

THE NEW ADAM



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The new Adam



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THE
NEW
ADAM



B y L O U I S U N T E R M E Y E R

POETRY

FIRST LOVE (<i>Out of Print</i>)	1911
CHALLENGE	1914
THESE TIMES	1917
THE NEW ADAM	1920

PARAPHRASES and PARODIES

THE YOUNGER QUIRE (<i>Out of Print</i>)	1911
"——AND OTHER POETS"	1916
POEMS OF HEINRICH HEINE	1917
· INCLUDING HORACE	1919

PROSE

THE NEW ERA IN AMERICAN POETRY	1919
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COLLECTIONS

MODERN AMERICAN POETRY	1919
MODERN BRITISH POETRY	1920

THE
NEW ADAM

LOUIS UNTERMAYER



NEW YORK
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A POET
(For J. S. U.)

*There was a late and lonely nightingale,
That leaned its bosom on an icy thorn;
And, from the branch that threatened to impale,
A bleeding ecstasy was born.*

*So have you conquered agony, and torn
A triumph out of torture. Oh, rejoice
While, from the stab of loneliness and scorn,
Rises the rapture of your voice.*

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CONTENTS

DEDICATION *v*

A NOTE ON THE POETRY OF LOVE *xiii*

THE NEW ADAM

THE NEW ADAM	3
HANDS	5
ASLEEP	7
SUMMER STORM	8
WALLS AGAINST EDEN	11
A MARRIAGE	13
WRANGLE	15
NEUROSIS	16
THE WANDERER	18
INFIDELITY	19
PICNIC ON THE GRASS	20
DUST	22
COME!	24
EQUALS	25
LOVE	27
IVORY AND ROSE	29
HAIR-DRESSING	30
SUPPLICATION	32
WORDS	34
THE MOON	35
INTERCESSION	37
LAST WISHES	38

ENOUGH	39
THE MATCH	40
THE BEREAVED	41
MATTER	43
FANTASY	45
MATINÉE	46
THE ETERNAL MASCULINE	48
ANNA	50
NOCTURNE	51
LANGUAGE	52
CATALOGUE	54
"SO REIN UND SCHÖN"	56
RAPUNZEL	57
WINDY DAYS	58
BRAIN AND HEART	59
MOZART	61
BEYOND SOUND	62
CONFIDENCE	63
DISTANCES	64
ALMOST	65
HOMAGE	66
THE EMBARRASSED AMORIST	67
THE VOICE	69
A STREET WALKER	70
THE DERELICT	72
IMPLICATION	73
TECHNIQUE	74
GHOSTS	76
THE SHRINE	78
ADVICE	79
HAUNTED HOUSE	82
WORDS FOR A JIG	83

NIGHTMARE	86
HABIT	87
END OF THE COMEDY	88
THE WORN STRING	89
THE UNFINISHED PARTING	91
THE LAST DAY	93
THE PARK REVISITED	94
FAIRMOUNT CEMETERY	96
AFTER A YEAR	98
RETROSPECT	100
CHANGE	102
DISILLUSION	104
FREE	105
GOLD AND WHITE	106
SURRENDER	107
THE PRODIGAL	108
THE CURE	109
THE WISE WOMAN	110
THE HOLY CITY	112
ESCAPE	113
YOU	115
HEREAFTER	116
BIRTHDAY	117
FULFILMENT	120

A NOTE ON THE POETRY OF LOVE

ALMOST the first thing that strikes one after reading a quantity of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century English Poetry is the preponderance of love-poetry. It seems to have been not only the major theme of every minor poet, it was practically the only theme of even the acknowledged leaders. Sentimental love, ideal love, platonic love, lyric and libidinous love, love elegant and *de luxe*—the variety seems all-encompassing at first glance. And then, beneath the apparent diversity of design, one is disturbed by a singular monotony; one quality stands out which gives this imposing structure a look of shoddy and crumbling artificiality. Its mass merely emphasizes its plastered columns and chipped cornices. The disillusion is bewildering. What has disintegrated? Why is it that what, in our youth, appeared to be a marble temple now seems to be little more than a suburban stucco-house?

The answer is, I believe, fairly simple. These "enamored architects of airy rhyme" were, in

spite of their graceful decorations, clumsy in the use of their material; ignorant, at least as artists, of the possibilities of their most common property. They wrote endlessly of women. But, for one reason or other, women had ceased to be human to them and had become somehow both subnormal and super-terrestrial. These poets gave their mistresses strange attributes; they equipped them with inexplicable fancies and extraordinary habits of mind. Unable or unwilling to probe their differences, they accounted for them all by surrounding the opposite sex with a specious and convenient "mystery"; they made the objects of their affection less and less like ordinary human beings until their heroines seemed creatures of another and incredible world. This combination of worship and bewilderment is faithfully reflected in the inability of most modern love-lyricists to write actually about love.

Let me take, as significant examples of the same tendency, three contrary temperaments. To make the range as great as possible, let me choose Pope, Tennyson, Swinburne. To Pope, the feminine world was a world of Dresden china, polite

persiflage, bonbons; a world of elaborate coiffures and compliments. Tennyson saw it as a universe of suave saints with red plush souls; his vision beheld a devotional and nun-like race dominated by impulses angelic in conception and mawkish in fulfilment. Swinburne, looking at the same world at the same time, saw it populated principally by Liliths, Faustines, Messalinas, Dolores-es, Félices, Aholibahs—a tribe of perfumed and perverse ladies lying about in Graeco-Gallic gardens. . . . None of these poets knew or, to be more accurate, knew how to express what love between the sexes really meant. To Pope it seemed a kind of fleshly *vers de société*; Tennyson found it serene and smug; to Swinburne it was sick and sensual and strange. The more these singers celebrated their heroines, the further the true figure of Woman receded until it blurred and was lost in a fog of distortion and unreality.

So—with the exception of Browning and Meredith—with all of the modern poets. Betrayed by their own preconceptions, they scarcely saw the objects of their lyrical concern. Ignoring the living model, they evolved figures exaggerated and

over-colored in one-dimensional effects. Remembering only that the poetry of exaltation will be always the highest, they forgot that man's love-life is not lived on one plane, they forgot that even its exaltation is dependent on an intricacy of kindred and even contradictory moods. They forgot that all human relations, even the tenderest, have been strengthened by the commonplaces and delightful irrelevances of existence. They forgot that a fully-rounded passion has not only experienced the major emotions of possession, hate, hunger and scorn, but has also known the minor moods of irony, irritation, frivolity, *ennui*. Their poetry pretended to express the depths of the closest intimacy; it simulated candor, promised a complete exposition. But it was scarcely ever a true picture, for it omitted everything but the high lights. Even the design was false. It neglected the little fluctuating phases of love which, besides being ecstatic and mystical, are so often petulant, sportive, cynical, sometimes merely companionable, sometimes actually flippant and vulgar.

This queer combination of toughness and tenderness is not impossible in English verse.

It is not even new. It can be found not so much in the pages of the latest Georgians as in the lines of the earliest Elizabethans. What is freshest and, above all, frankest in contemporary amative verse attempts the almost forgotten blend of hardness, heat and raillery of the poets of the Sixteenth Century. A resistless curiosity quickens the literature from Marlowe to Marvell. This radiant honesty smoulders in the sonnets of Shakespeare, breaks into angry sulphur-colored flames in Drayton, showers bright sparks through the levity of Thomas Carew, plays fitfully through the mocking banter of Andrew Marvell and bursts into that blaze of grossness and awe which is the glory of John Donne.

Suddenly something went out of the world. The sparkle died; the ashes, still warm, were scattered. For almost two centuries the poetry of love was also the poetry of false postures, of attitudinizing and primping rhetoric; its very over-emphasis revealed a lack of emotional integrity. Its glow was, in the worst sense, "hard and gem-like," the sham fire of an opal; it was a celebration of the flicker not the flame. From the artificial polish of Pope to the even more polished

xviii *A Note on the Poetry of Love*

artifice of Swinburne, little moves except in a skillfully superficial life. Real feeling gives way to a *pastiche* of emotion; in its desperate preoccupation with passion there is evident the failure to deal openly with this most difficult theme. The artist abdicates; the puritan is regnant.

It is strange that this Puritanism should be confined to the Anglo-Saxon. It is not, as one hears charged so often, a condition native to his temperament. This inhibitory reticence, incredible to the Latin or the Teuton, does not spring from a prosaic nature, for at heart the English-speaking race is essentially romantic—a tribe of adventurers, inventors, explorers; dissatisfied and probing romanticists. And yet the race that penetrated the dark heart of Africa has pirouetted before the heart of Woman and invented elaborate excuses for not exploring that darker continent. It has escaped the hazardous adventure by capitalizing Delicacy, Reverence, Womanhood. Until very recently the attitude of the English (and, for that matter, the American) amorist has been both excessively fervent and exorbitantly fatuous. When the worshiper was

not prostrate in a sacramental adoration, he rose no further than his knees to an almost impossibly sentimental one. His prayers and postures were often not so much imitations of passion as parodies of it.

In the last few years we have been witnessing a return to the upright vigor, the wide and healthy curiosity of our outspoken ancestors. No longer addressing the object of man's affections as if she were an embroidered wall-motto or an abstract ecstasy, poets like Thomas Hardy, Lascelles Abercrombie, Rupert Brooke, Edwin Arlington Robinson and, most notably of all, D. H. Lawrence, are writing dramatic lyrics and monologs that reveal the loved one as fully as they express the lover. Theirs is a love-poetry that searches even while it sings. It is written with a directness that tells of a living and intimate relation. It is addressed chiefly to a woman rather than Woman, to one who is not only mistress but friend, the fellow-mortal, the divine average. It has not the sound of a perfunctory peroration or a hymn to an absent angel who has either been smirched by or cleansed of the blemish of humanity.

xx *A Note on the Poetry of Love*

Such poetry combines the two urgencies which impel all vital art:—it fuses the emotion remembered in tranquillity with the passion kindled by the heat and humors of the moment.

THE NEW ADAM

THE NEW ADAM

Her body is that glorious gate
Opening on fresh and surging skies,
The door of flesh that holds a late
And larger Paradise.

Through this I plunge with hungry haste
Down the old garden, stock and root.
Nothing is barred; I touch and taste
Its unforbidden fruit.

The amorous jungle spreads its feasts,
The lion fawns about my knee;
A new strength dawns; and all the beasts
Are risen and contained in me.

Soft thunders gather as the glen
Unfolds the tree from which she shakes
Her heart for me—and once again
The wave of lightning breaks. . . .

Oh shut the gate! Let me be driven
Down the drab byways of the past.
What right have I in such a heaven
To whom earth clings so fast!

HANDS

Strange, how this smooth and supple joint can be
Put to so many purposes. It checks
And rears the monsters of machinery
And shapes the idle gallantries of sex.

Those hands that light the fuse and dig the
trap,
Fingers that spin the earth or plunge through
shame—
And yours, that lie so lightly in your lap,
Are only blood and dust—all are the same.

What mastery directs them through the world
And gives these delicate bones so great a
power? . . .
You drop your head. You sleep. Your hands are
curled
Loosely, like some half-opened, perfumed
flower.

An hour ago they burned in mine and sent
Armies with banners charging through my
veins.

Now they are cool and white; they rest content,
Curved in a smile. The mystery remains.

ASLEEP

These hands, two nimble butterflies—
I never saw them at rest;
Nor knew a tide so regular
Could move through your stormy breast.
You loved to meet life dancing
With glistening steps, till all
Your fluent body seemed a curve
In a restless waterfall.

And now you lie here so coldly,
So unbelievably still;
A stone on a marble river,
Ice on a wintry hill.
Something has made your beauty
Inscrutable and grave;
Holding your once warm body
In the curve of a frozen wave.

SUMMER STORM

We lay together in the sultry night.
A feeble light
From some invisible street-lamp crept
Into the corner where you slept;
Fingered your cheeks, flew softly round your hair,
Then dipped in the sweet valley of your breasts
And fluttered, like a bird between two nests,
Till it lay quiet there.
My eyes were closing and I may have dreamed—
At least it seemed
That you and I
Had ceased to be but were somehow
As earth and sky. . . .

The night grew closer still, and now
Heat-lightnings played between us and warm
 thrills
Ran through the cool sides of the trembling hills.
Then darkness and a tension in the black
Hush like a breath held back;

A rippling through the ground, a windless breeze
That reached down to the sensitive roots of trees;
A tremor like the pulse of muffled knocks,
Or like the silent opening of locks . . .

There was a rising of unfettered seas
With great tides pulling at the stars and rocks
As though to draw them all together.
Then in a burst of blinding weather,
The lightnings flung
Long, passionate arms about the earth that clung
To her wild lover.

Suddenly above her
The whole sky tumbled in a sweeping blaze,
Gathering earth in one tight-locked embrace,
Drenching her in a flood of silver flame.
Hot thunders came;
And still the storm kept plunging, seeking ever
The furthest cranny, till the faraway
Streams felt each penetrating quiver
And the most hidden river
Rose and became released. . . .

At last the stabbings ceased,
The thunders died.

But still they lay
Side by side,
While moonbeams crept
Into the heavenly corner where earth slept;
Dipping among her rosy hills, lighting above
Her curved and sloping hollows, till
She too was still.
Beloved and blest,
His cloudy head lay, seeking rest
In the sweet-smelling valley of her breast,
And each was huddled in each other's love;
Or so it seemed . . .
My eyes were closing and I may have dreamed.

WALLS AGAINST EDEN

Now Adam, dazzled, ill at ease,
 Inspects the copper-colored skies;
Ringed with the roar of strange machineries,
 He thinks of Paradise.

Yes, this is better. Here, at least,
 Is speed and struggle, not the old
Languor of Eden and the lukewarm beast—
 Here life is hot and cold!

Released for action, Adam is
 God in these swift complexities;
He laughs and leaps from cliff to precipice,
 Lurches through toppling seas.

New grain is always his to thresh,
 Through him all energy is hurled;
He rides triumphant on the tides of flesh,
 Pride of a gaping world.

Yet Adam, hero of all he sees,
Remains untamed, unreconciled;
And, in the midst of swaggering victories,
Turns like a wayward child;

Hungers for all he spurned, and shrinks
From clamor and the applauding cries;
Lost in a storm of dreams, he sinks
Remembering Paradise.

A MARRIAGE

I tell you it is over and I mean it.

You have been tugging at my joy too long.
The coming of the end—you must have seen it—
Finds us still struggling, stubborn but not
strong.

You light your darkness on me, you rekindle
Things long burnt out upon my warmth in vain.
Your flicker fails; the gusty fires dwindle.
And though you use me up, what do you gain?

If you could only drink some buoyance from me
Or draw me up, like blood, to be transfused.
But all your heavy broodings overcome me,
And leave us both bewildered and misused.

Well, let us try once more this magnifier
Of pride and passions. Let it burn us through.
Come, take of me whatever you require;
I shall not tell you what I steal from you.

Thus, feeding but not fed, we waste each other,
And war with weapons never understood;
And win, with each new ending, one another;
And take up arms again . . . and find it
good.

WRANGLE

The room was tense with a sullen silence;
There was no sound
But the tentative chirping of a caged canary.
Suddenly you said, "....."

And there were only
Your words and mine,
Beating their two-edged swords,
Clashing and wounding with a fierce intolerance;
Seeking the beloved blood.
Red and smoking words,
Hurling their brands in a dark abandon.
Words of destruction,
Hot to the hand,
Hotter to the throat;
Words of living, hurtling steel,
Blazing, bursting, screaming, shattering. . . .

Till there remained nothing
But the caged canary,
Pouring his cool passion
Over the glowing ruins of our peace.

NEUROSIS

Can this be you, this harsh, contemptuous thing;
Loveless and loathsome? Will you never shed
This angry hatred? Must you turn and sting
Whatever you can hurt, discomfited?

Now it is two o'clock. We both have tired
Beneath the blows of futile argument.
And still you rouse yourself to strike, inspired
With some dark force that never can be spent.

You will have one thing only and no other,
And even that seems hopeless and defiled.
You who have forced yourself to be my mother,
Resent the fact that you are not my child.

Alone in this, your baffled insurrection,
You will not arbitrate although you fall;
Facing a world of blundering imperfection,
Blind to its offers, you reject them all.

I see you, torn and lashed by your frustration,
Turning to rend what little joy you find;
In love with nothing more than cold negation,
You seek but never hope to meet your kind.

How will this suicide of fierce denial,
This rivalry of light and darkness end?
Will you not give yourself a desperate trial
And, much forgetting, learn to comprehend
Love that is less a father than a friend?

THE WANDERER

Is it a tribute or betrayal when,
Turning from all the sweet, accustomed ways,
I leave your lips and eyes to seek you in
Some other face?

Why am I searching after what I have?
And going far to find the near at hand?
I do not know. I only know I crave
To find you at the end.

I only know that love has many a hearth,
That hunger has an endless path to roam,
That beauty is the ghost that haunts the earth
And leads me home.

INFIDELITY

You have not conquered me; it is the surge
Of love itself that beats against my will;
It is the sting of conflict, the old urge
That calls me still.

It is not you I love, it is the form
And shadow of all lovers who have died
That gives you all the freshness of a warm
And unfamiliar bride.

It is your name I breathe, your hands I seek;
It will be you when you are gone.
And yet the dream, the name I cannot speak
Is that that lures me on.

It is the golden summons, the bright wave
Of banners calling me anew;
It is all passion, perilous and grave—
It is not you.

PICNIC ON THE GRASS

You, with your face to the sky,
Here, but still out of my reach,
Listening gravely while I
Burst into passionate speech.

Begging you not to delay,
While youth is a jubilant strife,
Till your hair turns a virtuous gray
And your grandchildren mock you with life.

Saying, " You must not deny,
But burn yourself out with the flame;
This placidly living a lie
Is ten times as shameful as shame.

" Oh, rouse yourself; kindle and burn
With April before it slips " . . .
You move your head slightly and turn
Your whimsical eyes to my lips.

Your eyes seem to lift with a queer
Light, as of battle half-won;
They challenge, "Come, make yourself clear,
O wise man." And I—I talk on.

DUST

Listen—the dust at our feet whispers and
breathes.

It speaks in a voiceless air that is delicate but
august.

Hurry, it says, for the wave that rushes and
seethes

Will spend itself on the rocks and crumble with
you in the dust.

I turn from the earth to your eyes; they are
bright as before.

Your ears can hear nothing grave. That is
merciful and just.

Thank God that you are not burdened with
knowledge and useless lore;

You can dance through a world that surrenders
to murder, to squalor and lust.

Thank God, your eyes are screened from the day
that I see

When your laugh is a bony grimace and the
gold in your hair is rust;

When your flowery hand, with its five white
petals, will be

A sensitive flower, turned yellow, that withers
and droops in the dust. . . .

And we will be lying apart, but compassionate
winds will blow,

Mingling our little separateness, a handful of
doubt and distrust.

And the years will come thundering by; trium-
phantly they will go

To creep back broken and join us, with the
night, in the frail dust.

COME!

Once more you falter and delay;
Your feeble courage fails again.
You'll yield to me, sometime, you say.
When?

When will you make all this worth while,
And put our jangling world in tune?
You answer, with a frightened smile,
"Soon."

But soon I will be cold and dumb
To your warm lips and child-like brow.
Faint heart, hold off no longer. Come—
Now!

EQUALS

You child, how can you dare complain
That you and I may be mismated
Because, you say, you lack a brain
And I'm so highly educated.

The body is the greater thing;
And you are doubly gifted when
You have such hands and breasts that bring
More peace than all the plans of men.

Take pride in this, your beauty; drink
The wine it offers for our love.
Be glad you do not have to think—
One thoughtful lover is enough!

Holding the dearest things too cheap,
You give yourself a needless strife;
Wiser than words, your dumb limbs keep
More secrets than I know of life.

We're equal partners, that is plain.

Our love cannot grow dull or shoddy

While I have such a lively brain

And you have such a lovely body.

LOVE

You close your book and put it down,
As one might drop a tiresome task;
And, with what tries to be a frown,
You turn and ask:

“How can you care one hour for me
Unless your love is all a sham?
‘Childish and cheap’—but can I be
More than I am?”

“Your poet knows that love delights
Only its equals, near or far . . .
‘*We love the things we love,*’ he writes,
‘*For what they are.*’”

You serious child, how can you place
Such utter credence in a song?
It is, I grant, a lovely phrase;
But it is wrong.

Why look, my darling, at the world
Rolling in blood and murderous flame.
And what's this life? A brief torch hurled
To darkness, whence it came.

The world is easy to revile
Where much is false and little true.
And yet we live in it, and smile.
—And love it, too.

Cease, then, to talk of wrong or right;
Finalities are cold and far.
We love the things we love in spite
Of what they are.

IVORY AND ROSE

Here in this moonlit room, I watch you slip
One shoulder from your dress and turn to me;
A polished statue, flushing to the tip
Of marble fingers gradually.

And, like a ripe moon out of flimsy clouds,
Blossoms the shining fullness of your breast.
These curves conceal, this dear perfection
shrouds
A soft, miraculous nest.

Your ivory body pulses as the white
Flesh catches flame and rosy tremblings move
Over this sanctuary of delight,
The last asylum of our love.

HAIR-DRESSING

Before the prim, old mirror
That stands so stiffly there,
With puritan precision
You re-arrange your hair.

Knitting your childlike forehead,
As, with a whimsical pout,
Your fingers, smooth and dextrous,
Bring order out of rout.

But here a coil escapes you,
And there a bright strand shakes
Over your neck and shoulders,
Like little, yellow snakes.

Serious and ensnaring,
Each skillful hand begins
To make a knotted pattern,
Bristling with puffs and pins.

You pause to turn and ask me
How this appears, or that,
Till all is smoothed and finished
With a last, loving pat. . . .

My pretty, proper darling,
With not one hair amiss,
Who turns, like some calm duty,
One powdered cheek to kiss,

Are you the same wild creature
I held last night, and found
Sleeping upon my shoulder
With all her hair unbound?

SUPPLICATION

Take away your soft hair and your softer lips,
Loose me from your twining fingers; turn away
your eyes.

For I loved this earth, and now a headlong pas-
sion slips
All its earthly ties.

I can wait for heaven, if that is to be;
Let me have those common days and know
their simple worth.

Do not make the quiet-colored moments dull to
me—
Let me keep the earth.

There is much I long to look at, much I long to
taste.

You have mocked a thousand raptures with
contemptuous power.
Do not let your beauty lay all other beauty
waste;
Spare a casual hour.

Let old music thrill me to my finger tips;

Bring me back the glamor of the things I used
to prize;

Lift this cloudy radiance where I only see your
lips.

Turn away your eyes!

WORDS

Why are your lips so soft and still?
They neither laugh nor weep.
Scorn cannot rouse; nor anger kill
The silence that they keep.

Your quiet drowns my vehemence
Till I grow hard and seek
A harsher tone, a loud offence
To make you start and speak.

But when I see those silent lips
Tremble like startled birds,
I put away the cowardly whips
Snapped by my lashing words.

And when they cling to mine, they reach
Beyond the sphere of sense;
They put to shame my deafening speech
With love's dumb eloquence.

THE MOON

What cold, celestial laughter
Disturbs me in the night?
It is the moon that enters
The street with a ripple of light.

His ghostly mirth reminds me
How well I ought to know
That flash of evil humor
Revealed some months' ago. . . .

Upon a beach where the pattering
Waves were music enough
Two lovers walked, believing
The world was made for their love.

The stars, the crooning silence
Worked through their stammering lips;
Slowly it drew them together
Like rudderless, driven ships.

In the deserted pavilion
They clung with a passionate faith;
Hurling, as though for the first time,
The deathless challenge to death.

.

And then, old moon, I saw you.
Your sharp and cynical smile
Cut through our boasts and bravados,
Breaking them off for a while.

Your long, ironic glances
Mocked us and seemed to inquire,
What ash would be left tomorrow
Of this brief spasm of fire?

We paused. And then, for an answer,
She laughed in my arms and said,
“ Why should the living listen
To you, the impotent dead! ”

INTERCESSION

Night,
Take down the moon's keen sickle
And reap a bright
Destruction on these light and fickle
Souls that dance with every wind.
Sweep left and right
Until these overplanted fields are thinned.
But spare
In your intolerant wrath,
One flower struggling where the path
Is overgrown with weeds and grass.
The rain has barely touched her thirst.
Let her drink sunlight first.
Night, when you see her waiting there,
Pass.

LAST WISHES

Not mine alone and never wholly mine
 Can your heart be;
I share you with a jealous world,
 With children, stars, a tree.

And with what quick and generous recompense
 They turn to you.
You give them love: they give you love
 And tributes, too.


You seem to cling to me, but they alone
 Will hold you fast.
Each look you give them is as long
 As though it were your last.

Such love should be my living monument:
 Let others see
In your unconquerable delight
 How you delighted me.

ENOUGH

If we have nothing more now,
 We have had this:
The keen joy of our bodies,
 The white, unearthly bliss

Of peace beyond all passion,
 Beyond all pain;
Tears which have healed the wounds that
 We opened time and again;

Days, when each casual greeting 
 Was a new thrill;
Nights, when love touched and took us
 Almost against our will;

Hours of beauty and banter—
 A cry and a kiss . . .
Let the earth crumble beneath us.
 We have had this!

THE MATCH

Do you recall our first few moments together,
Or do you forget?
You stammered and said something vague about
the weather;
I offered a cigarette

And took one for myself, and there were snatches
Of laughter as you tried
To keep aflame those weak, half-hearted matches
That flashed and died.

Finally, with an effort, you succeeded;
And, shielding it with your hand,
You offered me the only spark I needed.
You did not understand

When, as I leaned to you and the flame leaped
higher
And you would not let it go,
I warned you, laughing, you were playing with
fire . . .
Now you know!

THE BEREAVED

Rich in your grief, I watch you go
Wearing the perfume and the pomp of woe;
Deprived of nothing half so much
As of the things you will not see or touch.
Your pale and half-transparent thought
Is, even in its simple strictures, caught
By all the platitudes of pride
And self-indulgence that you cannot hide.
You have bereaved yourself of many things
Besides the bird-like, childish joy that sings
Within your spirit, that which loves
Whatever runs and leaps or merely moves.

Forget this self-inflicted hurt
And find yourself in all the sharp, alert
Business of living. Join once more
The human stream that surges past your door.
Go, leave your dead and live again
In the miraculous, laughing world of men.
See how this shop-girl's hunger thrills
With romance walking on the painted hills;

Or watch her dull and wooden boy
Burn with a hungrier fire than levelled Troy.
For you a thousand points of light
Pierce through the funeral draperies of night;
The dead years scorn their cenotaph
And in your blood all ages leap and laugh.
For you the sun goes riding by
Over the flaming ridges of the sky,
And every swift, adventuring day
Jeers at your dark, ridiculous display.
Let these things have you till you grow
Ashamed of your denial, and you go,
Shedding your truant airs, like one
Who finds instead of death and life undone,
Only the promise of a thing begun.

MATTER

When I was a live man
 A few years ago,
For all I might say,
 For all I could do.

I got no attention;
 My life was so small
The world didn't know
 I was living at all.

Such stolid indifference
 I couldn't allow;
I swore that I'd matter—
 Never mind how.

But after a lifetime
 Of hunger and prayer,
I broke my heart trying
 To make the world care.

Matter

And now as I lie here,
Feeding this tree,
I am more to the world
Than it is to me.

FANTASY

A bird ran up the onyx steps of night,
Seeking the moon upon her silver throne;
But stars confused him with their insolent light
And left him in the friendless skies, alone.

He watched the winds, disheveled and awry,
Hurling the clouds, like pillows from their
beds;
He saw the mountain-peaks that nudged the sky,
Take off the wreaths of sunset from their heads.)

He heard the storms, a troupe of headstrong boys,
Locked up as punishment for petulant tears,
Beat on the ebony doors with such a noise,
That all the angels had to hold their ears.

Frightened, he left the halls of thundering sound
For a less dazzling height, a lowlier dream;
And, perching on a watery bough, he found
The moon, her white laugh rippling from the
stream.

MATINÉE

The poet stood reciting
Examples of his art,
Considerately removing
The veils about his heart.

Eager and self-revealing,
He did his stripping well;
With every burning poem
Another garment fell.

With passionate abandon
He flung each cloth away;
Exulting in the pleasure
Of noble self-display.

Until upon the platform
Were piled his draperies.
And still the poet gestured,
Naked and quite at ease.

And no one screamed or fainted;

There was no stir or start.

The ladies all applauded

Such a display of Art.

THE ETERNAL MASCULINE

Woman, though you never heed me,
 Though our ways are seldom one,
Still I look for you to lead me
 Up and on.

Be my lamp, my steadfast beacon;
 Be my friend, philosopher;
And, if I should halt or weaken,
 Be my spur.

Draw me onward; leave me burning;
 Lash my thoughts with beauty's thong.
Have no pity while my yearning
 Makes me strong.

Let me seek you out, but fly me;
 Never drop the luring mask.
Teach your mercy to deny me
 All I ask.

Still your spirit's superhuman

Power calls the best in me . . .

Therefore, warm and earthly Woman,

Let me be.

ANNA

There's that you've not attempted;
 There's that you could not be;
But these things are forgiven you—
 At least by me.

Others are brighter, braver;
 Others more sweetly-grown;
But you've a salt and savor
 Of your own.

Earthy and hard and wholesome,
 You stand here, golden-faced;
Fresh as a young nasturtium—
 And sharper to the taste.

NOCTURNE

What was that so hidden
In your guarded mirth,
When the veils of purple moonlight
Screened the timid earth? .

When impetuous April
Called its reticent bride,
What was in your laughter
That you could not hide? . . .

Now a bird's note rises,
Colorless and cool,
Like a spray of silver bubbles
From a snowy pool.

And you smile, a warmer
Mystery than the bird's.
Come, reveal the music—
Never mind the words.

LANGUAGE

On the soft heaven of your breast,
My worn-out body lies;
Infinite solace, infinite rest
Lift me through opening skies.

Beyond myself, toward some far goal,
I mount, peak after peak;
Great waves of music wash my soul.
And then—you start to speak.

Swiftly the calm and casual word
Severs us each from each;
The earth springs back with your absurd
Relapse to empty speech.

I tumble down from heaven and clutch
At stars my fingers miss.
O close your lips; they move too much
Save when they move to kiss.

Be still, I tell you. Let us lie
And feel Love's silent growth.
O, never speak at all, for I
Can talk enough for both!

CATALOGUE

Why all these fears and feigned alarms
That never can pretend to blind me?
Let me enumerate the charms
With which you bind me.

First, I shall list one pair of eyes,
Like flame beneath some smouldering fuel;
A mouth that's witty if not wise,
Half kind, half cruel.

Thirdly, there are two tapering hands,
So delicate and diamond-spangled;
And there's your hair, in whose bright strands
I lie entangled.

Your breast, all rose and silk and pearl;
Your laugh, a bright and sharpened sickle;
Your whims, dear and distracting girl,
Footloose and fickle.

Your kiss, a wine that has no dregs;
Your love, a bird that seldom perches.
And I must add your lyric legs—
Two dancing birches.

But most of all I love your pride,
As firm as mine that I believe in.
Stubborn and selfish; hard inside . . .
That makes us even.

“SO REIN UND SCHÖN”

(With a volume of Heine)

Like some young flower, cool and white,
With the stars' kiss still on its brow,
You shine through my heart's dusk, and light
The dark concern that gathers now.

Half on my lips, a fearful hope
Starts like a prayer, already planned.
Toward your bright head my fingers grope . . .
But something holds my hand.

Prayers are not what you want. I see
That, when all other beauty fails,
You will not alter, you will be
So white and young—and hard as nails.

RAPUNZEL

Let down your hair,
That cloudy-gold lure,
The delicate snare
That holds me secure.
Delight and despair
War with me now—
Let down your hair.

Shake out each curl
Swiftly, and be
Like Spring, a wild girl
With her hair flying free.
Bury me there,
And be buried with me . . .
Let down your hair!

WINDY DAYS

The red wind tears and the bright leaves are
hurled

Down to their death. A rain of crimson spots
The rusty-colored earth; the young fruit rots,
Killed by the fiery gusts that sweep the world.
There is a treacherous poison in the year
That withers every branch and delicate fern;
Even the cloudy heavens smoke and burn . . .
And what, belovèd, are we doing here?

There's no escape; this tiny stretch of park
Echoes the clash and thunder of the town.
We cannot lose the world; it tracks us down
And spreads its wars till even peace grows dark,
Here where no bird dares lift a frightened wing
To try new heights or find a place to sing.

BRAIN AND HEART

What fertile and malignant plan
To flood the world with greater pain,
Could so desire to torture man
By giving him a heart and brain.

Crippled with these, he cannot be
A beast, a basker in the sun,
A growing pleasure like a tree,
But he must cower, cringe and run

Before the winds of memories
That rumble with his childhood's fears;
A handful of hypocrisies
Still sends him reeling through the years.

Poor worms that die upon a crust,
Betrayed and bitten by a dream,
Maggots that yield to every lust
With a deific self-esteem;

Driven by every twist of thought
Beyond their pitiful desires—
In what net are these creatures caught;
Plunged in what self-enkindled fires?

If there's one god who sees a part
Of all men's burdens—old or new—
He'll take away this brain and heart
And let the poor things muddle through.

MOZART

How calmly this beauty falls,
Confident, careless and futile;
Like rain upon troubled waters
Or stars on a field of battle.

The night, this music, these times
And you are clashing within me.
I am bruised and broken with visions,
A dark wood where sunlight is splintered.

BEYOND SOUND

The poets cry, the preachers drone
Of glories that are never heard.
And yet the moon, a worn white stone,
Says all they say without a word.

Their praise is loud, they smite the air
With eloquent and clashing zeal;
They force their love, while they declare
'Tis only half of what they feel.

Their thundering speech is quickly done;
Hushed by the deathless hymn that flows
From the mute passion of the sun,
The burning silence of a rose.

CONFIDENCE

Supposing the night should roar
Like a great beast unchained,
And the river in front of my door
Should rise with a rending voice;
Though all the leaves of the oak
In a gust of derision were rained,
And the winds should tramp till they broke
All things that dance or rejoice—

Still I would smile and have peace
Though the passionless stars should go mad;
Knowing this frenzy must cease
And quiet will sing to me soon.
I know that a silent laughter
Will comfort me when I am clad
In the golden indifference of sunlight
And the silver scorn of the moon.

DISTANCES

I read your note, and with it comes
A feverish expectancy;
It stirs my blood as though great drums
Were calling out in me.

Out of the struggling lines, a hand
Gropes and your large eyes make me start;
You mock at space, although we stand
A hundred miles apart.

Yet when we two come face to face,
I have a different sense of loss;
Somewhere, there is a widening space
We cannot hope to cross.

The distance grows, it stretches far,
Even when we lie heart to heart.
You hold me close—and yet we are
Ten thousand miles apart!

ALMOST

My sweetheart has beneficent arms
So full of tenderness and fire,
They almost cheat her other charms
The way they rouse and still desire.

My sweetheart has the kindest breast,
Two heavens with each a single star;
They give me everything but rest,
So strange these rosy pillows are.

My sweetheart has the hungriest lips
That seek and press unsparingly;
They probe until she almost slips
Among her kisses into me.

My sweetheart's body is a cry,
A poignant and resistless call;
It almost makes me wonder why
She hasn't any mind at all.

HOMAGE

Now that I've won you, you complain
I have forgotten how to woo you.
My words, you say, have lost the strain
That drove the young blood singing through
you.

No longer do I celebrate
"Your hair that shames the fire of Titian";
Nor swear, "Your beauty is so great
That it would check a god's ambition."

I have forgotten how to play
The nimble echo, nimbler servant.
But I do homage in a way
That is less facile but more fervent.

I worship as a mortal can;
And something more than words must show it.
I love you too much as a man
To want to love you as a poet!

THE EMBARRASSED AMORIST

I cannot choose between them now,
And yet I have to choose.
A hand, a foot, a child-like brow,
Enrapture me. . . . But whose?

I seem to have no will at all,
Only a stubborn need;
Blindly I follow beauty's call
Wherever it may lead.

I run to Anna's soothing arms,
Knowing that peace is best—
And then the thought of Lucy's charms
Provokes me out of rest.

I tear myself, but I am loath
To tear my soft chains free.
How can I strike at one, when both
Seem so wrapped up in me?

And though I know what should be done,
I know what I cannot do. . . .
It's heaven to be in love with one
But hell to be loved by two!

THE VOICE

I cannot recall your features,
Your words I scarcely caught;
But I shall always remember
The vision that they brought:—

*Blue depths and a cool air ruffling
The silver tops of trees;
A thousand young stars dancing
Down dark, adventurous seas.*

*Voices of children and heroes;
The moon on the crest of a wave;
A challenge of golden trumpets
Over a restless grave.*

A STREET WALKER

Four times she has passed this place,
Seeking a lover or food;
With what was a childlike face
Turned hardened and shrewd.

Her eyes looked left and right
With scarcely a turn of the head;
They were glassy and far too bright
Like the eyes of the dead.

The glare of the arclight strips
Her glamour and feeble pretense;
The smile on those shrunken lips
Would make a man wince.

Yet, in those terrible eyes
And in that gesture, I see
A poignance that struggles and cries
Directly to me.

The failure, the baffled grace
Is something I somehow knew.
That hard, little, pitiful face—
It might have been you.

THE DERELICT

She drifts by under the lights,
Flaunting her tattered sails;
Wreck of a thousand nights
And a thousand gales.

A derelict, yet she trades
With an ensign that's never furled;
An outcast, though she parades
The flags of the world.

Washed by the tides of unrest,
Chartless, but never free,
She floats on the passionate breast
Of a passionless sea.

IMPLICATION

God, you complain, gave you a pretty face—
And that, you half imply, explains it all;
Your sudden rise and still more sudden fall;
The flashy triumph and half-proud disgrace.
Bitter, but still resolved to keep your place,
You mock at signs of faith and honor, call
Life an unmeaning farce, a madman's brawl,
And lay it all on Him, in any case.

But why blame God? Is it His fault again?
He knows, it seems, little of needs or goals;
God's a haphazard giver, and all men
Grow careless with their battered aureoles.
He made you with a pretty face. . . . But then,
God can not make us all with pretty souls.

TECHNIQUE

So that's to be your tale? But who'll
Believe you?
What sort of mad, incredible fool
Could so deceive you?

One could as easily betray,
I warrant,
A lioness or, full of play,
Seduce a torrent.

You charge your anguish with a rough
Bravado . . .
But is one always carried off
By a tornado?

“Wronged! Wronged!” you trumpet. “Led
astray!”
You shout it.
Vengeance? But really, that's no way
To go about it.

Too loud for sympathy, and still
 Too pretty,
Your robust protestations kill
 Our faltering pity.

The crushed and half-bewildered air
 Is better.
With this, you'll find a host to wear
 The tightening fetter.

A drooping pathos that is frail
 But quiet . . .
And, when you're wronged again, turn pale,
 And gulp—and try it.

GHOSTS

The long street blares, the arclight throws
A singing halo 'round your head;
And yet, in spite of all that glows,
This is a city of the dead.

Dead, they are dead, these folk who run
Through pleasure in such darkening hosts;
While the old moon, a long dead sun,
Grins at this cavalcade of ghosts.

Dead, they are dead to every spark
Of struggling beauty, passionate aim;
Touched by some fire in the dark,
They smoulder but they cannot flame.

They are too dead to burn; too damp
With mouldy thoughts and rotting peace;
Life is to them a low-turned lamp
Lighting them to a bed of ease.

This masque of faces, dull and bland—
Are these the tribes that bore and bled?
You smile. . . . You do not understand.
Good God! Can even you be dead!

THE SHRINE

Beautiful, wise—but you do not compel
Worship beyond a bent and willing knee;
Your loveliness is a familiar bell
Ringing incessantly.

Yours is a dazzling and unblemished shrine;
The niches burn with color, candles sing.
Yet bread is bread, and water is not wine
For all your murmuring.

Yes, you are like a splendid house of prayer,
A sanctuary where no joy has trod;
But I can never stand in reverence there
Where there are lights and altars—but no god.

ADVICE

And do you truly feel surprise
That I no longer idolize;
That I who seemed to bow and pray
Have smashed my gods and run away.
You cannot think how much it pains
To slip the ineffectual chains;
But many others, you'll agree,
Will wear them far more gracefully.
So dry those forced, infrequent tears—
Emotion always interferes
With the manipulated grace
Of your *svelte* hands and chiselled face.
It takes a special sort of art
To simulate a broken heart,
And you should never try to act
A part where fancy turns to fact.
Always you should maintain that air
Of hushed and delicate despair;
The mood of great things to suppress
That you first wore with such success.

Never should you attempt again
The rôle of the tragedienne,
The worn-out rant that tries to show
A passion you can never know.
Be cool or dutiful or dense,
But never try to be intense.

Your other lures were swift and strong.
You caught me in the snares of song;
You put soft fetters on my feet;
But—ere your mastery was complete—
You tried for greater power: you sought
To charm me in the realms of thought.
Oh self-deluded girl, what vain
Pride made you dare that dark domain.
Trying to rule in that strange land,
The sceptre trembled in your hand.
It fell. You tottered; clung to me;
Then, growing frightened, set me free.

My dear, you should have been content
With a more lenient government;
You should have let your beauty go
Down the light roadsides that you know.

Playing an inconspicuous part,
You would have held me, hand and heart.
But no—you thought that you could bind
My fetterless and scornful mind.

Farewell . . . Why, you look half-resigned!

HAUNTED HOUSE

A drab old house on the meadow
Seen from the train;
Its color eaten by sunlight,
Its years washed in by the rain.

In the tarnished dusk it stands there,
Emptied of all delight;
Its windows, like eyeless sockets,
Stare on an endless night.

Suddenly one raw sunbeam
Writhes like a thing in pain,
And the eyes of that grim house sparkle—
And go dead again.

WORDS FOR A JIG

(To be danced on the grave of an enemy)

Thus I pay the visit

 Promised years ago.

Tell me, loyal friend, how is it

 There below?

Do these weeds and mullein

 Choke each angry mood,

Or increase your hard and sullen

 Torpidude?

You who sought distractions

 Howsoever base,

Have you learned to love inaction's

 Slower pace?

Here, at least, you've found that

 You belong to earth;

Dying on the careless ground that

 Gave you birth.

Do not let it fret you;
Things are not so drear.
Though the heartless world forget you,
I am here!

I have not forgotten
How you loved the stir;
Black at heart and doubly rotten
Though you are.

So I take my fiddle,
And I roar a stave;
Dancing gaily on the middle
Of your grave.

And I tramp the new wood,
And I shout halloo—
All the lively things that you would
Like to do.

Such regard must cheer you
In your misery,
Although I can scarcely hear you
Thanking me.

But I ask no hands in
Thanks or loud applause;
I am glad to sing and dance in
Such a cause.

Thus I pay the visit,
Promised years ago. . . .
Tell me, loyal friend, how is it
There below?

NIGHTMARE

It was cold that night by the lake,
 Something, I knew, was wrong
Though I whistled and tried to make
 The ends of a broken song.

Our footsteps crunched like a bite
 On leaves where the frost was strewn;
There was something false in the light
 Of that tarnished disc of a moon.

Like a rusty shield it hung
 Over a freezing abyss,
Cold as my heart, when you clung
 And stabbed me there with a kiss.

Then it grew light. I saw ships
 Huddling with frozen spars,
Your tell-tale eyes and your lips,
 And a sky that was stabbed with stars.

HABIT

Whatever may be false, let us agree
 This much is true:
You have no magic left for me,
 I wake no thrill in you.

You never speak of it, and yet I know
 The tale is told;
Your kiss is plainer than a blow,
 Too casual to be cold.

Well, let our yawning passion end unmarred
 By all that's mean;
There is no thing so base and hard
 As love's enforced routine.

END OF THE COMEDY

Eleven o'clock, and the curtain falls.
The cold wind tears the strands of illusion;
The delicate music is lost
In the blare of home-going crowds
And a midnight paper.

The night has grown martial;
It meets us with blows and disaster.
Even the stars have turned shrapnel,
Fixed in silent explosions.
And here at our door
The moonlight is laid,
Like a drawn sword.

THE WORN STRING

The weeks go past, the months slip by,
The magic mood has lost its thrill.
And what, I wonder, is the tie
That holds me still.

My eyes, cleared of the glamour, see
You are not whimsical or wild;
A spirit footloose but not free,
Childish, yet not a child.

On the soft airs of life you float,
A butterfly with lazy wings;
Too purposeless to heed or note
Ominous things.

Impervious to every taunt
You dream and drift; you will not set
Yourself to win the things you want.
You sink—and yet . . .

The Worn String

Yet I must make you glad and long
For things you only half divine;
You are not great, you are not strong,
But you are mine.

THE UNFINISHED PARTING

Why did she come? It would have been much
better

Had she but stayed away.
How could I hurt her then and let her
Hear what I had to say.

She came and sat there huddled, white and silent;
Not even daring to speak.
Against that mood I knew my violent
Words would be cruel and weak.

She had her best dress on, that cheap and flimsy
Affair of ribbons and tags.
It seemed a sort of pride or whimsy,
Like a ship going down with flags.

She knew we were to part there without quarrel-
ing;
She nodded while I spoke,
And bravely smiled till I said "Darling"—
And then she quivered and broke.

Sharper than strength and stronger far than duty,
I felt her silence press
The claim that held me, more than faith or
beauty:
Her helplessness.

THE LAST DAY

I never thought our love could be so much
More than the passion we could not resist,
Until the end, when you turned back to touch
That rusty bench where first we sat and kissed.

I never saw the cruel world so fair,
Nor knew how fast youth's bit of flame must
die,
Until I saw you standing silent there
With your young face against that wrinkled
sky.

THE PARK REVISITED

This is the place; here is the tiny gap
Left in the hedge through which we tried to
squeeze.

And here's the stretch of mall, that soft green lap
We entered shyly, guarded by the trees.

These are the same black twigs with their strange
growth

Of brilliant yellow buds, that seem as though
They held all last year's sun. And here we both
Paused where the path ran off, and let it go.

A moment, I remember, you stood still,
Facing me glowing and yet gravely there—
And then you stumbled, laughing, up the hill,
Shaking down all your tossed and yellow hair.

I caught you at the top and, as we hung
Above the world, you trembled to the tips
Of your cool fingers. Then you turned and clung,
No longer frightened, to my arms and lips.

In what a torrent of imperative gladness

Love swept us there; with what a reckless glow
We laughed at things like Time. . . . And was
this madness

In these prim walks less than a year ago?

FAIRMOUNT CEMETERY

Of all the nooks discovered,
I like our first love best;
That screened-off bit of hillside,
A soft, green nest.

A stream uncoiled beyond us;
Trees shook their smoky plumes;
And, like a still procession,
Marched the white tombs.

How often we would come there
To love and talk of love;
The cemetery below us,
Your heaven above.

And do you still remember
The solemn pledge we tried
To write in blood and could not?
And how you cried?

And how I dared the future
With many a pompous speech?
“What,” I stormed, “can touch us
Whom death cannot reach!

“Pain shall drop his dagger;
Care shall avert his face;
Defeated years shall triumph
In our embrace!

“Rapt as two young conquerors,
We shall laugh and know
Life is all that matters.
We have made it so.

“Life is all that matters;
Love is all that saves” . . .
Then I heard the dead men
Chuckling in their graves.

AFTER A YEAR

There was a morning fresh with laughing
 airs,
 A sudden city-full of dancing feet;
 And you came swiftly up the casual street,
Turning the landings into golden stairs . . .
I have forgotten it.

There was an afternoon we met and lied,
 Evading every claim with counter-claim.
 Fearing at last to call love by its name,
We stopped. And then you turned to me and
 cried . . .
I have forgotten it.

There was an evening after torturing drouth,
 With long hot silences and words ill-spent;
 Suddenly your hurt eyes turned eloquent
And your cool lips lay quiet on my mouth . . .
I have forgotten it.

There was a night—I hear your white voice yet
Cleaving us as we hung there, heart to heart,
“Come, let us kiss and part as friends would
part,
And grieve a month or two, and so forget” . . .
Have *you* forgotten?

RETROSPECT

Why should this down-at-heels December day
Remind me of the springs we knew together,
Of your thin hands and the peculiar way
You had of looking back, hard to tell whether
The eyes were solemn or gay?

It's raining, a slow, penetrating rain,
Ending an afternoon of heavy languor.
And, like a trumpet-blast or a gust of pain,
Comes your young face, flushed with a queer
anger,
Trying too hard to explain.

Trying to sound a note you could never find;
Struggling to reach the depths of a puzzling
emotion;
Groping among strange passions, bewildered and
blind . . .
Dear, how I envied that dogged devotion—
All heart and no mind!

The strained assurance, the hysterical vow

That silence, war or death could never sunder
Our bonds, our faith, and so on. . . . Yet some-
how

Those words persist, and this cold day I
wonder

Who hears them now.

CHANGE

What tricky chance, I wonder, made us meet
After these stubborn years. In what a daze
I saw you smile and pass me on the street,
While I stood staring at your altered face.

Where were those lights that woke a restless
magic
And leaped to find a swift and answering
gleam?
Where the inscrutable eyes, the dark and tragic
Lashes that drove me on from dream to dream?

Where were those mobile features? Where the
lips
I liked to think were proud, with just a strain
Of Eastern cruelty. . . . The glamour slips . . .
You have grown soft and common, pink and
plain.

What right had you to change! You come to
wake

Questions instead of clamorings in me.
Could I have been so blind, or did I make
You only what I wanted you to be?

And am I glad your presence left me cold?
Or do I wish, perhaps, I had been fired
With last year's flames? Can this be growing
old?

And am I wise this Spring, or merely tired?

DISILLUSION

The end is failure. Now the last
Pretense goes down, a frayed disguise.
A cheap and folly-ridden past
Is what I have to prize.

Sharper than all, the irony
Of being caught in my own mesh;
The self-deceit that tried to be
An exaltation of the flesh.

The grandiose emotions seem
Ridiculously small and crass;
A fool's attempt to build a dream
Lower than what he wants—and has.

Failure. Yet this I gain thereby:
When my desires grow feverish,
At least they will not strain and try
To find a goddess in a wish.

FREE

And suddenly the touch of flesh
Is hateful as these hungry curves;
And every point of contact is a fresh
Agony to these whipped and exhausted nerves.

Warm hollows, will you never let
Me go till you have buried all my will?
Oh, to be free of the body, to lie and forget
The use of lips and hands, to lie and be still.

I want a bed with room to spare,
Where nothing breathes and sleep is sure;
There lust shall have a deeper sense, for there
The worm shall be my only paramour.

Slowly the worm shall have his fill
(As I have had) of flesh and frequency,
Until the body falls away, until
Passion devours me—and sets me free.

GOLD AND WHITE

The snow on the yellow pavement;
 And the light of your coming—
Why should it make my cooled blood hot
 With a new drumming?

And my mind runs back to a windy meadow,
 Where the wind lays his
Breath on an agitated pool of buttercups
 With a froth of daisies.

Waves of yellow and white where a lavish tide
 Has flung them;
Tossed in a bright and futile abandon—
 And you among them. . . .

You stand, as you stood there, strangely unreal,
 Warm and quiescent.
Yet something eludes me; you melt like these
 snowflakes,
 Escaping the present.

SURRENDER

I have given myself to Life
Utterly.

Not knowing what she will do with me
Nor what thing, in the end, she will make me do.
She, the most proud and passionate mistress,
Shall laugh and possess me,
Calling, holding me close and carousing;
Filling the cups of my love
Till she knows I am sated.

And then—I shall leave her
Slowly, half-heartedly;
Turning from her warm side to a warmer breast.
Finding, at last, the long-sought and perfect,
Deep-eyed and patient
Mistress and mother.

THE PRODIGAL

Abashed and blundering I have come back
To force the liberal bounty of your love;
To ask for what I never had to lack
Or take too little of.

The brazen, desperate demands
Are halted by your clouded eyes;
Your cooling and compassionate hands
Choke my well-meaning lies.

Your wounded faith, your lavish love,
The glittering heights I cannot reach,
Those bright nobilities reprove
Me more than any speech.

Softly your silence, like an unrung bell,
Breaks into gentle music, and the black
Barriers lift as, from a transient hell,
I have come back.

THE CURE

“ Heal me, beloved, and have me
Strong at your side.
I am weak, I am cold and hungry
For all that you have denied.
I shall die with loving a promise—
Heal me! ” he cried.

She put her hands on his forehead;
She touched his lips and sighed.
With a warm and lavish abandon,
She flung off her pride.
She healed him of his sickness,
And it was she that died.

THE WISE WOMAN

His eyes grow hot, his words grow wild;
He swears to break the mold and leave her.
She smiles at him as at a child
That's touched with fever.

She smoothes his ruffled wings, she leans
To comfort, pamper and restore him;
And when he sulks or scowls, she preens
His feathers for him.

He hungers after stale regrets,
Nourished by what she offers gaily;
And all he thinks he never gets
She feeds him daily.

He lusts for freedom; cries how long
Must he be bound by what controlled him!
Yet he is glad the chains are strong,
And that they hold him.

She knows he feels all this, but she
Is far too wise to let him know it;
He needs to nurse the agony
That suits a poet.

He laughs to see her shape his life,
As she half-coaxes, half-commands him;
And groans it's hard to have a wife
Who understands him.

THE HOLY CITY

You are my holy city, my beloved;
Dark as Jerusalem and bright as Rome.
The gates of you are opened generously
To take the wanderer home.

What foreign towns I knew have never dimmed
The burning memory of your altar-fire;
My backward-hungering heart has always heard
In other songs, your choir.

I kiss your lips and dream of Lebanon!
You are my living Zion: and I rest
Here in the temple of your body's grace,
Beneath the white wall of your breast.

ESCAPE

When toil with many a promise
 Would keep me in its pay,
Her breast, it is my Sabbath,
 Her lips, my holiday.

I laugh at labor, knowing
 Its ineffectual power
Here, in her holy bosom's
 Serene and certain hour.

Here I am held and washed in
 Waves of a great content,
Tides of majestic passions
 That never can be spent.

Her arm is some white harbor
 Where ships can lie at peace,
And there church-bells are ringing
 And happy songs increase.

There I would end my journeys
And never slip away—
Her breast, my singing Sabbath,
Her lips, my holiday.

YOU

Is this your body that my fingers touch?
And are these lips but lips, that can reveal
Splendor of marching skies,—so much
More than the flesh can feel.

Under the savage heat and rude desire
A sudden glory breaks, half-felt, half-seen;
I rise upon a sea of singing fire
That lifts and sweeps me clean.

The rumble and the clash of war have gone
Into my blood that shouts its battle-cry;
Even your beauty keeps me struggling on
Toward that for which men die.

You hold me closely, yet you set me free
For unknown struggles with a great release;
You are my red desire of victory
And my white dream of peace.

HEREAFTER

When Time with its cruel abandon
Treats all of our dreams with disdain,
Though he sweeps out the ashes of memory,
Two things will remain.

Two things will persist through the darkness
When Death reaches out for the rest:
Your flower-like hand on my forehead;
My lips on your breast.

BIRTHDAY

Cleave the stubborn heart of me.
Grapple and remove
This unbearable apathy—
Rouse me with your love.

With the flint of loveliness,
Strike my wooden pride;
Till, in flames, a hot excess
Burns me to your side.

Rising from the coils of fire,
Kindle this damp fuel.
Surge within me; blaze and . . .

No, no. This is not right. The words are
false;
Even the tune is wrong.
Here I am fumbling with the annual song
That hesitates and halts

In cold repugnance at the lyric lies.

What are these cries

But cowardly appeals for you

To do what I should do;

Verbal mechanics built to shape

Means for a possible escape?

The lie, the pitiful irony of it all!

I, who have burned you out, turn and appeal

For greater warmth, new strength to feel

What I have squandered in impenitent greed . . .

And now I call

On you again to give me the one thing

That you most need!

Well, having started so to sing

Unworthily, at least I can be still.

And, having fed on you, I can begin to feed . . .

But what have I to offer? What can fill

The empty balance of my debt? This blood,

Brain and body I will break and make into

A sacrament worthy of the starved desire of you.

Yet that will never make it good.

The proffer of regenerated love?

It is not great enough.

Only one thing remains—
The will to make you care
For what lies almost buried in despair;
The faith that, struggling from its sordid chains,
Is its own prayer . . .

Something has taken root in me—or do I grow
Because of it? No matter. This stays true,
This much at least I know:
Through me forgotten flames will rise to quicken
 you
With an exalted glow.
Be glad, be glad that now it is my turn
To make you burn!

FULFILMENT

*Here, at your delicate bosom, let death come
To me
Where night has made a warm Elysium
Lulled by a soft, invisible sea.*

*Now in the porches of your soul I stand
Where once I stood;
Fed and forgiven by a liberal hand,
My broken boyhood is renewed.*

*You are my bread and honey set among
A grove of spice;
An ever-brimming cup; a lyric sung
After the cannonade and battle-cries.*

*You are my well-loved earth, forever fresh,
Forever prodigal, forever fond;
As, from the sweet fulfilment of the flesh,
I reach beyond.*

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