like an olden Inca priest.
None can picture all the sorrow, all the awe-struck fear, that broke
Over pious Madrid people. Then their oldest prelate spoke:

“Only Satan’s machinations have seduced this goodly youth
To idolatrous diversion from the way of light and truth.
I have exorcised the demon long, with candle, book, and bell,
But my weak and fruitless effort fails before his potent spell.
I will send to ask instructions from the holy one at Rome;
Meanwhile, minister unto him daily, in some Christian home.”
Time, the wearer out of vigils, sent the days slow lapsing by,
Till the pontiff, from his palace, sent incisive, terse reply:
“Mayhap that his body sickens; leechcraft something may avail,
Stayed by spiritual solace from within the holy pale.
For a spirit sorely tempted, much may be derived of good
From the tranquil, peaceful habits of a holy brotherhood.
Give him themes for churchly music, let him write, and let him play,
In the cloister’s safe seclusion, for a year and for a day.”

In a gorge, remote and dreary, of the mountains of Castile,
Stood a lonely monastery, grim and gray, a looming pile,
On whose dark roof, steeply sloping, never fell a ray of sun,
In whose corridors and chapel chant and prayer were never done.
Thither banished, Alvarado brought his raging, restless heart,
Without slightest inclination to a penitential part.
But the fiat was resistless and immutable as fate;
Though he offered prayer and promise, vain were they, and he must wait.
For a time he found a pleasure in the chill, monastic tone
Of the place, that wrought upon him with a power all its own.
Strangely, too, the zealous ardor of his whilom pagan course
Had abated, though its fever burned with undiminished force.
All day long he paced the circuit of his narrow-bounded cell,
Harkening to the oft-recurring clangor of the convent bell.
All night long he alternated prayer and curse and sleepless dole,
Till a deep despair succeeded to the frenzy of his soul,
Venting its excess in music; so the monks, for many days,
Heard his organ deeply pealing tones of wondrous power and praise.
Then a silence fell; they left him to himself a little space,
And a longer, until terror grew upon their hearts apace.
Then they sought him with foreboding—and they found him!—all the score
Of his music lay about him, strewn upon the earthen floor,
Drifted sheets, and still among them Alvarado lay at peace,
Dead before the silent organ, with his face upon the keys.

When the brothers would have raised him, straight the nerveless fingers
thrilled,
And a hush of expectation all within the chamber stilled,
While the dead hands, slowly lifted, wandered all the key-board o'er,
And a dirge wailed out, as never fell on mortal ears before.
Of the hapless Alvarado, only this survives his name.
When, with awe and tender reverence for his legacy, they came
To lift up the scattered music, it had perished where it lay;
Even while they gazed, it paled, and paled, and faded quite away.
Every year, in that lone monastery on the mountain-side,
On the night that marks the time when hapless Alvarado died,
Sounds within his cell, untenanted, the sorrow-burdened strain,
And a rustle as of sheeted music drifting down again;
And sojourning pilgrims, listening till they mark the burden, say
That it lingers ever with them. True it is, that to this day,
In the poorer streets of Madrid, on the city's outer verge,
There is played a strain of music known as "Alvarado's Dirge."

Publication. First published in *The Californian*, vol. 3, 1881, pp. 167–68.

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Colophon

Publication and production notes

This critical reading edition was edited by Brian Kim Stefans for The Text-Tech Papers, Los Angeles, in 2026, as part of *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. The poems were reset from the source pages identified in the publication notes and datasheet. The book was composed in EB Garamond on a cream field at 6 × 9 inches. The cover uses original abstract artwork prepared for this edition.