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## Poems and Epigrams: 1942-3

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POETRY  
POEMS AND EPIGRAMS: 1942-3

1. ON THE COVER OF MY BOOK

This garish and red cover made me start.  
I who amused myself with quietness  
Am here discovered. In this flowery dress  
I read the wild wallpaper of my heart.

2. ENVOI

Hear me, whom I betrayed  
While in this spell I stayed,  
Anger, cathartic aid,  
Hear, and approve my song!

See from my sheltered cove  
The Circe of my spell,  
Calm for adventure, move,  
Wild in repose of love,  
Sea-going on a shell  
In a moist dream. How long  
(Time to which years are vain!)  
I on this coastal plain—  
Rain and rank weed, raw air—  
Served that fey despair,  
Far from the lands I knew!

Winds of my country blew  
Not with such motion: keen,  
Stinging, and I as lean,  
Savage, direct, and bitten,  
Not pitying and unclean.

Anger, my ode is written.

3 . T O E . . . .

Love at what distance mine!  
On whose disdain I dine  
Unfed, unfamished, I  
In your hid counsels lie.  
I know your lover, fear.  
His presence is austere  
As winter air; he trembles  
At the interior thunder  
Of chill erotic wonder,  
Though the taut face dissembles:  
I know him, I am he.

Stilled in his arms, my dear,  
In tenderness of fear,  
Fulfilled of terror, sleep!  
And though you cannot, weep!

4 . C O M M E N D A T O R Y V E R S E S  
for a Friend's Book

Good faith gives simple lines,  
Or, rather, uncomplex,  
Which wariness refines  
And doubts perplex

Until the engineer  
Of metre, rhyme, and thought  
Can only tool each gear  
To what he sought

If chance with craft combines  
In the predestined space  
To lend his damaged lines  
Redeeming grace.

So is it in these pages.  
By grace the damaged heart  
(Once in how seldom ages!)  
Issues in art.

## 5.

What is it to forgive?  
 It is not to forget,  
 To forfeit memory  
   In which I live.  
 It is to be in debt  
 To those who injure me.

If, then, I shall forgive  
 And consciously resign  
 My claim in love's estate  
   In which I live,  
 Know that the choice is mine,  
 And is the same as hate.

Say, then, that I forgive.  
 I choose indignity  
 In which my passions burn  
   While I shall live,  
 Oh not for charity,  
 But for my old concern.

## 6. THE ART OF LOVE, OR THE KISS OF PEACE

Speak to her heart.  
 That manic force,  
 When wits depart,  
 Forbids remorse.

Dream with her dreaming  
 Until her lust  
 Seems to her seeming  
 An act of trust.

It is not doing.  
 Love's wilful potion  
 Turns the ensuing,  
 And brief, commotion

To spiritual bliss.  
 See how the blest  
 Receive the kiss,  
 Hot and undressed!

7. EPIGRAMS

a.

When I shall be without regret,  
And shall mortality forget;  
When I shall die who lived for this,  
I shall not miss the things I miss.  
And you who notice where I lie,  
Ask not my name: It is not I.

b.

Within this mindless vault  
Lie Tristan and Isolt,  
Tranced in each other's beauties.  
They had no other duties.

c.

My life from seventeen to thirty-one  
Was fourteen years of doing, quite undone.  
At thirty-one, indifferent to life,  
I sleep apart, as if it were my wife.

d. Motto for a Sun Dial

I who by day am function of the light  
Am constant and invariant by night.

e. Meditation on the Calculus

From almost naught to almost all I flee,  
And *almost* has almost confounded me,  
Zero my limit, and infinity.

f.  
In this child's game where you grow warm and warmer,  
And new grand passions still exceed the former,  
In what orgasm of high sentiment  
Will you conclude, and find the flesh content?

g.

I hoarded hurt, as dams torrential rain,  
And time grows fertile with extended pain.

## h. For a Book of Lyrics

This book affords  
 The peace of art.  
 Within these boards  
 The passive heart

Impassive sleeps,  
 And like pressed flowers,  
 Though scentless, keeps  
 The scented hours.

## i. Convalescence

Silence, the fever of my harried days,  
 I found that consciousness itself betrays.  
 In the last circle of infirmity  
 Where I almost attained simplicity—  
 So to recite as if it were not said,  
 So to renounce as if one lost instead—  
 My unabandoned soul withdrew, abhorred.  
 I knew oblivion was its own reward,  
 But pride is life, and I had longed for death  
 Only in consciousness of indrawn breath.

J. V. CUNNINGHAM