

MY SEASONS

by
Haniel Long



Boise State University
Boise, Idaho

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Editor's note: Poems appearing for the first time in print are undated.

Preface

Haniel Long's presence in our world is vivid. People are discovering his poetry, now twenty-one years after his death, and I who have known it for years find myself going back to these poems in different moods and in different seasons as I used to go to a spring near my house in New Hampshire when I got thirsty for a drink of sweet water. It had a special taste of roots and rain and leaves unlike any other water, and so do Haniel Long's poems.

The lyric poet has always been rare. His is a gift literally *given* in the same way that musical or mathematical genius is given, and as with them makes its appearance early. Unfortunately lyric poetry is often overlooked by the critics because it is magic and so does not feed the critical mind. The reader either experiences the authentic shiver, or he does not. I felt it the other day when I came on the line, "the stillness / Flows over me like a stream." Obvious? Almost too simple? Maybe. Most magic looks simple, and what can a critic say about it, except, "There it is again," like a trout in a pool.

Haniel Long's poems are not exactly like anyone else's. I get the feeling as I reread him that his lyricism was meditative, that it did not spring out of the moment as one expects the lyric to do, as much as *after*, as part of a meditation on something elusive and haunting that may have taken place years before. They are distillations rather than outbursts. This may be why the best of them reverberate as they do. "May Your Dreams Be of the Angels" gathers in the past and weaves history into our present anxieties and fears to ask an unforgettable question:

And who then or who now

Knows whether knowledge and peace are to be striven toward,

Or places prepared by us for them to come to?

Some poets would have left it at that. But Haniel Long comes closer—this is characteristic—to make a final statement that includes the reader.

In all these poems one feels one is being directly addressed. The reader is present. He is not being told about something; he is being conversed with, drawn in. It is a matter of tone, the tone of voice. Anyone who knew Haniel hears him read the poems, and hears the occasional deliberate roughness in the tone.

Frogs and snakes and a dead cat or two

Have fallen into the spring, the spring

That is *our* spring.

The tone can be wry; it can tease a little; there is often a smile hovering about as in Robert Frost, and you have to sense the smile to understand what is being said. It can be pretty tough.

But the toughness is part of the music. The danger in using quite simple forms is that the effect can be shallow or too neat, and then the poem glides away and is lost. Haniel often breaks lines up, setting the meaning across the metre. Who else could get away with

Grow and inflame me still,

Democracy; sweeten in me again.

And it is just that break in the line that gives it its force. He is not clever with rhymes, but he was not out to prove how clever he was.

Some of the good toughness comes from what Haniel Long saw and where he saw it: "The gale swayed the car"; "Hill tops are forms of silence"; "To wake at dawn with dryness in the throat / That is halfway to choking, and to know / The dust is blowing." These poems are steeped in the New Mexican landscape, which can be awesome. It is an exact vision of the earth as he saw it around him, as he experienced it. But the beautiful clear images and the haunting flutelike sound in these poems are the servants of a quiet penetrating attitude toward life itself. One reason Haniel Long's poetry has so much power to move us is that the questions he asks are our questions: the relation of man to the earth, the necessity for keeping himself in a good fruitful relation to it, and how to do it? The necessity for keeping aware always of what is going on in the world outside and for relating it to the past so as to understand it, and above all to keep our worlds open to each other. In essence these are poems about communion, the communion between nations as well as between friends, the communion in a marriage, the communion between a father and son. Reading them again I took a fresh look at what it is to be a poet, but even more at what it is to be a human being.

May Sarton
York, Maine
1977

I
My Spring

Now That March Is Ending

Herrera, good my neighbor,
Now that March is ending,
Come with your bright plow
To a garden that needs tending.

Come with the bright plow—
Open the back gates wide—
Drive the dappled horses
To me who wait inside.

With your light and nimble step
And the steel that sets all free,
Drive straight the garden furrows,
And drive them straight in me.

Herrera, this be my worship
To do beneath blue skies:
The other half awaits me
In a glade where moonlight lies.

To that wilderness in me
In the night alone I grope;
One half of life be its labor,
The other be its hope.

1945

Our Spring Needs Shoveling

Frogs and snakes and a dead cat or two
have fallen into the spring, the spring
that is *our* spring;
dead leaves have come swirling down,
and the fence of saplings that kept intruders
out
is all to pieces with hard rains, and
adds painful debris.

So dear friend:
let us go to our spring alone,
let us shovel out our decay, the snakes,
the leaves,
the mud and boughs, and give the source of
our youth
its old chance to be crystal.

The spring no longer flows—I know—and yet,
putting my ear close to the humid leaves
am I deceived, hearing the liquid murmur
of a god down in the earth?
But there's no point to these letters.
Letters allow us to continue an illusion.
It takes the actual living, the meeting in
the village
to test friendship.

And if one feel deeply
what is the joy in a casual encounter
when the spring's clogged? And why waste time
talking Japan and China, or the agony
coming in Europe, or the unrest here?
Better far to do our private shovelling.

It's odd about friendship the way it isn't sculpture,
not something one carves out and sits in front
of,
admiring—rather, a thing that comes of itself,
which we tend, or else lose, like a fire.
Youth was golden, being candid, and so age can be
when old friends consent to be candid,
to hear each other out, to be real.

After a City Winter

Hill tops are forms of silence,
And the sun draws me in and in;
And every jackpine along the cliffs
Quiets what I have been
And what I have known. The stillness
Flows over me like a stream,
And a three-stemmed dogwood in blossom
Gathers me into the dream
Of ever and ever unfolding.
I can feel my mind grow clear
Where there's nothing, excepting bird-song,
As far as I can hear.

1924

Towns

The towns in the desert are gardens:
in spring the bloom of fruit trees
floats through them like mist.
But a garden which is always in bloom
lies about the towns and between them,
a garden of cloud and mountain.
From the horizon, petaled with color,
the colossal flowers rise.

1925

Daphnis and Chloe

You found it difficult to woo—
So do we who follow you.

Everyone would like to mate;
Everyone has had to wait.

So much beauty, so much burning!
But ages pass as we are learning.

Day and Night

All the flowers by the lake
are for your shadow:
red hibiscus for your heart,
zuchil with golden center and ivory petals
for your body,
and a flower I do not know
for the thought of you which haunts me.

Under the pepper trees
your shadow waits for me;
your shadow comes with me
down on the sand where waves beat.
There in the black night
I gather a memory in my arms,
murmur a song to nothing.

1933

The Four Girls of Zuñi

The four girls of Zuñi
Keep in the center of the feathers:
The feathers dip and float and plunge,
But the four girls of Zuñi
Are quiet as ripples on a river.

Little feet, little hands,
Little faces with black doll's hair,
And turquoise and silver
Hanging on the white buckskin

The hawks and the eagles
Wheel and cry about them:
But the four girls of Zuñi
Smile, with their eyes on the earth.

1925

An Indian

I saw him by the river-flats
Come naked from a water-hole,
Slender and supple, and black with sun:
The flower, out of the mud;
The child, out of the mother;
The arrow from the bow.

1925

Letter

Consider—were we not in France before
Some had stopt saying, “We’ll never join the war”?
“We’ll never have conscription,” next they said—
It came almost before they went to bed.
And prohibition was the next surprise,
And then a country drunk as brewery flies.
And then, “Women will never get the vote”;
And they got it—“Never can do man’s work”;
And they did it. Are these enough? I shirk
Collecting examples of the thing I mean—
Shrewd propaganda sweeps the accustomed scene
And makes the few the many in an hour.
So, since your shelter is a common belief,
The majority perhaps will play the thief
And leave you roofless. Rather in your own
Identity of spirit and flesh and bone
Discover truth, the truth that you can trust,
And let the rest be a blowing of grey dust.
Of course, this is no widely cherished notion,
But by next week it may become the fashion.

1928

For Tony, Embarking in Spring

Mrs. Davis' younger son was home
On furlough, but the boy who was on Bataan
She has not heard from. Nor has Max Ribera
Had any word from his boy on Bataan,
And Frank's boy was drowned
In the Indian ocean.

Today at last it's spring.

The leaves of the pear tree follow the petals
So fast the tree is green and white. The ditches
Flash red with the peach petals they carry away
Singing. The flag went up on the new army hospital
Yesterday; today the major takes us out to see it.
We hear the war news generally at noon,
In your room, on your radio, and your mother
sews your curtains.

We hear it, and then we go outdoors again
To get our bearings from the spring trees.
Goodbye, dear boy. Thought can be the life of God
In each man, and God is love.

1945

Achilles' Farewell to the Daughters of Lycomedes

Obedient to my mother, but in shame,
I came amongst you, you the beautiful
The good, the true, the daughters of the king.
But I was a young eagle trained in death;
So I lay sleepless, since no lovely thing
Could live upon this bloodstained earth unharmed,
And asked myself what would become of you?
Then I remembered, Beauty's to assuage;
She thinks not of her own but of the woe
Of others; she should know
The lore of curing, she can learn, can grow.
So I unclencht my fingers and grew calm,
For out of me the eaglet could come sweet;
My knowledge of the healing of the earth
Though vain to me, to you could be of worth.

Always, the sages say, man's heart
Intellectual, fearful, shy
Alone must live, alone must die.
Yet came the mornings when we walked afield.
In the hill pastures beside rock and pool
'Twas to Achilles that you went to school.
I taught you the occult writings of the leaves
 How each herb smells and feels,
And even though deadly renders each his potion
 That pacifies and heals.
I pluckt perhaps plantain or pennyroyal,
Showed you the leaves, trefoil or quatrefoil;
Of the earth's health I taught you what I know,
What the centaurs taught me two short springs ago.

Before my birth, the iron gods had willed
That I should live to kill and to be killed;
Today I rise above that fate; my veins
Beat with a truer pulse than battles bring;
Because I taught you healing, I can sing.

To you
Yarrow along the lanes will cry
Achilles!
And wintergreen in the shade near by,
And anis and aconite reply,
Achilles, Achilles!

Death-camass on the Scyrian hills,
Snowy datura by the rills:
Soft as far thunder, mosses wet,
From fox-glove, may-apple, serpolet,
Achilles!

Achilles,
Who, while he waited for his sun to set
Bethought him to repay his mortal debt.
To live is to live in others, and to die
To die in others?—ponder then on me.

O gentle sisters, with your summer smile,
With you the eaglet changed into the dove
A little while.
Change him again—for may I change myself
Thrown into hate out of the arms of love,
Beyond your reach? Remember but the boy
Who knew the leaves, who curing knew and joy,
Not only herbs will dilate consciousness
And bring on trances—I who am the doomed,
Yea I, the damned, have it in me to bless
With vision, and with prophecy no less.
I go to Troy; my fate I must fulfill.
If poison could not cure, all life were ill,
Gather my simples, brew them as you will.

1945

For Tony, At Easter

Plums and cherries stand snow white today;
Easter is late this year.
One of our seasons is life and one is death,
And Easter is our festival, for we
Are the earth, its mortal and immortal breath.
Beauty, which seems a refugee,
Once more floats from the tree.
Your mother places in the tall glass vase,
With the three lion heads, the vase you gave her,
Finding it in a St. Paul antique store,
The first purple lilac, the last gold of the spice-bush,
A white tulip, three plummy sprays
Of spirea.

1945

The Law

There are those flocks of sheep
One would not tend if they were real,—
Dreams waking or asleep,
Shapes that are born of what men hope and feel.

Eating and drinking are
No pleasure till we know the terms
Of hunger. So the law
That from the angel reaches to the worms:

Greatest the joy that will
Be ushered in by greatest pain.
Grow and inflame me still,
Democracy; sweeten in me again.

1942

A New Music

This spring is going, too.
Clinging too long to nature,
He had hoped the tulip with the cup of flame
Might last forever; it drops its petals,
And the last iris fades into the dusk.

She gave him a drawing by Robert, called
The Dance.

“You know well what I like,” he said wryly,
And she, as in a dream, “Ruins,
With trees growing out of them,
People dancing and picnicking on them.”

Fate distils us; she was right.
Suffering is a looking-glass
For reflections we might not see otherwise.
He hungers for people growing out of ruins,
That new life streaming forth, that deeper inward glowing
Of music and of tears—
What is so fecund as our ruins are?

Each spring crumples to petals in the pocket.

He is making a new music out of new feelings
For a June evening under the deep trees
Of an earth, of a life, that is all ruins,
That is all release
—and most of it release
From what a man might fear
Destroyed him to part with.

1937

II My Summer

The Children's Crusade

There is a story written at the time,
Become an old dream now, and ghosts astir
In the far membranes of the memory,
With quick pale children in its tapestries
Who, seven long centuries since, like birds
Rising together from a field, grew restless,
Hoping in unison to go to God;
And in their innocence believed that they
Could go to Him together, in procession,
Bearing candles and roses.

No more helpfully than the daily paper
Can history explain the sudden fervors
It chronicles, for loveliness and brightness.

And these children are woven in us still.

1945

If He Can Make Her So

One of the bad things about living is
To wake at dawn with dryness in the throat
That is half-way to choking, and to know
The dust is blowing: to wake and lie there thinking
Of the long quiet years before we came here
And violated earth's protecting girdle.

Hunching its wide shoulders, the storm comes striding
Across eroded mesas, through the orchards,
Into our doors and windows, and our thoughts.

The living roots enfold the soil, the soil
The living roots—between them is forever
The secret ritual of their nourishment.
Without the roots the earth must blow away,
And out of earth roots wither.

Nobody knows what the soil is, except
That it is something working towards a balance,
Something that balances itself with death
As well as life, and needs long years to do so.
If the wide earth has anywhere done better
Because of men, be sure they were good men,
Each of whom tended his own bit of ground
Humbly, and went down into it at last
His heart already changed to a rich compost.

Perhaps it takes an Indian not to harm
The earth he owns. It may be it takes praying.
Or else it takes a man out of the future—
I think that he, that future man, will see
That earth is truly part of his own being
If he can make her so, as his thoughts are,
And instincts too, if he can make them so.

1945

Lightning

All evening I have watched the lightning:
it crests an unseen cloud with snow and foam,
veins it with fire, like a human hand, or a leaf,
flushes it sulphur and rose.
And through my own body
a vague trembling goes,
as though I too were vapor.

1925

If Our Great Fragile Cities

Man making nature to his own measure,
Making himself to his own measure,
Spun of his need
The switchboard of the telephones—
This symbol, this treasure.

If our great fragile cities were destroyed,
And the fabric of our life had to part
And we from the ground to make a fresh start,
It would be the light-flashing switchboard
My heart remembered in the void.

Trying to make corn grow
Without plow or hoe,
Trying to catch fish without hook or line,
My bare feet on sharp stones,
Not enough clothes to cover my bones,

To keep on living I could recall the time
When, if only over the telephones,
We became lights and went seeking
One another, and were answered by other lights,
And invisible people speaking.

1945

Picnic at Cañon Diablo

The others went anywhere, did anything,
But he and she still lay beside the spring.

“Cañon Diablo? Why do they call it that?”
He asked her. She removed her wide-brimmed hat,

And ran her fingers through her curls, and said
Nothing. High walls of rock rose overhead

On either side, gray bastions veined with blue
Torrents from the mountains had cut through.

“Someone,” said he, “was pleased beyond a doubt
To put the only spring for miles about

In a dry river-bed; I’d like to thank
The Author of the heart-disturbing prank.

He who gives water cannot be a devil;
What matter where he gives it—is it evil?”

To the edge of the spring beside him, still and deep,
Catching the clouds and her face in its sleep,

The track of thirsty creatures over-ran
The red arroyo, horse and goat and man.

“A spring is good-luck; it will always be.”
But she, touching his hand, “Don’t look at me,”

Said; then, “How much is there we can understand?”
Through the brown fingers fell the grains of sand.

"How do you know what eyes are watching you
Six yards away, in those rocks of grey and blue?

God creates springs; whoever would create
These walls, these rocks, to shelter death and hate?

To lead defenseless things dying for water
To a spot that offers no escape from slaughter?

I've seen the calf clawed by the lion of night,
Blinded by buzzards in the day's first light.

To let the water of life come bubbling pure
In the one place where only death is sure

Was a *diablerie*, my dear. Imagine it."
He gazed beyond her, and imagined it.

1932

Blossoms Went Up the Hollyhocks

Blossoms went up the hollyhocks in series
At different heights. Lake-like through the lilies
Gleamed the blue Chinese delphinium.
And everywhere he looked he pictured her;
And everywhere he saw her, in his mind
He joined her, violet for violet
And marigold for marigold. All day
He had been discouraged; but this revery
Brightened him with their oneness, and insured it.
After his farewell gaze, he knew that he
Would never be alone again, thrown swiftly out of her,
Out of himself, into his own country, —
The way one throws a pigeon from a cliff
And its wings take it safely.

He Never Said What Wilderness It Was

He never said what wilderness it was
Where he spent forty days.

It might have been the wild soul of another,
It might have been his own soul, or the world's;
This coil within us, to our thought fantastic
As acorns holding oaks, and terrible
With powers and latent tendencies to grow
Monsters as well as angels . . .
Who knows how he had found out what he knew?

He thought to pass his knowledge on to us
By speaking of togetherness where most
One looks for harmony: master and workman,
A father and his sons, the bridal supper:
How lacking one thing nothing could be right,
Though having it, the worst might be the best—
The bridegroom of the feast, he used to call it.

“And so you hid my treasure in your earth!”
The master cried to his unprofitable
Servant. The kingdom is like that, he said
Each time its lord and master returns home,
He reckons with us.

And if a man, for father or for mother,
Or any outward form of company,
Leave his own inward treasure, it disperses:
Outward togetherness could not disperse it;
Nor could togetherness within disperse it.
Goldenrod, elm, and rose bend with the wind,
But bend in different time, bend less, bend more,
Jerk, or are graceful, or are slow, or fast:
Yet every movement is reciprocal.

Our destiny lies in us like a dream
Which we remember out of its true image.
We are no longer sure what we remember.
But he remembers. He is flesh of our flesh
And has his life in our unconsciousness.
He hoped that we would send our tendrils out
Over the small world that is ours, tendrils
Of our blood that they might become Love's blood.

He thought the secret was a simple secret.
He tried to say it, but the meaning faded.
He told stories, the point of them escaped us.

1945

May Your Dreams Be of the Angels

The old men who lived two centuries since
In the great houses of New Mexico, aspiring
In the New World to the courtesies of the Old,
Would say to a guest at bed-time, I am told,
Smiling, yet meaning it, "May your dreams be of the angels."

These are the words they said in the patio,
Under the great apricot grown from a Spanish stone,
And full of moonlight, or of distant lightnings.
The guest would enter his chamber;
Lying abed, looking through the wide low door
Where he could see the apricot better, its branches
Thrown wide, receptacle of heaven and fire,
He might compare it to those highway trees
Which cast so little shade, yet rise so high;
And might debate two different ways of living—
The tree of a life that soars forever higher,
And the tree of a life that stretches ever wider;
The life that cleaves its way, the life that waits
Like a bowl, like a vase. And who then or who now
Knows whether knowledge and peace are to be striven toward,
Or places prepared by us for them to come to?

With Navajo marauding, and the drought lurking,
And the slaves and peons restless and resentful,
It was a good question to go to sleep with
For the Spaniard facing the terror of his New World;
As it still is, for you or for me tonight,
Sleepless between our future and our past,
Sleepless between our furies and our demons.

Whichever is your answer, may your dreams,
Whoever you are, be of them, of the angels.
In these human hells we go through, it is sure
We are not alone; there are witnesses to it.
Our helplessness is but a receptacle;
'Tis full of presences, 'twill catch good ghosts.

1945

Come Away

Come away!
Beyond you it is black,
Forget the haunting face,
Forget the bitter lack,
Let the cedars be,
Turn and gaze at me.

Come away, peer no more!
Leave the cedars as before—
Let them blacken out of sight.

Come away!
They have robbed us, we are poor;
What the cedars hide, they hide.
Be no captive to their lure—
Come away!

Let me carry you
With your bleeding feet.
Come away.
With the thorns caught in your hair
And the ragged dress you wear.

1931

III
My Autumn

Inland Lake

On Cape Cod, where stretch the golden dunes,
Dreaming alone on autumn afternoons,
I have heard the Atlantic feeling with soft hands
 along the tawny sands;

On the west coast, the Pacific from a hill
Has changed to birds and bells when I was still.
Now my eyes close; again I feel the ache
Of water lapping on an inland lake.

And now return the ghosts of nights and days
By that lonely water; and dark trees lean their sprays
Over its edge again, over me, on the beach.
A mist-red moon is flowering on the hill,
And stirs the leaves above me, which had been still,
Rousing the wind to follow a pathless trail,
Waking the water to shudder, after no sail.

I have returned to my own self once more
Knowing no other moon, no other shore.
And I am happy when I reach and take
The trees, the leaves, the red moon, and the lake.
This is the only world that lives for me—
Although my eyes are closed, at last I see.

1933

The Grist Mill

(for Ralph and Isabel)

It was September, the month the Navajo calls
"Even-the-mountains-are-ripe," it was a Sunday,
And ours was true harvest with you by your river.
It's not as though this human world was ever
A great success, measured by what it might be
(Yet measure it by what it once was, to believe
In miracles). Besides, there's the long war,
The fifth year of its ferreting out of everything,
In the flat and shocking way of wars,
That's wrong with men and the way we live together.
So we took a day off from bewilderment
And went to you, and found a thing that shone
By being together outdoors in the autumn,
And another shining thing in the old mill.
We had heard him talking even above the Pecos,
And walking upstream under the yellow trees
We came to a barbed fence that must be
Of all earth's fences the most barbed,
And we had a hard time getting through it,
And I remembered being a boy, barefoot,
And hunting Brindle where she hid and tinkled.
We gazed into deep translucent pools
Where green and tawny pebbles intermingled;
Then we crushed pennyroyal underfoot
In thickets, and the smell sent all of us back
Gathering childhood. And golden cottonwoods
Hung high above us all the while.

At last

We came to the grist mill, seated on his hillock,
A waterfall on each side from a log sluice,
And himself made of logs. Through the chinks

Came the clean smell of flour, of the wheat he was grinding.
What seemed perfect was that for a hundred years
He had waited there, coming to life each autumn,
Getting to work on each successive harvest,
Calling his fountains once more to his wheel,
Taking the kernels from a world of chaff.

“Sire, live forever!” was what my heart cried.
True Sire, true Father, for he touched my eyelids
And I could see again. Within my heart
Came clear hope’s future, why courage has a reason.
He made man’s proper measure grow in meaning:
A world with warm hands to keep alive
Each part of us; a world in which we put ourselves
Second, not first; a school of life that teaches
No substitutes for thinking and yet knows
Our thinking to be worth what we are worth;
A religion that does not enlist the soul,
But breathes on it the way you breathe on pine needles
To start a flame.

In this waiting answering world
We would not look about us for our chance,
But quietly would build our chance within us.
We would do all we could to keep alive
Our joy, the joy that is the joy of all:
Would give because we were in need ourselves.

1945

Ordeal by Fire

And so she was condemned to pass the night
 Above, beneath, beside, within a flame;
And everywhere she looked the sky was bright,
 And everywhere she turned the burning came.

Tongues licked her body, and a blaze
 Piled up as though her April skin were pitch;
And yet she rose unharmed, and went her ways,
 And the grey monks intoned, "She was no witch,"
 "She was no witch!"

1920

The Old Couple

Friesland Pottery Figures in Our Living Room.
(Ovid, **Met.** 8, V. 631)

Along the roadways tiny grapes are clustered
In dark green vineyards; sumach panicles
Are lifting like the lance-heads copper-lustered
Of a young army seizing dreamy hills;
Down in the valley, when the silence stills
The enchanted blackgreen edges of a lake,
Mirrors that image the spring pastures, take
The shine of pods, the gleaming of ash-keys;
While underneath the boughs new hopes awake,
And wildflowers flutter color to the bees.

Here first they lisped the lines they had to say;
Here first they guessed how they could be transformed
And the world with them, how the restless clay
Its hunger over-awed, its secret stormed,
Could reach beyond its precinct, and be warmed.
Here first the clinging music of man's fate
Stirred in them humbly that they might create
A place of peace, in the world's shift and smother.
It was for this heaven gave them each a mate
In that first spring they shepherded each other.

But now the grapes are gold and purple-lustered
Beside the lanes; the sumach panicles
Are the red spears of summer's army mustered
In its last stand; the glaucous cover dulls
On hidden butternuts; when the wind lulls,
The liquid looking-glasses of the lake
Black-green along the bevelled edges, take
The flashing of hornbeam and white-ash keys;
From over-ripeness fluffy milk-weeds break,
And the flowers throw their wild seed to the breeze.

They need not now withstand their autumn longer;
They can rejoice to read the latter skies.
The apple-red and wrinkling cheeks show stronger
Their love than seasons man must recognize.
Love is past seasons, is a thing of prize.
So sings the truth these dear ones represent,
Sings to the stars what is obscurely meant,
That while they live, and after, as shade trees,
They witness to the marvel they were lent,
And men can pause beneath them and find peace.

1945

I

Now That the Autumn Brings the Gold Leaves Low

My world today is skeleton and seed.
 The smokeless torches of the poplars fill
 The landscape round me, and the air is still.
Here is an autumn for the mind to heed.

I see a world of dying and starvation—
 I think how those desires that brought man's fall
 Were not the kind to be the good of all,
Were not the kind to build one happy nation.

Yet true joy draws us, beckoning like Fate—
 Let us begin to mold our infancy
 To the full human measure that will be
When each works at himself and at the State.

O dream of sundrench'd meadows and the sound
 Of wind in leaves, dream of the come and go
 Of winter and spring and summer beyond bound
Now that the autumn brings the gold leaves low!

1945

On the Road

The gale swayed the car,
The hills rose higher,
The haze was blue, and bluer,
The maples streamed with fire.

There was a detour east on a dirt road—
Five miles of beautiful slow going
Through color and vista;
Five miles I could not measure
Where I knew everything worth knowing.

The last fields were cut, the fruit
Was being gathered, the root
Used to both husk and seeded core,
Withdrew its ancient life once more.

1931

The Medusas, Furies, Harpies and Minotaurs to the Lord

We envy thee thy lack of claws.
Naked of talon and of beak
Thou lord'st it over strong and weak,
And shrink not from our breath
Who elsewhere are the cause
Of terror, rage, paleness and death.
We envy thee thy lack of claws.

We envy thee thy quiet eyes
That turn no one to stone.
What sorcerer gave thee that lens
To see the truth hid in the lies?
From whom didst thou extort thy dower
Of complicated mental power?
We envy thee thy quiet eyes.

1945

The Lord to the Medusas, Furies, Harpies and Minotaurs

Not often and not everywhere
Will the powers of thinking spare
You for whom no tears flow.

You kill the tender and the true,
And yet my presence tortures you.
What you dare not think, I dare.

Not often and not everywhere
Comes the balsam of my air,
You for whom no tears will flow.

You who homeless to and fro
Killing the tender and the true
Sudden as the sandstorms go,
I, your Death, am haunting you.

1945

I

IV
My Winter

With a Pocket Notebook, To Myself

Old pine tree,
Drop an occasional cone
From the ancient cell
From the forest bone,
In this quiet pool.

The Sisters

The looms of the sun
Wove color and shadow
And we drew near the going-down, *
And the looms of the sun
Took the great screens of landscape
With their weavings,
And led me into remembrance of two
Whose eyes made evening,
Whose smiles morning,
Whose figures before me
Were light offering itself.

**La Bajada, the sharp descent in the Rio Grande Valley at Cochiti which divided New Mexico into Rio Abajo and Rio Arriba.*

Pueblo Fireplace

(for Erna)

For the fireplace, three kinds of wood—
Ocote to catch quickly,
Piñon to catch slowly,
Sabina for the passerby to smell
In the dark street.

Communicants

To Edith Warner

The beyond reaches towards some of us out of
nature;
For others, rivers and trees come best through
human shapes.
You gave us pine cones and pine knots for the
Christmas hearth.
I handle them, burn some, look at the rest:
The baroque cone, profusion of nature in style,
usage, planning,—
The pine knot, the joining of limb and trunk,
The last thing time destroys about a tree;
The cone not made for lasting, that starts life;
The knot that lasts. The knot, witness of
dependence of life on life—
The more wind and rain wear a knot, the more
the knot shows what it is.
As for this little book I give you, call it a
Box of seeds which storm and sun have left of associations,
Of closeness from long disclosure
Maybe the last thing time can untie of a human being.
Talks can warm the mind when one is cold.
We are all communicants, or wish to be.

What Is the Most Quieting?

(for Henriette)

What is the most quieting sight in the world?
The winter lacework—as I've seen it walking with you—
Of the cottonwoods by the river, their net of silver
Which catches the blue.

What is the most quieting scent in the world?
The scent of piñones on a cold still day
With a little sun-warmth, when we go tramping
Out their way.

What is the most quieting sound in the world?
The tinkle of your doorbell when a bluebird
On the porch outside, alights on its wrought-iron ringer,
And the bell is heard.

1945

Thinking of Ovid Exiled

Out of your bleakness you returned to Rome
In letters more affecting than your poems,
Showing a human heart lonely for home.

"I write, to be among you still," you said.
You are among us still, and always will be.
You left a living thought, you are not dead.

"Love changes us,"—it was your legacy.
You listed divers fabled instances
Of change through love, and thought it poetry;

But it was more. The fables were the truth.
It is our hope, and is our only hope,
To change through love. Then may we build for youth

Cities in which the paths of living lead
Not to the dead sand, nor the Roman eagles,
But to a race children of love indeed.

1945

I

Grace Before Meat

To all Thou canst Thou givest much.
Perhaps we may extend Thy touch
 And learn from Thee to care.
Please bless the bread, please bless the wine,
And help us see in them the sign
 That it is Heaven to share.

In the Dark World

The swaying, the trembling,
the branches interlocking—
these are but shadows, only you and I,
before we were born,
after we die.

Night brings back the stark—
hunger is our truth. Under the old planets
we shadows are hungry.

You who make music of everything you touch
in the dark room of my life
touch me.

Touch hunger, make it Apollo
in the dark world.

1933

I knew not what it was you saw
As you stood there on the lawn,
What sight behind the misty hills
Had flashed and gone—

But you came back and took my hand
And a flutter like a leaf
Reminded me, though love is long,
Our life is brief.

1933

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