

TO THE NATURAL WORLD
by
Genevieve Taggard



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*Exquisite world, powerful, joyous, splendid,
Where, almost when we learn to live, our life is ended,
... O sun's calm, O
Sea's roar.*

"To the Natural World: at 37"

To the memory of Genevieve Taggard
1894-1948

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Introduction

Genevieve Taggard was born in 1894, on an apple farm in Waitsburg, Washington, a small town in the southeastern corner of the state that had been settled by her mother's family. She died in New York City, in 1948, just twenty days before her fifty-fourth birthday. The eldest of the three children born to Alta Gale (Arnold) Taggard and James Nelson Taggard—school teachers and missionaries—she left with them for the Hawaiian Islands in 1896, when she was two years old. Except for two intervals in Waitsburg, she and her family stayed in Hawaii until 1914.

In her fifty-three years, she lived on islands in the Pacific and the Mediterranean, in villages and cities of the Far West, East Coast, and Europe. "I rolled like a marble, from one little pocket of the map to another—Waitsburg, Washington, to Honolulu, to Berkeley, to New York, to Hartford, to San Francisco, to New Preston, Connecticut, to New York, to Antibes, to South Hadley, Massachusetts," she commented after a second stay in Europe that included the islands of Capri and Mallorca, and lasted from 1931 to 1933. And yet, in New England, where she thrice put down roots, ". . . it was as if I had never stirred from the farmpatch . . . I know farm folks, I think, because all the Taggards and Arnolds were farmers, until my father and mother broke away."

She began writing verse in 1907, when she was thirteen, and later her poems and stories appeared in *The Occident* (the literary magazine of the University of California). Her first book of poetry, *For Eager Lovers*, appeared in 1922, and her last (and favorite), *Slow Music*, in 1946.¹ In all, eleven volumes of her poems have been published. She taught literature at three colleges, edited four anthologies of poetry and two literary magazines, one of which she founded. She wrote dozens of book reviews, many articles, some short stories, and a biography: *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson*. She was working on a new biography of Emily Dickinson, on a book about her family and their life in Hawaii, and on a collection of modern American poetry in the last years of her life. She was married twice (in 1921 to Robert L. Wolf—my father; in 1935, four years

¹ *Origin: Hawaii*, her last "book," was published in limited edition in 1947. It contained four new and twenty-four earlier (and previously published) poems about the islands.

after Robert Wolf's confinement to a mental hospital, she was married to Kenneth Durant).

An intense sense of place—and of the “natural world”—infuses many of her poems, and it is this sense I have chosen to stress here. This emphasis is not contrived to limit variety of style and mood, but the selection is, perforce, only a sampling of the many modes in which she wrote. I have also tampered with “time” to achieve another coherence: though not arranged chronologically,² this grouping of her poems derives from a kind of “place-logic” that will, I hope, link certain aspects of Genevieve Taggard's life to her work.

More than the visible world was involved in her “sense of place”: in it was her early and enduring passion for melody and rhythm—one that animates her poetry. “I have always considered myself primarily a lyric poet. I have never been willing to stop experimenting with lyric effects. . . . When I write a lyric poem, I am often conscious of the fact that I have made up a musical background. . . .” she wrote in the notes following the poems in her 1942 volume, *Long View*. The “experimenting” with musical effects began in childhood: “My people were Scotch Irish,” she continued, “with many nonsense songs and plain and fancy ballads within easy reach.” Added to these in the early years were the Hawaiian songs and chants she heard and sang, and the hymns in the mission's church, where she often played the organ.

The various sights and sounds of her surroundings nourished her writing, but other things compelled it. “One's miseries—and there were some that were acute . . . having to do with my father's illness and the lack of money—became the final push toward writing,” she said in the preface to *Origin: Hawaii*.

Once begun, writing was more than an economic necessity: it was the never-ending search to wed the form of the poem to its idea. In *Circumference*, her anthology of metaphysical verse, she wrote of John Donne and Emily Dickinson, who achieved a “revolutionary technique, and a plain and homely grandeur.” Both poets, she claimed, “were deserting formal composition for the subtlest of all techniques—the form of an

² Here, in fact, the opening poem is her last: “Fructus” is also the *final* version of “The Luau.” (“The Luau” was included in Ahsahta Press's *Women Poets of the West*, 1978.)

idea. . . .” She continued: “To give the idea no form but itself, to show it as organic by an inner music, as if the bones of a skeleton were singing their own rhythm—that is the technical obsession of the metaphysical poet”—one that Genevieve Taggard shared, and one that shows itself in many of her poems, and in this selection, perhaps most strikingly in “Remote Design,” “Problem of Evil into Cocoon,” and “Exchange of Awe.”

With the publication of her *Collected Poems, 1918-1938*, she said: “A poet never says two percent of what he wishes to say, but that endless realization is his business. . . .” That process is bound to tell us something of the life and mind of the writer—and in the following pages you may discover the essence of this writer—and even, perhaps, something of yourself. If so, you’ll find

*Something no summer mirrors, an outline
No moon will stamp with her official shine,
Something not sung by me, but mine:
Added, if added, by its like in you . . .*³

Yet this selection, while it may evoke responses in the reader and give clues to some of the events in the writer’s life, is not intended as mere biography. Communion with the reader—using her experiences and observations as metaphors that might reach others—was this poet’s goal, and it has been my purpose here. Explaining this goal in terms of the “voice” she used, she said, in 1938: “The reader will misunderstand my poems if he thinks I have been trying to write about myself . . . as a biographer might—or as a romantic poet would, to map his own individuality. Since the earliest attempts at verse I have tried to use the ‘I’ in a poem . . . as a means for transferring feeling to identification with anyone who takes the poem, momentarily, for his own”

In 1934, my mother inscribed her book, *Not Mine to Finish*, to me, saying: “I wrote this book for you to read when you are as old as I am now. I wanted to make it like a road, or a bridge, to explain the things at the end of the road. . . .”

Now I hope that this small book I have assembled from some of her

³ “The Four Songs,” *Not Mine to Finish* (New York and London: Harper and Bros., 1934), p. 15.

poetry will also be like a road, and that, as you walk it with Genevieve Taggard, you will come to know this poet and her music, and to make her poems, momentarily, your own.

Marcia D. Liles
New York City
August, 1978

Books by Genevieve Taggard:

Poetry: *For Eager Lovers* (1922); *Hawaiian Hilltop* (1923); *Words For the Chisel* (1926); *Travelling Standing Still* (1928); *Not Mine to Finish* (1934); *Calling Western Union* (1936); *Collected Poems, 1918-1938* (1938); *Long View* (1942); *A Part of Vermont* (1945); *Slow Music* (1946); and *Origin: Hawaii* (1947).

Biography: *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson* (1930).

Anthologies: *Continent's End* (1925, with James Rorty and George Sterling); *May Days* (1925); *Circumference, Varieties of Metaphysical Verse* (1929); and *Ten Introductions* (1934, with Dudley Fitts).

A Note by Josephine Miles

In a legendary time in the Greek Theater in Berkeley at the end of the first world war, poets gathered around the visitor Witter Bynner with a great sense of inventiveness and praise. Names I have heard from that time were Genevieve Taggard, Hildegard Flanner, Eda Lou Walton, David Greenhood, Jack Lyman. A decade later, all were scattered, and new figures were slowly appearing from a distance, Colonel Charles Erskine Scott Wood and his wife, Sara Bard Field, Marie West, Yvor Winters, Kenneth Rexroth, Lincoln Fitzell. There persisted a contrast between the poets in the Whitman tradition, trying their freedoms, and those who held closely to or were renewing a kind of neat quatrain power, as we could read elsewhere in the country in Millay, Teasdale, Wylie, for example. Bynner lauded both. Today it is difficult to hear properly either the loosest measures on the one hand or the songs on the other. The implicative symbolizing tone seems somehow attenuated. A puzzled poem of mine may give a little of the feeling.

Luncheon

Jack Lyman came down from St. Helena for lunch.
A warm day
In the vineyard valley, misty in Berkeley.
Rosalie Moore, ***The Grasshopper's Man***, came, and Leonard Nathan,
Who Is Tolstoi, and Carol his wife.
Ask him
Were the eucalyptus groves in Berkeley like this then
When the Greek dancers danced in groves
As if fog, in chiffon? Where was the red wine
Inkiest in the city? How
Did Witter Bynner win those champions
From brief vignettes of song?

Later in the backyard
Leonard and I read the Rhymer's Club
To try to hear what they heard, but that wasn't it—
Those were ballads, in London, this may be George Sterling.
Evanescence?

•

At Arts and Crafts,
Kroeber, Cody's, Moe's, John's Soup Kitchen,
Far from the traffic of the Greek Theater,
They are crying or they are stammering
Creeley's halt lines.

So we ask Lyman at lunch,
As we would Hildegard Flanner, Genevieve Taggard, Sara Wood,
What did you hear then? Tell us how we can hear.

*"Elusively, a sense of things unheard
Awakes. and is forgotten as it dies.
The afternoon is great with peace. Then cries
Far off, and once, a bird."
From **Sails and Mirage and Other Poems**,
By George Sterling.*

Genevieve Taggard's poetry was not and is not limited by that aesthetic world. Rereading, I am impressed by its separateness, its independence of attitude and expression. It combines the free and the constrained in a way that seems to me full of surprises and graces. Rhyme wanders in and out, lines vary in length and emphasis, ideas break off or firmly assert themselves. Taggard was interested in metaphysical poetry and edited an anthology of such poems; her idea of the kind does not include the negativity of the metaphysical historically, but does remind us, in an era of "no ideas but in things" of all sorts of ideas in words, concepts, and generalities—"The bones of the skeleton singing their own rhythm."

In the opening poem "Fructus," and others following, a steady pentameter sustains heavy imagery which turns to ideas, in "so our games ran tacit, without blur," "in the harvest of trees," "jewels of appetite." Then in "Try Tropic," a masterly weaving of rhyme in an irregular line lists for a "sick generation" remedies perhaps now out of date in their natural sequence, but devastating in their total force. Then the light epigrammatic couplets of "The Enamel Girl," "They lasted till you came, and then/ When you went, sufficed again." Later, a Wallace Stevens-like "Hymn to Yellow." Some of these perhaps Hawaiian in their various ways, but steadfastly various. "Autumn Song for Guitar" is one of Taggard's highly sensitive social songs, which are less fully represented here. The more strung-out "Aleatory Wind" is an essay. So on from East Coast, and Mediter-

anean, and Vermont, and the fine free cadenced simplicity of "The Family" and "Long View."

In this book in 1980 we do not need to search our minds for sources. These poems, in their particular blend of color and fibre, are Genevieve Taggard's, sufficient for our day.

Berkeley, California

February, 1980

I. Hawaii

Fructus

Odor of algaroba, lure of release.
The smell of red lehua and the crisp scent of maile . . .
These words and images will help you after a little
Hypnotic words emerge and bloom in the mind,
Anaesthetic names . . . Dry buzz of bees
Who make a honey eaten at early breakfast
From a comb like a broken coral . . .
Do dreams foretell the honey? Break the spell.

So I come home in the valley of Kalihi,
My bare feet on hard earth, hibiscus with stamen-tongue
Twirled in my fingers like a paper wind-mill,
A wheel of color, crimson, the petals large,
Kiss of the petal, tactile, light, intense . . .

Now I am back again. I can touch the children:
My human race, in whom was a human dwelling,
Whose names are all the races—of one skin.
For so our games ran tacit, without blur.

What brings me back with giant steps to them?
What was the feast that woke this fabulous thirst?
What was the summer fruit we found and ate
Boldly, with the children of Adam?

A game and a daily search
In the harvest of trees. We played a parable.
We possessed a valley, devoured the juicy, dense
Jewels of appetite hung in fresco sweeps
In garlands and in fountains toward the sea.

Mangoes of golden flesh, with turpentine
Peel and odor. Plums of inky stain
And the pucker of persimmons. Dates to be got
By stepping up a tree-trunk. Coconuts

*

With custard centres. Rose and custard apple.
Eugenia pink, lemon and little orange,
And the sacklike fig, to be ripped, to be seen, to be tasted.
How rasping sweet the suck of sugar-cane,—
Papaya and banana taken for granted.

With giant steps, in sleep and troubled pain
I return to the fabulous feast, the old communion,
With bodiless hunger and thirst. Why have I come
Away from the adult world where race is war?

Here we are dipping and passing the calabash
In the ceremony of friends; I also;
But in frenzy and pain distort
The simple need, knowing how blood is shed:
To sit together
Drinking the blue ocean, eating the sun
Like a fruit . . .

To My Sister Born in the Tropics

You grew up on *O Susannah*. Natural, the plaint of *Sweet Lelani*,
Natural like the odor of nubs on the lang-lang.
You were famous with your family. You were full of disdain.
Stuff of life came sweet and well composed
In you, swart girl with the homespun chin,
And the jaunty manner of the old wild west,
Remembering fifteen races of little children singing *Hawaii Po Nui*,
Fire and innocence, the jokes of the lonely uncle . . .
Resolute sad mouth imposed and the best pair of eyes I ever saw.

You are a flower whose gentleness we shall all discover
By and by. More than all flowers but a flower still,
With mid-Pacific promise for the sky. You deserve
Dew, the courtesy of a clean sun, and a bowing and nodding company
Of friends. Always with you I hear the melancholy airs.
I hear not wails, not chants and never Orient song,
But very nervous wild and jaunty, so
Remote—St. Louie Blues on an oboe in the evening.

The Enamel Girl

Fearful of beauty, I always went
Timidly indifferent:

Dainty, hesitant, taking in
Just what was tiniest and thin;

Careful not to care
For burning beauty in blue air;

Wanting what my hand could touch—
That not too much;

Looking not to left nor right
On a honey-silent night;

Fond of arts and trinkets, if
Imperishable and stiff

They never played me false, nor fell
Into fine dust. They lasted well.

They lasted till you came, and then
When you went, sufficed again.

But for you, they had been quite
All I needed for my sight.

You faded, I never knew
How to unfold as flowers do,

Or how to nourish anything
To make it grow. I wound a wing

With one caress, with one kiss
Break most fragile ecstasies . . .

•

Now terror touches me when I
Seem to be touching a butterfly.

Sea Change

You are no more but sunken in a sea
Sheer into dream ten thousand leagues you fell;
And now you lie green-golden while a bell
Swings with a tide, my heart. And all is well
Till I look down, and wavering, the spell—
Your loveliness—returns. There in the sea
Where you lie amber pale and coral cool
You are most loved, most lost, most beautiful.

Try Tropic

(For a Sick Generation)

Try tropic for your balm,
Try storm,
And after storm, calm.
Try snow of heaven, heavy, soft and slow,
Brilliant and warm.
Nothing will help, and nothing do much harm.

Drink iron from rare springs; follow the sun;
Go far
To get the beam of some medicinal star;
Or in your anguish run
The gauntlet of all zones to an ultimate one.
Fever and chill
Punish you still,
Earth has no zone to work against your ill.

Burn in the jewelled desert with the toad.
Catch lace
Of evening mist across your haunted face;
Or walk in upper air, the slanted road.
It will not lift that load;
Nor will large seas undo your subtle ill.

Nothing can cure and nothing kill
What ails your eyes, what cuts your pulse in two
And not kill you.

Thirst

There is a bird than hangs head-down and cries
Between the mango leaves and passion vines.
Below a spotted serpent twines
And blunts its head against the yellowing skies.
Along the warping ground a turtle scrapes
And tortured lie glazed fishes in marsh grass.
Across a sky that burnishes like brass
A bat veers stupid with the yeast of grapes.

Imminent Doom

This frail and fragrant morning
Is streaming on toward noon;
Listen to my warning!
There will be buzzing soon.
Soon we shall be shaken
Like flowers and gold grass
And all our pollen taken
By a bee with bowels of brass.

Hymn to Yellow

La, la, la. To live with, to be like, to be
The serene, the level color. At ease in being. Of illusion clean.
Here is our kind. Parable of the bee's departure
On a swoon of air, lifted, guided, beguiled
To a bonfire of bloom, the yellow crest, la, la, la.
Corona horizon, utter pure, utter glow texture,
Flower goal nodding; new era's flange, la, la.

Translate us here, with the bee's literal urge,
Our lives soft bullets to this target, peace.
Large ritual—satisfaction luminous to no fraud.
Human burial, unalone, in quiet color accrued.
La, la, la into sepulcher, la, la into yellow,
Exuberance passing on, la, la, la,
Bold and bland into deathless change, the cool petal.

Bury us not in foaming snow, bury us not in brown,
Scatter us not in ash, sluice us not in green veins.
We decline to inhabit ideal blue. Divest us of love's blood,
Of red, and the splashes of rage.

But bury us like the bee
In calyx of yellow: to eat, to venerate the pollen, to eat
Particles, motes, specks of the dust, the yellow secret
Vibration:—living and dying in the sun's clear delicate ray.

II. Washington State and California

Swimming Elm Ave.

This is like living under water,
Under a dim green-yellow gloom.
Sabrina, Undine, Triton's daughter,—
Fair girls who haunt the sea, in whom
The tides have answer,—See, I pause
Under a frail, green-yellow gauze
And half recall how water was,
Recall, recall how water was.

Bobwhite

(To my father)

Farmer boy, Bible reader, Ozark child,
Learned from this bird
Language of yearning.
Felt no unfriendly beauty,
No world-of-the-high-and-mighty
In this song.

And later long
On his Pacific island, ill,
With Keats' own sickness, told his child,
And then his children,
The tune Missouri's bird had trilled for him.
And read his Bible and
Spoke gently with all men.

Western Meadow Lark

The meadow lark, many-fold, haunts fences,
Uses them for morning travel,
Likes middle air.
Moves span on span,
Spreading notes and wings
From tarred post to post.
Winter wheat out-shines him—
Whir-blur, bark-brown—
While he scribbles the air with notes of lark.

Age of the blond day falls
To dark, throat inshutting.
Night-hawk plaintive air,
Dark wash to ground level,
A time of tribulation
Hid,—a place asleep wherein to repeat
And repeat the remarks of morning.

Up, when the day lifts, how soft astir . . .
Against dark now to argue largely.
Our lark, the West's companion,
Warmly exhorts over the ploughboy's clods.
Whir-feathered, soft dust color,
Throat active, O teacher of Western children.
Contentends with the sound of tractors,
To interrupt, to augment toil.
Along miles of territory, reiterates
This many-fold bird, his theme.
Warns with big silence the coming of trains,
The clack of tracks humming away
His brown obbligato.

Everyday Alchemy

Men go to women mutely for their peace;
And they, who lack it most, create it when
They make—because they must, loving their men—
A solace for sad bosom-bended heads. There
Is all the meager peace men get—no otherwhere;
No mountain space, no tree with placid leaves,
Or heavy gloom beneath a young girl's hair,
No sound of valley bell on autumn air
Or room made home with doves along the eaves,
Ever holds peace, like this, poured by poor women
Out of their heart's poverty, for worn men.

Autumn Song for Guitar

Lost in the shuffle—wheat fields cut,
Wheat's on the train.
Autumn rain
Shuts off the farm, sweeps down the road,
Blows men to town, blows men
Lost in the shuffle.

Chaff off the hay-field; where to now?
Back to the town.
Let's go, we're going down
For winter pavements and the rainy snow.
Cards in a rented room, nothing to do.
Lost in the shuffle.

Too many of us. Walk the street and get
Jobs in the line.
(Another stiff got mine.)
Move on all night, all winter. (All my life?)
Move on, get going, you're
Lost in the shuffle.

Aleatory Wind

Much offends,
Especially the new beauty;
The honest eye that shines and pierces
Even while it pours its honest love like a vapor of healing.
The bare ritual offends;
And the ritual of brotherhood
Which is the basalt sense of the world
Offends, is made to seem contrary and ugly
By means of another ritual with a flimsy deity
And a fantastic logic.

Where the hands have no liking
For stones and where minds are blind
To structure. Wherever the hands cease to take hold,
Where the mind backs away from the plain and the related.
This ritual will hurt
The hands of those
Who have left the wilderness of necessity,
Deep mutuality, the sense of distance,
The sense of depth.

Of the fertility of stones, their tears.
Of the electrical star, its tears.
Of the hilarity of the stone brotherhood, the activity of jasper,
Of the inertia of stones, the fixity of basalt,
Of the vigor of stones in their power to draw,
To test metals, to build shapes, to be in space,
To become fluid in the blood of volcanoes,
Of these I made claim . . .

"No art," said the European, sidestepping the rattlesnakes,
With ballet steps. "Unreal," said the European, "No ghosts.
No culture."

I took a stone of weeping in my right hand.
And a stone of laughter in my left.

•

So the ritual always began, testing the power to hold.
Holding them behind me I juggled them evenly and said
"Choose.

Lodestones and touchstones. Magnets subtle, complex.
The greathearted jewels of the obsidian world."

And looking downward I saw a finger of wind in the dust,
Spinning the dust in a wheel, erratic,
In a funnel, a nothing of wind.

New-world dust sang a sulky little song,
But the tourist heard no song
And saw only liver-colored dust
About a foot high, suspended, in which to wade.

This stone is the electrical star,
The cleaver of space: can you, will you
Bowl it in nine-pins?
Curve it, will it to glide
In dream repetition?

We learn slowly the ritual of stones
And the tactile sense. The snap of action.
The excellent flash of the body
When it kneels and swings.

In this ritual we dance.
For we clasp our ghost, we whirl with a new music.
He is the man we murdered,
The red man. He goes. He is here.
Our ghost is our culture. And we embrace another.
He is the man we murder.
The black man. He returns and returns,
Teaching ritual. And every kind of man
Draws into this whirl. The wind veers
As if to nullify all.
The center of the earth is basalt.

Here we gaze to commune
On action's articulate bones,
Observing our guilt; the rituals of food and power
All wrongly played. Of this we know much.
Sharing aleatory wind
A thin ether,
Playing with skulls, color, gadgets
Inventions and dice.

A dangerous country. With a culture like whisky.

The European wore gloves,
And under the gloves, thimbles
On each finger—clumsy.
He turned the pages of old situations
And muttered his pity in the stony places.

III. New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts

Spring Touch

How tender-mad the little meadows lie!
The wobbling lambs are tasting milky weeds,
The tipsy trees
Are leaned like foam on green wind-gullied seas;
The pale moth flutters where the pale moth leads,
And you, swimming the sky
Waist deep in apple-blossoms,—I
Sweet to your thigh
Take the new tingle of the froth of seeds.

Monologue for Mothers

(Aside)

I am a coward now, and never shall
I walk the earth in confidence again.
And I have let death know I am afraid
At this late date.

His steps come at my back
As viewlessly as feet track some one with
The fortune of a nation,—just behind . . .
Halt when I halt, and pick me up again.

(A hinge, just a rusty hinge,
Nothing to ague at,
Still, how I scuttle and cringe!
What was that?)

The coarse stuff of myself folded no longer
Around the small pure person, the new child; I tremble,
I am afraid, I have found
How slender the shoulders, the rare bones, and how fine
The little deep-blue veins that show along
The temple bone. The world is evil. Greedy air
Sucking too near could sip her inward breath,—I go
So timidly now, who had so many prides.

Who scorned the craven wings across the nest,
The squawking warning of the parent bird,
Neck stretched far out, peering and peering still,
East, West, North, South for infant enemies.

Come, crane your neck, an instinct says;
Perhaps the great sky holds a hawk! a hawk!
If eagles come, combat them with your eyes.
Hold off a reptile with one mother-gaze.

(Beauty writhing in the snake,
Alert in the bad eye
Of the great hawk, good Beauty make
Cause with this child. I cry:

Beauty, be her swords to cut
Enemies away,
Build a circle-wall to shut
Night out and shut in day.)

We will not live in fear, in petty fear,
Nor shelter with an arm
Angled in terror; shock her innocent ear
With this insane alarm.

Now all the world will nod to her,
Nothing ever snatch
At her in evil—

 Something flew
Slant on the window!

 Fear is in my kiss.
And if you suffer it will be for this,
(O innocent and brave and grave and small).

Flute in Late Summer

The dandelion is frayed
And puffed on pipe.
Summer is delicately made
And the season ripe.
See the sun on the grass fade
From gold to green stripe.

Summer is delicately made.
While it is, it is ceasing.
At first we are a touch afraid
At summer's teasing,
And move from sun to shade
Fear shadow-increasing.

At first we are a touch afraid.
We start, we take care.
We delay, or we evade,
We wait or we stare
To see ripeness decayed
And the bright earth bare.

We delay and we evade.
But by degrees, relenting,
Color-timbre, grade on grade
The dimming eye inventing,
Until even the pale and the half-shed
Blow clean with calm consenting . . .

The dandelion is frayed
And puffed on pipe.
Summer is delicately made,
And the season ripe.
See the sun on the grass fade
From gold to green stripe.

Storm Centre

Past noon, past the strong
Hour for full song,
—However late—
Mere silence holds me. Here are met
Furious winds and the great
Quiet is desperate.

Utterly still they stand locked.
Once only the earth rocked
With the weakening of one.

This is battle, forehead-on.
Barbarous singing follows when
One triumphs. Now the centre
Tightens again
Closes. None enter—

It is silent where
Wrestles the air.

Letter in Solitude

Here are autumn certainties:
I will love you and the trees
Go on yellowing and the sun
Stand and pour its radiance down.

Count the seasonal certainties:
I will love you and the trees
Color like a carnival,
Color and refuse to fall,
To show a new aspect of trees
More nearly like themselves than these.

I will love you as I have said:
After all the leaves are shed,
And the sky is fastened down,
And the valley depth is brown,
And the ruts begin to freeze,
There are other certainties.

Surely love you, but with none
Of that radiant tint of sun;
As if a cloud had curled across
The sun, and clung like lichen moss;

Love you surely, but in a prone
Dogged way, more like a stone;
As if a stone's touch gave a cue
To a clearer love of you.

However absently the eyes
Thinking their inner thoughts may stare
They match within, the sharpened size
Of hillshapes in the cutting air.

And so, by seeing uncovered ground
And outlines gaunter all the time
I see love also winter-bound
And think more simply into rhyme.

And since love gets its tempered sense
From the large fact of altering earth,
I love the winter, stubborn, dense,
And love the storm my love is worth.

No More This Home

Weep, weep, and fasten the gate.
The moon is a laggard,—the straight
Lines from the stars, the star-threads
Streak the elms, the bowed leaf-heads.

I wait, and my love, he is late;
Broken apart with some grief,
Walking the mould of the leaf,
Treading as the stricken treads.

No more this home . . . nor these doors
To open, to startle, to shut,
Announcing our angers—to cut
The air back and forth like our wills.

Seal the door-sills.

To the Powers of Darkness

My love for whose ruin we have wept
Tears no one weeps for the dead
Hears no more storms as simple as ours are.
He hears rain never. Nature is not his.
The great sane day of light and genial power
Ceases with him and is the Arctic black.
We weep that none may cheer him any more.
No not even the great sun.

Tired Girl

Put her away some place between two hills
Away from the sea and the sun.
She has so much to think of, must she run
On your bright bosom always, Mother Earth?
Put her away and let some other birth
Bring her back to the sound of the sea and the sun.
After she ponders under silent hills
Beneath your swarming bosom, Mother Earth
She will have words for her beloved one.

IV. Antibes (France), Capri (Italy), and Mallorca (Spain)

To the Natural World: at 37

Exquisite world, powerful, joyous, splendid,
Where, almost when we learn to live, our life is ended,
Where, when we gather our trophy errors in,
And face the array and cannot again begin
To make another life less fatal, less
Like a poor travesty of some greatness,
World, you rebuke us calmly, ceaselessly,
With mute round of rising sun and mimicking sea,
With flood and ebb and taciturn refrain
In round diurnal rings, waxing to wane.
Our mortal life runs through you its swift line
Closing no circle, marking its scratch design,
Fusiform, the spindle, this is its mortal shape;—
O lovely world, midway in large landscape
I pause, look forward. Weakness with wisdom lie
Ahead with nodding age; error and energy
Behind, dim in regret and chaos where
I left my early self and got the despair
That seizes all who see how folly gone
Is their sweet youth with darkness sudden on.
World deign, for one moment, O deign to culminate
One wave in me; O in me consummate
Your surge with all beholding happy power.
So, overlapping once, here in the midway hour,
Let me watch outward splendor solemnly for
Life's brief in all this bigness, O sun's calm, O
Sea's roar.

To the Powers of Desolation

O mortal boy we cannot stop
The leak in that great wall where death seeps in
With hands or bodies, frantic mouths, or sleep.
Over the wall, over the wall's top
I have seen rising waters, waters of desolation.

From my despair bibles are written, children begotten;
Women open the wrong doors; men lie in ditches retching,—
The horrible bright eyes of insanity fix on a blue fly,
Focus, enlarge. Dear mortal, escape
You cannot. I hear the drip of eternity above the quiet buzz
of your sleep.
The waters are pouring, boiling over the wall; at the door
Where murder is under way they fall knocking on silence.
Go, that we may not hunger any more,
Or repeat again the wild ritual, the pang;
I will lie face downward
In an oblivion of waters,
Weeping in no way except in these words,
Caring then for nothing; for the blue wasp in the dabble
of blood, perhaps, only,
While the slow waters pour.

The Trance

In middle life, that time of highest light,
When under every object clings its shade
I fell into an apathy of sight
From looking at the pattern overlaid

Across the earth, the dazzling bright and dark
Complexity, the strange elaborate braid,
The tattoo, good and evil, heavy mark
Like that long twist the Snake in Eden made

When he through pure pale leaves ran mazy lines.
The diamond back of evil in all things
Copies that mark, its multiple designs,
And still he falls along our earth in rings.

Such webby tangle in all earth's array!
My apathy like any shadow clings
To all the happy objects of high day.
Before the snake the bird shuts down its wings.

Only declining sun or hazy eye
Can help indelible lines to shift or fade.
Then can the rigid bird come to and fly
Into the wave of the oncoming shade

Himself, he has no shadow—belly tight
He skims our land and under him no shade.
It is the sun, the very bliss of light
That gives the shadow out of dazzle made.

His coils are melancholy. Heavy snake
Crawl off a little way a little while!
When shall I from this reptile slumber wake,
Move, salute the sun and smile.

Return of the Native

Now, after years serving demonic excess,
Exalting those whose god-passions send them mad,
I am stranded on a simpler shore, much less
Sumptuous,—a land permanently sad,

Bearing a sombre harvest—an old island,
With cactus and asphodel and olive on
The rock itself. This oddly, is my land.
Here a moderate joy yellows the sky each dawn.

We toil—here toil has lost its hectic haste.
The outrageous wrongs men do lessen, diminish.
We are frugal, we share, we despise waste.
The work I have is good. It is not mine to finish.

Remote Design

Nothing lives in the circle
but the red cape, red, red, red,
the cape with fluted edges
turning on the axis of a still body,
a dream torso.
In the trance
of the circuit arena, round, round, round,
the cape lances clean
an ambit of air. Then ah! ah! diagonal and tangent
interrupts, el toro.

V. Vermont

A Poem to Explain Everything About a Certain Day in Vermont

Fifty wizards working in the wind
And one tall wizard standing in their rear
Made a quick sheen to lacquer all Vermont.
Up leapt the sun. The air was far and near.

The weeds, the grass, the corn, the slipping river
Made wizard-quiet. My noon-sleepy deer
Whisked in the shade, saw winsome sun go over,
And still those wizards brewed the atmosphere.

The lone tall wizard opened up the west.
Sunset made its exit beryl and sheer.
Those wizards leapt like acrobats, swinging free,
Hung their thin capes upon cold Vega's spear . . .

Galaxies were thick, weather was clear.

Gilfeather Again

In Gilfeather pasture, trim with moss
Near leafy mingle, in cove of air,
Space, by our moving, flows across
Meadow to shadow, and softly, there
Evening birds exchange by rote
Perfected oddments, echo-pure.
I hear them open on one note
Serene, secure.

No hurt retreats us from this calm,
Now fragile, and so seasonal.
Here, healing as the scriptural balm
In Gilead, affirms the small
Invisible thrush with delicate throat—
Where we delay or return to hear it—
Of which the importunate psalmist wrote
For the broken spirit.

Problem of Evil into Cocoon

Are monsters all big?
I connive on a twig,
Head to heel, head to heel,
Aloof in chenille.
Arrogant worm, is my name,
Ugly worm, they exclaim.
I warp to a hood.
I filter no good.
As horror as whale,
Malignant as eel,
As stinging, as male
In a sheath of chenille.

So fester on dews,
On my moss of chartreuse.
And if men come me nigh
Make a fright for near eye.
Arrogant worm, is my name.
Ugly worm, they exclaim.
Next make, next transform
Me more evil than worm.
My stupor I obey:
Erupt will I from this sack,
Monster as huge as day
And black as night is black.

Demeter

In your dream you met Demeter
Splendid and severe, who said: Endure.
Study the art of seeds,
The nativity of caves.
Dance your gay body to the poise of waves;
Die out of the world to bring forth the obscure
Into blisses, into needs.
In all resources
Belong to love. Bless,
Join, fashion the deep forces,
Asserting your nature, priceless and feminine.
Peace, daughter. Find your true kin.
—then you felt her kiss.

Delight

In the secret place of the heart
What is it my heart most cherishes?
What image, what token in dream, what token held in tight
fingers?
O, one from sweet everyday, whereon I dart
Like a child, whereon no joy perishes,
Wherein no fatal bitterness lingers.

My tall man walking the meadow at night, with the lantern,
A solemn sleepy procession, he and I to the cabin,
Both silent, I at his heels, to return
In morning dew, in first sunrays, with the dark lantern.

And if I were Ariel come home from toils and circling
errands,
I could laugh no more sweetly than when I inwardly see it,
My delight a trembling frame to this Attic picture.

Stern world, one rollicking image, for around this happy
thing
Forever I turn in light handsprings of the spirit.

The Weed

My sister loved milkweed, flower and plant,
Bland-toned, upsprung. The odd dim smell,
Faint fuchsia drench of color coated white
In the brown weed clusters.

Sister, I can't
Find you on all the long hard walks of the night . . .
(Travail of lost person always hunted for).
Day shows the visible universe, humbles to this:
Comfort, great weed.

I circle down . . .
Cluster, odor, color: blast of green wind from the earth's
great core.

In the Tail of the Scorpion

A suave and paltry man, my enemy,
He encounters no spirit law to lay him low.
Thrives in his pose, lustrous where I wilt,
Pretender in a trivial charade.

Robs me and daunts me, to a meanness down.
Still there's no base to put my rage upon.
"No being is half so paltry. Search for depth."
O zero-hero of my hate and love!

Who in this splendid universe of smart
Summer equipment can make moral sense
Where men are folded down like garden chairs,
And whiffs of autumn fleck canary paint.

Lines on Entering and Leaving a Meadow

Trillions of crickets jump in a pretty
Wave either side of my skirts as I pass,
Sleepy and happy, just come from the city
Delighted with grass.

As if I were steering in pale gold seas
Where drops of water leap away from the prow
I walk in this old meadow waved to the knees
By windy shadow.

Activity here a plenty and a stately progress.
Earth herself is a planet-boat
Running to autumn country of no dress
With snow for a coat.

I think of ships. And the earth cleaving
The verge of whitening cold is a ship.
This meadow is the front deck. We are leaving
The warmth for a trip.

When we come back we will be older
By a solar year both earth and I;
Before that we must prepare for colder
Zones, for maelstrom in the sky.

Back to the trillions of crickets certain next year
With earth as solid as ever; and men
Deep in history, unc cosmic and unclear . . .
With luck I will come here again.

No Abstraction

My hair is old. The startle of it!
Slant over my eyes in a river of air.
And I see here, ah, this my hair.
Oh, fright this,—still blowing and growing, but old.

Never so clearly in mirror
Caught I this—age in the edges.
And so slowly see
All powers work inward now
To dying centre, cark of care,
Coarse and inert, corpse, carcass,
Outcast, cold.

Say it clearly: this is dying.
The hair is not living, electric as it was.
Heavy substance of body,
Still in order, in labor strong,
Body obedient, heavily able,
The old, the only body
Makes no cave in mirrors,
No monster shade.

In the fringes,
The edges
Is the fright of me.
In the timid, the hopeful wisps . . .

This shocking, this horror hair,
Colorless, lustreless, human, unscented
Old. Lost the childish tousle.
Lost the quick swirl,
Pellucid brush, comet-warm
Young hair. (The possible
All forever gone by
Sliding like a comet with fiery train.)

Never the rich coil,
The mop of sheen
The girl wraps
Round the high spirit.

Now the hair of my head is old.
Old women accept me in your company.
Make room for me
In your truthful, your unattractive councils.
And I—(can it be true, dear vanity?)
Who loved myself that I was young
And the earth with me and in me,
Must I hate myself that I am old
And the earth not with me, not in me?

Creative Effort

Have you a theme?

Starvation.

In this country?

Yes, starvation. In this country.

Do you mean, nothing to eat?

Yes, to begin with.

Unpleasant theme and very hard to handle.

This is a rich country . . . Why not drop the theme?

Who will enjoy it? You sound a little odd.

Why make it worse than it is? I agree it ought to be helped.

Have you some other theme?

The mouth then smiled.

Some better theme?

Yes, said the poet:

Blood on the moon, a face to starve your smile.

Leaves Fallen and Falling

Lovely shock of plain brown!
Light leafage all down.
Bald. big in the branches the cliff-rocks recur.
With earth we are chilling; with her and in her
Our autumn, more true with each year—and each
 spring
Less near to our story, less true. (What is true?)
Bitter blue
radiant death! Small death, in moth-wing,
Light as leaves, light as wishes, to lie on leaf-mould . . .
And cool goes to cold,
And gold dims to gloom.
Shucks rattle, the thistle is thin on its stem.
We see something never to alter in them.
How hard for the poet to write in his room
With the pull of the seasons on all he pretends,
While the gold washes faint and the plaint of the wee
Invisible cricket crescendoes and ends.

The Family

The sadness of the old, the veteran old
Purges the crude
Metal. Purges the headlong blood
Of its one-word reply. The old
Say nothing wild.
But take up children in the lap to sit, —
Spent out of person in this clean defeat,
To blunder love and argue action true,
Until the planets hoist them, until they lift
Big on horizons in the chairs of sky,
Rocking, forever rocking in their parlor blue,
—Sober ring of rocking, critical few . . .

So shine the ancients in the wintering void.

Exchange of Awe

Deep cup of this cave
Heeds the moon,
Heeds the sun, tips down and up
With the tides. (So the cave rides,
The world, all gilded, glides.)
With sun, tide, moon,
With orb, quarter, crescent and the crescent wave,
Asleep, inert, a-tune.

Sunrise, the babe leaps forth,
Moonrise, he meets the maiden,
Tides, he suffers and riots,
Darkness, he recoils and dreams,
Recoils, descends
Toward the image within the image,
To devour the flower of rage,
To eat dust and taste blood,
Tight in the brackish fluid,
Brute, blind, in broken story a slave,
In the cave, the tight cave.

At noon his shadow merges with his fellows,
At noon, he toils and is heavy,
At noon he is slain and made many,
He is dismembered, he is eaten
And of others, he eats.

So he is born of man
In the realm and meaning
Of myriad man. Forgets
Oblivion, the cave,
Its residue, its after-birth; forgives
The tides their prod, accepts
Penetration of the sane sun; loves

*

Authority of the task,
Its antagonist fiber; dreams
His deep acquaintance with the stuff of things: adores
The burnished withering moon.

Marvelous now is man.
Wrinkles next his eyes.
Stubs of his ten fingers
Grow the exquisite skin of self.
Odors of love and sweat,
Voices of youthful creatures
Fill cups with winey light
Sweet to the lips; he drinks,
Groans in his excess
Lies prone to procreate.
Within is a great wave cresting,
The glee of the master.
He strides, an exuberant creature,
Happy at pitch, the crescent of his spanning,
Sober, with labor; defeat his skidding shadow.

Adjusted by the moon to wane,
A-down, a-dark,
Rejoicing and desponding,
Elate, afraid, shod with electric spurs,
Petitions not to die.
(For after he is slain his feeling is immortal.)
Mortal, lofty, in him, the human spirit
Repeats, repeats, petitions not to die.

Hark, and afar he feels return
The tug of tide and sun
The shock of setting moon
In solemn orb and wave, and these reply:
Lie down in nothing's cave,
Obey the grave. Undo thy self. Obey.
Now he is closing.
In mystery withers away.

Half-harking he shrivels, shrinks,
He is cradled, laved.
He is near nothing,
A nothing vast.
Now he is near pure nothing,
He is that nothing he knows never, never,
That nothing that is,
Bliss within bliss
He is no one
He is unspun.
Asleep, inert, a-tune,
A-down, a-dark,
Where pull and fuse
Forces of the tide, moon, sun.
(A gliding tide,
A moon
A swooning sun.)

Final

A far barbaric sadness haunts these hills
In mist of autumn and magnificence
Of clear unearthly color—

I have crossed the wall
Past mortal sorrow and its single sense;
I am a human dying of my ills
Who comes upon a cosmic funeral
And the still splendor of indifference.

Long View

Never heard happier laughter.
Where did you hear it?
Somewhere in the future.
Very far in the future?
Oh no. It was natural. It sounded
Just like our own, American, sweet and easy.
People were talking together. They sat on the ground. It was
summer.
And the old told stories of struggle.
The young listened. I overheard
Our own story, retold. They looked up at the stars
Hearing the serious words. Someone sang.
They loved us who had passed away.
They forgot all our errors. Our names were mixed. The story
was long.
The young people danced. They brought down
New boughs for the flame. They said, Go on with the story
now.
What happened next?

For us there was silence,
Something like pain or tears. But they took us with them.
Their laughter was peace. I never heard happier.
Their children large and beautiful. Like us, but new-born.
This was in the mountains of the west.
They were resting. They knew each other well.
The trees and rivers are on the map, but the time
Is not yet. I listened again. Their talk was ours
With many favorite words. I heard us all speaking.
But they spoke of better things, soberly. They were wise
And learned. They sang not only of us.
They remembered thousands, and many countries, far away.
One poet who sat there with them began to talk of the future.
Then they were silent again. And they looked at the sky.
And then in the light of the stars they banked their fire as
we do.
Scuffing the ground, and said goodnight.
This poem I bring back to you
Knowing that you wonder often, that you want
Word of these people.

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