

419051

This eBook is a reproduction produced by the National Library of New Zealand from source material that we believe has no known copyright. Additional physical and digital editions are available from the National Library of New Zealand.

EPUB ISBN: 978-0-908328-92-5

PDF ISBN: 978-0-908331-88-8

The original publication details are as follows:

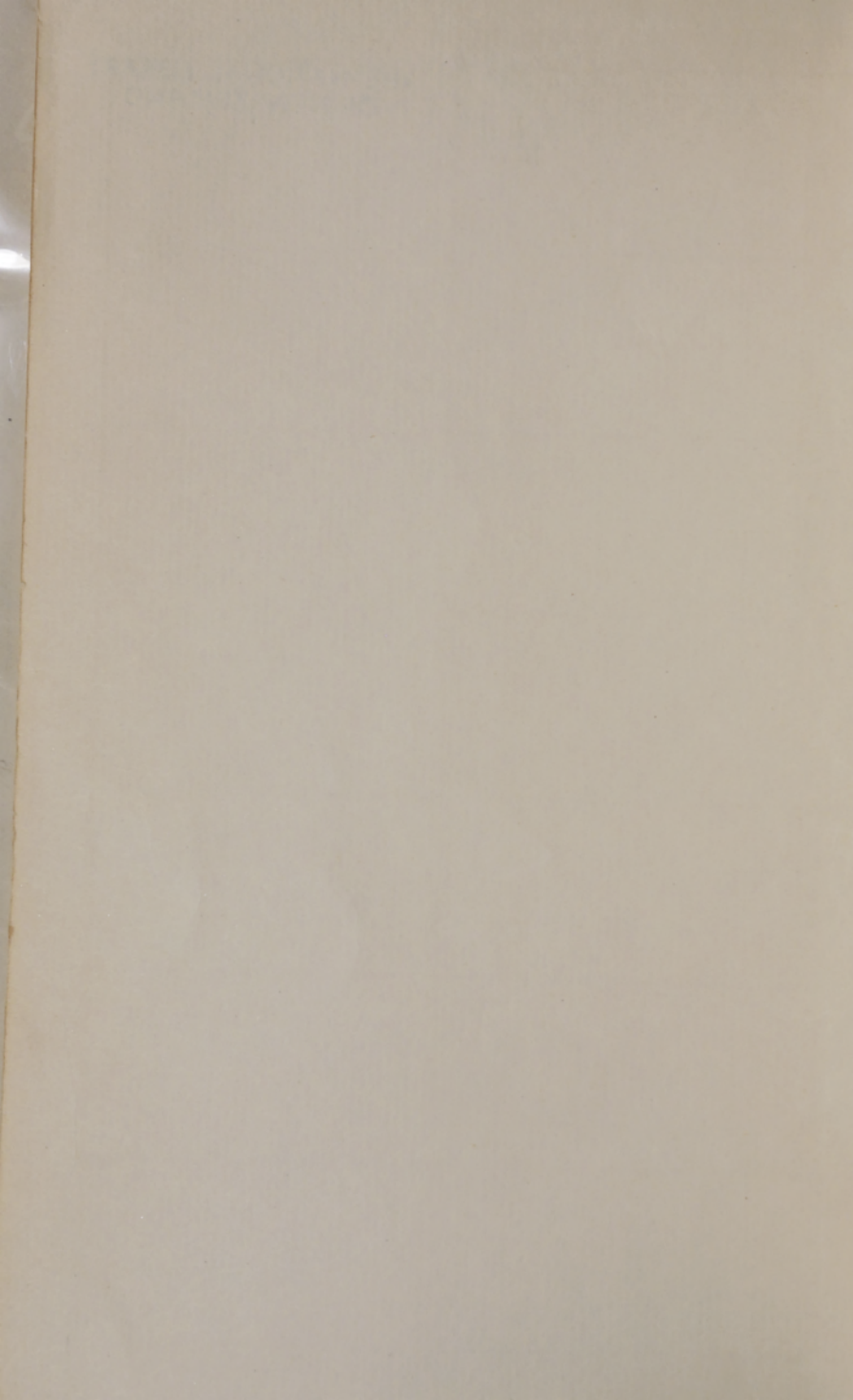
Title: Houses by the sea & the later poems of Robin Hyde

Author: Hyde, Robin

Published: Caxton Press, Christchurch, N.Z., 1952

NEW ZEALAND
NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICE

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY
OF NEW ZEALAND



HOUSES BY THE SEA
& *LATER POEMS*

BY ROBIN HYDE:

JOURNALESE

National Printing Co. Ltd. Auckland 1934

PASSPORT TO HELL (1935)

CHECK TO YOUR KING (1936)

WEDNESDAY'S CHILDREN (1937)

NOR THE YEARS CONDEMN (1938)

THE GODWITS FLY (1938)

DRAGON RAMPANT (1939)

All published by Hurst & Blackett, London

Poetry

THE DESOLATE STAR

Whitcombe & Tombs, 1929

THE CONQUERORS

Macmillan & Co., London 1935

PERSEPHONE IN WINTER

Hurst & Blackett, London 1937

HOUSES BY THE SEA

&

THE LATER POEMS

OF

ROBIN HYDE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

GLORIA RAWLINSON

GAMES

THE CAXTON PRESS
CHRISTCHURCH

1952

Published with the assistance of the
New Zealand Literary Fund

NEW ZEALAND
NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICE

652743

16 May '53

2821

Printed at the Caxton Press
Christchurch 1952

13 JAN 1987

FOR DEREK

For assistance and encouragement in compiling this book
I wish to thank Robin Hyde's sister Mrs Edna Rogers,
Mr Pat Lawlor, Mr J. H. E. Schroder and Mr W. R.
Edge, her executor.

G.R.

CONTENTS

Introduction	11
--------------	----

Poems 1935 to September 1936

The Wanderer	37
Illusion	38
Hero	39
Blondel	39
She of Shalott	40
A Song For Pilgrims	41
The Conjurer	42
Zoological	43
Company	44
The Dusky Hills	46
Requiem For Singers	46
The Pioneers	47
Dark Sentinel	47
The Pacifist	49
March England	50
Gradian	51
The Victory Hymn	52

Poems October 1936 to December 1937

Church of The Holy Innocents, Dunedin	57
Arangi-Ma	58
Young Knowledge	60
The Wise	64
Fairytale	65
Husband and Wife	65
Outdoors	70
Absalom	70
Street Scene	71
White Irises	72
The Rootless	73
The White Seat	75
The Bronze Rider, Wellington	77
The Roads	78
Whangaroa Harbour	81
Descendants	81

To Sarin, Who Drew A Tree And A Woman	82
Among Neighbours	82
Sand	83
The Last Ones	84
The Familiar	84
Titirangi, 1937	85
Tidemarks	86
Sea Song	87
Cockcrow Thrice	87
Guarded Heart	88
The Sword	89
Christmas Night	90
In The Doorway	92
Armaments Factory	93
The Encompasser	96
Waterglass	97
The Lake	98
Armouries	99
Digging	102
The Tower	103
Little The Great	104
Words	104
Twilight	106
Prometheus	106
Isabel's Baby	107
Time's Silence	109
Toadstools	109
Sisters	109
Fragment	110
The Exile	110

Houses by the Sea

Part I: The Beaches	115
Part II: The Houses	120
Part III: The People	125

Poems January 1938 to August 1939

Shiplights	131
Journey From New Zealand	131
Fragments From Two Countries	135
Ku Li	137

The Water-Bearer	138
Pih sien Road	139
Sweeping The Gutter Clean	139
The Silent	140
What Is It Makes The Stranger?	141
The Deserted Village	144
Written At Hsuchowfu	145
Hong Kong Water	146
The Native Grass	147
Thirsty Land	148
Prayer For A Young Country	150
Strange Inn	151
The Miracle Of Abundance	152
Feeding The Multitude	153
Katherine Mansfield	154
Sails	155
Temptation	156
The Verb	156
The Dream	158
Case Adjourned	159
Image	163
Interlude	163

INTRODUCTION

'Family history should be terse if mentioned at all; the glitter in it is so brief—sunlight on a broken sword; after that the long years that the locust ought to have eaten, unless dullness is the locust.'

Robin Hyde

Iris Guiver Wilkinson who is better known as 'Robin Hyde' was born on January 19th, 1906, in Capetown, South Africa. When she was a few months old her parents came to New Zealand and settled in Wellington which she regarded as her home city. In her early years because of family associations other countries, Australia, India, and the traditional England of Malory and Shakespeare held her interest and affection.

Robin Hyde's father, who was born at Agra, India, fought in his teens in the Boer War and in the First World War joined the N.Z. Expeditionary Force in the Postal Corps. Of him she wrote: 'I think he loved music as much as his books'. In China, coming down the lonely Pih sien Road from the battlefield, she recalled in a fragment of verse an incident of childhood:

. . . no more I say, but that once
My father brought home an old flute,
Very small was our house, but twining poppy wreaths
In our hair, my three sisters and I
Danced that night like four wands of corn.

From her mother, an Australian, Robin Hyde inherited her auburn hair and sensitive temperament. Mrs Wilkinson was a granddaughter of John Sircom who settled in Melbourne about 1840. John Sircom had a gift for writing satirical verse and in his day was reputed to be the wittiest and most popular man in Melbourne. His grand-daughter was a clever and determined girl with the nostalgia for England that sometimes shadowed with discontent the second generation of colonials. England was Home to her, but nursing experience took her only as far as South Africa where she met and

INTRODUCTION

married George Wilkinson. In later years Robin Hyde wrote of her mother: 'She looked to me, as often she did, strangely beautiful with her weary solid dignity—no pretensions—shaking off housework and unwritten things, shrugging her shoulders. She had written some poetry, verses she was rather shy about. One poem had been especially written for me when I was ill at Hanmer Springs . . . I think that Shakespeare's variety of Roman women had something in common with her.'

Robin Hyde's wanderings began in 1910 when Mrs Wilkinson and her children visited the homestead in Australia: 'Here', wrote Robin Hyde, 'we stayed first with one uncle and then another in Victoria. There were seven of them, all red-headed and known collectively as the Mallee Giants because of what they did to their scrub farms in early youth. Great-uncle George brought us button mushrooms in a vast red handkerchief and even invited us once to visit his (strictly bachelor) house. But for the most part we were quartered with my grandparents. How that old house must have sunned itself! I remember huge piles of the sweetest rock melons. Dog Sandy used, for reasons best known to himself, to steal loaves of bread and bury them. Grandfather did, yes, look a little like an animated brown potato, but didn't he keep striped mints in one pocket for good children and in the other, bless him, blackballs for bad ones!'

From an early age Robin Hyde's remarkable powers of observation and memory were apparent; school work came readily to her and she was a persistent prize winner. At twelve her character and interests foreshadowed those of her later life; shy, self-conscious, not fond of sport, she was reading Shakespeare, Malory, Byron and Shelley, memorizing the ballads and lyrics of Yeats whose poetry so influenced her own, and writing verses in a little black exercise book. Easily moved to tears she could not bear to see other children bullied or even rebuked and stray cats and dogs were always conscientiously taken home and cared for.

Many Wellington women will remember Iris Wilkinson as a contemporary schoolgirl for her feet also helped to wear the hollows in the wooden steps of Wellington Girls' College. Here she found a lifelong friend in Gwen Hawthorn (Mrs P. Mitcalfe) who shared her interests in poetry and art. Before leaving College she had won nearly all of the Rangiriri Literary Club prizes, was first in an Empire Essay competition and her poems were printed in the school magazines

INTRODUCTION

and local papers. In *Journallese* she wrote: 'Before I'd said Goodbye to the English trees and wooden stairway of our school, Eric Baume, then a contributor to the Dominion, startled several people including myself with a full column in the Dominion headed "Schoolgirl Poetess". That was an awful thing to call anyone, really, but at the time it looked like a leap up the ladder of fame which a kangaroo in good form might have envied. In between quoting bits out of extremely sentimental poems, Mr Baume would write paragraphs admitting that the stuff had points.'

When she was seventeen Robin Hyde went to work in the Dominion newspaper office which ran a rural journal 'The Farmer's Advocate'. After some months as 'Aunt Mary', christening pets for children and snipping items of interest to women from overseas papers her health broke down—the first indication that she was not equal to the demands of routine work. A long serious illness, diagnosed as rheumatic fever left her permanently lame and a victim of insomnia. She went back to work on crutches to write witty articles under the pen-name of 'Novitia'. As a Parliamentary reporter she had many privileges, was receiving a good salary and found the work interesting, but here again the demands of imaginative writing conflicted with journalism, again her health gave way and she spent some months in hospital at Hanmer Springs. Away from worry, noise and distractions, stories and poems were written here and signed for the first time 'Robin Hyde'.

By 1926 she was known as a promising young writer and her work appeared in the leading literary journals of the day. She contributed to 'The N.Z. Artists Annual' and 'Aussie' edited by Pat Lawlor, to the 'Triad', Sydney 'Bulletin', and other Australian journals.

Through the influence of Mr J. H. E. Schroder she became a reporter on the Christchurch Sun and when her first book of poems, *The Desolate Star*, was published in 1929 she dedicated it to 'J.H.E.S. whose friendship has meant so much to this book.' Though the poems in this first book bear the imprint of her early Romantic reading they show a gift for musical phrase and rhythm. Four of them were reprinted in *The Conquerors* (The English Trees, Running Water, In Memory and The Trees), and two in *Persephone In Winter* (Hanmer Woods and Division).

She left Christchurch to join the staff of the Wanganui Chronicle and from there went to the Auckland Observer where she was lady

INTRODUCTION

editor from February 1931 until June 1933. Apart from the wild scurry of reporting, interviews, articles, paragraphs and fashion notes she also contributed stories, poems and articles to other journals; but the work was arduous and she could never solve the basic conflict that was in herself. The torment of striving to keep her inner vision clear of what she described as: 'the huddled, hectic, breathless little lives, trying to do in anxiety and perpetual need for economic self-justification, what can only be done in calm', caused a complete breakdown. For a year it looked as if she would never recover, but with a quiet room to write in and a tiny garden to tend she slowly emerged from the shadowland of unreality and began to write poetry again.

Although Robin Hyde rarely theorized about it some notes made at this time show that she gave much thought to the art of poetry: 'I've discovered after reading through what is called Modern Verse of Living Writers, what abstraction in poetry should, and must be, if it's ever to be at all. It's the distillation of one's inward and secret self. This rare fluid, once released, is the correct colour-basis of modern landscape, skyscape, dreamscape. Most of the moderns, in a revulsion from the late Victorian verse which is simply music and anatomy, don't know this and write their abstractions—outwardly. Elizabeth Barret Browning wrote with a stethoscope; these Moderns with a microscope. The results are startling, but not convincing. I wonder if Epstein's *Rima* is the distillation of inward and secret Epstein applied to the green house of leaves, a fairy wood and a fairy love? If so, what a splendidly savage thing it must be . . . Bach and Shelley went to Heaven for *their* abstractions—and the Kingdom of Heaven is within . . . I myself write blotched attempts at poetry from a starved and strange body. I have not distilled my abstract, perhaps never shall . . . I believe that what applies to poetry applies to every art. For me, I need to practice poetic five-finger exercises hours a day, until the fingers of my soul ache. Go, root for your pearl! Rooting may cause pain or weariness, either an emotion—then there's your pearl, mellow and gleaming, if you only know it when you see it. Your clever subtle fingers will understand then how it should be set. I've a feeling that the Chinese understood and practised all this, centuries ago. But their understanding was never put into words and it's time somebody did it, if only whilst talking to herself in solitude. That loosed bird-song, who will ever cage it again? Little outwardly-seen, outwardly-drawn poems are not Chi-

INTRODUCTION

nese. No. Like the first porcelain to be manufactured in England after Cathay's little dim flower faces had proved so successful an adjunct to the gatherings of the West, they are merely, God help them, collector's pieces—a quaint imitation. But what wisdom, what passion, what shrewd observance and sense of humour lay behind the original flower faces . . . all distilled, distilled, again distilled, trebly fragrant and potent for that. I believe our own Elizabethans came closer to what I want. "Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle. She died young." Who could write that today, or throw into space just one of the thousand splintered stars in Shakespeare? Not one of them but burned first in his own heart! No other word—but to discover suddenly what has not been thought of before is good indeed, as it was to discover Neptune flaming in the wastes. Of course there's no such thing as the *creation* of a new Truth. It burns there forever, perceived or unperceived, but to realize it is something. . . .

In 1935 a collection of her verse, *The Conquerors*, was published by Macmillans in their Contemporary Poets Series. We find in *The Conquerors* the dominant theme of compassion and the search for a visionary country where:

. . . you shall not remember at all
That which you could not help, that which you
could not save;

* * *

Never a face be lifted, pleading or fierce
And the thought that you strove to save them, that
too shall cease.

(From 'Nirvana'.)

The Conquerors was well reviewed in England, U.S.A., Australia and New Zealand, and the fine sensitive withdrawn quality of the poetry commented on by many critics.

The routine of staff journalism was now out of the question and free-lancing too precarious for a livelihood; there remained the writing of books. In an effort to solve her immediate financial problems Robin Hyde wrote *Journalese*, a book of reminiscences which was published by The National Printing Co. Ltd., Auckland. This was followed by *Passport To Hell*, the war experiences of John Douglas Stark, 'Starkie', published in London by Hurst & Blackett, who were to publish the rest of her books. Next came *Check To*

INTRODUCTION

Your King, a brilliant and impressionistic picture of Charles Baron de Thierry, self-styled King of Nukahiva, Sovereign Chief of New Zealand. The Baron's long, disconnected record of his adventures 'An Historical Account of an Attempt to Colonise New Zealand' is preserved in the Auckland Public Library. From this record and other documents Robin Hyde wrote what may be considered our best historical novel to date, a book often used for reference by writers on early New Zealand.

In 1936 another novel *The Godwits Fly* was started but put aside for a phantasy, *Wednesday's Children*, an ill-fated book which did much to wreck her hopes of success in London three years later. The writing of novels did not interfere with her extraordinary outpouring of poetry and in August of this year she sent to Hurst & Blackett her third collection, *Persephone In Winter*.

This book represents an interesting stage in Robin Hyde's development as a poet, and for reasons other than surer grasp of technique, subtle change in depth and meaning or variety of subjects. Themes from English history, Shakespeare, Malory and the Bible still predominate and in *Le Mort d'Arthur* especially she found symbols of that visionary country she had long sought under so many names—Nirvana, Sarras, Camelot, Ultima Thule. Much of the verse in *Persephone In Winter* belongs to this phase but there is a change reflected in perhaps six or seven poems. The publishers had returned the ms. asking that a reselection be made to reduce the size of the book. This was done but new poems were added to the revised selection and one interesting point is that they all had New Zealand themes. *Paraha*, *Red Berries*, *A Song of Mokoia*, and *Sheep-folds* were among these, and the book was again sent away in January 1937.

In September of the previous year Robin Hyde had gone to Dunedin at the suggestion of the late Mr Downie Stewart who thought she would find valuable material for her work in the Hocken Library. Here she filled two large exercise books with notes including long extracts from Edward Markham's journal, 'New Zealand—or Recollections of it.' In 1820 Markham, an Englishman, wrote this frank record of his ten months stay among the Maoris of the Hokianga River and from this journal she drew material for *Arangi-Ma* and made of the author and his Maori wife a poetical study in the complexities of two ways of life. *Young Knowledge* was also written at this time and it would seem that Heaphy's discovery of the Green-

INTRODUCTION

stone People was akin to the 'young knowledge' that she as a poet was acquiring.

Letters from Dunedin reflected the direction her poetic imagination was taking: '... as to poetry—right now I want to change from one vein to another—its just dawned on me that I'm a New Zealander, and surely, surely the legends of the mountains, rivers and people that we see about us should mean more to us than the legends of any country on earth.'

And in an article on 'New Zealand Writers' she wrote: 'New Zealand is not a country of flat colours and facts. It is, in everything, subtle and complicated, and the knowing of it a craft as well as an art. It is not easily put on paper... but if the revelation is very difficult, it is also certain and individual and by its slowness you may measure its probable depth.'

Her desperate groping for background which had started with *Check To Your King* had now invaded her poetry and she could write with sudden conviction:

O red berries, red berries,
Surprise in the wilderness,
Coral on dark green dress.
Nay, don't tell me she's blank
My own land—she makes things. . . .

The Arthurian knights and historical heroes, even the dream worlds and enchanted islands almost disappear. In these same six months Robin Hyde literally travelled from 'the Bluff to the Cape', leaving Dunedin for Stewart Island, thence to Queenstown, Christchurch, Nelson and her home town Wellington and back to Auckland. In the summer of 1937 she left Auckland to stay first with her friend Gwen Mitcalfe and then in a little cabin on the Whangaroa Harbour: 'Here', she wrote, 'there is a huge burial cave, but the great totara tree which once served as a step-ladder has now rotted away. Gwen and I got there, however, despite shouts of admonition from a native farmer and much flourishing of horns from the wild cattle whose herds guard the place. Down below, in the tapu forest, no tree has been felled. So it stands there as it has been since the world began, its fallen dead crashed among the living, great black vines and lianas trailing across the silvery bleached trunks, and over the rich earth the scattered millions of tiny rosy apples of the puriri tree. . . .

'But if the music of the country (and isn't that like the wine of

INTRODUCTION

the country always the best to be had) is more to your taste, the window of my stilt-legged shack on a spur of the Whangaroa Harbour opens wide to moonlight, and over a mile of mangrove swamp and clear water come the Maori voices, laughing, singing and gossiping from their place, The Sawdust.'

In 1938 she wrote from China: 'Anyway my primroses don't clash with the colour of the Chinese people. I feel among them as I felt in my little Whangaroa hut among the remnant of the Ngapuhi Maoris—here is rest and peace, here are people who smile friendliness, unostentatious, not too deadly serious from their watchful eyes and mouths. Yes, the Chinese, like the Maoris, have long since found themselves. . . .'

Robin Hyde's journey north was to take her as far as Spirit's Bay. She was at work on a series of poems to be called *New Zealand Beaches* and the poems *Whangaroa Harbour*, *Sand*, *The Last Ones*, *Descendants*, *To Sarin*, and *Among Neighbours* were written at this time.

Back in Auckland Robin Hyde went to live in a small bach at Milford. She had now decided to go to England and was saving the advance royalties on her books to pay the passage. This year was one of hard work and penury for she had no regular income and lived 'on bread and butter, tea, and the tin-opener'. There was at this time an air of pathos about her and she clutched at friendship in a despairing manner. Sometimes her fine heavily-lashed blue eyes were down and done for, sometimes they had a large ghostly shine. Yet she could be a gay and witty companion, interested in world affairs and in a somewhat shy and hesitant manner always ready to give, listen to, and discuss solutions for the world's problems. She was a champion of causes, mostly lost ones, and wrote for the unemployed, the Abyssinians, the Orakei Maoris, and the loyalists in Spain. From 1934 she had made our flat her headquarters and we became accustomed to her odd comings and goings, almost every day, books under her arm, carrying a bunch of flowers or leaves and waving her stick.

Although actually of a gentle disposition she had no adaptability and in company of more than one or two friends would often become irritated and argumentative. She had been through troubled waters, the depths of which cannot be sounded in this outline of her literary life. She was haunted by doubts and suspicions, often unfounded, but once having gained her confidence and affection you held them

INTRODUCTION

forever and however bitterly she complained of her friends one to the other these friendships endured. She wept quietly and terribly at the slightest provocation. Her character was knit from strange old fragments: fear of darkness (she always slept with a light burning); extreme sensitivity to harsh or loud noises, only softest music pleased her; love for churches, mountains, moonstones and opals, old legends, ballads and words; a prodigious memory—she knew by heart and could recite many plays of Shakespeare, Milton's 'Paradise Lost', long passages from Chaucer and Spencer and carried in her head a huge anthology of world poetry; all interwoven with politics, religion, sentiment, and fiery obstinate pride.

She wrote incessantly: articles, book reviews, short stories, novels, half-finished novels and projects in all stages of development, but nevertheless found time to contribute often without payment to little struggling journals; requests, never refused, were made to her for contributions to parish magazines and literary journals. As if this was not enough she kept up a voluminous correspondence with a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. It made no difference that she had spent the whole day with you and parted from you late at night, no surprise was felt when a letter arrived the next day. No doubt these long intimate letters took the place of entries that might have filled her scanty journal.

Robin Hyde's work of 1937 stemmed from a mood of clear new energy. In the Milford bach *The Godwits Fly* was completed as well as a sequel to *Passport To Hell* entitled *Nor The Years Condemn* of which only a few copies survive, the Hurst & Blackett premises having been bombed early in the war and all stock destroyed. In this year she also wrote and planned more poetry than at any other time. Earlier influences were cast off as her vigorous and observant mind with so much of its own to say, strove to translate into poetry her 'young knowledge' of New Zealand. Her passionate concern for the great moral and political conflicts of our time is also a constant theme. She gave much time and thought to a long prose-poem *The Book of Nadath* and an historical piece *De Thierry's Progress*; these have been omitted from the present collection because of length but it is hoped to publish them later. In this volume her longest work is *Houses By The Sea*, a sequence of poems written in her Milford bach: it became part of her personal luggage in the next two years, read over, revised and corrected in many strange places. Two lyrics written in Hankow were added: *Hares on their forms at dusk*, and

INTRODUCTION

the concluding *Faraway*. The present version is the final draft as it was typed in England. *Houses By The Sea* was to be the title of a book of New Zealand poems.

Of such of Robin Hyde's poems as are known to me, numbering over five hundred, only some thirty were written abroad and most of those in China. *Journey From New Zealand*, *Shiplights* and one or two other smaller poems were written on board the s.s. *Changte* in three weeks between Sydney and Manila. *Journey From New Zealand*, the best known of her later pieces was first published in *Art In New Zealand* 1938. In London Robin Hyde helped Douglas Lilburn, the New Zealand composer, to prepare the text for his Choral work *Prodigal Country* (for chorus and orchestra) which won the 1940 Centennial Music Competition; the text included extracts from *Journey From New Zealand*.

The poems in the present book have been selected from over three hundred unpublished pieces as follows:

Part I includes most of the poems that were withdrawn from the first selection for *Persephone In Winter*.

Part II contains all but a dozen or so of the poems written between October 1936 and December 1937.

Part III contains all except two doubtful pieces written overseas. The poems *What Is It Makes The Stranger*, *Hong Kong Water*, *The Deserted Village*, and *Written At Hsuehufu* are from handwritten and untitled drafts and are the only poems in this book of which there were no typewritten and revised copies. I have endeavoured to place the poems in chronological order but in some cases it was difficult to be exact and I have had to rely on memory, letters to me, paper water-marks, and the lettering of different typewriters.

The rest of her unpublished poems including a series of children's verses were written prior to 1937.

On January 18th, 1938, Robin Hyde left for England. Her capital was £125; of this £92 went in paying fares, but Mr H. J. Kelliher of 'The Mirror' gave her a cheque for £20, advance payment for articles she was to write on the journey. Mr Trevor Lane, editor of the then 'Radio Record' also sent a cheque and request for articles; and there were others; but hers was a slender purse for a long journey. Still, her venture was not so foolhardy when it is remembered that she had had three books and two volumes of verse published in England and two more books accepted by publishers who had every confidence in her work. Her route was to have been:

INTRODUCTION

Auckland to Sydney, the Pacific ports, Hong Kong, Kobe, Vladivostok, Moscow, Warsaw, Berlin and London. But on board the *Changte* she met some Chinese people. . . .

Her journey from New Zealand until her death in 1939 is best told in extracts from long letters:

January 19th. I watched the coast until it was dark writing down bits for you and this is how it went: No green water even yet and no bright blue, but an indigo darkness with foam in little hard pellets of milk, drifting out upcurled from the ship—birds flying behind, sea pigeons and bigger chaps, till it grew so dark that their wings seemed black . . . The last I saw of New Zealand was a lighthouse flashing clearly and one island dark-topped with clay sides so yellow you could still see the clay grooved straight down like a waterfall. Well, here it is:

A TOKEN

Not speech of mine but gulls will tell you better
How like a one-legged saint set off to sea,
This sandalled ship, shaking back her creamy fetter,
Beats the Sad Walker lost on Galilee.

There was a dark-scrubbed island. None at all
Had seen before how clay and bushes part,
Carving straight down an earthen waterfall;
Ah! keep this poor rock Penelope, in your heart!

And if no porpoise swigs in Auckland town,
No fizzing glass of foam snaps sheer at stalk,
Still heed the blowing birds who scatter down
The same old briny gossip talk.

And think, setting up your house, Penelope?
(Yawning, Ulysses stuffed beside his shark),
The gulls turned black while I looked back at thee,
Long after dark, dear ones, long after dark.

Brisbane. January 26th. On the whole I liked the half-tragic, half-absurd little temple on the hill here . . . it was raining when

INTRODUCTION

we broke aside the wet grasses and read the words carved on the side thus:

‘I stood by the low and humble; the weary and broken
in heart,
from whose hands slipped the prize before they had
grasped it;
who stood on the dying of the day with their failures—
unseen, unheard, unknown, and even their fates overthrown.’

I never expect to see the obituary of the West better written.

s.s. Changte. January 30th. I have made friends with two sweet people, a little Chinese girl going home after eight years schooling in Sydney—and a very gentle gentleman Mr Yao. He is sad about the war between China and Japan. Every evening the stewardess reads a bulletin of the war to the Chinese crew and Mr Yao interprets for them. Yesterday his village was bombed and for some time he may not know whether his family is alive or dead. I think he was a little disturbed when I said, ‘Mr Yao I’d like to help’. But I don’t know. There is some vast difference in Chinese and foreigners. A Chinese is both momentary and timeless, like a flower or a tree, like anything left to its peace. A foreigner, especially a white foreigner, is like a clock. Wind the poor thing up and tick, tick, tick, as long as it lasts its devils make it go.

February 11th. Hong Kong. I got off the Changte and there was a weeping grey rain over the great red hills. But as soon as I stepped on to the not-at-all Chinese soil of Hong Kong, the conviction that I’m definitely not going any place but China came over me . . . it’s funny because this place isn’t exactly attractive.

February 17th. On Board the Aramis. Now guess what? I’m on my way to Shanghai. Most of the time in Hong Kong I spent with Mr Elliot (Inspector of Factories). At night I worked on Houses By The Sea and it’s now taking definite shape. I very nearly missed this ship through going up to the Peak but two clerical gentlemen drove me down to the Kowloon ferry. I’d not only have missed the ‘Aramis’ but would have forfeited 89 dollars; now don’t get all het up—for dollar read 1/3d., but 89 dollars Mex. are a lot to me.

Shanghai. March 10th. The bronchitis has left me at last, but I felt done in for about a fortnight. The snow comes down in big flakes

INTRODUCTION

and I'm wrapped in a big red quilt . . . the spring rains are bad, but it is hardly yet spring and snow is unusual in Shanghai. The second night of it, while the delicate flakes fell something like our little silver ferns, fifty Chinese refugees died in the snow, quietly as the flakes. I can't bear thinking about it but torture myself as usual. Not fifty yards down the road from here there is a big refugee camp, outside I saw a poor dirty old woman kneeling in the snow and slush, beating her head on the pavement and wailing 'Aiyah!' Really if one listens long enough life no longer seems worth living. I've lost all my Hong Kong confidence and no longer feel that I can give even a cent—so I hastened back here again, because I knew that if I listened any longer I'd give in. . . .

On March 14th she wrote that she was being sent to Canton for a month, fare and expenses only, out of a fund mainly controlled by J. H. Timperley, the Far East correspondent for the Manchester Guardian, and co-editor of *Asia*. *Asia* published three long sketches by Robin Hyde, one about slave girls, one called *Boy*, and one *Ways To Dust*.

Hong Kong (undated). I'm on this ship going from Shanghai to Hong Kong and I'm sorry to have to confess that I got caught on one of those nails you so earnestly warned me about. Oh yes, I remember and say to myself, 'Watch, keep quiet, don't let the thread catch on a nail'. Well, I've quarrelled with R.A. hopelessly, irretrievably—not the kind when I used to stamp out of your front door and ten minutes later creep in the back. Oh no! And all over those bluebells and primroses. It wasn't exactly the strutting *I* that quarrelled; it was a nervous, distraught, self-justifying *I* born of being two people. Well! Well! I'll watch closer next time. This ship, the 'Kaiser-I-Hind' is making her last voyage and I try, like her, to grin and bear it. Old ships have their feelings, their failures, none the less sad for being such failures.

This time in Hong Kong I met James Bertram and did not feel so lonesome. He took me to Macao, the Portuguese colony which dreamed; having on its wind and soil, red crackling fireworks, bells, anemone beds of green villas, and opium traffic the life of the place; Camoens, the poet, in his grotto.

Canton. March 22nd. I've been working so hard and am tired, tired, tired, but I feel you so near me as I write. Refugees again . . . and

INTRODUCTION

tiffin (I hate that word out of its proper Anglo-Indian context) in a well-to-do English house. The old beggar with his mild wizened face pressed against the glass doorway, not shouting, not whining . . . just watching us eat, murmuring, murmuring, murmuring gently, so that through the glass we could hardly hear him. It was a six-course meal. A little mint sauce? Murmur, murmur, murmur. You can't take any notice, you mustn't really, my dear girl, you'd have them all around, said my host bravely attacking the leg's dark brown underneath. Now a little more, just a little more lean, eh? Murmur, murmur, murmur. The house boy came out and told the old man to go away at once. It is a very great shame, he said with some dignity, for there is a guest in this house, you should go at once to Shameen. Murmur, murmur, murmur, soft apologetic murmur, without argument the old blue cotton shadow, the flat face pressed against the long glass window, unfastened itself and went. The house boy came in with calm pride. I hope you'll like this peach ice-cream thing. Afterwards I inspected the little sanctum of books. What hadn't he read? There was much our type of reading—all the mint sauce. Of course it was one of those impossible cases. To give is madness. Not to give is—what? But I suppose, as Robert Frost puts it, something has to be left to God . . . I wish I could forget that dinner.

Hankow. April 9th, 1938. I went to the main park of Hankow in a slapdash, slog-rattle Mongolian pony-cart. As added attraction there was a broken-hearted poor old devil of a chained tiger. Of course I must go up and scratch him behind the ears, to the horror of two Chinese who shouted what I took to be warnings. The poor miserable old beast's stomach rumbled. At first I thought he was going to purr, but then, when I knew he was hungry, I walked away. What else could I do? Buy him a bun? There were no bun shops about. So I went into a sub-park containing models of many famous places, the Eiffel Tower, George Washington's House, and the Tower of London. I was wandering away disconsolate and completely upset, sick with grief for the tiger, when two enormous halves of the biggest globe I have ever seen confronted me; all the countries done in bas-relief, their names printed in Mandarin beneath. And there she was! Still reasonably like a fish, my own little New Zealand and they'd even remembered to put in my darling Stewart Island. Then I met the man who sells woven rush frogs, fishes, birds, crickets, bees and other fauna, at ten cents each. From him I bought

INTRODUCTION

a prawn with crimson pop-eyes. A Chinese family coming into the Park laughed at me and indicated that they wanted the prawn for their baby. But I shook my head. They had an enormously fat sparrow in a cage and I didn't see why they should have my prawn. I put it in water and a few hours after its tail fell off and its pop-eyes fell out and I thought, well, fool, that's what would have happened to the bun and the tiger would be hungry again, so stop fretting.

On April 28th she wrote to say that she had at last received General Chiang Kai-Shek's pass allowing her to go to the Eastern Front: 'So far I've had it rather easy, now we'll see just how much I can take. I'll write this in bits, scribbling best way I can on the train. The place I am going to is called Hsuehchowfu. The strutting I says, I'm going to be near the scene of events, to write a book—Oh aren't we brave. At deep heart the other replies, I don't know, nobody knows, you are only a woman in a shabby green coat. Hankow wasn't enough. How could it be? Well, I'm on the train and there is a Chinese girl with a sharp-cut slender face and I'll call her Sienna Gown. We are both bound for Hsuehchowfu. We change at Chengchow, getting there about 10 p.m. if the line hasn't been blown up. Ivens and Furno are on this train in the dining car. I'm slightly battered but try to remember: Watch, keep quiet, don't let the thread catch. And now the jolting, swinging lights of the train are near Chengchow. Silly to spend my loose cash on drinks before leaving . . . A Chinese soldier tossed Sienna Gown and me into another train. Sienna Gown and I laugh and cling to each other—the train shakes itself like a wet dog. It isn't possible, yet we're off. Of course it is all noise and dirt, but I feel quite happy. The lights are a golden dizziness, and the officer in the top berth looks as serious as an owl. Hsuehchowfu tomorrow morning—and everybody in Hankow said no woman would be allowed. In the morning we wake up reluctantly, half-stupified with the heat. The train isn't moving—why, why, why? I look out of the window. Three filthy dirty little willow trees hanging over a dirtier bank, dust and flies. This horrid little baked blister of earth simply can't be Hsuehchowfu. Sienna Gown woke cautiously, turned her curly dark head from side to side on the pillow, cleared her throat, and spat. She's even nice when she spits, I thought, like a fairy bull-frog clearing its throat. The Japanese have bombed two stations ahead and two hundred people are dead . . . No, this isn't Hsuehchowfu.

'Sienna Gown and her soldiers and I finished the journey to Hsu-

INTRODUCTION

chowfu sitting on the floor of a troop train. We had to drop off into the sand, walking two miles to the battlements of the city. One of the soldiers grabbed my suitcase, the other steadied me against his breast, and on top of their kindness Sienna Gown gave them my coat to carry. Sand all the way, threaded with the same sand flowers that we have in New Zealand, a convolvulus like paraha, catkin grass on pale gold wires, wild primulas and a leaf flower like very red sorrel, something I thought looked like toad-flax, and a tinier speedwell than ours. I'm coming to Hsuchowfu, sang my heart, and now I'm in an upstairs bedroom of a mission house scribbling the last of this funny letter. I'll keep you posted. It's May Day—all over the world ring the bells for the first of May, 1938.'

From May 1st to June 27th Robin Hyde was reported missing in China. The Japanese captured Hsuchowfu and all communications were cut off. A detailed account of this is given in her book 'Dragon Rampant'.

May 10th. Hsuchowfu. I doubt you'll ever get this; I've been up to the front and looked through a telescope and seen little white-singleted Japanese in the distance—but now the front has come to us, quicker than we expected. I have sent an article to the 'Mirror' about it; I rode down from the front on a dear little ass and got badly drenched in the heaviest shower I have ever been out in. But all that matters little now.

May 14th. I've written to Bill Edge, just in case. This day the ancient drum tower burst. I went into the courtyard to write to you and mother and will post these letters now.

May 19th. Well, this day fell Hsuchowfu—but outside in the world, who cares?

May 24th. In the hospital wards I am really of little use. Apart from the fact that I have no medical or nursing training, not knowing the language is a handicap. I had to guess what the nurses were going to do, and though in most cases the dressings were simple enough, I was afraid to trust my unpractised fingers. I think if I ever get out of this place, and I doubt it, I'll urge all boys and girls to get a little Red Cross training—you never know when you will be needed . . . I helped to wash hundreds of wounds, and I think that some of the women and children who were not too badly bombed to notice anything, were pleased when I helped. They caught hold of my

INTRODUCTION

hands and tried earnestly to talk to me, but all I could say was, 'I can't speak Chinese. I feel bad for you. Your pain is my sorrow. Good morning. All right.' These Chinese phrases, so heavy and slow, I kept repeating. I went back to the house at last and made lint pads, hundreds of them. I felt better as they piled up, cool and white . . . There doesn't seem to be any way of getting out of here. I, being so unofficial, am not allowed to send any wire at all. I have told them that I have relatives and friends who could not know whether I am alive or dead. From this side it hardly matters, nothing matters beyond the walls of the city and what they enclose, people, wheat, dust, dead. But I spend my time trying to persuade them at one headquarters or another to get a wire off to Hankow, so that Mother will hear and pass it on to you. One of the Japanese officials was funny. He seemed to understand English but not to speak it. After I had repeated my telegram to him and asked with as much indignation as I could muster, 'Surely it's possible to send that?' he wrote on a piece of paper his one copybook ewe lamb—'Wor nose no law.'

Robin Hyde tried once to get out of Hsuehfu by walking down the railway lines. At dusk an old peasant overtook her and seeing what he thought to be trouble ahead, pushed her down a bank where she struck her head on a boulder and a thorn pierced her eyelid. After three days wandering she was placed on a trooptrain by a Japanese official who assured her that she was on her way to Tsingtao, but when she looked out in the morning light she found herself back at Hsuehfu. Some Japanese soldiers, mistaking her for a spy, had slapped her face, her eye was swollen and inflamed, and she was in great pain. She tried again to leave Hsuehfu and this time succeeded. She walked down the Lunghai railway lines and was taken on board a train to Tsingtao where a German doctor removed the thorn from her eye.

Tsingtao. July 10th. Everything for me can be labelled First. First bath, first cold cream, first clothes to replace old slacks and shirt, new shoes to replace my poor old friends who have been cremated. Now I'm anxious to pick up *Let's Go Safe* [her typewriter] and thankful I am that I did not take it to Hsuehfu. I've been memorizing some lines of poetry that I want to set down, and also want to hold 'Houses by the Sea' in my hands again.

INTRODUCTION

July 20th, 1938. Hong Kong War Memorial Hospital. By ship from Darien Bay to Shanghai and now here. Now this place doesn't mean a thing except that I've picked up a germ, sprue, a kind of anaemia, that thrives on fats of any kind. I was dead broke when I got here but the 'Mirror' and 'Radio Record' cabled me some money, bless 'em, and now I'm sitting up and writing articles in return. How did it happen? Dears, I was just sitting on a chair in a Chinese Hotel. I was all right one moment—the next, walls, floor and ceiling sloped into misty distance, squeezed back into a lozenge. I wrote my name and New Zealand address and got a boy who went out for a doctor. The doctor gave me morphia, enough to sleep without being lost. That was all I needed for a little time. I am on a diet of depressing stuff called Spruelac. The doctor gave me permission, the other day, to accept an invitation to the home of Mrs Sun Yat-Sen. She is a beautiful woman—but she gave me rose-pink ice cream. Well, I'd have eaten it if it had been tacks. It was good ice-cream she assured me, but for me it was suicide's ice-cream. I told her all about Hsu-chówfú, that is, all a speck of dust like me could possibly know, and wished it could have been more or of some importance.

August 10th. Hong Kong. Off to England tomorrow . . . Leaving China and just at this stage hurts more than is logical—but it is all finance! You see I wasn't correspondent of any important big Daily which might have sent me back to Hankow or the new capital in preparation, Chungking. After an original £25 (about 500 dollars Mex.) I never had a bean from the little Chinese propaganda paper I worked for in Hankow and Canton. The War Memorial Hospital used up 303 dollars Mex. of the money from the 'Mirror' and 'Radio Record' and Cook's took the rest, except a small surplus enabling me to buy a camphor chest with junk sail pattern to keep my papers in . . . I have a little money waiting for me in London—otherwise just £8 in hand . . .

Robin Hyde left Hong Kong on a freighter, the 'Serooskerk', but the voyage was not a happy one and she sent a thirty-six page letter about it. She was apparently still very ill and the captain arranged for her to stay in Singapore until another Dutch ship, carrying a doctor, could give her passage to London. From Singapore she wrote: Here I am, all based up in Singapore. A very nice bespectacled Chinese doctor said, when I thanked him for looking after me, 'Well I do my best, but sometimes I'm a little gruff, a little gruff.'

INTRODUCTION

I managed to buy a stuffed baby crocodile and two tiny vases and look through a book of Jo Alie's sketches—marvellous and wonderful being the only words to describe them. As soon as I was up the hospital sisters took me about in their cars. Normally I'd have been interested in the Base, but I'm too tired now. Ever since that Yunnan dream I told you about, I've longed for China.

m.s. Johan Van Oldenbarneveltdt. (undated). All I know is that I'm a first class passenger in a first class cabin all to myself when I should by rights be bunking with several others in a third. I have the run of the doctor's deck to myself and am trying to put my notes in some kind of order and do a bit of tinkering with 'Houses By The Sea'.

Balawan, Sumatra (undated). It's queer to find the monotonous olive shore-green broken by port so soon after leaving Singapore. Everybody says 'Go to Medan'. I go. Great waddling chocolate and white geese. Open light-coloured houses. Bouganvillia sprawling everywhere. Did Gauguin make the Pacific, the Pacific make Gauguin—and only half a job at that? Sabang is beautiful, but I fell among thieves who stung me for five shillings, had nice smiles and told me that they hated the Japanese and loved the British—all sounded very phoney. Back at Balawan I had more sense—whole streets of proper shops, with butterflies and trumpeting flowers over whose silent expressiveness Gauguin had no monopoly.

September 15th, 1938. Off Portugal. In a couple of days, slightly bloody—I would not say unbowed—I'm landing in England. But at times since reading over some of the poetry of this last year, peaceful and even happy—fascinated by a string of places which are all sunny sleepy story books . . . I keep thinking that if I were Jo Alie I'd draw Singapore as the old native trying to sell sticks; Medan as the swallow in the mosque trailing the tip of her wing across the visitor's book; Sabang as rain, well one third rain, one third grey lizards, one third flowers. My dears, things are not too good as I keep telling you, in High Finance, and I'm still sprue-infected. However, I believe my 'Godwits' will be out in Octoberish . . .

Robin Hyde arrived in London in the crises week of Munich, September, 1938. Shortly after her arrival she had an offer to join the staff of the London Daily Mirror, but was too sick and tired to think of accepting routine work, and wrote:

INTRODUCTION

Walk on the wine-red leaf-mould of an English forest, with water-hen ducking their small lonely heads among the reeds of half-frozen, half-muddy ponds, and suddenly I find myself measuring my steps to fit exactly the sleepers on the Lunghai railway line. It is dark within daylight; no beech or hornbeams broach their kegs of shadow over the sodden leaves. Instead comes a low white-flowering Chinese acacia, its marching lines broken by dusty willows . . . then a hornbeam straight ahead splits into two. From the joined mossy base its two trunks wreath like lovers . . . and I know, that is nothing of China's. And I say to myself 'Steady as you go lass, you are in England now.'

October 28th, 1938. I write to tell you that I have this day begun my book which I am calling 'Accepting Summer'. [This title was later changed to 'Dragon Rampant.'] I took this place, advertised as a caravan in a Kentish orchard, for its probable cheapness and quietness, and have got both; though to tell the truth the orchard is just a hilly field where a bull grazes, and blackberry very bad in the hedge. Now my Chinese photographs and reproductions are up and the wheeled box is ready, a little desperately, for the sort of life its next few months are likely to get.

November 10th. Maidstone, Kent. Far less despondent . . . and please keep on writing as much and as often as you can. My 'Godwits' are out. I got a nice bunch of letters from New Zealand and Dr Buchanan came to see me, he was like a bit of home in spite of his Scots accent. When he went away I sat on the step of my caravan and wept. I did not cry in front of him because he does not like the size of my tears but afterwards they fell down as big as marrowfat peas. Most important of all is that Hurst & Blackett offered a contract for my next three books, without their even being seen by readers or anybody else! Then I found them worried because the first was to be the Chinese book. However, after writing them that I simply had to go ahead with it and offering to release them from the contract, they kindly replied that they do not want, under any conditions, to terminate their contract with me. Oh, thank God!

December, nearly Xmas. I finished 'Dragon Rampant' in six weeks and came up to London intending to stay only a few days but I met James Bertram who introduced me to his bed-and-breakfast abode in Taviton Street and to Mr Philip Wiles of Harley Street who is

INTRODUCTION

going to shove me into hospital. He also read my proofs, restored my morale, corrected innumerable spelling mistakes—he knows more Chinese than I'll ever understand . . .

January 3rd, 1939. Bond Street Side Ward, Middlesex Hospital. It was like old times lurking here in hospital beneath the ominous shadow of a bed-table and reading your lovely budget. J. A. Lee and Dan Sullivan are very friendly in writing to me and J. A. Lee, like you, wants me to come home. But I'd like to finish another book, raise a little money, and go to China again for a few months; and though New Zealand and not England is my abiding place, I'd like to arrive looking less like a derelict Egyptian. I had a lonely New Year's Eve until my letters were brought to me. But I feel better and work better and have recently found glimpses which have left me less forlorn. Guess? Old Daddy Wordsworth . . . D'Arcy Cresswell turned up just now with carnations and chocolate biscuits; his second part of 'Poet's Progress' is finished, and he sends regards, but he, too, looks tired.

February 18th, 1939. I'm still writing occasional articles and war stories for 'China Journal', Hong Kong 'Telegraph', and Shanghai 'Morning Post'. I had a letter painted in little shadow birds from Dr Hsuing (Lady Precious Stream) asking me if I wanted an artist to do the cover for a second very small book of Chinese odds and ends I'm doing gratis as a thing to be sold very cheaply in aid of the China Campaigns Committee Funds . . . this shouldn't entail much work, but trying to write with nothing resembling a permanent address is fair to medium bad—but it can't be much worse, and may be better . . .

April 20th, 1939. Do you remember any University magazines of a few years ago containing some verses by Charles Brasch? Well, I'm at his Wiltshire cottage, Bishop's Barn, which is of a ripe brick age, 'tied up' with the funny iron S shapes the ancient builders used; inside is a little Nirvana of books and comfort. Here I sit under a ponderous yew tree, and in hand's reach grass, nettles, primroses, dandelions, blue vervain, all spring up; the cows shine white as washing. . . . Now and for the next three weeks, a long time by the summer's lazy clock, I'm free. There is a village gloriously named Ham near here, with wigs of thatch, peculiar chimneys, and trees like Christchurch trees. . . . After I leave Bishop's Barn I go to a flat in Charlotte Street that has been lent to me for a week or two.

INTRODUCTION

I've nearly finished the dramatization of 'Wednesday's Children', all but one scene. If it goes through, and they seem pretty sure that it will, this will mean at first £25 on account, which I badly need, later pay a royalty that might really be worth something.

From this date Robin Hyde's letters to me are full of references to *Wednesday's Children* and the worst of all a young author's troubles—hope deferred.

May 10th, 1939. My agents and the managing half of the play's prospective management are quarrelling violently; as far as I can understand it's about the American and Canadian terms. The English terms were happily fixed and simply turned me from a pauper into a Midas with £100 to hope for . . .

June 11th, 1939. Over this quarrel which is going on and on—I don't know; they have sent Watts a final and negative letter, then they wrote to me asking me to deal directly with them. I may be a disastrous fool but at this stage I feel I cannot drop Mr Watt since they give no real reason, and have written to say so.

July 8th, 1939. I wish you were here so that we could talk it all over. I don't know what to do. It is all so unsettling. I'm so hot and tired, high up in this Kensington room. . . . They must want the play or they wouldn't have written to me after cutting Watts. I want it to go on, very very much, and will do anything to heal the breach.

August 10th. The 'Godwits' didn't do as well as I hoped; it didn't get well reviewed either, but still it sold better than poor 'Wednesday', who is still having words, such and so many, with the would-be producers. They still want it but they have a Munich technique and not to insult them is doing something to my blood-pressure. Very much I want it to go on. Then perhaps I can make for Saigon and home. At the end of the month, with luck, I'm going as a P.E.N. delegate to Sweden. I'll write to you from Gothenburg, if I ever get there. Am in rags, and not well. At first I thought 'Dragon Rampant' was a complete flop. I nearly flopped too, for that book wasn't so easy in the making, but it has changed its mind midway and is now in 2nd edition with a full page from 'John o' London', three reviews in 'Times', long and good one in the Lit. Supp. Freda Utleý, whom I met at the China Campaigns Committee's last

INTRODUCTION

luncheon is reviewing it for 'New Statesman and Nation'—that means it's taken two months to get under way.

August 21st. Leaf, leaf, how can I be sane enough or mad enough to write to you—to touch or leave untouched—to say how much there is to say—or let silence have her shape? I don't know, it is all so difficult. But something you said, if you will only remember! that we live in several different lives, all of us, and however things might seem to be destroyed or broken or changed they can be restored to their former shapes, even born to greater beauty as Truth comes out of embers. Yes, yes, that is how it was and could not be otherwise—but *uncertainty* and the needs of body and mind for re-affirmation spend so much time trying to kill it . . . but a little above the margin we are lonely. The petals are pressed on and one day recognize each other in some glowing cycle . . . it doesn't matter. Sometimes fighting and dying are better than anything else . . .

It is obvious from her letters that she had not recovered from the exhausting tropical ailment, sprue, convalescence from which is prolonged and marked by attacks of severe depression. Sick and discouraged she was in no condition to battle with her increasing problems. Negotiations concerning the dramatization of *Wednesday's Children* were still inconclusive; owing to gathering clouds of war interest in the Sino-Japanese conflict had waned—all eyes were on Europe. She had insufficient money to return to New Zealand, to live in London for long, or to revisit China. However, by the persuasion of the N.Z. High Commissioner, Mr W. J. Jordan, who had been anxious about her health, during a visit to her on August 21st, she eventually agreed that if he made the necessary financial arrangements she would consider returning to New Zealand. An official of the N.Z. Public Relations Council in London had also visited her that day and had gone to see her literary agents. She had, too, living in the same house a New Zealand friend, Miss Beula Hay, (now Mrs B. Henry) who was concerned about her and endeavouring to get her home.

It will be seen that she did not lack friends. But nothing was to stem the impetus of despair and Robin Hyde (in her thirty-fourth year) died on 23rd August, 1939. It is ironical to have to add that a letter dated 21st August was on its way to her containing the long awaited agreements for the dramatization of *Wednesday's Children*.

Robin Hyde was buried in Kensington New Cemetery, Gunnersbury. Those present at the graveside were: The New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

High Commissioner Mr W. J. Jordan, Mr W. R. Edge of Auckland, who had arrived in London the day before, Mrs Edith How-Martin (of the Suffragette Fellowship), Mr H. T. B. Drew, and Mr F. A. Wright, a relative. Another New Zealand poet, Mr D'Arcy Cresswell, records that he arrived too late for the service but saw the little group dispersing. Mr Jordan, who had an appointment at No. 10 Downing Street immediately after the service, said at the graveside: 'In the midst of the important affairs of State we must make time to bury our young poet.'

G.R.

Auckland 1947

Poems 1935 to September 1936

THE WANDERER

Come, I will tell you the truth—if the truth may be
Told by a tavern fire, with the window-pane
Drummed by the restless, beating hands of the rain,
And a road beyond that blackens towards the sea.

I have offered up body and soul to the proud white glory
Of love. And those tall sails split with a sound of thunder,
And I watched the circling fins, as my barque heeled under,
And learned the last cold phrase of the sirens' story.

I have spun alone on the vast, and put my trust
In a star, and watched that light beleaguered go.
But the moon like a snail of fire trailed the slow
Phosphorus-slime of her chill and ancient lust.

Castaway I, in a land of which men speak
But as the waking speak of a dream sped by,
As the safe man jests of fear that blanches the cheek—
'This was afar,' they say, 'This was a lie.'

Yet I learned the all that this surly land could teach—
Aye, though it broke my youth like a wave on its shore.
What if I hungered at night for my native speech,
For the gleams of a rainbow lore?

There was a bird that rang through the Circean woods,
Sweeter than any who tolls in the meadow of youth;
And the slim, tall flowers, adream in their purple hoods,
Veiled not their looks from the truth.

I have sought out the enemy country, know where narrows
The snarling river of Life to the ominous shallows
That spare not ship of fleet sail, nor bird of fleet wing,
Nor any proud, impetuous, beautiful thing.

I have learned the lot of the serf, and the beggar's meed—
These, and a pride that laughs at the pride of kings.

Aye, where their chariots slacken, my silver steed
Stamps and widens his wings.

Such were the seaways. I come in a mean disguise
Back to a world that seems but a wraith of the foam,
Back to the laughter of alien lips and eyes—
Where shall my heart find home?

Sings the bird of the woods, there is comfort yet,
Music, beauty, the tender truths of a friend.
How if he lie? I shall turn to the west, and forget.
Shipwrack and sea-voice chanting, these also must end.

ILLUSION

When some spired illusion falls
Sacred stone by sacred stone,
Painted window and fretted walls,
Beauty like a bubble blown
By God's own breath to perfect being,
In little while, with eyes unseeing
Man passes by his dream's despair.
The green invaders mount his wall
And plant a forest's banner there . . .
He sees and goes. He does not care . . .
In little while, the scent of small
And tender grasses brings forgiving.

He watches not the ever-living
Shamed agony in breast and wing
Of his broken angels. And at last
In evening times, he comes for peace,
And the winds that move with quiet hands
And cool, in such forsaken lands,
And the tenderness of memories,
And the bird of youth, that sits and sings
Faithfully, in his ruined trees.

HERO

'Sirs, you have amongst you slain a most sweet and innocent lady.'

—Much Ado About Nothing

A prick of slander here—ah, rarely played—
Blue as a swallow flashed your dexterous blade.
Now, while she halts, you of the supple knee,
Here's a white breast might wear a rose for ye
Red as her heart's blood. Gallants, tell me what
Mere courtesy might spoil our sport, or spot
The name of any who, in self-defence,
Should stab such strange, unyielding innocence?

She was a silver birch? We cleft her down.
She moved with queenliness? We mocked that crown . . .
The stars are tinder, and all's equal now,
Nor need our sluts be quieted by a brow
Whose thoughts were white as cherrybloom, whose eyes
Were like a child's . . . but strange, and over-wise.
A word, a glance, we might have kneeled to her;
But quietude is feared. Some belling cur,
Finding perfunctory her cool white hand,
Started this frolic all could understand.
No more; we carve no statues in the snow.
The dearest's cheapened. Life is safer so.

BLONDEL

But there was loyalty then. A grim king ranting
Day after day against the prisoning tower,
Half dreaming, in the rain, his spearheads slanting,
Or roaring at a jest, or at the least
Deft-worded sneer a-bristle like a beast—
How could so lost a one hold any power?
Europe might fear him. Richard's march had been
Gold-casqued, the proudest thing their bays had seen.

But now might brother John on England's throne
Smile, while the toothless lion begged his bone.

Blondel was Richard's rainbow. From the skies
Shone down the faith that was not asked in vain.
And he who saw it waited with dim eyes,
And, knowing his heedlessness, half woke to pain,
Yet swore to find a reigning monarch's prize
For this rash boy, whom treacheries could not stain.

Let you be captive now. Bewildered turn
To friendships that seemed taut, love sleekly fed.
Or trail your battered gallantry to bed,
Knowing you will not meet one honest eye.
There is no hothead youth to deal with now,
She whom you lay with lightly gave her vow ;
Soft words—but softer, when your back is turned ;
And not in all the world that faith unearned,
That valiant fool, who for your sullied name

Had given like children's soldiers place and fame
And life itself. Ah, men are very free,
And quit of masters, as of loyalty.
And no more lutes awaken in a morn
The silver bird of some wild hope forlorn.
Go to the tower's edge, and peer, and stand . . .
Wait for your friend, with empty heart and hand.

SHE OF SHALOTT

She of Shalott moved ever through rippling twilight,
On worn gold carpets like mosses under the waters,
And they robed her in sapphire velvet, as it was right
For a bosom of snow, and a maid among Merlin's daughters.
Bright as the sudden colours shot on her loom
And richer than these, was the drift of her beechen hair.

But she knew not the wealth of her beauty. No light would dare
To dance like daffodils, there in her blue-veiled room.

Nothing she knew of her childhood, save that a voice
Gravely had said, 'She is gay as the jonquils in spring—
But our world would break so slight and gallant a thing—
She shall be sealed like a perfume. Such is my choice.
Percival, Pelleas, Bors, Lord Agravaine,
Long may ye seek for the joy withouten stain—
Ye will find not the hidden flower, the secret scent,
The magic maiden grown tall and innocent.

'Yet I would not keep from her whispering heart the arches
Of greenlit woods, the shining runnels of streams,
Crystal snow stamped hard by the budding larches—
Rainbow scarf of the morning shall span her dreams.
But the amber dusks and the nightwind's sparkling breath
Nearer her heart shall be than the fools that ride
With a tilted lance, with a horn making merry at death,
Though the may-tree gleam in their path like an unveiled bride.'

She of Shalott could fashion with swift white fingers
Phantom deer and flowers, the feather of smoke
From a gypsy fire, a gooségirl's scarlet cloak . . .
Yet ever and aye, her glance in her crystal lingers.
The wizard's daughter looks on the unforgot
Gold mirage, the city of Camelot . . .
And a knight rides out from the gates, on a road of doom,
And her ghostly flowers dance on her magic loom.

A SONG FOR PILGRIMS

Look up from dusk and see the starry marches—
Oh travel light, my soul, along that road.
Take not the cumbrous thing within thy load
Shall hold thee back, when the clear cry and thin
Rings from the heaven-trees, the starlight larches

That white as dreaming bud and dapple in
Their many-fronded mere, the Milky Way;
They fruit in moons, their bloom is comet-spray,
Whisper of gleaming rains is all their words,
Their boughs above, inlaid with jewel-birds,
Shall grove and glitter from the single root,
Their juice shall stain thy mouth, and dye thy running foot.

Take not desire. The shape of things shall change,
Thy granite mountain split for mustard-seed.
Nor take not coveting; thou shalt not need
Aught whose gold image fills the earthly range.
Take not thy worth; in rags the monarchs pass,
But the tall children naked on the grass.
Take not thy hate. Oh soul, thou dost not guess
How dear one human look, to bridge that loveliness.

THE CONJURER

Yes, watch the conjurer. See that peach-flowered sleeve
Flap down in mock obeisance. Who'd believe,
(Enchanted by his sonorous roll of words.)
That his white rabbits, tiny jewelled birds,
Fathoms of azure silk, trapped wings like rain
Beating against this vast hall's window-pane
Are only make-believe? Or, if alive,
Caught in the clever way such folk contrive
And loosed for entertainment? Clap, children, clap . . .
The little wild thing circles to its trap
Blind with gold lights, dazed with our shouting. Yes,
That blank white smile of his seems to confess
He's half as clever again as God: who waits
So still outside, where the poised wing hesitates.

Only it seems to me that you and I
Are at some slight disadvantage, having seen
Real rabbits, lop-eared fools, on the toadstool green

Washing their silly faces : and purple silk of the sky
Tumble down, yard by yard, from a strange space fathomless-
deep,
Into the lap of a woman spinning thin dreams for sleep.
We have smelt the hedgerow smells, they were quickening
things ;
There were hours when scarce our presence frightened
the shy stirred wings,
It seems to me, we have watched Nature's brown breast bare
And knowing that Beauty of God, we should know of the wrath
For the furtive foot that crosses an innocent path.
For the eyes that look on a star with a lesser light
Than that of wonder, than that of a love washed white.
Ah, little heart, He has taught us what magic dwells
In His glowing place, in the steepes of the foxglove bells.
And the high ferns closed above us. God's most secret and cool
Mirror of dusk shall hold no contempt for the fool,
But the flying feet of his free folk must come and go
Just as it please them. His love hath ordered it so.
Or we shall be trapped in this hall, with the mad trapped wings,
With the mad white smile, with the subtile conjurings.

ZOOLOGICAL

Then, gentlemen, next cage ; and here you find
Our quaintest captive yet, the human mind.
See how it shrinks away into the shade
Of that poor farcical tree. It seems afraid
Even of a voice . . . Yes, little master, prod
The sullen beast. (They say it dreams a God
Whose very light is shadow on the sand,
Shadow of a great rock in a weary land.)
Now stand aside. We watch its intricate
Baffled attempts to outmanoeuvre fate.
The cage is strong. Doubtless, set loose, this mind
Would rove, would seek for others of its kind,
There might be mating in some jungle's slow

Dropping of rose-flushed flowers, rose afterglow
In endless stillness: prowling to the crests
Of great bare hills, upthrust like goddess-breasts
Loved of the noon. But, gentlemen, our bars
Obliterate its fierce and hungry stars,
Screen it from dawns like a yellow rose . . .
Even we, who tamed the beast, shrink back from those,
They are so triumphant . . . ah, with such gold cry
Beauty's vast war-scythe harvests in the sky!
Yet we're good captors. Mind, chatter or be dumb,
Dreaming of freedom. *That* shall never come.

COMPANY

Nothing to bear away
Out of this place—
No rich dishevelment
Of silks and lace,
Rings for your fingers, or
Bells for your toes—
Only the laughing stare
Of the pink gipsy rose,
That does not know or care
How wild she grows,
Ragged she goes . . .
She has a star to friend,
A Prince with streaming hair . . .
Why should the gipsy care
How the wind blows?

Out of the hillside store
No gold for us—
Not from the unmined ore
Bride-pence or obolus,
But the bright brooch
That the John's wort pins on,
Gold such as Connar gave

Emain's wild swan.
And in the brook hard by,
The trout's cool chamber,
Glides the light, like a fin
Of pearls, of amber.

No gallant company
Sees us go by,
Elbowing, whispering . . .
'There go their Graces . . .
He is right fine—but she—
Ah, the cool breasts of snow
Under her laces.'
But the small crowded faces,
Freckled, determined,
Of grasses in the wind,
Grasses of green and brown,
Gossip-grass come to town,
Weighed down with pollen-baskets,
Jingling its silver caskets
Precious with seeds . . .
Loosestrife, hepatica,
Catmint and pimpernel,
Fortune-grass, tinkler-grass,
Soldier-grass, rye,
Cocksfoot and shivery-grass,
Timothy, timothy,
Sunburnt young timothy,
See us go by.
Grasses in little shoes
Greener than peridot
Nod with the magic news,
'This way the lovers go.'
Grasses with sacred seeds. . .
Are they not company
All the heart needs?

THE DUSKY HILLS

Write that I died of vanities,
Fire gone to embers in my brain—
But with a single dusky glance
The hills have builded me again.

And of blue cloud, of poignant small
Wraith blossom on the manuka,
Anew are woven those vestures grave
That pilgrims take, for going far.

The hills have given me quiet breasts,
Young streams for ease in time of drouth,
And a star's sweet astonishment
Kindness, to lay against my mouth.

REQUIEM FOR SINGERS

Hang up the bays: let the laurels shine on
Uncut, murmur and remember past ages.
There can be nothing valorous written upon
These idle and unlighted pages.
There is no courage in dying any more
For us, that have cheated life of beauty.
Neither lament be ours nor inscription: for
We paid not to the citadel our duty.
Let the unguerdoned brows of the beautiful places
Defiled by us, be with us in our dying.
Let the betrayed and empty human faces
That were our charge, look over our down-lying.
Saying, 'Poor and lonely, leave us a word
To know you by, since you knew our world in labour.'
But we shall answer not. Only the missel-bird
Solemn shall call, hard by the bright brook, her neighbour.
Having no quarrel with life, finding not much amiss
With sun's touch, or rain's, or uncleanness in mating,

Weaving her shuttle of wings in some crystalline world :
not this,
That we have left desolate in its fears and its hating.
We that were proud with a little pride, unkind
With a slight unkindness, and rapt on the ways that cease,
Let us lie still, while cataract, star and wind
Pour down for ever the unchanged Masterpiece.
Yea, since silence was the best we dared to give,
Let the humble dust be master and lord of lips shut.
Haply in fluent grass, some phrase shall live
Of the wasted song. Let the laurels shine on, uncut.

THE PIONEERS

For the beautiful people, the valour, the weary feet stepping
In old shoes of custom and courage through wastes, pioneering
New desert with that same courteous, head-lifted conviction
Schooled to their childhood ; for hands that can staunch a wound,
Proffer frail tea-cups, keep linen white, love flowers,
Win over music still wild and shy in the instrument,
Wring together only in secret over their losses,
Cradle a head to the breast ; for mouths still tender,
Still humourous, still informed by the noble legends,
(Camp-smoke and bush-track, cattle-bells thin in the manuka ;)
For the white heads serene, for the people that straitly face death,
Walk leal in life, laugh, and make gardens, we thank thee, God.

DARK SENTINEL

This is the sound that I most dread to hear—
The sound of many feet
Pressed on by scourge of loneliness or fear
Along this silent, twilight-narrowed street.

I know they have no leader, but go driven
Like beasts before the goad ;

Nor can interpret their dark cry that Heaven
Should comprehend their aching load.

But as oxen in the colourless morn
Waiting, raise up a restless lowing,
So these lost footsteps seem a plea forlorn
And inarticulate beyond man's knowing.

Feet passing by, comforted by faint light
Of transient fires that sink ;
Then challenged by the wardens of the night
Who wait on the unutterable brink

Of Death : 'Halt, heart, what is your password now ?
What bribes the sentinel
To light your shadowed eyes, inconsolable brow
To the fair legend fields of asphodel ?'

Ah, lift your courage, ye pitiful that pass !
Be this your countersign :
'My lonely feet trod the bright silk of grass,
My beggar soul slept in the ivory shrine

Of days unnumbered, and God's matchless vault
No loftier seems
Than man's heart builds it. You who bid me halt,
Dark angel, have no power beyond man's dreams,

And his thought liberates your terrible wings :
He is the sea-spun shell
Through which the universe roars, and nameless things
Their newborn chant of love and terror tell.

Annihilate him, your historian,
Tremendous and alone
Must dash the crystal seas conceived by none save man,
Who blind and lame and groping, raised God's throne :

Who is the harp by which the seraphs ring
Enchained round earth
Beauty articulate : who names the holy thing,
Whose longing star illumines glory's birth

Age upon age. He dies, and leaves a song.
Who shall despise
These fugitives, this blind and goaded throng?
They are the sun's voice. They are wonder's eyes.

THE PACIFIST

They have put their hopes on me, because I am young;
They have set me in the midst, saying, 'Listen and see—
This is the child. Forth from the fount of his tongue
Shall come the clear word given of prophecy.'
With many crowns have they made heavy my head—
She first, in her dim-smiling candlelight,
He in his books, where kingly things are said,
Where the gold border guards the script aright.

O regiments in my blood, march swiftly past
The buried wrong, the old imprisonment!
Marching with wet eyes where the stone was cast,
Marching with bowed head where their bravery went.
Mine not to carve their courage one notch more,
To catch again a warring trumpets boast;
I pass them by, the dead men and their war,
I tread in silence down their smitten coast.

Through vein and nerve, in waking as in dream,
They cry me back, the men whose sharp lives broke
As lance on target; they who from a stream
Of alien weepings saw their city's smoke.
I cross no forest and I climb no hill
But helmet voices, hollow in the glen,
Cry out for kin, their dusty loins to fill,
Seek for the hand to point their shafts again.

Crisp underfoot the leaves; the yellow water
Sodden with reeds and brittle-boned with ice
Sings yet again of legendry's lost daughter,
Her arms like white boughs bent from Paradise.

And all companionship and all rewards,
And all things lovely in her recent star,
Let fall their snows on wrists that supple are
By plight with falcon-jesses, wands and swords.

But I with peregrine upon my wrist,
(Her name is Truth ; her hooded eyes see clear,)
Must lose again their many-peopled mist,
Their rainbow bodies, bedded in the mere.
Must lead my lean horse, plod in beggar's smock,
Cringe from the stranger's spittle in the inn,
Until, alert and waiting in its rock,
The nearer blood of Abel cries me kin.

MARCH ENGLAND

No summer searches yet the dusky coppice,
Bringing stout heart to primroses forsaken,
To jonquils sentried lest her eyes awaken,
All jocund things, all valiant things and tender
There rallied to defend her
With the fledged spears of ancient, unsoiled armies,
Till she shall pipe them in the dance of poppies.

Ah, when the green flames tremble, hold your breath
Full fields—your tide shall run not neap with flowers
But one has watched you in envisioned hours,
Has seen, august, the pillared English trees ;
Sitting, her brown hands clasped about her knees,
The patriarch pastures sloping to her feet,
And walls of glass about her life and death.

Tell then your pride how one you had not seen
Have to the limbs of one who knew you not
The seed and speech of England unforgot,
That now their child with blinded eyes looks out,
Within her burnt world feels the heart of green,

And weary from her tall, half idled hills
Still shares your springtime in her days of drought.

How closer than the glance of customed eyes,
Not moved by changes and not overcome
By steel ploughs arrogant in English loam,
She sees the spires of foxglove garnet rise
Against the bracken, young fields gravely gilded,
All England's burgeoned soul made visible,
And in the larchwoods Camelot rebuilt.

And brings shy gifts, as one who does not know
The ready speech and answer of the guests;
Only the dark, resistant faith updrawn
From flaxheads painted on a southern dawn,
A kauri's head made noble in the noon,
A peak resplendent in the afterglow,
And hills with coral berries at their breasts.

But ere ye weigh too lightly, or pass by
Quick Arden, know how phrase by lessoned phrase,
Green beads, a rosary of forfeit days,
Slips England cool through many weary hands;
And the green fire upflashes from a word
Sudden as raindrops. Over many lands
Shines England like a stream and like a sword,
And pledges us by virtue of a petal,
And for our dust that spring is litany.

GRADIAN

Does star rise against star, Gradian, and in the waning
Of my spent face turned from the look of light
Shall thy young glow be bright?

Ah, listen then. Poets forspent with singing
Go forth at last, their dreams around them flying
Like tattered banners, yet without complaining.

They are no more than the old harp, where lingers
The ghost of gleam, the ghost of pressing fingers,
Air asking music, but no chord replying.

Patient in winter, they unleave themselves
Of all their words, mute and without denying
The right of winds to strip their snows away,
Showing them dwarfed or shapely as they are.

But I with my leaves' passing shall have red
Of vital berries, evening's orchard greens,
Because against my tree you rest your head
And fingering the rough bark learn what it means.

I shall look back on you, oh later comer,
Loving your music and your wind-tossed star,
And cry to earth, 'It grows not less, thy summer.'

THE VICTORY HYMN

For the lark pours into the blue
His victory unabated—
Tell me, I charge thee, who
Loved here, or hated?
Tell me what nation bought
With a price of empurpled sands
This ground we stand on? What thing wrought
The great and the pitiless hands?
Tell me what deed was done
And shall not be forgotten,
Here, where the dust of the first is one
With the dust by his loins begotten?
Tell me who calleth it home,
This city of hunger and thirst—
Lo, the last caravan stumbles, seeking
The wheel-tracks of the first,
And lips from beyond the foam,

Their strange dark language speaking,
Shout, and your bubble of peace is burst,
Tell me who seisin took
First of this ancient earth,
That at the end, his look
Held victory yet, or mirth?
That at the end he knew not
The bitter thrust of the rain,
And the nomad soul of man,
By his camp-fire stars again,
Turned not with stumbling caravan
From the soil where his spirit grew not?

But the song swells into the blue,
And the chalice is consecrated.
Listen, and kneel. Be humble, who
Would learn the empery fated,
And who would bend the head
And greet with a vassal face
The Lord beyond life or death,
The timeless King of this place—
For he passeth not. But we pass, we who
draw breath.

Hark what a blind bird sings,
The throbbing pulse of the cloud—
Naught but the triumph of wings
Over your chariot wheels.
And an arrow of timeless song
Pierces an armoured heart.
Weep for the wheels that were strong,
Mourn for the doom of the loud
Brazen wheels, that affrighted and scattered
the crowd.

There has come pause in their turning,
And here, led apart
Into a grove of shimmering trees, the victor kneels,
Lifting his eyes from the earth, and broken
with yearning.

And around him the wheels crash broken,
The wheels of his anger and pride,
For the victory hymn is spoken,
Out of a blue, serene
And faultless sky: and a shaft of quivering sun
Is the spear-haft plunged in his side.
Yet the anguish of Beauty is little,
Set beside Beauty's reward—
That is given unto these brittle
Creatures of sky and sward
Naming him overlord—
Ash-tree, moss, and the wind-borne butterflies,
And the gay innocence
Of your children's laughing eyes.
And the hand of the child unborn
Launches its mighty ships
To his charter. His is the song of the unborn lips,
And your womb, O listening woman, is his defence.

Tell me who won this place,
What son of an iron mother
Turned to the west his iron face,
And held against another
My city Melchek, unto the equal dark?
Tell me what cry gave warning,
Thin as the slayer's knife,
That the King should taste not of morning?
But whoso taketh his life
And sets it, a lamp in a casement, against the
purple wind,
Leaning there, deaf and blind,
To all save the voices of night,
And to all save the dappled morning's first-
thrilling lark,
He is the holder of Melchek. Lo, where the old
Cruel faces are graven on seals and gold,
His is the face, the secret face and apart,
Sealed upon sky and mountain—sealed upon
Melchek's heart.

Poems October 1936 to December 1937

CHURCH OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS, DUNEDIN

We came to the church that was left to wind and rain,
Crumbling; the door was fastened with iron locks,
Only the wind come down from the steep bright hill,
Only the swinging strand of the ivy knocks,
Rife in the churchyard. 'Pity it's locked,' said one,
'Fine timber inside, and a window. Long since, I knew
Each angle of wood, the worn plush hassock, the pew,
And the altar lily's golden-filleted head;
And I sang there once.' We turned away . . . So still
The valley lay, in the clasp of a white-armed sun,
And a little beyond, a red dog barked on his chain,
And leaves were a cry of green on the chestnut tree.
But beneath, in the grass, two sparrows were lying dead—
Dead in the glossy pomp, the upstart feathers
Of wings that never bridled the wintry weathers.
I gathered them up: 'Shot down by the boys,' said one.
But the stiffening breasts felt warm beneath my fingers.

Everywhere else on the Sabbath bells were talking,
Everywhere else in His cloisters God went walking—
All were so sure He never would come again
Back to the old sealed porch where the briar lingers,
Back to the church whose vergers were wind and rain—
And bright on the grass, two sparrows were lying dead.
So I left them God, but I thought that Christ came running
Hot from the Galilee beach where nets were sunning,
Where fisherman Peter argued, wagging his beard,
Over the wonders his old heart loved and feared.
Christ the stripling, too busy to change his smock,
Ran through the rotting door with the iron lock,
(Hark to the cry of green on the chestnut trees,)
Stripling leans from the pulpit: 'Are not these
Sold for the price of two farthings?' And in the space
The lilled light might take to look on his face,
Lo, the wings thresh, the small stark pulses race.
Christ the Carpenter, happy his voice be heard,
Speaks his mind to the tree and the breathing bird,

Then with his serious eyes and his young mouth soft
Opens his fingers, tosses the wings aloft.
And the branches kindle, the red dog breaks his chain,
Hard by the little church of the wind and rain,
Breaks his chain, (for the voice is passing sweet,)
Crawls on his belly to lick a Master's feet.

Everywhere else on the shadows bells were ringing,
Everywhere else they held their God in bands;
Slight claws stiffening, glossy feathers clinging,
Two dead sparrows lay in my hollowed hands.

ARANGI-MA

Arangi-Ma dropped the paddle, shook down her hair
That still bore up its sultry freight of blossom,
(He'd taught her to dress it in a Paris fashion);
Now with both hands she took the gleaming shell,
And cut and cut, great gashes on her bosom.
Widening over the river a sunset bled . . .
He raised one hand to stay her; but her crying
Was not one voice. All women in farewell,
Harsh and imperious, crying upon the air,
All longing, all the inarticulate passion
Of those who love, and cannot hold, went flying,
Dark birds, into the heart of the central red.

He closed his eyes, saw Luxembourg fountains brittle
As glass, round the face of another girl he'd wept for.
But here in the forest, something was amiss . . .
Here was no easy road of part and kiss,
And the sliding passion no man owns a debt for,
(Easy and warm and sliding on your arm,
The midnight and a laugh its only charm.)
He saw her with dropped feathers and dropped flowers,
All her brown heart laid open in a song,
Or hiding in the manuka, whose little

Grey daggers pricked them, as they crept along
Hunting slow kuku. All the strange old hours
Of raupo overhead and firelit face
Dammed up the river, crowded crystal space.
He stammered something; half he thought he'd take her
To Sydney, own her, boast her for his sweet.
But brown, brown, brown, the wail went beating over . . .
Somewhere his world held linen, fields of clover,
Slim girls with narrow gloves, small-boned, defiant,
Their strength unmeasured with the kauri giant,
And the gods of mist. Brown bough bent down his lover . . .
Nothing for hands to do, but clasp and break her.

But this is what she thought, if brown minds think :
'The pakeha rat ate up the old rah mourie,
So traps are set no more for boundaries ;
And fainter, where the pigeons come to drink,
Grow the old trough-trails, and the berries patter
Ceaselessly under the spreading puriris.
Nobody now can find the fallen kauri
That marked off Hepe's lands. Against the sun
Our old men sit with midnight in their eyes,
Plots of green corn spring up before their face,
And each will brag the story, each is wise
Beyond his fellows . . . each one *knows* he lies.
We cover up our speechless hearts with chatter,
Nobody now can name the ancient place.
I shall bear babes, but none with eyes of grey.
Sitting one day in stinging whare smoke,
Pulling my dreams about me, like a cloak
Of old soiled flax, I shall think about today ;
And wonder why I lifted him so high.
And why his love should seem a different love,
Trying by pigeon-trails, unkempt and blind,
To trace the fading pattern in my mind
Of what the pakeha lovers do and say.
Then the young girls will mock me, with their shrill
Unburdened laughter . . . old Arangi-Ma . . .
But I sit on in shadow, and half chill

Their singing veins, because I never move,
Not for the sunburst, nor the youngest star.
I shall carry my knowledge in me, like the child
That would not live; this is the price we pay
For loving whiter and better than we should . . .
Ever to wander in a thicket, wild
With dusk, the dear trails fainter in the wood.'

YOUNG KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge, I know, is sure, of gradual thought,
A mare in foal, who pastures with dew eyes,
Cropping the grasses of a certitude
By many seasons sweetened for her sake;
Waiting with heart untroubled till it come
That by the straw-beds and the breathing clover
Like frost shall brittle one brief night of pain,
And then her treasure nuzzles at her side.
Knowledge has sunlight sleeked about her limbs,
White-headed reverent trees to partner her
In days of no event but steady growth.
And in the orchard where the crab-tree blooms,
Where surpliced tui chants one orison
Too wild, and shakes his petalled pulpit down,
None plucks unripe, none has a lust for bane
Or thieves across a fence ungiven sweet.
The labours of the world make road for knowledge,
Handling their time-known tools, the scythe for stooks,
Blue wheel in ruts, the brown and running sacks
Wide mouthed forever on the threshing floor.
Proud-nostrilled, chestnut in the sun, shines knowledge,
And singled men will tend her all her days . . .

Or knowledge is the hour that strikes but once,
Strikes, and demands, and never comes again.
Old vine on walls, thick-jointed, stiff with knots,
Knowledge creeps up the mortised centuries;

White grapes from this; but here with darkling pride
Burgundian clusters silk their sides in sun.
A thousand stamping feet across the vats
Press out each grape-year; now the rosy foam
Seethes up in hillocks, and the vintner's rods
Stir the dark coil of potency beneath.
Awhile the new wine in the barrell hisses,
Singing the song of grapes with savage lips
Still sensual for the air, the straight-backed vineyards,
And brown hands thrust among the clustering leaves.
Slowly comes settling, slowly wine forgets,
Sinks into silence, dreams its sunny rage
Away in distillate of centuries.
At last when cobwebs thicken sweating wood
Sure hands draw off the spigot; so much red,
So much bouquet, just so much bite in crystal.
Set the dew to your lips, friend, this is knowledge.

Or knowledge is the thin, contemptuous wine
Of wit from him you met once, in a tavern,
The grudging fellow sprawled across the fire,
Who for no reason (smell of sopping cloth,
Click of the cautious weather fingering latch,)
Poured out his lees of laughter, crude 'I know';
One spoke his soul, but next day in the street
Passed you a stranger, never spoke again.

And knowledge is a thunder in the night,
Huge claps of mirth, a frightened woman flung
Over the bed in oil-lamp's yellow gleam;
One half your soul an awe of burning blue,
One half your life a flower of burning flesh,
Touch her and laugh, whisper the comfort-things;
While still the leaden sky is great with child
And adder flashes dart against the pane.

Knowledge has gardens planted, rooted, so companioned
The lichen on the cobhouse sees the way
The flowering damsons in your driveway spill,

And sets its orange cap to catch the smile
Of timid daisies, scared across the lawns
By that old gardner, whipcord like his boughs.
Long since the roots of ash-tree learned the gentle
Contact of fibrous-fed forget-me-not,
The creeper on the walls grown intimate
Swarms just so far, and then for its encroachment
Sees the remonstrance of the garden shears.
The bellbird half-afraid drops down his song
Into the thin and metal campanile
Of glittering pear-trees, white mirage of mosques.
Each bee has learned his choosing. Here you walk
By careful paths, no bruising, nor no stumbling,
And only age and almond be upon you,
Here in the garden; smooth to tread is knowledge.

Or knowledge was the second while you listened
Waiting for raindrops, in the little start
Like claws of birds that patter on the leaves . . .
And dreamed that your two hands had made a rainbow.

Knowledge is flint-fire crackling in the road,
The hard impatient message in the breast,
Big words like bloodshot smoke behind old houses,
Loud bells like fishwives clattering their news,
The loneliness of rocks where ships went down,
Black horse that broke his heart to reach the post,
The fool who fell too soon, or lived for failure,
Knowledge is blindness confined in a world
Where every bloom black-clappered with its bees
Rings out a fragile warning on the wind;
And none to heed; and all to toss aside
The stumbling words, the hand upon their sleeve.

Knowledge is all that grasps and breaks and strives,
The flat tide flowing red between the mangroves,
The little evil roots that suck in mud,
The broken faces; all the broken faces
That put together makes the mask of knowledge.

O fretted minds, bear yet your sheaths a little.
Not on the high fields you go, nor in command,
Not greatly owe to captains of wise mien,
For these were ordered; but your march as rough
As the first jagged troops that flung at Alps.
Like vagabonds and thieves you go by night,
Brandishing childish cudgels, circling torches,
And for a sudden burning you shall strive,
And at a sudden evil you shall strike,
But not for long; and God knows well or ill.
What your hard soles have taught you, and rough hands,
What your wet eyes have dealt with, and tight mouths,
What your bewilderment gave you, and hot heart,
That only is your knowledge. Take and bear it.

And die at last, like nettle in the ditch,
And burn at last, like gorse across the hills,
Because you stung the cloth and pricked the proud,
And are a bane to what shall come hereafter,
This also, is your knowledge; take and bear it.

Kauri they split with wedges, when too vast
The grey trunks rose for any ripping-saw;
It rounded off in masts that reigned on seas.
Gum-tree from Sydney makes the keels of boats,
But tall puriri, cut in six-foot lengths,
(After the berry-day that snared the pigeons,)
Rides evenly, and never rots in water,
And burns at evening with the hottest flame
For travellers, met ripe with early knowledge.
Soak the lithe toro-toro, and best yarn
Was not so strong for tying up stockades,
Three pickets for defence, a carved head fixed
Red-ochred, on the height of every gate.
The nikau born in shade plait hard together,
(One of the sacred four from lost Hawaiiiki,)
Lay over toi-toi, or the raupo, tough
When used for thatching; but if huts take fire
They sheaf in yellow flame seen twenty miles.

The mangrove roots were ground for making powder
 At the three secret mills among the Maoris,
 When the lost war-dance thudded through the North.
 They cut the yellow twisted horoeke
 For sticks; the grass springs best when thin-belled cattle
 Tramples their path, dung-dropping in the fern;
 And the young shoots were burned off once a year,
 But food for bellies when the crops were drowned.
 And these I know, and ghosts of dead men's knowledge,
 (And ghosts of young, rebellious, chidden knowledge,
 Dunce at its class and stalking out of school,)
 By bridges slender as the ake ladder
 Where Heaphy, climbing, found the Greenstone People,
 Saw the wide nets wash out in thundering surf
 Too huge for the canoes, drawn in by moonlight;
 Watched the brown women drying out inanga
 For fodder in the nights of eaten moons
 When wind prowls round the thatch with thievish fingers;
 Saw the marled greenstone littered on the ground,
 And how they fine the edge with whalebone drills—
 And turned away at last, and climbed the ladder,
 And standing on the clifftops, saw their smokes
 Final steam up, blue parting of a dream.
 There standing on the clifftops weighed his knowledge—
 The thin precarious weight of early knowledge—
 And staring in a sun, half steeled his heart
 To tell the cities there was no such world.

THE WISE

Today I heard the doves cry, in a cloud
 Of dreaming voices . . . far away, yet loud
 Enough for such as I to hazard guess
 What glinting thought stirred through their idleness;
 One spoke of sun, one of the wheaten grain
 Some kind white hand had strewed for her again,
 One praised her brood, and one the joy it brings

When sunlight starts the iris on her wings.
And not a wiser thought from flower or bird
Than the impassioned things my heart has heard
From men ; for each is lessoned in the school
Where nature bids her fool to rest a fool.
Yet sweet their dreaming was ; and wise, ah wise,
The stately lanterns lit in evening skies.

FAIRYTALE

In one of these old gardens,
In the bindweed's satin smother,
Give me the Brother with diamond eyes,
Give me the Brother.

In one of these lost orchards
Where the bramble's bow thrusts bolder,
Give me the Child with silver hands,
And a red cock perched on her shoulder.

In one of these tall houses,
Dark to the stranger's knock,
Give me the Father whose small bronze steed
Vaults from the midnight clock.

HUSBAND AND WIFE

HE : 'You've been with spring. Your eyes are full of it.'

SHE : 'Hush, and lie still. I'll be with you as soon
As I've got off my coat and combed my hair.'

HE : 'The little whipcord boughs, cat's cradle twigs,
The reddish twigs that shine like filaments,
And scarce-born leaves, unmassacred innocents.'

SHE : 'Don't, John. Be still. I wasn't gone five minutes.'

HE : 'Here's a fine thing. She looks so meek, so bland,

But I tell you she's the paramour of spring,
She's got that lying quiet around her mouth,
She comes here, and her fingers crackle green.
I lie abed, while slowly she unsheathes
The body that was mated with a wind,
And scent of spring stuff forces through the keyhole,
She comes in reeking bracken, rank with gorse.
If I peered over her shoulder in the mirror
I wouldn't see a woman, but a tree,
A cold, proud, pensive and unconquered tree.
I ought to put the axe against her roots
Or leave her to her starlight and the birds.
When she lets down her hair, it's osier leaves;
I married a woman, not this seeking ghost,
Mirrored reflection. I ought to leave her to it.'

SHE: 'If I let down my hair, it hides your face,
Covers my shoulders, and the piece of world
That's gone dark blue between the slats of blinds.
Now we lie in the woods, John, lie in darkness.
Why do we wrestle, hurt each other so?
I only crossed the road.'

HE: 'You only went
Into that other and deceptive world,
Stood with your blind hair blowing round your face,
Thought, "There's a hillock; let me see, I'll climb it."
You only found some place where rangiora
And the ragged wilderness fuschia, red of bark,
Shook down its little kisses on your skin,
Where birds were loosed like javelins through your mind
And berries made that red on your under-lip.
But that I wouldn't mind. You can't accuse me
Of thwarting your slight vagrant liberties.
It's the cursed trick you have of sinking
Into the last look of a far-stretched landscape,
Printing your gaze on rocks that won't forget you—
I hear them leaping down the quarry-face
Rattling clean and blue, now while we're lying
My face on yours. I see the yellow cliffs

Clear in the sun, where moonlight ought to be.
I've heard the green wheat sighing while you sleep
Out of your bones. Don't tell me you're no leman;
One night, no doubt, you'll come home caught with child,
Still with that borrowed radiance in your eyes,
Because a cloud rode silver on a hilltop.
If that's not treachery, tell me what?'

SHE: 'But John,
If you didn't make me cry, you'd make me laugh
Because we lie and hurt each other so.
Listen: we needed milk. Surely that's human?
One pint of milk. I ran across to get it.
And then, it's true, I'd been indoors all day,
The house was like an oven——'

HE: 'That's how we live.
That's how the poor live, if they've any honour,
Sweating and sick and faithful, in an oven.'

SHE: 'So I strolled up the hill, I didn't look
At the old gardens, I know how you dislike them,
And I shut my ears to rose-pipes sprinkling rain,
Though the clear was on the evening. Well, I walked
A little way, I don't know what I was thinking,
But suddenly I was treading pavement-steps,
So old, haphazard. Why the builders made them
Lord only knows. But then a street so tiny—
The smallest, I should think, in the whole world—
And houses sunken in its sunken gardens:
I thought, "I'll find its name, and then come home.
Wouldn't this make you laugh, John? It was Small Street.
The smallest street in all the world of streets,
And when I read the signpost, it was Small Street.
And big old paeonies tumbling into bloom—
I hadn't seen them flower for years and years—
I thought those things went out of date with hansoms;
Fat flowers, John, wine silk, but tips of cream
All crumpled up, before the whole bud bursts.

Then bells upon the wind kept telling me
"Five—six o'clock. Go home, you silly woman.
Go home and be ashamed, because John's waiting.
I only laughed at Small Street, then I ran.
But John, on the way I saw a dreadful thing—
An old oak hacked to nothing, for they'd lopped
Its poor head off, and left it there for wires
So that another house could own a radio.
I'd not have minded; but beside the wire
The dreadful tree that couldn't grow again
Had put out five green leaves, just five green leaves.
They were like Abel's fingers stretched from earth.
John, when I saw that thing, I crossed myself.
I know you'll think I'm childish." "

HE: 'They were right.

And you lie damned with every word you say.
Radio means news, perhaps the war in Spain:
Perhaps there's someone in that house who cares.
Radio's a blare, at least. Christ, how I hate
Smooth canticles. Discomfort, pain, the clang
Of a thousand devil's chariots over our heads,
Of a thousand angry waters over our souls.
Leave us ourselves, at least. The rest destroys us.
Don't they remind you that you've got to fight?
I'd rather drown you in your kitchen sink,
See you take typhoid from that stinking sewer,
Than watch you floating off on this blue tide.
The drains are broken, there's a war on hand,
We've starved and sweated, I haven't got a mate.
I married a woman, lie beside a tree.
Christ, why do men forget and men grow old,
And women act the Jezebel with spring?
One day, fat fools will call this cottage charming
And hold an auction for our chamber-pot.'

SHE: 'When I let down my hair, it covers us:
Covers our faces and the dark outside.'

HE: 'Why do we hate and love each other so?
Why does your spring betray me with a kiss?
I tell you, when a Red thinks for himself
Thinks of a higher screw, a softer bed,
A whiter breast, a roof that doesn't leak,
They've got him safely as a rat in cheese.
But when he thinks for men, he's dangerous.'

SHE: 'God meant us to be very baffled now :
I think with you, John, of the canticles—
How sick God grew of that calm sluggish flow,
Of certain ways to Heavens he never meant,
And cruel paths to Hells he never dreamed.
I think he meant at last, with one great thought
Lifting as slow as mountains out of seas
To make us bitter, tear our hearts to shreds,
Drive all the stubborn stuff to open ground
And let us fight. O, surely let us do
The utmost evil, till we know its face.
And let us hate so nearly that some love.
I think he shapes our hate as parody
Of what we are, and then rings up the curtain,
And stammering lips cry strangely, "Lord, not I."
I think he keeps a redder road untrodden
And fated for our chosen dynasties,
Because he chooses we should know the truth.
But in the background, in eternity,
He holds the ready healing of a leaf.
I've my oppressions, John, let me be healed ;
I promise you the wounds will bleed again,
And I'm the stronger that they sometimes mend.
Let all the world this silvery night lie healed
With healing of a leaf. You say my hair
Is osier leaves. See how its shadow spreads
Across the farthest star, and covers us.'

OUTDOORS

Daisies big as fifty moons
Feed the bees with silver spoons,
Soil is stubborn, black, and needs
Green rebellion of its weeds
To speak its anger. Overhead
Flying cloud as dark as lead
Clangs like a wild goose, soon to blow
Earthward the breast-down of its snow.
Not quite gold and not quite green,
Clean as unsaid thoughts are clean,
Unripened on a snowball tree
The squabs of blossom dance for me,
And greener, in pedantic rage,
A spider dances on this page.

ABSALOM

Life is all lovelocks on this summer day,
Shake out his curls of light below the waist,
Moves on the curt grass with a roebuck's spring,
Smiles with his slant red mouth, envisioning
In the bright well of every blackbird's leaf
Arms strong as boughs, lean thighs, superbly placed,
And clouds that budding round his head like may
Crown the bold temples of his unbelief.
I cannot watch him now. But through the branches
Of this churl tree whose lilac feasts are done
Sudden and fierce the gold hair avalanches,
And thin as shadow reeds the voice of one
Patient past sorrow : 'Absalom, my son.'

STREET SCENE

But Magdalen, before that, were there days
Sharp-focussed in a sun too cruelly pale,
When you in shoddy streets watched them go by,
Felt their grey stone grow phallic through your flesh,
Fixed the full compass of their miseries?
When you, with red cloak spread against the wind,
Knew by each sense the ordure of the city,
The spittle of the many generations,
The purulent flower, rotting from its birth,
And over all a pale sky arched like dreams?
Two thousand years old slippers shuffled here,
By this blunt corner; twice a thousand years
The carpet-vendor rasped his little cough,
Then with a brown hand knotted hard with veins,
Wiped the bright bead of anguish from his beard.
Here, lying loose within the clasp of living,
Only your smile taut, but your cloak and hair
Filmy as flowers gracing the wind,
You could accept them all—the orange leap
Of tumbling gourds, vermillion water-pots,
The whine and buzzing of the potter's wheel,
The carrion house, and the child's shrill laugh—
She, ten years old, slim by the humped and monstrous
Bulk of the harlot, shadowed at her side.
And when the dog with one crushed clotted paw
Nosed in the gutters—when a boy ran by,
Panting in hard small breast for all desire
Of space and wildness—when a kindled lamp
Traced red new shadows, stalking on the panes,
When sun sank bloody on Jerusalem,
(And so set in the sadness of a race,)
You, drawing tight your cloak, could whisper 'Mine.'

And choose out one, but not for your rejoicing;
And lead him quietly to the steep-staired room,
Setting his mouth to wine and silken stuff,
Indifferent to his worth, and to his quest

A windless valley. You, without desire,
Could fold your limbs about the race like trees,
And let its tears run down between your breasts.

WHITE IRISES

But when it came to holding fast
All my heaped days as water went,
Breast-high in swirling dreams I stood,
With vain hands clutched the slipping past
Of straws and faces on the flood.
Till single among stones I saw
The white, the ragged irises,
Cold on a sky of petals dead,
Their young cheeks roughened in the wind,
White-surpliced boys, a pale line spread
With the deep nave of dusk behind.
Over their feet the spring tide bore
In green, impatient, uncurbed grass,
High bellows flecked with daisied foam.
I saw the wind, a swimmer, pass
From grey-girt isles of cloud, his home,
And mount the blue stockades of trees.
O then a singing on the air,
Caught and flung back and held again,
Curled in the rosy shells of rain
And pressed against earth's listening ear
Took up the triumph-strain.
Cold boys of spring, the irises
With parted lips stood chanting there,
The green flood restive to their knees,
Rain powdered on their hair.
Till a red moon dipped shoulder-high,
A lantern swinging from the pole
Of some old fisher of the sky
In starry waters of the soul.
And I who sought for heart's farewell

In dusk of spring, have brought you these—
The choir singing in a spell,
The white, the ragged irises.

THE ROOTLESS

Will the day come, with these indolent trees lying back in the
arms of the tempest,

Wild, stormy, torn to tatters by the gusts of their own passion,
Stretching their ominous arms like thin wings that cannot fly,
Forsaking their foothold in earth for the clasp of a lover who
mocks them,

That they shall be broken from bedrock—and so shall I, even
so shall I?

Ah, but the trees have been wise. In their green slumber, in
that inert

Pleasure they take when their brown roots finger the breasts of
rock, and find them yielding,

They have scattered their seeds. Not one of them falls without
lineage—

Winged sycamore, brown pine-germ, pip of the apple and pear
Put on green sandals and brown, and follow the earth-curve,
marching

Slim little Hans of the highways, soldiers of fairytale,

With the groat of their first new moon jingling between their
fingers

They will get to the green bazaar, and buy them a robin's song,
Or squirrels, sweet to a tree, as their slumbrous mothers taught
them.

Earth will not be without them; though one or a legion perish,
Though the white blood drip on the axe or perfume a cottage
hearth,

Always young more are coming; always their smocks, and their
solemn faces,

And the way they purse up their lips and whistle with robin
voices,

Shall live in her chiding heart. They will dwell and renew, like
their fathers.

I, not a foot of the earth has ever been mine,
Not an acre of love, be the land never so desolate,
Could I touch for myself, seeking, but one cried 'Thief.'
In time I was proud to be rootless. I said, 'It is well to stand
Alone, and suck no love, nor drink no faith.'
But I am the ghost of a tree, ready at one first tempest,
To plunge up skywards, dark-green ludicrous kite,
Brittle on earth and crashing against the stars,
And to lie at last, dead weight on the unstirred body
Of her who held me not, but must cover me.
If the bees sought me, they were wild bees, knowing no better;
If a song found me, it was an alien, taking refuge,
Drenched and frightened, but glad to fly north in the morning.
If I have scattered dreams across your borders,
It was while you slept, Beloved; with a word to the wind, I
cajoled him—
'Carry these, they are light and swift, and will thrive on little.
Let them put up their silken mouths, and be quenched with rain.
All creatures so beseech you; I no less, O mischief.'
But already, Beloved, I know the day of the harvest,
And the husbandman walking along, dark and proud in his
furrow,
Striking off the heads of the unsought grain,
Uprooting the unasked tree,
Lest it bring him sorrow: without a thought for the green
mouths crying,
'We also would live—we also have loved, of our sort.'
Strike, then, Beloved. In a solemn flame goes down,
And under a sun not vacant of majesty,
All that was spaceless on earth and rootless in love
And the dream-seeds dropped across the guarded borders,
That better are given to wisdom than to dream.
But I die out on a wind you will never forget,
With a sound not of weeping, a sound as of mighty cymbals.
I claim the lust of the green mouths and the red,
Seeking and ousted; the right to die with them,

And the flaring tattered dignity of their death.
You, turn you to harvest. Between the oil and the mead,
Between the vine and the fig-tree, it may be you will forget me.

THE WHITE SEAT

Orangi-Kaupapa ; there high banks of grasses,
Heavy with seed ; in the darkness, castanets clicking
Where broom-pods burst ; white flanks of the elderberries,
Soon turned to wine, sapped through by the bills of birds.
Now, lumbering through the darkness, senses tricking
With jingle of bits like bells, the old horse passes ;
Drawls the blue cart by the quarry ; the waggoner's words
Melt into gloom, like the late, unhearted cherries
Whose petals were brides of the wind, nor came to ripe.

Now on the white seat half a mile from the top
I rest for a moment, lean over a cup of mist,
And the wrinkling harbour water curdled in moonlight,
Milky precipitate of the moon's alkaline stone ;
Know that a little higher are pine-boughs ; shake them,
Pollen flies out, in green and dusty tryst
With the will of the world ; the pine-germs lie on the ground,
Stitch their way under and up, thin stems self-sown ;
And the hedgehogs run in the grass, with no more sound
Than will scare the sleeping skylarks, half awake them.
Over the wanded bluegums the wild stars stop
Transfixed ; wild honeysuckle torments the night.

Peace at my feet sleeps, red-roofed hives in the gloom ;
The Southern Cross is nowhere else so large,
So large as silver keas flocked to a feast,
So large as a fiery babe in its mother's womb.

If one passes me here, though he be the least
Of men, it is he shipped oars on the silver barge
That bore me to Camelot once, on a tide run past ;
It is he who knows me, as grass knoweth the tomb.

Burrs hang in the grass, and the red weed having no name . . .
'Kiss-me-quick,' say the maidens; the red runs fast
To their cheeks, for their youth's pride and their bosom's
shame.

If I move down, I strike the starlit pitch
Of houses lapping at the molten drink
Of moonbeams in their gutters run to loss.
Old elbowing houses, listening with long ears . . .
No fetish theirs of times that made them rich
With crowns or dreaming. Theirs the bickering lives,
Rough husbands, cotton aprons, draggled wives,
Children brief beanstalk flowers to twine a cross.
But flames move through their shadows; high flames chink
And glitter, golden bees about the hives,
A worth for tattered loving, tattered years.

Life loves not man, the hills have never loved;
Over them fruits the moon, aloof, unmoved;
Yet thief in beauty's orchard, man may taste
The silver windfalls scattered down to waste.

Meat and drink is the moon; but if I wait
Till dawn unveil the hills, I feast my eyes
On tossing gorse and broom, bread consecrate,
Out of the sun's grist and the windy skies.

And still the grass by the white seat is warm,
As if some milk or blood, from earth's old breast,
Ran up to chafe the skylarks, or the swarm
Of white cocoons that sway with breezes' rest.

Since so much is familiar, runs to my side
With quickening glance or sound, old scent unchanged,
I know at last I had home there; lie estranged,
Shaken from bedrock, like the gleaning bride
Who wakening by her foreign kinsman named him
Softly; 'Boaz,' she called; small name, as strange
As burning bud, or uncalculated star.

We dug for fence-posts, over the dry Waikato?
Who remembers the panting women caught in childbirth?
A day, a night and a day, and the blown horse pounding,
Stopped at the ford where sullen Kawarru ran?
It was hard in our day' (say the old men) 'who knows the
months

Cut off, half-starved, half-mad, two men to quarrel
Into death or love; or one man left alone?
Who remembers our ways of passing an evening?
But the young have better roads and take things lightly,
And the cars rustle along the smooth-paved highways,
Spurning even the ghosts of the first-made faulty tracks.
It is well to be young. Nay, it is ill to be young,
Old friends: for the young have not peace or courtesy.'

So murmuring among themselves, they turn to their fires,
Seeing in flames old ways of many landmarks;
Here Thompson's cottage stands; here the White Pig,
With seal-wet gumdiggers plodding out of the muck,
Laughing, weighing amber lumps on the counters.
Here in the light of oil-lamps spring up legends,
Much-tried legends, making men's faces warm
As the glow of a match lights up a face in the dark—
Legends loud with the rustle of English leaves,
Swished through with the ochred prows of canoes,
Legends of Ascot, legends of Taratara.

Here beside the inn stood the low-built smithy,
Three grey horses tapping their heels in tune,
And the low red rings of the spark-fires smouldering
As the smith's lads tap their song on iron shoes.
And many a face of the dead, and some still living,
Seek out, over the country gates,
Cry out, sighting a friend in the country bars.
Once a month these bought stores: and once a month
Swarming down from their lone-set mountain cabins,
Tramping from cob and raupo, wattle and daub,
Swinging up from their silt-thick rivers of gold-dust,
These made an end of loneliness: they knew

What roads are for, and the strength of the tough-word
neighbour.

Now they look back on their roads of many landmarks,
And say, 'It is smooth today. The young take lightly.'

But the young, standing cold, bewildered and lost to
landmarks

In the fork of a highway leading from world to world,
Are proud with another pride:

Are proud of their clean wings cleaving down the sky-roads,
Proud of their swift-cleft seas,

And in all are lonely, having no neighbour.

Not through the little brush to the clearing's lamp,

But over a thicket of guns to the ends of earth

They seek him, the neighbour speaking peace and reason.

Hard enough shall their children be delivered,

Midwived by fear and flung in the lap of war.

Rough enough is their way from dwelling to dwelling,

Who must pass through the fields of hate,

And knock at so many doors, where none cries welcome,

Or hosts are the crazy owl and the crying echo.

The young, standing puzzled, wistful, half-defiant,

On the verge of their great plain having no landmarks,

Take their poor weapons in hand and say 'Set out'.

Few are the guides and false.

Out of one faring, ten million came not back.

But more were born; more must set forth undaunted,

Or if their heart shall fail them,

They must look back to the close-set amities,

Thinking, 'The roads were safer in the older days,

Yet, for our sons, they shall still be surer.'

WHANGAROA HARBOUR

Not broken yet, this mirror of the morning,
The heart-shaped polished nephrite of the sea.
Oh, glass of coldness, shield of steely shadows,
Cannot thy look assuage and counsel me?

Never a green life shirring in the thickets
But knows some keyword; so its day is spent
Secret and death-dogged, flash of wings in sunlight . . .
But not perverse; not wholly malcontent.

And Pani holds aloft the beaded maize,
And tilts the jewelled basket of the moon
For all but him whose hopes ride out too far,
On great white horses to a towering noon.

May none confront thee, but the secret daughters
Who light the glass, and see themselves new-fair,
And burn across the sea to kindle morning
Against the streaming torches of their hair?

DESCENDANTS

Somewhere behind her sliding wooden window
Old Kahu pads about, scrapes off the plates
That did for starvelings' supper, turns down low
Wick of a battered lantern, contemplates
Ten children cuddled in a threadbare rug;
(Small dreams and puppy nakedness beneath);
Watches the oozy light crawl off a bug,
Then grins her endless smile of broken teeth,
Thinking again of last month's picture-show.

The yellow corn-cobs from her sulky garden
Gleam up, barbaric wands with topaz set;
Arrogant as the armlets of a dream,

There on a platter, soiled and silver-wet,
Three fish she caught with that old mended net.
But brighter, watching days without surmise,
With calm beyond the goad-man's praise or pardon,
Her immemorial blaze of chieftain eyes,
That need not call to memory, nor forget.

TO SARIN, WHO DREW A TREE AND A WOMAN

If you have meant the flesh-locked fires burning
Out of those upward strokes, the cups of me,
Or the redder fires brushed out, the downward-turning
Sparks of pohutukawa tree—

Both fires were quick; but one struck out by blunder—
Old flint of mind, struck by the hard heart's yearning;
One a green oil, a million wicks of wonder.
Mine the look: tree's the slow learning.

Anyhow though you spoiled a page with me
Sarin, you loved a tree.

AMONG NEIGHBOURS

Spirit, spirit, come feed from my hand:
Be not so trembling, so anxious to fly.
At least I can school you to understand
What bean climbs up to the sky from our land:
(And the hungry cat, our foeman, prowls nigh.)
Taste I your white grains brushed together,
You, my wisdom out of the weather—
We could be brothers, you and I.

Understand! Understand!
When the sea is vile with the oil from a ship,

On draggled wings that beat and slip
The spent tern sinks to die.
And the way of forcing our truth to lie
Was, squeeze it tight in your hard hot hand.
(The stranger swore he would understand,
Yet left no space that we sing or fly.)
So of all men perilous, all men curst,
I hate my powerful neighbour the worst :
He holds me sweating, here in a Hand,
And watches me with an Eye.

SAND

Here by the hand of Fate,
Beyond the last fall of land,
Rise shapen the high-arched delicate
Ribs of the sand ;
Clean as the bones of a vessel
By one wave's anger undone—
Over them white gulls wrestle,
Into them burns the white sun.

Childless white body, that gives
No flower, no fruit,
Save the trembling paraha vine, who lives
With thirst for her root.
Who will make free with the sand,
Stride tall on her glistening crest?
He that is held by no hand,
That is cold in the eyes and breast.
Lie in the lap of the sand,

Head flung back on her knee,
Hand seeping into her hand—
Each grain was an argosy.
White and strange her cup,
Strange is her love ;
Not when the foam wells up
Shall he cry aloud or move.

THE LAST ONES

But the last black horse of all
Stood munching the green-bud wind,
And the last of the raupo huts
Let down its light behind.
Sullen and shadow-clipped
He tugged at the evening star,
New-mown silvers swished like straw
Across the manuka.

As for the hut, it said
No word but its meagre light,
Its people slept as the dead,
Bedded in Maori night.
'And there is the world's last door,
And the last world's horse,' sang the wind,
'With little enough before,
And what you have seen behind.'

THE FAMILIAR

Firelight, be my cat; lie soft within
My lap, rattle thy throat with growling song.
Sometimes in hidey corners leaf-light toss
The scareful shadows; sometimes, stretched out long,
Roll over belly-slack of ginger fur
For tickling hands. Lie languid so, and purr.
And sometimes, with great eyes of golden gloom,
Arch back, and fear me and my ticking room.

We may be lonelier, we shall not be stranger:
We are well armed for any mortal danger.

Pounce on the silence, on the scampering mouse
Of little grief, who grows too sleek of coat;
Chase out the shardy dreamings from my house,

Rattling the valiant war-drum in thy throat.
Arch, spit and pry : but spring not without warning
On any mottled feathered morning.

For still I love the young blue winds ; for still
I feed the throstle morning from my sill.

TITIRANGI 1937

Look upward : see the strange mountains of what-I-know not
sloping from human mind, like the sharp-back profiles
of nomad ancestors gone with the smoke of their reeds :
if beyond that peak, that rock where the sun stamps,
 glistening sandalled,
they dwell and are fruitful, who shall say?
Or if our tears are dew of their heavy pastures?
Sometimes in the night, wandering disconsolately
with the sweet-faced moon beside me, a blind boy guide,
I have thought to trace in my own flesh slender footprints :
I have heard a twig broken, and knew that I broke it not :
or espied in the cleft of breasts
dust moving a long way off : it might be herd-dust,
as the many-thronged beasts moved locked of horn and lowing
to roll their sides in silver dust of sea.
But if these be a people of dream, these long-curved nomads
whose grave beards ripple the dark, what man can tell?
Or if our tears be meat and drink to their pastures?
Not for us, sons of this age,
the tents, the gourds and the spinning
or the firelight ruddy and sprawling, their newborn babe.

TIDEMARKS

Calm stood the old house
Long unpossessed,
Close beat its silence
Under her breast;
Out of its sills
Wreathed clear and forlorn
What echoing trumpets
Of what dead morn?
Standing with fingers
Wide-spread and chilly,
On the spangling hood
Of a wild pink lily,
Said she to him,
(Small voice unmoved,)
'How many tidemarks
Since this house loved?
How many green tides
Wither again,
After this hour
Caught up from rain?
We looking down
From the sills to the waters,
I with cloak loosened,
Last of its daughters.'
But he, ere they passed within,
Paused and drew over,
Sandalling with dew
Her feet in the clover;
Down on her brown cheek
Straight drew he
A bough of old drudging
Mulberry tree;
And crushed the berries,
Ungathered, unblest,
Into her mouth,
Into her breast.

SEA SONG

Braid, braid, white tresses,
Be wrung about the sands,
Be combed with rainbow shells,
And curled round many rocks,
And hung with many seaweeds, many bells;
And be fair for him who sought,
All his days, all his days,
Looking down from swan-carved prows of many vessels,
Staring down at green-lipped pools in many a grot,
To see where it was not
The fading face in foam,
The moon-boned, cool dissolving wrists and hands.
Braid, braid, white tresses,
Be wrung about the shore,
He will seek you nevermore,
He is won home, won home.

COCKCROW THRICE

Does the darkness lie on your breast, the pulsing dark,
Black laurelled hair and face like a woman's face?
And your hands grope up, and knot themselves in space,
And somewhere, afar, the watchdog bark?

Does the hour's china tick pelt harsh advice
Into your brain, as you lie and pray for peace?
And a cock that crows by moonlight shatter thrice
Earth's crystal . . . and breathing cease?

Does the coat flung over your chair take phantom shapes,
Mocking your eyes, as sallow night burns on?
Daughters of Tyre . . . a girl with lips like grapes,
Whose red feet dance the wine-vats of Babylon?

Do you please your heart with a show of childish things?
Hedgehog . . . the mouse gone pattering, poor man's thief,
Pebbles, toadstools and thrush-eggs . . . three for rings . . .
Pink horns . . . snail on nasturtium leaf?

Must we loathe the dawn? Poor friend, we were wiser when
The grave voice broke in wave-bells of Galilee . . .
Half I remember . . . Peter and Magdalen,
With a storm between . . . and He rose, and walked the sea.

GUARDED HEART

Well armed the guarded heart; he knows
Rank and jointure of his foes,
Knows too well who stands without,
Gives ear to any whispering doubt,
On the ember of his rage
Burns up love's half-written page.
Warned by the fore-cries of the head,
He cannot well be compassed,
And purchased at a bloody cost
Hidden knowledge of riposte.
Shadow-striving all day long
He must keep his sword-arm strong—
Yet what has he to guard, alas?
The bitter and the untouched glass,
Bitter crust not broken up,
Since he feared with guests to sup.
Dark and dying in the night,
His cottage gives back little light,
Small commerce has he of earth's news—
What treasure feared he so to lose?
Only the penny of a pride
Whose mint long since was set aside.
Only the dark and beetling dress
Thought puts on in loneliness.
But unless Simon Peter knock,

To warn him by the crowing cock,
Or Magdalen all bruised of grace
Or Judas with a hangdog face,
Or Christ's Mother, old eyes dim,
Mend the broken boy in him,
Or Christ Himself barefoot shall beg
Drippings from his water-keg,
He may not cleanse himself in pain
Nor in the darling dew again.

THE SWORD

Had I a sword, a sword I had loved this lifetime,
With the pride of a boy, with the shame-faced love of a lad,
With the tempered zeal of a man who seeks not war,
I would take this sword and say, 'Sing, sword, for man—
Not for the ranks but the surge, for the coming surge
Of trampled faces, bloody and trodden down.'
I should say, 'Seek masters where best the mastery lies,
In the win-for-all, in the sway, in the oft betrayed
Man who rises eager out of the slime.
Sing, or be dumb: no carrion feast I give you
Of mangled nations torn for the Judas-meat,
No presage in gold, no prize of a privy quarrel.
Sing, sword, for man, lest I break you over my knee.'

I should say, 'By the rune of an ancient chivalry,
Under Christ, and for good of the commonweal,
I am sworn to aid you, woman, whoever you be:
Man unknown, I am sworn to cover your back.
Let but my sword take comrade's rank with the cudgel—
Both are clean born, man, both strike down oppressions.
England, a sword for man while my body lives;
After I die, a spirit; let tyrant's spirit
Rest not easy. I wait the hour to greet him.'

Had I a house, a house that had shed the weathers
Since oaks were new in the wood and the ash-tree thin,
I should say, 'Take, window, a light for the coming of guests.
Doors, be ready: bolts, be not stiffly drawn—
Man in his millions tramps down this road to seek you.
Mary on ass's foal, with her bright breast bare,
Seigneur Christ, worthy Joseph; and many a more,
Threadbare from ruins, picking their bread like daws,
Men who have stood the iron and shamed the blast,
Women with young eyes aged, and the ragged child.
Plenty is little here: yet help of hand,
Under the gift of grace, may yet be plenty.
Proud be you, table, to bear this groaning banquet.'

I should say, 'Look, mirror, not at the things that seem—
Not at kirtle's grace, and a cool hand winding ribands,
Not at the stormy brows that come with cursing.
Look you at woman: was made such a one in Eden,
Naked, I think, and not for your look to defile her—
Better your blue glance robe her in finest velvets.
Look you on man: was made such a one, God knows,
Steel enough, to come hard from these furnaces,
Peat enough, to come firm from such quicksand days.
These in our keeping, our look be cool and steadfast,
Trained on the fool who serves by outward show.
England, a mirror to guard you while I live—
Broken in death, I think: and yet the pieces
Glittering hard shall set in your brooks next winter,
Bright shall shine up at your triumph, next year's thaw.

CHRISTMAS NIGHT

Was it a way, Joseph?
Long pull up to the Inn?
'Aye; when we got to the jostler's gates
They wouldn't have us in.

'Herod, ye see, of Jewry,
Did bad by the innocents;
So we lit by a way of river-beds,
Thistles, and yellow tents.

'It's a hard land, that Egypt,
Or so they're telling me.
But I think to make our keep at least
By the old job, carpentry.

'Her being the way she was,
Bare able to walk or stand,
I brought her here on the little ass,
By the poor man's road of sand.

'Whistle for wages here,
And you'll play your rib-bones thin,
But I've my tricks with table or chair,
And I'm bound we'll pay the inn.'

Is it the truth, man Joseph,
She was brought to bed of a fire,
A fire named God? 'Who calls her wrong
Calls his black heart a liar.'

Was it the way, Joseph,
A star burned over her head?
'You're minding me now to pay the chap
That lit my girl to bed.'

Was it a fact, man Joseph—
Her in the manger laid?
'Aye, and what's sweet enough for beast
Came kind enough to maid.'

Did ye have Kings, man Joseph,
To make their sacrifice?
'My two big hands played midwife once—
God quit they play it twice.'

Is it the truth, man Joseph,
(How they're telling in town)
Shepherds of hills tossed singing up,
Big angels ringing down?

'Where would a shepherd be, that night,
But drinking five-pint-mellow?
And I'd 'a caught the pinion bright
And stuffed my girl a pillow.'

Was it writ down, man Joseph,
This boy must save the world,
And beckon great God out of Heaven,
With one hand curled?

'Go ye in and talk with her there,
That lies with the babe to her breast.
If books and she start praising the lad
I know who'll fix it best.

'But I'm for cutting a spruce
That stands a mile from here—
'Twill make him a cradle-bed, poor shrimp,
And her a rocking-chair.

'Then, maybe, we can argue
(The winter logs red-bright,)
Whether 'twas stars, or young boys' lamps,
Or Kings on Christmas Night.'

IN THE DOORWAY

Turn not, wheel; be the sky's blue axle broken.
Sun, set not your torch in those proud halls of night.
Wind, wind, white-breasted, willow-haired,
Lie with shut eyes entranced, and draw no breath
Where blossom rains down rosy stars on white.

Oh birds who shake the dream, be unawoken,
Hush your sweet rending flutes and thin.
The crystal globe of silence seals me in,
Holds me, a flower, in the hour endeared.
Today he came ; saith Death, he is gone again . .

Rain, my bird-lilac rain,
Little I asked of life : now heed, and tell
How lost lips begged their inaccessible.

Cried, 'Fall not, rain, shake out your plumes no more
All murmuring and all gleam be gathered up.
For so I keep him changeless in my door,
His hands, his lips, unsevered from my cup.'

ARMAMENTS FACTORY

Since you will have your way,
Will not release me,
Steel, son of this age,
Strike on my heart all day—
Harsh ring and clear
Into my ear.
Vent your full rage—
Steel, son of this age,
Melt and increase me.

Hammer, swift-striking,
What will you nail in me?
Ripping-saw, iron whine,
What was my tree to you?
No nest or song,
Leafage to love man's face,
Home or abiding-place :
Planks for a ship,
Butt for a gun,
Boards, a babe's coffin,
Arms for a cross.

Slender cranes, lift me,
Swing me smoke-high,
Dash me on lowering sky.
Hammer, strike hard on me,
This day your lover.
Nothing withheld from you,
Press me to anvil—
Beat, beat your blood in me,
Sow your red seed in me,
Children of Vulcan,
I face your hot foundry.
Dare not, on pain of death,
This day to fail in me.

Since you are master here,
Past quit or cure,
Since flesh is nothing here,
Save what you make of it,
Empty of merit
The clean-crying spirit,
Son of this age,
Look you endure.
Take flesh and break of it
Bread for death's table—
Stalwart be, arrogant,
Master of armaments,
Smasher of firmaments,
Be your blows able.
Much you asked, Giant—
Now the flesh, pliant
As damascened steel,
Bends in your grasp.
Shellcase or battle-wheel,
Bomber, the white unclean
Hulk of the submarine—
All your hot rage
Most may demand.
Take—but be sure thy clasp,
Huge-fingered hand.

Let one escape,
Whole, with his heart in him,
Pang of your rape,
News of your art in him,
Stamp of your lust on him,
Yet his thought clean
As this leaf's green—
Then, oh then, armies,
Out of earth teeming,
From skies grey-dreaming
Shall swing against you ;
Then the young broken,
The born-for-death,
In their graves awoken
Shall suck back breath,
For blowing reveille,
For calling to tryst.
Then shall God's tents like mist
Whiten the valley.
Then shall the helmets don,
Thick-starred in Heaven ;
Christ and His crews put on
Their strength of seven.
But fast and faster,
To the place of danger,
Man shall stamp up :
Man, with thy bloody cup
Dry at his lips :
Woman, whose loins were locked
Under your ships :
Child with the blinded eyes—
Shrink you to meet them.
Man, slave and stranger,
Wearing a diadem,
Winds for his cloak,
Skies for his tent,
Man shall stamp up :
Steel, son of this age,
Stand firm to greet them.

Since you will have your say,
Will not release me,
Smite on my heart all day.
Harsh sound and clear
Into my ear.
Ring out your rage—
Steel, son of this age,
Melt and increase me.

THE ENCOMPASSER

Break then in words, oh burdened heart ; oh casket
Of passions, rain down fire upon my feet.
And, weary husbandman, raise up thy basket
Of dewy thrice-immortal fig and peach.
Fear not but that my will shall find in each
The savour as you dreamed it, sharp or sweet.
In me grow keen your edgeless love or hate,
In me desires move tall and consummate.

But now look forth . . . Behold the white trees splinter
Clear lances, on the icy boss of winter.

My arms beneath you lock, the fast-abiding,
Black vines like massive serpents from me jet,
Fire and fountains, fins of opal gliding,
Shaped in your dream, and tangled in my net.
The grove of coral sway their heads as one . . .
All you have asked, and all you longed to give,
All jests and ghosts that secret in you live
Are jewel-dust consuming in my sun.

Yet at a brink no living foot has found
You shall not seek for burnished hue or sound.

Then as the wintry pollard shakes her tress
To spill her snows, and put her starlight on,

Naked and clean and whittled to the bone
Stands forth the stranger soul you would not guess.
Even he who haunts behind the lusting eyes,
He who enmeshed in karma dwells alone,
That skin-sloughed snake, that water petalled stone,
Tenant shall take the largeness of my skies.

Naked in moonstone water, oh my Brother,
Shall we, the One, laugh back at one another.

WATERGLASS

The willow, looking in the waterglass,
Need not resent her burning autumn hair,
Nor the sharp vigils she shall naked pass,
Or take a lace of frosts to wear.
Embered the year, but not the lovely tree,
Who gazing in the pool
Has time to learn her heart; a century
To catch the stream's sweet consonants and cool;
To see the miry cattle wade, the cress
Break green about their knees and stranded float,
Starlight drop sequins on the midnight dress,
And wind be oarsman for the rushes' boat.
Swift speeds the time; but lithe and young as rain,
When spring has drawn the circle round her hour,
Shakes she, to brush the waterglass again,
Green tresses, heavy tresses from the tower.
And tree-Rapunzel motions to the wind,
Who, the green ladder mounting to her breast,
Draws leaves across his eyes, lies lost and blind,
His sandal dipped no more in hillward quest.
Oh locks of green and silver, locks that burn
Showering the grass, in autumns fiercely bright—
So long your dreaming, surely crossed your night,
So long has willow-tree her green to learn.

I saw my green hour kindle, watched it pass,
From crumbling brinks my roots search out in air . . .
A dying tree has cracked the waterglass,
Winds wrench the ladder of her tattered hair.

THE LAKE

Sudden as death before us, the steely lake,
A shield with trees around, like prickling hair;
Out of our sight the lapping inlets bent
And washy shingle scrambling back to shore.
Stale leaves on drabs of foam dam up and break;
Catching at reeds swirl yellowly by the little
Coin-pats of snow, like witches' spittle.

No storm; but still the angriness is there:
A boat leaks, tied up here for someone's sake.
Somebody used to slack the rope at night;
(Touch and it bursts); someone pulled bumping down
That keel on pebbles, whistling through his teeth.
The rotting rowlocks stare up, grey and brown . . .
Perhaps the rocks know, dim-faced underneath
As water-fiends. Their clan remembers things:
But birch forgets, and wild duck's strident wings . . .
The nurslings of an autumn don't like death.
Come away quick! I think one isn't meant
To see . . . a shadow, and its eyes were bright;
It had run too hard for travellers before;
Its scarecrow ribs panted, but not with breath.

The one it seeks won't row here any more.

ARMOURIES

Never fear the slim arrow,
Its level look is parried
In a laugh, its anger intermarried
With the stillnesses that run
Beneath an old sun.
It may remember its string
Through the cool bees' converse and murmuring
In the ribs of grasses, slender and narrow.
But not until it learn
In the round world's turn
From curled shells of chalk
How the oceans talk,
From hepatica and fern
The maned riders learn,
From a stream wound spindle-thin
All that swam therein,
Can it know itself, and be
Again the stuff of its own hickory tree;
Or know how shaken with mirth
Are the heaved sides of earth
At all forsaking summer for emnity.
And under a pauseless sun,
Where the pink-kneed grasses run
Arrow and we shall mend
To our quiet end.

Yperite, shell,
Never fear them; they
Are iron and wrath, and can have their say
One yap, in a vast blue round of day.

Pity the sons, rather,
Of the old impotent ruined father
Who may swig at his venoms brewed
But forever is unrenewed;
He sees in the glass at night
Dim faces twisted and white,

And he dare not plank down alone
His gristle and bone—
For the walls bear him a spite,
If left, they will lean on him
And the doors and mirrors be mean to him,
Water out of his tap
Oozes a thick red sap;
Having died, as best he can
He must sort with his murdered man,
Who gave not a thought to him
Or his weaponed whim,
But is single and sweet, intent
And forever innocent.

And thou, youth, no more
Can the shafts pin to thee
Than forever was willed to be;
Ask us no pity; who knows what cities rise
In the coin-sealed eyes?
Walk where white Orpheus ran
Toss down, with what face you can,
Your fee for the drink named man.

Fear friendly-handed Mammon, that man,
Who sits at night over his book,
The slave of the lamp.
Softly raising the sill
He sees, with his blinded look
Through the third-set eyes of his will,
Stretching out beyond hate or pity
The appalling city;
Parricide by his father,
The child-murderess-mother,
Crucified by his brother
And broken beyond belief
The impenitent thief;
And the little cities deemed safe
Whose bells warn off affright
Like a wheel of doves in the night,

Soft cry and soft flight.
But beyond them his thought swells out
And his armies encamp
On moon-cratered mountains and plains of
 human grief:
On all mankind has borne
Since That sounded the horn.

Fear him: he turns from the night
And turns to his book
With eyes vacant as mirrors, bright
With the inward look;
Within him swelters the earth,
Soon he must change it
With a hard birth, with a weeping birth.
He scribbles, ill at ease,
The page on his knees;
Seeking the rock word, bitterly curbed;
Knock him up now, he will shout
Like the dead disturbed
Like the bones waking and quaking and breaking
 out.

More moths than he wants
Keep this man's covenants,
He writes startled by writhing ink he sees;
Fear the man who writes
By a mean light at nights
The cipher for centuries.
Fear the man who suckles
The corpse-white starveling child;
Who thrums with his lean harsh knuckles
On the door of the poor, and sends them wild:
He is the love like a curse,
The conspirator-lover:
Slay him—his blood-red verse
Bursts up the clover.

DIGGING

Lying here in the hammock, then, writing verses,
I am cut off short by the heavy voice of the spade,
Going about its curt occupation of digging;
Cutting deep into dreams, into the bed new made
Clean for a next year's ixias and carnations.
Ancient clodhopper muttering bedrock curses
As it strikes on a stone; blunt-handled, terse of blade,
In a garden full of autumn's latest creations,
Going about its curt occupation of digging.

Such a one dug its way in the mind of the poet Catullus,
Where he lay (too fat) and dreamed in the white-height
villa.

Whimpering petal voices: 'Sweet lord, cull us—
Paste us now in your verses. Red is dripping and falling.'
(Scarlet suicide roses leap from the highest pillar.)
Turned he heavy and bland from the round of the
olive isle,

Stooped to give an aphis a patron's smile—
Then through their blandishings cut the rude voice
of the serf,

Ancient and iron, swearing, sweating, sprawling
Over the rose-red petal's calling.
Cutting through clay, through turf,
Cutting through leaf-mould, sodden earthy mess,
Careless of verbal dress,
Caring no whit, no jot,
Whether the poet Catullus heard it or not;

Living because it had wived
With red-fool roses, married with beds of clay,
Somehow intent and peasant-churlish thrived
Through the silk of their lady-day;
Caring no whit for its time
For silken-tasselled rhyme,
Yet until rust was sent
It won each argument,

Knew the right side of the grave,
All the best hopes of the staunch soil gave,
Knocked poets lean and fat
Into a scarecrow's hat,
Clodhopper-King, gave earth
More than her money's worth,
Tucked lilies safe in bed,
Swore for the roses' red
Valued the aged Cato
Equal to one potato,
Said what its numbskull thought,
Too surly to be bought,
Too single to be whelmed
By armies shining-helmed,
Till it the grumbling-dull
Must reason with a skull.
Mine nor Catullian phrases,
Coined where kingfisher-flashing noontide lazes,
Shall turn its blade aside,
Turn it less earthy-eyed.
Yet between earth and Heaven
(So it was given,)
Spades shall throw kingdoms up
Into life's cup;
Spades shall throw kingdoms, colours up,
Into life's cup.

THE TOWER

I have appeared to you fortunate; a tower
To be pulled down, brick by brick, by your demeaning,
Proving the strength and impatience of the young hands
Who know no hate for the tower, but that it stands.
Arrogant seem the ringed torches set in my hall,
Streaming red-haired; and my counsels, crazy-leaning
Monsters of Jericho, set for the trumpet's call.
But I know best within my courtyard's keeping

Against what wind was nurtured what bitter flower,
And what raven water within the well lies sleeping.

Therefore I say to you, friends and enemies,
Do not disgrace our quarrel with too swift blows,
Do not sum up our friendship with too shrewd looks.
For the oldest writing was written upon the sands,
And the newest stands while a flash of lightning stands,
But the cipher tomorrow sets us, what man knows?
Man, when you reckon a man, have careful hands:
Think long on that which was given beyond the eyes,
And be versed, when you raze a city, in more than books.

LITTLE THE GREAT

Little the great; they roll themselves among
Dropped leaves and burrs, green dust of privet hedges.
And the stone lion pats them with wide paws,
The wind-cats play with them at the fountain-edges,
Tease them with milky teeth and delicate claws.
God's greatest sage was once a parasol
Blown inside out; next he, to hide his shame,
Became a lean-shanked polka-dance of flame,
Later a rabbit nibbling on a knoll;
The last shrived vanity; this song I make
Not for contumely or disorder's sake . . .
I had it straitly from a blackbird's tongue.

WORDS

Because of the easy way with words, the quick
Way of striping them tigers or butterflies,
The craftsmen who watch my fingers mutter, 'A trick !'
(And fall back, watching my eyes.)
But I tell you this, I,

Who have shaped my word while the fools have
 bungled ten,
Words should be hard old lamps, and white of wick,
And the right flame rises then.
But I, bringing forth from Egypt the strawless brick,
(Call it cipher or lie !)
User of words, shall be hounded down with words,
Hung with words, gelded and shamed with words,
Branded, seared and torn apart with words ;
(And these the words of botchers, the words of men
White-lipped for jealousy) ;
Maker of words, kicked from the door of words,
I shall be bound to the wheel of words, and die.

Yet I think, having used my words as the kings used
 gold,
Ere we came by the rustling jest of the paper kings,
I who am overbold will be steadily bold,
In the counted tale of things.
I tell you this, I,
The false magician who flourished Pharaoh's snake—
Long the word may curl in the tamer's hand,
For the true tale's sake.
I who hastened for Pharaoh the beaten king,
(Call me bought or fool !)
Fighter with words, must clasp the prick of words,
Fawned on with words, sick at the heart with words
I shall look to drink, and the well be foul with words ;
(And these the words of the mouths that cannot sing,
(Of the minds cold, not cool.)
I shall be struck on a futile mouth with words,
Capped with a word, in that hour I die.

Win then, the word-pack. But who bears silence best ?
(More in my Egypt than king or Jahveh knew) ;
Who lifts the iron ring, unlocks the chest,
Speaks to a wall . . . and the spell is true ?
This knowledge go seek who dares, in a certain hall
Where a word shall rise, and a word shall fall.

It is hued with ochre and green, with a slumbering red,
Set with the jackal heads and the ibis head;
It has set a store by words,
Woven a book and shaped a scale for words:
And it knows the mesh and the naked flesh of words:
Thither march we all.

TWILIGHT

When in amongst the quiet country firs
Slides the cold light, not apricot, not green,
Last medals glitter on the pine tree's breast;
Faces are blurred; colours of men half seen.

Trudging their way, old shadow-shapes beshawled
Mutter 'Goodnight,' halt, and peer back at me.
I bid 'Goodnight.' Ah, warily answer these—
Not men, but citizens of gramarye.

Turning the key that guards my dozing house,
I come on the unravelled yellow ball . . .
Firelight . . . some shadow plays it like a mouse:
Some hand I love, but know not, let it fall.

PROMETHEUS

No anger now, no surging of desire . . .
Only the light waves fronding on the sand,
The grains of sand fine gold from breast to knees:
And only in my cupped hands burn the little
Red semen, harsh and brittle,
Borne downward from these trees with hair of fire,
Borne from these slow and ancient rata trees.
Against the sand blue shadow quivers tall . . .
Once it was told that in another land,

Prometheus, hot-running from the caves,
Splashed to his thighs such licking milky waves,
Flourished against the sun his godly brand,
And in a second had the world aflame . . .
And burnt out littleness : and burnt out shame.

ISABEL'S BABY*

Isabel's baby, Isabel's baby
Didn't cry much, but wouldn't be fed ;
She had a dark and delicate head,
Curled wax fingers, like any daughter.
Long dark lashes she had ; between
Birds flew out of an orchard green,
Flew from her eyes like hidden water.
Run away, little boys, run away !
Run away, Abigail, stout commanding
Fox-red-saxe-blue-little-girl-standing,
Standing staring at Isabel's baby,
Run away, bowl your hoop of day !
Maybe you'll frighten Isabel's baby,
Maybe you'll steal its doll ; ah, maybe
Isabel's baby can win like you
Cherry-red pegtops, mug so blue.
Sky and fishing-boats aren't so blue.
Whisper and tiptoe, shout and run,
Fat brown children who grasp the sun,
Here must Isabel watch and pray
(Long dark lashes and orchards green),
Quiet people who pace all day,
Plotting to steal her little dark baby.

Rocking Chair Isabel, Rocking Chair Isabel,

*This poem is from a longer work *De Thierry's Progress* but Robin Hyde sent it to the late C. A. Marris as a separate piece for inclusion in *N.Z. Best Poems* 1938. Isabel was the daughter of Baron de Thierry.

Sits on her balcony buttery rosed,
Banksia-buttery-buttony-rosed ;
Trying to match them, trying to think
How she could make her baby drink.
They have the milk a baby loves,
Caught by night in the foxes' gloves :
She has only her mother's milk,
Come as the wise ones said it would.
Rocking Chair Isabel, Rocking Chair Isabel,
Lulling the dark soft head to rest,
(India muslin with gilded flies
Hiding her small and shrunken breast),
Sees how a parched world wills to thrive.
Sees how the Bold Ones stay alive.
Moss and fern lick the cold stone well,
Wise bee ploughs in Canterb'ry bell,
Pines with their shacko caps cocked even
File to the bubbly lake of Heaven.
All things moistening, blue on blue,
Sky and ocean-mouth lapping through
Green and silvery nipples air.
Rocking Chair Isabel, Rocking Chair Isabel,
Brooch up your muslin and pin your hair,
Nobody's asking your milk, my dear ;
Earth that was thirsty has ceased to care.
Sit where the bits of honeysuckle
Fall in your hair and the mauve light stipples
You with your brooch (great cameo brooch),
Raven hair, and the dark small nipples.
You with your dark and delicate head,
Lilac shoes with the silver buckle ;
(Isabel's baby, I'm told its dead).
Star falls and moth falls, a fire in your hair—
But the India muslin trails wet, my dear.
Earth that was thirsty has ceased to care.

TIME'S SILENCE

Grudge not the rose its winter sleep,
Grudge not Time its silence, dear ;
This ice blue-furred and spangled deep
Is a spring's garment, not her bier.

Flashed in a moment's kinship warm
Leap up thoughts of ruddy grace ;
Thawed by the vehemence of storm
A hailstone wins a snowdrop's face.

TOADSTOOLS

I have said much, and am doubtful of my wisdom—
A tricky vapour's breath :
Now peering at my doorstep I descry
Nine toadstools : and the taste of them is death.
So God makes toadstools : yes, and I make toadstools,
Born in damp places, strangers to your street.
Dainty enough, brown moles to mark the morning,
But only fools' or fairies' meat.

SISTERS

In a dream not long sped,
I stood on the sands, in the glassy-shattering reach of
the waves,
Quarrelling with my sister,
And caught her arm, as in their first furious childish
quarrel
Cain caught at Abel's sleeve.
Then I felt how thin her wrist was—thin as a young
child's wrist,
Hardly more than the bones of the snowy alighting birds,

Or the mast of a boy's blue boat ;
So slight the garment of flesh, thin the bone beneath,
Evanescent her young mortality.
But before I could see her eyes or speak her name,
The wave broke, covering all,
Brightening, enlarging the rock-pools.

FRAGMENT

Always a little ahead, my shadow,
Always too tall on our dial of life !
You the wise grain, well up in the meadow,
I a thin shoot, in the wrestling strife
Of grasses, nor mother, nor maid, nor wife,
Wild was their way, and my joying wild
How would you ask me, mother, my child?
But a ray cut sharp on a sunset's bevel
Show me your glance, grown equal and level,
Steadfast your look. Oh strange to follow,
Strange as the night's most succinct thing ;
Sharp of curve, mother, swift of wing
Into the blue wave slant you, swallow !
Hasteless, yet ever a little ahead
Swift for the springtides that bury the dead.

THE EXILE

This is my country ; here my feet are set
Without question, in the soil I understand ;
Here the lean hardships whimpering at my hand,
(Beggars, or rightful claimants to be met,)
Are kinsmen still . . . their eyes too often wet.
But every dream into this clean air spilt
Circles about the leaf-red tower I built . . .
Drive me away ; ye are my people yet.

Volumnia, you'll never know what bitter bread
I begged in that strange land, of that strange sky.
Their harsh red rabble of singing passed me by,
Unmoved their passions left me as the dead.
Let me reach up my hand to touch your head . . .
Or move about your tasks; but yet be nigh.

Houses by the Sea

THE BEACHES

I

Not here our sands, those salt-and-pepper sands
Mounding us to the chins : (don't you remember ?
Won't the lost shake for any cry at all ?)
Listen : our sands, so clean you didn't care
If fine grains hit your teeth, stuck in your hair,
Were moist against the sunburn on your knees.
Everything glowed—old tar-bubble November,
Nothing around us but the blue-bubbling air ;
We liked being quiet then. To move or call
Crumpled the work of hands, his big red hands :
(It was he, our father, piled the mounds for us) ;
He sat and read, dreamed there against the wall,
Thinking perhaps how rocks are not quite lands,
Housing old barnacles and octopus ;
How the wet gold soups back, strains into seas.

We closed our eyes : sunlight streamed through, in rays
Orange or green, but I liked violet most :
Black dog splashed past us, with the chewed-up ball :
Here it's so different. Flesh looks hurt, asprawl
These crayfish people ; legs like fungoid trees
Lopped off.
You're playing safe to stay a ghost.

II

Island Bay, Orongorongo, Day's Bay, Miramar,
Evan's Bay where the slips and the rust-red ships are ;
You can't lie still, pretending those are dreams
Like us . . . Or watch, I'll show you : wet and clean,
Coming past the sand-dune couples, strung out far,
Purple on brown, his shadow grows between :
Bleached logs stare up : he's bringing us ice-creams.

III

An absent face, remote and sharp, as far
As fisher's boats that bob across the bay
Setting their cray-pots in the island's shadow;
Fat men are red . . . this one's a different red,
Thin-faced and fair, burnt up in scarlet sun.
Ganges and Jumna, half the parrot places
With screeching feathers, soapstone lantern faces,
Were his; but he can't talk of what he's done.
Sometimes he hits his skull against a star,
Rages, fizzles red at everyone.

Later you hear him again: 'Sorry, old girl.'
The lamp goes up, her face looks wringing wet,
The shadow stoops, to see that we're asleep.
I'd like to ask them questions then: but one
Thinks you're clean toothbrush, homework neatly done;
One dreams, says 'A penny for a curl.'
They love you, but their thoughts tide back so deep:
Both are so very certain you'll forget.

IV

Sands, sands of my father's town,
Of my father's triple sea,
(Once for the eyes and twice for dream,
Thrice for memory);
Quilled in the dusk here, grey and brown,
Cool where the silvers gleam,
Hush your singing and let me down;
We shall hear the low-voiced sea.

What is it quickens the blood?
Smell of the sun-soaked, salt-white wood.
What is the tameless thing?
Gull's shafted wing.
What is it lads deserve?

White boat's arrowy glimpsing curve.
What is silk to my foot?
Tide on the turn, when spongy trees uproot.
What makes the sweethearts quarrel?
Third mouth, pink as coral.
What shall a maiden do,
Stay true or be untrue?
What says the Mother Sea?
On a glittering day, go free, go free.
What do fishermen keep in their pot?
Cod, garlic and crab they've got.
What makes the wanton's bed?
Sand while she's living, deep sea dead.
How about her that's nice?
Granite shone smooth as ice.
What must I do, my sea?
(With empty hands, quiet heart, little else, O Sea).
Still be my child—my child to me.

Sands, sands of my mother's town,
Of my mother's secret sea,
(For the head borne high, for the lagging heart,
At last for memory,)
Feathered in dusk here, grey and black,
White where the moon's on foam,
Hush your singing and hand me back
For a bed and a lamp at home.
'White bed,'
 Sea said,
 rocking,
'White bed,
 but not
 a home.'

V

This is my secret, this is the chord most perfectly strung:
There lay the dunes: I cleared them in one white stride,

Feet flying, arms flying, seagull-swift, hair and heart flying,
Smiting my feet on sand, I was into the tide :
Catching, striking, and streaming the harp-chords : for I
was young.

This in a sea-cleft bony with old spars staring out
From the rocks and the swaying livid anemones :
But the tide broke in, and with one magnificent shout
Caught me, carried me, balanced me, held by the knees :
Curled to me, high by the wrecked and foaming trees.

But the sparkling Sabine love three moments over
Ran I and laughed, from the greenbeards' following wrath :
Whirling in winds and taunted, my hollow retreating lover
Snarled at the cliffs, as his spray-drenched hands reached
forth :
And in many a sucking cavern, the convex eyes peered forth.

Turned I, and shaken, a child and a woman, blindly
Shook off the weed from my breasts, and knelt upon stone :
And climbed in the yellow steeps of a hill that held me
kindly,
And lay in the yellow flowers : and lay alone :
I parted the yellow flowers and lay alone.

VI

Close under here, I watched two lovers once,
Which should have been a sin, from what you say :
I'd come to look for prawns, small pale-green ghosts,
Sea-coloured bodies tickling round the pool.
But tide was out then ; so I strolled away
And climbed the dunes, to lie here warm, face down,
Watching the swimmers by the jetty-posts
And wrinkling like the bright blue wrinkling bay.
It wasn't long before they came ; a fool
Could see they had to kiss ; but your pet dunce

Didn't quite know men count on more than that ;
And so just lay, patterning the sand.

And they
Were pale thin people, not often clear of town ;
Elastic snapped, when he jerked off her hat ;
I heard her arguing, 'Dick, my frock !' But he
Thought she was bread.
I wished her legs were brown,
And mostly, then, stared at the dawdling sea,
Hoping Perry would row me some day in his boat.

Not all the time ; and when they'd gone, I went
Down to the hollow place where they had been,
Trickling bed through fingers. But I never meant
To tell the rest, or you, what I had seen ;
Though that night, when I came in late for tea,
I hoped you'd see the sandgrains on my coat.

VII

Cool and certain, their oars will be lifted in dusk,
light-feathered
As wings of terns, that dip into dream, coming back blue ;
but the motionless gull
With his bold head, hooked beak, black-slit humped harsh back
Freezing in icy air gleams crystal and beautiful.
No longer the dark corks, bobbing bay-wide, are seen :
Dogs bark, mothers hail back their children from ripple's
danger :

People dipped in the dusk-vats smile back, each stranger
Than time ; each has a face of crystal and blue.

In the jettisoned boat, the child who peered at her book
Cannot lift her glance from the running silk of the creek :
It is time to return to her mother, to call and look . . .
The sea-pulse beats in her wrists : she will not speak.
But the boats, in salt tide and smarting sunrise weathered,
Swing by an island's shadow : silver trickles and wets
The widening branch of their wake, the swart Italian faces,

Fisherman's silver fingers, fumbling the nets :
And the island lies behind them, lifting its glassy cone
In one strange motionless gesture, light on stone :
Only the gulls, the guards of the water-lapping places,
Scream at the fishermen lifting the water-lifting nets.

Far and away, the shore people hear a singing :
Love-toned Italian voices fondle the night : the hue
Of the quietly waiting people is velvet blue.

THE HOUSES

I

Old nursery chair ; its legs, cut down, are broken :
Old timepiece, out-of-date, forlorn and slow :
Slow creaking shadow ; somebody unawoken.
Trumpet: don't touch it, soldier, it won't blow.

II

On the asphalt a gas light pools : a child looks out
Swinging against the slotted fence and grey,
And eats the three nasturtium seeds : all day
She kept them in her pocket, for the doubt
They might be poison, as her sisters say.
But now their delicate, dubious taste can sting
Her tongue curled : snail's horns curl : they drop
 and cling
On round nasturtium leaves, green-saucered here.

Now she has evening all her own ; the hot
Cream scent of cabbage palms, trying to flood out
Like man's love, or the Blessed Sacrament :
Sunset peaks over her, a copper tent,

Wind like God's breath goes past her in a shout :
Behind this street shine houses that are not,
Playmates she loves, or loved : but then forgot.

III

Adolicus ; that's a creeper rug, its small
Pink-and-white piecemeal flowers swarm down a fence :
So little, no scent to be by ; show, pretence—
Nothing to do, but hide the rotting wall.
Three slats were broken : but the street-boys eyes
Can't climb in here like ants and frighten us.
Stare if they like : we've the adolicus.

IV

Hares on their forms at dusk were not so still
Nor those soft stones, their eyes, so warily bright
As yours, held captive by my story's will :
Candle-flame pricked between us : night
Lapped like grey water over the sill.

Why did you listen ? Little enough to learn . . .
Scraps from a baked street's platter ; folk we knew
Seen slantwise, through vined doorways that discern
The secret child. Did blue
Flame in my eyes so steeply burn ?

Why didn't you answer back ? Perhaps the wind
Was I ; you the deep earth, that wouldn't care
(So dreaming) for the littler left behind :
Flame pieces out your hair,
Your hands ; never that quiet coast, your mind.

V

None of it true ; for Christ's sake, spill the ink,
Tear out this charnel's darnel-root, that lingers

Sprouting words, words, words ! Give me cool bluegum
leaves
To rub brittle between my fingers.

I had the touch of hillside once : the ever-
So-slender cold of buttercup stems in brink :
Pebbles : great prints in mud : Oh, Lazarus, bring me
Some mountain honesty to drink !

VI

Section and brick and grass ;
The boys lingering home from school,
Tall girls, their long hair in plaits,
Their print frocks summer cool ;
Gates creaking, doors pushed ajar,
Narrow blue panes of glass ;
The shabby dreamers that pass,
Afar and afar
Spilling into this city, the sunset vats.

Oven, gas-light and sink,
The cracked plates getting hot,
The tired man's tedious return
To the house that honours him not.
Singsong of lessons ; the girls
Spell out their tables ; food
His own, and he knows it good :
But his dry cold senses yearn
For a friendly wine to drink,
For a laugh in his dwelling-place :
Weary his woman's face,
The bitter smoke whirls.

VII

Here the caged voice in the wood
Flown tame to hand
Told more, hinted at more

Than we understand :
Slave to the stubborn-fingered
Melted down to lullaby,
It urged more, stumbled and lingered
The advice, would not die.
Something had these to say—
Wood, string, ivory :
A prophecy out of the soul
Or out of the tree :
The singing bough was nailed
To masthead : young Argonaut
Half-heard, shivered and failed :
Laughed, half-forgot :
And leapt out sunwards, to play
With the dogs, the white sticks of his choice—
Anything, save that lamenting
Beautiful voice :
Leaving five notes on the air,
And the sunbeams, wild
As doves flicked off from his hair,
The impatient master, the child,
Knelt, making circles of chalk ;
And knew how alone
String, wood and ivory
Plead on, plead on.

VIII

But another and older music
Islanded round these keys,
Sweeping them low ; black birches dragged in
a brook :
So old, so tattered the book,
The names of its melodies
Were the signets of ancient kings
In a fire that leapt too quick—
The names and the fire were gone :
But the child's thin fingers drew on
Like a muslin drawn through rings

All that her dream might flag upon ;
(The song gat eyes and wings) :
Till the chords of the wooden heart,
The low slow messenger strings,
Gave her an art, where dwelt no art,
And songs the singer sings.
Backwards forwards and back
The spider hands in their web
Ran from the white to the quaking black
And span in the airy ebb :
Till with eyes forgetful of name,
With mind forsaken of words,
She played : and brushing her eyes as they came
The green and silver birds
Shrilled with the birds of flame,
With the instruments' red birds.

Outside mounted a hill
And flowed a moon,
Milk for the gourd-like valleys to spill,
Brimming over soon :
Yet it was evening still,
And a sprinkling hose made wet
The moth—a fluttering darker than air,
Columbines' spiky hair
And the humble mignonette.
In a cleft between dark and light,
(So the child knew,)
A road wound upwards, glassily bright,
And the trampling pines went through :
And the road and its pine-trees burned
In the glitter of fleeces blue,
In a sparkle of hooves, on the highway for which
 she yearned :
This the child knew,
But would not turn her head.
Slowly, solemnly, stately, she thrummed them
 into view—
The flocks that would feed on the dead.

THE PEOPLE

I

After we'd left off loving, long after that,
When you'd not see how we were sullenly young
Nor we how you were herded 'after the war';
When staring flower stuck out a china tongue,
And door was spring and slam—not any more
The wooden friend that watched us in and out,
Storing us up as light lies stored in a tree—
Still there were words and looks that struggled free.

But most, some wound stayed wide in us; you'd changed
Fearfully: why should we let this tall man in?
Tramps come like this, come sneak-bold past the kennel;
Their dusty shirts stink—loafing there in fennel
Feathered, high-arched, with half-sweet aniseed stink!
They beg, but never flinch from what you think;
Pink passion-flowers tap them, overhead:
And so you punish them with crusts of bread,
Your neat hands fold up water from the sink;
That'll teach their smirk to mock the linen sheet!
No—there's a difference: tramps are not estranged,
They never had: they don't plant cobbly feet
And their own doorways curse them, as if for sin:
But when you passed the spindling cherry-tree
Its ghostly hailstones shivered: 'Not he! Not he!'

Lamplight: Grace requires blessings on us all:
You didn't move or speak, but I could see
In your face (and vanished before the cat could blink,)
Black riverbeds; a strange new waterfall.

II

How she grew old happened in fine-darned places,
Cracked pictures, seen too close; you'd barely know . . .
She was a red-haired woman, two little lines

Sharp cut between her brows : her eyes looked tired
As long as I remember, and her strong mouth sad.
Still she held firmly : when we went for walks
It was I who flagged : You'd never guess what frocks
She made us, while the clean thread broke and broke,
And I stood pricking at red sateen, or spoke
Roughly : that dance, the only one we had,
I remember Judy's frock of petals, wired
Bright blue, with silver wrappings round the stalks.
Sometimes I loved her : but I liked the smooth faces

Like the other mothers had, and told her so.
She laughed : she was never frightened : she took knocks
Square on the mouth, and wouldn't hit you back :
I never saw my mother dressed in black
But grief came . . . and she never let it go.

III

How do I know? What a fool question ! Ask
How, sick of us, she wanted back herself
Too late : or ask in what mean arid way
Was snapped her pride. I only know, one day
Her eyes weren't tired, but weak ; she still kept on
A while yet, till our frocks were out of school :
Poor old machine ! I think it pricked a fool
Heart-deep, a million times ; the clear white cloth,
That too ; it tried to gather, as she told,
The running pleats ; but something crumpled both . . .
Then swift sly hands smacked up from every task . . .
She was a cracked jug clinging to its shelf ;
A fear, staring down at half-crossed Rubicon.

IV

But letting go . . . hands, eyes, teeth, body, all ways
 A woman has of feeling proudly made . . .
 Might still have left a dipping road ; blue haze
 (Kingfisher, sometimes), quilting soft afternoon ;
 But there were we, sprawled out : she was afraid,
 Seeing us spring like mushrooms, big so soon ;
 Toadstools, perhaps she thought ; her linen praise
 God knows she earned ; but hid it in her press,
 Fearing to soil it with some bitterness
 Against these young, who roared by different ways,
 Drank new wine, breathed a different-seeming air ;
 Once she had liked her hands, but now no more
 Her pride kept up its make in waist or hair :
 Honour meant most. She listened by the door
 For who'd betray it ; but too spent to care.

V

Now, in this place, I remember Faraway ;
 Past hilltops, one last pine-wedge, black, not green ;
 Three miles of houses chicken-snug between
 And through the pines, one house. Ellen would say
 'It's haunted !' But we laughed, kicked about blocks
 Down in the alley : beady sun dripped red . . .
 Sometimes my ticking heart spoke up, and said
 To Faraway, 'Open now ! Your stranger knocks !'

Empty I knew it, but the low fires lighted,
 Snow in coarse gig-ruts mounting up beside :
 The curtains drawn for what obscure benighted
 Wanderer who'd not quite lived and not quite died ;
 Who was at home here. Sometimes, up the stairs,
 Ticking loud my small heart climbed. The great dim bed
 Held shadow. 'Who dares?' 'The child, the stranger
 dares.'
 Hush ; the cold sigh. Shaking, I fled.

This was my Far, my point of vision, the single
Enchanter's loadstone, drawing up my heart
To dwell its serf, where crack-joint pine trees mingle
Needles and shade on wild turf sprung apart;
Spider-egg pebbles, panes too bright for pity—
I played alone, till hills quaffed down the sun:
Then, hand torn free, three miles through breathless
city
Home—run and run!

Poems January 1938 to August 1939

SHIPLIGHTS

Hugging the Queensland coast
There passed us, Saturday night,
Bare half a mile to port
A ship tricked out in light;
Swung up, shuddered and jibbed,
Like a rearing horse;
(And the Chinese boy stared out,
Watching her course.)
Till knowingly handled she swung
Heels up and over,
Melting into her destined wave
As woman to lover.
Glittering stem to stern
She left us, with no more sound
Than the rootless feet of the dead
On a rockless ground.
And of all her neighbours, we
In earth, sea or sky,
Were the closest she had on call,
The safest for standing by.
But steadily heading north,
Cleaving well apart,
She left our lights, in the murmuring well
Of the murmuring waters' heart.
So in clipped stiff English I asked
And the Chinese boy, watching on,
Said, a ship of Japan.

JOURNEY FROM NEW ZEALAND

Now as I go between sands red and yellow as poppies,
Or across a desert many-breasted like Kali,
Shifting, changing, with navels and sockets of wet deep blue,
I shall see always these things, patient yet obdurate,
And my heart be broken for them, as together we wait the
rainfall.

Earth, earth, and the purple thither-dusty grasses,
I shall dream thee fat rains, waiting alone by the desert
Whose white and bitter body makes mock of rain.
Sheep bought for Russia, thick-sided breeding rams
With the grey grass of the steppes tangled between your
teeth,

Do you lift up your heads, short and bellicose, black-nosed,
With the round horns curled hard as a boxer's fist?
Do you lift up your heads, snuffing their north-watered wind
That drank ice each winter, and seek, however dimly,
The scent of another spring than the Muscovy spring?
(Down in Mackenzie Country
They burn off tussock each year, with the writhing flares
Tied to their galloping horses' tails.)
You cannot remember the snow-fence, black birch rotting
in slabs,

Or your weak protesting cries
As Old Donald, the shepherd, snuggled you into his plaid,
And blinking stiff lashes free, thanked his stiff God
For a new lamb, delivered alive in snowtime.
The bark and frisking of collies is gone from you,
Lost honey, dissolved in the vague old murmuring hives of
your brain,

Yet, as you lift your heads snuffing, (the train growls by,)
I have a hope you will find their grass acrid, will give
Some maimed defiance out of the weight of your loins.
I too am sold into strangeness,
I too will look out of windows, thinking 'How fair!' or
'Strange . . . '

(Is ringo their words for an apple?)
But in my heart will only dissolve, re-form,
The circling shapes of familiar things.

That place trodden hard,
With the white cocks pecking in the sun,
Their combs like dusty blood,
Under the pines, and the serious pungent macrocarpa,
Don't we all know it?

Those dropped shafts of a gig
Leathered over from rain ; (it is seldom used now,
Seldom the jolting and laughing into market,
One boot high on the high old iron step,
And jogging in front the mare, the solemn dappled buttocks,
Black tail lifted for clean manure,
Grizzled lashes winking over her eyes,
Part of a world still—cars or no cars) :
Ah, I shall speak it between the scorching beats of the train.
(Change for Berlin midnight !)

Watching the kea, red outlaw, circle a plain
Scarred with river-beds, where gorse-gold metal
Flares up at the copper metal of underwings ;
I climbed a snow-peak once ; who would believe
How the ribbed gold grass bowed frozen into the snow ?
How a fall sprang out and down, singing,
The mountain's woman,
And the dreadful singing of winds blew forth at dark ?
Down upon Diamond Lake, the trout plopped home
Spreading such lonely circles ;
The dying boy mined shealite,
And the old man polished his well-loved worthless greenstone.

They say the great bird still stalks at Manapouri ;
No one has tramped these sounds.
They speak of great men with red beards ;
(Quickly ; this gulping train must start at midnight.)

Your crude country, hard as unbroken shell . . .
She was hard to love, and took strength, like a virgin.
Sometimes, in money or dust, the little farms ebbed away,
Dripping between disconsolate fingers like blood
Of that harsh girl, who would never love you.
But in the cities (old days !)
We could live better, warm and safe as the sparrows,
Twittering through the evenings like young sparrows.
Ours was a city, like any city,
But with more, perhaps, of sea and cloud, not long loved.

November tar, ripening, blackened our sandals.
Our city had doorways, too many shut.
Morning and evening, facing the rampant crimson brutes
 of the light,
Nobody had the beautiful strength to decree :
'Leave your doors open morning and evening—
Leave your gates wide to the stranger.'
So ours was a city, like any city, but fair.
At seven (still light), the children snuggled down
Like rabbits. The rest sat on in the lamplight,
Sat still or spoke words by their failures.

There is nothing else to tell, but the catkin grass
Strung on pale wires, close to the sea.
Our great rocks fluked like whales,
We loved the dead coal-hulks, did not despise them.
Money was nothing, balloons were much.
The grey mists quiet-breasted as doves.

I knew a green place where the light looked more like trees,
Trees more like diffused and stilly light.
(Green, green be upon your eyes ; red in my heart,
The world's troubled colour ; for I must awaken.)
Once in the rose parterres, my mother stood still and said :
'Man, woman and child ; man, woman and child.'
She was born with a restive heart, but grew old.

Ah, too many sparrows twittering in the dawn . . .
The deep, blue and unborn colour.
The dawn should be men's, not your little voices.
It was always too soon to awake, I remember now,
But the world, this and that world,
And the Templar stars in their order said : 'Rise and go.'

FRAGMENTS FROM TWO COUNTRIES

What is it makes the stranger? Say, oh eyes!
Coming to this land, I saw little boys spin tops,
Others tugged red-tailed kites against the wind,
Girls hopped in chalk-marked patterns about the streets—
That game I might have taught them, at five years old.
A man sold chestnuts, another warmed hands at his brazier,
A mother suckled the sleepyhead at her breast.

Crossing the Zacchewei Road, I saw one tree,
A white stranger to winter:
So, in my country, before slipping off her robe,
Spring tests the yet icy waters with bare white foot.

White bough, soft blow of blossom on my sight!
Spring takes the broken town.
How can they bear, this springtime in Japan,
When cherry trees are dight
To walk abroad, spread fans like delicate wings,
Move through the white and rose, half-seeming still
The same small courteous guests?

Boys fish, willows watch their tresses burn green in glass:
The people are deft in making bamboo huts.
Old men, thin-fleshed as golden shells, dream on,
Almost the dragon's blood, red-veined in stone,
Stirs from the torpor of the centuries.

In the heart of the reed is a secret,
In the heart of the green bamboo, a spear;
In the heart of a boy is 'Chee-lai, chee-lai!'
They will take a long time, ere they crush out these.

I saw a man plaiting withes still green,
Swiftly the green whips built up his basket,
A cool dark sap bled out of his fingers.

* Arise! Arise!

What will he carry in his basket,
Hurrying from shop to shop,
Whispering from door to door?
A fish, a flower, or a word?
The heart of China, the heart of China,
Whose living sap runs bright on his fingers;
He will creep with that heart through dark cities,
He will run with new heart to his mountains.

Having but idle servants in my train,
I can give neither tile nor lamp,
Only a footprint: some boy sees it at dawn,
Before his high wheeled cart creaks over it.

Of my home I say this: one day
My father brought in an old flute.
Very small was the house. But twining poppies in wreaths,
My three young sisters and I
Danced, that night, like four wands of corn.

I dreamed your book was written, and that the great
So praised it. In my green room, facing the hills,
Outstaring the cold Karori tombstones, the blinded moon,
Your eyes laughed, your two close hands were warm.
I was rested after a long and weary running,
And leaned my head. I, too, had praise for your book . . .
In the wakening, I saw my hands, wetted with tears;
Still the blind moon watching in,
And trivial guesswork . . . thus you might say, might write.

In the days before tempest, (My head will be good as
the next!)

I dream so much of the poems made in my youth.
Small idle ghosts I had written, forgotten, never since seen,
Slip into my brain; say, 'We are part of you,'
And swiftly are gone again.
A soft night carries us on.
It is like the wind, streaming over Wellington hills,
Which, bearing all sunset's flame, scorns not the kites:

It is like the tide, flowing out from Island Bay,
Bubbling round dinghies, it lifts the childrens' boats.

KU LI

Two words from China: 'Ku li'—bitter strength.
'This coolies' war!' tinkle the sweet-belled idle.
His face and Hundred Names sweep on below,
Child-like, he plays at horse without the bridle:
And carts a world along, and carts a war,
Tugging perhaps to mountain heights at length:
The new vernacular chronicles exhort him,
And waste their breath.
His grinning face can't know
Half the fixed meanings of the flags he saw:
He had a happy childhood: then time caught him,
Broadened his shoulders, but forbore his head.

Eight years his life between the shafts: eight hours
(With luck), between Changsha and Hsuehchowfu,
Picks swinging like pendulums in a noon of flowers:
Shining their freedom, bombers spot his blue,
But cease to count. Too poor for marriage-bed
He looks for dreaming in the big dim shed,
Rolled in the quilt where other warmth has dosed:

Turns to Yunnan, hacks the next strategy through,
Cheerful; and often killed; and always bossed.
And not on Tiger Head or Purple Mountain
His grave-mound rises: worlds live on, to slake
Their ashy gullets at his bitter fountain
Of blood and vigour. Enemy armies break
Somehow on this, as somehow cracks the stone
Under his pick: but now he rots alone
(Not claiming to have died for something's sake,
Only the earth makes ready for his bone,
The green rice sees him with unflattering eyes:

Too cheap a partisan for man to prize,
Men seldom know him for their broadest river,
And burnt in the immortal tiles forever.

THE WATER-BEARER

Earth says, 'Liang, my young darling,
Thirteen times has taken his New Year gift.
At seven he was busy, clinging astride the old meek
buffalo,
Switching off flies with a branch, watching out at
rice-fields.
The fish his brown hands pulled from the stream
Though little, he carefully bore to his mother
On his reed tray covered with leaves.
Later, when long drought sucked the apricot trees
And stones in the creek beds gaped like fish
It was he who searched far, finding water.
When winter cracked, when summer chafed my sore
sides,
Always Liang, awakening, listened first.
Only this year I watched his eyes grow grave—
He sees a star in my pool.
Still he runs like a child. Humbly I beg,
If the others must be for death, let this one stay,
My son, my water-bearer.'

General Matsui says
'No water, but redder drink
This earth must learn, perhaps four summers.
All crops shall carry red leaf—
Rice, cotton or bean,
Men shall reap nor need them.'

Liang, who guarded a field,
Caught between the laugh of childhood,
Star of his youth,

Speaking no word, presses cheek to dust.
The new red flower is born,
A curse on all crops.
Earth cries out: far, yet as clear,
Rings the starry cry.
When did men heed the pain in voices?

PIHSIEN ROAD

Old men in blue: and heavily encumbered
Old shoulders held by shadowy whips in sway,
Like ox and ass, that down this road have lumbered
All day: all the bright murderous day.
More than their stumbling footprints press this clay.

And light in air, pure white, in wonder riding,
Some crazy Phaeton these have never known
Holds by a lever their last awe, deciding
How flesh shall spurt from sinews, brain from bone—
Crushing desolate grain with a harder stone.

SWEEPING THE GUTTER CLEAN

Sweeping the gutter clean
For ever and in vain,
Men in straw cloaks and hats
Bare-legged, swish through the rain;
Pushing great brooms of twig;
And then
Mocking the backs of these men,
Second and filth and spittle fall again.

Later, downing their dress
Shanks bare as their own,
The midnight man goes forth

Stopping by blackened tusks of stone,
Sweeping the mortal household
 The sacrifice
Whose timeless agony did not suffice,
Pushing a broken broom, he goes alone.

THE SILENT

In this country far of range
Little is strange, little is strange;
Rivers in blue bowls clapped together
We front alike our teacup weather.
A young hawk sweeps the glistening pine—
Both are yours, but both were mine.
Green alabaster cups the foam—
There was a mead we loved at home . . .
Halting among your grasses, I
Trace no commandment from your sky
'Be thou different!' One in green
And one in shadowy purple, mean
An equal mood, the selfsame grace
Hooded about a country's face;
And sulphur butterflies among
The tangle loll with delicate tongue,
Choose their honey, seek out dew
In peace as clear as all I knew.

Only man, who cannot speak,
Must rest burnt hand on rocky cheek,
Printing poor gentleness in stone,
Where safely locked it lies unknown.
Against the bending of your road
I watched a woman and her load . . .
(Black her gown, but blue her scarf
As the old ocean's wrinkling laugh.)
Into the swaying lights of grass
She drew aside to let me pass.

She knew me, and she knew me not,
(Eyes of the ages half-forgot.)
Both were silent as the breeze
That wreathed about her mountain's knees—
Only this locust from the wall
Parched and dying, sings me all.

WHAT IS IT MAKES THE STRANGER?

What is it makes the stranger? Say, oh eyes!
Because I was journeying far, sailing alone,
Changing one belt of stars for the northern belt,
Men in my country told me, 'You will be strange—
Their ways are not our ways; not like ourselves
They think, suffer and dream.'
So sat I silent, and watched the stranger, why he was strange.
But now, having come so far, shed the eight cloaks of wind,
Ridden ponies of foam, and the great stone lions of six
strange cities.

What is it makes the stranger? Say, oh eyes!
Eyes cannot tell. They view the self-same world—
Outer eyes vacant till thoughts and pictures fill them,
Inner eyes watching secret paths of the brain.
Hands? But the hands of my country knit reeds, bend wood,
Shape the pliable parts of boats and roofs.
Mend pots, paint pictures, write books
Though different books; glean harvests, if different harvests,
Not so green as young rice first shaking its spears from water.
Hands cannot say. Feet then? They say
In shoe, not sandal, or bare if a man be poor,
They thread long ways between daylight and dark,
Longer, from birth to death.
Know flint from grasses, wear soles through, hate sharp
 pebbles,
Oftentimes long for the lightness of birds.
Yet in my country, children, even the poor
Wear soft warm shoes, and a little foot in the dance

Warms the looks of young men, no less than here.
In my country, on summer evenings, clean as milk poured out
From old blue basins, children under the hawthorne trees
Fly kites, lacing thin strings against the sky.
Not at New Year, but at other festivals
We light up fire-crackers
In memory of old buried danger, now a ghost danger.

On a roof garden, among the red-twigg'd bowing of winter
trees,
The small grave bowls of dwarf pines (our pines grow tall
Yet the needle-sharp hair is the same) one first star swam,
Silver in lily-root dusk. Two lovers looked up.
Hands, body, heart in my breast,
Whispered, 'These are the same. Here we are not so
strange—
Here there are friends and peace.
We have known such ways, we in our country!'

Black-tiled roofs, curled like wide horns, and hiding safe
From the eyes of the stranger, all that puts faith in you.
Remember this, of an unknown woman who passed,
But who stood first high on the darkening roof garden
looking down.

My way behind me tattered away in wind,
Before me, was spelt with strange letters.
My mind was a gourd heavy with sweet and bitter waters.
Since I could not be that young girl, who heedless of stars
Now watched the face of her lover,
I wished to be, for one day, a man selling mandarins,
A blackened tile in some hearth place; a brazier, a well,
a good word,
A blackened corpse along the road to Chapei,
Of a brave man, dead for his country.
Shaking the sweet-bitter waters within my mind,
It seemed to me, all seas fuse and intermarry.
Under the seas, all lands knit fibre, interlock:
On a highway so ancient as China's
What are a few miles more to the ends of the earth?

Is another lantern too heavy to light up, showing the face
Of farers and wayfarers, stumbling the while they go,
Since the world has called them stranger?

Only two rebels cried out 'We do not understand.'
Ear said, 'China and we
Struck two far sides of a rock; music came forth,
Our music and theirs, not the one music.
Listening in street and stall I hear two words,
Their word and mine. Mine is not understood,
Therefore am I an exile here, a stranger,
Eaten up with hunger for what I understand,
And for that which understands.'
Tongue said, 'I know
The sweet flavours of mandarin or fish. But mouth and I,
Speaking here, are mocked. Looks fall on us like blows.
Mistress, we served you well, and not for cash,
But free men. Therefore, beseech you, let us go on.'

Heart, lowlier, said, 'There is a way of patience—
Let ear study the door to understanding.
Mouth, there is silence first, but fellowship
Where children laugh or weep, the grown smile or frown,
Study, perceive and learn. Let not two parts
Unwisely make an exile of the whole.'

But still the rebels bawled, and so I saw
How in a world divorced from silences
These are the thieves.
Ear, who no longer listening well, sniffs up
The first vain trash, the first argument into his sack.
Mouth, who will spew it forth, but to be heard—
Both ill-taught scholars, credulous liars,
Seizing on, flinging up fuel.
There flamed the restlessness of such sick worlds,
As cannot know their country or earth's country;
Their moment or an age's moment.
Having such brawling servants in my train
I can be neither tile nor lamp.

Only a footprint. Some boy sees it at dawn
Before his high-wheeled cart creaks over it ;
Only a sped and broken arrow,
Pointing a way where men will come in peace.

THE DESERTED VILLAGE

In the deserted village, sunken down
With a shrug of last weak old age, pulled back to earth,
All people are fled or killed. The cotton crop rots,
Not one mild house leans sideways, a man on crutches,
Not a sparrow earns from the naked floors,
Walls look, but cannot live without the folk they loved—
It would be a bad thing to awaken them.
Having broken the rice-bowl, seek not to fill it again.

The village temple, well built, with five smashed gods,
 ten whole ones,
 Does not want prayers. It's last vain prayer bled up
 When the women ran outside to be slain.
 A temple must house its sparrows or fall asleep,
 Therefore a long time, under his crown of snails,
 The gilded Buddha demands to meditate.
 No little flowering fires on the incense-strings
 Startle Kwan-Yin, whom they dressed in satin—
 Old women sewing beads like pearls in her hair.
 This was a temple for the very poor ones :
 Their gods were mud and lathe : but artfully
 Some village painter coloured them all.
 Wooden dragons were carefully carved.
 Finding in mangled wood one smiling childish tree,
 Roses and bells not one foot high,
 I set it back, at the feet of Kwan-Yin.
 A woman's prayer-bag,
 Having within her paper prayers, paid for in copper,
 Seeing it torn, I gathered it up.
 I shall often think, 'The woman I did not see

Voiced here her dying wish.
But the gods dreamed on. So low her voice, so loud
The guns, all that death-night, who would stoop to hear?

WRITTEN AT HSUCHOWFU

Bear the message from the roof-tops, from the tiled h'gome
houses

Where the storks splash out in shallow yellow clay.
Tell them Ali's sister listens to the lessening of the
rein-bells,

To the jar of scattered pebbles far away.
Says she sings, and stoops anew to touch her loom
Where the thread is woven scarlet as his quests—
'Brother, beauty wearies the beautiful!
Next time, let me be born with no breasts.'

White door, and the blood-combed cockerel boasts the dawn,
Fierce hoofs, and the neighing stallion stamping forth,
Bells, and the women's veils across my windows drawn,
Lest I watch you in the riding to the north.
Keen and clean the air; sound of the cavalcade lingers,
Echoes and mocks and faints on the cloudy crests,
I would be beautiful, but not so beautiful,
Next time, let me be born with no breasts.

I would be your young companion, hold the jingling bridle
Near your sword arm, sleek the hides of our little
stubborn horses,

We would watch the silent planets in their courses,
In the silver-threaded hours of the idle,
I should learn from you the laugh a warrior knows—
Brother, the light loom flashes, whirs and rests—
I would learn to hold the lance and leave the rose—
Next time, let me be born with no breasts.

Sun on the steel, and not the trembling of rain.
(That is a woman's trick—to smile and to weep again.)
Hand by your hand at dusk, but not there
The still eyes, or the counselling hair.
Strength for your strength—but never till battles cease
The lost loom, the cool threads of your peace.
Rider to match your pace—but turn not
To the quiet hills, to the love you forgot.
Fight where you will, a red edge turned to the foam.
But speak not of women, dream not of home—
I shall be beautiful, questing brother; and you
Have lost but her whom you little knew.
For Shiva, the silent, smiles and shapeth his guests—
Next time, let me be born with no breasts.

HONG KONG WATER

China is floating past me, and I watch not
The little isles, the cool jade-rippling bay.
Half yesterday her face. Yes, I shall reckon
Her laugh, her terror, things of yesterday,
Seeing them vaguely, from so far away,
Coldly from West's grey eyes and unawoken
Saying, 'Not for me is brilliant, or is broken
Lord butterfly on lord hibiscus spray—'

And not for passing guests are set in motion
Junks that are autumn leaves across the ocean.

I shall be chaptered in the books of stone,
The cities of the west, aloof, immense,
With arrogance the marrow of their bone
And speed the levin of their insolence.
There to walk undisguised, without pretence
Of lowlier love than in their fortresses
Is coldly fed: where even music is
A metal mouth, writhing open in a hiss
For new attack, where there is no defence.

Steadily I shall seek to keep in tune
All I shall say, with all that blears their moon.

The Hong Kong water, lapping on stone stairs
Where a young lemming tipped the evening tide;
A broken moon, frail white, a lamp for prayers
So softly said, immaculate from pride,
It mattered not if granted or denied—
The fragile wish: the said too low for mortals,
The waters' quiet petition at the portals
Of the black cave that cracked across the west
To bear a pearly sampan on its breast.

THE NATIVE GRASS

Grasses, and none would speak
By our halted train;
Or they murmured among themselves,
And spoke not plain.
I know not when I may pass
That road again.

Meadow-grass speaks a known tongue
From a quiet mind,
Its speech is an English speech,
The farming keeps it kind.
But what of my untamed grass
In the twilight left behind?

Harvesting, cattle, stook
In the fields are known;
The field-grass speaks with the scythe
And greets with the milling-stone.
But the native grass stands back,
Uncouth and alone.

Lion rocks were the lords,
Stone was the bed,
Thorn bearing no man's fruit
Ran wilfully overhead,
And the sides of the hill were gored
Where sunset bled.

Man-high, sharp as a spear,
Speaking a barbarous tongue,
Edging and sheering back
In the beaten strength of the young;
This was my own land's grass,
And there, her songs sung.

Grasses, waiting the word,
Whispering hope or curse . . .
Treat with it, trample it,
For better or worse
There stands the only pride
No man buys with his purse.

THIRSTY LAND

Sharpset the tide runs up, the eagerly flowing
Sea-flags are tossed past rampart sand and stone
Where ancient sunbleached vessels dream, forgetting
Their wasted wooden sinews, broken bone,
Once more Argos at sunset. White birds scream,
Softens the skies, where noon's fierce helmets shone.
The lion dunes shake out their manes. Forever
Darkness and wave glide on.

Oh sick of empery, craving the tide-borne cup,
Things on that shore gasp seaward, and renew.
Rockpool anemones flush with rose; the soiled
Vain jellies spilt on sand fringe white and blue.
Old blistering wood is slaked, the salt drink wakens

White boats to bubbling talk ; veins filled with foam
The blackened seaweeds, swelling green and brown,
Sway out, stream glistening home.

And children's feet and wings pattern the gloam.

Now the cool stars come out, the murmuring nets
Round their moist lips, the sea-pods burst like grapes.
Street-weary people linger at the edge,
Shadows of things are lovelier than their shapes.
Sands underfoot turn chill, old fishermen hear
Lost bells, the drowned Atlantean ringing.
A needled silver pricks and cures the heart,
And sound of oars, and singing.

Around my hands the seaweed tress is clinging.

But pausing not the lambent waves melt on
Past where the Penguin sank ; a bright host flow
Cook Straits to Tory Channel, where the great
Barnacle-bellied seabeasts cumbrous go.
They hail the broadbuilt whaling ships, they pass
Remembered peach-tree islands, where one light
Breaks by the broken jetty ; where one house
Sets drift-fires to the night,

And air beats up the oyster-catcher's flight.

Farther to gleam, where feather-handful terns
Drift on great galleon waves, and fern plumes nod ;
Past Reefton, white in surf ; Lyttelton lights,
Lake-locked Manapouri, half untrod.
Past stars grown big as fists, through dangerous reefways
Sealers and men grown old in sailing teach.
(Wild fuschias' falling crimson dyes the sands,
Ambergris rolls on Hellfire Beach.)

Onward, to wash the southernmost reach.

Such I remember in the thirsty land
Whose bones stare through her skin, pain from her soul;
Her wells dry, her unharvested grain stands pale.
The tides run up, they lap the southern Pole.
Blue-green that ice; and this land burning hot
With fevers. Withering hangs her misty glow.
Abundant wings are black about the breasts
Of dead I loved, and could not know.

Give me your cold: waves from my hands to flow—
In the hot deathly nights, you arm me so.

PRAYER FOR A YOUNG COUNTRY

Leave the nest early, child. Our climate's changing,
Snow has a stiffer grip in every part:
Fingers of ice, about their treasons ranging,
Too soon shall set their purchase on your heart.

But where to turn? Feathered in what delusion
Sing the fierce swan-song, stride this cataract
Of one world's deadly purpose, one's confusion,
The noble dream turned cruel in the act?

I see the road sick centuries have tramped
Dying in scorn, by novel ways and bleak;
I see the earth beneath us cut and stamped
For new inheritors, but not the meek.

And gods born blind to lightening, deaf to thunder,
Whose ending is abyss and avalanche,
Shall teach you (youth, made clean to love and wonder!)
Under new names the oldest arrogance.

Also, brow lifted for the wind's white greeting,
I see the blind man, trusting to his stick;
I hear the children laugh . . . and know that fleeting
Echo of joy on earth is not a trick.

And dreaming near, too vast for rage or mirth,
I see where woman-breasted ocean lies;
One hand for her horizons, one for earth . . .
The green Pacific, with her waiting eyes.

STRANGE INN

Now our unfinished furrows break and catch
Like vines along the evening; brown and green,
Tree-light and tavern-light, ribbed loam between
Guide us together to the lifted latch
And leave us guess, ere entering, what they mean.
Lamps mark out squares: here may be death,
 our home,
Or put a pause for share and broken loam.
How long, since we two met? How little worth
The best I said! Now, in our silence, speak
(Drawing blue breath beside us,) things of earth
Who turn the smiter such a patient cheek.
How have you fared, or sown? Let's count together
Our beads of twisted wood and twisted weather.

I never hoped for freedom; but I saw
Many a fierce star and fallen in the quest.
The glory came by chance, in peace or war . . .
Oh brother, for the inn-yard, for our rest.

I ask you not how poppy clung with corn
How bitter tongues ate half the crop away:
I know how grimly your old share was borne
Even against dream or heyman holiday.
You crunched the clouds that took you in their
 snare—
Yet sometimes stayed for music; some loose hair
Of willows shook down sleep, beside a wood
Older than any virtue understood.
Your hands grew rough, the furrow profited

By things men learn at night, who cannot pray . . .
Only their fingers burst with beads of red.

Who dares the inn? I have not known this house,
It shows a threshold and a lamp. Men tell
How by soft beds most travellers were betrayed.
We needed one more morning . . . ah, so blue!
Clouds light as thistledown, earth gone mad with
laughter—

I don't know whether of old men, trees, or you.
But it was best to meet you here in darkness,
Our faces like rough lanterns gnashed upon
By winds . . . and yet the wicks are strong behind.
Perhaps across this threshold we shall find
Shepherds whose great old drinking-horns glow deep
With wine and firelight, moistened like a rose.
A silver seed blows down our furrows now;
Look back . . . the new moon, bending, bends the
plough;
And yet, like us, the birds seem bent on sleep.

THE MIRACLE OF ABUNDANCE

But in the dream,
We had come through fear and famine, blood and filth,
And were after a long while re-united.
Around us the lamp shed its cold blossom spilth,
And we sat in the peasant's hut benighted.
Happy, I rested my head against your knee,
And said, 'I will bear you all the sons you wish.'
There was a platter of blue set down on the hearth,
A meal of bread, and a little broken fish.

FEEDING THE MULTITUDE

Give me five fishes from the creel,
Dry and salt them in peat-brick smoke
From stammering fire, uncouth and red.
Now, since we cannot hope for bread,
Go from the hut, and grub the root
Drought left them; shrivelled black, but real.
Rub the smarting from your eyes,
Let them ache in stabbing gloom,
The old and shawled, the hunger-wise,
Lived a long while in this room.
Because their lives were Cana's wine
They weighed no more, no less than waves,
Spun their hours fine as flax,
Found good company in swine,
Living in their reachy caves
Carried Dublin on their backs.
Christ was bleeding-heart and gold;
(One they knew but not the other;)
With swine and men He shared their fold,
Dark-eyed, watching the stained flames mould
His cut-out beautiful cardboard Mother.
Wasn't He who worked their mircale
In this spent shell, this bitter cell?
I, whose dream knows many a stair
Spread like a snowy peacock-train,
Nothing know as straight as prayer;
Silken clues invisible
Hunt or flee within my brain.
I tell you yet that here was done
That miracle compassion made,
When the great multitude streamed on,
Moaning in Galilean sun
Like oxen, while His drawn mouth prayed.
They heard; but hunger's harder wish,
Coiled beneath the leather belt,
Answered His talk of bad or good
With that long cry for food.

He moved among them, all were stayed
With bread, and five small fish,
Touched and tasted, seen and smelt.
Chattering, laughing, picnicking, they were made
Full men again.
But here, spoiled roots,
Darned patches in a mended net,
Tell me in this hut was felt
Such hunger . . . God knows best
Whether it clawed at hosts or guest.
Yet here, I swear it, smoke's grey tree
Climbed upwards; deep voice said,
'Patsy, go quick boy! Don't forget—
Give the least drag on the net.
Coming in now, past the stack,
Sure you'll grab something for the sack.'
Christ helped, perhaps. But it was sodden boots
Trudged back, with fullness Belly takes to bed
In times of high shoals, racing roots.
With this, the multitude was fed.
Not only here: the multitude outside,
Rustling in ditches, rattling brick and tin
Not fit for rats—but fit for living in
By folk who just once know their souls have died—
(*Dead*, not asleep; for all the soft tongues said);
Even these multitudes were fed:
Waking, walked unafraid a little while,
Or sleeping, smiled—though they could never smile.

KATHERINE MANSFIELD

Our little Darkness, in the shadow sleeping
Among the strangers you could better trust,
Right was your faring, Wings: their wise hands gave you
Freedom and song, where we had proffered dust.
Dust is a thing of road and sheepfolds, rising
Where men and sheep are driven on to gate;

A wavering smoke, too faint and blown for signals,
Mica-bright staring crystals, love and hate,
A blindness in the eyes, a pain for feet.

Dust is the unthrown wrestler at our gate.

So wrapped in what they gave you, rest you, sweet :
Be tranquil, seagull conjured into swan :
We have in mind who used you ill or well.
The dark dust-taken hair slopes fallen back
From mermaid forehead : once for all lie slack
The winning fingers. Rest you, in those arms
Held out at Fontainebleau, rank flower and weed,
Idlers and gossips, shapes of strife and heat
Who find your marble cool to lean upon.

Deep underneath the seas is swung a bell
Of travelling note : oh, very far away,
Clear as you dreamed, gleam tiny bush and bay.

And after marble, dust fulfils a need.

SAILS

How many ruined sails creep round the world,
And drip their cold dews in the whitened bays,
And cast a rope of roses to the shores
And swim by isles of roses never won,
How many hands within this dawn lie folded,
Cold, and delivered over from supplication,
But guerdoned out of convoyed chests of dream
And plighted with a silver ring of seas
To hands that knew them well in other days.
How many ancient ports of sleep revive,
And on the dead wharves spin the mooring-rings,
And voices shout,
And murmurs phrase a narrative forgotten—

Nay, unforgotten ; but apart and secret.
Look on these sleepers : each has won his Venice.

It is enough, beloved and divided,
The hands upon the unawakened breasts
Are pointed up, sharp as the flames of tapers,
Careful hands set the tapers ; careful feet
Echo, to tell the dead they are the dead.

TEMPTATION

The ruined Brightness led Him up, and shewed Him
No cities of the earth, but one white rose :
Took gently away the bloodstained wine, bestowed Him
With water governed in that intimate close :
Saying, 'All these, and more of mine, I give thee,
O buffeted Sandal !
So that Thine eyes, shining the unchanged candle,
Shall know and honour and forgive me.'

But He, smiling home the look, nor sorrow nor mirth,
Turned back to the swelled plains battle-tented,
And said, 'Thou to thy reasoned citadel ; I to My earth,
Lucifer, lovely and still lamented :
Or follow.' Young and alone, the Son of Man
Stepped down to the slayings, His red cloak drawn on
the wind.
And a green stabbed sharper than green. And darkness
began
To crevice the face of the watcher behind.

THE VERB

Hooded, magnificently snake,
the Verb made rigid hissed their fate :
said he was God : divided and ruled
pronoun and noun by predicate,

viziered all cities under the sun
to turbanned Have, Known and Done :
(subject craving its flesh the object
cried to be nothing, or be one.)

But the Verb loved them out of pride,
darted sweetness into their side
and whispered sapience in that shell
the ear, behind which the strung senses died.

Lest the bored pronouns slip his bond
He had a tale to keep them fond—
told them they were his images : frightened
them of their dim faces in the pond.

Willow could never quite win to hand
unconsciously, stick or wand ;
Verb rustled up, to intervene
and introduce them with command.

Having thus ringed them with his fence
whose flex and barb are arrogance,
he saw their hate begin : beginning
the self-robbed's wars of self-defence :

witnessed the pronouns beating up noun :
saw the inhuman noun alone
like a guerilla smile waiting, then snipe
the impotent invaders down.

Here a train rusts, that shall not pass
to furious destinations : grass
climbs through a man, and stares around,
with none to call them I and grass :

second-hands of sunlight flash
around vain dials : vain cracks the lash
of night or daybreak : intimate grow
in thick-tongued parleys dust with ash.

Seer here reaching one with seen,
flood-gates are done : down rips the green
triumph of sense through dry-boned valleys
where no Verb prompts us what we mean.

And no more governing in the Verb's rod
by or with, for and of,
pronoun accepts the noun's sunrise in—
humanities : the stripped rivers of God.

THE DREAM

At last the fronds and grotto wavered dim :
Old aches, the intolerable unreal tensions
Struck off by silken mallets from each limb.
A wild green song like drowning filled his ears—
The lights hissed down, swelled out to grapes and
pears—
Hunger and all the lustrous fruits were free !

The inner man arose. No huge dimensions
His, but a child's. He had a place to find,
And riding swiftly on the wind, he found it :
And found it still that undiscerning kind
Pith of all warmth, the neighbour huts around it—
Round all, the moon-flanked cattle, cropping or sleeping.

Tapping it lightly as its willow tree,
He went in, and was known : and was not changed
More than by one hard journey in the dust.
No eyes smote up in challenge, looked estranged—
The casual family conversations ranged
Like sheep by ancient fences herds may trust.

Yet all he did was known, and all he must :
Here was no case for stammering the unsaid—
The core of tears was gone, without the weeping ;

Quarrel and comedy, a trite page read,
Ash in the hearth. Now he could speak their names,
Smile at their old ways, sitting down for bread,
Familiar and uncouth; and round each head
Haloed the angel irony of flames,
Whose light filled up his palms and made them clean.

The roof slid upward, suddenly strange and steep:
And someone said, 'All freedom is all sin,
Making us traitor to the God Machine.'
But ere the note of Far perturbed his sleep,
The poppy's wet black lashes curled him in.

CASE ADJOURNED

So I let them go, and knew not why they were going . . .
(Thick-sided flock . . . old ram before them belling . . .)
Then my sick heart, within me, did the knowing;
Then my shrill mind, beyond me, did the telling.

'You made them go . . . you and your gabble-voices,
Sprawled out like cut-throats before that snivelling fire;
You and your shabby-elbowed, blind-man choices . . .
Pillar of smoke . . . But where's your plain desire?'

Not that they weren't too soft with you. You found,
(Hung in the pause between one breath, one breath,)
That the loudest sound, the terribly sought for sound,
Was Christ's blue garment, trailing at Nazareth.

Nor did you try for that. You had, my friend,
Just too much conscience, too much sense of humour;
But pricked them on towards the selfsame end
Through mists of verses, half-fledged hints and rumour.

Why, there wasn't a one who wiped his boots on your mat;
(Knowing in quick and bone you were a liar,)
Who didn't want, poor sparrow, only that . . .
Crumb in winter, rainbow, the lost Messiah.

And you, my friend, what kept you hidden from us?
Rabbit in hat, a littered holy place . . .
Or some one moment, alert, mysterious,
When you saw, but could not reveal, the longed-for fence?

Did you start honest? Were your dreams the trick
Of grudge with men, of puny song stillborn,
Wraiths of a jealous mind, obscured and sick,
The beggar's rags, but statelier worn?

Best ask yourself. But here's the fact we've found.
You flooded our well-manned dyke, you let in pity:
And the sedulous ape has learned one trick that's sound:
To walk erect, in a perpendicular city.

Not for us light of stars, friend. Light of hovels
Is God's own death-ray, angel-armour's chink.
And the end of your way that flies and struts and grovels,
Is three old words of Body: you're in clink.

Taken up, for loitering without visible means
Of support for your dreams, and also inciting to riot
A crowd in search of New Jerusalem scenes,
Slipped through (we guess) from Hollywood, on the quiet.

And it won't take long for our Court to prove your prater,
Sick heart for sicker hearts, the duped, the dull:
But the question arises are you the bigger traitor?
Did you come with empty hands, and your pockets full?

If so, M'Lud, the people can understand it.
There's many a sleek self under a ragged shirt.
We're accustomed to spy, diversionist, wrecker, bandit,
And the small Apostles who sell their souls for dirt.

Was he consistent, prisoner at the bar?
Well he knew money-fear. We've watched him walking
In the deep old streets where rooted houses are . . .
And none but us to hear him, caught him talking . . .

Yes, he loved gentler music : all the mist
Of the old unfrightened : admired dubious kings :
Could cry at passing, (was he a Socialist?)
Of trees ; pianos ; banners ; minds with wings.

As for the way he'd stop in passing, he,
To smile at a sandwichman, a broken child,
We call it, M'Lud, colossal vanity ;
Lust of the sick for the sick ; a pride run wild

Down among the dead men, who'd count on what he told
 them,

And the lame who'd stumble after a dream gone lame.
He could play the Prince, his purple cloak enfold them
With colour. But where, M'Lud, was his honest shame?

He could batten upon them. Live like a cannibal.
If he tries to explain, M'Lud, he meant no harm, he
Had better denote, this patent pocket Hannibal,
Across which Alps he led his tattered army.

No, the case, M'Lud, is a clear one, plainly meeting
Laws against vagabondage in our city.
And the prosecution should charge him for counterfeiting
The great thing, love, with the leaden small thing, pity.

If it please your Honour, too many of these cases
Are coming before us. A salutary term
Might rid this Court, M'Lud, of some hang-dog faces,
And distinguish Cause of Ape from the Cause of Worm.

Up from his corner pipes advocatus diaboli :
'If it please your Honour, this man's just defence
Proves, though inclined like most to babble, he
Had more than most men's portion of innocence.

When the fires smoulder, not only the trees take light,
But the straws in the wind. Your Honour doubtless knows
Of the human proverb . . . Blowing across their night
The burning straw must show where the great wind goes.

He has a face, M'Lud, the normal shape
Of just what my learned friend, the prosecution,
Has taken for standard . . . the bulwark, the tired ape,
Whose slow heart's nimble hand's deft execution,

Brought into being what we see about us.
This concrete world dark-edged with abstract seas.
I submit, M'Lud, he did not seek to flout us.
In ignorance, defendant aimed to please.

From the edge of earth he has heard the sore heart beating,
Listened too late in the nights: and so put on
The veil that hid the Samaritan woman's greeting,
The very heavy tires of Babylon.

He has a little of Joan, (now legalised Saint,)
A little of Nero; I hope, M'Lud, a littler
Of Greta Garbo, and Israel's justified plaint,
(To be tried in this Court later,) Adolf Hitler.

Wild though his words appear to us, and crude as
The mortal means may be of this old lag,
There is one distinction between accused and Judas:
They have searched, M'Lud; they have not found the bag.

Therefore, M'Lud, I ask you that my client,
Man among men, his lessons half untaught,
Standing here before us, weary, old, defiant,
Have his case dismissed, or referred to a Higher Court.'

Up spoke the voiceless voice behind the Bench;
(No face showed. One candle-socket burned);
'Very well put! Counsel has dug a trench
For shelter of this defendant. Case adjourned.

Who will go bail for the prisoner? Cold, that cell . . .
Are not two sparrows somewhat steeply priced
As matched with these? We must have surety: well,
Will no-one risk it?' 'I will.' answered Christ.

IMAGE

In the Serpentine, where it falls dusk, the mother
 of cygnets
Stretches her tall wings once, rustles over the brood.
Gone the scull's plashing laughter; the carp suspended
Burn like red lamps in the fluid lapse of waves.
A rabbit lobs up, a leaf pitches: none dares
Splash through the yellow irises into water.
The mandarin drake sleeps standing on one foot.
And a bough leans: a closed bud, still lucent, informs me
'Be still, yes: piston no more arguments, heart.
Only from quiet water gleams back the perfected lotus,
Only in eyes entranced is the whole reflected.'

INTERLUDE

Rest, and take it easy from the wild crying,
From every storm-pack uttering over the hill,
Let the sun lead the oppressed, the Valkyries ride for
 the dying;
Thou, being spent, lie still.

It was not to govern others you came this way,
And the echoes prophesy, lean in the streets of fame;
It was for rhythms of dust, defeat and chilling delay,
And through fires without flame.

Yet each man's heart is stamped from the dye he best
 knows,
Minted in what he last chooses, the red or the black,
Whether he hold by sword, craft-tool or cloistered rose,
One coin renders he back.

And is valued, but no more appraised by the eyes of greed;
And is counted again, (though he knows it not,) to men
 of his earth.
And his quiet was never measured unto the little meed,
But is given like breath and birth.

P-163

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NEW ZEALAND



3 1111 01732017 5

NZC
821
HYD

1952



2821



NZC
821
HYD

1952