

New Mexico Quarterly

Volume 12 | Issue 4

Article 11

1942

Five Poems

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Recommended Citation

Crawford, Frances. "Five Poems." *New Mexico Quarterly* 12, 4 (1942). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol12/iss4/11>

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Is age a knotty staff, or crutch leaned on?
Perhaps the shadowed face is nearest dawn.

We do not know We climb a secret hill,
And call the planet green, who trust it still.
Behind us sleep the friends we walked beside;
Too soon they rest; it was not grief that died.

We suffer beauty's thorn, red leaves of day
That whip an autumn path and ancient way,
But lift at last a trembling hand and breath
Against the howling god, old wintry Death.

LINCOLN FITZELL

FIVE POEMS

1

Who comforts flesh unreconciled,
The spirit begging to be bound?
Leave space, destroy the flesh reviled,
The interval recalls no sound.

The hand that holds no instrument
Cannot create, impatient god.
How can the unarmed have intent?
Even the wrathful bears a rod.

Bodiless soul cannot perceive.
Then can the eyeless find their way?
The huddled spirit fears to leave,
Corruption near, it dares not stay.

2

The melody, from treble tones
Of clarity and quick design,
Scaling the intervals descends,
Losing in overtones its line.
But still the listener will hear
The tune unchanging to his ear.

So in the personal unity
The intricate harmonies of mind,

Transposed to body, will become
Precision marred and undefined.
And yet the instrument contains
The tune; the single phrase remains.

3

On still Spring night, the falling leaf
Startles the sense aware of death
Inherent to the leaf and earth.
The dying scent of loose-piled hay
Enfolds the woman sleeping there,
The man, awake, who dares not sleep,
Because he hears the falling leaf,
In stillness, hears that sound of death.
Frightened, he knows new leaves will grow,
Insensate, not to know decay.

4

Uncaptured is essential death,
Free is its visitation,
In aspect like the humid breath,
Visible in occurrence.

5

The supple body bends to will
And then springs back like storm-bowed tree,
Or like the grass behind the wind,
Erect, free from identity.

It has no need of subtle mind
For simple want and quick desire;
With longing satisfied, it turns
To balance. But the mind is slyer,

And creeping from the caverned skull,
Decisive thought's supremacy
Enforces in a moment strength;
But yet is served unwillingly.

FRANCES CRAWFORD